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PCZONE

ISSUE 209 AUGUST 2009

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INFINITY WARD'S SHOOTER REVEALED!

SEX AND VIOLENCE!

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Hands-on with BioWare's dark new fantasy world!

WIN! TINY COMPO
Where was the oldest example of a mohican discovered?

ULTIMATE PREVIEW!

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Exclusive screens! Exciting new info!
Blizzard's massive strategy sequel exposed!

REVIEWED!

PROTOTYPE

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INSIDE INFO!

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REVIEWED!

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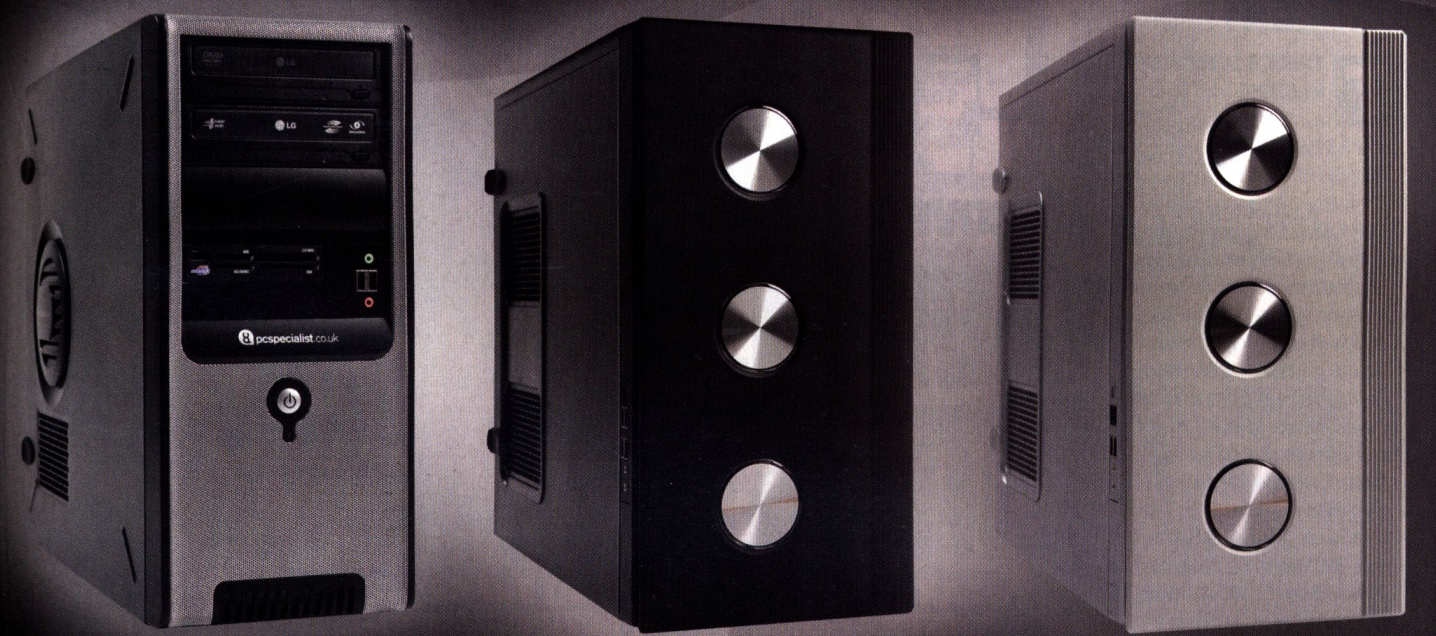

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In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

52 COVER STORY

MODERN WARFARE 2

GET AN IN-DEPTH FIRST LOOK AT THE SEQUEL TO THE SMASH-HIT SHOOTER. IT MAKES YOUR ACTION MAN DREAMS COME TRUE.

SUMMER DROUGHT

THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING from our cover game this month. Did you spot it? Infinity Ward have dropped *Call of Duty* from their follow-up to *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*; simply calling it *Modern Warfare 2*. But that's certainly not something that should put you off, as our world exclusive, courtesy of Will proves. It's all waiting for you across eight delicious pages from 52 onwards.

While releases are thin on the ground this time of year, I want to draw your attention to our four-page special on *Dragon Age: Origins*. Not only did David get hands-on with the game, but he also grilled BioWare (page 36). Meanwhile Steve has been behind-the-scenes with the people who provide voices to games and learn why standards have slipped. Head to page 22 for a six-page report.

While it seems that we've been waiting for ages for news from Blizzard about *Starcraft II*, things are really beginning to hot up for the game and in a month or so we'll be bringing you a First Look at the game itself, as soon as we get access to the beta. But to keep you happy until then, there are some tasty (some would even say 'hot') new screenshots on page 28 and 29. Enjoy!

Now I've really got to get back to *Velvet Assassin*; injecting yourself with morphine and running around in a nighty has never been so much fun! Just ask David...

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

36 DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Sex and violence with the developers of BioWare's upcoming original RPG.

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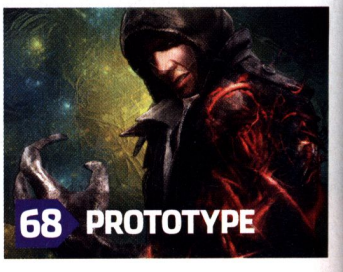
42 SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES



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See page 46

GO TO PAGE 46!

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Violette Summer isn't a Nazi. Really.

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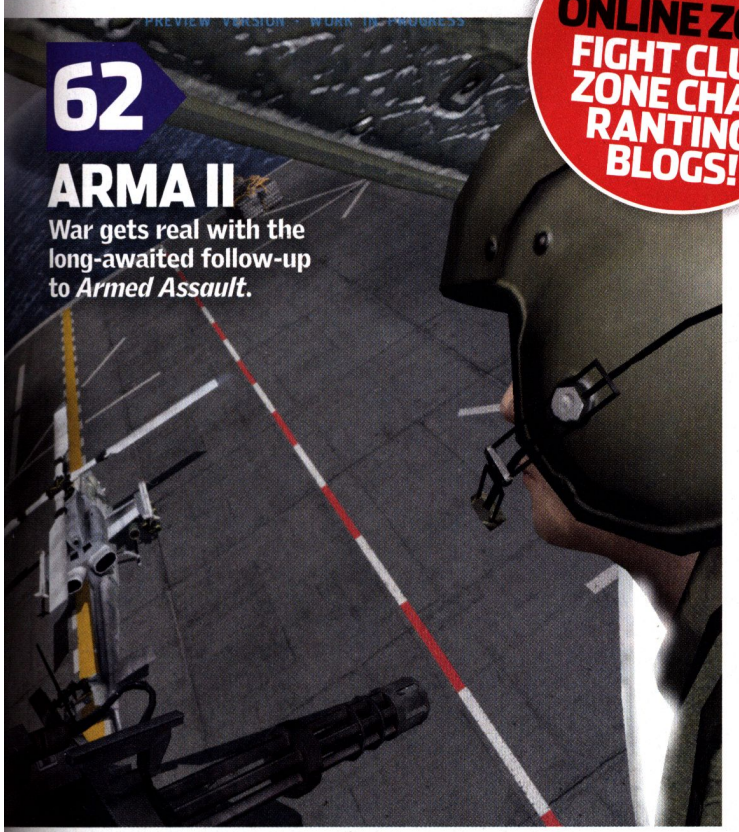
FIGHT CLUB! ZONE CHAT! RANTING! BLOGS!



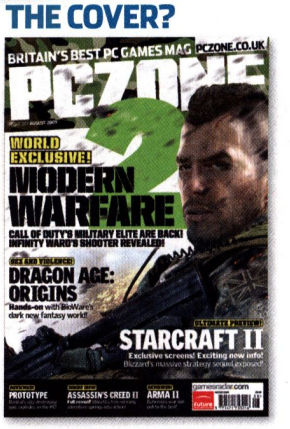
62 ARMA II

War gets real with the long-awaited follow-up to *Armed Assault*.

96 FREEWARE

Steve Hogarty **returns to deal with violent pandas, neurotic AIs, and ragdolls falling down caverns.**

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



52 **MODERN WARFARE 2**

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 82 words...

Get down to an army surplus store and get some fatigues: you need them for this is a military themed *PC ZONE*. Will Porter drools over *Modern Warfare 2*, Steve gets confused by *ArmA II*, and... er... soldiers get killed by a mutant in *Prototype*. OK, this isn't so much a theme as a coincidence. We also have a peek at the revamped *Spore*, head to Venice with a medieval hitman, and talk to actors who make all of the above speak.

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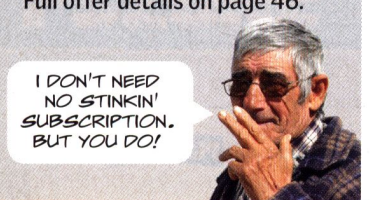
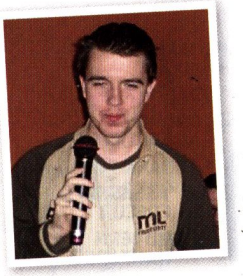


Meet The Team

Here are the ones to thank for *PC ZONE*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy editor

AGE 22 (and a bit)
LIKES Free games
DISLIKES Sunday hangovers
FANCIES Usually a Burger King Whopper
FAVOURITE GAME *Dwarf Fortress*
NOW PLAYING Anything but *Plants vs Zombies*

This month Steve's *Plants vs Zombies* addiction thundered on. Having put 24 gruelling hours into the thing he finally got rid of it, rather unceremoniously calling it a "time-prostitute" that "whored up all my time". Now going cold turkey, his successful rehabilitation has been hindered only by one incident, which involved him throwing a bag of frozen peas at an old man. Otherwise, he's doing well and according to eye-witness reports is as trendy as ever.

ALI WOOD

Editor

Ali took three weeks off the booze to see how quickly she could get pissed at her friend's wedding. A champagne brekkie the following day nearly made her barf.

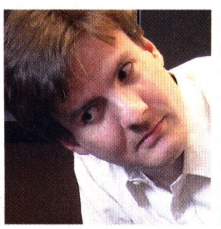
NOW PLAYING: ***Velvet Assassin***

CHRIS CAPEL

Lackey

Capel came back to Zone Towers in a work experience role. The team cheered when he arrived, pleased at having someone who could fetch mochas and lattes.

NOW PLAYING: ***The Witcher***

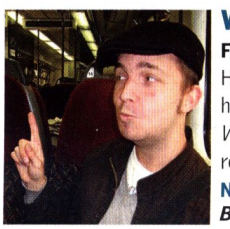


PHIL WAND

Soon-to-be daddy

Wandy is preparing for the imminent birth of his baby. This news led to Richard making jokes about *Demonseed* and receiving blank stares from other Zoners.

NOW PLAYING: ***Hide and seek***



WILL PORTER

Freelance splitter

Having gotten used to working at home, Will set off to see *Modern Warfare 2* in his PJs. A chill breeze reminded him to put on clothes.

NOW PLAYING: ***Fallout 3: Broken Steel***

ADAM GLICK

Sneaky freelancer

Dressed in a black spandex catsuit, Glick snuck into Zone Towers at night to leave a box of chocolates on Steve's desk.

NOW PLAYING: ***Splinter Cell*** **(for real)**

DAVID BROWN

Staff writer

David went to his GP complaining of blobs moving across his field of vision. He was told it was *Trigonis Procuratitis* and he should cut back on *Football Manager Live*.

NOW PLAYING: ***FM Live*** **(idiot)**

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... everyone being happy at the sunshine making flowers grow.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... hayfever making everyone sneeze snot over their keyboards.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

PEGI VS THE BBFC **10mins** Who will win? Who cares? We don't.

MP EXPENSES **87mins** MPs prove they're a pack of venal and dishonest twats.

KEYBOARD CAT **22mins** A cat playing unsuitably cheerful music after traumatic events. YouTube genius!

H1N1 **38mins** Shouldn't Bird Flu have spread faster than Swine Flu given that birds fly around the world?

STAR TREK **47mins** Letting people talk about Spock and Kirk without feeling like a Trekkie.

WOLFRAM ALPHA VS GOOGLE **2mins** Face it, no-one will ever say, "I'll just Wolfram it."

SHHH! **98mins** We can't talk about this thing that happened.

***SILENT HILL* COSPLAY** **13mins** theDreamerWorld's scary nurse photos sent us running screaming.

***TF2* SNIPER UPDATES** **8mins** Will *Team Fortress 2* get really dull when everyone plays as Snipers?

GOODBYE 3D REALMS... NEARLY **46mins** *PC ZONE* held a wake for 3D Realms. And then learned they're still going. Oops.

WIN!

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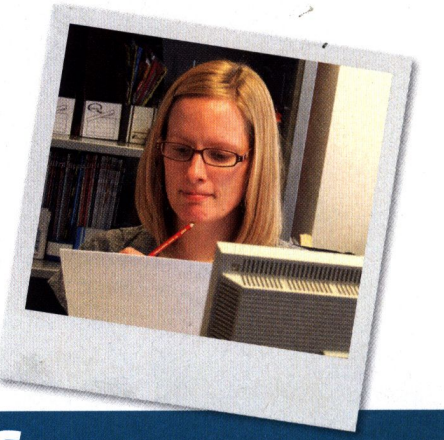
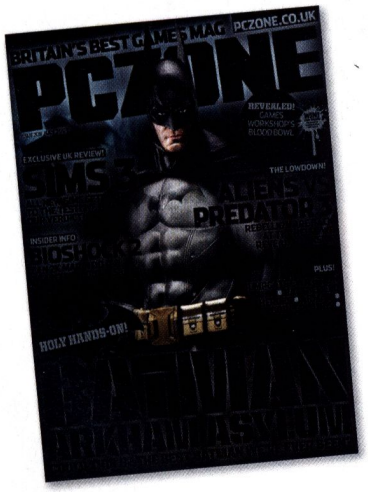
Letters

Responding to emails, *Ali Wood* thinks it might be time to rename the Letters page





KING OF LETTERS

F.E.A.R. POO

Although I'm a bit of a console whore these days, I still enjoy playing FPS games on my trusty old PC.

I've never found a gamepad nearly as accurate or comfortable as a mouse and keyboard in an FPS. And it's a hell of a lot more immersive, sitting 18in from my monitor, in my darkened study (or stinkpit, as my other half calls it), than sitting the other side of the living room with the cats trying to chew my head or sit on me.

So when *F.E.A.R. 2* came out, and you gave it a respectable score, I went to the shops and bought it for the PC. And it seemed like I'd made the right decision. Although it didn't bring anything new to the FPS party, what it did bring was an icy six-pack of highly polished and fun shooty action. And like a six-pack, I consumed it rapidly and completed the single-player game pretty quickly.

But then it all went irritatingly shit-shaped.

I've never really gotten into the entire online gaming thing. Every time I've tried it, I've just had my opinion that everyone on the internet is a dick reinforced. Generally, once I've finished the single-player story of a game, I like to sell it on eBay and put the few quid I'd recouped towards my next game purchase. That way I don't end up with shelves full of games I'll never play again, and I also end up saving a few quid off each purchase.

So I listed *F.E.A.R. 2* on eBay.co.uk hoping to get at least a fiver for it. But then someone sent me a message, asking if I was going to be sending my *Steam* account details with the game.

I did a bit of online searching and found out that once you've activated *F.E.A.R. 2* using *Steam*, that's it. If you want to pass it on, you have to hand over your *Steam* account. No deactivating. No multiple activations. Nothing. So I had to cancel the auction, and now I'm stuck with a game I'm not going to play again and can't sell.

Stupid Monolith. Stupid Warner Brothers. Stupid *Steam*. I think I'll go back to *Gears of War 2* on my Xbox.

Drew Littler

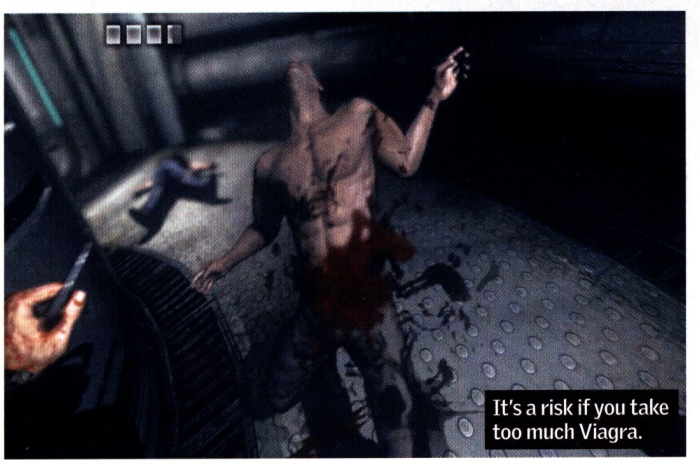
"You sort out a beard, I'll start piling furniture on him."

We can understand your frustrations Drew. However, as some way of consolation, have one of our brand new indestructible prizes for being King Of Letters.

We'd better not find it on eBay in a few days mind.

WIN!

Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper fingers to keyboard. The monarch will get a Corsair Flash Voyager memory stick. Corsair say these 32GB sticks were tested by being "laundered, baked, frozen, boiled, dropped, and even run over by a SUV" and still worked. So even the clumsiest PC user can't break one.



It's a risk if you take too much Viagra.

RIDDICKULOUS

Seriously, what the hell are the people at Atari playing at?

I'd been holding off buying *Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena* for a while, waiting for the *PCZ* review of course, and, when I saw the score I thought: "Yes, I shall venture forth to my local games merchant and avail myself of a copy."

However, disaster struck and my mercantile adventures were ruthlessly cut short by the fact no bugger is stocking the damn thing. A quick glance online revealed that only GAME's website had any stock. Further investigation revealed that some retailers had received a grand total of two copies and, I believe, this was a cross-platform issue, so it wasn't a "let's screw over the PC version, ha-ha-ha" plot.

I'll be interested to see what excuses Atari come up with for why it didn't sell well. Piracy, anyone?

Joseph Powell

I've been in touch with Atari to get to the bottom of this and by the time you read this they assure me there will be stock back in stores. But as you rightly point out, placing an order with

letters@pczone.co.uk @
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Attendees to the Duke Nukem Survivors Ball were few in number.

"*Steam* is not the piece of shit it was seven years ago"

GAME.co.uk is the best option as they have a back order with them.

BUST TALK

I've been meaning to contact you since you became editor and thought something in the new issue was a reasonable excuse.

So, George Broussard mentioned reaching some "Key Milestones" in *Duke Nukem Forever* (*Stop Press! PC ZONE* 208)? Sadly for him, a few days ago I've read they've gone bust! Maybe that's what he was alluding to.

I know it's easy to make fun, with the magazine being compiled weeks before release. It just made me chuckle (at them, not *PC ZONE*!) a lot. But, I was actually looking forward to some kind of release of *Duke Nukem* and still love the original game and it's humour.
Stewart Mclean

Since receiving your email, 3D Realms have denied the studio has closed, although they did confirm they laid off the *Duke Nukem Forever* team due to "lack of funding". They've said they will continue to licence and co-create games based upon the *Duke Nukem* franchise, so all is not lost.

STEAM SUPPORT

The Letters section of both issues 207 and 208 are a slew of people whining about *Steam*. Strangely enough, it's not the piece of shit it was seven years ago when it was released. I'm going to counter some of the arguments against it in the past two issues now.

Servers busy, updating etc. (*War Isn't Fun, Letters*, issue 207). Well, welcome to the internet, have a nice stay. Seriously, if you want to abolish the loading times associated with downloading updates, you should invent a faster way to connect to the 'net.

Maybe if you installed *Steam* before you wanted to play the game, you might not have noticed the delay.

Installing *Steam*? (*War Isn't... Etc, Letters*, 207). I'm pretty sure the reviewers at *PC ZONE* have had *Steam* installed for years, and most likely find as I do that installing a game through it isn't an issue.

Welcome to seven-year-old technology: did you also get central heating and double glazing in your house yet, or are you powering your PC from a hamster on a wheel?

CD key issues – referring to *Dawn of War II* (*Letting Off*

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
Sent in by Dean Mitchell
PC ZONE SCORE 89%

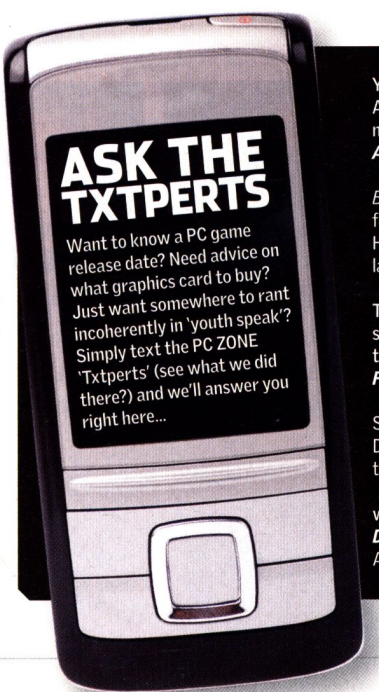
Where to begin and where to end. Will it be a classic? Yes. Is it a current top title? Yes.

Have I overplayed it and still love it? Yes. Without doubt one of the finest examples of the FPS genre in recent years, *Call of Duty 4* has topped many charts and won many awards.

All for good reasons too, clean, fast and immersing gameplay. Beautiful graphics, exciting storyline and some really memorable moments, sniper mission anyone? The addition of so many mods, new maps and truly re-playable standard maps makes this an all time favourite for many. Awesomeness.

YOUR SHOUT 98%

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



ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

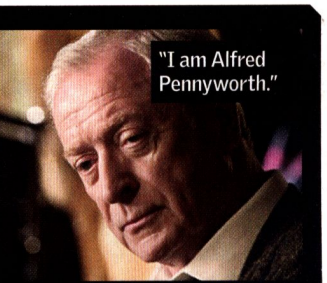
Yo! Arkham Asylum looks great but where's Alfred or Wilfred or watever dat dudes name is he is wik.
Anon

Batman: Arkham Asylum probably won't be featuring Bat's butler Alfred Pennyworth. However, with the game being delayed until late summer, we don't know everything yet.

This is David Brown of the future. I am sending this text through tim. David is in trouble, GET OUT OF LONDON DAVID.
Future David

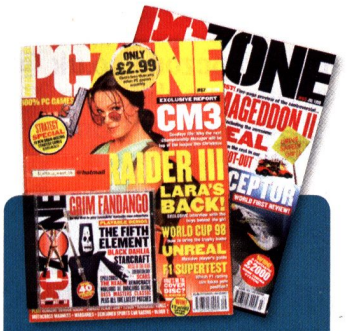
Someone's been watching too much *LOST*. Don't spoil it for me. I've got half the series to watch yet.

why no ghostbsters? whyyyy?!!! tellmeee!
Doomhead
Ask Sony and Atari. They're to blame, not us.


"I am Alfred Pennyworth."

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate.



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR DECADE-OLD MAILBAG, ANSWERED TODAY

GET A GAME ON!

I'm really interested in going to the Game On exhibition but living in Scotland I can't afford to get down for the day. I've head rumours that it's moving up to Scotland. Is this true?
Steve Wilson

I saw Pong on the big screen at this event, but I can't remember much more (free wine probably aided that). Funnily enough, there's another Game On on the 20-21 June and the UKeSA Grand Finals will run with it. This one's only in London at present. There's more info at gameonlondon.com.

↘ *Steam, Letters*, issue 208). As Valve didn't develop this game, maybe all the fault lies with THQ? If you bought the game through *Steam*, you wouldn't even need to put the disc in to install the game. Besides, discs for games are so '90s.

Anyway, enough ranting, do you know anything more about OnLive?
Alex Denvir

Good points there Alex. I invariably get frustrated with my internet connection at home and then realise its because I'm tight and refuse to upgrade to a faster connection. It's embarrassing, I know. It's a good job the office is bang up-to-date with its technology.

There will be more news about OnLive in the run up to the external Beta and launch.

FAN BOY WARNING

Just reading the new mag (issue 207) and am shocked by our editor's lack of *Zelda* knowledge! Let me bring to your attention page 41 column 2 line 4. Am I the only one who thinks Princess Zelda isn't a fella? Shame on you.
Jamie 'Jamym' Lepiorz
PS: We need more Dump Awards. There's been a lack of them recently.

Jamie 'Jamym' Lepiorz (is that your real name?!), you're right. It was completely my mistake. I blame *The Sims 3*. It just zapped all reasonable thought from my brain.

To make up for the lack of Dumps, there were two Dump Awards in last month's issue. It's the highlight of David's month when he gets to play games so bad they make his ears and eyes bleed, so what can I do but accommodate him?

This is Link. He isn't Zelda. Zelda's a bird.

"Am I the only one who thinks Princess Zelda isn't a fella?"

[PROTOTYPE]™

BECOME ANYTHING. CHANGE EVERYTHING.

You are Alex Mercer, the PROTOTYPE™, the ultimate shape-shifting weapon. With no memory and no mercy, hunt your way to the heart of the conspiracy which created you, making those responsible pay!

18 PLAYSTATION 3 Games for Windows XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE ACTIVISION

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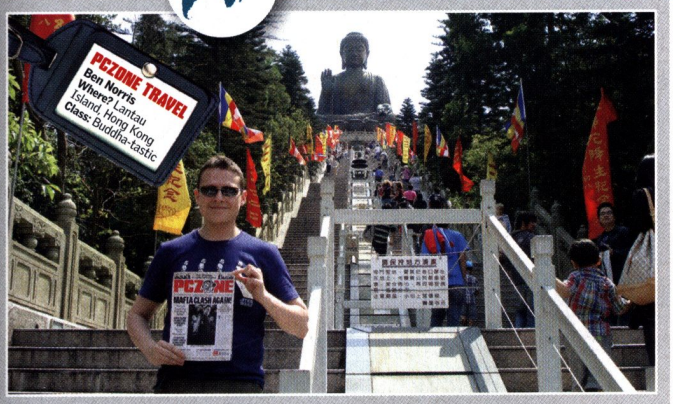
PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



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!

PRICE HIKE

When you buy a game from *Steam* you don't get any kind of physical product. No disc, no box, and no manual. So why on Earth are Valve's prices for this games so astronomically high?

I bought *Dawn of War II* recently from a high-street games store for £20 and today on *Steam* the price is £35. It's not just one game or one shop either, *GTA4* £26.99 on *Steam*, £17.49 from Amazon. *Call of Duty: World at War* £29.99 on *Steam*, £25.21 from Amazon. *Tomb Raider: Underworld* £22.99 on *Steam*, £14.99 from Gameplay.co.uk. You get the idea.

So what's their excuse? We need to know. I'm sure they will bleat about taxes and the cost of operating in this country but at the end of the day can they really say that it costs more to send a series of bytes over a loads of wires than physical media?

Mark Wood

Another letter about *Steam*. Alex Denvir will be happy. However, you have to admit that *Steam* is pretty damn convenient, even if you do sometimes have to pay a bit extra for the privilege.

Valve do run regular offers on *Steam* too, so it's always worth keeping an eye out for them.

PICTURE PERFECT

I've done some graphic design work in the past, so I'm all too aware of the challenges faced by your valiant art editors in their quest to create a fantastic looking magazine.

The reason car registration plates in advertising are always something like '808 IOI' is to allow editors to reverse the image without flipping the text. The same need to flip images applies to screenshots, but developers rarely consider this, plastering their images with text, and most noticeably, Nazi symbols.

Now I'm no fan of Nazis, but I know a backwards swastika when I see one. Page 25 of issue 207 has them going both ways. While page 53 of issue 206 has a reverse swastika hidden away near the fold.

In my opinion, you should reconcile these errors by printing massive (and correctly orientated) swastikas all over your cover. With the phrase "Heil Hitler!" underneath. You know, for context.

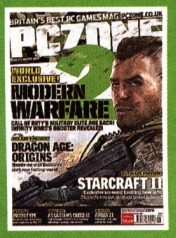
Herr Himmler

Hmm... no. PCZ

COVER STORY

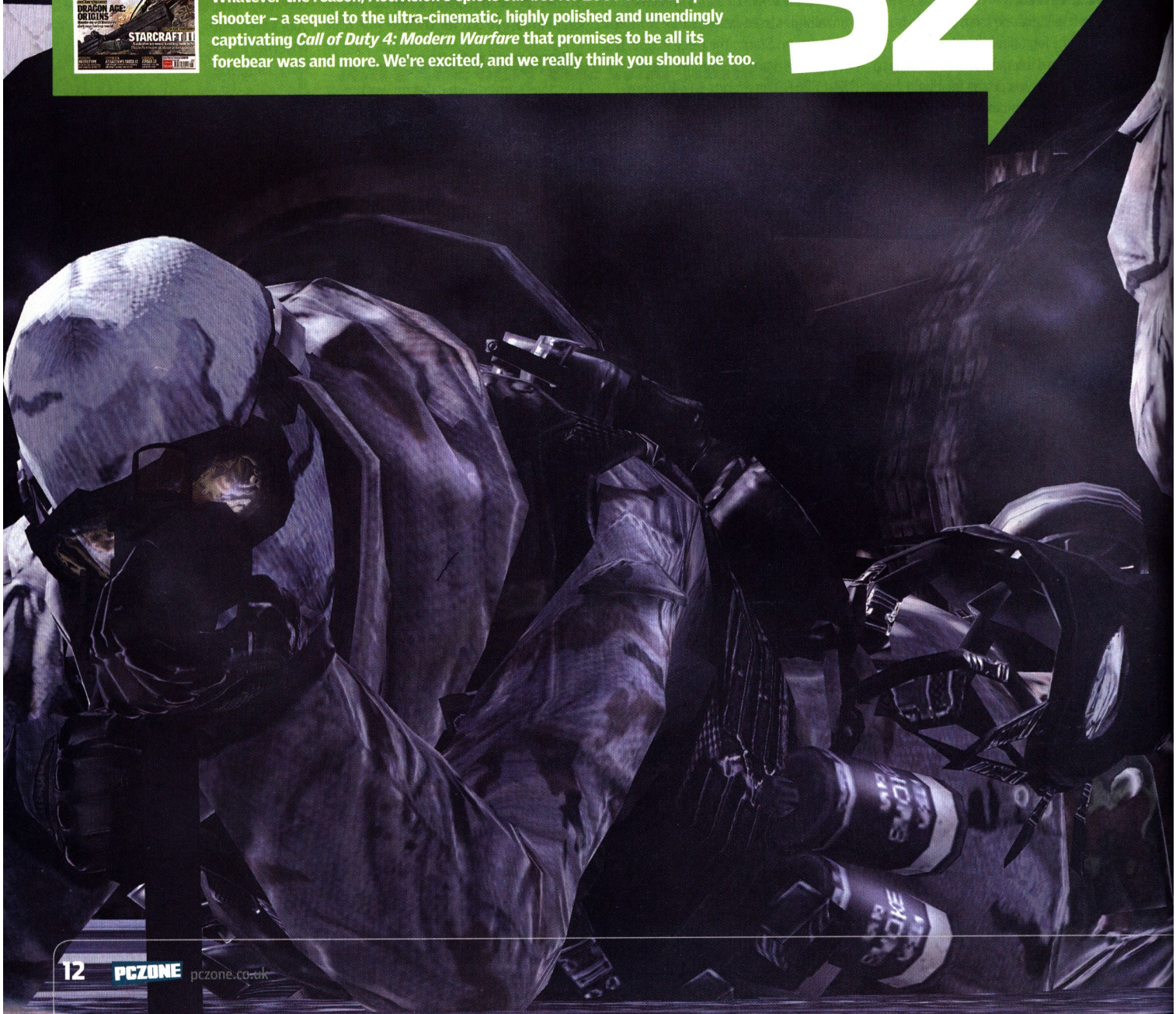
MODERN WARFARE 2

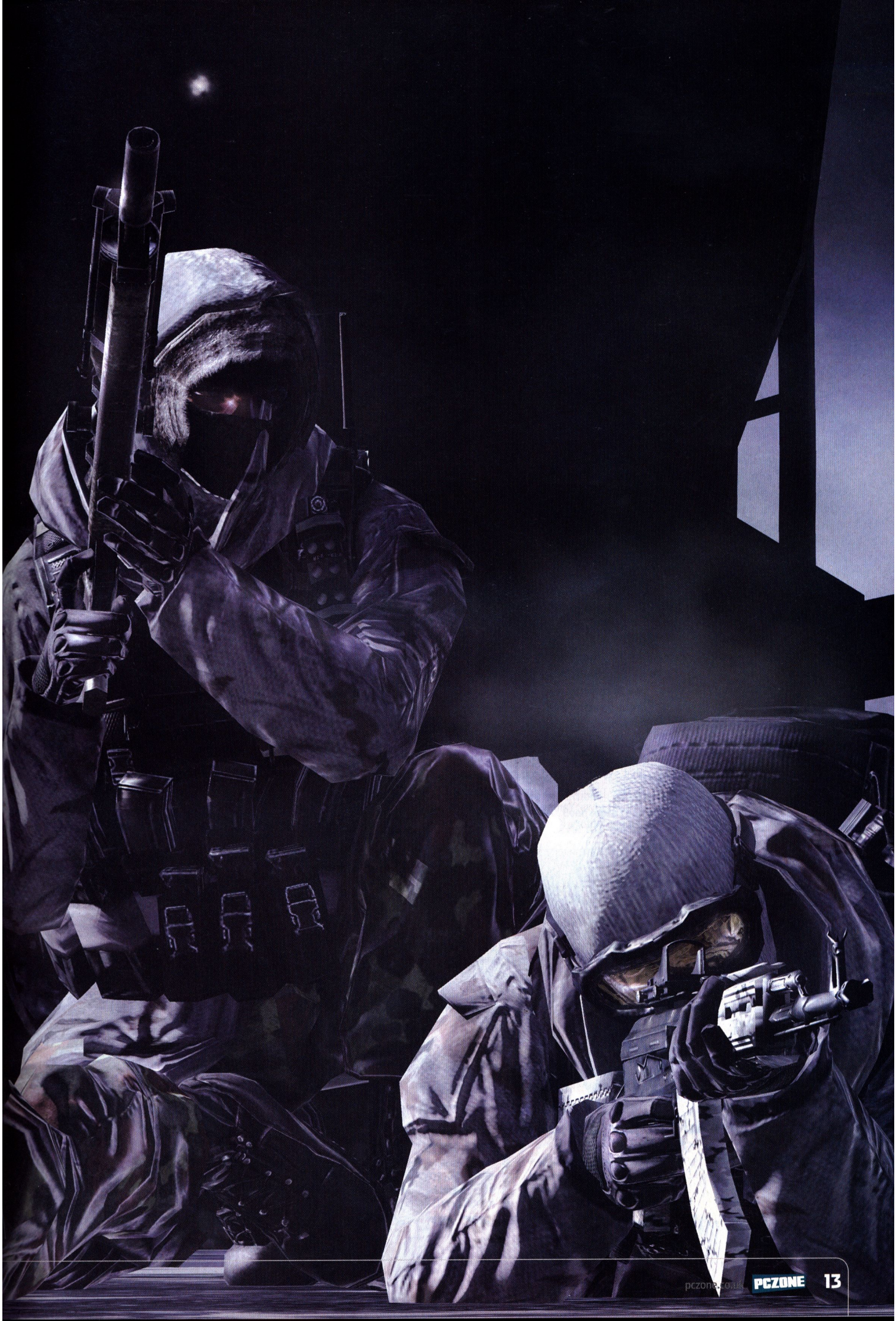
ACTIVISION'S UNFLINCHINGLY BRUTAL SHOOTER EPIC RETURNS...



YOU MIGHT NOTICE the *Call of Duty* prefix has been dropped from *Modern Warfare 2*'s title. Perhaps Infinity Ward are keen to distance themselves from the Treyarch outings or maybe they just reckon *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 2* sounds like a Sunday league football result. Whatever the reason, Activision's epic is our bet for 2009's most popular shooter – a sequel to the ultra-cinematic, highly polished and unendingly captivating *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* that promises to be all its forebear was and more. We're excited, and we really think you should be too.

PAGE 52





SAY WHAT?

STEVEN SPIELBERG HAS suggested virtual reality will be "the new platform for our gaming future". I don't know what '80s movie he's living in, because I think that's utter rubbish.

"I really think virtual reality, which came and went in the '80s, is going to be redeveloped, just like 3D today, and that's going to be the new platform for our gaming future," said the movie mogul. He has predicted that consoles will die out and we'll play games directly on TV sets. No news on what he thinks the future for PC gaming is, so three cheers for Pavel Barter who finds out that Microsoft is closer to making *Games For Windows – LIVE* user friendly. But will developers and gamers embrace the initiative? Go to page 16 to find out.

We've also a fascinating feature on voice acting in games (page 22-26), where Steve chatted to those who've worked on *Age of Conan* and Telltale's *Wallace & Gromit* game.

On a side note, email me with the weirdest/most shocking thing you've put through on expenses and we'll print the best ones in next month's issue. I guess mine was a hotel room bill (for about £600), although the hotel never charged me, so it was just like getting free money! Not that exciting, I know. I'm sure you can do better!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

ZONE ALARM

It's time for some more irradiated fun in the wastes of Chernobyl

DEVELOPER GSC Game World, **PUBLISHER** TBC **WEBSITE** cop.stalker-game.com

WHILE WE LIKED *STALKER: Clear Sky* – the prequel to *Shadow of Chernobyl* – it was afflicted by technical issues and a sizeable minority disagreed with us. However, this hasn't stopped GSC Gameworld continuing on their relentless march into the Zone. Now we finally know some concrete facts about what *STALKER: Call of Pripyat*, the next game in the series. Will it be enough to settle the nerves of those whose experiences of *Clear Sky* weren't "all that", as the phrase goes.

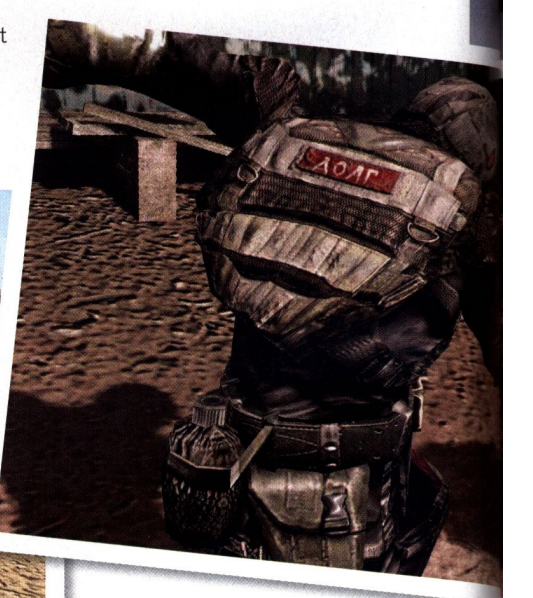
One thing GSC are promising is a whole new play area, so that should mean no old areas are recycled for a third time. To be honest, we'd be surprised if nothing was carried over, even if just for nostalgic reasons, but that's what the word coming out of GSC is. New places we can expect to see are Pripyat town, Yanow railway station, Jupiter factory, Kopachi village and others, with "photorealistic" recreations of them too, apparently.

The obvious additions of a new story, characters and quests, the latter of which will be extensively improved upon compared to the previous two games, will be supplemented by a new A-Life system. GSC promise they have listened to the worries and teeth-gnashing complaints of the fans and that these issues with A-Life will be resolved. Two new monsters will be joining the roster, namely the Chimera and Burer, while the rejigging of the game's allies should mean the behaviour of all creatures and enemies will be improved.

As Pripyat is a sequel to *SOC* expect the added time to have exacerbated the problem of emissions and their influence on the game world. The day/night cycle will be in full effect still, with missions taking place under the cover of darkness being more hazardous than ever, because of increased activity by the mutant elements in the Zone. So, logically, if you are a bit scared and don't want to wander about in the dark, you might want to sleep through it. And hey presto, that's one of the features too.

Other changes will include a new player interface, the possibility to continue the game after finishing the story and, most importantly of all, the proprietary X-Ray engine moving up to version 1.6. If that isn't enough to get you pleasuring yourself in righteous anticipation, then we don't know what is.

When gimps attack.



STOP PRESS!

STOP THIAF
Thief 4's finally been announced by *Deus Ex 3* developers Eidos Montreal. We don't know anything else, except it's called *Thi4f*. Great name, no? No.

FULL METAL COD
Unsurprisingly, Treyarch seem to be working on 2010's *Call of Duty* game, which might be set in Vietnam. At least it's not WWII again.

ATARI NOW NAMCO
Atari Europe have become Namco Bandai as of now, with Atari US becoming the publisher's sole HQ. Guess that goes some way to explain *Ghostbusters*.

22 **VOICES OF REASON**
Find out why speech in games is so wrong.

48 **ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
The stabbing gymnast returns... sort of.

52 **MODERN WARFARE 2**
The best action movie ever, on your PC.

The latest in post-Chernobyl Disaster fashions.

He's friendly once you get to know him.

DLC MELTDOWN

Bethesda unveil more *Fallout* DLC

DEVELOPER Bethesda **PUBLISHER** Bethesda **WEBSITE** fallout.bethsoft.com

BETHESDA HAVE REVEALED to us that two new clumps of DLC will be heading our way in late June and July.

The first, *Point Lookout*, will feature a new swampland area that is crammed with sizzling quests, eye-popping content, and inbred banjo-playing yokels (perhaps). The second one, *Mothership Zeta* will see aliens abducting you and testing your will to survive.

For those of you who haven't decided to spend your pennies on the first three expansions because of *Games for Windows – LIVE*'s awfulness, will be pleased to hear that they'll be available in shops later this year, in imaginatively titled *Add-on Packs*. Who knows, they might even work properly by then.

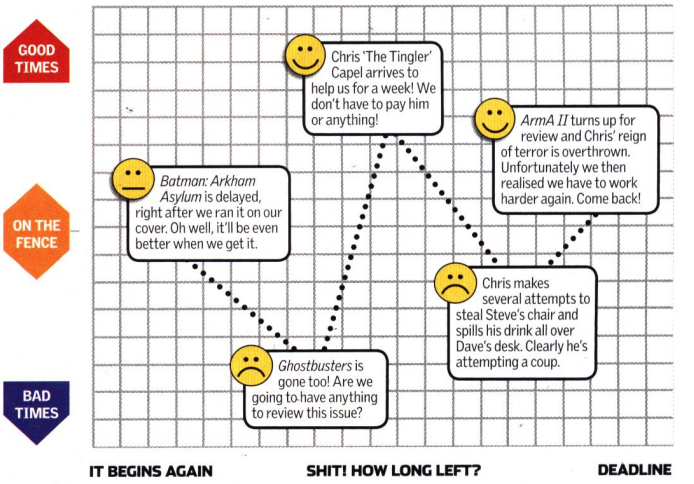
There'll also be a *Fallout 3 – Game of the Year* edition released for those who are either obsessed with the game, or who might not have decided whether to purchase it yet.

Fallout does *Deliverance*.

STUFF

3D Realms, arguably the most mocked developer in the world, have got rid of its *Duke Nukem Forever* development team, due to money troubles. Take 2 Interactive are still down to publish *Duke Nukem Forever*, although whether that will ever happen is anyone's guess. Even more than before, if that's possible. This could be the end for the famous studio, although releasing a game at some point in the last 10 years might have helped get them some funds. The upcoming *Duke Nukem Trilogy* games aren't affected, they're not coming to PC and look terrible anyway.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

Can the much-maligned *Games For Windows – LIVE* turn a new page in PC gaming?

Reporter
Pavel Barter

UPON ITS LAUNCH *Games For Windows – LIVE* **wasn't greeted with a cuddle. When Microsoft introduced its game service in 2007, the online community wanted to rip off its head and fill its innards with Semtex.**

"A shambles", "greedy", "bloated", "unfriendly and amateurish" – these were some of the nicer comments about the service. One site, ngohq.com, virtually declared war on *GFWL*, accusing it of "violating rights" and causing every PC gamer to "surrender his soul".

All a bit silly, really, but then Microsoft did themselves few favours. They charged for the Gold service and they shoved rubbish launch titles like *Halo 2* and *Shadowrun* before our indifferent faces.

"You can play together. Multiplayer. Online. As one!" And you could get better connectivity between two tin cans and a piece of string. Meanwhile, the clunky interface was the bastard child of *Xbox LIVE*. Was it any wonder people were offended? "It was almost a joke in a way," says Tom French, lead designer behind EA's upcoming sandbox game *The Saboteur*. "Hardcore PC people laughed at it – they mocked it."

Despite the deluge of online venom, Microsoft took a spanner to their clunking robot – refining, fixing, and (in some cases) firing personnel. *GFWL* Mark 2 seems an altogether healthier prospect. The interface is smoother and all prettied up – with a profile tab, friends list, chat tab and a messenger centre. And now the platform carries exclusive content, updates and multiplayer modes for games like *GTA4* and *Fallout 3*.

"I think the newer version, especially the version with *Dawn of War II* was so slick," continues French. "I'm really happy to see this iteration taking a step forward and becoming more seamless."

