

PCZONE

ISSUE 189 JANUARY 2008

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- 360 MAGAZINE

"10 OUT OF 10"

- OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

"A THRILLING AND DRAMATIC RIDE"

-PC GAMER

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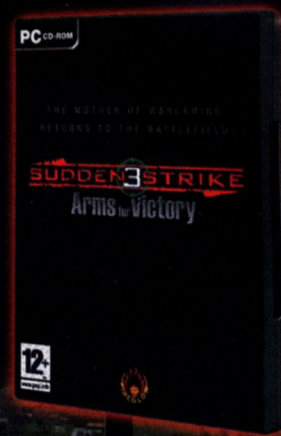
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COVER STORY

38

PROJECT ORIGIN

Alma matters in our fascinating foray into the true sequel to *F.E.A.R.*

NEVERQUEST 123

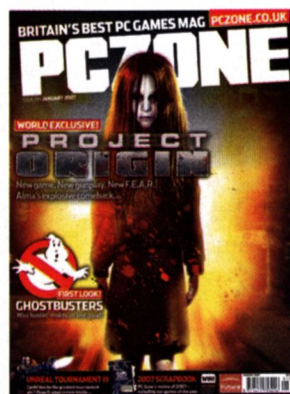
"I'm a pointy-eared twat walking in a mainly empty city"



GHOSTBUSTERS 20

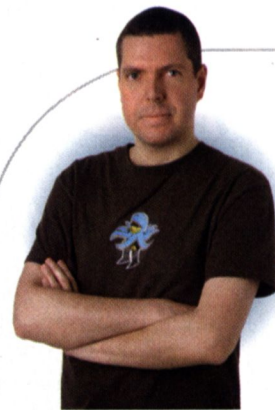
DEVELOPERS IN DALLAS AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOSTS. NO WAY.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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- 60 UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 46 words... Having badgered *Monolith* for what seems like years, we proudly delve into the true sequel to *F.E.A.R.* and explain why you should still care. And other stories. Including: busting spectres, rounding up years and reducing our foes to bloodied Skellingtons. And Log's face on a baby.



NEGATIVITY IS CRAP

HEY, GAMES ARE great! I just thought I'd mention that again in case anyone has forgotten why we read, write, play, love, obsess and argue about this hobby of angrily hammering the W, A, S and D keys while frantically clicking the left mouse button. We're now living in a Renaissance period for gaming, with an astounding line-up of titles - *Portal*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Unreal Tournament III* (page 60), *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat*, *Crysis*, *World in Conflict*... the list goes on, as you'll see in our 2007 Scrapbook feature (page 47).

Not only do we have access to all the classic games that have come before - even emulate the best ones from other formats - but we have the greatest new games now, as well as the amazing ability to tweak, twiddle and mod them to our heart's content (see page 114).

Yet, unbelievably, I hear from people on how rubbish everything is. As a cynical northerner, it's maybe a little hypocritical to be talking about how much negativity is pissing me off - but even I'm getting to the point where a world-weary shrug from a friend or forum post sends me into a Hulk-like rage. Someone famous once said "you've never had it so good" - I truly believe that. Although, 2008 is looking rather good...

Jamie Sefton, editor

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Return to the Thunderdome in what could be the most essential multiplayer game in years...

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F.E.A.R.: PERSEUS MANDATE



GET INVOLVED! 118

ONLINE ZONE
FIGHT CLUB!
PUBCASTS!
ZONE CHAT!
BLOGS!

FREELAYFREEWARE

Freeware
 Steve Hogarty is rich, now let him show you how to be rich

STRANDED II Wilson! Wilson! Wilson! etc

MONDO MEDICALS
 Doctor, doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains...

PORTAL: THE FEAR OF MON
 Now there's a hole in the sky

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH
 CLICK-DRAG-TYPE 3

112 FREEWARE
 We deliberately pay young Steve Hogarty far less than he's worth simply to keep his freeware senses... Win!

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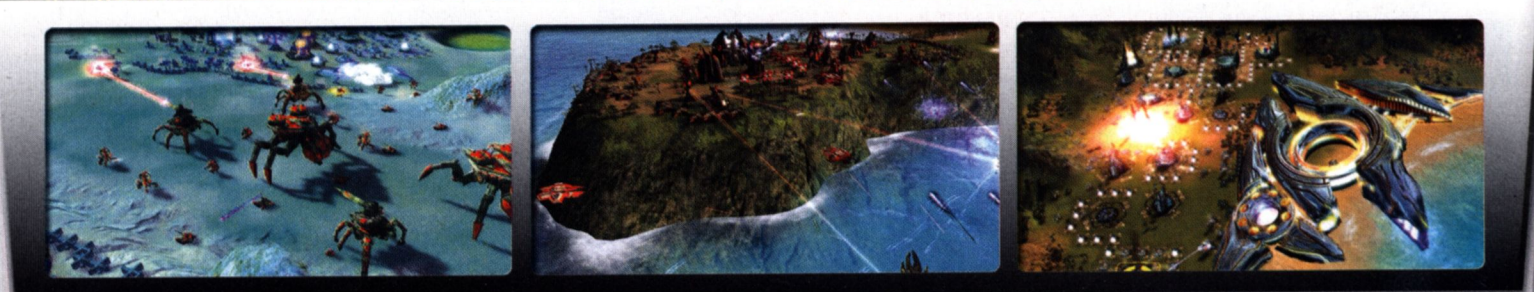
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STRATEGY ON A REVOLUTIONARY SCALE



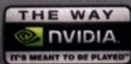
SUPREME COMMANDER Forged Alliance



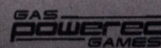
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Games for Windows



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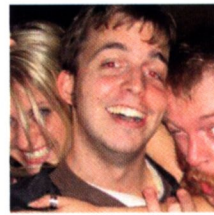
MEET THE TEAM

Hello, we love you, let us tell you our names

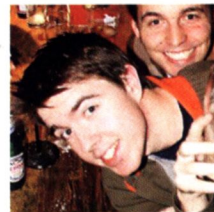


ED ZITRON
 Disc Editor
 AGE: 21
 LIKES: NFL and coffee
 DISLIKES: Gophers
 FANCIES: Arguing
 FAVE GAME: *Total
 Annihilation*
 PLAYING: *The Witcher*

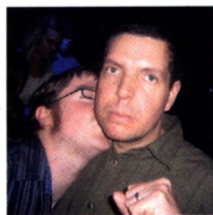
Ed Zitron has been hanging around the freelance bits like a rotten stench for God knows how long, but he is best known for his love-hate relationship with the MMORPG. Love, in that he loves them in a way that isn't healthy. And hate, in that he hates it when we throw books at him, and call him the goblin boy. However, it's not all morpguhs - he also likes fine wines, American Football and alt-tabbing five times a second whilst writing his excellent reviews. Ladies and gentlemen, a warm welcome to our very own gaming rain man, Ed Zitron.



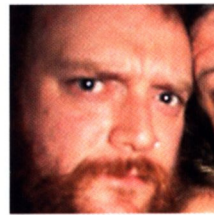
WILL PORTER
 Deputy Editor
 Will Porter is the gaming industry's most lovely and least judgmental men. His stint as Mussolini's biographer was cut short when he submitted a draft which read "He was lovely. Bit much at times, but aren't we all?"
NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty 4*



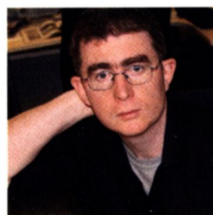
STEVE HOGARTY
 Section Editor
 Steve bought a MacBook this month, and now carries it with him everywhere, thanks to a jealous paranoia and love. If it was a woman his behaviour would be revolting. But it's a laptop. And you're supposed to take those with you.
NOW PLAYING: *Flight Sim X*



JAMIE SEFTON
 Editor
 From his modest Northern upbringing, even his mother never imagined that he'd reach the airless heights of videogame journalism, let alone become the editor of a PC gaming magazine that literally dozens of people have heard of.
NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty 4*



LOG
 Staff Writer
 Log has omitted "Jon" and "Blyth" this month, because everyone calls him "Log". One of the worst things about the last 18 months has been turning around whenever he hears the most common name in Britain.
NOW PLAYING: *Tabula Rasa*



RICHARD COSGROVE
 Production Editor
 Not only does he look over all of our words with a sneer, he phones up companies and demands justice for the consumer in the Watchdog page. If ever there was a cross between Batman and his nemesis The Bookworm, Richard is it.
NOW PLAYING: *The Movies*



MARTIN KORDA
 Freelance Guy
 Rumour has it that Crytek spotted Martin Korda snapping palm trees with his fists, and decided to include that in their new game. When they saw him leaping over houses and strangling Koreans with one fist, *Crysis* was born.
NOW PLAYING: *Bear Crush '08*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Will and Log's new computers, the continuing glut of quality games, and discounted organic coffee
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... A curious disease that causes a rainbow of liquids to come out of both ends of our bodies

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

- ENTRE NOUS** 120 mins The best club sandwiches in London. Nom nom nom
- MY HORSE AND ME** 100 mins Ed says he is reviewing it. Log prepares for the fight
- HONKPARP** 57 mins The rules of HonkParp are not very simple. Stop misunderstanding them
- THE CAKE IS A LIE** 75 mins Can all this joke-appropriation by over-eager nerds destroy *Portal's* charm?
- CRYSIS** 100 mins How much fun can you have just chasing and killing crabs?
- DEADLINES!** 240 mins They've passed, you say? Someone could have told us...
- WARCRAFT TRUFAX** 43 mins It's *Wrath of the Lich King*. Not *Revenge*. And definitely not *Witch King*.
- TAT ZONE** 25 mins £27 for a *Crysis* notepad? We should have asked for more...
- MANLY MEN** 52 mins The last woman left our floor to work on *Metal Hammer*. It's going to get musky in our office
- IPHONE** 40 mins Ed's had one since 2005. And it's HD-ready and everything

WIN! Wake up, Tiny Compo! We've invented the Massivo Ray, which will swell you to the size of *Guardian* Crossword! No longer will you be so wee, fall into drains and get bob in your hair. Stay still... oh, we missed you. Well, you are tiny. You stupid miniature tombola. Last month's winner was Justin Peacock in Manchester - send this month's answers to "I Can Only Describe Your Behaviour As Rum. Mr D'Arcy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW."

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date - 2 January 2008 - will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. 9. For full terms and conditions visit www.futuretcs.com.

LETTERS



Will Porter wonders why this section isn't titled 'emails'. And whether it ever will be



KING OF LETTERS

BARGAIN HUNTER

I'm a 16 year-old bloke on a low budget, working off a cheap Dell I managed to scrape together a little money for. I recently decided to buy a new game after a year of never even straying into my local game shop.

I went straight to the budget section, as is usual when I shop. "Maybe I can afford *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*" I thought hopefully, but when I looked I couldn't believe my eyes. *Mafia!* *GTA3!* *Age of Mythology!* *Morrowind!* Games I once could only hope to play in my wildest dreams just tossed into the bargain bin with little red stickers on. My eyes literally almost popped out of my head.

Needless to say, I counted out the pennies from my little purse and rushed home to make the most of my low-end computer. Pure bliss. Technology may change, but good design remains classic.

BioShock may make my eyes and mind bleed, but for me that's beyond my grasp and you know what? Who



Still visually stunning *Morrowind*.

cares! You may show off your *Quake Wars* and *Call of Duty 4* but I'll stick with my *Max Payne* and *Dungeon Keeper* for now thank you... well at least until I have money, then you can ignore this entire letter.

"Screw old games, I have a 5.8GHz triple processor and a 6GB RAM! Where's my virtual reality pill?"

Louis Richards

With the rich back catalogue of PC games, if you're happy to live with the games of yesteryear then there's no reason to play endless catch-up with technology. Your cashless stoicism is laudable, but surely it must hurt to hear of next-

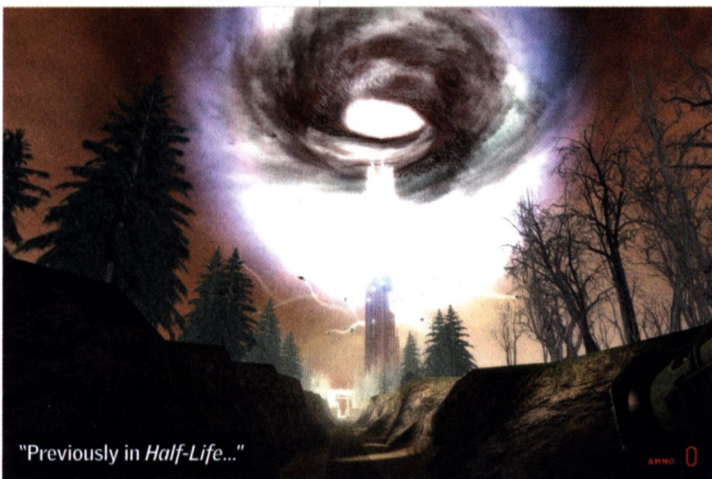
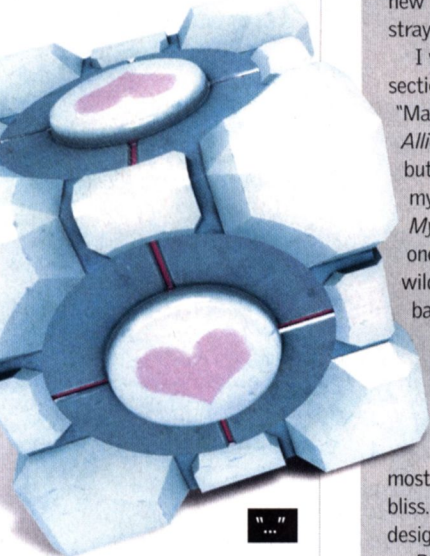
WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're all modern-like, fingers to keyboard. Every month, we'll reward our chosen royalty with a posh XFX GeForce 8600GT PCI-E graphics card. For more info, check out www.xfxforce.com. You can also buy one at www.dabs.com for £75 (product code PV-T84J-UDF3).

gen delights? And avoiding hearing about the endings of *BioShock* and *Portal* will be impossible.

As such, please accept a graphics card on us. It doesn't do ingested virtual reality - but you might be able to play *Half-Life 2*.



"Previously in *Half-Life*..."

STILL ALIVE

Having seen the ending to *Portal* (no spoilers here, thank you), I thought the music sung on the end credits was incredibly clever, but had to do something about it's insane 'argh, argh in my head argh' catchiness. Therefore, I whipped out my saxophone, and played it away. My head swam with the music and I was free of the addiction. So here it is, for your enjoyment, in low quality. The playing I mean, not the recording.

Siggs

Nice one Siggs. Our pages cannot relay the quality of your WMA file, but suffice to say it certainly did not

sound like someone blowing a kazoo into an empty baked bean can. If any other readers want to record themselves playing gaming songs we'll stick them up on the website, and maybe even award prizes.

BAD WINNERS

Dear *PC ZONE*. You got beaten in a computer games pub quiz by a team of Game Cultures students with a rubbish team name. I was on Team Beans. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

Charles Ali, Team Beans

For the record, the *PC ZONE* team (wisely choosing the moniker

BioShock: alt-tabbing into our hearts.



"Too many people are jumping on the games review bandwagon, and are doing an ass-ways job of it"

Cormac McDonnell on *PC ZONE*'s so-called peers and competition

'Anonymous Protagonists' over 'Quiz Team Aguilera') were doing alright until the quizmasters' repeated calls of 'There is no cake!' and 'The cake is a lie!' finally got a little bit annoying. Still, we had the better name - and therefore won the moral victory.

UNPROFESSIONAL

Any chance you can stop crap game reviewers giving people bad, even disappointing, views of games? I recently visited a well-advertised website and saw *BioShock* with three out of five stars and described as unchallenging and soon-to-be bargain bin fodder.

Too many people are jumping on the games review bandwagon, now they're a bit more mainstream, and are doing an ass-ways job of it. I don't know exactly how this can be solved but it's getting out of hand.

Cormac McDonnell

Never ever believe a review in a non-dedicated magazine or website: there are some absolute numpties in the national press who barely even play games before reviewing them.

Then again - there's a new PC magazine around with a staff who wouldn't know a *Windows* operating system if it repeatedly minimised itself on their genitals, so maybe you should just read us instead...

LAST TIME IN PCZ...

All the way back in issue 168 one of your readers asked why developers don't

add recaps to their games. In response, Jamie called to the gaming gods - Valve - to make it so and, lo and behold *HL2: Episode 2* had a recap of the previous episode at the beginning.

Now, can Jamie wave his magic gaming wand again, so that it would be possible for me to turn my texture settings on *Episode 2* beyond low?

Ian Morris

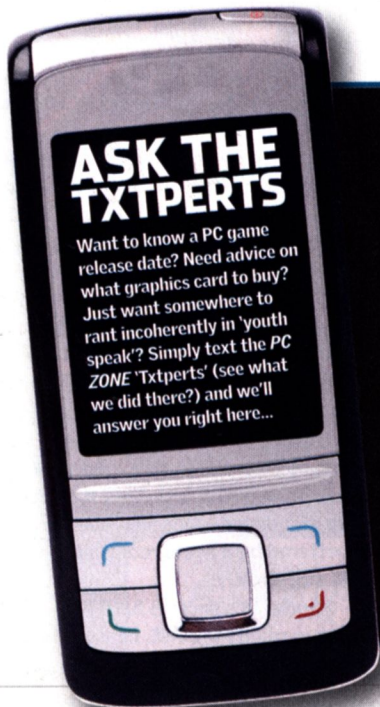
Sefton isn't around right now, and I'm not sure where he keeps his magic gaming wand. I can use my own magic gaming wand and

potentially reset your resolution or something, but I'm still something of an apprentice and can cause unsolicited crashes to desktop. I'm not going to risk it I'm afraid.

LONG WAY UP

Has anyone noticed how Gordon Freeman is looking more and more like Ewan McGregor's evil twin? I do hope I haven't ruined any aspects of *Episode 3* in this discovery. Though a motorcycle adventure from John O'Groats to Cape Town would be fun, just think of the achievement points that could be involved!

Chris Carr



ASK THE TXPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the *PC ZONE* 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...

So what happened to the *Quake 3 Arena* mods? Subscription on hold again...

Disappointed Quake Fan

Not sure about this. If in doubt I usually blame Log - so it is probably Log's fault that you have been made sad. Sorry. He's horrid.

Why isn't *STALKER* in your Buyer's Guide? It's a great game!

James

If you could see the civil wars that erupt in our office over the merit of *STALKER*. Some say it's great, others say it's great but has issues. But it's in there now (page 94).

I want to kiss 'n cuddle Steve till I am sick.

Biffs

Biffs, I hate to ruin your fantasies but you'd be sick almost instantaneously. He's a boy with a magic touch.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 2

Sent in by Charlie Street

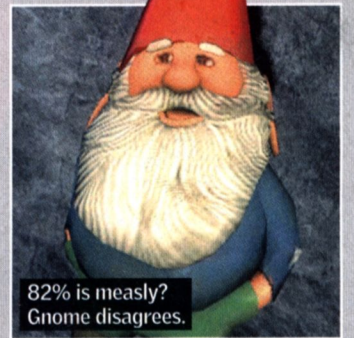
PC ZONE score: 82%

How, in the name of all that is good and holy did you manage to score *Half-Life: Episode 2* at a measly 82%? The opening sections are a mite dull, but the game turns into the greatest action nuggets that the series has ever seen. It betters Black Mesa, it betters Nova Prospekt - it's just sheer excellence. I'm astounded that Steve Hogarty could just get it so wrong.

As for there being no story - did he just not listen to a word that was said? Right, I'm off to carry a gnome all the way through the game AND THEN ALL THE WAY BACK. Just to prove you wrong even more.

Your shout:

95%



82% is measly?
Gnome disagrees.

Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words and a percentage score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



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Yes. And the idea of a completely silent Obi Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* prequels, or a cold-turkey Renton from *Trainspotting* attempting to mainline heroin through an HEV suit are certainly thought provoking. Next month: does Alyx look like a thin Roseanne Barr?

GUILD WHINGE

I've got a few thoughts about whether *Guild Wars 2* will actually be a massive *WOW* player-stealer, or whether it'll just destroy ArenaNet by losing a load of existing *Guild Wars* players. People have played for so long to get titles and items which will become worthless: in the Hall of Monuments there is barely anything of any value that you can have up there.

The change sounds amazing, but to be honest the items transfer/inheritance idea is pretty terrible, only the best items, and very few titles actually get transferred.

You can't just transfer any 500,000 gold elemental sword or platinum blade (some of the rarest weapons in the game) you can only transfer a few select non-farmable weapons. To be honest unless they tell us about what we will get from inheritance what's the point in us playing?

Carroll Macnamara

Carroll, you're talking bollocks. *Guild Wars 2* is a new game – not just some tacked on graphics and jumping bonus pack. Given that, what's the point in having an ultra-rare power sword from the last game when you're starting anew? The balance issues would cause developers to have nightmares. And at what point do you expect *GW* to be turned off? I can assure you that it won't be for a while. ArenaNet's inheritance system



"Hey guys, anyone seen my bear?"

for *GW2* is a better thought-out transfer system than the *EverQuest* one a few years back.

But at the end of the day, MMOs have a shelf life and we just have to live with it.

DO SHUT UP

What is the point in PC gaming anymore? Its redundant and more costly than a girlfriend, paying

hundreds of pounds to upgrade every year, why? You buy one piece of equipment and the chances are it won't be compatible with the next piece of hardware or even worse, you need to buy even more parts!

I'd rather spend £300 every six years on the latest console then £1,000+ on upgrading my PC nearly every year. Where's the logic?

Nathan 'Shepsypooh' Shepherd

First off: a girlfriend you pay hundreds of pounds to upgrade every year – lol.

Second off: no-one ever said that being a PC gamer was cheap, and no-one ever said it was hassle-free.

I can't speak for everyone, but I really like the fact that I can fiddle with the guts of my chosen games platform, in much the same way that a car enthusiast would improve a car.

As for the console argument – the community, online play, mods and general internet bickering that make up PC gaming will never, ever be bettered by a living room console. End of story really.

And if PCs suck so hard why are you reading *PC ZONE*, console boy?

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

VANGUARD

vanguard.station.sony.com
New boy Ed Zitron checks in every now and again to check on whether it's still shit. At the last count: yes, yes it is.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

www.wow-europe.com
We're out for two months, then all of a sudden we find ourselves back in raising invisible tigers. Oh cruel, cruel fate.

THE VISITOR

www.onemorelevel.com/games.php?game=593
Samarost-esque flash game in which a small alien becomes a big alien through the medium of Flash and exploding stomachs. Easy and short, but also rather special.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

THIS MONTH: BLOODYMESS

(AKA BEN BROOKE)



FALLOUT 2

Also meaning to finish this someday. Was shocked at how short the first was – still good though.

HELLGATE: LONDON BETA

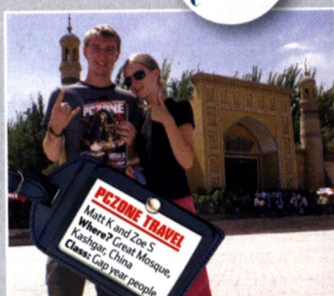
It's good, actually quite addictive. Except when it crashes, updates or game bugs kill me. Looking forward to playing the full game.

X2: THE THREAT

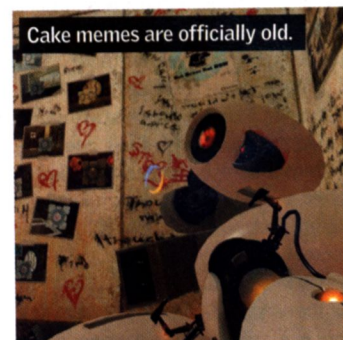
Thought I would try this series, only £5 on Steam. Quite good, but complicated and makes me feel stupid. Shiny though.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit the forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



Cake memes are officially old.



TM

CASH FOR KILLS



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DECEMBER

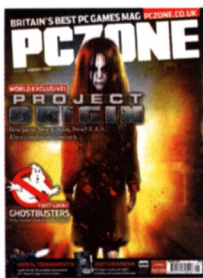
www.kwari.com



COVER STORY

PROJECT ORIGIN

Alma's Armageddon has begun. Discover why the *F.E.A.R.* universe wants you back...



IT'S A FRANCHISE buried beneath console versions and duff expansion packs, but what made it special remains. That brutal combat, the tricky AI and one of the few shooter stories to genuinely keep you guessing right up to the end. And now Alma and her masters at Monolith are back with a shooter dead set on righting all of their original game's wrongdoings – could this be an end to those endless grey corridors and faceless office blocks? Can that visceral body-cleaving magic be regained after so much bloodied water has flowed under the bridge? All signs point to yes. Alma is back, she has been unleashed and she is laying waste to an already bomb-ravaged city. Let the good times roll...

PAGE

38



All clear

SO WE'VE ALL made it through the year 2007, apart from those of us who have died. If you haven't died, then that's cause to celebrate, and what better way to celebrate than to play a PC game? And what better time, when we've had no less than several excellent games released: *Crysis* if you love shooters, *World in Conflict* if you love strategy, *The Witcher* if you're into RPGs, *The Orange Box* if you simply enjoy quality, *Super Mario Galaxy* if you picked up the wrong magazine in WHSmith - we're embroiled in this smutty mix of stinking goodness.

As a counterpart to this mindless optimism, here's something I'm not enjoying about this new wave of entertainment. DirectX 10 was supposed to use technological magic to make games look better and run faster. I remember seeing a tech demo with the words 'occlusion', 'efficiency' and 'optimisation' scrolling about - a vague promise that things would be better, when all we've seen are checkboxes enabling lens flare and crippled frame rates.

And, while I'm moaning, the latest *World of Warcraft* patch decreases the XP required to reach level 60, while increasing the XP received for completing quests. Blizzard might be making the game less of a grind through mid-levels, but you can bet your balls they wouldn't make that change if *The Burning Crusade* wasn't about to scoop up the resulting high-level subscribers. Bet your balls right the way off.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor



BEFORE THE FALL

Bethesda's Radioactive Man Pete Hines takes Fallout Boy *Will Porter* into his vault

DEVELOPER Bethesda PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE www.bethsoft.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 185

Q You're still showing quite an old build of *Fallout 3*, surely the current one back at the studio has seen some changes?

A It's about 1,000 per cent different. The number one rule of videogame development is that "if you touch it, it will break".

Any time that you're going through an adding all this extra content and all these new systems, you know, you're constantly breaking the game over and over again and changing the way things work. You know, things like VATS and how melee combat works, adding in

new features, so *Fallout 3* is in a constant state of change.

Has Liam Neeson finished recording his lines?

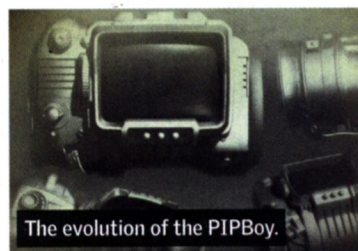
I don't know if Liam Neeson's done. Usually we do pick-ups as we go along. I imagine he's probably done the bulk of what he has to do, but there's always pickups. I couldn't tell you of anything else.

Is it likely we'll hear any other celebrity voices?

Probably.

Because I'm a massive nerd, I've gone and read a few post-apocalyptic books after playing *Fallout*...

Oh dude! Have you read Cormack McCarthy's *The Road*? No? You need to read it this week. It's post-apocalyptic required reading.



The evolution of the Pip-Boy.

How affected is American culture by the nuclear paranoia era? Were you aware of it growing up?

Not so much, as my generation is late '60s and early '70s. We were much more exposed to disco, and polyester leisure suits, but my parents certainly grew up in that era. It was probably at the very early part of my childhood that faded out.

We used to have, during the Cold War, bomb drills where we'd all go down to the boiler room, my whole little class, and we'd go down and say "The bomb's coming, get down to the boiler room!" and do the whole duck and cover thing. I do remember a bit of that from the Cold War, but it wasn't the same as the '40s and '50s.

Is it a fair assumption to say that the player's mother will play a part in the game?

It is a fair assumption to say that she will not play a part.

The beginning of the game, inside the Vault, sets up several characters such as the Overseer's daughter. Will these characters appear later in the game?

Yeah, I'd say so. It's fair to say that you'll come across folks you've met throughout the



He's either carrying a gun or a slightly melted spike.

STOP PRESS!

NCSOFT BUYS UP HEROES

NCsoft have bought the rights to *City of Heroes* from Cryptic Studios. Now *City of Villains* and *COH* players can access both games from one account.

PAC-TXT.COM

Some genius has converted *Pac-Man* into a text adventure, which you'll undoubtedly want to pour hours upon hours into.

WHAT A CUTE LITTLE CUBE

Soon you will be able to pick up a cuddly Weighted Companion Cube from *Portal*, not only to have by you at night, but a pair for your rear-view mirror.

18

Special Report

Comic books – what are they, how do people use them, and can they ever crush a man?



20

Ghostbusters

"You don't mean – total particle reversal?" See more geeky jokes in our preview of the 'busters return.



38

Project Origin

After some rubbish expansions, can Monolith breathe fresh fear into Alma's eerie mojo?



The PCZ team will cast judgement on the *Fallout 3* presentation next issue.

course of the game. I mean to use *Oblivion* as an example, you're talking about the Boris character, who's just this guy that keeps showing up here and there.

How does the VATS fighting system work with your companions? Can you give them orders?

You can have companions. What exactly your level of interaction with them is we're not talking about yet, but probably something similar to that. We haven't sorted that yet, but it'll probably be something similar to *Fallout*.

So will Washington DC residents recognise their ruined city?

Yes and no. The major stuff that you'll recognise will be stuff that was there in the '40s and '50s, but because the timeline branches off it's not the DC we have today, the DC that existed around that time went off in a different direction.

Y'know, there's some monuments they'll recognise, but there's a nuclear power plant right in the middle of it. So, yeah, there may be a few iconic things around.

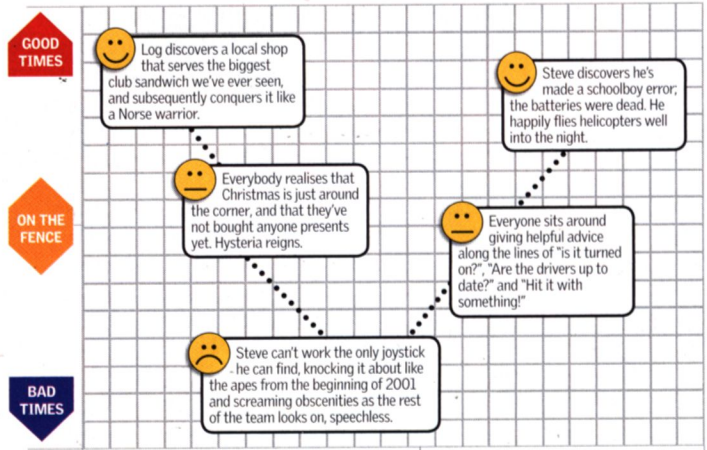


Beware radioactive advertising.

STUFF

Word is that *The Departed* Actor Marky Mark Wahlberg is being targeted to play grizzled slow-mo cop Max Payne on the big screen. 20th Century Fox have got John Moore to direct, and are as of going to press negotiating with Wahlberg over the role. When asked to comment, PC ZONE's Will Porter said it was "the worst news he had heard in his life." Don't worry Will: the cinematic *Max Payne* isn't due out until 2010. Plenty of time for Wahlberg to get grizzled.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



COMIC HEROES

Tackling the world of PC games turning into graphic novels, one 'THWAP!' at a time



Reporter
Pavel Barter

Games have had every spin-off known – movies, toys, T-shirts, even air fresheners – but comics are set to become big.

A *World of Warcraft* comic book is set to bogart Forbidden Planet's shelf-space next to titles like *BloodRayne*, *Tomb Raider* and *Halo*. Walter Simonson, the graphic novel veteran who wrote and drew *Thor* and *Wonder Woman*, is behind the publication. The comic will be "tied to the *Warcraft* lore and history," he tells fans. "If you're a long-time player, the comic is a revelation about some of the mysteries."

There are more revelations in store, reckons Harry Markos of UK comic publisher Markosia (www.markosia.com). "There has been an increase of the adaptations into comics recently and this will continue more so over the next year." The potential audience for these comics is huge, he adds.

Markos hopes that his company will reap some of the benefits of comic tie-ins, although with heavyweight publishers snapping up popular game licenses, it's no easy task.

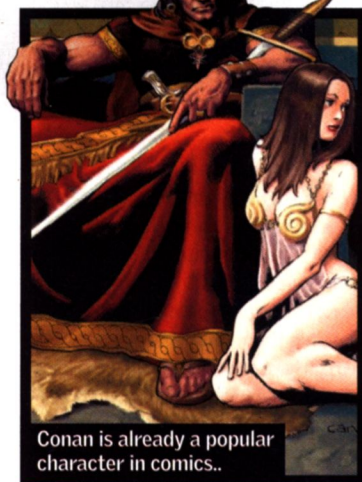
GAMES FOR COMICS

In recent years, Dark Horse Comics (www.darkhorse.com) which publish comics based on *Star Wars*, *Aliens*, and *Buffy*, have released comic versions of *Hellgate: London* and *F.E.A.R.*, expanding on the games' battle-sodden stories. Dark Horse's comic editor Dave Land, who worked on a *Dungeon Siege II* tie-in, explains the process: "Gas Powered Games approached us with the idea of spreading the *Dungeon Siege* universe across two mediums: a marriage of comics and games. Their backstory was used as a basis for the comic. We wanted to stretch the story to a place where the game could not travel."

In most cases, a developer works closely with the publisher in creating the tie-in.

First off, the publisher assigns a writer and artist. The writer plays the game until his/her eyes bleed, while the artist works on refining the hero's pectoral muscles, and at each stage of

Silent Hill isn't the most obvious choice for a comic adaptation.



Conan is already a popular character in comics..



BloodRayne has become a popular comic character.

the process artwork and scripts are sent to the licensor for approval. The amount of freedom afforded to both writer and artist varies between projects. "Some companies don't like you to stray too much from the game in case it affects potential sequels," notes Markos.

Despite such attention to detail, many comics based on games – from 1992's *The Adventures of Roger Wilco* to 2007's *Assassin's Creed* graphical tie-in – appear only to boost the game's popularity. Games like *Myst*, which received its first adaptation in 1997, suit comics like elephants suit tutus.



WOW's comic will build on the game's backstory.

"Comics based on games are often promotional exercises," says Markos. "A successful game can generate millions of dollars, so it makes any possible revenue from comics seem pretty small.

"But it's a great way to promote the game – as a marketing tool more than anything else. Any revenue generated is a bonus."

But some games are made for the comic medium. For example, when Funcom released a tie-in for next year's *Age of Conan*, it made perfect sense. "That was a perfect fit," nods Funcom product director Jørgen Tharaldsen. "At the time, Dark Horse Comics had gathered some great artists and writers for the new Conan stories. We wanted to see if we could tie their work into the game – specifically when it came to explaining the game's backstory."

REIGN OF RAYNE

Ed Dukeshire of Digital Webbing (www.digitalwebbing.com), the publisher of the *BloodRayne* comics, continues: "Although there are plenty of comics set up [as promotional tools], we saw huge potential in Rayne and wanted to contribute to building the character's rich history. To date, we have published 11 issues of the comic book (not counting two specials) and, based on feedback, we are making readers happy.

"We expect to see Rayne around for some time. The sales are steady and we pick up new readers with each passing issue so we're doing something right."

Likewise, Cryptic Studios' *City of Heroes* was crying out for a comic touch. In 2002, a single promotional issue was released to coincide with the launch of



Hellgate: London is being promoted with comics.

Strip tease

Digital Webbing's Ed Dukeshire, on bona fide comic book star Rayne

Why does *BloodRayne* lend itself well to the comic medium?

It's the character. There's so much backstory to her and she has this personality fans just love. Rayne's basically this badass half-vampire chick who actually cares about people. That and having those cool slice-and-dice blades doesn't hurt.

How do you draw inspiration from the games?

Die-hard game fans will notice we haven't touched on a lot of her abilities – like her game powers (Dilated Perception, Freeze Time, Aura Vision, etc). But who knows – if a story calls for them and we can figure out how to make it work, they'll show up. Recently our writer, Troy Wall, figured out a way to bring Mynce back from the dead. Severin and a bunch of Rayne's enemies from both games are planned to appear in upcoming stories.

Where do the comics fit into the *BloodRayne* PC games and movies?

The comics are based on the video games, just like the movies are based on the games, but both (the comics and movies) are totally separate from one another and don't share the same universe.



BloodRayne's comic doesn't link to the game's world.

Do you have to answer to the game's licensor?

We pretty much have complete control, but we still need to get story elements approved. There are some things Majesco trust us on. It's pretty shocking what we did to Rayne in the ending of *BloodRayne: Red Blood Run #2*. I won't go into details because I'd hate to spoil the surprise for any fans who haven't read it yet...

the game, introducing a new hero, Thunder-Clap, to Paragon City. "The comic was a nice bonus that I'd dreamed about doing," says *COH* designer Rick Dakan, who also scripted the comic. "I was pleased with the way it turned out. Although the need for a quick story that introduced the universe was a challenge."

City of Heroes and *BloodRayne* prove that, with some creative wattage, comic adaptations can achieve greatness. Both publications joined the ranks of other tie-ins – like *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider*, and, um, *Sonic The Hedgehog* – that outlived their promo prints. Even after Dakan left Cryptic Studios, he continued scripting the comics.

"I worked hard to show the side of the universe you couldn't see in the gameplay, like the heroes' home life, or the legal system at work, and I brought in more emotional story arcs," he says. But when another publisher bought the franchise in 2005, Dakan was replaced and he was not impressed with the way the series progressed. "They went a different direction, focusing on the *COH* universe's big heroes, whereas I was dealing with main characters, based on the kinds of experiences actual players

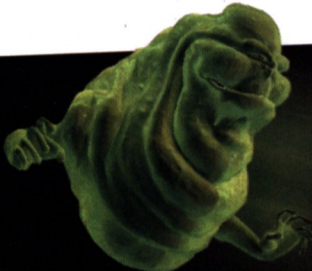
might have." The *City of Heroes* comic ended its run in May 2007.

When licensed comics fail to impress, or when developers don't release tie-ins, the fans step in. Nathan Ciprick, at gamics.com, has forged graphic novels out of games like *EverQuest*, *Doom III*, and *Lego Star Wars*. There are plenty more game licenses that would make fantastic comics: "The likes of *Blood Omen*, *Hitman*, *Legacy of Kain*, and *Infernal*," notes Harry Markos.

Let's hope that comic book publishers concentrate on making PC games that look as good on the page as they do on the monitor. "Like comics based on movies or TV or any other genre," says Rick Dakan, "comics based on games are hard to do well and easy to cash in on." Consider that a gauntlet thrown. **PC7**

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

✉ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



BUSTIN' MAKES US FEEL GOOD...

GHOSTBUSTERS



Keymaster *Martin Korda* travels to Dallas to take the world's first look at the new *Ghostbusters* game and answer the big question on everybody's mind... **how is Elvis?**

DEVELOPER Terminal Reality PUBLISHER Vivendi Games WEBSITE www.terminalreality.com



- THE LOWDOWN**
- Ghostbuster team reunited. Including Bill Murray.
 - Intense proton-pack spectre-capturing combat
 - Massively destructible surroundings
 - You get to slide down the firehouse pole
 - Action could be a little bit too one-note

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE like a comeback story to capture the imagination. In 1989, the Ghostbusters were down and out, broke and about as popular as a council health inspector about to rupture a spirit containment system. Forced to suffer the ignominy of making guest appearances at the parties of ungrateful snot-nosed brats in exchange for a few bucks, the boys in boiler suits were about as low as they could get without actually being scalded by the Earth's core.

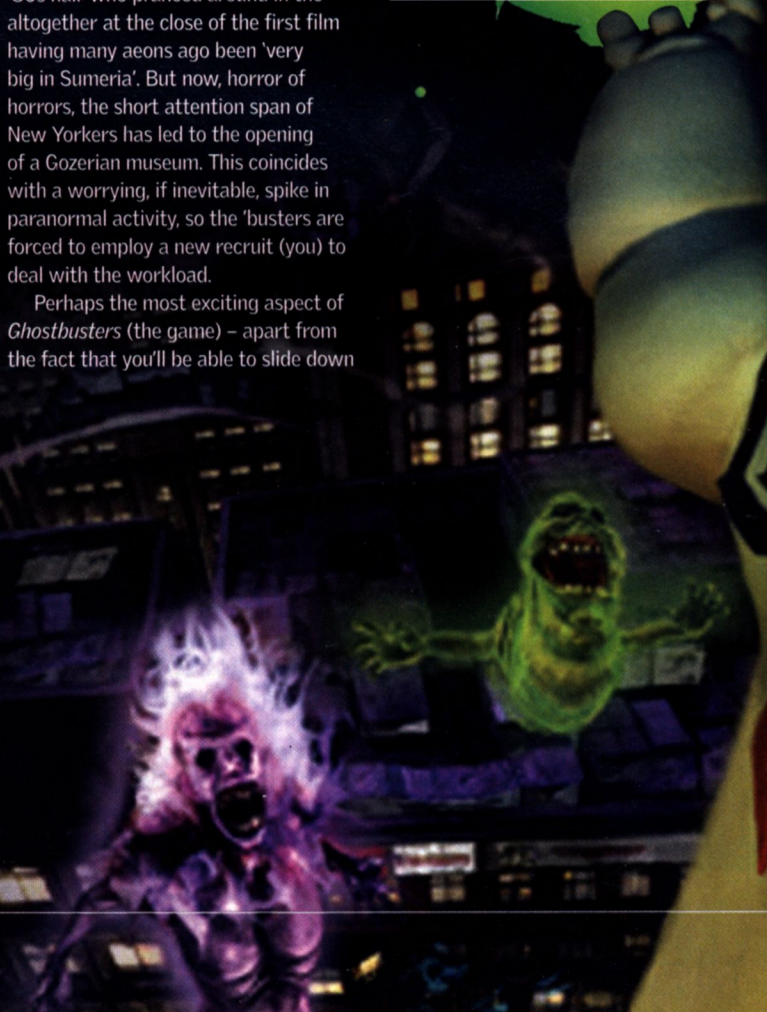
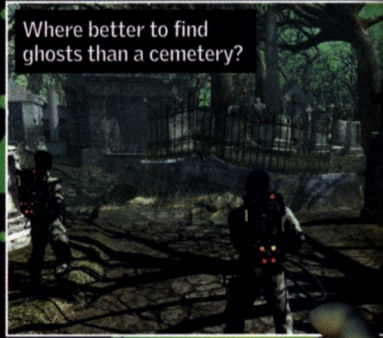
Gone were the days when they stood proudly atop skyscrapers battling giant sweet icons with their nuclear-accelerated proton packs in a last-ditch bid to save the world. The dream was over. Obscurity beckoned. Bankruptcy was knocking at their door like a restless poltergeist. And then, everything changed. One pug-nosed painting with a god complex, a dancing toaster, and an animated iconic US statue later, and the boys were back

in vogue. The film was a bit shit, and Slimer drove Rick Moranis around in a bus for no apparent reason, but the 'busters were back in business.

SO SHE'S A DOG...

You rejoin the 'busters in 1991, when they find themselves busier than ever, since New York has adopted an unhealthy interest in Gozarian law. Now Gozer was the lady with the '80s hair who pranced around in the altogether at the close of the first film having many aeons ago been 'very big in Sumeria'. But now, horror of horrors, the short attention span of New Yorkers has led to the opening of a Gozerian museum. This coincides with a worrying, if inevitable, spike in paranormal activity, so the 'busters are forced to employ a new recruit (you) to deal with the workload.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of *Ghostbusters* (the game) – apart from the fact that you'll be able to slide down



THE STORY SO FAR...
TERMINAL REALITY

OFF ROAD

The company's early games are racing games, like *Monster Truck Madness*.



