

PCZONE

ISSUE 193 MAY 2008

MUST-READ REVIEWS

C&C3: Kane's Wrath
Frontlines: Fuel of War
Sins of a Solar Empire
Lost: Via Domus

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

PROTOTYPE

Free-form carnage. Corrupted blood. A city on fire.
Why this new breed of chaos will be the year's shock hit.

INSIDER FEATURE

THE MAKING OF SUPREME COMMANDER

Gaming legend Chris Taylor on the creation of his RTS barnstormer

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES
The bitch is finally back!
But can she still cut it?



MASS EFFECT
Games writing special!
BioWare reveal all!



WIN!
TINY COMPO
What is the name of Prototype's protagonist?

gamesradar.com

future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

MAY 2008

9 771471 753016

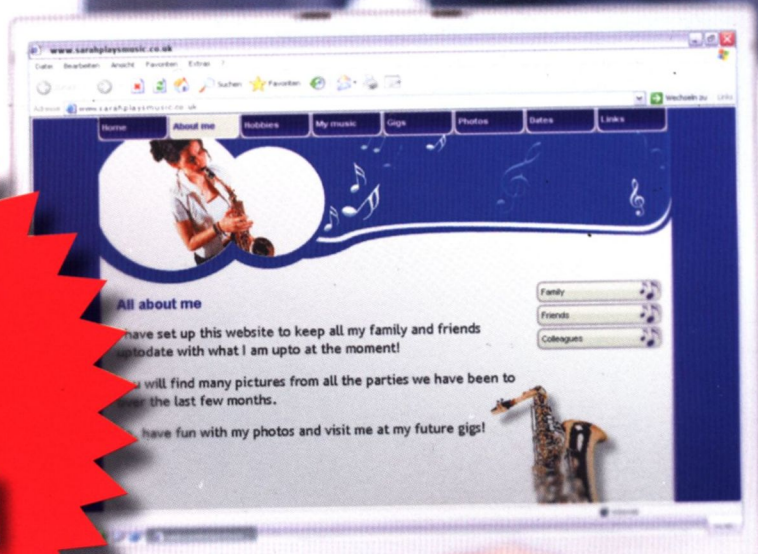
ES.99
05 >



You get more than just a

1&1 has everything you need to build your personal website. The 1&1 Home Package is ideal for creating an attractive internet presence for all your needs. Whether you are building a Business Site or a Family Web Page, we have put together a package that allows you to build your site without the need of specialist skills.

**.UK
Domain
for
FREE!**



* Offer subject to a 12 month minimum term contract.
** Offer is subject to a 24 month minimum term contract.



Call **0870 24 11 247**

a homepage!

Special Offer!

1&1 HOSTING: HOME PACKAGE

Includes **1 FREE .UK Domain** for the life of your package

The 1&1 Home Package offers an exceptional value for your money. Showcase your family, hobbies or anything else you'd like to share with the world. It just takes a few minutes and your professional looking website is online.

- 99.99 % Up-Time Guarantee
- 1.5 GB web space
- 400 2 GB POP3/IMAP accounts
- 20 GB monthly traffic
- Free WebsiteBuilder (4 easy steps)
- 1&1 Blog
- Photo Gallery
- SMS Manager
- 1&1 WebMail
- 1&1 Banner Advertising
- Free CGI's
- PHP 4&5
- 24/7 Support
- ... and much more!

£0.00

~~£4.99~~
per month

For the first 3 months
thereafter £4.99 a month
(£5.86 Inc. VAT)*

1&1 DOMAINS

.co.uk .org.uk
.me.uk

uk

£0.00

~~£2.99~~
per year

For 3 months. First
year only £2.24
(£2.63 Inc. VAT)**

Special Offers every month.
Visit our website now!

With 5 Million
websites worldwide,
1&1 is a global leader
in volume and web
hosting power.

1&1

Visit us now www.1and1.co.uk

Stay ahead of the competition...

The Xworks X8i-C2Q - PC Zone magazine's "PC of Choice" 2008

Case : X8i-C2Q Case (Antec P182 Silver or Black) - Zalman 600W 'Silent' PSU
Mainboard : Intel DP35DPM Mainboard
Graphics Card(s) : ATI Radeon HD 3870 X2 1GB [PCI-Express Gen. 2.0]
Hard Drive (1) : Western Digital 74GB - 10,000RPM Serial-ATA - 16MB Cache
Hard Drive (2) : Western Digital or Seagate 500GB Serial-ATA II - 16MB Cache
Hard Drive (3) : None
Hard Drive (4) : None
Optical Drive(s) : Samsung 20x DVD+/-R/RW/RAM (Dual Layer) - Black
Sound Card : Creative Sound Blaster X-Fi Xtreme Gamer 7.1
Network Card(s) : Intel PRO/1000 Gigabit LAN
Floppy Drive : No Floppy Drive / Optional USB2.0 Card Reader (+£8)
CPU(s) : Intel Core 2 Quad Q9300 (4x 2.50GHz - 2x 6MB Cache) 1333MHz FSB
Memory : 4GB OCZ "Reaper" DDR-2 800MHz (PC6400) (2x 2GB)
Mouse / Keyboard : Microsoft Optical Wheelmouse / PS2 Internet Keyboard
Operating System(s) : Microsoft Windows XP Professional (x86 or x64) - Or Vista
Monitor(s) : A wide range of monitor options available
Connectivity : Integrated USB2.0, eSATA and Firewire
Warranty : 3 Year(s) Warranty



X8i-C2Q..

Only £1199

(Plus VAT - Total = £1426.44 Inc. VAT and delivery)

..."If unquestionable pedigree means anything to you, there's no other machine to consider."

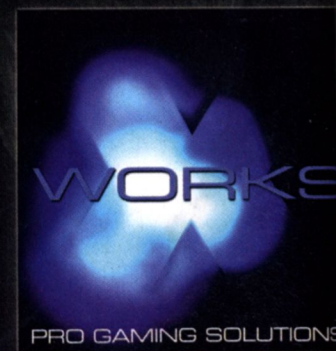
"The specification wants for nothing. Build quality is faultless and it's as quiet as a mouse"

- PC Zone Magazine

Xworks is the leading European manufacturer of award winning, ultra performance workstations.

The X8i-C2Q is the world's fastest quad-core workstation designed specifically to provide affordable, high-end performance for all of your gaming needs.

Xworks Recommends :-



Configure your own gaming rig at...
www.xworksinteractive.com

Or call +44 (0)1785 229191 for help tailoring your perfect system!



Cert No : 1969/99



COVER STORY

38 **PROTOTYPE**

You've never seen New York like this
 - let the mutant chaos begin!



NAMELESS THINGS

PC ZONE'S NEWSHOUND, young Steve Hogarty, has just returned from the Czech Republic. "All right Steve?" I just said, "How was your visit to Illusion Softworks, home of *Mafia 2*?"

"Isn't called Illusion any more," he dolefully replied with his trademark soft Irish burr. "It's called 2K Czech."

Is it not enough that the best developers around are being eaten up by the forces of capitalism, that they must suffer the indignity of having their names stripped away? What the likes of EA and 2K don't realise is that there's a magic to a development studio's name - that one word conjures up images of past games and your entire history with them.

Westwood. Irrational. Origin. Bullfrog. Illusion. Psygnosis. Can you tell me that when you read those words you don't get a spine-tingle? When publishers rebrand development houses in their own image it's nothing more than pissing on them to mark their territory. In one fell Deed Poll swoop a valuable heritage disappears, leaving nothing but a soulless wipe-clean veneer.

One of many issues I have with today's games industry is this hateful obsession with 'the next big thing' and the lack of respect for heritage or history - and this just sums it up.

Still, outrage notwithstanding, *Mafia 2* sounds ace. More next issue.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor

SUBSCRIBE NOW!
PCZONE

SEE PAGE 9
 SUBSCRIBE AND GET
 AN EXCLUSIVELY COOL
PCZONE HOODIE!



NEVERQUEST 123

"I take to the open seas on the good ship *NeverQuest*..."



Who played too
 of *NeverQuest* with Oliver

Who played
 with Oliver

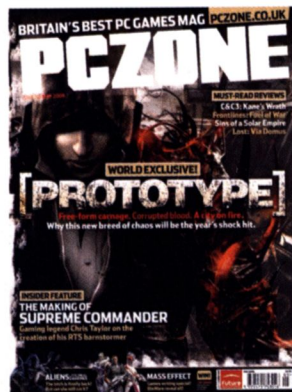
Who played
 with Oliver

Who played
 with Oliver

Who played
 with Oliver



WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



- 38 **PROTOTYPE**
- 68 **C&C3: KANE'S WRATH**
- 72 **FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR**

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 58 words... Steve Hill sees *Prototype*, and then Ed plays *Spore*, and then Martin plays *Frontlines: Fuel of War*, and then Steve plays *The Sims Castaway Stories*, and then all of these people combine their rings of power to summon Captain Porter, the editor, who spearheads a feature all about writing in games. This special issue ends global warming forever.

GAMES WRITING SPECIAL 47
 DODGY DIALOGUE TO SUPERB SCRIPTING - IT'S ALL HERE

A new way to
think smart

ESET®
**Smart
Security**

Intelligent protection for your PC

There are many software security solutions to choose from but only one can actually think.

Powered by ThreatSense® technology, ESET Smart Security anticipates potential dangers, doesn't slow systems down and excels in proactively protecting your computer. It's smart.

Antivirus + Antispyware + Antispam + Personal firewall

For Antivirus + Antispyware only,
try **ESET NOD32 Antivirus v3.0**

Call 0845 838 0832
or download at ESET.co.uk.



CONTENTS

UPFRONT

- 16 THE AGENCY
- 18 SPECIAL REPORT
- 20 SPORE
- 27 DAMNATION
- 28 THE SIMS 3
- 32 HOT SHOTS: BATTLEFIELD HEROES
- 34 ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES
- 38 PROTOTYPE
- 44 MYTHOS
- 47 GAMES WRITING SPECIAL
- 48 RHIANNA PRATCHETT SPEAKS!
- 50 VALVE'S UNSEEN SCRIPTS
- 54 SKINS CREATOR SPEAKS!
- 56 KEN LEVINE ON BIOSHOCK
- 58 FROM BOOKS TO GAMES
- 60 BLOWARE ON GAMES WRITING

REVIEWS

- 68 **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH**
- 72 FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
- 76 AUDIOSURF
- 77 AGON: THE LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO
- 78 JACK KEANE
- 80 SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
- 82 LOST: VIA DOMUS
- 84 HOUR OF VICTORY
- 86 THE SIMS CASTAWAY STORIES
- 87 ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES
- 87 CITY LIFE EDITION 2008
- 88 NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGNS
- 88 HARD TO BE A GOD
- 89 SAM & MAX: MOAI BETTER BLUES
- 89 SAM & MAX: NIGHT OF THE RAVING DEAD
- 90 INDIE ZONE
- 92 BUDGET
- 94 BUYER'S GUIDE

HARDWARE

- 97 HARDWARE NEWS
- 98 HARDWARE REVIEWS
- 100 DEAR WANDY
- 102 HOW TO... OVERCLOCK YOUR GRAPHICS CARD
- 104 HARDWARE BUYER'S GUIDE

FREEPLAY

- 108 ON THE DVD
- 110 NEWS & BUZZ
- 112 FREEWARE
- 114 MAPS & MODS
- 116 ONLINE ZONE

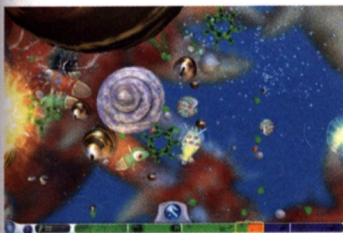
LOOKING BACK

- 120 RETRO ZONE
- 122 SUPERTEST
- 123 STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST
- 124 DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY: SUPREME COMMANDER
- 129 NEXT MONTH
- 130 BACK PAGE

REVIEW
68 **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH**

Kane is back, and tromping across the globe in this ruthlessly devastating expansion

20 **UPFRONT**
Spore



28 **UPFRONT**
The Sims 3



100 **HARDWARE**
Dear Wandy



80 **REVIEWS**
Sins of a Solar Empire



72 **REVIEW**
Frontlines: Fuel of War



GET INVOLVED! 116

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

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware
Steve Hogarty sells his soul for a bunch of free games

OFF-ROAD VELOCIRAPTOR SAFARI
We won't do it, but also might

KATAKIJIN
Ninja things

SPIN THE BLACK CIRCLE
You spin me right round

SHIFT Doesn't matter if it's black or white

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH
SAMURAI MOVERS

POSTER GAME OF THE MONTH

112 **FREWARE**
The best games in world are right here, and ironically undervalued because they cost absolutely nothing.

NEW GAMES TO PLAY WITH EVERY ISSUE!

FREE DISC! **10 GAMES TO PLAY**



Issue 32 April 2008 www.oxm.co.uk

XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

FIRST LOOK: THE GAME THE WORLD'S BEEN WAITING FOR

ALIENS

COLONIAL MARINES

EXCLUSIVE!

grand theft auto IV

Rockstar's epic is nearly here - new details inside!

Saints Row 2

Get up-close with GTA IV's biggest rival

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

The definitive review!

5 Exclusive Gamerbits

HOT GAME NEWS
GEARS OF WAR 2
Epic sequel shooter arrives in 2008!

10 games to play!

ON SALE NOW!

Exclusive previews!

First look at Aliens: Colonial Marines and Saints Row 2

GTA IV!

Latest news & screenshots

Gears of War 2!

Game details revealed

Definitive reviews!

Rainbow Six Vegas 2 & more

www.oxm.co.uk

XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

10 games to play!

DOLBY DIGITAL

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Play the ultra-stylish, devil-hunting epic now!

18

future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

Devil May Cry 4 | The Club | FIFA Street 3
Sensible Soccer | Kane & Lynch: Dead Men
Mutant Storm Empire | Omega Five + more

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG
PCZONE
 SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER



**FREE
 PCZONE
 HOODIE!**

Subscribe to **PCZONE** for only
 £9.99 today and we'll send you
 exclusive **PCZONE** merchandise:
 a **FREE PCZONE** hoodie in black
 (L) or in grey (M)!

**ONLY
 £9.99
 EVERY THREE
 MONTHS!**

Save **£37.91** on the cost of
PCZONE in the shops!

**Call our order
 hotline now!**

Quote the code p039

0870 837 4722

Lines open Mon-Fri 8am-9.30pm,
 Saturdays 8am-4pm

Or subscribe online

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/pzvp039

Closing date: 23 April, 2008



MEET THE TEAM

Just like *ThunderCats*. But, sadly, without a Cheetara...



STEVE HILL

Man of the Hour

AGE: Old as the Hills

LIKES: Sarcasm

DISLIKES: You

FANCIES: Me

FAVOURITE GAME:

Countdown

NOW PLAYING: *FM 2008*

With a life seemingly composed of free tickets for top football matches and rides in limos with glamour girls, we were surprised when Hill said he couldn't go to San Francisco to play *Prototype* due to a poker match in Clywd. But with this gambling journalism dispensed with, Hill was soon over the Atlantic - his only request being that no-one spoke to him during the trip. We love him still, as deep down he's got a heart of gold. And a million stories about what now famous and happily married American games developers used to get up to in strip clubs.



LOG

Reviews Lord

Just who urinated outside the Bath branch of the Officer's Club clothing store? We're too loyal to even pass comment, but if Columbo were here he'd have asked his 'one last question' and Log would be in Sing Sing.

NOW PLAYING: *Audiosurf*



STEVE HOGARTY

Suction Editor

Steve has been playing *Cave Story*. How do we know this? Because he won't shut up about it when he begins his daily 'indie games and freeware are going to conquer all' lecture. He's right, but he doesn't half bang on about it.

NOW PLAYING: *Cave Story*



ED ZITRON

Disc Editor

Like a pig in a war, Ed screamed aloud when given the extra responsibility of running the Freeplay section this month. It turns out he was only singing a PJ Harvey and Björk duet at the time, so no harm, no foul.

NOW PLAYING: *World of Goo*



WILL PORTER

Editor

During his holiday in Amsterdam Will discovered that loudly stating "My God! That prostitute was gorgeous!" is not the best way to enamour your girlfriend while on a romantic canal-side stroll. Women, eh?

NOW PLAYING: *Oblivion*



JAMES ROFF

Deputy Art Editor

James is one of a quintet of treacherous Mac users in the office, conspiring to make us all use one-button mice, have a more stable computing experience, wear berets and drink expensive coffee.

NOW PLAYING: *M-People Dance Simulator*



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor at "Large"

That's Editor at Large, not the new editor of *Large* magazine - as confused callers have believed. What services this fictional magazine would provide for the enquiring gentlemen remain unknown.

NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... The sun creeping out of the clouds, cavemen videos, the burgeoning *Fallout* renaissance
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Will going on holiday, connection difficulties, hangovers, the day of Ubisoft review slippage

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

EXTRA HOMEWORK 10min Evil editor making you read work-related books in your own personal time? Why not bitch and moan?

MISPRONOUNCING THE NAME WANDY 20min If it rhymes with the word 'glandy' or 'dandy' then you're saying it wrong

HOW ARE VALVE PAID? 50min A trough of \$50 notes is provided daily, and developers scoop out their pay with ladles

BIOWARE MARITAL MOMENTS 45min From droids fleeing from horrid *Star Wars* housewives to Henpecked Hoo

WORLD OF GOO 53min If you don't like it there's something wrong with you. Potentially the new *Peggle*

EA DEVOURING EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE 15min How everyone's favourite gaming mega-corporation is a smidge like Unicron in *Transformers: The Movie*

EEE PC 3min Holy shit, that is a tiny laptop. Can you play games on it? Does it fly? I bet you could eat it

X3: REUNION 1min Will the allure of interstellar factories ever fade?

LASAGNA CAT 48min Physical re-enactments of *Garfield* cartoons are nothing less than the best thing ever

HOW IS BABBY FORMED 5min How girl get pregnant

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER MINI-COMPO: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 874741 or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Mini-Compo, PCZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a copy of *Call of Duty 4*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about

products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "NO" at the end of your text or postal entry. **TERMS & CONDITIONS:** 1. Only completed entries received before 23 April 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 can't be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK employees of Future or its affiliates, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Full conditions: snipurl.com/futurec.

LETTERS



Will Porter hears his dog going mental, and then the sound of ripping envelopes

KING OF LETTERS

PAYBACK TIME

Having arguably more money than sense – and not believing any game could be that bad – I recently decided to purchase *Soldier of Fortune: Payback* (issue 191, 36%). To this moment I don't know why. The game is absolute pants! It's violent, vile and borderline racist. The real question isn't why this game was made, but why in God's name was it released?

In a climate where a game such as *Manhunt 2* has been refused a certificate in the UK, the fact that the authorities allowed this waste of plastic to be inflicted upon the masses beggars belief. *Payback* has no redeeming features. Or is it that horrific violence is OK, provided it's perpetrated by a Westerner and is inflicted on Arabs? In any case, I shall never doubt your words again.

Christopher Smith

To be fair to *Payback*, it doesn't only kill Arabs – it also kills a few Czech gangsters, some Africans,



and the final remnants of its developers' souls. It's sad, because its creators once made a half-decent shooter (*Chaser*) but since then – well *Payback* is unremitting pish of the highest order. The 'helpful slaves', the lone prostitute, the all-American massacres – I think the saddest thing is that this is a European game that's been designed for an already low-brow US audience, but ended up missing that brow and skewered the top cheek while humming the Star

BIG WOO FOR WOW

I know you must receive tons of letters each month, and I have a 0.000001 per cent chance of getting this published, but all I want to do is give a thanks to Ed Zitron for the great "Northrend Uncovered" article in issue 191.

My *World of Warcraft* characters are Napalmi (70 Mage), Azmodian (70 Warrior) and Hurumbalaiya (70 priest). Yes, I am obsessed.

Charlie Jenkins

Ed himself is well on the way to level 70 with his second character, after relentless bullying from the rest of the team convinced him to turn



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).

Spangled Banner in deep Eastern European tones.

I won't say this often, but I think we ought to dob these developers in to some important newspaper types so we can all waddle in indignant outrage as a glorious whole.

Horde. Seeing as the Alliance is for gimps.

Oh and here's a bit of random information – the *WOW*-obsessed editor of *Metal Hammer* told me that Swedish metal band In Flames (who are excellent) are *WOW*-crazy and play before and after most of their gigs. Not many people will care about this, but I do.

NEWSPAPER TYPES

I'd like to point out two online articles written by *The Times* journalists Kate Muir and Janice Turner that respectively infer that videogames are crack for kids and toys for so-called 'man-teens'.





PC ZONE asks that readers refrain from chainsawing *Times* columnists in two.

"These misconceived articles are provoking the beginnings of a crackdown on the games industry"

Reader Richard Lane's concerns over *The Times*' stance on gaming

Firstly, both of these articles are incredibly misinformed. Janice Turner makes the assumption that "when playing videogames, children are mentally imprisoned, wired into their evil creators' brains." Yet recent releases such as *Viva Piñata* can teach children about conservation and respect for life.

Furthermore, Kate Muir writes of two men she overheard discussing battle scenes in *Gears of War* and asking "Surely they were discussing their children's computer games?" If Kate had ever seen *Gears of War*, she would very quickly come to understand that it's most definitely not for children.

The lazily written, misconceived articles crafted by these journalists are provoking the beginnings of a crackdown on the games industry. The government has already proposed a tightening of rating laws on games, and it would be a shame to see a young and upcoming industry crippled by a minority of confused articles.

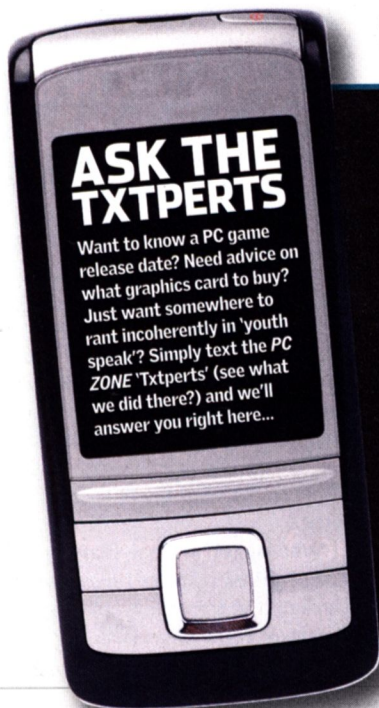
Videogames are not aimed at children only, and they never have been. Frankly it amazes me that this ridiculous assumption remains rife amongst professional journalists.

Richard Lane

This is sad, but it's nothing that other forms of media haven't faced in the past - videotapes, the cinema, TV, comics, rock 'n' roll, newspapers... even novels, when they were first

published, got some people up in arms about the amount of time young people (largely women) were spending being corrupted by the written word.

I'm of the firm belief that as the videogame-playing generation gets older we'll permeate these nay-saying institutions and take over from within. But don't let that stop your blood from boiling when you read such complete bollocks by supposedly well-informed people.



IN THE GARAGE

I'd like to open this letter by stating that generally I find your reviews to be quite honest and relevant to the game in question. That is why I was surprised to find such an arrogant statement as "Queens of the Stone Age and Weezer (if you like music) and Muse and The Killers (if you don't)".

First of all this is a statement based purely on opinion, people's tastes in music differ greatly, and I like music by all four bands along with a whole host of other artists. If you are perhaps referring to the mainstream appeal of Muse and The Killers then this too is

Why no Frontlines review in issue 192?

Anon

THQ couldn't provide full servers to play the game on, so unfortunately it was delayed. Apologies to those put out.

Command & Conquer hasn't done anything new in 10 years. Why your hype?

Wilf

C&C is an institution, and C&C3 was the biggest non-WOW seller last year. It's an important game.

I just saw Log looking grumpy in Soho. Do I win a prize?

Anon

Only if you tickled him and made him happy. People get prizes when they tickle Log in the street. This is official.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

Sent in by Andrew Griffiths

PC ZONE score: 82%

I've just finished playing *Half-Life 2: Episode Two* and what can I say - it's absolutely amazing! The final battle with the Strider attacks combined with the new Magnusson Device weapon was just spectacular - and then you get the heart-wrenching ending with Alyx and her dad. Wow. Not forgetting the rest of the six-hour epic, including the bit where the mine car falls on you in the pit, and the wicked new souped-up car, taking Hunters' legs from underneath them. How could you only give it 82%? Surely this was Classic award-winning stuff. For very shame!

Your shout: 91%

Later he'd blame a dodgy pint.



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



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.



irrelevant as Queens of the Stone Age (with *Songs for the Deaf*) and certainly Weezer (with their self-titled album) have made attempts at mainstream success in the past.

In short I am trying to say that I do not buy gaming magazines to be judged on my music taste, least of all by someone who evidently lacks any real knowledge on the subject.

William Morley

A statement based purely on opinion? In a PC ZONE review? Heavens be.

Much as I am saddened that we've ridden roughshod over your (I'm guessing) teenage sensibilities but everyone's allowed to have an axe to grind about popular culture.

And you say you don't want to be judged by someone who, you've guessed from a *Guitar Hero III* review, lacks any real knowledge

on the subject of music – so who's being a culture Nazi now?

Besides, I like all your favourite bands way more than you do.

DVD ZONE

I've noticed over the last few issues that you have included pictures of readers' collections of *PC ZONE*.

Well unfortunately, most of my mags have been destroyed by time, spilt drinks and the dog – but I do have a large collection of CDs and DVDs.

I've been a subscriber for nearly 10 years, but this photo is of about five years' worth of discs I reckon. Thanks for the last 10 years of monthly entertainment.

David

And not only have you kept them all, but you've put them into a beautiful spiral motif! You get

even more extra bonus marks for being so super-artistic. Be sure to put them away again mind, or your wife/girlfriend/mother will accuse you of causing a potential deathtrap. That's what always happens to me.

YESTERDAY'S TODAY

I've had a fair few consoles – you open the box, plug the cables in, insert your game disc and play. Great, until I realised that the PC is far superior.

However, the thing I liked about consoles, was the fact you can buy a game and it worked out the box. Why can't PC games? Because of this I now play games from two years ago that are fully patched up and ready to play.

For example, I've recently played *Half-Life 2*, *Morrowind*, *System Shock 2*, and *Deus Ex*, and I will soon be embarking on the originally 'broken' *Vampire: Bloodlines*. I guess in a couple of years I'll be playing the games of today (*Crysis* etc), on today's technology with the peace of mind that I can play them to their full potential.

Yes, it's nice to have the latest tech, but what's the point when you rush out and buy the latest games only to find they won't work properly? Yesterday is the future!

Jason Steel

As ever, if you don't want to keep up with the graphical Jones' then it's cheaper and more pleasurable to play everything at your leisure. After all, the games of yesteryear don't come equipped with a best before date. If you can avoid casting jealous glances in the direction of *Crysis* then you go for it.

Who knows, in three years time you might even have a rig capable of running it at something approaching its maximum settings. PCZ

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

TF2 BADLANDS

orange.half-life2.com/tf2
Yay and hoorah for new *Team Fortress 2* maps. And one of our favourites returning at that.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

www.2kgames.com/pirates
After *Pirates of the Burning Sea* we needed to get back to some proper pirating. Even if some of those governors' daughters were rather plain.

GRAMMAR NAZI

snipurl.com/grammarnazi
Poor English is the enemy's name, and you fight him by typing dictionary-fed words. Like school, but gamey.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

THIS MONTH: SAFARI JIM

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

I never tire of n00bing around on this (I only discovered online gaming six months ago!)

TEAM FORTRESS 2

Another Valve classic. The unpopular Pyro is actually my love – my crap *Counter-Strike: Source* aim translates into great Pyro spray. Lots of coffee to make you shaky also helps...

CCLEANER

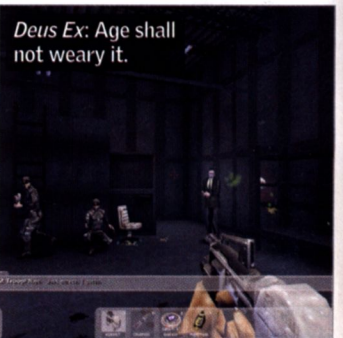
Wow! Who knew I had so much broken rubbish on my hard disk? This little beauty means I can get back to being rubbish at online games right away!

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!



Deus Ex: Age shall not weary it.

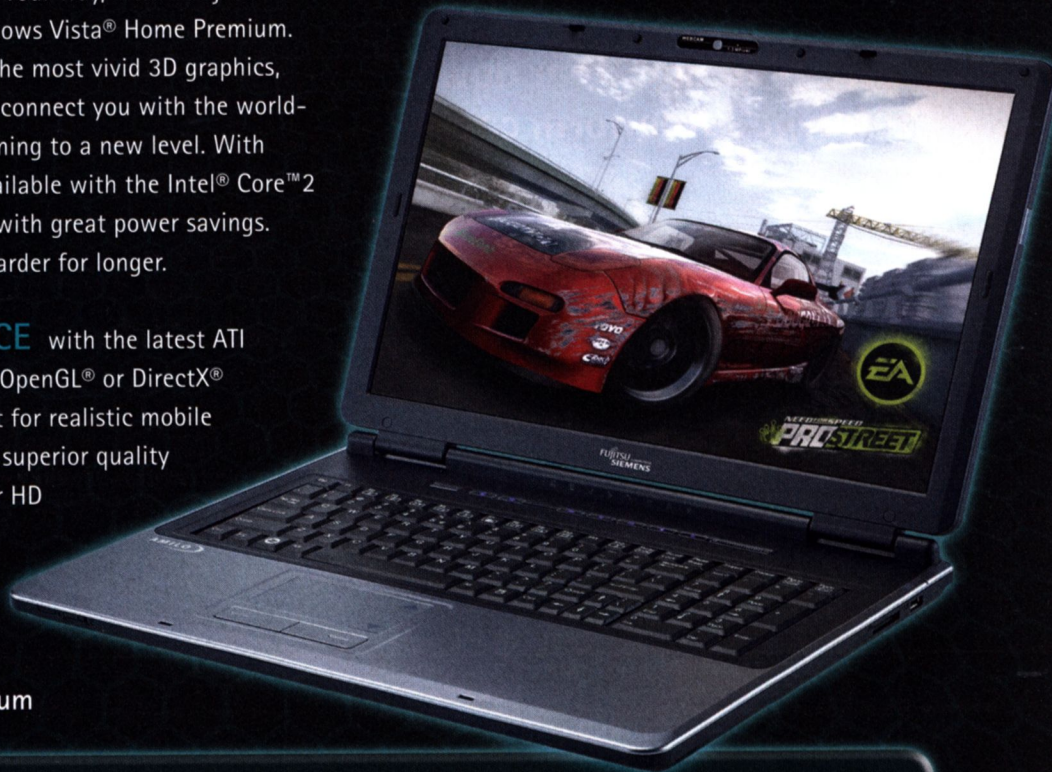
NEED MORE SPEED?

For the ultimate mobile gaming experience get the Fujitsu Siemens Computers AMILO Xi 2550 with Intel® Centrino® Processor Technology.



GAMES TO GO More games. More Play. Your way, with a Fujitsu Siemens AMILO Laptop, preinstalled with Windows Vista® Home Premium. You get the hottest titles, the latest features, the most vivid 3D graphics, and an infinite number of ways to more safely connect you with the world-wide gaming community! The AMILO takes gaming to a new level. With Intel® Centrino® processor technology now available with the Intel® Core™ 2 Duo processor, get breakthrough performance with great power savings. So whatever your game, now you can play it harder for longer.

ULTIMATE GRAPHICS EXPERIENCE with the latest ATI Mobility Radeon™ HD 2700 graphics ready for OpenGL® or DirectX® 10 games. Advanced Shader Model 3.0 Support for realistic mobile gaming. ATI Avivo™ HD Display Technology for superior quality pictures and videos. HDCP support prepares for HD ready screens. HD Video Playback up to 1080p. ATI PowerPlay™ 7.0 for extended battery life.



Fujitsu Siemens Computers recommends Windows Vista® Home Premium

- TECH SPEC** • AMILO Xi 2550 with Intel® Centrino® processor technology and Intel® Core™ 2 Duo processor T8100
- Genuine Microsoft Windows Vista® Home Premium • 2048MB DDR2 Memory • 1GB Intel Turbo Memory • 500GB HDD (2 x 250GB)
 - ATI Mobility Radeon™ HD 2700 with 256MB GDDR3 dedicated video RAM and up to 767MB HyperMemory™ • Built-in webcam
 - Blu Ray DVD RW • Wireless LAN 802.11 a/g/n. • 17" WUXGA+ screen • HDMI

Fujitsu Siemens SCALEO Pi 2662 Desktop Computer with Intel® Core™ 2 Quad Processor.

With four processing cores to handle massive throughput, this is the powerful desktop choice for multimedia and gaming enthusiasts.

- TECH SPEC Option 1** • Intel® Core™ 2 Quad processor Q6600
- Genuine Microsoft Windows Vista® Home Premium • 2048MB DDR2 Memory • 500GB HDD • NVIDIA® 8600GS graphics with 512MB

TECH SPEC Option 2 As above but with Blu Ray DVD and 1 Terabyte HDD



Products available from www.fscgaming.co.uk

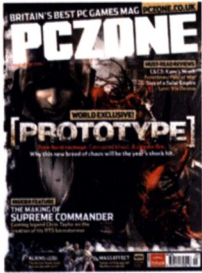


COVER STORY

PROTOTYPE

Warring factions tear downtown New York to pieces! Find out why *Prototype's* free-form carnage could make it this year's shock hit...





WHEN WE FIRST saw *Prototype* we were cautious – surely PC gamers are above another *GTA* clone? But then we watched the action unfurl – twisted metal being flung around Times Square and 360° panoramas of the military and monsters kicking off. Frankly, we'd never seen anything so stunning in a free-form game. If you ever wanted to be a superhero (OK, super-antihero) this is it: car leaping, running up walls, throwing heavy stuff at screaming pedestrians – it's all here. So enamoured were we with the game's potential, we let it grace our front cover and we sent Steve Hill off to the Game Developers Conference to get to grips with it. Amazingly, he came back unscathed.

PAGE

38





UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

Get off the train

BOOKS ARE OLD news. Nobody reads books these days. In fact, so soiled is the reputation of the book-reading commuter that to hit one with a baking tray would scarcely be objected to. You might even elicit a titter or two from your fellow travellers if you were to take a book reader's book and wave it above their heads while saying "If you want your book so bad just take it." Consider doing this until you reach the next station, when you might slam the book into their chest, glare deeply into their eyes for just a moment too long, and in a quiet, serious voice, say "Get off the train." Magazines, we hear, are still OK - better than the internet, or so the kids are saying.

The point I'm labouring to put to you is about games writing. We've brought you a massive feature on games writing in this issue, and while games certainly aren't replacing books (and nobody should ever hit somebody on a train, unless they're doing a crime. And even then it's risky, as they could have a knife), they've always offered literary entertainment, often on par with their papery brethren.

I've always suspected that out of the entire industry only 12 people are capable of spinning a decent yarn, and most developers couldn't tell a knock-knock joke without spluttering and falling over. Our games writing feature both confirms my suspicions and explains why things are the way they be. It's bloody interesting, I reckon. Go have a read.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

SPIES LIKE US

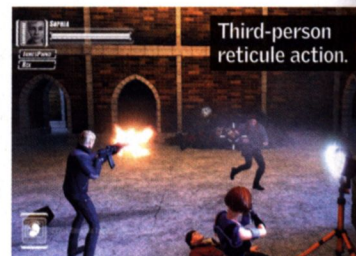
Sony Online's Bond-a-like MMO *The Agency* tracked down

www.station.sony.com | ETA: 2008

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT have been behind the mighty *EverQuest*, the thoroughly messed-up *Star Wars Galaxies*, and the innovative online FPS *PlanetSide*, so you can be sure it was a big deal when they announced a brand-new MMO late last year.

In *The Agency*, you get to live the life of a James Bond-style agent taking sides with one of two organisations, arming yourself with some cool gadgets and modern weaponry to defeat ridiculous world-domination plots in a fast-paced shooter with the persistence of an online game.

The two factions, ParaGON (Paramilitary Global Operations) and UNITE (United Nations Intelligence and Tactical Experts) differ in their methods and means, but they aren't strictly opposing each other. "Think of them as friendly rivals who, on occasion, blow each other up," laughs senior world designer Kevin O'Hara.



"On some missions, you'll have to work together with the other faction to take down a major world villain. Much of the time, however, the two factions will find reason to get in each others' way."

Apparently there'll be a good number of PvP maps for UNITE and ParaGON to necessitate violence between real players across the world, and familiar modes like Capture The Flag, Deathmatch and Control Point, as well as special mission maps where you have PvE goals - effectively you versus the game, while avoiding the other players.

"We'll also have PvP maps where you can choose either side of the battle regardless of

your agency," continues O'Hara. "But if you don't like PvP, don't worry, you won't ever have to do it, but hopefully it should be easy enough that everybody tries it out to see it isn't as punishing as many MMOs."

When you've chosen your role, you can head out and meet other player agents looking for a team to help with missions - you can do missions solo, but the best ratings and rewards are more achievable with backup, with a typical mission lasting between 10-50 minutes. However, another major aspect of the game are NPC 'operatives' who you can collect and send out on assignments using a tactical map.

"They may be working to build you a new gadget or weapon, gathering intel to help you unlock a mission, or working on building your resources," says O'Hara. "One of the neat things about operatives is that as they do assignments, they'll gain experience and rank up. Higher ranked operatives will help you on advanced assignments or might even be good to trade with other players."

After logging in, you can check with your operatives to see what they've accomplished in your absence, then select a mission and decide the role you want to play. There are six roles, each with their own look and feel; Sony Online reckon they're more similar to *Team Fortress 2* than *WOW*, but with a broader range of skills and responsibilities.



STOP PRESS!	TITAN QUEST OVER <i>Titan Quest</i> developer Iron Lore has closed its doors, having failed to secure the bags of cash it needed to stay afloat.	SCI AXES STAFF SCi, parent company of Eidos, is sacrificing 25 per cent of its staff and 14 projects, to the god of Losing Shitloads of Money.	EXTENDED CONFLICT The impending release of the console version of <i>Cold War</i> nuke-'em-up <i>World in Conflict</i> will herald the simultaneous release of a PC expansion pack.
--------------------	--	--	---

20 Spore

You want more on *Spore*? Get on the floor! Or read Ed's hands-on feature.



38 Prototype

Mutant fun in downtown New York. Steve Hill indulges in some creative murdering.

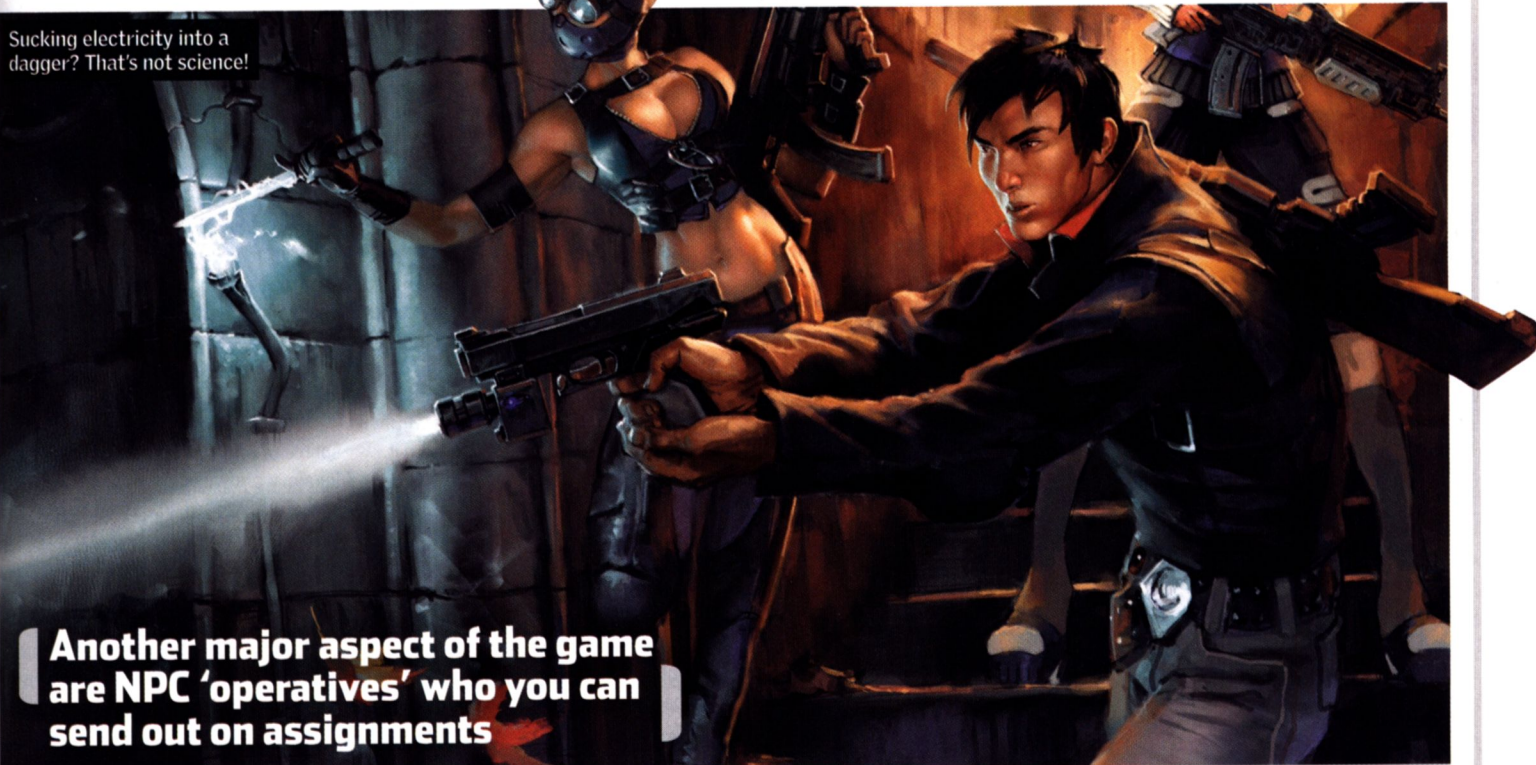


47 Games writing special

Get out your game writing pens and learn from the best. Game story creation exposed!



Sucking electricity into a dagger? That's not science!



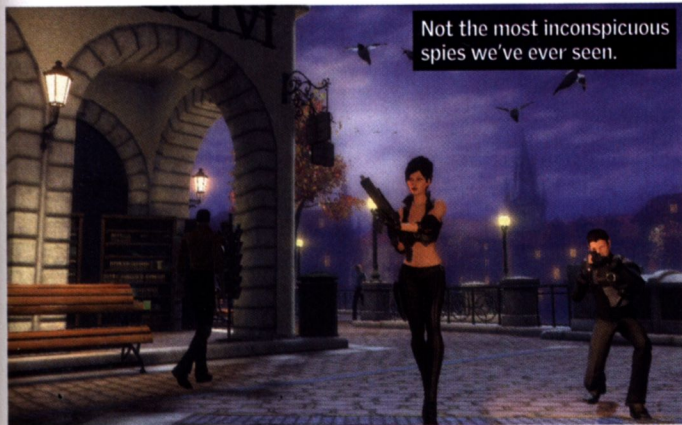
Another major aspect of the game are NPC 'operatives' who you can send out on assignments

"The two stealth roles will be about getting to places unseen, doing recon for the team and taking down enemies silently. Unlike *Team Fortress 2*, the stealth roles will have reasons to stick with the team and not just go off on their own," adds O'Hara.

As well as a de rigueur stylised cartoony look, Sony Online are currently developing *The Agency* for the PlayStation 3 with half the team playtesting with controllers and the

other half with mice and keyboards. However, whether you'll be able to spy on console players is still undecided according to O'Hara: "We could allow it, but the bigger question is should we allow it? We're well aware of the arguments against doing so. In fact, our own internal rule is: we won't compromise one platform's gameplay just to support both."

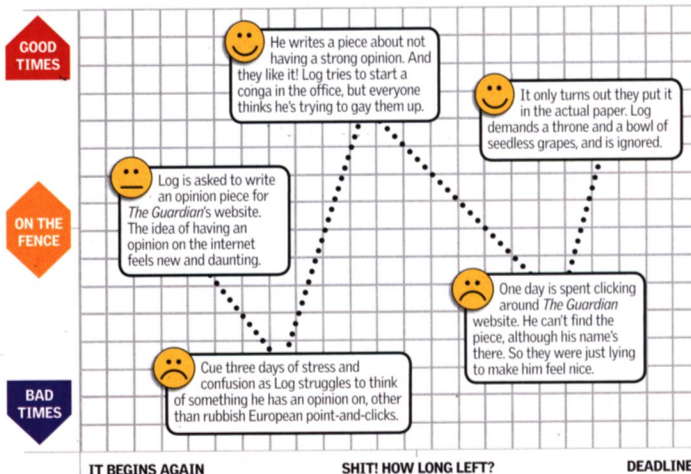
We'll leak more details on *The Agency* soon...



Not the most inconspicuous spies we've ever seen.

STUFF Metaphorically leaping away from the explosion that is SCI's massive downsizing, *Battlestations: Pacific* – a sequel to *Battlestations: Midway* (PCZ Issue 179, 68%) – has dodged the cull (see Stop Press). With 21 new units and 28 single-player missions spanning Japanese and American campaigns, it can only be better than the first title, which was a fairly disappointing action/strategy title about boats and planes.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



LET'S GET CRACKING

The fascinating story of how software piracy became an art form



DEMO SCENE.tv



Reporter
Pavel Barter

LET'S SAY, JUST for argument's sake, that you happen upon a hacked version of a PC game and run installer.exe. To the plonky sounds of

synth music you might read, "Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4 (c) Aspyr. Enjoy another nice game from your friends at Class." After that, you open the accompanying .info text file. Beneath an ASCII art graphic, you read details about how the game was ripped, and a 'help wanted' section, seeking partners in crime like suppliers, distributors, and the elite of videogame lawbreakers: crackers.

Back in the day, cracker groups were borderline famous. With names like Criminal Disguise, X-Static, G-Force, Now5 and Automation, they sounded like south London grime crews – but instead of laying down 'wicked rhymes', these posers gouged out the guts of PC games, wedged a few personal mementos inside, then sewed them back up again. Some pirates have little more than mischief in mind you see, in stark contrast to their public image of

morally repugnant individuals who somehow manage to fund terrorism.

"There is a strong social aspect to the cracking scene," says Ben Garrett, who runs Defacto2.net, a site dedicated to the computer underground counterculture. "It's part of the reason why people contribute so much time, effort, even money into their various roles and why they often find it hard to detach from it. Today's scene is nowhere near as social as it was in the '90s and '80s. Back then, consumer piracy was a civil, not a criminal issue and the risks and paranoia just weren't there."

In fact, home piracy began in 1975 with the first commercial program for a microcomputer: Microsoft's Altair BASIC. "Most users of this now legendary system were hobbyists who actively encouraged the copying and sharing of programming code," says Garrett. Mass piracy wasn't exactly a burning issue, though, since cassette games deteriorated after each copy. In 1978, Apple's Disk II floppy disk drive changed all that, and software publishers, seeing a fleet of marauding brigands on the horizon, hurriedly introduced copy protection.

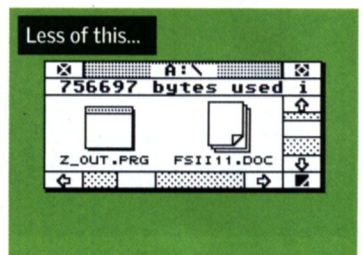
Ironically, it was the challenge of figuring out how the copy protection worked, and how it might be disabled, that spawned the cracker scene. These proto-pirates left their mark, like dogs peeing on lampposts, in the form of colourful introduction scenes: crack intros or 'cracktros'.

"Being a cracker soon became a source of pride, and the best names were known worldwide," says Tamas Polgar, author of *FREAX - The Brief History of the Demoscene* (www.freax.hu), a book about the history of cracking.

GANG WARS

By the mid '80s – the time of the Amiga and the Commodore 64 – crackers were organised into large crews that could distribute their wares without much difficulty. Europeans mostly spread their releases by mail, while Americans used modems and bulletin board systems (BBS) because of cheaper phone rates in the US. This resulted in a serious division in standards, explains Polgar.

"European crackers achieved a higher quality because they had time to get the original software in the morning, work on the crack all the day, let the C64



Classic cracktro action.



The demoscene has become a shining example of new media art

compress it during the night, and mail it the next morning. American crackers did not have time. They had to do it quick, and sometimes dirty, because the competition could upload work to a BBS at any time."

Today, speed and quality remain the main areas of competition among cracker crews: "Pirate scenes have always been highly competitive," continues Garrett. "It's competition, not free software, that is often the driving motivation for top pirates. Over the years the computer systems, participants and group names change, but the goal is always the same: to release the product in an acceptable form and to do so before anyone else."

During the height of the cracktro era, the scene split into two groups: pirates proliferated warez, while demoscene programmers stayed on the right side of the law. These cracker cousins use game graphics, animation and music to create non-interactive videos, running in real time on PCs - art gallery cracktros, in essence.

"A demogroup is usually made of a programmer, a graphic designer, a musician and a 3D and 2D animator," says Stephanie Cornilleau from the website Demoscene.tv.

DEMO GOODNESS

"People confusing the demoscene with warez are mostly journalists," she continues. "To the games industry, the demoscene is a fishpond of creative and technically talented people. There's no bad feeling between us and the industry."

Sure enough, development studios often recruit visual effects programmers from the scene. Will Wright has cited the scene as a major inspiration for *Spore*, and the team behind *Max Payne* are reportedly former scenesters.

Demogroups get together at an annual bash in Germany, where the Scene.org Awards hand out prizes to the best demos of the year. "The demoscene has its codes, its rules, its stars and as a result, its history," says Cornilleau.

These arty crackers have evolved over time, and now create demos on



Iconoclast serves up a bouquet of visual treats.



Making a scene

The drugs do work: three cracking good cuts from the demoscene



Smashy brickies.

FR-041: Debris

DEMO MAKER: Farbrausch

ORIGINS: PC demo, 2007

DESCRIPTION: A cube breaks into pieces and snakes through a high-rise metropolis, following undulating train lines. Then the buildings and sky explode into fractals.

EXPERT OPINION: "This is technically and creatively impressive," says Stephanie Cornilleau from Demoscene.tv. "During its first broadcast at the Breakpoint demoparty, we felt big emotion from the audience."

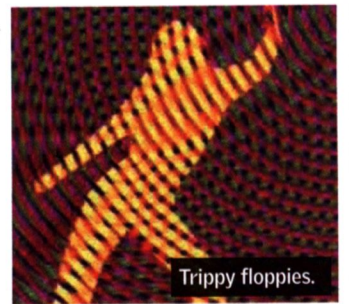
State of the Art

DEMO MAKER: Spaceballs

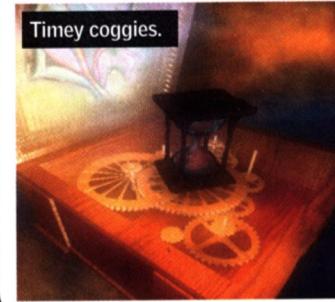
ORIGINS: Amiga demo, 1992

DESCRIPTION: Clearly inspired by the Aciiiiiid dance movement of the time, this demo looks like a trippy music video, but its dancing silhouettes have aged well, especially considering it was created on an early '90s home PC and fit on a floppy disk.

EXPERT OPINION: "This Amiga demo is emblematic - it was really popular in the '90s and a big inspiration for demomakers."



Trippy floppies.



Timey coggies.

Iconoclast

DEMO MAKER: Andromeda Software Development (ASD)

ORIGINS: PC demo, 2005

DESCRIPTION: *Tron* meets fireworks to the tune of wanky heavy metal. It's all very European (ASD are from Greece), but the exploding stars, howling faces, and ticking time mechanisms are visually impressive.