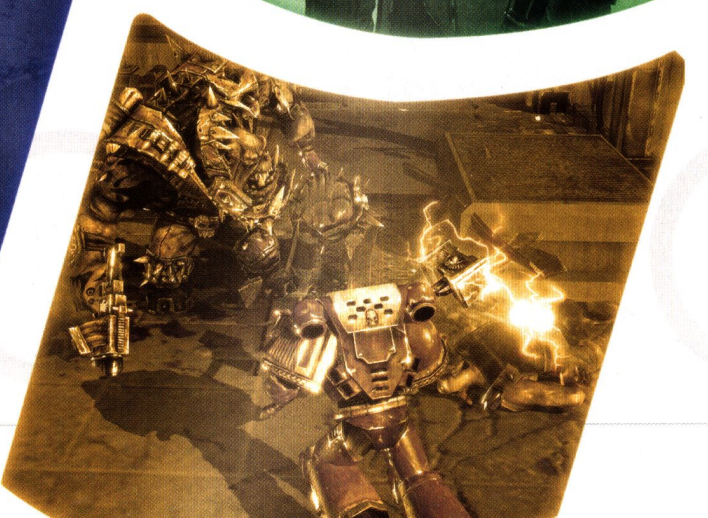
LIVE MATURING

Mike Laidlaw, lead designer behind *Dragon Age: Origins*, agrees: "I think it's starting to hit its stride now, in much the same way that *Xbox LIVE* evolved to the 360 version – much more fully featured and fleshed out. Honestly, anything that helps me feel like I'm an entity in the 'net – a gamer score that persists, a feeling that 'Oh, that's me', bragging rights – is really cool."

GFWL's re-invention leads to the question why Microsoft couldn't get it right from the start. According to Ron Pessner, general manager of *Games For Windows*, the service was initially envisaged as an extension of *Xbox LIVE*, bringing features like gamertags to the world of the PC.

"When we launched, the PC was viewed as the Wild West of online gaming," he says. "There simply wasn't an intuitive, user-friendly multiplayer service on the market – something that let you jump in and play. *Xbox LIVE* was the industry standard for online gaming on console, so it made a lot of sense for us to bring that experience to the PC."

No matter how much witchcraft you use, though, you can't turn an apple into an orange. "We realised that what's right for the console isn't always right for the PC," admits Pessner. "We listened to the community, and they



Microsoft are striving to make *Windows* games-friendly.

Fallout 3's DLC is only accessible through *GFWL*.

"When we launched, the PC was viewed as the Wild West of online gaming"

Ron Pessner, General Manager of *Games For Windows*

made it clear that paying for online multiplayer wasn't something they were accustomed to on the PC."

In mid-2008, subscribers were refunded and *GFWL* became a free service. In March 2009, new services were added, including an anti-piracy solution and an in-game marketplace. For their part, publishers and developers began warming to the service. Christian Svensson, vice president of strategic planning and development at Capcom, explains: "Our teams in Japan tend to favour *GFWL* because they have familiarity with *Xbox LIVE*. Although it's not a case of 'flick a switch and it works', there are a lot of the same structures and a basic understanding of the system. That's helpful with online integration."

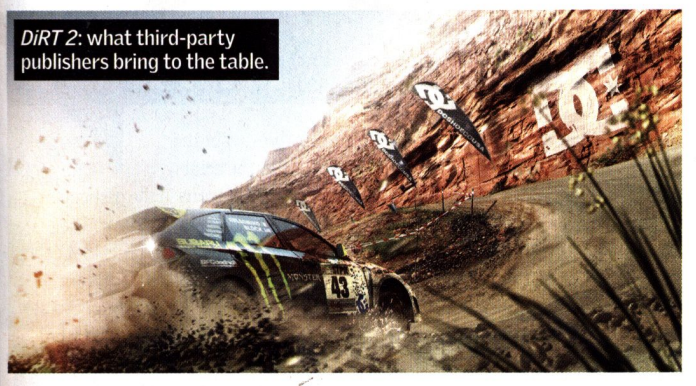
Alistair Hatch, from Bethesda, agrees: "We had such a good experience using *Xbox LIVE* Marketplace that we decided it was best to keep it similar across platforms and use *GFWL* Marketplace on the PC."

Problems remain, though. Not only have some users had problems with the downloadable content, but the idea of 360 and PC gamers playing together is like inter-species breeding. In fact, only three cross-platform games are available on *GFWL*: *Shadowrun*, *Lost Planet: Colonies*, and *Universe at War: Earth Assault*.

"We've provided [developers] with the tools, so they can add that feature when it makes sense for their game," says Pessner. For developers, it's not that easy.

MONEY WOES

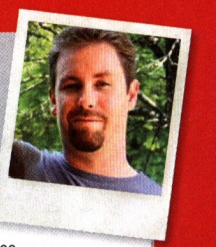
"There are cost implications," says Capcom's Svensson. "Any time you update one version you have to update two, which means double testing, additional submission and testing time. All of which means double costs." *Lost Planet* had cross-play; was that successful? "Fans with a PC and an Xbox in one house enjoy it. I think it would be nice if there was a higher percentage of cross-play, but I would say that of all the *GFWL* features, cross-play is one of the least valuable and least used by consumers."



DiRT 2: what third-party publishers bring to the table.

BATTLE ROYALE

The argy-bargy brilliance of *Street Fighter IV* is coming to PC. And it's packaged with *Games For Windows – LIVE*, says Capcom exec Christian Svensson.



Q How will you incorporate *GFWL* into *Street Fighter IV* on PC?

A We use it for matchmaking and we'll also be making use of the marketplace functionality for some of the costume sales. It's both a micro-transaction service and a matchmaking service for us. Then there's the usual online play, in-game messaging and friends lists, voice chat and achievements.

Why did you decide to make a PC port of the game?

This is a test for us. We didn't go into the PC version of *Street Fighter IV* thinking we were going to sell millions. We want to test it and see if there is a fighting audience on PC. There hasn't been a real PC fighting game since *Street Fighter II Championship Edition* in the mid '90s. There's obviously an active emulation scene: GGPO [ggpo.net] has a big fanbase in that space. Let's see if we can attract people with a premium product, a premium service and see how it goes from there.

Any plans on enabling cross-play with 360 players through *GFWL*?

Not at the moment. We can maybe think about that further down the line.

Do publishers like Capcom work with Microsoft in refining services on *GFWL* for games like *Street Fighter IV*?

Absolutely. The direction you've seen Microsoft take with some of the later iterations of *GFW* is directly in response to conversations they've had with publishers and listening to the consumers. I think Microsoft would probably agree that their earlier implementations didn't meet the promise that they'd hoped for. They are way closer to the promise and vision now than they were two or three years ago.

Chun Li really freaks us out.

Frustratingly, *GFWL* can only be used in-game, unlike rivals like Valve's *Steam* (store.steampowered.com) or *Xfire* (xfire.com). "I think that's the next logical place for Microsoft to go: a client outside a game that keeps people connected whether they're in a game or not." says Svensson.

But Microsoft have to convince the game industry of *GFWL*'s merits before PC gamers. An increasing amount of third-party publishers are shipping games with the service – *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and *DiRT 2* are due in the near future – but EA and Ubisoft are largely ignoring the service. Will *Spore Galactic Adventures* be *GFWL*-enabled?

"Probably not," says EA producer Morgan Roarty. "We keep getting approached by them to try to do that. But I haven't looked into it enough to make a valid opinion."

The *GFWL* team is not giving up, as PC gamers are slowly warming to the service, and more developers and publishers are signing up.

"It's an evolving service and we expect to announce more great features and updates in the coming year," says Pessner. "The online environment is important to PC gaming, and we're committed to creating a great online experience and helping publishers reduce piracy and be profitable."

A win-win result? Let's hope so. PCZ

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

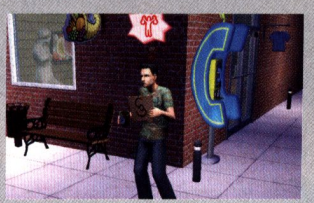
@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Special Report, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

PC ZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

1	–	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009	Issue 202 – 90%
2	–	EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR	Issue 206 – 94%
3	↑	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING	Issue 202 – 86%
4	–	WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II	Issue 205 – 78%
5	↑	THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE	N/A
6	↑	COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3	Issue 201 – 86%
7	↑	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST	N/A
8	↑	FALLOUT 3	Issue 201 – 91%
9	NEW	BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC	Issue 208 – 72%
10	↓	SPORE	Issue 199 – 95%
11	NEW	CRYSIS: MAXIMUM EDITION	N/A
12	↓	COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR	Issue 208 – 76%
13	↓	THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE	N/A
14	NEW	EVE ONLINE	N/A
15	↓	GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	Issue 203 – 91%
16	↓	CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR	Issue 202 – 84%
17	↑	F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN	Issue 204 – 80%
18	NEW	STAR WARS: THE BEST OF PC	N/A
19	↓	LEFT 4 DEAD	Issue 202 – 90%
20	NEW	COMPANY OF HEROES: ANTHOLOGY	N/A

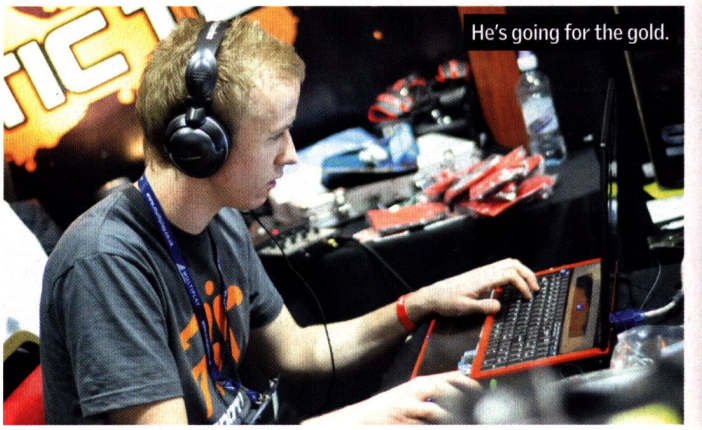


5. THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE
Every PC owner must have at least one copy of this by now. Stop buying it.

8. FALLOUT 3
Bethesda's RPG/FPS jumps back up the charts. Could *Broken Steel* have something to do with this event?

11. CRYSIS: MAXIMUM EDITION
Buy this collector's edition of *Crysis* and *Crysis Warhead*, and listen to your PC's graphics card whimper.

18. STAR WARS: THE BEST...
Jedi Knight II, KOTOR, Republic Commando and others in one box. More lightsabre action than is healthy.



He's going for the gold.

ESPORTS FINAL NEARS!

Final chance to win tickets

WEBSITE gameonlondon.com

YOU'VE HEARD ALL about the UKeSA Grand Finals in this very magazine and now the event itself is just days away.

Over the weekend of 20-21 June £40,000 in prize money will be won in a series of eSports tournaments at Game On!, and *PC ZONE* will be there supporting all the finalists. To find out updates on the event and what we'll be doing there, keep an eye on our website.

At time of writing, Game On! exhibitors include Alienware, HMV, Dell and EA, with more to be added over coming weeks.

Some 25,000 gamers are expected to flood the venue to get their hands on all the latest games and technology.

Tickets are still available for £8 (with 50p of each sale donated to CLIC Sargent, the children's cancer charity) from tickets.hmv.com/GameOnLondon or from selected HMV stores.

We're giving away five pairs of tickets to Game On! and the UKeSA Grand Final. To enter all you have to do is visit futurecompetitions.com/ukesa *and answer the question you find there. Entries must be received by 17 June.*

JOYSTICKS ARE SHORTLISTED

Decide who gets golden gongs

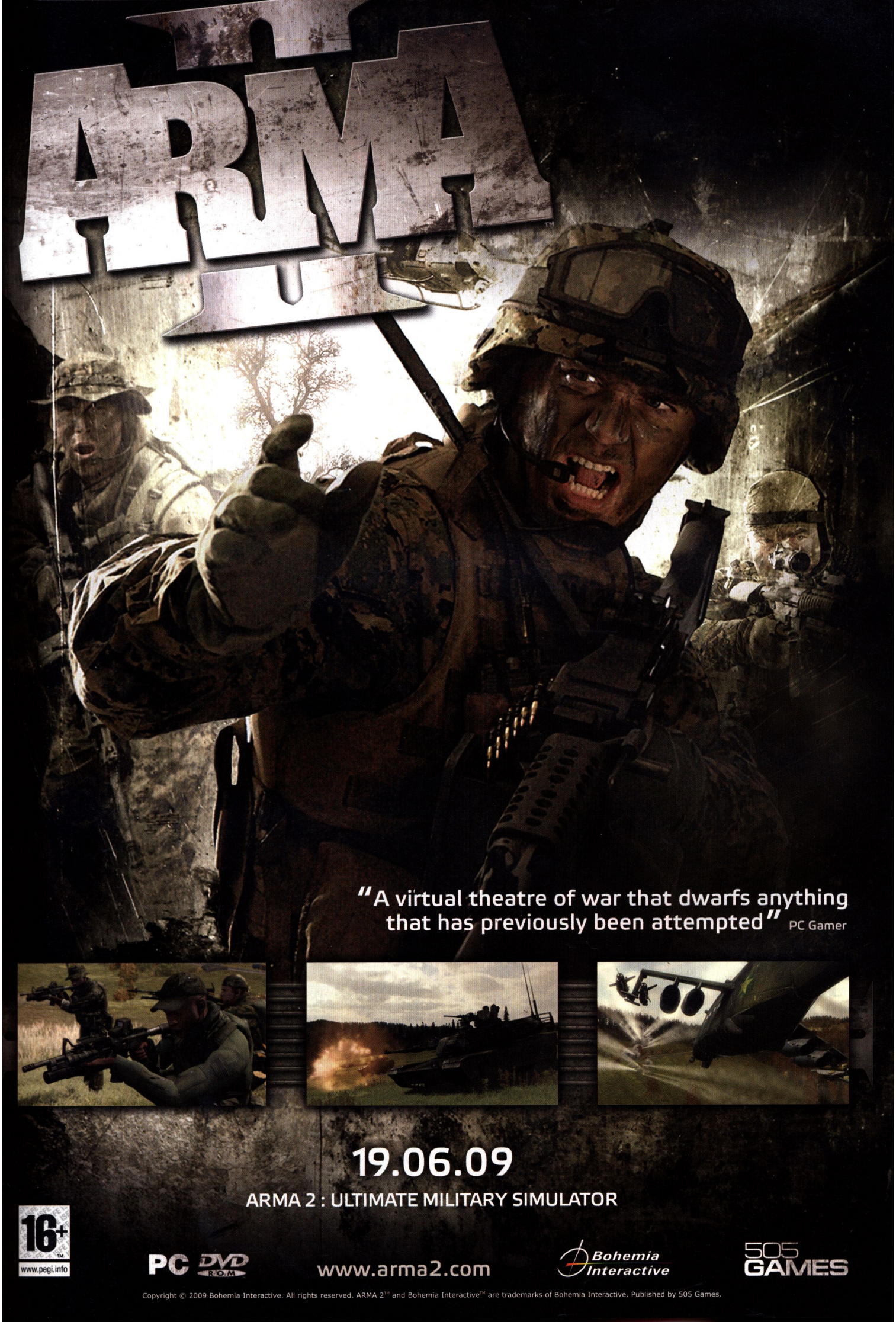
WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com

OVER 230,000 VOTES were cast in the biggest Golden Joystick Awards longlist ever and the shortlist has now gone live, so cast your all-important final votes to make sure your favourites win.

There are 15 Golden Joystick Awards categories in total, but as PC gamers the ones you need to pay attention to are: Ultimate Game, Multiplayer Game, Online Game, and PC Game; and UK Developer; Publisher; and The One To Watch.

Last year *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* swept the board at the most significant awards in the gaming calendar. This year, ensure you help shape who wins the awards that count by heading to goldenjoystick.com.

The winners will be announced at a fancy awards ceremony that'll be held on 30 October.



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You won't be seeing this on PCs for some time.

BUSTIN' NO MORE

Ghostbusters delayed, now PlayStation exclusive

WEBSITE ghostbustersgame.com

IN AN EXTREMELY sneaky move Sony have swung in at the last minute and made the European version of *Ghostbusters* a PlayStation exclusive, which is why you're not seeing the review this month. It's still coming to all the other platforms, but not until later in the year.

The game was previously due to come out in October 2008 but Activision let the licence go for not being exploitable enough. Atari picked it up, but their recent troubles presumably let them allow Sony Europe to take the anticipated game off their hands.

While this sort of thing goes on a lot in the backstabbing world of console gaming it rarely happens a month before release date with no prior warning whatsoever.

Furthermore, we can't begin to imagine what Sony expect to gain from all this. While *Ghostbusters* is a well-respected licence, it's hardly the sort of thing that sells consoles.

Ghostbusters is still, however, coming out June in the US on the PC. Not that we're suggesting that you import the region-free PC version if you want to play it, because that would be wrong. We think.

UNDERWATER TOURNAMENT

UT developer on board for *BioShock 2*

WEBSITE somethinginthesea.com

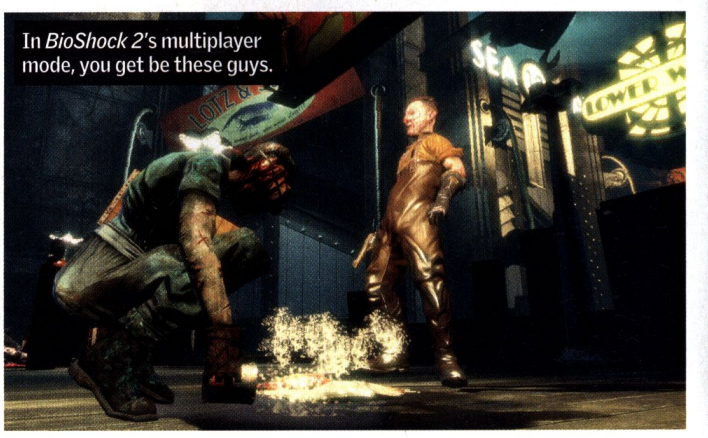
2K HAVE REVEALED that Digital Extremes, developer of *Unreal Tournament* before Epic reclaimed the series, will be making *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer mode.

Set during the fall of Rapture, a few months before *BioShock*'s events, gamers will play the first splicers. Each server will hold 10 players each taking control of a product tester at Sinclair Solutions, a plasmid and tonic developer.

The plasmid/weapon dual-wielding thing will carry over to the multiplayer, so expect to be electrocuted the second you step near or in any water. We've also learned that the health system will be of the *Call of Duty 4* wounds-heal-in-seconds type.

Better news, perhaps, is that a Big Daddy suit will appear randomly as a power-up for anyone to use. There'll also be a Perks and Challenges just like in, yes, *Call of Duty 4*. The maps will take the form of "re-imagined" *BioShock* locations, such as Kashmir Restaurant and Mercury Suites.

To us, we'll be honest, it doesn't sound like it fits with the spirit of the game, but you never know, it might be fun. Maybe. Hopefully.



In *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer mode, you get be these guys.

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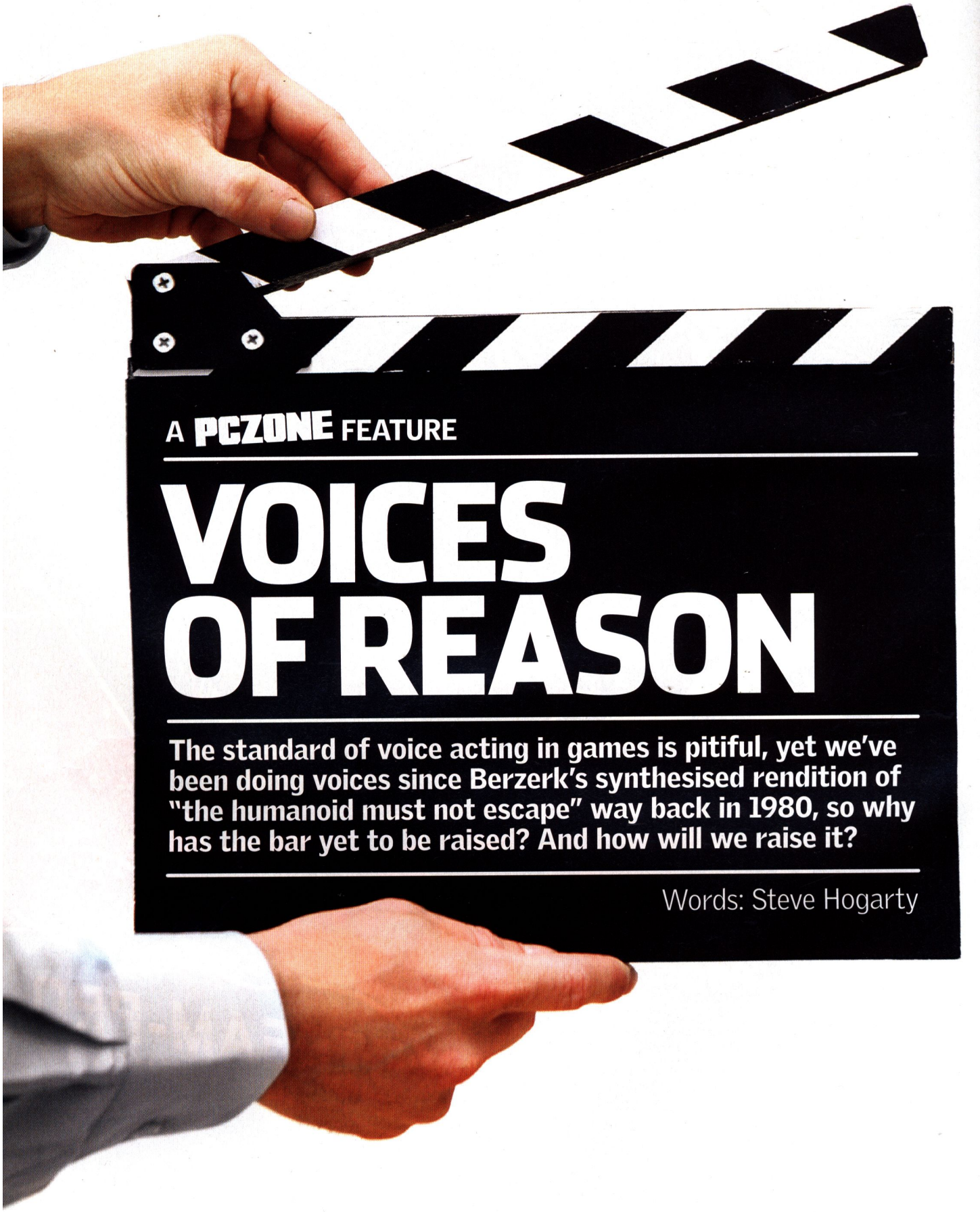


A PCZONE FEATURE

VOICES OF REASON

The standard of voice acting in games is pitiful, yet we've been doing voices since Berzerk's synthesised rendition of "the humanoid must not escape" way back in 1980, so why has the bar yet to be raised? And how will we raise it?

Words: Steve Hogarty

Voice-actor Ben Whitehead is an animated guy. It helps when putting a voice to animation.

TERRIBLE SCRIPTS. TERRIBLE casting. And lack of direction. Those are, according to Andy Emery, creative director at Side (side.com), the three reasons why the standard of voice acting in games is low enough to trip over. Certainly there are many games that raise the bar, but for every *Mafia* and *Portal* there's an *Oblivion* and a French point-and-click adventure. Things are improving though, considering that fully voiced games are a novelty brought about by larger storage media, and of course, that games themselves haven't been about a very long time either.

So why aren't game actors on par with movie actors? Lots of reasons, it turns out, and most are to do with games and movies simply not being comparable media, ultimately leading to voiceovers in games getting left by the wayside. Mark Estdale, voice and casting director at Outsource Media (omuk.com), has first hand experience with these differences. "The size of a game's script is massive," he begins.

TOO MANY WORDS

"You're looking at 120 pages of dialogue for a movie, whereas with a game it'll be anything between 500 to 1,000 pages. There's a lot of detail, it's often non-linear with no clear story arc, and the game must respond to the player's actions, which means there's randomness to the way a script is constructed.

"Working with game scripts is really hard for actors because the context isn't there for them. So it's really up to the production team to give them context, almost on every line."

Casting and recording studio Side has its fingers in the voice acting pie too, having worked on *Age of Conan*, *Fable II* and *LittleBigPlanet*. "Voice-recording has traditionally been a rather disjointed process," admits the company's creative director Andy Emery, "and every little element you can add to make a more complete performance is going to help.

"At first we'd have a motion-capture performance followed by the voice-recording session, with no correlation between the two. That results in very strange timing, with the physical performer making gestures that just don't fit the vocal performance.

"The next progression is to get that whole thing in one. There are advantages and disadvantages to every process, but it's certainly getting better."

What Side are attempting to achieve with the titles they work on is 'through-casting',

Capturing facial expressions during recording allows developers to tweak 3D models to fit.

having a single actor performing game scenes in the motion capture studio, while at the same time voicing the lines for that scene. They'll even go so far as to record the actors' facial expressions as they talk, and whenever possible, use that actors' likeness in the game to deliver a complete performance to the player.

DIRECTED GAMES

Remove any one of these links and you leave room for oddness to creep in – lines that don't fit with actions, or expressions that don't fit with lines. You don't want your main character doing back flips while he mourns his comrade in an extended soliloquy, or more typically, a character swinging his arms about in an attempt to over-act the recording he's working to.

Direction is equally important when trying to bridge a gap between developers with an occasional lack of communicative ability and professional actors with limited time. "A lot of making voiceovers work is getting a director who knows the script, knows the game, and has an idea of how the lines should be delivered," explains Phil Evans, Side's director of operations.

"Five to 10 years ago you wouldn't have even had a professional director involved," admits Emery. "It'd just have been a member of the development team. The developers know their game, but they have to be able to communicate their thoughts to the actor succinctly.

"For example, when we were working on *Age of Conan* the voice director worked with Funcom to create a map of Hyboria, and detailed all of the different races and how they related to each other. That enabled the director to quickly explain to an actor the key relationships involved, saying things like 'OK, you're here, and you hate these people over here'."

You can't just pluck anybody off the street either, though some cash-strapped devs have been known to rope in the cleaner when push comes to shove. Casting the right voice for the right part is exactly one third of the battle according to Emery's triumvirate of voice acting tenets – script, casting and direction.

THE RIGHT PICK

"In casting, the first key component is a casting bible from the developer," Emery claims. "Usually that has a head shot and a description that gives us hints to the vocal characteristics they're looking for. From basics like age and sex, to their personality, like 'warrior'."

Ben Whitehead's is able to sound like Wallace at will.

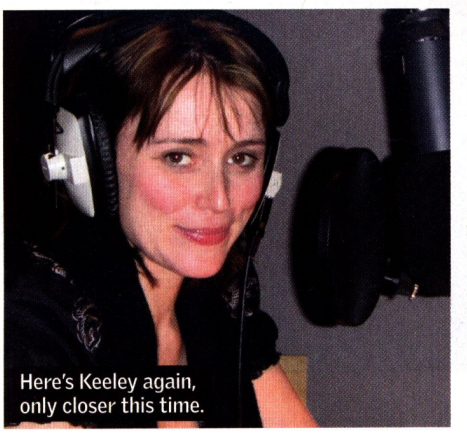
Side's Andy Emery and Phil Evans work with Keeley Hawes, the voice of Lara Croft.

Lead actors are chosen based on whether or not they're right for that given role, and wherever possible Emery will try to keep that actor exclusively working on that character. There may be up to 20 leads depending on the title, but for the rest of the cast, talented multi-character actors are chosen to fill out the ranks.

"It's a cost choice, ultimately," adds Evans. "If you had the money you would cast an actor for every different role."

This is the trap into which *Oblivion* so noisily fell. Being set in an expansive world with a large population, every one of whom could be spoken to, led to hundreds of characters being voiced by a handful of actors. To differentiate these roles from each other, their performances would be large and exaggerated. This is why beggars often started speaking like middle-class headmasters mid-script: the subtlety was blown away by the necessity for multi-character actors.

"I think for *Age of Conan* we had about 120 characters voiced by 40 actors. That's one difference between voice acting in games and movies," laughs Emery, "movies don't have 120 speaking parts.


Here's Keeley again, only closer this time.

The voice of *Wallace & Gromit*'s Great Aunt Prudence, in action.

"Is it the case that accomplished and highly talented actors just can't do games?"

"People tend to forget that when they complain that game dialogue isn't as good as movie dialogue, when a character has a bit of a funny accent – that actor might have already done three other characters that day."

Dwelling perhaps too long on *Oblivion*, which could be taken as a case study in the pitfalls of voice acting in an open-world RPG, I broach the subject of starring roles. Patrick Stewart's part as Emperor Uriel Septim was jarringly out of place in Bethesda's epic. Is it the case that accomplished and highly talented actors just can't do games?

"No," states Emery with some resolve. "They can all do it, it's down to whether they've been set up the right way, whether they've been engaged properly in the process and the game, and whether they've been well directed.

"What usually happens is, a big-name actor comes in and just wants to get the work done, but, if there's not a proper director there, the developers sometimes get intimidated. You end up with a big name that you can say is in the game, but you've got to ask yourself: have they added anything?"

The third pillar of a decent game performance is the biggest, and if that conflicts with the pillar metaphor then so be it. Bad writing will sour any voice acting it's associated with, and will thwart the best voice directors in the industry. The sad truth is, it's also the most prevalent of the three problems.

"The biggest problem we come across," claims Evans, "first and foremost, is developers not using proper writers. Sometimes the developers won't give enough attention to the script, like having changes the night before a recording that the writer hasn't really thought enough about."

"I agree," adds Emery, nodding. "Sometimes the source material we have to work with has been just atrocious. Sometimes there is the misconception that if you get a big-name actor in they'll make the lines work, which just isn't true.

"There's also movie licensed games, that sometimes have notoriously bad voice acting from otherwise really good movie actors. A lot of the time it's rushed, it's not well directed, it's part of their contract rather than something they want to do. On the upside, actors and agents are now realising the importance of games, and that's a great thing."

In Outsource Media's studios in London's trendy King's Cross, I'm invited to join the cast of Telltale's *Wallace & Gromit's Grand Adventures* as they record the dialogue for the series finale: *The Bogey Man*.

Mark Estdale, the studio's voice and casting director, is deftly barking orders at voice actor Ben Whitehead, Aardman's Peter Sallis stand-in. Sat in front of a bay of dials, monitors, knobs and switches is the series' lead designer, Telltale's Andy Hartzell. Having flown in from California to oversee the recording, he sits staring at Whitehead, mouthing the words of the script as the actor reads lines within the booth next door.

GUIDED BY VOICES

"Often when you're dealing with a quarter of a million words of dialogue," explains Mark Estdale, Outsource Media's voice and casting director, "putting direction to that is a massive task. There's an economy of script writing in games. Put simply, you're not writing a script and then building something around it, you're building a game and writing a script to the game.

"Generally the people writing the script have such intimate knowledge of the game that they don't actually put into the script the pertinent material that's relevant to the recording."

Put simply, a line could be read one of a thousand different ways, and often there isn't a clear indicator from the developer how it's supposed to be read aloud. A sound engineer pores over waveforms while Estdale readies the next lines to be read and ensures they're being voiced in the correct manner. The team are working from a lengthy spreadsheet listing every piece of dialogue in the episode – essentially a dump of part of the game code (the subtitles document in fact) – and it's Estdale's job to work with developer Andy in giving some context to the thousands of disconnected and seemingly random lines.

Watching the three men record dialogue is like watching tramps descend into insanity in fast forward.

"It looks like we've just served our last scoop of useful ice-cream, lad!" shouts Whitehead, twice, gesticulating madly to absolutely nobody. The Wallace-voiced actor is then hit with a barrage of instructions

With through-casting, the physical, facial and vocal performance of an actor are recorded in one swoop.

SPEAK, FRIEND, AND ENTER

BioWare's Mike Laidlaw on *Dragon Age*'s talking

Mike Laidlaw
Lead Designer, BioWare

Q How much does BioWare invest in voice acting?

A It's probably one of the most involved parts of a game. For *Dragon Age*, we're sitting at 144 voice actors, which is a huge undertaking. We've done this before from *KOTOR* onwards, so we've got internal people that coordinate it, work with the different actors, directors, and studios. One of our great successes is having the writers involved in that process, available for context at a phone call's notice.

We actually went to the UK for all of the native Fereldens to get real accents, and not Americans doing dodgy British accents. We made sure that we got this whole new bunch of actors we've never worked with before, so for me that was very cool. It adds such a texture to the game. The elves and dwarves sound so different to the humans.

How do you keep your voice acting standards high?

Having the writers involved in the process early helps a lot, as well as a dedicated design team that takes the recording as it comes in and puts the last little quirk in the visuals that makes it fit the acting. So you rarely have a character that looks really pissed off while the voice actor sounds really jocular.

Above all, it's really a dedication to quality. We're telling cinematic stories now, and we know that the actors have to be given enough information and context to sell their lines. We're willing to do the extra work it takes to let voice actors dive right in and produce quality lines.

Now we're starting to find directors who understand the structure of non-linear stories, so we've gotten better at producing the things that people need in order to get a really quality performance out of some really quality actors.

Telltale's Andy Hartzell oversees Whitehead's performance, down to the last "Wensleydale".

from Estdale: directions like "bigger" and "more urgent". He performs the line again, perfectly this time, before moving on to the next one.

It's quick, and the actor is unhesitant in his attempts to meet the needs of the voice director. "More nervous", "more to the player", "more to Gromit", and even "more huhuhuhuh..." – every instruction is rapidly heeded, considered and factored into the next attempt.

Whitehead throws his arms about and makes faces while acting – the physical performance leads to a more natural, flowing reading. There's the occasional falter, perhaps a dead end when neither the actor nor the director is sure of the context of a line. On these occasions Telltale's Andy Hartzell steps in, his intrinsic knowledge of the scene in question allowing him to guide Whitehead and ensure the dialogue works properly in the finished game.

"As a voice director I'm very reliant on Andy," explains Estdale. "He's written the game, so he knows the context, the meaning, and the purpose of those words. My job is then communicating that to the actor. The actor needs to be reacting to something to be able to perform, and often the developer won't have the experience to communicate that."

Crucial to giving good direction is knowing what you're directing towards. Estdale, along with most voice directors, asks for character sketches at the very least. An idea of the physical build of a character not only helps in casting, but also in delivering lines.

With titles like *Wallace & Gromit* it's a great deal simpler to cast – Whitehead's a comedy and cabaret performer who's worked as Peter Sallis' voice double in the past, so casting him was "a piece of piss, really" according to Estdale.

In a worst-case scenario, developers will approach studios with barely constructed characters. "The one line descriptions we often get are 'I want the character to be a bit like Vin Diesel in *Pitch Black*'," despairs Estdale. "Vin Diesel's performance is a very physical performance, it's not much to do with the voice.

"Another classic request is to have a female lead sound like Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens*, but while she's got a very strong screen presence, she's got a sort of mumsy voice. Listen to that voice in isolation and you miss the character. But that's the magic of cinema, where you get this real intense and powerful character from the image, the scene, and the lighting. When you just isolate the voice, you get somebody who could be your mum's mate."

Things are improving for those waiting for games to reach movie-quality acting, but you've only got to look as far as the two biggest PC titles – *World of Warcraft* and *The Sims* – to see developers realising that having no voice acting is better than using bad voice acting, or any at all. Voice acting has its place in games and its uses, but for certain genres it's integral and in need of a degree of attention many seemingly aren't paying it.

BRIGHT FUTURE

"I think it's an exciting time for story and characters in games," claims Side's Andy Emery. "Developers are looking for ways to lift their title above the others, and get better engagement with their players."

"We're still in the very early stages really," says Evans. "And it's exciting to think how much voice acting has developed. It's great to be involved in it as well." PCZ

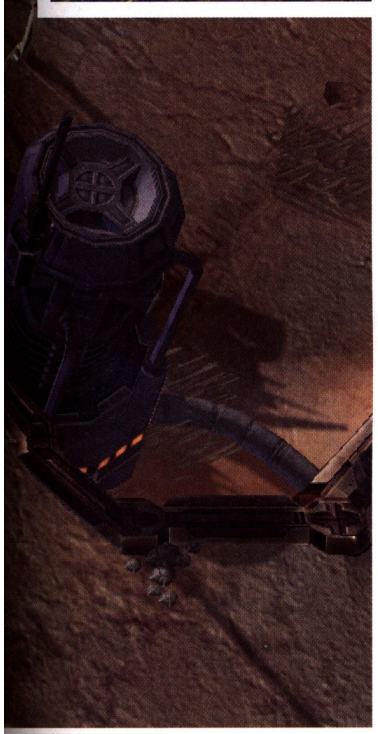
HOT SHOTS

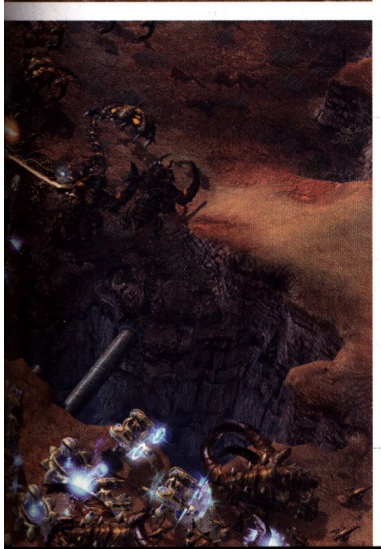
STARCRAFT II

DEVELOPER Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Activision **WEBSITE** www.starcraft2.com **ETA** Winter 09

THINGS HAVE BEEN relatively quiet since we last heard from the chaps over at Blizzard's Zerg-infested offices. We were worried they might have been ground into dust by their insectoid overlords, but we've finally heard back from them and these unit-filled screenshots are the result of months of beavering.

While not telling us a wild amount about the game, Blizzard have confirmed that it'll be colourful and full of life. The plot is as full of improbably named characters as ever and we know Blizzard are trying to keep its feel as close to the original as possible. Anyway, cast your eyes over the screens and see what you think...





THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. CAMPAIGN CENTRAL
The first part of the trilogy will focus on Terrans, with the Zerg and Protoss factions only playable in multiplayer and skirmish modes.

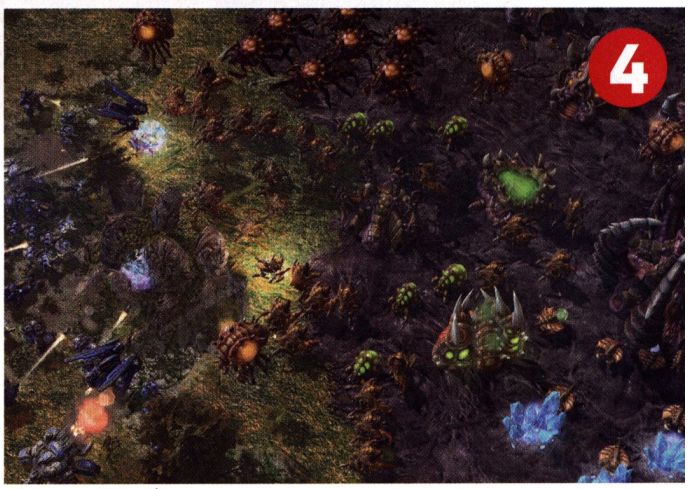
2. PLOT POINTS
The plot will follow on from the first game and its expansion, *Brood Wars*, but it will also be drawing on elements from the novels and other canonical work, such as the book *Firstborn*.

3. MASS EFFECT
The Zerg's main strength lies in numbers, overwhelming their opponents with brute force rather than tactical ploys and strategy. The more you build and the quicker you do so, the better.

4. BUNCH OF TOSSERS
The Protoss are described by some as enigmatic, which means they're just like the Eldar in *Warhammer 40,000* (but don't let Blizzard hear you say that). Driven from the world of Aiur, they fight for their lives in the trilogy's storylines.

5. CHARACTER TRAITS
A number of old characters from the first game will be present, including Zeratul, Arcturus Mengsk, Artain, Jim Raynor and Sarah Kerrigan. There'll also be some others with equally silly sci-fi names.

6. NO MORE HEROES
Those of you who might have been hoping for some new races or factions to play as will be disappointed to learn that there's little, if any, chance of this occurring. At the very least, any new faction will be non-playable, if there is to be one.



ETA AUTUMN 2009

"Bugger fighting. I'm heading to Bognor."

The original BFGs.

GET IN LINE...

ORDER OF WAR

Ali Wood gets a history lesson from Square Enix

DEVELOPER Wargaming.net **PUBLISHER** Square Enix **WEBSITE** orderofwar.com

ARMIES, TANKS AND planes. That's the basic recipe for a war game. No surprise there. But what makes *Order Of War* stand out is that it's J-RPG company Square Enix's first release of a Western-developed game outside of Japan – what they call a "strategic direction".

The Cabinet War Rooms was the perfect setting for the an in-depth look at the game, where you take control of an entire army on the battlefield, based on events from the summer of 1944. In its most basic form, the single-player mode of *Order Of War* can be played out in two campaign modes offering different storyline, missions, objectives and environments – America vs Germany on the Western Front, and Germany vs Russia on the Eastern Front. Gameplay modes include multiplayer, Deathmatch and Skirmish modes.

In development for three and a half years, Wargaming.net have taken key elements from traditional RTS games and mashed these together with the lowdown and dirty feel of first-person shooters, to create a unique feel and look to the game.

"We don't have flamethrowers. Just for the ethical reasons"
Victor Kislyi, Wargaming.net

"In *Order Of War* you take command of an entire army within the game so you're controlling huge scales on the battlefield – tank divisions, platoons, heavy artillery – so you get control of the entire war, not just small units on the battlefield," said Victor Kislyi, chief executive officer of Wargaming.net. "The game is historically accurate. There are two main campaigns. The first campaign that starts from D-Day in Normandy, where you take control of the US troops against the Germans, and a second campaign, based on the Eastern front, where you can play as the German army against the Soviet army."

Square Enix aim to uphold their reputation for high-quality products with *Order Of War,* and so the attention to detail is outstanding, with a 360° camera included to get the full battle experience.

Unit-wise they've thrown in all the major WWII unit types, with lots of infantry types, machine guns, rifles and grenades, with one notable exception.

"We don't have flamethrowers. Just for the ethical reasons," said Kislyi.

ARMY OF 1,000

At the beginning of each mission there's a short historic introduction, which is useful for people like me who fell asleep during GCSE history lessons.

Most of the campaigns' scenarios last from 30 minutes to an hour, but the later missions can take up to 1.5 hours of play to complete. Within each of these there are new tasks to complete every five to seven minutes.

"We put a lot of effort into making the player feel like they're doing something meaningful, even if he is doing a smaller task," explained Kislyi. "When this small task is over, the player will get another five-minute assignment and we'll make sure that he realises and understands what he has to do."

Instead of giving orders to individual units, you command squads of five to 10 soldiers, but as there's almost 1,000 units under your command, you really feel like a general in very big and decisive battles of WWII. To make sure you know what you're meant to be doing, a captain or general will crop up with certain advice throughout the game, plus there are gigantic red and blue arrows to guide your moves too.

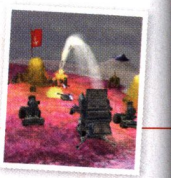
But to add that final dose of realism, the plan is that you will never see two maps that are the same. "We believe that these gaming mechanics will bring a whole new strategic perspective to gaming," said Kislyi. "This one is a whole new perspective of massive engagement in huge battlefields with big guns." PCZ

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Historically accurate
- ✔ Western-developed
- ✔ Massive scale
- ✔ Adjustable AI
- ✘ Educational = boring

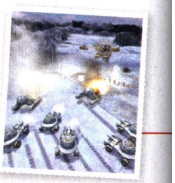
THE STORY SO FAR... WARGAMING.NET

MASSIVE ASSAULT
More of a puzzler than a strategy game.
2003



DOMINATION
MA's sci-fi Nazis and Allies return, in a proper strategy game.
2005

GALACTIC ASSAULT
Based on a book by the Strugatsky brothers.
2007



ORDER OF WAR
Wargaming.net turn back on the future and head into the past.
2009

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We get brand identity, but do you have to make all your screenshots so blurry?

Shunt, aka "one up the arse".

FOCUS...

BLUR

Steve Hogarty leaps into the driver's seat and squints his eyes

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations **PUBLISHER** Activision **WEBSITE** bizarrecreations.com

YOU COULD ARGUE that for many, driving games are speeding off in the wrong direction, becoming weighty simulations that leave casual racing fans coughing in their exhaust fumes. Certainly it's true that, for the uninitiated, the likes of *GTR* are nigh-on impossible to approach, but *Blur* promises, at the least, accessibility. And not that rubbish sort that translates to "giant arrows on everything, and only three tracks", but the good sort.

Blur's not alone, of course. There are games like *Burnout Paradise* on PC right now that prove pick-up-and-play arcade racers can be deep, complex and content-rich. Further afield, and far from the *GRID*s and *DiRT*s of the world, you'll find what appears to be *Blur*'s primary influence: bloody *Mario Kart*.

HACKNEY KART

Bizarre Creations are best known for the *Project Gotham Racing* series, starting with *Metropolis Street Racer* on the Sega Dreamcast (incidentally, the only game in the series I've played) and now residing with *Project Gotham Racing 4* on the Xbox 360. They're all excellent games, which is why *Blur* will have a lot of warranted attention paid to it over coming months.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Bizarre make great racers
- ✔ Promises fun
- ✔ Social networking stuff
- ✔ Wow, power-ups!
- ✘ Really... power-ups?

Old-fashioned crashes still exist.

The *Mario Kart* influence sees Bizarre Creations adding power-ups to their racing formula, along with their trademark detailed tracks set in real cities on authentic roads. Where *PGR4* had you racing through a spectacularly realised Westminster, around the filthy box of arsehole fraudsters that is the House of Commons, *Blur* will instead give us Hackney, the loveable-if-ragged borough of London.

What we saw of it was warmly familiar, and at times recognisable, but instead of the unflinchingly accurate routes of previous games, Bizarre have decided to tweak some roads simply to make the track flow better. Nothing major – a lowered kerb here, a roundabout removed there – but just enough to ensure you're not hamstrung by reality. Hackney, it seems, inflicts enough despair as it is.

