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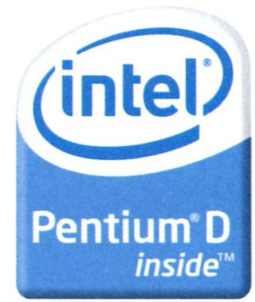


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COVER STORY

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SUPREME COMMANDER

Total Annihilation was one of the most important RTS games ever put on the PC. But it has never been bettered. Until now...

DOMINIK DIAMOND 146

The games I love most are the ones with no grounding in real life or responsibility



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR
A STAR WARS RTS BETTER THAN FORCE COMMANDER! WOO!!

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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 58 words... Big old stompy robots, Steve steals a horse and "I'M BRIAN BLESSED AND I LOVE PC ZONE!" Plus, we have a fiddle with Lara, Agent 47 and Tommy the Prey Native American, then we hit some homeless people over the head with a plank in *Condemned*. Finally, we make Brian Blessed references on every other page. "ZONE'S ALIIIIIIIVE!"



FUNNY BUSINESS

WHILE PISSING MYSELF laughing at *The Simpsons* again the other day, it struck me how many videogames miss the opportunity for humour. *Call Of Duty 2*, *Quake 4*, *F.E.A.R.* – all cracking action titles, but with less chuckles combined than Jim Davidson on an off-day. Of course, I always guffaw loudly at any ultraviolent ragdoll bodies flung about on my monitor, but it's more slapstick Laurel and Hardy than *Yes Minister*...

When humour is used well, it transforms a mundane scene (or game) into something that connects you emotionally to the characters and situation. I *like* games that just entertain me, but I *love* games that have genuinely made me laugh out loud such as *Half-Life 2*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *GTA: Vice City*. Compare the ham-fisted introduction of unfunny tubby Mapes in *F.E.A.R.* to the deft strokes of humour painted by *Half-Life 2* in the first lab scene with Alyx, Barney and Dr Kleiner, which fleshes out characters and exposition without resorting to clumsy dialogue.

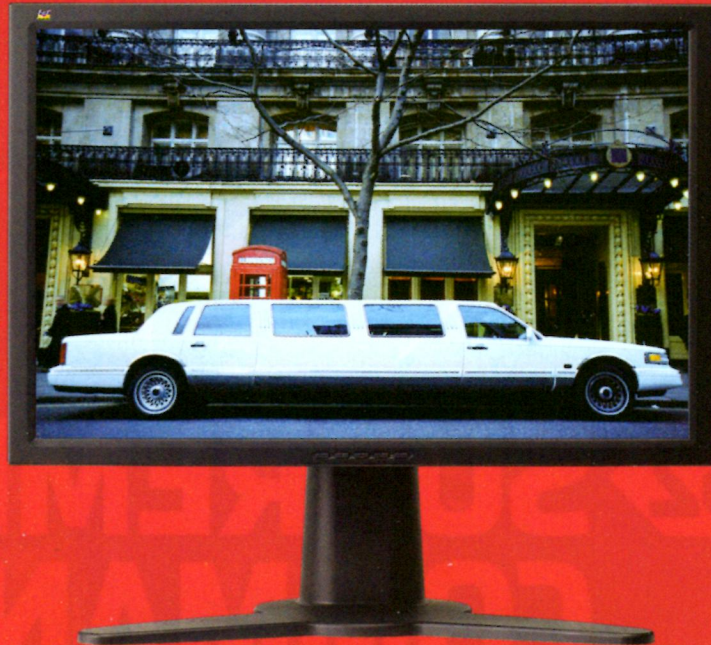
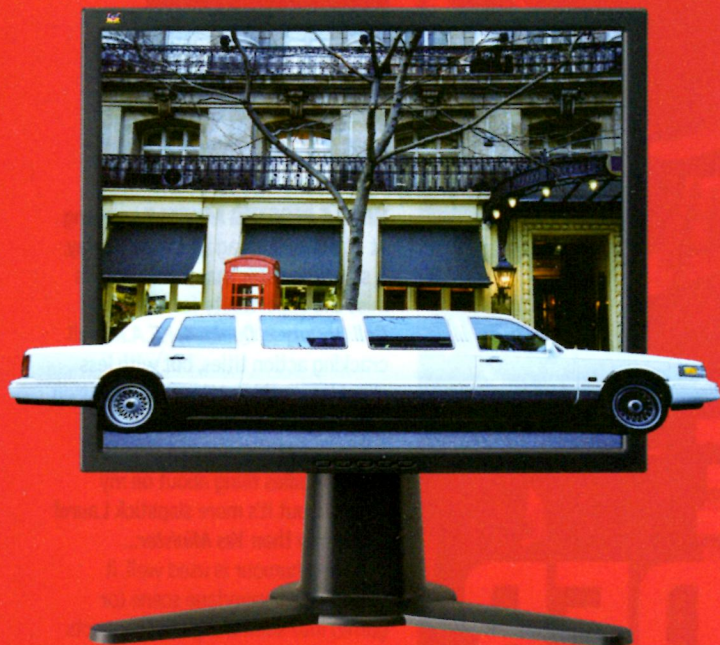
I don't think enough importance is given to the production of funny game scripts by developers and publishers – but are they completely to blame? After all, are most potential buyers of videogames going to be knocked sideways by flashy state-of-the-art graphics or the fact that the game is chock-full of cracking gags? Here at ZONE, we do at least attempt to bring you the full story – we've recently picked out the fact that games such as *Psychonauts* and *The Movies* (in the right hands) are hilarious titles. So I guess it's up to you, dear reader. Are you game for a LOL?

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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It's potentially the greatest RPG experience of our times. And we've played it...

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FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware

Steve Hogarty digs deep, but only finds some lint and an old train ticket...



DISAFFECTED

Be persuaded, instructed and...



ALTER EGO

Real life isn't us? Try this.



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FREWARE

Flying high in *Air Buccaneers*, being Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang in *GoldenEye: Source* and Steve Hill's *NeverQuest*

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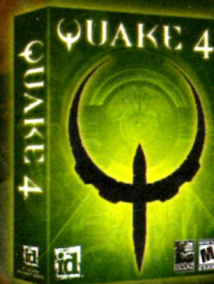


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UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

The biggest shrine of J-list celebrity since *Celebrity Fit Club*



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor

AGE 36

LIKES Kaiser Chiefs

DISLIKES The exchange of currency

FANCIES Diva J

FAVE GAME *Half-Life 2*

PLAYING? *Crashday* and *Call Of Duty 2*

After months of media speculation, the *PC ZONE* reshuffle has finally happened. Having stood on his front doorstep with a battered red case smiling for the cameras, our glorious leader came into work and laid down the law. Porter: Deputy. Wallace: Reviews. Hogarty: Freeplay. "Ner mur time fer fun 'n' games!" cried our supreme commander as he ushered in a new, more streamlined, age of *ZONE*. A battlecry that was answered by Hogarty missing a vital flight to America, Wallace staying at home for a week and a half, and Porter using his new-found power as a beverage-retrieval bargaining tool. How times change.



SUZY WALLACE

Wounded Soldier

Suze has just taken a record one-and-a-half weeks off work – having done the groundwork by coughing a lot, she went on to blame it on a chest infection. The tan must be a coincidence.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
Far Cry (still)



DOMINIK DIAMOND

Children's Entertainer

This month through his XFM duties Dominik met Noel Gallagher – Noel wasn't visibly impressed, but Dominik assures us that he was "smiling on the inside." Very, very, very deep inside.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
City Of Heroes



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff Writer

Continuing to make the most of his teenage years, Steve fell asleep for three hours in sub-zero temperatures on a roundabout in a children's playpark near Brighton. Thankfully, he didn't die.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion



STEVE HILL

Friend of Brian Blessed

This month, Hill sat on a sofa next to Brian Blessed and listened to him sing *Nessun Dorma* before getting him to boom "PC ZONE's alive!" into a microphone for our DVD. Life is good.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
Dark Age Of Camelot



WILL PORTER

Deputy Editor

To universal excitement, this month our faithful postman delivered Will a signed photo straight from Jossy from 1980s televisual epic *Jossy's Giants*. Spuggy from *Byker Grove* is next on his hit list.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
Condemned: Criminal Origins



RICHARD GRACE

Quitter/Surrender Monkey #2

A slide down a Tube escalator, a thud and a brief moan of drunken pain signals the departure of art editor Rich Grace. Please bid adieu to the forger of the redesign and all-round top chap.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING?
Some bizarre design program

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... The hiring of Log, a substantial orange harvest and antibiotics

STUFF THAT'S BEEN OF NO HELP WHATSOEVER... Passports being in Haywards Heath, Halifax valuations and musical teddy bear guts

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

MORRISSEY TICKETS 41 Mins London Underground deny Will his Mozza fix through their ineptitude. Blind anger ensues

EMPIRE AT WAR 110 Mins A good *Star Wars* RTS? Is this some kind of trick?

RACOONS WITH GIGANTIC TESTICLES 84 Mins The odd cinematic tastes of Ms Suzy Wallace

THE WALKERS CRISP REDESIGN 14 Mins We don't like it, we're not happy and we're cancelling our subscription

THE PRO EVO CUP 11 Mins A shock defeat for Sefton in the semis

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK 14 Mins Yes, it was one of the greatest PC games of all time

HOGARTY'S MISADVENTURES 136 Mins He's done what? He's where? What?

NEW FORUM SOFTWARE 10 Mins The countdown to the annihilation of the old forums proves remarkably exciting

BRIAN BLESSED 189 Mins We've never had so many opportunities to talk about Brian Blessed ever before

WHERE'RE MY F*ING MAGAZINES?** 99 Mins We really should stop hiding Sefton's magazines

WIN!

Tiny Compo. Give us the correct answer to the mini-question on the cover and you might win some fabbo prizes. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (165), *PC ZONE*, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. The first correct entry laid by the prize competition chicken wins. Closing date: April 1, 2006. The winner of Issue 164's Tiny Compo was er... Well, Steve sent the prize to somebody but has lost the postcard now and can't remember the name. He can't remember what he sent them, either. But it was something.

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

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This is a classic action-adventure game which we described as "a near-seamless gaming experience... Ubisoft has kissed a frog and it's turned into a prince". *PC ZONE* verdict 84%



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LETTERS

Like *Points Of View* – but with *Jamie Sefton*, not Terry Wogan



BETTER THAN SEX

I couldn't help but notice that at the bottom of the *Lula 3D* review in the 'how it stacks' section, you state that sex with a beautiful woman rates at 90 per cent. Interestingly, you gave *The Movies* 95 per cent. This is a sad indictment on the *PC ZONE* staff – would they really rather play what I consider a mediocre tycoon game rather than say, have sex with Kylie Minogue, a beautiful woman? How will we game players ever shake off our nerdish perception if these are the kind of statements we must live with?

Mike Agar

Good point Mike. A quick poll of the team shows that we'd actually all



rather have it off with Kylie (or Brad Pitt in Suzy's case) instead of playing *The Movies*. *Half-Life 2* though...

SHHHH...

Games today are becoming more and more action-packed – *Call Of Duty 2*, for example, has spectacular adrenalin-pumping battle scenes with incredible explosions, bullet decals and blast details. But what about the quiet moments? The calm before the storm or the aftermath of a battle? Veterans among you will remember the patrol missions of *Operation Flashpoint* – sure, this sounds boring, but I've honestly never experienced immersion like that in a game before or since. Another example is *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* – after one particular mission, I repaired a German staff car, piled my squad in and went for a joyride! I hope other developers follow these examples and give gamers a chance to relax in between every apocalypse a videogame throws at you.

Jack Kenny

I hate to keep banging on about *Half-Life 2*, but one of the most memorable moments from the game for me was in the driving sequence along the coast.

I stopped off at a deserted house on a cliff and wandered about exploring for about half an hour, with only the sound of the wind for

company. The overwhelming sense of desolation and loneliness was incredible – and completely immersed me in the world. Games with non-stop action are fine, but you're spot-on about the importance of the sound of silence. Anyone else have any memorable 'no action' moments from games?

ROMERO MMO

I'm shocked – John Romero is doing an MMO game? From the man behind classic shooters *Doom* and *Quake*, surely this is akin to your favourite band suddenly changing musical direction (Spinal Tap's jazz-fusion era springs to mind). Does this mean Romero has run away with the goblins? Is the FPS genre running out of ideas? Help me!

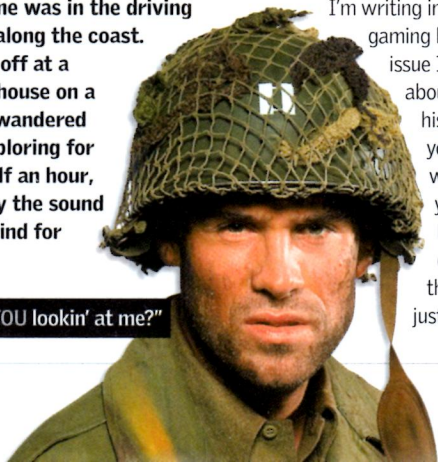
TimK

As you'll see in this issue's What The Hell Happened To... (page 142), Romero is a huge fan of *World Of Warcraft*, but we don't know yet that he's turned his back on shooters. Romero told us that in 2000 he was working on "a different kind of network game similar to *Guild Wars*, it's going to be the first FPS MMO." Although he eventually abandoned the project, Romero's latest game could well be in a similar vein – and before you say it, no, it won't be *Daikatana: Online*. We'll hopefully find out more later this year...

CAN'T LIVE WITH THEM...

I'm writing in to save Will Porter's gaming life, as he wrote in issue 164 that he was about to move in with his girlfriend. I warn you friend, it could well spell the end of your adventures with ElfieMoon in *World Of Warcraft*. I know this pain as I've only just managed to talk

"YOU lookin' at me?"



WIN!

ONE OF THESE!

You need a good graphics card. We need letters. (Good ones, mind, not rubbish ones like 'PC ZONE rulez, can I have a graphics card please?')

Well, serendipity now! The two needs have collided, right here, right now. Write us a letter today. If it wins Letter of the Month, we'll send you a prize tomorrow. Hurrah!

Letter of the Month

TIME TRAVELLER

Attention *PC ZONE*! I've travelled from the not-so-distant future bearing news of your own fates – should you dare to hear them. Jamie Sefton shall return to his acting career and become a major character on *Emmerdale* for three years before being killed off and subsequently taking a part in *The Bill*. Lady Luck shall smile upon Porter as he wins the lottery, but unfortunately struggles with a crippling junk food addiction. Young Hogarty becomes a comedy writer up there with Doug Naylor and Wandy becomes supreme ruler of our planet. Unfortunately it isn't all good news for the *ZONE* team, however, as Suzy becomes a wanted criminal after swearing at some kiddies, Steve Hill tragically drops dead after a non-stop three-day session of *World Of Warcraft 2* and Dominik Diamond goes blind from masturbating too much. Oh, and *Duke Nukem Forever* is great by the way.

Andrew Raynes

The Bill? Fantastic! If you're from the future you'll already know that you won a graphics card for this letter. Congratulations – next time, bring back some playable code of *Duke* too...

SAY WHAT?

Would your staff rather play a mediocre tycoon game than have sex with, say, Kylie Minogue?

When you put it like that, Mike Agar...



This should be an option in all football games: you should be allowed to foul people to the point of breaking limbs, and be able to fight people too – induce a mass brawl, beat up the fans etc – that'd be heaven. **Gilbert**

There are far too many matches in *PES5* where it's impossible to score. I even had an open goal, shooting from about two yards out, yet the keeper stopped it. I'm sure it's scripted. **minamoto**

That's the beauty of *Pro Evo* – you might have a stormer of a game but not get the ball in the net. Then your opponent gets you on the counter-attack and scores – like real football. **HasAnyoneSeenMyPipe**

Don't think it's scripted. I regularly play against one of my mates and we're the same standard – some games are goalless draws, some 4-0 to me, some 4-0 to him. Funny old game. **Paulod**

Join in the forum fun at www.pczone.co.uk



my girlfriend into letting me get an Internet connection after a year and a half! *WOW* has just been sitting on my shelf collecting dust since its release – the pain has been unimaginable! Think of the many other titles I've missed too. *Coronation Street*? Pah! Where are all the guns, headshots, frags, armour, swords and epic items? For the sake of ElfieMoon, stand your ground man! If you do move in with her, build your bastion to your gaming glory and mark your territory. Put up those pictures of ElfieMoon, and never back down, or you too may be condemned to live a single-player life like I have... **Karl Williams**

I tried to ask Will recently how he was getting on with his significant other, but he was too busy dashing out of the office at breakneck speed mentioning something about "having to buy new curtains at IKEA"...

MORE GAME FILMS!

Over the last few years I've developed an obsession with films based on games. I don't know what it is about them, but I just can't get enough. Everyone I know thinks I'm mad, telling me they're all

rubbish, but I simply don't agree. Even after the 43rd viewing, Lara's shower scene still puts lead in my pencil; The Rock's first-person rampage in *Doom* gets my pulse racing like a whipped greyhound; while Milla Jovovich's zombie-bashing exploits scare me more than fantasising about my mum. I've had so much stick from my mates that I'm starting to think I'm the only person in the world who appreciates these game-based celluloid masterpieces. Are there others like me, or am I alone? **Neil Spencer**

Nope, sorry Neil – you're alone mate.

ION STORM RETURNS!

I'm frustrated and filled with holy rage! My favourite game is *Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3*, and my friends and I play against each other every weekend.

However, I can't find a trace of it anywhere else. I believe I may have the only copy in the UK (my friends have to come over to play). I want to know why it was left to drift away into the murky depths directly after release. Do you have any idea why it flopped so spectacularly when it's such a brilliant, if not the best, multiplayer RTS ever? **Robert Martin**

You probably own the only copy in the world Robert. *Dominion* was Ion Storm's first game, released way back in autumn 1998. In our issue 67 review, Wandy gave it 43 per cent and said: "You're faced with a grim, desolate landscape – the game itself." So not one of our favourites. The critical mauling, the fact that Ion Storm is no more and *Dominion's* age explains why you can't find it any more. If you love futuristic RTS titles, this issue's cover game *Supreme Commander* (created by Chris Taylor of *Total Annihilation* fame) is the one to watch.

SWITCH OFF

Dominik Diamond was spot-on with his article in issue 165 about the lack of

MY IRON JUNG

For three years *ZONE* staff members have worked to craft renowned creator of analytical psychology, Dr Carl Jung (1875-1961), out of metal. A fount of knowledge, fed with gaming data from past and present, he exists for your enlightenment...



Send your gaming questions and queries to drjung@pczone.co.uk

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q What's happened to some of the best game series like *MechWarrior* and *Freespace*? **Robert Stonier**

A FASA studios, part of the Microsoft church of Gates, is pastor of the Battletech Universe – and unfortunately Mr Stonier, there are no PC plans to build on 2002's standalone *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries*. However, the *Mech* community continues to thrive, and have been releasing unofficial expansions and high-definition graphics packs ever since. Visit www.mechstorm.net for more *bzzt* details. *Freespace* too lives on through fan programming and total conversions – but poor sales of *Freespace 2* make a third game distinctly unlikely.

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q I'm a tragic *Stargate* nerd – is the *Stargate* game completely dead in the water? **Matthew Richards**

A I'm afraid it is. After the public fracas between JoWoD and Aussie developer Perception, the programmers took up a lonesome road without funding – and now the money has dried up and the project summarily upended. However, all is perhaps not lost. MGM has ordered an MMOG, to be known as *Stargate Worlds*, and a developer named Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment has been entrusted with the perpetual online existence of MacGyver and friends. I'd say it's *bzzt* perfect online roleplay fodder.

LETTERS

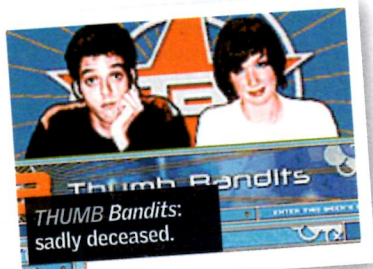


@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

games coverage on TV. A year or so ago, there was a TV show on Channel 4 called *Thumb Bandits* which was based on gaming, presented by Iain Lee. It took the piss out of crap games and consoles and showed great clips of upcoming titles. The show only got a late slot though, which meant few viewers and so death. BBC Scotland's *videoGaiden* sounds great – but until someone comes up with a good national gaming TV show, we're stuck with a magazine-only diet. Harry

I just can't wait for the day when the *Newsnight Review* team have a discussion about the latest *Unreal Tournament* – but I reckon it's going to be a long wait. Videogaming is still viewed as geeky and unfilmable,



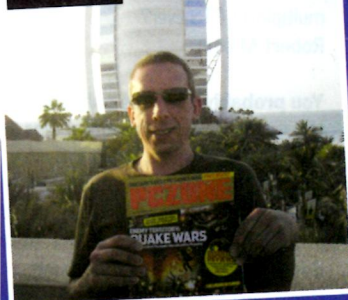
despite the fact millions of us play every day. TV companies seem willing to put endless snooker tournaments and reality shows on, but refuse to have even a half hour dedicated to a funny, irreverent but non-kiddy look at gaming. *PC ZONE TV* anyone?

NOOBS

I guarantee that anyone reading this has been called a 'n00b' at one time or another while playing a game online. The term is derived from 'newbie' as you'll know, but has been twisted from a positive and understanding word and is now used in a derogatory way. But how about this for a concept? Instead of just being called 'n00b' and given abuse, how refreshing would it be to be offered help and guidance? I'd appreciate it – many a time I've gone into a game where I didn't

PC ZONE Around the World

PC ZONE – an oasis of fun in the desert.



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!

know what was going on. I have, though, also found myself being warmly welcomed when joining a game. We were all a n00b once, so let's all treat new and/or inexperienced players with the respect we would have wanted ourselves. Let's help them grow in the gaming community, where taking part is worth far more than winning – though that's a bonus, of course... Matt Davidson

Absolutely Matt, which is why we have our regular **Fight Club** (page 122) that gives you the chance to join in online games and become a welcome member of the *PC ZONE* community. No matter how bad you are at PC games, you'll have a chance of giving us a hiding every month...

CRIMINAL

I've just bought *Crime Life: Gang Wars* – and it sucks! It's one of the worst games


I've ever played. The storyline, graphics, the music and the shit rapping – it's like this game was made overnight. *Crime Life* also tries so much to be like *GTA* and it fails miserably. You gave it 38 per cent, but I'd give it a Dump award!

Greg Moroney

May that be a lesson to you Greg – always consult our definitive reviews before you splash your cash, or you risk buying a real pile of (c)rap.

ZONE SHRINE

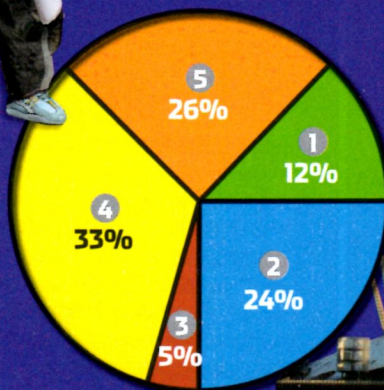
I think we can all agree that those horrible beige PC cases make us shudder. Unfortunately, I've still got one and am trying to find ways of sprucing it up. Has *PC ZONE* made any stickers so I could turn it into a living advertisement/tribute? Jamie Anderson

If you bought issue 159, you could rip off the special plastic 'moving' *PC ZONE* logo and stick that on your PC. Failing that, try cutting out our gorgeous faces from the 'Meet The Team' page (p9) to create a fun *PC ZONE* head collage. 



The Big Question

What's *Hitman*'s most effective disguise?



IDIOT'S CORNER

Real calls from real idiots...

PCZONE

Hello, *PC ZONE*?

IDIOT

Yes, I'm having trouble with my computer that I bought yesterday. Can you help?

PCZONE

Right. Well, I'm sorry but we don't answer technical queries over the phone. Can you send an email to Wendy?

IDIOT

Wandy?

PCZONE

Yes, Phil Wand. He's our technical guru.

IDIOT

Sorry, never heard of him. (Hangs up.)

TIMESHIFT

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PC-DVD MARCH 24TH 2006

WWW.TIMESHIFTGAME.COM

www.uk.atari.com



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An aerial view of a sci-fi battle scene on a green planet. A large, dark, rocky cliff face dominates the right side, with a sandy beach at its base. The ocean is a vibrant blue. The green landscape is filled with numerous small, colorful units (red, purple, white) and larger structures, including a prominent red and white base. A long, narrow, grey, segmented ramp or bridge extends from the cliff down towards the center of the frame. The scene is filled with dust and smoke, suggesting intense combat.

COVER STORY SUPREME COMMANDER

COVER STORY

SUPREME COMMANDER

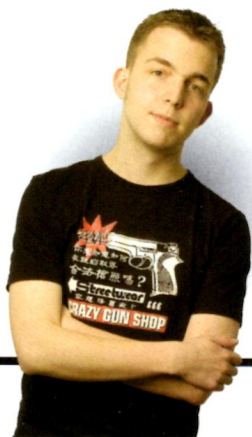
Simple, beautiful and quite revolutionary – Chris Taylor's follow-up to *Total Annihilation* opens the rule-book then starts ripping out pages...



It isn't every day a game like *Supreme Commander* comes along: a game that looks at its competitors, has a think, then starts rewriting the strategy rule-book. Chris Taylor did it before with *Total Annihilation*, and now he's doing it again on a global scale. Ground units, air units, colossal naval units, nuclear weapons and some massive great big stompy robots: *Supreme Commander* is taking the stuffier parts of the *C&C* canon, stacking them up and gleefully lighting a match. After a period in which the only innovator in the field has been *Total War*, Gas Powered Games is upping the ante...

PAGE

52



PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

DEPUTY EDITOR Will Porter

Me and my C:/Drive...

SEEING AS I'M newly anointed with more power than mortal man can recognise, this month I want to concentrate on the pressing issue of game installation folders. The case in point being: why? Why in the name of holy fornication, do publishers INSIST on demanding that we install games into a folder that bears their own name? From the highest worldwide conglomerate to the lowest back-street game shifter working out of a garage in Düsseldorf – every single solitary publisher seems to believe that we all have a catalogued and burgeoning collection of all their games that we want safe and secure in their own folder, and then subdivide between developers. How very, very precious.

I estimate that if I could claim back every time I changed C:\Program Files\EvilPublisher to my, admittedly less imaginative, C:\Games, then I'd have at least ten minutes of my life back. A time in which I could otherwise have created some work of art, discovered religion or at least eaten a Twix. Don't even get me started on each publisher wanting their own directory in the Start Menu either – that's just inhumane greed. If *Minesweeper* and *Solitaire* can sit comfortably in the same folder, then I'm sure that *Far Cry* and *Quake 4* can do the same without summarily imploding at having to share a bed.

And don't get me started on being asked whether or not I want to read a goddam readme file. Or, on an unrelated note, the way that BOTH *Doom 3* and *Quake 4* make you quit out to change the screen resolution. Why? Why god? Why?

A NEW FELLOWSHIP IS BORN

Codies snaps up *The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar*Publisher: Codemasters | Developer: Turbine | lotro.turbine.com

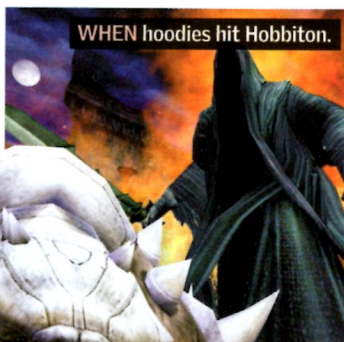
TURBINE'S SNATCHING AND grabbing of the MMO rights for the written word of Tolkien last year has resulted in all manner of increased ratcheting, sawing and banging noises coming from its HQ in Massachusetts. The end product: *The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar* which has just been given a publishing deal from Codemasters.

Based on the books rather than Peter Jackson's celluloid masterpieces, the game is set for a late 2006 release and will allow *Lord Of The Rings* fans to become immersed in an ever-evolving recreation of Middle-earth. With the game not constrained by the content of the films, there'll be plenty of extra areas, characters, enemies and weapons for you to discover and enjoy. Budding

QUIET. Peaceful. Serene.



WHEN hoodies hit Hobbiton.



adventurers will be able to explore the legendary land of Eriador (no, we've never heard of it either) – which lies between the Misty and Blue Mountains – as well as Rivendell, Barrow Downs and Bree.

The plot will revolve around the growing threat emanating from the evil realm of Angmar, from which Sauron's forces spew and enslave the free people of Middle-earth. And, as if you couldn't have guessed, it'll be up to you and your fellow online adventurers to thwart his evil plans.

Turbine is promising that there'll be plenty of variation when it comes to creating your hero. Not only will you be able to combine race, class and traits while forming your online persona, you'll also be able to forge your very own Fellowship to stand a greater chance of succeeding in missions such as saving Hobbit villages, clearing Dwarven mines and purifying Elven glades. With close to a year left of development, *Shadows Of Angmar* is certainly one of the best from the current gaggle of incoming *WOW* challengers.

A definite challenge for the Ten Years Younger team.



STOP PRESS!

Mummy Returns

A Cuba-based sequel to *Boiling Point* is in the works at Deep Shadows. You never know, maybe the company will get round to finishing it this time.

Cameron Online

James Cameron's next film, which he describes as a 'crazy balls-out sci-fi flick', is set to get a MMOG set in its universe before the film hits. Colour us intrigued.

Hardcore Pawn

LoveChess: Age Of Egypt has been released by kerr-azy Dutch developers. Ever wanted to watch the dog-headed Egyptian Gods copulating? Well, now you can.

22

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

We steal five hours of play from the jaws of Oblivion, and are left begging for more.



26

"I'm Brian Blessed!"

You certainly are. And you're also narrating *Rome: Total War - Alexander*, aren't you? "YES, I AM!"



52

Supreme Commander

Big stompy robots? Check. Nuclear weapons? Check. Genuine revolution in RTS gaming? Check.



CHAMPING AT THE BIT

Ailing management series set for rebirth?

www.championshipmanager.co.uk | ETA: Spring

A YEAR AGO it was hard to believe we'd ever see another decent *Championship Manager* game. Or even a half-decent one, come to think of it. However, having played the latest build of *CM2006*, it seems that this comatose giant could be about to be reawakened.

The brand-new match engine is the most notable improvement, with multiple viewing angles and 3D player icons helping to create a far more believable recreation of the beautiful game. Better still, our tactical changes seemed far more visually obvious than in *CM5*. Other tweaks and improvements in the latest iteration include new player management features that make it more obvious how your players are feeling, while offering you a variety of ways to deal with your gripes and needs.

While it's still clearly some way short of dislodging *Football Manager* from the management throne, *CM2006* is looking



like a marked improvement over its lacklustre predecessor. Look out for our definitive review next issue, when we'll find out if the game's potential can be realised – or whether it's just another own goal for Eidos.

We come in peace (Shoot to kill)

Star Trek: Legacy warns of Klingons on the Starboard Bow

Publisher: Bethesda | Developer: Mad Doc Software | www.bethsoft.com

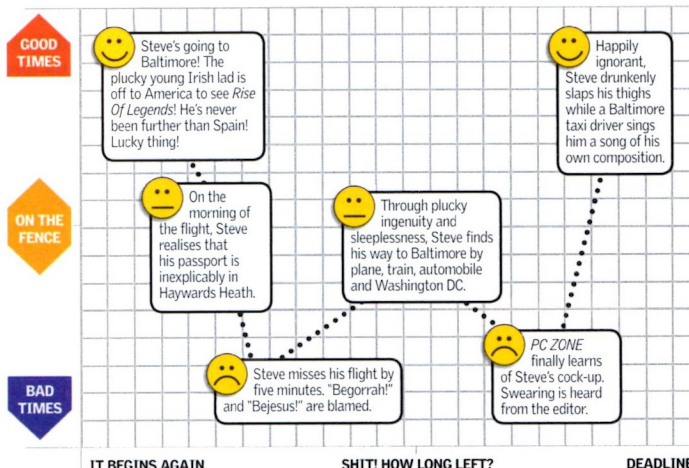
AFTER THE EVIL canning of *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Trek* fans haven't had much to shout about bar how lovely 'lovely' Jolene Blalock is, and always shall be. Now though, in conjunction with the work on the *Star Trek* MMO that continues apace, *Star Trek: Legacy* is on the way from Mad Doc software. A company famed for both the *Empire Earth* series and *Star Trek: Armada II*, all manner of 3D battlefields filled with stars, nebulas, wormholes and tachyon fields are promised. Covering the span of every *Star Trek* series (from *Enterprise* through *Original* through *Next Gen* and beyond), we're just praying for a recreation of the Wolf 359 battle against the Borg. And getting to control the Defiant. And the bit in *Star Trek IV* when Chekov is looking for the 'nuclear wessels'.



STUFF

Resident Evil 4, the greatest dirty console secret of every single member of the **PC ZONE** team, is due for a PC port. Thought by many as being one of the greatest console games of all time, its presence on our home turf can only be a good thing – while distributor **Ubisoft** is also promising that *Animusha 3: Demon Siege* and *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening* are getting similar treatment.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

PCZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

- 1 — **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006**
Issue 162 90%
- 2 ↑ **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 3 ↓ **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 4 ↑ **CALL OF DUTY 2**
Issue 162 91%
- 5 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 6 ↑ **CIVILIZATION IV**
Issue 162 92%
- 7 ↑ **BATTLEFIELD 2**
Issue 157 94%
- 8 ↓ **THE MOVIES**
Issue 162 95%
- 9 ↑ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
Issue 152 95%
- 10 ↑ **QUAKE 4**
Issue 162 84%
- 11 ↑ **F.E.A.R.**
Issue 161 90%
- 12 ↓ **BLACK & WHITE 2**
Issue 161 93%
- 13 ↓ **BATTLEFIELD 2: SPECIAL FORCES**
Issue 163 80%
- 14 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**
Issue 153 57%
- 15 ↑ **GUILD WARS**
Issue 156 94%
- 16 ↑ **MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT**
Issue 133 89%
- 17 ↓ **ROME: TOTAL WAR – BARBARIAN INVASION**
Issue 160 88%
- 18 **NEW** **ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: GOLD**
Issue 149 79%
- 19 (RE) **STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II**
Issue 163 61%
- 20 ↓ **NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED**
Issue 162 88%



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

In a chart that hasn't seen a decent new entry in an aeon or two, *FM2006* remains a lone striker at the front of the pack. It's quality too.



CALL OF DUTY 2

By the time you read this, hopefully, *COD2*'s lack of punkbuster will have been remedied so its online side can sing again. Well worth a try.



THE MOVIES

Not enough people have bought this excellent game. If you like gaming, movies, breathing, walking and talking, you'll adore *The Movies*. So get it!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

And still the noobs plough into Azeroth: as long as broadband connections are still being installed, Blizzard will be rolling in piles of cash.



LET'S FLY, LET'S FLY AWAY...

EA declares war on linearity with the upcoming *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*

www.ea.com | ETA: 2006

CALL OF DUTY 2 made a decent stab at attempting to engender some form of non-linearity in a few of its missions, but if there's one thing that needs to be jammed into the WWII FPS, it's a taste of real freedom. And now, surprisingly, the previous 'kings of corridor' at EA are about to light the blue touch paper on a 1940s shooter that promises just that.

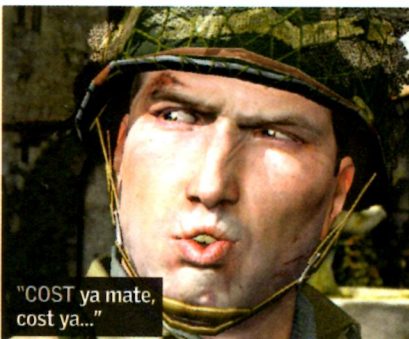
Seven vast behind-enemy-lines missions are in the offing with *MOH: Airborne*, each starting (*Crysis*-style) with a parachute leap that you can time, direct and land. Whether you land in a distant woodland or atop a Nazi jeep is down to you – but from then on, objectives will be distant, AI will be conjured on-the-fly and the previous trudge from one script-triggered set-piece to another lost to

memory. With a grubby map in your pocket you, one Boyd Travers, won't just be navigating free-form through Normandy fields either (although a D-Day level will, of course, be present), with mammoth levels also set in Sicily, Holland and Germany.

Put simply, EA seems to have had a 'Eureka!' moment. Its missions are set to move beyond a sequence of French villages, it'll have scripted objectives that have been melded with '*Far Cry*' freedom and it'll have a 'chute drop that could even end up with your canopy caught in a tree and you having to cut yourself free. All this and we haven't even mentioned EA's promise of four-player co-op. Shit-a-brick, but it could be amazing.

A *Medal Of Honor* game we're excited about?

Stop the presses, someone call Norris McWhirter. Your move, *Call Of Duty*...



"COST ya mate, cost ya..."



JIMMY regretted scrumping Nazi apples.

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Where the Iron Curtain fell, games are thriving. *Pavel Barter* is back in the USSR



Reporter
Pavel Barter

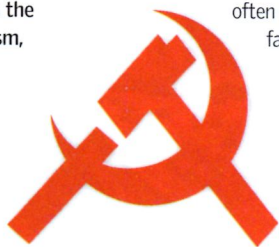
REAL LIFE is stranger than fiction. Well, it is if you consider recent reports that in the 1920s Josef Stalin tried to create

a race of superwarriors by crossing humans with apes. For reasons we'd probably best not explore here, baboon squaddies failed to materialise and instead the USSR became renowned for other reasons. It was still, however, a first sign that even in the darkest days of Stalinism, Russian minds were focused on at least the 'scientific villainy' aspect of gaming. And come the fall of communism, the entirety of PC gaming was put firmly on the agenda.

Like spies coming in from the cold, Russian developers are knocking on the global gaming door. WWII strategy *Blitzkrieg*, *Perimeter*, *Battle Mages* and so-called 'movie tie-in' *Pirates Of The Caribbean* all sold enough shedfuls between them to make three and a half sheds. Joining this (Eastern) bloc party, meanwhile, is a cavalcade of other titles

that will never set sail on this side of the North Sea – games with funny names like *Blue Beard* or *Safari Biathlon Racer*.

Moscow-based publishers 1C lead the pack, developing games in-house as well as selling the wares of others. "Russian developers are quite innovative and are always coming up with new ideas," explains 1C honcho Nikolay Baryshnikov. "Russian teams have great coders and are quite capable of making best-selling hits. There are dozens of Russian-made games on the market, and gamers often don't even know that their favourite title is brought to them from Russia."



FLY AEROFLOT

Russian flight sims, if you'll excuse the pun, have recently taken off (*No, we won't – Ed*) with bird's-eye experiences in *Pacific Fighters* and *IL-2*

Sturmovik (both produced by 1C), disproving the aviator's adage that flying is hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. Oleg Maddox – the brains behind *Sturmovik* – was inspired while working "in an aviation research every day from 8am to 5pm and, after that, till late at night in the Moscow Aviation Institute (MAI)." It

was his dream to create the ultimate aircraft sim.

Forget consoles, the PC is where it's at, explains Maddox – this box of tricks is as vital for his country's gamers as snow ploughs are for Red Square. "The PC is still way more universal for home entertainment and I know many people who use it for DVD, TV, photos, video, music and games. Russians are very creative and build their own PCs with separate parts. My home PC – I completed myself," whispers Maddox from behind a pair of loose-fitting flight goggles.

For reasons that remain obvious, PCs were household rarities behind the Iron Curtain in the 1980s, yet this was also when Russia chose to unleash their finest game since chess: *Tetris*. The story behind this crumbling puzzler is almost as enjoyable as the falling blocks themselves – an East vs West fable to rival *Rocky IV*.

BETTER THAN VODKA

June, 1985. A young researcher called Alexey Pajitnov creates *Tetris* while working at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The game spreads across Soviet countries like a virus before it's pilfered by a UK software house and then the Americans. Realising it's sitting on a goldmine, the Soviet Government finally cash in on the act and sell the game to Nintendo, although it's years before Pajitnov sees a single rouble for his efforts.

For today's Ruskie developers, *Tetris* was Year Zero. St Petersburg-based developers WildSnake Software know this better than anyone, having worked with Pajitnov (who now resides in the United States) on new puzzle titles. "The fact that a Russian was able to make a piece of software that brought fun and pleasure to the whole world was important to us," explains WildSnake's Andy Nick. "Every Russian game developer is hiding a tiny *Tetris* creator in our dreams and souls."



SERIOUS gaming business at the RGDC.

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

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





OLEG Maddox: the flight sim creator that isn't Microsoft.

Russian teams have great coders – gamers often don't know that their favourite title is from Russia

Nikolay Baryshnikov, international sales director, IC Games

Despite its mega success, *Tetris* was a one-off. Game & Watch reproductions were popular in the early 80s, but with Cold War borders blockaded, Russians were denied videogame imports. "Truth to tell, there was no gaming industry in our country in the 1980s," muses Maxim Maslov, chief co-ordinator of the Russian Game Developers Conference (RGDC). "None whatsoever."

LATE STARTERS

The birth of an industry began with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Western titles were distributed, then localised, and "companies began their own development around 1995," remarks Maslov. In 1998, the process stalled when the country's financial system collapsed. "If it wasn't for that, a competitive market probably as big as Japan's could have been established here. Only now are we reaching the same growth as before 1998."

While developers were attempting to rebuild their industry, other former communist countries were cashing in on the act. Croatia's Croteam fronted the *Serious Sam* franchise, while the petrol-starved Ukraine's GSC Game World created *Cossacks* and still-delayed shooter *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*. What's more, European and US companies have caught on to the massive savings available from outsourcing their work to countries like these and are now exploiting them like nobody's business.

In 2006, Russian developers are unifying much as Power Rangers would at the close of a particularly frantic episode. The Russian Game Developers

Conference, in April, will be attended by over 1,000 people representing more than 120 game companies from Russia, CIS states, Baltic states and other countries, and regularly attracts high-profile speakers like *Doom*'s John Romero.

FILTHY REDS

Rumours abound, however, that the Russian Government are allocating £76 million to a programme of patriotic education, which includes videogames. Such an endeavour would not be unusual, according to Oleg Maddox. One rare 1980s Russian title, *Zarnitza*, was for "military training... Similar to the US Army game", while a seemingly innocent platformer from 1990 called *Perestroika* (featuring frogs jumping on lily pads) was a subtle comment on Mikhail Gorbachev's economic reforms.

Maxim Maslov is sceptical about the state's videogame ambitions. "Considering the real state of affairs in Russia's Government, the hoopla around patriotic games doesn't seem to bring any fruit. It is a very vague programme and we still don't know who will make these games. Maybe they will hire some people and after releasing a couple of mediocre games, this entire endeavour will be forgotten."

At least developers can now release games at home with fewer concerns about horrid tealeafs. "Piracy is one of the major problems here," says IC's Nikolay Baryshnikov. "We are fighting hard against it. A few years ago the piracy level was way over 95 per cent, now it is probably close to 50 or 60 per cent. We are slowly winning the battle." Operation Kontrafact, launched by the



Better Red Than Dead

Part the Iron Curtain and visit the Fatherland



Moscow Rush

Driver Russkie-style... Just don't drive through the front doors of the Kremlin – the KGB might shoot you.



The Stalin Subway

Fifties Moscow: the War is bloody Cold. Pit your shootery skills against ageing ratbag Josef Stalin.



Stalingrad

Covering wartime events between 1942 and 1943, *Stalingrad* is so painstakingly authentic the developers must have shot each other in the heads with howitzers.



Syberia

This spooky adventure, a Belgian developer's take on a godforsaken part of Russia, proves that there is still life in the old point 'n' click dog yet. Just as well – the Russians shoot dogs you know.

Russian police at the end of 2005, closed three quarters of all retailers selling illegal software – which is a shitload of shops, by all accounts.

With recent decent stuff like IC's *Sniper* already out, the forthcoming *Battle Of Britain* game, the fifth game in the *IL-2 Sturmovik* series in the offing, and the intermittent appearances of mysterious FPS *You Are Empty* – the Russians are clearly moving into the gaming ascendancy. Maybe one day they'll hit the heights of *Tetris* again. Until that day, comrade... **PCZ**





"THIS helmet's been stuck for three months now."



RESPECT YOUR ELDERS...

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Steve Hogarty, horse-rustler and religious provocateur, hurls himself into *Oblivion*...

DEVELOPER Bethesda PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE www.elderscrolls.com PREVIOUSLY IN 165

THE LOWDOWN

Huge, huge world	✓
Amazingly beautiful to behold	✓
Incredible goal-based AI	✓
Unmatched freedom	✓
Goodbye social life	✗

"YOU CAN GO wherever you like, do and kill whatever you like, talk to whoever you like," explains Pete Hines of Bethesda. "All we ask is that you don't enter the Jaws of Oblivion – that's a secret." In a darkened office populated with journalists and PCs running *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, it's the equivalent of placing a jar of cookies in the middle of a crowd of hyperactive kids and then waiting outside.

Except we're all particularly unshaven kids and the jar is a flaming portal to the realms of chaos. Naturally, I make the mental preparations required to hunt the portal down and hurl myself into it before Hines can catch and reprimand me – it's not enough that Bethesda has crafted an enormous world full of beautiful cities, scenic forests, peaceful glades and treacherous mountains, oh no... The true meaning of adventure is going where the tall man in the nice shirt told you not to, and then telling him you went there by accident.

My personal quest is largely unsuccessful however, and my closest encounter with *Oblivion* comprises of a moment or two of



standing meekly a few yards from the threshold, trying to edge innocently towards the fiery red gateway while a Bethesda rep looms ominously over my shoulder like a school teacher. I could make a run for it, lunging head-first into whatever secrets await me, but then again the Bethesda rep might kill me seven different ways before the loading screen disappears. Besides, there's enough happening on the greener side of the Jaws of Oblivion to keep me occupied.

BREAKOUT

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion begins, as many RPGs do, with the clean slate that is memory loss. More specifically, you wake up in prison, being taunted by a fellow prisoner in a cell

across the hall. You're only half-listening to his jeering insults though, because I can guarantee your attention will be held almost entirely by your beautifully realised surroundings. Every brick of your cell looks slightly damp and rough, and you'll notice how the shackles swing realistically when you run into

ETA
March
'06

THE STORY SO FAR... BETHESDA

Bethesda
SOFTWARES

**WAYNE GRETZKY
HOCKEY**
18 years ago, Bethesda
made this hockey game.
What? You don't recall?



1988

**THE ELDER
SCROLLS: ARENA**
300 towns and villages,
amazing graphics,
Arena is a DOS classic.



1993

**THE ELDER SCROLLS:
DAGGERFALL**
Daggerfall had horses!
Morrowind didn't –
how cool is that?



1996

**THE ELDER SCROLLS
III: MORROWIND**
A truly beautiful thing.
An achievement for
mankind as a species.



2002



JUST like a real church, except
without the homophobia.