1996

BLOOD LUST

Terminal Reality's love affair with vampires began with the hit-and-miss actioner *Nocturne*.

2001

SUCKED IN

The team complete *BloodRayne*, in which you play a female Nazi-slaughtering vampire.



2002

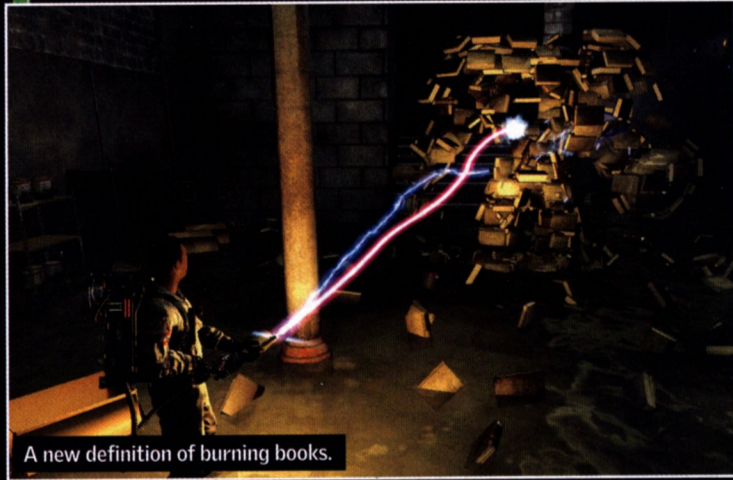
IN A FLUX

After *BloodRayne II*, the developer releases another third-person actioner, *Aeon Flux*.

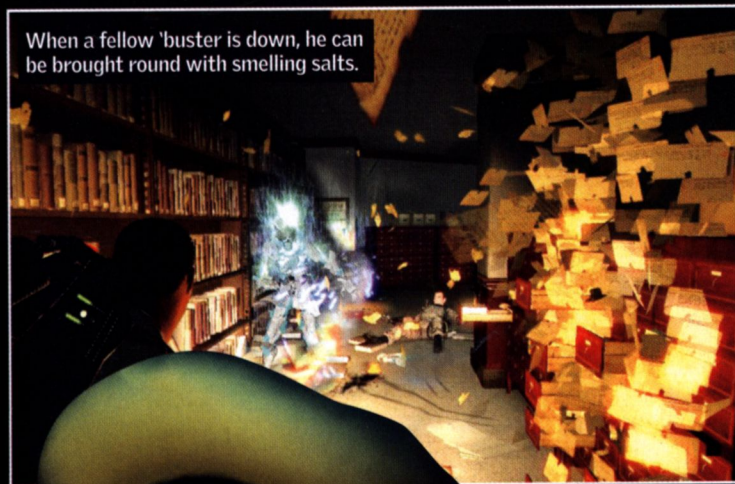
2005



You're not scaring anyone, mate.



A new definition of burning books.



When a fellow 'buster is down, he can be brought round with smelling salts.

Ghostbusters has the potential to be a real sequel to the two movies

the firehouse pole – is that it has the potential to be a real sequel to the two movies, thanks to the involvement of screenwriters and cast members Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis. The duo has jumped onboard to write the script, to ensure the game remains true to the *Ghostbusters* films and reprise their roles as the hyperactive Dr Raymond Stantz and acerbic Dr Egon Spengler.

"Dan and Harold have always bounced around the idea of doing something else with *Ghostbusters*," explained the game's executive producer John Melchior during our recent visit to Dallas-based Terminal Reality. "We made a prototype and took it to Dan and Harold. As soon as they saw it, it was perfect for them. They were at the point where they were willing to discuss *Ghostbusters* again. Harold and Dan have come up with the overarching storyline. They gave us the framework, characters and locations and then we made them and went back

to them. Harold and Dan are extremely involved in the production process."

OLD AND NEW

While *Ghostbusters* is very much a continuation of the movies, Terminal Reality is keen to ensure that the first few hours of this third-person shooter will be instantly familiar to fans, with numerous well-known faces making an appearance in the opening few levels, including floating green pustule Slimer and the intolerant librarian from the start of the original flick.

Creative director Drew Haworth explained that he and his team were using these reappearances as a chance to delve more deeply into the background of each ghost. "One of your tasks will be to scan ghosts," explained Drew as he fired up the game's library level. "You'll have to scan the ghosts with your PKE meter to be able to access information about them in *Tobin's Spirit Guide*."



Puft up "I tried to think of the most harmless thing. Something I loved from my childhood."

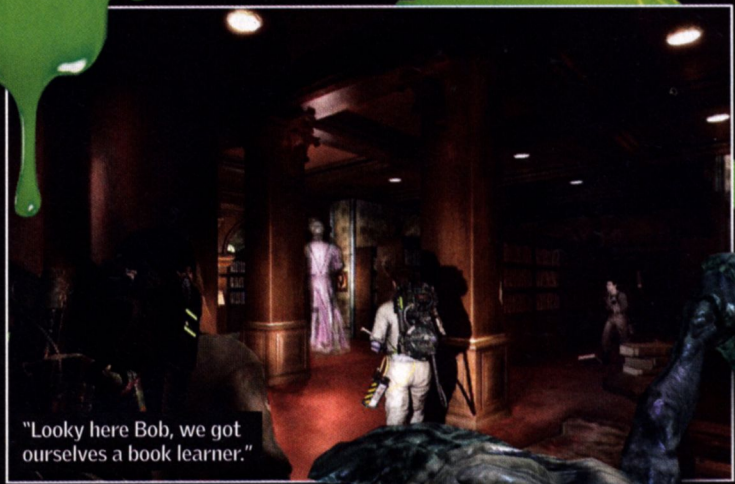
The Michelin Man's twin brother is set to play a pivotal and highly destructive role in *Ghostbusters*.

When you first meet Mr Puft you'll have to use nimble footwork and accurate shooting to avoid a barrage of cars. Next you'll have to hang off the side of a skyscraper as the giant white blobby sailor boy clambers towards you, intent on administering you with a lethal dose of sugar.

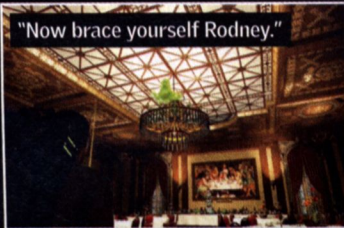
Looks like we'll all finally be able to live out our greatest *Ghostbusters* fantasy, and I'm not talking about the one involving Dana Barrett in THAT dress, with THOSE spilt personalities and an industrial sized tub of baby oil.



Quick, someone pass me a skewer.



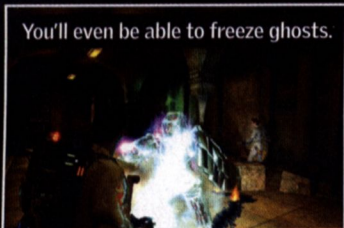
"Looky here Bob, we got ourselves a book learner."



"Now brace yourself Rodney."

"All of the significant ghosts will be making a return," interjected John as Drew descended into the library's basement. "We're making a lot of ghosts that are more set-piece contextual ghosts, such as two brothers who were prisoners. Some ghosts will have stories, others will be simpler. Many ghosts, like the Librarian, will have a lot of background information about them."

Drew stalked through the level, guided by the fluctuations of his PKE meter. Suddenly, books leapt from shelves like popcorn from a furnace, then formed into lumbering hardback warriors that Drew incinerated with a volley from his proton pack. Drew only stopped dispatching these spooks when he met his fellow 'busters, who dispelled the tension with the genius comedic one-liners that made the movies.



You'll even be able to freeze ghosts.

GOOFBALL GHOULS

Meanwhile, strange things were afoot in the basement, where a genuine sense of unease was being generated by haunting glissando violins, subtle sound effects and excellent use of shadows.

"We're trying to rely on tension rather than gore," explained lead level designer Andy Dombroski as an on-screen Egon remarked how the off the chart paranormal readings were going to force him to make new charts.



This time Mr Puft has brought his kids along.

To catch a mocking blob

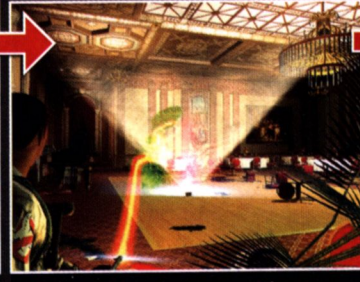
The art of frying and capturing dead green things, using nuclear-powered portable backpack ray guns



You've just received a call that a ghost is loose in a nearby hotel. It's that cheeky Slimer! Clearly he's been too impatient to wait for room service.



After giving you the slip, you corner him in the ballroom where a banquet is set to take place. Just make sure you don't break anything...



After trashing the room with your proton pack, you finally manage to catch the mucus ball and smash him against the scenery to soften him up.



With Slimer dazed and disorientated, it's time to pull him over the ghost trap and watch gleefully as the greedy blob is slurped inside.



"Howdya like my icethrower spook?"



"Oh hey - a ghost!"



Some missions will be set in different dimensions.



"There are sections in which you'll jump and be genuinely scared," continued Andy. "We don't use gore unless it's funny gore. Our uneasiness and scares are usually kind of goofy, just like in the movies."

One of the less goofy scares came from the Librarian, who turned her frail frame into a whirring ball of power that sucked books into its core and spat them out as legions of apparitions. The 'busters - rather than running away screaming as they had when they first met her - fought frantically to stem the tide, using an array of weaponry previously unseen in the movies, including proton torpedoes, electron pulses, and even shotgun-style particle-accelerated blasts. After repelling all

that the Librarian threw at them, the 'busters captured the fleeing ghoul in their beams, slammed her against shelves to soften her up (causing no end of destruction thanks to the superb physics of Terminal Reality's Infernal engine) and then sucked her into a trap, ready to be deposited into the containment unit back at the firehouse.

"Our emphasis is on lots of physics, lots of action and environmental manipulation, as well as all of the weapons and gadgets you've seen in the movies," enthused Drew as the level came to a close with a couple more wisecracks from the victorious 'busters. "Every ghost that you trap you'll earn money for," he continued. "We're looking into letting you earn more cash if you manage to capture a ghost in impressive ways, like bouncing it off a wall and straight into a trap."

Apart from the tether gun (a goo-firing weapon that'll allow you to link objects in order to solve physics-based puzzles), all of the game's weapons will be fired from the proton pack, which will double as a HUD. You'll also be able

to upgrade each weapon with the cash you earn, bolstering each one's range and ability to inflict damage.

THERE IS NO DANA

Also making an appearance will be the 'busters' decrepit shaggin' wagon Ecto 1, which is set to feature in a race towards Times Square.

"Leading up to Times Square, the streets will be like a disaster movie. So you'll have to escort Ecto 1 through the carnage as it's being massively attacked by spooks."

Conversation then, once again, drifted to the return of the series' founders and the legendary cast of supporting characters that made the movies such a triumph.

"We've gone after everybody that has ever appeared in a *Ghostbusters* movie," explained John when pressed on who might be returning for another ghost-catching escapade. And haven't they just? Alongside Ramis and Ackroyd, Bill Murray is set to reappear as comedy-anchor Peter Venkman while Ernie Hudson (who surely doesn't have

the busiest of calendars) is back as Winston Zeddemore

Add into this the nasty busybody Walter Peck, ginger receptionist Janice... Essentially the only one not confirmed is that ghost that fellated Ray one night, when he might have only been dreaming. This said, a definite non-appearance is Sigourney Weaver, whose character, Dana Barrett, has been written out of the game's script to make way for a new female lead who'll provide a few romantic distractions between your paranormal pummelling.

Twenty-three years is a long time to wait for a game worthy of the *Ghostbusters* franchise, and while it's still way too early to start making grandiose promises, the very involvement of Aykroyd and Ramis, along with the searing action and some impressively destructible levels, suggest that Terminal Reality has an excellent chance of creating a game that'll bring this franchise back from the dead. After all, there's nothing quite like a comeback story to capture the imagination. You know what? I love this town! **PC7**



Bloody parallel universes.



**WILL
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PRESENTS**

**THIS MONTH:
RISE OF THE PC
COGNOSCENTI**

As you know, owning a PC is often a trying experience. Well, not just owning – more just getting the damn thing to work. Yes, we've now moved beyond the dark days of DOS and boot disks, but I've just spent 25 minutes attempting to get a game (that may or may not appear in these pages) working without looking like a Salvador Dali-sketched checkerboard with an elf in it, and I'm spitting molten chunks of bile at everything around me.

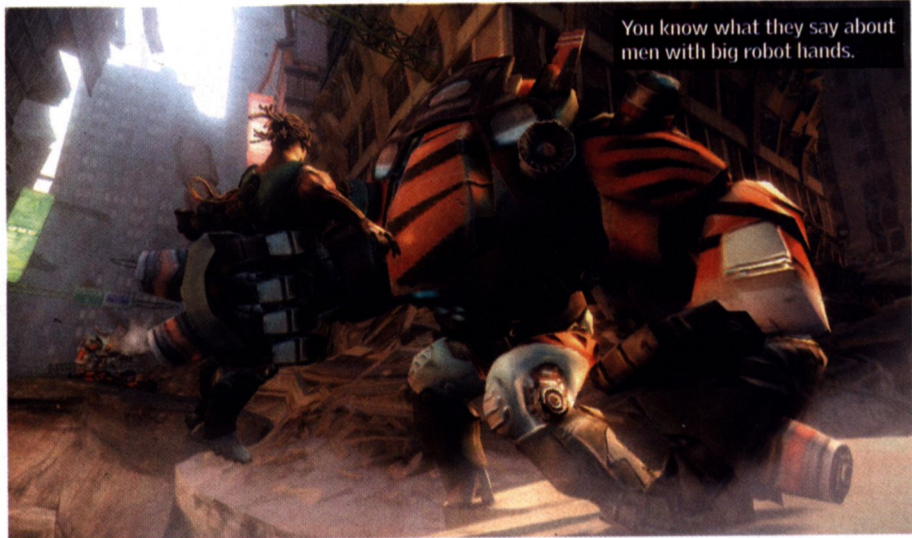
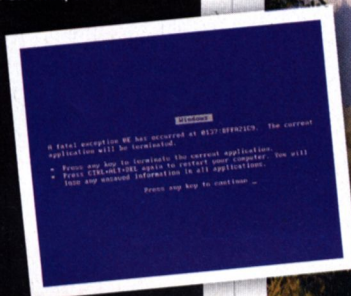
But, I believe that this frustration, this driver/hardware/patch/bug/resolution madness, makes us PC owners a special breed – more adept at problem solving, less likely to explode with vitriol at the inconveniences of modern life. We have looked into the face of the blue screen of death and we have laughed. We have suffered with our hobby, and as such we are prepared to suffer in real life.

This is a gift. And one that should never be abused or manipulated when dealing with the uneducated: the vast morass of the PC illiterate. Which is why, when I look at www.pcworld.co.uk I feel sad. The website says PC World's TechGuys, whose advertising suggests they are vaguely PC-aware people, are offering an in-store service to transfer music, photos and documents from your old machine to a new PC for £2999. £2999! That's 30 quid! That's a job I could do in about 10 minutes – and therefore working out to a possible hourly income of £180 an hour! Not even plumbers get that!

This is why I believe we PC people should band together – to combat this raw capitalism and dangerous new strand of idiot manipulation. If you have an easily confused parent trying to connect to the internet, help them! If an elderly neighbour wants rid of spyware, show them the best program! If a younger sibling has their porn stash foolishly unencrypted, explain how best to hide it!

If we work together I believe PC owners can bring about a new, better, era of the human experience.

We have suffered with our hobby, and as such we are prepared to suffer in real life



You know what they say about men with big robot hands.



The HL2 scanners seem to have a big brother.

**MACRO-BIONIC
MADNESS**

New metal-arm actioner *Bionic Commando* defies inevitable wanking gags www.bioniccommando.com | ETA: 2008

RIGHT ARM: GUN. Left arm: swinging rope, heavy object thrower and general purveyor of carnage. It's hardly something that weaponry experts are likely to conjure up in the real world, but in the intrepid realm of computer gaming it makes for a neat free-roaming *Spider-Man* style adventure through a bombed out cityscape.

Picking up from where the original 1988 NES *Bionic Commando* left off, and then changing it all to make it much better, you'll find yourself in control of one Nathan Spencer – a man who's generic name belies the gifts laid upon him by the Federal Bionic Armaments Development Division. Formerly imprisoned for crimes he did not commit (yadda, yadda, yadda) there's been some sort of unexpected

onslaught by über-terrorists (etc etc) and he's been released back into society – presumably under some kind of borked Care in the Community scheme.

Due for a head-on collision with the prettier *Prototype* with its 'crazy powers in the city' concept, *Bionic Commando* has a lot to prove. Can car-lobbing and skyscraper swinging in a *Fallout*-esque landscape buy it some space in the battle of the console ports? *PC ZONE* is divided on this one, but the ex-PC *GRAW* coders at GRIN know what they're doing.



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ARGUE THE TOSS
THIS MONTH: HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 2

Dearest Steven,

You have made a grave error in your review of *Half-Life Episode 2*, my problem being that I believe it was a dramatic, fun-packed adventure, and a sumptuous continuation of the *HL2* story. It's cinematic and plays fantastically. Ed Zitron

Dear Edward,

You waltz in here, swanning about in your bright orange jumper, black lipstick and green cords (frankly you look ridiculous), and you have the audacity to claim that *Episode Two* was anything more than a fun expansion pack. My review was phrased somewhat negatively to justify not handing it a Classic award, which is what most people were expecting. This is a fantastic game, but not essential. Steve Hogarty

Steve,

How can you on one hand call it a "fantastic game," while on the other say it's not essential? It's truly essential - the continuation of several years of storytelling, and one of the best examples of in-game cinematics ever created. It's an expansion pack, and I'd argue an essential one, because it continues the story in a highly satisfactory way, and has some heart-wrenching moments. EZ

Ed,

"One of the best examples of in-game yada yada blueergghhh": people keep throwing out these phrases when talking about *Episode Two*, saying things like "the emotional donkey punch that is the smile of Alyx as she wistfully vaults over a lake of radioactivity". But what it actually is, is a series of the same physics puzzles we all did in *HL2*, the same bloody antlions we all hated in *HL2*, some really good bits with a new enemy and a cool car, and a love-it-or-hate-it end sequence. SH

Steve,

Man, you have to loosen up. I never said Alyx jumping over shit was a crazy great thing, but if you don't see much worth in the intervention in the first quarter of the game, then you're a crazy fool. Maybe shaving your beard off has made you lose your powers of reasoning, much like Samson. EZ

Ed,

Clearly I displayed such deafeningly profound logic and reasoning with my *Episode Two* review that The Universe saw fit to bestow me with a beard - the recognised symbol of intelligence. I only shaved it off because I'm so modest. SH



RUN THE RISK

The "first true professional gaming league" arrives

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BRINGING BACK VIVID memories of *The Krypton Factor* and *Gladiators*, the Championship Gaming Series is set to bring the brightest and best gamers together in sporting style.

The Championship Gaming Series intends to have a real sporting atmosphere, with drafts, qualification stages, a proper league, and then a world championship. Would-be game-stars can compete in *Counter-Strike: Source* and *World of Warcraft* (as well as *FIFA 07* and other, non-PC games) to beat rival gamers

with such scary names as Snuggles and NT 101, to enter world championships against similarly talented gamers. It's a nationally televised event, with the UK leg kicking off on Sky 1 and 2 beginning 24 December, allowing you to follow the epic drama of a few lads, and ladies, duking it out to reach the fair shores of America for the big final. It's set to be at the very least interesting, due to how the league is obviously serious business, and if it pans out properly we could all one day be making millions off of our mad skills.



OPEN THE DOOR, GET ON THE FLOOR...

Turok does the dinosaur, now on your PC

propagandagames.go.com | ETA: Spring 2008

ASPYR STUDIOS, PROPAGANDA and Touchstone have announced that they're bringing a brand new *Turok* dino-blaster to the PC, after previously only doing so for the consoles, in spring 2008.

In a deeply *Apocalypse Now* situation (but with more dinosaurs), commando-type Joseph Turok must take down his mentor on a planet. Taking place in the future, we can only assume that said planet will be full of

angry dinos intent on tearing Turok a new orifice, as well as his mentor's evil soldiers. Turok won't be alone, going in with his squadmates, Whiskey Company, to no doubt rain hell upon flora, fauna, and global-warming-loving super-bastard Roland Kane. With any luck it'll improve on the past efforts, and bring something more to the story beyond "Turok see dinosaur. Turok shoot dinosaur."





LYDON VS HILL

Pretty Vacant Steve Hill meets the "godfather of punk" and survives...

www.guitarhero.com | Publisher: Activision | ETA: TBC Developer: Red Octane



WE GET INVITED to a lot of press conferences here at *PC ZONE*, a lot of them involving overweight bearded Americans explaining in a monotone drawl how they're "really excited about the quarter four release of the product." What we don't often get invited to is an audience with a genuine legend. Step forward, the one and only Johnny Rotten (nee Lydon), lead singer of the Sex Pistols, over in London promoting *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* in one of the more surreal events ever to grace the games industry.

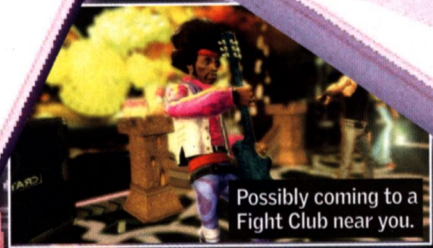
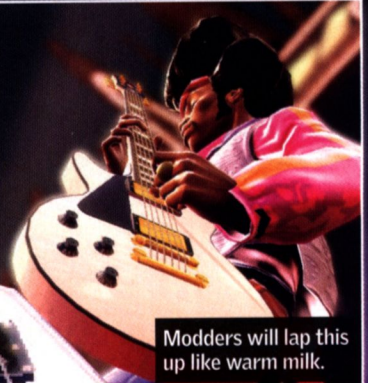
To the strains of *Anarchy In The UK*, Lydon takes the stage and immediately announces: "Fuck off, it's rubbish, I hate the whole thing." With PR representatives visibly wincing, he continues: "*Guitar Hero*,

I'll give it to you basic and honest. The offer came in, I took it home and I played it with a bunch of kids, mostly my younger brother's who lives nearby me in Los Angeles. I fucking loved it and the kids loved it more. What I liked was it weren't teaching you how to be a rock star, it was teaching you how not to be a rock star, how not to be an arsehole in your life and how not to seek fame and fortune 'cos the whole fucking thing's a joke. And that's it, alright? I loved the money, gotta say. Then Virgin Records decided they'd lost the masters so we had to spend our advance

rerecording. So we give them two songs instead of one: *Anarchy in the UK* and *Pretty Vacant*, alright? And I really like what me, Steve [Jones, guitarist] and Paul [Cook, drummer] put together, I think that was alright. So I'm bang on the money on this one, alright? And always remember, get 'em when they're young..."

The following half hour is a tense, contradictory, expletive-ridden Q&A during which he throws the microphone at one "beardy wanker," refers to the "Yankee representative" of the game as "a fucking arse" and explains that he misses "having sex with the Queen Mother." Lovely stuff. We genuinely are not worthy.

Guitar Hero III, by the way, should be out by the time you read this. We'll have a full review next issue, so don't buy it until you read that - you can bet your arse it'll be definitive, if not the most exclusive thing you'll ever see.

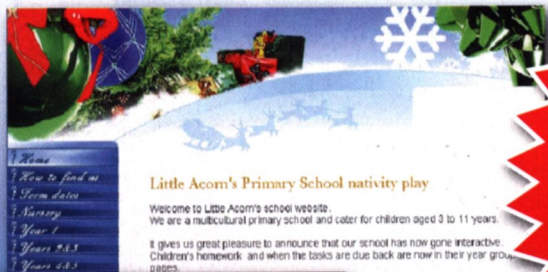


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Martin Korda fires the starting pistol as the MMOSG race gets underway



MORE PREDICTABLE THAN Man United overturning a deficit with a last-minute goal, it was only ever going to be a matter of time until we started seeing the emergence of MMO sports games.

First up is *Empire of Sports* (www.empireofsports.com), which sees you creating a sportsperson and training them up to become a super athlete, capable of competing in a variety of challenges. From the brains of French developer F4, *Empire of Sports* is promising to deliver strong community features, with several cities – each with their own style and vibe – providing the backdrop for player interaction.

After creating an avatar, you'll need to head to the gym and start honing your character's stats. Avatars will react to training and exertion like real people, and by that we don't mean they'll slump into a chair and stare at vacuous TV because they can't be arsed to reach for the remote. Your character will use energy and lose fluids, while their physical appearance

will be dictated by their training and the quality of food you force down their virtual pie holes.

Your character's performance will also depend on how you've trained them, what equipment they have, and their personal skill at each sport.

ATHLETIC PARAGON

Set to launch at the end of 2007, *Empire of Sports* will initially feature tennis, skiing, bobsleigh, athletics and basketball. We recently had a chance to test out the tennis and skiing games, both of which felt natural to play; sitting somewhere between arcade accessibility and realism, with the bias slanting slightly towards arcade action. While the skiing felt rather rudimentary, the tennis game possessed far greater potential and proved more challenging and entertaining, though the controls did take a while to get to grips with.

Empire of Sports' developers have also announced that in early 2008 11-a-

side football will be added to the game's line-up of sporting events, although concrete details have yet to be released.

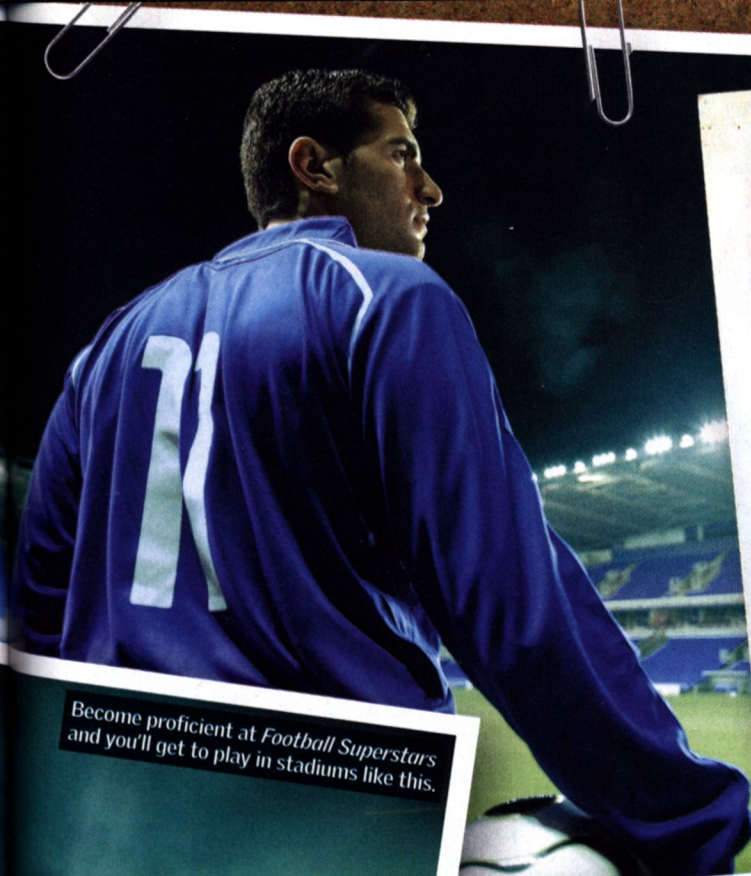
If you can't wait for the full game to appear, you can sign up for *Empire of Sport's* beta test at the game's website.

Speaking of footy, we caught up with Monumental Games' CEO, Rik Alexander to find out what's in store for *Football Superstars* (www.footballsuperstars.com), a free MMO that'll enable you to lead a player from obscurity to superstardom by playing in teams made of human players (though goalkeepers will be AI controlled).

"Initially you won't be required to pick a position," promised Alexander. "However, over time you'll naturally gravitate towards certain positions. So if you like tackling, your character will become a better tackler the more you do it."

Alexander also told us that you'll be able to spend your winnings (the more successful you are, the more

A sponsorship mechanic will hopefully make finding your feet easier than looking in your shoes



Become proficient at *Football Superstars* and you'll get to play in stadiums like this.



11-a-side football will be added to EOS in the new year.

Lead a rookie player to international renown in *Football Superstars*.



Skiing will be one of five sports featured when EOS launches.

Managing footy online

And let's not forget football...



Martin Korda FC has a bear in goal.

The beta of Sports Interactive's online-only version of *Football Manager Live* has undergone aesthetic improvements, including clear shortcut icons for tactics and names on players during matches. An intuitive Auto Matchmaker means you're no longer forced to hunt out suitable opponents, and matches are tense and highly tactical. We do have worries about the transfer market. Players who join a server early can sign up all the best players, sell them for a large profit and become very rich very quickly. This leaves little chance for latecomers to bolster their squad with decent additions or compete financially.

money you'll earn) on a variety of skills including tackling, speed and shooting.

At the start you'll be restricted to three- and five-a-side games in order to familiarise yourself with the dynamics of working with other human players and mastering a set position. However, over time, seven- and 11-a-side games will become unlocked.

WORLDWIDE SOCCER

A sponsorship mechanic that'll automatically assign you a team will hopefully make finding your feet easier than looking in your shoes.

"Every sponsor will have a team in each of the four divisions, so if you want to play competitively you can join one of these teams," said Alexander.

"Leagues will be based on performance, meaning that a team can play any number of times. Each team can have lots of players, so if 11 of them are online at one time, they can play a match."

As well as leading your team to glory, your ultimate goal will be to become so proficient that you're chosen to play for your national side against other international teams.

With Alexander promising us that a management option will be included (allowing you to form your own team and scout for players), *Football Superstars* certainly sounds impressive, but we'll hold off making judgements until we get our mitts on the game, which will be beta launching at the end of October, in preparation for a spring '08 release. Watch this space. **PCZ**



EOS's tennis games are fun, but take a little getting used to.



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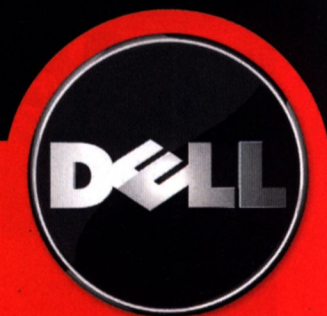
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PCZONE CHARTS



- 1 **NEW** CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
Issue 188 89%
- 2 **NEW** FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
Issue 188 90%
- 3 **NEW** CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008
Issue 188 71%
- 4 **NEW** GEARS OF WAR
Issue 188 90%
- 5 **NEW** HELLGATE: LONDON
Issue 188 74%
- 6 **NEW** THE ORANGE BOX
Issue 187 n/a
- 7 **↓** THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE
Issue 188 38%
- 8 **NEW** THE WITCHER
Issue 188 88%
- 9 **NEW** AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES
Issue 188 77%
- 10 **↓** WORLD IN CONFLICT
Issue 186 92%
- 11 **NEW** FIFA MANAGER 08
Issue n/a n/a
- 12 **↓** MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
Issue 185 83%
- 13 **↓** COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS
Issue 180 85%
- 14 **NEW** PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
Issue 188 87%
- 15 **NEW** WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST
Issue n/a n/a
- 16 **↓** ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS
Issue 186 87%
- 17 **RE** MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
Issue 175 91%
- 18 **—** THE SIMS 2: PETS
Issue 176 72%
- 19 **↓** MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR - KINGDOMS
Issue 185 90%
- 20 **NEW** TABULA RASA
Issue 189 81%



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
What a nice chart! Only a few *Sims* in there, and with excellent games sitting up top. Well done, populace.



THE ORANGE BOX
We're expecting this to linger about the charts for quite some time, hopefully. Just like *Medieval II* is doing.



HELLGATE: LONDON
A commercial success for *Hellgate: London* then, a game mauled by inadequacy and direness. It's likeable, if you try.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
You just don't want to leave the charts do you? Aww, well, you can stay because we like you. You big cuddly RTS.

DARK KNIGHT REBUILDS

Lego Batman swoops in

batman.lego.com

LOVERS OF THE venerable *Lego Star Wars* games will be tickled pink to learn that their favourite mammalian crime-fighter will be winging his way to their PC in buildable form. TT Games, creator of the aforementioned space platformer, will be bringing "several generations" of Batman's adventures, with classic villains The Joker and The Penguin no doubt being a thorn in your side.

Players can enjoy the story in single-player or co-op modes, as either the caped crusader or the plucky Robin. *Traveler's Tales* look to build on the success of *LSW*, and we're sure that it will, at the very least, be good fun for our children to sit in front of while we all play *UT3*. We're good parents, us.

This game may even cheer Batman up.



WITCHER CUT FOR UK

The Witcher watches its language

www.thewitcher.com/forum/index.php?topic=3855.0



"I'm going to **** your **** until you **** your breakfast, you ****!"

IT'S A MATURE, Polish RPG, and one that we found surprisingly excellent, but *The Witcher* seems to have suffered in its translation to English, according to internet men who check for this sort of thing. As an example, the original script contained the line, "Why do pricks go in c****? It's the natural order of things. Humans have always disliked dwarves and elves. Not for me to know why."

The English script simply reads, "Humans have always hated dwarves and elves." How boring is that complete lack of referring to genitalia? Writer Sande Chen says cuts weren't due to censorship, but a need to retain as much of the original meaning as possible.

No massive problem really, but we would've liked that really rude line to have been in our version. You owe us rude words, CDProjekt.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The lyrical genius behind Portal's final number



JONATHAN COULTON - SINGER-SONGWRITER, COMPOSER OF PORTAL'S STILL ALIVE

NOT MANY GAME endings have captured our imaginations and caused us to email MP3s around the office but thanks to nerdy songwriter Jonathan Coulton, *Portal* has just done that. Some mild spoilage may occur...

Q How do you become a "nerdcore folk rock singer-songwriter", what qualifies as a 'nerdcore' song?

A In the broadest sense, I think it's safe to say that my songs about fractals, robots and evil geniuses probably qualify as nerdy just because of their subject matter. I've always been a math (sorry, I mean "maths") and science guy, so I'm generally thinking about robots and fractals all the time anyway, whether I'm writing about them or not. But on a deeper level, I think there's a thread running through many of the songs that has more to do with how it feels to be a nerd - this kind of alienation, a sense of not belonging, not being accepted. And it's not just limited to actual nerds - I think we're all familiar with that feeling, no matter how popular we were in school.

How did you get involved with Portal?

I was playing a show in Seattle, and a couple of the game designers came up to me after to introduce themselves. They asked if I'd ever be interested in writing music for Valve - I've always been a huge

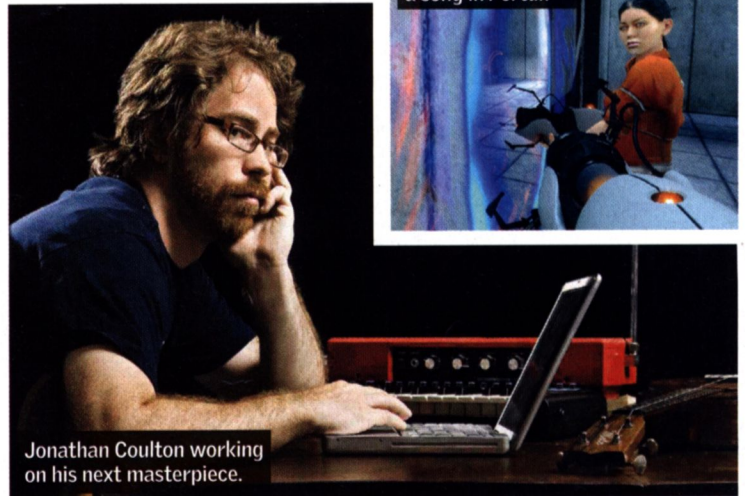
fan of *Half-Life*, so I said yes immediately. A while later we got together to talk about what we were going to do, and it became clear quickly that the character in *Portal* was a perfect overlap of our sensibilities.

What's Ellen McLain, the voice of GLaDOS, like to work with?

She's great - what was most striking to me was how much of the character's voice was her. I had already played the game and assumed that most of what I was hearing was some kind of effect processing. But when she was reading and singing her lines, she already sounded like GLaDOS. It was downright creepy. And of course she's got a wonderful and expressive singing voice, so it was a pleasure to work with her.

What sort of brief were you given?

I had many discussions with Erik Wolpaw, the writer for *Portal*, about who GLaDOS was and where she was coming from. Of course I'd played the game, and we pretty much knew how it was going to end and how she was going to be feeling. Erik did such a great job with this character - over



Jonathan Coulton working on his next masterpiece.

Chell earns herself a song in *Portal*.

the course of the game GLaDOS reveals herself so gradually, yet so completely. It was one of those situations where I felt like I knew her very well, so once I had found her voice I couldn't get it out of my head. It helps that my own personal conflict resolution techniques rely heavily on passive-aggressive behavior.

Why don't more games end in a song? We know how to tell stories in movies, but we're still learning how to do it in games. And that's why this marriage of song and game succeeds: by the end of the game you've developed a relationship with a very complicated character. So when she starts singing, it feels almost natural.

tat ZONE

Every month, the corrupt gaming industry backs a huge lorry up to our office windows. It is so large that it blots out the sky, and it is full of unimaginable riches. And we, the heroic journalists, must resist the tsunami of incredible free things that bombard us. We must be stoic in the face of new, better lives, because we love you. However, there's nothing to stop us selling it all to you for charity. Honestly, don't they realise they only have to take us out for drinks?

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www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



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	CRYSIS T-SHIRT None of the ZONE team have tucked it into their trousers to impress women.	£19.00	17
	CRYSIS NOTE PAD Twenty seven pounds for this? You lot are moneyed beyond sense!	£27.07	21
	OVERLORD T-SHIRT It's unfair to compare the high bids on merch from the most awaited game of the year with this T-shirt. But six pounds? Pfft!	£6.00	4



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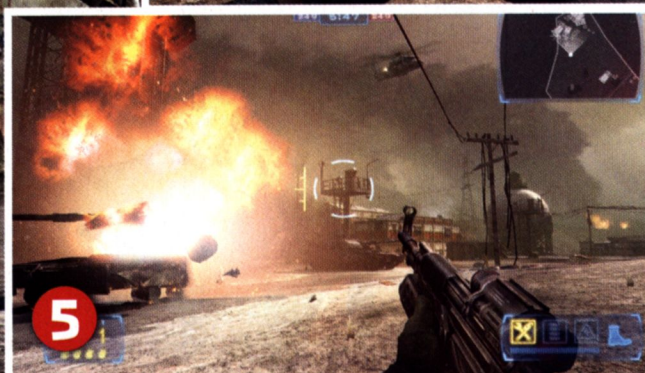
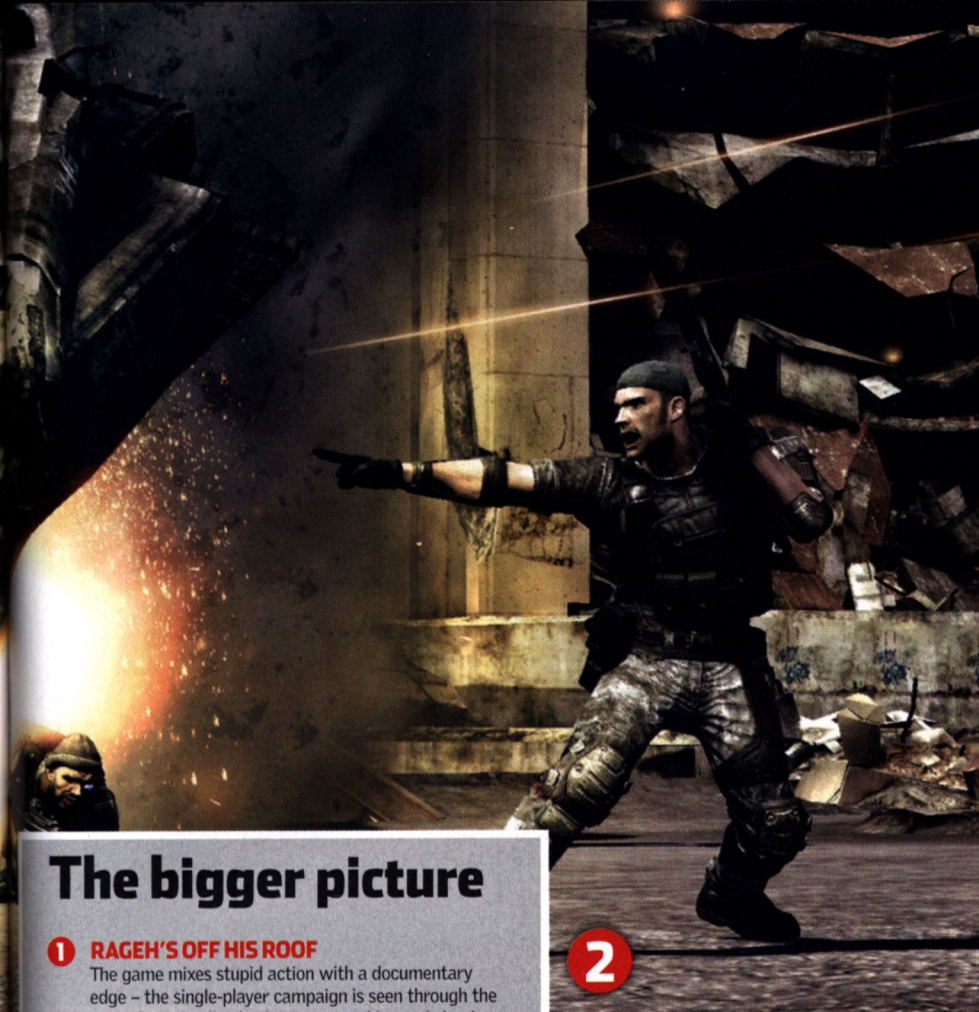


FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

DEVELOPER Kaos Studios
PUBLISHER THQ
WEB www.frontlinesgame.com
ETA January

IS THERE ROOM for another *Battlefield* clone? Well if there is, then not only are former *Desert Combat* modders Kaos the guys to make it – but they're also bringing in a mechanic that could well better the *BF* model. It's simple, and not exactly revolutionary, but having capture points solely along the frontline of a skirmish eliminates all the potential lonely faffing around at a deserted spawn point on a more casual server, funnelling everyone into the fray. Add into this some interesting player specialities (like radio-controlled drones and soldiers who are masters of drone/vehicle mangling EMP) and you've got a game that's potentially got a few more intelligent novelties than, say, *BF2142*.

7



The bigger picture

- 1 RAGE'S OFF HIS ROOF**
The game mixes stupid action with a documentary edge – the single-player campaign is seen through the eyes of a journalist, both in game and in comic book style cutscenes, who then proceeds to 'do a Johnston' and gets himself kidnapped...
- 2 HOUSE SPECIALITY**
Having chosen your class (sniper, assault, close combat etc.) you can choose to specialise in ground support, EMP, air support or drone tech. These lads could be the ones who call in air strikes, so don't mess.
- 3 ATTACK OF THE DRONES**
Drone specialists pilot around kamikaze mini-copters who can tag enemies onto the mini-maps of your friendslies. They later upgrade into minigun-wielding mini-tanks. It's a mini adventure.
- 4 TRAFFIC CHAOS**
The environments featured in *Frontlines* certainly feel a little less empty than *Battlefield*, in that there's always a little more level furniture and stuff to look at. And a handy battle-PSP to help negotiate it all as well.
- 5 ONUS ON ONANISM**
As well as being fun in its own right, the solo campaign is being primed as an excellent way to get a taste of the different variants in online gameplay. A bit like *Tribes: Vengeance* did, but less ignored.
- 6 ROADS LESS TRAVELLED**
We're not talking *Crysis* levels of freedom, but in single-player you can expect multiple different approaches designed into levels – including a few easter eggs that only the more adventurous will discover.
- 7 EMP-OWERED**
What's better than ruining someone else's fun? With an EMP speciality you'll be able to take out little flying buggers like this drone (or even its giant counterparts). Or you could just find its pilot hiding on the level and shoot him in the head.