ETA WINTER 2009

The power-ups include abilities like Shunt, a forward firing blast of energy; Barge, a sideways firing blast of energy; Shock, a jolt of lightning on a chosen nearby opponent; Nitro, a temporary speed boost; and Mines, which are mines. They're down to earth enough to keep *Blur* from feeling like *Wacky Races*, and they seem complementary to the racing mechanic rather than being at the core of it, but they'll be what folks notice most considering Bizarre's grounding in realistic racers.

The developers are also working hard on the game's front-end, implementing a hugely customisable social networking system. Inspired by how fans played online with *PGR4* – in particular an entirely unsupported, player-invented game mode called Cat and Mouse – Bizarre now allow players to create playlists of tracks, each track with its

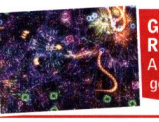
THE STORY SO FAR...
BIZARRE CREATIONS

FUR FIGHTERS
Remember this? No? We do. We remember everything. Sigh.

2000

METROPOLIS STREET RACER
The best racer ever, on the Dreamcast.

2001



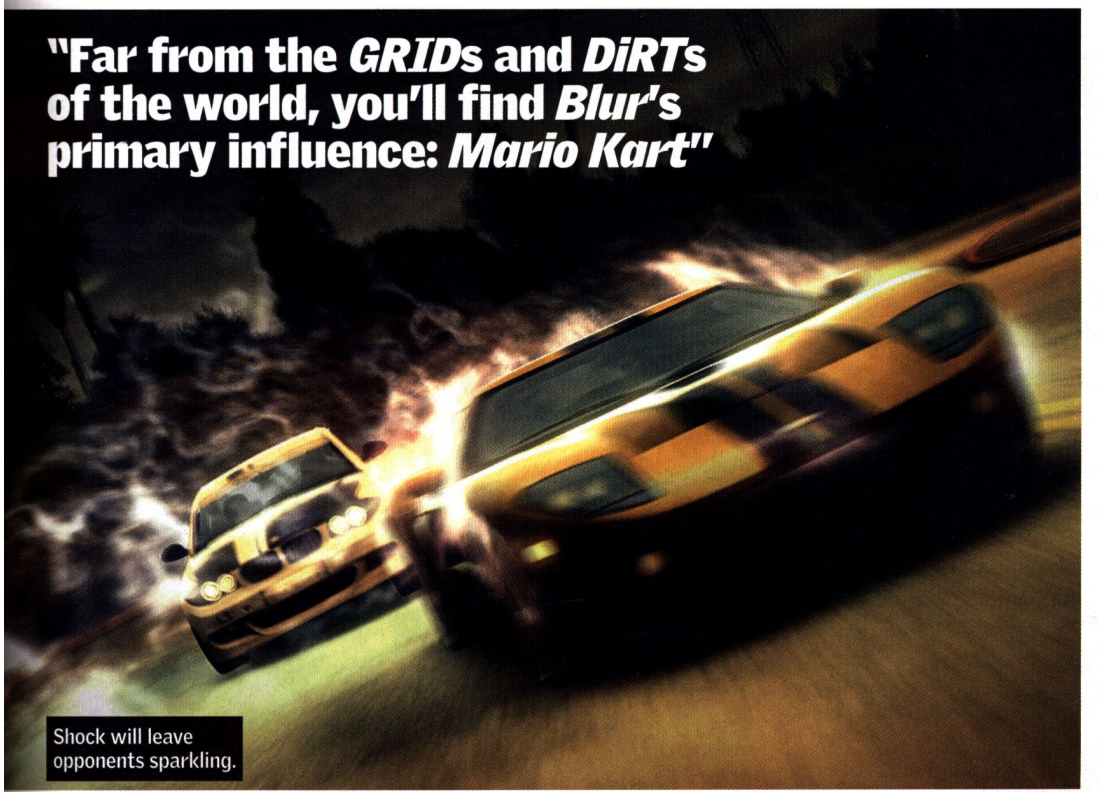
GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED
A *PGR2* minigame, *GW* got its own release.

2007

THE CLUB
"Basically *Stranglehold* or something, but shit." – David Brown.

2008

"Far from the *GRID*s and *DiRT*s of the world, you'll find *Blur*'s primary influence: *Mario Kart*"



Shock will leave opponents sparkling.

Power-ups hover above the road, a la *Mario Kart*.

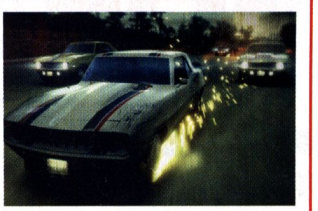
own rules. These playlists, called groups, are publicly available, with the best floating to the top of *Blur*'s front page and becoming super mega popular.

That means the *PGR* fans who'll baulk at the idea of power-ups, can turn the things off. There'll be groups that take the car count down from the bustling default of 20 on track to the sixes and sevens of reality, strip out the ridiculous power-ups and choose only urban tracks from real locations. They could, in theory, turn *Blur* back into *PGR*.

Clearly, Bizarre would rather those people be sold on the basic idea of *Blur* in the first place. That of a game dropping out of the realism race and concentrating on what makes a racer fun to play. This isn't a game where spinning out on the first corner has you spending 10 laps stealing seconds back, it's a game where you'll constantly be battered from all sides by magical shockwaves, arcs of lightning and pixie road mines.

In Bizarre's words it's a halfway-point between *PGR* and *Mario Kart*. We can only hope *Blur*'s not lost in that gulf. PCZ

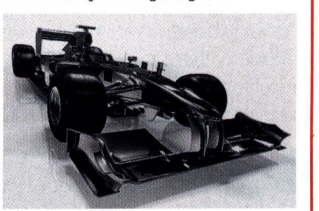
ON THE STARTING GRID
Racers to look forward to playing in 2009



BLUR
Bizarre Creations' funtime racer strikes a balance between realism and power-up japes, with a cunning social slant not seen in other racers.

NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
Very much a super-serious racer from Slightly Mad (nee Blimey!, the SimBin break-away group), *Shift* forms one third of a trio of *NFS* releases.

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2
Will take the world by storm when it's released, its rallying credentials cemented by the original game.



F1 2010
Codemasters have snapped up the official Formula 1 license, and vow to bring it back to PC having been stifled by a Sony-exclusivity deal for so long.

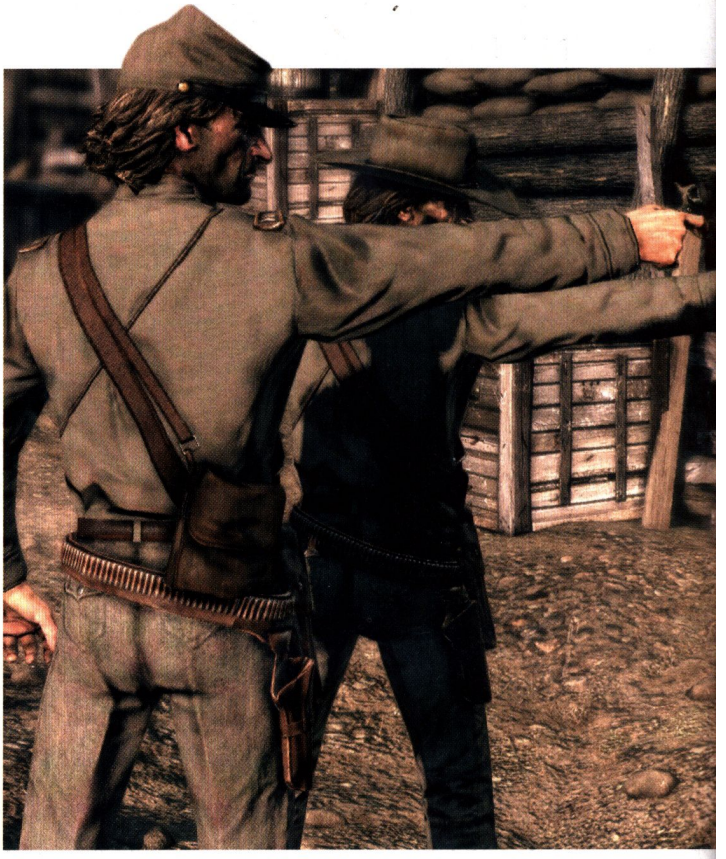
SIMBIN: VOLVO
Similar to SimBin's free BMW racer, the racing devs have struck a deal with Volvo to release a free racer featuring only Volvo cars. Great, if you like Volvos.

HEED THE CALL...

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

David Brown was once bound in blood, but enough about his sex life

DEVELOPER Techland **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft
WEBSITE callofjuarez.uk.ubi.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 207



HAVING PLOUGHED my way through the preview build of *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood*, it's safe to say that what will hit our desktops will be substantially different to what came before. What was once a unique take on the FPS genre, quirks and all, has turned into *Call of Duty: Stetsons at War*. And I can honestly say I have had fun carving up the Wild West with my six shooters.

Bound in Blood can be summed up in six words, and each of those six words is "variety". During every level you seem to be encountering new stuff to do or weapons to use, which keeps things fresh and interesting. Most of the time you'll be firing away with either your rifle or pistols, but you could just as easily toss some dynamite, whip out your bow and arrows, or start hurling knives at your enemies. And let us also not forget that most of these weapons can be used while on horseback, which nobody could tire of (even if these horses ride a little too light to be called realistic).

Hot cowgirl moment: woof!

THE LOWDOWN

- A Western *Call of Duty*
- Lots of variety
- No Billy or mountain climbing
- Bow and arrows
- Attempting to innovate
- Dumb AI

CALL OF BLOOD

The whole feel of the game is very much *Call of Duty*. And that's not just because of the regenerating health system Techland have added. Certainly this is most prevalent in the very first mission, which sees you – as Ray McCall, the elder brother – embroiled in the Civil War on the Confederacy's side. There's that same sort of intensity, bullets flying around you, heat of the action-type feeling you get in *COD*, although this diminishes as you progress. This is because of the variety.

I won't talk about the subsequent levels, because I don't want to spoil the story for you, but each stage feels different to the one that preceded it. From the intensity of Civil War trench warfare to the tension of hiding in a cornfield, waiting to stealthily take out soldiers with throwing knives, there's a new experience to be had after each loading screen.

I really can't stress the diversity in the gameplay enough. You always seem to be discovering new things to do, even if the basic action is the same throughout. Even that is augmented by the Concentration mode, which takes three different forms.

With Ray, you get the Paint mode, where time slows to a crawl and you mark targets on enemies on screen. Go back to normal speed and Ray lets off a lightning-quick volley of shots, wiping out all in his way. For Thomas, Concentration takes the form of a slow-motion shooting gallery. Fire a round and you have to move the mouse up and down quickly to simulate Thomas' hand repeatedly slapping the hammer. I'm reliably informed this is called "fanning" and it is just one example of the effort Techland have put into making these elements feel unique.

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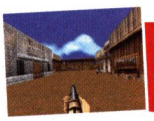
BOUND IN DUTY

Some might argue that Techland have jumbled the gameplay; that you never really get into a flow because you're constantly being presented with new features and encounters, but these people are probably the first to moan about repetition in games. However, they have a point, so if you can't get your head around the way Techland have gone

Welcome to Deadwood.

THE STORY SO FAR... WESTERN PC GAMES



OUTLAWS
Too old now to hold the accolade of "Best Western Game".

1997

GUN
Native Americans called for its recall for offending Apaches.

2005

CALL OF JUAREZ
Too many mountains and too many really annoying teenagers.

2007

BOUND IN BLOOD
Juarez's sequel is ready to don spurs and ride into the gaming sunset.

2009

This'll definitely hurt.

Life on the open range.

LA DANZA DE LA MUERTE

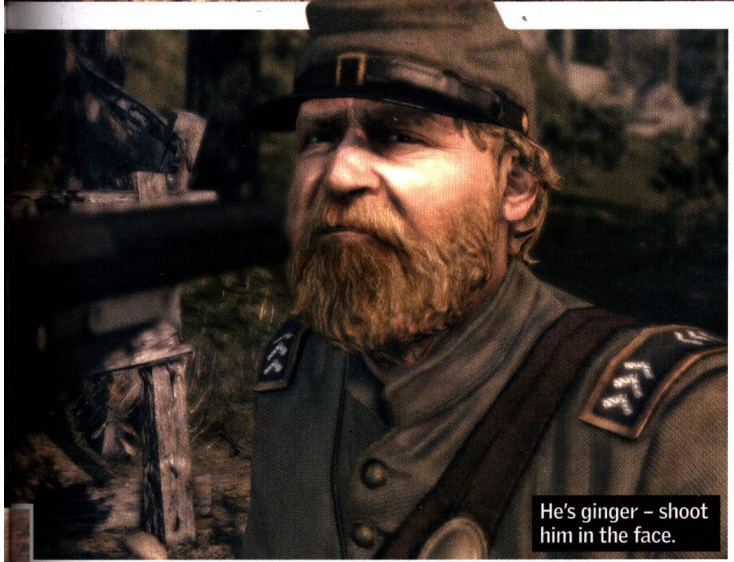
Sergio Leone would be proud

What Western film would be released without a staring eyes, twitching fingers pistol duel? Exactly, hardly any. One of the scenes most synonymous with the Wild West, the quick-draw duel is something that Techland have put into *Bound in Blood* and they've done it fairly well.

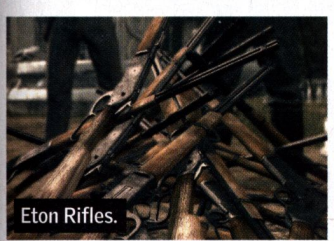
In a duel, you need to keep your enemy on the right-hand side of the screen. If he tries to move, you have to counter his steps to keep him in your sights. When the church bell tolls, you need to whip your hand down to your holster, pull the gun back up and fire.

If your enemy is too far to the side, you'll stand no chance of hitting him in time and be gunned down like the worthless dog that you are.

"Er, best of three then?"



He's ginger – shoot him in the face.



Eton Rifles.

Fetch me a priest.

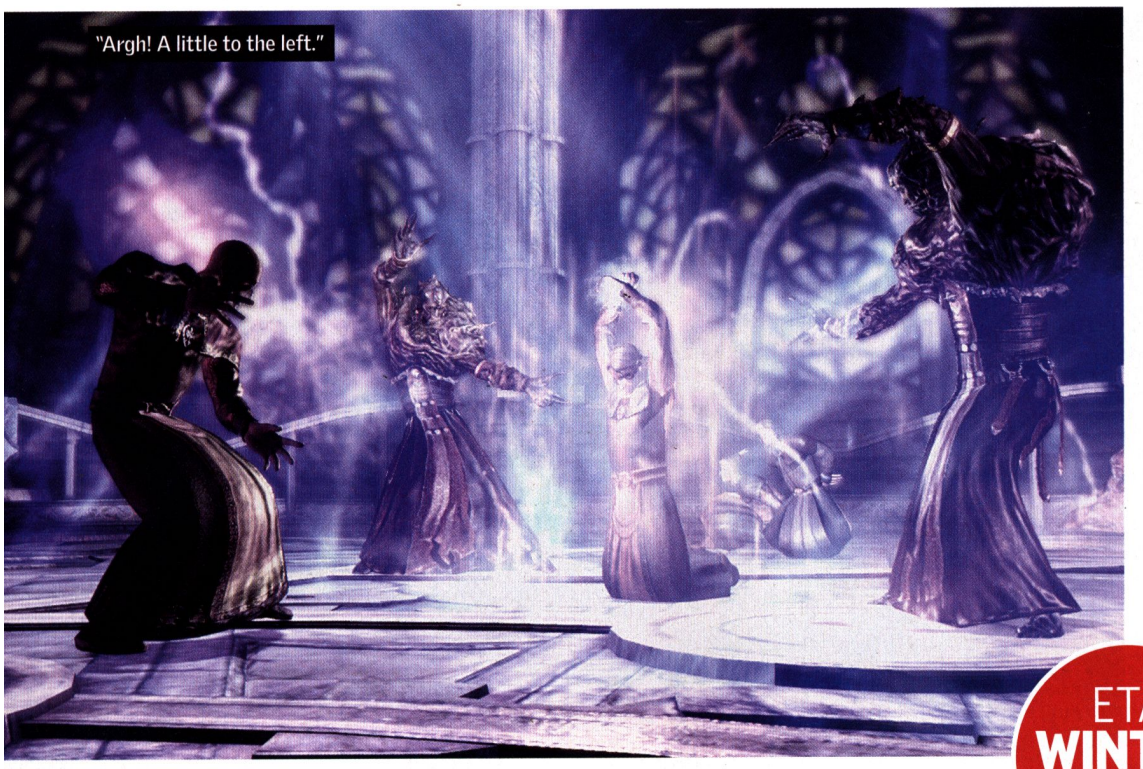
Anyone for sweetcorn?

Two to one: nice odds.

about making *Bound in Blood*, you might need to be a little wary. However, those of us who are of the "Ooh, look what I can do" persuasion will revel in the breadth of options available.

There are a few little niggles, like the AI not always being the sharpest tool in the box (though when were Western bad guys ever geniuses?) and it being a little bit too easy on the lower settings. Our preview build was inconsistently buggy too, working perfectly on one machine but with lots of problems on another. It's a preview build, so hopefully any issues can be ironed out in time for release.

If a demo is released, take the plunge. From what we've seen, *Bound in Blood* deserves to be a success. PCZ



ETA WINTER 2009

ELF HATERS AHOY...

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Get down and dirty with *David Brown* and some pointy-eared folk

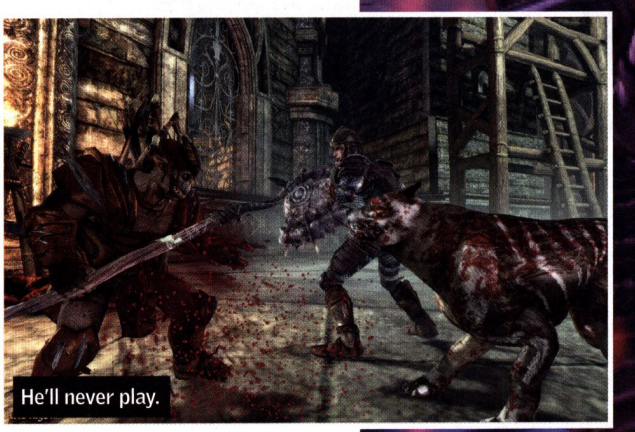
DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 205

I'M NOT A big fan of dogs, but when a fantasy RPG from BioWare includes one as a major character, I sit up on my hind legs and prick up my ears. If nothing else, *Dragon Age: Origins* will be the first game I know of that'll allow you to level up a canine in the same way as a wizard.

THE LOWDOWN

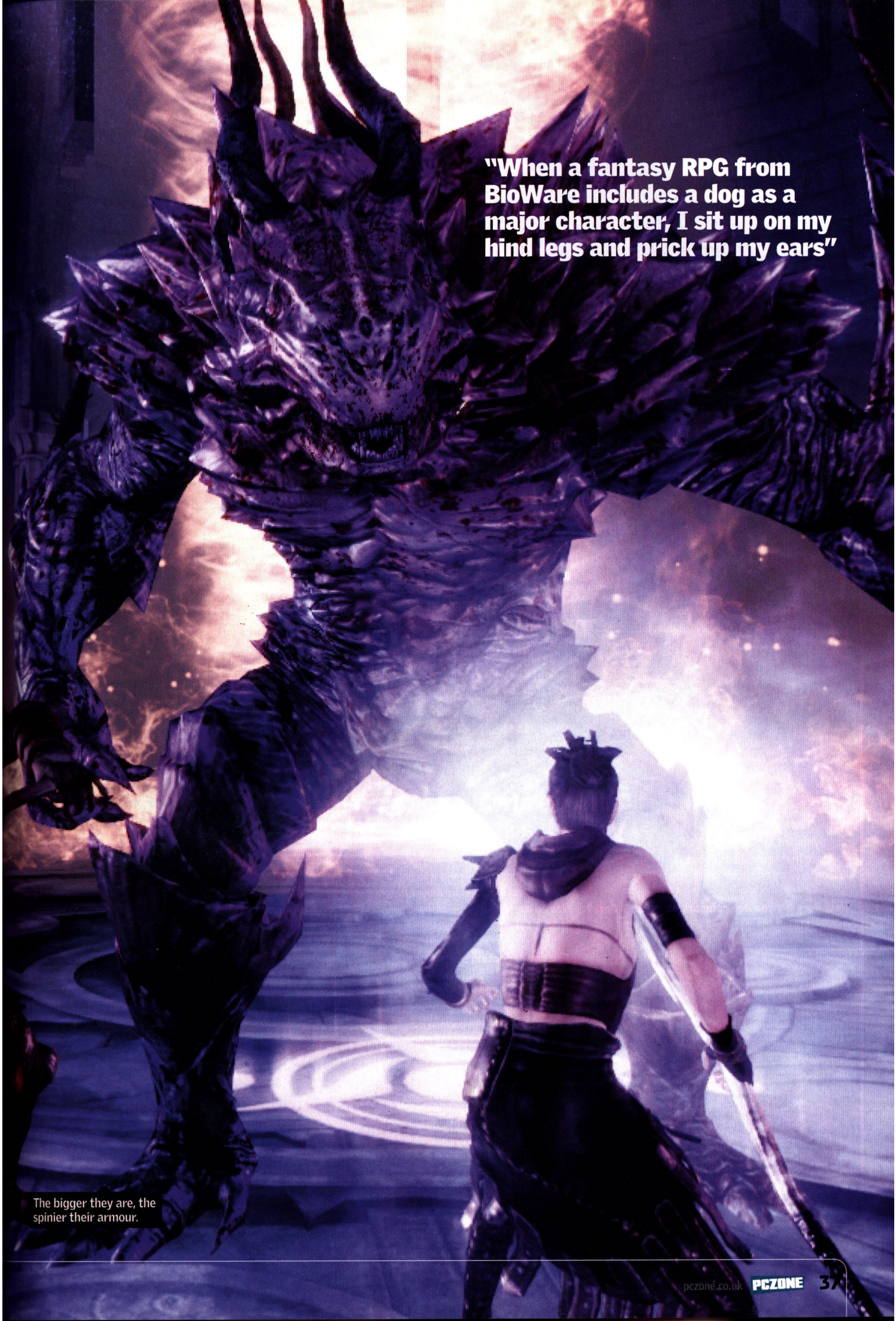
- ✔ Lots of skills and spells
- ✔ Dog
- ✔ *Mass Effect* conversations
- ✔ BioWare don't let us down...
- ✘ ...but worries remain

I'm still not sure I was meant to find the dog while sitting in the corner, far from the prying eyes of various PR people observing the collected throng of journalists attempting to defeat an evil, insane wizard. Naturally, I'd mopped the floor with him with a minimum of fuss and was busying myself trying to explore as much of the game as I could before EA tore the mouse from my bloodied stump of a hand. And that's how I discovered that, among the various wizards and warriors, a huge bulldog-type creature who, when included in your four-man (OK, creature) party, was just as capable of gaining experience and levelling up as his bipedal colleagues.


He'll never play.

Apparently he's just called Dog too, which I suppose is as apt a name as any. But enough of that.

One of the main worries about *Dragon Age* is that since the game has gone cross-platform, all the initial "We're making a PC



"When a fantasy RPG from BioWare includes a dog as a major character, I sit up on my hind legs and prick up my ears"

The bigger they are, the spinier their armour.

See?

INTERVIEW

GROWN-UP FANTASY MAN

Lead designer Mike Laidlaw reveals *Dragon Age*'s secrets

Mike Laidlaw
Lead Designer, BioWare

Q How do you respond to worries that *Dragon Age: Origins* will be dumbed down for consoles?

A There are really two sides to this fear: we'll gut the game for the consoles, or we're going to rip stuff out of the console version, and ship what people consider to be an inferior product for the PC.

From the development side it's been very smooth. The big process for us has been to alter the GUI and the user interface. Really just changing those two things are all it takes to bring the game into the console space. It's similar to the process we used with *Knights of the Old Republic*, *Jade Empire* and *Mass Effect*. So really that's been our main focus, to make sure *Dragon Age* feels likes it looks and plays like it was designed for the right system.

There have been some minor tweaks to the gameplay in the PC version, and certain focuses are slightly shifted, but other than that there are the same options, choices in the story, and character depth. It's all there.

How does *Dragon Age* compare to *Baldur's Gate*?

We tried to get the essence of the *Baldur's Gate* games: the epic scope, the classic fantasy tropes, being a leader who uses the abilities of their team to defeat overwhelming odds. The final element is the party – the sense of camaraderie, back-and-forth banter, and even a bit of humour. When I think back to *Baldur's Gate*, those are what I see as the key moments.

So that's where we're heading, to get that feel but modernise the experience. The UIs are going to feel much more intuitive, the graphics have gone from top-down and large blocks of text to the same technology as *Mass Effect*. Digital actors with voice acting for all the NPCs, all that stuff in terms of storytelling.

In terms of combat *Dragon Age* can really be played much faster. You can dive right in, see up close, watch as your warrior spins and takes a head off as a finishing move, or see your mage hit a guy with a cone of cold and shatter him with a boulder spell.

Is the top-down view designed to recreate *Baldur's Gate* visual style?

Yeah, getting top-down is excellent for spell positioning and stuff like that, so from the gameplay side we had a clear reason to do it. Putting the circles down, having numbers floating off the head, that was definitely a bit of an homage.

Are your recent games influencing you, like *Mass Effect*?

There's no reason not to use *Mass Effect*'s systems, as they're amazing in what they let you do. Something as simple as the writer setting the emotion in a line of dialogue to affect how the lip-sync is generated, all the way to the hand-tweaking by the Cinemax design team. Most of our the guys who polish conversations and smaller cutscenes are *Mass Effect* veterans who trained our new hires. So we have not only the same tech, but also the same feel from the same people.

"There's always controversy when you tell a story that isn't vanilla"

Are you expecting controversy?

If someone had sat me down in front of *Mass Effect*'s cutscenes and said "How much controversy would this cause?", I would've replied "What... in the '80s?"

Dragon Age is not backing down from sexuality and mature themes: it's a bloody game with a darker tone, and a mature feel in terms of choices you have to make. Essentially the world is on the brink, so there are themes like violence, lust and betrayal, and it's down to you to drag these things into the light, which isn't always pretty. Within that, there's room for romance and sexuality, and there's always controversy when you tell a story that isn't vanilla. And I don't think *Dragon Age* is vanilla in any way.

That said, controversy is fine as long as what you make holds up. If something is gratuitous and tossed in out of the blue, that's terrible. In *Mass Effect* the sex scene held up because it was part of a 10-hour story in the game.

Why are you dropping with SecuROM DRM?

We're being aggressive about the *Dragon Age*'s toolset being available to users, and we've got two years of DLC planned. These provide an incentive for players to have a legal, registered copy of the game, because the extra content will be coming through our servers. To me it's more rewarding to approach it that way, to reward you for owning the real game.

Will the DLC be free?

I imagine it'll be a mix of free and paid-for content. There are always gains to be had with something that's free to whet the appetite, but it's really a matter of scope. If you have something that's large and really cool then we'd want to make sure that it was priced accurately. If you release something 20 hours long for free people would ask, "How bad is it?"

Can you have other animals in the party, apart from the dog?

No. The dog is the only playable animal in your party. There's one that's possible that's almost an Easter Egg, but I'm going to let people find that one on their own!

The dog is really cool. He's a simple, almost stat-driven, character. He has a bunch of things that he can do that no-one else can like a "good nose"! And for an animal he's got an exceptional personality.

How many D20s can you fit in your mouth at the same time?

You know, I've never tried that due to a desperate fear of choking to death on a random die. I'm a pretty big guy, but I tend to be more of a closed-mouth talker. I'll have to go with about 12 or 13.

THE STORY SO FAR...
BIOWARE

BALDUR'S GATE
BioWare's beloved series was a gaming revolution in its day.
1998

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
This 3D RPG did well. Its sequel was buggy.
2002

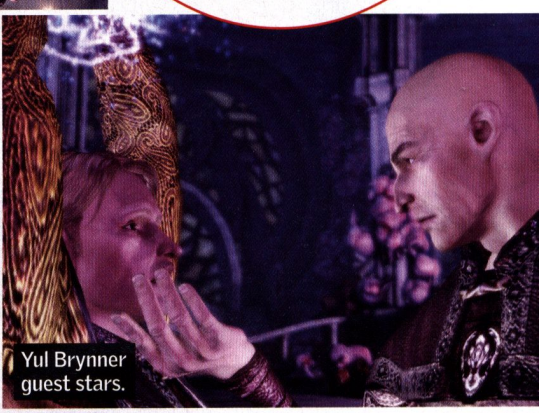
JADE EMPIRE
Though console-led the Oriental actioner remains a classic.
2007

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
Will it live up to its forebears?
2009

"Yuk. You need a shower mate."

HOW TO WIN FRIENDS...

BioWare have taken the brave step of only using the most basic of copy protection measures on *Dragon Age: Origins*. That means you won't be seeing any tedious threads on various internet forums about how "DRM killed my baby". The game will ship with only a basic disc check protecting it from pirates. Hopefully this act of goodwill the consumer will be repaid rather than abused by those interested in playing it. If the game sells well this could mark a turning point in the fight against piracy. We hope.



Yul Brynner guest stars.

My name's Dave, pleased to meet you.

Lycra's popular in the *Dragon Age* universe.

A novel way of lighting a BBQ.

game for PC gamers" bluster would turn out to be just so much hot air. While we only obviously got a limited run through various aspects of the game, my impression was that *Dragon Age: Origins* is a cross between *Baldur's Gate* and *Mass Effect*. That isn't big news really, but it might help qualify what you should expect from the game come winter.

Combat was the focus of our hands-on, with the aforementioned mad mage needing to be put in his place. First of all, a conversation was had that was straight out of the *Mass Effect* playbook. The facial animations and conversational style were so similar, so while we shouldn't expect the same level of sophisticated storytelling as shown in *The Witcher*, BioWare's usual high standards in terms of acting and writing will shine through.

After the inevitable "Actually, you know, I won't just give up" conversation finishes, you get ready to rumble. This is where BioWare have, surprisingly, managed to keep the new and old RPG fans happy.

ZOOM ZOOM

For those used to *Mass Effect* and its ilk, you can fly right in and look over your character's shoulder while you fight. For those of the *Baldur's Gate* school, you can keep the view zoomed out and go old school.

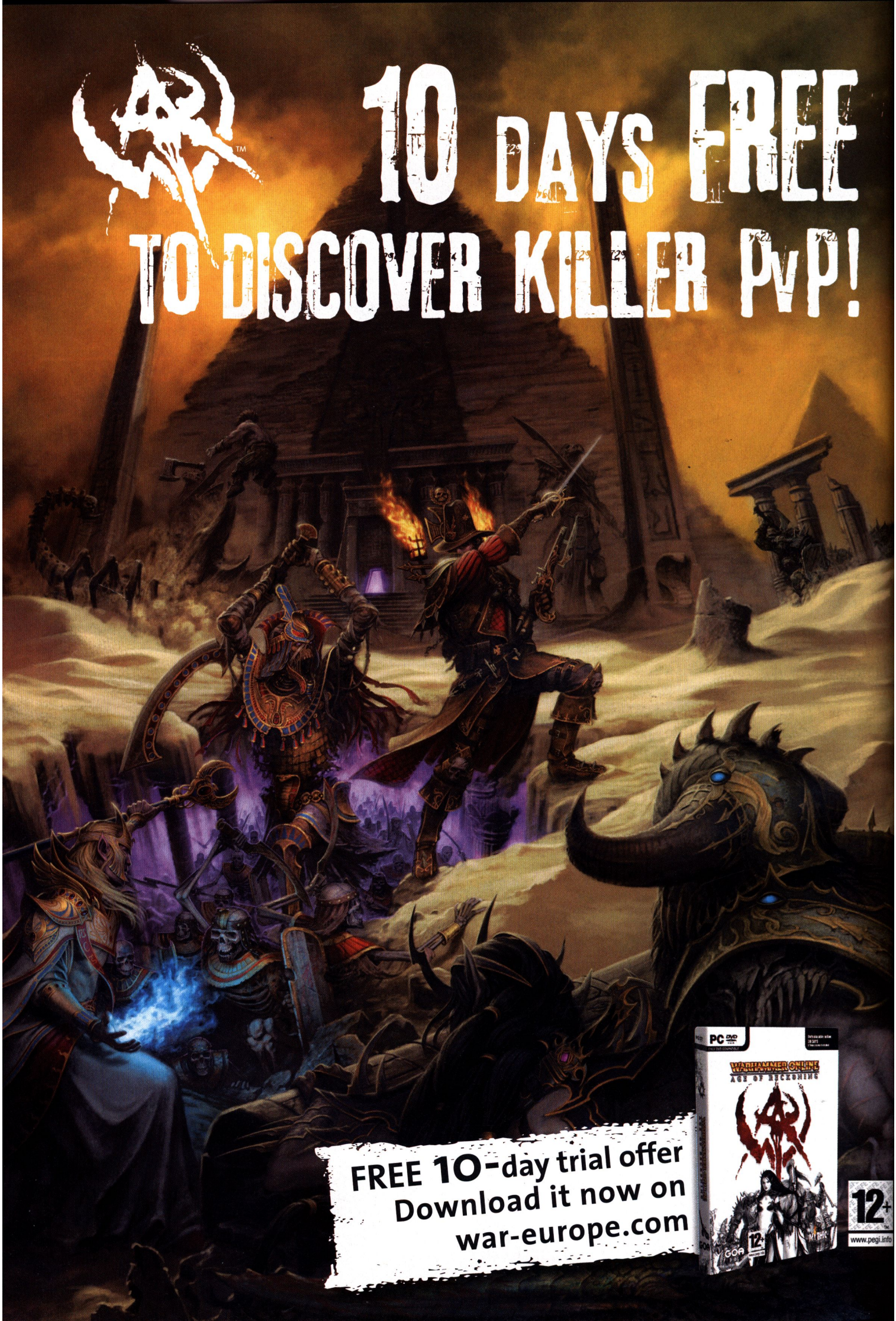
Combat is pausable, so you can consider your strategy and queue up spells and attacks, just like in the good ol' days of top-down goblin slaughtering. Certainly for those worrying about *Origins* being dumbed down, this notion has been blown out of the window for the combat at least. You can even zoom out outside of combat too, so instead of using WSAD to move about, you can click around the screen instead. It is, as they say, up to you.

As for what is going on behind the scenes, it's all reassuringly dice roll-y and the number of skills, spells and so on are a far cry from more recent streamlined RPGs. While I won't go so far as to say the game mechanics are as in-depth as the *Baldur's Gate* series, it certainly shouldn't be lacking in options.

The main problem that still persists is whether the game's storyline and its universe will be interesting enough. Other than being described as a "mature fantasy" *Dragon Age: Origins* doesn't seem to have much of a hook, some key ingredient that will get people rushing to the shops to buy the game. One imagines that BioWare are gambling on their name alone being enough to guarantee sales, which is probably true, but there is definitely a "meh, whatever" attitude amongst a substantial percentage of the PC gaming community.

From what we've played so far, the actual gameplay won't be a problem, pleasing as it should veterans and newbies alike. Whether the core story and characters will be good enough, well, we'll just have to wait and see. PCZ

Mmm, toasty.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MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT

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GRENADE

EVOLVING...

SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES

David Brown gets to grips with *Spore*'s coming of age

DEVELOPER Maxis **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** spore.com

ETA **JUNE 2009**

THE MAIN PROBLEM with the original *Spore* was that what people loved to do – use their imaginations to create wonderful and fantastic creatures – was overwhelmed by repetitive gameplay. Naturally then, the public (read "internet moaners") decided to unleash their nerd rage at EA and Maxis, saying *Spore* was rubbish, there was nothing to do and so on.

IMAGINATION STATION

Months down the line and the first proper expansion for the game is peeping two goggly stalk-eyes over the parapet, checking that the coast is clear. The hubbub has quietened down, anger-geeks have returned to badmouthing other easy targets, and actual *Spore* players (who, EA tells us, have created 98 million different in-game objects) can now be left to playing the game in peace. What they'll see in *Galactic Adventures* may well send them to new levels of excitement, globules of spittle flying all over the place as they whip themselves into a frenzy of anticipation.

As I tip-toed about the game, with my own personal Maxis representative answering my dumb questions along the way, it was obvious that *Galactic Adventures* would be something special, especially for an expansion. Perhaps the best way to think about *Galactic Adventures* it is to imagine the *Creature Creator*, just a lot better, because instead of a utility to generate animals and objects, you have an entire game-making suite at your disposal.

Plonked down in front of a blank world, I got started clicking about and investigating what all the icons did. One thing I discovered quickly was that terrain can be easily morphed to fit whatever crazed plan you have in your head. It all fits together with water levels and such too, so if you create a deep enough depression, it fills with liquid. The water level can be increased or decreased, while environmental effects can be changed. So my makeshift lake could become a frozen ice pond or a bubbling lake of lava. There are all sorts of possibilities in the world editor,

The *Spore* version of a taffy pull.

Nice moustache.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ **Vast potential**
- ✓ What *Spore* should have been
- ✓ **Excellent editor**
- ✓ Unlimited gameplay...
- ✗ **Most of which will be rubbish**

ENEMY AT THE CAKES

An attempt to create an adventure for *Spore* that nobody could enjoy

Galactic Adventure's editor is so flexible you could create the most outlandish mess in the history of gaming.

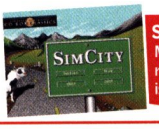
My own attempt involved a giant evil rabbit monster guarding a collection of treasure chests. A river of lava flowed under a bridge, which was protected by a big gate. Objects in the world can be disguised as other things, so my gate was actually a big pink wedding cake.

Being locked, it needed a key to open it, which I decided was a 3.5in floppy disk (remember them?).

The task was simple: pick up the key, open the cake-gate, and kill the rabbit to pick up the treasure.

Simple, imaginative and utter rubbish.

THE STORY SO FAR...
MAXIS



SIMCITY
Maxis' first game remains a classic, and is possibly its best.
1987

SIMANT
The best game ever made about running an insect colony.
1991

SIMCOPTER
Nowhere near the best game ever made that features a helicopter.
1996

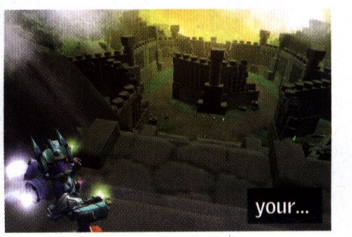
SPORE
We loved it. Which is a controversial view, but the right one.
2008

Never saw these guys in *Star Trek*...

David vs Super Goliath.

The sky's the limit in the editor.

Let...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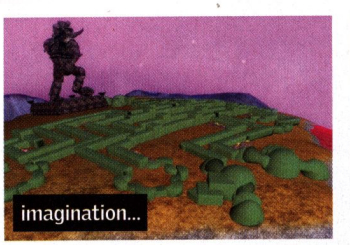
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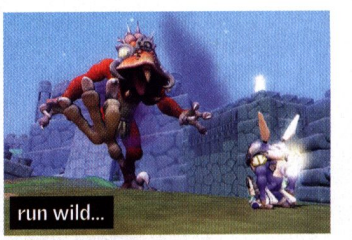
run wild...

"Instead of just a utility to generate animals and objects, you have an entire game making suite"

although the real fun comes from placing objects and creating your own adventure.

As a fully registered and paid-up cynic, I expected *Galactic Adventures* to be a gimmicky load of nonsense, but I've got to admit that this could be huge. Just being shown a few of the custom-made adventures was enough to start my mind racing through the possibilities.

Large RTS-style battles contrast with harmless child-oriented playing about with cute characters, while platform-jumping levels move swiftly on to tiny calculator games, where you hand two numbers to a sheep and he brings you the result of both being added together. Remaining within the boundaries of sanity, if you can imagine it, you might just be able to create an adventure about such simple mathematics.

POTENTIAL CLASSIC

All of these adventures and levels are accessible through the menu or the Space section of the main *Spore* game. We're not sure exactly how this will work in practice (we weren't shown that bit) but, in theory, you'll be able to explore the galaxy with your Captain – an avatar that you'll use in all of the adventures, and who can be levelled up as you complete them – and simply drop down onto whatever planet takes your fancy, and see what's there to play.

The only problems we can see with *Galactic Adventures* are that most of the user-created levels will be garbage – a logical outcome from letting the general public loose on something. There are also bound to be a plethora of rude or risqué planets of levels, although this is less of a problem and more of a shake-your-head-at-humanity issue.

There's also the question of what people who don't really like being creative will get out of it. Admittedly, these people will be the ones who get far less from the expansion, but there is at least the fact that they shouldn't ever be yearning for extra levels to play. After all, with 98 million objects having been created for just the original *Spore*, there's bound to be just a teensy bit more than a handful of levels and minigames created for *Galactic Adventures*.

Expect to see *PC ZONE's Big Penis Monsters Invade Vagina World* being banned by Maxis later this year. PCZ

Screen taken from the *Kama Sutra: Spaceman* edition.

ETA AUTUMN 2009

JET SET WILL(Y)

DARK VOID

With a lump of metal strapped to his back, *Will Porter* plummets to his death

DEVELOPER Airtight Games **PUBLISHER** Capcom **WEBSITE** darkvoidgame.com

No Elton John jokes, please.

AS SILLY GAME premises go *Dark Void* takes some beating. It's the tale of a pilot called Will (no relation) who accidentally careers through the Bermuda Triangle and enters a parallel dimension. Here he meets Nikola Tesla (real-world Serbian physicist and electrics boffin, who invented the radio, the AC electricity motor, and the eponymous Tesla coil) who presents him with a kickass smoke-billowing jetpack and points him in the direction of the Watchers – a bunch of miniature robot-controlling ne'er-do-wells that have enslaved the resident humanity in the style of *Stargate*. That's right – gritty realism has finally come back to PC gaming. Well, maybe not.

But at least the jetpacks have come home to roost.

"The *Tribes* franchise serves as a great model to follow. We're big fans," explains beret-wearing senior producer Morgan Gray. "*Tribes* was fantastic, and the series was fantastic. So the columns, shafts and the architecture of *Dark Void* are directly inspired by those sorts of games. Then when we added the ability to fly, which is beyond what *Tribes* does, we started to look towards games like our own *Crimson Skies*.

"There are really few game models that are similar to *Dark Void* in terms of the entirety of the experience, but there is a similarity to *Tribes* in how you can have a ground-combat based game then take to the skies and bring that death from above."

Combat is the game's weak spot so far.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ *Rocketeer* jetpack
- ✓ *Tribes* a big inspiration
- ✓ Great *I, Robot*-style enemies
- ✓ Fight in mid-air or on foot
- ✗ Combat needs work

FLYING LICENCES

Much of *Dark Void* is spent swooping through Grand Canyon-esque surroundings – blasting UFOs, knocking out ground emplacement guns, and leaping on shiny discs with every intention of playing a metal-ripping mini-game that'll end up with you in command of the alien craft. Get onto terra firma and affairs switch into a third-person shooter, with a strong emphasis on danger far above and far below. If you're at the bottom of a huge vertical shaft, for example, you can even

Altogether now: "He's above you!"

THE STORY SO FAR...
CAPCOM

OLD SKOOL
Street Fighter – the original, and nowhere near the best.
1987

DUMB FUN
Brain-dead demon shooting fun featured in *Devil May Cry 4*.
2008

WELL ARMED
Bionic Commando will be out in July. *snort* Yeah... right.
2009

ROCKETMAN
Dark Void should be out around autumn if all goes to plan.
2009

Giant pillars are great for a slalom.

PLANES AREN'T SEXY
But men called Will are. Especially when they can fly

There's a place for flight sims, but increasingly games publishers seem to believe that place is in an obese middle-aged man's bedroom. And who wants to make games for people like him? *Dark Void* is another jazzed-up flight combat game with go-faster stripes – like *Crimson Skies*. Compare this to the recent *Blazing Angels* series being upgraded with electronic bells and whistles, and the appearance of a somewhat flashier *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.* and you've got yourself a trend.

"What we're trying with *Dark Void* is to provide all that you want from flying," explains senior producer Morgan Gray. "The seat of your pants, daredevil, barnstorming man who's barely in control of his jetpack stuff – and none of the flight simmy complicated aspects."

Flight sims might not be dead, but it's evident what sort of game makes the most money.

It looks pretty, but must play havoc with his posture.

Bad guys are *I Robot* 'bots mixed with *Star Wars* battle droids.

Bermuda Triangle aliens eh? Tch.

The Watchers kill you. A lot.

You'll believe a man can swoop.

hang from the ledge you're standing beneath and fire upwards in a neck-straining variation on the ever-familiar *Gears of War* cover system.

What's more, if you're one of the few who played *Tribes: Vengeance* you'll be reminded of how the shared design mentality of creating a game-space in which foes aren't restricted by gravity pays off with some hugely imaginative, and vertigo inducing, alien chambers. Your jetpack can be still be used to spurt yourself around the scenery despite your feet being largely grounded in these sections and, if you'll forgive the deeper regression to PC gaming past, occasional "Which way is up?" *Descent* moments can crop up what with the non-gravity adhering architecture.

"With jetpack games the player can zoom and zip around at will, so level design techniques of days gone by don't apply any more," picks up Gray. "One of the things that's been great about doing the jetpacks in *Dark Void* is finding ways to take the traditional setups, say you going into a hallway and suddenly along come three bad guys out of a closet, and finding the aerial counterpart. It's a new grammar that we're exploring..."

Coming out of aerial space closets won't be your average bad guy grunts either, but instead highly manoeuvrable creations, piloted by Watchers, that are reminiscent of the swarming, swinging and slinky 'bots in the *I, Robot* movie. They're great fun to watch as they power down ledges towards you, and are accompanied by a full cast of whip-tailed hover beasts and some Watcher Knights that pepper you with rockets and machine gun fire before turning into UFOs and chasing you into the sky.

