

Steve

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

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ISSUE 202 JANUARY 2009



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SPOT MY FACE

READERS! IT'S ME, Steve. And I'm at the front of the magazine ("doing a magazine" as it's known, professionally). How did this happen? Well, I did my best wrestling moves on the team and they all left in disgust, some of them even cursing my name. So due to staff shortages, I'm occupying no less than six other places in *PC ZONE* too. In fact, email us with the locations of all my faces and you'll win a prize.

Rest assured though, besides my abundance you'd hardly be able to tell the difference between this issue of *PC ZONE* and the last. Marvel as the undeviating Will Porter rejoices over *Left 4 Dead*, gasp as the interminable Jon 'Log' Blyth gives us his thoughts on *Armed Assault II*, and burp as the perpetual Ed Zitron sinks his teeth into *Wrath of the Lich King* – it's an unmissable all-star line-up! They'll be back every month until the end of time too, as their very livelihood now depends on the creamy teat of *PC ZONE*'s freelance budget.

The worst part of this new found (and luckily for everyone, temporary) responsibility is that my ability to take care of this magazine in the time until our new editor shows up will be judged solely on how well-written this column is, and not the fact that the magazine eventually made it to the shelves in one piece. And that's unfair, as we're way past deadline and I'm writing under incredible duress. Enjoy the issue!

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty,
deputy editor
shogarty@futurenet.co.uk

40

IN-DEPTH PREVIEW!

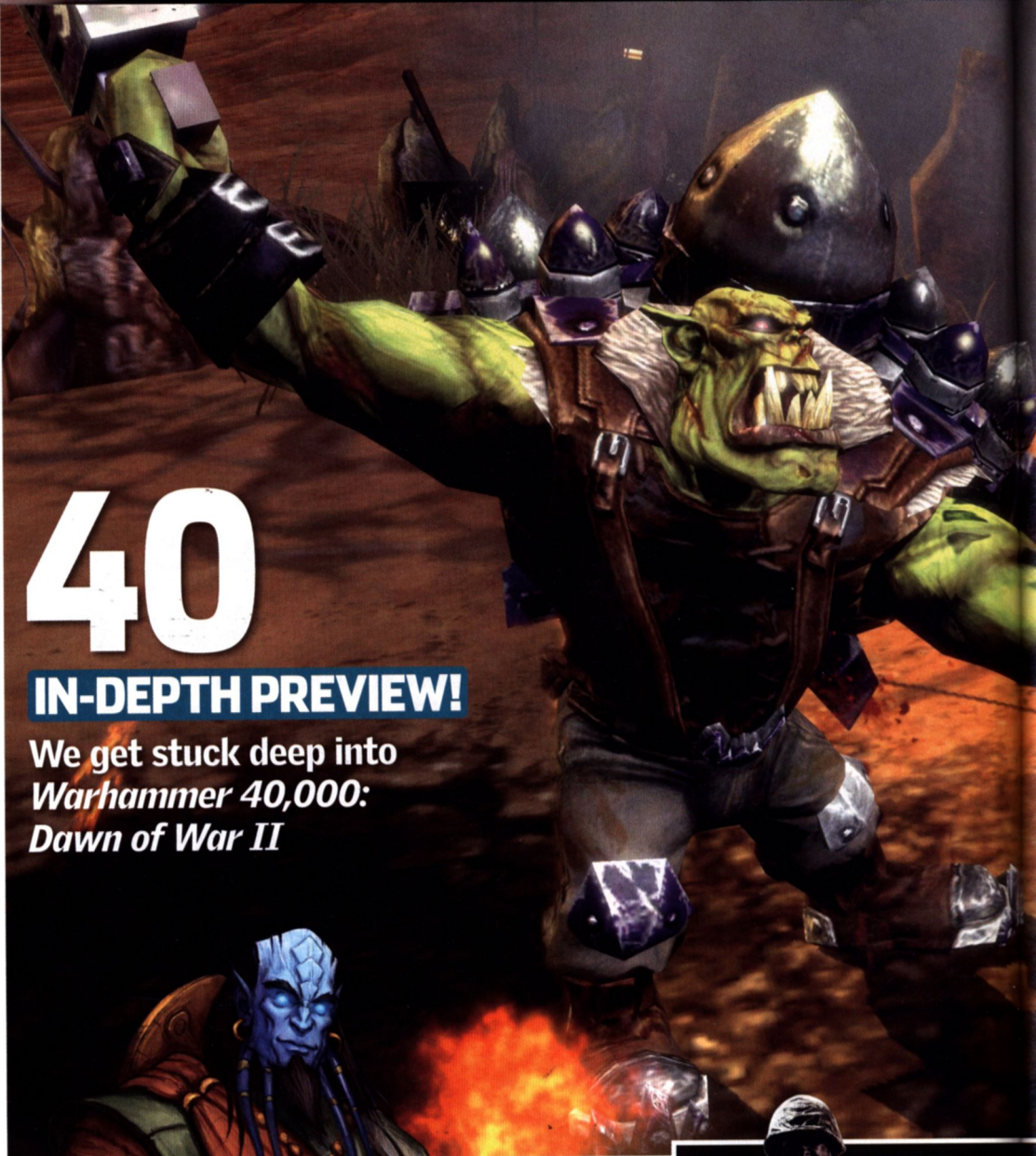
We get stuck deep into
*Warhammer 40,000:
Dawn of War II*



48

WRATH OF THE LICH KING

Will a move to Northrend be worth your time?



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PCZONE

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brand new Saitak
Cyborg gaming mouse!
See page 102





GET INVOLVED!

**ONLINE ZONE
FIGHT CLUB!
PODCASTS!
ZONE CHAT!
BLOGS!**

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LEFT 4 DEAD

We unload on Valve's anticipated zombie co-op shooter.



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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



**40 WARHAMMER 40,000:
DAWN OF WAR II**

Too busy? PC ZONE in 99 words...

First up we send Chris Capel on a sprint through the Mines of Moria, and then Log is sent into a warzone for punishment for deserting PCZ. (Well, a simulated warzone - we like Log.) Relic's past and future (which appears on the cover) is put under a tough examination, and Ed goes to Northrend, taking a holiday from enjoying New York's cocaine and prostitutes, and Will Porter to be eaten by zombies, in punishment for deserting PCZ. (Real ones this time - we never liked Will.)

96 FREEWARE

David Brown rides an Atomic Worm before he hangs out with angling buccaneers!

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MEET THE TEAM



PC ZONE's rogues, vagabonds, scoundrels and charlatans



DAVID BROWN

Newbie

AGE: 28

LIKES: Liverpool

DISLIKES: Arsenal

FANCIES: A curry

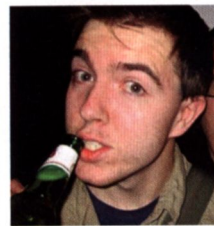
FAVOURITE GAME:

Monkey Island 2

NOW PLAYING:

Call of Duty: World at War

Dave has stepped into the Log-shaped staffing breach, calmly submitting his copy on time and appearing to be the epitome of icy coolness. However, the mask slipped for just a second when Lara Croft decided to throw herself off a ledge in the wrong direction one time too many. Luckily, he was subdued before being able to set fire to his desk and was heroically able to finish his *World at War* review on time.



STEVE HOGARTY

Master and commander

This month, PCZ's deputy editor has go-karted with Rockstar, lost a FIFA 09 tournament, and had a severe mental breakdown, brought on by a dastardly PR person.

NOW PLAYING: *Far Cry 2*



STEVE HILL

Chester's guiding hand

Hill is struggling to adapt to a 3D *Football Manager*. It isn't because he hates change, he just doesn't like the fact that it makes Chester look worse than they actually are.

NOW PLAYING: *FM 2009*



WILL PORTER

Zombie negotiator

Will found that trying to arrange a peaceful resolution to the conflict in *Left 4 Dead* wasn't effective. Undeterred, he staged a candlelight vigil that he says went rather well.

NOW PLAYING: *Left 4 Dead*

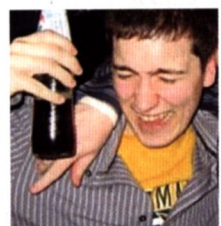


RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Genestealer killer

The intrepid Richie was asked to get a taste of *Dawn of War II*. Unfortunately, THQ threw him out after he attempted to eat the game disc.

NOW PLAYING: *Dawn of War II*



ED ZITRON

NYC coke-fuelled sex fiend

Living in New York has changed Zitron. The country boy we all knew and loved has turned into a drug-crazed sexual maniac. For shame.

NOW PLAYING: *Wrath of the Lich King (with hookers)*



LOG

Poor freelancer

Despite having left PCZ's bosom, Log hung out in the office this month, grappling with *Mirror's Edge* for a console magazine and reassuring us with his presence.

NOW PLAYING: *Dirty consoles*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... A bag of money found behind the sofa, allowing each of us to buy a monogrammed crown.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Swear words left on Warren Spector's voicemail. Not being able to count or add up.

What we've been talking about...

DEAD SET 3min Zombies can't run! God Brooker, get it right!

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR 34min Best Treyarch game since *Die by the Sword*.

FIGHT CLUB 1min sv_gravity 5 makes everybody float, what fun we had!

RUSSEL BRAND 9min The office is split over whether he is a talentless dick or not. [He's not! - Ed] [He is! - Prod Ed]

TOO MANY GAMES 16min We'd get to play them all if it weren't for this 'sleeping' lark.

THE WITCHER 4min CD Projekt teases us with the chance of a new *Witcher* game.

US POLITICS 69min A black president? This is just like 24!

FALLOUT'S STUPID ALLIES 10min Why do they jump on our grenades? WHY?

DWARF FORTRESS 6min We love the little people, so we created a collage of them.

GO-KARTING 15min Steve regales the office with tales of his injuries.

WIN!



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LETTERS



An increasingly panicked *Steve Hogarty* replies to your writings



KING OF LETTERS



Gears of War 2 will never reach the PC, supposedly.

The comments in last month's 'Stuff' article on page 15 by Epic's Cliff Bleszinski really annoyed me. Who does this guy think he is? He's labelling the majority of PC gamers as pirates and I'm frankly pissed at the arrogance this guy has. Has he forgotten that if it weren't for us 'pirates', Epic probably wouldn't be where they are today?

Jill of the Jungle, *Jazz Jackrabbit* and *One Must Fall* weren't released on a console, because Epic was some little arse-end-of-nowhere outfit whose food was paid for by us 'pirates' through shareware!

By choosing to go down the PC path, you're guaranteeing a hardware upgrade at some point, but claiming that ability goes hand-in-hand with the ability to pirate software is just grasping at straws.

I would love to hear what some of the old timer Epic boys like Tim Sweeney say about those comments. If I remember correctly, *Unreal* was one of the first games developed (*Quake* aside) to take advantage of 3DFX Glide technology. Most people were forced to upgrade to take advantage of this.

I for one will not be buying any more of Epic's games on PC, let alone on my console, until we get a decent explanation of those comments or even dare I say an apology from the mighty ass clown that is CliffyB himself! I hope others will follow in my footsteps.

Emmet Cleere

While it's not an apology, more of a mollification, Cliff Bleszinski recently responded to those who took umbrage at

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.)

his remarks by saying, "I'll always love the PC. That's where our roots are, but companies evolve and their strategies sometimes shift. That's an unfortunate reality of business."

It's true enough too, industry players have to go where the money is. Despite Cliffy's vehement denial however, I still think *Gears of War 2* will show up on PC at some point. I can feel it in my waters, Emmet!

CRY ME A RIVER

"Ah, *Far Cry*, dat's well class mate, I got dat in me Xbox, you getta go Africa and your map is like a weapon and..." Sigh, "That's not *Far Cry*! You're talking about *Far Cry 2*!"

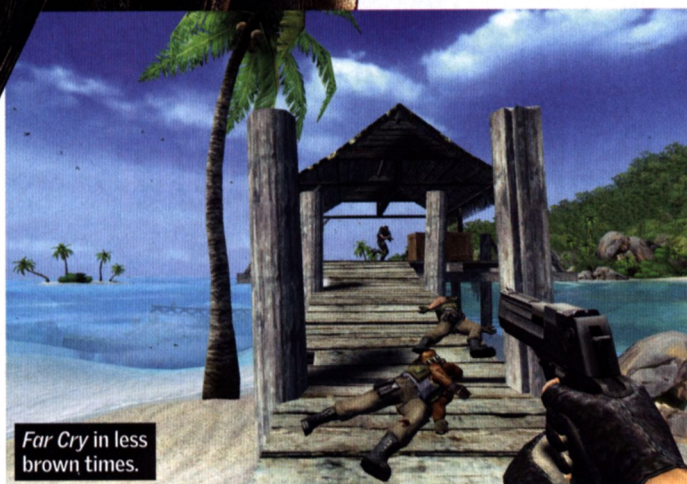
That's me, defending *Far Cry* from a horde of spoilt 8 year-olds with Xbox 360s. Of course, they don't remember way back in 2004, when the idea of blowing up an explosive barrel and then hijacking the boat you just 'freed up' was like a dream come true.

Anyway, I know this whole hold-your-map-like-a-weapon thing is great, and night and day cycles are impressive, but why not just stick to heads-up displays

and make the whole game nighttime? What I say to these noobs is, "Get *Far Cry*, complete it on hard mode, then come back to me with your 256MB hard drive and unmoddable Xbox and say you're right!"

Peter Kelly

Bah, who needs heads-up displays? And if day and night cycles are irritating you, just sleep all day and kill all night, like a truck driver. *Far Cry 2*'s got very little to do with *Far Cry* anyway, so I reckon you're allowed to enjoy one irrespective of the other. Let's just be grateful for an excellent game either way.



Far Cry in less brown times.



"Whether or not a game is available on Steam in Europe is decided by the game's publisher or developer"

BIG GREY FRIEND

I truly have to credit the positive influence this big grey box sitting next to me as I write has had on my intellectual development in life. This hunk of wiring and circuit boards has probably fostered more provocative trains of thought and more lust for knowledge than anything else I might care to mention. Sure, the other kids may have had fun with their sponge footballs and yo-yos, but what did they really gain over me? An in-depth knowledge of every nuance of every conflict since the dawn of man? Nope. A penchant for a well-told story and an eye for a beautifully conceived artistic style? Nope. A thirst to learn and develop the imagination? Nope. Social skills? Well, OK, I'll give you that one...

When mass-market targeted games like *The Sims* and *Spore* enjoy such grand commercial success, it gives me the hope this underappreciated media can be used to plant the seeds of creativity, logic, and forward thinking into the minds of the current youth. Perhaps we are in for a future of fine architects, thinkers, and scientists. That, or we'll end up with a generation of sadomasochistic interior designers and Dawkins-esque militant atheists.

Louis Richards

Hmm, can't say I agree with you there. I'm fairly certain that games

dissolve the brain in ways science can't yet detect, which will lead to some really entertaining dementia in our twilight years. Personally, I hope to be trapped in a game of *World of Goo*, talking gibberish about the sign painter and refusing to eat custard.

STEAMED OFF

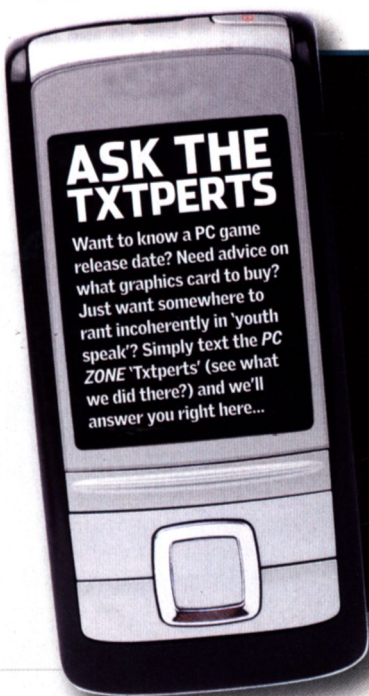
I love Steam. But this does not mean I cannot see its flaws. One I can't stand is the regional restriction. I would love to buy *Beyond Good & Evil* on Steam but it

is only available in America. This doesn't make sense as they claim that *Beyond Good & Evil* has not sold enough copies. Of course it hasn't if you cut part of your market out. Steam has responded to this a few times but I think it is time that we European gamers demand that Steam releases each of its games in Europe.

We European gamers will rise and not stop demanding the entire Steam catalogue until we have every single one available. Will you support me in this?

Eoghan O'Connell

Whether or not a game is available on Steam in Europe is decided by the game's publisher or developer. Ubisoft are notorious for this,



Are we ever going to get ports of Condemned 2 or Darkness on PC?

Andy Cull

Condemned 2 will surface eventually, but no news yet on *The Darkness*...

Will as Jeanette on the Letters page: Oh god please take my eyes now! No more!

Andy Cull (again)

If it's not his shit-eating grin you're complaining about, it's his endearing penchant for cross-dressing. You lot are so hard to please.

When will the new Diablo be released?

Colin Will

Past the ever so fashionable "when it's done" tag, our money's on an Autumn 2009 release.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

PARIAH

Sent in by Peter Kelly

PC ZONE score: 81%

Very few games can actually be defined as art, and almost all that are either have odd gameplay or are world-class wonders. *Pariah* is sort of the middle ground, a strange storyline, involving amazing characters, intriguing twists and some sweet cinematics.

Pariah is set on a corrupt prison planet, swarming with mercenaries and illnesses. It's Earth. I know, just another game trying to capture the post-apocalyptic future. Just trust me on this one - it isn't.

You play as Jack Mason, the better-shaved version of Gordon Freeman, as he tries to cure his friend Karina and free the prisoners of Earth. One Word: Masterpiece.

Your shout: 87%

Pariah: a masterpiece?



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Dead Space was crippled by dire controls on the PC.

presumably because of the exchange rate between the dollars-only Steam service and our pricey pounds.

Still, this whole "rising up" thing sounds fun – you've got our support!

PAD IT OUT

I've been sitting here boiling with rage over the increasing number of games that are virtually forcing me to ditch my trusty mouse and keys in favour of some

plastic monstrosity that calls itself a Microsoft Xbox 360 pad.

I don't mind if people want to use them – each to their own – but I should also be allowed to use my own preferred method of control, rather than being told I'm 'unfashionable' and 'non-hip-trendy' in my non-pad-worshipping ways. I'm too old to change now, having grown up using keys for playing games, so why can't developers include decent support for them?

Take *Dead Space*, for example – good game and everything, but if *The Suffering* can utilise the mouse and keys perfectly, why can't a big budget game from EA? I demand vengeance!

Caithail Duff

You're correct in saying every game should function as well as possible on a mouse and keyboard setup, but you must admit that certain games are better served by other control methods. Flight sims have joysticks, driving games have steering wheels, and in some cases pads provide the best control. No console has such a wide ranging choice of peripherals though, so you can still act elitist in that respect.

TURD PATROL

In response to J2theROC's letter in issue 201 about shits in toilets, my favourite shit in a toilet appeared in the much-loved but terribly aged *Kingpin*. I'm

surprised you didn't mention it in your reply! It really took me by surprise when I saw it because I'd never even seen a toilet in a game before then. Let alone one with a shit in it!!


George Power

Kingpin is right up there with *Duke Nukem* when it comes to virtual commodes, and we're ashamed not to have mentioned it last month. Let's redress the balance now with hearty congratulations to *Kingpin*'s pot-bound turd. Hip-hip-hooray!

SAFETY

If there were a real zombie apocalypse I'd survive the longest. I've got a huge basement and there's only one way in, so it's easy to defend. You're welcome to stay in the basement with me if you like.

Simon Hewitt

Can't wait, Simon! 



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

FOOTBOLLOCKS

Just been reading the 'Meet The Team' thing in the new mag and noticed that most of the clan rate *Championship Manager 2* – what a bunch of sad, statto-type gits. I also noticed that Charlie Brooker reckons – and I quote – that "football is for ****s". Was he too busy playing with himself to watch the World Cup? Does he support Man Utd? And by the way, *Ultimate Soccer Manager* is by far a better game.

Mikk, e-mail

Yeah! *Ultimate Soccer Manager* was ace, *Football Manager 2009* has only just caught up with it, in our opinion. Good call, man from the past.

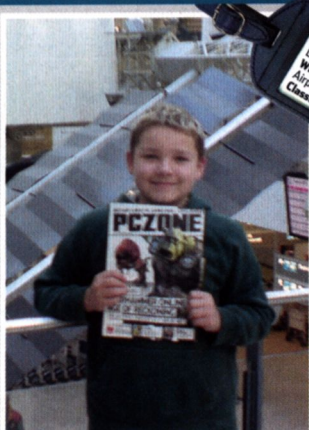
PARK LIFE

As I'm such a big fan of *Theme Park*, I was wondering whether there were plans for a *Theme Park 2* in the not-so-distant future. Could you guys possibly get some info out of Bullfrog?

David Byrne

Well, I called Bullfrog but the line was engaged. Every time.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



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



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COVER STORY

WARHAMMER 40,000

DAWN OF WAR II

It's a new dawn for the strategy genre, Relic's masterpiece is almost here...



YOU CAN BEAM as many tyrannids into our retinas as you like Relic, but you'll never silence our roaring desire to simply sit and play *Dawn of War II* as if it were a real, tangible game. Unless, of course, you let us do just that. Flying off to Relic's Vancouver studios, we go balls-deep in the violent, explosive, and now physics-powered strategy epic to bring you the first hands-on details of *Dawn of War II*. It's the main attraction on our whistle-stop tour of Relic's studios, which begins on page 34, but if you want to cut right to the bullet-ridden chase: the Orks are waiting...

PAGE

40



Sliders

I 'VE GOT A confession. My PC is rubbish. It's a four-year-old Dell, and I bought it so that *Doom 3* would look better on my machine than it did on my friend's. It was an embarrassingly slow arms race, with each of us striving to gain the upper hand by spending all of our cash updating our PCs' components.

Ultimately, I was scuppered by my CPU being soldered to the motherboard, or something equally unlikely. Now the PC sits in my bedroom, becoming more and more obsolete with each passing hour. It's the sort of PC that when somebody mentions it, you shrug and say, "Well, I can do *MSN* on it."

See, working at *PC ZONE* means I've got a really great machine here in the office (using words like "shit hot", "beast" and "screaming powerhouse" makes me feel like a dong, but it is those things). The thought of this gentle giant sitting on my desk prevents me ever shelling out on a new PC at home. The office is where I play *Crysis*, while at home I play *Civilization IV*. It's a happy balance.

Here's the thing though. On a whim I installed *Fallout 3* on my shit-heap PC, fully expecting it to melt down. Dolefully dialling down each slider, I managed a shockingly smooth 30fps indoors and out. It doesn't look bad on low-settings either, with the draw distance still stretching out to that all-important horizon. Oh, and the game's pretty good too. Great job Bethesda.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty,
deputy editor

PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

THE DARK KNIGHT

Rocksteady director Sefton Hill on *Batman: Arkham Asylum*...

PUBLISHER Eidos **DEVELOPER** Rocksteady **WEBSITE** rocksteadyltd.com **ETA** 2009

Q Why did you decide to develop a very dark Batman title?

A The decision to develop a very dark Batman game came naturally. As we were not linked to a movie licence, we had a lot more freedom in the visual direction, allowing us to investigate deeper inside the Batman universe and highlight the elements that make him so strong in the graphic novels.

What are the main problems translating a superhero and their universe into a videogame?

The main challenge, especially with Batman, is to represent all the aspects of his character that make him fascinating in one game. Some of the most important ones are also the most difficult to represent. For example, the psychological torment that drives but also haunts him.

Do you think creating a good story arc has become more important in games in recent years?

Definitely. As the industry matures, developers are realising something that

films have known for years: that emotional resonance makes every action more important and interesting. However, this is far more difficult in games than films as it needs to be perfectly balanced and integrated into the gameplay. Of course, this isn't necessary for every game, and games can be great fun without a good story arc. But if you are going to have a story, it's very important that you do it right!

Does the premise serve the story or the story the premise?

Both must be developed in conjunction for the story to work successfully. It's one thing to write a compelling story but very different to write one that combines with the game mechanics and features seamlessly. You can see a lot of games where this balance is off and one or the other suffer for it, but only a handful have managed to get this feeling right. For *Batman*, we worked on the story from day one and made sure that the gameplay features and the story complement each other perfectly.



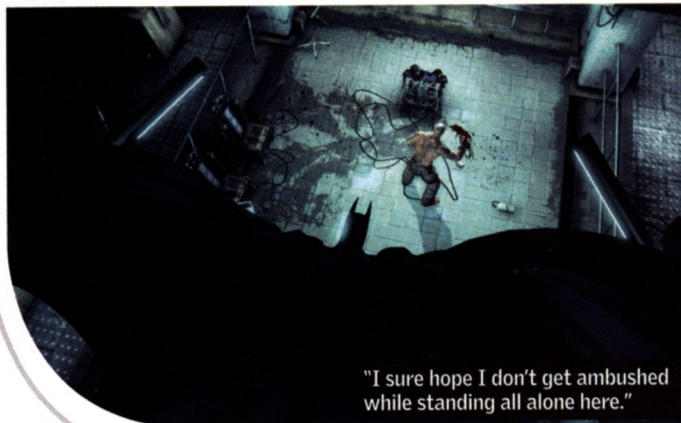
Sefton Hill
Director, Rocksteady

If you're using established characters, does that remove the ability to do life-altering things to them, and therefore subtract the sense of danger from the player?

Naturally there are some restrictions, but not as many as you might think. Working very closely with DC, I think we have been able to give a very fresh take on many of the characters, and there are a number of things in the game that you have never seen before anywhere in the Batman universe!

Lego Batman, Mortal Kombat vs DC, now Arkham Asylum. What is it about Bats that has endured 70 years?

You could write a whole book about this one, but I think for me it has to be the fact that he has trained his mind and body to perfection, creating a superhero to rival any other, but he has no superpowers – he's just a man, both vulnerable and flawed. For a game character, that's an amazing combination to work with. **PCZ**



"I sure hope I don't get ambushed while standing all alone here."

STOP PRESS!

SAINTS ROW

The quite-good *Grand Theft Auto* clone from THQ has been delayed until early 2009. Rumours abound that *GTA4* will be joining it in slipping to next year.

LEGAL STRIPPING

Judges in San Francisco have ruled that the Pig Pen in *GTA: San Andreas* was not infringing on the trademark of LA's Play Pen strip club.

LEFT 4 DEAD

Read our review over on page 54, but note that Valve have reduced the system specs for the genre shooter. Good news for folks with dump PCs.

28

Armed Assault 2

Jon Blyth tears into the ultra-realistic modern warfare sim.



36

Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor

The finest WWII strategy returns to the frontlines.



40

Dawn of War II

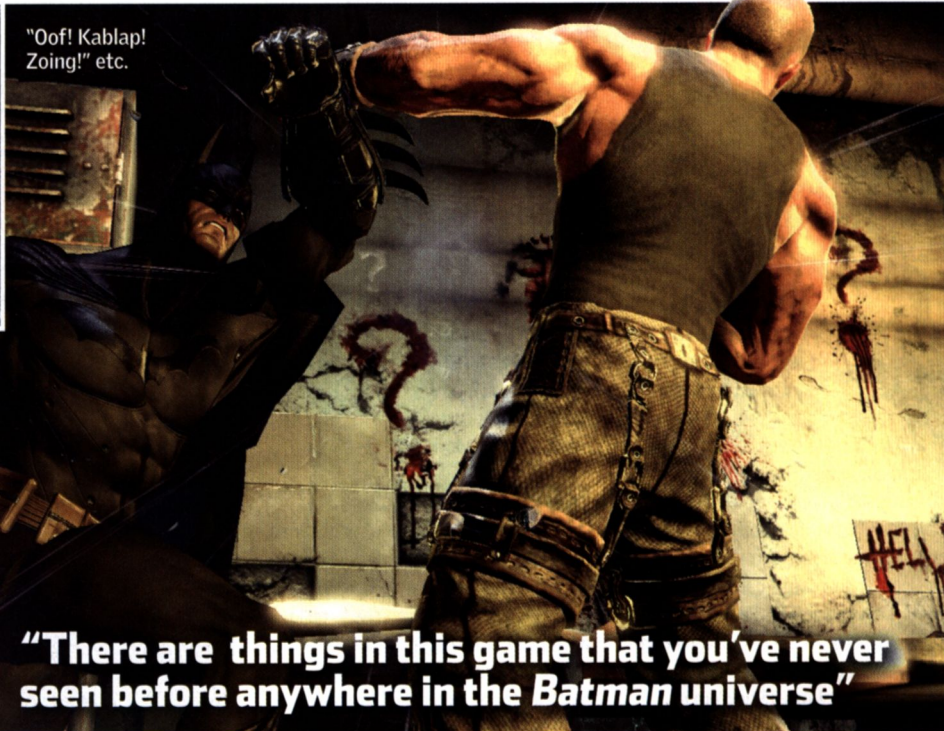
Exclusive first hands-on with Relic's strategy epic.



"Take that, foul ne'er-do-well!"



"Oof! Kablap! Zoing!" etc.



"There are things in this game that you've never seen before anywhere in the *Batman* universe"

Is it a stockbroker?
Is it a quantity surveyor?



STUFF

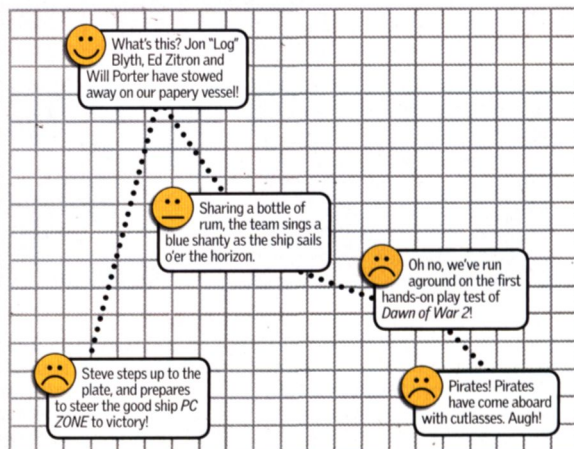
Oh Germany, what will you ban next? *Left 4 Dead*'s gory cover art has been deemed too ghastly to appear on German game-store shelves, and has been replaced with a chuckle-inducing alternative. Instead of featuring a hideously wounded left hand missing a thumb, it now features a left hand meekly hiding its stumpiest digit behind its palm. Luckily, our German friends need only slide the paper sleeve away to reveal the original, bloody art.

Life is a rollercoaster

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

GOOGLE GOT GAME

Will *Google Lively* become the ground zero of online games? Its creative director, Kevin Hanna, reckons so



Kevin Hanna,
Creative Director, Google Lively



Reporter
Pavel Barter

FIVE MINUTES INTO trying

Google Lively and I feel like a dong. My character, some sort of hamster-cat, is wearing

a stetson, handlebar moustache, waistcoat and tracksuit bottoms. All around me, immaculately sculptured beautiful people are pointing and laughing at my sartorial plight. The setting is a jazz café – couches and rinky-dinky music – it's like the set of *Friends*, only with the cast laughing in my face. "Howdy pardner," one coiffured joker LOLs. "Stick 'em up."

At first glance, Google's new online world has all the allure of herpes. When the megacorp first released *Lively*, it was touted as the new *Second Life* – in truth, it's more like the new *Animal Crossing*. The animation is like something off



No wookiees, sadly.

Nickelodeon and there are no user-created rooms or in-built economy (the backbone of any decent virtual world). In truth, there's bugger all to do, apart from watching YouTube videos and talk about haircuts. In its current incarnation, *Lively* is just a virtual world chatroom.

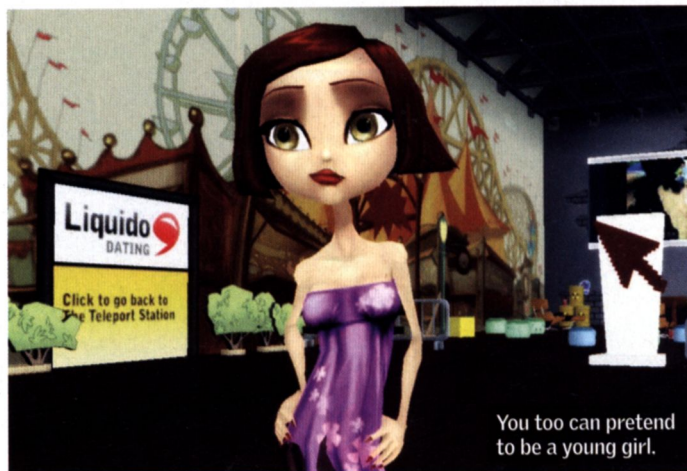
SIDE PROJECTS

What *Lively* does have is potential. Or so reckons Kevin Hanna: "In the long term, we want to open up the complete API so developers can use the engine to build whatever gaming experience they want," he says. "Casual or hardcore games – that's up to the individual developer."

After downloading a free IOMB plug-in, you can embed *Lively* into websites – Facebook and MySpace included. Add this to a huge volume of content and a 3D engine, and *Lively* lends itself to PC games, says Hanna. But why should it be any better than its competitors?

"If you visit a generic website, and it says 'Download a plug-in to play a game'. Do you trust it? Probably, not. But most people trust Google."

Hanna has the credentials to back up his claim. After working at Microsoft for five years, where he helped launch the Xbox and Xbox 360, he became an art



You too can pretend to be a young girl.

director for Disney Interactive, tinkering with titles like *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*. "I've been in this media space for a long time and have the ability to create compelling worlds, avatars, and characters," he says.

Lively, however, was the brainchild of Niniane Wang, a programmer who developed the platform as part of Google's 20% Project, which allows employees one day a week to develop new ideas.

"She didn't study similar products – *Second Life*, and so on – or wonder how Google could look in a similar space," says Hanna, who was hired to work on *Lively* as part of the entertainment company, X-Ray Kid Studios. "She thought about how people want to communicate and share information over the web. The internet is a 3D space and we are moving in all dimensions, but doing so in a series of 2D plains. The next logical progression is for us to move to a more 3D space."

Smart but casual

The online gaming portals *Google Lively* is challenging



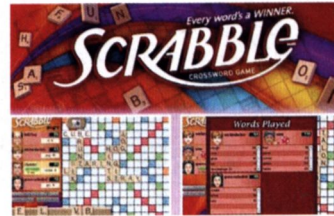
YAHOO! GAMES

Since 1998, Yahoo! Games (games.yahoo.com) has built up a catalogue of almost 800 titles. Amongst them are point-and-clicks like *Sam & Max Episodes*, and tosh involving clothing and catwalks: *JoJo's Fashion Show 2: Las Cruces*, for example.



HABBO

A social networking site with games you last saw in kindergarten, like musical chairs and pass the parcel, Habbo (habbo.co.uk) is more known for controversy than games. Like the time a group of avatars blocked a swimming pool, saying it was "Closed due to AIDS".



AOL GAMES

AOL's games service (games.aol.com) has over 250 free titles, and user-powered features: reviews, chat, etc. The games are ideal for lazy gamers offering *Bingo*, *Poker*, *Solitaire*, *Scrabble* and *Gin Rummy*. The servers, however, are poxy.



MSN GAMES

MSN's games site (games.msn.com) lures the ladies with *Samantha Swift* and *The Hidden Roses of Athena*, *Mystery of Unicorn Castle*, and *Wedding Dash*. Fellas might prefer *Burger Island* (tagline: "Build the perfect burger in this tropical island snack shack").



Creepy old man hanging out with kids? Another day on the internet.

Surely this is a bit outdated. People have been socially networking in 3D games like *World of Warcraft* for years, which let them fight orcs when they tire of chitchat. But "the large-scale MMOs don't have the option for casual play," Hanna argues, "and the social interactions in online games like *Team Fortress 2*, etc – are horrible."

So Google *Lively* could host RPGs, FPSs, RTSs and sports PC games, as

jump into their 3D *Lively* room where there's an honest-to-goodness virtual arcade. Each of those arcade machines are portals to different games. In a very old-fashioned manner, I can go up behind a guy, watch what he's playing and see if I'm interested. Maybe there could be a way to put your coin on top of the machine to say you're next. I'd love to bring back that social interaction of gaming in a real space."

"The world of PC gaming is ready for a punk DIY revolution that will shake the industry to its core"

well as casual content? "Exactly, and it will all stem from a social platform."

Hanna foresees *Lively* morphing into an online arcade – a 3D environment that resembles the real arcades of yesteryear, only without the misfits smoking in the corner.

"In the short term, I can see a model where you visit someone's website and

By the same token, as engines become more accessible and software tools become easier to handle, users might be able to create their own *Lively* games. It's a pipe dream for now, but in Hanna's mind, the world of PC gaming is ready for a punk DIY revolution that will shake the industry to its core.

REVOLUTIONS

"We're starting to see more creative, innovative, smaller titles, but I don't think we're at the stage yet where we can have a huge indie blockbuster that does just as well, if not better, than the mainstream. We're just waiting for the game that costs under \$100,000 and makes over \$100million. When that happens, gaming will change."

Lively could be the place to make this happen, reckons Hanna, although he is quick to mention that his eulogising is not official Google speak. The company's communications manager, Annette Ryszkowska, certainly isn't forthcoming. "I'm afraid that we don't have a great deal to contribute at this stage about the gaming aspect of *Lively*," she says.



Google have not been shy about their ambitions in the game's space, though, having recently launched an in-game advertising service, and the rumour persists that they want to buy *Half-Life* developer Valve.

Reportedly, third-party developers are already exploring *Lively*'s possibilities, only a few months after the launch of the service. Hanna's lips are sealed when it comes to specifics, but he contends that *Lively* could be a godsend for PC gamers.

"This is a personal opinion, not corporate Google ideology," he says, "but if a developer uses the assets that are already there, as a core engine that can embed into a website, it could become a home for hardcore gaming. The potential is definitely there."

For one *Lively* character, a downtrodden hamster-cat, this is a prospect that can only be welcomed. **PCZ**



GAIA ONLINE

Social networking site Gaia (gaiaonline.com) rises a severed head above its online competitors thanks to its zombie skins. Fishing is a gaming highlight, and avatars can watch films in virtual cinemas and throw vegetables at the screen.

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

MOVE TO MIDDLE-EARTH. THE JOURNEY CONTINUES



OFFICIAL EXPANSION TO THE CRITICALLY
ACCLAIMED PC GAME OF THE YEAR*

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE™:
SHADOWS OF ANGMAR™!

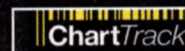
Available
from **GAME**
game.co.uk

FOR MORE GAME INFORMATION VISIT
www.lotro-europe.com



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PCZONE Charts



- 1 **NEW** **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 2 **NEW** **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 3 ↓ **FAR CRY 2**
Issue 201 - 90%
- 4 ↓ **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 5 **NEW** **FIFA MANAGER 09**
N/A
- 6 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE**
N/A
- 7 - **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 8 **NEW** **DEAD SPACE**
Issue 200 - 81%
- 9 **NEW** **PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009**
Issue 201 - 85%
- 10 **NEW** **X3: TERRAN CONFLICT**
Issue 201 - 88%
- 11 **NEW** **BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY**
Issue 200 - 86%
- 12 ↓ **CRYSIS WARHEAD**
Issue 199 - 92%
- 13 ↓ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 14 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV: COMPLETE**
N/A
- 15 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION**
Issue 200 - 88%
- 16 ↓ **WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING**
Issue 200 - 92%
- 17 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**
N/A
- 18 ↓ **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 - 89%
- 19 ↓ **FIFA 09**
Issue 200 - 74%
- 20 **NEW** **QUANTUM OF SOLACE**
N/A



FALLOUT 3
Despite the gnashing of teeth from the old school fanboys, *Fallout 3* dropped the bomb on its competitors this month.



