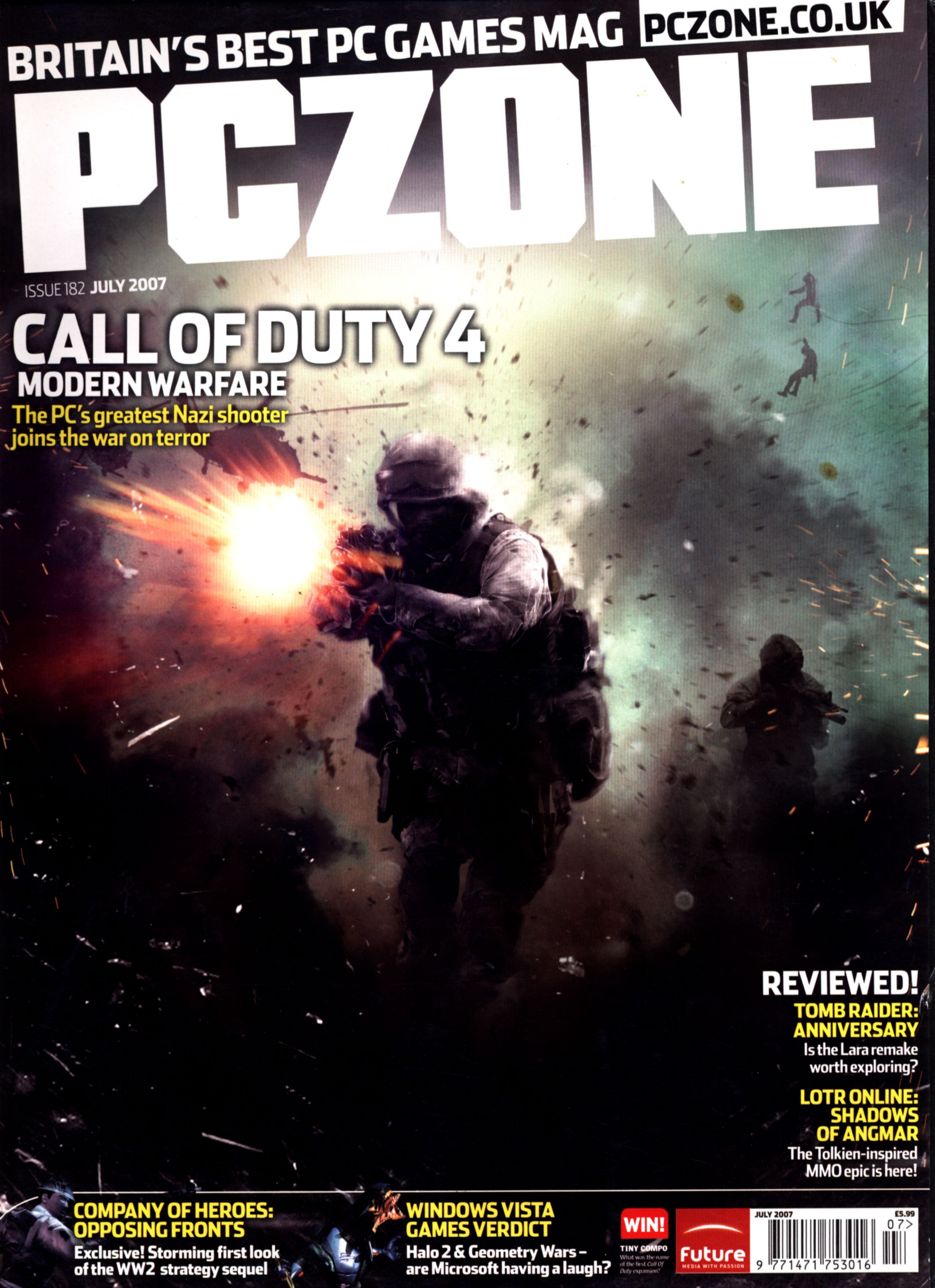# PCZONE

ISSUE 182 **JULY 2007**

CALL OF DUTY 4
MODERN WARFARE

The PC's greatest Nazi shooter
joins the war on terror

REVIEWED!

**TOMB RAIDER:
ANNIVERSARY**

Is the Lara remake
worth exploring?

**LOTR ONLINE:
SHADOWS
OF ANGMAR**

The Tolkien-inspired
MMO epic is here!

**COMPANY OF HEROES:
OPPOSING FRONTS**

Exclusive! Storming first look
of the WW2 strategy sequel

**WINDOWS VISTA
GAMES VERDICT**

Halo 2 & Geometry Wars –
are Microsoft having a laugh?

WIN!
TINY COMPO
What was the name
of the first Call Of
Duty expansion?

future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

JULY 2007
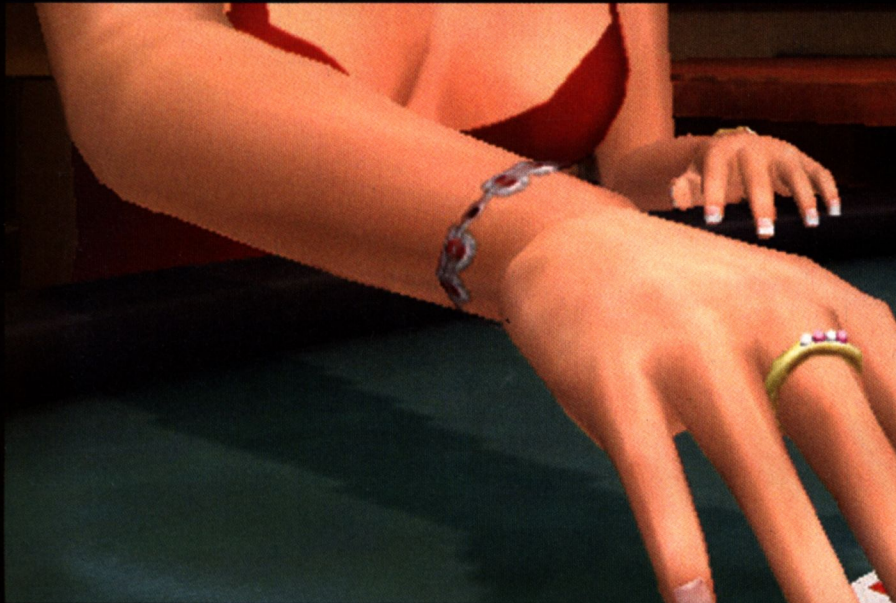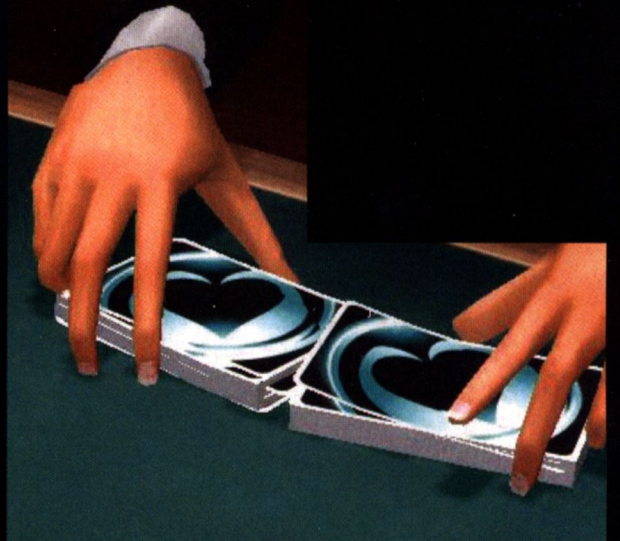
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"The Future of Online Poker"

FHM

"like Grand Theft Auto, but with chip shuffling"

Bluff

www.pkr.com

PC ZONE

COVER STORY

CALL OF DUTY MODERN WARFARE 4

The classic shooter series leaps into modern combat, but can it hold its own in a fight?

SHOCK THERAPY 108

"Should this really be the subject of entertainment?"

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG   PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

CALL OF DUTY 4
MODERN WARFARE

REVIEWED!

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 41 words... *Call Of Duty* abandons WWII, *Company Of Heroes* gives it a manly hug, and Lara jumps, swings and pulls levers once more. We also review the *LOTR* MMO and it's really quite good. Plus, we have 300% fewer Leeds Utd references.
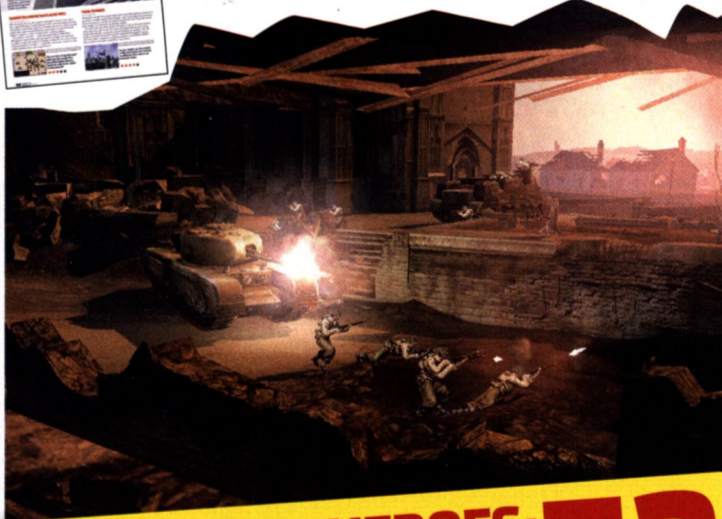
COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS 32
IN DEEP WITH THE WW2 STRATEGY SEQUEL
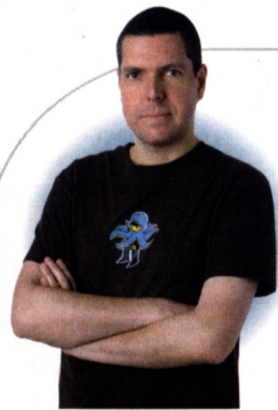
NAZI FATIGUE

CALL OF DUTY is back, minus the Nazis, with a new PC FPS *Modern Warfare* – another *PC ZONE* exclusive (page 50).

I have to say that while Hitler's army are the best villains you can have in a videogame, I'm getting rather jaded with WWII-themed shooters that need me to blast swarms of Nazis. Developer Infinity Ward are certainly taking a risk moving their franchise away from the reality of WWII into the made-up fiction of a Russian/ Middle East conflict, but from what I've seen, it's a good move.

COD4: Modern Warfare is still vanilla *COD*, but it's been given a rocket up the tailpipe, and then handed the latest enemy-shredding weapons-technology for a far more brutal experience. It'll be interesting to see whether the more-traditional WWII setting of rival franchise *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* (p42) will compete against the modern setting of *COD4*, with both games set for an autumn release. Let battle commence...

If you can't get enough of WWII though, head to *Opposing Fronts* (p32), the follow-up to our current favourite RTS *Company Of Heroes*, where you can play as the British and – yes – the Germans. Even if Infinity Ward are leaving the fields of Normandy behind, it seems there are still armies of PC developers willing to go back into the muddy trenches...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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REVIEW

66 TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Lara proves that tomb-raiding never gets boring – ten years on and she's still at it...

42 UPFRONT **Medal Of Honor: Airborne**

66 REVIEW **The Lord Of The Rings Online**

26 UPFRONT **Speedball 2**

20 UPFRONT **Kane & Lynch**
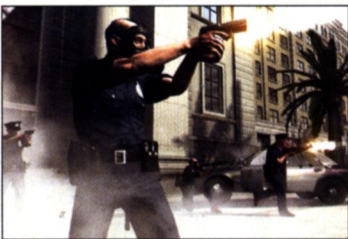
PLUG IT IN, PLUG IT IN **48**

THE WEIRDEST OBJECTS EVER TO ENTER AN INNOCENT USB SLOT

40 UPFRONT **Overlord**

FREEPLAY JACKASS

PC ZONE JACKASS

BEGGAR-BAITING IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Have you had one too many 12-year-olds run up to you and say, "lg PLZ NEED WEAPON", without so much as a hello? What kind of people are these infesting our scallywags? Join us in revenge as we begin a regular series of cocking about in games, beginning this month with beggar-baiting in *World Of Warcraft*...

THE FACTION TRAP

THE GAME SHOW

THE TRADE-WINDOW TEASE

IT'S THE COPPERS

SHOW THEM YOU'RE NUTS

NEW

114 PC ZONE JACKASS
"I've had it with your rules!" you might shout, and we'd agree. It's time to play games your own way...

MEET THE TEAM

Proudly sponsored by Peggle
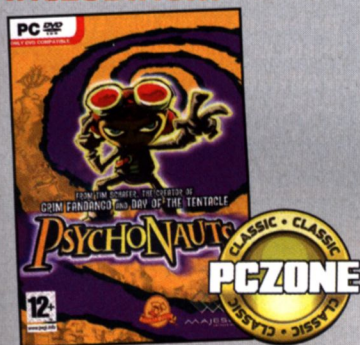
WILL PORTER
Deputy Editor
AGE: 27
LIKES: Spooky Ball
DISLIKES: Zen Ball
FANCIES: Bjorn the Unicorn
FAVE GAME: Fallout 2 (or maybe Peggle)
PLAYING NOW: BioShock and Peggle

Will's used to spotting celebrities when he's jetting off to exclusive parties around the world, but his latest sighting took even him by surprise. At a shindig in New York, he encountered none other than <CENSORED>, the middle-aged star of <A POPULAR US CRIME DRAMA SERIES> who was, unfortunately, a bit worse for wear. Grappling Will's neck with a hairy arm, she demanded to know why some guy "who was on Married With Children once" thinks he's better than her. Will admitted he didn't know why, and in return she flashed her lady bits at him and fell into a limo.

JAMIE SEFTON
Editor
Say 'Leeds United' to Jamie Sefton and he emits a low, drawn-out, bassy groan that continues for several minutes before the man slowly rolls into a foetal position and rocks back and forth.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: STALKER and Peggle

JON 'LOG' BLYTH
Staff Writer
Log's just discovered that sales of his book Law Of The Playground in Europe amount to a mind-bending minus eight. People are literally unbuying his book. He now owes his publisher £3.32.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: C&C3 and Peggle
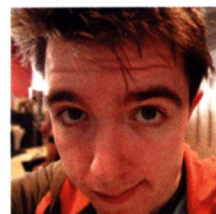
STEVE HOGARTY
Section Editor
By saying that his Pad Thai was a bit off, Steve managed to bag a free meal at a local pub. The thing is, it wasn't off at all, it was actually quite delicious! Steve just wasn't very hungry.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: STALKER and Peggle

SUZY WALLACE
Reviews Editor
Suzy's two favourite new things are a website with funny pictures of cats, and a YouTube video of the new Snickers ad, with Mr T in a tank. She's compelled to see both at least nine times a day.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: Company Of Heroes and Peggle

DAN GRILIOPOLOUS
Freelancer
'Dan' rhymes with a lot of other words, and it's for this reason alone that he is 'our man', and sometimes even 'our man with a plan'. What this plan is, he will not tell. We think it involves borsch.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: LOTRO and Peggle
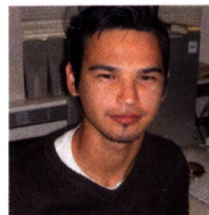
DALE PRATLEY
Art Editor
Dale hates being in the Meet The Team section. We'll show him this and he'll say, "Mate, can't we have someone else?" Sorry Dale, this month it's your time to shine. Whether you like it or not.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: Not Peggle

STUFF THAT HAS HELPED US THIS MONTH... The chemical process of sublimation, whereby matter converts directly between solids and gas
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Vista PCs going mental, crashing all over the place, flying off our desks and smoking cigars in the stairwell

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

	Mins	
ABC	45 Mins	Anyone But Chelsea. Just to see the tortured look on Jose's face
SWEARING	12 Mins	And the extent of Steve's while playing Geometry Wars: "Holyshitmonkeyf***ingwanker" being a highlight
POSH HAIRCUTS	1 Mins	Will once went to a proper hairdresser and had his hair washed and head massaged. Now that's posh
THE GAY HOT TUB SCENE	11 Mins	In Final Fantasy VII, when Cloud gets into the brothel... Surely somebody else remembers this?!
PEGGLE	291 Mins	Ode To Joy is our new soundtrack
GOT SEOUL	81 Mins	Log's packed his frilliest knickers for a press trip to Korea
THE NEW WOTSITS BAG	22 Mins	Since when did crisp packets go landscape, Walkers? This. Is. Madness
THE FUTURE	34 Mins	GNER now have (expensive) wi-fi on their trains. Whatever next?
BANANA GUARD MUST-HAVE	2 Mins	Google Ads says we can guard our bananas with glow-in-the-dark plastic for just £3.97
THE BECK JUKE-BOX BOOBY-TRAP	16 Mins	How you can never be sure you're not 20 seconds away from a ridiculous tin clatter

WIN! Tiny Compo, you've been eating your puddings, and you've gotten fat. It's back in the cage for you, you gluttonous stinkrod. Just tell us who won last month and put the masking tape back on. Did you say Jane Wright of Kent has won and should be sent a splendid prize? I can't hear you, your cheeks are so fat. Ploff ploff ploff, splaaa. That's what you said. Send this month's entries to Tiny Wee Woo 182, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Don't forget to tell us your favourite RGB value (HEX ONLY!!)
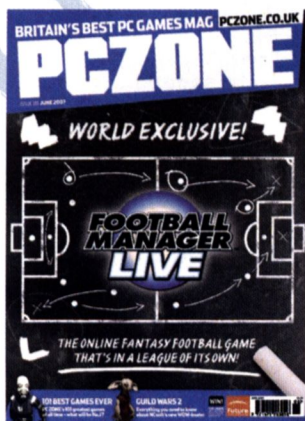
LETTERS

Steve Hogarty has envelopes for fingers and stamps for eyes – he is the letter prince...

KING OF LETTERS

GOT PROTECTION?

I've just bought *Command & Conquer 3* and have to say I really like it. It's very similar to the rest of the *C&C* games, but I don't care – it works for me. There's one thing that doesn't work however, and that's Vista 64-bit compatibility.

OK, I should have checked before buying it, but it was a spontaneous purchase and other games such as *Supreme Commander* run fine on Vista 64, so I wrongly assumed that EA would want to support Microsoft's latest toy as most other new releases will.

Digging around on the Internet, I found out the cause of the problem was the copy-protection program, which apparently doesn't like Vista 64 (driver signing and all that lot). So I dug a little more and found a 'work around' to the problem so I can play the game I bought.

Isn't that ironic – the whole point of these copy-protection programs is to stop Mr Pirate nicking software and allow legit users to play the
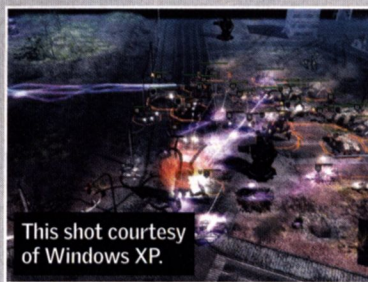
This shot courtesy of Windows XP.

game, but in reality legit users have to become 'pirates' to get the thing to work!

I reckon it's time for EA and other lazy publishers to wake up to reality. 64-bit systems are here to stay, so support them properly (with driver signing and without needing to run with an admin account). As for copy-protection – don't bother! It's too easy to crack (often within a few hours of a game being published), and all it really does is piss off legitimate customers.
Shaun Pugh

Yup, it seems that SecuROM doesn't work under Vista x64, meaning *Command & Conquer 3* simply won't run (that is, unless you hunt for a solution). You have to wonder if the amount of time, money and effort spent developing and implementing these copy-protection systems is worth the frustration it causes legitimate users – and the benefit, if any, it brings to the product. Have a graphics card as consolation – we're fairly sure that it's compatible.

56th best game ever, we reckon.

EGG ON YOUR FACE

I just read your '101 Best Games Ever' feature (issue 181), and I agree with a lot of it. My all-time favourite game is *Final Fantasy VII* and that's what I would have put at number one – but I agree, *Deus Ex* may well be the best game ever.

I was disappointed that *Neverwinter Nights* was nowhere to be seen though. The original campaign was nothing special, but that's only a tiny part of it. When you take into account the hundreds of fan-made modules, premium modules and the potential for making your own, it surely belongs in this list, doesn't it?
Alex Brown

Yes, I suppose you're right. Luckily, we have a time-travelling motorbike that can take us back in time so we can put *Neverwinter Nights* in at number 56. Why not try looking now? It's hidden in the corner.

JACKASS LOVE PART 1

Congratulations on the Jackass feature (issue 180) – it's about time someone thought 'outside the box' (geddit?) and didn't just follow the usual routes the developers intended in games.

Inspired, I decided to try a '*PC ZONE* Jackass' for myself, and so, in *BF1942: Secret Weapons of WWII*, tried to see

Carl Sheen's conga line in *LOTRO* put Steve and Log's to shame.

"I think that was the point where I couldn't be arsed and went down the pub"
Mark Gidden tried a bit of Jackass. Then went for a pint...

ARMED ASSAULT
Sent in by Martin Dutton
PC ZONE score: 84%

Armed Assault is the spiritual sequel to one of my top-five favourite games ever – *Operation Flashpoint*. Sure, *OFP* had some bugs and it wasn't going to win any beauty contests, but it did what no other combat sim before or since has – it gave us war!

Armed Assault is now here and having completed it, I'm gutted. It looks great, but it seems the engine was all anyone cared about. The bugs that added to *OFP's* quirky charm are still there, but whereas you could forgive *OFP* because, well, it couldn't help itself, it seems unacceptable in this far more toned sequel. *Arse Assault* more like...

Your shout: 60%
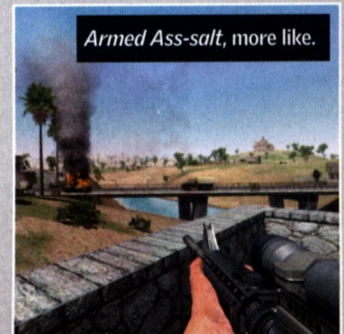
Armed Ass-salt, more like.

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

---

how far you could take a soldier when you launched from the German rocket-plane launcher. I then marked the distance with a bullet in the side of the cliff, but I think that was the point I couldn't be arsed and went down the pub.
Mark Gidden

JACKASS LOVE PART 2
I want to invite *PC ZONE*, as the inspiration for the event, to join us for some Jackass-style cocking about in *The Lord Of The Rings Online*. After Steve and Log's failed *WOW* conga line, I've been organising a huge conga line in *LOTRO* for this Saturday at 8pm on the Evernight server, starting at the Brandywine Bridge on the west of the Breeland map. It would be great if *PC ZONE* were represented in this great act of cocking about.
Carl Sheen

Sorry we couldn't make it to your *LOTRO* conga, Carl. I'd like to say I was at some sort of social gathering which prevented me from dancing in a line with some hobbits on a Saturday evening, but I was actually sitting at home watching *The Planet's Funniest Animals*. Those cats! Anyway, there's more Jackassery goings-on in the Freeplay section this month – and every month from now on.

PSP BITES BACK
Being a subscriber to your magazine for many years, I've seen it undergo many changes, mostly for the better.' However, I've noticed a trend in this magazine

(and others) to make cheap, immature replies to letters in the hope that they're funny and entertaining. They are not.

I am of course referring to such childish comments such as, 'Only knobs own PSPs'. Opinions are there to be shared and respected. But who wants to read a magazine who can't respect the opinions of ALL their readers? Your magazine is here to entertain and inform your readers, not insult them.
Oliver Newton

'Ooooh, I bought a PSP. I'm off to play *Lumines* on the toilet, but not for long because the battery life isn't great.' That's you that is. That's my ironically cheap and immature impression of you.

OLDEN DAZE
Following on from Jon Holland's letter in issue 180 about nostalgia, why hasn't Retro Zone looked at the Acorn Electron, which was a great machine and had some wonderful games?

I'm talking about Superior Software and great titles like *Citadel*, *Deathstar*, *Galaforce*, *Thrust*, *Tempest* and the irrepressible *Repton 1*, *2* and *3*, and so on. Many of these games came with prizes for being the first to complete them, and in all cases you only had three lives – if you died for the third time, it was back to the beginning. No

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

Plz no more pics of Will smiling! He has the worst shit-eatin grin ever! Check out p10 of the june issue if u don't believe me.
Jon p.

You'll find no argument here.

Can u tell me when *HL2*, *TF2* & *Portal* are out? Sum folks are sayin Xmas.
iDogboy

At the moment, autumn of this year. But knowing Valve... 2008.

"Please don't feed the submarine" "What can you feed a submarine anyway?" "Nothing... Weren't you listening?" Haha thx sam n max
Egg90

It's texts like these that really remind us what it means to be a TXTpert.

Games: far more fun than the Atkins diet.

"If overweight people swapped their Cheerios for MMOs, we'd have a much slimmer nation"
Wise words from Jack Chapman

saving or reincarnation. Games today are easy by comparison, and young gamers have no concept of the difficulties and complexities of these true classics.
Dave Dalglish

Old games are rubbish. There, I said it. But just for you Dave, there'll be a Retro Zone Electron special next issue.

20-SIDED PIE
Nearly a year ago now, I was at a gig by some Emo rock band. The audience of youths were all shouting insults about the *Daily Mail*, while being egged-on by the band – and it's only today that I realise the significance of this event.

The slander perpetuated by such gutter press is not only unreasonable, but in most cases an outright lie. Take obesity, for example. What's the main reason that the kid down the road needs to consume his own body weight in snacks every day just to satiate his colossal appetite? Why, PC gaming of course. If such a diverting activity didn't exist, little Timmy would no doubt be frolicking in a park instead of growing steadily chubbier in front of a screen.

For me though, PC gaming has helped me lose weight. Who can be bothered to have breakfast when you can gain 2d6+1 fire damage if you stay a few hours longer? If all overweight people swapped their Cheerios for MMOs, we'd have a far slimmer nation.
Jack Chapman

Of course, it all makes so much sense. Now we just have to get the NHS to pay for Timmy's *WOW* subscription, and I think we might just have a solution on our hands.

MASSIVELY MORAL
As much as I love them, there are some aspects of MMORPGs that worry me. I'm concerned about the morality choices in them and their effects on the real world. There should be greater regulation of the gaming world, as elements in and out of the gaming community are seeking to profit from things we enjoy.

Computer gaming is increasingly being used to earn money. There are players who set out to attack and kill other players with the aim of selling their loot on eBay. Is this morally right?

Here's a disturbing story. A local guy who played *Tibia* had almost all the best items in the game. He lent them to another player, who apparently sold the loot for £500. He went to the police, who did nothing. The guy tracked down the player who sold it, and shot him in the head.

Surely for this reason alone, the sale of MMORPG items should be restricted, if not prohibited? Many players take their games very seriously, and it seems unfair that others should gain an advantage because they have more money.
Dan Gregg

That's probably more a case for not selling firearms to psychotic *Tibia* players. Although, what you're suggesting could well bankrupt the Korean economy. All right-minded gamers want to see less of it, but you might as well try to hold back the tide...

ALL OUR FAULT
After the terrible events at Virginia Tech, how long before the loons of the media world (present company excepted) launch into us gaming freaks as potential murdering loonies? I give it 24 hours before we're accused of being brain-addled, *Doom 3*-inspired, gun-wielding nutters. Oh, and if a link can be established to Metallica or AC/DC at the same time, all the better. The headlines and cash registers are being prepped as we speak.
Daz

Too true – although I've noticed a slight decline in the blame game. Anti-gaming lawyer Jack Thompson, for example, is being increasingly ridiculed on American TV for drawing up these tenuous links between murders and games. The sooner we return to blaming jazz music for all of society's ills, the sooner we can start getting on with our lives again. PCZ

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD

PCZONE TRAVEL
Kay Timson
Where? Glenorchy, New Zealand
Class: Wood Elf

PCZONE TRAVEL
Matt Franks
Where? Mount Fuji, Japan
Class: Gaijin

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!

MMOs: to die, or kill for.
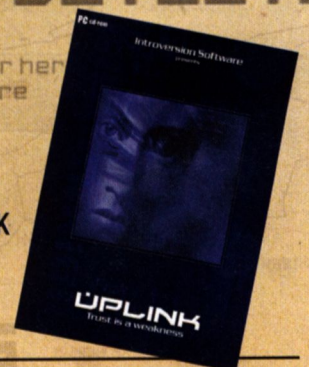
CALL OF DUTY 4
MODERN WARFARE

The shooter series famous for its epic WWII battles jettisons the real past for a fictional today. *PC ZONE* steps straight into the firing line...
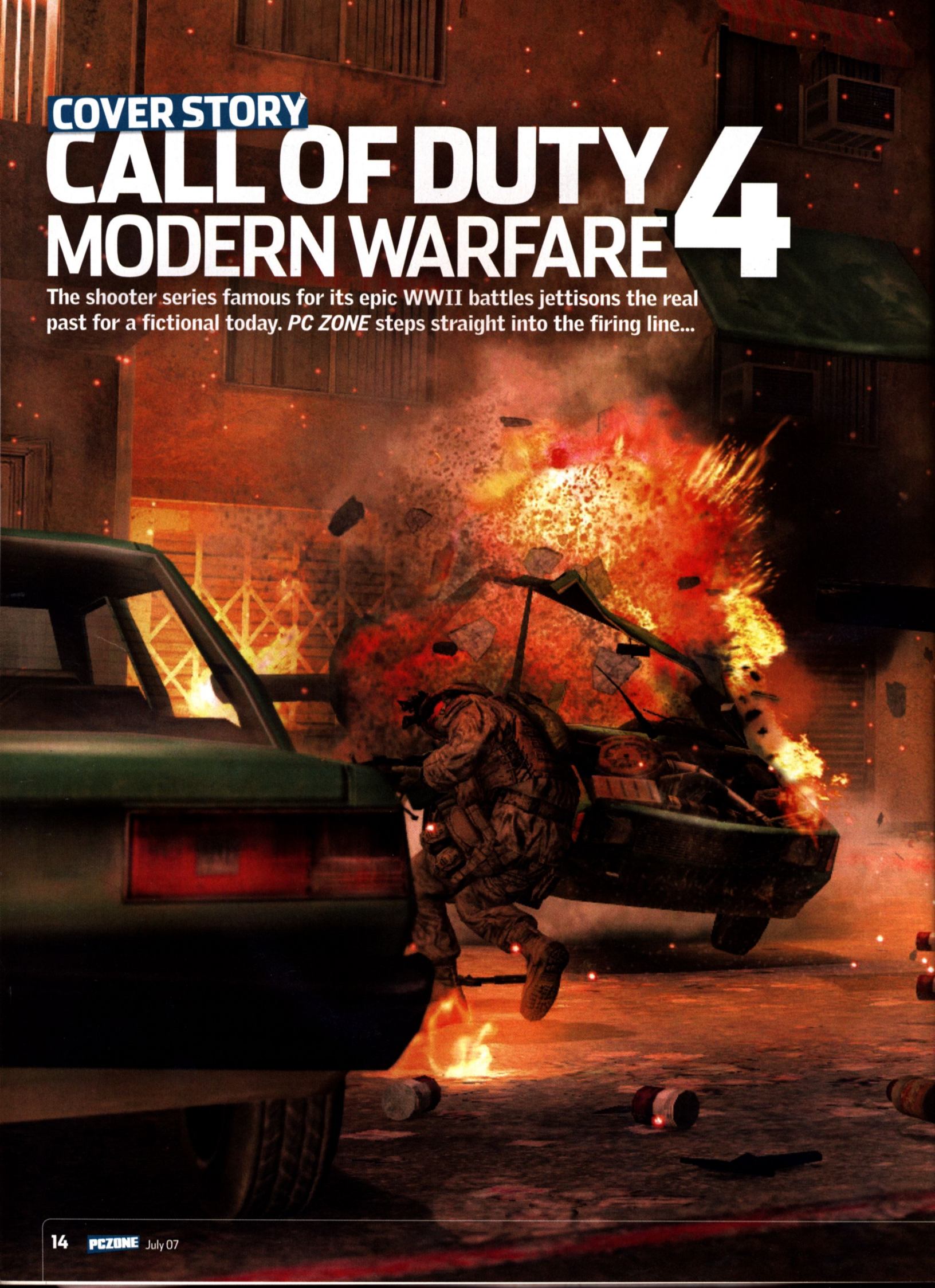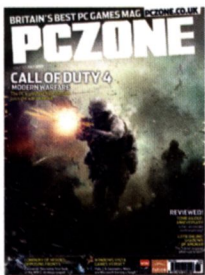
WE BROUGHT YOU the world's first *Call Of Duty* cover-exclusive back in the summer of 2003 because we knew that the promising studio formed by 22 of the *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* team was building a WWII shooter classic. Four years on, we bring you the first look at *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, the third FPS developed by Infinity Ward, and the first to leave behind World War II for a fictional modern conflict set in Russia and the Middle East. Risky? Absolutely. But from what we've seen, this is still an epic *Call Of Duty* experience, only more intense, brutal, faster, realistic and beautiful. WWIII is the new WWII...

Great expectations

IT'S WEIRD WHEN you want something so badly that your own fervour takes over and bends your imagination to its whim. Take my first play of *BioShock* the other day. I was expecting it to be thoroughly excellent, dark and sedate – but what I played was thoroughly excellent, dark and flooded with frenetic action. With its multitude of genetic powers, weapons, specialised ammo and varied death hazards, it was far more of a claustrophobic killing sandbox than I'd previously conceived.

Methods of disposal are remarkably varied, from mindless shooting, to fiddling with security systems, shooting pools of water with electric shotgun pellets, igniting oil with fire-bolts and having splicers fight between each other...

The list is huge, but the surprising thing is just how quickly all this stuff happens. My expected spooky plod around drippy corridors became an edge-of-the-seat fight to the death against what I guestimate at 'shitloads' of enemies – shrieking, shouting and dragging sparking metal limbs towards me at great speed.

My expectation was even further confounded when I first attempted hacking and was promptly placed in a game of *Pipe Mania*. As it turns out, it's a mini-game that genuinely seems to work and fit the steampunky hydraulic nature of the game, but who saw that coming? What next – *Treasure Island Dizzy* with a starring role in *Crysis*? .

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

IN RAPTURE

BioShock creative director Ken Levine guides us even further into his deep, dark, submarinal adventure...

www.2kgames.com/bioshock/ | ETA: August 24

How far off the beaten track will *BioShock* let you stray?
"I think of most other shooters as a ball of string – you go from place to place, but at the end of the day it's one long string that you follow from beginning to end. One corridor that magically opens up other areas, and there's nowhere else to explore. What we have in *BioShock* are more exploratory areas, there's a whole bunch of them. There's also a lot that's off the critical path, and it's in these areas that we hide weapon upgrade machines, special ammo and more involved story elements. That's a thing about this game; you can explore every nook and cranny."

And how do the various areas of Rapture differ?
"It's almost like when you go and see that *Grindhouse* movie – one by Tarantino, the other by Rodriguez – two very different films. Here, you have all these levels that do their own thing – this wharf town Fisheries area, the underwater forest of Arcadia, Fort Frolic which is for theatre, shopping, restaurants and strip clubs, an industrial area, a residential area and a science area. They all just feel wholly different. The level of detail and visual storytelling is huge – it's not a bunch of prefabs. Everything is built entirely from scratch and all handcrafted."

One thing that's instantly apparent when you play are the myriad of

> Big Daddy's visor goes red when he's angry, green when neutral and orange when he's feeling full of giggles.

SEA

Nobody's mentioned how bad it must smell in Rapture.

**different ways you tell the story –
audio logs, written logs, graffiti,
stuff left lying around the place...**
"We've also licensed all this period
music, and I've just written this song
that's by this horrible songwriter called
Sander Cohen. It's an anthem for
Rapture, and it's called *Rise Rapture,
Rise* – we recorded it the other day and
you'll hear that in the game. Plus, the
vending machines talk, the gatherer
sings her little song. A lot of it comes
in at the last moment too. We were
recording another character's lines
recently and I asked: 'Can you do a little
girl's voice? Hang on, I'm going to write
a song.' Then I wrote the Gatherer's
Garden song, which we recorded right
there and then."

**In the last presentation I saw,
there were fishes at the windows.
I didn't see fishes at the windows
when I was playing last night...**
"There are! There are many fishes at
windows – I promise you there are
fishes at windows. This is a pretty
packed game, if you look at the
density of objects and geometry...
It's packed to the gills. In some
places we can have fish, in some
places we can't have fish. But I promise
you fish. You saw the whale on the
way in, didn't you?"

**Yes I did. And it made me very
happy. I don't know much about
whales but...**
"You will have your fish my friend."

"What's new pussycat?"
"Nothing. It's 1959."

ZONE's guilty pleasure

**Join us for a chorus of, "Now that's
liquid *Peggle*!"** Out now on Steam | www.popcap.com

UNFORTUNATELY MISSING OUT
on the privilege of inclusion in last
month's '101 Best Games Ever', it
would be remiss not to give *Peggle*
some love in these pages. A *ZONE*
staffer is even having *Peggle* dreams.
Essentially a bagatelle affair
that demands a supreme mix of skill
and sheer luck, it features weeping
unicorns, Egyptian cats, multiball
madness and some of the most
happiness-inducing gameplay ever
conceived. Aim a ball, knock out as
many red pegs as you can and live in
eternal hope for that precious moment
when the camera zooms in on your last
peg strike with a drumroll. Victory is

signalled by fireworks and a quick
blast of Beethoven's *Ode To Joy*.
You rarely get a game as pure in its
conception and execution as *Peggle*,
and you can expect a full round-up of
the other PopCap games available on
Steam in a future issue. *Bookworm
Deluxe* is very good as well.
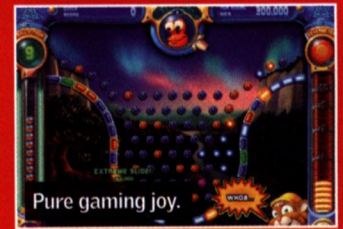
Pure gaming joy.

STUFF *GTA IV* info continues to invade our every waking thought.
The main character, Nico Bellic, is in New York (OK, Liberty
City) to work at his cousin's taxi firm – which is presumably more crime-
orientated than he expects. With a female character called Elizabeta
cropping up later in the game and faithful re-imaginations of Brooklyn,
Manhattan, the Bronx and New Jersey, anticipation is at fever pitch.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER

GOOD TIMES

With Porter safely
packed off to New York
to play *BioShock*, the floor
becomes bereft of simulated
Barbie sex noise.

ON THE FENCE

Fears for Will's libido
are expressed as
a USB Pole Dancer and
a German erotic FMV
adventure appear in the
post on the same day.

While in New York, a
relatively famous ageing
TV actress gabbles drunk-
nonsense at young Will, before
pulling up her dress and
showing him her ladygarden.

The Pole Dancer's cries
of 'Ooh baby yeah yeah!
Yeah yeah!' irritates all and
sundry. Will remains blissfully
unaware that he has become
office enemy #1.

The adventurer returns and
insists on telling EVERYONE
the story AT LEAST five times.
The Pole Dancer gyrates every
hour, on the hour.

BAD TIMES

IT BEGINS AGAIN   SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?   DEADLINE

STEALING THUNDER

As top developers accuse pirate gamers of robbing them blind, *Pavel Barter* goes undercover with a wooden leg and scurvy...

Alyx: who wouldn't want to steal her?

Doom 3 lost £1.5 million of sales to pirates.

Reporter
Pavel Barter

PIRATES. AN IDEAL subject matter for hackneyed analogies about sea shanties, dead men's chests and bottles of rum. None of which you shall read here, this being a serious investigative article and all. Let it just be said, it was once rumoured that Chuck Norris lost a fight to a pirate, but this rumour was a lie created by Chuck Norris to lure more pirates to him.

Truth be told, not even the ginger warlord or Steven Segal (or David Hasselhoff in his prime) could stem the onslaught of PC games pirates, currently causing developers to weep like children.

At GDC 2007, id boss Todd Hollenshead blamed piracy for the death of PC games (that old chestnut). As much as 50% of all PC game sales are lost to piracy in the US he said, and up to 90% in Asia. Epic honcho Michael V Capps weighed in, saying that piracy was the reason behind *UT3* cross-platforming.

For the most part, PC gamers do not enjoy the finger of blame pointed their direction.

"What a load of crap," the average brigand bleats on a forum. "Most people who pirate games don't buy them anyway, so how are publishers losing money?" Another token voice pitches in: "Draconian piracy protection hurts games more and the customers are beginning to get tired." Others moan that piracy has been about for aeons.

The outspoken developers are clearly shocked by the venomous reaction of the gaming community. "I think I already stoked the fires a bit too much on this issue," says Epic man Michael Capps when approached for a comment, although others call it like

it is. "PC gaming piracy these days is BAD," announces Jørgen Tharaldsen, Funcom product director. "In many regards, it's easier to get hold of a pirated version online than going to a store to buy it."

WE'RE ALL DOOMED
Of course, bandits have plagued the information highway for years. In 2004, prior to its release, *Doom 3* sneaked onto file-sharing networks and was downloaded to over 50,000 home PCs in the space of a few hours, translating to £1.5 million in lost sales. On the infofilter.net game torrent chart, *Command & Conquer 3* is hot property with 1,010 traders, although (weirdly) *Backgammon Pro MultiPack* pips it to first place with 9,120 traders.

Like the music industry, pre-release leaks are PC gaming's bugbear. Before Funcom's epic adventure *Dreamfall* reached shelves in Europe, over 200,000 illegal copies of the game had been downloaded.

"We first launched in the US and just days after release it was cracked, so everyone who wanted it in Europe and Asia could download it illegally prior to release" says Jørgen Tharaldsen. "It's a

strange feeling being 'download of the week' when you launched in retail only a few days before."

Valve marketing director Doug Lombàrdi tells his war story. "During the development of *Half-Life 2*, we had a security breach on our network and the source code for the project was stolen. Gabe (Newell, Valve boss) reached out to the community, asking folks to help us find the person(s) responsible. After a few months of working with community members alongside various international authorities, arrests were made."

SMOOTH CRIMINALS
PC game publishers try to ward off pirates via CD copyright protection (usually reduced to putty in a matter of days) and many gamers argue that Digital Rights Management is the reason they download illegal content in the first place. "I'm against copy protection schemes because they're bad business. They discourage people from buying PC games," complains a blogger called Draignol.

Aside from 'giving it to the man', why do gamers break the law? Some complain about awkward PC game installation, others say they're sick of spending their hard-earned on crappy

Download an illegal copy of *UT3* and you'll have these guys to deal with...

titles. Garry, of *Garry's Mod* fame, offers a few theories: "Downloading is easier than going to a shop or waiting for a game to be delivered. This is the same with Day Zero stuff (when a game is finished and in replication, but not yet available to consumers).

"For example, I had *STALKER* on pre-order from Amazon for about two months, but about three days before it was delivered it'd already been pirated, so I downloaded the pirate version and played it. I feel perfectly justified because I'd already bought it. Another group is kids. Kids don't have money and they can't really buy off Steam because they need a credit card or PayPal."