Beyond the interesting gameplay dynamics there's a lot of tinkering that needs doing with *Dark Void*'s engine. It's great that Will looks rather fragile and delicate when zooming through canyons with his clothes rippling, but markedly less fun when he connects with a surface and is greeted by our friend insta-death. Likewise, although arguably a sensation of floatiness is required in a game like this, the third-person combat currently lacks weight and could do with some added pep.

Despite its preposterous setup though, there's a heady aroma of gameplay goodness going into *Dark Void* – but even the most yappy of exuberant optimists would be able to see the potential for things to go all fubar. However, in an era bereft of *Tribes*, *Dark Void*'s undeniable imaginative flair cannot be ignored – so keep watching the skies. PCZ

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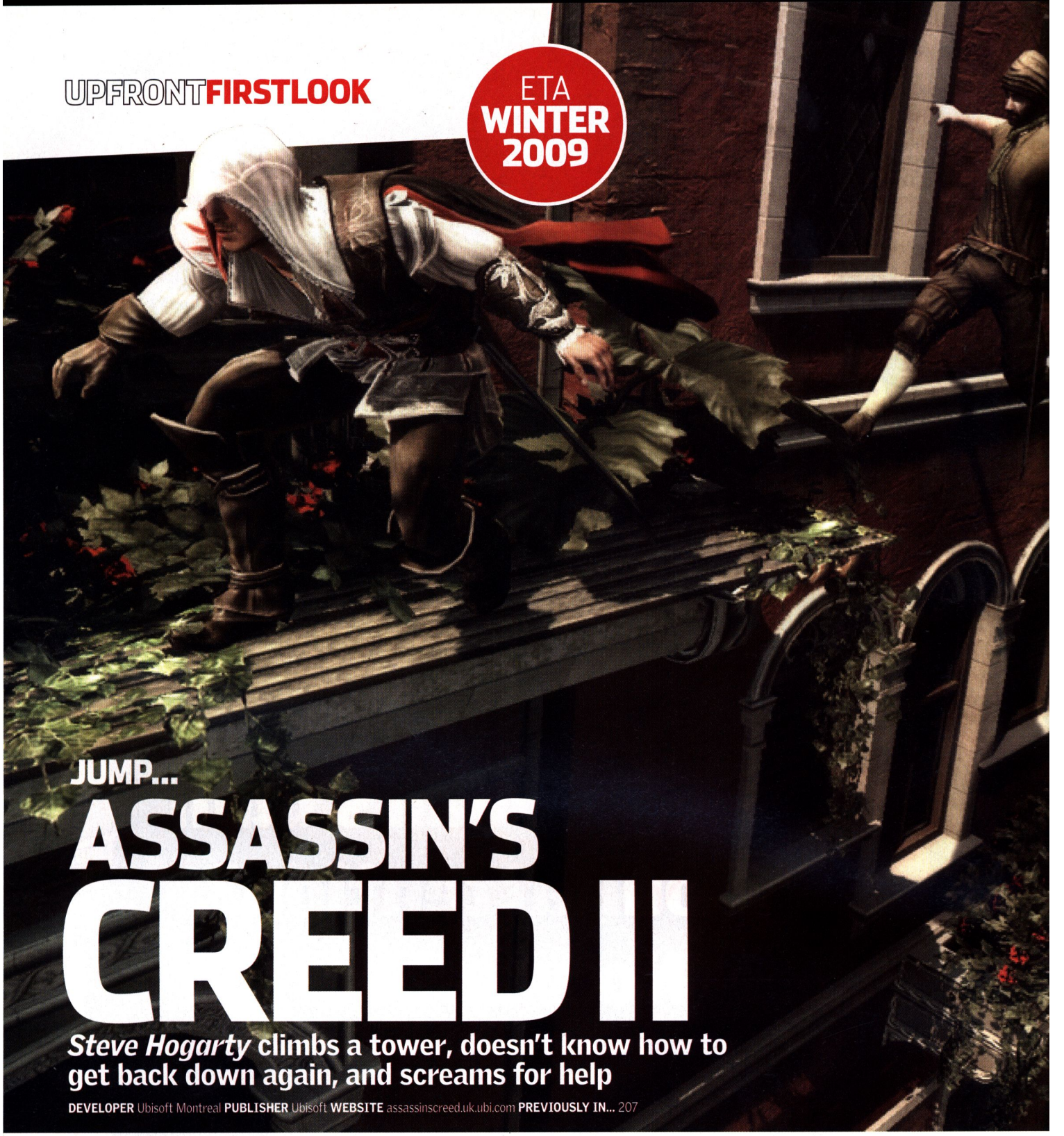
ETA WINTER 2009



JUMP...

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Steve Hogarty climbs a tower, doesn't know how to get back down again, and screams for help

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 207

VENICE, ITALY, THE 15th century. In reality this seemingly picturesque town is an overcrowded, plague-ridden pit. A hairy miasma-hole perched on the rudest bit of long-legged Italy's suggestive coastline.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Jumpy action fun
- ✓ The last one was good
- ✓ Original, interesting location
- ✓ It's got Da Vinci in it
- ✗ Original's problems may stay

You wouldn't go there if you could help it, you'd probably go to the far prettier Florence to do your wine shopping. Sure, there was a Renaissance happening and Senora Vespucci down the way says that hot young thing Da Vinci is zipping about the city streets in a hello-copter – but the place smelled like poo. No amount of culture can waft away a poo smell.

CLEAR WATERS

Thankfully Ubisoft are downplaying the reality slightly, if only to give the new Altair the ability to dive into crystal-clear Venetian canals instead of plodding between bloated corpses and turdy sandbanks. In fact, Ubisoft's vision of a Renaissance-era Italy is a beautiful one, from the shimmering waterways of Venice to the chapels and architecture of Florence. Where the original went some ways towards highlighting the sparse beauty of the ramshackle Middle Eastern cities of the Third Crusade, *Assassin's Creed II*'s art direction collides head-on with the most creative period in human history, resulting in some visually astounding scenes.

This isn't Altair either. The wacky futuristic subplot to *Assassin's Creed* tells the story of an unwitting descendent of an assassin's guild forced to relive the memories of his ancestors in a magical genetic memory machine. No doubt that for the sequel the machine's been recalibrated, and the memories you're now re-enacting are those of a different

"The art direction collides with the most creative period in history"

THE STORY SO FAR...

UBISOFT MONTREAL

ASSASSIN'S CREED
The original beam-percher comes to life.

2007

FAR CRY 2
The spectacular savannah shooter blows us away.

2008

PRINCE OF PERSIA
The re-imagined *POP* fails to make waves.

2008

ASSASSIN'S CREED II
The new beam-percher will arrive.

2009

You can disarm guards and use their weapons against them.

Your pursuers are inexplicably agile, as before.

ancestor, one called Ezio Auditore di Firenze. As he's part of the same legion of assassins, and of the same blood as Altair, he'll look vaguely similar and sport that all-important white hood.

Da Vinci, who's very much a character in *Assassin's Creed II*, is claimed to have invented dual wristblades – a weapon remarkably similar to the hidden blade used by Altair, except mounted on both wrists instead of just one (what a genius). Ezio's been gifted with this innovative new invention, as well as the newfound ability to disarm guards and use their weapons against them.

"Squawk!"

Polearms and poleaxes were the tools of choice for many in this age, and each weapon purloined opens up a variety of new moves and abilities for Ezio, namely great big swipes and rude, thrusting pokes.

Some clues to potential new weapons lie within the presentation we were given. Da Vinci's sketchbook was a trove of ideas for Ubisoft's design

Ezio Auditore di Firenze, in all his glory.

team, featuring mad contraptions like a wooden tank and bomb arrows (a boss fight in any level designer's books), as well as the flying machine shown in the game's artwork. In Ubisoft's universe, Da Vinci is a friend to the assassins, and his workshop acts as a mission hub as well as a dispenser of useful equipment with which to surprise pursuing guards.

As ever, combat is intended to be the assassin's last resort. The point here is to avoid scraps by clambering to the tops of buildings and bounding over rooftops or slinking into a crowd to evade detection. That was the original's selling point: the fluidity of your character's motion as he skips from beam to bar, from ledge to sill, sprinting through the urban environment in a finely tuned, accurate-to-the-pixel display of agility.

That's still the case, and much of the architecture seems familiar in terms of game mechanics. This is after all the same engine, though it leads us to wonder how many criticisms have been addressed since the first game.

The ability to thread Altair through the city was lauded for being stylish and spectacular, but it was heavily automated, with the player choosing where to go, rather than choosing how.

CANAL SWIM

Ezio will be able to swim and dive in the canals of Venice, and we're told that, where Altair could blend with monks, Ezio can blend in with "any kind of group of citizens" in the crowd. You'll be able to move freely while blending too, instead of being forced to walk the same path as your habited friends. While weapons such as warhammers and axes can be snatched from guards, unarmed combat has been made more complex and involving to encompass a wider range of combos and to that effect, there's a spate of new assassination moves too.

We doubt Ezio will get a jump button (and whether we'd want him to is questionable), but other game elements are definitely being tweaked. Buildings can now be entered and explored, a

FACTION STATIONS

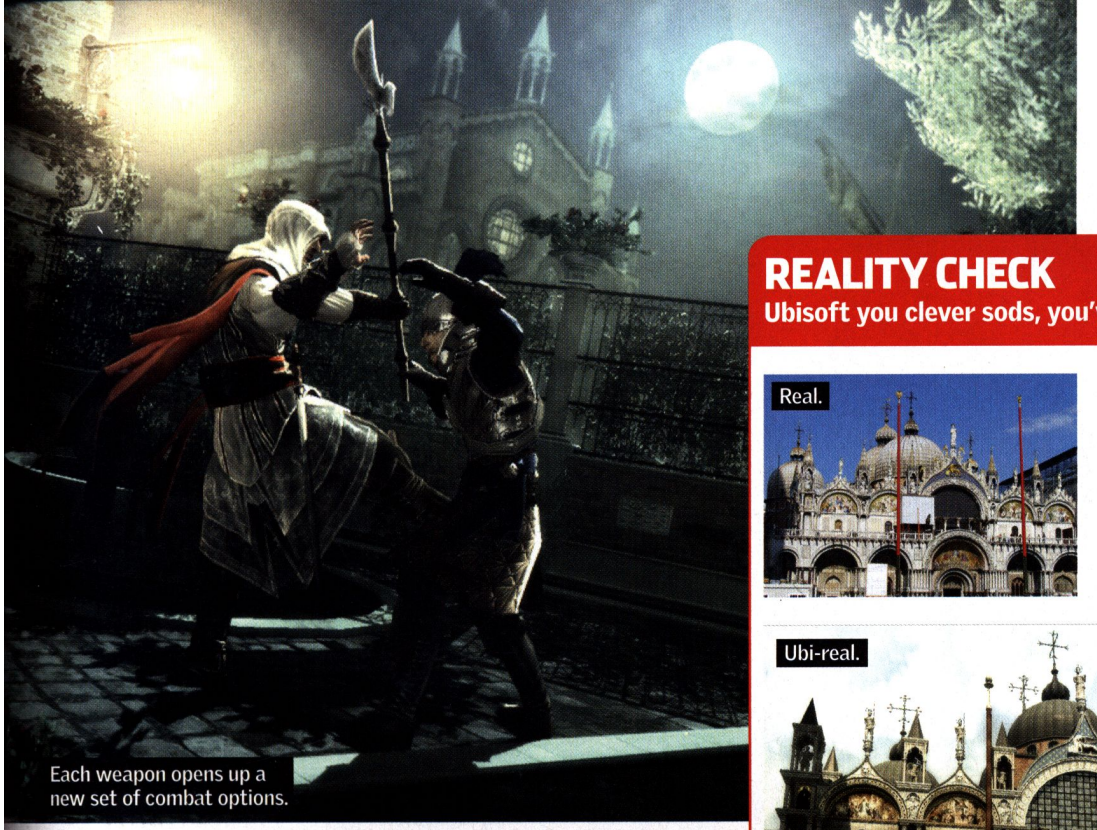
As thick as thieves, as destitute as prostitutes, *Assassin's Creed II*'s factions exposed!

THIEVES' GUILD

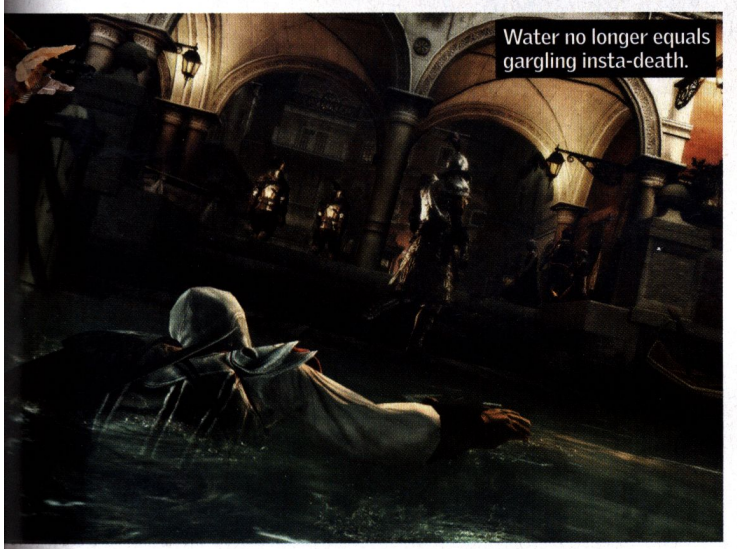
Led by master thief Antonio, the Thieves Guild operates in Venice's commercial district as an conglomerate of pocketpickers and burglebirds. Antonio grew up without much money, and weighed down by his shoddy heritage his hard work and determination was fruitless. Buoyed by a shocking sense of entitlement, he began to steal from the corrupt upper classes. So he's a decent fellow, and looks on the Guild members as his brothers. Ezio's dealings with the guild are amicable, considering his talents are of great use to their organisation.

COURTESANS' GUILD

Led by Madame Paula, the Courtesans work out of a Florentine brothel. Paula's backstory is a bit grim to say the least. Having been abused by a guard while living on the streets, she eventually freed herself from her captor and murdered the man who'd tortured, raped and imprisoned her. Afterwards she took it upon herself to look after other homeless women, with the Courtesans' brothel acting as a halfway-house for wayward souls. As high-class escorts to the rich and famous, the girls' connections will be of great use to Ezio.



Each weapon opens up a new set of combat options.



Water no longer equals gargling insta-death.

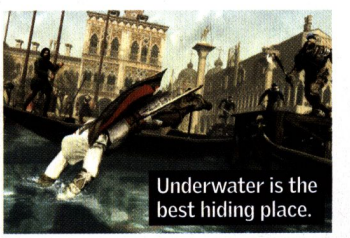
REALITY CHECK

Ubisoft you clever sods, you've made it look real

Real.

Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice is the seat of the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Venice. So it's important that it's represented properly in the game. The last thing you want is to upset a Catholic with inaccurate Byzantine architecture. A quick glance at the comparison shots above show that, for now, Ubisoft Montreal are safe from the wrath of the religious types.

Ubi-real.



Underwater is the best hiding place.

"Hay!"

feature which only barely appeared in the form the original's safe houses.

The mission structure of the first game was rigid and repetitive; a routine of finding your agent before climbing to the tops of towers to discover three different kinds of investigation events on your map. This time around, those types (eavesdropping, interrogation and pickpocketing) have been extended to 16 (a number Ubisoft say could rise). And rather than successful events simply accumulating until you reach a point where you can move to your primary assassination target, missions will branch and diverge, unlocking new agents and unique missions. What those 16+ mission types will involve isn't yet known, though they'll go a long way towards dissolving the tedium felt during the first game.

There's more. Optional missions will be spread throughout the cities of Venice and Florence, on which listless assassins might be tempted to spend their time.

If you've gutted your screaming target in a busy town square and don't want witnesses saying what a rubbish assassin you are, you can hunt them down and silence them (ideally in a subtler manner).

Your crimes will be noted too – every action you take will be tied to the game's notoriety system, in which you gain a wanted level in each city you frequent. Presumably there are consequences of becoming the most wanted man in Florence, benefits of being the most feared man in Venice, and ways to get the authorities off your case with bribes.

Other agents will crop up alongside Leo, including Botticelli, the powerful Medici family, and Machiavelli, a man so scheming he has his own adjective and an assassin's guild loyalty card. Around these, two major factions will operate in 15th century Italy: the Thieves Guild of Venice – purported to be the beginnings of the Mafia, and conduct themselves as such – and the Courtesans of Florence – high-class hookers (see *Faction Stations*).

"A sequel that injects worth into the original's hollow shell will be very special indeed"

Assassin's Creed II will be more than a simple scenery swap then, taking key features from Altair's adventure and expanding on them while introducing new ideas.

Most exciting is the fact Ubisoft have sorted out the botched mission structure. The one-dimensional progression of the original was the biggest sticking point for many, so tying missions to characters and allowing their outcomes to lead to other missions makes a very big sack of sense.

We'll have to see how wackiness such as Da Vinci's flying machine fits into this new equation (apparently we'll be able to carry out assassinations from the thing), and beyond Venice, Florence and the surrounding Tuscan countryside, the locations Ezio will visit haven't been confirmed. There's also an economy system yet to be unveiled, which will no doubt see Ezio paid with cash that can then be used to buy Da Vinci's wares.

The first *Assassin's Creed* was a deeply satisfying game to play, one whose lack of substance was obscured by the thickly laid on style – a sequel that injects worth into the original's hollow shell of spectacle would be something very special indeed. *Assassin's Creed II* might have avoided the stench of Venetian reality, but it's also steering well clear of the stink of... um... not learning from mistakes. PCZ

MODERN LIFE ISN'T RUBBISH...

MODERN WARFARE 2

WILL PORTER IS CALLED OUT OF RETIREMENT AND HEADS OUT ON HIS FINAL MISSION

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward **PUBLISHER** Activision **WEBSITE** modernwarfare2.infinityward.com

WHEN YOU'RE ONE of the first in the world to be shown what'll likely be the most successful shooter of recent history, it's bad form to repeatedly point at the game and excitedly bark which movies you've seen its setpieces in before. And, indeed, for flecks of your spittle to land in the eyes of its designers.

After 45 minutes in front of *Modern Warfare 2* I'd stopped to excitedly bite my fist no less than seven times to stare with strange intensity at Infinity Ward's studio head Vincent Zampella and community manager Robert Bowling, and yell things like: *Goldeneye*! *Police Story! Vertical Limit*! *Die Hard 2*!

To this Infinity Ward return a shrug. "I don't know that it's intentional... though we watch a lot of movies," offers Zampella by way of explanation, with perhaps an underlying glimmer of alarm that the feverish individual sweating into his leather couch is listing increasingly bad '90s actioners rather than marvelling at the updated graphics, remarkable motion capture and breathless innovations in level design on show. Yet this isn't a criticism on my part; it's the recognition that more than any other game *Call of Duty* – or what was once *Call of Duty* – has increasingly pitted you as the star of the most visceral, imaginative and adrenalin-ripped set-pieces ever committed to 3D engine, or indeed celluloid. That it occasionally stoops to cherry-pick the very best moments of violent popular culture is an affirmation that *Modern Warfare 2* is aimed squarely at fulfilling the Action Man fantasies of a generation. The fact that I'm dribbling as I type this is proof enough that it will hit its target.

"No-one blows up my truck. And lives."

ETA **10 NOV 2009**

"I take snowball fights seriously."

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ **Business as usual! Hurrah!**
- ✓ Hugely imaginative level design
- ✓ **Steals from action movies**
- ✓ Co-op enabled Spec Ops mode
- ✓ **Civilians! Snowmobiles!**
- ✗ 'Soap' is still a silly name

CO-OP BLOW UPS

This stance is solidified as I watch the Infinity Ward twosome play a co-op mission in *Modern Warfare 2*'s Special Ops mode. As Robert places an explosive charge on a dank brick wall, and they both charge, co-op style, through the flying rubble, accompanied by a beautifully animated slow-motion Russian soldier cartwheeling away, my animated burbling is proved correct. This mission-slice, cut and pasted from the main game

THE STORY SO FAR...

CALL OF DUTY SERIES

CALL OF DUTY
EA splitters make the definitive WWII shooter.

2003

CALL OF DUTY 2
Fatter Nazis and more rope dangling make up the sequel.

2005

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
The leap to modernity is made with grace.

2007

MODERN WARFARE 2
'Call of Duty' dropped, and left to moulder.

2009

Name that movie in one.

"MODERN WARFARE 2 IS AIMED AT FULFILLING THE ACTION MAN FANTASIES OF A GENERATION"

"SOAP AND HIS BOYS IN TASK FORCE 141 ARE ON THE CASE"

for ramped-up difficulty and co-op jollities, is a dingy prison shower-block – a concrete basin full of grey shower fittings and crumbling cover points. Above this, two raised guard gantries on either side provide cover for a barrage of snipers.

"This," I delicately proffer, "is taken out of *The Rock*." I'm met with friendly affirmatives all round; we pause for a moment and hold each other in a testosterone-charged, yet powerfully emotional, embrace.

AN ICE TIME

Modern Warfare 2's storyline picks up directly after *Call of Duty 4*'s bridge finale, with villain Zakhaev dead by your (well, Soap McTavish's) hand, and everyone else apparently dead bar the oddly-monikered Soap and the heavily-bulleted Price. But what with international foreign policy being what it is, the slaying of Zakhaev has prompted an even more desperate state of affairs.

"Killing Zakhaev has allowed Makerov – one of his main guys – to take power, and use his death as a martyr situation," explains Zampella.

With Makerov pointing the finger at the Allies and screaming blue murder, Soap and his boys in Task Force 141 – an international elite military unit dedicated to hunting down terror targets are on the case.

Thing is, this time around you're not playing Soap – in the snowy mountain-top level I was shown he's become an NPC on the battlefield, ordering you around as you both get up to stealthy mischief in the manner of Price's *COD4* Chernobyl adventures.

This level begins in a blizzard and halfway up a mountain, with you edging around a tiny ledge with your back to a sheet of solid ice and your front to countless fathoms of fresh high-altitude air. What follows is a remarkable set of stunts, climbs and perilous dangling as you follow Soap up the ice sheet – a subtle mix of player-controlled movement, predetermined slips and acrobatics.

You'll slam ice axes into the glacier with your left and right hands through alternate mouse clicks, hauling yourself up and watching the ice crack as you put your weight on it. You'll watch Soap heroically leap a massive gap with ice axes flailing (in the manner of the only good bit of *Vertical Limit*), then do so yourself before the ice breaks beneath you and Soap dashes to grab your arm.

This is all far removed from what you'd expect, and an example of the

Could *Modern Warfare 2* have a level in space?

SPACE SQUADDIES

Journalistic hyperbole points to zero-G combat

After my incessant bleating of action movies I've convinced myself have influenced *Modern Warfare 2*, the one I'm most surprised to yelp is *Moonraker* – the worst Bond film ever. This cry came from using journalistic powers unknown to mere mortals to spot the words "International Space Station" in the level list of the build I was shown.

Could *Modern Warfare 2* be about to bring zero-G laser battles and the heartfelt tale of how a metal-mouthed monster learned to love a nice girl wearing glasses to our PC screens?

"I'm not sure... what you're talking about. erm... I don't remember showing you anything like that..." murmurs Infinity Ward's Robert Bowling. "But we're, erm... we're not going *Moonraker*." You heard it here first.

Hey, the good guys want snowmobiles too.

way Infinity Ward are manhandling a multitude of different experiences, peaks and troughs into each and every level. Always ensuring that you'll never know what to expect.

What you should expect next is a two-man stealth assault on an enemy airbase. A blanket of fog rolls in and out, while flurries of snow covers all so you can just about see the silhouettes of patrolling guards, beautifully animated and hunched against the elements, and the red glow of their cigarette butts.

What pans out is similar to the early stages of the assault on Chernobyl in *COD4*, moments such as the memorable "You take the one on the left on the count of three" trick are elegantly woven into the level's gameplay and are no longer stand-out moments. You're even equipped with a heart-beat sensor, and can make out where your prey are patrolling – and soon Soap retreats to a sniping position to help you take out the periphery soldiers.

Again, this leads to semi-scripted moments of utter genius – such as Soap lining up a kill and saying "I've got this one..." the second before you launch into a melee attack, taking out his target and leaving him to mutter, "Oh... never mind." Small details like this pepper the game, even more so than in the original, and the result is a smooth and organic experience where you simply can't see the joins.

Eventually, having perched explosives on the required targets, you meet up with Soap and venture inside one of the airfield's hangars. It's at this point that the ever-evolving gameplay of the level turns from sneaking and stealth, and enters the familiar *Call of Duty* phase in which the shit hits the fan and you find yourself involuntarily hiding behind the scenery just to catch your breath. You run

These chaps die in even more entertaining ways than before.

"Weerhooo... my MIG is on fiiiire!"

COLLATERAL DAMAGES

Tidbits that there wasn't space for elsewhere

WEAPON EXTRAS

Weapons will come with a lot more attachments, so the weapons you pick up from enemies will be a lot more varied in their capabilities.

GIVING GREAT HEAD

The guy in charge of designing the characters' heads previously did *Final Fantasy* character models. Watch out for tint on sunglasses, or the flashes of light reflecting off goggles.

SHIELD OF COOLNESS

There's a riot shield that you can carry. Seeing bullets strike it will make you bite your bottom lip with excitement.

GET WET

Having been shown models of NPCs decked out in frogman gear, there will certainly be underwater scuba levels.

REALISTIC PINEAPPLES

Grenades will now have proper physics attached to them, and will now do exciting things like roll down stairs.

CALL THE RSPCA

Will there be dogs? "Absolutely. We're gonna kill some motherfucking dogs!" says Robert Bowling.

MORE GUN FUN

Levels in *Modern Warfare 2* will be longer than *COD4*'s, so the game might have a longer play time. Although the devs won't confirm this.

CATHERINE WHEELS

The most impressive piece of destruction shown off by Infinity Ward was a humble petrol pump. When ignited the petrol nozzle starts flying around in loops, propelled by the flames being thrown out of its end, and promises to set fire to anyone who comes into contact with its unholy fire-flight. Woohoo!

PORTABLE MGs

There are sections with laser-guided auto turrets that you can carry around, much in the fashion of *Half-Life 2* and *Portal*. Their barrels make a hissing noise when they cool down.

Brazil isn't all sun, sand and plastic surgery.

up to the hangar gantry, and look over the building's floor to see Soap with his arms raised and around 20 Russians at the, now open, hangar doors aiming their guns at him (*GoldenEye* comparisons begin here). At first you assume he's a goner, but then the game casually reminds you that you've got a detonator in your hand and Soap soon makes his escape alongside billowing smoke and flame.

"These moments of peak gameplay are more punctuated, they stand out more, when you have quiet moments that lead up to them," Zampella says, standing on the now mist-free runway and watching soldiers flood in from every direction towards him; MIGs and fuel tanks exploding nearby in the crisp mountain air. "We go for peaks and valleys in the gameplay. We make the whole game that way, but within a single level we do the same thing."

As Soap and the player leg it over the runway with every available evil-minded Russian on their tail the distant reedy engines of enemy snowmobiles can be heard: "It's not our game unless there's eight different games inside of it..." explains Bowling, as three Ski-Doos leap over the crest of a hill towards the player.

Soap, meanwhile, hides behind the corner of a rustic outhouse and hooks a passing enemy snowmobile driver off his steed with an ice axe (in a move that will cause grown men to whimper with admiration) and in no time at all you're both bombing down the mountain on stolen snow-motors. Turning pursuing enemies into snow-melting balls of fire, giggling to yourself more than is healthy and doing spectacular jumps over what can only be described as the thinnest of air. (*Die Hard 2*).

So ends, having reached your waiting helicopter, a frankly stunning *Call of Duty* mission – a perfectly structured mixture of tension and exhilaration, prevailing weather conditions and a brilliant bit I forgot to mention in which Soap runs up behind an enemy and bodyslams him into a set of lockers. Probably the best example of stunt motion-capturing I've ever seen.

Infinity Ward won't be drawn out on storyline particulars or the character(s) you'll play, but it seems they feel as if they've already done the tale of the war on two fronts and the red herring twist. They will, however, talk with a great deal of enthusiasm about the chaps of Task Force 141, recruited to go after high-value targets around the globe.

"It's like the task forces that went after Saddam Hussein [Task Force 20] and Osama [Task Force 121]," says studio head Zampella. "It's international. It's SAS, it's special forces, and it's linked with Delta Force a lot – with CIA implants... so you have at your disposal the best of all the best armed forces of the world. The task force, in real life, are the elite soldiers of the elite soldiers."

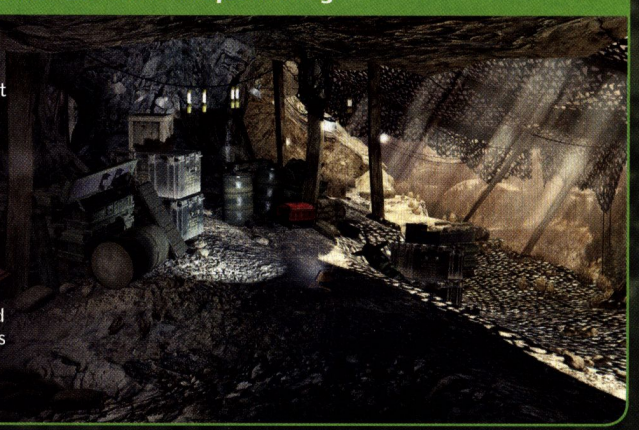
What's more, so badass is this cosmopolitan brew of casual murder and bodily odour, that they get a fair amount of leeway in the manner they conduct themselves.

EMBRACING THE BUSH DOCTRINE

Modern Warfare 2 ditches fake countries. World keeps turning

Whereas *Call of Duty 4* was coy about the fictitious Middle Eastern country its soldiers ran around in, *Modern Warfare 2* makes no bones about the fact that some of it is set in Afghanistan. It's a beautiful level too, at first a barren wasteland – then a forward-facing rappel down a cliff with an utterly beautiful blue river snaking through the valley below. Beyond this a network of caves (reminiscent of *Iron Man*) await alongside a nest of evildoers to rout.

"We always try to be respectful with the things going on, and it's not a conscious decision to go some place more realistic – it fits the story," says studio head Zampella. "With Afghanistan, it's a vast area, and there's any number of things going on. There are forces there doing operations, but they're not as well known, or publicised. So the fiction is more believable."



Mirrorshades – the height of fashion for spec ops sodliers.

"SOLDIERS ARE REGULARLY DRAFTED INTO INFINITY WARD'S STUDIO TO ADVISE"

YOU'VE GOT A PROMOTION!

"We're obviously building off the success we had with the last game," claims Infinity Ward studio head Vincent Zampella, "there's a lot of new stuff." As for exactly what, he won't be drawn on. It's promised that the *Modern Warfare 2* multiplayer won't simply be a set of new maps, but those excited at having snowmobiles in deathmatches should calm down – that's not happening. The only other shred of information I could get from Zampella was that the grenade martyrdom achievement you can unlock in *COD4*, that I hate so dearly, isn't leaving. "But that's great! I loved that," counters Zampella when I moan at him. It's definitely in then.

"The cool thing about Task Force 141 is that they're the guys that have earned the right to customise their own gear," picks up Bowling. "If you're infantry you have the standard load-outs, but if you're in the Task Force they'll use what's most useful."

REAL GEAR

As such, when you look at the heavily detailed character models of your allies you'll notice self-customised things like shoulder antennas bent in two, duct tape hanging between their legs and battery packs tucked on the back of their necks.

Such is the Infinity Ward dedication to the feeling, if not practice, of accuracy that soldiers are regularly drafted into their studio to advise on, for example, the gloves Task Force 141 should be wearing. Typically a soldier would choose to wear pilot gloves, apparently, since they're

There's a whole lot of sniping going on here.

Either there are lots of snipers, or it's sexy laser-disco time.

thinner and that means that fingers are closer to the triggers.

"They'll take a standard piece of gear, and they'll say – you know what? That thing's shit. As soon as it gets sand in it, it stops working," confirms Bowling, himself a former military type who'd wrap the aforementioned duct tape around his handguards (whatever they are) when out in the field. "And we use the cage for something else... or we use the belt for this. We do a lot of work to make sure the gear is what the soldiers in the field are using."

This added emphasis on character detail doesn't begin and end with Task Force 141 either, since now whatever weapons an enemy is carrying will have a direct implication for the gear, ammo and outfit you see on his body. So in both single-player and online play you'll face a variety of differently equipped enemies, but also be able to instantly tell what weaponry your foe is packing and thinking about the best way to deal with them.

But how do you balance this obsession with reality with a game that, with the best will in the world, hardly replicates what you see on Channel 4 news? After all, the *COD* series has never claimed to be another *ArmA* or *OpFlash*. "We call it authenticity, not realism," trots out Zampella. "We don't want to make a sim-shooter. But it has to be authentic. Like when

Ski-Doo roo ron ron. Ski-Doo roo ron ron.

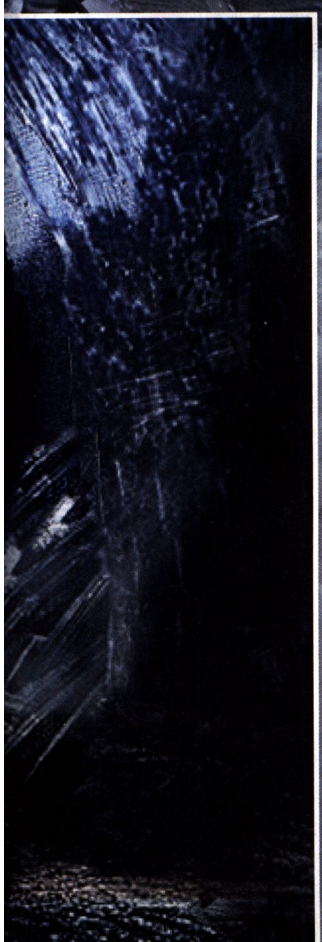
Real men don't care about frostbite.

This is the point where he usually gets a call from Father Ted.

When in doubt in gaming, go for the legs.

"CIVILIANS HAVE FINALLY ENTERED CALL OF DUTY, THEIR ROLE TO RUN AROUND SCREAMING"

See the weather? It looks great in motion.



you see a guy in an action movie. If it all looks real and legitimate you think 'Hey, that guy looks like a soldier', but what he does can be over the top – part of an entertainment experience. This is like that – an interactive action movie."

Back to the interactive action then, this time in Brazil (Rio De Janeiro to be precise) where the Task Force are hot on the trail of an arms dealer by the name of Faust. A trail that turns bloody when a bullet from one of Faust's men kills the driver of the Task Force vehicle tailing him. With the car's interior decked out in glass and glistening droplets of blood your character leaps out and chases the hoodlum through the colourful and crowded streets.

That's right: non-scripted civilians have finally entered *Call of Duty*, their role seemingly being to run around while screaming, and occasionally to be clipped by passing gunfire. One non-lethal takedown later (a shot to the leg) and the miscreant is strongly encouraged to give up the shanty town location of his diabolic leader.

I haven't seen the gameplay that follows, but I've been on a fly-past of where the action takes places – and it's beautiful. It's an uphill fight and a downhill escape through the said favela with the backdrop of Rio's famous Christ the Redeemer statue towering above, and presumably disapproving of what he's watching. Here multiple paths will lead you through armed locals and petrified bystanders to a confrontation with Faust at the top of the shantytown – with enemies dashing over rooftops, popping out of side-streets and more fruit, bricks and random furniture to blast past than has previously been imaginable. It'll be good in single-player, but you can't help but think that when it appears as a multiplayer map it'll be an utter marvel.

BRING A PASSPORT

Elsewhere on planet *Modern Warfare 2* I'm shown a snowy Russian pine forest with distant cable cars crossing a valley and beautifully rendered churned up mud on the roads. Here, I'm told, enemy APCs will storm over a nearby ridge and slide down the icy incline – firing as they slip and forcing you into the woods with shell-rocked snow falling from the trees around you. Beyond this, a snowdrift-packed village emerges beyond the misty forest, and beyond that again a full-on military installation – complete with tanks, submarines and various combat paraphernalia. This, combined with your forays into Afghanistan, proves that *Modern Warfare 2* will be a truly globe-trotting action adventure.

All that's left to ask then is, when you've got the world's most recognisable military game name in the palm of your hand, why dump the *Call of Duty* tag?

"We're just trying to get across that this is *Modern Warfare 2*, not *Call of Duty 6*," deadpans Zampella. "It's important that people know that. That's the only reason."

Nothing to do with the dilution of the franchise by other, lesser, developers then? Then again, frankly, who cares? *Modern Warfare 2* is going to be an utter barnstormer of a game that I'd buy, even if it had *Medal of Honor* in the title. PCZ

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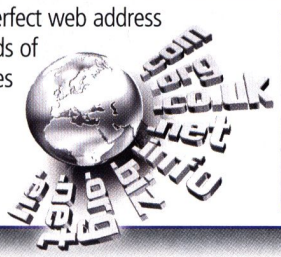

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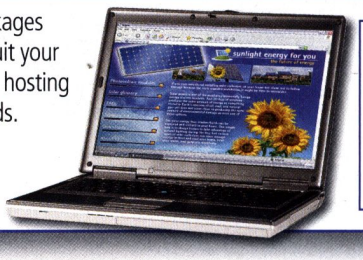

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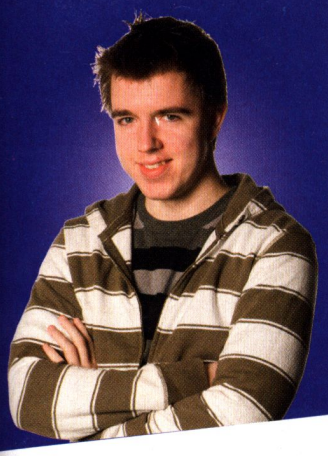


PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

62 ARMA II

Prepare to crawl around in the dirt and get shot by enemies you'll never see: the ultra-realistic war sim is back.

BURNOUT

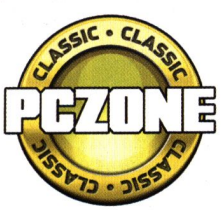
WELCOME TO THE Reviews section, which I'm disgusted to report only has one review of a car racing game, and that's the indefensibly shite *Death Track*. You see, now that I've had my first driving lesson, I can categorically state that I am an expert driver and driving game critic.

Now if you've yet to drive a car and are in need of some reassurance: it's really just like playing a game. Under your feet you've got your three buttons – 'go', 'stop it', and 'breaks the car'. The steering wheel is lifted from the USB peripheral of the same name. And though there are no quicksaves, once you're cocooned in the ultra-secure interior of your vehicle, your actions as a road-user feel of little to no consequence.

If you spin your wheels at the traffic lights though, there's a good chance you won't be asked to take part in a crazy death race with three other drivers. But maybe that only happens once you've got a full license.

Steve Hogarty
Deputy editor

THE PC ZONE BADGES



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?

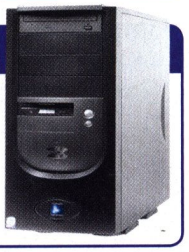
DUMP (0-19%)
PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.

ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.

EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get 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: xworksinteractive.com.

ALSO REVIEWED

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Honestly, how much fun do you think knifing Nazis while wearing a negligee will really be?

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The shape-shifting cop-killing mutant arrives on the PC. Find out if the hype was justified.

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We test one of the few first-person beat-'em-ups around.

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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...

Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead GTA4

PCZONE SWEARS...

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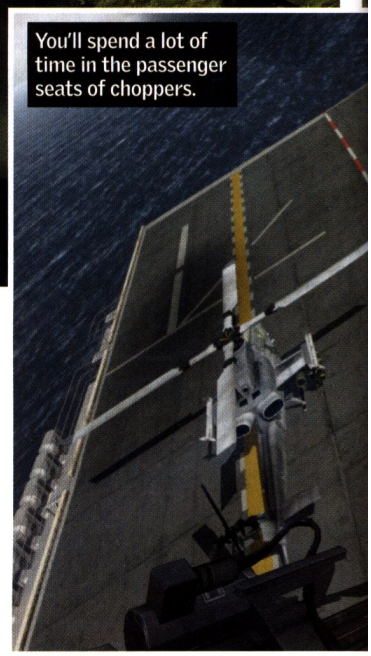

You'll spend a lot of time in the passenger seats of choppers.

ARMA II

Steve Hogarty loves dodging bullets and shrapnel

DEVELOPER Bohemia
PUBLISHER 505 Games
WEBSITE arma2.com
ETA 19 June
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Advanced military simulation with heinously rough edges only enthusiasts could forgive. Thankfully, it only appeals to enthusiasts.

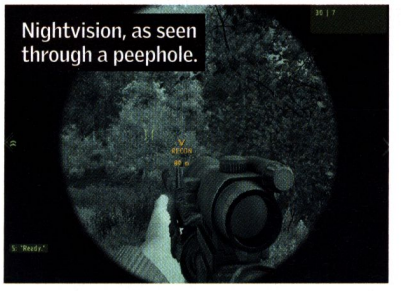
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon 3200+, 1GB RAM, and an Geforce 7800 or Radeon 1800 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3 support.

HOW IT STACKS

ARMA: ARMED ASSAULT	84%
ARMA II	70%
ARMA: QUEEN'S GAMBIT	70%

GET INTO THE habit of mentally adding the qualifier "which is good, if you're into that sort of thing" to the end of almost every paragraph of this review. Look, I'll do it for you this once, just to get you into the swing of things.

ArmA II is a military simulator set in the fictional Eastern European state of Chernarus, now a dynamic battlefield in which insurgents and peacekeeping forces take AI-controlled pot-shots at one another; a wide-ranging contingent of land, sea and air vehicles patrol dynamically from base to base; and civilians and wildlife try to get on with their lives without catching bullets between the eyes. It's fundamentally hardcore army make-believe, the sort of game where every key does something strange and wonderful and the list of controls when printed could fill a roll of Andrex. Which is good, if you're into that sort of thing.


Nightvision, as seen through a peephole.

The thing is, many people won't be. *ArmA II*'s biggest problem is that, for a lot of players, it simply won't be "their thing". Bohemia have made few concessions to accessibility and presentation, and as such the game is incredibly difficult for unwitting users to pick up and play. Everybody will have some idea of what to expect – the game warns you, patronisingly, that it isn't like other shooters, as if anyone was under the impression that they were booting up a game of *Call of Duty* – but once you're in, *ArmA II* is an overwhelming torrent of engaging, tactical combat, clever troop movements, intricate squad commands and utterly confusing menu systems.

REAL WAR

Here's a game in which the majority of soldiers whose heads you'll so dutifully pop will be hundreds of metres from you, mere speckles of pixels through your gun sights. You'll walk with your weapon pointed down, rather than with it hovering around the bottom of the screen. You'll raise it to shoulder height and peer down the sights in an accurate, authentically motion-captured manner.

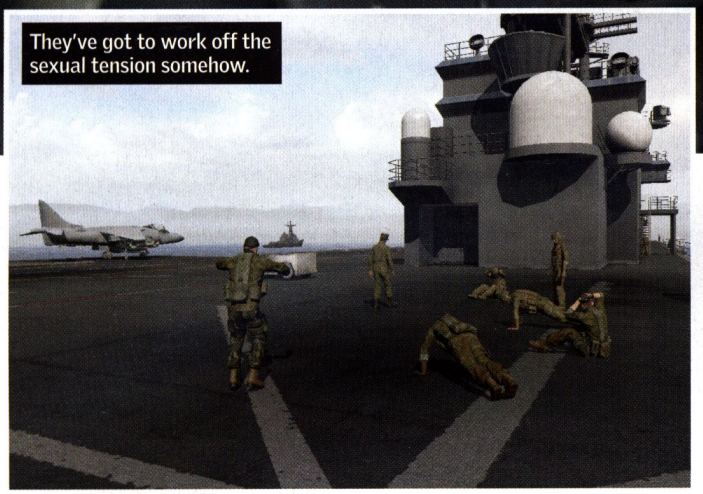
Little known fact: camouflage nets are crap at hiding things.

You'll spend ages trudging across the countryside, then die as a single bullet tears through your skull. It's that sort of game, and being set in this gigantic open world means it's equally blessed and cursed by the semi-autonomous AI that populates it.

The campaign introduces some narrative structure, which often falls foul of the game's underlying AI systems. What I mean here is, your character might break away from his group to investigate claims of a mass grave a kilometre away and, upon discovering it, have a bit of a blubber about how horrible it all is over the radio to his commander. Once this bit of scripting relinquishes control of

"For a lot of players, *ArmA II* simply won't be 'their thing'..."

You lazy tank-riding bastards.


They've got to work off the sexual tension somehow.

Prepare for frequent, fiery deaths the first few times you try this...

↘ the radio back to the AI, your commander forgets your traumatised state and screams for you to get back in formation, like some senile, bellowing grandparent. *ArmA II*'s campaign is peppered with these holes, hallmarks of a powerful simulation engine simply trying to do what it thinks is right, but in the wrong context.

GUN GEEKS ONLY

There are frayed edges here then, and *ArmA II* is, unfortunately, as unpolished as the original *ArmA*, but the roughness is the sort that will only bother those used to the perfect sheen of blockbuster shooters. I don't think I'm being too forgiving when I say that if you're predisposed towards this breed of game, you'll happily overlook many of its quirks. For that reason it's difficult to give *ArmA II* a straight verdict: this was always going to be a hearty recommendation with some fairly significant caveats hanging over it.

