BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG
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PCZONE

ISSUE 201 XMAS 2008

EXCLUSIVE!

STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

THE FULL REVEAL OF BIOWARE'S ROLEPLAY REVOLUTION!

REVIEWED

FALLOUT 3

CAN BETHESDA'S RADIOACTIVE BLAST WIN US OVER?

REVIEWED

FAR CRY 2

THE AFRICAN FREE-FORM SHOOTER STORMS IN FROM THE PLAINS!

REVIEWED

RED ALERT 3

CAN TANYA STILL CUT IT AGAINST THE RED MENACE?

WIN!

TINY COMPO

What was your secret identity in the original KOTOR?

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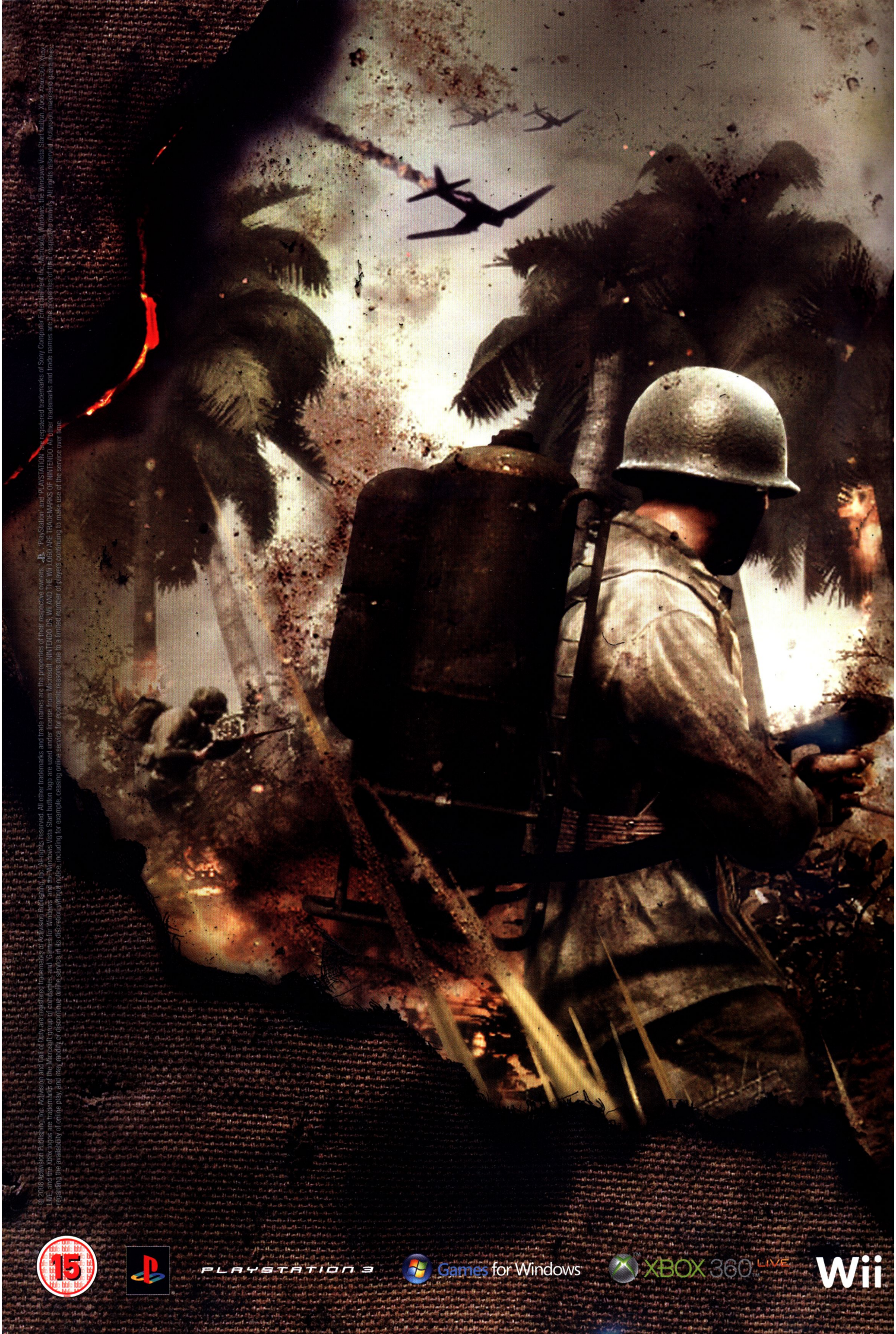

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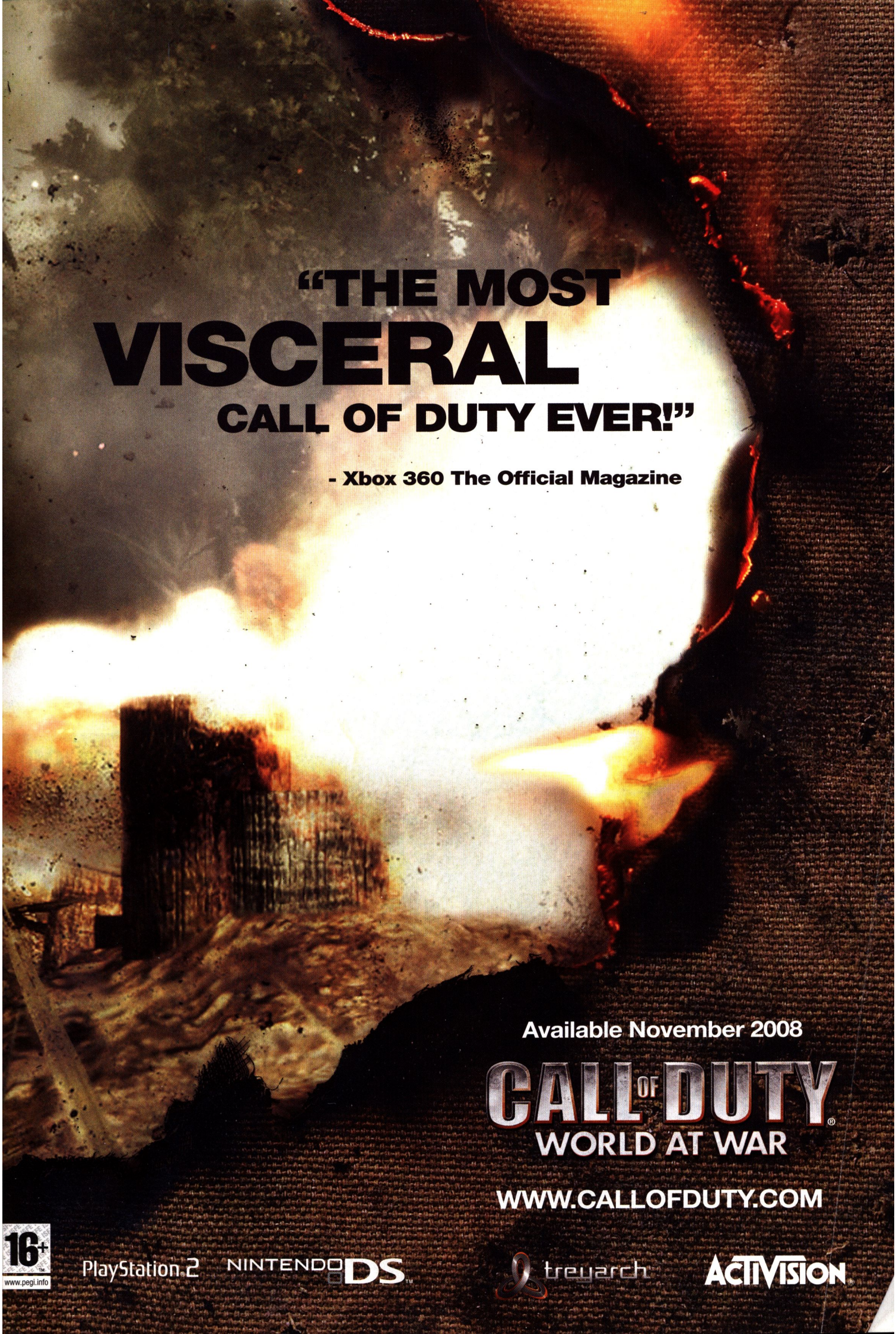
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ALL GOOD THINGS

I CAN REMEMBER WHEN all this was primary coloured fields, built with Unreal Engine 2 and filled with polygon cows that shared the same death animation and 'surprised moo' sound effect. Ah, those were the days: unskippable cutscenes, health packs littering the floor, grenade launcher bound to number six... wasn't everything better in the old days?

Well, "sort of" and "actually, no". In the five years I've spent making tea for *PC ZONE* I can't argue against the fact that some tenets of PC gaming have hit the wayside. There's a fair amount of depth, difficulty and some hardcore sensibilities that have fallen away from some of the bigger multi-format releases. All that said, if someone were to show me today's *Fallout 3* a mere five years ago I would have shit myself. I then would have taken a second look, and I would have shit myself again.

I believe that games improve year by year, but what people don't take into account is that expectations are raised by an equal margin. And that edge of hardcore, that essence of community, tweakability and stalwart independence that makes PC gaming such a brilliant thing is never far from the surface. So, despite the doubters, I reckon that PC gaming is more vibrant than it's been at any time I've been at *PC ZONE*.

Speaking of which, I'm buggering off. I'm leaving the *PCZ* office for polygonal pastures new, even though I'll still knock around as a writer lackey. Thank you so, so much for having me for the past five years. It's been amazing.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor
wporter@futurenet.co.uk

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

BioWare tell us all about *Knights of the Old Republic* – the MMO!

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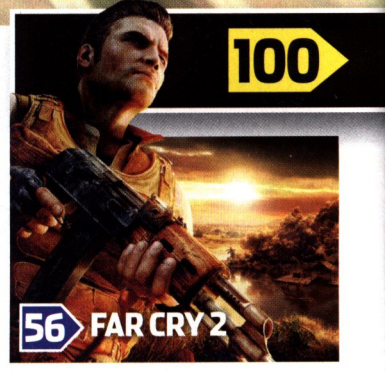
Bat-shit crazy strategising makes a big red return.



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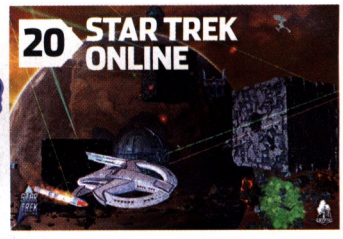

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See page 112

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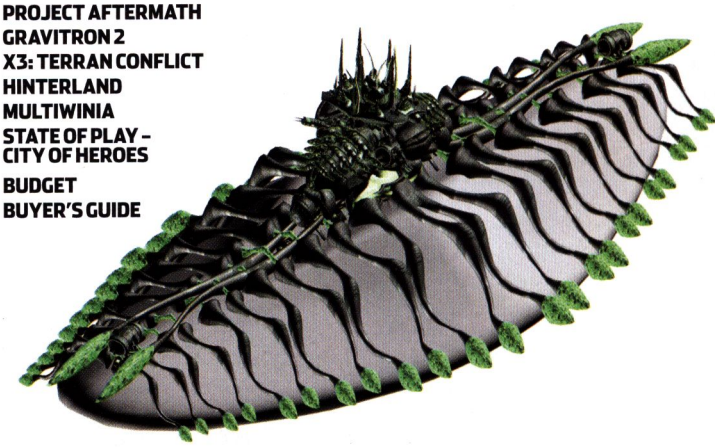

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The long-awaited return of the classic RPG series is tested by its biggest fan.

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Take a *Flashback* as *Steve Hogarty* tests out *Iji*, an indie game that could shame big name games!

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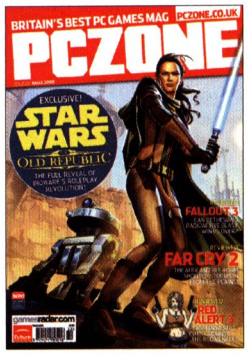

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Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 50 words...
Is that Bastila? Is that not Bastila? Find out on page 30, otherwise watch in amazement as Log wrestles the massive *Far Cry 2* to the floor, Will delves deep into *Fallout 3*, and Korda rides armoured bears into the sunset with *Red Alert 3*. It's a massive sequel special!

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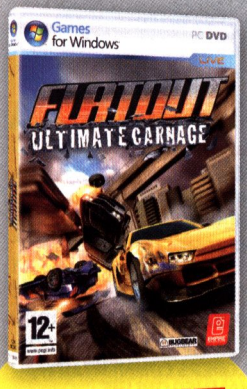

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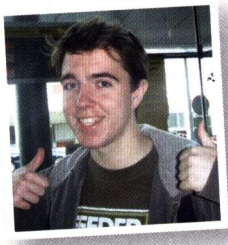
MEET THE TEAM

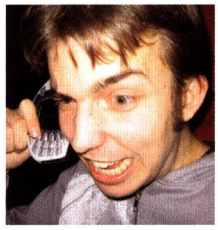
Like where everyone says what they're studying on *University Challenge*



STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy Editor
AGE: 21
LIKES: Sticking around
DISLIKES: Splitters
FANCIES: Barbara Windsor
FAVOURITE GAME: *Dwarf Fortress* (still)
NOW PLAYING: *World of Goo*

Behold the glory that is Steve. Watch intently as he boldly streaks across the sky, deputy editorship spewing in his wake. Becoming a deputy editor is much like levelling up: new powers are opened up to you, expensive clothes and foodstuffs become less of a concern to your wallet, your colleagues say 'gratz' without really meaning it, and you become far better at killing things. To celebrate, Steve has been going back to old staff writer zones and effortlessly kill things for no XP.

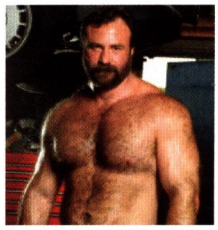


WILL PORTER

Was a good boy really

After five years as tea boy Will is leaving *PCZ*. He's off to chase his dreams, so he'll be gone a long time. Well, one month – he's reviewing *Left 4 Dead* next issue.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallout 3*



LOG

Big teddy bear

Similarly dream-chasing, Log is ignoring the fact that he'll be bereft of regular income by pretending that watching *Diagnosis Murder* is a viable career option.

NOW PLAYING: *Far Cry 2*

MARTIN KORDA

Champion of the World

Meat. Bears. Nameslees. The Magnificent, Korgon. Man alive, we need a new nickname and/or comedic device whenever we talk about Martin. Suggestions?

NOW PLAYING: *Red Alert 3*

THE FTSE INDEX

Monetary system of some kind.

FTSE has had an interesting month, as in between playing *World of Goo* he's been plunging us into a global recession. Christ knows what that means, but at least he tries hard.

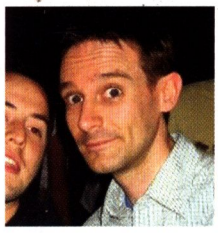
NOW PLAYING: The market

CRAIG KIRBY

Unpaid labourer

Known as Sarevok on the forums, Craig transcribed 20,000 words of interviews without once shouting, screaming or slamming people's heads into monitors. We salute him.

NOW PLAYING: .wma files



JAMES ROFF

Art whizzkid

When asked if he'd done anything of note recently, Roff told us to make something up. He misjudged our depraved imaginations.

NOW PLAYING: around with gun-toting strippers

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Suzy's secret magic door at London Bridge. Truly the Narnia of the modern age.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Having three monitors and only two monitor cables. Not being able to find Monster Munch.

What we've been talking about...

DAVID BROWN 3min He's new. He's nice. He has a beard. He might have to drop the boob-jiggle forum avatar though.

NEW EDITOR 56min Oh who, who shall it be?

DEVELOPMENT HEROES AT A PUB TABLE 23min Non-crawly bumlick fawning discussion severely limited. We'll be over on the quiz machine then.

ELEVENTH HOUR BOOK EDITORSHIP 13min You want what when?

THE *HACKSPIT* PC GAMER SHOWDOWN 23min Much improved by sneaking vodka past security.

PAUL 'WARHAMMER ONLINE' BARNETT 9min Rings us randomly when we're next to the potatoes in Sainsbury's on a Sunday

FALLOUT 3 VS FAR CRY 2 56min Two open worlds. Two brilliant games. Which way will you go?

QUANTUM OF SOLACE 23min Film appears to be brilliant. Game appears to be bum-arse.

SEFTON'S NEW JOB 10min And how he sounds strangely polite when he's on the phone all of a sudden.

NEW TANYA VS OLD TANYA 3min Sorry Jenny, the old tight-green-topped Tanya wins hands down.

WIN!

HOW TO ENTER TINY COMPO: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474, or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a rather nice *Fallout* T-shirt, torn from the arms of a bawling obsessive fan who wanted it for himself. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.
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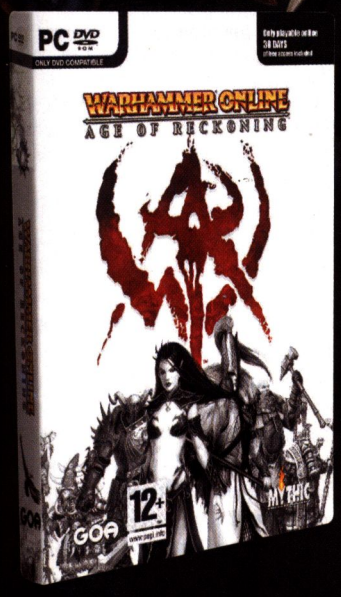
War is everywhere

750.000 players
have already chosen their side

GC 2008 BEST online game



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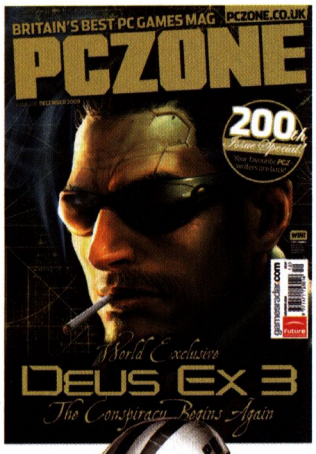
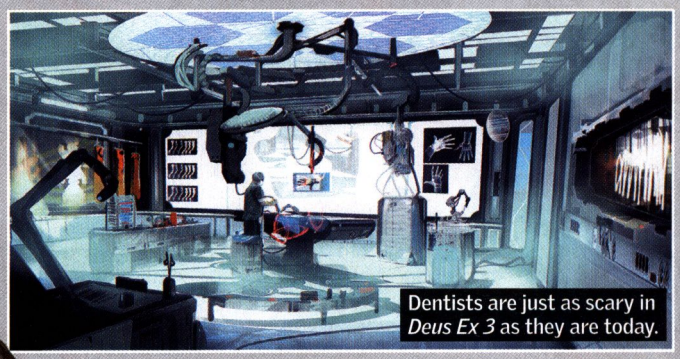


You asked for orange. *Will Porter* gives you the lemon-lime

KING OF LETTERS



Dentists are just as scary in *Deus Ex 3* as they are today.

GOD OUT OF THE DETAIL

Beautiful as its artwork is, and good as I'm sure Eidos Montreal's intentions are, can I just voice a concern that I'm sure is shared by a good proportion of your readers about *Deus Ex 3*? Essentially, I'm a bit worried that the game is going to be monumentally shit.

I'm sorry, but *Deus Ex* without shadow-based stealth? Levelling up your character having no influence on combat? Taking *Gears of War*-style third-person cover? That's not *Deus Ex*. It's utter bullshit.

They tell us that they're reverting back to having different ammo for different guns, but to me that sounds an awful like pissing on our legs and telling us that it's raining.

Clive Hennessey

There's no doubt that the curators of the Denton legacy are in distinct danger of falling between the two stools of mainstream appeal and PC purity.

There's any number of games you can parade that have done this successfully (*Oblivion*) or have fallen foul of it (*Invisible War*). You're right to fear change (what PC gamer doesn't?) but two things lessen my concern.

Firstly, that these gameplay concerns are something they're considering right from the off and as such they won't come across publisher pressure halfway through development to dumb down, as often happens to a game's cost.

Secondly, *Invisible War* was such an utter palaver that there's no way on earth Eidos will let themselves fall into such an obvious trap again.

Eidos themes, concepts, setup and most of its plans that have been announced sound amazing, but I can't deny that some of its decisions have raised my right eyebrow. Here's hoping.

WIN!

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

Those latrines are gonna pay...

ACTUAL SHITULATION

I read that letter from that idiot about *IL2* being a "shitulation". Now I'm a big fan of flight sims and it's the 5,000lb bomb of them all. Tons of flyables, as much realism as you want and good graphics (if you're not arsed about the fact it's eight years old).

I read the letter and got *IL2 '46* out as a knee-jerk reaction. I got into an RAF Mosquito, bombed some stuff, shot some stuff up and flew about five feet off the floor for a bit, to see if I could do it and not die. Then I got bored and decided to kamikaze a Russian's house. I ploughed my plane into it at 400kph, pretty much destroying everything.

But there was one thing left standing: a small outhouse. Its roof had been blown off, so I zoomed in on my wreckage I was gobsmacked to see it had a toilet! I could see the texture of the bowl and everything! This was in a flight simulator – a game you spend all your time shooting at stuff at 10,000ft and it had an honest-to-God toilet! Outside!

This further underlines that this game's too good for someone who can't use a keyboard and joystick at the same time. Tell that bloke to stick to *Minesweeper* and keep *IL2* in your top 10. It deserves it, at least until something better (and by Oleg Maddox) comes out.

J2theROC

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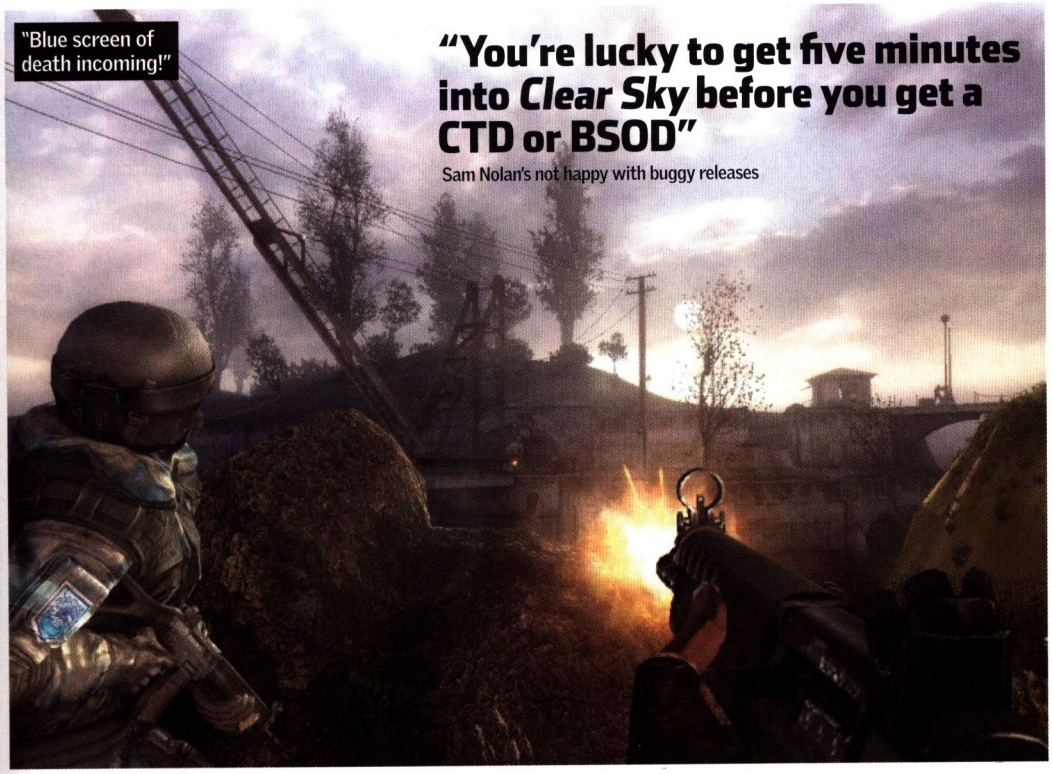


"You're lucky to get five minutes into *Clear Sky* before you get a CTD or BSOD"

Sam Nolan's not happy with buggy releases

No little Russian turd inside it? Surely a wasted opportunity. To be honest, having in-game toilets used to be a really big thing – who remembers just how astounding it was to race around a toilet bowl in a *Micro Machines* game? Or the first time you found a *Duke Nukem* grunt having a dump? We were so innocent back then weren't we? Now it's all blood and faecal matter on the walls... how times change.

BUGGY MESS

What's with developers these days releasing buggy, unfinished games and expecting us to pay upwards of £40 for them, and then having to wait half a year for bug fixing patches? Back in the day, it was acceptable because the games were quirky and new, and made by small, independent developers. These days there's really no excuse for it. You would've thought GSC Game World would've realised their mistake with *Shadow of Chernobyl*, but oh no. *Clear Sky* is even worse and you're lucky to get five minutes of play before you get a CTD or BSOD. And what's the best part?

If you're unhappy with your purchase you can't even return them, because you've used the subscription key and therefore no store will accept a refund.

Sam Nolan

Buggy releases will forever be the... ahem... bugbear of the PC gamer. We're last at the trough for console games, and as such suffer with lacklustre ports. We're also the only platform that has a variety of different configs, and the option of post-release patching – even if the consoles are catching up in this respect. Yet there's still no excuse for buggy releases. Publishers: listen!

DOWNLOAD WOE

I bought *Spore* and installed the EA Downloader, and then I get a message asking me if I want the patch. But what's this? There's a button asking if I want to see what is in the patch. I think 'what a good idea' so I click on the button. And do you know what it said? Look on the internet. What the hell is that about? And how long does it take to patch one game? I want to play with it, not wait for it.

Chris Hall

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

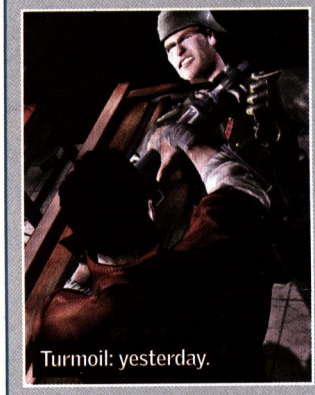
TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

Sent in by Joe Battershell

PC ZONE score: 59%

So if Winston Churchill died early, atomic grenades would be a standard in WWII? Hmm. Plus, the operation of buttons and levers and to begin the process of climbing a ladder would require you to stand a distance of 0.2 metres away (plus or minus 3mm) from the object in question. Jesus Christ. If you're bored enough to buy this game, go outside and get a job or slam your hand in a car door. Either way you'll have more fun.

Your shout: 30%


Turmoil: yesterday.

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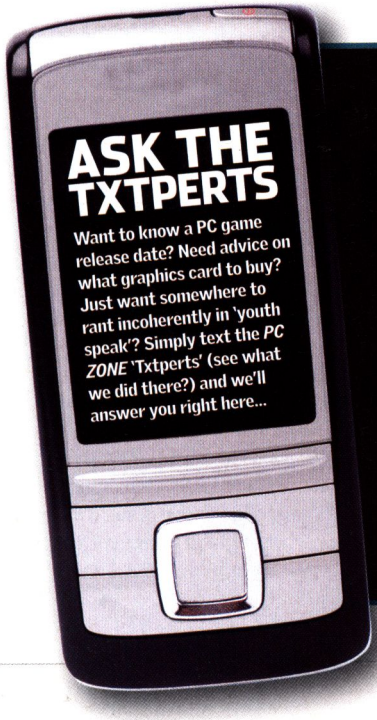


ASK THE TXTPERTS

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...

I want to buy a graphics card to run *Crysis* on very high settings that's around £220. Any ideas?

Anon

Wandy says: "Radeon HD 4870. You still need flying saucer level technology to do the game any justice on high detail".

Guys. Come on. What's with the obsession with Spector's dog?

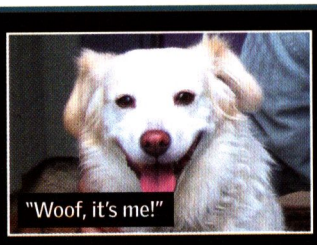
Jeff

Woof. Maggie disapproves of your text.

Saw you lot from a distance at the *hackspit* *PC Gamer* Showdown. You looked miserable.

Froot

Yeah, but that was only because we sitting right next to the enemy.


"Woof, it's me!"

Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting *PC ZONE* you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word STOP at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.

