

PCZONE

ISSUE 198 **OCTOBER 2008**



EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky

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The Forbidden Zone wants you back...

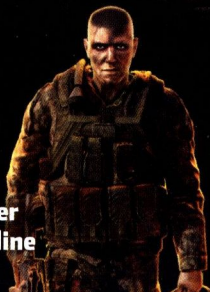
LOTRO: MINES OF MORIA

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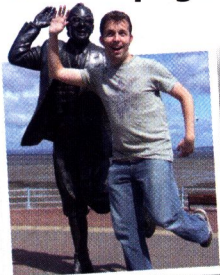
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XBOX 360 LIVE

MEET THE TEAM



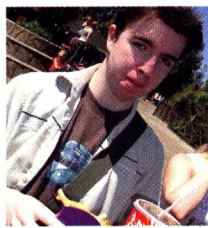
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WILL PORTER

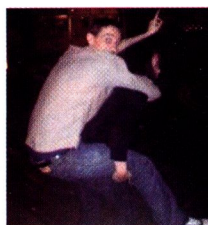
Editor
AGE: 28
LIKES: Farms
DISLIKES: Mischievous Rabbits
FANCIES: A quiet night in
FAVOURITE GAME: *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*
NOW PLAYING: *Team Fortress 2*

Boss Porter has been on an endless trial of stag dos, leading to guffaws from the young un's of the team that he's getting old. Will assures us he isn't and that it's "something that just happens at his age," before wrapping himself in a blanket, turning on the wireless and having his afternoon nap. This is before we shipped him off to Spain for his yearly few days of holiday, which he stunningly accepted, imagining the magazine wouldn't burst into flames in his absence. We sure showed him.



STEVE HOGARTY

Section Editor
 "What's *Clear Sky* like?" we asked. "Sod off," he jeered, before flipping us the bird and jumping a motorbike through a paper hoop.
NOW PLAYING: *STALKER: Clear Sky*



JAMES ROFF

Deputy Art Editor
 The surname "Roff" comes from the practice of dog whispering, in which shamen would say "roff roff" to Alsatians in an attempt to stop them humping the Crown Jewels.
NOW PLAYING: *Adobe CS3*



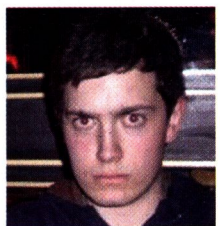
JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Reviews Editor
 This month, Log's brother had his 40th birthday. This gave Log such a taste of mortality that he went into denial, and has been wearing kitten heels and crop tops since.
NOW PLAYING: *Planet Busters*



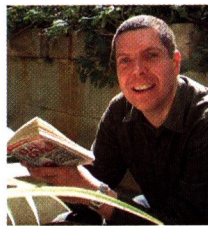
CHRIS EVANS

Work Experience
 Give a workie a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Give him a 40-minute interview recorded on a 10 year-old Dictaphone to transcribe, and he'll change his career plans.
NOW PLAYING: *Age of Conan*



ED ZITRON

Disc Editor
 Ed has decided to play through *Diablo II* again. This will be the ninth time. If the Mental Health Act doesn't cover this, it needs to be changed. Now.
NOW PLAYING: *Diablo II*



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor-at-Large
 Mild-mannered Jamie called EA to bother the minds behind *Mass Effect*, before calling GSK to get a free carton of low-sugar Ribena. He truly lives the life of a rock star.
NOW PLAYING: *With his baby*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Chris, packed lunches, the lovely weather.

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... The Tube being full of sweaty people, forgetting things at work, lost Dictaphones.

What we've been talking about...

- DWARF FORTRESS** 188min Steve's sloppy tunnel-planning leads to a flood in the Hairy Clasp barracks.
- ANAGRAMS** 45min Don't ask about the *Spore Creature Creator* one.
- ED'S DAD** 85min Got briefly excited about the idea of an 'Allo 'Allo MMO. Bless
- DWARF HAMSTERS** 63min Tempting as it may be, don't play with their disproportionately large bollocks.
- DARK KNIGHT'S DRAWING IN** 44min We've been disappearing pencils all week.
- TWO YEAR-OLD EYE DROPS** 5min Well, it's not like it'll turn into poison. Is it?
- RUSSELL T. DAVIES** 59min Log joins the bumpy-face apologist Porter in the "he's not that bad" camp.
- GOOD OLD GAMES** 399min The best old games? Three quid? No DRM? OMGOG.
- GUESS THE SONG** 5min Titty Titty Bum Bum, Titty Titty Bum; Titty Bum Bum Titty Bum, Titty Titty Bum
- IPHONE** 24min Forget data transfer rates: this means Monkey Ball...

WIN!

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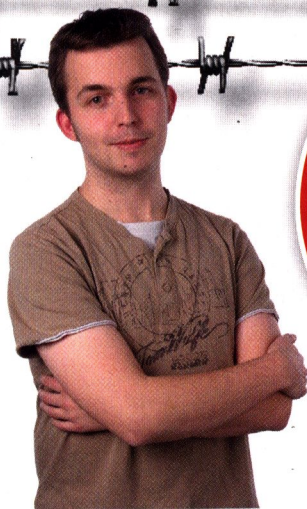
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BOOM AND BUST

NORMALLY WHEN IT comes to economics and political stuff it's easy to watch loud men in ties braying at each other on the news and pretend that it's nothing to do with you. It rarely is: I don't own a house, I barely understand the concept of a stock exchange and don't have a proper job. But then you go to the supermarket and, oh my God have you seen the price of microwave curry? The economy is doomed, and it's taking us all with it.

It'd be easy to say that games will take a downturn along with everything else – let's face it, you don't get many more expensive hobbies than PC gaming. Thing is though, if you look back at some of the nastier depressions in the last century they've been accompanied by an entertainment boom. In the Great Depression, Hollywood flourished – cinema was a cheap day out for the whole family. Similarly, in the early '80s, miners' strikes and early-Thatcher gloom was met with an explosion in home video sales and the VHS/Betamax wars.

Gaming provides lengthy, replayable entertainment without travel costs or rip-off ticket fees, so I reckon we're safe for a while. You may make less off-the-cuff purchases in Gamestation (and BitTorrent may be tapped heavier than it's accustomed to) but *World of Warcraft* and Steam growth will keep on trucking.

Of course, we could always read a good book or take a walk in the park. But I think we both know that that isn't going to happen...

Will Porter

Will Porter editor
wporter@futurenet.co.uk

**EXCLUSIVE!
FIRST UK
REVIEW OF
STALKER'S
PREQUEL**

52

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

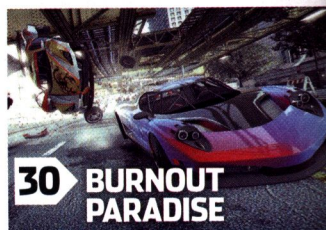
STALKER: CLEAR SKY

Will the prequel fix up the flawed masterpiece that was *Shadow of Chernobyl*?



46 **LOTRO: MINES OF MORIA**

Exclusive first look at the new LOTRO MMO expansion.



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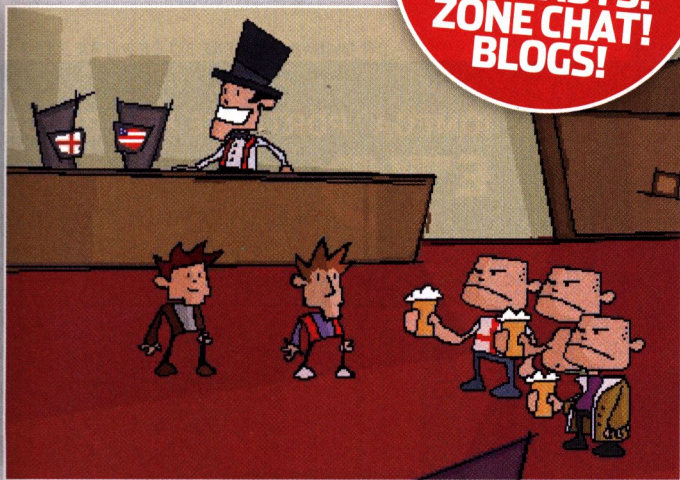




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98 **BEN THERE, DAN THAT!**
Dan Marshall takes us through the creation of a soon-to-be-classic.

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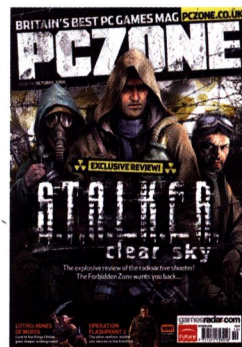
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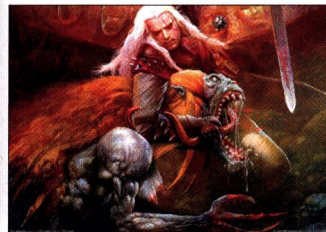
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89 FREEPLAY

Thriftmeisters Ed Zitron and Steve Hogarty bring you more free games, mods and map packs.

Too busy? PC ZONE in 65 words...

This month Steve heads to the Forbidden Zone to review *STALKER: Clear Sky*, and Ed is booted across to Boston to take the first glance at the new *LOTRO* expansion. Dan Marshall talks about the development of *Ben There, Dan That!*, Will looks at *Burnout Paradise* with his friends at Criterion, and to top it off, Log enjoys the delights of SEGA's action-packed *Space Siege*.

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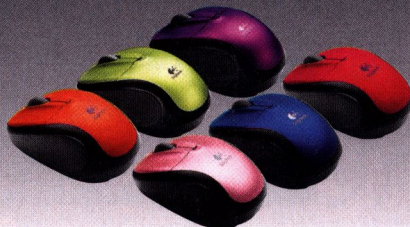
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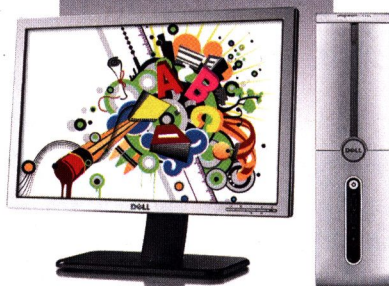
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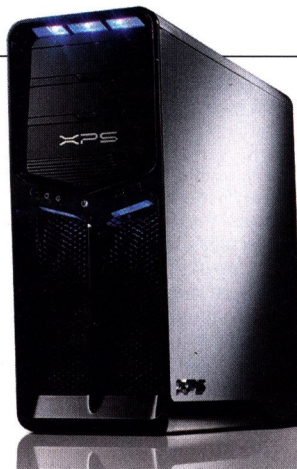
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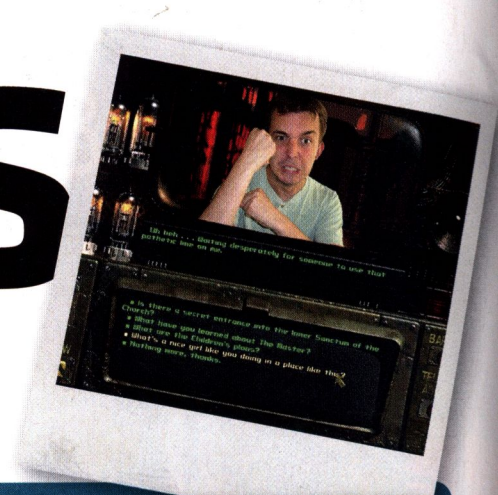
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LETTERS



Will Porter dabbles in a spot of audience participation



KING OF LETTERS



HIGH STREET WOE

The other day I went to my local game shop to swap some games, as I do every now and then. While there I was amazed to see that what used to be a full three-shelf rack of PC games to swap had become a single one. I then looked around and saw in sadness that games for the PlayStation 3, Wii and Xbox 360 had monopolised the place. It's sad enough seeing that GAME have ceased doing swaps on PC games, but now there doesn't seem to be anywhere else that does it.

The console games have taken over. A while ago you could buy PC games in Asda, but that's now history. How is it possible that something as loved as PC games are disappearing from shops? I just hope that we don't have to get to point that we will have to use the internet every time we want to buy a new game.

The Spaniard, Oscar Angel-Baro

I can see why GAME, Gamestation and their ilk are abandoning game swapsies – not that I'm happy with it. PC games devalue far quicker than console ones, so there's less profit, and PC games are increasingly tied to online activations and subscriptions that muddy the water when it comes to secondhand sales.

Your other point, is entirely valid – and one that I think that all of us will have noticed. Microsoft's promises of a huge retail push for Games for Windows have not materialised, and PC games are increasingly being pushed to the back of the store – and often out the back door.

I don't think this is just due to online sales and piracy. The fact is that PC gaming is in a state of flux and change (that's "flux and change", not "decline") while consoles are racking up traditional box-sale profits like no-one's business.

WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're at all PC-literate (which we're guessing you are) fingers to keyboard. The winner will get £100 worth of free games, and decent ones from a genre you like as well. Not just any old shit. (The one's you get won't be the ones we've pictured by the way, unless you're mad keen on them.)

We're entering a new age of micro-transactions, subscriptions and online profiling with *World of Warcraft*, *Battlefield Heroes* and *Steam* – and that doesn't translate to the shop owner or marketing man's mind.

That said, I went into Sainsbury's the other day and there was a display of 200 copies of *Sims Life Stories* by the door. We live in interesting times don't we?

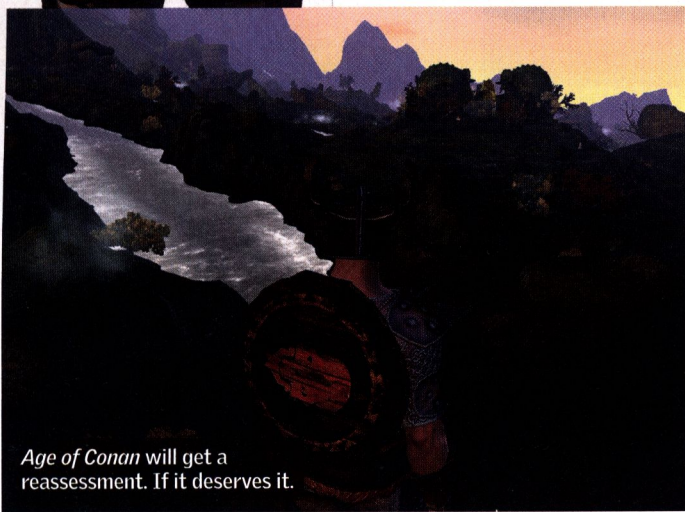
OPINIONS EH?

Just read Will's editorial regarding MMOs and felt the need to write and commend you. Truth be told, Ed Zitron's review of *Age of Conan* nearly made me email – not that he was that wrong in what he said you understand, most of his comments were going in the right direction, I just thought he was far, far too harsh. But it's not his opinion that annoyed me the most, as he is entitled to it.

The thing is – your opinions matter! You have a very loyal fan base, I'm a subscriber myself, and I would bet that many readers base their game purchasing decisions on your reviews. I would also bet that if

a game doesn't get a Recommended rating or above in your magazine then they won't buy it unless they are especially fans of that genre or game series. That is the case with me and *Age of Conan* – I loved Robert E. Howard's novels so I bought the game pre-review. What annoys me is that had I just gone on Ed's review I wouldn't have bought it.

I can't stress that bit enough – I would not have bought the game based on Ed's review. I wouldn't have bought it and I would have missed a game I really thoroughly enjoy and is much better than the score given. I know everyone is entitled to their opinion, after all that's what a review



Age of Conan will get a reassessment. If it deserves it.

"Even some newer PC exclusives like *Crysis* and *STALKER* seem a little bit sluggish"

Richard Copperwaite claims to have a cure for slow shooters



Crysis can certainly be tweaked in favourable directions.

is, but that's why giving a second opinion or revisiting games such as MMOs down the line is such a great idea.

I know giving second opinions on every game like you used to is a big task but maybe the big reviews could have this feature? I presume there was obviously a bit of backlash to the *AOC* review which prompted the editorial so maybe others feel the same. Even if the suggestion of second opinions isn't brought back, I applaud you for going back and taking another look at MMOs.

Chris Crowther

Reappraising MMOs (or any game, really) after they've had updates and patches is more a reflection of the way that games can now improve after release than an attempt to right any perceived wrongs in our original review, and I still stand by Ed's opinion. But if we didn't discuss the state of play with different games then we'd be doing readers and the games in question a disservice.

As for the second opinion feature in reviews - I think it made matters more confusing for people buying games than less, being the definition of sending out mixed messages. This said, I'm strongly considering introducing

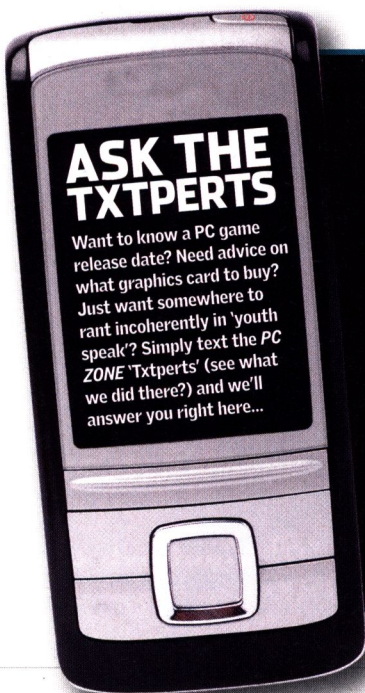
a variant on "What's on the *PCZ* hard drive?" where we can follow up our reviews a month later with the thoughts of staff members on recent releases This will accompany a new "State of Play" feature in Reviews that tracks post-release MMO improvement, or the lack thereof.

PERFORMANCE TIP

Have you guys noticed that every PC game made for the Xbox 360 has controls that aren't as responsive as

they should be? Even some newer PC exclusives like *Crysis* and *STALKER* seem a little bit sluggish, right? (Try playing *Counter-Strike* and compare and contrast.)

Although toning down the graphics might help, the real answer lies in DirectX itself. You see, Microsoft have mucked things up again by adding a setting that makes no sense to anyone: the "Pre-Render Limit". This basically means all new DirectX games generate three frames before processing the controls... that's three frames, a good 10th



ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

Is there a chance you could use the might of *PC ZONE* to discover how the bods in Russia are doing on making *Black Shark*?

Carl

We'll try and get something for next issue. For those not in the know, *Black Shark* is a fearsome helicopter sim from the guys who brought you *Lock On: Modern Air Combat*.

Don't put a game on your cover. Put a chick in leather. Can't fail. I'd buy it anyroad.

Clegz

Cheers Clegz. Your advice, as always, proves invaluable.

Which developer has the nicest beard?

Anonymous

Warren Spector has the nicest beard.



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SPEEDBALL 2: TOURNAMENT

Sent in by Rob Palethorpe

PC ZONE score: 66%

You know how it is. You're browsing in your local games emporium, when suddenly your eye is caught by the words BARGAIN and BIN, and nestling at the bottom is a shiny remake of a game you love. A game you broke countless joysticks playing. One you played so much that you even had dreams about it. For me that game was *Speedball 2*.

But, here's the thing. *Speedball 2: Tournament* is crap. Utter bilge. And, although it's cursed with the worst front-end in gaming history, the interface is more inspiring than the game itself. So, just avoid it. Even if it does look like a bargain.

Your shout: 37%



"This ice cream tastes like shit."

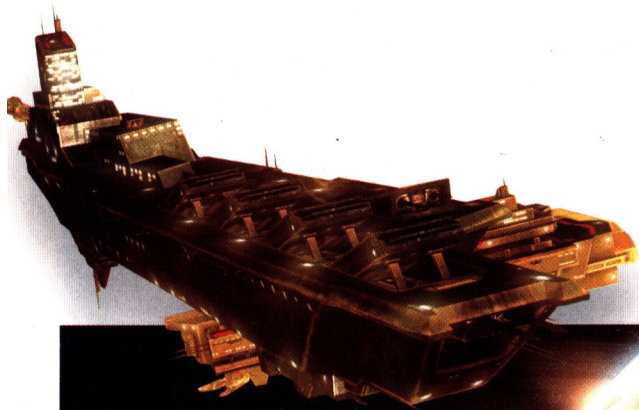
Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Warren. Lovely Warren.

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.

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That's no moon. It's an exploding spaceship.

of a second, for your head to be taken clean off by a sniper.

NVIDIA have cottoned on to this worrying development, and in their latest driver release, they've allowed you to change the Pre-Render Limit in the NVIDIA *Control Panel*. About time too. *RivaTuner* is another free graphics tweaking program that gives you the same control over your controls. I recommend changing the limit to 1, or even 0 if you really need it. Go, do it now! It adds at least 25% to *Alone in the Dark's* review score!

Richard Copperwaite

"Few games match the crystal-clear movement of *Counter-Strike*"

Are you an undercover NVIDIA PR man? If so, well done – you've bagged yourself some coverage. If not, cheers for the tip. I can't say I've had too many problems with *Crysis* and *STALKER* myself, but you're right in that few games match the crystal-clear movement of *Counter-Strike*. Unless it can magically turn off irritating bats and insta-death I'm not over sure it can salvage *AITD* though.

SINS OF PIRACY

Reading through the August issue, there's a few references to piracy and the harm it does gaming in

general, and more specifically PC gaming, with some software houses becoming reluctant to develop games on a platform that's arguably more susceptible to piracy than consoles.

Well I'm sorry software houses, but unless you put some genuine efforts into protecting your product, you're always going to have to put up with it. It beggars belief they complain about theft, but seem to make little progress in making the software unusable unless it's genuine.

I have a car. It has locks and an alarm. It keeps it safe. Software

houses should stop moaning and protect their efforts. Take *Sins Of A Solar Empire* for example. I bought it and installed it. It didn't ask for a registration key. I can also play it without the DVD in my PC. The game itself has never required the reg key. I almost asked myself what's the point buying it, if that's their attitude to piracy theft.

Phil Yockney

My young liege Steve Hogarty has asked to respond to your letter. He begins thusly: "Developers can't win can they? Haven't you noticed the arcane wizardry

employed by most publishers desperate to keep pirates at bay? Millions are spent trying (and failing) to prevent pirates cracking and distributing games – so the problem is certainly nothing to do with developer inaction.

"Sins of a Solar Empire, despite appearances, is progress. Rather than being vehemently anti-piracy, Ironclad are, in their words, pro-customer. Purchase their game through Stardock Central and you're guaranteed online support and updates, instead of staggeringly restrictive activation codes and wankish faffing. You should buy the game because that's their attitude to piracy, not in spite of it."

THE WONDER DUFF

It's about time the duff people of the UK and the world took a stand. I'm Duff and proud, and am always glad to see the many references to my fine name in your magazine. Imagine my surprise then when I rush out to buy a game that you earmark as 'duff', only to find that it's pants. Please can you ask reviewers to amend this, and remember that Duff is good.

Fergus Duff

That's the duffest email we've had all month Fergus. Congratulations, and my best to Duffs everywhere.

What's on the PCZ hard drive?



WOW: LICH KING BETA

Yay! It appeared right at the end of the mag's schedule, so we'll have the full story next issue. Death Knights here we come...

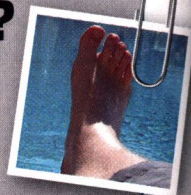
DWARF FORTRESS (STILL)

Favourite dwarves dying. Mass suicide. Riots over corpses thrown into rubbish pits. The baron's consort's tomb filled with dresses. Tax collectors demanding copper statues for their bedrooms. What sort of game is this?

KAROSHI 2.0

Seriously, if you haven't played this then do so. The most inspired lunacy you'll ever discover. Make sure you've got an audio CD nearby when you play though.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE? THIS MONTH: CAFF



MAX PAYNE 2

Still worth a play if you've not before. The coolest bit is where the piano slows down in bullet time.

STALKER: SOC

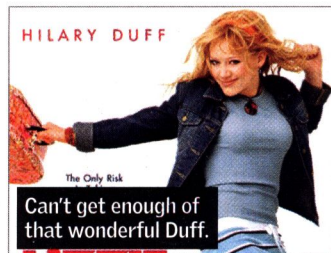
I re-installed it with some graphical mods. Still as eerie as when I first played it – but not sure whether I'll see it through to the end.

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

This shooter never ages. Still as good as it ever was.

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

HILARY DUFF



The Only Risk
Can't get enough of that wonderful Duff.

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COVER STORY

STALKER: CLEAR SKY

Another day, another nuclear wasteland - but will *Clear Sky* be able to deliver a breath of fresh air?



THE ORIGINAL *STALKER* is a game you take pride in enjoying. When so many people are repelled by its roughness, the ability to see through the problems and recognise the diamond quality beneath makes you feel privileged. *Clear Sky's* new faction dynamics lend a deep level of playability, seemingly absent from the first game, to the Zone's landscapes. *Clear Sky* isn't just a sequel, it's developer GSC's second shot at a game that wasn't quite what they had hoped for. If that sounds negative, it shouldn't – what you're seeing is greatness being built upon greatness. But has the Zone become any more welcoming?

Page
52



Box happy

I'M GOING TO take a break from writing about silly things like how awesome the *Battlefield* theme tune is, and how more developers need to invest in decent intro videos so I can spend my Friday evenings watching them on YouTube in my pants, scooping forkfuls of chicken pasta into my mouth while tears stream down my face. Instead we're going to talk about something that affects us all: game boxes.

Except that's not strictly true, it no longer affects everybody. For all the good Valve's done with online content delivery, they're destroying the tangible packaging to which we owe the security of so many precious discs. The lack of packaging is for many the final hurdle on the road to a full-on Steam embrace. And when Valve are made to put out a boxed version of say, *Left 4 Dead*, they'll do a terrible job of it, with lousy box art, flimsy casing and, if past releases are anything to go by, a stinking PDF manual. It's like asking somebody to wash the dishes, and then they smash all your plates and shrug and say, "Oh well, I guess you shouldn't have asked me to wash the dishes, durr!"

On a positive note, the hellish world of plastic casing means that when a publisher decides to put out a nice box (*Morrowind* and the original *Splinter Cell* being my personal favourites, if you're keeping count), it's a real treat. Honestly, give me a nice box and I'm set for the afternoon.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty section editor

TERRAN IT UP

Steve Hogarty finds a way home in *X3: Terran Conflict*

PUBLISHER Deep Silver DEVELOPER Egosoft WEBSITE www.egosoft.com ETA Winter

ASK ANY FAN of the *X* games what planet he longs most to see cartwheeling about his monitor in the midst of battle, and he'll gaze out of the nearest window and bellow "Earth!". Of course, as any PC gamer worth their PC gaming salt knows, the *X* universe is set in a close-knit and closed-off community of systems far from our own. But now, with the standalone expansion *X3: Terran Conflict*, our planet and its neighbours have come thundering into view. I, for one, pooped a space-brick at the very thought.

Egosoft's Bernd Lehahn recently talked me through the huge changes being made as he weaved between the struts of a particularly massive solar power plant situated on Neptune's rings.

The previous game in the series, *X3: Reunion*, started development as an expansion to *X2* before warranting its own, standalone release. *X3: Terran Conflict* is less of a departure from its predecessor, using the same engine, but



Who'd build a space station so close to those asteroids?

brings with it a host of upgrades, features, completely reworked ideas and of course, the Sol System.

Slaves you acquire on your *Elite*-style business ventures can be trained up as soldiers, which you can then employ to board and take control of ships. Your men will swarm from your cargo hold, using their spacesuits to propel themselves to the surface of the targeted

ship before cutting holes in its hull and clambering inside. And we're promised we'll hear the interior scuffle as it happens, while you lurk outside, ensuring the target's shields remain disabled.

All-new mouse controls bring things more in line with *Freelancer's* control method – which I only mention because it works so bloody well. The interface has been remade again, allowing squads of



Space remains improbably colourful.



You still can't land on planets, sadly.



Is this Earth? No!

STOP PRESS!

STAR TREK ONLINE

It's been confirmed, though we all knew it anyway, that *City of Heroes* creators Cryptic are at the reins of the Enterprise -em-up MMO. Hooray.

WARHAMMER ONLINE

Some of the more interesting content has been scrapped from the upcoming *Warhammer Online* – namely the Greenskin hometown and some classes.

HACKSPIT

The *hackspit* *PC Gamer* Showdown is still edging towards us, taking place on the 27 and 28 September. *Left 4 Dead* will be there! You like *Left 4 Dead* don't you?

30

Burnout Paradise

Arcade racing explodes onto PC, showering us with deadly shrapnel.



38

Operation Flashpoint 2

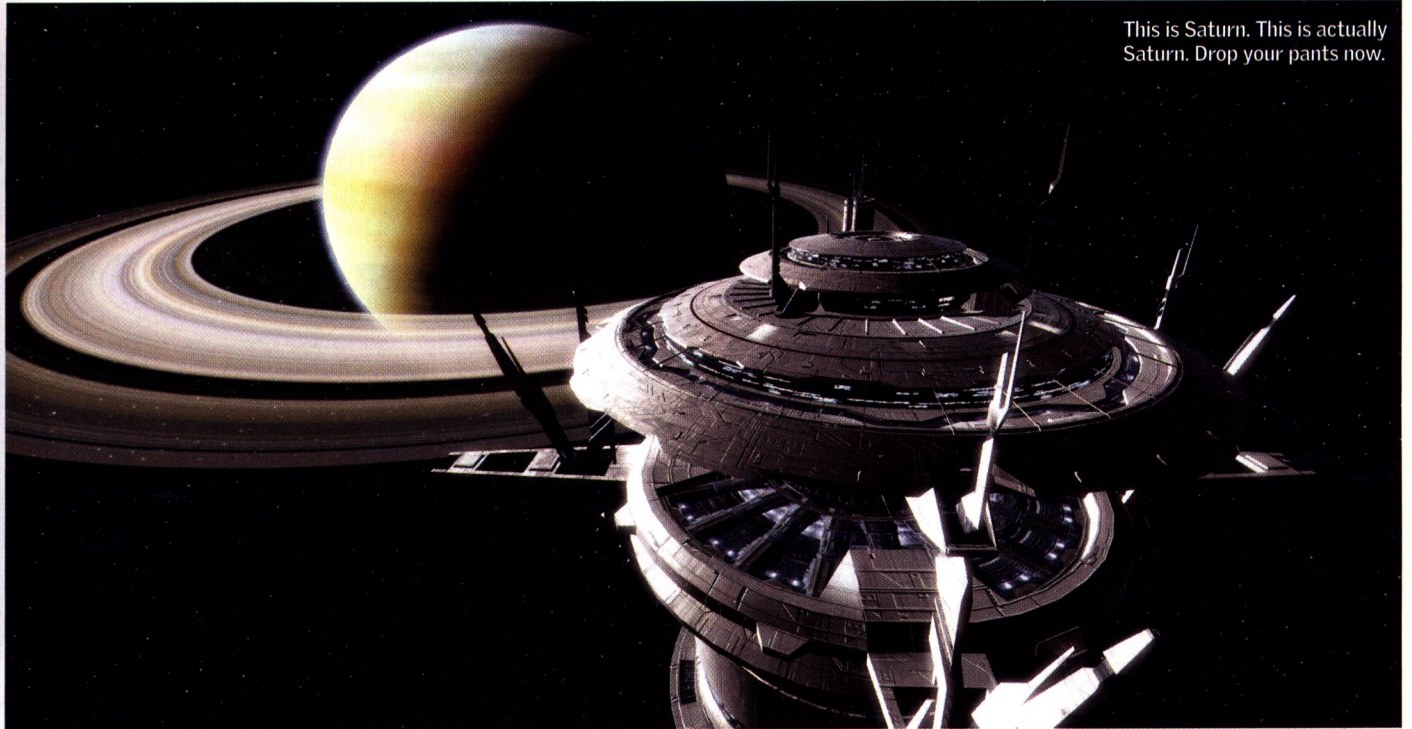
The hellishly realistic war simulator is back, and it's more brutal than ever.



42

Wolfenstein

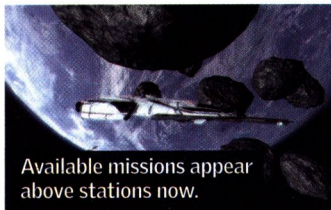
Yes. Believe it or not, this multi-coloured bedbug is from *Wolfenstein*.



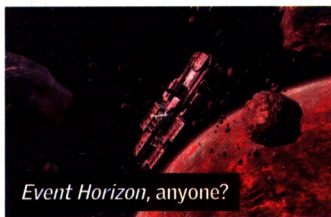
This is Saturn. This is actually Saturn. Drop your pants now.

AI-controlled wingmen to be more simply ordered around. New weapons and better missions are delivered by the new Terran race (that'll be us original humans), alongside insultingly huge space constructions. Of course, you'll still be able to build factories and become grotesquely wealthy by manipulating the in-game economy, and the voice-acting is bound to be as shockingly bad as ever, but this is ultimately a service to X's long standing fan base.

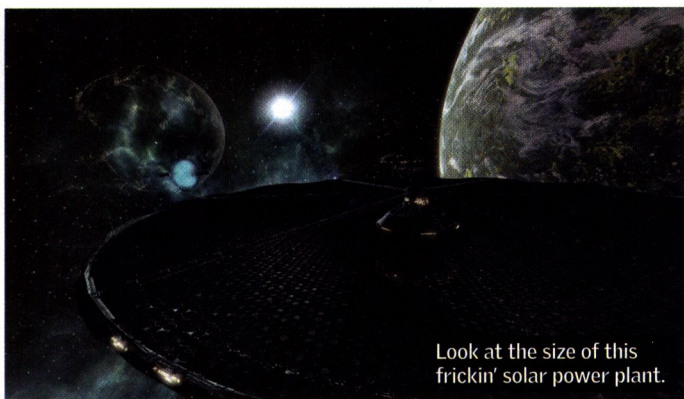
This looks to be a doff of the cap, and a rather substantial update to a game already worth sinking hundreds of hours into.



Available missions appear above stations now.



Event Horizon, anyone?

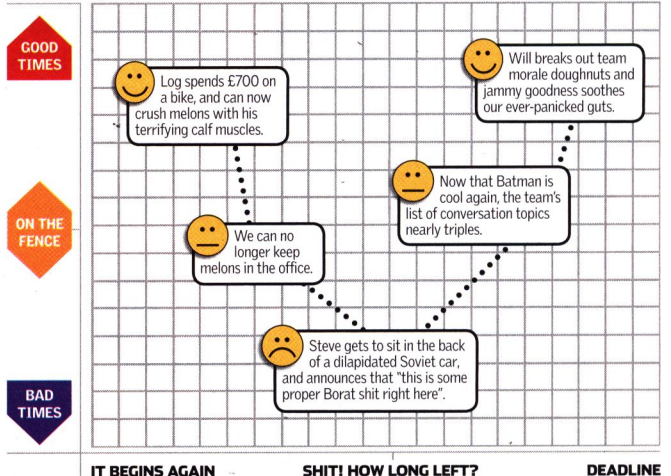


Look at the size of this frickin' solar power plant.

STUFF

Though we'd love to say Microsoft have bowed to pressure from our recent scathing report on Games For Windows LIVE, there are probably different reasons that caused Microsoft to scrap the fees associated with their Gold service. They've just announced that you will no longer have to pay to experience cross-platform play between PC and 360, and that they'll shortly be introducing a Marketplace service, similar to Xbox LIVE's, offering demos, movies and other bits. Just like, you know, the internet we've already got...

Life is a roller coaster



GAMING KILLED THE RADIO STAR

Saving the music industry from a miserable death, one licensed track at a time



Reporter
Pavel Barter

JET, ARCTIC MONKEYS, The Darkness, Good Charlotte, The Hives, Franz Ferdinand."

Steve Schnur, EA's global exec of music and marketing, is reeling off a list of recording artists and there's no end in sight. "Wolfmother, Bullet for My Valentine, Sum 41," he continues. "30 Seconds To Mars, The Bravery, Maximo Park..." Schnur hasn't got an angry teenager in a headlock, intent on reading out the contents of the youngster's iPod; he's citing acts that have appeared in EA games over the last seven years – each of whom have countless new fans and several sports cars in swimming pools to thank for it.

You see, the recording industry is in a right state these days. Ever since it launched a panicked assault on Napster in 2000, sending music fans scuttling toward BitTorrent, CD sales have been in decline and retailers have been wringing their hands like medieval widows. These days a recording on its lonesome has the



monetary value of a raw, dropped sausage. Just ask Radiohead, who didn't even charge for their last album's release online.

"The labels have been in total denial of what went on when it came to file and song sharing," says DJ and remixer Junkie XL, best known for his 2002 take on Elvis Presley's *A Little Less Conversation*. "Instead of embracing the internet for new ways of distributing music, they started fighting it. Today, those record companies are still in denial. Instead of coming up with a creative solution, they demand a higher percentage of everything an artist makes."

NO DOUBT

Jim Guerinot, Gwen Stefani's manager, contends that "the traditional selling of music through CDs is on its way out. But I don't think that we should pine for the days of sitting on a beanbag with a bong, reading the sleeves of a gatefold album after listening to FM radio. There are a lot of other means in which we can get music out there." One of the biggest means of all? "Videogames."

Schnur reckons that games offer a golden opportunity for the music industry. He should know, having spent the first half of his career with MTV, Warners Bros and EMI: "A recent poll of gamers aged 13 to 32 revealed that 55% of them learned about a new artist after hearing a song in a videogame. Over one-third downloaded a song because they heard it in a game. More than 20% purchased that artist's CD."

"Now consider that an average of 2.5 people play each game sold. Each game is played an average of 50 hours per player. On the game software, songs rotate and are identified on screen at least twice per each hour of play.

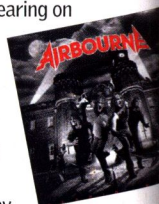


FIFA '09 is projected to sell more than seven million units. That means that any given song in that game will be heard and identified nearly one billion times. No medium can deliver instantaneous exposure on this extraordinary a level."

Games have always been alluring for recording artists, Guerinot is also Trent Reznor's manager. Reznor was such a fan of *Doom* that he worked on the music for the first *Quake*, which goes a long way to explain the presence of NIN logos on ammo boxes. As for licensed music though, with others on Guerinot's roster, like The Offspring, appearing on

Madden NFL 09, it's a phenomenon that is still in the process of skyrocketing. What's more, the sudden surge is being aided and abetted (some might say spearheaded) by the sudden success of console games like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*.

After the launch of *Guitar Hero III* sales of DragonForce's album *Inhuman Rampage* increased week-on-week by 126% – and that was simply through having a track called *Through the Fire and Flames* as an unlockable bonus track. Mötley Crüe's single *Saints of Los Angeles*, meanwhile, was downloaded over 47,000 times onto Xbox 360 *Rock*





Wasteland harmonies

Pete Hines, Bethesda's frontman and marketing guru, on unearthing ancient melodies for *Fallout 3*



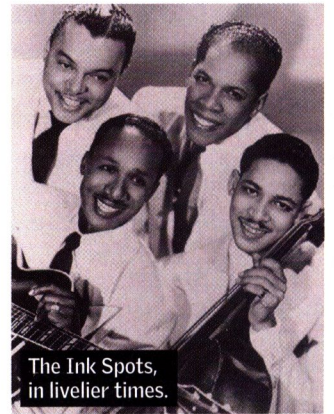
Q *Fallout 3*'s radios feature songs from the '40s and the '50s. How do the likes of The Ink Spots add texture to the game's post-apocalyptic world?

A "A big part of the original *Fallout* games was this music: the pre-war aspect of the world, set against the post-war destruction players find themselves in. The music and all the iconic images are a big part of the feel of *Fallout* and how those two things exist in the same space."

How did you go about sourcing the music you'd use?

"We worked with someone who does it for a living who helped us with our wish list. They turned the list into a reality, and supplemented it with a few great suggestions that we ended up using as well."

Has the copyright of any of these songs run out? If so are they in the public domain and does this impact the cost of using them?



The Ink Spots, in livelier times.

"No, they aren't public domain. The recordings are still owned by the various music publishers and so you have to get the rights. They are not free, I assure you. The music industry is now very much aware of the videogame industry and the popularity of videogames thanks to likes of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*."



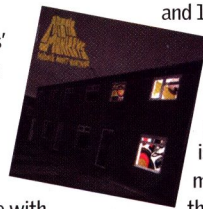
Mafia II will play host to hours of period music.

Band accounts, but barely hit 10,000 purchases over other distributors like iTunes and Amazon.

RETRO RADIO

What's more, this isn't restricted to new music. More and more developers have realised that period games can get added texture and atmosphere through the use of music contemporary to their gameplay. As such, Billie Holiday and Bing Crosby crackle out of ancient gramophones in *BioShock*, while the

future '50s ambience of *Fallout 3* will be given foundation by tracks like the Ink Spots' *I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire* and Roy Brown's *Butcher Pete*. So it is then that games now function as a form of radio, in a literal sense with games like *Grand Theft Auto 4*, and are hassle-free earners for lesser-known acts. According to ASCAP, the American music rights organisation,



artists can get one off fees of between \$2,500 (£1,270) to \$20,000 (£10,153), for appearing in a title. Or they might earn royalties, making between eight and 15 cents for each game sold.

Artists are pawing back pennies to pay for their sojourns in rehab. But what's in it for gamers? "Licensed music in games is selected with love and care by music supervisors who are part of the development teams," says Junkie XL, who's remixed tracks for games like *Need For Speed ProStreet*. "So it'll enhance the gameplay quite a bit. Because the gameplay is enhanced, people tend to love the music more than if they had listened to it in a different environment."

NEW CHANNELS

Ever so slowly, record labels are dipping their toes into the scary cesspit of gaming. Junkie XL is signed to LA-based Artwerk, half of which is owned by EA, the other half by bona fide record label Network. The deal, he says, allows artists to reach licensing channels that the traditional industry has been slow to explore.

Warner Music Group have signed a deal with Acclaim for the MMO *Dance! Online*, while the remaining Beatles, notoriously cagey about exploiting their back catalogue, are in talks about handing over their song bank for a game.

But, inevitably, the games industry will steal a slice of the record industry's pie over their own downloadable services. An option, perhaps, for Steam? Valve's Doug Lombardi is staying schtum.

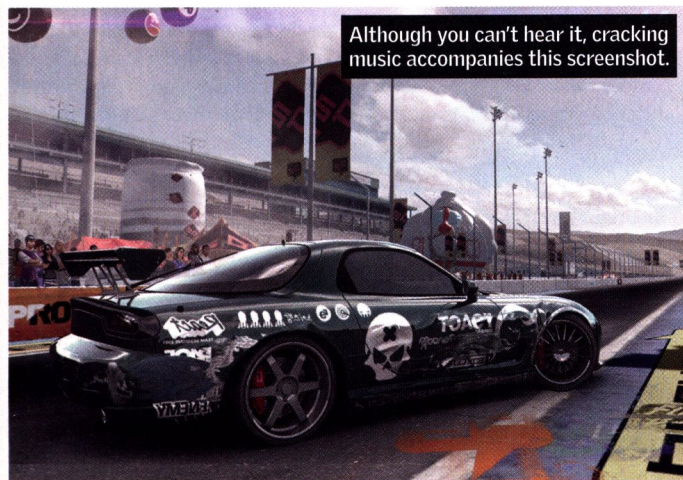
"Looking forward, we'd love to have more forms of digital entertainment available to those using Steam," he says. "Which other forms of media and when we launch those are big questions that we're starting to mull over and discuss. Please stay tuned for more on that."

Ultimately, says Schnur (once he finishes name-dropping rock stars appearing in EA's games), game song selections are now impacting radio, TV, and even sporting events.

"This has changed the business faster than perhaps anything since the dawn of recorded music," he says. "In under six years, videogames have become the most effective and essential way of breaking music in our world today." **PCZ**



"Games are hassle-free earners for lesser-known acts"



Although you can't hear it, cracking music accompanies this screenshot.