**Want to ignore
the prophecy
and forego the
main storyline?
Fine, it'll wait
if you want to
do it later**

TIBER Septim? Don't they
make sewerage tanks?



Clone Wars

Yet another anecdote
courtesy of *Oblivion's*
fantastic AI



the wide world of Cyrodiil, you're told by a
character that he's been watching you and he
reckons you're a capable thief or knight, or one
of many character classes available (based on
the choices you made while you escaped).

It's a clever way of
bypassing the boring and
meaningless menu screens

of character creation, and one that works
extremely well. Of course, you can disagree
with this character and choose your own class
or skillsets – the decision is yours.

GO YOUR OWN WAY

And that's where everybody's game stops
being the same. That's where you step outside
into the world and are given the freedom to
go wherever you please. You want to ignore
the prophecy and forego the main storyline?
Fine, it'll wait for you if you want to do it
later. You want to start trading drugs and
making a small fortune before buying a house
in the capital city? It's a possible, if
dangerous ambition. The sheer scope
of freedom is astounding, and



them. It's
no wonder
you're being insulted
by a stranger, because
you look like a mental
patient as you gaze
wondrously at the floor
and gasp at the light streaming
through your window. For the
technically-minded, Bethesda is
using shaders on everything;
for the less technically-
minded, Bethesda has
smothered everything in
liberal amounts of pretty-

juice, and you haven't even stepped outside
the confines of your cell yet.

Having chosen your race and carefully
designed your own face, you set off to make
your escape, traversing a dungeon which
offers you many different ways of getting to
the other end. You find corpses, some with
swords, some with daggers, some with bows
and shields. You find enemies who can be
killed outright in bloody combat or stealthily
picked off. You also have opportunities to
use magic, chances to use different types
of armour and to use melee.

The first section of the game is effectively
a tutorial, and rather ingeniously it's a
character-creation tool too. Before you enter

Once upon a time there was an *Oblivion*
developer who was putting the finishing
touches on a new cloning wand he'd just
added. The idea was that if you pointed
this wand at an enemy, it would make a
body-double of that enemy who would
do battle with his genetic twin. Anyway,
in order to test the physics sounds, he
dropped this wand on the floor, only to
have a hostile NPC pick it up and zap him
with it. Cue shocked faces all round as a
perfectly cloned copy of the developer's
character appeared nearby and promptly
began kicking the crap out of him.
"Everybody come look!" he yelled. "It's
me!" While it's likely that such craziness
will be removed from the final game for
the sake of balance (unfortunately), it's
clear that Bethesda's new Radiant AI
system will still be very impressive. And
they'll probably live happily ever after too.



A Horse Is A Horse

Of course, of course



MISTER Ed:
depressed and
mute since 1966.

Horses, not seen in the *Elder Scrolls* universe since *Daggerfall* back in 1996, are making a triumphant return to Tamriel in the latest game. Unfortunately, you can't do battle while on horseback, meaning your trusty steed is really just a way of getting from one place to the next with a bit more haste than usual, especially when being pursued by angry, marauding wolves or monks or dwarves (or whoever you've managed to annoy). You can purchase a horse if you're the legitimate sort, or you can steal one if you're in a hurry – something that tends to happen a lot if you play *Oblivion* the way I did. Horses, noble beasts that they are, will wander off if they've been stolen or stay put and wait for you if they've been lawfully bought. We haven't seen such profound morality in animals since *The Lion King*.

whereas in *Morrowind* it was almost intimidating being left to your own devices, *Oblivion* subtly directs you to your objectives via an on-screen compass. You can also quickly travel between places you've already visited if you don't like trekking everywhere, although it'd be a shame when the environments are this breathtaking.

As for me, I decide to wander into the vast beyond, eventually finding myself in a small, secluded monastery in the hills. Spurred by the sweet evening air and my naturally destructive tendencies, I draw my dagger and stalk a strolling monk. As soon as

I'm close enough, I attempt to pickpocket him. Unfortunately, he's carrying nothing but a loaf of bread and some books, and even worse, he immediately spots my cack-handed attempt to rifle through his habit. Cornered between a screaming monk and a hard place, I do what any



JUST like Thief!



**I'M sensing
a trend here.**



**THINK you might
need a bigger axe...**

sensible man would do – stab the religious type multiple times and run as fast as I can towards the stables.

GIDDY-UP!

High priests and guards alike are already giving chase as I leap over the fence and clamber on top of the nearest, shiniest horse. Then, just like in *Knight Rider* when KITT does a turbo jump, I launch over the fence and gallop towards the horizon, leaving four angry priests, an exhausted guard and a confused stable master in my wake. I've killed a man of the cloth, so I ride hard and fast lest my terrible past catch up with me. A gritty monologue plays in my mind, something about a man wanted by the law, surviving as a soldier of fortune. If you have a problem, if no-one else can help, and if you can find me – maybe you can hire Steve Hogarty, horse thief, regular thief and murderer. I also do balloon animals.

Later that night, as I lay in a bed in an inn in a town where nobody knows who I am or what I've done, a shadowy figure appears in my bedroom. He's a member of the Dark Brotherhood, and has observed my murderous actions. He's here to offer me a chance to join his ranks of darkness, a society of evil-minded contract killers. This means I get to take part in a huge series of side-quests that I could easily have overlooked.

I choose to accept the offer as soon as I learn that killing your contractual targets without them ever seeing you gets you a nice

bonus, and that one of my contracts would involve breaking back into the prison I'd escaped from in order to kill the taunting jailbird from earlier on.

It just goes to show how diverse the *Oblivion* world is and just how many opportunities there are, implicit or otherwise. Get thrown in prison for example, and you're approached by the Thieves' Guild, a society of honourable tealeafs (don't look so surprised) who frown upon murder but smile upon stealing pretty things from people who weren't really using them anyway.

In fact, get thrown in prison and you can try to break out rather than live out your sentence: try attacking a cellmate and then ambushing the guards who come rushing in, before stealing their weapons and fighting your way out. Or maybe you'd rather pick the lock on your cell door and stick to the shadows. It's all about choice – wonderful, wonderful choice.

COMBAT HIGH

All this and I haven't even mentioned the heavily-tweaked combat system. It's changed from *Morrowind*, in that pointing-and-clicking on an enemy is now a guarantee that you'll make some sort of contact. This makes for far more physical melee combat, and being able to launch magic attacks while holding a weapon means learning and using magic is a far more appealing pursuit in *Oblivion*. Bows are vastly improved too, now that whether or not you hit the enemy is based on how skilful



NOW that's just impressive.

DITTO. Trees have never looked so pretty.



you are at aiming rather than your stats. You can block using the right-mouse button, it's no longer a random stats roll, and you can disarm opponents, and even apologise to NPCs you've accidentally (or otherwise) enraged.

YOUR OYSTER

If you've played *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, you'll have an opinion of RPGs vastly different to that of somebody who's never experienced the freeform gameplay of Bethesda's classic series. *Oblivion's* precursor brought so much to the role-playing table, it practically brought the tablecloth and those little doily things that everybody assumes will already be there. Foregoing the usual stigmatic RPG features that so often scare regular shavers away, the next *Elder Scrolls* game again offers you an enormous and deeply involving world right from the game's outset, a main quest which can be dipped in and out of at will, plus intuitive gameplay that simply works with you rather than against.

Morrowind was an amazing achievement for Bethesda and the RPG genre too, and now *Oblivion* will arrest your attention like a bullet to the knees. Prepare yourself for something special. **PCZ**

Cornered between a screaming monk and a hard place, I stab the religious type and run fast



FACE-transplant donors are hard to find.



FRESHWATER erosion – the best kind.



ROME: TOTAL WAR – ALEXANDER

Total War expansion gives *Steve Hill* an excuse to interview the mighty Brian Blessed...

DEVELOPER The C reative Assembly PUBLISHER Sega OUT Digital download at the end of March PRICE TBA

WHEN THEY DECIDED to call it *Total War*, they weren't really telling the whole story. In the seven years that the epic RTS series has been around, it seems to have spawned more spin-offs than *Friday The 13th* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street* combined. Further expansion is on the way in the shape of *Rome: Total War – Alexander*, and you won't even need to leave your iron fort to buy it, instead downloading it – for a fee – from the safety of your own dressing gown.

Reckoned by many pundits to be the greatest general of all time, Alexander's campaign is set to recreate his epic push to conquer the known world, spanning the years from the death of Philip II of Macedon in 336BC up to Alexander himself carking it. Throw in six new historical battles that highlight his most momentous conflicts – all also playable

in multiplayer – and you're looking at the best part of 40 hours of gameplay.

Four new factions will be available, namely Alexander's Macedonian army, The Persians, The Indians and the Barbarians. The 50-odd new units will include the Theban Sacred band, Indian Elephants, Persian immortals and even Indian naked female archers.

All of which pales in comparison with the news that Brian Blessed is lending his voice to the game. Attracting something of a cult following, Blessed is famously revered for his show-stealing portrayal of Prince Vultan in 1980's *Flash Gordon*, particularly his ad-libbed battle cry of: "Who wants to live forever?" Already familiar with the subject matter – if not necessarily through his appearance in the fanciful Oliver Stone movie of *Alexander* – his performance as narrator of the game should be worth the admission fee alone. Alexander's alive?

"FLASH! Flash I love you – but we only have 14 hours to save Thrace!"





IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



A booming voice echoes around a sound recording studio in central London. Finding the rotund face of Brian Blessed on a monitor, he's putting the finishing touches to his narration of *Alexander*. Emerging from the studio, he's a great bear of a man. Having just had yellow fever injections for a forthcoming Ugandan climbing trip, he's already running a temperature, but agrees to join me on the sofa for a chat. Amid some judicious swearing and an ear-splitting reprise of his *Stars In Their Eyes* performance of Pavarotti's *Nessun Dorma*, these are the highlights. We're not worthy...

Brian Blessed, star of film, television, stage, and now games...

"There's no end to my talent! The game I enjoyed most was *Privateer 2: The Darkening*, where I played Uncle Kashumai. I'm the narrator for *Alexander* and it's the kind of subject matter I'm delighted to do. This game will be a fun game, a challenging game, but what's good is it will inspire people to look at history. The facts in this are accurate, whereas the stuff in *Alexander*, the Stone film, is full of inaccuracies. So not only are you playing a game, but you get the exciting facts about what Alexander was about, because Alexander was amazing. Alexander The Great was taught from an early age to embrace all religions. When he conquered a country, he would actually embrace their gods and pray in their temples. Egypt made him a pharaoh – and that's never happened to anybody."

Q Given the historical aspect, could you find yourself playing a game like this?

A "Yeah, I could. My daughter plays games all the time and finds them very stimulating. I don't subscribe to the fact that games are not good for you. I think they do stimulate the brain and I think they have a very constructive and marvellous effect on people. People love to f***ing criticise these games. They're fun! Television's fun, games are fun and I think that games that have history are a great way to present history rather than some grey-beard pontificating in a classroom – unless he's really imaginative, it's going to be boring. And I think to have it in a game is inspirational."

Q What's the procedure for a job like this? Do you rehearse it or get into character?

A "There are scripts and there are scripts. Some things you look at and you think 'Oh Christ' – you know, I'll do this and it's all right and you get paid for it – because I've got lots of animals, I've got 4,000 animals in a refuge. Something like this I spent five days studying it, because it's so important and so good. I think if something's worthwhile then you've got to give it that kind of attention. Not only must I narrate it, but I must have a feeling of gravitas and excitement about it. I can actually bring my quiet, deeper tones and stiller tones into the narration. It requires great clarity and subtle variety. It's a very well written script, so you have to bring out a lot of adjectives and there are a lot of very colourful lines in it. It's a balance of not over-colouring, but they've guided me very nicely so it's a very satisfactory conclusion. I've loved doing it."

"ONWARD my brave pikemen! Let this be known forever as Alexander's day!"

"DISPATCH war-chariot Ajax to bring back his body."

"THANKS Hephaestion, for giving an old bird a second chance!"

Games stimulate the brain and have a marvellous effect on people. People love to f*ing criticise games, but they're fun!**

Brian Blessed tells it like it is

One does not simply walk into Mordor.



OR THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

OR FORNOST

OR ETENMOORS

OR MITHLOND

OR RIVENDELL

OR THE SHIRE

OR MORIA

OR ISENGARD

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or The Withered Heath.

or Erebor.

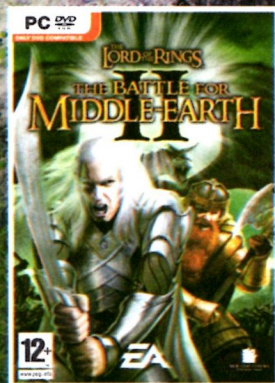
or The Iron Hills.

or Celduin River.

or Mirkwood.

or Dol Guldur.

or Lorient.



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1



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IT'S A WELL known adage that dogs can't look up, but in reality they need to look up so rarely that it hardly ever occurs to them as a viable option. The same has been true in FPS deathmatch since its conception – death always comes from the sides – or, if you're being pedantic, perhaps a nearby roof. It never comes from the ceiling – not until now anyway. It was around ten minutes into our first multiplayer bout of *Prey* that there was a beautiful moment in which we got an indescribable urge to stare upwards – and lo, there was a mini-asteroid hanging 15ft above our head with two upside-down Native Americans firing acid at each other on its surface. This summer, dogs will look up.

7

2



The Bigger Picture

1 WE'RE FLOATING IN SPACE

Yes, playing multiplayer will hurt your brain for a little while – and have those balance-bits in your ears all a-quiver – but after a while it starts to make sense. Probably not the best game to play with a hangover though.

2 NO CEILINGS IN HERE

When playing *Prey* multiplayer, you're constantly aware that you could be being shot at from any angle, as ably demonstrated by the physics-mangling abuse of the third dimension in this screenshot. Someone had better make a mod based on the end of *Labyrinth*, that's all we're saying.

3 GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOMMY

It looks so peaceful doesn't it? But unfortunately, you won't have much time to sit in your flying pod and gawp at Mother Nature – you'll be far too busy picking up grunts with your tractor beam and hurling them into the inky blackness of space.

4 CANNON FODDER

Fodder, the insignificant yet toothy workers of the alien sphere's ecosystem, hatch from fleshy pustules that slide out of the walls on your approach. Here Talon, your friendly spirit pet, is dishing out some avian justice on them.

5 SOMEONE CALL LIONEL RICHIE

Human Head is more excited than is medically advisable about what the mod community is going to create with the bonkers upside-down, inside-out action in *Prey*. As you'd imagine, designing levels for *Prey* demands a rare talent.

6 RIDDLED WITH BUGS


The charming giant insect being held here may occasionally nip your fingers, but it makes for a handy grenade when hurled. Flip it onto its back, meanwhile, and its sticky arse makes it the perfect proximity mine. Evolution's a funny old thing isn't it?

7 WHO ATE ALL THE GENETICALLY-MODIFIED PIES?

Flabby, steroid-infused body. Catheter and bottle of suspiciously yellow liquid. No neck. Giant mouth instead of an arm. These 'let's laugh at fat Americans' TV shows have really gone a trifle too far.



6

**COMING
SOON...**


OUR fashion correspondent reports that shorts like these are very 'in' right now.

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

An aristocrat who likes shooting exotic animals? *Will Porter* is to the manor born

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.tombraider.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 163

THE LOWDOWN

New Lara now 25 per cent more sexy!	✓
Ace graphics coupled with traditional gameplay	✓
Neat physics puzzles and grapple hook	✓
Actually raiding a few tombs this time	✓
But can she still cut it?	✗

PEOPLE FORGET ABOUT *Tomb Raider*. They don't forget Lara Croft, but they forget the joy of the original *Tomb Raider*. Over time, Lara's breasts have nuzzled the sheer wonderment of her earlier games into obscurity – so by the time we hit *Angel Of Darkness*, fond memories of cavernous graphical splendour and epic waterfall leaps into huge lakes were laughable. Lara had become a bug-ridden console cash-cow. But now... 'Shinier! Sleeker! More productive! Beautiful lighting! Less ludicrous body! No more cartoon eyes! Back to the old days!' The future of Lara is apparently to be found locked in her past – but will the magic come back with it?

And so it was that when playing through Lara's new adventures in the darker parts of Bolivia and Peru, we did our utmost to ignore the glitz of her new engine – lovely as her dappled skin, cleverly sourced lighting, rippling water and pert arse were. And it felt like we were playing *Tomb Raider*. Perhaps not the simply astounding game we played

in 1996, but still an episode of a highly competent wall-leaping romp with some neat puzzles and spinning blades.

STILL PERKY

But it isn't all old though. There's a distinct pull towards the next generation in the way that the physics crops up so often in puzzles. One occasion, for example, sees Lara confronted by an ancient see-saw and a collection of metal cages that need to be shifted a few levels higher. Rather than the 2D perfect positioning required of randomly shoved blocks of old, however, after a period of intense head-scratching we worked out that our role was to roughly shove a cage on the 'floored' end of the see-saw, then propel it skywards by leaping on the other end and using our body-weight in a forceful manner.

Other nods to modernity, meanwhile, include bullet-timey leaps and twirls during combat, along with the introduction of *Fahrenheit*-style action segments in which keys must be tapped in correct succession during moments

of high intensity. Yes, this may sound crap on paper, but can end up quite compelling when a large statue is about to fall on your lithe, young body.

Lara's ancestral base-camp also returns – its main hall filled with roaring log fires and suits of armour at one end, packed to the rafters with technology and wires at the other. From here, Zip (American, slightly zany) and Alex (British, not zany) look up various facts about ancient civilisations and violent indigenous wildlife, and whisper information into your earpiece in true *Treasure Hunt* style. ("We've got it Lara! The lost treasure of the Incas is in the village hall! Time's running out! Now run so we can watch your arse bounce!")

Back to basics then: mutilating animals, shifting blocks and plummeting from ledges – with a few neat modern-day twists. Whether or not Croft can still cut it today is still up for question – but *Legend* is certainly set to be an impressive stab at reclaiming former glory. Plus you can unlock lots of sexy outfits for her to wear. Ding dong. **PG-13**

ETA
April
'06

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

HIDDEN HUD

Crystal Dynamics has gone all out to avoid cluttering the screen with health meters, inventories and flashing warning signals. The idea is to reel you in, rub your eyes in 'EPIC!' and alternately bedazzle and amaze. This oxygen-ometer is the exception.

EYE FOR THE DETAIL

It may be a multi-platform release, but while ageing consoles will just see slightly mottled walls here, PC owners will get to admire carvings, engravings and filthy graffiti about ancient High Priests and call-girls.

HOLY UTILITY BELT BAP-GIRL!

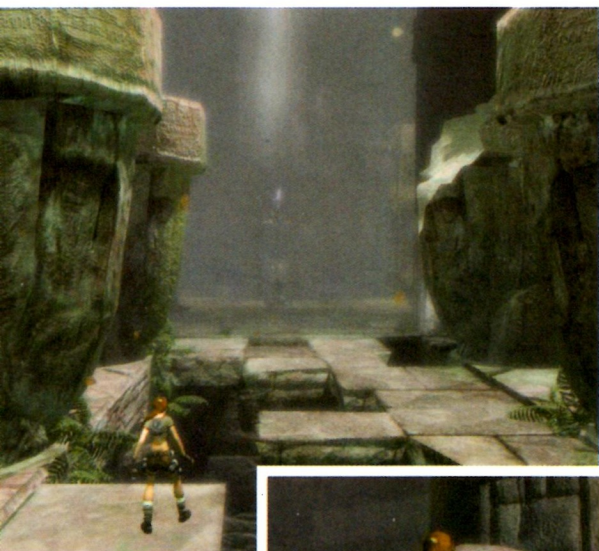
Four grenades, two pistols, a grappling hook and (presumably) a hidden bag containing lippy, mascara and other girl stuff. No inventory needed now you see, it's all on the hips.

IT MADE ME WANT TO DROWN THINGS!

What would a *Tomb Raider* game be, if it didn't make us think of *Spaced* quotes? As yet, Eidos has refused to answer the question of: "Why can't you shoot straight you big-titted bitch?" Watch this space.

PUSH ME, PULL ME

Here, Lara is pulling five magic stones (or something) out of their sockets so that it opens a nearby door. Hardly the most thrilling of activities, but a ringing endorsement of the technology of the ancients nevertheless.



YES, it's got tombs – but Lara still finds time to drive a motorbike off a Tokyo skyscraper in the full game.



It's mutilating animals, shifting blocks and plummeting from ledges – with a modern-day twist





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XBOX
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PlayStation.2

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* Co-op Campaign not available for PlayStation®2



TOM CLANCY'S

GHOST RECON

ADVANCED WARFIGHTER



UBISOFT

THE MAN WHO KNOWS



The games industry is in **uproar** at a cruel and heavy-handed bout of **legislation** that has seen **naked, and nearly naked, women** banned from casting their wares in the faces of baying crowds at yearly gaming and exploitation show **E3**. Puritanical LA Convention Center bosses have banned naughtiness, "including but not limited to **nudity, partial-nudity and bathing suit bottoms**," much to the chagrin of the great unwashed. The stockpiling of mental images for later private perusal has long been a favoured E3 activity for many an unsexed games industry representative, but the hiring of **tuppenny tarts** seems soon to be at an end. Tight-lipped **E3 killjoys** have, however, claimed that their policy is simply a reinforcement of the rules, "which simply allow show management to **better enforce the long-standing dress code**". It has been countered, however, that their time would be better spent banning **whiffy black Dungeon Siege** T-shirts, Muumuus and any shirt **stained with lumps** of burger gristle.

Robert Locke, gubernatorial candidate for Texas and **prize numpty** has demanded a 100 per cent tax on violent games in the **Lone Star State**. **The Amarillo Globe News**, a title usually concerned with the **hugging of pillows** and the **weeping of willows**, has reported that the **mad governor wannabe** is demanding sweeping taxes on everything he happens to dislike – including **abortions, violent games and soft drinks**. Under the sadly nicknamed 'Star' Locke's eagle eye, it has been claimed that by order, games deemed violent by a **highly informed** ten-member committee would find themselves swiftly levied, with money raised going towards the **abolishing of property tax**. "Our concept is that we need to tax things we don't want, and you want to not tax things you want to encourage," mumbled Locke disjunctedly as he begged for the approval of **similarly small-minded idiots**.

"The mad governor wannabe is demanding sweeping taxes on anything he happens to dislike – including abortions, violent games and soft drinks"



Editor Session = 870 (K2 Alpha)



DESIGN your very own army of killer crab things.

CRABS: don't walk straight, don't think straight.



FROM RYZIBLE TO RYELLY QUITE GOOD?

Slightly rubbish *Saga Of Ryzom* gets an impressive expansion

www.ryzom.com | ETA: Spring

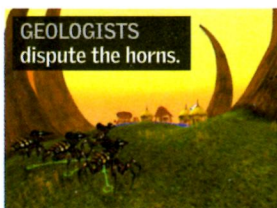
LET'S BE HONEST here, on its release, *The Saga Of Ryzom* was about as tasty as an arse sandwich. But, eager to exonerate itself from such a stinking release, developer NevraX has been busily working on an expansion pack, which could just rejuvenate this flagging MMOG.

The Saga Of Ryzom: The Ryzom Ring is set to be more than just your average expansion pack. Y'see, instead of it simply providing you with a collection of new locations to explore, it'll grant you the power to create and DM your very own lands and adventures, which both your friends and people you've never met before can take part in.

An intuitive level editor will provide you with complete creative control, allowing you to customise



100 per cent organic.



GEOLOGISTS dispute the horns.

everything from the look of each level (there'll be over 200 templates to start you off), to what NPCs, items and events will inhabit your creations. Better still, you'll be able to craft adventures of up to ten acts, with each new



chapter based in an unique area. Once you're done, your quests will become accessible to anyone while you're online, or, for a few euros more a month (believed to be around five), your worlds will be permanently stored on the *Ryzom* servers and made available 24/7 to any would-be adventurers.

We've seen *The Ryzom Ring* up and running and we've certainly been impressed with how intuitive and powerful it's looking – enough to believe that this somewhat whiffy MMOG could yet end up smelling of roses.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



The Independent Gaming Hero

CHRIS DELAY - LEAD DESIGNER AND DEVELOPER AT INTROVERSION GAMES

Having worked in the games industry on what he describes as "some fairly forgettable games", Chris Delay and his cohorts launched themselves into the murky world of independent gaming. After cult hacker sim *Uplink*, Delay's ace, neon-tinged weird-fest *Darwinia* was selected for distribution on Steam. The mighty Empire then fell, the second Death Star was destroyed and Endor was saved!

Q So how did Introversion come about?

A Introversion was formed by Mark Morris, Thomas Arundel and myself. We were all studying at Imperial College in London in 2000. I'd been secretly working on a computer game about hacking called *Uplink*, and they happened to see it while we were all living together. We talked about the potential ways to create a company of our own, and ultimately Introversion Software was founded.

Why the interest in hacking and crazy computery/neon visuals?

It would be suicide for us to attempt to develop a generic type of game. We still only have a handful of staff and there's just no way we can compete with commercial videogames when it comes to content and realism. Our trick is to refuse to try. All of our game designs involve a particular visual style that isn't tied to reality and is achievable by a small team with limited resources - *Uplink*'s blue interface, for example, or *Darwinia*'s retro landscapes.

What were your aims with *Darwinia*?

Well, I met the co-author of *Darwinia* (Andy

Bainbridge) while I was working in the commercial games industry. We'd been looking at the Indie Game Jam during its first year - basically a small group of ninja programmers who get together for a long weekend and churn out around a dozen games in that time. During the first year, they experimented with placing hundreds of thousands of sprites on screen to simulate massive armies, and we saw it and thought we could make a cool game using a similar setup. The final product was very different to our initial aims, though - we spent months experimenting with different ideas, and the retro theme didn't surface until around a year into the project.

Do you have any plans for furthering our *Darwinian* experience?

Definitely - we're hoping to release *Multiwinia* during 2006. We've got big plans for multiplayer *Darwinia* and it's going to be totally crazy.

What would life be like if *Darwinia* had never been released on Steam?

I think we'd be in a bit of trouble. It's no secret that *Darwinia* didn't do too well in the high street. We made enough money to keep

running, but it would have been close. The Steam deal was a real life-saver for us.

Where did the idea for *Defcon* come from? Is it straight out of that Matthew Broderick *WarGames* film?

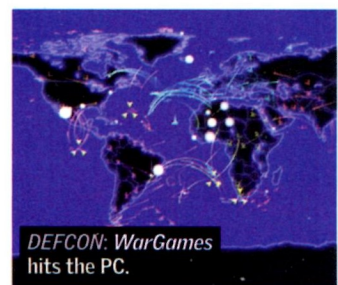
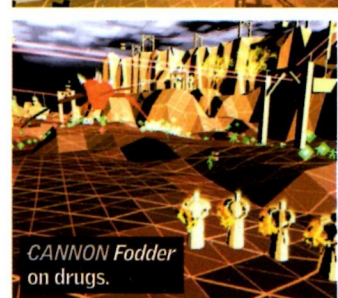
You've answered your own question! The movie *WarGames* is, of course, the biggest influence. It's one of my favourite movies from my childhood (along with *Tron* I suppose), and I'm amazed nobody has made a game from it yet.

Defcon features an Office mode so that you can covertly play it when the boss isn't looking. Is this the kind of audience that you're targeting with the game?

It's one kind of audience. We're aiming to replace *Solitaire* and *Minesweeper*!

Are you a happy chappy?

Definitely. Things are good at Introversion right now. Our second game is doing great on Steam, our third game is coming out this year - and we've got lots of other stuff in the pipeline. We have our plans for the fourth game and it's going to be amazing. But one thing at a time...



LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

The second away team has just returned from the now mountainous pile of tat, and tells of a previously undiscovered stratum of tat just below the tat caves on the eastern side of Mount Tat. Sadly, the remains of the first away team have not been found - no doubt they themselves have become one with the very tat which they desired. Fear not though, as we've surgically removed four more specimens of tat and placed them on eBay in a bid to help charity - look out for our PCZoners tag online.

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



THIS MONTH'S TAT



ANOTHER CALL OF DUTY LIGHTER
Zippo no. 2, this time General Will Porter's.



PARAWORLD RADIO ALARM CLOCK
Looks like a '30s suitcase, but is actually dead cool.



KONAMI SWEATBAND
In case you perspire during PES sessions.



NCSOFT CALENDAR 2006
In case you've been too lazy to get one yet.

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	EVERQUEST SPELL THINGY Well, we don't really know what it is, so two bids isn't all that bad. It's still the worst yet, though. Congrats Norrath.	£2.20	2
	ART OF EMPIRES BOOK An absolute steal at just over a tenner, this book is winging its way to a very happy nerd indeed.	£10.50	8
	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY BOARD GAME We prefer <i>Ghost Castle</i> to be honest, but <i>AOM</i> is probably fun too.	£29.00	11
	ELDER SCROLLS IV CALENDAR Better than last month's 'dirty munters from Romford' <i>GT Legends</i> offering, now someone, somewhere can gaze longingly at sexy elves from Cyrodiil.	£16.00	9



KETCHERSIDE!

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Will Porter annoys the scribe behind *SiN: Episodes* to such an extent he feels compelled to answer his many questions

Who are ya?



NAME Shawn Ketcherside

DEVELOPER Ritual Entertainment

POSITION Lead game designer and writer

AGE A long-toothed old coot of 30

GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE At least half a dozen unannounced titles,

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero and

Star Trek: Elite Force II.

FAVOURITE GAME Many – including *Legend Of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Half-Life*, *Diablo II*, *EverQuest* and a load more

Q How will Blade's character be developed in the upcoming *Sin: Episodes*?

A Well, I don't want to give everything away, but I can give some set-up. Blade has fallen to his own obsession with bringing down Elexis Sinclair, and now he's willing to risk everything to take her out. Right, wrong, legal, illegal – none of these things mean anything to him anymore. He's got one goal, and he'll do anything to accomplish it.

Sounds serious. And we're guessing that Jessica Cannon is more than a tasty bit of arm-candy as well...

Absolutely. Jessica has some very important ties to the lore we're developing – we're going to be layering in these elements across the episodes, so as the story arcs progress, you'll begin to understand just how critical Jessica is to the game world.

So what's the trick to writing a good game script?

Outside of gaming, I've written a few screenplays and a couple of novels I'm currently shopping to publishers. (You can follow the progress, or lack thereof, of my current work at www.shawnketcherside.com.) What I've learned is that despite many similarities, screenwriting for movies and games are two different beasts. In movies, the viewer is told a story. In a game, the player tells the story. They're very, very different mindsets. In good game dialogue, the lines help frame the world, establish characterisation and give some direction. Other than that, it stays out of the way. I've also learned how critical it is to keep the lines short – especially in a game like *Sin: Episodes* where we don't have traditional cinematics. Basically, no matter how great my dialogue is, no matter how compelling the story framework is, it just can't compete with slinging bullets into bad guys. This is exactly how it should be – after all, it's a game.

***Sin* was famous for its level of interactivity – fiddling with ATM machines and the like. How are you continuing this tradition?**

Well, we've got the stellar physics-related interactivity that comes from the Source engine, and we've designed with that in mind. For example, we spent a lot of time working on our explosives. In addition to the standard 'exploding barrel', players can shoot oxygen and acetylene canisters, and these will then take off and kill any foes they collide with before exploding. You can use this in any number of different ways: you can simply enter a room, start firing and unleash chaos, or you can be more strategic, picking up and placing explosives for tactical advantage. We were careful to try and ensure there was no 'right' way to play with this system.

How does the dynamic difficulty system work? Why choose this over the usual 'very easy, easy, average, hard' system?

Traditionally, selecting a difficulty level has always done very little – changing hit points, changing ammo drops. We wanted our dynamic difficulty to go beyond that. The system our coders have put in place is phenomenal. It's constantly monitoring your progress and play style, then adjusts the game. Games are most fun when they hit a sweet spot of difficulty, they need to be challenging – sometimes very

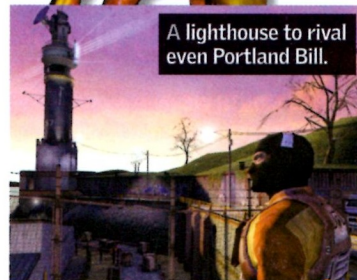
challenging. However, when a game steps over the line to frustrating, it becomes a problem. So far, the system has proved fantastic: we've had play-tests where hardcore FPS players have sat next to truly neophyte players and have finished the game 15 minutes apart.

How many episodes worth of *Sin* do you guys have mapped out?

We have nine episodes in various stages of planning, but we're trying to remain very fluid with the later episodes. One of the strengths of episodic games is the ability to quickly react to community feedback. So, for example, storywise, I'm attempting to seed every episode with cool potential tangents. If the community grabs hold of one or more of these, then we need to adjust to deliver what they're looking for.

Will every episode necessarily follow *Emergence's* FPS format?

I wouldn't expect it to. I don't anticipate us releasing an RTS episode or anything, but players should expect us to try new things and push the ideas of what an FPS is. **PC7**



A lighthouse to rival even Portland Bill.



EVIL forklifts must die!



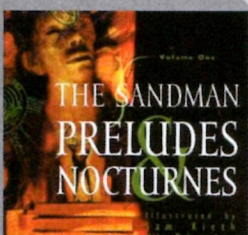
BEST leather-clad buxom lady since Cate Archer?

SHAWN KETCHERSIDE

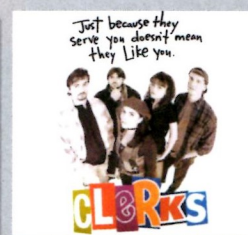
Where he turns for inspiration...



BLOCKBUSTERS: "I love blockbuster movies: Peter Jackson, Michael Bay, Jerry Bruckheimer."



NEIL GAIMAN: The books and comics of the *Sandman* creator are top of Shawn's reading list.



KEVIN SMITH: Shawn digs the dialogue and the mother-f***in' nootch of Jay and Silent Bob.



LOST: "Lost and 24 are good examples of great episodic content, which is what we're aiming for."

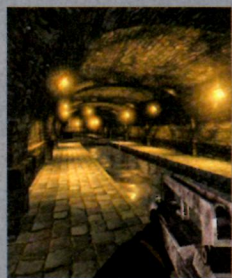


THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

THIS MONTH WE come across the most mistreated subject yet. Something that may be out of sight and out of mind for most of us, but something that young Mike Dodd professionally bathes in day in, day out. That's right kids: sewers. Home to giant rampaging alligators, teenage turtles

and lumps of floating ordure. But just how do gaming sewers live up to their real-world counterparts? Well, apparently they don't. We didn't find a single game in our vast library that contained anything that looked remotely as if it had fallen out of someone, and Mike... Well, Mike just got angry.



CHASER

"This looks more like a tube station with the tracks flooded than a sewer. You would never get walkways down each side of the water body – excavating that much earth costs shedloads. What's more, the metal

gate at the far end would clog up in no time at all with stuff that's been flushed down the toilets. Sewers aren't canals with a regular flow – they're designed to run at full capacity if required, but there isn't any crap and rags on the ledges or walkways. Far too clean for my liking."

PCZONE



Too big, too clean, too bad



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

"This is the best of the bunch, as long as you ignore the lights which certainly wouldn't be put in a sewer, and especially not so near an invert that's liable to surcharge

and totally flood. Seeing as it's such a corrosive environment, when work is carried out temporary lights are used. Essentially though, the roof-mounted pipework is feasible and the effluent looks realistic – although it could do with a few more rags. Proportion, shape and condition are good too – but why the hell is it green?"

PCZONE

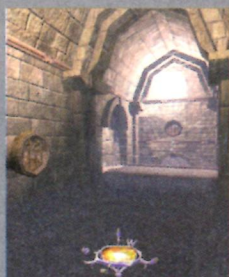


Alright, despite the light



HELLFORCES

"A poor example of a sewer. Pipes never run down the side – they run at the top and away from the invert to prevent obstructions for when it surcharges. You would never have a valve in a sewer either; this would obstruct the flow and would force workers to enter the sewer to shut it off. The grill is a load of rubbish as well, and would be ragged up with shit. I suppose the brickwork is good, but the metal support bracing is crap. This is more likely a dry 40-year-old service tunnel – there are far too many obstructions for it to be a sewer."



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

"This is not a sewer. You would expect a radius invert for normal flow conditions and you would also not get the ornate detail that can be seen at high level. What's more, the connections that you can see opening up into the sewer have grills attached, which would very quickly rag up. These should really be clear connections, or at the very most a tidal flap. Overall, this is far too clean and looks more like a medieval prison corridor than the harsh reality of a sewer."



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

"What the feck is this supposed to be? With a lick of paint and a towel rail this could be a swimming baths with those pan ceilings and elaborate columns. With this you could simply never get the constant waste water flow that's required to keep the water level constant. This could feasibly be part of a clean water distribution system, as you'd have control, but not a sewer. The effluent also looks far too clean. You'd also never get a pile of shit like that and the presence of an intact skeleton is rubbish – the surcharging would break it all up."

WINNER: Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines

Many congratulations to Troika Games (RIP), whose intense attention to detail with Santa Monica's pumping of raw effluent was second to none.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

• Spaceships • First Aid • Medieval Weaponry • Genetic Engineering

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.

THIS MONTH: SEWERS

Expert: Mike Dodd Job: Professional pumper of poo
Company: ARUP International
Specialised Pedantry: Sewerage in PC Gaming



PCZONE



Shit game, shit sewer

PCZONE

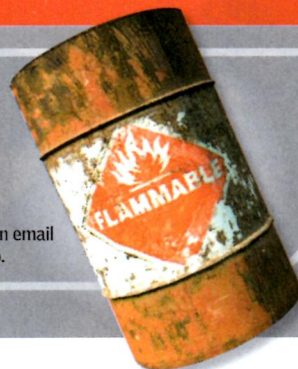


No radius invert!

PCZONE



A right stinky one



ELF HAZARD

SpellForce 2 magics up another slice of RTS/RPG mayhem

spellforce.jowood.com | ETA: April

IF YOU'RE GOING to meld two genres together, you might as well do it right. *SpellForce* was one of those experiments which, through stem cell research or something, managed to successfully meld role-playing and real-time strategy into one genetically-modified bunny-rabbit of a game.

SpellForce was definitely an accomplishment for developer Phenomic; it didn't dent the tills on the high street, but it made many Germans warm and contented. After two expansions however, it's high time Phenomic pulled its finger out and hopped on the train to sequel town – and that's just what it's doing, funnily enough, with *SpellForce 2: Shadow Wars*.

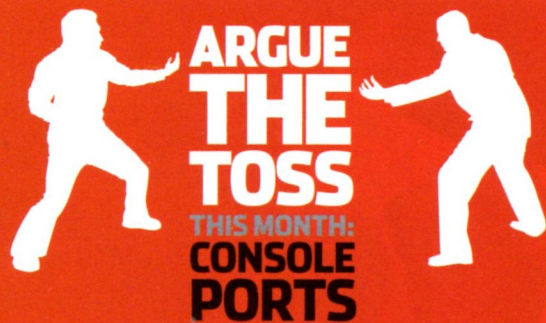
It's prettier, as you'd expect, with bloom effects and fancy trees, as well as more detailed wolves, spiders and skeletons than ever before. What's more, there are loads of new character abilities and skills, along with an improved RTS engine, three different factions, each with 12 different units including infantry, cavalry and flying troops, not to mention a special co-op campaign and long-winded, feature-listing sentences that never seem to come to an end. In short,



SpellForce fans will lap this up like cheap German beer.

Moreover, this time around *SpellForce* is unashamedly introducing a buxom half-blood Dark Elf called Shadowsong. "We've always tried to be stylish with our *SpellForce* brand," states Phenomic's Amelie Clement. "It's similar to the early Roxy Music album covers from the '70s which involved glamorous women whose image projected desirability and wouldn't be out of place in Hollywood."

Well, we took a look at some Roxy Music covers and we reckon they're nothing but filth. If that's what Phenomic plans on peddling with *SpellForce 2* (besides the role-playing strategy stuff), count us in. Expect ample, elfen breasts to be adorning your monitor this April.



Dear Andy,

I honestly don't mind console games being released a year or so late on PC. Yes, the graphics are often shoddy and yes, sometimes the menus and controls are iffy. But who can possibly complain about titles that you might not have been able to play appearing on your home format? It's hardly a crime is it?

Will Porter

Dear Will,

I think you answered your own question; PC ports often come out months late, run like a wonky shopping cart and are typically hindered by some seriously dodgy controls. What's the point? Console ports dilute the PC market when developers should be thinking up innovative and unique ways to play typical console-centric genres on the PC.

Andy Robinson

Dear Andy,

OK then, imagine me as a normal Joe Bloggs. I've heard loads about *Resident Evil 4*. I have no access to a GameCube or PS2 because Mrs Bloggs would complain about the stealing of her TV screen. I do, however, own a PC. My favourite PC games magazine (this one) has just announced *Resi* is coming out on PC. What would you do if you were me, Mr Robinson?

WP

Dear Will,

If somebody wants to play *Resident Evil* let them buy a cheap GameCube for 30 quid. Why should we settle for console ports? Shouldn't Capcom develop us our own *Resi*, tailored to the PC's many strengths? Why is the PC always the last port of call when it comes to multi-platform development?

AR

Dear Andy,

In your little perfect world of clouds made out of fluffy ice cream then yes, Capcom would be developing a PC-specific *Resident Evil*. However, the harsh reality of a money-led games market means that would never happen.

WP

Dear Will,

I'd like to meet this mythical person who owns a PC capable of running *Resident Evil 4* and no consoles, because the majority of people own a console. Chances are, if they don't own a console they don't give a pants about the latest *Resi*.

AR

Dear Andy,

If every single PC owner also owns a console, then why the bleeding f*** are they bothering to release *Resi* on it? They're not daft in the head. Unlike you, you stupid man's idiot.

WP

**BALD EAGLE**

The Cuotl 'gods' are really just alien technology dressed up as mystical beasts like this giant stone bird. With enough resources, you can summon this hero character who allows you not only to scout the map and hunt down the enemy, but destroy them with lasers once you find them.

CU-WHAT-LL?


The Cuotl are the recently unveiled third race in *Rise Of Legends*. After a spacecraft crashed on the planet, its alien occupant set himself up as the god of this Aztec-themed nation. This floating fortress is one of many high-tech Cuotl weapons, and it easily reduces the enemy to a sort of sizzling slush.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

DEVELOPER Big Huge Games **PUBLISHER** Microsoft
WEBSITE www.riseoflegends.com **ETA** March 2006

SOMETHING THAT Big Huge Games has noticed lately is that, just like socks and species of duck, RTS games have unwittingly become variations on one or two central, unmovable themes (elves and World War II). Not that there's anything wrong with that – we love orcs and Nazis – but sometimes we want change. So now, like those socks with the individual toes, Big Huge Games has made an RTS with a difference. Steam-punk Da Vinci-inspired civilisations, ancient Aztec monuments, mythological Arabian creatures – and all this coming from the same guys who brought you *Rise Of Nations*. "What's that giant floating temple thing?!" we hear you scream, covering the page in spittle. Calm down and read on...



AT EASE

The giant floating fortress may be stealing all the glory right now, but foot soldiers are always an integral part of your military force. Squads are made up of nine soldiers, rather than *Rise Of Nations'* three, and they can be knocked skywards by a rampaging hero, like an Alim scorpion-man.

CASTLES IN THE SKY

The Alim, based firmly in Arabian mythology, are indigenous to the *Rise Of Legends* world. Their cities float above big pits in the desert. We're not sure what legend that comes from, but it looks really cool and we like it. As the Alim, you can summon massive fire-breathing creatures of sand and glass.

WE DON'T NEED NO WATER...

OK, so this one might be on fire, but normally your cities are prosperous bastions of your civilisation. You can choose to build different districts, such as military and merchant, which branch out and expand your city, making it bigger and taller and ultimately more city-ish.



YOU need that axe, and there's only one way to get it.

ALONE IN THE DARK...

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Will Porter kills a series of tramps with an iron bar while making whimpering noises

DEVELOPER Monolith PUBLISHER Sega WEBSITE www.condemnedgame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 154

THE LOWDOWN

From the dark creators of *F.E.A.R.*



Bloody scary



Amazingly atmospheric sound effects



As violent as they come



Prompts embarrassingly loud yelps



I'M ALWAYS A bit worried when I boldly proclaim that a game is frightening – I hate trotting out the old 'Play it in the dark! On your own!' adage. A large proportion of gamers seem to whip through games without registering an ounce of emotion simply because they objectively want to moan about how they weren't scared one little bit – and the games journalist usually ends up getting bit in the bum and shown up as a pussy.

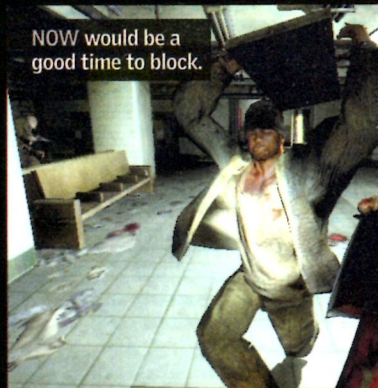
Well, guilty as charged obviously. But even the strongest of wills can be broken by *Condemned* – its entire slow-paced setup emits waves of terror in a far more slow-burn fashion than its development bedfellow *F.E.A.R.*, and the sheer brutality of its hand-to-hand combat gives everything a remarkably personal edge. You may be standing in a deserted Metro station jumping at the sound of a falling tin can clattering onto the floor, or you may be trying to work out exactly where in your environs a chattering madman is hiding – but you'll always be sitting somewhere in the vicinity of the edge of your seat. And when said madman leaps out of his hide-hole and you're frantically timing

blocks with your right mouse button and swipes with your left, and your hammer finally connects with a remarkable thud/crunch and a puff of blood – well, the feeling is indescribable. Don't tell the *Daily Mail*, but in *Condemned* beating thugs to death with blunt instruments feels really, really good.