Ah, Steam. Love it or want to mutilate it slowly, Valve's digital condom has re-written the rulebook for PC game protection. Although *Half-Life 2* experienced an early network break, Steam successfully shielded the finished product from thieving itinerants. Doug Lombardi recalls: "When *Half-Life 2* was

released, it was the only major release of that holiday season (on any platform) that did not experience Day Zero piracy. Pre-ordering and preloading on Steam means that you can get a game the instant it's released. Now the pirates lose out by not buying."

DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

Some voices from the industry suggest the Steam model isn't enough to save offline PC games content. Funcom plan to publish *Dreamfall: Chapters* (the next instalment in their adventure series) online, while Valve appear to be favouring downloadable episodic content.

"We're entering a new age of games distribution," remarks Jørgen Tharaldsen. "There are so many advantages that it would be foolish for a developers like Funcom not to explore it. We started

Spring a leak
Every developer's worst nightmare, aside from a Uwe Boll spin-off...

Half-Life 2
Frustration over the delayed release of *Half-Life 2* culminates in the game's code theft. A 21-year-old German programmer is arrested on recommendation of the Feds for having created the Phatbot Trojan, linked to the leak. A patsy, we think.

Quake
In 1996, an unscrupulous rotter hacked into the id website and robbed the *Quake* source code. More amusingly, *Hexen II* was leaked during a press meeting in Australia, and id's own dodgy security system was to blame for *Quake 2* going AWOL.

GTA: San Andreas
Rockstar was an irony-free zone the day someone stole their crime-fest. The developers asked gamers to grass up their mates and threatened tough retaliation: "We will continue to diligently and aggressively pursue this matter." Get them.
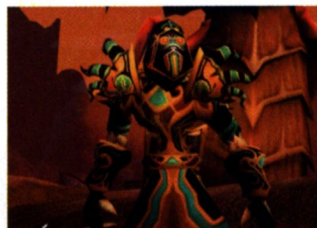
World Of Warcraft
When an early version of *WOW* leaked onto the Internet, some do-gooders were far from impressed. "I was incredibly pissed," ranted one MMOG junkie. "If any of my friends said they'd downloaded the leak, I'd have slapped them in the face."

> ## "PC gaming piracy is BAD... In many ways, it's easier to get hold of a pirated copy online than to buy it in the shops"
> Jørgen Tharaldsen, product director, Funcom

C&C3: Tiberium Wars is hot property on the download sites.

distributing digitally back in 2001 with *Anarchy Online* – the game would have been nowhere near as successful without it."

Other developers, like Soren Johnson (lead programmer on *Civ III & IV*) argue that MMOG is the future of PC – by their very nature, these games can't be pirated.

Arguments over PC game piracy rumble on, not least among gamers. "I hate pirate scum," rants one online gamer. "They reckon the PC doesn't get any decent games and they shouldn't have to pay for content they 'don't want'. But they still decide to play!"

However, the likes of Garry (*Garry's Mod*) reckons that file-sharing can boost a game's sales and popularity: "When a friend passes me a CD and says 'try this', that's great marketing because I'd never have known about that game, so it's not really a lost sale."

One thing is certain: if the relevant authorities catch you illegally downloading games, you run the risk of massive fines and imprisonment. So start asking yourself, "Is it really a pirate's life for me?" Yo ho ho, me hearties, show me that horizon! And other familiar nautical expressions. **PCZ**

With *Dreamfall's* past piracy record, Zoe's right to look worried.

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

THE LOWDOWN

Brutal, unflinching, chaotic	✓
Good script, intriguing characters	✓
Inspired by some amazing films	✓
Doesn't feel very 'new'	✗
Squad issues need to be addressed	✗

GRUESOME TWOSOME...

KANE & LYNCH:
DEAD MEN

Will Porter hits Tokyo with two new friends, and lends a hand in painting the town red...

DEVELOPER Io Interactive **PUBLISHER** Eidos **WEBSITE** www.kaneandlynch.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 172

BUS STATIONS ARE never nice places at the best of times – they usually smell a bit like wee, and once, in Bedford bus station, a man of around 60 walked up to me, stared me in the eyes and hooted like an owl.

True story. It was terrifying. This bus station, however, takes the biscuit. My team and I are positioned about 20ft above it, coach bays and varied Tokyo public transport devices spread out before us, and the place is in total, utter chaos. Word of the running gun-battle that I've been occupied with for the past 20 minutes has clearly spread – and more than a couple of innocents have been caught in the crossfire, so people are perhaps right to be worried.

BANG BANG

Suddenly a few bullets from somewhere graze me, I click for a token 'over-the-shoulder' viewpoint and scour the crowd, trying to make out anyone in uniform and waving a gun. Thing is, it's hard to make them out among hundreds of people, and as I do so I barely notice the SWAT team trucks pulling in at the bus station gates to herald yet another outing in bloody street combat.

If you're late to the *Dead Men* party, then perhaps a recap is in order. It's a hefty plot, but its bare bones are that Kane, the disgruntled chap I'm playing, may or may not have betrayed a shadowy brotherhood of arch-crims known as The Seven – stealing a heap of cash and legging it to Venezuela. Once there, he's captured by the authorities and sentenced to death by the US for his many crimes. The Seven, however, spring him from a prison truck and imminent peril, then blackmail him into retrieving the lost cash through threatening the lives of his estranged family. Lynch, a psychotic maniac due to be imprisoned because he may or

ETA
Q3

THE STORY SO FAR...

IO — Io-Interactive
INTERACTIVE

Assassin appears
Io's big, bald badass appears. The initial game is patchy, but its high concept has impact.

For freedom
Io's first venture outside cross-dress murder, *Freedom Fighters*, saunters into town.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Whirr, clank, buzz
The *Freedom Fighters* template is put into a machine that looks like kids' TV icon Bertha.

Lovely machine
Kane & Lynch appears on the conveyor belt. They embark on a killing spree.

2000   2003   2004   2007

It was at this point that Kane realised he may not have turned the gas off.

The impact sends a shitload of innocent people cartwheeling in every direction possible

Boys in blue often come a cropper.

Kate Moss's new Top Shop collection had the crowd in a frenzy.

may not have murdered his wife, is placed as a constant watchdog over Kane to ensure that he follows the crime syndicate's wishes to the letter. Kind-hearted, rough-and-tumble light comedy this most certainly is not.

LOBBY SEQUENCE

Nine months ago, at the game's announcement, I bore witness to Kane, Lynch and varied hoodlums abseiling down a tower block, murdering a roomful of armed businessmen, stealing a briefcase and descending through the guts of a Tokyo skyscraper – eliminating

both life and the quality of many and varied interior furnishings. Today, I play its conclusion; a street fight ripped straight from Michael Mann masterpiece *Heat* (see 'Mann Alive', p23).

It begins with lift doors pinging open – revealing myself and my contingent of mentalists clad in token smart suits – and a stunning view from the office-block's vestibule balcony of hundreds of screaming people piling towards the exit with their hands waving in a traditional worried manner.

Now, the usual thing to do at this point is to nonchalantly walk towards

the exit with an air of, 'Well, I didn't have anything to do with the 50 ragdoll Yakuza bodies lying around upstairs'.

PLAY IT AGAIN

What I choose to do however (purely with the pursuit of journalistic integrity in mind) is run up and throw a grenade into the seething mass of people. Just imagine my disgust when the impact of the explosion sends a shitload of innocent people cartwheeling in every direction. I'm so disgusted, that I turn the game off, restart and do the exact same thing again – just to check that I'm disgusted to that high level all over again. Reader, I am.

Either they're in love, or he's after his Beckham-alike shades.

We're equipped with magic adrenalin syringes, so I'm back on my feet and ready to be shot in the head again in no time...

Do you see what I see?

The eye of the sniper brings a thrill to the fight...

A neat feature to be included in *Kane & Lynch* is that whenever you're clocked by a sniper, a little screen appears in the bottom left-hand corner of your monitor. Here, you can see your enemy's viewpoint – and your good self dancing around, trying to hide behind whatever street furniture is in your proximity. It's a neat trick that reduces the unfairness of headshot snipe kills, as well as piling on the panic and neatly reminding me of the times in which I've shot myself in the head with my own windowed sniper in *SWAT 4*.

Don't try this at home. Or in the street for that matter.

Kane and Lynch: often seen from trendy angles.

Out on the street, and police cars are beginning to appear. Cover is important in *K&L*, so we spray fire from the skyscraper's entrance with an eye on thinning out the opposition a little.

Already, things feel a little slower-paced than Io's last outing in squad combat, *Freedom Fighters*, and a little more stressful too – since with so much chaos being stuffed into affairs, the game makes it deliberately hard to keep tabs on everything that's going on. Occasionally, the zip of a low-passing bullet is the only sign of the police appearing behind you when you're least expecting it.

TIME TO GO

Still, the time has come to move on out; a moment somewhat helped by the Tokyo police force's odd insistence on cowering behind their overwhelmingly explosive vehicles – which is perhaps an oversight in their vigorous training regime.

With the squad controls, I can point and click orders for my crew members – telling them to fill certain law enforcers or areas with lead, move them about the place and call them closer to me.

In terms of armaments, meanwhile, I'm carrying a pistol and a higher-powered assault weapon, alongside

Mann alive!
Just how much like Michael Mann films is *Dead Men*? Prepare to feel the *Heat* around the corner...
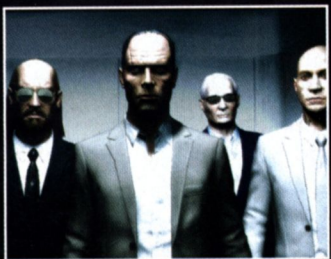
SHARP SUITS
Lynch is in a suit almost identical to that of Bobby DeNiro, while sunglasses are a de rigeur look for an arch-criminal. Kane's grey pastel suit, meanwhile, is a dead ringer (tie aside) for Val Kilmer's – who, let us not pass on mentioning, really shouldn't have ditched the swished back blonde look.

TRIGGER-HAPPY FUZZ
Problems downtown? Then why not ditch years of progressive policing by simply sending shitloads of cops into the danger zone and firing willy-nilly in the direction of the law-breakers? Works every time! Hide behind your car too – bonus points for smashed windscreens!

TOTAL BLOODY CHAOS
Everyday life halted: pedestrians running and screaming, businessmen cowering and cops buying it left, right and centre. The world of Kane, Lynch and Michael Mann is not only seemingly trapped in the mid-'90s, it's also a relatively unsafe place to live.

HONOUR AMONG THIEVES
They may be bad to the bone, but they still look out for each other and drag each other about when one has been mortally wounded. Then again, the huge sack of money that they're carrying in both instances may help the bonding process somewhat. A touching scene nevertheless.

---

what must constitute vast pocketfuls of tear-gas and grenades – switching between them (and swapping weapons with your cohorts) with the analogue-stick-friendly radial inventory system that's so in vogue at the moment.

A sniper appears on an overpass up ahead and shoots me dead – leaving me bloodied, blank-screened and grimacing as I listen to aural flashbacks to even nastier sections of Kane's life. Thankfully though, both myself and my crew are equipped with magic adrenalin syringes, so I'm back on my feet and ready to be shot in the head once more in no time. Further down the street, SWAT teams have appeared brandishing shields and ever more powerful weapons, and we desperately try to fight our way back to our delayed getaway driver and safety.

FEEL THE KANE
It's fun, this horrible urban massacre, but I do wonder if it truly is the next great hurrah in third-person action I want it to be. Cinematic and neat as its art-style may be, there's an odd hum of the last-generation about the game. Sure, certain bits of the environment can be destroyed, but it's no *Stranglehold*, the street combat is intense but not up to *GRAW* standards, and explosions

"I asked for it medium rare!"

aren't up to any action game we've seen in the past year. Squad controls, meanwhile, need prodigious tightening to meet Io's former *Freedom Fighters* benchmark, where ease, fluidity and constant awareness of the whereabouts of squad-members seemed effortless.

As much as I dislike rumbling discontent when there's still time for remedies, an element of caution should be taken with these astounding-looking screenshots, and also a brief note that the game isn't expected to last far beyond the eight-hour mark.

Then again, there's still the iron-clad storyline, a beefy script with decent characters and a catalogue of

destruction in many and varied cinematic guises; from bank jobs to prison breaks and all the way to large-scale tactical warfare, with each of your crew having their own satellite crew members to be launched into the fray.

Add in co-op mode (potentially with whoever's playing as Lynch having manic episodes and needing Kane to knock him back into sanity), and you've still got a highly promising game here – just as long as the control and squad kinks are ironed out. The chaps at Io aren't known for dropping the ball though, so I still have faith. A concept this damn good shouldn't be wasted. **PCZ**

PC ZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

①

②

① LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
How could *LOTR Online* have failed? It could have been a virtual tour around Bree and it would have sold.

② COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS
There's nothing wrong with old-school – and *C&C* is the ultimate in 'not broke, don't fix' franchises.

⑦

⑬

⑦ ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA
How excited must Eidos have been to discover that the fairly obscure *Ancient Wars: Sparta* would be fighting in the shade of *300*?

⑬ THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: SHIVERING ISLES
It's a whole new world... Or a Daedric anthropomorphically geographical representation of insanity, at least.

Still...The clouds are quite lovely, no?

Alas, this time it *wasn't* burnt toast.

COUNTDOWN TO ARMAGEDDON

Liam Neeson confirmed as *Fallout 3* lead voice actor, as stunning artwork emerges

fallout.bethsoft.com | ETA: Probably 2008

SO WHAT CAN we tell from the limited info-burst Bethesda have treated us to? Well, first off, that Liam Neeson is playing your character's father. The star of *Schindler's List*, *Batman Begins* and (cough) *Star Wars: Episode I* has a role, in the words of executive producer Todd Howard, "written with Liam in mind", that "provides the dramatic tone for the entire game". This therefore suggests that Neeson's father character is the initial mission-provider – perhaps even in the role of the underground-vault leaders of the original *Fallout* games. The fact that we're talking about the tone for the entire game also suggests that he doesn't snuff it early on 'Patrick Stewart in *Oblivion*'-style.

Elsewhere, a traditional wasteland pic has emerged – with a familiarly *Fallout*-style wrecked petrol station on the left-hand side. With various nooks and crannies in the landscape that suggest much scope for underground 'dungeoneering' escapades in addition to said barely inhabitable structure, we can certainly expect parts of the third *Fallout* game to be as relentlessly brown as the fans demand. Pretty and dramatic skies aside.

Finally, and most excitingly, there's the image of a bombed-out Washington DC. As entirely accurately predicted by *ZONE*'s Will Porter at the start of the year, the now apparently confirmed eastern-seaboard setting will feature famous US political landmarks and scope for a considerable amount of strokey-bearding on the meaning of humanity, power and how cool the Capitol building looks when it's been explodified.

Can we also have Ron Perlman doing his traditional "War. War never changes" spiel at the start of the game as well, please, Mr Bethesda?
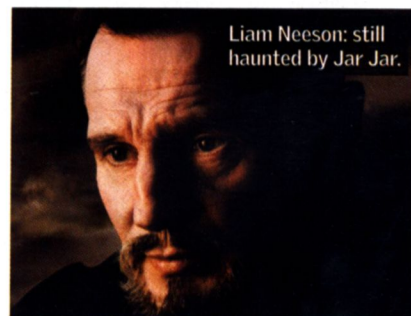
Liam Neeson: still haunted by Jar Jar.

The strength to wield
the arcane arts...

...is all in YOUR mind

DAWN OF MAGIC

OUT APRIL 2007

HTTP://DOM.DEEPSILVER.COM

THE REBIRTH OF
SPEEDBALL 2

Jon Blyth hyperventilates over the return of Brutal Deluxe...

DEVELOPER Kylotonn Entertainment **PUBLISHER** Frogster **WEBSITE** www.speedball2.com/ **PREVIOUSLY IN...** N/A

I'M NOT WELL. The symptoms are a widening of the air passages, and a feeling that although I was breathing out normally, every intake of breath seemed to inflate me a little bit more. It wasn't unpleasant, but it was accompanied by a darker feeling 2ft below. The sensation was like a dozen bakers hurling crusty loaves around in my gut.

The doctor asked me the usual questions. What are you eating, do you smoke, is anyone remaking any dearly beloved games from your youth, have you been on the absinthe. All that stuff. It turns out that someone was remaking *Speedball 2*, and I was suffering from defensive nostalgia.

BACK IN THE DAY

Speedball 2 is nothing short of an all-time 16-bit classic, from the glorious reign of the Bitmap Brothers. It was the days when eight-directional scrolling was something to splash on your box, and the Bitmaps delivered not only a technically impressive game, but one with gameplay that felt so natural and balanced that manuals, and a life outside your bedroom, became

immediately unnecessary. And now, with Mike Montgomery of the Bitmaps in a supervisory role, Kylotonn are remaking the classic retro future sport. A number of questions spring immediately to mind. Mainly, what are they going to do to it? Yann Tambellini, the creative director of the whole shebang, fields this vague question.

"We're going to keep a big part of the classic game – for example, it'll be playable from the top-view," says Tambellini. This is reassuring; during a teaser tour of the 3D arena, I recently had a horrific vision of first-person gameplay. I've even dreamed of playing this version, and it was rubbish. Tambellini continues: "There'll be two modes for players. The older people can have classic gameplay, with the original controls and just the one action button."

WORK IN PROGRESS

So that's the retro die-hards hopefully placated – what's the new stuff? "We thought that 17 years on, we could make the gameplay a bit deeper. So in advanced mode, it'll be playable with keyboard and mouse. Aim with your

mouse and run with the keyboard. You'll be able to jump, shoot during a jump, curve the trajectory of the ball and so on." Is it working? Well, the reason they've not released that much gameplay footage at this stage is because that's exactly what they're working on.

"We're not really at an alpha or beta stage – this kind of game is difficult to fix on a scale like that. We've got playable code, but right now we're working really hard on the gameplay and the online engine." There's a playable version out there right now, in a secret room? "Oh yes," says Tambellini. "Very playable."

LOST IN TRANSLATION

The team development is intact, as you'd imagine, although the stats of the original *Speedball 2* have been adjusted. Ladies, gentlemen and cyborgs will be playing against each other and together, with respective proficiencies in speed, strength and accuracy. There'll be nine to a team, instead of six, and the somewhat esoteric stat of 'intelligence' has disappeared.

"Players have six statistics – like speed, strength, accuracy..." continues Tambellini, but at this point in the interview we then spend a few seconds trying to communicate beyond our common vocabularies, resulting in me finally translating the Frenglish 'stiffness' into 'stamina', a statistic which is explained to me as affecting "the rate at which you lose stiffness". Yikes. That sixth stat suddenly feels unimportant, and we move on to glorious distractions of power-ups – all of which remain intact: bumpers, team improvements, tunnels, the works.

But what was that online engine he mentioned, earlier? The essence of *Speedball*, it seems almost too obvious to say, was sticking two joysticks into your computer, inviting people around

"Ice cream!"

who'd never played it before and beating them. What multiplayer options do Kylotonn have in store for us?

HOW MUCH?

"There will be two online games. The first is just friendly matches, you can play against anyone at any time. The second part of our online matches, with a monthly subscription, will save your matches and give you an online ranking over five different leagues. At the end of the week, you'll be able to advance according to your score." Hmmm. More monthly subscriptions? However, we're assured it'll only be two or three Euros per month, whatever they are.

Talking to Kylotonn calmed the feeling of dread in my guts. They get it, for sure. As to whether they can build a game that'll cut it in 2007 on the sandy foundations of nostalgia; well, we honestly can't wait to find out. **PCZ**

But will cute robots still carry off the injured? They better...

> **"We're going to keep a big part of the classic game, but 17 years on, we're making the gameplay a bit deeper"**
> Yann Tambellini, creative director, Kylotonn Entertainment

As ever, the future of sports will be super-shiny.

The curse of Speedball
When Super Nashwan Power just wasn't enough

Speedball Arena
Originally mooted for 2002, *Speedball Arena* sounds similar to what Kylotonn have in the offing right now: that is, enhanced gameplay and online play. The game was unceremoniously cancelled though, and a nation pushed out its bottom lip.

Speedball 2100
Unlike *Arena*, *Speedball* was released for PlayStation – but it didn't go down well. Was it just a tiny disruption of the gameplay balance? Did the audience want more sophistication? Or was it too slow? Whatever, Kylotonn are aware of their duty to *Speedball 2*.
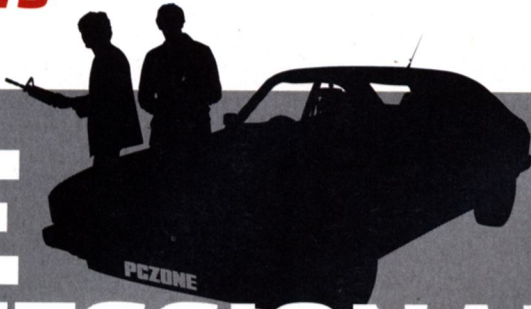
THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

OPERA SINGER NIKOLA had to train for seven years before he could become a professional. "I have to hone the power of the strongest scream I can muster into a comfortable and sustainable sensation that doesn't interfere with my other bodily movements or emotions. I need to be at my coolest in front of thousands of people, judging me, requiring me to be at my absolute best. My body is my tool. I am an opera singer. And I play computer games." And because of all that training, he can spot a dodgy vocal performance a mile off; this guy is impressive, and knows some long words to boot...
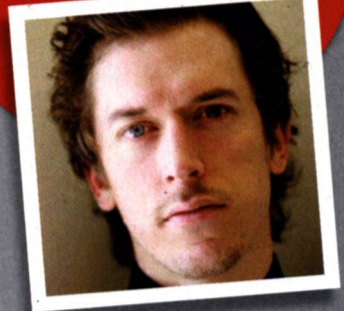
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

"Being an amoral clone, Agent 47 can't be expected to be used to social conversation, nor to have particularly resonant tones – a dark, well-trained voice will get more attention than a high-pitched, unfocused one (which is why many US actors use synthesizers to pitch down their voices). 47, then, has an unfittingly heroic and melodic voice. It's more likely a clone assassin would have a laryngeal dysfunction causing sudden cramps or cracks and a barely audible voice, hinting at emotional repression and breathing problems."

PCZONE ★☆☆☆☆
Sociopaths don't boom

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

"Almost all of your female companions in the game have a contemporary dysfunction that's very common in the US, where the larynx is tensed up far too high in the throat, thereby causing a 'nasal squeeze'. This stems from not breathing right and because they unconsciously want to sound harmless and ingratiating. It's essentially involuntary social programming. Not very fitting for brave adventurers from other dimensions or magic towers! Another character, Zhjaeve, has so little vocal-cord contact in her voice that you'd have to stand right next to her to hear her!"

PCZONE ★★★☆☆
American squawks

ROME: TOTAL WAR

"Commanders in *Rome* hold rallying speeches of great musical arc, and there's a good tempo to the phrasing. On the other hand, I still found the voice of the General too weak and contemporary before battles. Why do they hire actors to do these things who don't possess strong enough voices? These days, actors are trained to sound good on a microphone, and even spoken theatre is miked. That's pitiful. How are you going to portray great military leaders if you can't produce a sustainable, impressive sound?"

PCZONE ★★★☆☆
No more heroes any more
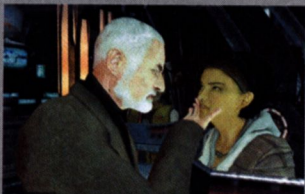
HALF-LIFE 2

"Freeman has clearly suffered such a shock that he's lost the ability to speak. This is both credible and tragic. In terms of other characters, the sound often distorts credibly when the other actors are shouting. I like that. There's an analogous sensation in it. The strange instrumental quality to the alien 'voices' also lends an emotional impact to say that 'we are not so different after all'. I can sense a deep compassion in the way Valve have produced this game."

PCZONE ★★★★☆
Valve almost victorious

BIOFORGE

"It may be a very old game, but the voice-acting is excellent throughout – even the synthesized AI. The fact that there's a cyborg machine supporting the inner organs of Lex, and he's in a state of frightened confusion, is palpable in his voice all throughout the game – and in the reactions of other characters to his appearance. The blue-skinned prisoner who's just lost his arm at the start of the game is still one of the strongest, best-realised and most disturbing characters in computer games ever."

PCZONE ★★★★★
Unexpected glory

WINNER: BIOFORGE

The man from the Royal Opera House has raised a classic from the grave: *BioForge*, with all the 'beat a man to death with a severed limb' joy that it entails. Who'd have thought it?

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:

*Glass-bottle manufacture *Torches *Crates *Keys and locks *The weather *Vending machines *The paranormal *PC monitors *Nanotechnology *Boats

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

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WORLD FORGE

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

Can **Eastern Europeans** be trusted? Not if the Internet has anything to do with it, as the entirety of the Web recently went on a **stolen texture-driven witchhunt** to oust **GSC Gameworld** from its happy pedestal of *STALKER*-praise. Y'see, GSC Gameworld had **allegedly nicked** lighting textures from *Doom 3* and water textures from *Half-Life 2*. The evidence? Why, only shared water files, and a filename called **lights_impflash.dds**! And as we all know, aren't there imps in *Doom 3* which are **prone to flashing**? The **sword of Damocles** fell squarely upon the *STALKER* creators' **rotten heads** – guilty as charged, and a sign of the piecemeal way the delayed Ukrainian title had been put together. The **truth**, however, is **slightly different**. The lights_impflash texture just happened to stand for an 'impact flash', and both Valve and GSC happened to use textures from a library sold by middleware firm Marlin Studios. The revelation, however, came after **the online trial and execution** of the company – whose **damning silence** turned out to be one of **bemused innocence**. Ahem...

Meanwhile, **race relations**, always a bit of a **prickly subject** what with people being racist **quite a lot** still, have been prodded by the online Beta of **Acclaim's** dance MMO, *Dance!*. Essentially, skin tone can only be changed to **non-caucasian** through earning in-game currency, or as one bemused forumite asked: **"I gotta pay to be black?"** In response to this, a player-moderator, clearly **not skilled in political correctness**, explained: "Black is an EXTRA feature. It makes your person look unique, **so that is EXTRA**. Therefore, you have to PAY for it." Thankfully though, an Acclaim employee rushed in: "As an optional character upgrade, we must put this in the item shop for players to acquire. This is the only way to offer the African-American heads. However, it should be EASILY accessible to all, so we made it just **1 POINT** in the shop (basically, FREE)." Reports that **everyone then held hands** and sang *Imagine* by John Lennon were unconfirmed.

> **"Race relations, always a prickly topic, have been prodded by the Beta of Acclaim's MMO *Dance!*"**

It's similar to *Freedom Fighters* in theme, but with fascists instead of commies.
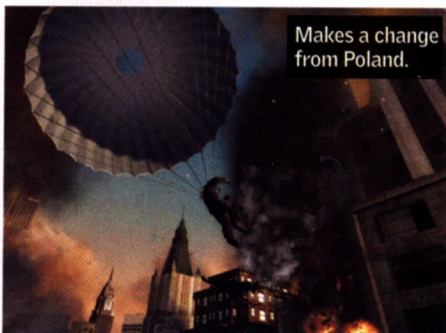
Makes a change from Poland.

This could *really* have happened. Maybe.

THE KIDS ARE ALL REICH

Nazis go stateside in *Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty*

www.codemasters.com/fallofliberty/ | ETA: Q4

DESPITE THIS GAME being one in which the Nazis fared a little better during the war and sent a whole load of zeppelins, Stukas and prototype weapons (including the house-sized Maus tank) across the Atlantic to besiege New York and cripple the Americans, Spark Unlimited are trying to maintain some degree of realism. At least that's what they claimed when asked if robo-Hitler would be making an appearance (he's not).

We've been shown the opening level from a team best known for console varieties of *Call Of Duty*, a sequence of events so stuffed with action and heavily scripted sequences as to be all at once laughable and epic. On the one hand you've got scenery being destroyed in such a way as to blatantly lead you down a specific route, but then you've also got Luftwaffe bombers spinning out of control and smashing into the sides of Manhattan's architecture. It's undeniably cinematic, if a little shallow.

The game begins atop a work-in-progress skyscraper, as you, a construction worker, attempt to reach street level before the Nazis get you. Grappling with them lets you chuck them off rooftops or smash their faces into tellies, or once you've found a gun you could just do them in the old-fashioned way with bullets and the like. Just don't count on Cyborg Himmler showing up.

The man who makes Football Manager realistic

RAY HOUGHTON – IRISH FOOTBALL SUPREMO TURNED TACTICS ADVISOR ON *FOOTBALL MANAGER* AND *FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE*

Ray Houghton had a glittering career at Liverpool and some star-turns in the Irish side that include *that* stunning strike against Italy back in the 1994 World Cup. He now balances a career of amiable punditry with ensuring that all of the 'funny' is placed within Sports Interactive's funny old game...

So how did you first get involved with Sports Interactive?

"I was working for a football agency over in Berkshire, and the lad I was working with was a big fan of *Championship Manager*. We were looking for young players to bring in, and maybe sign up for clubs in England and he showed me that in the game, the lads at SI had a list of all the top-graded youngsters. At that time, English clubs were taking on a lot of players from Scandinavia, so we thought if we could tap into that, it'd suit our portfolio. I was only at that place a few more weeks before I went on to Crystal Palace, but I still thought we could utilise the game for our own benefit – it was good publicity for Sports Interactive and also helped us out."

When did they call you in to help out?

"I kept in touch with them, and they said they wanted to take the game from a text game to having a match engine. I was interested and came to have a look. I was a bit surprised really, seeing how it was going from text to visuals on a football field. At that point, when you put in certain things – like picking up certain players from a set-piece – your players were taking it literally. So when a ball got kicked down the line they'd all run out of formation, leaving the whole of the middle of the goal open. Someone could just run through the middle and score, and you're thinking 'that shouldn't happen'. It was about going back to basics, trying to say 'this is how a full back would operate' 'this is how a centre-half would operate'. The basics of football."

Where do you see the *Football Manager* match engine going in the future?

"We want to move it on. At the moment, you still can't show contact – you can't see a tackle. Say you and I went up for a ball, you won the header and knocked me over – you can't see things like the player on the floor. Because of the mechanics at the minute, it's difficult to implement – but as computers get quicker and can hold onto a lot more megabytes or whatever, then we'll be able to take it on further."

Is it true you play in the Sports Interactive five-a-side team?

"We played today! We won 3-1, one of our lads Keith scored three today. He's a coder. They've all got a great attitude and we always have a great laugh. The lads we play against, usually when I'm playing they get their best five out and say: 'Look at that fella over there, he can't play anymore!' That usually spurs me on to be honest."

The big French clogger.
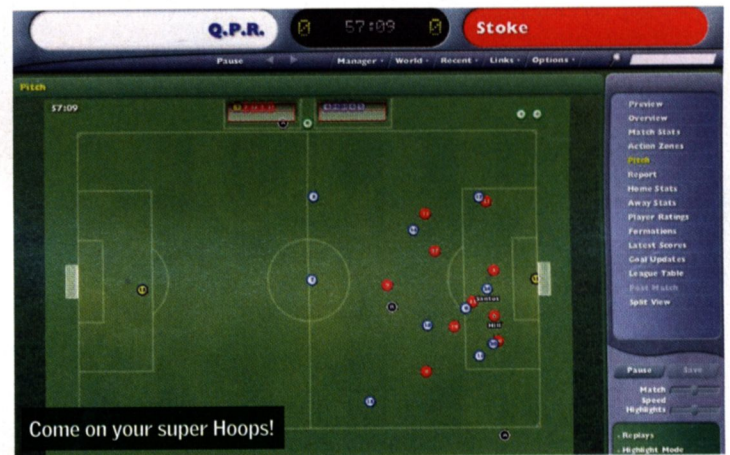
Come on your super Hoops!

tat zone

Don't go into that tat-door! Because there's something down there...

We're so swamped by unwanted promotional material here at *PC ZONE* Towers that we flog it on eBay under the tag of PCZoners. All profits go to charideee, all manner of game-related tat is given a good home by you, and somewhere, somehow, a rainbow sparkles over the avenue named Goodwill. Our hearts are warmed, our coffers swell and that XXL T-shirt finally has a purpose in life. If you want to buy into the gaming giving this month, here's what's on offer...

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

THIS MONTH'S TAT

USB HUMPING DOG
We've got two, and although we'll keep one, two is one too many.

DOFUS ART BOOK
French scribblings from a French MMOG. Very *Dogtanian*-esque.

SECOND LIFE: THE OFFICIAL GUIDE
If you've got your first life figured out, try this.

AFC WIMBLEDON SHIRT
XL. Not for sale in Milton Keynes.

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	MARILLION STUFF Proving that Marillion aren't all about Fish. Or chicken.	£11.50	8
	ANOTHER GUN BAG Bags always do well, since they're the only useful item we ever get to flog...	£22.00	5
	SPORTS INTERACTIVE LADIES L T-SHIRT One pence? One single copper new pence? Are you taking the piss or what? FFS.	£0.01	1
	RIPPED COPY OF *LEFT BEHIND* **NOVEL** Maybe unbought because those interested had already got their express passes to heaven.	£0.00	0

COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS

Company Of Heroes was the strategy game of last year – brutal, brilliant and full of brawn. Can the sequel reach similar heights? *Suzy Wallace* tracks its progress...

THE LOWDOWN

Follow-up to the highest-scoring RTS of recent times	✓
Focus on strong single-player experience	✓
Features the British	✓
Without embarrassing cockney accents	✓
Can it live up to the original?	✗

ETA AUTUMN

DEVELOPER Relic Entertainment **PUBLISHER** THQ **WEBSITE** www.relic.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** N/A

SILENCE FALLS over the table of a rather posh waterfront restaurant in Vancouver, where I'm sat surrounded by various members of the team from Relic Entertainment. "It's a moose." "What? Are you kidding me? Look at its nose! That's no moose. It's a caribou!"

Canadians, eh? Pretty much since we sat down, they've been comedically bickering, and I've just inadvertently triggered the next argument by innocently asking which animal features on the back of a Canadian quarter. Over the following hours, not only does my knowledge of horned ungulates increase tenfold, but I'm witness to debates on the value of local-language voiceovers and whether the representation of Canadians in *South Park* is accurate, and I learn that

the producer of Relic said he "wanted to crap his pants" when he heard the V1 rocket in *Company Of Heroes*. By the time we reach the end of the meal, I'm left with no doubt in my mind that the new breed of World War II RTS creators are no longer your stereotypical Polish bespectacled bedroom coders. Rather, they're hugely passionate, loud, funny and authoritative on the differences between elk, moose and caribou.

And that passion's proved a major asset, because *Company Of Heroes* is head and shoulders above its various competitors in that most populated of genres to exist on PC – the WWII RTS.

While Relic's experience from previously successful titles such as *Homeworld 2* and *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* has undoubtedly helped, they're still competing in a pretty crowded field. It's something that the developers are keenly aware of. "On *Company Of Heroes*, we really wanted to

reinvigorate the RTS genre," says lead designer Josh Mosqueira. "There were three key areas that we concentrated on: real soldiers, real battlefields and a compelling cinematic experience. Now we think we've achieved that, we're looking to the future. *Company Of Heroes* was always a starting point. We want to create a living franchise."

SOLDIERING ON

Mosqueira continues: "Four years ago, almost to the day, we sat down and said, 'OK, we're working on *Company Of Heroes*. What do we want to do with this? What are our big goals?' For us, our goal is to become the definitive World War II strategy platform and eventually to become the definitive strategy platform, period."

To most, that would sound like a pretty ambitious aim. But *COH* clearly demonstrated to the world that Relic are more than capable of achieving

> "*COH* was always just the starting point. We're looking to the future now, and to creating a living franchise..."
> Josh Mosqueira, lead designer, Relic Entertainment

their lofty ambitions. Garnering critical acclaim across the globe, it picked up awards left, right and centre, scoring an impressive 93% in *ZONE*, and put Relic firmly on the map as one of the premier RTS developers around.

But while you might be scratching your head wondering just what these guys could do to improve upon the highly acclaimed *COH*, they're very far from mystified. "We're perfectionists, we pick apart our games and we're actually pretty brutal," says Mosqueira. "So there's a whole ton of things that we want to improve and enhance to really create the best RTS that we can. Obviously one of the things that we learned from feedback was that people wanted more armies."

And so in stalks *Opposing Fronts*. A standalone expansion to *Company Of Heroes*, it will feature two brand new armies, the British and the Panzer Elite, and two full

"Drei, zwei, eins... Achtung, bitches!"

campaigns, the Battle for Caen and Operation Market Garden. But don't be fooled into thinking that Relic are just going to add a bunch of cheap content. As Mosqueira points out: "There's actually more content in *OF* than in the first *COH*, but we're making sure it has the same quality bar, or even higher."

DAD'S ARMY

The first thing that Relic are really keen to stress is just how different the two new armies will feel. Mosqueira explains the reasoning behind this.

"It's not like a fantasy or sci-fi game where you can add hover-tanks or demons. All the armies share common units, so our goal is really to make sure that when you're commanding the British or the Panzer Elite, they feel unique and distinct. In terms of looks, characteristics, abilities and tactics, every army has a unique essence that sets them apart from the others."

As the only journalist present from the UK, a patriotic smile spreads across my face when the British army appears on screen. Art director Nick Carota

explains their visual style. "The British are extremely straightforward and efficient, and very practical – they endured a lot of suffering in the war. We're trying to represent that in their vehicle design, so there's a lot of gigantic bolts and it's like they melted down a whole bunch of cast-iron frying pans to build this Cromwell tank, which they did do." But the differences aren't just limited to their design...

British lieutenants and captains serve as the army's lynchpins, offering nearby units offensive and defensive bonuses respectively, and in contrast to previous squads, they're the only British units able to become veterans. The Brits will also be able to call upon masses of artillery to back them up, delivering everything from counter-barrages to a general pounding of an area. But the Tommies' key advantage is their defensive ability. Forget *COH*'s measly sandbags; our plucky privates specialise in digging in and weathering the storm. Slit trenches offer excellent cover and are able to withstand direct hits, mortar/anti-tank/anti-aircraft pits

can be dug out to provide specialised defences and artillery emplacements can also be constructed.

Another unique British trait (as well as, presumably, the ability to whistle jauntily), is the ability to pack up their barracks and move it to the front line, putting an emphasis on picking out key sectors, moving there and then digging in. Relic also lets on that their command tree will feature the Royal Canadian Artillery, the Royal Commandos and the Royal Scots Engineers, although further details are scarce.

With all the defensive options on offer, playing as the Brits will offer a hugely different experience from what we've seen before. And before you cringe at the thought of all those Jamie

Oliver soundalikes, you'll be happy to know that Relic are working hard on making the voiceovers as believable as possible, with auditions being conducted to search out the right talent. Which is great news indeed, guvnor.

ZE GERMANS

The Panzer Elite are a different matter entirely. Carota explains their design. "Visually, they're very badass. They've got the stealth look to all their vehicles. They had some of the coolest camo in the war, they loved their leather jackets and some of their half-tracks were like the Batmobile. We've just had a field-day working with their stuff."

Contrasting starkly with the Brits, they're a vehicle-based army with little

"I regret nothing, Britischer shviiine!"
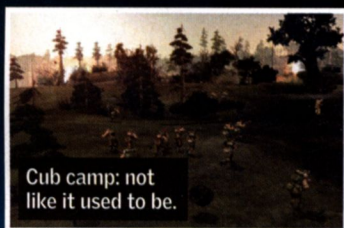
Cub camp: not like it used to be.

"As we're in a church, let us spray (bullets)."

"Is that the AA? I think my camshaft's buggered."

"Last one to the trench is a rotten egg!"

THE STORY SO FAR...

RELIC ENTERTAINMENT

relic
ENTERTAINMENT

Relic are go
Alex Garden and Luke Moloney set up shop above a club in Vancouver.
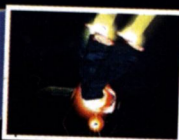
Space exploration
Homeworld, their first title, is released to critical acclaim, scoring a hefty 94% in *ZONE*.

Heavy assault
Relic serve up some brutal combat with the release of *Warhammer 40K: Dawn Of War*.

War hero
Company Of Heroes is released and becomes a huge success, picking up a cool 93% in *ZONE*.

1997   1999   2004   2006

to no static defences. Instead, when troops are garrisoned into one of their vehicles, the soldiers will take up proper offensive positions within it, shooting their weapons from its relatively safe confines, essentially turning the thing into a huge chunk of mobile armour.

Some of the game's most powerful vehicles are controlled by these guys, including the Jagdpanther, which Relic liken to a moving bunker, explaining that it once took five US Sherman tanks to disable one. Their command trees should also prove intriguing, with Luftwaffe ground troops, tank hunters and scorched earth being the three options on offer.

Let's face it, we've all played WWII titles as the Americans or the British, but this opportunity to see the war from the other side throws up a refreshingly different set of challenges. Mosqueira reasons: "It's one thing to always play

as the Allies, but at a certain point I think people get a little tired of that and they want something different. Recalling the soldiers' story from the German perspective was important.

"At this point in the war, most German troops knew the end was in sight, so how do you deal with that? You're fighting for your homeland so that what happened at the end of World War I doesn't repeat itself. So there's some really interesting drama. But at the same time, we have to do it in a respectful manner. We make sure there are researchers looking into things – all of our scripts are sent over to Germany to be vetted."

DOING THE CAEN-CAEN

Perhaps even more so than in *COH*, super-strong single-player experiences are a prime aim for *Opposing Fronts*.

"We're aiming for the same length in total as the original *COH*, so expect to have a good 15-20 hours of gameplay," says Mosqueira. "As you start, you'll get to choose the Caen campaign as the British or the Market Garden campaign

Multiplayer mayhem
Here's what Relic have got planned for the multiplayer side of things...

Having picked up some tips from *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War's* expansion, *Dark Crusade*, Relic have decided to make *Opposing Fronts* a standalone expansion. But that won't affect your ability to play with *COH* players online. Oh no. If you already own *COH* and then purchase *Opposing Fronts*, you'll be able to play as any of the four sides – Americans or British versus the Wehrmacht or the Panzer Elite. If you own only one and not the other, you'll be limited to the two armies in your version. But Relic are looking to add some team-play elements to the mix this time round too – Quinn Duffy, the senior designer for multiplayer, says: "We're looking at things like making abilities shared between teams that we didn't in the past. Things like the 'for the Fatherland' ability on the Axis side, for instance, would work for both players as opposed to just being an individual ability, so again, we're trying to patch those team-play elements and get these guys really playing well together."

as the Panzer Elite. You'll be able to swap, so if you've played a couple of missions in one, you'll be able to start up the other one as well. It's important to know that it's not a mirror campaign; each campaign is entirely separate and has its own missions, its own maps and its own objectives."

In Caen, when the Allies arrived, Hitler had some of his best SS Panzer divisions placed around the city, which led to some of the largest tank battles fought during the war. Here, playing

as the Brits, this intense urban warfare takes place among some of the most devastated landscapes that *COH* has offered, with barely a wall left standing in the entire city. There's also a truly inspired setting in the form of the innards of a blasted cathedral, complete with missing roof and crumbling walls.