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

PCZONE Charts



- 1 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 2 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: FREETIME**
Issue 194 70%
- 3 ↑ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 4 — **MASS EFFECT**
Issue 195 92%
- 5 ↓ **AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES**
Issue 196 73%
- 6 — **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 89%
- 7 ↑ **ASSASSIN'S CREED**
Issue 194 72%
- 8 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**
Issue 188 38%
- 9 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE**
N/A
- 10 ↓ **SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE**
Issue 193 91%
- 11 ↑ **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
Issue 180 85%
- 12 ↑ **CRYSIS**
Issue 188 92%
- 13 ↑ **WARHAMMER 40,000: DOW SOULSTORM**
Issue 192 81%
- 14 ↑ **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION**
Issue 175 91%
- 15 ↓ **RACE DRIVER: GRID**
Issue 195 88%
- 16 ↑ **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 17 ↓ **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008**
Issue 188 71%
- 18 NEW **THE SIMS 2: CASTAWAY STORIES**
Issue 193 48%
- 19 NEW **TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2**
Issue 194 83%
- 20 RE **MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X DELUXE**
Issue 179 89%



SLAY WHAT?

Dragons, actually – in the divine sequel, *Divinity 2: Ego Draconis*

WEBSITE larian.com ETA Spring 2009

DIVINE DIVINITY MAY have had the worst title in role-playing history, but it was a fantastically detailed RPG world, with a great score and some memorable characters. *Divinity 2: Ego Draconis* looks like it's going to use that foundation and build high.

Players will start their adventure in Fairglow, a town of retired wizards where Dragon Slayers must go to become infused with dragon memories and are given a power to see ghosts that turns a man's eyes silver. Larian have rejected day/night cycles and obvious mini-maps to encourage that old-school sense of discovery and exploration, and they're filling the world with interesting characters and events to make that exploration worthwhile. If you see some rabbits, for example, with one looking a bit different, you should investigate.

The freedom, and the subtle impacts of your decisions, must make playtesting and debugging an absolute nightmare. Take the short story of Dana, Derk and

Carl. Dana is married to Carl, but in love with Derk, who runs a local stall. Dana's so desperate she gives you a message to pass to Derk, which is where your fun begins. Show it to Carl, and you'll get an amulet, but Derk will raise his prices. Attempt blackmail, and his shop will be completely closed to you. Alternatively, you can just keep the message, and leave the unhappy marriage intact.

This will give you the opportunity – when it transpires later in the game that Carl has a murderous past – to turn him in, then present him with evidence of his wife's infidelity as he stewes in jail. Nothing quite like kicking a man when he's down, but the fact that this possibility has been scripted into the game is faintly mind-boggling.

With a strong (and enjoyably European) sense of humour, and made with a profound love of the genre and RPG craft, *Divinity 2: Ego Draconis* should be an absolute better. However, don't hold your breath for a 2008 release. That would be unhealthy.



1 THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE

It's not what happens when you put two copies of *The Sims* in a bun, it's a big box that simpletons just have to buy.



7 ASSASSIN'S CREED

Regardless of needing a supercomputer to run his story at low settings, a fair amount of people want to be Altair.



16 AGE OF EMPIRES III

It's old, it's fun, and it's somehow managed to vault and stagger back into the charts like an aged spider.



19 RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

It's rappelled back into the nation's hearts after a brief hiatus, and we can't fault punters for loving it.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

THE MAN WHO'S KICKING THE HOBBIT

ERIC 'GIZ' GEWIRTZ - DIRECTOR AT PANDEMIC STUDIOS



With *Star Wars: Battlefront* Pandemic successfully took the entirety of the *Star Wars* saga and created a *Battlefield*-lite multiplayer shooter using nothing but Pritt Stick and glitter. Now, they're aiming to do the same with *Lord of the Rings*, right down to the very last dwarf...

Q How does *LOTR: Conquest* compare to *Star Wars: Battlefront*?

A *Conquest* shares similarities to *Battlefront* in its approach to delivering the feeling of reliving the epic battles you saw in the films, any way you want. As with *Battlefront*, we will be dropping the player in the middle of the conflicts and letting them use their tools to figure out how to accomplish their objectives and win the battle.

Unlike *Battlefront*, *Conquest* has a robust melee combat system as well as ranged combat, siege equipment and creatures to control, three times the amount of units on the battlefield, and a lot more heroes and playable characters.

What battles from the movies and books will we be taking part in?

Conquest will have every major battle from all three films, and a bunch of additional locations familiar to fans. Players will be able to fight in Helm's Deep, Minas Tirith, Pelennor Fields, The Black Gate, the Battle of the Last Alliance, the Mines of Moria, Isengard,

Osgiliath, Minas Morgul, Mount Doom, Weathertop, Rivendell, and of course, The Shire.

What characters and classes will be featured?

In addition to the Warrior, Archer, Scout and Mage, a ton of unlockable heroes will be available. On the good side you will have Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Gandalf, Frodo and more. On the evil side Saruman, the Ringwraiths, the Witch King, the Balrog and Sauron himself will all be playable. Also, both sides have playable giants, like Trolls and Ents, as well as horses and wargs, and a bunch of siege equipment.

How will boss characters such as the Balrog and Gandalf function?

The heroes and bosses work like powerful versions of the base classes. So Gandalf plays like a Mage, but with unique attacks and special abilities. As the Balrog, you can use his massive fire sword to set you enemies aflame, as well as pick up enemy units and toss them across the battlefield.

LOTR: Conquest will most definitely contain Oliphants.



How will the single player campaign pan out?

There are two full single player campaigns in the game. The first one, "The War of the Ring", is played from the good guys' perspective. It faithfully follows the events from the trilogy, but lets the player determine how they want to achieve victory in the major battles.

The second campaign, "The Rise of Sauron" assumes that Frodo failed in destroying the Ring and Sauron was able

to retrieve it during the Battle at the Black Gate.

The campaign is played from the evil perspective, and involves conquering the lands of Middle-earth and crushing the Armies of the Free People.

Can we ride the Oliphants? Please?

I guess so. Only because you used the magic word. If you ask really nicely, we may even let you take down the Oliphants, Legolas-style.

tat ZONE

When we're nestled under our desks and attempting to sleep through the hot summer, we occasionally scamper out into the open and scratch our heads as we try to remember where we buried our gaming paraphernalia. Often we're stumped and stand quizzically smelling the air for hours, clueless as to where our *EverQuest* T-shirt has gone. The ones we find are sold on eBay.co.uk for charity, under our tag of 'PCZoners'.

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



THIS MONTH'S TAT



FOOTSTEPS OF ILLIDAN WOW TCG CARD
Unlocking glowing green footprints in-game!



DISCO INFERNO WOW TCG CARD
Unbelievably unlocking an in-game disco.



CHEGERS PARTY QUIZ ON PS2
We found it on the floor. Unloved.



FALLOUT 3 VIEWMASTER
Like in the '80s. With 3D screenshots in it.

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THE TAT BOARD

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	LINEAGE II T-SHIRT In the summer heat, this T-shirt's a treat.	£10.50	10
	FOOTBALL MANAGER KEYRING Also functions as a platter for a Barbie doll.	£3.20	10



ARGUE THE TOSS
THIS MONTH:
THE MAX PAYNE MOVIE



Dear Will Porter,

Ahahahahaha. Have you seen the *Max Payne* movie trailer? As a *Max Payne* fan you must be heartbroken, not only is Mark Wahlberg so utterly incapable of coming close to playing a decent film noir role, but the movie looks cheap, cheesy, and has angel things flying about. And fake snow that appears to have been stolen from Santa's grotto.

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

You quite clearly weren't paying attention when Mark Wahlberg was diving in slow-motion and shooting at that door, or at the bit where he was jumping backwards and shooting over his head. Or the gravelly monologue that was over the top of it. For God's sake Steve - a helicopter exploded next to a skyscraper. That's exactly what happens at the start and end of the original *Max Payne*! And Mona was in it too!

Will Porter

Will,

It's hard to pay attention to a man diving through the air when it's Mark Wahlberg and he's flinging his legs about like he's riding an invisible hover bike. And the backwards bit just looked odd. And the gravelly monologue was awful, senseless and forced. I direct your attention yet again to the angels Will, the giant, black, winged creatures flapping about the place. That's just not *Max Payne*. SH

Steve,

OK, so they seem to have taken on a slight occult tangent. But in the original game there was some demon worshipping going on: what about the all the references to "the flesh of fallen angels", the Valkyr hallucinations and Satan-worshipping mob boss? It may not have been in *The Fall of Max Payne*, but it was certainly in the first one. WP

Will,

Whatever. Have you seen who's been cast as Jim Bravura, Max's chief superintendent of internal affairs guy? Ludacris. This is the man who's supposed to turn to Max and say "You're a loose cannon Payne, you're off the case". Bravura needs to be a fat, past-his-prime yet utterly respectable cop who only leaves his chair to get shot dramatically. This is some astoundingly bad casting. SH

Steve,

Oh gods. You're right aren't you? This is going to be terrible. *Max Payne* is going to discover a fallen angel worshipping crime syndicate after they kill his wife and baby, they'll be connected to the Illuminati somehow... and at the end it'll just be a horrible CGI angel gunfight. Why? Why Steve? Why? WP

Will,

Don't fret, just go watch *Hard Boiled* again. John Woo is the closest thing to a *Max Payne* movie we're ever going to get. SH

Steve,

Yeah, I like the bit where they shoot things in a warehouse. WP

UNLOCKING TEAM FORTRESS



Valve justify recent TF2 Medic and Pyro frenzies

WEBSITE teamfortress.com

THE DEBATE OVER Valve's class-by-class *TF2* updates is a bitter one, achievements and unlocks may be fun - but they also unbalance all but the most hardcore of servers. Having been flambéd slightly too many times during the Pyro wars a few months back we thought we'd ask Valve just why they didn't update everything in one go like someone who wears Clarks sensible shoes would do.

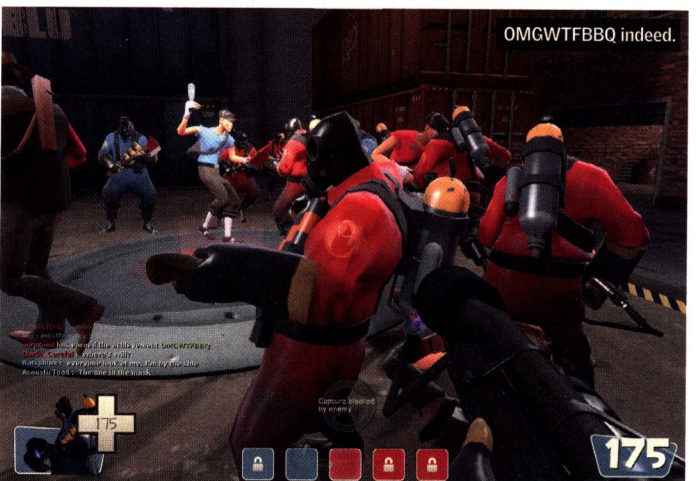
"If we had waited to do them all, you would have had to wait another nine years for it to come out," laughs Valve face-man Doug Lombardi. "Or at least another year. It's also one of those areas where Valve are using an interesting process to find this connection with the community.

"We learned a bunch of things from deploying the Medic stuff, and that has helped us make better decisions with the Pyro stuff and so on. We think the Pyro

release was better than the Medic one, it went quicker and we felt we made better decisions along the way."

At the time of writing the Heavy, who's next on the list, hasn't received the unlock and achievement love - but you can guarantee that it'll be a bad day to be a low-health Scout when it comes and five Heavies a side are raining death on each other. Still, Valve aren't fretting about it.

"We feel that if we develop this with the community we'll get to a better place," explains Lombardi. "You always have these decisions on to-do jobs - sometimes you release it as a final product and sometimes you develop it in real-time. We think we are making better decisions by making it more organic."



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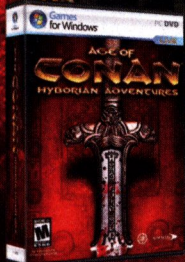
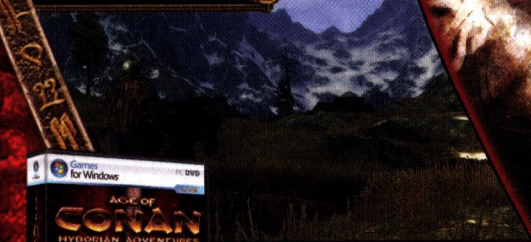
LIVE



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WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR II

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com ETA Spring 2009

WHEN A MAN from THQ came into our office to show us the gameplay of *Dawn of War II*, the sequel to the excellent RTS set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe, we were told we couldn't have a copy of the movie. We had to sit there and watch it on a laptop, which we weren't allowed to touch.

DOW2 has already attracted a lot of speculation – if not for the gameplay video (which was finally shown at E3), then for the teaser trailer which alluded to a new, sky-dwelling terror about to infest the world. The current favourite bet is that the hive-mind Tyranids will be swarming across the maps – if you're not up on your Warhammer lore, they're an awesome super-predator with accelerated evolution. This could be good...

7

The Bigger Picture

1 NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

Hero units won't die, they'll be incapacitated until they're rescued by a commander. This has caused a few concerns from people asking how a game will ever end.

2 UNITS

Battling well earns you the power to summon a reinforcements pod from the skies. Getting a pod to land on your enemy will cause massive damage and a gratifying spatter of blood.

3 TYRANID MENACE?

No-one's confirmed whether the Tyranids are in the game yet. Their similarity to *StarCraft's* Zerg is obvious, but fans of *Warhammer* will tell you that the Tyranids pre-date the Zerg by a good few years.

4 WORK TOGETHER

The environment can be used tactically: if there's a wall in the way, you can either use your commander to jetpack over it to surprise the enemy or blow it up with grenades.

5 ACCESSORISE

Before you enter battle, you can load out your characters with items found on the battlefield. Each add-on gives the squad an ability boost, and can make a big difference to a battle.

6 NOW YOU SEE ME...

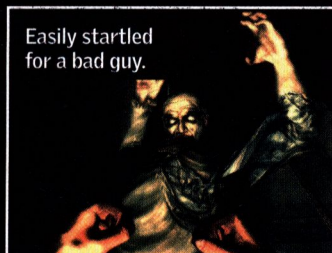
The races' play styles are hugely distinct: Human squads are small but pack a punch, Eldar have the blink-like ability to warp and disorientate their opponents, while Orks are ruddy big and scary.

7 KNOW NOTHING

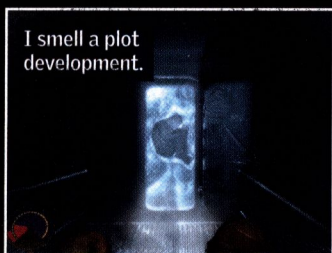
Flames can be used to flush enemies from buildings. Many found Humans were overpowered in previous *DOW* games, so we're looking forward to seeing how it all balances. Especially if the Tyranids are playable...



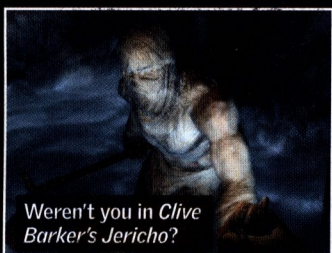
RAID OVER MOSCOW



Easily startled for a bad guy.



I smell a plot development.



Weren't you in *Clive Barker's Jericho*?



Who wants a body massage?

Jon Blyth investigates gaming behind the remnants of the Iron Curtain...

RUSSIANS LIVE UP to their stereotype. Luckily, it's a stereotype that's easy to love: boisterous, friendly, prone to nostalgia and incapable of refusing a drink. The onus is on you to prove you don't want a drink and it's incredibly hard to prove a negative. They do things differently there – take IC's approach to piracy.

There is a solution that would have you roughed up and escorted from the Codemasters building and sneered at by a specially-employed waiter in the headquarters of Ubisoft. And yet, their grass-roots battle with piracy has been more successful than any campaign of torrent tracking and nasty letters.

IC are a huge company based in Moscow, so we're in a Russian restaurant in West Brompton. You might have heard about East European development companies having an unusual sense of freedom, thanks to the low cost of a project's failure. Games development may still be cheap in Ukraine, but that's not the case for IC, as the price of Moscow real estate is comparable to that of London's. Russia is a country with a heavy bias towards PC gaming as consoles have traditionally been too expensive for Russian pockets.

That's changing, though – as the fundamentals get more expensive, some basic luxuries are getting cheaper, including the Xbox 360. IC Company

it as a way of getting people into our way of thinking." So, the 360 release *Birds of Prey* will have two compromise modes which include visual clues not available to WWII pilots: a radar, warning signals and a leading reticule that shows you where to shoot. But the flight physics are always the same, and the simplified and realistic modes are there to prep you for the simulation.

PC enthusiasts can rest easy, for now. *Birds of Prey* is the dipping of an elbow as IC aren't ready to jump into the console bath yet. The other big titles on display are resolutely PC-only. *Men of War*, the meticulously detailed RTS game, where every unit on the field has a *Diablo*-like inventory, looks awesome.

"Russia is a country with a heavy bias towards PC gaming as consoles have traditionally been too expensive"

are already massive in Russia for their video game translations, original PC games and office productivity software. Now they're taking *IL-2 Sturmovik*, their hugely-respected and super-realistic flight simulator to the 360. This is such a PC exclusive, the decision wasn't easy.

"People said we would be mad to keep the realism," says Nikolai Baryshnikov, IC's top man. "But we see

Physics are rife. An early map has a vast dam just ripe for the breaking, and a powerful tank will be able to unleash plentiful carnage. Yet this will be a heavy strategy game, made more instantly fun by the ability to sway the tide of combat with direct control of your units. While this isn't a new trick, it's woven into the strategy so seamlessly that it feels like another valid tactic rather than a gimmick.

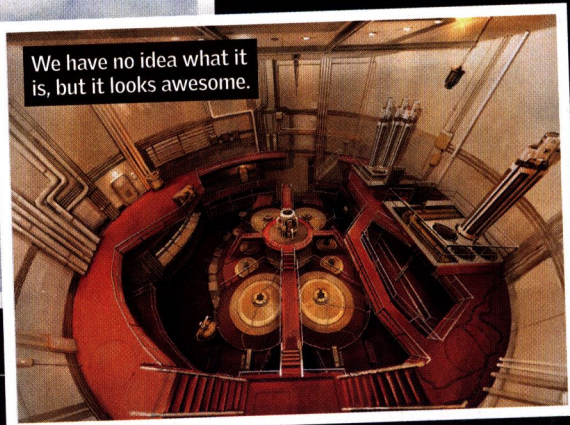
VISION OF NECRO

The third game they're showing off is *NecroVisioN*. From half of the team behind *Painkiller*, this is a World War I FPS. To add the phrase "with a twist!" is a huge disservice, as there's no phrase that sums up *NecroVisioN* better than "batshit crazy, grunting on all fours".

What starts out as a routine Kraut-killing game, evolves quickly into an



Cryostasis: it's all about being cold and miserable.



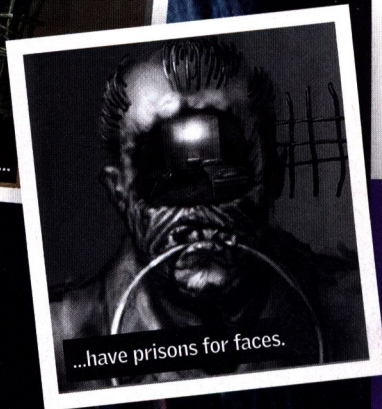
We have no idea what it is, but it looks awesome.

Underworld-esque zombies vs vampires story, with your character mixing melee and ranged combat to produce combos so awe-inspiring to your opponents, that they'll go insane, start vomiting and kill each other. The smallest boss you'll see is a vast mechanical scorpion. The smooth, speedy movement lets you know it's all about the action – this is more the child of *Unreal Tournament III* and *Dark Messiah*, than *Call of Duty* and *Red Orchestra*.

NecroVisioN's eclectic approach to cool – "anything with loads of cool stuff in it, no matter how unhinged they are, must necessarily be cool" – may or may not work. Certainly, the combo system seems more suited to a third-person game, but there's a shed-load of mindless



An example of ironic reincarnation: jailkeepers...



...have prisons for faces.

Retro is everywhere

A parable of the past

At one stage during my time with the Russian publisher 1C, a cry comes up from across the table, and a bottle of vodka is shown around. "Look! It says 'Made In The USSR!'" screams a nearby Russian. This is a surprise as the USSR broke up in 1991, the same year that 1C Company were formed. It's explained to me that the '90s were a time of casting away old design, and making everything anew. And it's this knee-jerk rejection of everything that sparks such a strong sense of nostalgia; it's like the same emotional tug you get when throwing away your childhood doodles. The new bottle of glossy gold and black Stolichnaya on the table is trying too hard to be classy, and it's the faded matt orange and white label on 20 year-old bottle of vodka that gets everyone excited.

It's pretty much the oldest lament of the older gamer: "Yeah, the graphics may be all zip-zazzing and the heeps may have gone polyphonic, but where's the charm of the flying toilet in *Manic Miner*? No, I don't know about *Half-Life 2: Deathmatch*. I've been playing *Frogger* for the last 20 years. Kindly reinsert my catheter."



IL-2 - moving to the Xbox 360.



Faster! The horizon's getting away!

Men of War - get ready for tanks.

promise in *NecroVisioN*. The letdowns of recent *Painkillers* may still be smarting, but it's impossible not to be charmed when the game's designer says, "Hold on, I need to kill that ghost to get the key." You almost expect him to say "Just 10 more apples for an extra life," or "Now I can blow twice as many bubbles".

SLEEP OF REASON

Cryostasis: Sleep of Reason has already been described (mainly in IC's press releases) as the Russian *BioShock*. The sense of trapped isolation is similar - you're cut off from the world by a deadly blizzard. And it's also a single-player only experience led by story and atmosphere.

When your character responds to a distress call from a gigantic stranded ship (nine stories high, 2.5 football pitches of space on each floor, goes the official line), he navigates a foul journey across Siberian-style white wastelands. He collapses on arrival, only to wake a few days later - alone, chilly and with a new mental power.

There's no health in *Cryostasis*, only body temperature. The enemies' attacks are built around reducing your body heat and a large part of your mission is to restart the ship's heating. In cold rooms, the monsters are stronger and your temperature dwindles naturally.

The inhabitants of the ship are people who either died fighting this encroaching chill, or embraced it. These traitors were granted new forms - a jailor has a Judge Fear-like grill for a face, and the keys to his cells have been grafted into the flesh of his arms.

You're not without your own uncanny powers, although how you got them is part of the game's mystery. When you touch certain bodies, you get the chance to relive and change the last moments of their lives. This is a more immersive and engaging mechanic than the traditional audio diaries, and despite the environment of a press day breaking the game's spell, a properly translated *Cryostasis* could go down a storm. (Small note to localisation teams:

remove the phrase "You saved someone's life, making yourself a little better!" Moral decisions are all too black and white in games as it is - there's no need to rub our faces in it.)

The survival horror feel comes courtesy of the monster design - more rooted in reality than the *BioShock's* Splicer designs - the constant battle against heat and the unreliability of your weapons. You will be both unnerved and infuriated in colder areas, when your weapon is chilled to jamming point.

After playing *Cryostasis*, I got a chance to speak to Anatoly Subbotin,

IC's PR manager. He's direct, friendly, and when you get him off the subjects where there's a big list headed "What not to say", he's even more direct and friendly. A former translator, his English is perfect and we both react with the same enthusiasm about the nearby vodka bar.

While drinking Anatoly tells me about the rising prices in Moscow, and that developing a game there is getting to be as expensive as the West. The spirit of creative freedom is no longer anarchic in Russia, but let's not forget that IC design business software -

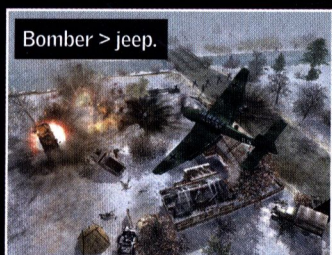
Sleep of reason

No time for a kip

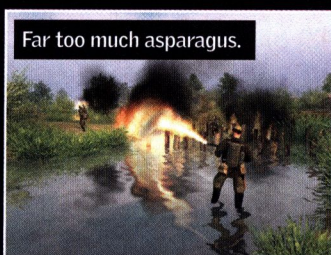
The first hour of *Cryostasis* gives you a strong feel of the game. The weapons are all realistic - although as you play, you collect the parts of a powerful heat gun - and the first monsters are despatched with a panicked combination of an easily jammed rifle and an axe. Heating the rooms causes a shift in lighting and a sweaty moisture on the walls, that instantly makes you feel less nervous. And an early scene which has you scaling the outside of the ship is the best blizzard I've ever walked through. In a game.

The game's signature flashback, and possibly the scene that will become the one that the game is known for, is the Mental Echo that takes you into a cow's last memories. It's effective - the claustrophobia of the abattoir, the overwhelming view of another cow's arse, the unpreventable death - it all goes against what our gaming minds tell us we should be doing.

As it turns out, you save the cow's life. It can't have been a purely pointless cow killing machine, though - surely that was going to be eaten by someone? Will people starve now? Did I just cause the original tragedy in the ship? This is the problem with game morality. You end up empathising with *Tetris* blocks and the *Pong* ball.



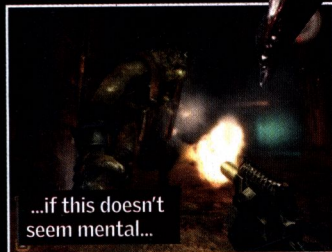
Bomber > jeep.



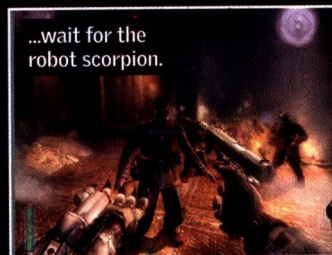
Far too much asparagus.



NecroVisioN...



...if this doesn't seem mental...



...wait for the robot scorpion.

they're closer to being Microsoft than Introversion. As such, they've faced their own battles with piracy – battles which led to some innovative, pragmatic and slightly alarming solutions.

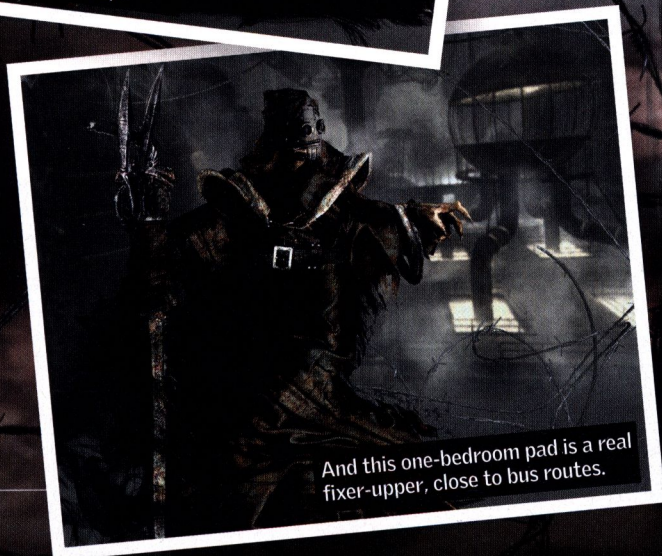
Instead of prosecuting the pirates, IC competed with them. They put their games in jewel cases and provided no manuals. Their legitimate games sold for the equivalent of a fiver in markets as well as shops. Anatoly's figures are, he admits, improvised, but they're indicative of a noticeable trend. He says that piracy rates have dropped from 90% to around 50%. Sales climbed so substantially as to make this strategy a success – but could it be done here?

Probably not. The Russian market is so dominated by PC gaming, and IC are so big, that it's only feasible there. Publishers in the UK aren't going to sell games for a fiver on the PC – not when they're selling it for £40 plus on the consoles where there's less of a piracy problem. You can see why Americans are considering the ad-funded free-game model.

There's no chaos at IC Company. They're producing a bunch of games with a strong stripe of imagination, but the development process has already reached the sprawling Western standards. But hey – we still manage to produce the odd good game, and there's every reason to expect good things of IC's new line-up, too. **PCZ**



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Will Porter unthinkingly strums air guitar to Guns N' Roses while upside down, on fire and in slow-motion

DEVELOPER Criterion Games PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE criteriongames.com

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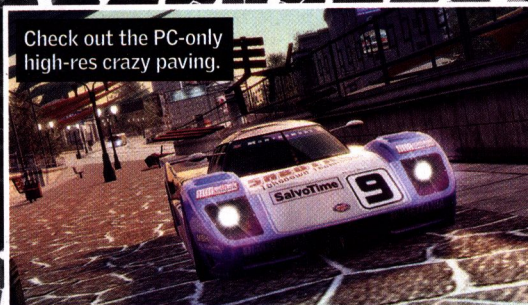


THE LOWDOWN

- Not a crappy port ✓
- Extra graphical whizzbang ✓
- Gameplay tailored to player desires ✓
- Incessant vehicular mayhem ✓
- No release date ✗

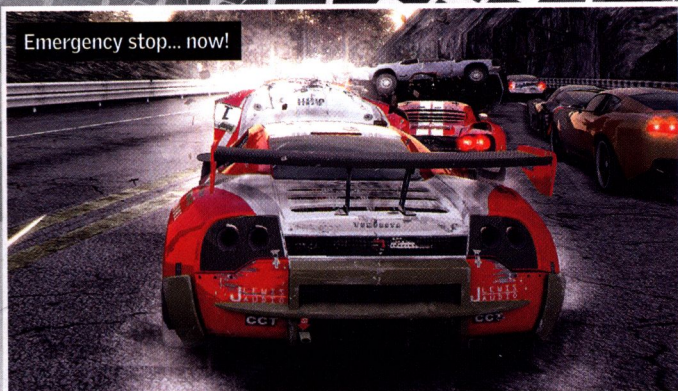
"I sat watching players controlling *Burnout Paradise* with a *Rock Band* guitar plugged into a USB port"

Check out the PC-only high-res crazy paving.

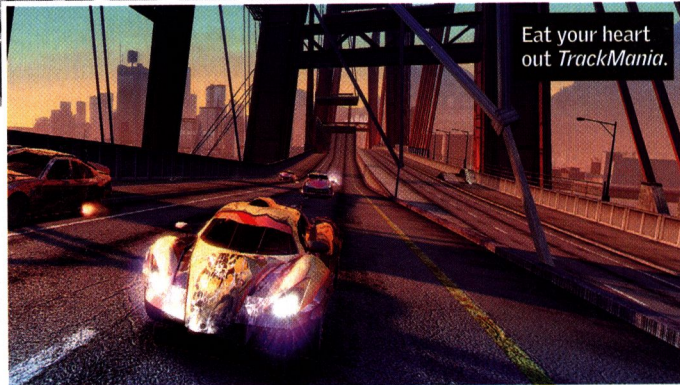


Bikes: vroom!

Emergency stop... now!



Eat your heart out *TrackMania*.



WHEN COVERING NEW stuff in games magazines there is a standard template procedure to follow. A games journalist rings up a PR person (more often than not a pretty lady he has a puppy-dog crush on) and states an interest in, say, *Super Death War VI*.

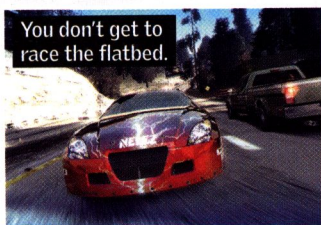
After this, the PR person emails someone else, who emails someone else, who emails someone in America, who are on holiday so the trail goes dead, so someone else is asked... In this fashion bureaucracy infects even the wonderful world of gaming.

FRESH AIR

What never, ever happens – but did last month – is that your phone rings, you answer it and it's *Burnout Paradise's* senior producer San Shepherd. "Hello, my name is San Shepherd and I'm the senior producer on *Burnout*," he says. "Do you want to come over and see my game?" Yes please, you big Danish-yet-living-in-Guildford hunk of love! You are more special than you will probably ever know.

This was our first sign that Criterion (a subsidiary of industry megalith EA let's not forget) are something different

You don't get to race the flatbed.



from your usual development house. We've never come across them before, since *Burnout* and *Black* never ventured to the PC – but as I sat on a casually discarded tyre in the gentle hubbub of their studio watching community members, who had been invited in, controlling the PC version of *Burnout Paradise* with a *Rock Band* guitar plugged into the machine's USB port (a raised guitar neck providing boost) everything just felt a bit special.

The continued post-release development of *Burnout Paradise* on console is fascinating, and seeing as we'll be getting it all in a great big lump, with snazzier (yet eminently scalable) graphics, keyboard control above and beyond that of a bog-standard port, and all manner of community features – a little bit of dabbling in history is required.

Burnout's first four iterations were fabulous on console – focussing on a remarkable sense of speed, hilarious crashes, pile-up-centric game modes and, increasingly as the series went on, takedowns of your opponents – ramming all and sundry off roads, into walls and off cliffs. This all lay within the somewhat archaic different countries,



Mid-air cars are considered 'taken down'.

different environments jet-set deal that seems to have been with every racing game or fighter since *Street Fighter II* though, so *Burnout Paradise* re-threw the dice. Criterion, unsurprisingly to wails of Guins N' Roses, unveiled *Paradise City* to the world – a free-roaming playground of destruction the likes of which had never been seen before. Or at least not to this extent.

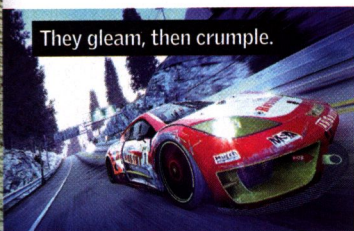
CRASH AND BURN

"*Carmageddon II* was my favourite game of all time," explains Shepherd as I make my first tentative acceleration boost into *Paradise City*. "I loved that game – smashing and ripping the car in half, sideways, from front to back... I played that game to death. When I came to *Burnout Paradise* it was an opportunity to take some of that open-world experience and really put it into, what I think, is a much better game because it's got so much more depth."

Paradise City then, split into nine zones of differing style and substance, is a vast network of billboards to crash through, secret areas to pile into, junk yards to store your cars in and cliffs to drive off while giggling. The city also, obviously, has races and challenges of various hues (see *Wackier racing*) attached to each major junction – all of which lead to car unlocks and untold vehicular carnage. It's a great game too, somewhat daunting in that you have to learn the layout of the city for the best chance of success – but unparalleled in the amount of sweat it coaxes out of you after near misses.

What's more interesting though, and what we'll be presented with as a lump sum at an unspecified point in the future, is the *Burnout* online presence and the massive updates being piled into the console game for free in this, the self-proclaimed "Year of *Burnout*". When the PC version

They gleam, then crumple.



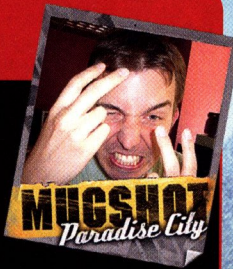
Kodak moment

Saying (knob)cheese for the camera...

Whenever you win a race in online Burnout you can gurn into your trusty webcam, as it takes what's known in the trade as a "smug shot" which is then beamed across to all those you have recently vanquished. Of course though, people won't always take a snap of their face.

"The console demo launched around Christmas of last year, and I'd just bought my mother a PlayStation 3 with a camera," explains evidently affluent senior producer San Shepherd. "We were down in the south of France and I was desperate to make sure the demo was working well, so I was playing it late at night.

"My very first experience of the mugshot was of course the dreaded one – somebody showing me a part of their body that I really didn't want to see. I think it was a Frenchman."



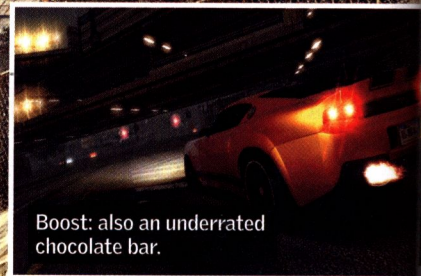
Different cars earn boost in different ways.



Sadly riders don't get thrown around *FlatOut*-style on impact.



Multiplayer Freeburn challenges are a laugh riot.



Boost: also an underrated chocolate bar.



"The game doesn't just hold your attention – it causes your jaw to drop"

THE STORY SO FAR... CRITERION

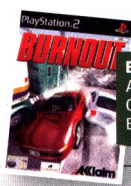
Middlemen
Criterion are founded
as a 3D graphics
rendering house.

1993



Tricky Business
Criterion's forgotten
gem, *TrickStyle*, arrives
on the Dreamcast.

1999



Burnout
A legend is born.
Crashes are caused.
Buses are feared.

2001

Paradise Unlost
The streets are
opened. There is
rejoicing.

2008

BURNOUT Paradise

In-game advertising appears in the form of billboards. Ooh – a podcast!



Wackier racing

The modes that give meaning to the destruction

Race

You and your opponents race through Paradise City to one of eight locations by any route you see fit. Avoid the traffic, take out rivals and watch the flashing road names at the top of the screen for the most direct route.

Road Rage

Take down a set number of opponents in a limited amount of time – force them into bridges, ram them off cliffs, gently nudge them into the path of an oncoming bus: you know the drill.

Marked Man

Offline you find yourself fending off black FBI-style cars, attempting to get to the other side of the city without becoming nose-deep in concrete any more than three times. Online you take turns to be 'it', and everyone places chasey-chasey and crashes.

Stunt Run

Essentially where *SSX* and *Tony Hawk* meet *Burnout* – points are awarded for boosts, jumps, drifts and the like – either in competition online or self-satisfaction off. The fanboy record is over a billion points – simultaneously an awesome and depressing achievement.

Burning Route

An offline time trial that you can only complete with a certain predetermined car, the completion of which will unlock a souped-up version of said vehicle. The number of cars in the game borders on the unnecessary in all honesty, but they come in lots of different colours.

Show Time

At any point in the game you can slap on the slo-mo, and engage in a spot of incessant point-based carnage. The more coaches, hatchbacks and Ford Cortinas that you bounce off the more points you rack up – while any shred of realism joyfully escapes the room.

rears its head the first thing you'll load is a Facebook-lite community screen detailing the exploits of various friends (from a soon-to-be-unified EA service that's sure to blow Games for Windows LIVE out of the water), Criterion-suggested weekly achievement targets and many and various scorecards and leaderboards. After this, as with the console variant, the city of Paradise City will act as a lobby – any and every online game mode will be accessed through swift taps of the keyboard while you're driving.

FREEDOM TO PLAY

What Criterion noticed after the release of console *Burnout Paradise* was that only 10% of people were actually bothering with straight racing. Their telemetric eye hovered over all, and saw that the majority of people were using the game's online capabilities to piss around. They were having a laugh jumping through hoops together at the air field, or doing barrel rolls off ramps on the beach. As such, rather than get all narked about people not playing their game as nature intended, over several free updates to the game Criterion have simply been piling on extra content of the sort that their community is playing, in the areas that they're hanging out in.

Freeburn challenges, for example, have you and seven other punters zooming around the place – not in

competition, but in camaraderie. Racking up near-misses over jumps against the clock, then racing to a bridge so that everyone attempts to jump on and balance precariously on its metal girder roof (the latter task being one that I completed to a chorus of joyful shouts from machines around the Criterion offices, after everyone waited atop the bridge watching me comedically fail get any purchase on it time and time again).

Such were the popularity of these Freeburn challenges that online modes like Stunt Run, Marked Man and Road Rage were also recently added – alongside entire new areas, new vehicles, motorbikes (boost-free yet supremely nimble) and the promise of, perhaps in time for the PC version, planes for you to jet around in. I had scarcely believed the plane rumour myself, and it was only signing into the Criterion visitors' book and seeing that the chap who'd clocked in 10 minutes previous was from the RAF that convinced me that they actually were that crazy.

Criterion claim that now is the first time that they've felt comfortable with the concept of getting that smooth 60Hz *Burnout* feeling onto the full gamut of PC capabilities – from the mid-range PCs all the way up to the technical powerhouses that they hope to make sweat with far more detailed road textures, better shadows, further draw distances,

improved motion blur and much technical palaver. They don't yet feel comfortable with opening the whole thing up to modders, this being their first PC title, but don't count out the possibility of people one day being able to set their own Freeburn challenges to mess about in with their mates. What they really want to underline is that this is not another generic port, this isn't a *Need for Speed* cut-and-paste job. They've got 10 people working on the PC version at any time, alongside 40 content designers, and they're aware of how fussy us lot are when it comes to game controls.

The crucial *Burnout* factor though, for me at least, is the way the game doesn't simply hold your attention – it causes your jaw to drop, eyes to blankly stare in utter concentration and for trails of saliva to descend from your mouth unbidden as you attempt to avoid oncoming traffic. There's simply no other game that makes me look more of a fool when playing it. And that is where we will have to end our story, with your correspondent happily smashing into barrier after barrier – the PC I'm playing on hooked up to three parallel monitors and looking for all the world like I'm training to be an airline pilot. With San Shepherd wondering quite why he invited me to his place of work, and a small pool of dribble slowly congealing on the floor in front of us. Happy days. **PCZ**

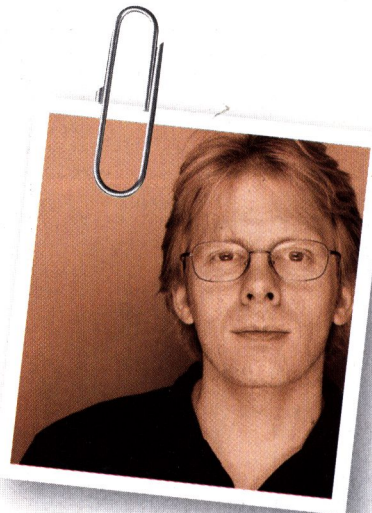
QUAKE LIVE

id's John Carmack and Marty Stratton on how *Quake Live* brings brawling to our browsers

ESSENTIALLY, *QUAKE LIVE* is a free version of what many still consider to be the purest multiplayer experience on any gaming platform, slotted neatly into a browser window. Why? Because it turns the now muddled *Quake 3 Arena* into a streamlined, idiot-proof game.

"Imagine if somebody gave you a copy of the original *Q3A*," suggests id Software co-founder John Carmack, "and asked you to come play with them online. You'd have to install it, download the latest patch, figure out what mods people are playing, figure out how to find the servers – that whole long rigmarole that the game conventionally requires. The whole point of *Quake Live* is to bypass all of that."

If you haven't played *Q3A*, chances are that's why – but just 15 minutes after getting the keys to the *Quake Live* beta we were in a bloody battle. Between rounds, Carmack, and executive producer Marty Stratton, gave us their thoughts...



With the option to run full-screen, *Quake Live* is just like the real thing.



A graphical update keeps things fresh.



When you pause you see how camp the characters are.

with any of the original *Quake 3* characters, plus we've got over 30 arenas now, which you'll be able to play in any of five game types. It's a broad range of content that will speak to everyone.

For the casual player we've got some new maps and some redone maps that are a bit more of an even playing field, without a lot of verticality.

We've also created some new maps which we think will appeal to the more competitive players who approach the game from a duelling perspective.

Will *Quake Live* remain ad-supported?

JC: In the beginning *Quake Live* will be completely ad-supported, it's not out of the question that eventually we'll have some kind of a premium service. But we don't know what it's going to be yet, and

"You have to look at the PC as a platform with its own strengths and weaknesses"

we're certainly going out with the completely free-to-play model. As the community grows and we start seeing what people actually want to get out of it we may offer some other things there. We don't have any firm directions on that. A lot of it will be seeing how things go marketing wise, because this is very much an experiment.

There could be a huge possible range of successes that we could see on here, and if it does well we could end up

keeping people on here indefinitely, growing the community, polishing things up, adding new content. As long as it can be supportable like that.

The in-game advertising is done by a company called IGA. Do they understand games?