EXPERT OPINION: "This demo has visual identity," remarks Cornilleau. "A great deal of work was undertaken on the graphics."

platforms like mobile phones and iPods, as well as old-school emulators like the ZX Spectrum.

But while the demoscene has become a shining example of new media art, piracy has turned all seedy. In the '90s, BBS gave way to the internet, which revolutionised cracker-communications.


COMMON PIRATES

"The downside was that it exposed many more people to what was previously a little-known activity," says Garrett.

"Many people, often kids who couldn't join a top-tier group, would start their own group, releasing products of dubious quality that other people wouldn't touch. There was a surge in quantity and a decline in quality."

Furthermore, game piracy became a massive legal and moral issue. Law enforcement bodies like the FBI started hounding down and locking up pirates, while gamers became genuinely concerned that piracy could lead to the downfall of the PC game industry.

Despite all these concerns, however, the irony is that the cracking scene itself has hardly changed.

"The groups who crack, package and release titles have nothing to do with the seedy sites that populate the internet," says Garrett. "Groups who release titles, release for themselves and for their inner circle. The filtering down of releases onto peer-to-peer networks, websites and into the general population is probably an unfortunate consequence. The problem is not that piracy or the scene has gone dirty, cheap and commercial, but rather that piracy has finally been exposed to the greater world." 

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

ETA
SEPT 7
2008

EVOLVING FUN...

SPORE

What do you get when you mix God and Dr Moreau? Apparently, *Ed Zitron*...

THE LOWDOWN

- Amazing creature creator
- Well-defined phases
- Gorgeous looks
- Near endless gameplay
- May lack weight in later gaming phases

DEVELOPER Maxis PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.spore.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 190

WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING in front of it and taking time to see what you can do, *Spore* is hard to appreciate and understand. On paper, the idea sounds like a pipe-dream that could never become a game – and that's why it's all the more weird to play.

When you see how much work has gone into the creature creation, from evolution from primal sludge to interplanetary colonist, you see that Maxis have created a game that is plain special. You can choose to go from the very beginning in the Tide Pool, or jump into space instantly, creating a race and heading to the cosmos. *Spore* is your sandbox, with enough buckets and spades to keep you very, very busy.

PRIMORDIAL WHOOP

In the Tide Pool Phase you start as your first creation, eating things and growing, adding dangerous body parts to your creature as you go. This phase is similar to *Feeding Frenzy*, but a lot prettier, with crab-like creatures chasing you down as you eat your way towards evolution across a watery, 2D expanse. In all honesty, this is somewhat peripheral and feels like a mini-game. Things soon change when you enter the Creature Phase, as you face the true creation editor, with the emphasis on making something that will survive in a 3D world brimming with life.

You're able to make creatures with four pairs of legs, three arms, gigantic snouts, gnashers like a crocodile, and even a big bum with antlers on it.

A series of mathematical equations judges the construction of each creature and how they'll walk, so each has a distinct strut or scuttle. Or, in the case of the monstrosity that was my first creation, a distinct hobble, with its four jaws (including two on its knees) clicking and clacking with each pained moment of life.

AH, REAL MONSTERS

The good news for my beleaguered 'Farchnad,' was that you're able to edit your life-forms at any time. Once edited, mine confidently strode around the world, in an RPG-esque manner, befriending the occasional creature but mostly seeking to eat and destroy anything in his path.

Progression as a carnivorous (destructive) or herbivorous (friendly) entity depends on the creature's physical characteristics. Enemies have resistances and weaknesses, such as poisons, which various body parts can counter. Impressing other creatures is also based around this parts system. One puny monster walked up to me and sang a little tune, and *Spore's* UI insisted I attempt to impress him by singing back. Sadly, I had no mouth, so instead I decided that the only song he was going to hear was the melody of my claws squeezing the life from his fluffy little arse.

If you want, you can be a herbivore, gaining friends and avoiding predators, but everyone makes babies. From this dirtiness comes the chance to evolve, adding body parts to grow towards the



It's Watto from that rubbish *Star Wars* movie.

point of sentience, where you gain the ability to create things. There's a real feeling of life, with each race you create, and possibly make extinct, feeling utterly new and original.

So far the gameplay is somewhat simplistic, but the sheer scale of the world and the number of creations within its gorgeous vistas make up for this. And once you evolve, there's plenty more to do.

TRIBAL WARFARE

The Tribal Phase, which is a bit like *The Settlers*, sees you building settlements, making enemies or friends with other tribes and collecting the main source of income (meat) by slaying local wildlife, and (somewhat disgustingly) from other creatures' corpses. You cease to control a single creature, instead taking control of an entire group to slowly mate and crawl towards a civilisation of, in my case, Bumantlers: crocodile-ducks with antlers coming out of their rear-ends.

The interface feels like a classical RTS, as you create farmers to farm, diplomats to talk to other tribes, fires so that your Bumantlers can dance, and of course, spear-makers to make war with. Eventually, my Bumantlers became so numerous that they

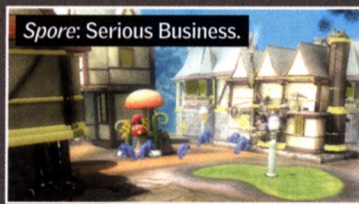


The Blogspore

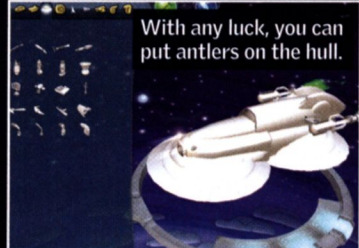
Social networking for the *Spore* generation...

Spore sets up a profile for each creator, and lets people see what achievements they've gained, creatures they've shared and Sporecasts they've made.

Sporecasts are made up of choices of units, creatures, buildings and/or themes, and can be shared. You can select any number of Sporecasts to populate your world, and *Spore* judges where in the game they'll fall. If a creature is too strong for the Creature or Tribal Phase, it'll appear in the later phases. You can also message people, add friends, leave comments on their creatures and subscribe to all Sporecasts, downloading your friends' creations as they add them.



Spore: Serious Business.



With any luck, you can put antlers on the hull.



The universe is yours.

THE STORY SO FAR...
MAXIS

BRAUN TOWN
Will Wright and Jeff Braun found Maxis for the sole purpose of publishing *Sim City*.



1987

SIM-U-LIKE
People-simulator *The Sims* is released, and becomes the best-selling game of all time.



2000

WELL DONE
Wright gets a lifetime achievement award at GDC for his work on the *Sim* games.

2001

SHOUTS
At GDC, Will Wright announces *Spore* to the world, causing groups to faint.

2005



How adorable. Let's hit it with sticks.

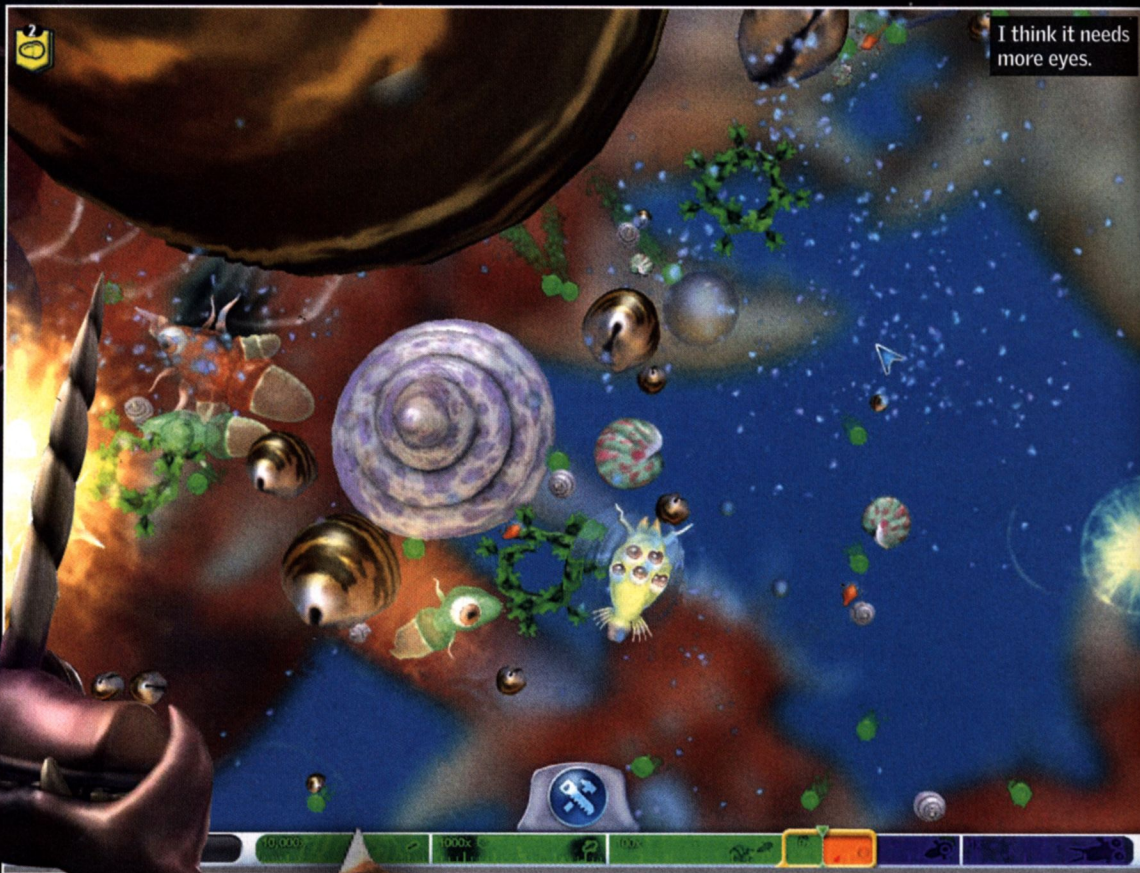


Sadly, *Spore* has no nuclear winter.

There's a real feeling of life, with each race you create feeling utterly distinct



It's a storm in a Petri dish.



Pollination downloads creatures to populate your world, making Spore a 'massively single-player game'

founded their own city, and Buntropolis was born. At this point, the game ceases being about other creatures and their relationship with you, and starts being about your creation and its colonisation of the planet.

The Civilization Phase is like *Sim City*, with a bit of RTS when you're at war. You advance by taking over the planet through diplomatic, religious or military activities.

The religious aspects aren't yet in place, but we're told they'll allow you to indoctrinate other cities (using gigantic holograms, religious dances and the like), with the eventual winner gaining control of the entire populace.

In diplomatic mode, you can visit other cities and make peace with them, sharing resources and giving them gifts, *Civ*-style. The military aspects meanwhile are fantastically creative, allowing you to design your own war machines.

There are no premade units, with your creativity limited only by your stocks of Spice, the phase's currency.

SPACE TRADERS

When the planet is under your control, you can go into space – and, again, the spaceship is yours to create.

There are hundreds of thousands of randomly generated planets you can fly to, scanning and capturing life, and eventually creating your own colonies. You'll run into life ranging from simple creatures to fully-fledged civilisations, which you can once





Let's be friends, disgusting horse-monkey creature.



Behold, the duckenfragon.



War ain't never been this cartoony.

again either attack or befriend – gaining technology in the process.

You can also create life on other worlds by planting trees and making the environment more hospitable, eventually terraforming them. Each world has a different combination of life, temperature, terrain and so on, and won't be a just-add-water civilisation-solution.

While the possibilities are clearly endless, we're assured that it will become possible at some point to 'finish' the game. Your eventual goal is yet to be revealed, but Maxis promise a full story arc with a definite beginning and end.

CREATIONISM

Spore is not a hardcore game. At the same time, it's not really a casual game – you'll have to take time to do things, otherwise the game's value will be lost. That's not to say you can't speed through the phases if you want to, rather that there's a charm to the beautiful experimentation, and the sheer range of

options is staggering. The result is that you feel a real sense of ownership of your creation – that's your little thing running around, not Murloc X or Mud Crab Y.

This is a step beyond *The Sims*' fake humanity. When you create buildings in the latter phases, they can be customised in thousands of ways, and using Maxis' Pollination technology, you can go online and receive a stream of new creatures, ships and themes into your universe.

Ultimately, Maxis plan to have a MySpace-style website that allows you to create 'Sporecasts' of particular groups of ships, housing, creatures or any other creations. A great example is the Alphabet Creatures – a selection of strange-looking monsters shaped like letters that's being shared across the internal *Spore* network as we speak. These As, Bs and Cs move distinctly, dance, squeak, and very much have their own 'life', and are editable once downloaded – each one is stored as a few kilobytes of data, as what you download is essentially their DNA: a code for *Spore* to manipulate.

Pollination expands this further, in that it downloads creatures, vehicles, and other sets to populate your world with, making *Spore* what Maxis

Fear of a pollinated planet

How you can steal the ideas of everybody on the internet!

Pollination, as Maxis are calling it, directly links your *Spore* gameplay to other people's, but in a more random and scattershot fashion than the MySpace-style Sporepedia.

Based on settings that you define – say, for instance, you only want steampunk stuff for your civilisation – *Spore* releases its own internet spider to find the DNA of those sharing content, and brings it back, entering it semi-randomly into your world. So, next time you play, you might find another

entire city using steampunk units and architecture, pollinated from the internet.

Once you reach space, there's every chance you'll find an entire planet made up of steampunk things – and if you've allowed creature pollination, you'll see them scattered in the wilds of other, less civilised worlds. Ultimately, Maxis wants to make *Spore*'s creatures, units and worlds out of both its own randomly generated creatures and the self-authored content of its entire user base, potentially making for a huge social back-end, outdoing even the most ardent of *Sims* communities.



Endless new user-generated content will populate your universe.



The secret to all happy-looking games is bloom.

refers to as a 'massively single-player game,' as your content is made up of other players' content mingling with yours to create a unique experience every time you play. An example is that in Creature mode, your world is made up of your species and others that you must make extinct to evolve – these, through Pollination, will be made up of downloaded content, changing each time you start a new creature.

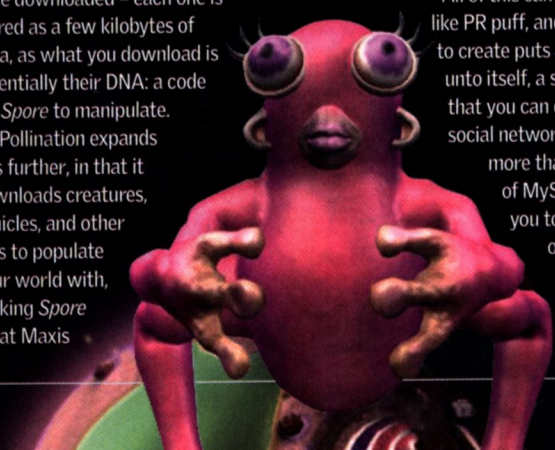
All of this can start to sound like PR puff, and yet the freedom to create puts *Spore* in a genre unto itself, a sandbox universe that you can get lost in. The social networking features are more than a mere aping of MySpace and allow you to interface with other users' content – we've actually seen it running, and

it's real. Maxis have even hinted that you'll be able to export videos of your units directly to YouTube, and 3D models to the animation package *Maya*. The networking features are both in and out of the game, with a website giving you access to your Sporepedia, but your in-game version is more robust and allows downloading of creations and Sporecasts.

As *Spore* stands, it's unbelievably beautiful and mesmerising. Will Wright and Maxis may very well have created something with the mass-appeal of the original *Sims*, with elements to draw in tougher-edged gamers in the Civilization and Space Age modes – though their complexity does remain to be seen. Can the Tribal, Civilization and Space Phases really feel as robust and intricate as their equivalents in other genres? We'll let you know. For now, the excitement is electrifying, the possibilities endless, and our interest way beyond piqued. **PCZ**



Yes, your house can be this goofy.



PCZONE CHARTS



- 1 — **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008**
Issue 188 90%
- 2 — **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN COMBAT**
Issue 188 89%
- 3 **NEW** **THE SIMS CASTAWAY STORIES**
Issue 193 48%
- 4 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**
Issue 188 38%
- 5 ↓ **CRYSIS**
Issue 188 92%
- 6 ↑ **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION**
Issue 175 91%
- 7 ↓ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 8 ↑ **UNREAL TOURNAMENT III**
Issue 189 90%
- 9 ↓ **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008**
Issue 188 71%
- 10 — **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
Issue 180 85%
- 11 — **THE ORANGE BOX**
Issue 187 n/a
- 12 ↑ **SIM CITY SOCIETIES**
Issue 189 61%
- 13 ↓ **THE SIMS COMPLETE COLLECTION**
N/A
- 14 ↑ **CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE EDITION**
N/A
- 15 **RE** **GEARS OF WAR**
Issue 188 90%
- 16 ↓ **WORLD IN CONFLICT**
Issue 186 92%
- 17 **RE** **BIOSHOCK**
Issue 185 96%
- 18 **RE** **MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE**
Issue 185 83%
- 19 ↓ **THE WITCHER**
Issue 188 88%
- 20 ↓ **WARHAMMER 40,000: DOW ANTHOLOGY**
N/A



1 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008**
Outselling *Championship Manager* by a huge margin, *FM2008* remains atop the charts.



2 **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN COMBAT**
When you abbreviate this to *COD*, it's really hard to not think of the endangered, delicious fish.



3 **THE SIMS: CASTAWAY STORIES**
You all bought this? Without waiting to read our review? That's just bloody charming that is.



5 **CRYSIS**
Proving negative reports of its sales were fibs, processor-hungry *Crysis* is still holding on and riding high in this month's charts.

MAD ABOUT GOO

We go all warm and squidgy for *World Of Goo*

www.2dboy.com | ETA: 2008

AMIDST THE EXPLOSION of physics-based gaming in the indie games market, you just knew that there'd be something better out there than the unending flow of "hey, this ball bounces" and "Jesus Christ water in a bucket!" freeware games. *World of Goo* is that thing.

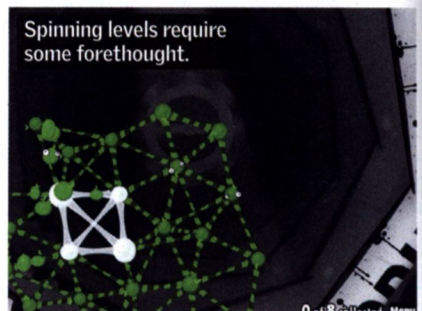
This puzzler requires you to get a selection of little blobs – Goos – towards a large pipe that sucks them up. You have a limited amount of Goos to use, and they can be pulled together in stringy lumps to make a structure to get them either across a gap or upwards, the trick being to create a gooey structure that successfully bridges a gap or doesn't fall over. While some Goos are only useable once, there are others that can be used multiple times to create complex structures that can brace against walls to help you reach the highest places.

While it's based on freeware game *Tower of Goo* (recreated in the full game as the game mode Goo Corporation), *World of Goo* goes above and beyond the original, with innovative and downright fun puzzle challenges that range from a casual stroll to a fiendish challenge, without managing to make you tear your hair out in sheer annoyance.



The game is also aurally and visually stunning, and feels more like it's been forged by an elite gaggle of designers and musicians rather than two guys who sit in web cafes instead of a proper office (their words, not ours).

We've only played one chapter of *World of Goo*, yet we're now in a ravenous frenzy to play the rest, as it's so impressive, so utterly gorgeous, and so fuzzily charming that we can't move on. Those who pre-order not only receive the same 'chapter one' demo we've played, but also a profanity pack that puts cuss words into the game. So hit the website you goo-ey sod, and prepare for puzzling.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man with games in his brains



DR MACHIEL SCHUETTE - NEURAL IMPULSE ACTUATOR DEVELOPER

Dr Michael Schuette has developed the Neural Impulse Actuator - a mind-reading device that allows people to control games by altering their concentration levels. Visit snipurl.com/brainscan to read Log's blog on his experiences beyond the real cutting-edge of gaming tech, and read on to learn more...

Q How long have you been working on the Actuator?

A Andrew, who actually invented the whole thing, has been working on this since 1996, but porting the software into DirectX and the .NET framework took eight months, between the both of us.

How does it work?

It uses a combination of software and the Actuator headband to read both your gestures and electric signals from

your brain to control games like *Unreal Tournament III*, but this morning I was using it to play *World In Conflict* - it's very flexible in the way it can be adapted to certain games. For example, you can bind particular movements to concentrating hard, such as moving forward and shooting.

But what does the Actuator actually measure when it translates its readings to movements in the game?

It measures electrical potentials, which are brain discharges, neuromuscular activity, neurons actually firing towards the muscles, and also every physiological response. The different levels of reactions from the body, for example excitement, can actually be measured in the discharge of volts (millivolts) in the body, and that's part of what the Actuator measures. So, muscles are typically running at about 250Hz, and that's how you can isolate them from other signals in the body, such as the beta waves, which run at 45Hz.

What are the advantages of using the Actuator?



Log tries out some psychic UT3 kung-fu.

Once you're trained, the reaction time is so much faster than normal keyboard use. A good example is when something flies towards you, your first reaction is to close your eyes, and when you're trained with this headset, your first reaction will be quicker than your movement with the mouse.

We actually had a guy at a games convention who had quadriplegia - he was paralyzed from the neck down - being able to use it and play regularly.

This all seems quite minimalistic, especially only having three sensors...

The most important part of the whole setup are these three sensors. The integration is all done using carbon nanofibres, all the way up to where the wire goes in. Only those three points are measuring, and realistically you only need three points. You can break down bio-potentials into the frequency components that control the game.

tat Zone

Hey, you, what's tat sound, everybody look tat's going down (on eBay)

Because we cause so much suffering in our daily lives, we confess through the medium of eBay by selling off the things that we occasionally get sent by companies to you, the reader, donating all the money to all kinds of charity. Once a new issue bumbles onto the shelves of your local newsstand we create these auctions, and you have the chance to win all sorts of delightful gear, including two things that you can wear on your filthy body! Look out for the 'PCZoners' tag on eBay.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



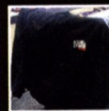
ALIENWARE T-SHIRT
A black T-shirt to make you all the rage in the dungeon you work in!



BOX OF DUBLOONS
Full of real, metal coins! They're not real currency, though.



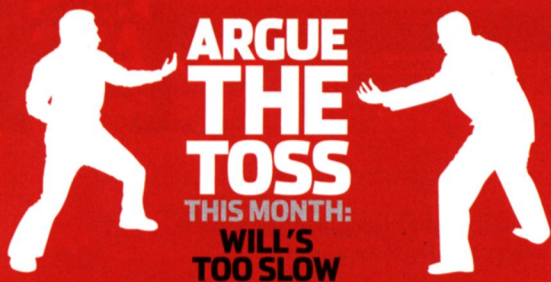
PIRATE FLAG
Bring yourself a step away from having a Confederate flag on your car.



KANE & LYNCH HOODIE
Black on the outside and yellow on the inside, just like a bumblebee!

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	LINEAGE II T-SHIRT - EXTRA LARGE Four bidders could only raise £2.20? This is for charity - have you a heart?	£2.20	4
	LINEAGE II CUT-OUT LIKE IN SHOPS That's better, but it's still pitiful you shameful skinflints...	£3.90	6
	FOOTBALL MANAGER KEY RING A dozen footie fans fought for this trophy, and raised a not-quite pitiful amount for charity.	£6.00	12
	SEXY, SEXY LINEAGE II STATUE The promise of having your very own barely dressed, but inanimate, woman raised cash in the double figures. Surprise, surprise.	£16.01	9



Dear Will,
You still haven't finished *Episode Two*, and in doing so you're making a mockery of episodic gaming. The thing is designed to be completed in one or two sittings, and you're dragging it out over months. Why haven't you just sat down and played it all the way through? Have you no passion for games?
Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,
Is this a dig at the fact that I feel no need to complete games hours after they've been released? I treat my gaming like one of those Spanish tapas meals – a little of this, a little of that. So what if it takes me longer? I'm currently replaying *Oblivion* and *Deus Ex*, ploughing through *C&C3*, and finishing off *Episode Two*. What's it to you how I spend my time?
Will Porter

Will,
Yes this is a dig at that thing you just said. Like most people who enjoy games, I'm eager to play them as soon as I can. If I've been anticipating the release of a game for some time, I'm enthusiastic about playing it and make it my priority. Don't you remember this? Ever read a game manual on the bus, because you're so very excited about your purchase? SH

Steve,
Reminiscing about reading manuals on the bus on the way home is my party trick young man. I just like to be more leisurely than you. And, although we're suddenly dipping *Argue the Toss* into far more personal areas than normal, I also have a hideous commute and a girlfriend who demands that we watch *Coronation Street* together. I'm no longer the young buck who can play a game for five hours straight. This is how gamers mature: one day you shall become me. WP

Will,
Why can't you be more hardcore, Will? You view your piles of games with dead eyes; your fingers, once calloused and worn by their collaboration with WAS and D, are now soft, fragile and effete. It's not like you're entirely bereft of squealing, girlish enthusiasm either – you rushed out to buy that *Harry Potter* book fairly sharpish. Mature my arse. SH

Steve,
I am hardcore Steve: I'm editor of a pigging PC games magazine! But to enjoy PC gaming you don't just have to sit open-mouthed at the end of the hype machine's conveyor belt and then gobble it all down at once. It's bad manners for a start, plus you get some sort of metaphorical indigestion. The best way to chew your gaming nourishment is to play games in shorter bursts and enjoy them all the more for it. WP

Will,
You have become weak. And I will destroy you. SH

CRIME ONLINE

APB takes MMOs on a joyride www.apb.com | ETA: TBA

APING THE OLD themes of open-ended urban criming seen in his past games – like *GTA* and *Crackdown* – *APB* is Dave Jones's waltz into proper MMO gameplay.

From what we've seen at GDC *APB* uses seamless instances created around players' actions across an expansive city. This is not as complicated as it sounds: say you're a lawbreaker (as opposed to a law enforcer) and you smash your car into a pensioner: an instance is created that is populated by yourself and player-controlled law enforcers of equal ability, leading to car chases and shootouts and all sorts of ridiculous fun.

APB sounds like it could be hugely entertaining and infinitely replayable, with the emphasis not on levelling up your character, but on customising them with player-created content, like lewd T-shirts and trendy hats.

More info as we get it, but until then *APB* is looking like recapturing the lost magic of cops 'n' robbers. I shot you! You're dead! No I'm not! Oh, what fun we had.



BLOCK PARTY

Gaming goes gaga with Roogoo

www.southpeakgames.com | ETA: April

WE'RE MASSIVE GURGLING idiots when it comes to good casual games, and *Roogoo* simply looks too magnificent to ignore, with its bold, primary colours and sickeningly cutesy visuals.

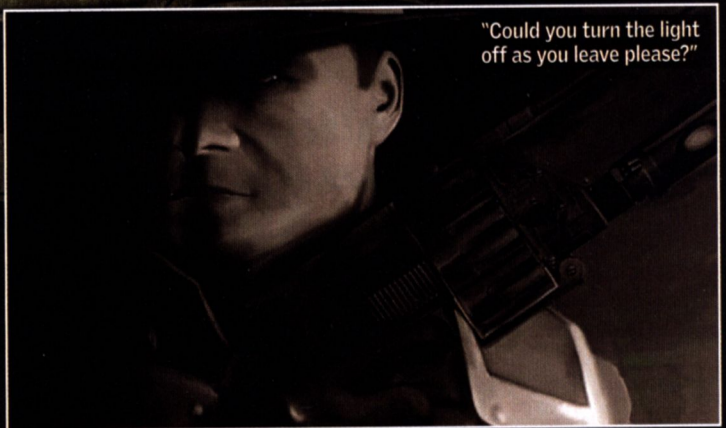
The idea is to rotate the platforms to allow the appropriately shaped meteors to fall through them, before stacking them up at the bottom to achieve victory. Triangle meteors go in triangular holes, square meteors go in the square holes, and as for the circles, well, that's a secret.

We're brilliant at the preview version of *Roogoo*, but, having skipped ahead a load of levels, we realised that it becomes really bloody difficult.



Look out for it near the end of April – it might be worth a go, as long as they don't charge something stupid for it, like a tenner. It's not worth a tenner. Five pounds perhaps.



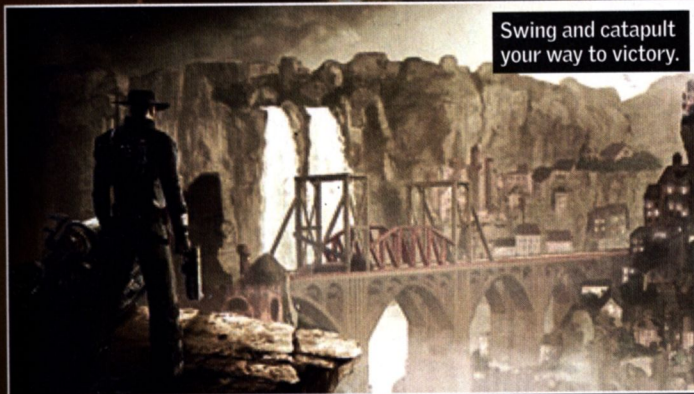


"Could you turn the light off as you leave please?"

THEY MADE SOMETHING UNREAL

Damnation somersaults out of nowhere, startles old lady

www.codemasters.com | ETA: Winter



Swing and catapult your way to victory.



'Vertical gameplay' means they'll be more 'up' to play with.

THE INTRIGUING 'MAKE Something Unreal' tournament has already given us *Red Orchestra*, which transformed a bunch of serious modders into people who done a big game.

Now, it's giving filmmakers Blue Omega a chance to make their first game, based on their competition runner-up *Damnation: Hell Breaks Loose*. *Damnation* (no subtitle) is a retro-futuristic acrobatic steampunk megablast that's claiming to "take the shooter vertical". Whatever that means.

We're used to vertical play in terms of having to watch out for guys upstairs, but *Damnation* is promising (boldly, perhaps) to take this to the next level, being set over huge levels that "could take three hours to climb to the top, in real time". Videogames don't have much respect for real time though, so you'll be swinging and catapulting yourself around, scaling buildings with wall jumps, and generally using superhuman acrobatic skills to dispatch enemies with similar abilities.

Your character, Hamilton Rourke, is a veteran of the long-standing civil war that has left the game universe exhausted. He's got a love interest he'd kill for and a thirst for revenge, all of which make you wonder

if Blue Omega's films ever starred Steven Seagal. He'll end up having to fight the Prescott Standard Industries (acronym obvious), who fancy nothing less than world domination.

The whole gameworld has a dusty, dirty fantasy feel to it, and in line with that, your character can use 'spirit vision' – essentially a spider-sense that lets you see the locations of your enemies. This all sounds excellent in the imagination. The problem with insane acrobatics is that you have to remove 99 per cent of complexity to take into account the fact you're not really doing it, and still make it feel like the player's achieving something. The more insane the acrobatics, the higher that percentage.

From what we've seen so far, the whole thing feels like a cross between the gymnastics of *Prince of Persia*, the 360° action of *Descent*, the over-the-top gun-action of *Devil May Cry* and... erm... the wall-play of *Spider-Man 3*.

That's two great games, one console-orientated PC flop, and one crime against electricity – which roughly reflects the opinions in the office of how *Damnation* might eventually turn out. All will become clearer as the release date approaches.

IT BEGINS AGAIN...

THE SIMS 3

Jamie Sefton on the next version of the rather big little people program... DEVELOPER EA/Maxis PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE thesims3.ea.com



THE LOWDOWN

- Seamless, cohesive, changing neighbourhood
- No more mood bars
- Discrete moods instead
- Social networking
- Yet another *Sims* game

ETA
TBC
2009

WE HAVE AN uncomfortable relationship with *The Sims* here at PC ZONE. We might occasionally do a 'Sims-free' Top 20 chart or give a risible expansion pack such as *The Sims 2: H&M Fashion Stuff* a well-deserved Dump award, but we also thoroughly enjoyed mucking about with toilet training our Sims in a Jackass feature and will heap praise and a 72% score upon a genuinely excellent addition to the franchise such as *The Sims 2: Open for Business*.

Maybe our schizophrenic behaviour is because we're gaming snobs, unable to appreciate the fact that within our overwhelmingly male hobby, nearly 60 per cent of *Sims* players are female, and convinced that this isn't a proper game like *World of Warcraft* or *Crysis*. Or

maybe it's because of the endless chart-clogging expansion packs – *Teen Stuff*, *Makin' Magic*, *University* et al – that for us, sum up everything that is bad and cynical about the gaming industry.

More likely, it's both of the above, and the fact that perhaps, after all, there is a great game here – created by game visionary Will Wright – that has become a worldwide phenomenon, shifting close to 100 million units.

SIM CITY

So while *The Sims 3* will never be a PC ZONE cover game, you can be sure we'll be keeping an eye on it – especially as the EA development team are apparently taking tips from Wright's forthcoming opus *Spore*, and are promising more features to appeal to us so-called hardcore PC gamers.

The first of these new additions will be a more open, seamless world for your Sims to inhabit. Rather than being trapped in a pit of your own virtual filth, with only a few token public areas (shops, parks and the like), you'll now be able to wander across the lawn and have a peep through your next-door neighbour's window. You'll be able to freely wander through the Sims' town, see other Sims walking around greeting each other in Simlish (the game's gibberish language), driving cars, shopping, hanging round on street corners scaring old Sims – a real-time virtual settlement directly around your Sims' homes.

However, *The Sims 3* won't be revisiting the failed *Sims Online* MMO project of a few years back. Instead of multiplayer, EA will be pushing the community side of the game, with features such as a Facebook-



EA are promising more features to appeal to so-called hardcore gamers

THE STORY SO FAR...

THE SIMS 2 STUFF PACKS

SIMPLY AWFUL
 Christmas Party Pack had 40 Xmas objects for £10: 8% and the first pack to receive a Dump.



2005

SIMPLY TERRIBLE
 Festive Holiday Stuff was a repackaging of Xmas Party Pack with 20 more items: 12%.

2006

SIMPLY SHIT
 Glamour Life Stuff had 60 items such as fur coats and paintings for £999: 18%.

2006



SIMPLY RED
 H&M Fashion Stuff was an advert that you had to pay for: 5% and yet another Dump logo.

2006

style social networking service. Here, you'll be able to upload Sims to a homepage, where friends and other players can download them into their own towns.

TOILET TROUBLE

Another major complaint about *The Sims* was the 'hamster cage' mentality of the previous games – that you spend too much time making sure your Sims don't piss their pants rather than evolving their characters.

The Sims 3 is much lower maintenance, removing the previous games' mood bars, so rather than micro-managing your small-

bladdered chum in the morning as he/she juggles a shower, breakfast and wee-wees, there'll be a simple bubble that pops up stating that your Sim is hungry, and with a deft click, all the tasks will be taken care of. Long-standing features such as the ability of your Sims to work hard for their money will return, and they'll have a range of jobs they can do to bring in the cash.

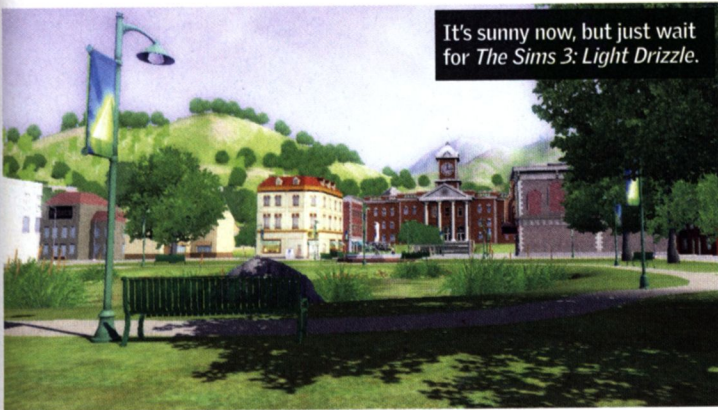
The major nods to the role-playing genre continue with the new inventory system, which allows you to, for example, pick apples and cook them rather than pop down your local Sim shop (it's bound to be

a WalMart rather than a CostCutters) and buying a ready-made pie. Plus, if your Sim gets a kiss from his girlfriend, or is given a present, for example, you'll see an icon called a 'moodlet' – a classic MMO buff – to indicate your Sim's state of mind after an important event.

Further RPG elements include 'traits', which are simple one-word descriptors that can be applied to your Sims, such as genius, grumpy, frugal and evil. Six or so can be assigned to the little AI folks; so if your Sim is an insensitive, kleptomaniac, outdoors type of person, then watch your wallet if you go out jogging. On the reverse side, that particular Sim would feel happiest when shouting abuse and stealing personal property on a fun run. Probably. Anyway, if you can't be arsed with all that character-creation stuff, you can also pick from a selection of pre-configured personalities – although angry Northern games journalist has yet to be confirmed.

Given that EA have ambitions to create a more fun, open 'sandbox' kind of game, rather than a domestic boredom simulator, *The Sims 3* could be surprisingly great. At this stage, however, the only thing we can guarantee with certainty is that the add-on packs are already being planned. **PC7**

It's sunny now, but just wait for *The Sims 3: Light Drizzle*.



Lily Allen re-recorded *Smile* in Simlish. True.



Fans of blue armchairs are shafted yet again.



Body shapes

Character creation – now with size zero!



Someone's been at the eggs and Guinness.

Yes, it's true – Sims can now grossly overeat just as much as anyone else in Western society. There are now sliders for muscles and weight, meaning you can go from a Kate Moss to a Russian shotputter with a quick click of the mouse button.

On first viewing, there doesn't seem to be a great difference between *The Sims 3* and its five-year-old ancestor. But compared with *The Sims 2*, the new Sims will have more lifelike skin, more detailed features and vastly improved facial animation to elicit more emotions.





pcspecialist.co.uk

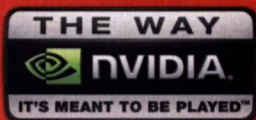


Apollo CM-X

£2095.00 incl VAT & Delivery*

INTEL® CORE™2 QUAD QX9650 (4 x 3.00GHz)
64bit Windows® Vista Home Premium
4GB CORSAIR® Dominator 1066Mhz Memory
ASUS® P5N-T Deluxe (3-Way Sli Support)
150GB WD Raptor® X Clear (10000rpm)
750GB Serial ATA Hard Drive (7,200rpm)
20x Dual Layer DVD RW + Lightscribe
768MB nVidia GeForce 8800GTX
Sound Blaster® X-Fi™ Xtreme Music
800W Super Quiet Quad Rail PSU
ASUS® Silent Knight II CPU Cooler
52 in 1 Memory Card Reader
Onboard 10/100/1000 Gigabit LAN port
CoolerMaster CM Stacker 831 Case
Six USB Ports (2 Front / 4 Rear)
2 x 1394 Firewire Port Onboard
1 yr RTB + 1 Month Free Collect & Return Warranty

GAMING MACHINES



opening times 9-5pm Mon-Fri & 9-1pm Sat
email:enquiries@pcspecialist.co.uk

you dream it... we'll build it!



Apollo GT

£792.00 incl VAT & Delivery*

INTEL® CORE™2 DUO E6850 (2 x 3.00GHz)
32bit Windows® Vista Home Premium
2GB CORSAIR® XMS2 800Mhz Memory
ASUS® P5N-E Sli Motherboard
500GB Serial ATA II Hard Drive
20x Dual Layer DVD RW + Lightscribe
512MB nVidia GeForce 8800GT
8 Channel Supreme FX High Def Audio
600W Super Quiet Quad Rail PSU
ASUS® Silent Knight II CPU Cooler
52 in 1 Memory Card Reader
Onboard 10/100/1000 Gigabit LAN port
Stylish Silver/Black Trident Case
Six USB Ports (2 Front / 4 Rear)
2 x 1394 Firewire Port Onboard
1 yr RTB + 1 Month Free Collect & Return Warranty

Apollo GT Sli

£1208.00 incl VAT & Delivery*

INTEL® CORE™2 QUAD Q6600 (4 x 2.4GHz)
64bit Windows® Vista Home Premium
4GB CORSAIR® XMS2 800Mhz Memory
ASUS® P5N32-E Sli+ Motherboard
2x 500GB Serial ATA Hard Drive (7,200rpm)
20x Dual Layer DVD RW + Lightscribe
2x 512MB nVidia GeForce 8800GT (Sli)
Sound Blaster® X-Fi™ Xtreme Music
700W Super Quiet Quad Rail PSU
ASUS® Silent Knight II CPU Cooler
52 in 1 Memory Card Reader
Onboard 10/100/1000 Gigabit LAN port
Stylish Silver Aluminium Trigon Case
Six USB Ports (2 Front / 4 Rear)
2 x 1394 Firewire Port Onboard
1 yr RTB + 1 Month Free Collect & Return Warranty

Apollo GTX

£1488.00 incl VAT & Delivery*

INTEL® CORE™2 QUAD Q6600 (4 x 2.4GHz)
64bit Windows® Vista Home Premium
8GB CORSAIR® XMS2 800Mhz Memory
ASUS® Striker Extreme Motherboard
150GB WD Raptor® X Clear (10000rpm)
750GB Serial ATA Hard Drive (7,200rpm)
20x Dual Layer DVD RW + Lightscribe
768MB nVidia GeForce 8800GTX
Sound Blaster® X-Fi™ Xtreme Music
800W Super Quiet Quad Rail PSU
ASUS® Silent Knight II CPU Cooler
52 in 1 Memory Card Reader
Stylish Silver Aluminium Trigon Case
Six USB Ports (2 Front / 4 Rear)
2 x 1394 Firewire Port Onboard
1 yr RTB + 1 Month Free Collect & Return Warranty

* Prices subject to change.

order online
or call us on: **0844 499 4000**

other methods of payment include:





BATTLEFIELD HEROES

HOT SHOTS

DEVELOPER DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEB www.battlefield-heroes.com
ETA Summer

BELIEVE IT OR not, this cartoony third-person shooter is from the same developers as the gritty *Battlefield* FPS series. And it's going to be free to play. *Battlefield Heroes* is an attempt to make an accessible and fun (casual) multiplayer blaster with revenue generated from banner advertising on the game's website and loading screen, as well as 'micro-transactions' – although whether this means players will be able to buy extra weapons or just bright pink sombreros for their characters is yet to be revealed. What we do know is that this is a serious proposition: two factions, three character classes, special abilities such as being able to see enemies through walls, multiple vehicles and a battle mode that mashes capture the flag and team deathmatch into a colourful explosion. But we'll reserve judgement on whether it deserves the *Battlefield* name until we get our hands on it...

50



50



3



4



5

The Bigger Picture

1 CLASS ACT

Battlefield Heroes has three classes: a Soldier, a speedy Commando, and the heavy weapons guy – the Gunner. Each class also gets sticky bombs for killing tanks.

2 MASS APPEAL

The UI has icons for health, weapons, team 'tickets' and experience. There's no mini-map, as DICE felt an overall view wasn't needed in game where you decrease your rivals' spawn times through both kills and flag capture.

3 AXIS AND ALLIES

When you register you have to swear allegiance to the Royal Army (good guys) or the National Army (Nazis without swastikas). Victory is gained by winning territory, but the exact mechanics of this are yet to be seen.

4 BATTLEFIELD LITE?

Gameplay changes include no friendly fire, no knife kills or one-shot-kill sniper hits, and a third-person view (because first-person views confuse noobs, and stop you seeing customisations you make to your character).

5 TANKS A LOT

Vehicles are included, but they're easier to control. Tanks are faster, and planes are more agile, and soldiers can sit on the wings for extra firepower.

6 SPECIAL POWERS

Abilities – like a health boost for nearby team-mates, and X-ray vision to see foes through walls – are available to players before they jump into the game. There's also an emote system with nine animations.

7 CARTOON CAPERS

DICE have said they want to return to the silly feel of *Battlefield 1942*, delivering a game that anyone can join in and play. *Heroes* will also have a matchmaking service, auto-patching and hardware specs that include as many potential gamers as possible.



6

**MOSTLY
COMING
AT NIGHT.
MOSTLY...**

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

**ETA
EARLY
2009**

"Get away from her you glitch!", screams Jamie Sefton, before updating his graphics drivers

DEVELOPER Gearbox PUBLISHER Sega WEBSITE www.sega.com/aliens

THE LOWDOWN

- A new *Aliens* FPS!
- Squad-based shooter with four-player co-op
- Canonical weapons, gadgets and locations
- Could be *Brothers in Arms: Jarheads in Space*

TRUE STORY: A friend of mine was working as an extra on *Alien³* at Pinewood Studios, and Kylie was filming a music video in the sound stage next door. A few members of the film's crew decided it would be funny to play a prank on the pop princess, and enlisted the help of some puppeteers.

On one take, as the unaware Kylie pouted and danced towards the camera, there was an unscheduled xenomorph to her left. Kylie, according to my mate, "shat herself". I've never found out if that was a literal description or not...

Admittedly, H. R. Giger's creatures are damn scary – they move blindingly fast, melt into shadows unseen, strike violently, and have no mercy. There's no dropping to the knees and pleading for your life if you encounter a xenomorph.

And thanks to Gearbox, the bitch and her spawn are back...

HUG MY FACE

Aliens: Colonial Marines is based on James Cameron's *Aliens*, presenting a frenetic, frightening universe where you and your squad are facing off against hordes of the creatures, in a game set just after the events of *Alien³*.

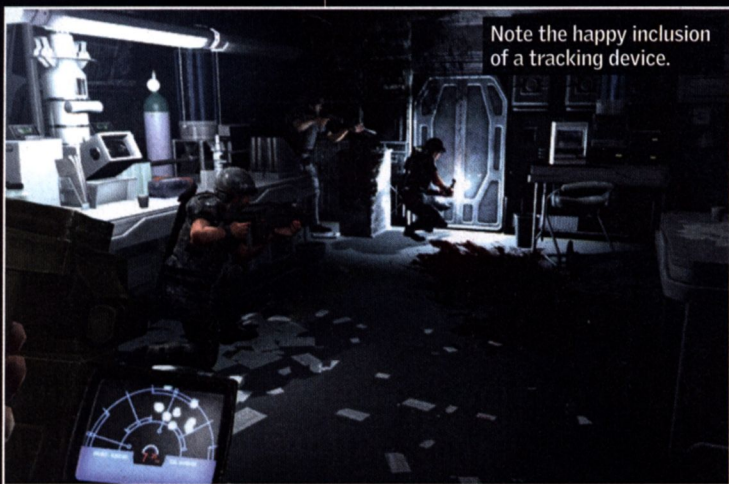
Alien: CM's placement in the canonical *Alien* timeline should spare us the terrible human/aliens hybrids and the Predalien that the film franchise has inflicted on us more recently. Just to underline: we're in pure Cameron war movie territory.

The storyline, written by *Battlestar Galactica* (the new cool one, not the ultra-camp '70s one) scribes Bradley Thompson and Dave Webber, is a closely guarded secret, but apparently you begin the game as a brand-new character in charge of a squad of marines who are sent aboard the derelict USS Sulaco, which was left abandoned at the start of *Alien³*, to find out what happened to its crew.

However, *Aliens: CM* doesn't just include the atmospheric settings of spaceships such as the alien derelict (where William Hurt was facehugged for the first time), but expands into bigger locations including cargo ships (so that means power-loaders) and even futuristic cities – so maybe we'll get to see xenomorphs on Earth after all...

Gearbox are huge fans of the sci-fi series and are carefully recreating many of the classic beasts, sets and weapons from the first two films, using a large collection of replicas and original props from the movies. They've even got their hands on original sound effect recordings from *Aliens* to meddle with.

All the Colonial Marines' armoury seen in *Aliens* will appear in the game, including the pulse rifle, those cool automated gun turrets that appear in



Note the happy inclusion of a tracking device.



Sentry guns keep you safe-ish.

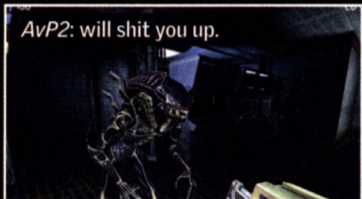
Alien Odyssey

Three *Alien* games bursting from the bloody chest of the PC...

PC ZONE reviewed the first *Alien* FPS in 1996, *Alien Trilogy* – a decent shooter (we gave it 79%) where you play as Ripley talking on those xenomorphs.

Aliens vs Predator, another shooter, appeared in 1999 but was in a different universe quality-wise (91%). Three species (Colonial Marine, xenomorph and Predator) meant three styles of gameplay (survival horror, wall-crawling kill-fest, and stealth).

Developed by Monolith (developers of *F.E.A.R.*) and released in 2001, *Aliens vs Predator 2* is the ultimate *Alien* game: with fantastic graphics, huge outdoor levels, immense atmosphere and multiplayer action. Fantastic and well worth its 93% Classic award.



AvP2: will shit you up.



You never were very good at leadership.

THE STORY SO FAR...
GEARBOX

SHEPHARD
Opposing Force, Gearbox's official expansion to Half-Life, was a major hit.

1999



BARNEY
Blue Shift was the next Half-Life expansion, starring security guard Barney Calhoun.

2001

MASTER
Gearbox ported Halo to the PC, introducing Master Chief to online multiplayer.

2004



MATT
Gearbox release Brothers in Arms: Road To Hill 30, its love-it-or-hate-it squad shooter.

2005

We're already expecting great things from this express elevator to hell

the extended *Aliens: Special Edition*, and Hicks' favourite boom stick, the Remington shotgun – although to keep you immersed in the action, there's no in-game HUD, with ammo counters appearing on the side of each weapon.

"I LOVE THE CORPS!"

Despite the probable release date of next year, *Aliens: CM* is already looking like the kind of game we've been waiting a long time for.

In one demonstration level that takes place on a colony planet similar to LV-426 (the planetary setting for *Alien* and *Aliens*) the four marines have to "make a stand" (as Gearbox says) by setting up a defensive perimeter before the xenomorphs begin scuttling towards your positions in droves. As leader, you can command your troops to set up the sentry guns, set explosive traps and weld doors shut, all done with context-sensitive actions.

Soon, the proximity meter is blipping, and the place is torn apart by dozens of murderous creatures, attacking through vents in the ceiling, and punching

through floor tiles, as the realistic-looking environments are filled with the glistening, deadly bastards.

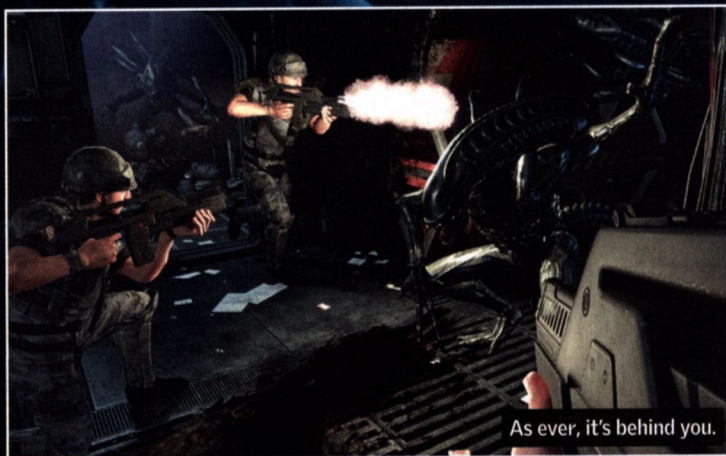
Although the animation is still unfinished and glitchy in places, it's clear that Gearbox already have a handle on the unearthly xenomorph physicality, apparently hand-animating all the creatures to avoid 'guy in the suit' B-movie monster syndrome.

While you can order your three AI squadmates around, and also leave them to fight any enemies without telling them to (as with *Brothers in Arms*), there's also a nifty bonus: *Aliens: CM* is set to feature seamless jump-in/jump-out co-op for up to four players. Just imagine what it'll be like with today's tech and four mates swearing and laughing at each other as you bumble around the levels hopelessly causing lethal chaos. This could be an experience that might even match *Left 4 Dead*, and that's saying something.