C&C: RED ALERT 3
The alarm bells might be sounding at EA HQ as one of its potential cash cows has failed to slot right in at number one.



DEAD SPACE
Try playing this after midnight in a lonely country house and then tell us you didn't have a 'trouser accident' at least once.



QUANTUM OF SOLACE
The game is out and we haven't been sent a copy yet - make of that what you will. There are better games to spend your money on.

ACADEMICS BRUTALISED

Study into videogame violence beaten

WEBSITE iastate.edu

A STUDY RELEASED by academics at Iowa State University has come under heavy fire from respected professors and games industry professionals.

The research claims to prove that playing games makes people more aggressive and far more likely to push an old lady down some stairs, gleefully shouting "EPIC FAIL!" at her broken and twisted corpse.

One critic said the study suffered from "numerous flaws in the literature review, methodology and conclusions," while the Entertainment Consumers Association (theeca.com) has said the report does not address the many questions those in the industry want answered in an unbiased study.

Rumours the author of the report has challenged his critics to a Bunsen burner duel are completely unfounded.



Playing *World at War* makes you more violent. Maybe.

ELEMENTAL DIPLOMACY

Turn-based fans get in their element

WEBSITE elementalgame.com ETA 2009

THERE WILL ALWAYS be a place for turn-based strategy games on the PC and *Galactic Civilization* developer Stardock knows it. This is why they've decided to come back down out of the blackness of space to work on a new turn-based

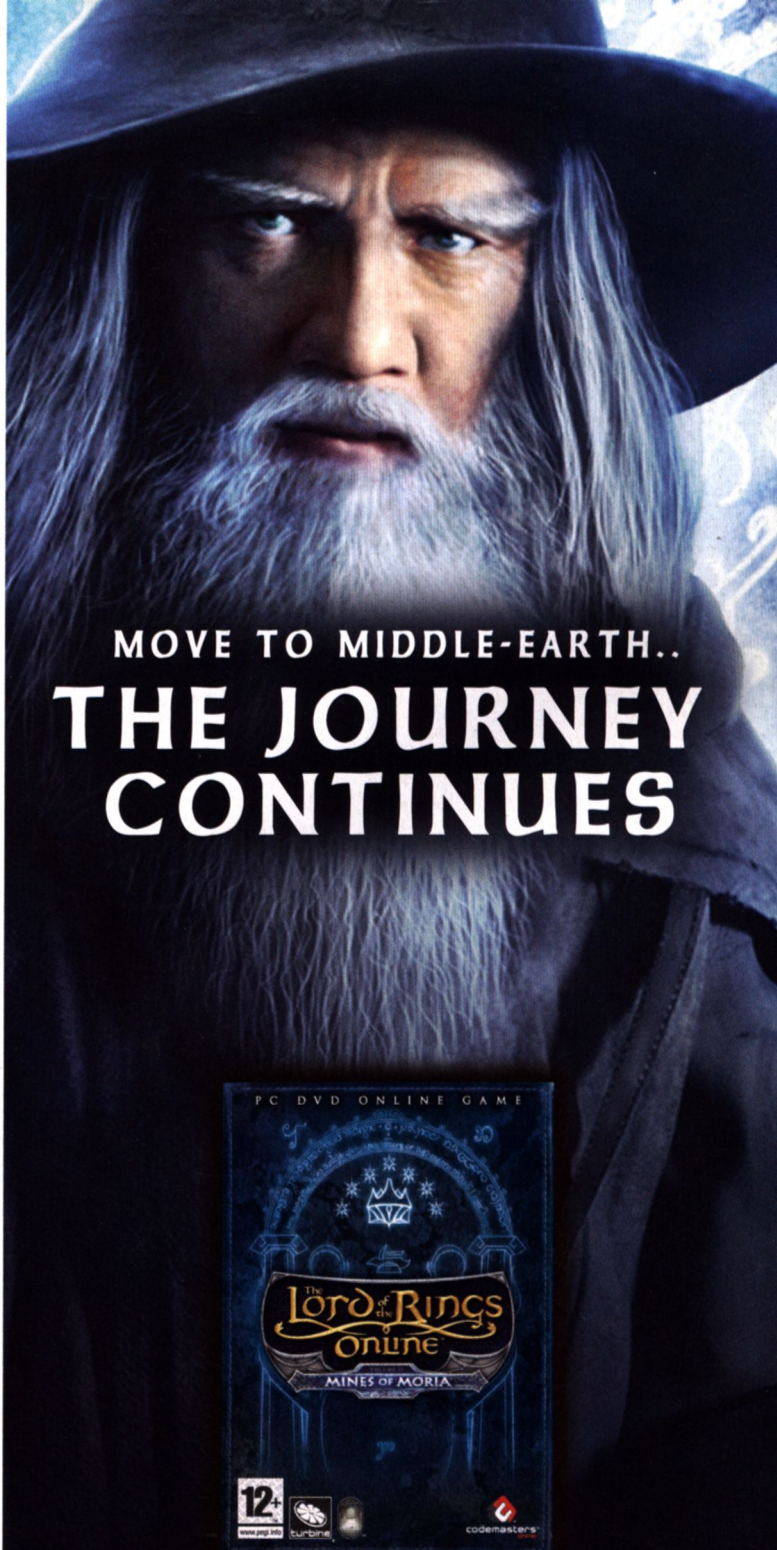
strategy game, namely *Elemental: War of Magic*.

This isn't all old school shenanigans though – after all, they've got the modern colon-split title going on – but the general principles of exploration, expansion and extermination will all be present and correct. What you might not expect is the cartoon-y nature of the visuals, which you can see fluttering in this news item like a colourful butterfly of graphic information.

The game looks set to see the light in or around June 2009, so you've got plenty of time to grow a Gandalf beard in preparation.



Cartoon strategy fun.



MOVE TO MIDDLE-EARTH..
**THE JOURNEY
CONTINUES**



OFFICIAL EXPANSION TO THE CRITICALLY
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Dear Steve,

I was just flicking through your preview of *GTA IV* and noticed your advocacy of pads as the best method of control for combat in the game. I find your reasoning flawed. Please explain why you believe this to be so.

David Brown

Dear David,

On my keyboard, the A and D keys are either 'pressed' or 'not pressed'. Using these keys to drive a car in *GTA* means I'm either turning the wheel fully left or fully right, never anything in between. This is no way to drive a car, unless you are some sort of robot man.

Steve Hogarty

Steve,

Any skilled keyboard enthusiast is able to compensate for this by dabbling lightly at the keys, but I'll take your point on the racing games. However, anybody who says playing FPS games with a pad is better should be thrown off a cliff onto some jagged rocks.

DB

Dave,

Oh, so you've conceded that the pad is better for some genres than others? Could this be the shortest Argue The Toss ever? I thought you were a militant keyboard and mouse fanatic?

SH

Steve,

Racing games are the only genre I can think of that I would consider using a pad for – even then, I'd probably still do better with the keys! Considering how popular pads are, it is bewildering that they are actually inferior for virtually all genres. And that's the bottom line.

DB

Dave,

You're not very good at this arguing lark. I never said that pads are better than keyboards, all I've said is that they're better for certain genres, namely ones with cars in. And you've agreed. Also, the fact that you'd do better with keys just means you've all the dexterity of a horse or a sponge or something. Get off the stage, Brown, come back when you're ready to have some bloody conviction, you pasta-spined tit.

SH

Steve,

Aha! Resorting to insults is the final refuge of the morally bankrupt and, crucially, the loser of an argument. By falling into my cunningly laid trap, you have proved yourself unworthy of this debate. Be off with you or feel my boot upon your throat, good sir! I'll even control it with my keyboard to demonstrate how awesome it is. How'd you like them apples?

DB

Dave,

You're never allowed to argue the toss again, newbie.

SH

EVE SHOOTER IN THE WORKS

Developer CCP hints at an *EVE* FPS

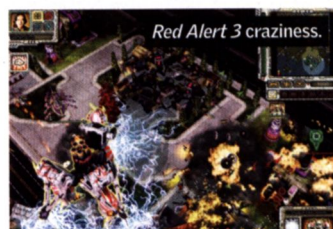
WEBSITE eve-online.com ETA TBA

CHILLING ICELANDIC RUMOURS have surfaced following the *EVE Online* fanfest earlier this month. The summit, organised by developers CCP, saw the unveiling of the largest expansion the space-faring MMO has played host to yet. As is tradition, the unnamed update will be free to subscribers, and will add modular ship design to the mix, allowing for thousands of possible permutations when it comes to crafting your vessel.

More intriguingly, CCP heads Hilmar Petursson and Nathan Richardsson

announced that the developer has a "game console strategy" in place, while later showing footage of a first-person shooter on a planet surface. The art style and weapon design was clearly reminiscent of *EVE Online*, leading PC ZONE (and everybody else) to believe that an *EVE* shooter is most definitely in the works.

Already we're speculating how such a thing would work. Would the industrial and economic aspects cross the genre divide? Will it even arrive on PC? We'll be here rubbing our thighs until there's more news to tell.



SERIAL KILLER

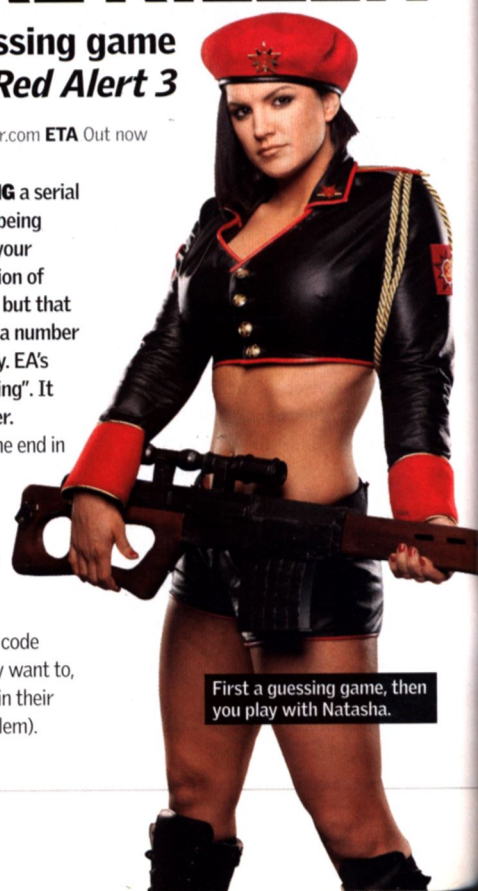
Serial key-guessing game included with *Red Alert 3*

WEBSITE commandandconquer.com ETA Out now

EVER TRIED GUESSING a serial key? It isn't much fun being stopped from playing your brand-new game by a collection of random numbers and letters, but that is just what has happened to a number of *Red Alert 3* buyers recently. EA's advice was to just "try guessing". It isn't as bad it sounds, however.

The last digit was left off the end in some manuals, so it's just a matter of determining which letter (or number) is missing. Don't worry, you'll only have to tap in that 20-digit code 36 times at most.

EA says you can get a new code directly from them if you really want to, by filling in a little form found in their website (snipurl.com/ra3problem).



First a guessing game, then you play with Natasha.

THE POLISH SMASH

The Witcher: Enhanced Edition sells a million

WEBSITE www.thewitcher.com ETA Out now

CD PROJEKT HAS revealed more than one million people have stepped into Geralt's boots in the past 12 months, slashing through the console propaganda to prove that good sales are indeed possible on the PC. They've also released a 'fan appreciation' trailer at snipurl.com/witchervids which features footage

that could potentially be from a new *Witcher* game (at least, it's definitely not from the current one).

The company itself has also continued to be outspoken on the future of PC gaming, saying: "Scientific research has proven that those sales numbers are quite good for a debut game based on

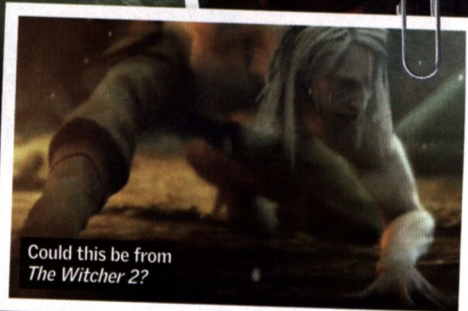
a relatively unfamiliar IP from an unknown studio on a 'dead' platform." Michal Kicinski, CD Projekt's chief executive, has said *The Witcher* universe is still ripe for exploration, so fans should start applying magic grease to their mice in preparation for some more adult-oriented roleplaying and sex card collecting.



The Witcher Enhanced Edition is a bestseller.



Next time Geralt gets his kit off.



Could this be from *The Witcher 2*?

BY SEPTIM'S BEARD!

New *Elder Scrolls* game coming in 2010

WEBSITE elderscrolls.com ETA 2010

THE CHAPS AND chapettes at Bethesda can never be accused of resting on their laurels. Fresh from rolling around on piles of money after *Fallout 3* rocketed to the top of the charts, Bethesda has told the world

that the next *Elder Scrolls* game will be emerging in 2010.

In terms of game information, there is absolutely none, so feel free to speculate wildly about what the game's setting might be. Perhaps there'll be a return to

Morrowind's locales? Perhaps there'll be a zombie Uriel Septim to fight, and will the star of the game be Suzy's unicorn?

All we can do is spend our days hunched over a keyboard, typing random thoughts onto forums, hoping that at

some point we can go "Ha! We were right all along!"

Whatever the setting, we can't wait to start exploring Tamriel once again. This time though, can we have some more interesting NPCs, Bethesda?

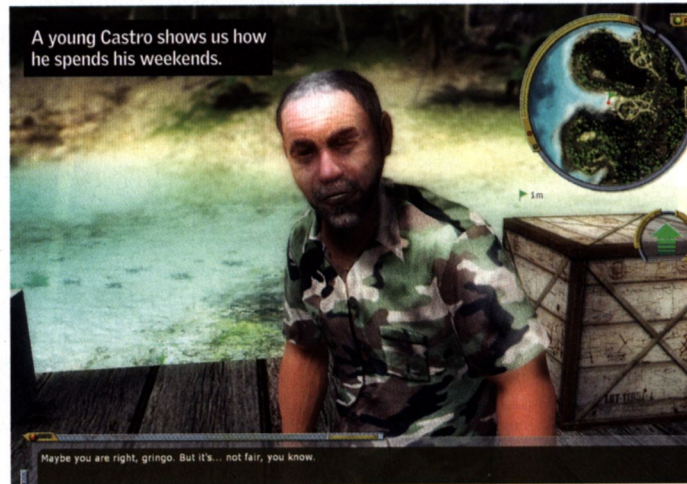
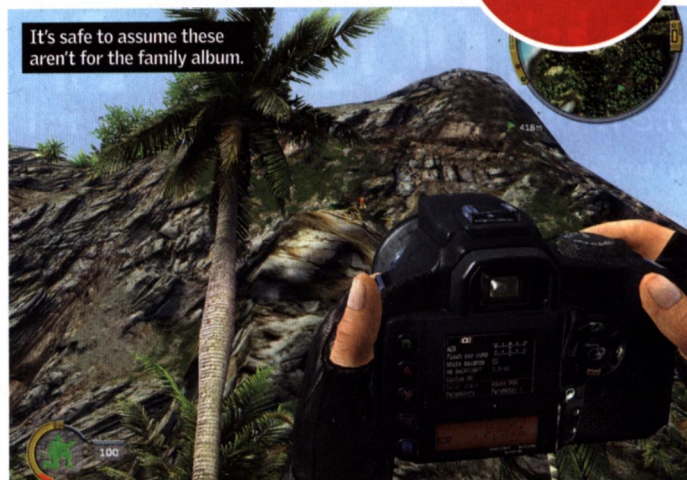


COCAINE IS FUN...

WHITE GOLD

Steve Hogarty plays the dope while snorting up a big line of fun

DEVELOPER Deep Shadows PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE whitegold-game.com



I WAS DETERMINED not to harken back to *White Gold's* predecessor when writing up my impressions of the open-world shooter, but when you're sprinting down a road being chased by a disastrously animated snake, it's hard not to conjure up memories of *Boiling Point's* hovering death pumas.

The preview code I've been playing is rough as hell (yet thankfully stable), with some outlandish placeholder translations and legally dubious game assets too – a sound effect from *Windows 95* when you level up and a near-perfect recreation of a Canon 30D digital SLR camera being my favourite copyright infringements.

Some pre-packaged save games guided me through the game's features

and vehicles. Jumping into 'Plane.sav' afforded me the privilege of pootling about in one of the game's seaplanes, a jaunty vehicle that obeyed physics in only a very casual fashion. Decelerating, for instance, seemed to convert all my forward momentum into sideways velocity, propelling me alarmingly over some islands. Other saved games conveyed yet more of the game's features, including one mission in which you encounter a suicidal man (cutely translated to 'self-killer').

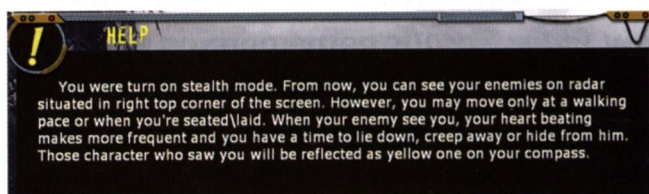
KILLA

You can either coax this guy down from a ledge by fetching his psychiatrist, or goad him into diving into the pavement head first. This is the kind of thing that would benefit from a sharp script, as even once you've summoned his counsellor, there's a maze of branching dialogue to navigate before he calms down. There's dark, wayward humour tied up in here too, hinting at an underlying cleverness to the game that's lost in translation.

Despite all these loose ends, there's something innately promising about *White Gold*. Even though you'll chuckle at the crooked animation and the lines

You were turn on stealth mode

"Your heart beating makes more frequent"



We don't mean to take the piss out of Deep Shadows (our fluency in Ukrainian is rusty to say the least) but this early version of *White Gold* has some hilariously translated dialogue (see above).

Part of us would love to see the charmingly clumsy English make it to the final release, but we're certain it's an area of the game which will be improved upon in the coming months. Hopefully...

of powdery, white 'adrenaline' you'll loot from corpses, there are more ideas in here than most other open-world shooters. My first actions in the game involved leaping off a pier having seen some interesting tropical fish, stabbing said fish with a Bowie knife, and being delighted that I could pick up the dead fish and see it in my inventory. The inventory description promises that I can cook it too.

Deep Shadows have let their ideas run wild with *White Gold*, admittedly

without looking back very often to make sure those ideas will fit together properly. As such, you can't walk five metres into the jungles without seeing something that's mildly interesting. For instance, after exiting the pier at the beginning of the game, somebody began to shout about "a man up there". I looked around and there indeed was a man standing up on top of the mountain.

I couldn't for the life of me figure out why that man was there, but for some reason, I liked the fact that he was. **PCZ**

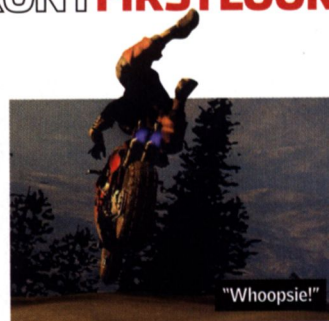
THE LOWDOWN

Bit like <i>Far Cry</i>	✓
But even more freeform	✓
Really weird, in a nice way	✓
Ropey as hell	✗
Could be badly translated	✗

"Global warming isn't simply a tax scam invented by the government"



If you can stay on your bike long enough you can drive to the horizon.



Basement flats are less desirable in this future.



ETA
2009

FILL HER UP

FUEL

Steve Hogarty takes a nostalgic sniff of petrol and heads off into the wilderness

DEVELOPER Asobo Studio PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE snipurl.com/asobofuel

CODEMASTERS ARE ALREADY at the helm of some of the PC world's finest racing titles. *GRID*'s got track racing down to a tee, while *DiRT*'s replicated mud-based rallying to a staggering degree of accuracy. So what's left? How about both? How about tarmac and dirt with grass and mountains? How about 5,000 square miles of the stuff to be exact, an unbound chunk of west America, procedurally generated using satellite imagery and laced with 11,000 miles of road. That'll do, won't it?

We've had promises of open-world racing before. Some – like *Burnout Paradise* and *Test Drive Unlimited* – amount to a carefully interwoven series

of tracks – not truly open, but bloated with routes. Others, such as (wouldn't you know it?) Codemasters' old-time racer *Insane*, gave you a chunk of 3D landscape and made you work out the best means of navigating it.

Fuel belongs in the latter camp, stretching the tiny arenas to a single, monumental stage. It's so huge, claim the developers at Asobo, that they've yet to see it all themselves.

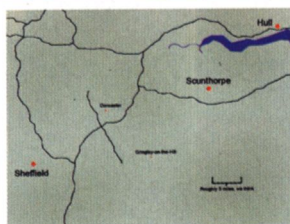
The setting is an alternate-present, and some narrative excuse has been conjured up to explain away the absence of major urban locations (the closest you'll come to a city is a view of some sunken skyscrapers breaking the surface of a lake).

Petrol has become the currency of thrill-seekers, as combustion engined vehicles become the transport of choice for stunt-faced biker types. All the uptight normal people presumably pootle about on hydrogen cell powered mopeds waiting for the lights to change.

"The closest you'll come to a city is a view of some sunken skyscrapers"

Home truths

We can't print Google Maps, so we made our own



To put *Fuel*'s vast distances into perspective we've knocked together a quick map of the Sheffield area.

A region of this size will be playable in *Fuel*, encompassing, as you can see, the distance between Sheffield and Hull. Driving from corner-to-corner in real life would take you one hour and 15 minutes, traffic permitting. Of course, the human mind is incapable of comprehending such orders of magnitude, so we'll forgive you if you haven't already pissed yourself in shock.

The Grand Canyon, Monument Valley and the Salt Lake area will all feature, though urban settings will be scarce. *Fuel*'s environments are ravaged by a scenario in which global warming



Bad day for lost ramblers

isn't simply a tax scam invented by the government, but an actual problem. Dynamic weather effects turn the playing field into a meteorological hoe-down of sorts, with tornadoes frequently tearing shit up left, right, and centre and rainstorms beating the dusty ground into a muddy submission.

NO FAKERS

Massive draw distances allow you to peer right across the map and something Asobo is quite proud of is not ever having to "fake a horizon". What you see, where the land meets the sky, is a piece of earth you'll be able to drive to. This is the *Far Cry 2* of racers, the only problem with which is a possible lack of tightness in procedurally generated courses. *Fuel* might lack that human touch.

Whether it'll be a tonic for lap-based monotony or an overly ambitious sandbox project remains to be seen, but with Codies at the steering wheel, *Fuel* could be special. **PC7**

THE LOWDOWN

Unbelievably huge world	✓
Lots of vehicle variety	✓
Lovely weather effects	✓
No more laps	✓
Enough man-made content?	✗



26th ANNUAL
**GOLDEN
JOYSTICK
AWARDS**

EXCITING GOLDEN JOYSTICK RESULTS

Which PC games have rocked your world in 2008

WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com

THE JOYSTICKS THIS year was almost totally dominated by one game, making this report much harder to write than it would otherwise have been. Cheers for that, Activision! Anyway, that game was of course *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, which swept the boards to claim the Nuts All-Nighter Multiplayer Game of the Year, PC Game of the Year, Games Radar's Online Game of the Year, and Virgin Media Ultimate Game of the Year awards.

Activision Blizzard even won Publisher of the Year as well and we're willing to believe *COD4* had a lot to do with that particular success as well. The madness didn't end there, with Play.com's One to Watch award going to *Call of Duty: World at War*. Despite being a damn good game (see the review on pg 60), the general consensus seemed to be that the new game in the COD series wasn't lighting many fires in the gaming community. Even our esteemed ex-editor-turned-freelance-scrounger was under the impression the game was going to be a bit rubbish.

A few other games did somehow manage to fight off the gaming colossus that is *Call of Duty 4*.

Grand Theft Auto IV, soon to be making waves on the PC, managed to scoop two awards, while PopCap's *Bejeweled 2* won the E4 Talent Mobile Game of the Year gong.

Edge's Most Wanted award went to *Fallout 3*, which has seen Bethesda showered with praise in the media, even if some of the fans of the old games seem distinctly unimpressed. Elsewhere, Rockstar plucked the CVG UK Developer of the Year accolade from the hands of its rivals, smashing the driver's side window of the nearest BMW and fleeing into the night.

There were some other prizes on offer, but most of them involved the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360.

RESULTS

Family Game of the Year

Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock

Sponsored by *The Sun*

Retailer of the Year

Play.com

Sponsored by Activision Blizzard

Multiplayer Game of the Year

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Sponsored by *Nuts All-Nighter*

Soundtrack of the Year

Grand Theft Auto IV

Sponsored by BBC1Xtra

PC Game of the Year

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Sponsored by The United Kingdom e-Sport Association

The One to Watch

Call of Duty: World at War

Sponsored by Play.com

UK Developer of the Year

Rockstar

Sponsored by CVG.co.uk

Publisher of the Year

Activision Blizzard

Most Wanted

Fallout 3

Sponsored by *Edge*

Grand Master Flash Award

Stickman Madness

Sponsored by E4.com

Online Game of the Year

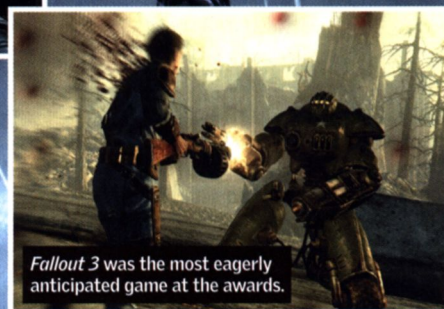
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Sponsored by Games Radar

Ultimate Game of the Year

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Sponsored by Virgin Media



"KEEP AN EYE ON THIS
IT'S BIT OF A GEM"

-PC GAMER



FALLEN ANGEL Sacred2



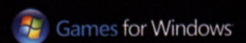
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DEEP, DEEP DOWN...

LOTR ONLINE: MINES OF MORIA

Chris Capel speaks friend, and enters...

DEVELOPER Turbine PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE lotro-europe.com/minesofmoria PREVIOUSLY IN Issue 201

ONE OF THE great things about *Lord of the Rings Online* is how committed Turbine are to providing free content. They've added two new land masses, many new quests and innumerable polishes. So what can the game's first proper expansion pack do to justify its greater-than-zero price?

The name should be enough for most fans: *Mines of Moria*. If you haven't heard of them, you're playing the wrong game. Seriously, bugger off and play *Guild Wars*, your kind ain't welcome. Here be the Balrog – and not the guy from *Street Fighter*.

The Epic Quests have always been the spine of *LOTRO*: story-driven adventures that run parallel to Frodo & Co's journey (and are now narrated by Galadriel rather than Gandalf, who is voiced by an actress who sounds in no way like an impressionist doing Cate Blanchett). What a shame then that the first missions of *MOM* consist of killing a few crows and delivering some packed lunches. Fortunately it gets better fast.

Past the slightly drab Eregion lie the Walls of Moria, with an expedition of dwarves looking to reopen the Mines and find out what happened to Balin's party. They're working to unblock the Hollin Gate (which Tolkien fans will be happy to hear only glows in moonlight), and have many missions to give you in the mean time. Once you venture into Moria though, there's no going back.

"Past the slightly drab Eregion lie the Walls of Moria, with an expedition looking to reopen the Mines"

An attack by the Watcher later (and some hasty cries of "run away!") our character got something new: a legendary item. These weapons can be levelled up, and indeed before entering Moria you have to get this weapon to level 10.

UNDERCITY

Fortunately this didn't take long, and soon I was facing the Watcher again, determined to send him back into the abyss. The proper battle against him was far less exciting than its first surprise attack, and consisted of a few tentacles that disappointingly waved about. For a battle with such a build-up this was quite an anticlimax.

Venturing in through the now open Gate, the first word out of my mouth

**ETA
OUT
NOW**

upon seeing Moria was "wow". No, I don't mean *World of Warcraft*, I mean the good kind of "wow".

Moria is a truly impressive place. Detailed pillars, huge statues, vast areas, high stairs... and that's just the entrance hall. Things only get more impressive as you go in. I honestly thought it was better than the version in Peter Jackson's film.

Getting through the long dark realm of Moria takes hours and hours of gaming, not to mention going up a few levels now that the level cap has been raised to 60.

"Bugger that," I thought, "I want to see Lothlorien." Taking the Steve Hill approach, I just legged it from every single enemy and made my way with barely a passing glance at the wondrous architecture. It took me bloody ages, but with some really determined cowardice I made it.



This is the countryside. It is not Moria.



Everyone ignored Schmeil the dwarf.



THE LOWDOWN

Moria truly impressive	✓
An absolutely gigantic playing area	✓
A worthy extension for your cash	✓
Watcher battle a bit poor	✗
Magic will annoy purists	✗

Gothic style is all the rage down in the Mines.



It's just me and my taunt.

THE STORY SO FAR... TURBINE

ASHERON'S CALL
Turbine's first RPG
for Microsoft. Sequel
follows in 2002.

1999



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE
Not bad. Soon came
the anticipated...

2006



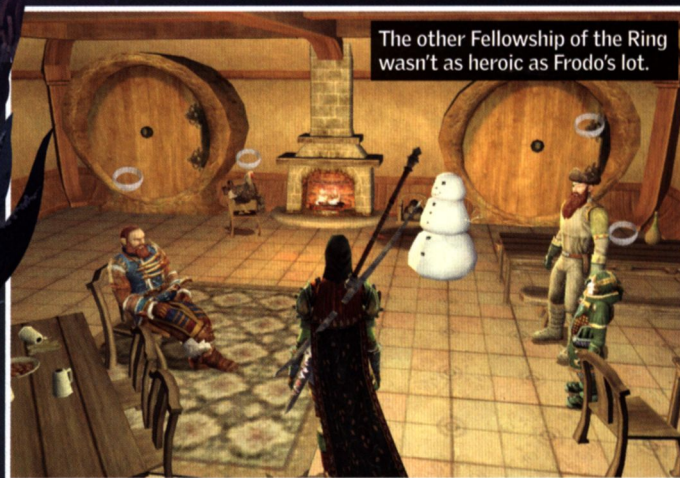
LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
A serious alternative
to WOW arrives.

2007



MINES OF MORIA
Middle-earth expands
underground. Like the
Wombles.

2008



The other Fellowship of the Ring
wasn't as heroic as Frodo's lot.

You shall not pass...

Where next for the Tolkienites?

So where in Middle-earth should fans expect to go next? Turbine are good at adding free expansions to their world, so we wouldn't be surprised to see Mirkwood or The Lonely Mountain appear.

However, what of the proper paid expansions? Turbine have said previously that they will follow the Fellowship, so the next pack should be Rohan. Could this mean horse combat perhaps?

They have also suggested a proper Helm's Deep battle might be staged at some point. That would be unbelievably cool (despite being the absolute opposite of real life cool, really), but it's more likely that these battles will be confined to straight Instance Quests. Then again, maybe Turbine are eyeing up *Warhammer Online* right now.



The sun's up and
it's daylight. Eh?

Lothlorien, once reached, is actually something of a disappointment. Its few trees and tiny population pale in comparison to the grandeur of the Mines. Turbine, quite rightly, have concentrated their efforts on the titular location. And it shows.

With my speed-expedition curtailed, I explored the two new classes, the Warden and the somewhat controversial Rune-Keeper.

The Rune-Keeper makes use of an 'Attunement Bar', which means the more you use your Offensive powers in a round, the easier to use they become, with Defensive powers becoming harder to use, and vice-versa. These abilities have caused no end of distress among the fans, as Tolkien only ever granted Gandalf and his kin magic.

Some of the interiors are
impressive in their scale.



The Warden, on the other hand, is another tank class but gets extra unique powers by mixing up certain other moves. Both new classes are a lot of fun, but only time will tell if they'll fit (or at least be accepted) into an already well-balanced game.

The only problem with *Mines of Moria* is the current lack of players at the moment. Granted, the thing's just getting going, and in time the areas will fill with adventurers.

When it gets released and the players flood in to explore Moria, we'll bring you our final verdict. For now, these mines are rich with new content: a must for subscribers. **PCZ**



WAR NEVER CHANGES...

ARMED ASSAULT II

Donning his Kevlar and camocream, *Jon Blyth* ventures into battle

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive Studios PUBLISHER 505 Games WEBSITE arma2.com PREVIOUSLY IN 200

ONE PHRASE STICKS in the mind from the presentation of *Armed Assault II*. One phrase makes you ponder briefly what's changed in PC gaming, and what's changed inside our heads. When Marek Spáňal says "We don't try to provide just fun – it's a deeper, more sophisticated experience than that", it catches your ear. It's not often someone derides the notion of fun, in a games presentation. Fun and games, right? They're like... shits and giggles. But Bohemia Interactive have never been frivolous, petty or whimsical. It's their continuing mission to give you an incredibly real location in which to wage a war. Whether you like it or not.

We used to like it. With our most steamy, rose-tinted glasses on, it seems that PC games were once the very

essence of exploration and discovery. Passionate, skilled, and unqualified mod-makers would be carried around the world on the shoulders of thankful gamers, and *3D Studio Max* was as much a playground as *Quake*. We're stupider now, and games like *Arma* feel like an anomaly. This shouldn't be the case; *Arma* sold 400,000 copies without a global publisher, or even particularly glowing reviews. How brilliantly defiant is that?



Let's get the basic stuff out of the way, first. *Arma2* takes the conflict out of the fictional Sahran of *Arma*, and lands it into the equally fictional Chernarus.

USERS FIRST

Set in the very near future – the future doesn't get much closer than 2009 – it's October in this post-Soviet land, and the colour palette is appropriately rusty. Chernarus, if you like. The country occupies 225km² of meticulously mapped land, with terrain built from real satellite maps, with around 50 towns and villages spread amongst the game's 326km of roads (for more statistical fun see 'That's Numberwang!').

You take control of Razor Squad, a team whose well-rounded character sheets are at slight odds with the current state of the robotic communication (the

generated barks don't stitch together very well at the moment, leaving you talking to a robot with mood swings). The game's cutscenes see them in full character, though – potty mouths and all.

The engine is certainly looking better, although it's still a year or two behind the cutting-edge games which rely on bonfire night visuals to woo and confound. But visuals have never been where Bohemia have been cutting edge. A good example of this is the way they've declined to offer a DirectX 10 version of the game. Ninety percent of their community don't use it, and they're working for their community, not to an imaginary new standard that was only ever really about coercing a Windows upgrade. Or, as they put it, "We prefer users over the industry".

The advances are still there to be seen, though – dust clouds



"ArmA2 takes the conflict out of the fictional Sahrani of ArmA, and lands it into the fictional Chernarus"



**ETA
2009**



"Hey! I just hit the broadside of that barn!"



"I yelled 'Look out for the truck!', but did you listen?"



Cataracts in a sniper is not a good thing.

ARMA PEOPLE PERSON

Team Razor Squad... assemble!

ROBO

Rock-solid orphan, Robo is described as having an excellent physical constitution. Couple of bullets will still put him down though – he's only human.

SCARLET

His nickname coming from his surname – O'Hara – he's the team's medic, who's best at pulling you out of trouble and patching you up if you get a bullet in your face.

EIGHTBALL

This is the leader man, and the person you'll most likely be playing. Although, you can swap who you're controlling, if you prefer micro-management to the Micro-AI.

ICE COLD

This is your stealthy fella, who works well in camouflage, and is great for scouting and sniping duties.

COOPS

This is your squad's reconnaissance expert. Having him around during enemy conversations will allow you to understand what they're talking about.



kick up from the back of trucks, helicopters form swirls of disturbed particles – it's a noticeable improvement over *ArmA*.

Talk of a role-playing element in the press materials might alarm some reality purists, but you might already have guessed that Bohemia aren't talking about levelling up. The role-playing here is in terms of keeping civilians happy – it's the battle for hearts and minds that

the Americans kept forgetting about in Iraq. Keep the locals' trust and they'll co-operate, providing you with money. Be a gun-happy dick and they'll co-operate less, provide less money, and give information to the other side.

There'll also be multiple endings, depending on your decisions and failures. Just like previous games – and life – failing a mission doesn't end the game, it just affects events in the world.

PLANE FUN

There's good news for pilots, too, with the introduction of the F-35 Lightning and MV-22 Osprey Helicopter, both of which have vertical take-off and landing capabilities, so no more crash landing in a runway-less field.

In the multiplayer, you'll earn money from your achievements, giving you the chance to spend it on squad members and vehicles, from APCs to tanks. If you're feeling generous, you can also give it to teammates – or, if you're feeling like a cocky sod, give your enemies a few dollars for a nice new skirt.

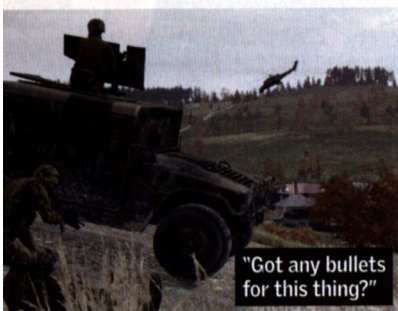
A side commander can issue missions to players and their squads, to give the

game a really strong sense of a coherent military manoeuvre.

Commanding a squad takes a bit of getting used to, and can be done with a selection of F-keys (for selection) and number keys (to issue orders). You can also use the mouse wheel to issue commands. It's slightly less precise, but the application for any console versions is obvious. And now the potential for community involvement in the console market is growing, that's something that Bohemia are likely to be very interested in – even with the unlucky failure of *Operation Flashpoint: Elite* on the Xbox.

The emphasis is firmly, squarely, and unflinchingly on reality – that was the initial brief with *OpFlash*, and it's the passion that led to the US and Australian military using adapted versions of the game for inter-crew training. And let's not forget the military were trying to make their own simulators – so for Bohemia to outperform the US military's efforts, with all their obscene budget, let's you know how seriously Bohemia take realism.

But when you try to make a realistic wargame there will be some casualties.



THE STORY SO FAR... BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE

**OPERATION
FLASHPOINT**
Award-winning, yet
bloody and hard game.

2001

VBS1
Played by soldiers in
VR hats before they
kill IRL baddies.

2002

ARMED ASSAULT
Without a global
publisher, *Arma* sold
nearly half a million.

2006

ARMED ASSAULT II
Will the ultra-realistic
war simulator beat its
predecessor's success?

2009

How To Win Hearts And Minds
#1: Don't wave big guns around.



"Get out of
my gunship!"

"Now, are you sure we're firing
at the Russians? Remember
what happened last time?"

"Sir, you'll live longer
if you don't stand up."

Accessibility, for one – playing any of Bohemia's games is a waste of time unless you're willing to take it seriously and stop fanning about. That means using sensible military tactics and obeying the chain of command. And no rocket jumping.

"Many of Bohemia's staff are plucked from the modding community"

That's not to say there aren't compromises – even playing with a mouse and keyboard is technically a compromise in the battle for realism – but when Bohemia make compromises, it's always with a view to limiting the fantastic. For example, there are no *Brothers In Arms*-style circles above an enemy's position, to indicate when they've been suppressed by your fire. The

inhabitants of Chernarus do not speak English, and the road signs – each one unique – will not be translated from the Cyrillic alphabet. If you're in a foreign country, it's a bit much to ask. However, if your translator is present, you get subtitles – an elegant compromise.

Bohemia agonise over these things, and concessions are trivial – parachuting into battle is only from 1,500m, they confess, and not the 7,000m that actual Airborne soldiers would leap into a warzone from. "That would be boring," confesses Spänel.