REASONS TO BE F.E.A.R.F.U.L.

PROJECT ORIGIN

Will Porter explains how one of the best shooters of recent years is clawing its way back into the limelight

DEVELOPER Monolith PUBLISHER Warner Brothers WEBSITE www.projectorigingame.com

ETA
Q3 2008

THE LOWDOWN

- A true full-on sequel
- More variety, character and far cleverer shocks
- Same brand of visceral, bloody violence
- You go outside!
- Are we over-saturated with F.E.A.R.?

WHY IS IT that child stars always suffer so? It's the Macaulay Culkin effect: subject to an increasingly mediocre by-the-numbers career while bickering parents divorce and squabble over the cashflow. Spare a thought then for Alma Wade, preteen star of Monolith moneyspinner *F.E.A.R.*: a victim of a tug of love between her creators and her publishers Vivendi – but also paraded through an array of ill-fitting console treatments and absurdly bland expansions. Step-parent developed games that have not only besmirched her good name, but also made us heartily fed up with concrete walls and ceilings. I, myself, can't even go into multi-storey car parks any more without being physically and violently sick.

So why are we championing her return? For one thing, the Monolith brand of *F.E.A.R.*'s close-quarter gritty

combat and AI has never really been bettered. For another thing, Monolith (who haven't been a part of the *F.E.A.R.* franchise since that climactic explosion took out Alma's cage and half of the city of Auburn) are remarkably candid about the original game's failings. Yes, the story was engaging, and yes the soldier AI was great fun to fight against, but for how long could lift shafts and corridors stay immersive?

"It was a frustration on *F.E.A.R.*, not being able to get outside!" agrees John Mulkey, the game's lead designer. "We had a pretty indoor game. We were a claustrophobic game by design, but at a certain point tension becomes numbing. So we've decided to mix it up and to have these more open spaces, and you feel a little colour from the sky before going back to tight, menacing environments." Unlike so many prima donna developers, the 'Lith boys are



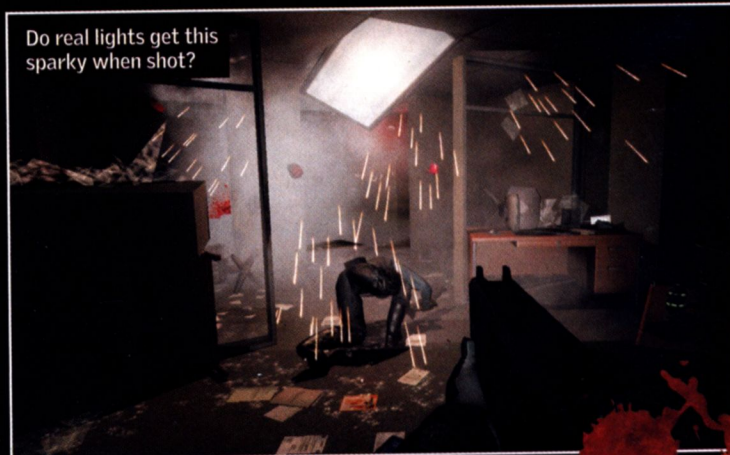
Swivel chairs: *F.E.A.R.*

responding to feedback from *F.E.A.R.* – meaning that there's a concerted effort to throw in more engaging and varied enemies outside of the endless soldiers, a mix of different locations, and a team you may even give a shit about.

"Plus, we really played out the whole 'creepy little girl walking across the hall in front of you' card" explains Mulkey, as our conversation drifts to everybody's favourite psychically created eight-year old personification and crazed psy-power mental



If he's got a moustache, then he's the team leader.



Do real lights get this sparky when shot?



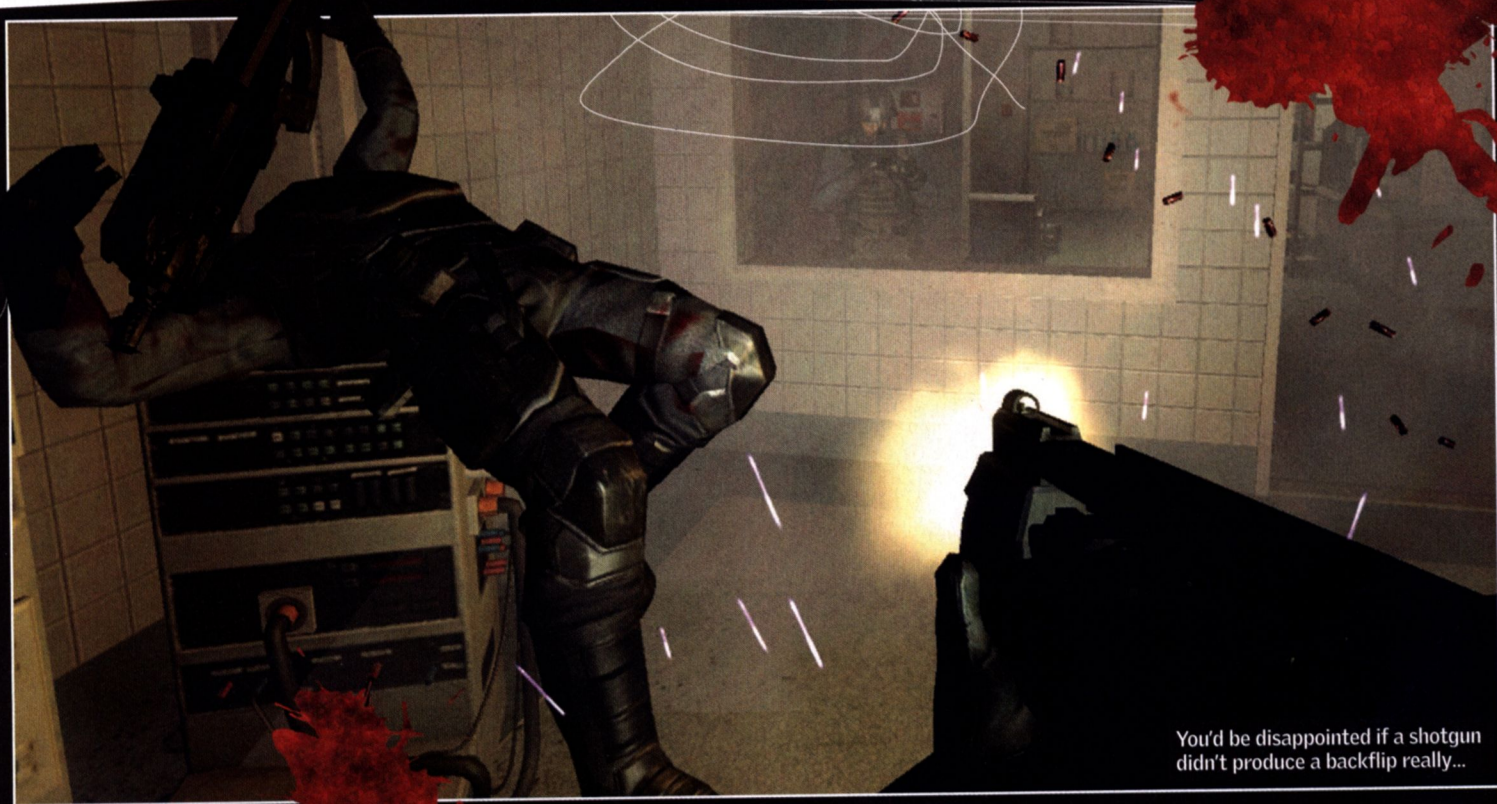
Unlike so many prima donna developers, the 'Lith boys are responding to feedback



Project Origin has you fighting real humans, not just faceless clones.



Note the throat-guzzling chap through the window.



You'd be disappointed if a shotgun didn't produce a backflip really...

patient. "We've put a lot of effort and a lot of thought into the ways in which we can give Alma teeth. It's going to be more direct, and an escalation: not something you say 'Creepy little girl is not so creepy anymore...' to."

POINT MAN

In another break from *F.E.A.R.* you no longer play one of PC gaming's amnesiac protagonists, you're a member of the US Army's covert Delta Force and your name is Michael Becket. Now Delta Force were the whipping boys in *F.E.A.R.* – the ones who were waiting in the wings, but then started leaking blood all over the place whenever a spot

of the old Alma ultra-violence was required.

"Yeah, he's a Delta operator," picks up Mulkey. "And at the beginning of the game it's actually 30 minutes before the end of *F.E.A.R.*. You're heading to the penthouse residence of Genevieve Aristide, because of all the things the *F.E.A.R.* team and the *F.E.A.R.* point man have been uncovering in the first game."

Obsessives may recall the voice of mysterious cigarette-smoking, femme-fatale Genevieve from the original game, she was the head of both the now-titular Origin project (mandate: lock up Alma – make her have babies) and the Perseus project (mandate: make

her kid able to control an army of clone soldiers, and make him eat people while you're at it since that would be cool).

In fact it was her voice that closed *F.E.A.R.* with her telling a Senator that "the Origin situation has been resolved" and that "There is some good news, however: the first prototype was a complete success".

"She's very connected into what's going on – all the cloak and dagger and black ops." Explains our man from Monolith. So he might say that Alma has a grudge against her? "Oh yeah, that might be fair..."

Mulkey refuses to explain exactly how a common-or-garden Delta operative such as yourself is suddenly



granted the time-slowing ultra-sensitive reactions of the original game's point man, but clues may be provided by the fact that early in the game you find yourself lying prostrate on an operating table and dipping in and out of

Trigger fingers still suffer from the bizarre tightening of immediate rigor mortis.

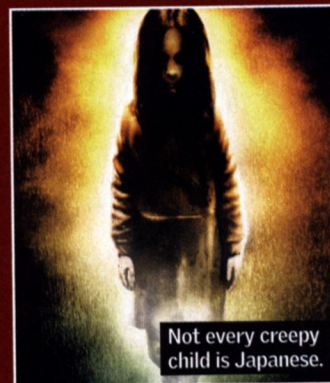


The story so far

SPOILERAGE

A condensed, and possibly slightly inaccurate, rendition of the plotline

So there's this collection of corporate bastards called Armacham right? And one of them has this psychic daughter who's doing all kinds of mental stuff with people's brains, so he locks her in a metal cupboard at the age of eight where she goes even more insane. Because they're utter bastards they make her have kids when she's hit puberty, and then attempt to train one of them to psychically command a legion of cloned soldiers. Twenty-odd years later the mad woman in the subterranean metal attic makes contact with him, and he revolts. Because Armacham are such utter bastards though, they send in her other amnesiac son to kill everyone and blow it all up. Which was you, by the way. So everything got blown up, but Alma the mad woman/child survived and it was a bit scary. The end. Or is it?



Not every creepy child is Japanese.

THE STORY SO FAR...
MONOLITH

Monolith lives
Six clever developers combine their secret special powers and found Monolith.



1994

They live again
Blood turns into an inventive Duke 3D acolyte. Many zombie's heads are kicked.

1997

No-one lives forever
'60s superspy Cate Archer wouldn't live forever. But she does, in our hearts.

2002



Eek - scary child!
Alma scares us from the top of stairwells and ushers in a run of second-rate follow-ups.

2005

Home Alone 2 finally meets its match.



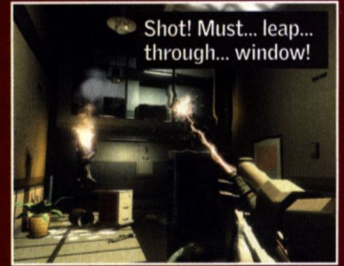
Death and glory

When imminent demise isn't a hindrance, but a chance to show off

You know when the mad steward of Gondor gets set on fire and runs one and half miles while covered in flames to jump off his mountain city's curiously placed aerial diving board? That's the sort of nonsense being put to good use in *Project Origin*: the 'glory death'.

"The idea is that if the A.I. knows they're going to die, then they do it in a cool way," deadpans lead game designer John Mulkey. "Guys will throw themselves out of windows and off balconies. It plays into the incendiary behaviours we've got too; the AI know what state they're in a lot better than before, and they know when they've caught on fire!

"Let's say a hydrant has been knocked over and there's water shooting all over the place, if a guy's on fire he knows about that - so he's going to run over to that water, roll around, put himself out, get back up, pull out a



sidearm and get some revenge." Add this random factor into the already proficient (and inevitably to be bettered) flanks, retreats and squad communication systems of *F.E.A.R.* and quite a neat little combat simulator is on the cards...

A game character writing stuff on a wall with his own shit? That's a first for gaming isn't it? "We're groundbreaking!" affirm Monolith

consciousness as an officious woman with a snappy business voice looks on. It doesn't take a huge leap of the imagination either (though this is Mystic Will talking rather than the sternly monitored voice of the developer) to surmise that you're being upgraded with another brand of Armacham technology to eventually aid and abet Ms Aristide, and perhaps even protect her from certain insane small children.

MAXIMUM WTF

Either way, the game starts in earnest in pure *28 Days Later* fashion deep within said hospital. Now, you might have read my stuff on this before - but sit tight for a paragraph or so as there's an excellent bit coming up about faeces. After watching surgeons attempting to save you from the brink of death (and watching spectral assailants devour you whenever you lose consciousness) you wake up alone in the operating theatre.

This then turns into a Monolith masterclass in what I refer to as 'scripted WTF'; a speciality of theirs that's been a hallmark ever since that Marine level in *Aliens vs Predator 2* where pipes and steam proved scarier than any alien attack. Alma has broken out, bits of guts keep on falling from airvents, odd scrawlings cover the walls and a wall-hanging man-creature is leaping around and behaving very oddly.

This chap is the first example of Monolith recognising that they needed to spice up the combat with regular enemies who weren't simply the same endless clones or one-trick ponies like the original's invisible wall-huggers.

"We're really trying to introduce new soldier types that go beyond having a different coloured uniform," outlines level designer supreme and lead developer Mulkey.

"Having new AI types that have different tactics that push the player to think in different ways of combating them. Adding elements to break up the gaming experience so it doesn't fall into a rhythm that could become tiresome."

Which leads us to this rather pallid gentleman feasting on dead bodies and leaping from wall to ceiling to hospital bed with great, and beautifully animated, skill and vitesse. "He's mumbly," picks up a clearly passionate Mulkey. "You hear these mumbles and nonsensical rants - but it sounds like someone talking to themselves, like two separate people having an argument. Where you find him, you find these very odd scrawlings all over the ground and the walls and surfaces around him. It's

an odd mix of numbers, symbols and words. He's trying to puzzle something out. And it's usually drawn out in blood, or faeces..."

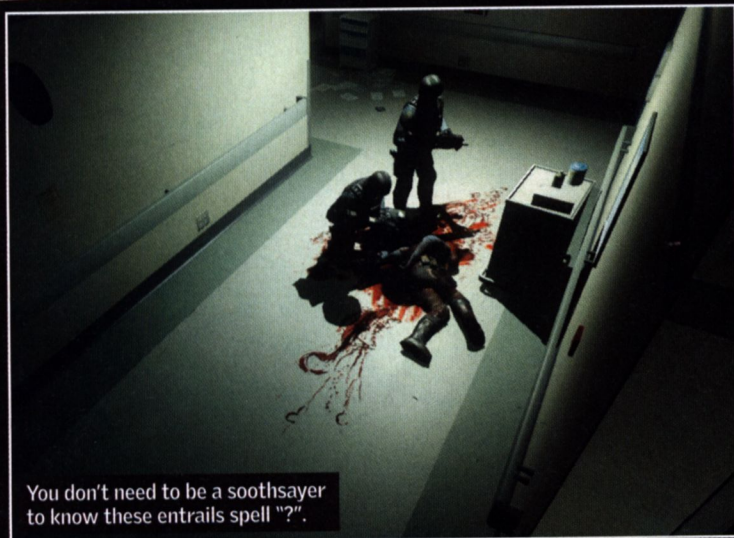
A game character writing stuff on a wall with his own shit? That's a first for gaming isn't it?

"We're groundbreaking!" affirms the Monolith man. "This character, he's very skittish. He's also rather aggressive, you'll come across some soldiers and you'll see this thing is picking them off. These guys use them in their equations. You come across this body and there's all this scrawling across the floor, and



Hospital standards slipping? Don't tell the Tories - they'll only moan.





You don't need to be a soothsayer to know these entrails spell "??".

Alma will be blowing stuff up with her mind, and you can expect a few ominous playgrounds as well

you'll see the soldier's head has been scooped out as if it were an inkwell.

And eventually, obviously, these confused maniacs will meet the hollower end of your weaponry. They'll stick to corners if they can, scuttling around insect-like – avoiding crossing the middle of the room.

"They're little wads of muscle," continues a fervent Mulkey. "They can weave up through the ceiling panels, dive up off the walls... the bounds of the normal world just don't have the same meaning for them... jumping across a table and running up a wall is the same to them as us walking across the floor".

And so with your revamped, highly polished and better animated arsenal of

wall-pinning Penetrators and grunt-igniting laser beams you'll traverse the wrecked city of Auburn with, we're promised, a bit less corridor and a bit more variety.

OUT AND ABOUT

"It's a more open environment; a destroyed city opens up an incredible amount of opportunities. You can have what seems like a very normal environment, then turn it about on its head. You can do some really great things to play with a player's expectation," explains the lead designer, wary of a fierce PR lady employed to make his life a misery if he lets on too much about specific environments.

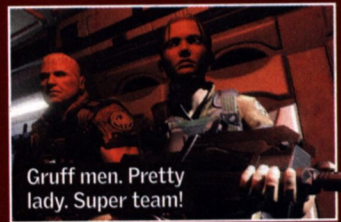
Carnage chums

Why Deltas are the best greek alphabet-inspired death squads ever

The story was good in *F.E.A.R.* but it's hard to remember the actual people in the *F.E.A.R.* squad other than there being a smarmy black bloke, a Korean lady and a man who you thought was called Randy, but was actually called 'Rowdy'. With *Project Origin*, Monolith are trying to better their former efforts.

"You're part of the Delta team that has been pulled together on the fly, people that you haven't really hung out with a lot," explains John Mulkey. "We really want the player to come to understand the people they're with and learn about them, and share experiences with them in a real way. Not as a little background story".

No confirmed names or characters just yet, but we're promised a few returning stars



Gruff men. Pretty lady. Super team!

from the original game other than Genevieve Aristide. But is Norton Mapes still dead? Mr Monolith: respond! "I am going to say... yes, but with the caveat that in the *Project Origin* universe, anything is possible". FOR GOD'S SAKE MAKE HIM BE STILL DEAD.

Not bad for an artwork created by a gibbering Gollum-esque mutant.



As far as stuff goes for dead-certs though: killer robot-mechs will certainly be tasked with hunting you down in the Auburn streets, high-kicking foes known as Replica Assassins with wrist-mounted blades will cause hand-to-hand mischief (who could well be tooled up variants on our hospital poo-smearing friend), Alma will be blowing stuff up with her mind, and you can expect a few ominous playgrounds as well. And a downed plane or two.

And the combat sounds as much fun as it ever was. Not least because the chaos of your gunfights will be exacerbated by the fact that there'll be five times as much detail to each room than before, and therefore more breakables, more debris, more smoke and more slow-motion swearing. More than ever before the aim is for bullet exchanges to be sandbox, with ramifications of your split-second battle tactics reflected in your enemies movement, actions and eventual demise. Plus, you'll be able to interact with the environment in much the same

way as clone soldiers could in the previous game – leaping over fences, or toppling over furniture, flipping it over and taking cover behind it. "What we've done is built lots and lots of systems into the game – and not so much hardcore scripting, that would mean every time you go into that room the exact same things are going to happen in that exact same order," explains Mulkey. "We put a lot more opportunities into the environment, that given the right conditions and the right player choices certain things play out."

This random factor, the way clever level design goes hand in hand with AI cleverness, is what has been so lacking on the externally produced *F.E.A.R.* expansion bandwagon. What's more it's a paramount shame that such a worthy development team and game have been forced so far back in the starting grid by powers beyond their control.

The *F.E.A.R.* universe was, and is, a unique step forward for first-person gaming, and the prospect of getting it back new, improved and with a bit less corridor is exciting to say the least. **47**

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the power and tyranny of war.
Help us to see that suffering delivers justice.
Harken to our prayers and provide
a remedy for our calamities.*

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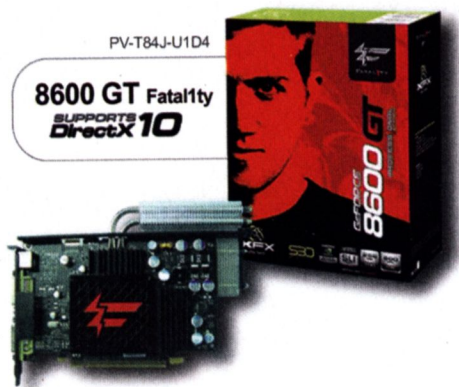
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PCZONE 2007 SCRAPBOOK



Hello. I'm not Jimmy Carr, but welcome anyway to the *PC ZONE* Review of the Year. 2007 has been a monumental year for PC games: *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl*, *Crysis*, *BioShock*, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat* and *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* are just five titles that made owning a big box full of hardware conflicts held together by sticky tape and *Windows* an absolute delight. Join us as we look back at one of the best 12 months ever - apart from *Little Britain: The Game*, and Steve and Log in their jim-jams. Shudder.

Jamie Sefton
Editor

2007 SCRAPBOOK Q1



Windows Vista is launched

Was this a new dawn for PC gaming? Well, with sub-par Vista-only releases such as *Halo 2* and *Shadowrun*, and the rather superfluous Games For Windows LIVE, no. However, as the compatibility issues are gradually ironed out, and more DirectX 10-compatible games appear (hello *Crysis*), we'll all have to make the switch sooner rather than later.

Shivering Isles announced

Bethesda reveal exclusively to PC ZONE that the next major expansion to *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* will be *Shivering Isles*, about the bonkers realm of Sheogorath.

JANUARY

WOW: The Burning Crusade

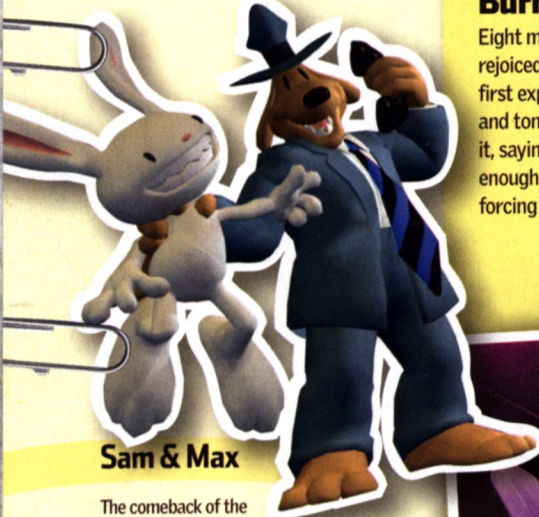
Eight million addicts (and counting) rejoiced as *World of Warcraft* received its first expansion pack, adding new races and tons of new content. We rather liked it, saying, "Must Buy" doesn't seem strong enough. There should be some kind of law forcing every player to have it."

93%

Star Trek: Legacy

A Captain's Log of a game – the story wasn't bad, about a Romulan intergalactic plague, but the whole *Trek* experience is ruined by shoddy presentation, terrible combat and unresponsive controls. One of the biggest wastes of a fantastic sci-fi licences in videogame history, in fact, "it's worse than that! It's dead, Jim! Dead!"

52%



Sam & Max

The comeback of the dog and rabbit-thing continued early in 2007 with *Episodes 2* and *3*...



FEBRUARY

Supreme Commander

Titanic robots of death blasting the living shit out of each other? Yes, we'll have some of that please – in a handy, addictive RTS form. Chris Taylor – we salute you, before annihilating your base with a barrage of missiles.

88%

Armed Assault

A mite buggy and rough around the edges, but still containing enough larks for us to claim this unofficial sequel to *Operation Flashpoint* was "one hugely accomplished modern combat simulator".

84%

Peggle

Our fascination with *Peggle* peaked when Steve cleared every peg from every level, in a display as spectacular as the first laugh of a newborn lamb. Beneath its brightly coloured exterior lie unholy equations capable of ensnaring our imaginations in a destructive spiral of insane addiction. It's simple and embarrassingly casual, but it feels so good to play. "Joy: The game."

83%

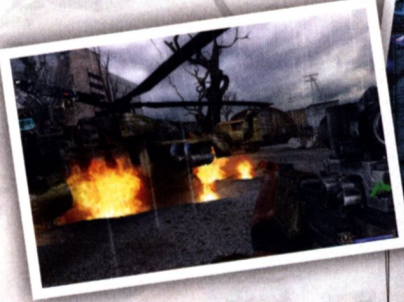


MARCH

STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl

Has it been worth the long six-year wait? Yes. With an awesome setting, great action, brilliant weapons and the Artificial Life wandering around, *STALKER* was a radioactive shooter classic. "Genuinely original."

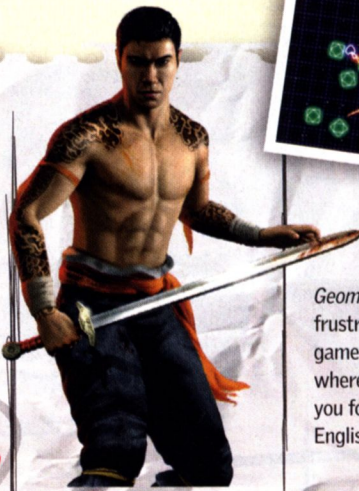
85%



C&C3: Tiberium Wars

Tiberium Wars was creeping up on a Recommended award this month. With an excellent new faction and glorious FMV, only the retreading of that old-school gameplay kept the score in the 80s. But it looked magnificent and made fans of the series very happy indeed.

86%



Jade Empire

After *Knights of the Old Republic*, BioWare created their own universe in this fantastic RPG with a great story, satisfying fighting and brilliant characterisation. "Transcended its Xbox roots to reincarnate itself as a high-kicking epic RPG for PC."

89%



Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved

Geometry Wars was hardcore, compulsive, frustrating and hypnotic - one of the few games to drag you into that gaming state where you can't remember the last time you focused your eyes or thought of an English word.

80%



The new weekly PCZ...

Dear Willdred solved gamers' problems.



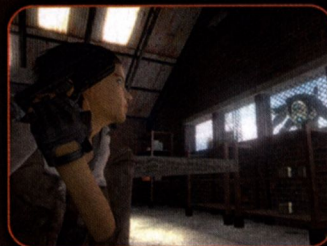
2007: Top 5 no-shows

- *Spore*
- *Alan Wake*
- *Huxley*
- *Alone in the Dark*
- *Age of Conan*

Half-Life® 2: Episode Two



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2007 SCRAPBOOK Q2



Blizzard Invitational

We get invited to South Korea to witness the launch of a shock new title. Would it be *Diablo 3*? *World of StarCraft?* *Hellgate: Warcraft?* Or a new franchise called *The Sandy Bumwitch*? Everyone knew what it was going to be, but we all acted surprised, anyway. Blizzard announced *StarCraft 2* in the country that plays the first game as a televised sport. Canny move, lads.

APRIL

Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar

If any franchise was going to be the unstoppable force to *WOW*'s immovable object, then it was going to be Middle-earth. Although the world-shaking collision of two fantasy giants went unfelt in the normal world, *LOTRO* has dug itself out a strong following in the MMO world.

87%



Little Britain: The Computer Game

One of the year's two single-figure scoring games, no-one ever really expected much of a *Little Britain* game. However, Blast! managed to make this cash-in so bad that it almost became noteworthy as the perfect example of how to shit on a customer.

7%



The Shivering Isles

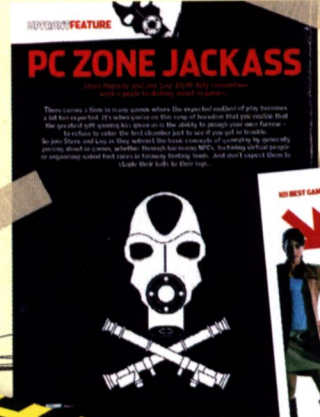
Oblivion's first add-on gave everyone bipolar disorder. With two worlds, one an explosion of creativity and hedonism, the other a joysink of paranoid stagnation and inertia. *The Shivering Isles* had some of the strongest storytelling and most memorable, and often funny, characters of the series. "A very different experience from *Oblivion*... one that all adventurers would be crazy to miss."

87%



Jackass

The Jackass feature tried to break games for fun's sake, and launched our now-regular spread in the Freeplay section.



MAY

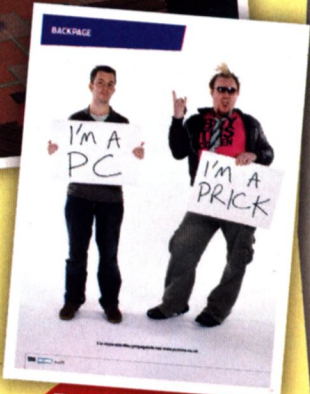
101 Best Games Ever

Deus Ex remains the best game in the world ever. The 101st best game? Well, that was the pitchfork madness that was *Blood*. Remember short game titles?



THE SIMS 2: H&M Fashion Stuff

The lowest score of the year went to EA, for their sheer audacity in charging £10 for an advert for a clothes shop. The only thing worse than the cynical process that got this shit commissioned is the fact that it probably shifted enough units to make it profitable.



BACK PAGE: PC vs MAC
Log plays the least challenging role of his life.

5%

PCZONE PCZONE



2007: Top 5 mods

- *Minerva 3: Metastasis (HL2)*
- *Desert Conflict (BF2)*
- *Monkeys of Doom (Doom 3)*
- *BTMod (Oblivion)*
- *Dystopia (HL2)*

JUNE

Tomb Raider: Anniversary

Did Core Design take it as a kick in the teeth when Crystal Dynamics rejuvenated the *Tomb Raider* license with *Legend*? Maybe not, but they must have smarted a bit when the upstarts decided to take the original game, and make it better. "Brings back the goodness of the original game, without the crap graphics."

83%



Back Page: Tomb Raider

Think *Tomb Raider* tit humour is beneath us? Think again!



Team Fortress[®] 2

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2007
SCRAPBOOK
Q3

JULY



**Ghost Recon:
Advanced Warfighter 2**

An uninspired, but genuinely fun, sequel. The multiplayer was the real star, but went underappreciated because nobody really wanted to play *Ghost Recon* all over again. "Your teammates are morons. Tell them to take cover behind a wall and one of them will amble into a nearby street."

80%



Civ IV: Beyond the Sword

This expansion pack sought to remedy the needlessly complex gameplay of *Civilization IV*, but made it even more confusing. All the countries are the wrong shapes too. Wales is a clump of right-angled coastline once again, the cheeky sods. "If Ghandi has cunningly delayed his launch to strap on an extra booster, he may well overtake you and win."

86%



**Lost Planet:
Extreme Condition**

Another kick in the face from Capcom for PC owners, who were still reeling from *Resi 4*. *Lost Planet* wasn't so bad, because the original game wasn't special. However, mouse and keyboard play were crippled, making the whole exercise just feel a little bit needless.

66%

**Empire: Total War
announced**



As Mystic Will saw in his crystal ball last year, the new *Total War* game is indeed to be set in the Napoleonic era, complete with - at last - fully-implemented naval battles. *Empire: Total War* is the age of Mozart, Wellington and the British Empire, with many factions including old adversaries France and Spain vying for political and economical supremacy in the old and new world. 2008 is already looking like it will be a classic year for the RTS...

AUGUST

BioShock

Like it was the sanest thing in the world, Ken Levine did a game set in an aquatic dystopian society and we all went mad about it. It was really good: cinematic and moving, with emergent combat, movie-quality voice acting and all of those things we like our games to be. "Never has the medium been used as a storytelling device in such a beautiful and engaging way."

96%



Two Worlds

An *Oblivion*-esque RPG you'll have to try hard to enjoy, but offers its share of payoffs. Hardly anybody played it though. Always the way, eh? You should buy some more games madam. "The horse handles like a sack of warm shit."

73%

Steve samples Seattle

It was in September that Steve flew away to Seattle to review Valve's *Orange Box*. Armed with a Pantone swatch he verified that the box was indeed orange, but moaned about the time he spent sitting on his own in his hotel room. Such is the life of Hogarty.



SEPTEMBER



World in Conflict

In the face of great adversity, a really good *Company of Heroes* expansion, and an increasingly uneasy relationship with our spy-poisoning, media-controlling comrades in Moscow, *World in Conflict* proved that the typically neutral Sweden could produce the most destructive, and visually astounding war RTS of our time.

92%

Medal of Honor: Airborne

A new idea for the *Medal of Honor* series: falling out of planes and having a mission unfold based on where you've landed. It didn't work out as we were told it would, as you can't smash through a window and land saluting the distance on a Nazi general, but it was jolly good fun anyway.

83%

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

A game that should've been huge, but was scuppered by horrendous delays and ended up releasing alongside the year's bigger-but-not-that-better shooters. Still overlooked to this very day, it wanders the streets in search of children who don't eat their vegetables. "An immersive game, with distinct shooter classes, and some of the best multiplayer maps we've seen."

87%



2007: Top 5 Free Games

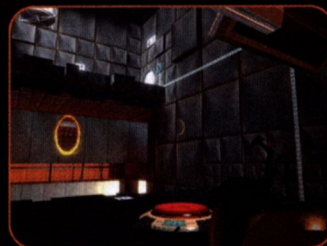
- *Chalk* (www.konjak.org)
- *De Blob* (snipurl.com/pcz_blob)
- *Counterclockwise* (www.16x16.org)
- *Stranded II* (stranded.unrealsoftware.de)
- *Cortex Command* (datarealms.com)



Portal™



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2007 SCRAPBOOK Q4

OCTOBER

EA devours BioWare

As was the fashion this year: two became one. Let's hope nothing is compromised...



The Orange Box

The Orange Box

The triumvirate of highly toned first-person goodness trundled into our Steam accounts with undeniable panache. Sure, our Steve may have pointed out that the allure of the Half-Life 2 setup is starting to wane, but how can you deny the joy when a developer provides such class acts as the Strider battle, Still Alive, Sasha, GLaDOS, the spy and the sinister warring Builders League United and Reliable Excavation Demolition corporations? Pure, ingenious PC gaming class.



Tabula Rasa

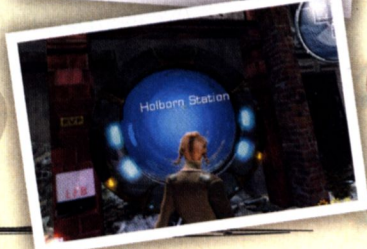
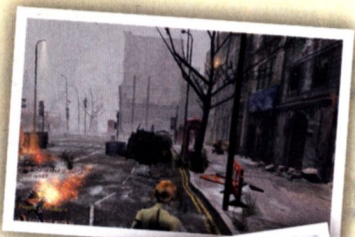
Sure, Burning Crusade took us into a brave new world of sorts but if any game nudged the MMO envelope to somewhere slightly new then it's the faster-paced action stylings of Tabula Rasa. Sure, the grind is still there but it's still the most interesting thing to hit multiplayer gaming since PlanetSide. "With a little work could be a top-flight MMO."

81%

Hellgate: London

We hoped that its bugs and foibles would be addressed soon after its release, but as this issue goes to press they still haven't. Easily the biggest disappointment of the year - Hellgate: London had some brilliant Diablo-invoking stuff in its inner workings but was severely compromised by its hosepipe weapons, horrible presentation and basically unfinished status.

74%



Slip sliding away

Every game we predicted would fall into next year, fell into next year. Brothers in Arms, Assassin's Creed, Splinter Cell: Conviction...

BBFC rattles sabre

It's not exactly a fight over the very pinnacle of gaming - but is the Manhunt 2 brouhaha a signal of clampdowns to come?



The Witcher

Deep, dark and stuffed to the gills with gameplay (and indeed, bodices stuffed with bosoms) The Witcher is PC ZONE's candidate for Dark Horse of the Year. An unknown quotient on the roleplay radar, its powerful narrative and engaging gameplay turned it into the game we all were hoping beyond hope that it could be. Thank you Poland!



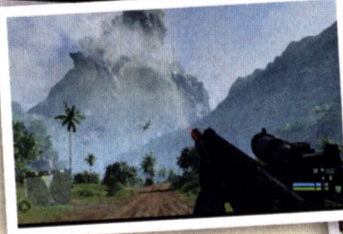
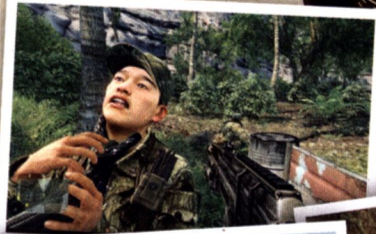
88%

NOVEMBER

Clive Barker's Jericho

The year's second big disappointment. The supposed grand re-entrance of the horror supreme turned out to be nothing but a so-so shooter with a severely limited menagerie of evil to combat. The blood may have been shiniest of the year, but the game still managed to fudge all points at which a distinctly average game becomes a half-decent one.

68%



Crysis

The system-chewing behemoth was finally upon us – and far more of a *Far Cry* re-imagination than we expected. The anti-Korean action bubbles gave this year's most exhilarating single player thrills, even if the alien-baiting towards the game's close forgot what made its earlier chapters so special. Plus you could throw turtles at rocks!

92%

Unreal Tournament III

Reviewed this issue – overall *Unreal Tournament III* wasn't the massive evolution that *UT2004* was, but its refinement of pure action and almighty graphical prowess have made it an excellent addition to the Epic canon. Single-player mode whiffs of needless testosterone – but hey, life goes on.

90%

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Constant brilliantly scripted action where you could hardly see the joins – plus an actual ending! Whoever thought we'd get a *Call of Duty* whose finale wasn't a load of soldiers throwing their hands in the air and going 'Yeah!?' Plus: "Grab Lassie's cute little head and twist sharply until you hear a snap!"

89%

Top 5 hardware

- Intel Penryn – November
- USB 3.0 unveiling – September
- Nvidia GeForce 8800 Ultra – May
- ATI R600 – May
- Hitachi Deskstar 7K1000 – March



DECEMBER

Not very much at all happens. Long nights draw in. Games are played amid the winter snow. PC games development goes into its annual hibernation in the wait for the glorious dawn of 2008.

Log & Steve in pyjamas

2007 also saw our Log and Steve dressing up in their night clothes for you. And no, Log wasn't wearing that outfit on a bet. He owns it... Really... We're not joking.

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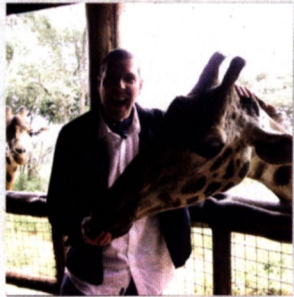
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2007: HOW WAS IT FOR US?

The PC ZONE team pick their favourite moments and name their Games of the Year...



Jamie Sefton

WELL, I COULD bang on about the botched launch of Microsoft Vista and Games For Windows LIVE (*Shadowrun* and *Halo 2* as flagship titles – what were they thinking?) but for me, 2007 was the best year ever for PC games. Seriously. That year when *Half-Life* came out? 1998 = meh.

This year had some amazing single-player shooters (*Crysis*, *BioShock* and *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*), incredible multiplayer shooters (*Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, *Team Fortress 2*, and *Unreal Tournament III*), stunning real-time strategy games (*Supreme Commander*, *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* and *World in Conflict*), smart MMOs (*WOW: Burning Crusade* and *Lord of the Rings Online*), cracking sports games (*Pro Evolution Soccer 2008* and *Football Manager 2008*) and genuine quirky innovation (*Portal* and *Peggle*) – as well as some of the best free games, indie titles and mods. As long as Microsoft sorts out the *Vista* compatibility issues and makes Games For Windows LIVE complete free, then the future looks as good as a computer-generated DX10-enhanced Scarlett Johansson.

Game of the Year:
BioShock



Will Porter

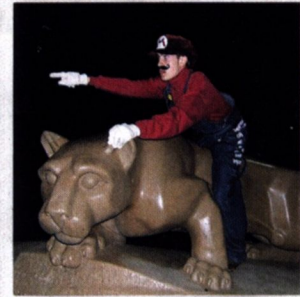
ON THE SURFACE 2007 could seem like a year of sequels and rampant money-spinning, and when you dip below the surface it isn't far different. But buried in this hype machine, this year stands out for me because of the genuine artistry that's been wrapped into games.

I'm talking about the uneasy feeling I got when listening to the cold military chatter as I blasted distant troops in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat* through a grainy gunship monitor; those magical first moments of exploration as you enter Rapture in *BioShock*; being drawn so deeply into *Portal* by GLaDOS' frankly stunning monologues and then being floored by the best-conceived game ending I've ever played.

Say what you will, but I truly believe this year saw a decisive turn into deeper and more meaningful gaming. Oh, and this was also the year that Steam took over the world – the amount of money Valve must be making is mind-boggling.

With so many publishers climbing into bed with them, Christ knows what it'll be like this time next year...

Game of the Year:
Portal



Ed Zitron

BAR THE TERRIBLE release and eventual downsizing of MMO whipping-boy *Vanguard*, I can't fault the massively multiplayer online industry this year, which has gone from strength to strength. Past the obvious release of *World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade*, the highest selling MMO expansion of all time, *Guild Wars* has gone from strength to strength, really competing to become one of the biggest successes within the MMO community.

EverQuest II improved remarkably under new management, with *The Buried Sea* doing well with fans and building nicely on the foundation of the game. Out of nowhere came *Tabula Rasa*, a game I personally remember looking rather drab at E3 2004, which was matured into a genuinely individual, fun and exciting MMO – another trophy in NCsoft's cabinet.

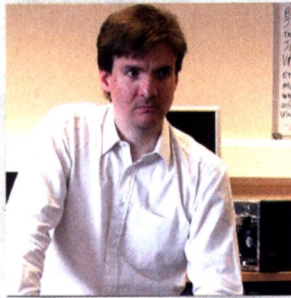
The development and momentum gained by *Lord of the Rings Online* has been incredible; Turbine really know how to layer on content – free content at that. With the release of *Book II*, they've really upped my expectations for the game, and there's no doubt we'll see more and more added onto the game in 2008.

Game of the Year:
The Witcher



How Was It For You?

Feel like venting your anger at the latest The Sims expansion not being nominated for any Game of the Year awards? Hit the PC ZONE forum now and tell us what you think! We'll print the best comments and maybe give out prizes, if we can be arsed - www.pczone.co.uk.



Phil Wand

GAMERS WILL REMEMBER 2007 as the year AMD took a serious beating - which is ironic, considering they were always the gaming platform to beat.

Although the company released their long-awaited HD 2900 XT card in May, NVIDIA's rival G80 line had been sucking up buyers for the five months since Christmas, leaving the Radeon brand floundering. While mid-range products propped up sales, it was all yesterday's technology.

The company's Athlons fared no better. They were comprehensively outgunned by Intel's all conquering Core 2, including a raft of new quad-core variants, and while the upcoming AMD Spider high-end gaming platform - based around the new Phenom - may have impact, the die-shrunk Penryn will shift Core processors into higher gear, and Nehalem will really get things moving in 2008.

There was a major storage milestone in the form of Hitachi's 1TB drive, currently on sale for £200, though with 500GB drives hovering around £65 the big Hitachi is more bragging rights than best buy. Give it six months and it might be worth considering.

Game of the Year: Team Fortress 2



Jon 'Log' Blyth

REVIEWING A MEDIOCRE game is terrible, because it forces you to acknowledge - in the name of balance and professionalism - some of the good points of a game you want, as a gamer, to utterly destroy. Every instinct tells you to act like you're on an internet forum and just scream like an infant, but you can't.