Aliens: Colonial Marines is ages away, but we're already expecting great things from this express elevator to hell. Don't let us down Gearbox. **PC7**



Right, that's just obscene.



As ever, it's behind you.

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER

Subscribe today
and you can choose
your **free hoodie!**

OFFER 1

DIRECT DEBIT - Pay only £9.99 every 3 months and receive a free black (L) hoodie

OFFER 2

DIRECT DEBIT - Pay only £9.99 every 3 months and receive a free grey (M) hoodie

YOUR
DETAILS

Title Forename

Surname

Address

Postcode

Telephone

If you'd like to receive emails from PCZONE and Future Publishing and its group companies containing news, special offers and product and service information, please include your email below.

Email

GIFT
SUBSCRIPTION

If recipient's details are different from above

Title Forename

Surname

Address

Postcode

DIRECT DEBIT MANDATE

I would like to pay by Direct Debit
(I understand that £9.99 will be debited from my account every 3 months)

	Originator's Identification Number	
	768195	
Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay Direct Debits		
To the Manager (Bank name)		
Address		
Postcode		
Name(s) of account holder(s)		
Branch sort code	<input type="text"/>	<small>Please pay Future Publishing Direct Debits from the account detailed on this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Future Publishing and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank or building society.</small>
Bank/Building Society account number	<input type="text"/>	
Ref No (Office use only)	<input type="text"/>	
Signature(s)	<input type="text"/>	
Date	<input type="text"/>	

PC ZONE Subscriptions, FREEPOST RLSC-SXSE-SKKT,
Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, LE16 9EF

OFFER CODE P039

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available on request. This offer is for new subscriptions only. You will receive 13 issues per year. The minimum subscription is 12 months, but if at any time during the first 60 days you or your recipient are dissatisfied in any way, please notify us in writing and we'll refund you for all unmailed issues. In the first 60 days you can also change which magazine you're subscribing to. Personal subscription will start with the next available issue and gift subscriptions will start with the first issue of the new year, unless otherwise requested. Offer ends 23/4/08. Stock subject to availability. In the unlikely event of stocks becoming exhausted, we reserve the right to substitute with items of a similar value. Full terms and conditions of this offer are available at snipurl.com/substerms Please tick here if you do NOT wish to receive relevant information about products or services from Future Publishing or any of its group companies by post or telephone .

POST YOUR
ORDER

SUBSCRIBE NOW GET A FREE HOODIE!



SUBSCRIBE TO BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG TODAY!

WHY SUBSCRIBE?

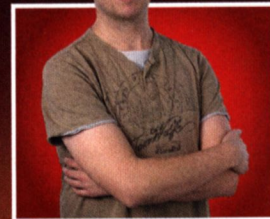
- ✓ You get a free black (L) or grey (M) limited edition PC ZONE hoodie
- ✓ Save £37.91 on the cost of PC ZONE in the shops!
- ✓ You ensure that you never miss an issue of your favourite PC games mag!
- ✓ You get the magazine delivered early directly to your door, hassle-free every month!
- ✓ All for £9.99 every three months!

ALL FOR
£9.99
EVERY THREE
MONTHS!

(OFFER ONLY AVAILABLE
IN THE UK)

GET A FREE HOODIE!

Subscribe today and
you can choose your
free hoodie!



"Believe it or don't, but I have worn my **PC ZONE** hoodie almost every day since the first ones were brought into the office. It's warm, sleek, well produced and (I think) dryly witty. What's more I will not rest until every youth at every bus stop, and every gamer in front of every PC is adorned by one. To this end we're giving them away free for anyone taking up a **PC ZONE** subscription – available in black (large only) and grey (medium only). Some say that the **PC ZONE** hoodie brings you luck, although for legal reasons we cannot back up these claims."

Will Porter
Will Porter, editor

Black (L)

PCZONE

In The Absence Of
Sexier Hobbies
Or Bands I Like,
I Wear PC Games
Clothing

PCZONE

In The Absence Of
Sexier Hobbies
Or Bands I Like,
I Wear PC Games
Clothing

PCZONE

In The Absence Of
Sexier Hobbies
Or Bands I Like,
I Wear PC Games
Clothing

Grey (M)

ORDERING IS EASY!

ORDER ONLINE: www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/pzv/p039

BY PHONE: CALL OUR HOTLINE **0870 8374 722** (quoting code P039)

(lines open 8.00am-9.30pm weekdays, 8.00am-4.00pm Saturdays)

BY POST: Complete the order form opposite and send to the Freepost address:

PC ZONE Subscriptions, FREEPOST ELSC-SXSE-SKKT, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, LE16 9EF

PROTOTYPE

Steve Hill takes a look under a mutated hoodie, but decides not to hug...

ETA
WINTER

DEVELOPER Radical Entertainment PUBLISHER Vivendi WEBSITE www.prototypegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 192

RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, hoodies have something of a bad rep, the wearers of the much-maligned garments being widely blamed for the majority of society's ills.

Thanks to Vivendi's forthcoming *Prototype*, that reputation is set to get a lot worse, as the baggy top sported by antihero Alex Mercer hides a lot more than the acne-ridden visage of a callow youth lurking outside an off-licence, spitting needlessly. While the craze of happy slapping has thrown up some appalling acts of immoral behaviour, we've yet to see a clip where 15 people are sliced in half with a flick of the wrist. Yep, it's going to take more than an ASBO to stop Mercer, as he wages a one-man war across the streets of New York, taking on the full might of the military, along with hordes of bloodthirsty disease-ridden zombies.

Why? Who knows? Mercer doesn't even know himself, joining the (very) long list of amnesiac characters that start out with a mind blanker than a cheque, and gradually piece their past together over the course of the game. However, not for Alex the tried-and-tested method of asking around and seeing if anyone has heard anything. Instead, he goes straight to the source, by consuming people and absorbing their minds to create a composite of his restored memory. He doesn't eat them, but it's a pretty unpleasant process all

the same, involving sticking his arm in their chest and turning them inside out.

SHAPESHIFTER

As well as downloading their memories, Alex can also shapeshift into any person he consumes, thus putting into practice the first half of developer Radical Entertainment's so-called 'Deceive or Destroy' gameplay.

The 'Deceive' mechanic is not a new idea, and indeed older readers may recall *PC ZONE* cover game, *Messiah*, wherein a cherub called Bob climbed into the arses of his intended victims and possessed them. More innocent times perhaps, as today's equivalent involves a hoodie-wearing killing machine, twisted innards and a gallon of blood. This is an effective trick all the same, letting Mercer gain entry to areas that would be inaccessible in sportswear, such as military bases.

These are dotted around the city, not simply as somewhere to sneak into, but as a pre-emptive measure against the thousands of feral zombies wandering the streets of Manhattan. As is probably apparent, something is rotten in the Big Apple, which has been struck down by a terrifying phenomenon, the scale of which has not been seen since the days of disco. The situation is so dangerous that the military has cordoned off parts of the city into Infected Zones.

While this continues, Alex Mercer is certainly not feeling himself, what with

his newfound ability to shapeshift. That's not even the half of it though, as he has somehow transformed into a superhuman walking weapon capable of leaping tall buildings and tossing vehicles around like confetti. He's even picked up a bit of that 'free running' business that was fashionable about two years ago – around the time *Prototype* was conceived. Mercer is suddenly a dab hand at it, able to literally run up the side of a building at a jab at the keyboard. And given that he's bang in the middle of New York, he has plenty of opportunities to do so.

SCREEN TEST

This sounds good on paper, but it's even better on a giant screen in front of hundreds of baying punters. Unveiled at the recent Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, adverts for the game were hard to miss, and the presentation drew a decent crowd, hosted by senior producer Tim Bennis and lead game designer Eric Holmes – a fiery Scot who impressively used the words 'fucking' and 'systemic' in the same sentence.

Holmes explained that he was heavily inspired by the fact that he didn't know what was going on in the thriller film *The Prestige*, and that Alex Mercer would encompass the style of Darth Maul, the frustration and madness of Travis Bickle, and the calculating murderousness of Hannibal Lecter, all wrapped up in a plot scrawled in blood by

THE LOWDOWN

Massive open world	✓
Two-player online co-op	✓
Extreme violence	✓
Foul and abusive language	✓
Fast zombies (which aren't really zombies)	✗



**It's going to take more than an ASBO
to stop Mercer, as he wages a one-man
war across the streets of New York**

Slow down there

It's not us, it's in the rules...



Not so fast, disease-ridden creature.

Behind closed doors, I was treated to a rare glimpse of one of the Infected areas, where diseased zombie-like creatures spawn from water towers (the disease is carried in water), gnash their teeth a bit, make some painful noises and attack as one.

As any fool knows, zombies overpower their target through sheer weight of numbers, not fleetness of foot. So the Infected may not really be zombies, though as Alan Partridge said, "Zombies, by their very nature, are inconsistent." But these ones moved a little bit fast for my liking.

the bastard son of Tom Clancy and Stephen King.

Following a somewhat inappropriate slide show of highly disturbing images, the assembled whoopers and hollers were treated to an extensive action sequence. Evidently New York, the city, is

attract the attention of the military, and he admirably responds by throwing taxis at their helicopters.

For showing off the game's high-adrenaline 'Destroy' gameplay, it's a well-chosen demo, recalling the most extravagant of Hollywood disaster

was as well). Speaking exclusively to *PC ZONE*, Bennison explains: "We're not a first-person shooter or an RPG; we're something different from your average PC release, plus this thing runs best on the PC. But in terms of the story – it's a conspiracy, it's got layers, it's a mystery. You start out the game not even knowing your own name. The player character doesn't even know his own name, and the player – along with the player character – slowly expands their knowledge of what is really going on and what happened to Alex Mercer and how he got like this and how he's all wrapped up with what's going on in New York."

So effectively, the person playing the game knows as much as *Prototype's* lead character.

Mercer's parkour is an impressive feat, letting him scale tall buildings and then leap down with impunity

densely populated with traffic and pedestrians, none of which Alex Mercer appears to have respect for.

We're shown an extensive gamut of his moves, including some weird claw thing, whereby he sticks his genetically modified hand in the ground, only for the sharpened prongs to pop up elsewhere, to the misfortune of anyone standing there. Mercer's parkour is an impressive feat, letting him scale tall buildings and then leap down with impunity, save for a large crack in the road. His antics quickly

movies, somewhere between *Godzilla* and *Independence Day*.

CONSPIRACY THEORY

Prototype is being developed by the core team behind *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, but despite the ostensibly similar action scenes, Radical are keen to stress that this is not a regular superhero game, and is a fully fledged PC release to boot. (And probably, deep down, that it isn't as disappointing as *Scarface*

Who you calling a chav?



"Subscribe now and receive this charming hooded top. Free!"

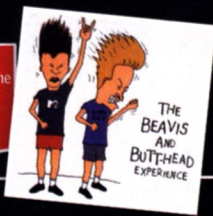


THE STORY SO FAR...

RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT

CHANGE IT

Radical kick off with the long-forgotten *Beavis and Butt-head* game. Butt munch.



1994

YELLOW PERIL

The licences come thick and fast, including *The Simpsons Hit & Run* and *Road Rage* games.



2003

GREEN MAN

The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction is made by the team behind *Prototype*.

2005

SAY HELLO

Scarface: The World is Yours resurrects the excesses of '80s films, with rude words.

2006

"As the character learns, you learn," confirms Bennison. "It was really important to us. A TV series like *Lost*, it's not the same tone obviously at all, but you watch it every week because they're going to peel back a layer and they're going to peel back another layer and hint at another layer and 'Oh my God you've got to watch next week.' You answer a question but you pose two more. So that's the structure of our game. That's another thing about our game in terms of the open-world space. It isn't a superhero game, or an urban crime become-the-kingpin thing: it's a thriller, it's a mystery."

The lead character is also something of a mystery, and not just because his face is obscured by an item of chav-wear.

"You're an antihero," says Bennison. "An antihero is somebody who is adept at what they do, which is kill people usually, but is so good that you actually root for them. And sometimes they may have a moral code or some redeeming quality. We're playing into that. Even in testing, even at a concept level, people found that interesting, that Mercer wasn't just a black-and-white evil guy or a black-and-white superhero."

WEARING DISGUISES

While the main GDC demo was undeniably impressive, it was largely one-paced (although at one stage it did waver between frantic and frenzied). Clearly the wow factor was to please the slack-jawed

onlookers, but behind closed doors I am privy to a shift in emphasis.

"The player really controls the pace," explains Holmes. "I guess what you saw there was 11 on the dial. We also have a bunch of disguise mechanics, where you can get the units to start wiping each other out by becoming a member of them and then confusing them as to which one you are."

"It's called the Patsy Mechanic," adds Bennison. "Basically you're in a squad, in disguise, and if you do a special move on another character, they'll think that character is you and they'll go after that other character. You can cause them to self-destruct basically. It's very



Punching tanks – it really works.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK!

So good they recreated it in detail...

While it's not exactly mapped, *Prototype's* setting is indisputably the Big Apple in all its gritty glory. Comprising the whole of Manhattan, it features 110 recognisable landmarks. As Bennison explains, "What we wanted to capture was the feeling of being there. We didn't want all 750 blocks of Manhattan accurately represented and three people walking around. We wanted the density of cars, the density of pedestrians that you see in Manhattan, and the soundscape. And you interacting with that: you start up crap in that environment. It gives us a volume to play in that's absolutely immense, especially when you've got airborne characters and the character has airborne abilities."

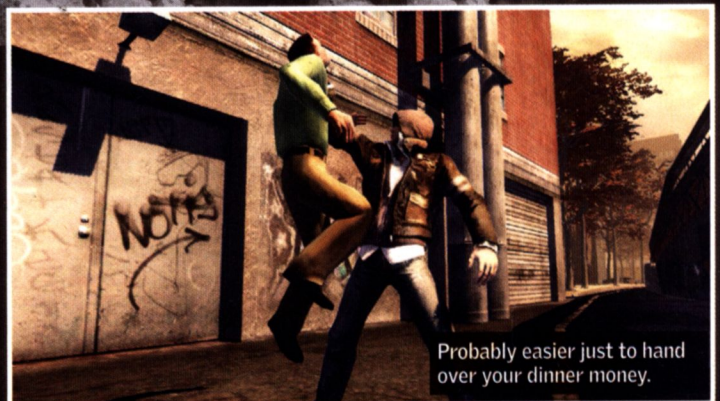
"It feels like anything could happen," adds lead designer Holmes. "It's electric."



Mercer loves his pogo stick legs.



That gymnastics he did at school finally pay off.



Probably easier just to hand over your dinner money.

Mercer uses his giant right hand to divert attention from the distance fog.

While Mercer becomes more powerful as the game goes on, there are still forfeits for misbehaviour



Jogging in the park.

important to us to deliver a game that has player-controlled pacing through the disguise mechanic. What disguise gives is the ability to recon a situation. You walk up, they don't know who you are, you can check out a base for example, see where all the defences are, and then take it apart by using your disguise.

"The point is that we wanted this player-controlled pacing so that you're not always in the moment of our previous console game, *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, where you're this 12-foot high green guy, everyone knows who you are, they're

firing missiles at you the whole time, and it's fun but it's one-dimensional.

"This game is not like that at all, although we did show those kinds of moments. We have another dimension to the game which is really cool."

PSYCHO KILLER

Apropos of nothing, Holmes explains: "I did a degree in psychology and there was an interesting question of profiling. One of the questions for psychopaths was 'Would you like people to fear you?' and I think that in this game we've kind of proved that's a fun thing to tap into.

"The Web of Intrigue system we have, these conspirators around the world, when you find one of these guys, he's going to be begging for his life, trying to get out any way he can. You're

going to be like a cat with a mouse, patting it around and there's definitely a sense of fun and power. It's much more low key – the guy's not going to be flying a helicopter gunship at you with a squadron of F-35s, it's more like one guy who darts into an alleyway, running for his life and you can find the way you want to take him down."

The disguise mechanic appears to work effectively, but as the old adage maintains, you can't put toothpaste back in the tube. Once your cover is blown, all shades of shit kick off, although if you're quick you can skulk into an alley and shapeshift into your previous form as if nothing has happened.

While Mercer becomes more powerful as the game goes on, there are still forfeits for misbehaviour.

When strawberry bootlaces go very wrong.



They'll never find him up there.



This must be those kicks everyone's talking about.



That's your no-claims bonus gone.

"There's punishment in the sense that when you create mayhem," says Holmes, "the military are going to hear about it, they're going to see it, and they're going to send in strike teams to find you."

I'M FREE

"You can play the game however you want," explains Bennisson. "The point is there's no moral code, but we do have a response system. Halfway through the game, if you harm a pedestrian and a cop car drives by while you're doing it, the cops can't do anything to you, but you know what they have? A radio. And the radio's connected to the military and the big guys will come after you in a second."

"We don't have this arbitrary star system where some god is watching you play the game, but it effectively does work that way."

Continuing the theme of player freedom, Holmes expands: "It's really important to us that if a player wants to do something in the game he can do it. Something that frustrated me in the EA *Superman* game – the first thing I did was grab a pedestrian, fly straight up as high as I can, and you want to drop him right? But Superman won't do it. That guy was created for comic books, to sell a wholesome moral vision of what his creators thought this guy was and what his values were."



That'll take weeks to tarmac.



The stealth approach obviously didn't work.

Sickness in Manhattan

My life's the disease...

The origins of the zombie-alike disease blighting New York are shrouded in mystery, with the facts becoming clearer over time as Alex Mercer uncovers the so-called 'Web of Intrigue'. In the meantime, we've uncovered this secret document, which traces the background of the sickness.

We've also discovered that there's a metagame that plays out in the background, while you're busy skulking around in disguise, mercilessly slaughtering hordes of people (both diseased and healthy) and leaping into helicopters. Like a New York-based game of *Risk*, there are neutral, infected and military zones, with the city in a constant state of flux.

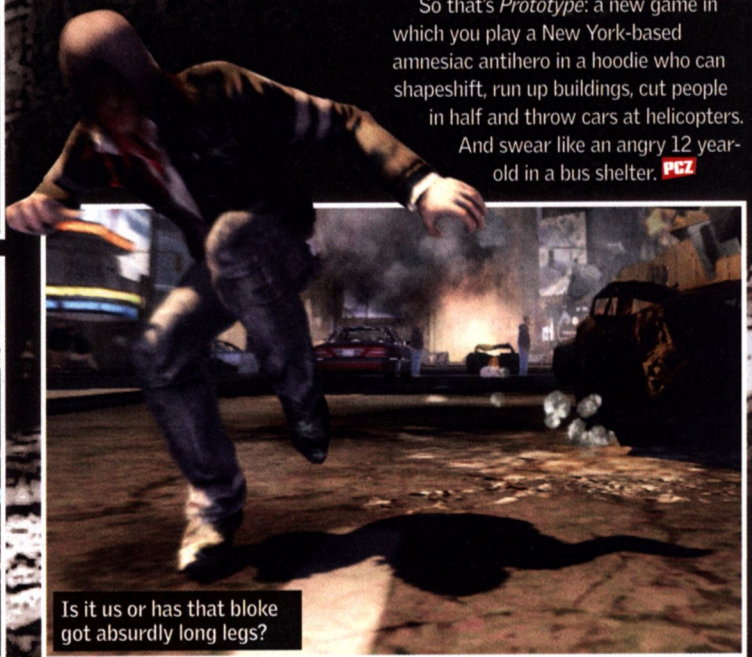
You play an amnesiac antihero who can shapeshift, cut people in half and throw cars at helicopters



He can't keep out of those tanks.

"Superman's a cool character, I grew up with him, I loved him. He's a fantastic movie character, but put him in a videogame and it's hard because you either have to go against the character or say to the player, 'No.' And our game is based around telling the player, 'Yes you can, and here's why you should...'"

So that's *Prototype*: a new game in which you play a New York-based amnesiac antihero in a hoodie who can shapeshift, run up buildings, cut people in half and throw cars at helicopters. And swear like an angry 12 year-old in a bus shelter. **PCZ**



Is it us or has that bloke got absurdly long legs?

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, BOOM!

MYTHOS



Ed Zitron battles the memories of *Hellgate: London*, the forces of evil and carpal tunnel syndrome. And wins

DEVELOPER Flagship Studios PUBLISHER Flagship Studios WEBSITE www.mythos.com

IN THE EIGHT years since *Diablo II* was released, many titles have tried to recreate its addictive qualities, but none have truly cracked the secrets of what kept players coming back. *Mythos*, the new 'free' MMO from Flagship Studios, is the latest contender, joyous in its countless homages and similarities to Blizzard's action-RPG. The difference, of course, is that Flagship know the secrets of *Diablo*, because most of them created the whole goddamn series in their former jobs at Blizzard North. So, the game has breeding; the question is, can a free game deliver the goods?

MONSTER MASH

Mythos is made up of a mishmash of fantasy clichés, wrapped in the wry

humour of a world of gremlins with cigars, homicidal toys and farmers who'll summon field-tilling zombies to get ahead of the competition.

Your character can be one of three races – humans, satyrs and gremlins – and from one of three professions: Gadgeteer, Bloodletter or Pyromancer.

The Gadgeteer is probably the strangest of the bunch, using guns (like *World of Warcraft's* Hunter), and devices that can slow down, explode, confuse and otherwise bother enemies while he stands at a distance and shoots them down. A Gadgeteer can't take much damage at first, so you're required to do a fair bit of dancing in circles while frantically clicking and praying your bullets find their mark.

Where *Mythos* really departs from the formula, however, is its distance from the rigid class structure. While each profession has a generic path of close (Bloodletter) or distanced (Gadgeteer and Pyromancer) combat, a talent system sees you accumulating points that can be spent on any of three skills, allowing a certain amount of control over your character's direction.

As such, Pyromancers can become proficient melee fighters, while Bloodletters can summon up huge personal armies; and while

Gadgeteers always need to keep enemies at a distance, they can develop skills to stop themselves dying the moment they get surrounded. Best of all, the classes feel fresh and different from the *Diablo* games, rather than a simple rehash.

JOY OF REPETITION

However, the *Diablo* influence is still very much there. While quests have a general-purpose narrative, most of them lack substance beyond picking up items or destroying things.

The further you get into the game the more obvious – and frustrating – this becomes. As you progress, there's more grinding to be done between skill levels, and the lack of new things to do becomes almost painful.

Compounding the problem is the skill system. As we're still in beta this could change at any time, but at the moment the sense of advancement is notably lacking. As the grind takes hold, spending points on abilities begins to feel a bit meaningless, and in a game of this nature this is a critical issue. Despite all this, however, *Mythos* manages to stay addictive, especially if played in small bursts.

It helps, obviously, that the game is entirely free to play – or

ETA
WINTER
2008

THE LOWDOWN

Unbelievably addictive	✓
Endless combat	✓
<i>Diablo</i> for 2008	✓
Repetitive	✗
Success of real-money transactions uncertain	✗



Flagship promise there will be no compulsion to invest any money

XP marks the spot

Find the secret maps and unlock epic new dungeons

As you advance through *Mythos*, you'll be able to collect a series of dropped maps that open up pocket instances around the game world. Venture into these dungeons and you'll find each one inhabited by a boss monster which, if slain, drops a master key. This, in turn, opens a big chest full of riches, and so-called 'epic' maps.

These epic dungeons are rock hard, and are best tackled in a group, but they contain the finest loot within their designated level range. The maps fetch a pretty penny at the shops, or they can be traded with other players – and as you only require one map per party, you can even auction off places in your group to would-be dungeonrunners. While epic dungeons can be soloed, it's worth noting that they're ridiculously hard, and with so much of the game being conquerable alone, the company may even bring a smile to your face. Maybe.



The most fashionable Gadgeteer in town.



THE STORY SO FAR... MYTHOS

CONDOR AVENUE
Indie developer Condor is bought by Blizzard, is renamed Blizzard North and releases *Diablo*.

1996



DIA-BLOWN
Diablo II is launched and outsells its hit prequel. Blizzard North become superstars.

2006

FLAGSHIP SETS SAIL
Condor's founders and Bill Roper resign from Blizzard North to start Flagship Studios.

2003



MYTHOS IS REAL
Designed as a stress test for the *Hellgate: London* servers, *Mythos* gets a life of its own.

2008

These old-timers feel the weather in their bones...



Look at that mess!



almost. The idea is that *Mythos* will make its money from selling in-game cash, with the economy split into ingots (paid for) and gold (collected). Each of these is needed to get certain things in the game, so some items will be forever out of reach for non-paying customers.

However, Flagship promise there will be no compulsion to put money into the game, with progress to the maximum level being no more difficult if you don't invest real money. Content updates will be available for everybody, and anyone will be able to play as much as they want without paying. At this stage, there are no details on what exactly will cost money, but there's little to suggest cash investments will be vital.

But aside from being free, *Mythos* is simply one of the most addictive MMOs I've played. While it lacks the depth and narrative of its peers, it makes up for it by having such tight and moreish gameplay. Skills need tweaking, but the beta should fix all that.

Even this early stage, *Mythos* has more spit, polish and gameplay to it than any other free-to-play MMO out there. It's exciting, addictive and pleasing to the eye, and there's little to dissuade you from giving it a try. Look out for the open beta this spring. **EW**



Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



Mario Kart Is Back!

Check out the exclusive review, only in the **Official Nintendo Magazine**.

Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

On Sale Now!

GAMES WRITING SPECIAL

This month *PC ZONE* takes a long look at the wordsmiths who are making PC gaming ever more unforgettable...

THE OTHER WEEK A friend of mine who's a 'real' journalist was badgering me to give him a quote about how much games are becoming more like movies. The article was of the sort that's been written ever since the mainstream media realised that some of their readership were playing silly children's games well into their 20s and 30s. As story lines are becoming ever more epic and intricate, and more and more money is being made, this 'Are games the new Hollywood?' angle was inevitably created. Meanwhile, among the gaming cognoscenti, the hoary old chestnut of 'Are games art?' rattles on endlessly, along with all the fancy language that such a subject demands.

Both of these arguments irritate me to an equal extent, simply because the answers are so blindingly obvious. Games are several steps away from movies, but the games and interactive experiences our children will one day play will leave Hollywood's dusty celluloid-based medium far, far behind.

Similarly, anyone who doesn't think games should be considered an art form clearly hasn't played a game since *Centipede*. The people whose works are forcing these discussions onto the world are games writers. Often they're the people hired to thread an afterthought of a plot between levels, but increasingly they're working hand-in-hand with design teams from the beginning to genuinely push gaming into the realms of believable character pieces and real emotion.

In truth though, the PC has been doing this for a long time – from Black Isle's role-playing games through to genre-busting first-person shooters *Deus Ex* and *System Shock 2* – but respect for games writers has been a long time in coming.

The following pages represent merely the tiniest slice of the amazing stuff coming out of developers these days, hope you like it.

Will Porter
Editor



PROSE & CONS

Rhianna Pratchett talks us through the ups and downs of being a games writer



OVER THE LAST five years I've, accidentally, cut out a career designing stories and writing scripts for games – some of my most recent being *Overlord*, *Heavenly Sword* and the upcoming *Mirror's Edge*.

To be honest, I'm worried that someone is going to find out how much fun it is and stop me doing it. But since I get regular emails asking about my job, closely followed by "How can I do it?" I felt obliged to share with my first writing home the nitty-gritty about games writing. But be warned, despite the fun there's to be had, there's a hell of a lot of gritty.

STRANGE BEAST

Games writing is more akin to a craft than any other narrative discipline and it truly is a strange beast. The tasks of a games writer can include any of the following, in any combination or order: helping build a new IP (intellectual property); crafting a story around a bunch of levels; writing cutscenes; coming up with ambient, combat or level dialogue lines; designing characters; rewriting an existing script; polishing supposedly finished material; assisting with casting and audio; providing marketing copy; and writing manuals. I've done all those at some point or another, just rarely on the same project.



The PS3's *Heavenly Sword* – one of Rhianna's recent projects.

Mirror's Edge promises a strong storyline to back up the gymnastics.



And that's the main thing you find with games writing – a writer's task will vary (sometimes wildly) from project to project and company to company, be they working on a triple-A blockbuster or a below-the-radar indie project.

WHEN IT BEGINS

Largely the above list will depend on what point the writer is brought in on board. Companies like BioWare and Blizzard have specialist writers in-house, and it's easy to see why. But by and large, games writing is usually done by a member of the in-house development team (often a designer or producer), a contracted writer, or a combination of the two.

Although films start with a script, most games do not. They start with a strong idea of gameplay and usually the embryo of a story, which informs the team enough to start creating content. A studio will usually bring a writer onboard after a large portion of the game has gone into full production. Ideally, there's still enough room at this point for the writer and story development team to exercise their creative muscles: flesh out the bones (even sometimes designing new characters); define the characters' motivations, relationships, journeys and story arcs; and work alongside the level and audio designers to create the best possible narrative adventure. This was my experience with both *Overlord* and *Mirror's Edge*. With *Heavenly Sword* it was similar, although it had a first draft of a script in place. This was then subjected to what, in Hollywood, is called a 'page one rewrite.'

All of this means that the ability to work within pre-existing boundaries and, to a certain extent, retrofit story elements, are

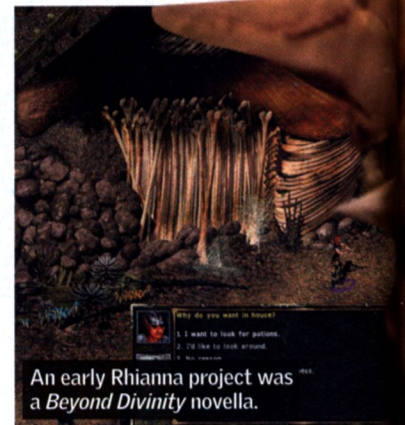
desirable skills for a games writer. This may sound restrictive, and it is, but being forced to work in a smaller narrative area can produce just as creatively satisfying results as starting with a blank sheet.

NARRATIVE PARAMEDIC

Sadly, many game writing gigs don't allow the writers so much freedom to become involved with story design, as writers will be parachuted in as narrative paramedics to solve "We-didn't-think-we-needed-a-writer-but-now-we-do-and-we-have-no-budget-left-and-four-months-until-we-ship" problems. However, localisation and dialogue polishing are still regularly required and they're often good ways for a writer to get started in the industry.

This kind of work does come with its own frustrations, though. Often, due to time restrictions, there's very little a writer can do but try to use all the tricks of the trade to disguise gaping plot holes and narrative-unfriendly level designs. At best you feel like you've added something meaningful to the overall experience, however late in the day. At worst it feels like you're doing a *Weekend at Bernie's* – wagging a narrative corpse to make it look a little less dead.

Although the industry has a long way to go, games narrative and story design is being taken more seriously. What would seem to be a no-brainer – namely getting a writer in to do the actual writing – is becoming more commonplace. There are still many battles to be fought because, for a new discipline in a new entertainment form, the path isn't yet clear. But at least the narrative soldiers are starting to mobilise. And, by God, we'll find that right path – even if we have to build it ourselves. **PC7**



An early Rhianna project was a *Beyond Divinity* novella.

How to become a games writer

Rhianna's top tips for wannabe games writers

- ✓ Analyse the narrative components of your favourite games to see how game design dictates the kind of narrative you may be expected to create.
- ✓ Try writing your own samples of dialogue, whether ambient, combat, or cutscene based.
- ✓ Look for local developers and indie projects to get involved with. Failing that, try creating the narrative for mods and other fan projects.
- ✓ Attend as many industry events as possible – network your ass off.
- ✓ Keep playing lots of games. Understanding gameplay is key to games writing.
- ✓ Read books on the subject such as *Game Writing: Narrative Skills for Videogames* (editor, Chris Bateman) or *Writing for Video Games* (Steve Ince), as well as classic story and character studies like *The Writer's Journey* (Christopher Vogler) and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Joseph Campbell).



GAMES
WRITING
SPECIAL

Often there's very little a writer can do but try to use all the tricks of the trade to disguise gaping plot holes

THE VALVE ME

Will Porter gets a glimpse into the creative collective that is Valve

WRITING ONE OF Valve's games is a fascinating process, with a creatively minded superteam of writers working hand-in-hand with the game's developers to create the likes of GLaDOS, Alyx and the antipodean snarl of *Team Fortress 2*'s sniper.

To shed some light on the way the team works, we had a chat with one of their wordsmiths and liberated some early drafts of famous scenes from the *Half-Life* saga.

CASE STUDY #1

THE WRITER

ERIK WOLPAW STARTED out on Old Man Murray.com – a website that he ran with another comedically minded chap called Chet Faliszek (now a fellow Valve writer). A website that forever railed against the evil forces of crates in shooters and bizarre logic in adventure games, Old Man Murray was essentially the finest corner of the internet until it fatefully was updated no more.

Erik went on to co-write *Psychonauts* with the legendary Tim Schafer, before getting the call from Valve head honcho Gabe Newell – a scene we imagine was very much like where God appears to King Arthur in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. He has since contributed to *Portal*, *Team Fortress 2* and some secret stuff.

Turning the Valve

Erik Wolpaw on the creative processes of Seattle's finest

Q So how long was it between your first contact with Valve and working for them? Was it an arcane process?

A One morning, an email arrived from Gabe asking if I'd like to come up for an interview. Then a week later, I did that. They made me an offer that day, I accepted, and within a few weeks I'd moved from beautiful Duluth, Minnesota to slightly crappy Bellevue, Washington. Apart from having to leave Duluth, it turned out to be a damn good job.

You seem to have fingers in many pies. What exactly is your role at Valve?

Valve does this crazy thing where nobody has a job title. The place is a big, egalitarian hippy design collective where everyone's an equal – except on payday. People do whatever they're good at and interested in. I write, direct voice actors, and do a little itty bitty bit of coding.

So did GLaDOS go through any other test personalities in development?

Not really. She ended up reasonably close to what I'd envisioned at the start. The turrets, however, went through a few iterations. There were sultry turrets, angry turrets, rapping granny turrets, scared turrets, and probably some other turrets I'm forgetting now. There was a mumbling turret, I think, too.

Did any of your stuff get into *Episode Two* and *TF2*?

I have some dialogue scattered throughout *Episode Two*, but it's pretty much all Marc Laidlaw. Chet and I wrote all the dialogue in *TF2*. There's a surprising amount of it. Each of the nine characters has something like 200 unique lines.

You also worked on *Psychonauts*, for which we shall be forever thankful. What's Schafer like to work with? Are you aware of just how special you are?

Tim's a great guy and a good boss. It's a testament to what a great guy Tim is that even though making *Psychonauts* was a multi-year-all-crunch-all-the-time death march, virtually nobody left Double Fine. I did, but that's because I'm weak.

If you were going to advise an upstart on breaching the fortress of games writing, what first moves would you suggest?

I honestly have no idea. I kind of fell into this line of work without any clear plan. Looking back on it, I can't even reverse-engineer a plan. If anyone does what I did when I was young, they're 99999 times out of a 100 gonna end up 40, living in a dump, painting houses for a living, and generally just being desperate and miserable. My plan, effectively, was hoping that I'd win the career lottery. Which is a terrible, terrible plan. That said, most places are only going to hire writers who've written something that captures the imagination of the people doing the hiring. So, write something really, really terrific and publish it somewhere.

METHOD



Enter Test Chamber
Door servos shut - not getting out
You get service cart - something scurries
out of it - alien? -

A.M.S.
antimatter spectrometer

Countdown -

[Time to look around.]

VOICE 1 (low) All right, Gordon - your suit should keep you comfortable through all this. The specimen is being readied even as we speak. We will warm up the ~~analyzer~~ ~~analyzer~~ antimatter spectrometer now, and see if we can hold her steady at 80% until the carrier arrives.

VOICE 2 (med) Power in three... two... one...

FIRST STAGE HUM

VOICE 1 Predictable arrays. Very good. Gordon -

VOICE 3 (high) Mister Freeman, ~~you~~ you might want to stand back from the ~~delivery system~~ focal beam, at least during this ^{hourly} phase, suit or no suit.

VOICE 2 You weren't planning on having children, were you, Gordon?

V3 Nonsense! Nothing's been proven!

CASE STUDY # 2

THE TEST CHAMBER

THIS IS THE original, scribbled script for what would become the most iconic scene from the entirety of the Half-Life universe - and the work of chief Valve scribe Marc Laidlaw. They're waiting for you Gordon... in the test chamb... er.



VOICE 2 Secondary emitters, activating now.

2+ phase of Motion + Sound

VOICE 1 It looks like the crystal sample is ready, Gordon. Look to the delivery system for your specimen.

Rises from floor

VOICE 1 Standard inertion ^{for a nonstandard specimen.} ~~specimen not so standard on the~~

Go to it.

VOICE 3 Wait!

VOICE 2 Capacitors to one or five percent. Initiating black box messaging.

VOICE 3 What?

VOICE 1 Gordon, we're bringing the analyzer to ~~operational~~ superoptimal performance. There's no telling how long the system can take it - or how long the reading will take. Please work efficiently.



CASE STUDY # 3

NOW ARRIVING: CITY 17

THIS IS A STORY fragment, again by Marc Laidlaw, that was given to the *Half-Life 2* development team in its early days of conception. Written to convey the feel of City 17, and for use as a design springboard for different environments and situations, it's a fascinating study of how the game was originally imagined. Not only is the scene over-described in terms of what the player eventually sees, but it contains dialogue that would never make it to the final cut – stuff that cracks open a window into the *Half-Life* universe that tiny bit more, and shows just how refined the final game was.



NOW ARRIVING: CITY 17

Phosphores flares across his eyelids. Hisssss of decompression. And then a sudden chill.

Chill...at least it is a sensation. He has felt nothing for...how long now? Has he been sleeping? Even in sleep one imagines sensations: sights, sounds, tastes. But for Gordon Freeman, for so long, there has been nothing. Not even sleep. Something deeper. Darker. Something so numbing that this brush of icelike vapor feels like the warmth of dawn.

Brighter now. Something moving out there. Someone. More sensations joining in the mix. Pain flooding back into his limbs. He would rub his hands, rub the feeling back into them, but he cannot be sure of their location. It's not completely reassuring to know he has a body into which this pain can creep. Less reassuring is the voice that crawls inside him, stealthy as the hiss of icy steam:

"Rise and shine, Gordon Freeman. I do believe I've kept you waiting long enough."

That voice...and somewhere, a blurred shape emerging from the darkness. A withered face, narrow eyes, a visage that seems simultaneously paralyzed and possessed by erratic tics that hint at extreme senility or neural damage. It floats in the vapor, blurred at the edges, seeming insubstantial. He has heard the voice somewhere before...somewhen...

"Ten years, Mr. Freeman. It won't seem that way to you, of course. But ten years is a long time. Long enough for humanity to swallow its pride and begin to accept its common fate. Long enough for your fellow man to develop callouses against the master's collar. Long enough for the first scars of whiplash to begin to heal. Long enough to forget how things used to be.

There was a ticking sound now, a low drumming clatter. The voice was beginning to fade, the face receding. Sensation solidified into substance.

"But you won't have forgotten, Mr. Freeman. You still remember how the air used to taste. You remember how freedom felt. You remember...the sky."

And it was gone. A hard surface beneath him. The clattering sound sprang loud in his ears and he knew it as the sound of a train jammering over tracks.

"Hey, buddy..."

He opened his eyes. A face--not the strangely familiar one seen through mist, but a stranger bending over him. He sat bolt upright, startling the other man, his fellow passenger. Swinging around in his seat, casting wildly around him. It was a train car, and for a moment it overlapped in his memory with another train, in another time. Had any time passed? How had he come here?

"Mister, you can't ride around like that," the man was saying, watching him with concern. His voice was an urgent whisper. "Where's your mask? Take one step outside without it, you'll be coughing up bloody foam. It can kill you that fast. Here, look, I've got a spare. Can't be too careful. I had one fail on me once, and I've carried an extra ever since. Took some real damage that time. I hope I don't get in trouble for this, but you need it more than I do. Come on...train'll be coming into City 17 any minute now. Get this on."

He found he could hardly raise his hands. Life was slow in returning to them. As he tried to get his bearings, the stranger slipped a mask over his face, let the straps fall tight behind his head. A taste of stale carbon, and a moment that felt like suffocation. Then he began to calm down...reminded himself to think, study, plan his moves. Gordon peered out through the slightly rounded goggles at the dilapidated car.



GAMES
WRITING
SPECIAL



Torn seat cushions; dingy light fixtures, half of them burned out; the floor strewn with cinders and sawdust and crushed cigarette butts; brushed aluminum panels showing marks of peeled-off advertisements. Here and there were posters of a solemn face, owl-eyed, watching over the passengers. Always the same expression. Always some variant of the same brief message: THE CONSUL SAYS...RELAX. THE CONSUL SAYS...REPORT.

"There you go."

The stranger fell back in the opposite seat, across the car, looking relieved and smiling slightly. Beyond him, the windows opened onto a blasted landscape. Wrack and ruin, desolation, shattered shards of a half-known landscape that only partly resembled anything he had seen before. It was as if the world he had known, the former world, had been lifted up entire and dropped from a great height. Crushed buildings; teetering spikes with frayed wires dangling from them. Fat, bloated trees that seemed to snatch and sniff at the train, as if sculling dusty plankton from the slipstream.

"Name's Samuel, by the way. Samuel G-11789RF, if you want to be formal. Came through here, saw you laid out like that on the bench, I thought you'd already bought it. Don't know how they'd let you on the Express without a mask anyway. You must've been working in a dome, right? Out in the Waste? We were wondering why they'd stop the Express out in the middle of nowhere like that—never seen that before. Are you from City 17 originally? I got my Notice a couple days ago: Shift to 17. Same old game. Shuffle the population, keep 'em confused. Spent my last trimester in 49. I've never been in the same zone more than six months. 17's supposed to be nice enough. I hear the Consul's been stationed there for the time being. Might even get a look at him in person. Some people still hate him, but I say...how can you hold it against him? It was strike a deal or lose everything, right? We owe him big-time, the way I see it. I'd sure like to see him in person. Hey...there it is. Seventeen."

Gordon shifted, looking out the window behind him. Something immense sprawled on the horizon, a shadow glimpsed through shifting gases like smoke perpetually rising from the ruins, as if they harbored a fire that could never be extinguished.

A city.

Layered towers faded into distance, located somewhere beyond the tangled sprawl of debris that made a menace of the landscape. Tiers of buildings of uncertain age and architecture rose in ranks, stairlike—a self-contained metropolis, sketched in acid mist. Beyond those, harder to see, an immense irregular spire with its tip lost in the fumes that hid the heavens.

Samuel said, "I've gotta say...it looks a lot like 49. And 40 before that. They all look pretty much alike from this distance. Only when you get into them can you start to get an idea of how the place looked before...you know. Just before."

Gordon didn't see the tunnel coming. For a moment he thought the smoke had thickened so suddenly it had put out all light; but the sound of the train closed in around them, trapping them in a tube of darkness. Not long after that, a few dim lights flickered past, casting their wan glow on a grey amalgam of broken rock and cinderblock crammed together with bits of scrap metal. He thought he saw a human femur jutting from the wall; a rounded socket that could have been part of a skull. They passed through a portal of sharpened steel, razor edged doors retracting for the train, and the walls become smooth, dark, regular. And then the wheels were screaming. The train seemed to sway on the track as it started to brake. Lights flared ahead, space opened around them, and they floated into the station.

"Now arriving," said the train. "City 17."

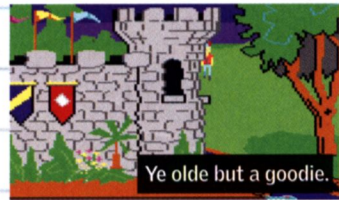


* These transcripts were originally published in the excellent 'making of' book *Half-Life 2: Raising the Bar*.

SKINS DEEP

We talk to Jamie Brittain – a man who played too many adventure games, and came up with *Skins*

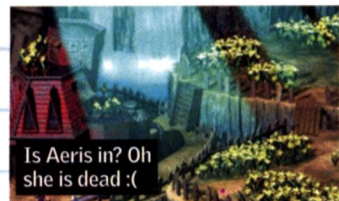
JAMIE BRITTAIN'S HEAD houses the young brain that came up with E4's current teen drama monster, *Skins*: a show that effortlessly balances comedy and dark drama. Unless you're the most tiresome of anti-everything curmudgeons, you'll have been surprised by the show's blend of humour, raw emotion, honesty and the way it fannies about with your expectations. Jamie's a screenwriter and a PC game obsessive and he met *PC ZONE*'s Jon Blyth in the pub.



Ye olde but a goodie.



The Tentacle is nowhere near.



Is Aeris in? Oh she is dead :(

Q So, what's your relationship with PC gaming?

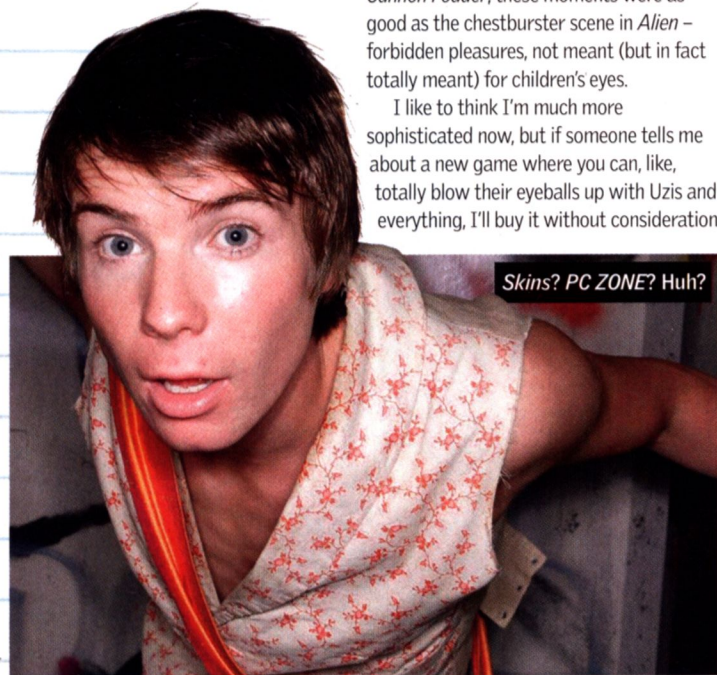
A One of my earliest cogent memories is being allowed to play *Wolfenstein 3D* in a computer shop when I was about seven. That pretty much defined the next 10 or so years, in that I spent the rest of my childhood trying to replicate the rush of adrenaline I got when I first knifed a Nazi in his big Nazi face. I suppose I still am.

Being into games as an adult is often seen as a relic from childhood, isn't it? That's why we adult gamers are so bloody nostalgic for old games.

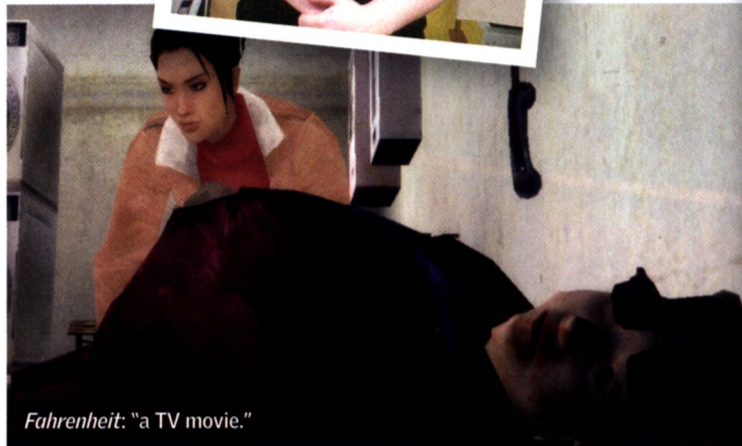
Yeah, I think boyish morbidity inspired my love of games. PC games were from the adult world, which was dead sexy, and I think a lot of the appeal was the swearing and the gore. Parents didn't really understand computer games back then, and would happily produce 18 certificate games for their innocent darlings.

Gibbing an innocent stripper in *Duke Nukem 3D*, putting a writhing and screaming soldier out of his misery in *Cannon Fodder*, these moments were as good as the chestburster scene in *Alien* – forbidden pleasures, not meant (but in fact totally meant) for children's eyes.

I like to think I'm much more sophisticated now, but if someone tells me about a new game where you can, like, totally blow their eyeballs up with Uzis and everything, I'll buy it without consideration.



Skins? *PC ZONE?* Huh?



Fahrenheit: "a TV movie."

You mentioned that you loved adventure games. What was the appeal there?

The appeal of adventure games is that the story is right at the top of the agenda – and story is what I'm most interested in. In other respects adventure games can be crap – all that endless dobbing about, that semi-conscious void of pointing and clicking you fall into when you get stuck. But if there's a good story – I'm thinking of the early *King's* and *Space Quests*, anything Tim Schafer has ever waggled his finger in, and the Ron Gilbert classics, like *Maniac Mansion* – then you can have a cracking time playing those games even now. A lot of those games had a lovely postmodern, playful touch – like the 10-minute conversation you can have with an inanimate statue in *Day of the Tentacle*. That's something that has kind of been absorbed and forgotten by the gaming industry. I'd love to see that kind of witty, ironic banter back in computer games.

Has the writing in a game ever ruined it for you?

Loads of times. Mostly Japanese games that have been poorly translated, but sometimes in Western games that have no excuse. I know David Cage is French, but he speaks English perfectly and should and could have done better with *Fahrenheit*. He obviously wanted cinematic style dialogue, but missed the mark entirely and ended up with this awful TV movie stuff, which totally fucks the game up. It looks like his next thing will be better, though. Also *Oblivion*. You're immersed in this amazing world, you fancy a chat and it all goes downhill from there. In games where the writing matters, developers have a responsibility to make it work, or they shoot themselves in the foot.

Taking it in the opposite direction, have you ever enjoyed a terrible game because of the story?

Not terrible games, but there are certainly games I only play for the stories. Like *Final Fantasy* – does anyone really enjoy messing around with stats and levels and items and the what not? I play *FF* games for the stories, and the stories alone (and *FF7* has one of the great stories of the '90s, in any medium).

Ken Levine said – and I'm paraphrasing here – that stories in games are difficult, because no-one cares. Do you disagree, and if so do you think you're in a minority of gamers?

I do disagree. However, people get used to low-quality products and will buy them anyway. But look at some of the top selling games of the last few years – *BioShock*, *GTA*, *Half-Life 2* – these are all games that push the boundaries of how game and story can be combined. There is a massive market for strong story-driven games. People do care. I'm not a minority.

There's a tired old analogy with film. How long did it take film to produce anything more than amusing diversions? How long did it take to overcome melodrama and focus on realism? How long until people really began to exploit and push the limits of what could be achieved in that medium? Modern gaming is, what? Thirty years old? We're only really beginning to understand what can be achieved in games and I think that the correct implementation of story in games is an art that has yet to be truly refined. It's been done right a few times, but I think it's the next 10 years that are going to be really exciting. **PCZ**



GAMES
WRITING
SPECIAL

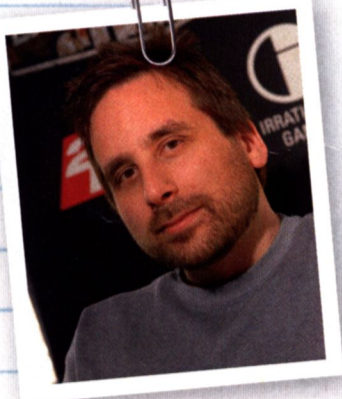
The correct implementation of story in games is an art that has yet to be truly refined

UPPER BEHIND THE BIG DAD



BEHIND THE

BioShock's Ken Levine explains his mysterious ways and a hungover Steve Hill presses 'record' on his Dictaphone



RULE ONE, IT seems, is simplicity. "If you stop Indiana Jones in any scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and ask him what he's doing, he'll tell you 'Looking for the Ark.'" Explains Ken Levine as he sits in front of a gaggle of developers in a talk entitled, *Storytelling in BioShock: Empowering Players to Care about Your Stupid Story*.

