## Loading…

### The E3 expo

Games industry dignitaries and select members of the press meet annually in Los Angeles to indulge in mutual back-slapping and, presumably, a spot of gaming too. This year's E3 expo was a cracker, with many big names making some equally mammoth announcements.

Sony surprised gathered hacks by lifting the lid on its PSP handheld entertainment console, while the improved PlayStation2 and latest Gran Turismo 4 took a back seat.

With *The Matrix* fever rife at the moment, UbiSoft announced its plans for The Matrix: Online, a MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) – an acronym that has gamers wetting their pants in excitement.

Microsoft gave a few hints about the eagerly anticipated Halo 2 for the Xbox. There's a brand-new graphics engine and Xbox Live support, which will surely confine a generation of adolescents to their bedrooms for years to come.

PHOTOGRAPH: COPYRIGHT GAMES PRESS LTD

A game that may keep teens in their rooms for entirely different reasons was announced by Eidos. Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness sees the cyberbabe back on our PS2 consoles and PCs. Her popularity, particularly among pimply youths, shows no sign of abating.

Finally, we welcome back a games industry legend. Infogrames will henceforth be Atari, bringing back happy memories of Pong, Space Invaders and PaperBoy – at least for me. ■

*Ben Camm-Jones*

## Strike Fighters: Project 1                    PC CD-ROM

Enthusiastic flight simmers will know that developer Just Flight isn't new to the genre. In the past it's produced some of the best add-ons for Microsoft's simulators.

Strike Fighters: Project 1 plays host to four planes. Only four? I hear you cry. That's exactly what I thought when I picked up the sim, but the detail and quality of the aircraft is absolutely superb and makes up for the lack of choice.

You can see literally every rivet punch and flake of rust on these planes which date from the late 1950s and 60s and are decorated according to your squadron.

During a campaign you embark on some taxing missions. You don't know precisely where you are, just that it is somewhere in the Middle East. In addition, you need to keep an eye on weapon supplies to ensure they don't run out. We learned this to our cost when we tried shooting down a Mig with no ammo.

As well as the campaign option there is also a single-mission mode were you decide what you want to do, who you want to fight and what ground target you want to destroy.

One of the hardest parts of playing a flight sim is mastering landing and takeoff. Luckily, Strike Fighters allows you to opt-out of this task so you can go straight to the action.

To feel the full effect of Strike Fighters you need plenty of hard disk space, a decent graphics card and, ideally, a force-feedback based joystick as it can get quite tedious using the keyboard all the time. ■

*David O'Connor*

↑ Relive your favourite *Top Gun* moments – ridiculous nickname and 80s bomber jacket optional

### GAMES CHART, ALL FORMATS

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker** |
| 2 | **Midnight Club II** |
| 3 | **Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell** |
| 4 | **The Sims** |
| 5 | **Championship Manager 4** |
| 6 | **FIFA 2003** |
| 7 | **X-Men 2: Wolverine's Revenge** |
| 8 | **Burnout 2: Point of Impact** |
| 9 | **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** |
| 10 | **Dancing Stage Party Edition** |

### PC GAMES CHART

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Championship Manager 4** |
| 2 | **Medieval: Total War Viking Invasion** |
| 3 | **Vietcong** |
| 4 | **The Sims** |
| 5 | **The Sims: Unleashed** |
| 6 | **Freelancer** |
| 7 | **Command & Conquer: Generals** |
| 8 | **World War II: Front Line Command** |
| 9 | **Eve Online: The Second Genesis** |
| 10 | **Delta Force: Black Hawk Down** |

*Positions correct for week 05/05/03-11/05/03*

**Strike Fighters: Project 1**

☐ Just Flight: 01480 462 748
☐ www.justflight.com
☐ £29.99

**System requirements**

500MHz Pentium III; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP; 128MB RAM; 450MB hard disk space

**Overall rating**

■■■■■■■□□

# Enter the Matrix

**M**ake no mistake: 2003 is the year of *The Matrix.* In a move unheard of, the Wachowski brothers – directors and writers of *The Matrix* films – decided to release the next two instalments within months of each other rather than wait until next year when the hype will have died down.

As you'd expect from such a large release, Enter the Matrix is the obligatory movie tie-in but it also heralds a new level of collaboration between Hollywood and games developers. The Wachowski brothers scripted and directed the game, while the developers were given full access to the film's sets and stars.

## Welcome to the real world

Enter the Matrix is a decent extension of *The Matrix* universe, but it certainly hasn't redefined gaming as we know it. It suffers from all the generic flaws that occur when developers try and ingratiate themselves with the largest audience possible: the casual gamer. That isn't to say that you won't enjoy playing Enter the Matrix – far from it – but it's ironic that it pales in comparison to Max Payne, a game that plays as a tribute to the first *Matrix* film.

While Enter the Matrix is a standalone product, it cleverly intertwines the plotline from *The Matrix Reloaded* to produce a narrative of its own. Surprisingly, rather than taking on the role of Neo, you get to play as Niobe or Ghost and your choice affects gameplay.

Much of Enter the Matrix is taken up with beautifully choreographed fighting and over-the-top gunplay with a touch of driving thrown into the mix too. All of this is delivered with huge attention to style and here it's impossible to fault. It's graphically accomplished and the sound environment is brilliantly accompanied by an atmospheric score straight from the film.

## Where they have failed, you'll succeed

We haven't yet touched on how Enter the Matrix actually plays. One aspect the developers couldn't leave out is *The Matrix's* innovative slow-mo bullet firing. In the game this is called the focus button and, though it's unlimited,

↑ Some people will go to any lengths these days to avoid a speeding ticket

you have to wait for the focus bar to regenerate before the effect can be used again. The focus button has different attributes depending on whether you're driving, shooting guns or fighting and it interacts nicely with the gameplay.

If you're in fight mode the focus button opens a bewildering array of gravity-defying stunts. However, the nature of the fight engine detracts from your overall enjoyment. With just a couple of mouse clicks you can unleash a phenomenal amount of kicks and punches, taking out multiple enemies with amazing combos in a short space of time – strangely unsatisfying and lacking in challenge.

Don't get me wrong – taking out an enemy in slow motion looks stunning. But the camera sweeps all over the place as it tries to cope with multiple enemies, making it hard to follow what's happening.

There's plenty of random button pressing in Enter the Matrix: jump into the fray, press punch, kick and focus as quickly as possible and you'll probably be the last man standing. This is much the same when using weapons – auto-aiming makes it hard to miss. But it lacks interactive environments and it's not a patch on the amazing gunplay in Max Payne. ∎

*Spencer Dalziel*

← Ghost manages to knock a policeman senseless *and* stand on one leg

↑ Agent Smith was starting to regret calling Niobe's hairstyle 'interesting'

# Chaser

**Chaser**

☐ www.jowood.com
☐ TBC

**System requirements**

650MHz Pentium III; Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 1.35GB hard disk space

**Overall rating**

■■■■■■■■■□

Due to hit the shelves towards the end of June, Chaser is an impressive-looking FPS (first-person shooter). I was lucky enough to get my hands on some preview code and to say it blew my socks off would be something of an understatement. From the minute Chaser was up and running I was drawn by the stunning visuals and exciting storyline.

Imagine you wake one morning and realise that you're on board a spaceship where there's plenty of unhappy armed psychos who want you dead. To complicate matters further, you're not sure who you are or why you're there. If you're the type of person who keeps a cool head under extreme pressure then you'll realise you need to get the hell out of there

← It's best to kill the guards before they get within kissing distance

as quickly as possible, while attempting to find a few clues about your identity along the way.

John Chaser finds himself in this position one day in the year 2044. Except he doesn't know that he's John Chaser or that what year it is. Fortunately for him he's a rough-and-tough, ass-kicking SOB who happens to be able to run pretty fast and fire a gun dead straight.

As if this wasn't handy enough, he stumbles across some dead soldiers who have carelessly left their weapons strewn across the floor. Now he's got a shooter, he can kill as many of the guards – who look like *Star Wars* stormtroopers, only red – as he needs to in order to escape the HMS Majestic, which just so happens to be exploding at any minute. Pretty exciting, huh?

You'll also visit locations such as Montack City, Siberia and the planet Mars. The plot twists and turns and you'll encounter some powerful enemies and useful allies along the way. This game has everything a FPS needs and is reasonably easy for beginners to get to grips with as well. Be warned, though – Chaser gets much, much harder as it progresses. ■

*Ben Camm-Jones*

# Music Maker Dance Edition

Once upon a time you were lucky if your computer could bleep occasionally. Now, combined with some half decent speakers, even a basic-spec PC can deliver sound to make an audiophile go weak at the knees.

As the PC music revolution has mushroomed so too have the number of audio editing and creation packages available. The imaginatively titled Music Maker does exactly what it says on the box and then some. It's much more than your average beat cruncher with a plethora of synthesiser tools, effects and samples at your disposal. My personal favourite was the drum and bass synthesiser which allows you to create your own loops in real time.

Unlike an amateur package, with its tinny beats and cheesy loops, Music Maker features rich sounds and beats that help you create tunes you won't be embarrassed to play to your pals. Its interface makes complicated-sounding tasks, such as time stretching, simple. Other plus points include an easy-to-access online database of samples and loops.

Magix has outdone itself here. For just under £30 it gives you the power to create a variety of music from pop to hip hop. Music Maker is an awesome platform for anyone from the amateur to the semiprofessional and, as it can deal with pretty much any audio file, you'll find the longevity of this product worth the price. ■

*Simon Alveranga*

← Do you listen to the Top 40 and think 'I could do better than that'? Here's your chance

**Music Maker Dance Edition**

☐ Magix: 01923 495 496
☐ www.magix.com
☐ £29.99

**System requirements**

300MHz processor; Windows 95-XP; 64MB RAM; 550MB hard disk space; 16bit sound card

**Overall rating**

■■■■■■■■■■
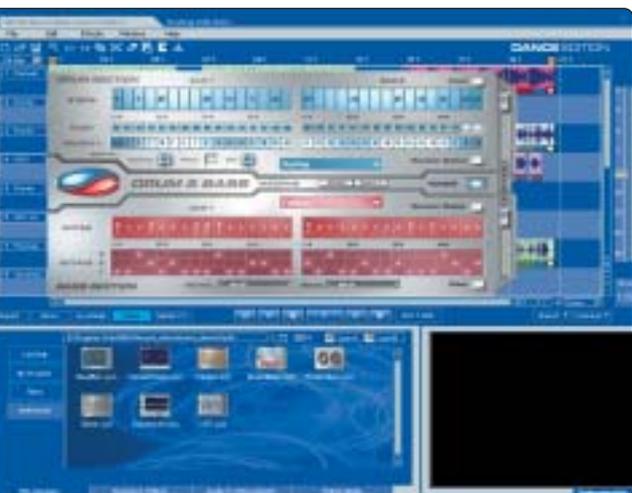
# Eye2eye Britain

**Eye2eye Britain**

☐ Eye2eye Software:
  01223 293 886
☐ www.eye2eyesoft.co.uk
☐ £39.99 inc VAT

**System requirements**

75MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 20MB hard disk space

**Overall rating**

■■■■■■□□□□

Eye2eye Britain contains 10,000 pictures of 3,000 different towns, cities and villages, tourist and historical sites. You're presented with a map of the UK, and you simply type in a place name and then click the flashing button to be take to that location. You can jump from place to place using the compass keys – ideal if you're deciding between neighbouring towns for a day trip or the prettiest spot for Sunday lunch.

As well as selecting specific places, you can enter slideshow mode and take an armchair tour of the country. Unfortunately, pictures come with only the most basic captions and, in many cases, there is little context provided. Unless you know something about the local history, famous residents or events, you're unlikely to increase your knowledge of the area. You may not want to be bogged down with too much reading, but for £39.99 Eye2eye

← For the truly lazy: explore interesting British tourist sites without leaving your seat

Software could have come up with a way of providing both eye candy and information.

Eye2eye Britain isn't up to date, either, unless the maker knows something we don't and Notts Forest are about to re-enter the Premier League. It's fairly hit and miss whether you get a single image or a large selection to browse when you click on a town or village name. For instance, you get 37 views of the important naval city of Portsmouth, but only one picture of the village of Chawton where Jane Austen lived. This seems strange since, presumably, Eye2eye is meant to be a souvenir product as much as anything else.

However, the point of this program is to show off Britain in all its varied glory and it works well as a pictorial roadtrip. Your armchair journey can take the form of a simple yet lengthy pitstop tour around Britain's coast or you can select a theme for your excursion such as historical, gardens and parks, industrial or even choose to snoop around TV and film locations.

While Eye2eye Britain is short on detail, it's a great way of exploring the country or taking a visual trip down memory lane. ■

*Rosemary Haworth*
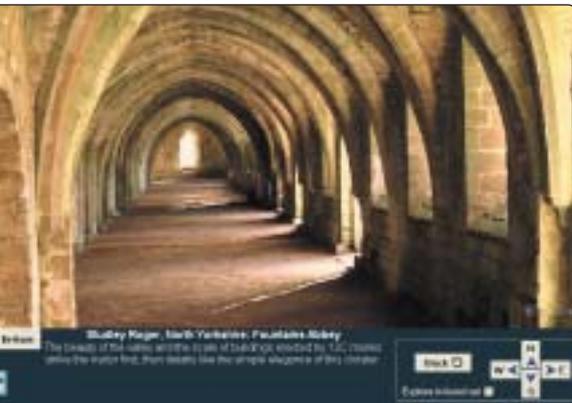
# Vietcong

Fear is your first enemy. You sense the restlessness of the natives and you're acutely aware of a palpable dissonance in the air – one that signals its intent through charged particles that raise the hairs on the back of your neck. Analytical cogitation is replaced by animalistic proclivities and you're reduced to the reactionism of fight or flight. All the while an appreciation of the irony of the situation is indicated by your wry smile – you've never felt so alive because you've never been so near death.

Welcome to hell on Earth. Welcome to Nam – Dagenham, about 11pm on a Saturday night outside The King and Queen. Scary stuff. If, however, you can't muster the courage to try out this terrifying experience then have a go at an altogether more enjoyable but less brutal Nam adventure, Vietcong.

This FPTS (first-person tactical shooter) is based on jungle warfare in Vietnam. It plays out like a cinematic encounter – the breathtaking awe of the initial helicopter journey and interactive nature of the NPCs (nonplaying characters) are accompanied by a superb soundtrack. Like Novalogic's Black Hawk Down, the tactical label in Vietcong is a misnomer – you

→ A wrong turn at the Co-Op, and you're in unchartered Essex territory

only have limited control over your squad and the emphasis is on straight-out action rather than strategic battle. Not a bad thing because it's well done and the varied missions keep your interest.

Graphics and sound make Vietcong an immensely atmospheric jungle trip. The lush foliage is so dense that it's hard to spot enemies – you'll have to rely on both your hearing and your pointman. This magical illusion is shattered by three issues we have with the main protagonist. First, he sounds more like a teenager rather than a man who loves the smell of napalm in the morning. Second, he's the spitting image of Leonard Nimoy in *The Search for Spock*. And third, his name is Steven Hawkins. They'd tear him to pieces in Dagenham. ■

*Spencer Dalziel*

**Vietcong**

☐ Take 2 Interactive: 01932 838 230
☐ www.take2europe.com
☐ £29.99

**System requirements**

500MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 256MB RAM; 1.8MB hard disk space

**Overall rating**

■■■■■■■■□□

# Zoombinis Island Odyssey

When I loaded up Zoombinis, I thought I was in for a sweet and cuddly kid's game with nothing in it to challenge my developed, worldly mind. However, my afternoon didn't turn out to be as comfortable as I had thought.

It's a well-known fact (to those who can still remember) that you forget over 90 percent of what you learn at school soon after leaving. Personally I can't recall the first thing about algebra or Latin. It's all very well to try and drum facts into a child's head but to present things in a fun way is a more satisfying and rewarding experience for both pupil and teacher.

This is what Zoombinis aims to do – it will engross children from the age of seven up with its neat storyline and charm kids and adults alike with the cute creatures.

Presenting mathematical and logical problems in a way that interests kids is not the easiest job. Recent surveys suggest that one out of every one children is hyperactive and has a short attention span, but Zoombinis Island Odyssey manages to engage the attention. I didn't actually have any children available to test it on, mind, but the fact that it kept me happy for hours is proof enough.

Zoombini's packaging doesn't do the game justice. Rather like a box of washing powder, it boasts 'New! Now with Science!' as if science were some kind of secret ingredient to make your whites whiter. Nonetheless, this serves as a clear message to parents – we've managed to sneak something of real educational value inside this game and your kids won't even notice.

The trouble with education for a lot of children is that the very concept of school and classrooms are dull. If you can help them to learn without them even realising then you have a greater chance of keeping them interested. An ideal package for both parents and teachers alike. ■

*Ben Camm-Jones*

➔ Cuddly and cute, Zoombinis teaches and entertains
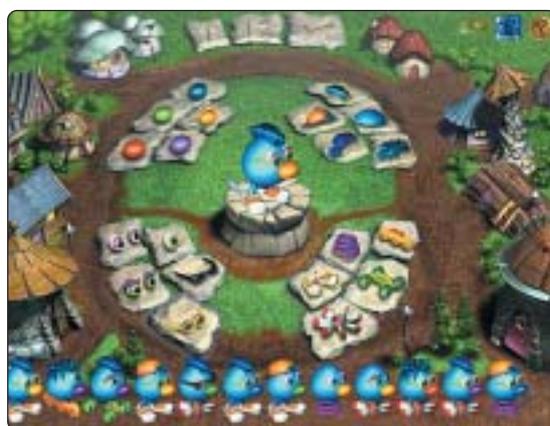
**Zoombinis Island Odyssey**
☐ Mindscape: 01293 651 300
☐ www.mindscape.co.uk
☐ £20

**System requirements**
200MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 80MB hard disk space

**Overall rating**
■■■■■■■■☐☐

# Neighbours from Hell

America, home of the serial killer and appalling TV shows, including *The Planet's Funniest Animals* and *The World's Scariest Police Chases.* Gameshows have been a staple on US and UK screens for years and they are all, without exception, utterly dire. A chance for some complete no-mark or, even worse, a whole family of them to leave their stain on the public consciousness.

Then there are the studio audiences. Why anyone would voluntarily go and watch one of these abominations is beyond me. But they sit there laughing along, encouraging the contestants, enthusiastically applauding and yelping. In the US you can hear the audience firing their guns in the air too. Well okay, you can't, but only because they know that doing so will bring down the lighting rigs hanging over their heads.

Some might argue that I was destined to hate Neighbours from Hell, based as it is on a gameshow. It's a fairly simple idea – you must sneak around your neighbour's house, setting up practical jokes without him catching you. If he does he'll beat you to a pulp, but if he doesn't he'll continue to stumble across the tricks you've left for him… with hilarious results.

It does require a strategy – okay, so it's not exactly chess but it will make you think. You must be aware of the audience ratings as you need a certain percentage to progress to the next level. For example, leave more than one joke for the neighbour so he falls for two in quick succession and the audience will lap it up. It's much better if he's already angry when he falls for a trick as he'll really blow his top.

Much to my surprise I found myself enjoying Neighbours from Hell and the kids will love it too. Just make sure it doesn't give them any ideas – unless you don't mind a bottle of red wine in the washing machine. ■

*Ben Camm-Jones*

← Play practical jokes on your neighbour to earn points and laughs. Just don't kill him

**Neighbours from Hell**
☐ www.jowood.com
☐ £19.99

**System requirements**
166MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 130MB hard disk space; DirectX 8-compatible graphics & sound card; 16MB video RAM

**Overall rating**
■■■■■■■☐☐☐