MS: IGA understand that there are advertisers that match the kind of players we're going to have in *Quake Live* and there are advertisers who aren't. They're not in the business of trying to put Martha Stewart ads in *Quake Live*. They want advertisers to be in the game that will relate to players.

We've gone through every level and really done a first-rate job of placing ads that fit. It feels like a stadium, there's stadium lighting and scoreboards, and we've given every aspect of ad placement a level of polish.

How will mods work with *Quake Live*?

JC: The answer is that, in the classic mod sense of being able to hack whatever you want, they don't. We've incorporated a lot of the things that have been popular in mods, we're working with mod teams on there, but it is essentially a controlled system. We're in no way shutting down the original *Q3A* scene, so anybody who wants to build things with the open-source code is still

Q So is *Quake Live* the next step for PC gaming?

A John Carmack: I don't think this is the future of PC gaming, though it's certainly an aspect of it. PC developers need to start considering the PC as a unique platform rather than a gaming machine that happens to be in your den rather than your living room.

The traditional big-budget, media-rich, single-player type games like we used to make at id Software through to *Doom 3*, all that really has to be done cross-platform on the consoles now, to basically cover the development expenses for something like that. But the PC still has huge success stories, with things like *The Sims 2* and *World of Warcraft*, which have been bigger successes than any console game has ever been, or possibly ever could be in the near future. At the end of the day, you have to look at the PC as a platform with its own strengths and weaknesses.

So *Quake Live* plays to these strengths?

JC: While *Quake Live* isn't a big-budget extravaganza, it is consciously playing to what we consider to be the PC's strengths. The PC is still a better information platform in terms of browsing the web and showing a lot of statistics and information. That's still really painful to do on the consoles.

It's still got the mouse and keyboard interface which for a competitive first person shooter is still far and away the best way to play, versus playing on an analogue thumbstick or whatever.

And I do think that the neat aspect of being able to jump on and play from any place where there's a PC is going to be interesting also.

Marty Stratton: I think there's some difference between *Quake Live* and *Battlefield Heroes* in terms of what we're trying to do. As far as I understand it they're going down a bit more of a microtransaction route, where you pay for additional skins or what have you.

Our content is completely free, and we've got a ton of content. You can play

more than free to do so. That may even become a proving ground for moving things into *Quake Live*.

Would id ever consider doing something like this with a new game?

JC: There's no way we could justify building a modern game for the PC exclusively. Not to say that it's impossible, but it just wouldn't be a good bet. Even a big-budget extravaganza like *Crysis* didn't do very well in the larger scheme of things. So if you want to develop something on the PC right now, it had better either be cross-platform (like what we're doing with *Rage*) or it'd have to be something like *Spore* or *The Sims 2*, that really caters to the type of game that more people are playing on the PC. Or it'd have to be something a little bit different, like what we're doing with *Quake Live*. At least that's my assessment of the business situation right now. Everybody's still free to make their own decisions, but I don't think the trends are encouraging for high-end, media-rich, PC action gaming.

If this is successful, do you plan on releasing more browser games?

JC: If it is successful, we've tossed around the idea of taking the *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* game (which was actually always more popular than *Q3A* in the online space) and doing a similar treatment on it with the experience we've gained here. But no effort will be spent on that until we know whether *Quake Live* was a brilliant idea or if it was a dumb move. **PCZ**



"We've tossed around the idea of taking the *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* game and doing a similar treatment"



Has it really been that long since this was the cutting edge of visual technology?

From zero to hero

Quake Zero, Quake Live? What's the difference?

Quake 3's The Longest Yard before...



...and after, in *Quake Live*.



"*Quake Zero* was *Quake Live*," explains Carmack. "The only problem was that we announced it before we'd locked up the domain names. A squatter got some of them, so we decided that since we hadn't started it was easier to change the name than to buy the domain names back."

"*Quake Zero* is what *Quake Live* is now," he continues, "and that was a concept we came up with a little over a year ago. At the time we thought it'd only take six months to wrap a website around the *Q3A* codebase. Yet here we are, just rolling into a beta now. We didn't reckon on the challenge in doing a good job with something like this."

ETA
SEPTEMBER

TWO GIRLS, ONE KRUPP

BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Hey, Satan! *Ed Zitron's* paid his dues!

DEVELOPER Gearbox PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE brothersinarmsgame.uk.ubi.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 190

STAFF SERGEANT MATT Baker must have a lucky rabbit's foot. Surviving several campaigns in a war which cost the lives of 72 million people, Baker still keeps his devilish good looks. His rampant serendipity continues into the third *Brothers in Arms* FPS as he repeatedly evades death, ranging from dodging bullets to a girder spearing itself in the ground an inch from his face.

Regardless of this artistic license with chance, *Hell's Highway* is grounded in *BIA's* trademarked historical accuracy, being based on Operation Market Garden (see box-out).

This daring mission, the basis of the film *A Bridge Too Far*, aimed to secure a series of bridges in the Netherlands to allow the Allies to advance across the Rhine to cut off Nazi forces. The name of the game refers to complications that led to the enormous Allied force being funnelled into a single road – highway 69. This was known as Hell's Highway.

DEVIL'S DOZEN

The chunk of the game that I played through took place in the insertion into the Netherlands. You're dropped in gliders right into Nazi territory as a part of the three airborne divisions, yours

being the 101st Airborne. You play Staff Sergeant Matt Baker, with his chiselled jaw and baby-blue eyes, leading two squads through German-occupied towns, wiping Fritz out and taking down their AA emplacements.

Hell's Highway has got all of the staples of the *BIA* series. You can suppress enemy troops by firing near them, filling up a reticule above their heads to send them into a suppressed state that makes them less accurate and more prone to being flanked. A new trick meanwhile is the *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2*-esque cover system that lets Baker drop from the first-person

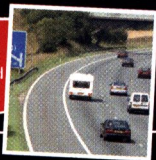
THE LOWDOWN

Authentic WWII storyline	✓
Brilliant cover system	✓
Tight squad-based combat	✓
Great, cinematic cutscenes	✓
World seems too neat	✗

THE STORY SO FAR... BROTHERS IN ARMS

HIGHWAY TO HULL
The M62 motorway, that connects Hull and Liverpool, is built.

1972



HIGHWAY TO HELL
AC/DC releases their classic rock album *Highway to Hell*.

1979



ROAD TO HILL 30
The first *Brothers in Arms* game, *Road to Hill 30*, is released.

2005



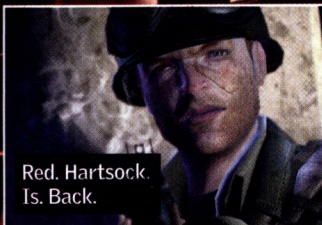
ROAD TO HELL
GearBox cranks out *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*.

2008

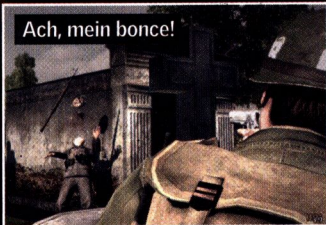
I like to believe I'm a post-pacifist.



Red. Hartsock.
Is. Back.



Ach, mein bonce!



view into cover, popping out to shoot in either third or first-person. It's such a logical development that I wonder how it was missed out until now, and it fits like a missing piece of the puzzle into the strategy of the WWII game.

While as a pure FPS, this game would've been somewhat dull, the cover system, mixed with suppressing fire, adds a fantastic war of attrition feel. You order your squads around with the right mouse button, switching between the assault and bazooka men with the Tab key.

Cover also reacts realistically to gunfire – a table will break apart under too many shots, and a grenade will shatter all but the most staunch of surfaces. This encourages you to

assault squad to pin them down while my bazooka team lined up and shot a rocket into the fence. Three of the four men died instantly, the last losing most of his hiding spot and looking confused as I placed a bullet in his brain.

GEARS OF WWII

Drumming up enthusiasm for another European WWII campaign is a little difficult, but it's phenomenal how well *Hell's Highway* works. Unlike many squad games where your comrades feel like useless sidekicks, you come to rely on your men to suppress the enemy, blow up gun emplacements, or cover you as you try for a headshot.

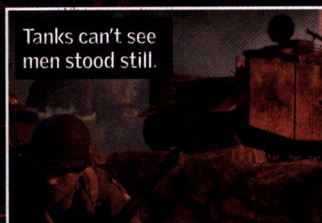
The annoyance is the slightly overdone subject matter, but *BIA*

"Hell's Highway is grounded in BIA's trademarked historical accuracy"

intelligently use your bazooka commander to blow up enemies sheltered behind bulletproof cover.

One situation had me hiding while a bunch of Nazis used a thick fence for cover. We were at a stalemate – there were so many of them that I couldn't get a reliable shot off, so I ordered my

Tanks can't see men stood still.



covers this with a *Band of Brothers*-style TV veneer, complete with a "Previously on..." that opens the game. There are well-acted cutscenes, dramatic special effects (like blood and dirt spattering the camera) and even history lessons for those interested in seeing the reality behind the game.

And even then, for those who just want to blow shit up, the combat feels more complete than any other WWII shooter. While *Call of Duty: World at War* may be promising a grittier war, *BIA* is fronting a rather more developed one. You're not a one-man army, and after this, you might not want to play as one ever again. **PCZ**

Operation Market Garden

A grim premise for a World War II game

While it's easy to make a game about a successful mission, Operation Market Garden was famed for its bloodiness and the great losses – the Allies lost between 17,000 and 20,000 people over the nine-day operation. The offensive was aborted after the Allies failed to secure the bridge at Arnhem that crossed the Rhine – the infamous 'bridge too far'. While the Allies failed to cross the river they kept control of Hell's Highway, allowing them to retreat – albeit under continuous assault by German forces.

Exactly how Gearbox manages to tell this story will be interesting, as – at the very least – it's going to be a harrowing time for our hero Staff Sergeant Baker. With tens of thousands of soldiers wounded and killed in the operation, we can only imagine this isn't going to be the most glorious war story ever.



A grim time indeed.

I swear guys, there was a Nandos here a minute ago...



The viewpoint switches to third-person when you take cover.



No, wait, my bad, that was the Nandos.



CHINESE, ANYONE?

OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING

ETA
2009

Steve Hill discovers that there are always casualties in war. In this case, authenticity is definitely not one of them...

DEVELOPER Codemasters PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk/flashpoint2

IMAGINE IF YOU were playing a war game and you suddenly noticed that the weapon you were wielding was held together by eight-sided nuts instead of the statutory six-siders. You'd naturally be horrified, the integrity of the experience would be compromised, and you'd probably never touch it again. Thankfully, that actual problem has already been rectified, and the person responsible presumably sent to Codemasters' version of Guantanamo Bay. That said, the bloke who spotted this heinous error does admit to occasionally questioning his own sanity. A lovely story, we're sure you'll agree, and a pertinent example of the painstaking attention to detail going into *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon*

Rising, which is already threatening to be the most authentic military simulator ever made. Or at least since the groundbreaking original game, which is now a ripe seven years old; a lifetime in game development, and indeed modern warfare.

As brand manager Andrew Wafer explains, "We took the concept of what *Flashpoint* was, the first game, and we really tried to refine that and build upon that in terms of the scope that we wanted to do. That comes down to not just the authenticity of things – like how the modern military works – but things like the size of the environments, the power of the weaponry, elements like multiplayer and the command structure and tactical manoeuvres. It's about being able to move around in these big environments, make your own tactical decisions and orders, and utilise a vast array of realistic vehicles and weapons to do that. It's about big battles, it's about big military warfare. It's not small skirmishes with a couple of troops, it's about fighting forces which are equally matched, big global superpower armies."

To recap, those superpowers are the good old US of A in the form of the US Marines Corps (with the correct demographic breakdown, naturally) and the Chinese, in the form of the People's Liberation Army. The realistic scenario sees the two sides scuffling over the

THE LOWDOWN

- Long-awaited sequel to the classic game ✓
- 220km² of game area ✓
- Exhaustively researched weaponry and vehicles ✓
- Advanced adaptive AI ✓
- Also available on consoles ✗



This is no time for bird watching.

Nice bit of dry stone walling.



The Javelin hits the target.



rights to an oil-rich island off the coast of Russia, north of Japan, with America sticking up for the Ruskies.

Based on an actual location, the island is known in the game as Skira, although the topology and geology has been lifted – thanks to Google Earth – from a real-life island in Alaska. Not content with pilfering an entire island, Codemasters have engineered an erosion system and a water system, with functioning oceans, lakes and rivers. There's also a bloke whose sole job seems to be building trees, piecing them together branch-by-branch, replete with a detailed damage model. Throw in a bit of weather and a day/night cycle and you're left with 220km² of living, breathing landscape.

To put that into context, it'll take the best part of three and a half hours to drive from one end to the other, or 20

“Codemasters have engineered a water system, with functioning oceans, lakes and rivers”

minutes to fly. And while what you see on these pages are “visual targets” as opposed to actual screenshots, the whole thing is being put together using Codemasters’ Neon/EGO engine, as used in the visually resplendent *Colin McRae: Dirt* and more recently, *Race Driver: GRID*.



Gun porn

Big hard weapons...



FGM-148 “Javelin”

Unlikely to feature at this year’s Olympics, the Javelin is a portable anti-tank guided missile that also appeared in *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, where it was used with scarcely more preparation than a water pistol. In reality, it takes some time to set up, making you potentially vulnerable in the process.



SCAR-L MK16 MOD 0

The MK16 was originally designed for use by US special forces, but it was adapted as a battlefield rifle. This beast of a weapon is also equipped with a grenade launcher, and comes in three barrel lengths for close-range, standard and long-range combat. So it’s the rifle for every occasion.



MK48 MOD 0 MARKSMAN

A gas-operated, air-cooled, fully-automatic, belt-fed machine gun, the MK48 is currently in service with the US Special Forces, including Navy SEALs and Army Rangers, it’s also 17% lighter and 8.4% shorter than the classic M240 general purpose machine gun we all know and love.



That'll be the interior of a UH60 helicopter.



Start the game by taking the airfield.

Operation Flashpoint 2 will naturally feature very different types of vehicles, with no less than 50 different variants, comprising tanks, helicopters and all manner of acronym-based affairs, each modelled down to the most anal levels, both inside and out. Apparently, all of this information is freely available, although as senior producer Brant Nicholas jokes, "I think we're on the Pentagon's 'currently being watched' list."

The Chinese data has unsurprisingly proven slightly harder to attain, although as Nicholas muses, "I'm actually

wondering if there's going to be just as many Chinese playing this game as people from other countries around the world online. That adds a fun element, I bet there's going to be real-world competitiveness actually involved in playing online."

As for the core single player campaign, it's some 30 missions long, and begins with an invasion of the island, with you playing the part of a lowly grunt receiving orders, before moving through the ranks to the stage where you're the one barking the instructions. Whereas

the co-op mode will require actual intelligence, playing it solo will clearly involve a large reliance on the AI, an aspect that the development team is keen to emphasise.

Clive Lindop is the senior designer and AI lead, and enthuses, "One of the things the AI is very good at is looking after itself. The AI uses real military playbooks. We took infantry manuals, spoke to guys from the US Marines about their experience of actually fighting in those

environments and created an AI system around that.

"The AI looks at the environment, looks at the tactical situation and what you're doing and decides what to do based on all that information. And what kind of kit you've got, whether he's got friends nearby or not, how much ammunition he's got, what his morale's like, how heavy the fire is coming at him. They won't just run out into a lot of bullets. They'll measure all those things.



Certain bullets will pass through walls.

Tanks for the memory and a chopper

We read Wikipedia, so you don't have to...

M1A2 ABRAMS TUSK

A variant of US staple the M1 Abrams with improved armament protection and electronics, this battle tank is named after General Creighton Abrams, former Army Chief of Staff who oversaw the US Army's actions in the Vietnam conflict. Used in Iraq, they can be vulnerable to roadside bombs (IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, in army jargon).

M2A3 BRADLEY IFV

As anyone who has spent any time with the military will have been reminded, this is not a tank: it is an IFV, or Infantry Fighting Vehicle, used for carrying troops around. When you're stuck in the back with bullets ping-ponging off the exterior, you know you're in a war.

AH-1Z Viper

An upgraded version of the Cobra – hence it's nickname the SuperCobra – this four-bladed gunship is primarily used by the US Marine Corps. In the game you'll be able to fly it and live out your *Apocalypse Now* fantasies by laying waste to great swathes of Chinese infantry.



THE STORY SO FAR... CODEMASTERS

Hello Darling
Brothers Richard and David Darling found Codies.

1985

Toy Cars
Micro Machines spawns a highly successful series.

1991



War Eh?
Operation Flashpoint appears from Bohemia Interactive.

2001

Killer Queen
Darlings awarded CBEs for services to the gaming industry.

2008



A relaxing day at the beach.

"It's also adaptive. If you fight differently in a mission from the way you did last time the entire battle will unfold differently. They'll react and make their tactical decisions based on the situation, depending on what their objective is."

By way of example, we're shown a mission where a small squad is charged with the task of flanking an enemy machine gun nest. There's an overhead map portraying the positions of allies, enemies and corpses, and the whole thing could theoretically be played out as a rudimentary RTS game. As in the first game, you rarely get to see the whites of the enemy's eyes, as this is realistic long-range warfare, comprising such established tenets as suppressing fire.

WOOD WORK

A key improvement from the original game immediately becomes evident, in so much as the enemy can see the wood for the trees. As Lindop explains, "People awarded qualities to the original AI that it simply didn't have. It couldn't actually see trees. It could see trunks, but it couldn't see foliage, so it made these amazing 500 yard shots and you'd die."

By way of a further example, Lindop says that the enemy's ability to flank you was down to the errant path finding, with the AI largely unable to walk in a straight line. As he says, "What we've done this time is we've kept those experiences that

people perceived and made them functional. We had to wait for the technology to catch up. We very much aim to deliver two things. One is to deliver people's expectations of what that experience was, and the second is to turn up the ante. We really want to deliver the experience of modern warfare, the lethality of that experience."

"It's intended to be a genuinely shit-the-bed terrifying experience"

While there is something vaguely unseemly about podgy men cradling replica weapons and drooling over what is essentially military pornography, in their defence Codemasters aren't seeking to glamourise war.

"The goal is to depict war in a representative but not over-the-top way,"

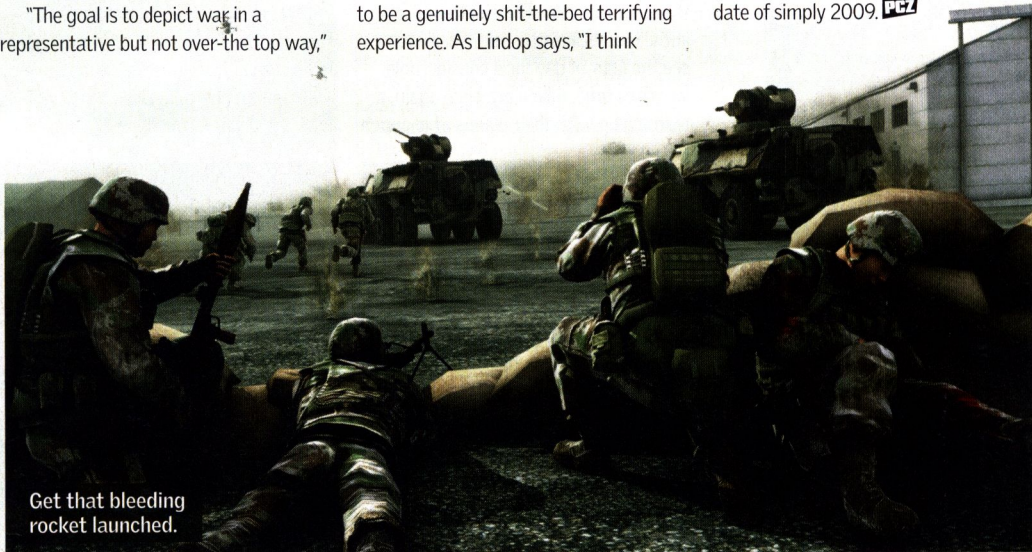
says Nicholas. "You're not going to see giblets flying everywhere. There's a difference between gratuitous and representative damage. So our goal is not to have gratuitous giblets like *Quake*, we have context sensitive damage where if you get hit say, in the arm, the texture will actually seep blood in that area. No other game does that. You can have flesh wounds, you can get incapacitating

damage, you can get catastrophic damage. A flesh wound is dangerous – if I don't get attention in a certain amount of time I will bleed to death. Just like real life a light hit can be deadly."

And just like real life, it's intended to be a genuinely shit-the-bed terrifying experience. As Lindop says, "I think

people will walk away with a serious respect for the guys that stand out there and do it. Even in the game when 50 calibre rounds are zipping past your head you think 'I'm not getting up.' As a soldier I could choose to leave my squad. It's an open sandbox, it's like the real world, if a soldier goes AWOL, a soldier goes AWOL."

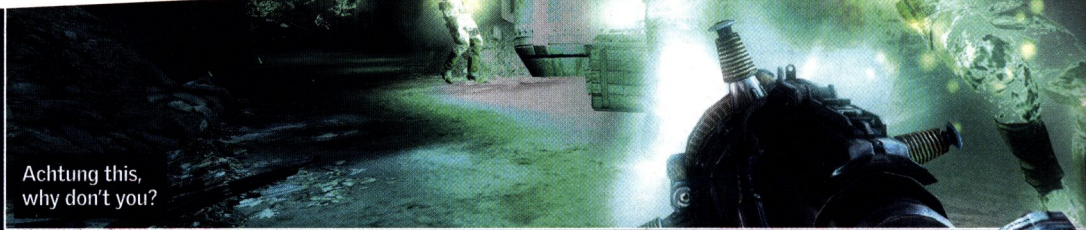
The venerable franchise appears to be in safe hands. Purists may balk at the development on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 and the use of the words "fun" and "accessible". To be honest, *OpFlash 2* doesn't seem to be either, which is good, and it looks set to redefine the military experience for a war-savvy audience numbered to atrocities by nightly TV reports. A massive undertaking, there's a definite "done when it's done" mentality, with a loose release date of simply 2009. **PCZ**



Get that bleeding rocket launched.



And now. A ragdoll.



Achtung this, why don't you?

MEIN GOTT, ES IST...

WOLFENSTEIN

Steve Hogarty discovers a horrifying dimension lacking in roast dinners and Alsatians

DEVELOPER Raven/id Software PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE wolfenstein.com



MAYBE SOMEBODY IN the planning meeting had Tourette's. What other way could great big ball-sack aliens find their way into the one of the PC's most important and genre-founding franchises? Surely somebody must've spluttered some heinous expletive as they collapsed from their office chair and convulsed madly on the meeting room floor. And that's not even how Tourette's works.

I mean really, aliens? From another dimension? Where are the undead Nazis? The roast dinners? The medieval castles perched atop stormy cliff faces? They're gone. Based on what we've seen so far these things – the very pillars of *Wolfenstein* – will not be making an appearance. Instead we're being shown what appear to be the slightly mediocre parts of *Medal of Honor* crossed with the worst parts of *Painkiller*.

Hopes aren't exactly high then – but that could change. This is, after all, an initial impression of a title which won't see the light of day for a considerable length of time. Raven are once again teaming up with their chums at id, much

as they did with *Quake 4*, to create the third 3D *Wolfenstein* game, and though we've already quite rudely crossed our arms and had a sulk at their aliens, they do have some interesting ideas on show.

QUANTUM LEAP

Namely, the Nazi's newfound interest in dimension hopping. They've become obsessed with the Black Sun, an otherworldly artifact of immense power. Rather than spend money on new tanks which could be used to win World War II, they've focused their efforts on finding this fabled object. This leads them to the Shroud dimension – an evil and slightly green-tinged dimension that exists alongside our own.

This in itself sounds interesting, especially when you'll be flipping from the real world to the Shroud in order to carve your way through the Third Reich's forces. Levels themselves will offer multiple paths to objectives, all within an unnamed city, torn between Nazi soldiers and a nasty throng of pure evil spewing from the city centre.

Returning hero BJ Blascowicz will have the uncanny ability to flip between

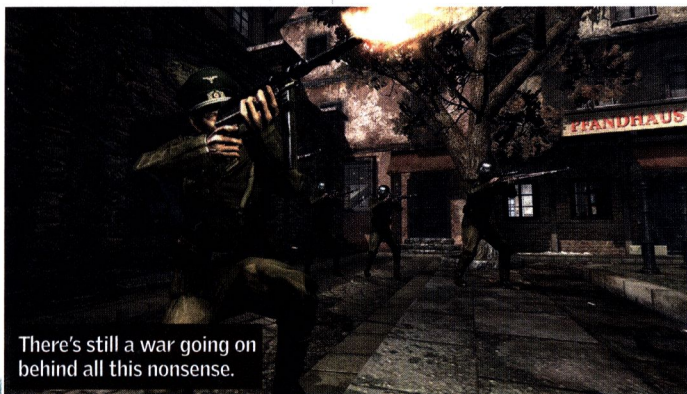
the real world and the shroud dimension at the push of a button, at any moment, not wholly unlike the spectral realm of *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver*. The town's central church spire transforms into a grotesque citadel of pulsating evil, areas of the real world marked with occult symbols reveal themselves as gaping wounds in the Shroud's landscape, and the local M&S downgrades itself to a demonic Lidl.

More obviously, the mostly docile, fleshy aliens shuffle hither and thither, barely aware of your incursion into their darker, greener dimension. Shoot them and they erupt like tiny Hindenburgs, their explosive energy leaking into the real world, surprising the Nazis in an altogether unfair way. BJ's abilities even extend to that most fashionable of tricks – bullet-time. Reduce the passage of time to an inexorable crawl and you can dart between hanging bullets, handy for avoiding mounted machine gun nests. Oh yes, there are mounted machine gun nests.

Raven have hardly put their best foot forward with *Wolfenstein*, unless you consider aliens, bullet-time and

THE LOWDOWN

It's <i>Wolfenstein</i>	✓
It's barmy	✓
Bullet-time	✗
Rubbish looking aliens	✗
So far, so unoriginal	✗



There's still a war going on behind all this nonsense.



The infamous aliens in all their glory.

THE STORY SO FAR... WOLFENSTEIN

CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
It wasn't id's game, but it inspired *Wolfenstein 3D*.

1981



WOLFENSTEIN 3D
The primordial ooze of FPS spews out this kill-a-Nazi classic.

1992

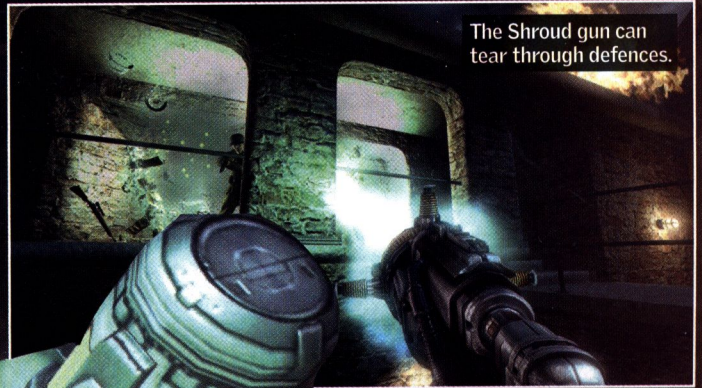


RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
Id and Grey Matter provide roast dinner.

2001

WOLFENSTEIN
Wolfenstein is announced. No fancy names this time round.

2008



The Shroud gun can tear through defences.

"Raven have hardly put their best foot forward with *Wolfenstein*"

mounted machine gun nests the components of a good foot. There's more to reveal however, with the promise of more guns, and more Shroud-bestowed powers for BJ to play with.

WHEEL, REINVENTED?

What's more the guns on show right now are terrifying examples of Raven's ingenuity, with one weapon searing flesh from bone with pure occult energy. It doesn't look quite as gruesome as in the last scenes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (which also had

occult-obsessed Nazis) where a very similar thing happens, but it's cool just the same.

And lest we forget, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* didn't push the envelope in any drastic fashion. Just as *Wolfenstein 3D* did, it nailed the very fundamentals of the genre, with a responsive, reactive, mindless shooter that was simply great fun to play.

Once you've got that bedrock of playability in there, surely developers can go to town on the baubles and frills, be they roast dinners, mecha-Hitlers, or ridiculous aliens. Who are we to sulk when *Wolfenstein* changes tempo from wacky to silly? Nostalgia-plagued idiots, I suspect. Hopefully. **PCZ**

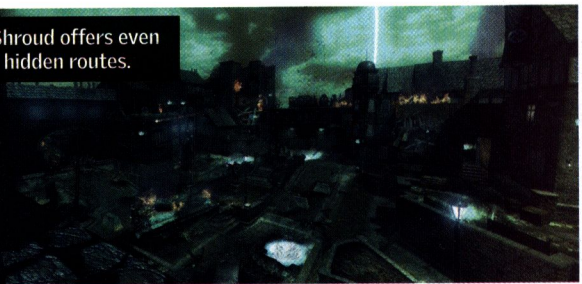
Explore and order

Open levels? Pah! In my day it were all linear...

Multiple paths through levels are arguably a good idea, and one that's put to good effect in *Wolfenstein*. Whereas previous games ferried you between two points, occasionally offering a hidden wardrobe full of treasure (which can now be used to buy new Shroud powers, though from who is a mystery), this new city offers more than one route to your objective.

Go by the rooftops and you can lob grenades on unsuspecting soldiers below, go by the sewers and you likely encounter no resistance at all (but will no doubt get the bottoms of your trousers all covered in piss). Exactly how structured levels will be remains to be seen, though it might be a bit much to expect openness to the degree of, say, *Medal of Honor: Airborne*.

The Shroud offers even more hidden routes.



BIOWARE'S BACK...

DRAGON AGE:

Ed Zitron doesn't think, he feels. But only if he rolls a 20...

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com



AS FAR AS excellent RPG franchises go, BioWare's lineage makes other companies wilt like untended lilies. *Baldur's Gate* redefined RPGs, its sequel defied expectations by being even better, and *Mass Effect* and *Knights of the Old Republic* both won our coveted Classic award, while *Jade Empire* came within a hair's breadth of gold. So when it comes to making new, playable, engrossing RPGs, there's nobody to match BioWare's track record, and that's why you should be excited for *Dragon Age: Origins*.

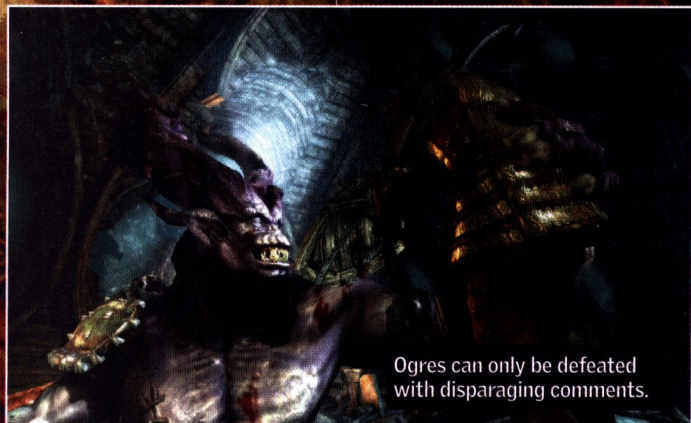
BioWare's new RPG puts you in the shoes of a Grey Warden, one of a bunch of knightly types fighting against a newly-formed horde of evil. The Blight, as they're known, are an army of Darkspawn (mages gone bad) led by the Old God they've awoken – a gigantic dragon that lives beneath the Earth. Hence the title, I suppose.

ORIGINAL FANTASY

What's evident with BioWare is that, while they're deviating from their former licences by creating their own, they've learned to take the best elements and adapt them for the new series. *Dragon Age*, while sporting a *KOTOR*-meets-*Baldur's Gate* attack queue system, can be played in its entirety from either a classic isometric view or a third-person mode. You can also pause the combat and select movements for your players and, as you'd expect, the dialogue trees will bear a resemblance to *Mass Effect*'s.

THE LOWDOWN

- It's a new BioWare game
- Huge, epic conflicts
- Again, it's a new BioWare game
- Horrible British accents



Ogres can only be defeated with disparaging comments.



"Dragon Age is a PC game first and foremost, with console gamers to be concerned with at a later date"

THE STORY SO FAR... BIOWARE

STEEL WILL
BioWare's *Shattered Steel* was a near-classic mech sim.



1996

BALDUR BALLS
Baldur's Gate appears, changing the face of fantasy RPGs.



1998

DAMNED ODDNESS
BioWare releases the best of the genre-bending MDK games.



2000

EATEN UP
EA swallows BioWare and Pandemic Studios whole.

2007

ORIGINS

You'll no doubt have the same level of moral freedom, too, with the ability to use soldiers as useful allies or as walking meat shields, depending on how friendly or destructive you're feeling.

Dragon Age is going for a slight twist on a genre, with a darker-toned fantasy environment (enough to make the BBFC sweat) rather than the relative glitz of *Icewind Dale* and *Neverwinter Nights*. Characters get drenched with blood, both when they get injured and when they inevitably chop through their enemies. Even the ogre, a common fantasy staple, is a lot

darker, looking like the lovechild of the *LOTRO*'s Trolls and Horny out of *Dungeon Keeper*. They're even more vicious, too – as you fight them they'll grab your party members, beating them with one gigantic fist as you desperately try to free your friends.

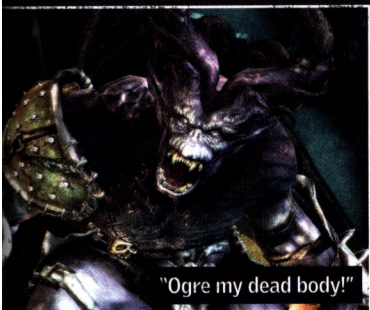
DRAGON TRAINS

A new feature in combat is the effect of surfaces and elements on your movement. For example, a fire trap can cover an entire area in flames, but with an ice spell you can traverse the path with ease. This hopefully means that your party – which from what we've seen can include up to four people – will have to be reasonably balanced to deal with the threat of The Blight.

So expect a tighter version of *Baldur's Gate 2*'s battles, in which the focus is on tactics to bring down bigger enemies. This is where pausing the combat helps a great deal and where the more patient gamer will succeed. When this kind of thing happens, you'll be able to queue up a series of attacks to free



Environmental traps demand specific magic skills.



"Ogre my dead body!"

your dress-wearing magicians, rather than bricking it and clicking like hell.

There's also good news for anyone worrying that BioWare had forgotten where their roots lie – dice-rolling, stat-driven strategy with fantasy elements. We can't blame the worriers either, with the glut of action-RPGs like *Sacred 2* and *Diablo III* promising to dominate the genre. While at first glance, *Dragon Age: Origins* might seem a little bit generic (with poncey British accents and *LOTR*-style forces of light and dark), it's filling a painfully empty gap in the genre where a new (single-player) *KOTOR* or *Baldur's Gate* should be. Slate EA all you want for buying up companies left, right and centre, but they've left BioWare to create *Dragon Age* as a PC game first and foremost, with console gamers something to be concerned with at a later date.

So if you've grown tired of the more simplistic RPGs out there, BioWare are back to scratch that

numerical itch without boring the shit out of you in the process.

The very fact that *Dragon Age* has the *Origins* suffix suggests that this could be the beginning of a full-scale series, and, if the fates decide, a whole series of proper, full-blood PC RPGs. With a few years since we even heard from it last, *Dragon Age* is reasonably far along in development, and thus we'll be seeing a lot more about it in the coming months. Who says that single-player role-playing is dead? **PCZ**

Knights of the Old Republic MMO

What BioWare's been up to in secret...

While we all kind of thought it was coming, EA's dark lord John Riccitiello revealed his insidious plan to take the hearts and minds of nerds everywhere.

The *KOTOR* MMO has been confirmed, and while details are light on the ground, we can at least tell you that the universe lends itself to an online RPG environment. While in *Star Wars: Galaxies*, regardless of how it made absolutely no sense, everybody wanted to be a jedi, *KOTOR*'s universe means that anyone can be a lightsaber-wielding ponce without the lore imploding on itself.

There has been no announcement made as to who exactly (beyond BioWare) is going to be handling the nuts and bolts of the *KOTOR* MMO, but once we know more, you will.



Now you too could be a jedi – online!



ENTER THE DWARF FORTRESS...

LOTR ONLINE: MINES OF MORIA

A greedy *Ed Zitron* digs deep into the first annual expansion for Turbine's Tolkien MMO...

DEVELOPER Turbine PUBLISHER Codemasters Online Gaming WEBSITE www.lotro.com



ETA
AUTUMN
2008

THE LOWDOWN

- Two new classes
- Huge subterranean areas
- Still true-ish to *LOTR* lore
- Swords that level up!
- Mostly for the higher-level players

WHILE THERE'S PRESSURE

on MMO developers to get their dungeons right, the crunch on Turbine to really nail Moria is intense. As the first annual paid-for expansion pack for *LOTR*, and the second volume in its epic storyline, *Mines of Moria* is opening up the long-dormant Dwarven capital of Khazad-dûm and its surrounding areas, and draws the player into the struggle to re-establish Dwarven supremacy underneath the world.

DWARFED

Players will also, once through the mines, be able to meet with Lady Galadriel in Lothlórien, as well as rub shoulders with The Fellowship themselves. This is end-game content done differently, with a focus on tight, story-driven questing, small groups and continuing the epic legacy of Turbine's take on *LOTR*.

The scale of the kingdom is such that executive producer Jeffrey Steefel and Turbine had to reconsider how to build their environments.

"It's a challenge filling any space in a game like *LOTR*. What helps us in *Mines of Moria* is that the space itself is


a character. It has a lot of interesting architecture and lore, rather than being a flat space that we have to populate with objects, towns and NPCs. However, you've got to use the space right. If it's just about saying we've got X amount of space and each area needs to have Y amount of stuff in it, we'd never succeed."

Turbine has had to monkey with the engine to texture both the skyline and the ground with the same amount of detail. While this sounds dull, it adds a sense of scale to the caverns on a level unseen in an MMO. Standing on top of a stairwell leading into one of the first caverns of Moria gave me a genuine sense of nauseating vertigo as things stretched off into the distance – a distance that was fully rendered and accessible. Worse still, I could see the ceiling, resplendent with gigantic stalagmites, giving me the feeling that I was in very much a tiny part of a huge, hulking subterranean dungeon.

In fact, Turbine are deliberately leaving areas empty to both make it real and establish its scale. "It's about creating a space that makes sense, and asking yourself what parts need to be filled. There's a lot of spaces in the distance that are untouched caverns.

"The parts that are touched are markedly different, and that's the





“Standing on top of a stairwell gave me a genuine sense of vertigo as things stretched off into the distance”



You may outnumber me, but at least I'm wearing a shirt.



It's OK. He's a troll, he's in Moria. We get this guy laid.

most important thing. It's a huge challenge – it's got six distinct environments and we wanted everything to feel new," nods Steefel. That's an important part to remember – just because it has 'mines' in the title, Moria wasn't and isn't an area that's populated by a series of bland caverns and troglodytes. It's full of ancient, beautiful architecture, created at the height of Dwarven civilisation and their collaboration with the Elves, ruins corrupted by the Goblins and Orcs, and even the visually stunning waterworks – the science that kept the Dwarves alive below ground. To top it off, any non-instanced content is all in one zone – there's no loading, just a seamless, gigantic cave.

A legend in your backpack

A little more detail to *LOTRO*'s new way to grind

Legendary items, when forged, will have a selection of legacies (ability improvements), such as bonuses to the chance of making a critical strike. Every 10 levels, you'll have to reforge the weapon, which will create a new legacy. Turbine claim that certain items won't have exactly what you want, as legacy calculations are all up to chance. So there'll be a player-driven market for weapons with particular legacy load-outs. Essentially, this system turns items into levelling, sellable equipment that grows with your character.

While you can have a few on you at a given time, only your equipped ones will level. The good news is that they'll be an integral part of the *MOM* story, and will drop from instances, quests and monsters, meaning that there's a good chance the legendary item with the right potential will be within reach.

Your entry into Moria takes place a few weeks after the Fellowship passes through, as you join a plucky bunch of Dwarves in their expedition to break past the Hollin Gate. As you'd expect, things aren't as easy as opening a door and you're attacked by The Watcher, a vicious squid-like monster, and have to beat a retreat. To ward off the creature and gain access to Moria, you have to return with a legendary weapon. This is Turbine's new advancement system, that I reckon competitors are going to be wholesale copying very soon.

You pick up these items in a bit of a state, and have to take them to be identified by a specialist NPC. Once this is done, they level alongside your character, gaining experience that can be put into 'legacies' to improve characteristics. Things become a little complex past that, with each weapon having particularly

effective legacies, and the ability to re-forged each one a few times over, making the Legendary Advancement system a potentially endless pursuit of augmenting these magical items (see 'A legend in your backpack' for more).

WEAPON OF CHOICE

Luckily, it's not all content for the high-level stallions, as *Mines of Moria* introduces two new classes, The Warden and the Runekeeper.

The Warden is a medium-armor tank who uses a similar fighting style to *Age of Conan*. On the surface he only has a few abilities, but by using them in certain orders he can activate gambit moves. These can heal the Warden, taunt enemies to attack, stun opponents or deal damage. The intricacy of the class comes in knowing what gambit moves you're opening up with each combo, and Turbine touts that it will be one of the most complex classes to play.

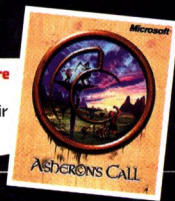
The Runekeeper is the first real magic user class in *LOTRO*, with the ability to both nuke anything and heal allies. The caveat is that each time you use an offensive or defensive ability, it pulls the Runekeeper's abilities towards that particular school. So over the course of a fight you may be constantly blowing up things, unlocking more destructive spells and making your attacks more effective. However, this may dampen or even lock out some of your healing abilities, and vice versa if you're healing a group. While this



THE STORY SO FAR... TURBINE

Hello, Asheron Here
Turbine releases
Asheron's Call, their
first MMO.

1999



Goodbye, Asheron 2
The ill-fated sequel
to *Asheron's Call*
shuts down.

2005



Angmar about
Turbine release *The
Shadows of Angmar*,
the start of *LOTRO*.

2007

Asheron's Still Here
Asheron's Call
approaches its 10th
year of existence.

2008

doesn't affect soloing ability until the later levels, it makes the Runekeeper an intriguing character to play, and one that, mixed with the new trait system (see Go on, trait yourself) will become unique depending on your play style.

However, The Runekeeper is a departure from *Lord of the Rings* lore. On *Shadows of Angmar's* release, Turbine were very clear that they were keeping spell-casting reserved to Gandalf and Galadriel, but time has led them to change their mind.

"When you're a level 60 in an MMO fighting The Watcher with just swords and arrows, it just doesn't feel right. We've demonstrated that we can package things in a way that they still fit in Middle-earth, and so when people are zapping other people with lightning, it'll still feel in some ways like it makes sense in the world.

"It's a stretch, no question about it, and we're going to have some hardcore fans who are going to be upset. Even when we first started talking about the Runekeeper, we had people in the development team who were opposed to the idea," admits Steefel.

TOLKIEN THE PISS

"[Dealing with the Tolkien licensees] is interesting. It comes down to trust, and in the last four years we've shown that first and foremost we value the world and lore, and not just because we paid for the license - we've become very protective of it. Part of the product is the believability of the world, so I think they've come to trust us. Even if we stretch it a little bit, they know we'll do it in a way that's believable.

"They're also learning more and more about what an MMORPG is, and getting a little more comfortable with the conceits that exist from a gameplay perspective. Players want certain things to make the game more enjoyable. However, they're going to be looking very closely, especially in areas like this where we push the content. We're in contact over everything, and we're very well-connected with them, because if they're on our side it's only a good thing."