They've also reacted to complaints that soldiers died too quickly and too often. But not by giving your character

more HP, or by turning bullets into candy floss. Instead, they've introduced the idea of battlefield clearance and healing. If you're wounded, a squad member can pick you up, get you somewhere safe, and patch you up. It's not easy, and your saviour is taking a calculated risk; is it worth risking his own life to get you back on the battlefield?

Left 4 Dead (page 54) may be at the other end of the gaming spectrum, but similar abilities promote a sense of interdependence and teamwork, way beyond "you go over there, I'll shoot stuff from over here".

The community is a huge part of daily considerations. Not only are many of Bohemia's staff plucked from the modding community, but part of the reason, Marek implies, that they fell out with Codemasters is that they spent far too long supporting *OpFlash*.

That's numberwang!

Those press release statistics
in full, with extra information

1,883

unique traffic signs. Also the year in
which Coco Chanel was born.

326km

of roads. The distance from
Holyhead to Easter Compton

One bicycle

0.00001% of the bicycles in Beijing

236 million
pixels

of satellite imagery. Would require a
285in monitor to display every pixel

225km²

The size of a Scrabble
board with 1km² tiles

**37 female and
31 male civilian
character
models. 8
men per 100
population
who will die
alone**



The game has always been a sandbox and *Arma2*'s armoury gives you the chance to play around with everything in the game. It's here that Bohemia's sense of properness takes a bizarre turn: 'everything in the game' includes a hen. It perhaps shows my own inability to fight in a war that I spend five minutes creating a hen, promoting her to the rank of Major, and pecking futilely at a tank.

I'm fairly certain it's safe to say this wasn't Bohemia's intention – and I'm honestly not even sure if it was their idea of a joke – rather it's just shows how seriously they take the idea of the game being a sandbox, for users to play and create new wars in; to not let you take control of Major Hen would be taking your tools away from you.

Still, I bet they'll take out the ability to assign military ranks to hens by the time *Armed Assault II* is released. **PCZ**

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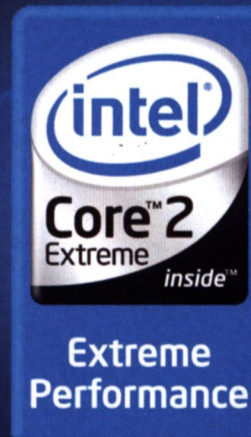
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LEASH POWER

 **CYBERPOWER**

RELIC EXPOSED

Richie Shoemaker unearths the past and future of one of the world's greatest strategy developers

LET'S NOT BEAT about the bocage, Relic make incredible strategy games. Perhaps not in the same commercial league as Blizzard's, but in the 10 years since debut title *Homeworld* edged onto the RTS radar, the Canadian code-mongers have released more real-time strategy epics than almost anyone else, clocked up million-sellers with each one, and, unlike some of their contemporaries, still retain much of the identity that brought them to our attention back in the days when *Half-Life* was looking tasty. More importantly, Relic's games have been unmistakably their own.

Even if you only own just a few strategy games, we'll wager at least one will be of Relic manufacture. If you're of the old school, *Homeworld 2* will probably be your favourite. Younglings might edge a preference for *Dawn of War*, whilst everyone else will probably favour a love for *Company of Heroes*. If

Impossible Creatures is your thing, then you're just being willfully obscure. The point is, Relic can do unique as well as anyone and they can make games that sell. 2008 will go down as the year *Call of Duty 4* broke records, but on PC, the *Dawn of War* expansion *Soulstorm* was the bestseller. Call that a sad indictment of PC gaming if you want, but for Relic, who hardly broke a sweat making it (because they oversaw it), it's an impressive record for the third expansion to a four year-old game.

CANUCK HEROES

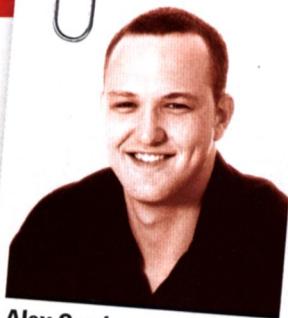
For Chris Degnan, a designer who's worked on both *Company of Heroes* and *Dawn of War*, choosing to work at Relic was much more than being able to work with fellow countrymen. "I think every studio has to make a balance between the quality of the games that you make and financial success" he says. "When I first came to Relic I noticed there was a much greater focus on quality. Success and stability was closely behind it, but the quality of the gameplay experience was something that as a creator of it, remains a huge priority for this studio."

Garden of Relic

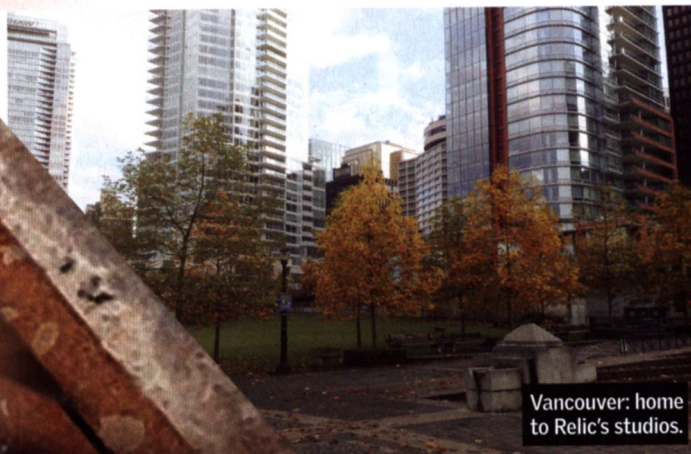
The man that started it all

Alex Garden, the founder of Relic, may not have remained as high in the great gaming consciousness as names like Will Wright or Sid Meier, but a decade ago he was being hailed among a new generation of rock star game developers (like John Romero – remember him?). The thing with rock stars is that they like their independence and it was Relic's absorption into THQ that caused Garden to move on. He remains, to Chris Degnan, Mr Relic: "I was honoured to have worked alongside him."

These days Garden still resides in Vancouver and is close with many of Relic's current crop of band members.



Alex Garden
Founder of Relic



Vancouver: home to Relic's studios.



Even Relic's tank is feeling the Halloween cheer.



We've a feeling they'll need a bigger desk soon.

For Degnan, the priority was not to finish a project on time, but to complete it as well as possible: "I think that more than anything else is what really sets my experience at Relic apart from anything else. Plus," he adds, smiling toward the distant mountains, "I'm a huge snowboarder." He would say that, but if he enjoys his job as much as he insists and Relic are still pumping out games that are every bit as good as they've ever been, what does it matter?

Relic are in a very happy place. After losing their financial independence to THQ, they've been as commercially and critically important to a far greater degree than at any point in their history, and with *Company of Heroes* they've forged the first successful franchise to call their own since *Homeworld*.

As reward it's only fitting that THQ secured for them the rights to revisit the series that brought them to our attention in the first place. Beyond *Dawn of War II* and *Tales of Valor*, *Homeworld 3* awaits. If they get that right, Relic will have the right to claim the RTS crown.

"I do not have the hubris to step up and make that sort of claim," says Degnan. "I know that the experience that we provide is like no other and if it's your thing, then you will find it amazing."

It is, and we do. We suspect we're not the only ones. **PCZ**

Five of the best

Relic's biggest hits



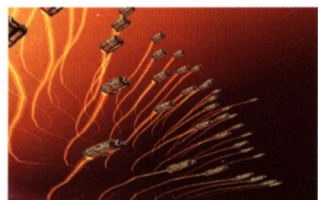
1. COMPANY OF HEROES

This hit World War II RTS has proved a hard act to beat by Relic's competitors.



2. DAWN OF WAR

The definitive *Warhammer 40,000* RTS cemented Relic's reputation.



3. HOMEWORLD

A pioneer of 3D space-faring strategy games that gobbled up awards.



4. IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

This game let you play with Intelligent Design years before Will Wright's *Spore*.



5. HOMEWORLD 2

This reworking of the original wasn't a huge development, but is still astounding.

THE RELIC SPECIAL BEGINS HERE!



P36 TALES OF VALOR

Relic's expansion to the original *Company of Heroes* is transforming the classic World War II RTS into something more tank-ish. By adding more tanks, of course.



P40 DAWN OF WAR II

Dawn of War II holds no secrets from us. We waded into a sea of warring tyrannids and Space Marines to bring you the first hands-on with the sequel to the *Warhammer 40,000* RTS.

LEST WE FORGET

COMPANY OF TALES OF

Richie Shoemaker is sent to recon our favourite World War II RTS

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE companyofheroesgame.com

ETA
**SPRING
2009**

HERE WE GO again... another WWII game, another click-and-drag RTS, effectively another *Dawn of War* expansion pack. Well, actually, perhaps not. While it would seem the standalone expansion *Tales of Valor* – the second to bless 2006's *Company of Heroes* – is set firmly in the WWII timeline and is of the real-time strategy genus, one thing it certainly isn't – or at least isn't planned to be – is another *Dawn of War*. This is a good thing.

Don't get me wrong, I liked *Dawn of War* a lot. I still do. I'm looking forward to its sequel as much as anyone else. I go all weak at the knees over WWII strategy games too, but *Company of Heroes* didn't really jelly me up as much as it did others, simply because it was just too much like playing *Dawn of War*.

I felt, and still do, that the capture-and-hold mechanic felt natural in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe, because it's based on a big nerdy board game with garish colours. But having to ring your troops around a flagpole in a field that seemed to hold no strategic value, in the grit and grime of WWII, didn't fit the reality. The abstraction



Fewer units mean tighter strategies.

sent me running back to the game that spawned it. And there I remained, until I was asked to meet the lead designer on *Tales of Valor*, who happened to be stopping by with an early version of what I thought would just be more of the same.

LET US PLAY

On the face of it, *Tales of Valor* is more of the same, especially when you're forced to watch someone else have all the fun before you're allowed to get your hands on it. It looks great, of course. In fact, for a game that's a relic by usual PC standards, *Company of Heroes* is still the best-looking RTS on the market. Relic isn't planning to raise the system requirements with *Tales of Valor*, but the sight of bodies being uprooted from behind stone walls and the billowing dust from explosions still looks impressive and provokes snorts

of child-like glee. So it's business as usual on that front.

Where the changes are evident are in the first of three new campaigns (and hopefully across the other two that are still at the pencil stage), where there won't be a single capture point to worry about. Advancing will of course be a necessary route to success, but the resources to further it will have to be gotten by plain old killing and maiming, and the completion of those things generals have set a lot of stock in since time immemorial.

This may not seem like a radical shift, but then *COH* was always an evolved and polished game, rather than a revolutionary one. The genetic material here has been augmented by such modern

THE LOWDOWN

Looks as good as ever	✓
More tactical campaigns	✓
Direct fire mode	✓
Multiplayer customisation	✓
No Space Marines	✗

HEROES: VALOR

Think tank

More than just a ride to the front

Relic is expanding the concept of Company Commander rewards from the original game, where experience points could be traded in for Infantry, Airborne or Armor abilities. Now individual tanks will have abilities of their own, with you able to upgrade the capabilities of the driver, loader, gunner or radio operator. The idea is for tanks to be seen as the game's hero units, which after having received certain upgrades, will be augmented with graphical additions. So if you see a Tiger heading to you pimped with gleaming alloys, you're in trouble.

With five campaigns, you can be sure there'll be tanks a-plenty.

"The first mission sees you controlling a Tiger tank against hordes of British troops"

Direct tank control lets you ramp up the carnage.

classics as *World in Conflict*, where progression was dominated by using tactics to drive the story forward.

The other design consideration that has driven the construction of *Tales of Valor* is to pull away from having more and more units, and focus instead on fostering just a few.

Last army standing

Invasion of the multiplayer modes



According to Relic, 25% of *Company of Heroes* regulars would rather play skirmish games against the computer.

"There's a good portion of our audience that doesn't necessarily want to play the competitive multiplayer game," says Brian Wood. "They want the fun multiplayer element, they just don't want to have a person screaming at them."

One of the new multiplayer modes called Invasion is aimed at these folk, by having four of them cooperating to defend the centre of a town against hordes of enemy AI units. If the besieged defenders can break out to outpost buildings, they receive bonuses. Actually, it sounds like a lot of fun, though we're certain there'll still be shouting.

"This is not *Supreme Commander*," says Relic's Brian Wood, who seems poised to let me have a go at the game at long last. "We're not trying to make that big strategic global-scale combat. We want to bring in focus and make it real. We want a more intimate feel in terms of the storyline of the game."

This intimate feel comes across immediately in the very first mission, which sees you controlling a lone Tiger tank against relative hordes of British troops in Normandy, with you weaving your way in-between tight roads and medieval stone walls. It may seem a

strange and almost empty proposition to have just one tank under your control in a strategy game, but Relic is hoping that less will be more.

"I really want this campaign to feel like I'm a player engaging as the tank commander" says Wood. "In WWII, a Tiger would have one or two shots at a vehicle and could completely take it out. They were also notoriously unreliable."

Sure enough, just a few moments after I'm sat down in front of the screen, my lone unit splutters to a halt and half the crew jump out to make repairs. Now a single tank that breaks down may not

Oh Normandy, we know thee so well.



THE STORY SO FAR... RELIC

Homeworld
The best *Battlestar Galactica* game in all but name.

1998



Sigma
Impossible Creatures: the *Spore* it was cool to like, before *Spore*.

2002



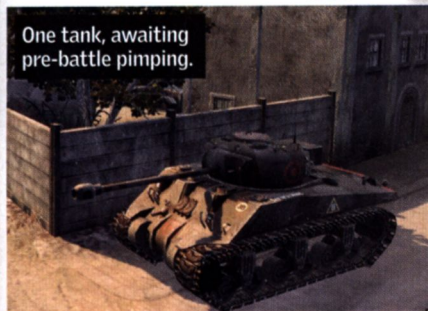
Home Again
Relic and *Homeworld* are reunited, but for what purpose?

2007



Persistent
China prepares to launch *Company of Heroes Online*.

2008



One tank, awaiting pre-battle pipping.

sound like a most enticing premise for an RTS, but this allows the guy from Relic to show off another new adaptation, this one borrowed from Codemaster's 2004 RTS *Soldiers: Heroes of WWII*, which allowed you to directly control tanks in the field.

"The focus here is to make tactical tank combat fun," says Wood. "We did infantry really well in *Company of Heroes*. The whole combination of moving those different squads together was fun."

Not so with tanks, apparently. Here, we had to blunder through the interface to take out walls and dish out suppressive fire from vehicles.

BIRD'S EYE KILLING

The big thing with direct fire is that it works like a wall hack: You can see enemy units coming using the overhead view and so time your attacks to hit as soon as the enemy pokes their noses around the corner. Of course, being direct fire means that this only works for units you directly control, but the interesting thing is that this is a mechanic for all units. Units under direct fire control have a considerable advantage, but the downside is that the other units are left to their own devices, which will make for interesting multiplayer possibilities.

If the single-player campaign looks to be a kind of entry point for newcomers and a new angle of attack for veterans, the proposed changes to multiplayer aim to cover all eventualities. Wood refused to confirm or deny the introduction of new factions beyond the Wehrmacht (the belated introduction of the Soviets would be warmly welcomed), but he could at least talk about a fundamental change to how players will be able – to a limited degree – customise unit production in multiplayer games.

The plan is that players will be able to swap between vehicles so you can make your Panzer Elite hit harder, perhaps at

the expense of fast movement. For instance, as your main light tank, you might, as the British, prefer the new Staghound or the Stuart, or as Americans, the Greyhound or the Stuart. The deal is that choosing one before a battle locks out the other.

The metagame element to all this is that players will learn which units their opponents may favour. It's a principle common in many persistent-character FPSs and MMOs where you choose a kit or character inventory ahead of a battle or raid. If you don't manage your resources correctly before the map begins, you can lose before the battle has even started. In an RTS environment, whether this is just over-restrictive, or whether Relic is taking tactics a touch too far down the FPS road in terms of limiting the weapons you carry, will have to remain to be seen.

"We're going to make the vehicles so they are comparable, so that it doesn't imbalance the game," says Wood defiantly, confident that by introducing pre-game tactics *Company of Heroes*' online game will be much richer for everyone. "It's a little combination of being able to out-think your opponent outside of the game that I think adds a different level of strategy and diversification."

If anything has managed to keep *Company of Heroes* and *Dawn of War*



Tanks will be customisable in multiplayer games.



You can switch between different tanks to trade speed for power.

fresh, it's been the diversity offered by the expansions that followed them.

A few years ago an expansion pack was usually a bunch of missions cobbled together and one or two new units added for good measure. Relic has consistently proved that expansions can and should stand on their own as games in their own right, by broadening the features they offer so that they don't just appeal to hardcore fans. *Tales of Valor* looks to be following a similar path, by reinvigorating the original game and offering new experiences to those who might have let the original pass them by, whether, like me, they were just never gripped by its finely-honed grasp, or whether they were simply jaded by the never-ending assault of WWII games.

"I think there is a lot of stigma with WWII titles being very

specific for people who just love WWII realism. I think *Company of Heroes* does a really good job of balancing the demands of realism against historical accuracy and entertainment.

"RTS games might not be for everybody – they still take a lot of effort and energy to learn how to play, but we're trying to break that down, both as a company and in *Dawn of War II* and other games."

Here we go again then... and a good thing too. **PC7**

"If you don't manage your resources correctly before the map begins, you can lose before the battle has started"

ETA
SPRING '09



WARHAMMER
40,000

DAWN OF WAR

*Richie Shoemaker witnesses a new
dawn for Warhammer 40,000*

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com PREVIOUSLY IN Issue 200

"Dawn of War II is the most anticipated and easily the most distinct of the series"



Orks are as fun to play as ever.

THE LOWDOWN

Tyrannids	✓
RPG-style campaign progression	✓
Cooperative multiplayer focus	✓
Essence 2.0 engine	✓
No Chaos, Guards, etc... yet	✗



The Essence 2.0 engine means firefights will be even more spectacular.



You can zoom right into the action for a closer look.

FLATTERY WILL GET you everywhere in this business. Having peeked over my shoulder during a multiplayer session of *Dawn of War II*, lead designer Jonny Ebbert rated me an "advanced player". I perhaps should have reciprocated by complimenting him on his rugged features, but it didn't seem the time or place to say such things given our surroundings inside Relic's Vancouver offices. Instead I calmly accepted the kind words, blushed ever-so-slightly and buried deeper the shameful fact

that I'd never actually won a multiplayer game of *Dawn of War*. "That guy behind you, with his back to the window," said my new best friend, referring to a correspondent from a famous European gaming website who had been my teammate in the co-operative battle, "He was struggling. He was barely hanging on." Ebbert evidently sets a lot of stock in watching people play his games. If he were a film director, he would be freaking people out in movie theatres. Tall and as bald as a Space Marine's

genitals, he probably freaks people out regardless. Thankfully as a designer of real-time strategy games he can be afforded the luxury of watching from safe distances. Having cut his teeth on the flawed masterpiece that was *Empire Earth*, he jumped across to Relic to help design *Dawn of War*'s first expansion. He's been keeping a close watch on the design team ever since. 2009 will see a fifth *Dawn of War* release in as many years. But by way of being a direct sequel *DOW2* is

understandably the most anticipated and, thanks to taking inspiration from *Company of Heroes* and its own heritage, is easily the most distinct of the series. "Remember Carentan?" Asks Jonny Ebbert, referring to *Company of Heroes*' finest hour. "That feeling of having three squads, and that's it, and you gotta take a whole town with them? That was the most engaging strategy moment I'd ever seen in my eight years making RTS games. We watched people

"There's just no place for a street fighting man."

Workshop Relationship

Games Workshop is a company who never says 'no'

In fact it's fair to say that Relic and GW are the best of buddies

"Occasionally they have to throw up the red flag," admits Ebbert, "but what we love about working with them is that they don't ever just say 'no'. It's more like 'well, what are you trying to do?' They'll pull something out, sometimes really old stuff they've moth-balled and say 'Will this work?' We're like, 'Yeah, totally!'"

It works the other way too. The retired Eldar Harlequins appeared in *Dark Crusade*, after which GW brought them back into the fold in the Fifth Edition ruleset of the pencil-and-paper wargame. Let's hope the squats will make a similar comeback in the future.



Explosions will be both plentiful and impressive.



Resources must be defended against the enemy.

play that mission and they'd be on the edge of their seat, pupils dilated, every click counts... 'holy shit'..." His arms stop flailing and he retreats from the flashback. "The next mission was make a big base, make lots of guys. You'd see people totally check out."

DOW2 is Carentan extended, extrapolated and transposed onto the *Warhammer 40,000* canvas, with four squads in Imperial power armour and bolters ready to do the Emperor's bidding against those dastardly Space Orks and the others in their fragile alliance of futuristic Greenskins.

Only now though, the squads have names, they talk to each other between each mission, during missions, and, more importantly, they improve.

ALARM CALL

"The core fantasy of the *40,000* universe is few against many," says Ebbert, "a small force making a last stand, overcoming impossible odds. If you look through the artwork from the universe, that's all you see: a few Space Marines on a hill against a huge horde. We wanted to recreate that."

Recognising that they must keep the brutality of *Warhammer* intact, and mindful that players weren't going to be happy buying their way through

THE STORY SO FAR... SPACE MARINES



SPACE CRUSADE
The first interactive
sighting of GW's
Space Marines.

1992



SPACE HULK
Terminators vs
genestealers in your
computer.

1993



CHAOS GATE
A turn-based strategy
effort similar to the
X-Com series.

1998



DAWN OF WAR
The first 40,000
game to really hit the
big time.

2004



Crates explode here,
not just barrels.

of units growing during a campaign," says Ebbert. "So then we thought 'how will we going to make them better?' Well they can get stat increases, they can unlock talents, and they have so many different load-outs so, of course, we'll improve their equipment and unlock new types. It just all fitted

together extremely nicely."

THE W40K RTSRPG

If the squads were single characters *DOW2* would almost be indistinguishable from a role-playing game. Sergeant Tarkus leads your tactical squad; Avitus leads the heavy weapon-wielding Devastator squad; Cyrus heads the scouts as they creep across the map; Thaddeus leads the Assault Squad who jump into battle. You are the Force Commander, a one-man squad – and that already makes five. Your party, or rather, your force, can only contain four.

"You unlock new types of squads, but you always have to choose four – we found it's a magic number," says Ebbert, perhaps alluding to the neat synergy between keyboard shortcuts and the sum total of human fingers necessary to reach them. "When you get it down to



the same series of games played through a new 3D engine, the team considered what had to be changed.

"We identified a problem with real-time strategy, that other genres are providing a superior fantasy," says Ebbert. "We broke it down to three things: starting over just destroys it for most people, no-one likes it, it feels arbitrary, and it ruins any kind of storytelling you are trying to do.

"Secondly the RTS reward structure is awful compared to other genres. They just front-load everything, overwhelm you and there is very little to discover after that. Other genres reward you constantly for playing. The final thing is that it's hard to feel attached to the action because everything is disposable. We felt that persistence across missions would provide that attachment."

Arguably *DOW2* isn't an RTS game at all, as far as the single-player campaign is concerned. Base building has been completely and ruthlessly gutted out. The only resource is the humble experience point, earned in blood. The faster you complete a mission, the more enemy units you destroy and the fewer you expend in the process, the more experience you will receive to spend on your squads.

As a squad levels up, you can spend points on attributes such as Stamina, Ranged Combat, Strength and Will. Depending on the squad you're advancing, different abilities will become available. Over the course of the campaign your heavy weapons Devastator Squad could become, with XP invested in the right areas, an adept close-quarters unit, or simply more proficient with heavier weapons. Your Force Commander, a relentless nutter-bastard with a chainsword, in chaining up 10 points in Ranged, earns the right to wield a heavy weapon. A frightening prospect, if a somewhat distant one. The point is that hybridisation, for years a staple of role-playing, is a central part of strategy in *DOW2*.

"We wanted a sense

Blizzard at dawn

The gathering storm



Relic isn't worrying too much
about the competition.

Having defied the ageing process over the course of a decade to become the world's favourite RTS, the little matter of the approaching sequel(s) means Blizzard's *StarCraft* will be a significant threat to *Dawn of War II* – if not commercially, then certainly critically. Given that *StarCraft* borrowed as blatantly from *40,000* as fantasy *Warhammer* did from Tolkien, it's not surprising that Relic have an opinion on the matter:

"When I look at *StarCraft II* I look at it with two sets of eyes," says Jonny Ebbert. "As a game developer I see incredible polish, incredible attention to detail and amazingly precise control. But I played it at Leipzig and I'd read previews that it was just playing the original, but I had no idea it would be like playing the original. It was a little too faithful. I felt like I should be learning new stuff. So I came away feeling a little befuddled and kinda... disappointed... as a fan. But as a game developer I see superb craftsmanship there."



There's bravery and then
there's outright stupidity.



Terrain will offer tactical options to the smart general.



Cover can be used to your advantage...



...as can sheer weight of numbers.

"Literally out of the blue, a race appears in orbit that fans have been eager to see for four years. Tyranids!"



The Eldar are set to make a return in DOW2.

four you use the squads in their roles. There's at least one mission where you have more – it's a special-circumstance mission – but we've paced out the content in the campaign so that you're always getting cool new surprises."

Ebbert won't be drawn on what these new surprises might be, but given their presence in the multiplayer roster and their necessity to any 40,000 game, Terminator squads, Predator tanks and Dreadnoughts are certain to be available units in the fight across the planets of Aereia and Typhon Primaris.

Although the number of controllable vehicles at any one time will be far fewer, their scale and detail is such that a single tank should be twice as imposing and effective as any armoured rush from *Dawn of War*. Perhaps more importantly, as much thought will have to be put into spending experience points on vehicles and their crew as on your Marine infantry units.

"It's a much more tactical game, using cover, buildings and shot-blocking objects. The abilities you have are usually the tipping point in a battle.

Like the Force Commander's charge, Thaddeus' squad jump, Cyrus' sniper shot, or Tarkus' grenades, those are usually what will tip the battle."

BUGS, BUGS, BUGS

As was the case in the original *Dawn of War* campaign, the only playable faction will be the Blood Raven Space Marines, with the opening antagonists being the Space Orks. Rather predictably the Orks have gotten themselves into an uneasy alliance with some Eldar. Then, literally out of the blue, a race appears in orbit that fans have been eager to see for four years. Tyranids!

For those not fully up on tyranid

anatomy, they are essentially a race of aliens more traditionally set against a team of Colonial Marines led by Sigourney Weaver. Lacking acid for blood, the famous genestealers are no less deadly with their raking claws, hypnotic stare and probing, lashing tongue. Over the years the tyranid race has been expanded to include creatures more inspired by *Starship Troopers'* insectoid antagonists, but they remain, in short, hive-minded and relentless close-quarter specialists that attack in vast numbers.

According to 40,000 doctrine, the first wave of a tyranid attack features fast-moving gaunts, then the more substantial 'stealers turn up ahead of

the main attack. With that process so enshrined and so conducive to the RTS mechanic that *Dawn of War* has fostered, it's still somewhat baffling why it's taken so long for a Hive Fleet to arrive.

"Part of it was that we wanted to avoid *StarCraft* comparisons," says Ebbert, comparing *StarCraft's* Protoss with 40,000's Eldar, and Blizzard's Marines with GW's. "*StarCraft* just lifted the 40,000 universe wholesale and brought it to videogames. Ironically we came out six years later but we had to be careful of looking like a *StarCraft* clone, even though we were the originals."

The main (and more diplomatic) reason for the delay, is that Relic felt that they couldn't do justice to what is, among *Warhammer* 40,000 fans, an iconic faction: "Our animation system wasn't nearly as robust as the one we were developing for *Company of Heroes*. We thought about doing them in an expansion, but then the more we watched how they were developing the Essence Engine, we were like, why don't we just wait for that?"

Ebbert says Essence 2.0 offers



Infantry can fortify themselves in buildings.



Expanded universe

The add-on assault could begin online

Inevitably we can't help but wonder what else Relic have planned for *DOW2*. Will it be another period of standalone add-ons, or is it time for a change?

"We're still evaluating our options," say Relic. "It's a really exciting time in games in that we have options that we didn't have before, like digital distribution that has become much more widespread and getting more so every day."

Although keen to stress that digital distribution is more of an option than a certainty, it does sound like Relic would prefer to go the same way as the offline *Warhammer*, ie: the route of the blister pack: "Downloadable content is exciting because it allows people to get the content that excites them. It's win-win. It lets you pick and choose as a customer and it lets us distribute things in more incremental ways."

more possibilities than were available in *DOW*. Gaunts will leap over walls, while other tyranids will burrow to ambush the players.

"With tyranids we're able to do crazy stuff," he says, "We modelled the gaunts after the little dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*. They stay just out of reach, but are always edging in. If you throw a satchel charge over a wall into a bunch of gaunts and they're in synapse, they'll avoid it. But if you kill the synapse creature, they'll stare at it until it explodes in their face."

MORNING GORY

Tyranids will be available in multiplayer games, as will Eldar, Orks and Marines. Compared to the single-player game, the changes here are less obvious. Base-building is part of the fun, but it has been scaled back: placement of buildings has been eliminated, replaced with upgrading a HQ that deploys units.

Where the focus of the multiplayer game has shifted is in allowing players to choose from a variety of Commander units (one a pure combat-focused Force Commander unit, a

Techmarine that builds turrets, and the support-focused Medic Commander.) The aim is to create an atmosphere of cooperative play. I'd say Relic have a good chance of furthering their reputation for providing memorable multiplayer experiences. Had we been allowed to field tyranid forces during our time with the game, we might have been able to provide a more glowing report.

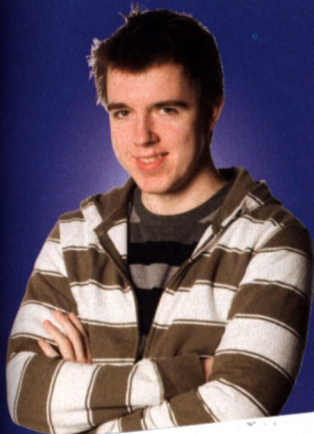
As satisfying as winning a multiplayer game against peers is, and as much as Relic really don't have to do much to keep hold of a glowing reputation, there are months until *DOW2*'s release and, therefore, a prime opportunity to make a spectacular cock-up. The swing away from more traditional RTS to a persistent-unit model might upset die-hards, but having played through 10% of the campaign missions, we've no reason to suspect Relic will screw things up, not on Ebbert's watch. After all, he knows an advanced player when he sees one. **PC7**

Stop! Warhammer Time!

COMING SOON...

TOTAL

TOTAL FILM 150TH ISSUE
DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS
SPECIAL COLLECTABLE EDITION
ON SALE 12TH DECEMBER



PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the
latest PC games

Game bloat

THERE MIGHT BE a problem. This month we've got *Lich King*, *Left 4 Dead* and *World at War*. Last month there was *Fallout 3*, *Far Cry 2* and *Red Alert 3*.

You are, of course, obliged to buy all of them and fling yourself into whatever degree of debt is necessary to obtain every single PC release this month. But no amount of credit can distend the fabric of time to give you the hours needed to finish all of these games to your satisfaction. Can you think of the shame of being asked by a friend for your thoughts on the latest PC game, only to be incapable of giving an informed response? Why, your credibility would be dashed! "You haven't played *Far Cry 2* yet? What are you, some sort of stupid twat?"

My advice is to store these games for the barren release schedules of next year, like a cybernetic squirrel storing data in its titanium tree-hole. And ignore people who call you stupid: they're not your friends.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
deputy 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...



Spore Sins of a Solar Empire The Orange Box

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WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

Blizzard breaks the ice with their chilling expansion to *World of Warcraft*...

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.

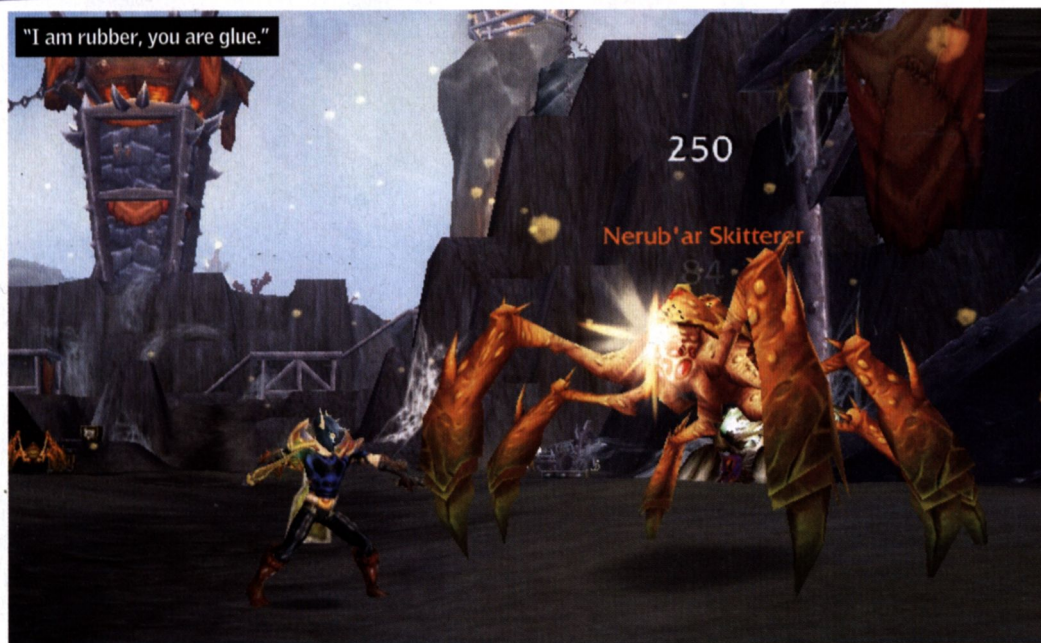


ALSO REVIEWED

- 54 LEFT 4 DEAD**
Can Valve's co-op zombie shooter be every ounce as good as we all thought? Yes.
- 60 CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR**
Is this one trip to World War II too many for the COD series?
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Lara's underwater jaunt: wet 'n' wild or a damp squib?
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PCZONE SWEARS...

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



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

A parka-less *Ed Zitron* braves the frost of Northrend

DEVELOPER Blizzard
PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard
WEBSITE wow-europe.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

An expansion pack to the wildly popular *World of Warcraft* that adds months of new content for grinders.

Minimum system requirements:

XP: Pentium 4 1.3GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a Radeon 7200 or GeForce 2 32MB graphics card or better. Vista: Pentium 4 1.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a Radeon X1600 or NVIDIA 7600 128MB graphics card or better.

HOW IT STACKS

THE BURNING CRUSADE 93%

WARHAMMER ONLINE 92%

WRATH OF THE LICH KING 86%

BELIEVE IT OR not, it's been four years since *World of Warcraft* opened its awaiting arms to would-be adventurers, and nearly two years since its first expansion, *The Burning Crusade*. Regardless of this slightly languid release schedule, *WOW* continues to be wildly popular, and thus Blizzard are willing to swing the punch of an expansion at the most competitive time in gaming.

Expectations are high, otherwise respectable people are preparing to forget to use the toilet and eat, and over 11 million subscribers are desperate to hit the icy terrain of Northrend. Which is why it's slightly awkward to deliver this review. *Wrath of the Lich King*, while a phenomenally tight, well-built expansion, lacks the killer instinct and wow-factor (acronym and adjective) that both *WOW* and *The Burning Crusade* had.

Depending on what character you're

using, *WOTLK* starts off with you either at odds with or working for the Lich King. And if you have a level 55 character, you'll be able to create a Death Knight, *WOW*'s first hero class (see 'Death Knights' box out).

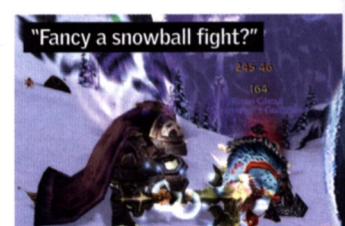
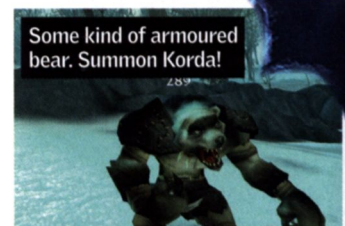
BIRTH OF A KNIGHT


Beginning at 55, the initial experience of being a Death Knight introduces you to the class through a few hours of heavily story-driven quests, beginning above the Eastern Plaguelands in a necropolis known as Acherus: The Ebon Hold. This gigantic floating skull-palace houses your quests, your class-trainers, and the new rune forging (read: Death Knight-only buff application) system. Through these quests you level from 55 through to 59, and acquire as many talents as you would from level 10 onwards.

These quests are well-written, fun, and reasonably dramatic, ending with a large-scale battle against the forces of

the Light, who eventually free you from the thrall of the titular undead demigod, carefully explaining how you can join the goodie-two-shoes Alliance. You'll even find yourself experiencing a little guilt as you do dirty work for Arthas (the titular Lich King) – killing innocents, stealing horses, and generally doing true, no-nonsense evil. This is refreshingly grim in comparison to some of *WOW*'s somewhat reserved content, and will no doubt create a fair amount of grumbling among the moralistic.

Lich King is also an example of how well Blizzard does boxed-in, instance-based content. The instance that you (and other new Death Knights) work within constantly changes as you advance, with once-beautiful countryside becoming plagued and charred. You have a real connection to the world as you progress, gaining gear, levels, talents and a rather





Gloomier than
South London.



***"Wrath of the Lich King, lacks
the killer instinct that both WOW
and The Burning Crusade had"***



"Alright Bill, fancy seeing you here!"

"The Death Knight is an endearing, playable and endlessly resourceful class to play with"

dapper steed, which causes dissonance when you reach the end, to be thrown back into the static, yet enjoyable, content of *The Burning Crusade*. Sadly, once you're past the initial stages, you'll have to move up to level 68 to enter Northrend. And, face it, in the last two years, we've already grinded ourselves enough alts to 70 to get tired of Outland.

Nevertheless, the Death Knight is an endearing, playable and endlessly resourceful class to both play with, as their ability to (when specialised in Blood Talents) solo makes Outland that bit

more palatable. That, and those of you who need to catch up to 68 to hit the icy waters will have a slew of grumpy new friends to level up with.

Entering Northrend is done by zeppelin or boat, depending on whether you're Alliance or Horde, to either the Howling Fjord (accessed by Menethil Harbour or the Undercity) or Borean Tundra (accessed through Stormwind or Durotar). The Fjord's Valgarde houses the Alliance dangerously close to the newly-awoken Viking giants, the vrykul, while the Horde end up doing more bitch

work for the Forsaken at New Agamand. In the Tundra, the Horde's Vengeance Landing is immediately accessible, as is the impressive Warsong Hold, while Valiance Keep is all that stands between the Alliance and a swift reaming by the ever-more-bold undead Scourge.

In comparison to the demonic, explosion-filled war zone that The Dark Portal had waiting for you, your entrance to the North is actually rather relaxed. You'll slip in somewhat unheralded and begin collecting quests and go to work trying to establish your side's agenda. Wherever you choose to land, it seems that old habits die hard – The Forsaken are up to new and unusual ways to make members of the Alliance suffer, while the goodie-goodie humans are trying to get along with the locals and protect their



Dwarves are big ZZ Top fans.

supply routes.

In fact, you'll find a great many of the initial quests eerily similar to your experiences in *The Burning Crusade*, with kill X of Y quests, pick up X of Y quests, and bombing runs against large groups of otherwise unreachable opponents. It's not that these aren't fun or well balanced, it's more that they lack the furious extremes of Outland. While two years ago you were fighting hellboars on



Those tusks are surely more trouble than they're worth.