TRAMP DREAD

This sudden surge of violence among the down-and-outs and your unfortunate solitude in a series of run-down locations, is all tied to a serial killer called The MatchMaker. While *F.E.A.R.* chose Asian horror as its jump-point, *Condemned* has opted for the lingering horror of US offerings such as *Se7en* or *The Silence Of The Lambs*. You play FBI Agent Ethan Thomas, hot on the trail of the aforementioned mentalist and his bloody modus operandi of setting up murder victims in gruesome tableaux, with shop-floor mannequins and their faces scratched off. Quite why the homeless are going nuts is explained later on, as is the game's fascination with dead birds, but suffice to say two levels into the game Thomas has been accused of a 'crime that he did

NOW would be a good time to block.



HE'S very well built for a tramp.



ETA
April
'06

THE STORY SO FAR...

MONOLITH

I LIVE AGAIN

Claw (moving swiftly on) and *Blood* (a fondly missed *Doom* clone) are released.



1997

KISS ME CATE

No One Lives Forever is well received, even if ZONE's Dave Woods is grumpy about it.



2000

FACE HUGS

AVP2 scares the world so much the United Nations gives Monolith a severe ticking-off.



2001

BODY SHOCKS

F.E.A.R. hits PC and *Condemned* is an Xbox 360 launch title – both are massive.



2005

NOT her again. We had enough of her in *F.E.A.R.*!



Serial Killer Hunting

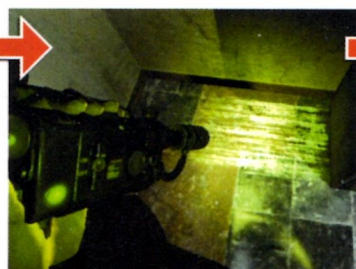
It's not all about discovering that Steve Buscemi has driven through three states using a woman's head as a hat. Sometimes there's work to be done...



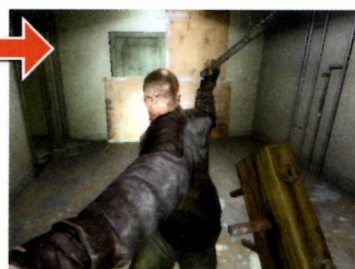
HMM... My special 'rotten flesh-o-meter' has led me to a dead bird. How intriguing – could it be a serial killer dead bird?



BUT wait! My special shiny light thing has discovered a trail of something gooey on the lino! Could it be serial killer goo?



BUT wait! What's this? The goo has led me to scratches. My powers of deduction lead me to conclude that they might be serial killer scratches...



BUT wait! A scarred madman is hitting me with lead piping. Again and again! Could he be a serial killing scarred madman? Probably.

The limited availability of bullets and firearms brings a remarkable amount of intensity to the game



GUNS are not welcome at any cottaging meet.

not commit'™ and is very much on his lonesome, bar the help of a mysterious stranger 'who may or may not be what he seems'™.

TURN IT ON THEN

As an FBI agent you also have a few gadgets up your sleeve – not least a handy torch (that never runs out of batteries!) and a tazer that can be used every 30 seconds or so on the screaming tramps chasing you. When you discover crime scenes, meanwhile, you get a cool laser camera, nifty sample taker and a *Basic Instinct*-type, homicide-spunk-torch (although to be honest I haven't come across any of that yet – mainly fingerprints and chemicals). With these in hand, you can send off evidence at heavily-prompted moments to a friendly scientific lady, who fills you in on what horrors you're witnessing – while *F.E.A.R.*-style paranormal visions are also present to fill in plot points.

In fact, *Condemned* seems to have far more stylish ways of telling its tale than *F.E.A.R.*'s somewhat clunky answerphone

messages – which is more than helped by its more tangibly grungy atmosphere.

Whether or not the appeal of the fierce hand-to-hand combat lasts the whole game will be discovered come our review next issue – but there's no doubt that the limited availability of bullets and firearms brings a remarkable amount of intensity to the game. Its slow pace too, makes you notice the minutiae of the game far more than you would in pacier games like *F.E.A.R.* or *Quake 4*. Even something as simple as seeing three bullet holes in a reinforced window and three corresponding holes in the wall opposite with a splash of blood seems quite special.

If there's one area, however, that *Condemned* is due to thoroughly excel in, it's the sound effects. They're fundamentally magisterial – from the thumping and bumping of a nutjob racing around on the floor above you, to the staccato chuntering abuse they give you as they try to dash out your brains with a crowbar. Forget the fear of a botch-job 360 conversion, Monolith really could be onto something special with this. **PCZ**



MILLS AND DOOM

Can a book based on a game be any good? Can you ever read it in public without shame? Join us, as we blow the dust from the bookshelf that your local library forgot...



FOR THE PAST month, PC ZONE staffers have been publicly humiliating themselves on trains, buses and even within their homes – publicly reading books covered in pictures of Lara Croft and Master Chief much to the chagrin of uptight old ladies and the amusement of gaggles of giggling schoolgirls. No, we have no dignity (we haven't had any for a while), but we've set ourselves a task. There's a question that needs answering: are videogame novels all turgid shit? Time for a taste test...

DOOM: KNEE-DEEP IN THE DEAD



AUTHOR: Dafydd ab Hugh and Brad Linaweaver

REVIEWED BY: Will Porter

PLOT: Corporal Flynn Taggart is facing court martial for refusing to open fire on a group of monks who might have been carrying guns. Right now though, he's on Mars, his best friend and romantic interest are somewhere deep in the facility and there's something strange going on. All hell can't stop him now.

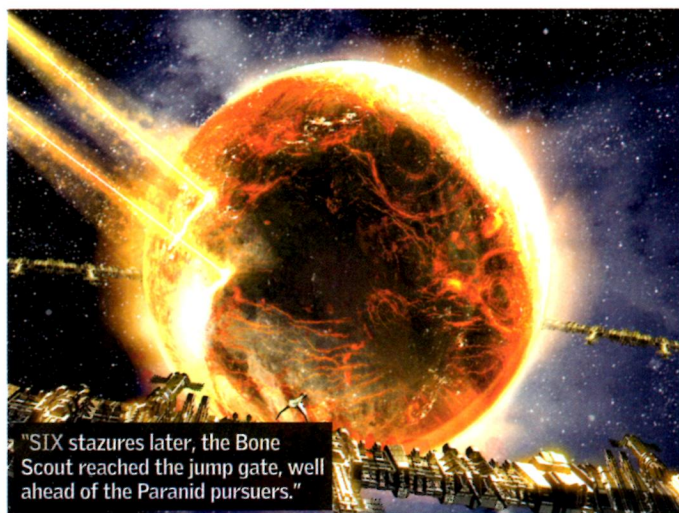
TYPICAL QUOTATION: "I whirled around, diving sideways; two spikys, two zombies, one big barrel of sludge. Ignoring the monsters, I concentrated fire on the stationary barrel. It took a couple of rounds then exploded spectacularly. I wondered if my 'intellectual' demon could spell 'KA-BOOM!'?"

INTERESTING FACT: Zombies smell like sour lemons. Strange but true. Apparently.

REVIEW: We begin with the most piss-poor offering on these pages – essentially a list of guns, monsters and macho grunting masquerading as a novel. From the awful scenes in which Flynn and his beefy love interest sit around naming the monsters ("Maybe we should call it a pinkie?") to the deadeningly relentless way in which the book feels like it HAS to crowbar in everything in the game (from bizarre blue drops of health to the same specific order of discovering new weapons), the book's a shit-mine. Three-quarters unremittingly dull shooting-in-the-face, one-eighth adolescent whining about Doomguy fancying his mate and another painful eighth musing on the true meaning of duty. Eugh. The fact that there are three other whole books in the series makes me weep for humanity.

RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Three-quarters unremittingly dull shooting-in-the-face, one-eighth adolescent whining



X – FARNHAM'S LEGEND



AUTHOR: Helge T Kautz

REVIEWED BY: Paul Presley

PLOT: Essentially the events of the first X game combined with sub-par space antics and two-dimensional aliens. Captain Kyle William Brennan has disappeared in space without a trace, his best friend Elena is hot on his trail and a species of three-eyed mathematicians are tracking them down.

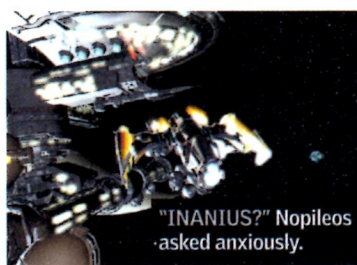
TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Oh, rotten egg', Nopileos cursed quietly as his Egg-Brother vanished behind the next turn without responding. Why was it so difficult to have some fun or adventure with Sissandras or anybody older than four suns?"

INTERESTING FACT: Japanese is the language of the future. Really, that's in the book – the Earth pilot communicates with aliens by speaking Japanese. Honest.

REVIEW: Faithful to the source in that the original X games were never exactly strong on story, dialogue or plot, and neither, really, is *Farnham's Legend*. Whether this is down to merely dodgy translation from the original German (of which there's plenty), or just the cornball nature of the story and characters, this does at least follow the basic plot of the game pretty well, at least up until the crowbarred inclusion of the love interest. The depiction of the various aliens also feels somewhat less at ease than in the

original game, especially with the poorly developed and pretty two-dimensional Klingon rip-offs, the Split, who have a culture that's rife with inconsistencies and contradictions in this tome. Put it this way: if Arthur C Clarke was about to have a spot of bother sleeping, he needn't worry himself over this.

RATING: ★★☆☆☆



TOMB RAIDER: THE LOST CULT



AUTHOR: E E Knight

REVIEWED BY: Will Porter

PLOT: A school friend of Lara's has been brainwashed by a cult known as the Mené, an evil troupe of malcontents who want to wake up some vengeful 'Deep Gods™' through the abuse of archeology. Thankfully, Lara's mind-controlled-sexpot-friend's-ex-boyfriend (who has gigantic metal arms due to a climbing accident) is on

hand to help her out. Which is a spot of luck.

TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Speaking of which, the tub was nearly full. She topped it off with the third box of bath salts. Then she stuck one leg in up to the knee, relishing the painfully hot water. Exquisite. She stuck the other leg in and prepared to lower herself ever so slowly into the steaming bath."

INTERESTING FACT: Lara can be involved in a confrontation in Mayfair, central London, that leaves four hoodlums dead by her own hand – yet the constabulary not only take her word for it that they deserved it, but also let her swan off around the world despite the pressing needs of their investigation. Maybe they'll call her back at a later date, like Kate Moss.

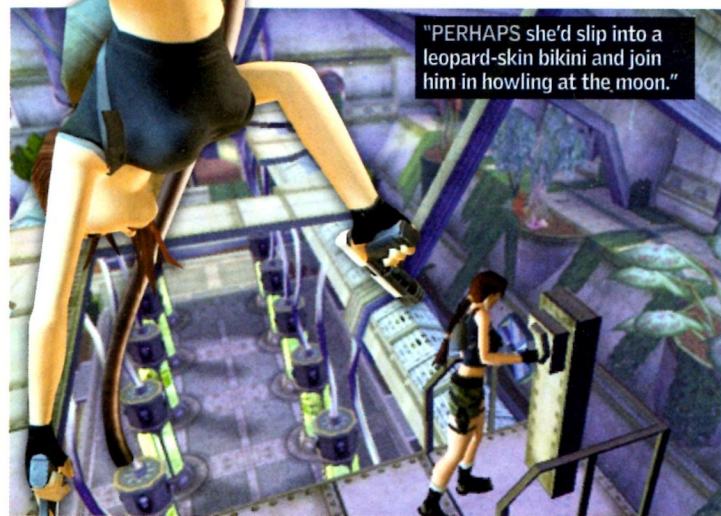
REVIEW: It gets a bit silly towards the end, but this lump of *Tomb Raiding* nonsense is really quite enjoyable as long as you and your brain agree to part ways while you and the book are in the same room. Yes, every cliché in the book is turned upside-down and shaken vigorously, but its rambling *Inspector Morse*-



meets-*Indiana Jones*-meets-ultra-violence set-up is really quite engaging. Bike chases, indoor base jumping, things exploding, giant insects and evil mer-creatures: it's a stupid, daft adventure with big blue boobs on. The sort of book that, without the videogame tag, my dad would happily read on the beach with furrowed brow and nodding head.

RATING: ★★★★★

"PERHAPS she'd slip into a leopard-skin bikini and join him in howling at the moon."



WARCRAFT: WAR OF THE ANCIENTS – THE WELL OF ETERNITY



AUTHOR: Richard A Knaak

REVIEWED BY: Will Porter

PLOT: A year or so after the tumultuous battle of Hyjal, some naughty night-elves are fiddling with the time continuum and the demons of the Burning Legion are getting fidgety. Three heroes (a dragon mage, a human wizard and an embattled orc warrior) have been hurled back into Azeroth's past – can they save the greatest MMOG of all time?

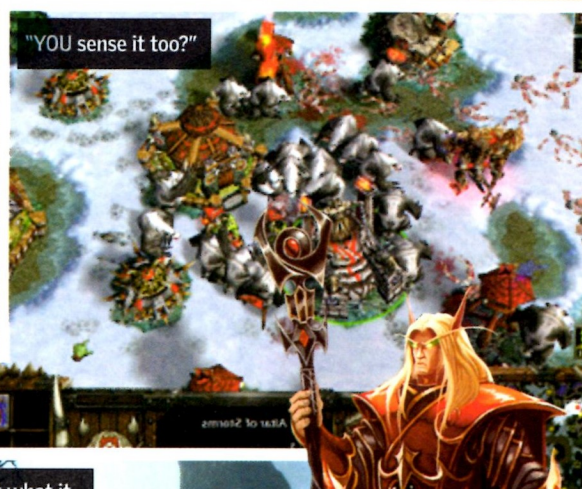
TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Korialstrasz reached the shores of Kailimdor late in the day. He and Rhonin paused only to eat – the dragon imbibing in fare away from the wizard's sight – and then set off again for the vast mountain chain that covered much of the western regions of the land."

INTERESTING FACT: *Well Of Eternity* shows that it's possible for children (twins no less) to be born with an elf mother and a human father. So perhaps all that cybersex you've been up to isn't as futile as previously thought.

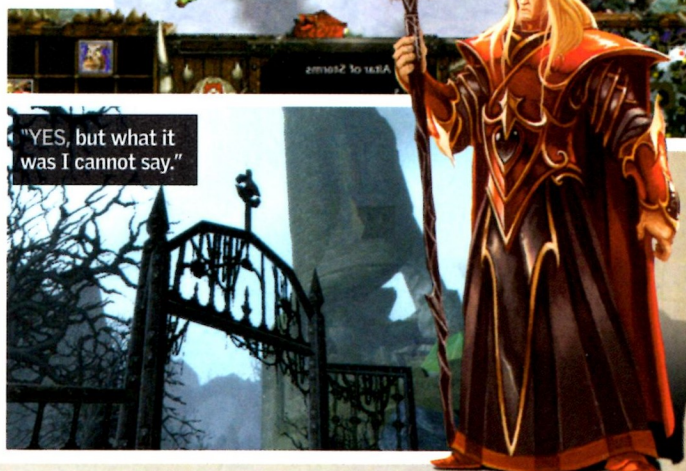
REVIEW: This is a really, really good book – entirely aided by the fact that my double-life as an Elfin Huntress means that I know many of its locations with worrying detail. It doesn't bother straying



"SOMETHING tragic happened here," Korialstrasz commented.



"YOU sense it too?"



"YES, but what it was I cannot say."

from the usual fantasy template of chucking together heroes from different races who may not all get along but at least have a common goal (Tolkien who?), but it remains an accomplished piece of writing with equal parts of action, adventure, comedy and goblin-nobbling. With ace portrayals of many of *Warcraft*'s Night Elf heroes in their early years (it's a bit like those *Friends* episodes when they go back in time and Monica is hilariously fat), this is a book that *WOW* nerds will love, and anyone with a slight angling towards spellcasting will enjoy.

RATING: ★★★★★



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL



AUTHOR: David Michaels

REVIEWED BY: Steve Hogarty

PLOT: Sam Fisher hides in some shadows and brings down Iranian terrorist regimes by systematically snapping their necks one by one. One man in particular plans to bomb Baghdad and blame the US: Sam will have to snap his neck extra-hard.

TYPICAL QUOTATION: "My arm muffles his cries as I pop his head forward, snapping the surprisingly brittle bones in his neck."

INTERESTING FACT: Sam's OPSAT pokes him on the wrist to wake him up if he decides to take a nap in a ventilation shaft.

REVIEW: The cover reads 'Created by #1 New York Times Best-selling Author Tom Clancy', and then in smaller writing underneath, 'Written by David Michaels'. David Michaels must be feeling pretty short-changed, perhaps even vengeful towards Clancy – maybe that's why he's written such a piece of crap, perhaps he's trying to sully Clancy's good name. This is a god-awful tragedy of a book, written in

present tense, first-person and probably originally in crayon too. Imagine the action scenes of *Splinter Cell* written in the form of a 10-year-old's 'My Summer' essay and you'll get the gist. "And then I broke his neck. And I hid. And it was nice."

RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

"THE carpet must be awfully interesting though because he's keeping his head down."



A tragedy of a book written in present tense, first-person and probably originally in crayon

MYST: THE BOOK OF D'NI



AUTHOR: Rand Miller with David Wingrove

REVIEWED BY: Steve Hogarty

PLOT: A bunch of determined chaps set out to rebuild the world of D'Ni by wandering around other worlds called 'Ages' which are hidden in books. On their quest, they find an amazing world (of peril), and in typical fashion, get more than they bargained for.

TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Islands littered the lake, twisted spikes of darkness jutting from the level surface of the water, and there, on the far side of the cavern, one single, massive rock, split yet still standing, like the splintered trunk of a tree, its peak hidden in the darkness."

INTERESTING FACT: Jethhe Ro'Jethhe, son of Eedrah, Lord of Terahnee is actually a nice bloke once you get to know him.

REVIEW: *Myst* sat meekly in our pile of books, like the fat kid in PE who'd get picked last for football. Who'd want to read a book based on a game like *Myst*, the interactive slide-show with some incomprehensible appeal to strange people? Well, we were pleasantly surprised to learn that this particular *Myst* book is actually a decent piece of fantasy writing. Although it's a bit of a dry read, it's got strong characterisation and a genuinely interesting plot with plenty of *Myst* lore ramblings and twists. And yes, everybody has an apostrophe or five in their name.

RATING: ★★★★★

"ON a podium a book lay open, the faint ghost of a palm print over the duller descriptive pond."





DIABLO: LEGACY OF BLOOD



AUTHOR: Richard A Knaak

REVIEWED BY: Suzy Wallace

PLOT: Veteran warrior Norrec Vizharan

stumbles upon the armour of Bartuc, Warlord of Blood in his search for treasure. But the armour is cursed and, unable to remove it, Norrec embarks upon a journey to seek help while trying to control the armour's bloodlust and evade the demons who pursue him.

TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Upon returning to Tristram they learned the sorry truth: a great champion had descended into the labyrinth but a few weeks before and supposedly slain the terrible demon, Diablo."

INTERESTING FACT: One of the more obscure legends in the book reveals Lut Gholein as the possible location of Baal's tomb. Fascinating stuff.

REVIEW: Yes, I thought it'd be naff too, but I found myself engrossed by the *Legacy Of Blood* storyline. There are plenty of interesting characters, from centuries-old wizards to beautiful female necromancers and demon henchmen; while the story has a distinctly dark feel to it, with many slaughtered left, right and centre straight from the off. The story builds to a decent climax and although actual links to the game are tenuous at best (despite place-names and characters being name-checked here and there), any fan of the game will love this. Highly recommended.

RATING: ★★★★★

HALO: FIRST STRIKE

AUTHOR: Eric Nylund

REVIEWED BY: Jamie Sefton

PLOT: Set just after the destruction of Halo (from the first game), *First Strike* follows Master Chief and a ragtag bunch of UNSC Spartans as they attempt to rescue survivors on the planet Reach, and prevent the fanatical Covenant from discovering the whereabouts of Earth.

TYPICAL QUOTATION: "Fred's plasma pistol discharged in a bright, emerald flash. The Jackal flopped over on its back, minus its head."

INTERESTING FACT: Master Chief's name is John, Spartan number 117.

REVIEW: *First Strike* isn't going to trouble the Booker Prize panel, but as a brainless action sci-fi romp, it does the job. The third in a trilogy of *Halo* novels, *First Strike* focuses mostly on the adventures of Master Chief and his sarcastic AI companion Cortana as they attack seemingly insurmountable



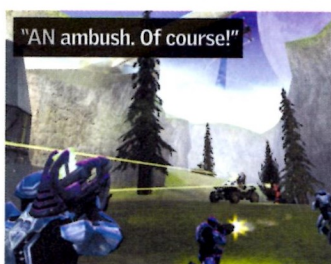
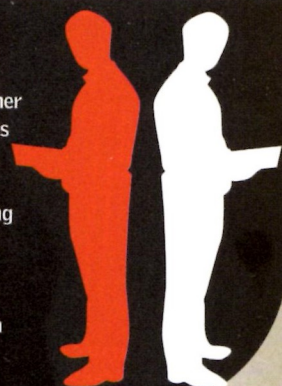
Covenant forces, although the action zips quickly back and forth in time covering other characters along the way, including a Spartan soldier called Fred and even a Grunt alien called Zawaz. Some of the corny dialogue between the Earth soldiers is obviously 'inspired' by *Aliens* ("You sleep when you're dead, marine"), and the novel is littered with techno-babble ("She concentrated on interpolating the fluctuating space"). Ultimately though, it's entertaining and true to the characters, locations and weapons of Bungie's shooter.

RATING: ★★★★★



ANY GOOD THEN?

Actually, game books aren't that bad. Yes, some are so bad you begin to wonder whether massive piles of burning books in the streets isn't such a bad idea after all, but as far as pot-boiler paperbacks or hack 'n' slash fantasy go, perhaps there's life in the gaming novel yet. We may have been pointed at by fellow commuters and lost several pounds-worth of dignity, but by god we're proud of our achievement. We await the novelisation of *Lula 3D* with renewed vigour. **PCZ**



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Steve Hogarty shaves his head and rents a suit – he must have a score to settle

DEVELOPER Io Interactive PUBLISHER Eidos WEB www.hitman.com PREVIOUSLY IN 164

JUST LIKE BEER-TESTING and plywood manufacturing, the contract killing industry is a highly desirable yet difficult line of work to get into. So, in a world of over-educated and under-skilled university graduates, where can we turn to find the next Agent 47 – an Agent 48, if you will? You can't kill a man with a BSc in Media Studies; you could probably give him a nasty paper-cut which might become infected, but that's merely an amputation at best. So for all you budding hitmen out there, here's everything you wanted to know about contract killing, but were too afraid of being garrotted at a urinal to ask...

ETA
May
'06

01 Where should I practice?

Anywhere with people will do just fine. Depending on your moral fibre or skill level, places like schools, churches and Battersea Kitten Orphanage are all fair game. In this particular example, we've chosen an institution for persons of erratic mental disposition, also known as a rehab clinic. All of the residents here are on a significantly lower rung of society than you or I, so this is an ideal setting for gratuitous violence with very few moral repercussions. Jiffy bags of talcum powder can fetch quite a bit of extra dollar here too, but do try to focus on the task at hand.

"I want your clothes, your boots and... Actually, that'll do."

LOOK at how neatly he folded that suit – a cub scout perhaps?

02 What should I wear?

Most of your clothing can be acquired on-site, but always wear the obligatory black suit and tie until you find a better-fitting alternative. Above is an errant drug-abuser hiding behind a dumpster in the grounds outside the clinic – he's not exactly *using* his clothes, so by all means take them from him. With the right garb you can fit in pretty much anywhere, despite your blatant slap-headedness. Indeed, if you hope to get inside the clinic at all, you'll need that white bathrobe and blue-stripe pyjama ensemble.

03 He says he won't give me his clothes, what am I doing wrong?

People don't simply hand over clothes, except of course to Oxfam, and even then those clothes are generally horrible and wanted by nobody. No, if you want to dress to impress you'll need to forcefully remove this man's clothes and bundle him in the very dumpster he was trying to hide behind. Ignore the vague sexual connotations and wrap your piano wire around his neck, applying pressure until he slumps to the ground. As somebody probably once famously said, dead men

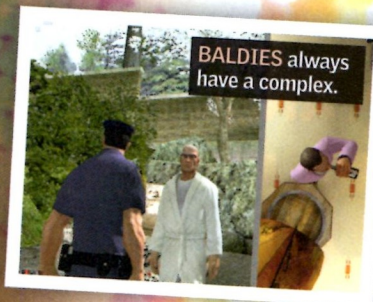
don't need clothes, so don't be shy. Dead men don't need glasses either, by the way.

"GUESS who?!"

AGENT 47 'infiltrates' rehab. When will the denial end?

04 Right, I'm dressed, but now there's a guard coming towards me!

Remember rule seven in the *Dummy's Guide To Contract Killing* (funnily enough also rule seven in the *Dummy's Guide To Cottaging*) – play it cool. It's not enough to look the part, you also have to be the part. You're a recovering alcoholic, not quite famous enough for Betty Ford's but still willing to reform. Avoid doing anything suspicious like climbing fences or brandishing heavy weaponry and you'll be fine. That 24-esque picture-in-picture shows one of your targets swigging away at a secret stash of booze in the clinic, something you'd do well to note.

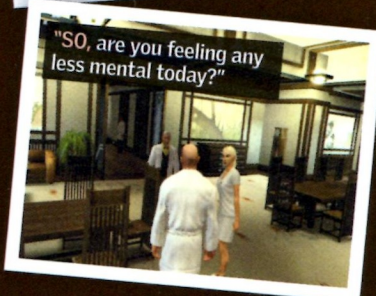
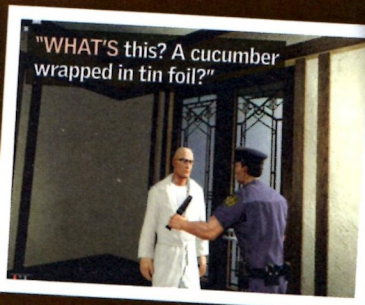


05 He's got a squeaking wand machine! WHAT NOW?!

Any excuses about accidentally swallowing a penny or having three metal rods in your spine due to a horrific tiddlywinks accident just won't fly with these guys. A real hitman doesn't need a gun anyway, or indeed any sort of weapon, so when approaching a metal detector you should leave your guns elsewhere (or perhaps arrange for them to get to wherever you're going by some other means, preferably inventive). Death can come from any direction, not just the barrel of a gun, so use your surroundings to kill your targets, like Jackie Chan.

06 So how can I kill this guy without anybody noticing?

Well, let's review what we know about this guy so far. He likes pink bathrobes, he doesn't cross his legs when he sits down and he hides a bottle of Jack Daniels inside a globe from which he routinely swigs when the doctors aren't looking. You, on the other hand, are a contractual murderer with an array of poisons at your disposal. Put two and two together and you get a convulsive coma and cardiac arrest resulting in death. Watching the poor sod writh and keel over is what being a hitman is all about. That, and the pension scheme.



08 This is all far too cerebral, I'll just take out my sub-machine gun here...

Probably not the best thing to do when you're a hitman, as while you do have gun skills far superior to the security guards dotted about the clinic, they'll eventually overcome you as there are just too many of them. Not to mention the fact that it's extremely unprofessional. You're not a murderer, you're a businessman (whose business happens to be murdering people). So play it safe, fulfil your contract and try not to get your bald barcode-head noticed. **PCZ**





TOTALITARIAN ANNIHILATION...

SUPREME COMMANDER

COVER
FEATURE

Martin Korda jets off to Seattle to speak to gaming legend Chris Taylor about his visionary new RTS epic

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE www.gaspowered.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 158

THE LOWDOWN

Titanic maps that can be played from close-up or a global viewpoint



Streamlined yet massively intuitive & powerful interface



Three unique sides to play as, each with distinct ideologies and arsenals



Countless brutal and manic battles raging all across the battlefield



Could be tricky to micro-manage individual skirmishes



ETA
2007

IT'S RAINING: it always rains in Seattle. And if it's not raining it's probably drinking a coffee, watching *Frasier* and thinking about it really hard. But this bleak blanket of watery needles is battering the windows of Gas Powered Games' plush offices as I wait for the arrival of gaming legend Chris Taylor, founder of the studio and creative director of what could just be the most innovative and ground-breaking RTS game since *Shogun: Total War*.

On the giant screen before me stand perfectly aligned columns of futuristic soldiers, their ranks sprawling menacingly into the distance. Things are starting to look brighter already.

Taylor's entrance is typically energetic. He's a man who bleeds gaming, someone who's always striving for evolution in his latest project. Given his track record – after all, he was the brains behind *Total Annihilation*, one of the greatest RTS games of all time – I'm eager to see just how this, his latest vision, will stack up

to the competition. Never one to linger on formalities, Taylor dives straight into his presentation.

"Our first goal is for players to be immediately comfortable," he begins. "No learning curve. All of the controls that RTS fans are familiar with are present. However, you can also use the mouse wheel to zoom out to see more of the battlefield in order to be more informed of what's going on. We have scale of map, scale of unit and scale of numbers, which make for battles consisting of hundreds of units."

ZOOM, ZOOM, ZOOM

Suddenly we're propelled from a close-up view to an intricately detailed, all encompassing zoomed-out perspective that displays the entire battlefield, a massive expanse of land and sea dotted with units and armies skirmishing in multiple hotspots. It's as though someone has taken ten levels from a standard RTS and pasted them into one gargantuan war zone.

Before moving on, Taylor takes a moment to explain the player's role in this bloody conflict. "You play as the Supreme Commander, who's a unit on the battlefield. After a thousand years of war (see 'Fight For Your Right', page 56), no-one has had a strategic enough mind to win the conflict. That's where you come in. You're the Supreme Commander who ultimately wins the war."

Your Supreme Commander will be fully upgradeable with either defensive augmentations (that'll allow him to sit deep inside your main base and repel the enemy), or with jump jets and shield systems that'll enable him to wade into the frontline action. And of course, should your Supreme Commander unit snuff it, it's game over.

DIVE IN

Without doubt, the game's most impressive attribute is its scale, and when I'm saying that I'm not just nodding towards its mammoth-sized levels. Zooming down to ground level, Taylor skims



WE hope this
hits something.



Action stations

Resources take a back-seat as action drives gameplay



SO there's coal and steel nearby? Who cares?

With maps as big as *Supreme Commander's*, the last thing you want to be spending your time on is painstakingly collecting limited resource supplies, then arduously traipsing across the map to get to the next lot. It's just as well then that Gas Powered Games is providing you with an infinite resource model that'll allow you to spend more time wading through the corpses of our vanquished foes and devising cunning battle plans.

Supreme Commander's resources will come in the form of War Mass (the substance needed to build units), which can be extracted from underground wells and energy generated by reactors. Couldn't be simpler, really.



NO smoke without fire. So true.

BET he's glad he's not down there.



the camera across the sea – each undulating wave reflecting the sun's rays with startlingly lifelike realism for an RTS game.

Then a dot appears on the horizon. As we approach, it starts to take on a distinct form, swelling into a monstrous metal battleship bristling with four anti-aircraft guns, three enormous main cannons and two anti-missile turrets. The sheer immensity of this vessel makes most other strategy games' naval units look like fishing boats. "The scale in *Supreme Commander* is huge," says an enthusiastic Taylor. "Most RTS games would only have one or two weapons max for a unit like this."

Taylor heads towards land where a moored battleship towers above a column of heavy tanks, dwarfing them as an NBA star would a row of stunted dwarfs. "In the old days, you'd have a ship and a heavy tank that weren't very different in size," he explains. "In *Supreme Commander*, the barrels on a heavy tank are the same size as the anti-aircraft guns on a battleship. We're trying to make the scale of our units a lot closer to real life than other RTS games." So far, it's looking like he and his team are well on course to achieving their aim.

HEAVY METAL

But *Supreme Commander's* sheer scale isn't Gas Powered Games' only consideration in relation to realism. With every projectile's flight computed through

three-dimensional space, you'll be able to see each shot streaming towards its target and colliding with a suitably meaty impact. Battleships will sag backwards as their guns fire off fearsome salvos while smaller, nippier units will duck under the legs of their larger, slower comrades.

But I'm concerned. Sitting here listening to Taylor, I wonder whether all this ambition will be hampered by lack of control. After all, co-ordinating multiple attacks and defensive manoeuvres across a huge expanse of land is no small ask. Unsurprisingly, Taylor is way ahead of me, moving the presentation onto what could potentially be one of the most intuitive interfaces ever to grace a strategy game.

THE FULL PICTURE

"When you start off playing an RTS, the first thing you want to do is to zoom out," he begins. "The more information you have, the more strategic you can be. You can get a complete picture of what's happening on the battlefield thanks to the zoomed out viewpoint. You can move all of your units from the zoomed out perspective or from up close. It's the exact same interface paradigm.

"You can also set and monitor patrol and move routes with a press of a button and even see their estimated time of arrival. This system makes it very easy to create a co-ordinated attack. We joke that if Eisenhower had had this system, he could



INTELLIGENCE AND SUBTERFUGE Know your enemy, win the war

Supreme Commander is aiming to be every bit as strategic as it is immense. Collecting intelligence data will be paramount to your war effort. Fail to gather enough intelligence and it'll be virtually impossible to guess where your enemies are or where their strengths and weaknesses lie – and in a game this big, that's going to be essential. You'll also be able to play tricks on your opponents by duping them with false attacks. A certain unit will allow you to convince the enemy that a large force is bearing down on its base, allowing you to launch a real offensive from another angle and split their defending armies in two. Suckers!



identity," explains Taylor as he concludes his weapons inspection.

With the game's basic premise explained and the three factions introduced, it's time to get into the meat, and I'm not talking about the three kilo vat of beef lasagne that Gas Powered has wisely ordered me for lunch. Like some sort of strategically masterful Russian doll, *Supreme Commander's* three campaigns will comprise of six or seven operations set on unique and increasingly expansive maps. Each operation is then set to feature between two and five missions, with every new objective revealing a previously hidden section of the level.

"You don't start off an operation with a base," continues Taylor. "Your *Supreme Commander* uses a Quantum Tunnel to appear on the surface of a planet and you immediately have to start



building it. You're then given a lightweight mission to start off with, but things soon start to heat up as new intelligence comes in. The idea is to create some surprises, so on the way to attacking an enemy base, you might come across another one you didn't know about. This makes missions feel more fluid and less scripted."

In a game of *Supreme Commander's* magnitude, it'd be all too easy for base management to distract from the game's all-out



have co-ordinated the Normandy invasion in 26 seconds instead of eight months."

Another exciting new feature will be the ability to queue up build orders for weapons factories still under construction (now there's a first), and you'll also be able to see exactly when each new unit will be ready to enter the fray. It's innovations like this that could just propel *Supreme Commander* into a new echelon of strategic excellence and finally eradicate the strategy-lite, build-and-rush ethos that has held a stranglehold on the genre for far too long. We live in hope.

A TALE OF THREE SIDES

The titanic conflict at *Supreme Commander's* core involves three very distinct warring factions. "I believe in asymmetry," explains Taylor when I ask him about the differences between the three sides. "It makes each side more interesting and fun."

The UEF consists of the greedy, colonising forces of Earth, which come equipped with an instantly familiar arsenal of heavy tanks, bombers and battleships. The robotic Cybrans, meanwhile, are distinctively different with their collection of alien-looking units, including towering spider-walkers that dwarf even the mightiest UEF tank. The Aeon's are also highly unique, possessing sleek, simple, single-weapon units.

"We want the player to believe that each faction wants to create its own



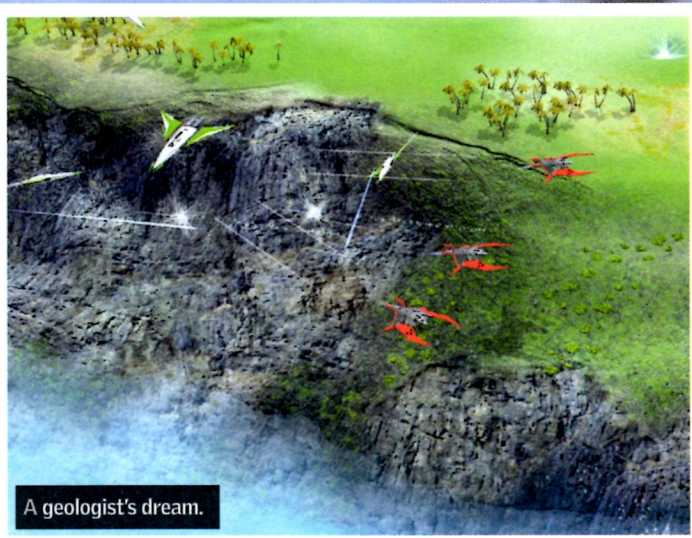
Fight for your right Three factions, three ideologies. Take your pick

WHO will you fight for?



It's 2007. A group of scientists create a system called Quantum Tunnelling that allows high-speed space travel. Harnessing this new technology, humanity colonises the galaxy. With the UEF's empire expanding too rapidly, the galaxy collapses into civil war as planets try to break away from the UEF's rule. But while the battle rages, the UEF continues to colonise new worlds, and discovers and wipes out an alien race called the Seraphim. However, a handful of humans, intoxicated by the Seraphim's spiritual way of life called The Way, break away from the UEF and form the Aeon faction.

Meanwhile, a character called Dr Brackman has created a way to augment human intelligence with a chip. He creates a new, robotic race called the Cybrans, who thirst for independence. But with the UEF determined to keep them in line and the Aeon's unwavering determination to bring peace to the galaxy by wiping out any potential aggressor races (go figure), it's not long before the galaxy becomes embroiled in a three way, thousand-year war. The question is, whose cause are you willing to die for? The decision is yours.



A geologist's dream.

action thrust. It's a pitfall that Taylor has, once again, already addressed.

"During the game's later stages you'll be able to build a unit called a Base Commander. The Base Commander can be upgraded and will remember where every factory in your base is. So if you're attacked, he'll automatically rebuild your base, meaning you can really focus on the frontlines rather than micro-managing your bases." Now why didn't anyone ever think of that before?

AIR, LAND & SEA

Time for some more action. We're back out at sea tracking a fleet of ships powering towards an enemy coastline. Whining overhead is a wing of Interceptor planes flying in perfect formation, scanning the skies for any sign of hostile aircraft. It's not long before they appear, two wings of enemy bombers bearing down on our

flagship. Our planes peel off and engage, the sky suddenly swarming with darting planes and fizzing missiles that connect with crippling force, sending their victims spiralling out of control into the sea. Two enemy bombers shake off their pursuers and head for one of our battleships, which opens fire with a devastating anti-aircraft barrage. One of the bombers never makes it. The other does, condemning our craft to a watery burial as the aerial battle continues to rage above.

"When ships sink, we want them to sink with the power, sadness and majesty that giant capital ships sink with," whispers Taylor as the last remnants of our warship gurgles below the waves. It's a moving moment, and we both salute as members of the development team play a solemn tribute on string instruments hidden below their desks. I urge Taylor to continue.

The action moves inland. We arrive just in time to witness the start of an encounter between UEF and Cybran forces. The humans are soon on the back-foot, their collection of foot soldiers reduced to mush by three giant spider-walkers and an array of nippier anti-gravity



TODAY'S the day the electro hover-tanks have their picnic.



THE STORY SO FAR...

GAS POWERED GAMES



Full steam ahead

Chris Taylor sets up GPG, and promptly teams up with Microsoft for its first game.

1998

Yes my siege

Dungeon Siege gets solid reviews, though some RPG purists find it a little too simplistic.

2002



Carry on sieging

Dungeon Siege spawns a sequel with a deeper storyline but much the same gameplay.

2005

The Supremes

Chris Taylor returns to his RTS roots with *Supreme Commander*. The world waits.

2006



tank-like units. Things are looking bleak for humanity, but as ever, Taylor has a trick up his sleeve.

BOOM!

Zooming out to the global view, Taylor selects a nuclear submarine, grinning evilly as he gives the command to fire. The missile hurtles straight for the massed Cybran ranks, before detonating into a devastating mushroom cloud that vaporises every living (and mechanical) thing in its path, while its secondary blast hurls away other nearby enemy forces like leaves in a typhoon.

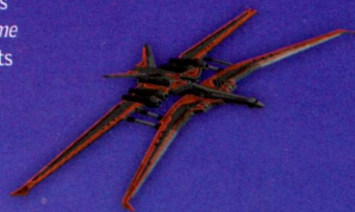
It's moments like these that set potential blockbusters apart from RTS fodder, and from what I'm seeing, *Supreme Commander* is already looking like being

Experimental weapons? Oh yes my friends, we're talking the kind of experimental weapons that'll have every RTS fan dramatically swooning left, right and centre on the highways and by-ways of Great Britain. Taylor starts off by showing me a giant flying saucer that's more than a little like *Independence Day's* gargantuan invasion ships. "This is the most devastating unit that the Aeon can build. It can be used as a transport, but it has a gigantic beam of death that shoots down," he explains.

"In addition, one of the UEF's experimental weapons is the Mobile Tank Factory. It's an enormous unit that can go across any terrain. You can even drive it along the sea floor and up onto your opponent's continent. It has battleship guns

to defend itself and an air service facility so you can service scouts and bombers on it." I urge him to go on, but Taylor has finally run dry, keen to hold back *Supreme Commander's* last few tantalising secrets for another day.

I leave Gas Powered Games with a renewed sense of hope. After years of stagnation where – *Total War* aside – innovation has been sparse, it looks like *Supreme Commander* could be the game that leads the genre in a new and exciting direction, providing a ray of light for a game type that's been flooded by *C&C* clones for far too long. It's just a shame it can't do the same for the Seattle weather. It's still raining. It always rains in Seattle. **PCZ**



Supreme Commander is shaping up to be a truly exciting and intense RTS

one of the most exciting and intense RTS games for years. But, just when I think I've seen it all, Taylor unleashes one final surprise.

GETTING EXPERIMENTAL

"One of the coolest things about *Supreme Commander* is the way our technology escalates," he begins. "You get to a level where you have giant battleships and enormous spider-like vehicles stomping around, but then the game goes one step further with its experimental weapons."

BATTLESHIPS was never this much fun.



NEVER a tree around when you need one.



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GIRL ON GIRL
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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Scaling the heights of PC gaming

DISC EDITOR Suzy Wallace

Barbie girl

COUGH, COUGH, SPLUTTER. That's been the sound I've been mostly making this month. The onset of a chest infection has meant that I've spent the best part of the last two weeks coughing up small parts of my lung and getting acquainted with the social issues of the day via *Trisha*, *Richard & Judy* and other such wonders that make up daytime television. As if I didn't feel bad enough already.

However, upon my weary return, I was greeted with no less than the reviews section to oversee. Packed full of gaming goodness, this month features the likes of the new *Star Wars* game, *Empire At War*, and even a half-decent *Sims* expansion. Is there a new world order?!

Well, yes actually. As of next month, I'll be responsible for bringing a feminine touch to the reviews section. So you can expect pink kitten borders, preference to be given to Barbie games and karaoke titles, plus reviews of the *Sims* and its endless expansion packs to now comprise the main bulk of the section. Oh, and the Classic award will make way for the new 'Fabulous & Fluffy' award.

Actually, I'm just kidding. Or so you hope...



GAME OF THE MONTH

60

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

Feel the force in the greatest *Star Wars* RTS ever!

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

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



EXPANSION PACK

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



ON THE DISCS

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

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Alienware Area-51.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	128MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	1GB
Video	32MB	128MB	256MB	512MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 60 **STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**
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All the latest from the world of independent gaming

BUDGET

TOCA Race Driver, *Empire Earth*, *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death*, *FlatOut* and more

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Write in and become a reviewer

BUYER'S GUIDE

Buy this little lot

Must Buys!

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



PCZONE SWEARS...

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



WHAT you can't see are the two gigantic logs on either side of this screenshot.



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

After so many years, do we finally have a decent *Star Wars* RTS? Many Bothans were killed and eaten for *Martin Korda* to bring you this information...

DEVELOPER Petroglyph
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE
www.petroglyphgames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99



AT A GLANCE...

An ambitious and entertaining RTS featuring both a strategic tactical map and frenetic real-time RTS combat. Play as the Empire or the Rebellion in either story-driven or freeform campaigns as you seek to conquer or free the galaxy.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

ROME: TOTAL WAR 93%

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR 85%

AGE OF EMPIRES III 84%

FIRST, AN ADMISSION. I'm not a *Star Wars* fan boy. Never have been, never will be. Sure, I enjoy watching the movies now and then – yes, even *Episode I* – but I've never wrapped myself in a poster of Leia in *that* outfit. Similarly, I've never been compelled to strap on a latex mask lined with lady napkins (absorbs the sweat apparently) and spend my weekends wedged into a conference hall with a collection of wet-lipped spods all

pretending they're from a planet with a dozen Ys in its name. I did own a *Return Of The Jedi* sticker album once, but I was five at the time, so I don't think that counts.

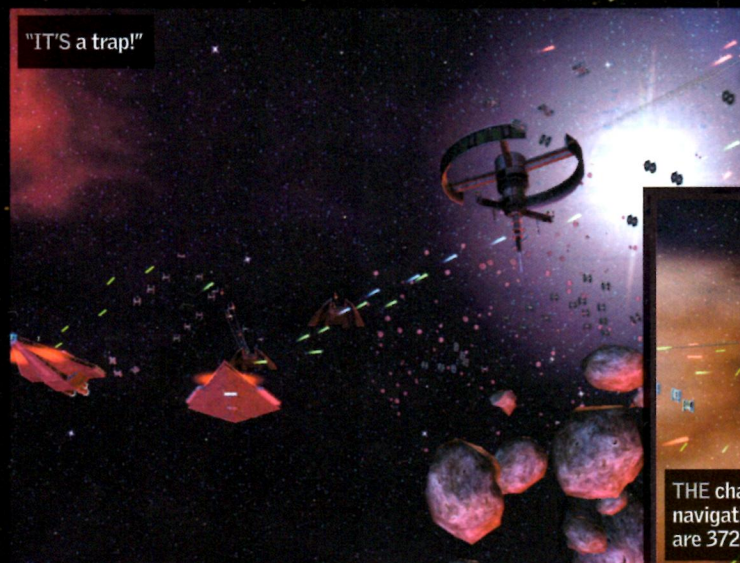
Without doubt, the celluloid romps that chart the Rebellion's struggle against the Empire are hugely entertaining, as are many of the plethora of shooters and smattering of RPGs based on the events of a galaxy that's well over two-and-a-half miles away from here.