Reviewing a truly shit game, on the other hand, is a pleasure. Take the fundamentalist RTS *Left Behind: Eternal Forces*. (In fact, take it far away.) It was a massive brown stinker, whose only good effect was to wipe millions from the value of the revolting company that spawned it. However, even that game was surpassed in offensiveness by the jaw-droppingly cynical *Little Britain* cash-in. If these games were free, I'd recommend you all play them just to feel that pure heat of anger.

On the other hand, this is the year I managed to give my first Classic award. It may have been a console port, but it was good, honest dumb-ass action, and after the heartbreaking disappointment that was *Resi 4*, *Gears of War* was a great example in keeping a great console game great after the tricky journey to the PC. Let's have more great - and more truly shit - games in 2008, please.

Game of the Year: The Orange Box



Steve Hogarty

I DON'T REALLY have a fully formed opinion about 2007 yet. It was sort of a pear-shaped year for games, with all the best releases being bunched up at the end. I don't know why 'pear-shaped' is thought of as a bad thing though. The shape doesn't matter, just as long as it's a tasty pear. But we're talking about games here, and having a strangely delicious concentration of games weighing down our wallets at one end of the year isn't so bad.

The Orange Box, *Crysis*, *Unreal Tournament III*, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat*, the other ones - it means we can get through the festive season without ever having to interact with our friends and families. Is that an opinion?

Peggle stole away months of my life, and *Call of Duty 4* was surprisingly well made, but the game I can see myself continually coming back to in 2008 is looking extremely interesting.

Also, I'm going to build a *Portal* map and it's going to blow everybody's minds. You'll all see.

Game of the Year: Portal





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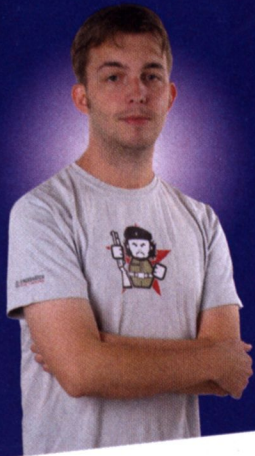


AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 2008



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PCZONE REVIEW

Our verdict on the latest PC game



Pet sounds

M ANY MOONS AGO I worked in a post room in a management consultancy magnate in the Canary Wharf tower. It was great: the guts of the place look just like Black Mesa, and I spent all my time playing cards. But I digress – basically the area where all the posh nobs worked was quiet as the grave.

Sound was at sub-library levels – if one of the high-earning, unattainable female executive clothes horses had farted you'd be able to hear it at a workstation 100 dead-eyed metres away. I have never been so amazed by an absence of noise.

Which brings me to the day *Unreal Tournament III* was ushered into my current working environs. There were screams, shouts and a somewhat rash accusation of Martin Korda being little more than a 'Redeemer-using c***!'. I'm not saying it's better on my side of the fence, but I will say that the new Warfare mode could do wonders for corporate morale. It was blissful, and made me happy to be alive. The end.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



60 UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

Is Epic's unstoppable rampage a killing spree that's heading for God-like domination?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns PC ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com.



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PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk



UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

It's finally here, but has it been worth the wait?
Martin Korda heads to the battleground...

DEVELOPER Epic
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE www.unrealtournament3.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99



AT A GLANCE...

The latest instalment in the *UT* series, offering some of the best multiplayer FPS action ever, though the single-player campaign is pretty lacklustre.

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 3.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS



WE LOOK PATHETIC. We really do. No matter how many litres of steroids we pump into our arms or right arms we hew into our jawlines, sadly, we humans look about as menacing as a toddler staring down Mike Tyson when it comes to eyeballing a razor-toothed alien behemoth who could rip out our spine and play it like a glockenspiel. If you don't believe us, take a look at the *Unreal Tournament III* poster from issue 187: no wonder these extraterrestrial bastards keep invading us.

One look at us and they think it's a dead-cert win, a walkover, taking candy from a dead man's hand. And, yes, it would be if war came down to who looked the scariest. Only, of course, it doesn't. War's about guns, guts, vehicles, explosions, man against aggressor race, a battle for liberty, justice and an all-consuming lust for raw materials. Which, when it comes to shooters such as *UT3*, at least gives us a fighting chance.

The latest lot of space invaders to fancy a pop at humanity (admittedly not Earth-dwelling humans, but rather Homo sapiens on a planet called Taryd) are a bunch of goths with a penchant for tight leather attire called the Necris, a race who make up for looking like a bunch of BDSM enthusiasts by employing the services of – yes, you guessed it – a race of razor-toothed alien behemoths (the Krall) to do most of the bloodletting for them. Just like its predecessors, *UT3* is a game that shuns the contemporary, tactical, role-based approach used by so many recent

multiplayer FPS titles, instead sticking to the tried and tested manic gameplay mechanic that propelled the original to international multiplayer superstardom at the end of the last millennium.

OLD FRIEND

Entering one of *UT3*'s countless levels for the first time is like revisiting your favourite '80s action movie after months of watching heavy, character-driven World War II epics. The game's instant simplicity, unapologetic brutality and searing pace suddenly pull you back to a simpler time, when a multiplayer shooter's only concern was pure, unadulterated action. *UT3* provides the type of gaming experience that has your arse crack sweating like a fat man's pits as it clings to the edge of your seat while you press your nose to your gilet-caked monitor and yell "Die!", before having your skull lopped off by a well-placed sniper shot.

But before we delve too deeply into the minutiae of *UT3*'s frenetic firefights and impressive collection of game modes, weapons and vehicles, we'd better dedicate a few choice paragraphs

That's one way to kill a cockroach.



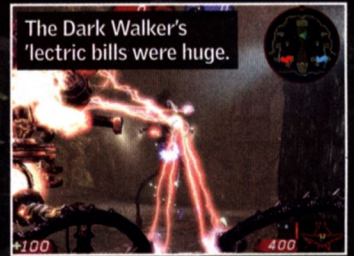
The new Warfare mode sees you capturing a series of nodes.



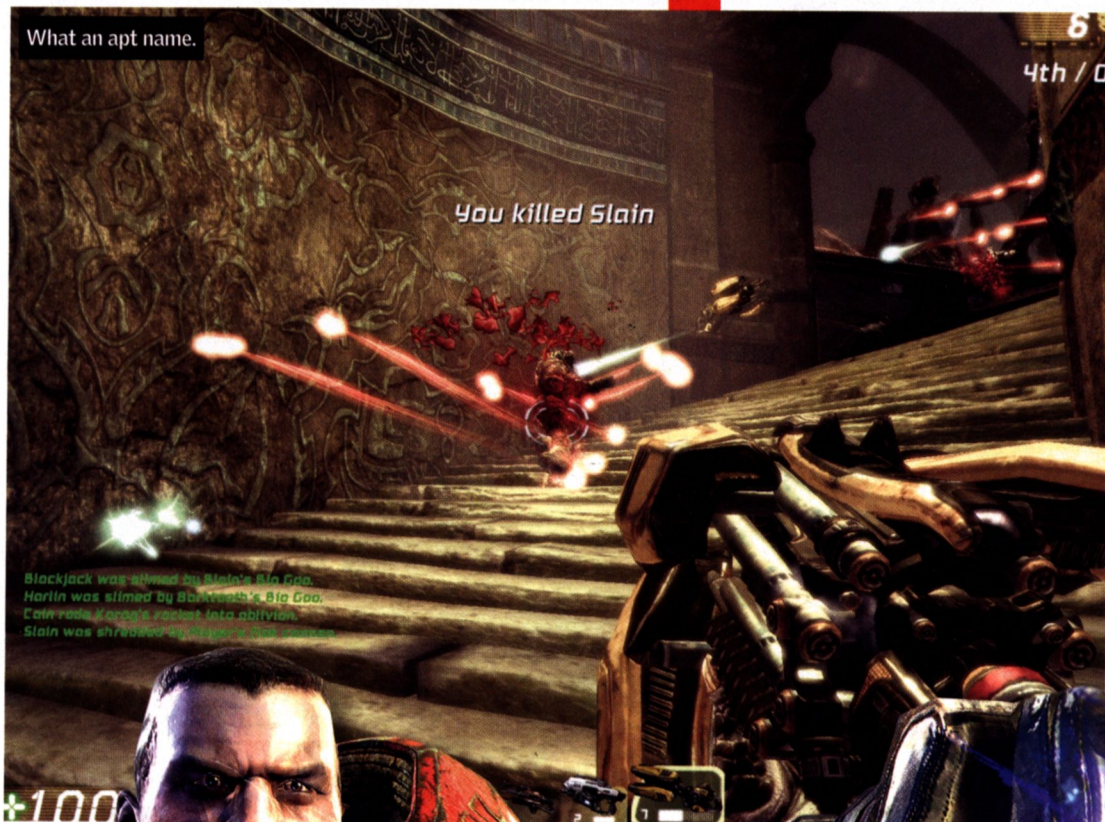
You can tether yourself to vehicles while boarding.



The Dark Walker's 'lectric bills were huge.



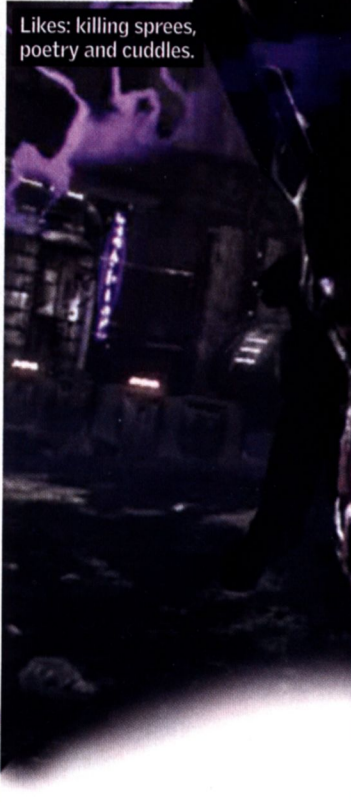
UT3 has your arse crack sweating as it clings to the edge of your seat



What an apt name.

You killed Slain

Blackjack was slayed by Slain's Big Goo.
 Harlin was slayed by Blackjack's Big Goo.
 Cow rode Jackie's rocket into oblivion.
 Slain was shredded by Jackie's Big Goo.



Likes: killing sprees,
 poetry and cuddles.



At least it's a clean death.

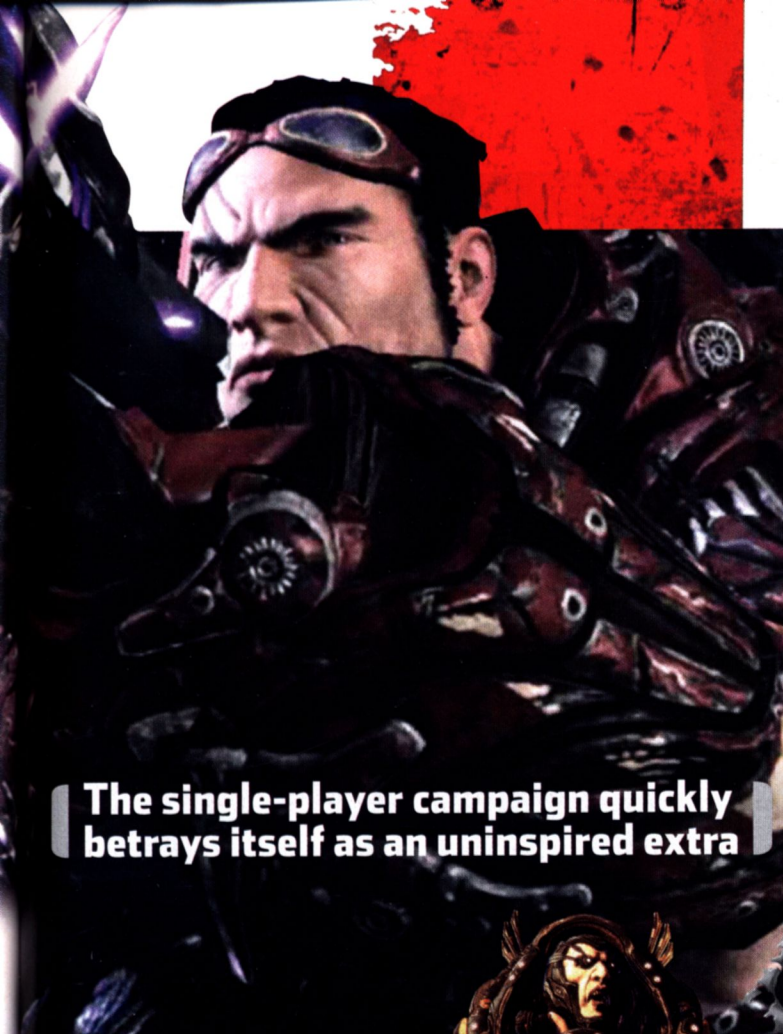
to the game's much vaunted single-player campaign. This, friends, is Epic's attempt to cater for those of you who still don't like jumping online and competing against gobby American teens with egos the size of Everest and the eloquence of a dyslexic badger. Those of you who prefer to wage war against the virtual, preprogrammed killers born of some of the world's finest bot programmers. Or perhaps those of you still living in another century, where logging on involves ear-splitting 56K screeching and a five-day wait for your homepage to fire up.

FAILED CAMPAIGN

We were promised a branching, epic journey, charting a global war between three human factions, during which your mission choices would be crucial to determining your path through the game and deciding the outcome

of the conflict. We were promised that this would be followed by a terrifying struggle for survival as an alien race interrupts this skirmish for land and Tarydium (a resource that's to Taryd what black gold is to us earthlings), forcing you and your comrades to fight for your homeland. Assurances were given that all this would be bound together by an intriguing plot, centring on your quest for vengeance after your family and tribe are brutally slain by alien scum. So many promises. So much to look forward to. And what do we get? A rudimentary global map, with minimal mission branching, a modicum of knock-on effects (eg complete a certain mission to unlock a new vehicle) and a plot packed with more bluster and testosterone than a pro wrestling locker room.

The chief problem with the single-player campaign is that *UT3*'s inherently multiplayer



The single-player campaign quickly betrays itself as an uninspired extra

gameplay means that it all feels, well, a bit ludicrous, really. For example, playing Capture the Flag levels in the context of a global conflict is just bizarre, and we don't care how many times we're told that these "FLaGs" affect the enemy's respawn capabilities. It just doesn't feel believable. What's more, the plot is utterly underdeveloped and the campaign map is best described as a scattering of dots on a globe, with each mission accompanied by a basic written explanation and a briefing overblown with machismo. Sure, the FMVs linking it all together look nice and are smartly edited, and it's nice to see Malcolm, Reaper et al



Doubt he'll be getting up from that one.

Boarding school

Don't need money, don't need fame...

UT3's addition of a hoverboard has completely transformed the dynamic of the series' vehicular-based missions. For starters, it means that you're no longer forced to yomp massive distances if there aren't any vehicles in the vicinity. Better still, the manoeuvrability of these boards is truly breathtaking, and it's not long before you're powering up ramps and propelling yourself over walls and ditches, then slaloming between the legs of a Dark Walker, grabbing the enemy's flag and making a swift, weaving getaway from the inevitable enemy barrage. You can also tether yourself to a vehicle and be dragged along behind it, which makes for some superb, high-speed boarding. The only downsides are that it only takes a single bullet to dislodge you, and you can't shoot while on the board, which - in my opinion - is an opportunity missed.



Slaloming past enemies is thrilling.

Deathmatch games are frenetic, especially with 16 players.



develop personalities of a sort, but it all falls flat.

It may be encouraging to see a single-player campaign included here (it can also be played cooperatively), but it's a feature that quickly betrays its true self, an optional and uninspired extra rather than the game's driving force (which, admittedly, it was never meant to be). There's also the problem that way too many missions involve no more than eight to 10 combatants in total. On some of the larger levels, you can often run around for what feels like an age before you track down a foe, in contrast to the unrelenting 16-player vehicular slug-fests you can lovingly create in multiplayer mode. As a result, several campaign missions feel more akin to limp altercations between two

small gangs than raging war zones that will decide the fate of an entire race.

Finally (and we promise after this we'll start extolling the game's myriad virtues), there's absolutely no sense of war progression, such as shifting borders to show how your victories and losses are aiding or hampering your faction's war effort, or even a sense that you could actually lose the war. Fail a mission and you just play it again and again until you win. As a result, you're left with a campaign that's flatter than Holland. After it's been crushed by a meteor. It's a massively missed opportunity, because had Epic crafted a truly compelling single-player campaign to complement UT3's abundance of unequalled fragging mayhem, it would have found itself releasing one of the finest FPS packages of all time, one that would have given even *The Orange Box* a run for its money. What a shame...

THE REAL DEAL

So, let's get back to the main aspects of UT3, the parts that make it one of the most desirable multiplayer blaster packages on the market.

All's fair in love and warfare

The new Warfare mode is a node-capturing, vehicle-trashing, orb-carrying blast!



Starting from your main base, grab your orb (which instantly puts any node under your team's control) and rush towards the primary node.



With the primary node yours, capture the central node with another orb or by destroying its central hub and then claiming it for your team.



Make sure you protect your nodes to stop the enemy from taking control of them. Be especially vigilant to identify and kill any enemies carrying orbs.



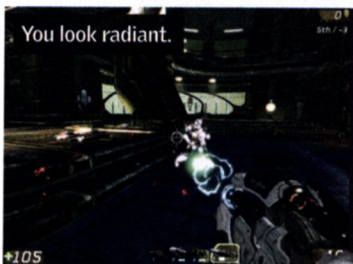
Once all the nodes are under your control, head into the enemy base and start blasting its power core. Destroy it and you'll be victorious.

Dark Walker vs Leviathan. The battle of the heavyweights.



Powered by the very latest version of Unreal Engine 3, levels simply teem with the type of detail that'll have your eyeballs divorcing their sockets and shacking up with your monitor. If you're running well under the recommended specs (2.4GHz dual core with 1GB RAM, and an NVIDIA 7800GTX+ or ATI x1300+ video card), then it's unlikely you'll be

Beware the sniper.



able to enjoy *UT3* as it's intended (beware of some instability issues on PCs hovering around the minimum specs), but if your machine is up to the challenge, then prepare yourself for an unrivalled visual feast in which levels pulse with beauty and boast macabre yet stunning alien architecture, and in which vehicles suffer severe real-time damage, smoking and burning as their armour bucks and sags from enemy onslaughts.

Many of the game's modes will be utterly familiar to you – most notably Deathmatch, TDM, Duel and CTF. Vehicular CTF throws in the extra variable of motorised transports (which we'll come to in a bit, we promise), but rather than having you tearing across the sprawling levels in the nippiest vehicles while clutching the flag for an easy score, there's the added catch that flags aren't allowed inside these mechanised beasts. And that means you and your sidekicks are going to have to work as a team.

REV IT UP

It can be all too easy to dismiss the *UT* franchise as a glory-hunter's paradise where every player is out for themselves, but over



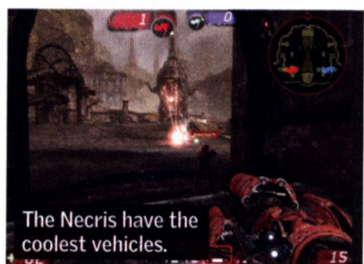
The unspectacular campaign map.

the years, Epic have slowly imbued the series with an increasingly solid tactical spine. The addition of vehicles aided this considerably, with combined-arms assault forces containing nippy and heavy vehicles, backed up by infantry and air support, usually prevailing over more ragtag teams in Vehicular CTF games.

This is even more the case in the superb new Warfare mode, which sees the Assault and Onslaught modes from previous *UT* games combined into one sublime whole. It's a triumphant addition (for more on how this works, teletour up to the "All's fair in love and warfare" box), one that further embellishes the essential strategic subtleties that enable *UT3* to cater to both the twitch-trigger deathmatch fanatic and the clan-lover in equal measures.

Also impressive is *UT3*'s collection of vehicles, most notably the all-new Necris war machines that showcase the Epic development team's admirable artistic and design prowess. Putting the human arsenal to shame (which remains relatively unchanged from that of *UT2004*, with a couple of tweaks here and there), Necris vehicles are a joy to behold, adding a genuine sense of awe to battlefields as they roll, lumber or hover into view.

Most remarkable of all is the Necris Dark Walker, a towering three-legged death-bringer that looks like it's been plucked straight out of *War of the Worlds*. Watching these lumbering hulks wreak havoc across a battlefield is one of the most incredible multiplayer FPS sights you'll ever have seen. Throw in (amongst others) the buzzing,



The Necris have the coolest vehicles.

Better call Direct Line.

Enemies fly to pieces, heads spin off shoulders and flesh is incinerated



tentacled Fury, which practically swims through the sky with its gangly mechanical feelers, and the hysterical Scavenger, which can be turned into a sphere and driven like a bowling ball through hapless ranks of enemy foot soldiers, and you begin to grasp the sheer level of imagination that has been lovingly applied to each piece of alien tech. And with several vehicles having enough space for at least one other teammate, and the addition of hoverboards (see "Boarding school"), the numerous tactical and offensive possibilities of vehicular combat become even more extensive.

FIRE IT UP

The *UT* series has always been well known for its weaponry, and once again, all you fans of the series will be instantly at home with the hardware on display, as little has changed in this department since *UT2004*. There's an argument here that the lack of new firepower is a bad thing, but once your fingers close around each weapon's bulky casing and you depress the trigger, you'll realise you'd be hard-pushed to find superior alternatives. As ever, each weapon has at least two firing modes (some of which can

be combined to devastating effect), with the primary one usually possessing a quicker rate of fire but inflicting less damage, while the secondary option is usually slower but packs more punch.

Favourites making a return include the Link Gun (which can regenerate vehicles and nodes as well as destroying them), the multi-missile-firing rocket launcher, the flesh-ripping Flak Cannon and everyone's favourite tactical-nuclear-missile launcher, the Redeemer (which can have its projectiles knocked out of the sky by a hotshot). New to the fold is a collection of deployable weapons, most notably the Stasis Field, which generates a huge block of jelly-like goo that turns enemies into slo-mo sitting ducks when they try to wade through it. There are also some great power-ups and upgrades to track down (which thankfully are sparingly scattered though each level), including Invincibility, U-Damage, Jump Boots and a set of region-specific body-armour parts.

Armed with this devastating array of firepower and upgrades, and with the action ramped up to *Quake*-like speeds, *UT3* proves to be an unrelenting assault on the senses, its simultaneous demands of accuracy, quick

reactions and strategic thinking resulting in one of the fastest, most enjoyable fragging experiences you'll have had in years. It's brutal too (though gore levels can be turned down if you're a touch delicate), with enemies flying into a thousand blood-caked pieces, heads spinning off shoulders and flesh being incinerated, leaving behind just a rigid skeleton where an opponent once stood.

Rounding off this superb package are some of the finest bots you'll ever have had the pleasure of decapitating. Despite the very occasional bit of odd behaviour (bots firing at enemies that aren't there or trying to move vehicles through walls), *UT3*'s enemy AI has again raised the bar for virtual-opponent realism, often to the point where you can't distinguish the computer-controlled enemy from the living, breathing one.

While the future of team and multiplayer first-person shooters may well lie with the class-based war zones of *Battlefield*, *Quake Wars* and *Team Fortress*, *UT3* proves that there's still oodles of room for the more straightforward multiplayer frag-fest. Its single-player campaign may be weak and forgettable, but its true genius lies in the untouchable quality of its firefights, its splendid visuals, diverse level design, massive attention to detail and downright awesome vehicles and weapons. No other game on the market can equal its thrill and frenetic nature, and while there may be larger, more populated and tactically adept virtual-battlefield games out there, as a pure multiplayer fragging and vehicular FPS experience, *UT3* is utterly peerless. **PCZ**

Sandstorms severely restrict how far you and the enemy can see.



Hoverboards totally change the dynamic of vehicular combat.



Mutation

Fancy a change? You got it



The leader's head swells with the Big Head mutator.

Once you get bored of the standard gameplay (which will take quite some time, trust us), as is traditional, you can inject a collection of mutators into the mix. These include Big Head (which makes the leading player's noggin grow bigger the further ahead they get), Instagib (one shot, one kill), Low Gravity (which makes for some superb floating jousts) and Freak Speed (if you thought the standard pace was quick, wait till you get a load of this). Better still, you can mix and match these mutators, meaning that the game's already impressive longevity can be further enhanced.



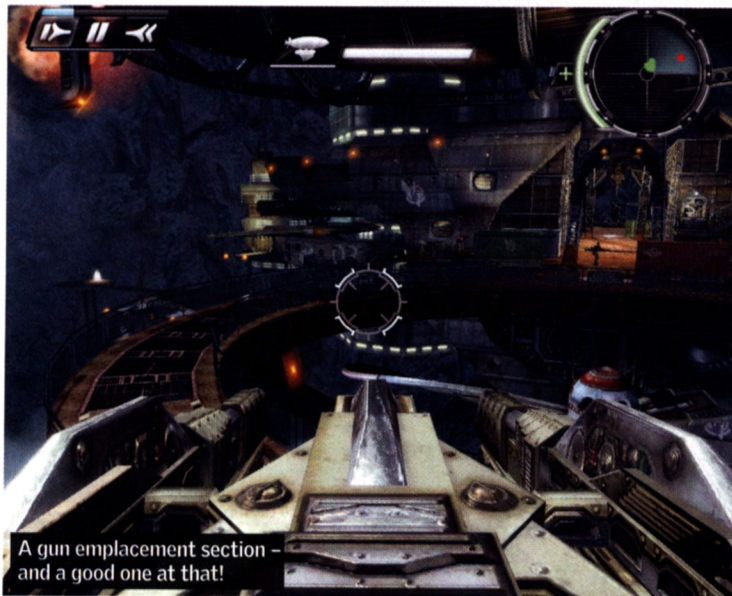
PCZONE

Graphics Eye-poppingly impressive
Sound Brutal and beefy
Multiplayer The ultimate frag-fest

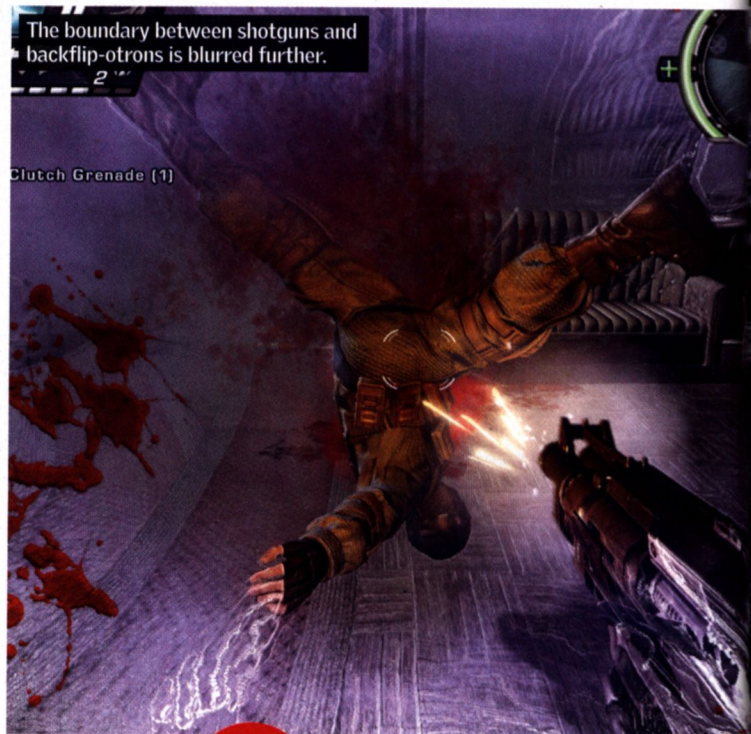
- ✓ Unrivaled multiplayer fragging fun
- ✓ The best FPS visuals around
- ✓ More populated levels look and feel like real war zones
- ✓ Stunningly lifelike, tough AI
- ✗ Vaunted single-player campaign a huge let-down

90

Frag-tastic



A gun emplacement section – and a good one at that!



The boundary between shotguns and backflip-otrons is blurred further.

Clutch Grenade (1)

TIMESHIFT

Will Porter scratches his arse then unthinkingly eats a biscuit with the same fingers. In slow motion!



DEVELOPER Saber Interactive
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE www.timeshiftgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

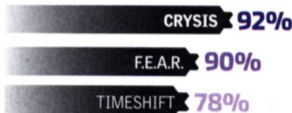


AT A GLANCE...

Run and gun tomfoolery with a monolithic body count, neat-o time powers and a distinct victory of brawn over brains.

Minimum system requirements: 2.0GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS



IF I COULD TURN back time, if I could find a way, I'd take back those bullets that have hurt you. And I'd place a grenade at your feet. And then in slow-motion I'd knock your body through the air with repeated shotgun blasts. And there, for a little while, you'd stay.

Who knew that the plaintive words of Cher would be so apt when reviewing a stupid no-frills gib-hungry bad man shooter like *TimeShift*? Not her, presumably. And, what's more, neither she, nor I, nor you could ever have guessed that the lamest of FPS ducks, the most bunion-afflicted mallard on shootery pond, could have been turned into such a proficient action outing.

BLAME EINSTEIN

TimeShift isn't rocket science. It isn't Shakespeare either. It's a daft resistance fight set in a dystopian parallel timeline, with big stompy robots, steampunk heli-zeppelins and goons who explode into constituent body-parts with the mere brush of a rocket-propelled grenade. It's absolute

no-brain carnage, with decent AI, and pretty explosions, and it's also the first game to do something new with the concept of time manipulation in donkey's years.

As is à la mode this season, the hero wears a special magic suit. The magic suit heals you when you get shot (anyone else miss health packs?), but what makes it even more magic is its ability to temporarily halt, slow or reverse the passage of time. Freeze a scene of carnage and you can fill a man's face with lead before seeing him cartwheel bloodily backwards when time reverts to normal, fly off a ledge on a speeding train and you can reverse it through time back onto the tracks, place angry grunts in time-treacle and your opportunities for headshots increase tenfold.

Importantly, it's the enemies, vehicles and environments that feel the various effects of grandfather time – not you. This isn't like *Prince of Persia* in that you fall on a spike, then reverse time and drag yourself off the metal instrument of pain, and as such the reverse time feature rarely comes into

play unless part of a puzzle or a scripted event. Each time power you're using saps a reservoir of regenerating magic time fluid, and because the game assumes that you're stupid (this is a console co-release) when you tap the 'f' key it'll select the power most relevant to your situation. If you're being a bit more choosy, however, pressing shift and the relevant key will deliver your own selection of time trumpetry.

FLUX CAPACITOR

The story, as told in professional, fast-cutting and increasingly confusing FMV flashback sequences, is that an evil professor called Krone has stolen the magic time suit he was developing and diverted the timestream to his own megalomaniacal whims. You, a former co-worker, are in possession of the Beta Suit and hot on his tail in a cloud of suspended animation body parts.

I sincerely doubt that much of *TimeShift* is scientifically accurate. In fact I certainly remember a doeful voice, proud holder of an Irish-equivalent physics A Level, complaining "that's not how time and physics work!" as I froze time in order to tiptoe across the frozen surface of an electrified pool of water. The time I froze to walk through a wall of flame provoked an even more caustic reaction from our resident physicist.

What's more (let's be realistic) it's even more unlikely that wearing a magic time suit would gift the quad bike you're riding with similar qualities, or that crashing into the same time-frozen



PC gaming toilet case study #563.



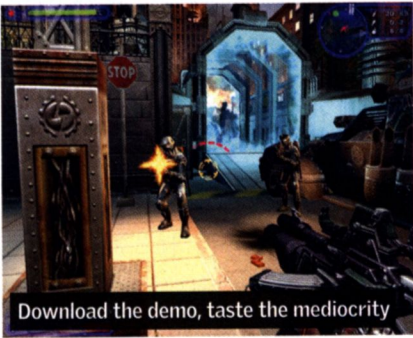
"Yatta!" (Trans: "I did it!")



What could have been...

If Biff hadn't stolen that gambling book, things would be different...

Last year *TimeShift* was due to be unleashed in decidedly shoddy form by its publishers Atari. The old demo is available on the 'net and it's fascinating to play both and see what's changed – essentially the demo's maps exist in the full game, but the pace, weight and scripting of the action that takes place in them is remarkably different. Before you might have been playing a shooter from 1998, and even though I'll forever love steampunk, the whole vibe of the game simply didn't fit.



Download the demo, taste the mediocrity



Eat quad bike moron!



Grunt murdering is rarely so much fun.

As I froze time I remember a doeful Irish voice complaining "that's not how time and physics work!"



What is it with dictators and giant city destroying crab mechs?



A lodged helmet can easily be loosened using bullets.

man three times would cause his legs, arms and head to fall off. Then again, I'm no expert in this field. If a professor of time and space is reading then I'd be grateful if they got in touch.

The most immediate touchstone here is *F.E.A.R.* – a superior game in its AI and ever-engaging combat, but also one (at first) outdone with *TimeShift* by a laudable awareness that it needs more than drab

urban corridors and gritty pock-marked courtyards to sustain attention.

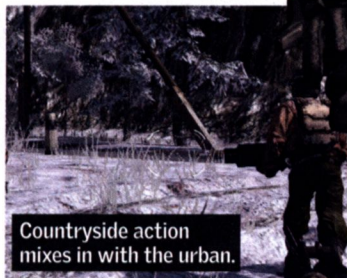
After the Ministry of Love-esque buildings, rainy street battles and time-delays on the underground system, then, comes haring around on



Many enemy goons seem to be circus trained.



Synchronised slaying: the new Olympic event!



Countryside action mixes in with the urban.

Nice Gun. I'll take it.

When you start the game one of the things you enjoy most is torturing the enemy by freezing time and plucking their weapon from their iced mitts. Then cruelly executing them.



This chap is stuck behind a flooded underground train track that's been mysteriously electrified. He could have been there for weeks.



Having frozen time skip merrily across the surface of the water, then remove the man's troublesome rifle which he was attempting to kill me.



Panicked by the loss of boomstick, the marooned man begs that I refrain from murdering him and falls to his knees whimpering.



I murder him. And his body slips into the fizzing, still electrified, water. Then I reversed time and kill him again - this time with a shotgun.



The best type of grunt - the standing around kind.



Who lives in a decaying apartment block like this?

quad bikes in relatively wide-open snowy vistas and *Medal of Honor*-style assaults on trenches protecting military emplacements. The drip-feed of weapons is fun too, as with any FPS the shotgun is never eclipsed as the weapon of choice - but the array of flamethrowers, explosive crossbows and plasma bolts that open up to you never really fail to open up new avenues of fun.

TIME AFTER TIME

Unfortunately, this isn't quite the case through the whole game. There is a definite point at which *TimeShift*'s bag of tricks runs ominously dry - all care for any particular storyline is lost and the game turns into a slightly vapid dash between checkpoints in metal-clad military bases.

The rough-and-ready grit-transplant supplied by Vivendi in revamping the game



<Insert 'Hammer time' reference here>

There's a point at which *TimeShift*'s bag of tricks runs ominously dry - all care for any storyline is lost

(see the What could have been... box) fades somewhat towards the game's latter half, as you simply get bored of gimmicks that were super-entertaining when you began playing the game - like removing a gun from the hands of an immobilised enemy, watching him come to and start panicking before calmly delivering a pistol shot to the back of the neck.

This said, enemy grunts equipped with gear like your own that lets them speed around the map in a blur brings back heady memories of the assassins in *Half-Life* - but over all the last third of the game is a bit of a drudge.

TimeShift is essentially a lower-grade *Crysis* - somewhat letting you toy with enemy AI by freezing everything and running off to somewhere they're not expecting you. To another extent it's a lower-grade *F.E.A.R.* - giving you meaty satisfaction through time-assisted violence. To yet another extent it's a lower-grade *Half-Life 2* with its inventive weapons and occasional obtuse physics puzzle sitting in its linear gameplay funnel. I think you can spot the theme appearing here.

There's no doubt that *TimeShift* is a master of the brand of shooty that cartwheels enemies high, high in the air; but without character, humour or a sustained tone throughout the game it never leaps into your affections as much as it should.

This said, full marks to publisher Vivendi who saw the potential in *TimeShift* and took it from the grasp of Atari - a company who were ready to proffer the game in its former lacklustre guise several moons ago. Back then this game was abominable and would barely have scraped 50%, but now it's a creation that - if it doesn't sink in the pre-Christmas shooter free-for-all - is a solid game, and a secure base to build a lovely new brand of time-trickery.

If *TimeShift* were a movie then it wouldn't be one you'd get round to seeing at the cinema, but a few years later you certainly wouldn't begrudge pushing your bedtime back by three-quarters of an hour so you could watch it on Channel Four. It's little more than an amusing way to pass the time - but with that time passing backwards, forwards and sometimes not-at-all, you won't hear many complaints. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Bloody chunks nicely rendered
Sound Time effects exemplary
Multiplayer Good, won't change the world

- ✓ Good meaty action
- ✓ Great weapons and powers
- ✓ Bodies flying in the air!
- ✗ Shallow
- ✗ Runs out of steam

78

Pretty much on time



TABULA RASA

We humans must rely on *Ed Zitron* to defend us from genocidal aliens... we're screwed



DEVELOPER Destination Games
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE
www.rgtr.com
ETA Out Now
PRICE £29.99 and £8.99/mth subscription



WHEN IT COMES to MMOs, it's always good to see a title released that doesn't contain dwarves, gold, sorcery and other things that can be lifted from Tolkien and *World of Warcraft*. Forever the company that stays on roads less-travelled, NCsoft have delivered us what's probably their most different genre piece yet.

Tabula Rasa is an MMO that places you in the centre of an intergalactic conflict between us plucky humans and the evil, ruthless etc alliance of aliens called the Bane, which laid waste to our beloved Earth.

STAR CHORES

The actual premise of *Tabula Rasa* is much like your average MMO, setting you up in a starting area where you learn the rules of the road and how to navigate, before moving onto pick up quests or do some random adventuring and wandering. The big difference is that it plays more like a third-person shooter, breaking the mould of melee combat and making the combat a great deal more frantic than you'd usually expect.

You can augment the damage you inflict not just by moving back and forth but also by crouching; while different guns have their own idiosyncrasies, like being able to hit multiple enemies. This adds a degree of tactical weaponry above and beyond having standard gear sets for particular abilities, making arming up for a big battle great fun.

Tabula Rasa also has some of the best NPC interaction in MMOs I've played.

AT A GLANCE...

Futuristic third-person MMO with plenty of alien blasting action for those hungry for a change.

Minimum system requirements: 2.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 128MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT	95%
GUILD WARS	94%
TABULA RASA	81%





The Logos

Mind your language...

Tabula Rasa makes things interesting with abilities. Many require you to advance not only through levels, but also by hunting down the mysterious language of the ancient race, the Elo. Certain abilities require the right language parts, for example, "projectile" and "area" for particular area of effect attacks. Some quests require you to have certain parts of the language to proceed through them, with eerie-looking doors that have specified symbols à la *Lord of the Rings*

Online. It's a nice little addition that actively draws you into the storyline without forcing you to face it at every turn, and has some really varied uses.



While in *EverQuest* and *WOW* going into battle alongside the computer was a rare occasion, this game constantly throws fellow NPC soldiers into the mix. This really gives the feel of being in an army, rather than the usual haunting sensation that you're the sod that does all the work.



The missions send you all over creation, and are merciful with any quests involving the collection of flora or fauna forcing you to go into foreign territory and kick arse. To break this up are random attacks by the forces of the Bane – so out of nowhere; dropships can make things harder by bringing extra troops to

the battle. This means you'll be near a fight, planned or not most of the time.

BLADE GUNNER

At levels five, 15 and 30, you'll get the chance to choose new classes and clone your character (if you've got enough clone points). This copies your avatar and your level, while resetting everything else so you can pick a new class and re-assign skill points. While this stops you having to replay the entire game when you want a new character, it leaves the clone with no gear.

However, it's not all fun and games. While NCsoft claim they've eliminated grind in *Tabula Rasa*, it's still there. You will find yourself killing lots of things to make your way to the next level, to get more abilities so you can kill more things, and so on. To make

matters worse the UI system is the single worst I've ever seen in an MMO. To equip a gun, you'll have to hold CTRL, go over the character pane, find the tiny bit that says "equipment", click it, and then drag the gun over to your main window to equip it. And that's only if you want to find your guns or ammo – recipes are in another window.

Combat is terrible in laggy areas, with gaps between when you fire and the hits registering ruining the experience. And as of going to press there's only one EU server, making the starting areas annoying to unplayable for new players.

Tabula Rasa is an excellent prospect though. It has a fantastic atmosphere, a good backstory, and a combat system that, when stable, is more fun than other MMOs'. It fails to break the MMO quest/mission structure though, and there are few words to accurately show how terrible the UI is.

With a little work it could be a top-flight MMO; for the moment, it's definitely one of the better contenders. If you're looking for something more hands-on than *WOW*, more dramatic than *EverQuest*, and just plain better than *Anarchy Online*, then *Tabula Rasa* is your game. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Crisp, cool, space-age themes
Sound Atmospheric noise
Multiplayer Nothing else but

- ✓ A new take on MMO combat
- ✓ Great atmosphere and storyline
- ✓ Huge amount of fun
- ✗ The interface
- ✗ Still a gigantic grind

81

Tantalising



Well, there goes the Middle East.



X-COM's globe has been nicked.



Not the Stone Age.

EMPIRE EARTH III

Dan Griliopoulos finds a plain jane RTS just got pretty

DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE www.empireearth.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99

THERE'S A THING you get in a cheesy film when the quiet girl with glasses takes them off, shakes out her hair and, now a beautiful bimchette, breaks into song. I think the word is "blossoming". The Mad Doc guys just blossomed *Empire Earth*. They've changed it from a staid, historical simulation into a game, that's pretty, exciting and different. But is it *Empire Earth*? Does it work? Is she cute?

The problem is that the quiet girl was more... complex. She had facets, a lot of history. Sure, this girl is charming, attractive, individual... and, well, enjoyable. But it isn't *Empire Earth* anymore; it's closer to *Kohan II* or *Warcraft III*. Instead of the impeccably researched units and factions of the previous game, which were halfway between *Civ IV* and *Rise of Nations*, Mad Doc have simplified everything, giving every unit silly catchphrases and introducing some

ludicrous super-units, like Atomic Annie (a nuclear artillery device). This is in aid of chasing that element of fun which many strategy games sacrifice to accuracy. I think they've made the right decision. The previous game was too complicated; it was more about memorising tech trees and grabbing land quickly, than tactics.

NOT THERE YET

But you can't help but feel that too much has gone. There's only three factions now; Western (big, expensive units), Middle Eastern (mobile, hit-and-run units) and Eastern (many, many units). They've only got a limited number of buildings and unit types, all of which upgrade as you travel through the five epochs.

The combat is still wooden and oversimplified. Indeed, that could be a black mark against *EE3* - it's crude and easy to master, which reduces the amount of gameplay. Where something like *Total Annihilation* rewarded varied strategies, *EE3*'s limited tech tree makes this come down more to the build rate.

The new domination mode is different from any of the staid campaigns of yore. It's set on an *X-COM*-style globe where you get to choose one of the three factions then attempt to take over the world, Purple Tentacle style. The mixture of zoomed-in battles and large areas to fight over, mixed with persistent buildings and

armies, turns the whole game into something approaching *Total War Lite* - which is not only a gap in the market but also one worth filling. But *EE3* is still a confused mixture of the previous game and something faster and more exciting. If Mad Doc further develop this new, it could be a great, fast RTS game. At the moment, the girl's let down her hair, removed her glasses, but she's still short-sighted and a bit ugly; Mad Doc needs to do the full makeover in the expansion. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

A simplification of the previous games. Take your nation from the Stone Age to the future and crush your enemies in RTS warfare.

Minimum system requirements: 1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



The attack on the bazaar ruined Christmas shopping.

PCZONE

Graphics Cute. Better animation
 Sound Good music, quirky voices
 Multiplayer One to eight friends

- ✓ New cute *Warcraft* design
- ✓ Innovative freeform campaign
- ✗ Limited unit varieties
- ✗ Not quite *Advance Wars*...
- ✗ ...not quite *Empire Earth*

72

Not perfect but good fun.