"If you want people to follow your plot it has to be really fucking stupid," he says. "What are you doing in *BioShock*? Act 1: Find the submarine and get out. But, the sub gets blown up. So Act 2: You go find and kill Ryan."

However, *BioShock* wasn't always like this, the game started out far more complex. "When we started the game it took place over 70 years, during which three civil wars went on, and this group of savants in tanks ruled the city..." explains Levine. "When I reread the document recently I didn't even understand it. In 2006 we just took a knife to it. About a dozen scientists died."

Outwardly then, *BioShock* became simpler to understand, yet also became interwoven with an extremely intricate

narrative: presented using hidden clues, audio logs, character exposition and the terrifying film studies concept of mise en scène. If you wanted you could charge through the game, but if you wanted depth you could actively seek the plot out: going against rules instilled by books, films and TV.

THIS IS HARDCORE

Historically, often laborious cutscenes have propelled the story in games, something that Ken unsurprisingly compares to watching a film. As he says, "The purpose of a cutscene is to push information at the player. You want them to see all of it, same as movies, right? You go to a movie; you have the same experience as the next guy, who has the same experience as the next guy, like any linear media.

"That's not videogames' advantage, that's not our strength. We have the ability not to push information at people but to let them pull it to them. First off, hats off to Valve on this entire concept because I think *Half-Life* was the real pioneer here."

But as Ken himself asks, "Why is that better?" Surely it's hard enough pressing the

right keys and not getting your head staved in without having to go searching for clues like Poirot with a graphics card. As Ken concedes, "The biggest problem, which we had in *BioShock* all the time, was 'Aren't they going to miss that?'"

Inevitably they are, and Ken is prepared to admit that some people will actually miss most of the story in *BioShock*. Breaking down gamers into three approximate categories, he claims that at the base level there are those who only need to know who to kill and where to go.

Secondly, there are those who have a general overview of the story and some concept of the motivation behind their actions.

Finally there are the obsessives, who Ken likens to music fans: "There are kids who'll get into it, they'll dance to it. Then there's the weird kid at the back of the classroom who's writing all the Nirvana lyrics on his notebook. That's the level of the people who get into a game that you have to support, they're the hardcore fan. They want a novelistic level of detail, they want to be able to look at every poster, every nook and

King Kenny's Comparisons

Levine on famous tales that work, and famous ones that don't...



Lost: "What is their entire stock-in-trade? It's basically asking a bunch of questions which they don't answer for a very long time."

Robinson Crusoe: "You're a castaway, you're in a strange place, what do you do?"

Cloverfield: "What is that? It's *Godzilla* with less information."

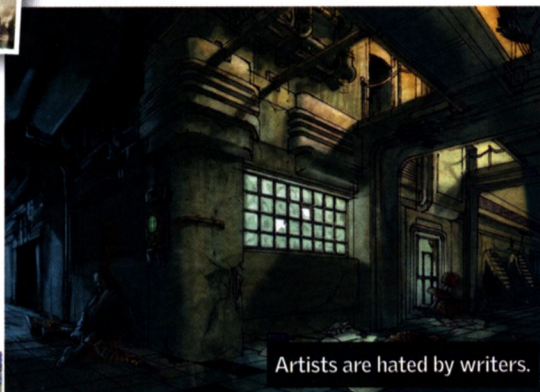


The Ring: "Is it really that interesting when you find out about that movie? It's kind of banal, but the mystery at the beginning of watching that movie and wondering what it's about is powerful."

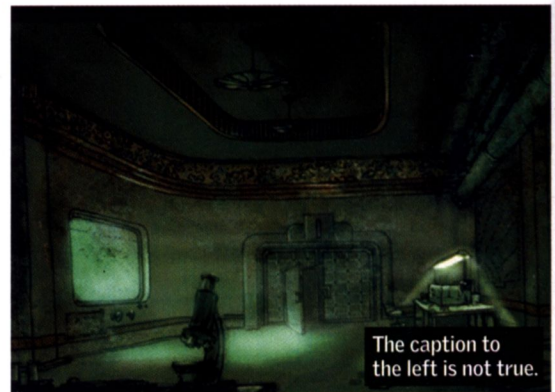


Twin Peaks: "When you found out who killed Laura Palmer, what was left?"

Fight Club and The Usual Suspects: "The narrator is misleading you in some way. He's not lying to you, but playing little tricks with you. I knew I wanted to do that."



Artists are hated by writers.



The caption to the left is not true.

G A M
W R I
S P E C I

BIG DADDY

cranny, they want to go and write an essay about it for their college class.
"We want to support that, but you can't get in the way of the experience that the guy who just plays *Madden* and *Halo* wants."

HOT AIR

Ken's argument is that if you have to seek the story out, it's ultimately more rewarding. But as in more established storytelling formats, you still have to keep 'em guessing.
"We call it the mystery balloon because we're pretentious," says Ken. "Think of a half-filled helium balloon that's naturally going down. That's mystery, or your story, and your job is to tap it back up again before it gets too low.
"The problem is if you tap it up too high, as with season three of *Lost*, you start losing your audience. They want some questions answered, but not all of them."

Which, as Ken frankly acknowledges, is a trap he fell into. "In the third act of *BioShock* when we answered the whole question about Ryan, the mystery balloon hit bottom and people were left hanging. I underestimated the impact that would have on the game and people's perception of it. We learned a big lesson there."
An honest admission, but what about the decision to include a character called Mr Bubbles, who shares a name with a notorious Australian kiddy-fiddler? That, as they say, is another story... **PC7**



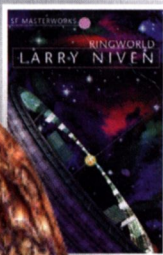
If you have to seek the story out, it's ultimately more rewarding. But you still have to keep 'em guessing



FURTHER READING

More games than you'd realise have their roots in novels. To see which ones are worth a look, the **PC ZONE** team were given some homework...

THE LINKS BETWEEN novels and gaming are stronger than you think. Successful franchises spawn tie-in books dealing with the further adventures of Lara Croft or generic videogame action heroes, but often a respected author's words can find themselves directly or indirectly rendered in 3D through gaming. Take Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* for example, a post-apocalyptic journey through a near-future American wasteland that's become required reading with some of those working on *Fallout 3* at Bethesda – nuances which will surely have inspired them with their own desolate creation. The following books have stronger links to their creative progenies and are all fascinating to read. Even though you have to be very clever to read *Atlas Shrugged*.



RINGWORLD

AUTHOR: Larry Niven
GAME: *Halo*

WILL'S VERDICT

This is a proper 'hard' science fiction novel – with giant cat aliens, futurescape-imagining, astrophysics and a bit of a quest dynamic with two humans and two aliens going on an exciting voyage of discovery. The novel deals with the discovery and investigation of a vast alien constructed ribbon of planet circling a sun and although *Halo* isn't a direct reference, there's no doubt that Niven's *Ringworld* novels were a strong influence.

When the brilliantly imagined heroes crash-land on the ring there's much musing on technology and religion, and questions raised about ancient civilizations, while some of the vistas wouldn't be out of place in one of Bungie's space operas.

The Covenant wouldn't particularly jar with Niven's incredibly well-defined cultures and life-cycles either.

There's no hiding behind rocks while shields recharge though.



ATLAS SHRUGGED

AUTHOR: Ayn Rand
GAME: *BioShock*

LOG'S VERDICT

The developers of *BioShock* made no secret of drawing on Ayn Rand's philosophical sci-fi classic – the guy talking in your ear is called 'Atlas' for a reason. Rand's book considers what might happen if the world's innovative artists, philosophers and scientists disappeared, while *BioShock* shows you where they went.

Ryan's speech when you arrive in Rapture is an introduction to Randian philosophy – that every person is not a means, but an end; and that each has the right to live without being subject to the orders or whims of another – which is a thesis made ironic by the game's show-stopping twist.

Rand's capitalism is perverted by *BioShock*. For Rand, capitalism is the impossible ideal of men dealing with each others as equals, under a small government built only to protect their rights. In *BioShock*, as in life, it's the neon pursuit of profit and selling idiots the lie of perfection.

Atlas Shrugged is a brilliant book, and reading it will make you go straight back to *BioShock*, but there's little simplicity or comfort in Rand's brutally clinical prose. I suppose she's a bit like a Big Daddy.



Master Chief: all about rings.



This guy's never read a book in his life.



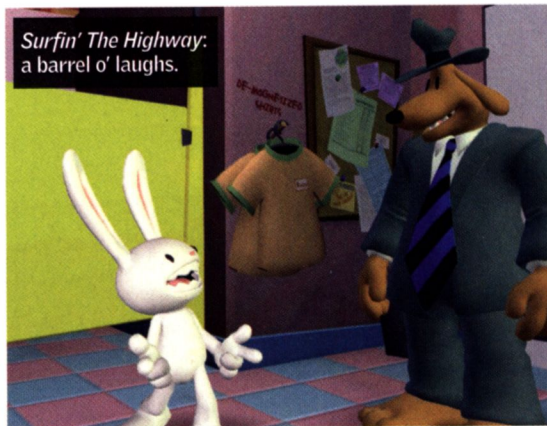
SAM & MAX: SURFIN' THE HIGHWAY

AUTHOR: Steve Purcell
GAME: *Sam & Max* series

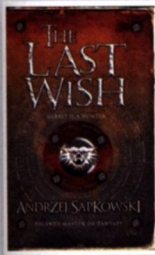
ED'S VERDICT

Recently re-released, the comic that inspired the gruesome twosome has that same bizarre, chaotic humour that *Hit the Road* and the recent *Sam & Max* episodes are renowned for. This is much more of a stream-of-consciousness affair though, with each page of *Surfin' the Highway* feeling pretty much disconnected from its brothers in a pleasing, yet bewildering, hurricane of gun-toting, door-kicking, crime-stopping mania.

Most of the artwork is in black-and-white and provokes more heart-warming smiles than belly laughs, but this is a good read for anyone wanting to swot up on our heroes' lo-fi roots. The origins of *Sam & Max* are even more bizarre than you'd think; you witness them battle with manatee rustlers, ride on a wheeled land pirate ship drawn by rats, meet the world's largest prairie dog, get deprived of sleep and face off with a demon that arises in the cereal aisle of a supermarket. *Surfin' the Highway* is barmy, barbaric and wonderful.



Surfin' The Highway:
a barrel o' laughs.



THE LAST WISH

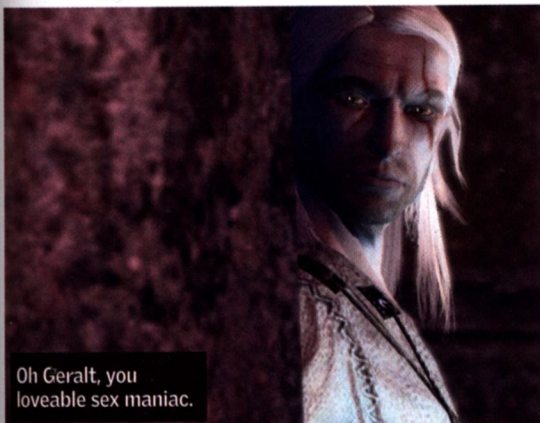
AUTHOR: Andrzej Sapkowski
GAME: *The Witcher*

ED'S VERDICT

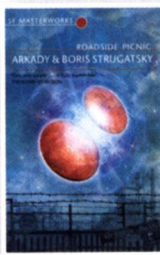
The Last Wish is a short story collection which includes the story of *The Witcher's* Geralt – the fantasy equivalent of John Shaft. Within the first five minutes of reading, Geralt has had wild sex, murdered three people and extorted 3,000 orns out of a king for his recent murder of a mutated princess.

This English translation of *The Last Wish* is incredibly gritty and inordinately expletive-packed, striking a great balance between contemporary language and fantasy elaboration. The world Sapkowski creates is bleak, but Geralt seems to exist to primarily right wrongs, and in the process have mucky relations with as many women as he can find.

The Last Wish is a must-read for fans of *The Witcher* – it's amazing how contemporary its setting is, despite the gnomes. Don't expect to want to be Geralt's best friend though. He's a gloomy bugger, and nobody understands him, not even the various women he picks up along the way, or the disgusting pig-monster that he decides to sit down and have dinner with on a casual monster hunt in the forest. Such is life for a witcher.



Oh Geralt, you
loveable sex maniac.



ROADSIDE PICNIC

AUTHOR: Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
GAME: *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl*

WILL'S VERDICT

If you enjoyed *STALKER* then it's imperative that you read this novel. It's set in and around one of several toxic Zones created by an alien visitation, where mind-bending mutagens and deadly phenomena are braved by foolhardy scavengers – stalkers – who illegally forage for items of incredible scientific value. In fact it concentrates on the tragic life of Red Schuhart, a scientist who supports himself with increasingly suicidal trips into the unknown.

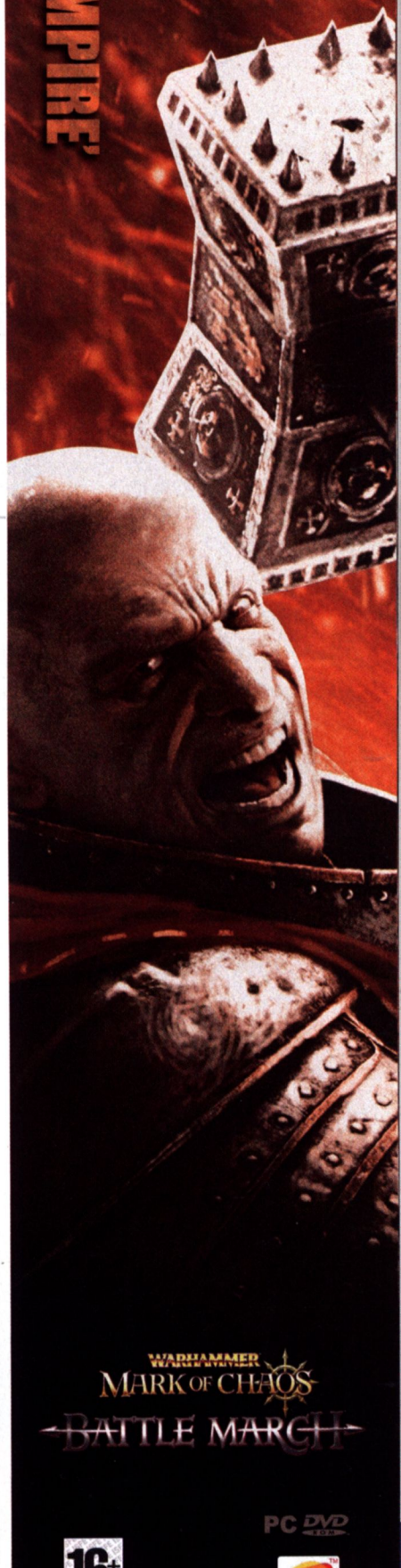
The text may be dense through translation but it comes alive during Red's fascinating (yet rare) ventures into the Zone's badlands. The book is the root of *STALKER's* strange artefacts and invisible, incomprehensible anomalies. What's more, as you read of the effects the Zone has on the local populace, and Red's family, it's no surprise that *STALKER's* developers latched onto it after the Chernobyl tragedy.

This is an incredibly clever book too; when the explanation of the odd title comes around you realise that you're reading a champion of sci-fi thinking. There are no deadly mutants, but the novel is even more haunting than the game it inspired.



Roadside Picnic:
radioactive egg sandwiches.

'FOR THE EMPIRE'



WARHAMMER
MARK OF CHAOS
BATTLE MARCH

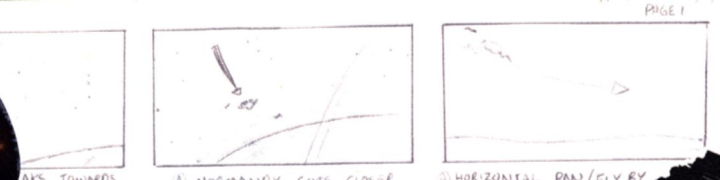




THE **BIOWARE** TECHNIQUE

Jamie Sefton exclusively talks to BioWare's Mike Laidlaw and Drew Karpysyn about scripting the company's RPG classics...





AKS TOWARDS
RING PLACEMENT
CAMERA SHAKES FROM THE
FORCE OF THE FLYBY

A NORMANDY GOES CLOSER
TO THE

B HORIZONTAL PAN/FLY BY

GAMES WRITING SPECIAL



A NORMANDY
WE GET A CLOSE VIEW OF
ONE OF THE TOWER, SMOKING?
MATCH BANKING TO PREVIOUS
SHOT ANDERSON BEARING HIMSELF



Don't look... but I think you're being followed by a galaxy.

IF YOU LOVE role-playing games, you love BioWare, a company set up in 1995 by industry legends (and medical doctors), Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka. Consistently the greatest RPG creators for the past decade, they have developed an enviable list of triple-A titles including the *Baldur's Gate* saga, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Jade Empire*. They also created a gun-toting cigar-smoking dog with four arms in *MDK2*, but further investigation of that will have to wait for another day.

You see, in May BioWare will release the PC version of their latest opus *Mass Effect* – and as such it only seemed right that we grabbed an interview with two of the Canadian company's respected writers – Mike Laidlaw (opposite-left) and Drew Karpyshyn (opposite-right) to stand as the lynchpin of our game narrative special.

SILENT MOVIES

Karpyshyn joined BioWare in 2000, beginning work on *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, and going on to be lead writer on *Knights of the Old Republic (KOTOR)* and most recently, *Mass Effect*. He's also the writer of the much-acclaimed *Star Wars – Darth Bane: Path of Destruction* and *Rule of Two* novels, as well as *Mass Effect's* prose prequel, *Revelation*, and *Ascension*, its sequel.



He's not fooled by this old "Read what's on my sword handle gambit."

Laidlaw began working for BioWare in 2003 and was lead writer on *Jade Empire* as well as collaborating on *Mass Effect*, and is currently leading a team of writers on a project that is shrouded in mystery.

Both are experienced games writers and great champions of the medium, believing that they should be aiming to reach the quality of film scripts, but also ensuring that games develop in their own way.

"Getting to the same level of quality as film is good," says Laidlaw, "but just trying to make a film isn't the right direction.

Interactivity gives us something no other medium has."

Karpyshyn agrees: "We're finding that the technology is finally reaching the point where it's starting to feel very realistic – we can actually have interactive conversation where you talk with people rather than them just talking at you.

"I like to use the analogy that we're at the point where Hollywood was in the early '30s where they're just starting to add sound, they're starting to get the technology locked in place. It's



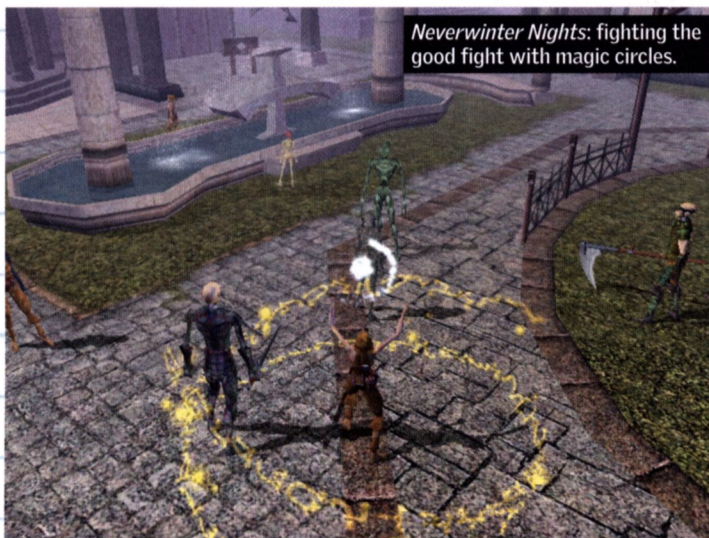
'FOR THE BLOOD GOD'

WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS BATTLE MARCH





Jade Empire: all oriental, no chicken.



Neverwinter Nights: fighting the good fight with magic circles.



First one to look really nonchalant wins.

Working within a well-known universe has a unique set of challenges

all about our skill set, coming up with our own conventions, our own language of telling stories, something film has developed over the last century."

SPEECH THERAPY

Creating entertaining, involving dialogue for characters is a major element of making a role-playing game, with characters such as *KOTOR*'s killer robot HK-47 and his immortal line, "I am most eager to engage in some unadulterated violence." However, when asked about writing speech for games, Karpshyn is brutally honest in his assertion that "dialogue is so often one of the last things we do!

"There's so much you have to do before starting on the dialogue, especially with a new game like *Jade Empire*, as you have to establish the world. So for *Mass Effect* we spent about nine months planning everything out before we started to lock down characters or the story. It's trying to establish what's your setting, what's the tone, your art style, and your narrative style."

Laidlaw adds that it's important that writers also

ensure they ask themselves what the game is actually about: "You have to think what are we trying to do? What are we trying to say? What is the point of this story? If you think about *Mass Effect*, a prime theme of the game is 'Is it us versus them, or is it us with them?', which could very easily be carried into an allegory for modern times. It helps us set a purpose for the story and the characters."

BioWare create character bibles for most of the personalities in their games, and settle on three levels of importance – major, medium and minor. "Minor characters are typically the barkeep, where I'm not so worried about his family history, as in any interesting personality quirks he has – he's short and round, maybe has asthma..."

says Laidlaw. "But as a character grows in significance to the story we flesh them out a lot further, largely because we want these characters to be 3D, to resonate properly. You have to make sure that they have enough depth to go beyond [does lame tough guy voice] 'I am a guy with a gun!'"

"The bibles then allow the artists to get a real grasp on the characters so they can then come in and provide concept art and

Mass effects

BioWare on the PC iteration of its sci-fi RPG epic...

In May, BioWare release the previously Xbox 360-exclusive *Mass Effect* on PC and we can report that the company are looking at this – like *Jade Empire* – as the definitive version of the game.

"Anyone who's seen our PC ports, knows that we tend to put new things in there," says the game's lead writer Karpshyn. "I think you'll find that *Mass Effect* pushed the Xbox 360 pretty much to its limits and even a little bit beyond, so the nice thing with PCs is that you do have a little more room to play with – the hardware can be more powerful."

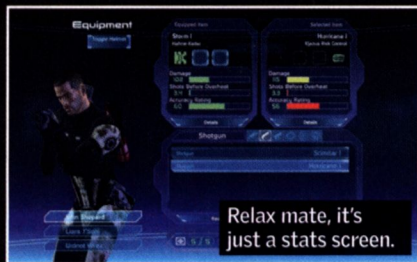
As a result, visuals are noticeably sharper and textures load much quicker than the console version, and there are other minor tweaks, including WASD movement for the main character Commander Shepard, mouse look and the ability to hot key special abilities.

"We want to make sure it feels like a PC game," adds Laidlaw. "In the *Jade Empire* port, you could map 10 styles by hitting '1' through '0', so I switched styles more often. It was very cool that they were dedicated to make it more of a PC game."

Other improvements include individual party member orders, rather than just squad control – complete with cursor clicking for ordering your men/women/alien(s) – better Mako (the ground vehicle) controls and a vastly improved inventory UI.

"I think there's going to be few extra things too. It's just a chance for us to do something for PC players, as they've had to wait quite a bit," says Karpshyn.

We'll have a hands-on with *Mass Effect* next issue.

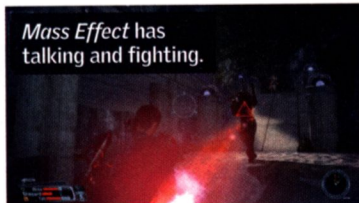


Relax mate, it's just a stats screen.





GAMES WRITING SPECIAL



models, and give their feedback," continues Karpshyn. "Quite often you'll find they actually take what you were doing and emphasise a particular element that you had mentioned, such as push a character's appearance to be more humorous or more sinister – and it really helps us create that link between what you see in the game and the words that we're putting into the characters' mouths."

LUCK BE A LADY

The RPG presents a unique problem for writers, in that the main character can be male or female, or even non-human. Aside from moral outrage from deluded Murdoch-owned news outlets when same-sex couples and alien types bump pixelated uglies, just how difficult is it for writers to cope with having a lead character who can be so different from player to player?

"It's problematic in that you might have to imagine the character is a woman, but it's also awesome!" continues Laidlaw. "The best part of this kind of writing is knowing that you have to account for those kinds of variations. We're entering into a kind of deal with a player – we're going to give you a playground, a space of possibilities this wide where you can be a man or a woman, you can be a raging dick or a fantastically nice guy. We're not going to let you do absolutely anything, but we're going to tell a really good story between these boundaries."

Branching narrative and side-missions are also an important element for RPGs, and a unique aspect of videogames, which some writers find difficult to deal with.

"I think that's probably the hardest part about writing for videogames," confirms

Karpshyn. "Fortunately at BioWare, because we've been doing this a long time now, we've kinda got used to it, but that's why it requires a full team of four or five writers for one of our games."

A lead writer such as Karpshyn would have the responsibility of ensuring everything – including side-missions – fit with the tone and themes of the game. Also, there's the tricky skill of ensuring that if anything major happens in the subplots, it's accounted for in the main plot, without creating a feeling that it's disconnected, or that you've developed an over-complicated matrix of choices for the player.

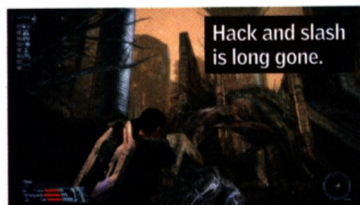
"There's a real art to it, and that's the thing that new writers have the most trouble with – understanding how the player choices affect all these multiple plots that we have, and how you keep them on track for the main story, while still allowing them the freedom of choice."

A LONG TIME AGO...

Knights of the Old Republic was a hit for BioWare both critically and commercially, and for *PC ZONE* one of the greatest *Star Wars* games ever created. But working within an established and well-known universe has a unique set of challenges compared to developing an original setting.

"One of the advantages of using your own material is that you have a lot more freedom, you can kind of do anything you want," explains Karpshyn. "But with that comes a lot more responsibility too, because in establishing your world, you really have to try to make sure

BIOWARE



'FOR THE WITCH KING'

WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS BATTLE MARCH



Action Asari

Dialogue It was one of
captain Anderson's troops.

Action Saren turns head

Dialogue he received the
information from the beacon
like you did.

Action lights in room start
to act weird, strange
Saren (Saren's) building
this is Saren's getting angry

Dialogue

Action Anger building
slow down in
Saren's losing control

Dialogue

Sign off Writer

Action Quiet, light flickers
on ceiling Saren is in the
chair there are medical
tools around a wall.

Dialogue

Action behind Saren

Dialogue

Action Asari Matriarch walks
into frame

Dialogue

Action Saren is foreground
with his hand on his forehead.

Dialogue Saren Saren something
isn't wrong other colony
level not deluded

Mass Effect storyboards.
Spoilers may be present.

Sign off Writer



Stop... standing...
on... my shoes.

Character Creation

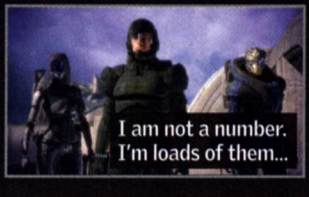
The BioWare boys name their own favourite creations...

Laidlaw and Karpshyn have worked on BioWare's biggest games including *KOTOR* and *Mass Effect* - but which is the game character that they're most proud of creating?

"As a writer, your personal favourite is often a small character that plays a very specific role in the game, that sticks with you," says Karpshyn. "So one of the guys I particularly enjoyed was Harkin in *Mass Effect* - an embittered ex-Citadel security agent who has a foul mouth and is such a slimeball."

And Laidlaw? "I enjoyed some of the bigger characters in *Jade Empire*, but in the third bounty hunter quest in the Imperial City, there's a character called Aishi the Mournful Blade. I wrote her one night, wrapped up her dialogue about midnight, slumped in my chair and went 'I like that!' It's funny because the process by which she was created was that we needed to fill a plot hole, and it was a moment of liberty, like, 'Ah, whatever! We'll figure something out!'"

"Writing her and having her shine as this sentimental and moral moment in the game, when it was so unnecessary to the story, I just loved that."



I am not a number.
I'm loads of them...

that the audience understands what you're doing, and that they get what they're looking for out of the experience.

"When you're working with an existing setting, such as *Star Wars*... well, we were huge fans so we knew what the audience wanted. You take a much bigger risk with a new creation, but if it pays off, it's very satisfying to know that you've made something entirely new that people respond to, which I think we've managed to do with both *Jade Empire* and *Mass Effect*."

The plot of *Knights of the Old Republic* was, like all of BioWare's stories, created internally by the game's lead designer James Ohlsen, project director Casey Hudson and Karpshyn.

"We felt it was important that there was a revelation or twist to capture that *Star Wars* feel, the 'I am your father' thing, as it's an integral part of the whole experience. We tried several different ideas - some worked, some didn't.

"George Lucas' role was more giving us approval and feedback on ideas, and LucasArts were really good to work with. They came to us because they liked the way we did things, and they were respectful enough to let us do our work rather than trying to impose something on us."

KOTOR's revelation - that moment in which your character's insidious past is revealed - is a fantastic jaw-dropping moment, and the team believe that it was in the execution of the idea where the game really succeeded. Karpshyn: "In simple terms it's 'Oh, you have amnesia,' which has been done to death. It's not so much a specific element of a story, but how you present it and all the little details that go with it.

"We knew from the very beginning that the twist was going to be a critical element of the story, so we spent a lot of time laying the foundations with things that kind of gave you clues to it, so that it fit, and didn't

look like we'd pulled it out of thin air and sprung it on you. There were clues that when you play it a second time you see much more clearly."

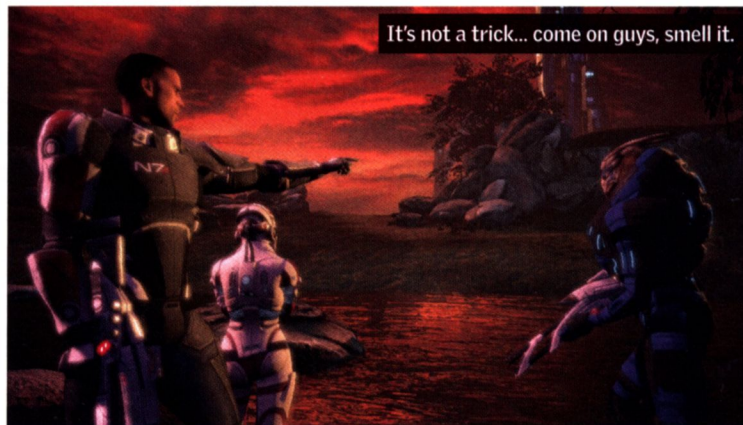
KOTOR is a personal favourite of mine, so I take the opportunity to admit to the guys that the first time I completed it, I did so without unlocking the fantastic HK-47 robot (this is a bit like watching an episode of *EastEnders* that cuts out any scenes with the chubby woman who lives with Phil Daniels' alcoholic ex-wife).

"I'm sure there would have been a time when Karpshyn would've winced at that comment, but I'm sure he's well past that now," laughs Laidlaw. "Frankly that's a minimum of two full months' work on that character, but it's really cool that you could play through the game and have a fundamentally different experience.

"We always think of it as a calculated risk whenever we're designing stuff - are we comfortable with the player missing this? How much time did we spend on it and how cool is it that it's possible to not see? A lot of the time it's finding a balance, but for the guy that finds the hidden stuff, it's so worthwhile and rewarding."

MMO MONEY

Mass Effect is the most graphically impressive of BioWare's titles, with huge environments, detailed landscapes, and some of the most expressive facial animation seen in a videogame. However, is it essential for the development of the RPG that the visuals are great? After all, there have been some great RPGs with poor graphics, and vice versa.



It's not a trick... come on guys, smell it.



Mass Effect's Citadel, where democracy happens.



"I think it's two legs of the same body," continues Laidlaw. "Graphics are still not perfect, but in Mass Effect they're so much closer than they've ever been before. We're not over-writing it as much as we were because we don't have to. In Neverwinter Nights it was a person with a fixed facial expression bobbing his head, whereas there are real subtle moments in Mass Effect when characters are looking at one another, and you can absolutely tell what they're thinking - we couldn't do that before."

As for the voice acting for the characters, directors are hired by BioWare to translate the writers' visions into a language that the actors can understand.

"It's important we stay closely involved so that it doesn't turn into something that feels cartoony or over the top, and that it matches the mood and the story we're trying to tell," Karpyshyn chips in. "If we have these realistic-looking characters, you want to make sure the acting is realistic and suits what you're seeing on-screen."

Finally, I ask about the MMO that BioWare's Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka announced recently, and whether a story-driven online multiplayer RPG is going to be infinitely more difficult to create.

"In an MMO you have thousands of people simultaneously doing dances and stuff - that's a nightmare from a rules standpoint, and a nightmare in terms of world consistency," says Karpyshyn. "But it's like one of those nightmares you wake up from with a 'Yeah!' - a good quality nightmare, an 'I just kicked, Freddy Krueger in the nuts!' kind of thing. It's a massive challenge, but

Gissa Job

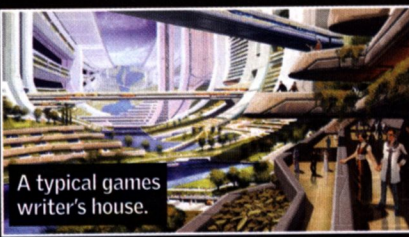
BioWare's advice on getting a career in videogame writing

There can be no better job in the world than creating characters and writing for videogames such as KOTOR and Jade Empire - games that sell by the truckload and entertain millions of people worldwide. But where do you start?

"This is a tough industry to just walk into," says Karpyshyn. "When I started they were just putting ads out in the paper looking for people, but it's not like that any more. So I think you want to make sure you understand not just how games are written, but how they're made, so look at sites like Gamasutra (www.gamasutra.com), and anything that talks about development. Dig out interviews like this, hear what industry experts do, maybe go to conferences like GDC (www.gdconf.com) - really immerse yourselves in the industry."

"You need a love of writing and a love of gaming, and to understand that you're not going to get the final say - it's a collaborative process, so you have to love your own work, but you also have to let it go and not be precious."

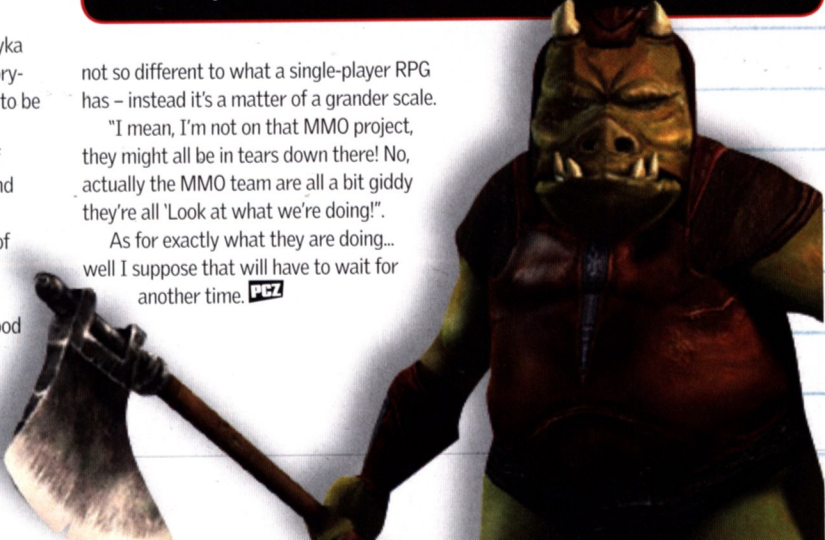
"I hate to sound like Mr T, but I frankly say to kids: get your degree. It almost doesn't matter what degree, as the process of university teaches you how to learn new things. Also, let's be practical: it's bugger hard to emigrate anywhere without a degree. That's the harsh truth. Ride out school, go to university, get that piece of paper and suddenly emigration opens up to you. This is a global industry - there are studios in Shanghai, Canada, the US, Britain, France - so why close all those doors by only being able to work where you came from?"



not so different to what a single-player RPG has - instead it's a matter of a grander scale.

"I mean, I'm not on that MMO project, they might all be in tears down there! No, actually the MMO team are all a bit giddy they're all 'Look at what we're doing!'."

As for exactly what they are doing... well I suppose that will have to wait for another time. **PCZ**



WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS BATTLE MARCH





CUSTOMIZE THIS.



AVIATOR™ NOTEBOOKS



AVIATOR EQ7

HYPERSONIC
PART OF THE OCZ TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Take flight and break the barriers of mobile computing.
Customize your own on-the-go gaming powerhouse at:
hypersonic-pc.com

CALL TOLL FREE: 1-800-520-0498

Intel and Intel Core are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. NVIDIA, the NVIDIA logo, SLI, the NVIDIA SLI logo and the NVIDIA SLI-Ready logo are registered trademarks and trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation.



PCZONE

REVIEW

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Reviews monkey

HELLO. I'M IN charge of the reviews section now. Don't mistake this for a sudden burst of career progression though, as it was made abundantly clear in this month's Supertest (subscribe at pczone.co.uk, plug plug) that I'm not the reviews editor. I'm just looking after the reviews section until its mother comes to pick it up.

Which is a shame, because the games have pretty much thrown themselves from the cot this month. *Assassin's Creed*, *Turning Point* and *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2* all narrowly escaped my clutches – it's almost like the publishers waited for me to phone before they cancelled all their games and moved into wholesale fish packing. Hopefully, this is bug fixing and tweaking rather than a reluctance to give the games over for review, but we'll see about that next month.

But there's hardly a drought – we've got the surprise corker *Sins of a Solar Empire*, the *C&C3* add-on *Kane's Wrath*, as well as a few games that are so bad you just want to read about how much someone else hates them.

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer

Must Buys!



PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



68 COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH

Putting Kane centre stage, where the bald sod belongs

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP (0-19%)
PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.

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.



ALSO REVIEWED

- 72 FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR**
Can the game be any better than the title?
- 76 AUDIOSURF**
More compulsive than it has any right to be
- 77 AGON: LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO**
Engage patience circuits now
- 78 JACK KEANE**
Aping the best
- 80 SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE**
Surprisingly excellent open-ended RTS
- 82 LOST: VIA DOMUS**
- 84 HOUR OF VICTORY**
- 86 THE SIMS 2 CASTAWAY STORIES**
- 87 ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES**
- 87 CITY LIFE 2008 EDITION**
- 88 NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGNS**
- 88 HARD TO BE A GOD**
- 99 SAM & MAX 2.02: MOAI BETTER BLUES**
- 79 SAM & MAX 2.03: NIGHT OF THE RAVING DEAD**
- 90 INDIE ZONE**
Small-time coders are delivering big-time games
- 94 BUYER'S GUIDE**
The best line-up we've seen so far

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



COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH

Ed Zitron shaves his head and grovels at the feet of the one true prophet

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE [www.
commandandconquer.com](http://www.commandandconquer.com)
ETA Out now
PRICE £1999



AT A GLANCE...

A frustrating campaign carried by the greatest strategy experiences on the PC.

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

HOW IT STACKS

COMMAND & CONQUER 3:
TIBERIUM WARS **86%**
COMMAND & CONQUER 3:
KANE'S WRATH **82%**
WARHAMMER
40K: SOULSTORM **81%**

THE INEVITABLE RISING of the (tiberium) sun is the only thing more reliable than the release of a C&C expansion, and *Kane's Wrath* gives us the basics we expect. Namely, new units and a continuation of the storyline with an extended campaign. Though *Kane's Wrath* is a mite more risky than expected.

While it flaunts a fan-pleasing timeline with 13 new Nod missions, it also adds the fantastic Global Conquest mode – world map *Risk*-style gameplay that you'll recognise from *Empire Earth III* and *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Dark Crusade*, but which C&C has taken to new levels of balance and engagement.

I'll delve deeper into this world domination mode, in which armies stage skirmishes on a continental level, later. First, we need to discuss the fact that for all but the hardest of hardcore C&C players, the campaign missions of *Kane's Wrath* are ball-kickingly difficult. I've barely slept since I played them, as my dreams are plagued with replays of their various tactical injustices.

KANE'S LYNCH

The Nod campaign kicks off with the smooth-headed maestro of hyperbole striding into an abandoned Nod command centre, resplendent in a delightful terminator hat and eye-patch ensemble. Aside from the

inevitable armies soon to be at your disposal, you're the murderous Messiah's only trusted aide. No pressure then.

Your first task is to start a revolution within downtrodden Rio De Janeiro, and this you'll achieve by capturing radio stations and undermining the GDI presence by destroying their buildings. To start this is all par for the course – a casual stroll through the streets, knocking off a few GDI soldiers, until you're attacked by a Nod splinter group. At which point the entire situation goes to shit. What unfolds defines the campaign – endless, merciless waves of units that seem to know just where to hit you, and at exactly what time. On my first go I was obliterated, because the sheer number of units that dropped on me at once was unspeakably vast, and could only be planned for with prior knowledge.

This trial-and-error approach seems vital to progress, forcing you to strategise around forthcoming surprise attacks. For example, a mission against The Black Hand, a Nod splinter group, drops GDI units on you from the east with no warning and no explanation. This is impossibly frustrating, and in a lot of missions you'll spend most of your time desperately trying to keep your base in one piece long enough to get the lay of the land and launch a huge tank rush to the other side of the map.

While it's laced with plenty of C&C lore, there are times when the stupidity of the challenge make the campaign feel somewhat fan-made, with little consideration for balance or giving you time to prepare. What it comes down to is repetitive turtling, with the occasional movement of a surveyor to set up an outpost closer to your target – if only so you can build a few more refineries to fund the gigantic force required to do the job.

This would be intolerable if it weren't for the fact that the story is remarkably engaging, with the hilariously camp overacting that makes C&C what it is. The *Tiberian Sun* and *Firestorm* storylines are interwoven, along with a continuation of *Tiberium Wars'* storyline, in a fascinating way. Just fascinating enough, in fact, to make it worth wrestling with the Herculean tasks of the campaign missions to reach the next cutscene. Some people will lack the patience or mettle to conquer them, which is a shame as they'll be missing out.

The missions are bearable and beatable once you get used to the continuous stress and paranoia of having to defend your bases constantly, and once you've attuned yourself to the sometimes predictable AI (they won't walk over mines, they kill your harvesters, etc.), you can actually hurtle through the missions a bit more quickly. Just don't expect any of the

If all else fails, shoot the tiberium.



Carl Lumby is an angry man.



All roads lead to war.



This is a war of scraping attrition that will force you to use every damn dirty trick in the book

Global Conquest

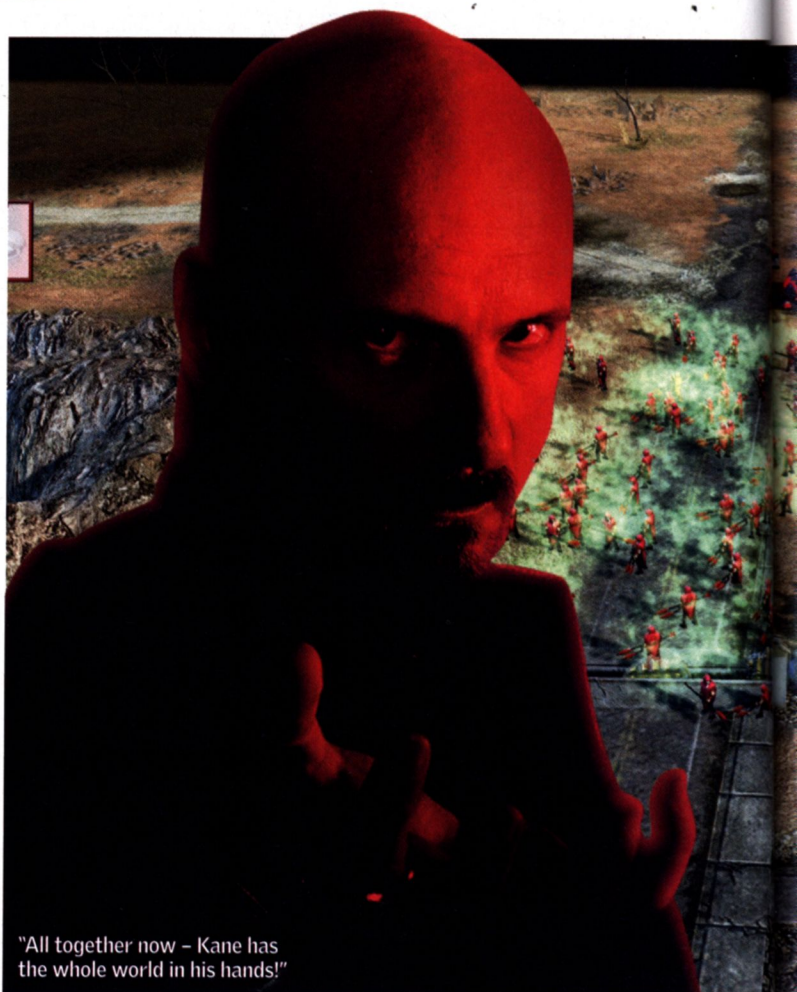
How to conquer the world in a few measly hours...

In Global Conquest winning is actually remarkably time consuming, as it's mostly not based upon beating a few enemies. Rather, it's about the ability to control the most resources and space on the map while making it difficult for the enemy to get more. This in turn dwindles their forces and allows you to reach your alternate win conditions.

For the GDI, these are based on influencing a percentage of the map, while the Nod needs to have a percentage of the map's cities in unrest – which is remarkably difficult, as the GDI are constantly trying to lower the unrest in cities for their own gains. The Scrin needs to build nine upgraded bases with towers – which sounds easy, but having nine fully upgraded and protected bases is no mean feat.

The battle of Britain.



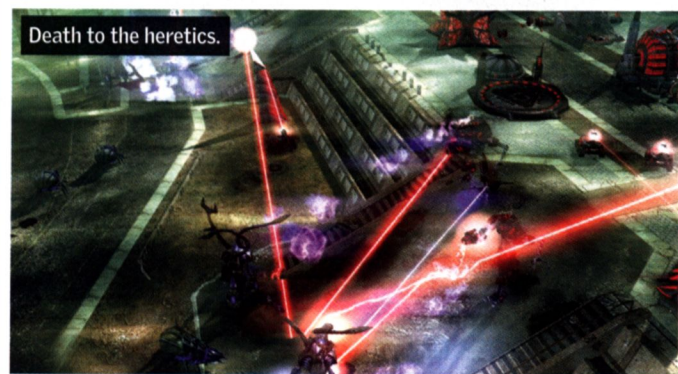


quick fix, small-scale unit battles of *C&C3* – this is a war of scraping attrition that will force you to use every damn dirty trick in the book.

focused on upgraded firepower and shielded harvesters, and the latter having Yuri-esque mind-control abilities as well as the ability to use tiberium against its users. Their epic unit is a garrisonable spider-thing (this expansion is big on arachnids) that can also collect dead units and recycle them into resources.

Hard to be a Nod

The Brotherhood's got problems, but you can sort them out...



Taking place just after *Tiberian Sun*, the Brotherhood of Nod is splintered into several factions that either fear the GDI or believe Kane to be a false prophet.

The most notable of these anti-Kane revolutionaries is Brother Marcion, the newly elected leader of the Black Hand, played by Carl Lumby (Marcus Dixon out of *Alias*). Not only is he a fantastic orator, he also has some of the most ridiculous facial expressions in videogame history, making a new standard for over-the-top campiness in *C&C* games.

The other star of *Kane's Wrath* is Natasha Henstridge, famous alien nymph/murderer from the sub-par series of sci-fi flicks *Species*, who plays Alexa Kovacs, a Kane fanatic and one of a few friendly faces – beyond, of course, Joe Kucan, who is at his most angry and bald throughout the expansion.

WORLD WIDE WAR

RTS expansions means new units, and *Kane's Wrath* brings these to you in the form of four new sub-factions. The GDI gets the earthy marine units of the Steel Talons, who sport *Tiberian Sun*-era mechs such as the Wolverine and Titan at the expense of some of the newer *C&C3* units – however, they also get upgraded units such as the armoured harvesters.

ZOCOM are tiberium-haters with tiberium-resistant armour and upgraded Zone Troopers, and they're also invincible to tiberium-related attacks.

The GDI also gets the ridiculous MARV – a gigantic, garrisonable, rolling tank-monster that eats up tiberium and rolls over lesser tanks like they roll over troops.

The Nod get Marcion's Black Hand, with their special infantry and flame-throwing war mechs, and The Marked of Kane's cyborg units prove to be both great fun to use and frustrating to fight. Their epic Redeemer also bears some resemblance to the mechanical spider from *Wild Wild West*.

The Scrin, alien-types that they are, get the Reaper-17 and Traveler-59 – the former

THE WORLD IS YOURS

The single-player campaign is classic *C&C* action, but with the difficulty verging on the imbalanced. However, the centerpiece of *Kane's Wrath* is the frankly fantastic Global Conquest mode. This feels like a mixture of *DEFCON* and *Risk*, generously peppered with *Total War*. The game opens on a map of the world, with cities as the points of tactical consideration. These cities provide resources for all three factions in different ways, and each faction starts with a few bases placed onto the map.

These bases have a ring of influence, which grows as the base levels. A city within your ring generates resources for you, based on what's going on in that city. GDI want cities happy, and gain the most currency from smiley townfolk. The Nod will gain nothing from a civilly obedient town, and must keep towns under their influence in turmoil if they're to reap profit from them.

The Scrin don't care about how happy the people are because that doesn't affect



I guarantee that you'll find yourself territorially protecting Britain out of sheer pride and tactical impetus

how tasty they are. They sap the population of each city with each turn, but gain credits from them regardless of unrest, giving them a different tactical approach to the world map, and one that's excellently balanced.

Affecting the state of the world map is done by assembling strike forces. A strike force is limited by your cash reserves, tech level, and a standard size limit, and usually consist of an MCV and several groups of troops. You can use them to set up a base, extending your influence over more cities, or launch attacks on enemy bases – using the specialist base-damaging Ion Cannon, for example. Or you could opt to hobble your enemy's resources with a Media Blitz, to lower unrest in Nod-controlled cities.

So far, so not-very *C&C*. However, when your strike forces meet with the enemy, be they other forces or bases, you can either auto resolve or fight it out in real time. Your strike forces can be customised or launched in preset configurations, and auto resolutions are calculated in a reasonably predictable and realistic way, to the point that two bombers can obliterate a strike force if it hasn't got any anti-aircraft units.

The greatest facet of *Global Conquest*, though, is the real-time use of different factions to pull off skill-based victories over grim odds. While auto resolving a battle against the Scrin with some rocket troops,

an MCV and a lone mammoth tank would have left me with a black eye and a bruised ego, my tactical genius led them to conquer a gigantic base with few casualties, wiping out the alien invaders' European stronghold in the process.

TIBERIUM MORES

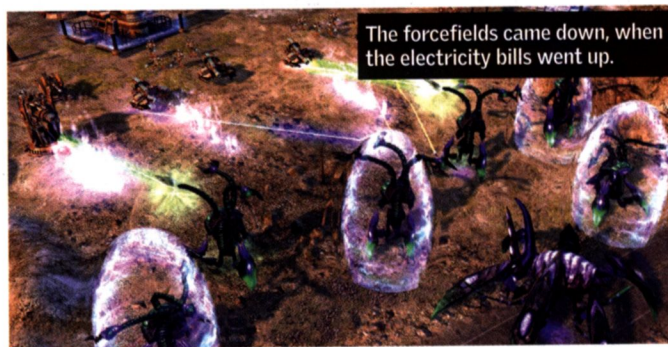
The beauty of *Global Conquest* is this: while you can auto resolve a great deal of battles (you'll have to, as even a single game can take up to 3-4 hours with a few RTS battles here and there) you can tactically deploy strike forces against bases and then deal with them in real time. You can choose to forge an especially micromanaged siege against a Nod fortress, or custom configure a strike force to fight a *Ground Control*-style baseless battle.