This deep connection allows them to really exploit the great big dollops of Tolkien mythos. *Moria* itself holds around 60 new instances, ranging from solo to three and six-man groups,

"The sheer scale, lore, potential and span of content coming with *Mines of Moria* is stunning"

Go on, trait yourself

Turbine's personalising *LOTRO's* trait system

While the trait system has been used to reward players for using particular abilities repeatedly and customise without a real plan, *Mines of Moria* will bring in specific trait paths - such as the Captain's Line of Kings - that will reward players who hunt down traits with stat bonuses. It will even add the possibility of new abilities at the end of the line.

Turbine's immediate comparison was to the armour sets of *Diablo II*, with smaller gains as you receive and equip some of the traits required for completing a set. The entire trait system is also being revitalised, with its own menu, and separate sections for virtues, racial traits and sets. It's worth noting that, while available with the new expansion, trait sets will be an integral part of the lower-level experience - Turbine hasn't forgotten about the little guys.



delving into the huge underground gardens of the Dwarves, the burial chambers of those that fell in the war with the Orcs and even the Shadowy Abyss, the place that the last Balrog hid after its race was killed off. In fact, Turbine hints that you may be able to find out the history of the flaming monstrosity. You can also look forward to a gigantic raid against The Watcher at the very end of the game.

The sheer scale, lore, potential and span of content coming with *Mines of Moria* is stunning. My only worry lies in how much is left to be done between now and the end-of-the-year release, considering the somewhat rocky release of Book 14 and the amount of things Turbine are

taking on. Also, constantly updating the main epic quest line could bring into question the game's accessibility - in two or three expansions, how could new players catch up?

While *Burning Crusade* may have been an impressive expansion pack, even opening the Dark Portal didn't trigger within me the sort of fearful nausea and jaw-gaped awe of *Moria's* Endless Stair. Even Azeroth's Hellfire Peninsula lacked the domineering scale that the cavernous *Moria* delivers, and while it had a great deal of glitz, I can't deny my gut feeling that *Mines of Moria* may give *LOTRO* players a great deal more than Blizzard gave its addicts. **PCZ**



Real dwarves, real axes, real ale.



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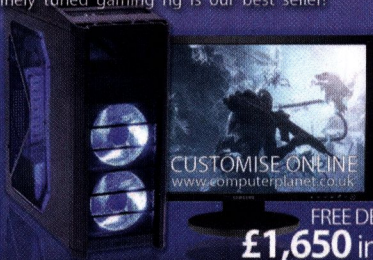


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PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games



PC ONLY

THINGS WERE BAD enough when the 360 controller proved adequate for playing *Command & Conquer* and *Battle for Middle-Earth*. Then *Sam & Max* made the sidewise leap onto the Wii and *Civilization Revolution* took Sid's strategy series to the DS. We're leaking entire genres to Wii wands and touchscreens!

This isn't necessarily a bad thing – games are great whatever platform they're on – I'm just at my happiest with a 100 buttons, just in case. But it is interesting to meet up with the Russians (page 24) and talk about a market that's so PC-based, their biggest-brand titles are all PC-only.

This is all interesting in theory but it still doesn't make it less frustrating when Telltale can't get review copies of the PC version of the *Strong Bad* adventure because everything's gone wappy with the Wii release. Still, games are games, and this month has a bumper crop of good and bad: brand new titles and dated ports, from the innovative to the derivative.

If variety is the spice on the food of love that is games, then... play on.

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, Reviews Editor

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...



52

STALKER: CLEAR SKY

Can the radioactive prequel wake up last year's sleeper hit?

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

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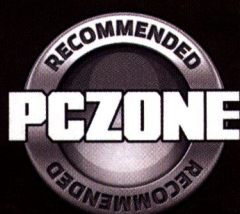
PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
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- 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

STALKER: CLEAR SKY

Steve Hogarty downs a teaspoon of radium and sets off to save Chernobyl

DEVELOPER GSC Game World
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE stalker-game.com
ETA 29 August
PRICE £29.99

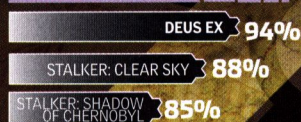


AT A GLANCE...

A return to the Forbidden Zone sees *STALKER*'s gameplay bolstered by inter-faction warfare, new areas and a landscape that wants you dead and tries its best to make it happen.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



FORGET INTRODUCTORY **SUPERLATIVES** designed to ferry your eyes across this six-page review, it took just a single improvement to convince me outright that, with *STALKER: Clear Sky*, GSC have not only tactfully re-approached their original design brief, but listened to their constantly chattering fans' response to *Shadow of Chernobyl*: they've made nighttime pitch dark.

Stand in a field once the sun's gone down and you'll see nothing more than a vague outline of trees tearing a dim horizon across your monitor. Better yet, wait for a thunderstorm to arrive and you'll witness a spectacular light show, with flashes illuminating the landscape for fractions of a second. Distant campfires stand out as pinpricks of glowing detail, while enemy flashlights huddle like lost fireflies, prompting you to switch your own lamp off and hope to God they've not spied you first.

And when the sun eventually shows itself, vast columns of light stream over hilltops and long dawn shadows are chased away. The first change you'll notice here is just how stunningly beautiful the Forbidden Zone has become, through both a technical overhaul and a closer affinity


to art direction. No longer will you have to endure a bleak eternal twilight, as the wastelands now swing from blistering afternoon sunshine to suitably thick and inky darkness.


BATTLEFIELDS

So yeah, no more rubbish nighttimes and lots more pretty graphics. What else have GSC fixed with their sequel to *Shadow of Chernobyl*, a game that punched an RPG-shaped hole in the shooter genre, promising the world and delivering slightly less than that? New inventory screens, new locations, an arrestingly inventive and intuitive faction system that turns the game world into a something akin to an ongoing game of *Battlefield 2*, and an even more ominous and lethal environment.

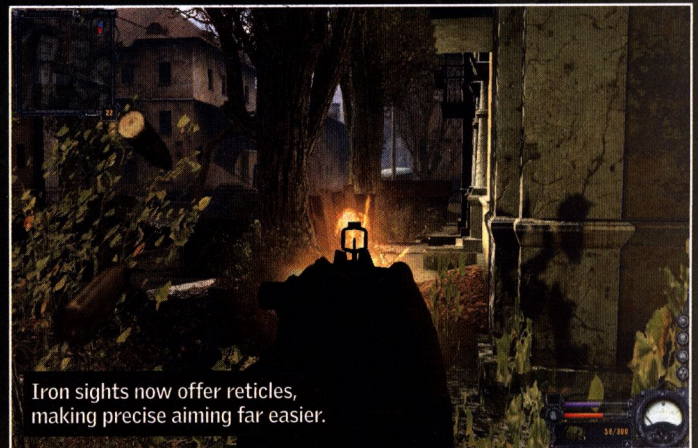
By any measure, *Clear Sky* doesn't fix all of its forbears problems. Production values haven't shot through the roof for instance – it's still a dog-eared loveable scamp of a game, peppered with almost endearing glitches – but what *Clear Sky*

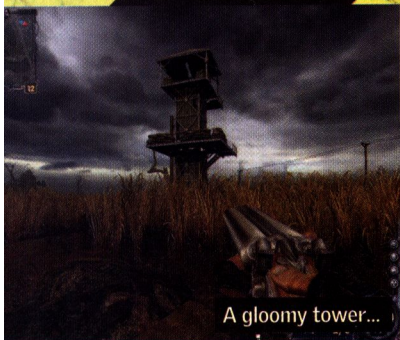
changes and improves upon is what made *Shadow of Chernobyl* such an appealing title to begin with. The combat is as rugged as ever, bolstered by a massively reworked A-Life system (one which makes grenades altogether more fun to play with, as everyone else uses them as well as you), and the weighty atmosphere, that aching *Mad Maxian* solitude, has survived the transition to this altogether more community-centric world.

We're still at the arse-end of the localisation machine, with some awful voice-acting spanning dialogue that seems to drag on far too long. And, outside of the dynamic faction missions, your objectives still seem to gravitate towards the 'go here' and 'pick this up' style of play. 

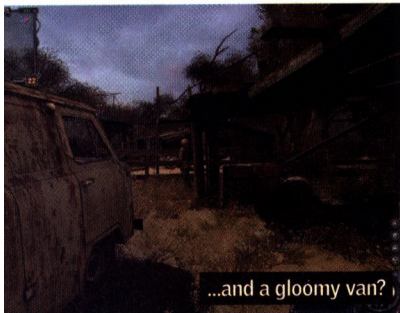


"Clear Sky is still a dog-eared loveable scamp of a game, peppered with almost endearing glitches"

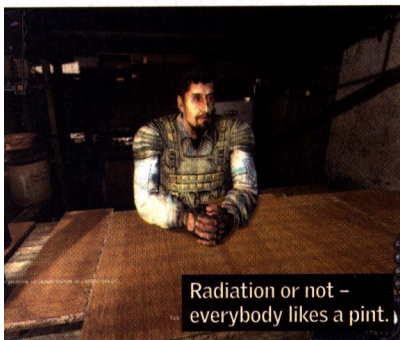




A gloomy tower...



...and a gloomy van?



Radiation or not - everybody likes a pint.



"Anyone heard of soggy biscuit?"

Sneaky Treats

My HUD, what have you done to my HUD?

Clear Sky has a new way of displaying information about the environment around you - primarily through a series of needle gauges on your inventory screen. But more noticeably, indicators of how much noise you're making and how lit you are, have been scrapped. It's pretty much up to you to decide whether you're being a master of agility, or just scooting about the wrecked suburbs like a fat man on a moped. Stealth becomes a matter of common sense instead - crouch and your movements are concealed, walk in the shadows and you'll stand less chance of being seen. No really, you'll be fine. Trust your instinct. Feel the stealth Force.

Inventory screens have been overhauled.



But that was eminently overlookable in *Shadow of Chernobyl* and it's equally forgivable this time around. You'll be exploring the same Forbidden Zone too, but one that's not only changed to allow access to some new areas, but become a far more dangerous place.

You could spend hours poring over what's changed and what's not, so I'll stop here and simply assure you that *Clear Sky* is a superbly dark, AI-led shooter set in beautifully realised landscape - a great deal closer to what GSC wanted the first game to be, and as a result more enjoyable.

FACTIONS

Let's take the faction bits first. Thrown into the game's opening arena, a vast marsh harbouring noxious puddles, scavenging mutants, overgrown grass and a handful of encampments, you initially find yourself fighting for Clear Sky, the faction that so kindly rescues you in the game's opening cinematic. This places you in the thick of the game's new directive, the inter-faction warfare, a mechanic whereby squads of stalkers defend control points and send out assault teams to capture new areas, transforming the environment into a battleground whose fronts change constantly and unpredictably.

Distress calls crackle from your PDA, pleading for your assistance in dealing with the unrelenting bandit forces. One such cry for help leads me to a burnt-out farmstead and I encounter, by chance, an allied squad en route to the same

objective. Reaching the charred buildings, the men move to cover and begin chirping orders at one another, ensuring that the first shot isn't fired until the squad leader (which is sometimes you, under various circumstances) says OK.

This isn't *Ghost Recon* or what have you, as the extent of *Clear Sky's* squad management goes no further than a simple cue to begin the attack. But that's not to say that squads aren't essential to capturing points of interest either, as on more than one occasion I've had myself saved from one of those stupid flat-faced radiation dogs by a last-second shotgun blast from a helpful squadmate.

The AI's ability to hide behind debris and corners occasionally has the irritating side-effect of nudging you out of said positions and into the crossfire - but for the most part the automated

overlooked, rather brilliantly, by the bandits who seemed sure the skirmish had ended. This allowed me to stride triumphantly from the shadows, place a round in the back of the head of one of the unsuspecting bandits, and from there liberate the farm completely.

Carrying out these incidental faction duties earns you rewards from the respective faction bases. Back at the Clear Sky camp, where the game begins, the trader had prepared a goody bag for my return. New weapons, new armour, new upgrade schematics, rubles, you're never certain what you'll receive for helping out.

Factions will also offer guides, stalkers who act as *Clear Sky's* answer to fast travel by warping you from one location to the next. Guides will only take you along paths they feel safe, that is

"Superbly dark, it's a great deal closer to what the first game wanted to be"

squad warfare is an impressive tactical spectacle, with displays of suicidal idiocy rare enough to be overlooked. Cover is bountiful too, with large squads assuming well-dispersed and believable shooting positions. Naturally, enemies are driven by self-preservation too, chucking themselves behind any cover they can.

In my particular case, the bandits' foothold at the farmstead proved too mighty for the Clear Sky squad - who were decimated by the rogue faction. I was left cowering inside a building -

areas their faction controls - another incentive to ensure your favourite faction maintains a strong presence in the Zone.

GAMMA

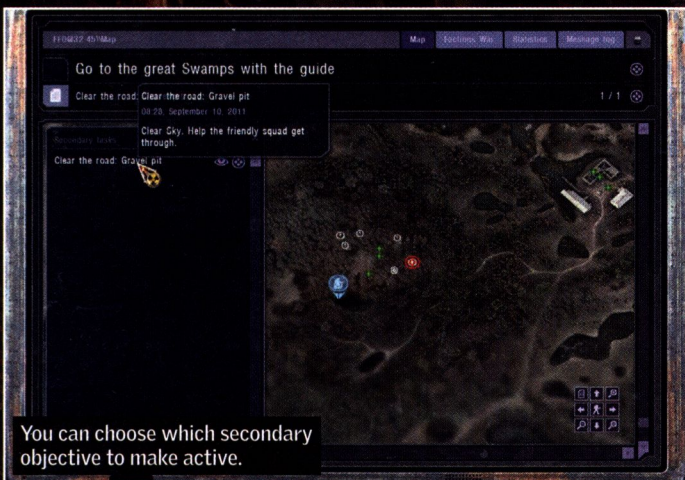
Your PDA and inventory screens have been redesigned to accommodate this newfound political bent. Alongside your map and diary, your PDA now shows the balance of power between factions in your current area (based on the points controlled and resources available - more resources



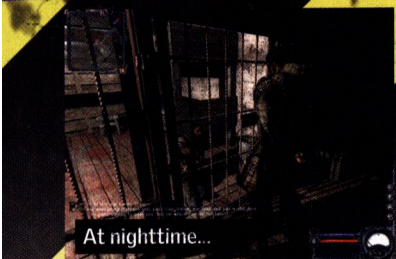
“For the most part automated squad warfare is an impressive spectacle”



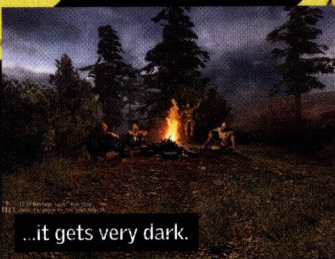
Weapons deteriorate with use. But they can be repaired.



You can choose which secondary objective to make active.



At nighttime...



...it gets very dark.



Major Khaletskiy
Whatcha staring at, assface?

Mercenary Scar
faction: Mercenary

Hah, it's funny seeing a military commander behind bars.

Alright, so the dialogue has improved slightly...



Fights pan out with or without you, but help and you'll be rewarded.



means bigger and better weapons, their standings in the Zone overall (essentially, their aggregated strengths throughout the game world), and your relationships with them (friend or enemy).

The opposing factions of Duty and Freedom make appearances later in the game, giving opportunities to enlist in either camp, but other, smaller groups are scattered throughout, and all of them can be charmed or angered by your actions. Somehow, I'd managed to get on the good side of the bandits, until they saw fit to attempt to mug me at

a crossroad, at which point our friendship was sadly and violently terminated. Can't trust those bloody bandits. *Clear Sky* loves to throw such semi-scripted spanners into the works from time to time, if only to lend some structure to the to-ing-and-fro-ing of allegiances.

This pendulum of loyalty drives *Clear Sky* from beginning to end, offering a constant and meaningful distraction from both the main plotline and the mini-quests you'll pick up from the Zone's inhabitants. All the old loveliness you may have enjoyed in *Shadows of Chernobyl*, such as the stashes hidden

in the wilderness (whose location is only vaguely noted on your PDA – you've got to read the description and have a proper hunt for it yourself), make their return too.

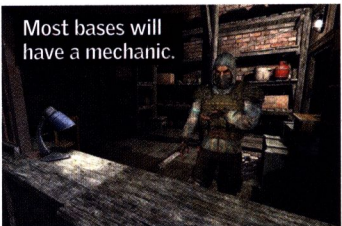
But artifacts – those shards of irradiated stones that imbue the holder with boosted attributes – have taken on an interesting new guise in *Clear Sky*. No longer are these supposedly rare objects (the very things driving stalkers into the wasteland in the first place) strewn about the landscape like confetti. They've gone invisible, detectable only by using the appropriate tool. The detector given to you at the outset is a basic affair, a simple proximity beeper, which becomes increasingly excited the closer you come to one. More expensive detectors improve your ability to hunt the shards, which can be a difficult task considering some artifacts are capable of moving about, oddly enough.

This may seem a simple change of pace for artifacts, but in practice chasing down your prize is a game in itself – an often infuriating game for sure, but one that makes the sight of a glowing stone finally popping into visibility all the more rewarding. Certainly it makes the damn things feel a tad more special than in the previous game.

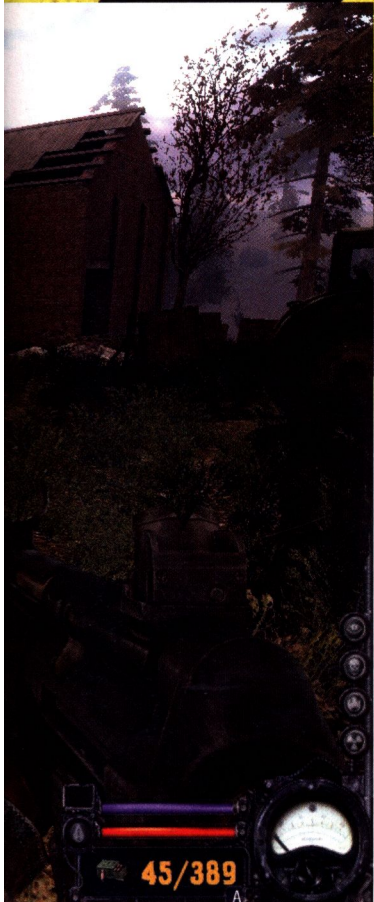
Fixer Upper

All about *Clear Sky's* helpful mechanics

The weapon upgrade system has been completely reworked for *Clear Sky*, allowing you to not only repair weapons, but to upgrade them without needing attachments. Each mechanic knows of certain methods of upgrading certain equipment, improving its accuracy or recoil rate for example, and his repertoire of upgrades can be improved by bringing him the schematics you find throughout the game. Only one upgrade can be applied to any one part of a weapon (the barrel, for example), and combining them unlocks second and third tiers of upgrades. This allows for some hugely improved weapons, such as my trusty pistol, which could snipe the genitalia off an ant at 50 yards.



Most bases will have a mechanic.



Also on the cards are the Zone's radioactive outbursts. Having seemingly become a semi-sentient chunk of earth, the Zone has been enraged by incursions into its most delicate regions (incursions by Strelak, if you're interested in the storyline). On a semi-random basis, horizon-spanning blasts of radiation tear through the landscape and, given no more than a minute's warning before these catastrophes, you're forced to seek cover or perish.

One such blast forced me to dump half my inventory on the ground, as I desperately needed the stamina to sprint

"Clear Sky is a unique experience, unparalleled save for its predecessor"

to a distant bunker before my face was torn off by gamma rays. Such safe spots are marked up on your PDA during these blasts (*Clear Sky* calls them 'emissions', which sounds filthy), and they happen rarely enough to be an interesting and exciting occurrence, rather than an arbitrary annoyance. They look great too, turning the sky a deep red and causing birds to drop out of the sky like cooked chickens. Just watch your quicksaves – it's all too easy to fling yourself into a fatal dead end if you're in the wrong place.

Clear Sky's is a dangerous world, fully intent on killing you, and yet it's one you'll simply enjoy inhabiting. The new Limansk area even manages to transform the typically rural action into something more similar to *Half-Life 2*'s City 17, allowing GSC to parade their AI's ability to effortlessly move through and make use of cover during massive gun battles. Enemies occupy street blockades as well as building interiors, meaning death can come swiftly, and from any angle. The path to Red Forest has been opened too, offering woodland terror, disorientating radioactive anomalies, and mutants

capable of pouncing on NPCs, and bounding back into the wilderness, still holding their witless prey.

ALL CLEAR

As mentioned, *Clear Sky* builds on *Shadows of Chernobyl*'s strengths, but turns a seemingly blind eye to many of its problems. *Clear Sky* reintroduces old characters (though you'll struggle to remember who they are) and tries to force personality into new characters (a hash-smoking trader called Ganja is

the only one who sticks in my mind – and that's because he was so laughably bad). NPCs essentially shovel impenetrable narrative into your face until you're simply driven to ignore it.

But not a single thing *Clear Sky* brings to the table negatively impacts on what's already there. The interactions of all its elements, the factions, the loyalties, the unpredictable AI, the open world, the threat of nuclear annihilation, they're fibrous strands of the most enjoyable sort of rope. *Clear Sky* is a unique experience, so far unparalleled save for its predecessor.

That it's a successful melding of RPG-style inventories and an extremely solid-feeling shooter in a semi-free-roaming and original world is in itself enough to make it worth playing. But the added texture of the newly refined A-Life, and the engine's ability to deliver a uniquely surprising experience every time you play gives *Clear Sky* some incredible appeal. This is the game *Shadow of Chernobyl* was meant to be. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **DX10** version astounds
Sound **Meaty** guns, spooky wailing
Multiplayer **It's there, but you won't play it**

- ✓ **Dynamic** faction warfare works
- ✓ **Weapons** and combat are meaty, visceral and solid
- ✓ **Some** astounding visuals
- ✓ **Random** radiation blasts are ace
- ✗ **The odd** bum mission
- ✗ **Crap** script, storytelling and characters again

88

Enriching



SPACE SIEGE

A robot best friend and a steel spine – Jon Blyth's dreams come true

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE spacesiege.com
ETA 29 August
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

It's a dungeon trawl through space, with a lot of the beefier RPG elements reduced, in favour of a streamlined combat approach.

Minimum system requirements:
 2.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SPACE SIEGE **83%**

DUNGEON SIEGE II **82%**

TITAN QUEST **81%**

IN THE LATE 22nd century the name Seth has finally become cool. So get ready to play Seth Walker, a man whose name was unusable in Britain for many decades, thanks to the mutton-chopped gamekeeper in *Emmerdale Farm*. These were dark years for Seths everywhere: until spunky American Seth Green tried to reclaim the name, hindered only by an acute case of ginger hair. He was the turning of the tide though and in the 22nd century, Seth is the name of humanity's last hope in a war it wasn't prepared for.

Galactic exploration hasn't been going too well. A colonisation of the wrong planet triggered a catastrophic response from its hidden insectoid owners who embarked on a universe-wide genocide of humanity. When Seth appears on the scene a tutorial shows you the usual basics and gets you into a vast ship's cryostasis pod, guided by the ship's computer – PILOT – and Commander Vargas, a gruff military type who seems like the sort who'd secretly love his wife.

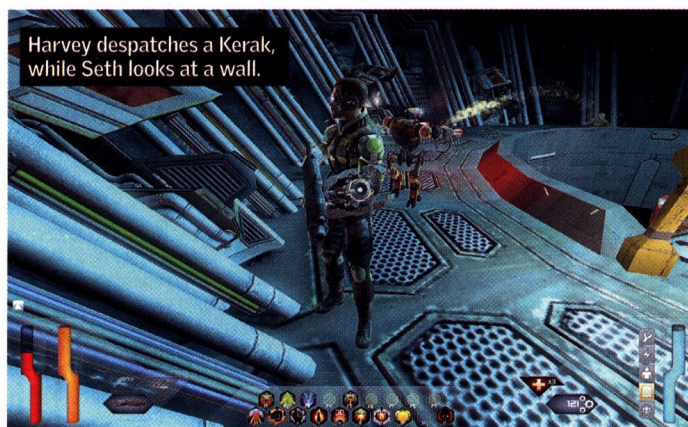
Quickly it becomes obvious that this isn't a full-blown RPG adventure – there's

no character creation process or classes. On top of that, an instinctive tap of the 'I' key fails to produce anything like an inventory. You'll find weapons on your travels, but other than that, the only currency is upgrade materials. These come from everything – ship robots, the Kerak (the insects), and Cybers (humans who've gone strangely mental since waking up weeks early from coldsleep).

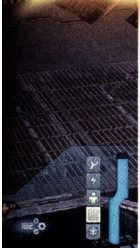
GET PHYSICS-AL

Upgrade materials do everything. They can be used to upgrade your personal skills, the abilities of your helper robot, the speed, damage and crit rates of your guns, and even used to build the items that you'll find in chests. These are the clearest indication of Gas Powered Games' intention to clear as much junk out of the genre as possible. And incredibly, it works. You can be careless and rely on medkits – but you'll end up with fewer gun upgrades in the process. It even works logically – nearly. Not quite, but nearly enough for your belief-suspension to web over the gaps.

Fighting, then. Your arsenal kicks off with the basics: your Mag-Blade arm provides powerful melee and can be upgraded to deal powerful critical hits,



"Gas Powered Games' intention is to clear as much junk out of the RPG genre as possible"



More swords than hands, that one.

and then there are your machine guns. There you have your combat basics: two equipped weapons that you can hot-swap with a tap of the Tab key, and fire with the right mouse button. Exploding barrels are so prevalent that the developers couldn't avoid making a joke about them, so the sheer brazenness and overuse of the cliché actually breaks the spell of naff. You'll gasp as ever-larger explosive crates are introduced, and

whimper in anticipation as a massive crate of gas cylinders explodes to the sound effects of fireworks. You know someone's having a laugh, somewhere.

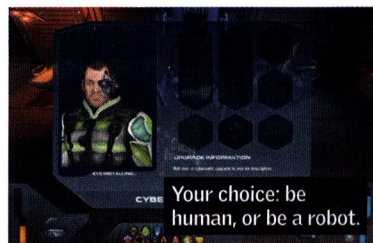
Your keyboard hand is left to deal with the special attacks. These give battles punctuation – without them, it'd be a strategy-free bullet-slog – and require energy that you can only regain by causing more damage to

Have you got skills?

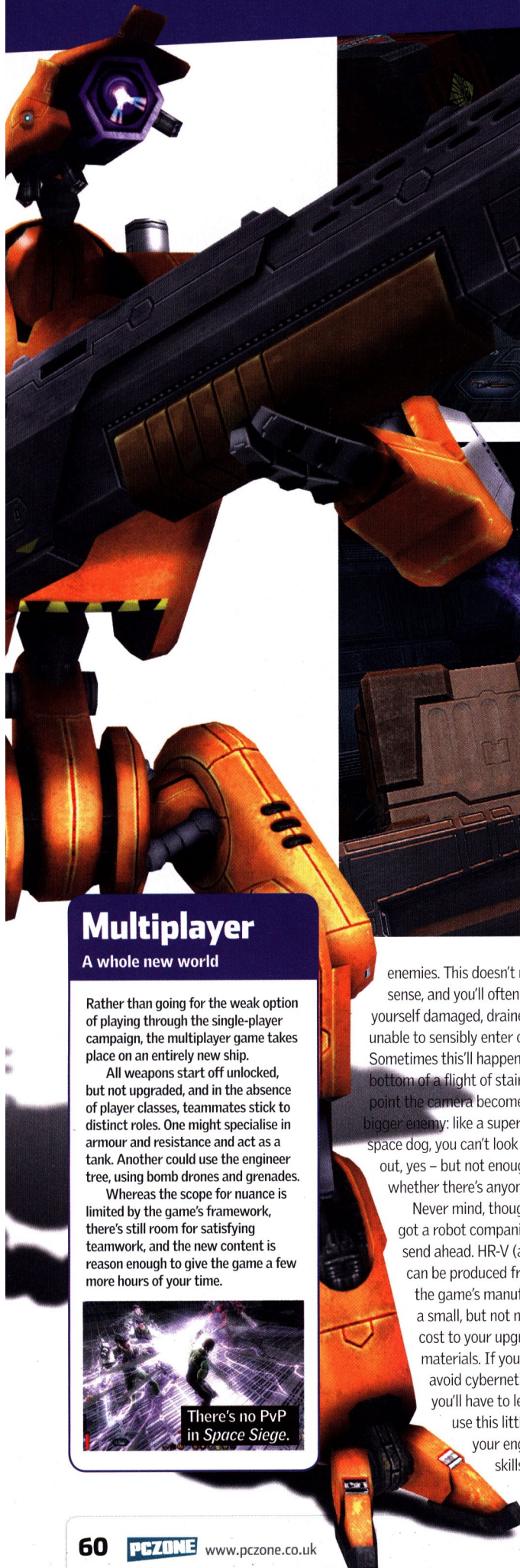
And if so, are they in combat or engineering?

Your skills tree has only two branches: combat and engineering. If you want to remain human, you'll be relying more on your engineering side. This contains gadgetry such as stun grenades – useful for taking the edge from powerful enemies such as the Rhino. Crowds of enemies can be weakened with a bomb drone, which scuttles autonomously to areas of high bastardry. All these weapons need finding or building, however – and your main weapons have infinite ammo.

Replacing yourself with metal bits isn't all sunshine and stat bonuses. High-tier powers such as Inspiration become inaccessible once you've removed a certain amount of your humanity. That said, these powers do feel like a token nod to balance in a game where the cyborg path is deliberately easier. Just don't expect a perfect ending...



Your choice: be human, or be a robot.



Later enemies get bigger and more messed up.



Boss battles – few and far between.

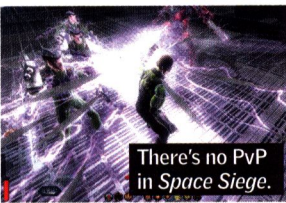
Multiplayer

A whole new world

Rather than going for the weak option of playing through the single-player campaign, the multiplayer game takes place on an entirely new ship.

All weapons start off unlocked, but not upgraded, and in the absence of player classes, teammates stick to distinct roles. One might specialise in armour and resistance and act as a tank. Another could use the engineer tree, using bomb drones and grenades.

Whereas the scope for nuance is limited by the game's framework, there's still room for satisfying teamwork, and the new content is reason enough to give the game a few more hours of your time.



There's no PvP in Space Siege.

enemies. This doesn't make much sense, and you'll often find yourself damaged, drained and unable to sensibly enter combat. Sometimes this'll happen at the bottom of a flight of stairs, at which point the camera becomes an even bigger enemy: like a superheroic space dog, you can't look up. Zoom out, yes – but not enough to see whether there's anyone there.

Never mind, though – you've got a robot companion you send ahead. HR-V (aka Harvey) can be produced from any of the game's manufactories at a small, but not negligible, cost to your upgrade materials. If you're going to avoid cybernetic surgery, you'll have to learn how to use this little robot and your engineering skills.

Harvey is mostly helpful, causing less damage than yourself, but providing a valuable shield. He can repair himself, so mastering the balance of allowing him to pull enemy fire quickly becomes an important strategy. Out of combat, he can be a right prick – a number of times, he eagerly ran into a crowd of proximity bombs, causing me to suffer enough direct and subsequent burn damage to die a horrible death.

Death, though, has very little sting. The admirably seamless save system lets you dip in and out of a medical room, and if you're not too far from the last one, there isn't much strategic difference if you choose to respawn rather than waste a medkit. As the enemies you've damaged remain damaged, the only thing stopping you choosing the less honourable latter path is a sense of embarrassment at your own shoddy tactics. You can plough through the game like an idiot – rare boss battles

aside – but it's rewarding only when you put a bit of thought in.

WITHOUT CLASS

Apart from occasionally blowing you up, Harvey's a good companion, making up for the general tactics that go with a party system by having a more pet-like relationship, with his abilities spread above your own, along the function keys. Use him with style, or use him as a fire-pulling decoy – just remember that every time you have to rebuild him, you'll use upgrade parts you could have spent on your own weapons.

There might be no classes, but you do get a choice of where your character's finer specialities lie. Every major mission will give you two skill points, allowing you to climb down the combat or engineering skill trees. There's a good range on offer, for a single play-through – but not really enough to warrant playing the game through again. However, on



Hey Holohead, how about a less intimidating eye colour please.



You're in trouble if you're alone against ranged and melee enemies.

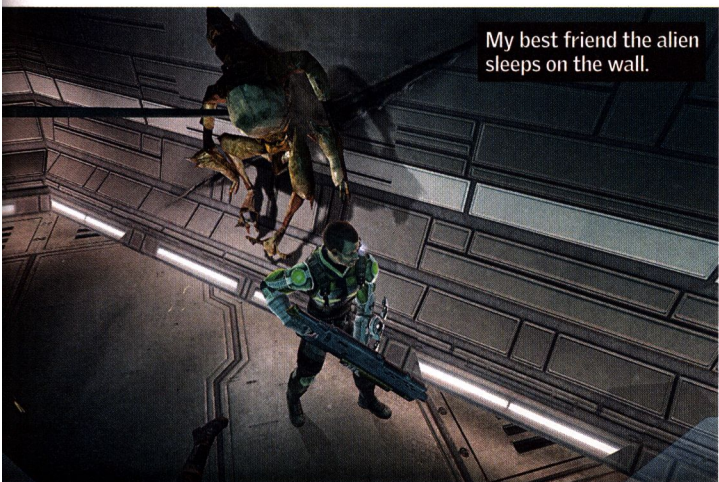
certain stages during the game, Doctor DeSoto will alert you to the presence of a cybernetic implant.

CYBER DECISION

This is the game's one moral quandary: how far down the cybernetic path should you go? Not only do the mechanical parts give you an instant stat bonus, they unlock parts of the already limited skill trees. In its early stages, the game actually does a good job of steering you down the mechanised path. You've got an entire species to save, after all. And it's just an eye. The arguments against are pretty much summarised by "ew". You might be offended by the crude notion that three per cent of humanity resides in the eye. Then you'll notice that the last

item on DeSoto's shopping list is a tin brain. Ew.

Space Siege is a very linear affair – exploration is only useful for two things. First, the secondary missions, which are marked on your map. Harvey upgrades, weapons, and cybernetic implants are all mapped out for you. The only other rewards for an inquisitive mind are bones, upgrade parts and grenades. It's here that you feel the absence of *Diablo*-esque armour sets, recipes, and a rich world of randomly-generated hats. GPG have successfully streamlined the action-RPG – a fairly incredible achievement – but chests feel underwhelming without the chance of epic loot. This is a matter of taste, but if you want *Legendary Sets*, you'll find *Space Siege* lacking.



My best friend the alien sleeps on the wall.



Attaboy Harvey – I'm off this way.



I lost my heart to a cybernetic procedure.

Whilst the main story is fine, the scriptwriting isn't afraid to splash around in the paddling pool of cliché. However, the dialogue is well-acted, even when the script rings false. Bonus plot information is offered to those who give a toss, in the time-honoured tradition of audio diaries. These can be gratingly satirical news stories or unsuccessful attempts to give the lost crew a human story, but there's a truly compelling chain of notes from a man who is looking for his daughter. His descent into madness is surprisingly well-handled, and makes up for the phantom of the giggling girl that runs through the ship's corridors for the majority of the game, like a shit Ripley's daughter.

I say that, but about two thirds through the game, an innocuous chair cast the perfect silhouette of a slouched girl, and I haven't tiptoed so gingerly towards a chair since my grandmother fell asleep watching TV, and everyone thought she was dead. So, hackneyed as a small girl might be, it's still effective on some level.

Space Siege is an achievement, answering a question that no-one really asked, by thinning out the deeper elements of the action-RPG to the point where you might as well just call it an

action game. The combat has that intangible but important sense of connection. Although the first half of the game falls into a lull of mundane and repetitive baddies, it definitely becomes more interesting, difficult and intense toward the closing acts. But don't expect brilliant innovation. **PCZ**

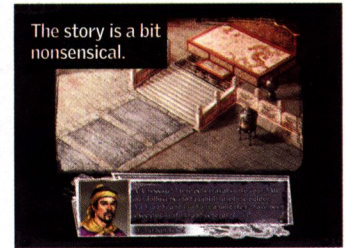
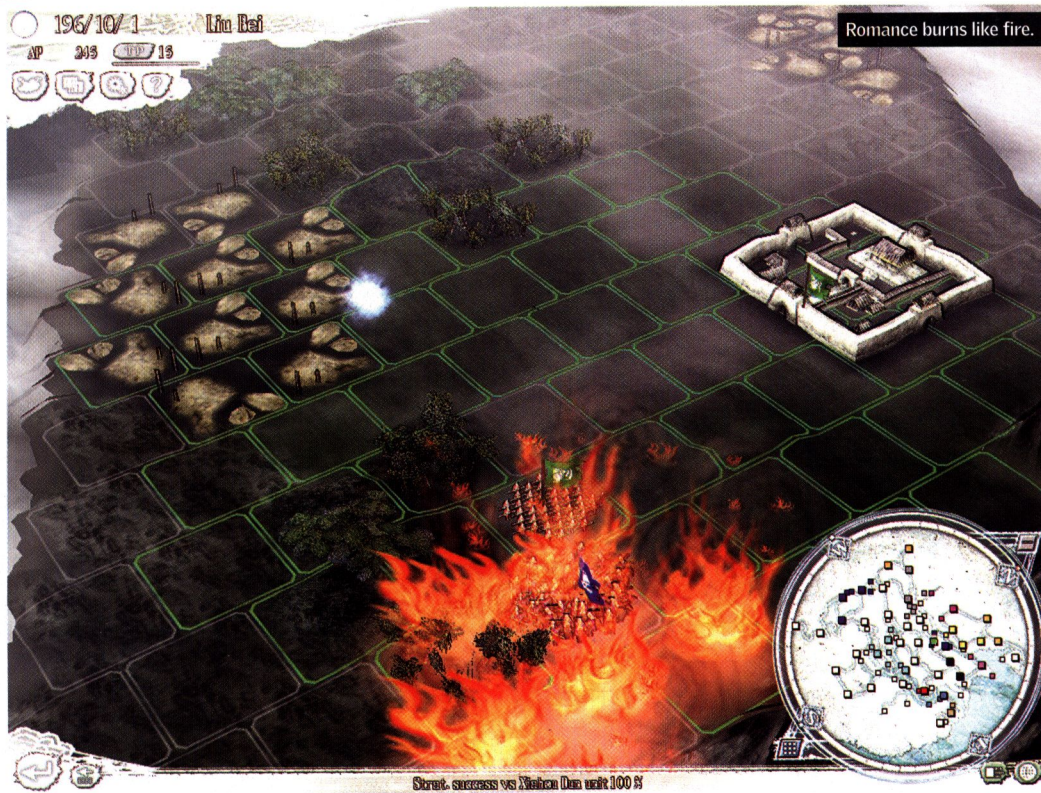
PCZONE

Graphics Adequate to good
Sound Dramatic score, decent effects
Multiplayer Different co-op campaign

- ✓ Cleverly simplified currency
- ✓ Decent plot
- ✓ Satisfyingly tactile combat
- ✓ Real sense of strategy
- ✗ Low frame rates
- ✗ Script occasionally weak

83

HR-Ving a good time



ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS XI

Ed Zitron puts on Barry White and lights some candles for a night with Sun Tzu

DEVELOPER Koei
PUBLISHER Koei
WEBSITE koei.com/rtkxi
ETA 8 September
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

Hardcore historic Chinese turn-based strategy, with huge armies doing battle across gigantic, country-sized maps.

Minimum system requirements:
 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



IN MANY WAYS, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms XI* is much like the love that old people have for each other: it's deep, it's been going on for a long time, and to most people it's completely impenetrable. You don't understand how this decrepit system has kept together all this time, but it turns out that there's real beauty behind it all, once you take the time to look past the silence and weirdness.

The problem isn't so much that *RTKXI* doesn't ease you into its world – its exhaustive tutorial takes two hours – it's just that *RTKXI* has got so much to teach you that your head will spin. It lacks the logical connections that most strategy games have – for example, to build around a city, you have to select the city, click build, then click on randomly placed build areas, instead of just clicking an icon and building. Every action seems to have four or five menus behind it, each one with drop-downs, resources, time constraints and statistics that they abide

by. When you have to build things in six cities, controlling it all becomes an absolute nightmare.

Then you have the complexities of keeping the will, supplies and vehicles of troops under control. This is complicated by each action you need to take requiring a general, and each general having different statistics and specialities.

As PC gamers, we're not shy of reams of statistics – but *RTKXI* is confounding. Even now, when I have a grasp of what is going on, it remains bewildering. Once you work out plausible stratagems, you'll find it incredibly satisfying to execute them – but first you'll need to understand the balance between resource gathering, statistic building and troop marching. All that, and comprehend several other columns of numbers.

RTKXI has hours of mile-deep strategy, and will appeal to a certain person – someone with the patience of a saint and the ability to take on a great deal of information that doesn't connect in any

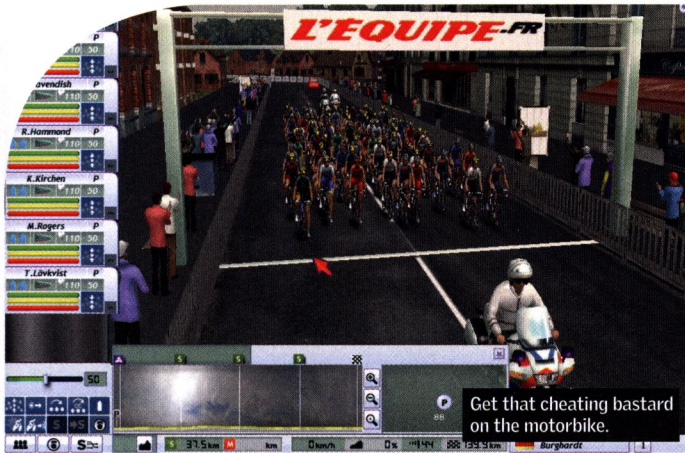
logical construct. And indeed, someone who can tolerate an over-complicated interface, a serious amount of number-crunching and aged graphics. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics 3D maps, tiny soldiers
 Sound Keyboard orchestra
 Multiplayer None

- ✓ Deep strategy
- ✓ Well written
- ✗ Nigh-on impenetrable
- ✗ Clunky interface
- ✗ Just too much going on

59
 Romance, but no kissing



PRO CYCLING MANAGER 2008

Enter the world of dope-free pro cycling

DEVELOPER Cyanide Studio
PUBLISHER Focus Home Interactive
WEBSITE www.cycling-manager.com/en
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
2.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

THIS IS A great time to be a fan of cycling, with the Volta a Portugal em Bicicleta (Portugal's Tour de France) in full swing and dopers galore crawling out of the woodwork. *Pro Cycling Manager 2008* allows you to take part in the former, but not the latter.

For the first time in the series track cycling is introduced, although the cycling itself isn't that good – again. With poor graphics and animations, watching a pack of riders is like watching a cloud of gaudily-dressed flies huddle around a high-speed turd. With an unimpressive racing interface, in which you give your team commands, the 3D aspect of the game is lacking.