But if there's one thing I've never enjoyed, it's a *Star Wars* RTS. In fact, it's testament to just how poor these games have been that isometric eyesore *Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds* (issue 109, 84 per cent) still stands as the pinnacle of *Star Wars*-related real-time strategic gaming. Pathetic.

NOT ANY MORE

Of course, that's all about to change. Yes, 85 per cent – in case you've somehow resisted the temptation to turn to the last page of this review for a sneaky peek at the score. Which means *Empire At War* is a pretty damn good game in my book.

In case you don't know, the developer behind this highly ambitious game is Petroglyph, formed from many of the



THE chances of successfully navigating an asteroid field are 3720:1.



TAKING out space stations is much harder than it looks.



EWOKS not pictured...



programmers, artists and scripters who created the legendary *Command & Conquer*. Which means there's experience aplenty behind *Empire At War*. And boy, does it show.

By the time you've reached the end of the near half-hour tutorial, you're left in no doubt that here lies an RTS of genuine ingenuity, imagination and ambition. Behind the slightly shaky visuals is a gaming mechanic married from many of the genre's most innovative and impressive titles, yet *Empire At War* still manages to remain remarkably intuitive despite its ambition.

EPISODE I

Kicking off just before the events of *Episode IV: A New Hope*, you take control of either the Rebellion or the Empire in a campaign of expansion, conquest and research. There are three parts to each campaign. The first is played from a 2D tactical map which displays the state of the galaxy, a vast swathe of space dotted with planets that must be subjugated or liberated, depending on your allegiance.

Here, you get to move your forces around the galaxy, build units, planetary buildings and defences, space stations and starships. You can attack pretty much any planet and should you succeed in capturing it, you'll bolster your income and gain

access to bigger armies. Spies, bounty hunters (yes HE is in it) and smugglers can also be sent out on clandestine missions to hamper the enemy. Every decision, every move, every kill and building destroyed affects the overall state of play for galactic domination.

JACKANORY

However, some planets remain out of bounds. Why? Because as well as being freeform, *Empire At War's* two main campaigns are also story-driven affairs that you can dip in and out of at will. There's never a time when you don't have a story-related mission to pursue, but it's up to you to choose whether or not to first conquer other worlds and boost your tech tree, or whether you rush straight in to each key mission with whatever's at your disposal. And while the strategic map's interface looks about as appealing as Jabba porn, it still proves very easy to navigate.

Just Like The Movies

Watch your battles from George's chair

HIT the Cinematic View button, then sit back and enjoy the fireworks.



The developers worked on *C&C*, which means there's experience aplenty, and boy does it show

A useless addition this, but a welcome one nonetheless. A feature called Cinematic Camera Mode means you can watch your battles from the viewpoint of a one unit.

Though no orders can be issued from this perspective, it does make space-based skirmishes look lush, while taking impressive screenshots has been a piece of piss. Look, see?

Once again, though, there's a problem with the land battles, where for some reason, the camera always takes forever to pan around to the action, spending more time thinking it's filming a nature program about grass growth than capturing the close-quarters laser blasting action. Pity.



LAND battles are pure *Command & Conquer*.



RUN Han, run!

It's Skill Units with more bang

THE Emperor has several special Sith powers...



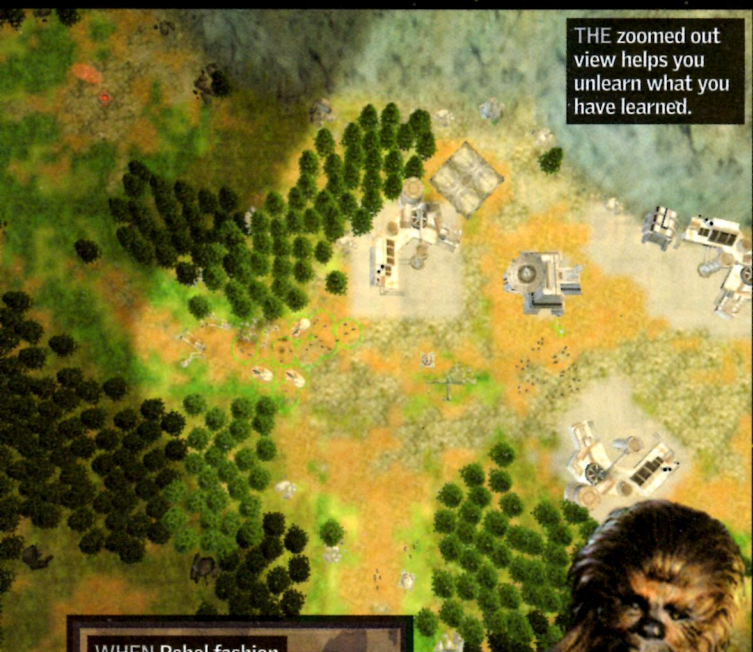
...WHICH make him a one-man army.

Every unit not only carries an attack bonus against certain enemies, it also struggles against others, meaning you always need to think carefully about which units you pit against an enemy force.

Every unit also carries special secondary abilities that can be used in conjunction with its primary weapons to make it a more effective killing machine. Star Destroyers have tractor beams, AT-ATs can deploy a wave of Stormtroopers from their bellies, T2-B tanks can search a level for enemies, while AT-STs can bombard an area with concentrated fire rather than the watered-down kind.

Best of all are the heroes who possess an array of powers that'll turn even the most hardened enemy soldiers into puddles of bloody goop. Darth Vader has Force Push that kills any nearby foot soldiers, the Emperor can electrocute his enemies or turn them to his side, while R2-D2 can control enemy turrets and repair vehicles.

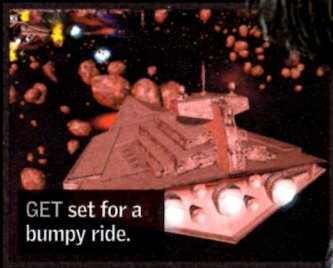
THE zoomed out view helps you unlearn what you have learned.



WHEN Rebel fashion police strike...



GET set for a bumpy ride.



I think I'm going to need some more troops.



THAT'S no moon! Oh no, wait! It might be.

Suddenly you're embroiled in some of the most retina-exhausting space combat scenes ever to grace a videogame

Clearly, Petroglyph has taken a long hard look at *Total War's* campaign map, and while *Empire At War's* is considerably smaller, it's still every bit as vexing and compelling. But here's the catch. Unlike *Rome's* turn-based strategic map, this one is real-time, meaning you never have to wait to issue your orders. And it works superbly, with planets (each has its own benefits and bonuses) constantly changing hands as you and your foe launch daring raids into each other's territories.

EPISODE II

So, let's move onto the second part of *Empire At War*, the space battles. I'll be honest, the first couple were less than impressive, raising my pulse to near-comatose levels as a couple of small ships buzzed around the screen pinging little green dots at each other. "Rubbish!" I cried.

But I was wrong. Very wrong.

Within a couple of hours of the start you begin to acquire the big boys,

massive capital ships that, despite looking like giant doorstops, pack more firepower than your average American household. Suddenly you're embroiled in some of the most retina-exhausting space combat scenes ever to grace a videogame, skirmishes so impressive they even manage to surpass *Homeworld's* space-based slugfests.

SPACE HULKS

Capital ships pound each other mercilessly while fighters swarm around them, dogfighting with each other and picking off the larger ships' defences. You can order your armada or individual vessels to target specific hardpoints on enemy cruisers, rendering them impotent as you disable their turrets and engines.

You can also erect monstrous space stations, hulking masses of steel bristling with weaponry that'll give even the most awesome fleet a run for its money. And in the latter part of the game, you become enmeshed in see-sawing cosmic wars that



"OUR first catch of the day!"



EVEN the younglings would die in that...



COULD be worse. I could be up against the Death Star.

test your strategic skills to haemorrhaging point, while dazzling you with their blistering brutality. Oh and don't worry, they're dead easy to control.

EPISODE III

So far, so good, then. But of course, there's a but. And the 'but' is *Empire At War's* land battles. And we were doing so well, too.

Here's the problem. While the tactical map and space battles are sublime, cleverly drawing on the RTS genre's most impressive recent innovations (strategic map, simplified resource model, huge battles etc), *Empire At War's* ground battles remain firmly entrenched in a dogmatic adherence to dated conventions, which roughly translates to: 'They're a bit shit.'

OK, so there's no resource management or unit construction to worry about here, just reinforcements to call down from orbit should things go tits-up. I'm guessing this was done to free up more time to enjoy the combat. Only problem is, there's not much enjoyment to be had.

Suddenly, it's like you've been sucked back a decade and you're playing *C&C* again, with many missions rapidly degenerating into tiresome yomps around levels capturing reinforcement points (that let you call down more troops), while eliminating countless blatantly positioned pockets of resistance until there are no enemies left to slaughter.

To compound the problem, the visual spectaculars of the space battles are replaced with static troops that stand in front of each other firing their guns. It's about as exciting as watching televised paintballing (should Channel 5 even decide to stoop that low),

just without the sweating, heaving fat boys complaining about pink dye and mud on their new Nikes.

HIDE & SEEK

But it gets worse. Cast your mind back to the birth of the RTS and you'll remember how infuriating it was when you reached what you thought was the end of a level, only to find that somewhere – probably tucked away under a large stone on the other side of the level – there were three enemy soldiers left that needed to be found and slaughtered before the mission was deemed a success. Well, get ready to start yanking out your nasal hair with fury, as that's exactly what you can expect to find here.

Throw in some suspect path-finding that often sees your troops getting in each others way and plodding around with the grace of a one-legged sumo ballet dancer –



How To Crush A Rebellion Wipe them out - all of them



TROUBLE'S a brewin' on Geonosis, with those pesky Rebel scum up to no good. But before we can take the planet, we need to build up an armada to punch through their orbiting defences.



ENCIRCLING the enemy with superior firepower, my forces make short work of their dinky little fleet, leaving the planet ripe for invasion. Better get the troops down there pronto.



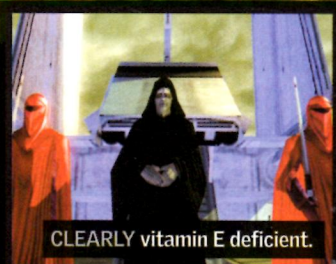
WITH Darth leading the assault, we cut through the planet's primary line of defence with ease, capturing a reinforcement point near to the Rebel's main base. It's only a matter of time now.



CALLING down some AT-STs, we wipe out the resistance's base. All we need to do now is spend ten minutes marching around the map searching for any enemies we may have missed. Sigh.



ENOUGH of the shooting. Let's pick some flowers instead.



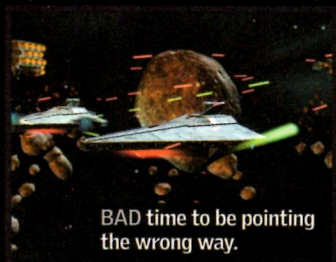
CLEARLY vitamin E deficient.

struggles against others. But it's not quite enough to paper-over the fist-sized cracks.

FAN FAVOURITES

Perhaps the most infuriating thing in all this is that had some more thought gone into these surface battles, *Empire At War*

***Empire At War* has almost everything a *Star Wars* fan could want - intrigue, excitement, innovation, tension...**



BAD time to be pointing the wrong way.

would be smugly buffing its Classic award right now. The two story-driven campaigns are magnificent, unravelling a back-story that perfectly complements the films. There's also a freeform campaign that's every bit as entertaining - in some ways, more so. Voice-acting is above reproach and all of your *Star Wars* favourites make an appearance including Boba Fett, The



Emperor, Han Solo, the droids and Darth Vader. You even get to control them and harness their special abilities and powers.

Yes, *Empire At War* boasts almost everything a *Star Wars* and RTS fan could hope for. There's innovation, excitement, intrigue and enough tension to give you an aneurism, but those pesky land battles just manage to sully an otherwise top-class piece of software.

However, when you're blasting an enemy fleet to pieces with the Death Star, outmanoeuvring your enemies throughout the galaxy and controlling all your childhood heroes on screen, you soon learn to live with the land-based distractions, many of which (any non-plot-based missions) can be auto-resolved anyway.

So, at last, it's here. A genuinely entertaining *Star Wars*-based RTS, one that's finally bucked the trend of the countless duds that preceded it. Whatever next? Me in a sanitary towel-lined alien mask? I wouldn't count on it. Then again, never say never... **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Slightly dated but functional nonetheless
Sound Rousing musical score, brilliant sound effects and voice-acting
Multiplayer 1v1 campaign, land or space battles and 4v4 land-capturing skirmishes

- ✓ Tense, tactical strategic map elements
- ✓ Breathtaking space battles
- ✓ Huge selection of units, each with secondary abilities too
- ✓ Gripping and superbly acted plot
- ✗ Graphically a bit weak
- ✗ Disappointing land battles

85

The best *Star Wars* RTS in the galaxy... Ever!



THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Steve Hogarty learns to mind his own business for a change

DEVELOPER Maxis
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

HI, I'M STEVE, the Ninja of Pleasantville, and I had a business idea so ingenious, so amazingly original and fantastically arousing that I risked my financial security just to make it a reality. Picture this, a place where you can shop for toilets, showers, baths and bins but then, when you get tired, you can relax and watch TV on a comfortable couch, or dance to 80s pop! But here's the clincher, here's the gimmick: all of my employees will dress in full medieval armour. I'll call it 'Bath Knights', and it will revolutionise the bathroom industry.

OPEN ALL HOURS

It's been a while since I've played *The Sims* and been reminded of what makes it such a great game. It's been even longer

since the game has made me want to dive right in and create my own character and design my own buildings. In fact, it's been so long since I've been impressed by anything *Sims*-related that it was a pleasant surprise to find that *Open For Business* is easily the best *Sims* expansion yet. Allowing your Sims to start their own businesses, either from home or by buying real estate, or even by building a store from scratch, the expansion adds new gameplay aspects which go so far as to transform the core ethos of the *Sims* universe from a life simulator to a business tycoon game. It's a highly polished and impressively detailed expansion too, with a massive amount of complexity on offer such as hiring employees, assigning them tasks, creating uniforms and levelling up your business skills to include things like popularity increases and reductions in wholesale prices.

Amazingly it all still works via the standard *Sims* interface, and the depth and intricacies of the many commands (from firing employees to forcing hard sells on punters) are neither intimidating nor confusing, and businesses range from piling a load of old crap on a rickety table

in the back garden to the likes of multi-level supermarkets and gyms. In short, even though it feels so very wrong to say this, *Open For Business* is a *Sims* expansion worth buying. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics As detailed as ever
Sound Includes a Simlish cover of *Too Shy!*
Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Massive new gameplay dynamic
- ✓ Slots into the current game nicely
- ✓ Highly detailed and polished
- ✓ Levelling up adds longevity
- ✗ Won't convince *Sims* haters

72
Actually good!

AT A GLANCE...

A logical upgrade to the virtual dollhouse, *OFB* lets Sims run their own virtual doll stores.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

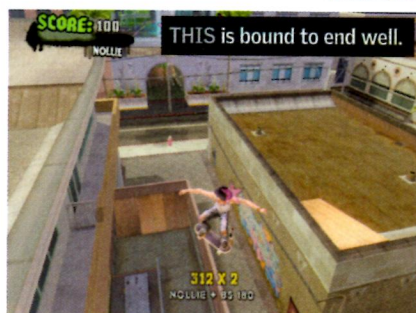
THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS 72%

THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE 58%

THE SIMS 2: CHRISTMAS PARTY PACK 8%



WRITING in gauntlets is a tricky business.



TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

Dan Marshall comes a cropper and bangs his teeth on the pavement...

DEVELOPER Neversoft
PUBLISHER Aspyr
WEBSITE www.th-american-wasteland.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £1999

AT A GLANCE...

Skateboard and BMX around LA, where every building is a ramp and every object a cracked skull waiting to happen.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

GTA: SAN ANDREAS 92%

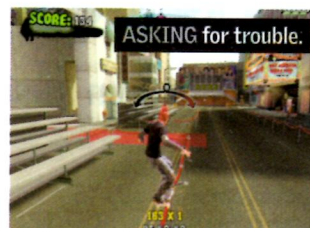
TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 86%

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND 59%

I'M ONE OF those people who associates the name Tony Hawk with the googly-eyed British comedian who played the vending machine in *Red Dwarf*, rather than the kneecap-shattering maniac who crops up occasionally on youth television saying things like, "Switch pop shove it," and explaining how he, "Boned ollie." However, I did grow up in the '80s with a skateboard decked out in neon green sandpaper (for extra grip), so such things aren't beyond me.

In this latest offering from the skateboarding legend, you run, skateboard (obviously) and BMX your way around some fairly uninspiring locations, performing tricks for cash and spending it on a new hat or two. While jumping and grinding your own way about town can be great fun, the forced *GTA*-style missions that drive the story are far from pleasant, revolving largely around pulling off endless tricks and combos. Failure is a 'back to square one' process that culminates all too easily in utter frustration and a fist through your monitor.

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland is a console port, so you know the drill. Infuriating controls, so-so graphics and a nonsensical camera are all present and correct. The 'no levels, no load times' selling point is a bit of a lie, as your PC chugs and stops to think in the corridors that link the bland districts



together: *San Andreas* on a board, this most certainly isn't.

FINGERS AND THUMBS

Your enjoyment of *Wasteland* also depends on how many fingers and thumbs you've got. If it's more than the regulation ten issued to the majority of us by those in the know, you might be alright. Without wacky mutated hands though, you'll find yourself stabbing wildly at any buttons you can to pull off moves.

Admittedly, performing the mid-air aerobatics we were so cruelly unable to pull off as clown-footed pre-teens was undeniably enjoyable, while the ability to customise your character and skate about with reckless abandon like Marty McFly were definite plus-points. However, the fun factor is most definitely missing in *Wasteland*, and it's difficult to recommend spending any money on a port of a sub-par console game when your PC is capable of something exponentially more delightful. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Functional, dead-eyed mannequins
Sound Refreshing punk rock soundtrack
Multiplayer New multiplayer modes for PC

- ✓ Makes you want to watch *Back To The Future*. Again
- ✓ Plenty of tricks to pull off
- ✓ Character almost infinitely customisable
- ✗ Requires magic fingers to play
- ✗ Dull missions
- ✗ Boring-looking maps

54

Tony Hawk's American Waste Of Time





RUGBY 2006

That sport where you pass backwards

DEVELOPER EA Canada
PUBLISHER EA Sports
WEBSITE www.easports.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

RUGBY ISN'T OUR most beloved of pastimes: schoolboy memories of muddy slide tackles and cold showers do well to dampen our enthusiasm for the sport. But hey, we're the world champions, so as a nation of people constantly disappointed by our performance in proper sports, it's customary that we at least pretend to be aggressively enthusiastic about EA's latest offering, *Rugby 2006*.

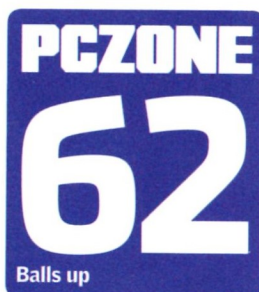
Being a rather complicated sport, *Rugby 2006* could do with a simple, intuitive interface to help gently ease you into the game. Instead, the developer has decided to chuck together a confusing tutorial, some awkward keyboard controls that teeter on the complex and just let you get on with it.

Granted, if you're a burly rugby expert who crushes Stella cans on

your forehead, you may find *Rugby 2006* a bit easier to understand, but that doesn't make it any less of a crime that the game is so complex and inaccessible. What's more, not only is there a serious lack of sheen compared to EA's other sports offerings, but the soundtrack and menus are both similarly lacklustre. If we're talking Six Nations rankings, it's more Ireland than Wales.

For fans of the series, *Rugby 2006* does include some improved AI, updated player rosters and some very minor graphical updates. However, these fiddles with the game still don't push the score into our 'recommended' bracket.

Andy Robinson



LEGION ARENA

It came, it saw, it conquered nobody

DEVELOPER Slitherine
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE www.slitherine.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 3

FOR A SECOND there, I was genuinely excited. It was a fleeting, momentary surge, a sudden belief that here was a dark horse ready to gallop through the RTS ranks and announce its intent by trampling all before it. Sadly, *Legion Arena* turned out to be more of a three-legged nag than a slaving stallion.

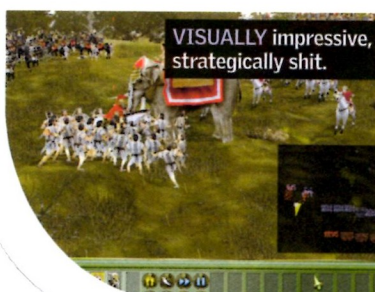
However, it's not the game's impressive 3D engine that lets it down, as this renders massive battles in which hundreds of troops slug it out over rolling landscapes. It's not the deep tactical slant that embraces terrain advantage and troop placement either. Neither is it the well-researched historical facts about the rise of the Roman empire you're fed between missions, or the excellent upgrade system that allows you to nurture your troops into more effective killers.



No, the problem with *Legion Arena* lies with the enemy AI, which shows about as much tactical nous as a pissed-up Sunday league pub team. This startling strategic ineptitude consists of enemy forces moronically marching towards your troops in straight lines and leaving themselves pitifully exposed to simple flanking manoeuvres, thus negating the need for any other noteworthy military shennanigans. And with most battles under two minutes in duration, it's not long before you realise just how easy and repetitive the whole affair is.

Granted, there's potential aplenty here, but with AI this idiotic, *Legion Arena* can only go down as a massively missed opportunity, more fit for the glue factory than the glories of war. Shame really.

Martin Korda





DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: DARKNESS RISING

Real ale role-playing returns. No razor required

DEVELOPER Mythic Entertainment
PUBLISHER Mythic Entertainment
WEBSITE www.darkageofcamelot.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

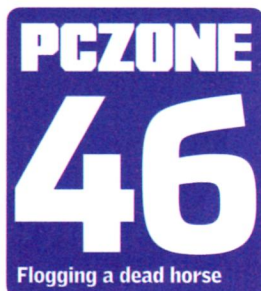
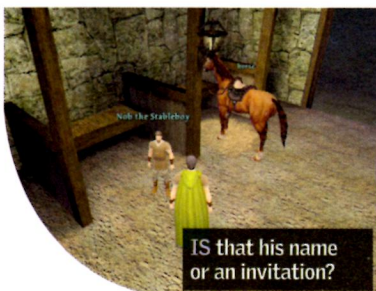
WITH THE user-friendly likes of *Guild Wars* and *City Of Villains* almost giving online role-playing a veneer of respectability – within the gaming community, if not the world at large – the defiantly old school *DAOC* limps into its sixth expansion pack with a hey-nonny-nonny and a pint of Olde Peculiar if you please, stout yeoman of the bar.

In its defence, the game does do a good horse, and this is one aspect that has been elaborated upon in *Darkness Rising*. Become a level 45 Champion of the Realm (by which time you're probably already dead) and you'll be eligible for a so-called advanced mount. Majestic steeds, one and all, these include such equine treats as Nightmare, Unicorn,

Warhorse and the Undead Phantom, all of which can be given a pet name and fitted with saddlebags and armour. My Little Pony for dungeon-fanciers.

At the very least graphics have been improved and a huge high-level quest has been added, but elsewhere, there's scarcely any improvement on the original. It's a largely impenetrable world, crippled by an arcane interface and almost bereft of human contact. Four years after the game launched, a small band of merry adventurers are seemingly prepared to accept this no-frills approach. That said, with barely 15,000 online on a bleak Wednesday night during *Match Of The Day*, the battle of the abbreviations is unlikely to see *DOAC* usurp *MOTD* in the nation's hearts any time soon.

Steve Hill



THE REGIMENT

Let's get SAS-sy

DEVELOPER Kuju
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE www.konami-regiment.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

EVERY GROWING LAD dreams of one day becoming a member of the SAS. There's just a lot of appeal in joining a bunch of burly Scotsmen, shooting the crap out of terrorists and then nipping down the pub for a cold celebration beer. A phobia of getting shot prevents me from joining the real SAS, but after spending a couple of hours training in *The Regiment*, I'm confident that I could grab a few mates and perform a decent tactical assault on my local Homebase.

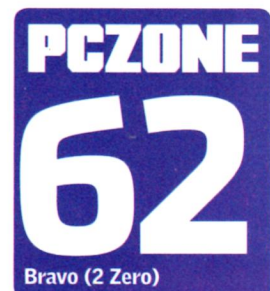
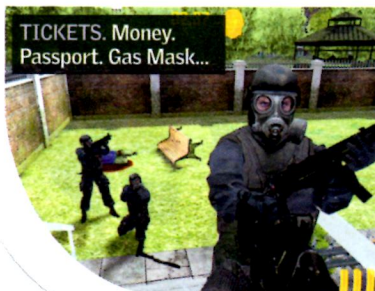
If you're also frightened by moving bullets and loud bangs, *The Regiment* offers a harmless alternative, promising (though not entirely delivering) the most accurate SAS simulation available. Crosshairs and ammo counts are thrown out the window (unless you play in 'arcade' mode) in favour of one-hit kills and strategic entry manoeuvres. So

obsessed was the development team with providing an authentic SAS experience, it even sought expert advice from SAS legend John McAleese (no, we've never hear of him either), who proudly shows off his Freddie Mercury moustache in moody briefing videos.

The few missions provided are tightly structured and despite dated visuals, feel fairly realistic. The London Underground level in particular was so authentic I could almost smell the wee and Burger King from the train carriages.

The Regiment certainly doesn't have the levels of fun or customisation of the (itself disappointing) *Rainbow Six: Lockdown*, but still remains a playable and thoroughly British alternative.

Andy Robinson



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EMPIRE EARTH II: THE ART OF SUPREMACY

He's white and he's a supremacist, but don't get the wrong idea about *Steve O'Hagan*

DEVELOPER
Mad Doc Software
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE
www.empireearth2.com
ETA Now
PRICE £19.99

WHEN YOU think about it, the notion of a PC strategy game that spans the swathe of history from Ancient Egypt to the 21st century is the dream of either a deluded slaving lunatic, or a balding US games genius called Sid Meier. It's no easy task to pull off.

Now, owing to a fundamental aversion to bum-jousting with convicted armed robbers in prison toilets, we're not going to provoke this land's stringent libel laws by accusing the developer of *Empire Earth II: The Art of Supremacy* of being a slaving loon. But we will go as far as to say that, judging by this ultimately unsatisfying add-on to an already ageing game, receding hairlines or no receding hairlines, Sid Meier it ain't.

Admittedly, *Empire Earth* never set out to be *Civilization*. It's real-time for a start, and you don't make great jumps in technology and history during gameplay here, rather between missions. What *Empire Earth* has always been about is a cunning fusing of the classic history game gather-and-build dynamics perfected by *Age of Empires*, with *Civ's* epoch-spanning scope. Or that was the plan, anyway.

IN THE BEGINNING

Empire Earth first arrived way back in 2001 with the fanfare of a military tattoo, but behind the drum rolls and the pipe playing



AT A GLANCE...

More civilisations, more units and more campaigns, but not much more in the way of satisfaction from this add-on to a sprawling, historical RTS.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

RISE OF NATIONS 90%
AGE OF EMPIRES III 84%
EMPIRE EARTH II: TAOS 69%

there was a really rather derivative RTS. When *Empire Earth II* pitched up last year, despite packing one of the finest RTS interfaces ever splashed across the bottom quarter of a computer monitor, it also started to knock at the knees when confronted with one of its more muscular, effective competitors. And, sadly, this expansion pack, for all its extra units, missions, civilisations and modes, doesn't really help matters much when it comes to taking on the big boys.

The chief offerings of *Art Of Supremacy* (is supremacy an art, by the way? Can you hang it in the Tate? Has it ever won the Turner Prize?) begin with the three new single-player campaigns, and the four new civilisations ready to be obliterated within. The first unfolds in Ancient Egypt, charting 30 years of conflict between Egypt and Thebes. The second puts you in the rather plush shoes of Czar Alexander of Russia in his fight against Napoleon, and the third somewhat bizarrely follows the plight of the



Chicken supreme

Smack my bitch up



One of *Art Of Supremacy's* new features is Fealty: if one of your opponents is about to do you in and you can't take annihilation like a man, you can swear Fealty to him, and from then on you are his bitch. You still play, but resources and military units go over to him. If he goes on to win, you win too. The other interesting new mode is Tug Of War, which sees multiple battles see-sawing over several maps until an ultimate winner is decided. Plus, *Empire Earth's* multiplayer was always strong, and *Art Of Supremacy's* is even better.



Part *Age Of Empires* and part *Civ*, what's missing is a memorable game experience

semi-nomadic Maasai people in West Kenya, circa 2037, who are being menaced by agitated lions. Guess which scenario designer was probably honking on the crack pipe the night before? On top of the campaigns are two huge battle scenarios that can be played on either side: the clash between Russia and Germany at Kursk; and Rorke's Drift, where a handful of heroic British Redcoats slaughtered hordes of dastardly Zulus with their boomsticks.

ZULU YAWN

Having ignored the continent in the two expansion packs and a sequel, we finally have a campaign based in Africa to play through. ("It's a small country near Ey-rack"). And it's in this new environment you'll find what's possibly *Art Of Supremacy's*

biggest gameplay tweak: the native tribes scattered across many of the maps. Essentially caught in a shit sandwich between you and your opponent, your first impulse is naturally to bomb them back into the Dark Ages and nick all their land and resources (us British built an empire on such enlightened tactics after all). But should you



take the time to lure them over to your side by trade and diplomacy, impressive rewards await, with your new friendly chums bestowing you secret technologies, maps and no doubt ten of the chief's daughters. A neat touch, for sure, as is the new battle plan manager that, once mastered, lets you co-ordinate simultaneous attacks between your troops and those of any allies.

All well and good, but for all its added ingredients, *Art Of Supremacy* doesn't provide the recipe *Empire Earth II* needs. Packed full of elements and ideas, the game needs an identity of its own. Part *Age Of Empires* and a dollop of *Civ*, what's missing is a memorable game experience. And as for the visuals – line it up against *Total War* or *Rise Of Nations* and it's almost laughable. Garish colours, blocky terrain, stupid and repetitive animations – we could go on. If there really is an art to supremacy, the developer of *Empire Earth II* had better go back to the drawing board. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics It promised art, it didn't deliver
Sound Repetitive speech samples, otherwise a rousing din
Multiplayer A strong point, great new modes

- ✓ Three new campaigns provide plenty of meat
- ✓ Variation as epochs progress
- ✓ Clever multiplayer options
- ✗ Stone Age visuals
- ✗ Still feels derivative
- ✗ Messy and unfocused

69

Not a work of art or a love supreme



CHARACTER models look great, but backgrounds don't.



NICE pooch.



THE gold spangly top always wins the day.

NEVEREND

Andy Robinson puts on his robe and wizard hat

DEVELOPER Mayhem Studios
PUBLISHER Dusk2Dawn
WEBSITE www.neverend-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



LIKE your mum told you, don't put your hand in the fire.



STONES: more impressive than you think.

SO HOLD ON a minute: it's only 20 quid, it's from a little-known publisher and the box art looks like it was knocked up in Photoshop by a drunken blind man. The warning bells are sounding loud and clear for *Neverend*, an RPG which does its best to pretend we've never heard of big names like *Morrowind* or *Neverwinter Nights*.

Unfortunately for developer Mayhem Studios, we've sampled the finer wines at

the gaming dining table, and we've acquired a liking for their elegant taste. It's hard to overlook *Neverend's* bland presentation, generic structure and ear-piercingly bad voice-acting when we've been so constantly spoiled by the wealth of excellent RPGs out there.

PREPARE TO FIGHT

To be fair, *Neverend's* combat system is pretty good – not too dissimilar to the *Final Fantasy* games – especially its unique Freeze Time indicator, which shows you how much time you have till you can twat your opponent with your sword or cast a spell. The more powerful the move or incantation, the longer it takes to charge. So if you're really crafty, you can land several weaker blows before your opponent can say: "Sword, what sword?"

Sadly, *Neverend's* brief encounter with originality ends there. The structure remains the same generic role-playing fare that's been re-used for the last decade, while the game's collection of wizards and mages do very little to progress the game's narrative beyond the forgettable.

Crucially though, *Neverend* lacks the production values needed to propel it anywhere near the whimsical heights of the big PC RPGs. Menus are thrown together, the soundtrack is MIDI-calibre and the voice-acting is truly awful – it sounds like the developer rounded up

whoever was in the pub at the time and gave them a microphone. Thankfully though, you can turn them off.

Championing pre-rendered backgrounds in this day and age immediately makes *Neverend* feel dated, and the gameplay does little to lift that 'samey' feeling. Despite its decent character models and combat system, there are plenty of other RPGs far more worthy of your time. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Create your own spells and pave your path through a fantasy RPG world. Under the rule of a powerful wizard, all non-human magical beings have been banished from the realm. Only a few remain, and you're one of them.

System requirements

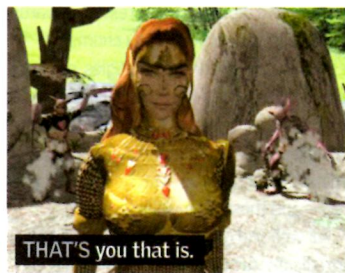
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HOW IT STACKS

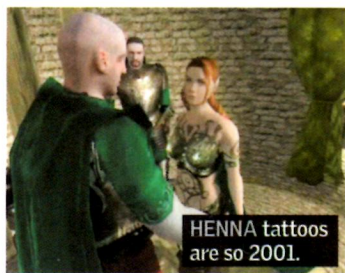
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 91%

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT 87%

NEVEREND 48%



THAT'S you that is.



HENNA tattoos are so 2001.

PCZONE

Graphics Pre-rendered backgrounds just don't cut it anymore
Sound A tour-de-force of Mega Drive-grade MIDI music
Multiplayer Spirited away

- ✓ The combat system isn't half bad
- ✓ Fair price
- ✗ Dated graphics
- ✗ Forgettable plot
- ✗ God-awful voice-acting

48

Never again

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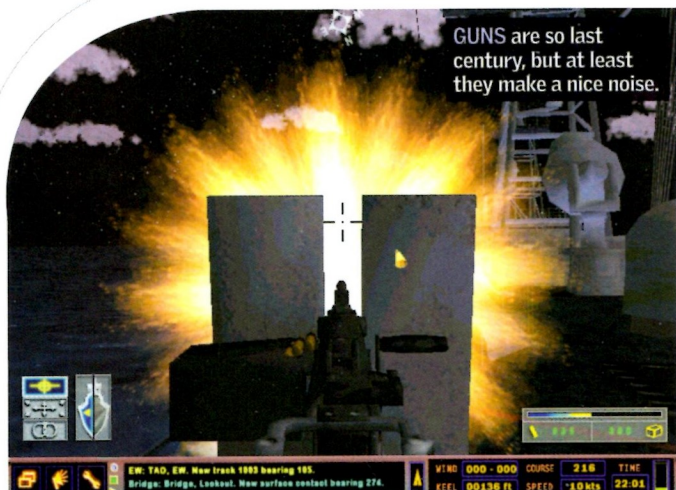
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FROM THE CREATORS OF

PCZONE



DANGEROUS WATERS

Can this be underwater love?

DEVELOPER Sonalysts
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE
www.sonalystscombatsims.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1

YOU'RE EITHER a shower person or a bath person. That is to say, you either like to experience a sudden rush of water to the ol' jangleberries and shoot off to work invigorated, or you prefer to wallow for hours in the water until your nuts have long since turned to raisins.

Not that we'd suggest *Dangerous Waters* favours either method of cleanliness, but with a manual in excess of 500 pages (in PDF form of course, the paper edition will set you back another £11), the latest title from this naval-simulation specialist is clearly one that requires some serious time to get to grips with.

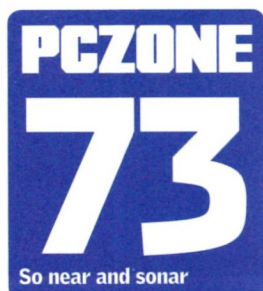
What you'll find is surprisingly varied, with a lengthy campaign to plough through, a near-infinite number of single missions and the ability to control planes, choppers, subs and surface craft. And let's not



forget the other areas of warfare that you must tend to, ranging from deck guns to sonar stations.

The trouble is that even if you've spent the last few years in the navy, you're still going to be all at sea getting to grips with it all. Thankfully most of it can be automated and the rest is fairly easy to pick up, but even so, you'll have to wade through those pages eventually if you want to get your money's worth. And even though the game is rich with tension (certainly enough to offset the mediocre graphics), unless you're at her majesty's pleasure, you probably won't have the time.

Richie Shoemaker



CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: THE AFTERMATH

The 1960s aren't what they used to be

DEVELOPER G5 Software
PUBLISHER Black Bean
WEBSITE www.g5software.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

IT WAS A close call when the US saw that the pinko Ruskies were building missile silos in nearby Cuba. Had the crisis escalated, few of us would be here today, certainly not without an extra appendage or two. Luckily everyone calmed down, computer games were invented and the rest, as they say, is history.

Except that this game – based on what could have happened – is entirely fictitious. Here, the US and the Soviets have traded ICBMs, and what's left of planet Earth is a conventional fight for the remnants of Russia, China, the US and Europe to fight over.

If the game looks familiar, it's because the old Blitzkrieg engine has been dusted down and spruced up with '60s era choppers, tanks and jets replacing WWII hardware. Despite its age, the 3D graphics do have some

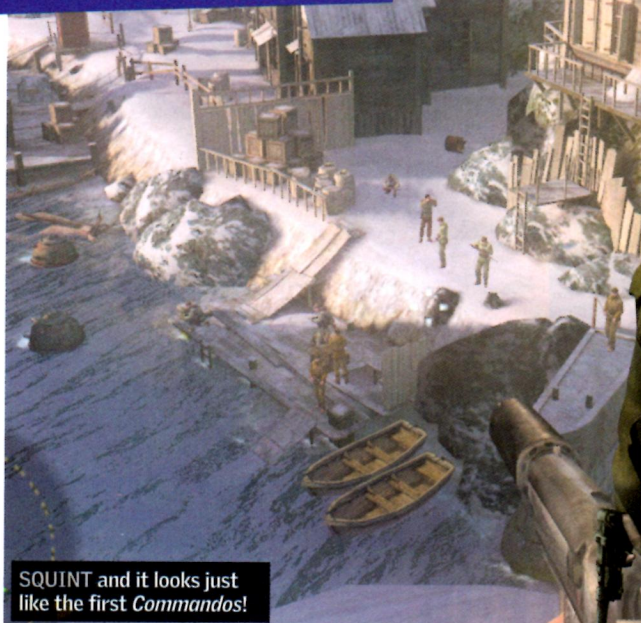


sparkle, and if you like your strategy games to be realistic, you'll be happy to hear that the game relies heavily on re-supplying and re-arming your units in the field, while trying to avoid puddles of toxic sludge.

Perhaps the title's most innovative and irritating feature is that the campaign is set across a turn-based map. So, rather than a linear set of missions, you can decide your own objectives. The problem is that déjà vu quickly sets in as there are only a handful of map templates. What's more, without a proper Skirmish or multiplayer option, if you're adverse to such hardships it won't be long before you're pining for something more upbeat.

Richie Shoemaker





COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE

Sam Kiildsen used to come to the office commando.
Two written warnings later, he's started wearing boxers

DEVELOPER Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.commandosstrikeforce.com
ETA March 31
PRICE £29.99



YEAH, WE KNOW what you're thinking. "Another month, another World War II game..." And you'd be right, it does involve killing hordes of Nazis and blah blah blah. But this is no ordinary WWII game. This is a *Commandos* game. This is a game with breeding and heritage.

Except *Commandos: Strike Force* is nothing like the previous three *Commandos* games. Those, lest we forget, were exceptionally challenging top-down stealth puzzlers that would have you tearing your

hair out in frustration one minute, then basking with satisfaction at a job well done the next. This is a first-person shooter that you can breeze through in a few hours.

Even the *Commandos* team itself been changed. There are only three of them now: the Spy, the Sniper and the Marine, and one of them has a DARK SECRET. The game mixes stealthy sections with balls-out, shoot 'em up sequences, and the mix is a reasonably effective one. One level might see the lone Spy inching through an enemy base, picking off officers one by one, while another

will give you control of the Marine and Sniper (you can switch between them), some AI-controlled allies, a boxful of ammo and mines and the open-ended task of defending a bridge from hundreds of Jerries and a couple of tanks – in whatever way you like.

NAZI PIECE OF WORK

Alas, while there's fun to be had on some of the huge levels, neither of these parts truly excels. The stealth sections are more watered down than curry house lager – you

Deep Cover

Behind enemy lines with the Spy...



OUR Spy, George, dressed in the clothes of a German officer he garrotted earlier.



WHILE quietly garrotting more Germans, George spots something...



SHITTING hell! It's his Russian friend – a lowdown Nazi collaborator!



GEORGE watches, waits... Then pops a cap in his ass. Ever thus to traitors, Ivan!

AT A GLANCE...

Those loveable *Commandos* get a first-person makeover and almost single-handedly win World War II. Again.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY 91%

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 88%

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE 73%



The stealth sections are more watered down than curry house lager

don't need to hide bodies, for instance, and the lacklustre AI engenders as much dramatic tension as an episode of *Family Affairs*. It's a far cry from the ultra-hardcore sneaking required in previous *Commandos* titles, where a stray footstep would have Nazis swarming all over you like chavs at a Burberry sale. The action parts are more challenging, but you'll often find yourself having to replay missions because too many AI-controlled buddies bite the dust (when will developers learn that babysitting idiotic cannon fodder is annoying?).

It's a real shame that the *Commandos* franchise has ditched its signature style in a bid for a bigger audience (*Strike Force* is also heading to Xbox and PS2, in case you hadn't guessed). While the old games were harder than titanium nails, they were innovative and unique, with a charming Boys' Own feel and an obsessive level of detail. *Strike Force* isn't any of these things. It is an enjoyable WWII romp that will while away a couple of afternoons – but stealth lovers will prefer *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and actioneers should get their kicks from *Call Of Duty 2* instead. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Nice, if not cutting edge
Sound Atmospheric music and convincing gunshots
Multiplayer Team and deathmatch modes

- ✓ Mixes stealth and action adeptly
- ✓ Huge levels
- ✓ More forgiving than old *Commandos* games
- ✗ It's too short
- ✗ Lacks the charm of the original games
- ✗ Tons of games do stealth and action better

73
Fun while it lasts



BODE MILLER ALPINE SKIING

Bode-acious? More like taking the piste

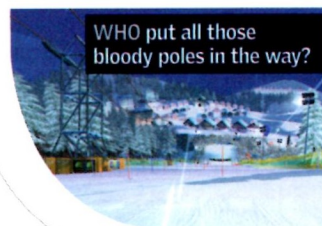
DEVELOPER 49Games
PUBLISHER Merscom
WEBSITE www.bodemillergame.com
ETA TBA
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

ON OUR LEFT, we have a 90-quid console. On our right, we have a monster PC worth well over ten times that amount. On the console, we can spend hours rail-grinding and doing spinny helicopter tricks on our skis with *SSX On Tour*. On the PC, we can lurch down a lifeless mountain occasionally aiming between some gates with a bloke called Bode. What's wrong with this picture?

In fairness, Bode and chums are probably aiming for a different clientele to EA's trick-fuelled tomfoolery, namely Lycra-loving ski enthusiasts, but that doesn't really excuse *Alpine Skiing* for being almost totally bereft of a sense of fun.

It certainly looks quite nice, with sporadic flocks of birds, light shows and fireworks decorating the skies ahead, and it even comes packaged with a couple of



sarcastic commentators. But none of that makes up for the fact that what at first seems like a litany of events and competitions actually amounts to sliding down a series of bland and characterless mountain tracks by yourself, while struggling with controls that are as easy to handle as helping Fern Britton into her bathing suit.

For the same money you could have an hour of real skiing at an indoor snowslope, and you'd still have a better time even if you managed to break both your legs and spear your ball bag with a ski-pole.

Michael Filby



PCZONE
38
Doesn't bode well



WHO dropped that grenade? When friendly fire attacks...



THEY picked a bad day to put a wash on.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

Alpha! Bravo! Tango! Can of Fanta?
Steve Hill is bang out of hammer puns...

DEVELOPER Pandemic
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE
www.fullspectrumwarrior.com
ETA March
PRICE £34.99



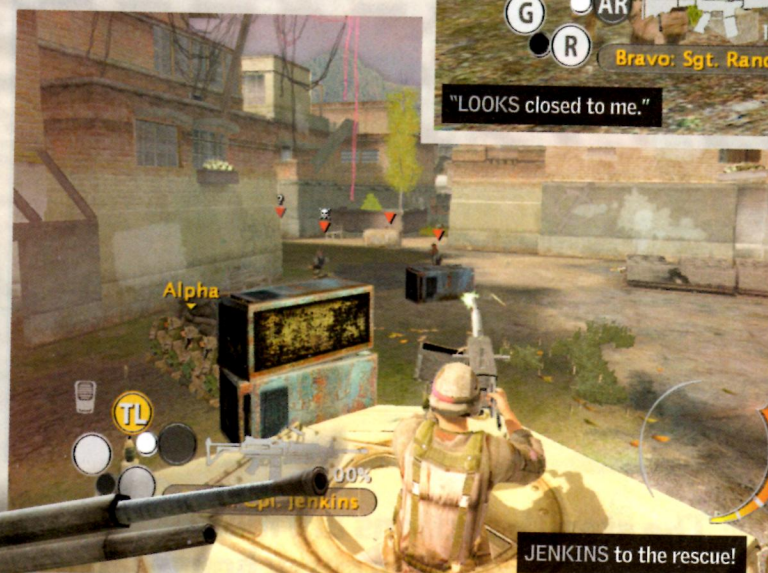
AT A GLANCE...

A fully-fledged sequel to 2004's hardcore military simulator. A new scenario and a few tweaks, but essentially more of the same.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR	80%
FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS	75%
CONFLICT: GLOBAL STORM	74%



JENKINS to the rescue!