Carota mentions a particularly nice little touch: "In all of our cities in *OF*, you can actually see in the distance the cities that you're going to go to. When you've completed the first ➔

"Er, I think my gun's on fire!"
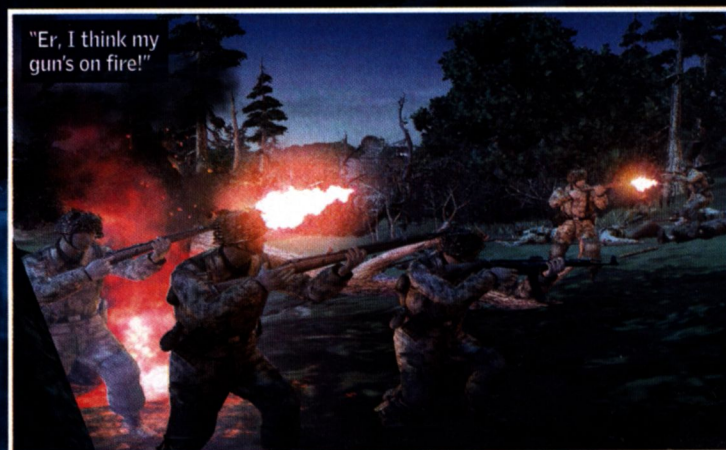
Watch out for the big things that go 'bang'!

> "In *Opposing Fronts*, I want every level you play to be truly memorable"
> Nick Carota, art director, Relic Entertainment

When not in WWII, Europe actually looks a look less dusty than this.
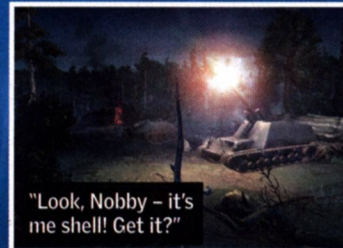
"Look, Nobby – it's me shell! Get it?"

"That beret is *so* you, Sarge."

mission, you're actually looking at Caen – and during the mission you can look over and see it, Carpiquet or Hill 112."

MARKET RESEARCH

The other campaign, Operation Market Garden, in which the Germans attempt to repel the largest airborne assault in history, offers its own opportunities.

"It's important for me and the rest of the art team to visit a new place like Holland, because we're getting pretty sick of Normandy," laughs Carota. He continues: "Playing as the Panzer Elite in the Market Garden campaign gives you a chance to see the conflict from the other side. After all, you do play both sides, and that was a tremendous advantage in the narrative, to be able to allow a sense of empathy to appear."

Whatever campaign you're playing though, Relic are working hard to make each level unique. Carota explains: "In this game, I'm really concerned with making sure that every level you play is memorable, so that when players go and talk about it with their friends, there won't be any confusion between different missions. They'll be like, 'You know, Caen counter-attack, at night when the lightning's coming, and then the King Tiger rolls in. Oh, I crapped my
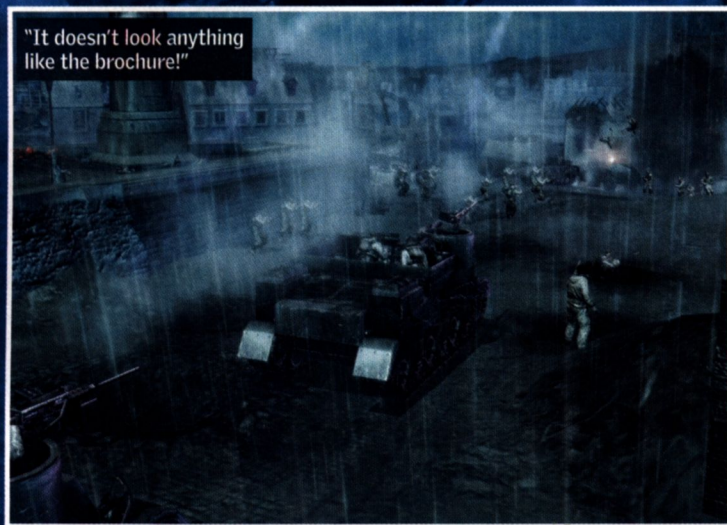
"It doesn't look anything like the brochure!"

pants!" As you can tell, the crapping of pants is a big deal at the home of Relic.

FIGHTING TALK

War has been described as 90% boredom, 10% terror. With the former in mind, *OF* will offer a wide variety of combat scenarios, including the counter-attack missions seen in levels such as Carentan, epic tank battles, elite infantry skirmishes, fighting over bridges, a level in which troops and tanks arrive via

gliders and lots of conflict in the forest. Mosqueira adds: "In *COH*, we had very little forest-based fighting, but now we've implemented it properly." Hippies might want to look away now, as it's pretty certain that a lot of trees will snuff it. Mosqueira also quips that we'll "get to see what happens when a Sherman attacks a windmill". I'm putting my money on the Sherman.

Other additions will include "tactical sound" (enabling the astute player to

recognise the type of machinery firing from its unique sound effects), a full selection of weather effects, complete day-to-night transition (finally enabling missions that say "hold the town until daylight") and a complete overhaul of the vehicle AI.

Carota continues: "We spent all this time doing the believable squad movement, and the vehicles frustrated us, because we had big plans for these formations, but just didn't have the time to implement it in *COH*. Visually, seeing intelligent behaviour from your units is very important, and the believability factor was quashed a lot when you saw a whole bunch of vehicles doing the dirty."

SQUARE OFF

As my presentation comes to an end, Mosqueira loads up a level to give us a quick demonstration of the two new armies in battle. Under the cover of darkness and a stinging rain, a couple of British squads cautiously stalk across open terrain to capture a resource point, with a Cromwell tank and their lieutenant standing watch. Once the point's been captured, Mosqueira has one squad build a slit trench while the other takes cover behind the standard sandbags. Lightning flashes overhead,

You either Caen or you Caen't
A look at some of the key stages of the British campaign. Damn good show, what?

CAEN: Welcome to Caen in 1944 – a devastated shell of a town with barely a building standing, featuring a huge cathedral that you'll fight inside.

CARPIQUET: As you attempt to take over this airport, you'll find yourself fighting between planes in hangars and across a massive runway.

HILL 112: A critical objective for both forces, this hill witnessed some very fierce fighting. Seems like everyone was a bit partial to hills in WWII.

OPERATION GOODWOOD: Featuring rolling hills and plenty of countryside, this was the largest tank battle that the British Army have fought.

Just another Friday night in New Cross...

Will Daz get out these stains?

Tanks a lot
These guys *really* like their military vehicles...

Yes, in their *office*.

Here at *ZONE* Towers, we often return from a press trip with tales of how cool the offices of a particular developer are. Valve have a room full of sweets and Io Interactive have a hammock, dog and bikes for riding around the office. Returning from Vancouver though, I was pretty sure that Relic were in the running for coolest reception ever. Stepping out of their swish elevators and onto the custom Relic carpet, you're greeted by an 8ft wooden *Warhammer* character guarding the stairs. But even more arresting is the tank bursting through the wall on the other side. Yes, that's right. A tank. The bar has been raised...

illuminating the forces at work. Minutes later, a couple of the half-track vehicles of the Panzer Elite roll into the square, with German soldiers leaning out of them, firing their Panzerschrecks at the Cromwell tank. However, they don't last long against the heavily dug-in British.

Time to even things up a bit. The steady rumble of a tank fills the air, and suddenly one of the walls of the square crumbles before the might of a Panther. Panzer Elite troops flood through the gap in the wall and the scene descends into chaos, with machine-gun fire filling the air and explosions rocking the screen. Mosqueira switches back to the British to call in some help courtesy of the Royal Canadian Artillery. Soon, shells begin to drop from the sky and the battle really heats up.

Panning around, the units that took cover behind the sandbags have been totally wiped out and the Cromwell's been decimated by the superior Panther. All that remains is a handful of plucky Brits in the slit trench withstanding hit after hit. When only one is left, it looks like the battle's going the way of the Germans. Suddenly, reinforcements arrive, and a neat bit of flanking exposes the weaker parts of the Panther's armour to the two newly arrived tanks, while

the infantry reinforcements mop up any German stragglers. A moment to feel patriotic if ever I saw one.

HALF THE BATTLE
It's an exhilarating display that serves to remind us all just why the original *Company Of Heroes* was such a notable success. After all, how many other RTS games can you list where just the act of watching someone else play a level gets your heart racing?

The problem with follow-ups to games that are so successful is the difficulty of matching the intensity and expectations of the first title. But my trip to Vancouver has cemented in my head the fact that the team at Relic are one of the most passionate I've ever met. Couple that with a love for their subject matter that borders on scary and a harsh eye for self-criticism and you can begin to see the potential for *Opposing Fronts* to be hugely successful. And if this is only the beginning of the *COH* follow-ups, then Relic seem to be firmly in line to live up to their goals.

The definitive WWII strategy title? We thought they were there already to be honest – but won't stop them bettering it if they feel inclined. Just don't mention the moose... **PCZ**

ARGUE THE TOSS
THIS MONTH: FOOTBALL MANAGER
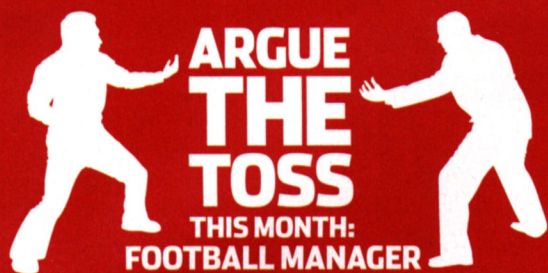
Dear Will,

I'm baffled, Will. I've watched you playing *Football Manager Live*, and I've heard you making all of the noises that a person who's enjoying himself would make. And yet, I've seen the happy-glass glaze that fudges over your eyes when other people talk football; you're like a family dog who doesn't know which parent he should be listening to, you're just thrilled to not be in the garden. How in Pippa Funnell's name can you be enjoying yourself over there?
Jon 'Log' Blyth

Dear Log,

What you're suggesting is that I know very little about football, but endeavour to appear to have opinions about it so I can win friends and influence people. This isn't true at all. You're essentially just jealous because I'm a proper man who drinks lager and has an opinion about the current state of the England team, while you're too busy sipping from a flute of champagne and fluttering your eyelids at the bar staff to care. I know lots about football, and use my knowledge to win at online football games. This isn't even an argument – it's a mild insult.
Will Porter

Dear Will,

I'll indulge your fantasy that you're a clued-up geezer for a second, even though I've heard nothing from your lips to suggest any knowledge of football beyond the fact it's a conjunction of the words 'foot' and 'ball'. I'm out and proud about my ignorance of the stupid kick-sport, and it pains me to watch you deluding yourself like this. You can't be enjoying yourself. There's no fun in that statistic-spattered database for people like us, Will. Come away. There's Nazis need shooting. Look. I've got a Nazi. Come and shoot him, Will. Nazibangs! JB

Dear Log,

I am enjoying myself. The joy of *FM* doesn't lie in knowing shitloads about offside traps (although it would help), but in sustaining what you claim to be my 'clued-up geezerdom'. I know an average amount about football, and find fun in fiddling with the teamlist on the off chance that my tactics work. Admittedly, when I'm getting my arse kicked I simply press the buttons that say 'Go striking crazy!', but that's true to say of most *FM* players. WP

Dear Will,

Oh, I give up. I just hate football. If you put them in tunics and gave them fireballs I'd be with you, but the fact is you're saving up for Wayne Rooney and that's the most depressing summary of a game I can imagine. JB

Dear Log,

Hurrah! My masculinity is secured for at least another month then. Babycham, dear? WP

A build-up of static electricity is inevitable in plastic caves.

DARK MASK

Ensure that it's still not winter with
NWN2: Mask Of The Betrayer ETA: autumn | www.nwn2.com

HISTORICALLY, SINGLE-PLAYER *Neverwinter Nights* hasn't truly come into its own until expansions and modules turn up – so hopefully, the story of *Mask Of The Betrayer* will top the already nifty characterisation on show in *NWN2*.

It's after the climactic battle with fantasy cliché supremo the King of Shadows, and you've awakened deep beneath the Earth's surface surrounded by nastiness. Who is the betrayer? Who is the betrayee? What sort of masks do they wear? All these questions and more shall be answered – alongside access to character levels that developers Obsidian are labelling 'epic' to make them sound cooler, new races, companions, weapons, ostentatious trousers and other such fantasy expansion conveyor-belt fare. Hurrah!

"I remember when all this were low-res textured fields..."

RESUME OPERATIONS

Non-Bohemia Interactive *Flashpoint* sequel

ETA:2008 | www.codemasters.com/flashpoint2

WHEN BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE and Codemasters had a bout of grumpy slapsies, one toddled off with their clever programming abilities and made *Armed Assault* – while the other sat around looking glumly at a game brand suddenly without its creator.

Still, making the best of things, Codies went on to amass the biggest internal development team the company had ever known and created their own military opus.

Now in the open and scheduled for release next year, Op Flash 2 will take place in the forests and hills of modern-day conflict. What's more, it'll contain the largest traversable FPS landscape ever. Which presumably means 'bigger than *Armed Assault*!' if you read between the lines.

5 INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT TWO WORLDS

The developers call it an *Oblivion*-beater. Should you care?
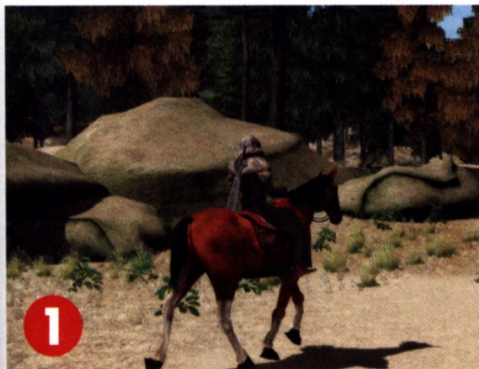
1

TELL YOUR FRIENDS

If you want to follow more of a solo quest, you can – but part of *Two World's* charm is that if you want company, up to ten players can play in the same world via the wonders of the Web. These MMO dynamics let you team up with mates for specially designed quests, scrap between yourselves or set up horse races if you're up to mount-owning status.

2

FAR AND WIDE

The graphics aren't quite *Oblivion* – *Two Worlds* doesn't have that jaw-drop effect. The map, however, is vast – with 30sq km to pace around questing in and about 25 more below ground. You know the drill: desert, rivers, tumbledown villages and barren rock-faces. Squint and you could be in *Gothic 3*. Actually, you probably wouldn't have to squint all that much.

3

IT'S UP TO YOU, BABY

The way your actions affect the gameworld are far more noticeable in *Two Worlds* than in Bethesda's effort. Your popularity with the humans/dwarves/serpents/orcs/elves affects whether you get certain quests, and you have to decide who you favour. Do you help a city withstand an orc siege, or whistle innocently while nudging the gates open?

4

WORRYSOME WILDLIFE

In our early play of the game, *Two World's* rolling green hills contained a few too many things that could bite chunks from our roleplay corpse, but the hack-and-slash-meets-tactics nature of combat was definitely interesting. The addition of hunter snares and traps, plus a handy right-click fireball certainly add some drama to the mix. It's a major departure from the developer's last title – super-techie future RTS *Earth 2160*.

5

PRETTY LADY

The CEO of the developers Reality Pump, Alexandra Constandache, has put herself into the game as the long-lost sister the lead character is questing after. Far from being shy and retiring, she's been rendered in both the game and marketing bumf as a big-boobed sex-lady with a tendency towards self-harm. If anyone senior from Bethesda is listening, *PC ZONE* believe this is the way forward for RPG promotion.
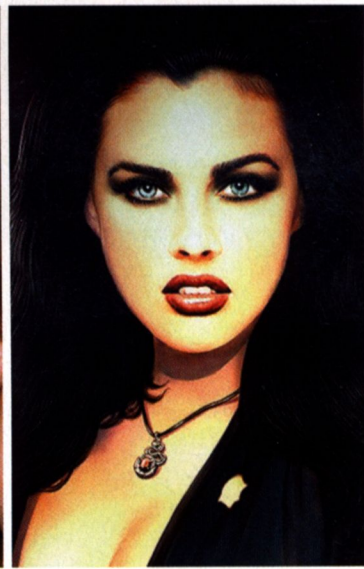
SHOULD YOU GIVE A SHIT?

The jury is defiantly out on *Two Worlds*. On paper it sounds amazing, but whether the game can surmount its current dull translation and truly engage players is yet to be seen. As for the MMO stuff – well, you can't deny that the idea of bringing friends into a Cyrodiil-like play area is an attractive one. Colour us intrigued, but use weak pastel colours rather than anything particularly striking.

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS...
OVERLORD

Steve Hogarty is suffering a severe case of déjà vu...

DEVELOPER Triumph Studios **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** www.codemasters.com/overlord/ **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 178

Roast pumpkin, anyone?

You fat bastard.

THE LOWDOWN

It's like *Fable*	✓
It's like *Pikmin*	✓
Minions don't get annoying	✓
Clever, minion-based puzzles involved	✓
May not have lasting appeal	✗

ETA SUMMER

YOU WON'T GET through any articles about *Overlord* without reading the words *Fable* and *Pikmin* at least eight times, but Triumph Studios' action-RPG really is, very simply, *Fable* mixed with *Pikmin*. Not since *The Matrix: Path Of Neo* (issue 163, "shite") has a game been so describable. Sometimes, writing about games is *easy*.

From *Fable* it takes its art style, the wonderful colourful world, the exaggerated characters and ear-stabbingly enthusiastic voice-acting. You play an evil lord, resurrected to reclaim the world after being vanquished by seven valiant heroes. These heroes have become grotesque representations of the equally numerous deadly sins, such as a fat-bastard gluttonous halfling and a gold-obsessed dwarf. As an evil lord, you must destroy the seven heroes, rebuild your tower and establish yourself as the almighty leader of all you observe.

YUMMY, EVIL!

The world itself is semi-freeform, composed of several linear areas and sub-domains threaded together. Depending on your actions, people will either scream in terror as you come bounding evilly over the hills, or praise you as their saviour. Either way, you're evil, and any good actions you carry out are always with a view to future gains, like ripe, tender virgins full of gold.

From the *Pikmin* component of the already tired 'this is *Fable* mixed with *Pikmin*' summary come your minions, a group of gremlin allies who do your bidding, all the while gurgling and chirping with their little gremlin voices. Nintendo's puzzler had you using your tiny followers to collect items and solve puzzles, and likewise with *Overlord* you use your minions to turn wheels and flick switches (god forbid you do some work yourself). Plus, with a clever use of gamepad analogue sticks they begin to feel like an extension of your main character. Keyboard and mouse implementation is actually quite good at the moment, but a gamepad will no doubt be ideal.

RAINBOW MINIONS

Of course, the minions are *Overlord's* biggest draw. You slowly gain the ability to control more and more of the things, moving on from simple brown minions to specialised ones. Red minions are impervious to fire and can launch fireballs, green minions are stealthy assassins and blue minions can heal and revive their dead friends.

Run them through some furniture and crates with a sweep of the mouse and they smash and destroy everything in their path. They'll pick up useful debris like pots to use as helmets, or wood to use as weapons, or if they find gold or healing potions, they'll run back to offer it to you with a raspy-voiced (and startlingly enough, not annoyingly repetitive): "For yoooouu!"

Order them to attack an enemy and they'll swarm all over them, jumping on their victim's back and overpowering them with numbers. The effectiveness

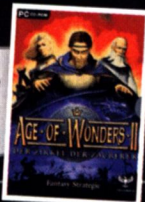He goes down a storm at kids' parties.

Age Of Wonders
A turn-based strategy game that's often likened to *Master Of Magic*.

1999

Age Of Wonders 2: The Wizard's Throne
A turn-based strategy game in a fantasy setting.

2002

Age Of Wonders: Shadow Magic
A third turn-based strategy game in a fantasy setting.

2003

Overlord
A turn-based... Oh no wait, it's an action-RPG like *Fable* mixed with *Pikmin*.

2007

> The melding of different game ideas makes *Overlord* a meaty prospect, and one that's swimming in a delicious sauce of neat touches

Killing spree

You see, Spree is the name of a town in *Overlord*, and you're killing the residents of that town. Clever, eh?

This is what's known as a minion gate, and that number you can see is how many minions you can summon forth from its fiery depths.

Fifteen minions should do the trick. They all come flying out with joyous screams, a little bit like the gremlins from *Gremlins*.

To tool them up a bit, have them raid a house. They set the place on fire, and use anything they can find as weapons or armour.

And then order them to slaughter a few sheep. That'll show this one-horse town who's the evil overlord around here.

Your personal jester praises you after successful quests.

With a maximum of 50 minions, boss-fights become massive pile-ons.

of your minions increases when they pick up weapons, so the longer you can keep them alive the better they become. You can get stuck in with your own axe too, although in many situations you've got to use your little 'uns to get to places you can't reach.

GOOD BOY

On the face of it, it's a slightly unoriginal morality 'em up, but the melding of these two different gaming ideas works well enough to make *Overlord* a meaty prospect in its own right, swimming in a delicious sauce of neat touches. For instance, command four of your underlings to carry a sack of treasure back to your tower and they'll get to it; call three of them back halfway through the task, and the final minion will drop the loot on his foot before hopping around in comical slapstick agony.

We've some reservations about the morality system. Being an evil character, making a 'good' choice just seems wrong, and the control system is still a little fiddly when it comes to choosing various minion types and positioning them in specific places. Then again, Triumph's decision to make you play as this morally biased character means the writing and the game should be better focused.

Overlord looks like it could be a pleasantly surprising title, and one that'll be interesting enough to catch the attention of the PC market. And if you like to read the last paragraph first, it's just like *Fable* crossed with *Pikmin*. PCZ

OI! GILMORE!
WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

The next *Medal Of Honor* has you jumping from a C-47 right into the battle. *Jon Blyth* awaits the green light...

Who are ya?

NAME Patrick Gilmore
DEVELOPER EA
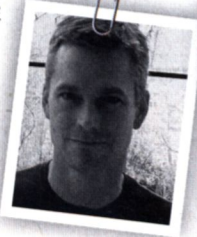**POSITION** Executive producer
AGE 42
GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE *Medal Of Honor* series
FAVOURITE GAMES *MechWarrior, Resident Evil, Half-Life, Super Mario 64, WOW, Gunstar Heroes*

**Q** What's been your role in the *Medal Of Honor* series?

A "I was executive producer of the first *Medal Of Honor* title, then I moved off to do other things. I came back to EA about three years ago, and got straight back onto *Medal Of Honor* with *Airborne*."

You've got another iconic WWII scene in this game, with the crew waiting in the plane for the green light. How important are those gritty, realistic scenes for you?

"They're very important. The feeling of being on a Higgins boat when the front goes down on Omaha Beach – that's not just something straight out of the history books; that's truly iconic. Finding those moments has been pretty important to the franchise, but not central. It wasn't the first thing in our minds when we decided to make a game based exclusively on the airborne forces, but very shortly after making that choice, we realised that standing in the jump door of a C-47 was going to be another one of those moments."

Does working on these games turn you into a bit of a war historian, then?

"Some titles more than others, but yes – we obviously have to do a lot of research. We make the game authentic to the oral histories – it's a collage of many different experiences. At the end of the day, it's about fun, but making the experience resonate is an important aspect of what we do."
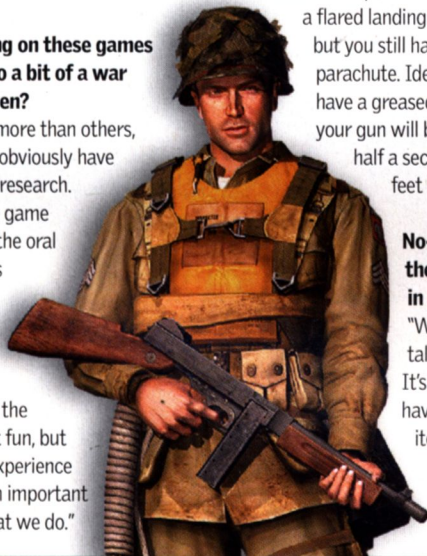
When you play, how free are you to decide where you want to land?

"From the moment you leave the plane, you have full control over your parachute and where you land. Every surface in the game is playable, so you can land on rooftops and balconies, on top of walls, in back alleys or on top of your primary objective."

Is it tactically sensible to follow your colleagues, though?

"That really depends on you as a player. If you're not an expert FPS player, then you should land near the green smoke, where there's allies and health packs. If you're an expert player, you can go ahead and land directly on the rooftops of the main objective and dismantle it in pretty short order."

Just how badly can you mess up a parachute landing?

"When you botch a landing, you hit the ground, then you have to take the time to stand up and unbuckle your chute. If you chose to land in a difficult area, they'll be firing at you, and you're going to take some punishment. There's also a flared landing – this is better, but you still have to remove your parachute. Ideally, you want to have a greased landing, where your gun will be in your hands half a second after your feet hit the ground."

No-one will find themselves stuck in a tree, though?

"We did do a lot of talking about snags. It's possible we may have them in a later iteration of the game, but we decided not to have them

Our codename? Death From Above.

"Every surface is playable, so you can land on rooftops, balconies, walls, in alleys or on top of your objective"

"I'm landing on Lana Turner..."

There's always one guy who says, "Go! Go! Go!"

in this game. Getting stuck in a tree, it turns out, was not super-fun."

So how does the Affordance system work with the AI?

"Traditionally, most shooters have the AI hiding behind a couch, and he'll jump out at you, then jump back. The illusion that he has a brain wears off pretty quickly – and the average lifespan of an AI is around five to ten seconds for this reason.

Our players do a wide variety of actions based on Affordances – a bunker offers affordance, high ground, a tree – and the Affordance engine scores everything in a way NPCs can understand. Most of the tuning happens by changing the environment."

So you can wound one enemy, complete an objective, he'll run to defend another and you can finish him off later?

"Yes! The AI can appear everywhere. It's all about infinite variability – people won't be in the same places every time. A great moment was when we gave NPCs new path-finding intelligence. When someone jumps over a sofa or out of a window, that's not scripted – they're doing it because it makes sense. When we first gave them the ability to jump through windows, someone threw a grenade into a building and five guys jumped out the windows. We were like 'Oh my god!' All we'd done was give this system a new skill, and the NPCs were using it in combat. It was really something." **PCZ**

"Lovely party! Shame we weren't invited..."

PATRICK GILMORE
Where he turns for inspiration...

Okami: The beautiful swansong from the PS2 is one of Patrick's favourite pieces of graphic design.

Mexican film-makers: Modern Mexican directors such as Guillermo del Toro have got under his skin.

MXC: The US name for *Takeshi's Castle* – and they don't get Craig Charles slobbering over it either.

1

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

DEVELOPER Capcom **PUBLISHER** Capcom **WEB** www.lostplanet-thegame.com **ETA** June

AFTER THE DISAPPOINTMENT of the *Resident Evil 4* conversion to PC, it seems Japanese games giant Capcom are determined to set things straight with the forthcoming release of frozen sci-fi third-person shooter *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*. It promises major graphics improvements over the already-impressive Xbox 360 version, including higher-res icy textures and even more gorgeous lighting, and *Lost Planet* will also include mouse control and a lobby system for multiplayer designed especially for PC. It also includes massive deadly mechs you can climb into and blast *Starship Troopers*-style alien bugs with the biggest, most spectacular explosions this side of a 19-inch widescreen monitor. Oh, and a hero called Wayne...

7

The Bigger Picture

1 ICE TO SEE YOU
Lost Planet is set on a sub-zero world called EDN III, where all the buildings are half-buried in snow. Keep an eye on your vital kill-fuelled Thermal Energy. If it drops to zero, hero Wayne dies.

2 FROSTY WELCOME
Multiplayer is being tailored for PC, so consolitis will hopefully be avoided in its game types of Elimination, Team Elimination, Post Grab (the capturing of reinforcement posts) and Fugitive.

3 WAYNE'S WORLD
Wayne Holden is the amnesiac hero trying to find an Akrid creature called the Green Eye that topped his dad. Along with a team of Snow Pirates called Rick, Luka (love interest) and Yuri, a conspiracy unravels (gasp!). Violence ensues.

4 FEAST FOR THE ICE
Lost Planet already has smooth mo-cap animation, beautiful HDR lighting, motion blur, atmospheric arctic environments and Hollywood-standard fiery explosions. The PC version is prettier still.

5 SHORTCRUST OR FILO?
Your frozen world is overrun with insect-like creatures known as the Akrid, including flying arachnids that dive-bomb you from above to armoured beetles that curl up and roll you over like pastry.

6 STARSHIP TROOPER
You can only carry two weapons, but Wayne has access to more than a dozen including shotguns, machine guns, sniper rifles, a grappling hook and a multitude of explosive devices to see off bugs and rival Snow Pirates alike.

7 MECH LOVE NOT WAR
Wayne has access to six types of Vital Suits ('great big mechs' to the rest of us). Once inside a VS, you can jump large distances, transform into a tank or just hover and stomp about, riddling enemies with Gatling gun bullets, missiles and the like.

1&1's Award-Winn

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360°

SNOW

Blog -

March 2007

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1st day of sk

13/1/2007 by Mark Step

This is a first class ski

We had loads of fun today
was really nice. The sun v
even got a little sunburn.

call **0870 24 11 247**

PLUG-INS BABY...

Random USB crap to buy for your PC – for the rich and slightly touched in the head...

THE HUMBLE USB port has given us many things – most notably the ability to stick something into your PC without having to poke around in the dark recesses at the back of your desk, twiddling tiny knobs with your great cack-handed fingers. This is as nothing, however, compared to the limitless insanity of what is being pumped out to fill these empty USB slots. So if you're a reclusive millionaire and feel a desperate need to piss your money against a wall with needless frippery, exactly what should float your peripheral boat?

USB POLE DANCER
Price: £29.95

Famously banned from Marks & Spencers, this little lady doesn't so much pole dance as waddle round a pole waving a plastic Barbie arm. Either playing her own theme tune ("Ooh baby! Yeah yeah! Ooh baby!") or your own MP3s shuttled through a speaker cable (causing hilarity should you be playing the spoken-word poems of WH Auden) – the result is a distinctly non-sexy experience accompanied by flashing lights and mottled embarrassment. Certainly cheaper than seeing the real thing though, and with a far smaller likelihood of being beaten up by gangsters.

★★★☆☆

POLE DANCER

DEMO   POWER ON / OFF

USB HUMPING DOG
Price: £6.95

Why? Dear god, why? Strangely designed so that it can't fit in your average USB slot – let alone joylessly have sex with it – the USB Humping Dog is a devastating blow to all that is good and true in the world. Its purchase grips you with such feelings of monetary loss and fiscal sadness that anyone who bears witness to its juddering mechanical behind is instantly hit by the utter meaningless of human existence. Or simply the existence of USB sex dogs. Then again, it does break the ice at naughty parties.

★☆☆☆☆

USB HAMSTER WHEEL

Price: £24.95

If you've ever found yourself in need of a metaphor for your daily grind (and let's face it, who hasn't?), then a rodent that skips along in a wheel while not actually getting anywhere is fairly laboured – not exactly Poet Laureate stuff. Still, it keeps tabs on keyboard activity, and when you're tapping away then the hamster (who is called 'Hamster') spins round in a merry reference to the futility and hopelessness inherent in working life. Well worth the several hours you worked to pay for it then.

★★★★★

USB MISSILE LAUNCHER

Price: £24.95

Office politics got you seething with rage and in dire need of retribution? Quite fancy the girl sitting in the next cubicle, and need a way to overcompensate with forced humour due to your failings elsewhere? Then simply fire missiles! Ronald Reagan's Star Wars programme this most certainly is not: the three polystyrene rockets only fire around three metres, but fiddling with the direction and trajectory of your payload on your PC provides a definite 20 seconds or so of larks and distraction.

★★★★★

USB MASSAGER

Price: £9.99

The main draw of giving anyone a USB Massage Ball is taking bets on exactly how long it takes before the recipient places it down their trousers. And not even in a particularly kinky way either – when it's plugged in and you're on your own, it just seems like a fairly natural thing to do. Quite why a vibrating plastic object needs USB-power is unexplained (We've been told there are battery-powered products already on the market). However, having a bumpy blue object placed down the back of your neck does make you giggle.

★★★★★

All this stuff is available from www.iwantoneofthose.com, apart from the naughty pole dancer which you can get from www.boysstuff.co.uk. If you've seen or, heaven help us, even bought something equally deranged as this lot, then please share it with as at letters@pczone.co.uk. We promise not to laugh too hard.

ETA AUTUMN

WHO DARES WINS...
CALL OF DUTY
MODERN WARFARE

Infinity Ward's definitive war shooter leaves World War II far behind for a brutal new battleground. *Jamie Sefton* reports from today's front line...

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward **PUBLISHER** Activision **WEBSITE** www.charlieoscardelta.com

EVER-GRINNING INFINITY WARD president Grant Collier has put on his serious face. "Folks thought it would be Vietnam or Iraq, but nobody thought it would be a fictional conflict," he explains while revealing a snazzy T-shirt printed with a smart *Call Of Duty 4* logo on the front and a battle scene on the back. "There's sensitivity about the subject matter, but we don't want people to misunderstand what we're doing – it's absolutely not about the war in Iraq..."

As with *Call Of Duty* and *Call Of Duty 2*, PC ZONE has been invited to publisher Activision's UK HQ for the exclusive first look at the new Infinity Ward shooter – this time *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*. We're just about to find out the closely-guarded secret setting of the new game, and you could say that we're a teensy bit excited.

"We really wanted to craft an enemy that would give the Western powers a stand-up fight," continues Collier. "COD for us is two sides with different advantages pitted against each other, but very evenly matched. A lot of the modern battles are very one-sided, so one team comes in and f***ing annihilates the other guy, then it's just insurgencies and mopping up –.stuff that really isn't *Call Of Duty* and doesn't make for a fun game."

BACK IN THE USSR
We settle down in the presentation room in front of a large hi-definition TV, displaying a pre-Alpha splash

THE LOWDOWN
Brand-new fictional modern-day setting	✅
Play as both the British SAS and US Force Recon Marines	✅
Full physics with damage modelling and ragdolls	✅
New weapons, technology and weapons effects	✅
Is it different enough from the *Call Of Duty* of old?	❌

Rather a *Full Metal Jacket* vibe going on here...

The British SAS missions have more stealth elements.
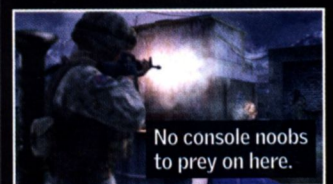
COD4's 'rim lighting' in full effect.

No 360 allowed!
COD4 multiplayer stuff revealed

screen of the brand new *Call Of Duty*. So what is the '*Modern Warfare*' in the game's title? Collier explains that they've created their own conflict, focusing on a main bad guy – a Russian ultra-nationalist called Zakhaev, who wants to bring back the Soviet Union in the style of his idol, the ruthless genocidal Stalin. These are actions that would obviously have Boris Yeltsin turning in his recently-dug grave. Zakhaev is being backed by a significant group of dodgy Russian businessmen, mafia and military, so has a lot of meaty hardware

at his disposal, which he promptly uses to start a civil war in his mother country. However, Zakhaev knows that the other world powers will eventually get involved in his little conflict, so he hatches a scheme to occupy the attack dog of the West, the USA.

LURE OF THE DESERT
"Everyone knows the Americans are a sucker for a conflict in the Middle East," says Collier, "so Zakhaev uses a buddy called Al-Asad to fund a coup in this nondescript Middle Eastern country. It's a trap, so the Americans get tied down and Zakhaev is ecstatic."
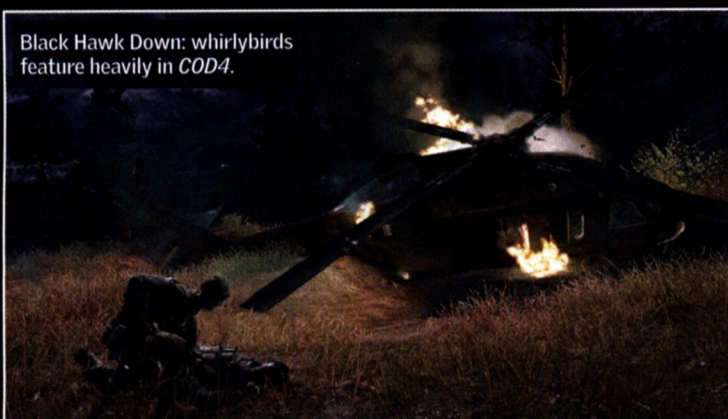
Meanwhile, the good ol' British, in the form of the SAS special forces, have been keeping tabs on Zakhaev for a long time, since the days when he

was an arms dealer. They're in Russia undercover trying to find him, while gathering more intel by working with loyalist Russians to try and convince the US that the war in the Middle East is just a distraction. So, the Yanks send the Marines' elite division, called Force Recon, to track down Al-Asad – eventually leading to the two storylines interweaving and meeting up in Russia. You ultimately have to track down and stop Zakhaev, Al-Asad and their two close associates (known collectively as 'The Four Horsemen') before the world is plunged into a catastrophic global conflict where nukes are involved.

PARALLEL LIVES
"*COD4* takes place over 30 days, and we really want it to play out like an episode of *24* – we're working with TV writers who understand how to get a strong, episodic storyline going," says Collier. "We're able to have continuous characters throughout the game while being able to change locations. In previous games we changed locations through the various campaigns, but you lost contact with all the characters from that storyline. And besides Price and McGregor, do you really remember any of the characters from *Call Of Duty*? No. Our goal is for you to really get to know these characters, to have an attachment to them, and at the end of the game, remember them."

Call Of Duty 4's multiplayer game has been worked on since day one of the project by the same team who did *COD 1 & 2*. Infinity Ward want to maintain the popularity of the *COD* games online, so are introducing a new persistent stats system which will be tied to your online profile. As you play and achieve objectives you'll unlock additional weapons and items, such as a sniper rifle, which Infinity Ward president Grant Collier hopes will get novice gamers into multiplayer. "However, we don't want this to be a grind for veterans – they'll be able to unlock the options quickly, and high-end users will also be able to unlock player and weapon skins."

COD4 also introduces a create-a-class option, and a new 'Hard Point' system will give territory a reason to be fought over. For example, if you capture a radio tower, the mini-map will begin showing hostiles as well as friendlies. There won't be a co-op mode, and cross-platform gaming has also been nixed.

"It's so hard to make a shooter good on console. You have to do stuff like auto-aim and movement compensators. After finally persuading people to play online on console, why put them off by having them slaughtered by PC gamers? Someone with a pad against someone with a mouse and keyboard? They asked us to do it, but we said, 'Nooooo waaaaay'!" Sounds cool. Just make sure you include PunkBuster next time, eh guys?

Black Hawk Down: whirlybirds feature heavily in *COD4*.

No console noobs to prey on here.

Stalag 17
A group of *Medal Of Honor* developers leave EA to form Infinity Ward.

Escape to victory
Call Of Duty is released and becomes *PC ZONE's* favourite WWII FPS.

The eagle has landed
Call Of Duty 2 is released, with more open levels and multiple paths.

From here to eternity
After *COD3* snubs the PC, the franchise returns with a modern-day setting. Rejoice!

2002   **2003**   **2005**   **2007**

"Step out of the vehicle! You were doing 105 in a 30-zone!"

As with other *Call Of Duty* games, the first level begins with training – this time in an SAS warehouse filled with a plywood ship, as Price (yes, he's back) yells instructions, teaching you how to aim down the sights and so on. However, Grant Collier starts the action with the first proper mission, as you and your three-man SAS team rappel from a helicopter onto a ship at night, in rough seas, with a horde of angry ultra-nationalist Russians looking for a fight.

SEA LEGS REQUIRED

The scene is one of a constantly swaying ship in a storm, with rain and sea spray lashing the deck, as you machine-gun your way past enemies and through some containers to gain access inside. Lightning flashes and briefly lights up the action, as you witness your support helicopter hover down and send a volley of mini-gun fire through the windows of the bridge above, killing everyone inside in a shower of bullets and glass.

You're kept constantly updated over voice-comms, and make your way to a ship door as your AI team-mates kick it in and storm inside, allowing you to systematically take enemies down – including those asleep in their bunks. Shoot a pipe and gas leaks from the bullet holes, while enemies recoil and fall realistically down stairs or slump against other moving objects – *Call Of Duty 4* has a fully-realised proprietary

physics system. If you're shot, the screen begins to turn red and if it's bad, you hear your heart beating, which as in *COD2*, signals that it's time to find cover and drop back from the action until your health returns to normal. Yes, this is the *Call Of Duty* we know and love, but it's much faster, with more realistic animation and liquid-smooth visuals whizzing past at a solid 60-frames-per-second.

There's a brief lull in the chaotic action, and I ask Collier if this new *Call Of Duty* is a bona fide PC shooter despite the multi-format release? "Yes – there are things you have to do across all platforms, but we want to be the best shooter on PC and all formats.

Call Of Duty 4 has a fully-realised proprietary physics system

There are a number of advantages on the PC side – you're going to have mouse/keyboard, dedicated servers, higher player count and the visual quality is much better on high-end systems." Were Infinity Ward aware that PC gamers were annoyed when *Call Of Duty 3* didn't make it to PC?

"We know people were aggrieved, but *COD3* wasn't made by us – it was a console developer who made a console game. *COD4* is being released two years from the

Tear gas grenades and flashbangs are new additions.

"Sarge, second-hand smoke is REALLY bad for us, you know."

finish of *COD2*, as *COD2* was two years from *COD*. If a game comes out every year, it isn't going to be as amazing."

Next up is one of the first US missions, which begins with an obvious homage to the 'Ride Of The Valkyries' helicopter attack from *Apocalypse Now*, with a dozen or so Black Hawks flying in over a very detailed Middle Eastern town, as ground-to-air missiles roar up from ground level, snaking smoky trails behind them. You hastily rappel down into the dusty urban sprawl with the other troops – some of your fellows begin constructing barbed wire defences, while you commence intense street-to-street fighting, throwing the new flashbang grenades into rooms and clearing them of stunned enemies.

"Our art director Richard Kriegler has really helped improve the quality of the artwork across the board. One example is when he asked the programmers to create a post-processing effect engine, so he can now take sliders and change the time of day or the lighting to create different moods. So in these hot, dusty levels, it looks really washed out and desaturated, such as in films like *Saving Private Ryan*."

The US Marines' Force Recon squads are larger than the four-man teams you have in the SAS levels, and rather than being used for quick infiltration and clandestine missions, they storm in guns-blazing and lay down the law. As before, AI soldiers point the way

towards objectives, and you have multiple paths through the levels, but Collier asserts that *COD4* isn't a 'sandbox' game.

"We get knocked unfairly for being too linear – we spent a lot of time in *COD2* trying to open it up. With our save system, it goes back 10-15 seconds before you die rather than at the start of the level – if we did the latter, you'd see how much choice you get during levels, but we don't want to punish the player. We want to keep it moving forwards so you feel like you're playing a movie.