When it all works as intended, *ArmA II*'s an incredibly involving and complex military sim. The campaign moves quickly from linear, objective-based missions to open-ended areas of operation. You report to your superior, who gives you a daunting list of objectives spread across huge distances, three underlings to command, artillery support when required, and access to a useful helicopter taxi service. Arresting non-combatants, destroying key structures, wiping out insurgent bases – how you proceed is entirely your choice, and at times you'll be asked to make decisions which have ramifications later in the campaign.

Having secured a small rebel ammo dump, for example, the local priest pleads with you to leave it there so that the rebels might better protect the village. Let him keep the guns and he'll give you some useful intel, and when you report the cache to high command you get big props from on high. Again the AI tends to put its foot in it in these situations, as if throwing a tantrum having had control taken away from it. For instance, as he pleaded with me the priest was gently rotating on the spot.

When not being pock-marked by oddness, everything about *ArmA II* is steeped in authenticity. When you begin to think your handgun feels pathetically weak, you can be fairly certain that's because it's just as flimsy in reality. Conversely, the assault rifles and heavy weapons might often sound reedy in the open air, but in no other game do they feel this deadly.

Accurate ballistics carry your rounds realistically to their destination, and to fire from a prone position at a target in the distance only to have your round thud into the dirt around him – well, it feels like serious business. You spend enough time not firing your weapon to make that

moment of squeezing the trigger mean more than all of the endless rounds you'll have fired in *Call of Duty 4*. Couple that with the pervading notion that where you're firing from, who you're firing at and why, has all happened by chance and choice, and you soon appreciate that this truly is an open-ended and unpredictable world.

VEHICLE HEAVEN

Though you'll spend a great deal of time chatting with locals and strolling eventlessly through villages, combat remains at the game's core, and from low-level exchanges between your squad and straggling militia troops, right up to aerial and armoured combat, it's intense, enthralling and exhaustingly realistic.

The original's penchant for lengthy vehicle and weapon rosters return, and you'll be able to commandeer and pilot everything from hatchbacks and tractors to M1 Abrams tanks to Kamov Ka-52 gunships. The Armory mode acts as a playground for the game's extensive cast of usable vehicles, throwing challenges at you (maintain an altitude, reach a top speed, etc) which allow you to unlock further vehicles in that game mode.

They're all meticulously detailed too. The frequent encounters with helicopters hovering a few feet above the ground, beating the grass flat with their rotors' downforce and kicking up a blinding cloud of dirt and dust in their wake, is one of the finest sights in any game.

Your ability to command your units is extensive and exact, though it's hidden behind the fiddly and cumbersome interface. Said interface is at least consistent: you'll use the same crappy menu system for ordering a single man into a barn as you will for commanding whole battalions to open fire. *ArmA II*'s interface, while powerful, is as intuitive as shitting in a wind tunnel. Immense reserves of patience are required to get the most out of it.

That's perhaps the best summary of *ArmA II* you could hope for: it's for the patient. There's a fantastic military simulation here, with genuinely spontaneous moments of tense drama and elation arising from intelligent and dynamic systems, but it's obscured by the awkward relationship between hard-scripting and dynamic AI, as well as the unfriendly interface. Fans will look right past these problems and enjoy the game endlessly – and that's sort of the point for Bohemia, they don't seem terribly interested in presenting their game in a way that attracts new players. *ArmA II* is the pinnacle of fan service.

Where that ultimately leaves you depends on whether you're "into this sort of thing". PCZ

"The original's penchant for lengthy vehicle and weapon rosters return"

IF YOU BUILD IT...
Welcome to Theme Army Base

You might think that the option to build bases and sentry camps on the field during the campaign is needlessly complex and a misdirection of time and effort, which could have otherwise been spent polishing the game and overhauling the backwards-minded interface. And you'd be right. At times you'll hover above the grassy hills and plonk down structures like some po-faced version of Theme Park, with valid placements glowing green and naughty no-nos turning a deep red. The bases you place are supposed to impact on the AI of the enemy, who'll siege it or avoid it entirely.

Everybody seemed to pretty much avoid the crap I built, though. Which hurt more than any bullet ever could.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Staggeringly pretty
SOUND Ratatatatat, nice guns
MULTIPLAYER Yup, best on a LAN

- ✓ **Frighteningly realistic**
- ✓ Dynamic, continually changing battlefield
- ✓ **You can jump over walls**
- ✗ Shockingly unpolished
- ✗ **Unfriendly interface**

70

Caveat emptor, mofos

Egads, stop tempting us with your hot Nazi chick look.

VELVET ASSASSIN

David Brown spends his times watching women running around in their underwear

DEVELOPER Replay Studios
PUBLISHER SouthPeak Games
WEBSITE velvetassassin.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

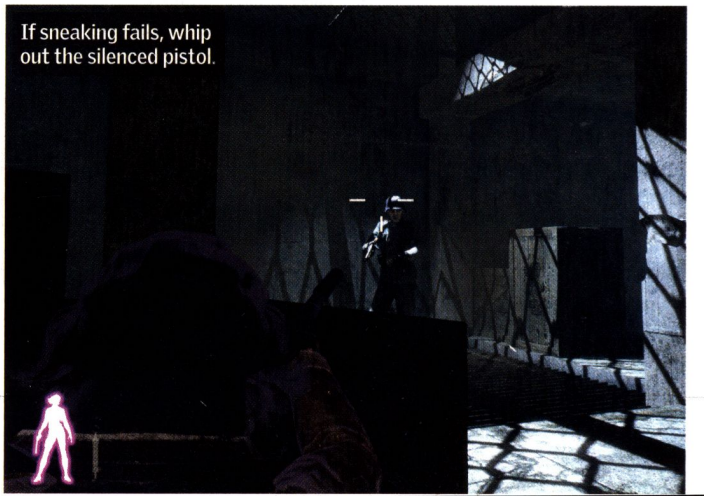
OFTEN GAMES PUBLISHED by the chaps at SouthPeak are complete garbage, so to get one that isn't is a pleasant surprise. While *Velvet Assassin* won't be running off with any Golden Joysticks or BAFTAs, as a plain-and-simple stealth-action game it's enjoyable, albeit with a few niggles.

You may know already (if not, then the screenshots on these pages will have given the game away) that you play a ruthless murderer/brave soldier of freedom (delete as appropriate) of the female persuasion; one that has been given a relatively realistic physique as well. We're glad the developers haven't played up to the cliché of women in videogames and made her top heavy. It would spoil the mood somewhat if you were controlling an inflatable doll, so well done for that.

Said character is called Violette Summer (based the real-life WWII spy, Violette Szabo) and we find her at the beginning of the game bedridden and at death's door, mere months before the end of World War II. Each mission is therefore a flashback (or 'fever dream' to give them the official term) to a time when our heroine wasn't confined to a hospital bed. These follow relatively traditional lines, such as assassinating an evil Nazi, destroying a Nazi fuel dump, and various other things lethal to Nazis.

To accomplish her missions, Violette needs to sneak about like Sam Fisher, stabbing people in the shoulders, neck and throat before hiding their bodies and moving on. She is also capable of donning various disguises to help her walk through places with hardly any shadows to hide in... just like *Hitman*'s Agent 47. When inside buildings, keyholes can be peeked through; again,

Not really necessary.


If sneaking fails, whip out the silenced pistol.

AT A GLANCE...

Splinter Cell meets *Hitman*, with a non-bald sexy assassin who likes dressing up and stabbing Nazis in the neck.

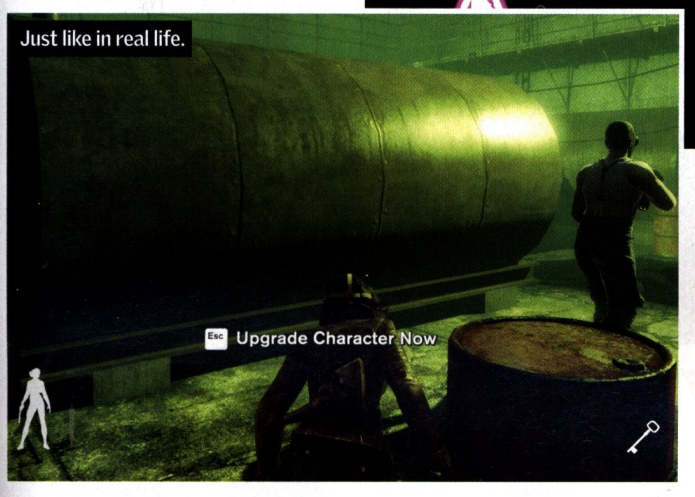
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	84%
VELVET ASSASSIN	71%
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	67%

Violette prepares to enter a Nazi bondage club.

Do all Germans love wearing vests?



Paris at sunset.

"Violette can get around lethal situations by twisting the timeline"

just like Agent 47. Finding secret objects and completing hidden objectives gives you experience points to spend on upgrading your skills and abilities. Remember those bits in the *Hitman* games where you could hide in cupboards, peeking through a crack in the doors to observe enemies? You can do that in *Velvet Assassin* too.

Now, before you get carried away and think I'm mocking the game, I'm not. While there's relatively little we haven't seen in plenty of other stealth games, this isn't a bad thing. These things reappear because they work in other titles, so why not re-use them? No marks for originality, but only the disguise system could truly be said to be a bad implementation of a trusted mechanic (it's far too easy for your cover to be blown). Everything else works and makes the game solid and dependable. You know what you are getting and so aren't too disappointed not to see exciting new ideas cropping up all over the place.

One slightly new-ish idea (although it is effectively bullet-time) is 'Morphine mode', where time stops still and you can rush up to an alerted character in order to take them out before they can react. Now, remember when I gave the developers a well done for not exploiting the fact a woman is the lead character? I spoke too soon. In Morphine mode Violette strips down to a flimsy nightie. The premise is that, being a dream, Violette can get around potentially lethal situations by twisting the timeline and making sure her dream continues. Flimsy, just like her nightie.

MORPHINE MODE
Why men stand still when she wears her lingerie

As mentioned in the main text, Violette can enter a bullet-time mode when she injects herself with morphine. This allows her to move freely while all enemies are frozen in place. Two enemies in a room? No problem, just shoot one in the head and quickly enter nude, I mean, Morphine mode and stab the second one. It still looks bizarre whenever you enter it, though. Ah well.

LACY STEALTHY

Nevertheless, barely explicable scantily clad slo-mo sequences aside, *Velvet Assassin* is a really solid game. There are a couple of little graphical glitches, but nothing major – the worst I saw was her face going completely yellow in certain lighting conditions. The only major flaw is badly placed checkpoints, forcing you to redo certain sections again if you, like me, like to be über-stealthy and refuse to continue after alerting the guards.

As mentioned, *Velvet Assassin* is unlikely to win any awards, but if the stealth section of your shelf o' games is a bit empty these days, this one will fill your slot nicely. Don't go into it expecting the new *Hitman* or *Splinter Cell* and you'll have a decent time, even if you'll end up wondering why you find Violette so much more alluring when she's wearing her Nazi chick outfit. PCZ

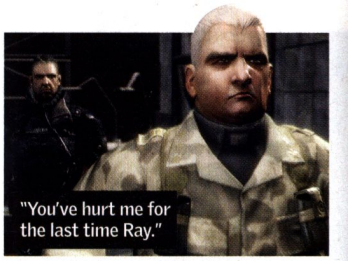
PCZONE

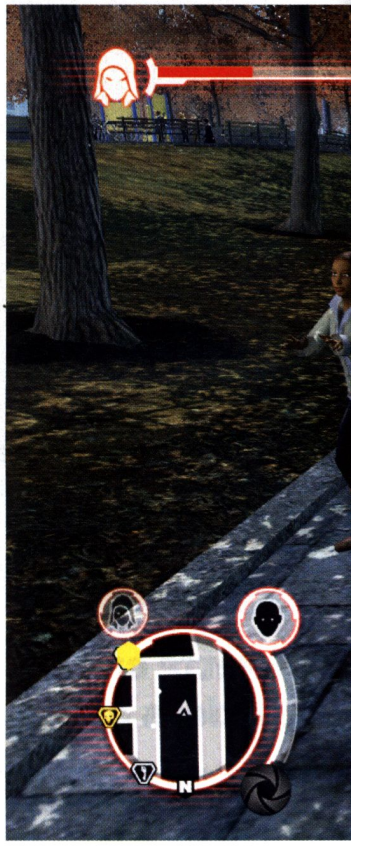
GRAPHICS Better than average
SOUND Nazis speak German
MULTIPLAYER Nien

- ✓ **Solid stealth action**
- ✓ Good death animations
- ✓ **Realistic heroine...**
- ✗ ...who disrobes for no reason
- ✗ **Not entirely original**
- ✗ Bad checkpoint placement

71
Nudey girly fun

Those dreadlocks are completely out of control.


"You've hurt me for the last time Ray."



PROTOTYPE

They broke the mould when they made *David Brown*, which is a great relief to the rest of humanity

DEVELOPER Radical Entertainment
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE prototypegame.com
ETA 12 June
PRICE £29.99

BEFORE THE ANTI THIRD-person brigade pickets our offices, let's be fair about this: *Prototype* does actually do a lot of things right. The game is crammed with great ideas, plus a load of features other people had years ago that Radical are (to put it diplomatically) paying tribute to. The problem is that you get a distinct feeling that Radical have erred too heavily on the quantity side of the quality argument.

The first thing that might strike you is how underwhelming the visuals are. While not affecting the gameplay, it would have been nice to have at least a little bit of an improvement in the visuals over the console versions. That said, when you get high above the city on the tallest buildings, there is a great sense of scale. You do genuinely feel a "Top of the world, ma!" moment hitting you. When you leap off, you do also feel like you are travelling a long distance to the ground. However, I digress.

The concept of *Prototype* is that you, the hoodie hero Alex Mercer (who we are supposed to believe worked at a genetic research corporation) are on a quest to find out who turned you into a scientific aberration. Dead on a slab at the beginning of the game, you come to life and gradually develop superpowers, like the ability to sprout large claws from your forearms and usurp the bodies of innocent (and not-so-innocent) civilians.

IDEA OVERLOAD

To the game's credit, three or so hours into the game and you are still finding new concepts and ideas thrown at you, but again, to reiterate my earlier point, there are too many of them. You actually end up forgetting a few of them even exist, because you are always discovering new ones.

The game itself is *GTA*-esque, in that a lot of it will be spent roaming about the city of New York taking on storyline-advancing missions and attempting various optional challenges. As you progress, you get experience points which you can spend on unlocking new abilities and powers. The plot is also advanced with the Web of Intrigue, a pseudo-map of connectivity between various characters, most of which have no part to play other than to get 'consumed' by you and have their little plot video unlocked. Incidentally, this is one of the features I forgot existed during play, other than when consuming a character initiated a video clip.

Consuming people basically involves Alex inserting his fist into a person's torso and absorbing them into himself. This also allows you to disguise yourself as that person, which brings in yet

"Aargh, my knees!"

AT A GLANCE...

Bestride the city of New York like a colossus, crushing your foes in the usual third-person perspective and uncovering the genetic conspiracy.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 1.86GHz Intel Core 2 Duo or AMD Athlon 64 X2 4000+ CPU, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB graphics card (512MB *Vista*).

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	91%
MIRROR'S EDGE	71%
PROTOTYPE	70%

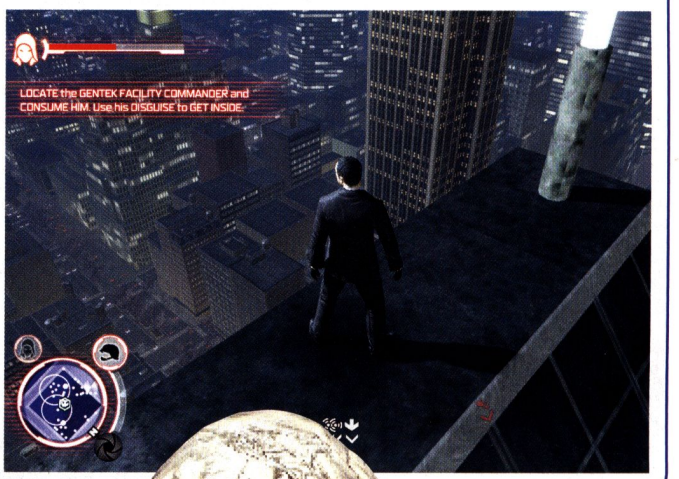
"Er... where's the fire escape gone to?"

RUNNING WILD

Roaming the city has never been this much fun

One of the best things about *Prototype* is the free roaming mode and the way you go about doing it. The main gimmick of the game is that you can run up and down vertical surfaces and leap giant distances.

Free roam allows you to explore the city of New York from top to bottom, literally. You'll spend so much time doing this, you'll almost forget you've got missions to complete.



"Oh yeah baby, shake that groove thang!"

I refuse to believe this guy is a geneticist.

"The game is crammed with great ideas, plus a load of features other people had years ago"

another feature involving hiding from the police and soldiers. The theory is that, if you do non-human things in front of them you'll be unmasked. The reality is that it doesn't seem to matter what you do, as the cops won't bat an eyelid. The AI is astoundingly stupid, with police officers often running right past you and yelling, "Lost contact with the suspect". Once I landed inches from a cop after falling off a skyscraper, and his response was "Sarge, I think I saw something".

There's loads more stuff we could talk about, but it distracts from the actual gameplay, which is both fun and not-fun. The fun parts include running up and down buildings, leaping about on rooftops and generally just running around the city. Radical have nailed this aspect of the game, and as you gain abilities and realise you can do anything without alerting the authorities, you'll have a ball. However, the actual missions and combat are boring, in some ways getting in the way of the superior sandbox runabout simulator of the free-roam sections.

There's fun to be had here, but not enough to make you bothered about following the plot or continuing to the end. The plot is a bit of nonsense and the NPCs' AI is dumber than a bag of hair, but slashing up civilians with the Claw is always amusing. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Weak until you get up high
SOUND Nothing special
MULTIPLAYER None that we could find

- ✓ Wonderful free roaming
- ✓ Slash people up real good
- ✓ Stunning views
- ✗ Missions a bit dull
- ✗ Too many features?
- ✗ Weak visuals

70

High-flying fun

Just like Peckham in the spring.

Say fellow, why the long face?

Insert sound effect here.

Try dragging that back into the sea.

ZENO CLASH

Steve Hogarty fears all forms of physical contact

DEVELOPER ACE Team
PUBLISHER ACE Team
WEBSITE zenoclash.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

AT A GLANCE...

Linear first-person brawler in a mad, fantasy world thankfully bereft of elves and goblins.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and an ATI 9600/NVIDIA 6600 or better graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA	87%
DARK MESSIAH	84%
ZENO CLASH	78%

IN MUCH the same way as *The Neverending Story* promised us that books could transport us to magical new worlds, games have always threatened to scoop us up in their digital arms on an express route to Imagination Town. Except most books are about stupid things and boring people, and typically the most imaginative games ask you to imagine if you had a gun and weren't that bothered about killing people.

XENO BASH

Zeno Clash is honestly imaginative though, a fact wonderfully symbolised by a screenshot of an anthropomorphic rat woman with four barely-obscured breasts. In context it's not funny or bawdy, but befitting of a fantastic, original and artful world. Characters range from bizarre pig men and parrot people to the disturbing Father-Mother, a gangling 12ft tall bird/human with babies in his/her jacket. *Fraggle Rock,* Hieronymus Bosch, Miyazaki – trying to pin a single artistic influence on this game is fruitless. *Zeno Clash*'s style is distinct, and beautifully unsettling.

It's like Fight Club, maybe.

In this world you'll be mainly punching things until they die. *Zeno Clash* is a linear, first-person brawler whose closest peer is *Dark Messiah*, not least because it also uses the Source engine, but also because of the brutality and physicality of the combat. The sounds of knuckles hitting flesh give a meaty sense of connectivity, and the elaborate fighting system – cleverly rooted in just three simple actions: attack, strong attack and block – cause varied and engaging scraps. It's not easy, and button mashing will tire your character out – instead you time your attacks, block at the right moment to throw your opponent off balance, counterattack with a kick, or dodge to the side and get your blows in that way.

In larger groups this dependence on tactics becomes more pronounced. If you become surrounded your inability to focus on more than one enemy at a time sees you unfairly battered from all sides. Worse still, get stuck on the scenery while fatigued and bird-men get carte blanche to smash you in the face repeatedly until you look more outlandish than they do.

Other than a rubbish level in which you twat statues on the head with a stick you won't find many more issues. And it's only £15, so unless you've got a mortgage or some other life-sapping debt, you've really no excuse. Unless you abhor fantasy violence towards what are technically animals. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Beautiful art design
SOUND Squaaaark!
MULTIPLAYER Nada

- ✔ Visceral
- ✔ Punchy
- ✔ Kinetic
- ✘ Some duff levels
- ✘ Not too long

78
Thwacko!

Weeeeeeeeee!

There are plenty of chasms to be crossed.

He liked Spirograph a bit too much.

The perils of loose nails.

DAMNATION

David Brown sometimes feels as if he was cursed in a previous life

DEVELOPER Blue Omega Entertainment
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE damnationthegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

HAVING HAD SUCH high hopes for this game, it's a crushing disappointment to finally play it and discover it's so generic and dull. While the gimmick of verticality was never going to be anything more than "you go up levels instead of along them," and discovering this is true doesn't disappoint at all, it's soul-destroying to find out *Damnation*'s actual gameplay is a cobbled together mash-up of most console-led third-person action shooters. All the verticality really does is make it feel like a poor man's *Prince of Persia*.

The plot follows the adventures of Rourke, a man wearing what I believe to be an abnormal amount of eye shadow. His job, accompanied by a motley crew of dullards, is to defeat an evil guy called Prescott, sadly not modelled on our ex-Deputy Prime Minister. He does this in a steampunk version of the US Civil War, examining what might have happened had it continued for decades rather than a mere four years. The end result is what made the game looked compelling in all the previews and pre-release information we got our mitts on: a potentially intriguing action game in a unique setting.

Sadly, what we actually have is a sub-*Gears of War* action shooter with *Prince of Persia* platforming elements that just never feels as smooth or fluid as the latter game.

Most importantly, *Damnation* just never once felt fun to play. Combat is poor, with guns either being limp or wildly inaccurate. You can only carry three at a time and it seems that the majority of the weapons you could pick up had virtually no ammo and there was no real prospect of obtaining more. Because of this, you end up using the basic pistol and machine gun the whole time, which is just unsatisfying.

The list of problems with the game is too long for this review – boring characters; average-to-weak graphics; idiotic, irrelevant and ineffective comrades; a platform-leaping mechanic that just feels silly and tacked on, even though it is a core element of the game, and so on and so on.

Not once did I actually enjoy myself or think "Yeah, that was pretty good," except for when I dabbled quickly in the co-op mode. *Damnation* is deeply generic and boring, so it gets the sort of mark that it deserves. PCZ

That's on back-to-front.

AT A GLANCE...

Gears of War meets *Prince of Persia*, but sadly turns into a disappointing, generic and average platform-shooter thing.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 6800 or Radeon X1300 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

GEARS OF WAR	90%
PRINCE OF PERSIA	75%
DAMNATION	50%

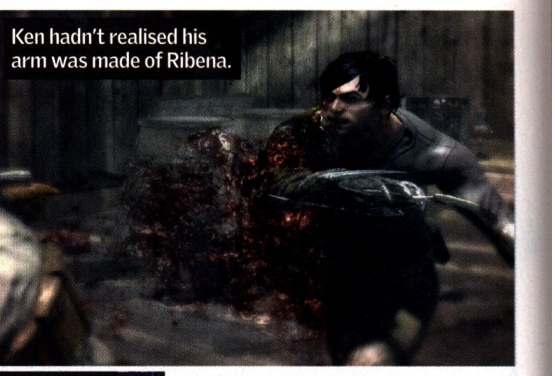
PCZONE

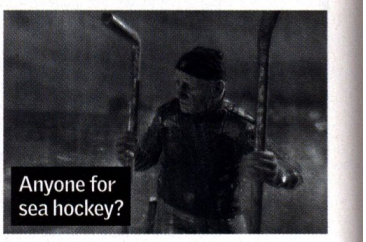
GRAPHICS Pretty weak
SOUND Uninspiring
MULTIPLAYER Co-op and Versus modes

- ✓ Co-op
- ✓ Fairly original concept
- ✗ Comrades are stupid
- ✗ Platforming feels silly
- ✗ Woeful combat

50
Damn poor

Tut. Vandal.


Ken hadn't realised his arm was made of Ribena.


Anyone for sea hockey?

Show off.

DARK SECTOR

Adam Glick doesn't believe that all you need is glaive

DEVELOPER Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER ND Games
WEBSITE darksector.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

THE MAIN problem with today's gaming climate isn't that games aren't coming out on the PC, but that most of them are like *Dark Sector*. Released in March 2008 on consoles, this third-person action-adventure romp has been ported to PCs with less fanfare than the start of Jim Davidson's next world tour.

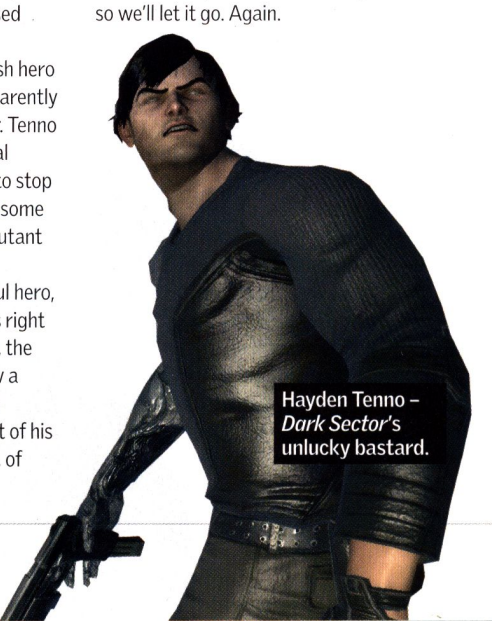
This is probably because it isn't good. It does all the basics well enough, but there's so little inspiration or innovation here it's tough to care about it at all. The game's gimmick, the Glaive, doesn't raise it above the mediocre, so all you're left with is a standard cover-based shooter with a shallow plot.

For your sins, you play a boyish hero called Hayden Tenno, who is apparently voiced by *Smallville*'s Lex Luthor. Tenno is sent to the ruins of the fictional Eastern Bloc country of Lasria, to stop an evil man getting his hands on some evil things to do with infected mutant zombie people.

Unfortunately for the youthful hero, he's deliberately infected and his right arm turns icky. For some reason, the infection also allows him to grow a three-pronged boomerang-style throwing blade – the Glaive – out of his limb (shades of *Krull* there). This, of course, makes no sense whatsoever, but hey, its a game, so we'll let it go.

Dark Sector's problems are that the whole game is creatively sterile and the Glaive is slow and ineffective, unless you can hit the sweet spot of the power throw. There's also some strange things that perplex rather than annoy – for example, you can upgrade your existing weapons and buy new ones at Black Market stores (manhole covers that conceal a shop). Why there would be a large network of weapon stores in a city solely populated by virus-infected zombies is beyond me. But it's a game, so we'll let it go. Again.

If you've played any of the hundreds of third-person action-adventures that have come out in the past year, there's no need to play *Dark Sector*. The main gimmick is a bit rubbish, the cover system doesn't really work, and it'll make those of you who have no fondness for console-led action games vomit in rage. It's a boring game, and we won't let that go. PCZ


Hayden Tenno – *Dark Sector*'s unlucky bastard.

AT A GLANCE...

Generic console action with lots of depth-of-field, an auto cover system and other stuff you've seen before.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, GeForce 6600 or ATI X1300 or higher with Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

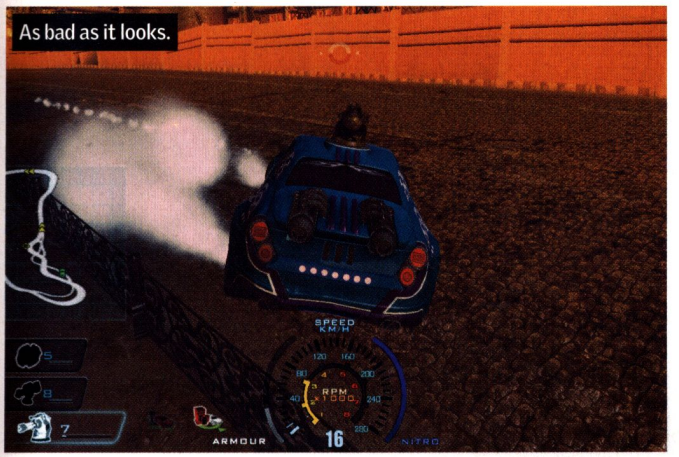
QUANTUM OF SOLACE	68%
WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE	61%
DARK SECTOR	58%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Typical console affair
SOUND Nothing special
MULTIPLAYER Nope

- Cheap. Fairly
- Looks reasonably good
- Uninventive
- Main weapon is cruddy
- Cover system dodgy

58
Drab Sector



DEATH TRACK: RESURRECTION

Another Russian remake of an ancient game everybody's forgotten

DEVELOPER SkyFallen
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE death-track.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £15.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon 3500+, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB graphics card. 64-bit *XP* and *Vista* not supported.

THIS GAME SO nearly didn't make it into the magazine, for reasons I'll discuss at the end of this review. Anyway, the main premise of *Death Track: Resurrection* is that you compete with a group of other drivers on a series of post-apocalyptic renditions of famous cities, like London, Paris and Moscow.

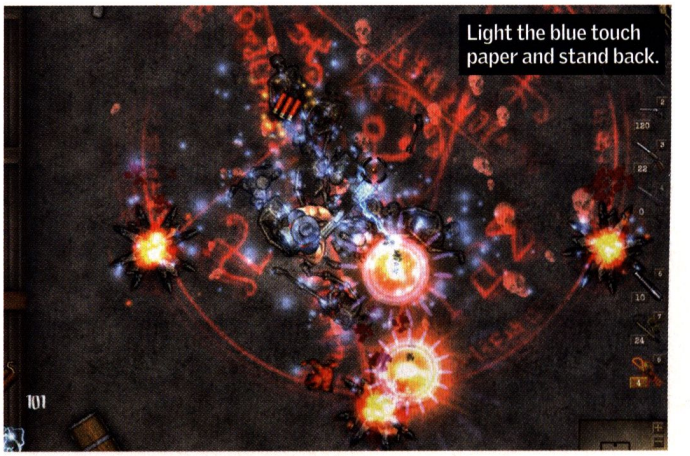
As you drive about the tracks, you can shoot at your opponents and they can return the favour. Between races you can upgrade your vehicle with better weapons, armour etc. There are a reasonable number of racing options to choose from as well, although there is no multiplayer at all.

Sadly though, for a game about shooting, racing and explosions, there's very little fun to be had here. Some of the tracks have been interestingly constructed, but they don't half go on and on, and if you finish fourth or below, prepare to do it all over again. There are nice little touches, like blowing up buildings (although I don't actually know what you get for doing so) but generally it is just uninspiring and boring as a game.

The reason we nearly didn't review *Death Track* was that the keyboard controls do not work. Pressing forward often results in you going backwards or spinning in a circle. Turning left or right often fails to work, as does applying the brakes. Sometimes you can even release the controls and your car will continue driving itself. The game is playable with an Xbox controller, but this is the worst implementation of a control system I've ever, ever seen. The voiceovers during races are appalling as well.

The whole thing is an abomination.
David Brown

PCZONE 27 Death Cack



LARVA MORTUS

Alien Breed meets *Nocturne* in repetitive indie game

DEVELOPER Rake in Grass
PUBLISHER Meridian4
WEBSITE larvamortus.rakeingrass.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £8.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

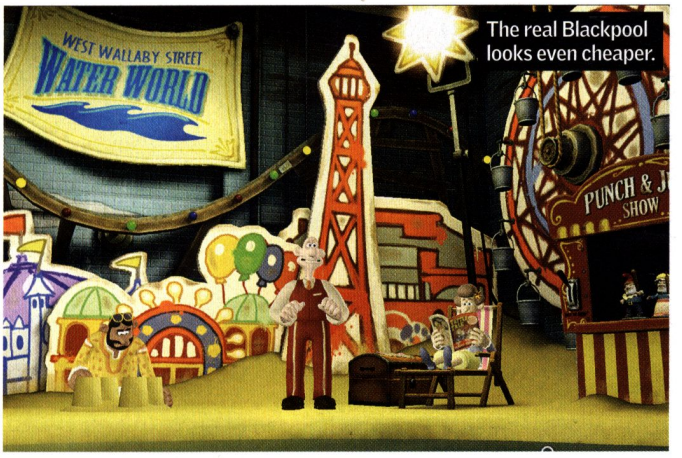
INDIE GAMES are appearing on *Steam* more frequently than Princess Diana crops up in the *Daily Express* and an awful lot of them are decent concepts stretched so thin they'd make Kate Moss look portly. *Larva Mortus* is one of these games, although it definitely earns some credit for taking inspiration, deliberate or not, from Terminal Reality's excellent horror title, *Nocturne*.

The likeness of your main character, at least in terms of the non-top-down view of him, to *Nocturne*'s Stranger is surely too uncanny to be coincidental. Sadly, while we do have a curiously perverse love of top-down, old-school arcade shooters like *Alien Breed* and *Take No Prisoners*, *Larva Mortus* just doesn't have enough charm to it to remain interesting.

Having said that, the action is decent, with the shotgun in particular being substantial enough in its damage dealing to be described as satisfying. You can also chop up enemies with a sword, which is never less than fun. The main problem lies in the presentation, with the environments being boring, grey and repetitive. Couple this with the "clear room, move to next one, repeat" game dynamic and you lack a recipe for long-term gaming nourishment.

Take No Prisoners and *Alien Breed* remained interesting because of the variety of environments and scenarios you went into. *Larva Mortus*, while we know it was an indie game with a limited budget, fails to do that in any significant way and, when you start to pit yourself against the big boys in a competition for sales, you need more than that naïve charm to make it. It is blandly fun for a bit, and we did like the pseudo-Stranger, but it would probably be better to just load up *Take No Prisoners* one more time.
David Brown

PCZONE 52 Mortified



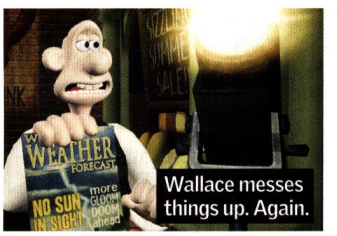
The real Blackpool looks even cheaper.

WALLACE & GROMIT: THE LAST RESORT

Sand, rain, mystery and plasticine

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/wallaceandgromit
ETA $34.99 (£24) for 4 episodes
PRICE £6.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB DirectX 9.1-compliant video card.



Wallace messes things up. Again.

ALTHOUGH I'M certainly a fan of the plasticine pair of Wallace and Gromit, I have to concede that our review of the first episode was spot-on. While the game was a great adventure, the humour evident in the *Wallace & Gromit* films and Telltale's other games was lacking.

After playing the second episode, things haven't really improved in this department. It's certainly charming, with a few cute smiles and knowing grins, but very few of the laugh-out-loud moments *Sam & Max* or Aardman elicit. That said there was at least one, caused by a character's pun name: Scottish character Duncan McBiscuit.

Despite the humour dip, *Bumblebees* was well-designed with satisfying puzzles. Unfortunately, the puzzles in *Last Resort* aren't as good. For example, I solved the opening and finale parts of the episode by accident. The middle parts fair better, but it's all too easy.

The story involves Wallace setting up a holiday resort in his basement, and then a whodunit mystery as Duncan gets thumped and Gromit has to find the, um, thumper. It's all very entertaining and the story's chapters all have separate enjoyable objectives.

The characters are mostly the same lot from *Bumblebees* with the addition of Duncan and Ms Flitt's two psychotic dogs, and are all fun to talk to. I've gotten used to Ben Whitehead's impersonation of Peter Sallis (the real Wallace) now, and thankfully he's no longer drowned out by the music. The rest of the voices, effects and music are all excellent as usual, although there was a bit of sound popping now and again.

The Last Resort is still enjoyable for fans of *Wallace & Gromit*, but seasoned adventurers will run through it like a summer breeze.

Chris Capel

Electricity and water never mix well.

PCZONE 72 Cracking

Hex grids are erotic totems for old-school RPGers.

KING'S BOUNTY: THE LEGEND

Talk about a long overdue sequel

DEVELOPER Katauri Interactive
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE kings-bounty.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.6GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon 64 +2800, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a GeForce 6800 or Radeon X800 graphics card.

Mages get the best outfits.

THERE'S TAKING YOUR time over a sequel and then there's *King's Bounty: The Legend*. (Just forget *Duke Nukem Forever* for a little while to make this analogy work.) The original *King's Bounty* came out in 1990 and only now are we seeing the game's proper, official sequel turn up and demand to be played. For good reason, this is a strategy-cum-RPG game that does indeed require your attention if you are of the right mindset, but it isn't without its faults.

The gameplay itself takes the form of a cross between a *Diablo*-style RPG and a hex-based *Heroes of Might and Magic* strategy title. You wander about the world of Endoria hoping to serve your king faithfully, while making a name for yourself and a pretty penny to boot. As you wander about the place, you'll meet various traditional RPG folk, who all seem to have a quest for you to take on.

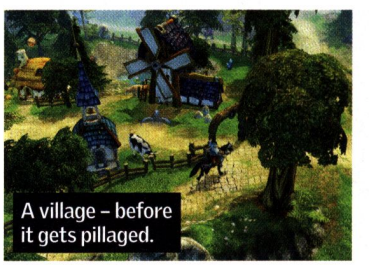
As either a knight, a mage or a paladin (a cross between the first two), you have to roam the world completing said quests, collecting loot and levelling up in a variety of chosen disciplines. While it is advisable to specialise in one element (like combat arts for knights), it's possible to cross-specialise if you want to become a jack-of-all-trades type of adventurer.

Problems crop up in the form of some annoying visual tearing and the occasional total system lock-up, which is a little annoying considering the game has been out for a while.

Other than that, there's a huge amount of gameplay to be had here, and there's also an expansion on the way soon too.

Worth buying if you like the *Heroes of Might and Magic* series.

Adam Glick


A village – before it gets pillaged.

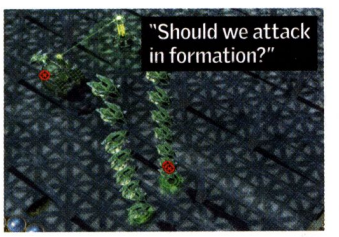
PCZONE 78 Bountiful

PERIMETER 2: NEW EARTH

Don't let it through

DEVELOPER KDV Games
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE perimeter2.kdvgames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon XP 2500+, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 128MB or Radeon X1800 graphics card.



THE FIRST *PERIMETER* **wasn't particularly well received, but at least had a couple of ideas that distinguished it from other RTSs. However, its sequel manages to remove all those ideas and make the whole game worse, which isn't what sequels are meant to do.**

KDV Games are obviously proud of this game's storyline, judging by the long cutscenes, which is sad because it's complete boring bollocks. The only aspect I found interesting was the Nazi-like propaganda the two sides level at each other. Unfortunately that's the only good thing I can say about *Perimeter 2*, and it took me all night to think of it.

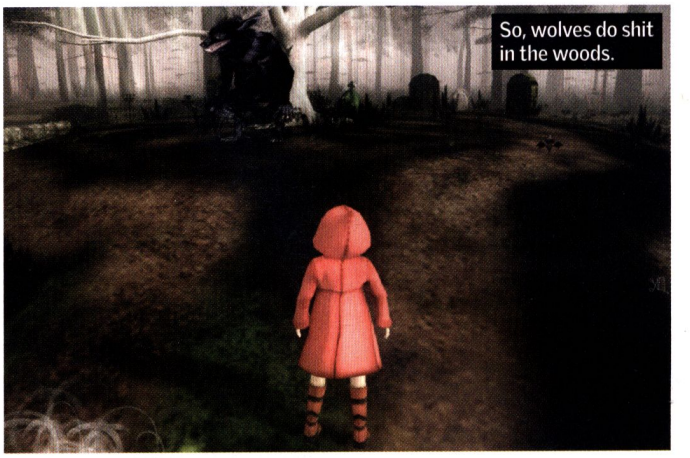
In an early mission, I was told to build some power plants at four points. The playing area was one big square, with the enemy bases spread around a bigger square. Not only was the map like a poorly-designed skirmish arena, but immediately upon starting I was attacked from all sides and annihilated. I managed to build one building and a couple of turrets, and at most I killed one enemy. After many attempts I restarted the map on Easy to continue. This was only the third mission!

The maps are boring, units weedy, AI absent, troops non-responsive, graphics dire, sound effects pathetic, music repetitive, resource gathering system incomprehensible, and the storyline, as mentioned, is woeful.

Not only all that, but it has the gall to cost £20. Lieutenant, get my gun.

Chris Capel

PCZONE 28
Should be shot

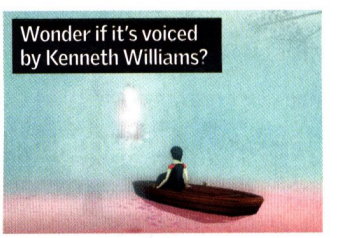


THE PATH

Just make sure you find another shrubbery first

DEVELOPER Tale of Tales
PUBLISHER Tale of Tales
WEBSITE tale-of-tales.com/ThePath
ETA Out now
PRICE $9.99 (approx £6.50)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.



NOW THIS IS **an odd one, in many, many ways. Basically a twisted retelling of the Red Riding Hood story, *The Path* is sedate, relaxed, and very messed up.**

After choosing one of six girls, your character is dropped off in a dark forest on the titular path. Your objective is spelt out right at the start: "Go to grandmother's house. Stay on the path." Of course, the first thing you do (after getting used to the slightly odd controls) is take your girl off The Path and into the far more interesting woods. Then things get very strange.

There's no challenge here. There's no risk, no enemies, no real puzzles to solve and no Game Over. *The Path* is all about story and slow exploration, and is, if nothing else, a unique game. It seems childlike and innocent at the start (if you don't move, a girl in white will come along and literally hold your hand) but quickly turns much darker.

While there isn't any sex or violence some very adult themes are explored, and when you finally get to granny's house it really takes a turn towards horror, removing all control from you except for moving forward.

The game's main problem is repetition. While each girl is a different experience, it does boil down to wandering around a dark wood for hours trying to find items or places of interest.

That said, *The Path* is strangely intoxicating and is certainly an original, properly adult game (something that's all too rare), but it can get boring, fairly quickly.

If you have a lot of patience, follow *The Path*. If not, bugger off and pick up an FPS.

Chris Capel

PCZONE 69
Freaky adult fun

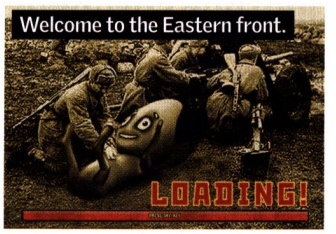
Better Red than dead.

STALIN VS MARTIANS

With his alligator, all hail Stalinator

DEVELOPER BWF/Dreamlore/N-Games
PUBLISHER Mezmer Games
WEBSITE stalinvsmartians.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £16.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.



YOU KNOW YOU'RE in for a strange ride when the intro sequence to a game is a Soviet flag with the anthem of the USSR playing in its entirety. Yes, this is the game everyone and his dog has been getting in a bit of a lather about, the one with the techno-dancing Stalin and the curious teenage girl bopping along between clips of tanks blowing up aliens.

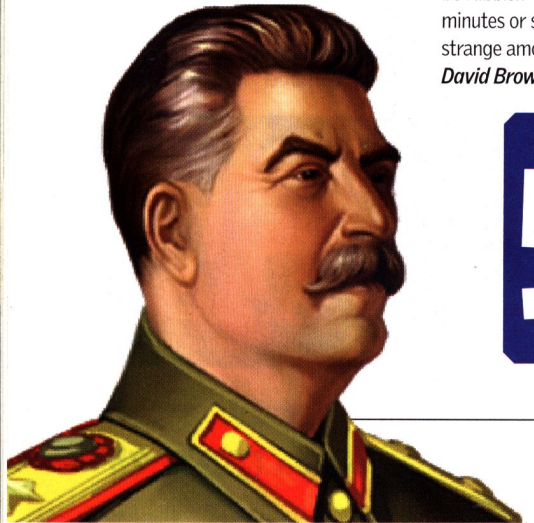
The plot, such as it is, involves a secret war between the Soviet forces and Martian invaders in Siberia. As a promising commander in the Red Army, your task is to take your cannon fodder infantry and tanks into the surprisingly non-icy wastes and eliminate the extra-terrestrial threat. Then, after a few missions, the game decides to take a breather, showing a mind-boggling music video as a form of intermission.

Strip the game of all its comedy trappings and what you have is a very basic, very arcadey real-time strategy game. The action is generally frenetic and lacking in any real tactics, other than "select all, attack". It gets boring very quickly and it seems almost certain the game was merely included to give the developers something to drape their Bolshevik-baiting satire over.

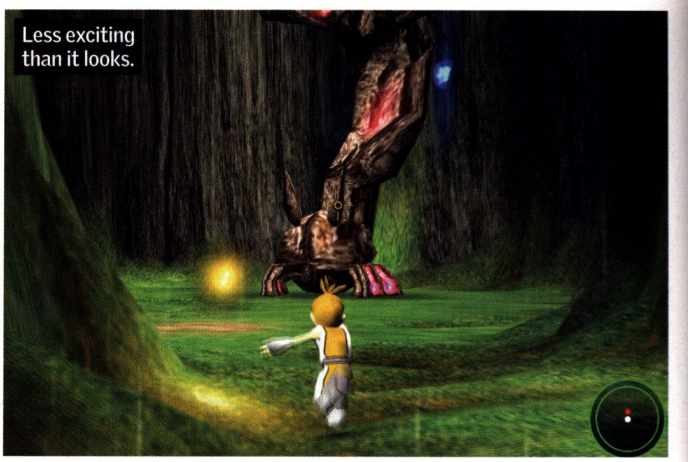
You'd have to be a real curmudgeon not to raise at least a smile at the numerous and sometimes overwhelming jokes and comedy interludes that crop up during play. Your units declare that they "like you" when you select them, the music is outlandish, the visuals are colourful and, of course, you can call upon the support of a 40ft tall Stalin to help you crush your Imperialist alien foes under his Communist feet.