O'Neill and Teal'c got a surprise when they came through the gate.

KING OF CLUBS

Jack of no trades, more like...

DEVELOPER Oxygen Studios/Eipix
PUBLISHER Oxygen Interactive
WEBSITE www.oxygengames.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Min system req:

1.0GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.



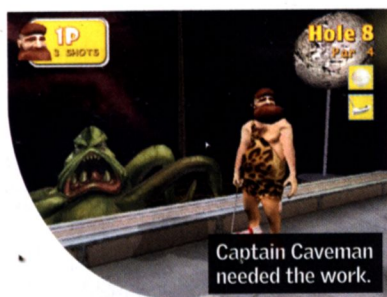
ANYONE HERE GOT a Sony Ericsson phone? I have, and what it lacks in screen space and keys compared to a PC, it more than makes up for in attention-absorbing ability, thanks to a crazy-golf game that comes free with it. This is perfect for public transport, occupying your eyes and preventing any unnecessary contact with the elderly gent who's telling a young American girl that her face is "shit".

Take away that one use for mini-golf games and you have *King of Clubs*, a small gaming sponge that'll soak up maybe a dozen of your heartbeats. If you play *King of Clubs*, and suffer its endless reiteration of just how crazy golf can be, you'll be left directionless, hypnotised and melancholic. After playing through 81

of the 90 holes, I'd developed the unfocused stare of a soldier with post-traumatic stress disorder. The music – the kind of music you'd expect if you were watching Billy Ray Cyrus self-harming on a gaily coloured carousel – left me with the sense that my soul had acute psoriasis, and was simply flaking away. Then I unlocked the game's final and best club. I couldn't tell the difference. I played the last nine holes. A forgotten part of my brain noticed that most of these levels looked like *Super Monkey Ball*. This was to be my path back to reality.

If you were to torture me, I'd admit that I'm intrigued by the claim in press releases that a hole-in-one is possible on every hole. I'm just not intrigued enough to play the game, ever again.

Jon Blyth



Captain Caveman needed the work.

PCZONE
41
Shiteclubbing



THRILLVILLE: OFF THE RAILS

Rollerconsole Tycoon

DEVELOPER Frontier Developments
PUBLISHER LucasArts
WEBSITE www.thrillvilleofftherails.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:

1.0GHz processor, 256MB RAM (512MB for Vista) and a 64MB graphics card.



ONE DAY, SOME developers looked at *Rollercoaster Tycoon* and *Theme Park* and decided they just weren't wacky enough. And so, with an injection of pure zany, these maniacs created a game so tubular and so bonkers it just had to be called *Off the Rails*.

This sequel to the console title *Thrillville* is set upon force-feeding you proof of its craziness until you vomit. From the 'whoa' coasters to the Christopher Lloyd-style scientist nutter to the 'hilarious' minigames, *Off the Rails* is plain out of this world.

At least, it tries to be. Under the veneer of madness, this is a capable but dumbed-down console port of a theme-park sim, dealing with the chores of management through a selection of generic minigames.

These are a mix of every cliché imaginable. A side-scrolling beat-'em-up, a *DDR* clone, a racer, some kind of *Tron* rip-off – they're all here, and mostly utterly, utterly boring. To add insult to injury, the PC version is clearly an afterthought. Everything is awkwardly placed, with unintuitive controls and console-style menus leading to unnecessary fumbling.

Thrillville: Off the Rails is the daddance of the simulation world, aiming low and missing to such an extent that even kids may find the stupidity and oversimplification condescending. While some elements are playable and, occasionally, fun, this mixture of Fisher-Price *Theme Park* and a bunch of Flash-esque minigames isn't recommendable in the slightest.

Ed Zitron

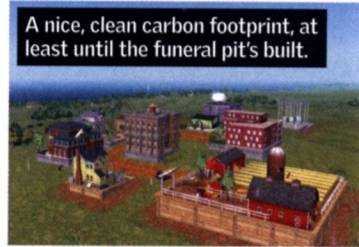


PCZONE
40
Vomit-inducing

REVIEWSSIMCITYSOCIETIES



"All happy clones report for reprogramming. All sad clones carry on. The Computer is your friend..."



A nice, clean carbon footprint, at least until the funeral pit's built.



Ahh, achievements. The curse of Xbox LIVE strikes again.



The Doctor's search for a new companion reaches a new low.

SIMCITY SOCIETIES

We gave Paul Presley his own community to steadily destroy

DEVELOPER Tilted Mill
Entertainment
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
simcity.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

THE PRERELEASE HYPE for *SimCity Societies* lies, telling you "The possibilities are endless", promising worlds of staggering depth and versatility, hampered only by your cruel, cruel imaginations (face it, no one reading this is interested in creating agrarian paradises, it's dystopian cities or nothing for you lot).

The idea behind this latest version of the standard-setter of the sadly-dwindling city building genre is that you're no longer left out in the cold when it comes to determining the overall mood of your urban hellholes. In previous incarnations of *SimCity*, you had plenty of abstract control, but you were at the mercy of your village peoples' moods, curse their swinish independent AI routines.

In *Societies* you've sacrificed a level of detailed managerial control and instead are playing at amateur urban psychologist (or psychotic), taking a more hands-on approach to building, directly choosing the types of constructs and juggling the various life moods that each component

carries with it. So choose nightmarish authoritarian workhouses and oppressive police controls to ensure loyalty and productivity at the barrel of a gun (or mood reprogramming centre), or drop a load of ice cream parlours and mime schools in the city limits to create HappyFunsVille instead.

STAY INSIDE THE BOX

Unfortunately there's a gaping flaw at the centre of all this. While it would be nice to think that you can mix and match from the styles and create cities of every possible persuasion (Orwellian farming communities anyone?), as soon as you start to stray outside of the basic set of predefined city templates, you're going to run into trouble.

There's an illusion of depth at play, and it's only once you really get going with the thing that you start to realise that to have any real sense of control over the growth of a city, you need all those fiddly micro-managing options that you had in the previous *SimCity* games.

This whole series has been steadily dumbing down as the years have progressed and *Societies* is doing nothing to reverse that trend.

Don't get me wrong, there is still a playable enough game in here, and there's enough of the old *SimCity* magic pixie dust floating about to keep the hooks in and want to keep you experimenting with different layouts of your loving tributes to Doncaster (or 'Dongcaster', following the traditional obscene punning in *SimCity* place names), but the pull is weakening. **PCZ**

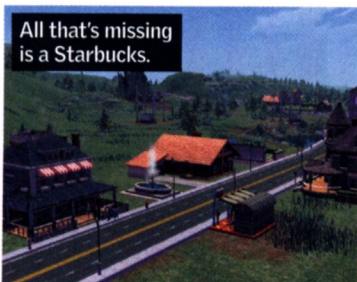
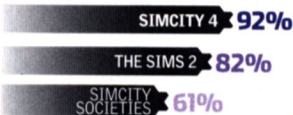


AT A GLANCE...

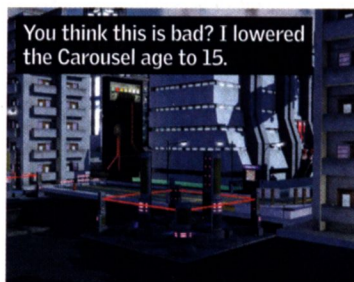
SimCity, minus micro-management, but added God/Orwell instead to keep the control freaks happy.

Minimum system requirements:
1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



All that's missing is a Starbucks.



You think this is bad? I lowered the Carousel age to 15.

PCZONE

Graphics Adequate
Sound Oddly lifeless
Multiplayer Saved game sharing

- ✓ Trying something new at least
- ✓ Retains addictiveness
- ✓ A certain sense of humour
- ✗ Limited in scope
- ✗ Awkward camera controls
- ✗ Lack of depth compared to originals

61

Flawed, but playable



It's a safe bet a wisecrack is being delivered there.



Yeah, they're in it. Sorry.



Rat boxing - the new badger baiting.

SAM & MAX 2.01 - ICE STATION SANTA

Jon Blyth shoots stuff, saves Christmas

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
 PUBLISHER GameTap
 WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com/samandmax
 ETA Out now
 PRICE \$8.95



AT A GLANCE...

Everyone's favourite misanthropic dog and rabbit PIs find themselves involved in a case that seems to be inevitably leading towards them saving Christmas.

Minimum system requirements: 1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB 3D-accelerated video card.

HOW IT STACKS

S&M SITUATION: COMEDY 82%

S&M ICE STATION SANTA 81%

BONE: THE GREAT COW RACE 67%

THE FIRST SEASON of *Sam & Max* had its ups and downs (two ups per down, to be exact), but was episodic gaming as it should be: regular, entertaining slices of game that you can look forward to, and spend an entertaining night in with. Following the love-of-TV cliché made apparent with *Situation: Comedy*, Season Two kicks off with a Christmas special.

The first thing to note is that it's friendlier to the novice. The obsolete - and excellent - computers from *Reality 2.0* guide you through the setup, and a hint system has been built into the game. This is Telltale's way of getting casual kids involved, and it's funny enough to placate the experienced who might be patronised.

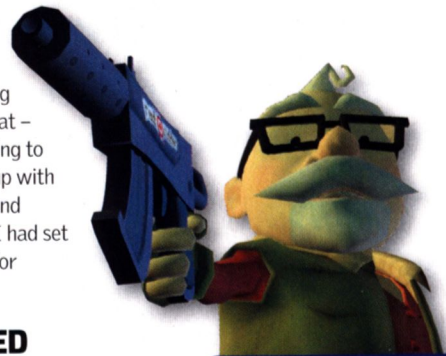
The hint system - which, fear not, is off by default - is handled excellently. The higher it's set, the more often Max will pipe up with something that nudges you in the right direction, without destroying

the satisfaction of solving it yourself. Well, I say that - after five minutes of trying to find a sock, he did pipe up with a particularly scathing and precise suggestion, but I had set the hints to maximum (for research, naturally).

GSOH REQUIRED

Let's run through the reasons why you might not like *Sam & Max*, because some idiots don't. You might hate listening to dialogue. And it's true, some sub-par jokes do make it through the net, but when you're firing this many rounds, some are bound to miss. You might not enjoy puzzle-solving. You might think no game is valid unless it takes 30 hours to play. You might long for the '80s, when some adventure games were solved in such oblique ways that solving a problem provided more frustration than being stuck. Perhaps you're cripplingly joyless.

The second season of *Sam & Max* kicks off with new characters, and a welcome facelift for Straight Street. What's more, it holds it all together with coherency, and more of a sense of storytelling than was ever apparent in Season One. I'm not entirely convinced by the solution for the ghost of Christmas present, and some of the jokes probably looked better on paper, but I'm glad my boys are back on the gaming calendar. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Big friendly moving pictures with '50s stylings
 Sound Great voice talent
 Multiplayer Play while a friend watches

- ✓ More elaborate storylines
- ✓ Straight Street gets a makeover
- ✓ Mini-game lets you decorate your car
- ✓ Despite a few lulls, scripts are still great
- ✗ The Soda Poppers can die now thanks

81

Dogs are for Christmas





SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE

Andy Robinson takes a deep breath, assumes the lotus position and stretches his mouse hand before the inevitable onslaught begins

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE
www.supremecommander.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99



AT A GLANCE...

GPG's new *SupCom* boasts a much improved UI, a new, Transformer-esque faction and units big enough to wear Wembley Stadium as a hat.

Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD IN CONFLICT 92%

SUPREME COMMANDER 88%

SUPCOM: FORGED ALLIANCE 86%

AT TIMES, *Supreme Commander* can be bloody hard work. When you're trying to juggle power management and build queues, cover countless front lines and synchronise air, land and sea attacks, the idea of stepping away from the PC to do a day's work at a lumber mill seems like quite an appealing alternative. Bizarrely, though, despite the fact that we were slightly unnerved by the somewhat unforgiving learning curve of the original, *Forged Alliance* manages to provide a much more enjoyable single-player campaign by throwing you straight into the action and scrapping the training wheels entirely.

The six-mission campaign tosses you right into a massive battle with tons of units at your disposal, which, after the original's slow and drawn-out pacing, is a welcome introduction in itself. But the principal reason *Forged Alliance* won't have you reaching for the brown paper bag to de-stress *too* many times is its revamped and improved UI. In the campaign you'll notice it at work immediately – replacing the dirty great bar that hogged half your screen and rendering it an entirely cleaner affair. You can hide and expose menu items on the fly, and it's generally a lot easier to see who's kicking



whose arse and how many of your engineers are having a sneaky kip round the back of the land factory.

After some clicking around, this soon makes the whole experience much more stress-free. The game enables you to select what you want to see and what you don't in your intel, military and UI info, so there's a lot less clutter on screen and no useless info screaming out for your attention and threatening to cause cardiac arrest due to information overload. Good news indeed –

and you'll quickly discover this interface upgrade is the icing on the cake of a meaty single-player campaign that improves upon the original in many, many ways.

SURFACE TENSION

Forged Alliance, as the title suggests, sees the original game's warring factions (the UEF, the Cybran Nation and the Aeon Illuminate) banding together against a new enemy, the Seraphim. This Transformer-esque group of aliens is out to kill off the human race, and

Supreme beings

Perhaps Skynet wasn't such a bad idea after all...



The EAB: the bastard child of Tron and a TIE fighter.

We love the hulking, 100ft experimental units of the first game, and *Forged Alliance* has given us a new favourite: the Experimental Assault Bot, the Colossus's skinnier, machine gun-wielding brother. Unlike the other robot Godzilla, the EAB has a devastating goodbye present: when it dies, it drops a renegade energy ball that attacks everything in the surrounding area in a flurry of pink electrical death – even your own units. Even more reason not to go near it, then.

The game enables you to select what you want to see and what you don't, so there's a lot less clutter on screen

plays in a much more laid-back, less stroke-inducing manner than the usual suspects. See? Gas Powered have been listening!

The Seraphim units take longer to build than those of the other factions, but are consequently more powerful. This basically means that you can build up a squad of fewer than ten Sniper Bots and go out and decimate 25 enemy Siege Tanks – making the faction essentially a bridge solution for every player who found the original game a little too taxing when it came to build management. On top of this, everything's looking prettier (although the hardware demands have increased accordingly), and some of the new experimental units, such as the base-levelling Seraphim Bomber, are absolutely fantastic.

For *SupCom* fans, *Forged Alliance* doesn't do that much wrong at all; there are tons of new units in there, the solo campaign is action-packed and void of gameplay lulls while the new faction is a genuinely different and welcome addition to the roster. Ultimately, the comparatively sloth-like Seraphim and the UI changes aren't going to be enough to fully convince those put off by the original's demanding gameplay, but any variant on the *SC* model is forever going to require a quick-brained RTS fan to fully appreciate it. If you're not a master multitasker, you may want to ditch the Red Bull and play something less intense, but until then we'll keep our bastard-massive UFO hovering right over your base... **PCZ**



"Tremble at the might of our glowing things!"

PCZONE

Graphics More polygons means prettier
 Sound Ace soundtrack and booming explosions
 Multiplayer The real meat, but GPGNet is confusing

- ✓ Great, action-packed solo campaign
- ✓ Improved UI and engine
- ✓ Even bigger new experimental units
- ✗ Still too demanding for some players
- ✗ Still hardware-munching

86

Back in command



GameTribes is an MMO (massively multi-player online) Portal offering free to play games to gamers in Europe. With great titles covering RPG, Sport and Racing there's sure to be something for any type of gamer on the **GameTribes** network.

Registering couldn't be easier! Just go to the website www.gametribe.com click on "REGISTER NEW ACCOUNT" and start the registration process. Once you're registered all our games are free to play meaning you can visit our site, download the gaming client and you won't be asked to pay money to access the game. You can enjoy optional special items, upgrades and additional parts of the games although these will only be accessible via a small payment.

There is a game to suit all types of gamers leading with **KICKS** a street football game where matches can be conducted in 3vs3, 4vs4 or 5vs5 mode and played in unconventional fields such as roofs, streets or factories. *Kicks Online* features cartoon style 3D scenes and outstanding render action. Also available is **Dream of Mirror** a highly addictive RPG taking you on amazing quests and missions whilst encouraging gamers to form close friend groups within the online users.



1 + download game - 2 + register - 3 + play for free



Sometimes the combat can get a little crowded.

FURY

It will make you mad



DEVELOPER Auran
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.unleashthefury.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99 (optional subscription £5/mth)

Min system req:

2GHz processor, 512MB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 128MB graphics card.



Where's Wally gets serious.

WHILE DEVELOPERS Auran claim boldly that this is an MMO that is "free to play," they really mean to say "this is an MMO that is playable for free." For the mere sum of a fiver-a-month subscription, you can receive such unnecessary elements as in-game customer service, the ability to sell in the auction house, and straight up extra gold in battles.

Considering that *Fury* is a bastardisation of MMOs, it's rather rude that they'd dare charge extra money for what amounts to stuff that *Guild Wars* does for free, amongst a smattering of e-penis enhancements. And while you get a month's free 'immortal' status, beyond that you're left to foot the bill.

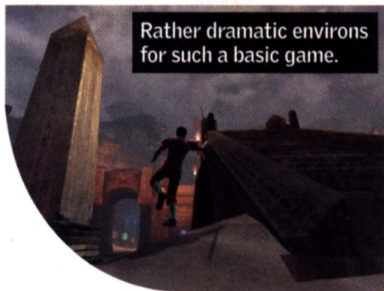
The core of the game itself is something like the PvP arenas of NCsoft's aforementioned tour-de-

force mixed with the item pickups of an FPS, with any of the semblance of depth lost.

This is a great shame *Fury* looks the part (partly due to being powered by the Unreal Engine), and has an generic, yet fun, combat system that would have worked well in a cut-price title. However, it's a very much full price game demanding a subscription to play a stripped-down *Guild Wars* with no quests (the game's entire focus being on PvP action) and weak-sauce advancement that's achieved through repetitive combat.

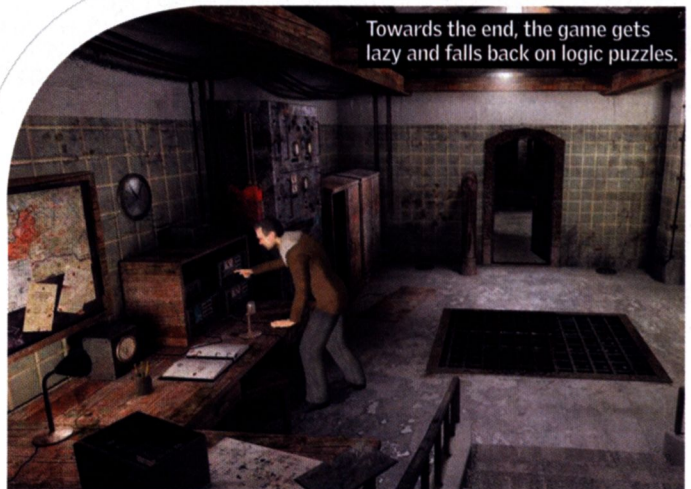
For £15 less and with no subscription fee, *Fury* would be worth a look. As it stands Auran's product lacks any sane rationale behind its price and hides within it a game that could have been so much more, but just isn't.

Ed Zitron



Rather dramatic environs for such a basic game.

PCZONE
58
 Frivolous



Towards the end, the game gets lazy and falls back on logic puzzles.

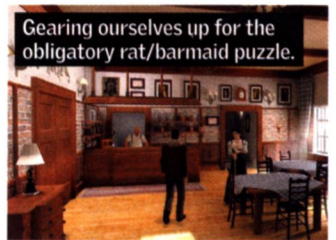
UNDERCOVER: OPERATION WINTERSUN

Science has never been so fun!

DEVELOPER Sproing
PUBLISHER Anaconda
WEBSITE www.undercover-game.com/PC
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:

1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 64MB graphics card with DirectX 9 support.



Gearing ourselves up for the obligatory rat/barmaid puzzle.

NOT UNTIL SOMEONE picks up the publishing rights for 'Uptight Traffic Wardens featuring Heather Mills' will you find a protagonist as scorn-worthy as Dr John Russell.

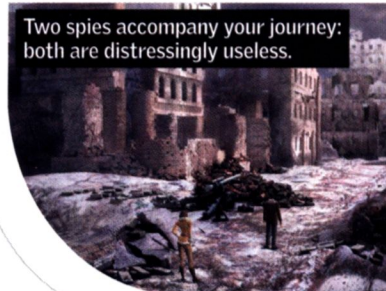
It's not that he eats babies or anything, he's just a wet cabbage. Imagine Rupert Giles from *Buffy*, except without the self-deprecating wit and you're there. Russell's dour personality is complemented perfectly by the least enthusiastic voice acting this side of a hostage situation, meaning that it's a real struggle to avoid siding with Hitler throughout this otherwise serviceable World War II point-and-clicker.

Russell is a scientist forced to go undercover in 1943 Berlin in an attempt to prevent the Germans

getting their mitts on nuclear technology. Due to Russell's area of expertise, the puzzles are a little more McGyver-ish than are usual, often requiring you (for example) to mix solutions using spirits, rock salt and God knows what else to progress.

There's nothing actually wrong with the riddles being a bit more oblique than usual, but that's dependent on the game showing you all the pieces of the puzzle with clarity. Instead, you'll be left scouring the floor for items no bigger than a gnat's nutsack. When inevitably you miss one, it's trial and error all round. "That doesn't make much sense", Russell continuously offers. I KNOW, YOU INSUFFERABLE FOOL. THAT'S WHY I'M TRYING TO DO IT.

Alex Dale



Two spies accompany your journey: both are distressingly useless.

PCZONE
52
 Keep it under wraps

18+
www.pegi.info

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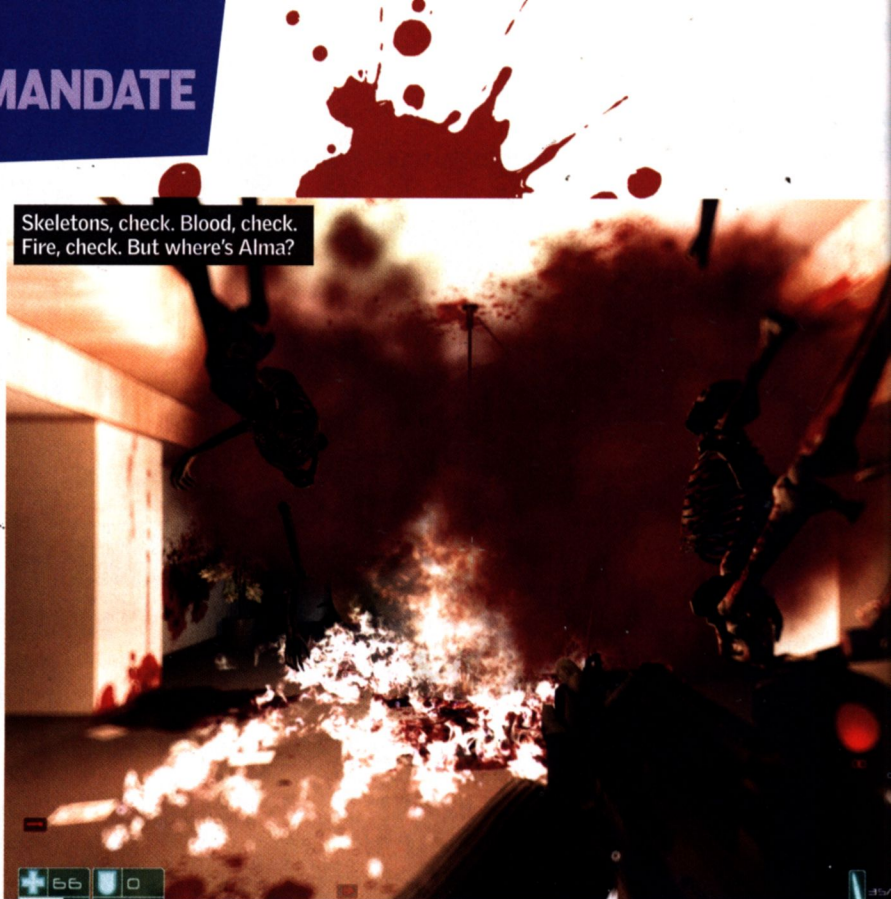
amazon.co.uk

ATARI

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"They're hacking the internet mainframe!"



Skeletons, check. Blood, check. Fire, check. But where's Alma?

F.E.A.R.: PERSEUS MANDATE

Steve Hogarty is going on a mandate from hell

DEVELOPER TimeGate
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE
www.whatisfear.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

THERE'S ONE MISSION in *Perseus Mandate* where you are, in all seriousness, asked to "make your way to the computer core to access the mainframe", and then you have to run through a series of repeating grey rooms until there's a switch you press.

These rooms don't even resemble rooms, they're hollow concrete cubes. Cuboids if the designers were feeling creative. And when you get outside into some courtyards, the buildings don't look like real buildings either. They look like what a blind man would draw

if you described to him what a building looked like. TimeGate need to spend less time making crappy expansions for *F.E.A.R.*, and more time learning what things look like, because their grasp of reality, or at least their ability to recreate it visually in a game, is laughably tenuous.

WORST ADD-ON EVER?

This is the second time TimeGate have grabbed the *F.E.A.R.* license (albeit with a standalone expansion), lifted its skirt over its head and shouted "BUM! BUM! *F.E.A.R. LICENSE HAS A BUM!*" That's a metaphor for how stupid TimeGate are, and how incapable they are of creating a meaningful and original expansion to an excellent game. Occasionally, a room will fill with enemies in a vain attempt to remind you that *F.E.A.R.* was, in fact, a fantastic shooter, but aside from these faded facsimiles of what made the original great, *Perseus Mandate* is stunningly dire. It's somehow worse than their last expansion, *Extraction Point*, and that was really rather bad.

The levels in *Perseus Mandate* haven't been designed so much as they've been hacked

together from old bits of levels that were too bland to make it into the previous expansion. Entire rooms are shamelessly copied and pasted over and over again, leading to infuriating moments in which you think you're backtracking when you're actually just progressing deeper into a quagmire of featureless monotony. The game just filled me with a directionless wandering hatred that left me in a bad mood for the rest of the day after playing it.

But hey, it's not all bad. It's never all bad. Those parts where it's most similar to the original *F.E.A.R.* still count as redeeming, even if they're entirely unoriginal. Despite looking like a graphically castrated version of its progenitor, the action never fades – the visceral joy of firing a shotgun into a man's face at point-blank range in super slow-motion, seeing his head come off and his body gently back flip into an exploding canister, while his gun fires its final rounds like a Catherine wheel into the floor, wall, then ceiling, filling the air with dust and concrete debris – that sort of fun just doesn't get old, no matter how awful you make the rest of the game.

HELICOPTER MEN

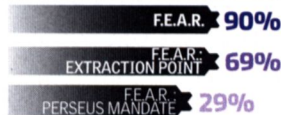
F.E.A.R.'s plot, about a group of men who fly around in helicopters at night, returns in *Perseus Mandate*, except this time it's utterly incomprehensible. Halfway through you'll realise that it's taking place in the

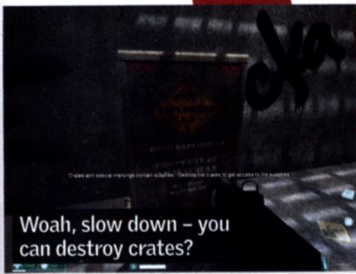
AT A GLANCE...

F.E.A.R. is a really good game, and this standalone expansion really, really isn't. Which is annoying.

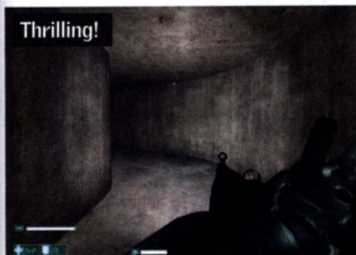
Minimum system requirements:
 1.7GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 5GB HDD space, 64MB graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support).

HOW IT STACKS





Woah, slow down – you can destroy crates?



Thrilling!



Streams of enemies running towards your turret = innovation.

The most fun

Here's the most fun I had while playing *Perseus Mandate*

People sometimes forget what a good physics engine the *F.E.A.R.* engine has, but I don't. Dell are still sending tornados of money at Vivendi, meaning their 'elite gaming rig', the Dell XPS, can be found sitting on almost every desk in the game. And you can knock it over! But even better are the game's office chairs – use your melee attack to whack the side of the chair, and it spins around. Time your attacks to make it spin faster and faster! Once it's really whipping around, slow down time to hit the chair at the perfect point to add just a smidge more rotational velocity. If you want something more advanced, try to keep two or more chairs spinning at the same time. This also works in *F.E.A.R.*, so don't buy this expansion.



Spin! Spin! Spin!

same timeframe as the original game, and that you're actually playing as another character, who happens to have the same ability to slow down time. Otherwise the storyline is a tedious waltz from office building to building site to mine-shaft to an office in a mine shaft. And it just goes on and on, with no twist, no hook, and no point, in increasingly bland rooms, with increasingly stupid enemies, on increasingly arbitrary missions with increasingly forgettable characters.

And now that scary little girl stuff has been flogged to the point of being about as shocking as an unexpected fart, there's no horror factor to revel in either. It is a failure of a game – Monolith must be chuckling into their lattes as they work on *F.E.A.R.*'s true sequel, *Project Origin* (page 38).

This game is badly made and overwhelmingly bleak, and while the original *F.E.A.R.* still exists, there's absolutely no way I could ever recommend anybody buy this, even if you're on fire and this game is a bucket of water. I'm scoring this game in that comparative context – this standalone expansion has unwittingly inherited that nugget of goodness that made us love the original, but as long as simply buying the original is an option, *Perseus Mandate* deserves to be kicked in the teeth all day. I hate it, and I think I hate the developers too. Luckily I'm good at remaining objective, despite my raging emotions. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Worse than the original *F.E.A.R.*

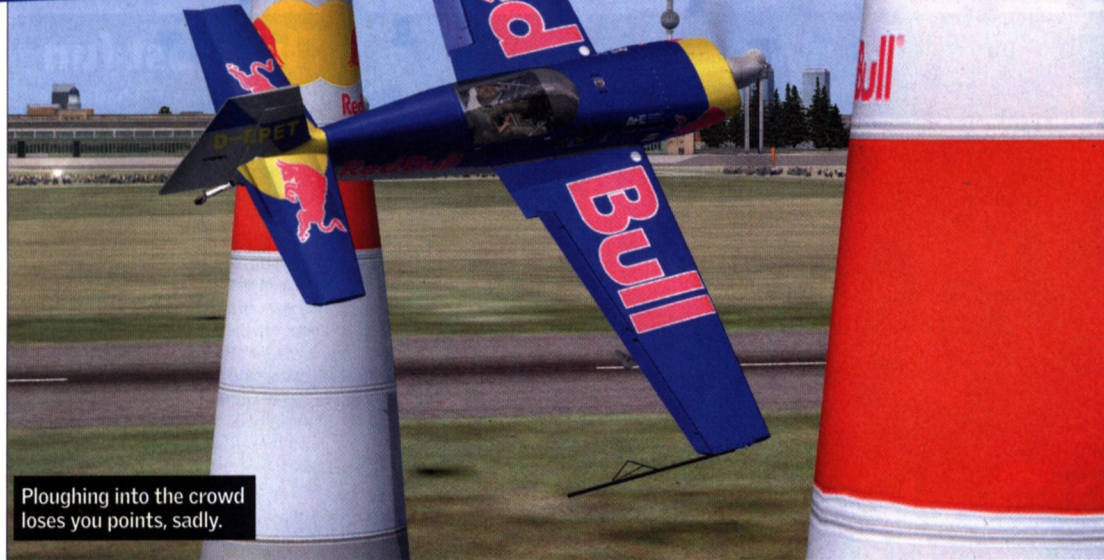
Sound Same as the original *F.E.A.R.*

Multiplayer Download the original *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer for free

- ✗ Bland
- ✗ Levels don't look real
- ✗ Stupid enemies
- ✗ Confusing story
- ✗ Extremely badly made

29

Frankly embarrassing



Ploughing into the crowd loses you points, sadly.



The radio chatter is pleasingly realistic.



No, we're not sure what the mirrors are for either.

FLIGHT SIMULATOR X: ACCELERATION



Steve Hogarty is increasing the rate of change of his velocity over time

DEVELOPER Microsoft
 PUBLISHER Microsoft
 WEBSITE
www.microsoft.com/games/flightsimulatorx
 ETA Out now
 PRICE £24.99



AT A GLANCE...

FSX gets three new planes, extensive multiplayer options, races, missions, and two different kinds of winch. Honest to God, two!

Minimum system requirements:
 2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 4GB hard drive space, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

- FLIGHT SIMULATOR X 89%
- FALCON 4.0 82%
- FLIGHT SIMULATOR X: ACCELERATION 76%

IF THERE'S ONE thing I love about *Flight Simulator X*, it's probably all the planes. After that, it's the off-beat humour which somehow integrates itself into the serious-faced, pre-flight check-laden wondrousness of modern flight. Maybe humour is the wrong word there – but the light-heartedness of some of this flight sim's missions are a spark of warmth and charm in an otherwise cold, clinical genre.

Flight Simulator X: Acceleration adds three new aircraft, along with a series of missions for these aircraft and previous aircraft alike. The P-51 Mustang is a little one what can do stunts and races, the F/A-18 Hornet is a fighter jet what can take off from boats, and the EH101 is a helicopter, which can winch crates from the ground and people from the sea.

They're each drastically different from one another, and are painstakingly



Have fun with winning!

realised both visually and – I'm going to guess here having never flown any type of aircraft – aerodynamically.

PLANE GEEK PARADISE

I'm a nerd for this sort of crap, I admit, and I was surprised to find myself enjoying the EH101 helicopter more than any other aircraft in the game. Winching things is amazingly difficult, and harder still is setting things down again. There are two different kinds of winch too, one for people and one for things – I bet you didn't even know that – and they're both here.

The Hornet's missions are modest recreations of carrier operations, taking off with catapults and landing with hooks and elastic bands (no guns, missiles or explosions though), and the P-51 Mustang opens the game up, along with the original 300s, for Red Bull air races. These races can be taken online if you want to crash into a mountain over the internet, taking yet another step towards *FSX* becoming a game rather than a cloud rendering tool.

Acceleration suffers from a few buggy hiccups accompanied by a rude return to the desktop, but that's rare – otherwise it's an expansion that's clearly been designed with passion. I'm giving this 76 and I don't care what anybody else thinks, especially not my colleagues who think flight simulators are stupid. **PCZ**



Write rude words with smoke to unlock cheats.



Graphics Still mind-blowing
 Sound Still ear-blowing
 Multiplayer Extensive new race options

- ✓ New multiplayer options
- ✓ Winning things
- ✓ Catapulting off a carrier
- ✗ Occasional bug
- ✗ Extremely demanding system requirements

76
 Faster faster faster!
PCZ



SURRENDER OR FALL

WWW.INTERNATIONALJOURNAL.CO.UK

TURNING POINT
FALL OF LIBERTY



You'll never find a Nessie in the zoo...

BEOWULF

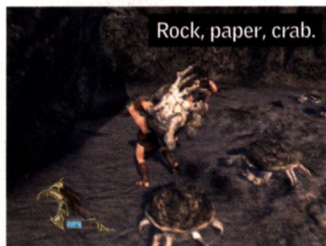
Studying it at school was more fun...

DEVELOPER Tiwak
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

Min system req:
3.0GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

LEARNING NOTHING FROM the many, many terrible movie tie-ins of recent times, *Beowulf* is yet another abominable silver-screen translation, desperately trying to cash in on Joe Public's awareness of its bigger CGI brother. All the necessary ingredients of rip-off franchise crap are here, from real-life celebrity voices to generic clichés to terrible padding of the movie storyline to make two hours stretch across one terrible game.

Beowulf is an unashamed clone of PS2 slash-'em-up *God of War*, taking everything from its excessive gore, having a legendary sea creature as the first boss, and worryingly high testosterone levels. It honestly is little more than a smattering of mediocre presentation and repetitive, drool-pool-deep combat. The "Thanes" that follow you are nothing more than Overlord-style minions that can kill

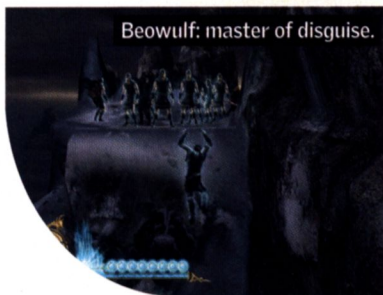


Rock, paper, crab.

things and move things – but wait; there's more. For some reason, some bright spark decided there could be – nay, *must* be – some kind of rhythm-action mini-game in which you encourage your men. This makes them work faster, which is fine... but it takes the form of a three-minute song about whores, pillaging and war that pretty much defies description. We'll give it a go, though: utter shit.

The chunky, blurry graphics are at first bearable, but quickly become a terrible mess of greying textures and pug-dog-faced men, mixed with the occasional graphical flourish that seems utterly out of place. There's a game in here somewhere, but it's so lazily developed, so utterly devoid of creativity and verve, that it's not even worth giving half a chance.

Ed Zitron



Beowulf: master of disguise.

PCZONE
34
Beo-logical warfare



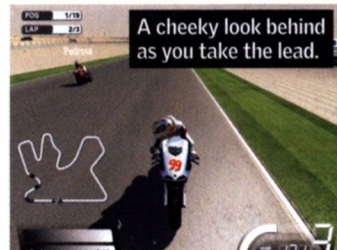
It doesn't really matter where you start.

MOTOGP 07

It's great when you're straight...

DEVELOPER Climax
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE www.motogpthegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

Min system req:
2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

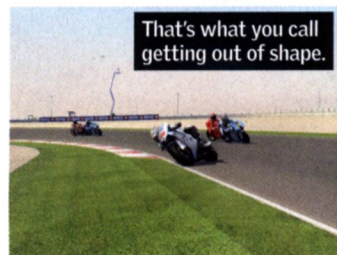


A cheeky look behind as you take the lead.

HERE'S HOW A race pans out in *MotoGP 07*: start at the back of the grid, overtake the entire field by the first bend, plough off the track, flip into the air like a rag doll, get back on the bike and repeat until the end of the race.

That's a simplified summary, but it's fair to say there's a steep learning curve. Despite a few brief training modules, the only real way to master staying on the track is to put in hours of practice. Whether you'll do this will depend on how patient you are, and whether you have a decent analogue joystick: playing this with a keyboard is akin to trying to plait snot.

How much of a simulation you want it to be is up to you; the game is almost infinitely tweakable, with finding the right balance something of a challenge in itself. Despite having



That's what you call getting out of shape.

the same pitfalls as pretty much every two-wheeled racing game ever made, there is a decent game trying to get out here, with a fully fledged Grand Prix career mode and even an Extreme mode enabling you to buy bikes and swap parts in your workshop.

As ever, the AI riders stick to the racing line like shit to a blanket, but there is a 16-player online option. If you can find anyone else playing it.

Steve Hill



Gravel is on the menu again.

PCZONE
65
What's another year?



www.oxm.co.uk

XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



EXCLUSIVE!

GH**OST**STBUSTERS

The world's first preview of the new ghostbusting game – only in Xbox 360: The Official Magazine!

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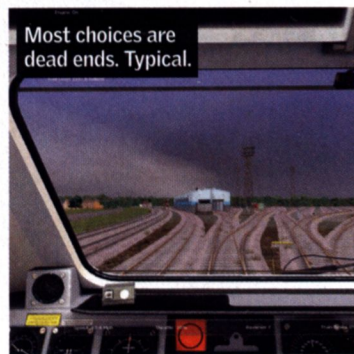
ON SALE NOW!



Pick one. And then drive. It is a land of dreams and make believe.



I've not seen anything like this since *Myst*.



Most choices are dead ends. Typical.

RAIL SIMULATOR

Jon Blyth attempts to join the real steam community

DEVELOPER Kuju
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.railsimulator.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

YOU WANT ME to make a joke? You think rail simulators are funny? You think the idea of recreating a largely event-free one-dimensional journey is absurd? Why not think of it as *Half-Life*, without the excellent narrative or the satisfying combat? There you go. That's made you all excited.

Your first hour in *Rail Simulator* might run like this: you jump in, expecting an in-game tutorial, and utterly fail to move anything. So you slide the quick reference card into the gap above your number keys. But this will fail too, because knowing how to change the reverser isn't the same as knowing what you're supposed to do with it. So, after 20 minutes of turning your wipers on and off, you're forced into reading the manual. Which is something no human has done since *Civ 2*. And that's the biggest disappointment. The manual is lacking.

It tells you how to get moving, but when it comes to the expert controls on a steam engine, the game and the manual assume you're one of the living dead that litter the platforms of Clapham Junction noting wheel numbers of passing locomotives. When the hell should I "inject water", eh? I don't drive steam trains for a living.

DERAILING THE GAME

The game can be played freeform, or with a limited number of scenarios – moving football fans and pigeons around – and there's a track editor to let you drive trains around your name, or a cock. With the lack of directional freedom, the focus really turns inward – rail fans will use this focus to get the job done as efficiently as possible, and conscientiously tending to the information they're being given. Or you could uncouple your carriages full of football fans, then reverse into them as fast as you can, causing a "Game Over Error". This is one of the only times I've gathered everyone around my computer

to look at what I was doing, and it was probably because I'd spent so long driving, in a straight line, through an interminable string of green lights, that I'd uncoupled my eyes from my brain.

It's good that *Rail Simulator* has been made, and it's a strangely satisfying and therapeutic experience. However, it's sad that it wasn't given better packaging, that the cockpit views are often claustrophobic and obscured, the interactive controls are an unusable and token effort, and seeing as it's from the people who did *Dark Messiah's* multiplayer, perhaps some graphics would have been nice. **PCZ**



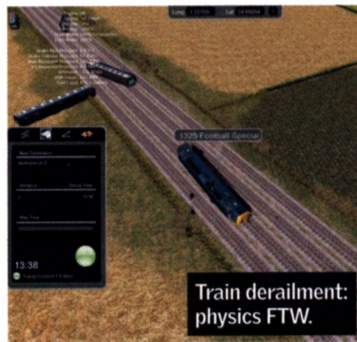
AT A GLANCE...

Look, do you like trains, or not? Do you want to play a rail simulator? You'll enjoy it if you really, really do.

Minimum system requirements:
 1.7GHz processor (2.6GHz for Vista);
 512MB RAM; DirectX 9.0c; 64MB
 graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0).

HOW IT STACKS

MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR **76%**
 RAIL SIMULATOR **70%**
 TRAINZ RAILWAY SIMULATOR 2006 **52%**



PCZONE

Graphics **Unspectacular**
 Sound **Tweet, chuff, toot**
 Multiplayer **You ride alone**

- ✓ It's a very good rail simulator
- ✓ That's not a bad thing to be
- ✗ Uglier than it should be
- ✗ Assumes too much knowledge
- ✗ Hints for 75p a minute, you say?

70

What are cylinder cocks?



ZOO TYCOON 2 - EXTINCT ANIMALS



Beasts that didn't try hard enough

DEVELOPER Microsoft
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE zootycoon.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Min system req:

Windows XP; 733MHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 16MB graphics card



THERE ARE CERTAINTIES in life; the sky is blue, QPR are never going back to the Premiership, and there will always be more *Zoo Tycoon*.

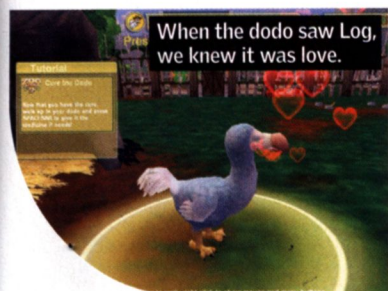
Extinct Animals does what it says on the tin, bringing long-since dead animals back to life by manipulating fossils, and challenging you to shoe-horn in said fauna into your budding zoo. The caveat is that these animals are not the easy to deal with – notably the angry dinosaurs which occasionally become enraged, turning your zoo to rubble and eating passers-by. Alright, not that last one.