WAR, WE WANT no more. That's unlikely to happen any time soon though, either in global terms or in the world of gaming, where virtually no conflict remains untapped in the name of entertainment. In *Full Spectrum Warrior* the developer even makes up fictional wars, and any similarity to actual events is entirely coincidental. If you've no idea what we're on about, the original *FSW* was a modified version

of a US military training program, specifically one designed to teach the intricacies of the vaguely pornographic-sounding MOUT, otherwise known as Military Operations in Urban Terrain. *Mario Sunshine*, it wasn't.

Featuring a bunch of gung-ho good old boys steaming into a fictional Middle-Eastern country – Zekistan, no less – and laying waste to the populace in the name of Uncle Sam, *Ten Hammers* sees you redeployed to the northern city of Khardiman, where hard-line loyalists have attacked a US



What happens is you go piling in, get torn to shreds by rampant insurgents, swear a lot and try again

Army Civilian Security team. With the country on the verge of civil war, only you – and superior firepower – can save the day.

SEARCH AND DESTROY

As for the mechanics of the thing, you generally have two squads of four – alpha and bravo – which you can switch between and give orders to. Most of the time you don't actually fire the weapons yourself, and *Ten Hammers* can essentially be thought of as a real-time strategy game with you in the thick of the action.

Missions are the usual mix of search-and-destroy or rescue-based affairs, and in general involve hiding behind whatever cover you can find, pinning down the enemy with one unit and flanking them with the other. That's the theory anyway, and missions can effectively be looked upon as extended lateral-thinking puzzles, which can be solved through the shrewd application of military strategy.

Of course, what really happens is that you go piling in, get torn to shreds by rampant insurgents, swear a lot and try again. For all its strategic pretensions, much of the threat can't be accounted for, as enemies appear in areas that have previously been deemed clear. Get caught in the open and it's usually curtains, as the interface simply doesn't allow for split-second reactions. Adapted from the console

Coming Through

You can drive my tank...



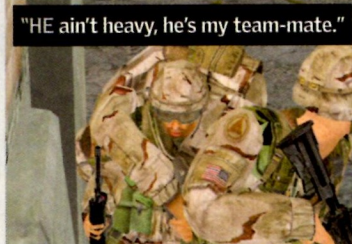
game, it's a largely inelegant affair that requires you to place a series of pointers where you want your soldiers to move to.

Given the paraphernalia of the battlefield, simply moving the pointers to the right place can be a chore in itself, and you're often grappling with the interface as much as the challenges of the particular mission, with panic setting in as you attempt to move your boys to safety. Further complications have been added with the ability to split each unit into buddy-teams of two, and even briefly control individual soldiers, but ultimately making it more complex doesn't make it any more intuitive.

TOO TOUGH TO DIE

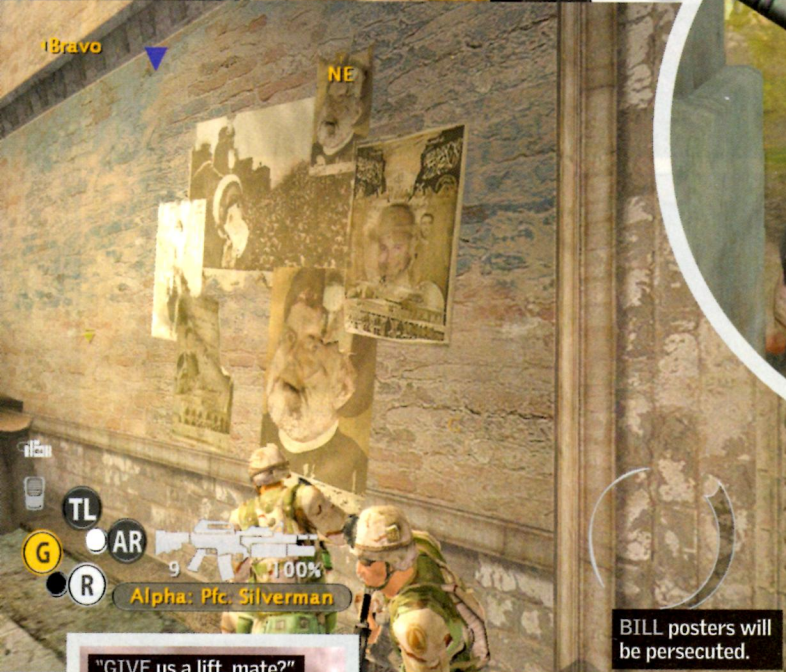
Cumbersome though it can sometimes be, it's still extremely involving, and you'll find yourself attempting missions numerous times until you get it right, often through a case of trial and error; simply remembering where the enemies are going to come from and reacting accordingly. And thankfully, the elaborate save-game procedure of the last game has been dispatched in favour of a more traditional checkpoint system.

Even so, you cover the same ground several times. What's more, while the missions are fairly lengthy affairs already, they become even more laborious if you get a soldier injured, as you have to drag him – sometimes



We were promised new player-controlled mechanised units. What the developer meant was that you could get behind the levers of a tank and blow great big f***-off holes in the scenery, simultaneously killing and mutilating insurgents beyond recognition. Yep, when the story deems appropriate, you'll briefly be put in charge of a heavily-armed vehicle and given free reign to terminate with extreme prejudice. It's one of the few moments of the game where you actually enjoy yourself. After hours of skulking around by proxy, to actually be in direct control of a large weapon is a rare joy. Boom!

REVIEW TEN HAMMERS



THERE are always casualties in war.

the tension, kicking in dramatically in the heat of the battle. In fact, sometimes the only way you know you're under fire is when the music speeds up.

FILTHY TALK

Elsewhere, there's been a vague attempt to imbue the individual soldiers with a personality, presumably in the hope that you'll forge some kind of protective bond with them and be deeply upset when they buy the farm. This never happens though, and they're little more than hapless grunts sent to die at your whim, thousands of miles from home.

In their defence, they do swear like f***ing navvies though. Whether moaning about their wounds – "My f***ing arm!" – or simply chatting among themselves – "We're f***ing dickheads" – with the profanity filter switched off it's a near constant stream of foul and abusive language. There's even some impromptu rhyming, such as the

touching couplet: "Alpha team, lean and mean, taking out Muhajadeen..."

Other conversational snippets cover such topics as rap music, spinal injuries and the fact that the dying soldier slumped over his team-mate's shoulders has been eating too many kebabs. This is about as far as the humour goes though, and it's fair to say that *Ten Hammers* is as serious as cancer. The antithesis of brightly coloured faraway lands often depicted in games, the word 'game' doesn't readily apply – it's based on a military simulator after all.

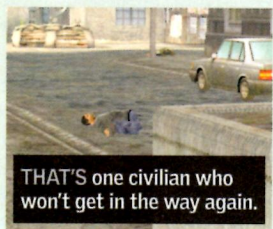
As joyless as it is, *Ten Hammers* does begin to suck you in, and you do occasionally find yourself thinking like a soldier, avoiding open space, applying suppressing fire, covering your mate's back and whooping like an idiot when you blow up some foreigners. That said, without the constant instructions, you wouldn't have a clue what to do.

With patience, it can be an engrossing experience, as you tentatively eke your way through a foreign town, with deadly threats lurking round every corner. It's dramatic, it's tense, it's infuriating, but is it fun? No. It's not fun, it's war. **PW**

literally – back to a CasEvac (casualty evacuation) area for treatment. To its credit, the game doesn't shirk from the horrors of conflict, and the soldiers even show a modicum of remorse when civilians are mown down in the crossfire. And unlike some games, you can inadvertently decimate your own squad with a case of 'friendly' fire.

There's still a bit of Hollywood thrown in for good measure though, and when one of your team takes a fatal hit, it's shown in spectacular slow-motion as his innards are spilled onto a foreign street. Mention must also be made of the music, which adds to

"GIVE us a lift, mate?"



THAT'S one civilian who won't get in the way again.

BILL posters will be persecuted.



"CHEER up love, it'll be over by Christmas..."



"FOLLOW me. Last one there's a dick."



TL
G AR 95%
R Alpha: Sgt. Mendez

THIS is no time for a drink.

You start thinking like a soldier, whooping like an idiot when you blow up some foreigners



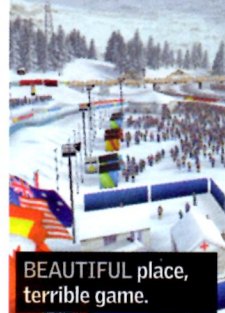
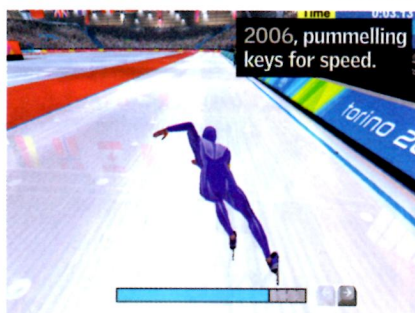
PCZONE

Graphics Slight console heritage, but passable
Sound Dramatic use of music, swearing
Multiplayer Yes

- ✓ Quite tense
- ✓ Satisfying when you get it right
- ✗ Fiddly interface
- ✗ Lots of trial and error

75

Hard as nails



TORINO 2006

Steve Hill is sunk up to the nuts in white powder. Sigh...

DEVELOPER 49Games
PUBLISHER 2K Sports
WEBSITE
www.2ksports.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

The official licensed game of this year's Winter Olympics, offering a variety of frozen sporting events and wintry landscapes. And it's muck.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

SKI RACING 2006 66%

SKI-DOO X-TEAM RACING 64%

TORINO 2006 45%



STILL got it, tiger.

Continue



AS A RULE of thumb, any sport that requires water in any of its physical forms – ice or snow, for instance – is often a waste of time. As a further rule of thumb, licensed games cobbled together to cash in on a televised sporting occasion are usually a further waste of time. Throw both maxims together, and you've got whatever the opposite of gold is.

Torino 2006 is of course the obligatory official 'licensed product' of the Winter Olympics, in which a variety of entirely unsuitable events are shoehorned into a videogame on the basis that people will see the Olympics on the telly and go out and buy the game. And the sad truth is, that's exactly what will happen, despite the fact that as a game it fails to engage on almost every level.



Of the 15 events featured, over eight main disciplines – Skiing, Biathlon, Bobsleigh, Luge, Speed Skating, Ski Jumping, Cross-Country Skiing and Nordic Combined – less than half can even claim to be genuinely interactive. The rest are essentially a series of rhythm-action games that happen to have vaguely related low temperature-based action taking place on the screen simultaneously.

BUTTON BASHER

The developer has even resorted to the vintage 'Daley Thompson' control method, requiring you to pummel alternate keys to get your Speed Skater up to speed. While Daley Thompson's Decathlon was a classic of its time, we'd like to imagine things have moved on somewhat since those Spectrum-battering days.

In its defence, the Downhill Skiing sections are playable, requiring a reasonable amount of co-ordination. The Bobsleigh and Luge are mildly impressive in terms of speed, but without the imminent threat of decapitation, soon lose their appeal. And you might try the Ski Jumping a couple of times.

As for the rest, they're thoroughly joyless, with the Cross-Country Skiing proving a particularly moribund experience. The bottom line is that these

events, while fairly dreary in reality, simply have no place in a game. For all its production values and official licence, ultimately you'd have a more interactive experience playing with a yoyo while watching the Winter Olympics on the telly. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Realistic, mainly white
Sound Bad music, annoying commentary
Multiplayer Four-player, head-to-head or turn-based

- ✓ Downhill skiing is OK
- ✓ Bobsleigh and Luge are tolerable
- ✓ Ski jumping is briefly entertaining
- ✗ Most events are barely interactive
- ✗ Wholly cynical licensed product
- ✗ You won't want to play it for long

45

Downhill all the way

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

STRIKE FORCE. STRIKE FIRST.

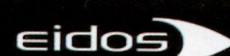


www.CommandosStrikeForce.com

16+
TM
www.pegi.info



PlayStation 2



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RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

Red and yellow and pink and blue – Will Porter can see a rainbow too



DEVELOPER Red Storm
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.rainbowsixgame.com/uk/lockdown/
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

RAINBOW SIX GAMES are, and always have been, sheer gun porn. The story is inconsequential, the characters are inconsequential and any kind of real-world logic is thoroughly prohibited. What's important is having a vast rack of grenades, scopes and boomsticks for you to peruse and abuse and various corridor-based terror-holes in exotic locales. Whereas other FPS games have long since dropped the Bond/Mullins habit of inter-level long-haul flights between continents, Ding Chavez and pals remain proud owners of many an air mile and pair of fluffy Virgin Atlantic travel socks. And not a single ounce of jetlag either. That's army training for you.

The main fear for *Lockdown* was always the lingering touch of console – after all, in the build-up to the (somewhat mottled) living-room release, the dual PC version disappeared from the radar only to

bob back up to the surface towards the end of last year. Presumably it was thought that if released on PC in its previous multi-platform guise we would scream and shout, "Looks like console! Smells like console!" and stamp our little feet; whereas after some fiddling on behalf of Red Storm, we're instead shouting, "Looks like console! But doesn't smell, if we're being honest!"

SMOOTH TRANSITION

The controls feel tight and accurate, kills are satisfying and the fuzziness around the edges that we were fearing are impressive in their absence. In terms of the basics, working your way through tens upon hundreds of ragdoll villains through the Scottish Parliament building or an Arabian market town, the game works pretty well. The 'three gun-strikes and you're out' damage system has just enough give in it to make affairs pretty tricky without ever

AT A GLANCE...

Not a patch on the SWAT boys, yet still better than the mindless blasting of *First To Fight*.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

SWAT 4 86%

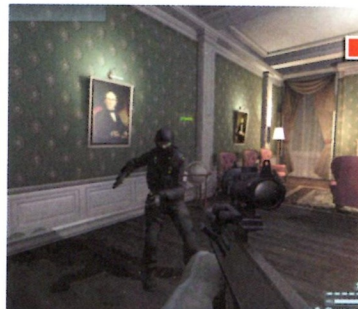
RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN 67%

CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT 62%



Friends Will Be Friends

If you're a regular reader, you'll know what complete suckers we are for any form of co-op entertainment – it makes us roll on our backs and make giggle-noises. Here's the highlight of Hogarty and Porter's *Lockdown* adventure...



BEGINNINGS: Replacing my previous co-op partner (Paul Presley), I've now recruited young Mr Steve Hogarty. Here he is doing a little dance in celebration of his sudden promotion. There's terrorism afoot though, so no real time for frivolity.



MIDDLEINGS: Having mopped up a bit of resistance, we reckon there might be bad things afoot behind this door. Steve is duly placed at the entrance and behind his usual dour Irish witticisms, I think I can sense a slight tinge of over-excitement.



MORE MIDDLEINGS: "So you go in that door when I say, and I'll go in the other. Right?" "Yeah." "And shoot anything with a balaclava or a terrorist disposition." "Yeah." "OK, wait a second." "Kay." "OK, now go! Go! Go!"



DISTINCT ENDINGS: And so it was I realised that young Steve was an even worse choice as a fellow crime hunter than the ginger-ninja of old. A small room, a spinny chair and a fellow *Rainbow Six* team-mate was all that was needed to fill me with bullets.

straying into the realms of the unfair, and there's an undeniable 10cc (or so) of adrenalin that pumps through you when bullets start punching shattered glass out of the window you're slinking past. This is a fun game to play.

Your squad, however, aren't the most mentally gifted urban warriors around.

they die (a crime for which you pretty much go unpunished), it feels like it's the game's fault and not yours. Also, you may be trying to play tactically – but you also know that on the normal difficulty setting, you might as well leg it through the level spraying bullets at whoever you come across willy-nilly. There's just no tangible connection

With never-dull multiplayer and decent co-op, *Lockdown* remains an attractive package – but it just feels old

They're great fun to stack up in front of a door and to scream a "Go! Go!" signal at, but unfortunately never really feel like anything more than an in-game tool rather than a group of fellow terror-haters: and it's here that comparisons to the ineffably superior *SWAT 4* start to kick in. While the *Rainbow Six* kids are quietly competent in terms of self preservation for the most part, when

between you and your followers; yes, you have various commands to give them, but when your kill-count is invariably going to skyrocket towards the hundred barrier while they're lolling around on a (admittedly more moral) 20, it all just seems a bit silly.



Another stumbling block is the AI of the evil terrorist masterminds that you're chasing. Compared to the improved smarts of enemies we've been seeing in squad shooters like *Brothers In Arms: Earned In Blood*, the way that *Lockdown*'s (always near identical) enemies can stand in front of your guns with little more than an expression of "Now did I lock the front door?" has become unacceptable. True, they can surprise you – but, in these days of *F.E.A.R.*, squad AI goons like these look like pure cannon fodder more than ever. Matters aren't helped by some supremely boring level design in the saggier parts of the game, when (wrong-doings of all wrong-doings) endless corridors adorned with unopenable doors become the norm.

Once again, the shadow of *SWAT 4*, with its realistic building lay-outs and more obviously varying environments looms large.

OAP

In terms of customisable play, varied and never-dull multiplayer along with a decent co-op mode, there's no doubt that

Lockdown remains an attractive and enjoyable package – but it just feels old. If I'm doing a mission on a cross-channel ferry on a PC, shouldn't I at least be able to look out of a porthole and see the sea? Shouldn't villains who've taken over a Dutch police station wear more varied clothing than universal hoodies? Shouldn't this have been released two years ago? Well... Yes – probably. Time has moved on, and Tom Clancy needs to keep up. **PCZ**

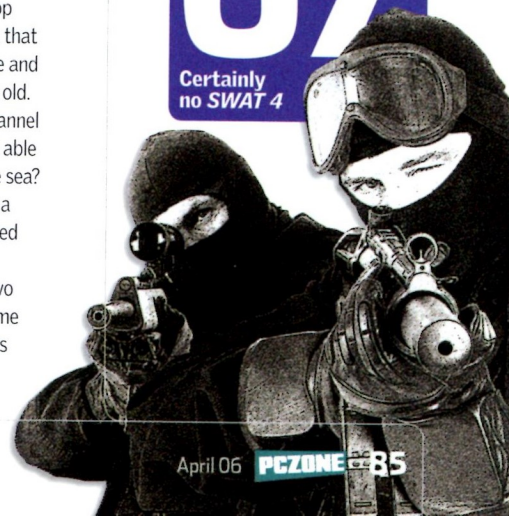
PCZONE

Graphics Dull, dim, unpolished
Sound Gun noises are pretty good
Multiplayer A veritable cornucopia of modes

- ✓ Nowhere near as console as feared
- ✓ Good multiplayer, co-op is always welcome
- ✓ Guns, lots of guns
- ✓ Decent fun
- ✗ Dull, ageing graphics and patchy levels
- ✗ Rubbish enemy AI, so-so squad dynamics

67

Certainly no *SWAT 4*



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

indiezone



Martin Korda survives another month being blasted in space and attacked in the water

DESPERATE SPACE

DEVELOPER Jagged Blade Software WEBSITE www.jaggedbladesoft.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



THE game also benefits from the gayest bullets in gamingdom.



DESPITE ITS

unremarkable looks and basic premise, *Desperate Space* is a 2D shooter that belongs in the upper echelons of its genre, thanks to many excellent features that set it apart from most of its rivals.

After sitting through the simple yet informative tutorial, you're charged with rescuing enslaved captives held by an evil alien race. With missions becoming increasingly more frenetic – so much so you're even joined by wingmen who help you out – you must complete a variety of objectives, including ambushing enemy convoys and protecting your base from countless waves of pesky alien attackers.

But wait, there's more. As if *Desperate Space's* intelligent collection of missions and all-out action approach weren't already enough to make it stand out from the monotony of many other arcade shooters, its credentials are further boosted by the inclusion of five distinct ships, masses of weapon upgrades to collect and buy, titanic bosses to battle and a remarkable variety of nasties to vaporise. Sounds impressive? It is, and despite its limitations, it's still more than worthy of your hard-earned moolah.

PCZONE
68



MAGIC STONES

DEV Winter Wolves WEBSITE www.winterwolves.com PRICE \$24.95 (£14)

IF YOU LIKE cards, mages and runes but hate sunlight, vegetables and society, chances are you'll quite enjoy this RPG/card game hybrid. If that doesn't sound like you though, you might struggle to see the point of *Magic Stone's* existence, let alone fathom its over-inflated 14 quid price tag.

You play as a druid, who must wander the lands battling evil monsters and gathering artefacts, before competing against other druids in a tournament to find out who's the greatest mage of them all.

The combat is a turn-based affair, where you first select a team of avatars (creatures you summon to fight on your behalf), then issue them with attack commands and hope they don't get trounced. A collection of spells marginally increase the level of interaction, but ultimately, *Magic Stones* is just a slightly more involving videogame version of Top Trumps. And you can buy those in Woolies for three quid.



PCZONE
37

WATER BUGS

DEVELOPER Retro64 WEB www.retro64.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

WE'VE SEEN SOME simplistic games, but few have been quite as patronisingly undemanding as this one.

Amazingly, *Water Bugs* is actually a sequel – to *Cosmo Bots* – meaning enough people had to buy the original to warrant a follow-up. Wonders truly will never cease.

The reason for my cynicism is simple: *Water Bugs* is, well, a bit crap really. With the Earth's oceans infested with, you guessed it, water bugs, which are destroying all of world's undersea plumbing, you must fire vertical and

horizontal barriers across the level in order to close off the holes. The smaller half of the selected section is then filled in, crushing any insects caught inside. However, if the bugs come into contact with one of your barriers before it solidifies, the barrier is destroyed and you lose a life.

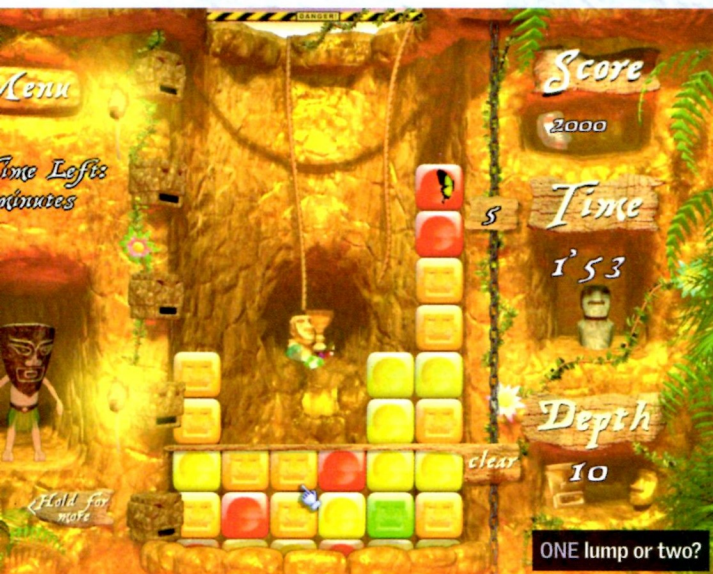
And that, despite some rudimentary power-ups, is about as complex as *Water Bugs* gets. Worth eleven quid? No chance. Worth eleven pence? Maybe. At a push.

PCZONE
15



MIXEM DELUXE

DEVELOPER Binary Graffiti WEB www.binary-graffitti.com PRICE \$19.99 (£11)



ANOTHER MONTH, another skewed take on *Tetris*. However, unlike the majority of games that try to pay homage to the Russian legend, *miXem Deluxe* manages to bring something vaguely original to the table.

With a column of different-coloured squares rising up from the floor, you must mix colours – say red and yellow to create orange – in rows of three or more, in order to make them disappear. To add a little extra spice and strategic dimension, you also get to move the blocks around.

Things start out nice and slowly, but within a few levels you're testing your cerebral powers to the max as you're suddenly faced with countless colours to mix and match. It's all very challenging

and clever, and if you're looking for a real brain teaser, you'll find plenty of fun here. Some, however, might just find it feels a bit too much like hard work. Make sure you check out the demo on our DVD before you buy, as *miXem Deluxe* is well worth a look.

PCZONE
59



Developer Q&A



New Star Games

SIMON READ

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

COMPANY New Star Games

WEBSITE www.newstargames.com

GAMES *World Cup Manager*,

Euro Cup Manager, *New Star Soccer*

1, 2 & 3, *Sensational Soccer* is also

almost complete



PCZ Tell us about your company...

SI I'd always wanted to make my own football management game and *World Cup Manager 2002* was my first attempt. After that came the *New Star Soccer* series which eventually started to make some money – so that's when I decided to set up New Star Games.

PCZ Tell us a bit about the *NSS* series – how it started and how it evolved...

SI Football management games are already sewn up by the big boys, so I tried a different angle. Inspired by the classic Spectrum game *Footballer Of The Year*, I decided to do something similar based on a player's career rather than the manager's. From there, the *New Star Soccer* series has grown and grown.

PCZ Tell us a bit about your personal programming and gaming background?

SI I've always had a passion for football games. After university, I bought some C++ books and started programming in my spare time, so I'm self-taught.

PCZ What advice would you give other budding indie game developers?

SI To create games that they're passionate about and not to bite off more than they can chew. Start off with something small but fun, and if other people like it, then take it further.

BUDGET

Can't afford a haircut? Haven't got a job? *Martin Korda* has the solution...

TOCA RACE DRIVER

PUBLISHER Sold Out WEBSITE www.sold-out.co.uk PRICE £4.99

STORYLINES IN RACING games. There was time when such a thing was a more alien concept than Steve Hill turning down a press trip or Leeds in the Premiership. *TOCA Race Driver* changed all that – well, the storylines in games bit, anyway.

You play as Ryan McKane, a driver keen to make a name for himself in the world of pro touring car racing. What follows is a story-driven campaign in which you get to drive and destroy one of 42 cars on 38 real-life circuits.

To be honest, the story is throwaway, with the game's true beauty lying in its excellent recreation of touring car racing, made all the better by a top-notch physics system that makes each car handle uniquely and degenerate in a variety of

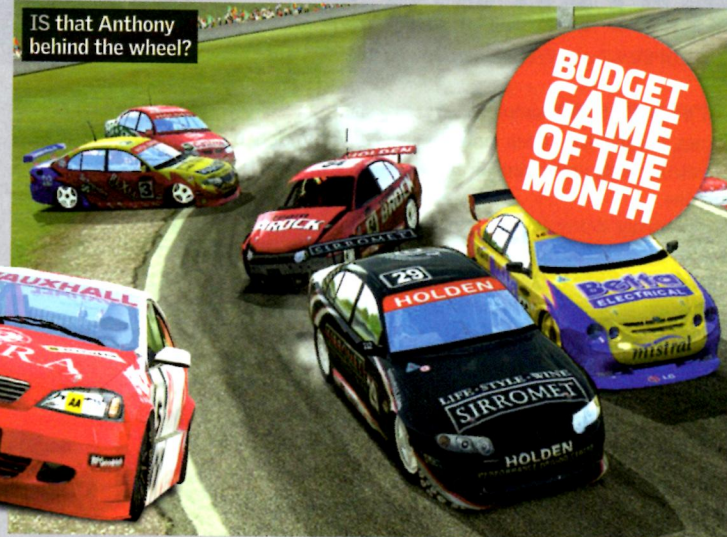


debilitating ways. Better still, opponent drivers hold grudges should you shunt or block them off, meaning the experience glows with a genuinely lifelike sheen. Highly recommended then, but if you're running anything under a P4 1.6GHz, make sure you steer well clear.

PCZONE
77

IS that Anthony behind the wheel?

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...

Steve bought Choco Snaps instead of Coco Pops:
Saving: 27 pence

Suzy subscribed to *World War II Weekly* instead of buying copies from the shops:
Saving: Three ration kit tokens

Not having to pay Paul Presley's over-inflated wages:
Saving: £1.12 per hour



EMPIRE EARTH

PUBLISHER Sold Out WEBSITE www.sold-out.co.uk PRICE £4.99

HAILED ON ITS release as a cross between *Age Of Empires* and *Civ*, *Empire Earth* was one of those games that promised so much but only delivered in part (for the recent expansion *Empire Earth II: Art Of Supremacy*, see p70). All of which wasn't all that surprising, as had it achieved its objective of mixing those two strategic legends in one perfect whole, we could all have happily packed up and gone home, knowing we'd played the ultimate strategy game.

What you do get, however, is an entertaining RTS game spanning 12 distinctly different historical epochs, ranging from prehistoric times to the future. The gameplay is far more akin to *Age Of Empires* than *Civ*, and in fact more often than not, *Empire Earth* feels

like *Age Of Empires*, only with more epochs, a greater selection of units and less intelligent AI.

Graphically, the game has aged poorly, but if you're looking for some basic history-spanning RTS fun, then *Empire Earth* is still an entertaining jaunt – especially at this price.

PCZONE
74



JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

PUBLISHER Sold Out WEBSITE www.sold-out.co.uk PRICE £4.99



THAT'S going to sting in the morning.



YOU'RE THE law in this hit-and-miss shooter based on 2000AD hero Judge Dredd. Armed with a multi-purpose gun called The Lawgiver, you spend the first part of the game cuffing punks round the ear for committing heinous crimes such as doodling on walls, after which things start to warm up as the evil Death begins causing mischief.

The naughty little scamp.

The game's sprawling city is bold and colourful, but is let down by a lack of life that makes it less of a bustling metropolis and more of a British seaside resort in winter. Otherwise, the licence is well used, managing to capture the sanitised yet brutal and discriminatory world over which the Judges preside.

As a shooter, though, *Dredd Vs Death* feels as though it'd

be more at home on a console, a fact that's compounded by some moronic AI that often resorts to charging right at you. Not essential, but *Dredd Vs Death* is still the best Judge Dredd game ever made. Then again, that's not saying much.

PCZONE
63

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1 FAR CRY

£9.99, Mastertronic

Better than *Half-Life 2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2 X2: THE THREAT

£9.99, White Label

Begone *Freelancer*! The real space sim starts here – on budget anyway (*X3* is better yet, but costs more). Freedom among the stars. Could life be better?



3 BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

£9.99, Focus Multimedia

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in all of gaming-dom make the ever-overlooked *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



4 SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

£12.99, Codemasters

One of the finest strategy titles of recent years, *Soldiers* is a near-perfect blend of tactical thought, balls-out action and historical accuracy.



5 WARHAMMER 40K: DOW

£9.99, Focus Multimedia

Even if you've never heard of the nerdy Games Workshop franchise, this *Command & Conquer*-style RTS is great-looking and explosive fun.

FLATOUT

PUBLISHER Xplosiv WEBSITE www.xplosiv.net PRICE £4.99

LOOSELY BASED ON professional car scrapping (aka amateur stock-car racing), *FlatOut* is a action-rammed racer that'll have you entertained in seconds and bored within hours.

Racing games really don't come more simplistic than this. Hurtle around a track as fast as possible (flat out, you might say), ramming your opponents out of the way while gleefully watching your car and the scenery disintegrate thanks to the game's excellent physics model.

All of which sounds mighty fun, but *FlatOut*'s main problem is that there really isn't much else to it. Tracks lack variety, upgrading your car is passable at best, while the bonus games are no more than a fleeting distraction between destruction derbies. Only speed freaks and carnage lovers need apply.

NEVER gonna happen.



PCZONE
59

And the rest...

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



THE HULK

£4.99, Sold Out

A rubbish camera that never points in the right direction, tacked-on stealth sections and some below-par AI detract from the mindless fun of smashing everything up with an overgrown green lunatic.

PCZONE
53



RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS

£4.99, Xplosiv

Shit your pants as you battle zombies in a big city. Graphically it's looking a bit rotten, but there's no faulting the tense atmosphere and gripping storyline that keep you hooked till the bloody end.

PCZONE
69

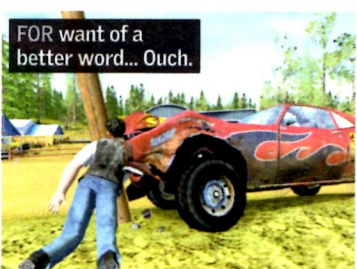


CHAOS LEGION

£4.99, Xplosiv

Crap conversion of crap, repetitive PS2 hack-and-slash game in which you play a knight called Sieg Warheit who likes hitting evil things with swords and summoning sidekicks. Yep, it really is as terrible as it sounds.

PCZONE
27





YOUR SHOUT!

Speak your brains on the latest releases

YOU DO THE REVIEWS!

Agree? Disagree? Well, the world wouldn't be the wonderful place it was if we all thought the same way. If you fancy sharing your own thoughts with your fellow readers, then jot them down (we find the recent advancements in parchment and ink technology to be handy), trim the amount of words to a MAXIMUM of 100, add a score out of 100 then send them to the address below. If we think they're worthy of sharing, we'll print them here. Better yet, one of you each month will be awarded our coveted Review Of The Month award and showered with a gift of some description.

Send your reviews to: yourshout@pczone.co.uk, or stick them in an envelope and post them to: PC ZONE, Your Shout, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.



QUAKE 4

OUR SCORE: 84%

Having finally managed to save up for a decent PC that will run the latest games, I decided to invest in *Quake 4* to see how well my new baby performed. I'm risking being castrated by fellow gamers here, but to be honest, the game is a disappointment. The graphics are amazing and sometimes quite disgusting (especially the transformation to a Strogg), but I'm disappointed by the linear gameplay and the sometimes overly simplistic puzzles. Overall, it's a great game for showing off your spangly new PC, but it's far too easy to complete and it isn't really worth the effort.

Damian Brierley: 65%

Review of the Month



F.E.A.R.

OUR SCORE: 90%

F.E.A.R. takes scary to an unknown level. Who is this girl? What does she want? Why is she walking on the ceiling towards... OH MY GOD, RUN! It's the kind of fear that doesn't disappear when there aren't any monsters around either. For instance, I was quietly walking around a small room when I knocked over a can; I instantly lit up the place with gunfire as I panicked, but there was nothing there. The developer has really done its homework to make the game fit the name. My awe doesn't stop there either; the game is gorgeous to look at with some very nice movie-like effects. Every aspect looks well thought-out - I have feet, can climb ladders properly and above all, the voice-acting is superb. It's these little things that keep *F.E.A.R.* from losing that fear.

Fpshead01: 94%



THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND

OUR SCORE: 75%

The next chapter in the chronicles of Torque starts off well. The plot moves straight from the original game into the new one and starts off drenched in the same dank atmosphere, deep storytelling and immense gore found in the original. Unfortunately, it then slips downhill. The camera suddenly becomes very floaty (making aiming a chore), Torque suddenly seems to forget how to carry painkillers and the entire game soon becomes far more repetitive than the original. This is marred further by broken continuity and little sense of progression until you're near the end of the game.

Heero Yuy: 70%



THE MOVIES

OUR SCORE: 95%

Having been a PC gamer for ten years now, I often look forward to a game, only to find it a tremendous disappointment - but not this time. This has to be the most fun, addictive and downright hilarious game I've ever played. Lionhead has excelled itself, as this is one of the most polished games on the PC. My latest movie 'Todd Macfee and The Hairy Armed Hussies' had me and my mates in stitches - and at a time when the fun has gone from many of our games, that's a rare thing indeed.

Gizz: 95%



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unstoppable invaders and tear it apart.

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BUYER'S GUIDE

The best games money can buy, all in one place



PCZONE TOP 5 DUBIOUS SPORTING GAMES

- 1 INTERNATIONAL CURLING CAPTAIN 2006
- 2 TOXTETH SMYTHE'S CROQUET CHALLENGE
- 3 TOTAL TIDDLYWINKS
- 4 CABER TOSSING 12: HIGHLAND MASTERS
- 5 BALLOON INFLATING MANAGER: SEASON 04/05

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES - MARTIN KORDA

- 1 ROME: TOTAL WAR
PCZ ISSUE: 148
- 2 VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES
PCZ ISSUE: 150
- 3 HALF-LIFE 2
PCZ ISSUE: 148
- 4 ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
PCZ ISSUE: 110
- 5 WING COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM
PCZ ISSUE: 35

PCZONE TOP 5 MOVIE/GAME TIE-INS

- 1 THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK
- 2 KING KONG
- 3 TIE FIGHTER
- 4 THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
- 5 ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



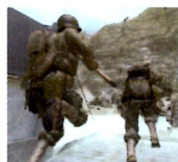
BATTLEFIELD 2 PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



CALL OF DUTY 2 PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 PCZ Issue: 138 - 91%

If you've got some downtime at the close of the day, then *Pirates!* is the most relaxing (and swashbuckling) game around. Drifting around the Caribbean with a flotilla of ships and mischief on your mind is escapism at its finest.



F.E.A.R.

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



SWAT 4 PCZ Issue: 154 - 86%

SWAT 4 is a tactical squad shooter that sings. Dark in places, brutal in others, it's the only shooter that allows you to tazer old ladies and drown them in pepper spray. Probably the best co-op experience around to boot.

Strategy

Must buy!



ROME: TOTAL WAR PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Once upon a time, all strategy games were visual abortions and strictly for the hardcore (OK, a bit of a sweeping statement). But *Rome: Total War* changed all that, mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic, as well as staggering historical accuracy. The result is a masterpiece and a game just about anyone can enjoy. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



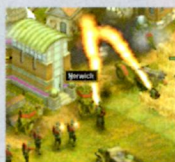
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



RISE OF NATIONS PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of Empire builders, *Rise of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones and Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the *Civ* genre.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES! PCZ Issue: 149 - 88%

If you've got some downtime at the close of the day, then *Pirates!* is the most relaxing (and swashbuckling) game around. Drifting around the Caribbean with a flotilla of ships and mischief on your mind is escapism at its finest.



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS PCZ Issue 143 - 84%

Despite a few AI glitches, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions. Strat-fans should check it out.



AGE OF EMPIRES III PCZ Issue: 162 - 84%

A sprinkling of innovation and a barrelful of lushness lets us give this a hearty endorsement, even though it doesn't stray far from the established formula. Still the best 'new world' game, and the best RTS cannons ever.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



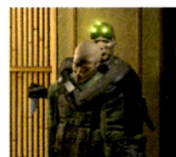
MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



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

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



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

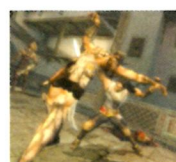
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

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



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

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



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.

MMOs

Must buy!
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
 Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.

EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
 A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.

GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
 How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.

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

CITY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
 Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Sport

Must buy!
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
 Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of *Pro Evo* ever, also the best footy game ever.

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006
PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%
 One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
 Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. *Tiger 06* is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.

NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
 Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

MADDEN 2005
PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%
 Although the 2006 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 2007 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

Simulation

Must buy!
X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
 Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.

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

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT
PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
 No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yet there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.

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

FALCON 4.0
PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
 An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!
GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
 While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.

GTR
PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%
 As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, shunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.

LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
 Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
 Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3
PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
 If you're into cars, this is about as essential as petrol. With a massive collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games

Must buy!
THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
 Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.

BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
 The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.

CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
 A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.

EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
 Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
 An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

RPGs

Must buy!
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.

BUDGET
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
 Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.

BUDGET
DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
 This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
 It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
PCZ Issue: 86 - 87%
 Compelling storylines, great characterisation and a heart of pure darkness - *Planescape* is the best thing Interplay's Black Isle Studios ever gave us.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

April

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006
 CITY LIFE
 HALF-LIFE 2: AFTERMATH
 HEARTS OF IRON II: DOOMSDAY
 SEED
 SHADOW VAULT
 SPELLFORCE 2
 THE GODFATHER
 TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
 WAR ON TERROR
 WILDLIFE PARK 2

EIDOS
 MONTE CRISTO
 VALVE
 PARADOX INTERACTIVE
 RUNESTONE
 DUSK2DAWN
 JOWOOD
 EA
 EIDOS
 MONTE CRISTO
 DEEP SILVER

Q2 2006

AUTO ASSAULT
 DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH
 GUILD WARS: FACTIONS
 HEART OF EMPIRE: ROME
 HELLGATE: LONDON
 HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V
 HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY
 HOTEL GIANT 2
 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
 PARAWORLD
 PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
 RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR
 RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
 RF ONLINE
 TABULA RASA
 TITAN QUEST

NCISOFT
 CODEMASTERS
 NCISOFT
 DEEP SILVER
 NAMCO
 UBISOFT
 EIDOS
 JOWOOD
 ATARI
 JOWOOD
 SEGA
 MIDWAY
 MICROSOFT
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FROM EUROPE'S NO.1 GAMING WEBSITE



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

HARDWARE EDITOR Phil Wand



WOULD you just look at the interface on that!

NEWS ROUND-UP

Chip behemoth Intel might be in the middle of switching to a 65nm manufacturing process, but that hasn't stopped it from demonstrating its next-generation hardware: the 45nm processor. Dubbed P1266, the new engine boasts a 30 per cent reduction in power consumption (ie, it runs cooler) and a 20 per cent hike in switching speeds, with twice the transistor density. AMD, the ball's in your court.

I don't know about you, but I no longer feel safe at night – thank goodness some genius has come up with the shouting lamppost. Fitted with a motion detector, if miscreants hang around it too long it starts haranguing them and taking photos. Not sure how it distinguishes between a dog having a whizz and someone up to no good, nor if it runs Windows – and if so, will it have a little sticker with the product key on it?

The RIAA, sexual partner of the US music industry and scourge of online music pirates, has excelled itself by taking a woman to court who doesn't even own a computer. Ranking close to the immaculate conception in terms of how they think she must have done it, I wait with bated breath to hear the damning evidence it's collected.

ABOUT BLOODY TIME

NVIDIA crowbars 7-series technology into an AGP card

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN you exclude more than 50 per cent of your customers by releasing new products they can't use?

Not a lot, actually. AGP motherboards might be old-fashioned, but coupled with a decent processor and a thick wedge of RAM, they're fast enough to laugh at any game currently on sale. And when the process of upgrading one requires a knowledge most gamers don't have, the only route to PCI-Express is a new PC.

But there is another way. Bringing today's technology to yesterday's hardware, NVIDIA's GeForce 7800 GS should delight AGP users worldwide: online retailers here

are already stocking Asus, BFG, Club 3D, Gainward, Gigabyte, Leadtek, PNY, Sparkle and XFX cards, with versions priced from £250. In reference form, the 16-pipeline newcomer features a slower core but slightly faster memory, and should deliver performance to put your rig a neck ahead of the £220 Radeon X800 XL.

There's the rub. Although the G70-based newcomer is a good card with features and abilities not available in any rival, it's still an expensive option – and it makes no sense if you already own an X850 or X800 XL. AGP users are best advised to keep saving. www.nvidia.co.uk

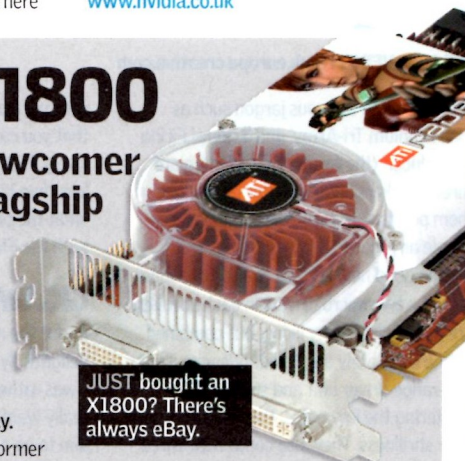
ADIOS X1800
Faster R580 newcomer replaces ATI flagship

THE RADEON X1900 XTX has overtaken its X1800 predecessor – soon to be phased out after just six months on sale – to become one of the fastest cards on the market, and with immediate nationwide availability.

The £400 card is a sweet performer in today's most popular games, beating every NVIDIA rival in *Half-Life 2*, *Battlefield 2*, *F.E.A.R.* and *Call Of Duty* – it also sits atop the 3DMark05 and

JUST bought an X1800? There's always eBay.

3DMark06 benchmarking charts. Only in *Quake 4* were the scores reversed, where the GeForce rival remains the better choice – proving once again that no one card dominates. www.ati.com/uk



24-PIN SETUP: A once popular, but sadly defunct style of bowling. **B1 AND B2 SLOTS:** When bananas in pyjamas love each other very much...

STREAMING: An extreme sport which basically involves riding an old person across a stream like a horse. If you fall in, you lose. **CROSSFIRE AND SLI:** One tough, downtown precinct. Two renegade cops, doing things their own way. *CrossFire* and *SLI*, the new hard-hitting police drama, coming soon.

MTBF FIGURES: Pronounced 'mut-buf', this piece of jargon exists to make office workers sound knowledgeable. For example: "Have you seen the latest MTBF figures? Man, those are some bad MTBF figures."

WARNING:
**THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**

BY STEVE HOGARTY



I-TRIGUE L3800 2.1

Speaker Power: 9W RMS per channel x 2
Subwoofer: 30W RMS Frequency Response:
30Hz - 20kHz Warranty: 24 months

GIGAWORKS T20 2.0

Speaker Power: 14W RMS per channel x 2
Subwoofer: N/A Frequency Response: 50kHz -
20kHz Warranty: 24 months



THE I-Trigue (right) wins the day over the more minimal Gigaworks.

I-TRIGUE L3800 2.1

PRICE £89 MANUFACTURER Creative PHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

GIGAWORKS T20 2.0

PRICE £79 MANUFACTURER Creative PHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

APPLE'S IPOD MIGHT be short on features, long on price and found in the pockets of middle-class boneheads for whom it's a 'lifestyle choice', but it remains a modern masterpiece. Like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Jean-Michel Jarre's *Oxygène*, or a 1965 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III, its quality, style and beauty give it the coolness to transcend both time and taste. In five, ten, or maybe even 50 years from now, Apple's MP3 player will still be smooth.

I-TRIGUE L3800 2.1

In contrast, Creative's I-Trigue speakers won't. Launched last month, the 2.1 L3800s shown (above right) already look borderline yesterday, with brushed aluminium casings, fingerprint-attracting plastics and a contrived shape reminiscent of Bang & Olufsen stereos from the '70s and '80s. They try too hard to be noticed in an environment where most of us would rather not notice them at all, and to add insult to injury, come

sprinkled with tortuous jargon such as 'NeoTitanium Tri-Array' and 'Lateral Firing Transducer' (the former means there are three speakers and the latter means one of them points sideways). Can't things be simple any more?

The good news is that they don't sound bad. The two micro drivers in each speaker are too bright for my liking, but combined with a separately amplified, sideways-facing, mid-range driver unit and subwoofer muttering the low notes, they do lose a lot of their shrillness. They also come with wired and wireless controls: the wired allows you to adjust volume, bass, mute and power, and offers connections for your headphones and auxiliary source; while the tiny remote gives you the power over your Creative Zen. You couldn't want more.

