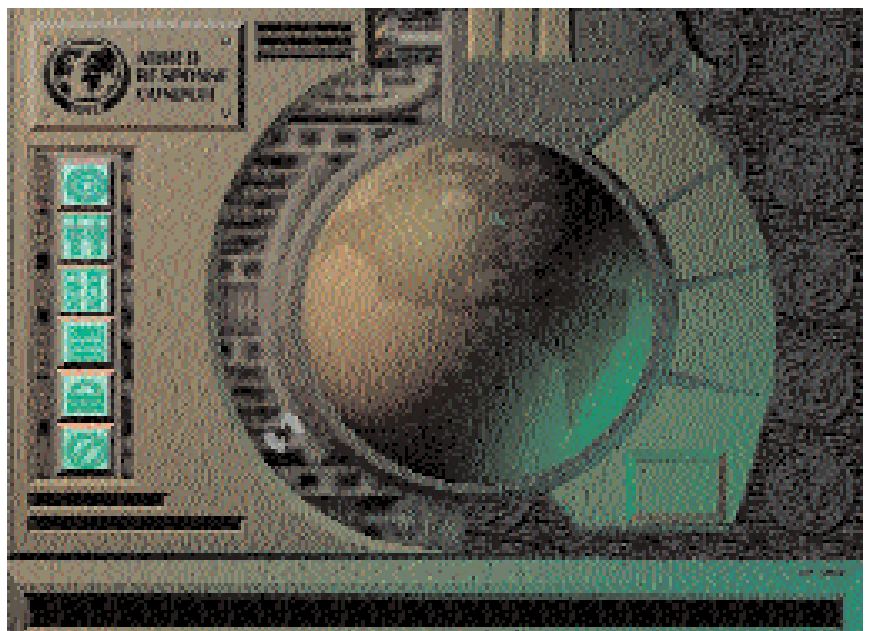
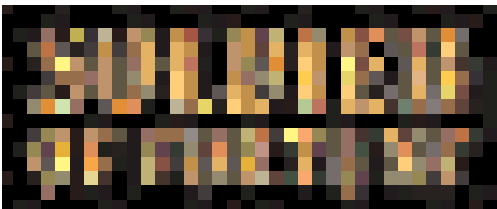


Crossing the reality gap

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

FIONN BEHRENS

You'd think that Linux would have the shoot-em-up genre pretty well sown up by now. However, realistic scenarios for *Opposing Force* etc. have been thin on the ground. With *Soldier Of Fortune* from Raven Software (*Heretic II*) and Lokigames, this gap is (at least partly) bridged.



Soldier Of Fortune transports the player into the secret and deadly world of the modern soldier. Using innovative multiplayer modes, your man has to battle his way through dozens of realistically designed missions on five continents. The game, (encompassing around 740MB), is easy to install thanks to the Loki setup. Those using a Banshee graphics card should add the following lines to the "sof" start script to avoid spoiling their fun:

```
export FX_DONT_FAKE_MULTITEX=1
export SDL_VIDEO_X11_DGAMOUSE=0
```

Graphics and control errors may arise if this is omitted.

The genre of the 3D-Shooter is not well known for its innovative game play. This reputation isn't threatened by *Soldier of Fortune*. But if you prefer games that are thin on elaborate plot, then the all-action *Soldier Of Fortune* is the one for you.

Fig. 1: Main menu, from nice little details to the status indicators.



The soldier of the title is one John Mullins. He's paid for carrying out the most diverse of secret missions. Mullins is assigned his tasks at the start of every mission. The game play now and then reduces such tasks to the familiar "wipe out everything that stands in your way" routine. There are hostages to be rescued and civilians who have to be spared occasionally, so it's not fair to generalise too much.

The game runs on a highly modified and tuned Quake2 engine. Thus all the levers and adjustment wheels, for example, are simply borrowed from Q2. Otherwise the engine turns in a good performance when it comes to presenting scenarios realistically.

SoF is especially outstanding in the richness of its detail. Your opponents don't all look as if they have been cloned, they wear glasses and hats, which can even be shot down (unfortunately not collectively). The sound too is nice – running water, speech, shots and other sounds come across as very realistic – although the death cry is somehow always the same.