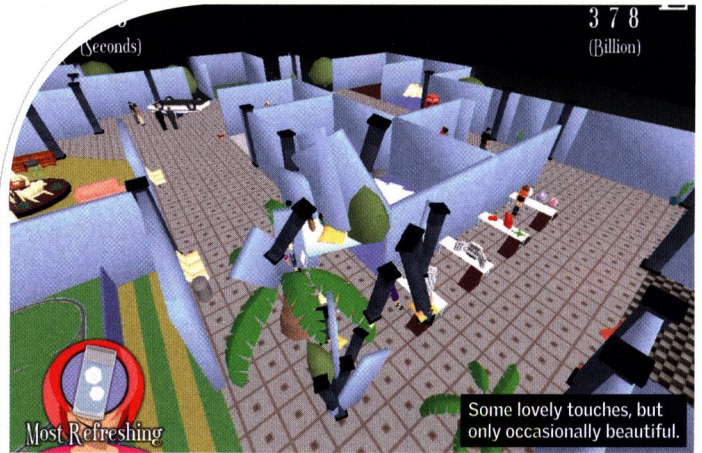
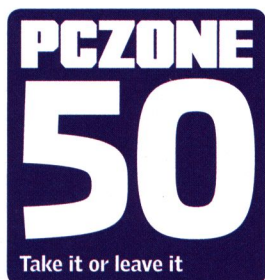
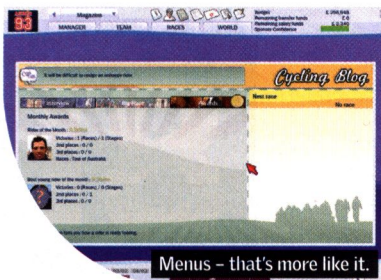
Look beyond this, and you get a solid management game. While it may not be as polished as the big-hitters like *Football Manager*, it hangs together.



With attention to aspects like sponsors, hiring and firing riders, and control over which events to race in, the management part of the game is worth sinking a few hours into.

If the cycling part of the game was better, or the game cost less, then the score would go up. However, you'd be better waiting for this game to fall to half price, as only half of it is any cop.

Chris Evans



THE WONDERFUL END OF THE WORLD

Hardly a whole new ball game

DEVELOPER Dejobaan Games
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE www.dejobaan.com/wonderful
ETA Out now
PRICE \$20 (£10) from Dejobaan, \$10 (£5) from Steam

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a DirectX 9 compatible 3D card.



THERE'S NO ESCAPING the desperate inspiration here – Namco's *Katamari Damacy*. You walk around, getting stuff stuck on you, growing, collecting larger items, until you're as big as the level. The concept, gameplay, whimsical presentation, musical style – even the feel of one or two of the less ambitious maps – are as close to identical to the oddball classic as laws allow.

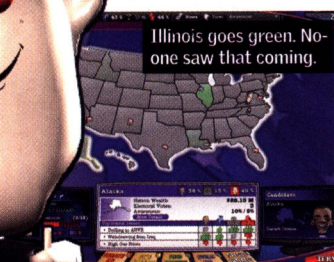
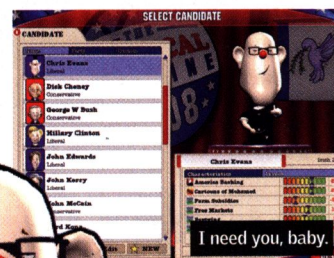
Whereas the real *Katamari* has stagnated somewhat – the Xbox 360 version was a dull exercise in by-the-number iteration – *The Wonderful End of the World* has plenty of imagination, and some excellent level ideas. The Arcadia level, in which your progress causes the field to pull back, revealing more and more classic coin-ops being played, is brilliant – and the word blocks level is aching for modders to make it filthy.

But these cubic, concept levels are the exceptions. The levels which are more reality-based just don't work as neatly, and have enjoyment-shattering issues with collision detection. Nothing ruins a time-limited game more than becoming trapped in a glitch, and the graphically busier levels drag along like a dog with an itchy arse.

You can't say that this is a good idea with only passable execution, because that's misplacing the credit for the idea. However, what *The Wonderful End of the World* lacks in elegance and originality, it makes up for with flashes of imagination and brilliance that have been lacking in the inspirational franchise. In the absence of an official PC *Katamari*, download *World's* demo from Steam, and then decide it's worth your fiver.

Jon Blyth





THE POLITICAL MACHINE 2008



Chris Evans gets bare-faced for the political race

DEVELOPER Stardock Entertainment
 PUBLISHER Stardock Entertainment
 WEBSITE politicalmachine.com
 ETA Out now
 PRICE \$19.99 (€10)



AT A GLANCE...

Become a presidential candidate and win the election. Serious real-world issues and fun bobbleheads combine for a great balance.

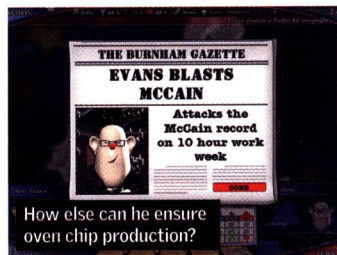
Minimum system requirements:
 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB video card

HOW IT STACKS

THE POLITICAL MACHINE	81%
DEMOCRACY	72%
DIPLOMACY	69%

THE POLITICAL MACHINE 2008 follows up the 2004 version which, so the developers claim, accurately predicted that the state of Ohio would prove key to securing Bush's second term. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't - but this is a sober and enlightening game, with all the forced wackiness of bobbleheads.

As with most videogame diplomacy everything goes in turns, and one turn of the game translates into a week of real-world campaigning. You use this time to travel around the various states, build up your Campaign Headquarters, and fire off opinions in multiple-choice chat show interviews. Building Consulting Offices earns you Political Capital, which allows you to hire units such as the Fixer. He can eliminate your opponent's Intimidator, a shadowy character who affects public



opinion with fear tactics. Meanwhile, your own Intimidator is roaming their states barking about terrorism. It's depressing how much like a game the reality is, which is why *The Political Machine* works so well.

In your bid to win in the complicated American electoral college system, you'll be presented with an updated set of hot political potatoes, and campaigning will require you to advertise on the right medium, on the right issues and make speeches on the fly. For instance, while visiting Alaska you should focus on oil drilling and undermine your opponent by pointing out their policies on petrol prices. To stop the game getting stale, Stardock are even planning to update the issues in the game as they change in reality.

The game does realise we're not all amazed by US politics too, even though it's distant enough to be an entertaining pantomime. The European and alien Drengin campaigns are far less developed though - but at least provide relief from the intensity of the US election. It does feel slightly insulting to have our politics equated to that of a fictional race of aggressive aliens, but then again, Boris Johnson is Mayor of London.

At its heart *The Political Machine* is a great strategy game with some fun

tension-breakers thrown in for good measure. If you're not interested in politics, this will bore you stupid - and who can blame you, when everything's as transparently corrupt as it is? Yeah, get back to *Massive Bucket of Sand Simulator*. The graphics are awesome - and you get infinite ammo. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics **Bobbleheads and a map**
 Sound **Isn't atrocious**
 Multiplayer **If you think you're hard enough**

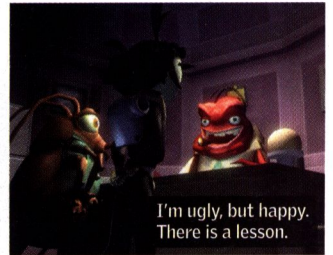
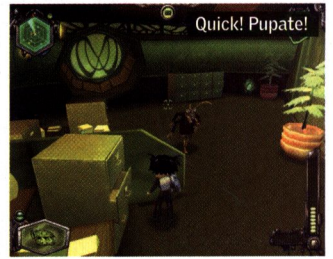
- ✓ Realistic political issues
- ✓ Makes you feel clever
- ✓ Very accessible
- ✓ Drengin
- ✗ Republicans can win
- ✗ No Clinton/Obama rivalry

81

Bobble-Obama



Yeah, I'm pissed off. No-one told me I could dress casual.



INSECTICIDE PART 1

Ed Zitron hoists his petticoat to reveal a chitinous carapace

DEVELOPER Crackpot Entertainment
PUBLISHER Gamecock Media Group/Steam
WEBSITE insecticidethegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$14.99 (£7.50)



AT A GLANCE...

A multi-genre detective game that blends 3D platforming with well-voiced adventure sections in the vein of Telltale's *Sam & Max* games.

Minimum system requirements:
 1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 64MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

- SAM & MAX - 2.05: WHAT'S NEW BEELEZBUB **84%**
- INSECTICIDE PART 1 **57%**
- AGON: LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO **35%**

IN *INSECTICIDE*, CRACKPOT Entertainment are giving two genres an honest bash, doing their best to combine a 3D platformer in the vein of *Psychonauts* and a 3D point-and-clicker like Telltale's *Sam & Max* series. The game takes place in the city of Troi, where a sudden crime wave has kicked off, giving newbie detective Chrys Liszt a great deal of work. You travel the city, pummeling perps with your selection of pun-laden weapons, solving crimes and jumping between genres like a grasshopper who can't decide where to use her triangular abdomen valves to dig a hole and lay her eggs.

If Crackpot wanted to create some kind of fresh-faced genre mix-up, they've fallen short. The 3D platforming feels awkward to control. You use the WASD keys and the mouse to move, but it never feels tight enough, and there are way too many jumps that feel like leaps of faith. This platforming isn't bad – although it gets repetitive – but it feels dissonant with the rest of the game.

You see, most of your time will be spent with the adventure game, picking up evidence and uncovering clues, like

Steve Purcell's animal duo. This is where *Insecticide* inspires and frustrates the most. The voice-acting is superb and the characters interesting, but the dialogue is intent on beating you over the head with insect-related puns. I suspect that the writers returned to the game to add more, just in case somebody missed the fact that you are playing as an insect, in a city full of insects, in a game called *Insecticide*.

That said, it also has moments of brilliance (for example, the hista-mine), and the premise, characters, city, and art style have the potential make this a truly brilliant series.

Insecticide Part 1 is middle-of-the-road, but it could have been great fun given a bit of self-reflection and polish. Given the episodic nature, and *Sam & Max's* ability to respond quickly to the worries of its critics, we genuinely hope that Crackpot will be able to improve matters to something we can completely recommend. At the moment, it's not there. However, considering the budget price, you could do a lot worse on your quest to find an original adventure game this summer. Especially if you love insectoid puns. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics: Cartoony, last-gen
 Sound: Spritzy jazz, great voice acting
 Multiplayer: Nada

- ✓ Great art style
- ✓ Brilliant voice acting
- ✗ Platforming is a rum do
- ✗ Lacks cohesion between two genres
- ✗ Terrible, terrible puns

57
 A bee minus

PC Specialist recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium



pcspecialist.co.uk

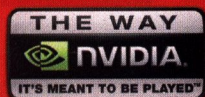


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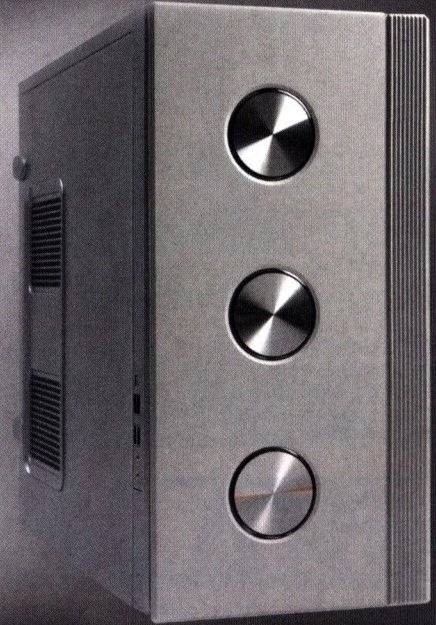
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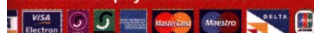
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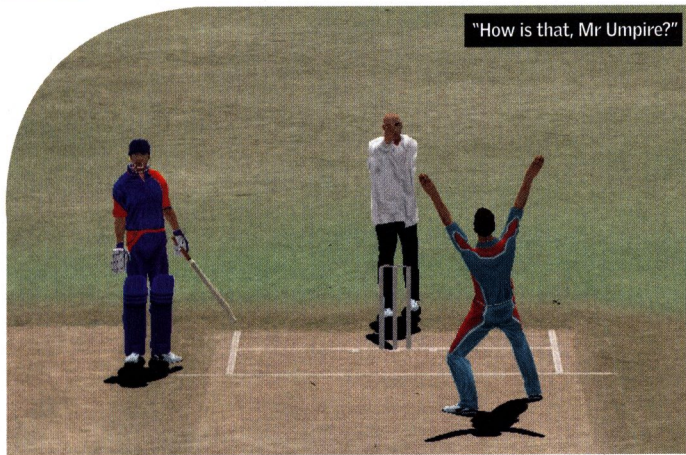
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INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 2008

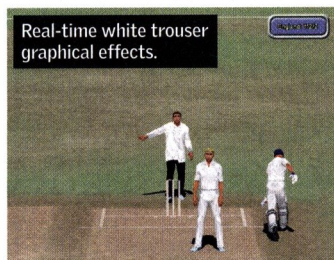
How's that? Not great...

DEVELOPER Xplosiv
PUBLISHER Xplosiv
WEBSITE childishthings.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

IT SAYS SOMETHING about the perverse nature of cricket that it often better listened to than watched, whether on a balmy summer afternoon or ensconced under the bedclothes on a winter night, receiving reports from an exotic land. The specific machinations of the sport can be too bewildering to comprehend, and it's sometimes more reassuring to simply know it's there.

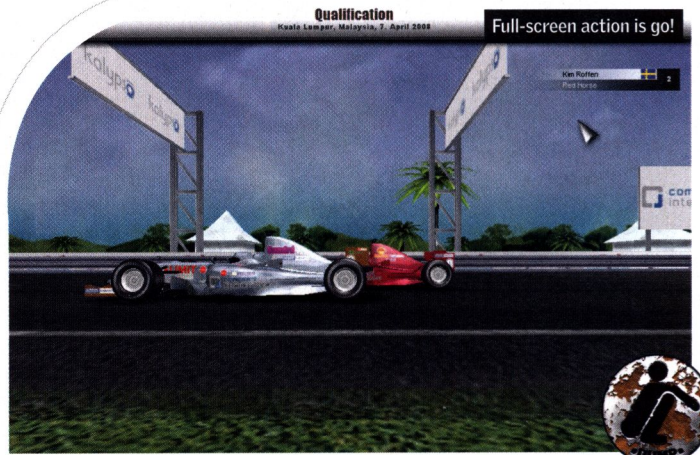
Those of a more tactical bent can chance their arm in *ICC '08*, but as in life, setting everything to default is as good a plan as any. In fact, this game is best enjoyed while doing something else as it stretches the definitions of both 'interactive' and 'entertainment.' Furthermore, with 800x600 graphics that wouldn't look out of place on a mobile phone, it's simply too ugly to play full screen, and is best tucked away in a corner of the monitor while you attend



to more pressing matters. In a nod to this, the action pauses whenever you're using another application.

Every so often you can go back to the cricket, instruct your bowlers and batters to be more or less aggressive, and play an over with as many or few highlights as you wish. Cricket fans will lap up the authenticity, but £20 is still a bit much for what *ICC '08* delivers.

Steve Hill

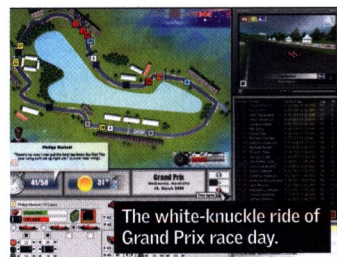


RACING TEAM MANAGER

Car trouble...

DEVELOPER Comport Interactive/
RTL Sport
PUBLISHER Kalypso Media
WEBSITE kalypsomedia.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.



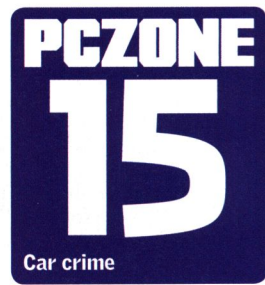
BACK IN WHAT is popularly known as 'the day,' there was a Formula One management game on the ZX Spectrum. Despite mainly involving watching cars flash across a static screen from right to left, it succinctly captured the white-hot atmosphere of Grand Prix team management. Decades on, this is essentially the same game, with scarcely improved graphics and an emphasis on banal technical details, with the already dismal experience hampered further by tooth-grindingly slow loading times.

Furthermore, Formula One fans will be put off by the lack of authenticity, as you find yourself managing fictional drivers for teams like the thinly-veiled Ferrari-alike, Red Horse. When you finally get to race day, it's relayed in an overhead view of the track, with cars represented by numbers, alongside a 3D window of irrelevant track action.



Success is based on keeping an eye on the weather, selecting the right tyres, timing the pit stops correctly, and responding to your two drivers' requests to lower or raise the front or rear wing, presumably by remote control. Having the right amount of fuel is also key, so when you inexplicably and instantly go from half full to completely empty it's either a crippling bug or an unforgivable design flaw. Either way, it's enough to ensure that you never play it again.

Steve Hill

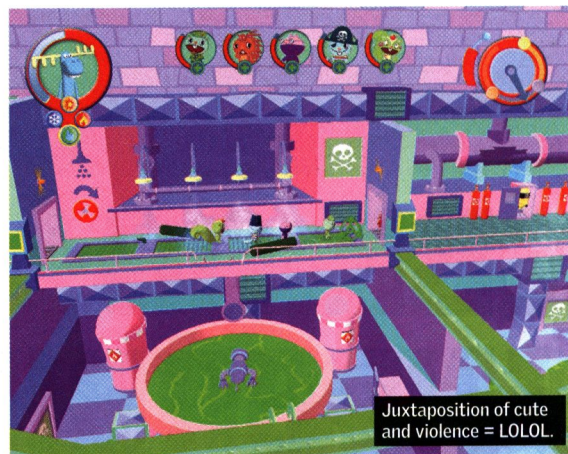




Pain = LOL.



Walking along = LOL.



Juxtaposition of cute and violence = LOLOL.

HAPPY TREE FRIENDS: FALSE ALARM

Jon Blyth emerges angry from two hours of tedium

DEVELOPER Stainless Games
PUBLISHER Sega/Steam
WEBSITE www.sega.co.uk/games/?g=289
ETA Out now
PRICE \$23.99 (£12)



AT A GLANCE...

Charmless *Lemmings*, crossed with a dreary take on *Little Big Adventure*. It's shit – and twice the price of the XBLA version. Can we take the ball gag out now?

Minimum system requirements:
 A graphics card, a processor, and no brain at all.

HOW IT STACKS

LEMMINGS 2: THE TRIBES 88%

PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES 83%

HAPPY TREE FRIENDS 19%

DO NOT BUY this game. I'll explain why, but it's important that we get that out of the way to begin with. Put your credit card back in its plastic sheath, so we can talk with less urgency.

Happy Tree Friends: False Alarm is about £14 (including various taxes). For that, you get 30 levels, each taking between one or two minutes. That means you're paying £14 to experience, at most, 60 minutes of anti-life spent in a glazed state of nothing. Oh, look: they're vomiting blood from radiation sickness. You'll feel nothing. No shock, no mirth, because the developers have got absolutely nothing right.

Your mission is to get five characters from one side of the linear, trap-strewn map to the other. The maps look nice enough, and there are a variety of locations, but they're all fundamentally the same, lacking any sense of progress or innovation.

You can't control the characters, but you can intervene. Melt snow and scare the friends into a run with Fire. Blow things up a little bit with Nitro. Freeze your friends and block pipes with ice. The rest of the time, just click anything that's

flashing. That's it. Thirty damn times.

This is an under-featured Flash game in a paper mask. It doesn't even trigger the "Press Shift+Tab" Steam Community features – which does have the accidental benefit that no-one need know that you've played it, let alone blown the price of a decent meal on it.

The video you unlock – your grand motivation – is a badly encoded kick in the face, reminding you how wearisome the original cartoons were. And if you think otherwise – perhaps you think it's edgy! – you're both wrong, and an insipid idiot who doesn't deserve to watch *Divine* eating dog shit in *Pink Flamingos*.

Whether Steam should act as a rubbish filter when choosing which games to fire at us is a different issue. This is a shockingly overpriced web game made offensive by its Mature certificate, when it could only prove challenging, or of any interest whatsoever, to a seven-year-old.

This isn't even an issue of prudishness, as I'm an advocate of pornography, condoms and Viagra being made available in primary schools everywhere. This is a matter of not being dishonest, cynical fuckers surfing the misplaced

kudos of a shit cartoon, and slipping an expensive game to the public before any reviews register on Metacritic.

Happy Tree Friends: False Alarm makes everyone behind it look like absolute bastards. We can only hope the subtitle doesn't imply there's more of this vomitous guff in the pipeline. **PCT**

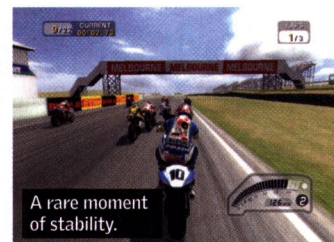
PCZONE

Graphics Adequate
 Sound 10 second music loop
 Multiplayer No

- ✓ It's very short
- ✗ A waste of a bad franchise
- ✗ Tediously easy in theory
- ✗ Made harder by AI glitches
- ✗ Doesn't even get the gore right

19

Heinous. Terrible



SBK-08: SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Anthony Hare mounts his metal steed and twists its right hoof

DEVELOPER Milestone
PUBLISHER Black Bean/Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.sbkthegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

This year's *Superbike* – a challenging racing game with unforgiving AI and an emphasis on reality.

Minimum system requirements:
2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

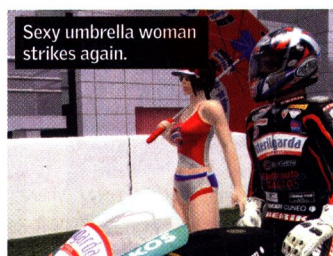
HOW IT STACKS



RACING GAMES ARE a bit of a coin toss. Now that stunning and cinematic visuals are almost a given, developers just have to work out whether to focus on by-the-book authenticity, or whether to focus more on violence, crashing and death. And boobs.

SBK-08 puts you on a motorbike capable of nearly 190mph, and injects a double dose of realism into the bike racing. So while you will suffer a huge catalogue of spectacular crashes, it's not something you'll be getting a Turbo Meter boost for or plaudits from your peers – it's actually discouraged.

The game does offer some flexibility, through the Realism tab. Basic settings are more forgiving, meaning you'll only fall off when you touch another competitor



or a wall. Otherwise, newcomers to Simulation mode will find tight corners and stray farts knocking them from their seat to slide along the tarmac.

Once you do master the controls – which takes roughly the same time as training a snake to knit scarves – the game fans out to expose its more playable side. But it's still not that hot. Just like *Moto GP*, *SBK-08*'s AI follows a perfect racing line, and rivals are packed together tighter than a cluster of gnats' chuffs. Cornering with the pack requires huge skill and if you make a mistake, you're effectively knocked out of the race. Realistic? Definitely. Game-enhancing? A matter of taste. Even those taken-for-granted-these-days visuals are nothing particularly outstanding. The occasionally plain environments are populated by cardboard cut-outs.

The realism's where the game shines: no expense was spared in getting hold of the official licenses. Yamaha Motor Italia and Ducati Xerox are present, each having an engineer on standby who can give you advice on how to tweak each bike for different situations.

Despite the frustrations, *SBK-08* is a decent, if unforgiving motorcycle sim.

It'll leave the two-wheeled hardcore all happy in their pants, but is a tiny step in the wrong direction from *Moto GP 07*. Those just interested in a good racer should play *GRID*, where falling off and grazing your entire torso down to a featureless stump just isn't an issue. **PCZ**

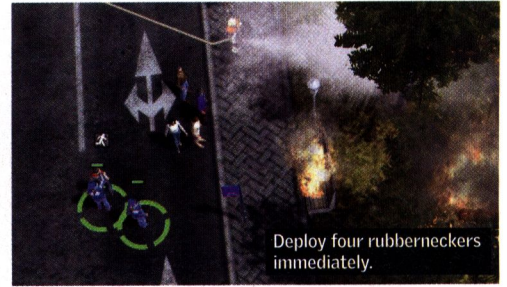
PCZONE

Graphics Flat scenery, pretty bikes
Sound Roaring motor noises
Multiplayer LAN and online

- ✓ Plenty of game modes
- ✓ Lots of playing styles
- ✓ Accurate bike racer
- ✗ Realism hurts
- ✗ Cornering becomes an art
- ✗ Controls take a lot of getting used to

67

Fast and a little furious



EMERGENCY 4: GLOBAL FIGHTERS FOR LIFE

Burgled? On fire? Collapsed circulation? *Jon Blyth* is your only hope...

DEVELOPER Sixteen Tons Entertainment
PUBLISHER Bluestone Interactive
WEBSITE www.emergency4.de/en
ETA Out now
PRICE £1999

AT A GLANCE...

A strategy game in which you must put out fires, arrest pickpockets, and rush to the aid of people who've suffered a "collapsed circulation".

Minimum system requirements:
 2.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE **91%**

EMERGENCY 4 **65%**

BEAUTY FACTORY **17%**

EMERGENCY 4 IS strange. It's a game that is summed up by the sentence on the back of the box: "You bear responsibility for life and death!" Flawed, but basically charming. You load out and deploy, RTS style, the four emergency services: police, fire, ambulance; and, in a bold statement that will infuriate coastguards, the fourth group are engineers. Fair enough, though – engineers have skill sets that complement an urban environment better than a slow-motion tit montage.

One half of the game is focussed on scripted situations, in which you deal with increasingly huge disasters. And the other half is an entertaining sandbox city where you deal with multiple emergencies to earn the equipment required for the next big disaster.

The controls are a strange blend of pernickety and intuitive. There's an element of micromanagement, but it doesn't offend thanks to the right mouse button, which tends to arrange the most sensible thing. Sometimes it fails – for example, trying to save people from a burning building with a fireman carrying a hose will result in you dousing the

already-choking victims. But this falls into the charm category – one thing I wasn't expecting was to get out-loud in-game laughs, intentional or not.

Sadly, there are some flaws that aren't as entertaining. In the Tyre Yard mission, I found myself dousing the same fires again and again. I was unsure if I was having any effect, I didn't have enough budget to send more trucks out, and I ended up watching my guys spray the same fires for 10 minutes, for lack of anything else to do. I passed the mission, but I'm haunted by the suspicion that I bored the computer into timing out.

Recommending this game is difficult, because it's hard to imagine who it's aimed at. It feels overpriced at £20 – the action does get a little repetitive, even with the constant introduction of new units. Yet I found myself satisfied by success, so repetition rarely strayed into boredom.



Meanwhile, the scenario editor and co-op multiplayer are welcome features.

The odd moment of frustration aside, this is a shallow, but entertaining strategy game. *Emergency 4* is by no means a gem, but it's certainly a well-polished nugget of bronze. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics **Very dated**
 Sound **"Completely In English!"**
 Multiplayer **2-4 player co-op**

- ✓ Well structured
- ✓ Thoughtfully paced
- ✓ Occasionally intuitive...
- ✗ ...occasionally counter-intuitive
- ✗ Slightly repetitive
- ✗ Very low frame rates

65

Could you?



SUPREME RULER 2020

Martin Korda gets all political and tries to take over the world

DEVELOPER BattleGoat Studios
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE battlegoat.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$39.99 (£20.00)



AT A GLANCE...

Hardcore international government management sim for equally hardcore strategists.

Minimum system requirements:
800GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 16MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

- SUPREME COMMANDER 88%
- SUPREME RULER 2020 69%
- NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGNS 65%

HOW DID WE allow the country to get like this? Skyrocketing food prices, you can't walk down a street for getting stabbed, we live under an unjust system of double and triple taxation, CCTV cameras ask us to moderate our language if there are ladies present, and 42 days is deemed an acceptable amount of time to lock someone up without telling them why – perhaps their ID card didn't have the correct "Not A Terrorist" stamp on it.

Clearly, this government's arsed it all up beyond hope and everyone's doomed, but could you do any better? Well, that's what *Supreme Ruler 2020*, a hardcore government sim, lets you discover. You start out by taking control of any country in the world in the aftermath of global financial meltdown (a tad prescient), each with an exhaustive array of well-researched statistics that provide the game with an early twang of believability.

I'M IN CHARGE

Once you've waded through the somewhat inadequate tutorials, it's time to start presiding. As leader of your nation, you must deal with matters both

foreign and domestic to ensure your country's prosperity. The action takes place in real time, but thankfully you can pause the game to issue orders.

The sheer wealth of options is either impressive or terrifying, depending on how hardcore you like your strategy games. If you're a control freak, you can make every single decision yourself, be it raising taxes or launching a nuclear strike against another nation. You can also delegate all or some responsibilities

to ministers, who will then consult you before executing new policies.

Despite your ministers' assistance, *Supreme Ruler 2020* remains a highly challenging experience, at times taxing your grey matter to melting point; a situation not helped by an ugly and unwieldy world map that lacks detail, even when zoomed in. Do you choose to focus on building cities, industrial complexes or military installations? What type of helicopter gunship is best



The cog of war

No oil, no boom-boom...

When at war, you control your troops in real time. While this level of involvement is fun, the action is marred by a fiddly control interface that makes issuing orders unintuitive. However, despite these interface niggles, warfare is handled extremely realistically.

Deployed troops cost money, and while reserves are cheaper, they're less battle-ready. What's more, moving troops uses up huge amounts of oil, so selecting all your troops and sending them to a hotspot is the last thing you want to do, otherwise you'll find your entire army stranded and defenceless in enemy territory.



CODE OF HONOR: THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

They came to forget. This didn't help

DEVELOPER City Interactive
PUBLISHER City Interactive
WEBSITE www.city-interactive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £4.99

Minimum system requirements:
 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.



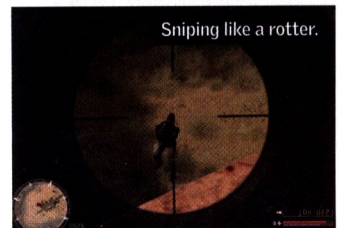
Sacré bleu (up).

BY NOW YOU'RE probably aware that if you see a game published by City Interactive you should probably avoid it. Avoid it as you would death itself.

Code of Honor is a basic FPS from the budget Polish publisher, that throws you into the French special forces, and asks you to kill people in a bug-ridden anti-paradise.

On the first play through, saved games don't load in some areas, and restarting the level causes you to spawn back at the start, unable to move. Hardly ideal. When it works, "intelligent" isn't really the way to describe the enemy – they shoot at walls, stare vacantly into the distance and even blow up their own vehicles in incidents of cross fire that I don't even remember being involved in.

This is a budget game, so I can forgive the graphics looking older than ha'pennies rusting behind a nan's sofa.

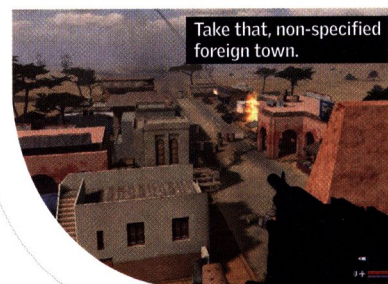


Sniping like a rotter.

But there's no forgiveness for game-obstructing visuals: the iron sight on your default weapon is a big grey blob that could obscure a double-decker bus from 10 metres.

The level of professionalism in this game can be summed up by the fact they haven't even bothered to translate all the text. Even with the low price tag, that fiver could be put to better use – such as folding it to make the Queen look like she's smiling.

Anthony Hare



Keep your armies well supplied or risk annihilation.

to research next, or would you be better off channelling your military budget into missile defence satellites? Are you producing, exporting and importing enough of the game's 11 resources to ensure your country continues to function and grow? Is your reputation high enough in the United Nations? And most importantly, are your people happy? These are just some of the conundrums you face. You also have to keep an eye on your finances, as falling into debt can be catastrophic to your country's growth prospects.

LEGACY

Without question, *Supreme Ruler 2020* is an impressively detailed strategy game, which admirably captures the wealth of obstacles and tough decisions that the ruler of any nation in the world inevitably faces.

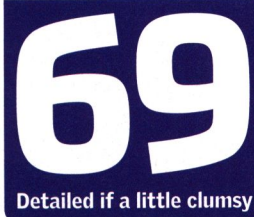
That said, it's also rather inaccessible unless you're an ultra-hardcore strategist with more time on his hands than Hiro Nakamura. There's also a distinct lack of quality feedback relating to your decisions and the progress of your negotiations, which can be a little frustrating. But with patience and

perseverance there's plenty of reward, and if you can dedicate enough time to it, you'll discover a highly immersive management experience that allows you to lead your chosen country to a brighter future than the one England seems to be heading for. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics **Poor and lacking detail**
 Sound **Passable music and SFX**
 Multiplayer **Much the same as single-player**

- ✓ Exhaustively detailed
- ✓ Very realistic
- ✓ Weeks of gameplay
- ✗ Ugly and somewhat unwieldy
- ✗ Lacks adequate player feedback





This is how we'll get around when the oil runs out.



All you need to know about the graphics.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: THE OFFICIAL VIDEOGAME

Ed Zitron is exposed to a massive dose of whisky, and becomes a superhuman beast

DEVELOPER SEGA
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE web.sega-europe.com/hulk
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Free-roaming action game in which you play the famous green-skinned force of destruction, knocking down buildings, punching soldiers and wreaking havoc.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



WE DON'T EXPECT the highest quality from a game labouring under the twin burdens of console port and movie cash-in, but so soon after the porting excellence of *Devil May Cry 4*, *The Incredible Hulk* brings everyone crashing back down to Earth. This is an unashamed rip-off, charging full whack for a thinly souped-up PlayStation 2 version of the game, where the higher-resolution mode only leaves the graphics looking more embarrassed and naked. This is an ancient-looking, repetitive and buggy turd.

The story, as with most licensed titles, loosely follows the plot of the film, shoe-horning an extra faction to justify the gamut of repetitive "find this, punch that" scenarios that makes up most of the game. You run around the city of New York, fighting against either the army or The Enclave – a totally generic, group of high-tech terrorists that have popped up in the comics every now and again.

This is an open-world game that might be serviceable if it wasn't so bland, featureless and ugly. You pull off moves with combinations of the middle and right mouse buttons, while also having to

move the unwieldy camera. Using the mouse just doesn't feel right, so the Hulk is only really controllable with a 360 pad.

Graphically, it's atrocious. Textures fail to improve at higher resolutions, and the game's engine has a shocking draw-distance – the sudden appearance of trees and buildings is embarrassing. The game's bugs are pretty much the insult to an injury that's the game itself.

Cars explode at the slightest touch, and their AI leads to hilarious situations where they turn around to speed in the other direction on seeing you, only to lightly brush a wall and detonate. Civilians don't seem to notice the Hulk's activities. Enemies get stuck in the side of buildings, and you'll spend the end of some missions jumping about like a blue-arsed fly trying to locate the one remaining Enclave swine.

The Incredible Hulk has no place expecting to be bought and played. And the fact that it's been made under the decades-old 'shit game, doesn't matter' business model doesn't make it even slightly less engaging; in fact, that just makes it 10 times worse. **PGZ**



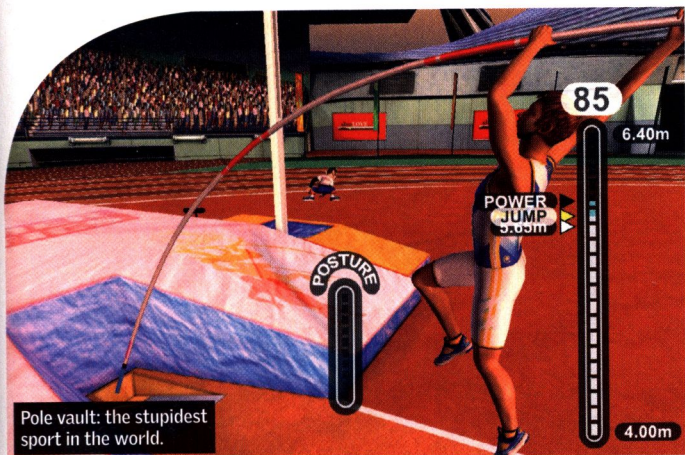
PCZONE

Graphics Ugly, blocky, sludge-like
Sound Generic laser-sounds and roaring
Multiplayer None

- ✓ The box isn't full of bees
- ✗ Ugly as sin
- ✗ Buggy as hell
- ✗ It's the bloody PS2 version
- ✗ A lazy port

18

A great hulking shit



SUMMER ATHLETICS

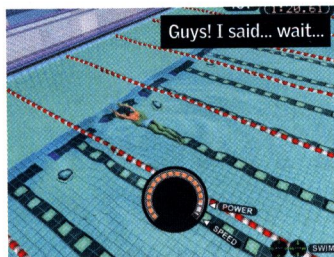
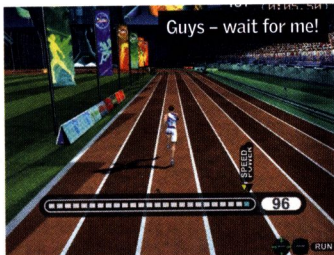
We're javelin a good time

DEVELOPER 49 Games
PUBLISHER DTP
WEBSITE www.summerathletics.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
 1.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB video card.

WE DON'T GET out much, so it's always a pleasure to pretend that we're ridiculously athletic people who can complete feats of Herculean strength. *Summer Athletics* scratches this itch without betraying, too fiercely, its lack of an Olympic licence, with the same list of events, the same huge crowds, and a terrifying midget/chimpanzee mascot that does handstands while you compete.

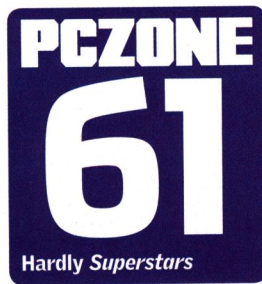
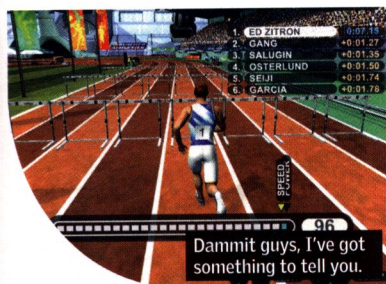
While we couldn't get the 360 pad to work under *Vista*, *Summer Athletics* works well on the keyboard. Gameplay is a combination of *Track & Field* key-tapping and precise button pressing with events like the triple jump, discus and 1,000m biking requiring a little more patience than the faster 100m and relay events. Most of them are fun, either in single-player or with people huddled around the screen, apart from the biking events that are a confusing balance of keeping speed and stamina.



Getting gold medals is rewarding enough for those looking for a bit of self-affirmation, and the easier settings are the right level of challenge for more casual gamers.

Summer Athletics is definitely fun, but it's about as deep as a puddle - even with the career mode, which is the normal events plus a bizarre statistics system. Regardless, anyone can step in and have a good time with it, and for that it deserves a bit of respect.

Ed Zitron



PLANET BUSTERS

Bustin' makes me feel moderately good

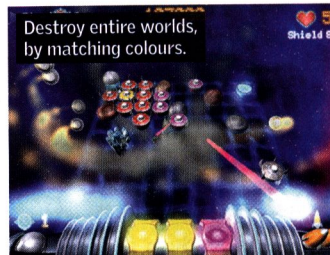
DEVELOPER Slam Games
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$15 (£8)

Minimum system requirements:
 1GHz processor, 256MB of RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

MATCH THREE GAMES seem to have broken through the shit barrier. *Puzzle Quest* took basic plan-ahead gameplay into the realms of RPGs and *Aurora Feint* is giving a simpler distraction for free, to anyone with the new iPod software.

Planet Busters dispenses completely with the pretension of grimoires and enchanted glades - you'll be using your colour-matching skills to destroy huge ships in space. With a score straight from a John Williams TIE-fighter dogfight, urgent time limits, and several different level styles, it's easy to forget that you're lining up three similarly coloured rockets, in order to launch all adjoining rockets of the same colour.

The launch conditions (three in a row) and patterns (all adjoining) allow you to plan for large chain launches, but that's barely the point here; mostly you'll be matching up as fast as possible to avoid death, and collecting EMPs and missiles (by matching rockets next to them) to

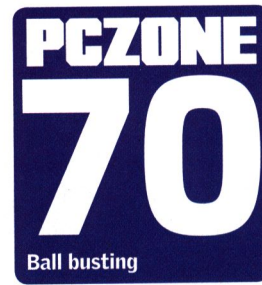


destroy debris and preserve your shields until the end of the grid.

There are a surprising variety of levels, and occasionally you'll even find yourself forced to strategise on a level beyond simply surviving the current wave. But the game crashes regularly, and the save system is unreliable.

Planet Busters is a challenging diversion and a welcome change of pace in casual gaming. If it had reliable saves, it'd be pushing a Recommended award.

Jon Blyth



BUDGET

Jon Blyth drinks the dregs of someone else's pint and grumbles incoherently

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.tombraider.com/anniversary PRICE: £10

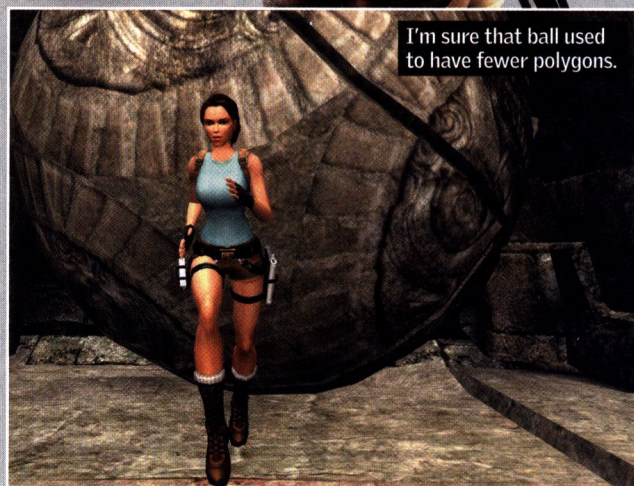
WITH *TOMB RAIDER: Legend*, Crystal Dynamics rescued the nation's most cash-pregnant franchise from the spiked pit of naff. With *Anniversary*, it whipped its manhood out and declared the entire series its own, with a stream of hot, straw-coloured playability.

Although a lot of the niggles with *Legend* weren't fixed, they were never

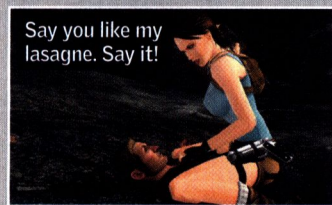
game-killing faults, just a feeling of relative ease and being slightly patronised by obvious flagging. On the other hand, the move to mouse and keyboard is thoughtfully done – the T-Rex fight and the Sword of Damocles room stand out as arcanelly affy moments, but the rest feels perfectly tailored for PC.

In truth, the game's finest moments come from revisiting the places you loved the first time around, and enjoying the new, massive cogs. But even if you joined in the series with *Legend*, this will be more-of-the-same fun, only with a dinosaur and a couple of centaurs.

PCZONE
80



I'm sure that ball used to have fewer polygons.



Say you like my lasagne. Say it!

OVERLORD

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: www.codemasters.com/overlord PRICE: £10

WHEN GIVEN THE choice to play good or evil, most people always have one path they'll go down. So for people who always choose good, games like *Evil Genius*, *Dungeon Keeper* and *Overlord* give you a brilliant sense of freedom; you don't have to worry about upsetting people, because that's what you're supposed to do.

Here you play a recently revived bad chap, in a world of regional accents similar to *Fable*. Your evil aspirations are aided by minions, whose independent japes provide most of the game's fun. They're well-scripted, get up to lots of visual shenanigans and in your highly weakened state, these devilish imps are your main weapons.

The game lacks substance, but has plenty of personality. It's recommended to anyone who's ever wanted to stick their head in a pumpkin.

PCZONE
75



I'm cancelling my *I Love Horses* subscription.



Twelve!



Also, stop sending me *Snakes in Lakes Monthly*.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Will turning up to a black-tie affair in a free *BioShock* T-shirt.

Saving: Moss Bros Hire, £30



Richard forgetting to pay his credit card bill.

Saving (very short term): £300



Log smooth-talking his way onto a bus by looking sad and panicked.