The Horde now has its very own parachute regiment.



"Now open wide and say aaah."

charred terrain while juddering devices of the Burning Legion fought overhead, a great many of your first hours in Northrend are spent killing the wildlife or scuffling with the locals. This is an expansion of exploration, and feels more like an expedition, not an adventure.

The best example came from my personal experience jaunting around the Howling Fjord in my first few hours. Feeling the advantage of jumping off the beaten track, I sought out Winterhoof, a camp of both Tauren and Taunka (apparently their ancestral cousins), thinking that it would be ripe for the adventuring. On arrival, I received a quest that had me picking up hippogryph feathers around generic, icy/green terrain, amongst a few others involving the killing of elementals and wildlife. I threw up my hands – hadn't I left this shit behind in the Hinterlands?

This isn't to say that *Wrath of the Lich King* is a litany of repetitive boredom – far from it. There are some wonderfully intricate, atmospheric and well-done quests within the Frozen Hell. Zul'Drak, the home of the ice trolls, is simply one of

the coolest environments in fantasy lore. You're sent into gigantic troll ruins at the request of gods (gigantic Totem animals), fighting vicious ice trolls protected by eerie dancing tiki masks with floating spears. Lightning crackles in the sky, and Blizzard do their best to build on the lore started rather briefly in *WarCraft III* expansion *The Frozen Throne*.

MYTH MAKERS

In fact, the best parts of *Wrath of the Lich King* seem to be when Blizzard breaks away from making a successful MMO and focuses on pure, unfettered adventure. Be it the Death Knight quest line, the battles between the Skybreaker and Orgrim's Hammer, insulting a vrykul's mum, or fighting a Scourge Veteran and an army of skeletons alongside a Horde Hero, *WOTLK* shines when it doesn't feel like it's setting up the treadmill for generation after generation.

Lake Wintergrasp is a great example of this. Only accessible past level 77 (when players are able to learn Cold-Weather Flight and mount their respective winged beasts), it's high-level

Death Knights

What *WOW*'s first hero class is all about



The Lich King

Unlocked at level 55, the Death Knight is somewhere between a damage-dealer and a tank, depending on what talent build you go with. You start off in Archerus: The Ebon Hold, an instanced zone above the Eastern Plaguelands, and over the course of the quests (all of which can be soloed) you complete, you'll receive a full set of armour and talents – and be well on your way to level 60. Their abilities are activated using combinations of runes – of which you have two blood, frost and unholy. Death Knights also build runic power, which can be used to power certain abilities, the coolest of which is Death Coil, a spell that either does a big chunk of damage or heals the same damage upon an ally.

Death Knights, depending on their specializations, can step into just about any role. They're the most solo-friendly class in *WOW* – when blood-specialized they can effectively mow on endlessly

through crowds of creatures. They're also able to summon up ghouls from the corpses of enemies and allies alike – and if you're resurrected by a Death Knight using this method, you can control the said ghoul.

Using frost and unholy specialization, the Death Knight can also become a respectable tank or PvPer, though the most fun to be had is through their ability to solo almost without stopping for hours on end – if you're into that, of course.

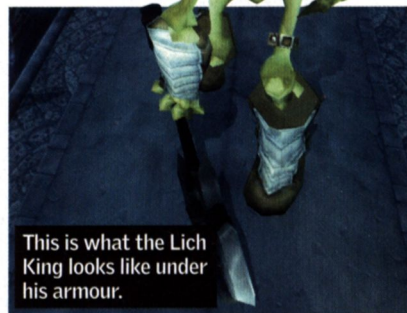
The Death Knight storyline lasts around four hours, depending on how much you get into the lore, and involves everything from rampant murder to using the cannons on a ship to blow up the Scarlet Crusade. It connects to events of *Wrath of the Lich King*, and you'll run into some of the reborn Death Knights in Northrend.



PvP chaos that rewards good teamwork. Either the Horde or the Alliance takes control of Wintergrasp Fortress, where they must destroy the enemy's siege engines and workshops before they can blow the fortress to smithereens.

Unlike your average battleground, Wintergrasp rewards coordination and smaller groups protecting siege weapons, weakening walls, or baiting groups of players into the path of one of the long-range siege weapons' guns. It's important to realise that you can't really win Wintergrasp reliably without playing as a team – have-a-go heroes on their lonesome find themselves torn to shreds, even at 80. No matter how many hours you've denied your spouse or your worklife, you're not going to win in a fistfight with a Demolisher.

This is a refreshing take on PvP, but disappointingly closed-off for the average player. Many will (reasonably) assume that this is a counterpoint to the



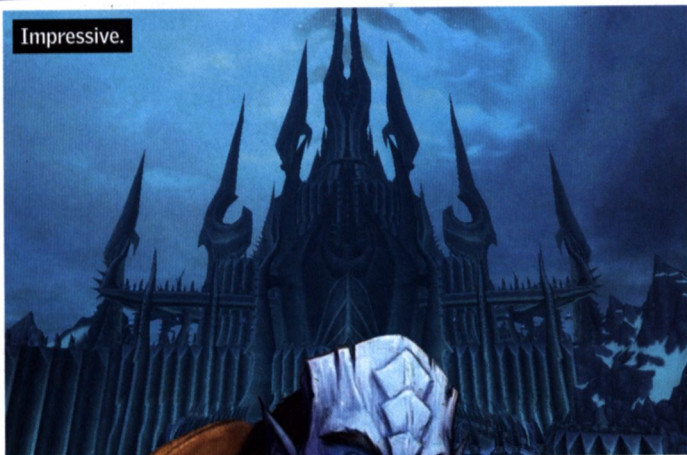
This is what the Lich King looks like under his armour.

PvP-centric *Warhammer Online*, only to find that out of the box they're not going to be able to travel there – especially if they don't even have a flying mount to begin with. What could have been a drop-in, drop-out PvP war zone is now a fun little club for the elite to hang out at – which is, now especially, not what it should be in the face of what Mythic has to offer.

Wintergrasp isn't the only bizarre geographical choice that



Impressive.



"I'm sure we can work things out peacefully..."



Tiki Masks. Possibly the weirdest *WOW* foe ever.

Blizzard made with Northrend.

Before release, it was stated many times that the continent wouldn't be made up predominantly of icy caverns and different kinds of yeti. While this is certainly the case, much of the continent feels put together seemingly at

random. Lush plains roll into barren wastelands, that in turn roll into Scourge-infested terrain, that then subsequently rolls back into icy expanses.

The Borean Tundra and Howling Fjord are the worst examples, and feel rather like eight or nine zones stuck together with varying degrees of success, but much of Northrend lacks coherent artistic direction. Once you leave the loving arms of the Tundra and the Fjord (which takes far too



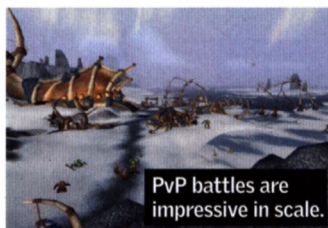
Bruce realised he'd picked the wrong mount to make his getaway on.

Swoop, magic, swoop

Azeroth's magical city takes a trip to the skies

Available either through a quest at level 71 in the Dragonblight or using a flying mount, Dalaran has been raised to above the Crystalsong Forest. It serves as a neutral city, much like Shattrath does in Outland, but with the added difference of being split between the Horde and Alliance, and not being constructed to kill you by making you fall off of ledges. There's just about everything you could need from a quest hub (except an auction house and class trainers – because, we imagine, Blizzard hates us).

Lore-wise, Dalaran's continent-hopping is owed to the anger of the Blue Dragonflight and their leader, raid boss Malygos, and to face off against the Lich King and his Scourge. All that remains of the original city (near the Alterac Mountains) is a bit of purple smoke and a large crater. Nice.



PvP battles are impressive in scale.



Air travel will be epic.

long, in comparison to the transition between Zangarmarsh and Hellfire in *The Burning Crusade*, progression becomes a little more interesting, but it lacks a vigorous, adventure-like buzz. It's more of a stroll through a series of well thought-out ideas that aren't held together as well as they should be.

WOW FINESSE

In all fairness, *WOTLK* does everything that *WOW* has always done very, very well. Zones in and of themselves are always dramatic, and at times stunning, particularly Icecrown and Zul'Drak. A great deal of effort has been made to make zones feel bigger than anything

Blizzard has created before, as is evident from the vertigo you'll get on flying towards the flying city of Dalaran (see 'Swoop, magic, swoop'). Character models are still cartoony and lacking in detail compared to *Age of Conan* and *Warhammer Online*, but environments are still ahead of the competition.

This makes scoring this expansion rather painful. There is so much love for the lands, the lore, and the characters in the *Warcraft* universe, and so many fantastic ideas that exist to go into the Northrend Saga. Somehow, Blizzard managed to take potentially the least interesting idea in history – an entire continent made of ice – and lace it with

fascinating ideas, quests, and areas to explore. The problem is that these ideas aren't held together very well, and players have to push through more ho-hum content than we've yet seen from a Blizzard product. I hasten to add that it isn't bad content, but we're now four long years into *WOW*.

If you're on that boat, and want to continue playing a game that is enjoyable and addictive yet, ultimately, doing the same bloody thing it did on its release, then be my guest. You will love *Wrath of the Lich King*, because it does exactly what many want it to – it elongates a successful game model in a pleasing, easy-to-consume package, much like each year's new *FIFA* and *Football Manager* games. The instanced content is excellent, the Death Knight is a well-balanced war machine that looks good in black, and the storyline – once you hunt it down and wring it out of Northrend – is crafted well enough to sate even the most die-hard lore nut.

But by any standard, this far into the development of an MMO, and with two years since your last expansion, the envelope should be pushed a little. Blizzard could've shaken up the genre here. *Wrath of the Lich King* has had two years to innovate, build and refresh *WOW*, but all it seems to have done is prolong the same experience that people have been waiting to continue for years.

Whether or not that's a bad thing is up to you. **PCZ**

"In all fairness, *Wrath of the Lich King* does everything that *WOW* has always done, very, very well"



WOW's version of the Mines of Moria.



"Thundercats-ho!"

PCZONE

Graphics Grand architecture, cartoony characters
Sound Swelling orchestral pomp
Multiplayer All there is

- ✓ Great lore
- ✓ Wintergrasp is a lot of fun
- ✗ More of the same
- ✗ Bitty, disconnected areas
- ✗ Lacks Blizzard innovation

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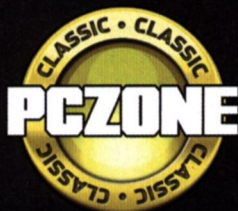
More hmm than wow



LEFT 4 DEAD

Will Porter is the one infected, twisted animator...

DEVELOPER Valve
PUBLISHER Valve/EA
WEBSITE l4d.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

You and three mates must carve through zombie hordes on your way to safety. Shoot them in the head, in the leg... anywhere really. Just kill the bastards.

Minimum system requirements:

Pentium 4 3GHz processor, 1GB of RAM (2GB for Vista), an ATI 9600 or NVIDIA 6600 graphics card. Internet connection is required. A headset/microphone is recommended.

HOW IT STACKS

LEFT 4 DEAD 93%

CRYSIS 92%

FAR CRY 2 90%

ANY GAME WHATSOEVER can immediately be rendered fun through the inclusion of a co-op mode. A game in which four players stand around slowly getting buried deeper and deeper in sand would be fun, for example, simply for the witty repartee of your friends and glib remarks about its (presumed) crap framerates and crippling load times.

A game in which you and your strangely dressed companions stand around next to a tree, discussing bags and boots while waiting for someone else to log on so you can get on with things – that's pretty much *World of Warcraft*, and 11 million people find that fun, so they can't be wrong. In short, even a game in which you're doing the square root of bugger all is fun if you've got a couple of mates in there with you, painstakingly mulling over the manifold reasons why they think you might be gay.

Take this nascent co-op fun factor, blend in some heavy firepower, several drops of Valve patent-pending magic beans, and thousands upon thousands of sprinting zombies that lean into bends as they power towards you while screaming to high heaven, and what you've got is the gaming adrenalin-rush of the year. It can't be denied: *Left 4 Dead* is every single shade of awesome.

For latecomers to the zombie apocalypse, let's run over the basics. America has become infected by a mysterious plague that has turned most of its inhabitants into the *28 Days Later...* variation on the zombie theme (ie not the living dead, but people turned into cannibalistic monsters).

BAD TO THE BONE

You and your mates (mysteriously transposed into the forms of a sexy brunette, a gruff Vietnam veteran, a tattoo-heavy biker and a black bloke wearing a tie) are among the immune

– and in each of the game's four campaigns you must battle your way through five linked areas, each heavy on Infected hordes, towards salvation. The odds are against you. The military aren't coming, but at least someone has left ammunition at regular (if randomised) intervals and Molotov cocktails in every public toilet or two.

Getting down to nuts and bolts, the zombie hordes are magnificent. When they haven't been alerted to your presence they shamle around – fighting amongst themselves, vomiting on the floor, leaning

Interrupting a zombie rave isn't clever.



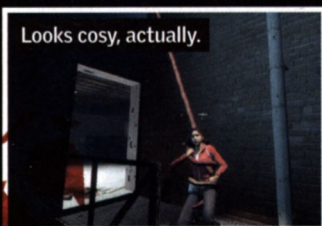
Francis, Bill, Zoey and Louis: the four playable survivors in *Left 4 Dead*.

"It can't be denied: *Left 4 Dead* is the gaming adrenalin-rush of the year and every single shade of awesome"

Or just turn the knob.



Looks cosy, actually.



Meet the Witch

The best spindly hag since Meg and Mog...

The most fearsome of the Infected menagerie is the one you're least inclined to shoot, or indeed shine your gun-mounted torch at.

The more you agitate the Witch the higher she climbs out of her bent, weeping stance – and once she's fully aware of your presence she'll run after the member of your group that startled her and have them incapacitated with a mere two or three swipes of her clawed fingers.

She's genuinely terrifying, and the fact that she's randomly placed means that you'll never quite know exactly where she's hiding – only that the noise of sorrowful wailing and accompanying tinkly music is getting ever louder.

The Witch is the only member of the Infected, alongside the usual zombies, that you can't control in *Versus* mode, but she's an outright force to be reckoned with.

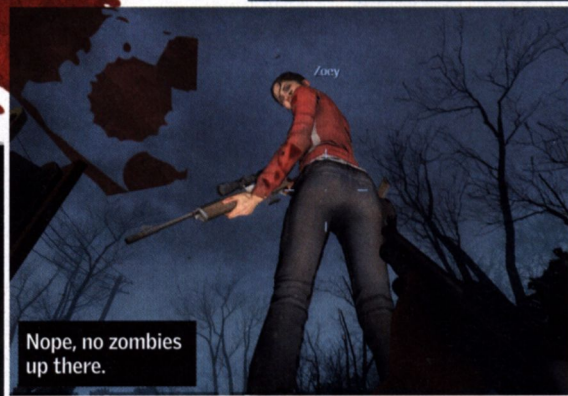
At this point, you're done for.



No, the shotguns don't shoot flames.



Nope, no zombies up there.



"You got red on me!"

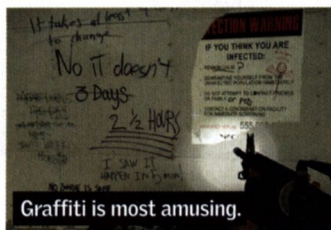


against walls and groaning. Some won't even attack, they'll just stare at the ground as you approach – grunting. Listen hard enough and you'll realise they're actually saying, "Run! Run!"

More often than not though, they'll become enraged and rampage – sometimes spawning from a nearby corner (at the whims of the AI Director mastermind rather than scripting) or summoned by one of your party accidentally setting off a car alarm, getting a rusty lift to stir into life, or being drenched in Boomer vomit.

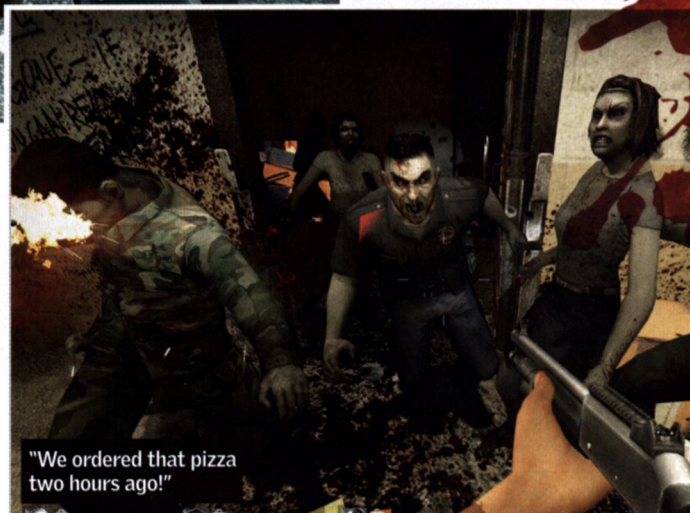
BRAINS AND GUTS

When the Infected rush, it really is a thing to behold – there are often so many on-screen that you're not so much taking aim as hosing an acre of pallid flesh with bullets. Limbs fly, heads are decapitated, you scream and you shout with horror and delight (real-life you, that is) and companions are left wounded on



the floor – letting off pistol shots in a vague attempt to help out. Zombies jump, swarm and climb over everything and anything; fences, walls, rooftops, cars... none are an impediment to an enraged member of the Infected. Bullets go this way and that, and seeing as friendly fire is most definitely on (and impossible to turn off) there's often a lot of accidental damage dealt in the panic.

Some of the Infected though, for biological reasons unknown, have been assigned duties over and above that of your common or garden fast zombie. Some have become the aforementioned Boomer – obese tubsters intent on spewing green vomit over you and your friends to entice the horde, whose vast forms explode into a cascade of guts with a couple of bullet strikes. Meanwhile Smokers fire their tongues at stragglers, dragging them into danger and constricting their breathing; Hunters leap about the place – landing on chests and scrabbling at bellies; and muscle-packed Tanks (think zombie Hulk) appear every now and again to the sound of distant pounding and promptly start knocking cars in your direction.



Each two-hour(ish) campaign is split into five lumps – separated by safehouses where you can relax, heal up and the game can load up the next environment. There are airports, train stations, small towns, cornfields, farmhouses, ominous woods, hospitals, building sites, office blocks and churchyards to navigate (see

When played on higher difficulty levels, these are L4D's true hallmarks of brilliance – you'll experience endless failures, coupled with endless joy and instant reloads.

En route to this there are various other typical zombie situations that are embedded into the campaign's structure,

"Limbs fly, heads are decapitated, you scream with horror and delight as zombies swarm over everything"

'On the campaign trail'), and each campaign is subtly different – in tone and scripted events, if not the ebb and flow of gameplay. Each has a finale in which you must hold out against the Infected until the help you've radioed for arrives – whether you're atop a skyscraper, hiding in a child's bedroom with far too many doors and windows, or standing on a petrol tanker on a broken runway.

away from the machinations of the unseen Infected controller that ensures that zombie (both specialist and run-of-the-mill) placement and high-powered weapon drops are random. You might need to wait for an elevator to arrive, for example, or perhaps to start a car so that it crashes through an airport security desk and simultaneously enrages every zombie in a square mile radius. And as

Zombie rappers?

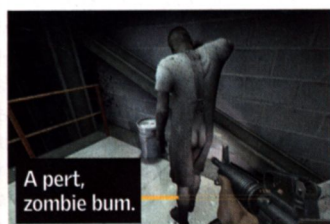




soon as they're enraged, you'll whoop and you'll holler and you'll scream with joy:

If you haven't played *Left 4 Dead* yet, you may well think you've already got the measure of it – but there's a myriad of little touches you won't have counted on. Stuff like the messages written on the walls of safehouses that detail the plight of fellow survivors – messages to loved ones, advice on where to find safe zones or scribbled time-lapsed conversations on the increasingly desperate situation.

The sound effects, meanwhile, are quite magnificently bodily. The Boomer makes belching, burping noises that



almost make you feel nauseous, while the Smoker coughs and wheezes, meaning you're simultaneously put on edge by their proximity and drawn into this most squelchy and corporeal of plagues.

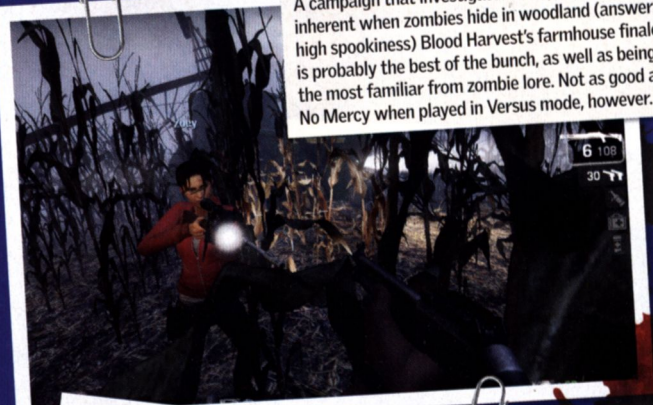
This Valve magic, this thinking beyond the realm of necessity, is simply everywhere. From the sinister music and wailing that accompanies the presence of the Witch (see 'Meet the Witch') to the way the game plays with the 'film stock' quality of the visuals and even the colour palette of buildings and the like to unconsciously inform you of what's going on and the danger levels of the situation you're in. The zombies are even dressed in ways that befit the area you find them in, with patients in Mercy Hospital running around in surgical gowns with their arses hanging out. Even if said hospital seemed to treat only flabby men.

Tiny details are everywhere. At one point I was playing with a fellow reviewer, a nice Austrian



BLOOD HARVEST

A campaign that investigates the spookiness inherent when zombies hide in woodland (answer: high spookiness) Blood Harvest's farmhouse finale is probably the best of the bunch, as well as being the most familiar from zombie lore. Not as good as No Mercy when played in Versus mode, however.



DEATH TOLL

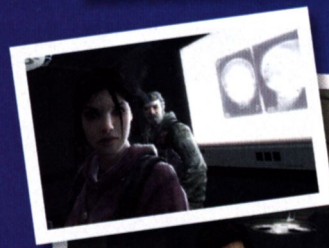
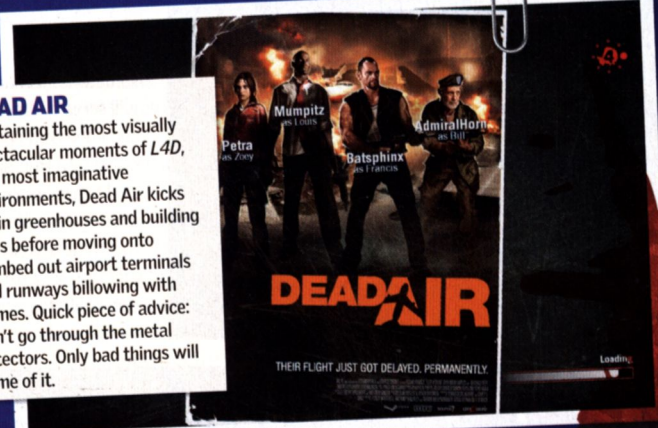
Starting with relatively mundane areas, through roads and drainage systems, as soon as you get to its mid-point church (and resident bell-tolling nutcase) Death Toll lurches into brilliance. A bullet-torn trek through small-town America follows, and a frankly brilliant riverside finale.

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Four different avenues of pain.

DEAD AIR

Containing the most visually spectacular moments of *L4D*, and most imaginative environments, Dead Air kicks off in greenhouses and building sites before moving onto bombed out airport terminals and runways billowing with flames. Quick piece of advice: don't go through the metal detectors. Only bad things will come of it.



NO MERCY

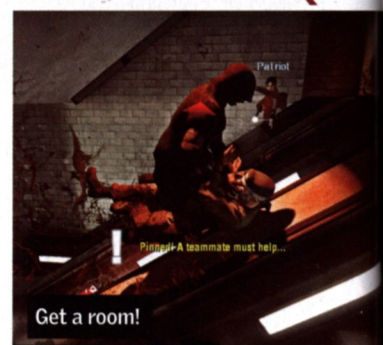
Starting on the roof of an apartment block, then having your team wind their way through underground train systems and sewers, the campaign then has you battle your way through to the roof of Mercy Hospital and duke it out with the Infected until a helicopter arrives to rescue you.



man, and two bots – we had reached a natural pause in proceedings and he called me back to an overflow pipe that was pouring water into a gutter. "Look!" he said, "When I stand under this water, it bounces off my head!" I agreed, as the water was indeed spattering off his sexy Brunette head, just as it would in the real world. We stood there looking at each other for a second or two, but were interrupted by him being pounced on by a Hunter and me



Remarkably in a review already demarked by a somewhat glowing nature, we haven't actually got to the second helping of the game yet – the aspect of it that will give it a dash of longevity over and above the four campaigns that (with the best will in the world) you won't be playing forever. Versus mode lets four of you play the game co-op, as usual, but also lets up to four rivals occupy the minds of the specialist zombies out to thwart you.



much they hate fast zombies, and how they're pissed off that they're not slow, proper zombies. It doesn't always work: sometimes a character will scream about someone being pinned down by a Hunter when said beast's brain has already been blown into the great beyond. But it adds an extra dash of originality to each playthrough.

PLAYING DEAD

If playing as a zombie, you appear at the same place as your living foes, and you have to race off ahead to where they can't see you to enter the game proper. You can also scuttle up certain paths onto roofs or behind breakable walls before starting the hunt – Boomers spew zombie attractant with a left-click; given a decent view Smokers automatically lock onto rivals' necks to snag them with their tongues; and when crouching and left-clicking, Hunters can leap all over the place – ultimately on top of their

unfortunate prey. And every now and then someone even gets randomly selected to play the Tank, and the results are rarely anything but thrilling.

A good team will co-ordinate all four skills, royally screwing over their opponents and killing them before they reach the next safe zone.

When they're dead, or they reach a safe house, scores are collated, roles are reversed and the level is played again – the pattern repeating all the way through to the campaign's finale.

"Hey dead head!"

How to ensure all you meet take a bite of peach...



MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

A zombie aflame is halfway to being a dead zombie. But be warned: a misplaced petrol bomb can end in disaster. The flame spreads wider than you expect and Infected charging through the fire will be able to damage you. Still, it'll look pretty cool.



PIPE BOMB THING

A grenade attached to a smoke detector. If you chuck it when your team are in dire zombie-swamp straits, all your bog-standard aggressors will swarm it and wave their arms madly – until they disappear in a cloud of blood and now-unattached arms.



RUDE SHOVE

Don't disparage the simple medium of the right-click. It'll not only knock wildly slashing zombies away from you, but it'll also detach them from the ledges they're climbing up to get to you and remove Hunters from the chests of your allies.



EXPLOSIVE FURNITURE

Petrol canisters and Calor gas tanks litter your path. If you think a certain doorway or hole in the wall looks like a potential route of undead attack you can lump said explosions-in-waiting to the most tactical locations.



Fact: untucked shirts attract zombies.

At first, it's strange – and a bit weird not only seeing every player through the walls when playing as an Infected, but also the long-ish spawn times and having the computer decide which variant of zombie you're destined to be. Once you get it though, you're hooked. The mood of *Versus*, currently open to only the No Mercy and Blood Harvest campaigns, is markedly different to straight AI-led *Left 4 Dead*. It's pacier and non-stop in its action – human players need to rush to the end of the level, and the Infected are spawning regularly to stop them.

"If playing as a zombie, the results are rarely anything but thrilling: the mood is pacier, the action is non-stop"

Some of the situations that crop up are simply hilarious, my personal highlight being when I had finally staggered into a safe house to join my teammates and turned around to shut the door – only for an Infected player hiding in the shadows (actually the aforementioned Austrian) to fire his projectile tongue at me and drag me

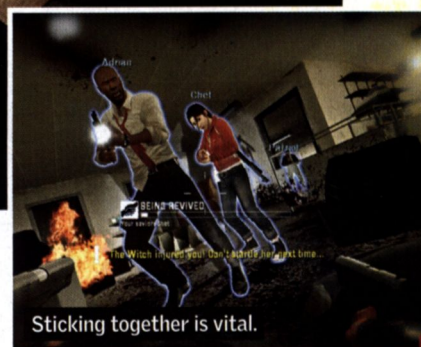
back out into the fray, where someone from Shacknews.com drenched me in vomit. My human allies foolishly ventured back out to save me, but died in the resulting onslaught – losing us the round.

So, does *L4D* have weaknesses? Well, if you're not playing with the full four players in the campaigns or the full set of eight in *Versus*, you won't be having as much fun as you could. The AI that fills the gaps in the absence of a full deck of players just about does the job, but often lags behind or attempts to heal you at entirely inopportune moments – more importantly though, they don't shout

"Boomer!" or "I'm being tongued!" through your headset. Good as the game is, there's no denying that your first play through a level will be the best – and there's no way you should tarnish it with anything less than the full complement of players. Or indeed playing it without a headset to talk to them through – it should be in the system requirements.

Despite its efforts at level randomisation in terms of zombie flow and the fun of *Versus*, I'd also argue that *L4D* doesn't have eternal replay value, as do the likes of *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress 2*. Obviously things can be mixed up in terms of difficulty levels and the people you're playing with, but the more you play the more accustomed you are to which areas are coming next and how they're likely to pan out. Then again, with Valve promising new creatures, new campaigns and existing maps redone with *Versus* capabilities that will be sent to you through the Steam pipe (presumably for free, if you look at the *TF2* model) it does seem a bit churlish to moan excessively about it.

Left 4 Dead is a monumental pillar in multiplayer gaming; playing it without yelping in delight is like eating a doughnut without licking your lips. You honestly won't know the true meaning of friendship until one of your mates has blasted a Hunter off your stomach and patched you up with their own health pack. It almost makes you wish for your very own Infected zombie apocalypse. For a lack of better words, it's groovy. **PCZ**



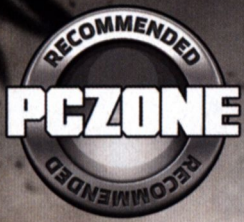
PCZONE

Graphics Understated, beautiful in their complexity.
Sound The best Valve music and SFX yet.
Multiplayer Don't play it any other way.

- ✓ You will shout with joy
- ✓ Contains zombies
- ✓ Clever storytelling
- ✓ More content will be trickled in
- ✓ Excellent *Versus* mode
- ✗ Must, must, must have a full server

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Beg 4 more



AT A GLANCE...

The *Call of Duty* franchise returns to its WWII roots with new Soviet and Pacific campaigns to plough through.

Minimum system requirements:

Pentium 4 3GHz, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), NVIDIA 6600GT or ATI Radeon 1600XT graphics card or better with 256MB RAM.

HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY 4:
MODERN WARFARE **89%**

CALL OF DUTY:
WORLD AT WAR **84%**

CRIMES OF WAR **55%**



POLONSKY: This is bullshit.
POLONSKY: You hear this, Sarge?
 We ain't getting shit 'til tomorrow morning.

Tempers flare when the sandwich shipment is delayed.

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

David Brown is hiding in a Japanese foxhole, polishing his rusty bayonet

DEVELOPER Treyarch PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE callofduty.com ETA Out now PRICE £34.99

THERE ARE A lot of people out there who dismissed *Call of Duty: World at War* almost from the moment it was announced. First of all, there was the return (unwelcome for some) to World War II, a scenario that raised eyebrows and elicited sighs of disappointment from people fed up of fighting Nazis in the fields of central Europe. This turned out to not be so much of an issue, with the setting being a return to the Eastern Front, specifically the Soviet

fightback from Stalingrad, that most incredible of military encounters.

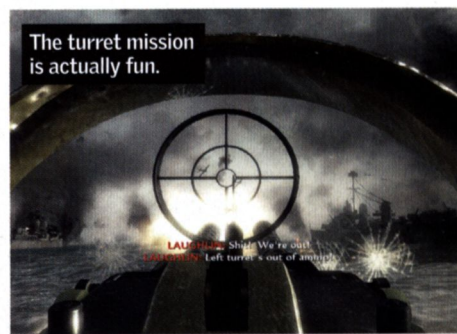
World at War also marks the introduction of a new theatre into the *Call of Duty* recipe book, the exotic dish that is the fight for the Pacific. Most of the discussion has been on how different this new scenario would be – essentially, would it be as refreshing as the modern setting that proved so popular in *Call of Duty 4*?

The answer to that is a positive no, unfortunately. While Treyarch tries very

hard to make the Pacific missions as distinct and individual as possible, they don't succeed. Although Japanese adversaries change the combat dynamic slightly – popping out of camouflaged foxholes, sniping from trees, charging with bayonets

– in the end you're doing the same thing you've done to the Nazis hundreds of times. Having said that, it's surprising to note that it's the Soviet campaign which provides the game's outstanding moments, but we'll come back to this...

The other thing people will have been talking/worrying about is the developer itself. Treyarch, after *Call of Duty 3*, has a notoriously bad image in the gaming community – you'd be hard pressed to find somebody who has been resolutely positive about *WAW*'s prospects since



The turret mission is actually fun.

the game was announced. Certainly, *WAW* has a lot to do to convince the doubters, who could easily opt for one of the many other big-name titles coming out in the run up to Christmas (a lot of which will already have drained the bank balances of potential customers).

You start off captured by the Japanese, watching an American GI being tortured and brutalised by a sadistic guard right in front of you. Refusing to answer his questions, the private has his



"Protect the boxes at all costs, soldier!"

Brothers in arms

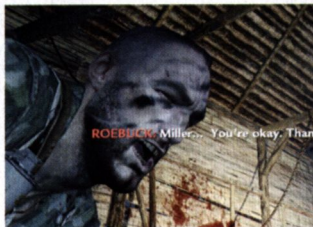
Oldman and Sutherland, your ever-present companions, provide narrative between missions and the driving force for in-game action.



COMRADE REZNOV

(GARY OLDMAN)

Reznov is a bitter veteran of Stalingrad, whose thirst for vengeance leads to some of the most brutal scenes in the game.



SERGEANT ROEBUCK

(KIEFER SUTHERLAND)

Sergeant Roebuck is weary of the conflict, angered by the 'dirty tricks' employed by the Japanese defenders.



REZNOV: In the midst of all the blood, the bullets and the dead... I found that an old friend was still very much alive... Dimitri Petrenko!

The Russian campaign is more visceral than its Pacific counterpart.

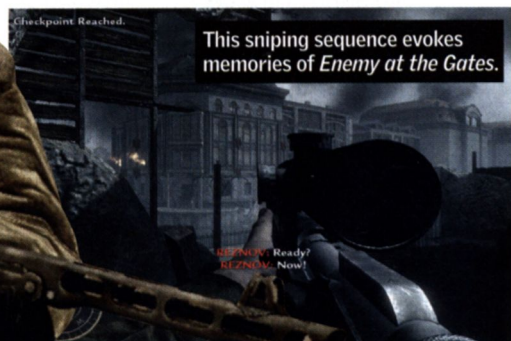


POLONSKY: Hell yeah!

We can only assume something "kick ass" just happened.



"It's only a flesh wound."



This sniping sequence evokes memories of *Enemy at the Gates*.



No COD game would be complete without a beach.

keeping with the rest of the Soviet campaign. You can see why they've added it – to break up the on-foot action and



Tanks are rarely seen in the Pacific campaign.

throat savagely slit by your captors. You realise you are next, but luckily, rescuers (primarily in the form of Kiefer Sutherland's Sgt Roebuck) storm in and prevent your death in the nick of time. From here, you assist in escaping the island prison and returning to the pillowly bosom of US territory, before being shipped out to help the war effort.

Like the death of your character in *COD4*, this particular sequence isn't what you'd expect from a big-budget, consumer-friendly title. In fact, the level of brutality on show – Japanese soldiers getting their limbs blown off, Nazis viciously executing the dying and wounded in Stalingrad – makes the whole experience grittier than ever, certainly more so than any previous *Call of Duty* game.

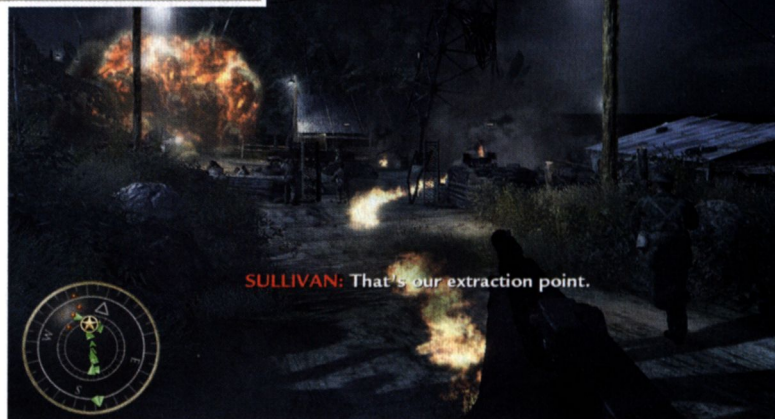
“The level of brutality on show makes this a grittier experience than any previous *Call Of Duty*”

All this happens in the same graphics engine as *COD4*, so you can expect a brilliantly optimised engine that looks gorgeous even on lesser systems (although the character models sometimes look a bit rosey). There are some lovely little touches here and there, like the barrel of your gun being spotted with rain in certain levels. Despite occasions when your surroundings look like they've been shrink-wrapped, the only stage that really lets the side down visually is one where you take control of a Soviet tank rolling about the Seelow Heights outside Berlin. In fact, this level is probably the least interesting part of the game, feeling tacked on and out of

destroying your fleet, while floating survivors plead to be hauled aboard.

This is where one of the game's moral moments rears its head. You can rescue said survivors if you like, but you risk giving the Japanese planes an opportunity to break through. Such morality plays a much heavier part in the Soviet campaign, as Treyarch make sure to highlight the intense savagery of the struggle between the Soviets and Nazis. Some of the set-pieces are on a par with the original *COD*'s Stalingrad level, especially when you're working your way through to the Reichstag in Berlin. The game's engine does a good job of handling the more epic battles, with

smoke, explosions and corpses flying about all over the shop. AA flak zips across the sky, grenades and Molotov cocktails explode all around, while wave after wave of men drop like flies. There are few game series that put you right into the heart of



SULLIVAN: That's our extraction point.

Zombie co-op

How long can you survive against undead Nazis?

One of the most talked-about additions to *World at War*'s multiplayer is the inclusion of a survival mode, the primary objective of which is merely to survive against unlimited waves of Nazi Zombies. One zombie-specific level sees you and your companions trying to keep the undead at bay in a *Night of the Living Dead*-style ramshackle old house. You even get the chance to revive fallen comrades. I wonder where we've seen that before. Completely out of keeping with the serious nature of the single-player experience, this co-op mode provides a relatively amusing diversion from the intensely competitive regular multiplayer element. It won't hold the attention for that long, being very much a one-trick pony, but if you can get three comrades to join you, fun will almost certainly be had.



the battle like this and *World at War* lives up to expectations perfectly.

It even has a D-Day style beach assault, although there aren't any cliffs to climb up this time round.

What *WAW* does very well, specifically in the Soviet campaign, is give you a great sense of the struggle for humanity that is taking place. As you progress, driving the Nazis back behind the borders of Germany, your constant companion, Reznov (played by Gary Oldman), is driven by the desire to crush the 'rats' who butchered his comrades in Stalingrad. At least one other soldier fighting at your side questions the need to kill surrendering troops where they stand, to show some mercy where their enemies had previously shown none – pleas that are subsequently ignored.