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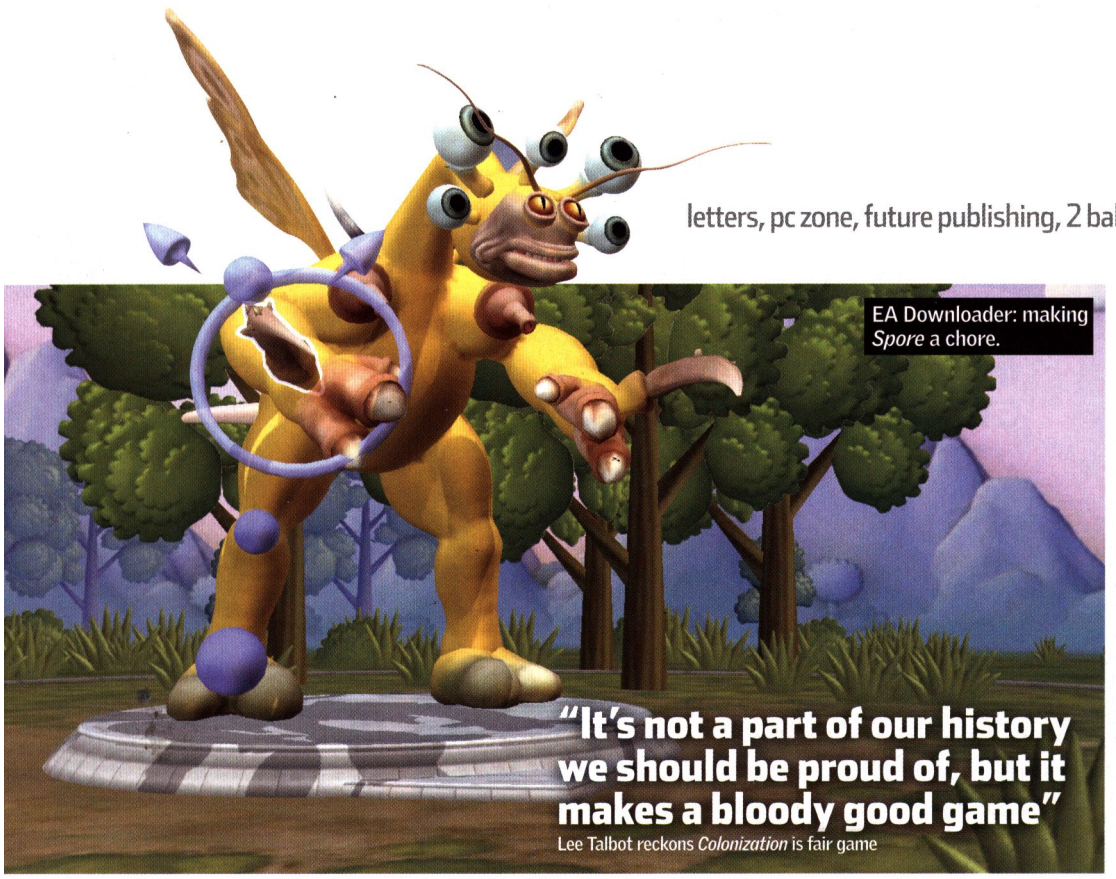


EA Downloader: making *Spore* a chore.

"It's not a part of our history we should be proud of, but it makes a bloody good game"

Lee Talbot reckons *Colonization* is fair game

In some ways the EA behemoth has become almost too big, you can't help but wonder whether the right hand knows what the left is doing – apart from maybe spooning diamonds into the communal giant mouth.

Compared to Steam, EA Downloader has been ruddy awful – almost on a par with Microsoft's godawful Games for Windows LIVE scheme – and it seems the only reason for its existence is to irritate. You can bet that EA are looking to remedy this though – the online sales market is too big to ignore – and you can also be assured that new rival Activision/Blizzard will have started work on a unified download service.

ROSE TINTED

Loved issue 200. Few notable omissions from the writing roster though. Macca? Chris Anderson? Patrick McCarthy? Otherwise top marks for a brief wander down memory lane. Would have been nice to have had a bit more than a page of Brooker, mind.

Kevin Baars

Issue 200 was a joy to put together. It isn't often you have a reason to contact your heroes.

Macca was planning a back page for us – he's a conceptual designer now (www.davidmccandless.com) – but then Mr Cursor appeared at the last minute. Sadly my *PCZ* Bat Signal doesn't have enough juice to shine into Norrath for Anderson.

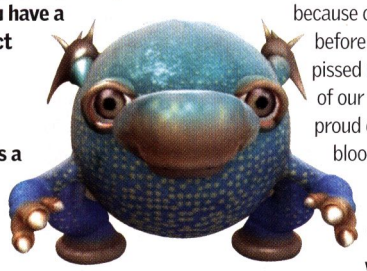
Issue 200's stroll down *PCZ*'s memory lane.

IMPERIAL GLORY?

Just wanted to mail in to declare my outright love for *Sid Meier's Colonization*. It's one of those games I was too young to play first time round, so I'm chuffed to be able to bury myself inside it now.

There was some blogger going on about what an awful game it was because of its subject matter before its release, which pissed me off. It's not a part of our history we should be proud of, but it makes a bloody good game.

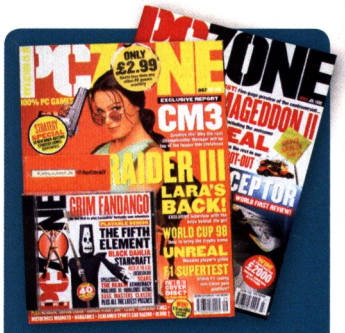
Lee Talbot



That bloke's name was Ben Fritz, and he works for *Variety*. He said that "anybody with a shred of moral conscience who studies the history will be appalled."

Ooh, get him! I've found the game an educational and haunting experience. This isn't cowboys and Indians – it's an extremely clever examination of rugged independence and an excellent moral framework that sees you at first reliant on the good will of the natives, and then inexorably strapped on the money-fuelled conveyor-belt destined to screw them over.

What Fritz doesn't realise is that setting up a new home in distant lands isn't necessarily a bad thing; it's the greed-infused descent into imperialism that it brings with it that creates the brutal conflicts. Look! Politics! PCZ



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

BANBURY CROSS

I wish to complain about your recent criticism of Banbury. I feel that you are misleading the public with such uninformed comment.

Banbury is, in actual fact, a far more horrible and tedious place than the town you described.

Jason Butterly

Cock horse.

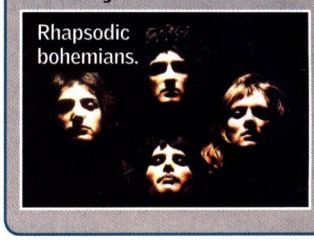
Actually Jason, I'm hereby revoking *PC ZONE*'s traditional hatred of Banbury. I can only speak for the Banbury Cattle Market that my Dad took me to in, I think, 1990 – and was sadly closed down in 1998. But that was quite a nice place, if full of farmers. Banbury: we love you again. Bicester though: what a shithole.

FAT BOTTOM

How dare you refer to Queen as "bloated aging rock stars"? Queen, as we all know, were the greatest group ever to grace the face of this planet, and I'm sure we all aware just how thin and beautiful all four of them were. You've obviously got Queen confused with some cack group like Oasis or the Fugees.

Ian Fishwick

We did what? Dear Lord Ian, I'm sorry. I take this one back too. But be warned: in about seven years time a musical will open called *We Will Rock You*. Don't go.



Rhapsodic bohemians.

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

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ASCARON DEEP SILVER PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 LIVE Games for Windows

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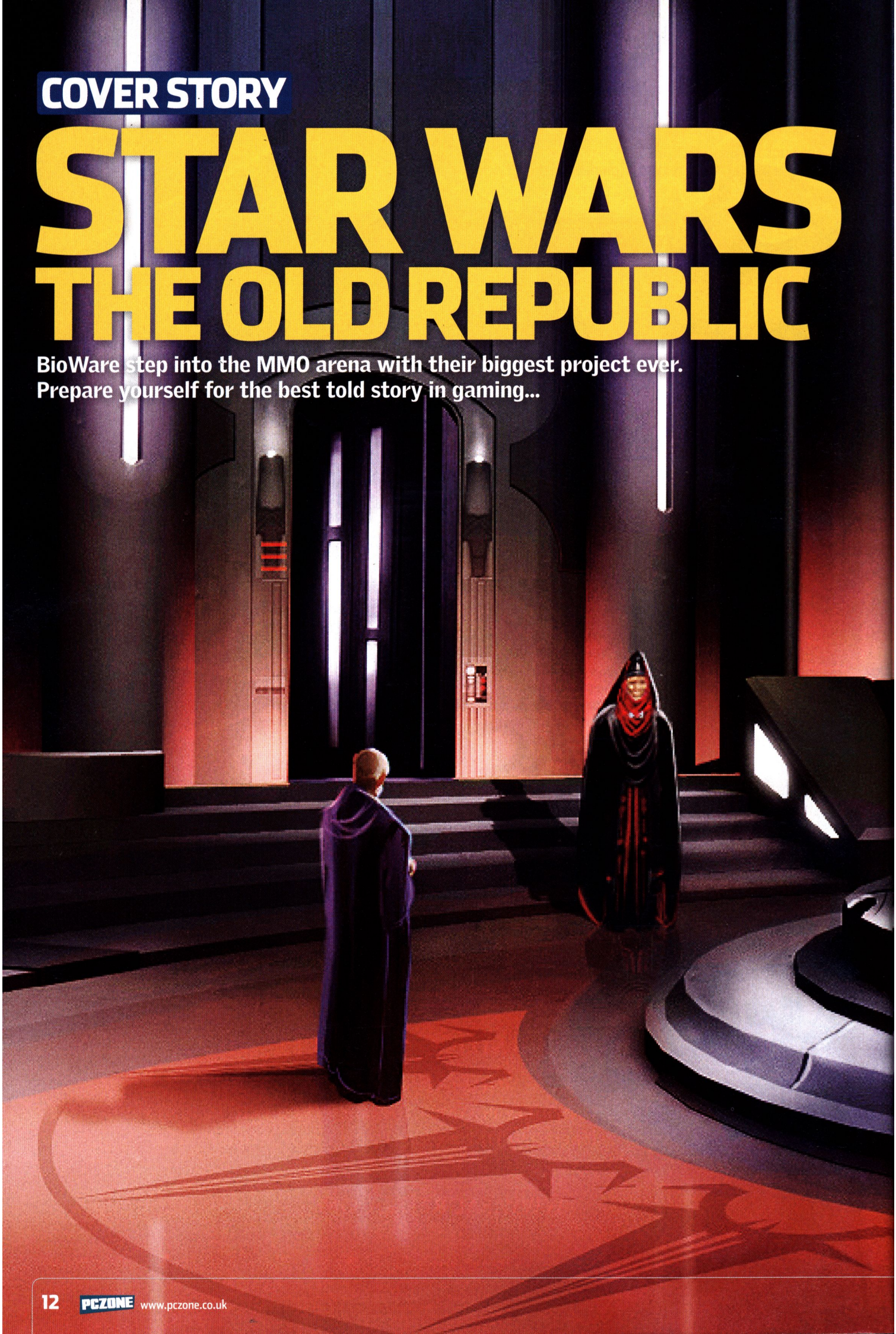
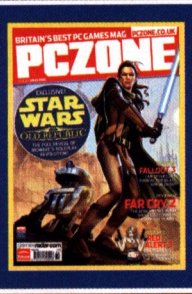
COVER STORY

STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

BioWare step into the MMO arena with their biggest project ever. Prepare yourself for the best told story in gaming...





SO MIGHTY IS the *Star Wars* universe that developers have fallen spectacularly when trying to take it into the MMO arena. It's a galaxy of legends, heroes and villains, a place where it takes three movies just to get your point across. BioWare are about to show us how to make a *Star Wars* MMO and step one is straightforward enough: tell a story. And not just one story, but epic, individual adventures for every character class, each one containing an entire game's worth of narrative. So is this *KOTOR 3*? No - it's *KOTOR 3, 4, 5, 6, 7...*

PAGE 30

PCZONE UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

My opinions

HERE WE GO with another of those self-important, inch-wide columns of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and I think a few adverbs, conjunctions, particles and (knowing me) pronouns.

I've already talked my tits off about *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (page 30), so here's a stream of other opinions from me, an undeserving child with a loudspeaker. Watch out though, I'm anything but self-effacing, and I'll try to make myself the subject of every sentence. In fact, if I see a sentence I'll mercilessly insert myself into it, bending punctuation and grammar around my presence.

Far Cry 2, there's a game we're all playing. The reasons why it's great are obvious enough, but what's interesting is how, when a game is that good, focus turns unfairly to its bad points. Even now, I'm stopping myself ranting about how random strangers in Africa will chase you ruthlessly across the continent just for driving past them. Africa despises you and wants you to stop being alive.

These things are noteworthy of course – if you can pinpoint the exact parts of a game you dislike, you can isolate and celebrate the nourishing goodness that's left behind. What's unfair is when people begin to dwell on that negativity, and allow it to obscure the undoubted excellence of the game in question.

Even though I had to cut myself down with sarcastic self-deprecation before I inflicted that opinion on you, it's still a good one. Hooray for games.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty deputy editor

MINES, ALL MINES

Balrog revealed in LOTRO: Mines of Moria

PUBLISHER Codemasters Online **DEVELOPER** Turbine **WEBSITE** www.unlocktheminesofmoria.com **ETA** November 2008

AFTER THE PRESENTATION of the vast underground caverns that make up the first paid-for expansion of *LOTRO*, a man strides onto the stage. "I'm from the *Guinness Book of Records*," he says. "And you've been awarded the Guinness World Record for Most Complicated Music System in a Role-playing Game".

Jeffrey Steefel, the producer at Turbine, smiles because he's a smiling kind of man. But as far as impressive world records go, this is up there with "Tiltiest hat".

Turbine haven't been neglecting their users, so far, with new content being regularly injected into Tolkien's world. But Steefel is at pains to point out that the Mines aren't just a dungeon: they're a vast underground world. They're home not just to the dwarves who forged the oversized hallways, but to an indigenous breed that Tolkien left vaguely described. This has given Turbine's artists a chance to flex their darker creative muscles, in a world that too-often succumbs to Tolkien's solemn over-description.

They're also where the last Balrog lived, and as the game is set just after the Fellowship passed through the area, Gandalf has already defeated that chap, and evolved, like a hairy pokémon, into Gandalf the White. Turbine know that players want to live these moments, though, just like a player would feel robbed if they hadn't met a Nazgûl at the opening of the early levels. So you'll meet the Balrog in an interactive flashback – set in the time that Durin first unleashed the fiery bugger, centuries earlier.

"The Mines aren't just a dungeon: they're a vast underground world"

Two new classes join the ranks: the Runekeeper avoids accusations of casual magic use in a world of few wizards, by 'guiding nature's energy' instead of casting massive fireballs. She gains momentum in either healing or damage, with continued performance in one direction "attuning" her, and unlocking the more powerful attacks and heals. Meanwhile, the Warden uses a different power attack depending on which four attacks preceded it. They're both made to solo effectively and work in groups.

Runekeepers can switch between attacks and healing without unlearning talents, and the Warden can be a powerful tank.

Only a small segment of Tolkien's hand-drawn maps have so far been filled out, and when asked where they're going next, Steefel just laughs and says: "We could go anywhere. We're not worrying about running out of places to go".

Yes, the /kneel command is working fine.

The mines are wonderfully decorated.

Indoors, but huge.

STOP PRESS!

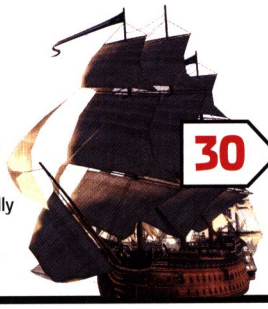
TIBERIUM CANCELLED
EA's *Command & Conquer* squad shooter *Tiberium* has been canned. Rumour suggests crappy project management is to blame.

EPISODIC STARCRAFT
Blizzard think the *StarCraft II* campaign they've created is too big for one game, so the RTS will be instead broken into three parts, beginning with the Terrans.

MIRROR'S EDGE
The PC version of *Mirror's Edge* has slipped as far as early 2009. Console versions are due to arrive mid-November. Maybe we'll get extra goodies to make up for the wait.

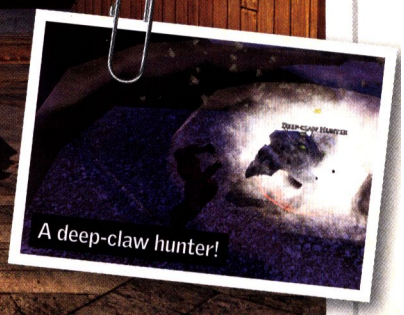
22 **Metro 2033**
An offshoot of the *STALKER* team provides a new radioactive threat.

26 **Empire: Total War**
The illustrious campaign map is finally revealed, we give it a thorough breakdown.



30 **Star Wars: The Old Republic**
BioWare announce their plans to storm the MMO market with their massive, story-driven RPG.

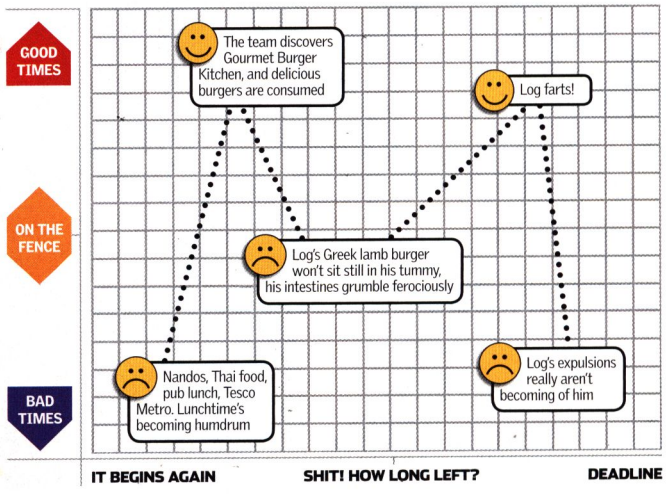
A man thinks of a painting of a horse. A ghost stands idly by. Is this art?



A deep-claw hunter!

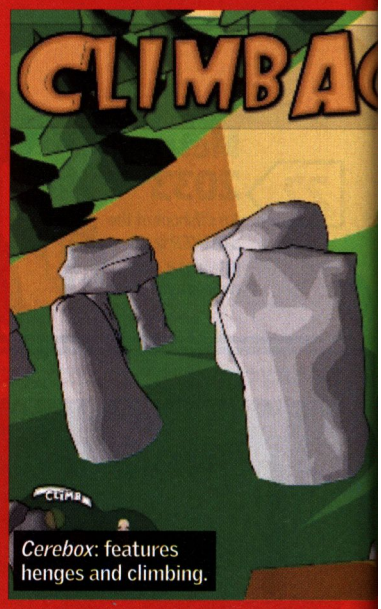
STUFF **Cliff Bleszinski, designer at Epic Games, has stated that *Gears of War 2* will not be coming to the PC. "The person who is savvy enough to want to have a good PC and upgrade their video card," he claims, "is a person who is savvy enough to know all the elements so they can pirate software. Therefore, high-end videogames are suffering very much on the PC." Owners of high-end gaming PCs, in Cliffy's eyes you are guilty of rampant PC gaming piracy until proven innocent – charming eh?**

Life is a roller coaster



DARE DEVILS

Dare to be Digital is half competition, half game developer initiation ceremony



Cerebox: features henges and climbing.

Reporter
Pavel Barter

WHEN CONOR MCGUIRE recalls the making of *Shutterbug*, the first memory that springs to his mind is one of panic. McGuire and his pals created the game for Dare to be Digital (daretobedigital.com), the games design competition for students, but they hadn't bargained on time constraints. The competition has a 10-week development period, "but it is essentially eight and a half weeks because you also need to demonstrate the game," says McGuire. "You plan 10 weeks then think, 'Oh crap'. There was a lot of pressure to finish it on time."

Shutterbug, a futuristic photo-'em-up (think *Wall•E* as a paparazzo), turned out OK, but the judges questioned its market potential. But for McGuire the competition was fortuitous. *Shutterbug* may not have set the world on fire, or even scooped an award at this year's competition, but its amateur developer got a job out of it. Upon graduating from the University of Abertay in Dundee, McGuire will start work at Rockstar North.

WINNER GETS HIRED

The international Dare to be Digital contest, which the University of Abertay Dundee started in 1999, has become a hotbed of new game talent.

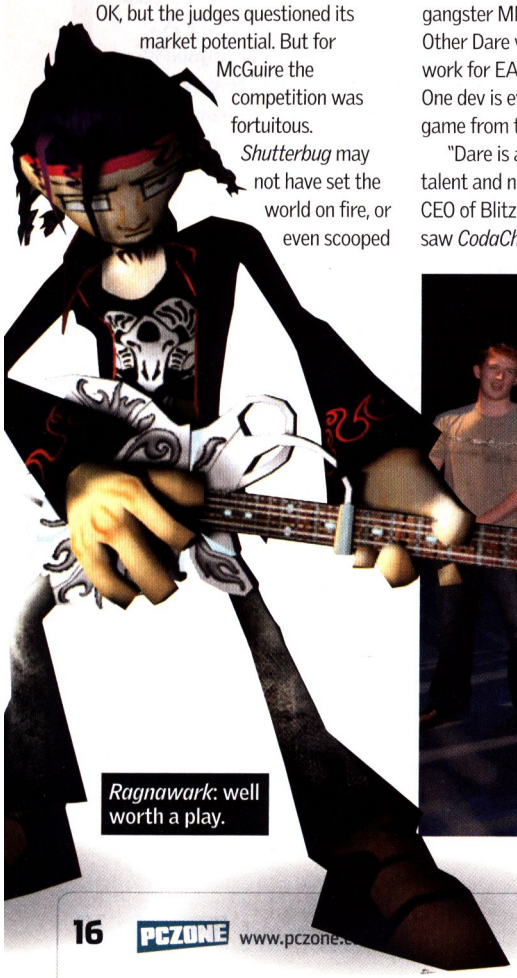
"Every year we pick up a couple of brilliant guys from it, the cream of the crop in terms of their class," says Colin Macdonald, producer at Real Time Worlds. "The experience they gain in Dare makes them extremely valuable." Real Time employs around a dozen former Dare contestants, including Steve Peterson – AI lead on the upcoming gangster MMO *All Points Bulletin* (*APB*). Other Dare veterans have gone on to work for EA, Lionhead and Microsoft. One dev is even set to publish a winning game from the 2005 competition.

"Dare is a great place to spot new talent and new ideas," says Philip Oliver, CEO of Blitz Games Studios. "When we saw *CodaChain* we thought it was a unique and appealing concept that we could develop into a full mass-market game across many platforms with huge appeal... We bought the IP and hired some of the original team."

Boro Toro was a 2008 prize-grabber.

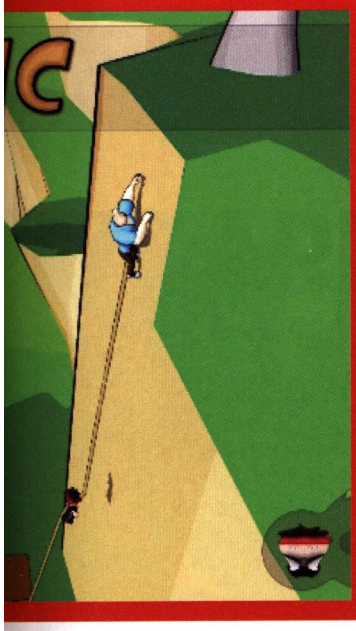
Dare's director Paul Durrant is exceedingly chuffed. The competition was first intended to help students find jobs, but also to overcome segregation in game courses. In the real world, artists and programmers work closely together when making games, but students tend to follow different paths through their academic life. "We thought it would be a good idea to bring arts and technology students together, so they would understand interdisciplinary teamworking," says Durrant.

Since 1999, Dare to be Digital host centres have sprung up in cities like Birmingham, Dublin, London and Brighton, as well as in India, China, Japan and elsewhere. This amounted to 17 teams taking part in the 2008



Ragnawark: well worth a play.

2008's winners attempt to say 'yay' simultaneously.



competition from across the globe. Most years a team from Abertay scoops one of the three prizes – and 2008 was no exception with Blue Skies's *Origamee* stealing the show.

"One of the problems is the legacy of Abertay," says Macdonald, who's been involved in Dare's preliminary judging since 2003. "All their teams know what is involved, they know the standard, and are coming from what is perceived to be one of the UK's best game courses."

CROSSING OVER

Durrant reckons that the advantage for Abertay students is more about the application than the competition.

"Because Dare is written into the history and culture of the university, when students come back in September, a lot of them are thinking about it. As a university we've learned a lot from Dare, so we have a lot of interdisciplinary work between our students anyway – it's pretty easy for them to get into teams of artists and programmers. Other universities have less crossover."

According to Conor McGuire, Abertay's reputation can in fact put its Dare contestants under pressure. "Everyone is a lot more competitive in Abertay, because of the history of Dare. Everyone is trying to get into the teams, so the people who take part are under a lot of scrutiny from everyone else."

Within Scotland, though, Dare to be Digital is creating William Wallace levels of national pride. According to Linda Fabiani, Scottish Minister for Culture, even the government has pitched in with funding and praise.

"Over the last four years, the Scottish Government's Fresh Talent initiative has provided funding for international students to take part in the competition," she says. "This puts Dare, and Scotland, firmly on the international gaming map. The funding demonstrates this government's support for the gaming industry – one of many modern Scottish success stories." So vote now!

Over the years, the competition has also lured the games industry in the form of speakers, mentors and sponsorship: from EA to Rockstar North, who sponsored this year's awards ceremony. Colleges elsewhere might take a leaf out of Dare's book. Many of them have little industry involvement – tagging "Game Development" onto their course list in a cynical attempt to put bums on seats and reap sky-high fees, and employing IT lecturers with no experience of the games industry. In the world of game courses, institutions like Abertay and the University of Teesside, who work closely with the industry, are exceptions rather than rules.

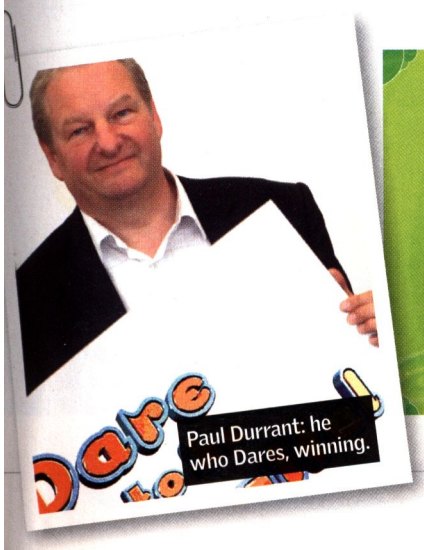
For this reason, perhaps, the industry still doesn't have a huge hire rate from colleges, with bigger companies preferring to run their own graduate training programmes. But Dare to be Digital provides a new model.

Around 80% of participants have gone on to work in the industry – many of the remaining continuing in education – and the competition criteria ("be creative, get market potential and be technology smart") is nurturing creativity far beyond Scotland's borders. Even the critical establishment has recognised Dare to be Digital: Bafta now chooses one of the competition's three winners to receive its 'Ones to Watch' award.

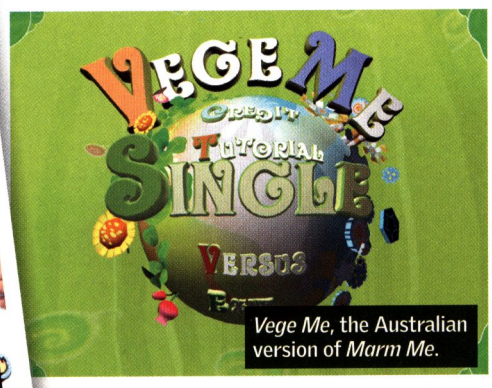
With enquiries for new host centres emerging as far away as New Zealand, Paul Durrant is now considering expansion. If the competition does continue to grow, Dare to be Digital's competitive streak will increase, as will industry's interest. After all, as Conor McGuire will testify, the competition is a dose of reality for new developers.

"Any university lecturer can tell students, 'You've got to plan X, Y and Z', but it doesn't mean anything to anyone," says Real Time's Colin Macdonald. "It is only when you see for yourself, when you see what doesn't work as well as what does, that you really learn. In these 10 weeks those guys learn that it's not all going to come magically together. That's part of the value of Dare: they've learnt their lessons." PCZ

"We thought it would be a good idea to bring arts and technology students together so they would understand interdisciplinary teamworking"
Paul Durrant, Dare director



Paul Durrant: he who Dares, winning.



Vege Me, the Australian version of *Marm Me*.

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

Who dares wins

Choice cuts from Dare to be Digital

2004 – Pixie Dust

Team: Pixie Dust

Pixie Dust **might sound like slang for a potent street drug, but is in fact the story of a girl trapped in a psychedelic 3-D world. Awash with trippy visuals, this game is cuter than a shop full of buttons.**

2005 – CodaChain

Team: Missing Link

Some killjoys are trying to ban music, just like in *Footloose*, and it's your job to make beautiful music once again by creating conga lines of foot soldiers. Soon to be released as part of *Blitz Arcade*.

2006 – Gal-EX: Spatial Delivery

Team: Rule of Thumb

A courier crashlands on a robot planet. Collect parcels in a 3-D platform puzzle, using living putty to batter androids and bounce over lava pits.

2007 – Bear Go Home

Team: Phoenix Seed

A side-scrolling platformer featuring a fat bear who sprouts wings and changes colour when he feels the need. Players stretch and squeeze him, keeping him gorged on pies.