Stalin vs Martians really should be rubbish – and it is – but for 30 minutes or so, you'll be having a strange amount of fun.

David Brown



PCZONE 50
Shall we dance?

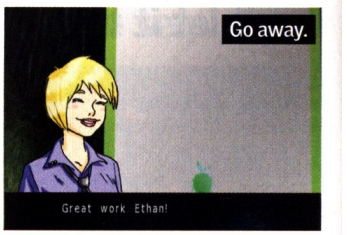

Less exciting than it looks.

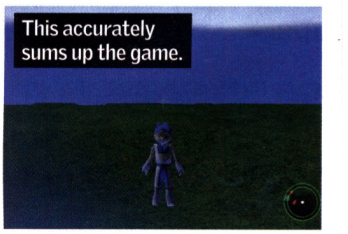
CASTER

Nothing to do with sugar

DEVELOPER Elecorn
PUBLISHER Elecorn
WEBSITE elecorn.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £3.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
800 MHz processor, 64MB RAM, and a 16MB graphics card (GeForce2 or better).





I SUPPOSE WE should give *Caster* some slack as its developer is one person, but this isn't freeware. This game costs actual pounds and so we have a duty to lay into it.

The game's a very simple third-person shooter. You move, you jump, you shoot monsters and you collect glowing balls for no discernable reason. While there are a lot of missions, they all look the same and objectives fall into "kill things" or "collect things" categories. While some are potentially challenging, the fact that death simply means a few seconds of the camera panning around dramatically before you come back to life removes any challenge.

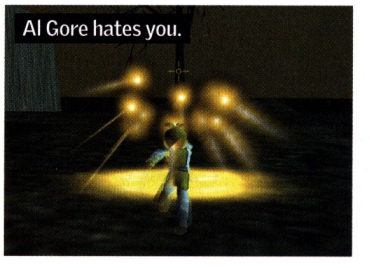
The animation is incredibly crude, with main character Ethan flailing his legs about like a puppet. Monsters range from poorly designed blobs to insect things, and none are interesting to fight. The bland, dull graphics don't really help matters.

A lot of the above problems could be excused if the game was any fun, but it's not. *Caster* gets repetitive immediately and, despite Elecorn's efforts at introducing variety with the enemies, weapons and levels, it can't hide the fact that you're just doing the same things over and over again.

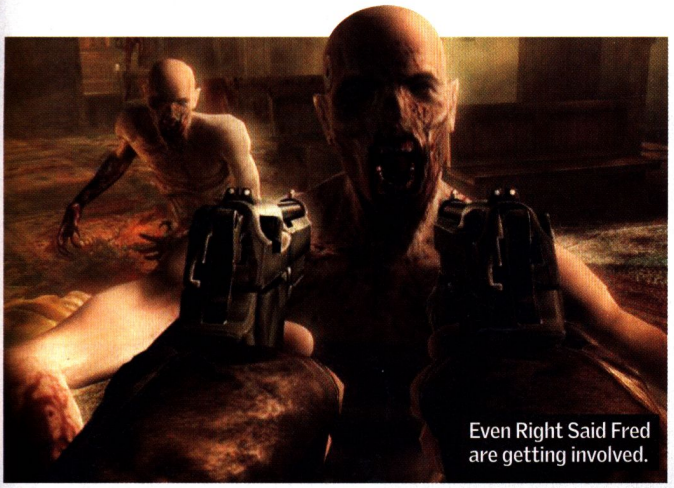
The levels are uninteresting, the enemies unsatisfying, and the story non-existent. There are some cool terrain deformation effects that Elecorn's obviously proud of, but when the environments are so lifeless it's impossible to care about this touch.

I suppose there's some fun here, but there's better things out there to spend £4 on. Another game, for example.

Chris Capel


Al Gore hates you.

PCZONE 41
Sugar's better



Even Right Said Fred are getting involved.

KILLING FLOOR

Once a mod, now is it a killer app or just a killing joke?

DEVELOPER Tripwire Interactive
PUBLISHER Tripwire Interactive
WEBSITE killingfloor.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

The big ones vomit on you...

THE MOST VITAL piece of information you could wish to know about *Killing Floor* is: **is it worth spending money on something you can still get for free? As usual with this sort of thing, the answer is yes and no.**

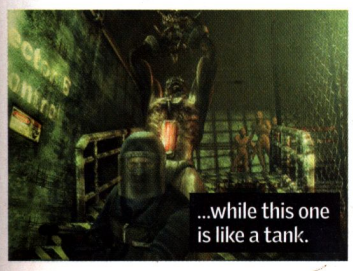
While the graphics have been updated from the original *UT2004* mod, Steam achievements added to give a sense of progression, and the experience tightened and polished, you're still effectively paying for a free multiplayer shooter. One that also has less to it than the mod. At least for now.

The game itself, if you haven't been made aware of the surprising amount of hype surrounding it, involves fending off increasingly tough hordes of 'specimens' (zombies) before taking on a Patriarch in a boss battle. There are only a handful of official maps to play, although each one is substantial in size. Variety comes from being able to choose perks for your character; essentially character classes. Being able to level up more than one of these at a time is a nice touch, although some will take considerably longer to level than others.

As mentioned before, the full game has less to it than the free mod. This is because the mod's community (based at killingfloor.net/forums) has produced lots of new maps and features so it's safe to assume that, with the SDK being made available instantly, this issue won't be one that has too much bearing in the long term. So we come back to the initial problem – is *Killing Floor* really worth buying?

If you're going to stick around for the long term and don't mind loading up something that gives you a "hang on, have I just loaded up a mod?" feel every time you play, then yes, it's probably worth it. Everyone else will probably be just as happy sticking with *Left 4 Dead*.

David Brown



...while this one is like a tank.

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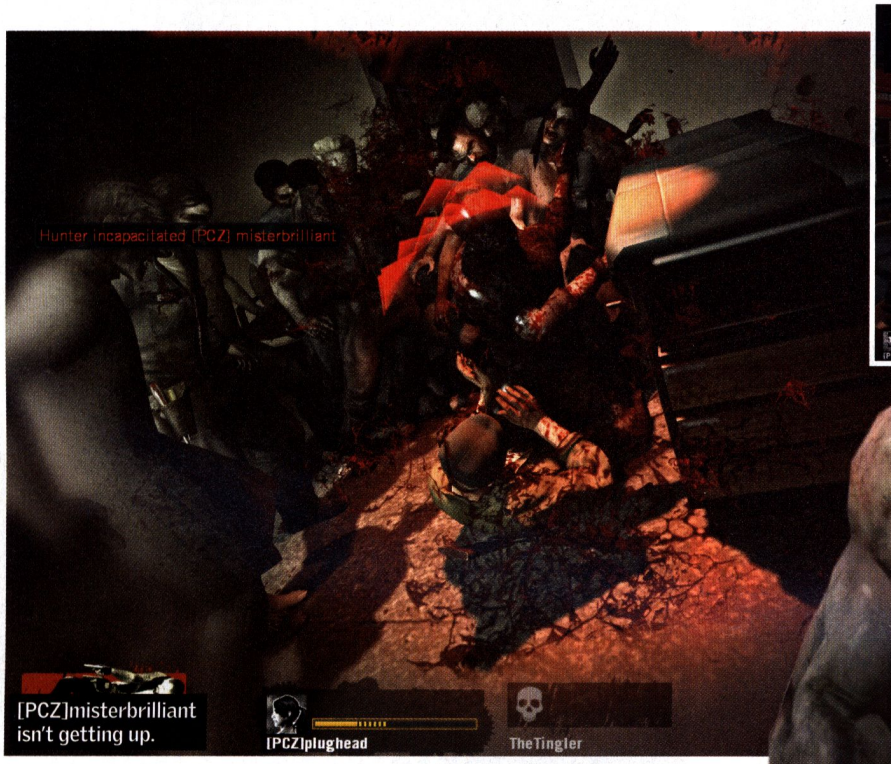
State of Play

Every month we cast fresh eyes over the changes made to long-running games...



THIS MONTH...

LEFT 4 DEAD

PUBLISHER Valve **Developer** Valve **WEBSITE** www.left4dead.com **PRICE** £26.99

I'VE PLAYED AS Bill in 27% of campaigns. Do you know which one Bill is? I don't, which is why I find Valve's decision to make it known which of *Left 4 Dead*'s four non-dimensional characters (Bill, The Biker, Black Man, The Girl) you prefer, a bit weird. I'm not saying it isn't interesting; I never choose a specific character, instead allowing the game to randomly pick one for me. This suggests that for Bill to come out higher I've either not played enough games to sandpaper that stat down to the expected 25%, or that other players are actively not choosing him. Perhaps because he's old and therefore hugely unappealing.

Valve's most recent *Left 4 Dead* update explodes your Steam stats page, peppering you with deadly info-shrapnel such as the above character stat, your favourite weapons, the number of infected killed and people vomited on. It's a self-indulgent sort of statistical onanism, as you'll spend far more time preening through your own precious stats than looking at anybody else's. Of course, you'll fall limp in disinterest the moment somebody starts harping on about how many rocks they've thrown, while you'll all too readily strike up dinner conversation about the number of times you've shat on somebody's face as a Hunter. But because every one of us loves seeing the numbers go up, we love it. It's an age-old incentive that, once it hooks you, keeps you coming back. Why more games aren't supporting stats is a mystery, when even *Plants vs Zombies* has taken achievements on board.

Other than your PC now ejecting a steady of stream information at your face, Valve's main addition since the game's launch is the Survival mode – the punishing zombie face-off which pits four human players against an unending mass of infected, occasionally throwing in special infected until the point where those occasions occur extremely frequently, with survivors often having to contend with multiple Smokers, and even multiple Tanks. Neat chunks of levels are lifted from campaigns to act as siege arenas, and knowing where to make your stand is half the challenge.

Compared to the Campaign and Versus modes, Survival's a throwaway affair. Typically, until you've learned where to stand and how to use your weapons effectively (pro-tip: use dual pistols against normal zombies and save the shotgun ammo for the tank), you won't last more than five minutes. And as someone who's become frustrated with Versus mode, in which a team with any

degree of orchestration will outperform one without, and reluctant to devote 45 minutes to a campaign, the quick-fire nature of the mode is terrifyingly appealing. In fact it's single-handedly brought me back into the game after a month-long absence.

MEDAL WINNING

Bronze, silver and gold achievements are dished out depending on how long you can stave off the invasion, and the add-on also unlocks Dead Air and Death Toll in Versus mode, meaning you can smash people in the face in an airport and a church, as well as a hospital and a barn.

"*Left 4 Dead* is the gaming adrenalin rush of the year"

93% – Will Porter, PC ZONE #202

Valve's philosophy of nurturing their titles long after they're released is well established, and their refusal to fall into the all-too-tempting trap of releasing paid-for DLC is laudable. *State of Play*'s got nothing but love for the tweaking developer (and that's the good sort of tweaking, not the terrible drug rehab sort of tweaking – though the flurried activity of Valve could be indicative of some sort of caffeine-based reward system at the Seattle-based developer).

Just recently, the *Left 4 Dead* SDK has finally been unleashed, so we can expect the first wave of shopping centre and haunted house maps and "tributes" to George A. Romero's films very shortly. I'd argue that we should hold off on unofficial add-ons (which inevitably bring custom-map running servers with quirky sound files and unsolicited BSP downloads) as long as Valve are actively delivering their pitch-perfect official content – but that's mostly because I'm of the opinion that 95% of player-created mods and maps are utter bums. And I say that having edited the Freeplay section of this magazine for one and a half bitter and soul-destroying years.

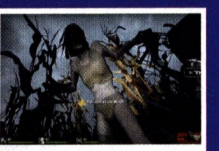
VERDICT

You know what, the day an update from Valve isn't utterly celebrated is the day we vomit the contents of our arseholes out from our noses.

Steve Hogarty

THE STORY SO FAR... UPDATES 4 ALL

NOVEMBER, 2008
Left 4 Dead's arrival coincide's with the 10th anniversary of the release of the original *Half-Life*.

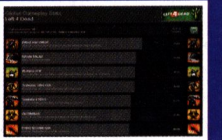


DECEMBER, 2008
Valve fix two major exploits: "hugging" zombies, and blocking entrances with physics objects.

FEBRUARY, 2009
Steve Hogarty plays *Left 4 Dead* with Father Ted writer Graham Linehan. World is torn asunder.

APRIL, 2009
The *Survival Pack* is released, adding a new gamemode and two new Versus maps.

MAY, 2009
Steam, that bastion of special offerings, gives *Left 4 Dead* away for exactly free, for two days.



MAY, 2009
The addition of Steam's Global Achievements view allows players to see just how awesome they are.

Budget

***Adam Glick* has a rummage around Good Old Games in search of gems**

SIMON THE SORCERER

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

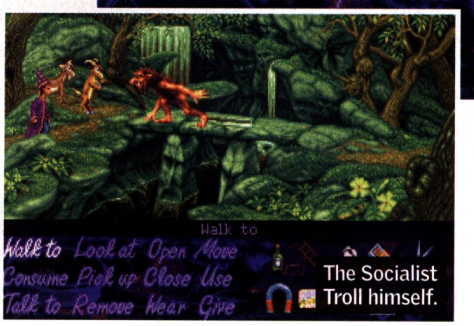
PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£4)

THE FIRST, AND definitive, release in the long-lasting fantasy/comedy adventure series, this is the one people go "Aaah, memories" when you mention *Simon the Sorcerer* games.

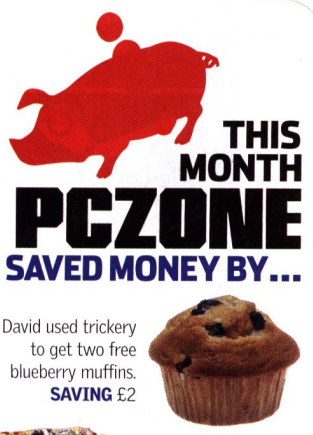
Simon the Sorcerer is the instalment with the swampling and, of course, Chris 'Rimmer' Barrie doing the voice of Simon himself. The game is large, the puzzles difficult and obtuse – just how adventure veterans like them. For those people who are new or unsure of their adventure credentials, this one is a must-play, but it's very, very tough. Even after all these years, reading "That doesn't work" on a monitor causes much hair to be pulled out of a head that really doesn't have enough anymore.

After this, the series paralleled at *Simon the Sorcerer II: The Lion, the Wizard and the Wardrobe*, before sliding into a deep quagmire of shite with *Simon 3D* and its completely-missing-the-point European follow-up.

We hear there is a fifth game on the horizon, which, judging by *Simon 4*, will be another nail in the series' coffin. This *Simon* is the only one you should bother with.



PCZONE 71 Magical times



THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

David used trickery to get two free blueberry muffins. **SAVING** £2

Steve refused to buy pizzas from an online pizza delivery service. **SAVING** £50

James cut his hair with hedge clippers, giving himself a sideways Mohican. **SAVING** £34

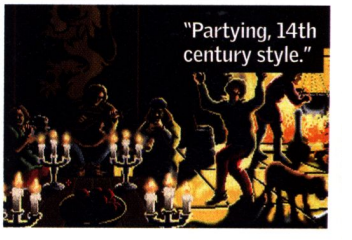
CASTLES COLLECTION

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£4)

IN MY YOUTH, I once spent hours playing the CD-ROM version of *Castles II: Siege and Conquest* because it came with copious amounts of documentary footage explaining castle design. This game taught me what the garderobe was (a sort of secure walk-in wardrobe) and what crenellations (battlements) were really used for.

Looking back on the game now, coupled here with its surprisingly different forerunner, is a testament to how far strategy has moved on. Yet despite its age and simplicity, *Castles II* remains a difficult game to play, which gives you a lot to think about when you get into the meat of the action. The battles are embarrassing, but the campaign map play is still fun. Bonus points still have to go to it for setting itself in medieval France, an under-used scenario.

PCZONE 58



LIONHEART: LEGACY OF THE CRUSADER

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£4)

A BLACK ISLE game that I've never heard of? Surely not! But yes, although this was made under their banner by a developer called Reflexive, this is indeed an undiscovered (at least by me) game in the *Planescape: Torment* mould.

Instead of using Black Isle's *Infinity Engine* – developed for the company's *AD&D* games – it uses *Fallout*'s *Velocity Engine* (including S.P.E.C.I.A.L. stats and perks, and AI-controlled NPCs that can fight alongside you). However, it isn't anywhere near as good as Black Isle's other RPGs, which could be why I never noticed it before.

Yes, this guy is evil.

A poor man's *Planescape*.

While it has an interesting premise – the Third Crusade opens a portal through which demonic forces invade Earth – it just doesn't intrigue.

Also my main character walked in a very strange way as well. This is a petty thing to get angered by, but it did irk me every time she moved.

But *Lionheart* is a solid title... for the forgiving RPG fan.

PCZONE 62

BENEATH A STEEL SKY

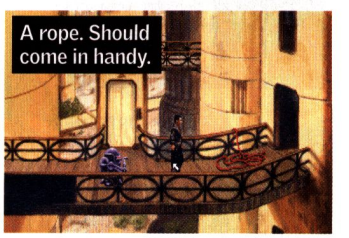
PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** Free

BEFORE THERE WAS *Broken Sword*, there was this gem – an humourous adventure set against the backdrop of a dystopian computer-controlled city in Australia. You play Robert Foster, a boy brought up in the wilderness outside the city's walls, but with a mysterious past linked to the urban sprawl. Kidnapped by security forces, you're taken back to metropolis but escape, along with your robot pal Joey.

Nice overalls.

From there on in, you're in standard adventure territory, with the Revolution Software twist of AI characters with routines, meaning certain puzzles had to be completed when the situation was just right.

Beneath a Steel Sky is a classic point-and-click adventure that doesn't feel too difficult by modern standards. Even though there is a little bit too much pixel-hunting for most people's tastes.


A rope. Should come in handy.

Best of all, it is one of the games GOG is giving away for free.

PCZONE 70

AND THE REST...
The other cheap releases out now

LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS
PRICE Free, Good Old Games
Not as alluring as in days of yore, but an interesting adventure nonetheless.
61

MESSIAH
PRICE $5.99 (£4), Good Old Games
Control an angelic cherub in this underrated possess-'em-up. Looks ropey but still decent.
66

TEENAGENT
PRICE Free, Good Old Games
Possibly the worst game on GOG, making a mockery of the "good" part of its name. Avoid.
6

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES

ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II
PRICE £15, SEGA
Huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people beating each other to shit and back.

FAR CRY
PRICE £5, Sold Out
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the 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 than this epic, sprawling classic.

PSYCHONAUTS
PRICE £10, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter 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

PCZ TOP 5 GAMING CELEBRITIES...

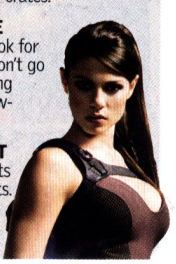
1. **JONATHAN ROSS** Chat show host, DJ and *Curse of Monkey Island* lover.
2. **CHARLIE BROOKER** Do you know he used to write for *PC ZONE*?
3. **ASIA CARRERA** Ex-porn queen and *UT* nerd.
4. **CHRIS MOYLES** DJ who has his own *COD4* clan.
5. **FELICIA DAY** *The Guild* actress/producer/writer and cute *WOW* alpha geek.

PCZ TOP 5 MACHINIMA SERIALS

1. **RED VS BLUE** Satirical *Halo*.
2. **SUPREME SURRENDER** Pacifist *Supreme Commander*.
3. **STRANGERHOOD** Comedic *The Sims 2*.
4. **P.A.N.I.C.S.** Bravo-lous *F.E.A.R.*.
5. **1-800-MAGIC** *Shadowrun*, but good.

PCZ TOP 5 GAME CHARACTERS WHO ARE CRAP AT THEIR JOBS

1. **GABRIEL KNIGHT** Didn't sell many books for a guy who ran a bookshop.
2. **JAMES BOND** If he's a secret agent, why does everyone know he's a secret agent?
3. **GORDON FREEMAN** Physicists do more than play at see-saw with crates.
4. **MAX PAYNE** Detectives look for clues. They don't go round shooting people in slow-motion.
5. **LARA CROFT** Archaeologists study artifacts. They don't steal them.



FPS

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.

LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.

TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%

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

CRYSIS WARHEAD

PCZ Issue: 199 – 92%

This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much 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.

BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

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

STRATEGY

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 – 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.

COMPANY OF HEROES

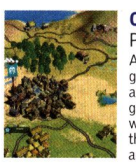
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, 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 in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.

SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

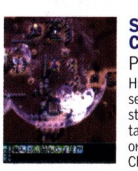
PCZ Issue 193 – 91%

This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come 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.

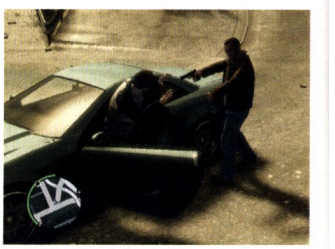


SUPREME COMMANDER

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



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 – 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.

GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%

GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.

FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.

PSYCHONAUTS

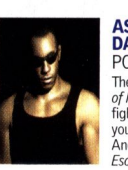
PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and 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.



ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

PCZ Issue 207 : 87%

The new story in the *Chronicles of Riddick* is a mix of brutal knife fights and stealth, which means you need fast fingers and brains. And it comes with a revamped *Escape from Butcher Bay*.

MMOs

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS 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: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.

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 for old school gamers, 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.

SIMULATION

X3: 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 with the X Universe?

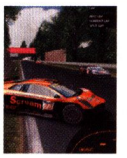
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!

THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.

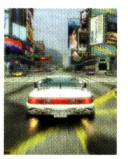
MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%
If you fancy a life beneath the waves, this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

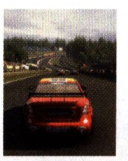
DRIVING/RACING



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. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.

COLIN MCRAE: 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. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.

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. (Well, fish-tailing '60s).

ODDBALL

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, this indie title 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.

BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 – 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009
PCZ Issue: 201 – 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.

NBA 2K9
PCZ Issue: 203 – 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.

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.

ROLE-PLAYING

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 and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.

FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.

MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 – 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens – 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 an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.

DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

JUNE

ANNO 1404	UBISOFT
ARMA II	505 GAMES
HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF BLOOD PRINCE	EA
JUMPGATE EVOLUTION	CODEMASTERS
OVERLORD II	CODEMASTERS
PROTOTYPE	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 3	EA
SPORE GALACTIC ADVENTURES	EA
TERMINATOR SALVATION	WARNER BROS

JULY

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM	WARNER BROS
BIONIC COMMANDO	CAPCOM
CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD	UBISOFT
CHAMPIONS ONLINE	ATARI
STREET FIGHTER IV	CAPCOM
WATCHMEN: THE END IS NIGH – EPISODE 2	WARNER BROS

AUTUMN/WINTER

ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA
ASSASSIN'S CREED II	UBISOFT
BIOSHOCK 2	2K GAMES
BORDERLANDS	2K GAMES
MAFIA II	2K GAMES
MAJESTY 2: THE FANTASY KINGDOM SIM	PARADOX
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR
MODERN WARFARE 2	ACTIVISION
NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT	EA
OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING	CODEMASTERS
RESIDENT EVIL 5	CAPCOM
RED FACTION: GUERRILLA	THQ

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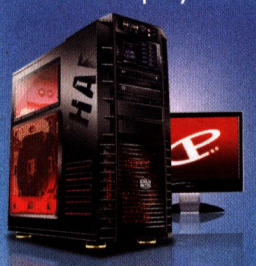


From £1329

Infinity i7 Stealth

MSI® X58 Platinum CrossFireX™ LGA1366 Motherboard
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium 64-Bit
G. Skill® 6144GB (3 x 2 GB) PC-10666 DDR3 Memory
1TB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 32MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX 285 1 GB Video Card
CoolerMaster HAF 932 Full Gaming Tower Case w/ Side-Panel Window
Cyberpower Ultra 600W Power Supply

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)

Extreme i7-975 3.33Ghz	£1995
i7-940 2.93Ghz	£1580
i7-920 2.66Ghz	£1329

System included the following

LG® Blu-ray Reader · HD 7.1 600 W · Logitech® · Logitech®

From £855

Infinity i7 Elite

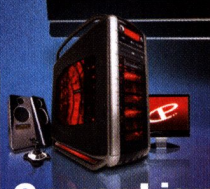
MSI® X58 Platinum CrossFireX™ LGA1366 Motherboard
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium 64-Bit
G. Skill® 3072 MB (3 x 1GB) PC-10666 DDR3 Memory
500GB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 16MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
ATI® Radeon™ HD 4850 512 MB Video Card
Cyberpower Gangster Mid Tower

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
Incl. Del. & VAT
(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)

Extreme i7-965 3.20Ghz	£1489
i7-940 2.93Ghz	£1095
i7-920 2.66Ghz	£855

System included the following

LG® DVD 20X±RW · HD 7.1 600 W · Logitech® · Logitech®



From £1855

Gamer Liquid i7 Black Pearl

Asus® P6T Deluxe V2 X58 DDR3 LGA1366
Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium 64-Bit
G. Skill® 12GB (6 x 2GB) PC-10666 DDR3 Memory
1TB 7200RPM SATA-II 3.0Gb/s 32MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
Water Cooled ATI Radeon™ HD 4870X2 2GB Video Card
CoolerMaster Cosmos S Gaming Tower Case w/Side-Panel Window
Silverstone PSU 750W Element 80 Plus Bronze

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor
Incl. Del. & VAT
(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)

Extreme i7-975 3.33Ghz	£2569
i7-940 2.93Ghz	£2145
i7-920 2.66Ghz	£1855

System included the following

LG® Blu-ray Reader · HD 7.1 600 W · Logitech® · Logitech®

Intel® Centrino® 2 Technology
- Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor
- Mobile Intel® PM965 Express Chipset
- Intel® WiFi Link 5300 802.11 A/G/N

Gamer Xplorer X5-4850

Genuine Windows Vista™ Home Premium
2GB DDR-II PC5300 667 Memory
160GB SATA150 Hard Drive, 8x DVD+/-RW Drive
15.4" WXGA TFT Display 1280 x 800 pixels
1000/100/10 Network & 56K V.92 Fax/Modem
NVIDIA® GeForce® Go 9600 GT 512MB, 1 PCMCIA Type II Slot, 3 Hours Battery Life, Weight only 6.39 Lbs, Free Carrying Case, 6 Custom Colors to Choose From

Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor (800Mhz FSB)

T9800 6MB L2 Cache, 2.93Ghz	£1045
P9600 6MB L2 Cache, 2.80Ghz	£889
T9550 6MB L2 Cache, 2.66Ghz	£865
P8700 3MB L2 Cache, 2.53Ghz	£799
P8600 3MB L2 Cache, 2.40Ghz	£765

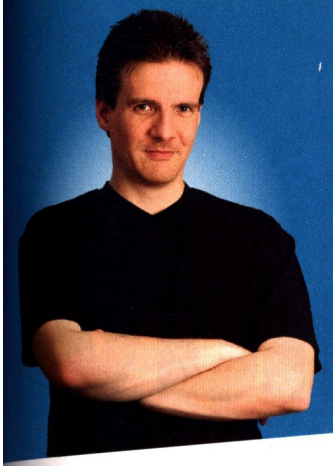
From £765

www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

0800 019 0863 0800 612 0279

Cyberpower recommends Coolermaster

Celeron, Celeron Inside, Centrino, Centrino Inside, Centrino Logo,Core Inside, Intel, Intel Logo, Intel Core, Intel Inside, Intel Inside Logo, Intel Viiv, Intel vPro, Itanium, Itanium Inside, Pentium, Pentium Inside, Viiv Inside, vPro Inside, Xeon, and Xeon Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. CyberPower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright ©2008 CyberPower. All rights reserved. NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® • www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell /



PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

STEALTH PCs

IN BETWEEN THE fireplace, sofa and a tumble of unread books, my TV is a monument to sloth and ignorance. When switched off, its blank expression becomes a reminder that I'm too lazy to entertain myself, and when on it makes me stupid.

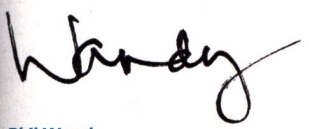
Remember when people hid the lounge TV inside a wooden box with doors? Now that 42in flatscreens are the norm, today's furniture needs to be the size of David Hasselhoff's drinks cabinet. You'd end up with something more vulgar than the TV.

Or would you? My spare room has just been redecorated, and after putting fresh paint on walls and new carpet on the floor, dragging the PCs back in made my wife gasp in horror. How could I stop it looking like an office without losing the machines?

The answer is, of course, a wooden box with doors. The price of Lincoln's Home Office Workstation is just shy of two GTX 285s, but as with the SLI GeForces it's way ahead of other solutions.

First, it's made from solid oak and ash and isn't something you screw together yourself. Second, close the doors and the room is instantly tidy. Third, the pull-out tray is wide enough for both mouse and keyboard, plus up top it'll swallow a whole 30in screen. There's even a cubbyhole for your subwoofer.

Wonder if they do one with a cubbyhole for the missus?



Phil Wand
Hardware editor

GIGA HURTS

Radeon HD 4890 passes 1GHz. Slaps GeForce GTX 275 and reins in the GTX 285

SAPPHIRE ARE ONE of several AMD partners to release limited-edition versions of the Radeon HD 4890 with the card's core and GDDR5 clocks knocked to 1GHz and beyond.

Now the fastest single AMD card on sale, and with a price premium of £25-£50 over standard cards, the factory tweaked HD 4890 is an obvious answer to NVIDIA's GTX 275.

SAPPHIRE's card features a hybrid cooling system that combines the company's own Vapor-X system with heatpipes and heatsinks. Vapor-X relies on a coolant in a vacuum vaporising when it makes contact with hot surfaces, the resulting gas then condenses and releases heat. In the SAPPHIRE, a low-power, low-noise fan also helps to shift the heat away from card components.

SAPPHIRE's Radeon HD 4890 ATOMIC gets decent results but feels like a marketing exercise.

While able to punch as hard as the GTX 285 in a number of benchmarks, the overclocked HD 4890s cost close to £250, making the identically priced GTX 285 a more obvious choice. In addition, the standard HD 4890 card is essentially an overclocked HD 4870 anyway.

Better to spend your money on something that'll make a huge impact on your day-to-day gaming and won't be out of date six months from now: a solid state hard drive.

sapphiretech.com

PARALLELISM

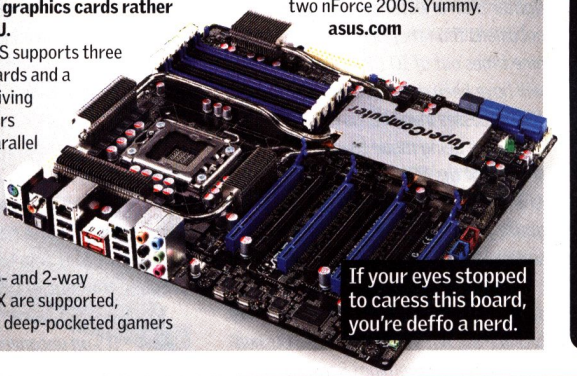
The shape of things to come

ASUS have launched their first 'supercomputer' board for CUDA, NVIDIA's parallel computing platform that allows developers to perform calculations on graphics cards rather than on the CPU.

The P6T7 WS supports three NVIDIA Tesla cards and a single Quadro, giving workstation users almost 1,000 parallel processing cores and 4 teraflops of processing power.

While both 3- and 2-way SLI/CrossFireX are supported, only a few deep-pocketed gamers will buy one. The rest of us will be content with pictures of what is unarguably a handsome mobo: seven PCI-E x16 slots, six DIMM slots, two gigabytes LANs and two nForce 200s. Yummy.

asus.com



If your eyes stopped to caress this board, you're deffo a nerd.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Activision are bundling an electronic motion-sensing skateboard as the controller for *Tony Hawk: Ride* for the Xbox, Wii and PlayStation, seemingly ignorant of the fact that the people who perch on the edge of their bed eating crisps and playing *Tony Hawk* games do so because they like sitting on their arse and can't actually skate. Clever move, Activision.
activision.com

Anyone who loves their *Windows* rig will get a kick out of Apple's latest ad campaign. It tells you nothing about Macs, of course, and focuses on bashing PCs for being prone to catching viruses. Replace "viruses" with "code written to exploit the largest possible number of users" and you'll understand why nobody targets the Mac.
apple.com/getamac/ads

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

TERAFLOP: The event when a person who weighs at least 30 stones leaps into a pool, stomach first. The jumper's agonised screaming is usually drowned out by the ensuing tsunami. **TESLA:** The original mad scientist who invented AC electricity, radio and spark plugs, yet who everyone thinks didn't really exist. Also the world's most famous Serbian, except for war criminals. **VOIP:** An innocent abbreviation that makes you feel either idiotic or perverted when used as a verb. Don't believe us? Walk up to a stranger and say "I'm going to VoIP my sister tonight" and watch their face.

Dear Wandy

If it ain't working, don't panic – Wandy's here...

PROBLEMS?
Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* 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 your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much infomation about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

Q PREMIUM PSU

I need a new power supply unit for my PC. My existing PSU – a Corsair HX620W – is not good for overclocking, but I can't decide what to replace it with.

My system has an ASUS M4A79T Deluxe, AMD Phenom II x3 3.55GHz, ASUS EAH4870 512MB, 2GB RAM and three hard drives. I'm looking for something around £150.

Dmytro Sossa

Give your PC the heart of a prize-winning bull.

A

The Corsair HX620W is a rebranded Seasonic product and is without question one of the finest PC power supplies money can buy. It has every modern certification you can think of, is a near-silent modular design, and although sold with a ceiling of 620W will happily dish out 10-15% more than this. A combined rating of 50A across three 12V rails means the HX620W will be capable of feeding the configuration you have and still give elbow room for you to add a further HD 4870 and a Blu-ray drive. Maybe even a USB vegetable steamer.

The question is what led you to believe the Corsair isn't good for running your modified PC? Anyone who's dabbled in overclocking will have locked their system tighter than a Victorian corset on more occasions than they can remember, and nine times out of 10 these instabilities will have been due a misunderstanding of the processes involved, as a result of hardware being made to work outside its limits. Not the PSU. In your case, the M4A79T will be delighted to receive any abuse you dish out – you'll have to be seriously ham-fisted to annoy it.

You could possibly fry RAM with some cheap-ass, Chinese-made, bargain brand PSU, but you will be hard pushed to do so with a premium Seasonic box like the HX620W. You could perhaps run out of juice trying to get power to every component, but right now you're not even close to the limits of the Corsair. And if you're thinking that voltage changes may tip things over the edge, I can assure you they won't.

To give you an example, the new £200 ASUS Radeon HD 4890 comes with voltage tweaking features that up the flow from the Radeon stock 1.312V to around 1.4V. Even if you failed GCSE Physics, you should be able to see that such a change wouldn't trouble the average potato – let alone your PC's PSU!

In short, stick with what you have. It's the real deal.

Forget internal floppy drives. USB devices are so much easier to get along with.

Q FLASH UNHAPPY

I've been reading the article in issue 207 about flashing my Sapphire card's BIOS. I've found a floppy disk and an external floppy disk reader. I downloaded *MS-DOS 6.22* and when I try to run it, the message I get is "Please insert floppy to write". There's a blank floppy in the drive but for some reason it won't work. Please help, I'm getting sick of not being able to play *GTA4*.

Stephen Vincent

A

It's an unconventional procedure and you shouldn't be too worried if things don't go smoothly.

To start with, you need to make sure that your floppy drive is connected properly. If it's a USB drive, it'll be powered by the USB bus and won't need drivers, so you can simply hook it up and it'll magically start working.

Open Windows Explorer *and click the new A: drive icon to explore what's on the diskette. If it's unformatted media, you'll be prompted to format it – though I should say almost all diskettes currently on sale come formatted. If you get a 'write protect' error, you'll need to eject the diskette and slide the write protect tab into the opposite position. Pop it back into the drive and try again.*

If you've gone to the lengths of adding an internal drive to your system, things get a lot more complicated. To start with, it's easy to get the ribbon connector up the wrong way: the classic symptom here being the drive's access lamp glowing green the moment you power the PC on.

Assuming you've managed to avoid this predicament, you will then need to enter your BIOS – what key you need to press should be shown when you boot – and make sure you select "1.44MB, 3.5in" as your system's legacy diskette. Save your changes and you should then find the A: icon apparent in Explorer *when you reach* Windows. *It's about now that people realise how much easier the USB route would have been.*

If at this point you're still having trouble, try starting Windows *in Safe Mode or try creating a bootable USB pen*

"The M4A79T will be delighted to receive any abuse you dish out"

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.4	08 Apr 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 182.50	02 Apr 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

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

"This memory business pre-dates Bruce Forsyth's toupee, and it's an issue that almost every user is bumping into"

drive instead using the Hewlett Packard utility. Instructions and downloads can be found on the bootdisk.com website.

Q BATTERED RAM

I recently decided to buy some more memory for my PC. I had two 1024MB Corsair XMS2 6400 DDR2 sticks installed, and I decided to go with the same manufacturer, so I bought two more 2048MB Corsair XMS2 6400 DDR2 sticks.

After installing the RAM and booting up, I checked system information and even though there should have been 6GB installed it only showed 2.48GB.

I tried changing the arrangement of each of the sticks, putting them in different channels, but still no change. I had a look on the BIOS and there it stated 6GB physical memory but only 2.5GB usable memory – what does that mean? Can it be changed?

I'm running *Windows XP Home Edition SP3* on an MSI K9A Platinum board with Athlon 64 X2 5600+ and two Radeon HD 2600 XT cards. Any help will be appreciated.

George Appleby

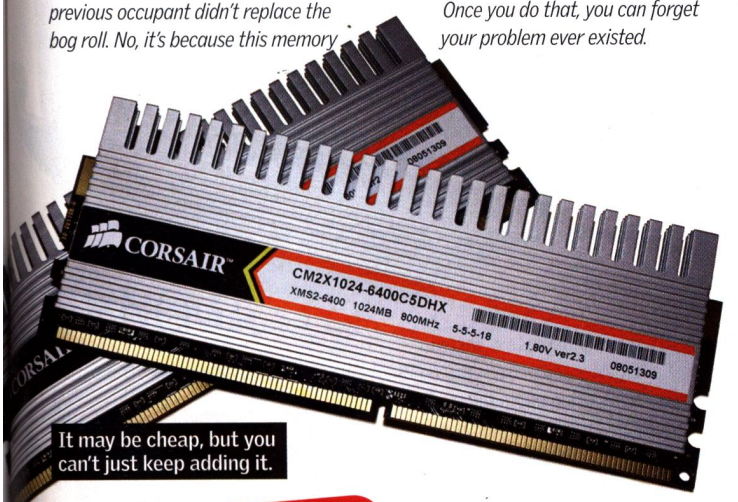
A *My regular readers will be rolling their eyes at this point, and not because their reading room's previous occupant didn't replace the bog roll. No, it's because this memory business pre-dates Bruce Forsyth's toupee, and now that RAM is a PC's cheapest component it's an issue that almost every user is bumping into.*

This isn't to say that anyone caught frowning at the huge disparity between "installed" and "usable" memory readouts on their Windows *PC is a clown. It simply means that it's such a complicated and ridiculous business that only a fraction of people will understand fully what's going on here.*

The long and the short of it is, don't try and get your head round it. Essentially, if you're using a 32-bit operating system such as Windows XP Home Edition*, you're subject to a number of constraints that affect the amount of RAM that* Windows *can access. If you are using SLI video cards, the amount will be different again. Put simply, ignore what you're seeing.*

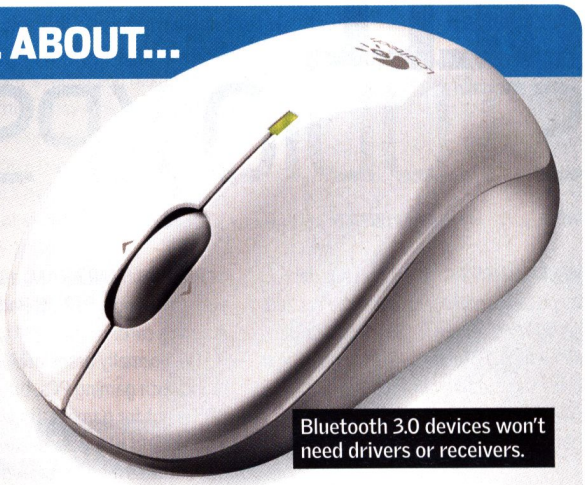
I've covered the reasons behind this particular shenanigans in some detail in previous issues, so I'll not go further into it here. What I would suggest though is that you hold onto all the RAM that you have – shuffling things about shouldn't have any obvious impact on your system's performance – and then upgrade to the 64-bit version of Windows 7 *when it's released a few months from now.*

Once you do that, you can forget your problem ever existed.



It may be cheap, but you can't just keep adding it.

ALL ABOUT...


Bluetooth 3.0 devices won't need drivers or receivers.

15 BLUETOOTH

Now that you can buy Bluetooth keyboards, mice and even joysticks for gaming on your phone, you might wonder why makers are using Bluetooth wireless in preference to plain old wireless.

In terms of operation, Bluetooth devices are very similar to the WiFi connection you may have at home which links up your broadband router, laptop and perhaps the Nintendo Wii you stopped using last Christmas. They use the same radio frequencies, albeit in low power form, and the end result is the same: no cables snaking across carpets. Where Bluetooth makes sense is in battery powered devices that demand low power consumption, don't need high bandwidth connections and only operate over short ranges. Like your phone.

The Bluetooth specifications evolve continuously and today they provide a wide range of predefined profiles and protocols that regiment the transmission of audio, video, picture, fax, printer and other data between compatible devices. Bluetooth 3.0 announced earlier this year permits data transfer rates of up to 24 megabits per second by piggybacking with existing 802.11 WiFi networks. You should begin to see Bluetooth 3.0 devices appearing by the end of summer.

Q JERRY BUILT

I've only just signed up to broadband internet this month – please don't laugh – and I want a modem gateway that successfully combines wireless phones with wireless internet and wireless VoIP.

Does such a modem exist?

Simon Grieves

A *Despite its stupid name, the £179 FRITZ!Box Fon WLAN 7270 does exactly what you want. As well as being a wireless ADSL modem router, it also acts as a DECT base station allowing you to connect up to six phones.*

The clever thing is that, through the web interface, you can add internet telephony services and configure your phones individually to dial out using VoIP, and receive incoming calls on your fixed line. It even has connections for two more analogue phones and a fax machine, making it the ideal hub for a home or small business.

However, if you have older DECT phones you could be in for a rough ride. My suggestion would be to replace them with one of the more recent CAT-iq devices such as the Siemens Gigaset S67H which simply hooks up to the FRITZ!Box when you turn it on. No configuration necessary. PCZ

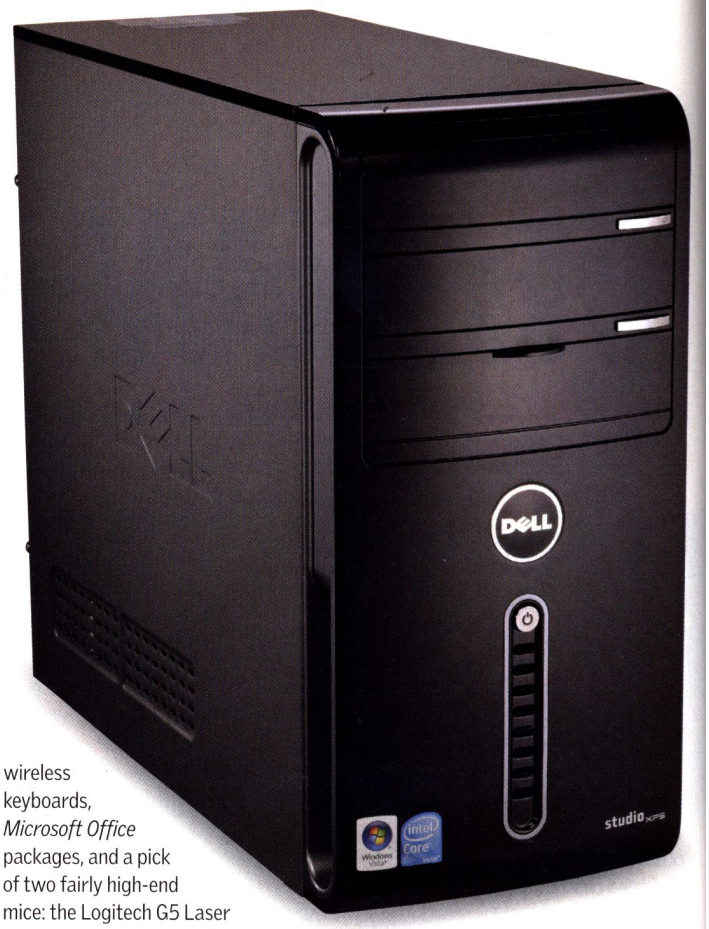
FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(Blueboy67) I've been stuck on an idea for the wife's birthday, but recently I've noticed she spends a lot of time on my PC on Facebook, so it crossed my mind I could get her off my PC and get her a nice gift by buying her a netbook PC. (Rich) I have an Acer Aspire One 9in running *Windows 7* and it's a fantastic bit of kit. (darth_careful) If I were buying now I'd get the Samsung or EEE. (Edd) I second exactly what Rich has said, since I also have an Aspire One. (Ruzz) I have a Samsung NC10 and it's just about the best piece of kit I've owned – it's completely displaced my Sony Vaio and I take it everywhere.