Some moments are genuinely thought-provoking, with Soviet troops dealing with a captured German soldier in a ruthless and brutal fashion – one that is celebrated by Reznov, yet may well disgust you, the player. Treyarch have done superbly in refusing to shy away from the madness of the Eastern Front, the horrors of which we in the West can only begin to imagine.

Perhaps the best moment in the game, therefore, comes not from the storming of the Reichstag but when you find three Nazi soldiers at the entrance to a subway. They are of no threat, desperately pleading for mercy. However, surrounding them is a group of Soviet soldiers clutching lit Molotov cocktails, and Reznov places their fate in your hands. I won't splay the scene wide

Rifle grenades are effective at clearing out machine gun nests.



Grim realities

War is hellish and Treyarch makes sure you know it



STALINGRAD

The beginning of the Soviet campaign is particularly harrowing, with Nazi soldiers slaughtering the dying and wounded in front of your eyes.



FLAME THROWERS

Setting Japanese soldiers alight is a necessary evil, although it doesn't make the squealing and thrashing of the dying any more pleasant.



DISMEMBERMENT

Enemy soldiers caught too near grenades (or hit with the most powerful guns) can lose their legs, which stops being funny very quickly.

Press F to swap for Arisaka Bayonet



EXECUTION

Soviet vengeance manifests itself in the ruthless execution of this helpless German soldier, just one of a number of similar sequences.

RUSSIAN SOLDIER: What mercy did you show to our people!



"This is no time for dancing, man!"



Banzai charges are rarely effective.

open for you, but it's enough to say that the outcome is grim either way.

RANK DISSENTION

There's a strange aspect to the missions that sometimes grates a little. It was the same in *COD4*, but is more pronounced this time out. Sometimes the battles seem to progress without any input from you, while at other times, if you don't take the risk and advance yourself, your squad will remain stuck where they are forever. It doesn't really matter too much, but it can still lead to a few moments of "Am I meant to advance now or what?" You might even advance too early and get rinsed by a sudden wave of enemies.

If you're after anything resembling a challenge, it's best to steer clear of the easiest difficulty levels. You certainly

won't get the most out of the battles when you can take ridiculous amounts of punishment before finally carking it. The larger battles are meant to be exercises in intense action, but when you can survive so easily, they lose most of their impact. You'll find yourself virtually impervious to damage, apart from grenades and flamethrowers.

Speaking of flamethrowers, you'll find yourself equipped with one pretty early on in the Pacific campaign. It's devastatingly powerful and makes clearing out bunkers and enclosed spaces a doddle. Unfortunately, due to the nature of your Japanese opponents, specifically their banzai charges, the weapon makes some sections far too easy. When enemies rush right at you, a one-shot-kill weapon takes any sense of fear out of the equation. This could

"In these days of vast free-roaming worlds, the game's extreme linearity is both frustrating and, curiously, comforting"

Checkpoint Reached.
Objective Completed.

The ruins of Berlin are an effective backdrop to the Soviet campaign.

have been solved by making adversaries appear from unexpected directions more often, catching you by surprise, but, disappointingly, this rarely happens. They usually just pop up right in front of you, virtually pleading to be roasted alive. You can also use the flamethrower to burn the long grass the Japanese sometimes hide in, as well as the trees enemy snipers call home. However, due to the nature of the game engine, it doesn't feel as natural as the flame-bringers in *Far Cry 2* or even *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

World at War is still as resolutely linear as its predecessors, except for one or two moments where you get to choose whether to go right or left.

In these days of free-roaming worlds and vast environments, the extreme linearity is both frustrating and, curiously, comforting. Sometimes you don't want to be overwhelmed by side quests or options – you just want to get stuck into the combat. When you get that particular urge, the *Call of Duty* series remains at the top of the pile, providing one

of the most tightly scripted and linear gaming experiences money can buy. Nevertheless, some more choices here and there would have been nice, even if it was just along the lines of a branching campaign that involved some form of decision making on your part.

Multiplayer has been expanded since *COD4*, with the addition of a co-op mode, vehicles and a Nazi Zombies mode unlocked by completing the single-player campaign (see 'Zombie co-op'). There will also be the usual Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag modes, plus the usual perks and achievements for people with far too much time on their hands.

The multiplayer beta that has been doing the rounds hasn't gone down too well with some fans, specifically veterans of *COD4*, who have complained it is effectively just a reskinning of that game's own multiplayer section. Even if the more

Death Cards

Rummaging around in bins yields curious rewards



Scattered about the levels in *World at War* are Death Cards that unlock special abilities in the multiplayer co-op modes. Most have positive and negative consequences – one gives you the

ability to heal yourself only by killing the enemy, while another replaces your guns with a bunch of rocks – and will potentially extend the appeal of the co-op modes substantially.

competitive elements of *WAW*'s multiplayer don't go down too well, the co-op side is, as such modes tend to be, great fun.

What we have here is an excellent game that will suffer not because of its quality or lack of such,

but because it is inevitably going to be compared to its immediate predecessor. Gameplay-wise, there is little to separate the two titles in terms of quality. Both are perhaps the finest current examples of tightly scripted, linear rollercoasters, packing in as many extraordinary moments into their relatively short timespans as possible.

World at War is a bit more expansive than *COD4*, in terms of both level design and length. So the fact there are so many moments I'll remember long after the game's credits is a testament to the cinematic quality of the game. Sadly, for some players the fact they'll feel like they

are playing a mod of *COD4* will be too difficult a barrier to overcome, especially when the scenarios are, at least initially, unexciting prospects for a *COD* veteran.

Nevertheless, if you can get over these obstacles, you'll find yourself enjoying yet another example of exhilarating action.

While *World At War* isn't original and has moments lacking in inspiration (the tank section, ugh) it has refined the linear World War II shooter template as much as perhaps it can be. **PC7**

Every great FPS needs at least one toilet.



PCZONE

Graphics Mostly gorgeous
Character models
ropy
Sound Excellent
Multiplayer *COD4*-style, co-op
and zombies

- ✓ Superbly atmospheric
- ✓ Doesn't pull any punches
- ✓ Reinvigorated Soviet campaign
- ✓ Epic battles
- ✗ Too similar to *COD4*
- ✗ Pacific campaign not revolutionary

84

Brill but familiar

Some of the scenery is gorgeous.



"My face is up here..."

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

David Brown revels in the slaughter of wild animals

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE tombraider.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

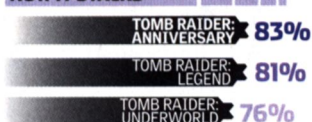
AT A GLANCE...

Lara returns in her latest acrobatic romp, showing off new moves, equipment and a renewed interest in killing animals.

Minimum system requirements:

Intel Pentium 4 3GHz or AMD Athlon 2.5GHz, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), GeForce 6800 GT or ATI 1800XT.

HOW IT STACKS



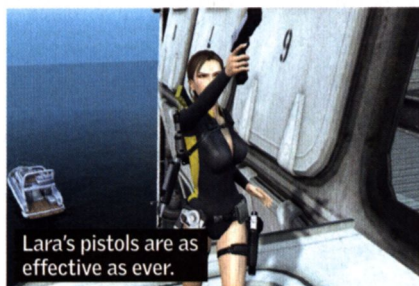
TOMB RAIDER FANS who happen to have glanced down at the score will know that Lara's latest outing is a decent game, one that will more than satisfy their chasm-defying action desires. Crystal Dynamics has succeeded in improving upon its template for the 'new breed' of *Tomb Raider* games, although all but the most ardent Lara worshippers will notice there are still things that could turn off the casual observer.

By casual, of course, I mean somebody who has perhaps dabbled in

the series before, rather than someone expecting Lara to take a break mid-adventure in order to work her way through a bumper book of Sudoku.

Anyway, what we have here is your typical *Tomb Raider* romp, with our heroine clinging to precarious ledges, sliding up and down poles and falling gracefully to her death on numerous occasions. Her adventures span the globe once more, with the jungles of Thailand and Mexico balanced with trips into a submerged temple and the crypts of Croft Manor itself.

Lara and her environs are at their most gorgeous in *Underworld*, especially with all the twiddly graphical effects ramped to the max. There are also some pleasing little touches here and there that add to the experience, such as Lara getting muddier the more she rolls about. Incidentally, as a passing Xbox owner reliably



Lara's pistols are as effective as ever.

informs me, the PC version is significantly more impressive in the visuals department than its console counterparts, with underwater sections in particular being much easier to navigate. However, as with all *Tomb Raider* games, it does sometimes feel like you would be better off ditching the trusty mouse and keys in favour of an Xbox 360 controller.

NORSE FROLICS

Still, those who worked their way through the other Crystal Dynamics Lara games without a pad won't find anything to make them tear their hair out. There will, as with most platform games, be times where you are stumped as to where to go or jump next, but never will you feel completely at a loss, especially with a 3D wireframe map being handy.

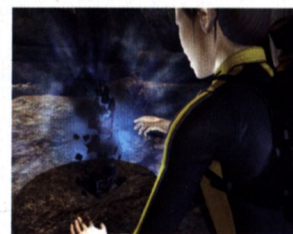
If we're being honest, the plot is pretty ludicrous. Norse artifacts hidden under a Buddhist temple in Thailand?





Smasher

Protect and preserve? Nah...

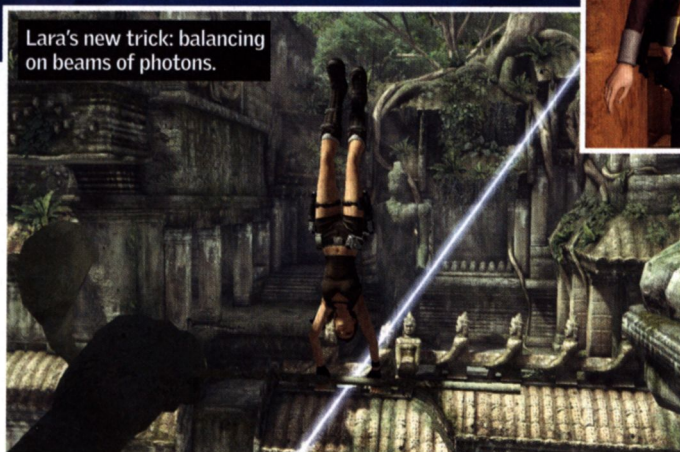


Lara Croft is an archaeologist, supposedly concerned with the preservation of historical artifacts and the sites she finds them in. So why does she care so little for the numerous pots and earthenware containers strewn across *Underworld's* levels? Some of them contain shiny things to collect, but still, we can't help but think Ms Croft will be expecting a sharp letter of condemnation from the World Archaeological Congress in the near future. Would it really have been that hard to include an artifact preservation mini-game?

Thor's relics give you super powers for a short period.



Lara's new trick: balancing on beams of photons.



"MOTHS! RUN!"

No problem. Some more in Mexico? Sure, why not? It doesn't really matter, as you aren't coming to a *Tomb Raider* game for Proustian complexity, but a little more logic would have been nice. Importantly, purists won't feel it is out of keeping with the series as a whole.

What you do come to the game for is the action and *Underworld* rarely disappoints, though the niggles of pretty much every 3D platformer are present and correct. Sometimes you'll find Lara hurling herself into space in the opposite direction to the one you indicated and the whole thing doesn't feel as seamless as the *Prince of Persia* trilogy.

Combat is also pretty drab, with auto-aim being the order of the day. Granted, this does help with annoyingly small opponents like bats and spiders, but humans and larger animals require very little skill to defeat. Pretty much the only way you will perish in these bouts is if you get cornered by a couple of tigers or if you get stuck on the scenery.

This leads me onto the area that will probably draw the most criticism – the camera. Unfortunately, there are times when your efforts will be thwarted by it, leading to a good many hopeful leaps into space. While this is less of a problem than in the past, it still gives moments of exasperation. Similarly, it can also be relatively disorienting when Lara moves close to certain walls and objects, jerking around like an epileptic breakdancer.

Nevertheless, you won't come away from *Tomb Raider: Underworld* with any real sense of dissatisfaction. This sounds silly, considering how much I seem to have criticised the game, but Crystal Dynamics has laboured to make this, at the very least potentially, the best *Tomb Raider* title of its generation, although sadly the flaws that were forgivable in previous years are less so this time round. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Some stunning vistas and scenery
Sound Perfectly adequate
Multiplayer Flip all

- ✓ Excellent platforming action
- ✓ Beautiful scenery
- ✓ Probably the best recent Lara outing
- ✗ Dull combat
- ✗ Camera problems

76

Excellent despite niggles

 **pcspecialist.co.uk**

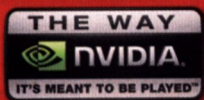


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Jimmy slides up bannisters, Mary Poppins style.

BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION

Jon Blyth rejoins the class of 2006

DEVELOPER Rockstar Vancouver
PUBLISHER Rockstar
WEBSITE rockstargames.com/bully
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

The unfairly controversial PS2 classic – which took Rockstar's *GTA* template into the playground – finally makes it to the PC. Dated, but still great.

Minimum system requirements:

Pentium III 800MHz or equivalent,
256MB RAM, and a 32MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

GTA3 92%

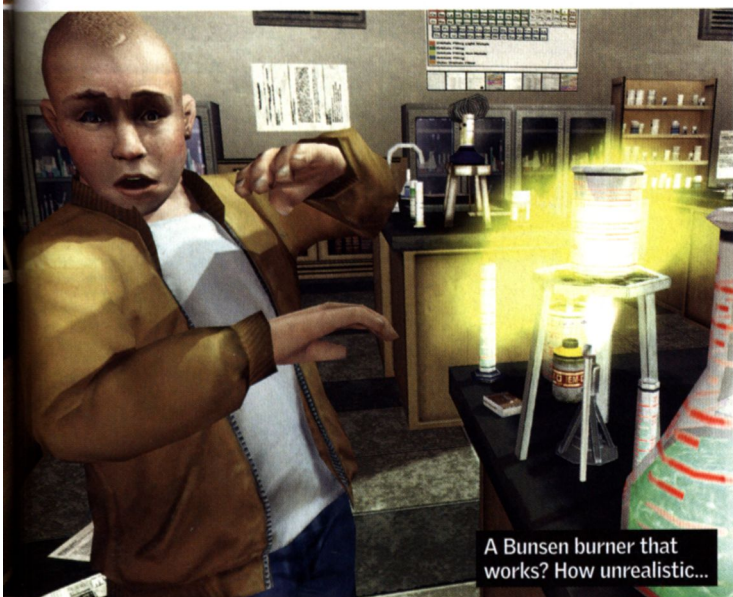
BULLY 79%

MANHUNT 74%

WAS IT REALLY only two years ago that Rockstar rebranded this game *Canis Canem Edit* for the PlayStation 2 to pacify a bunch of angry ban-minded tabloids, who wouldn't think past that single word *Bully*? Was it really only eight months ago that the *Scholarship Edition* appeared on the Xbox 360? It feels like this game's been around for a decade – perhaps that's something to do with all that controversial publicity that Rockstar seem to suck up like profitable shock Hoovers. It's good that the game's finally made it, but it's not the flawless migration of *GTA3*.

So, if you haven't already, meet Jimmy Hopkins, a hard, defiant, but not evil boy, who's been placed in Bulworth Academy by parents who don't seem to care much what happens to him. Being the new kid is never the best position, and if it were real, your first hours in *Bully* would be enough to grind you down. Girls jeer, you don't register with the Jocks, and even the nerds are brave enough to have a pop at you.

Fortunately, at least for the first chapter, Gary takes you under his wing, guiding you through his brand of amoral, medicated missions, in which you play along with his Christian-Slater-in-*Heathers* attempts to rule or destroy the school. Sure enough, they're fetch, fight and escort missions, but the world is full of things to do, and the rewards are real – people become well-disposed to you and the school's factions become less hostile. It happens slowly, but Bulworth becomes a more tolerable place once you've built a reputation.



A Bunsen burner that works? How unrealistic...



Punch the chubby kid!



Playground japes.

scenes and storylines are fantastic. There's a huge reliance on stereotype and gross-out, but with so many characters, you can forgive the game for relying on familiarity. But there's also a heap of humanity. It's hard not to feel a pang of sympathy for the thieving girl whose locker you're raiding when she comes back into the toilets for a bulimic purge. And Jimmy's speeches are unsentimental, but occasionally kind.

Controls, as mentioned above, have been literally translated from a console

This is school, so there are classes – which you can ditch, if you don't mind getting chased. If you're on a mission when there's a lesson, and you get busted, the mission will fail, and you'll be dragged back to class. The days seem full. Have you time to squeeze a mission in between classes, or a few races after school? *Bully* is full of things to do; the world may be smaller than in Rockstar's other games, but it's packed solid.

You'll actually want to go to classes, because the bonuses are useful. Smooth-talk ladies and avoid violence with English; build bikes in Shop; increase your health bonus in Art. It almost feels like you are being encouraged into thinking an education is somehow useful. None of the ban-this-filth platoon said that, because – of course – they would have to play the game to find this out.

Even if the missions aren't exactly groundbreaking, and suffer from the mini-map checkpoint-chasing that is almost Rockstar's motif, they're fun in the schoolyard setting. Plus, the cut



Prefects are more hunter/gatherer than philosopher.

Tickets Please

I want a go on the big wheel

The carnival has a large set of minigames, ranging from the simple button mashing of the Test Your Strength machine, to a full go-karting mini-game. Outside, there's also a top-down 2D-racer – and once you unlock the beach house by punching a bunch of aggressive posh kids, you get access to the modern 3D version of the game. Later on, unlocking the nerd's dungeon as a place to rest gets you a new game: *Consumo*, a simple affair that might have passed for a coin-op in the '80s. They're all great little distractions in a big game that's packed solid with just that.



pad onto the keyboard. Once you've changed the mouse sensitivity settings, it'll be bearable, but it's still only a mixed success. Picking locks feels possible, but imprecise. English lessons are bizarre – selecting letters using the direction keys? On a keyboard? Did no-one realise there was an easier way to choose letters, staring directly at them? Also, the mapping of the console D-pads to Shift, Alt, Space and R – around the WASD direction keys, in other words – feels perverse. The eccentricity of the targeting system (it was always too easy to accidentally target and attack the person you're supposed to be helping) is amplified on the PC and the bicycles send the camera into a troubling spasm. It's strange, coming to a game, knowing you love it – but also knowing that it's taken so long

to get here, and especially post-*GTA IV*, it's almost certainly going to look dated. Even resenting the time it took, if I'm confessing to a bit of platform-based petulance.

LOVELY BIT OF BULLY

Bully is undeniably a fantastic sandbox game. It follows the *GTA* template of missions, gangs, and world expansion, and adds such a glut of things to do, that you'll be shocked how slowly the percentage complete counter rises, and be tempted to play the game in one 20-hour sitting. *Bully* has a large and unlikely heart, and a stubborn reluctance to fit onto a mouse and keyboard. It's a great game; but this release is too long after the PS2 version, and *GTA IV*'s RAGE engine, to make an impact. **PCZ**

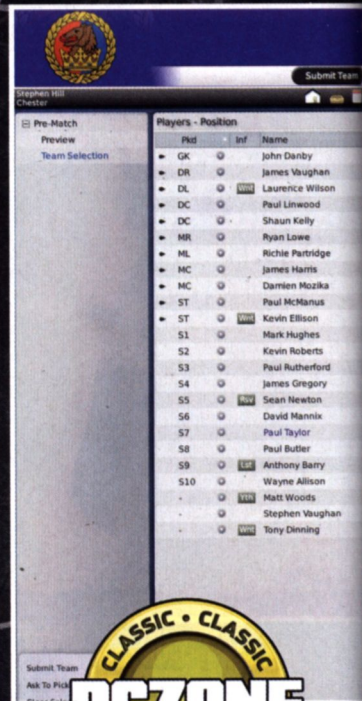
PCZONE

Graphics Dated spade-hands
Sound Short music loops and heavily repeated
Multiplayer None

- ✓ Huge game
- ✓ Shedloads to do
- ✓ Good script, great acting
- ✓ Full of personality
- ✗ Uncomfortably dated
- ✗ Doesn't play happily with the mouse

79

Held back a year



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

Steve Hill prowls the touchline of a brave new world...

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER Sega Europe
WEBSITE footballmanager.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99

AT A GLANCE...

The venerable football management behemoth surprises everybody by finally embracing newfangled 3D graphics.

Minimum system requirements:

1.4GHz Pentium 4 (2GHz for Vista),
 512MB RAM (1GB RAM for Vista),
 and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009 **90%**

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008 **90%**

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007 **90%**

STOP! BEFORE ALL you goblin-fanciers blankly flick past this review in search of mystical worlds, take a minute to gaze in wonder at the surrounding screenshots. For years you have dismissed *Football Manager* as a glorified spreadsheet. Even the introduction of an overhead 2D match engine couldn't sway you from pixie boots and leprechauns. But look now, there are actual human footballers with shirts and hair and skin, some of which even relate to their real-life counterparts.

Yes, the king of football management sims has finally stepped into the '80s with the advent of a 3D match engine, adding a further facet to what is arguably the deepest role-playing game ever made. That role is the thankless job of a football team manager, and until this year the feckless overpaid players in your charge existed only in your mind, or as a series of dots on an overhead view of a pitch. Now finally made flesh, it's like

going through the looking glass, and in gaming terms is a revelation akin to the advent of colour television.

Pah, the naysayers will scoff, 3D football management games have been around for decades, the vast majority of them looking considerably better than these rancid Amiga-standard graphics.

PARK LIFE

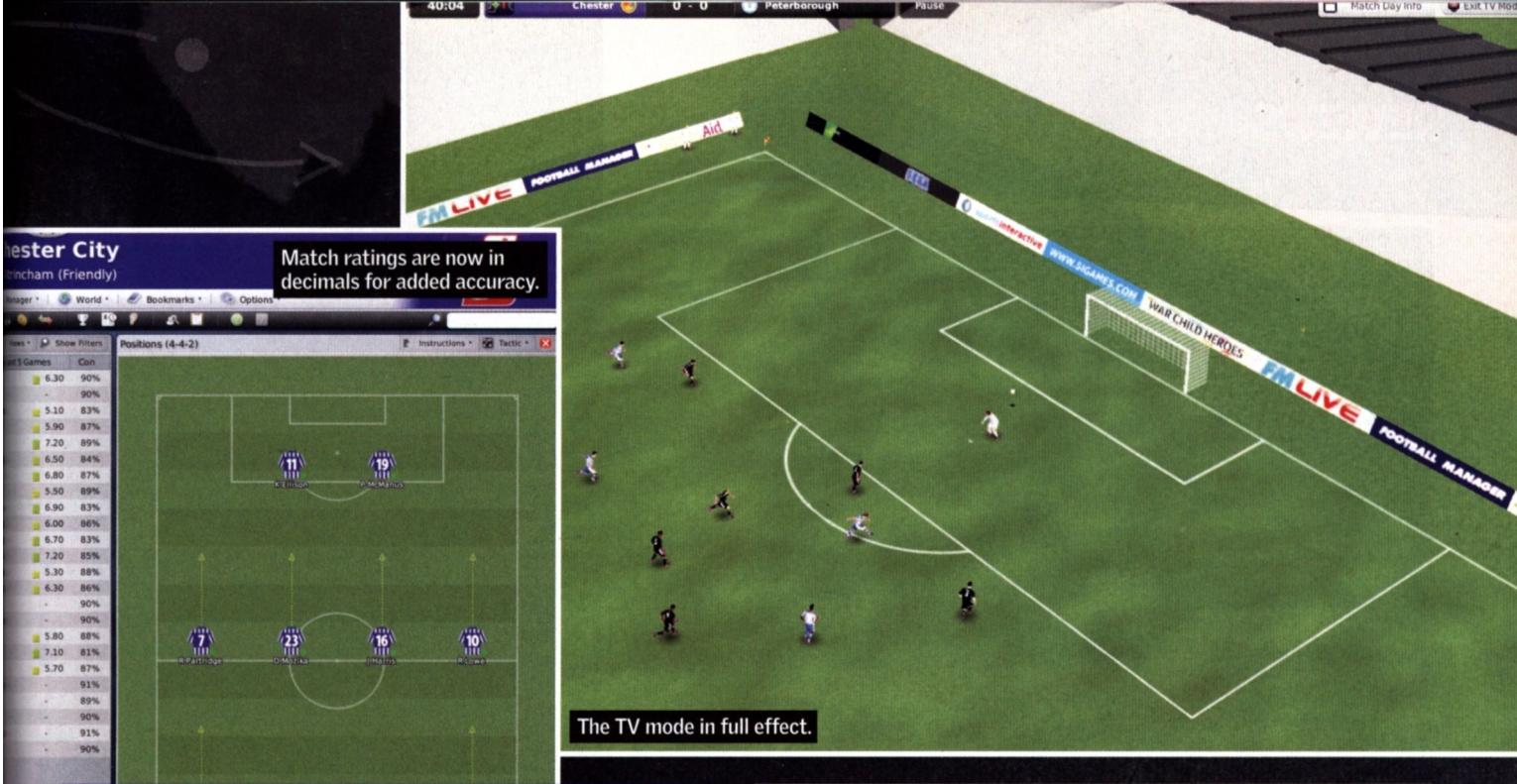
The difference of course is that all other football management games are dog shit, the fancy 3D graphics doing little more than papering over the cracks of a paper-thin match engine and a fundamentally flawed management model.

In *FM 2009*, the point is that the players are doing exactly what the dots were doing in previous versions of the game; it's just the circles have been made flesh through a bit of motion capture courtesy of Sega Japan's *Virtua Striker* development

team. So while purists may fear that the series has sold out, rest assured that the integrity of the match engine has in no way been compromised. And besides, bluff old traditionalists can still use the 2D view. In fact, if your laptop is more than a few years old, you'll have no choice.

With the concept behind the leap into 3D hopefully established, what is the experience actually like? Much as we love the game, let's not pretend that it's like watching *Match of the Day*. Rudimentary at best, the graphics occupy the middle ground between the original *Football Manager* on the





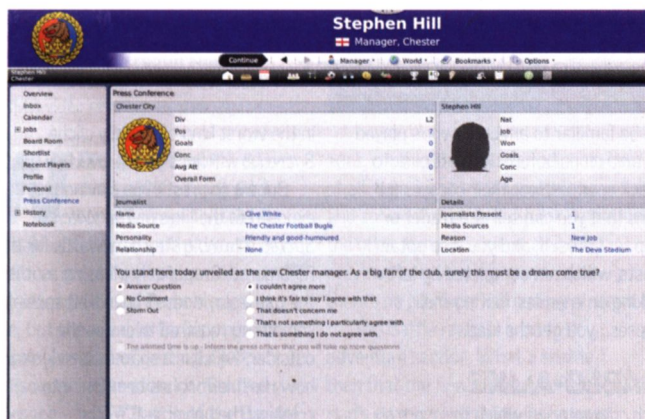
The TV mode in full effect.

Media relations

The power of the press

Reflecting the current position of the media in football, *Football Manager 2009* recreates the pressure put on managers by the salivating dogs of the press. You are asked to attend press conferences and face a grilling from a variety of outlets, from the national papers to local

rags, with your answers having an effect on how the players react, for instance. It's a multiple-choice format, but the Additional Comments area lets budding Joe Kinnears type in a stream of foul and abusive language. It's possibly the most fun we've ever had.



Spectrum, and the latest version of FIFA. While remaining watchable, it's not without its quirks, with players getting tangled up in each other and passing the time with the odd spot of moonwalking. In general, it takes some getting used to, particularly when the action freezes in order to advance the clock. In the previous text commentary or 2D modes, it wasn't particularly noticeable, but seeing footballers suspended in mid-air while the game zips forward to the next highlight does tend to make you think it's broken.

"The 3D match engine adds a further facet to what is arguably the deepest role-playing game ever made"

Either way, the action can be watched from a variety of vantage points, from the main stand to behind the corner flag, or even an overhead *Sensible Soccer* view. And when in full-screen TV mode, a variety of so-called widgets can be displayed, showing player ratings and so on, although it gets a bit cluttered with more than two or three open at once.

While it's tempting to think that with all the attention on the 3D engine the rest of the game has been neglected, as ever the tireless drones at Sports

Don't panic, all the usual stuff is still in there.

Interactive have been ceaselessly building upon perfection, with such evolutions as increased Assistant Manager feedback, more media involvement, and an overhauled transfer system.

And as ever, it's the same life-sapping experience it has always been. As the nights draw in and clinical depression due to a lack of socialisation rears its ugly head, it's reassuring to know that there's a place you can go where your actions mean something and people know your name, even if it is just some pretend footballers with the wrong coloured hair. There's an argument that says living in this dismal country is only made bearable by the televised sporting calendar, and the annual release of *FM* almost falls into this category, providing a swathe of green for men to stare at for hours on end while the rest of the world gets on with allegedly important stuff.

Even without the 3D engine, *Football Manager 2009* is still fully deserving of its classic rating, providing a staggeringly comprehensive simulation

of the complex world of management. We predict a few patches before the match engine is fully functioning, but even in its current state, it tangibly enhances the experience. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Rudimentary
Sound Functional
Multiplayer Irksome

- ✓ New 3D match engine
- ✓ Hugely absorbing
- ✓ Massive database
- ✓ Highly authentic
- ✗ A bit glitchy

90

3D is the new 2D



Inquisitors can piss wherever they like.



"My mother was right. Doing... that really did make me blind."



Rugs cheer up any cave lair.

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

David Brown sustains repetitive strain injuries in an RPG clickfest

DEVELOPER Ascaron Entertainment
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE sacred2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Hardcore Germanic roleplaying prequel with a distinctly *Diablo*-esque feel.

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



SACRED 2: FALLEN Angel is epic in pretty much every sense of the word. For instance, it has a power metal theme song, penned by Teutonic veterans Blind Guardian. The terrain measures an impressive 22 square miles, there are 200 character levels to attain and the number of quests approaches 500 or so.

The question is whether you will stick around long enough to really get to grips with the game's impressive array of content. If you liked *Diablo* and are salivating at the prospect of getting back into its dungeons, *Sacred 2* will keep you going until *Diablo III*'s release. If you didn't, *Sacred 2* will be an experience comparable to having your eyes pecked out by eagles.

Set 2,000 years before the events of the original *Sacred*, the plot centres around a struggle to control the world of Ancaria's most important resource: T-Energy. You are thrust into this world as either a follower of Light or Shadow, with subsequent events being determined by your choice. For example, choose a Light character and you will be attempting to stem the chaos and bring peace. Go the other way and your destiny will be to further destabilise the situation. How you go about doing this

will be familiar to anybody who's played a *Diablo* clone before. You left-click to attack enemies, loot their corpses for items that you can sell at a trader or keep for yourself, and you also obtain quests, which are completed by left-clicking on enemies, looting their corpses... you get the idea.

DIABLO-ALIKE

Each character, of which there are six, has a variety of unique abilities and specialities, meaning that there's substantial replay value if you're insane enough to want more. You can even take your character online for PvP and co-op PvE action, if that takes your fancy.

The major problem with this game is one of perception – if you don't mind hideously repetitive clicking, then you'll be in your element with *Sacred 2*. Likewise, if you don't mind a game mired

in the worst kind of fantasy cliché, *Sacred 2* will float your proverbial boat.

But for the rest of us, having been exposed to the likes of *The Witcher*, *Sacred 2* is a big step backwards for the RPG genre. Graphically pleasing as it is, the gameplay doesn't have that special something required to entice the outsider, which is a shame considering how much effort has been put into creating the universe. **PCZ**



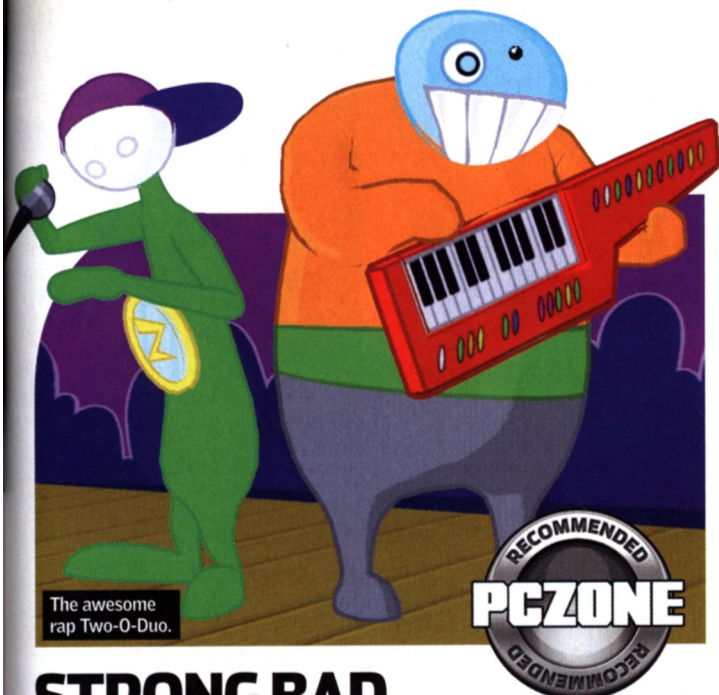
"I told you, I want a bigger kennel."

PCZONE

Graphics Vibrant and colourful
Sound Terrible voice acting
Multiplayer Co-op and PvP

- ✓ Vast amount of content
- ✓ Online co-op
- ✓ It's like *Diablo*
- ✗ It's like *Diablo*
- ✗ Clichéd

65
Bored Guardian



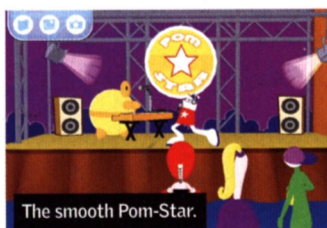
The awesome rap Two-O-Duo.

STRONG BAD EPISODE 3: BADDEST OF THE BANDS

Are you ready to rock?

DEVELOPER TellTale Games
PUBLISHER TellTale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$8.95 (£5.00) or five episodes for \$34.95 (£22)

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



The smooth Pom-Star.

WITH A NEW month comes more great *Strong Bad* comedy from Telltale. In a break with (two months' worth of) tradition, it's not an antagonistic email that sets up *Strong Bad's* story this time, but the need to fix his precious console. Instead of getting a job, he discovers a far more convoluted approach – hold a Battle of the Bands!

The story's fairly obvious (persuade bands, sabotage bands) and there aren't really any new characters or locations, but I'm not going to call it stale because it's just too damn funny.

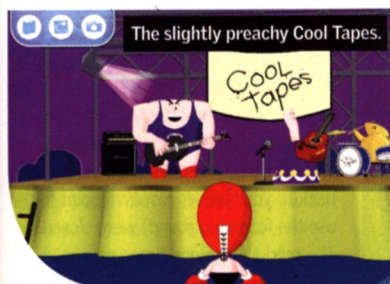
The puzzle quality is a little inconsistent however. Sometimes I got stuck because they were too simple. I'm thinking of one particularly early puzzle where I was scratching my head for

ages, cursing the hints for being no help at all, then I just tried something random and solved it. The semi-titular Battle, on the other hand, is superb, and most previous locations are removed so there's no pointless retreading of steps.

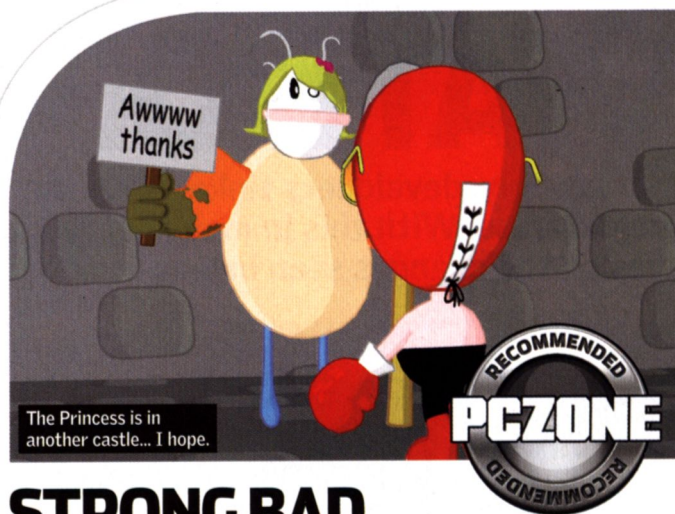
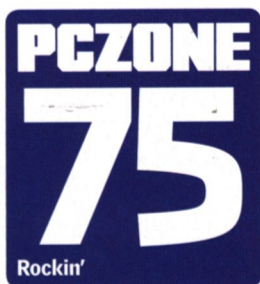
The Battle really is a perfect adventure section. What a shame then that the final challenge, *Strong Bad's* own performance, just consists of clicking things. It is all really straightforward, but then it so perfectly builds to a really amusing conclusion that you won't mind.

Any problems melt away fast with writing as sharp and hysterical as this. Although admittedly that means nothing when the best line is "Jibbly jibbly jibbly jibbly".

Chris Capel



The slightly preachy Cool Tapes.



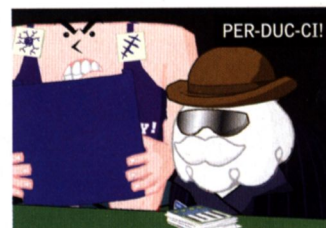
The Princess is in another castle... I hope.

STRONG BAD EPISODE 4: DANGERESQUE 3

You're going to have to JUUUMP!

DEVELOPER TellTale Games
PUBLISHER TellTale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$8.95 (£5.00) or five episodes for \$34.95 (£22)

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



WE'D SAY THE last three *Strong Bad* episodes didn't really need you to be a fan to enjoy them. *Episode 4* still doesn't, but if you don't know about *Dangeresque 2* or *1* (in that order) there'll be a minuscule enjoyment loss.

The *Dangeresque* films are extremely low-budget actioners starring *Strong Bad* as the titular sunglasses-wearing cop. The third was promised in 2004. It's a bit late, but it was worth it, as this is most fun game in the series so far.

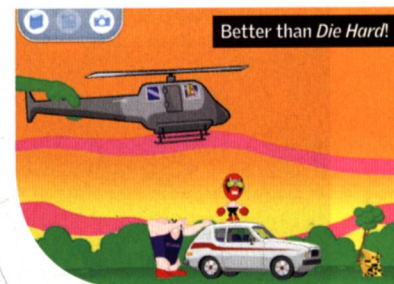
The entire game is the movie, creating a completely different look and feel from earlier episodes. It's fun seeing how previous locations have been (badly) adapted to be film sets, like five different countries being represented by the same bridge.

Keeping the crappy film motive, there are cuts, edits, stunts, even shaky-cam on close-up shots. It's put together so convincingly (the game, not the film being played) and is packed with so much point-and-laugh-at-the-crap-movie humour that it feels completely perfect.

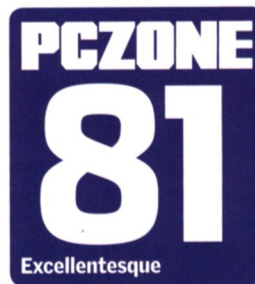
OK, not completely. Because it all flows so linearly like a movie plot, most of the puzzles are pretty straightforward. However, this is the first time where I'd say simple puzzles in an adventure game is a good thing, as getting stuck would interrupt the flow and the fun.

Strong Bad fans will find this episode essential. Everyone else will merely love it. Only one episode to go now, and the quality's steadily increasing. The finale should be the best thing ever made ever.