The tactical aides let you turn the tide of war in your favour with one deft stroke, and there's an undeniable thrill of satisfaction when you succeed in pushing a faction out of a particular part of the world. What's more, I can guarantee that you'll find yourself territorially protecting or fighting for Britain out of sheer pride and tactical impetus – it's got three clustered cities and thus is a huge resource.

With the ability to fight the battles personally, you feel a vice-like grip over your forces, and the new factions play into this

Power Play

Abilities, War, and You



When playing turn-based *Global Conquest*, you'll find yourself able to use a few abilities to turn the real-time battles in your favour, for a low resource cost. Most of these are based on the manipulation of unrest, the creation of new units and general-purpose damage, and range from single-target moves to area-of-effect blasts. For example, the GDI's Ion Cannon causes major damage to anything in its range, while the Orca Strike only damages a strike force. The Nod, however, have the ability to make a strike force or a base miss a turn, allowing you to attack unannounced or wipe out a base without the worry of another strike force halting your path. Both the Nod and the Scrin also have the ability to make a low-cost strike force appear within any circle of influence across the entire world map. The fact that any of these abilities can be used across the whole of the world, regardless of your bases' placement, adds another realm of tactics to an already fiendish gameplay mode.



The lazy man's war.

by allowing you to construct particularly tailored forces for each situation. For example, a ZOCOM group with a MARV will be an easy way to auto resolve past any marauding forces, but a smaller scouting party with an MCV will be useful to take out an enemy base with a structured, resource-building campaign.

Kane's Wrath is undeniably good value, but it is a bipolar expansion. While the campaign mode is at times unbalanced and blood-pissingly annoying, the *Global Conquest* mode is hours of the finest strategy action I've ever played. The game is addictive, rewarding and accessible while at the same time being complex enough to win RTS veterans to the cause.

There's no doubt that the Nod campaign will frustrate all but the purest and most masochistic of *C&C* nuts, but *Global Conquest* manages to whip in and save the day. You can't kill the Messiah. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Identical to *C&C3*
Sound Swirling and orchestral
Multiplayer Global Conquest mode, skirmish

- ✓ Global Conquest is replayable fun
- ✓ Storyline is engaging
- ✓ *C&C3* gameplay expanded
- ✗ Nod-only campaign
- ✗ Harsh difficulty

82

Kane is able



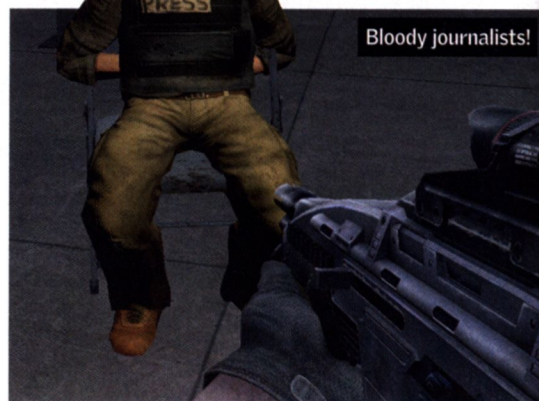
It warms my heart.



Front row seats.

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

Has *Battlefield* finally met its match? *Martin Korda* fuels up and heads to the frontline to investigate...



Bloody journalists!

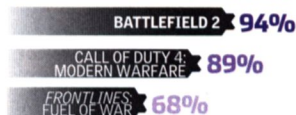
DEVELOPER Kaos Studios
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE www.frontlines.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Large-scale WWII shooter featuring a story driven single-player campaign and 64-player online war zones.

Minimum system requirements:
2.8GHz processor, 768MB RAM (1GB for Vista), and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



YOU CAN'T HAVE it all. At least, not unless you're Valve, Infinity Ward or Bungie. In this age of escalating graphical finesse, and skyrocketing production values and costs, most FPS developers simply have to face facts: you can create a killer multiplayer experience or a sublime solo one, but creating both in one package needs mountains of cash and legions of manpower that are beyond the reach of most developers.

Not even the colossus that is Epic could pull off this – the most elusive of combos – with its recently released *Unreal Tournament III* (which featured an awesome multiplayer, but a disappointing single-player campaign), so it's surprising that a fledgling development studio – albeit a highly talented one mainly comprising of the team behind the excellent *Desert Combat* mod for *Battlefield 1942* – believed



Bring out the meat!

it could compete with the big boys on two fronts. Kudos to Kaos for trying, but no Stogie. But maybe an ultra-thin Hamlet for giving it a crack.

We certainly had high hopes for *Frontlines*. At one point, pepped up on hype and optimism, we even thought it may be capable of slugging it out with *Battlefield 2*, rather than being another glass-jawed dope riding high on PR propaganda.

Frontlines' promises of 64-player battlefields rammed full of infantry and vehicular firefights; a searing, story-driven single-player campaign tackling some of our time's most poignant global issues; and the seemingly obligatory Unreal Engine 3 pulling the strings in the visual department, meant the portents were more than positive. But joyous gaming moments aren't built on corporate half-truths.

SINGLED OUT

Over the past few months we've received conflicting messages about the single-player campaign. Some said it would be no more than a training mode for multiplayer. Others claimed it was a game in its own right, and one potentially good enough to stare down *Call of Duty 4* and its peers, while walking away with its head still held aloft. But strip away the pre-release chatter and you find that it's neither.

Set in the near future, *Frontlines'* single-player campaign charts the conflict between the Western Coalition Army (the US and European Union) and the Red Star Alliance (Russia and China) – two superpowers scrapping for control of the world's dwindling oil reserves. As a member of a Western Coalition Spec Ops unit, you find yourself at the epicentre of the conflict, and it's not long before you're sent on a daring mission to capture oilfields and stymie enemy incursions into WCA territory.

Clearly, the world's leaders overlooked the irony of fighting over petrol using legions of heavily armoured fuel guzzling war machines. Politicians, you've gotta love 'em.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

At first, *Frontlines'* single-player action is deceiving, drawing you into intense encounters that have you panting like a whipped dog in a sausage factory. Backed up by your AI-controlled sidekicks and urged on by a masterful, undulating soundtrack of rousing riffs and orchestral highs, the early minutes have you believing you're in for something special.

Your gun kicks heavily as you struggle to pin down your meandering foes – tough-to-hit targets that simply won't stand still. Tracer fire slams into walls and dirt, bullets buzz past like

At first, *Frontlines'* single-player action is deceiving, drawing you into intense encounters



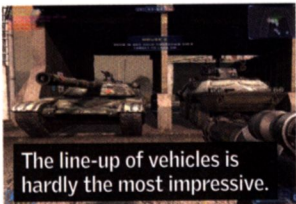
Frontlines isn't short of explosions.

Machines at war

Frontlines' vehicles fail to stack up to the competition

Frontlines' array of armoured war machines can at best be described as solid and at worst, workmanlike. Comprised of tanks, Humvees, mobile anti-aircraft vehicles, gunships and jets, each faction's arsenal is virtually identical. Worse still is the fact that vehicular encounters lack the fun of *UT3*, the weight and realism of *Battlefield 2*, and the versatility of *Quake Wars*.

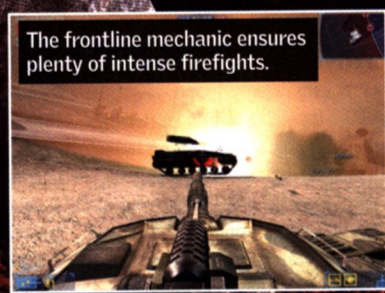
Once the shells and bullets start to fly, you'll briefly forget these shortfalls, distracted by the visceral brutality of it all. But in this day and age, we expect so much more from our vehicular slugfests than eye-popping pyrotechnics and a momentary shot of adrenaline.



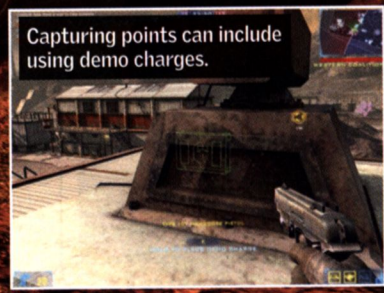
The line-up of vehicles is hardly the most impressive.



You need to remove a couple of ribs first, mate.



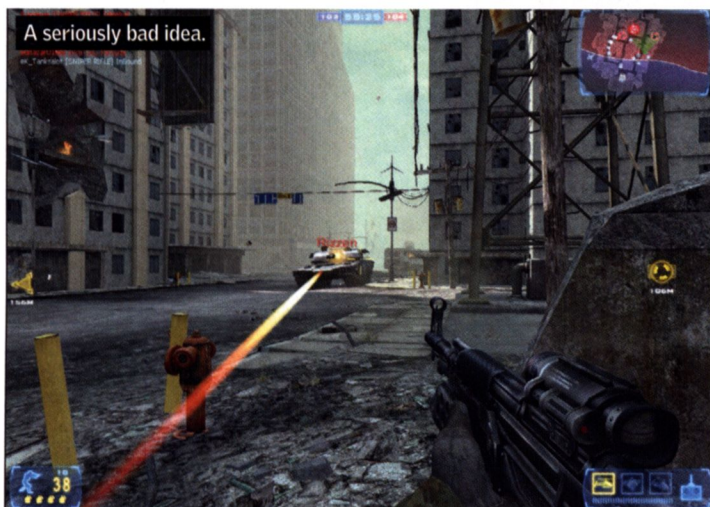
The frontline mechanic ensures plenty of intense firefights.



Capturing points can include using demo charges.



The cutscenes do a great job at presenting the story.



A seriously bad idea.



"Go, go, go!" or something...



He never saw it coming.



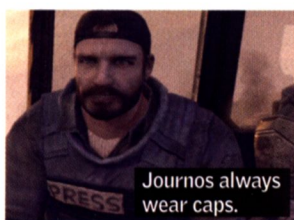
Sorry mate, was that your helicopter?

The paparazzo chronicles

World War III – from the battlefield to your living room

Frontlines' single-player campaign is presented through the eyes of a US reporter, who shadows your Spec Ops team and unravels the plot through a set of excellent cutscenes.

Snappy dialogue and a well-realised vision of a bleak, war-torn future ensure that the story is one of the game's strongest features, once again proving the merits of an adept and well-written narrative in games.



Journos always wear caps.

radioactive flies, while levels and enemies appear to exude impressive levels of detail.

The sheer ferocity of this campaign's battles is admirable, while the semi-opened levels ensure you can approach each battle from a variety of directions. The plot is another plus, its measured twists admirably convincing you that you're trapped in an uncompromising World War.

Then it happens. Slowly, bit by bit, the cracks begin to appear as the intoxication of the opening encounters wears off, and the truth stares back at you from your monitor like an aging ex-beauty queen with fading makeup.

CRACKING UP

There are problems aplenty. Immortal teammates are incapable of killing an enemy soldier, no matter how many rounds they pump into their Kevlar-encased ribcages. Enemies seem to target only you, virtually ignoring the presence of your half-dozen comrades. Not that it matters, as you literally have to charge into the open with

a target painted on your backside while shouting, "Russian vodka tastes like ovine afterbirth!" for there to be any chance of you actually getting killed. And let's not forget the poor collision detection and the occasional invisible barrier that clamps your vehicle and won't let it go.

What begins as a seemingly convincing battlefield soon degenerates into a predictable slog. The visuals also begin to betray their true hues, with enemy faces that are blank and characterless at close quarters, and death animations appearing to be tacked on rather than seamless.

These faults create a nagging feeling that Kaos Studios have attempted to ape *COD4's* action, but that they've forgotten to inject *Frontlines* with its illustrious counterpart's cinematic panache.

WAR FOR THE MASSES

Moving swiftly on, *Frontlines'* selling point is the multiplayer campaign, which has little resemblance to the single-player experience.

The multiplayer game's primary selling point is the purported revolutionary, shifting frontline mechanic. Basically, this means that instead of being able to capture strategic points in any order, you can only liberate points at the frontline of the battle. Capture one of these strategic points and you force your enemy's holdings back and advance your own, thereby shifting the frontline of the conflict.

This actually works incredibly well, as it manages to concentrate hotspots to one or two brutal battles, making for some truly cataclysmic bloodbaths, especially on the more populated, open maps.

Frontlines' multiplayer games can be unceasingly brutal, despite a myriad of collision and clipping glitches. Rumbling through the desert in a column of tanks while jets screech overhead to meet a wing of advancing gunships will have your blood circulating like you've just been spanked by a drawing pin-studded bat.

Driving and piloting vehicles are, on the whole, pretty uncomplicated tasks. Except for flying choppers and jets, which are the very definition of infuriating. Expect to see countless unintentional kamikaze dives from multimillion dollar pieces of hardware as flyboy wannabes career into cliff faces and dunes, and gunships are felled by the merest contact with the scenery.

Getting to grips with these aerial machines is so time-consuming you're likely to abandon the whole notion of adeptly

THREE STEP MASTER The magical ways in which *Frontlines* levels you up on the battlefield...

Each specialist role – Drone Tech, EMP Tech, Air/Ground Support Specialist – has three tiers of proficiency. The more time you spend as a certain specialist, the more experience you gain, allowing you to access new abilities. Here's what you get when on your way to being a Drone Tech master:



You start off with a basic miniature flying machine that you can pilot into armoured enemy territories and then blow things up.



On reaching the next level of proficiency you're given a small buggy packed with explosives to reconnoitre areas, or blow things up.



This powerful armoured beast is armed with a heavy machine gun that you can use to do all your dirty work for you, and blow things up.



Co-ordinating balanced attack forces is anything but simple.

piloting one, unless you're the type of person who slaps on mirrored shades while watching *Top Gun* and cups their crotch during the dogfights.

(UN)ORIGINALITY

One of the multiplayer game's biggest letdowns is the similarity between the two side's arsenals. You barely notice what side you're fighting for, save for some minor aesthetic differences, excellent radio chatter and blaring propaganda messages that assault your ears as you hump, drive and fly through the eclectic collection of solidly designed levels.

There's a lack of originality and imagination that permeates *Frontlines*. Soldier classes, while numerous (Assault, Heavy Assault, Sniper, Anti Vehicle, Spec Ops, Close Combat) are one-dimensional, each sporting overly attack-biased capabilities. The specialist roles (see the Three Step Master panel), while being novel and welcome, also feel overly predictable.

Worse still is that there's only one type of multiplayer game mode which means,

despite the multiplayer game being fairly entertaining, *Frontlines'* action begins to feel repetitive far sooner than the non-stop carnage suggests it should.

For every moment of air-sucking destruction there's an exhalation of disappointment at the lack of variety, at the sheer rigidity of the action, where, "Kill, kill, kill!" is the only mantra that seems to truly matter. While the frontline mechanic does succeed in coordinating attacks and creating hotspots, there's rarely a sense of the genuine team synchronicity that sets *Battlefield 2* so high above its peers, just a feeling of strangers nodding in unspoken comradeship before embarking on haphazard expeditions to track down the enemy somewhere on the frontline.

Performance is another issue. Even on some of the less populated maps, the action often chugs like an aging steam train scaling Everest, even on systems packing much more grunt than the minimum specs demand. And if you're looking to join 64-player servers, you'd be best advised to kit yourself out with a powerful dual core



Looks like someone's got a case of pink eye.

The action begins to feel repetitive far sooner than the non-stop carnage suggests it should

processor and at least two gigs of RAM before signing up.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

Kaos Studios' bold attempt to create a first-class single and multiplayer experience should certainly be admired, but while the team has managed to pull off some notable successes – especially in the intensity department – it's fallen short in too many key areas. A lack of originality, polish and imagination are the main culprits that blight a solid – if predictable – single-player campaign and a sporadically decent multiplayer experience.

Frontlines initially promises much, and while it does manage to deliver a brutal and unceasing FPS experience in which the superpowers of the future slug it out for the world's remaining resources, the end result is more often fool's gold than the black lifeblood that motivates the game's two uncompromising warring factions. **PCZ**

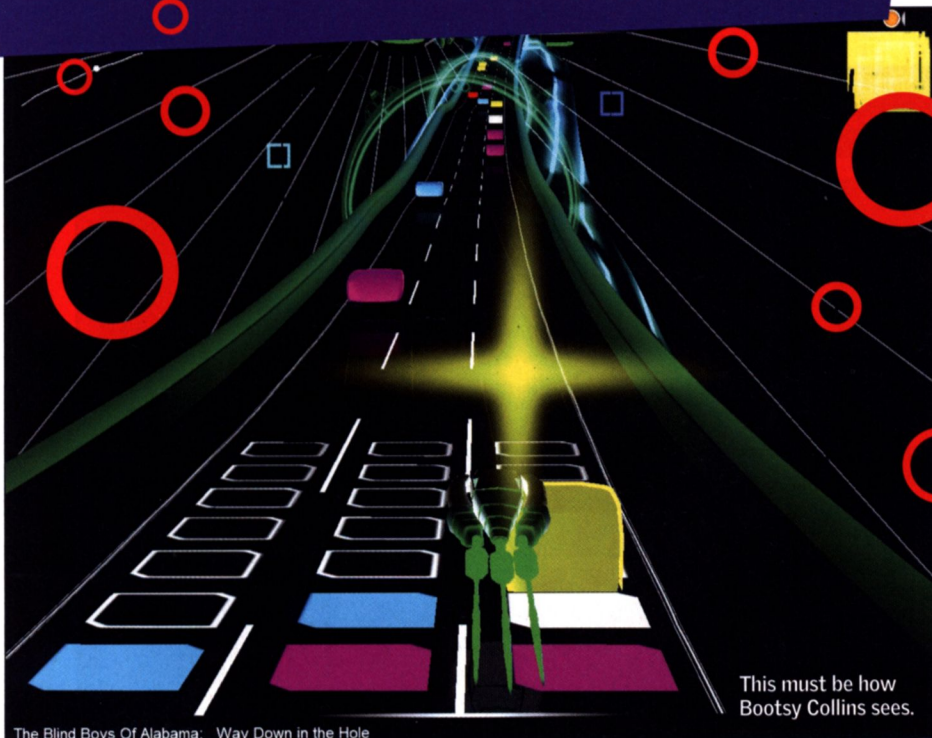
PCZONE

Graphics Decent but not the best
Sound Quality soundtrack and chatter
Multiplayer Brutal, if unoriginal

- ✓ Visceral multiplayer
- ✓ Sizeable game modes
- ✓ Decent plot
- ✗ Lacks imagination
- ✗ Lacklustre single-player

69

Poor man's COD4

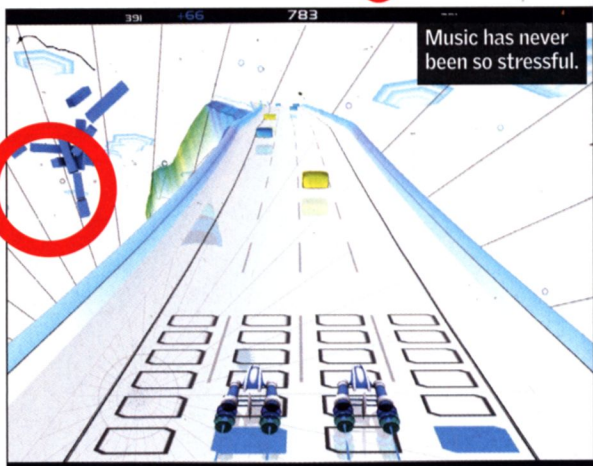


The Blind Boys Of Alabama: Way Down in the Hole

This must be how Bootsy Collins sees.



unknown: CD Track 02



AUDIOSURF

Let the music take control, oh yes, let *Ed Zitron* heal your soul...

DEVELOPER Dylan Fitterer
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE www.audiosurf.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9.95 (£5)

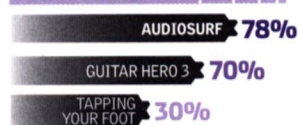


AT A GLANCE...

Bumping, jumping, thumping, puzzling music action game, that has you matching coloured blocks created out of your MP3s.

Minimum system requirements:
 1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 32MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



AUDIOSURF IS A weird beast of a game. Hailing from the same tradition that spawned *Rez* and odd vector-graphic rabbit *Vib-Ribbon* on the PlayStation, it uses your music collection to create its levels, sculpting your tunes into a playable visualisation.

However, the wider your taste in music, and the larger your music collection, the more you'll get out of *Audiosurf*, with your reaction ranging from 'Hey, what a nice little diversion' to rampant, feverish battling to have the top spot on a song's leaderboard.

You control a weird spacecraft type thing, moving 'cars' (differently coloured blocks) into groups of three or more to make them disappear, with different colours generated by different intensities of music. The ship is controlled using the mouse or by the keyboard, and the end result is a game where *WipeOut* meets *Columns*.



There are several different ships to pilot, each offering a slightly different take on the game. The Mono offers a sedate ride, requiring you to pick up just one colour of block while avoiding the greys. In the Pointman, you have to collect other colours, resulting in an overflowing rainbow mess, but you can grab cars as they come at you and drop them in any column. The Pusher is a more aggressive Pointman, and allows you to shove blocks to the left or the right. In the Vegas you grab as many blocks as possible, then hop off-track to shuffle them into combos. The Double V is similar to the Mono, except it's two cars. You can either play with a friend, or you can be a real man (or woman) and play two at once.

CHASING CARS

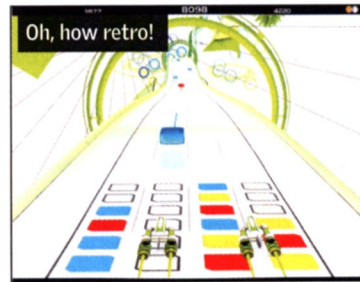
The strong-willed can also try the Iron Mode, which ends the track and the game if your columns overflow, after failing to clear your collected blocks.

As for the 'music-adapting' aspect, there's some dark witchcraft going on in *Audiosurf*. While the easier levels leave you feeling a bit disconnected from the music, the Pro modes allow you to develop a deep lock with the notes, pre-empting oncoming traffic with your knowledge of the lyrics or percussion, and feeling slightly ill as the track bumps and ripples to the beat.



Faster songs feel more difficult, but the real challenge is complex music – simple 4/4 soft-rock is easier than bizarre improvised jazz. Playing several hard, fast tunes in a row isn't recommended either, as the velocity and psychedelia of it all frazzles your brain.

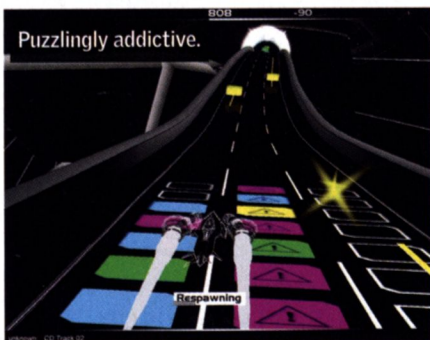
Deep down, *Audiosurf* is a technological feat mingled with a fun, yet shallow game. It's an original and addictive way to listen to your music, but can be ridiculously



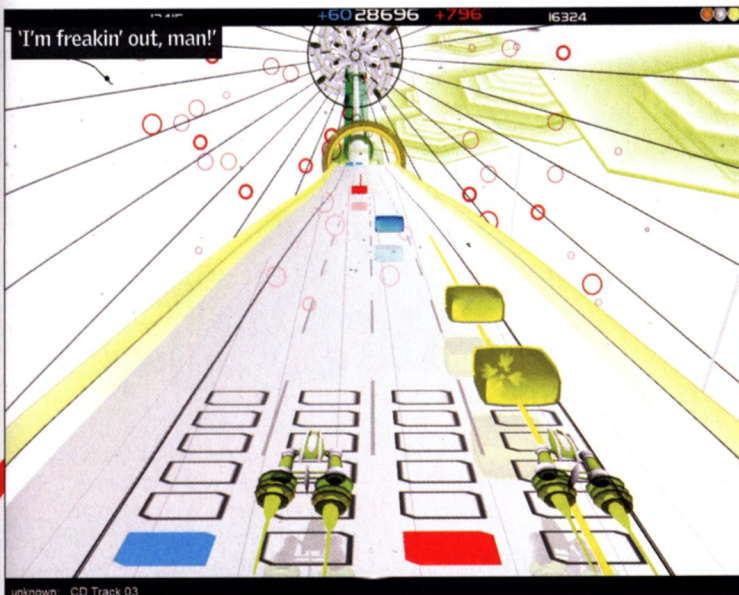
Community space

Me and you vs the world

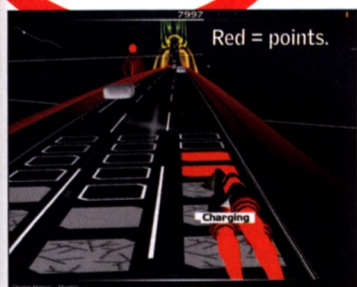
Anyone buying *Audiosurf* through Steam will find themselves with the soundtrack to *The Orange Box* preloaded into the game. Some would argue that's worth a fiver in itself. This also gives a focus to the game's community aspect: before you launch yourself into your own music tastes that no-one else shares, you can rank yourself against a selection of tracks that people will have played. The online leaderboards can quickly become compulsive, as you chase a top 10 ranking for your favourite tracks – although finding obscure songs that few people had played quickly became our substitute for genuine excellence at piloting the crafts. As such, we're number one at Aphex Twin's *Come To Daddy*, and the only player of Alcazar's *Sexual Guarantee*. Believe it or not, Alcazar's Swedish pop track was absolutely nails, whereas *Come To Daddy*'s cacophonous dirge made for a featureless ride.



Puzzlingly addictive.



Audiosurf is a technological feat mingled with a fun, yet shallow game



repetitive, and even makes you feel a little queasy when it runs too fast. This may be a compliment though, as *Audiosurf* creates a fantastic sensation of speed, and is the closest you'll get to living your music until you can plug your iPod into your brain stem.

Audiosurf is fun, frantic, and a fiver. If you're a music fan, you're bound to enjoy it in short bursts of philharmonic fun. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Psychedelic
Sound Your music collection
Multiplayer Offline two-player mode. Online leaderboards

- ✓ Gorgeous-looking
- ✓ Excellent music tracking
- ✓ Online leaderboards
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ Shallow

78

Music to your ears



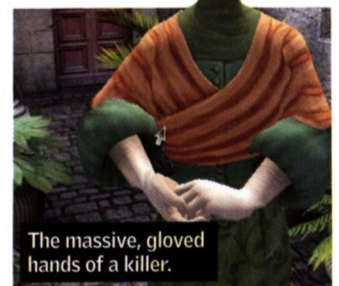
As far as I know, today Mr. Alonso has gone with his son to his relatives for a week, and even the housekeeper was released on holiday.

AGON: THE LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO

Skip to the end

DEVELOPER Private Moon Studios
PUBLISHER Kalypso
WEBSITE www.kalypsomedia.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
1.7GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 32MB video card.



The massive, gloved hands of a killer.

TO CALL *AGON* a point-and-click game is to grossly overstate the amount of clicking. For a very long time, the game involves nothing more than exhausting the dialogue trees of the characters you meet. Although the puzzles you'll eventually reach are decent enough, the exhausting swamp of extremely middle-class dialogue you have to trudge through makes it feel more like a Radio 4 play than a game.

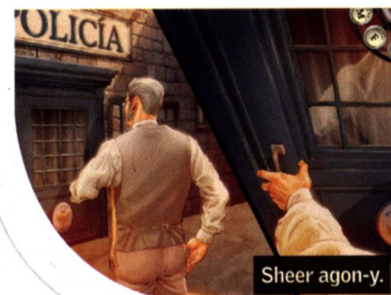
Worse still, the dialogue sounds like it's delivered slowly by the over-keen members of an am-dram group for simpletons, and you don't get a whiff of a puzzle until you've listened to in excess of an hour of this eye-glazing chat. If it's designed to make you care for the characters, it's a terrible mistake –

you spend long minutes actively willing them to explode.

Agon makes a vague stab at aping *Myst*, by confining your exploration to a series of jump points. However, where *Myst* let you know with intuitive visual clues where you might be expected to go, *Agon* leaves you to scour a 360° panorama for something, anything, that changes your cursor.

Sometimes it seems deliberately mocking. To whittle the branches of a dialogue tree to one option feels like the main achievement in *Agon*. And for that option to be the tree-exploding question, "Can I ask some more questions?" – well, to continue the arboreal metaphor, that famous scene in *Evil Dead* springs to mind, because that's what playing *Agon* is like: getting fingered by a tree.

Jon Blyth

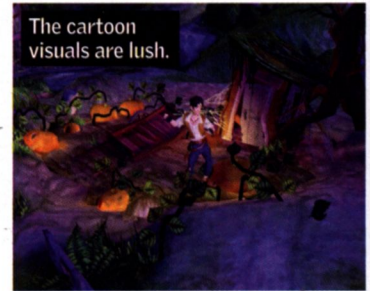
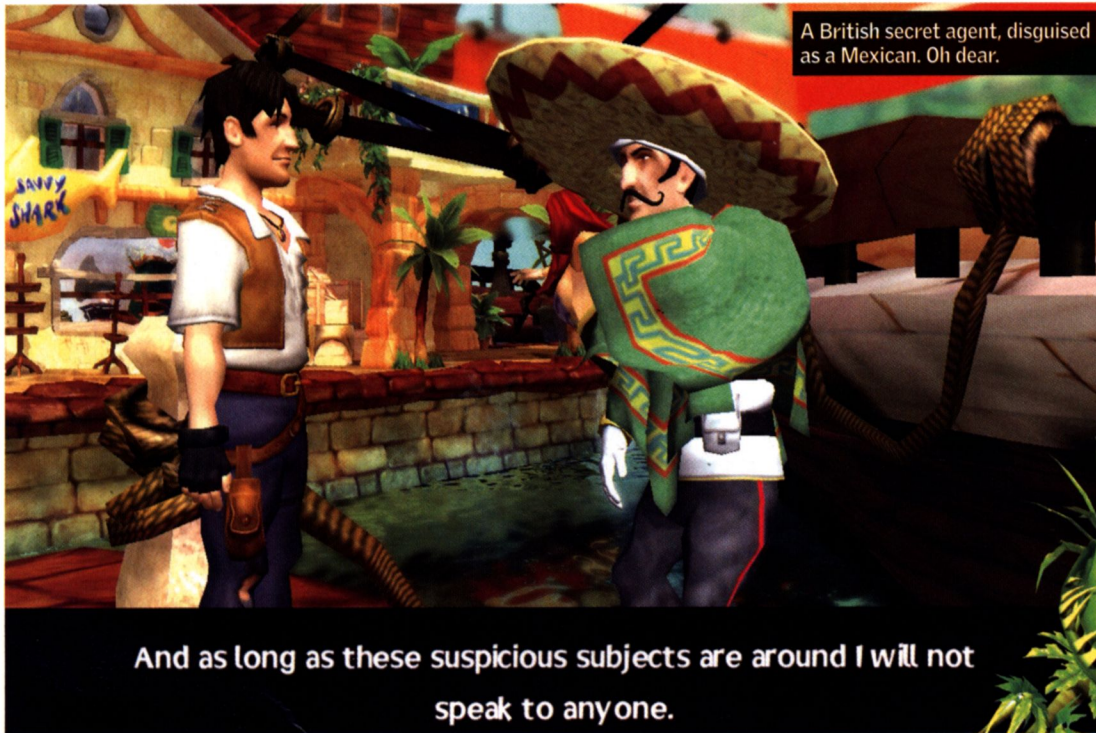


Sheer agon-y.

PCZONE

35

Direlog



JACK KEANE

Alex Dale encounters the famous German sense of humour



DEVELOPER 10tacle Studios
PUBLISHER Deck 13
WEBSITE www.jackkeane.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Cuppa-loving colonial Brit Jack Keane tries to save an island from tea-munching plants. Move to, look at, talk to, use x with y, and so on.

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

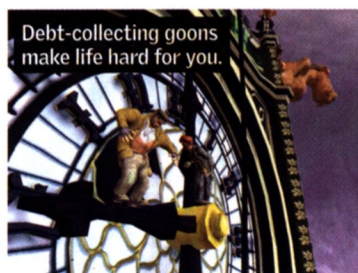
HOW IT STACKS



I MADE A promise to myself and to you, dear reader, that I'd never do it. I'd never compare a point-and-clicker to *The Secret of Monkey Island*, or any other LucasArts adventure.

This is lazy and obvious games journalism, and in any respect, LucasArts' early '90s output was so polished that it only leads to unfavourable comparisons. But then along comes a game like *Jack Keane* that practically comes with a 'Wish You Were Here' postcard of *Monkey Island* stapled to the box.

Consider the facts: a jittery hero in a flouncy white shirt, a female sidekick who's tougher than she looks, an obligatory 'scare a bird off' puzzle, and an obsession with monkeys. This is a total own-brand version of *Monkey Island*. I've met more innovative sausages than this and if Keane couldn't be bothered to be



original, then why should I, eh? But here's the caveat: if you don't judge it against anything else, this a decent little game.

JOKER IN THE DECK

Jack Keane comes from Deck 13, the German studio responsible for the likeable-ish *Ankh* adventures, and through research, collaborations with Telltale Games (of *Sam & Max* fame) and sheer hard graft, they've reached the point where they can put together a solid point-and-click game. *Jack Keane's* numerous locations are bright and breezy, the controls streamlined, the puzzles logical – which is more than can be said for many of its peers – and the pacing is spot-on. Indeed, the speed in which the characters move make *Jack Keane* somewhat of a leader in its genre. The game never drags in the way that even *Monkey Island* et al often could. And the characters are definitely likeable enough, despite the imbecility of them having British accents that seem to have been voiced by morons who wouldn't be able to locate England on a map of England.

The problem with *Jack Keane* is that it's just not funny. The game tries too hard to be something its not. Watching these 'zany characters' (the game's website's words, not mine) rattle off their tepid

jokes is an experience that'll see you crack one smile for every four groans.

Jack Keane is a very respectable adventure, and there's definitely plenty of it. I like point-and-click games, and I like *Jack Keane*, so make of that what you will. But often while playing it, you'll wish there was a game out there with a little more charisma, with a little more natural charm. And there is: *Monkey Island*. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Colourful and European cartoon
 Sound Fine, except for dog-shit British accents
 Multiplayer None at all

- ✓ Solid puzzles
- ✓ Excellent pacing
- ✓ Refined controls
- ✗ Humour doesn't translate
- ✗ Not exactly original

73

Sheer piracy

"Online poker is about to take a giant step forward"

Inside Poker

"It rocks!"

FHM



"The future of online poker is here..."

Poker Player

Emotional intelligence

"It rocks!"

FHM

Some people call it a hunch or believe its intuition. They say they can read into a smile. Or in the way you look at your cards. One thing's for sure, there's more to this game than cold hard facts. So come and experience the whole game, personality included.



www.pkr.com

18+

Please gamble responsibly. For more information and advice visit www.gambleaware.co.uk Licensed by the UK Gambling Commission



Check out that exhaust baby. Woo-ee.



Space macrami of the future.



...and this is where they filmed *Sunshine*.



Always plenty going on.

SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

Richie Shoemaker gets on his knees and plays

DEVELOPER Ironclad
 PUBLISHER Stardock
 WEBSITE www.sinsofsolarempire.com
 ETA Out now
 PRICE \$44.95 (£27 approx)



AT A GLANCE...

Three races vie for domination, developing planets, building ships and blowing them all up again.

Minimum system requirements: 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE **91%**

SUPREME COMMANDER **88%**

SWORD OF THE STARS **81%**

ORIGINS CAN TELL you a lot about a game, even before you've prised it from the shelf. *BioShock*, *Supreme Commander* and *The Movies* are titles we've gotten all giddy about because of the crew behind them. This was also quietly true with *Sins of a Solar Empire*, which apart from having a very evocative title, comes from an outfit who've made a significant contribution to the *Homeworld* RTS series. If that wasn't enough they've been helped and bankrolled by Stardock, who took the *Civ* concept, put rockets on the side and shot it into deepest space to great acclaim, through their *Galactic Civilizations* series.

Pedigree counts for nothing unless the final product is good – and *Sins of a Solar Empire* is unquestionably very, very good. This is *Supreme Commander* in space, minus the crushing system requirements and free of the constraints of a linear campaign. In scale and function it feels every bit as

accomplished, whilst measured in terms of depth and progression, it dwarfs any kind of RTS you care to mention.

THAT'S NO MOON

Whilst there are many aspects of galactic conquest to juggle, at no point does the game overwhelm, which is an incredible achievement for a real-time game where war can be fought across hundreds of planets, with battles that scale from trade-

lane skirmishes to fleet clashes between untold numbers of vessels. You don't get the full range of tactical choices you might want should you be one of those finger-in-every-pie wargamers, but as a fleet commander you get enough to be able to trust the smaller ships to get on with things whilst you make sure the capital vessels use their special abilities at the right time.

With the focus on war and conquest, matters of diplomacy, research and



Sweet sunset.



Like a massive space Wario.



If outnumbered the AI will retreat.

There are subtle layers of strategy that allow you to think outside of the relentless warfare of other games



Having been beta tested for many months, the game is delicately balanced.

planetary development are made easier, rather than have you rely on fallible AI advisors. Thankfully this isn't so much a dumbing down of a hardcore genre, but the levelling up of a relatively mindless one.

There are subtle layers of strategy, a conspiracy of design that allows you to think outside of the relentless warfare that RTS games usually peddle. You might have an empire that is stable and secure, yet you feel compelled to expand, for fear that your neighbour might at your expense. You create a 'defence' force and your neighbours do the same (even those you are newly allied with, whether they're AI or human-controlled) and an arms race ensues. By recruiting pirates as a proxy force you have all the elements of a Cold

War – yet it's not so much a hard-coded feature of the game as a result of it being so open in the first place.

Sins is not a wild adrenaline ride, nor is it punctuated by meaningless visual flourishes. This game looks good, works smoothly in every department – and I mean every department – and offers a diverse challenge that will engage players for weeks, if not months. Yeah, so there's not much of a story, no real goal beyond that of victory, but the freedom to define victory on your own terms by not having it thrust down your throat is what makes the game so captivating. And having hundreds of spaceships blowing the crap outta each other up is always cool, whatever universe you hail from.

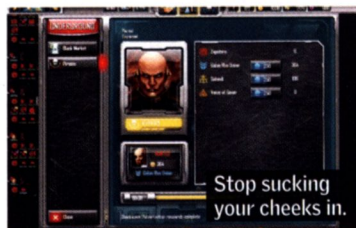
Sins of a Solar Empire is light years ahead of the

Massive on the multiplayer

Possibly the best online RTS at the moment



Sins supports up to 10 online players, and this multiplayer is a winner because the sandbox that is the single-player game is mirrored for the multitudes. What this means is that the seething pace of the game brings in the personalities of the players themselves. Diplomacy and communication is of course prevalent, as it should be. On the flip side unless you kick up an iddy-biddy three-system scrap (also great fun), games can be very long – an entire evening should ideally be set aside (as it should be for your opponents if you are to avoid losing them through attrition). Thankfully games can be saved and resumed, but whilst AI generals can take the place of absent real-life opponents, if you're going to get involved in a 10-player epic across hundreds of systems, you will most likely be defeated by domestic civil war from a spouse or relative rather than on the battlefield – you have been warned!



competition and to miss it would be unforgivable. And if another reviewer writes a better box-friendly quote than that, I'll piss in their face. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Solid and seamless
Sound Atmospheric
Multiplayer Endless

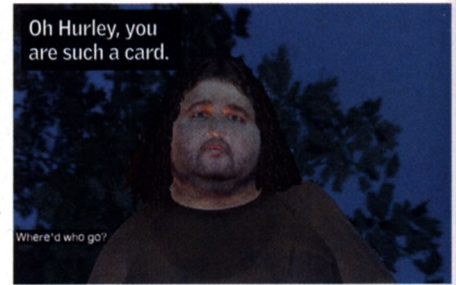
- ✓ Uniquely playable
- ✓ Deep and accessible
- ✓ Balanced and refined
- ✓ Top-class multiplayer
- ✗ Needs more races

91

Unrepentant



The Black Rock – miraculously recreated.



Oh Hurley, you are such a card.



Two season's worth of hatch.

LOST: VIA DOMUS

"Show me the way to go home," mumbles *Will Porter*, "I'm tired, and I want to go to bed."



"Waaaalt!"

DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE lostgame.us.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

ONE DAY IN the not-too-distant past, two or three of JJ Abrams' most trusted henchmen sat down with Ubisoft's finest to discuss the game that would become *Lost: Via Domus*. That game must have sounded amazing. For a start, the story – that of an amnesiac photographer with a dark past who goes largely untrusted by the island's residents, is truly worthy of the TV show itself.

After this power-meeting, the Hollywood creatives would have high-fived their way out of the room, leaving some enthusiastic developers gradually teetering towards the realisation of the task ahead of them. An average episode of *Lost* is two-fifths chat and three-fifths running away from things and hiding, generally encompassing about two gunshots worth of action. So where's the game?

At this point in the discussion one of the developers would have stood up and screamed at the ceiling, "How about having

the game largely consist of picking up coconuts, answering maths questions and solving problems with GCSE-level electrical circuitry?" His companions would then have grunted an affirmative, before continuing to pick nits out of each others' luxuriant fur and eating them.

LOCKE STOCK

Lost: Via Domus' story is genuinely interesting. The best thing about it, as with the series, is the clever integration of flashbacks in which you learn about your character's dark past. The game proper, however, is a collection of mini-games and dire third-person adventuring that should have died in the plane crash. For a start, for the most part it's not even the original cast doing the voices – and they seemed to have shipped Bobby Davro in on some sort of job-lot deal. Your character's televisual absences are explained away by you never being around at major points in the TV series, but this doesn't matter too much as you barely speak to anyone anyway.

More often than not you share one single conversation with major characters in the show (Sun, Jin, Desmond, Clare...) and always with the same generic one sentence, one answer stock questions. What's more, some of the castaways may look the part (like Kate and Sayid), but others bear no

resemblance to any human that has walked the Earth. Hurley looks like a bestial mix of pug-dog and bubble-throated amphibian. In fact, at one point, my girlfriend walked in while I was playing and genuinely asked "Why have they made Michael blind?", convinced that his massive swaying eyes and inability to focus were a *Lost*-style twist rather than blundering animated nightmare.

The only high spot in the gameplay (repeat: the only high spot) is when you're put under pressure to tap in those fabled numbers. Beyond that, it's simply a case of deadening, infuriating and constant running away from smoke monsters and continual undergrowth gunfire resulting in repeated insta-death, time and time again. 'Game over' screens appear relentlessly. You have been shot. You fell down a deep dark pit. You tried to do something the game engine was not expecting and it threw a wobbler over. In fact, the closing scenes genuinely require you to fail several times so you can watch what happens once it's game over, anticipate it and prevent it from happening. How broken is that as a concept?

Beyond its strangely grey-tinged jungles and monotonous wrong-sounding residents, where the game really falls down are the awful, awful puzzles. The nadir of this, the Mariana trench-deep slough of despond puzzle, is a cross between *Pipe Mania* and

AT A GLANCE...

Marooned on an island, you're an amnesiac photographer, dealing with the Others and your own past. Sounds great. But isn't.

Minimum system requirements:
 2.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

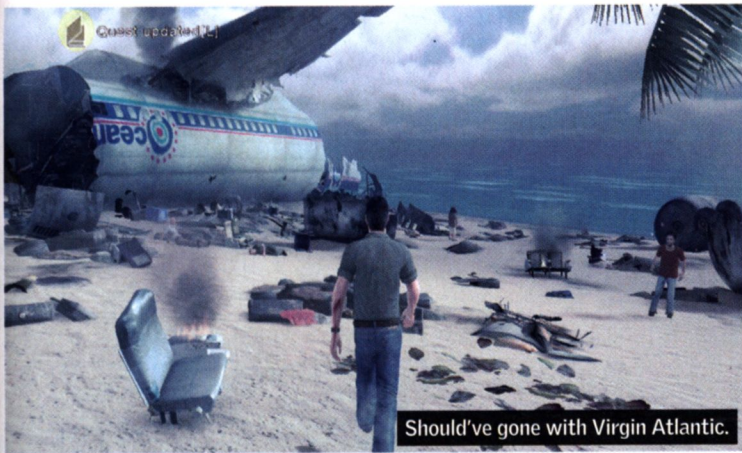
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 89%

KING KONG 83%

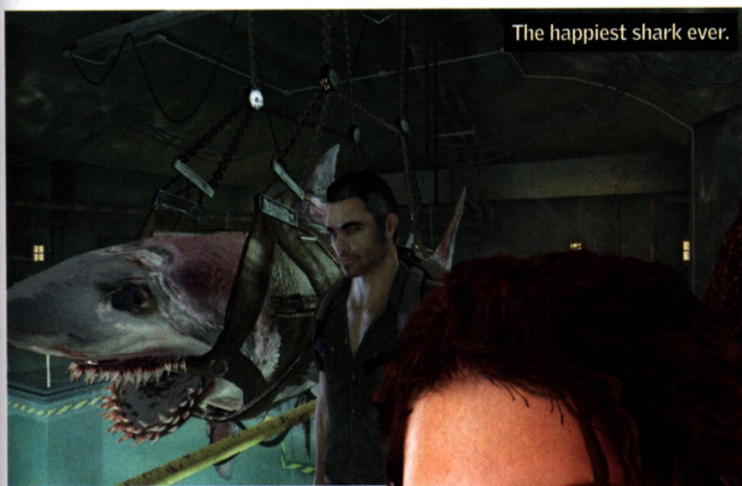
LOST: VIA DOMUS 32%



Use 'coconut' on 'face'.



Should've gone with Virgin Atlantic.



The happiest shark ever.

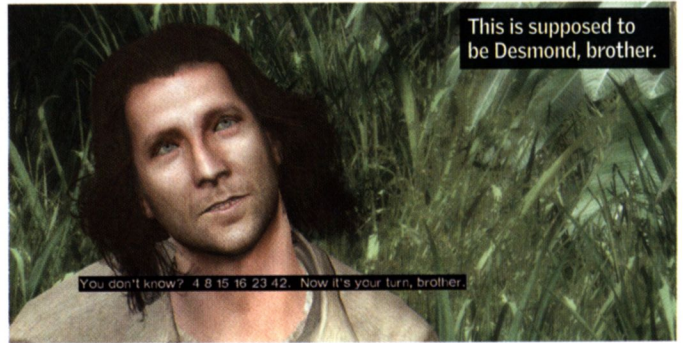
the bits of physics lessons you never listened to, slotting fuses into a wonky circuit board and trying to get the right amount of power into each part of it. Done once it's an average puzzle, done twice and it's an annoyance – done six or seven times throughout the four-hour game (five including 'stuck-time') you'll get a Pavlovian feeling of looming dread whenever you see a casually discarded fuse left on a work surface.

Essentially what's wrong with *Lost: Via Domus* is that, while its concept and story are gripping, the gameplay is as distant from the concept of fun as a bucket of pig shit is from boiled lobster. Sitting at a keyboard answering basic mathematical sequence problems? Woo bloody hoo. Stop me while I rock gently back and forward in the sheer excitement of it all.

Had they got in an interesting developer with jungle-friendly credentials (say Michel Ancel the *King Kong* man) *Lost: Via Domus* had the promise of being something different and something engaging. As it stands it's the least fun I've had since I had a catheter fitted during a spell in hospital. **PCZ**

But is it canon?

A box-out that's purely for *Lost* fans. With spoilers



This is supposed to be Desmond, brother.

You don't know? 4 8 15 16 23 42. Now it's your turn, brother.

Lost: Via Domus takes place within series one and two, and culminates at the point of the hatch explosion. Seeing as your character gets to meet the Others, and gets trapped within their aquarium way before Sawyer ever even heard of a fish biscuit, a few season three characters get a look in as well. If your favourite character has been bumped off by the close of season three however (apart from Charlie) they don't appear in the game – so no Shannon, Ana Lucia, Boone or Mr Eko. Desmond, the best character, is hardly in it as well. There's a fair amount of fun in looking round the hatch, but you have to solve three fuse puzzles there. You meet one polar bear, but he's dead.



Flashbacks are the best bits.



Alas, crap puzzles.

PCZONE

Graphics Grey jungle, pug-dog Hurley
 Sound God-awful fake voices
 Multiplayer Would make it more broken

- Flashbacks are interesting
- A waste of a license
- Risible character interaction
- Constant, needless deaths
- Puzzles that cause tears

32

None will be saved

Nazis: big on flags, short on intelligence.



HOUR OF VICTORY

The brown tide of WWII shooters is back. Taking a bullet for the team is *Dan Marshall*...

DEVELOPER N-Fusion Interactive
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE
www.hourofvictory.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

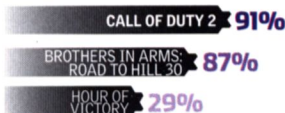


AT A GLANCE...

Play as one of three unlikeable goons as you waltz through the Second World War's most overused and uninspiring locales!

Minimum system requirements:
 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



I LIKE TO think that somewhere atop Game Design HQ there's a big tombola left over from a '70s BBC game show, and when they need a title for the latest copy-and-paste World War II shooty bang-bang game, they give it a spin and pull random wartime-inspired words out of the box.

Wup-wup-wup-wup, round it goes, and the first word is... 'HEROES!' Wup-wup-wup, spin the box... ooh, it's... 'COURAGE!'

And there you have it – the challenge to the development team is then to head off into darkened rooms and make something vaguely interesting out of the title 'Heroes of Courage'. Or maybe 'Courage of Heroes' if they're feeling particularly out there.

Hour of Victory is, presumably, the by-product of just such a contraption, the same demonic device that gave us *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty*.

The simple tragedy here is that unlike those fine games, *Hour of Victory* is every bit

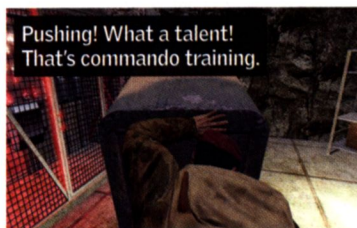
as uninspired as the drab title suggests. Game Design HQ also presumably contains some sort of checklist that all World War II shooters are obliged to conform to. Shooting down planes from a gun emplacement? Check! Driving a tank for a bit? Check! A bit where you go up in a cable car to a Nazi castle? Check! Helmets that ping off improbably when struck by a bullet? Check!

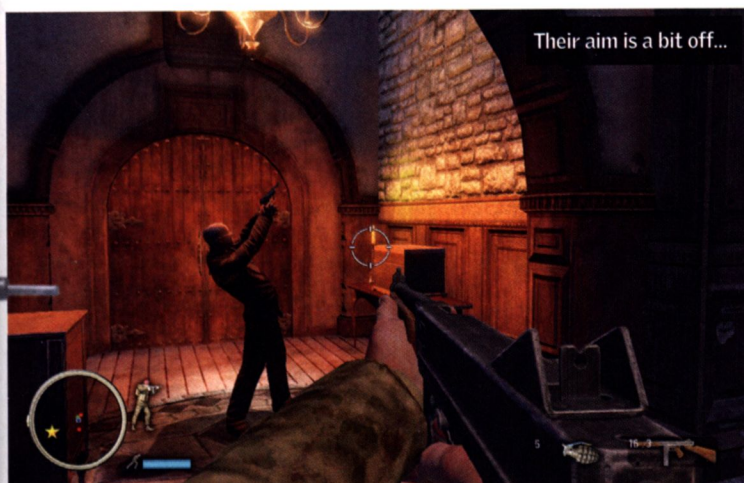
TRIPLE TROUBLE

Hour of Victory has one not-at-all unique twist, in that you have the opportunity to select which of three bland stereotypes you'd like to play for each mission. There's the Scottish commando who likes shooting, the sniper who also likes shooting, but from a distance, and the sneaky stealth guy, who prefers to sneak around a bit, before giving up when he realises the game engine's not built for stealth gameplay and actually the war would probably be over an awful lot quicker if he joined in and did a little bit of shooting too.