HOW WE TESTED

SPEED: We check a PC's combination of RAM, CPU, hard drives and motherboard to find out just how fast it works. **COST:** We checked a PC's sale price against its peers, and the cost of building a similar machine yourself. **INSIDES:** We look inside the box to check on components' brands and whether everything is properly installed.

DELL STUDIO XPS



PRICE £900 **MANUFACTURER** Dell Microsystems **WEBSITE** dell.co.uk

WHEN THIS PC arrived on our desk, its price caused eyebrows to be cocked. As building a Core i7 system costs the same as the Studio XPS, this machine's price tag is a fairly impressive feat.

Dell's Core i7 is a small PC, but it packs a 2.66GHz Core i7 920 CPU, 6GB of 1067MHz DDR3 RAM, a 1TB hard disk drive, and a 512MB Radeon 4850 graphics card.

We normally associate Dell's XPS brand with gaming PCs, but the Studio XPS is not for gamers. Its huge amount of RAM and HDD space, and 64-bit *Vista,* makes it good for hi-def video editing and photo manipulation, but the 4850 lets the system down. This isn't a bad card, but it brings the Studio XPS' benchmarks down to the same level as last year's high-end PCs.

As is typical with Dell, this PC can be customised with a few extras including wireless keyboards, *Microsoft Office* packages, and a pick of two fairly high-end mice: the Logitech G5 Laser and MX Revolution Cordless.

At this price point there's little room for any major complaints. After all, you're getting a Core i7 system for under £1,000. Just put your change towards a Geforce GTX 290. ***HW***

SPECIFICATION

GPU	Intel Core i7 920
SPEED	2.66GHz
RAM	6GB, DDR3, 1067MHz, Tri Channel
GRAPHICS CARD	Radeon 4850 512MB
STORAGE	2x 512MB hard drives (RAID 0)

"At this price point there's little room for any major complaints"

PCZONE 78 Office gamer

NVIDIA GEFORCE 3D VISION

PRICE £135 **MANUFACTURER** NVIDIA Microsystems **WEBSITE** nvidia.co.uk

THESE GLASSES MAKE *Left 4 Dead*'s 3D zombies and effects inhabit real space, giving a palpable feeling of depth. Likewise in *Burnout Paradise*, your eyes pick up on new visual cues and focus on distant junctions and landmarks, making timing turns and crashes easier.

The downside are the system requirements they require. First, they only work with NVIDIA cards using special drivers and certain monitors (like the Samsung SyncMaster 2233rz). That said, NVIDIA have made the glasses' installation process a breeze, limiting it to a single wizard.

However, the glasses' biggest weakness is with the games. NVIDIA's website (snipurl.com/3dvisiongames) lists 320 games that have 'excellent' or 'good' compatibility with the glasses. However, this list doesn't always match up to what happens in practice.

Fallout 3 is listed under 'excellent', so we expected to be greeted with a breath-taking panorama when we left Vault 101 at the game's start. Instead we met a flat view and a "Scenic Overlook" sign poking out in the foreground. At other times the game was like a shadow theatre, with cutout puppets held at different depths.

As with the cinema industry the gaming industry is looking at 3D to push the medium forward. And as in cinemas it'll take years before 3D gaming will become as common as widescreen monitors. ***NM***

SPECIFICATION

MONITOR	120Hz LCD or 100Hz CRT
GRAPHICS CARD	GeForce 8800 or later
OS	Windows Vista

PCZONE 70 Zombie heaven

THRUSTMASTER FERRARI F430

PRICE £75 **MANUFACTURER** Thrustmaster **WEBSITE** www.thrustmaster.com

THIS STEERING WHEEL is based on the cockpit of a Ferrari F430. Our favourite control is the Manettino. This control lets you flick through car settings during races. It can store five of these configurations, and it comes with pre-made profiles for few games. Handily, it can also be programmed with settings for other titles.

Other controls include 10 programmable buttons (six on the wheel, four on the body).

Best of all is the wheel-locking force feedback. Bestest of all is the F430 costs under £80. ***AO***

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HERCULES XPS 2.0 60

PRICE £60 **MANUFACTURER** Hercules **WEBSITE** hercules.com/uk

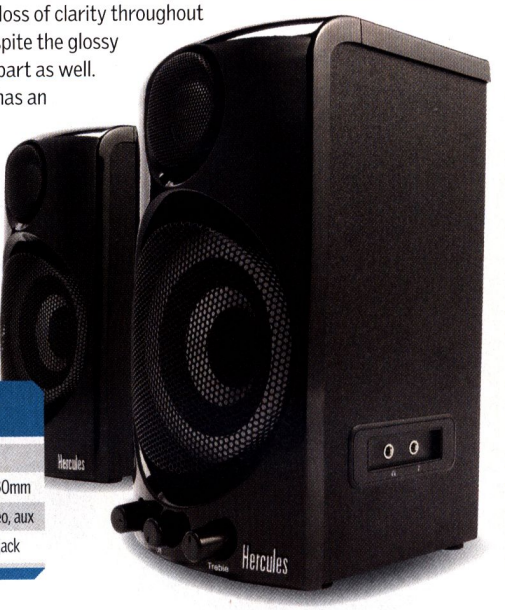
THIS PAIR OF 15W speakers have remarkable sound quality for such a simple set, and enough power to fill most rooms.

The sound is bassy, but as this speaker set lacks a subwoofer that's an achievement. Even with those booming basses, there's no loss of clarity throughout the speaker's range and despite the glossy plastic finish, they look the part as well.

The missing subwoofer has an advantage – less wires.

There's a place for audio gear using analogue amps and rare metal drivers, but if your budget is realistic, these will suit you. ***AO***

PCZONE 90



SPECIFICATION

POWER	2x 15W
DIMENSIONS	210x105x130mm
INPUTS	3.5mm stereo, aux
OUTPUTS	Headphone jack

SPECIFICATION

SIZE	22in
RESOLUTION	1680 x 1050
BRIGHTNESS	300cd/m²
CONTRAST RANGE	20,000:1 (dynamic)
RESPONSE TIME	3ms (3D)/5ms (2D)
INPUT	DVI-D

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER 2233RZ

PRICE £276 **MANUFACTURER** Samsung **WEBSITE** samsung.com/uk

THIS 22IN MONITOR has the expected 1680x1050 resolution, dynamic 20,000:1 contrast range, 5ms grey-to-grey response, a DVI-D input (but no others), fixed stand, and a tight viewing angle.

The 2233rz makes full use of its dynamic contrast range, but deep blacks and bright whites lead to over saturated colours. The screen's saviour is a 120Hz refresh rate that makes games feel liquid smooth.

But unless you want to use 3D glasses, get a 24in 1080p panel with a 5ms response rate instead. ***NM***

PCZONE 88

ZALMAN CNPS9900 LED

PRICE £47 **MANUFACTURER** Zalman Microsystems **WEBSITE** zalman.com

THE CNPS9900'S ALL-COPPER heatpipe-and-fin turbine design feels like it's been around forever, but it's good enough to keep an overclocked i7 under 40°. Although it was made for socket 775 or AM2+ chips it can be easily attached to an X58 motherboard.

As good as the Zalman CNPS9900 is, its huge size (roughly 9.5x14x16cm and 782g) means alot of cases can't fit it. Still, it's hard to pick on Zalman when everyone is intent on making coolers large enough to affect weather patterns. Next time, make it better, not just bigger. ***AO***

PCZONE 90

Reviews by Adam Oxford, Neil Mohr and Henry Winchester

REMEMBER: TURN OFF YOUR PC BEFORE STICKING A SCREWDRIVER IN IT

At some point you'll want to replace a part inside your PC. When you attempt this remember to set the power switch to "off" and unplug the cable. Having a jolt of mains electricity running through you isn't fun. It resembles being hit in the chest – by a baseball bat.

Hardware Buyer

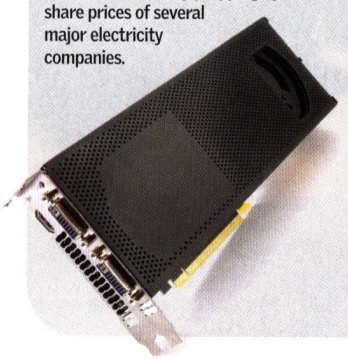
This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295
PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965
PRICE £839
intel.com

Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3
PRICE £529
onec.com

If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME
PRICE £321
asus.com

This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1
PRICE £144
auzentech.com

Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11
PRICE £99
seagate.com

If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500
PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk

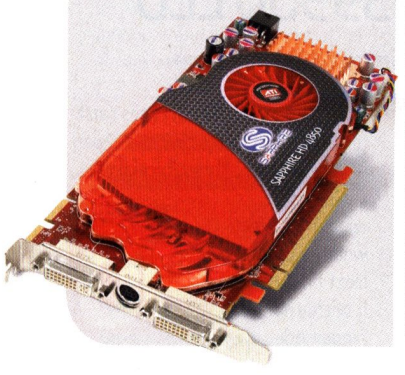
The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850
PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 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

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180
PRICE £44
intel.com

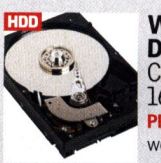
At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not suprising that things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2
PRICE £60
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.

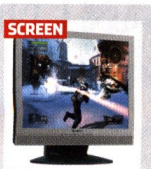
HDD



WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS
PRICE £30
wdc.com

A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, 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



VIEWSONIC VA903M
PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com

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, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUNDCARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE
PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy card 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, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530
PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk

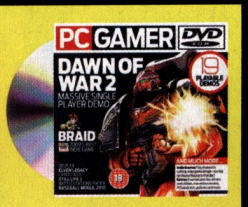
Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

NEW LOOK

FREE DVD

19 GAMES TO PLAY NOW!



PC GAMER

ULTIMATE SCOOP! WE'VE PLAYED...

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

FREE! £5.99 WORTH OF BATTLEFIELD HEROES CASH!
(See p63 for details)

NEW LOOK ON SALE NOW

EXCLUSIVE!
STALKER RETURNS
CALL OF PRIPYAT FIRST LOOK

19 SECRET SEQUELS
THE GAMES OF 2010 REVEALED

17 NETBOOK MUST-PLAYS
THE ESSENTIAL PORTABLE GAMES

+ 21 PAGES OF PREVIEWS!
SINGULARITY
BIOSHOCK 2 MULTIPLAYER
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
BLUR

UK Edition £5.99
July 2009 Issue 202
www.pcgamer.co.uk

18

FULL STORY INSIDE!

THE BEST REVIE
ARMA
TERMINATO
SIMS

Short list announced

You and your fellow gamers decided who made it on to the short list, now you decide who wins...

The Golden Joystick Awards are known globally as **'The People's Gaming Awards'** and they're the industry's most prestigious. Why? Because they're voted for by the people who matter most – you. Whether you're a PC, PlayStation, Nintendo or Xbox fan, this is your opportunity to make sure your favourite game claims the ultimate gaming accolade, a Golden Joystick Award. And if you need an extra incentive, we'll be giving away some brilliant prizes in our 'landmark' voting system. So you might just win an LCD TV, PS3 or Xbox just for exercising your democratic right!

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

Go to **www.goldenjoystick.com** to vote and ensure your favourite game doesn't lose out to an inferior rival!

PCZONE Freeplay

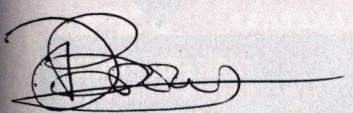
For the man who has nothing

FALLING OUT

I'VE TAKEN A little bit of a back seat this month in the old Freeplay section, as my colleague Mr Hogarty felt the urge to get his hands on some non-commercial releases for a change. "It was like seeing a long-lost love again," he said, wiping a tear from his eye as he did so. A long-lost love that involved tossing his objet d'amour out of a bucket and into a bottomless pit, as it turned out. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to the youngster getting all excited by his free games, more pleasing because it gave me more time with mods.

However, sadness quickly turned into despair when I realised that the mod scene is not as vibrant as it once was. Maybe it is just the time of year, but the dearth of quality was a real shame to behold, so much so that I was forced to have a look at *Perfect Dark: Source*, a mod we once had high hopes for, but has turned out to be pigswill. One faint glimmer of hope is the *Medieval II: Total War* scene, which continues to throw up some excellent (and mind-bogglingly in-depth) mods for all us amateur strategists to get our teeth into. We hope it's just the season for modders to be beavering away, not revealing their bounty until the time is right. Unfortunately, this means the current climate is one of depression.

If you think I'm wrong, that there are actually plenty of exciting mods out there that have snuck under the radar, then please let us know, either on our forums, via Twitter or using whichever mode of contact you prefer. Even smoke signals would do.



David Brown
Staff writer

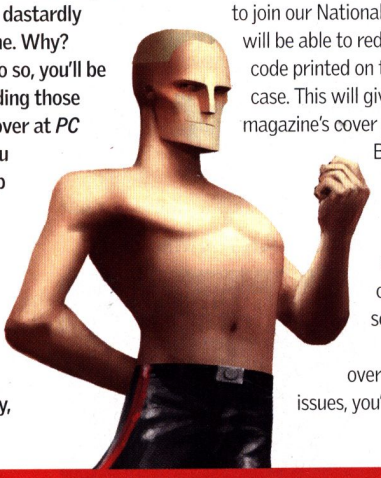
That can't be effective in combat.

FOR ZONE AND COUNTRY

Join the *PC ZONE* National Army and get some freebies

WEBSITE battlefield-heroes.com

BY THE TIME you read these delicious words, you may well have already got to grips with *Battlefield Heroes*. You may even have chosen what side you want to be on. Wait just a minute there, young shaver-me-lad, you need to think again if you happen to have chosen to fight under the flag of those dastardly Royal Army swine. Why? Because if you do so, you'll be inadvertently aiding those filthy mongrels over at *PC Gamer*. What you need to do is slap yourself in the face for being such a fool and choose again, wisely this time. The National Army is the *ZONE* army, offering the very latest in fetish wear that looks nothing like the uniforms of a certain National Socialist political party from '30s Germany.

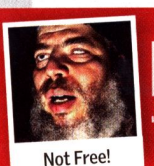


By now, *Battlefield Heroes*' closed beta will have opened its doors to the public, as you'll already know. What you won't already know is that, if you decide to join our National Army ranks, you will be able to redeem that lovely little code printed on this issue's DVD case. This will give you the magazine's cover price (£5.99) in Battlefunds – *Heroes*' in-game currency with which you can upgrade your character with new clothes, taunts and so on.

Not only that, but over the following four issues, you'll be getting two new pieces of clothing each time, building up to complete the National Army Rocketeer costume at the end – that's the fellow above. Yes, you'll look like someone who has just stepped out of a Rammstein video, but you'll be the talk of the server, trust us.

Of course, if for some bizarre reason you want to join the seedy, despicable ranks of knuckle-dragging cave dwellers that pass for *PC Gamer* readers, you are within your rights to do so. You can buy lots of issues of that magazine and obtain the full National Army costume too, but, let's be honest, what possible reason could you have for doing that? Other than some sort of masochistic wish to defile yourself in public. It's the only reason we can think of. The best thing to do, we reiterate, is to get the full *PCZ* gimp suit and then jiggle your digital posteriors in the face of slaughtered *Gamer* readers while playing.

PCZONE FREE-O-METER



Not Free!

0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

Free!

248 HOURS*

Demos

PCZONE ON THE DVD

***Chris Capel* gives you free stuff. Isn't he nice?**

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

AKA *Company of Space Marines*

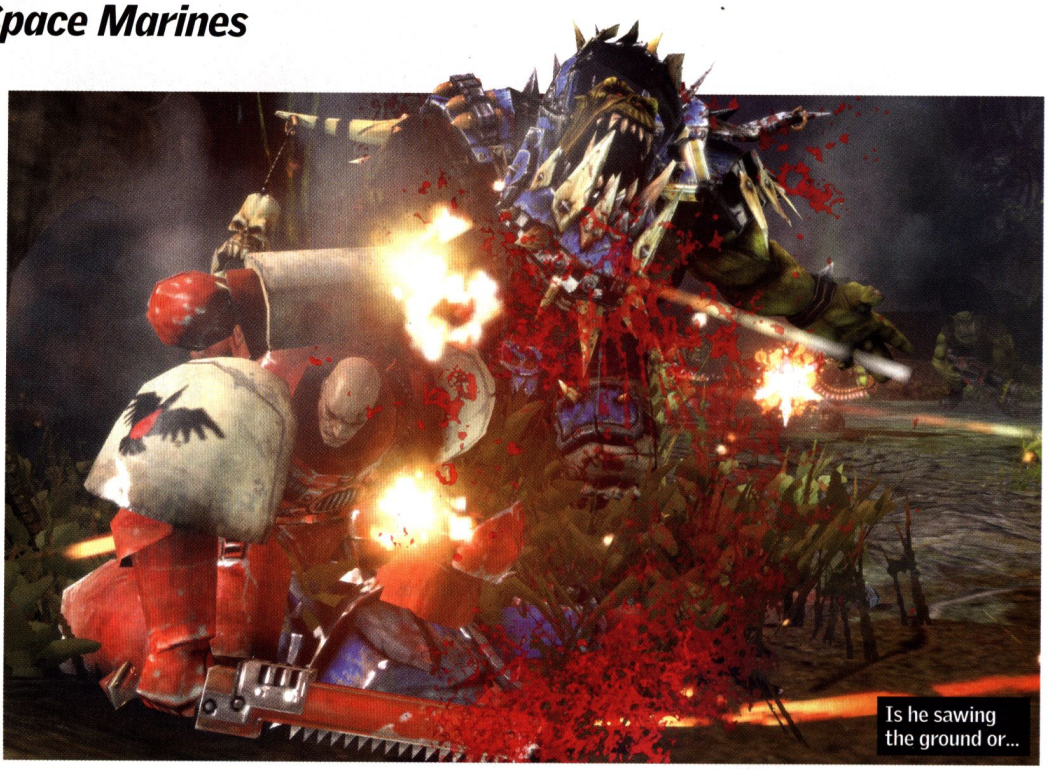
WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com

THE GAME THAT divided *Warhammer 40,000* fans is now available as a demo. But you can forget all about waiting for it to download over a crappy broadband connection, we've got it on our disc!

While we liked it, others didn't appreciate the tonal shift towards *Company of Heroes*. If our review didn't sway you, you've now got a chance to try before you buy.

This demo allows you to play Space Marines battling Eldar, Orks and Tyranids. There's no multiplayer on the demo either, which is more faithful to the original, so you'll have to buy the game to try that out.

If you've only played the *Space Crusade* board game you'll be amazed at how far these games have come in 19 years. I know I was. It's got polygons and everything!


Is he sawing the ground or...

PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

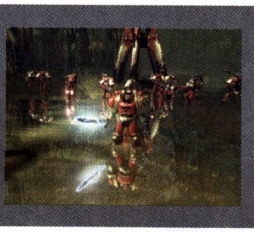
1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).

2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.

3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.

4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The *PC ZONE* discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



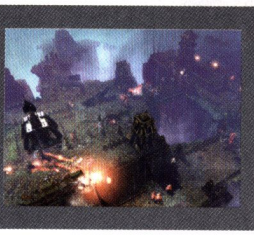
HANDSOME FELLAS

Your trusty marines. They have a penchant for loose women and killing all non-humans, but they're a great bunch of lads.

GIGER COUNTER

Tyranids look nothing like the xenomorphs from *Aliens*. Honestly. Nor do they look like the original terrifying genestealers. They enjoy killing all non-Tyranids.

SEE MY MASSIVE WARHAMMER



CHAOS (MARINES)

Here's what happens when they get together. Still, it'd be boring if they sat down and discussed a peace treaty, wouldn't it?

ORK FROM MORK

Orks are still hassling us humans even in the year 40,000. They enjoy killing all non-Orks. These races should kiss and make up – they have so much in common!

CRYOSTASIS

It's a bit nippy out

WEBSITE cryostasis-game.com

WHILE IT MAY be a cheaply made Russian game from an unknown developer, *Cryostasis* impressed us when it came in. When we're not espousing how great the cold effects are we're cowering in terror under our desks.

In this demo you'll get to take down axe-wielding insane crewmen, get a hint of the seemingly unrelated storyline, and learn to use the innovative heat-based health system.

You'll also get to go all *Quantum Leap* (seriously, it's even the same visual effect) on dead crew members, setting right what once went wrong in their lives, and handily opening that door they froze to death against in the process.

Just don't listen to the reviews of this game seen in certain other PC gaming magazines: they don't know what they're talking about.

And before you get too excited, this demo is designed to show off NVIDIA's fancy PhysX engine, so you'll need to install the NVIDIA drivers and patch we thoughtfully put on the DVD as well.

OH BOY

STICKY END
Oh dear, it looks like this poor chap has been stabbed 15 times. How careless.

WHERE'S AL?
Prepare to be him and save his life. Bet he has another accident later, the clumsy git.

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES

Steve's new best game in the world

WEBSITE popcap.com/games/pvz

LIKE POPCAP'S OTHER addictive puzzler *Peggle*, *Plants vs Zombies* has taken over the office like a zombie apocalypse. And like a killer plant, it takes hold and doesn't let go.

Utterly casual and unchallenging and yet amazingly time-absorbing, minutes will turn into hours and "just a quick go before dinner love" will turn into "you want a divorce? Oh, OK" before you know it.

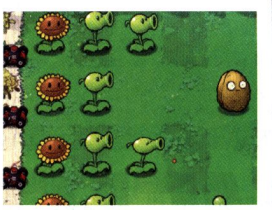
Luckily, this is a time-capped demo, but get your credit card ready – you'll be needing it.

1. YOUR CROP
Basic types to create resources, attack, defend, and annoy small children by not being chocolate.

2. THE UNDEAD
They don't stand a chance against your veggie army!

3. SUNLIGHT
This is your resource. It either falls from the sky or comes from sunflowers. Fail to collect it at your PERIL!!

LAWN OF THE DEAD



PLANTS
Here are your basic plants. You'll be relying on them for several hordes, but at some point they won't be enough.

ZOMBIES
The bread and butter of the zombie horde. They're brainless, and their heads fall off comically.

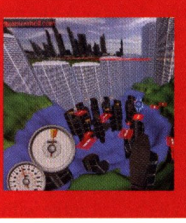
HOT DOWNLOADS

PCZONE

AAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

snipurl.com/aaaaaaaa

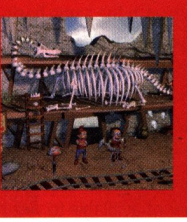
Jump off a building, avoid hitting anything, then parachute safely to the ground. Worth playing for the title, in case you have any friends who ask you what games you played last night.



GOBLIIINS 4

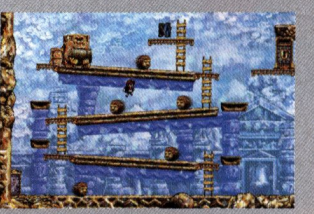
snipurl.com/gob4demo

Just in case you didn't believe that this game was as shit as we said, try the demo and learn the hard way. Don't say we didn't warn you. Because we did. Why do you keep on ignoring us?! We need a cuddle.



BEST OF THE REST

Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



BRAID
The console polloi had it months ago, but don't let that disgust you as this is a neat platformer with a cool time-based twist. Shame about the plot.
braid-game.com

BATTLEFIELD HEROES
Install *Battlefield Heroes* and join *PCZ*'s Nationalist army, and you'll get in-game money. Seig hei... er... Hip-hip-hurrah!
battlefield-heroes.com

BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC
Fly around the Pacific, shooting down Japanese planes before they destroy your ships. All the fun of WWII, with none of the blood.
battlestations.net

THIRD AGE: TOTAL WAR
The game Tolkien fans dream of: a *Lord of the Rings* mod for *Medieval II: Total War*! You can't play as trees yet, but we're holding out hope.
twcenter.net

Freeware

Skint, *Steve Hogarty* returns to an old friend

PCZONE ON THE DVD

This month, help out a broken coffee machine with confidence issues, collect iPods and cigarettes around Stockholm, career down a rocky underground crevasse and insert your shapely shapes into shapelier holes, then get dizzy with a vomit-inducing platformer...

PANDALAND

DEVELOPER A Swede
WEBSITE www.pandaland.nu

THIS IS ONE of those games that makes you feel like there's some inside joke that you're missing out on, whether or not there actually is.

Pandaland is a fun platformer in which you play a girl travelling, as all girls must, from left to right, collecting cakes, coffee, lipstick, wine, lager and pizza. You throw cherries at enemies who vary from busty women, to flash photographers, to dogs with projectile barking onomatopoeias which you must avoid.

The platforming itself is basic and bereft of any of the high-falutin' frills to which we're so accustomed. There'll be no wall-jumping, sprinting double flips and what have you, just the sort of rigid mechanics of NES classics. Which is fitting, as the whole thing looks like it just dropped out of a NES cartridge, with its giant pixels, reduced colour palette and two-frame animations dragging you back in time to a place where games were rubbish and cost just as much as they do today. You think you got ripped off paying £40 for *Fallout 3*? My mam paid £40 for *Donkey Kong Country*, and 20 years ago somebody would've paid the same for this game about jumping and cherries.

MENTAL REPAIRS, INC

Open wide and say 01100001 01101000

DEVELOPER Hulub **WEBSITE** hulub.ch/mentalrepairs.php

IN THE FUTURE AIs will suffer from anxiety-related disorders. And they won't have the luxury of Ruby Wax to raise awareness of their plight on beer mats, instead probably depending on an army of her preaching android descendants whose reign of terror occludes the mental health issues they're trying to communicate.

Mental Repairs, Inc is a point-and-click with the same basic concept of *Psychonauts*: you enter the psyches of various machines in order to solve their particular problems. It's a basic item-swapping adventure with a thankfully streamlined interface – radial menus around interactive objects present the options available to you, rather than having to awkwardly flip through "Look at", "Talk to" and "Walk to" actions just to pick up a horseshoe. A side effect of this is the lack of jokes when you try to talk to an inanimate object or sit on an angry goat. This would be a shame if this were a LucasArt's adventure, but a blessing in an indie title where incidental chatter is generally torturous.

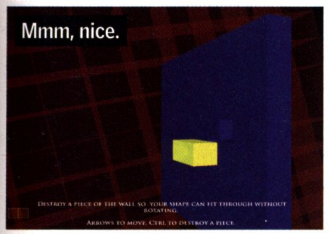
The dialogue that does exist in *Mental Repairs, Inc* is superbly written and the characters you'll encounter are cleverly portrayed, with befitting problems – an elevator with a split personality (one that wants to go up, the other down) being a favourite. Not that we took a vote. I'm just assuming that my colleagues will agree with me.

Mental Repairs, Inc is an accomplished title, and one that's hugely refreshing having slogged through the tide of head-up-arse mini-games people are pumping out. Self-publishing isn't an excuse to bin your personal shit filter under the guise of "trying new things" – a crime *Mental Repairs, Inc* is innocent of.

MINDWALL

And not a Dale Winton in sight...

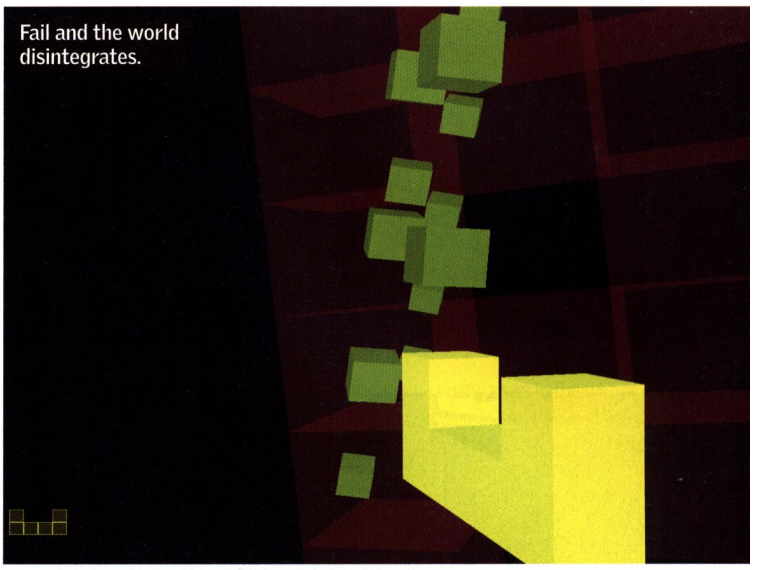
DEVELOPER Seth **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/mindwall

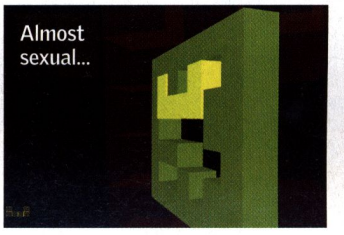


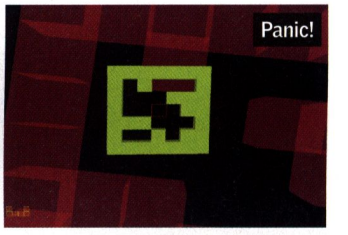
AN ENTRY IN the Ludum Dare 48 Hour Game compo (ludumdare.com), *Mindwall* sees you in control of a shape which you must pass unhindered through a wall without rotating it. You must remove a single block from the wall to create a hole of the correct shape to allow your shape to pass through. Here's the twist, there's only one correct block to remove, and the wall is moving towards you, forcing your hand. Alright, that's not much of a twist, certainly not up there with *Sixth Sense* or *The Crying Game* but it's fairly big news in the context of the whole shape-and-wall mechanic.

The premise here is strong, and the puzzle is a good one, but *Mindwall* falls down in that while the walls are randomly generated, there are only a handful of levels to play, each with their own shape. A mode in which the shape was randomly generated would be much appreciated.

While we're making demands, please get rid of that bizarre "wahh" sound the wall makes as it floats towards you. It's like being rushed by a Capuchin monk.







CAVERN KLÄMRISK

Proof that simple games are the best

DEVELOPER Brain Control **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/cavernklamrisk

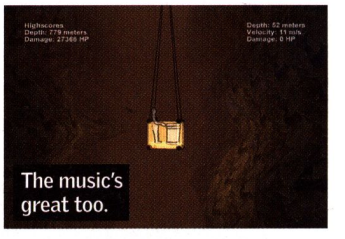
THIS IS MAYBE my favourite game this month, as having played so many tosh freeware releases recently – games that forego fun in favour of aiming to represent loneliness, or something that's just as pointless, pretentious and uninteresting – I've been itching to play something modest, basic and funny.

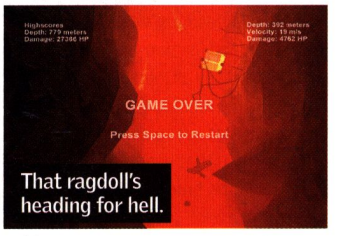
In *Cavern Klämrisk*, you control a man in a trolley descending through a crevasse at high speed. The aim is to get as deep into the Earth as possible, while avoiding having the ragdoll man fall out of the tub.

That's it, really. The tub gets faster, sometimes the ragdoll man is set on fire by falling magma rocks – but that's perfectly acceptable, even encouraged by the game – and high scores are kept to be beaten at a later date.

As the shaft gets deeper it gets thinner (ooo-err), with more jutty out bits than you'd like, until you're madly swinging left and right, held aloft only by sheer chance. Hitting the edges sends your blokey tumbling into the endless abyss below.

Now that's a great freeware game. What's not a great freeware game is a text adventure in which the more you play the less sense the text makes, until every word on the screen is profane, and people strut around the internet claiming it to be "provocative" or "deconstructive". More games with crazy music and ragdolls being set on fire, please, and fewer games about emotions, relationships and feelings.





WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

ROTATSPIN

DEVELOPER Nevcalian
WEBSITE snipurl.com/rotatspin

IF YOU WANT a compelling and nauseating platform adventure play *RotatSpin*. Your character is always running, and can be slowed or sped up with the left and right arrow keys, and jump with the up key whenever needed.

Hitting a certain tile will cause the entire level to rotate, and while this doesn't effect the level it disorientates and confuses the player.

In essence this is a platformer in which you'll die repeatedly and rapidly – each screen is a test of your reaction times, and death simply resets you to your starting position and increments your death count. Progression is frequent enough to sustain interest at least as long as it takes to make you feel like you have to vomit.

Extend

PCZONE ON THE DVD

David Brown **checks on the latest mods, maps and add-ons**

Empty and desolate. Just like the server list.

The Dark Angel herself.

PERFECT DARK: SOURCE

A mod that's far from perfect after all

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 **WEBSITE** pdark-mod.com/joomla

WE HAD A look at *GoldenEye: Source* in issue 207, so why not have a quick glance at *Perfect Dark* – the other big N64 game of its ilk to have a Source remake? As it shares a history with *GoldenEye*, it can't be that bad, right? Wrong.

This mod is highly disappointing on a number of levels, not least of which is the fact no bugger is playing it. This isn't uncommon when it comes to mods, but I thought there might be at least one server up, somewhere. But there wasn't.

The mod itself just feels unfinished, worlds away from the promise shown when Steve interviewed the developers way back in issue 175. Textures are missing, the hit boxes are terrible and the guns just seem bizarrely balanced, with the RCP being effectively useless (apart from the nifty, if glitchy, cloaking device attached to it). Most of the time, running around punching opponents was more effective.

Enlisting the help of a trusted reader we went one-on-one on all four of the mod's available maps, which aren't really designed for two-player duels, admittedly. They all looked good enough except for the missing texture issue on some big boxes – a strange error to leave in a mod that has been out and about for some time. Sadly, it just wasn't much fun.

GoldenEye: Source has its clipping problems, but *Perfect Dark: Source* takes this to a whole new level. Let me give you an example: I wanted to take a screenshot of my opponent jumping up and down while firing. I fired towards him as well, making sure to aim at least two feet to the left of his head. He goes down screaming and I bemoan the ridiculous clipping, ruining as it did my action screenshot.

With more players, *Perfect Dark: Source* might be fun, perhaps only in an "in it together" way, where the mod's problems are to be overcome and the best made of things. However, that isn't the most ringing of endorsements. As I mentioned above, you'd expect people to be playing if it was better. Alas, this isn't the case and the mod's server list remains barer than Newcastle United's trophy cabinet.

I wanted to enjoy this mod and I expected to enjoy it. We've featured it before and the original comes with all the plaudits you care to mention. Sadly, you shouldn't really bother giving this one a go, unless you really are a long-time *Perfect Dark* fan and have a group of equally obsessed friends who'd be willing to get involved on a user-created server. Perhaps there's some fun to be had there, but we guess it won't be had by many people.

THE THIRD AGE: TOTAL WAR

Tolkien's not spinning in his grave

MOD FOR Medieval 2: Total War: Kingdoms **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/third-age-total-war

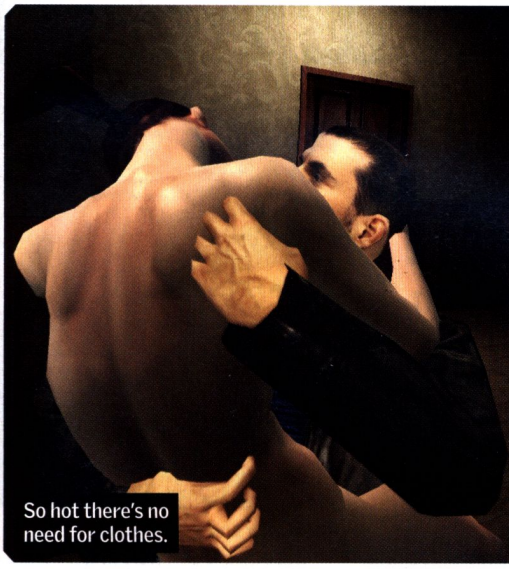
Did they have phalanx formations in *LOTR*?

A QUICK NOTE for those considering downloading this good *Medieval II* mod: you need the *Kingdoms* expansion to get it to work, and a hotfix that corrects an issue some people were having with a whited-out UI. Other than that, this mod is essentially *Lord of the Rings: Total War*, and is pretty much as cool as that sounds. The team behind it have clearly invested a huge amount of time to get the whole thing looking authentic.

All the factions you could think of are included, and you can fight the Ring wars with Sauron teaming up with Frodo's lads to give the elves a right shoeing, if that takes your fancy.

The campaign and battle AI has been reworked to "make the player's life much harder" and units can now only be recruited on a regional basis, so you can't just build the best units at any location – no dwarves in the woods of the Elven domain, for example. The AI gets a few bonuses to balance things a bit too, if it is doing badly.

In the heady world of *Medieval II* mods, *The Third Age* is right up there with the best of them.



So hot there's no need for clothes.

BOILING

Hot stuff coming through

MOD FOR Max Payne 2 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/boiling

FOR THOSE OF you paying attention, we spoke about *Mona: The Assassin* in issue 205, a *Max Payne 2* mod that allowed you to take control of the titular lady killer for some tight-trousered gunplay. The same people who made that are responsible for *Boiling*.

You play an anonymous mafia hitman who just happens to be married to Mona Sax (although we think it isn't actually Mona, but she was the only suitable female character model in the game). She spends her entire time in the game naked, so the gratuitous nudity of any *Max Payne 2* mod has been catered for amply here. You start out accepting a mission from a suited sleaze, before leaving your disrobed wife to put a cap in the dome of your assigned target.

The mod isn't very long. In fact, it's too short, even for a user-created bit of material. Having said that, it's well made and had a lot of thought poured into it. Besides, aside from the nudity, the best part of the mod involves the Angry Granny, a bonus part of the game where you clear the floors of the building using the old lady Max Payne bursts in on during the main game.

THE WITCHER MOD

Making a great game greater

MOD FOR The Witcher **WEBSITE** moddb.com/games/the-witcher/downloads/flashs-the-witcher-mod-10

THERE STILL AREN'T many mods out for *The Witcher*, with the only really notable ones being *Deception* and *The Wedding*. While both are decent, neither of these could be described as definitive, so the world still waits for a truly great *Witcher* mod to appear.

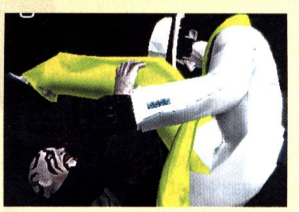
In the meantime, we have Flash's *The Witcher Mod*, which introduces a few new things to the vanilla game. These include higher difficulty levels, improvements to some game balancing aspects, a raft of bug fixes, and various other tweaks and additions.

If you didn't think *The Witcher*'s combat was difficult enough, maybe this mod will be worth having a look at. Really though, it probably isn't worth jt, in the long run.

Geralt's fire safety talk went very wrong.

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



MICHAEL JACKSON: SMOOTH CRIMINAL!

MOD FOR Resident Evil 4
WEBSITE moddb.com/games/resident-evil-4/downloads/michael-jackson-skin

Ever thought about what it would be like to beat up zombies while dressed as Michael Jackson's Smooth Criminal incarnation? We haven't either. But a modder who may be teetering on the brink of sanity has, so now you can do it. Great, eh?

SPLIT PERSONALITY

Uwe Sittig discusses his *Dirty Split* with *David Brown*

DEVELOPER Dreamagination **WEBSITE** dreamagination.org

Uwe Sittig
Overlord, Dreamagination

THE FREEWARE SCENE is, one could argue, the last real bastion of innovative adventure game design. Unless you count the slew of mainland European low-budget arse-fests that drop onto our desks every couple of months. There's often more love and dedication to the genre in a few minutes of a good indie adventure than you'll ever find in a full-price release. And, in *Dirty Split*'s case, far superior voice acting.

David Brown recently spoke to Uwe Sittig about how he sees the adventure game scene developing, what the reaction was to his game and whether the world needs a game that uses a Wiimote to simulate masturbation.

Q We're wondering: what does the title have to do with the game?

A Splits are a central theme in the game: the young couple in the beginning split up, the main character separated himself from his police duties and started working as a PI, and one character split off from his entire family and former life. Each time there's dirty business involved. So *Dirty Split*.

In retrospect, choosing that name might not have been the best idea, considering what some people associate with it. Next time I'll consider the implications more carefully and choose a title that can't be misunderstood.

By the way, I'm proud to announce our next game, *Dr. Jerkov the Weasel Teaser*. It'll be loads of fun to play, especially with a Wiimote.

What plans do you have for a sequel or are you working on an unrelated project?

We're working on other game projects right now that have nothing to do with *Dirty Split*, although they will also be set in the adventure game genre. Developing this first game was a very rewarding experience. We have learned a lot in so many different disciplines that we can now apply on more ambitious projects. Having a successful little project to show really helps in attracting talented people. *Dirty Split* was a one-man enterprise, and I'm excited about the games we'll build as a team full of talent.

There might be sequels to the game though eventually. I'd love to return to the '60s, and there are many more stories to tell in Baxter's world. I'd like to keep things fresh though and turn to some different themes before returning to *Dirty Split 2*.

What made you go with the game's distinctive art style?

I'm very fascinated by the works of Josh Agle aka SHAG (shag.com). They have a distinct '60s vibe, and every one of his paintings oozes style and atmosphere. Each one has a story to tell, yet the artwork seems both simple yet stylish. I was curious what his paintings would look like if they were animated, so I tried to keep to their style.

What influences did you have?

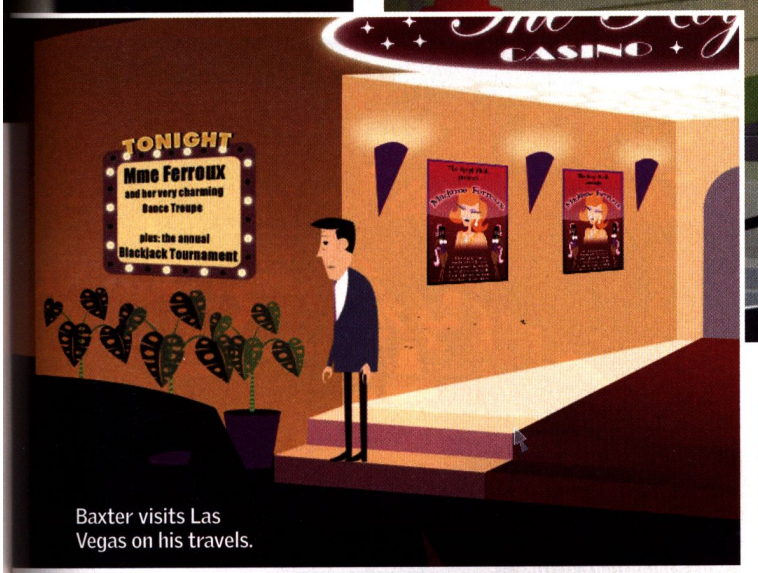
Mostly Agle's paintings, which were a great source of inspiration. I love the atmosphere of elegance and classiness they exude, and it was such a fresh setting for an adventure game.

I came up with a story pretty quickly and kept in the right mood by listening to jazz and lounge music: Ursula 1000, Pink Martini, Nicola Conte, Supreme Beings of Leisure... artists like that.

How has the game gone down with adventure fans?

The feedback I've received has been overwhelmingly positive. I started the

It doesn't get much seedier than this.



Baxter visits Las Vegas on his travels.

IN A NUTSHELL...
What the game's about and why you should get it

The plot follows Al Baxter, a private detective attempting to earn a living in the seedy underbelly of American society. Hired to investigate a murder and to prove the son of a wealthy personage is innocent of the killing, Baxter ends up entangled in a plot more fiendish than a whole room full of supervillains.

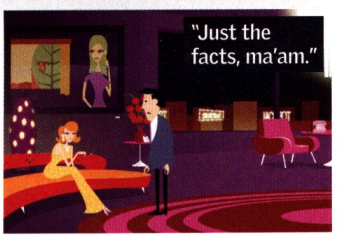
The feel of the game brings back memories of *Dragnet*, with the deadpan lead character delivering his lines in a similar fashion to Joe Friday. Baxter uncovers evidence to suggest that the son is innocent, but the dunderheaded cops are unlikely to believe him without more concrete proof, so a journey across the heartlands of America is required to solve the mystery.

On his way, Baxter comes across a collection of quirky characters and locations, with a whole host of film and game references along the way.

game as a little training exercise and showed some screenshots around. Before I knew it people were asking for more and suddenly there were really talented voice actors applying for roles in the game. When it was released I was really surprised at how much people loved it, and I received loads of positive emails and reviews. That alone was worth all the effort and the seven months of work it took to complete the project.

The main complaint about *Dirty Split* is that it's too short and too easy. The interesting thing is that many people wrote to me how they'd never touched an adventure game before because you can get stuck so easily and lose all your patience. And they enjoyed the game! So I hope I've helped to bring a few people around to the genre.

What's your favourite adventure game of all time and why?
Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge, because that was the first PC game I ever played, and it's timeless. I know it's boring to hear everybody say "*Monkey Island*", but that just shows how memorable the game is. But I love all the LucasArts classics, really, and it's great to see their humorous and fun spirit continued in today's games. Especially those made by former LucasArts designers like Telltale, Autumn Moon and Double Fine.



How do you see the future of adventure gaming panning out?
Things are getting worse, speaking of classic adventure games. As the gaming market grows the genre can't keep up and gets pushed into a niche. Today, adventure games' former monopoly – telling a good story – is rivalled, and sometimes surpassed, by games from other genres. And they do a lot better job of immersing the player while they're at it, and providing a more gratifying gaming experience with quicker and more frequent satisfaction.