The L3800s are fine for music, movies and games, but I should say that the sub is a little down on power for that proper cinema experience: don't go expecting to have your kidneys tickled. They're also far too much money for what is essentially a two-channel

setup in a party frock. When you consider that you can buy Creative's frumpy-but-lovely P5800 5.1 surround system for less than half the money, you do wonder what the point is. Perhaps there's a parallel with the iPod after all.

GIGAWORKS T20 2.0

As for the more attractive, subwoofer-less, delightfully clutter-free 2.0 GigaWorks pair, I was rather sad at their averageness. I really wanted them to be good. The T20s aim to be a 'back to basics' set without any of that under-desk, low-frequency cabinet business, and without the mare's nest of wires running to and from it.

The problem is that the sound is without soul: it induces none of the heart-racing, finger-tingling arousal you get from a sharper, fatter, bass-propelled sound. And while audiophiles might lament our reliance on the subwoofer, the T20s are ample demonstration of why a dedicated boom box is the way forward for home cinema and action games. Even if it is a mess.

I-TRIGUE L3800 2.1

PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE



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GIGAWORKS T20 2.0

PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE



70

RD480-A939 CROSSFIRE

UK
EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW!

PRICE £60

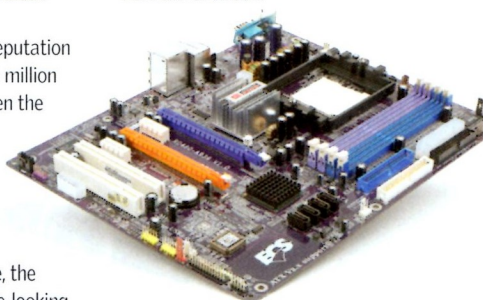
MANUFACTURER Elitegroup
WEBSITE www.ecs.uk.com

TELL YOUR SNOBBY friends that you've bought an ECS board and they'll pinch their noses in disgust. Elitegroup Computer Systems has a reputation for making low-cost, no-frills products for the majority of people who aren't interested in water cooling, overclocking or pissing about with memory voltages.

ECS also has an undeserved reputation for unreliability: it makes over 2.5 million motherboards each month, so even the smallest failure rate is going to affect a large number of people. My thoughts: there was some truth to the rumours some years ago, but not now. Anyway.

Although it has a budget price, the RD480-A939 has some expensive-looking

features. As well as dual-slot PCI-Express and ATI's Radeon Xpress 200 CrossFire chipset, there are plenty of tweaking options, support for the dual-core Athlon 64 X2, plus a decent manual. You also get eight-channel audio and Gigabit Ethernet. Well worth a look.



PCZONE



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P2

PRICE £20

MANUFACTURE RAPTOR-GAMING
WEBSITE raptor-gaming.com

THE WORLD'S BEST gaming surface is without doubt the SteelPad S&S, made by Danish manufacturer SteelSeries. It's far larger than you need, is thinner than an After Eight with an eating disorder, and the reverse is flecked with a rubbery snot meaning it never slips about underneath you. Invariably, the first thing people say when they use my PC is: "Doesn't your mouse feel nice?" Yes, it does.

For the same money you could buy this RAPTOR-GAMING P2, a smaller, noisier, thicker mat with the uncanny ability to confuse the crap out of my Microsoft clickers. Quick diagonal movements are translated to the screen as slow ones, the mottled surface of the P2 proving less than ideal for the optical S+ARCK.

Additionally, the inclusion of anti-friction pads and 'glide spray' turns the surface in to an ice rink, and with no feedback from the pad it's hard to be accurate.



PCZONE



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3D AURORA

PRICE £77

MANUFACTURER GIGABYTE
WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

TO FASHION-CONSCIOUS modders who are constantly swapping their peripherals between the latest haute couture cases, the 3D Aurora is positively prehistoric. It was launched this time last year, and in a world where chassis design takes a left turn every 90 days, GIGABYTE's first enclosure could be seen as a little passé.

But who cares? It's frumpy but well built, relatively light and has numerous 'surprise and delight' features. For example, the door's held with magnets and the rear incorporates two 120mm fans. Together with pre-drilled pipe holes, the 3D Aurora is ideal for nutters with water-cooled setups.

The interior of the case is capacious and accessible, and with a ventilated side panel plus large diameter blowers (supplied), the air moves freely around key components. The one downside is that, unlike modern quiet cases, it can be bit too raucous.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 205mm wide, 522mm high, 510mm deep
Weight: 7.1Kg Boards: ATX, Micro ATX



PCZONE



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PJ256D

PRICE £999

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

THE PJ256D IS a 1024x768 DLP projector measuring less than 200mm wide: that's the same as a DVD case, or slightly less than a pack of custard creams. It's so miniscule that, when the box turned up here for review, I tossed it into a corner assuming that ViewSonic had sent the power supply separately and that I'd receive the main unit the next day. Whoops.

Even now, when I unpack the wee wonder and settle back to *The Fifth Element* or an eye-popping game of *TOCA Race Driver 3*, I keep glancing over my shoulder to see if it transforms into some sort of weird bio-luminescent alien while I'm

SPECIFICATION

Pixel Format: 1024x768 native (1280x1024 compressed)
Throw Distance: 1.5m-10m Contrast: 2000:1
Brightness: 1500 lumens Aspect Ratio: 4:3 native, 16:9

looking the other way. The image is so detailed, so bright and so beguiling, I can't get my head around the fact it weighs just 1Kg and would slip into the pocket of my overcoat. If you have £999 to spare, email me.



PCZONE



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HOW TO...

UPGRADE YOUR POWER SUPPLY

Need:

Power supply, screwdriver, velcro cable ties

Time

30 mins

Difficulty level

Phil Wand

HAL 9000

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

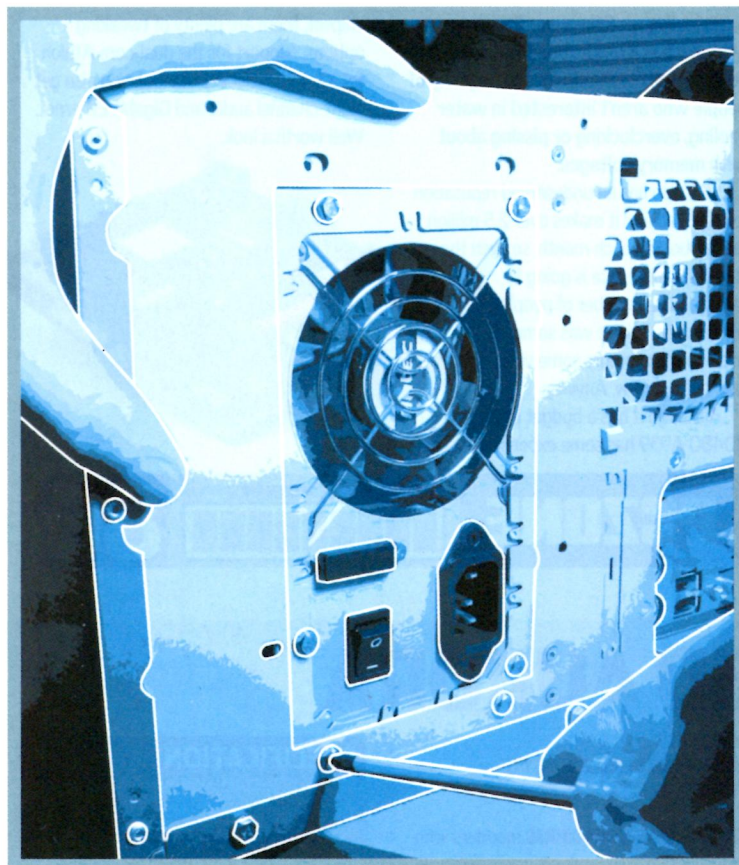
Jamie Sefton

Phil Wand whips out his tiny unit and stuffs in a shiny black monster. Plus similar jokes...

T HINKING OF AN upgrade?

While you're saving up for that bitching new video card, don't forget to put a few pennies aside for a bitching power supply to go with it. Many of the more recent PCI-Express cards require a minimum 400W PSU to accompany them, with CrossFire and SLI setups requiring at least 500W. Unless you want your rig to be less stable than a stressed lemming, never introduce new power-hungry components – or new USB devices – unless you know for sure that you have the power spare to feed them.

But don't fret! If you can change your video card or change your hard drive, you can change your power supply without breaking a sweat. Follow the steps outlined on this page and you'll soon be pumping out the right amount of juice to suit your system...

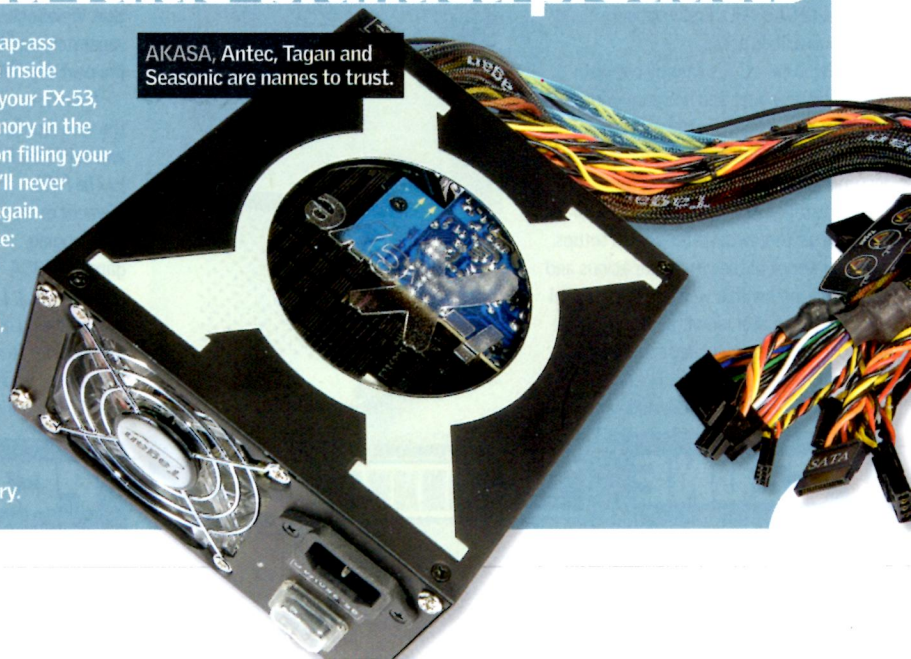


ATX or **Advanced Technology Extended** is a set of specifications describing the layout of motherboard and case designs. This means if you buy any ATX motherboard, it will fit any ATX case with an ATX power supply. At time of printing, **version 2.2** is the current ATX specification. See formfactors.org for more details. A **power rail** is, as the name suggests, a way of delivering electricity to hardware. A new PSU will have **+3.3V, +5V, +12V, -12V and -5V rails**, described on a chart with each rail's current in **amps**. You could waste time working out the total power requirement of your PC, but you're better off simply opting for a PSU capable of **at least 20A on the +12V rail**. A **modular power supply system** enables you to connect only those cables you require, rather than deal with a knot of cables you don't. **MTBF** is short for **Mean Time Between Failure** and is a rudimentary gauge of hardware quality.

01 Avoid value-branded products

Once you've had a cheap-ass power supply backfire inside your case, destroying your FX-53, motherboard and memory in the process, not to mention filling your room with smoke, you'll never go the bargain route again. Learn from my mistake: spend at least £40 on a recognised name – Akasa, Antec, Tagan, Seasonic – and go for ATX 2.x compliance. If you have an Athlon 64 or Athlon XP, or a Pentium 4, you've no need to worry.

AKASA, Antec, Tagan and Seasonic are names to trust.



WARNING: ELECTRICITY CAN BE FUN!

If you've been messing around inside computer cases for more than a decade, you'll have had at least one painful encounter with electricity – the older you are, the higher the voltage. My first jolt came from removing the on/off switch of an old IBM AT, back when the button on the front had 240V mains power running through it. Nowadays, to get a belt from an ATX case would require you to take apart the power supply or take a bath while holding it. So although electricity remains dangerous and you should always be cautious, try not to be a big girl about it.

02 Decide what you're after

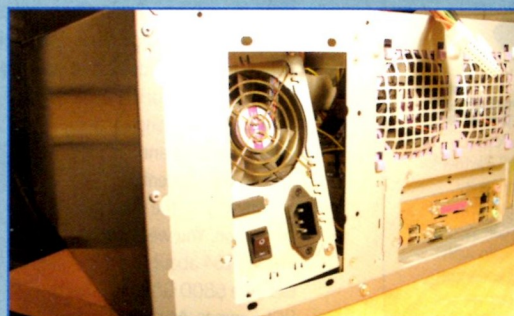
If noise is important, choose a quiet PSU. The more serene supplies feature a low-speed, large-diameter fan – many silent supplies, such as the Antec Phantom, claim to be 'fanless' but still feature a blower for high loads. Pay attention to warranty and to MTBF figures: a higher number means better quality. Treat 420W as a bare minimum, but if you're running dual CPUs or CrossFire/SLI, you'll need 500W together with ATI/NVIDIA certification.



ANTEC describes its Phantom as 'fanless', except when the blower kicks in.

03 Remove your existing supply

Unplug all the cables from the rear of your PC and heave it onto a desk where you can better get at it. Open the case and, tracing every cable from your power supply, disconnect the motherboard and all peripherals. To extract the existing unit, simply undo the four screws which hold it in place. Take particular care to remove only those screws which are in contact with the case and not those which are part of the PSU itself.



THE power supply is held in place by the four outermost screws.

04 Install the new supply

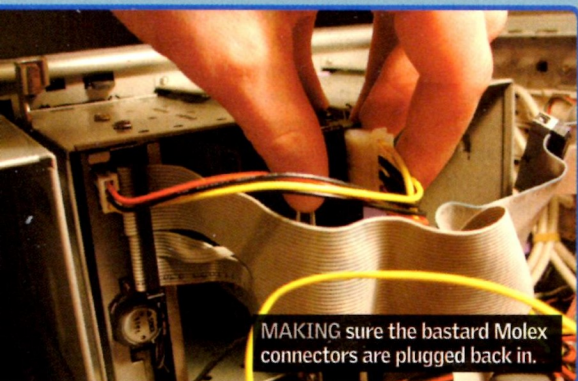
Withdraw the old power supply and push the new one home. Run the wires into the main body of the case and connect the 20-pin power connector to your motherboard. If the block is too short, don't panic: you have a 24-pin setup and need to elongate the connector. Most manufacturers supply an extension block for doing this, so check your manual. Note that your board may also require a second 4-pin 12V connection block, so have the motherboard manual handy too.



HOOKING up the main board.

05 Connect up your peripherals

Remember those bastard plugs you struggled to remove a couple of steps back? It's now time to reconnect them. This means all hard drives, optical drives, floppy drive and case fans. Some supplies have separate cables for your drives and an earth strap, so familiarise yourself with its documentation. If you have one or more video cards requiring external power, don't forget to hook them up too. Screw the supply firmly into place, plug in the mains cable and power up.



MAKING sure the bastard Molex connectors are plugged back in.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Got something you want to ask? Just want something else to read? Either way, this little box will make you happy.

- X How do I know if my current PSU is failing?**
 - ✓ Telltale signs include random reboots, particularly when the system is under load, and buzzing noises from the supply when the PC is on standby.
- X What do you have against value brand PSUs?**
 - ✓ Value brands are cheaper because they use cheaper components. They also tend to have lesser MTBF ratings and fewer amps on the 12V rail.
- X I've fitted the new PSU and now Windows won't boot.**
 - ✓ Check you've reconnected the motherboard cables, and that your motherboard doesn't require a secondary connection. If you've lost the manual, you should be able to download a new one from the manufacturer's website.
- X Can I trick my PSU into delivering a higher voltage?**
 - ✓ Not without extreme peril.



DEAR WANDY

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



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Up to your neck in debt? Partner sleeping around? A propensity to wake up on Saturday morning with a kebab and beer can stuck to your face? We can't help with any of those (but if you know the answers, let us know), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.

WONKY WANDY

Q I always enjoy reading your answers to problems. I enjoy the questions, and then usually find myself disagreeing with some of the advice that you give. But who am I to gripe – you've got the nice job working for a great magazine and I'm just a lowly student.

Anyway, to the point: a correction. You were wrong in issue 164 about the GeForce 6800 GS being strictly PCI-Express. At the time of writing, the AGP version may not have been available to purchase, but it was definitely available to pre-order – I'd seen the card advertised for some time on sites such as Overclockers UK. I hope that Daniel Jackson, who wrote the letter to you, has not purchased the card you suggested. The Radeon X800 XL is a nice card, but it's not the very best card for a mainstream budget.

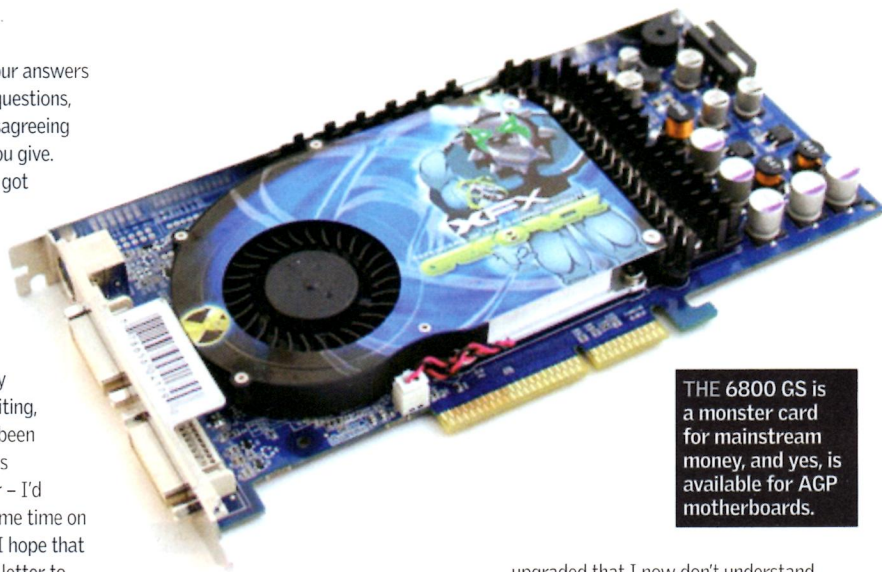
You do an outstanding job normally, and I know it's not easy to get everything right all the time. However, if you ever have any questions about hardware, feel free to email me and I might be able to help.

Luke Addison

A When Daniel put his question to me back in November, the AGP version of the 6800 GS was mere speculation. The first time you were actually able to pre-order the card was a few days before Christmas, when XFX announced it was rolling off production lines and would definitely be in shops.

I'm aware that Komplett had been listing the card since the beginning of December, but at that time its arrival was never a certainty, and I'm not going to give someone advice based on non-existent stock at a random Web retailer.

You're right though, the 6800 GS is faster than the X800 GTO, and is the one card to have between £100-£200. That said, it's really not the all-conquering bargain you think it is: Overclockers UK is selling the AGP GS for a little over £180, making it £70 more expensive than a Sapphire X800 GTO. That's a huge difference in price, and one of the reasons the GTO remains in the Buyer's Guide.



THE 6800 GS is a monster card for mainstream money, and yes, is available for AGP motherboards.

ANOTHER FINE GS

Q My existing Mesh system is struggling a little with *Quake 4*, and maybe I need to upgrade the video card from the current GeForce Ti4600. The systems specs are Asus A7N8X Deluxe, Athlon XP 2800+, 1GB RAM and 80GB Maxtor drive. I'd be most grateful if you could give me my options or any advice. Do I need AGP or PCI? Is a complete system replacement my best option?

Ian Krusche

A Assuming you can afford it, look for one of the AGP variants of the GeForce 6800 GS (between £160-£180) – but don't hang about as they're going pretty quick. There's no point changing your system just to play *Quake 4* – the GS card upgrade should do you nicely. There, now everyone's happy.

NON-JERKY BEEF

Q After a successful Christmas, I found myself with a pile of the latest PC games. On installing them, I found Santa had not been as thoughtful as first anticipated, as my PC can't run any of them at a resolution higher than 640x480 – and even then, they're in jerk-o-vision. All is not lost, as I have a PC upgrade budget set aside for just this eventuality, but it's been so long since I

upgraded that I now don't understand any of the new hardware.

My current set-up is an ASUS A7V8X with AMD Athlon XP 3000+, Radeon 9600 PRO, Audigy and 1GB RAM. I've looked at the budget options on the Buyer's Guide, but think I can spend a bit more – I've got about £650. Can I afford the necessary upgrades to run X3 and its ilk – not just at their minimum settings, but really run them? No stutters, plenty of detail and a massive resolution?

Mike Laing

A From the cheaper half of the Buyer's Guide, go for the ASUS A8N-E (£80) and a Western Digital drive of 100GB or larger (£55). Find yourself 1GB DDR PC3200 RAM (£65) and either a Radeon X1800 XL or a GeForce 7800 GT (£240). Get yourself a 430W or better ATX 2.0-compliant power supply from Antec or Tagan (about £55) and, if you fancy the upgrade, Antec's Sonata II case (£78). Have you spotted what's missing? No, nothing important, just the processor. With what you have left – probably somewhere in the region of £100 after delivery charges – look around for retailers that have the AMD Athlon 64 3500+ on offer. You should be able to pick one up from around £140.

MIXING MEMORY

Q I have a slight problem. I have a system with an Athlon 64 3000+ processor with 1GB RAM consisting of

DRIVER WATCH

Keep your PC happy

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 5.13	21-DEC-05
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 81.98	21-DEC-05

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER X-FI 2.070004	15 NOV 05
Creative	AUDIGY 2 VALUE 2.08.0002 BETA	21 SEP 05

I recently went on holiday, leaving my laptop with my girlfriend. When I got back, she told me she'd broken it

Love isn't all plain sailing as reader Baz Jones now knows



2 x 512MB sticks. My Asus AV8 Deluxe has four RAM slots. I have the two 512MB in slots B1 and B2, but when I install a 1GB stick into the remaining slots, nothing happens when I turn it on. I've tried all combinations with the RAM, but still had to keep the 2 x 512MB sticks in place.

Phil Watts

A Normally there isn't a problem in mixing RAM sizes: what you need to be careful about is mixing RAM types. For example, having both buffered and unbuffered chips will only cause trouble. You really need to comb the AV8's manual for details of how the banks are populated. Some boards slow down when addressing four chips rather than two, and others won't allow you to run odd numbers of chips.

NIGHT NIGHT LAPTOP

Q I recently went on holiday, leaving my much-loved laptop in the charge of my girlfriend. When I returned, she told me she'd broken it. I turned it on and it all worked fine – apart from the fact that the screen was really dark and I'm unable to see anything on it. I tried to adjust the

contrast and brightness, and even went as far as a system restore which didn't change a thing. Any idea what the problem is?

Baz Jones

A Could be a number of things. When you say it's really dark, do you mean that you can still see what's on it? If so, it means the laptop has probably been dropped and the backlight in the display has bust. Either that, or the switch which activates it has broken. You'll need to get an authorised repairer to look at it and replace the light or the switch. If you can't actually see anything at all, it's going to be something more serious and may be quite costly to repair. I'd start taking a long look at the machine's warranty and at your household contents policy.

XP HOOVER EDITION

Q I have an Advent T9202 PC with a Pentium 4 550 3.4GHz processor. As soon as I start up any game with 3D graphics, the PC decides to turn on the processor fan at full speed and this sounds like a vacuum cleaner. My friend's Compaq Athlon 3700+ PC runs the same games,

but its fan hardly ever kicks in – and when it does, it makes about a quarter of the noise of mine.

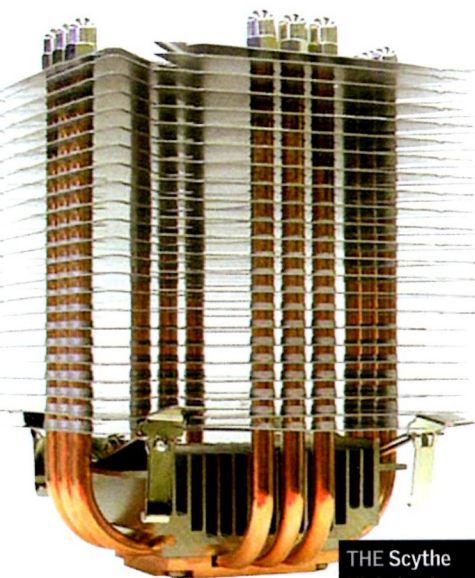
Can you recommend a replacement cooling system that I could install which doesn't make so much noise? Or is there some way I can change the settings so the fan only kicks in when actually needed?

Mike Hedges

A Your best place to start for quieter components is quietpc.com. All Zalman products I've used (bar the company's crappy surround headphones) have been first-rate, but be sure to

check the 'Motherboard Compatibility' pages at Zalman's website before making a purchase. Plus, if you're looking to buy something like the Scythe Ninja-Plus, you need to get accurate measurements of the space inside your case, as it's a real

skyscraper. You'd also be well advised to lift the lid off your Advent anyway and make sure it's the processor fan that's causing the din, because Quiet PC also stocks replacement power supplies and case fans. **PCF**

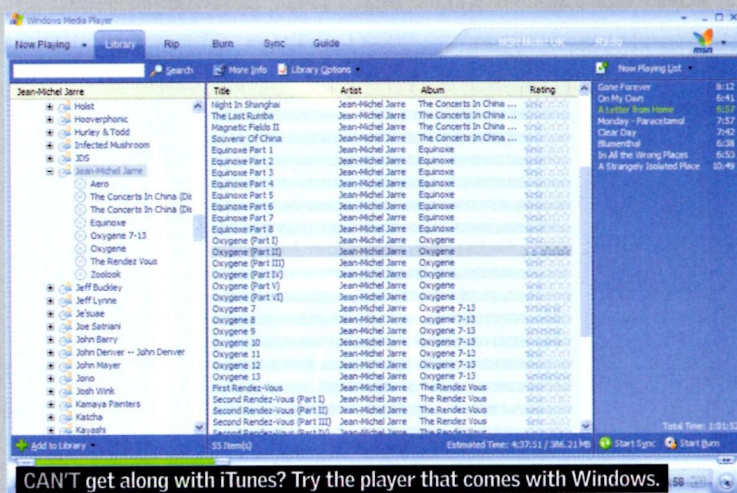


THE Scythe Ninja is... Large.

**WARNING:
DON'T TRY
THIS AT HOME!**

When upgrading the network driver of a friend's PC, Windows decided it would turn the screen blue. I looked long and hard for a hint of what might have gone wrong, but discovered nothing useful. I'm not sure blue screens have provided anything but misery and, in the case of malfunctioning cash machines, light relief. On restarting, the network device wasn't working, and re-installing the old drivers caused further explosions. Because there was no Internet, the only way for me to get back to where I started was to drive back to where I started. Top tip: get your friends to bring their PCs to you.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



CAN'T get along with iTunes? Try the player that comes with Windows.

8 WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER

EXPECT TO PAY Free

www.microsoft.com

I've used Apple machines since the '80s, but never liked iTunes. Not only does it steadfastly refuse to look like a Windows utility when run under Windows, instead choosing to ape the dated appearance of a Macintosh application, but it also eats Windows system resources like a fat bloke eats French fries. Leave the heaving lump open for any length of time and you'll find Windows getting slower and slower, like a fat bloke climbing stairs.

I also object to being charged 79p a track when Americans customers are charged just 99 cents for the same music – that's more than 20p cheaper for no obvious reason. For iTunes users

on the other side of the Pond, an album works out at almost half the price. And while the music store in Windows Media Player charges you the same 79p per track, you can also stream them instead for just 1p a listen, and the Radio feature streams all the top-selling tracks to you one after the other. Now, the music I love, I buy on CD, and the music I like I stream when I'm in the mood.

Microsoft's Media Player has the same core features as Apple's, such as the ability to create playlists, rate your music and burn it to CD. It has a more familiar interface and won't install Windows Services that talk to your iPod – very useful if you don't have or refuse to waste money on the most overpriced and overrated fashion statement of recent times.

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GAMER EXPLORER | 70

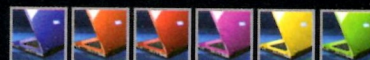


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WATCHDOG

Rotten companies need sorting – and good ones need praising...

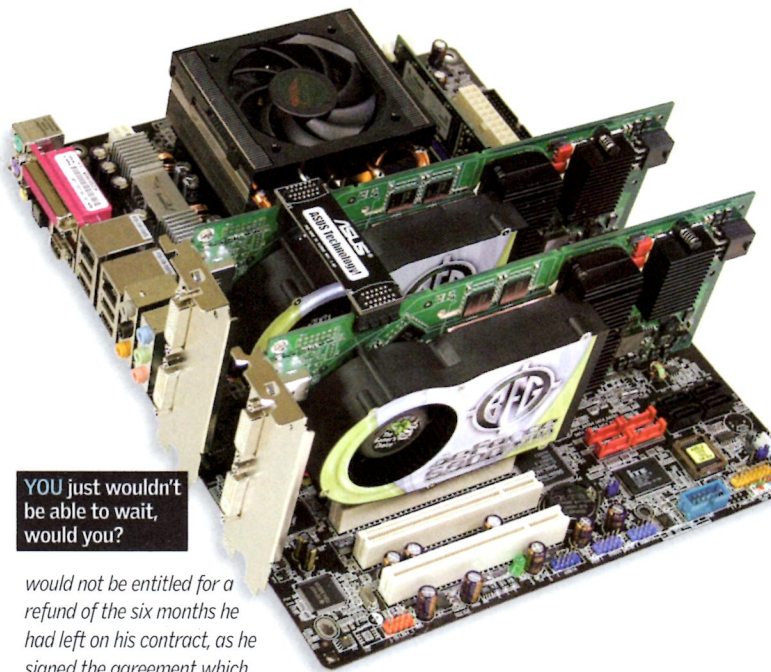
Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Pleased remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

TELE-GONE-WEST

Reader Alan Bell was renting out a place for six months when he looked at treating himself to a Telewest Blueyonder broadband package that came complete with phone and TV. Knowing that he'd only be at the address for six months when the minimum stated contract was a year, he contacted Telewest to ask if he could move his service to his new address and having received a positive response, he signed up.

Six months later when he came to move, Telewest informed him that it could not supply the service to his new address and promptly terminated the contract. All of the equipment was returned to Telewest too, so you can imagine Alan's surprise when a week later, he was sent a bill for £150, including a contract termination fee for the Internet of £89.95 and a termination fee for the phone of £30.50.



YOU just wouldn't be able to wait, would you?

would not be entitled for a refund of the six months he had left on his contract, as he signed the agreement which states that the contract is for 12 months. However, as a gesture of goodwill we have refunded him for the six months. The customer is happy with this and the case is now closed." So it's all turned out well for Alan, but it should still serve as a stark reminder to anyone considering getting broadband over the short term. Make sure you read the small print!

CHRISTMAS CARD

The Christmas period is a time to eat, drink and be merry – but that's not all, as reader Carol Nicholson discovered. Between the

delivery courier ParcelForce, it had already shut for the holidays on Friday. Carol fumes: "Dabs must have known this, yet still delivered the package to ParcelForce and charged me for Saturday courier service."

The package containing the second card eventually arrived on January 3, but nine days later, Carol still hadn't had the extra money she'd paid for Saturday delivery refunded from Dabs, despite sending several emails asking for her money back.

The New Year was fully underway by the time we contacted Dabs, but it came back

Anyone considering getting broadband in the short term – make sure you read the small print!

turkey and mince pies, Carol had been busy building herself a tasty SLI rig, and all she needed to finish was another graphics card for that magical second slot.

So off she headed to www.dabs.com, where she put in an order for her second card. Since it was already Friday Dec 30, Carol ticked the Saturday 'Next Day Delivery' box so the card would arrive in time to finish the machine for the New Year, paying the extra cost. But Saturday came and went with no delivery, so Carol asked Dabs what was going on.

She was told the package had been passed on, but when Carol chased up the

to us quickly with the following response: "We're sorry to hear of Ms Nicholson's dissatisfaction following the order she recently placed with dabs.com for delivery on Saturday December 31. We should indeed have removed the Next Day Delivery facility from our website for this date, as ParcelForce had informed us it was unable to provide a service. Unfortunately, this was overlooked and is of course, entirely our error. We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused to Ms Nicholson and have already fully reimbursed the cost of the Saturday delivery initially requested." **PCZ**

BROADBAND: more contract stipulations than Madonna.

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Also get a phone service with unlimited local and national weekend calls. All these delivered down one state of the earth fibre optic cable.

Special offer - only £30.00 a month* for the first 12 months, (thereafter the standard monthly charge will apply, currently £33.99). Offer ends 28th February 2006. Available to new and existing customers who have 1 or 2 Telewest services.

Prices quoted are for payment by Direct Debit. Payment by any other method will incur a monthly £3 administration fee.

Add to basket

THE ACCUSED

Telewest
tv, broadband, phone

dabs.com

Guilty until proven innocent

Alan feels this is grossly unfair: "It was Telewest Blueyonder who cancelled the termination contract, and if the salesman at the time had informed me that I'd be liable to pay the termination fee if the service wasn't available at his new address, then I'd have gone with BT instead." When Alan called to complain, he was threatened with legal action and told that his bill would be passed on to a debt collection agency...

We got in contact with Telewest who came back to us very quickly, stating: "We have contacted the customer regarding this issue and informed him that in most cases he



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REMEMBER:
YOU ALSO NEED
MONEY FOR FOOD
AND CLOTHING

We are legally required to remind readers that money splashed on hardware may be better spent on families, wives and girlfriends. PC ZONE isn't liable for any estrangement that may ensue.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Have you been neglecting your PC? Time to open your wallet and show it some love...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

GV-NX78X256V-B

EXPECT TO PAY £350

MANUFACTURER GIGABYTE

WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

Emphatically the fastest card we've tested. Unlike our favourite 6600 GT, GIGABYTE's 7800 GTX is built to reference specifications with a 430MHz processor and 256MB of 1.2GHz DDR3. Hunt around and you can buy an even faster variant or just overclock the crap out of this one. It seems to enjoy it.



PROCESSOR



ATHLON 64 FX-57

EXPECT TO PAY £700

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE www.amd.co.uk

For extreme performance, the flagship Athlon is the only processor to buy – even if it makes the same dent in your bank account as last month's mortgage payment. With AMD's new memory controller, unlocked multiplier and highest ever clock speed, the latest FX is the fastest thing inside any PC.

MOTHERBOARD



FATALITY AN8 SLI

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER ABIT

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Designed specifically for gaming, the nForce4 SLI-based Fatal1ty AN8 supports all 939-pin AMD processors. As well as SLI support it features ABIT's Guru Panel, a front-mounted display unit for overclockers. The board also uses a bevy of ABIT features, including OTES cooling and AudioMAX 7.1 onboard audio.

HDD



RAPTOR 74GB

EXPECT TO PAY £118

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. And although it's not especially large, it's big enough for a dedicated gaming rig. Two of them in RAID 0 configuration will give you almost 150GB and really make *Battlefield 2* fly.

SCREEN



MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

EXPECT TO PAY £360

MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi

WEBSITE www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk

The LCD1970GX is a 19in LCD screen, with an 8ms response time and an inky black glass screen that saturates all the colours and darkens the shadows. It includes a joystick controller for the on-screen display, and a four-port USB hub.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £179

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £220

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

They'll cost you over £200, but they're also the best speakers we've ever tested at PC ZONE. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

X800 GTO

EXPECT TO PAY £115

MANUFACTURER GECUBE

WEBSITE gcube.com.tw

You could save yourself a tenner and go for the 8-pipeline GT, but you'd be missing out. The GTO is without doubt the mainstream card to go for: an overclocking dream, it can trump the 6800 GT on maximum detail and this GECUBE comes with a heat-pipe and sensible bundle.



PROCESSOR



ATHLON 64 3000+

EXPECT TO PAY £95

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE www.amd.co.uk

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty in the BIOS, Athlon 64s can be highly rewarding – particularly so on an nForce4 motherboard. Famous for overclocking and top performance in games, there's really no alternative. This AMD chip is the one to have if you're building to a budget.

MOTHERBOARD



A8N-E NFORCE4 ULTRA

EXPECT TO PAY £80

MANUFACTURER ASUSTek

WEBSITE uk.asus.com

The A8N-E supports the full range of Athlon 64 FX, dual-core Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon 64 chips, plus PCI Express and 7.1 channel audio. The nForce4 Ultra chipset has more features than a circus has clowns, and ASUS includes a raft of its own, as well as some serious overclocking tools.

HDD



1200JD SATA

EXPECT TO PAY £55

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY £152

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £34

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £40

MANUFACTURER Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

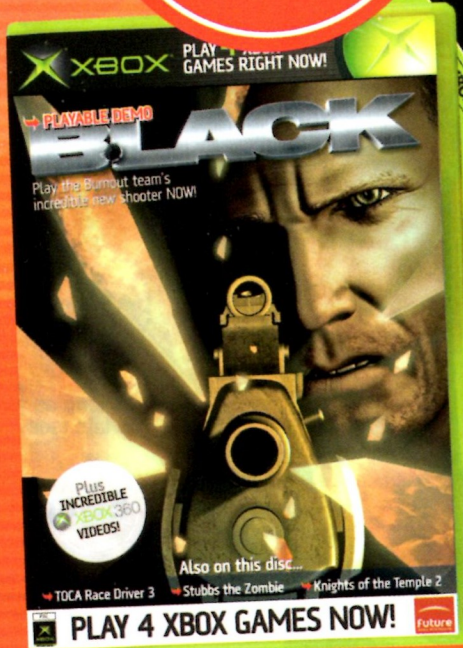
You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

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PCZONE

FREEPLAY

Skint? Play PC games for zero notes...

STAFF WRITER Steve Hogarty

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

**FREE
GAMES!**

All change

HUDJAH?! BUH-WAH?! Where's Suzy gone? What am I doing in Freeplay? I've got *Sims* expansions to review, let me go! Ahh, haha, but seriously though, hello and welcome to Freeplay. If you don't read the magazine backwards, you'll notice that Suzy's marched over to page 59 to head up the reviews section and as nature, and indeed Jamie Sefton, abhors a vacuum (as well as puppy dogs and baby seals), I've been drafted in to captain the good ship Freeplay. They're giving me a pirate's hat and everything.

Confucius once said: "You can take the girl out of the Freeplay, but you can't take the Freeplay out of the girl." We've proven him wrong though, and after 17 hours of arduous keyhole surgery we have indeed removed Freeplay from deep inside Suzy's heart and implanted it directly into my own brain, thus transferring to me the power to hunt down and present to you all the best mods, maps, add-ons and general free stuff the Internet has to offer. So climb aboard, and let's see if I can't bring this section screaming to the ground in a blazing fireball of fiery doom.

Try this!

Sound advice in *Two Thrones*

Right before the chariot race in *Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones*, if you climb halfway up the pole closest to where the enemies spawn before jumping away from the gate, a strange lady will read out the names of the sound engineers who worked on the game. Weird.



110 Demo Pages

Get your free games here!



112 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



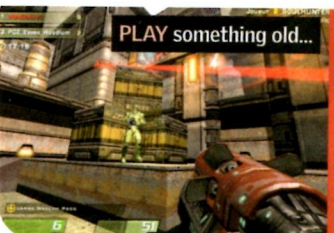
116 Freeware

The best darn free games from the wide and often wacky world of that there Internet



118 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



126 Make the most of Quake 4

Become a multiplayer legend!



129 How To Make A Game

Play the *Gibbage* demo again!
**PCZONE
FREE-O-METER**

0
HOURS

208.8
HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



FREEPLAYDEMOS

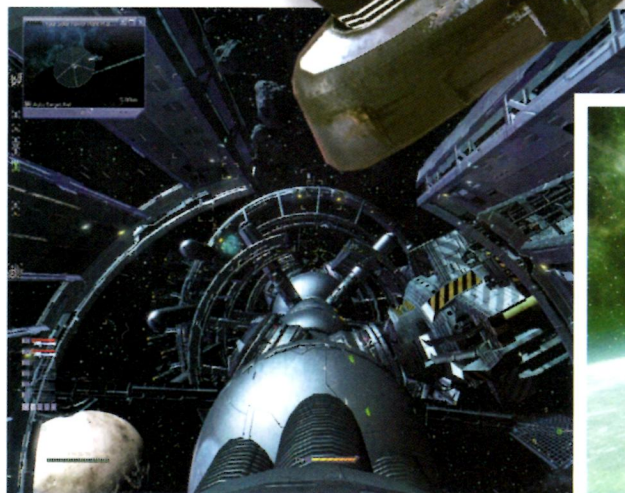
Demos

On the DVD – free games galore!



DISC TROUBLES?

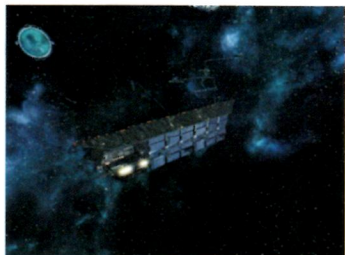
Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



X3: REUNION **EXCLUSIVE!**

Survive wave after wave of dirty alien scum!

www.egosoft.com | ETA: Out now



THERE ARE ONLY four things a man needs in life: a light fighter, a heavy fighter, a cargo transporter and a space-station complex producing microchips for sale on the market. The X3 demo gives you all of these things, along with five whole sectors of the universe to explore or attack or exploit or defend. Effectively a big old tutorial for the monumental space

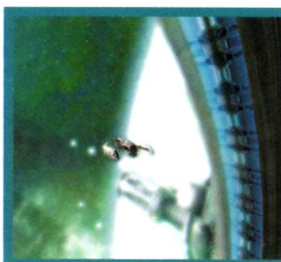
simulation, the demo sees you under routine attack from Khaak ships, forcing you to upgrade your own ships and hold out as long as possible.

Besides fighting for your life, you have the option to build a sector-spanning empire through smart trading, mining or all-out tyranny. For example, use your cargo ship to sell your microchips to the various other stations that need them, or build a mine on an asteroid to create cheap resources for your other stations. Alternatively, just hunt down pirates and blast them to bits for bounty rewards. Of course, you could always just fly around and gawp at just how amazing everything looks instead – because it does.



WORLDS OF OPPORTUNITY

The scope and freedom on offer is a bit daunting, even if there are only five sectors to explore. So instead of twiddling your thumbs like the kid in glasses at the school disco, get in there and blow something up.



THE OTHER SIDE

After flying through a 'big swirling blue circle thing' we find ourselves in another sector. This one is called Kingdom End and it belongs to the Boron race. They look a bit like newts. Or crocodiles. Something a bit like amphibians anyway.

SPACED! It's very, very big. Infinitely big in fact, which is bigger than seven trucks



CRAP

He had fighter drones and a backwards-pointing laser! It's vicious and selfish reprobates like this who should be locked up behind space bars and have the space key thrown away. It's disgusting. Bring back space capital punishment, we say.



'AVE IT!

Who does he think he is? Flying around like he owns the place. Let's take him down a notch – in fact, let's take him down a notch and a half. This guy won't even have a notch by the time we're finished. He won't even know what a notch is!





FREEPLAY DEMOS

CRASHDAY EXCLUSIVE!

Nitro-fuelled carnage awaits you in Atari's car smash 'em up

www.crashday.com | ETA: Out now

HERE'S A game to satisfy PC gamers who love witnessing scenes of twisted metal, fiery explosions and general vehicle-based mayhem – unfortunately for *Carnageddon* fans though, no dead cows. *Crashday* straps you into a souped-up motor and hurls you into a series of races, deathmatches, mini-games and stunt challenges that would give Mad Max nightmares. The demo has two game modes and cars in single-player (see 'Smash It Up', right), plus a LAN and online multiplayer option complete with an extra Pass The Bomb game type. Get revving.

Smash It Up!

Two full playable games are available in *Crashday*'s single-player mode



WRECKING MATCH

Does what it says on the dashboard – a hectic deathmatch against AI-driven cars, with the first player to destroy ten vehicles being the winner. Use Nitro boost to dodge missiles and check your map regularly to scout for sneaky opponents.



STUNT SHOW

Compete against other computer-controlled cars to see who can rack up 250,000 points first. Combine jumps, spins and loops for combos that reap big points à la *Tony Hawk*.



THE BEST OF THE REST



BRIAN BLESSED

Brian Blessed is on our DVD! Whether you want to use him as a ringtone, or simply have him scream 'PC ZONE's alive!' whenever you boot up – he is our most favourite hero. All together now: 'My name's Brian Blessed, and I love PC ZONE!' We love you too Brian.



THE MOVIES

The Drifters once sang about 'Saturday night at the movies', which is what people did in the 1960s. But now you can spend every night at the movies, and you don't even have to leave your PC. It's our game of last year, and now you can love it too.

www.themoviesgame.com



RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

Now you too can have a group of heavily-armed men on *Lockdown* – a single-player and co-op map set in South Africa and a Prison multiplayer map. Not the greatest departure for the *Rainbow Six* series – but still worth a temporary place on your hard drive.

www.rainbowsixgame.com



COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

The hallowed *Commandos* franchise returns with an entirely new perspective. Heresy or welcome change? Well, you can probably guess what we think – but give this a spin and see what you make of it. Then we can get together and reminisce about the isometric days of yore when all this were fields.

www.commandosstrikeforce.com

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

It's the best *Star Wars* RTS ever!

www.petroglyphgames.com | ETA: Out now

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE to give those pesky Imperialists a right royal kicking. This short yet satisfying demo allows you to experience all three sections of the game, providing a campaign featuring two planets, one asteroid field, one space skirmish and a land battle. You also get an

in-depth tutorial to get you acquainted with the game's subtleties.

With Han Solo and Chewbacca leading your forces in both conflicts, you'll also get to see how heroes can influence the tide of battles with their powerful special skills. May the Force be with you.

TACTICAL TRICKS Navigating the strategic map



1 Constructing troops: you can build land and space units on any planet that you control. Of course, you'll have to construct barracks and space-stations first.

2 Enemy-held territory shows up in red. Before you can take over a planet, you first need to clear its orbit of enemy ships, then send your troops to the surface.