Chris Capel

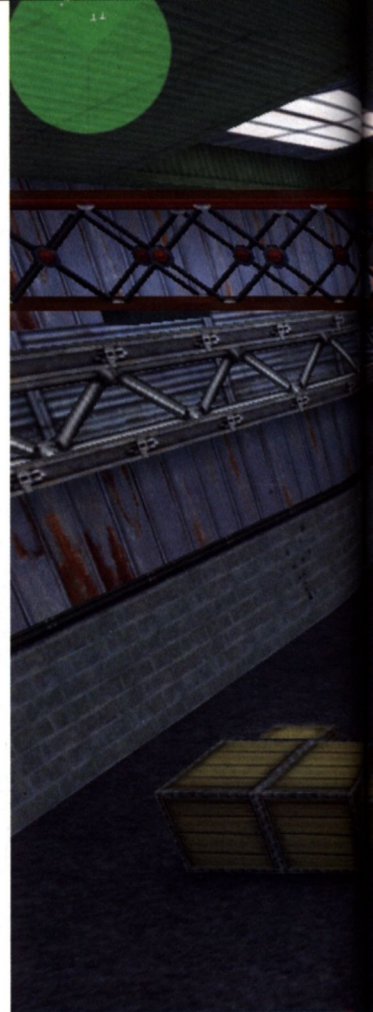


Better than Die Hard!



STATE OF PLAY

Increasingly, developers tinker with their creations long after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...



THIS MONTH... COUNTER-STRIKE

PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE store.steampowered.com PRICE \$9.99 (approx £6.50 plus tax)

REDUCING THE APPEAL of *Counter-Strike* to mere numbers is easy for me, so I will. At weekends, almost 250,000 people take to their copy of Steam for a game, and an incredible 75% of them – more than 150,000 players – choose *Counter-Strike*. This astonishing figure is one of the main reasons the title has had so few revisions since those early betas of the late '90s.

The initial release appeared in the summer of 1999, not long after *Team Fortress Classic* and around the same time freak temperatures in Britain had PC owners cancelling barbecues and staying indoors to play computer games instead. The strange *Counter-Strike* mod for *Half-Life* a few hundred people downloaded was a rather anorexic affair,

not so far removed from the game on which it was based. It had fewer than 10 weapons, three or four bug-ridden maps (none of which survive today) and hostage rescue was the only gameplay mode.

Counter-Strike was also a far less hardcore experience than it is now,

the game's customised *Quake* engine roots clearly visible behind all the stuck-on realism. Early code allowed players to leap and fire while remaining as accurate as if they were crouched behind a crate, and the slightly random prices in the Buy menu, not to mention skewed weapon balance and complete

lack of grenades and a round timer, meant that games either lasted forever or were 45-second massacres. And while hostages in *Counter-Strike* have never been smart, before Beta 3 they were so stupid that even the rescuers exterminated them.

Updates came thick and fast though. In the six short months between June and November of 1999, *Counter-Strike* turned into the game everyone now knows. The more baffling aspects of play had been refined or retired, maps were tuned to the point of perfection and loopholes like gunrunning (where weapons from corpses could be carried back to your team's respawn point for use the following round) were closed. The mod also gained brand new maps, extra weapons, plus a "new gameplay



"Over 36 months, 26 updates made Counter-Strike almost perfect, at which point a line was drawn"

scenario involving C4 bombs". Yes, it was at this time that arguably the most famous gaming arena of all time, de_dust (the 'de' prefix in the name short for 'defusal') made its entrance, as did the likes of de_prodigy and de_nuke.

Over 36 months, 26 finely fettled updates made *Counter-Strike* almost perfect, at which point a line was drawn and version 1.6 of the game was left in the care of an adoring community. It would be two years until the release of its only major revamp.

In 2004, almost five years to the day after Beta 1.0 first appeared, *Counter-Strike: Source* was released. This was essentially a remake of the last version of the original CS game, taking advantage of the Source engine's graphical superiority and lifelike physics. As well as finally getting a realistic look to match its realistic objectives, players now found themselves able to move objects about, barricade doorways with chairs and tables, and create cover with whatever objects they happen to find lying about any of the reworked maps.

Initially, the cosy, quick-loading familiarity of the original proved too much, and few players switched to the Source version. While the former was angular and dated, it would still run on a £25 car boot sale PC, and the sheer number of maps, gameplay styles and server mods dwarfed those of its successor.

But when Valve's regular updates began to provide serious gameplay enhancements – an improved radar, anti-cheat system, voice comms, dynamic weapon pricing and support for 5.1 and 7.1 speaker configurations – the old-timers begrudgingly made the switch. Today, the populations of *Counter-Strike* and *Counter-Strike: Source* are roughly level, a testimony to the charm of the original and Valve's determination to make the Source version the same but better.

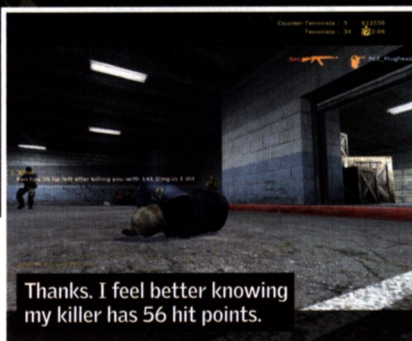
Now that Valve are busy on both *Half-Life: Episode 3* and *Left 4 Dead*, the follow up to *Counter-Strike* is apparently a long way off. In interviews, Gabe Newell has said that *Left 4 Dead* will

PMD neplosiV :: rock

PMD

A perfect hiding spot. So long as no-one looks up.

Target has been saved!



appeal to *Counter-Strike* players (find out for yourself on page 54), and a sideways glance at screenshots reveals the two could be related. Whether a community of people hooked on hostages and plastique will find much appeal in a survival horror with clichéd monsters and plot is not yet known, but Newell has always maintained that if there ever was a *Counter-Strike 2*, it would never be anything predictable. It couldn't be... could it?

VERDICT

We've not seen anything fresh in *Counter-Strike* for years, but that's a testimony to the brilliance of the concept. For those of you looking for an online shooter that's rock steady in every way, it's peerless.

Phil Wand

THE STORY SO FAR... COUNTER-STRIKE



1999 BETA 4.0

A few guns, a few maps, some hostages to rescue and the world's most popular online shooter is born.



2000 VERSION 1.0

The SAS turn up, as does de_dust and a defuse kit. Smoke grenades, teamkill penalties, and two more game modes.



2001 VERSION 1.1

A barrel load of cheats are fixed, but the addition of spectators brings a new level to exploits in the game.



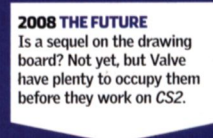
2002 VERSION 1.4

New maps like cs_havana, de_chateau and the underrated de_piranese. Corpses now remain visible.



2004 CS: SOURCE

Players shun the later game's look and feel, despite vastly improved graphics and physics from *Half-Life 2*.



2008 THE FUTURE

Is a sequel on the drawing board? Not yet, but Valve have plenty to occupy them before they work on CS2.

BUDGET

Unemployed correspondent *Will Porter* chimes in from a threadbare sofa

SEGA RALLY

PUBLISHER White Label WEBSITE rally.sega-europe.com PRICE £9.99

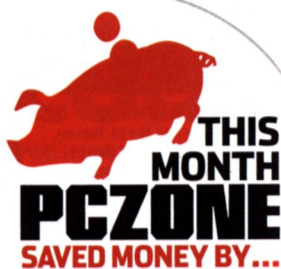
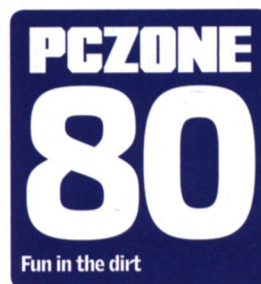
RALLY GAMES ARE seemingly never off the Budget pages, presumably because rally enthusiasts will always need something to do when they're not standing on a grassy bank near a muddy hairpin and waiting to jump out of the way of a careering saloon.

Sega Rally might not have quite the same appeal to that brave brigade of standing-in-the-rain people though, seeing as it's nowhere near the authoritative mud-streaked affair that the games of the dear departed Colin McRae are. Instead, well, it's more Sega-y essentially, isn't it? There are no hedgehogs, but the sky is markedly bluer and the game is friendlier than any other rally game. It's more of a "Do your best to keep it on the track" sim than a "Hard right. Hard left!" affair, although obviously both hard lefts and hard rights



more than make their presence felt. It also has a rather sparkling terrain deformation system in its guts, meaning that snow disperses as you do laps (yes kids, laps) and mud is muddled.

Sega Rally does what it says on the box: it's all about going fast round a muddy track, sliding round corners, and it skips all of that car modifying nonsense, and it does it all rather well.



Will no longer commuting to PC ZONE towers. He blames the Tories.
Saving: £340



Not buying a PS3, despite Little Big Planet.
Saving: £299

Steve not needing a bed, as he no longer sleeps.

Saving: What beds cost

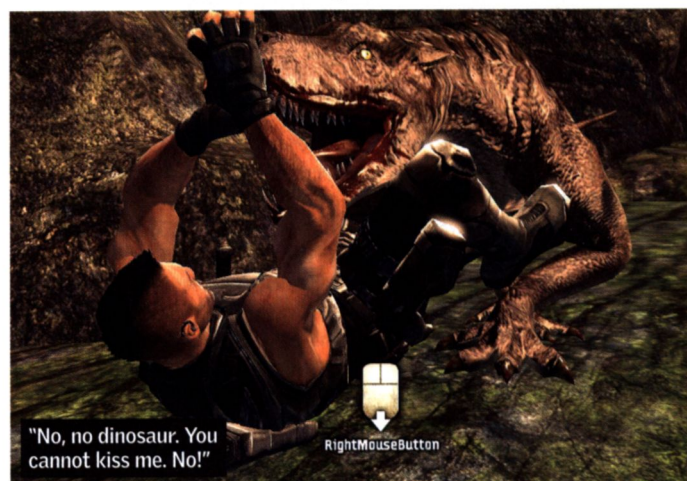


TUROK

PUBLISHER White Label
WEBSITE turok.eu.com/uk PRICE £9.99

ONE OF GAMING'S greatest mysteries is why dinosaur combat, *Off Road Velociraptor Safari* aside, has never been mastered. The *King Kong* game came pretty close, even if throwing the jungle equivalent of toothpicks at a dino would be unlikely to work in the real world, but to this day I still don't know what it feels like to truly fire a rocket launcher at a T-Rex. *Turok* was the game that could have given us that experience: it failed.

Don't think that this is a truly bad game, it isn't – it's just eminently mediocre, on every count. Fighting against grunts isn't bad, fighting against the cold-blooded dinos is oddly toothless, and the game is packed with those needless button tapping quick-time



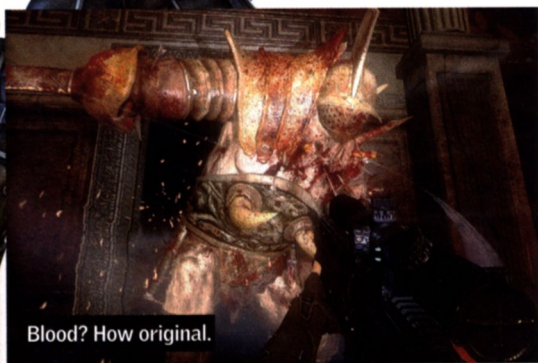
action sequences favoured by consoles. In a perfect world someone, somewhere would have created a game that perfected the thrill and horror of the first *Jurassic Park* movie. This is not a perfect world. We are doomed.





CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

PUBLISHER White Label WEBSITE codemasters.com/jericho PRICE £9.99



Blood? How original.

THE MONSTER DESIGN is good, the various abilities of the *Jericho* squad (half muscley men, half goth chicks) well thought out and balanced, and the concept of time slices, where Nazis and Romans have entered this violent hell-sphere years before you and become ever more corrupted, is also an excellent one.

Where this linear FPS went wrong is that each level looks the bloody same (dreary, with oozy redness) and you fight the same monsters from level one to the end of the game. Yes, they're imaginative, but when you're blasting the iron mask off your fifth hellslug in your third river of shit, the novelty wears off.

PCZONE
57

PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DARTS 2008

PUBLISHER White Label WEBSITE oxygen-games.net PRICE £9.99

I HAVE LONG-harboured an urge to get pissed with the crowd at Lakeside and whoop, holler and wave excitable placards as Martin 'Wolfie' Adams strides on stage in a smog of dry ice before a bout of darts. There are few sporting events quite so ironically thrilling.

Sadly, *PDC World Championship Darts* doesn't evoke the same amiable drunken haziness – partly because it's the wrong league and partly because Wolfie doesn't feature, but also because it's monumentally shit.

PCZONE
23



Remember: the key is to let go of the dart.

Exhibition	Sets	Legs
Taylor	0	1 501
Lloyd	0	0 351

And the rest...

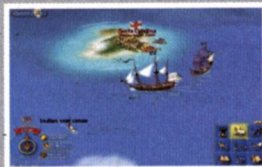
The other cheap releases out now



ROLEPLAY COLLECTION

£24.99 JoWood
Spellforce 2, Dungeon Lords: Collector's Edition and Gothic 3: perfect for German RPG fans.

PCZONE
72



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

£4.99 Sold Out
The best Meier strategy game that doesn't require deep thinking, but is still hugely fun.

PCZONE
81



TOTAL OVERDOSE

£4.99 Mastertronic
Total Overdose: a mix of *Far Cry*, *Max Payne*, and a terrible game to drag the average right down.

PCZONE
60

PCZONE Top 5 budget games



ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, Sega

This is huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people hacking each other to shit and back.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the rock-hard original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



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.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

Here's Tim Schafer's psychological platform adventure. You won't have more fun until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Don't stop buying them until they're bought



PCZONE Top 5 GAMES THAT COULD BE CLOTHES

- 1 BIOSOCK
- 2 SCARF-LIFE 2
- 3 TIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
- 4 COLIN MCRAE: SHIRT
- 5 WORLD OF SHOE



PCZONE Top 5 SHERLOCK HOLMES GAMES

- 1 LOST FILES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: ROSE TATTOO
ISSUE 47 - 70%
- 2 SHERLOCK HOLMES: NEMESIS
ISSUE 196 - 66%
- 3 SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE AWAKENED
ISSUE 180 - 50%
- 4 CASE OF THE SERRATED SCALPEL
ISSUE 17 - 48%
- 5 DINOSAUR DETECTIVE AGENCY
ISSUE 17 - 42%

PCZONE Top 5 GAMES WITH MYSTERIOUS NAMES

- 1 THE QUIVERING
A silly first-person point-and-click
- 2 QUEEN: THE EYE
A game with music from Queen!
- 3 MOHO
A game where you've got a ball instead of legs
- 4 HIRED TEAM: TRIAL GOLD
A rubbish Quake clone
- 5 WEIRD DREAMS
Some bizarre puzzle adventures



FPS

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



BIOSHOCK PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%

The psion of *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.



TEAM FORTRESS 2 PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



BATTLEFIELD 2 PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.



CRYSIS WARHEAD PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%

The standalone expansion may only take a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains a few moments of fantastic action storytelling, and improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2 PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%

A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%

Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

Despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one as a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with so many positives in one sentence, you know it must be good.



WORLD IN CONFLICT PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%

A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE PCZ Issue: 193 - 91%

This startling beauty came from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



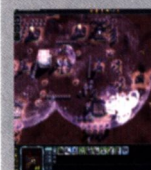
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation.



SUPREME COMMANDER PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



GEARS OF WAR PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%

Who knew the all-conquering console title would work so well with a mouse and keyboard? *GOW*'s skirmishes against the aggressive Locust Horde are enjoyably tactical, while its cover system and difficulty level combine to make you genuinely fear the bullets flying around you. With the battle against the almighty Brumak near the game's close, the PC has the best version of an already excellent shooter. So hooray for us.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

Showing its wrinkles a bit now, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that Payne is still a force to contend with.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming.



FAHRENHEIT PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4 PCZ Issue: 197 - 82%

Best played on a pad - but entirely comfortable on the keyboard - this is long hours of insane hack 'n' slash action and doolally cutscenes. Expect huge boss fights and an exhilarating slog through massive crowds of demons.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



LOTR ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips Warhammer into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PVP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare scenarios. Brilliant.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies, can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, FM succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 - 87%
Still in a different league to FIFA, PES lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, Tiger 06 has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent FIFA still lags behind PES, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.



NHL 08
PCZ Issue: 187 - 80%
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like Speedball!) to our PCs, the latest NHL is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

Simulation

BUDGET



X2: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better X2: The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the Microsoft Flight Sim series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If X2 is too slow for you, Freelancer should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a Hollywood-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. LFS has realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. A remarkable achievement by such a small and talented team.



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While GTR takes care of modern-day racing, GT Legends, a successor to Grand Prix Legends, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.

Oddball

Must buy!



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, World of Goo is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, World of Goo is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, Portal is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The god game-like Garry's Mod gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, Viva Piñata looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddie-looking graphics - it's a keeper.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
Possibly BioWare's best game since KOTOR, with a new combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and space sex - it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of The Witcher is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
This could be the most intimidating, yet wonderful, game we've ever played - the breadth and depth of Morrowind remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in FPS RPGs. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure Deus Ex remains the alpha male of gaming.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

December

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
LEGENDARY
PRINCE OF PERSIA
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: STORM OF ZEHIR

ROCKSTAR
ATARI
UBISOFT
EA
ATARI

Early 2009

ARMED ASSAULT 2
COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOUR
DAWN OF WAR 2
EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR
FEAR 2: PROJECT ORIGIN
MIRROR'S EDGE
SAINTS ROW 2
STREET FIGHTER IV
TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR
VELVET ASSASSIN
WHITE GOLD

505 GAMES
THQ
THQ
SEGA
WARNER BROS
EA
THQ
CAPCOM
UBISOFT
GAMECOCK
DEEP SHADOWS

TBC

ALPHA PROTOCOL
BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM
CHAMPIONS ONLINE
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE
DIABLO III
IMPERIUM ROMANUM II
MAFIA II
METRO 2033
STARCRRAFT II (x3)
STAR TREK ONLINE
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

SEGA
WARNER BROS
2K GAMES
SONY ONLINE
BLIZZARD
KALYPSO MEDIA
2K GAMES
THQ
BLIZZARD
TBA
EA / LUCASARTS



XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

**FREE
DISC**

10 games
to play!

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

PRINCE of PERSIA

Read the world's first
review only in OXM!



21 GAMES REVIEWED!

Call of Duty: World at War • Banjo-Kazooie
Left 4 Dead • Mirror's Edge • Guitar Hero 4
Rock Band 2 • Spider-Man • Spyro
Mortal Kombat vs DC + more!

ON SALE NOW!



PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

7's a charm

I'VE NEVER BEEN enthralled by new versions of *Windows*, chiefly because they tend to coincide with the last one having just matured. Just as everyone had begun to settle down with their copy of *XP* and relax in the knowledge that there wasn't a product on the planet that wouldn't work with it, or have a stable driver available for download, Microsoft announced its successor. Great.

It's like buying a new house and being asked to move the moment you've finished shifting your furniture in. Why can't I stay? I've just had the wallpaper done in the lounge and the carpets are barely a month old!

Call me mad, but *Windows 7* might be different. Microsoft won't admit that *Vista* sucked harder than a £2,000 whore, but anyone with more marbles than a spray can knows it's not been a success. As Sir James Dyson says, you have to learn from failure, and Microsoft have had one hell of an education.

Many of *Windows 7*'s features seem like good ideas. The fact that applications can be made to snap to the screen edges, or the way UAC can now be adjusted rather than turned on/off. And so many of the operating system's underpinnings – for example, its fonts and ClearType – can now be tuned to your liking without using third-party tools.

They've even done away with the sidebar and introduced Post-it notes for the desktop. I'm almost looking forward to it.

Wand

Phil Wand, hardware editor

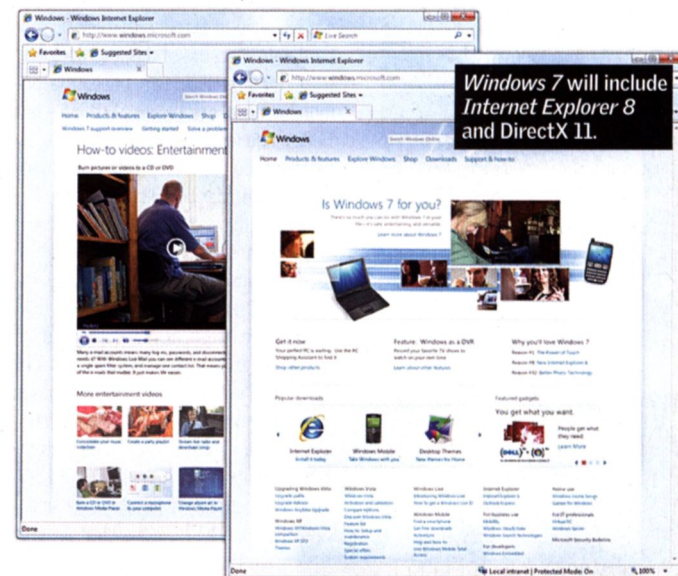
VISTA + 1 = 7

Microsoft return to numbers for *Windows*

ALTHOUGH MICROSOFT'S MARKETING department is barking mad – a look at any of their recent TV ads will confirm this – it seems the ponytail boys have been kept well back from having anything to do with the successor to *Vista*.

For starters, it's going to be called *Windows 7* and not *Vienna*. The majority of PC users understand the concept of numbers, and giving the operating system one makes perfect sense. It allows developers to describe their products in a more coherent way ("Requires *ME*, *XP*, *Vista*, *2003* or *Vienna*" becomes simply "Requires *Windows 7* or later"), and when *Windows 8* appears, users will instantly know where they stand.

Microsoft have also reworked many of *Vista*'s myriad annoyances. User Access Control is now a slider, much like your internet security settings, access to programs is quicker, and the system's hunger has been tamed – users are reporting it requires less than 512MB RAM, can be installed on car boot sale hardware – and it feels snappy.



Windows 7 doesn't look much different, but redesigning the interface would cause more problems than it solves. How smooth the upgrade process runs and how your games play are aspects that are yet to be determined. windowsteamblog.com

News round-up

The Japanese have come up with an orb-shaped wooden mouse that you hold in the palm of your hand and tilt like a *Wii Remote*. If you want something for your PC with a similar lifespan to that cheap wand, and can afford the baffling \$232 (£148) asking price, it could be ideal.

japantrendshop.com

On a similar theme, Sony has registered a patent for a new transforming game controller. Pictures show two *Wii*-like wands with removable panels, plus weird-looking spheres with LEDs and sound emitters which presumably work in tandem with the *PlayStation Eye* and thus make it useless for PC owners.

sony.com

CORE IN STORE

Preorder your Core i7 for Christmas

OVER THE NEXT few months, you're going to read a lot about Intel's new Core i7 product family.

You're going to hear about the return of Hyper Threading, and no doubt see all manner of graphs and PowerPoint slides demonstrating how i7's Turbo Mode will knock your system into overdrive when you're playing games.

All you really need to know is that the three chips available at launch – the £230 i7 920, £420 i7 940 and £749.99 i7 965 Extreme Edition – are, clock for clock, up to a



third faster than Core 2s. System builders and upgraders also need to know this new product line uses the new LGA1366 form factor, so need new mobos. intel.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS
BY STEVE HOGARTY

WIRED2FIRE: An ingenious but short-lived method of powering household appliances by placing their power cords directly into the fireplace. **28IN HANNS.G:** The bad guy from *Die Hard*, except really tiny and not all that scary at all. **CUBE247:** The trendy new nightclub in Camden, the main feature of which is a massive cube that consumes most of the dance floor and displays the time. **DIGITAL THERMAL SENSORS:** Determines whether your PC is "hot" or "not". If "hot", you are rewarded with JPEGs of your CPU in suggestive poses. **CORE I7:** The correct response when viewing said digital images of your CPU being provocative.



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.



The Hanns.G monitor trades price for quality.

Q BORED OF HOME BUILD

I'm looking to buy a new PC system. I used to build my own, but have been out of the country for a year or so and am not really up to speed with the latest hardware. Because of this, I've decided to get a pre-built system. I need the lot – monitor, speakers, the whole thing – but I often find looking online that you're better off buying a completed base unit and ordering peripherals separately.

I want the system mostly for gaming and watching DVDs. I've looked at a range of retailers who make custom gaming PCs, for example Cube247, Wired2Fire, Mesh, PC Specialist and CyberPower. Any information you could give me on these retailers – based on your experience of reviewing their systems – would be fantastic. I'm looking to spend up to £1,300 to get a really good system and would like to know what you think are the best deals out there.

I'm also after advice with regards system life span. For example, should I be looking at DDR3 systems, dual or quad core? Does Windows Vista work properly yet? Any help you can give me would be very useful.

As for the screen, have you ever used the Hanns.G 28in monitor? It seems to get very good reviews online, but I'm not so sure about the resolution on such a large screen area.

Richard Forrest

A You have to remember that specialist PC builders all use the same components, and that what you really need to look for – aside from a competitive price tag – is warranty and support. You can find warranty information from



Can monitors be too big for gaming?

websites, and you can test support – assuming it's not at additional cost – by calling help lines. Is it a premium rate number? How quickly is the phone answered? Are the staff based in this country? You get the idea.

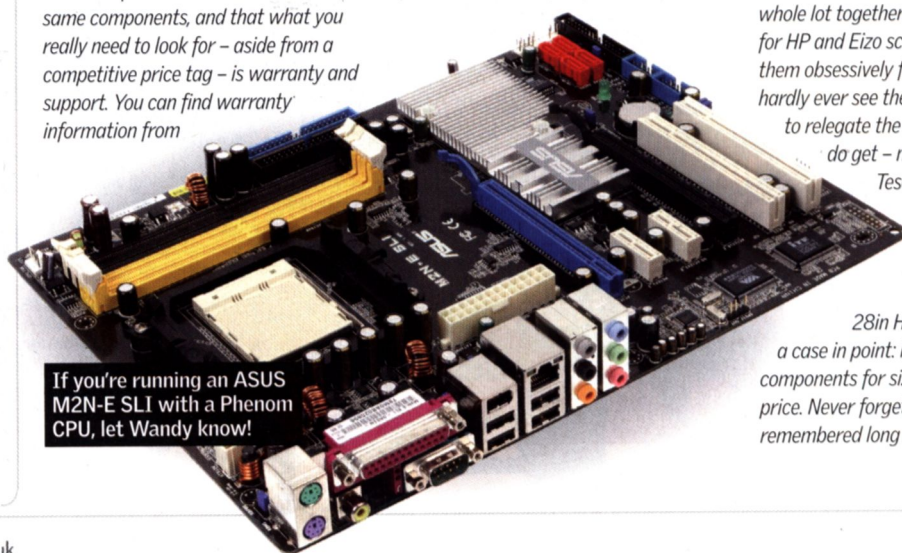
I'd also look at the choice of components very carefully, and run it past me or the Dear Wandy forum members. For example, CyberPower's £3,000 Gamer Infinity Xtreme XI claims to have two GTX 280 cards supported by a 420W PSU. But 420W isn't enough for one! This is without doubt an oversight by their webmaster, but this is where forums can be a big help.

Today's games are beginning to take advantage of today's processor designs, so I'm beginning to recommend quad core variants over dual cores, and there's no problem choosing Vista. It's XP with Christmas decorations and works fine – it's just not a recommended upgrade for existing XP users who need to wait for Windows 7. In addition, if you're a fan of older titles such as Battlefield 1942 you might want to stick with XP.

In most cases, buying the base unit on its own and shopping for peripheral components online can indeed save you a lot of money, but occasionally you'll find some really good deals when you buy the whole lot together. I have a preference for HP and Eizo screens, having chosen them obsessively for decades, but you hardly ever see them as an option. I tend to relegate the bundled monitors you do get – many of which are

Tesco Value quality products – to the wife's PC and buy a better one elsewhere. Regarding the £270

28in Hanns.G monitor, that's a case in point: it trades quality components for size and a super low price. Never forget that quality is remembered long after the price is



If you're running an ASUS M2N-E SLI with a Phenom CPU, let Wandy know!

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.10	15 OCT 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 178.24	15 OCT 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.18.0004	30 JUL 08
CREATIVE	ALCHEMY 1.20.04	01 AUG 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.18.0001	17 JUL 08

"To notice the upgrades in games, you need to be spending money on processors and video cards"

forgotten, particularly if you're a movie buff, but then again if the price is so low it barely registers...

Q AM2 UPGRADE DILEMMA

I'm looking to upgrade my current system. I've no plans to upgrade my motherboard just yet, so I was trying to find the best possible components for the AM2 platform I already have. The question is, what will make a the most difference? My current specs are an ASUS M2N-E SLI, 3GB DDR2 667 value RAM, AMD Athlon64 4000+, BFG 8800 GT OC, 600W power supply and Windows XP.

I'm going to be upgrading my graphics card soon to either the Radeon HD 4850, HD 4870 or the GeForce 260, depending on what offers are about when I decide to buy. However, I think I need to upgrade my processor and memory as a priority, though I'm not sure of my best option. I've been looking at Corsair XMS2 PC2-6400C4DHX TwinX 800? On the processor side, I really don't know what's best for my AM2 socket.

What are my best options/plan, and what will make any significant difference compared to cost?

Lee Page

A The M2N-E SLI does not officially support Phenom products, despite being one of the first 'Phenom Ready' boards ASUS were busy telling everyone about this time last year. There are a number of reports from people happily using the newer chips on it, but while ASUS continues to omit everything but older Athlons from the compatibility list on their website, so going the Phenom route could prove to be a gamble.

My advice would be to treat the M2N-E SLI as you would any other older platform, and not over invest in it. Spend £99 on an Athlon 64 X2 6400+ replacement CPU and enjoy performance on a level with the Core 2 Duo E6750. The X2 6400+ should give you CPU benchmark scores roughly twice the size of what you're getting currently, and when paired with a decent card like the HD 4870 – don't go overboard here, keep it to under £200 – should provide you

with adequate thrust to get you into the new year.

You might find yourself turned on by the thought of quad core Phenom performance in multicore capable games but the older dual core Athlon will always be £99 well spent.

As for your memory, I really don't think it's worthwhile you upgradin.

To notice the upgrades you buy in games, you need to be spending

money on bigger processors and faster video cards, not on premium RAM and motherboards. Your money is best saved for a clean start some time next year.

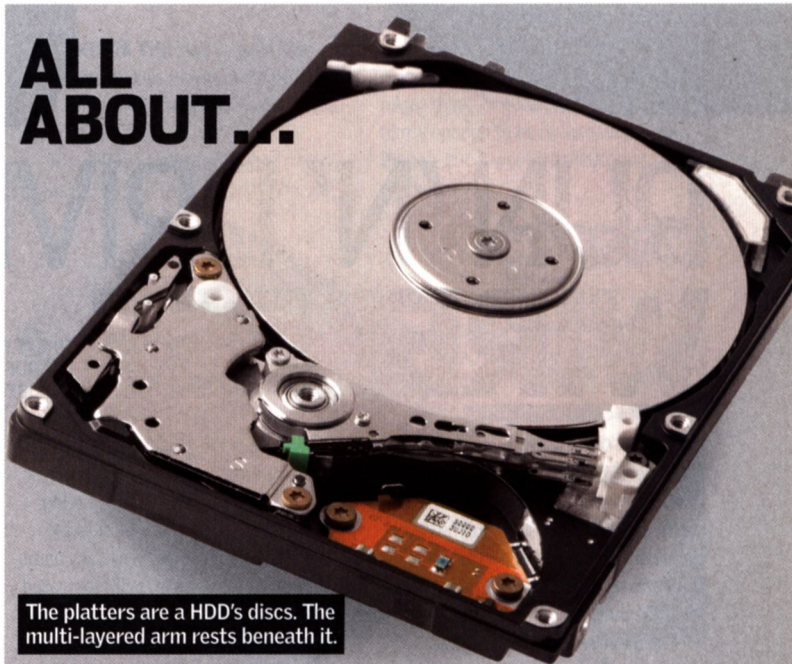
Q INDIAN MESSAGE

I've a Q6600 and an Intel motherboard. I have 4GB RAM with a GeForce 8600 GT. I want to change the motherboard since it runs slowly while playing, and I'm left wondering whether I'm using a quad or not! What's a good board? My budget is less than INR1,000 (£13.50).

Naren Keshav, India

A Without knowing the board you have, it's difficult to try and pinpoint the problem. On certain platforms, you need to overclock the BIOS settings in order for the board to run the chip at the correct speed. However, most Intel boards don't allow

ALL ABOUT...



The platters are a HDD's discs. The multi-layered arm rests beneath it.

08 HARD DISK DRIVES

Hard disk drives are on their way out. Pretty much every desktop computer in existence has one, but their dependence on moving parts means they're soon to be obsolete.

They work by storing and retrieving magnetic information on a spinning platter. An electric motor revolves the platters at very high speed, typically 7,200 revolutions per minute or faster, and a mechanical arm works their surfaces. The arm contains devices to manipulate the data immediately underneath it, and it moves about the disk so quickly that it's a blur – it can reach every

portion of the platter dozens of times every second. The tiny amount of time it takes to reach a particular part of the platter is known as seek time.

Data is arranged on the platters in tracks, sectors and clusters. The tracks are much like you'd expect on a record, and the sectors are a set size and arranged into clusters within each track.

Take a hard drive apart and you'll be amazed at how little there is inside it, and how beautiful it is. The platters are mirror smooth and the tracks within them invisible to the naked eye.

you to change things like DRAM clock settings, and in any case, I doubt it's the board causing you the problem. If your Q6600 is recognised when the PC starts up, and the chip's description and speed are displayed correctly, I'd say it was impossible for an Intel board to be incompatible with a popular Intel chip.

More likely is that the chip hasn't been seated correctly – the push pin heat

sink fans are a pain to lock home – or the compound between the top of the chip and the bottom of the sink is either patchy or missing altogether. Intel chips integrate thermal protection with Digital Thermal Sensors (DTS) which throttle the cores and will ultimately shut down your PC. Changing the motherboard to fix misbehaviour in games should be a last resort. **PCW**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(mike.pegg) I've bought myself a new 1TB F1 HDD and was wondering if it's worth using it as the only drive in my system or sticking with a 500GB main and using the 1TB as storage. If I use the 1TB as a main, should I partition it for OS and storage? (djmagnifique) Personally whenever I build a PC I always put two drives in, one for the OS and one for everything else. That way if your OS goes bad and you can't recover it you should still have all your data intact. (bsoltan) Installed games and OS don't have to be on the same partition, you just specify where you want to install the game when you install it. 100GB for the OS is fine. You can always add other drives later on.

TESTING REGIME

We're looking for gear that's well built, with firm but responsive buttons. Controllers should work without drivers, but we checked their software suites for ease of use. Comfort is a concern, so grips that are too narrow and heavy pads lose marks. Wireless signals flaking out, buttons failing, and macro keys forgetting their programming, also mean lost marks.

SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 8
Sticks: 2
Analogue triggers: 2
D-pad: 8-way
Weight: 202g



RUN 'N' DRIVE WIRELESS

PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
WEBSITE thrustmaster.com

ONE OF THE key features of this pad is the Mapping button, which allows you to reprogram the keys on the fly. Hit it and you make the Right Shoulder mimic the X key – it's limited but definitely useful. You can also remap all of the buttons in the drivers.

The main event is the wheel: a rotating cuff around the D-pad, that is

tracked by an optical sensor that can act like a miniature steering wheel, rudder or zoom tool as required. Despite it being useful, we veered back to thumbstick steering in racing games, while any game that needs a zoom is generally controlled by a mouse.

Setup is simple: a wireless dongle plugs into a USB port and two switches

sit on the controller itself to turn the controller's power and the rumble on (a battery-saving option).

The Run 'N' Drive is a good pad. The shoulder triggers are well-positioned and very accurate, and it isn't too expensive. If you want a wireless pad, this is the one to buy.

PCZONE
85
Good, but console-centric

CYBORG RUMBLE

PRICE £18 MANUFACTURER Saitek WEBSITE saitek.com

BEING HONEST, THIS doesn't sit as comfortably in the hand as the official Xbox 360 controller, and the plastic shell doesn't feel as if it's built from quality materials. The curved base of the grip is a bit too round and slippery, the plastic thin to the touch.

It is tougher than it looks though, successfully completing the stress test (smash repeatedly on a desk) with ease, and it's less than two-thirds of the price of a Microsoft pad.

Where the Microsoft logo would be on the console controller there's an unusual FPS button – an attempt to

resonate with PC gamers that frankly falls a little flat. This feature switches between shooter controls and a high-precision mode – but since PC gamers only use pads when driving cars, flying planes or playing *GTA* games, the truth is this will never get used.

The analogue triggers don't have the travel range of the Thrustmaster pad, but within the limited movement they do offer they are very accurate.

The only other minor complaint is that the cord seems strangely short, which can be a problem since USB

extension leads are often unreliable.

Saving the best until last though, you can pull out and rotate the left thumbstick and D-pad, so the sticks can be Xbox 360-style or together, depending on the game. That's a killer feature for comfort, as far as we're concerned, and combined with the low price make this controller a winner.

SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 6
Sticks: 2
Analogue triggers: 2
D-pad: 8-way
Weight: 214g



"That's a killer feature and combined with the low price makes this a winner"

PCZONE
89
Great value

**GAMEPAD
SPECIAL!**

XBOX 360 CONTROLLER

PRICE £31 MANUFACTURER Microsoft WEBSITE microsoft.com

WE WENT INTO this test expecting the Microsoft controller to win – the fact that it isn't even second says a lot about how far third-party gamepads have moved on in the last few years.

Lacking wireless convenience, the only thing that really sets the 360 pad above any other is the thickness of the body material and the exceptional grip comfort. There's no way it comes close to justifying the price, though.



SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 8
Sticks: 2
Analogue triggers: 2
D-pad: 8-way
Weight: 212g

**PCZONE
74**

NAVIGATOR 365 LASER

PRICE £21 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.com

THIS IS THE kind of good idea that makes its way onto *Dragon's Den*, and is snapped in half by the cheerful Greek one.

The 365 is a notebook mouse which opens to reveal a tiny gamepad inside.

It's obviously not as good as a proper gamepad, but actually not as bad as you might think for gaming on the go. It is flimsy enough to be broken with ease though, but it would make a good stocking filler.



SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 8
Sticks: 0
Analogue triggers: 0
D-pad: 4-way
Weight: 68g

**PCZONE
77**

LOGIC3 RUMBLE PAD

PRICE £9.99 MANUFACTURER Logic3 WEBSITE logic3.com

THIS VIBRATING GAME pad resembles a PlayStation Dual Shock controller, which remains the best console input device to date.

For the price, we're genuinely impressed – you may not get analogue

triggers and the D-pad feels like it's going to slide right off at any moment, the shell is tough and the thumbsticks sturdy and responsive. There are no fancy frills, though for under a tenner it's well worth considering.



SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 8
Sticks: 2
Analogue triggers: N/A
D-pad: 4-way

**PCZONE
79**

MAXFIRE G-12U VIBRATION

PRICE £15 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.com

THANKS TO ITS enormous dome of a body, the Genius entry feels like a lot of pad for the money. And it is. Strange, then, that in use the controls feel more cramped than on the Thrustmaster.

There are also no analogue triggers for precision acceleration and braking, which makes it worth paying the extra for the Saitek. That said, the grip design is second only to the Microsoft, so it's worth checking out all the same.