The dinos need to be controlled by either your new ability to tranquillise them, or if it becomes a serious, your local dinosaur capture team. Players also have to deal with disease, hunting down the source of the illness

by analysing food, objects and trees in the animals' enclosures. This adds another level of depth to *Zoo Tycoon 2*, and it's a laugh playing House MD with your animals, even if it's easy.

Ultimately, *Zoo Tycoon 2* has its audience, and this expansion builds upon the structure in place. This isn't going to change the world, nor is it going to win any new gamers, but it's worth a go if you've got a copy of the game to hand, especially considering the bargain price of the *Zoo Keeper Collection* at the moment.

Ed Zitron



PCZONE
61
Grr. Argh. Etc



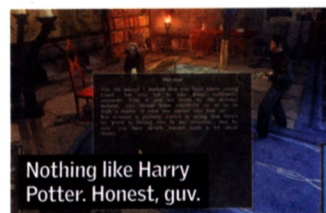
AVENCAST

Harry Potter and the Halls of Dullness

DEVELOPER Clockstone
PUBLISHER Lighthouse Interactive
WEBSITE www.avencast.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Min system req:

2GHz processor, 412MB RAM, and a 64 MB graphics card



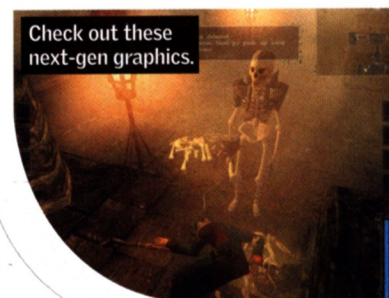
SIMILAR TO THE cold horror of waking up next to a corpse, sometimes a game reminds us all effortlessly that there are still uncreative, dull-edged developers who will gladly rip off anything to make a quick quid. *Avencast*, like an excrement-driven Delorian, takes us back to the heady days of *Diablo*, mixing in various pillaged elements from the rest of the fantasy genre, with every cliché imaginable. While *Fate* at least tried to be original, *Avencast* manages to be about as much fun as Gordon Brown reading the Bible.

Unlike the genuine article, however, *Avencast's* controls are sluggish, and are a strange mish-mash of FPS and *Diablo* controls that's at best confusing, and at worse frustrating, as your character moves off in the direction of where your mouse points, instead of where

you actually want to go. While this carries on, you have to hastily pull together moves to bring calm to the mayhem of monsters that the game throws at your underpowered, adolescent arse.

It isn't even just that the game is inherently broken – somewhere within the battered remains of *Avencast's* ideas lies a middling story, but the entire product feels terrible. Enemies take too long to kill, the dialogue has the tone of a 12 year-old's fan fiction, and the gameplay is of Flash-game quality, but at a full-price premium. For the price of *Avencast* you can get *Titan Quest*, or even *Diablo 2* and its expansion, and still have money left for tea. There's no need to struggle to even give this low-quality hogwash a try – there are bigger, better and cheaper RPGs out there.

Ed Zitron



PCZONE
34
Cast away

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Jamie Sefton
Editor

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our discs.

IndieZone



Martin Korda heads off to war, the ring, outer space and a patch of grass

BRASS HATS

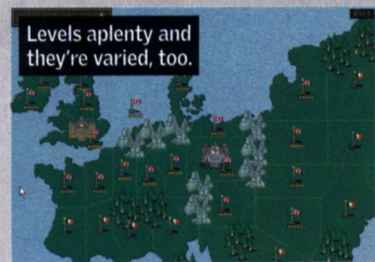
DEVELOPER Square Earth Games WEBSITE www.brasshats.com PRICE \$23.95 (£12)

SOME TURN-BASED strategy games can be utterly overwhelming or so poorly executed they're a chore to play. *Brass Hats* is different. In fact, I'd say it's one of, if not the finest indie turn-based game I've ever had the pleasure to review.

While the visuals are hardly anything to spill your chocolate rations over, there's little to criticise in terms of pure turn-

based fun. The premise is basic: build up a force of infantry, armour, artillery, ships and aircraft and move across the map capturing strategic locations to bolster your income. Thanks to an excellent AI that adeptly utilises combined arms you're faced with a stiff challenge, though the four difficulty settings ensure there's a level to suit everyone's ability, and the tutorial is broken down into easily digested bite-sized chunks.

While it's a touch more expensive than the rest of this month's line-up, *Brass Hats* is well worth it. If you're a lover of accessible turn-based strategy or if you've always wandered what all the fuss is about, don't look any further than *Brass Hats*.



Levels aplenty and they're varied, too.

INDIE ZONE GAME OF THE MONTH



Not much to look at, but incredibly addictive.

PCZONE 83

REACH

DEVELOPER MDickie WEBSITE www.mdickie.com PRICE £14.99 (£7)

SELF-PROFESSED DEVELOPMENT legend Mat Dickie is realising some of his potential, as this is his best game to date.

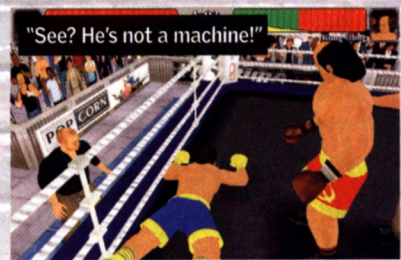
Starting out with an obscure boxer, you must train him up (using finger-crippling button-mashing exercises), find a manager

(by clicking on manager names until you find one willing to take you on), arranging fights and working your way up the ranking ladder.

There are a wealth of options and fun features here and while the action can be somewhat cumbersome, the matches are a great fun. Some decent cutscenes and context-sensitive news reports further bolster the immersion factor. Entertaining if flawed, *Reach* is a boxing game that's likely to leave you satisfied rather than thrilled, though it's still well worth checking out.



Have it!



PCZONE 75

RICOCHET INFINITY

DEVELOPER Reflexive Entertainment
WEBSITE www.ricochetinfinity.com PRICE \$19.99 (£10)

RICOCHET INFINITY is easily the best *Breakout* game we've seen since *Boom Voyage* back in Issue 178 (71%). In fact, it even manages to surpass it

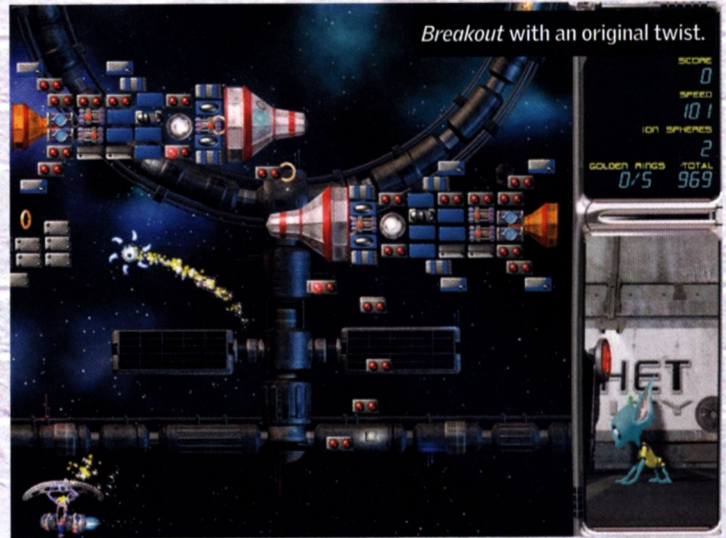
thanks to some fairly original features that set it apart from the majority of its by-the-numbers competitors.

As well as the standard ball-and-paddle mechanic, you can also manipulate your pinging sphere by

holding down the right mouse button, causing the ball to curve and change direction in order to reach those hard to reach targets. Lasers and projectile weapons further increase your ability to smash up the imaginatively shaped collections of blocks.

Throw in a mass of varied levels, top-notch presentation and a decent soundtrack and you're left with an addictive game packed with fun and novel features, that stands out from the rest.

PCZONE
72



ATTACK OF THE CREEPS

DEVELOPER Galago Games
WEBSITE www.galagogames.com PRICE \$9.99 (£5)



ATTACK OF THE Creeps is a poor man's *Master of Defense* (issue 168, 70%), in which you must prevent a string of enemies from making it from one side of the screen to the other by strategically placing a collection of turrets around the level to shoot them before they can make it across.

Tower defence games are usually fun, however, *Attack of the Creeps*' overly linear and samey levels, coupled with unimaginative enemies, annoying sound effects and second-rate visuals, means that this game is strangely bereft of both atmosphere and entertainment.

The large selection of turrets appear varied at first, but they soon prove somewhat limp and unsatisfying, and while later levels are fairly frenetic, it's not long before you're slapping the Escape key in search of a more entertaining distraction, such as clipping your toenails with your teeth.

If you're looking for a tower defence game, then I'd recommend the superior *Master of Defense*, because even at £5, *Attack of the Creeps* isn't worth more than a glance.

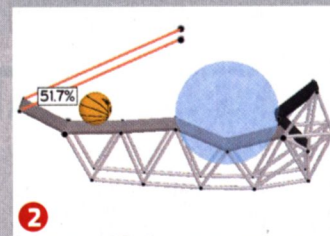
PCZONE
38

TOP 5 INDIE PUZZLE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

While some may perceive it as an action game, *Roboblitz* has more than its fair share of taxing physics-based puzzles for it to be included here. With your space station under attack from pirates, you must manipulate your surroundings with some incredible Unreal Engine 3-powered physics to solve conundrums and repel the invaders.



ARMADILLO RUN
www.armadillorun.com | Issue 171

This incredibly addictive physics-based brain teaser has you navigating a ball around the screen with pulleys, ramps, rocket, trampolines and a host of other contraptions.



CHOCOLATE CASTLE
www.lexaloffle.com | Issue 184

Chocolate Castle challenges you with devouring chunks of different coloured chocs with correspondingly coloured animals. If you need a cerebral workout, look no further.



BREAKING NEWS
www.mysterystudio.com | Issue 185

A word search puzzle wrapped in rudimentary management features, *Breaking News* has you building up a news channel by finding words to match news headlines within a time limit.



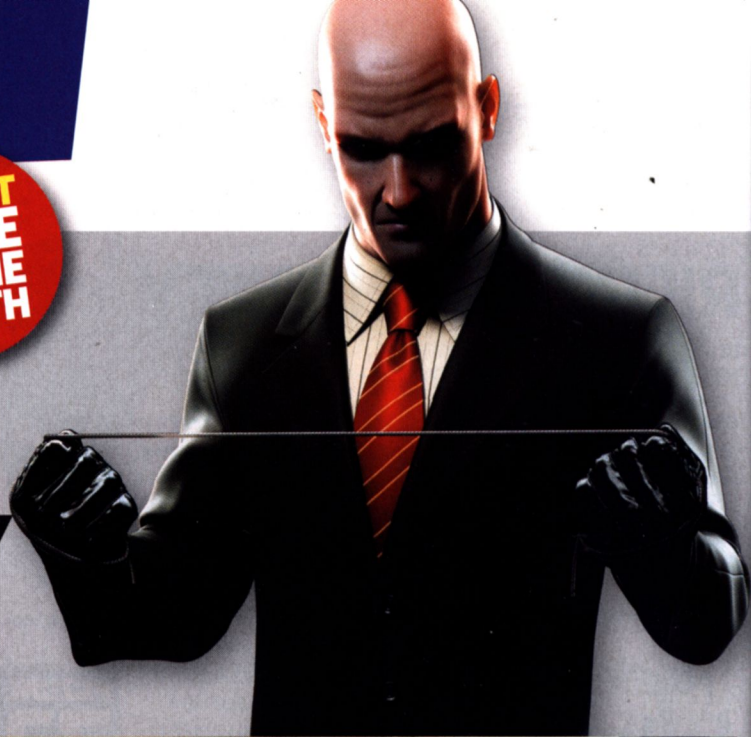
HACK IT
thecoreteam.de | Issue 175

In *Hack It* you must push blocks to create a circuit before a timer reaches zero and a bomb explodes. The gameplay is samey, but the presentation is above reproach.

BUDGET

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

We look at how much bang you can get for your buck. Or should that be pound...



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.mastertronic.com PRICE: £9.99

THIS WAS HITMAN'S finest, and most recent hour, the hour in which Io Interactive keyed into just how cool it is to be a cold-blooded assassin.

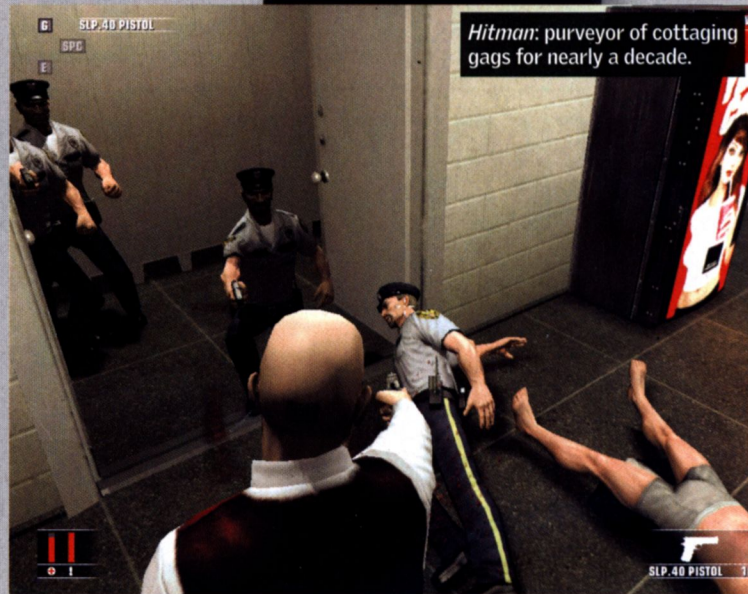
Blood Money's levels guide you into constructing elaborate set pieces, with classy, violent, and immensely satisfying pay-offs. The ability to carry out each mission undetected, leaving nothing but a curious string of high-profile, ridiculous accidents in your wake (one with an actual shark eating someone), opens the game's replay value too. This is the most

stylised game of the series, ripping off several popular TV shows and movies to create what we can only describe as the definitive and best version of *Hitman* ever to be released.

If you like the movie *Final Destination* and setting up convoluted domino chains (with a shark at the end), then you'll enjoy *Hitman: Blood Money*. And for a tenner, it's extremely worthy of your time.

Steve Hogarty

**PCZONE
80**



**THIS MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**

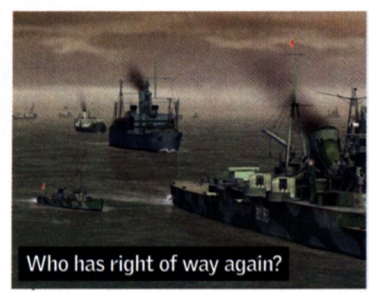
Will blagging some tickets to see the Sex Pistols
Saving: £120

Jamie finding a fiver in a railway station vending machine
Saving: £5

Log locking himself out of his house for a night
Saving: £1.27 on bills

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.mastertronic.com PRICE: £9.99



IN THE NAVY, you can join your fellow man, or alternatively you can obliterate your fellow man at sea using gigantic nautical weaponry. The latter is what concerns *Battlestations: Midway*, requiring you to negotiate the dangerous waters of famous World War II battles and eliminate your opponents in all kinds of planes, boats and submarines.

The problem is the slight tediousness of it all. At times you can find yourself moving about thousands of tons of seafaring metal at ridiculously slow speeds, preparing for a giant battle that, without the right degree of tactical

finesse, will lead to both your demise, and a load more repositioning. Just like real naval warfare then – except with save games. This is very much a slow-moving war game, and while certain elements (plane-based combat for one) offer speedier action for the less-than patient, the rest of the game still requires a level of forbearance that won't be necessarily be granted by a lower price.

Battlestations: Midway still has a very niche market, but at least the niche can get it on the cheap.

Ed Zitron

**PCZONE
70**



SAM & MAX: EPISODES 1-3

PUBLISHER: Steam WEBSITE: www.steampowered.com PRICE: \$19.95 (£10)

YOU DON'T NEED to have played *Season One* before you play the second, but it makes a little more sense to play *Ice Station Santa* knowing all the characters you'll meet. Perhaps this 'buy two, get one free' offer on the first three episodes will seduce you into a compromising financial position, and entice you into the point-and-click world of the freelance police. It's funny, it's clever – and the episodic format breaks the package up into three evenings of excellent distraction.

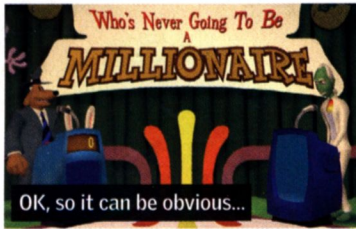
As much value as this package offers, we'd probably recommend you play the free version of *Episode 4* (it's on the cover disc, so you've got no excuse), then buy the whole season if you like it. Besides, *Episode 3* is also the most disappointing episode, so it'd be a shame to finish that and not have the rest of the episodes to remind you how fundamentally good the *Sam & Max* world can be.

Jon Blyth

PCZONE
84



Nuke headware – snazzy.



OK, so it can be obvious...



One is funny; one irritating. Guess which...

ROGUE TROOPER

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

ORIGINALLY STANDING AS an unoriginal yet quirky shooter, *Rogue Trooper* is now out at a budget price that makes it worth another look.

If you were disappointed by past efforts to bring the *2000AD* universe to your PC, then you may want to give *Rogue Trooper* a blast – it's faithful to the comic, has some interesting additions to the genre, and has a good few hours of warfaring to power through. You can salvage gear off of dead enemies to build up your own arsenal, and the eccentric dialogue certainly adds a great deal of authenticity to the game, enhancing the gritty, weird atmosphere of *2000AD*.

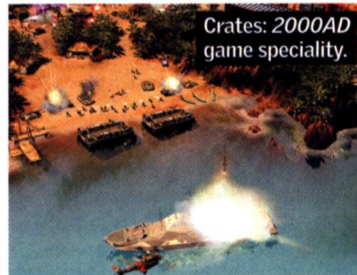
Ultimately, *Rogue Trooper* is a B-grade shooter that won't make you uninstall *Gears of War* in a hurry, but might be worth sticking a tenner on if you're a fan of the comic.

Ed Zitron

PCZONE
65



Looks like rain.



Crates: 2000AD game speciality.

And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



WORMS 4: MAYHEM
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Yes, this is a good 3D *Worms* game, with excellent new weapons including the concrete donkey, which can drop through a multi-storey building for much destructive happiness. It's still not as good as 2D *Worms* though.

PCZONE
76



DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
\$9.95 (£5), STEAM

Slick mod *Day of Defeat: Source* was met with a little bit of opposition when it was released with some greater graphical lustre at a cost, but this budget pricing makes this World War II multiplayer shooter a lot more appetising.

PCZONE
79



IMPERIAL GLORY
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Any historical RTS always has to battle against the mighty *Total War* series, but *Imperial Glory* – from the creator of *Commandos* – does a decent job, with fast-paced 3D battles, diplomacy and amazingly-excellent sea battles.

PCZONE
77

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1
HALF-LIFE 2
\$19.95 (£10), STEAM

Do we really need to explain why you need Gordon's physics-based outing? For a tenner? OK then, it's PC gaming at its finest. Happy now?



2
FAR CRY
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI. Formerly the only real rival to the FPS dominance of *Half-Life 2*.



3
COMPANY OF HEROES
\$29.95 (£15), STEAM

Relic's title made the WWII RTS into an enjoyable genre again, with an excellent campaign and taut, tactical gameplay.



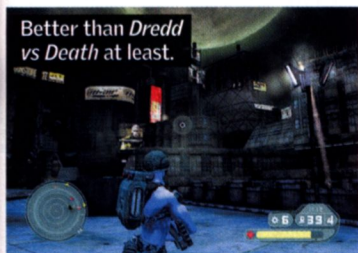
4
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The precursor to *Oblivion*, Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG offers cheap goblin bashing.



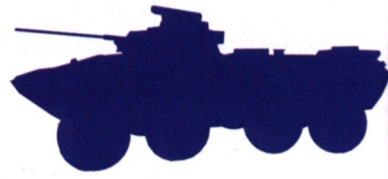
5
PSYCHONAUTS
\$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM

Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.



Better than *Dredd vs Death* at least.

BUYER'S GUIDE



Now rejigged and improved for your game-buying pleasure

PCZONE TOP 5 FRANCHISES WE'D LOVE TO COME BACK

- 1 X-COM
- 2 RISE OF THE TRIAD
- 3 DEUS EX
- 4 DUNGEON KEEPER
- 5 BEYOND GOOD & EVIL



PCZONE TOP 5 FRANCHISES THAT HAVE COME BACK

- 1 FALLOUT
- 2 TEAM FORTRESS
- 3 SAM & MAX
- 4 TOMB RAIDER
- 5 OPERATION FLASHPOINT



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES WITH CRAP BRITISH ACCENTS

- 1 HELLGATE: LONDON (ISSUE 188)
- 2 CALL OF DUTY 2 (ISSUE 162)
- 3 FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS (ISSUE 160)
- 4 THE BLACK MIRROR (ISSUE 143)
- 5 DICK VAN DYKE'S CRAZY PLANE CHASE! (NOT REVIEWED)



FPS

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in – but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

The spiritual sequel to *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with some superb animation to rival Pixar's films.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 – 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *B2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.



CRYSIS

PCZ Issue: 188 – 92%

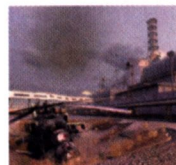
A retooled, condensed *Far Cry* for newer hardware, with *Crysis*'s neat nanosuit and 'anything can happen' action-bubble mentality making it a winner. The last act falters, but the Korean-bullying is endlessly replayable.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

PCZ Issue: 188 – 89%

Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

PCZ Issue: 179 – 85%

Occasionally stilted, but still bold and quite brilliant. The solitude and desolation that shroud your travels through the Zone make this unlike any other game, while the action is brutal and engaging.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

The fact that despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one is a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%

A stunning RTS set at the height of the cold war, *World in Conflict* offers genuinely innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've ever likely to see.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place indeed, and the latest version is the greatest yet. It's now available with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Now complemented by the excellent *Kingdoms* expansion.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

Massive battles and armies composed of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most unique RTS titles around? Check, check and check.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 – 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the genre-dominating *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%

Who knew the all-conquering console title would work so well with a mouse and keyboard? *GOW*'s skirmishes against the aggressive Locust Horde are enjoyably tactical, while its cover system and difficulty level combine to make you genuinely fear the bullets flying around you. With the battle against the almighty Brumak near the game's close, the PC has the best version of an already excellent shooter. So hooray for us.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

A bit frayed around the edges now, but it still shows how to do bullet-time right. A noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkably evergreen gun action mean that Payne is still a force to contend with.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 – 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious – *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue: 154 – 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. Boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



LOTR ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spide! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...



EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW's Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original game a much-needed lick of paint, and adds a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A timesink in a good way.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. A lot of polish and thought have been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy - it's up to you.

Simulation

BUDGET



X²: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X²: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X²* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. *LFS* offers realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers, that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
The rallying legend returns, and this time he treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping, though.

Oddball



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The god game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Try it out and see for yourself.



PEGGLE EXTREME

PCZ Issue: 183 - 83%
A weeping unicorn and a sequence of bagatelle-inspired peg-bouncing puzzles combine to make a casual game of unparalleled addictiveness. If you doubt us, you haven't played it.



THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul - games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say, "No, Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well, now you can, with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, *FM* succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

PCZ Issue: 188 - 87%
Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, *Tiger 06* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 08

PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.



NHL 08

PCZ Issue: 187 - 80%
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like *Speedball!*) to our PCs, the latest *NHL* is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

Role-playing games



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent (if a mite sexist), the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Quite possibly the most intimidating yet wonderful game we've ever played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the gaming world.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Q1 2008

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES
ASSASSIN'S CREED
BLACKSITE
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR - SOULSTORM

EIDOS
UBISOFT
MIDWAY
UBISOFT
THQ
SEGA
THQ

Q2 2008

ALONE IN THE DARK
COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH
FAR CRY 2
LEFT 4 DEAD
LEGENDARY: THE BOX
STALKER: CLEAR SKY

ATARI
EA
UBISOFT
VALVE
GAMECOCK
GSC GAME WORLD

Q3 2008

FALLOUT 3
PROJECT ORIGIN

BETHESDA
WARNER BROTHERS

TBC 2008

ALAN WAKE
DRAGON AGE
GUILD WARS 2
LOST: THE VIDEO GAME
OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING
RACE DRIVER ONE
SPACE SIEGE
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION
SPORE
STARCRRAFT II
WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

MICROSOFT
BIOWARE
NCSOFT
UBISOFT
CODEMASTERS
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
UBISOFT
EA
VIVENDI GAMES
GOA/EA
VIVENDI GAMES

WIN!

ALIENWARE PC AND FLIGHT SIMULATOR X: ACCELERATION

Yes! Win one of two Alienware Aurora 7500 gaming PCs with Microsoft's *Flight Simulator X: Acceleration!*

WE LOVE GOING really, really fast here on PC ZONE, which is why you'll sometimes see Log running through the corridors of Future Publishing with his arms spread out making a "Neeeeeeeeeeeeoooooww" sound, closely followed by a speedy Will pushing a post room trolley screaming "dukka-dukka-dukka-bang-bang-kerpow!" At least you would have seen it, until someone from HR complained about the noise and "endangering people's lives".

Now for speed thrills, we simply boot up a copy of Microsoft's latest *Flight Simulator X* expansion *Acceleration* – a game, as you can see in the review on page 82, that we rate rather highly. To celebrate the release of the new expansion pack, and to mark the anniversary of the invention of the in-flight sick bag, we're offering you an opportunity to win a copy of the game, with the original *Flight Simulator X*, plus one of two superb Alienware Aurora 7500 PCs worth over £1,000! Yep, that's TWO PCs up for grabs – of which you could win one of them (don't be greedy). Not bad eh? That's double the chance of normal, boring, land-based competitions you'll find in inferior PC games mags.

In addition, we also have three copies of the original Microsoft *Flight Simulator X* plus the *Acceleration* expansion to give away to three runners-up. So, what do you have to do to win? Simple – just answer the easy question below...

Q What was the name of the American brothers who flew the first airplane?

- A) The Chemical Brothers
- B) The Wright Brothers
- C) The Chuckle Brothers

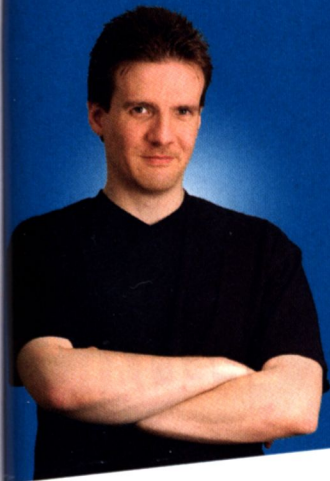
To enter send a text message to 80889. Start your message PCZFLIGHT, then a space, then enter A, B, or C, then a space, then your name and email address. It only costs 50p and you can enter as many times as you like. Competition ends 2 January, 2008, entries received after this date will be shunned. Standard competition and texting rules apply (see below). If you don't want to receive details of further offers and promotions from Future Publishing or other companies, then please put the word NO at the end of your message. If you ignore this technology you can enter by sending a postcard to FSX Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.



ALIENWARE AURORA 7500*

AMD 64-bit Athlon X2 processors, NVIDIA Next Generation Graphics, Low-Latency DDR2 memory, Windows Vista Home Premium, Standard Features, NVIDIA nForce 590 SLI, High-Definition Audio, Keyboard Mouse *specification may change

TERMS & CONDITIONS: By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurepub.com. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) will not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Vista surprise

SO THEN. ONE month of Vista. What happened?

I confess that while Windows still makes me holler with frustration, the overall experience hasn't been too bad. While that's hardly a glowing recommendation – "well guys, it's not awful" – in truth I was expecting a great deal worse.

I've managed to do away with all my big XP addictions, such as a cluttered Quicklaunch and Start Menu, and have gotten used to 'the Vista way' of doing things – although the revised Start button was one of the few things Microsoft changed that made sense, so perhaps that's not a good example. I've even left User Account Control on. If anything, I'm grateful for the interruption when what I'm about to do could be detrimental to the entire system.

What I'm frustrated by is the hardware that no longer has drivers, and all the games and applications which, Vista constantly reminds me, have 'known compatibility issues'. I can continue using these them as they are, complete with constant jitters, or I can spend upwards of £500 upgrading everything so it all runs smoothly. Guess which route I took.

I have a couple of doubts. The first is that none of it is radical, and by that I mean that 98 per cent of the time it looks, feels and handles just like a redecorated XP.

The second is the fact nobody really needs it.

Phil Wand, hardware editor

BE SEATED

Renegade Gaming Chair now available direct from a UK supplier

KICK OFF YOUR shoes, sit back and get ready to be rumbled by no fewer than 12 vibration motors synchronised with the action in your games.

The Renegade is one of two sitting-oriented products made by Ultimate Game Chair Inc, both of which look worryingly similar to those bucket seats that teenage morons bolt into their 1.1-litre Citroën Saxos in order to make them like Tommi Mäkinen. The fact Tommi Mäkinen doesn't drive endlessly round Southend seafront at 3am doesn't occur to them.

In keeping with the tricked out Essex theme, the Renegade also has ground lighting effects and stereo speakers integrated into the headrest, plus a special 'always on' feature that alerts every female

in the vicinity to the fact you're very single.

The chair will hook up to any PC or modern console, and with USB connectivity allows you to use a joystick, wheel or other peripheral with it. There's also an input for your iPod or any other music player, plus an output for headphones.

The Renegade is made in America, meaning it has genuine fat bastard removable armrests and even cupholders. The whole thing can also recline and has a pull-out compartment for emergency packets of crisps.
thegamingcollection.com



Ready to sit down and do your thang?

MAGIC NUMBER

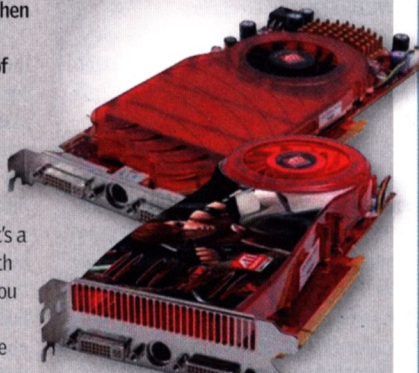
AMD's new naming scheme for ATI branded cards actually makes sense

THERE WERE ROLLED eyes all round when AMD announced it would be renaming every Radeon card, followed by gasps of delight as people realised they actually understood it.

The first number denotes the card's generation, the second the type, and the last two digits refer to the model.

In the case of the Radeon HD 3850, it's a third generation (3) high-end card (8) with the two digit number on the end telling you it's a Pro.

The HD 3870 is from the exact same line but is an XT, and should rival NVIDIA's storming 8800 GT.
ati.amd.com



Every RV67-based AMD cards will be DirectX 10.1 compliant.

NEWS ROUND-UP

NVIDIA have launched their 8800 GT, a card which sits well below the 2900 XT and its sibling GTS in terms of price, but is faster than both. The GT has 100MHz over the GTS and clocks at 600MHz, higher even than the GTX. To make sense of all this, NVIDIA has pumped up the GTS in order to distance it from the GT, though the latter remains incredible value for money. Look out for the review next issue. nvidia.com

Wealthy gamers can now buy the £669 flagship Core 2 Extreme QX9650 processor, the first in a line of updated Core 2 desktop products known broadly as Penryn. The remaining products will be available from early next year, when the 1333 FSB QX9650 will be replaced by the even faster QX9770. intel.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY JON BLYTH & ED ZITRON

WSXGA: The World Snooker XTreme Gaming Association, which involves playing snooker in massive chrome spheres of death that are catapulted into the sun. **SIDEWINDER:** A World of Warcraft-related injury, caused by a combination of one-hand typing and swivel-chair creep. **GIGAWORKS:** The giant-run fortress in Helsinki that is the true birthplace of golden syrup. **G5:** The postcode of Scobies Bar in Glasgow, and rarely-used police code for "officer trapped in a chest freezer with all the ice creams". **THRUSTMASTER:** Any brand making themselves unacceptable to prudes are "doing a Thrustmaster". Other examples include the "Brutal Horsecrusher", and the unpopular "Shit On My Pinny". **ZALMANS:** Grapes that, when crushed at exactly 40 °C, give off fumes that have a mescaline-like effect.

LAPTOP GAMING

While high-powered laptops are gaining in popularity, those who want to stay at the front of PC gaming technology should stick with a regular modular PC system. While powerful notebooks like the Xtreme 770 save space and make gaming-on-the-go practical, their hardware can't be upgraded. So in a couple of years when everyone else is using DirectX 13 1GB graphics cards with quintuple anisotropic filtering, you won't be.

**XMAS
HARDWARE
SPECIAL**



Turns out benchmarks ahead of a gaming rig from our Vista round-up

XTREME 770

PRICE £1,599 **MANUFACTURER** Rock Group **WEBSITE** rockdirect.com

WITHIN THE NEXT three years, laptops will overtake desktops as the weapon of choice for home users. Shipments of them have grown by almost a third, with prices tumbling by a similar amount.

While much of this can be attributed to corporate buying and the availability of wireless networks – hotspots are everywhere now, from coffee shops to hotel rooms and even train carriages – other factors are at work.

First, we've all become so obsessed by the internet now many of us can't survive without tanning our brains in the dull glow of computer screen for at least an hour every day. And it's no longer possible to switch your computer off in the evenings, because your favourite TV programs bombard you with URLs and a quick Google tells you whether the lead actress you fancy ever got her

whammers out on camera. Having a laptop means you only have to stand up to fetch the tissues.

Second, laptops have gotten fast. Really fast. The X770-T7700 on this page turns out benchmark scores ahead of at least one of the dedicated gaming rigs from our Vista round-up in issue 181, making it a bona fide replacement for your desktop. The only downside as always is that it's a sealed box, almost like a console, meaning you'll not be able to upgrade anything inside bar the memory.

NOTEPADS RULE

As well as a 2.4GHz Core 2 Duo T7700 on test, the Xtreme is also available with T7500 and T7800 processors – the former costing £200 more, the latter available for £200 less. Going for the bigger chip is unlikely to have any real impact on your games, meaning you should save your

money for something more tangible. Opting for the 1920 x 1200 WUXGA panel over the standard 1680 x 1050 WSXGA+ costs not much more than £40, yet affords you a 30 per cent bigger pixel count – a thoroughly more worthwhile investment.

The Xtreme features an integrated microphone, making voice chat a cinch, together with a headphones socket and built-in webcam. Arguably of more importance to gamers is the proper-sized keyboard, complete with numeric pad, full height enter and a separate function key row. The only obvious drawback is the omission of dedicated media controls, such

as play, skip and mute. The battery charges within the hour and runs flat almost as quickly, but like Mr T always says, you need mains to play games, sucker.

In summary, it's hard to see how laptops can become any more enticing to desktop users. Its design could be a little cohesive – the mix of orange paint, cod carbon fibre and brushed steel is a little jarring – but other than that, it's basically a high-powered rig with a beautiful screen that you can take to bed. Highly recommended.

SPECIFICATION

Intel Core 2 Duo T7700 2.4GHz
2GB DDR2 667MHz, NVIDIA GeForce 8700M GT
512MB, WUXGA X-Glass 1920x1200
160GB 7200rpm SATA HDD, HD DVD/dual layer DVD
writer optical drive, Windows Vista Home Premium
3 year Pan-European collect and return warranty

**PCZONE
90**



FERRARI GT EXPERIENCE

PRICE £39 **MANUFACTURER** Thrustmaster **WEBSITE** www.thrustmaster.com

IT NO MORE recreates the experience of driving a Ferrari than a 2002 Michael Schumacher calendar, but this new force feedback GT is still a good wheel at a great price.

Alongside high-end rivals like Logitech's £180 G25 (issue 175, 88%) it seems like a stocking filler bargain, despite the fact everyone will think you're too old for something so toy-like. And while it lacks the former's clutch pedal, gated shifter and premium quality construction, such things

rarely translate to lower lap times – you may as well go ahead, buy the GT and save yourself the cost of a decent video card.

The Thrustmaster is fully compatible with both the PlayStation 2 and PS3 – there are brightly-coloured buttons and flashing LEDs for the console heads – and also with XP and Vista. I can attest to it working flawlessly in *Live for Speed*, *Race 07* and *rFactor* (which is getting reviewed next issue). It's often said that many of the people you'll meet racing online are prize

twats, and I'm happy to report that every game I joined had some cretin playing bumpercar the wrong way round the circuit, or using you as a brake on the first turn.

Complaints? The pedals are set too high, meaning you get aches keeping your feet held at a peculiar angle, and the clamp isn't quite as solid as on the Logitech. But those are all the bad sides.

PCZONE
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L VERSION

PRICE £75 **MANUFACTURER** Tokyoflash **WEBSITE** techdeals.eu

TOKYOFASH WATCHES HAVE been popping up everywhere this year, from *Wired* and *GQ*, to *FHM* and *Playboy*. Now the circle of cool is complete.

Stop laughing, gamers can do stylish. Just because we're ill at ease with girls and don't shut down our PCs and play outside enough, that doesn't mean we're blind to a bit of premium novelty bling.

Tokyoflash stuff is borderline 'zany' (ie deliberately designed to be mad and quirky) but it feels top drawer. As watches, they're completely and utterly rubbish at telling the time (a lack of hands combined with typical Japanese oddness make none of the 40 or so designs easy to read) but they're startlingly unique and everyone wants a look.

The L Version here has its number markings in kanji, making things even more cryptic than usual, but once you've learned the knack you can annoy people with the way you can decrypt the time and they can't. Sad but great.



PCZONE
85

SE420 EARPHONES

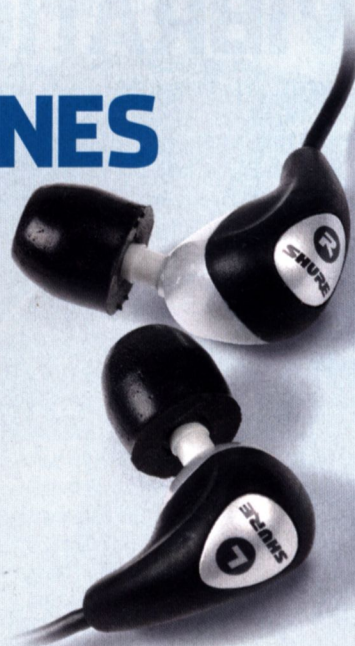
PRICE £190 **MANUFACTURER** Shure **WEBSITE** shure.com

SHURE'S SE420 EARPHONES are so astonishingly good that the only debate here is whether they're worth all that money.

Earphones in the Wandy household are usually supplied free with MP3 players or mobile phones, and are more likely to deliver headaches than pleasure. The iPod ones are a case in point, being not just poorly made but awful as well.

And here is where it gets tricky. I'm often heard condemning the overpriced mediocrity peddled by the likes of Apple, yet here I am eschewing the benefits of spending close to £200 on a pair of earphones.

The thing is, they're so damned perfect – light, comfortable, and with an astonishing range of highs and lows thanks to twin speakers each side – you'll never need to replace them. The foam collars blank almost all external noise and transform heavily soundscaped gaming titles like *Crysis*. Truly wonderful audio gadgets.



PCZONE
90

SIDEWINDER

PRICE £39 MANUFACTURER Microsoft WEBSITE www.microsoft.co.uk

YOU WILL PLEASE note that for almost three years I've been telling everyone that wireless mice are crap. Because they are.

I'm delighted to report that all of today's gaming rodents have a tail planted firmly in their bottom (or in their face, who knows), so I'll say this one last time: wireless mice are crap.

In addition to a wiggly wire, the new Sidewinder has small counterweights that sit in a tray under the mouse and make it feel solid or slippery depending on what suits you best. As with the original Logitech G5 (issue 162, 91%), it's a simple idea that works remarkably well.

What doesn't work is the ridiculous clown car shape. It's arguably the least comfortable device I've ever held, an opinion echoed by everyone in the office who tried it. Which is a shame, because the software and indeed everything else about it is first-class.



PCZONE
70

PC ANTI-VIBRATION KIT

PRICE £6.99 MANUFACTURER Fansis WEBSITE quietpc.com

IN THE SAME way you give antiperspirant to someone with whiffy pits, an antivibration kit is the perfect stocking-filler for someone with a noisy PC.

Quiet computers have become a modern obsession, but it wasn't until recently that PC makers started to do something about it. If your rig is more than 18 months old, or you've built it yourself to a strict budget, there's a high chance it'll be noisier than two dozen spoons in a Magimix.

The Fansis Anti-Vibration Kit costs under £10 and contains four rubber-damped silicon feet, eight rubber fan mounts, plus an assortment of HDD, CD-ROM and thumb screws each with a silicon or rubber washer.

If your machine sits on a laminate floor, the feet will convince you. As for the other fitments, you need to know your way around PC's insides.



PCZONE
85



ITEMPO 800

PRICE £54 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk

THE ITEMPO 800 is a digital audio system for your iPod, meaning the box shows various gormless models in two-tone sunglasses lounging about on white furniture.

Because Apple owners are a bit dim, there's also a warning that the system "does not include iPod", though it does come with an AC adapter and a cradle for nanos, minis and regulars. Once inserted, the device charges up and you can then read all two pages of the user guide.

In fairness, the iTempo is little more than a 20W amp and speakers, so there's no need for hefty manuals. The sound quality ranges between OK and quite good, and the slimline

remote means you can put on those massive shades your dad bought in the '60s in the belief they turned him into James Dean, and flop around on beanbags pretending it's a cigarette case. What more could any idiot iPod owner want?

PCZONE
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GIGAWORKS T40

PRICE £75 MANUFACTURER Creative WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

THE T40 IS Creative's flagship speaker set for the premium audio speaker market, and it has a premium look and feel to match.

They're the bigger brothers of the T20 system (issue 166, 70%), which were the company's original 'back to basics' pair, and they suffer the same problems of average sound combined with limp amplification courtesy of 14W per channel. Driving a decent pair of headphones requires you to have the volume at 80% or more, above which it distorts.

Curiously, the on/off switch is tiny and on the rear of the master speaker, meaning you're encouraged to leave them on. And you know how your car stereo sounds without the loudness turned on? Listening to the T40 without the bass and treble at maximum is the same, the results lacking any urgency or desire to please. Sadly they're not designed for gaming and are best left tuned to Classic FM.



PCZONE
75

MEDIAPLAYER-350 WLAN DRIVE-IN

PRICE £129 MANUFACTURER Freecom WEBSITE freecom.com

IF YOU'VE EVER wanted to watch grotty movies and listen to MP3s from the comfort of your DFS sofa, look no further.

The MediaPlayer-350 WLAN Drive-In is one of an increasing number of devices that connect to your telly or stereo, pulling in media from a PC in another room over an existing wireless network or optional internal hard drive. It's roughly the same cost as rivals including Pinnacle's ShowCenter 200 and Netgear's EVA700, but £50 cheaper than the Linksys KISS 1600 which has a built-in DVD player.

One thing these products all share in common is a desperately terrible user interface. It's either slow as hell (Pinnacle), odd (Linksys), odd and buggy (Netgear), or simplified to the point where you feel stupid

just looking it (Freecom). You'd have thought these things would have improved over time, particularly as many of us are now acquainted with the way *Windows Media Center* goes about things, but they haven't.

Assuming you can live with the doltish menu system, you connect your MediaPlayer to the TV in your lounge using component (high-quality) or composite (low-quality) video, and digital DVI or HDMI sockets; or to your stereo using RCA. The picture's fine and upscaling is passable, but the streaming of bandwidth-hungry content is best described as 'a bit wobbly'.