"We do spend a lot of time crafting the cinematic moments because they can be seen from multiple directions – we never know where the player is going to be looking. So we have to really pack in the eye candy and you should feel the intensity…"

STREETS OF RAGE
On to another Middle Eastern level, and this time you and the Force Recon squad have to rescue an M1A1 Abrams tank and work alongside it through the tight streets. The action gets more chaotic when the tank rolls over a car, crushing it in real-time, and you enter an area teeming with Al-Asad's soldiers, armed to the teeth with automatic weapons, grenades and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades, not copies of *Diablo*).

Explosions now have a physical shock wave – walls collapse sending rubble and dust particles into the air and vehicles can be shot to pieces and will blow up if damaged enough. You can now pick up grenades that have been thrown at you and chuck them back as well, with access to tear gas and flashbangs as well as smoke and

Collier collared
Annoyingly quick questions shot at Infinity Ward president Grant Collier

PCZ: With events as they are at the moment, were you wary of having levels of *COD4* set in the Middle East?

GC: "The fictional conflict is mainly in Russia, so there's just a window into the Middle East. We don't want people to mistake it for the war in Iraq, because it's not. None of the battles resemble the battles there – maybe in Fallujah, where you might have had tanks in the city supported by infantry – but if that was the case, it's coincidental."

PCZ: Will you include modern-day urban warfare tactics such as suicide-bombers?

GC: "No, we don't have any suicide-bombers, but I'd love to – I think that'd be a great gameplay mechanic."

PCZ: The Tom Clancy games *Rainbow Six* and *Ghost Recon* are well known for doing this modern-combat setting…

GC: "Yeah. People have mentioned the Clancy games, and we love those games, we're big fans. However, I think we have more in common with *Call Of Duty 2* – you don't control the squad and action is the focus."

PCZ: What about the bits in *COD* where you climb into a vehicle and shoot bad guys?

GC: "Oh yeah. There's a level where you're a pilot of an attack helicopter Apache – you actually control it. Then there are bits where you're the gunner on various aircraft, and we have the jeep rides – all that cool stuff."

Black balaclavas = evil.

Deployable fireworks cheer up troops under fire.

frag grenades. The ballistics and impact of every weapon have been accurately modelled too, allowing you to use, say, a heavy machine gun to shoot through walls and ceilings to kill bad guys.

> ❚ *Modern Warfare* looks and feels like a *COD* game, but in today's world ❚

WAR IS PRETTY

Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare has really improved visually, as you would expect for any new next-gen game, so you'll be seeing realistic foliage in the Russian levels, gorgeous rippling water, birds and butterflies flying around. If the beautiful terrain wasn't populated with mad Commie terrorists trying to kill you with rocket launchers, you'd believe it was a sneak-peak at a new *Elder Scrolls* game. Also, to aid your immersion, Infinity Ward have gone further by reducing the amount of HUD information than in other *Call Of Duty* games – they've got rid of the mini-map in single-player, and information on weapon choice pops up then fades away quickly.

In the final level we got to look at, your character and the Force Recon soldiers go into an area deep in Al-Asad

territory to find a crashed helicopter, at night, in hugely dangerous, boggy wasteland littered with war debris and derelict buildings. As with all the levels, it begins with a satellite view of the terrain, which then zooms in quickly to show the battle landscape at eye level, like a military Google Earth.

Amid the intense fighting, Collier demonstrates the night-vision goggles that give you a bright green-eyed view of the ensuing chaos, allowing you to spot targets easily in the darkness.

"We've created new technology to emulate what the human eye sees, so we've looked through real night vision, filmed through night vision, compared the two and then modified it. We've found that eyes and cameras are very different. Also, there's a depth of field system, so when you're staring at someone down a sight, they're in fine detail, but in peripheral vision, you don't

really have them full focus. We don't want people to notice, we just want it to feel natural."

Collier also shows the same dark building interiors without night vision, to show how another subtle visual effect is used to further convince the player that what you're seeing is real. "When people move about in low-level light, the human eye can actually pick that up, unless it's pitch black. Rim lighting is a faint outline of the characters in the darkness, so people can have fun in dark levels, without having to crank up the gamma settings on their monitor."

To finish, we're shown one of the most impressive first-person shooter weapons I've ever seen – a massive rocket launcher that, when picked up, allows you to electronically tag your distant target using the weapon's HUD, then unleash a truly devastating explosion that rocks the environment and kills any living matter within the radius of the fire storm.

HEROIC RETURN

Call Of Duty is back. *Modern Warfare* looks and feels like a *Call Of Duty* game, but in today's world, complete with blinding pace, terrifying weaponry and state-of-the-art technology. "You've got that intelligent squad surrounding you, you've got intense firefights where you might get pinned down or you might get flanked," adds Collier. "We really want the player to teeter back and forth between feeling like you're

crushing these guys, to feeling like, 'Oh my god, I'm so f***ed'!"

The pacing will also be much more varied than *Call Of Duty 2*, where the action was ramped up to 11 for most of the levels. "You'll be in Russia doing some spy-type stuff in camouflage suits, then you'll head to the Middle East with squad warfare supported by helicopters, then become a gunner on an attack helicopter, then back to Russia protecting a defector from Zakhaev. *COD4* even has back-story missions where you go back 15 years in time for a *Highlander*-style flashback."

With exciting multiplayer modes already well on the way and a single-player campaign that follows the same characters through big trademark action set-pieces in different locations, we're excited. Team this with realistic lighting, AI, weapon ballistics, true physics, mo-cap animation and more gear such as tear gas and thermal goggles, and *COD4: Modern Warfare* could condemn other shooter franchises stuck in WWII to the history books. **PCZ**
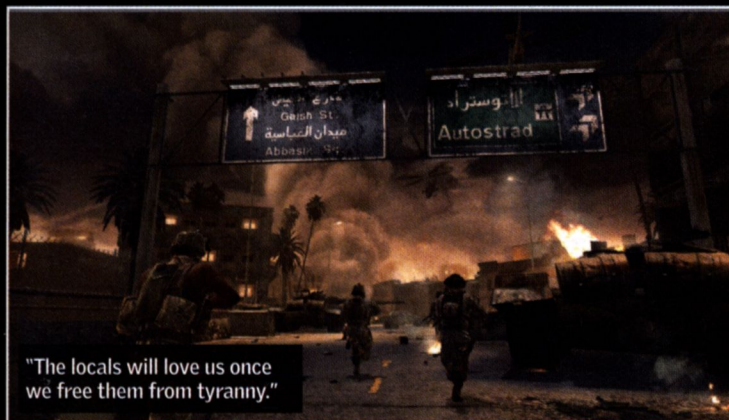
"The locals will love us once we free them from tyranny."

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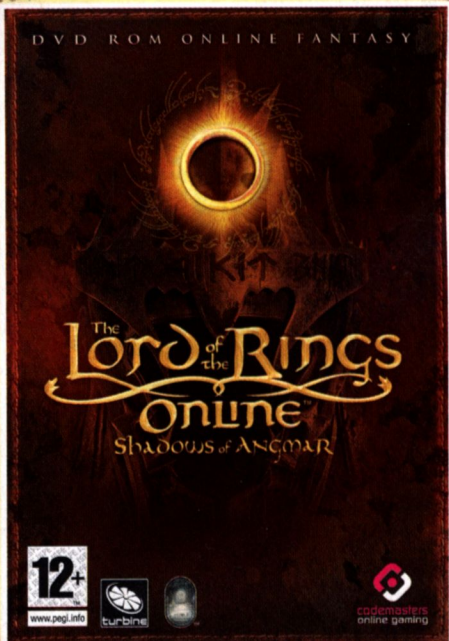
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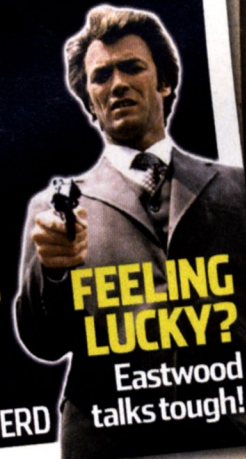
GET ON THE CASE!

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest ~~games~~

The big picture

I'VE BEEN MEANING to buy myself a new monitor for ages. At home, the CRT screen that came with my first proper computer (over ten years ago) is still providing me with a reason to own such a large desk, often reminding me of its vast girth by demolishing chunks of the wall when I swivel the screen around.

You may remember me mentioning that I'd plugged my PC into the boyfriend's 42-inch hi-def plasma TV – but the truth is, I've only used it once since he's often hogging it with his machine.

I've only just got around to buying a wireless keyboard and mouse (yes, we've been chained to it till now, like a hospital patient), and with the boyfriend out, I was recently free to hog the TV. A frantic scramble ensued for the best-looking game my PC could muster. Ah, *Far Cry*, my hero.

Now the squeaky office chair's been swapped for the comforts of the sofa, I've decided I like it here. Not sure the boyfriend will be too impressed though. S'pose I might even have to let him have a go once in a while....

Suzy Wallace x

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys! ✓

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

HL2: Ep One   Company Of Heroes   Oblivion

60 ▶ TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Over ten years on and she's looking younger than ever. Eat your heart out L'Oréal…

The PC ZONE Awards

CLASSIC · CLASSIC
PCZONE
CLASSIC · CLASSIC

RECOMMENDED
PCZONE
RECOMMENDED

·DUMP·

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

The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make your games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com

ALSO REVIEWED

PCZONE SWEARS…

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
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- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk
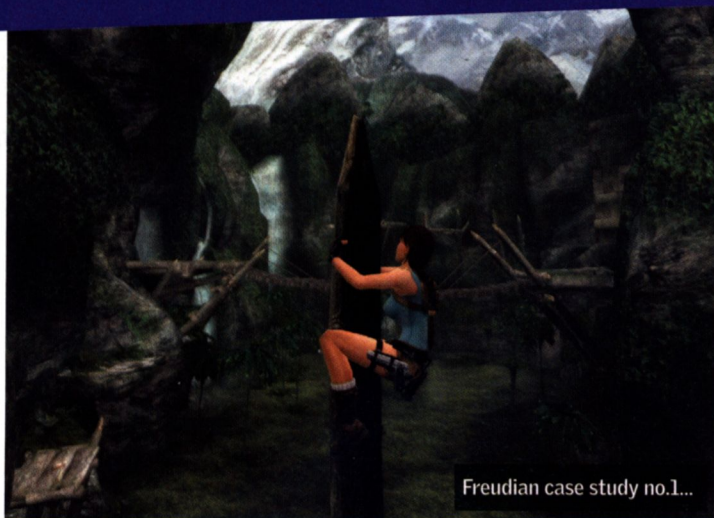
Freudian case study no.1...
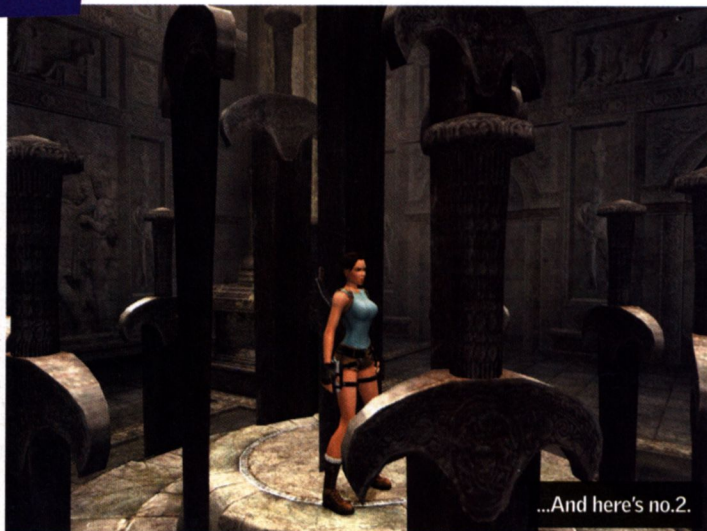
...And here's no.2.

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

If anyone needs extensive cosmetic surgery and a breast reduction, it's *Jon Blyth*. Some girls get all the luck...

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.tombraider.com/anniversary/
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

RECOMMENDED PC ZONE RECOMMENDED

AT A GLANCE...

A remake and re-invention of the original *Tomb Raider* game, which helped kick-start the whole sorry notion of cyber-babes. Better graphics, bigger levels, unerring familiarity.

Minimum system requirements:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

TOMB RAIDER	95%
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY	83%
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND	81%
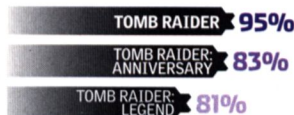
ELSEWHERE IN THIS very issue of this very magazine, I react with some nervousness about the imminent remake of *Speedball 2* (p28). The news of this particular reinvention brought out the defensive nostalgic dick in me. Until I spoke to the guys making it, I was certain it would be a soulless echo, an open-palmed slap in the chops to my childhood.

The news of *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* caused none of this fatherly dread. In fact, I barely raised an eyebrow. That's not because I wasn't impressed by the original *Tomb Raider*; it's just that *Tomb Raider* wasn't a great example of classic old-school gameplay. Rather, it was the first, accomplished step in a new platforming direction. It was a filmic experience, with a grand soundtrack and cinematic scenes, and it kicked your jaw off with the unprecedented ability to hang from ledges, in 3D, as a woman. Lara Croft was as close

as we had at the time to feeling like we were controlling a human, with arms that weren't just used to put above her head when she jumped. She'd leap around, hang off stuff and slam her dumplings again and again into sheer rock faces. It's a style that's been consistently built on, so this is exactly the kind of game that could benefit from enhancing surgery.

QUALITY AGAINST TIME

We're all aware of the slow decline and sudden rebirth of *Tomb Raider*, but here it is again, in a nutshell. Excellent first game spins wildly into quickly released sequels, and a world of boobalicious merchandise. Lara Croft gets her own press office, while the quality of the games degrade into unfinished, repetitive crap. Lara jumped, then flipped mid-air and shot a number of sharks with *The Angel Of Darkness*. Then, she was unexpectedly resuscitated on the other side of a number of sharks when

Crystal Dynamics took over the development, and produced the gridless, physics-powered *Legend*. And now, Core Design – who made all the games up to *The Angel Of Darkness* – have to suffer the indignity of Crystal Dynamics making their first baby better.

So, what criticisms has the game faced? "Not enough tombs" is a good start. "Too much shooting animals" was one cry, until animals were replaced with gangsters, at which point "it wasn't *Tomb Raider* enough". In remaking the original game – the very definition of *Tomb Raider*, surely – the decision has been made to keep it as pure to that ill-defined *Tomb Raidery*-ness as possible. It's a level-for-level remake, so that means tomb after tomb mixed with raiding galore. The only skyscraper is in a cut-scene, and there's certainly no Tokyo level, which the more cynical players of *Legend* would describe as a wank break.

WHAT ONE WAS

Let's talk about the original *Tomb Raider*, then. Players of *Legend* might be surprised by the lack of globetrotting. The original game took Lara through three large tombs, working for and then against the shadowy Natla Corp. Tombs had a Peruvian, Greek, and Egyptian theme, each split into a number of levels. These levels generally took the form of a
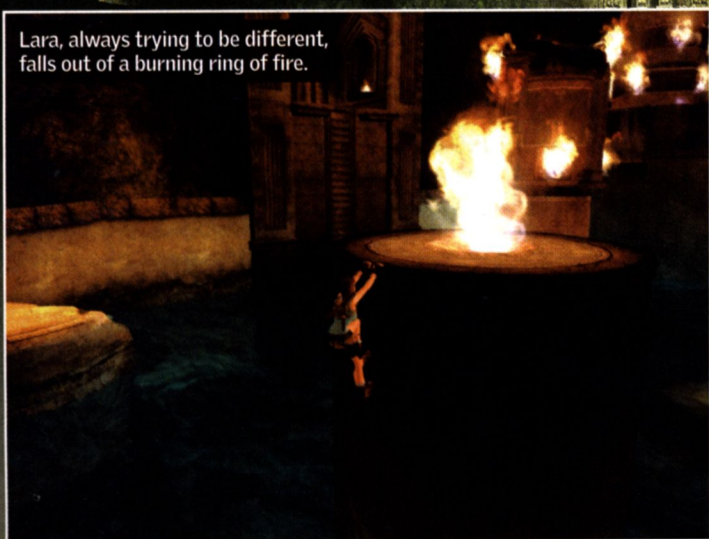

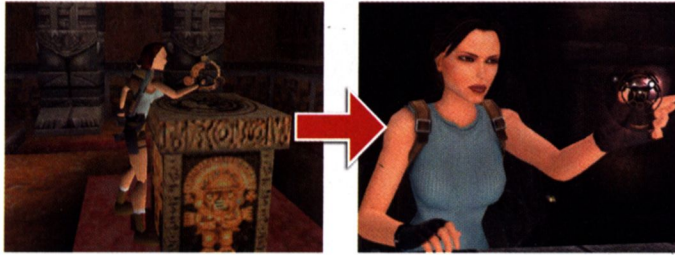Oi! Pervert with the goggles!
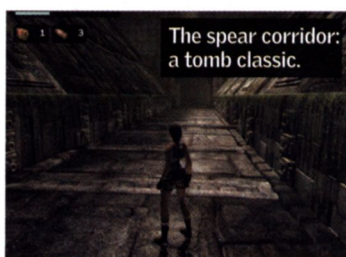
The spear corridor: a tomb classic.

Run, or you'll have to play
the last 30 seconds again.

Lara, always trying to be different,
falls out of a burning ring of fire.

1996 vs 2007
We must have been stupid to even bother playing games back then...


SCIONTOLOGY
Here in the Tomb of Qualopec, Lara gets her first piece of the Scion. In the original, the Scion looks like a huge sextant, and the picture of the guy on the podium like his hands come out of his shoulders. This is not how people looked in ancient Peru, and it's racist to say they did. Naughty 1996!
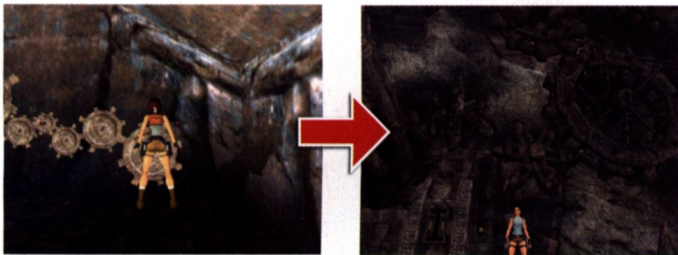
FULLY COGNISCENT
On the left are cogs from the original *Tomb Raider*. Aren't they stupid? Like anyone would defend a magical artefact with a machine that used cogs like that. On the right are cogs from *Anniversary*. These cogs are ruddy huge and take up an entire wall of a massive cavern. Take that, the '90s!
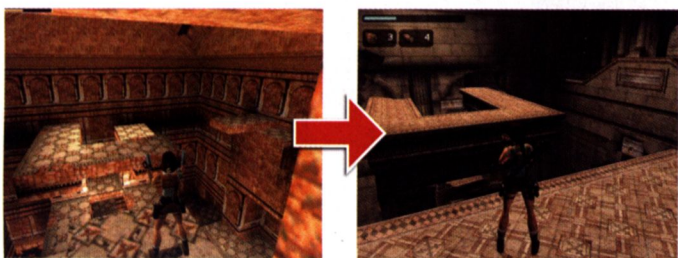
FOLLYFOOT
After jumping off a load of pillars, you gain entrance to St Francis' Folly. It's a big level, with four keys to be grabbed from god-themed puzzles, but the main thing about the new version is that the pattern on the floor matches up really nicely. The second millennium was rubbish! All of it!

REX THE RUNT
Now I've killed you, Mr Terrible Lizard, let's get up close and count those polygons. You're nothing more than a toothy rhombus! You're so stupid, I can stand in a ruin and pick you off with my pistols. Not so with 2007. It's such a fuss to pick him off, you'll wish you never bothered. Now that's progress!

"Is this the one that shot your mum?"

4 /36

Anniversary acknowledges that the past wasn't perfect, and then makes changes wherever it sees fit

hub room which requires three cogs, four keys and three gold bars, basically x of y, which could be found in puzzle rooms branching off from the hub. It was simple but effective, and felt more engaging than the more linear levels of late. Then, it was off to Atlantis, where it was revelations galore and the end of the game.

Playing the original *Tomb Raider* again for this review was a predictable eye-opener. From 1996, I mainly remember the fact that I was impressed, that it seemed like games had suddenly changed a little bit, and that I said to my then-flatmate: "It's like someone threw a dimension at *Prince Of Persia*."

Since those days, my brain has blended the bad-jigsaw textures, smoothed out the polygons and with every advance in graphics in the real world, my memories of the original Lara got upgraded to match. So I was appalled when the reality was shown to me; how on earth did people make a fetish of this bad Frank Sidebottom impersonator? *Anniversary* feels like the real game, not this weird imposter from 1996, that could have, erm, been made a decade ago.

So, that's what *Anniversary* feels like. It's like playing the game again, like you want to remember it. It runs at great speeds, although at some points ambition outstrips technology. Standing at one end of the Coliseum, for example, and forcing your PC to draw the whole thing while you spin your mouse around with your mouth wide open, well – that'll cause some slowdown.

ROSE-TINTED
Anniversary – because of what it's doing, as much as how it does it – brings back the welcome tingle of nostalgia, and reminds you what a great game the original *Tomb Raider* was, without ripping your pink contact lenses from your eyeballs and making you face up to the graphics. It's the very best kind of nostalgia, because it acknowledges that the past wasn't perfect, and changes it wherever it sees fit.

Because this isn't the *Tomb Raider* you played. If your memory is as dim as mine, you'll *think* this is how it played, but then you'll realise that ropes weren't introduced until *The Last Revelation*, and swinging

Dusky Greece.

Quit drooling, boys.
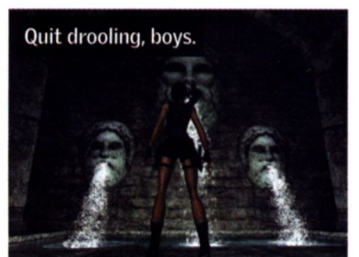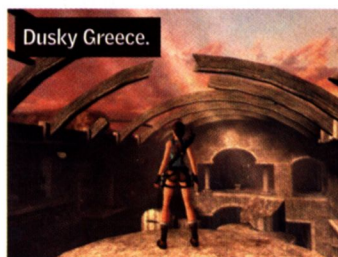
The timeline of gymnastics

Lara's never been shy of learning a new move or getting on a new vehicle. The main concern with every new game is generally what she'll be able to do next, and how big 'they'll' be. What's that? You say you all want a scientific timeline of what the girl done-did? Your wish is our command...
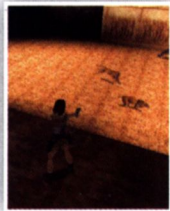
TOMB RAIDER II
Climbs stuff, lets off some flares and rides a Venetian boat and a quad-bike.
1997
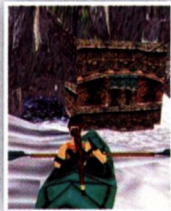
THE LAST REVELATION
Lara first climbed a rope and a pole in '99 and she's still doing it today.
1999

THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS
The backflip below (from *Legend*) was first seen in 2003's stinky chapter.
2003

ANNIVERSARY
Lara's latest trick – flailing about on top of a pole. Oh, and she can wall-walk a bit, too.
2007

1996
TOMB RAIDER
She jumps, she grabs onto ledges and she pops several off into a tiger's gob.

1998
TOMB RAIDER III
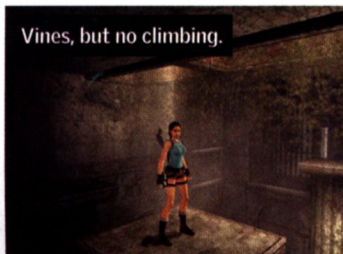She swings from vines, rides a kayak and learns the thrilling 'crouch stance'.

2000
CHRONICLES
Bars and tightropes were introduced in 2000. Bars have been put into the remake too.

2006
LEGEND
New developers, new grappling hook. She also rode a motorbike, which was actually rubbish.

I'm going to need a bigger pressure plate.

Vines, but no climbing.

4   13

6 /38

Stop shooting him! He's already dead.

Furrowed brows are all the rage in Anniversary.

from horizontal bars was first seen in *Chronicles*. Take away the personal assistant and pocket torch from *Legend*, add the ability to leap onto and balance on poles and wall-walk from your grappling hook, and you've got Lara '07. Plays like *Legend*, feels like *Tomb Raider*. It's an intangible feat that stares you out, defying you to put your finger on it.

THE LITTLE MOUSE THAT COULD

Controlling Lara, you've got the choice of whether to use mouse and keyboard, or a control pad. Don't get me wrong, I'm by no means averse to using a gamepad when I have to, but when someone gets the mouse working right, it gives a PC gamer a little thrill of petty vindication.

It's actually more fun to play with mouse and keyboard; the ability to whip around 180-degrees and jump immediately from pillar to post while your 360 player would still be turning around – it makes you feel that little bit more like the gymnast you're not.

It's not all roses, though. The control you have over the camera can sometimes be a burden. For example, when you're

wall-walking from your grappling hook and need to jump backwards from the height of Lara's run, unless you've got the camera perpendicular to the wall, the keys don't quite work to make Lara perform the required jump, and she tends to jump off at the wrong angle and land on a massive sword instead.

LET'S GET CRITICAL

Most importantly for getting that old *Tomb Raider* vibe, combat has rocketed backwards into the world of hardcore animal abuse. Gorillas, tigers, rats, crocs and raptors all must die. No human AI, just circling beasts and infinite pistol ammo. You won't even get to shoot lucky Pierre this time around.

To add something back to this boiled-down combat, Crystal Dynamics have introduced 'rage'. If you see a gorilla making circles come out of his head, that means he's sick of you shooting him. This is rage. When enraged, animals will charge you, and cause heftier than usual damage.

However, this also activates your adrenalin dodge, which – if Lara pulls it off – gives you the
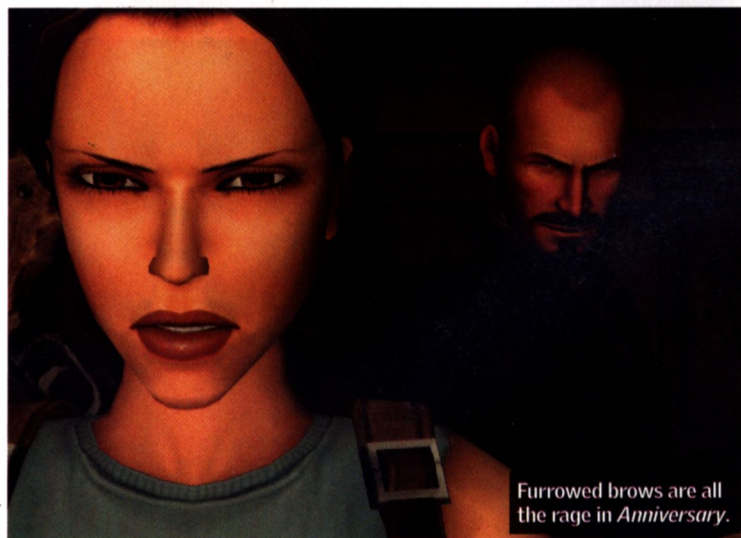
The sincerest form of flattery

Lara's inspired much fanfiction. Here's a selection plucked from fanfiction.net...

A RAIDER'S SUFFERING

"Do not enter the key! This door is a-" But Lara's words meant nothing to him. He had already put the key.
"Trap." sighed Lara. Then she pointed her finger at the hallway.
"I recommend you two to abandon this place as posible." As soon as she said that, the ruin started shaking, making many stones fall at the relic hunters and the archaeologist.

Kyubak

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND?

"Oh, you're just jealous, because I'm so clever!" Lana grinned then started pushing those cages and after she finished and went through the door, she reached another room, what was full of evil coat racks, what immediately attacked Lara. "Argh, they want my coat!" she cried. "What shall I do?"

Adrienn Steele

THE SCANTILY CLAD CHRONICLES

Chapter 1: The Attack of the Lesbian Android
Butler: Um... Miss Croft wouldn't you like some clothes?
Lara: No, being naked in the inevitable oncoming fight scene will be a hit with male gamers.
(Fondling herself she winks in the direction of the computer screen.)
Butler: Oh, of course.

demonchild1

He's very handy.

Re-using the Tesla effects from *Legend*.

chance to perform a headshot. Does it work? Well... Yes, and no.

DIE ANOTHER DAY

It's purist *Tomb Raider*, for sure. But by virtue of being reduced to the bare essence of feral genocide, it isn't terrifically satisfying. Locking, shooting and flipping around quickly becomes routine, and with the overly forgiving checkpoint system, dying is never more than a tiny-wee setback.

The adrenalin dodge takes a little getting used to. You probably won't even use it until the T-Rex, when it suddenly becomes necessary. And that's when you'll be hit by the full awkwardness of the system, too. Trying to guide T-Rex into the traps involves the awkward feat of walking backwards, with the direction you're facing being decided by the position of the lock-on. You

So many poles, so little time.

"I know what you're thinking, and yes, my backpack is from Primark."

know what to do, but it's near-impossible to work out which way you're walking. You'll beat the T-Rex, but you'll also rip your shirt in frustration, like you're at the end of *Planet Of The Apes*.

COME AND HAVE A GO

There was talk about *Anniversary* being harder than *Legend*, in response to the demands of the fans. It's not. It doesn't quite fall into *Legend's* trap of putting a bullring through your nose and dragging you – compliant, dumb and drooling – through obvious paths.

However, the hangable ledges are obvious in white, and grappling points are emblazoned with an unmissable blue circle. What's more, they've kept the Dragon's Lair 'Press Up Now To Not Die!' cinematics that add very little. It's frustrating to not be trusted by the developers to solve their puzzles. We've got websites with fan-contributed walkthroughs available the day after release, for god's sake. If you do beat us, we'll just ask our friends, or cheat.

That said, the levels are fair, and boss-battles aside, you never feel cheated, except by your own stupidity. The checkpoint system of *Legend* is intact – no PlayStation save crystals and no quick-saves – and if you foul up a jump, landing you in a previous part of the level, you might like to know you can reload a checkpoint rather than do all those fancy jumps again. Hell, you've proved you can do it, it makes you no less of an explorer.

It's this sense of exploration that's been missing of late – having four or five levels in the same tomb creates a better illusion of depth. I'd be lying if I didn't admit that playing *Anniversary* was definitely enhanced by that experience. To see all those half-

If you haven't played the original, then don't play it just to enjoy this; *Anniversary* stands up on its own
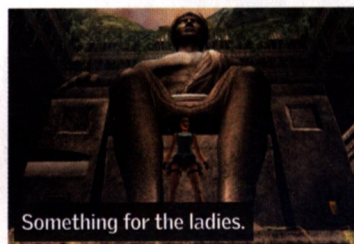
Something for the ladies.
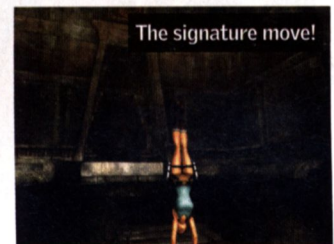
The signature move!

remembered scenes with particle effects and no ugly joins in the textures – well, it felt like vindication of the fact I've stuck with playing videogames all these years. If you haven't played the original, then don't play it just to enjoy this; *Anniversary* stands up as a decent game without the benefit of going, "Oh my god, I remember this bit, hang on, it wasn't like that," for 15 hours.

WHAT WE MEAN IS...

Let's attempt a summary, then. *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* is the game you think you remember playing. By taking your memories and upgrading them, it works in the real-world like a cross between *Total Recall* and *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*. It brings a good dose of the strengths from the original and adds a couple of the strengths and weaknesses from *Legend*. It's a good game, a solid remake, but having said that, 11 years on, it was never going to garner the awe-struck plaudits of a gobsmacked world. We're used to it, now. **PCZ**
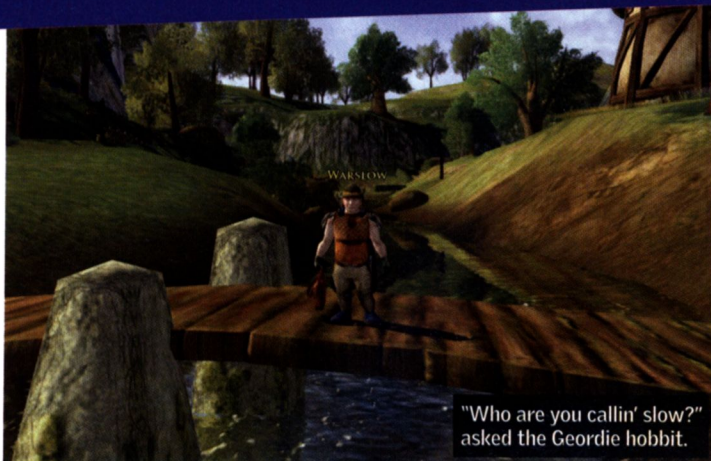
"Who are you callin' slow?" asked the Geordie hobbit.

Hobbit children love to play at *Vets In Practice* in practice.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

ONLINE ONLY

Dan Griliopoulos finds out if Turbine have something special up their wizard's sleeves...

DEVELOPER Turbine
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.lotro.com
ETA Out now
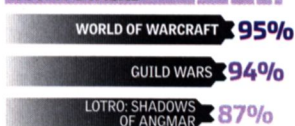**PRICE** £35 + £9 monthly

PCZONE RECOMMENDED

AT A GLANCE...

Tolkien's world brought to life in a *World Of Warcraft*-style MMO.

Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT	**95%**
GUILD WARS	**94%**
LOTRO: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR	**87%**

WHEN BEARDY MEDIEVAL historian JRR Tolkien conceived of Middle-earth, way back in 1917, we doubt he ever imagined his reworking of ancient British and Nordic myths would have any audience beyond kids and academics.

Here it is though, having established an entire genre of writing and maintaining itself as one of the biggest mythos franchises in the world 90 years later. We don't think old JRR conceived that one day people would be taking glee in using the giant spiders of his myth to massacre villages of hobbits, running pies from one side of the shire to the other, or taunting an AI Gandalf about his terrible taste in dresses. That said, with his elitism, happiness at the murders of millions of press-ganged orcs and retrograde romanticism, we doubt he would have approved of much nowadays.

Let's be clear from the start: *Lord Of the Rings Online* is an amazing achievement. It's managed to cram lots of Middle-earth into the MMO standard framework. Plus, while there are substantial areas missing, the game is planned to progress further through the plot, unlocking new areas as the Fellowship progress through them.

FAIR TO MIDDLIN'

If you've seen the movies or read the books, this is set in Eriador (comprising the Shire, Bree, Rivendell and other areas). The action takes place just after Frodo and the hobbits have left the Shire, when the Black Riders have first been seen in Middle-earth. If you've not partaken of Tolkien's mythos, then you've only got about 100 hours of reading ahead of you.

You take the part of a normal member of your race, somehow enlisted in the troubles of the times; with the dwarves, it appears you're an out-and-out warrior; with the hobbits, you just happened to want the post to run on time. You gradually pursue and solve problems in your home town, before leaving to make your name in the world and pursue plots parallel to those of the books in the Witch-King's realm of Angmar.

Initially, you're given a tutorial quest; what it is, depends on your race. Dwarves get to wander around Thorin's kingdom, humans and hobbits get to play around in Archet (near Bree), and elves appear in Rivendell. Some of these areas are implied to be in the past, though whether that's the recent past (Bree) or years before (such as the dwarf area) isn't always consistent.

In these main storyline encounters, you often meet the heroes of the books; Gandalf and the late Thorin pop up in the dwarf prelude, Strider and Elrond are floating around, and the rest of the Fellowship are

Stand back: it's a fight!
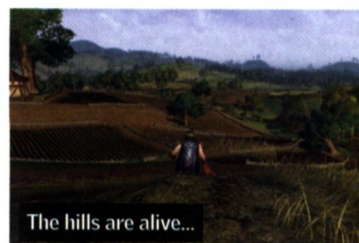
The hills are alive...

> Let's be clear: *LOTRO* is an amazing achievement, cramming lots of Middle-earth into an MMO framework

This might be an orc, we're going to pretend we can't tell.

out there in the wilds, somewhere. Notably, they, like the scenery, don't relate to the films; so Strider looks tall, dark and handsome, without being Viggo Mortensen and Elrond looks nothing like those Agent Smith fellas from *The Matrix*. This is very much its own world.

LOOKING GOOD

Before our hobbit Warslow popped out into the world though, we explored the Shire. We found all the towns mentioned in the books, from Needle Hole and Waymeet to Little Delving and Hobbiton, with the layouts pretty much as we imagined. Everything from Bag End to the Green Dragon Inn to Ted Sandyman's mill is entered and rendered beautifully. We were loathe to leave the Shire at all, so endearingly parochial were its concerns; chickens not laying, a bad batch of pies and so on. It also looks amazing, increasingly so on higher-end machines.

Bree and Rivendell are also beautifully constructed, and the towns give an

Money makes the world go round

That clinking, clanking sound
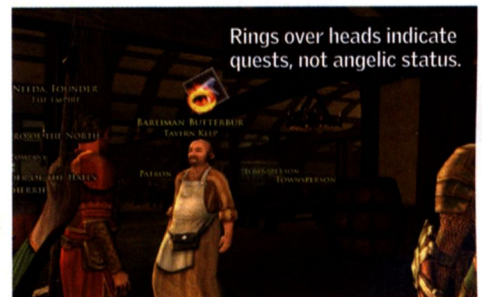
Rings over heads indicate quests, not angelic status.

Codemasters have experimented with different pricing strategies for some time now, notably attempting the Korean model with *ArchLord*, where they had tiered payment systems that allowed those paying more to have more cool loot. When the public (and *PC ZONE*) protested at this completely unethical aristocracy of real-world income inside an otherwise commitment-rewarding MMO, they dumped it and reverted to the much-preferred *Guild Wars* model of no monthly fees. For *LOTRO: Shadows Of Angmar*, they've introduced the standard £9 monthly fee, but the more committed can instead pay for the £99 lifetime package, meaning you'll never have to pay a fee again. However, this ties you to the game for 11 months, and doesn't say anything about paying for the inevitable expansion packs.
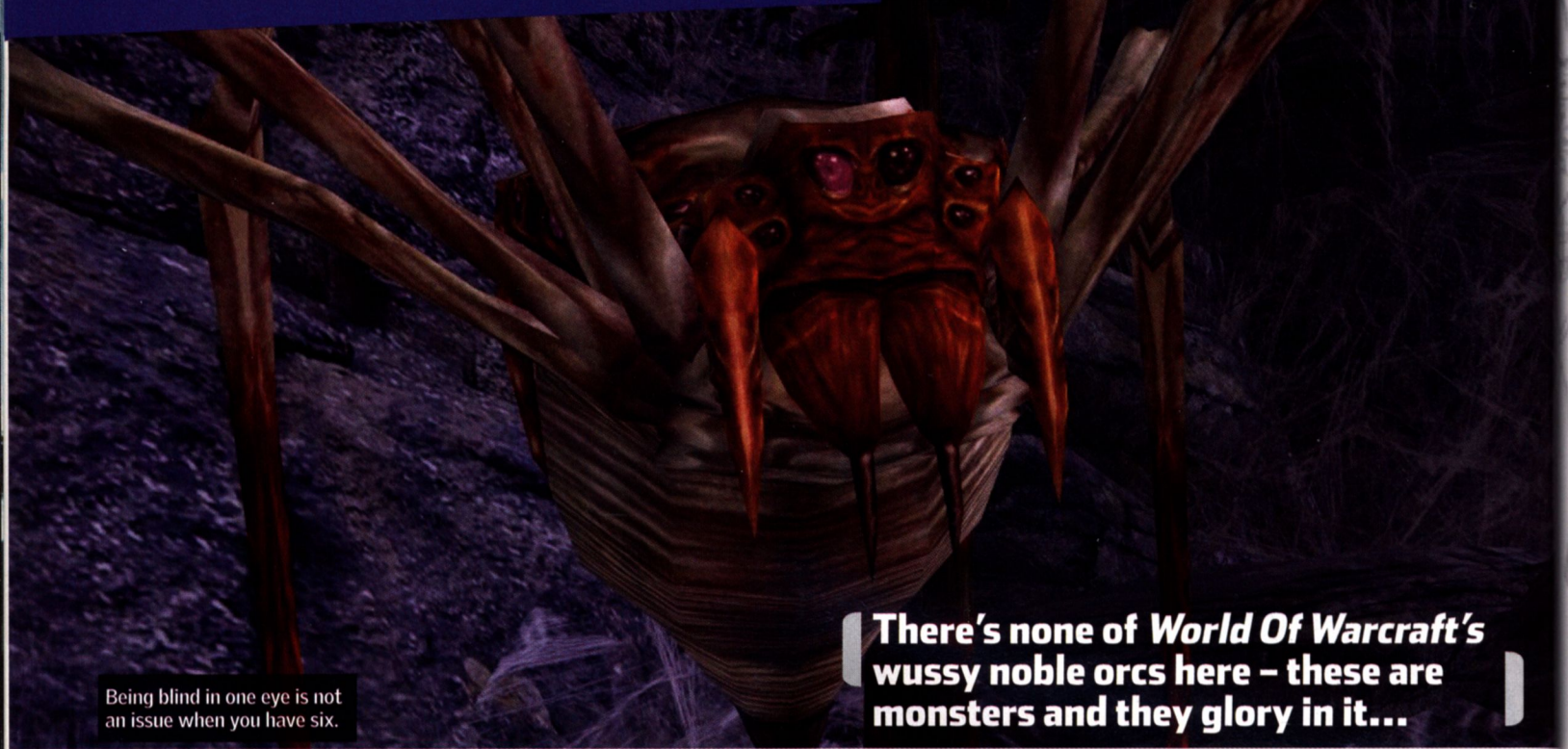
Being blind in one eye is not an issue when you have six.

> There's none of *World Of Warcraft's* wussy noble orcs here – these are monsters and they glory in it...

There's a lot of pubs in the Shire.

Horses handle fast travel.

Elves have tasty ears.

Mr Deeds goes to town

He's got a list, he's checking it twice...

Achieving stuff in *LOTRO* isn't just quest-based; you also have a deed list, which tracks some arbitrary collection of things that the developers consider it's important you experience. This is divided into race, class and a collection of deeds local to each area, such as the Shire or the Ettenmoors. They vary from visiting all the sights of the Shire, from the Party Tree to Stocktower, to delivering mail to every town. You also get bonus deeds for completing all the quests in each area, which give you big trait boosts, allowing you to customise your character more.

overall feeling of being well-populated with realistic communities, whether that's because there's a kid who's trying to balance on a wall or some workmen working on the thatching on the pub while the locals stand around and bitch.

What's more, although they don't always match the locations created for the films, the layouts are consistent with Tolkien's description and draw on the 70 years of art that the books have inspired. What we're trying to say is, it's great.