3 The mini-map shows which planets are under whose control. Above is information about your finances and current tech level, which you'll want to get as high as possible.

Ground Space

How to win on and above a planet's surface



Ships In Space

Target the ships' weapons with your fighters while pounding them from afar with larger vessels. Take on Tie Fighters with the Millennium Falcon.



EMP The Empire

With a powerful turret blocking your path, send in Han to blast it with his EMP ability – then send in the cavalry to mop up the exposed enemy forces.

LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

www.fileshack.com/file.x?fid=8373



Ready for broadband delivery is the RTS sequel that all Hobbiton is talking about – with goblin and dwarf factions available to play, a tutorial and a skirmish map. It's a whopping 1.3 GB though, which might make your Internet connection wither and die.

BLACK & WHITE 2

www.lionhead.com/bw2



With phat pipe in hand, you can chase chase a giant monkey and keep it in your hard drive. Well, at the time of writing we don't know exactly what breed of animal will be in Lionhead's demo – but you can rest assured that it'll be gigantic and somewhat unruly.

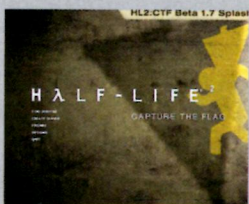


SNIPPETS



CRIME ACCOMPLICE

Has it been far too long since you stole a car, killed a cop and slept with a prostitute? Of course it has. The latest version of *San Andreas* mod *Multi Theft Auto* is all you could ever want from an online *Grand Theft Auto*. Version 0.5 features two new maps: Staunton Island and Shoreside Vale, the latter of which sports all new character selection screens and the ability to jump to super-human, car-dodging heights. www.mtawc.com



WAVE THE FLAG

Gordon Freeman's Aliiiiiive! OK, we'll stop it with the Brian Blessed references now. *Half-Life 2 Capture the Flag* is one of the most popular *HL2* mods around. When they're not having regular matches against Valve employees, the *Half-Life CTF* team brings us important mod updates like the latest version 1.7, which features revised maps, new models and all manner of bug-fixes. www.hl2ctf.com

"THE RAIN WAS coming down like all the angels in heaven decided to take a piss at the same time." If ever

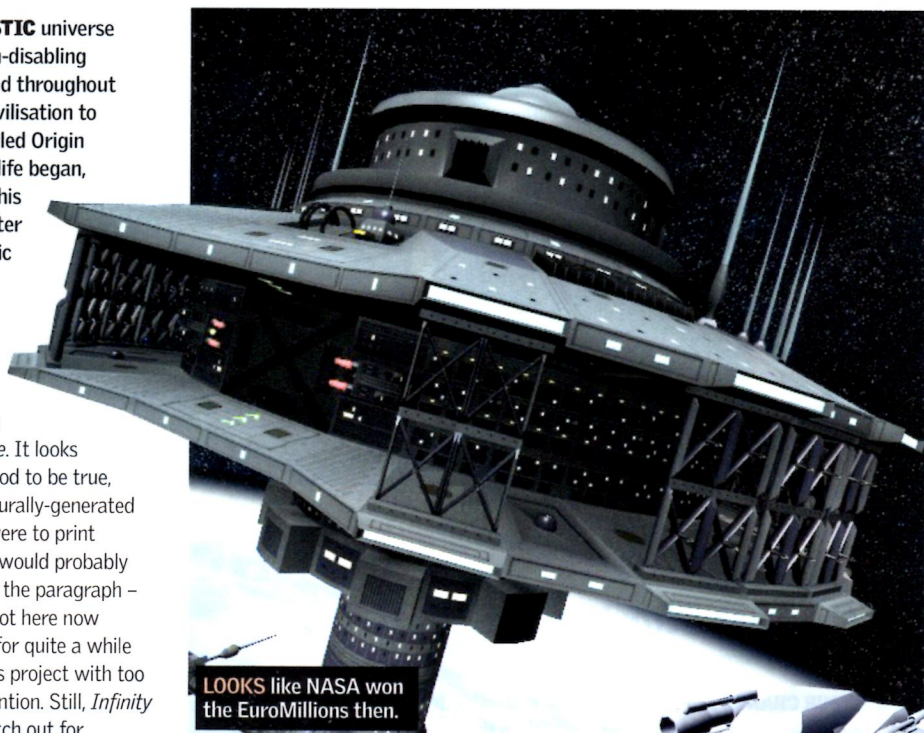
AND BEYOND

fl-tw.com

An MMO called *Infinity* and not even a mention of Buzz Lightyear

PICTURE A FUTURISTIC universe in which a procreation-disabling disease has propagated throughout our species, forcing civilisation to search for a planet called Origin on which it's believed life began, lest mankind perish. This planet, wait for it, better known as, cue dramatic music... Earth! Oh.

Right then, with the interesting backstory nailed down, let's introduce *Infinity*, an MMO space game in the vein of *Elite*. It looks amazing, almost too good to be true, with 100 billion procedurally-generated planets to visit. If we were to print that number, the zeros would probably go right off the edge of the paragraph – it's that big. Sadly, it's not here now and probably won't be for quite a while being such an ambitious project with too many spaceships to mention. Still, *Infinity* is one free MMO to watch out for.



LOOKS like NASA won the EuroMillions then.

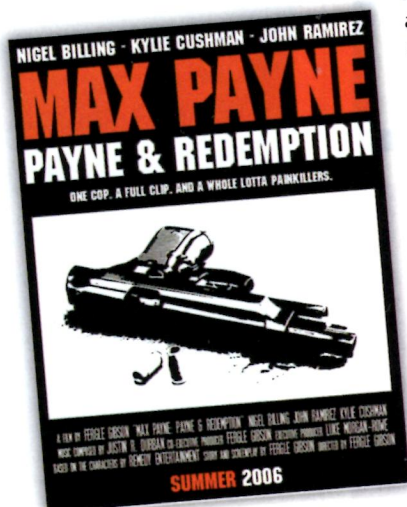
PAYNE & REDEMPTION

All starry-eyed, Max Payne heads to the silver screen...

www.payneandredemption.com

there was a *Max Payne*-ism that deserved to end up on the big screen it's that one, but unfortunately all rumours of a *Max Payne* movie are as solid as a toilet trip after a curry night.

In the meantime, keep an eye on *Payne & Redemption*, an independent movie promised by the director to be true to the gritty and dark *Max Payne* style, replete with cringe-worthy similes. We're hoping this means it's full of guns, diving with guns, shooting people with guns and talking metaphorically about guns. Right now though, there's nothing but a teaser trailer on the website, and that's cold, colder than a walk-in fridge. Cold as a gun.



CONQUER THE GALAXY

C&C heads *PlanetSide* in *C&C: Auraxis*

www.cncauraxis.com

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT suggest that the explosive tank battles and distinguished factions of *PlanetSide* would work well in a strategy game, and according to the guys behind *C&C: Auraxis*, they'd be right. *Auraxis* is a *C&C: Generals* mod that merges the worlds of *PlanetSide* and *C&C* into a mod that can be enjoyed by fans of both games.

In a plot taken from the online shooter, the three playable sides, New Conglomerate, Terran Republic and Vanu Sovereignty, are all locked in a galactic war – which is convenient because the *C&C: Generals* engine features a lot of tanks. All of your favourite vehicles and mechs are here, so there's plenty to make you feel at home if you're a wandering *PlanetSide* refugee looking for an RTS hook.



SNIPPETS



RAVENHOLM

What do you get if you cross *Half-Life 2*, zombies and two Czechs? A woolly jumper! Wait, that's not it, no, you get *Ravenholm*, a *HL2* mod which takes the scariest bit of the game and stretches it into some terrifying levels. Look out for full coverage in next month's Freeplay. ravenholm.wz.cz



DYSTOPIA THE 4TH

One of our favourite *Half-Life 2* mods *Dystopia* has recently seen a mammoth game update – and you don't have to hack any computer terminals to get it. Version 4, as well as making various tweaks and bug-fixes, adds *dys_Silo* and *dys_Fortress* to the mod's ever expanding map roster. Get your hands on it now for an extended bit of Mr Freeman. www.dystopia-game.com



"GET ready for a fist sandwich!"



"GET ready for a cheese sandwich!"



BULGING LYCRA!

Free update to *City of Heroes/Villains* packs in tons more stuff!

eu.cityofvillains.com

AH, TO BE A SUPER-HERO – being publicly accepted in the open while wearing a gimp mask and purple Y-fronts on the outside of your trousers. Which is not the case in the *PC ZONE* office (as Sefton found out last week). Of course, if you've played *City of Heroes* and/or *City of Villains* since launch, you will have already been exorcising your inner demons online, and the rather good news is that Cryptic Studios is about to reward you with mega-update *Destiny Manifest* come April.

Completely free to existing subscribers, it will add extensive new content for

high-level (as in 'good') players, as well as low-level (as in 'crap') players. Kicking off, there'll be two new zones: Grandville, featuring the web-tastic Spider City, where you battle mutated arachnoids and other nasties including Lord Recluse; and a zone that has the villains assaulting Paragon City, known as Recluse's Victory. The latter level has both heroes and villains fighting over control points, using heavy weaponry as well as their superpowers.

There'll also be new Patron Powers for villains that include a Spirit Shark for Captain Mako, which has a relative of Jaws snapping

towards enemies; and an expanded Power Set for villain archetypes including Dark Armour for the Stalker and Thug Pets (pitbulls perhaps?) for the Mastermind.

City of Villains is also getting over 300 new missions – including custom ones – that take you from levels 40-50, as well as Mayhem Missions, an excuse for extreme chaos allowing your evil-doers to take part in timed escapades in destructible environments, planting bombs, blowing up buildings and terrorising citizens. Not only that, but players of both games will get improved graphics, new costume items and smart base features – our favourite being the ability to give your base an eerie glow in a colour of your choice. Interior design has never been so super.



Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE II



Patch v1.2.33 "fixed crap end boss" apparently. Their words, not ours.

Movie of the Month SC: DOUBLE AGENT

With *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* held back until September, Ubisoft has had to win over our hearts with a brand-new game trailer before we hit the picket lines in a raging fury. Give it a watch and be amazed by Sam's arsenal of varied facial-expressions...



THINGS are getting heated in the slammer – one false move results in an indignant water hosing.



I don't think Lambert would approve of this! Sam gets loved-up with his mate's missus.



SOMEONE important dies. Cue dramatic camera angle and emotional screams.



"HAVE that you goggle-eyed git!" Sam outsmarts super-spy by hiding in the snow.



KILLER INSTINCTS

Dino-Instinct feasts on *Half-Life 2*'s innards www.dino-instinct.com

SCIENTISTS STILL can't agree on why the dinosaurs actually died out. However, there's good news for those Mekon-headed boffins – we've figured out an explanation. Apocalyptic asteroid collisions? Nonsense. Evolution? Rubbish. The real reason the dinosaurs became extinct is because of an organised dino deathmatch. It was a bloodbath out there.

Dino-Instinct pits two teams of prehistoric reptiles against each other. Choose to play as either the gigantic, blood-craving carnivores or the pansy ones that eat plants (we know where we're putting our money), before engaging in a violent game of Jurassic deathmatch.

But this isn't just your bog-standard, giant lizard action game – oh no. *Dino-Instinct* has a unique approach to the crowded genre, in which you start off as a small, relatively tame dino and evolve into a more menacing, sharp-toothed beast once you've axed off a few of your snappy opponents. As well as punishing newbies for being rubbish, this system brings a much more dynamic flow to the game, ensuring that the T-Rex is played only by the most über of combatants. We'll have a full playtest of the finished mod in Freeplay soon...

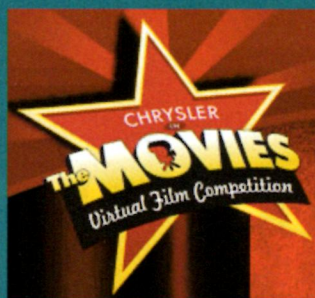


And the winner is...

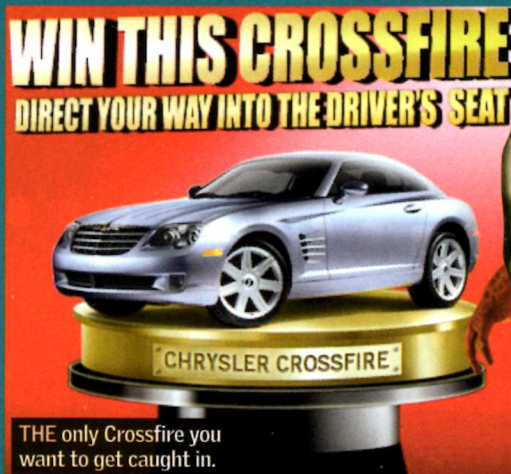
The Sundance Film Festival judges *The Movies!* chrysler.movies.lionhead.com/

QUENTIN TARANTINO watch out – the big indie showings at this year's famous Sundance Film Festival in the USA will be from Lionhead's *The Movies*. Accurately titled 'The Chrysler in The Movies Virtual Film Competition' (or TCITMVFC for short), the contest has the best website-submitted movies picked by an expert panel of über-film judges, with the best virtual director winning a gas-guzzling Chrysler Crossfire.

Even better, however, is that some entries may actually be shot as proper short films by real, breathing actors, at a cost running



into the hundreds of thousands. Watch this space – Dustin Hoffman starring in Prezzer's epic blockbuster *Shenannygoats* could be hitting your local cinema this summer.



FERRY SCARY

pcmod.fearmaps.com

F.E.A.R. and loathing in outer space

IF YOU'VE HAD your fill of F.E.A.R.'s special forces action but hanker for more supernatural frights, then total conversion *Pleasure Cruise* might be right up your dark alley.

Set in the near future on a space cruise vessel, it won't be long before your fellow passengers start acting strange – eg going insane then turning into zombies and trying to rip out your spleen. Not only will it be up to you to uncover the mystery of what's going on, you'll apparently also have to contend with bizarre hallucinations, too. Sounds intriguing.

While no release date is available, we've been promised that we won't have to wait too much longer before we have this potentially chilling and thrilling experience on our DVD to freak you out.



Racing Maniacs' World Cup

TrackMania goes global www.trackmanianations.com

IT'S FAST, IT'S furious, it's *TrackMania Nations ESWC*, a free download made specifically for the Electronic Sports World Cup which will take place in Paris from June 28 to July 2.

TrackMania Nations comes replete with a revamped game engine which makes the manic racing series look better than ever. You'll also find a brand new environment, – The Stadium – that makes for some of the most manic racing action ever seen in the series.

Testing yourself against other TrackManiacs from across the globe is easy thanks to the in-game online ladder. You can even customise your car and race in your country's colours. So get online and start racing – your nation needs you.



SO, YOU
WANT
TO BE A...



Lead Game Systems Designer

NAME David Eckelberry
WORKING ON *Dungeons & Dragons Online*
AGE 32
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE Three years, Turbine; five years, Wizards of the Coast; two years, TSR, Inc

PCZ How did you get started?

DE I got started in the games industry by writing tournament adventures and some freelance articles. That led to a job writing for pen-and-paper D&D, and then the game version.

PCZ What's the pay like?

DE No comment!

PCZ What does your job involve?

DE Every day is different, depending on the focus of the week or even the hour. The job is a mixture of testing, evaluation, asset-building (practical design), concepting (theoretical design) and working in a big team.

PCZ How rewarding is your job?

DE Very! Working as a game designer combines some of the best aspects of being in the entertainment industry. Not only is it great fun, but you see your work come to fruition and be appreciated by others.

PCZ What's the most annoying part of the job?

DE Working on a big project like *D&D Online* means you don't get the creative vision and freedom that you may be accustomed to from working alone. Also, every day can seem like a sprint, right up until the project's completion.

WE SAY... DIY

There are many paths to getting a games design job – the most reliable probably being a university degree (see last month's Special Report). It's at least as important to be an avid player and games critic. Make your own game or ten (as primitive as they may be), or your own levels for published games with level editors.

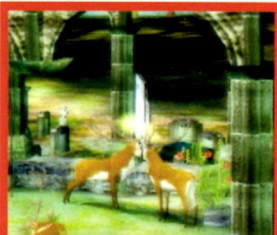


Freeware



Steve Hogarty digs deep, but only finds some lint and an old train ticket...

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes, webgames or emulation. This month sees gay gaming icon Master Chief drop a dimension, some idle deer and the opportunity to live out an alternate life.



ENDLESS FOREST Lions and tigers and deer, oh my

Developer: Tale Of Tales
www.tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest/

First off, it's not really an endless forest, it's about a 100-square metre area repeated indefinitely. Well OK, it's endless... It also calls itself a screensaver, which is accurate in a sense. This is an MMO without levels, skills or even verbal communication. It's an MMO in which you play a deer in a forest, with other deer who are also people. You can run and jump, sniff other deer and rub against trees – everything a real-life deer would do. It's massively pretentious mind (and those deer-faces will give you nightmares), but *Endless Forest* is worth it for the novelty value.



AUTHENTIC repeating backdrops.



LENS flare is back in fashion.



JUST like real Halo!



HALO ZERO

Halo can you go?

Developer: Doberman And Co.
www.halozero.new.fr

AFTER A LENGTHY debate we've decided that, alongside Waluigi and Cate Archer, Master Chief is one of gaming's best gay icons.

And with that fact clearly stated and left largely unexplained, let's talk about *Halo Zero*, a 2D rendition of the classic (if hugely overrated) shooter. Excuse the cynicism, but *Halo* was, for the most part, a game about fighting roughly four different kinds of aliens in roughly four different rooms repeated over and over, but in spite of the

repetition it was quite an enjoyable shooter. So in that respect, *Halo Zero* is a carbon-copy of the popular I'm-a-Mac-game-turned-PC-game-stolen-by-Xbox-and-masquerading-as-a-PC-game-again shooter, sans the third-dimension visual trickeries.

The game's surprisingly well made considering it comes from a team of dedicated fans, who may or may not live in a bunker under the ground, pushing a button every two hours to stop the world ending. The sprites look authentic, from Master Chief's Spartan armouring and machine gun, to the Covenant grunts' scurrying and elites' striding gait. Energy pistols and plasma rifles are all present, along with the sticky grenades and the generally unpopular Earth grenades. It even sticks to the *Halo* storytelling format of 'go here, blow this up, now we must go here, here we are, get over there now, we have to go this way instead'.

With mouse control giving you all the accuracy you could ask for, and the arrow keys moving your character about with the grace, civility and purposefulness of the queen herself (except when it comes to jumping, which is handled quite clumsily), *Halo Zero* isn't too difficult to steer. And while it does suffer from some repetitiveness, it's still got the Warthog – and if that was enough to save *Halo*...



IF it moves, blow it up.

DISAFFECTED

Be persuaded, instructed and erm, activated

Developer: Persuasive Games | www.persuasivegames.com

TAKE A LOOK around Persuasive Games' site and you'll see that despite the brightly coloured and blocky graphics of its games, the company's motives are altogether more suspicious. "We design, build and distribute electronic games for persuasion, instruction and activism," claims the developer of *Disaffected*, a game in which you must run a copy store (or a 'photocopying shop' as we'd call it). So they're activists, which means you have to be careful around them in case they activate.

Disaffected is a self-proclaimed 'anti-advergame', which intends to satirically attack Kinko's copy store. You control one of several disaffected employees who must sort and retrieve the orders of various customers, while your colleagues mix things up and make life difficult for you. Essentially a puzzle-memory game at heart, *Disaffected* will soon make you understand why the people in these places never smile – it's simply because they're dead inside. Timers tick down and angry customers storm out, irritated customers quickly become impatient and abusive, orders are never where you left them and everybody is incompetent. It seems that the developer hates Kinko's, and soon you will too.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

Falling Sand



Developer: d_of_j
chir.ag/stuff/sand/

Falling Sand is a webgame in which four things fall from the top of the screen, one of the things is sand, the others are water, salt and oil. You can draw... Things... With your mouse and the things falling from the top pile up on the things you drew. You can also draw things like fire, which ignites things like oil and is put out by things like water. You can draw things like plants which grow in things like water but are destroyed by things like fire. I haven't really figured out what the salt does, but it's probably something equally interesting. A particularly fun game is igniting a really long trail of oil and watching it burn away, or drawing a cock made of sand. Strangely calming, oddly compelling and worryingly time-consuming. *Falling Sand* is yet another of those fantastically addictive things you come across and spend an hour playing with before never looking at it again. Just like most of our favourite webgames in fact.

ALTER EGO

Developer: Peter J Favaro | alterego.polemik.ch

Real life not so hot? Try this

FROM THE VERY first time a caveman put a bunch of reeds on his head and said "Ug" in a slightly higher pitch, pretending you're somebody you're not has been a form of escapism for mankind.

These days, our cross-dressing tendencies are satiated by *World Of Warcraft*, but back in 1986, when people wore whatever they wanted anyway, they had *Alter Ego*.

What is it? Why, it's a text-based life simulator, where your objective is to live, and life consists of a series of multiple-choice situations. For example, when lying in your crib, do you want to grab at blurred objects in the distance? Or when your dad wants you to help with chores, do you watch cartoons instead? Will you get into a car with a stranger? Will you climb on rocks in the

You are in a warm, dark, comfortable place. This has been that you are alive. It's almost time to enter a different world.

Select an action:

- STAY IN A LITTLE LONGER
- COME OUT FIGHTING
- COME OUT PEACEFULLY



YOUR choice:
spit or puke?

ARE you a lover
or a fighter?

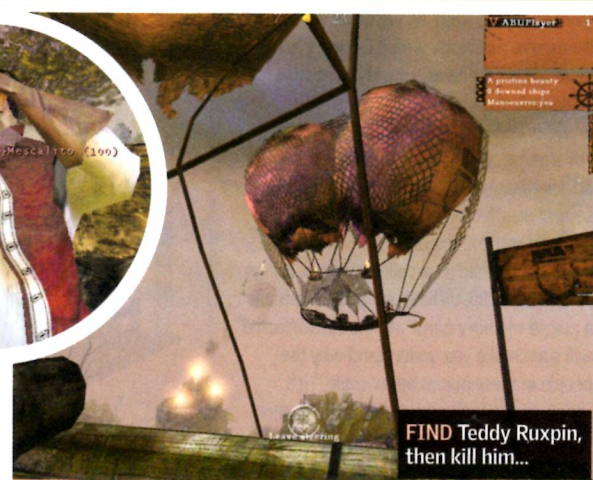
park with the big kids? When your friends are taking drugs, will you join in? Should you grow a moustache? Get a job? Married? Piss yourself at your 90th birthday? Much like life, *Alter Ego* is a series of choices, each one affecting your personality in a different way.

It's funny at times, with observational humour being chuckled

about like a desperately failing Jewish comedian, and the general tone sways between wacky and embarrassing situations to stark and sobering realities (such as when you unexpectedly encounter your own death). On the whole though, it's one alternative to calling yourself Mandy at the weekends, and one that's probably just as addictive and time-consuming.



AIR BUCCANEERS



Will Porter doesn't believe many things, but he believes he can fly... ludocraft oulu.fi/airbuccaneers/



A UT2004 MOD in which players seem almost compelled to converse in pirate-speak? It seems too good to be true, but "Yarr!" it be real – and well-established, quirky and beautiful to boot.

A slow-paced battle of airships, cannons, muskets and rockets that scream like they've been bought for £6.99 from Forbuoys – it's something that could have been plucked straight from the mind of Terry Gilliam himself. With each balloon preferably

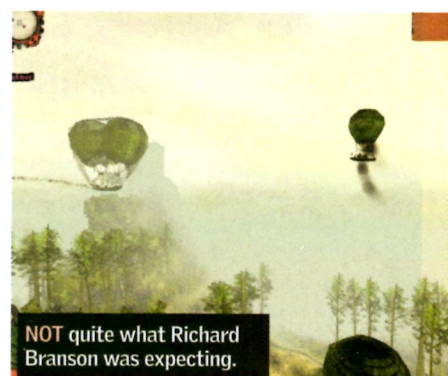
manned by at least a couple of scurvy air-dogs, teamwork, timing and experience are vital components. One player mans the rudder, the others manually aim the cannons, manually load the cannons and manually light the blue touch paper, watching the fuse burn down and praying that the enemy haven't drifted out of range.

Anyone new to the game, which is catered for by a limited yet often full couple of servers, will undoubtedly feel palpably noob-like and useless. Thankfully though, this is a mod somewhat bereft of the omnipresent porn-spraying, insult-barking Dallas teen, and instead full of unusually kindly pirates. You may be watching pirates leaping from balloons on high and lodging grappling hooks into enemy vessels, then clambering on board and running the hapless cannon loaders through with their trusty blade, but you'll be busy feeling guilty for consistently pointing the cannon in the wrong direction and shooting the tops of trees rather than the troublesome air pirates trying to put holes in your mainbrace.

So yes, the learning curve in *Air Buccaneers* is pretty fearsome, but the satisfaction garnered through

landing a direct shot on the deck of the opposing team or seeing their bag of wind plummet to earth in a ball of flames is second to none.

Made by Ludocraft, a bunch of clever bods at the University of Oulu in Finland, the mod is a prime example of graphical excellence (decks have never been so rickety) and startlingly innovative gameplay. Add to the mix a general feeling of vertigo, a pinch of Baron Von Munchausen and some gliders that make up for their non-user-friendliness with choking smoke, and you have a mod that, while ageing, remains firmly in the 'must-play' hall of modding fame.



GOLDENEYE: SOURCE

Andy Robinson puts on his gold-tinted glasses www.goldeneyesource.com

BACK IN THE innocent days of the late '90s, we're sure that, like us, you were swearing at a TV somewhere, using a pack of projectile remote mines to lay waste to your friend's virtual Oddjob guise. Of course, we're talking about *GoldenEye 007*, the only shooter with a default attack which meant you could engage in a theatrical girly slap-fight like a pair of drunken hussies outside a Romford kebab shop. Welcome then, *GoldenEye: Source*.

What's more, there's no need to grasp at loose and broken N64 analogue sticks to get at this classic shooter, because the multiplayer – which is the only part we play any more – has gone and got a Source-y makeover using the Half-Life 2 engine. So far, the team has only managed to get five weapons into this alpha version – and the rubbish Klobb isn't one of them – along with four arenas for you to wage war in. There's also promise of plenty more to come for *GoldenEye: Source*, which

is reassuring because as we all know, the included maps Caves and Egypt are both rubbish. The alpha version is worth trying for Facility alone, which is one of the best architectural wonders ever to grace a TV screen, and also the reason why we now strafe around corners when we're shopping at our local Tesco. Thanks a lot, *GoldenEye*.



DRAGONFLY VARIATIONS

Will Porter is born, has sex, then dies ludocraft.oulu.fi/dragonfly/

FROM THE SAME mind-boggling talents that brought you the excellent *Air Buccaneers* is this more recent, and less popular, game of dragonfly mentalism.

It may be tricky to get on a server that isn't a ghost-town, seeing as the average 14-year-old doesn't really want to play as a LSD-fuelled insect, but just look at it... It's

worth gathering a few friends over an IP address isn't it? Described as having a 'vaguely communist eldorado' setting, it's all about a giant, carnivorous panda who's just suffered from a meat-induced stroke and is having some kind of insect-driven hallucination. You play as said insects, either disturbing spiders and stealing flies, or in

another game mode hovering inside various balls of power and nabbing points for your side. It's bizarre stuff, and managing to organise a full server is a bitch, but it's another mod geared to forcing teams to play together and wanting everyone to have a role – there are no lone gunmen in Ludocraft mods. Nor, indeed, lone dragonflies or air pirates.

PCZONE TOP 5 NWN MODS



1 SHADOWLORDS/ DREAMCATCHER/DEMON

Masses of custom-content: three modules, one fantastic series.

2 KALE'S RANGERS

Ranger-based tale that features great NPC interaction, interesting enemies and fantastically-scripted sequences.

3 HEXCODA

Seamlessly blends sci-fi with fantasy and works in some brilliant scripting, great twists and fantastic party interaction.

4 RUNES OF BLOOD

An interesting script, open-ended but challenging play and many secrets to uncover meant that this made it through to the IGF Best NWN Mod final.

5 TALES OF ARTERRA

Detailed and intense storyline, great dialogue, party interaction and combat to boot.

TOTAL BF2 MAP PACK 3

Suzy Wallace discovers maps aren't just for orienteering

mapping.totalbf2.com/mappack3.htm



A perky Cumulus Nimbus.

IF VARIETY IS the spice of life, then TotalBF2.com must be hotter than a vindaloo washed down with some red Aftershock. This is the third map pack the team has released for the frantic online shooter *Battlefield 2*, carrying on from the high standard set in the previous two map packs. The six maps on offer here feature plenty of variety, some novel settings and beautifully

detailed locations in which teamwork will be essential to capture the many bottleneck control points such as in map Operation Yellow Dragon.

Most of the maps have the US forces battling against the Chinese, and these battles occur in an extensive range of scenery, from bunkers to power plants. However, by far our favourite map in the set is Insurgency

on Alcatraz. Yep, there's an entire map set around the temporary home of Al Capone and The Birdman, and it also displays a heavy influence from the classic action film *The Rock*.

Where it really impresses though is with its highly accurate mapping, meaning previous visitors of the prison island should be able to make their way around without tour guides – but we can't help but wish that you could enter the prison building itself. Overall, these maps are essential stuff for *BF2* fans: well-designed and beautifully detailed, the only downside here is that you won't be able to build up your all-important ranking on them.



NICE day for it.



LIKE Sheffield, if it was sunny.



SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

Here comes the science part

www.planethalflife.com/si/

FAR AWAY FROM the prying eyes of Hans Blix and his team, research into chemical weapons research continues unabated in the world of *Half-Life*. *Science & Industry* put you in the shoes of a security officer at one of two competing research corporations, whose task is to protect the company's most valuable assets, the scientists. Left uninterrupted, their research produces new weapons for your use and generates cashflow for the company. But why just be content with what you've got when your rival company has even more boffins to be disrupted or even stolen? Combine this simple concept with some neat touches and gameplay that for once *isn't* based around who gets the most kills, and it's easy to see why this mod was one of *Half-Life*'s most popular.

THE ISLAND

Andy Robinson blasts the undead in the head



stalk3r.wz.cz



LET'S kill some zombies...

DON'T WORRY, IT'S not the rubbish Michael Bay film; *The Island* is a *Half-Life 2* map full of nothing but high-tension zombie-blasting action. You'd think zombies would have learned by now, having lost countless ancestors to their age-old enemy, the shotgun. But no, they still waddle towards our twin-barrelled nasty in a collective stupor and we blast their stupid heads off.

The zombie race's fearless attitude to high-calibre weaponry makes for lots of fun in *The Island*, where you can spend all day planning ways in which to creatively dispatch the buggers, and they'll still come stumbling back for more. The map wields all of the undead and ammunition you could possibly want for the rest of your natural life, along with an army of headcrabs who seem to be breeding like nymphomaniac Dutch prostitutes to refill their ranks. Frankly, after all the zombies we've killed here, we want to leave the rotten gits forever and live the rest of our lives in a quiet country recluse. Oh go on then, let's shoot some more...

MORROWIND ADD-ONS

Steve Hogarty slams his apple juice on the table and demands free *Morrowind* add-ons

games.moddb.com/36/mods/Morrowind/



SO-VERY-ALMOST-FAMOUS singer Emilia once sang: "I'm a big, big girl in a big, big world," and those words ding on the big dangly bell of truth whenever you find yourself playing *Morrowind*, a game with miles of smiles, grass and trees. So while you may not be a big, big girl, you can still expect to find an amount of things to do somewhere in the vicinity of infinity plus five. However, being the restless gamer you are, this just isn't enough – you want add-ons, plug-ins, upgrades and downloads to further enhance your role-playing lifestyle, so without going overboard on the old adieu, let's go...



FORGOT his broly again.



Vibrant Morrowind 3.0



If brown is the new black, then *Vibrant Morrowind 3.0* is very much the new *Vibrant Morrowind 2.0*. By replacing *Morrowind*'s textures with livelier ones, *Vibrant Morrowind* gives the game the sort of effervescence once thought to be achievable only through constant drug-abuse. It's like turning the saturation way up on the TV and seeing Michael Barrymore's face turn a sort of luminous red colour.

Changing Faces



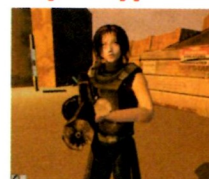
Ever watched *Nip/Tuck* and thought, 'Hey, I wish the faces in *Morrowind* were a bit more extensive'? If so, why? But funnily enough, there is an add-on that does that very thing. *Changing Faces* will add a whole host of extra faces and hair to the current lot, further enhancing your *Morrowind* experience albeit in a shallow, graphical sense. You'll need the *Tribunal* and *Bloodmoon* expansions for this one.

Morrowind Enhanced



This nifty utility allows you to run several gameplay-altering mods, such as *Combat Enhanced*, which improves the combat and allows decapitations, *Blocking Enhanced*, which puts blocking under your control, and *Journal Enhanced*, which allows you to create your own entries in the journal. If you can't wait for *Oblivion* then it's worth checking this out. Again, you need either *Tribunal* or *Bloodmoon*.

Ashes Of Apocalypse



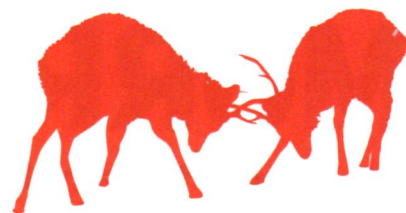
Total conversions for *Morrowind* are as rare as otter pockets, only not as wet. This particular add-on turns the island of Vvardenfell from lush green vistas and desolate volcanic wastelands to regular desolate wastelands of the post-apocalyptic variety. It's a hefty download, but the game's been completely reworked, with this extra adding new models, sounds, music, textures and even guns.

Wizards' Islands



Work is already underway on the next chapter of *Wizards' Islands*, but we thought it'd be worth mentioning the first release, *Scourge Of The Frost Bringer*. Another TC, it features a new snow-bound island with a full storyline, four cities, lots of quests, new spells, new creatures and better graphics than vanilla *Morrowind*. What's more, it contains a healthy 20 hours of gameplay. *Tribunal* required.

Fight Club



First rule of fight club: please check your dignity at the door

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

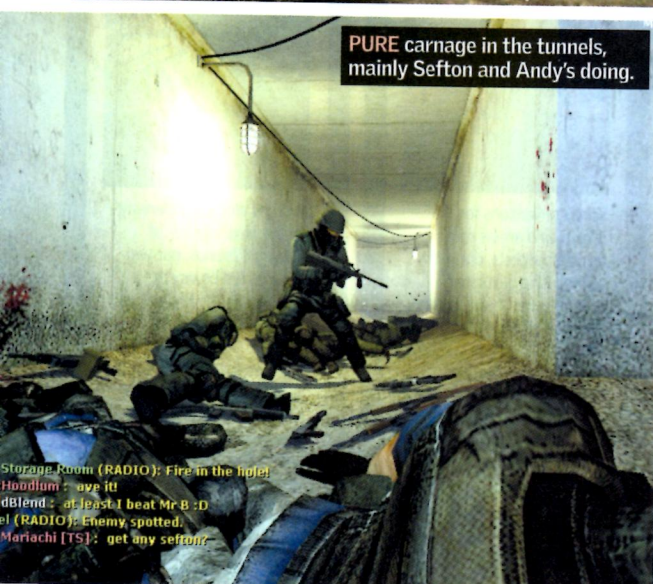
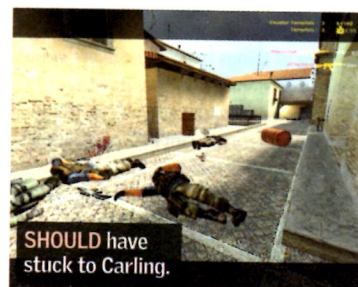
TUNNELS - THEY'VE GOT so many uses. Helping badgers cross the road, helping immigrants cross the channel and now helping Jamie Sefton lead kamikaze death runs through *Counter-Strike: Source*'s excellent *cs_militia* map. Yes indeed, one and all turned up to witness *PC ZONE*'s unadulterated monthly spanking at the hands of our loyal readers and random Americans who happened upon our bustling server of shooty-blasty joy.

We did have one or two cases of glorious retribution last month however, not only with Andy's astounding (ly

lucky) quad-kill in the aforementioned doom-tunnel, but also with Sefton's wild, random and ultimately lethal gunfire after being blinded by a rogue flashbang grenade. He maintains that he meant to do it, but nevertheless the *ZONE* flag was held aloft by none other than the consistently excellent Sam Kielsen. We think Steve was there too, but spent most of his time as a bullet-ridden corpse.

So what's next month? Well, the masochist inside us compels us to go for another round of *Counter-Strike: Source* seeing as it was bloody good fun last time, so head over to www.zonegames.co.uk

on Thursday, March 9 from 6pm and get your whipping hand warmed up. Pride? We don't know the meaning of the word.



BEST TAG AND SCREENSHOT COMPOS

Send us your images, wow us with your names...

EACH MONTH WE'RE going to be running two competitions, the winner of which will be announced on these very pages and sent a fantastic/mediocre prize. Depends how good you are.

First up is the Tag competition, set to reward the player with the most imaginative or amusing *Counter-Strike* graphic. Compo number two will be the Screenshot contest, which will require you to send us a screenshot from this month's Fight Club. The most amusing one will, again, win a prize.

Send your Fight Club screenshots to Fightclubsscreenshot@pczone.co.uk with 'Fight Club Screenshot Compo' in the title to stand a chance of winning this soon-to-be coveted award.

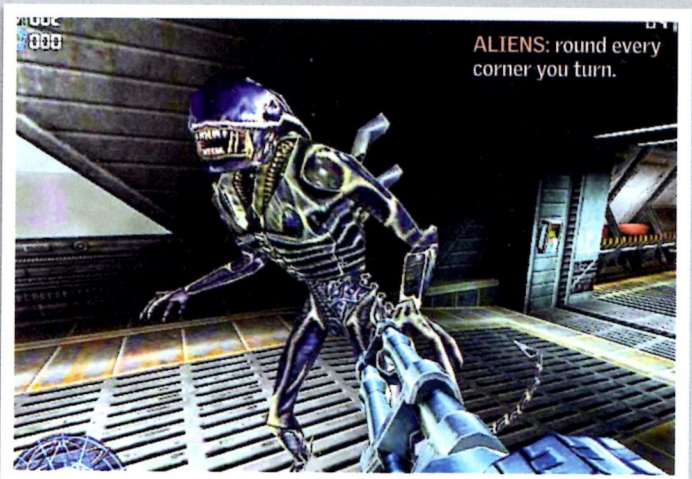


READ THE FULL TRANSCRIPT AT
WWW.ZONEGAMES.CO.UK!

ANOTHER MONTH, ANOTHER ZONE chat, another hour of babbling between scores of you and a few of us about a multitude of subjects strangely unconnected with games. Business as usual, then.

Main topics of conversation included: the *Aliens* quadrilogy – one and two were great, three was boring, four was shit; the word 'quadrilog' and whether or not it really exists; cars; driving in London, not driving in London, not driving in London because no-one drives in London hence the congestion (go figure); the new Joe Satriani album (a guitarist in case you didn't know); and LCD screens. How we packed so much into 60 measly minutes is anyone's guess.

Didn't make it this time? Then make sure you don't miss the next scintillating ZONE Chat on Wednesday, March 8, which will be kicking off at 5pm sharp. Write it in your diary, or backwards on your forehead so you don't forget.



How to join in!



If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

Washing your hair that night? Worry not, we have the following public servers running 24/7, so drop in any time you feel like taking on a fellow PCZ reader – you may even catch the ZONE staff in there too. As always, you can find up-to-the-minute server information at www.zonegames.co.uk!

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Andy Robinson PCZ_EssexHoodlum
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Sam Kieldsen PCZ_BoyWonda

- 1 **SWAT 4**
swat4.zonegames.co.uk
- 2 **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015
- 3 **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- 4 **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- 5 **BATTLEFIELD 1942 DC MODDED**
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567
- 6 **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- 7 **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- 8 **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004**
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888
- 9 **CALL OF DUTY**
cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960
- 10 **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
Listed on NovaWorld

THE FATE OF THE ENTIRE GALAXY IS IN YOUR HANDS

THE FLEETS

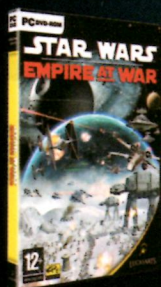
Do you quickly build a fleet of TIE fighters and swarm the enemy before they gain strength? Or take time and build a more powerful fleet of Star Destroyers?

THE ELEMENTS

Do you wait until after the ice storm and lose the element of surprise? Or do you take advantage of low visibility and attack when they least expect it?

THE ARMIES

Do you crush bases under the feet of AT-ATs and risk losing a few? Or do you call down ships from space and bomb them back to the Stone Age?



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GALAXY IS IN YOUR HANDS. READY?



THE WEAPON

Do you protect the Death Star and reveal it at a critical moment? Or do you break out your big gun first and use Rebel planets for target practice?

THE CREATURES

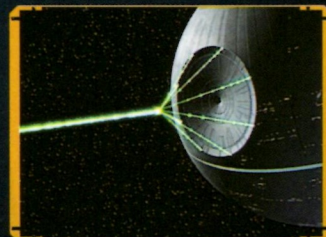
Do you attack head-on and risk massive casualties? Or flank the enemy, circle around and hope any rancors you meet along the way aren't hungry?

THE TROOPS

Do you use guerilla tactics, conserve resources and slowly pick off enemy forces? Or do you go for broke and overwhelm the enemy with a sea of troops?

STAR WARS

EMPIRE AT WAR





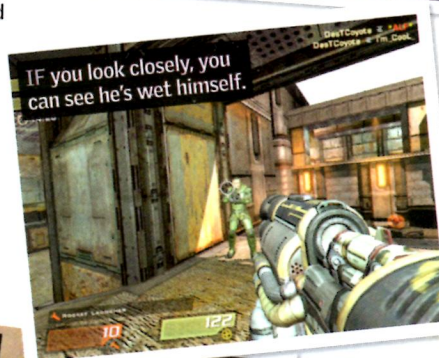
Become the chosen one in... Quake 4 multiplayer

Andy Robinson polishes up his nail gun

ARE YOUR friends constantly beating you at *Quake 4*? Are you often embarrassed by trash-talking adolescents in online games? Well, with the help of this handy how-to guide and a large reflex boost that only a Redbull multi-pack can provide, you'll be well on your way to becoming a rail-gunning, rocket-jumping *Quake 4* legend. The most important thing to remember when trying to impress in the harsh world of online deathmatch is to always have a quip remark in reserve, ready to launch at your conquering opponent. You may be crap at *Quake 4*, but that doesn't mean you can't tell your subjugator that you doubt his parentage...

01 Rocketman

Let's start things off with the classic *Quake* jumping trick, the rocket jump. This explosive method of jumping is as old as the series itself, and involves essentially blasting the ground beneath yourself with a rocket launcher and jumping at the same time, propelling you to previously inaccessible heights. The rocket jump is useful for quickly nabbing high-up items, but keep an eye on your health bar or you could end up executing one of the more embarrassing methods of suicide.



Need:

A copy of *Quake 4*
A competent Internet connection
Witty comebacks

What you'll get:

Lots o' frags ✓
The respect of your friends and family ✓
Mechanical body prosthetics ✗
Killed from behind with a gauntlet ✗

02 Know Your Maps

Being a game for the sharper-witted of deathmatchers, closely studying the maps and arenas is an essential process for becoming a *Quake 4* expert. With rocket-wielding aggressors running around the place there's no time to drop a trail of rice and retrace your steps. Try having a quick run around offline to work out where everything is, or simply keep losing online until you create a mental map of every weapon and power-up location.

03 ENJOY THE VIEW

Although your eyes can see about 180-degrees without moving your head, *Quake 4* sets your FOV (that's field of view, abbreviation fans) to just 90-degrees to compensate for the fact that your PC monitor only fills part of your vision. But we don't care, we're deathmatching dons and need maximum vision span – bring down the console (Alt+Ctrl+Tilde) and type 'g_fov 140' for a real fish-eye experience.

04 Paint Your Rails

This one's less of a tip, more of a psychiatric evaluation. Ever wondered if your opponent is a complete nutt? Take a look at the colour emitted from their rail gun, and you can learn a lot about who you're shooting at. A red rail means they're an aggressive, attention-craving individual, while a blue rail indicates a more serious, professional combatant. Green indicates a passionate person likely seeking a harmless, fun game. As an in-training *Quake 4* overlord, you should never use the green rail.

06 DON'T STOP MOVING, BABY

A simple sounding tip maybe, but this is perhaps the most important element of becoming a bona fide *Quake 4* ninja. If you're standing still you're going to get shot, or more likely mutilated by the business-end of a rookie's gauntlet. If you're having trouble sticking to this tip, have a family member hit you over the back of the head with an effective striking object (we recommend a Logitech wireless keyboard) each and every time you take your finger off of the Move key.

07 The Glove Of Love

True love is a quad damage gauntlet – or at least it is when you're playing on a server of people oblivious to aggressive buzzing noises. There's nothing more satisfying than chasing down a startled deathmatch player, and then forever immortalising their failure on the pages of *PC ZONE*. Whenever possible, whip out your trusty gauntlet and get a few cheeky kills from the rear. Bonus points for gauntletting AFK players.

08 RAIL STRIKE!

Let's admit it – the secret to being a successful *Quake 4* master lies in becoming an absolute rail gun whore. If you can keep a steady aim even when jumping around like a raving lunatic, you'll certainly join the deathmatch greats at the top of the leaderboard. Be patient, take your time, pound the jump button as if your life depended on it, blast your would-be aggressor right in the cheggers and then lie back and wait for the inevitable abuse. **PCZ**



05 Strogg Men Can't Jump

Strafe jumping is another super-secret technique used by the *Quake 4* elite which enables you to travel around at lightning-quick speeds. To pull it off, you need to jump around like a loon, timing the jump key so that you immediately jump again upon landing. After you've mastered this, you'll have to press alternate Strafe keys each time you jump; first left, then right. If you pull it off correctly, you'll look like a complete mentalist, but you'll be sprinting past the competition.

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HOW TO...

Make a game

PART EIGHT



Dan Marshall braces himself for criticism of his game *Gibbage* – from you



WHAT CAN I say? It seems my evil plan to use the *PC ZONE* readership as a source of free QA testers has worked perfectly – and with extremely positive results.