2008 – Origamee

Team: Blue Skies

Guide 2-D paper kid Giff through a cartoon world, accompanied by puffs of cel-shaded smoke and a pixie called Teru. Fold Giff into origami shapes to overcome puzzles and assault animals with paper cuts.

PCZONE Charts

ChartTrack

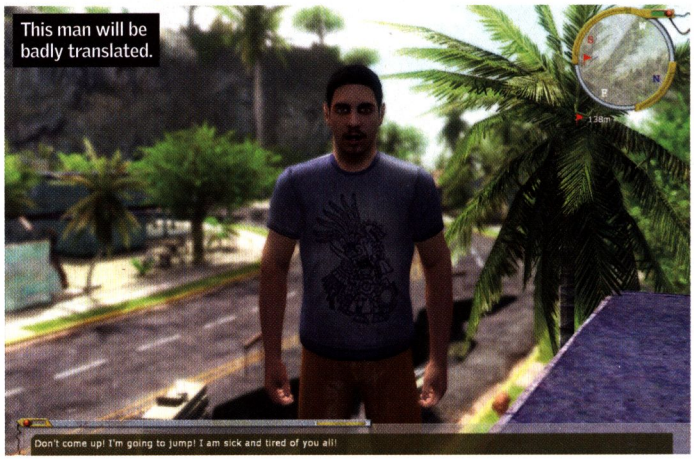
1	—	SPORE	Issue 199 95%
2	NEW	WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING	Issue 200 92%
3	NEW	CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION	Issue 200 88%
4	NEW	CRYSIS WARHEAD	Issue 199 92%
5	↓	THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE	N/A
6	NEW	FIFA 09	Issue 200 74%
7	↓	THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE	N/A
8	↓	CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE	Issue 188 89%
9	↓	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST	N/A
10	↓	STALKER: CLEAR SKY	Issue 198 88%
11	NEW	THE WITCHER ENHANCED EDITION	Issue 188 88%
12	↓	THE SIMS 2: FREETIME	Issue 194 70%
13	↓	CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE	N/A
14	↓	COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS	Issue 180 85%
15	↓	SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE	Issue 193 91%
16	↓	CRYSIS	Issue 188 92%
17	↓	EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR	Issue 200 40%
18	↓	THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE	Issue 188 38%
19	—	AGE OF EMPIRES III	Issue 162 84%
20	RE	MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X DELUXE	N/A

SPORE
Still on top of the charts despite everybody voting it down on Amazon after the DRM fiasco. And look, it's beating *Warhammer*!

WARHAMMER ONLINE
Pah, couldn't even beat *Spore* to the number one spot. If your mother was here she'd be so disappointed in you. Hmph.

CRYSIS WARHEAD
Take a look at my head, what sort of head do I have on right now. That's right it's my warhead, now get out of my way.

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR
We got in trouble for saying "wanking over porn in lay-bys" in our review, but do we care? Yes, we made a humbling apology.



IT'S COCAINE

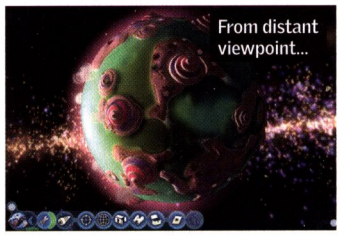
'White Gold' allusion deciphered!

WEBSITE whitegold-game.com/eng **ETA** 2009

WE'VE HAD A functioning version of Deep Shadows' open-world shooter *White Gold: War in Paradise* for weeks now, occasionally dipping into the tropical adventure to remind our eyes that brown isn't the only colour in the open-world shooter palette. It's not great, we can tell you that much, but it's certainly very interesting.

Run across one of *White Gold*'s islands, turn around, and you are guaranteed to see at least two militia henchmen, a big snake, and some sort of lethal great cat chasing you. Unlikely enemies teaming up and chasing you over cliffs and rivers is a just one foible in a game full of other foibles, and being the sequel to the terminally bugged *Boiling Point*, it exhibits that very same rough and ready feel.

Reign in your expectations though, and there'll be enjoyment aplenty. We'll have a full report next issue.



CUTE 'N' CREEPY

Spore expansion kick-starts money raking

WEBSITE www.spore.com **ETA** 18 November

A *SPORE* EXPANSION entitled *Cute & Creepy Parts Pack* made a brief appearance on online retailers before disappearing again – though we're guessing that by the time you read this it will have pootled into existence.

The pack's proposed release date is 18 November, which means a paltry 73 days will have passed since the original game went on the shelves. Assuming this is the frequency at which EA will continue to release *Spore*'s expansion packs, we project that in 2012 as a Russian gymnast vaults over a pile of barrels at the London Olympics, a commentator may say this: "That jump has made me glad I own all 21 expansions for *Spore*". And if you asked Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, a TV show set in the 24th century, how many *Spore* expansions there were, he would tell you there are 1,860. You heard it here first.

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Champions Online elicits obvious Queen reference

WEBSITE www.champions-online.com **ETA** Q1 2009

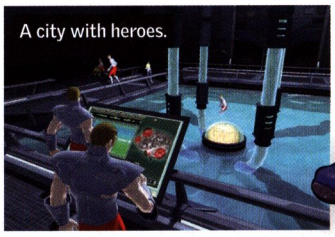
REAL SUPERHEROES FIGHT on the moon. We're sure that, or some other sliver of wisdom, is emblazoned on the walls at Cryptic, the studio working their nuts off on the upcoming MMO *Champions Online*. Known for their previous work on *City of Heroes* (page 78), the studio are taking on *DC Universe Online* for a slice of the next-gen superhero MMO pie. In doing so, they're designing *Champions Online* across both console and PC platforms.

"Me Grimlock no like Champions."

Combat will be action-orientated, with fewer hotbars and cooldowns and more button-hammering combos. The character creation will still feature strongly, but classes are axed in favour of custom skill sets determined by your character's build.

The move away from MMO customs allows for a greater variety. In the short demo we witnessed, objects were being picked up and thrown with staggering frequency.

And yes, there will be fighting on the moon.



A city with heroes.

Comparisons to *DC Universe Online* will be inevitable.

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THE NEXT GENERATION?

Star Trek Online details finally confirmed

WEBSITE www.startrekonline.com **ETA** Late 2009

AMIDST THE BLARING siren of a new *Star Wars* MMO (page 30), you could be forgiven for overlooking the emergence of the first details of *Star Trek Online*. Cryptic Studios, of *City of Heroes* fame (page 78), helm this highly anticipated stellar venture, which means that at the very least we'll be able to fiddle with a Play-Doh Klingon's face until it looks just the way we want it.

In fact, the character customisation will go beyond anything *City of Heroes* offers, seemingly approaching *Spore* levels of creative possibility. Stick a Klingon fanny-forehead on a Bajoran face and give it Vulcan ears if you like, as you're not restricted by *Star Trek*'s canonical species at all. You can customise your ship too, from the livery of the runaround you're given on starting, to your epic Voyager-class vessels. Aping *Spore* yet again, you'll be positioning nacelles and saucers to your tastes.

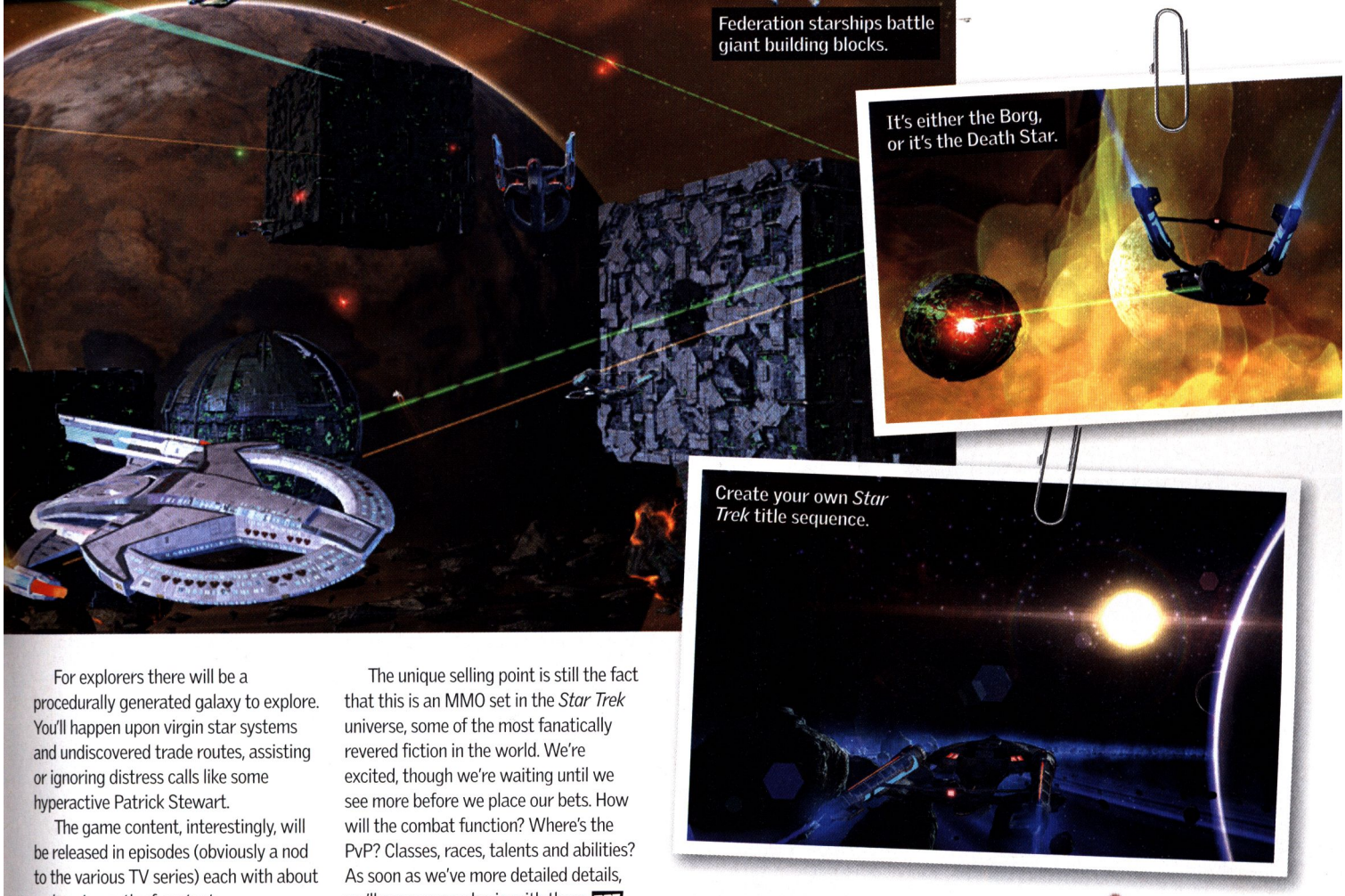
The game itself sees the Federation and the Klingons up to their old tricks, with a failed peace agreement leading to your typical Alliance/Horde separation. The Gorn, Orions and Naussicans have sided with the Klingons, while the Bajorans, Ferengi and Vulcans show up on the Federation's roster. So far what the other races are up to remains a mystery.

Starbases will form the game's social areas, allowing players to wander the corridors of *Deep Space Nine*-style complexes, shopping for items, recruiting crew members and building larger ships. The crews themselves will function as extensions of your own character, carrying out your orders during space combat. Power can be diverted to various ship components (say, to bolster your shields), turning combat into a slow, tactical event, much like a sea battle.

"You're not restricted by *Star Trek*'s canonical species at all"

SHE CANNA TAKE IT

Your chief engineer will have specific talents (such as dicking about with the warp core for extra speed), and as such he and the rest of your staff will function much like *World of Warcraft*'s pets. You can hire and fire crewmen as you meet better and more talented people, though exactly where you'll find these people isn't clear. Perhaps an auction-house style careers bulletin board?



For explorers there will be a procedurally generated galaxy to explore. You'll happen upon virgin star systems and undiscovered trade routes, assisting or ignoring distress calls like some hyperactive Patrick Stewart.

The game content, interestingly, will be released in episodes (obviously a nod to the various TV series) each with about an hour's worth of content.

The unique selling point is still the fact that this is an MMO set in the *Star Trek* universe, some of the most fanatically revered fiction in the world. We're excited, though we're waiting until we see more before we place our bets. How will the combat function? Where's the PvP? Classes, races, talents and abilities? As soon as we've more detailed details, we'll pepper your brain with them. PCZ

16+
www.pegi.info
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THE NEW STALKER?

METRO 2033

ETA AUTUMN 2009

"You can leave the gas mask on," mumbles *Steve Hogarty*, rubbing his thighs

DEVELOPER 4a Games **PUBLISHER** THQ **WEBSITE** www.thq.com

THERE ARE A few important things to notice about *Metro 2033* before we start. It's from some of the guys who worked on the original *STALKER* who broke away from GSC Gameworld to form their own studio. Clearly they had something to prove, right? Surely they must've been tired of modelling irradiated rocks and staring bleakly at a nuclear-disaster ravaged wasteland? What sort of primary coloured and cathartic wonderland were they planning on creating – a *Mario/Sonic* hybrid set in an ocean of red liquorice laces and honey?

Not quite.

The year is 2033, a nuclear war has turned everything cold, dusty and brown as an eternal winter grips much of the planet. A poisoned atmosphere has forced the remnants of humanity in Moscow below ground and into tribal societies aligned with urban Metro stations. On the surface, hellish creatures stalk a desolate and ruined city. The Geiger counters of brave surface explorers click out their manic, muted beats. Gas masks obscure the faces of gun-wielding men. Ghostly, supernatural anomalies replay echoes of the past. It's even based on the work of Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky (available online if you're interested).

But while *Metro 2033* looks and feels like a sequel to *STALKER*, it's rather a different breed of game. Instead of the rolling plains and wide open arenas of GSC's title, *Metro 2033* favours a more directed approach, one which allows the development team's focus to move to creating better and more detailed environments.

BEWARE! LIBRARIAN

For instance, a library they've designed is based on a real building in Moscow. A high-ceilinged tomb of a place, the apocalyptic seat of learning has taken a beating. Holes have been poked in the foot-thick masonry, allowing great shafts of light to pierce the musty halls. A semi-sentient organic growth has crept in through the windows, resulting in dangerous snake-like vines which must be either avoided or limply batted at with the butt of your rifle.

You're here with two teammates, having accepted a mission to retrieve an important book from deep inside the building. Each excursion to the surface comes with a time limit, as filters on your gas mask are finite. Condensation forms on the inside of your visor as filters begin to expire, while your wristwatch keeps track of your remaining time in the toxic atmosphere.

From the outset, you're steeped in the sort of menacing silence seen in games like *F.E.A.R.* and movies like *Alien*. Black humour skitters back and forth between your comrades, before a winged manbat descends from the blindingly bright holes in the roof and starts grabbing at an unfortunate teammate. In bullet-time, he's picked up in mutant talons while the manbat beats its wings powerfully. Knocking objects away, it smashes through a tall window. Your teammate falls from its grip, hitting the floor with a thud and a snap.

An awesome sequence that may be, but it's one scripted neatly into the game experience. Other instances were less forced, such as the ability to set off *Oblivion*-esque spiked log traps, or shoot at icicles above an enemy to see them crushed. And some of the enemies are downright horrifying. The Librarian is a hulking sort of gorilla mutant – turn your back and he'll violently unravel your body, but look him in the eyes and he'll keep his distance.

STALKER v3.0

But has the recent spate of radioactive games left us bored and bloody-gummed? Or will we find ourselves emphatically dusting off our hazmat suits again? *Metro 2033*'s got some fantastic ideas. Despite looking like they haven't broken their creative ties to *STALKER*, the team are working hard to create a world more detailed and immersive than the Forbidden Zone, as well as a story more comprehensible and more worth following. Give us a bit more time with the manbats though, and we'll have made our minds up. PCZ

A nuclear winter grips the city of Moscow.

THE LOWDOWN

Visually impressive	✓
Lovely architecture	✓
Some horrifying enemies	✓
Heavily scripted	✗
A poor man's *STALKER*?	✗

THE STORY SO FAR... METRO 2033

STALKER
GSC Gameworld release *STALKER*, under publisher THQ.

2007

THE SPLIT
4a Games break from GSC Gameworld, staying under THQ.

2007

CLEAR SKY
GSC Gameworld create *Clear Sky*, under Deep Silver.

2008

METRO 2033
While 4a Games announce *Metro 2033*, under publisher THQ.

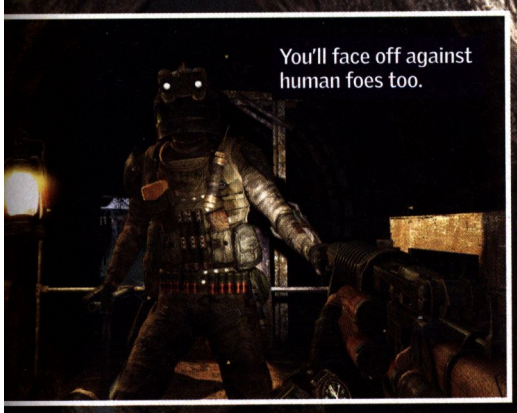
2008

One we made earlier

Metro 2033's homemade peashooters

We know why real guns were scarce in *BioShock:* it was an underwater city. So while they had a few proper pistols and shotguns, weapon mods and heavier weapons – like turrets – were DIY jobs.

Simarlily, while there are real weapons in *Metro 2033*, a lot of what you'll be using are distinctly homemade, or just crap. Take the pump-action pellet gun for example, which requires that you repeatedly tap the right mouse button to pump pressurised air into the barrel, before firing off a ball bearing with the left mouse button. Enemies can hear your little exasperated pumps too, so you've got to make sure to pump well in advance. Once pumped though, you're pretty much good to go.


You'll face off against human foes too.

Allies will help fend off mutant attacks.

"While *Metro 2033* looks and feels like a sequel to *STALKER*, it's a different breed of game"

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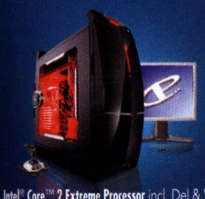

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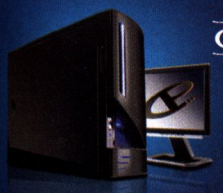

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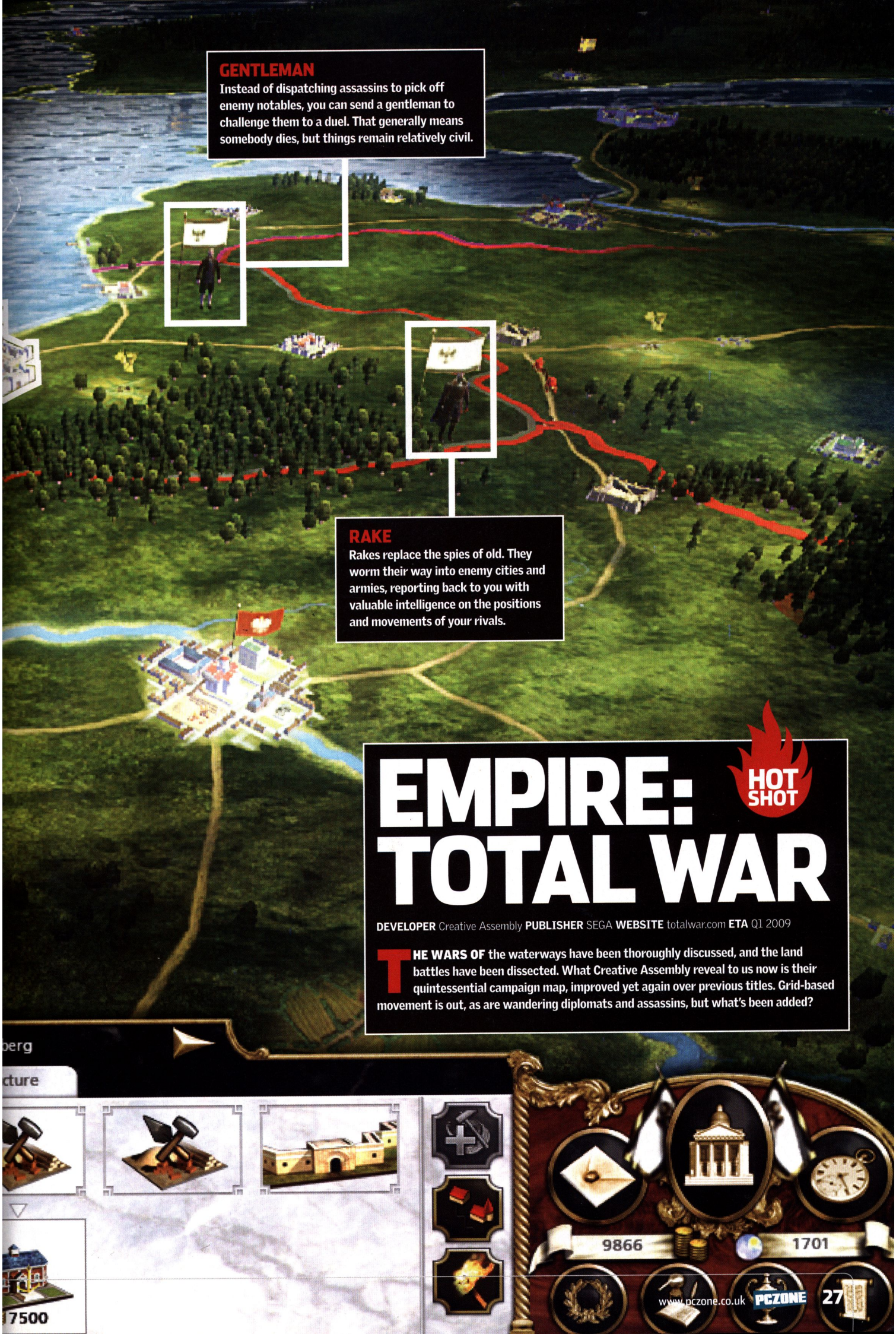
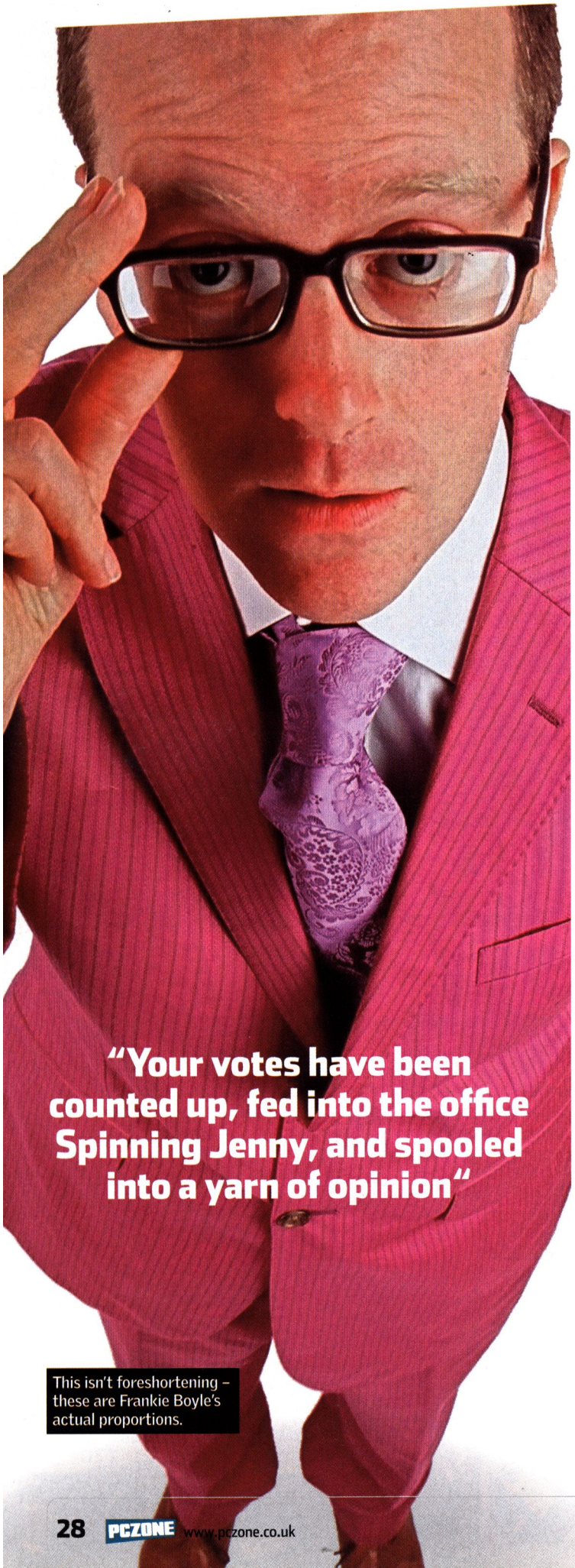


EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

HOT SHOT

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly **PUBLISHER** SEGA **WEBSITE** totalwar.com **ETA** Q1 2009

THE WARS OF the waterways have been thoroughly discussed, and the land battles have been dissected. What Creative Assembly reveal to us now is their quintessential campaign map, improved yet again over previous titles. Grid-based movement is out, as are wandering diplomats and assassins, but what's been added?



"Your votes have been counted up, fed into the office Spinning Jenny, and spooled into a yarn of opinion"

This isn't foreshortening – these are Frankie Boyle's actual proportions.

Virgin media 26th ANNUAL GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS

BOYLE-ING POINT

Scottish comedian brings Golden Joystick Awards to a merry conclusion

WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com

AFICIONADOS OF PUBLIC gaming events will be well-accustomed to celebrity presenters whooping about how great games are. If it's not Vernon Kaye dropping to his knees and screaming "I love video games," then it's someone else talking about the time he played *Tetris*, and how fast it all moves these days. This year's Golden Joystick Awards saw the excellent and unacceptable comedian Frankie Boyle taking his turn to mention games and looking like he means it.

By now, your votes will have been counted up, fed into the office Spinning Jenny, and spooled into a thick yarn of opinion. Our internet seamstresses have knitted this rainbow into a website, www.goldenjoystick.com, which you can visit using the same computer you use to play PC games. While you're there, check out the winner of the Virgin Media Ultimate Game Of The Year award – it's the best game there is, according to you lot, so you'll probably want to know what it is.

While you're looking at the website, you mind might start wondering about the speed of your broadband connection. So, it seems like as good a time as any to bleat the following advice: If you're a gamer and need super-fast broadband, check out Virgin XL – the Mother of all Broadband services, offering speeds of up to 20 megabits a second. (That's fast.)

While you're there, let us draw your attention to the competition on that site. The top prize is a beefy old Cyberpower Game Infinity Xtreme XI, that'll probably see you right until 2055 – and all you have to do is look at things on the internet. If you're looking at the Golden Joystick website, you're halfway to winning already.

The competition involves five surfing missions (they call them tasks, but missions sounds more game-y). You'll have to know your way around the internet to complete your missions in a winning time, but you'll also win a "KB mouse", which looks like someone in marketing mistook KB as a brand of mouse, rather than a contraction of keyboard. Go team advertising! PCZ

So good, sexy ladies will leap out of your monitor.

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ETA TBA

STAR WARS® THE OLD REPUBLIC™

Steve Hogarty feels the force of BioWare's biggest game ever

DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA/LucasArts **WEBSITE** bioware.com

THIS IS A massively multiplayer online role-playing game with more story content than every other BioWare game combined. That got you interested, didn't it? That unbelievable boast (from the mouth of Rich Vogel, studio director at BioWare) encompasses classic RPG serials *Baldur's Gate*, *Knights of the Old Republic*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Mass Effect* and *Jade Empire*.

Star Wars: The Old Republic will be huge. Set 300 years after *Knights of the Old Republic* and its sequel, it'll also wrap up any loose ends you may have been fretting over. You'll discover what became of Revan, Bastila and our twittering robo-chum T3-M4. BioWare are keen to allay any fears that by taking the MMO route they will dispose of *Star Wars* mythos which fans have come to love. Instead, *The Old Republic* will be built on the tenets BioWare are famous for: deep storylines, fully realised and meticulously scripted companion characters, branching dialogue trees and player choice.

But that sort of narrative doesn't work in the MMOs we're used to playing. You couldn't have the trolls and dwarves of *Warcraft* embarking on identical story arcs. You couldn't have every inhabitant of the *Warhammer* universe chasing down a single nemesis and keep it feeling personal and unique at every point along the way. There's no 'twist' in *City of Heroes*. How can BioWare properly weave a story into an MMO?

NOVEL IDEA

Well, most notably they're giving every class their own storyline and overall quest, each with their own starting planet, villains and game content.

From the moment you start a new character you can expect a lengthier story arc than any other BioWare game, and that's just for your chosen class. Start over as a different class (Sith, Jedi, and others) and you'll be approaching the game from another angle, with an entirely distinct story and agenda.

We've confirmed this is not Bastila, but we bet our replica lightsabers that's T3-M4.

THE LOWDOWN

More content than every other BioWare title combined	✓
Individual, unique storylines for each class	✓
Answers all of our unanswered *KOTOR* queries	✓
Companion characters return	✓
We remember *Star Wars Galaxies*	✗

STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

BioWare promise fast-paced and interactive lightsaber combat.

Customisation: *Halo*-style armour meets Obi Wan cloakwear.

"Imagine playing *KOTOR*," offers Daniel Erickson, lead writer at BioWare, "and then playing *Mass Effect* in the very same game. That's the kind of scope we're after. A role-playing game has four pillars: you've got exploration, combat, progression and story. For whatever reason, MMOs seem to leave story behind. Our speciality at the studio has always been putting story into these games. So one of the things we talked about really early on was how to bring back that fourth pillar. How do we bring story, which belongs in an RPG, into the MMO space?"

"Our solution was to have your chosen class define your story," continues Erickson. "So if you're playing a Jedi you're going to have a completely different experience than if you're playing a Sith. You can't have all these people going forward and having the same, unified experience.

"You can't build a storyline for both the guy dreaming of becoming Darth Vader, and the guy dreaming of being Luke – it wouldn't make any sense."

"Once you've chosen your class," adds Vogel, "you've got something larger than *KOTOR*, just for your class. We like to think of it as each class getting its own trilogy of movies, essentially."

An interior on Tython, home of the Jedi.

"And inside of that," claims Erickson, "you've got all of the player choices, all of the light and dark side decisions, all of the quests which have choices both big and small that effect what happens in your story and where your story goes."

CLASS ACT

While BioWare won't yet divulge exactly how many classes to expect, they happily state that each class will be associated with "heroic roles" from the first and second movie trilogies.

"We also want to make sure that the conflict is between dark and light," claims Ohlen, "so we can confirm we'll have Sith and Jedi in the game. But we also want to ensure other popular heroes from the movies are represented, and you can probably guess at what those might be."

So expect archetypes Luke (nice Jedi) and Vader (naughty Jedi turned Sith), along with Han Solo (rogue explorer), Boba Fett (bounty hunter), and Darth Maul (total Sith) to name a few obvious fellows. I leave out Chewie, because it's likely the character creator will

"Imagine playing *KOTOR* and then *Mass Effect* in the very same game. That's the scope we're after"
Daniel Erickson, BioWare lead writer

A lesser k'lor'slug gives a Sith something to worry about.

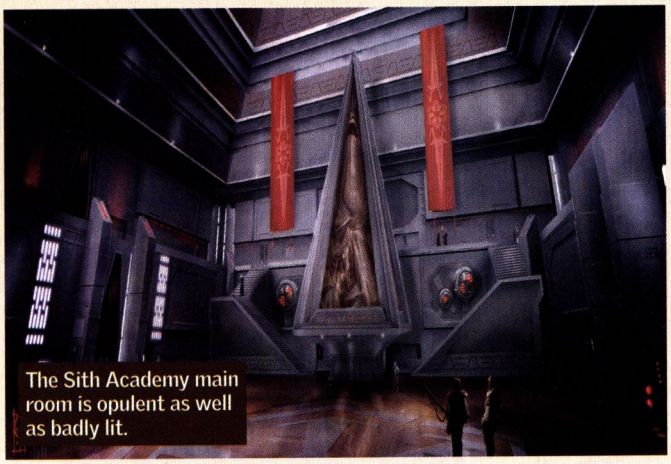
allow you to choose a species within a class, doubtlessly leading to terrifying Wookiee Jedi and Twi'lek bounty hunters not seen outside *Star Wars*' Expanded Universe.

This isn't the first time Lucas' epic has entered the MMO arena. 2003's *Star Wars Galaxies* was a wonderful social experiment in which folk were given the choice of being Rodian dancers, occasional Force-enlightened supermen, or seven-foot-tall bears. BioWare claim to have learned a lot of lessons from Sony's failed outing.

"We're not in Sony's restricted space," assures Erickson, "*Star Wars Galaxies* ran up against the problem of setting itself in a time period that didn't have Jedi. We do not have that issue whatsoever, as people saw from *KOTOR*. Our time period has tons of Jedi and tons of Sith, so we escaped that problem entirely."

TRADE FEDERATION

An interconnected collection of planets and all the space in between acts as the backdrop to all this adventuring. Familiar locations from *KOTOR* will appear alongside planets drawn from the wealth of *Star Wars* fiction already out there. For instance, Sith players will begin their game on the Sith homeworld, Korriban, their opening quests carefully guiding them through the required training before they may leave the planet.



The Sith Academy main room is opulent as well as badly lit.

The planet Tython, from the rich Expanded Universe, is the birthplace of the Force – it's here where the Sith and Jedi originated, split and went their separate ways. With the Jedi's temple having been smashed to bits in *KOTOR*, the order have returned to occupy the planet. The total number of planets isn't being spoken about, and neither is the sort of scale we can expect once you arrive on the surface, but exploration will be a key component in *The Old Republic*.

Space will exist in some fashion too (rather than being a mere swooshy loading screen between locations), but again BioWare aren't keen to lift the lid on exactly how it will be implemented. One thing is

Planetarium

Possible *KOTOR* locations in *The Old Republic*

1 Tatooine: Luke Skywalker's home planet, this place is essentially an expansive desert. It's also home to the huge Krayt dragon.

2 Kashyyyk: Home of the Wookiees, who live in towns built high up in the canopy of this forest-covered planet, while enemies lurk far below.

3 Manaan: An ocean-covered planet visited in *KOTOR*, this location is home to the fishy Selkath. The floating Ahto City is the only above-water settlement, though unseen cities exist below the waves.

4 Taris: The planet you crash on after evacuating the Endar Spire, Taris' surface is covered in a single metropolis. Lower classes live beneath the city surface, with the planet's outcasts living in the dangerous Undercity.

5 Rakata Prime: A location from the end of *KOTOR*, Rakata Prime is drenched in the dark side. Abandoned, the remains of a superweapon is scattered on its surface.

The only character to be revealed so far, Dashad is shown in various states of undress – meaning the ability to equip companions has been carried over from previous BioWare titles.

MELTING POT

Concept art nicked from the desks of BioWare's doodlers...

Korriban is the Sith starting area, and you'll certainly recognise it from *KOTOR*.

The k'lor'slug comes in two varieties, lesser and greater. Note the stomach detail – possible weak points?

The Terentatek first appeared in *KOTOR*. Originating from Korriban, they're beasts corrupted by the dark side. Standing 15 feet fall, they feed on Force-powered individuals.

certain, and that is that there'll be times when you'll be flying in space. If that's not enough information for you, well I honestly don't know what to say.

You'll be visiting all of *Star Wars*' most iconic worlds, in care-free Han Solo-esque romps across the galaxy. "It's not just *KOTOR* stuff either," insists James Ohlen, creative director. "It's stuff from the movies and the Expanded Universe. If you love *Star Wars*, we want you recognise that this is the *Star Wars* you love. We're not forcing *KOTOR* on new players, but all the unanswered questions are there to discover if you want."

FRIENDLY FACE

From *Baldur's Gate* right through to *Mass Effect*, companion characters have been a staple of BioWare's games. The expertly constructed NPCs (from sassy assassin droids to intemperate hulking aliens) will fight alongside you, offering a helping hand

THE STORY SO FAR... BIOWARE

BALDUR'S GATE
The game that defined a generation of roleplaying games.

1998

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The game that redefined that very same generation.

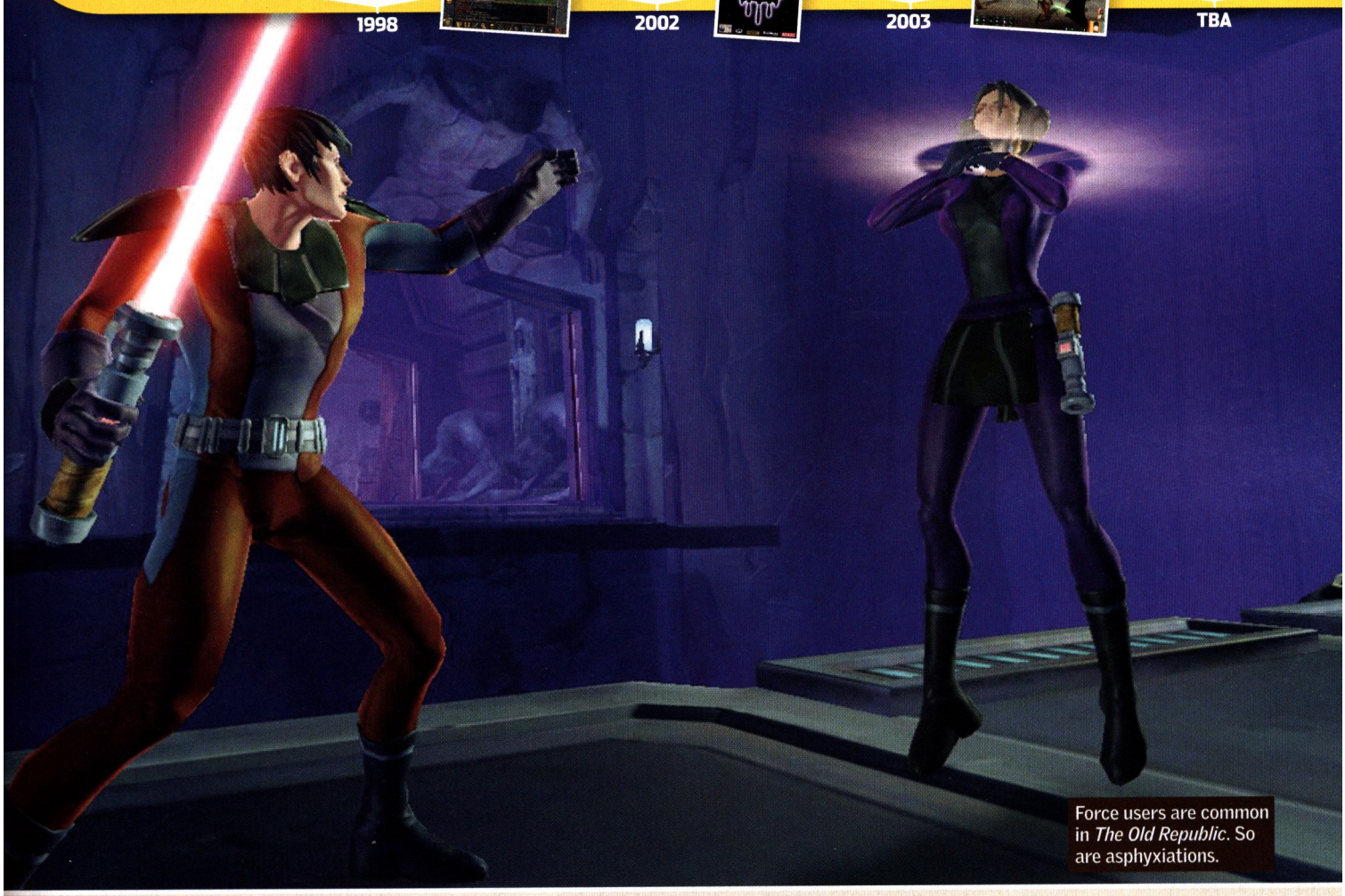
2002

STAR WARS: KOTOR
One of the finest role-play experiences known to man.

2003

THE OLD REPUBLIC
A decade's worth of BioWare rolled into one glorious MMO.

TBA



Force users are common in *The Old Republic*. So are asphyxiations.

when it's needed and engaging in awkward elevator conversations while the game loads the next area. They act as conduits for relating story too, at any point you can strike up a chat with a companion and they'll have at least a snippet of character-infused narrative to fire at you.

Nothing's changing with *The Old Republic*. "Companion characters are a big part of how we do our storytelling," claims Erickson. "There'll be a very large variety and amount of companion characters that are available for all of the different classes. Everybody will be adventuring with companions. They won't be like *World of Warcraft* pets – they'll be people you interact with, like in a typical BioWare game."

A writing team four times larger than BioWare's standard (which is already significantly girthier than your typical game writing team, being in the "double figures") drawing from all of the developer's past titles ensures there'll be wealth of different characters in *The Old Republic*. Though how you'll meet them and how they'll stay unique to you is unclear. "We had a challenge when we realised that players running about in a public world will eventually see their companion running about with another player," admits Ohlen. "Athough we've solved it." How? Procedurally generated party hats? He laughs: "I can't tell you how, but we've solved it."

Before Stormtroopers, people had to make do with regular Troopers like these.

"A writing team four times larger than BioWare's standard ensures there'll be a wealth of different characters in *The Old Republic*"

If you think this is sounding more like a single player RPG than a persistent online game, that's because it really does, *The Old Republic* is deeply rooted in BioWare's experience in offline adventuring. Even the company's morality system has survived the genre transition, pegging you as a light or dark character based on your actions, regardless of your chosen faction. Even in the first few hours of the game the quests will have multiple outcomes based on player choice. Those outcomes will impact on the story, something no popular MMO has ever attempted.

CHARACTER BUILDING

The delineation of sides won't be as neat as your usual Alliance and Horde division. As in *KOTOR*, you'll find Dark Jedi trying to spoil their faction's well-preened image. Similarly, Sith characters can do good deeds like any other, even if they'll presumably have less lightning at their fingertips.

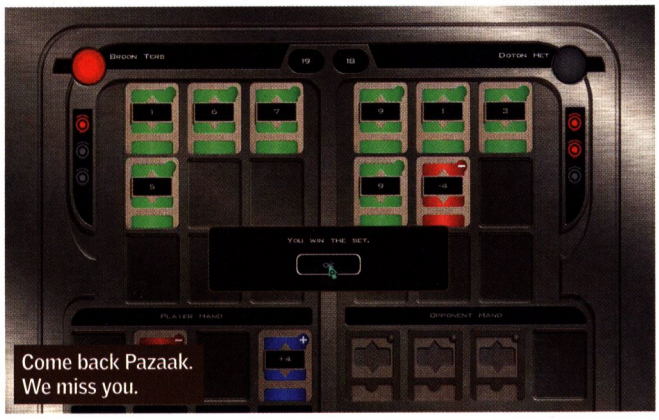
Whether or not BioWare will employ *KOTOR*'s sliding scale of morality (in which good deeds negate bad) or *Mass Effect*'s cumulative one (in which both good and bad deeds aggregate) isn't known. Fans seem to have favoured *Mass Effect*'s system, as it made a great deal more sense, so it seems a safe bet that it'll reappear in *The Old Republic*.

A fog of rude mystery currently hangs over the

Some mining droids on Tython, defending a mine we presume.

Why don't you...

Things we'd like to see featured in *The Old Republic*...



Come back Pazaak. We miss you.

BioWare will miss a trick by not allowing players to gather in cantinas and play some multiplayer Pazaak. The card game from *KOTOR* was an excellent diversion from the main quests and allowed players to make a little extra cash on the side.

Also, why not let us build and customise our own droids? Sure, let BioWare imbue them with their own carefully written and scripted personality, but let us pick what colour they are.

Although BioWare aren't ready to mention how they're handling space, allow us to get all ambitious and imagine an *X-Wing* style space combat system. Maybe even quests involving escorting ships or assassinating targets.

Finally, let's face it – personalised lightsabers are a must!

specifics of *The Old Republic*'s more traditional MMO features. Crafting will be in there, as well as PvP, with ongoing battles of an unknown scale taking place between the Sith Empire and the Old Republic.

Character development will be "familiar to BioWare fans and MMO fans alike", and when pressed for information on how classes will differ in terms of skills and abilities, BioWare simply nod and say, "Have we told you about our companion characters yet?"

Clearly it's early days for *The Old Republic*, and the company's priority is placating an already vocal crowd of fans who think *KOTOR*'s about to be diluted in the vast lake of *Worlds of Warcrafts*, *Warhammer Onlines* and *Ages of Conans*.

"We'll have thousands of players in a persistent world," assures Ohlen. "We're building an MMO for MMO players, but we're also appealing to BioWare fans through the story systems we've built.

"We're giving you the Hero's Journey. We're creating an MMO that will be able to do everything you can do in other MMOs."

So there'll be no skimping on the essentials then? "No way, if you come to *The Old Republic* looking for *Star Wars*, you'll get it," adds Erickson. "If you come looking for an MMO, you'll get that too."

PICTURE PERFECT

Going hand-in-hand with character progression are the ways in which it is rendered visually. You only have to look at the recent *Warhammer Online* to see how precious and particular players can be when it comes to the look of their characters – it's important to have an avatar that reflects not only the time you've spent playing, but the choices you've made along the way.

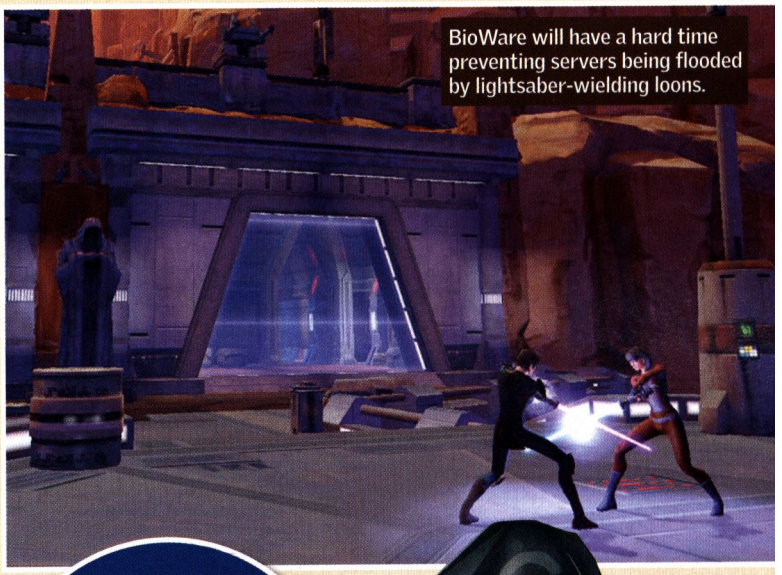
"We spent a lot of time ensuring that progression is rewarded visually," explains art director, Jeff Dobson. "A level one guy lends himself well to a simpler outfit, regardless of your background.

"As you progress you'll recover things or find loot, that sort of thing –

It seems the more evil you get, the bigger the hologram you get.

You'll be joined at all times by companion characters. Unlike this lonely sadsack.

"Lightsabers will connect properly and blaster bolts will be deflected"



BioWare will have a hard time preventing servers being flooded by lightsaber-wielding loons.

you'll basically look flashier and cooler. We take characters from the movie and think, what level is that guy? And that becomes the target: Darth Vader is your top level Sith dude. Luke on Tatooine, he's a level one anything, you know? He's just getting started!"

"There's so much room for customisation," adds Erickson, "and different paths to take. Something our art team's worked really hard on is making your character not just say, 'Hey, look at me I'm really high level' but 'This is how I choose to play my guy.' If you choose to play a dark side Jedi and approach the world in that way, you'll look like somebody you shouldn't screw with."

Stylised realism is the term BioWare are using to describe their visual style, a sort of halfway house between *World of Warcraft*'s system-friendly environments and *City of Heroes*' colourful characters. "We wanted to make sure we had a unique look," explains Dobson. "We didn't want to look like anything else out there. At the same time we didn't want to cross the line and become too cartoony or so stylised that people couldn't relate to it. We really strive to make our game look like our concept art. Quite often I'll walk past somebody's PC and see some nice concept art suddenly begin to move on their screen."

BioWare promise that the combat itself is being built with attention paid to that all-important authentic *Star Wars* feel. Lightsabers will connect properly and blaster bolts will be deflected. Steps are being taken to avoid the floatiness of animation usually associated with MMOs.

"With our combat system," explains Ohlen, "we wanted it to feel different to other MMOs, we wanted it to feel like *Star Wars* combat. With a lot of other games, combat is too slow-paced and non-interactive. I can't go into too much detail, but we're ensuring it looks and feels like *Star Wars*."

"Oh, it's also real time, all the time," laughs Ohlen. "You can't pause the server to queue up moves."

"There'll be ongoing battles of an unknown scale taking place between the Sith Empire and the Old Republic"

A NEW HOPE

With an impeccable sense of self-awareness, BioWare are carefully navigating the expectations of millions of RPG fans.

The shift into a multiplayer gear will be jarring news for some, casting doubt on whether we'll ever see a 'proper' single-player *KOTOR 3*, but *The Old Republic* is already promising to deliver far more than that. Almost certainly the biggest writing team in the industry is creating a series of intertwining legends in the *Star Wars* universe, creating more story content than every other BioWare game combined, and what they've revealed so far is hugely exciting. But no pausing mid-battle? Pfft, not interested. PCZ

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Revenge or acceptance? Justice or retribution? But choose wisely.
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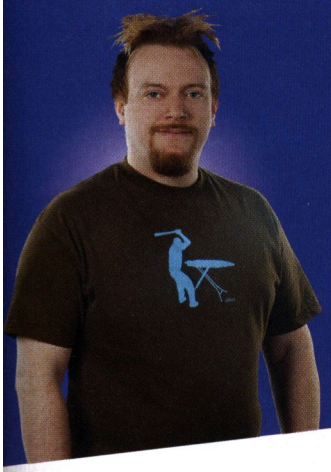

PC ZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

40 RED ALERT 3

Do Tim Curry, attack dogs, armoured bears and sexy ladies make a good RTS?

Big game

INNIT MARVELLOUS? Three massive games in one month. It's like these games publishers are timing their releases to coincide with a religious purchasing festival of some kind. These massive games are even coming through with a substantial amount of their pre-launch promises intact. *Fallout 3* has moments of corridor slog, but they're drowned out when you realise that everyone's played a different game. *Far Cry 2* has issues of communication and storytelling, but it's a world which is so beautifully created you'll want to spend time in it. And *Red Alert 3*? Well, it's got armoured bears. To quote Paris Hilton: hot.

But best of all, we've got *World of Goo*. The finest indie game of recent memory. If you only buy one game from this issue, buy *Goo*. Then reconsider your spending policy and buy the rest.

Oh, and this is my last month as a staffer, but I'll still be writing for ZONE, and losing in Fight Clubs, avoiding the topic in Zone Chats, and that. So... see you all around, yeah?

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, reviews editor

Must Buys!

***PC ZONE* Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...**

Spore | Sins of a Solar Empire | The Orange Box

The PC ZONE Awards

CLASSIC (90%+) Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.

RECOMMENDED (75-89%) Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?

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

AND THE REST

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

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

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

The PC ZONE gaming machine

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

ALSO REVIEWED

50 **FALLOUT 3** Can Bethesda defy the sceptics, and keep true to *Fallout*'s spirit?
56 **FAR CRY 2** Welcome to Africa, where everyone wants to kill you.
64 **GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS 2: ENDLESS UNIVERSE** A man could lose himself in a universe this large.
66 **WORLD OF GOO** If you don't love it, the official position is that you're evil.
68 **PRO EVO 2009** Join Sefteraldo in his world of pig's bladders and football.
69 **DARK HORIZONS**
70 **PROJECT AFTERMATH**
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73 **HINTERLAND**
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80 **BUDGET** Steam's *X-Compilation*, *Rogue Trooper* and more.
82 **BUYER'S GUIDE** Whatever your personal tastes, these are the games you shouldn't be without.

PC ZONE SWEARS...

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

I hate post-modernist art!

Proof that lightning can strike twice.

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

Martin Korda welcomes back a dear friend and discovers that the old dog has learned a few new tricks...

DEVELOPER EA LA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.ea.com/redalert
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RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

AT A GLANCE...

This third instalment of the frenetic *Command & Conquer* spin-off *Red Alert* offers full co-operative campaign play.

Minimum system requirements:
XP: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card. *Vista:* 2.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card. Internet connection required for authentication. Currently limited to five installs.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD IN CONFLICT	92%
COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3	86%
COMMAND & CONQUER 3	86%

HERITAGE GOES A long way. But it has its limits. If a great game's sequels and spin-offs are to keep us interested, they have to find new ways of engaging us. A different skew, a new idea, something innovative enough to compel us to part with another fistful of crinkled notes and an extra-large portion of spare time.

Since *Command & Conquer* turned RTS gaming into an international phenomenon in 1995, the *C&C* series has sired three games, two *Red Alert* spin-offs, a myriad expansions, and the misjudged *C&C: Generals*. And yet the series' success continues unabated as it has cemented its position as the most successful and enduring RTS franchise of all time. And thanks to *RA3*, it's likely to remain that way for some time to come.

The reason for this bold prediction are the game's all-new co-operative play and co-commander features, which make *RA3* unique when compared to its illustrious predecessors, while never compromising the unrelenting battlefield havoc that has typified the series.

Just like its predecessors, *RA3* is set in an alternative world where Soviet and Allied forces are locked in a brutal conflict: Great World War III. Things haven't been going too well for the Ruskies of late. Pushed back to their own borders by the Allies, the Soviet superpower's two premier military minds, General Krukov and Colonel Cherdenko, are forced into one last desperate gamble to reverse their nation's flagging fortunes. Stepping into a top-secret time machine designed by gormless scientific genius Dr Gregor Zelinsky, Krukov and Cherdenko travel back in time to eliminate the man they believe is responsible for the Allies' edge on the battlefield, Albert Einstein.

Returning to the present day with the frizzy haired one eliminated, they discover the landscape of power has been reversed. The Allies are in full retreat and Cherdenko has become the new Soviet Premier. Much vodka swilling and affectionate moustache tweaking ensues, only for the duo to discover that their space-time continuum meddling has created a new superpower: The Empire of the Rising Sun (aka Japan).

So ensues a three-way conflict between a trio of vastly different superpowers. Which side prevails is up to you.

THREE TO ONE

Whereas *C&C3: Tiberium Wars* featured one long, connected war in which you played all three factions, *RA3* provides standalone campaigns for the Allies, Soviets and the Empire, each driven by a plot infused with more cheese and ham than a Frenchman's fridge.

After you've sat through the fittingly pounding intro, the first thing that'll strike you is just how much diversity EA LA has injected into the factions. This is easily the most eclectic mix of arsenals that a *Red Alert* game has possessed, with every unit lavished with imaginative design and secondary skills that a canny commander can utilise to great strategic effect. *RA3* has captured the type of factional diversity that few RTS games have. And, indeed, that *Red Alert*

"This is easily the most eclectic mix of arsenals in a *Red Alert* game"

Tanya and friends.

Your co-commander intelligently backs you up.

More war

Let the carnage continue...

If you're looking for the stiffer challenge of having to work alone against the AI then you can have a bash at one of *Red Alert 3*'s 28 skirmish levels.

Up to six factions can scrap on these maps, and with the safety net of your co-commander removed, you're suddenly faced with a far tougher challenge as you're forced to cover your own back against AI enemies that are far more proactive than those of the campaigns.

Of course you can always team up with an ally and use the co-commander control system you've grown to know and love in the campaign missions. Whatever takes your fancy.

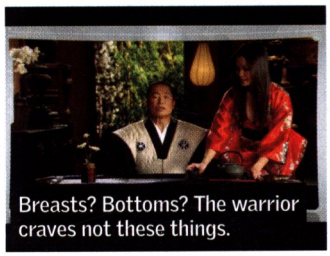
insanity that other strategy titles wouldn't dare broach: parachuting war bears, battle dolphins and paralysing-bark powered Alsatians rub damp noses with Tesla troops, tanks and airships.

The Soviets are the brutes. What they lack in manoeuvrability and subtlety they more than make up for with sheer firepower. Spearheading the Red Tide's advance is the Apocalypse Tank, a thunderous metal hulk possessing two 125mm cannons and a magnetic grapple that snares nippy enemies, petrifying them until they're vaporised.

BOMBING WITH HAM

The faction's aerial behemoth is the Kirov Airship. Ostensibly a blimp with bombs, this terrifying flying fortress may have the turning circle and acceleration of an oil tanker, but position one over an enemy base and it'll wreak utter carnage in seconds as it drops its load.

Yet despite their great strength, the Pinkos also have a smattering of subtler units such as the Bullfrog, a transport vehicle which is as comfortable bobbing on water as cruising along tarmac. The Bullfrog can also be employed as an AA gun and best of all, launch troops cannonball man-style into enemy territory. Propelling its troop contingent over enemy walls, the men glide to earth on parachutes ready to engage an unsuspecting enemy. And let's not forget brutal female sniper Natasha.


Breasts? Bottoms? The warrior craves not these things.

In the plot department, the Soviet campaign is somewhat lacking. Hammed up to laugh-out-loud proportions by Tim Curry's portrayal of an increasingly megalomaniacal premier, and topped off by a twitchy, madness-tinged performance by Peter Stormare as the jittery but brilliant Dr Zelinsky, the whole thing is incredibly kitsch. You just can't help but smile at the unashamed self-indulgence of it all. The increasingly vitriolic rants of self-professed genius

General Krukov provides an excellent counterpoint to the eye-bulging (or in the case of your comms officer Dasha, bra-bulging) performances of his comrades. The Soviet plot also has one of the most telegraphed twists I've ever seen, compounded by the fact it's the same twist that *C&C* games have been using for over a decade.

defect to your cause. You can't really go wrong with their FMV selection either, with Jenny McCarthy perhaps not filling the boots of the Tanya of old – but with J.K. Simmons stealing the show as the rambunctious apple-pie loving President Howard T. Ackerman.