Saving: 90p



CHILDREN OF THE NILE: ENHANCED EDITION

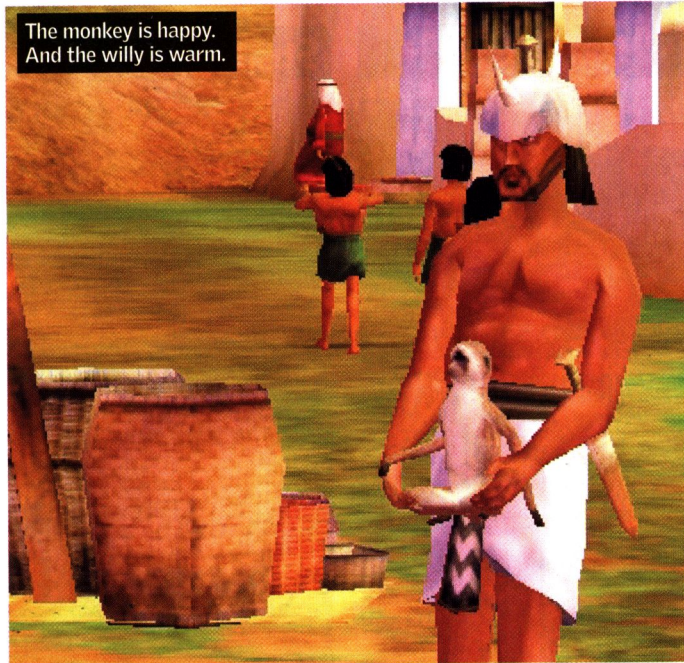
PUBLISHER: Steam WEBSITE: www.steampowered.com PRICE: \$19.99 (£10)

POSITIVELY LADYLIKE AT a slender £10, *Children of the Nile* has decided to drop the *Immortal Cities* prefix in favour of an *Enhanced Edition* suffix. A wise choice – a game title can only tolerate so many colons and hyphens, before Lynne Truss absconds in through a window and starts busting some nuts.

This isn't so much an extended edition, as a revamped version of the Egyptian city builder. Balance tweaks, UI prods, and gameplay fiddles all combine to make the game feel a little more modern, whilst still only requiring a 2004 PC to play it. The fundamental pace of the game is still the well-rounded, patient and complex process of the original – it's just a bit better now.

If you've already got the game, don't complain – these enhancements are available as a patch.

PCZONE
77



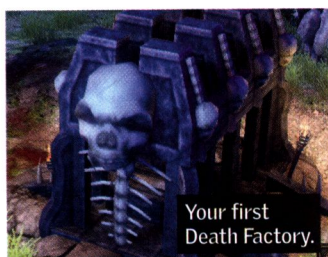
SPELLFORCE II: SHADOW WARS & DRAGON STORM

PUBLISHER: Steam WEBSITE: spellforce.jowood.com/sf2 PRICE: Around £10 each, around £15 for both

IF THE SPELLFORCE Universe pack (which included the original and its expansions), seemed like a bit of a commitment, Steam subscribers can now get the sequels for the slightly smaller price of \$30.

This is a tempting offer – the game is a skilful blend of resource management strategy game, with hero-equipping RPG dynamics. Hero units take over towns to make more disposable units, which you can then despatch to their deaths.

The games are both worth buying, although the expansion pack doesn't add much to the spellbook (fnar, fnar), and the accents are often atrocious – but



if you are interested, I'd really recommend the boxed copy of the *Spellforce Universe* pack.

Although it's a fiver more expensive, this beefier pack is available at online stores for less than the combined price

Steam offers (don't forget they add VAT) and you get a complete game and two expansions. So if you want value don't go with Steam.

PCZONE
75

And the rest...

Avoid unneeded money-fritterage



ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

PRICE £10, Mastertronic
Act of War has *Red Alert*'s overblown cutscenes, over-the-top action and slick presentation. The worst thing about it is the generic, forgettable name.

PCZONE
80



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PRICE £5, Sold Out
If forking out £10 for *Anniversary* (left) is an impossible expense, maybe you'll be more tempted by the previous effort, *Legend*.

PCZONE
83

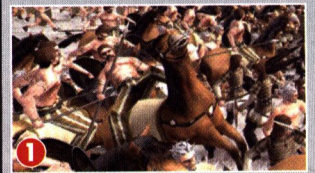


ART OF MURDER: FBI CONFIDENTIAL

PRICE £5, City Interactive
Go into any shop selling this game and say, "If this game is on your shelves tomorrow, I'm going to burn your shop down". This isn't an overreaction.

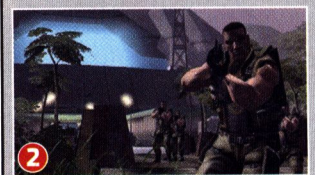
PCZONE
10

PCZONE Top 5 budget games



1 ROME: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, Sega
This is huge-scale RTS warfare at its finest. Thousands of people hacking each other to shit and back.



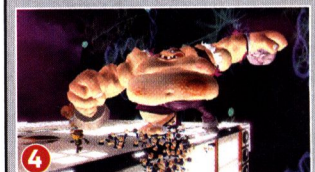
2 FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out
Half-Life 2's been in this list for too long – it's time for *Far Cry* to take the spotlight again. This rock-hard shooter has to be the best FPS to not feature a grabby gun.



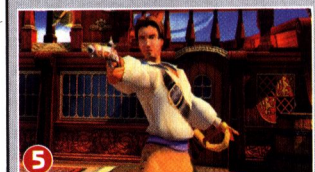
3 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic
IF RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse (or, in *Oblivion*'s case, slightly worse) than this epic, sprawling classic.



4 PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam
To lighten the tone here's Tim Schafer's psychological platform adventure. You won't have more fun until *Brütal Legend* comes out.



5 SID MEIER'S PIRATES

PRICE £15, Steam
That's all the genres, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's everything. This isn't a Top 5: it's an encyclopaedia.

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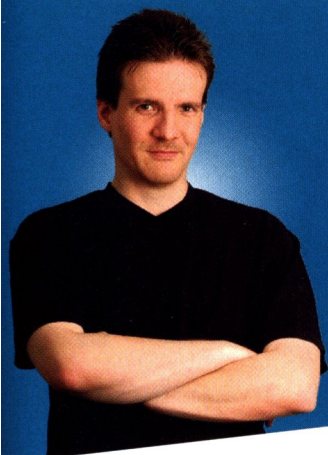
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Tired of walking to the shops? Arms hurt from carrying the magazine home? Worried about imminent economic meltdown and the fact that this time next year the price of sausages will equate to that of gold?

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PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Antiboredom

I HONESTLY CAN'T remember the last time I was bored. This is partly the legacy of my grandmother, a stern version of Miss Marple who insisted there was no such thing as boredom. If my brother or I uttered the 'b' word in her presence, she would threaten to box our ears – an ancient punishment of such legendary unpleasantness that neither of us knew what it was.

Today I'm far from 'b' thanks to my Ethernet cable. I have dozens of games on tap, plus a web browser, email and instant messaging. I also do my banking online, and spend many happy hours fighting off Direct Debits. Gym membership? Headshot! Sky subscription? Multikill! Charity for diseased orphans? Rampage! It's all very satisfying, and leaves me with more money with which to buy extra copies of *PC ZONE*.

Now the Sky subscription's gone though, Mrs Wandy can't watch *America's Got Morons* while simultaneously recording *Celebrity Fridge Audit*, so I've been charged with replacing the wretched Sky+ box. After the *Media Center* fiasco of 2007, which proved that an obese OS barely tolerable on your desktop becomes an evil monstrosity when left in charge of TV viewing, I'm not allowed down the Microsoft route.

So I'm going to build a MythTV box, something which requires me installing Ubuntu Linux. I'll let you know if there are any Linux games worth bothering with.

Phil Wand, hardware editor

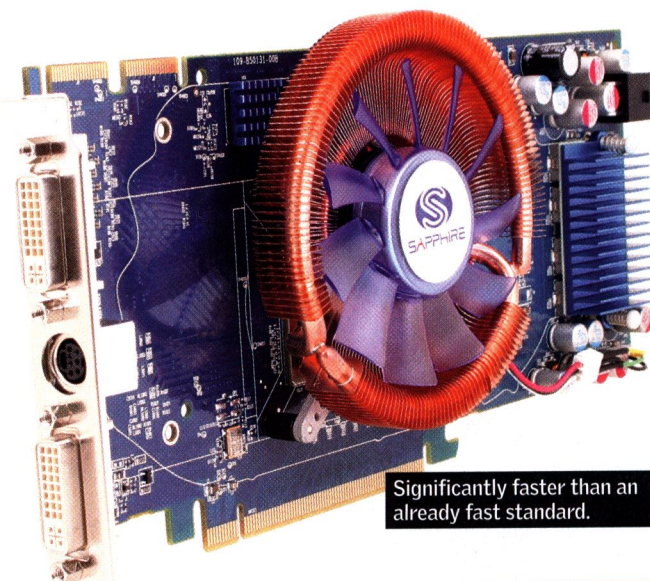
TOXIC GOODNESS

SAPPHIRE introduces the Radeon HD 4850 TOXIC Edition

DESPITE AMD BLEEDING out more than \$1 billion last quarter – the company's seventh consecutive quarterly loss – and losing its chief executive Hector Ruiz, there are some things about which Radeon can feel very pleased.

The Radeon HD 4850 and HD 4870, launched earlier this summer, are two such things. The latter is a mid-range card capable of high-end performance – a £200 card that's able to shadow NVIDIA's £300 flagship, the 280 GTX, in benchmarks. Meanwhile the HD 4850, that costs less than £125, outperforms the £175 GeForce 9800 GTX in certain tests, and includes key features such as an integrated eight-channel audio controller with HDMI transport.

Now SAPPHIRE have given the 4850 better memory and have raised its clock speeds by 8%. They've also bolted down a Zalman heatpipe fan, and have slapped on their TOXIC branding. This does a significantly better job of cooling the card than the AMD original, and gives headroom for further tuning.



Significantly faster than an already fast standard.

The card also uses ATI Avivo HD Technology and hardware video decoder to reduce system load when watching Blu-ray discs. There are also two dual-link DVI outputs, a TV output, and a dedicated HDMI adapter.
www.sapphiretech.com/uk

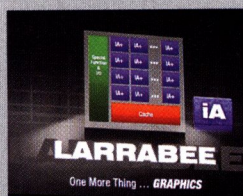
GRAPHICS X86

Details of Intel's high-end GPU due soon

LITTLE IS CURRENTLY known about Intel's forthcoming graphics chip, except that it will meet the existing Radeon and GeForce range head on.

The Larrabee's x86-based architecture will differ from the current stream-based processors of AMD and NVIDIA, featuring multiple cores. The chip's being designed by the team that created the Pentium 4 so should give today's flagship cards a good run. The chip is compatible with existing graphics libraries, such as OpenGL and DirectX, but will also feature a wide range of development tools. More details next month.

www.intel.com



Intel is soon to divulge all about the Larrabee.

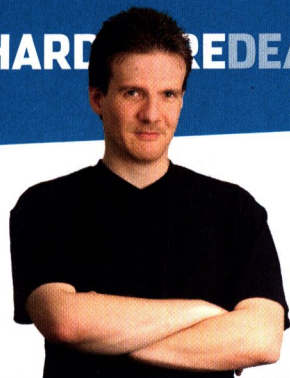
News round-up

As AMD slipped deep into the red, Intel's profits went up 25% – the giant now controls nearly 90% of the global microprocessor market. Also it was revealed that over half the CPUs it shipped were for mobile platforms. The company is also under antitrust investigations by both the Federal Trade Commission and European Union.
www.intel.com

October's Hack-In-The-Box conference will see security expert Kris Kaspersky showing how attacking CPU flaws can zombify a PC. Kaspersky claims you can use errors generated by processors to circumvent *Vista* security from something as simple as JavaScript.
hackinthebox.org

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**
BY JON BLYTH

TOXIC Edition: The only graphics card that causes Sandi Toksvig to think that a nearby group of hardware enthusiasts are talking about her. **Creative Alchemy:** Bored by the unending failures of the attempts to synthesise gold, the apothecaries of the 17th century began this offshoot science, in which they would make baskets out of wicker and lovely jumpers out of wool. **Avivo:** What Mexican mothers say instead of "peepo". The child's proper response is "Arriba arriba". **The Clockwork Cow of Apology:** A creature who appears a month after Dr O'Possum challenges people write in to prove they read *Hard Words*. The Clockwork Cow would like to say, "Thanks for your overwhelming response. I'm sorry for doubting you. Moo."



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



PROBLEMS?

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 setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.



These aren't the boards you're looking for.

Q DEAR SIR

First of all, let me thank you for the great hardware section you provide every month. As a hardware buff myself I think you do a great job providing readers with just the right amount of hardware info they need, but not too much to overwhelm the less savvy.

However, I must say I'm a little miffed by your choice of processor in the Loaded section of the Hardware Divide. You suggest a very nice motherboard, which I would not disagree with. You also suggest buying an Intel Core 2 Quad QX9775, which is a great processor but it is a Socket J, or LGA 771 server product. I think a better choice for those willing to splash the cash is the QX9770.

I hope you consider changing this, as any readers who decide to upgrade to the best of the best and follow your guide may end up with an incompatible board and processor.

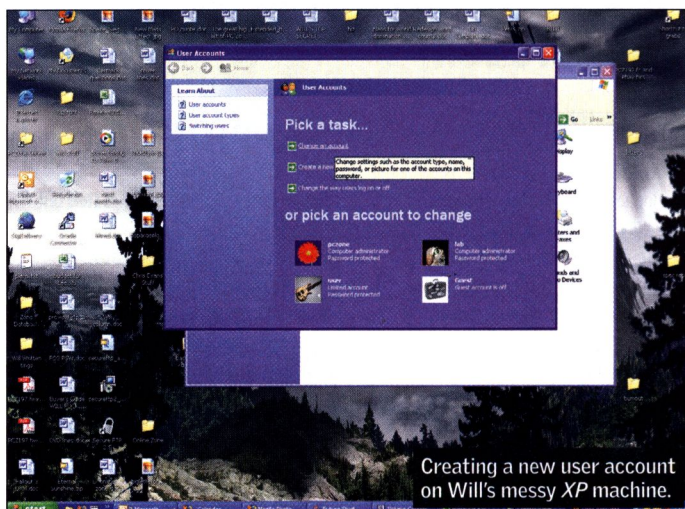
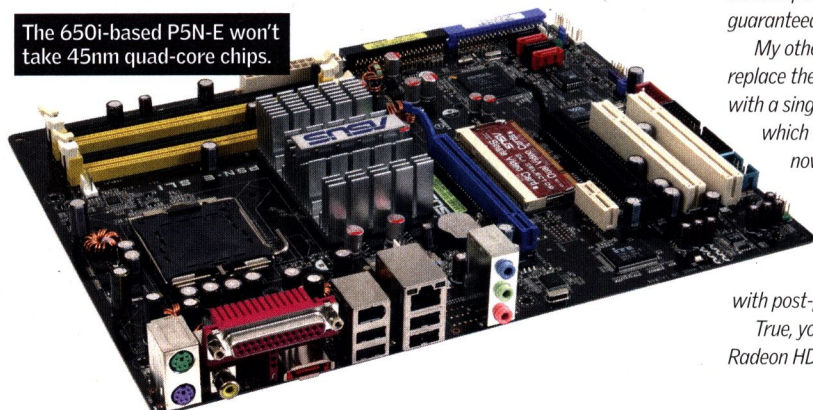
Ross Ferguson

A You are correct. The QX9775 is part of Skulltrail platform, Intel's chip and platform combo that allows eight cores in dual processors, not to mention quad SLI.

To make a Skulltrail system you need a Core 2 Extreme QX9775, a D5400XS motherboard and you'll have to dump all your DDR2 and DDR3 memory modules for FB-DIMM server RAM instead, as Skulltrail is essentially a Xeon-based corporate product rather than a consumer one. You also need a fat-ass power supply, with Intel recommending a minimum 1,000W unit to feed it all.

To cut a long story short, the QX9775 should always have been a QX9770. Skulltrail is a fine platform but one that's

The 650i-based P5N-E won't take 45nm quad-core chips.



Creating a new user account on Will's messy XP machine.

too far-fetched even for our wallet-emptying Loaded section. Also it's not that special to gamers, given that few games are written to take full advantage of dual processors – hostage rescuers among us would not notice any difference between one and two CPUs.

Q QUICK FIX

I'm looking at upgrading my current system as it's getting outdated. My current setup is an ASUS P5N-E nForce 650i SLI board, E6300 processor, 2GB RAM and two Geforce 7600 GS cards. I'm running Vista and have a 550W PSU.

I use my system for gaming and have a budget of around £600 to either upgrade or buy a brand new base unit. I've looked at buying a new rig from Alienware and they look good but pricey.

My question to you is, if you had my system as above would you use the money to upgrade or buy new? And,

what upgrades would you actually recommend – particularly with regards to the graphics card and processor? I am stuck on deciding what to do.

Adrian Dewsbury

A I first squinted at your message on a BlackBerry some weeks back. I was on holiday at the time, watching the surf roll in from behind sunglasses and a pint of cold lager. I don't know why, but my eyes flicked across the '650' and '7600' and reported '750' to my brain, and I emailed with a recommendation to buy a Q9450 processor, the 750i chipset offering full support for these newer chips.

Of course, the 650i you actually have won't talk to 45nm quad-cores, and the P5N-E BIOS update released in July does nothing to change that. So ditch the E6300 for a £170 E8500 instead. Use your web browser to locate the best deal, as if one retailer doesn't have the retail box on special offer this week, it's almost guaranteed that another will.

My other recommendation was to replace the two 7-series graphics cards with a single 280 GTX – variants of which are appearing for under £300 now. It's an expensive option, but unarguably the fastest single card you can buy, and particularly impressive when you use high resolutions with post-processing.

True, you could spend £50 less on a Radeon HD 4870, or perhaps a little

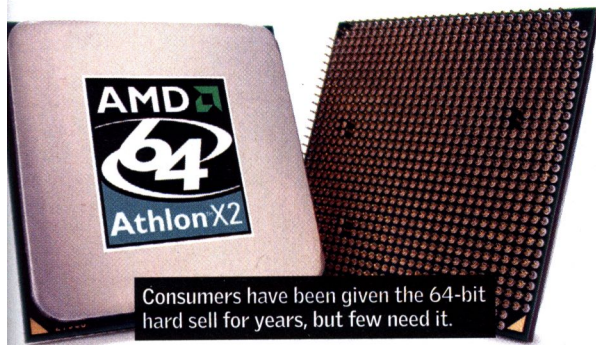
DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.6	18 JUN 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 17741	26 JUN 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.18	2 JUN 08
CREATIVE	CREATIVE	
CREATIVE	ALCHEMY 1.10.01	15 MAY 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.18	2 JUN 08



Consumers have been given the 64-bit hard sell for years, but few need it.

wandy@dearwandy.com @
dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw ✉

"The 64-bit edition of Vista is not a home user product for two reasons"

more on a 4870 CrossFire bundle, but you'll then need to change your PSU. If in doubt, keep it simple, and never forget that whatever you go for you'll be wanting to go faster by Christmas.

Q USER ABILITY

Could you please go into more detail about creating a new user account in XP, something you advised Jason Steel to do in issue 196? The more detail you give would be appreciated as I'm OK running around shooting people in COD4 but this is a bit more techy for me!

Mark Kaye

A Creating a new "Gaming" user account is an ideal way of keeping processes to a minimum, but you need to be aware that it isn't a panacea. Depending on how your system is configured many applications – particularly anti-virus tools – will run whatever user is logged in. If you're serious about keeping your PC clean, you need to make sure that whenever you buy new software, you choose to install it for the current user only.

With that in mind, click the Start button, then open the Control Panels, and double-click to open User Accounts. Create a new account by clicking the appropriate link and then choosing a name – 'gaming' is as good as any. Make the new account an Administrator, choose a password and away you go.

Q LOST MEMORY

I bought a rig from a PC specialist last year. I spent a small fortune on the thing, giving it an Extreme processor, two 8800 GTX cards in SLI, a Raptor hard drive, 1,000W power supply and Striker Extreme motherboard.

The machine came with four 1GB sticks of DDR2 Corsair RAM. I've had the system for just under a year and realised only last month that it was showing 3GB. I read on the 'net that you

have to use Vista 64-bit to solve this, so I loaded it onto my system and this is where all the problems started.

After downloading a patch from Microsoft to allow the motherboard to read all the RAM, I started to get random blue screens. The system would run for 30 minutes to a few hours before the errors popped up. I ran memtest and hey presto, it failed. I've tried six different settings for the RAM and have dropped the memory speed to 667MHz. The system is a bit more stable, but it's still not great for spending £2,500.

Alex Hey

A I covered the Four Gig Conundrum back in issue 193, where I explained that Windows will talk to 4GB, but only as a total amount. What that means is with a maximum 4GB RAM installed as modules on your board, plus your two video cards, Vista cannot address both amounts within its 4GB range. The OS needs to reserve space to talk to stuff like your graphics hardware, and the end result is that it will report the maximum memory available to you as less.

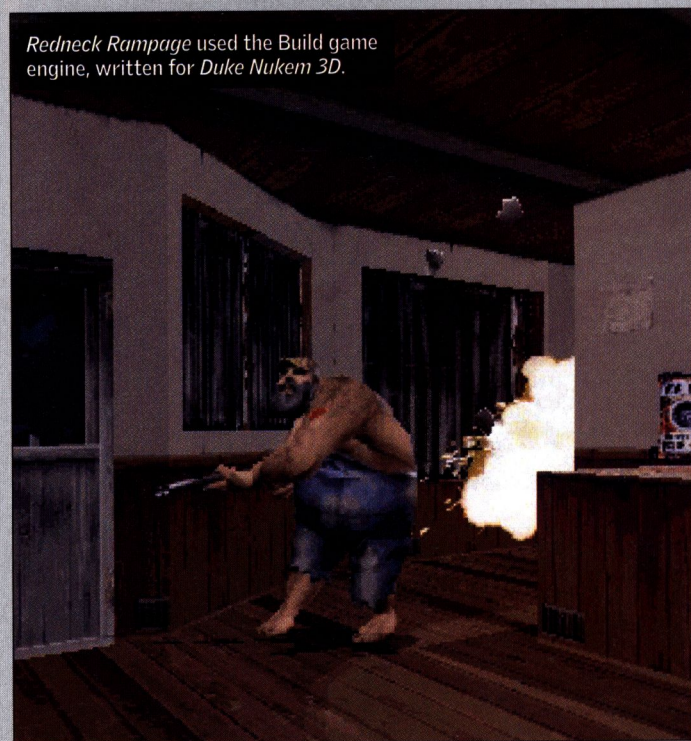
You're not alone, though. Thousands – perhaps millions – of PC users around the world end up worrying that there's something wrong with their rig, when in actual fact there's not. If you stuck with 32-bit 'ordinary' Vista and patched it to Service Pack 1, the disparity you were witnessing would disappear – Microsoft now report the memory differently.

You did the wrong thing updating to the 64-bit edition of Vista – it's not a home user product for two reasons: home users don't need 64-bit operating systems, and I wouldn't rely on most drivers, games and software to be 64-bit happy. Go back to Vista 32-bit.

As for the failed memtest, you need to rerun the test four times – one for each of the modules you have. Replace the duff one and reset the BIOS settings to their defaults. **PCZ**

ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN PC TECH...

Redneck Rampage used the Build game engine, written for Duke Nukem 3D.



04 GAME ENGINES

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines, Prey, Dark Messiah, Counter-Strike and Enemy Territory – some of the most interesting titles of recent times are built on shared platforms known as engines.

The engines that make the above shooters work were written for a specific project, and the code subsequently licensed to third party programmers to help them accelerate the development process. Today, there are hundreds of different game engines available, and thousands of titles which use them.

The engine approach gives developers easy access to a huge library of physics, lighting, artificial intelligence, sound processing, high dynamic range

rendering effects and network code with which to make games. And of course, they're tried and tested and are known to work.

Look under the bonnet of any modern cars and you'll see the same philosophy at work, with the same powerplant appearing in other models.

Valve's Source Engine, arguably the most talked about game engine of recent years, was the original framework for Half-Life 2 and has since been reused in a dozen or more other titles. Similarly, Crytek designed the CryENGINE for Far Cry and later CryENGINE 2 for Crysis. If you're a games developer, both are available for inclusion in your own software. But at a (mightily considerable) price.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(simon_blackwell1) For a week now my be internet has worked fine on Wi-Fi, but not on my PC which is connected by an Ethernet cable to the modem. Nothing has changed. Very frustrating. Any ideas? (wilko) Do you run ZoneAlarm on the device that won't connect through wired Ethernet? A recent XP security update bugged it up and made it block all net connections. (PrinzEugen) As suggested before – perhaps stick the ZoneAlarm sliders on medium for security – it will at least allow you onto the net if it is related to the XP update fiasco. (simon_blackwell1) You are all stars – adjusted my ZoneAlarm settings and I'm back on. (Wandy) Ah, you're the guy still using ZoneAlarm?

WIRELESS 802.11N

802.11n networks (as with the ESR-9710 router opposite) are the new standard for wireless routers that only recently went primetime. If you've seen some milling around before, there's a chance they're based on test standards, but pretty much the same.

New with 802.11n is MIMO. This allows routers to send and receive multiple signals to 802.11n-compliant devices. This means faster data streams and better support for sending multiple files at once – perfect for BitTorrent and online gaming.

“Wired2Fire don't install any of the crapware that other PC suppliers tend to”

SPECIFICATION

Antec Three Hundred case; Intel Core 2 E8400 3GHz; Asus P5N-D motherboard; BFG Geforce 9800 GTX (overclocked); 4GB Corsair Twin2X C5 RAM; Western Digital 500GB HDD; DVD-RW; Asus Realtek audio and networking; Vista Home Premium (Service Pack 1).



DIABLO SLI

PRICE £878 MANUFACTURER Wired2Fire WEBSITE wired2fire.co.uk

WHEN YOU BUY a PC called “Diablo SLI” you expect two things: it'll worship Satan, and it'll have at least two graphics cards. If you expected that from this custom-built PC, you'd be wrong twice: the Diablo SLI only has one graphics card and it doesn't smell like chicken blood at all.

An SLI setup is an optional extra on the Diablo, but it isn't really needed as it already uses an overclocked GeForce 9800 GTX 512MB card from BFG Tech (bfgtech.com). While this isn't the best card around, it's still a good model.

The rest of the parts are fairly decent: a Western Digital 500GB Cavier hard drive, 4GB of Twin2X C5 RAM from Corsair, an LG DVD-RW drive (no Blu-ray or HD-DVD here), an Intel Core 2 E8400

3GHz processor, an ASUS P5N-D mobo and *Windows Vista Home Premium*. In a welcome touch Wired2Fire not only install and configure *Windows* for you, they but don't install any of the crapware that other PC suppliers tend to. They'll also fine-tune the PC, updating drivers and installing *Vista Service Pack 1*, tidying up cables to maximise airflow and overclocking the PC, so you get the most you can out of it.

There were two aspects to the Diablo SLI we were disappointed with: you use ASUS' Realtek onboard audio (sound cards, like a second graphics card, are optional) and the Antec Three Hundred case looks dull and can be noisy – lots of fans, no dampening. The good news is the Diablo's PSU churns out 850W, which

should be enough to power said 9800, a good soundcard, and all those case fans.

The Diablo PC we tested makes for a decent gaming rig, delivering good performances on *Company of Heroes* and resource-hog *Crysis*. But there's room for improvement, which Wired2Fire can provide. Diablo SLI machines can be configured to suit your needs, with everything from different processors (the system notably isn't a Quad Core, instead opting for a nippy Dual Core), Blu-ray and (now defunct) HD-DVD drives, different cases, CPU coolers, peripherals, extra HDDs, and – as mentioned – extra graphics and sound cards. Of course, this knocks up the Diablo SLI's base price.

Speaking of, the £880 Wired2Fire are charging PC ZONE readers (found in

the Review/Offer Systems part of their website) is fairly good value. Although it doesn't include a monitor.

While the Diablo SLI isn't a cutting-edge gaming machine, it will last you two, maybe three, years, before it's outstripped by advances in PC tech.

PCZONE

85

Powerful not pricey



EVERGLIDE DKT BOARD

PRICE £38 MANUFACTURER Everglide
WEBSITE everglide.com

ACCORDING TO PROFESSIONAL gamer Brian "DKT" Flander, this is "a divine fusion of sleek style and unyielding durability that makes it the perfect companion in my conquests." So is this a keyboard, or a wingman to help apparent idiot-savantes like DKT to kiss girls?

Well, the former, it's the old thin-based aluminium affair with a bunch of Razer gaming tech jammed in to make it special. Eight programmable keys, cool backlighting, slimline profile... not only does it do the job, but it does it well.

It's true to say that the DKTBoard's keys feel rough and stiff (if you'll forgive a quick descent into *Carry On...*) but once

you get used to it you barely notice. It's a notably tough beast, with well-placed media controls that your elephantine digits are unlikely to splay themselves between and it's all topped off with a rather nice finish. Hooray for this DKT chap then, we guess.



RAZER PIRANHA GAMING COMMUNICATOR

PRICE £49.99 MANUFACTURER Razer WEBSITE eu.razerzone.com

RAZER HAVE SHOWN restraint with the Piranha – their usual lavish lights are limited to two Razer triskelions – but the design remains excellent. The lightweight plastic frame and the ear cups are padded with foam, while the 8ft cord

has a clip-on in-line volume and mic control. Meanwhile the flip-down mic is set far enough away that your breathing won't be heard, but close enough to pick up your speech. The Piranha sounds good as well, giving plenty of bass without sacrificing trebles.

Sure, older rivals like the Sennheiser 161s still give it more than a run for its money for about a fifth of the price – but these remain excellent cans for gamers.



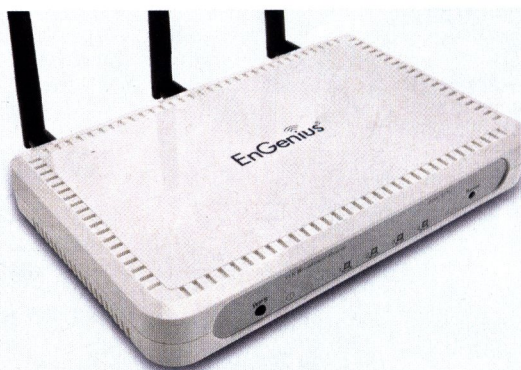
LIMITED EDITION TRITON 79 AMAZING

PRICE £56 MANUFACTURER ASUSTek
WEBSITE asus.com

WE'RE NOT SURE the PC world is ready for limited-edition processor coolers, especially when they have the word "amazing" in the title. Nevertheless, here it is: the ASUS' Triton 79 AMAZing.

ASUS have only made a few thousand of these coolers and claim it'll cool your Intel or AMD quad or dual-core processor down by 10°-15°. Under tests its set of copper heat pipes, 12cm fan and aluminium fins certainly worked well enough, cooling a 3GHz Quad Core running in sweltering conditions. And quietly at that, to boot.

This comes at a price: it's huge (roughly 14x12x12cm, and it weighs half a kilo) and it's pricey. There are coolers that cost less, that do just as good a job.



ESR-9710

PRICE £100 MANUFACTURER EnGenius WEBSITE engeniustech.com

LOOKS-WISE THIS draft 2.0 802.11n router looks like it belongs in a *Dilbert* cubicle, but as with so many things, it's what's on the inside that counts.

Packed into this box is the new version of 802.11n. This means the ESR-9710 can theoretically push 35MB of data around a wireless network every second. In other words, it's bloody fast. EnGenius haven't slacked on security, providing WPA, WPA2 and AES encryption. The only thing it lacks is a built-in ADSL or DSL modem.

This router proved easy to set up, and delivered what was expected of it – high-speed internet access and networking for multiple computers, game consoles, and media players.



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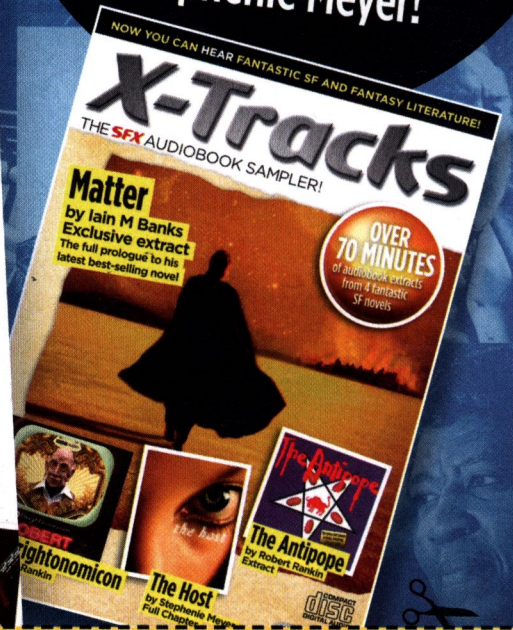
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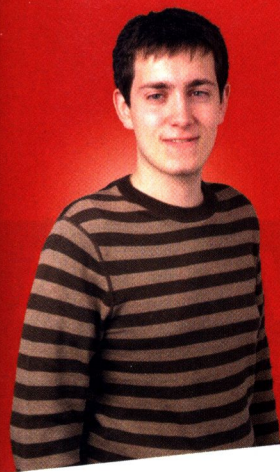
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PCZONE FREEPLAY



Sweet, sweet freedom

FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Flagshipped

I ORIGINALLY WROTE this column expressing regret that Flagship Studios, creators of *Hellgate: London*, had been closed. In fact, the situation is a little bit different, according to a post by the company in its own forums: "the core management and founding team members are still at Flagship," but they "couldn't sustain the size of the company any longer," so they, "laid off most employees." As of going to press, I'm getting more and more angry at the radio silence that, at the time of writing, is being held by Flagship central. Fans still know nothing other than that Flagship are no longer taking subscribers, and current subscribers won't be billed.

As a company Flagship have managed to keep their fans in the dark, their subscribers in the darker, completely screw over an entire part of the market, and then, at the game's bleakest time, systematically fail to give any concrete answers.

If anyone learns anything from this whole thing - and I certainly hope they do - it's that you have to be transparent (or at least translucent) with your public, as well as listen to what's wrong with the game and fix it.

Well, you live and learn, gamers.

This month's Freeplay makes up for any failures on the above company's part by being fantastic, as usual. We've got *Survival Crisis Z*, one of the scariest free games ever made, the return of my esteemed colleague Steve for this month's Freeware, an RPG made out of the Source engine, and, as you'd expect, Online Zone, the only place where we talk about our tiny little corner of the internet.

Flagship ex-employees, we salute you. As you'll be wanting to save some money, everything in these pages is free of charge. Our treat.

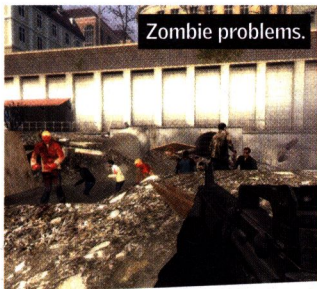
Ed Zitron

Ed Zitron, disc editor



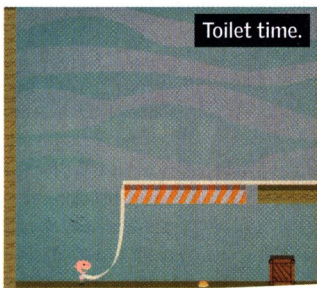
90 Demo pages

Make a town, shoot some robots, and rule the world



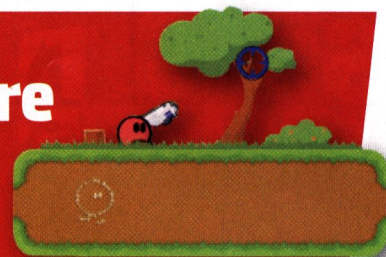
92 News

Zombies and shooters and web games, oh my!



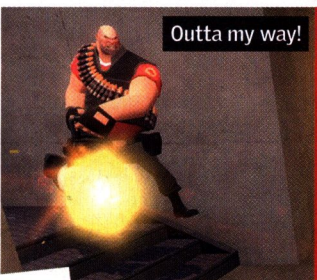
94 Freeware

Steve Hogarty's crazy pagefuls of nothing



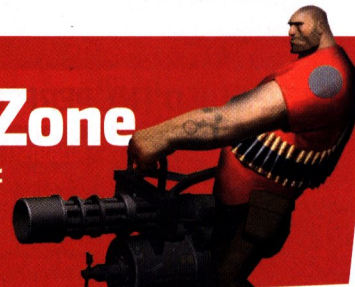
98 Ben There, Dan That

A huge feature on Dan Marshall's point-and-click...



102 Online Zone

Chat, shoot, repeat



PCZONE FREE-O-METER



0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



222.2 HOURS*



Wind farms never make people happy.

Demos

What you'll find stuck on our DVD this month...

SIMCITY: SOCIETIES

You win sim, you lose sim

WEBSITE simcitysocieties.ea.com

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

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.

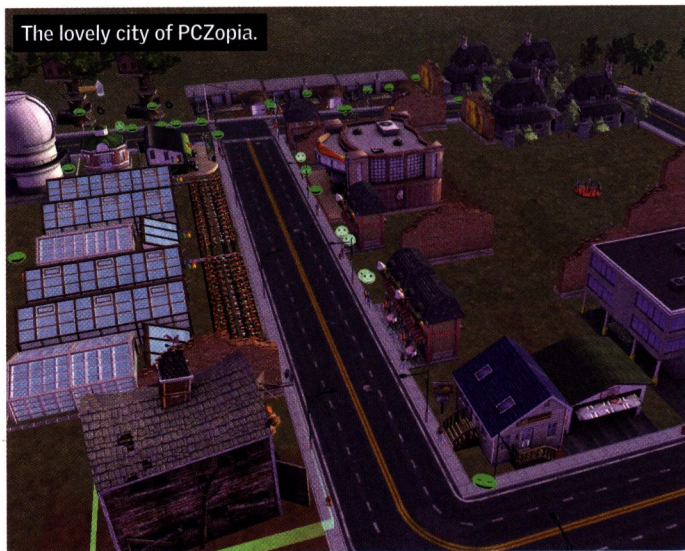
WHILE *SIMCITY SOCIETIES* didn't blow our minds with its simplified version of the city building simulator, it was engrossing enough to wile away the hours. So if you've been on the fence, the good times are rolling in with this deep introduction to the game.

The tutorial is a little bit patronising, but it does fill you in with anything you could want to know about building your little town into a vast metropolis.

Once you pass it, you're given free reign to create somewhere wonderful to live. This is done by creating housing, jobs, places to relax, and areas that add creativity and prosperity to the town. As these attributes grow, you're able to build more complex things, always having to balance the statistics of the town with the power that it drains from your energy sources.

SimCity Societies is very much *SimCity Lite*. Once you've clocked the tutorial, the town opens up, and you'll

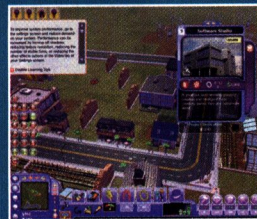
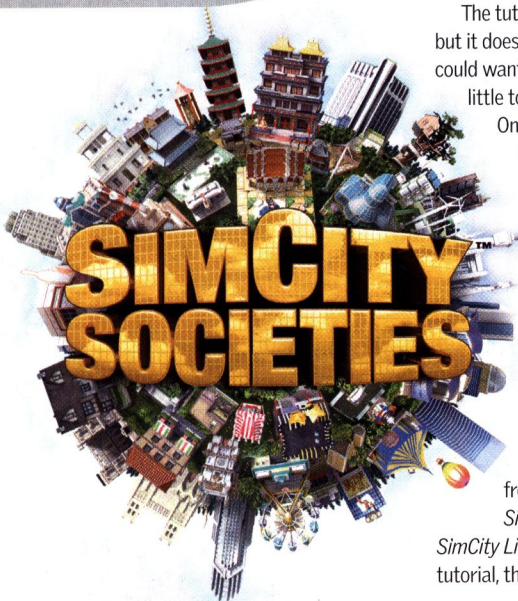
The lovely city of PCZopia.



be able to complete various tasks for trophies, and unlock more buildings to up the creativity and productivity of your town. You can also zoom into the micro level and watch your happy Sims walking around town, if you really must, but when we played, we just got the urge to smack them. That said, there is an odd

satisfaction in watching their little faces light up when you bring a big blockbuster to the cinema.

Anybody can sit down with this demo and enjoy it – not just city-sim nuts – and decide on whether they want to pick up the full game in time for the new *Destinations* expansion pack.



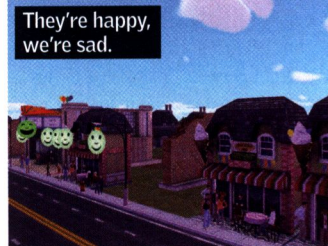
LABOUR PARTY

The Software Studio, though expensive to build, provides a great deal of Simoleans and can get 12 Sims at once working on a project. Knock down a few smaller jobs to make the space too – it's worth it.



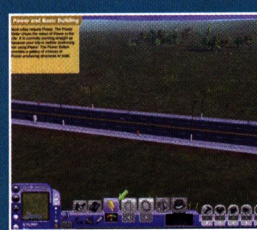
CREATIVE STREAK

Build public murals, parks, and other creativity producing objects to balance out the negative effects of building new workplaces. Although you'd think having extra jobs would be a good thing for a city.



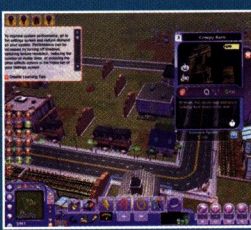
They're happy, we're sad.

HOW TO BUILD THE PERFECT CITY



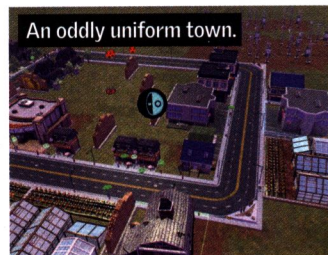
RUBBISH

If you're totally cack at *SimCity Societies*, all of the cheats are available in the demo. Just hit Enter and type `moneytree` followed by a number of your choosing to receive it in Simoleans.



CREEP SHOW

Some buildings, like the Creepy Barn and the Cinema, allow you to improve your citizens' moods every 24 hours. Use them to boost the morale of these moany little computer-sods.



An oddly uniform town.



AIR RIVALS

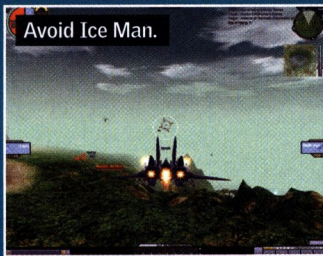
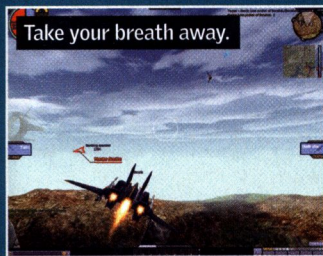
Terminal 5 Velocity

WEBSITE www.air-rivals.net

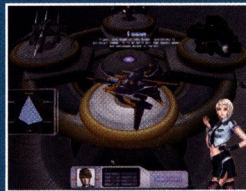
WHILE THERE ARE a million free-to-play MMOs out there, *Air Rivals* is one that we're obsessed with playing. It plays just like *Starfox*, but with mouse controls and skimpily-dressed policewomen who give you experience.

While it's a little on the grind-side, it's so much more fun than a lot of the

general-purpose fantasy bashers that we can forgive it – oh, and did we mention that it's utterly free? All you need to do is go to the website, sign up for an account, and then load the client off our disc. Happy flying. And if you're lucky, you might just catch a few of us in-game.