CLASS WAR

The classes deviate thankfully from the Blizzard formula and, though the races are familiar, Tolkien surely has a prior claim here to men living alongside elves, hobbits and dwarrow (nicely, the dwarf is the only race that doesn't offer you a choice of gender.)

The familiar classes are Burglar (rogue), Champion (barbarian), Guardian (tank) and Hunter. The unique ones are the human-only Captain (like a *City Of Villain's* mastermind, the captain is a group leader who has an NPC that follows him around); the Lore-Master (who replaces the mages of many games, Tolkien's world only

having five wizards and no normal magic users); and the Minstrel, who's a good all-rounder and healer, while also being able to play all the instruments in the world.

It's a sign of how much love has gone into this game that every class can learn to play a couple of instruments, and that the instruments are all playable on three different octaves using the number pad. Yes, you can actually jam in this game, though it's a pity the minstrels don't have to have any actual musical skill...

STAND UP AND FIGHT

Despite our unreserved praise so far, it's the combat that reveals how much the mechanics that underlie the world owe to its predecessors. You get into combat with an enemy (all the familiar shortcut keys match those of other MMOs, such as tab to target), and then you line up attacks. If you kill an enemy, you get to loot their body. If they kill you, you can respawn nearby (though occasionally, you'll respawn miles away, irritatingly). You can also team up with other people in 'Fellowships' to do particularly hard missions and instances.

Here, Turbine have borrowed from *EverQuest II*, introducing Fellowship

I, Monster
Set the beast inside yourself free...
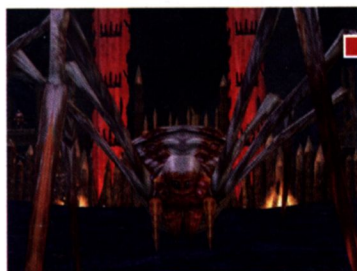
This is my spider, Limbs. He's a weaver, which means he goes around smashing up toll gates and will die at a young age under a loom up north. Probably.
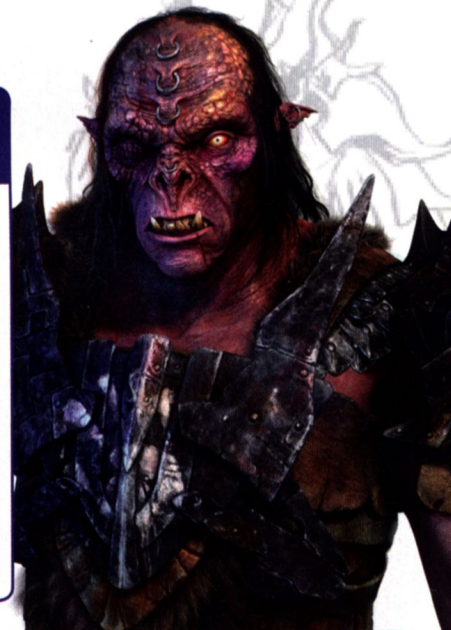

He's called Limbs because he collects them – I've got a range of Hobbit appendages in my inventory. I keep the feet mostly, as they're the tastiest.

That's a hobbit I've just sucked dry and spat out. So die all enemies of Angmar, ha! By the way, my secondary profession is a lawyer.

Your evil characters can get new skins.

You sometimes come across these sun-struck trolls.

combos which do extra damage against elite or harder enemies. Certain moves of certain classes trigger these, so players have to plan their moves as a team properly for harder bosses. We're not saying the combat isn't fun – it's as fun as anything *WOW* has to offer – but it's not original and it's endowed with the same inflexibility of action as its predecessors. That said, it's familiar and easy to learn if you're new to MMOs.

As usual, you get experience from killing enemies and quest completion, but there are also alternate methods of recognition. First, there are deeds (see 'Mr Deed Goes To Town', opposite). Deeds unlock traits which allow you to customise your character at the local bard's shop. Then you can get titles, again from deeds or quest completion, that you can put after your name.

Alternatively, there's the whole usual crafting set-up, which follows *WOW's* system of levelling by harvesting and making items, though the various professions are only available in larger bundles, limiting you to certain crafting set-ups. Turbine have stated that the best items in the game will come equally from drops, crafting, and quest and PvP

rewards – even at the starting levels it was easy to make kit that matched the rewards or drops. There's plenty of variation in the kit then. There's not quite so much variation in initially creating your character, and most character's creations, especially male hobbits, look very similar.

MONSTER MANIA
When your character reaches level ten, you become eligible for Monster Play. Here, you find a fell-scrying pool in one of the main towns such as Bree, and select a monster type from five options. The types are both races and class, so orcs/uruks are archers, tanks and warriors, wargs are sneaky rogue types and spiders are some sort of frail anti-player class.

You start, *get this*, at level 50, so you're already a hideously over-powered creature. However, you need to do Monster quests to unlock better stats, more skins and new skills so you have a chance against the goodies that've had to play their characters up to that level.

The style is completely different up here. You're threatened, cajoled and treated like dirt by the quest-givers. There's none of *WOW's* wussy noble orcs here – these are monsters, and they glory

in it. When you get mission descriptions from the respected Arch-Tyrant of a fortress which read "Like elves. Ears tasty. Get!", or talk about treading your corpse into the road to victory, you know they probably haven't been through the usual sort of leadership training.

In the high-end areas of the game's end, like the Ettenmoors, PvP is enabled, but only with Monster Players against everyone else. These are the same players but with different skins, so we're intrigued how this is going to work. At the time of writing, the Ettenmoors is empty except for the forces of Angmar, preparing for the assault of the first level-40 players.

There's a series of castles spread over the enormous open map, defended by hordes of level 50 NPCS – it'll take several groups of Fellowships to get into these places and then the end-bosses have literally 50 times the morale (health) of anyone else, as well as being rather hard to actually hurt.

Suffice to say, there's a lot more in *LOTRO* than we've had the space to cover. What we can confidently say though is this: it's the first challenger to *World Of Warcraft* for some time, and credit is due to both Turbine and the long-dead JRR. **PCZ**

It might be wartime, but at least it's sunny.

Just look at that track gauge. Magnificent.

Ugly green blobs highlight your men.

Believe us, you won't win this war.

THEATRE OF WAR

Steve O'Hagan takes his seat for the latest WWII RTS production...

DEVELOPER 1C Company
PUBLISHER Battlefront
WEBSITE
www.battlefront.com/
products/tow/index.html
ETA Out now
PRICE $45 (£23, download)

THIS GAME PROMISED much. A link-up between Russian über-developer Oleg Maddox of *IL-2 Sturmovik* fame's 1C Company, and hardcore US strategisers Battlefront. Years in development, it promised to be the greatest payoff from the end of the Cold War since Abramovich gave Chelsea FC a billion pounds.

The game simulates smallscale WWII European ground combat, stretching from the invasion of Poland in 1939 to the fall of Berlin. It's dripping in WWII hardware porn, all manner of lovingly modelled tanks, guns and infantry teams detailed down to the penetration factors of their weapons and the thickness of their armour.

Missions are combined into campaigns that let you command Polish, French, UK/US, Russian or German forces throughout several battles. Every soldier, driver and

Oleg's engine in full effect.

gunner is individually detailed, with stats for everything from marksmanship to leadership skills. Survivors of battles gain experience and decorations that improve their performance for the next outing.

RISE AND FALL

Inside this is the makings of an absolutely brilliant realism-focused RTS – the classic *Close Combat* series stretched over three dimensions. No resource-gathering, no super-tough hero units, no click-fest tactics, nada. And when all hell is breaking loose, shells bursting all around and cannon fire ricocheting off your tanks' hulls, the game is, as they say, a blast.

But sadly, there's a platoon of issues lurking to ambush the unwary. First up, *Theatre Of War* is rock hard. As we speak, fan forums are filling up with puzzled hardcore strategy game veterans wondering what they're doing wrong.

More importantly, the game is in need of some furious spit and polish. The camera control system is wonky, making everything needlessly difficult. There's not enough info feedback to let you know what your individually modelled troops are doing. The behaviour of your units can be erratic, irrational and unrealistic (standing up in a field while being machine-gunned).

Plus, the audio is weak too, making the action half as gripping as it could be.

There's still enough goodness if you crave some proper real-time tactics to have a punt. But if you're less sure, you'd better bide your time and hope they slap on a man-sized patch soon. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Historically accurate, graphically excellent, though massively difficult and unpolished WWII RTS that will hopefully improve with patches.

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

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES	93%
CLOSE COMBAT: CROSS OF IRON	78%
THEATRE OF WAR	71%

PCZONE

Graphics	Blisteringly real
Sound	Sadly lacklustre
Multiplayer	Yes

- ✓ Incredible level of realism for nerds
- ✓ Beautifully realised battlefields
- ✓ Tough tactical challenges
- ✗ Punishingly difficult
- ✗ Camera controls are a bitch
- ✗ Not nearly enough polish

71

A brilliant, realistic RTS is being held prisoner

BECAUSE THE FATE OF ALL MANKIND IS TOO GREAT TO BE DECIDED ON A CONSOLE ALONE

HALO 2

Halo® 2 for the PC is here. Two all-new exclusive maps, 23 in total. And a Map Editor to create even more. Only on Windows Vista.™

Arriving 25 May 2007

www.gamesforwindows.com

BUNGiE

Microsoft game studios

16+ www.pegi.info

Games for Windows LIVE

The Chief took a no-nonsense approach to fox-hunting.

"Call that aiming? I call it *laming*."

"*Love* what you've done with the place."

"No chance we could talk about this, then?"

HALO 2

Will Porter sits in front of his telly in 2004, holding a sweaty gamepad, open-mouthed. Only today, and on PC!

DEVELOPER Bungie/Microsoft
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/games/halo2
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Big green man fights aliens. Some are big, some are small, some are nice, some are diseased – but they all die.

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

HOW IT STACKS

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	84%
CLEANING BELLY BUTTON	61%
HALO 2	60%

YOU CAN'T SAY you don't like *Halo*. Even if you claim to dislike it, I know that somewhere deep down in your soul there's a little gravelly voice cheering its sticky plasma grenades, fun little vehicles and relatively unique take on combat. You've had some good times with Master Chief, whether sitting on the floor in front of an Xbox with a mate or perhaps even with Gearbox's PC version of times past. I know that a fire has been lit somewhere deep in your heart – so take hold of my hand, look deep into my eyes and join me in exhaling a smidgen of that green metallic love.

Something you *can* say, though, is that there was no need to keep the PC community waiting three long years for a conversion. A conversion too that now appears dull and ageing, and what's more can only be run on a Vista platform bereft of anything else worth playing apart from *Geometry Wars* (see p74). That is, at least until the advent of DX10 and the whine of a million gamers opening their wallets and pouring coins into the cavernous maw of Bill Gates.

But whatever you think about Vista, and whether you consider MS a risen messiah or a ruthless hijacker of fun, I think that while we're still holding hands (and we are still holding hands), we can all agree that releasing the ancient *Halo 2* as a flagship title for both Vista and Games for Windows LIVE is a f***ing stupid idea.

BE MY HALO

The bare bones of *Halo 2* are great – its shooty, hidey gameplay, amusing physics and some genuinely excellent set-pieces (notably jumping onboard the giant spider mech in an otherwise barren attack on Earth) still get the adrenalin pumping. But due to the 'OMG – online multiplayer on Xbox! This is the future!' effect of its original launch, people tend to forget its multitude of sins.

The dull, obtuse and nonsensical storyline (the low point of which is a Flood hive mind ripped straight from *Little Shop Of Horrors*), the sudden ending, the cop-out that was the Earth invasion, the crap bits where you play as an alien Arbiter, the endless retread of gameplay already done to death in the

original... All getting in the way of action you can't help but feel affection for despite it all.

STILL A PISSER

Multiplayer is what sealed the deal with the living-room format, and all the old arenas and downloadable content resurface here – ready, willing and able for you to strap yourself into MS's bulky LIVE system and an undeniably giggle-packed game, despite a marked variation in quality as you pass between the 23 maps.
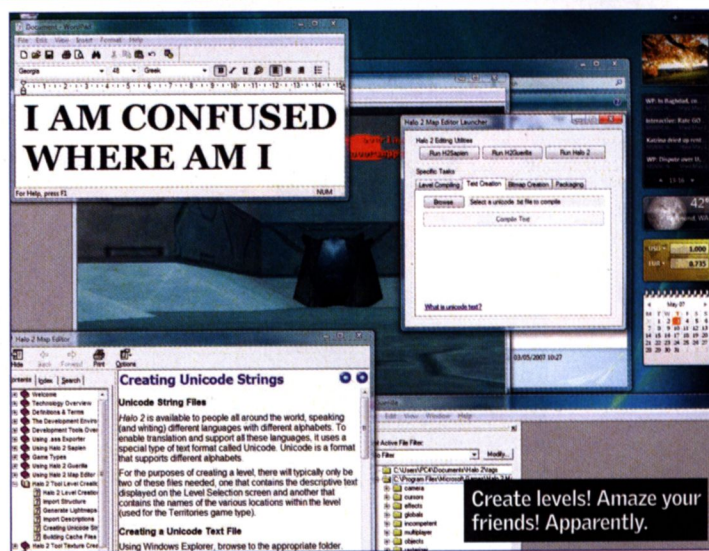
The two new maps on offer (Uplift and District) are pretty intense – but, I'm sorry, if there are redeeming features in that one with the giant turbine that every bugger plays, then I've yet to find them. As for the persistent lack of co-op play on PC, well, that's just as unforgivable as it was last time around. Oh, and the menu systems pissed me off too – MS still seem convinced that everyone will be playing with one of their pads, and to get my mouse inverted (yes, I know), I had to traverse seven screens, which may not sound like much, but felt like I was ascending Kilimanjaro.

Alas, the Chief had sneezed in his helmet.

The graphics are crisper and cleaner than those of the Xbox version, but that doesn't stop them looking dated

Personal Halo
Building your own levels for fun and (not much) profit

I AM CONFUSED WHERE AM I

Create levels! Amaze your friends! Apparently.

When you see the *Halo 2* map editor in the list of extra features, unless you're super-clever and have time to kill, don't get too excited. My expectations went through the roof, as I imagined dropping Warthogs here and cutting and pasting grey corridors there, and I got slightly giddy. Unfortunately, though, rather than being all user-friendly and drag-and-drop-ish, it's all a bit complicated – not at all the *TrackMania* or *Pariah*-style affair my heart desired. It seemed like you needed a degree in it to reach even a level of vague comprehension. Well, almost. It was too clever for me anyway. But then again, so are both the word and number rounds on *Countdown*...

"Dude, your arm! Wassup with that?"

"Silly blue guys awa-hyyy!"

As for the graphics, well, I can't deny they're far crisper and cleaner than the Xbox version (you can increase the resolution and everything), but that doesn't stop them looking dated. I've always really liked the character models of the *Halo* menagerie, but even so, everything seems flat and lifeless compared to the efforts of every other shooter on the market.

Crikey. What a kicking. Despite all this, though, what *Halo* boils down to – the same 30 seconds of decent action, repeated ad infinitum – is, while sometimes *too* repetitive, still great fun. Interiors are drab and lifeless, exteriors are often starkly beautiful; you shoot, you jump, you hide, you win, you lose, you die, you laugh, you live once more.

The *Halo* template is not broken – but shell out cash for this and your spirits sure will be. You'll have fun, it'll make you smile, I won't deny it. But three years on, the *Halo 2* Vista experience is as forgettable as it is tardy and somewhat depressing. **PCZ**
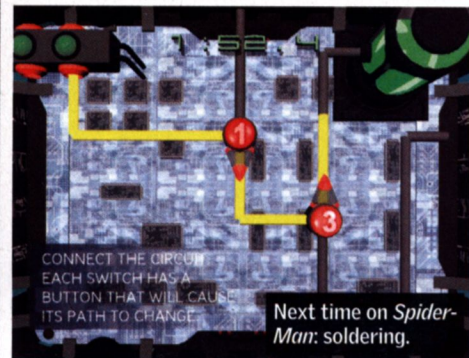
PCZONE

Graphics	Undeniably crisper, yet heftily creaky
Sound	Excellent. No flies on Master Chief there
Multiplayer	Solid fun. But not legendary

- ✓ *Halo* is always a laugh
- ✓ Gets the adrenalin flowing
- ✗ It was decidedly patchy three years ago
- ✗ Graphically lacking
- ✗ They act like we should be grateful or something

60
Late to the party

Pete's Spidey sense told him 'low bridges, bad'.

CONNECT THE CIRCUIT
EACH SWITCH HAS A
BUTTON THAT WILL CAUSE
ITS PATH TO CHANGE
Next time on *Spider-Man*: soldering.

The 'Banker Boys' lacked coordination.

SPIDER-MAN 3

Who's that slamming his face into the sidewalks of New York? Oh, it's *Jon Blyth*

DEVELOPER LTI Gray Matter
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE sm3thegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

YOU REALISED THIS was a piece of merchandising, right? In case you didn't realise it, it says so twice on the first splash screen. 'Official Spider-Man Merchandise', it says, right next to the less official-looking 'Spider-Man Merchandise' badge. They might as well put a little BBFC grid on the back that says, 'Contains commercial cynicism. Suitable for clueless parents, naive fans and dribbling three-year-olds screaming 'Maa! Maa! Spoo-da-mang!' in the supermarket'.

There, that's my token dig at film tie-ins out of the way. Now I can admit that I've pretty much enjoyed a couple of the *Spider-Man* games so far, and this fits snugly into that Spideygame mould. Swing around the city solving crimes as you find them. Have your disbelief-suspension molested by 'mission activation' tokens, which progress the various storylines with cut-scenes. Unlock more and more moves, and annoy more and more gangs. At worst, it's an average string of scraps made bearable by the fact that you're swinging around like a good 'un. And to give *Spider-Man 3* its due, the web-slinging feels good.

The missions are divided into fights, chases, defusing bombs, photography and swinging around with Mary Jane. It's not really worth describing all the mission types separately, because they all involve the same thing. You follow waypoints (so many waypoints) and then either have a fight or defuse a bomb. Defusing a bomb is a strange metaphorical process – it's a combination of *Dancing Stage*-style button-bashing, *Paradroid* and 'rotating the thumb stick'. Sound fun? It is, a bit. For a while. Not quite so much after the umpteenth bomb tour.

BAD MOVES

Fighting is a process of building on your four basics – fast, strong, dodge and web – and your ever-growing bank of unlocked special moves. On mouse and keyboard, it's the predictable, unmanageable, third-person whirligig that'll have you puking out a forgotten sandwich, and this is also true of navigating the city. Once you set up your gamepad – and even that proved to be a shockingly difficult feat here – you'll only be lurching forwards occasionally to enter camera mode.

When you consider that the game is far too ugly to be shown on an unforgiving monitor – cel-shaded *Ultimate Spider-Man* looked infinitely better – and that it asks for an unjustifiable 6GB of HD space, *and* that we couldn't get more than 30 frames-a-second out of a fairly hot PC... Well, it doesn't seem like the best way to spend £30. Our advice would be to avoid the PC version of *Spider-Man 3* like a spunk-filled bowler hat. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

A Spidey cash-in that adds very little to the themes of previous Spidey games, and has a couple of crippling flaws due to an awkward port.

Minimum system requirements:
2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 256MB T&L-capable graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN	71%
SPIDER-MAN 2	46%
SPIDER-MAN 3	42%

PCZONE

Graphics	Alternately dull and rubbish
Sound	Surprisingly dull music, proper voices
Multiplayer	No

✔ The film's OK
✔ Variety of stuff going on
✘ Very repetitive
✘ Maddening camera
✘ Needed more play-testing
✘ Waypoint mania

42

Tangled

The Big Bang, "aciiid"-style.

"Er, nice snakey-snakeys? Crap."

Tonight on Five: *When Graph Paper Goes Bad.*

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED

Steve Hogarty swears his way through yet another game...

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE zone.msn.com/en/vistagames
ETA Out now
PRICE £4

BLACK HOLE, black hole... Art thou a handy friend, granting me temporary refuge by means of your intense gravitational field? Or art thou, as many might suspect, "a f***ing-bastard-stupid-shit"?

Yes, it's *Geometry Wars*, turning sane folks into profanity-spewing demons as it did on console. What we've got is pretty much identical to the 360 version: as pure a shoot 'em up as you'll ever see, with as simple a rule-set as games generally allow.

To play, you really need a gamepad – mouse and keyboard isn't half as good. The left analogue stick moves your ship about, the right controls the direction of your bullets. Enemies of increasing degrees of complexity throw themselves at you, each with its own behavioural patterns and distinctive 'birth noise', which you must bury deep inside your subconscious mind and routinely exploit in your efforts to achieve a slightly higher score than last time. You could write a thesis on this game, and many people probably have.

SPACE-HUNGRY

Some drawbacks arrive with this Vista-exclusive version, however. The game is

more suited to the dimensions of an HDTV than a typical monitor, despite the option to ramp up the resolution. It's hard to see what's happening when it begins to look like an exploding fireworks factory, or a truck carrying kaleidoscopes crashing into a shop full of stained-glass windows, or whatever simile you'd care to misuse. Plus, on anything less than a 21-inch screen, the excessively flashy visuals hinder the game slightly.

There's also a yet-to-be-patched-up exploit involving Vista's fancy alt-tabbing, which slows the game to a stutter, meaning that you can rack up huge scores, albeit quite slowly. And, of course, the very fact that it's needlessly exclusive to Vista will be a sticking point for some, but that's a criticism to be aimed at Microsoft, and not this beautifully crafted shoot 'em up.

It's only a £4 download too, so if you're running Vista, this purchase could only be described as, well, *logical*. Even more so if you don't own a 360. If you're still on XP, however (and you probably are), this isn't even nearly reason enough to rush out and upgrade. That said, *Geometry Wars* is a near perfect port at a perfect price point. Get it, if you can. **PCZ**

PCZONE ON THE DVD

AT A GLANCE...

An Xbox Live Arcade classic appears on MSN Games for Vista for an absolute pittance. If you've got Vista, then you really ought to buy this.

Minimum system requirements:
Vista – if your machine's running it, then you can run this.

HOW IT STACKS

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED	80%
GEOMETRY WARS CLONES	75%
GEOMETRY LESSONS	12%

PCZONE

Graphics	Anti-aliasing wouldn't work, but otherwise beautiful
Sound	Key to the gameplay, actually, so turn up the bass
Multiplayer	No – it would be interesting, though

✓ Extremely exciting
✓ Twitch gaming at its best
✓ Faultless graphical style
✗ Will make you shout bad things
✗ Better on a big HD telly
✗ If you're rubbish at it, you'll hate it

80
The right angle

Hands up, baby hands up...

The tension and excitement are palpable.

ALPHA PRIME

Neither in its prime nor the alpha male

DEVELOPER Black Element Software
PUBLISHER Idea Games
WEBSITE www.alpha-prime.com
ETA Out now
PRICE €29.80 (£20 – download)

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 128MB graphics card

Not great, but not shit either.
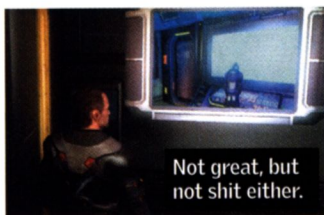
THERE'S SOMETHING UNSETTLING about an FPS that comes out of nowhere. Even the very worst FPS games tend get a bit noticed, mainly because of press releases that shyly claim "unprecedented realism" and "immersive gameplay".

So, for a game that's had close to zero press in the UK, it's a surprise to report that *Alpha Prime* isn't, well, all that bad. The script may be Europengrish delivered with stilted ham-sodden madness, and there's very little to rescue the game from mediocrity, but *Alpha Prime* looks good, plays OK and sounds – well, it sounds like an insane Italian guy.

The plot revolves around space prospectors who've been driven mad by the stuff they're looking for. This 'hubbardium' – take that, Scientology – could be a safe metal, but could just be a mythical creature's bones. Refined hubbardium has the side effect of charging up a bullet-time bar, which is bloody convenient for a modern FPS.

The other gimmick is a hacking tool for controlling doors, machines and cameras. It's not an evolution of gameplay, and the AI is straight from the Academy of Box-Hidey Standbang. You've played a dozen games like it, but maybe you enjoyed them.

This quiet end of the FPS world is populated mainly by atrocious stinkers, and it's usually only the hilariously bad gameplay that makes them bearable. *Alpha Prime*, with a passable storyline and passable gameplay, is a little passable anomaly.

The worst thing about this game is that I don't get to laugh at how shit it is; sadly, I can't really gush about how great it is, either, because it's not.

Jon Blyth

Matt gazed longingly at Clive's red vest. Sigh.

PCZONE 58
Past its prime
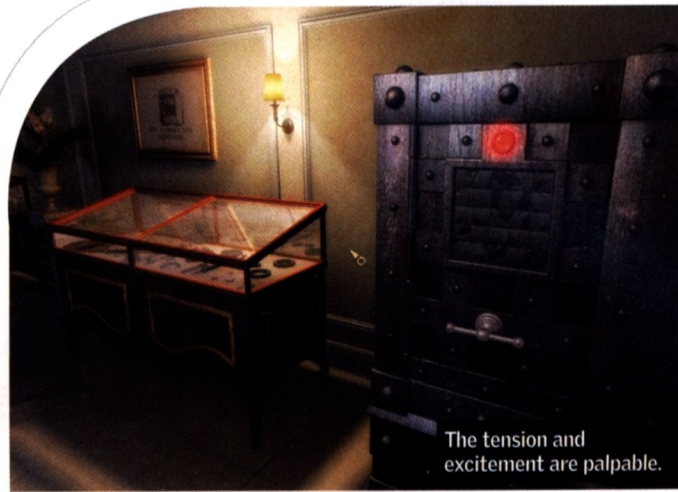
SAFECRACKER: THE ULTIMATE PUZZLE ADVENTURE

A whole new meaning to 'thick as thieves'...

DEVELOPER Kheops Studio
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE tinyurl.com/2cgbo7
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
800MHz processor, 64MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card

LET'S FACE IT, we all do things we're not proud of. It might be that Britney Spears album that you bought in secret or what happened between you and the woman from the third floor at the Christmas party. Sadly, I'll admit to actually being quite eager to get my hands on *Safecracker* when it arrived. I blame it on the re-runs of *The Crystal Maze*.

The story goes that an eccentric billionaire with a fondness for safes has died but left his will in a safe somewhere in his mansion, and the family's hired you to retrieve it. Which basically consists of wandering around a bunch of static environments while trying to crack the safes (puzzles) dotted around the place.

But herein lies the problem; I want to be eased in. I want the puzzles to seem solvable. But barely three puzzles in, I'm stuck – and without a jump-suited team-mate standing outside telling me the wrong instructions and screaming at me to "get out!", I'm stumped. Sadly, I even take a puzzle home to solve but only progress by another four safes before I'm stuck again.

After a few more hours of random clicking, I decide I'm bored of walking round the same three rooms and never want to see a puzzle again. If you find yourself tempted by this game, either go out and buy a puzzle book or go DIY by getting yourself a harmonica, shaving your head and challenging some mates to a pub quiz before having a lock-in.

Suzy Wallace

It's a cracker.
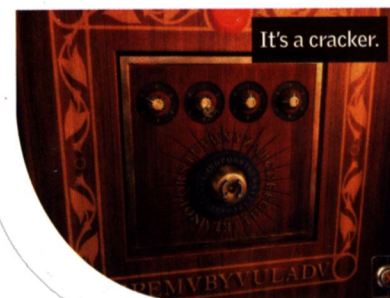
PCZONE 31
Safe and very sorry

Life's a bitch.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: LABYRINTH OF THE MINOTAUR

Jump, magic, jump, dance, magic...

DEVELOPER Mythic
PUBLISHER GOA
WEBSITE camelot-europe.goa.com/labyrinth/
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card

GOING STRONG AFTER nearly six years, *Dark Age Of Camelot* is now lavishing higher-level players with enough new PvP, PvE and Realm versus Realm content to keep them going for many a moon with this expansion.

Set, as you'd expect, in a gigantic labyrinth below PvP-haven Agramon Island, *Labyrinth Of The Minotaur* expands on current Champion Level formulas, allowing players to further develop ability-wise, rather than adding levels above 50.

The new Minotaur race is available to every realm, along with a new Mauler class activated through a world-event quest. Maulers are a jack-of-all-trades, close-combat fist-fighting class somewhat like the Brawler from *EverQuest II*.

The meat-and-potatoes of *LOTM* is centred around cajoling RvR-centric players into going after PvE content, and vice-versa. The minotaur relics strewn throughout the labyrinth exist in three tiers, and the best are only available through PvE raids. These are especially useful in that they can be taken outside of the labyrinth and used to conquer Keeps, as well as pursue more raid content.

You'd never be considering this without playing the original first, but *Dark Age*, fast approaching its sixth birthday, is still fun once you reach the higher levels. If you own the game but play causally, this may not be your cup of tea – but for the avid *DAOC* veterans, it's a must-buy.

Ed Zitron
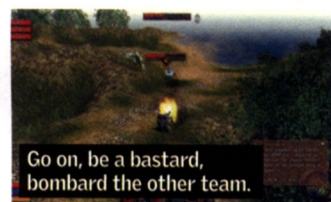

Minotaurs may be strong, but their skin is *so* dry.
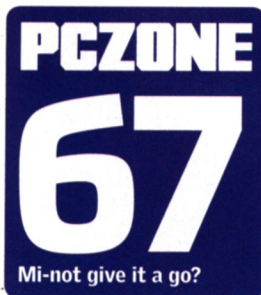
PCZONE 67
Mi-not give it a go?

Reavers can do crazy Jedi-style levitation attacks.

DAWNSPIRE

A bit *Diablo*, a bit *Guild Wars*

ONLINE ONLY

DEVELOPER Silent Grove Studios
PUBLISHER Lexicon Entertainment
WEBSITE www.dawnspire.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $24.95 (£13)

Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card

Go on, be a bastard, bombard the other team.

It's all about relics.

AS THE CURRENT industry cash-cow, MMORPGs are popping up everywhere, desperately trying to cram as many of their competitors' features into themselves in the vain hope they'll steal some of *WOW's* glory.

Dawnspire, in realising this, has released a quirky, simplistic, user-friendly and fun quasi-MMO that emphasises teamwork and real-time PvP over experience-based levelling. Playing something like a stripped-down *Guild Wars* mixed with the click-to-move nature of *Diablo*, you're looking to out-battle the other team in a game of fantasy capture-the-flag known as the Relic Conquest.

You need to pick up each relic and take them back to receptacles, scoring points and bringing your team glory. The twist is that each relic has a negative effect, be it an are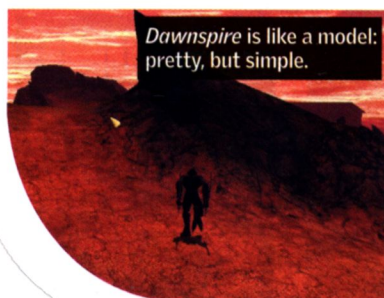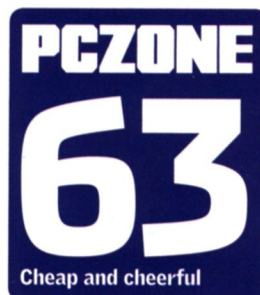a-of-effect stun or slowly killing your character. Teamwork is necessary to save the relic-carrier from both the other team and the relic itself. This adds a layer of strategy to the game that separates it from being a mundane fantasy PvP-fest, but requires a team of people who are somewhat beyond the usual crowd you find online. Unless you're prepared to gang together and protect your relic-mates, you'll be buggered – and the bots are utterly useless, so don't depend on them.

Dawnspire is a good, cheap laugh, and if you can get some friends to play, it's worth giving a whirl.

Ed Zitron

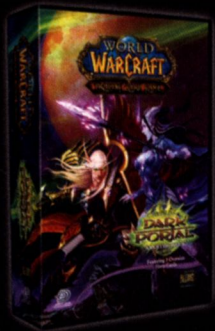
Dawnspire is like a model: pretty, but simple.

PCZONE 63
Cheap and cheerful

Bosco's finest performance yet.
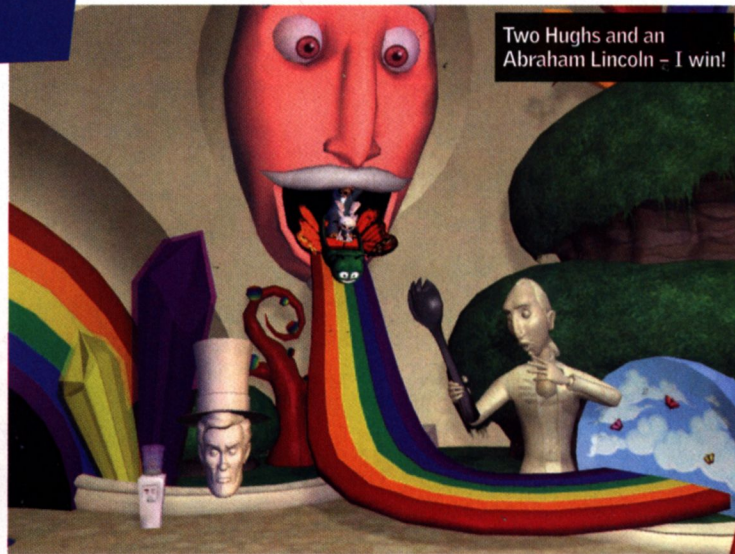
Two Hughs and an Abraham Lincoln – I win!

Midtown Cowboys reunion.

SAM & MAX: EPISODE 6 – THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE MOON

Jon Blyth on the final outing of the dog and rabbity-thing...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Gametap
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com/samandmax
ETA Out now
PRICE £8.95 (£5) per episode, $34.95 (£19) for all six

AT A GLANCE...

After seven months, it's the final chapter in the canine-lapine crime-fighting series, and there's a camp magician on the moon.

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card (hardware transform and lighting recommended).

HOW IT STACKS

EPISODE 5	83%
EPISODE 6	72%
EPISODE 3	71%
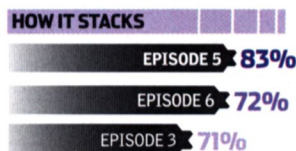
THE FINAL EPISODE has some act to follow, after defeating an alternate-reality Internet in text-only combat. Telltale rise to the challenge effortlessly; the very first thing you do is drive to the moon. If that seems unlikely, then the explanation's in a 1992 comic-book; something to do with engines and sulphur. Best not to ask.

Half the cast of your adventures so far are waiting for you on the moon, to inadvertently assist you in the final battle against magical hypnotist Hugh Bliss. The other half are blown up or tied up in your office closet. Sybil's the Queen, Bosco's his own mother – everyone's here, and on form. The difficulty's up a shade from previous adventures, but it's still finely-written, with likeability in spades.

If I have a gripe, it's that the introduction of Hugh Bliss's magical talismans makes for some rather forced puzzles. A vomiting talisman? A spoon-bending talisman? Especially inside the Blister, it feels like the game indulges the oddness of the moon setting at the expense of its own internal coherency. It never snaps, but safe to say your inventory will be both bizarre and strangely obvious for most of the game.

GLUG, GLUG

It's annoying to have to give *Episode 6* as low a score as this. It feels like a final judgment on the series, when in fact the high points were much, much higher. Sure, people who've been underwhelmed by *Sam & Max* episodes have some valid complaints. Tries too hard, plays too easy – but when you take the games as a fun way to pass an evening for the price of a cheap bottle of wine, they make perfect sense. Especially if you buy the wine as well; drinking alone is brilliant.

Telltale Games have succeeded where Valve and Ritual have failed; they've made episodic gaming work. Sam and Max have been a welcome part of half my working life at *ZONE*, and I'm going to miss clicking on things, and having Sam tell me it's "not going to happen". With self-deprecation, warmth and a torturously over-wrought exclamation kicking each episode off, Telltale have pulled out a corking piece of entertainment. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Just the ticket**
Sound **Tickety-boo**
Multiplayer **Not on this ticket**

✅ Same great writing
✅ Same great characters
✅ It's on the moon
❌ Puzzles feel far more contrived
❌ Not the best episode in the series

72
A little lunar let-down

NOD32. Swift. Nimble. Relentless.

Can you describe your antivirus software with the same certainty?

NOD 32
antivirus system

Just set it and forget it. That's the beauty and the power of NOD32's ThreatSense® technology. NOD32 proactively protects against viruses, spyware, rootkits and other malware. And, its high-performance engine won't slow your system down. Take a free NOD32 30-day test drive. Call 0845 838 0832 or download at ESET.co.uk.

"The best antivirus product of 2006"*

*AV-comparatives.org, 2006 Summary Report

Our camp is under attack!

Swords, shields and knobbly knees. All the essential RTS ingredients are here.

ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA

Richie Shoemaker is pretty ancient, so this is just his kind of game...

Another dead heat in the beard competition.

DEVELOPER World Forge
PUBLISHER Playlogic/Eidos
WEBSITE
www.ancientwarssparta.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Collect resources. Build base. Make war. All with the sound of King Leon ringing in your ears.

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

HOW IT STACKS

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	90%
ROME: TOTAL WAR – ALEXANDER	85%
ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA	72%

IT TAKES A few decades for movies to get the remake treatment, and more often than not the wait is never worth it. However, the recent cinematic remake of *The 300 Spartans* (*300* – by way of a graphic novel of a similar title) was something of an exception.

In gameland, we tend to call remakes sequels, but in the case of *Sparta*, we should make a distinction. This is because while it could be mistaken for a movie tie-in (and wouldn't marketing love that), it is in the Hollywood sense a remake of an earlier RTS: *Age Of Empires*.

Like *300*, *Sparta* offers the same kind of experience as its predecessor, only rebuilt with new technology, special effects and gore. In the case of *Sparta*, that means you'll be pumping out villagers to farm food, chop wood and mine gold – all in the name of military conquest and all by way of a 3D engine that looks suitably 21st century and makes rudimentary use of 3D particle physics.

What are standard-issue RTS features can at least be praised for being reliable: in formation, troops retain cohesion until a battle demands otherwise. Then, when approached by the enemy, your soldiers can be relied upon to attack suitable targets without unnecessary clickage on your part.

DEAD CERTS

In addition, there are a scattering of new features that may well make a lasting impression in the footnotes of RTS history. One of these is the option of using your villagers or slaves to collect weapons

Like *Age Of Empires*. Only newer.

from the deceased. Given that you can equip troops from a selection of researched or pillaged equipment (including horses), this is a useful feature and one that gives your plebs a support role just beyond the front line. And in a similar way that you can customise what weapons your warriors carry (giving missile troops a backup sword, for instance), you can choose what troops to mount on chariots, camels and boats.

While the extra effort is justified and perhaps realistic, spending precious minutes rounding up horses, getting the right troops behind the reins and pulleys,

Soldiers lob torches at buildings rather than use their swords.

Ramming speed
**Potentially the best RTS ship-on-ship action ever**

That deck catapult comes in handy.

Ship combat in RTS games is rarely exciting, with boats typically employed as slow-paced troop transports. In *Sparta*, such things are called barges and they ferry the big stuff (elephants, catapults, chariots etc). However, you can also use smaller triremes to ferry raiding parties. Load them with archers and they become a decent mobile weapons platform; with swordsmen you can grapple with other ships and take them over. What's more, because these are ancient ships, if the wind is favourable, you can ram the enemy with your spiky front thingy. Indeed, ship-to-ship combat in *Sparta* is the best I've experienced in an RTS – at least it will be when they fix the atrocious pathfinding.

> *Sparta* offers much the same as its predecessor, only rebuilt with new technology, special effects and gore

If you want peace and quiet, you've come to the wrong place.
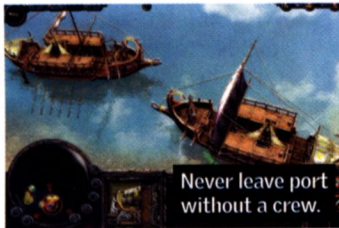
Never leave port without a crew.

then assembling them all for an attack will surely frustrate less well-organised players. There are the occasional AI issues too, where troops get stuck in the scenery and refuse to mount up. The camera too could do with being able to zoom out a touch more.

SOLO SHENANIGANS
However, the greatest failing is that the *Spartan* single-player campaign is little more than a rather turgid expanded tutorial, not nearly as immediate or as exciting as a skirmish game. The Persian and Egyptian solo campaigns fair much better, but they also take too long to get going.

While most of what *Sparta* has to offer has been done before with Rome as the backdrop, for the most part it's an engaging and exciting game, and certainly a visually arresting one. For all it's minor embellishments on the genre however, it will be remembered for being an accomplished and distinct modern tribute to an all-time classic – which is perhaps no bad thing. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics	Scalable, detailed, plenty of nice touches
Sound	Quantity rather than quality
Multiplayer	Fun, but not enough maps or options

✅ Loot corpses and steal horses
✅ Ship combat
✅ Looks pretty
❌ Slow-paced solo campaign
❌ Not enough skirmish variation
❌ Some pathfinding issues

72
Wannabe *Age Of Empires*

Can it really call itself magic without Paul Daniels and Debbie McGee?

DAWN OF MAGIC
Could it be magic?

DEVELOPER Sky Fallen
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE dom.deepsilver.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card

Who lives in a house like this?

I'M ALWAYS EXCITED by *Diablo*-style action-RPGs, and although I didn't expect great things from *Dawn Of Magic*, I was initially impressed.

There's a lot going on: 12 stables of magic in which to park your spell-casting horse and an interesting primary/secondary method of hybridising your horses, along with a 'dark path' teleporting power that works better in gameplay than you think it's going to. Yes, *Dawn Of Magic* has enough familiarity and innovation to raise a mouse's eyebrow. And you can have that as a box quote.

Despite my initial giddyness though, my high hopes were to be whittled away. I still enjoyed the game, but it was despite the obstacles developers Sky Fallen threw at me.

Combat suffered from the expected action-RPG nonsense of clicking on moving things on a moving background while you move, but the awkwardness goes way beyond that.

The inventory has room for 500 items, but only displays a few at once. Browsing is potentially exhausting. The town-quests are unembarrassed to the point where NPCs actually say: "Do this mission many times over for extra skill points." Thanks. I won't. Also, levelling-up doesn't feel like the event it should be, especially because each level is four mini-levels, with even fewer rewards. Progress is steady, but carries little momentum.

This game should be better. I'm almost tempted to say it is better, but it's choked by its own clumsy presentation and inability to develop its own ideas. It's got the ball, it's facing the right direction, but *Dawn Of Magic* just isn't running.

Jon Blyth

Hedgehogs are in great demand.

PCZONE

53
Not a new dawn

This is no time for a conga.

5 / 5 AMMO   + 88   60

PATRIOTS: A NATION UNDER FIRE

## It ain't easy being cheesy (and shit)

DEVELOPER 4D Rulers
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.4drulers.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
850MHz processor, 256MB RAM
and a 64MB graphics card

"And when we're done, we can have a game of 5-a-side!"

FROM THE MOMENT you first run out of ammunition and literally explode a terrorist's head with your hammer, to the first time you trigger a Mexican-sounding terrorist into saying "I like to shoot them 'een the eyes", you'll be aware of a stupid, illogical charm in *Patriots*.