"The *Gibbage* demo's on the DVD," I said in issue 164. "Bring it on..." And you did, in your droves. This was the first time *Gibbage* had been played on anything other than the PC in my bedroom, and as I stared in disbelief at my game printed on the front of a national magazine, it dawned on me maybe no-one would bother playing it or that I'd be a laughing stock. High stakes indeed.

I checked my email late one Thursday afternoon, and was somewhat shocked to find my Inbox crammed with messages. Only this time, they weren't trying to sell me a new penis – they were inspiring messages from *PC ZONE* readers.

"Fun little game you got there, very enjoyable. I think it might replace *Minesweeper* as my game to play when I'm bored and can't be arsed with a 'big' game."

At times, I'd finish reading one email of support to find a new one waiting for me. Being the geeky type who teaches himself how to code games as a hobby, I've never been this popular. "Fast, old-school gameplay with a very simple concept that works rather well for a quick blast..."; "I just played the demo of *Gibbage* and I was very impressed. Nice but simple visuals and fun, addictive gameplay – nice work!"; "I'll just have to sneak on to the family computer any time I want some of that *Gib*-based chaos..."

WHY. WON'T. YOU. DIE?

However, it wasn't all positive – in fact there was a running theme to the emails I got. Despite the fact that *Gibbage* is designed to be played against real people, nearly all of you complained about the difficulty of the CPU-controlled bot, with comments such as: "The enemy AI is just too good, he kills me every time on everything but the tutorial! Fair enough I'm not that good, but you gotta make it accessible..." Or: "His rather impressive knowledge of the levels made him a bastard to keep up with while trying to focus on those cubes. So I kept getting the losing message..."

This confused me somewhat, as I'd spent weeks in advance of the demo shitting myself that the AI was too damned stupid. I was convinced that the *ZONE* elite – hardy

Where's Wally?

Were you paying attention?

The final version of *Gibbage* is littered with hundreds of references to films and other videogames. Like Dr Robotnik's egg-ship-thing parked in a spaceport, *Prince Of Persia* potions stashed quietly in a corner, or *Flashback*'s Conrad B Hart dancing in a nightclub. In fact, the Hell map released with the demo contained a few – can you spot the links to *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, *Down Of The Dead* and the original *Doom*?

super-soldiers trained on a diet of railguns and headshots – would have no problem beating a bot who very occasionally gets confused and runs around trying to collect bullets instead of cubes.

No problem – the full version now has an option to tone down the AI's competence. So you can now set him to either act like a ruthless killing machine or a village idiot on crack. It's your choice entirely.

BACK TO BASICS

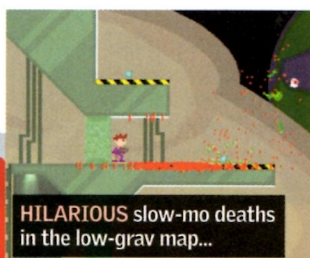
What's more, a fair few readers understood the ethos of my game perfectly. "*Gibbage* is easy to learn and super-addictive – me and my brother have been playing it now for three hours – I love the controls, the music and the feeling of total ownage it gives when you win. Who needs *Quake 4* or *BF2* when you can get the same feeling with a retro game like this?" Who indeed? You can't stop and tickle your opponent in *Quake 4* or call them a twat to their face when they're on the other side of the world. That's the beauty of *Gibbage* – it brings people together around the warm inviting glow of your monitor.

Another theme to your emails was just how many have been inspired to pick up a coding book since reading my articles. I'm now thinking of starting my own army of indies. Together, we'll turn this industry on its head and start making

games people want to play. Games with blue skies that involve collecting sweetsies. As one reader put it: "The game's lovely, and I'll definitely buy the full version when it's released. I thoroughly enjoyed the crazy action; there are truly not enough games nowadays that revolve around fun." We're looking at you, *Doom 3*...

So, if you took the time to write to me, thank you. I'm working on the bugs you found and suggestions you made. I think I should close with this comment I received: "Good work, you've opened my eyes to indie developers, in future I'll pay more attention to them." Mission accomplished, no? **PCZ**

SHOTS of the zombie map seemed to pique your interest.



HILARIOUS slow-mo deaths in the low-grav map...



MORE relentless *Gibbage* action. As you can see, I'm having no trouble beating the AI here.

If you want more...

www.indiegamer.com

Where we proper indies hang out and slag off multi-million dollar productions.

www.gibbage.co.uk

Where all the info on *Gibbage* will be – once I learn how to write websites too. Sigh...

encoremusic.dmusic.com/

My composer's portfolio – if you're an indie developer, I highly recommend him.

abandonware

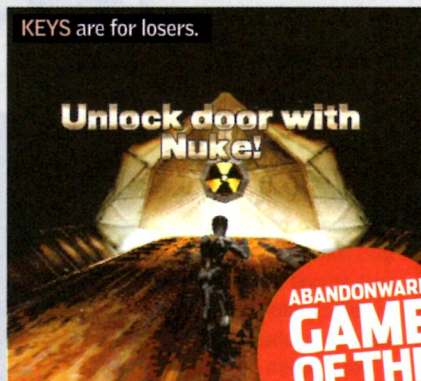
Andy Robinson with the videogames that time (and publishers) forgot...

What is abandonware?

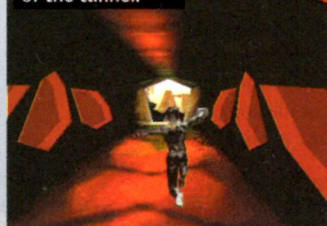
Abandonware is computer software that's no longer being sold or supported by its copyright holder, such as the classic sci-fi RPG shooter *System Shock 2*. However, game copyright is protected by law for 70 years, so even though you can't buy these games, downloading them is technically illegal. *PC ZONE* doesn't condone filthy criminals. Or even ones that have had a good scrub.

MDK

DEVELOPER Shiny Entertainment
YEAR OF RELEASE 1997



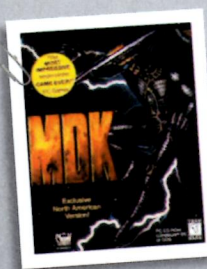
SHITE at the end of the tunnel.



ABANDONWARE
GAME OF THE MONTH



"PAARRRRP!"



THE END of the world is near. Earth is being invaded by Streamriders and you're the only one who can save the day. The impending alien forces plan to strip the Earth clean of all life, but thanks to some revolutionary weaponry kindly donated by a strange scientist, you're about to serve

up a can of alien whoop-ass.

MDK (*Murder Death Kill*) is a unique third-person shooter with an abundance of style. The game is a barrage of explosive action sequences, and yet strategy is still an integral part of tackling its relentless challenges. *MDK* takes the clichéd premise of an evil alien invasion, but renders it with enough style and creativity so you forget it's been tried more times than Michael Jackson.

Back in the carefree days of the late '90s – 1997 to be exact – *MDK* created a storm in the gaming press. It was widely considered to be the best PC game of the year, garnering many awards and much praise for its entertaining game design and then-impressive enemy AI.

Innovative features like the excellent sniper rifle integration helped secure *MDK*'s place in the hearts and minds of gamers everywhere.

Unique, funny, action-packed and visually pleasing, *MDK* looked set to be hugely popular. Yet even though it was well received, the game struggled to break even at retail, seemingly thwarted by the original *Quake*'s bustling popularity. As a result, *MDK* is regarded as something of a cult classic, with many singing its praises but few having experienced its shining grace.



If you want more...

www.abandonia.com

Kosta Krauth's website is a treasure trove of delectable abandonware goodness.

www.the-underdogs.org

A podium for the unappreciated PC games of yesteryear, let's hear it for the underdogs.

www.revolution.co.uk

Grab your swag bag and loot a free copy of *Beneath A Steel Sky*.



California-based game studio Shiny Entertainment was founded in 1993 by games industry veteran David Perry. Shiny grabbed the attention of games critics with its first game *Earthworm Jim*, which later spawned notable licensing deals including a cartoon TV series and Marvel comic book. In 1997, Shiny released the critically acclaimed *MDK*, which won several industry awards and featured on the covers of over 55 gaming publications. Today, the company is part of publishing giant Atari and most recently worked on the *Matrix* games, which have sold more than six million copies worldwide. We didn't buy any.

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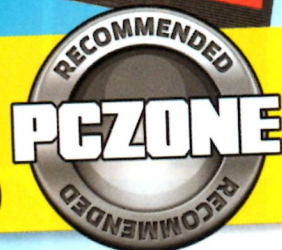
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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill meets an old friend in *City Of Villains*

ONCE UPON A time, there was a PC ZONE employee called Mallo. Tired of the joyless treadmill of deadlines and dishonesty, Mallo left the games industry for the far more wholesome world of hardcore pornography. His legacy remains though: as well as being a fastidious screenshot-taker, Mallo was the man who practically pioneered the concept of playing RPGs in his underpants, spending an estimated 10 per cent of his life killing trolls in Menzoberranzan.

Lost for years in the wilderness of double-ended dildos and DPs, Mallo is back by special appointment, and I'm on my way to meet him. His state of dress is unknown, although disturbingly he later confirms it as semi-naked. Actually, meeting up is easier said than done, as we're in different areas of the Rogue Isles, and as I explain: "Some twat's trying to kill me." Interestingly, the word 'twt' is allowed, although as Mallo soon proves, 'c****' is banned (unlike in his day job).

Finally negotiating the transport system, I'm closing in on him, and turn the corner to be confronted by the one and only Mallo, erstwhile King of the Goblins. It's a peculiar sight – part-gimp, part-demon – and I justifiably ask: "What the f*** is that?"

"I'm a mad pornographer gone wrong," he explains, uncannily close to the truth. "Doctor Penetrator is the name, penetrating is the game."

DOUBLE DONG

Further investigation of his biography reveals: "The Evil Doctor Penetrator spent ten years making hardcore pornography before entering into the world of supervillaindom. His ill-gotten gains finance his love of destruction and heavy machinery, and his army of killer ninjas protect him at all times. Doctor Penetrator prefers to spit-roast his victims with his special 'double dong' mutant power – an ability which allows him to [censored for the good of humanity]. Let's just say, if you end up in prison with this guy, do not drop the soap near him in the showers." Nice lad.

Giving me the once over, Mallo/Doctor Penetrator exclaims, correctly: "Ooh, you look like him in the magazine!" A big fan of my work, Penetrator is here for my help, firstly in defeating Sapphus and his guards. In other words, killing some more snakes, again. It's a rudimentary mission, but Penetrator is struggling already, taking a couple of minutes to negotiate the entrance to the cave. Bored of waiting, I steam ahead, meting out fiery justice to the serpent hordes on my own.

When Penetrator finally turns up, he proceeds to circle the enemy from a distance and take pot-shots with what appears to be a child's bow and arrow. It's a pitiful effort, but he does have a surprise up his leather sleeve, summoning up a ninja with the introduction: "He's my special friend on a lonely night."

He's scarcely any more help, but eventually we smite the scaly hordes and reconvene above ground. Keen to press on, Penetrator announces, "We have to kill The Infected," his use of the word 'we' being slightly presumptuous. Nevertheless, I agree to help, although again it involves covering old ground. The key difference is that the last time I did this mission, it was under the strict stewardship of my temporary mentor, Doctor Robotnik (now mysteriously untraceable).

MASTER AND SERVANT

This time round, I am master, Doctor Penetrator is servant, and worryingly I find myself becoming increasingly frustrated at his amateurish efforts, echoing Robotnik's irritation at my previous weak showing. Like some chilling rite of passage, I begin to question what I have become, my previous innocence replaced by an inner rage. Then I set fire to a few thugs and the mission is over.

Suggesting we attempt one of my missions, Penetrator respectfully asks: "Can I have a quick burn?" "OK, make it quick though," I acquiesce. "This isn't Kew Gardens." "Ten minutes – brew and a roll-up," Penetrator bargains, returning refreshed to fight the law.

SCUM

It's a big job, involving kidnapping a Council Base Commander, name of Archon Winter. We've barely got to the location, and Penetrator is already holding me back. "I'm dead," he cries, pitifully. "You're a liability," I reply. "I'm stuck in a single room cell trying to break the door down with my ninja pal. Is there any way out of here?" he pleads pathetically.

Deciding it's the best place for him, I continue alone. A misguided sense of loyalty soon kicks in though, and I head back and break down the door, freeing the porn baron and his ninja sidekick. No sooner have I rescued them than two guards turn up and proceed to kick me to death, while Penetrator and his spar casually look on.

Standing over my flaccid body, Penetrator sagely pronounces: "Face down in a pool of your own piss. I'm the daddy now!" **PCZ**



'Dr Penetrator is the name, penetrating is the game' he tells me

"TONIGHT Matthew, I'm going to be..."



SPECIAL EDITION

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: DELUXE EDITION

Will Porter asks whether BioWare's baby can still hold its own in the face of *Oblivion*



DEVELOPER BioWare
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE nwn.bioware.com
PRICE £29.99

IN THE BOX

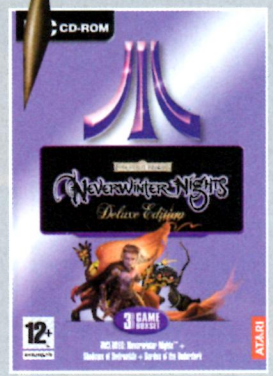
Neverwinter Nights

Neverwinter Nights:
Shadows Of Undrentide

Neverwinter Nights:
Hordes Of The Underdark

Kingmaker, Witch's Wake
and Shadow Guard
premium modules

Sleepless nights



MOST GAMERS REMEMBER some darker days in the past, where unemployment saw them sitting with claw-hands at a keyboard for hours and days on end. The chosen poison these days is *World Of Warcraft*, but my own method of frittering away the precious life granted to me was *Neverwinter Nights*. In 2002, set free from a job that consisted solely of cleaning flies from light fittings, by day I was a shiftless rogue on the streets of Luskan and by night I was dreaming about lock-picking and ever-more powerful sets of arrows. And no, I hadn't had sex (nor indeed would I) for a long time.

But what of today? Can BioWare's supremely customisable *Forgotten Realms* RPG still hack it in a gaming world that's soon to be hit by the narrative might of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and the supreme nerd-tweakery afforded by its own progeny, *Neverwinter Nights 2*?

TIME TO FADE AWAY?

In the box you've got vanilla *NWN* packaged with its expansions *Shadows Of Undrentide* and *Hordes Of The Underdark* – and a few extra goodies in the form of three of the excellent smaller-scale adventures sold from the BioWare website: *Kingmaker*, *Witch's Wake* and

NEVER chant in a circle.
Bad things always happen.





NEVER actually winter, but occasionally chilly nonetheless.



THE henchmen system isn't a patch on *FallOut* or *Baldur's Gate*.



UNFORTUNATELY the elves aren't as sexy as they once were.



Shadow Guard. This clocks in at a rough estimate of 140 hours worth of game – if played at 'noob-speed' – which would make it the sale of the century without even looking at the dungeons upon lairs upon dungeons waiting online.

STEADY GRANDPA

Here's the thing though – *Neverwinter* is looking dated. Endlessly boxy environments, in the vanilla game specifically, could perhaps have been forgiven at the time – but in this new

has certainly stuck his fingers firmly into its more pudgy areas and squeezed.

If I were to direct someone to an RPG in the long wait until *Oblivion* and *NWN2*,

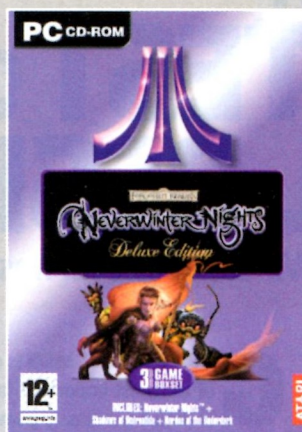
Father Time has stuck his fingers into NWN's more pudgy areas and squeezed

age of *WOW*, a definite feeling of non-wonderment with *Neverwinter's* environs becomes palpable. The whiffy henchman system meanwhile, only mildly fixed by the fact that you could gain two uncommunicative friends in *Underdark* rather than the rudimentary one, has also become even more of a gut-wrench in these post-*KOTOR* days. Yes, *Neverwinter* is and was the most community-friendly toolbox and best friend of all budding dungeon masters – but cruel Father Time

I'd probably point in the direction of either a classic like *Baldur's Gate II* or the superb *NWN: Pirates Of The Sword Coast* downloadable premium module (yarr!) that this *Deluxe Edition* is obstinately bereft of. However, if you want a massive, wide-ranging and life-sapping roleplay experience (although I'd not bother with the vanilla game and leap right into the expansions myself), the sheer gumption of the product lives through. If you've got the time, then this will waste it. **PW**

WIN!

Five copies of Neverwinter Nights: Deluxe to be won!



If you want this year's cold season to progress throughout the year via the traditional D&D mode of giant insect butchery, then perhaps you could do with one of the snazzy *Deluxe Editions* of *Neverwinter Nights* sitting atop our communal PC ZONE games pile. The first five postcards plucked from the editor's dour, flat cap will win a copy – so don't hesitate to scribble an answer on a postcard sent to: I Wish It Could Be Winter Every Day, PC ZONE, Future, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.

Q. Which company is developing *Neverwinter Nights 2*?

- A** Black Isle (RIP) **B** Troika (RIP)
C Obsidian Entertainment

Closing date for entries: March 29, 2006.



TOMBS: not as quiet as you'd think.



NO, they're not voiced by Woody Allen.

THE RAVAGES OF TIME

BALDUR'S GATE II 1st

PLANESCAPE TORMENT 2nd

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 3rd

Despite the age of the games we've pitted it against, we reckon *NWN* hasn't entered the true PC hall of legends. The amount of content for it, however, is gob-smacking.

SUPERTEST

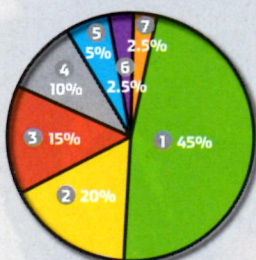
GREATEST LEVEL DESIGN

This month the **ZONE** team get all nostalgic and dream up the greatest ever game levels



YOUR VIEW

Last month's subject:
Which is the best World War II PC game?



CALL OF DUTY 2 **1st**

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT **2nd**

COMMANDOS **3rd**

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II **4th**

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2 **5th**

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD **6th**

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT **7th**

PawsOfEvil: "Nothing does emotion, atmosphere and the balls-to-the-wall frenetic energy of firefights among the ashes of victory quite like *Call Of Duty 2*."

Gowerly: "*Commandos* for me. I loved the top-down view and the fact that it was so incredibly challenging. I've never been so determined to win a game before in my life."

reids: "I doubt I will forget *MOH:AA's* D-Day landing for a long time, along with everyone else that ever played the game."

Bald_Beauty: "Where's *Return To Castle Wolfenstein?* Played that to death and I'm pretty sure the mutant things were real..."

speakafrica: "What is *Brothers In Arms* doing on the list at all? It's the biggest pile of bobbins ever."

GOOD LEVEL DESIGN is one of the most important factors in defining a classic game.

Do it right and your game will be remembered and replayed for years to come. Get it wrong and you'll get lost, bored, or both.

This month's Supertest, as well as being host to Will's delicious crispy snacks (they're a bit like posh Nik Naks), was the setting for our heated debate on the best game levels ever. There are so many glistening gaming memories lurking inside our collective craniums that deciding a victor in this month's debate was no easy task. In fact, so many of our favourite levels cropped up that we were forced to use Martin Korda's dreaded 'dual-voting system', described by some as "rubbish".

Taking Will's top spot was *Surface Tension* from *Half-Life*, while Steve chose the beach landing from *Allied Assault*. Andy went for the opening level of *Duke Nukem 3D*, Suzy pioneered *Rebellion* from *Far Cry* and Martin gave his deciding vote to the blasted beach landing in *Allied Assault*. Load the file from our DVD onto your favourite MP3 player for a more entertaining – and thanks to Martin, verbally explicit – run-down of our favourite gaming levels.

Will's top spot was *Surface Tension* from *Half-Life*



But all is not lost – there's still time for you to prove that the real champion game level lays nowhere near the bloody shores of *Allied Assault's* scripted Normandy landing. Get yourself onto our delectable website (www.pczone.co.uk) where, via the big 'INTERACT' button at the top, you'll find an inviting poll on the *PC ZONE* forum. Choose your favourite game level from our selected candidates, and when the poll results are printed in next month's issue, together we can prove just how flawed and one-sided Martin Korda's voting system really is. **PCZ**



KORDA'S 'dual-voting system' got everyone unbearably excited.



New ways to
discover the best new games
read all the latest gossip

see the

score

learn

chat

get so

win

shots

inner

first

layers

free gifts

prizes



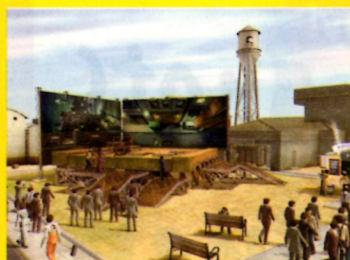
OUT NOW



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

THE MOVIES

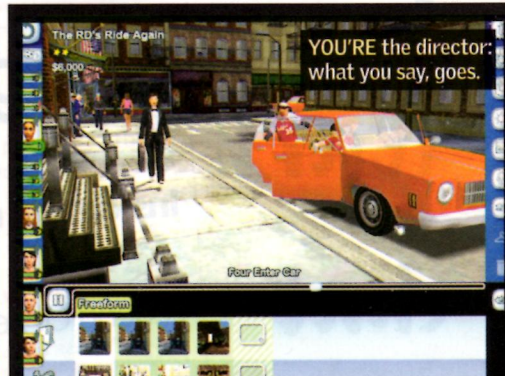
The story behind the game that proved there's no business like show business. At least, not one that we know...



THE CINEMA HAS given us some truly great works: *Casablanca*, *Dr Zhivago*, *Poultrygeist: Attack Of The Chicken Zombies!* (starring Pavel Barter)... The list is endless. But it's also brought us what we rate as the best game of 2005, Lionhead's *The Movies*. We caught up with Sir Peter Molyneux (right) and Mark Webley, executive designer and executive lead designer of the Guildford opus, and put them in the Developer's Commentary limelight...



A mini trailer park.
Can you see Britney?



02 ROLL CAMERA: Molyneux: "For me, the first real crack of light in the movie-making was something called the twig – the little bar that let you decide what you wanted to happen. That was the first thing we really got implemented. We had one prototype that was two cowboys outside a bar; one extreme was they slapped each other like women and the other was one cowboy broke the other's arm and then kicked him. That then lead on to the idea that we would have lots of different scenes and allow people to change loads of different elements within them."

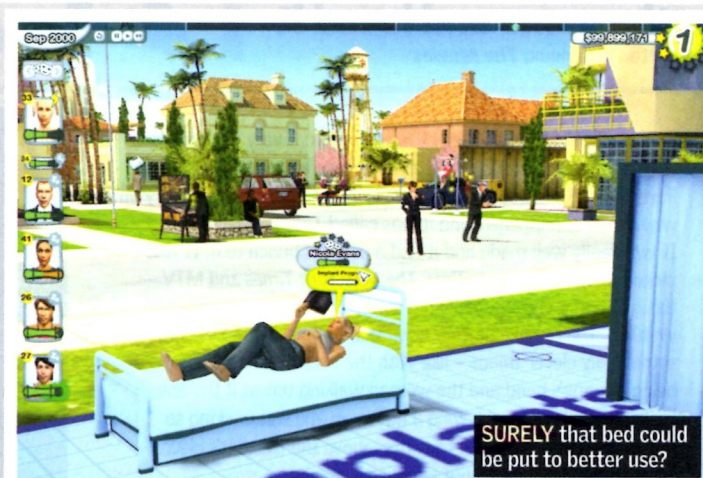
01 EUREKA! Molyneux: "I'd love to tell you that it came about from sitting down and saying, 'How can we make a successful title?', but it didn't. It was an idea that came to me one night – I woke up and thought, 'Why don't we make a game about the movie industry?' Run a studio, look after stars and create your own movies – that was the idea from the start. What happened next is that I came into Lionhead – and you have to remember we were already doing loads and nobody wanted to start another game! I just said to Mark: 'No. We have to do this.' And his first reaction, before he heard the idea, was, 'What the hell are you talking about?' But when we spoke about the idea together we both saw it had enormous potential. We both saw what we should do with the simulation side, having stars and the like, but the real issue was the movie-making side." Webley: "Our history is *Theme Park* and *Theme Hospital* and we saw that bit very clearly, but the movie-making was the interesting challenge."

It was an idea that came to me one night – I woke up and thought, 'Why don't we make a game about the movie industry?'

Peter Molyneux, *The Movies*




03 THE DILEMMA OF THE INTERFACE: Molyneux: "The big challenge wasn't thinking up good ideas – that's really piss-easy compared to everything else. The big problem with *The Movies* was always the interface. When we first started on it, everything was driven through menus and windows; so if you wanted to put a star in a movie, you'd select the movie, then click on the star and go through this big list. We realised about 18 months ago that we had this game set up, but that we just weren't involved in the movie world at all – there was no feeling that it was your own studio." Webley: "We wanted to get you close to your stars and have you care about them. You were spending so much time in a 'football manager' kind of mode and this just took you away from the studio too much. When we sat down and watched other people play it, we realised that something wasn't right." Molyneux: "If we were creating an action game then it would have been much easier to think, 'Right, now we need a monster to come out'. But it's much harder to nail down what the real compulsive elements of something like *The Movies* are."



04 WARTS AND ALL: Molyneux: "At one point in the game, there was drug addiction and sex addiction; our inspiration was the stories we'd heard from Hollywood. You don't hear them so much these days, but in the '70s, '80s and the Marilyn Monroe era, it was all about these famous people just living the most extreme lifestyle imaginable. There's lots of things we talked about that didn't make it to the game – we talked about different locations, having your movie lot in different places and having more of a town around the movie studio so that your star's entourage meant something. I'd say the end-game only implemented a quarter of what we talked about."



05 BURN HOLLYWOOD, BURN: Molyneux: "We didn't want *The Movies* to be an exact simulation of what the movie industry is – we wanted it to be what you and I think the movie industry is about. We did do some research and I spent some time with people in Hollywood, and I came away realising that it's an incredibly complicated, amazingly mixed-up industry, and how any film gets launched is amazing. It's about who you know, who knows you, where you have a cappuccino and whether you're successful that sees which films get made." Webley: "It's not a true simulation of what Hollywood is like – there's no stuff like gaffers or Best Boys. People don't know what these things are and don't really care, so we had to pull back on a lot of things just to get the game done." Molyneux: "Yes, we decided that this would be more of a simulation of what the movies were like in the '30s and '40s, which was much more about, 'Hey, let's make a movie about this book. You go write the script, I'll think about who should star in it, we'll meet next week and shoot it the week after.'" 



THAT hat's not fooling anyone – that's no soldier.

06 MALKOVICH, MALKOVICH, MALKOVICH: Molyneux: "We've had some feedback from people like John Malkovich – he played the game and really enjoyed it. He liked it so much that he wanted his clothing line Mrs Mud in *The Movies*, and that's exactly what we've done. So as an additional download you can now have his clothing label – it's product placement, but it does show that there's interest in the game from Hollywood. Also, there's the Sundance competition being set up. That's a really big deal – there will be a panel of very famous judges viewing movies on the website, and then the top ten movies from that will get their movies made into real movie shorts and they can win a Chrysler Crossfire. They're proper budgeted movies and there's hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on them. In that respect, I suppose we've had a lot of Hollywood respect."



We've had feedback – John Malkovich played the game and loved it

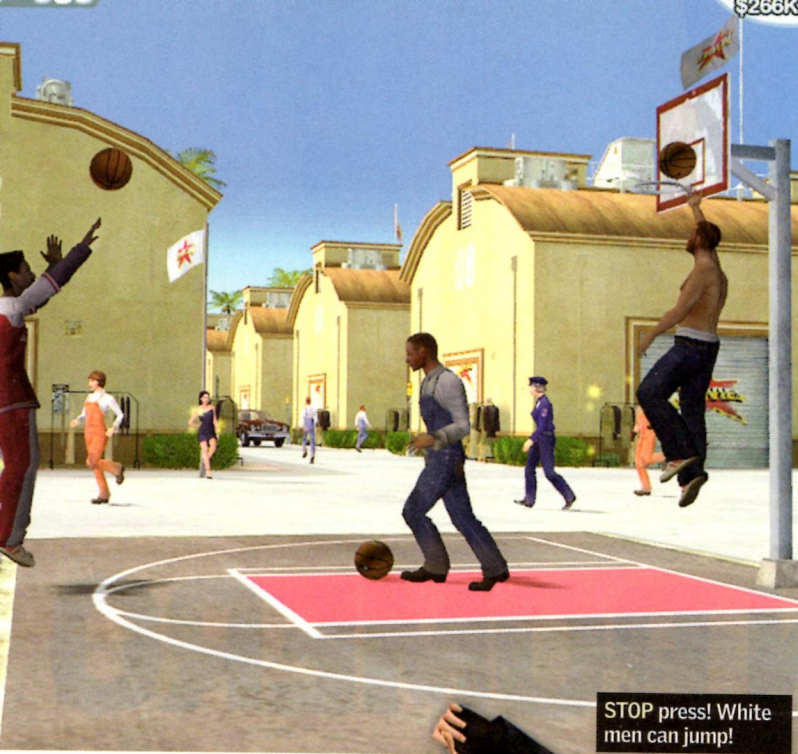
Peter Molyneux, *The Movies*



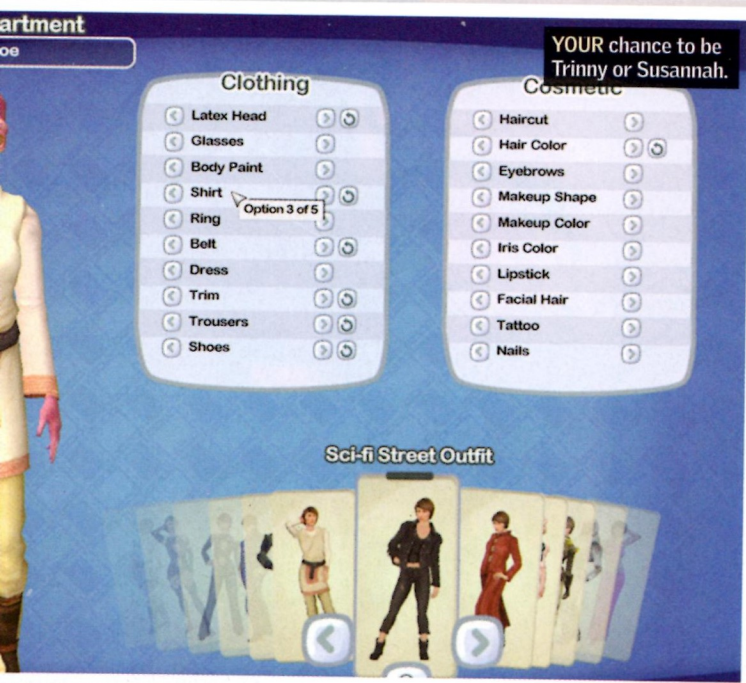
07 OSCAR CONTENDERS: Molyneux: "Every day a new movie comes up that amazes me. Do you remember the Paris riots? Somebody made a movie which was a commentary on why the riots happened, and it was called *The French Democracy*. It was really well made and it had a political punch to it. It was picked up by *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New York Times* and MTV – this guy had created a really big story."

Webley: "The remake of *King Kong* was impressive too. He did some really clever things – like with the backdrops actually being the ape's hand and the woman walking out as if the ape had put her down, and having a guy in an ape suit walking so that he looked like he was towering above the trees. It's clever stuff that people are doing."

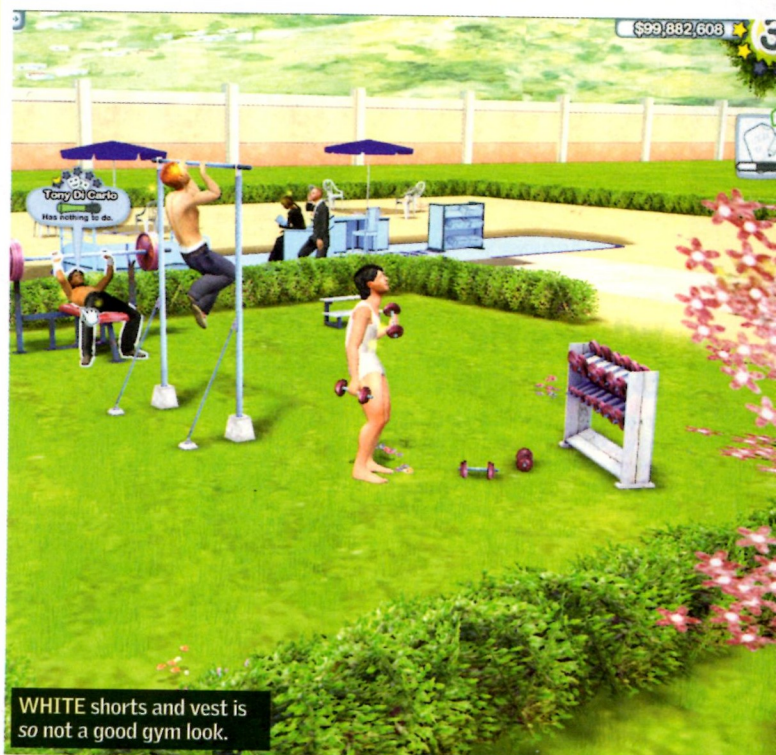




THE sky's always blue in Hollywood.



08 LONG-LASTING APPEAL: Molyneux: "I just don't know how long *The Movies* is going to last. It's interesting that it stayed in the charts well past Christmas – I think it's a slow-burning thing. We're doing lots of downloads and an add-on disk – we're trying to support it." Webley: "The downloadable content is giving stuff to the movie-makers, but we're also trying to expand the gameplay aspect. We're not just talking more sets and more scenes – we're really going to be concentrating on the gameplay and looking after your studio."



09 QUIET TIMES AT LIONHEAD HIGH? Molyneux: "The days of having a studio which would have a year of insanity and then months of peace are long gone: we've moved on to what's going to come next in *The Movies*, we're working on a new title and another that will be announced reasonably soon. There's about 220 people at Lionhead – we may have finished three games all at once, but you can't just have 220 people sit around doing nothing for three months because it costs millions of pounds. Everyone's working hard on new stuff at the moment – we've actually just come out of a design meeting to do with a game which I'd love to tell you about – but I can't..."



JOHN ROMERO

Jamie Sefton opens the gate to hell to meet the demonic daddy of the first-person shooter

Why Do We Care?

You're joking right? This is frickin' John Romero – the co-founder of legendary developer id Software, and co-creator of *Wolfenstein*, *Doom*, *Doom II*, *Heretic*, *Hexen* and *Quake*. Without this man, the PC would probably still be the refuge of flight sims, adventure titles and games with goblins in them. Romero eventually left id and helped set up the troubled-but-great developer Ion Storm in Dallas and Austin, producing the ambitious flop FPS *Daiikatana*. After that he launched Monkeystone games with another ex-id employee Tom Hall, before joining Midway to work on *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows*.

What's He Doing Now?

Romero revealed exclusively to *PC ZONE* more about his top-secret MMO for a new company. "It's awesome because I love MMOs and the one we're doing is very different from any other MMO for some special reasons," he says. "I can't really say too much – it's the opposite of the Ion Storm 'let's publish our game design in magazine ads' style. This isn't a typical games company and we're not making typical games." Romero doesn't expect the game to be released until 2007. For more, check out www.rome.ro.



Remember These? ROMERO'S HEROES



DOOM: It's been 13 years since id Software's genre-defining shooter, but the violent cultural effects are still being felt today.



HERETIC: Along with *Hexen*, 1994's *Heretic* was Romero's attempt at moving the FPS into fantasy territory. Its gauntlets were classic weapons.



QUAKE: Another mega-FPS from id in 1996 – although according to John, the development ended in a seven-month "march of death".



DAIKATANA: The year 2000 saw the release of Romero's shooter. "Disappointing" is an understatement – the gaming press had a field day.

Q Where did you get the idea for *Wolfenstein 3D*?

A After id's initial first-person game *Hovortank* in 1991, we were wondering about our next game. Initially called 'It's Green And Pissed', it centred on a biological research lab going mad and mutants – typical mad scientist stuff. It was really lame though, like a really bad B-movie, so I suggested we remake the Apple II classic *Wolfenstein*. That game was awesome and I love the name 'Wolfenstein'. John Carmack had the engine up and running after just two months, so we finished it by June 1992.

So *Doom* was your next project?

We all loved the movie *Aliens*, and we found out that we could actually get the licence. However, we soon realised that we'd constantly have a movie company smacking us around. It was actually John who came up with the concept of demons from hell in outer space. We all loved *Evil Dead 2* – it was funny and action-packed with cool weapons. So we kind of merged *Aliens* with *Evil Dead* – which is where we got the idea to do the chainsaw.

Was the development of *Doom* particularly difficult?

Every time we did a new 3D game, it was a lot of work for us to break our previous design habits. Our first *Doom* level looked exactly like *Wolfenstein* with 90-degree corners, fixed heights and stuff. I wasn't happy – we needed to make sure no area of the game looked like *Wolfenstein*.

You knew you really had something quite special in *Doom*?

We'd done interviews and stuff before, but when *Doom* came out,

everything that happened before was like nothing. Every single games magazine wrote about *Doom* – it was almost, 'here's what a computer is for'. There was some backlash, but it was so minor compared to the overwhelming tidal wave of acceptance that I think violence became a lot more mainstream in the media because of it. It was insane – definitely the biggest cultural thing I've seen in gaming.

Can you remember any stand-out moments from the development of *Quake*?

There was a big company meeting in November 1995 when it was decided not to go with our original plans. The engine had taken a year to get to the point where developers could actually make a game with it – compared with four months for *Doom* – and they were having to throw a lot of design stuff away, which was very stressful. When I saw that the other owners were leaning towards the 'let's just throw *Doom* weapons in this thing and get it done' idea, I was totally against it, but I went along with it because I was tired of arguing. I re-wrote the design doc so we could just power this thing out.



So the next chapter was *Ion Storm* in Dallas and Austin...

There's a lot of things that went bad – Ion's story is so big I don't even know it all. It was an experiment though, and it made money thanks to Warren Spector. I decided to bring in Warren in September of '97, and later when the other founders in the Dallas office wanted to kill the Austin office – and people never would have seen *Deus Ex 1* and 2 or *Thief 3* – I kept it going. I knew that was going to be the only shining thing to emerge from the whole mess.

How pleased were you with *Daikatana* in the end?

If the execution of the idea had gone well it would have been a decent game, something different. It was pretty ambitious, with four different time zones. The big thing was getting those sidekicks to play well too – but it was hampered by inexperienced staff and the fact my entire team left in November '98. There was about 20 months of work on *Daikatana* completed and most of it was thrown out – we had to re-do a lot of levels, so it took us a year and a half to get *Daikatana* done from a restart. There were only two people who started and finished on *Daikatana* – everyone else was replaced.

What's your favourite game that you've been involved with?

I've been happy with most of my games, but *Doom* was probably the best. It didn't take too long, and for the amount of effort we put in, the result was insane. The development process was awesome too – there were no arguments and everyone understood what we had to do and wanted to make it better. 

For the full transcript, hit www.pczone.co.uk after March 14.

John Romero likes...



MUSIC: John loves game music, metal and trance/electronic stuff.



WOW/HL2: "WOW is an awesome game, as is *Half-Life 2*."



GAMES: "I've been making them since I was 11 years old."

Doom was insane – the biggest cultural thing I've seen in gaming

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PCZONE.CO.UK Editor John Houlihan 020 7042 4311
Hardware Photography In-house
Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low
rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street,
London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3300

Printed in the UK by Southernprint

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DOMINIK DIAMOND

With the screaming birth of my third offspring, my thoughts turned to the *ER* game. Could Abby and Carter cut it in Glasgow's Southern General? Probably not...



I HATE THE SIMS.

The original, the sequel, *Sims: University*, *Sims The Snuff Movie* – the whole

lot are products shat from Satan's bumhole. I hate them almost as much as I hate pets. But for the same reason. They're both substitutes for having kids. Seriously. In both, you have to care for things and clean up crap. Coming from someone who's just had their third child, I can't fathom why the hell you'd want to relax by nurturing and crap-cleaning.

That's why the games I've loved the most have been ones with absolutely no responsibility or grounding in real life: Sonic was always better than Mario because a hedgehog's life is worth far less than a plumber's in the real world.

Half-Life terrifies me because of the colossal responsibility. When the scientists die I find myself agonising for hours over the therapy their kids will have to go through as a result of my selfish ascent to the surface. So I've always preferred the cartoon escapism of *Duke Nukem* and *Serious Sam*.

Even if you wish to replicate a real-life situation in a fantasy environment, as Steve Hill regularly and admirably points out in these pages, the real-life equivalent of games are completely different. Or are they?

WHERE'S ABBY?

I started playing the *ER* game recently because the new series had started on the telly, and I was so stressed in the lead up to the birth of baby number three that it seemed a good idea to spunk £25 on a load of utter shite.

Now at first glance, the 'immersive gameplay that lets you experience the excitement of *ER* firsthand' was very different from the real-life hospital experience at the Southern General in Govan, Glasgow.

In the *ER* game, the hospital is spic and span, beautifully rendered in a way that only looks ten years out of date. In the real world, the hospital was held together by

surgical tape. Polythene awnings and blinking neon strip lights welcomed you as much as a nun's gusset.

In the *ER* game, you can have casual conversations with nurses about the weather. In the real world, I sat there and listened to matter-of-fact discussions about my partner's vulva as three different women got gynaecologically closer to her than I'd been allowed in two months. (I know... In a non-birth situation that would have been referred to as 'getting all five numbers and the bonus ball'.)

FINGERBOBS

In the *ER* game, you can start romances with the staff. In real life, my missus related some tale of how her friend Becca had her baby up some mountain in India, helped only by some village elder who'd stuck her finger up her bum and flicked a muscle to relieve the pain. I asked if they could do that in this hospital. "Not for you, sir," the midwife replied.

I hate to spoil it for dads-to-be out there, but the birth of your kids is, for the most part, bloody dull. You sit there for hours, you can't really do f*** all but you get moaned at for sitting there doing nothing. Finally, in the end you realise you personally haven't really achieved anything during this marathon and it would have been far better to spend your time listening to the new Arctic Monkeys album eight times. Which is why it's EXACTLY the same as playing the *ER* game. **PCZ**

In the *ER* game, the hospital is spic and span: in real life, it's held together with surgical tape



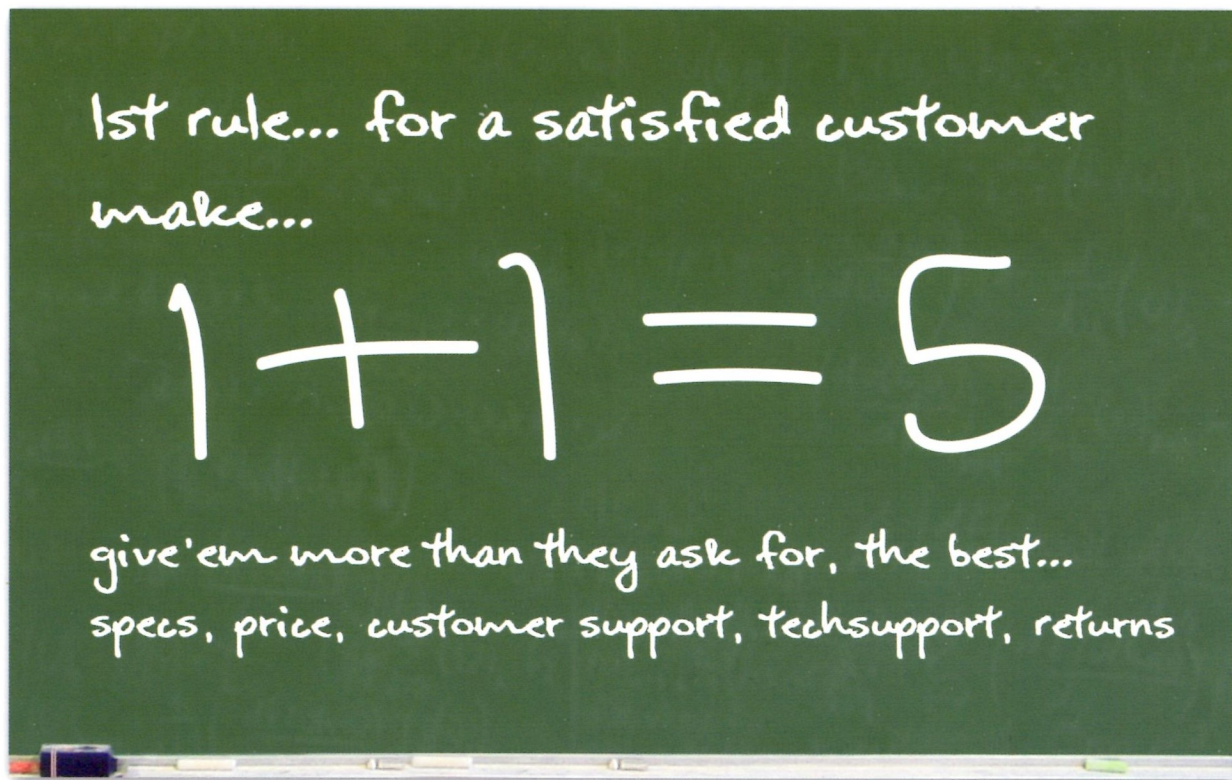
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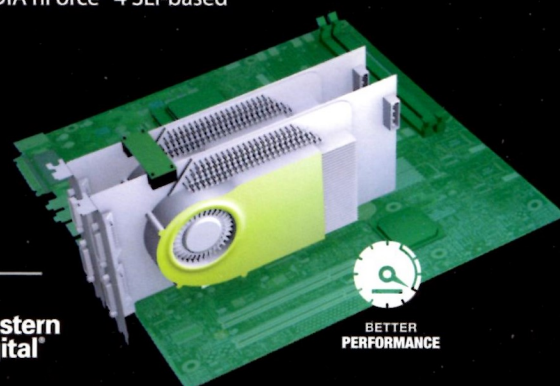
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