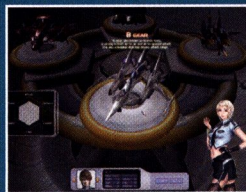


GEAR UP



I-GEAR

The I-Gear is easily the fastest ship, able to dodge missiles and afterburn for longer.



B-GEAR

It takes a while to get used to, but the B-Gear is the fastest leveller in the game.

SUPREME RULER 2020

Hindsight is this game www.battlegoat.com/supreme_2020.php

IN TERMS OF diving in, *Supreme Ruler 2020* is the equivalent of an empty swimming pool: you'd have to be mentally ill to try. So, prepare yourself for a few incredibly dry tutorials, in which you can't press the "close" button on the obstructive tutorial box, because it closes the tutorial.

Eventually, this reluctant steel flower will open up and offer you some hardcore and unpretty strategic challenges – but it'll be more instantly appealing to insane strategy bastards, and indeed people who've played the previous game.



Cor, this is hard

And pleasantly inaccessible



CAPITAL SHOW

Use the Harrison button to send tanks to your strongpoints. To be honest, we're just telling you to do what we did in the tutorial.



SUPERFLY

Likewise, we just made up the phrase "deploy airborne defensive stratagems" to sound clever, as it sounds like it involves planes.



CABINET

A lot of the micromanagement can be replaced with cabinet advisers. Just do what they say, or they'll get snippy.



WESTON-SUPER-MARE

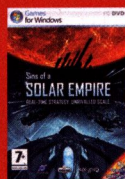
The best thing about this demo is that they appear to have replaced Weston-Super-Mare with a nuclear power station.

DISC COMPETITION WIN! one of five copies of *Sins of a Solar Empire!*

THIS MONTH, WE'VE been sneaky enough to grab you five copies of the awesome *Sins of a Solar Empire*, one of the best space-strategy games we've ever played. It's almost completely randomly generated and ridiculously deep, and if you're lucky enough to win a copy we guarantee it'll scratch that strategic itch for hours.

If you're up for winning a copy, put this month's disc in your machine and click on the Disc Competition link on side one of the disc.

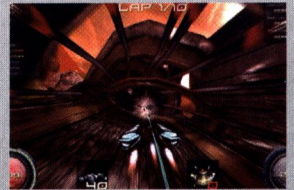
Entry deadline is the 10 September. Visit snipurl.com/futuretc for full entry rules, regs and conditions. We've also put the demo on the disc so that you can see whether entering this competition is for you, so give it a go.



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

BEST OF THE REST



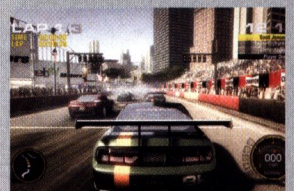
PYROBLAZER

WEBSITE www.pyroblazer.com
Futuristic racers are always a good laugh, if only to pretend you're David Carradine, and *Pyroblazer* is shaping up to be a fun alternative to the more realistic driving games that usually clog up the release schedules.



BEN THERE, DAN THAT

WEBSITE www.gibbage.co.uk
The gorgeous point-and-click adventure from *Gibbage* guru Dan Marshall is now available on our disc, following the adventures of Dan and his friend Ben Ward. It involves cows, rockets up arses and enough tomfoolery to kill a judge.



GRID: EBAY MOTORS

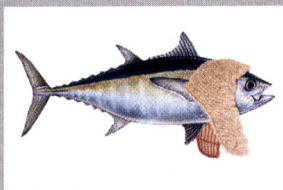
WEBSITE www.racedrivergrid.com
Race Driver: GRID excelled at being a playable, gorgeous driving game, and Codemasters have released another demo of the game in conjunction with eBay, including American muscle cars, the most manly of penis-replacements.



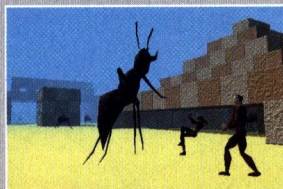
STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME

WEBSITE www.fireflyworlds.com
While we weren't crazy about it when it came in for review last issue (197, 42%), there are some out there that might still be interested in giving this archaic strategy game a go – thus we're good enough to have put the demo on the disc.

SNIPPETS



THOMPSON TO BE BARRED?
WEBSITE snipurl.com/jackthompson
 In a legal case that's too complicated to fit into this report, US judge Dava Tunis is deciding whether infamous anti-gaming attorney Jack Thompson should be stopped from practicing law in Florida. But if you're like us, right now you're imagining a big legal fish called Tuna Davis.



ANT ATTACK GETS MORE 3D
WEBSITE encho.demon.co.uk/aa3d
 The original is 25 years old and this isn't the first remake. But *Ant Attack 3D* now includes a level editor, and the ants have the bone-chilling ability to climb blocks. So you won't be able to jump onto a building to avoid getting chomped.



BIOWARE: THE NEW FACEBOOK?
WEBSITE kotaku.com/5024003
 BioWare are boasting its forums have four million members. This is a lot, but if you take how many are online at any one time (about 500) that's 0.000125% of four million.

ISOMETRIC BRAIN SCAVENGERS

Survival Crisis Z adds zombies to the *Syndicate* model

WEBSITE skasoftware.wordpress.com

VERY OCCASIONALLY, OUT of the bowels of a much-humped genre (the 'help, zombies!' genre), comes something incredible. In this case it's the wonderful intricacy of Ska Studios' *Survival Crisis Z*.

You play as one of five classes, each with different weapons, abilities and item load outs. You control your character from an isometric perspective, moving a reticule arrow to aim your gun, firing with the CTRL key. This control system takes a little getting used to, as the difficulty curve is a bit on the steep side, throwing hordes of undead, G-Men and Rebels at you in Story Mode with barely a few minutes to help you learn the ropes. *SCZ* also manages to scare the shit out of you, with a low, thumping bass that constantly keeps you worried about what's around the corner.

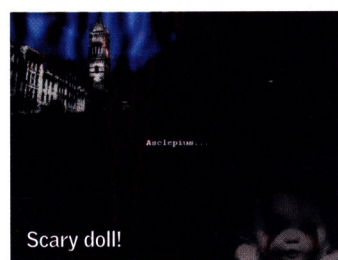
The Arcade mode is much more visceral, with hordes of the walking dead shambling into your gunfire. You can pick up power-ups, multipliers, and point-



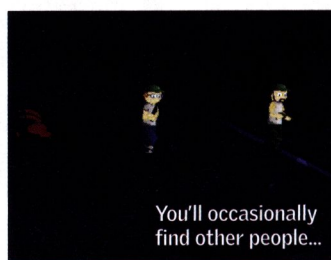
Just like how violence used to be...

coins, as well as different weapons like machine guns and flamethrowers.

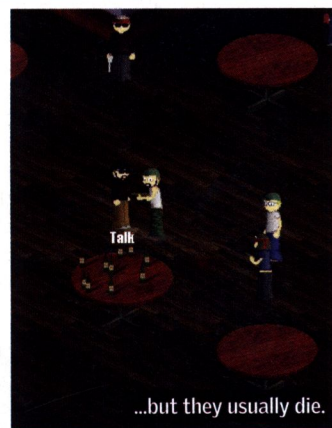
Survival Crisis Z is an excellent, totally free game, and we'll be sure to cover it in full in next month's Freeware.



Scary doll!



You'll occasionally find other people...



...but they usually die.

PREACHING TO THE KONGREGATION

Excellent web portal brings achievements to flash gaming

WEBSITE kongregate.com

THE INTERNET IS becoming a comfortable place for Flash developers these days, with countless blogs popping up alongside new web portals. Amongst these lies Kongregate, which has become a juggernaut of community based gaming.

You can find a great deal of flash classics on there, such as *Desktop Tower Defence 1.5* and the latest *Pico* games, but Kongregate adds spice with achievements that level you up.

Each week, there are also special challenges that award cards that you can use to play Kongregate's own, free-to-play collectible card game, *Kongai*. And there's even a leaderboard to compare your skills with other gamers.

Better still, these challenges are usually used to hype unsung Flash game greats, and so Kongregate has become fantastic at giving exposure to the little-known games out there, such as the wonderful *Typing Ninja Hunter*.



Ms. Least Sexy Screenshot 2008 heats up.

CARD-BASED RAT HUNT

EverQuest meets *Magic: The Gathering*, produces entertainment

WEBSITE legendsofnorraath.station.sony.com

LOOKING COOL PLAYING a

collectable card game is impossible, and thus it's nice to play them in the comfort of your own home against the anonymous masses. *Legends of Norraath*, Sony Online's new, free branch of the *EverQuest* franchise, uses a mixture of *EQ* myth and newly-forged characters to create a *Magic: The Gathering*-esque online experience. You start with a general purpose deck, and can update it with 15-card booster packs (£1.99) or entire (58 card) starter decks (£5.99), and can also trade with other players depending on what rare cards you get.

You play by completing four quests on the card table or attacking the other player's avatar. Quests are completed by pitting cards against them, but you can block other players from doing so by using creatures and beginning mini-skirmishes. As mentioned, you can go after the other player's avatar, but this can be a challenge if they manage to



complete a few quests before you're able to do some real damage.

LoN is a little hard to understand at first, and you can look forward to getting your arse handed to you again and again by the final tutorial level until it's clear in your head what creatures are expendable.

Surprisingly enough in the completely free version of the game, there's a single-player storyline (which isn't exactly going to rival *Baldur's Gate* or *The Witcher* in its intricacies) that gives *LoN* a bit of impetus for you to learn outside of playing other people.

And we must warn you – these people are unforgiving mega-tacticians that will break you over their knee, and then proceed to pepper you with internet-insults for being pathetic.

Just to underline, playing *LoN* is demoralising at the beginning, but there's a great deal of satisfaction to be had by delivering a card-bound smackdown to these ingrate teenagers. *Legends of Norraath* has the learning-curve from hell, and the tutorial could do a little more to clear up everything, but once you're fully versed, it's supremely addictive.



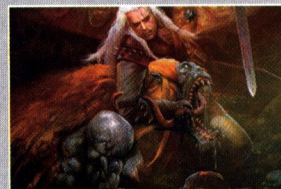
SCISSORS SNIPPETS



GOOD OLD CD PROJECT

WEBSITE gog.com

When we first received emails from CD Projekt (*The Witcher*) telling us about their plans to sell old games, cheaply, and without DRM, we terrified them with instant responses of delighted hoots and indelicate swearing. What a brilliant, brilliant idea!



WITCHER WEB GAME LAUNCHED

WEBSITE versus.thewitcher.com

This has been hanging around in beta form as *DuelMail*, but CD Projekt's online duelling game has seen the name change to *Versus*. It's a one-on-one PvP turn-based combat, and is damn fun.

Bug-Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
THE SIMS:
FREETIME



"Tinker interaction is now available on the 'Big and Brown Dishwasher by Romantic Notions'."

MOVIE OF THE MONTH DIABLO III

Announced to cheerleader-like screams from the audience at the Worldwide Invitational, *Diablo III* looks, from the huge gameplay trailer we've got on the disc, like it'll be a ridiculously epic and equally addictive RPG nightmare that will consume us soul first. Urgh.



The Barbarian is back, and he's a leaping, scrambling bad arse.



You're able to knock down walls and throw enemies off bridges.



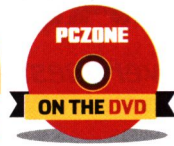
The vicious Thousand Pounder is summoned to fight our hero...



...but we're really looking forward to fighting the Siegebreaker.

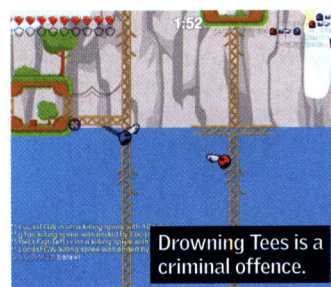
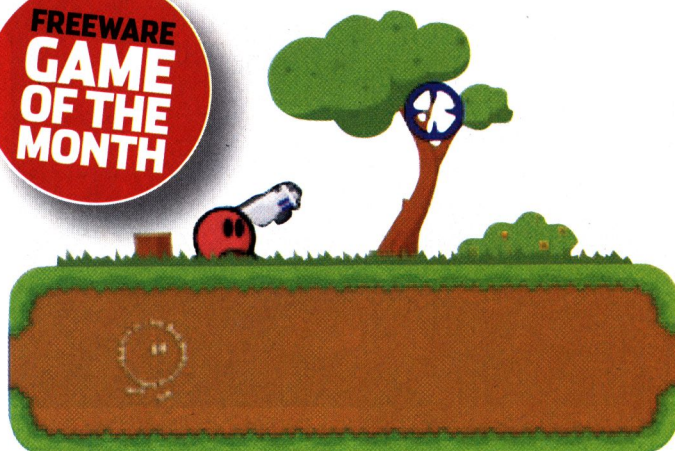


Freeware



Put that wallet away, sir, these splendid games are on us

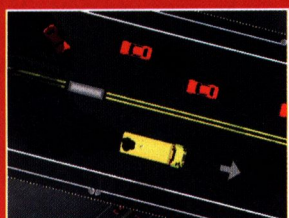
Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the internet has to offer. So dedicated are we, that to deliver less than absolute perfection would cause us to choke on our own shame-inspired vomit. This month we murder lots of cute animated creatures, zip right into the middle of an asteroid, chase after a baby canine bog roll thief, assassinate stickmen, and fly at 19 miles a second (so it's reckoned). Enjoy!



TEEWORLDS

Like *Maple Story* crossed with *Unreal Tournament*

DEVELOPER Magnus Auvinen WEBSITE teeworlds.com



RANDY BALMA: MUNICIPAL ABORTIONIST

DEVELOPER Messhof WEBSITE messhof.com/games

WE FIRMLY BELIEVE that developers should be free to feed their creative urges from the scariest and most darkest reaches of their disturbed minds – as long as they come back out with something half playable. And playable isn't really an adjective you can pin to Messhof's latest title – it's more a blinding assault on the senses than anything else. (That said, if you want a real game, go play the *Powder Game* – snipurl.com/powderdance – which is awesome). *Randy Balma* is also mildly hypnotising, with swirling multicoloured graphics and dancing baby heads that are sure to tear from you what little sanity you have left.

Randy Balma is a short series of baffling minigames set in a distorted reality, an ultimately disturbing set list of nightmarish, drug-induced scenarios. You're never quite sure what you're doing, but subtle guidelines will always pull you towards your objective. That's if you survive the initial confusion that every member of the PC ZONE team had on contact with this insanity. If you don't have a epileptic fit, that means you've won.

IN THE NEVER-ENDING war between red and blue factions everywhere, a new campaign rages on between the cuddly little Tees, as they wield their hammers and swing at each other's cute puffy faces.

Teeworlds is a multiplayer 2D deathmatch that wouldn't look out of place presented in a children's book written by Andy McNabb. The game's full of running and gunning precision that is aided with the likes of hooks and shotguns giving it a very hit-and-run style of gameplay. The three game modes are deathmatch, team deathmatch and capture the flag, but the underlying principle in each is similar: kill all the cute things dead.

Looking past the very *Kirby*-esque exterior, you'll find a frantic and addictive shooter that prides itself on outright simplicity. Navigate each world by jumping or using a Worms-style grappling hook, and when you come across an opponent, scratch, smash and shoot them as much as possible until one of you is scraping brain matter off your boots.

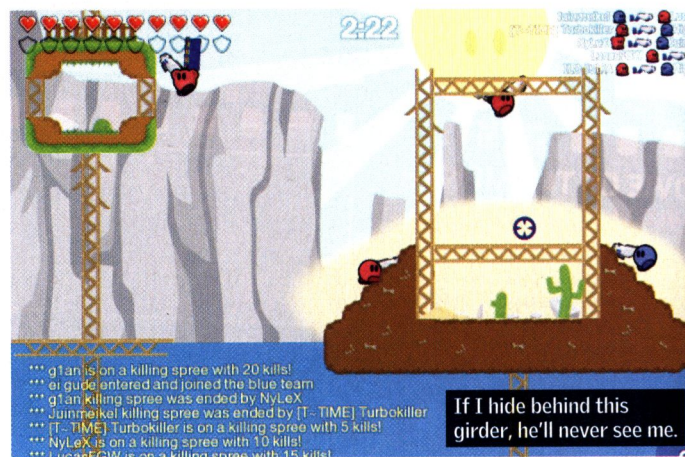
The advice "be quick or be dead" should be applied here, especially when using the *Unreal Tournament*-style insta-gib guns, which – disappointingly –

make Tees burst into stars, instead of rupturing the ball-like creatures into tiny pieces of smashed bone and severed organs. This is where the grappling hook comes into play, with skilled players being able to manoeuvre across huge distances in minimal time, firing shots off at enemies as they move.

The fantastic thing is that it can be taken as lightly or seriously as the player wants. There are clans who fight it out in tournaments, training day and night like angry Energiser bunnies. Then there are those who log on to the public servers for

the odd five minutes at lunch time, taking out their stress-built rage on the internet rather than co-workers. The support for both softcore and hardcore gamers smacks a little of manic online *Worms*-meets-*Tanks* shooter *Gunbound*, but with a less obnoxious anime feel to it.

Although *Teeworlds* is still in its relatively early stages, there's a lot of third-party content available, such as the aforementioned insta-gib fun and servers with little customised touches that make this game all the more worthwhile. It's a kill frenzy, and we love it.



THRUSTBURST

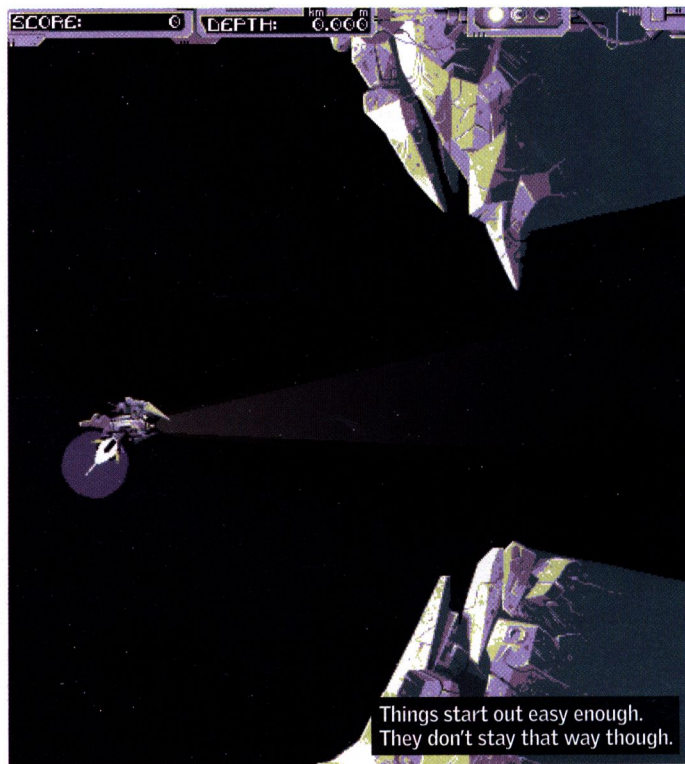
And step and pivot and thrust...

DEVELOPER Umlautgames WEBSITE umlautgames.net

LESS AN R-TYPE clone and more a twitch-happy arcade shooter that rewards precision and fine controls, *Thrustburst* has you jetting your way Han Solo-style into a cavernous asteroid.

While you have infinite fuel with which to thrust, your shield and laser are powered by a teensy battery, which must be recharged either by scraping your ship's tail fin against the ceiling or floor, just like a bumper car, replete with dramatic sparks. A single unshielded collision with an enemy is enough to end the game, and as the passage narrows the further into the asteroid you wander, *Thrustburst* becomes about flying as far into the rock as you can manage. Your ship's also got a lamp on it too, which lights up surfaces in a pleasing manner.

With the difficulty as rocky as the asteroid you're traversing, and the level of required control equal to that of defusing a bomb placed inside a person's heart, *Thrustburst* is best played with a gamepad. Or if you're easily aggravated, not at all. Maybe go lie down in a dark room instead. For those perhaps able to see in the dark, you're just going to have to play more *Thrustburst*. Sorry.



JIMMY'S LOST HIS TOILET PAPER

Damn Labrador puppies... DEVELOPER Petri Puhro WEBSITE www.kloonigames.com/blog/games/tp

Despite his peril, Jimmy stays happy.



THERE'S NOTHING QUITE as maddening as tangled up wires. If there's something that comes close, it's dropping toilet roll and having it bounce happily away from you, leaving a papery trail behind it. Imagine then, how terrifying a concept is that of tangled up toilet paper threading itself in and around platforms, demanding that you roll it up again by hopping about the level in a very specific way.

Developed by Petri Puhro (the freeware magician who's brought us such fantastic games as *Crayon Physics* and *Humpsters*), *JLHTP's* simple mechanic of rolling up bog roll is made more complex by moving platforms, crates and switches – which generally conspire to create a single, obtuse solution to what initially appear to be simple levels. Strangely intelligent, considering the game's title.

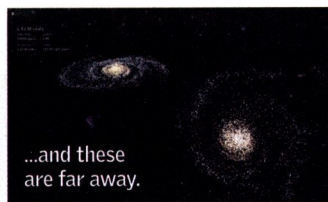
UNIVERSE SANDBOX

Now, what the hell did I do with Mercury?

DEVELOPER Dan Dixon WEBSITE www.universesandbox.com

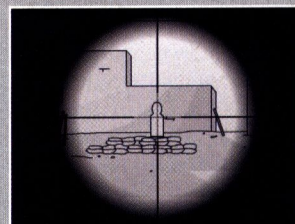
A FREWARE TOY that's had us humming the galaxy song from *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*, *Universe Sandbox* attempts to simulate physics

from the tiniest moons of Saturn right the way up to the biggest things currently known to science – Jupiter, galaxies, and your mum.



The fun doesn't end there though, some preset systems show off the engine's ability to explode planets, with a special nod to the exploding Death Star and the damage it would've actually done to Endor. And if the season finale of *Doctor Who* had you wondering just how easy it would be to place 27 planets in perfectly fixed positions in space, I think you'll find the Daleks had a bloody hard time doing it. Davros must have been screaming non-stop.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



TACTICAL ASSASSIN

DEVELOPER Simon Hason
WEBSITE snipurl.com/pcz_sniper

SNIPERS HAVE A fairly sour reputation. Often depicted as the cowards of the battlefield, they can most often be found squatting in bell towers and getting shot in the eye. In more recent times they're unfairly painted as psychos, scooting about the place taking pot shots at pedestrians.

As being killed from halfway across a map is one of the most infuriating deaths possible, in games snipers are pegged as cheaters, liars and merchants of deceit. *Tactical Assassin 2* turns these preconceptions on their head, placing you in the role of a hitman whose skill lies not only in exploding heads, but also finding who your target is.

Although *T42* plays like violent version of *Guess Who?* it's an enjoyable and original game.



Ye Olde LARPer.

BLOODSTONE: THE JOURNEY HOME

Like getting an RPG from the Source engine

WEBSITE www.bloodstone-thejourneyhome.com MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

PROVING THAT THE Source engine is as versatile as pipe cleaners, *Bloodstone: The Journey Home* is a *Half-Life 2* mod that puts you in the medieval boots of Khrinz, a farm boy trying to get home.

This RPG adventure starts with our hapless protagonist touching the Bloodstone, which transports him to the town of Riverside. On arrival he's drawn into a web of intrigue, grinding out experience and completing odd jobs for the locals, while gaining equipment that you can put on your ragdoll, making him as manly or girly as you like.

The twist to the regular RPG formula is that the environment bears a factor in how effective your magical abilities are. For example, standing next to a fire might provide a 10-point bonus to flaming wizardry, whilst standing in a dark cave increases the power of your earth-based attacks.

This adds a bit more strategy to the tried and tested 'point at the man and shoot' mentality, as different abilities have bonuses depending on where you have your feet planted.

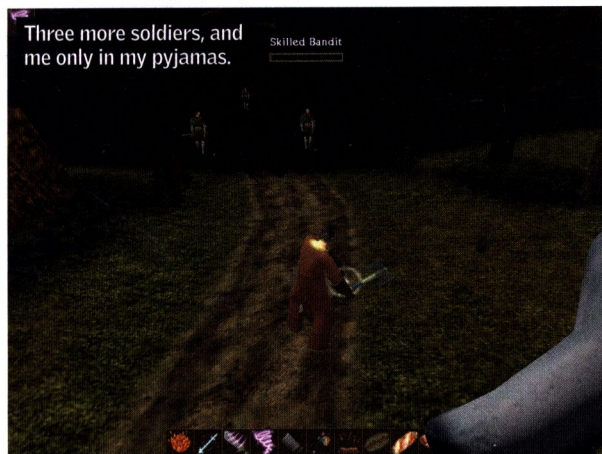
Bloodstone is a fairly big game, and as a lot of the people you meet have menial

tasks that put you in danger for crap pay, you can slowly level your character up so that he can wield the gargantuan axes or the less impressive staves.

Speaking of the weapons, there are a lot of them, each boasting unique abilities and stats which let you swipe more often and do more damage along with special abilities, like being able to dual-wield swords. How the mod team have built so many intricacies into *Bloodstone* is also impressive – the world itself is big, considering the limitations of working with the Source engine, and it has a

passable map and a full-blown item database, with *Diablo*-esque random drops and experience-grinding à la professional hack 'n' slash products.

A lot of effort has gone into this well-polished mod, which is surprisingly deep and enjoyably addictive. Completing the less interesting quests becomes a slog, but *Bloodstone* is a fascinating fantasy adventure that really raises the bar on non-shooter mods.



OUTBREAK

Zombies, zombies everywhere, but not a crowbar in sight

WEBSITE veterangamer.proboards81.com MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

INCHING YOUR WAY slowly through the familiar grounds of Ravenholm, you're joined by a squad, all eager to go, when a low-pitched groan comes from the distance. You turn around the corner, where you'd normally expect a couple of the headcrab zombies to be, but 50 of the lumbering dead await.

Outbreak takes you through *HL2* with new weapons, intense gore and a lot of re-skinned undead, giving the Combine and the Resistance something else to juggle in this hellish circus.

With the addition of the zombies, enemies on the screen are a horrifying

crowd, giving you plenty of targets and even more reasons to brick it – and even throws you the odd curve ball, with things like a Strider appearing early in the game.

Outbreak's very pretty and breathes more action into *HL2's* base gameplay, with a recovering health system and new sub-objectives.

If you have an uncontrollable lust for killing zombies, and can't hold on for *Left 4 Dead*, *Outbreak* provides a nice outlet for all of your anti-undead desires.



Zombies crowd every corner of *HL2's* story.

SOURCE TOWERS

Tower? I barely even knew her!

WEBSITE www.moddb.com/mods/11044/source-towers MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

JOINING THE UNRELENTING hordes of tower defence games comes this new Source mod that puts the familiar (albeit slightly overdone) concept into *HL2's* flexible engine.

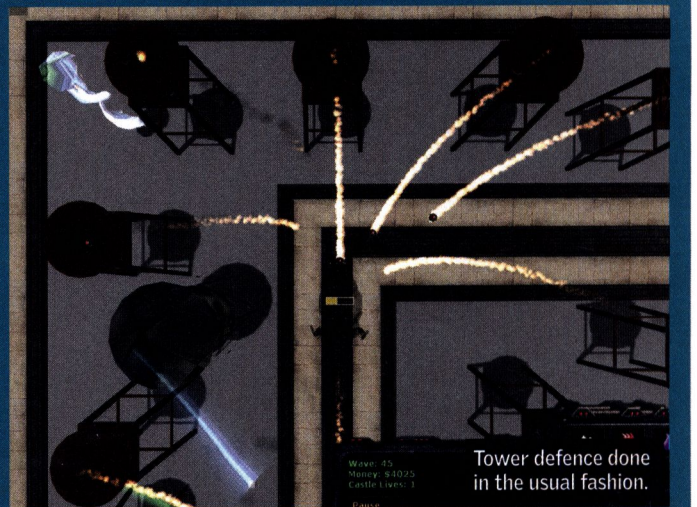
This edition sends an onslaught of Combine advisors at you, with the sole intention of destroying a castle that the player is defending.

You do so by placing projectile spewing towers that come in earth,

fire, ice and special flavours along the sides of the advisors' route.

The effects are well done, with enemies exploding with the fiery clouds we all know from *HL2*, and each tower changes significantly with each upgrade.

The game only ends when you are overrun by the progressively more difficult bad guys, but it's still a good way to waste the odd minute or lunchtime for the discerning gentleman.



Tower defence done in the usual fashion.



France's contribution to the *HL2* mod scene.

LOGISTIQUE

The Vanishing goes all sci-fi

WEBSITE www.moddb.com/mods/logistique MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

PUZZLES AND REALISM are the order of the day in *Logistique*, a game that sees a citizen of City 17 go hunting for his pregnant wife who was snatched by The Cartel, a violent group under Combine control.

This English-language demo of the French mod previews some of the puzzles, which are a mixture of timing, object-pushing and button-pressing challenges, as well as introducing combat mechanics that would make Tom Clancy proud.

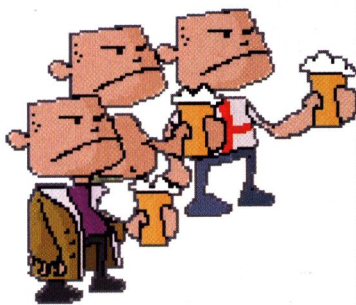
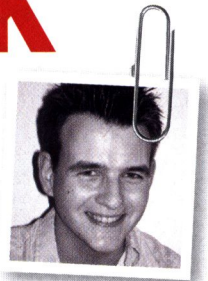
The lack of HUD (the screen is empty, except for your health) and a realistic reloading system are an indication that the producers of this mod are gunning for an experience that is a bit closer to real life than *Half-Life 2* dared to tread.

Being a demo of a mod that is still in its early days means that there are a few bugs here and there, but this is definitely shaping up to be something that somehow combines authentic gunplay with *HL2* without gallycally shrugging its shoulders and saying "Bof".

HOW TO...

MAKE A POINT & CLICK ADVENTURE GAME

Fed up with the continuing lack of LucasArts adventures, *Dan Marshall* decided to make his own



THE ADVENTURE GAME Studio (AGS) has given every layabout gamer with delusions of grandeur the opportunity to make their own point-and-click games without really having to do any of the complicated thinking traditionally associated with making sprites move about on the screen. All the hard work's been done for you, so it's now strikingly easy to cobble together your own sub-LucasArts puzzle adventure. But how easy? Easy enough for a couple of layabout drunks to produce something half-decent? Well, let's see...

Long-time readers may remember that I once had a little corner of PC ZONE all to myself where I tried to learn how to make games. The offshoot of that process was *Gibbage* – a 2D deathmatch,

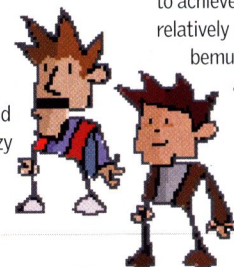
honest-to-goodness classic which set fire to the indie game industry before selling more than enough copies to erect a massive golden statue of myself outside my flat, complete with rubies for eyes and a fountain of finest real ale streaming out of its arse 24/7.

A while back a chance encounter with Lemmy and Captain Binky (a talented couple of disillusioned games industry types who are working on a swish-looking adventure game by the name of *The Forgotten Element* – see page 101 for more) pointed me towards Chris Jones' *Adventure Game Studio*, which I promptly downloaded, installed, and dicked about with one lazy Sunday afternoon.

After realising how technically easy it is to make a *Sam & Max* style adventure game for free, the idea was to make a quick point-and-click game to give me something to do, and to stop me crying during the gaping void of endless free time that *Gibbage's* completion had left me with.

IT BEGINS

As a tool, AGS is a blessing and a curse. Certain bits are a joy while others are an unfathomable mess, so working out how to achieve certain things left me, a relatively competent coder, frequently bemused. You start out by setting up a room, and importing a background image. To this room, you can mark out areas your character can walk on,





and start populating it with objects, hot spots to interact with and NPCs to talk about things with.

This is all done through a friendly interface: you select a particular object in a room, bring up a menu for it and select from the list of potential interactions – look at, use inventory on, talk to and so on. From there, you pick what you want to happen from almost every conceivable circumstance – move the player to a particular spot, get them to say something, add stuff to your inventory, or whatever takes your fancy.

However, there's only so far that these simple menus will take you before you need to get your hands dirty with a little grown-up scripting. To write a fully proficient adventure game with puzzles more complicated than key-in-lock stuff,

you have to learn how functions and variables and what-have-you work, as AGS essentially runs using a pared-down version of the C programming language. While this is nothing that *C++ For Dummies* or a decent online tutorial won't teach you, it's potentially confusing stuff all the same. So it's advisable to make your first game about a man in a room, not a dimension-spanning epic involving aliens and an improbable storyline.

INSPIRATION NEEDED

Once we'd grasped the basics, my flatmate Ben and I hopped merrily off



to the nearest public house armed with a notepad and a half-broken biro, bubbling with ideas and intent on crafting a game that would be the rebirth of the long-dead adventure game like some sort of digital zombie.

The first few pints' worth of ideas were a mess. Our original plot involved *The Secret of Monkey Island* creator Ron Gilbert trying to take over the world by stomping around in a giant robot. We were to call it *Ron Gilbert's Gone Rilbert!* on the assumption that "rilbert" was some sort of synonym for "crazy". As it turned out, it isn't. I desperately tried coining "rilbert" at urbandictionary.com by way of haphazard justification for the amazing title, but they weren't having any of it and immediately rejected my suggestion. That idea was promptly scrapped and, somewhat narcissistically, we cast ourselves as the main characters, and started to string together some sort of plot that'd involve us being able to visit various different dimensions as a crafty way of re-using graphics on the sly.

The game itself is a nonsense, knockabout comedy adventure, with a style that parodies and lovingly rips off the old LucasArts adventure games – mainly the almighty *Sam & Max: Hit the Road*, from which we borrowed our interface, format and most of the jokes. There are digs at pretty much every adventure game (except *The Dig*) and the whole thing pokes fun at the inherent lawlessness involved in going on a point-and-click adventure.

Links

www.zombie-cow.com

Find out how to play and join in the 'fun'.

www.cgempire.com/forgottenelement

Find out more about *The Forgotten Element*.

www.adventuregamestudio.co.uk

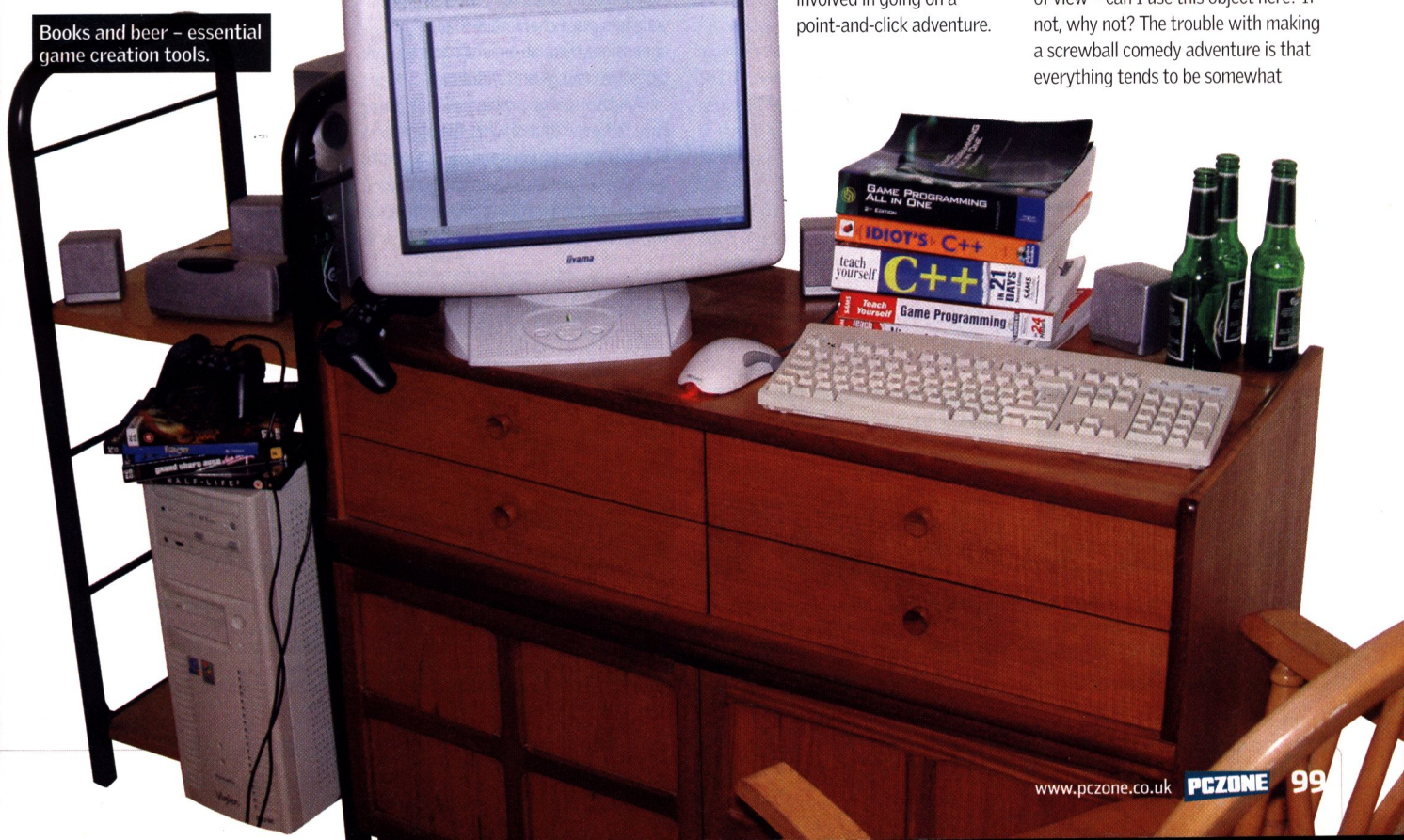
Download AGS and have a pop at making a game yourself.

In terms of plot, Dan and Ben find themselves abducted by fairly-stereotypical aliens and spend their time whipping to-and-from various alternate dimensions in an attempt to get home while the aliens themselves set about causing all sorts of mischief. When written down like that the game somehow sounds fairly tired and unimaginative, but I'm trying not to give away too much of our amazing plot so you can experience it all for yourself. There are zombies in it, however.

PUZZLE NATION

From a design point of view, by far the hardest thing when writing an adventure game is thinking up puzzles. Oh sure, it seems easy from the outside, but the lesson we very quickly learned is that non-logical puzzles are a massive turn off for the player. You need to think about a puzzle from the end-user's point of view – can I use this object here? If not, why not? The trouble with making a screwball comedy adventure is that everything tends to be somewhat

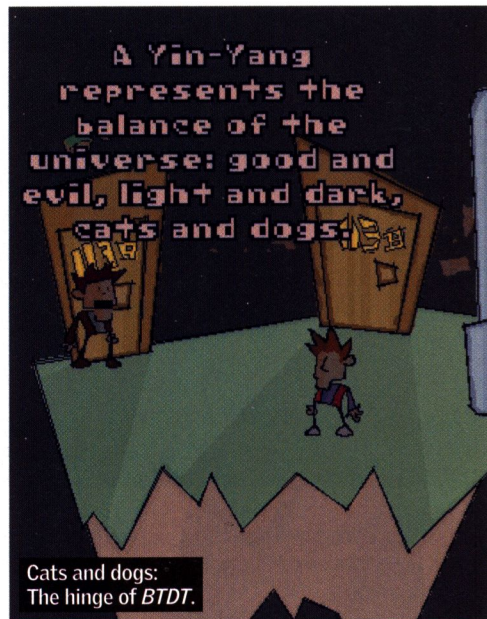
Books and beer – essential game creation tools.



FREEPLAYHOWTO...

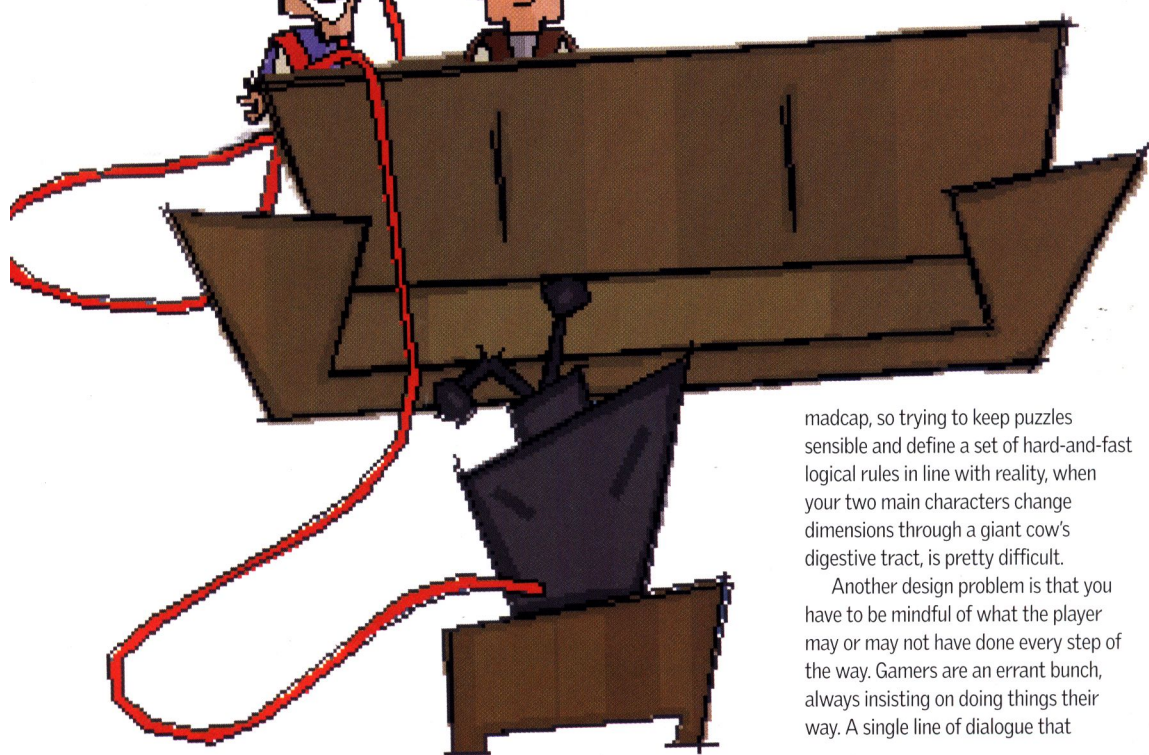


Hired goons – the worst kind of goons.



A Yin-Yang represents the balance of the universe: good and evil, light and dark, cats and dogs.

Cats and dogs: The hinge of *BTDT*.



madcap, so trying to keep puzzles sensible and define a set of hard-and-fast logical rules in line with reality, when your two main characters change dimensions through a giant cow's digestive tract, is pretty difficult.

Another design problem is that you have to be mindful of what the player may or may not have done every step of the way. Gamers are an errant bunch, always insisting on doing things their way. A single line of dialogue that

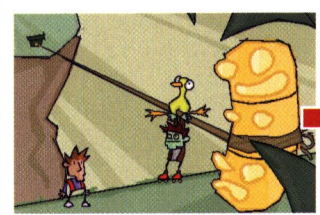
references something the player might not have experienced yet is a game-breaker – for example you can't sign off a conversation with a new character, say our mad priest who has been bitten by zombies, by using their name in case the player didn't pick the "What is your name?" option from the dialogue tree. Having to foresee everything a dopey gamer may or may not do while playing the game is a complete nightmare.