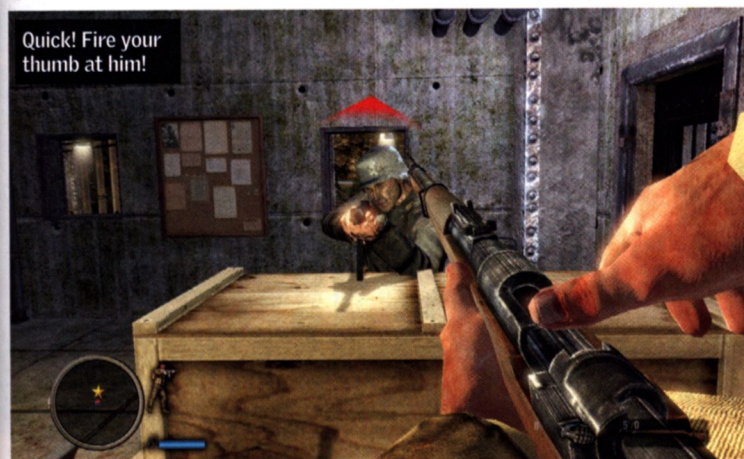
All in all, this tired little addition to the game is an outright disaster. Instead of giving you a free-roaming path through a level and objectives that match each soldier's unique skills, all it really means is that the commando can push things out of the way, the sneaky man can pick locks, and the sniper – being the highly-trained, best-of-the-best, special operative of the three – can climb ropes.

As such, any potentially clever and interesting situations that might arise from you playing as one character rather than the other are immediately cast aside, and the solution simply involves walking round the





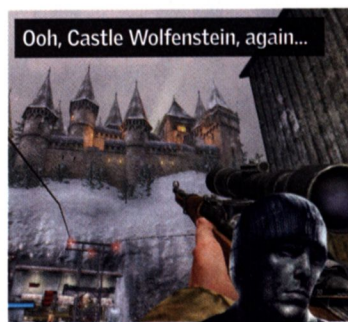
Hour of Victory's Nazis take the Iron Cross for Stupidest Nazis Ever



Where eejits dare

Old duffer scared by inanimate objects shocker!

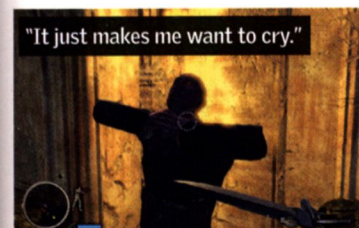
At one point, you have to rescue some loathsome scientist who's stuck in that castle from *Where Eagles Dare*. He's a useless old codger, his poor AI essentially turning him into an unwitting parody of Indy's dad. He's inadvertently hilarious, and all-in-all the best thing in the game. The batty old goon kept going on about what a brave, handsome and talented soldier I was while shooting at suits of armour as though they were coming to get him, before running away and shouting 'Help me!'. Amazing.



corner to find a different thing to push, lock to pick or rope to climb in order to progress.

From here, things go from bad to worse. I've seen *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* enough times to know that Nazis are pretty damned stupid, but *Hour of Victory's* Nazis take the Iron Cross for Stupidest Nazis Ever. They just sort of bob around and occasionally duck behind things, hoping that if they ignore you you'll go away, and then acting all shocked when you saunter up to them and clobber them round the chops with your rifle.

Speaking of which, the code that works out whether you're close enough to a baddy to clobber them instead of shooting is completely broken. As such, the two of you can be on opposite sides of a crate, and, while he's shooting you in the face with his machine gun, you're forced to stand there wildly swinging your arms in an attempt to knock him out, even though you're fully six feet away.



In fact the whole thing is pretty buggy. Tanks disappear inches from your astonished face, guns hang about in mid-air and NPCs shout "Follow me!" before sprinting merrily into the nearest wall, looking perplexed and then disappearing from view entirely.

KILL ME NOW

Frankly, *Hour of Victory* is out-and-out the worst shooter I've played in years. For all its Xbox-isms and trendy bloom effects it never really feels much of a step up from *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* in terms of visuals, and

the original *Wolfenstein 3D* in terms of gameplay.

The game has an impossibly horrible and staggered plot that makes no sense whatsoever and ties none of the missions together at all. The 'heroes' are all bitterly unlikeable pricks. The gameplay is tattered, broken and excruciatingly boring. In fact, there are just too many horrible things going on in *Hour of Victory* to sum up in a single magazine, let alone two pages. Put succinctly: the mere thought of booting up *Hour of Victory* ever again is making my balls hurt. **PC7**



PCZONE

Graphics A long, long way from state-of-the-art
Sound Decent music, so-so effects
Multiplayer Yes, but why?

- ✓ Doesn't do D-Day again
- ✓ Has shooting and explosions
- ✗ Looks horrific
- ✗ Terrible script and acting
- ✗ Bland gameplay
- ✗ Not even a bit fun

18

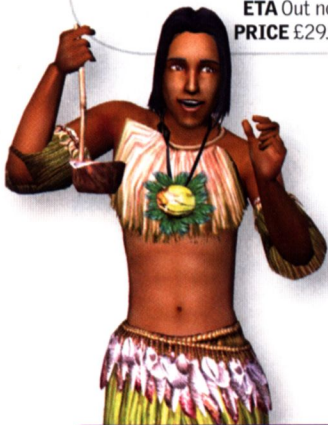
War is hell. This is worse



THE SIMS CASTAWAY STORIES

Steve Hogarty crafts a rather fetching bra out of a pair of coconuts

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

EA fling themselves onto the *Lost* bandwagon. As well as the *I'm A Celebrity...*, *Love Island* and *Survivor* bandwagons.

Minimum system requirements: 1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

THE SIMS: LIFE STORIES 57%

THE SIMS CASTAWAY STORIES 48%

THE SIMS PET STORIES 44%

A NICE TOUCH in *The Sims Castaway Stories*: when you swim in the ocean, not only does your hygiene bar increase, but so does your bladder bar.

So this game advocates pissing in the ocean – the most fiendishly feral thing a human being can do. As well as this, when you hand an ape a banana it retreats into a bamboo thicket, squats, and commits an act that must be obscured by a pixelated box of censorship. Is it eating it in a suggestive manner? Or something even more crude? It's a cheeky mystery.

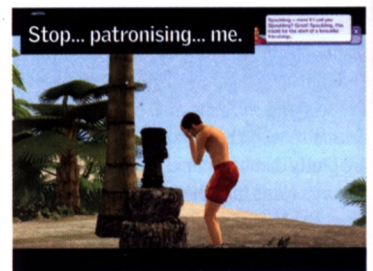
This is the third *Stories* title in the series, continuing the tradition of taking you by the hand with bone-crushing firmness and leading you down a linear path of objectives. The house building and character creation has been done away with in favour of a rigid storyline built



around *The Sims 2's* interface. Every step of every action is clearly dictated for you – from finding a hatchet, to feeding an orangutan, to adopting that ape as a pet and giving it a job – there's little freedom to be had on your island refuge.

That's a shame, because despite every *Sims* game defecating on my optimism in ever larger amounts, there's a part of me that thinks they might produce something worthwhile again. For instance, this could've been a brilliant survival game in which you were left entirely to your own devices, forced to figure out how living on an island worked. Instead it's a dull, interactive movie, punctuated only by your guided clickings and inexorable groans. There's no opportunity to work things out for yourself, no sense of discovery or exploration to be had, and very little satisfaction in proceeding through the set-in-stone storyline.

By peddling this sort of single-minded crud to children EA are creating a new generation of absolute morons who won't be able to think more than one step ahead of themselves. They will be incapable of making toast without first celebrating peeling a slice of bread from the loaf. They will burn down their houses and piss in the oceans. And it will all be EA's fault. Well done. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Water looks a bit weird
Sound Yes, there are some sounds
Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Resource collecting is good
- ✓ Monkeys
- ✗ Obscenely linear
- ✗ Treats you like a dolt
- ✗ Restrictive environments

48

Lost



ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

That's some Gaul

DEVELOPER Étranges Libellules
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.atari.com/asterix
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM (1GB for Vista), and a 64MB graphics card.



THIS ISN'T a bad little game. If that sounds patronising, like I'm congratulating the developers for eating all their dindins, then I'm sorry. But this game is clearly pitched at a younger crowd, and it's not bad at all. The story's fun – someone's opened a door between all the different Asterix universes, resulting in photo-realistic characters mingling with cartoons and paper cut-outs. Visually, it's lovely, and even the script is often funny.

The core game isn't just *Track & Field*, either – there's an action adventure storyline threading the mini-games together. Which is lucky, because a good number of the mini-games are moronic in their simplicity. The default controls are awful –

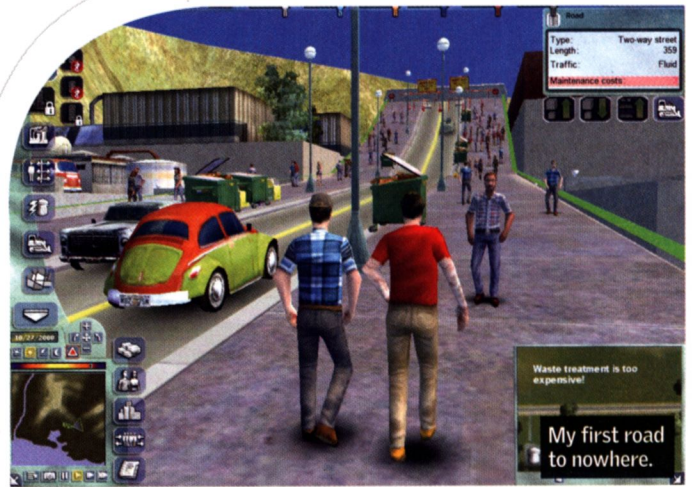
tucking you away on the cursor keys and numeric pad, but here's perversity for you – even hunched over a corner of my keyboard, looking like a little old lady holding her handbag in front of her, I still enjoyed the PC controls more than the predictable shaky-swipes of the Wii version. Does this peg me as a fanboy? Not really, I'm just very lazy.

This is not a terribly thoughtful port (note to developers – the PC has a keyboard that you might say is custom bloody designed for typing in names) and there's not enough meat to the game to score it any higher. However, if you've got young kids who hate Romans, but aren't quite ready for gibbs, *Asterix* will keep them off the meth for a while.

Jon Blyth



PCZONE
63
 Fun for the kiddies

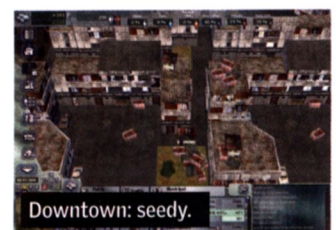


CITY LIFE 2008 EDITION

The haves and the have-nots

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE www.ascaron.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
 1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.



A RECAP, THEN: *City Life* is the city-building game that makes you to deal with the conflicting needs of six groups. At first, you'll build housing that'll only attract the lower tier, as those upper class scumbags won't move into your town until there's a strong bloodstream of poverty for the vampiric bastards to suck on, yeah? Am I right, brothers? So the main thrust of the game, apart from making sure everyone's got a shop and a doctor to go to, is making sure you don't incite a riot by forcing the arty chic types to live or work next door to the blue collar workers. In other words, keep the jazz poetry readings away from the beer factories.

This is a balanced and relaxed take on city-building, and the extreme zoom that gives you little snapshots

of the city dwellers' lives is fair enough, but the original game's unpolished, yet acceptable, quality is already well-documented. What is it that warrants this 2008 repackaging?

Basically it's just a few extra maps, a bunch of buildings to break up the formerly monotonous skylines, and a few extra scenarios. The satellite map import function is pure gimmickry, so this is absolutely no reason to buy the game again – the original is bundled in this pack, anyway.

However, if the original, and the 2007 *Deluxe Edition* passed you by, then this is definitely a modern city-builder that's pretty absorbing and worth £20.

Then again, if you've already managed to ignore the game twice, perhaps it should take the hint and sod off until the sequel.

Jon Blyth



PCZONE
74
 Bigger, better, older



A noose loose, about this hoose.

HARD TO BE A GOD

No-one told us that when we signed up for the job

DEVELOPER Akella
PUBLISHER Ascaron Nobilis
WEBSITE www.hardtobeagod.com
ETA 20 April
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
2.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.



Horses: non-flammable.

LET'S TALK ABOUT loading times. Having been around long enough to remember my Commodore Plus/4 taking half an hour to crash itself, I'm not usually one to whine about games taking a while to load. But seeing how low-spec *Hard To Be A God* is the loading screens don't half have you by the jaffers. Mountains form in less time than it takes to save and reload the game.

On the plus side, when you're not looking at a row of horse's backsides (or whatever else is on the loading screen), you're partaking in an action RPG that has plenty going for it. While it's plagued with a fairly bad real-time combat system (the controls are simple enough, but the quasi-isometric view makes aiming a

pain), *Hard To Be A God's* storyline is strong enough to make it worth persevering with if you're a fan of the genre (as it should be, being that it's an adaptation of a book). And at least it has a simple, logical drag-and-drop inventory system to cushion the blow.

The adaptation is of a well-regarded Russian sci-fi novel by the Strugatsky Brothers (who also wrote the novel *STALKER* is based on – page 58). The blend of classic fantasy and sci-fi is interesting, but hardly genre-changing – after all, sci-fi is just magic spells for sceptics.

For my money, this is a tale best told on paper, if only because the book doesn't have such awful music and voice acting, and it isn't shoe-horned into a generic RPG template.

Alex Dale



"Come out Windy Miller! We know you're there!"

PCZONE
60
Immortal coil



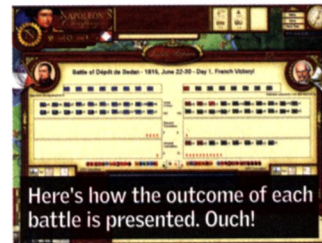
Europe in the early 19th century. Apparently.

NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGNS

Proving you don't have to be tall to get your own game...

DEVELOPER Nobilis
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE www.napoleons-campaigns.com
ETA May (out now as download)
PRICE Boxed: £19.99, download: €39.99 (£30)

Minimum system requirements:
1.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.



Here's how the outcome of each battle is presented. Ouch!

ANALLY ACCURATE HISTORICAL strategy games have given the turn-based strategy genre a bad rep amongst non-hardcore gamers, because they're inaccessible to the majority of humanity.

Napoleon's Campaigns is clearly a labour of love, with historically accurate maps recreated to the very last shrub, and a wealth of stats and variables based on historical records beneath the surface. This is hardcore stuff, no frills, no pretty animations, just good old fashioned drag-and-drop tactical gameplay, followed by reams of virtually indecipherable stats that represent the outcome of your battles.

If you can look past the unhelpful tutorial, overly long loading times, and ropey controls that often have you dragging the map rather than units, you'll find a decent, if fiddly, set of Napoleon-themed campaigns from 1805 to 1815. This is a game where terrain, morale, supply routes and the your generals' aptitudes are integral in determining the outcome of battles.

Add in superbly researched factual passages about the Napoleonic era, and you're left with a game that'll interest hardcore strategists and those who spend their weekends dressed as Napoleonic soldiers. However, if these descriptions don't sound like you, steer clear of this one.

Martin Korda



Terrain and supply lines play a major role.

PCZONE
65
Detailed but inaccessible



SAM & MAX 2.02: MOAI BETTER BLUES

Two's a company of statues...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale/Steam
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9 (£5) per episode, \$35 (£18) for entire season of six

Minimum system requirements:
 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB graphics card.



SAM & MAX IS part of the gaming calendar, and the change of emphasis since *Hit the Road* – from epic smart-talking puzzler to family friendly smart-talking puzzler – has only made it more accessible. However, there's only so many times you can start a review with that kind of round-up before you start looking desperate for an opening paragraph, so let's get on with it.

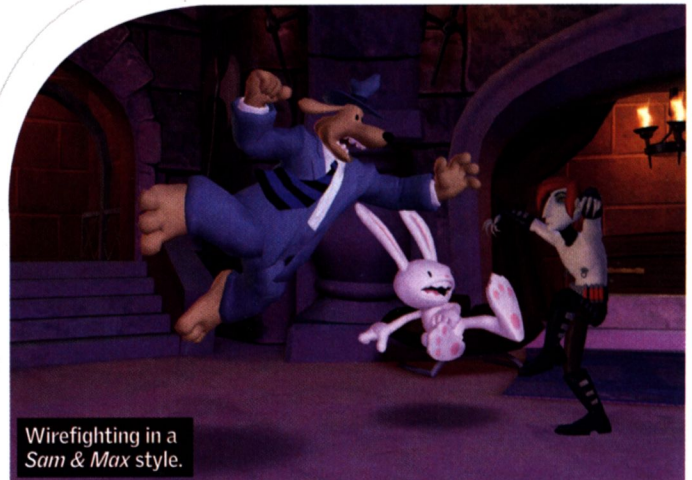
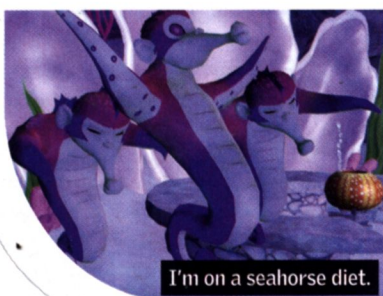
Moai Better Blues takes the duo through a rogue Bermuda Triangle to Easter Island, a portal-infested rock dominated by a volcano. Despite the comedy touchstones being a little shaky – we've lost the Soda Poppers, but they've been replaced by a bunch of age-regressed baby celebrities, which I hope are one-offs – the script

is strong enough to carry on through the wincing baby laughs.

As usual, the puzzles parody the well-established formula of the genre. When Max hears about prophecies that must be fulfilled, he quips 'I bet there's three,' at the same time I thought it. Perhaps it's forced by the bite-size nature of the games, but *Moai* does manage to disguise the triple-puzzle rut of the series better than other episodes.

Moai Better Blues plays with S&M's format enough to keep it fresh, the new hint system balances sneaky clues and blatant giveaways, and the barrage of gags will sandblast away any doubts you may have. There's no sign of let up, yet – at least, not on this half of the page. Stay tuned...

Jon Blyth



SAM & MAX 2.03: NIGHT OF THE RAVING DEAD

Three's a crowd of zombies



DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale/Steam
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9 (£5) per episode, \$35 (£18) for entire season of six

Minimum system requirements:
 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB graphics card.



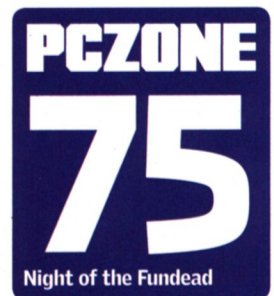
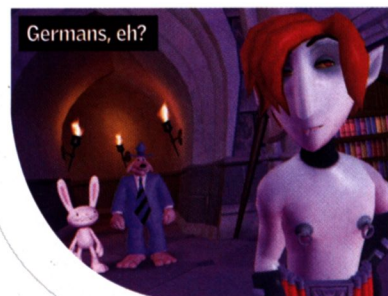
NIGHT OF THE RAVING DEAD takes you – and I shit you not – to a German dance club, hosted by a 'fruity' vampire. That's not UK 'fruity', which involves pinching girls' bums in the bus queue in the '60s, but American 'fruity', which is the same but gay.

Fashion victim zombies have been captivated by the effete style of Stuttgart's premier fruity freestyle emo MC, Gunther. To beat him you have to solve two three-pronged puzzles. Although the puzzles are less tangential than in episode 2.02, there was one moment when I dismissed a solution to a door-opening puzzle because it didn't make sense, only to try it in desperation after 30 minutes of non-progress. It worked, which is probably the sign of a bad puzzle.

What might be a problem to some players might also be the reason you enjoy *Raving Dead* the most: the in-jokes and self-references come as thick and fast as arterial spray. If Max's presidency, Midtown Cowboys, and Prismaticology mean nothing to you, you'd be well advised to head straight back to season 1, episode 1.

Sam & Max might be showing a few chinks in its charming armour, and in short episodes like this, one duff puzzle can leave you feeling robbed. But as usual the scripts and the jokes carry you through and make even that sensation enjoyable. This may be Sam and Max at their most entertaining, but it's not their most logically coherent outing. Being funny isn't always a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Jon Blyth



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



Bad indie games really bug *Martin Korda*. But this month we're bug-free...

BAND OF BUGS

DEVELOPER NinjaBee WEBSITE www.ninjabee.com PRICE \$14.95 (£7)

WHOEVER SAID TURN-BASED strategy games have to be hex-based, visually uninspiring and tactically hardcore should be made to play *Band of Bugs*. This highly accessible, visually bold and entertaining turn-based romp has made a triumphant leap from Xbox LIVE Arcade to PC, and feels more at home with a mouse and keyboard.

Bearing a striking resemblance to Zee-3's stunning *Naked War* (PCZ 177, 85%), *Band of Bugs* places you in command of a set of highly trained mini-beasts, each with their own special skills and weapons. You must lead your troops to victory over increasingly taxing groups of insect invaders in a series of stylishly designed and colourful levels.

This is the perfect entry point if you've ever wanted to get into strategy gaming, but have been scared off by swarms of hexes and units that look like they've been hacked up from a smoker's lungs.

While *Band of Bugs* may not possess *Naked War's* depth and ingenuity, it is instantly entertaining turn-based strategy.



Create your own levels with the intuitive level editor.

PCZONE
81

INDIE ZONE
GAME OF THE MONTH



DARKSIDE

DEVELOPER Pie Eye Games WEBSITE www.pieeyegames.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

AS WE'VE MENTIONED many times, indie arcade space blasters are 14 a penny (or 1,400 a pound). However, every so often we're sent one that brims with originality, overflows with entertainment and spews self-assurance all over its stuttering, less accomplished rivals.

DarkSide just happens to be one of those games. It's the type of space arcade shooter that not only infuses the age-old blasting template with originality - thanks to its blistering 3D spherical action - but actually fills you with the joy of a child presented with its first sherbet lollipop.

Searing combat that's the definition of the word 'arcade' is pumped up by megatons

of upgrades, varied mission goals (protect an outpost, hold out for a set period of time etc) and sparkly explosions that'll have you renting your monitor to local parks for Bonfire night. And while the enemy AI is more solid than spectacular, the bobbing, weaving enemy fighter craft still provide a fair challenge due to the unrelenting action.

Sure, the early levels are a little limp (spinning on your axis while firing is all that's required to win) and the sound is weedy, but *DarkSide's* supernova-hot action throws it light years ahead of its rivals.

PCZONE
79



ARMAGEDDON EMPIRES

DEVELOPER Cryptic Comet WEBSITE www.crypticcomet.com PRICE \$29.95 (£15)

THIS COLLECTABLE CARD game/board game/turn-based strategy hybrid will have you wrapping up your brain in a soft blanket and lovingly rocking it in your arms until it stops wailing, due to its brain-busting learning curve.

You start by choosing from one of four factions, each with its own deck of playing cards, after which a turn-based battle ensues where resources and territory must be captured. The premise sounds simple, but isn't. There are endless rules and permutations to be learnt and while an intelligent, tactical game does, very slowly, begin to surface

from the quagmire of complexity, only the most ardent hardcore strategists are likely to stick it out that long.

The absence of an in-game tutorial is unforgivable and while there's an in-depth guide available on the website, it's just as inaccessible as the game, with sentences such as, "most facilities can collect only one of each resource, which means for a hex with two energy, for example, you'd need a collection facility AND a base," proving the norm rather than the exception. You have been warned.

PCZONE
55



SLEEPLESS HOLLOW

DEVELOPER Hamumu Software WEBSITE hamumu.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)



FROM THE TEAM that brought you the excellent *Loonyland II: Winter Woods* (See 'Top 5 Indie RPGs') comes this frenetic cartoon-style action/adventure in which you play gormless slaphead Bouapha, a man trapped in the eerie, enemy infested town of Sleepless Hollow.

Just like its stablemate, *Sleepless Hollow* focuses on action over sedate exploration, with each new location teeming with bad things intent on making you dead. You can fend off the endless waves of foes with hammers that are scattered throughout the game, and more often than not you'll have to defend yourself while solving

some tricky puzzles. This makes for copious amounts of squealing as you're chased by hordes of zany enemies, and lashings of fist hammering as said hordes of enemies surround you and give you a drubbing (especially if you opt for the tragically fiddly mouse control option).

However, the excellent snippets of irreverent humour soon win you round, and have you succumbing to the temptation of just one more go 'til your fingers are nowt but worn, bloody stumps.

PCZONE
75

TOP 5 INDIE RPGs



AVEYOND II: EAN'S QUEST

www.amaranthia.com

Reviewed Issue 192

Play a young elf on a mission to save his friend from an evil snow queen in this accomplished RPG, which resembles the *Zelda* series. Full of great puzzles, colourful characters, top-notch combat and great side quests (the game packs in 60 missions), and the chance to raise some pets, it's simply essential.



MORNING'S WRATH

www.morningswrath.com

Reviewed issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction.



MR. ROBOT

www.moonpod.com

Reviewed Issue 181

Like an isometric *Roboblitz* with zany RPG-style combat, you play a robot that must bring a malfunctioning starship back online.



ESCHALON: BOOK I

basiliskgames.com

Reviewed Issue: 192

Uncover your forgotten past on a war-torn planet. A huge world and multiple-choice NPC interactions ensure hours of entertainment.



LOONYLAND II: WINTER WOODS

hamumu.com

Reviewed Issue: 182

Favouring action and quick-fire missions over complex quests and reams of text, *Winter Woods* is an RPG packed with charisma.

BUDGET

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

Get your cheapies under advisement from the buy-wise kings

THE SUFFERING

PUBLISHER: Midway WEBSITE: thesuffering.midway.com PRICE: £9.99

THE SUFFERING GAME at a time when survival horror games seemed hobbled, as the deliberately stifling control system of *Silent Hill* and the predictably claustrophobic camera angles of *Resident Evil* bound together with a dreary shortage of bullets.

The Suffering may not have been a re-invention on the scale of *Resi 4*, but it had everything we wanted: exciting gunplay, stitched-up gimps that could have been drawn by Clive Barker and atmosphere that came as much through the level and character design as the number of bullets you had.

With your sanity teetering on the edge, visual and aural hallucinations plague you through the game, and there's also a fair slice of swearing, which is what grown-ups do when lunged at with a bloody syringe.

The Suffering suffers from contemporary comparisons, but this is one survival horror action game that wasn't horribly mutated on its journey from consoles to PC. Well worth the tenner they're asking.

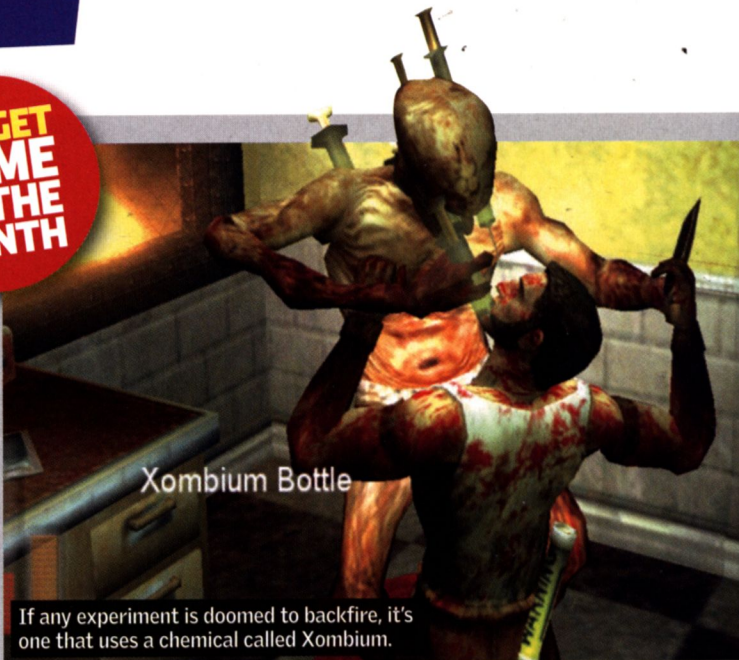
**PCZONE
82**



He's always strafing left, bless.



First tests of the snow angel simulator.



Xombium Bottle

If any experiment is doomed to backfire, it's one that uses a chemical called Xombium.



And that's for not wiping the knife between the Marmite and the butter.

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

Log went to that computer fair that's always on down Tottenham Court Road.

Saving: £14

Steve stole a Frenchman's hat.

Saving: £25 (estimated)

All of us forgetting to buy Steve a present on his 21st birthday.

Saving: £5 each



MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.mastertronic.com PRICE: £4.99

AT THE TIME of release, *Matrix: Path of Neo* was awarded a Dump award, and attracted such comments as "Worse than most *Matrix*-themed mods", and "Shitatrix: Path of Shite-o". However, scoring 19, it was a borderline Dump.

A few years later it's possible that the graphics, story, camera problems, stupid checkpoints, appalling script and the shabbiness that come from a thoughtless console port might make this game appear charming. They don't.

You'll smash bottles against your kneecaps in frustration at this game. Imagine the look on a dog's face when you punish him for no reason. That sad face, cocked slightly as his understanding of how to behave is shaken - that face is what *Path of Neo* is.

**PCZONE
18**



Come on, people - you're not taking yourselves seriously enough.

AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS

PUBLISHER: Xplosiv WEBSITE: www.microsoft.com/games/age2 PRICE: £4.99

SINCE IT'S BEEN around for nine years, it's hard to believe this hasn't featured in the Budget section already. While this resource-gathering, town-building classic may have aged visually in a decade, the fundamental gameplay still offers a brilliant balance of military and domestic strategy.

Something that never dates is subtlety, and the levels of nuance in *Age of Empires II* are magnificent – such as 19 different infantry units, with upgradeable armour and weapons. Add the element of research (allowing you to counter sheer numbers with improved weaponry), and the non-military needs of your settlements, and you've got a fulfilling, wonderful game that shines even brighter when played against a group of human opponents.

PCZONE
86



Ice O'Metric: the Irish rapper who embraces European standards.

SERIOUS SAM 2

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.mastertronic.com PRICE: £4.99

WHILE WE ORIGINALLY tore *Serious Sam 2* a new one for being a pretty, yet hollow, £35 FPS, when you whittle that price down to a single fiver, it's a little more appetising.

The *Serious Sam* games have always had the same aim – to kill hordes of eccentrically designed mutants, be they men with bomb heads, robo dinos or goat-skeletons. They'll run at you, and you'll blow them up, because you're Serious Sam, and that's what Serious Sam does.



SS2 is the very essence of old-school gameplay, mingled with some wonderfully crisp visuals and unfunny one-liners that may grate on your nerves. But for £5, fans of the original may want more of Croteam's pleasing level design and bite-sized chunks of simplistic, repetitive action. And if you've not played the first *Serious Sam*, pick that up as well.

PCZONE
70



The Highest Screen Coverage From A Single Gun Award goes to...

And the rest...

This month's pick of the box set compilations



GOTHIC UNIVERSE
£30, JOWOOD

Although the first *Gothic* is more of a curate's egg these days, there's plenty of free-form, consequence-based RPG action in the second and third games to absorb you for hours. Just don't expect action in all of those hours.

PCZONE
80



ZOO TYCOON: COMPLETE COLLECTION
£10, XPLOSIV

The mediocre zoo management game tries to suck up the addled dads it missed the first time around, with the *Complete Collection*. This set is incomplete though, missing the especially average *Endangered Species* expansion.

PCZONE
49



SPACE BUNDLE
£20, JOWOOD

The charmingly named *Space Bundle* includes the thoroughly respectable and engaging real-time strategy of *Genesis Rising*, and the flash-whizz visuals and unpolished unfriendliness of *Space Force: Rogue Universe*.

PCZONE
69

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1
DEUS EX
£5, STEAM

This game gives you real choices that really affect its mind-blowing narrative. If you haven't played it through, go back and do so now.



2
HALF-LIFE 2
\$19.95 (€10), STEAM

This game will stay here until every person with a PC has bought it. Please buy this game, so we can mention something else.



3
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The precursor to *Oblivion*, Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG offers cheap goblin bashing in a vast game world.



4
PSYCHONAUTS
\$19.99 (€9.99), STEAM

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

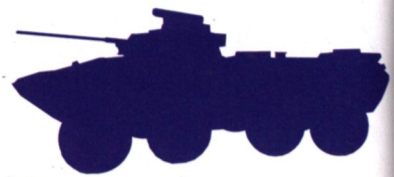


5
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!
£15, STEAM

Pirates! has the polish expected of the Meier brand name, and is more instantly fun than *Civ*, without sacrificing depth.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The greatest games that money can be frittered away on...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMING DRUGS

- 1 FISSTECH**
THE WITCHER
- 2 VALKYR**
MAX PAYNE
- 3 JET**
FALLOUT
- 4 SKOOMA**
ELDER SCROLLS
- 5 ADAM**
BIOSHOCK



PCZONE TOP 5 DRINKABLE CHARACTERS

- 1 JACK CAVA**
FAR CRY
- 2 GORDON'S FREEMAN**
HALF-LIFE
- 3 ANISE TAWODI**
PREY
- 4 LARA CROFT ORIGINAL PALE CREAM SHERRY**
TOMB RAIDER
- 5 STROGG NOG**
QUAKE IV (AND SORRY)



PCZONE TOP 5 13s, 47s, and 3598s

- 1 XIII**
XIII
- 2 RED XIII**
FF7
- 3 AGENT 47**
HITMAN
- 4 HK-47**
KOTOR
- 5 LEGIONNAIRE**
3598
ROMA VICTOR



FPS

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issue: 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 psion of *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 superb animation that rivals Pixar's films.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT III
PCZ Issue: 189 - 90%

The daddy of online shooters returns with a mule-kick of intense deathmatch, epic vehicles, high-speed combat, Warfare mode, and a graphical sheen that outdoes its ageing insta-gib rivals.



BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* 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.

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 liked 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 manic 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 original 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 ever-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 Hillys 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.



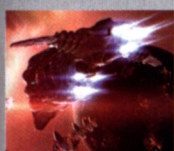
LOTR ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...



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 setup.



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



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X3: 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 *X3* 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!



GT2
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 pinging, 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.



VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising game. Don't be put off by the kiddy graphics - it's a keeper.



PEGGLE DELUXE
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.

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

Must buy!



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, 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%
This could be 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

April

DREAM PINBALL 3D
TUROK

SOUTH PEAK
DISNEY/TOUCHSTONE

Spring/summer

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES
DEAD SPACE
LEGO BATMAN
LEGO INDIANA JONES
MASS EFFECT
MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES
RACE DRIVER: GRID
SPACE SIEGE
SPORE
STALKER: CLEAR SKY

EIDOS
EA
WARNER BROS
ACTIVISION
EA
EA
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
EA
DEEP SILVER

Autumn/winter

AION: THE TOWER OF ETERNITY
BORDERLANDS
EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR
FALLOUT 3
FAR CRY 2
GHOSTBUSTERS
LEFT 4 DEAD
PROJECT ORIGIN
RED ALERT 3
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION
TIBERIUM
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

NCISOFT
2K
SEGA
BETHESDA
UBISOFT
VIVENDI
VALVE
WARNER BROS
EA
UBISOFT
EA
EIDOS

TBC

MAFIA 2
STARCRASH II
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

2K
VIVENDI
VIVENDI

EXTREME POWER

COMPUTERS FOR THE DEDICATED GAMER...



£841 INC VAT

Package Details:

Intel Core 2 Duo E6850
2 GB 800 MHZ DDR2 Memory
500 GB SATA-II Hard Drive
Asus Motherboard
Windows Vista Home Premium
20x Dual Layer DVD Writer
19" Widescreen TFT
512MB ATI HD 2900XT
Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Logitech Speakers
7.1 Surround Sound
8 x USB 2.0 Ports
Broadband Ethernet LAN Port
1 Year Warranty
Lifetime Technical Support

CUSTOMISE
ONLINE

BUY IT NOW
ONLINE



£1,261 INC VAT

Package Details:

Intel Quad Core Q6600
4 GB 800 MHZ DDR2 Memory
500 GB SATA-II Hard Drive
Asus Motherboard
Windows Vista Home Premium
20x Dual Layer DVD Writer
22" Widescreen TFT
768MB NVIDIA 8800 GTX
Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Logitech Speakers
7.1 Surround Sound
8 x USB 2.0 Ports
Broadband Ethernet LAN Port
1 Year Warranty
Lifetime Technical Support

CUSTOMISE
ONLINE

BUY IT NOW
ONLINE



£2,084 INC VAT

Package Details:

Intel Quad Core QX6850
4 GB 800 MHZ DDR2 Memory
74GB Gaming HDD + 500GB SATA-II HDD
Asus Striker Extreme SLI Motherboard
Windows Vista Ultimate 64 Bit
20x Dual Layer DVD Writer
24" Widescreen TFT
2 x 640MB NVIDIA 8800 GTX SLI
Keyboard & Optical Mouse
Logitech Speakers
7.1 Surround Sound
8 x USB 2.0 Ports
Broadband Ethernet LAN Port
1 Year Warranty
Lifetime Technical Support

CUSTOMISE
ONLINE

BUY IT NOW
ONLINE

OR DESIGN YOUR
OWN IN MINUTES
WITH OUR ONLINE
CUSTOMISER!

FREE 2GB FLASH DRIVE WITH EVERY PC SOLD

cp ComputerPlanet
www.computerplanet.co.uk

Sales: 0161 660 9150

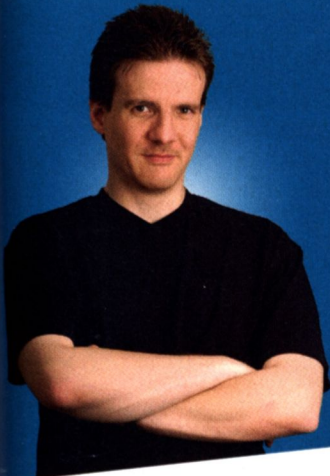


PCF NOW JUST £4.99 Format[®]

WORLD EXCLUSIVE
**Assassin's Creed:
The Director's Cut**
First ever review – it's
bigger and better on PC!

On sale **Now**





Simply hard

BACK IN ISSUE 187, I reviewed the £119 X-Fi Prelude sound card. I summed up by making scoffing noises about how Auzentech would never get around to releasing Dolby Digital Live support, because any product based on Creative technology would always lack the necessary drivers.

No sooner had I submitted the review than a nice lady at Auzentech sent me a link where Dolby Digital Live (DDL) drivers were available (snipurl.com/xfiddl). And they worked like a dream.

DDL converts audio data into Dolby Digital streams, allowing you to run a single S/PDIF cable from an X-Fi Prelude into your home cinema setup, and enjoy all your games and applications in multichannel glory.

Not only that, but Creative Alchemy works on Vista, enabling you to use the X-Fi Prelude for full hardware-accelerated 3D Audio and EAX support up to version 5.0.

Given all the above, my original score of 71% is woefully inadequate. The X-Fi Prelude is a great product, ideal for those with home cinema systems and are always playing games, watching films or listening to music.

My own Prelude is connected to an old Sony STR-KS600P with five speakers spread about my desk. I leave the amp on 'Pro Logic II' mode, the card in 'Entertainment' mode, and the volume left high. An easy 90%.

Handy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

HOT ONE HUNDREDS

Low cost graphics card arena heats up

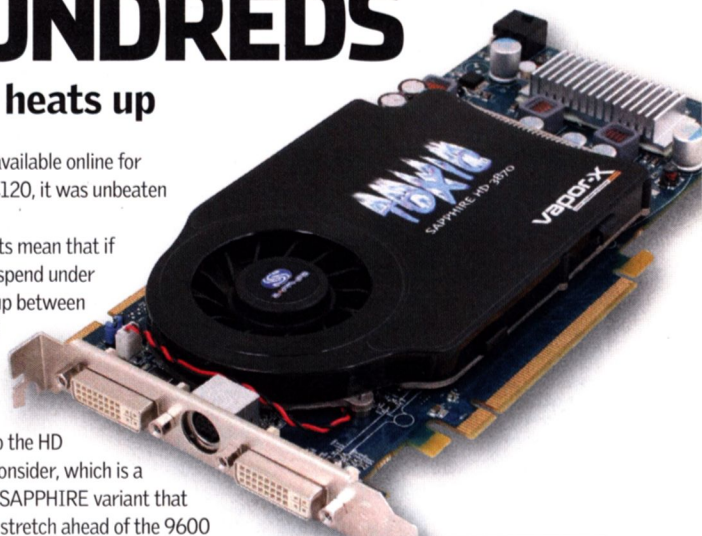
BUYING THE RIGHT mainstream card was never an easy task. This month it's even trickier than usual, with NVIDIA's latest 9600 GT causing AMD to slash Radeon prices, and AMD board partners to introduce souped-up variants.

The first of NVIDIA's new 9000-series GPUs occupies the same space as the outgoing 8600 GTS, but it's such a strong performer against the HD 3850 and even the HD 3870 that an upset AMD responded with price cuts on both high-end models.

At release, the GeForce 9600 GT rose swiftly to the top of benchmarks and appeared to be the only mid-range card to consider. Not only did it trounce the reigning Radeon class champ at today's widescreen resolutions, but in some situations was a match for the bigger HD 3870. In addition, it had 512MB RAM as standard, and with

budget variants available online for little more than £120, it was unbeaten on value.

But AMD's cuts mean that if you're looking to spend under £150, it's a toss-up between the 9600 GT and HD 3870, both of which hover under the £130 mark. There's also the HD 3870 TOXIC to consider, which is a clever single-slot SAPPHERE variant that should be a good stretch ahead of the 9600 GT in benchmarks. The card is overclocked some way ahead of the standard HD card, and CrossFireX support means once four-slot boards are available you'll can daisy chain yourself into bankruptcy. www.nvidia.com and www.sapphiretech.com



SAPPHERE's TOXIC is a HD 3870 with advanced cooling and costs £150.

QWERTY SOVIETS LCD keyboard makes it onto shelves

REMEMBER THAT FANCY Russian keyboard where each key was a fully configurable LCD?

Art. Lebedev Studio are now shipping the Optimus at an eye-watering price of \$1,500 (£765) – plus tax and shipping. Reports are that the Optimus is just as beautiful as everyone expected, and it works, but is sadly unusable in the real world.

The problem is that the LCD keys are so heavy they make your fingers want to crawl back inside your hands whenever you type anything longer than about five words. Ideal for today's teenagers then. www.artlebedev.com



Too clever for its own good. Like me.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Mozilla was excited at its free and user-configurable internet browser Firefox hitting half a billion downloads recently, but there was no mention of the browser's total market share – the real number to watch. Sadly, it's also the hardest to obtain reliably. Even sadder is the fact that Firefox will never overtake Internet Explorer unless Microsoft bundles it with Vista or Windows 7. Which they won't. getfirefox.com

Undeterred by a muted reception to their surround sound headphones, Zalman are selling a 22in ZM-M220W Trimon 2D/3D monitor. The company is working closely with NVIDIA to add real 3D visuals to games using drivers and 3D glasses, but you'll need a beefy GeForce (or two) as the left and right eyes are rendered individually. zalman.co.kr/eng

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**

BY JON BLYTH

Razer Barracuda: A set of 5.1 surround headphones named after the most vicious fish that market researchers found people would find most comfortable for aural insertion. **Riva Tuner:** A freshwater fish first made famous in the "piano tuner" joke of 1775. It went out of fashion briefly with the advent of the 12in pianist joke, but returned to international acclaim in the permissive '60s. **Benchmark:** A corruption of Tenchmark, a system of comparing European carps to see which one can run the latest games at the fastest frame rates. **Carps:** The giggling feeling that you get after starting a themed list, before realising that you only had two ideas for that list. Also, cars per second in racing games.

WIRED TO BLAST

If you have £700 in your piggy bank, you'll find it a tough call between the Wired2Fire Diablo Ultima seen here and Chillblast's Fusion Colossus. Both will delight and remind you that you needn't spend more on a gaming PC. Right now, I'd give the nod to the Diablo. While it's nearly identical to the Colossus, with a P5K board, 512MB 8800 GT and 2GB RAM, it uses the E6750 CPU against the E6550 in the Colossus. And although the latter's 320GB hard drive is larger than the Diablo's 250GB, it's no dealbreaker.

3D GRAPHICS BENCHMARKS

	INFERNO	DIABLO	COLOSSUS
Price	£880	£699	£699
Supreme Commander	17,801	17,179	16,560
Counter-Strike: Source	292.99	284	248
Call of Juarez	47	26	N/A
3DMark06	15,874	11,496	8,806

DIABLO ULTIMA

PRICE £699 MANUFACTURER Wired2Fire WEBSITE wired2fire.com

GRUNTING AND SCRAPING noises herald the arrival of Wired2Fire's new entry level gaming rig. The company might be small, but they make up for it with the size of their packaging.

While that might seem like an odd introduction, if you've ever had to lug your PC round to a friend's house, or halfway across the country to a LAN party, you'll know the pain involved. The problem isn't the sneezing and groping under the desk beforehand, the rat's nest of cables, or the guaranteed bump on the head – it's opening the car door, grabbing two handfuls of cheap cardboard, hearing a tearing noise, and then the sickening crash of metal and the tinkling of plastic as case hits driveway.

Wired2Fire identify themselves as gamers, and they understand we might want to repackage our rigs more than once. Thus the Diablo's box arrives with reinforced handles and more interior cushioning than a padded cell at a giggle house. A sheet of engineer's notes explains that a factory restore point has been created for you in the

event you do something stupid, together with a soothing reminder that the company can help with free initial telephone support. They're even open Saturdays.

FUSION REACTOR

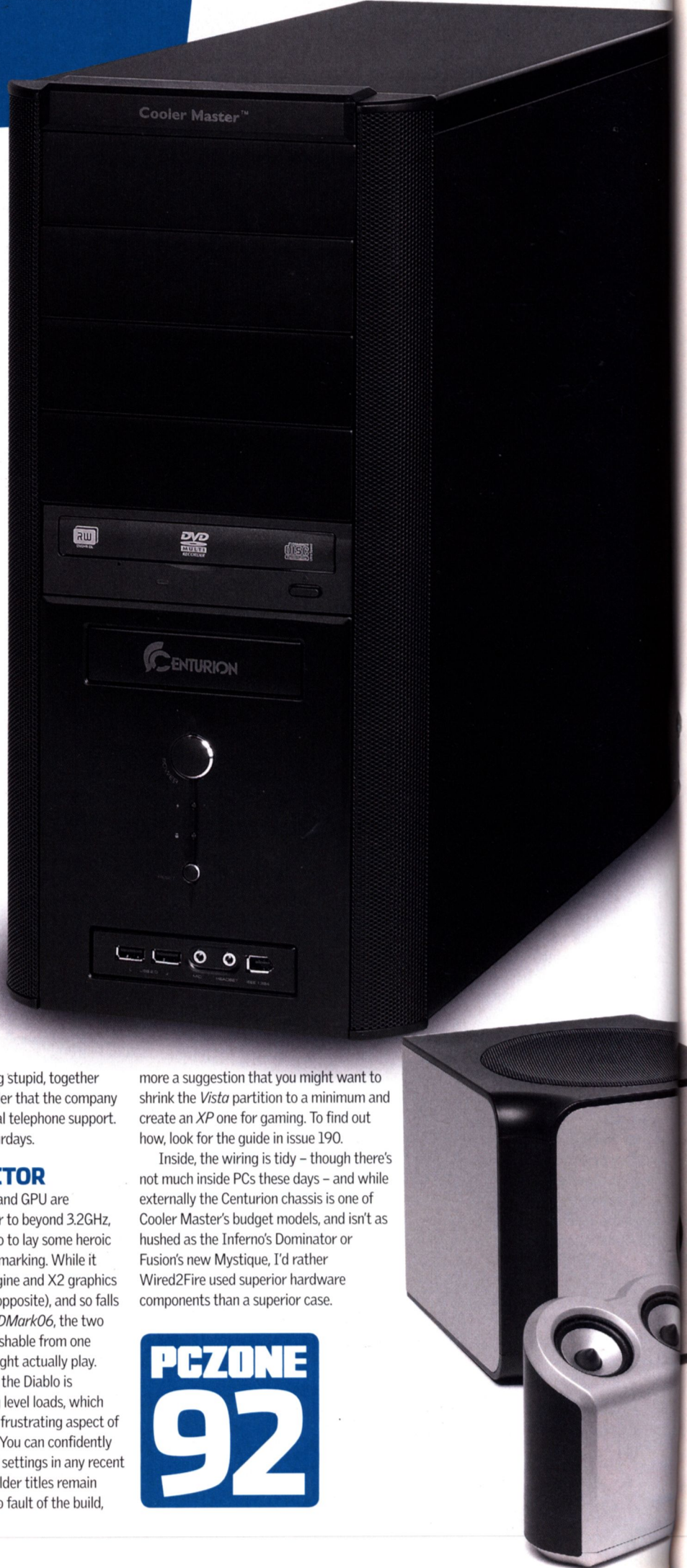
Both the Diablo's CPU and GPU are overclocked, the former to beyond 3.2GHz, which allows the Diablo to lay some heroic burnouts during benchmarking. While it lacks the quad core engine and X2 graphics of the Fusion Inferno (opposite), and so falls a little way behind in *3DMark06*, the two systems are indistinguishable from one another in titles you might actually play.

In *Team Fortress 2*, the Diablo is appreciably fast during level loads, which have become the most frustrating aspect of big-ass Source games. You can confidently give it maximum detail settings in any recent release, though some older titles remain flaky on Vista. That's no fault of the build,

more a suggestion that you might want to shrink the Vista partition to a minimum and create an XP one for gaming. To find out how, look for the guide in issue 190.

Inside, the wiring is tidy – though there's not much inside PCs these days – and while externally the Centurion chassis is one of Cooler Master's budget models, and isn't as hushed as the Inferno's Dominator or Fusion's new Mystique, I'd rather Wired2Fire used superior hardware components than a superior case.

PCZONE
92



FUSION INFERNO

PRICE £880 MANUFACTURER Chillblast WEBSITE www.chillblast.co.uk

THE INFERNO IS the 17th system to wear the Fusion moniker, and although it's nearly £200 more than our Fusion favourite, the Colossus, this PC is plenty quick enough.

3DMark06 returns a score that's getting on for 16,000, Source stress tests rack up 253fps, and *Supreme Commander's* result of 17,801 is the highest we've yet seen. All numbers are way ahead of the £2,749 Commodore XX (issue 187, 73%), and are continuing proof that you needn't spend more than £999 on a gaming PC.

Central to the Inferno's record-breaking scores is the quad core Q6600, overclocked

to 3.3GHz, plus 4GB of PC2-6400 RAM and a Radeon HD 3870 X2 sitting on the Crossfire-compatible ASUS P5K motherboard. Anyone doubting whether AMD are still capable of making a decent gaming Radeon should use the Inferno to play *Crysis* with all the graphics options set to maximum.

Before rushing out to your web browser, credit card standing in attention behind your function keys, you should be aware that Chillblast have recently reworked the £699 Fusion's specifications to include an 8800 GT graphics card (the system we tested had the 8800 GTS) and they've reduced the overlock on the E6550 processor from 3.0GHz to 2.9GHz, presumably to increase stability. They've even changed the case.

All this fine-tuning makes the Inferno's benchmark results a little deceptive when viewed alongside the old Colossus, so don't get too distracted by them. Let's just say that this PC is quick, quiet, and you might just want to buy it.

Proof you needn't spend more than £999 on your next gaming system

3D 590

PRICE £50 MANUFACTURER Saitek WEBSITE www.saitek.com

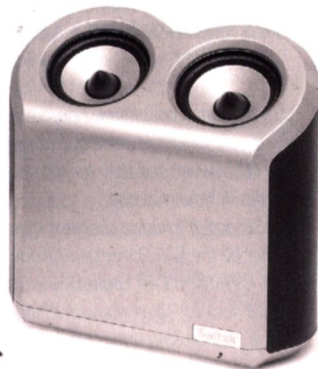
WHEN A COMPANY'S 'top-of-the-range' speaker system can be found online for under £40, expectations can't be high.