Saving the best till last, we have the Empire of the Rising Sun. Here we have

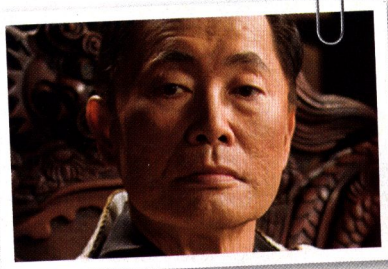
"The Empire is one of the finest factions yet seen in a *C&C* game"

The Allies' arsenal is the most unspectacular of the three, though that's not to say there aren't standout units, including the Athena Cannon, a vehicle that can tag an enemy then call down fire from a satellite. Tanya is, as ever, a highlight and comes equipped with a time belt that allows her to rewind the action; an ability that can transform her into a destructive force like no other if used cannily. Spies are also worthy of praise, able to bribe enemy troops to defect to your cause. You can't really go wrong with their FMV selection either, with Jenny McCarthy perhaps not filling the boots of the Tanya of old – but with J.K. Simmons stealing the show as the rambunctious apple-pie loving President Howard T. Ackerman.

Saving the best till last, we have the Empire of the Rising Sun. Here we have one of the finest factions seen in a *C&C* game, by melding nanotechnology, robotics and Japan's samurai heritage, EA LA has created the perfect alternative to the Allies' and Soviet's more conventional arsenals. Many of the Empire's units can also transform into different vehicles, such as the Sea-Wing, which begins life as a bomber but can morph into a submarine and the Striker-VX, which can fill the role of an air-to-ground attack

The credits

Enter stage left...

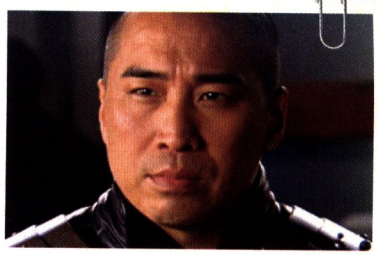


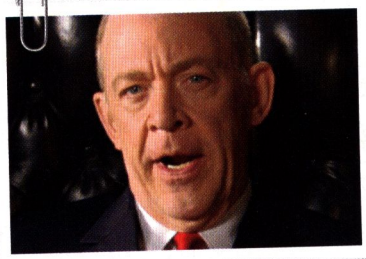
EMPEROR YOSHIRO

The deluded emperor of the Empire of the Rising Sun is convinced he's descended from a god and that it's his destiny to conquer the world. He also believes that an enemy must be defeated spiritually as well as physical. Played with gravitas by *Star Trek* legend George Takei.

CROWN PRINCE TATSU

Videogame voiceover regular Ron Yuan plays Emperor Yoshiro's hot-headed son, who favours annihilating an enemy rather than playing mind games to demoralise them – an attitude that doesn't sit well with his father.



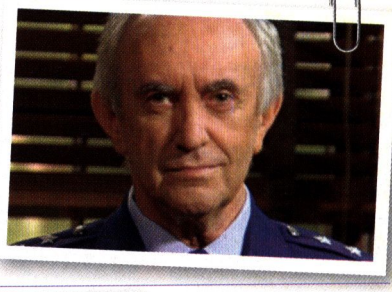


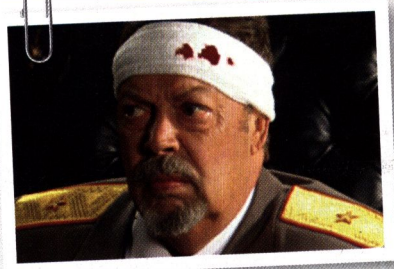
PRESIDENT ACKERMAN

Played by the brilliant J.K. Simmons, whose booming performances as newspaper editor J. Jonah Jameson in the *Spider-man* films was one of the highlights of the trilogy. The actor is in great form as the newly appointed gung-ho US president desperate to stop the spread of communism.

FIELD MARSHALL ROBERT BINGHAM

Jonathan Pryce (*Pirates of the Caribbean*) is excellent as the beleaguered Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Europe. With the rest of Europe defeated, he finds that only the plucky Brits stand in the way of the seemingly unstoppable Soviet armies. Tally ho!



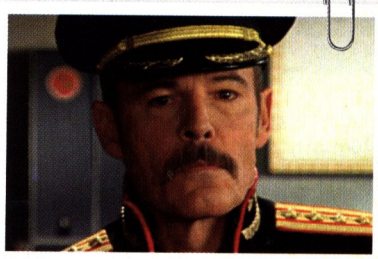


PREMIER CHERDENKO

Evergreen B-lister, and no stranger to FMVs, Tim Curry portrays a power-obsessed Russian premier in perhaps the most '*Red Alert*' performance in the game, which roughly translates to hammy acting and an accent that slips more than a bald tyre on an ice hockey rink.

GENERAL KRUKOV

Lost's Andrew Divoff (one-eyed Mikhail Bakunin in the series) is the mustachioed General who sees both you and Premier Cherdenko as threats rather than comrades. During the Soviet campaign, sparks soon fly between him and Premier Cherdenko as their opposing agendas emerge.



chopper or an AA gun. The versatility this provides is impressive as it can fundamentally change the way you approach missions.

King Onis are giant robotic warriors that crush tanks with their mechanical arms and reduce entire regiments to mush with blows from their Radiant Eyeblasters. But even this hulk is dwarfed by the might of the Shogun Executioner, a titanic tripod housing three giant, swivelling mech bodies wielding samurai swords that cleave through enemy armour like a katana through butter.

There's also a brilliant surprise cameo we won't spoil.

Brighton beach on one of its more sedate nights.

POWER BABES

The Empire also possesses more subtle and imaginative units, like the Sudden Transport that can morph its appearance to resemble an enemy vehicle. Rocket Angels meanwhile are brutal females clad in combat suits that wield devastating paralysing whips and missile launchers.

The Empire also has Yuriko Omega, their counterpart to Tanya and Natasha, and arguably the most powerful of the trio of killer babes. Don't let her pigtails fool you: this girl has psionic powers that can fell the most powerful pieces of battlefield technology. Strong male units, similar to Tanya, Natasha and Yuriko, are conspicuous by their absence.

The Empire's base-building abilities have some interesting strategic options, most notably the ability to construct buildings anywhere on the map, rather than in a set area, as is the case with the Allies and Soviets.

Plot-wise, things are again positive for the Japanese, with the faction featuring the most compelling and well-acted scenes that depict the struggle between old and new schools of thought, while some intelligent historic reversals – such as the US attacking the Japanese stronghold of Pearl Harbour – add substance. It's striking just how effective the more serious performances of the actors are during this campaign, providing ample proof that FMVs don't have to be corny to work, they just need to be acted by performers who don't see video games as a way to make rent payments between movies.

So clearly, *RA3*'s three factions and campaigns are in pretty good shape. But the true test comes on the battlefield. Resource gathering has again been kept to a minimum, with Ore the sole resource, you're alllowed to focus on carnage. *RA3* uses a similar expanding level dynamic to the one which served *Supreme Commander* so well, with most missions starting off as mere microcosms of their end forms. As each key objective is completed, the map opens up and you are tasked with performing increasingly Herculean feats.

While the visuals (water aside) are somewhat of a disappointment, *RA3* has

Sex sells

***Red Alert 3* has more female flesh on show than all of the other *C&C* games combined. And there's even a little something here for the ladies this time around. Here's a little taster...**

GEMMA ATKINSON
Plays: Eva McKenna
Gemma (of *Hollyoaks*) plays Eva, who gives you mission briefings during the Allied campaign while displaying a cleavage you could drown in.

RANDY COUTURE
Plays: Warren Fuller
Five-time UFC Champion and one of the most successful mixed martial arts fighters, Randy has biceps of steel and is also an excellent listener.

JENNY MCCARTHY
Plays: Tanya
With a pair of blasters like that no wonder the Russians and Japanese run scared. Bet those guns could do some damage too. Cher-ching! Etc.

GINA CARANO
Plays: Natasha Volkova
MMA champion Gina Carano plays Soviet sniper Natasha. What she lacks in acting ability she makes up for with thighs that can snap a man's spine.

Kill the power, kill the turrets.

Work with your co-commander to vanquish the enemy.

been buffed to an impressive sheen. Buildings pleasingly degenerate as they're pummelled while code stability is rock solid, and intelligent game design ensures you're never left feeling lost. Plots have also been integrated well into missions, with snippets of information and character development interspersed between the action, while the soundtrack is the finest in the series' history, slipping seamlessly between rousing Russian choruses and searing rock riffs.

A superb interface, the ability to garrison your men and unit veterancy are also worthy of high praise.

As I mentioned earlier, *RA3* has transformed the dynamic of

No power, no defences.

Natasha and friends.

"FMVs don't have to be corny to work, they just need to be acted by performers who don't see video games as a way to make the rent between movies"

Yuriko and lots of people she just blew up who don't want to be her friends.

C&C with co-commanders: an AI-controlled assistant. RTS games have flirted with this idea for years, most recently in *World of Conflict*, yet none have embraced it to this extent. *RA3* has taken that all-important step of making teamwork integral to every mission and the result is triumphant despite some AI irritants that we'll come to in just a moment.

A FRIEND INDEED

Whereas previous *C&C* games were typified by long periods of inactivity while you built up a sizeable force with which to assail the enemy, many of *RA3*'s missions are unrelenting battlefields that pull you in a multitude of directions at once. While you're building a force, your co-commander may be attacking the enemy, or repelling an onslaught that requires your aid to prevent the enemy from prevailing, generating some of the most dynamic battles seen in *C&C*.

During the larger conflicts *RA3*'s co-commander mechanic shows its true worth. You must not only coordinate with your ally but intelligently read a fluctuating battlefield, just like a true commander rather than a connoisseur of build and rush.

This is tempered only by your foes' AI lacking a proactive approach to offence, tending to probe your defences with incessant predictability. Why enemy AI remains

Protocols of conflict

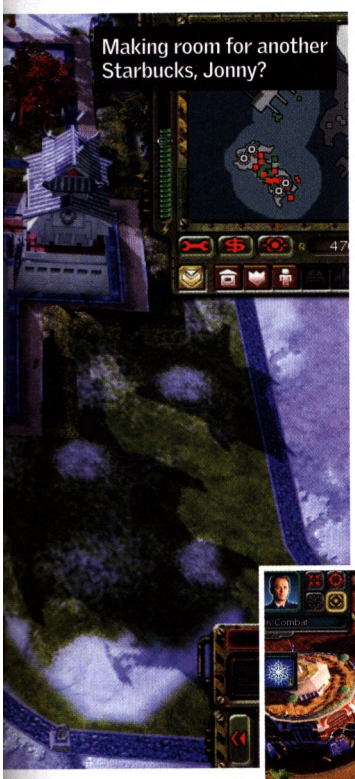
More support than a Wonderbra

Play well and you're rewarded with Security Points, which can be spent on upgradeable Top-Secret Protocols.

These are a collection of offensive and defensive support powers that can be called upon at any time to turn the tide of battle or gain the upper hand. Every Protocol has a cool down time, meaning you must think carefully about when to use each one.

Factions have unique Protocols and are upgraded throughout the course of a campaign. Protocols range from calling down satellites from space to pummel an enemy stronghold, to freezing everything within a set location.

One of the most visually spectacular Protocols is the Ultra-Magnetic Satellite, which sucks up targeted metallic units into space.



Kirov Airships may be slow, but they pack some serious firepower.

such an underdeveloped part of many RTS games is a mystery and a travesty, but *RA3* is not the only culprit of this.

Communicating with your co-commander is intuitive thanks to an excellent command interface that allows you to place attack and waypoint markers on the map for your sidekick to follow. Your co-commander also endeavours to mop up your mistakes, adeptly reading the situation and sending troops to back you up, if you've, say, left your base vulnerable to an enemy flanking attack.

"Despite this newfound intensity, *RA3* is let down by some irritating gripes"

Despite this newfound intensity, *RA3* is let down by some irritating gripes. Despite its numerous symphonies of mass destruction, the game also features a collection of under-developed missions that can be completed without breaking a sweat. At least one in four levels can be won by taking out key enemy buildings from afar with your offensive Top Secret Protocols (see 'Protocols of Conflict'), while you sit safely behind your base defences. There's also a lack of strategic design imagination, with *C&C* mainstays such as taking out power stations to deactivate turrets, a little too prevalent. There are also AI issues that blight proceedings, with stray units failing to find their way to a designated area, and occasional erratic behaviour from your co-commander.

Perhaps the game's biggest missed opportunity is the lack of true tactical variety between the co-commanders. While each has a distinctive character, there are no discernible differences when it comes to their battlefield abilities. Had each co-commander been lavished with deeper strengths and weaknesses that forced you work with each one differently, *RA3* could have been a true masterpiece, rather than just a highly entertaining RTS romp.

That's not to say that the game is bereft of tactics. Using combined arms is an essential skill to master, especially important given that naval combat (a bit too much like land battles, just on water) plays a major role in the proceedings. The problem from previous *C&C* games of being able to amass a horde of choppers and attack an enemy head-on still lingers, but with a balanced force, some strategic thought and quick mouse work, and the canny use of your co-commander, you'll find *RA3* also offers enough variety for even the more discerning military mind.

But the decision to make every campaign game a co-operative affair really shows its worth when you start playing these missions with a human ally. Yes, that's right, you and a mate can now hook up online, or by a LAN, and work co-operatively throughout the campaign. By using VOIP and placing markers for each other, you can coordinate with even more aplomb than when working with AI allies. And it's a hoot!

This facility gives *RA3* that all-important original slant on the tried-and-tested formula that has served the series so well for years. Yes it has its faults, and certain elements of the game do whiff of Xbox 360 dumbing-down, but it's never blatant and EA LA should be praised for creating such a widely accessible product that not only captures the essence of its predecessors, but infuses them with a whole new multiplayer dynamic. Sure, heritage is important, but you really can't beat bloody good gameplay, and *RA3* has that by the truckload. As well as bears. In armour. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Stylised, but lacking detail
Sound	Stunning soundtrack and SFX. Some hit and miss unit voiceovers
Multiplayer	Brilliant co-operative and skirmish options

- ✓ Three distinct factions
- ✓ Co-commanders are a hit
- ✓ Co-operative campaign play
- ✓ Frenetic and entertaining
- ✗ Some predictable and static enemy AI
- ✗ Co-commanders lack tactical diversity

86

Fun = *RA3*

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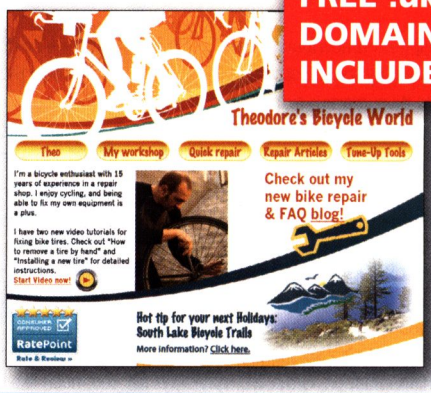

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You're either targeting the arm, or it's heavily irradiated.

FALLOUT 3

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Post-nuclear action role-player that merges '50s sci-fi kitsch with mutant dogs getting their heads blown off.

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and an NVIDIA GeForce 6800 or an ATI x850 graphics card, or better.

HOW IT STACKS

OBLIVION	95%
FALLOUT 3	91%
FALLOUT	91%

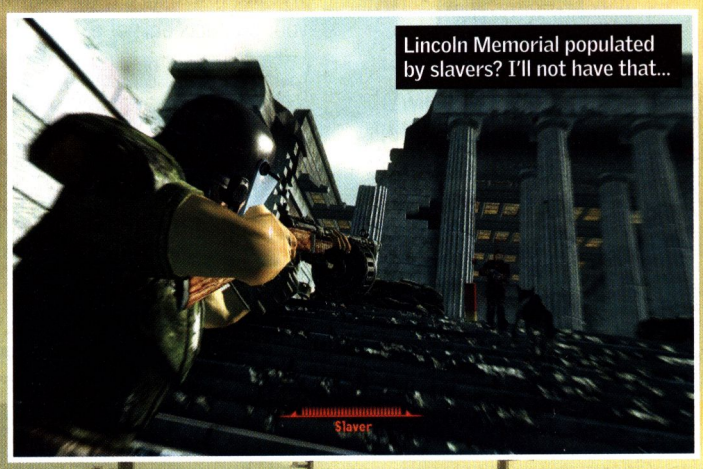
MY LOVE AFFAIR with *Fallout* has been long and torrid. We've had our ups (*Fallout* and *Fallout 2*), we've had our downs where we'd eat our meals in silence and stare vacantly into space (*Brotherhood of Steel* on the Xbox). We also had a time of tragedy with the closure of Black Isle and the sudden death of the nascent *Fallout 3*.

Now though, after much afterworld kerfuffle, my first true love is back – somehow possessing the body, form and looks of someone else. It's like when Patrick Swayze takes over Whoopi Goldberg in *Ghost* and has a full-on snog with Demi Moore. With me being Demi Moore. And? Well, it's strange at first – but after a while you're at it hammer and tongs.

GROWING UP

Fallout 3 is fiendishly imaginative, beautiful in its desolation, and brutal and uncompromising in its combat. However, it's not perfect – there are flecks of decayed meat here and there that the game's loud and overbearing critics will draw nourishment from as they gnaw upon this worthy tribute to the half-buried irradiated skeleton of *Fallout*. To find out why, how and wherefore, let's start at the beginning.

The first hour or so takes place in Vault 101, the latest in Bethesda's series of intelligent stabs at having you choose your character stats and abilities through story and gameplay rather than sitting po-faced in front of a series of spreadsheets. As a newborn baby you wordlessly demand your name and looks (while your presumably terrified mother



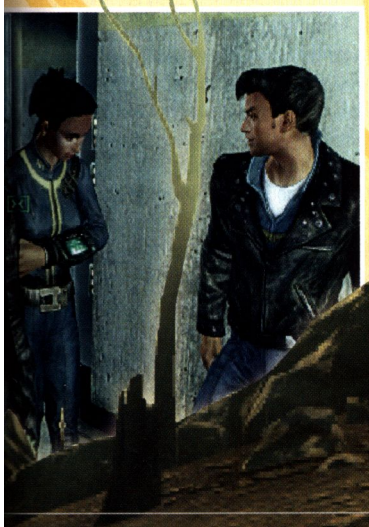
Lincoln Memorial populated by slavers? I'll not have that...

Thankfully every Vault was supplied with leather jackets and Brylcreem.

The *Fallout* Experience: hiding from a fake mammoth behind a dinosaur.

carks it through cardiac arrest), as a toddler you earmark your baseline stats, and as a grunting teen nod at your particular skills in a none-too-subtle "How do you feel about shooting someone in the head?" exam.

Having learned how to operate your handy Pip-Boy wrist-mounted PDA (and radio, Ordnance Survey map, audio player, rucksack and drugs stash) and shot a few cockroaches in slow-motion with a BB gun, your dad buggers off and everything goes boobs skywards.



"*Fallout 3* is fiendishly imaginative, beautiful and brutal. It's not, however, perfect"

"What *Fallout 3* does brilliantly is create a world where your actions influence the game"

"OK Dogmeat, you'll be Jenny and I'll be Forrest..."

Buddy movie

Let's have a party: me, you and the dog

Dogmeat is out there, hidden in the wasteland. He's fun to have around, but an absolute bugger to keep alive.

Dogs aren't all that tactical you see, and he has an unnerving tendency to attack things where you'd rather be throwing frag grenades. Still, that's dogs for you. The best thing about him is that when you command him to wait outside Vault 101, where it's less hairy, he'll respond with a puzzled "aroo?" then doefully pad off and mournfully wait.

Otherwise there's ghoul slaves, super mutants, Brotherhood of Steel ladies and various other people you can recruit hanging around in the wastes – though the chances are you won't run into them that early in the game.

Don't expect deep conversation while you're out in the wastes though, they're not the well of interaction that previous *Fallout* games have fallen into.

The draconian and puritan Overseer, father of your best friend Amata, starts quelling doubters with bullets – and with a little bit of further to-do you're off into the big lonesome outdoors.

The storyline that follows is a trail of quest-based breadcrumbs that has you tail your father through the ruins of Washington DC and beyond, enravelling you in a tale expertly shrouded in traditional *Fallout* concerns: Garden of Eden Creation Kits, the politically minded Enclave, different stuff stashed in different Vaults, the scarcity of water, the Brotherhood of Steel, giant scorpions... all that jazz.

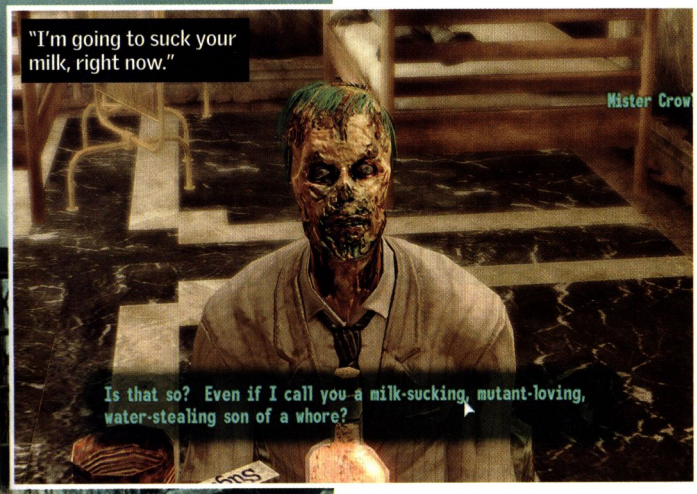
CONSEQUENCES

What *Fallout 3* does brilliantly, over and above anything Bethesda have done before, is create a world where your actions influence the game you're playing. Many quests are deeply layered, not at all of the 'give this plot item to this man standing in the corner' variety, and very often you'll complete them without having the foggiest idea of how deep the rabbit hole could have gone. I completed

The Behemoth is dispatched.

one quest – the search for a *Blade Runner*-style replicant – for an evil man in a hat, almost immediately after I got it. I simply agreed with a secret society of synthetic people sympathisers that I wouldn't seek out the vulnerable android. But I can only guess at how much gameplay I missed out on in terms of trying to earmark which NPC in Rivet City was going about their daily business, unaware of their Deckard-esque origins. Or what cool piece of tech the evil hat-wearing man would have rewarded me with for going down his dark side.

Another early quest had me dealing with a vampiric cult called The Family, who'd been blamed for a savage murder in the nearby settlement of Arefu (a place precariously balanced on a broken



motorway bridge) and for brainwashing a local teen. My response was to make my way to their lair deep in the Washington subway system, dodging their bear traps, mines and homemade booby-traps as I went. I turned up during some kind of church service and interrupted the sermon with a few stealthily placed mines of my own and a couple of tossed grenades. One extremely hard-won battle later, I had not only a bunch of decapitated bloodsuckers at my feet, but also a flaming metal sword called a 'shishkebab', removed from the corpse of their leader, that would put me in good stead for melee combat for the next 15 hours of the game.

"Hooray!" I thought, "I'm a regular wasteland badass."

Only when in discussion with a fellow reviewer did I discover that if I'd been a bit more Poirot about it I'd have learnt the people I'd slaughtered were a bunch of entirely pleasant, yet heavily misunderstood, individuals. I could have brought peace to the region with controlled blood loss, and I would also have been taught the ability to regain health through the use of bloodpacks – which would have been invaluable later.

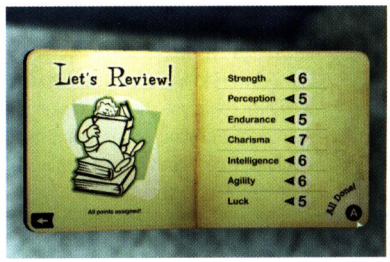
There are unseen quest branches going this way and that, and decisions you make often rear their head later in the game – I dealt with the situation in Vault 101 at the start of the game with minimum bloodshed, for example. Ten hours later this led to me picking up a radio signal distress call from my friend Amata calling me back into the Vault to help bring peace back to it – after which, even then, I could have left it in several different situations.

To this day I have no idea if something similar could have happened if I'd have been more murderous upon my initial escape from the Vault. When playing *Fallout 3* your experience will be very different from mine, and that is far and away the most stunning thing about it.

We ought to touch on my problems with *Fallout 3* now though, as they indirectly spring from this added quest depth. In *Oblivion*, smaller more perfunctory quests would

Wanted: an experienced and specially skilled perky goat

The baseline stats of *Fallout 3* in all their glorious numeracy

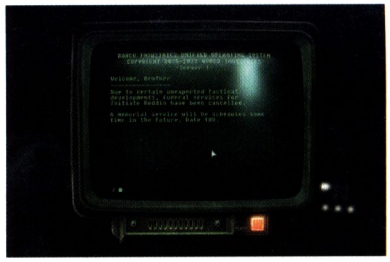


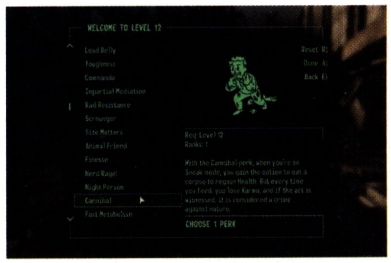
SPECIAL

Your baseline character stats are set at the very start, but can occasionally be increased by things happening in-game, or more regularly through the intake of addictive chems like Jet or Mentats. In truth you'll rarely run into trouble with these stats unless you've become reliant on the latter.

SKILLS

You get to pile extra points into your various skills every time you level up, and the number of skills have been condensed since the last time *Fallout* wandered round the block a decade ago. Specialist in small guns, big guns, sneakage or Science? Repairing stuff or chatting? The choice, as they say, is yours.





PERKS

Available every time you level up, which robs them slightly of their special-ness if you'll excuse the vague word match-up, Perks given you particular advantages in particular situations. One, Right Here Right Now, automatically sends you up a level. Which, now perks are one-a-level, is a bit weird to be honest. Also: cannibalism.

KARMA

In *Fallout 3* an unseen omniscient god watches you stealthily stealing stuff or cannibalising corpses in front of terrified children, then whispers things into a vast NPC subconsciousness. You can play it good or bad. But those who thieve, annoyingly, cannot avoid getting marked with the sinner stick.

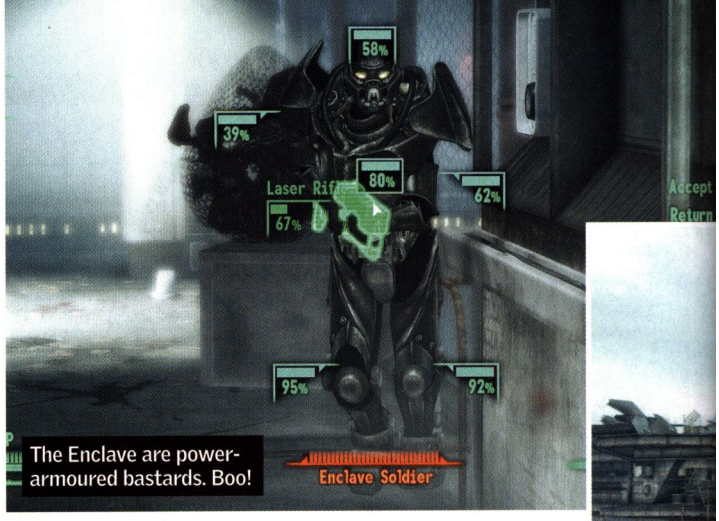
spring up unbidden in your quest log. At any time you had the option of following one of the four guilds' quest paths, the main storyline or any number of townspeople's grumbles.

At its opening, *Fallout 3* opens up far less to you: nearby Megaton's quest-count is actually rather small, less pressing stuff that could have been marked up as quests before don't appear on your Pip-Boy (someone feeling suicidal going somewhere at a certain time of day, someone taking drugs in a water treatment plant at night) and though the wilderness is tempting a lack of map markers won't have you straying for long. As such you're very much encouraged to follow the main storyline at first, and this is where *Fallout 3*'s inadequacies rise.

First up, the wrecked Washington DC is stunningly realised – but it's a nightmare to navigate. You can't wander straight through each street, walls of insurmountable rubble are everywhere, and as such you have to negotiate the subway system. In the same way as *Oblivion*, the Pip-Boy's local map shows you which route you should be taking – whether overground, underground or wombling free – but with everything a rubbly shade of brown, the tube layout of DC somewhat alien to most players, and paths to and from the main locations being complicated and poorly marked, it means that the map system simply isn't good enough. Actually it's frustrating.

I'd also argue that towns and quest hubs are poorly set out – brilliant as Megaton's crater-bound setting is, its verticality makes it hard to remember which path goes where; while the awe-inspiring setting of aircraft carrier/town Rivet City is peppered with load zones and layers that make it hard to navigate.

What's more, the fact that most players will find themselves naturally funnelled through this early storyline stuff with a relatively bare quest log and a horde of enemies in beautiful yet samey environs means that at times DC can gain a touch of the *Doom 3*s.