Sure, it's too hard to be any fun. Not hard in a challenging way – more in a stupid, dull way that has EASY opponents refusing to shoot, and HARD opponents taking perfect cover and sniping you from the moon.

And sure, I ended up walking outside the play zone – unable to re-enter the combat, and leaving dent-marks on the invisible wall with my hammer. Sure, there's not enough ammo to give you a sporting chance, so many terrorists it just feels like a
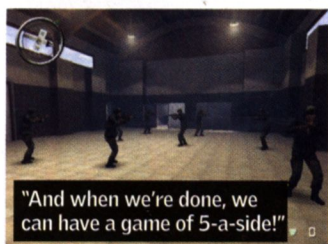
stupid zombie mod, and your squad love nothing more than to stand in your way and not move. Oh, and I couldn't get the sniper's alternate fire to work. It's easy to list a million ways in which this game fails to grip, entertain, engage or even work.

So *Patriots: A Nation Under Fire* may be one of the worst games I've played this year, but to its credit, it knows full well how rubbish it is. Hardly a reason to buy it, but you've got to admire the style of a company who make their terrorists sound like Speedy Gonzales. I want to give it a higher score, but I'd be quite justifiably ridiculed, attacked and sacked if I did.

Jon Blyth

This man hates magnolia walls.

+ 100   0

PCZONE
29
Terror wins
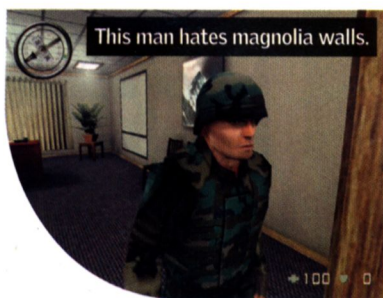
My map's brighter than yours.

MAKING HISTORY: THE CALM & THE STORM

Yet more WWII grand strategy

DEVELOPER Muzzy Lane
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE www.making-history.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $39.99 (£20, Steam download)

Min system req:
1.8MHz processor, 512MB RAM
and a 32MB graphics card

Think you're better than Hitler?

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN 2004 as an educational title, this beefed-up version of *Making History* puts you in the shoes of your favourite dictator/ leader of the free world to re-fight the entire war on a global scale.

Like a huge game of Risk, it divides the world up into territories, around which you shunt your armies, navies and air groups, combat kicking off sporadically. Not that this is anything like Risk, as you have to manage everything from transport infrastructure to weapons research, as well as making alliances galore.

What's interesting is that once the game starts, pretty much anyone can gang up with anyone, meaning the war can pan out differently to history. Stalin might get in bed with Hitler, or the French might decide that the

Spanish are their best buddies, before surrendering to the nearest foe.

The interface is streamlined, even if managing all that production and research can feel a little like doing work experience at an accountant's office. As for combat, it's unsatisfying, being a matter of throwing everything you can muster into a disputed territory and observing turn on turn as the sides whittle each other down.

Making History is a decent bit of strategy, but it's hardly treading new ground. 2x3's *World At War* is a similar (and better) turn-based WWII grand strategy sim, and Paradox's *Hearts Of Iron* does it all in real-time. In the end, this just doesn't kick up enough of a storm to stand out.

Steve O'Hagan

Not most gamers' cup of tea.
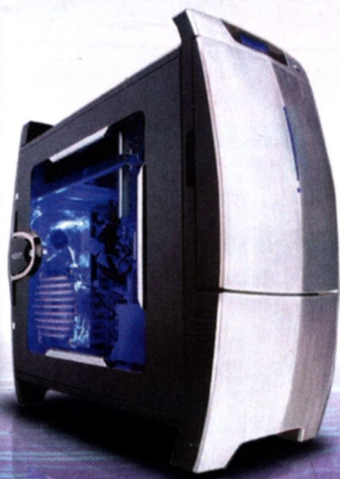
PCZONE
61
A bit too calm

indieZone

PCZONE ON THE DVD We wouldn't call *Martin Korda* loony. At least, not to his face...

LOONY LAND II: WINTER WOODS

DEVELOPER Hamumu Software **WEBSITE** hamumu.com **PRICE** $24.95 (£13)

AFTER THE ENTERTAINING romp that was *Loony Land*, it's great to see that Hamumu have taken the time to make this sequel, which proves even more accomplished than the original.

While *Loony Land II* can hardly be considered hardcore, favouring action and quick-fire missions over complex quests and reams of text, it's still an RPG packed with features and content that'll keep you schlepping around its charismatic locales and interacting with its host of imaginative characters for countless hours.

The sheer amount of quests and sub-quests is highly impressive for an indie game, and as if that wasn't enough to convince you of investing, then the myriad of items and upgradeable skills might just swing it.

There's more than a faint whiff of *Zelda* here, and only an overly basic combat system, a few hit-and-miss passages of text and some basic visuals sully proceedings in any serious way. However, it's hard to find too many faults with this charming, humorous and massively detailed piece of role-playing goodness.

PCZONE 77

Stay off the drugs.

Frosty Cliff
The combat system isn't the best.

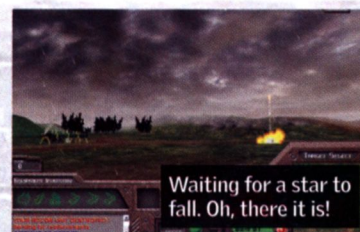**INDIEZONE GAME OF THE MONTH**

SCUDBUSTER

DEVELOPER HyperKat Games **WEBSITE** hyperkat.com **PRICE** $14.95 (£8)

WHATEVER YOU DO, don't judge *ScudBuster* on first impressions, because for the first ten minutes you'll be convinced it's little more than a glorified 3D version of battleships.

However, after you've got to grips with the basic premise – lay out a collection of SSMs (surface-to-surface missiles) and radars on a map, then use your recon units to find the location of the enemy while fending off their attacks with a first-person perspective missile launcher – you'll find a tense, manic and tactical game just waiting to be enjoyed and explored.

While enemies may be bereft of character (they're simply dots on a mini-map), and longevity is somewhat limited, *ScudBuster* still manages keep you gripped for long enough to make your investment worth it. It ain't rocket science, but it's still a blast.

PCZONE 65

Fend off enemy attacks with the first-person perspective rocket launcher.

Waiting for a star to fall. Oh, there it is!

ODDICTIVE

**DEVELOPER** Tapout Games **WEBSITE** tapoutgames.com **PRICE** $14.95 (£8)

HERE WE GO again, another take on the match-three mechanic, though admittedly, this one is tinged with a hint of originality.

Here's the deal. Different coloured balls drop from above towards different coloured containers. It's your job to draw lines across the screen in order to create makeshift ramps for the balls to roll down into a correspondingly coloured cup. The longer the balls roll on a ramp, the more points you score. Get three balls of the same colour into their container and you've got a match. And that's about the size of it.

For a couple of quid, *Oddictive* would have been well worth considering if you're on the look out for an alternative to the countless *Tetris* or *Puzzle Bobble* clones on the market. For eight quid though, it's right up there with gold-plated dish scourers and bottled tap water in the value-for-money stakes.

PCZONE 42
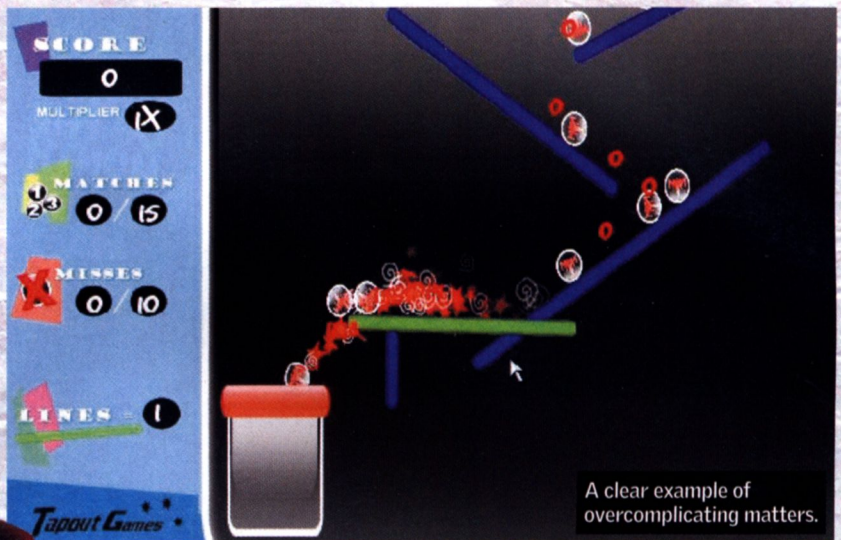
A clear example of overcomplicating matters.

ARCTIC STUD POKER RUN

DEV Game Refuge Inc **WEB** www.arcticstud.com **PRICE** £24.95 ($13)
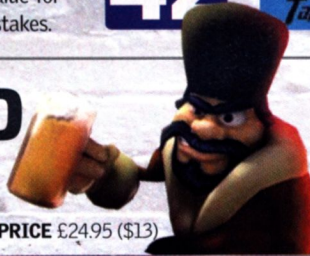
Decent concept, terrible execution.

NOW I DON'T doubt for a second that *Arctic Stud Poker Run* sounded great on paper. Action, shooting, racing, gambling, like Bravo TV in gaming form, a seemingly perfect combo for any red blooded, violence addicted, wannabe poker super-stud. Except it's not. Because it's rubbish. With flies on top.

Racing around on a skidoo against several AI or (if by some miracle you can find anyone playing it online) human opponents, you must chug around circuits picking up playing cards in order to amass the strongest possible hand before crossing the finish line.

Now, here's where the violence part comes in. See, if someone has a stronger hand than you, you can try to stop them from crossing the finish line before the timer runs out by shooting them with machine-guns and rockets. Impressed? You won't be.

With a sense of speed that'd make a tortoise crawl into its shell with embarrassment and a totally inappropriate soundtrack, there's little here to commend other than the solid 3D engine. Still with me? Didn't think so...

PCZONE 34

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES

1

ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed issue 177
This stunning third-person action-puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest-scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.

2

NAKED WAR
www.zee-3.com | **Reviewed issue 177**
A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.

3

MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com | **Reviewed issue 163**
A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.

4

NEW STAR SOCCER 3
www.newstarsoccer.com | **Reviewed issue 164**
This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.

5

MR. ROBOT
www.moonpod.com | **Reviewed issue 181**
Like an isometric *Roboblitz* with zany RPG-style combat, you play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

BUDGET

"Will it move?", he asked. "No, I just can't seem to budge it..."

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

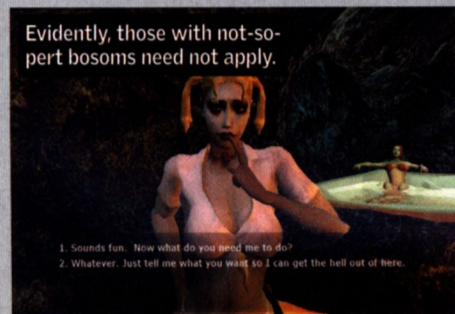## VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

PUBLISHER Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com **PRICE** $19.95 (£10)

EVEN THOUGH ACTIVISION stick their fingers in their ears and hum loudly whenever somebody mentions the fact that *Bloodlines* is not just buggy, but bugged to buggery, it remains one of our most fondly remembered games. It's an exercise in steely perseverance, and one that's made easier by installing the unofficial fan-made patch which makes it so that the game doesn't clutch at its chest and keel over halfway through.

Stability issues aside, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is the closest we've come a proper next-gen *Deus Ex*. It's a dark first-person RPG, with some obscenely clever and well-written dialogue, massively entertaining characters, playable classes that are substantially different from one another, and open-ended missions that offer you genuine leeway in choosing how to tackle them. As the Source engine's first hurrah, it was marred by rough edges – but at least now, with the Steam release, there's a means of playing the game to completion.

Steve Hogarty

PCZONE 81

Evidently, those with not-so-pert bosoms need not apply.

1. Sounds fun. Now what do you need me to do?
2. Whatever. Just tell me what you want so I can get the hell out of here.

There's blood, but not necessarily in lines.

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** www.mastertronic.com **PRICE** £9.99

WHILE BEING FAR from a legendary game, Lara's seventh grave-robbing adventure is certainly worth seeking out. After the disgraceful state of *The Angel Of Darkness*, development duties were taken roughly from Core Design in the UK and given to US-based Crystal Dynamics, creators of the underrated *Legacy Of Kain/Soul Reaver* series.
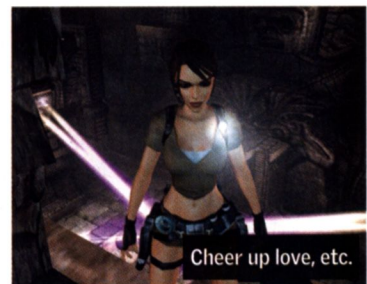
Along with old boy Toby Gard, the new team's result was a polished, tightly plotted third-person action-adventure. What's more, it threw the nature-hating heroine back into huge puzzle-packed subterranean caves and tombs, rather than allowing her to aimlessly wander about the streets of Paris. Gone was the awkward and unforgiving pixel-perfect jumping of previous efforts – now you could acrobatically leap around the lush global environments with smooth context-sensitive moves.

Tomb Raider: Legend also introduced physics-based puzzles, better combat and a 'pocket light source' (a torch to you and me). If you're hankering after a Lara outing, you can't go wrong for less than ten quid.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE 80

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Clare not paying her gas bill for a year
Saving: £600
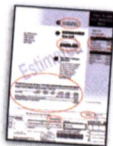
Using our publisher's bar tab to buy a lot of crisps
Saving: £3

Even more delicious pizza bribery!
Saving: £8.50

Weeeeeeeee!

A fine pair.

Cheer up love, etc.

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** www.mastertronic.com **PRICE** £9.99

DON'T BUY *STRIKE FORCE* if you're expecting a continuation of the previous top-down, punishing strategy games that won the hearts and minds of those who could spare them enough effort.

This chapter is a first-person affair, lacking in the difficulty and complexity of its brand cousins, but boasting huge levels and an open-ended approach to problem-solving. The fact it loosens up the demanding difficulty levels of the strategy games could even come as a relief to the more casual/less patient.

It has its problems: unspectacular AI, watered-down stealth and the sacrifice of the earlier games' hardcore charm at the altar of a wider audience, to name but three. It's still what you'd call a 'solid romp', if you used those kinds of words. However, by moving away from its stealthy roots but never really shrugging them off in the pursuit of action, you get a relatively accomplished game that excels in neither genre. Having said that, it's worth a ruddy tenner.

Jon Blyth

PCZONE 72
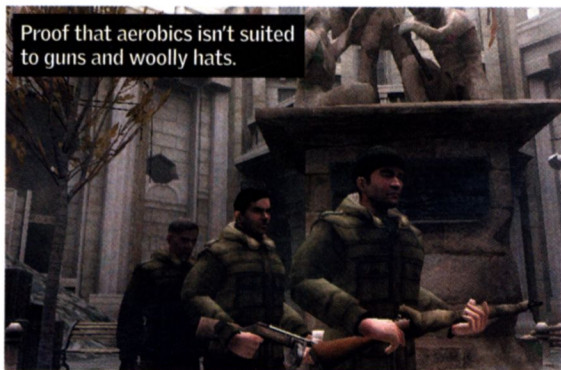
Proof that aerobics isn't suited to guns and woolly hats.

Careful with those big, flappy hands now.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** www.mastertronic.com **PRICE** £9.99

IF YOU CAN'T wait until Colin's latest offroading adventures in the mucky-sounding *DIRT* later this year, then the last and best outing for the muddy Scot was *CMR2005*.

Like most rally games, it involves racing with a manic map-reading co-driver (Nicky Grist here) over several stages against the clock – the car with the best overall time wins.

CMR2005 had over 30 authentic cars, eight locations (including snow-bound Sweden and dusty USA) and tons of options for getting under the bonnet and affecting everything from traction balance to choice of music. Graphics are last-gen, but the vehicle handling and feeling of being just on the edge between success and tree-hitting disaster is still spot-on.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE 75
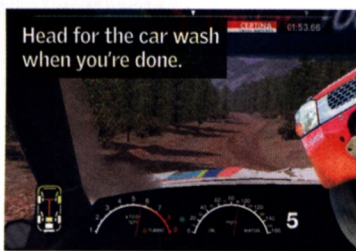
Head for the car wash when you're done.

Mind the lamppost.

And the rest...

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

BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2005
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC
If you really love 2005 and think things have been downhill since then, then *BLIC2005* is the international cricket game for you. Experience cricket without the guilt of global warming, or having to think about Iran's nuclear program. Good, but aged.

PCZONE 58

JOINT TASK FORCE
$19.95 (£10), STEAM
Take a cupful of BBC News 24 and throw it in your washing alongside the dirty laundry of modern-day conflict and you've not only got whiter whites, but a combat-focused strategy title which, with *World In Conflict* in the offing, now looks a bit drab.

PCZONE 62

RUNAWAY: A ROAD ADVENTURE
$14.95 (£8), STEAM
We've reviewed *Runaway 2* last issue, which was suffixed by some extra title about a dreamy space turtle. If you were suitably pleased by the pointing-and-clicking of the sequel, you'll be happy to see the original tumbling in price to £8 on Steam.

PCZONE 65

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'N'

1. **NETWORK Q RAC RALLY** (ISSUE 44)
2. **NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2** (ISSUE 122)
3. **NEED FOR SPEED 3** (ISSUE 69)
4. **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** (ISSUE 118)
5. **NAVY STRIKE** (ISSUE 33)

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMING SLAPHEADS

1. **KANE – COMMAND & CONQUER SERIES** (ISSUE 180)
2. **AGENT 47 – HITMAN SERIES** (ISSUE 169)
3. **SAM FISHER – SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT** (ISSUE 175)
4. **RIDDICK – THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY** (ISSUE 150)
5. **MAXIMILIAN – EVIL GENIUS** (ISSUE 147)

PCZONE TOP 5 MOST RIDICULOUS HAIRSTYLES

1. **CLOUD STRIFE – FINAL FANTASY VII** (ISSUE 66)
2. **BOBBY ZILCH – PSYCHONAUTS** (ISSUE 156)
3. **DUKE NUKEM – DUKE NUKEM 3D** (ISSUE 40)
4. **MALE TARUTARU – FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE** (ISSUE 148)
5. **KYLE KATARN – JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II** (ISSUE 55)

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.

BUDGET
FAR CRY
PCZ Issue: 140 – 93%
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.

HL2: EPISODE ONE
PCZ Issue: 170 – 91%
Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.

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.

F.E.A.R.
PCZ Issue: 160 – 90%
With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Rentaghost* (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.
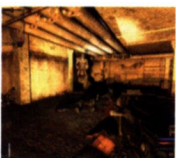
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
PCZ Issue: 179 – 85%
Despite being a bit on the late side, *STALKER* remains a fantastic outing for PC shooters with its unique setting, great action and genuine attempt to do something new.

Strategy

Must buy!

COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.

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.

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.

RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%
Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.

LOTR: 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.

SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
Massive battles and huge armies comprising of thousands of air, sea and land units? Tick. Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? Tick. One of the most unique RTS titles around? Tick.

C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS
PCZ Issue: 180 – 86%
A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

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.

BUDGET
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 mercs 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*.

BUDGET
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.

BUDGET
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES
PCZ Issue: 164 –86%
The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

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.

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

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.

NEW ENTRY!

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

Driving/Racing

Must buy!

GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.

GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%
While GTR takes care of modern-day racing, GT Legends does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to Grand Prix Legends, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.

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.

TRACKMANIA UNITED
PCZ Issue: 179 – 86%
Now with online play and community via broadband, this previously Gallic institution is a total joy to play. Not your conventional racer, and so fast it'll make your eyes do backflips.

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.

GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, Garry's Mod gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source Engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.

BUDGET

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.

BUDGET

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.

Sport

Must buy!

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
PCZ Issue: 175 – 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of FM has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
PCZ Issue: 175 – 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than FIFA – just.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, Tiger 2006 has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.

FIFA 07
PCZ Issue: 174 – 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest FIFA. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best FIFA yet.

NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 – 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this 06 incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.

Role-playing games

Must buy!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.

BUDGET

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 2
PCZ Issue: 176 – 86%
An identical twin to NWN but using modern technology, NWN2 has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Rest of Q2

BLACKSITE: AREA 51	MIDWAY
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT	CODEMASTERS
GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2	UBISOFT
HALO 2	MICROSOFT
HELLGATE: LONDON	EA
HOSPITAL TYCOON	CODEMASTERS
LOST PLANET	CAPCOM
OVERLORD	CODEMASTERS
SHADOWRUN	MICROSOFT
STRANGLEHOLD	MIDWAY
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY	EIDOS

Q3

ASSASSIN'S CREED	UBISOFT
BIOSHOCK	2K GAMES
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO	CODEMASTERS
COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS	THQ
CRYSIS	EA
ELVEON	TBA
EMPIRE EARTH III	VIVENDI GAMES
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR	THQ
GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH	NCSOFT
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN	EIDOS
LEFT 4 DEAD	VALVE
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS	SEGA
MOTOGP 07	THQ
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER	ATARI
ROGUE WARRIOR	TBA
SPEEDBALL 2	FROGSTER INTERACTIVE
TIMESHIFT	VIVENDI GAMES
TRANSFORMERS: THE GAME	ACTIVISION
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT	SEGA
THE WITCHER	ATARI
WORLD IN CONFLICT	VIVENDI GAMES

TOTAL FILM

ON SALE NOW!

PIRATES 3

Johnny, Keira & Orlando
The Only Interviews

DOUBLE TROUBLE
Tarantino & Rodriguez open Grindhouse

TRANSFORMERS FOX!
The robots aren't the only special effect

'I'M SUCH AN OLD HAG'
The many moods of Natalie Portman

TOTAL FILM

FREE!
STAR WARS
PICTURE BOOK

THE SECRET VISUAL HISTORY OF
STAR WARS

EXCLUSIVE COLLECTORS' SUPPLEMENT
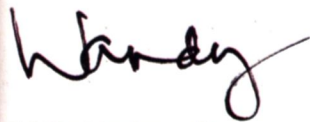RARE PICS TAKEN ON-SET OF THE ORIGINAL STAR WARS

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Underwhelmed

B **IT OF A** quiet month, this one. Having received my regular consignment of exciting new hardware, I was left feeling a bit numb after I'd done all the tests. Maybe it was the packets of silica gel I'd been dunking in my tea, or more likely it was all those boring bloody video cards.

Sadly, the new GeForce 8600 isn't like mainstream firecrackers of old, many of which were capable of being unlocked and clocked to deliver the performance of products costing twice as much. In other words, they're no longer grin-inducing bargains: even in SLI, there's still a gulf between them and the frame-rates offered by the not-much-more-expensive 8800.

In addition, the 8600 is a common or garden card which offers very little to tempt existing owners away from their Radeon X1950 Pros. Well, it does offer the promise of DirectX 10 – a technology everyone's sick of hearing about because nobody's actually played games with it – but not much else.

I know that driver improvements will eke out better numbers, and developers are certain to work some magic over the coming months, but few people buy cards to play games they don't yet own on an operating system they're still slightly wary of.

Still, kudos to ASUS for being the first company to bundle a game I was tempted to nick ("The disc fell out, honest"), and to XFX for putting a dog in sunglasses on the box artwork.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

MEET THE RADEONS

New R600-based cards on shelves now, but HD 2900 XTX flagship postponed indefinitely

AMD HAVE FINALLY released their new DirectX 10 line-up, with the Radeon HD 2900 XTX at the top, the HD 2900 XT a rung down and the HD 2600 and HD 2400 series filling in the value and mainstream segments below.

Early benchmarks have shown that the HD 2900 XT is more than a match for the card it'll be priced to compete with, NVIDIA's GeForce 8800 GTS. The new Raddy XT comes with 512MB of GDDR3 memory and should have enough tweaking headroom for overclockers to be kept busy sharing core frequencies and acne remedies for months.

Sadly, the flagship HD 2900 XTX has run aground even before it was launched. AMD have withdrawn the card from the batting order so they can sort problems with its huge 1GB of GDDR4 RAM – in some instances, the bigwig XTX was slower than its XT understudy.

Sven Olsen of DailyTech, the website which conducted one of the XTX's first head-to-head benchmark tests, said the top Radeon's performance was "less than stellar", and even suggested that because of the huge memory cost the card would never become a reality anyway. ati.amd.com
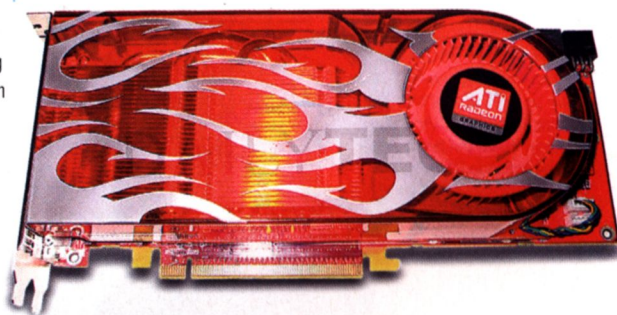
ATI fans have had a long wait.

CORE PIPS ATHLON

Intel market share really quite large

INTEL OWN MORE than 80% of the x86 desktop processor market, with arch-enemy AMD losing all the gains it made last year.

The chip giant behind the Core 2 Duo – now also the choice of Macintosh owners – took a bite out of Athlon's share and posted a profit of $1.6 billion, with its rival losing more than $600 million in the same period.

AMD has been slashing prices of all its processors in order to stoke demand, meaning you can now buy an Athlon 64 X2 Dual Core 5000+ for not much more than £100. intel.com

These Core 2 Duos look prettier every month, don't they?
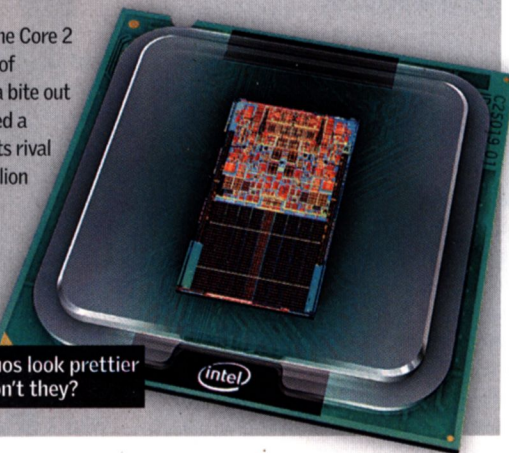
NEWS ROUND-UP

Microsoft have recently been peddling some huge revenue figures – almost $15 billion this last quarter – and have put the number down to the success of their new operating system. But nobody seems to be using Vista, and there's a widely-held belief among existing PC users that there's little to be gained from upgrading other than a redesigned interface to learn and some pointless eye candy. In addition, Dell have recently reintroduced Windows XP to its product line-up, having shifted to Vista shortly after Microsoft launched it. microsoft.com

As reported a few months back, the Commodore name has returned to home computing. Only this time, the machines aren't quite so affordable. The flagship Commodore xx is an eye-watering £2,899, whereas the budget Commodore g is £949. And why the stupid lower-case names that look like they're a typo? Your guess is as good as ours. commodoregaming.com

I BOUGHT ONE

I've been a Shuttle XPC SB51G owner for five years now. The wee cube is noticeably smaller than the newer SN27P2, but the engineering and attention to detail remain the same. I've used the XPC at exhibitions and demonstrations, and it's been all around the country to friends and LAN parties. It's survived being dropped and although it now looks a little battered – the lid is bent at the corners and the paint is missing from where I spilt battery acid on it – it's never missed a beat. At the moment it's used for media encoding and for running two or three Virtual Machines through Microsoft Virtual Server. When the bomb drops, I'll be crawling inside it.

SN27P2

PRICE £285 **MANUFACTURER** Shuttle **WEBSITE** www.shuttle.com

SHUTTLES ARE CUBE-LIKE small-form factor (SFF) machines that aren't too dissimilar from half-baked rolls. With all the hard work done, all you need do is spend a few minutes with the right tools turning it into a finished product: switch on, install Windows and away you go.

The first thing that strikes you is how obvious it all is. It's obvious what components are needed (your own choice of Socket AM2 processor, DDR2 memory and SATA hard drive), and it's obvious how they fit together – no specialised knowledge required.

Access to the machine's bowels involves a few thumbscrews and removal of a U-shaped lid, with plenty of space inside and a decent manual to guide you. You won't need cables or a power supply,

just a screwdriver, a sandwich and a fizzy pop. If you've always wanted to build your own PC but have lacked the confidence to do so, a Shuttle is your dream come true.

SMALL WONDER

And it's a bargain. With 1GB RAM onboard, a cheap 80GB hard drive and Athlon 64 3800+ nestled down under Shuttle's own heat sink, you'll not have spent more than £400. Even if you went for a spunkier processor more capable of making up the performance shortfall between AMD and Intel, it's still going to be within a £500 budget.

In addition, the SN27P2 will take any PCI-Express graphics card – including the double-deckers, though doing so does preclude use of the adjacent PCI slot – and has a generous four memory slots

that will happily soak up all those odd RAM sticks you've accumulated over the last few years.

Industry analysts are predicting how small PCs like the SN27P2 will soon account for more than one in every ten systems sold, and it's a wonder that more manufacturers aren't copying the idea. This Shuttle is the best one yet and may persuade them: it's small, unbelievably quiet and no less capable than any of the high-power gaming rigs whose designers were inspired by high-rise apartment buildings.

When it comes to benchmarks, there's no difference between the diminutive Shuttle and an identically specified system based around the ECS KN3 SLI2 Extreme (issue 177, 80%). The only thing that will deter enthusiasts is the lack of tweak options in the BIOS.

SPECIFICATION

CPU Socket Socket AM2, Athlon 64 X2 and FX series processors **Chipset** NVIDIA nForce 570 Ultra **Memory** 4 slots, DIMM 240-pin (8GB max) **Expansion** 1 x PCI-E x16, 1 x PCI **Audio** Realtek ALC882 (7.1) **Internally** 1 x FDD, 1 x IDE (2 devices), 3 x SATA **Externally** 1 x GB LAN, 8 x USB, 2 x FireWire **PSU** 400W **Warranty** 36 months

PCZONE 90

GEFORCE 8600 GT XXX EDITION

PRICE £124 **MANUFACTURER** XFX **WEBSITE** xfxforce.co.uk

A YEAR FROM now, the 8-Series cards you see on this page are the ones that'll be perched atop Valve's survey. They're what NVIDIA hope will win them the bulk of sales: sensibly-priced DX10 parts aimed at sensible people who run sensible resolutions and use sensible levels of detail.

Only trouble is, the cheaper one – the 8600 GT you see here – is a bit of a damp squib. It's slower and more expensive than the X1950 Pro, and if you were to compare one of the overclocked variants of the older Radeon – for example, Sapphire's Ultimate Edition or HIS's ICEQ3 Turbo – you'd wonder if the new technology wasn't actually sucking you backwards. You can also buy an X1950 to fit your AGP slot, whereas AGP 8-Series cards are nowhere.

XFX's XXX version does crank up the heat in the form of a faster core and faster memory, but it's not enough to leave me thinking existing mainstream owners should go out and replace what they have already. Even when you add in the enjoyment brought by NVIDIA's latest technology, such as HD movie playback through PureVideo and of course DirectX 10, it's still not that exciting a package.

In addition, these new mid-point cards are now demonstrably slower than their high-end brethren, and yet the huge difference in performance isn't reflected by a huge difference in price. Put simply, you'll find better value spending the extra on a £180 320MB 8800 GTS.

PCZONE 75

EN8600GTS TOP

PRICE £155 **MANUFACTURER** ASUS **WEBSITE** asus.com

T HE 8600GTS is NVIDIA's ever-so-slightly pricier mainstream entrant. It's quicker than the 7600 GT it replaces, but only by a neck.

What's more, it won't transform your gaming until developers start to take proper advantage of the way in which the new GPU works. In fact, the moment you start adding a healthy dose of AA and AF in older titles, there are instances where our Buyer's Guide perennial X1950 Pro shows the posh new GeForce a clean pair of heels.

When you consider that just £30 more buys you that delectable 8800 GTS from the rank above, then all things considered, the 8600 equivalent doesn't seem anything like the obvious choice it should be.

But it's not all doom and gloom. The ASUS card does do something remarkable – it comes bundled with a game that you might actually want to play in *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*. What's more, the TOP version here delivers better results than any other GTS we've reviewed in the past. Overall though, it remains disappointing.

PCZONE 78

NX8600GT

PRICE £99 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **WEBSITE** msicomputer.co.uk

M SI'S 8600GT number is one of the cheapest versions you'll find, which means that it's a little easier to ignore its performance shortcomings.

At a price that slips under the magic £100 radar, the NX8600GT suddenly makes more sense as the ideal card for a Vista-based home-theatre PC. NVIDIA's widely-praised HD video-decoding component really does seem to be impressing movie buffs, but it's still not a gaming card quite yet.

Mainstream products like this were always about letting budget-conscious buyers enjoy any game on the market, albeit with detail sliders set low and the resolution knocked right down. Not now. The problem with the 8600 series is that it's been left behind by today's more demanding titles: there just isn't the grunt to play *Supreme Commander* and it's only just enough to get into older *Battlefield* mods.

The bottom line is that this new line-up isn't anywhere near as compelling as mainstream cards of old. Buy one if you need DX10.
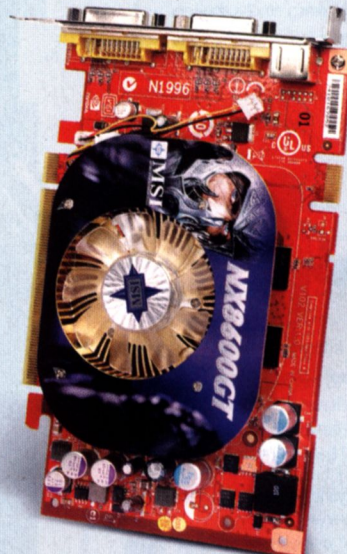
PCZONE 77

HOW TO...
START YOUR OWN INTERNET FORUM

You're registered on dozens of discussion boards, but what about joining your own? *Phil Wand* **shows you how...**

THERE WAS A time when girls and boys dreamed of becoming astronauts, train drivers or occupational therapists. Nowadays, they see themselves running a successful Web 2.0 social networking site, and dream of spending all day out on the patio smoking cigarettes while click-through revenues pour into their current account and pay off their mortgage.

Although reality may have a long history of destroying your goals, it is possible for you to make an original and informative website and make money from the people who visit it. You won't need much to get it hosted, and you won't need specialist knowledge to create it – but what you will need is a forum. A forum generates its own content with little input from you, with the added bonus that people keep coming back for more.

What's more, adding a forum to your website is more straightforward than you might think. Read on to find out how you can do just that...

01 ▶ Find a hosting package

When choosing someone to host your new forum, you'll need to find a package that gives you PHP 4 or PHP 5, together with MySQL 3 or better.

You'll also need to think long and hard about what you want to achieve. If you're looking to turn the forum into a business, you'll need a package which not only allows you room to upgrade, but which gives you unlimited website traffic and a MySQL limit of at least 300MB. For comparison, the Dear Wandy database contains around 250,000 messages and is 290MB in size.

RECOMMENDED PACKAGES:
1&1 Business: www.oneandone.co.uk, £7.94/month
Fasthosts Developer: www.fasthosts.co.uk, £9.38/month
Hostway Linux Gold Plan: www.hostway.co.uk, £16.39/month

You need both PHP and MySQL to run your new forum – check they're part of your package.

02 Choose your forum software

You might not know it, but there are more than 100 different forum packages you can download online. Broadly speaking, most offer the same range of features with a similar look and feel, meaning which one you actually end up with boils down to how much it costs.

Two of the more popular forum packages are phpBB and vBulletin, as used by Future Publishing and Valve Software respectively. Both are known to be robust, secure and well-supported by their developers, and are excellent choices for new and old communities alike.

RECOMMENDED FORUMS:
PunBB: www.punbb.org, free
vBulletin: www.vbulletin.com, $85/year
phpBB: www.phpbb.com, free
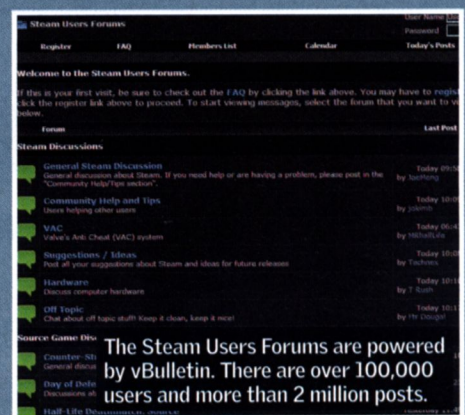
The Steam Users Forums are powered by vBulletin. There are over 100,000 users and more than 2 million posts.

03 Upload the forum files

Once you've bought and activated your hosting package and have downloaded your forum software of choice, you then need to upload it. To do so, you'll want to download and install an FTP client in order to transfer the files to your Web space.

For the purposes of this tutorial, we'll be installing Rickard Andersson's punBB forum software, available for free download from punbb.org. It's fast, easy to modify and has a growing community of users keen to support newcomers.

To upload, open your FTP client, connect to your new site with details provided by your host, and create a directory there called 'forums'. Your discussion areas will then be accessible by browsing to http://www.yoursite.com/forums.

RECOMMENDED FTP CLIENTS:
SmartFTP: www.smartftp.com, free
FTP Voyager: www.ftpvoyager.com, $49.95
FileZilla: filezilla.sourceforge.net, free

Use any FTP client to upload the forum software to your site.
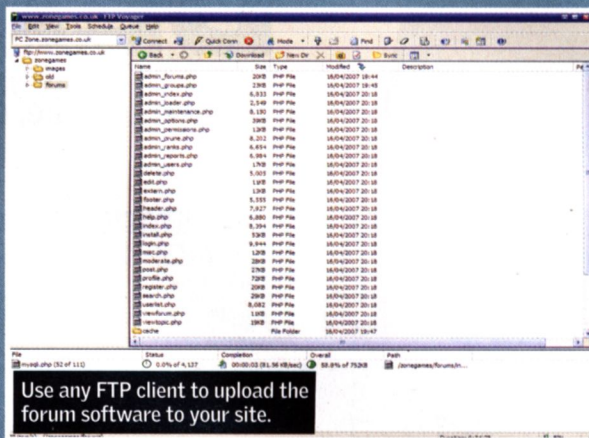
04 Install the forum

Any forum needs to be configured before it can be used. The software you've just uploaded will need to prepare the database, create an initial user – you, the administrator – as well as form at least one discussion area.

In the case of punBB, it's a one-step process: all you need do is point your browser at the software's self-contained installation script, accessible at http://www.yoursite.com//install.php. You'll need to tell the script the hostname of your database server, along with the name of the database and the credentials required to access it. Don't worry – your Web host will provide you with all this information once you've signed up with them.

Don't be daunted by forms – your Web host can tell you all you need.
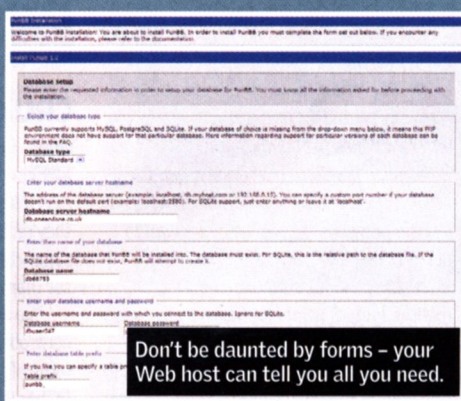
05 Keep the pot boiling

A successful forum is a forum with many active members. To make sure people come back for more, you need to make sure that you keep the pot boiling. Scour news sources and blogs every day for any scrap of information you can share with others on the forum.

Post messages that invite responses; don't write random thoughts or share opinions unless they're original, insightful or deeply controversial. Try to offer something different and stick at it – forums don't get successful overnight.

Lastly, make sure you update your profile on other boards to include a link back to your own. If people like what you have to say, or just the way you write it, there's every chance they'll register.

There aren't enough *Supreme Commander* mod forums. That's a hint by the way.

Keep it slim When you're starting up your forum, less is more...

The mistake most new administrators make when setting up their new forum is to create far too many conference areas. All this does is thin out the discussion and make your board feel a lot less busy than it actually is. When starting from nothing, you don't need any more than three or four categories – add new ones only when the need arises. For example, if you've created a fan forum for *STALKER*, cater for people asking about gameplay questions, technical problems and people just wanting to chat. You might want to add somewhere for people to talk about game mods, but that's it.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Q Should I pay for forums software?

A Commercial developers will try and convince you that by paying for your forums you're guaranteeing a certain level of customer service, but free software often has such a large community that it's just as easy to get help.

Q How can I earn money from my forum?

A By signing up to a publisher's advertising service such as Google AdSense, you can integrate banner adverts within your pages and get paid when your members click on them.

Q Do I need a powerful machine to host a forum?

A Not unless you have many thousands of active members – until then, opt for a shared hosting package instead.

Q How do I backup my forum?

A You need to create a MySQL dump of your forum's database tables and save it somewhere safe. Refer to the software's documentation or online support forums for full details.
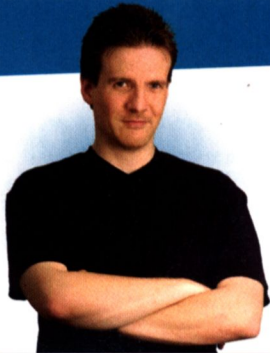
DEAR WANDY

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

PLAYSTATION GLEE

Q I'm a PC nut but my friends are console junkies – and with the release of the PlayStation 3, it's all they can talk about. Now, I know the PC can still better the PS3 for games hardware, but I need some ammo. I know what's quick and what's not for PCs, but what are the real hardware matches? What PC CPU, GPU and memory are needed to match Sony's hardware? I need to put the console fanboys in their place and I'm relying on you.

Waldo

A controller for stupid people.

A This is a difficult question to answer because PCs and consoles are totally different. You can't compare them when one is designed purely to play games, and the other is a multi-purpose platform that's been improved and polished over years to perform any task you care to imagine.

In fact, the PC is such an amazing all-rounder that it's what PlayStation developers use to make PlayStation software. Sony's ProDG, a suite of tools for building, debugging and fine-tuning PS3 games, runs exclusively on Windows. You might like to tell your friends that if their expensive toy is so great, why do we still need PCs to make it work?

Inside, the Cell processor is much like any modern GPU. It provides amazing power in certain circumstances, and gives maximum thrust when used solely in the environment for which it was designed. In short, it's horses for courses; no benchmark will prove anything substantive.

The PS3's graphics core is based around last year's NVIDIA NV47 architecture, and while that's hardly stone age, it does mean that – like any technology sealed in a box with tamper-proof screws – the PlayStation 3 is already dated. The current G80 is the largest and most powerful commercial GPU ever made, and you'll not find it squeezed inside any console.