Likewise, graphics are always a chore. The original brief for *BTDT*, as co-writer Ben saw it, was that I wasn't allowed to spend any time whatsoever on the artwork. As a result, I was miserable. The game looked terrible, and not even in a good way.

Halfway through the design process I scrapped everything and re-drew it with a chunky, messy and scrappy look which was influenced by the kookiness of *Day of the Tentacle*, and I thought it worked really well. Ben was right – I still spent no time whatsoever on the artwork, but at least I found a style that allowed me

Analysis of a puzzle

Like all good classic adventure games, we start with the end of the previous adventure...



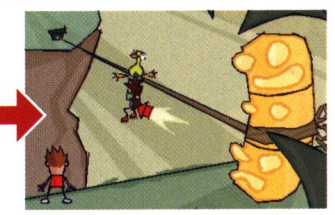
Dan's dead, and rigged up for a ride across a canyon on a bit of rope using a rubber chicken with a pulley stuck in it.



All the hard work's been done – all that's needed is to propel him across the gap using only a firework and a Zippo lighter.



So now all you need to do is insert a firework up Dan's bum, light the fuse and retire to a safe distance.



Using Hi-Tech 3D technology, Dan flies into the distance to be reanimated by Doc Oddball's corpse reanimation equipment...

DOING IT RIGHT

AGS is put to a pneumatically good use

Where *Ben There, Dan That!* was cobbled together out of bits of old string and sticky tape, *The Forgotten Element* looks set to be a veritable tour-de-force of adventure gaming done right. Lemmy and Captain Binky have built on AGS with plug-ins like AGX (snipurl.com/agxplugin).

Using their oh-so-clever know-how of grown-up coding they're bringing point-and-clickers into the 21st century, complete with snazzy particle effects and everything. They've even gone so far as to remake the classic Amiga *Deluxe Paint* package to make creating intricate pixel art easier.

Much of *The Forgotten Element* (theforgottenelement.com) remains



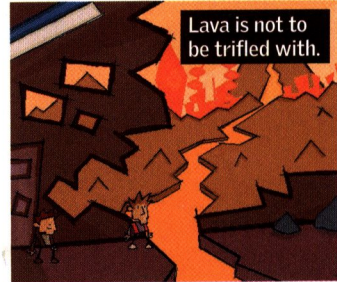
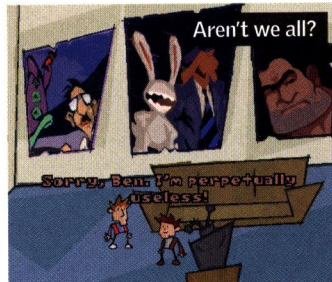
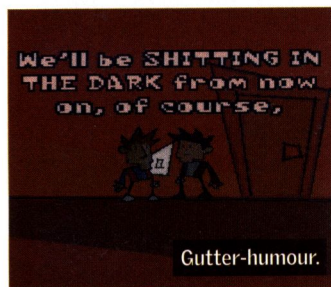
something of a mystery – all we know is a large-breasted girl in an ill-fitting nurse's uniform awakes on a creepy island, and finds herself chased by a number of misogynistic gentlemen, while solving various mysteries.



to do that without it looking like I'd just used *Paint*.

Our comical walking animations were done as a joke. As Ben scribbled away at concept designs behind me, I set on the arduous task of drawing the walk cycles. After a little under two minutes, I turned around and jokingly said "finished!", pointing at the rubbishy two-frame animation on the screen. The resulting half-monkey wobble made us laugh so hard I didn't dare to take it out.

As time wore on, the original days-long project spun into weeks, and eventually months. During this entire process, we'd barely crafted a single line of dialogue. By the time the game's locations, puzzles and artwork were complete, there wasn't a single response coded for any of the many things to look at or interact with throughout the game.



We spent the next month locked in our respective bedrooms, furiously typing away. Even in a relatively-short game like *BTDT*, there's approximately a bazillion responses to account for, and if you want to make any of them even remotely amusing, it's a long process indeed. Inevitably, Ben's mid-'90s computer couldn't handle the breakneck pace, and it consequently erupted into a shower of smoke and sparks. *BTDT* killed it off with its cutting dialogue and witty repartee.

Dialogue in *AGS* is split into two sorts – your everyday "look at object" stuff is handled with a simple line of script such as: cCharacter.Say("I'm selling these fine leather jackets."); for a decent length game you'll have to write approximately a bazillion-and-a-half of those lines – so much so that it's now impossible for me to type a speech mark without quickly tapping out a); on the end of it.

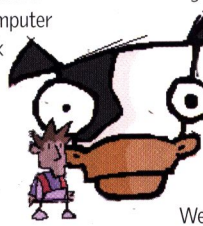
Conversations with other characters are slightly different, handled by

branching up-and-down dialogue trees, giving each character their opportunity to speak and opening up new dialogue choices as appropriate. At first, designing these conversations is mind-bogglingly complicated, but after a few solid hours of staring at a screen and screaming, it starts to make sense.

And there you have it. A year or so after we first thought it'd be a 'bit of a laugh' to write a quick adventure game, we've very much learned our lesson.

We've taken out the bits of dialogue from the end sequence that suggest there's even the tiniest possibility of there ever being a stumpy robot-based sequel, because frankly it's far too much like hard work. Ron Gilbert deserves some sort of medal for doing what he did for all those years at LucasArts... no wonder I hear he's gone completely rilbert.

Ben There, Dan That is on this issue's DVD, so have a play and tell me what you think at www.zombie-cow.com. **PCZ**





On the blog, we've got good old games and a whole bunch of our back pages to give away. In the forums, the terrible allure of *WOW* causes grown men to tremble at the repercussions of installing that latest patch, and in the Supertest, we imagine what worlds might make good places for new MMO worlds. Zone Chat takes a turn for the cerebral. And in Fight Club, we namecheck the wrong people. Better luck next month!

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

THE STERLING EFFORTS of CD Projekt's Good Old Games website (gog.com) more than attracted our attention. Selling old games that work fresh from the download is a great idea, so we had a think about other titles we'd love to see on their service. *Total Annihilation*, *Dark Forces*, and the full *Duke Nukem 3D* were suggested, as well as a slight whimper for *System Shock 2*.

After this we made the unprecedented decision to give away our last 20 hilarious back pages away in the form of a downloadable PDF booklet. At the time of writing we don't know whether we got a hit on Kotaku, but if we don't then we'll be cross. After all, last month's 'Allo 'Allo Back Page got positive feedback from the people who got the joke. It'll probably be on the DVD next month as well.



Back page paradise.

Online Zone

Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just visit 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

Azeroth wants you back

It was a terrible dream. It was a wonderful dream. It was a dream that reached into my very core and terrified me. In this dream I had logged back into *World of Warcraft*. I was there, running across the Barrens as a level 30 Shaman, wielding an epic two-handed hammer that someone once gave me. Alliance scumbags fell before me, and the XP flooded my bar at an incredible rate. And then I woke up, and thought about playing it again... and realised two very important things. One, that

my girlfriend would kill me. Two, that I'd rather sensibly deleted the contents of my *WOW* folder, to ward off temptation. CURSE YOU BLIZZARD!

Brax

I have a job and a girlfriend and *Football Manager*. Delving into online shenanigans would probably result in a jar of formaldehyde on the mantelpiece containing a set of testicles. Bad *WOW*! Don't do it kids!

Alberthammond



Fight it... fight the urge to log in.

Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
Forum Index Search Memberlist Profile Log in to check your private messages			
PC Zone Magazine Forums			
Forum public Area and announcements	0	0	No Posts
Forum news, news and announcements			
PC Zone Magazine	488	12402	18 May 07 11:20 am
Should it be about our magazine here, give feedback, suggest ideas, vote monthly at our words, whatever			
Gaming Forum	20	288	14 May 07 21:22 pm
Thinking something about a game? Why not have it all done in here and we'll all have a chat about it?			
Movies, TV, Music and that	4	24	11 Apr 07 9:04 pm
Recreated the old set of something you've seen or heard, as long as it's not rubbish indie crap like The Raas			
The Fightclub Arena	2	24	28 Apr 07 5:52 pm
Organise your online football events here, or find out when the next Fightclub will be taking place			

My girlfriend plays *WOW*.

SunScramble

I spoke to a solicitor who looks like an Elf today. Does that count?

G_hughes

If it ain't *EverQuest*. It ain't worth it. *1980's style rapper arm fold*

Shakermaker07

All I know is that William Shatner plays it.

Trahildan

William Shatner's battle cry would be something like "For. The good of. The Horde!"

Plughead

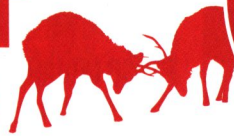
Last night, a few teenagers were walking down the street talking loudly, and one of them was saying "I have two 70 Undeads and a 60 Night Elf". There is no escape. *WOW* is the real life equivalent of *Deus Ex's* Helios.

Brax

PCZONE PUBCAST!
NOW DEFINITELY AVAILABLE ON THE ZONE WEBSITE AND ITUNES!

SUPERTEST
A FRESH NEW GRINDHOUSE
MMO lands we'd like to visit

FIGHT CLUB



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

PC ZONE staffers hide in fear

A SERIES OF natural disasters and brutal acts of god this month resulted in a lone Log poking his nose into Fight Club, avoiding the crippling responsibility of getting healed by someone by choosing to be a Medic himself. An unusual amount of people asked for a name check in the mag this month; sadly, Log can only remember the names Pengopia and Assassin, and he's fairly sure it wasn't those who asked.

So, if you want namechecking in the next Fight Club, be sure to back up your in-game requests with an email, because we're too thick to remember short words. Next month – and we mean it this time – we're seriously changing the game. We probably should acknowledge the other games in the world, even if that means not playing *TF2*.

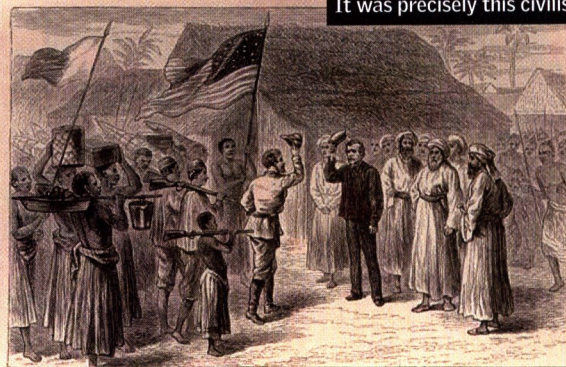
Join in our Steam Community at steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz to be alerted of upcoming Fight Clubs.



ZONE CHAT



PC ZONE: Never knowingly understood



It was precisely this civilised.

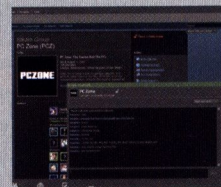
"DR. LIVINGSTONE, I PRESUME."

AFTER THE RECENT plethora of NSFW filth in ZONE Chat, this month's affair was like walking through the looking glass. Polite hardware chitchat, a discussion on the effects of the current fiscal downturn on the games industry and (no shit) Third World economies and their effect on the political infrastructure of the Congolese area of Africa and Cambodia.

Before you ask, yes we had someone in Zone Chat who was an economist specialising in developing nations. And yes, Will is currently reading a book about the Congo. Next month's topic is irenicism in games.

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...



Five seconds later, the red team died.

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy picking flowers, 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 pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Ed Zitron PCZ_EdZed
 Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
 Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
 Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
 Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
 Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx

- 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
- CALL OF DUTY 4**
 Coming soon
- 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

AFTER ED'S BOLD statement a few issues ago that there weren't many fantasy worlds left that would fit the *WOW* model of MMO, we dedicated this month's *Supertest* to perusing other avenues for the grinding-with-friends genre.

The White Wolf *World of Darkness* universe, used in *Vampire: The*

Masquerade – Bloodlines, was touched upon, as was the potential for real-world conflicts to become online-ified, but the most excitement was reserved for the very concept of running amok in the worlds of *Blade Runner*, *Tron* and *Judge Dredd*.

If you think about it, with Mega-Cities acting as hubs and the

surrounding Cursed Earth providing the action, a *2000AD* MMO would make a hell of a lot of sense. *Tron*, meanwhile, would fit extremely well with all the levelling up and avatar customisation stuff.

In any case, you can hear our earnest discussion in the audio file placed atop this month's DVD.



WIN IT!

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with
PCZONE

Everything on this page could be yours!



1. CODE:
FC1

WIN A HOLIDAY TO MONTREAL, A TRIP TO UBISOFT TO PLAY FAR CRY 2 AND A 32" HD-TV!

It's the ultimate prize for any gamer – a once-in-a-lifetime chance to visit Ubisoft's award-winning Montreal studios in Canada. These talent-packed developers created Splinter Cell, Prince of Persia and Assassin's Creed and are now working on this year's PS3, Xbox 360 and PC blockbuster Far Cry 2.

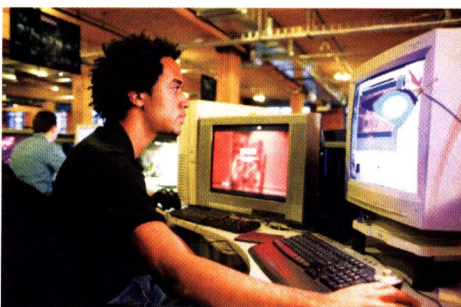
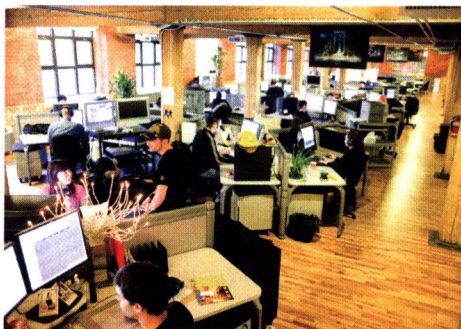
Set in 50 square kilometres of open African savannah and jungle, Far Cry 2 could even surpass the original game by delivering what should be some of the most realistic environments and amazing effects seen in a first-person shooter.

This prize will allow one lucky winner to fly to Montreal and find out exactly how it's all been achieved. If chosen, you and a friend will be flown to Montreal, stay in a 3 star hotel for two nights, spend time at the game studio, meet Far Cry 2's creators and be among the first lucky people in the world to actually play the game months before its release for the rest of us. As if that's not enough, when you get home there'll be a 32" HD-TV waiting for you.

To win, simply answer this question and text FC1, a space and either A, B or C to 87474 (cost £1.50 plus standard charge) or enter online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/fc1. Closing date is 30 August.

Where is Far Cry 2 set?

- a) Africa
- b) India
- c) Australia



2. WINI!
CODE: LIJ2

LEGO INDIANA JONES: THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

Win a treasure trove of goodies to celebrate the launch of Lego: Indiana Jones, including the game, special edition Lego merchandise and ten more Activision games.

What was the name of Indiana Jones' kid sidekick in the Temple of Doom?

- a) Short Round
- b) Young Indiana Jones
- c) Willie

Text LIJ2, space and either A, B or C to 87474 (cost 50p) or go to: www.futurecomps.co.uk/lij2



3. WINI!
CODE: WFMK3

Wii FIT AND MARIO KART

We have five copies of the latest craze to sweep Wii, Wii Fit – it comes with the tilt-sensitive Balance Board – and Mario Kart Wii to give away.

Which of these characters does not feature in Mario Kart Wii?

- a) Luigi
- b) Baby Peach
- c) Sonic the Hedgehog

Text WFMK3, space and either A, B or C to 87474 (cost 50p) or go to: www.futurecomps.co.uk/wfmk3



4. WINI!
CODE: TCON4

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: PRINCE CASPIAN

Revisit Narnia in Prince Caspian – it features 20 of your favourite characters to play as. Our winner will get an 80GB iPod Classic while ten runners up will bag a copy of the game.

Who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia books?

- a) C. S. Lewis
- b) Enid Blyton
- c) Philip Pullman

Text TCON4, space and either A, B or C to 87474 (cost 50p) or go to: www.futurecomps.co.uk/tcon4



Text to WIN!

Send your text to: **87474** with the competitor code, then a space, and finally your answer:

A, B or C

(Main comp costs £1.50, small comps 50p plus standard charge)

Or enter online at:

www.futurecomps.co.uk/ (code here)

for example:

www.futurecomps.co.uk/fc1

for the main Canada trip compo.

Closing date is 30 August 2008.



Terms and conditions: By entering this competition you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd. If you do not want to receive this information please text the word STOP to 87012. Texts will be charged at £1.50 (main compo) or 50p (small compo) plus standard network tariff rate. By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitions/rules.asp. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

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Welcome back to

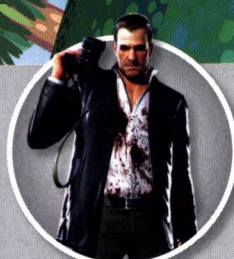
Animal Crossing

Now on Wii™

WARIO



PLUS TWO GREAT GIFTS
FREE!
NINTENDO
PLAYING CARDS
& A DS GAME
CASE!



Dead Rising

Capcom's zombie masher is coming to Wii; the first screens, right here!



Guitar Hero On Tour

First UK review of Activision's portable rock revolution!

Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

On Sale Now!

Retro zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback of the Month

But how?

A lot of these old adventure games don't play happily inside newer versions of *Windows*, so if you want to play the golden games of LucasArts, you might need the *ScummVM* emulator. Better still, there are versions of the emulator for Nintendo DS and Sony PSP, so if you're tired of watching all those awesome UMD movies, you can play *Day of the Tentacle* instead. You'll need a legitimate copy of the game to avoid breaking the law, but there are a few freeware adventures that you can use with it instead. It's not the easiest emulator to get running, but it's not rocket science either. And to save you the bother of finding it, it's on the cover disc.

www.scummvm.org

Home of the emulator and help files.

the-underdogs.info

A site we like to mention on these pages around twice a month.

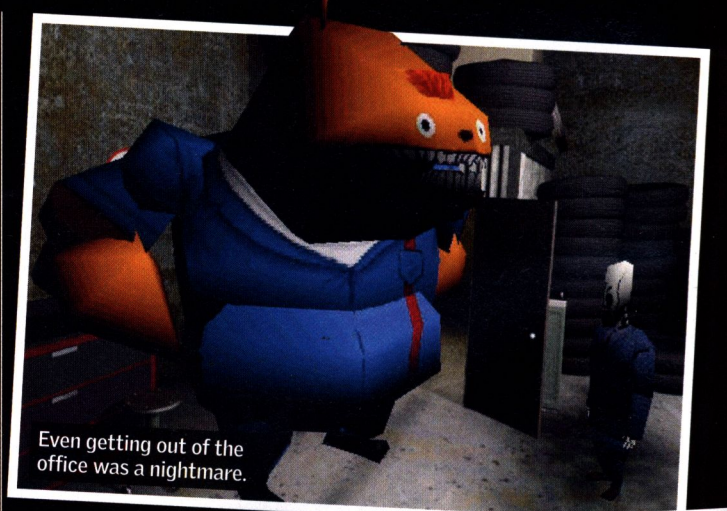
The glory days of...

LUCASARTS

IF ONE COMPANY can justify a page of navel-exploring retrospection, it's LucasArts. They furnished the world with the highest calibre of point-and-clickers – matching expert storytelling to excellent scripts, and puzzles that were challenging enough to make you angry, but never obscure enough to make you hurl your PC into a skip.

They gave up on the genre in 2003, leaving a bunch of their employees with no option but to set up the hugely successful Telltale Games. Since LucasArts transformed into an auto-cannibalistic *Star Wars* mentalist, trying to suck the last shreds of meat from its own, once-muscular forearms, it's been down to Telltale to provide us with the memorable characters. *Sam & Max*, *Bone*, and *Homestars Runner's Strong Bad* adventure are all keeping the spirit alive – and that's because most of them are from LucasArts in the first place.

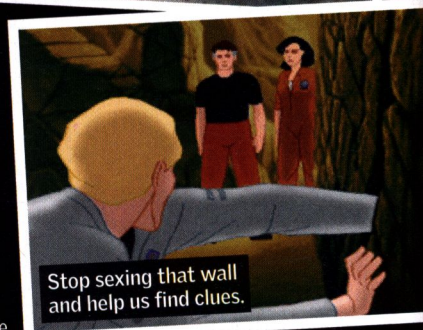
Look out for their influence in this month's featured indie game from *PC ZONE* writer Dan Marshall. *Ben There, Dan That* (page 98) has posters of all the LucasArts greats in the first 10 minutes of play, and is a loving homage



Even getting out of the office was a nightmare.

to the trappings of the point-and-click adventure. This is the love that LucasArts inspired. And it is a love that can survive, no matter how long George Lucas trains his appalling shit-cannon directly into our eyes and ears.

So raise your glasses to LucasArts, for she is the zombie lover we'll never be able to bring ourselves to kill. Perhaps it'd be wise to lock her in the cellar, though.



Stop sexing that wall and help us find clues.

Not just a gold guy *Join us on an incomplete journey through the logos of Lucasfilm*



THE WESTERN

The first logo was just like the *Indiana Jones*-themed Western logo.



POLISHED UP

Maniac Mansion added a classy metallic sheen that reeked of style.



BEWARE - SPLINTERS

There are trees on Monkey Island, hence this wooden effect.



SHINY SHINY

The Gold Guy marks the change from Lucasfilm Games to LucasArts.



LOOKS FAMILIAR

Full Throttle has a *Simpsons*-esque cloudy title sequence.



OOH LOVELY!

For a more complete list of LucasArts logos visit snipur1.com/lalogo



Now & Then

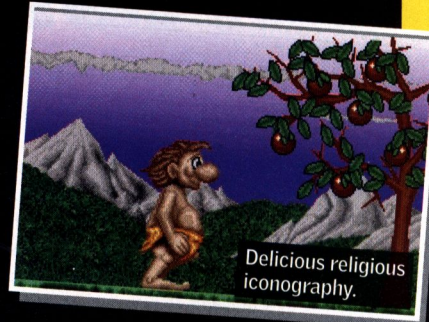
SPORE vs THE HUMANS



Cute, or a case for mandatory euthanasia?

SPORE MIGHT BE the game that convinces religious fundamentalists that evolution is great. With its cock-monsters and Humpasaurus, it might also be the game that drives them all into an Amish retreat from technology. However, *Spore* isn't the first game to use evolution as its central theme.

The Humans had you guiding homo sapiens' ancestors through evolution by having them invent the wheel, weapons, discover fire, and... erm... eat apples from the Tree of Knowledge. As if the confusion of cause and effect isn't enough (I'm certain inventing fire wasn't why we lost our webbed toes) but there's biblical imagery too! Poor old Dickie Dawkins would be turning in his grave, if he was dead. So here's to evolution – the only thing we've ever seen anyone try to disprove with a banana (snipurl.com/nanaz).



Delicious religious iconography.

Play it! ▶

Discover the best cavemen ever. Apart from Chuck Rock

The Humans is available to play in files on the internet. We'd put it on the disc for you, but that ends up with our editor going to prison. This way, you go to prison, which Will isn't ashamed to say he prefers.

1 Type four magic letters into Google. H! O! T! U! This summons the dog-faced god of the underworld, who cares for forgotten games.

2 Press the I'm Feeling Lucky button. Gently caress the 1993 copy of the game you already own in redundant floppy disc format.

3 You're in forbidden tomb territory now – watch out for blow darts as you type "*The Humans*" into HOTSU's title search box.

4 CTRL-F "Where to find it", and reflect on how easy it is to fall between the cracks of society and become lowlife pirate scum.

Mameframe VENDETTA

IN THE '80S, people would come back from the US with wild stories. It was more alien, exotic and futuristic than. Children capable of elaborate lies could convince an entire school they were an extra in *Jaws 6*, and they'd played the Nintendo TerraSystem with 128KB buzz-packs.

For those of us left at home, all we had to show us American culture was Van Damme films and games like *Vendetta*. What a world it was! Men with motorbike chains murdering each other, kidnapping chicks and spraying the marrow-chilling graffiti "Slime Balls Rule OK".

Like *The Simpsons*, *Vendetta* let four people play at once, and let you pull off tag-team combos. Get your mate to grab the bondage whip lady from behind, and you get a couple of free kicks to her face. That's how uncivilised these Americans were – in the UK, bondage whip ladies get visited by MPs, judges, bosses of motor racing and architects. In America, they get kicked in the tits by hoodlums!

This shocking display of anti-social insolence is the reason we're proud to be British. So from now on, you'll only ever find us playing *Effete Wit Simulator 1885*.

Ritz's has gone downhill since the refurb.



What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from 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.



Four players on one keyboard is hard work.



He's... nibbling the city!



Where'd he go?

Back in the day



Psycho killer

by Will Porter

Something cruelly robbed from us in the later annals of *Half-Life* was the pure joy of murdering scientists. After the lab coat wearer had opened his door, or informed you about how terrifying the whole situation was, what else was there to do but sidle up to him and batter his face with a crowbar?

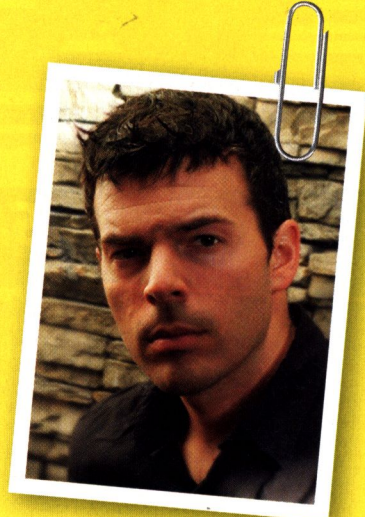
The logic was simply that, what with the Marines going kill-crazy and Xen invading, who'd question a limp scientist body with a few crowbar wounds and the last remnants of a shout of "Gah! What are you doing?" showing on his rigor mortified lips? I mean, I wasn't the only one who did this, surely?

Sadly, due to plot reasons clipboard-holder killings haven't been allowed since *Half-Life*. Perhaps Gordon had a lot of time to think about his actions while in train stasis, or maybe it's just because a City 17 crowbar attack would be harder to cover-up than one in Black Mesa. Still, the campaign for random acts of violence in *Episode Three* starts now...

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

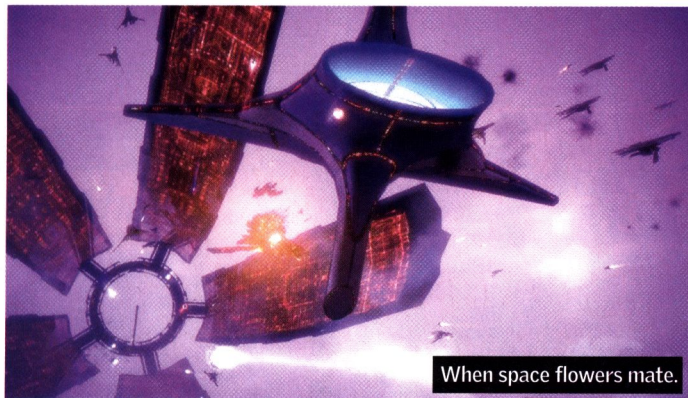
MASS EFFECT

Jamie Sefton discovers the ancient secrets behind the making of BioWare's classic space opera.



MASS EFFECT IS an epic, non-linear sci-fi adventure that features multiple planets, alien civilisations, real-time tactical combat and Fox News-baiting space nookie. BioWare outdid themselves in creating an original, engrossing and exciting new universe to play with, nigh-on redefining gaming sci-fi in the process. The game got even better after the definitive version of the console-pleaser was

finally brought to PC, scoring 92% (issue 195). Project director Casey Hudson docked with the good ship PC ZONE to discuss creating an original sci-fi universe, the online activation debacle, making the combat system work on the PC, what was cut from the build, and more importantly the further adventures of Shepard, Wrex, Garrus and the rest of the SSV Normandy's crew...



When space flowers mate.

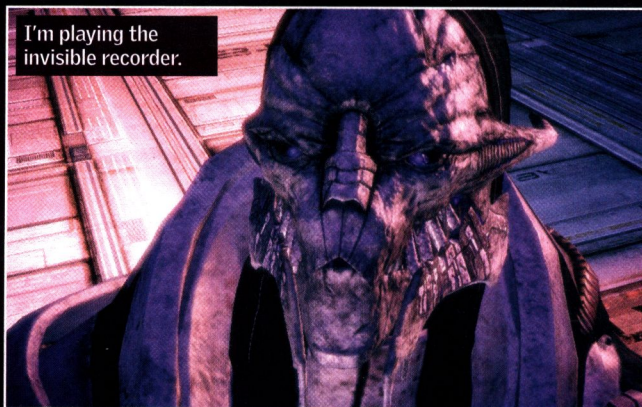
01 THE BIG BANG: "We wanted to make a franchise that we would own and be able to direct and do whatever we wanted with, so we spent the first year of the three-and-a-half-year project just getting a handle on the story and the universe basics, as well as just starting to work on the kind of game *Mass Effect* would become.

"As for the setting, you actually have to find a sweet spot where you're creating something that is familiar enough to people that they can enjoy it, but is also not a cliché – you don't really want to go and try and reinvent *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*.

"I really wanted to go back to the original sources of science-fiction. Going back that far and then building up from there, allowed us to apply principles that we know are familiar enough – such as what it's like to have your own starship, or to meet alien people and civilisations – without being directly inspired by other properties."

02 CREATING LIFE: "The characters were probably the biggest and most difficult part of the game. We had developed games like *Knights Of The Old Republic* and *Jade Empire*, where you were able to see characters in 3D, but we knew that this generation would require that much of a leap ahead again, and the issue this time would probably be dealing with the uncanny valley and trying to bring characters to life. Aspects of them can look realistic, but other areas can be much more challenging, such as giving life to the eyes and facial expressions. So that's where we put a lot of our effort, mainly because the other component was the dialogue system which we knew was another thing that we had to push forward.

"The character technology and the dialogue system are the two key pillars in the cinematic story-telling aspect that we achieve through gameplay and we put a lot of work into them."



I'm playing the invisible recorder.

"We spent the first year just getting a handle on the story and the universe basics"

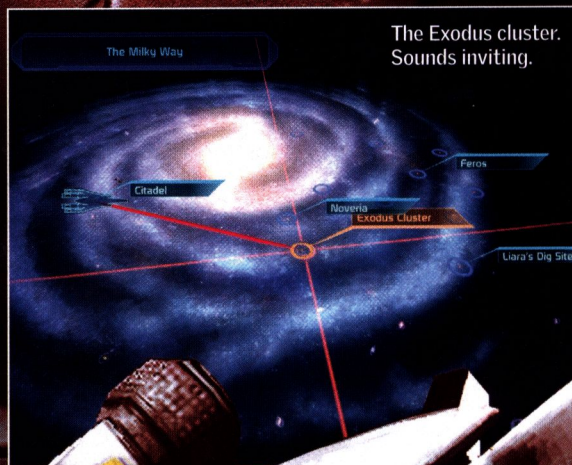


"If you've pulled a large bit of the story out, it's almost as much work to try and patch over the hole"



03 BLACK HOLES: "There was one entire world that we had in there for a while called Caleston, which appears in the TV commercial, but we ended up cutting it out of the final game. Caleston was kind of styled on the film *Outland* - you go to a really rough mining colony with a dispute between the factory workers and drug gangs.

"We want to make sure we have all the best stuff in there and also to make sure that the story works from the beginning to the end as a whole. I've kind of alluded to the fact that it's really hard to track all the character decisions during the game, so you can imagine that if you were to add something to it or take a big chunk out, you have to make sure that there's no hole. Quite often it isn't possible to cut story stuff because it's so embedded in all the other threads that are there, with characters reacting to decisions or comments you've made. If you've pulled a large bit of the story out, it's almost as much work to try and patch over the hole."



04 DESIGNER SPACESHIPS: "To me it kinda feels like when you watch *Star Wars* or James Bond, there's a mystery to the technology in there. There's nothing cool about using a GPS in your car – it's stunning how advanced the technology is – but it's not cool, in a James Bond technology way. We wanted to get back to when the future was this impossibly exciting time that was just full of mystery and wonder – something that seemed like the futurism of the '60s and '70s.

Even now if you look at science-fiction magazine or book covers from that period or paintings by John Harris and artists like that, they still kind of have that extra futuristic look to them – there's something inspiring about them. So that's what we were trying to get back to, that feeling of an extra sleek and clean future, but also to bring some reality to that and make you feel like you're actually living in that world

"In *Mass Effect* you have a world that is epic, sleek and idyllic, but people are ignoring the biggest problems that they have."

Look at eager beaver, warping around.

05 FUTURE MUSIC: "The soundtrack was another area where we certainly didn't make things easy for ourselves! It would have been easy to say 'science-fiction means an orchestral score like *Star Wars* and so we need a live orchestra'. But we were trying to create something familiar, but different, and we really liked the way that Tangerine Dream and that kind of '80s electronica still has that very super-futuristic feel to it.

"The idea was, what if the strings and drums and stuff that you hear in that kind of electronica were played live in a hall, so you still had this futuristic sound yet it was a little bit bigger and live? What if it was then backed up by the remainder of a live orchestra, so it would have that nice warm resonating quality to it? You would get this synthesis of sound, something which feels futuristic, but when you needed it could really draw from that orchestral power.

"I think we really got a long way there and I'm really happy with how the soundtrack worked out."

I hope there's no-one on board having a shave.



Planet of the very high sheds.

06 BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS: "It's almost painful talking about areas such as the battle system, as we once again made things really hard on ourselves! One of the big differences is that *Mass Effect* is entirely non-linear, compared with many of the other blockbuster games – you can always stop and turn around and go backwards through a level, so we weren't able to do a lot of optimisation. The combat also offers so many different things that the player can do at any given time – tech powers, four different weapons that you can swap around and fire, grenades, mods – all those things that make it interesting and customisable, that allow you to play the character you want and to fight the way you want.

"Obviously trying to squeeze all this into something that plays well and is intuitive, really requires something that didn't exist before, which was real-time third-person shooting but with the ability to engage fairly sophisticated commands for your squad. If you add up all the things you can do in combat it's a huge list, and it takes a lot of iterations and a lot of design and simulating in your head how it would work. It takes a long time just to build something you can play, and you might go that distance only to realise that what you prototyped is exactly what you don't want!

"We actually did that on *KOTOR*, where we did seven full iterations of the combat system – and it was the same for *Mass Effect*."

Mass Effect was planned to connect to the internet every 10 days to combat piracy.

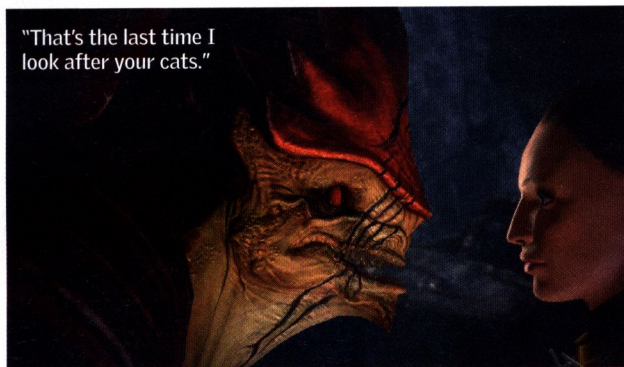


08 ACTIVATION NATION: "I focus on the creative and technical aspects of making the game itself, but you always want to know that this thing that you've put however many years of your life into is going to be enjoyed by people and have value. You obviously don't want pirating to happen, but in spite of that, from my perspective, I have to trust the people who are experts in copy protection. There are new ways to beat copy protection all the time and there are new forms of copy protection, so it is always hard to tell how people will react to something or how it's actually going to work when it gets played – and in fact whether it will be effective or not.

"So, from what I can tell, in the end the majority of the complaints seemed to be prior to release rather than how people experienced the release itself. Whether it was effective or not I'm not sure – it's always hard to tell as in the end people are always able to pirate anyway..."

"The majority of complaints seemed to be prior to the release rather than about the release itself"

"That's the last time I look after your cats."



09 MASS AFFECT: "Usually the starting point for anything that we build into a game is that we have an experience that we want to give to people or something we want them to feel. Then we start creating the actual materials for it, designing the ship or creating the character or writing that bit of the story. So, for me, the thing that I love most about game development is going all the way through to the end and seeing it go out into the world and watching the way people respond.

"Some of my favourite stuff is to see that people really loved things like the ending, even though this is just the first act in a trilogy, to feel really satisfied and really enjoy the ending of that first title. It's great to see that gamers calling it thrilling and conclusive and stuff like that. I like to go on YouTube and see people who are posting and talking about *Mass Effect* and the things they enjoyed."

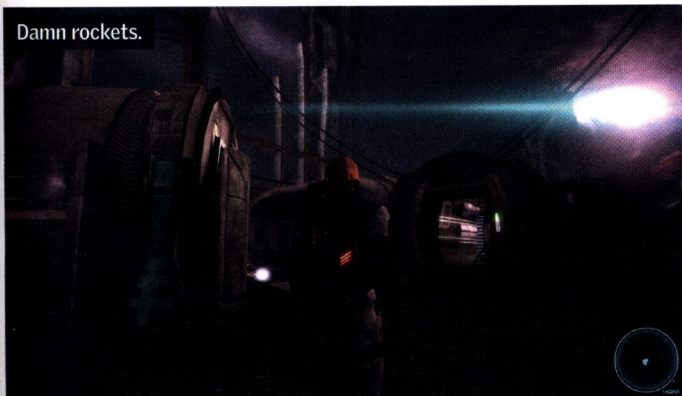
07 PC WORLD: "The gaming world was fortunate that the PC mouse turned out to be the ultimate pointing device – for a shooter just being able to snap around and look in a specific direction really helps. The other thing that came together nicely was the idea that people who had played previous BioWare games would know to hit the Space bar with their thumb to bring up a pause menu, so we already had those two things going for us. But it still really required going back to first principles and saying: we have this game, there is this list of things you need to do in combat, so on the PC what is the best way to do that?"

"That is one thing we always do regardless of what platform is released first or whatever, we always look at the platform and work out what's the very best for it. With the PC version, *Mass Effect* didn't go through as many entire iterations because we knew the kind of things we wanted to do with the combat. We did integrate a lot of the different pause screens from the 360 all into one screen for the PC, and that kind of stuff took a lot of time. In the end I think we were able to capitalise on the PC's strengths to make it easier to play."

"We built seven full iterations of *Mass Effect's* combat system"



Damn rockets.



Get down, it's a lens flare!



10 THE SEQUEL: "We started it at the beginning of the year and are getting pretty far into it. We have our story pretty much locked down and are now building levels. The great thing about working on *Mass Effect 2* is that whereas the first one was really starting from scratch and building a universe, a game and storyline, with the next one we're really able to refine and polish what the experience was about, take all the feedback from the fans that have played it and make it so much better."



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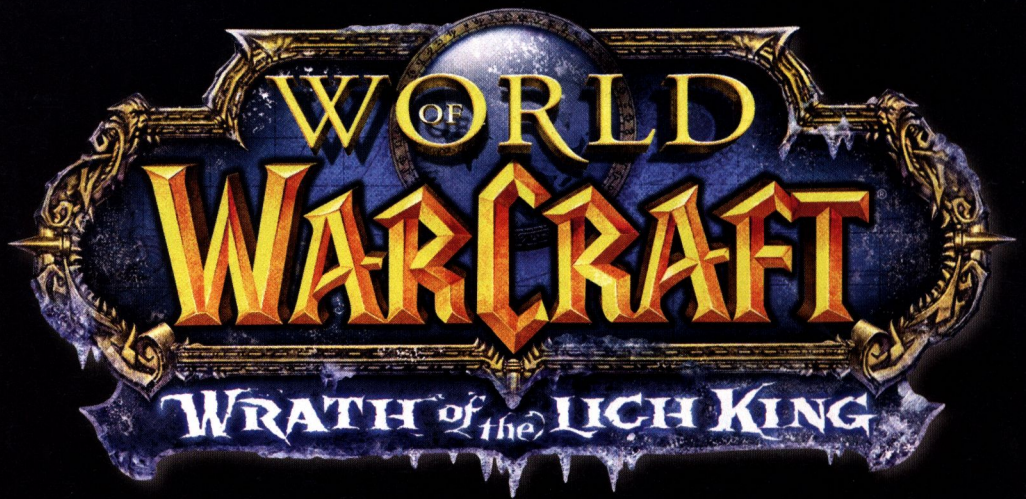
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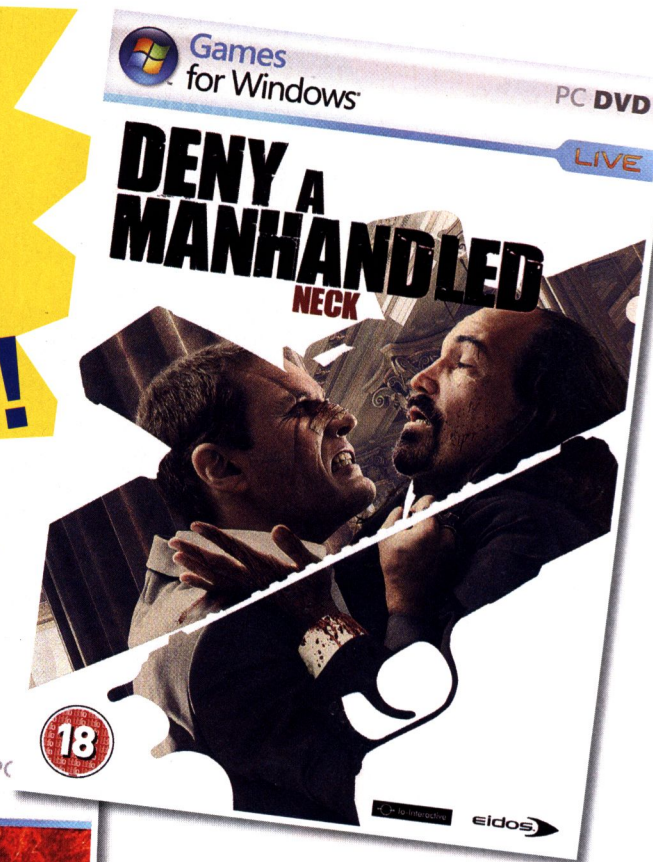
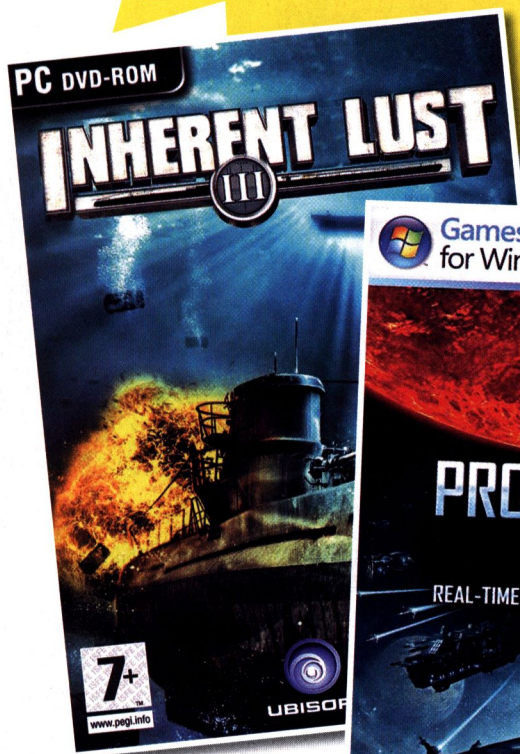


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*DISCLAIMER Bit of a spicy anagram this one, but don't worry political correctness chums! Log and his boyfriend are both gay, so Log asked Stuart and he said that it'd probably be fine in that funny Welsh voice he does. With this action we gained the permission of the bear tribe of the gays to gain temporary access to the word homo, much like when Firefox asks if you want to temporarily allow pop-ups to appear on a webpage. So, in a court of law, we reckon that we'd probably be OK.



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