SPECIFICATION

Buttons: 10
Sticks: 2
Analogue triggers: 0
D-pad: 8-way
Weight: 275g

**PCZONE
78**

REMEMBER:
SAVE MONEY ON
HEATING - PLAY
MORE GAMES

Stick a couple of high-end graphics cards in your PC, take off its case, disable its fans, and play *Crysis* on the highest settings - you'll stay toasty warm thanks to the huge amount of heat that your hardware will generate as it melts from the strain.

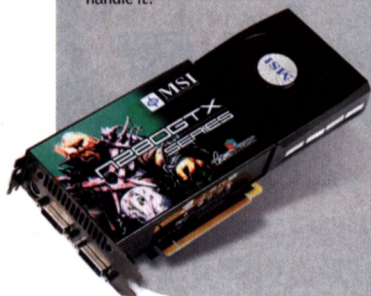
HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at **PC ZONE**, but these are the bits we just adore

LOADED?

GRAPHICS N280GTX

PRICE £420
MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk
Fast graphics don't come cheap, and NVIDIA's 200-series flagship is reassuringly expensive. There are four power modes on offer, PhysX support, and a batting average better than any other. Plus there's 1GB DDR3 and many other enhancements that deliver performance around 1.5x faster than any predecessor. Can your credit card handle it?



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775

PRICE £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk

A silly price makes for awesome power and magical performance. Not only will your Extreme Edition chip cost you the same as several entire PCs, but like everything else in your PC it'll be obsolete within two years. If you've got the money, go crazy and give your PC a hot rod CPU.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

PRICE £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about their products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



WD7500 AAKS

PRICE £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE wdc.com

Almost as fast as the 150GB Raptor, but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN



SM226BW

PRICE £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung
WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast (it has a grey-to-grey refresh rate of just 2ms) and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs just a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

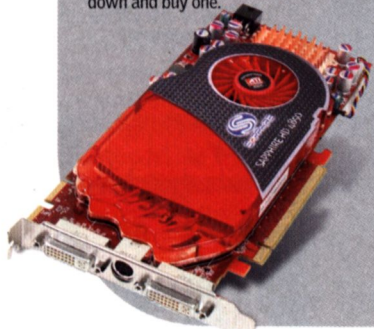
PRICE £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk

The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS HD4850

PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com
This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk

At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE- ESATA2

PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEBSITE asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE wdc.com

A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

PRICE £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE viewsoniceurope.com/uk

The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS



X-530

PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk
Logitech's X-530s

have the edge on quality and are available everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

Magazines
aren't for
reading...

they're for
reloading.



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mind-blowing jolt public servers or take complete
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www.jolt.co.uk

YOUR DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WII™ AND DS GAMING



FREE NINTENDO
CALENDAR
Plan out 2009 in style!

Nintendo®
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
On Sale Now!



PCZONE FREEPLAY



For the man who has nothing

PCZ noob abuse

AS I WRITE these words, Steve Hogarty is beating me across the shoulders with a truncheon – just one of the many toughening up exercises I've had to endure in my first days at PC ZONE. Part of the induction involved being tied to a chair, my head shaved clean with a straight razor and the cuttings glued back on haphazardly so as to form the monstrosity you see above.

That said, if one ignores the drubbings and painful psychological torture, I've been enjoying my first days in the hallowed halls of Zone Towers. Working in an office where somebody can put on AC/DC's *Black Ice* without fear of reprisal is a refreshing experience. Of course, the chance to play games for a living sweetens the deal, so much so that my eyes are in danger of developing a digital form of diabetes. When you finally get to play *Ivan Drago: Justice Enforcer*, you'll see what I mean.

But enough of this nonsense. My task is to sieve the web for moist chunklets of free gaming goodness, some of which you can find on our cover disc, probably still located in the packaging you tore off with your teeth just seconds ago. Engraved onto the plastic you'll find a game in which you slaughter fish with oil and a driving title that brings back memories of yesteryear with its polygonal action.

So go on, slap it into your disc drive and enjoy some of the delights featured over the next few pages. If you don't, my picture above will start weeping salt tears, loosening the ink from the papyry bosom of the magazine and these words will forever be just a distant memory.

David Brown
Staff Writer

MAX PAYNE – STREET FIGHTER

Hundred hand slapping in slow motion

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/streetfighter MOD FOR Max Payne 2

MOD PEOPLE ARE an imaginative bunch, it has to be said. This month we came across *StreetFighter* – a *Street Fighter 2* mod for everybody's favourite slo-mo shoot-'em-up, *Max Payne 2*. So with the upcoming PC release of *Street Fighter IV*, we thought we'd take a look.

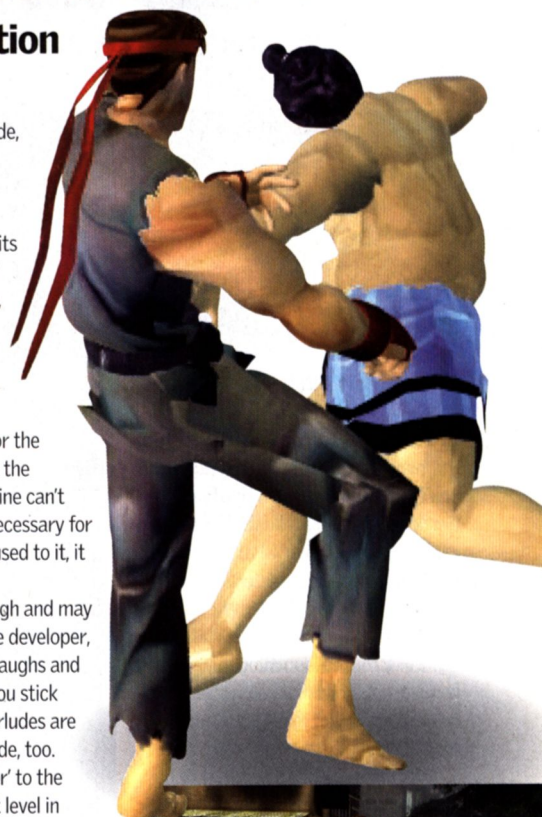
As total conversions go it's pretty impressive, with a storyline centred round Ryu. He's accompanied by 16 combatants from the series, which duke it out over 16 maps. Intriguingly, these stages use *Max Payne 2*'s physics, so that each one has things to knock over.

Another interesting feature is the combination of *Street Fighter* characters

with *Final Fight* in Rage Mode, which sees you clearing the streets of criminals in time-honoured fashion.

StreetFighter does have its faults – due to the nature of *Max Payne 2*'s game engine, some of the clipping is disorienting, with punches and kicks appearing to miss completely, yet registering as hits. The key is to listen for the audio cues rather than trust the visuals. It's a shame the engine can't handled the close combat necessary for this mod, but once you get used to it, it matters little.

StreetFighter is a bit rough and may have been abandoned by the developer, but it should provide a few laughs and a couple of hours of fun, if you stick with it. The comic book interludes are a nice touch in the story mode, too. (Incidentally, add 'developer' to the shortcut, otherwise the first level in the story mode might fail to load.)



The special moves are quite impressive.



You can use bullet time to give you the advantage.

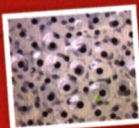


Evil Ryu always gets his way.



Most of the old favourites are back.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



666
HOURS*

FREEPLAYDEMOS

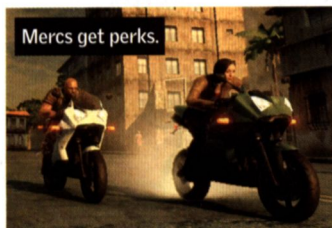
Demos

Will Porter guides you through your free DVD

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

Venezuela or ka-boom and bust

WEBSITE mercenaries2.ea.com



Mercs get perks.

NOBODY BELIEVED ZITRON when he said *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* was great fun. But play this demo for five minutes and you'll scoff so hard you'll scoff up your breakfast. The unintelligible on-screen icons, and blundering AI are enough to make you weep, but persevere and *World in Flames* really does become a great deal of fun. You'll squeal at the sight of a rocket-launching dune buggy being dropped from a helicopter, you'll be amazed as you realise just how many exploding weapons there are.

This demo gives you a nugget of the map to destroy, featuring an enthusiastic army base and a few blocks of urban scenery just waiting to be decimated. One mission even asks you to destroy a building using whatever means available to you. It's fun! Really!

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.



"Screw health and safety! Rararar."



RUNNIN'

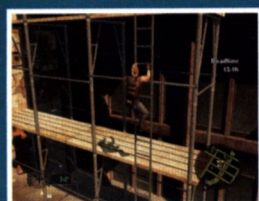
Runnin' is something you can do in *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames*. You can put some Blu-tac on the key and run forever. But then you'd miss out on blowing things up...



MAKE ASPLODE

...which you will do a lot of, as you spend most of the time making things explode, which is great because most of the world is very much breakable.

FOUR THINGS YOU CAN DO



CLIMB THE LADDER

Just when you think you've done it all, you can go climb a ladder. Annoyingly, this one leads to nowhere and is not equipped with explosive weaponry.



DRIVE A THING

You can drive too, not just cars but tanks, buggies and helicopters, that are often equipped with weapons that explode things. It's a sandbox of destruction!

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

The Something of Boris, is that what it was?

WEBSITE 007thvideogame.com

THE BOND MOVIES have reinvented themselves in recent years, but the videogame hasn't. As such prepare yourself for an onslaught the size of a small army, chained headshots and an occasional third-person viewpoint to make you appreciate the clause put into Daniel Craig's contract that forces his likeness into bilge like this.

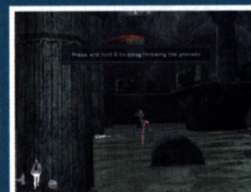
This demo is a chase through some catacombs after an assassination of a fellow agent, with lots of shooting and lots of death. *GoldenEye* has still not been bettered.

BOND'S POWERS



COVER

Hey, remember *Gears of War* had that cover system. Here it is again, but with Daniel Craig!



GRENADE

Bond now carries an improbable number of grenades. Where does he fit them all?

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

Who doesn't love German RPGs?

WEBSITE sacred2.com

GERMAN ROLEPLAY? SOMEONE call Max Mosley! (Although we realise his roleplay wasn't very German. Just a bit spank-y).

Nevertheless *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel* has timed its release perfectly, hitting at the sweet spot where *Diablo III* hype is yet to fade and the game itself is a

million miles off. With its heftily original character types, the demo lets you manipulate the curves of cover girl the Seraphim, and its addictive slashing through Elven lands proves it more than competently picks up the clicking-and-hacking torch of its underrated progenitor.



1 Compass

Sacred 2's world is huge, this compass helps out, while also giving the time of day.

2 19 XP

If you enjoy levels, you'll swoon with amazement – *Sacred 2's* got 200 of them!

3 You

This is the person you play in the demo, whose breasts are of grotesque proportions.

WHO'S WHO

And what they do



DRYAD

The dryad is a new class in *Sacred 2*, a nature loving sort of hippy class, favouring long-ranged attacks and natural magic.



SERAPHIM

Returning from *Sacred*, the Seraphim excels at close-range combat, drawing on a bank of technological skills when required.

BEST OF THE REST



What is on the pages opposite is not the whole of our cover disc's content. Here are the other demos and movies that you can enjoy. Or not, if that's your will.



PURE

WEBSITE snipurl.com/disneypure
A demo that encapsulates the indescribable feeling of driving off a hilltop on a speeding quadbike, accompanied by an in-game script written by none other than PCZ's Martin Korda



PRO EVO 2009 MULTIPLAYER

WEBSITE pesgaming.com
Let's face it. It's not as much fun playing AI as you can't punch its arm when it scores a goal against you, or makes a blatant dive.



MOTORM4X

WEBSITE theeasyco.com/projects.html
More vehicular nonsense over muddy farm tracks? Perhaps not quite as slick as *PURE*, but a contender for muddiest game of the month.



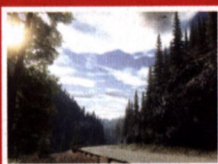
PATCHES GALORE!

Want to get *Clear Sky* running glitch free? Well you can certainly get half of the way there, alongside *Spore*, *Mercs 2* and *Frontlines*.

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

ALAN WAKE MOVIE

WEBSITE alanwake.com



After a continued absence Alan Wake has been revealed to the world once again. Can it's *Twin Peaks* meets Stephen King episodic stylings match what we want it to be?

LEFT 4 DEAD DEMO

WEBSITE steampowered.com



By the time you read this, Valve should've gotten round to releasing a *Left 4 Dead* demo through Steam. We're certain that after playing this demo, you'll be as smitten as we are.

ENTER THE FORTRESS



Head into a land of ASCII fantasy with *Dwarf Fortress*

DEVELOPER Tarn Adams & Zach Adams WEBSITE bay12games.com/dwarves

FOR A GAME so outwardly unfriendly on the eyes, *Dwarf Fortress*'s ASCII visuals belie some bewildering depth. This is a fantasy strategy RPG god game that touches on *Rogue*, *Evil Genius*, and everything in between.

Steve Hogarty speaks to Tarn Adams about his incredible creation, and whether dwarf women carrying babies should receive an armour bonus...

Q Where do you find the time to work on *Dwarf Fortress*?

A I spend pretty much all my time on it. I used to be a mathematician but I left my job in June of 2007, so now doing *Dwarf Fortress* is a full-time thing. I pretty much set my own schedule and lately I've been taking all the weekend days in a month, putting them at the end and just doing 21 or 22 days of solid work on *Dwarf Fortress*. I can get on a roll with it, and then take my time off at the end of the month.

I can live off the donations now – I'm not making as much as I was at my last

job, but it's enough to eat, pay rent and so on.

So you're earning enough through people downloading the game and liking it enough to give you money for it?

Yeah, it's working out well and I've gotten a lot of fans over in Europe. With the exchange rate the way it is things have been going really well over there lately.

Something I heard was that if a dwarf is holding a baby, she will have less chance of being pierced by arrows...

There are different things I've heard as well, hah. It's not that a baby would act like armour (though it probably should, right?), but I think what's actually going on is probably just the person shooting the arrow would either be targeting the baby or the mother, probably the mother,

but if the arrow enters the square, it then has to decide who it hits, and the baby would be chosen just as often as the mother. The way it works now, it might even depend on what order they are in the unit array, but it could be random – I don't recall – but it certainly would help you out.

Now one thing that doesn't happen that I heard someone say was, "Yeah my mother soldier dwarf just charged into battle, swung her baby at someone and the baby died!"

Well the baby died probably because it was targeted by the person attacking the mother. They don't swing their babies around: that's too hardcore for me. But there's certainly lots of people dying in the game. Is that even legal in Germany? I heard there's some kind of law.

No, they don't like blood over there. Also blood doesn't accumulate like water yet, does it?

It's planned, I've definitely got to do that because you can't have a proper hellish environment without rivers of blood, but it's tricky of course because it's all that maths storage.

Right now I've got one bit set aside for the liquid type, it's either water or not. So I'm planning to set aside three to four bits, which would be eight or 16 types of liquid. I'm trying to decide what I want. There's blood, there's sand (that would be an interesting liquid – sort of a semi-liquid, just how it acts and flows), oil, burning oil...

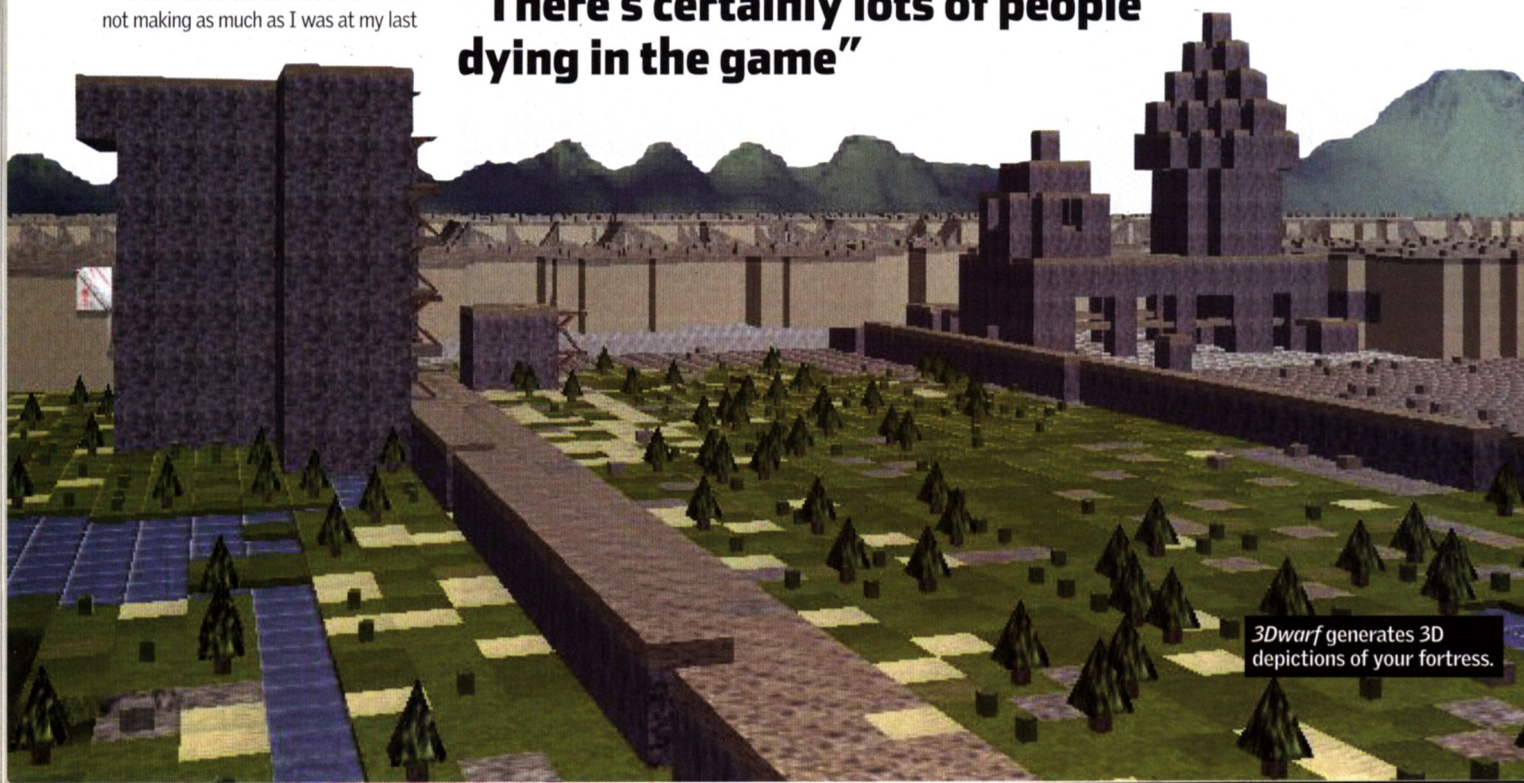
Vomit?

Yeah, vomit, bone meal, alcohol, you know there's all kinds of choices.

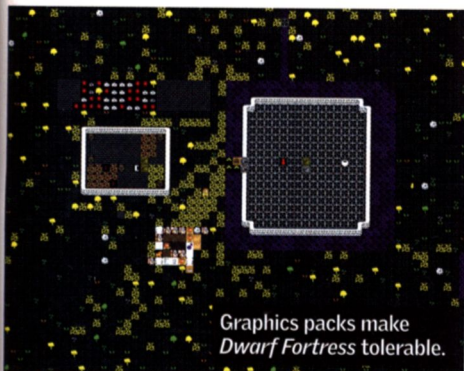
Is it true that you primarily developed *Dwarf Fortress* on a laptop?

Yeah. I've been on laptops now for... I'd say eight years, it's just easier for me. I'm

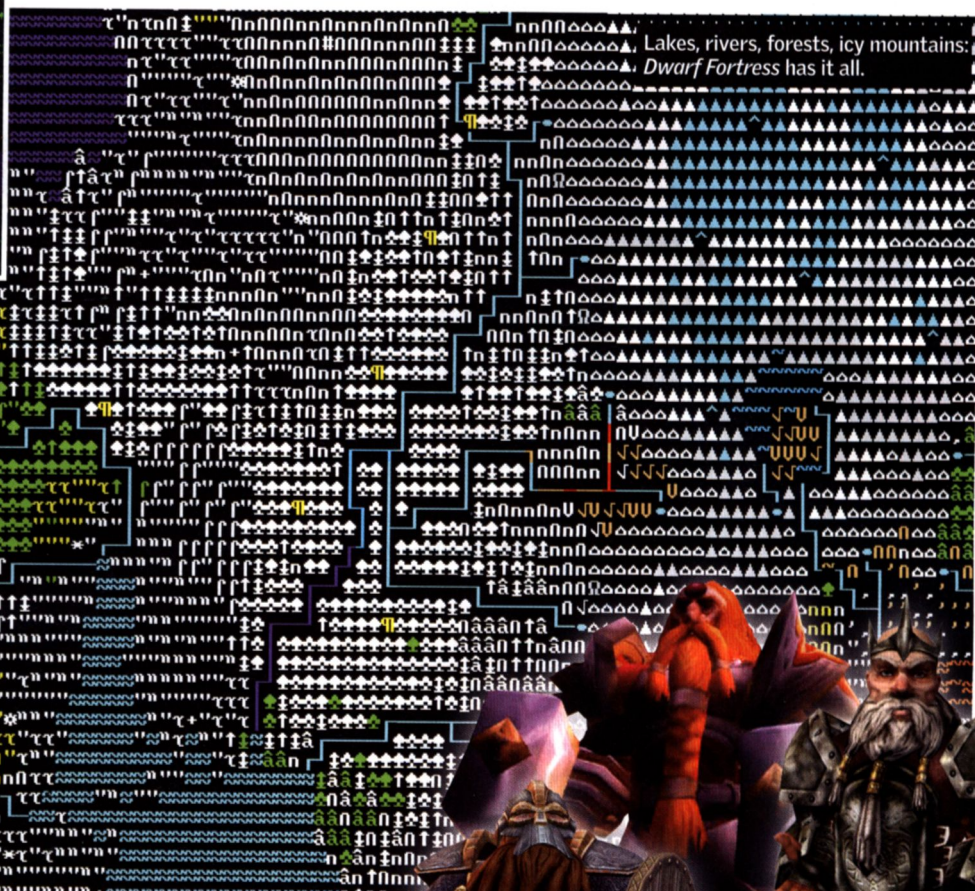
"There's certainly lots of people dying in the game"



3Dwarf generates 3D depictions of your fortress.



Graphics packs make Dwarf Fortress tolerable.



"The people writing *The Sims 3* are playing *Dwarf Fortress*"

not a technical person: I just can't handle installing your own heat sink, making sure your case fits, pointing it in the right direction, and blah blah blah, so I just buy laptops and wear them out.

My laptop has a problem now where when I open the laptop the screen no longer turns on, so it's monitorless, I plugged another monitor in the back of it so I use this other monitor. It also has lots of heat problems, probably because it's full of dust and I'm afraid of opening it and taking the dust out, and so I've got it sitting on empty toilet paper rolls and I put a fan under it, so it doesn't lock up anymore. It's running at about 60°C, but it was getting up to 100°C when I left it on my desk.

Have you ever had any interest from the industry?

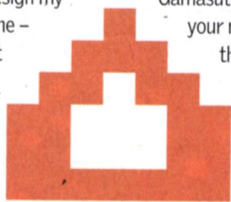
Yeah, not so much "Come design my game" because I think anyone – even if they appreciate what I'm doing – would realise I wouldn't be very good in the industry model, and certainly I don't know if people really ask for

designers so much, because everyone wants to be a designer. It seems to be that way anyway. The only ones I ever see, they're more like "Can I publish *Dwarf Fortress*?" Not from anyone big, and I'm not sure it's nobody you would have heard of, but certainly places that had experience from previous games. They kind of just wanted to write the front end of *Dwarf Fortress*; like "Just keep doing what you're doing and we'll stick a front on it", and the problem with that is that you have to set a point where you're going to sell it, and I'm just not interested in that.

I know the people that are writing *The Sims 3* and *Warhammer Online* are playing *Dwarf Fortress*. So there's people that know about the game, and it's not surprising because it's been on

Gamasutra and other websites, and your magazine is gonna have a thing about it – it's been around enough for people to hear of it anyway. **PCZ**

Read the full interview at pczone.co.uk



Some examples of dwarves.

+@\$g++++++@@++

That's ASCII art – we haven't gone insane

Donate to Bay12 Games and you're rewarded with a lovely snippet of *Dwarf Fortress* fan fiction (and a piece of ASCII art depicting the scene) from Zach Adams – here's a taste of what our \$10 got us...

Whispers of dissent swirled around the fortress hall. The aging king was deathly ill, and relatives swarmed with their supporters like so many buzzards. Whichever dwarf held the royal mandate would be king.

However, it would be a short reign without the will of the dwarven people. The leading candidate was Baron Nilrod, a great fat dwarf with bushy eyebrows. Everywhere he went, he turned out his pockets and showered the crowds with gold.

One dwarf who was not so easily swayed was young Brokbog. He was an energetic dwarf, both scribe and bard,

always seeking the truth at the heart of things. He could see through Baron Nilrod's brazen attempt to buy the throne. Now here he stood, at the appointed place to meet his source, a mysterious dwarf named Deep Chasm. Lo, the cloaked figure approaches!

"You seek to know the secret poison at the heart of this dark matter?" asked the shadowy dwarf.

"Yes!" exclaimed Brokbog.

"Behold your new king," said Deep Chasm in a hushed whisper, pointing down the corridor to a pair of torches. There Brokbog saw a creature hand Baron Nilrod a sack full of gold. It was a goblin!

Brokbog skipped down the corridor laughing. This was the best story yet. Soon the entire fortress would know Nilrod had been bought by the enemies of all life.

Freeware

David Brown spreads freedom and free games

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content from across the world of the internet. You want free games? We got free games. You want movies? We got free games. Shreddies for breakfast? You betcha, free games. This month, guide an irradiate worm, use a pogo stick to smash some pigs' skulls in, rescue a damsel in distress, dump gallons of precious oil into our precious oceans and enforce justice, Soviet-style!

ATOMIC WORM

Slithering its way into your heart

DEVELOPER Charlie Dog Games
WEBSITE snipurl.com/atomicworm

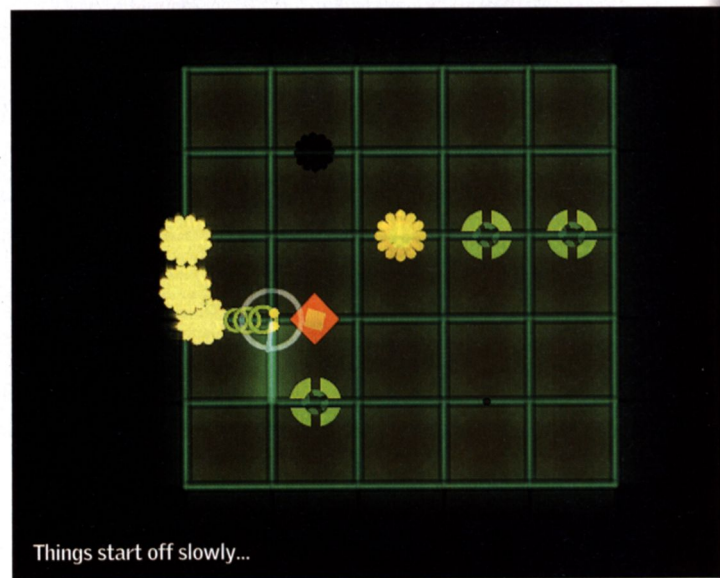
ATOMIC WORM IS basically a more substantial version of the mobile phone game *Snake* (the first game to appear on mobile phones, trivia fans) taking the same basic premise – guide a worm around a grid while trying to avoid doubling back on yourself and colliding with your ever-growing tail.

Charlie Dog Games has run with this ball, so to speak, and actually made it interesting. Personally, this humble writer got bored after 10 seconds of playing basic *Snake*, so the fact he found himself still plugging away on *AW* testifies to the addictive nature of both the original concept and its application here.

Things start out gently, allowing you to grasp the basics very quickly. Items appear gradually on the grid, which, when collected, get added to your tail. Collect three of a kind in a row and all items of the same type are removed. Your worm is also granted temporary immunity to mines, so if you are careful, you can eliminate such threats.

Sounds simple, but the difficulty is soon ramped up after a couple of levels, which is where *Atomic Worm's* biggest fault lies.

You see, things can get very confusing at an alarming rate. Dawdle for just a moment and you'll soon find the grid filled with items, mines and other hazards. Things are exacerbated by the need to complete a certain number of item combos before the exit teleport is revealed. Each time you succeed, your



Things start off slowly...

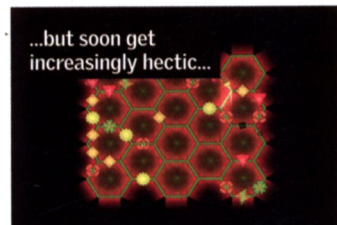
worm gathers pace, making things even more hectic.

At times you're overwhelmed and unable to follow the action, leading to almost inevitable cataclysmic destruction as you inadvertently headbutt your own tail. Those without the ability to think quickly and act decisively will come unstuck as the game progresses.

It's also important not to get too fixated on obtaining the next correct item, avoiding potential success in a single-minded attempt to reach it.

Nevertheless, *Atomic Worm* makes the original redundant, improving on it in every way. If somebody could find a way

...but soon get increasingly hectic...



of including this on a mobile device, I'd happily play it while waiting on a windswept train platform. Considering I have singularly avoided doing this in the past, you can assume *Atomic Worm* is a game worth playing when in need of some freeware fun.

POLYMANIACS

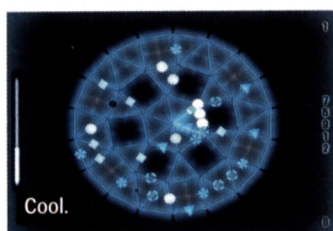
DEVELOPER Stevie Goodwin
WEBSITE snipurl.com/polymaniacs

WE DON'T NORMALLY include alpha versions of games in these hallowed pages, but *Polymaniacs* impressed us enough to warrant such coverage.

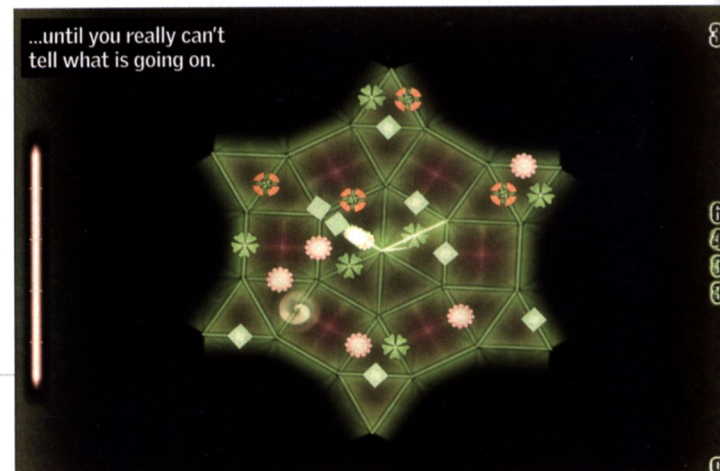
Think back a few years now to *Offroad* (issue 102) a racing game where you traversed various types of terrain while trying to achieve various goals. This is almost exactly where *Polymaniacs* is coming from, just that it is doing so for free and it looks far more like *Micro Machines* as it does so.

Even at this alpha stage, there are an impressive number of options available – time trials, deathmatches, team games and so on – and we can only assume these will be fleshed out with more maps and vehicles as time goes by. The graphics are simple, but that's the point – it doesn't play up its devotion to polygons for nothing.

As it is, *Polymaniacs* is definitely one to keep an eye on – it could turn into something special, especially if they add some kind of online multiplayer to the mix.



Cool.



...until you really can't tell what is going on.

SKULLPOGO

Pogo sticks and vampire pigs

DEVELOPER ChevyRay WEBSITE snipurl.com/skullpogo

HAVE THERE BEEN any stranger ideas for a game than using a pogo stick to shatter the skulls of vampiric pigs? Well, probably, but that's not important right now.

Like all the best freeware games, *Skullpogo* is easy to grasp, yet it will provide many hours of wrist-shattering frustration and elation in equal measure.

Intriguingly, one of the power-ups involves you trying to come as close as possible to failure, before rescuing yourself at the last moment. The nearer to losing you come, the higher the potential bonus to your score. It's



risky, but necessary if you want to make a mark on the high score table.

Skullpogo sounds silly, but it really works. While it isn't a stayer in the *Peggle* sense, it'll certainly be one of your favourite desktop distractions for a week or so.



DAMSEL

Princesses are doing it for themselves

DEVELOPER Strange Visitor Productions
WEBSITE snipurl.com/damsel

WHILE DAMSEL MIGHT be too short to be deemed worthy of the term "adventure game", you can definitely fritter away 10 minutes or so on it.

The bods at Strange Visitor are hoping to turn it into a series of short vignettes and, if this one is anything to go by, they should provide a bit of point-and-click sustenance, especially for those

who aren't planning on busting heads in the big name shooters appearing in the coming weeks.

While nobody could really ever call *Damsel* funny in a *Monkey Island*/*Day of the Tentacle* sense, it is pleasant enough – although, thankfully, a quick click of the mouse will skip any particularly annoying vocalisation.

The puzzles are extremely easy too, which makes this game the definition of the term 'casual'.

PIRATE FISHING

Fish need DRM too

DEVELOPER Petri Purho WEBSITE kloonigames.com/blog/games/pirate-fishing

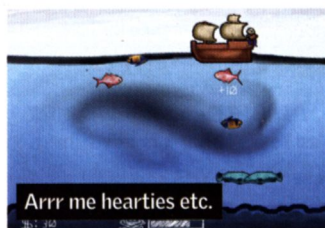


WHERE WILL PIRATES go when they've destroyed the games industry? An easy question if you're Petri Purho, creator of *Pirate Fishing* – they go out to sea and wreck everything for fishermen. Your objective in this game is to slaughter as many aquatic creatures as possible by dumping oil into the ocean.

You'll need to make sure you observe the direction of the currents, because

your oil slick will dissipate quickly if you aren't careful.

We've found that the best tactic is trap the fish between two waves of oil, by dumping it quickly in two locations. This makes it impossible for them to swim to safety, although managing to



"Kill as many aquatic creatures as possible by dumping oil in the ocean"

snare the deepest ocean dwellers with your oil is a difficult task to achieve.

Pirate Fishing won't hold you into the wee hours, but it's an amusing little time waster. But do watch out for Mr Purho's next game, *Crayon Physics Deluxe*, which won't bait Al Gore as much.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



IVAN DRAGO: JUSTICE ENFORCER

DEVELOPER i-mockery
WEBSITE snipurl.com/ivandrigo

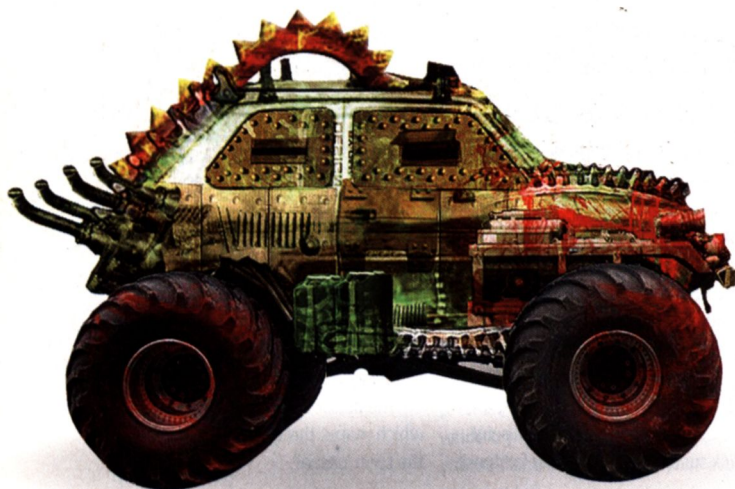
ONE OF THE greatest '80s action characters of all time, Ivan Drago (the Russian in *Rocky IV*) has been sent out by Mikhail Gorbachev to wreak Soviet-based havoc on the decadent USA, taking out leather jacket-wearing hoodies, yuppies, whip-carrying dominatrices and even a dinosaur.

The game is very simple – press A to punch, S to block and D to duck, while moving about with the arrow keys – and plays out like a more amusing version of *Double Dragon*. A two-player mode would have been nice, as would some variety to the gameplay, but this is primarily a spoof, so expecting depth is silly.

So oil up your chest and give those capitalist pigs a damn good drubbing, comrades!

Extend

A round-up of mods now available through Steam



D.I.P.R.I.P.

A wheely bloody experience

WEBSITE diprip.com MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

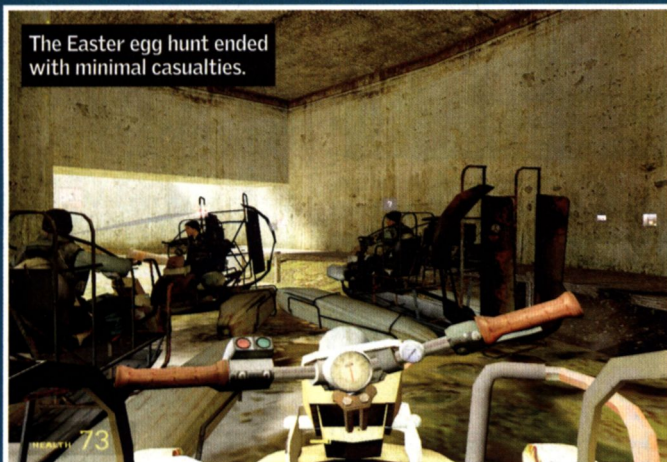
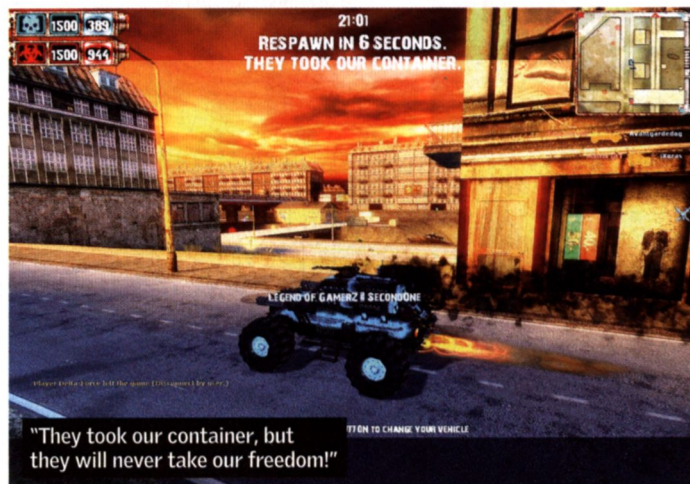
D.I.P.R.I.P. (OR DIE in Pain, Rest in Peace) is all about big guns, muscular cars and capturing flags. One could imagine the brains behind the mod flinging their heads with wild abandon to Motörhead when they started work on this project.

Despite a relatively steep learning curve (expect to die a lot to begin with), it's worth persevering to earn that very first kill, which earns you an achievement.

Sadly, after you've earned your stripes in such butchery there's little depth to the game, beyond getting the hang of the weapons and finding out what each power-up can do for you.

D.I.P.R.I.P. is more suited to a quick blast before *Neighbours*, rather than a marathon session lasting deep into the night. Unless, of course, you stick some Metallica on, with which it seems to make a lot more sense.

STEAM MOD
ROUND-UP!
THE TOP FIVE



SYNERGY

Teamwork is good for the soul

WEBSITE synergymod.net MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

EVERYBODY LOVES A bit of co-op, be it a LAN blast with some 'friends' (whatever they are) or mingling with the unwashed at 4am for a spot of raiding on *WOW*.