But as is so often the case with hardware, you can't link price with enjoyment. The 3D 590 speaker set might cost the same as a couple of of the latest blockbusters on Steam, but their audio is rounded and they look pretty good on your desk (visitors point and ask questions).

There's 90W on tap here, with each of the two satellites housing two double-drive speakers and an explosion-enhancing woofer for under the desk.

A wired remote (meaning yet another cable to add to the tangle on your desktop) completes the setup, with an obligatory headphones input and a feature that Saitek call 'Advanced Stereo Imaging System'. (My suspicion is that it refers to the way the speakers angle towards you.)

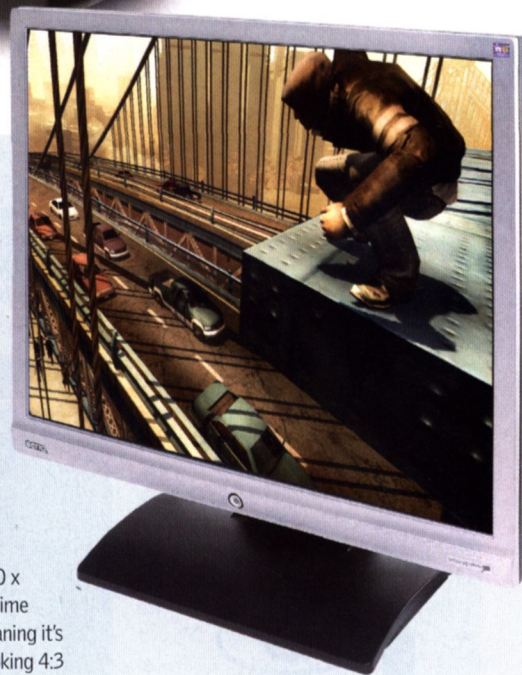
Build quality is fantastic and unlike the more expensive Altec Lansing VS2421s (issue 188, 85%) they're unaffected by signals from nearby mobile phones.



PCZONE
86



PCZONE
88



G900

PRICE £139
MANUFACTURER BenQ
WEBSITE benq.co.uk

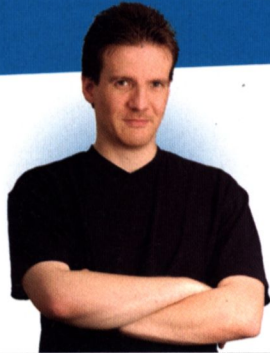
NOT SURE WHAT to make of this one: a new BenQ LCD with specifications that might just have been exciting three years ago.

The 19in monitor has 1280 x 1024 pixels, a 5ms response time and 400:1 contrast ratio, meaning it's a modestly quick, average-looking 4:3 product rather than a rapid 16:10 widescreen display that gamers actually want on their desks.

So where does it fit in? While three-quarters of us are still running 4:3 monitors, 16:10 is fast becoming the dominant format. ViewSonic's 22in VX2240W from last issue is wider (the 16:10 1680 x 1050 display puts a half-million more pixels on screen), faster (it has a 2ms response time), and it has a wider contrast range (4,000:1) for just £45 more. In simpler terms, the Viewsonic makes more long-term sense for your average gamer.

The G900 is keenly priced and the picture quality's fine, but this is a screen for budget-conscious non-gamers.

PCZONE
63



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 blue-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.

THE VISTA TRAIN

Q As much as I hate the thought of pandering to Microsoft's prices, I really want *Windows Media Center* as it seems the most complete and easy to use PVR around. Since we'll all need to get *Vista* at some point, why not get the benefits now? I have an American relative and I'd be able to have them purchase and post a copy of *Vista* to me from the US, thus saving a minor fortune. However, will this pose any problem on a UK system?

I'm more than technically competent and usually like to leave the case open for tinkering and exploring technology, and was wondering if the difference between *Vista Home Premium* and *Ultimate* editions is really worth it? Particularly if you don't intend to run a client/server network, or some other business nonsense.

Michael McConnellogue

A If you're a gamer looking for a way to spice up your sitting room with scheduled EPG recording, live pause, series linking and all manner of TV-related goodies you never realised you needed, *Windows Media Center* makes the most sense. This is a PC application, meaning you



Keep the dream alive with a wired-up mouse.

can still run *Steam*, watch *YouTube* and talk to your mates on *MSN*, and because it's integrated with *Vista Home Premium* and *Ultimate*, it's effectively free.

That said, my own experience leads me to believe that it will always feel like an afterthought. *Acer's lifestyle PC* – the *Aspire iDea 500* – is a brilliantly packaged mess that aged me two years in the week I had it, by recording scheduled programs at 3am and then not shutting down, and later shutting down only to never wake back up. In the end I was watching less *TV* rather than more, and in future I'll be sticking with dedicated PVRs such as

Humax's superb £170 PVR-9200TB – if you're happy with *XP* I'd urge you to consider doing the same. When you hear that *Media Center* has now been rewritten for *Windows 7* and is slated for release next year, why buy into something that's not just aggravating, but also obsolete?

If you do want to get *Vista* and have a relative in America to help you, stick with *Home Premium* edition and you'll be saving yourself at least half the UK price tag. But be warned that if you import from a retailer like *Amazon.com*, you'll be liable to pay all manner of import duties which won't make it such a bargain.



Would you trust *Windows* with your TV?

UNWIRED

Q I'm getting a new system and I'm OK with all of it bar two things. Basically, I'm pretty set on the G15 keyboard as it's the best and I love it, but the mouse is the problem. I was going for the G7 as recommended by *PC ZONE*, but it's almost impossible to find outside eBay and I'm not sure I want to go wireless.

I'm totally open to all sorts of mice, so please help me choose one. Price isn't much of a problem, as all I want is a good one.

John Lewis

A First, a complaint. I ordered a set of six whiskey tumblers from you only the other week and they turned up smashed to bits. A refund please.

Second, if I had to choose a mouse it'd either be the £35 *Razer DeathAdder* (issue 179, 89%) or a £44 *Logitech G9*. Both are wired devices – never buy anything wireless if you intend using it for fast-paced action games – and are fine pointing devices. I'd wager over 90 per cent of buyers never try

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.2	13 FEB 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 169.25	20 DEC 07

SOUND		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.14.0001	09 JAN 08
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR 215.0004	05 NOV 07
CREATIVE	ALCHEMY 1.00.30	24 DEC 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY, AUDIGY 2	
	AUDIGY 4 2.09.0016	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 2.12.0002	16 MAR 07



wandy@dearwandy.com @
pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw ✉

"If you're a gamer looking for a way to spice up your sitting room Windows Media Center makes sense"

Wandy makes a rare compliment towards Microsoft

The Core 2 remains more 'phenom' than the Phenom.

their mice before they buy them, so go with whichever one plucks your heartstrings and learn to live with it. Everyone else does.

As for where to buy, you might not be able to source a G7 so easily as it's an old product, but any online box shifter such as Overclockers or Ebuyer should have both the DeathAdder and G9 in stock.

REMOTE CON

Q I read your article on accessing PCs from remote locations but I can't get anything to work! I'm using the free install of VNC under Vista, and all it says when you hover over the icon is that it's 'not accepting connections'. I've done all I thought I needed to, but it won't play ball.

David M. Metcalfe

A The problem you describe with VNC is a common one, though VNC's developers fail to mention it anywhere in their FAQ. Vista is an all-American product, and thus takes its security very seriously, with the result being that you need to use a workaround when running the free edition of VNC.

If you've already installed it, unregister the VNC service by choosing the icon in the Start Menu, and if you're going to install it, uncheck the box which asks if you want to register the program as a service. If you use Windows Firewall, make an exception rule and then start VNC by right-clicking on the 'Run VNC Server' icon in the 'VNC User Mode' folder of the Start Menu and choosing Run as Administrator.

For the record, the reason I focused on VNC rather than on Microsoft's Remote Desktop product is because, the latter isn't available for Home versions of Vista.

PHENOM ANON

Q I'm thinking about upgrading my CPU. I have a Dell Inspiron 531 with an AMD Athlon X2 5000. I've already upgraded the PSU to 600W, and the graphics card to a GeForce 8800 GTS 320MB. Can I stick a Phenom 9500 into my (unknown) motherboard, as it and my current chip are both socket AM2?

I was thinking of upgrading my RAM from 2GB to 4GB, but I've got Vista Home Premium edition and I heard that Windows will only recognise up to 3GB!

Michael Joyce

A Faced with the fact their new processors were still several strides paces behind Intel's, AMD started talking about 'value' and 'upgrade paths', hinting that the chips would be priced keenly and that existing AM2 owners would be able to drop them into place.

The reality is different. Not only are Phenoms guaranteed to work fewer than 20 boards at the time of going to press – their pricing isn't thrilling. Most people with older AMD hardware will need to replace what they already have, and in which case why not go the whole hog and defect to Intel? My advice to anyone else with a high-performance Athlon is live with it, until you can replace everything.

Windows in 32-bit form can talk to a total of 4GB. That means Vista can't address both 4GB of RAM and 512MB on a video card, and it will report the maximum memory available as less.

Given that 2GB pairs are so cheap, buy the 4GB and to hell with the fact you're not getting benefit from all of it.

ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN HARDWARE...



The image on the right uses supersampling.

01 ANTI-ALIASING

In describing anti-aliasing, we need to look at the problem the technique is attempting to solve: aliasing.

Aliasing occurs when an infinitely complex shape – such as a curve – is displayed using finite low detail, such as when your PC shows images on your monitor.

On a page in a magazine, the permeating quality of ink combines with high resolution to fool your eye into thinking you're looking at continuous lines rather than a sequence of discrete points, but when you try and display such gradual changes of position on a computer, you're limited by the number of dots on the monitor.

While you might think your new LCD offers super high resolution, it's rough compared to printed matter, and positively Lego-like compared to the picture your eye can capture. When you look at a curve on a PC monitor,

there aren't nearly enough dots for your brain to see anything but a jagged edge – a distortion of reality caused by the low resolution.

To combat this, computers use anti-aliasing to hide those 'jaggies' when pixels are stepped out of line. In games the technique is called 'adaptive supersampling', and everywhere else 'anti-aliasing'. This is where your graphics card works out which pixels are forming edges, creates enlargements of the image around each one, and finally takes a set number of samples (typically between two and 32, shown in your video options as 2x and 32x) from that whole area.

The pixel that makes it to your screen is the same size and shape as before, only its colour is now a clever blend of every neighbour, with the result that it appears to have been smoothed into its environment. No more jaggies.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(sherlock) Mate of mine just bought a new system, the motherboard is a Gigabyte GA-M61SME-S2 with a Realtek 883 chip on board. He installed XP with Service Pack 3. Everything installs perfectly, the audio does not. In the BIOS audio is shown as 'auto'. Perhaps it is an issue with SP3? (sherlock) Fixed it! We put the 30-day trial of Vista on, and the audio works. It would appear the issue is with SP3. This is a complete bastard as his original student edition of XP has it integrated. (Wandy) A win for Vista! I'm just off to eat my hat.

HOW TO...

OVERCLOCK YOUR RIG

Need:

Need: A Windows PC

Time:

Ongoing

Difficulty level:



Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Ren or Stimpy

Jamie Sefton

REMEMBER:

While you're unlikely to destroy your PC or graphics card by overclocking, you can lose data in the event your system locks solid. So make sure you're prepared for the worst: run backups, set system restore points, and take a deep breath...



RivaTuner was a registry tweaker for RIVA TNT owners, hence the name, but more recent versions muck about at the driver level and are able to boost the performance of NVIDIA and AMD cards. And it's free.

A **clock rate** is the **frequency** at which a component **cycles** and deals with fresh information. The higher the **frequency**, the faster the component is, and the more data it can handle.

Overclocking involves raising **clock rates** over their standard levels to get a better performance.

Artefacts are visual anomalies caused by too much **overclocking**. These can be created by the heat from the faster cycling; by the hardware not being supplied enough voltage to cope with the jump in **frequency**; or by the **frequency** being too high for the components to cope. If you see **artefacts** when testing **overclock** settings you must lower your **clock speeds** accordingly.

Want to get more go from your graphics card – for free? *Phil Wand* shows you the overclocking ropes

IF YOU'RE ONE of the breed that reads online reviews of video cards, you will know that half the benchmark charts include results from overclocked hardware. And no matter how hard you look, nothing in the review explains what was done to get those results, leaving you to think there's a 'turbo' switch on the back of video cards you can just flick.

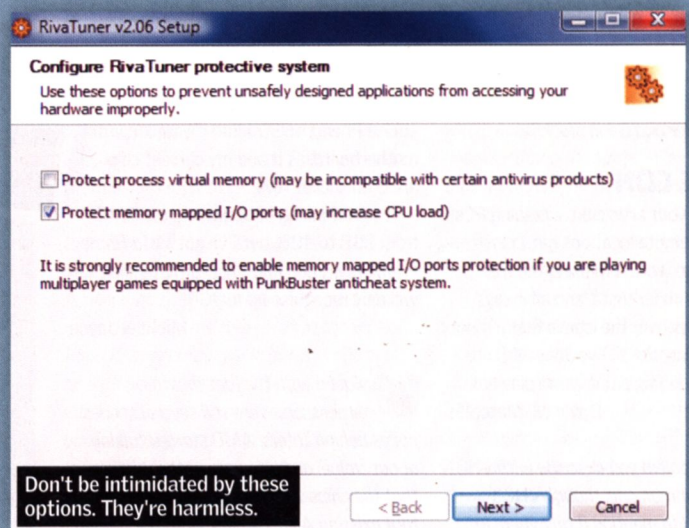
In fact, video card overclocking is no more complicated than a flicking a switch. You can download a number of free tools that help you tweak the workings of your graphics card by moving sliders, so it's no longer rocket science to get a jump in performance with minimal tinkering. The process is also relatively safe – unless your PC is remarkably old.

01 Installation and Vista setup

First things first: run a benchmark such as *3DMark06* (snipurl.com/3dmark06) and note down your score. Now download *RivaTuner* (see Questions, Questions) and run the installer.

When asked to configure the program's protective system, leave the virtual memory box unchecked and the memory mapped I/O box checked (see right). Once set, you won't need to worry about either of them.

Vista owners shouldn't open *RivaTuner* right off – instead they should right-click *RivaTuner* in the Start menu, then Properties then Run as Administrator in the Compatibility tab.

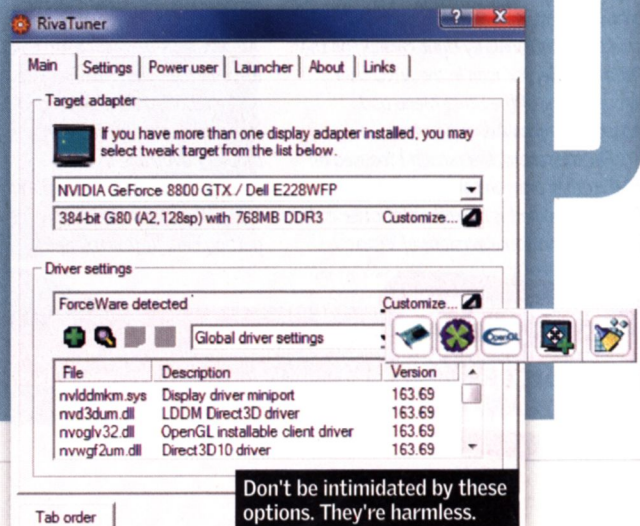


02 Getting into RivaTuner

Data loss is a risk when overclocking, so before going on, run a system backup and set a restore point, before starting up *RivaTuner*.

When *RivaTuner* first runs it'll build a new registry database. At this point you may notice the *Windows Defender* icon in your system tray alerting you to a modification to your system. Double-click the icon to allow the change by clicking the Permit button at the bottom.

Once the program's main screen is displayed, click the Customise link in the section marked Driver Settings to open a small menu bouquet. Click the video card icon to access System Tweaks and begin overclocking.

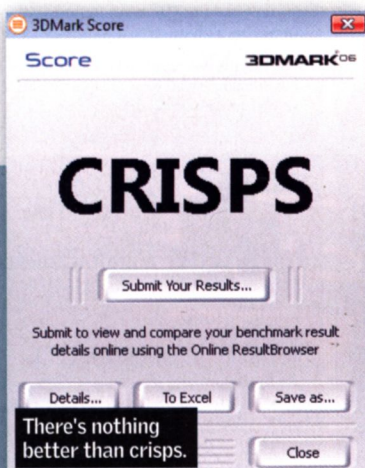
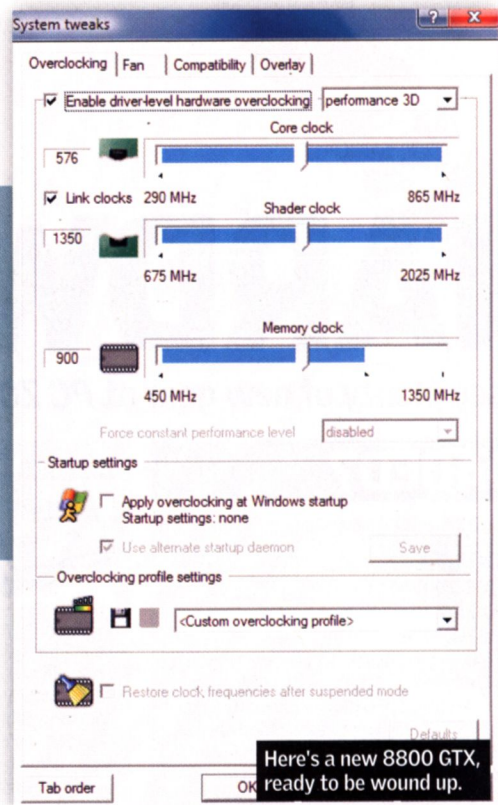


03 Learning the tweak ropes

On the System Tweaks screen put a check in the box at the top, and when prompted reboot your PC to allow *RivaTuner* to properly detect the clock frequencies used by your card. These frequencies determine how fast your video card processes information, and so how well it performs when you play games.

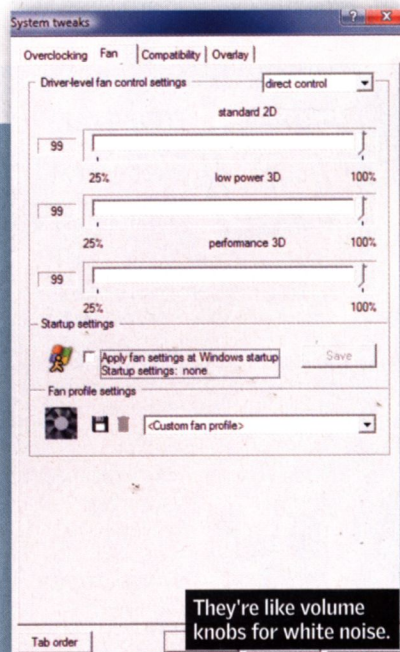
On older cards such as the 7900 GS, you'll see two sliders relating to the card's memory and core clock speeds. On more modern cards such as the 8800 GTX, you'll see three.

If this is your first time tweaking, put a check in the Link Clocks box, so the sliders move together.



04 Mark those benches

At this stage you should resist the urge to move every slider to its bump stop because you'll lock your system solid and cause artefacts to appear on your display. Instead, raise each clock level in small steps – no more than 5MHz at a time – and after applying the change run a benchmark or stress test, such as the one provided with *Counter-Strike*. If you see snow on the display, or strange colours or tearing, you've pushed things too far.



05 Keeping things chilled out

Once you're happy with the performance hike your tweaking has delivered, it's recommended you move on to the Fan tab of the System Tweaks screen and increase the driver-level fan speed of your card. Doing so means you'll be offsetting the heat generated by the increased clock frequency with an increased volume of air cooling the GPU. Heat is your enemy now.

Click the performance 3D slider, drag it towards the right, and click the Apply button when you've hit 100 per cent. You should be able to hear the card's fan spool up immediately.

If you find it's too noisy, you're not hardcore enough for serious overclocking and should probably stick to browsing the web.

WHAT, NO ATITOOOL?

ATITool is another overclocking tool, but is arguably superior as to *RivaTuner*: it has better support for Radeons, is more hardcore, and it renders images to a Direct3D window as you tweak, so you can see when you've gone too far without having to run benchmarks or games. But *ATITool* hasn't been updated since 2006, and doesn't behave under *Vista*. But if you use *XP* and have a Radeon, visit www.techpowerup.com/atitool and see if you prefer it. The good news is that *ATITool* supports 64bit versions of *XP* and is free.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Q Where can I download *RivaTuner*?

A Visit guru3d.com and click the *RivaTuner* link in the Affiliates section on the right.

Q Why won't it work with my ATI hardware?

A The latest Radeons, like the HD 3870X2, aren't fully supported yet. Check the *RivaTuner* ATI forums at snipurl.com/rivaatforum for help and workarounds.

Q How do I reset everything?

A Open *RivaTuner* and click the button next to Customise in the Driver Settings box. Click the icon furthest on the right marked Reset, and reboot your PC.

Q Can overclocking damage my stuff?

A The more modern your hardware, and the better your cooling, the less the chances are you'll damage what you're tinkering with.

REMEMBER:
YOU CAN'T REFILL
A LIQUID CRYSTAL
DISPLAY MONITOR

Despite what urban myths and some parts of the internet say, you can't refill an old LCD monitor with liquid crystals to get a better picture. So don't try it. Even if your monitor has a hole in the back.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at *PC ZONE*, but these are the bits we just adore

LOADED?

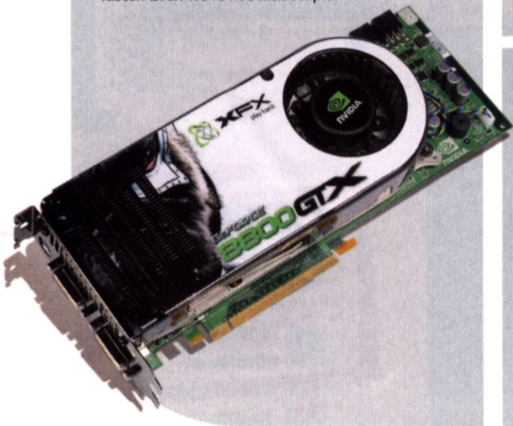
GRAPHICS

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
MAN 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
WEB intel.co.uk

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XB, 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



WD7500 AAKS

EXPECT TO PAY £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE wdc.com

Almost as fast as the outgoing 150GB Raptor but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's (noisy and pricey) Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to be spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN



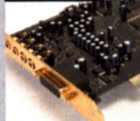
SM226BW

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.com

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

GeForce 8800GT

EXPECT TO PAY £142
MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE XGXFforce.com

Ladies and gentlemen, the card of the moment. While we've yet to put a retail GeForce 8800 GT against its Radeon opponents, reference benchmarks have shown that the NVIDIA box is the one to buy. Just avoid those fussier model variants that sail close to £200.



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



CONROEXFIRE-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



X-5300

EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.com

Say goodbye to Creative's P5800s, longest serving denizens of the *Buyer's Guide*, and guten tag to Logitech's swisher X-5300s. With the edge on quality and available everywhere, the Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music.

STUDY

Game Design + Development

3D Animation | Game Audio Production | Graphic Design | Web Design + Development

DIPLOMA DEGREE* MASTERS

ENROL NOW

LAPTOP INCLUDED
WITH
ALL
COURSES



Q qantm
COLLEGE

www.qantm.co.uk +44 (0)845 017 1015

* Not offered in all locations.

INSIDE PC GAMER

THE SIMS 3 SCOOPED!

Hardcore gamers: it's coming for you!

RED ALERT 3!

The return of a bizarre strategy legend

PLUS...

BATTLEFIELD HEROES > SPORE > LEGO INDIANA JONES > TEAM FORTRESS 2 CREATOR SPEAKS > THE GENIUS OF STEAM > BARGAIN CLASSICS > DAWN OF WAR: SOULSTORM > WARHAMMER: BATTLE MARCH > AUDIOSURF > DAMNATION > MORE

SPECIAL COLLECTORS' EDITION!

The **SIMS 3**

REVEALED!
LITTLE PET PEOPLE PREPARE TO TAKE OVER YOUR WORLD

FREE DVD!

THE CLUB, CONFLICT: DENIED OPS, SAVAGE 2, AUDIOSURF...



BRITAIN'S **BEST-SELLING** PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER

RED ALERT 3
C&C's mental cousin makes a comeback

STEAM WORKS
How Valve became the PC's champion

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

The SIMS 3

The world's favourite game is coming for YOU

PC GAMER DVD 22 PLAYABLE GAMES!

GAMES > MOVIES > MODS > TOOLS > EXTRAS

THE CLUB 29,363

ARCADE BLASTING!

DOUBLE DVD DISC

HOURS OF GREAT GAMES

WAR ON TERROR!

CONFLICT: DENIED OPS GUN-FEST

CLASSIC CARNAGE!

SHADOWGROUNDS SURVIVOR ALIENS

INDIE SMASH!

AUDIOSURF MUSIC MEETS GAMING

PC GAMER TOOLKIT

42 UTILITIES TO BOOST YOUR PC > ANTI-SPAM VIRUS KILLER > FIREWALL > GAME APPS > DRIVERS > MEDIA UTILITIES > MORE...

18

SAVAGE 2 FIVE HOUR FULL GAME TASTER

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW



The Zitronosphere

AND LO, DID my ascension through the ranks of these hallowed pages begin, rising from just about being able to handle a half-page review to my own full-blown section, with my disgusting visage at the top and child-like signature at the bottom. Can I follow the quality writing of sirs Hogarty and Blyth, and Miss Wallace? Who knows. Most likely I'll kill us all – or die trying – but in my blaze of glory I will fill these pages with the highest quality of writing that my fingers can provide, and rant heartily in this column about the internet and what it has blighted us with this month.

I say "blighted", but if you read these pages you'll see that the fiercest of electronic mistresses has been a kind one this month, with such quality things as a playable splat of *World of Goo*, *Off-Road Velociraptor Safari*, *TF2's* Badlands, and our excellent disc pages for our excellent disc.

That a man can take a piece of polycarbonate plastic and make it scream, shoot and throw helicopters at you is really a wonder of modern technology, but I'm such a man. And I have given you such a disc. And I am a bit too smug about it. And the best thing about this disc is it's free, along with all of the contents. They're demos, but if you were to download them, it'd cost you money. And with the extra time you save, you could even construct an effigy of me to watch over you at night – and as we all know, Edward means Guardian of Prosperity, so to even read these pages makes you rich. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride, even if it's a ride towards our eventual doom.

Ed Zitron

Ed Zitron, Disc Editor

PCZONE

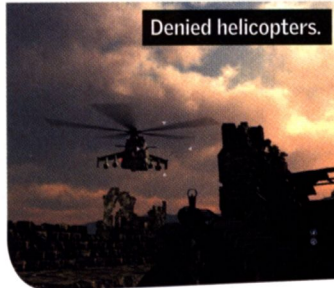
FREEPLAY



The free things shall save us all

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

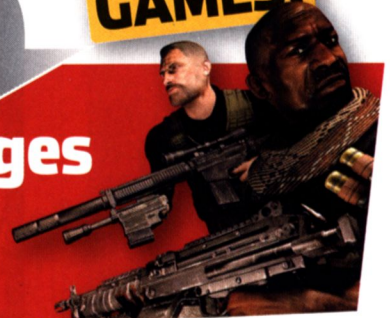
FREE GAMES!



Denied helicopters.

108 Demo pages

Try them before you buy them, guy.



Browser adventure.

110 News

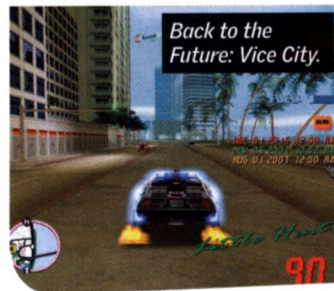
What's new internet, woah-oh-oh, ohhh.



Raptor homicide.

112 Freeware

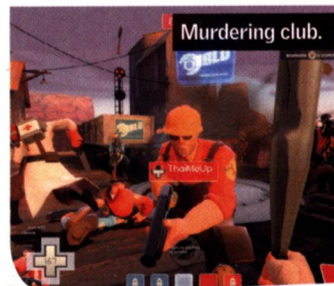
Steve Hogarty's generous with his time, but not with his money.



Back to the Future: Vice City.

114 Mods

Pirates, Knights, Vikings, Cowboys, and a time-travelling motorcar. Huzzah!



Murdering club.

116 Online Zone

A satirical commentary on the electronic world wide webiverse.



PCZONE FREE-O-METER



0 HOURS



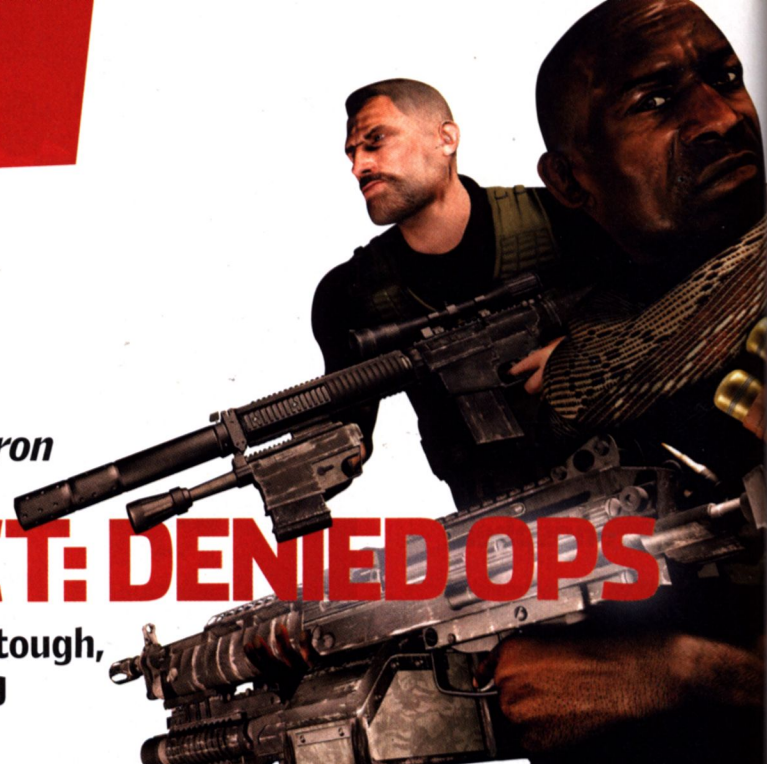
392.4 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Demos

Stuff to pack into your HDD from *Ed Zitron*



CONFLICT: DENIED OPS

When the going gets tough, the tough get gunning

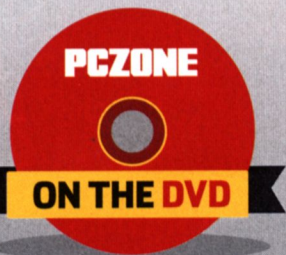
www.conflict-deniedops.com/uk

AS IF SOMEHOW obsessed with two-man ordinance, Eidos have followed *Kane & Lynch* with yet another game where an unlikely pairing take up arms to deal with a dangerous situation. This month's game is part of the much more legal setting of the *Conflict* series, in which you control two dedicated, hard-edged CIA agents going deep into deadly South America to blow up anything that will burn – or won't, as the case may be.

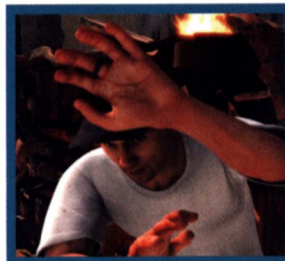
While it'd be a dirty damn lie to say that this is the greatest FPS ever, *Conflict: Denied Ops* is a pretty, well-tuned game. In this demo you can play a level set in Venezuela, giving you a chance to experience some of the different abilities of the two agents – a loud-mouth heavy gunner and a sneaky sniper – along with some of the cinematic action that *C:DO* is so proud of.

The controls are very much archetypal of the genre, apart from your tab key switching between the agents.

Try out *C:DO* – you'll feel like you're in a TV action movie from the early '90s.

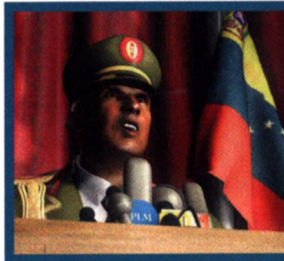


Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



TROUBLE IN PARADISE

In the most generic of problem situations, America takes too much interest in a situation arising in Venezuela. No doubt there's an oily agenda to this curiosity.



GRRR, ARRGH

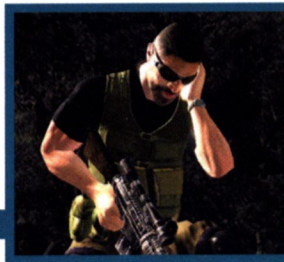
In retaliation, Venezuela's angry, militaristic leader – Mr Alberto Generico – screams bloody murder at the US for poking their cheeseburger-eating noses into his business, and threatens nuclear war.

WAR IN PIECE(S) The briefest of briefings on the operations we're denying



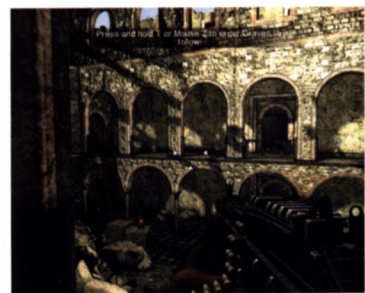
OH, FIDDLESTICKS

As your the team has the subtlety of Brian Blessed dressed as a clown, before you know it you've shot down a helicopter and blown up someone's server. That's what you get when you mess with the US, man!



THE DREAM TEAM

The US's reaction to being told to stay out and not cause any more problems is to send in highly trained soldiers who'll – with any luck – not cause too much of a ruckus and cool the whole thing down.



THE CLUB

Come on, give me a hug – just a little one

www.sega.com/theclub

LIKE A GOOD kebab, there's nothing sophisticated about *The Club*, yet it's still remarkably tasty. The entire point of the game is to shoot fellow homicidal maniacs, gaining *Tony Hawk*-style score multipliers and rolling up the sweet, sweet high scores.

Each difficulty level requires higher scores to progress to the next stage, and has you shooting secret markers along the way and acting all psychotic.

If this was the last game you played before going to war, you'd at least be somewhat prepared. So give it a go, because despite our cynicism it's worth at least eight laughs.



Have the time of your death

The prospects for homicide in *The Club*



LAHNDAHN TAAAHN

The first level has you standing in a circle of traffic cones, trying to survive wave after wave of angry, and apparently suicidal, men with guns and bullets.



VENICE THE MENACE

The second is in Venice. You're storming through the streets, following signs while getting a particular amount of points – and, of course, trying not to die.

SHADOWGROUNDS SURVIVOR

You've got survivalism www.shadowgroundsgame.com/survivor

HEAPING PRAISE ON *Shadowgrounds Survivor* is something that we can do with particular glee, as it's so tightly made and so beautifully sculpted, that it's hard not to love it. While it may be a tad on the repetitive side, the atmosphere and

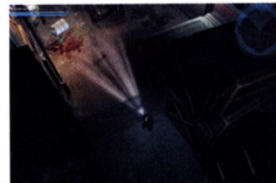
whimsy of its ambient light, physics engine and control system makes it something you have to play. You should be able to get a fair idea of what the game involves from this sweet swig of shooter soda – and we really recommend you do.



- Control me**
Moving your mouse aims the reticule and holding down the left button shoots things. WADS moves, M heals, and tab opens the map.
- Dance alien**
Aliens move fast and they leap like cannibalistic, rabid freerunners. So don't get too close, or confident in your distance.
- Beware blow-ups**
Objects in the game are thrown about by explosions. This can be a problem when you find your way out blocked.

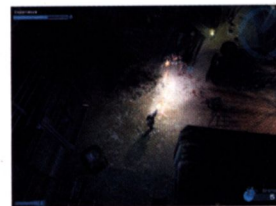
Stay Frosty

Look into my eye...



Shadow play

The ambient light adds to the atmosphere, with torchlight spilling through grates and making the monsters' shadows look gigantic.



Da-ding! Level up!

As you progress you'll be able to level up and get upgrades to your guns and useful equipment, like motion sensors, for classic *Aliens* moments.

AND THE REST...



AGATHA CHRISTIE: EVIL UNDER THE SUN

www.jowood.com

Yet another adventure game in which somebody is dead, and there's evil to be dealt with. So exercise your little grey cells and deal with it, just don't expect David Suchet.



PENUMBRA: BLACK PLAGUE

www.paradoxplaza.com/penumbra
Made by a pair of Swedes, *Penumbra: Black Plague* received applause last issue, as it's better made than a lot of high-budget, big-name games. And it made us wet ourselves at least three times.



JACK KEANE

www.jackkeane.com

Point-and-clicks aren't dead, and *Jack Keane* hopes to break the trend of mediocrity that stinks up the genre like a Glastonbury Festival toilet. And we're good enough to give you the demo.



IMPERIUM ROMANUM

www.imperium-game.com

How many Ancient Rome-related games are there? Probably about 100, but we haven't counted. *Imperium Romanum* is different, as it's actually rather good. More economics than bloodstained sandals, but there you go.

PCZONE
HOT
DOWNLOADS

CURSE CLIENT

www.curse.com



This excellent program can, at a click of a button, download and install hundreds of mods into your *World of Warcraft* client. Curse.com also organises said mods, lets you see what's installed, and uninstall them at any time. A must-download for *WOW*-heads.

SAM & MAX 2.03: NIGHT OF THE RAVIN' DEAD

snipurl.com/smrvngdead



We're doing our very best to get *Sam & Max* into every issue, partly because we love rabbits and their new adventures are cheap and well-written. This month's involves the duo facing off against an emo zombie and a horde of solemn undead.

SNIPPETS



IBM SCHOOLS YOU

www.powerupthegame.org
While the entire PC ZONE staff is too cool for school, and abhors the idea of an honest education, IBM hope to bring back wayward maths-shy kiddywinkles using the medium of their new free MMO, *PowerUp*. You'll have to solve maths problems to save a fictional planet from all kinds of environmental problems. Oh well, at least you now have a use for your GCSEs.



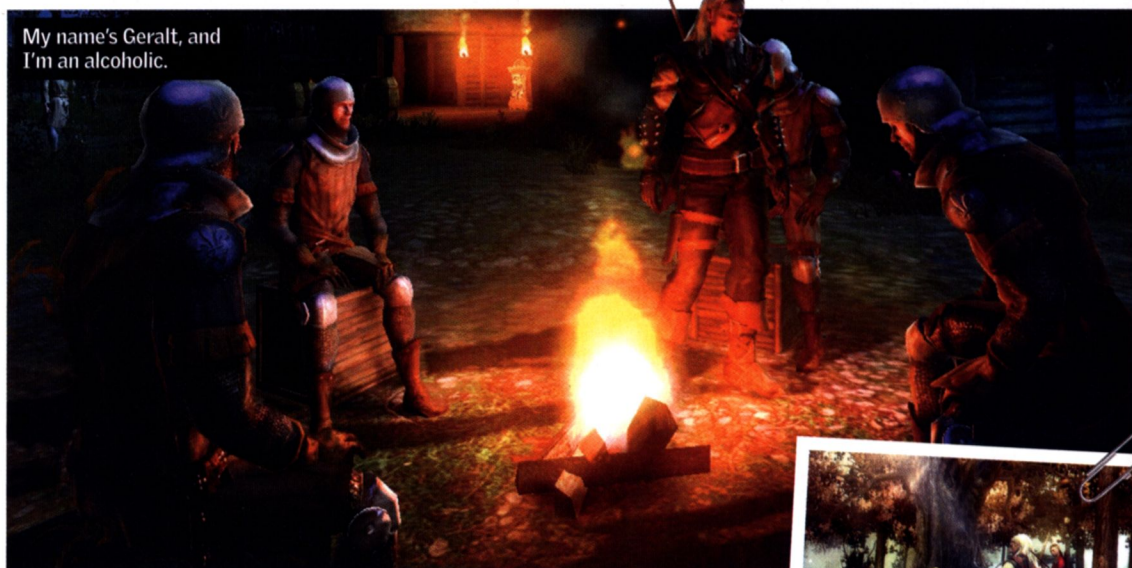
THROW ME THE IDOL...

indianajones.lego.com
Following the *Indiana Jones* trailer's rampage of the internet like an elderly stalker, the free *Lego Indiana Jones* minigame is a remarkably detailed, multi-level adventure game in which you guide Lego Indy through some of his escapades, from the famed boulder chase to escaping Lego Nazis on a motorbike with a Lego Sean Connery. Positively shocking!

ANY WITCH WAY BUT LOOSE...

The Witcher to get massive patch

www.thewitcher.com



My name's Geralt, and I'm an alcoholic.

WHILE WE LIKED *The Witcher*, giving it 88% in issue 188, even our rampant enthusiasm couldn't deny its faults – especially the giant-sized loading times and crippling system problems that some experience with it. In a move uncharacteristic of the PC game industry, the game's Polish developers CD Projekt have decided to release *The Witcher Enhanced Edition*. This version will, CD Projekt claims, "Create a game that is devoid of all the major criticisms levied at the original release."

The enhancement includes an 80 per cent reduction in loading times, improved stability, and a completely new English translation that will include content that was lost first time round. Other changes include a new inventory screen, 50 new models for NPCs, 100 new character animations, and better lip-synching.

Before you go huffing and puffing about having to pay for all this, CD Projekt have said that owners of the original will be able to download this update as a patch. But it'll be released



Where are my tree nymphs?

in a new boxed version – *The Witcher Enhanced* – including a 'making of' DVD, two new adventures, the soundtrack, an official guide, and the D'jinii mod editor for designing missions. *The Witcher Enhanced* will be released in May. The patch will be available soon after.

QUAKING IN YOUR BROWSER

Quake Live offers free browser-based FPS action www.quakelive.com

WITH FALLEN EMPIRES: *Legion* being a completely browser-based game, and the excellent *Off-Road Velociraptor Safari* (page 110) proving that the medium isn't limited to terrible Flash games, it's not surprising that a big developer would eventually leap on a making a proper 3D game to play in browsers.

Enter id's *Quake Live*, a self-titled 'freemium' (read "paid for by advertising"), browser-based 3D shooter that looks a little like *Quake III*, with the difference being that you can run it on your toaster, if you have

a monitor and an internet connection hooked to it.

Another big draw is that *Quake Live* will include a community side that'll allow players to keep track of each other's stats, run tournaments, and join matches. There's not a lot of info about the game yet, but its screenshots look a great deal like *Quake III*, and it promises "Quake-style deathmatch."

While we cynically raise our eyebrows at the mere prospect of any franchise being added to the word 'free,' we'll give the full rundown on *Quake Live* on its release in Freeware.



All this can soon be found in Firefox...

QUAKE LIVE

MAYBE I'M CRAZY...

Barkley: Shut Up and Jam: Gaiden – first chapter released

snipurl.com/barkleybball

AFTER THE GREAT B-ball Purge of 2041, basketball was banned. Now, in the year 2053, slammer legend Charles Barkley is on the run from the law, led by traitorous B-ballers Jordan, trying to stop terrorist group B.L.O.O.D.M.O.S.E.S. from releasing yet more Chaos Dunks upon the populace of Neo New York.

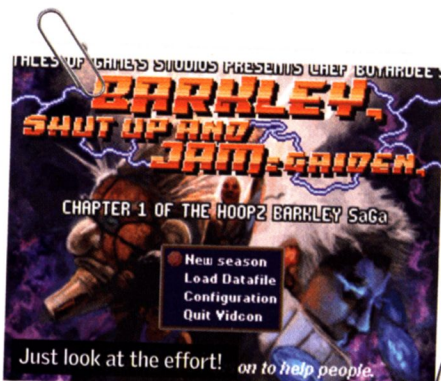
Framed for the murder of 15 million people and the destruction of Manhattan, Barkley must join forces with Lebron James' great-great-grandson and a cyborg Vince Carter to clear his name and save the world from the dastardly sporting terrorists.

Barkley: Shut Up And Jam: Gaiden is Tales of Game's dystopian story of a world gone wrong after the banning of one of America's famous sports. This is a sprite-based RPG that looks, plays, and sounds like Square-Enix's *Chrono Trigger*, with turn-based combat and ridiculous basketball moves – such as the Showboat Jam and the Free Throw – mixed with the stupidest yet most fantastic premise for a story ever conceived.

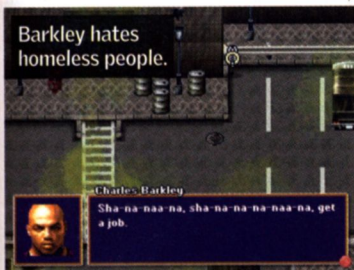
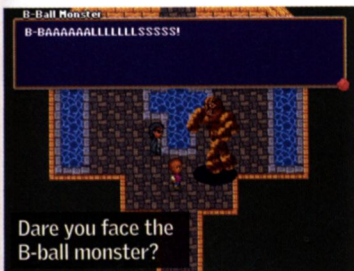
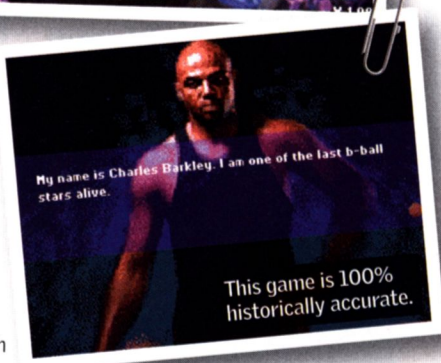
While it's hard to take too seriously, there's been a remarkable amount of work put into the first chapter of *Shut Up and Jam*, from the original sprites to the constant shoe-horning of real basketball players and references into the post-apocalyptic gameworld.

You'll fight against gigantic, hulking B-ball monsters, argue with former basketball greats about their dedication to the sport, and even use steroids to heal yourself – though we're fairly certain that's not what steroids really do.

Though only the first chapter has been released so far, there's a great deal of story and action in this improbable basketball yarn. We're excited to see where the tale of Barkley and his son Hoopz ends up, and we'll excitedly bring you more information on it once there's a new release. Even though football is best.



Just look at the effort! on to help people.



SNIPPETS



HOW IS BABBY FORMED

snipurl.com/grammarnazi
Freeware spods Klooingames are at it again with their near-impossible word shooter *Grammar Nazi*. You play the eponymous word warrior, fighting the force of evil that is The Poor English. You cause damage by typing in words, but this lowers the shields that protect you from The Poor English's falling letters. Tough, frustrating, but fun.



FREE TOMB RAIDER?

snipurl.com/freelara
Those of you happy to receive endless advertising, as well as lying about whether you're American, may be happy to know that PayPal rivals TrialPay are offering free copies of *Tomb Raider Anniversary* to those signing up to their service and trying one offer, such as buying tat on ebay.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH THE SIMS: BON VOYAGE



"Sims will no longer pop out of the hammock when WooHoo is rejected."

Movie of the month LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

LOTRO has to be some of the best value for money in the MMO market, with consistently released new content. The latest punch is *Book 12: The Ashen Wastes*. The update includes a few tweaks to the Guardian and Burglar classes, a ten-quest story arc, and a cavalcade of smaller bug fixes.



The best idea for surviving in Middle-earth is to play dead. That's what we'd do, anyway.



The Angmar region is getting a rejig. We hope that it won't add a Starbucks – we like Caffè Nero.



Little did Simon know that he'd accidentally superglued a table to his right arm...



Freeware



Steve Hogarty sells his soul for a bunch of free games

This is a browser-based special this month, with nearly all of the games featured here only playable in your web browser. So mow down some raptors, slice some ninjas, trebuchet furniture, alter space and time, eat some worms, and make a ball fall through a hole. Online!

OFF-ROAD VELOCIRAPTOR SAFARI

Dev: Flashbang Studios | raptorsafari.com



LAST MONTH WE broke the news that the effective sequel to *Tribes* would be entirely browser-based, and through our veneer of professionalism it was apparent that we were fundamentally unsure about the whole thing. A browser is for the internet, not games (at least not 3D games). To play a decent game in *Firefox* is to eat cereal off a plate with a fork: outright nonsense done wrong-wise.

But look across these two pages; I've been playing webgames all month and loving it. This here game, *Off-Road Velociraptor Safari*, is obscenely fun. To play it, you download a neat 3MB plug-in for your browser of choice before the whole thing jumps to life right there in your browser window. *Velociraptor Safari* looks great, runs great, and is a fully featured game with persistent stats, achievements, leaderboards and objectives. This game is proof that browser-based gaming can work, and that *Fallen Empires: Legion* (the *Tribes* sort-of sequel) won't be held back in the slightest by its medium. How exciting.

Melding the joy of all-terrain vehicles and dinosaurs, *Off-Road Velociraptor*



Safari has you driving a 4x4 across a prehistoric landscape, ploughing through ancient reptiles before collecting their bodies and depositing them at specified locations. The joy is in the killing, which can be done either by ramming into the dinos, or deploying a ball and chain that

hangs from the back of your jeep. Sharp turns send this spiked ball swinging around (every movement dictated by a solid and satisfying physics engine), and well-timed actions lead to skull-crushing impacts and clotheslined reptiles. Downed raptors are impaled on the ball, adding extra weight to it for smacking up some more dinosaurs should you desire it, and there are even bonuses for doing so.

The game is soaked in physics-centric fun, and the ability to create an account to keep a log of your achievements and high scores adds unexpected meaning to the whole thing. Oh, and we especially like the cunning and inexplicable twist, which is that you're a raptor too. Just one capable of driving a car.



STORMWINDS

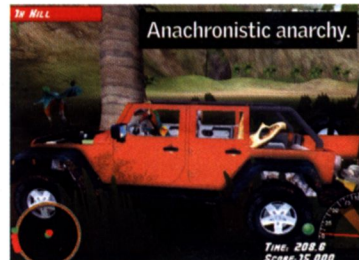
Gale force fun

Dev: Hero Interactive | www.herointeractive.com/stormwinds_1-5

BASE DEFENCE GAMES come in all sizes and shapes. The most frequently seen size is about turd-sized, and the most frequently seen shape approximates that of a turd. *Stormwinds* is one of the few base defence games I've actually enjoyed.

In it, you spend cash on upgrading your base's defences with turrets, launchers, and other things like passive tools to enhance damage, before a wave of enemies attack. The difference here is that *Stormwinds* affords you direct control over your ordinance (other games tend to make you sit back and watch), meaning you can take control of a single turret and actively attack the enemy.

This is the best looking of the genre too, all steampunk and lush, and it has the option to save your progress.



KATAKIJIN

Ninja binge Dev: Ultim8poo | snipurl.com/katakijin

A HARD-AS-YOU-LIKE ninja platformer, *Katakijin* takes its cues from *Ninja Gaiden*. Buttons are assigned to jumping, slashing, another more exotic kind of slashing, blocking, shuriken throwing, and a magic swirling blue whirlwind attack – there's also rolling, wall-running, and mystical combinations of all of these things that create some amazing strings of attacks.

The enemy AI is relentless and the difficulty curve unforgiving, but the style

and animation on display are lovely and ultraviolent. The developer, a Mister Ultim8poo, has only released this single level as a form of elegant demonstration of his skills and his wares.

I haven't completed this demo because I'm absolutely rubbish at it and can't get any of the slicing-throwing-leaping combos to work, but I'm totally certain that *Katakijin* is excellent fun for people with good, working fingers.



FISHIE FISHIE

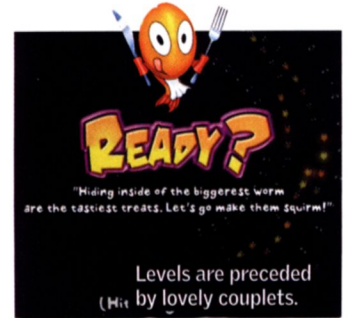
Nobody likes you, go eat worms Dev: Farbs | farbs.org

OFFENDED BY GAMES that require the use of two, three, or even four buttons, Farbs has created *Fishie Fishie*, which requires just one, single button.

