



• Bazooka Joe fires a fin-stabilized rocket grenade at an AV. The ballistics modeling—line-of-sight issues notwithstanding—is terrific.

# THEATRE OF WAR

Theatre of the absurd

PUBLISHER: [Battlefront.com](http://Battlefront.com) DEVELOPER: 1C Games GENRE: Historical Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: E-tail ([www.battlefront.com](http://www.battlefront.com)) ESRB RATING: Not Rated  
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2.6GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 3GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Gold Master

## REVIEW

About halfway through 1C Games' World War II RTS *Theatre of War*, I was tempted to pick up the mouse, wag it at the computer, and—heeding Peter Finch's call in 1976's *Network*—yell "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" But I kept on taking it anyway, as my platoon of German Pz IVs had to punch through a company of Soviet KV-1s and T-34s...and I was damned if the pinhead tactical A.I., AWOL features, and frivolous landscape scrub were going to stop me.

But stop me they did, like a steel wall of heavily entrenched Königstigers in some other, better game. While I had a decent rip with *Theatre of War*, I can't say I'll touch it again until it gets an overhaul—it's simply too undependable. For starters, you spend more time paused than plunging through the Axis or Allied European theater campaigns and solo battles, microherding because the A.I. lacks the autonomous know-how to tie its shoes. Squads under fire momentarily hug turf, then stand and charge bullet sprays like delusional supermen. Speedier armored vehicles rear-end slower tanks, then irrationally pull out of formation, dangerously exposing their flanks. Pinned gunners inexplicably break from their squads and lunge at the enemy without a "bold" or "heroic" psych indicator in sight. In short, destination trumps deliberation, making your soldiers act like robots.

### I SEE YOU

Irrespective of nationality (Poland, Germany, Russia, France, U.S., U.K.) or weaponry, your computer opponent possesses the eyes and aim of a god, while your walking toolboxes shoot like Dick Cheney. Instruct your squads to attack, and they'll often respond with

"don't have clear line of fire," which—since you don't get line-of-sight tracing lines—leaves you to guess by moving gunners around like hats on sticks. On the other hand, a single tank will reliably spot your "hidden" antitank guns at up to 1,000 tree-and-brush-choked meters, then proceed to one-shot liquidate both crews. Grass may not stop bullets, but when the enemy can see prone weed-covered teams half a map away, either someone was bitten by a radioactive spider, or the sighting algorithm's fishy.

On the upside, the game models stuff like vehicle armor levels and facing, different ammo types, and much of the ballistic miscellany that war gamers tend to rhapsodize. But then it goes and breaks command and control by forgoing must-haves like waypoints—a death kiss for any company-level RTS.

### EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE SQUAD LEADER

When a war-game skunk works like Battlefront launches a new game, it's like an arm reaches through the clouds (cue the ringing hosannas). Figure in the guys behind *IL-2 Sturmovik*, and you half expect something to drop through columns of diapered cherubim. How two quality ops managed to screw up *Theatre of War* is anyone's guess, but they did—and with the genre on life support as it is, that's a serious bummer. • Matt Peckham

### VERDICT

Historically detailed units and vehicles; realistic ballistics.

Unrealistic enemy A.I.; no option to set waypoints or check line of sight.

4/10

BAD

Games for Windows  
THE OFFICIAL FIGURE



• Vehicles are modeled with exceptional historical accuracy, right down to precise gunnery, ammo loads, engine speeds, and armor thickness.



YOUR COMPUTER OPPONENT POSSESSES THE EYES AND AIM OF A GOD. WHILE YOUR WALKING TOOLBOXES SHOOT LIKE DICK CHENEY.



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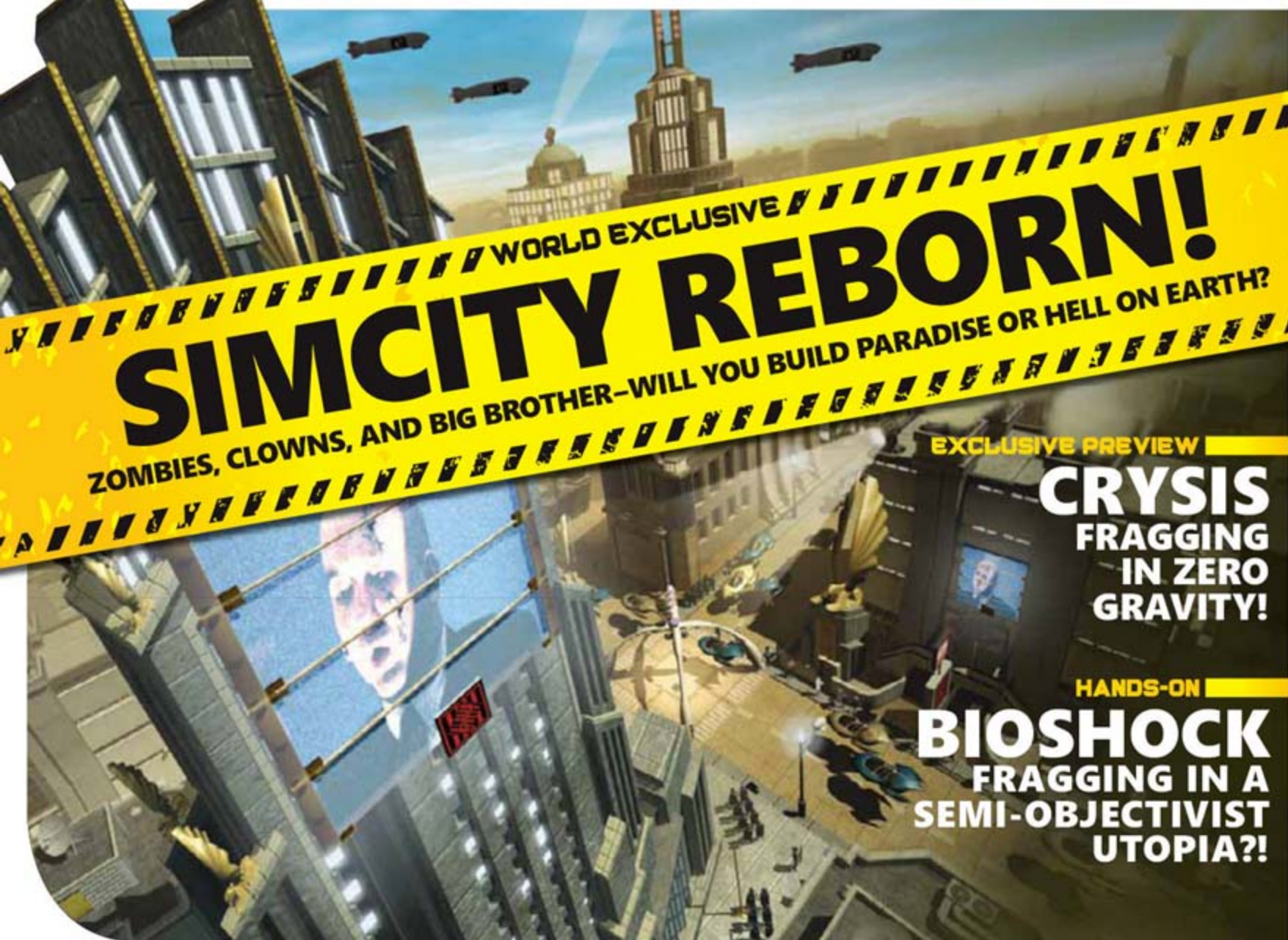
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