So let's peek into the world of *Synergy* to see just what we can do working together.

Allowing you to play through the whole of *Half-Life 2*, its episodes and

even the aborted *SiN Episodes* (among others), *Synergy* is as good as the games it replicates, but improved by the presence of your chums.

There are some niggles, such as ammunition shortages (other players will selfishly hoover it all up) and being addressed as Dr Freeman, but such is the nature of the co-op mod beast. In the end, good fun will be had by all.



ZOMBIE PANIC

They're afraid of *Left 4 Dead*

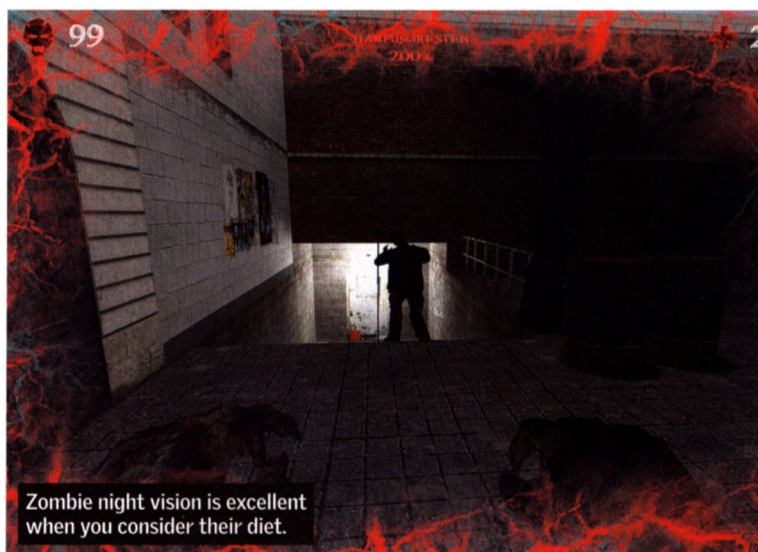
WEBSITE zombiepanic.org MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

ZOMBIES ARE ALL the rage at the moment and, what with *Left 4 Dead* having been released, we thought it would be a good time to revisit *Zombie Panic*, being as it's just appeared on everybody's Steam list.

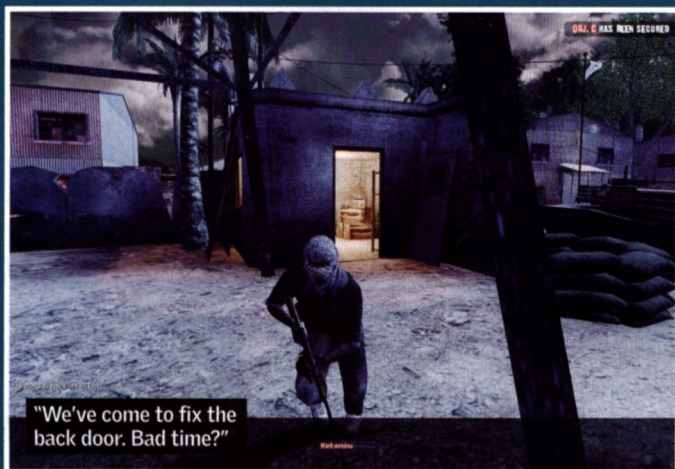
If you're not familiar with it, *Zombie Panic* involves a team of humans trying to complete a number of objectives while fending off a growing zombie horde.

The twist is that each human that dies at the hands of the initially tiny zombie force is reborn as one of the walking dead, making teamwork on the part of both sides absolutely crucial to victory.

As with most mods, it still needs some polishing. Those looking to get their eye in before *L4D* should give it a go – not much beats trying to take out a zombie with a frying pan.



Zombie night vision is excellent when you consider their diet.



INSURGENCY

The revolt against *Counter-Strike*

WEBSITE insmod.net MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

INSURGENCY IS VERY much a mod in the *Counter-Strike* vein, but around 10 times more hardcore and complex. Don't let devotees hear you say that, of course, or you'll get slapped quicker than you can say "I need backup!"

Such a feeling will be familiar when you first join in the Iraq-based conflict. Dying without knowing where your assailant was hiding is common.

Realism is paramount, so you aren't given handy "Here he is!" notifications, just a sky to stare up at while your blood oozes out of you onto the ground.

There is little scope for unleashing one's inner Rambo here, so those weaned on CS will need to take a reality check before signing up for a tour in *Insurgency*. One for those who yearn for slower-paced online combat.

MARE NOSTRUM

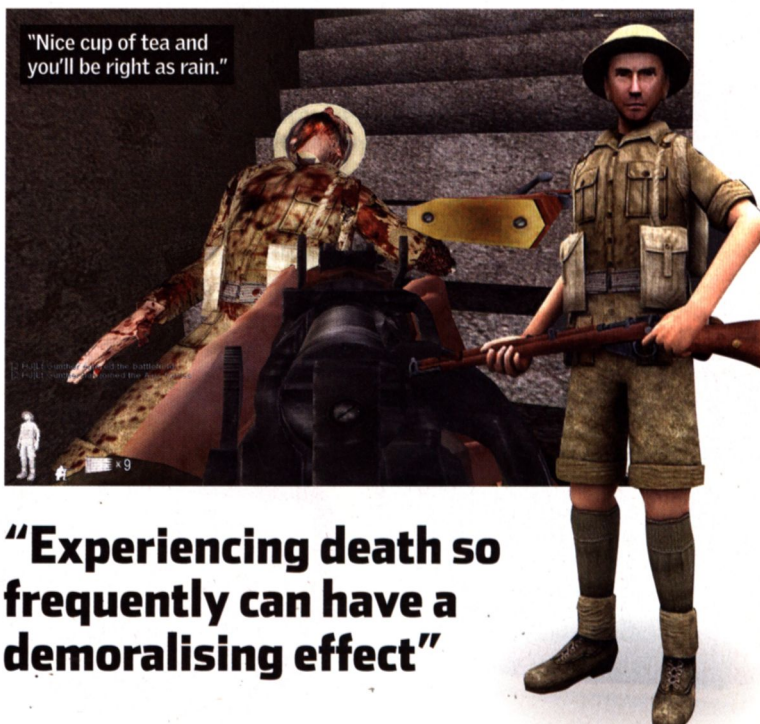
Death on the Nile and its sandy shores

WEBSITE marenostrumgame.com MOD FOR *Red Orchestra*

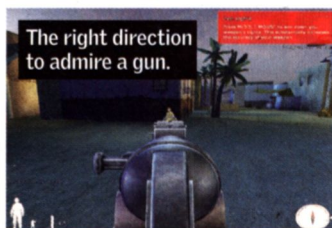
HAVING THE HONOUR of being the first ever non-Source mod to be released on Steam, *Mare Nostrum* aims to make *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45* even more brutally hardcore than before, taking the series into the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East, along with some Italy-based combat thrown in to boot.

This certainly makes a change from the depressingly bleak nature of *Red Orchestra's* original landscapes – the urban North African battlefields are a visual treat – but those who found the original game a little too daunting won't be won over by the appealing new scenarios, the additional arms (new infantry and anti-tank weapons) or armor (early British and German tanks).

The very nature of *RO's* gameplay has often put casual players off joining in. After all, experiencing death so frequently can have a demoralising effect. Still, they are not the market that this mod is aimed at – *RO* nuts will lap this up like cats eyeing a particularly mouth-watering saucer of gaming milk.



"Experiencing death so frequently can have a demoralising effect"



Online Zone

What's new in PC ZONE's forum, podcast, Fight Club and Zone Chat

A new Freeplay guy means a fresh approach to what we affectionately call the grey intro box. So there won't be any off-topic discussion or shameless avoiding of the topic. All I'm going to do here is to tell you exactly what we have in store over the course of the next two pages, in a not-at-all roundabout and rambling manner. So here we go, deep breaths now. Oh bugger, now I've gone and run out of space.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Left 4 Dead – retail or Steam purchase?

I think that when prices were comparable people were happy to get the games through Steam for the convenience, so weren't bothered by the lack of physicality. I just wonder if now Steam is going to cost more, whether that will alter people's buying habits?

peachFUZZ

The only game I ever bought off Steam was *Peggle Deluxe*. When Play.com sells PC games for an average £10 cheaper than Steam, then they can f**k right off.

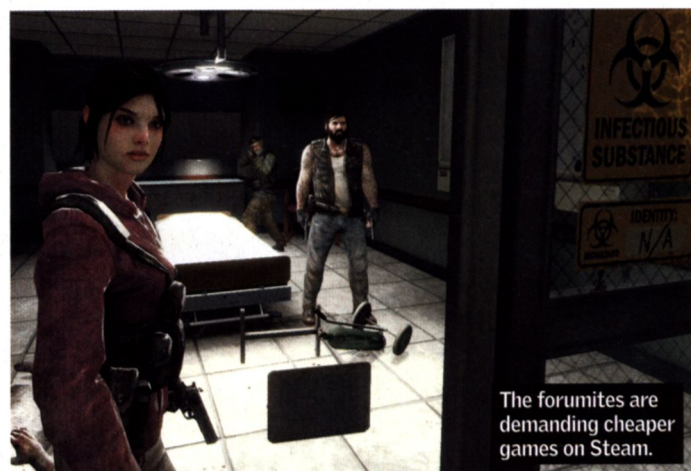
JoWoo

I believe that retailers put pressure on both Valve and the publishers who sell through Steam – basically threatening to cease stocking their titles if they are available for much cheaper through digital distribution.

musicalgibbon

I always buy games where I can get them cheapest. I don't find waiting a few days for an envelope any more inconvenient than having to download gigs of data.

-Doomus-



The forumites are demanding cheaper games on Steam.

"Unless the prices drop on Steam, buy a boxed copy"

You can't beat the "bargain" gene, so unless the prices drop on Steam, buy a boxed copy.

DR_DARK

I do like the whole digital delivery thing. The ability to make impulse purchases is appealing.

madameye

It does strike me as being a missed opportunity for digital distribution, but if Valve are still dependent on retailers for profit margins that they're gonna yonk the prices of their downloads up, for fear of offending said retailers, then the PC market can't be in as bad shape as a lot of people are making out.

SunScramble

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

WE'VE BEEN SO busy getting over issue 201 that we almost forgot we had another one coming out (the very tome you are feverishly pawing at with your moist hands right now, in fact). We nearly forgot so much that there has been little time for blogging, although we did manage to tell you all about Dan Marshall's spiffing cameo competition for the *Ben There, Dan That* sequel. There was also time to slip in a quick mention of the Golden Joysticks, urging you all to stick up for the PC against the console swine.

Hopefully you didn't all ignore our wise words and vote for *Twee JRPG Number 2,932* instead. That would make us cry like little children and nobody wants that. Anyway, we promise to update the blog a bit more this month, honest. To check up on us, just head on over to pczone.co.uk!



Frankie Boyle voted for *Euro Truck Simulator*.



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Talking rubbish about games, for you

FIGHT CLUB



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

Amorous rodents and *Far Cry 2*

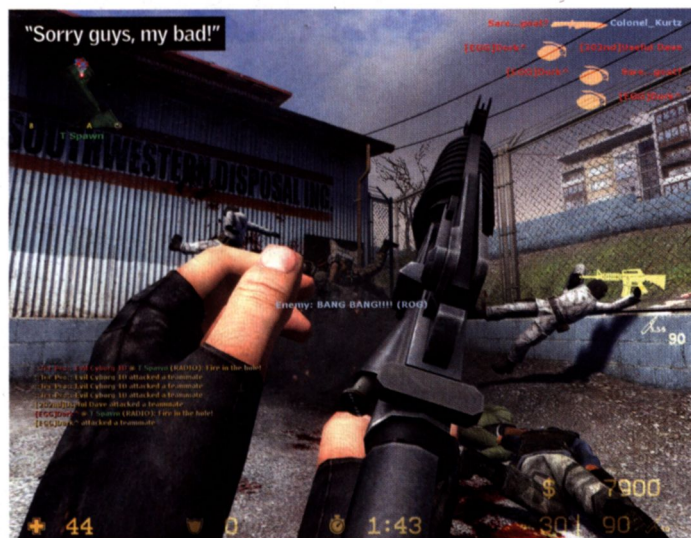
SOMETIMES THE OLD favourites are sometimes the best, but are not always the easiest to remember the admin commands for. Back in the traditional 'after work' slot, Fight Club was brought to you from the world of *Counter-Strike*, with all the random headshot and grenading goodness that said game entails.

Joining the team for this month's bullet festival was intrepid freelancer Chris Capel (aka The Tangler), who put up an admirable fight considering he hasn't played CS for four years.

Sarevok and forum regular JoWoo were also hanging around, the former deciding to take everybody on with just his knife.

This month's Fight Club was also a special occasion, marking (nearly) as it did one of our regulars' birthday. Step forward, Mr Ghostchanter, and receive the congratulations of your peers.

Remember to join our Steam Community group at steamcommunity.com/pcz, otherwise you won't know when and where you can give the Zone staff a good hiding.



ZONE CHAT



Humiliating ourselves in public again

ZONE CHAT WAS a curious mix of the sexually bizarre and deadly serious this month, with reports of our deputy editor enjoying a romantic tryst with a squirrel confirmed by the man himself.

While the twisted among the throng were desperate for information about Steve's animal entanglement, those who wanted to talk games argued about *Far Cry 2*, with JoWoo registering his disdain at being repeatedly rammed by road users.

We also introduced **ZONE's** new staffer to the world, although his fame was cut short by revelations that some chatters had secured the amorous attentions of a variety of woodland creatures. We knew you guys were animal lovers, but it was frankly disturbing. In a bad way.

Anyway, next month we'll find out how Steve's date with a hedgehog went. We tried to get his spiky friend to log in to Steam, but she refused. A shame, as we were interested to hear her opinions on *Far Cry 2*.



For legal reasons, Steve's squirrel cannot be identified.

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...



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been arrested for stealing garden gnomes – then join **PCZ** readers on the following public servers. We might even pop in from time to time, you never know. The latest info can be found at pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Steve Hogarty PCZ_Escaped_monkey
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
David Brown PCZ_Plughead

1 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025

2 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

3 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

4 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

5 ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS
pczone2.jolt.co.uk

6 CALL OF DUTY 4
Coming soon... really

7 BATTLEFIELD 2142
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567

8 TEAM FORTRESS 2
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

AS YOU ALL know, this issue has heralded a new era for **PC ZONE** and the podcast is an interesting mix of the old and the new. Log rocked up as our special guest, while David Brown hung around in the corner, occasionally sprinkling his own jumbled thoughts into the audio soup that is the now 100% sober podcast.

We won't spoil the delight of hearing us witter, but suffice it to say that if you are a German widescreen gamer, you might want to clap your hands over your ears during parts of our broadcast.

We also take time out to consider an under appreciated game of yesteryear that slipped under the radar. See, that's how cutting edge we are here at **ZONE** –

old games and a ruthlessly scornful approach to rectangular monitors.

We also get stuck into why we think *Dead Space* has woeful mouse control and how *Far Cry 2* is splitting the readers into two bitter gun-toting rival camps, waging word-based war across the digital savannah that is the **PC ZONE** forum.



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Everybody's hands are different, it's all part of the wonderful stage show we call life. But when it comes to purchasing a mouse it's important that the tool you choose complements the unique contours of your phalanges. That's why I'm chuffed that we're able to give away a Saitek Cyborg Mouse with your subscription to **PC ZONE**. Not only is it an incredibly comfortable rodent, it can be configured to fit your hand perfectly. A programmable four-way D-pad shifts the casing about with tiny whirring motors, like the flaps on a fighter jet. The Cyborg is the mouse of choice at **PC ZONE**!

**PCZONE
90**

**"The Cyborg has a body that can be
configured to fit your hand"** Phil Wand, issue 194

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Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
deputy editor

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback of the month

ZX FAMILY

LAST MONTH, WE took the piss out of the Sinclair QL and probably upset Sir Clive Sinclair, who's probably furiously riding around the boardroom of his local MENSA sect in a C5 as you read this. We've already covered the ZX Spectrum, but the birth of Sinclair's success lies in the ZX80.

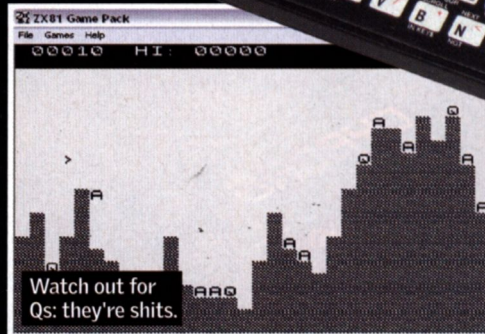
The only proper computer to be sold as a project for grown-ups who weren't afraid of firing tin solder into their eyes, the ZX80 (released in 1980 and featuring a Z80 processor, numerology fans) was barely popular, and so was killed to make way for the ZX81, which kept the waterproof membranous

keyboard, but added a few kilobytes to the RAM. You could upgrade the ZX80, but the feeling from the public was "stuff this, I want graphics". The ZX81 did, however, introduce moving images with its innovative "slow" mode.

Now, in a decadent, robot-frotting time, owners of these proud beasts are relegated to being bedroom curators, who try to tell you that "this processor is more powerful than the one in the space shuttle". This gives you an opening to throw their aged computer out of the window and say "doesn't go as far, though".



The ZX81 was crippled by the lack of a Space bar.



But how? Get Sinclair's stuff working

Most people have a ZX80 or 81 in their garage, so it's worth looking through any boxes you remember seeing any Paul Young records in, just to make sure you don't already have one. If you don't, then you'll need MESS - Multiple Emulator Super System - a fantastic cluster of emulators that covers almost everything out there. It's not the easiest to get working, but the manual is on the website

too, and far more intelligible than a short précis in a piss-takey magazine article.

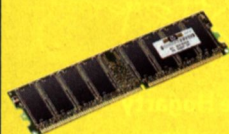
www.mess.org/download.php
The download page of the MESS site.

roms.zophar.net/sinclair-zx81/all
There's nowt for the ZX80 as it suffered for games, so here are some ROMs for the ZX81 instead.



The ZX80 - your PC's great-granddad.

Factopolis Six things you simply have to know about the early ZX computers



1 K++
The ZX80 had 1KB of RAM. So did the ZX81, until a gigantic 16KB RAM pack appeared.



2 BLIMEY
If you scaled up this price in an '80s Tandy catalogue, a gig of RAM would cost \$19million.



3 PRE-RS232
The ZX printer burned onto a roll of aluminium paper, called "Hot Robot Bogroll".



4 ASCII
Sinclair shat on ASCII standards, having half the numbers as inverses of the other. Take that, standards!



5 MICRO ACE
What they called the ZX80 in the US. Because they got its name wrong and wouldn't admit it.



6 RUBBER LOVE
The Spectrum's keyboard wasn't lemonade-proof. It'd burn your knees if you left it on your lap.

Now & Then

BULLY vs SCHOOL DAZE

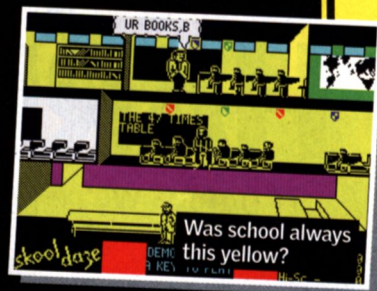


Bully – once called *Canis Canem Edit*.

WHEN *CANIS CANEM EDIT* (now *Bully*) was first released, this comparison was everywhere – but that was ages ago. So join us now, as *PC ZONE* pretends to draw the first ever comparison between these two games.

For a time when no-one really expected anything beyond sprite detection and colour-clash management, *Skool Daze* packed flabbergasting depth into its two-screen wide playfield. Just like *Bully*, you had to attend lessons. There were swots and bullies too, and crowds of wee nobodies running around the school. You could be given lines for misbehaving – and there were over a dozen reasons to be punished.

If you can lower your expectations to '80s levels of depth, *Skool Daze* will literally purse its lips, lean into your ear and blow your mind. Yes. Literally.



Was school always this yellow?

Play it! The option you choose affects how long it takes you to play Skool Daze

- 1 Buy a working ZX Spectrum and a cassette player, and find someone on eBay who's obsessive enough to have kept *Skool Daze*, but now wants to sell it.
- 2 Install an emulator from the huge list at snipurl.com/specems and find the ROM from this page: snipurl.com/skooldazerom. Then work out what to do with them.
- 3 Wait for the atoms of the universe to collide in such a way that this happens naturally, without you having to lift a finger. This may take in excess of a month.
- 4 Go to snipurl.com/skooldazejava where a Java emulator will pop up, with the game already loading up and playing. It's a tiny screen, but takes virtually no effort on your part.

Mameframe

YIE AR KUNG-FU vs KUNG-FU MASTER

NO-ONE KNEW if we were saying it right, but no-one cared. We were Oolong, the hero of *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. We didn't know why we were fighting – we just knew that kung-fu was the easiest way to jump seven times your own height. *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* contained all Eastern culture as we knew it – a fat man, a lady, some dude showing off with nunchakus, and a guy called Feedle hiding behind a screen.

But, as we grew, we demanded narrative and motivation – so when *Kung-Fu Master* arrived, in which you have to go upstairs to rescue your kidnapped girlfriend, we were amazed. We had to fight men, children, snakes, disappearing hunchbacks and even butterflies to save her. And when we did, she got kidnapped again and was kept prisoner in a harder house. "Cut your losses, mate," never entered our minds, and we carried on piling in the Florins. Because that's what a kung-fu master would do.



Kung-Fu Master: Game Over.



Yie Ar Kung-Fu: Chilly.

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.

Back in the day

MY LIST OF GAMES

By Jon Blyth

MY MOTHER RECENTLY presented me with a room full of paper.

"I want to get shot of this crap," she said, and I started whimpering. It was my stuff: a 25 year-old jotter with "BIG BROWN BROTHEL" scrawled on the front. A letter to someone I remember wanting to cuddle once. And my List of Games.

I'd noticed that List of Games was an acronym of my own name, so I kept a list, rewritten every week, of all my new games, along with those I'd lent out, and an appended wish list. All decorated with an ornate LOG that wouldn't have looked out of place on a gangster's back. After cuddling my List of Games, I forbade mother to enter this room again.

And Duncan Emerson, you've still got my copy of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, and I want it back.



CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



MULTIWINIA

Flustered and flattened: **Steve Hogarty**

WHILE IT DIDN'T arrive to the fanfare some were expecting, *Multiwinia*'s become one of the few strategy games I can stand playing. I adore it. I love how units flock and move as seamless, fluid forces, battlegrounds are clearly defined, the objectives are bold and simple, and the colours are distinct and vibrant. It's the equivalent of large-print books for RTS fans, a game that dispenses with the baubles of strategy classics in order to draw attention back to the clear-cut genre basics.

RTS CONVERT

I was no fan of *Darwinia*, quickly tiring of guiding the digital populace across large maps and watching them get stuck on every crag and peninsula they could find. You wouldn't think it, but *Multiwinia*'s a very different game (with pathfinding, for a start). Units feel more disposable, they move swiftly and with more autonomy, allowing you to successfully direct supply chains of reinforcements without worrying that your entire army is stuck on a particularly jagged polygon.

The retro stylings can't be faulted – *Multiwinia* is as unique as it's striking.



The crate drops, those tide-turning superweapons that fall from on high to bolster your chances of victory, are superb toys too. Between *DEFCON* subs rising from the depths to launch nukes and *Tron*-style ships delivering airstrikes, it's clear Introversion had a blast putting *Multiwinia* together, and it's felt in every reference and subtle hint of humour.

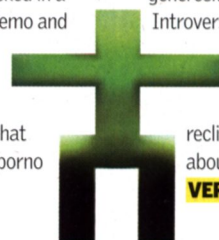
Most importantly, Introversion have put out a demo that unashamedly bares the game's soul to you. Not only does it serve the fine purpose of dispelling any of the preconceptions you might have had about what sort of game *Multiwinia*

"If I had to be locked in a room with nothing but a demo, it would be the *Multiwinia* demo"

actually is, but it's also disproportionately generous. If I had to be locked in a room with nothing but a demo and an internet connection, it would be the *Multiwinia* demo (or, if I had to spend a very long time in that room, some really smutty porno game, admittedly).

Though perhaps this enormous generosity could become a problem from Introversion. I mean, why buy the cow when the milk's free? Beef, you might argue. Which is a good argument. I've just reclined in my chair and thought about that.

VERDICT Sweetie beef treats



DOOM 3

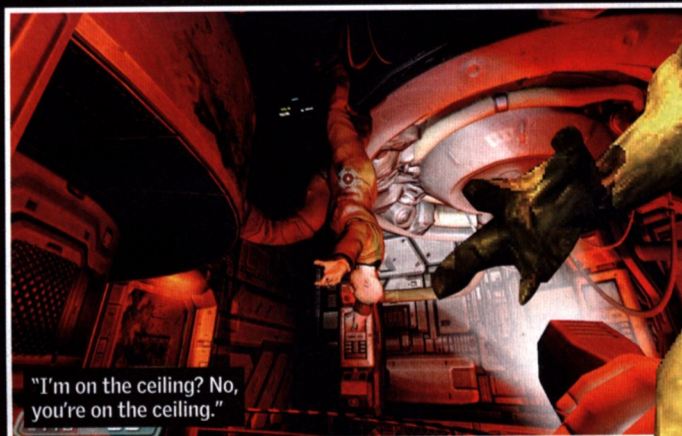
Condemned to hell: **David Brown**

LIKE STEVE WITH *Fahrenheit*, I'd never finished *Doom 3*, mostly because my computer took umbrage at having to play something technologically sophisticated. I also got bored of it and decided to play something more interesting.

Nevertheless, I don't like leaving storyline-based games unfinished, so recently I've been ploughing through the plastic-y spawn of hell once more.

Doom 3's obvious quality still lies in its graphics, which have stood the test of time surprisingly well. However, its gameplay hasn't followed suit, with the repetitive corridor-based tomfoolery even less appealing this time out.

If you try not to remember you've been playing more intellectually stimulating titles since it came out, *Doom 3* can still provide a bit of visceral



"I'm on the ceiling? No, you're on the ceiling."

"Doom 3 can still provide a bit of visceral fun every now and then"

fun every now and then. Some of the set pieces are still quite nerve-jangling and any game that scared my younger sister so much that she refused to play it ever

again has to have something going for it. Still, if you asked me to pick one of the *Doom* games to play at random, I'd revisit the original. Let's just hope a fourth title comes along to stamp on the throat of the games industry once again.

VERDICT Doomed



Kablam!

MAFIA

Jonny Twinkletoes: **Will Porter**

I'VE PLAYED THROUGH the early chapters of *Mafia* on four separate occasions – each time distracted by something shiny like a gaming magpie, making a dash for higher FPS ground after *Mafia*'s opening hours of bespoke boredom.

Speed limits, taxi shuttling from the theatre to the hospital, short-cuts that end up with your car lolling on its roof with a mission failed message but a breath away... there can be no other game that hides its winning hand so deep into the game.

This time though, I'm going in for the kill. I'm gunfighting on the rooftops, I'm shooting dogs outside hotels, I'm patching up the game so I can win a race, and I'm standing in a barn during a thunderstorm awe-struck at how it's so very much like my second-favourite scene in *The Untouchables*. The action hasn't dated well, but somehow the graphics have – while its role as a period piece is practically unparalleled as you thunder round corners (at precisely 40mph) and collide with a lampposts to chintzy '30s music.

No, it isn't as close to Scorsese as reviewers said, but it's closer than *Max Payne* got to film noir.

Somewhere deep in the Czech Republic a new Mafia don is being made, in every sense of the word, and I'm very excited.

VERDICT Bellissimo



Never, ever, take the Hoboken shortcut.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

POWDERMONKEY SPORE

"Who wouldn't have this on? A little less replayability than I would have liked, but a novel and exciting game nonetheless."

THERUMINATOR GEARS OF WAR

"I loved it all the way to the end where I failed terribly to kill the big rancor-like thingy. I suck."

DISTURBING AIM COMMAND & CONQUER 3

"Absolutely brilliant. And if there's a skirmish map out there I have yet to play, someone is hiding it from me."

JOHNNYWARMONGER WORLD OF WARCRAFT

"I'm giving this one more go. If I still hate it in a month, it's not going back on."

Tell us what's on your hard drive at pczone.co.uk.

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE

Jon Blyth ambushes **Marek Spanel** and **Ivan Buchta** of **Bohemia Interactive**, and demands retrospection

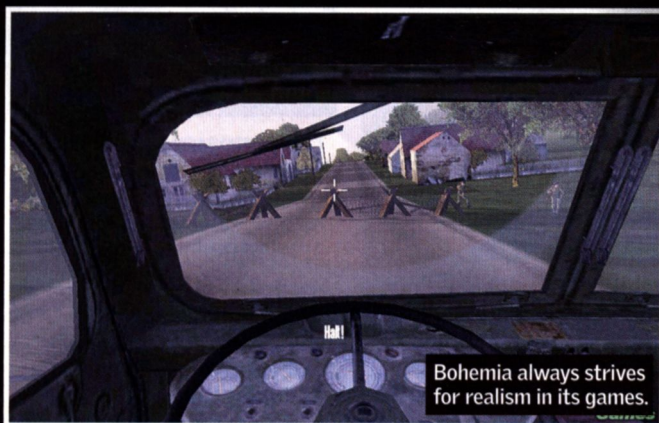
BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE HAVE grown slowly but steadily since they began a decade ago. From their roots as a handful of enthusiasts, they grew into an established Czech business, and as they grew, they took enthusiasts from the modding community with them.

There's a unique sense of modesty and honesty to the staff of Bohemia, that we'd like to say felt somehow British. Visiting the out-of-Prague offices, set by a lake up a remote hill, with a bunch of black cats, Jon Blyth took the opportunity to chew over old times with CEO Marek Spanel, and *Arma 2*'s lead designer, Ivan Buchta, who's been with Bohemia since his work in the *Operation Flashpoint* modding community.



Marek Spanel, Bohemia's CEO.

Ivan Buchta, *Arma 2*'s lead designer.



Bohemia always strives for realism in its games.



You won't last long in one of these.

01 BEGINNINGS

Spanel "When we started, we were just two brothers working from home. We have grown gradually, when we finished *Operation Flashpoint* we were just 10 people, now we are much larger, with 60 or 70 people working for us. So, there's much more of a management overhead than in the early days, when everyone knew everything about the project, and there was no need for formal processes and documentation. So it's sometimes more boring, now. But, it's necessary and logical, because the technologies we're working on now are much more complex. Now, we're an established business – back then, we were just a bunch of enthusiasts. That's the change, really."

02 COMMUNITY

Spanel "Once *Flashpoint* was released there was a lot of interest in using it as a training tool, so demands were made that superseded our capabilities as a company. We needed to find people to help out with new stuff. That's how we ended up working with the mod community, and later some of them joined us full-time. A significant part of our team comes from this."

Buchta "I was working on the *Czechoslovakian Army Mod (CSLA Mod)* for *Flashpoint*. It was a group of several talented people, and me. Then we had the chance to help make *Virtual Battlespace One* (virtualbattlespace.com). The relationship with Bohemia got stronger, and after some time I realised I was bored working in a university, so I joined in with this great challenge."

"You call yourself the king of the jungle!?"



"If there's something you can put into the game, you should be able to play with it"

Marek Buchta on Bohemia's design philosophy



03 SOPHISTICATION VERSUS FUN

Buchta "In *ArmA 2*'s armoury you can control the creatures in the game, but we didn't focus on simulating animals. We simply try to create full systems. We don't want fake things. If there's something you can put into the game, you should be able to play with it. That's the way we like it."

Spanel "There's a *Flashpoint* mod called *Crime City*, about cops and robbers, and there's a mod in which you can buy clothes and houses called *Sahrani Live*, it's like a country you can live in. They're very realistic."

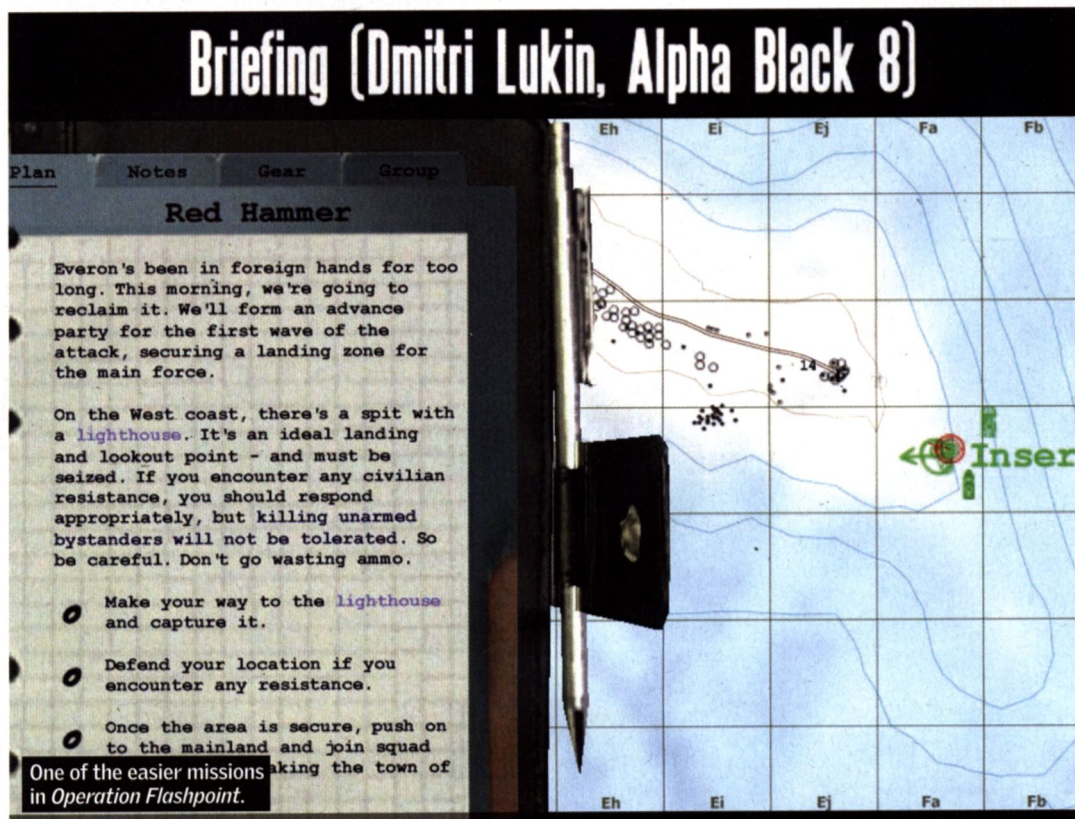
Buchta "This is possible due to our approach, to provide that basic sandbox functionality."

Spanel "That's how the engine was designed to work. Some people don't like the light effects in *ArmA*, and want to disable it. But why disable the light simulator?"

04 SMALL CONSOLATION

Spanel "We underestimated the difficulties of putting *Flashpoint* onto the Xbox by a factor of about 100. All the issues of moving our game to another platform, lower memory footprint, all the limitations, we just underestimated. We spent a long time dealing with that."

"Unfortunately, *Operation Flashpoint: Elite* came out at the time when the Xbox was being discontinued. That was the fastest ever decline of a console. What you hear – I'm not sure if it's true – was that Microsoft were losing money on the hardware, so they wanted to phase it out very aggressively. It died almost instantly, when there was still a demand, but there was no hardware to buy any more. We were very unlucky to launch our game just as the 360 was launched."



Flashpoint was definitely not one for casual players.

05 MILITARY TRAINING

Spanel "In the military, the most common usage of our simulators is convoy training. Convoys are commonly attacked in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it's difficult to train people in dealing with that. It's called Diverse Ambush for that reason."

Buchta "In general, our games are not good for teaching people how to shoot, or for some vehicle related drills, but it's good for training interoperability. Training for combined operations in real life costs lots of money. If you need to teach people how to move with APCs, or react to an ambush, it's very expensive to do in the field."

"Helicopter crews don't have much room to train – they train in classrooms, which is non-interactive and kind of boring, and when they train in the air the fuel is so expensive and it isn't safe. With our system, the pilot is there not to learn how to fly a helicopter, he's there to learn how to work with his crewmen. So they learn this in full virtual reality, in a cockpit and cargo space, communicating through their headsets."



06 PUBLISHING WOES

Spanel "We are more free without a publisher, but it is more difficult. Our relationship with Codemasters started well, but soon after *Operation Flashpoint*, things started going not so well, and eventually the relationship broke. There was some struggle, because the game was so successful. We probably ended up working on the original game too much, as a company. Nobody paid us directly for this – it's hard to describe, it was like a ride. We'd been working on it for a long time, when nobody wanted it much, then it got large, a massive hit. All the publishers wondered why they'd rejected it, we got these Game of the Year awards, so we just ended up offering support. We listened to the community, and whatever they wanted, we did. We did this too much, really."

"We listened to the community, and whatever they wanted, we did. We did this too much, really"

Ivan Spanel on how *Flashpoint* caused Bohemia's break with Codemasters

Bohemia didn't expect *VBS1* to be such a success.



07 VBS1

Spanel "We definitely weren't expecting *Virtual Battlespace (VBS1)* to happen. It was a rollercoaster ride. We started building this idea before *Flashpoint*, but originally we never thought this potential existed. But we somehow ended up with this very complicated system, that was unique.

There were really massive attempts in the military, with extreme budgets, to build something that was comparable to *Flashpoint*.

"And it's still the backbone of some of the most successful programmes used. The US Army use *Diverse Ambush*, which was funded by DARPA [the mad scientists of the

US military] and this is actually a mod of *Operation Flashpoint*. It was a massive success. And then there's *VBS*, which was more successful in Australia.

"In the US, it's the Marine Corps who are the pioneers in this field, so that's where we had our biggest success."

"There were really massive attempts in the military to build something comparable to *Flashpoint*"

How Bohemia beat the US military



08 ARMA HARMER

Spanel "*ArmA* wasn't as well received as *Flashpoint*, but we sold 400,000 copies, which is respectable.

Without a global publisher, we couldn't hope for massive sales. And the PC gaming market changed. It seems that older gamers have moved to consoles, are playing easier games, more action-packed games. But even after that, we're still doing well. I wouldn't say that *ArmA* wasn't a success, it was just less successful than *Flashpoint*."

"Only 848 metres to go!"

09 REALITY SOUNDBITES

Spanel "We've introduced lots of new sound technology in *ArmA 2*. But we had some things, like the speed of sound, incorporated into *Flashpoint*. So, if you fired a rocket launcher, and the explosion happened a kilometre away, you'd see the explosion, but the sound was delayed. The same thing with the supersonic boom – gamers were complaining, asking "what is this crackling sound?", because they don't know it's real.

Buchtal "In normal FPS games you only destroy things that are about 30 meters away, so this is not an issue. But if you launch a Javelin missile at an incoming T72 that's 1,500m away, you need these effects."



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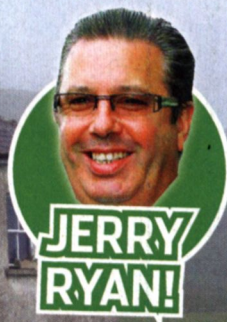
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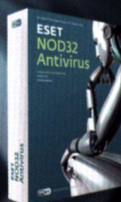


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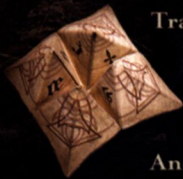
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