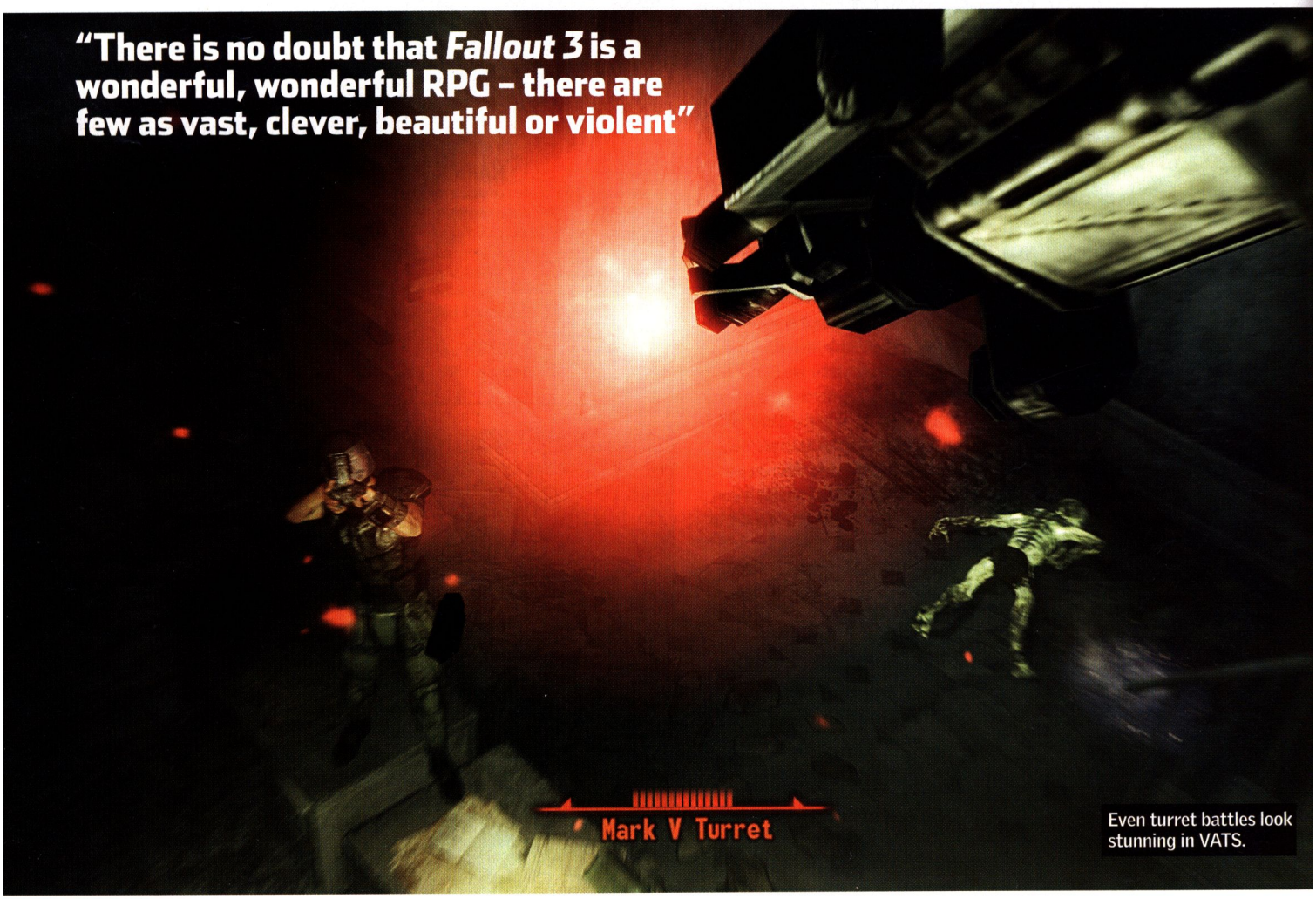


The Enclave are power-armoured bastards. Boo!

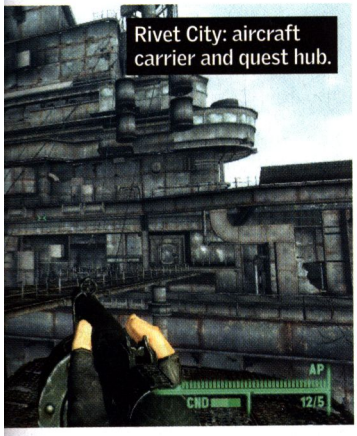
Despite all the above, stick with *Fallout*. Once you know the lay of the land and have visited enough landmarks to make fast travel an option, these issues almost completely evaporate as the game directs you back into the furthest-flung depths of the wilderness, where wandering is a far more enjoyable option. In fact it would be remiss of me to fail to indicate that the storyline takes you to some fiendishly imaginative environs: a Vault-Tec sponsored vault exhibit in the Museum of Technology, for example, or the *Fallout* equivalent of the wonderful 'Painting' quest in *Oblivion* that I won't spoil, but is where *Pleasantville* and the *Red Dwarf* episode *Gunmen of the Apocalypse* collide. There is no doubt that *Fallout 3* is a wonderful, wonderful RPG – there are few as vast, clever, beautiful or violent.

The action, and the slow-motion targeting assistance system known as VATS, is brilliant: it's supremely satisfying to queue three separate headshots, or to toss a grenade into a morass of enemies in slow-motion, and watch the giblets fly. Sure the camera bollocks up affairs one critical hit in 20, but you'll forgive it for the pure puppy dog exuberance you'll feel

"There is no doubt that *Fallout 3* is a wonderful, wonderful RPG – there are few as vast, clever, beautiful or violent"



Even turret battles look stunning in VATS.



Rivet City: aircraft carrier and quest hub.

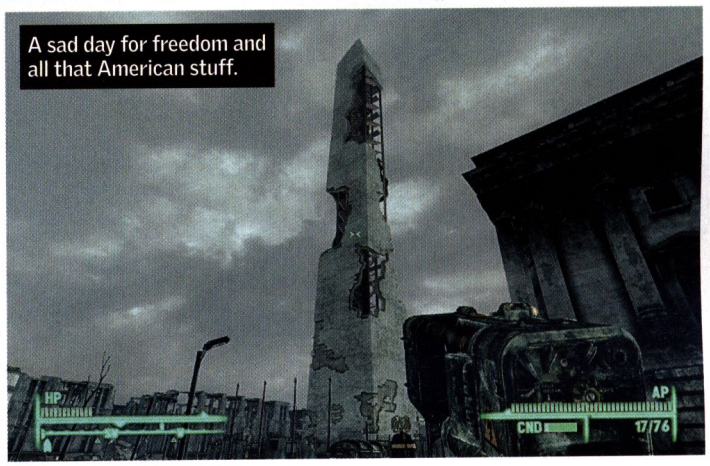
National Treasure

"...and the land! Of the! Free! (Apart from the slaves)"

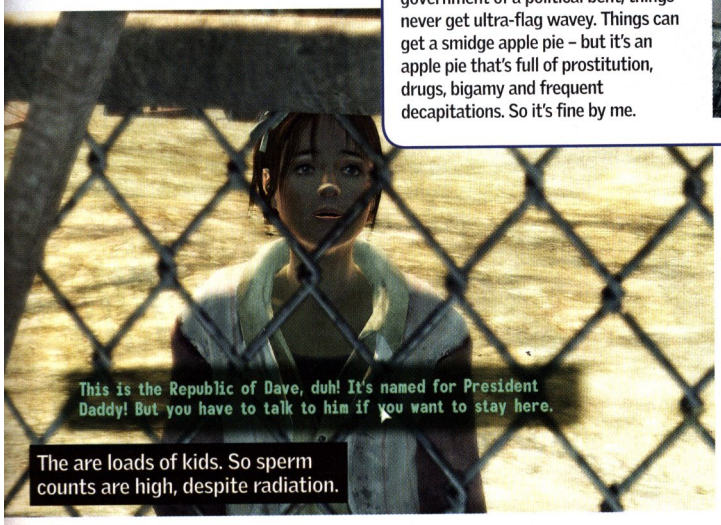
What with *Fallout 3*'s Washington DC setting there's some Nic Cage-esque haring around the place trying to find Declarations of Independence and American memorabilia.

"Oh noes! Slavers have taken over Lincoln's memorial!" Oh, cruel irony! What shall you beset us with next? A supermutant picking his teeth with a cherry tree claiming that he didn't smear excrement all up the side of the Washington Monument?

In all seriousness, what with the villains of the piece being a faux-government of a political bent, things never get ultra-flag wavey. Things can get a smidge apple pie – but it's an apple pie that's full of prostitution, drugs, bigamy and frequent decapitations. So it's fine by me.



A sad day for freedom and all that American stuff.

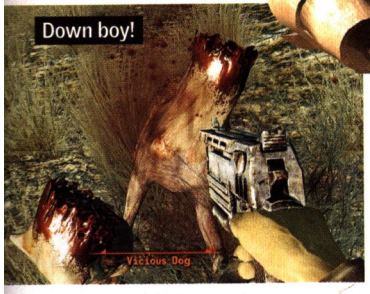


The are loads of kids. So sperm counts are high, despite radiation.

whenever a well-placed armshot pings a foe's weapon off-screen, or a ghoul is fried when its claws are just inches away from your third-person fizzog.

And what ghouls! The fast-zombie stylings of *Fallout*'s favourite irradiated creations (non-sentient variety) are a joy to fight, while the *Fallout* menagerie has been comfortably extended to include mutated bears, bloat flies and nippy giant vole things, as well as the *Fallout* standards of Deathclaws, Centaurs (which are a bit crap), Radscorpions and giant ants. All of which can be seen tussling with each other if met out on the open range.

The return of the SPECIAL system is also an entirely welcome one, a more detailed description of which can be found on page 53. At first it seems like you're being given too many points to slot into your various skills whenever you level up (and you now get a perk for every level, *Fallout* faithful – not one in three), but levels do space themselves out a bit more later in the game. While we're on the subject, progress towards your next level is not only shown on-screen, but any gained experience is coupled with a great 'kerching!' sound effect, which when paraded with a gaffer-tape noise whenever you're repairing something, shows a great comedic resourcefulness on the part of Bethesda. It just sounds and feels right.



Down boy!

"Must walk in an urgent and purposful manner"

RESPECT IS PAID

The fact that the world doesn't level up around you *Oblivion*-style (the non-story bits at least) also means that the world feels more visceral and real – in some areas you'll feel fine, in others you'll feel entirely out of your depth.

The game tightens up various nuggets of Bethesdan gaming furniture as well – number one being that the completely random shit you find inside boxes, cupboards and compartmental corpses now actually have a use. If this game had callipers you'd probably be able to do something with them. Schematics of weapons, which can be found or bartered for, list random stuff that you can combine to create home-made armaments – whether we're talking gear sticks, pool balls, hair dryers or pulleys. So you consider carrying around the worthless tat you come across.

Other nips and tucks include using harvested weaponry as spare parts for repairing guns, being over-encumbered slowing you down rather than rooting you to the spot, and a lockpicking minigame that requires a degree of skill and returns a degree of satisfaction.

Is this a worthy continuation of *Fallout*? I think it is. There was perhaps more wit to Black Isle's games, certainly an added layer of complexity that was found in PC-only role-playing a decade ago and that shows no sign of ever truly returning in the mass market. But in terms of taking the old, retaining its core values and opening the game up to newer, younger, audiences – Bethesda have succeeded. The fundaments of *Fallout* are still here, even if the fug that covers it all is *Oblivion*-scented.

For a pure-hearted escapist adventure, and what I consider the meatiest and most satisfying combat system around, you can't go wrong with *Fallout 3*. It's been a rocky road, but we got there in the end. PCZ

PCZONE

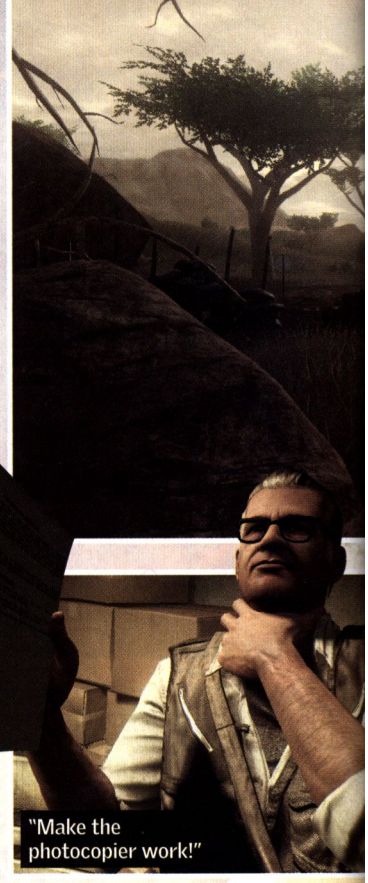
Graphics **Beautiful, desolate, relentlessly rubbly**
Sound **Pretty much perfect, but voice-acting fairly variable**
Multiplayer **Nowt**

- ✓ Successfully picks up the *Fallout* torch
- ✓ Brilliant and imaginative quests
- ✓ Great combat, excellent stats system
- ✓ Beautiful and desolate
- ✗ Washington DC a pain to navigate
- ✗ Some *Oblivion*-esque niggles

91

Learn to love the bomb

Far Cry 2 is crosshair-less by default, so work on those iron-sight skills.


"Make the photocopier work!"

FAR CRY 2

Jon Blyth uses pliers to pull an agonising review out of his kneecap

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE farcry.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Doesn't live up to its ambitions, but with ambitions this high, that's hardly surprising. Still bloody good.

Minimum system requirements:
Pentium 4 3.2GHz, 1GB RAM, NVIDIA 6800 or ATI X1650 or better graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

FAR CRY	93%
CRYSIS	92%
FAR CRY 2	90%

THERE'S AN ASSUMPTION that when developers move from a publisher, they take their talent, leaving a massive, unfillable void. So after Crytek's team split with Ubisoft after making *Far Cry*, there was a period when people thought *Far Cry 2* would be a poor cousin to *Crysis*. But Ubisoft did a brilliant job in reversing that assumption, making *Far Cry 2* feel more anticipated than *Crysis* ever was. It's not just journalists frothing each other up, either. Magazines with *Far Cry 2* on their covers sell very well, making it the Posh Spice of gaming.

Far Cry 2 is almost bizarre in its ambition, offering combinations and choices that gamers don't expect. You can choose from nine characters at the outset, and although it doesn't really have an impact on your abilities, the people you don't choose will become your friends in the world. How you interact with them is what we're told makes *Far Cry 2* a masterpiece of adaptive storytelling. It's a phrase with a strong whiff of bullshit about it, as much as "living, breathing city" or "and the dirt is gone!". So let's see how it goes...

The game opens with a good old-fashioned taxi ride. It's a world that's definitely worth showing off – depending on the time of day, Africa is all shades of dirty or all kinds of pretty. Nighttime is a murky affair, but never to the point where you'll need a torch. Dusk is a dusty rainbow of brown. It's like Ubisoft have been granted access to whole new exciting swatches of the colour, and it's still curiously beautiful. If brown.

The blazing daytimes are when Africa is at its most traditionally beautiful – with all the settings up, the game is a blaze of colour, bloom, fire and shadows. But don't fret, as it scales down to something a bit more mundane, but still manageable. An 8800 card should be able to handle the perfectly acceptable Very High graphics settings, but you'll need something a bit special for the gorgeous Ultra.

NO HOLIDAY

Your taxi driver also takes the time to introduces you to the game's themes. People are fleeing the country, he says, gesturing to a plane, but only the rich people can afford the fares. He points out a fire, and you can see how quickly it spreads in the country's dry flora. A patrol drives by you. The military types will leave you alone he says, adding "mostly" as a qualification that turns out to be grossly understated. His speech ends as you reach your destination – which seems like an appropriate time for you to have a serious attack of malaria and collapse.

This is where you first meet the Jackal, the arms dealer and brute-philosopher who's the centre of your game. It's a great part of the open-world illusion that this meeting isn't always in the same place. His speech, however, remains the same – and his musings on being thought of as a monster, but never becoming a beast, are well-scripted and intelligent. He's a good character, but one who you instinctively want to kill.

Although the writing is excellent, there's something strange about the delivery of the scripts. It's like the actors have been told to talk in a passionless monotone, and save time by not leaving gaps between the sentences, making them sound like they're being read by a highly intelligent, but socially inept, child. This doesn't ruin the game at all – in fact, it conveys a numbness to the carnage around you with a disturbing efficiency.

Your first missions give you a more hands-on introduction to the world. The game's buddies (people who don't reach for their guns and kill you the second they see your face) hang out in Mike's Bar. Your best buddy will give you missions, and your second-best buddy can rescue you from a critical wound (see Healthy nice

You'll find yourself pointing guns at sunsets quite often.
Car speedometers actually work – hoorah for detail!
"Grargh! My blood!"
"The acting conveys a numbness to the carnage around you with a disturbing efficiency"

Getting around

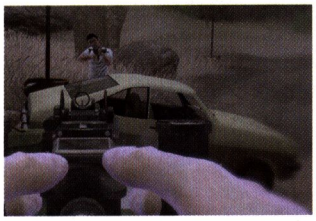
Malaria messes up your fitness, so take to the road...

JEEP

They've got their names on the steering wheel, but if Jeep paid for it, they'll be disappointed with how easily I grounded myself on a gentle slope.

GUNBOATS

There's a network of rivers that take you nearly everywhere, and although people still give chase, it's a slightly more picturesque way to get around.



BASIC CAR

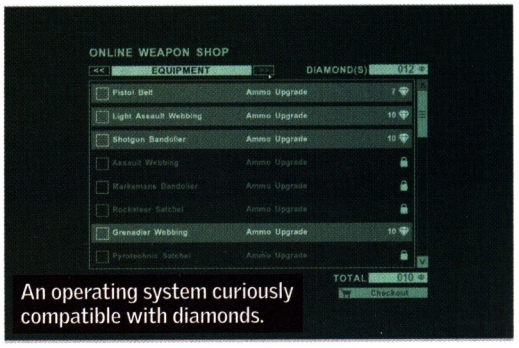
It's faster than a gun truck, but you'll soon end up with white steam coming out of your bonnet and no acceleration. You can still run people over, though.

GUN TRUCK

Great for doing your weekly shop, or just picking up some bits. Tapping C puts you in the gun turret, where you can kill anyone who takes your spot.

Mounted guns are powerful, but they're only occasionally useful.

The mortar is fun, but incredibly difficult to use effectively.



An operating system curiously compatible with diamonds.

nice) during a mission. This, they will do once, until you go to bed. Then, they'll be eerily sitting at your bedside, telling you they're back.

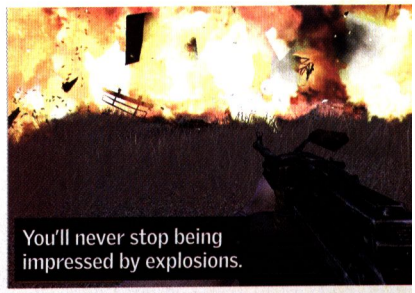
Then, you're be introduced to the first act of the game's main city, Pala. This is where the factions have their HQs, and it's your main go-to place for plot-advancing missions. Not just the two factions, who've been waging a Jackal-supplied war against each other, but also the Underground. These guys, led by the local churchman, have access to malaria meds, and they're the only non-buddies who seem motivated by anything other than killing people.

CITY HUB

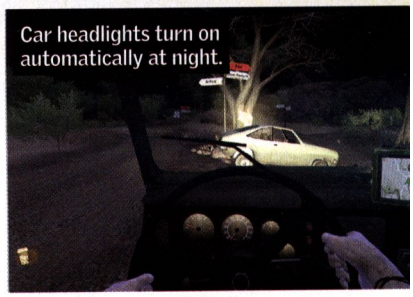
The city's map is about a mile square, and mission objectives pop up all over it. It might take you two or three minutes to drive to a location – and dealing with the hostilities en route can actually take more time than the mission itself.

The fundamental structure of the game – the open world, the temptation to explore, the mission chains and the distractions – are all reminiscent enough of *GTA IV* to warrant a comparison. Where Rockstar created a living, breathing city, Ubisoft have created a dying, gasping country. But *GTA*, with its blue circles to drive into and jarring cuts

If this was in-game, he'd be being shot at by now.



You'll never stop being impressed by explosions.



Car headlights turn on automatically at night.

Storyline

Great stories are memorable

On the basis that a great story should stick with you, and have you thinking about it, here are my recollections of the storyline, stripped of spoilers.

The AFP asked me to kill someone, who was a nuisance. They told me the other members of the AFP didn't know about it though, so they'd attack me. They also didn't seem to mind if I shot them, which is a bit blasé by anyone's standards. Then I blew up some greenhouses and rescued my best buddy from a plane crash, and killed this guy's dad. The murderous son was so pleased he gave me a Jeep.

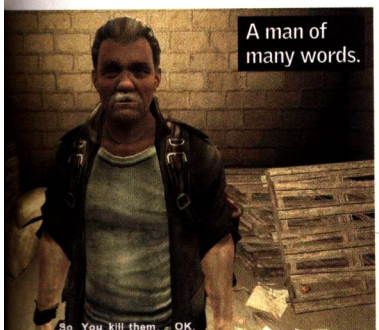
There's lots of great stuff going on in *Far Cry 2*, but a strong sense of overarching narrative just isn't part of it. Just enjoy what you're doing, not why you're doing it.

to acted scenes, can only dream of feeling this fluid. *Far Cry 2*'s missions, and the options open to you, are more varied and interesting. I'll happily say that *Far Cry 2* is better than *GTA IV*. But that praise comes with the blasphemy that, when it comes to pure gameplay, I don't think that *GTA IV* is all that.

Getting around *Far Cry 2*'s world is entirely fluid and plot exposition is from the seamless school of *Half-Life*. You're just as mute as Freeman, presumably because no-one wanted to record nine voiceovers for the main character. As a result, the character you choose is the one you have least attachment to. I forgot who I was playing halfway through the game.

This is also a savage game. Odd, then, that it won't be as controversial as *GTA*. Is that because it's more realistic? Because it's not copy-able by teenagers? Or because it's not easily summarised in a way that tabloid writers like? Maybe it's just because violence in other countries is generally considered fair game. The passionless animosity and bloodshed in and around Pala, not to mention some of the gut-churning amateur surgery you perform on yourself, make this very much an adult game.

"*Far Cry 2*'s missions, and the options open to you, are more varied and interesting than *GTA IV*"



A man of many words.

If anyone sees you, they'll try to kill you. If you drive past another car on the road, they'll chase you. If they've got a mounted gun, and most of them do, they'll try to shoot you down without shouting over to ask if you're that guy. Some games try to make you feel guilty about your actions. *GTA*, *Deus Ex*, and *KOTOR* all gave your enemies enough personality to think twice about killing them. *Far Cry 2* doesn't give you that option: it quickly teaches you to feel nothing, to kill anyone you see, as readily as they'd kill you. When you lose 20 minutes progress because someone runs you over in their Jeep, you learn quickly to walk quietly or kill first.

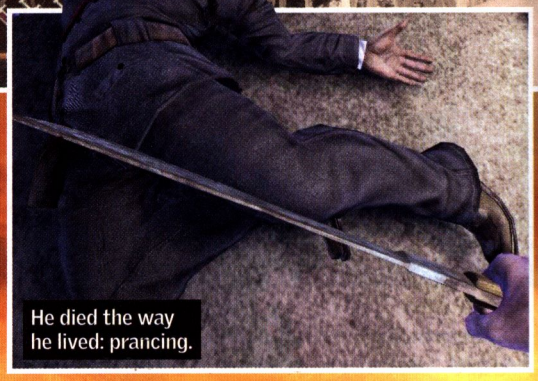
Savagery aside, the difficulty is pitched well; easy is easy, with only wild recklessness killing you off. Shift up the difficulty, and the enemy AI becomes excellent. They stop standing so much out in the open, and try to flank and circle you. This intelligence increases as the game goes on.

The options open to you in completing a mission are good, too. Observing the path of a car I'd been told to destroy, I parked across the bridge, climbed a hill, and sniped the guy from above. A friend said that he'd done a similar thing, but instead of sniping, he'd set the bridge on fire with a Molotov cocktail.

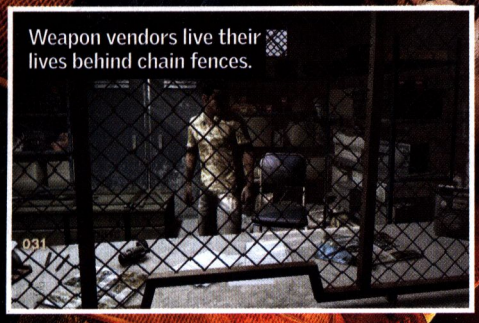
Bearing the constant animosity of the locals in mind, *Far Cry 2* can feel like a slog. The phrase "it's as good as you make it" applies, but that always rings alarm bells. It's a euphemism for "it can be fairly repetitive", and "some of the stuff I did was awesome, when I bothered trying". Escaping from an important assassination, I decided to try out the bridge-burning approach, scooted off across a rope bridge, and torched it with a grenade. The bridge collapsed with two people on it, leaving me feeling so chuffed and pumped with myself that I decided to hang around and snipe the ones stranded on the other side.

FAN FACTION

The work you'll do for the factions – the UFLL and the AFP – form the backbone of the first half of the game. They're what pushes that important 'game completion' percentage number towards 100, and they trigger other world events. They'll nearly always trigger a phone call from your best buddy, who'll offer you an alternative approach. At first, this'll feel like you're choosing between the two missions, which feels weird when the factions so unexpectedly pay you up front for your troubles. But you won't miss out on parts of the game if you do accept a diversion from your buddy – in fact, they're



He died the way he lived: prancing.



Weapon vendors live their lives behind chain fences.

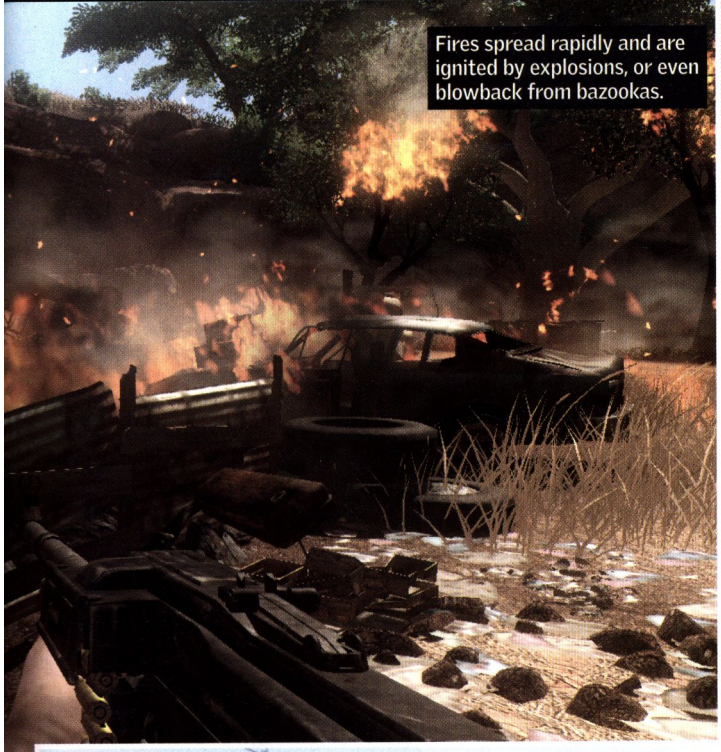
Every single vehicle, even crappy boats, contains an expensive GPS.

generally the more entertaining parts of the game, and lead to some of the most interesting areas – like a greenhouse and a scrap yard.

YOUR KILLER BFF

Once your buddy stuff is done (and your buddies can die, permanently, during missions unless you save them with deft medical skills) you'll get back to your lonely main mission. Your reward for the side mission is usually an upgrade to your safe houses. Ammo, health boxes, massage chairs, furry toilet seats – the further you progress, the more you'll be glad you unlocked them.

Missions include everything you'd expect – storming a fortress, chasing down a car,



Fires spread rapidly and are ignited by explosions, or even blowback from bazookas.

Whack up the DirectX 10 settings and you've got the prettiest game ever created.

connections get you out now.

assassinations – and the changeability of the mission locations means you might find yourself travelling a difficult path. Don't expect a gentle introduction to areas from this game – you'll be sent across the map from the beginning.

Stealing a car isn't a crime that anyone bothers about here, so fill your boots. Besides, if you drive along the roads, it'll soon get destroyed, forcing you to steal another. That's one way to get where you're going – TWOC leapfrog. Alternatively, you can be a bit craftier: drive off-road. If you're in a decent car, and want to keep it, get out and deal with assailants on foot. Once you stop treating *Far Cry 2* like an obligation to do the next faction mission instantly, it opens up. When you start taking the action seriously, and plan your attacks from a vantage point, then you'll start to get the thrill of a plan coming together.

The monocular doesn't work in the same way as the first *Far Cry* – you can't tag people. You use it to spot provisions, whether that's ammo, health, whatever – and once you've spotted it, it'll be on your map. The world is full of sweet, findable things, and more importantly for a game that's suffered accusations of overkill with the colour brown, the world they're hidden in is varied. Rivers, abattoirs, oases, desert – it's all decayed, battered and makeshift, but the variety they've fit into that template is fantastic.