However, much like traditional 2D animation features, classic adventure games have a style of their own, and they'll always have an audience with a taste for them.

Adventure games won't die, but it will become increasingly difficult for companies to produce them on a profit, and only quality games will have a chance to prevail.

However, there's also the independent game market. Adventure games are expensive to make, yet not as expensive as a full-fledged ego shooter that starts off using a $500,000 engine. Many indies have proved that it's possible to create really great games on a budget, and try out innovative ideas that would be too financially risky for a big publisher to run with. That's where the innovation and progress lies, and also a lot of hope for the adventure game genre.

"Classic adventure games will always have an audience"

Can we see your dirty split?
Not on a first date, you cheeky sod. PCZ

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

Riffing through time, space and the fibre-optic cables of your android heart comes a new edition of Online Zone, full of kooky funsters talking nonsense, people killing each other in *Team Fortress 2*, questioning the sexuality of *Star Wars* characters and wondering whether it is right that MPs should be allowed to claim lawnmowers and other things like that on expenses. Not the last bit, though. I made that up.

PCZONE 2009 ON THE BLOG

Pretty in pink, isn't he?

THE MAJOR TALKING point this month was whether Jedis could be gay, one of those quasi-existential quandaries that keeps us up at night worrying. Sleep time has never been easy, what with the call of various mind-bendingly addictive puzzlers calling us back to the mouse at all hours (damn you, *Plants vs Zombies*) but the very essence of a Jedi's core could be shattered if he was even thought to have a sex life.

What we were worried about isn't the fact Jedis could be gay – because we know that they could be – but whether the legions of... well... exciteable religious types in the USA might rise up and castrate George Lucas and his followers for allowing it to be the case.

The ramifications for Hollywood would be mind-boggling. Harrison Ford stoned to death in the street, Luke Skywalker nee Mark Hamill beaten wafer-thin, and Carrie Fisher hounded out of the country by zealots.

Elsewhere, we had Steve posting a picture of himself wearing some delightful *Plants vs Zombies* gardening gloves, sent to us from the lovely chaps over at PopCap. To follow us digitally, just head to twitter.com/pczone or visit our lovely website at pczone.co.uk.

FIGHT CLUB

Clubbing our readers to death.

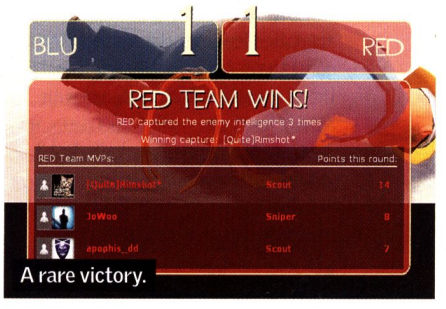
ANOTHER RETURN TO familiar waters this month, as the comforting environs of 2fort welcomed us back to their pillowy bosom, comforting those of us who get scared of more complicated *Team Fortress 2* levels. However, there were some upon whom this comfort was bestowed less liberally than others. Our very own scribe Steve Hogarty was constantly sniped, burned, stabbed and rocketed until he had enough and ran off to Nando's for a meal. We've heard of rage-quitting but that was just silly.

Steve's premature departure did occur after David had dominated him in the final seconds of a round, Steve being unarmed and defenceless at the time. This marked the first of many wins for the Blue team, the Reds demoralised by the loss of their leader to a chicken-cooking emporium.

Despite the best efforts of Omar, whose Spy shenanigans caused much consternation in the Blue ranks, and Bogie the Scout, the Blues consistently managed to drag the opposing flag over their threshold far more often than they had any right to.

Much of this success can be credited to the sterling Heavy work of our very own freelance enfant terrible, Chris Capel (aka The Tingler). Backed up by medics, he carved a bloody swathe through the Red ranks, leaving many an enemy tattered and bloody on the dirty ground. Impressively carrying the flag home on a number of occasions and garnering a number of achievements earned him the Player of the Match award. He was brought back down to Earth with a bump by Apophis_DD and JoWoo, who ended their domination by him within milliseconds of each other.

As usual, the group photo was a nightmare to take.



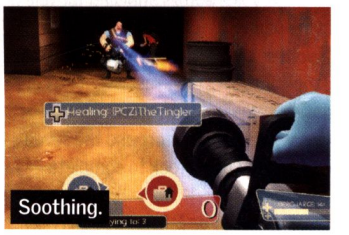
A rare victory.

Fighting back against the Blues were Omar and Bogie, the former performing remarkably well as a Spy, lying in wait for snipers and engineers before springing into action. Bogie, playing as a Scout, flitted about the place, trying to cause havoc. Sadly for him, he was dealt with severely by a combination of machetes and spanners.

David's initial choice of the Sniper class wasn't popular, despite some great shooting. Some were so annoyed by their inability to track him down and murder him, they resorted to childish name-calling (the only type of name-calling we personally approve of). "Coward!" and "Pussy!" were yelled in his direction, though he remained unperturbed. However, a quick change to Engineer and a nice turret/dispenser combo in the intelligence room soon put paid to those complaints,

Although we wonder whether shooting from the frontline as a Sniper or hiding at the back as an Engineer is more cowardly.

"They resorted to childish name-calling (the only type we approve of)"



Soothing.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Unlockable achievements in online games: yay or nay?

LIQUID_METAL : Item unlocks in multiplayer shooters are the best thing ever, as they give a sense of progression and a need to carry on playing. I just hope developers go further with the idea with huge tech trees, everyone starts of as a bog-standard soldier and how you progress along determines if you become a medic, commando, bunny snatcher or whatever. The days of the run, gun and load another level FPS are over, just look at the amazing success *Unreal Tournament 3* had. They have there place for a quick blast now and then but they just feel outdated.

THE STALKING HEAD: Yeah. I want fully customisable weapons and I mean fully, eg choosing barrel length and calibre, firing mechanisms and clip type/size etc. Oh, and the same could be done with armour and gadgets.

JOWOO : When you first start playing *Call of Duty 4* in standard modes, you're at a slight disadvantage, but it's not like being ganked in an MMO. You can compete competently once you've got a hang of an M16.

BRAX: If you play hardcore mode, all the weapons basically do the same amount of damage. Only variations are in terms of fire rate and bullet spread, so really the unlockable weapons are a matter of preference.

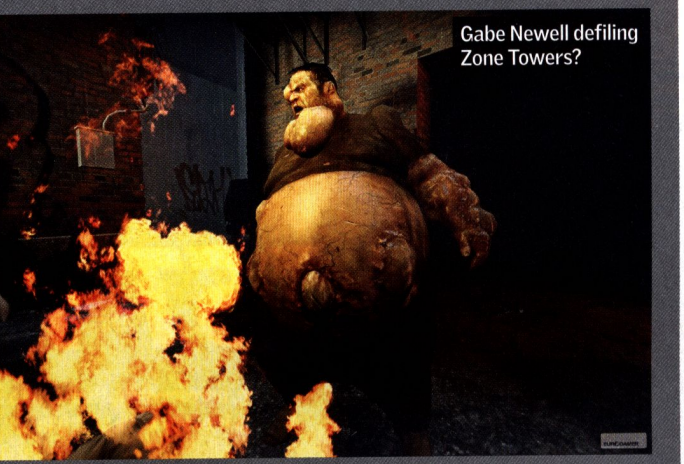
SUNSCRAMBLE: In *World at War,* unlockables are nothing but a pain in the bottom for the first few hours of online play. It was the special sights you could unlock for each weapon that made the difference. Those tasty optical jobbies make such a difference to the assault rifles and sub-machine guns that being denied them for so long caused no end of frustration as a noob.

SHLOBADOV: I don't like unlockables that give a player an advantage because they're only available for people that have put in the hours.

Custom unlocks: cruel on newbies?

ZONE CHAT

Amateur booming



Gabe Newell defiling Zone Towers?

WITH CAPABLE FREELANCER Chris Capel firmly installed in one of the Zone Towers sarcophagi, the trio of intrepid Zoners ventured into Zone Chat's netherworld wondering what ills might befall them. After a quick chat about whether *Plants vs Zombies* would make a better Fight Club game, the talk commenced.

Tingler started things off by confusing the other chatters with a mention of a Nazi guy in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* by the name of Rimshot, but it turned out he was talking about something else and his fevered brain had conjured up an entirely different set of circumstances that just happened to be Indy-related.

The reason he mentioned Rimshot was because a chatter had that as his handle, prompting a discussion as to whether it was a reference to basketball or a late-night toilet accident. Please write in and tell us if you happen to know.

Fight Club regular Flatline decided to take the time to remind us of the insanity of people who decide it's a good idea to squeal or bleat down their microphone over the in-game voice comms in *Team Fortress 2* and its ilk, raving about how ridiculous it is and how it just makes them look even more stupid.

Finally, reader Mark wondered if Gabe Newell of Valve had ever entered Zone Towers and "boomer biled" over the staff. The answer is no – he's much too classy to do that.

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 joined a silent order of monks – then join other PCZ readers on these public servers. We might even join the rabble from time to time.

WHO'S WHO
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea

BATTLEFIELD 2
85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2
85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...

MULTIPLAY

Retro zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

THE LOST VIKINGS

DOES ANYONE out there remember a game development company called Silicon & Synapse? They once produced a wonderful platform/puzzle adventure called *The Lost Vikings*, the subject of this month's *Retro Zone*. Sure you don't remember them? Ah, perhaps you know them by their more common name: Blizzard Entertainment. I'm also going to shock and probably appall you all by stating, unreservedly, that *The Lost Vikings* is easily their best game.

Regardless of this controversial view, there's little doubt the game remains a classic of the genre. Indeed, if you glance back at issue 207, you'll see that we compared the intriguing-looking *Trine* to *The Lost Vikings*, so its influence lives on. But, I hear you cry, what is it actually about and what do you do in it?

You take control of a trio of Norsemen who are captured by an alien being intent on imprisoning them in an intergalactic zoo. Naturally, these men of the frozen wastes of Scandinavia don't take kindly to being kidnapped and so seek their freedom in the only way they know how: getting involved in some puzzle-based platforming.

Each Viking has an individual ability: Erik the Swift is the athlete, able to run and jump to reach certain areas. Baleog the Fierce wields a sword and is able to kill enemies or strike objects, while Olaf the Stout carries a sturdy shield, which can be used to protect against weapon turrets, to provide a portable platform for Erik to leap from, or act as a makeshift, if heavy, parachute.

The missions require you to use these abilities to manoeuvre the Norsemen through the level and, while frustrating, it rarely causes a single moment of pure taping-mice-to-your-shoes rage. The second game wasn't as good, but it was still a fine title.

What perhaps *The Lost Vikings* most recent contribution has been to PC gaming is that it allowed Blizzard to begin to hone the development skills that have come to dominate the gaming world today. Best of all, though, it is still great fun to play.

Vikings causing you pain? Try Anti-Norseman Anadin.

But how? Get the Vikings home again...

If you want to help these Scandinavian fellows on their intergalactic journey, your choices are limited.

The best bet is to get out your dusty old copy of the game and insert those two disks into your PC. If you lack a floppy drive, head over to the Blizzard Classic Arcade website and play a bit of it online.

The only other option is to visit an Abandonware site. But that's wrong.

dosbox.com
The download page of good old *DOSBox*.

Thehouseofgames.net
Details of old games and stuff we can't talk about here.

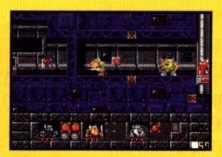
blizzard.com/us/blizzclassic
A microsite with three of Blizzard's old games, including *The Lost Vikings*.

The Three Amigos How to escape from an evil alien zookeeper with your beard intact

1 FLY HIGH Use Erik's athleticism to leap obstacles, reach difficult ledges and cross large gaps.

2 DO OR DIE Remember that he's defenceless, so you'll need the other characters who will have to protect him.

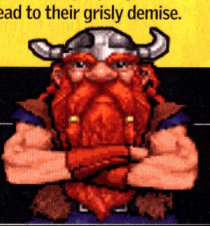
3 SHIELD WALL Olaf can use his shield to block enemies, as well as absorb their laser blasts and other missiles.



4 BLADE RUNNER Baleog can wield a sword or a bow, making him the only character who can eliminate enemies.

5 MANUAL LABOUR Any of the team can manipulate machines and objects, although only some will be accessible to all.

6 END OF DAYS Failing to use your characters properly will lead to their grisly demise.



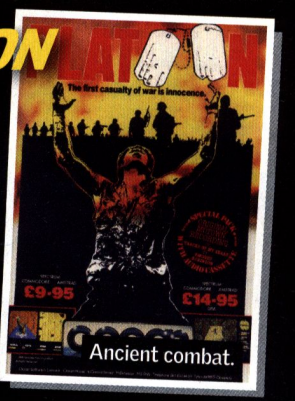
Now & Then

MODERN WARFARE 2 vs PLATOON

Modern Warfare.

THESE GAMES AREN'T as similar as we would have liked, but it was difficult to think of an adequate comparison. And, if you think about it, the *Platoon* game was modern when it first came out on the Spectrum. It also had some warfare, so that's good enough for us.

Theoretically, in *Platoon* you got to shoot ridiculous amounts of Vietnamese soldiers and, eventually, the treacherous Sergeant Barnes in a brutal, grenade-spewing climax. In *Modern Warfare 2*, there are no characters that have anything to do with Tom Berenger anywhere, which is just a criminal oversight by the Infinity Ward team. So clearly *Platoon* was a better game even if, in reality, it was dull, boring and hard. But it had Tom Berenger in it (kind of) so it automatically wins.



Ancient combat.

Play it! Get out your camocream and M4, and prepare for war

1. World of Spectrum is your first destination again for more Speccy magic. It's your one-stop-shop for 48 and 128k goodness. You can find it at worldofspectrum.org.
2. If you are a Luddite who lacks the internet, prepare yourself for the only sensible option – recreating the hellish jungles of Vietnam in some nearby woods.
3. If you want to make things even more realistic, why not play the game on a laptop while you're buried under a pile of rotting corpses, or while sat in a burning village?
4. Perhaps it would be best if you played *Modern Warfare 2*. We take it all back, it is clearly better than *Platoon*. The game that is. Not the movie. That was excellent.

MAMEframe

GOLDEN AXE

SWIPE, SWIPE, SWIPE, swipe and jump, swipe and so on. Honestly, why did this ever seem like the height of combat game sophistication? Yet, despite the utter repetition, the game is fun, like pretty much every one of these side-scrolling combat games. At least, fun for a while.

I found myself getting bored after a few levels, which is why the screenshots don't encompass all areas of the game. I also kept accidentally hitting the space bar, which made my character do the 'blue bottles in the air' nuke attack.

One nostalgic feeling that was evoked by the game is a distinct sadness that these games aren't made any more, the closest being flashy on-rails shooters made for console nutjobs. Anyway, they'd probably be utter and complete rubbish, but there's always something to be said for teaming up with a friend to clear a screen of thugs/skeletons/whatever.

Having said that, if the recent remake was anything to go by, maybe we're better off without a resurgence of the genre.

What is MAME?

The *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator* runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of *MameUI*, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

Blow them up...

...or clobber them.

By the power of Grayskull.

Back in the day

REBELSTAR II

By Adam Glick

TURN-BASED GAMES are fucking awesome. You can stuff your real-time strategy up your ADD-crazed rectums, as far as I'm concerned. Evidence is clearly provided by the wonderful *X-Com* series, even though some of the new ones were shabby, and this gem from Julian Gollop.

Rebelstar II kept me going through numerous days of solitary Spectrum playing. It was so difficult just to even get to the alien spaceship and do whatever it is you were supposed to do there that I'm not sure I ever actually finished it.

That's what you kids are missing now – games that are so difficult, they shatter your mind into a thousand pieces. One level, loads of aliens, *Aliens*-themed heroes, and a difficulty level that should have come with a health warning. Classic strategy gaming at its finest.

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them

Really worth playing we reckon.

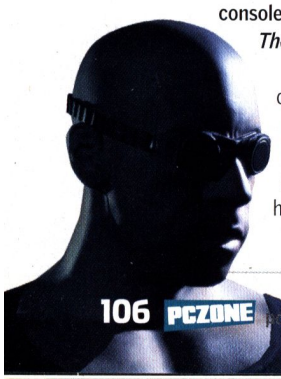
Vin Diesel, taking names.

"Foreshortening. Deal with it."

CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

Sneakin' around: ***Chris Capel***

BEING ONE OF the many who was put off playing *Escape From Butcher Bay* by the licence (surely the opposite of what licences are meant for?), my first foray into a Starbreeze game was console-only shooter *The Darkness*.



This game was dark, moody and oppressive, where the good die, the bad die horribly, and the worst of the whole lot is your character. I wonder if the team pulled the legs off spiders.

As I learned from *The Darkness*, and which is carried on here, Starbreeze are masters of writing and characterisation. These *Riddick* games really show the *Chronicles Of Riddick* movie for the disorganised mess it was. Characters are the scum of humanity, but believable scum. While the stories are basically just Riddick escaping from places, but there are loads of interesting sub-plots going on.

Fortunately the game is good fun to play too, although it does get on my nerves the way the game forces certain scenarios on you. The best bits are when you can choose between stealth and gunplay. Having the choice taken away is like snatching a Twix away from a toddler and giving him a Penguin biscuit instead. It's good, but not as good as the Twix.

That said, there's an incredible amount of variation on show here, so it just never gets boring. One minute Riddick's disembowelling corrupt guards, then he's blowing away Borg-like drones, then he's stomping around in a mech... in space! Most games would be happy to do any one of these genres this well.

Granted *Dark Athena* has loads to do, plenty of violence, good writing, animation and acting, and the coolest anti-hero around, but it's not as good as *Butcher Bay*; missing a lot of that game's adventure-like moments, but still giving lots of brutal fun. I just wish there was more Twix and less Penguin.

VERDICT: Being bald is fun

BALDUR'S GATE SERIES

Kobold killin': *Richard Cosgrove*

ABOUT ONCE a year I dig about in the back of my wardrobe and pull out a pile of DVDs. These contain the *Baldur's Gate* series – my favourite games of all time. I then spend an evening impatiently installing all of the games, and then as many mods as I can without breaking them.

The reason for this is a challenge I set myself after *Throne of Bhaal* was released: that I'd take a character from *Baldur's Gate* to the end of *Throne*.

The problem is each of these games are so intricate, take long to play, and are just so plain bollocking hard (especially *Tales of the Sword Coast* – pure sadism is that add-on), doing this could take about a year. And a lot of that time will be taken up with fighting with dragons.

You don't meet any dragons in *Baldur's Gate*, but you do in *Shadows of Amn* and *Throne*. And they're hard to kill. Make that, "practically impossible to kill". For example, in *Throne* there's one I had to fight – I had no other option. It slaughtered my entire party. By beating its wings.

How fucking insulting is that? My entire party – a team who could take on armies without sweating – was killed by a giant lizard that didn't deign them important enough to bite!

I don't know how many times I've attempted to complete the *Baldur's Gate* series. But I'm determined to finish it this time round.

And to give that bloody dragon the arse kicking it so richly deserves.

VERDICT: **Epic, in every way**

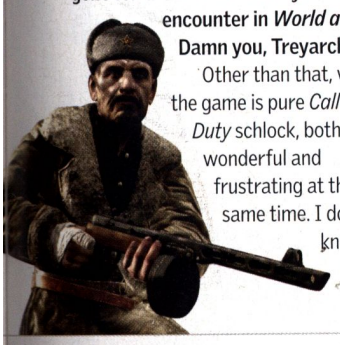
"Dragon noises."

Copper armour fails again.

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

On the front line: *Adam Glick*

MY GOD, IS that tank bit shit or what? That's what everybody who's played *World at War* has turned to a friend at some point and said, a look of horror crumpling their features as they did so. It isn't as if the series didn't already have tank bits for Treyarch to look back at and go, "Yes, that worked well, we'll go with that". No, they decided to ditch all ideas previously shown to have worked and gone for the bastard child you will encounter in *World at War*. Damn you, Treyarch!



Other than that, well, the game is pure *Call of Duty* schlock, both wonderful and frustrating at the same time. I don't know if it was just me, but I felt the battles veered between "I need to move to get things to happen" and "Hey, where'd everybody go?" Yes, I know *COD4* was like that too, but somehow I didn't notice it half as much in there. Having said that, shooting Nazis is more satisfying than maiming random Arabs and Russians. Oh, and the Nazi Zombies bit pulls down the pants of *Left 4 Dead*'s Survival mode, before inserting a large radish with the word "pwned" carved into it, right up the latter's fundament.

Verdict: **Tanks = Rubbish**

Tanks for the memories. (Sorry.)

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

CHO-KONNIT

Recently been playing *I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Blood Bowl* fantasy football game, *Chaos League*. Great laugh, great gameplay.

In the first match of the league I whacked a Wood Elf team 5-2. In the closing minutes I changed tactics and stamped on as many of their players as possible.

MAD_AL

I am now playing, no, enjoying *Titan Quest*. Its stunning visuals combined with its genius of RPG goodness, keeps me coming back for more. It's the most re-installed game I have from Steam.

ANDY_MONAHAN

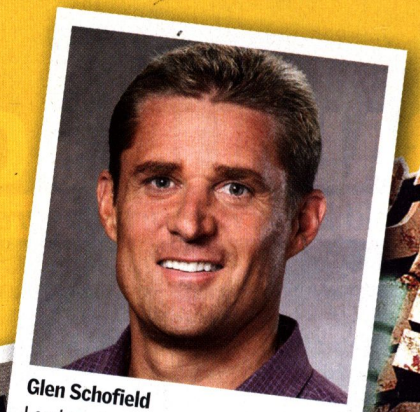
Sins of a Solar Empire: what an awesome game! Easy to pick up yet as complex as you want. Going to try some of the mods featured in the magazine as well.

DEAD SPACE

Steve Hogarty meets Visceral Games in a cold, dark place

ONCE EA REDWOOD, who were once probably something else, Visceral Games are proud of what they've achieved with *Dead Space*: a gruelling, exhaustingly frightening survival-horror game which smacked of the best bits of *Event Horizon*, *Silent Hill*, and *Resident Evil*. And those are great things to smack of, if you're going to smack of anything.

We caught up with lead producers Glen Schofield and (the amazingly named) Chuck Beaver to grill them on exactly what made *Dead Space* scary, how sounds made it scary, how its controls made it scary, and how the guns made it awesome. Take it away, guys.



Glen Schofield
Lead producer, *Dead Space*

Chuck Beaver
Lead producer, *Dead Space*

01 PITCHING THE TENT

Glen Schofield: "When we went to EA we said 'Let's make *Resident Evil* in space' or an *Aliens*-type game, as there weren't many games in the action-horror genre. This was over three and a half years ago, with the idea existing for five. We had a concept that was different enough from other survival-horrors, and it made good business sense because EA wasn't in that genre. So it wasn't a hard pitch to make."

Chuck Beaver: "It helps that you had a really clear vision too. You had it before the pitch and all the way during the production of the game, so we were never wondering what we were going to do."

GS: "I think we did a pretty good job! We were reading the reviews of *Resident Evil 5* and a lot of them compared it to *Dead Space* and how we 'actioned' the genre up a bit more, we made the controls a lot more friendly. I think *Dead Space* is certainly scarier than *Resident Evil*. We spent a lot of time trying to scare the player and keeping the tension up. I think we stack up well against them now!"

02 SOUND BLASTER

GS: "I remember sitting down with Don Becker, the audio director (who I actually pulled off another project because I think he's the best), and saying that this is the one type of game that sound effects are important. In *Dead Space* a quarter of the game is the sound and the mood."

CB: "I'd say higher, like about half."

GS: "Sometimes it even means no sound, and that's a conscious choice, that's a big part of it. The decision to make Isaac silent was conscious and controversial. We went back and forth on that. On the original one-page design document it said that we wanted the character to be like Gordon Freeman. We thought it would help with the immersion, but the team was split down the middle. In the end we stuck with it."

CB: "There's not many third-person games out there where you can see the character and he doesn't talk."

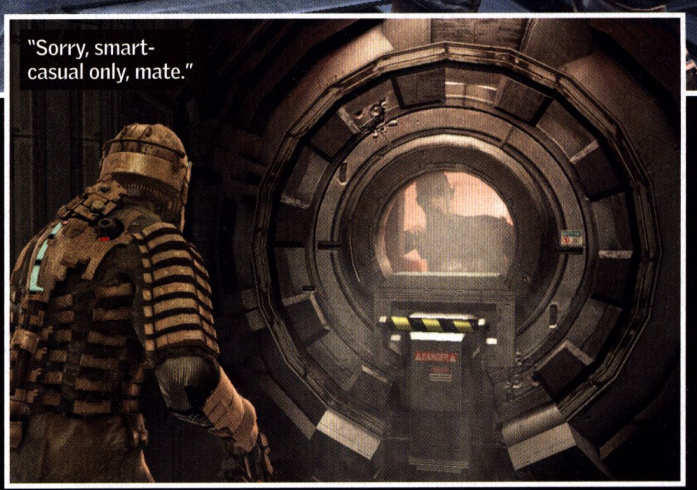
03 CONTROL SCHEME

CB: "Other design choices, like the controls, which took a lot of wrangling on the team to get our controls away from the traditional survival-horror template – so everything was sluggish, you didn't turn fast, everything was a little bit slow to make you underpowered. That didn't really work in the end for us so we amped up the controls, and to compensate for that we have a lot of other pieces in the game that keep you from being overpowered so we don't exit the survival-horror genre.

"Things like that were very conscious decisions in order to keep you in the action all the time. Due to our controls being a little more fluid, we had to keep the threat more immediate and keep you at risk longer and more tensely."

GS: "We spent a lot of time on getting Isaac's controls right, and were tweaking right until the very last minute. We spent a lot of time on some features, like the drag tentacle. Originally we thought that'd take about two weeks, and ended up taking several months. We had to choose whether to continue to do that until it's perfect, or cut it. We had to cut some other stuff, but we knew in our head that even though it didn't fit in the schedule we could get this right because it was important to get in the game.

"I think the biggest thing we wanted to do is evolve the genre a bit. We wanted to make it a bit more accessible. *Resident Evil* is a great game, but it took about 45 minutes to get really used to the controls. We wanted something that the average gamer could get into and not only play it within five minutes and have it feel familiar, but also feel that it wasn't your typical shooter or action horror."



"In *Dead Space* a quarter of the game is the sound and mood"

The plasma cutter is the best gun, overall.

04 THE GREATEST VIEW

GS: "The camera is another area we tweaked the living hell out of. We finally came to the over-the-shoulder one for a few reasons. It felt claustrophobic enough that you'd still have that little bit of horror, but you could still see enough of the screen because of course you don't have a HUD, you had the rig on his back to see health and energy. You could empathise with the character a lot more too because you could see him."

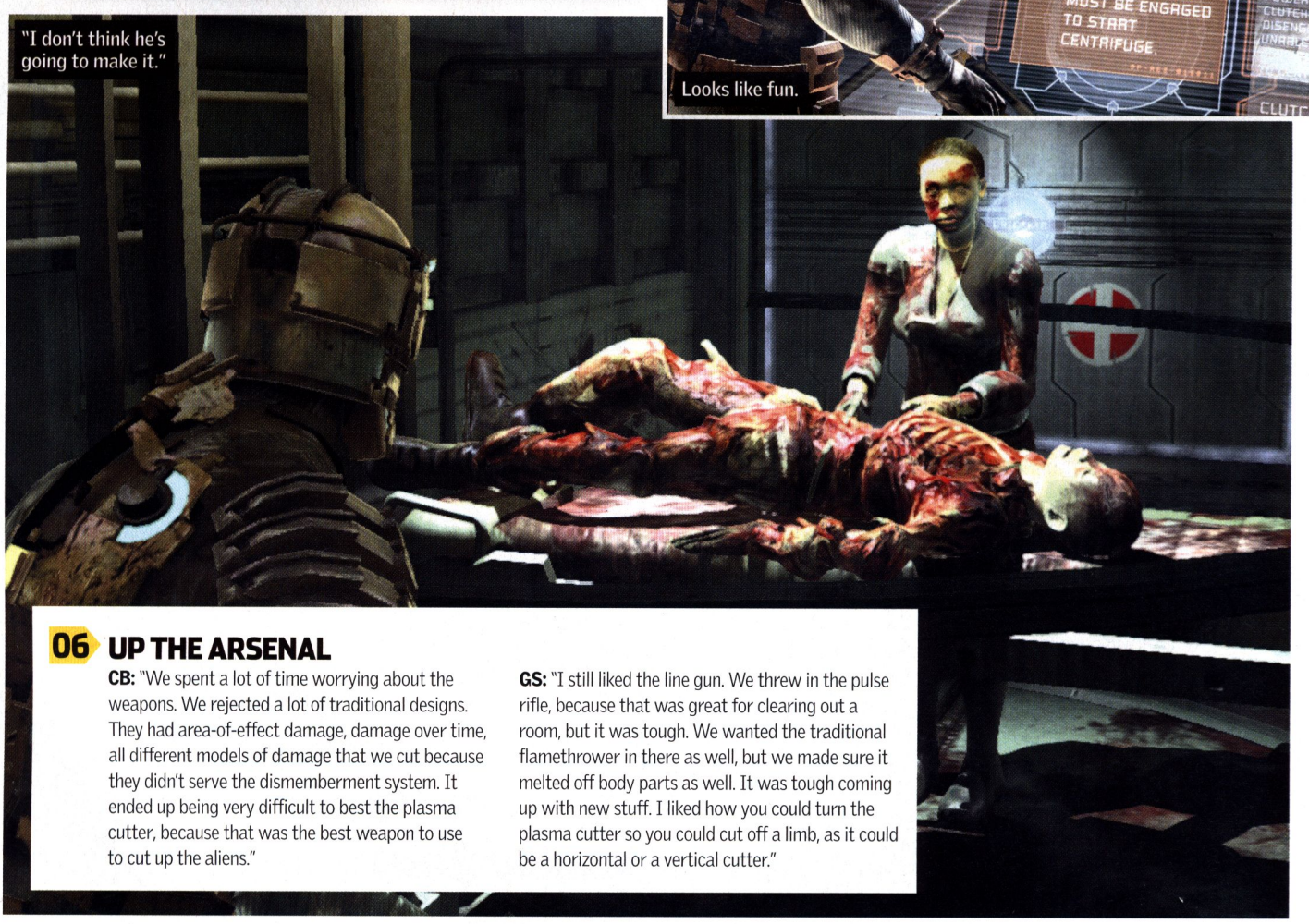
CB: "We did consider the possibility of a first-person perspective, but we put Isaac on the screen so he could experience the gore part of survival-horror. He could get dismembered, he could get attacked, and every enemy could kill him in a different way – some of them were almost an Easter Egg!"

05 KILLING FLOOR

GS: "I think the Divider has a good killing animation. His head would jump on your head, rip it off, then stick its tentacles down your neck and puts its head on your neck. It then takes a few steps, turns its head to look at the camera and shambles off. I also loved the Twitcher. He slices you in half, there's about half a second of hesitation, your top half falls off then your legs take a couple of steps before they keel over.

"In the early stages when we talked about it, we wanted to be to dismemberment what Burnout is to crashes! Making the choice to do dismemberment resonates throughout the whole game. Now you have to have fantastic physics, your art direction of your enemies have to look like things that can be dismembered, the weapons have to be able to dismember, pieces floating in zero-G and all that. We said that if we were going to do it, we were going to do it right."

Looks like fun.


"I don't think he's going to make it."

06 UP THE ARSENAL

CB: "We spent a lot of time worrying about the weapons. We rejected a lot of traditional designs. They had area-of-effect damage, damage over time, all different models of damage that we cut because they didn't serve the dismemberment system. It ended up being very difficult to best the plasma cutter, because that was the best weapon to use to cut up the aliens."

GS: "I still liked the line gun. We threw in the pulse rifle, because that was great for clearing out a room, but it was tough. We wanted the traditional flamethrower in there as well, but we made sure it melted off body parts as well. It was tough coming up with new stuff. I liked how you could turn the plasma cutter so you could cut off a limb, as it could be a horizontal or a vertical cutter."

Isaac's armor is based on church designs.

07 CHARACTER CREATION

GS: "We wanted something that was unique, but at the same time we were trying to come up with our art direction. Believe it or not the Ishimura's look is based on medieval European churches, with the huge buttresses and the ribbing motif, which extended to Isaac's suit. We had about 25 drawings of just that until we had one that we liked. We then had the upgrades, which took about six to seven drawings apiece to get right.

"When we finally built it in 3D, we saw the issues we didn't have with the drawing. It was not an easy suit to come up with, but if you look at it now pretty much everyone knows that it's *Dead Space*. There are at least a hundred drawings!"

"The Ishimura's look is based on medieval European churches"

"You're not coming out of there until you've done your homework."

"Stop it! That tickles!"

08 HUD-DLED MASSES

GS: "From the beginning it was 'no HUD'. There were times that people said it can't be done, and we said 'No, it can be, please figure it out'! This is definitely one of the parts of the game we're really proud of. When you're going up against *Resident Evil*, one of the pillars of the industry, we looked at it and asked ourselves how we could innovate on every level. So when it comes to the HUD, having no HUD is a great innovation!"

CB: "It was part of a conscious decision towards survival-horror, keeping you immersed in the world full-time. We didn't want anything that would break the fourth wall – like not having a traditional HUD on the screen or cutscenes – that was a huge decision. A lot of people wanted to take the camera and do some horror tricks with it, but we wanted to keep you in the world and scared." PCZ

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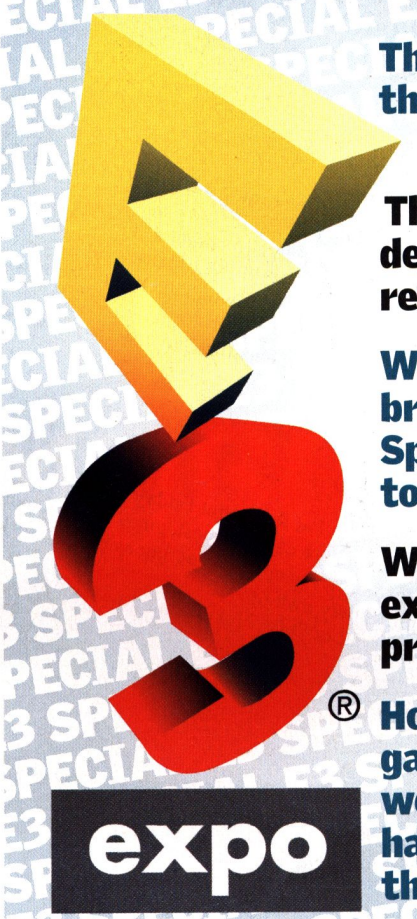


The biggest news from the world's biggest videogames event!

The world's top developers will reveal all!

Will Bethesda's brand-new FPS from Splash Damage live up to expectations?

What is Valve's exciting new project?

How many games can we get our hands on in three days?

HE'S BACK!
STEVE HILL'S E3 REPORT RETURNS!
Find out if he gets out of bed before midday!

MASSIVE REVIEWS!

FUEL!
CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD!
WOLFENSTEIN!
JUMPGATE EVOLUTION!
ANNO 1404!
OVERLORD II!

Only in the next issue of PC ZONE!

ON SALE 8 JULY

All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change.
PC ZONE is a fickle mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

3D REALMS
REALITY IS OUR GAME™

Minutes for the meeting on Wednesday 4th of June 2003
FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY

revious minutes:

- That woman who kept wandering around outside the office turned out to be the mailman (mail-lady?)
- police advise "no cause for concern" and "stop calling us"
- As of this week nobody has owned up to creasing the cardboard cutout of Duke Nukem on the neck so that his head keeps flopping down - WE ARE NOT DROPPING THIS
- CCTV has been checked and it was DEFINITELY Steve who won the Office Chair Racing semi-finals last week, as George left his chair and ran the last ten yards.
- "Donut Friday" has been moved to Wednesdays but as the leaflets have already been printed it's still called "Donut Friday"

Discussed:

- George: Donuts are really good today, thanks to Pat for Donut Friday idea.
- Funny cat videos. The ones Quinn sends round are easily to best, guys. Keep standards up.
- Cardboard Duke head is still floppy, plastic ruler temporarily acting as brace. Works for now but the person responsible will be punished unless they own up.
- Seriously we only have one cardboard cutout of Duke Nukem and now it's ruined.

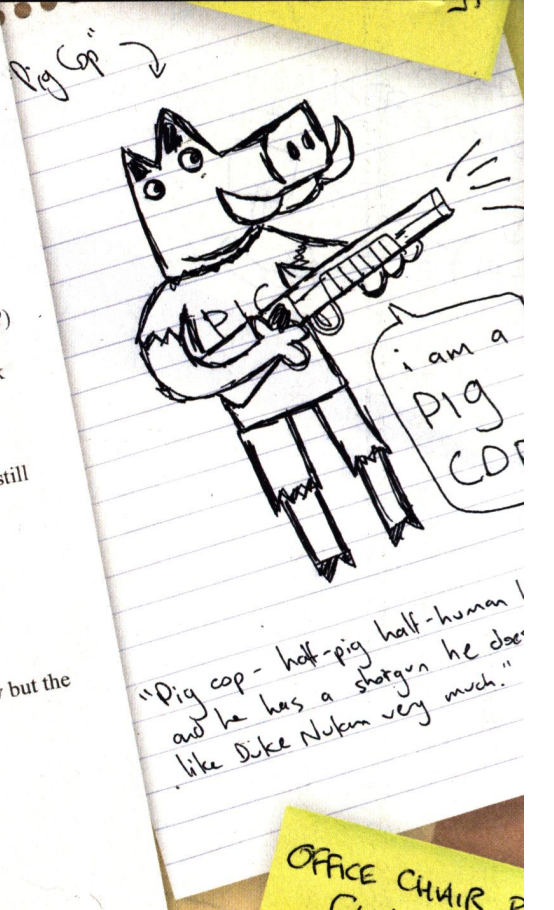
Duke Nukem Forever progress report:

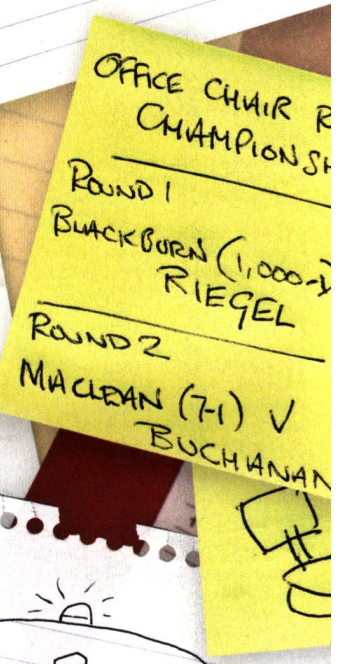
- Scott drew a pig cop.
- Andrew drew a picture of prostitute.
- Scott had level idea: titty bar in orbit around planet of sexy women, besieged by randy aliens.
- Suggestion from Bryan: engine change?
- George to look into starting from scratch with CryEngine.
- Suggestion from Bryan: engine change?
- George to look into start-
- Suggestion from Bryan: engine change?
- George to look into starting from scratch with the Doom 3 engine.

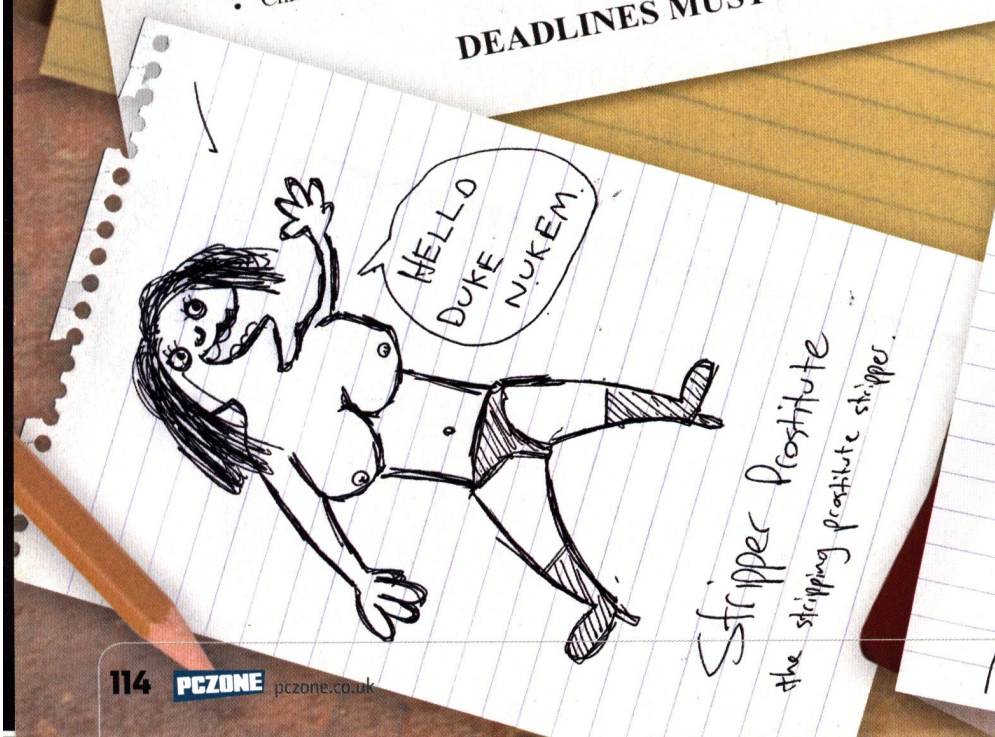
To do:

- Can we get a giant Duke Nukem symbol on the floor at the entrance to the office? George to action.
- We ran out of 3D Realms paper again. (Someone is printing out Donkey Kong Country walkthroughs on it???) George to action.
- Also 3D Realms pens, let's get some 3D Realms pens. George to action.
- Deadlines must be met!
- Chris's chair to be fixed in time for Office Chair Racing Finals.

DEADLINES MUST BE MET! >:(







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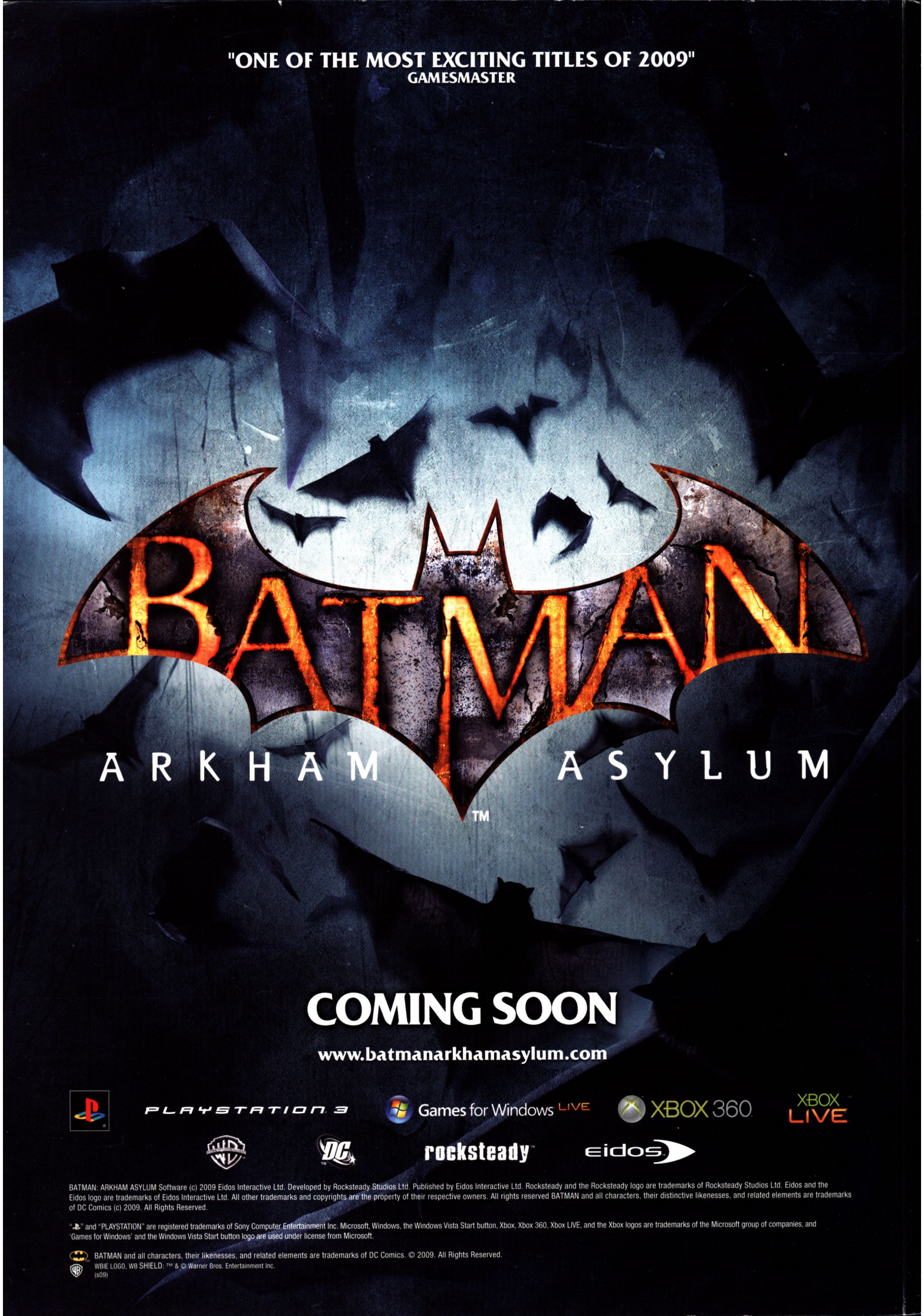
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