Put simply, the higher the quality of your video, the more stuttering you get on screen. Freecom states the unit is "HD Video-File compatible", but you'll need to spend extra on an IDE hard drive and follow Freecom's

instructions for fitting it before this statement becomes true.

On the plus side, the MediaPlayer does notice network storage devices, such as the Buffalo TeraStation NAS under my desk, meaning you're able to browse content without getting up to turn on your PC.

PCZONE
83



ZM-DS4F

PRICE £18 MANUFACTURER Zalman WEBSITE quietpc.com

SRI LANKAN GANGSTA Pop given unparalleled depth and colour; the *Windows* 'ding' furnished with genuine vibrancy but without the harshness that's so often the downfall of midrange cans.

The clarity and presence afforded the 'You've got mail!' alert brought out more

nuance than I've ever heard before, and I could almost feel my messages were in the room with me. I felt like getting up and reading!

Joking aside, these Zalmans are what we've come to expect from Korea's most famous maker of cooling products. OK, so they do include two speakers in each earpiece – a 28mm tweeter and 40mm woofer – but they're enclosed in padded cups that are uncomfortably smaller than your ears, meaning not only do they fail to eliminate any background noise, they always feel like they're on the verge of falling off into your beans on toast. And indeed they do, should you ever nod.

The connecting arm digs into your head, and the sound is so shrill it you'll be wincing at gunfire and running away from any sort of explosion, but they are white. They're also cheap and collapsible. And that's about it.



PCZONE
63

RUN 'N' DRIVE

PRICE £25 MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.com

THE RUN 'N' Drive has a clever double-ended wireless connector with a USB plug on one end for the PC and PlayStation 3, and that frumpy nine-pin Sony affair on the other.

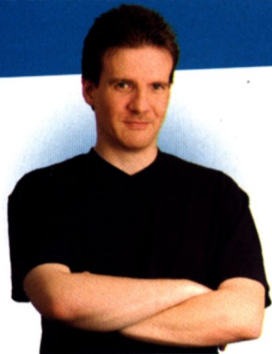
It works flawlessly with XP, Vista and a PS2, but because I don't know any of the 17 people worldwide who bought a PS3, I was unable to test it and so it may blow when plugged into that. It's also a gratifyingly weighty affair, feeling more solid than any of the joystick-alike devices you have stashed away in your wardrobe, but slender grips and some decidedly crazy positioning of extra buttons on the pad's underside favour larger hands.

For running about, lamping pedestrians and running over hookers in *Grand Theft Auto*, the genre at which it is most obviously aimed, it's pretty much perfect. The optical 'wheel' is a self-centering thumb collar around the



directional pad, and it feels intuitive and the results are pleasing, but in all honesty it doesn't offer any real advantage over a more traditional prodding of the analog stick. It works, but you can't help feeling it's a bit of a gimmick.

PCZONE
80



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them, you know... Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite green-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

MEMORY DRAIN

Q Being an avid reader of your column, I know you're the right person to ask this question. I have a 3.0GHz Prescott running on an ASRock P4V88+ board.

Currently this has two 512MB modules of PC3200 RAM in dual-memory mode. I've just purchased two 1GB PC3200 modules as I want to improve my gaming.

According to the ASRock's manual, if I replace the two smaller sticks with the larger ones I'll retain the full 400MHz speed, but if I were to keep the 512MB modules as well, for a total of 3GB, this would slow things down to 333MHz. So, is it best to discard the two smaller sticks, or is 3GB at the slower speed a better setup for gaming?

Phil Ducker

A This is a limitation of your ASRock's crappy memory controller. It's fully capable of refreshing 2GB at the higher DDR400 memory rate, but will drop down to DDR333 when presented with any more. This problem was prevalent a few years back, particularly among Athlon 64 early adopters who'd bought double-sided RAM modules, but thankfully it's no longer an issue. Gamers choosing Windows Vista now need a decent processor and 2GB RAM as a bare minimum, and the idea that random motherboards will inexplicably 'throttle back' the bus when presented with extra memory defeats the point of adding it in the first place.

Anyway, my advice here's simple: get shot of the two 512MB modules - stick them in a laser printer, stick them on eBay, cover them in ketchup, whatever - and enjoy 2GB at the proper speed. It's all you really need with that setup.

DOUBLED UP

Q Not so much a problem really, just expert advice needed. I'm in a dilemma as to what to spend my hard-earned dosh on. Do I go for the GeForce 8800 Ultra, or two 8800 GTX cards run in SLI? I keep getting conflicting advice. It's going to be bolted into a new quad-core system with an Intel QX8650. Please can give me your opinion?

Tyrone Taylor



The world's duller looking laptop? No matter, it's superb value.

A You need to ask yourself exactly what you want from your system. Your choice of processor suggests you're the sort of person who wants the fastest PC on the planet, and in which case you're always going to end up sorely disappointed. There'll always be benchmark or game that makes the best technology look like the worst, if only for a fleeting moment, and even if you could create a computing goliath capable of rendering *Oblivion* at a constant 100fps in any scene and at any resolution, the technology would be obsolete by the time you'd tightened the last screw. And your mortgage company would repossess your home.

Which brings me to SLI. While NVIDIA will tell you it gives you 'up to twice the gaming power' or something, the reality is somewhat different. SLI can give you a handy boost, but the amount you get depends on the game and your video settings. If you're planning on running all your titles at 2560 x 1600 with heaps of anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering, then a dual-card setup might help the game feel vaguely playable. But if all you're ever going to do is fill the bounds of a 19in flatpanel, a single GTX like the one in our Buyer's Guide (the 8800) will be adequate. It'll also

be significantly quieter and you won't need a huge PSU to feed it.

LAP DANCING

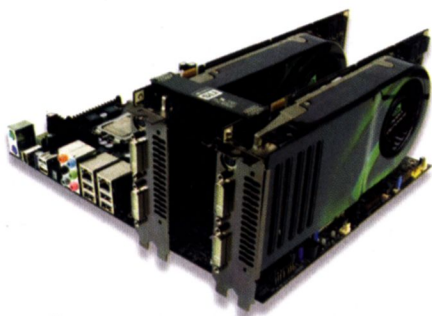
Q I play *World of Warcraft* a lot and my five year old rig with its GeForce4 Ti just isn't cutting it. Even with only very few interface mods I'm getting a lot of slow down while people are rendered, and 40v40 PvP has become impossible.

I know I could probably get a decent replacement for £600 but I've the added complication of a girlfriend. This means I spend half my time round her house, and since she has chronic fatigue syndrome and sleeps a lot, I have a lot of time to kill.

I've been looking at Dell and was thinking that the base model Inspiron 1720 laptop, with a GeForce Go 8400M GS, might do me. It comes out at £619 which sounds reasonable, but I've no idea if it's a good deal or even if it would run *WOW*. What about the Vostro 1700 at £587?

James Langridge

A I don't know that spending £600 on a laptop is going to blow more than one of your socks off, but all that up-to-date kit should be an improvement over what you have right now. At present, the Dell



Dual GeForce cards look great, but their noise will grate.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 710	11 OCT '07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 16369	18 SEPT '07

SOUND		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.09.0007	30 OCT '06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 2.15.000	30 MAY '07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY AUDIGY 2	9 OCT '06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4.2.09.0015	
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA 2.12.0002	16 MAR '07

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Get shot of the two 512MB modules - stick them in a laser printer, stick them on eBay, cover them in ketchup, whatever"

Wandy's advice for getting rid of RAM that'll slow your PC down.

Inspiron and Vostro lines are both based on Intel's Santa Rosa platform and are essentially the same machine, the new Vostro name merely differentiates a business product from a home one.

I'd say that of the two, the latter makes more sense - with a T7250 processor, 17in 1440 x 900 widescreen panel, 2GB RAM and a 256MB GeForce card, you seem to be saving a substantial amount over the equivalent Inspiron, even when you take VAT into account. Drop the 3 Year Business Hardware Support to 1 Year Business Hardware Support and you save yourself a further £149. OK, so you'll end up with Vista Business meaning there won't be any built-in games, but Vista's games suck. I'd do it!

OPEN WIDE

Q I've just upgraded from Windows XP to Vista on my Dell Dimension 9150. I've fitted a new 700W PSU and a new Radeon HD2900XT card. Whenever I play *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* in DirectX 10, the game never allows me to go beyond a resolution of 1152 x 858 despite me having a 1280 x 1024 Dell Ultrasharp connected using DVI.

With *World in Conflict* the mouse cursor becomes invisible, making it unplayable. Both games run fine in DX9 but *WIC*'s frame rate drops significantly.

I've completely uninstalled and re-installed both Steam and *WIC* but with no luck. It's strange as *BioShock* runs perfectly.

I was thinking it may be the motherboard. If so, what would you recommend, as I'll be wanting to upgrade to a Core 2 Duo or Quad processor soon, if one would make any significant difference to my system?

Michael Fossaluzza

A It's not your motherboard. *Lost Planet* is a second-rate console conversion whose video configuration baffles every PC user who plays it. To start with, 1280 x 1024 is not a supported resolution, meaning you're going to be stuck with something non-native to your panel. You could try editing the game's configuration file in `AppData\Local\capcom\lostplanet` but I don't hold much hope that actually doing anything.

Secondly, trying to run an NVIDIA-sponsored title such as *Lost Planet* in DirectX 10 on an ATI card is really not worth the effort. I know it doesn't sound very helpful but I'd simply not bother for the simple reason that many games in this translational period are using DirectX 10 as a sales pitch only. Instead get *Crysis* (below), which really makes having a DX10 card worthwhile. **PC7**



Crysis: worth upgrading for DX10 goodness.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



31 ITUNES

COSTS FREE FROM itunes.com

Let's get something straight here: *iTunes* is not a good media player, nor has it ever been. It's an ugly, bloated, slow, resource-hungry whale that was late to the party and made no effort to fit in with its environment, choosing instead to ape the look and feel of a blasted Mac. Not only does its '70s style 'brushed metal' interface make it stick out like bare toes from an old sock, but as we all know, Macs are comedy computers for mums and dads and artistic bores who talk about the novel they have in them.

So why is it on this list? It's here because pretty much every new piece of software and every new item of hardware makes a reference to iPods and iTunes. Even my

network storage device is 'Apple friendly', allowing me to move all my MP3s to a central location and have everyone on the network browse them - they show up under a new 'Shared' item on the main *iTunes* interface without requiring any sort of configuration.

Don't go thinking that I don't still hate it. It takes forever to copy and index files on network folders, hanging the interface in the process and leaving you unsure whether it's crashed or busy (terrible coding, plain and simple). There's also the fact that the *iTunes* Store is a blatant rip-off, charging you good money to download a file over which Apple retains control. It's all rather hateful but, tragically, borderline necessity. And free.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(tornado) For some reason, if I drag anything to a new location, they become unavailable. I can't view them, I can't delete them and I can't move them. As an experiment suggested by my good wife, I made a document gggggggg, then saved it and dragged it to my Desktop, and now I can't open it or delete or move it. Here's the message I get: Cannot Open/Delete/Move gggggggg Access is denied. Make sure the disc is not full or write-protected and that the file is not currently in use. (Wandy) Try taking ownership of the files and the folder from which you are copying them. Google KB article 308421.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Richard at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to him at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

They offered to send an engineer – two weeks later. The engineer got lost...



A phrenology head: More useful than staff at some call centres.

WATCHDOG



Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...

MESH computers **THE ACCUSED:** Mesh Computers **PROBLEM:** Dead PC

Two days after Mike O'Brien received it, his new PC from Mesh (www.meshcomputers.com), threw up the first in a series of blue screens of death. A week later it stalled, made a whining noise and displayed the message "BOOT DISK FAILURE, REPLACE DISK AND STRIKE ANY KEY".

Mike called Mesh's tech-support line, and a rep told him the hard drive had failed and offered to send an engineer round – two weeks later. When the engineer got lost, Mesh sent round two non-engineers instead, who replaced the hard drive. Three days later the PC had another BSOD crash.

A call to customer services led to Mike sending the PC in for a check-up, which was meant to take a maximum of five working days. Just over a fortnight later, he got his computer back. He turned it on... and was met with "BOOT DISK FAILURE..." again.

Mike contacted Mesh once more to ask for a refund. Mesh refused to pay out unless they could check the PC for themselves.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: The Sale of Goods Act 1979 says items sold by a trader must be as described, and "fit for purpose", ie it must work. If you're sold a faulty product, you have a "reasonable time" to report the fault to the trader, who must give you a refund.

This period isn't fixed, but generally you have about two weeks to a month to report a fault if you want to be sure of getting your money back. After that time a trader can offer a free repair or a replacement instead. After six months, you need to prove the fault was present at the time of sale. Before then the law assumes the product was sold faulty, unless the trader can prove otherwise.

However, Mesh's purchase agreements states that they must be allowed to examine an allegedly faulty PC before coughing up.

After Mike returned the base unit to Mesh, they confirmed the PC was faulty and his money was returned.

FINAL VERDICT: Refund given

MEDION UK **THE ACCUSED:** Medion

PROBLEM: Shoddy hotline

Lee Workman bought a PC from Medion which developed a fault with its graphics card. A Google search revealed claims that

this was a common fault with his machine, the MD 8800, but when Lee called Medion's tech-support staff, they were "unable to diagnose the fault over the telephone", and they "refused to send an engineer to my home", even though he had a three-year on-site warranty.

After sending off the machine for repair, Lee repeatedly called Medion's hotline to check on its status – but found the call centre staff to be less than helpful. "At virtually every stage, various members of Medion's staff have lied to me and been unhelpful, abusive, evasive and rude. I've been promised a call back many, many times, and each time they couldn't be bothered."

Lee was told the repair would take 10 days, but he still hadn't received his PC after a month, and he was unable to reach anyone in the customer services department at Medion's UK head office. Medion also refused to return the hard drive from his old PC unless he paid £75 plus postage.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: We contacted Medion UK, and got this reply from service manager Mike Mason: "Calls are monitored on a regular basis, and in the event that any information provided is inaccurate or an agent's approach isn't considered polite

or helpful, this is addressed. Should any member of staff be found to have been abusive, this would be taken very seriously."

Shortly afterwards, Lee received a brand new MD 8822 PC, and the hard drive from his old machine with all its data intact. As well as an apology, a new three-year on-site warranty, and a selection of hardware from Medion's catalogue.

FINAL VERDICT: An apology and a brand-new PC system – a great result

A CLARIFICATION: Previously we've said that "restocking fees" were a grey area, being allowed in some cases and not in others. Since then we've been advised by the DTI that "restocking fees" are illegal at all times.

If you use the seven-day cooling-off period mandated by the UK's Distance Selling Regulations (DSRs) to return working but unwanted goods, a trader can't charge anything. But after that period they can charge for the "direct cost" of returning the item, if the charge is specified in a clause in your purchasing contract. But a trader can never charge a "restocking" or "administration fee"; or make you pay to return faulty goods at any time. **PCZ**



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

When the right mouse button on Andy Travis' Logitech G5 mouse stopped working, he contacted the firm.

"I mailed Logitech directly, telling them of my problems. They asked me for all my product details etc. I sent them and didn't expect to hear anything for a while (if at all).

"A day later, though, one of the reps contacted me, telling me that he was going to ship out a replacement mouse. Woo!"

A few days later Andy was the proud owner of a brand new Blue G5 Logitech mouse!

So well done, Logitech, for showing how customer service should be done.

REMEMBER:
LOVE IS LIKE A
MAGIC PENNY

Hold it tight and you won't have any. This isn't true of magic pennies, which always remain in your hand. Spending all your non-magic pennies on hardware leads to non-magical bankruptcy.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at **PC ZONE**, but these are the bits we just adore

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

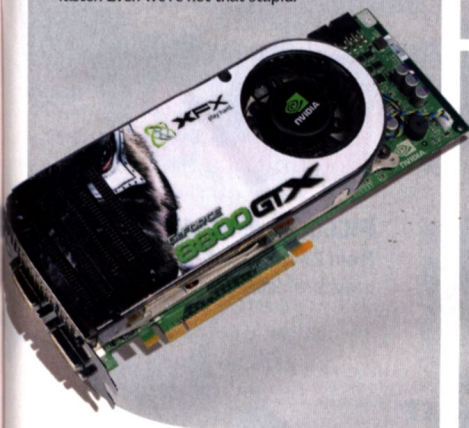
8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

EXPECT TO PAY £630

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

Faster than its predecessor and any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme CPU has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache, and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, it has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

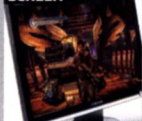
EXPECT TO PAY £149

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



SM226BW

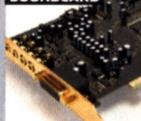
EXPECT TO PAY £219

MANUFACTURER Samsung

WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks, making it ideal for any kind of game.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

EN8600GT TOP

EXPECT TO PAY £99

MANUFACTURER ASUS

WEBSITE asus.com

ASUS have upgraded the standard EN8600GT's memory and have pushed the stream processor clocks from 1,188MHz to 1,458MHz to give us a card that's between 10-20 per cent faster than standard models and noticeably faster than the 2600 XT. Budget mainstream cards don't get better than this.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY £105

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing speed for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROE FIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £60

MANUFACTURER ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19in screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the 1440 x 900 panel of its VA1912w sibling.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £20

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £35

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

BOYS TOYS

The perfect excuse to give yourself a treat

BEAT THE BOREDOM of everyday life with BoysStuff.co.uk. We've teamed up with BoysStuff.co.uk to bring you an unmissable special offer of £5 to spend on any product on their website until 6 January 2008.

BoysStuff.co.uk is widely recognised as the online destination for boys toys. They offer next day, Saturday and international delivery along with a 30-day no-quibble money back guarantee, so why not check them out today?*

To claim your free £5 follow these simple steps:

1. Visit www.BoysStuff.co.uk.
2. Select the items you would like to purchase.
3. Proceed to checkout.
4. Enter discount code PCZDEC07 at the checkout when prompted and you will automatically receive £5 off your total order value.



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£139.00 Experience the thrill of driving the famous Aston Martin DB9.



FLYING ALARM CLOCK

£19.95 Launches across the room making a mosquito sound to get you up and running.

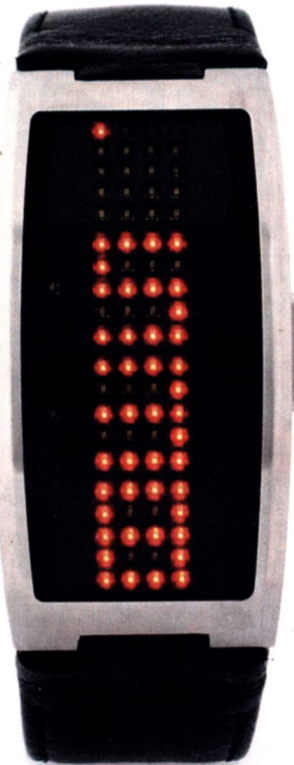
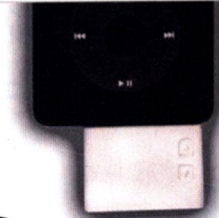
MEGA MOSQUITO

£29.99
Bug the family with this remote control flying Mosquito.



IPOD FM WIRELESS TRANSMITTER

£14.99
Listen to your iPod music off any FM stereo!



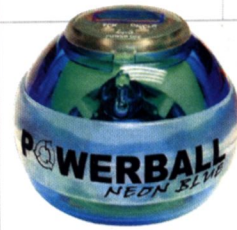
BLACK DICE GURU LED WATCH

£99.00 Stand out from the crowd with this cool futuristic watch.



BAD MOTHER F**KER WALLET

£9.95
This BMF wallet is right out of Pulp Fiction.

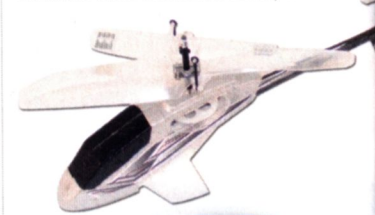


NEON POWERBALL GYRO

£24.95
Strengthen your arm muscles like never before.

PICCO Z R/C HELICOPTER

From £24.95 Play Airwolf for real with this miniature radio-controlled helicopter.



INFLATABLE SANTA

£19.95
Stand out at the Christmas party!



WIRELESS SPEAKERS

£69.95
Crisp, clear sound without the tangle of wires.



TVR TUSCAN WIRELESS MOUSE

£19.95 Live the dream with this light up mouse.



SWEET MEMORIES HAMPER

£19.95
A box crammed full of your favourite childhood sweets.

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PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Born free, as free as the wind blows

FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Tech sport

H EY, EVERYONE LISTEN to me. I just fixed my computer. My new computer didn't turn on, so instead of folding my arms and blowing raspberries into the plug socket like your mum would, I ripped open the side, slung it across the room like a steel Frisbee, and threw maths at the motherboard. Seconds later, I'd found the loose connection, and my PC was running smoother and silentier than a freshly-waxed ninja.

So as you can imagine, I'm pretty much psyched about my powers at the moment. So much so that I reckon just sitting here, typing this, I'm probably going a long way to fixing the world's energy crisis. My starchild powers are kicking in at last.

I probably wouldn't feel so thrilled and empowered by this minor achievement, if I hadn't been castrated, insulted and disgusted by the technical support at the PC's supplier. Having been misdiagnosed, misunderstood and underestimated by this company, I was all but ready to commandeer the Watchdog page with my own personal gripes, but it turns out that page is for you lot. Now I've got a new computer, getting this old one fixed under warranty is now my new free hobby.

I got served, and now it's on. You had me over a barrel, but now it is I who holds the cards. And people who hold cards do not get had over barrels. I'm going to get a working computer out of you nightmarish bastards if it's the last thing I do.

The moral to this story is that technical support is only a nightmare if you don't have a spare computer. So, stock up on PCs for a stress-free new year.

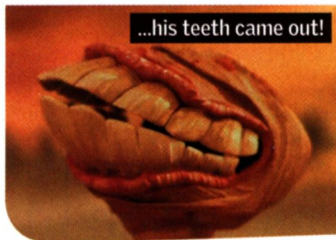
Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer



108 Demo pages

So many gift horses, it's difficult not to look in any of their mouths



110 News

One month in just two pages? It's a complete mockery.



112 Freeware

Steve Hogarty cannot and will not stop giving you free games



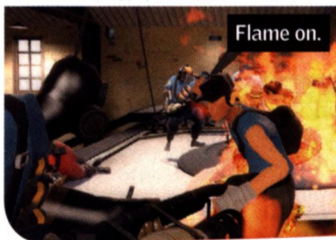
114 Freeplay

Mods for your face. Mods you will love for your gorgeous



116 Jackass

We try to break the - surprisingly breakable, as it turns out - Crisis demo



118 Online Zone

Printing out the internet, two pages at a time



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



312 HOURS*

Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up the free stuff on our free DVD



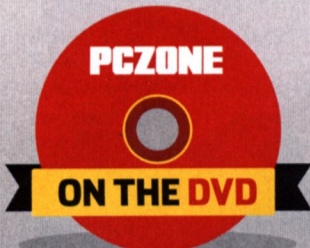
CRYSIS

Can you actually contain your happiness please? www.ea.com/crysis

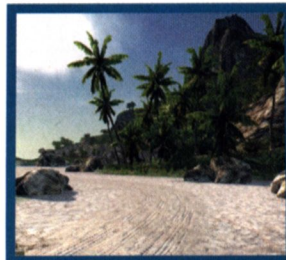
I ASKED STEVE whether *Crysis* was the natural enemy of the Chuckle Brothers. He replied that it was far too tenuous a joke to put in the strapline. Even after I'd explained "you know, cry, chuckle; brothers, sis," he said he understood what I was getting at, but that it was just strained and bordering on unfunny. Screw Steve. He wouldn't know an amazing joke if one crept onto his face, and drank from his mouth while he slept.

My personal grudges with Steve aside, here's the demo of the sickeningly awaited *Crysis*. Demo it may be, but you'll have instant access to your suit's powers, and a few of the weapon customisations. It's amazing, and a testament to Crytek, how quickly it feels perfectly natural to speed up to a Korean and punch him squarely in the everything.

Everything's as it should be – and while you won't be fighting off the aliens menace in this demo, the Korean soldiers have got better AI, anyway. If you think about it, we're actually doing you a massive favour.

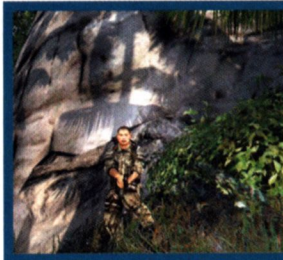


Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



MAXIMUM SPEED

When you're walking around in iron sights mode, you move more slowly than that turtle you shot in the legs at the beginning. But Maximum Speed allows you to sprint like a literal bastard.

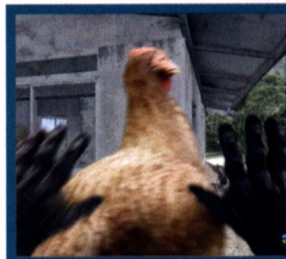


MAXIMUM ARMOUR

Don't want to waste your suit power sprinting around like a big old tit? Transform that power bar into regenerating armour. Perfect if you plan on getting shot in the torso for a while.

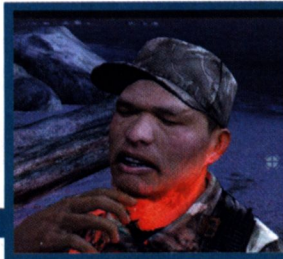


MAXIMUM KILLSUIT Engaging amazing mode



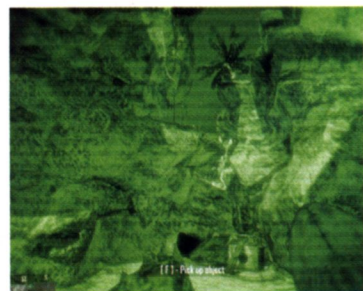
MAXIMUM CHICKEN

The French call chickens 'poulet', after the two things that chickens can actually do. The chickens in *Crysis* do neither, and picking them up doesn't let you glide off the top of building, like in *Zelda*.



MAXIMUM STRENGTH

For many, Maximum Strength means only one thing: punching jeeps. I couldn't wait to punch my first jeep, and was surprised when the jeep exploded, killing me.



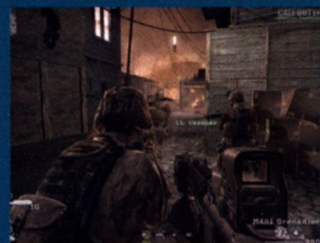
COD4: MODERN COMBAT

Thoroughly modern killing

www.charlieoscardelta.com

AS FAR AS opening scenes go, *Call of Duty 4*'s is action packed. No sooner have you been told what's duck, jump and how to run away from grenades, you'll be taking out tanks with a Javelin rocket launcher and night visioning your way through a building.

Shooting textured polygons hasn't had such a satisfying effect in ages – having played *Gears of War* and *TimeShift*, it's easy to forget that bullets are lethal.



Shooting someone in the nose should kill them right away, or at least reduce their ability to enjoy the pleasing aromas of the farmhouse kitchen.

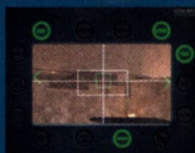
Perverts and bombs

The modern soldier has many toys to play with



NIGHT VISION

These games always make me want a real pair of night vision goggles, although I'd never be able to convince my other half they're not for sexy escapades.



JAVELIN

How many times will your sergeant patiently tell you to pick up the gun and destroy the tanks, without shooting you for insubordination? I reached 30.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

www.ut3.com

Necris cross'll make you rocket jump

IT TOOK ITS time, but *UT3* is finally poking its monstrous snout through the birthing hole. And after the triumph that is the PC version of *Gears of War*, Epic are driving a double-decker bus of excellence through the walls of everyone's emotions.

If Deathmatch is your thing, try the Heat Ray or Shangri-La maps. If you

want to try out the tanks and raptors on a Vehicle CTF map, then you've got Suspense to fanny about in.

If this doesn't cause you to slip your hands into a pair of cotton killing gloves, then you were never meant to wear those gloves, and you should take them back to the shop.



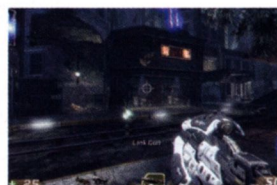
1 Praise be for massive arsenals. Sure, no-one can carry all that stuff, but this is *UT* – no-one's got time to discard weapons or deal with weapon changing animations.

2 Killing bots is one of the least satisfying things to do – it's even less fulfilling than taking a crowbar to Alyx Vance's stupid face.

3 Having said that, I love taking a crowbar to Alyx's face when I hear her say "Thank goodness you're alive, come this way and open a door."

Mapalicious

Tanks and guns – *UT3* has it all



BLOWN OFF

Heat Ray has launch pads, animated bus shelters and a big hologram of something that you won't look at, because someone'll shoot you.



VEHICLES

I went straight for the tank, before realising that I hate driving tanks. Luckily, I manned the turret, which I actually hate even more.

THE BEST OF THE REST



HELLGATE: LONDON

Hi, I'm some portal-opening demonic entity, and it was hoped that my arrival would herald an FPS re-invention of *Diablo 2*. Sadly, it's not as good as we'd hoped, but this is the perfect opportunity to see for yourself whether the game'll tickle your own peculiar tastes. Play for free, while we try to remember why we bother reviewing things in the first place.

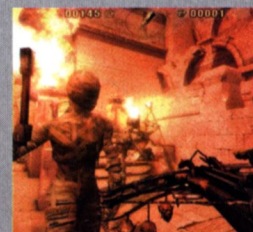
www.hellgatelondon.com



TIMESHIFT

Hi, I'm the Time Princess, and I grant you three powers. First, you can do bullet time. Second, you can make time stop and flick the bird at your enemies' faces, and they won't even know. Third, you can briefly rewind time, which you won't use all that often to be honest, but it does complete the set of video controls. Please don't abuse your powers, or the Trumpet Kingdom will never see another rainbow!

www.timeshiftgame.com



PAINKILLER: OVERDOSE

Hi, I'm a retired major with dubious sexual tastes. There's a certain, unnameable thrill that visits me, whenever I'm approached by a man with circular saws for hands, and my heart skips a beat when I find myself surrounded by 10 identical zombies in hard-hats, who appear bent on my demise. I'll wager *Painkiller*'ll have me going off like a wet, sexy bomb.

www.projectoverdose.com



JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

www.gamershell.com/download_21626.shtml



How hot can a subtitle be? First there's "hot", which is pretty hot. Then you've got "nights", which is when people have sex, the hottest things humans do. Then there's "import" which is how you get sexy-hot photos. This must be the hottest download ever!

ZOO TYCOON 2: EXTINCT ANIMALS

www.gamershell.com/download_21513.shtml



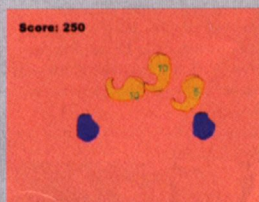
"Excuse me sir, your mastodon is dry humping my dodo." That's just one of the sound files we're hoping to hear from this expansion. I guess we'll just have to play the game to found out if our dreams could come true.

SNIPPETS



LAST CHAOS FOR UT2004

chaotic.beyondunreal.com
Chaotic Dreams have just released their final build of the *ChaosUT2* mod. Available as a full download, and with a new Vehicle Capture The Flag map, it's the rounding up and the kissing off of their long-standing project. We'll be covering it in more detail next month. (Any excuse to play *UT2004* is a good excuse.)



HERMIES

snipurl.com/hermies
Remember *Boobza Sports*: a woman playing ping pong with her tit? It was a... huge phenomenon from the mind at www.jazzuo.com, who is deep in development of his new game, *Hermies*. We won't describe the game to you; the video explains it all far better than any feeble words ever could. Brace yourself for five minutes of what we can only call adorably wrongsexual meeping perversion.

ACCIDENTALLY FREE

Crysis demo contains far more than it possibly should

www.ea.com/crysis

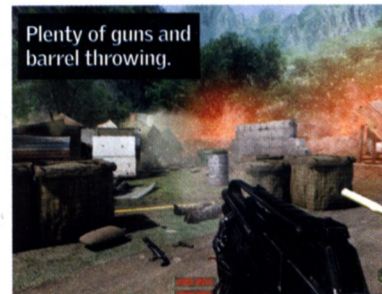


CRYTEK HAS GIVEN away more than they intended with the *Crysis* demo. The very demo that's on the cover disc. The very cover disc that you may have ripped off and thrown into the bin, because it didn't fit into your pocket and you bought the mag before going on a train.

Not only are all the sound files included, giving you a chance to start posting spoiling blogs about the plot, all the guns from the game are a tiny hack away. Simply locate and download the map titled "demofunmap #5", replace the existing level.pak in the Game\Levels\Island folder, and enjoy these game-wrecking treats. Hopefully, everyone will now be torn between wanting to see everything, and not wanting to ruin one of the year's best shooters.

On a less morally ambiguous note, there's also a hack to turn on all the 'very high' DirectX 10 effects on a machine running *Windows XP*. That's the kind of hack we like – the kind that de-trousers that irritating faked exclusivity, and delivers a stout wedgie to the way companies feign genuine progress in an attempt to force upgrades. (NVIDIA and the damnable Pixel Shader 3, I'm squinting at you.)

In order to pull this one off, you just need to pull out a few settings files, and tell *Crysis* to use the DX10-exclusive "Very High" settings in regular DX9 "High" mode. We're not Luddites here – we love needless technology, and *Vista's* growing on us – it's just the trickery and lies that get on our tits. Full details, along with the files you need to change all prepped up for you, are here – snipurl.com/crysis_hack



BOOTY SHAKER

Pirates of the Caribbean Online now online, now

disney.go.com/pirates/online

IF YOU'RE ONE of the few people not suffering from piratical cool fatigue, and you want to play a fairly entertaining but simplistic MMO, then you might want to... no, hang on. There're a couple of other conditions. You've got to be happy with lag madness, disconnections, a queue to enter the world and – to add a kick in the nuts to that wait – you've got to be happy with watching a video of the most attractive members of the development team being kooky while you queue.

If you're down with that – and animated banner ads unless you pay \$10 a month – then you're ready to set sail with Jack Sparrow.

To be less disparaging for a moment, the opening scenes do a good job of balancing tutorial with world exposition, and my random clicks on the character generation sliders gave me a distinctive



character with the frankly excellent name Jeffrey Dampeagle. If your fascination with Sparrow's universe has taken root in the mentally ill part of the brain that

we all have, then you should definitely download this now. You can play poker against other pirates and everything. Otherwise, go out dancing.

EA AREN'T MAKING FREE GAMES But are kinda considering the concept, in hypothetical theory

www.electronicarts.com

FIRST, CODEMASTERS ANNOUNCED

that their new releases would be available free, or as good as – *Clive Barker's Jericho* only fingered \$1 out of any Americans willing to sign up to the GameTap service. Then, Ubisoft made select titles from their back catalogue free, for Americans, again, realising the value this would add to any franchises with forthcoming titles.

Now, even EA's CEO John Riccitello is joining in, spurred by the fact, perhaps, that EA just declared losses of \$195million in three months.

Riccitello didn't explicitly suggest EA games would drop in price any time soon, although he did suggest that current prices couldn't last, and pointed to China, where the games are freer than the people who live there.

We can't help but think we're on the cusp of something advert-saturated and cheap; but given that games are already gently infused with ads, how many more – and how much more intrusive – are they going to have to be, to bring the cost of the game down to zero? And will anyone outside of bloody America ever feel the benefit?

SNIPPETS



PAC MAN PUGS

snipurl.com/pacmanpugs
Once you've bred a dog with a mushed face and poor respiratory functions, you'll be looking for more ways to bend nature to your amoral aesthetics. And of all the things you can do to demean your animals in front of a crowd, dressing them up like the cast of Pac-Man is the only thing we'd say is cool.



£200 LAPTOP: ALMOST FREE

www.asus.com
You probably won't be able to use it for games, but it's so stupid-cheap that it deserves a mention. Sure, it's got a 7in screen with a 800 x 480 screen, but it weighs less than a bag of sugar and you could fit it inside a massive pocket.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH THE WITCHER VI.1



'A child in epilogue cutscene doesn't look like badly sewn young Frankenstein'

Movie of the month BRÜTAL LEGEND

When you get excited about games like *Crysis* or *BioShock*, the excitement's based on what you imagine it's going to be like. With *Brütal Legend*, you don't have to worry about that. You know it's going to be bloody awesome, so write off the next few months and just sit there, until Double Fine finishes the damn game.

We'd totally make out with this guy if it meant Tim Schafer would pat our heads.

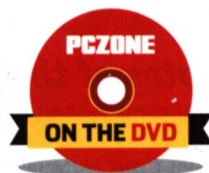
Basically what's happening here is, he's chopping people in half with an axe.

Now he's driving into a sand worm. Oh, and the music is Black Sabbath's *Mob Rules*.

And... rest, surrounded by ghoulish rock chicks from the pre-emo era (aka goths).



Freeware



Steve Hogarty is rich, now let him show you how to be rich

This month, get lost, go hungry and train monkeys to do our bidding, on a desert island, play yet another version of *Asteroids* yet again, do some brain-hurting puzzling puzzles, get really disconcerted by a woman yelling at us about cancer, and play *Portal* in 2D.

STRANDED II **Wilson! Wilson! Wilson! etc**

Dev: Unreal Software | stranded.unrealsoftware.de

I GOT LOST on a beach twice. The first time I waded out really far along a cliff face in Majorca and stood on a rock and cut my foot, and the saltwater stung it, and then the sand on the beach made it sting even more. The second time I was on a cliff again, and I was trying to climb up when I became paralysed with fear and couldn't go any higher. I also couldn't go back down, so I stayed there on the cliff for a while.

So *Stranded II* struck a chord with me, because in it you're lost on a desert island and must find the bare necessities before you die of exposure. Once you're not immediately about to die, you go about creating a semblance of a lifestyle in the harsh environment. At first it's extremely difficult – punching crabs does nothing, and scratching at trees gives you piles of leaves and bark – but persevere (and combine a rock and a stick to make a hammer) and you'll be building primitive shelters, storage areas, and camp fires.

Combine objects you find to create or improve your tools, use these tools to



As far as freeware goes, it's a looker.

rapidly gather resources, and go from being a bearded Tom Hanks-type man, dragging logs across the island one at a time, to a master of the wilderness, harnessing nature's power to your own dastardly ends, like an evil Ray Mears.

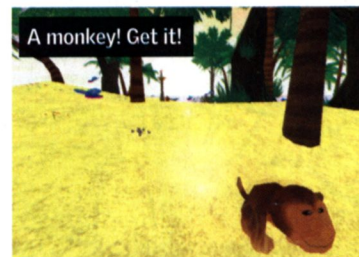
You can train monkeys to collect food for you, once you've sorted out your survival, and you can pluck cotton straight from the tropical sheep littered about the land.

This complex game is one of the best and most addictive freeware titles I've played. Think *Harvest Moon* – but with the threat of a horrible dehydrated death constantly looming over you – and you'll begin to understand the appeal. I give it five stars, or something.

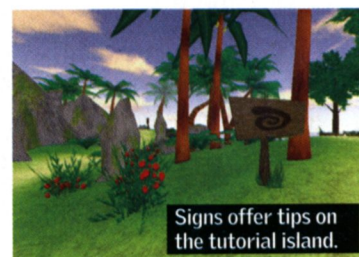
Go from being a bearded man to a master of the wilderness, harnessing nature's power to your own ends



Those clever neolithics.



A monkey! Get it!



Signs offer tips on the tutorial island.



MSOIDS Meteor-asteroids!

Dev: Cactus | www.cactus-soft.co.nr

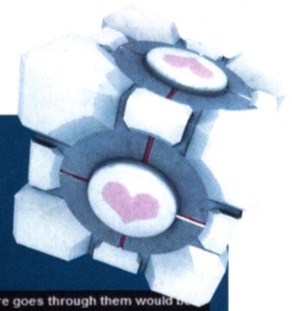
ANOTHER ASTEROIDS REMAKE is sitting on our DVD, innocent and unsuspecting, mewling "where am I?" as it paws at its folder's walls. "Who's out there?" it yelps. Nobody responds, not even the *Crysis* demo, which is far too busy to care about a little freeware game.

Who'll ever know of how its unique graphical style gives it a charm worth playing for? Nobody. Who will care about its jittery explosions, and utterly brilliant soundtrack? No one – except you.

Maybe you'll install *MSOIDS*, and experience the thrilling action it provides. It asks for nothing in return, save a double-click every now and then. Maybe even a single-click, followed by a tap of the return key. It's all the same to *MSOIDS*.

PORTAL: THE FLASH VERSION

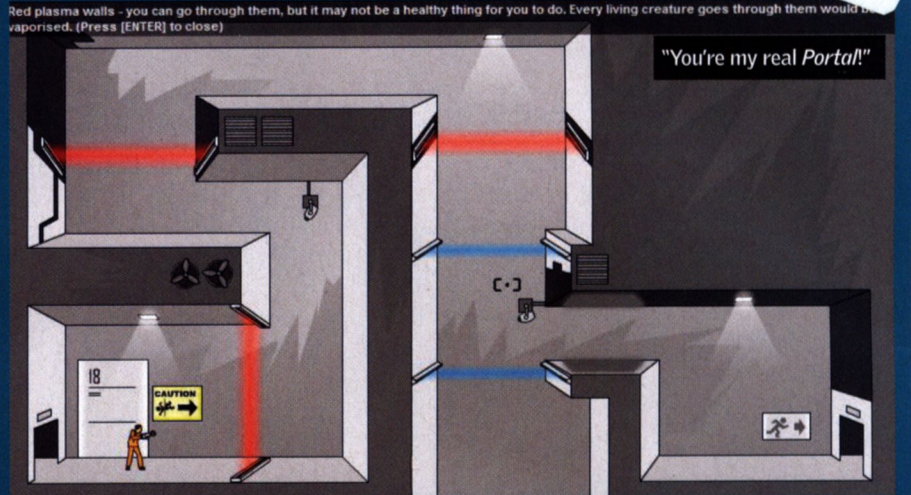
Now there's a hole in the sky Dev: We Create Stuff | portal.wecreastuff.com



THIS FLASH VERSION of one of the finest PC games ever created is an awful blight on all that is good. It is an attempt to usurp the brilliance and finesse of the most ingeniously crafted piece of art that gaming has ever witnessed, and through its clumsy emulation of what it thinks *Portal* is about, based on nothing more than conjecture gleaned from the original prerelease gameplay movies, it succeeds in crippling itself under the sheer excellence of the game it's attempting to replicate.

Right, with that out of my system – the completely unofficial flash version of *Portal* is actually an addictive jaunt through, as I mentioned, puzzles based on what was seen in the *Portal* movie Valve released. It's all fairly accurate too, except for that key element of humour so expertly delivered by the real *Portal*. This annoys me in the same way that the American version of *Men Behaving Badly* annoys me – it takes something good, and then tries to do it another way that isn't good.

Actually, I don't like *Men Behaving Badly* anyway, so this analogy fails.