"There's nothing like *Far Cry 2* around, and even with its flaws, it's a game you certainly grow to love"

Meanwhile, you've got malaria medicine to earn if you want to stave off those debilitating attacks, and guns to unlock with missions from the weapon shop guy. Diamonds, currency found with a handy detector, are no use unless you're going to buy stuff with them, and the weapon missions are great distractions from the main plot. The maps are full of other objectives, too – at some points, the map is full of possible missions, and you can unlock any safe house by killing the two or three people feeling safe there. These safe houses are less important on the PC, as you can save whenever you like – but if you decide for personal reasons to go with the 360 version, they're absolutely vital.

The buddy system is, sadly, one of the more transparent parts of the open-world illusion. Once found they appear in Mike's Bar, but it's only your two best buddies that impact on your world. This'll change from game to game, but their purposes remains distinct: one is an extra life, the other is a mission hub. The rest step up should the others die. While this is a great system, it's certainly not a staggering leap into bold new narrative territory. In making sure a dozen stories can be told, no story gets told particularly well.

What Ubisoft is trying to do is brilliant, and massive props are deserved for their pioneering spirit. But unless you play *Far Cry 2* through again, and realise the scope, it works against the overall narrative drive of the game. This isn't a crippling body blow, because the open-world aspect of the game is so good – but it's a shame that the main story feels more like a bunch of missions than anything holistic.

OPINION SPLITTER

Far Cry 2 is going to split people in the same way *BioShock* did. There'll be those people who don't get it, and hate the game because they didn't listen to the tapes, and dive into the world.

There'll also be those people with poorly developed bullshit detectors, who bought into the hype to the point where they have unreasonable expectations.

But if you want a great open-world game, that treats you like a grown-up, and has increasingly brilliant AI (so long as you don't play on the Easy mode), then *Far Cry 2* will give you plenty of enjoyment for a long time, in a beautifully realised African country.

There's nothing like it around, and even with its flaws, it's a game you certainly grow to love. PCZ

Healthy nice nice

It's lovely not being dead

Far Cry 2's health system is unique. You have five bars of health, each of which regenerate until they're wiped out. Then, you're onto your next bar. The last bar doesn't regenerate – it flashes red and gradually empties, which is when you die.

Before you finish bleeding out you have to press H to trigger one of a set of brilliantly disgusting animations involving DIY surgery using DIY tools, and restore yourself to two bars. But if you get hit or disturbed in that time, you'll have to start again.

This is a great system, that adds real stress to difficult gunfights. And it's always good to see a hero jamming a knife and pliers into a wound, to fish out a bullet.

PCZONE

Graphics: All kinds of beautiful
Sound: Tribally atmospheric, great AI grunts and script, oddly acted
Multiplayer: Standard FPS style

- Innovative storytelling
- Beautiful, large world
- Great mid-game world expansion
- Superb AI on harder modes
- One of the most open worlds
- Everyone hates you

90

Open wonder

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GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II: ENDLESS UNIVERSE

Daniel Griliopoulos finds the best *Civ* game isn't *Civ*

DEVELOPER Stardock
PUBLISHER Stardock/Kalypso
WEBSITE galciv2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

The biggest *Civ* game ever made, with Sid Meier nowhere to be seen. *Alpha Centauri*, eat your heart out.

Minimum system requirements:
Pentium III 800Mhz or equivalent, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

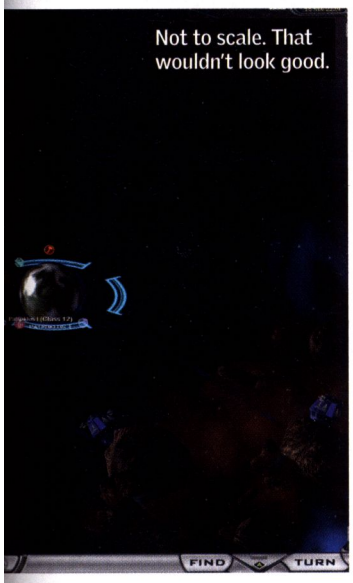
SPORE	95%
GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS II: ENDLESS UNIVERSE	92%
CIVILIZATION IV	92%

LET'S GLOSS OVER our former reviewer's previous opinion of *Galactic Civilization II*, blame it on someone who's left and can't fight back, and reiterate the generally received facts about *GCII*: this is the only really good challenger to Sid Meier's *Civilization* for the 4X strategy genre. And, as the word "galactic" implies, it's bigger, funnier and just as fine looking as its supposedly superior Leonard Nimoy-voiced cousin.

The game sees your race (chosen from the original selection of 10 highly differentiated races) starting out with a single planet, a colony, a survey ship (essential for exploring the myriad goodies), and a space mining vessel. Your aim is simply to dominate the universe, one way or another. How the map is set out depends entirely on what starting conditions you've chosen, from a simple small map with a couple of stars and races, to the imponderable measureless massiveness of the Immense map size, which frankly breaks weak minds asunder in its scope, as it features thousands of planets, dozens of races (major and minor), wormholes and asteroid belts. Thankfully, the universe is represented as a flat 2D plane, otherwise this would prove mind-bogglingly incomprehensibly complicated.

Imagine that blowing a raspberry on your stomach.

There's also a more limited campaign mode – the weakest part of the game, though it's still pretty damn fine – which drops you into a series of preset *GCII* maps with different starting setups (number of planets, allies, starting armies) and lists of objectives. But because of the enormous scope of *GCII*, it's very hard to focus on a target clearly and also irritating to start your whole research tree from scratch each level. That said, the story's well done, the scripting and writing of your alien compadres/foes is darkly funny, and the basic game mechanic is both addictive and endearing. And this contains all the



campaigns of all three games. There's also a semi-multiplayer, called Multiverse, but it's more of a posh ranking table, so we'll skip past it.

MEIER: WORRY

The *Endless Universe* part of this release is a combination of two of *GCII's* expansions: *Dark Avatar* and *Twilight of the Arnor*. This means there's a million little tweaks to the core gameplay in here; firstly, *Dark Avatar* brings the addition of mineable asteroid belts and a variety of horrible-yet-just-inhabitable planet types, to more important things like the AI-controlled Mega-Events (which can help to rebalance unbalanced conflicts) and customisable (but balanced) races to play against or as. *Twilight of the Arnor* brings larger maps, unique technology trees for all 12 civilizations, and six editors.

Civ-il Spore

Could *GCII* be turned into *Spore*? Yes, easily.

As we all know, *Spore*'s biggest innovation was making us, the paying plebs, do all the grunt work in the game by making the interesting creatures. Hand-crafting that much content would take the lifetime of a design team, but *Galactic Civilizations II* has something similar.

All your spaceships are completely customisable. There are basic units always on offer, but you won't succeed if you don't take advantage of newly researched upgrades, and you can also build them from scratch visually.

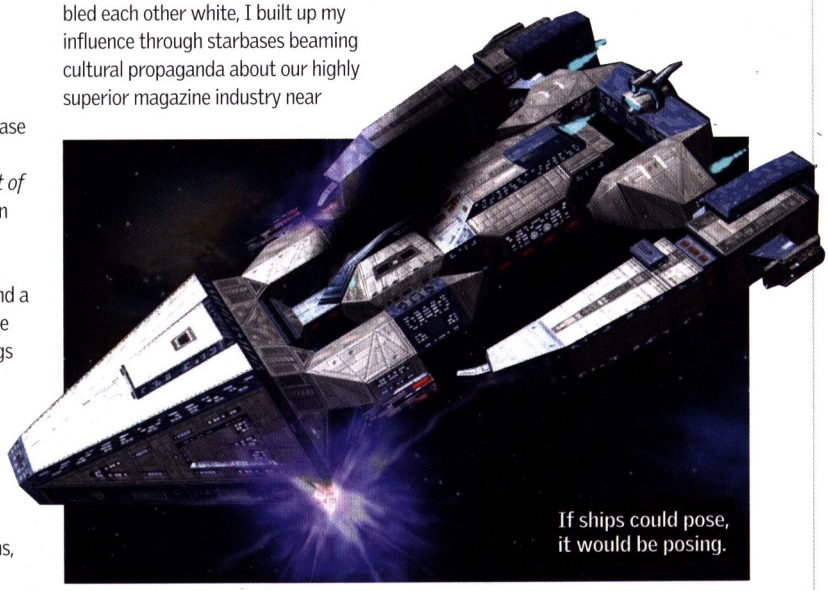
All Stardock need to do is patch *GCII* to feed players' content to each other through the Multiverse ranking tables, so it randomly appears as enemy races on other player's games and make the whole thing a lot cuter, and you've got *Spore*. Or at least *Spore*'s final level.

"Be warned though: buy *Galactic Civilizations II*, and you may never need another strategy game"

In my last play through, as the End of the Zoners led by NotPorter, I destroyed the leading power in my galaxy without firing a shot. I built up my diplomacy skills so that every time the Drath threatened war I bought them off with new tech, whilst in the background paying the second and third strongest civilisations to attack them. Whilst they bled each other white, I built up my influence through starbases beaming cultural propaganda about our highly superior magazine industry near my borders. Soon, their armies were crushed and their planets were defecting in droves. The next time I played, as the Korath, my civilisation collapsed and entire planetary systems went turncoat as massive unsustainable debts created through an expansionist militarist policy led to a mid-game cultural stagnation.

Few games allow for emergent story-telling, but when they do they're the best of games: *PlanetSide*, *Spore* and *Dwarf Fortress* to name a few. Yet only *Galactic Civilizations II* has the amazing size and depth, intelligent, charismatic AI participants, and array of victories or failures to do this constantly and consistently. This game genuinely throws up new stories each time you play, on both a grand and a minor level.

Be warned though: buy *GCII*, and you may never need another strategy game ever again. PCZ



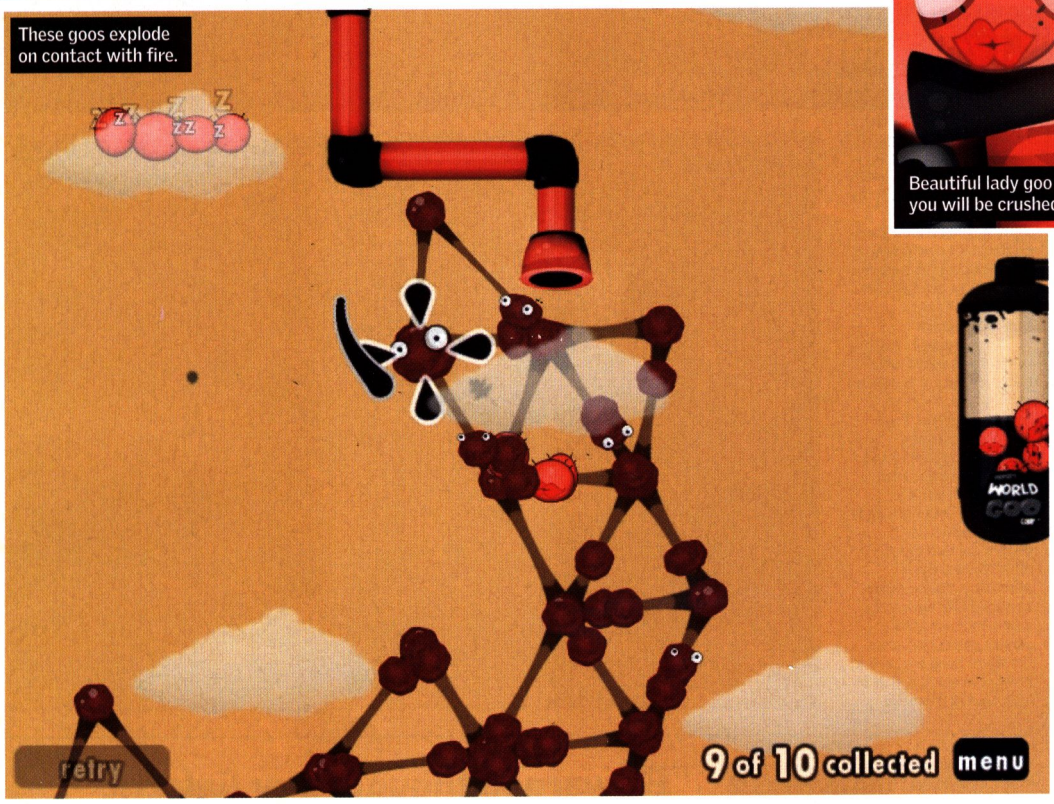
PCZONE

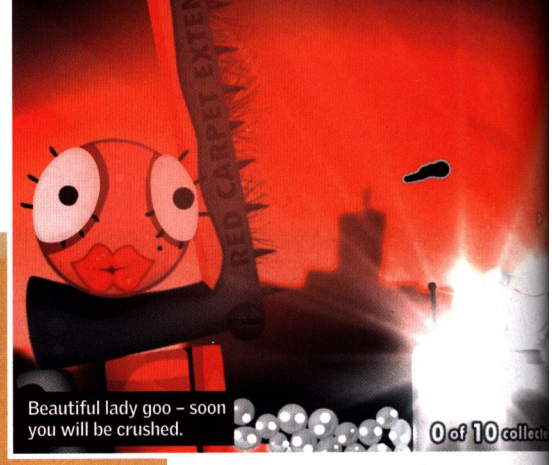
Graphics **Journeyman rendering of intergalactic conflict**
Sound **Ace**
Multiplayer **Just a ranking board**

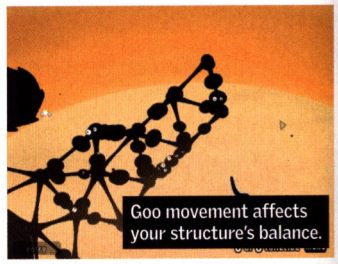
- ✓ Massive, deep strategy
- ✓ Nigh-perfect AI
- ✓ Endless, varied gameplay
- ✓ Customisable everything
- ✗ No true multiplayer

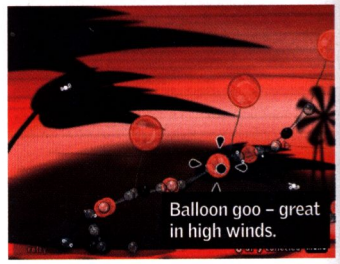
92

It's full of stars









WORLD OF GOO

From an experimental tower to a big, beautiful world: *Jon Blyth* falls in love

DEVELOPER 2D Boy
PUBLISHER 2D Boy
WEBSITE www.2dboy.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $19.99 (Around £12)

AT A GLANCE...

Help a bunch of sticky balls of tar escape an evil corporation. A top-class indie puzzler that shows up mainstream developers.

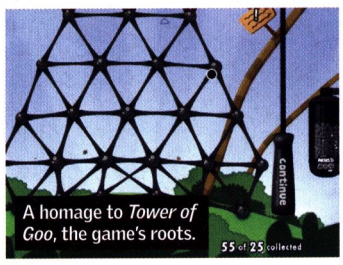
Minimum system requirements:
If you have a graphics card, you can play this.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF GOO	90%
PEGGLE DELUXE	82%
AUDIOSURF	81%

TO FIT THIS review onto a page, I'm going to have to stifle the natural inclination to gush. So let's get this out of the way – *World of Goo* is fantastic. It has a simplicity and effortlessness so profound that it's obvious that you're being protected from the complexity and effort inflicted on the poor developers.

In *World of Goo* – which, for the sake of not upsetting anyone, we'll abbreviate to *Goo* – you have to get the balls of sticky tar into a pipe. Position a ball within the range of an existing structure, and it'll bouncily connect and extend that structure. Each goo has its own abilities – some are gooier, some form more connections, others are sticky, and some types can be reused. There are exploding goo balls. There are also massive lady goos that you have to crush into tiny lady goo. All of these work together in a clever way to get you to that pipe.



The beautiful design of the worlds, the brilliant tactility of the goo-play, the funny and sub-real anti-corporate storyline, and the Danny Elfman-esque music are immersive and charming enough to make you fall in love with the game. But it's 2D Boy's ability to keep a fundamentally simple idea fresh and exciting over five worlds that makes this a game worth frothing over. You won't get bored. Things change. We haven't included screenshots from the final levels, because it should be a surprise.

Goo doesn't get too hard – it is a game that wants you to enjoy playing it. Levels that seem impossible are in too small an area for the solution to not become apparent. However, if you want to stretch yourself, every level has an OCD completion criterion. If you insist in chasing all of these objectives, I bid you adieu – you are on the hardcore road to cultivating a variety of new and exciting mental illnesses.

It could be said that it's a little short, unless you're chasing completion – and sometimes, when you're dealing with multiple kinds of goo, it can be difficult to get the cursor to land on the one you want. Despite these minor niggles, *World of Goo* is a game of such independent and charismatic flavour, it hits you full force with the excitement of how games used to feel. Anyone not buying it right now is making an idiotic mistake. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Utterly cute
Sound	Utterly charming
Multiplayer	You can see other players' towers

- ✓ Fresh concept
- ✓ Imaginative puzzles
- ✓ Challenging levels
- ✓ Utterly beautiful
- ✗ Occasionally fiddly

90

Ga-ga for goo

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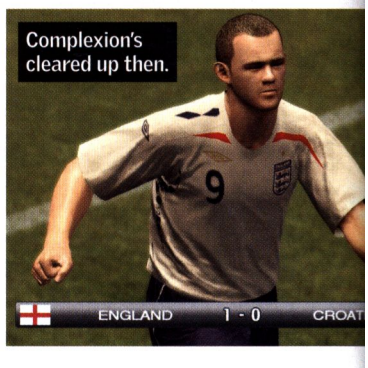


PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

Jamie Sefton is off the bench for the most important review of the year...

DEVELOPER Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE pesfan.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

After a lacklustre '07/'08 season, Konami's footie series makes a successful return with new game modes and improved online multiplayer.

Minimum system requirements: Pentium 4 1.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA GeForce FX or ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card or better.

HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008	90%
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009	85%
FIFA 09	74%

OVER THE LAST 10 years I've given Konami's *ISS/Pro Evo* football titles more of my time than any other game, resulting in several won tournaments, numerous smashed controllers and one rather angry secretly filmed YouTube video (which you can see at snipurl.com/angrypes). However, last year Konami badly dropped the football with a *PES* that had shocking slowdown, laggy online play and a feeling that the plucky "feels like the real thing" series was in danger of being overtaken by a rejuvenated *FIFA*. So, the '09/'10 season is now make-or-break for *PES*.

Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 focuses on the middle part of its moniker, rather than enjoying a complete revolution of its feature list and gameplay – something that was introduced for the excellent Wii version. The football itself is as fast, playable, addictive, frustrating and exhilarating as usual, slightly tempering the goal-fests of *PES 2008*, increasing the number of players with unique characteristics (Ronaldo's silky ball-dribbling histrionics for example) and producing games that match their real-life counterparts for goal-mouth incidents and heated pub-talking points. Players still make the odd suicidal pass to the opposition, but the AI can make intelligent runs to create mesmerising link-up play, and allowing devastating through-balls that split defences.

FOUL FOULS

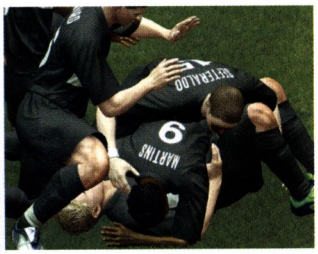
Diving has been retained. Although arguments will continue as to whether the feature tarnishes the game, I had a rather enjoyable match playing as England vs Argentina, where I managed to get two penalties and Heinze sent off through outrageous cheating. That's videogame karma in action.

While it's true that *FIFA* has been nicking ideas and gameplay from *PES* over the past few years, the reverse is true this time – *PES*'s Become A Legend mode is a nod to *FIFA*'s Be A Pro mode, that lets you play as one player in a team, building up your stats and progressing from the reserves to the starting line-up. It's no Master League (which again is the best thing about *PES 2009*) and for several seasons it's a tedious exercise of playing endless reserve games, skipping matches and waiting for your skills to improve, but the fact you can import your face into the game (see 'I am legend') makes it compulsive if you're a raging egomaniac.

Other additions include a UEFA Champions League option, and although

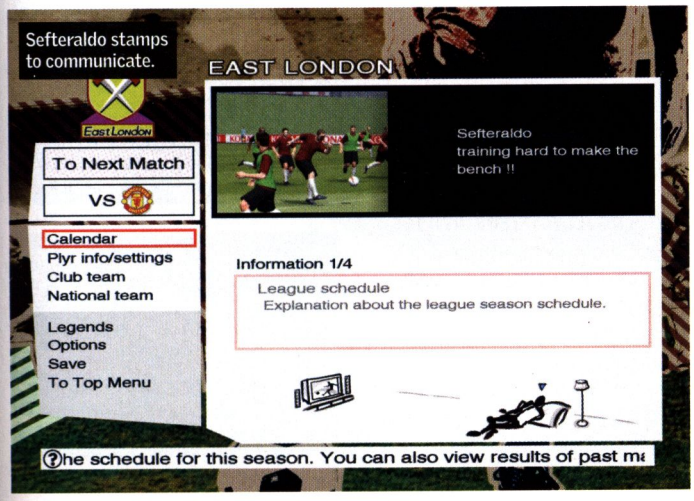
I am legend

PES 2009's Become A Legend mode puts your face in the action...



There's something innately funny about shoving your mug into a character in a videogame – and this is especially true of the latest *PES*. A simple uploading of a photo, a bit of manipulation, and your face is plastered onto an upcoming footballer's head in the game's new RPG-lite Become A Legend mode. Although the lack of colour options meant my player Sefteraldo (see what I did there?) looked as if he was the receipient of recent, and botched, face transplant surgery.

If you have a good game, your stats improve, and you move into the reserve A team, onto the bench, and eventually into the first team for good, tackling the likes of Ronaldinho and scoring cup-winning goals. Continue to play well, and you can even be called up for the national team, where hatred and vilification await.



the Italian and Spanish leagues are present, there's a depressing lack of Premiership teams, with only Liverpool and Manchester United there officially. As for online, improvements have been made, such as allowing you to send messages to friends in-game, but as we're reviewing before the game is released, only time will tell if the multiplayer is a lag-free experience. It's a sad indictment that we've come to doubt Konami's promises, while trusting EA to deliver solid online play in *FIFA*.

Just on the match action alone, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2009* is a fantastic game – still producing genuine moments of football magic, in a simulation that is the closest to the beautiful game you can get. However, this isn't 2001 – footie fans now expect proper team names for all the English and Scottish divisions, plus reliable online multiplayer, and so this season *PES 2009* could have a real battle on its hands to hang onto its usually loyal supporters. PCZ

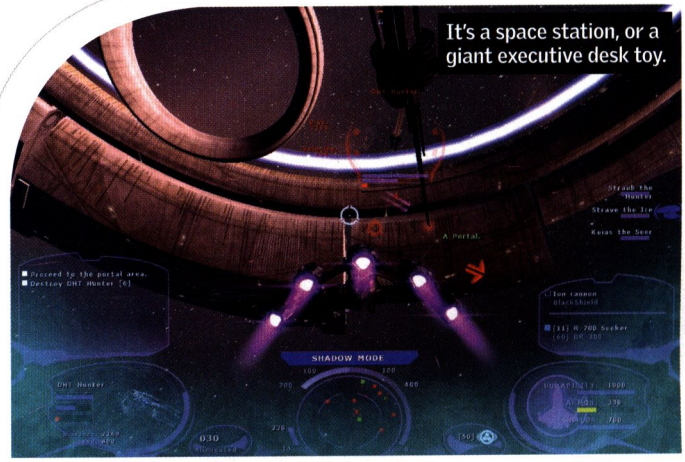
PCZONE

Graphics **Good likenesses and animation**
Sound **Awful music and commentary**
Multiplayer **Yes**

- Plays a great game of football
- Score fantastic goals
- Addictive Master League and Legend modes
- Multiplayer games mean endless replayability
- Lack of English league licenses
- Limited online features

85

Footie, footie, footie

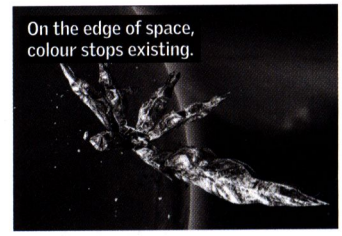


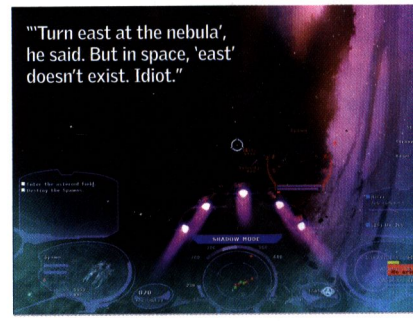
DARK HORIZON

In space, nobody can hear you yawn

DEVELOPER Quazar Studio
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com/DarkHorizon
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 128MB RAM, and a GeForce FX 5700 graphics card.





THE DAYS OF the space opera are, unfortunately, long gone, with no prospect of a new *Wing Commander* or *Privateer* appearing through a wormhole any time soon. With *Dark Horizon*, the initial signs were promising: a space combat game without the trade and with a heavy emphasis on laser-induced death.

Despite a confusing and incomplete tutorial that raises as many questions as it answers, the combat itself is easy to get into and feels solid enough, with some acceptable visuals that are reminiscent of the *X* games (just not as nice). Quazar is a small studio, so we can forgive the lack of graphical splendour. We're not shallow, you see.

What we can't forgive is the dreary nonsense that passes for a storyline. *Dark Horizon*'s main 'evil force', comically dubbed the Mirk, doesn't exactly fire the imagination as did the Kilrathi all those years ago. So, there is never much impetus to continue playing, to discover what events will unfold. Some of this will be down to inadequate translation, with gems such as "We know the number of opened by the enemy portals" not winning any awards for snappy dialogue.

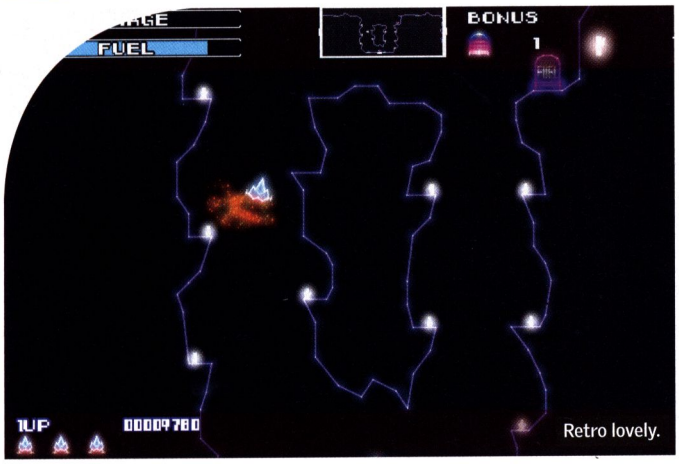
With a flat plot, albeit one fleshed out by vast reams of inter-mission text, the solidity of *Dark Horizon*'s combat becomes irrelevant. Sadly, it seems *Wing Commander* fans will have to wait a bit longer for their salvation.

David Brown

PCZONE

62

Mirked



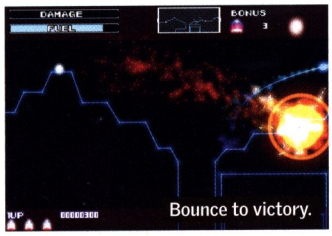
Retro lovely.

GRAVITRON 2

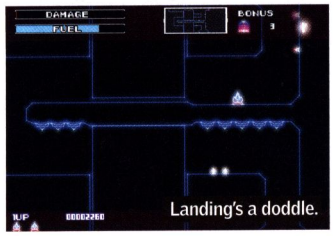
Bouncy nice time on the moon

Developer: Dark Castle Software
Publisher: Steam
Website: xout.blackened-interactive.com/Gravitron2.html
ETA: Out now
Price: $5 (about £3 after tax)

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, and an OpenGL graphics card.



Bounce to victory.



Landing's a doddle.

WHEN YOU START playing *Gravitron 2*, it feels ridiculous. Are you being seriously expected to take this *Moon Lander* clone seriously? The graphics are simpler than... well, they're simpler than everything else there is. With an electronic glow that's meant to replicate that old-school screen burn, there's very little else about *Gravitron 2* that makes you think you're going to enjoy it.

So why have I played it all morning? Is it the fact you bounce? I do have a problem with most *Moon Lander*-style games when trying to reach a tedious speed of near-zero so that touchdown doesn't blow you up. Simply bouncing off the walls makes it feel a bit like you're supposed to be enjoying yourself. Bouncing is fun.

Or was it the difficulty of the levels, that increase so gently, but so firmly? Whatever it was, I found myself voluntarily playing *Gravitron 2* to the point where I couldn't begrudge anyone £3.

The mouse sensitivity should be configurable – you might find yourself spinning around a little out of control – but apart from that, this is a deeply simple and hugely over-used concept, that's been executed in a way that's more entertaining than it has any right to be. The developers have chosen their price modestly and well – $5 is, give or take a dollar, what this game is worth. That's not the biggest compliment in the world, but it's not really an insult either.

Jon Blyth

Costs a pittance.

PCZONE 65
Attractive enough

Like marbles, but with men.