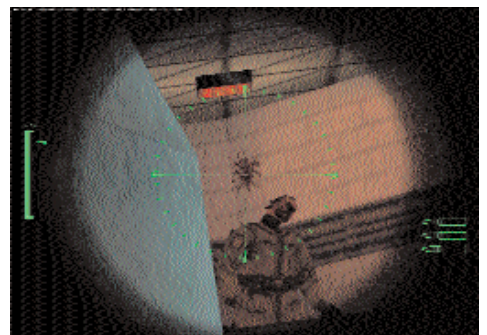
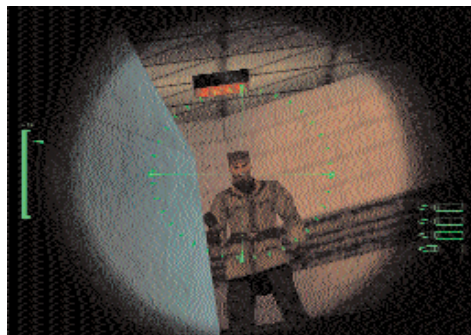
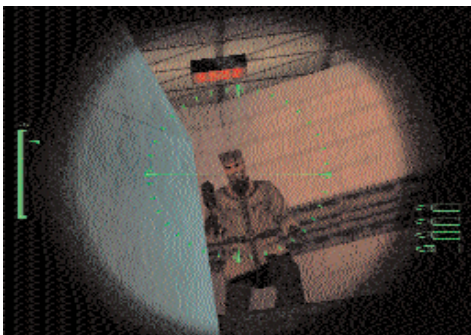
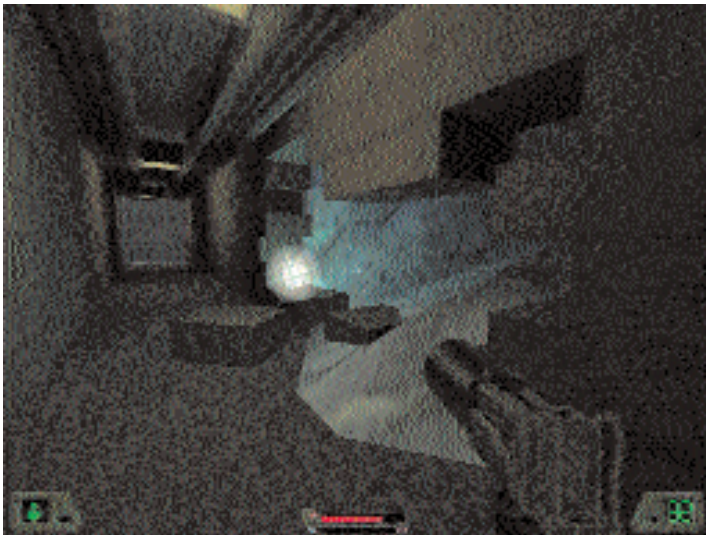
That brings us to the most outstanding feature of this game – its brutality. The engine distinguishes between twenty-six different types of shooting injuries – each of which is shown in detail and animated! You can put opponents temporarily out of action by well-aimed shots in the knee or arm, but they'll get really angry with you. Shot-away body parts and other gory details are reproduced by the game with macabre precision. Consequently, the game is unsuitable for children. In some places it

feels like a Western, as you shoot your opponent's gun clean out of their hand, or let an unfortunate sniper have it in a particularly vulnerable area. Ouch!

It's rather courageous to launch SoF when such violent games are increasingly controversial. Mind you, the depictions of violence can be greatly reduced via a password-protected menu option. It may be that a version with "moderated violence" is the one that reaches European shelves. But realism gives rise to another effect too. From time to time, it seems as though you're the star in your own action film. And this is fun. The effect of the various weapons is very realistic. If you're hit by a rocket then you'll find yourself (at best) in a lot of tiny pieces. There is still some way to go to reach the cinema-like standard of Half Life, but everything is basically fine – from the thunderous soundtrack to the faultless effects.

Developers have used the tempo of the game to intensify its "cinematic" qualities. It more or less has the best timing for any game of this type that I have come across. Soldier Of Fortune combines a very well balanced assortment of film sequences and action. You won't be exhausted from sheer action, or sustain a significant fall in adrenaline.

Your arsenal is oriented towards current state-of-the-art weaponry. You have a small- and large-calibre pistol, a shotgun, an automatic submachine gun (with and without silencer), a firearm with (zoom) telescopic sight, an extremely useful and a heavy



machine gun etc. all at your disposal. All weapons have absolutely realistic operation. The number of weapons that you can carry around with you at any given time varies according to the degree of difficulty or level of realism that you have selected.

The multiplayer mode uses the WON.net games network. This is integrated into the game transparently so that it is hardly noticeable. For multiplayer there are fifty different characters to choose from and seven different game variations. Amongst others is also a "realistic" death-match, in which things like tiredness (if you run around too much) and manual reloading of the weapon play a role or "Assassin", in which you have to catch a certain opponent whilst hunted by another opponent.

There's an indicator built into the screen which registers the amount of noise you make (as in "Thief", for example). The more noise you make, the more your adversaries will notice you. Mind you, your electronic opponents, intelligence can be extremely "unintelligent". On one occasion, a soldier standing next to his mortally wounded comrade, was still unaware of (your) hostile presence.

Although the "Ghoul" engine is based on a long-established design, Soldier Of Fortune is in no way an outmoded game. The soundtrack and the film sequences are extremely well devised. The effects exhibit a hitherto unknown realism. Opinions will differ over the presentation, to put it diplomatically. All in all the game is soundly built and good value for money. ■



Rating:

Long-term game fun:	75%
Graphics:	85%
Sound:	75%
Control:	85%
Multiplayer:	90%
Overall rating:	80%