To put fanboys in their place, just look at the software. There's no Joost, no Photoshop, no eMule, no iTunes, no World Of Warcraft and no Steam. You can't send MSN messages. You can't download free mods. You can't set up and run your own games server. You can't play first-person games with the ultimate in precision tools (ie, keyboard and mouse). What you can do is run PlayStation 3 games – and that's it.

CRUX OF THE SATA

Q One of my HDDs started making noises recently, so I bought two new Western Digital 500GB units – but they're SATA 300s and my board only supports SATA 150. I can't use them or set them up for RAID, or can I?

I've also been looking at a SATA controller to get around the problem, but most of them need to be connected to a PCI-E, PCI-X or PCI 66MHz – again, my board only supports plain PCI.

So I've been looking at upgrading my system. I have up to 6,000 Danish Kroner (about £550) to buy the hardware. I know it's not a lot, but I don't play graphics-heavy games: I tend to play DDO, NWN2, Oblivion and Dungeon Siege II. I don't yet have Gothic 3 or Dark Messiah as I want to play them on a setting higher than normal, same as Oblivion.

I currently have an Athlon XP 3200+, ASUS A7N8X-E Deluxe, GeForce 6800, 1GB PC3200 RAM and 400W PSU. What I've looked at is a Core 2 Duo E6300, Sapphire RADEON X1950 Pro and ASRock ConRoeXFire-eSATA2. Any input would be very welcome.

Benny Præstegaard

A To answer your first question, modern SATA drives are able to detect the transfer rate of your motherboard and throttle themselves accordingly. In other words, you can stick a brand new, super-fast SATA drive on a slow board. In your shoes, I'd simply connect the new WD drives to your A7N8X-E and see if they're detected: if not, install a jumper across the pins on the back of the HDD as shown in the diagram. This will have the affect of restricting the drive to 150MB/sec transfer – ie the 'old' SATA rates – and it will then definitely work with your ASUS, either individually or as part of a RAID array.

Second, your motherboard has a whole bunch of PCI 2.2 slots running at 66MHz, meaning if you went for Adaptec's SATA RAID 1210SA controller, which requires a 32-bit/66MHz PCI slot, you'd be just fine.

The upgrades you've been looking at would give you a noticeable boost from your current setup – the ASRock might look quite cheap alongside premium boards, but as I often say, it's not going to make any noticeable difference to what you experience on-screen. However, hold off buying the X1950 Pro until the new mainstream GeForce 8600/8500 cards
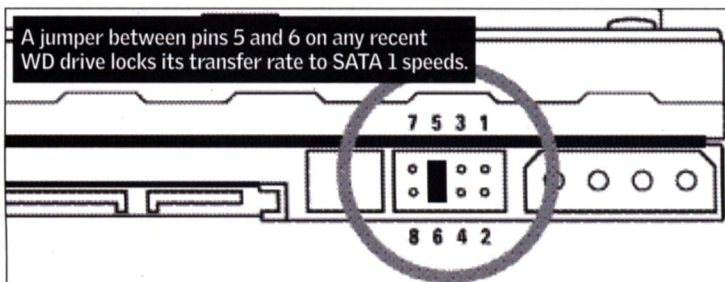
A jumper between pins 5 and 6 on any recent WD drive locks its transfer rate to SATA 1 speeds.

7 5 3 1

8 6 4 2

"Tell your friends that if their expensive toy is so great, how come it still needs a PC to make it work?"

When it comes to console fanboys, Wandy tells it like it is

are available, and ATI have launched their brave new Raddy.

WHERE'S MY EAX?

Q I've taken the dangerous and simultaneously brave/stupid step of building a new Vista PC. I ordered an ASUS P5N32-E SLI motherboard, E6600 processor, BFG 8800GTX video card and 2GB DDR2 RAM. The only two components carried over from my old PC were the HDD and X-Fi Fatal1ty.

I installed as many up-to-date Vista drivers for each component as I could lay my grubby hands on and they all seemed to work. I then inserted a game and found I had no EAX sound nor 7.1 sound. The very component I thought would give me the least hassle is in fact giving me the most...

I would have thought that since Vista has been in development for a while, Creative would have been working to ensure their products had working drivers. Can you help me solve the problem of how to get a wonderful soundcard back to its former glory, along with the audio console software, EAX for games and so on?

Jim McEwan

A *Microsoft removed the Hardware Abstraction Layer (HAL) for*

Join the Vista GX2 club! Crashes and hair loss guaranteed.

DirectSound and DirectSound3D in Vista. HAL was the 'software cement' between the hardware and your games that, in previous versions of Windows, allowed Sound Blaster cards to provide acceleration, 3D and EAX effects. Without HAL, your EAX titles will sound pretty limp.

Vista now uses on a cross-platform library called OpenAL, and any new games you buy use this technology instead. And let's be honest: EAX was overrated and restricted end-user choice because it was only ever available on Creative cards. You shouldn't be heartbroken that it's gone.

However, all is not lost for your old EAX games on your shiny new Vista PC. You just need to visit the Creative ALchemy Project at preview.creativelabs.com and download the beta version of the ALchemy installer. This allows you to experience hardware-accelerated 3D audio and EAX in older titles which do not support OpenAL.

GX2 BOO HOO

Q A few months ago I upgraded my PC with a GeForce 7950 GX2 card. Everything works fine with XP, but when I try to install Vista it reaches the loading screen and reboots, then keeps rebooting until I switch off. I replaced the GX2 with an ordinary PCI card and Vista installed without a problem, but now when I put my 7950 GX2 back in it won't load. Any ideas?

Denis Lynch

A *This was a common problem a few months back when Microsoft managed to ship trial versions of Vista with broken NVIDIA drivers. These caused GX2 users endless grief in installation. The way around the issue was documented best on the HEXUS. community discussion forums at snipurl.com/gx2vista. If you still have problems though, I'd suggest either sticking with XP or selling the GX2. Seriously. Vista is not yet the gaming platform Microsoft want you to think it is, and you'll gain nothing by upgrading to it.* **PCZ**

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

Don't point, type.

24 ▶ LAUNCHY

COSTS Free FROM www.launchy.net

The biggest problem with the Start Menu is that it's not only counter-unintuitive – what other operating system has you clicking a 'Start' button in order to shut down? – it also needs to be constantly pruned and rearranged before it makes sense. Microsoft acknowledged its awfulness by revamping it for Vista, but most of us – the XP faithful – remain stuck with a familiar yet baffling cascade of all the programs we've ever installed.

The various Start Menu organisers and emerging Vista Start Menu emulators don't cut the mustard, and the Vista way of doing things is arguably not that good anyway. It's still not quite there. What's needed is a straightforward way of getting to your applications, with absolutely no

mucking about. If you're one of those people who makes sure your menus are organised into sections you're halfway there already, but there's still no direct route. Until now.

Hold down the Alt key, tap your space bar and Launchy pops to the foreground. Begin typing the name of your application, or part of its name, and its icon will appear in a drop-down list. Click and you're done.

Launchy can be configured to scan any number of custom directories for potential programs or documents – it means you can search and launch any file, not just those tucked away in the Program Files hierarchy.

So do yourself a favour. Reclaim some desktop space by turning off your Quick Launch toolbar and download Launchy instead. You won't regret it.

WATCHDOG

Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...
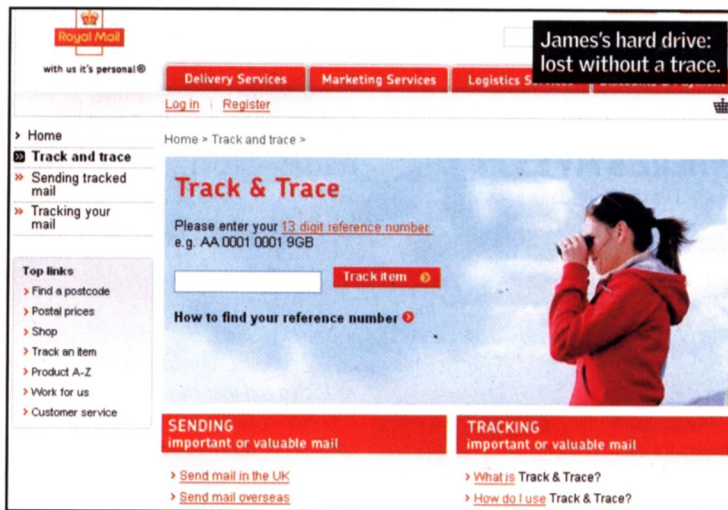
Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at **watchdog@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

> **Royal Mail said they'd lost the signature but the parcel had been delivered; Asus rejected this claim**

Peggle: ace, but comes with an overhead.

THE ACCUSED: Asus
PROBLEM:

Hard drive gone missing, deposit lost
Back in 2005, reader James Wheeler purchased a laptop from Asus. Earlier this year it gave up the ghost and was returned to Asus for repairs. But when it came back, not only did it still have problems, but the hard drive had been replaced. As there'd been nothing wrong with the hard drive, James called to find out why it'd been changed, only to be met with the reply: "All hardware is replaced when it goes for repair." James eventually paid a deposit of £120 to hire his hard drive back and recover his data, after which he returned it to Asus.

Some time later, James called the firm to ask why he hadn't had any response, but he was told that they'd never received the hard drive back. He phoned Royal Mail, who said that they'd lost the signature but could confirm that the parcel had been delivered. Asus rejected this delivery claim. As an exasperated James explains: "The Royal Mail refuses all responsibility, as do Asus."
PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: After getting in touch with Asus, and a bit of toing and froing, we eventually managed to get them the tracking number that confirmed delivery of James's hard drive. After checking the delivery had been confirmed, they were only too happy to help. "There's clearly been some miscommunication from the beginning, from no tracking number being available at the start, to Royal Mail stating successful delivery but no signature. Regardless of whether a signature can be provided via the customer's chosen delivery

James's hard drive: lost without a trace.

service, we will still be willing to refund the deposit for the HDD due to this problem being out of either party's control, and the customer having taken the correct steps to ensure Asus receives the part back. In brief, if James will forward a statement showing the date and amount paid as deposit for the HDD, we will ensure he's refunded."
FINAL VERDICT: Hard drive not found, but money refunded.

THE ACCUSED: PopCap Games
PROBLEM: Annoyance at UK vs US pricing
Peggle's a neat little game that's not only stolen a substantial number of hours in the *ZONE* office this month, but has also been a cause of concern for reader Greebo. He often grabs games from www.popcap.com, where the games are "old-fashioned, good, cheap, simple fun – just the thing to while away half an hour or so". So when he got the newsletter promoting *Peggle*, he promptly downloaded the demo. But to his annoyance, he discovered that the UK and US prices were different. The loading screen put the price at $19.95, but after he decided to buy the game, the PopCap website asked for £14.99, which is nearly a 50% increase.

Thinking that PopCap were using an old exchange rate, he got in contact, but was met with phrases such as "local sales and support" and "high-quality translations". As Greebo points out, when he buys a game in a store, he fully expects to pay more than in the US thanks to transport costs and store overheads, but, "PopCap are trading over the Internet and it shouldn't matter

to them if the customer is in the UK or US".
PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: It's common knowledge that we often get the short end of the stick in the UK, so we were interested in what PopCap had to say. The response was swift, but perhaps not quite what Greebo wanted: "The primary factor that creates disparity in pricing is the costs associated with doing business in different countries, ie, VAT. Second, PopCap is not just a US company. In fact, PopCap has invested in a full European team set-up in Ireland. Contrary to perception, we do have similar overheads to an offline store.

"As well as VAT, PopCap has a host of European costs – from office costs to game costs, including the creation of local-language websites and translating games into various languages. This investment in Europe means we can respond to UK customers in 24 hours. All of this goes into the final cost of games, and while we know prices can be higher than US prices for US-English versions, they're in line with other European distributors of casual games.

"That said, we are a 'new kid on the block' and don't profess to get it right all the time. We're still ironing out a few kinks – ideally, a UK customer wouldn't see the US prices, so as to avoid this type of confusion. We apologise to the customer for any confusion caused, and our customer services team will work with them to close this query."

So, no change in the pricing then, but it's worth noting that *Peggle*'s available via Steam for the US price of $19.95 (plus tax!), which may cheekily save you a few pennies.
FINAL VERDICT: Price remains the same, but there's always Steam. PCZ

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Summer's here at last! Why not celebrate by buying a new PC and playing games in the dark?
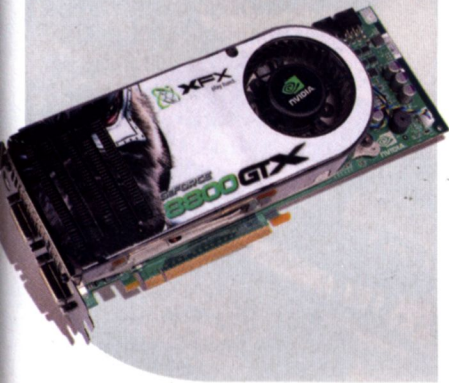
LOADED?

GRAPHICS
8800 GTX
EXPECT TO PAY £370
MANUFACTURER XFX
WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

It would have been nice to have an ATI card against which we could compare the flagship GeForce, but the new Radeon isn't due for at least a month. So NVIDIA's DirectX 10 heavyweight won by default. It's still the fastest video card you can buy, but be careful – there are no Vista drivers yet.

PROCESSOR
CORE 2 EXTREME X6800
PAY £600
MAN Intel
WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD
D975XBX2
EXPECT TO PAY £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD
RAPTOR 150GB
EXPECT TO PAY £149
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN
VP930
EXPECT TO PAY £250
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.
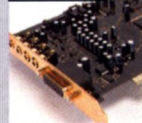
SOUNDCARD
SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATAL1TY FPS
EXPECT TO PAY £140
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

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 ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS
Z-5500
EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS
RADEON X1950 PRO
EXPECT TO PAY £130
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT – the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.

PROCESSOR
CORE 2 DUO E6300
EXPECT TO PAY £105
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD
CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2
EXPECT TO PAY £52
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD
CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II
EXPECT TO PAY £30
MAN Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN
VA903M
EXPECT TO PAY £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19-inch screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280x1024 panel offers greater depth than the 1440x900 panel of its sibling VA1912w.

SOUNDCARD
SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE
EXPECT TO PAY £32
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 £37
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.

FREEPLAY

Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Wrong angle

SO IT EMERGES, the real reason Microsoft came down like a ton of glossy round-edged bricks on poor little freeware clone *Grid Wars* was because they had plans to port *Geometry Wars* to the PC. Yeah, it's old news, but it's here to review now so it's topical again. It's just like *You Only Live Twice*, with the big spaceship eating the little one. And who is the spaceman left floating in space after the big spaceship snips his air tube? That's every person still using Windows XP. This metaphor is *airtight*.

Back here in Freeplay though, you'll find a review of *Desert Conflict*, the successor to *Battlefield 1942's Desert Combat* – and even at this early stage it's looking extremely impressive. Also, freeware MMO *Space Cowboy* is probably the most fun free MMO I've ever played. Those are my Freeplay Choice of the Month Awards, so definitely go and play them.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

Try this!
Smiley radar faces
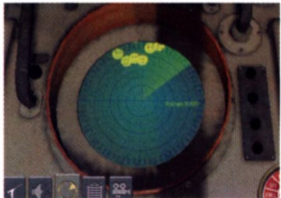
We bet the folks at Ubisoft were feeling a little giggly the day they sneaked this little visual gag into *Silent Hunter 4*, but if you hit CTRL + F11 when looking at the radar, smiley faces replace the blips. Those guys!

Fearless.
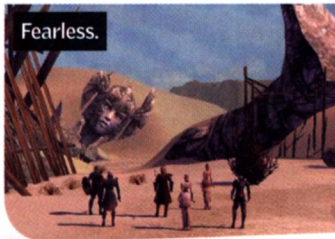
104 Demo pages
Try out the latest games right now!

Tasteless.
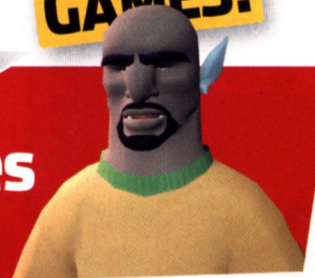
108 Shock therapy
When tragedy strikes, there's a freeware game following in its wake

Endless.

110 Freeware
The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep

Hopeless.
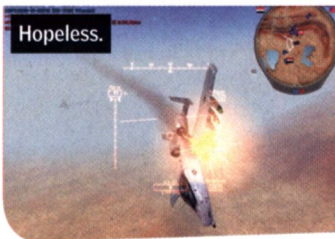
112 Play!
Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons

Homeless.

114 Jackass
We make fun of the poor and homeless, in a roundabout way

Useless.

116 Fight Club
We beckon you to enter our web of win – please do come in!

0 HOURS

389.5 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

Demos

Steve Hogarty rounds up our free DVD

GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL

You've got 14 whole days to play through our *Nightfall* demo. Hurry up then... www.guildwars.com

HOPEFULLY YOU HELD on to the free Asura mini-pet we gave away on last month's DVD, and didn't baulk at it, shake your head and mutter, "I don't play *Guild Wars*", before walking around town showing the DVD to random people, pointing at it and saying "but I don't even play *Guild Wars*!" without explanation.

If you instead stashed it neatly under your desk, you can now use that very same code in our exclusive 14-day trial of the 'other' best MMORPG around. We won't skirt around the fact that it's a 10-hour trial with an 14-day expiry, but if you find yourself hitting the 10-hour limit well within a fortnight, then that's clear indication that you should shell out for the whole thing. It's a once-off payment too, so it's not like you're marrying the game and being forced into a life of numb servitude to a 35-stone orc woman.

I would ask what you're waiting for, but it could be a lot of things. Maybe your sister is on the PC, or you've just moved house and are waiting for your broadband connection. Whatever, any problems, go to http://uk.support.guildwars.com.
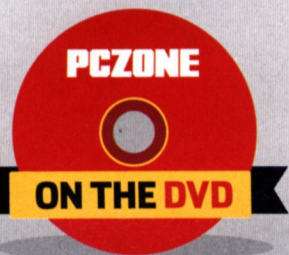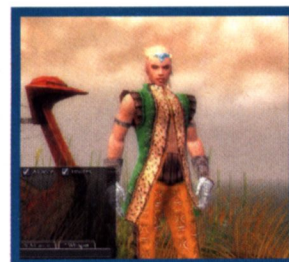
METROSEXUAL
This is the character I created, his name is Somota Fieryballs (look out for me!) – he's a metrosexual-looking Elementarianist (or something to that effect). I've got a stick that shoots water (ooo-err!).

TRAINING TIME
Kormir says that she'll let me teach the students how to move and attack. What she doesn't realise is that I'm learning too, and that I'm actually just doing what she says and pretending I know. But I'm good at it...

OUR ADVENTURE BEGINS How to get going in *Guild Wars: Nightfall*

SHE KILLED ME
Kormir decides to demonstrate how resurrection works by killing me. Oh, that's just bloody charming Kormir. I wasn't going to mention that your name sounds like a curry dish, but now I have.

MISSION O'CLOCK
I have to rid Chahbek Village of some bad guys, using everything I've learned up to this point. Already I'm the leader of a small group of people, all through looking good and bluffing.

SAM & MAX: REALITY 2.0

Take a trip down the tubes www.telltalegames.com/samandmax

THE PENULTIMATE EPISODE of Sam and Max's new adventure sees a new spark of life jolted through the series' mildly stagnating locations and objects, with lots of new bits of dialogue hiding beneath every mouse click. We reckon it's very good, but by now you'll probably be able to play the final episode and will have made up your mind about the whole series (see our review on page 80).

If you've not tried it out yet though, here's a trial of the second-to-last episode, which we loved enough to award 83% last issue. Yay for episodic gaming!

HA HA, TEE HEE
Here are just two of the insane jokes you can expect

POSTER JOKE
A poster for Ferret Lake outside Sam and Max's office prompts Max to claim that "sequels to beloved classics are always better than the originals". To which Sam replies: "Yes they are." Only *really* clued-up people will understand this joke.

VISUAL GAG
With this episode being all about the Internet, Bosco decides to take his business online. He's also decided he's a half-elf. He demonstrates this by wearing just one of a pair of pointy elf ears. This literally makes him half an elf! Chortle!

ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA

This is madness! www.ancientwarssparta.com

SPARTANS ARE *SO* in right now. So much so that people constantly walk out of H&M wearing kilts and saying "Spartan? I thought you said *tartan!*", before running away all embarrassed.

Ancient Wars: Sparta is an RTS in which you can play as the Spartans. You can also play as the Egyptians or the Persians; but as they're not in the game's title or in any popular movies lately, you probably won't pick those.

Each army gets one mission each, and if you pay attention to the explanation of how things work, you might just be able to play it too. As for me, I skipped all that guff and jumped right into the demo.

1 ACROPOLIS
This big building is an acropolis, where you can build many Leonidases. Our suggested pun: acropolis now.

2 WORLD MAP
If you want to be funny, you could point at this and shout: "This is SPARTA!" Or not.

3 SPARTANS
These are Spartans. If you stare at them long enough, they turn and wink at the camera.

THE RULES
How to be a proper Spartan

READ ME
Wow, this is quite the introduction. Do we really have to read all this? Yes we do? Jesus Christ.

FIIIIIGHT!
It's King Leonidas! From the movie! He was actually real? Who knew! The workers look confused though.

LINEAGE II: INTERLUDE
eu.lineage2.com/interlude/eu
Just look at that character art on their webpage. That bloody demon's got no nipples. All the fancy armour in the world couldn't buy this guy a pair of nipples. Are there nipples in the trial of this game then? Only one way for you to find out...

THEATRE OF WAR
www.battlefront.com/products/tow
If there was a real theatre of war, and an actor in a polystyrene costume shaped like Germany who sang songs about sitting on a mine on the Maginot Line, and also did a little Rhine dance, that would be good. Just like this demo really.

THE BEST OF THE REST

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED
zone.msn.com/en/vistagames
The Xbox 360 shoot 'em up comes to PC at last, but what's this? It only works on Vista, ho-hum. Can't say we're not a little miffed. Looks brilliant on a massive HD telly mind.

PENUMBRA: OVERTURE
www.penumbra-overture.com
Creep around some underground place and shriek at things you can't see. There's enough terror in this little demo to make you fill a thermos with poop, and still have enough left over for anything else.

SHREK THE THIRD
www.shrekthethird.com
If you'd like to play the demo of the sequel to the movie that was made to squeeze a bit more money out of a decent film, here it is. Alternatively, you could throw yourself beneath the wheels of a large moving vehicle.

ANKH: HEART OF OSIRIS
www.ankh-game.com
The mystery of who built the pyramids is nothing compared to the mystery of releasing a demo of this mediocre point-and-click adventure. This is about as lively as Tutankhamen's current social diary.

SNIPPETS

RESIDENT EVIL 4 PATCHED

Amazing patch massively improves dire port
www.res-evil.com/re4/ | For: Resi Evil 4

WE WEREN'T IMPRESSED with Ubisoft's terrible port of stellar GameCube survival horror *Resident Evil 4*. Fair enough they hadn't included any mouse support, or even decent keyboard controls, but the extent to which they neglected to even match the graphical fidelity of the console version was unforgivable. *Resi 4* on PC looks like it was shat out of a dog's arse.

The recently released patch, however, adds things that seem to have been missed the first time around. Things like, oh, just off the top of our heads, *lighting*.

It makes the game look infinitely better, and had it actually looked this good when we reviewed it, it would have undoubtedly scored significantly higher. It's on our DVD. Install it now if you somehow bought the tragedy that was *Resident Evil 4* on PC.

BEFORE

A mess of dull, greyish brown...

AFTER

...Is now a vibrant, creepy forest! Hurray!

DEFCON 1.4
www.everybody-dies.com
Who even knew *DEFCON* worked on Apple's silly clown machine? Well, the latest patch adds the wonderful opportunity for Windows players to nuke the stupid smug smiles off the faces of Mac players, and for us to be generally mean to Mac users, even though Macs are admittedly quite cool.

STEAM HAXXORD?
steamreview.org/posts/cafecardsstolen
Well no, but some guy apparently made it as far as a one of Valve's third-party file servers and allegedly compromised some Cyber Café credit card information. He then taunted, "I'm waiting for you Valve", before putting on his Spiderman pyjamas and being tucked into bed. Bless.

AND MOUSE SUPPORT

Resi Evil 4 becomes rodent-friendly
mouseaim.net.tc | For: Resident Evil 4

HOO-BOY, HERE'S the big one. Whether or not *Resident Evil 4* on PC should even have mouse controls split the *PC ZONE* team down the middle. On the one hand, playing a game entirely on keyboard just feels wrong. And on the other, having fluid mouse controls would detract from the game's tension, much of which is derived from the slightly restrictive controls.

Some clever blokes have managed to get working mouse support in there though. It hasn't become a different game, and it very much feels like you're controlling a joystick with your mouse, rather than directly swinging Leon's arms about, but it offers a bit more accuracy. It only works with certain versions of *Resi 4* however, so check the website for info.

HIGH-RES TEXTURES

Resident Evil 4 gets a bit more definition
z6.invisionfree.com/Resident_Evil_4_PC/

MEMBERS OF THE forum linked to above are feverishly working on creating high-resolution replacements for many of *Resident Evil 4's* blobby last-gen console textures.

It warms our hearts to see a community so disappointed with the bad port as to take it upon themselves to make it the game it should have been. It's almost enough to make us want to sing *We Shall Overcome* outside Ubisoft's HQ, while waving burning effigies of Rayman.

We'd prefer to see a proper high-res texture pack released, rather than these bitty individual mods, but hopefully it's only a matter of time until something like that gets compiled. In the meantime, you'll also find a Mario skin for Leon and a ninja skin for Ashley. Something different, innit?

DEVELOPER DIARY:

To Infinity and beyond

WITH FLAVIEN BREBION, FOUNDER OF SPACE MMO
INFINITY: THE QUEST FOR EARTH fl-tw.com

INFINITY
THE QUEST FOR EARTH

"AS A SMALL group of developers, we don't have the same resources as a fully funded company to design *Infinity's* universe. That's where procedural generation comes in. Instead of spending time to manually design each planet in each star system, we're defining some algorithms that generate this data on-the-fly as requested by the game.

"One of the key benefits is that the *Infinity* universe can be absolutely massive (think billions of unique star systems and worlds awaiting to be explored) without us having to invest time on each of them. The funny thing is, not even we as developers know what most of those worlds look like, as it'd take a lifetime to check them all.

"Many of those stars or worlds will be pretty boring, but we don't think it's a problem, as long as the the core worlds are varied and interesting. New players start in the core worlds, and that's also where you'll find most NPCs, missions, trade goods and equipment. But if you venture into deep space, the chances of meeting a player randomly get slimmer."

Space: large.

Ships: large.

By all accounts, a very large game.
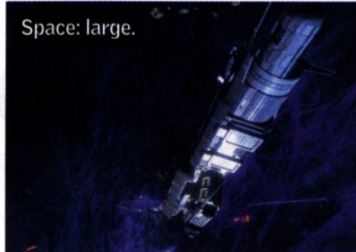
PHYSICS-BASED HOMEWRECKER

Phys_house map razes shacks to the ground

www.garrysmod.org/downloads/?a=view&id=6590 | Map for: Garry's Mod

JUST LIKE WHEN you're building elaborate sand fortresses at the beach, most of the fun of building something is knocking it down again and pretending you're a giant indestructible man. Alternatively, you could download this map for *Garry's Mod* and do the same thing in the safety of your bedroom.

The phys_house map contains a house built entirely of physics objects and breakable wood, and demands a decent PC on which to run smoothly. You can take the house apart yourself, or push one of a number of buttons outside the house, which trigger various events such as a train crashing through the living room, a UFO attack or a simple fire.

It's yet another reason to buy concrete homes and not these flimsy plywood things. As an added challenge, see how much of the ground floor you can destroy without the upstairs caving in.

Looks to me like a rapid oxidation process that creates light, heat and smoke is occurring.

SNIPPETS

For more levels and updated versions, click on this link...

SUPER Mario Flash

#1 PLAYER GAME
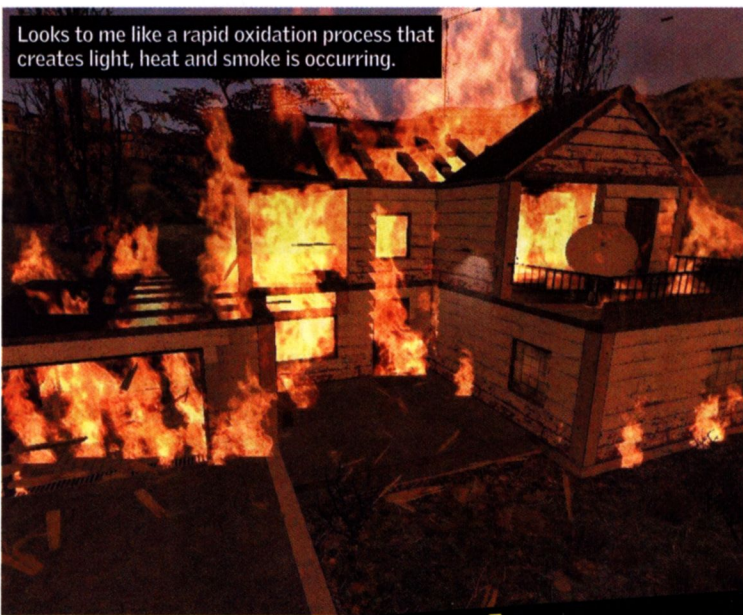
MARIO FLASH
pouetpu.pbwiki.com
Another Flash version of *Mario*? We're guessing this is the last one ever, and we only mention it because it features a remixed version of the regular *Mario* music. Remixed = somebody's played some drum samples in the background and for some reason thought it didn't sound awful.

THE APPRENTICE
www.apprenticegames.com
You're fired! Ahahaha. We love *The Apprentice*, but we can only find games based on the American version, which features the word 'Trump' a lot. Snigger. Sell ice cream for Donald now!

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
THE SIMS 2: PETS

Another great bugfix from *Pets*: "Cats no longer can become stuck in the litter box." Lolz.

Movie of the month

CRYSIS

EA and Crytek have joined forces to release a video of loads of stuff we've seen before – all that jeep-punching, roof-smashing, gun-adapting, tree-freezing malarkey we've come to expect. Then we're suddenly in what appears to be the later zero-gravity levels, surrounded by lightning squid-monster aliens...

CRYTEK

Boo! We hate trailers. We know who made it, so sod off. Show us the squid monsters.

Boo! Who *hasn't* punched a jeep into a barn? It's part of my weekly workout, actually.

Hello... This'll be the much talked about zero-g level. They're fast, but weakly armoured...

Thanks to skilled management, we're suddenly excited about *Crysis* yet again.

SHOCK THERAPY

Morally repugnant or free speech in action?
Steve Hogarty **on the freeware that wallows in the aftermath of human tragedy...**

CYNICISM IS A difficult thing to break through, and here at *ZONE*, the milk of human kindness often curdles into a vile, sneering yoghurt. However, witnessing the serene Virginia Tech memorial in *Second Life* – created by a VT student to commemorate the terrible massacre – you feel this was a respectful and genuine statement by someone close to the tragedy.

But how have other tragedies fared with their transition into the boiled-down world of gaming? What is it, other than vile shock value, that inspires their creation? Here, we look at the touching tributes, ham-fisted shockers, and offensive, opportunistic shit that fills the gaps that tragedies leave behind...

SUPER COLUMBINE MASSACRE RPG!

www.columbinegame.com

After the atrocity that was the Columbine High School massacre, there was no way a game titled *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* could avoid being lynched by the mainstream press. Most argued that it trivialised the deaths of many innocent people, while a quiet minority defended it, arguing that expression through the medium of games is as valid as writing a book or painting a picture.

As a game, it's quite basic – a well-constructed product of RPG Maker – allowing you to equip weapons and gain experience through, well, murdering. As a piece of social commentary, it's debatable whether it's merely a glorification of the violent events of that day, or an alternative (and mostly accurate) account of what happened, told in a very original manner.

Columbine: RIP.

APPROPRIATENESS-O-METER:

The very fabric of morality hasn't quite been torn asunder here, just ruffled slightly. However, should this really be the subject of entertainment?

★★★★★

TWIN TOWERS

www.surclaro.com

Following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, Microsoft removed the iconic skyscrapers from their popular *Flight Simulator* series, despite there being an in-game feature allowing you to set the time and date to well before their destruction. Similar denial rippled across the movie and television industry.

Microsoft might have deftly avoided a PR shitstorm, but modders were quick to replace the towers with several new models: the original buildings, the smoking remains at Ground Zero and even the planned memorial park are all on offer. The already-controversial *Grand Theft Auto* also found itself playing host to various Twin Tower mods, ranging from unassuming inclusions to bold 'NEVER FORGET' banners strewn across giant virtual World Trade Centres.

Modders show NYC as it was and is.
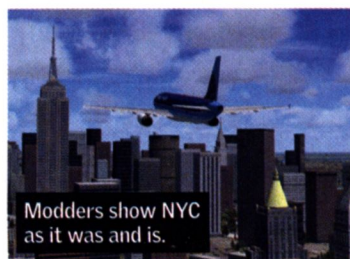
APPROPRIATENESS-O-METER:

As ever, modders go where teams of Microsoft lawyers fear to tread, re-adding the fallen towers and refusing to forget.

★★★★★

The Twin Towers: gone, but not forgotten.

YOU ARE HIDDEN!
You are 1297 meters SouthEast of the w...
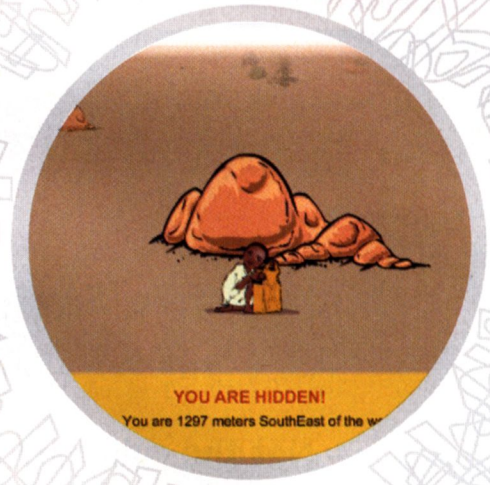
WACO RESURRECTION

waco.c-level.cc

The designers of *Waco Resurrection* are keen to point out that this is not a game, rather it's a subjective documentary, an art exhibit allowing you to get inside the head of cult leader David Koresh. This is the part where we jiggle our hands, grin and say "literally!", because to play *Waco Resurrection* you must wear a David Koresh helmet (yes, really). Through this helmet, you issue voice commands, experience the effects of FBI psy-ops on your brain (it vibrates), and imbue your followers with magic abilities garnered from bibles falling from the sky.

It's absolutely barmy high-concept art, and between bouts of pretension, it unflinchingly revels in its tragic subject matter. Probably one to leave out of your next LAN party though.

Where art meets tragedy.

APPROPRIATENESS-O-METER:

With a very big WTF from the moral police, *Waco Resurrection* won't offend because it flies so far above the heads of the general populace.

★★☆☆☆

FLIGHT TO HELL

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYvcNe4NJrg

Japan Airlines Flight 123 crashed 100km from Tokyo in 1985, killing 505 of its 509 passengers, and it remains the deadliest single-aircraft disaster in history. 'Flight To Hell' is piece of machinima created using *Flight Simulator*, recreating the crash with chilling sobriety. The depressing Johnny Cash soundtrack lays it on a bit thick, but otherwise the genuine audio recordings from inside the cockpit right up until the collision will leave you feeling like somebody's scooped your heart out with a hot spoon.

Sensitivity to the event has declined over two decades, but then again, there are about seven movies with *Flight Simulator* planes crashing into skyscrapers on YouTube, and nobody seems to bat an eyelid.

An emotional piece of machinima.

APPROPRIATENESS-O-METER:

An unbiased and slightly moving recreation of the event, and one that might just stop you getting on a plane ever again.

★★★★★

DARFUR IS DYING

www.darfurisdying.com

It's surprising that any Flash game based on the crisis in Darfur could ever be more than an insensitive *Operation Wolf* clone, but *Darfur Is Dying* is, in reality, a clever way of raising awareness of the kind of f***ed-up existence people have to cope with in vast areas of the Third World. Choose somebody to lead your village, a 10-year-old boy for instance, forage for water by avoiding Janjaweed militants roving about the country in their jeeps and return to your camp.

If you get caught, you're bombarded with harsh truths and reminders that you're safe in front of a PC while things like this actually happen. Once you've obtained some water, you manage your camp, and can then turn your guilty eye towards the 'Take Action' donation button.

And it still is, you know.

APPROPRIATENESS-O-METER:

This isn't a guilt-trip, it's a sort of guilt-cruise, with champagne and extra guilt being handed out by poor people.

★★★★★

Freeware

PCZONE ON THE DVD

If it ain't free, *Steve Hogarty* is damn sure it ain't going in...

Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month, try your hand at flying through rootin'-tootin' space, say 'Arrrrrr!' quite a lot and fill your face full of staples...

SPACE COWBOY ONLINE
Not the rubbish Clint Eastwood film

Dev: MasangSoft | sco.gpotato.com

A FREE MMO in which you play a space cowboy (who doesn't actually see much of space) piloting a ship through typical MMO missions while upgrading and improving your abilities and weapons in a world reminiscent of *Star Fox 64*? Why yes, that's exactly what this is, and while the fact that it's free to download and play might seem too good to be true, it's actually an enjoyable, if slightly unpolished MMO that I'm willing you to play using my mind powers. That slight tingling sensation you feel on your brain? That's me.

You begin by choosing your gear (in-game speak for your ship, and essentially your character) from one of four classes. These work out as sci-fi equivalents of fighters, tanks and healers. Flying your ship is achieved through mouse controls, allowing a degree of freedom to fly about not usually seen in the MMO genre. It means that *Space Cowboy* feels like a proper arcade space shooter (not in space), even though it's all one big RPG dice-roller underneath the bonnet.

Once you reach a high enough level, you can choose to join one of the game's factions, and it's from there on in that the game becomes more interesting. Join

FREEWARE **GAME OF THE MONTH**

Not much evidence of space or Stetsons. Lots of flying though.

> **Space Cowboy feels like a proper arcade space shooter, even though it's a big RPG dice-roller under the bonnet**

guilds and form groups to take on more powerful bosses, take on other players in PvP and take part in server-wide attacks on massive enemy mothership targets – *Space Cowboy's* got all the trimmings of its commercial cousins.

What it doesn't have is the user-friendliness of other MMOs, so if you plan on playing past level 11, read up on some FAQ-centric literature. Also, watch out for space bees (not actually in space), bone bats and other hilariously shit NPCs.

No sign of Steve Miller or his band either.
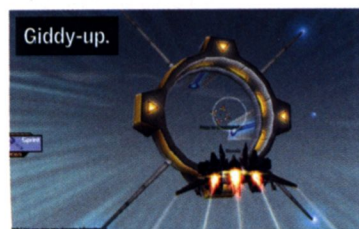
Giddy-up.

TRIPLE TRIAD GOLD
Pick a card...

Dev: Qhimm | ttg.qhimm.com

IF YOU'VE PLAYED *Final Fantasy VIII*, then you'll be in one of two minds when it comes to its card-based mini-game, *Triple Triad*. Either you thought it was the most irritating thing to come from the series since the Moogly-Woogly guys who saved your game for you, or you thought it was excellent strategic fun which outshone the main game with its addictive brilliance.

If you fall into the latter category, then try out this PC remake of the Squaresoft card game. It works in either two-player or against the CPU, and it stomps all over intellectual property by imitating the game all the way down to that wonderful music playing along in the background. Good for a bit of nostalgia, but ultimately a bit pointless when not attached to a bigger game.

Your size is never really explained...

...Neither is the reason you're fighting...

...But we like it all the same.
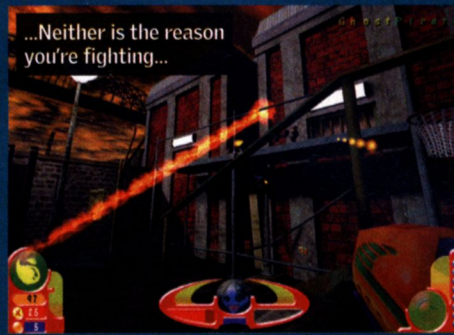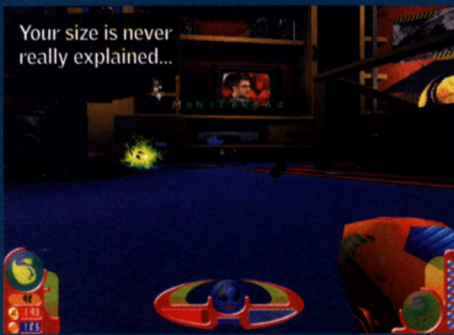
WORLD OF PADMAN
The Germans are coming
Dev: World of Padman Team | www.worldofpadman.com

PADMAN IS, ACCORDING to the website's history page, a comic-strip character who appeared in a German gaming mag before his "perpetual brutal actions, where at the end of the strip he would break something or someone" got him axed by some malevolent publisher. We're guessing he's some famous figure in German culture, up there with David Hasselhoff, but you might remember him from a couple of old *Quake III Arena* maps.

With *Quake III Arena* now gone open-source, *World Of Padman* has gone standalone. It features 12 excellent maps (in which you're a tiny player in a *Honey I Shrunk The Kids*-style giant room), an array of weapons which includes a paint gun and an angry duck thing, along with a constant supply of players to be found online (uncommon in freeware shooters). In short, *World Of Padman* is a surprisingly good game.

And of course, being a *Quake III* mod, it handles beautifully – maps feature jump pads and teleporters to move you about their cavernous spaces quickly, and the weapons are colourful and responsive, each being cartoonish takes on familiar archetypes like rockets and mini-guns.

All this, and it's wrapped in this bizarre comic style that proves that when Germans get quirky, it's in this creepy self-parodying way that we really like.

PUZZLE PIRATES
Long overdue mention for MMO puzzler
Dev: Three Rings Design | www.puzzlepirates.com

PUZZLES ARE GREAT, pirates have their upsides too, and you'll have a hard time finding somebody who'd disagree. *Puzzle Pirates*, therefore, is a very popular online game in which you play the role of a pirate who solves puzzles.

You take on missions aboard a pirate ship, and in order for the ship to run properly, players on the ship must play puzzles of a simplistic PopCap nature. Occasional updates let you know how much weight everybody is pulling, from an 'Ultimate' rating right down to a slightly patronising 'Learning' rating. You can work your way up the ranks of a crew, buy your own ship, run a shop or possibly become the governor of a little pirate island.

You earn pieces of eight for your hard puzzle work, as well as through challenging other pirates to puzzle fights, which you can then use to buy garb and pets for your avatar. Everybody likes to talk like pirates too, which makes the whole thing feel lovely to play.