The fish you control will swim in small clockwise circles until you press a button. This makes him swim anticlockwise instead. This results in a simple control method that demands as much skill to make your fish move in a straight line as it does to make him devour the food dotted about the underwater wonderland he inhabits.

This little yellow fella is a very hungry fishie – apparently starving, actually – and failing to guide him properly so he can constantly consume food results in a swift death.

Fishie Fishie looks and plays like one of PopCap's ultrasimple and ultracausal games, which ain't no bad thing, because we love all that stuff.

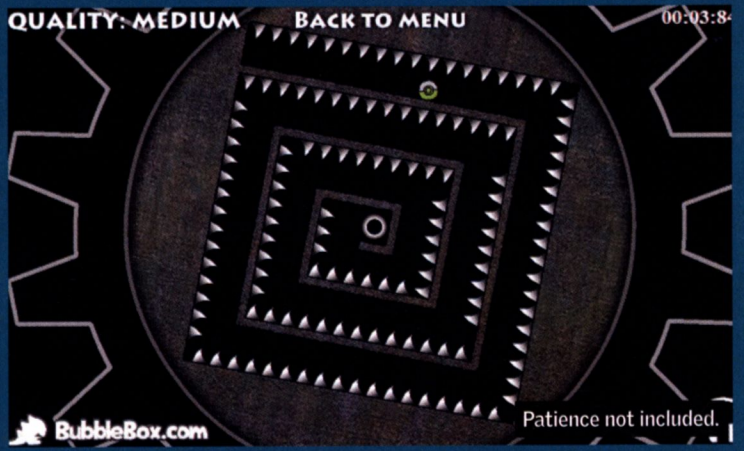


SPIN THE BLACK CIRCLE

You spin me right round Dev: Alejandro Guillen | onemorelevel.com/game/spin_the_black_circle

THIS WEBGAME IS like those little plastic toys you used to get on tops of the tubs of bubbles you used to be able to buy in the past – you know, the ones with the maze and ball-bearing. This game is just like those. You've got to get the ball to the hole by spinning the black circle, that is, rotating the whole level, so that the mysteries of gravity compel the ball to move towards its central destination.

This requires avoiding spikes and using momentum to get around some extremely niggly corners and... oh my God, I've just realised *Spin The Black Circle* is a Pearl Jam reference. Hoorah.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH SAMURAI MOVERS



snipurl.com/samuraimovers

OH NO, AN old Japanese lady is moving house and needs somebody to carry all of her furniture. But what's this? A group of unemployed samurai have shown up with their trebuchet, and they're willing to fling all of her furniture into her house piece by piece. Oh no, the trebuchet is smashing the place up and killing the old lady. The fridge has destroyed the roof, the TV has smacked her in the face, her table has taken out the rear wall – it's hilarious bedlam.

Make the furniture land as close as possible to the designated landing zone and you'll get extra points, but the real fun here is in laying waste to an old lady's house (and an old lady) through earnest, misguided helpfulness.

SHIFT Doesn't matter if it's black or white

Dev: Armor Games | snipurl.com/shiftgame



PRESSING A BUTTON to flip a level inside out and walk on the insides of platforms to reach your objectives is a novel idea.

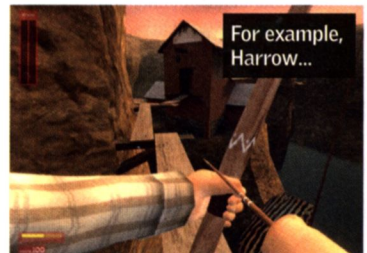
In *Shift*, you press the shift key to reverse the positive and negative spaces in the level. If you're standing on a black column against a white background, when you shift space, the whole level will rotate 180°, and you'll be standing in a white pit against a black background instead. This is an extremely confounding mechanic indeed, and one that's further complicated by spikes and switches, but one that you'll get the hang of surprisingly quickly. Good show.



The Ridiculous Hat Club is a dangerous business.



Arrow rhymes with lots of things...



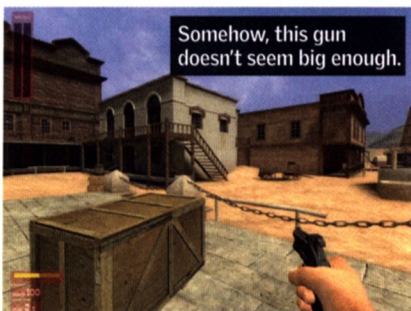
For example, Harrow...



Also: Barrow, Mia Farrow.

FISTFUL OF FRAGS Play: MOD

If you shoot to kill, you better hit the heart www.fistful-of-frags.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2



Somehow, this gun doesn't seem big enough.

WHEN YOU INSTALL a new mod, join an internet game, and you find people already playing it, you're onto an unusual thing. Sure, the people playing *Fistful Of Frags* were primarily idiot teenagers, spamming the voice channel with dreary narrations of their every shot, but that made it more satisfying to kill the adolescent cushion humpers.

Fistful of Frags is a Western mod, in which the Desperados and the Vigilantes

are fighting to find the money that's been left around the level. Pick it up, and a timer starts – if you're still holding the money when it expires, then your team scores the amount.

Obviously, the other team will be trying to kill you, both to stop you getting the money and to boost their notoriety. Notoriety is what you use to buy weapons. Money only counts towards winning the round.

To start, everyone is able to afford a main weapon and a couple of accessories (a hat, for example), but once you've been playing a while, you'll be notorious enough to afford a bigger load out, and the super-expensive explosive bow.

The five maps are well designed, well-crafted and large. And although the Peligro level has elements that feel like

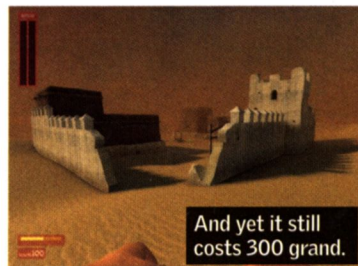
one of *Half-Life*'s partially-baked platforming elements, they actually work in a multiplayer game. Teamplay is intelligently encouraged with a notoriety bonus for protecting the guy who's claiming the money.

If we have any complaints, it's that the sluggishness of the reload combined with the slow pace of the characters (and a very short sprint allowance) makes the short-ranged weapons feel a little underpowered. *Fistful of Frags* is far more satisfying to play medium to long range, and once you get the lay of the maps, there's solid play to be had.

Advice for a more pleasant game: play before the US wakes up, because Europeans don't force you to kill your teammates by constantly using words like 'bitch' and 'fag'.



Damn this magnetic shotgun to hell!

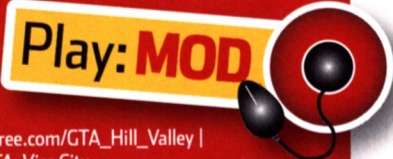


And yet it still costs 300 grand.



Steady now, they're only 14 year-olds.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: HILL VALLEY



Why don't you make like a tree and get outta here?

z3.invisionfree.com/GTA_Hill_Valley | Mod for: GTA: Vice City

THIS MOD ATTEMPTS to recreate the time-travelling madness of the *Back to the Future* films, with De Lorean, time-travelling trains, Libyan terrorists and plutonium using the glitziness of *GTA: Vice City*. Though its makeshift state may put some off, it's a lot of fun for the patient.

From the word go you can get in a De Lorean, go straight back in time, and do the few available missions, or climb to the top of Vercetti Mansion and take control of the difficult-to-

manoeuvre flying time train from *Back to the Future Part III*.

At present, there's not a huge difference between each timeline, but if you look closely you'll see that a lot of the vehicles and people change between the eras, and even see the occasional cool addition, like the hoverboards from *BTFII* in 2015.

If you can't enjoy anything else in this mod, then at least marvel at the raw creativity that is the customised splash screen – it's a work of art.



PIRATES, VIKINGS, KNIGHTS II (BETA)

Hagar the Horrible kills Johnny Depp www.pvkii.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

LAST TIME WE covered *PVKII* its beta was a smidge patchy, so we're glad to report definite progress as further gameplay is unlocked. As with its *Half-Life* mod predecessor, clever map design and varied weaponry are taking a "wouldn't it be cool..." pub chat concept and starting to make it sing.

The plans for this sequel are big: three new classes per team, taking the total to a respectable 18, each with their own unique set of weapons. This is becoming as intricate (if not as balanced, yet) as

TF2, with the introduction of healing classes, poisons, and combat buffs gained from a toot on the Viking horn. At the moment, however, only six of these classes are playable, with three more coming soon – but that doesn't mean that we can't throw word confetti at it like it's its wedding day.

So, treat this beta as an appetising whistle-whet, and join in one of the many well-populated public servers right now. This is an excellently made mod with a hellishly positive future ahead of it.



"What was that? Yarrr?"



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

Where have all the good RTS games gone?

I've just been looking for a good game to play, and I've noticed that since *Warcraft 3* there hasn't been a good RTS in a while. I mean a proper one, with resource collection and settlements, building up forces and then sending them to war.

I hate the forced expansion you get in games like *Company of Heroes* and *Age of Mythology*. Don't get me wrong - I love *COH* - but my fondest memories are creating a great base in *Age of Empires II*, dotting little secretive war camps across the map. It gave you a little strategy backing, whereas games like *COH* don't have that depth. I just yearn for the days of micro-management and base building.

shakermaker07

I haven't played a proper, good RTS for years. There are three ages of war: historical, contemporary and future, i.e. *AOEII*, *Red Alert* and *Total Annihilation*. Against these, all RTSs are compared, and never since has anything been equal. This is why I am no longer an RTSer.

apophis_dd



Total Annihilation: still the king.

I don't agree - the *Ground Control* series is an awesome one - no nannying the base while fighting the enemy so you're sure to have a fast action-packed game. Another one is *World in Conflict* by the same developer, Massive Entertainment. They've got a good formula going, so why change it?

bigairphil

The move to 3D was supposed to give us so much more - line of sight, high ground/low ground, etc, and it just hasn't happened yet. What we really

need is *Total Annihilation* for the modern age.

Alberthammond

I hope the new fad of no base building is just a phase and we can get back to it. There's so much that can be done with the idea that was never allowed to develop. I remember having some epic games that lasted ages in *Red Alert* and *AOE*, with huge sprawling bases and massive armies clashing.

liquid_metal

ON THE BLOG

PCZONE 2008

What's been happening in *ZONE's* web diary this month...

THE CLEVER BIT of our blogging this month was Ed's discussion of the law in gaming, and that the moment you leave the realms of reality, you also seem to instantly turn against our boys in blue, and that coppers seem to get a constant flow of raw deals from gaming.



The biggest surprise of the month was the release of the *Far Cry* movie trailer, by our favourite director, Uwe Boll (pronounced Ooh-vey Bowl) leading

to the greatest words in blog history: "Is that your gun? No, it's an erection!"

Appearing next with undue haste, Log wrote something delightful about his experiences using his mind to control *Unreal Tournament III*. This is true: it actually happened. The results were positive, although they still didn't manage to make him any good - but at least it left his hands free to let him scratch his bum and eat crisps.



PCZONE PUBCAST!

Round 7 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

Twenty-third rule of Fight Club: don't shoot the photographer

WITH THE RELEASE of the new *Badlands Team Fortress 2* map, it was somewhat inevitable that we would take to its Wile E. Coyote-esque environs for this month's Fight Club. Seemingly far more friendly to intense Scout, Soldier and Pyro play, the middle checkpoint seemed to remain permanently ablaze – the result of which was almost unheard of levels of tension in the office. Mutters became swearwords, swearwords became shouts, and shouts became real-world violence.

[Quite]Rob continued to be the most annoying person to ever play a Scout, somehow racking up endless kills with his baseball bat, and WeakLemonDrink was a blight on all who would stand in his way.

This month also delivered what is probably the best team photo ever – despite some wag thinking it would be clever to snipe the *PC ZONE* editor just as he was

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!



about to take the screenshot-based photo. No violence during camera sessions please!

Keep an eye on the *PC ZONE* Steam group for details on when the next Fight Club takes place – we look forward to shooting you dead!

ZONE CHAT



Talkin' it up on the *PC ZONE* Steam community



The *PC ZONE* carrier, stopped in Portsmouth.

ZONE CHAT THIS month was a flurry of words, all in white, that from a distance looked like a lovely pile of snowflakes. On closer inspection, there were some fantastic conversations going on about *WOW*, and how some of our members actually play it, regardless of how many claim they abhor it in our monthly chin wag.

That aside, *Fallout 3* continues to be a hot topic, with growing anticipation somewhat muted by general wariness.

A terrifying Steam outage interrupted proceedings, so double compo next time round. As ever, if you want in, join the community.

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC Zone (PCZ)*. Keep an eye out for announcements at the www.pczone.co.uk forums for the date of the next chat event...



Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy picking daffodils and crocuses, you big girly-man – 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*
Steve Hogarty *PCZ_escaped_monkey*
Phil Wand *PCZ_People's Front Of Judea*
Jon Blyth *PCZ_Log*
Ed Zitron *PCZ_EdZed*

- 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!

I'd had enough – the taint of being a human in *World of Warcraft* had overwhelmed me, so I threw myself into Ironforge's Great Forge. And this is me doing it. Goodbye cruel Azeroth.

Smalls
(Warren Morris)

Wish You Were Here!

This is my giant wolf sniffing my bum while I'm sitting down. We have a tight bond, of the kind forged between hunters and pets during long, cold winter nights. Please forgive us, it's the only comfort we know.

Jeronimo
(Dave Spare)



Windows Vista

The Official Magazine

£4.99 • 100% jargon-free

DISCOVER HOW TO...

- Solve those frustrating Windows Vista problems
- Beat the seven sins that slow your system to a crawl
- Max your PC's gaming power with our top tips

Install it now!

A FASTER, BETTER PC TODAY

Your complete guide to installing and getting the most from Windows Vista Service Pack 1

Reclaim your hard drive!
Five quick and easy ways to clear out the clutter *p72*

Avoid annoying ads in recordings
Skip ads in recordings
Media Center pro

SHOP SMARTER

Laptops that can put your desktop PC to shame

PLUS

Your first digital SLR
Ultra-mobile PCs
Wi-Fi hotspot finders

SAVE PAPER, INK AND MONEY!

How to make your printer more productive



Make your PC faster and more stable!

Get the official Windows Vista

Service Pack 1

**FREE
DVD**

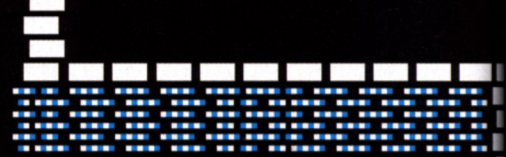
with Windows Vista:
The Official Magazine

**THE DISC EVERY
WINDOWS VISTA
USER ABSOLUTELY
MUST HAVE!**

Issue 16 on sale Wed 2nd April

Only £4.99

www.windowstvismagazine.co.uk



Retro ZONE



TEMPLE OF APSHAI

"Thou hast died. Play again? (Aye/Nay)" quoth Jon Blyth



BUT HOW?

The *Temple of Apschai* may be one of the oldest PC games around, but it runs just fine if you use DOSBox. Extract the file you've downloaded (possibly from the same place we'll send you to get *Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat* in Now And Then, opposite) then open DOSBox, set the folder containing the executable as a drive using the mount command (mount c:\path\to\apshai\), change to that drive with the c: command, and you're ready to go. Happy dungeoneering, thou intrepid adventurer thou.

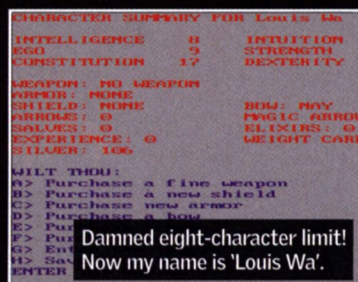
Links...

- 1 www.dosbox.com
The program that helps you run things from the time before Windows at PC-DOS and MS-DOS.
- 2 www.cstone.net/~rich/Temple/howto.html
An excellent instruction guide - it's not obvious, and the game uses most of the keyboard.

THE TEMPLE OF *Apschai* starts off with an old-fashioned character-rolling session. Three imaginary six-sided dice for each of your stats - this is classic *Dungeons & Dragons*. Apart from the fact that you go into a different menu, and choose your own stats. You couldn't give yourself 500 Charisma, but you could load yourself out with a full set of 18s - just like SSI's *D&D* PC games of later yore.

And then, you're into a *Rogue*-like dungeon trawl. Like *Rogue*, there's a heavy preoccupation with chests, treasure, weapons and so on. Unlike *Rogue*, the levels weren't randomly generated, and developers Westwood opted to use graphics over the basic ASCII set, to create an unprecedented sense of 'realism' and 'immersion'. Nothing says 'dungeon' like an 8x8 block of pixels and the beeping from a motherboard's built-in speaker.

The best thing about *Apschai*, however, was the book that came with it. More than just a manual, this tome offered pen-and-paper *D&D*-like descriptions of the rooms you were walking into. The smells, the sounds, the wall with all the jewels on it - if you got your mate to read the book in a creepy voice, closed your eyes and ignored the game, *Temple of Apschai* was one of the most engaging games around. Apart from the beeping.



"Another swamp rat, thou art too far away." That's poetry, is that.

Actually, that's a lie - the best thing about the *Temple of Apschai Trilogy* was the fact that you could give yourself as much gold as you needed, buy everything you wouldn't have been able to afford or use with an honestly rolled character, kit yourself out with 99 balms and salves,

then refuse to carry on playing when the game had the gall to say you're encumbered. The image of a huge warrior lugging a dozen carrier bags of medicine through a dungeon and having to stop to catch his breath and flex his fingers every so often has never left my mind.

THE LINGO OF YORE

Forsooth, the speakings of high fantasy

<p>THOU HASTINGS "Thou Hast" means "you have". As in, "Thou hast cuddled me to stiffness, I'm not kidding either."</p>	<p>TREASURE #20 Treasure #20 is Trash. "Thank you for mine birthday gift; truly, it was the 20th treasure."</p>
<p>THY Thy means 'your', and is used by medieval mynah birds in phrases like, "Shov us thy knickers."</p>	<p>YE HEAR MOSQUITO When ye hear mosquito, 'tis best to flap thine sword about, and hurl some algae thou found at it.</p>
<p>EPYX 'Epyx' is posh clothing. "Hands off mine epyx; don't touch what thou couldstn't afford to repair."</p>	<p>FOOD ALGAE The fifth treasure is edible algae. "A scabby lump of sediment with a side of number five, please."</p>

NOW & THEN

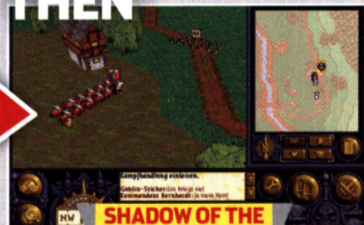
Mark of Chaos vs Shadow of the Horned Rat

NOW



MARK OF CHAOS

THEN



SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT

THIS IS WHERE Games Workshop's *Warhammer* and *Warhammer 40,000* reign on the PC RTS scene began: the excellent *Shadow of the Horned Rat*.

More in the league of top-end strategy games like *Total War*, it didn't focus on the struggle between Human and Chaos, Dwarves and Greenskins, and the High and Night Elves – instead, the enemies were the rat-like moon-worshipping junkie metaphors, the Skaven.



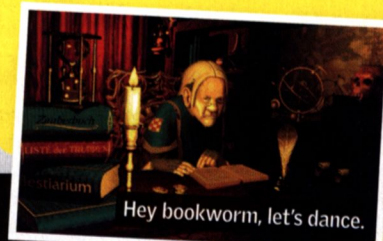
That's not to say you didn't fight everyone else; as a mercenary, you'd take on whoever was thrown at you. That's *Warhammer*: you dice up whoever comes close. With a delicate balance of violence and humour, *Shadow of the Horned Rat* is an example of an unforgiving (and punishing) RTS. The same team followed it with *Dark Omen*, which included everything good about *Rat* and had a decent learning curve.

PLAY IT!



If you want to get a taster of Games Workshop's earlier strategy games, just follow these very simple, clearly numbered steps.

- 1 The demo for *Shadow of the Horned Rat* is no longer available, so we couldn't put it on our DVD for you.
- 2 At the time of writing, there are big-box versions of the 1995 game available on eBay for between £7 and £12.
- 3 But using the internet, there's a way to play the full game in minutes. And this gives precisely as much money to the developers as eBay, so don't feel too bad.
- 4 We can't encourage such rudeness without looking embarrassed. But we're just saying www.the-underdogs.info has an excellent search function, and if you click 'Where to get it' on the *Horned Rat* page... we've already said too much.



Hey bookworm, let's dance.

MAME FRAME MAHJONG

Developer: Various | Year: Many

RETRO ZONE IS the section that hasn't really enjoyed a game in the last 20 years. But even in the '80s, when Retro Zone was having wide-eyed open-minded experiences and every game was a shattering thrill, it never liked *Mahjong*. But that was because the *Mahjong* that appeared on PCs was nothing more than posh Patience for housewives. Nothing like the illicit betting game so popular that the Chinese government – not known for a fondness of dissent – recently caved in and issued official rules.

The popularity of *Mahjong* is most apparent when you decide which version

to download – should you plump for *Banana Dream*? Perhaps *Electron Base Mahjong* is more your cup of tea. No sir, I've just the thing – you're a *Vanilla Syndrome* player. Take *Sailor Wars* and *Wakuwaku Catcher* back into the storeroom, Doris, we've got a perfect fit.

The rules of these games are too involved for this space, but take it from us, nowhere in the world of gaming are gambling and dramatically dressed sexy ladies so baffling and gratuitous. You might not understand what you're doing, but you'll certainly get beaten by someone with less clothes on than yourself. Unless you're nude. In which case: ewwww.



MAHJONG



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.



Oh! Tits!



Surely tits are cheating.

BACK IN THE DAY...



LOVELY BERTHA

By Ed Zitron

I've played RTS games since I could walk, talk and swear, but none of them have pervaded the very fabric of my gaming existence like *Total Annihilation*.

When I first played it, there was a heart-stopping, beyond cinematic quality to it – the thunderous explosions, the juddering pistons of your first Big Bertha shots. And then, of course, the nuclear explosions that were so utterly final, that nine times out of ten they would crash my computer.

And yet, somehow, there was no frustration – you just knew that what just went down was so monstrous and apocalyptic that not even an MMX processor could deal with it...

SUPERTEST

BEST WRITING IN GAMES

We wag our chops about the cleverest computer game wordsmiths...

YOUR VIEW

Last month we talked about our favourite things to murder in games, and you people said things like this...

ZOMBIE LOVE

My favourite enemies have to be zombies, or things that look like zombies, or things that don't look like zombies but eat brains. My favourite enemy has to be the massive fat guy at the end of *Wolfenstein 3D* with his giant chain-gunning ways. *sigh* Happy days.
monkeyman101

VILE LOVE

The Arch-Vile from *Doom II*. Even the name is terrifying. That map in *Final Doom* - "The Hunted" - aka The Arch-Vile Labyrinth - is the single most edge-of-your-seat pants-wetting scary map ever. That... evil... laugh!
TheTingler

BOXING ORCS LOVE

I really love throwing boxes at orcs in *Dark Messiah*. Lobbing a well-placed crate at said green-skins really made that game a lot of fun. Even better if I achieve domino effects with spikes, cliff edges, or NPCs.
Dogen_D_Derrible

CROSSBOW LOVE

Cowboys, through the head, ear to ear, using the bow in *Call of Juarez*. Or pinning a clone to the wall through his face in *F.E.A.R.* I remember another game where if you used the crossbow and caught the enemy right the head would come off...
peachFUZZ

AS SO-CALLED writers ourselves, the *PC ZONE* team complains endlessly when terrible writing creeps its way into gaming, but also applaud like drunken seals when we're pleased with the narrative niceties of a well-penned yarn.

So regular readers won't be surprised one iota to discover that the game ceremoniously agreed-upon as an outright scripting gem was DoubleFine's *Psychonauts*, the underappreciated platform genius that captured our hearts with its colourful and engrossing story, regardless of how slow it starts out.

Also up for discussion was the opinion of Ken Levine (he of *BioShock* and *System Shock 2* fame) that most people don't give two hoots about a story, and that to make a really successful game you have to make it so that the game itself entices the player in before bundling the narrative upon them - rather than amazing everyone from the off with the fancy placement of words.

Another surprise conversation topic (well, surprising if you don't know our editor) was Ubisoft's *XIII*, the cartoony

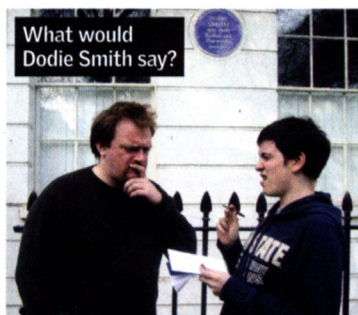


Will's pie collection: not pictured.

pulp-noir *Bourne* rip-off that still managed to strike a balance between the silliness of cel-shaded graphics and actual FPS action. The final accolades went to the fantastical and much-lauded RPG *The Witcher*, and the corny B-Movie styling of *C&C3*. And, before you ask, in order to ponder this subject fully (and to get outdoors for once) we went and stood next to blue plaques celebrating famous

authors in our vicinity. Because they were also clever with words.

So, what do you think is the finest writing in PC gaming to date? There's *Deus Ex*, *Max Payne* and *Warcraft III* to discuss, and you can do so right now if you look on our delightful forums, where you'll have to go if you want to listen to the Supertest, as technical difficulties left it off the disc this month. Whoops! **PCZ**



What would Dodie Smith say?



Electro Bolt



To ponder this subject fully we went and stood next to blue plaques

Would you inject yourself with the first syringe you found?

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill walks the plank in *Pirates of the Burning Sea*...

HAVEN'T WE ALREADY done this? I seem to remember me and erstwhile PC ZONE MMO guru, Prezzer, mincing around as seafarers a while back.

This game must be new though, as it arrives with a slew of promotional tat, including a Jolly Roger flag, a miniature treasure chest full of pretend doubloons, and a children's pirate book. The treasure chest is essentially worthless, but it seems inherently wrong to simply commit it to landfill at such an early stage in its pointless existence. As for the book, it was a thought-provoking read, even if the narrative was a tad simplistic.

All of this tat is a good deal better than the game it promotes, which is not so much half-finished as half-started. It's a damning verdict to say that the most fun in the game involves dressing your avatar. Given the choice of a Freetrader, Naval Officer, Privateer or Pirate, I naturally opt for the latter. After all, the game's not called *Freetraders of the Burning Sea*. And I don't recall seeing Johnny Depp starring in *Naval Officers of the Caribbean*.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

A-pirating I shall go then, and out of sheer laziness I almost opt for a random appearance. However, once I start tweaking I'm soon in the throes of a

complete makeover, trying on trousers, waistcoats and accessories, eventually emerging sporting the latest in pirate chic, replete with acid-house bandana and child-scaring chin-glove. I've put together a frankly terrifying look, but on the plus side there's nobody here to see me, with this corner of the Caribbean proving less popular than Blackpool in February.

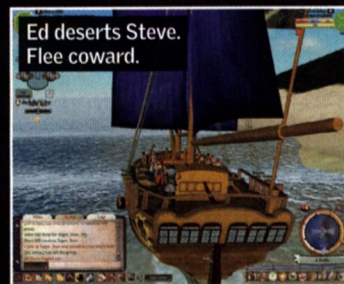
"Anyone here?" I shout hopefully. Eventually finding a wily cove by the name of Blackspot Glasgow, I look him up and down and address him with the traditional pirate greeting of "Eh up?" which is met with blank indifference.

Disillusioned by the lack of social interaction on land, I take to the open seas on the good ship NeverQuest, where I battle another boat. In the manner of a football manager speaking in the tabloids, I issue a broadside at the offending craft, and another, and another, and another, circumnavigating it endlessly in a cycle of ever-decreasing circles. To numb the pain, I'm listening to the cricket, which has been rained off, replaced by a looping message including the phrase "damp and sorrowful news," which drills itself into my brain as I endlessly unload my pitiful artillery.

I PATCH

This is all cruel and unusual punishment, and in a change of tack we decide to bring

Disillusioned by the lack of social contact on land, I take to the open sea



in the big guns, namely ZONE new boy Ed Zitron. A time is arranged and we sit and we wait and we patch. Hours pass while the game attempts to mend itself, listing its corrected foibles as our lives tick away. "Added some additional words to the profanity filter," it boasts. Thank **** for that. "Fixed graphical issues with prisoners in hanging cages," it claims. "Some singing drunks were playing the wrong animation," it points out. "There were three ladies standing in the same space," it says, and we can take no more.

Returning a full 24 hours later, by hook or by crook Zitron eventually finds me, and turns out to be brandishing exactly the same beard, offsetting the facial foliage with a shoulder-mounted parrot and a

dead white eye. After days of mooching round on my own, it's a change of pace and he bounces round like an E-number-fuelled child – much as he does in real life. He's eager to get going, so I explain to him that I have to go to a beach and beat up some students. "Yeaaaaaaah let's beat them up great," squeals effervescent Ed, and the students are duly dispatched.

BRITISH SEA POWER

With the impetuosity of youth, Ed urges, "Let's set sail and try to attack someone or something." I've barely had time to splice my mainbrace when I see his distress flare and get the message, "I appear to have attacked a British naval unit outside of the city. Help!"

I'm tempted to stand back and watch him be consigned to a watery grave. But I reluctantly come to his rescue, fending off the British Navy's finest while he makes his escape. At which point he casually announces, "I have to head out," then passes me some ingots and pisses off.

Left alone, I trudge through the mean streets of Morgan's Bluff, and seek solace at an inn. Where the barman refuses to serve me... [PCZ]



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

SUPREME COMMANDER

Jamie Sefton talks Fatboys, getting puking drunk and plans for *Supreme Commander 2* with Chris Taylor

GAS POWERED GAMES' founder Chris Taylor has a stinking cold. Even though he's still his usual effervescent, enthusiastic self, the interview is punctuated by the occasional sniffle, and he has a voice that in his own croaky words, "sounds as if I've been smoking three packs of cigarettes a day." I've dragged Chris Taylor away from a hot Lemsip to ask the industry legend that developed *Total Annihilation* and *Dungeon Siege*, about the making of his latest success – the hardcore sci-fi RTS *Supreme Commander* and its follow-up *Forged Alliance*. Read on for the story of the creation of the universe, the problems with developing for PC, falling through ceilings, and the first exclusive confirmation of *Supreme Commander 2*...



01 **UNIT DESIGN:** "The units themselves came from the team, and a bunch of them came from me, initially just to set the tone and set the size. The Fatboy unit with the giant treads, for example, came from me watching the huge Saturn 5 transport unit that moves real-world rockets from the vehicle assembly structure to the launch site – an incredible unit. I would suggest units for scope and scale and the team would brainstorm other units that would fit. Steve Thompson – the lead artist – came up with the Monkey Lord, the giant spider with the death laser on it. The ideas do flow from everywhere; as the lead designer I just set the tone and then everyone else plugs into that overall vision."

"They felt he was just hanging around the base, and they wanted to charge him out into the field"

Chris Taylor on why the SC's commanders like the frontline



02 **SUPREME COMMANDER:** "The idea of the unit was a response to *Total Annihilation*, as the commander in that game was a defensive unit. The feedback I got was that people wanted to take him – and it was always a him, they never thought of the commander as a female – and use him more as an offensive hero-style unit. Maybe it's because they played *Warcraft III* or some other games, but they felt he was just hanging around the base too much, and they wanted to charge him out into the field. I tried to make the design a little more robust, give him more defences so he would stand up more in battles."



03

MYTH MAKING: "We worked on the backstory for years – it started on the whiteboard as a pie chart that I divided into three pieces and drew out the three factions, and created these opposites – each factions' strengths and weaknesses – plus a belief system for each.

Evan Pongress, Bill Harms and the whole team worked so hard on the universe to build out the fiction, and make sense of the world that I started. Dr Brackman – my favourite character actually – was inspired by one of the great personalities of the games industry: Tom Prezina at EA. I asked Tom if I could have photos of him to model Dr Brackman and he agreed – it's really hard to come up with a character that rich and interesting out of just your imagination."



I wouldn't want to sit behind him in the cinema.

04

AEON FLUX: "The Aeon faction itself was this philosophical contradiction, which I got from the culture I live in. I wanted the Aeon to be visually different on the battlefield – one of the criticisms of *TA* was that you couldn't tell which unit was which in a battle. Our goal from the beginning was to have all the units of the UEF, Cybran and Aeon clearly differentiated, have them move differently, have different-looking weapons, and feel like they had different philosophical fighting styles. That was the hardest thing of all to do, and in the end we sort of fell back to tanks and artillery – but at least we tried."



This happens to me all the time in Tesco.



Amphabulous.

06 **PLAYER POWER:** "The strategies that come from players are always so different to the ones you imagine. You see people become so efficient at destroying their opponents, and you simply couldn't have imagined the techniques. They're so fast! They'd be in someone's base and have them killed in, like, seven minutes. An important part of the tuning process was seeing what people did and tweaking the game to close shortcuts and exploits."

"The strategies that come from players are different to the ones you imagine"

One of the biggest problems when playtesting an RTS – players

05 **BALANCE OF POWER:** "The guys who had to roll up their sleeves and test the game had a hell of a job. They looked at me and said 'You gotta be kidding right?' as they only had two or three months to balance the game. I just said 'Do your best,' and they did great for that first balancing, and better with each iteration. What we have today is really terrific. That's all you can ask for – but there's never enough time for balancing."

07 **TOTAL ASSIMILATION:** "We were definitely going to go to people who did a great job before – so of course it was a no-brainer that for the score we went to Jeremy Soule, who did the music in the original *Total Annihilation*, and Frank Bry for the sound effects. We were definitely trying to capture the spirit of what we'd done on *TA*. However, *Supreme Commander* is not *Total Annihilation 2* – if that game had been made, it would have been very different."



I don't think we'll ever find that contact lens.



Someone had a robo-curry last night.



It was then that the Sandals package holiday took a bad turn.

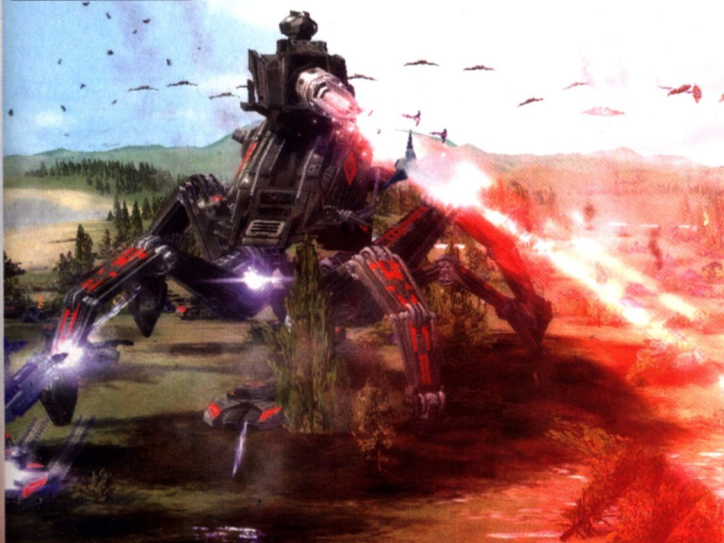
08 **SUPREME COMMANDER 2:** "For the expansion, the tuning was softened up a lot more to make *Forged Alliance* a lot faster, and make the experimental units easier to build, plus the UI was overhauled. I actually think it's a better game. I also love adding factions – they're very expensive to make, so nobody likes to do that in our business except me. I'm the first guy that wanted to do it back on *TA*, but all I could do was add more units. I was really excited to introduce the Seraphim in *FA* – the only thing stopping me from doing it on any sequel is memory. I've been told by my engineers that for *Supreme Commander 2*, I don't have enough memory in a PC with 4GB of RAM to have more factions. I'm like 'that's insane!', so we've got to work that one out. We'll return to the *SC* universe again, but we'll just have to see when that day is. Maybe when everybody has 64-bit processors..."

09 **CASUAL GAMES:** "On *SC*, we learned a big lesson that you really can't go too hard on system specs, because you need to make sure that the game can run on a lot of hardware. We pushed very hard, and although the game is very high-tech and state-of-the-art, it did cut out the lower-end systems. *Demigod* is going to run on a lot more hardware and there's going to be a lot more people that can play it. That's why I think that casual games are doing so well – they're a lot of fun and run really well on every computer made right now. I'd like to develop something casual, but a little more sophisticated, not just a one-play session type game, but one that persists online, something where you get a score you can track over time like an MMO. I do like that idea and I have got something that we're working on here that we'll be talking about it in another year."



If I could choose you all, I would.

He must have been bullied as a child.



"We'll return to the *Supreme Commander* universe, but we'll just have to see when that day is."

Chris Taylor confirming there'll be *Supreme Commander 2* – some day

10 **FUNNY STORIES...:** "Man, back in the old days we were such kids. We did the dumbest, weirdest things when we were back on *Dungeon Siege* and *Total Annihilation*, but we're sort of grown up now, more mature! We used to try and stuff as much pizza as we could in our mouths, fall through the ceiling, run around with a bucket on our heads, or get puking drunk – but on *SC* we didn't do any of that. It's kind of sad isn't it? Probably the funniest thing at the celebration of *SC* was me sticking my mouth over the champagne bottle because I was trying to keep it from spilling onto the floor. Someone snapped a picture of me and I had to run and tackle them to take the camera away. Maybe on *Demigod* we can let ourselves go a bit, break some stuff..." **PCZ**

SFX

INTO **SCI-FI** AND **FANTASY**?
YOU SHOULD GET INTO **SFX**...



REVIEWS ★ FEATURES ★ INTERVIEWS
COMPETITIONS ★ NEWS ★ FREEBIES

ASK FOR **SFX** AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSAGENT! MORE DETAILS AT WWW.SFX.CO.UK

PCZONE

Future Publishing,
100 Brooklands Avenue,
Weybridge, Surrey TW20 2EX
London NW1 6NW

TEL: 020 7042 4720
FAX: 020 7042 4729
MAIL: letters@pczone.co.uk
WEB: www.pczone.co.uk

Question: What is your
favourite children's TV show?

THE INFECTED

Editor Will Porter 020 7042 4725 *Things starring farmers*
Production Editor Richard Cosgrove 020 7042 4723 *The Muppet Show*
Art Editor Dale Pratley 020 7042 4727 *Astro boy*
Deputy Art Editor James Roff 020 7042 4722 *The Magic Roundabout*
Music Editor Ed Zitron 020 7042 4726 *Thomas The Tank Engine*
Section Editor Steve Hogarty 020 7042 4728 *Animaniacs*
Staff Writer Jon 'Log' Blyth 020 7042 4724 *Fingerbob Death Squad*
Editor at Large Jamie Sefton 020 7042 4721 *Muffin the Mule*
Contributors Pavel Barter, Alex Dale, Steve Hill, Martin Korda,
Emma Pratchett and Philip Wand
PCZONE.CO.UK Editor Gavin Ogden 020 7042 4311
Hardware Photography In-house

THE IMMUNE

Group Senior Editor Steve Jarratt
Group Art Director Ian Miller
Creative Director Robin Abbott
Design Director Matthew Williams
Editorial Director Jim Douglas
Production Director Ryan Ferguson 01225 788114
Marketing Manager Emma Cull 020 7042 4233
London Sales Director Malcolm Stoodley
Sales Director Jayne Caple

MARKETING
Acquisitions Product Manager Stuart Brann

REGULATION
Regulation Manager Stuart Agnew

PRINT & PRODUCTION
Production Co-ordinator Michelle McCormack
Production Manager Ralph Stringer
Head of Production Richard Mason

SENSING
Head of International Licensing Tim Hudson
Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244 Fax: +44 (0)1225 732275

COPYRIGHT PUBLISHING LIMITED
Assistant Publisher Lee Nutter
Publishing Director James Birns
Chief Operating Officer Simon Wear
Chief Executive Robert Price

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Phone our UK hotline on 0870 837 4722
Subscribe online at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
Back issues call 0870 442 0957

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE... 24 April

Printed in the UK by Southernprint on behalf of Future.
Never printed in the UK by Midway.
Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd,
East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 0207 429 4000

Future Publishing Ltd is part of Future plc. Future produces
carefully targeted special-interest magazines, websites and
events for people who share a passion. We publish more than
170 magazines and websites and 100 international editions of
our titles are published across the world.
Future plc is a public company
listed on the London Stock
Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com
Non-executive Chairman: Roger Parry
Chief Executive: Steve Spring
Group Finance Director: John Bowman
Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244

PCZONE is the registered trademark of Future
Publishing Limited. All rights reserved.

Future Publishing Limited 2008. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be
reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing
Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The
registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Beaufort Court, 30 Monmouth
Street, Bath BA1 2BW. All information contained in this magazine is for information
only and, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot
accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. Readers are
invited to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of
products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us,
we will automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part
in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any
physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at
your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or
contractors shall be liable for loss or damage.

SUBSCRIBE NOW!
PCZONE

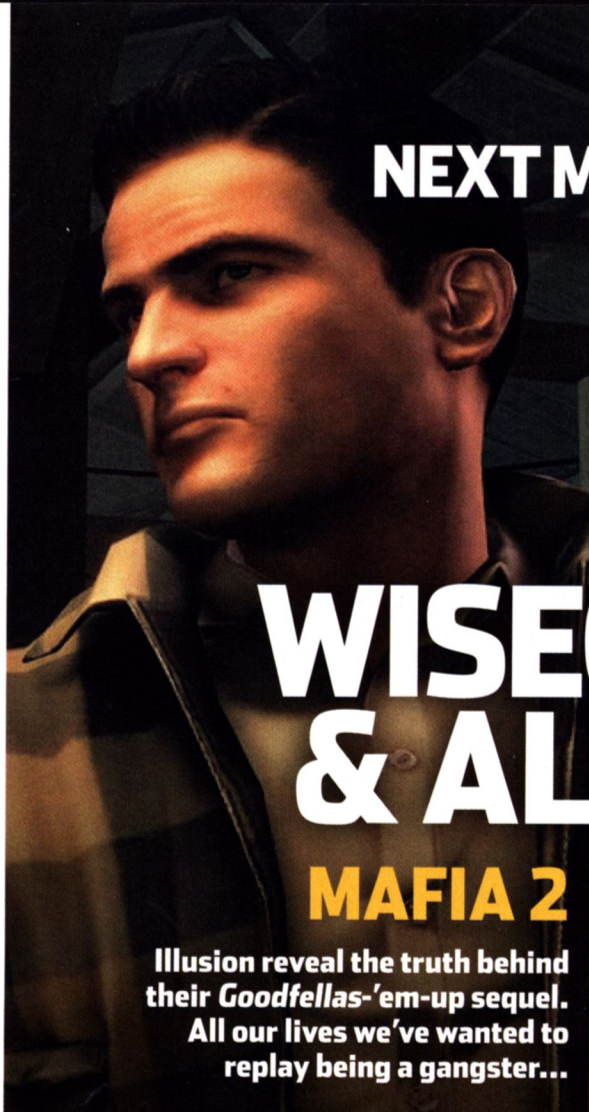
Call 0870 837 4722 or log on to
www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

recycle
When you have finished with
this magazine please recycle it.



All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. PC ZONE is a fickle mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

NEXT MONTH!



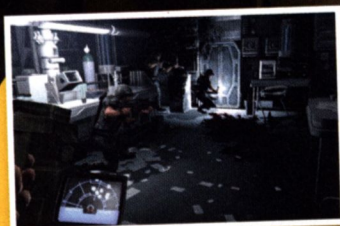
WISEGUYS & ALIENS

MAFIA 2

STARCRRAFT II

Illusion reveal the truth behind
their *Goodfellas*-em-up sequel.
All our lives we've wanted to
replay being a gangster...

"The best work we've ever done" –
we visit Blizzard HQ to play what
the gaming giants reckon is their
best yet.



ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES
Gearbox burst forth with
exclusive details on their
xenomorphic blockbuster.



QUAKE WARS
Splash Damage speak out
on the creation of the battle
against the Strogg.

REVEALED!
GOTHIC 4

This will be big in
Germany. But will the
roleplay tree-fest
work on these shores?

MASSIVE REVIEWS ISSUE



- ASSASSIN'S CREED (FINALLY!)
- RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2
- TURNING POINT



ALSO! Steve Hill joins the team in another protest
in *Second Life*, we go greenskin in *Warhammer Online*
and we reveal a game that's currently top secret...

ON SALE
24 APR

QUEST ACCEPTED

They've Nabbed Me Grapes!



Marvin Galore



DESCRIPTION

Greetings, priest. You join us in troubled times. Our war with the Alliance continues – early this morning, a raiding party got into our supply stores, and made off with a crate of grapes. Now, normally I wouldn't bother about a bunch of grapes, but these were an anniversary present from my wife, who's being held captive in Warblesong Gulch.

So, I'm building this Grape Summoning Device, but to get it working I need two Pristine Felweed Stems. It's annoying, because I'm up to my nuts in Immaculate Felweed Stems, but the arcane mechanisms say that's not good enough. I hear there's a bunch of the Pristine bastards behind that door, but the key is being guarded by the Oblivion Lurcher. And he will only appear when you sound the Dire Trumpet, which is in one of the sparkling boxes strewn across the Velvet Esplanade.

Now, the Velvet Esplanade has long been contested territory, not to mention there's that 40ft tall replica of the crocodiles you were killing two months ago. So, if you're planning on getting anywhere near those boxes you'll need to appease that crocodile. This book I've been reading has a chapter all about how much he loves grapes – but not just any grape, gods no, only the Razorfen Grape, which grows, contrary to its name, in Winterblast Gorge. As you'll be aware, Winterblast Gorge is guarded by an even larger crocodile. I'd give you the book about him, but the pages have been scattered across the Lost Continent. And I'm not sure where that is.

The upshot is, I'm pissed off. And the only thing that calms me down when I'm this worked up is watching someone kill tigers. Be a love and pop into that field, kill 10 tigers, then come back and tell me what it was like. I'd do it myself, but truth be told I've not moved from this spot for four years and I'm not even sure my legs work. I just sent some Dutch lad to do it, but he got called 'afk' and... well, you can see him over there, auto-running into a cliff face. He's been like that for 20 minutes now. I only wanted him to kill eight tigers, but watching him's pissed me off so much it's 10 now.

SUMMARY

Marvin Galore wants you to kill 10 tigers.

Goodbye

Magazines
aren't for
reading...

they're for
reloading.



Get your ass kicked for free on the
mind-blowing jolt public servers or take complete
control with your own jolt clan server.

Take no prisoners. Accept no substitutes.
www.jolt.co.uk

Cyberpower recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

Unleash THE POWER

CREATE THE PC OF YOUR DREAMS



Hard core. Quad-core.



CyberPOWER Inc.

All Desktop systems come with 3 year Limited Warranty



Intel® Core™ 2 Extreme Processor incl. Del & VAT
 (12MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Extreme QX9650 3.00Ghz £ 1439
 (8MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q6700 2.66Ghz £ 1115
 (6MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q9300 2.50Ghz £ 935
 E8500 3.16Ghz £ 935
 E8400 3.00Ghz £ 875
 E8200 2.67Ghz £ 865
 (2MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 E4600 2.40Ghz £ 845
 E4500 2.20Ghz £ 825

Gamer Infinity SLI™ 900

nForce® 750i -SLI™ P5N-D Chipset Motherboard w/ Dual 16x PCI-E
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium
 OCZ® 4096MB PC-6400 DDR2-800 Dual Channel Memory
 400GB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
 2x GeForce® 8800 GT 512MB Video running SLI™ Mode
 18x Double Layer DVD+/-RW Drive & 16x DVD-ROM
 High Definition 7.1 3-D Surround Sound
 Logitech® Keyboard and Optical Mouse
 NZXT® Lexa Blackline Tower Case w/ MOD See Through Window
 Dual Engine High Performance Power Supply
 Monitor not included but optional

£ 825



Intel® Core™ 2 Extreme Processor incl. Del & VAT
 (12MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Extreme QX9650 3.00Ghz £ 1155
 (8MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q6700 2.66Ghz £ 845
 (6MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q9300 2.50Ghz £ 665
 E8500 3.16Ghz £ 659
 E8400 3.00Ghz £ 609
 E8200 2.67Ghz £ 595
 (2MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 E4600 2.40Ghz £ 575
 E4500 2.20Ghz £ 559

Gamer Infinity SLI™ 800

MSI® 650i P6N SLI™-2F Chipset Motherboard
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium
 OCZ® 2048MB PC-6400 DDR2-800 Dual Channel Memory
 320GB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
 GeForce® 8800 GT 512MB Video
 18x Double Layer DVD+/-RW Drive
 NVIDIA® nForce® 6 7.1 3-D Surround Sound
 Logitech® Keyboard & Optical Mouse
 Turbo X-Cruiser® Case 420 Watt w/ See Through Window
 6 Cool Custom Colors to Choose From
 Monitor not included but optional

£ 559



Intel® Core™ 2 Extreme Processor incl. Del & VAT
 (12MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Extreme QX9650 3.00Ghz £ 1095
 (8MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q6700 2.66Ghz £ 785
 (6MB Cache, 1333Mhz FSB)
 Quad Q9300 2.50Ghz £ 605
 E8500 3.16Ghz £ 599
 E8400 3.00Ghz £ 549
 E8200 2.67Ghz £ 535
 (2MB Cache, 1066Mhz FSB)
 E4600 2.40Ghz £ 515
 E4500 2.20Ghz £ 499

Gamer Infinity 700

MSI® P35 Intel® Chipset Motherboard
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Basic
 OCZ® 2048MB PC-6400 DDR2-800 Memory
 250GB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 8MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
 GeForce® 9600 GT 512MB Video
 18x Double Layer DVD+/-RW Drive
 High Definition 7.1 3-D Surround Sound
 Logitech® Keyboard and Optical Mouse
 Nzxt® Hush Silent Case
 Monitor not included but optional

£ 499



Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor
 (800Mhz FSB), incl. Del & VAT
 T9500 4MB L2 Cache, 2.40Ghz £ 849
 T9300 4MB L2 Cache, 2.20Ghz £ 799
 T8300 4MB L2 Cache, 2.00Ghz £ 775

* Images for display only.
Free shipping

Gamer Infinity X5-80

Intel® Centrino® Duo processor technology
 - Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor
 - Mobile Intel® PM965 Express Chipset
 - Intel® PRO/Wireless 4965a/b/g/n Network Connection
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium
 MSI® 163A Notebook Verified by Intel®
 2048 MB DDR-II PC5300 667 Memory £ 775
 120GB SATA150 Hard Drive & 8x DVD+/-RW Drive
 15.4" WXGA+ TFT Display 1280x800
 1000/100/10 Network, 56K V.92 Fax Modem
 3x USB 2.0 Ports, 1x IEEE-1394 Firewire Port, 1 PCMCIA Type II Slot,
 3 Hours Battery Life, Weight only 6.39 Lbs, Free Carrying Case,
 6 Custom Colors to Choose From, 1 Year Limited Warranty



www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk • 0800 019 0863

CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell

Intel®, Intel® logo, Intel Inside®, Intel Inside® logo, Intel® Core™, Intel® Core™ 2 Duo, Intel® Core™ Duo, Core Inside®, Intel® Centrino®, Intel® Centrino® logo, Celeron®, Celeron Inside®, Intel® Xeon™, Intel® SpeedStep™, Itanium®, Itanium Inside®, Intel® Vii™, Intel® vPro™, Pentium®, Pentium Inside®, Pentium® III, Xeon™ and Xeon®, and Xeon Inside® are trademarks or registered trademarks of Intel® Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. CyberPower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright © 2008 CyberPower. All rights reserved. NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries.