



E PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal DEVELOPER: Irrational Games GENRE: Tactical Simulation ESRB RATING: M REQUIRED: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 2GB install, 64MB videocard RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2-16 players)

SWAT 4

Back in blue



The last time I saw *SWAT 4*, it was pulling away from its realistic, tactical roots to become just another shooter dressed in police gear. Then it vanished until Irrational Games, the makers of *Freedom Force* and *System Shock 2*, took over the project and kept the hopes of another brilliant tac-sim alive. Still, could Irrational really pull it off? Could it revive the series and take it off life support? When I successfully completed the high-octane restaurant mission and then moved on to a mission that contained the chilling horror of busting a Dahmer doppelganger, all doubts were removed. I had discovered my new favorite tactical shooter.

FRESH UNIFORM

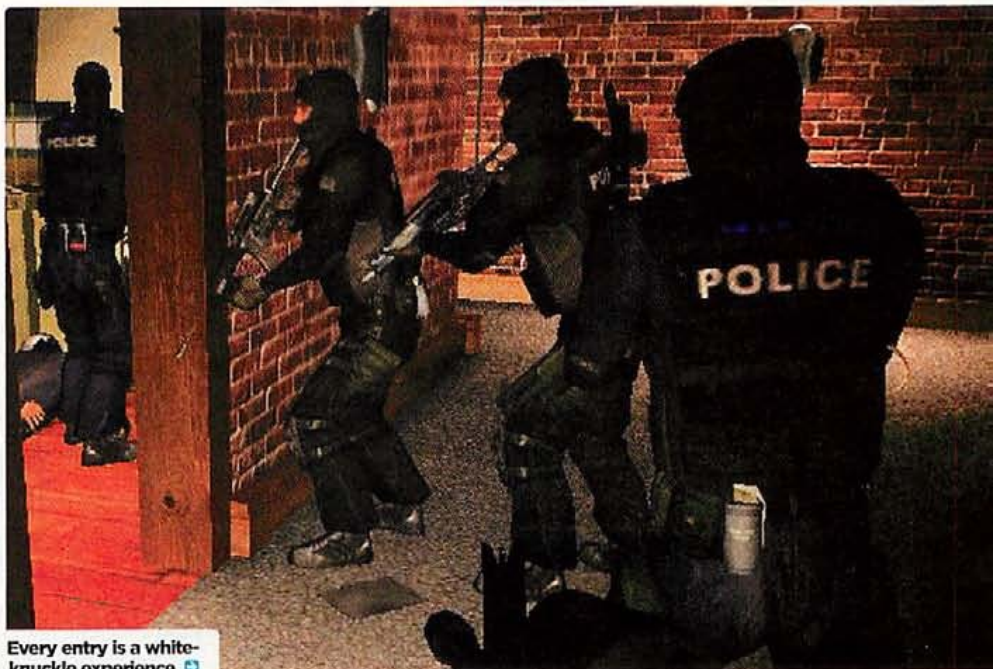
As a tactical simulation, *SWAT 4* provides the same gut-wrenching tension and realism as its predecessor, but it adds a streamlined command interface, simpler HUD, better damage model, expanded arsenal of police gear, user-friendly mission map editor, and a plethora of high-intensity missions to the proceedings, as well as more realistic A.I. and enhanced multiplayer support. Yeah...that's all. Oh, and the Unreal technology powering the game makes it pretty sharp looking to boot.


As the element commander of a five-man SWAT team, your job is to deploy your officers to gain control of some pretty hairy crises, tackling such objectives as bringing order to chaos or rescuing

civilians. Unlike in military combat sims, where lethal force is expected, *SWAT 4* relies instead on police rules of engagement, where compliance is the rule. No blitzing into buildings and taking out every bad guy on the map—you only shoot if the lives of your officers or innocents are at risk. If suspects are willing to surrender, you must apprehend and cuff them rather than kill them.

Keeping your finger from pulling the trig-

ger is a challenging proposition, especially when your Optiwand (a video-camera device used to peer around corners and underneath doors) shows an agitated group of gangsters holding hostages inside a dance hall. Once you give the order to "breach, bang, and clear" the locked room leading into the hall, your team mustn't succumb to pressure. Knowing when to order your officers to utilize stun guns, pepper spray, or less-

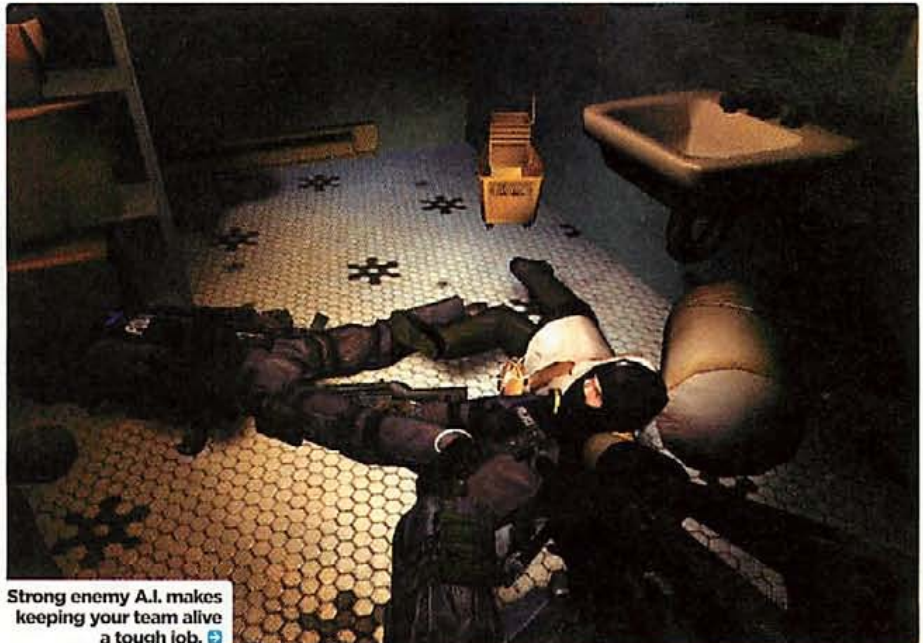


Every entry is a white-knuckle experience. 

lethal beanbag-firing shotguns instead of just mowing down noncompliant bad guys with GB36 assault rifles requires quick, cool wits. Be indecisive, and you'll discover how quickly hostages get waxed and your officers get blown away. Whether you're raiding a weapon smuggler's den while hoping to avoid shooting an unsuspecting undercover law-enforcement agent or protecting hospital patients from assassins looking to kill a foreign diplomat, *SWAT 4* somehow manages to top the grit and intensity of the excellent *SWAT 3*.

BE CAREFUL OUT THERE

After starting your career, you receive a ton of information at the beginning of each mission. This includes a highly detailed crisis briefing, an Entry screen providing a detailed map of the operation, and lists of suspects and civilians who are held hostage. Next you'll outfit your offi-



Strong enemy A.I. makes keeping your team alive a tough job.



Mission so incredibly not accomplished.



Resisting the temptation to kill the freak with the graveyard in his basement might be the toughest part of the game.

cers with the right gear for the job, and there's a lot of it. The *SWAT 4* armory includes an assortment of weapons such as the Colt M4A1, a lightweight .45 caliber submachine gun built from polymers; a pepper-ball paintball gun that allows you to fire a controlled volley of CS gas balls; and the new Benelli M4 Nova Pump tactical shotgun. Add door wedges, stun guns, and C2 breaching charges to your arsenal, and *SWAT 4* is packed with the right equipment for getting the job done.

All 13 missions are varied, challenging, and, thanks to random enemy placement, very replayable. Action is quick, and with the top-notch A.I., you'll need to stay sharp when clearing buildings. Perps are smart, quickly (and accurately) returning fire or running away. Unlike other tactical shooters in which A.I. teammates perform marginally at best, *SWAT 4*'s officers are proactive, reacting to situations so quickly that they dispatch bad guys before they can do any more harm. This gives the game a great realistic feel and lets you focus on the task at hand. It's a

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huge relief to finally play a tactical simulation without the hassle of micro-managing inept teammates.

A vastly improved HUD is simple and intuitive, and the context-sensitive commands make for a more efficient and enjoyable experience. No more getting mired in miniwindows—you now issue commands through a simple tap of the Space Bar (default) or through a series of colored, highlighted menus for a seamless execution of commands.

BREACH, BANG, AND CLEAR YOUR ROUTER

Unlike its predecessor, in which the multiplayer expansion pack was a year-later afterthought, *SWAT 4* comes packing a solid multiplayer game with about a half dozen game types for either co-op or

adversarial play. VIP escort in adversarial mode is probably the most challenging team game, with one team having two minutes to escort a randomly chosen SWAT VIP teammate to an extraction point while the opposing force tries to assassinate him. Whatever mode you opt for, it's all incredibly tense and fun.

Simply put, *SWAT 4* is just about the best tactical shooter available. Its outstandingly realistic and gripping play delivers everything a tac-sim fan craves. Now, if you'll excuse me, there are more perps in need of cuffing.

✕ Raphael Liberatore

Verdict ★★★★★

Gritty, gripping, great—*SWAT 4* is the new benchmark for tactical simulations.