Bad Stevepants. He's pants.
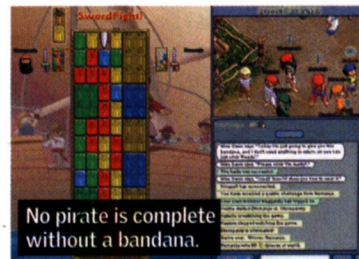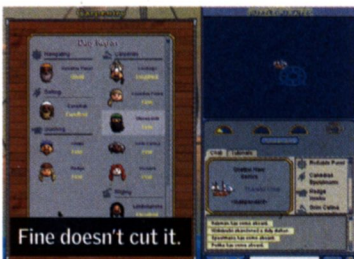
WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

Five Minutes To Kill (Yourself)

Dev: Ham In The Fridge | www.adultswim.com/games/fiveMinutes/

If television has taught us anything, it's that offices are horrible sanity-draining places, full of annoying people. But if reality has taught us anything, it's that offices are usually OK and can be friendly environments. *Five Minutes To Kill (Yourself)* takes place in more of the hellish, boring sort of office, and instead of carrying out your daily tasks, you must kill yourself as quickly as possible to escape the monotony of everyday life.

You do this by driving staples into your face, insulting your co-workers or aggravating sharks. There's a surprising amount to find too, so be sure not to kill yourself too quickly on your first go so you can find the clowns in the toilets, or talk to the guys in IT. Our best time is just under two minutes (thanks to the weasels).

Fine doesn't cut it.

Because wood is fun.

No pirate is complete without a bandana.

Hit me baby, one more time.

DESERT CONFLICT
Play: MOD

Steve Hogarty gets sand between his toes with the classic mod remake

www.desert-conflict.org | Mod for: Battlefield 2

IT'S OVER FOUR years since Britain and America slapped Iraq in its stupid face with a gauntlet of supreme justice and freedom, and it's over five since *Battlefield 1942* was slapped in the face by one of the greatest mods of its generation. *Desert Combat* modernised the World War II shooter by adding the death-bringing machinery of the Gulf War to our monitors – helicopter gunships, shoulder-mounted Stinger missiles, really big tanks, everything but the dodgy plutonium-custard gas stuff the Yanks carted out near the end.

Desert Conflict is, for all intents, a remake of *Desert Combat* in *Battlefield 2*, which might seem slightly mysterious considering that *Battlefield 2* is already set around modern conflicts. Thing is, it succeeds in doing everything better than the vanilla game.

It's faster, bigger and punchier than *BF2*, plus it manages to feel a whole lot like playing the *Battlefield 1942* mod all over again. Helicopters were always a huge part of the game, and with *Desert Conflict* they become twitchier and more responsive than before – essential really, as soldiers on the ground armed with

dumbfire missiles are extremely effective anti-air units. Pilots are no longer as invincible as they'd like to think.

New vehicles (new to *Battlefield 2* at least) include the Apache and Hind gunships, as well as mobile artillery – driveable SCUD missile launcher anyone? This takes the role of properly blowing things to shit out of the hands of the commander and into the hands of players – firing off a round, waiting to see it flash in the distance and adjusting your aim ever so slightly, like a massive first-person game of *Tanks* on DOS is an intense experience when under fire yourself.

Fans will welcome the return of old maps and weapons, El Alamein and Lost Village to name two, the former containing a C-130 Hercules cargo plane acting as a giant mobile spawn point in the sky.

Desert Conflict is a mod worth re-installing *Battlefield 2* for, and even at this very early release, it could easily be considered one of the series' greatest mods. If you've played *Desert Combat* to death, let me just assure you that the helicopters work, and that it's just as fast-paced and hectic as you remember. Install this and play it now.

Up.

Down.

The hostility is palpable.

TOWER OF TERROR

Who needs *Rollercoaster Tycoon* when you've got *Garry's Mod*?

http://files.moddb.com/4703/download-gm-towerofterror/ | Map for: Garry's Mod

IF YOU'RE A privileged child or a much beleaguered parent desperate to capture the love of your offspring, the chances are you've at least entertained the thought of going to Disneyworld in Florida. Well entertain that thought no longer! Now, through the magic of *Garry's Mod* you can not only ride MGM Studio's fantastic 'Tower Of Terror' ride, but also build a convincing queue out of *Half-Life 2* cast members!

This is an immaculate recreation of the ride's exteriors, interiors, clanks, groans and *Twilight Zone* commentary – it might be dull for non-Disneyphiles, but it's a pure nerdgasm if you're familiar with the house of mouse.

From the queue system to the TV beckoning you into (menacing gap between words) '*The Twilight Zone*', to a gift shop curiously bereft of merchandise, it's all fabulously recreated.

You do have to wonder at the sanity of the poor chap who must have gone on the ride multiple times armed with tape measure and audio recorder though. Can we have a 'Mr Toad's Wild Ride' next please? Or the 'It's a Small World After All' one. We're not fussy.

Play: MAP

What a terrifying tower.

Those people are terrifying!

OMG! Metal bars!

Not the gates of terror too!
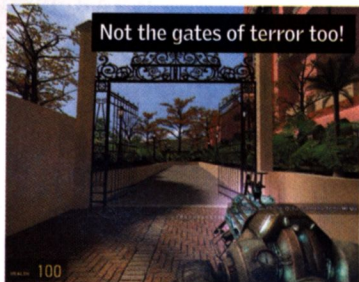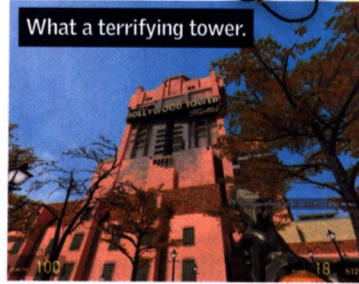
ZOMBIE STRESS

Play: MOD

Better than those rubbish squeezy face things

www.supacomix.co.uk/zombiestress | Mod for: Half-Life 2

ABOUT 20 MINUTES ago, I marched into the office full of enthusiasm, only to be met with a Windows bootup screen which refused to do anything other than blink that stupid blue progress bar at me. Four resets later and I'd regressed to an apelike state, smashing my keyboard against my desk and hurling my mouse at an innocent monitor.

It's for these special moments during which we lose all sanity and harbour murderous intentions that *Zombie Stress* is created. It's simple, just an open area, with lots of guns and oodles of *Half-Life 2* zombies to be slaughtered. Imagine they're your parents, your friends or your cat – whoever you happen to hate at any given time, then feel a sense of calming peace return to your primitive brain as you shoot theirs.

Once you're thinking logically again, you'll soon realise that as far as mods go, this is pretty rubbish. We can't even make sense of the second two zombie scenarios, which will probably cause stress rather than relieve it. This is still an efficient way of avoiding manslaughter charges though.

Because zombies live in tower blocks too.

Fill the tarmac with dead zombies.

Exploding zombies are the height of cool.
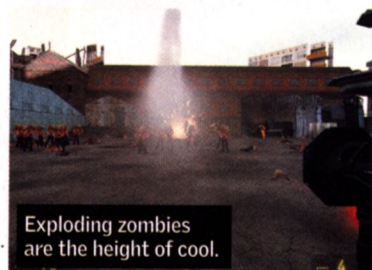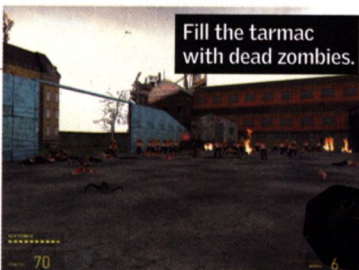
INTELLIGENT DESIGN
WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

1 + 1 = 5

Do you love Excel? Does your heart flutter when you imagine poring over a wall of numbers all cross-referenced against another wall of numbers? If the answer is no, then you probably don't want to be a designer. Or at least, you don't want to ever be the designer in charge of tuning. Or at the very least, you don't want to be the designer in charge of tuning an RPG, an RTS or any other genre that involves an acronym.

In High School, I quit maths as soon as I could, and my apparent punishment is to spend the rest of my life flashing back to the day my year-nine maths teacher told me I'd probably do better if I actually tried. But how could maths help me do anything that was valuable to me personally?

My teacher should have said this: videogames may seem to be about jumping and fighting and hot loot, but in reality they're pretty much about numbers. And of all the formulas, I think one is the most crucial: how often you reward the player and how steeply that reward increases. You can make a player do just about anything if you reward them at the right rate and the object you give them has enough perceived value. I played *Diablo* twice on different difficulty settings to find new gear, which wasn't even a new asset – it was just a different colour with a big, dirty number stuck on it.

But if you get the curve wrong and the rewards flatline, then I have no interest in playing any more. Or if the curve is too steep and I have to grind too long, I'll turn off. But as long as you keep my damage multiplier growing and my level keeps increasing, I'll pay my subs fee. And in an age where making games is getting more and more expensive, there's nothing cheaper than a climbing digit.

SPORE IS DUE OUT LATER THIS YEAR – WWW.SPORE .COM

PC ZONE JACKASS

BEGGAR-BAITING IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Have you had one too many 12-year-olds run up to you and say, "1g PLZ NEED WEAPON", without so much as a hello? What kind of people are these infuriating scallywags? Join us in revenge as we begin a regular series of cocking about in games, beginning this month with beggar-baiting in *World Of Warcraft*...

THE TRADE-WINDOW TEASE

THE SET-UP:
Open a trade window. The beggar will assume you're going to give them loot as epic as it is phat. A quirk of the *WOW* trading window is that the person you're trading with can see what you're offering before you confirm the swap. Put all your gold into the window, don't press Trade and go to bed.

THE OUTCOME:
Complete entrancement. The beggar will suspect something's awry, but that 500g you're dangling is just a mouse click away, and there's every chance he'll be there until your connection times out.

OFFLINE EQUIVALENT:
Shuffling your hands around inside your pockets for two minutes.
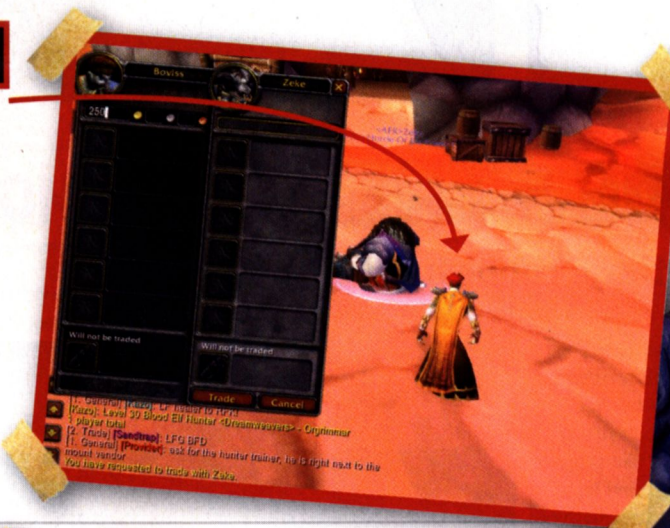
IT'S THE COPPERS

THE SET-UP:
Pretend the trade window is 'broken, or something', and hand over your loot one copper at a time. Trade one copper piece, confirm, repeat this as many times as you can be bothered.

THE OUTCOME:
Once they've worked out that 1g is 10,000 copper, they'll soon call you a noob and walk off. The fun is in seeing how many coppers they'll accept; we've managed seven copper pieces before the beggar got bored and scuttled off, although we had to beg them to stay for the seventh.

OFFLINE EQUIVALENT:
Flicking pennies in their stupid, unshaven faces.
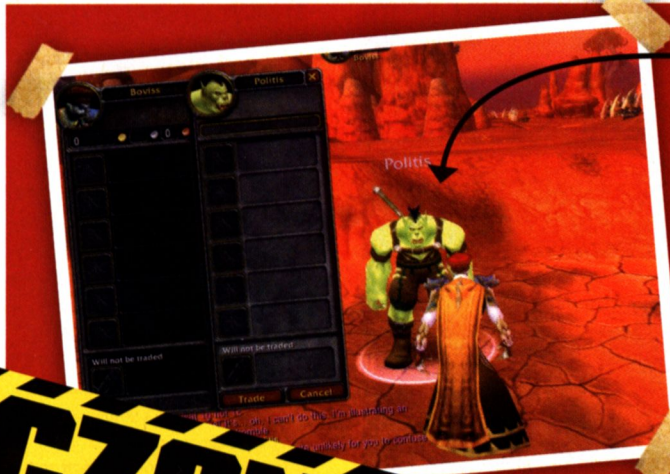
THE FACTION TRAP

THE SET-UP:
Hunters... Invite the beggar into a group. They'll accept, because you're thrilling and it's a huge compliment. Now declare war and attack a high-level neutral faction, then feign death so they attack your sidekick. He'll die.

THE OUTCOME:
Spiritual successor to the *EverQuest* 'Type /d (duel) to open the donation window', but the coin-hungry sods die properly.

OFFLINE EQUIVALENT:
Kicking a dog in the arse and throwing it at some poor homeless bloke.

THE GAME SHOW

THE SET-UP:
If there's just one person begging, ask him a question, then run off while they check the answers on Google. However, if you've got two or more beggars, start an unfair game show. Disallow correct answers, use arbitrary rules and ask contestants to make out. Set everyone to ignore and run away happy.

THE OUTCOME:
After five minutes of Steve asking questions and Log being an emoting Dolly Dealer, we gave them gold anyway, as we'd enjoyed ourselves way more than we could justify.

OFFLINE EQUIVALENT:
A pacifist version of that *Bumfights* DVD.

SEND US YOURS!
Have you found ways to play games in ways the developers never intended? Take a screenshot, video or just tell us what you did, and we'll print the best and put them online at www.pczone.co.uk. Email letters@pczone.co.uk, entitling your email 'PC ZONE Jackass'. Fame and prizes await!

SHOW THEM YOU'RE NUTS

THE SET-UP:
Abandon all pretence at wit, intelligence, bonhomie or animosity. Simply type, and just type unmitigated nonsense. Follow them wherever they go. Swap freely between whispering, saying, yelling and emotes. Warn the beggar you're out of mana, and demand healing. Veer wildly from 1337speak to Queen's English. Cry, laugh, flirt, beg, scream. Use any leftover snowballs, light orbs and rose petals from the seasonal quests. This is generally the last stage of beggar-baiting, before you have a nervous breakdown and learn that ignoring them is all for the best.

THE OUTCOME:
An understanding that hundreds of different people will enter our lives, and that by reacting to the idiots, we empower them. You might even give a couple of gold to the ones who ask using full words.

OFFLINE EQUIVALENT:
Screaming at the sky. **PCZ**

Fight Club

The 9th rule of Fight Club: bail out!

THIS MONTH, IN our regular celebration of senseless virtual death, we played the fantastic *Desert Conflict* mod for *Battlefield 2*. This meant running back and forth between various PCs, installing incremental patches and running arduous updates. Somebody suggested installing the game on a Vista PC, and the reverberations of our laughter made bits of masonry fall from the ceiling.

Muu_Puklip was pilot for the evening, expertly ferrying passengers about the map, dodging rockets and missiles like a pro, while Will tried to shred his enemies by ploughing into them, rotor-blades first. "Will it blend?" he quipped, exposing his shockingly Internet-savvy side.

Next month, we'll be playing *Half-Life 2 Deathmatch*. Join us on Thursday, May 31 at 6pm, and check out www.pczone.co.uk for more info.

"Come here, you fruity little terrorists!"

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

30

SQUAD MEMBER

Hinds: not so kind.

ZONE CHAT

Because talking is the new black...
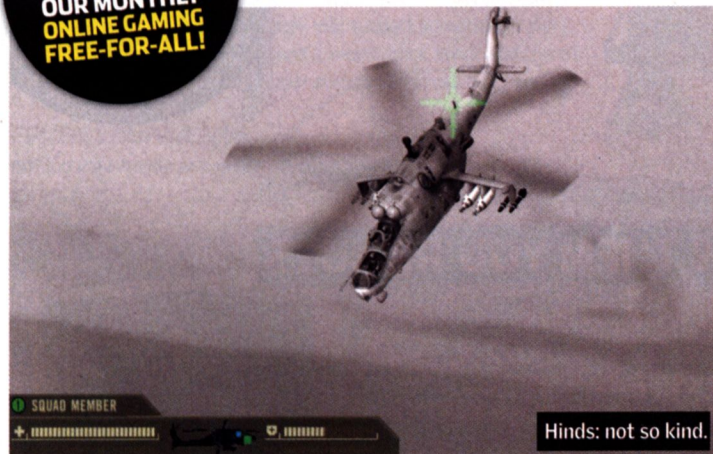
BIG BROTHER'S FACE towers over a darkened room, exhorting row after row of readers to "obey, obey, obey" or something similarly oppressive. But wait, there's a kerfuffle at the back of the auditorium as armed guards in black riot gear step aside, or maybe they were shot we're not sure, and who should come running down the aisle but us! *PC ZONE*! All of us! And a golden retriever!

"Would you guys mind obeying me? Thanks."
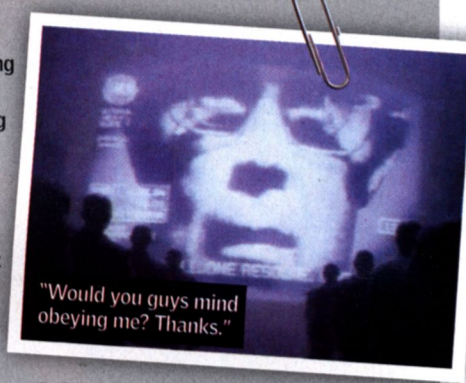
"Hyurk!" we shout, as we chuck a *Guild Wars* mini-pet at the video screen. It smashes! Everybody cheers! "Now who wants to chat?!" we enquire. "OK," says the audience. So we chat.

This month, we discussed the tragic Virginia Tech massacre and who was really to blame (ie, not games). We also had a competition, the results of which are highly secretive and exclusive only to those who bothered to show up. Was the prize a car? Maybe. It could have been a yacht too, if you think about it. If you'd like to fight against a dystopian future by convening online with like-minded folk, you can. All you have to do is read the bit below, and come along at 5.30pm on Wednesday, May 30, where the jovial *PC ZONE* staff and readers will be waiting to sweep you off your feet with their banter...

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.

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've decreed Thursday evenings as non-violent, preferring to play the piccolo instead – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some *ZONE* staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025

2 HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

3 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

4 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

5 WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960

6 PREY
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719

7 BATTLEFIELD 2142
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567

8 JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
Listed in NovaWorld

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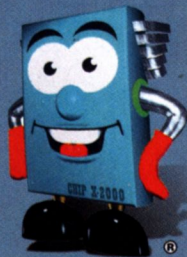
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RetroZONE

Stick to the cameras and keyboards, boys
THE WRISTPLAY REVOLUTION

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

CHILDREN THESE DAYS generally compose their first conceptual electropera at the age of 13. They've got the technology, you see. They just have to drag their palms across a panel of knobs, sliders, holograms and magical paste, and a multi-layered masterpiece flies across the room on ticker-tape.

Not in our day, comes the familiar cry of the middle-aged dullard. Hundreds of us were put into rooms, and forced to play the Glockenspiel until the heads of our plastic beaters dropped off. Like a cacophonous year-long episode of *Takeshi's Castle*, only the very best were allowed into the tinsel-filled room with the Casio keyboard. The fabled sampling keyboard of legend that was to introduce humanity to four octaves of belches and farts.

Keyboards are all dandyfine, but I can hear you bellowing that this is a gaming nostalgia page, and no-one wants to read about Harpsichord 2, Samba Fill-Ins and Cuicas. Casio were also kings of the game-watch – miniature gaming which was equally pioneering and crap.

Their Game-10 watch involved you moving up and down to dodge space bullets. The limits of the medium became more obvious when they released the Game-20, which was the same game rotated by 90-degrees. They also made
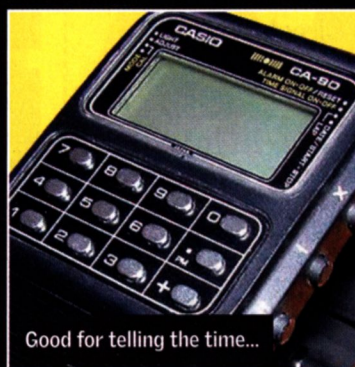
Good for telling the time...

...Not so good for gaming.

> **As well as keyboards, Casio were also kings of the game-watch, which was equally pioneering and crap**

over 100 handhelds, which you can gawp and coo over at the Handheld Museum (www.handheldmuseum.com).

No-one's bothered to emulate these games – an animated gif would be just as good – but there's a lively culture of early music emulation out there, from the commercial TR-808 drum machine (among others) emulator ReBirth, to the humble CZ101. Sadly, the Stylophone Emulator has been stuck in developmental limbo since 1998. Come on, people!

BUT HOW?

To get an old keyboard working, get the .dll and text file from the first address below. Then download the SAVIHost executable from the second address. Change the name of the executable to V11, keep it in the same directory as the .dll, then double-click. Five minutes of work, for two minutes of fun. Just like work. Oh, and here's the V11's manual: snipurl.com/v11_manual.

Links...

❶ VL-Tone Emu
www.polyvalens.com/vl1/
Contains the hardware emulator for the earliest Casio keyboard.

❷ SAVIHost
www.hermannseib.com/
english/savihost.htm
A less-friendly equivalent of the MAME program. Welcome to geekland.

❸ Handheld games
snipurl.com/casio_games
A full, loving list of Casio handhelds at Handheld Museum.

A great time to die.

SIX OF THE BEST
Some of Casio's 'finest' watches and handhelds...

COLORINVADERS
The world is under attack! From gaily coloured aliens. Can you prevent the huge rainbow attack?

GAME-30
Same game as the Game-10, but on its side and underwater. EA would do this, if they could.

MIRACLE PINBALL
Imagine pinball, infused with the interventionist power of the Old Testament god! This isn't that.

GG-9
You say you can't imagine how golf could be any fun on this watch? Eeh, you've been spoiled by pixels, you.

STRAIGHT FLUSH
One of the cooler watches from the days before anyone knew about Texas Hold 'Em.

LOVELY PANDA
A game in which a panda, who is lovely, has to go up, down, left, right and attack. They don't make 'em... etc.

NOW & THEN

Little Britain: The Computer Game vs *Viz: The Computer Game*

NOW

**LITTLE BRITAIN:
THE COMPUTER GAME**

THEN

**VIZ: THE
COMPUTER GAME**

COMPARING *LITTLE BRITAIN* to *Viz* does seem a little unfair. For starters, *Viz* has been varying shades of excellent for nearly 30 years, and *Little Britain's* been shit since 2003. In the sparsely-populated desert of comedy products that spawned computer games, however, they're both rubbish.

Viz was made by Virgin Interactive, and featured no input from the writers of the comic. This was depressingly obvious from the mid-game 'Top Tips', which failed completely to get the humour of the magazine: 'If you're thirsty, why not have a drink of lemonade or water?'.

The humour was lost, but Bertie Blunt's parrot was there, and they still managed to swear a lot in the cracked Automation version.

Little Britain goes the other way. Not only were Lucas and Walliams involved, they cheerfully distilled the repetitive humour of the TV show to two or three quotes that illustrate with choking clarity how nasty, witless and shallow the whole ugly venture is. The only people from these two worlds to escape with their dignity are the staff of *Viz* magazine – for recognising a turd in a basket, and choosing not to rub it in their faces.

PAPERBOY

MAME FRAME

PAPERBOY Developer: Atari | Year: 1986

PAPERBOY **WAS THE** first game to accurately simulate the increasingly unbearable drudgery of the work concept. Every decision you made on your short bike ride to the training ground had lingering consequences. Miss a house, and they'd cancel their subscription. No second chances here. Smash a non-subscriber's window, the next day it was boarded up. Tuesday's calm kittens were Thursday's hellcats, and it only took a day for a wronged owner to train his dog to maim you.

Paperboy was hard – even if you'd memorised all the attack patterns, and when the cars came, it only took a brief second to forget which day it was, and you'd be swerving to avoid the wrong cat and be on your pubescent arse.

Most people stuck to Easy Street, just for the sake of making the coins last longer. Anyone choosing Hard Way would find themselves beset by bomb dog chaos.

With its cool-dude Hawkins voice synthesis and handlebar controls, *Paperboy* was Atari's princess of the arcade – at least, until the monstrous boom-box bedecked *720°* carried us irreversibly into the world of skateboards and super-aggressive bees.

Infinite newspaper target dash frenzy.

I love you too, but do close your legs.

It's not my fault your cat hates me.
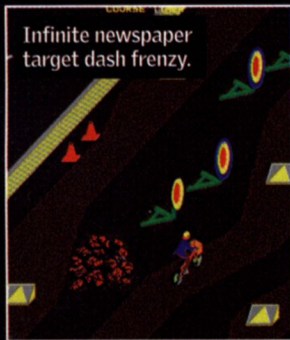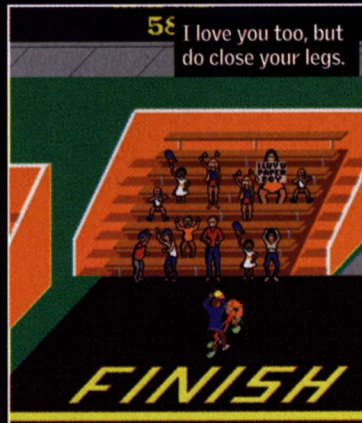
WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.
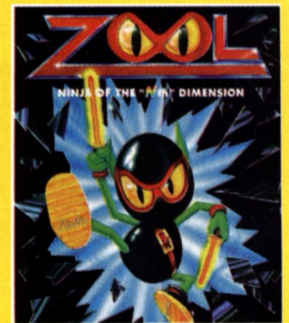
SUPERTEST
WHAT WWII NEEDS IS...

PCZONE ON THE DVD

The war that's spawned a thousand games gets a grilling...

WE DECIDED TO take the Supertest in a different direction this month. Rather than sit there, endlessly bah-bah-bah-ing about *Band Of Brothers*, *Call Of Duty* and *Medal Of Honor* and saying which one we thought was the best, we put on our wistful shades and gazed across the table, dreaming about what we want to see in WWII games.

Will kicked off by saying he wanted something more freeform than the corridor action of *Call Of Duty*, which almost felt like a way of goading Log to report on the *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* hands-on he'd attended at EA's Cheshunt hidey-HQ. Which Log did, demonstrating ably why he's a writer, and not a person who's ever been paid to talk.

Steve had idle dreams of a proper WWII MMO. Not like *World War II Online*, the pioneering MMOFPS. No, he wanted stats and ranks – basically,

World Of Warcraft without the magic, bulls, auction houses or charm.

Suzy favoured a squad approach to Log's glory-hunting solo heroics, although she did confess, after hounding from Steve, that *Band Of Brothers* often feels like you're looking after a bunch of babymen.

What do you want to see coming from the saturated WWII market? Do you want gritty realism, one-shot kills and trenchfoot, or do you want teleporters, aliens, lasers, ghosts and pirates? Go to www.pczone.co.uk and tell us, while other people watch. Oh, you cheeky minx. **PCZ**

This is WWII dog. He is sad.
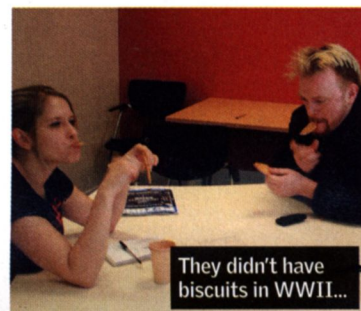
They didn't have biscuits in WWII...

Loosen up, man.

...Only powdered eggs. And Hitler.

Steve wanted a proper WWII MMO: a *WOW* without the magic, bulls, auction houses or charm

MOH: Allied Assault has all the key elements of WWII: guns, metal, helmets and death. Cheery.

NeverQuest

Steve Hill dons a stupid hat and dips a hairy, reluctant toe into
The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar...

I'VE PROBABLY MENTIONED this before, but all things *Lord Of The Rings* leave me decidedly cold. Mr Tolkien's work may have its devotees, but to quote an infinitely more talented wordsmith, it says nothing to me about my life – which is presumably the point of fantasy. All the same, I've never been near the books, and while it sounds like an idle boast, I've fallen asleep every time I've tried to watch one of the films. As for the games, barring a brief dabble on *The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth II – The Rise Of The Witch-King* (which I mention primarily for the word count), the last Tolkien-inspired game I played in earnest was that graphical tour de force *The Hobbit* on the ZX Spectrum.

By way of a tribute, I enter this world as one of the hairy-footed little fellows, wilfully ignoring the editor's order to be a dwarf. As it turns out, there are three varieties of hobbit, so I opt to be one of the Stoors on the basis that "they tend to be heavier and broader of build than other kindreds". They also traditionally have a name ending in 'o', so in keeping with the lore, I am Hillo Of The Stoors.

MUSIC SOUNDS BETTER

As in real life, you've got to get yourself a trade. In an even more obscure tribute, I elect to be a minstrel, bringing back painful memories of my solitary experience of live role-playing, when *PC ZONE* sent me down a cave in Kent armed with little more than a smock and a recorder. Here, I'm kitted out with a lute and able to defeat enemies with the power of song.

With that, we're under way, and I find myself in what appears to be a post office. I'm not here to cash my giro (yet) and instead have to deliver a letter of some import. Trudging down the long road to Archet, fraught with danger, I catch a glimpse of a Black Rider, which even with my limited knowledge I can tell is a very bad thing. Fortunately, Bounder Boffin comes to my rescue, leading me through a spider-infested farm. While he hacks his way through their webs, I hold the giant arachnids at bay, tasting the blood of the eight-legged beast as I make my first kill.

BURN, BABY, BURN

Arriving in Archet, the locals immediately abuse my good nature by bombarding me with errands, most of which I gullibly perform for little more than pocket money and jumble-sale attire. Seeking company, I offer my fellowship to a hobbit by the name of Foulgore, who gratefully accepts, drawling: "Thanks, dude – I just started."

Equally naive, we occasionally cross paths over the next few hours while both pandering to the whims of the citizens of Archet. Teaming up for the odd chore, we're soon grateful of each other's company when it all turns a little dark and we find ourselves hauling screaming villagers from the burning remains of Archet, victims of some evil arsonists.

Our work done, we leave them to rebuild their shattered lives and head for the green pastures of The Shires. Tired and emotional, I tell Foulgore I'm taking a break, and he's never seen again.

Ten minutes later, I'm back and chatting to the locals. Predictably, they've got a slew of jobs for me, and I spend the following hours doing such mundane tasks as delivering pies, keeping them away from the prying eyes of hungry hobbits. As embarrassing as this sounds in print, it's even more so when you crawl into bed at 5am and attempt to explain your activities to your significant other.

GRIZZLY MAN

Facing the next day with renewed vigour, I have an appointment with a fellow hobbit, who's none other than occasional *ZONE* contributor Dan Griliopolous, aka Warslow Wobbleguts, honorary sheriff.

"Hullo, Hillo!" says Warslow, and he promptly starts sucking on a pipe.

"What you smoking?" I enquire.

"Um, it says 'weed' here," he claims.

Apropos of nothing, he suddenly pulls out his lute and launches into a tuneless solo. Out of politeness, I perform a half-hearted jig. Offering his higher-level services, he explains: "I'll help out with your stuff, unless it involves pie-running."

Searching through my non-pastry-related quests, I suggest we could kill a few boars, and Warslow heads into some dense woodland. We've scarcely left the path though when it turns a bit *Blair Witch*. It's dark, we haven't a map and we're up to our hobbit nuts in murky water.

Evading the Creeping Oak-Roots, we clamber onto dry land, at which point a huge tree uproots itself and begins to chase us, *Evil Dead*-style. Minutes later, we're mauled to death by bears. A wasted opportunity for the films if ever there was one. **PCZ**

> **"I spend the following hours performing such mundane tasks as delivering pies"**

What's a lonely Hillo to do?
HILLO THE WARY

COW CORPSE
HILTO THE WARY
Looks like someone had a beef with him...

"Change my pitch up, smack my bitch up..."

"Quick – try singing *Bare Necessities*."

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY
JADE EMPIRE

Jon Blyth talks Chinese mythology, fanboys and taking photographs of bricks...

BIOWARE ARE BEST known for their interpretations of existing franchises: *Knights Of The Old Republic* remains a classic RPG that took *Star Wars* in more interesting directions than it had ever been before, and *Neverwinter Nights* makes fine use of the Forgotten Realms universe.

They're also a company who love to tell a story, and with *Jade Empire* they invented their entire world; sure, it's lifted from Chinese mythology and history, but they were only constrained by what felt right. We spoke to *Jade Empire's* senior producer, Diarmid Clarke (left), about the development process of the game they've been wanting to make for aeons...

01 **NOT JADED:** "It's actually a game we very much wanted to make from way back – the original idea is ten years old. It's one of those ideas that was there at the beginning of the company, and we've had to wait for the technology to get to the point where we could make it. The guys here are huge martial arts, kung fu and Chinese action-flick fans, and we wanted to make a game that was a more action-oriented adventure-RPG. With all the history we could use from ancient China, we knew this would be a great one to finally make, and the Xbox 360 gave us the lift of power we needed to make the game we wanted to make."

Ten years in the making, *Jade Empire* has been well received.

02 FREEDOM: "One of the things that the designers were looking forward to the most was not having the restrictions of a licence. A licence is really beneficial when it comes to structure and the framework of a game, and you can take a lot from research. *Star Wars* was a great example of that – we were really able to reinterpret it all. However, just to be able to do anything you want, and know that you're not contravening the rules or someone else's idea of how it should all go is cool. It's nice not to have to worry too much about that."

BioWare developed the game from scratch – and loved every minute.

03 FANS: "Within 24 hours of us registering the name for *Dragon Age*, one of the fans had found it and posted on our site. He was saying: "Hey, guess what, BioWare have got this *Dragon Age*, and boy, is it gonna suck." Immediately, we had someone replying: "You've got to be kidding, it's going to have thousands of dragons flying around everywhere." All we'd done was register a name that at the time, we may or may not have been going to use, but yeah, some people get pretty fanatical. I think you could just post the name, and the fans would just design the game for you – the speculation is unbelievable."

"Trip down the garden centre, anyone?"

"Working on the *Star Wars* licence was great, but to be able to do anything you want and know you're not contravening the rules or someone else's ideas is cool…"

Diarmid Clarke, senior producer, *Jade Empire*
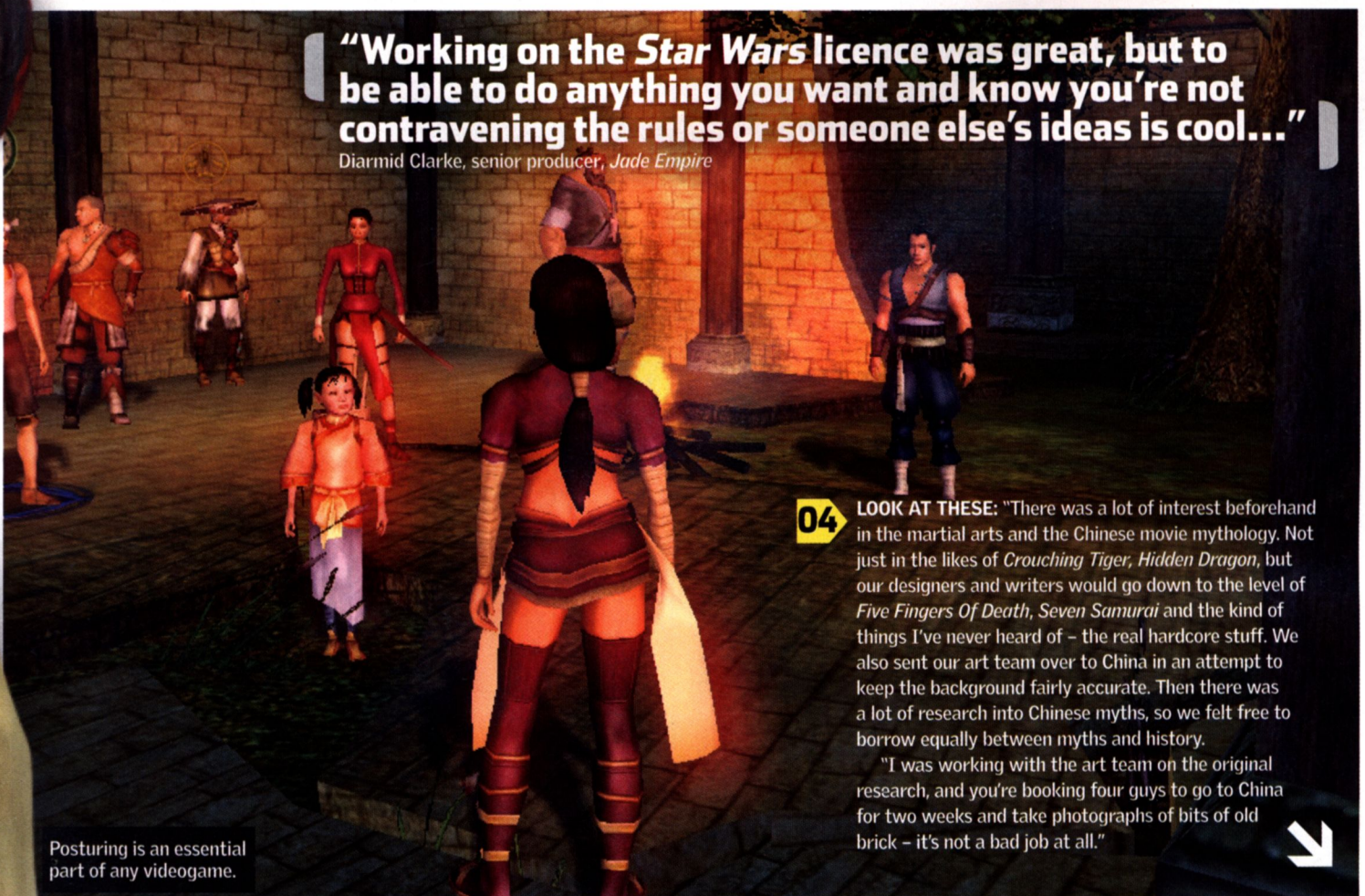
Posturing is an essential part of any videogame.

04 LOOK AT THESE: "There was a lot of interest beforehand in the martial arts and the Chinese movie mythology. Not just in the likes of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, but our designers and writers would go down to the level of *Five Fingers Of Death*, *Seven Samurai* and the kind of things I've never heard of – the real hardcore stuff. We also sent our art team over to China in an attempt to keep the background fairly accurate. Then there was a lot of research into Chinese myths, so we felt free to borrow equally between myths and history.

"I was working with the art team on the original research, and you're booking four guys to go to China for two weeks and take photographs of bits of old brick – it's not a bad job at all."

05 ▶ **PEDANTS:** "Not being constrained by other peoples rules means you can be a lot more imaginative with the kind of things you can do. We didn't want to be constrained by a real universe. Once you step away from the real world, you can just do things because it feels cool or it looks nice, and you don't have to worry about people complaining that it never really happened. For us, it's the escapism of games, and telling the stories you want to tell. We made a fighter simulation once, called *Operation Overlord*. A guy phoned up to complain that Biggin Hill landing strip is 15-degrees further north than it should be. It makes you think, 'It's also just a vector graphic rectangle', but people get very defensive when it's meant to be true."

No foxes were harmed in the making of this game.

06 ▶ **OPEN PALM, SLAPPED FACE:** "There's a mixture of karate, kung fu and around five different real-world martial arts styles included in the game, and we used motion capture to make sure it was accurate.

"When we wanted to add different moves, we borrowed from other sources. Things like the transformation styles – we borrowed some stuff from Chinese mythology, things like the cat demons. Then we added things we thought fitted in – that weren't taken from the mythology, but fitted in with what we were doing. Also, we were able to develop the Iron Palm style a little bit further and put it into the PC version.

"The first style I ever played in the game was the Leaping Tiger style. Just for that reason, that's probably my favourite style, because it's the first one I ever used. Although I love the transformation stuff too – getting the Jade Golem and kicking the crap out of everything was probably one of the best feelings for me in the game. I'm rubbish at Drunken Master, though."
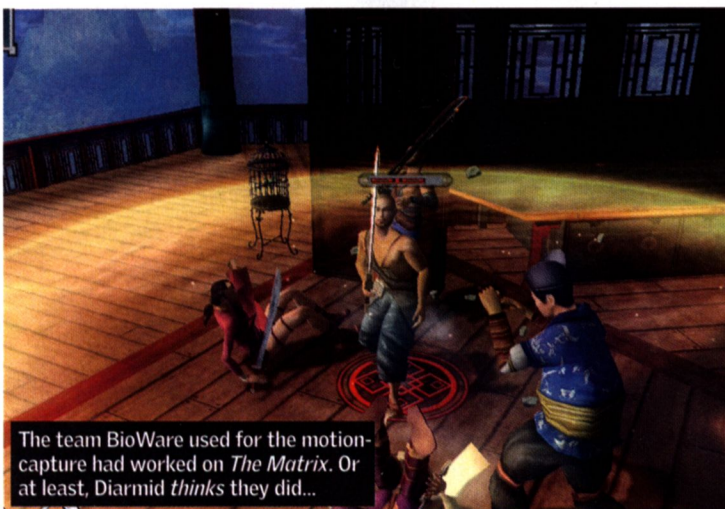
The team BioWare used for the motion-capture had worked on *The Matrix*. Or at least, Diarmid *thinks* they did...

07 **HENPECKED HOU:** "What we wanted to do is tell stories through character, so you want to build up a varied cast with their own histories, who relate well to each other. If you look at BioWare games, there's always one there for light relief – that's Henpecked Hou. He gets pretty much all of the best lines, he's absolutely the character I'd use, just to listen to him. He's absolutely useless in combat, but I'll use him, just to hear what he says next. My wife's not so keen on him, because he's constantly complaining about his own wife. He's definitely a man's character, and Henpecked Hou is a well-known character from China."

08 **JOHN CLEESE:** "The Outlander is a composite of different European explorers. His helmet is Spanish, his breastplate is German and he's obviously very English – he's an amalgamation of the European explorers who wandered over to China. Getting John Cleese was just one of those fortuitous moments. We were recording in Los Angeles, John Cleese was there, his agent was there and he was really open to the idea. We asked him if he had time, he said yes and it was all done in an afternoon. You'd expect something like that to take months, but it couldn't have been more simple."

Swaying lanterns, swishing swords.

OK dear, no need to shout about it.

"The marshmallows are ready!"

> "Getting John Cleese was fortuitous. He was there, we asked if he had the time, he said yes and it was all done in an afternoon – it couldn't have been simpler"
> Diarmid Clarke, senior producer, *Jade Empire*

09 **MOUSE AND KEYBOARD:** "Actually, I'm probably proudest of the PC interpretation of the control system in the whole project. From the outset, we were adamant that the game had to play well on keyboard and mouse, otherwise there's no point in making the game. We threw a dummy control system in at the outset of making the game, so we had the whole development process to perfect the controls. Personally, I think it plays better on keyboard and mouse, because your ability to jump between styles is a lot more fluid than it was on the Xbox." **PCZ**

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