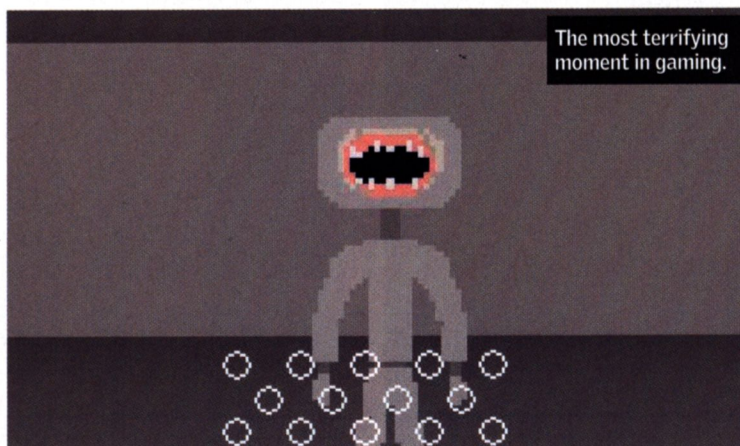
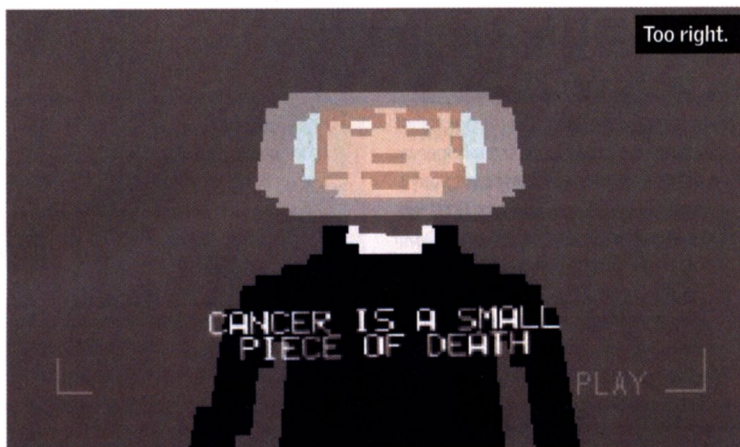


MONDO MEDICALS

Doctor, doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains... Dev: Cactus | www.cactus-soft.co.nr

THIS GAME IS disconcerting. I never thought a puzzle could be ominous, but the opening puzzle in the first-person, erm, puzzler, not only puzzled me, but made me feel uneasy. I'll tell you what the answer is, because you'll most likely get bored and quit otherwise: the introductory text asks you to follow the arrows to the exit, but try as you might, the arrows lead you in circles. The trick is to go in the opposite direction, which causes a door to ominously appear around one corner. Through that door, a woman screams at you about cancer. See? Disconcerting.

Mondo Medicals is mostly done in grey tones, and the viewpoint shifts gently, never quite staying still. The sounds are muffled and digitised, like a sad robot screaming into a pillow, and the puzzles are deliberately misleading at times. It's nightmarish at its best, slightly tedious at it worst, but at all times *Mondo Medicals* is always weird and wonderful.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

CLICK-DRAG-TYPE 3



fizzlebot.com/cdt3.php

I USUALLY STICK any old crap of a webgame in this spot (no offence, *Yeti Penguin Tosser Olympics 4*), but this month I've found a webgame worthy of a font size at least two points larger than what you're looking at now. *Click-Drag-Type 3* is a flash puzzler in which all of the solutions are solved through clicking, dragging, and typing.

Very few clues are given across the 15 puzzles, and solutions usually come to you through blind experimentation. The puzzles are amazingly inventive too, and completing them is as pleasing as licking the lid of a pot of clotted cream. It is really that good.

If you're like me and work with the most dull, characterless folk imaginable, this is a good way to escape them. Especially that Ed Zitron guy.

FREEPLAYPLAY!



77
His *Portal* addiction cost him his life.

SUIT 56

Play: MOD



MINERVA: METASTASIS 3



Log on the other reason *Half-Life 2* is great www.hylobatidae.org/minerva | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

WHEN YOU NAME your mod after the Roman Goddess of poetry – and not a kind of envelope, as I'd lazily imagined before running a Google check – you're burdening yourself with high expectations. And with the third, double-length chapter of this trilogy of mysterious single-player mods, those expectations are fulfilled.

Unlike *HL2*, *Minerva: Metastasis 3* is not so much a corridor, as a knot of progress – your path crosses itself

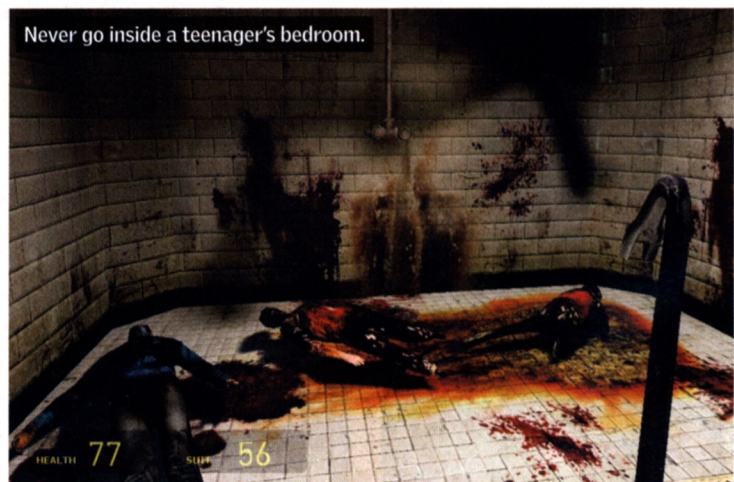
regularly (and economically) without ever feeling contrived. That progress is punctuated by messages from Minerva, an officious entity who sneers at your animalism, and goads you into finishing the game. Her messages put you in your place; a murderous insect whose acts are as distasteful as they are essential.

Her weariness seems to extend to the game itself. She notes that the door you need to go through is locked with a tangle of the eyes. It resonates

with *Episode 2's* self-referential – and almost apologetic – Vortigaunt in the antlion mines. Hell, if you're stuck with a gaming cliché, why not acknowledge it?

Minerva isn't voice acted, and that's possibly a wise move; the right voice would be amazing, but any of the millions of wrong voices would be disastrous for the sense of drama. And that's where Adam Foster wins – he can make an excellent mod, because he seems admirably aware of what's shit.

Built from the existing *HL2* palette – it's an entirely familiar world, apart from the mysterious utterances of your puppet master – *Minerva* has improved with each iteration. This final chapter has such control of pace, intelligent use of resources and locations, and well-measured difficulty that even Valve should doff their caps and might want to take notes. There's no excuse not to play this; it might fall short of Valve's official games, but Foster's closing the gap.



CSS SCI FI



Play: **MAP**



What do all the letters mean, mother? www.counter-strike.net | Mod for: Counter-strike: Source

IT'S ALL CAPS, they've left the colon out of *Counter-Strike: Source*, making it feel more like a futuristic web standard than a mod, and when you look at the title it's just a mess of senseless letters.

However, it's one of the more customisable mods, thanks to using the *SMOD* as its basis. The installation process involves 12 screens of options to let you choose exactly how difficult, restrictive and processor-intensive you want your experience. Then, it's into the *CS* maps, using *HL2*'s (somewhat limited) squad system to perform single-player hostage rescues, Combine elimination, and so on. Scraping a victory won't be a problem; but rescuing all those hostages is going to take skills we don't have.

There were a couple of glitches – a jeep started playing a massive version of pinball with the street and my character's head – but the missions are designed to be challenging, making it well worth the download, especially when it's a free offline download from our cover disc.



CS goes all *Rainbow Six* with this hostage-rescue mod.



That's a lot of denim.

Play: **MOD**



Being held up in the bog: a common problem if you don't eat roughage.



ALTERED REALITY



Next stop, Mudchute

www.alteredreality.altervista.org.com
| Mod for: *Prey*

THE ANAL FIXATED world of *Prey*, with its spinch-t-doors and corrosive excrement, stopped short of Tommy having a shit. Not so in *Altered Reality*, which starts with Tommy doing just that. And narrating the process, as the aliens attack.

This single-person addendum to *Prey*'s storyline isn't going to set the world on fire but it's a fair distraction. Just remember that you look down to use the doors, otherwise you'll be stuck in the toilet. Like I was. Stuck in the toilet with my half-finished stools.

Play: **MOD**



DM-UNEARTHED

V2 If it's night, have a bite. If it's day, run away



www.vgpro.com/file/dmuneearthedzip | Map for: *UT2004*

IT'S ONLY ONE deathmatch level for *UT2004*, but it's slightly more interesting than most, thanks to the Necris Bloodthirsters.

This is a non-canon vampiric species that can't venture outside during the sunlight hours, restricting their actions to a small arena until nightfall, when the

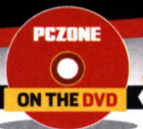
whole map opens up to the action. The Necris team is at a disadvantage, and the designer recommends this is balanced out by team numbers or fanning about behind the scenes. Either way, it's a little gasp of fresh air for *UT2004*, before the new kid comes along and kicks out the walls.



Time to break out the stakes and garlic.

PC ZONE JACKASS

CRYSIS DEMO HI-JINKS!



Fun and games in *Crysis* paradise!

CRYSIS HAS RECEIVED such long-term hype that it's almost a shock to be playing it. It's especially a shock to be playing with such mediocre frame rates from such powerful machines, but who needs that anisotropic shit, anyway? After finishing the demo, and knowing that it was due to be on this month's cover DVD, we decided to start again, and find what fun the tropics have to offer the game-breaking mind.

CRAB SKEET

THE SETUP:

The crabs that you'll see ducking in and out of the sea are what Mr T would call "scuttly suckers". We're all for nature, but when we see things scuttling around on the floor, coming out of the sea, and probably indulging themselves in some filthy reproductive process that only the revoltingly decadent crab could think of, it makes us want to crouch. It makes us want to crouch down and punch them to death. Then we picked them up, hurled them into the sky, and shot them.

THE RESULT:

Pick up a crab. You may want to shoot it first, to stop that infernal scuttling. Switch to Maximum Strength, throw the crab into the air, and let rip with your guns.

WE RECKON:

At first we thought the guns in *Crysis* were too realistic (read 'inaccurate') to pick off a high-speed airborne crab. Not true! We drilled that sonofabitch right through! Decapods: beware.



Flat roofs make the prettiest mess.

And they're more stable.

BUILDING BUCKAROO

THE SETUP:

Physics in *Crysis* are good, but construction skills on the island are shockingly poor. Some of your surroundings are fragile to the point of nonsense, you'd think even a casually slouching sentry could bring the house down. So how about a coffee blender on the roof?

THE RESULT:

Players take it in turns to pick up an item, jump onto the roof of a building (using Maximum Strength jumps), then drop the item on the roof. Once you've jumped off the roof, and as long as your item doesn't roll off, the turn passes to your friend. The person in control of Nomad when the shockingly frail buildings collapse is the loser, and has to say "I lost at Building Buckaroo, and consequently am shit".

WE RECKON:

The trick to Building Buckaroo is learning which parts of the building are weakest, as they're not uniformly stable. Don't blame us - blame the curious designs of cowboy builders, and make sure you have a go on the flat roofs, which are more solid.

Crabs: nature's gossips.

That's the last sunbather's nut sack you'll pinch.

PCZONE PCZONE

He's stuck on max armour, LOL.



He's pointing where he wants you to go! He thinks he's helping.



TURTLE ESCORT

THE SETUP:

Inspired by *Episode Two's* gnome-launching mission, in which you're asked to escort a wee terra cotta fella into a rocket finale, we decided to carry the first thing we saw – which was a turtle – through the demo.

THE RESULT:

For a man in a jumpy punch suit, this should have been easy – but it turned out to be nearly impossible. The first time we put the turtle down, the recoil killed us. We're not kidding. It's a good game this, but it can behave strangely. Plus, a living turtle is considerably lighter than a dead turtle, which implies that a turtle's soul is lighter than air. Finally, you can't shoot when holding a turtle (although you can when holding a Korean by his neck), so you have to put the fella down to attack. And more than once, when we put the turtle down, he rocketed off at a speed that can only be summarised as unturtle-like. Minutes of searching the beaches with the torch attachment later, we realised he'd completely left the game.

WE RECKON:

Crytek: sort out your turtle physics, not to mention your turtle persistence.

GARAGE SALE

THE SETUP:

Making piles of things is a time-honoured tradition in *Jackass*. And in their military lives, the soldiers have amassed a massive bunch of tin cups, wicker baskets and corrugated metal we thought it'd be fun to make a massive pile of everything in the game.

THE RESULT:

We were wrong. Until we realised that we could make a big pile of dead Koreans. New gaming morality means you're not allowed to defile corpses by arranging them into massive piles, but there's nothing stopping you picking them up by the neck, and slinging them into a pile. In no time, we'd built ourselves a mound of twitching soldier bodies that could only be described as a war crime.

WE RECKON:

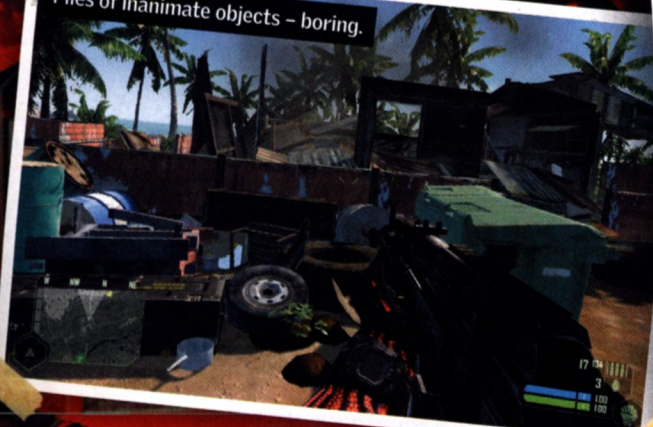
Valuable lesson learned – abusing human beings is more fun than abusing non-sentient beings.

SEND US YOURS!

Are you aware of a game with nifty spawning commands that we're not? Have you ever arranged *Far Cry* mercs in a vast island-cordoning circle-jerk? If so, you should ask yourself why – but not before sending us a screenshot or video. We'll stick the best up in a blog at www.pczone.co.uk. Email letters@pczone.co.uk with 'PCZ Jackass' in the title



Piles of inanimate objects – boring.



Piles of twitching rag dolls – fun. Also moving.





Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk



Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just hit www.pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Shakermaker07 doesn't like *Crysis*, but whose fault is that?

Does anyone else think *Crysis* kinda... sucked? The graphics were by no standards amazing. It seems like *Far Cry* with guys in suits, and the suits are fairly crap. OMG you can spring quick for four seconds. Armour? I'll be jiggered, a game that gives you extra armour. Why didn't anyone else ever think of that? Strength? Punch something, jump, and don't expect to use it again until some Korean dude has shot you. Oh, and the cloak. Wander around for a couple of yards before it runs out, and bam. Every guy in the base knows where you are. This isn't as great as it should be, this is pretty boring and standard.

shakermaker07

Crysis plays like *Far Cry*, which means that by and large, if you're seen, you're in trouble. You're never forced to be stealthy but it's usually a good idea.

csdaveuk

Do you know if the density of the vegetation affects the enemies as

well? Usually you can't see jack all but they can spot you perfectly. Pisses me off something chronic.

plughead

Play it more and discover skills to go with your suit: When speed running, jump just before you run out of energy. Cloaks last a long time when you're still, and don't shoot while cloaked if you need to recloak quickly.

apophis_dd

Your mum's suit powers are sub par.

Reverend_Joseph

Super-speed is my favourite. If used wisely, not just as a glorified mode of transport, you can pop between cover and move around much faster than the bad guys can follow you. It's great for getting close enough to those machine gun emplacements to pull the baddies straight out of 'em.

SunScramble

Right on the bonnet.



I tried to put an exploding barrel on the back of a jeep and draw the gunner's fire into it, so he'd blow himself up. I got halfway to the jeep before I was seen. Soon, I was holding a burning barrel. I swapped to super strength, and lobbed the barrel. A grenade lands at my feet, and I super jump off. The grenade explodes, the barrel goes up, taking out the jeep and surrounding shooters. I land in a quietly smouldering camp, victorious and smirking. THAT'S the mark of a good game.

csdaveuk

ON THE BLOG

PCZONE 2007

What's been happening on *ZONE*'s web diary this month...

FIRST, OUR PRODUCTION

editor, the lovely Clare, sods off. Then Suzy runs away, and we're forced to watch her enter the land of respectability and fair pay. Now, we are men. Manly men, who stop playing games only to sing in barbershop quartet harmonics about how much we'd love to caress a bosom. Manly men who give away spectral mounts, and who blog with possibly-ironic enthusiasm about an awards ceremony they weren't invited to, portals, and links they were just sent.

Yes sir, it's a manly stink in these parts these days. Not that we really like to acknowledge any other magazines exist, (in case you start getting ideas about reading them), but with the departure of *Official Xbox 360*'s production editor, there are no women on our floor. If something doesn't change soon this place'll be like a stinking boat full of galley slaves.



PCZONE PUBCAST!
Round 4 now available on the *ZONE* website and iTunes!

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our 'PC ZONE Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at letters@pczone.co.uk will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

FIGHT CLUB

Join us in 2Fort for napalm frolics

SO TF2 ONLY comes with six maps. Who cares, when you can spend 80 minutes in 2Fort, and people don't even seem to notice? This month's Fight Club was spread across two servers again, with Will heading up the Hydro server, and Log performing suspiciously well on 2Fort. With Log's soldier receiving some solid healing from Play_r, he even secured an enemy briefcase, which is absolutely unheard of. There were some fine dominations and revenges by Trash, Haagens21 and Enema, but the crowning moment came in Hydro's group photo, when Captain Kurtz ran in and set the reds on fire. All was as it should be.

The GGs flowed like honeydew, and although next month we'll be playing *COD4*, we'll probably end up playing more *TF2* in the meantime, just for shits and giggles. Join our Steam Community group for further warnings: steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz



Blues and Reds: will they ever get along?



Ah. Right.

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

ZONE CHAT



Overwhelming and disorganised, just like your face

THIS MONTH, THE chat was moved from IRC and to our Steam group's chatroom. And found the chat on Steam is three times more active than on



IM Zeng Rush.

IRC. With half the number of users, the chat went by at a staggering rate – so much so, that we're going to take next month's a little more seriously, and come at it with some structure. We had over 30 people talking at the same time on around 15 different subjects, and Ed Zed just typing things like "You twat!" without making it clear who he was talking to, it was an hour of well-meaning chaos. Next month, expect itineraries, subjects and all that stuff in the Steam Community Group, at steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz. (And Ed was talking to Steve.)

How to join in!



If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy fighting fires in East London armed with a special hose – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows – some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
- HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk
- PREY**
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
- BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- TEAM FORTRESS 2**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135



Holiday greetings!

Swim you miniature people!

Here's me taking part in a kinship swimming race across Evendim lake in *Lord Of The Rings Online*! It was a fantastic time, though a few entrants did go under, never to be seen again...

Titania
(Katie Francis)



Wish You Were Here!

/w want mount.

After winning our *WOW* competition, this is Baray84's character riding his new spectral mount around the entrance to Orgrimmar. Enjoy the jealous whispers, and demanding Dutchmen asking you how to get one...

Baray84
(Mohammed Ashraf)

Retro ZONE

Jon Blyth puts on his big hair and flips out over automated foes

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION



EMULATION OF THE MONTH

BUT HOW?

You can play *Impossible Mission* in its original state using the *VICE* emulator. This emulates a number of Commodore products – you'll be wanting the Commodore 64. Fire up the emulator, use the 'Autostart Disk/Tape Image' in the File menu, and point the browser to the unzipped *IM.d64* file (*VICE* doesn't read inside Zip files, like *MAME*). Then go to Settings/Joystick Settings to set up your keyboard layout. *IM* uses Joystick Port 2, so don't let that pointless quirk trip you up. You'll be doing jigsaws and jumping over robots in no time (which means about 15 minutes).

Links...

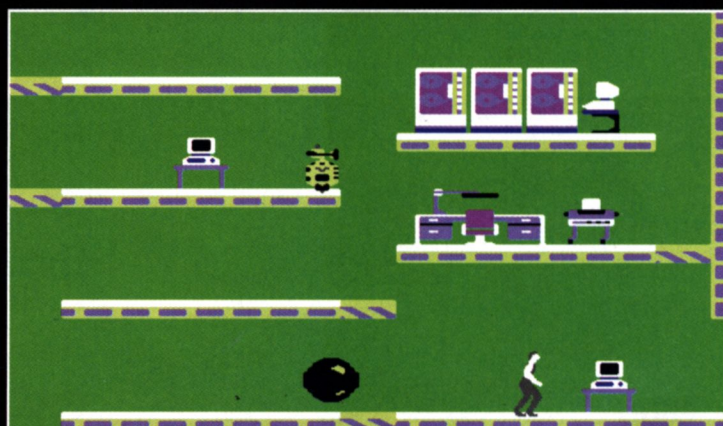
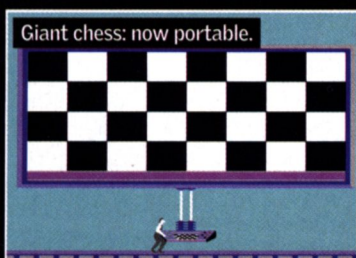
1 www.viceteam.org
Home of the Commodore *VICE* emulator
classicgaming.gamespy.com/View.php?view=gmfiles.detail&id=85
This is a web address, not a link. So you can't click it.

THE MOST INSTANTLY memorable feature of *Impossible Mission* is the voice. Even if you hated the game, chances are you'll remember the robotic, yet slightly camp voice of Professor Elvin Atombender declaring, "Another visitor. Stay a while. Stay... forever." Why didn't that sample take off as a doorbell chime?

Before we pink-tint our pupils, wipe the DS rerelease from your mind, because to enjoy *Impossible Mission* you've got to be in that '80s frame of gaming mind, and having posh backdrops only embarrasses the simplicity of the original game. Not to mention the fact that 12 buttons and a touchscreen is overkill for a character that can only run, use lifts, and jump.

But here's why it was great, so listen to me. Atombender's robots, although they looked identical, had dozens of different movement patterns. From the static, weaponless robot that you almost felt sorry for, to the bastard who'd cop a look over his shoulder and scoot towards you if you came near. Playing a room required you to learn what robots you were dealing with.

The tension was excellently measured; the time it took to search furniture for keycards forced you to balance robot avoidance with looking down the back of a sofa – a major reason of death was because you nearly had it.



Chances are you'll remember the robotic, yet slightly camp voice, of Professor Elvin Atombender

Jim Connelly and Jon Freeman released a load of classic s in their day (like the *California Games*), many of which could be said to be more groundbreaking or intelligent than

Impossible Mission. But they don't have a Stephen Hawkins sound-a-like lisping "Destroy him, my robots" when you enter a room. And you can't say they do, because they don't.

ALSO CONSIDER

Some other games from the same brains

STARFLEET ORION
Connelly and Freeman's first game. Before founding Epyx, they played D&D – which a lot of people did back then.

TAX DODGE
Freeman's *Pac-Man* clone. Making these was an '80s rite of passage, like watching *Porky's II: The Next Day*.

TEMPLE OF ASPHAI
Epyx's name was made with *Temple of Asphai*, an RPG that uses the manual to give atmospheric descriptions.

ARCHON
Fantasy chess that takes speed, time of attack, and hit points into account. *Archon* is an '80s strategy classic.

CALIFORNIA GAMES
So well-remembered, it's been released on the DS. Even if that version manages to be worse than the original.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 2
With themed furniture, more musical puzzles and more types of robot, *IM2* was another puzzly masterpiece.

NOW & THEN

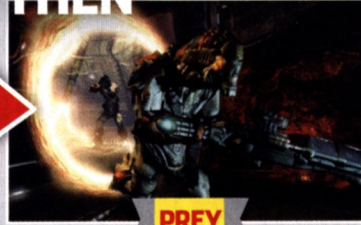
Did a nice lady with a gun really come from anus doors?

NOW



PORTAL

THEN



PREY



RELEASED IN 2006, you're probably thinking "Hang on, *Prey* isn't retro, get out of my kitchen!" But let's not forget that *Prey*'s origins were in a previous decade.

Long before *Narbacular Drop* wowed the Valve Corporate sponge into absorbing its whole ruddy development team, and back when Aperture Science was still focusing their research on shower curtains and the Counter-Heimlich Manoeuvre, 3D Realms were working hard on including convincing portals into the gameplay of an FPS.

Prey threw a lot of enjoyable stuff at the player, but the portals were a bit of a disappointment – they were essentially just push doors.

All that remains now is for a game to combine the gorgeous puzzles of *Portal*, the space-bending shooter action of *Prey*, with the storytelling finesse of *Half-Life*. Oh, and the music of *Super Mario Bros 2*. Is that too much to ask?

And before we get in a nit-picking contest about who had the first portal, let's not forget the tunnel in *Pac-Man*.

PLAY IT!

As *Prey* is still in the shops, you should buy a copy. But *Narbacular Drop* is a free download, so we've put that on the cover disc for you.

- 1 Pucker the cover DVD's cardboard sleeve with a gentle pinch, before hooking your most dextrous finger into the pivotal hole. Tease the DVD from its home.
- 2 Cajole your computer's DVD tray into the open position, using any means at your disposal. Once open, shove in the disc and push the tray closed using all your physical might.
- 3 Using the menu systems, navigate to the bit of the disc where *Narbacular Drop* is, using the buttons that seem most appropriate.
- 4 Play the best free portal-themed game of the last three years.



MAME FRAME METAL SLUG

Developer: SNK | Year: 1996

FOR ALL ITS charm – and *Metal Slug* is as charming as the run-and-gun genre gets – you never really imagine there to be much in the way of plot, but you couldn't be more wrong! Turns out the Rebellion vs Army plot is loaded with disillusionment, grief, a whole future history and all that involved shit. You wouldn't know it from the game, but apparently it's there.

As usual with the designed-for-profit coin-ops, the game lures you in with an easy first stage, before tightening the thumbscrews to the point where you can't even see where you are, let alone avoid the bullets. The amount of continues I used in *MAME* would have taken up a

month's pay – but that says as much about my pay as it does my lack of skills. *Metal Slug: Super Vehicle-001* (to give it its full name) has some of the best sprites around: soldiers conducting an argument over a bemused pig; a tank that looks cheeky when it ducks to avoid laser beams; and the soldiers who laugh when you die, only to look terrified when you drop in with a continue.

Metal Slug has so much personality it's easy to forgive the disappointing final boss. To be fair, the developers probably weren't anticipating infinite credits whores like me playing through on *MAME*, so they probably never expected anyone to get there.



METAL SLUG



WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator*, currently emulating over 3,500 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.



They've got names: they're people.

BACK IN THE DAY...



EQ IS FOREVER

By Ed Zitron

Eighteen stone and soaked in the sweat of 15 hours of being taped to the sofa (I played on a laptop, you see), I sat like a beached whale, wishing it would end.

Wrapped in the third year of my *EverQuest* addiction, I sat and contemplated – what was I really doing with my time? This game was terrible! It had terrible graphics. It had terrible gameplay. I was doing the same things over, and over again. This was the worst game of all time! I knew that day that I should quit.

I would quit. I would free myself from this elven vice, these raids, and these horrible poopsocking individuals.

I would be fre- ooh, a new sword. Oh well, sod that.

God I love *EverQuest*.



These are people too, but you kill them.



SUPERTEST

2007: A SUPERTEST ODDITY

What exactly were the most vital trends and events of this past year?

YOUR VIEW

Last month we gabbed on about which games stood the test of time, and were still as playable today as they were when clever men with beards coded them in times past.

GOLDEN AGE

I'd agree with *Fallout/Baldur's Gate*, and recently buying the *Fallout* collection has showed me they've aged well. I'm afraid to go back to *Deus Ex* in case it's not as good as I remember.

G_hughes

FOOTIE NOT CYBORGS

Everyone is expecting me to say *Deus Ex*, and I'll admit that although the gameplay is still more intelligent than 99 per cent of the FPS games and RPGs out there, the original Unreal Engine has aged badly. So I'll plump for *Sensible Soccer*.

Andy_Monahan

GRAPHICS SUXXOR

The thing about many modern games is that the graphics are sold as integral to the experience so games are bound to start feeling dated. Games that last are ones where the graphics only need to be 'functional', like *Alpha Centauri*, which I still play from time to time.

-Doomus-

XENOCIDE

UFO: Enemy Unknown is the one game I go back to over and over. There's just so much to it: base planning, research, stock control and fighting bug-eye aliens.

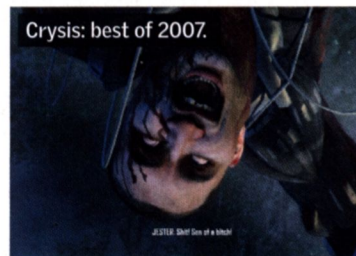
Big Bottom

SO WHAT WAS important in the year of our lord 2007? Well PC gamers are a grumpy lot, so it was no surprise that even in a year so jam-packed with massive releases the minute the tape started rolling we embarked on a goliath bitch-fest. Yes *Crysis*, *BioShock* and *The Orange Box* all came out and wowed us – but what about the bugs, console conversions, endless grinding and delays elsewhere in the year? Man, we're hard to please. Even Log who normally converses only in kissy noises and excited squawks.

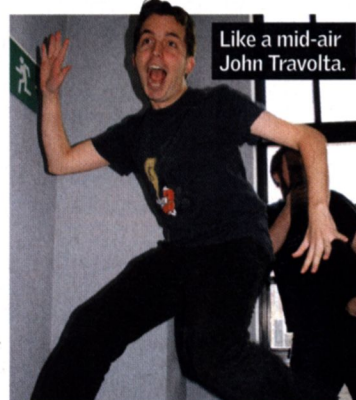
That's not to say we didn't do backflips over GLaDOS, Rapture and the ragdolls of *Call of Duty 4* though – killing people in that felt real didn't it? Speaking of which, because we're afraid of the moral minority this month's Supertest has been censored a mite, but we're sticking the full unexpurgated chat online (with all its 'can we say that?' moments) just to show we're not total 'fraidy cats.



"Eek a mouse!"

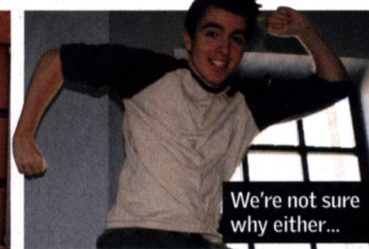


Crysis: best of 2007.



Like a mid-air John Travolta.

So in summary, 2007 was brilliant. Apart from Microsoft being frequently unfathomable with their Windows LIVE nonsense, the BBFC getting increasingly twitchy over games and a long segment in which we mysteriously start talking about the bloke with the screechy voice in the *Police Academy* movies. **PCZ**



We're not sure why either...

Team Fortress 2 is a prominent 2007 highlight.

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill dons his cape and tights in *City of Heroes*. Again...

A TIME FOR heroes, or is it villains? Either way, I'm a pointy-eared twat wandering around a mainly empty city, where the only people on the streets are criminals and their victims. An old lady is having her bag snatched by two waistcoat-sporting robbers with bandanas over their faces. Stepping into the fray, I use my superpowers to foil the thieves, encasing them in blocks of ice.

It's the first of many heroic acts, as I mete out justice in Paragon City. Finally, I meet my match in the shape of a giant tree-like creature with a flaming pumpkin for a head. It launches smaller pumpkins at my face, and, defeated by the Halloween-themed attack, I awake in hospital bloodied and bruised. A second encounter has the same result, and I opt for the quiet life, enrolling at Paragon University to study salvage and recipes. It's extraordinarily dull, and I vaguely remember I'm supposed to be helping some kind of war effort.

CURBED ENTHUSIASM

A couple of phone calls later, I am reborn as Nando Canuki, a level 40 Technology Tanker dispatched to the Rikti war zone. Kitted out in a dicky bow and flasher mac, replete with face mask, red horns and spot-welding goggles, I look ridiculous, frankly. Turning a corner at the base, I find I'm not alone in that, as I'm confronted by a berk

in a psychedelic top hat calling himself The Extraordinary CarnieBoy. He's accompanied by a bog-standard superhero by the name of RW, and they appear to be harassing an Icon employee. Apparently I have an unclaimed free tailor session, and I cash that in by accidentally turning myself into a robot ghost with cogs for shoulders, a two-foot Mohawk and oversized fly's wings.

Addressing the assembled gathering, I politely ask, "What's going on here, then?" "The usual," replies the earnest RW. "Rikti, Rikti, everywhere."

"Is that bad?" I enquire. "Course it is!" barks RW. "Whaddya think'll happen if the Rikti take over Paragon City?"

"No idea," I reply truthfully. "Never been here before." "For starters, they'll wipe out everyone who isn't them," says RW dramatically.

CLOWN SHOES

"That sounds bad," I concede, chastened. "What can we do?"

"Well, one thing we can do is keep damaging their mothership," explains RW. "If we can keep it in a constant state of repair, they can't launch raids."

I'm already regretting opening my mouth, but he isn't finished yet. "Vanguard doesn't have enough to blow it to kingdom come," RW continues. "So craploads of TNT

I accidentally turn myself into a robot ghost with a Mohawk and fly's wings



isn't gonna cut it. The other option is just to take them down wherever they are."

Desperately trying to change the subject, I ask him, "Who's that in the hat?" "This guy?" says RW. "No idea."

Interjecting, CarnieBoy announces, "Don't be alarmed, chaps. I'm not a clown; I'm a carnie."

"You look like a kiddy fiddler," I remark, at which point he encases himself in ice, summons up a sidekick called Phantasm and explains that he has to go and pick up some tent pegs.

"There's a war going on," I reproach him, "and you're running errands for your mum." He won't be swayed, though, and after calling him a "carnival pikey" and a "dodgem-riding tramp", RW and myself head for the war zone.

SUPER TROOPER

"Let's kill," I roar, and launch myself into the portal. "I hear that!" says RW, and promptly disappears.

"Stay close," I plead, and he explains he's scouting for Rikti, warning me to look for "big things, ugly, with elongated heads".

I've barely found my bearings when a pair of storm troopers wade into me.



Luckily, RW hears my screams for help and comes to the rescue in the nick of time. No sooner has he saved my life than he announces, "Uh-oh, I gotta run. I just got recalled to my Supergroup's base. Priority orders."

"Can I come?" I plead, hopefully. "Sorry, in-house classified," says RW. "I'll make you famous," I claim, hoping to appeal to his vanity.

"What, you think I'm in this for fame?" spits the affronted RW.

"I work for a games magazine. I need help," I explain, entirely accurately.

He resolutely refuses, though, claiming that he has to follow protocol.

"Protocol?" I fume. "Are you for real? I've got 800 words to write."

"I wish I could help," says RW. "But I don't have Super Writing."

"Just let me be in your gang," I implore. "I'll behave."

"I don't have clearance for that," he says. "I'll have to raise it with the higher-ups." Astonishingly, he actually pulls out a notepad and writes my name down, before disappearing in a puff of smoke.

"Thanks for nothing," I say, and am promptly killed by a giant spider. **CT7**



Sadly, the superheroes teamed up against Hill.

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

WORLD IN CONFLICT

We slip under the Iron Curtain and get a few words from Massive Entertainment CEO Martin Walfisz...

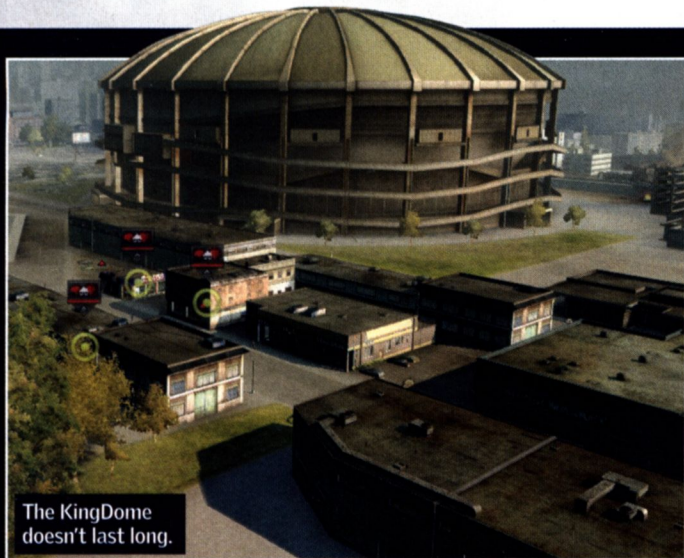
WORLD IN CONFLICT is an immersive mother of a real-time strategy game, making players team up tactically to solve objectives in small skirmishes, eschewing micromanagement of all kinds. Ed Zitron managed to get Massive CEO Martin Walfisz to drop the bomb on the game...



Without Airwolf, America was a sitting duck.



01 **SCENE SETTER:** "We were thinking about our next strategy game in 2004, and realised we had a really great idea in *World in Conflict*. We'd done the science-fiction setting with *Ground Control*, and so we thought we'd do a contemporary war setting. We thought about basing it around World War II, and more modern combat, with terrorists and the Middle East, but those are both overdone. Then somebody suggested the two superpowers – the Soviets and the USA – and the more we started talking about it, the more sense it made as a great 'What If?' scenario. It really lends itself well to a strategy game, as typically you want to have at least two equally balanced factions – and with the addition of NATO, it was fairly easy to skew them to be equally powered."



The KingDome doesn't last long.

02 REAL DEAL? "I'd say in terms of visual style *WIC* is all authentic. We have quite a few military buffs in the company, and the art team got heavily involved in researching materials. We actually sent teams to Russia and America to get us photos of various museums and monuments to make the whole thing as authentic as possible.



The entire Welsh army forms up.

03 SOLO ADVENTURES: "The single-player was the last big hurdle in production. We knew that we wanted to take the gameplay mechanics that really worked in multiplayer and build a developed story around that. What makes it varied is the story we've built around it; each mission has a different but small part of the overall story to it, and I'm really happy how we've succeeded with it. We introduce different types of units gradually throughout the campaign, giving the player something new to try as the missions progress... We had to consider how ambitious the single-player campaign was going to be – and in the end we chose the more ambitious path. We had allies fighting other battles near you to create the bigger war around you – the kind of *Call of Duty* feel of being a small part of a big war, without making the player feel that they're unimportant to the story."

"I love the graphics – they add a sense of immersion to this war that's going on around the player"

Martin describes the efforts taken to make *WIC* realistic.



Legalising marijuana just wasn't a good idea.

04 VERY HIGH GRAPHICS ABILITY:

"I think that graphics effects players differently depending on each person. Each gamer has his own level of how bad graphics can be before he ignores a game, and the better the graphics, the larger the audience we can potentially grab. I love the graphics – they really add a sense of immersion to this war that's going on around the player."



The *WIC* developers love their explosions.



“We knew that we had the potential to make a really original team-based strategy game, and that was our cornerstone”

Martin on what makes *World in Conflict* special.

05 THINGS THAT EXPLODE:

"We've been saying for 10 years, from our first design document for *Ground Control*, that the explosions must be amazing. It's something we've really put effort into in all of our games, and our effects manager is just brilliant at doing effects. He loves that stuff. He's literally blowing shit up. Although sadly, we didn't blow up any nukes in the name of research. I know we did blow up a few firecrackers though. The effect of Hollywood means that we've had to exaggerate explosions to make the games look like what they'd expect from a movie, rather than what it may actually look like in the real world."

06 HOME, PARKER:

"In *Half-Life* you're Gordon Freeman, and in *World in Conflict* you're the faceless Parker. We had help from Ed Zuckerman, an Emmy-Award-Winning Hollywood writer, who really helped add depth to the story, especially the characters, who worked closely with our writers to develop the story and characters that people would both like and dislike. Bannon is like Hudson from *Aliens*; he's annoying, but when the shit hits the fan he shows his true colours. It's important to get the players attached to the main characters, and doing that with in-game dialogue alone is never going to cut it. The cutscenes were able to let us get so much deeper into the characters – it made immediate sense."



07

DESTRUCTION WITH FRIENDS: "The whole epiphany on how the multiplayer should work came from the credit system, which we feel kind of mimics respawning in a first-person shooter. It makes the whole game more accessible to players, as they can just drop in. So we took some ideas from FPSs, and we built our community system from the ground up to support clan systems, so that people from any other type of game could join in."

"Team play was also absolutely key to building the game. From the very beginning, we knew that we had the potential to make a really original team-based strategy game, and that was our cornerstone. That philosophy influenced all decisions throughout the design process. Our lead designer is playing all the time, and actively participates in the forum, really getting involved with feedback from the gamers. We actually just had some team vs community matches, which we won all of bar one, but I don't think it'll be long before the best players are beating us."



08

OMG, THE NUKE: "The nuke was the effect we put the most hours into. I still get a chill every time the screen just whites out – I think we just got it right. I know some gamers wanted it to be bigger, but it wouldn't be much fun if it just killed the whole map like a real nuke. That'd limit the game."

"I think the secret behind them is in the camera – you see the horizon, and the whole effect works in 3D. From an immersion perspective, it just makes things more stunning."

"In the single-player there's only one nuke, but in multiplayer we wanted it to be something that players could have a lot of, so we made it less powerful – so it didn't just end the whole match the moment one is used – while at the same time making them useful. **PCZ**"

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NEXT MONTH!

EXCLUSIVE!

2008

All-new interviews, features and screenshots of the biggest games coming your way next year including

- Far Cry 2 ● STALKER: Clear Sky ● Guild Wars 2
- Fallout 3 ● Left 4 Dead ● Alien ● StarCraft 2
- Empire: Total War ● Dead Space and more

PLUS! incredible new games announcements we can't ruddy talk about now but will damn well reveal next month!



MYSTIC WILL

PC ZONE's games sage returns with his insights into games you'll be playing in 2008!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

We look at the expansion to the biggest MMO around.

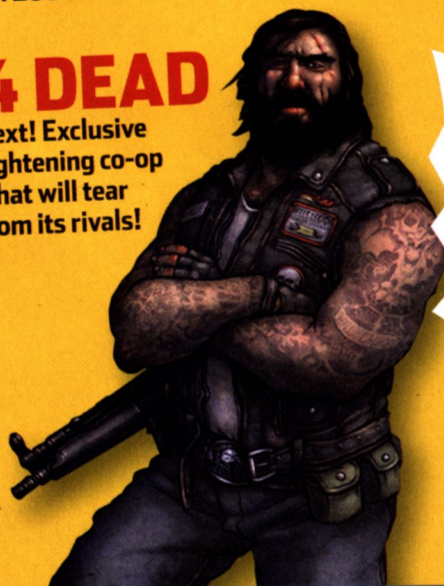


HARDWARE

Phil Wand with the best advice on keeping your PC games running sweet...

LEFT 4 DEAD

What Valve did next! Exclusive feature on the frightening co-op zombie shooter that will tear the living flesh from its rivals!



ON THE DVD

- Lord of the Rings Online: Shadow of Angmar
Exclusive! Free 7-day MMO trial!
- Sam & Max: Abe Lincoln Must Die **Free full episode!**
- Empire Earth III
- Need For Speed: Pro Street
- Battlestar Galactica
- F.E.A.R.: Perseus Mandate
- Portal extra levels

ALSO!

Steve Hill's adventures in NeverQuest, classic PC games in Retro Zone, mucking about in Jackass and games-for-nowt in Freeplay!

ON SALE 3 JAN 2008

Good tidings, treasured readership!



HERE AT ZONE, the birth of our Lord Jesus is synonymous with festive abandon. Our editor is bedecked with paper lanterns, a minimum of seven party poppers are let off every hour, and a fierce ribaldry descends upon us like a dark madness. It is in this unthinking state that we present our annual Christmas card.

Instructions

- 1 Using the largest pair of scissors you can muster, cut out the image of PC ZONE's yuletide glee.
- 2 Attach the paper, using the technologies of the day, to a stouter cardboard cousin. Adventurous readers might like to glue the card to a coarse Hessian weave, although it should be noted that such actions have no merits.
- 3 Sweep everything, as you did last year, from your mantelpiece in a dramatic gesture. Warn any spouses before doing this, in case they fear you've come home drunk, and flee to the scullery.
- 4 Place your PC ZONE Festive Epistle in the centre, and take a tiny puff on your pipe as a reward to yourself for a job well done.



Merry Christmas

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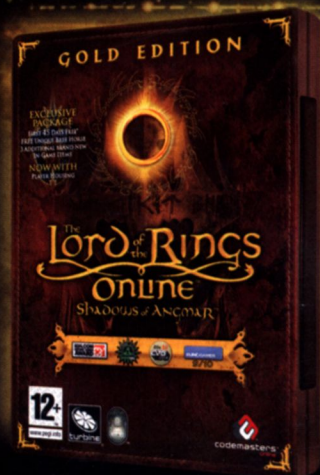
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