PROJECT AFTERMATH

First, they came for our goop

Developer: Games Faction
Publisher: Steam
Website: www.gamesfaction.com
ETA: Out now
Price: $19.99 (Around £14 after tax)

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6 series or RADEON 9600 graphics card or better.

Clearly compensating.

Bland environments.

PROJECT AFTERMATH IS surprisingly competent. It's even fun. It's a fast, arcade action RTS which initially seems shallow, but has just enough depth to keep you going.

The game is all about earning GOOP by killing enemy units and completing objectives. There's also canisters of GOOP hidden around the level, and it's the only reserve in the game. You use it when casting area effect spells on your enemies, and when resurrecting heroes; powers you should use sparingly (if at all) if you want to get the better medals.

The emphasis isn't on winning or losing – passing the mission isn't so hard. But passing with style is what it's all about. And passing with your GOOP level in the gold area isn't easy. You can power-up your units at the start of a level, but that reduces your starting amount of GOOP.

Meanwhile, you've got to balance armour and weaponry – it's not a complicated system nor is it tactically challenging, but it keeps you on your toes – which is something that *Project Aftermath* does constantly, with a charming enough comic book style presentation.

Project Aftermath isn't a full-scale RTS, and it doesn't try to be. It's not brilliant, and I don't think anyone involved with it thinks it'll change the world. It is, however, well-written, well thought-out, and an entertaining game that would have been a bargain before the pound went to shit.

Jon Blyth

Stat-happy.

PCZONE 69
Pet project

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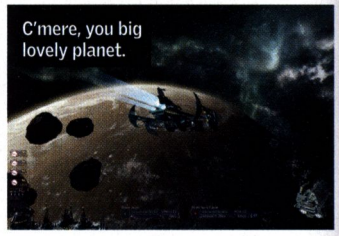
Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE



X3: TERRAN CONFLICT

Candles? Check. Wine? Check. Two glasses? Check. Barry White records? Mmm, yeah. *Paul Presley* engages his seduction thrusters

DEVELOPER Egosoft
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.egosoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

The ridiculously weighty and somewhat too ponderous for its own good space simulator returns for a semi-sequel set in our own solar system.

Minimum system requirements:
Pentium 4 2GHz, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

X3: TERRAN CONFLICT	88%
EVE ONLINE	88%
FREELANCER	84%

AT THE *X* series, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways... Every game reviewer has one of these, a game or series that touches them on a personal, intimate and downright naughty level, so enamouring them with their depth, breadth and endorphin-releasing wiles that he will hear no bad word said against them, no minor criticism that won't be met with a flurry of pre-rehearsed counter points and face punches, no rival comparison that won't be put down by shouts of "YOU JUST SHUT UP!" through the tears of infatuation as we cradle the box to our chest and run to our rooms to have a good cry.

For the boy Porter (can I still call him that after his year of editorship?) it's the *Fallout* games; the Mighty Korgon has his *Total War* posters stuck to his bedroom walls; Steve Hill won't go anywhere without a copy of *Football Manager* draped on his arm; and I'm sure Log has a PopCap tattoo hidden underneath his beard. Me, I'm an *X*osexual and don't care who knows it.

Yes, I know it isn't as fast, fun and friendly as *Freelancer*, never has been and never will be. But I don't see any sequels to that little number floating about the release schedules, do you? In fact, if it's in-cockpit, direct-action space simulations you want, well *X3: Terran Conflict* is about your only current generation option really. Good job it's still going strong then, eh?

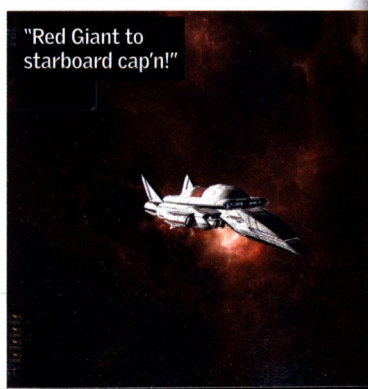
LOVE IS THE DRUG

As the title (and ending to the previous game) suggests, we're on home territory this time round, flying around our own solar system to begin with, marvelling at the beautifully rendered rings of Saturn, sighing wistfully at the gaseous beauty of Jupiter, and giggling childishly at the computer's unrefined pronunciation of Uranus.

The plot doesn't take long to kick in and, sadly once again, it's *X*'s main failing. For all the alien incursions, returns of old threats and attempts at tension, try as they might Egosoft just can't seem to crack the storytelling nut, and I'm not sure it's one that'll ever really get solved while we players remain resolutely inside our cockpits. Stories require character development to engage, and for all the communication window talking heads, *X*'s is a soulless universe. *Freelancer* scored by letting you stretch your legs wandering around stations, *X*'s only real star is the universe itself.

But at least it's a universe that is richer in depth and detail (visual and otherwise) than ever before. *X3: Terran Conflict* builds upon all the freedom of choice the previous titles offered, increasing the interactivity with a revamped and much more intuitive interface, allowing for easy control of everything from single ships to entire multi-wing fleets.

Better yet, the progress made with the combat mechanics shown in *X3: Reunion* has continued apace, to the point where the new mouse control

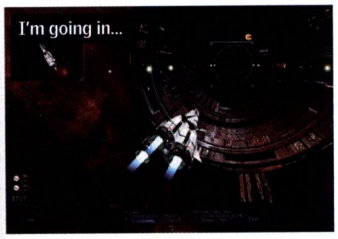


If I had a hammer

The spirit of DIY lives on into the future

One of the reasons that the *X* series has always impressed and annoyed in equal measures is the very nature of the depth on offer. Each game, *Terran Conflict* included, comes packed with a raft of gameplay options (good) that the majority of people will never find without a deal of internet forum detective work as they never get mentioned in the manuals (bad).

For example, should your ship take damage in a fight, you can limp back to a spacedock as recommended by the manual, or park up somewhere quiet, hop out in your spacesuit and blast lovely healing juice at your hull until you're ready to fly on. Is that mentioned anywhere in the manual? No wonder non-fans label this series as cold and unfriendly...



system that's on offer is fluid, smooth, enjoyable and easily on a par with *Freelancer*'s fun factor.

What we have then is a universe of staggering beauty and option, one that builds upon the *X* legacy and enriches it immeasurably without ever actually revolutionising it. It's true that this is less a sequel and more an extension of the last *X* title, a refinement of the prior game rather than genuinely offering anything new.

SECRET LOVER

It's still a game that you have to want to love, rather than one that will entrance the reluctant majority regardless, but will generously reward you, should you be willing to let yourself go along with it. It's still not the pick-up-and-play immediate gratification of *Freelancer*, and the requirement of patience and thought might still dissuade the casuals. I guess it says something that even after five years we can still compare this with Microsoft's now-dated rival.

But the infatuation continues, even if it's something of a clearer, where-is-this-relationship-going sort of direction than in previous years. The sex is still great, and I'd love to say we could still stay faithful to one another for many years to come. But it may well be that we've come to a point in our lives when it might not be a bad idea for us to start seeing other people. I've already got my eye on *X-Online*, actually. Or I could break this tortuous metaphor, and start dating human beings. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Stunning, truly stunning
Sound	Surprisingly only perfunctory
Multiplayer	Nope

- ✓ A rich and detailed universe
- ✓ Total freedom of choice
- ✓ Combat is now a real joy
- ✓ Revamped interface is much more user friendly
- ✗ Story telling is still sub-par
- ✗ Lacking character

88

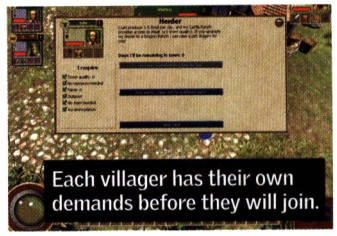
Let's get it on

HINTERLAND

It's time to loot, level and nod off

DEVELOPER Tilted Mill
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE www.tiltedmill.com/hinterland
ETA Out now
PRICE $19.99 (about £12, plus tax)

Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB *Vista*), and a 64MB DirectX 8.1 compatible card.



WITH AN IMPRESSIVE feature list and rumoured to have been inspired by *Dwarf Fortress*, *Hinterland* has been getting everyone excited. Build a town, give your peasants swords, and then head out to conquer your environs. What's not to like? Lots.

Hinterland claims to have strategic base building. In fact, you'll do the same thing every time: build some farms and crafters, upgrade your guards, and then ignore the town. Although being able to equip each villager is nice, there's no incentive to upgrade your settlement. There's certainly not as much freedom as you'd hope for. I tried to play an outlaw that refused the orders of the king, and my immediate death informed me: that's not how the game works.

The enemy raids on your town are few and far between, and nestled in the safety of your corner of the world it's far too easy to defeat them, even the raids of giant fire-breathing dragons.

Even securing resources gets dull, as combat is simply a case of clicking on your enemy and praying his health bar goes down faster than yours – although it's made easier by the fact that enemies never once attempt to recapture lost points. Once you've got the limited selection of resources added to your town, the game becomes a monotonous quest to clear the map of all the enemies for no reason other than genocide.

Hinterland's cheap; but that's no excuse for a game this poor.

Craig Kirby

PCZONE 45
Hinterbland

THE LICH KING AWAITS...

You've turned the tide against the demonic evils of Outland. Now the Lich King Arthas has set in motion events that will lead to the extinction of all life on Azeroth. With the undead legions of the Scourge threatening to sweep across the land, you must strike at the heart of the frozen abyss and end the Lich King's reign of terror for all time...

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- BRAVE THE LICH KING'S DOMAIN
- NEW DEATH KNIGHT HERO CLASS
- COMMAND MIGHTY SIEGE WEAPONS

12+

www.pegi.info

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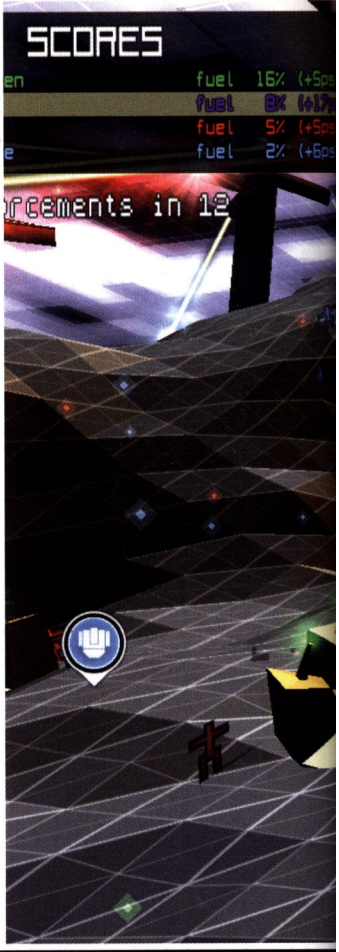
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
WRATH of the LICH KING
IN STORES 13.11.08



MULTIWINIA: SURVIVAL OF THE FLATTEST

Strictly speaking, no 2-D object can be flatter than any other, mutters *Dan Griliopoulos*

DEVELOPER Introversion
PUBLISHER Introversion/Steam
WEBSITE www.introversion.co.uk/multiwinia
ETA Out now
PRICE £15 download, £20 shelf

AT A GLANCE...

If *Darwinia* was *Lemmings*, this is *Worms*: there is some corner of a polygonal field that is forever angled.

Minimum system requirements:
2.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6200 or Radeon 9600 graphics card, or better.

HOW IT STACKS

DARWINIA 84%
WORMS 3D 80%
MULTIWINIA 71%

BEING SOMETHING OF an anti-modernist aesthete, 8-bit games have as much charm to me as Christopher Biggins in a fat suit, but I can understand their appeal. Almost in the same way I can see why pseudo-cannibals worshipping a 2,000 year-old Jewish zombie-god in the hope of immortality believe what they do – I just happen to disagree.

Let's be honest: though yesteryear's games were sometimes beautiful due to the efficiency of form that limited computing "oomph" forced upon them, often they were ugly and limited. *Multiwinia* very much relies on turning those misremembered flaws into nostalgic charm, which is a clever move from a small developer with similarly limited resources. It's one that has already produced a success in the cleverly crafted world of *Darwinia* (*PCZ* 153, 84%), a *Tron*-esque strategy title where you had to struggle against a strange control system and some evil email spam to save a race of crudely-iconic virtual lifeforms.

Multiwinia is simply the multiplayer mode of *Darwinia*, a cut-down blast that grinds Introversion's *Defcon* into the mix.

ACQUIRED TASTE

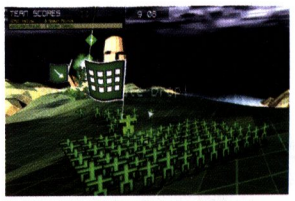
So the highly-representational graphics of older games are again recreated with affection here. A surprising amount of gaming power is required to create the flashback feel, but then there are hundreds if not thousands of wobbling Multiwinians on the screen at once, getting minced up in all sorts of interesting ways by turrets, explosions and weird alien monsters. If you're one of those people who yearns for the days of sprites, voxels, EGA and the simplified world of the past, then you'll love this. However, a lot of the game's charm is in its looks – if the screenshots leave you cold, you should try the demo first, as these pixels might not be for you.

Of course, it's not just the graphics that are retro; Introversion pack the limited language (limited in that it's plot-free) with references to other, mostly older, games and their own too. This will elicit love from Jeff Minter's folk. There are Space Invaders doing a bombing run, the nuke prompts a range of *Defcon* submarine icons to slowly (far too slowly) fire off their ICBMs, and there's

Not for nothing are Multiwinians known as the Slanty Hillwalkers.

Phalanx party

Multiwinians get ordered



Multiwinians are normally useless combatants, so the introduction of a formation command is great, albeit fiddly. Once you've created an Officer, you can tell him to form Multiwinians into lines, enabling much more efficient, longer-ranged sharp shooting, assuming they're not flanked. This enables a primitive form of tactics, rather than hoping your army outsizes enemies or relying on a superweapon.

And then, the guns came.

Try to find an angle that looks right.

even a *Portal* cube in there, somewhere. The game nods its head so often it appears to have referential Alzheimer's. It's retro homage for retro homage's sake, but it will charm a lot of people.

PAST TIMES

The last of the retro triumvirate is the most important; the gameplay. Do you think *Chaos* and *Robotron* are the best strategy games of all time? If that's the case then you really should be put back in a box in the attic with all the other dusty relics, and I'm not even sure why you're still buying games rather than gibbering over your collection of 5.25in floppy discs. But in the meantime, you'll love the simplicity of this game. It's a pure multiplayer blast with each side controlling rival Darwinian tribes in short-short combat.

There are eight game modes, with around 50 maps all told, and the range of weapon drops and landscapes gives the game good variety.

This is a purely multiplayer game allowing up to four players, or AIs, to battle. Sad then, that this is somewhat undermined by the repetitive gameplay, a control system that's arbitrarily different from any other RTS, unreliable pathfinding and crazy superweapons (that can, admittedly, be turned off). Whatever the mode, you're mainly taking large gangs of Multiwinians, using officers to either direct them or form phalanxes to kill the enemy faster than they kill you, and hoping that you manage to grab any of the over-powered weapon drops first.

Overall, it's a pity that with so much emphasis being placed on making something simultaneously original-looking and that alludes so heavily to past innovative giants, the gameplay doesn't have more original elements to it.

If you honestly don't like things that are retro or prefer your games to have complexity of gameplay, appearance and story, then you're going to hate this. *Multiwinia*'s not really a strategy game, it's a po-faced version of *Worms* that you can have a blast at in your lunch-break.

But, if you want a simple game that doesn't require you to devote the whole of your brain or your evenings, can buy into the game's modern-retro visuals, and can forgive a few flaws; it's undeniably worth a spin. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Passable retro-glory
Sound	Boops, screams and beeps
Multiplayer	Nothing but!

- Unique *Darwinia* design
- Range of maps and modes
- Cheaper than dirt
- Reliant on retro charm
- Limited strategy sim

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Flat mates

STATE OF PLAY

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

And that's for being bitchy about my hot leggings.

THIS MONTH...

CITY OF HEROES

PUBLISHER NCsoft **WEBSITE** uk.cityofheroes.com **PRICE** £14.99 then £8.99/month

ARGUABLY THE GAME with the most engrossing character creation system in existence, *City of Heroes* has changed a great deal since its release in early 2004. No less than 14 updates have been made, as well as integrating the *City of Villains* spin-off that was a separate game at first. The key here is that in the four years it's been going, this MMO has had one paid-for expansion, but more content added and fair-minded, wide-ranging tweaking than any other.

While the original game was accessible, silly fun, it lacked on release (and for some time afterwards) variety, and fast became a repetitive slog. NCsoft combatted this by continuously releasing new content in the form of *Issues*. Rather than going down the weak man's path of tweaking the occasional thing, NCsoft chose to completely revamp zones, add new power pools for higher levels, and even let players beat the bejesus out of each other in PvP zones of all shapes and sizes.

BATTLING CAPES

The most notable of these are the Coliseum (a PvP zone that let heroes slap each other about), and Bloody Bay, Siren's Call and Warburg, that are complete free-for-alls between heroes and villains. These zones, much like *Warhammer Online*'s RvR areas and Lake Wintergrasp in *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King*, have missions to complete, but also the constant worry of your nemesis coming to ruin your fun. This opened up both the competitive aspect of players beating each other up, and the ability for roleplayers to finally live out their fantasies of dominating somebody with quips and spandex.

In fact, *COH* has rather embraced its *Diablo II*-esque grinding, allowing players to repeatedly play some missions using either the Newspaper (villains) or Police Scanner (heroes) and the rewarding, multi-instance group missions (Task Forces). You can also look forward to replaying some rejigged content, like the Ritki Crash Site (that's now a huge war zone with a raid boss in it) or trying some bizarre missions, such as time travelling back to Ancient Rome. These also (using the Flashback system) let you replay through content that you've levelled past, a bit like the *Caverns of Time* from *WOW*, without the need to have a team of nutcases who know the game better than their own families.

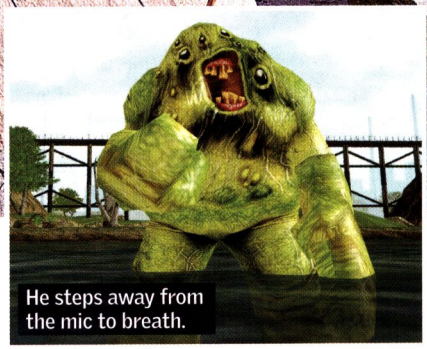
On top of this, there's now a crafting system, in the form of inventions. These let you salvage parts from fights to create exclusive costume pieces and even exclusive enhancements.

However, the most interesting update for *COH* in a while – hell, we'd argue most MMOs – is *Architect*. When it's released in its entirety (it's coming in two

"The game deserves to succeed... but until it expands *City of Heroes* is merely the best start of a game we've ever seen" 77% – PCZ #149, Xmas 2004

Hold on, who's holding our coats again?

He doesn't look impressed, love.



He steps away from the mic to breath.

parts in *Issues 13* and *14*) *Architect* will let players create their own missions using versions of the tools that the game's developers use. It's more creatively driven, meaning that players can't make a mission where you kick a granny and loot a Reality Bomb, but it's worth playing for the rewards you get (which are in line with average missions) and the fact that there are some truly creative players out there. It's one of the first attempts to bring modders into the MMO industry (the risible *Saga of Ryzom* aside) and it's exciting to watch how far it can be stretched.

NCsoft are also letting players buy booster packs, including new costumes, auras and powers. While drawing *COH* close to the Asian real money transaction model, these are meant to be aesthetic additions, and from what we can see won't be affecting the game on a larger scale.

What you should know if you stopped playing *COH* is that while the main body of the game is about beating the shit out of criminals, the amount of variety makes up for it. In a way eerily similar to *Diablo II*, you forget that you're doing the same thing again and again as it's presented in different ways, and you're invariably accompanied by a large group of bizarrely imaginative (or just bizarre) people.

City of Heroes is certainly a game worth returning to, at the very least to see some of the stuff that will be created by players using *Architect*, and to give it a go yourself. The ability to author your own missions has a bit of an *Evil Genius* feel to it, and with a team of friends to battle through them, you might just grasp a glimmer of sandbox joy from this still sparkly box. That, and it works on just about any PC that can produce a polygon, even with the upgraded graphics.

So go on, have a swing.

VERDICT

While not a different beast to what it used to be, *City of Heroes*' elaboration on the crime-fighting/causing formula continues to be fun and addictive for as long as you can stomach the repetition.

Ed Zitron

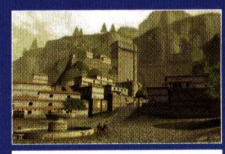
THE BIG ISSUES... HOW *CITY OF HEROES* HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS...

ISSUE 1: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
The first update raised the level cap from 40 to 50, and added two new zones: the Ritki Crash Site and Peregrine Island.

ISSUE 3: A COUNCIL OF WAR
Sadly for those who loved World War II, the SS-style Fifth Column was replaced with The Council: nasties backed by supersoldiers and the Nictus – evil aliens.

ISSUE 6: ALONG CAME A SPIDER
This *Issue* revamped *COH*'s engine with dual-core support, and added three PvP zones, and bases for Super Groups (*COH*'s guilds).

ISSUE 10: INVASION
This strange expansion gave heroes and villains the chance to work together against the Ritki, alongside the Vanguard. Ritki would also invade certain areas at random.



ISSUE 12: MIDNIGHT HOUR
Players were allowed to travel back in time to Ancient Rome. NCsoft also added new power sets for many of the game's archetypes (classes).

ISSUE 13: POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY
This pack allowed switching between PvE and PvP builds, to sate anger at the game's balance issues, and delivered the first part of *Architect*.

BUDGET

***Will Porter* and *Jon Blyth* fight for pennies in a gutter**

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

X-COM COLLECTION

PUBLISHER 2K Games/Steam **WEBSITE** www.steampowered.com
PRICE $14.99 (about £9 with tax)

IN THE INTERMINABLE wait for the announcement of a new breed of *X-Com* games, there's no reason for you not to revel in this most grand royalty of PC gaming.

The *X-Com* games work like *Thunderbirds*: your teams are being called out to various hotspots throughout the world from a central equipping station (like Tracey Island) where tech upgrades are researched. Then, when you get your team to the relevant isometric area with alien feet scuttling just below the fog of war, turn-based terror ensues.

Our personal favourite is *X-Com: Terror from the Deep* (a definite contender for hardest strategy game of all time) but being able to nab this alongside *X-Com: UFO Defense*, *Interceptor*, *Enforcer* and *Apocalypse* for what roughly equals a £10 note is an outright steal.

That said *Interceptor*, (ropey *Wing Commander* wannabe) and *Enforcer* (ropey third-person action) haven't exactly weathered time with their dignity intact.

PCZONE 85

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Quitters having other people buy their drinks.
Saving: Undisclosed

Forgetting to eat while playing *World of Goo*.
Saving: A bit less than a fiver

Passing Go earned us £200, financing a hotel in Angel. Hoo, yeah.
Saving: £200 of temporarily real banknotes

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE

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

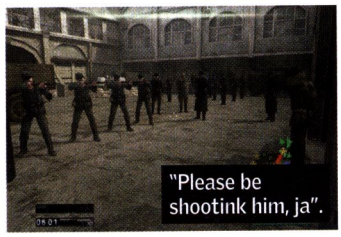
WHAT'S THIS? ANOTHER beatified PC gaming series that no longer does the rounds?

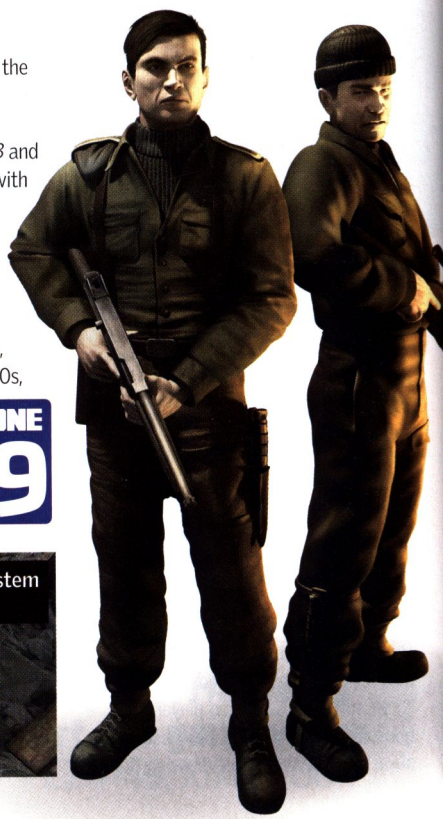
Strike Force was the vague attempt to take the hoary, yet brilliant, old Commandos template and try and sell it to Xbox owners. Once an isometric/topdown strategy game of Nazi-evasion, clothes-stealing and wire-cutting, *First Strike* takes three *Commandos* staples (Green Beret, Sniper, Spy) and puts them in a sub-*Medal of Honor* battlefield – letting you jump between them at will whenever their individual skill sets are required.

The levels are well designed, and often fairly tense, but the charm and rugged individualism of the rest of the series is sadly lacking.

The '3D-because-we-have-to' problems that beset *Commandos 3* and made it a bit of a failure, coupled with the fact that *Strike Force*'s main problem was sheer indifference from all quarters, means that it's fair to say that *Commandos* is now a deceased franchise. The flames of Spanish developers Pyro, once gaming royalty back in the '90s, have been extinguished. So spare a thought for these fallen heroes and get one of the original games instead.

PCZONE 59





ROGUE TROOPER

PUBLISHER Sold Out **WEBSITE** www.rebellion.co.uk/rogue.html **PRICE** £4.99

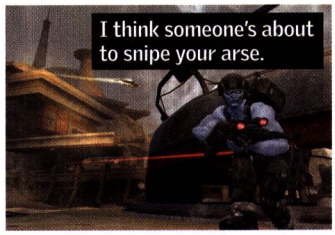
***ROGUE TROOPER* IS a game that improves with memory. Although it suffered from the same empty-world syndrome that broke the immersion in Rebellion's *Judge Dredd* FPS, there's a strong script at work, and fine acting.**

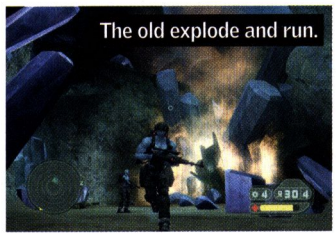
2000AD noobs will need an explanation: *Rogue Trooper* is a blue, genetically modified soldier who sees his squad die in the opening scenes of the game. However, that's OK! In the future, soldiers have biochips, which store their personalities, that can be installed into their rifles, helmets and backpacks. This leaves you – Rogue – with an entire team around your person.

This is a great, stylish take on the HEV suit, with invisible voices bickering around you. And some of the comic translates well into gameplay, too. For example, Gunnar's biochip (installed in your rifle) allows you to drop your gun and leave it to act as a sentry post.

The characterisation is classic, sassy soldier chat, and it's done well – and it's an above-average shooter. *Rogue Trooper* is nothing you haven't seen before, but you can't go around demanding to see new things every day. What are you, some kind of princess?

PCZONE 75





MALL TYCOON 3

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/malltycoon **PRICE** £4.99

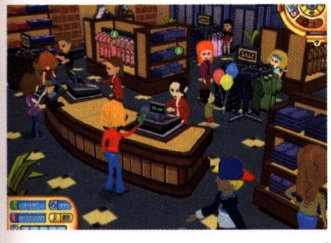
THE LONG-AWAITED release of *Mall Tycoon 3* answered the questions of an angry nation. "Will Mrs Neasden have access to the higher-end food shops with those sausages that Mr Neasden likes so much?" was one such question. "Will it be on fire?" was another.

As far as childlike *Tycoon* games go, *Mall Tycoon 3* is an opaque, unsatisfying process, with success or failure hiding behind an unfriendly mist. Even your own basic understanding of how things work – near the mall entrance is a prime location, and expensive shops bring in more money – doesn't necessarily hold true in *Mall Tycoon* world. You can't advertise for a store that's flagging, but you'll have to suck up the financial loss when they get pissed off and piss off.

This is a nicer-looking affair than the previous two games, and if you must wade through the treacle of *Tycoon* games, this is actually one of the better efforts out there.

However, there are more fulfilling, coherent, and less frustrating ways to fulfil your greed instinct. Better still, you could just stifle that instinct and become a nicer person.

PCZONE 58



And the rest...

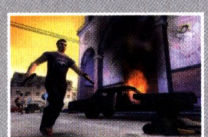
The others ones to watch out for

ALPHA PRIME
PRICE $9.99, Steam
If you buy one sci-fi shooter, buy *Dead Space*. If you want to buy two then *Doom 3* is a giggle. If three is your goal, don't buy *Alpha Prime*.

PCZONE 50

FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE
PRICE £4.99, Sold Out
This is a vaguely playable, but throwaway hack 'n' slash adventure. Emulate *Golden Axe* instead.

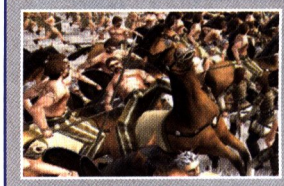
PCZONE 62



TOTAL OVERDOSE
PRICE £4.99, Sold Out
Total Overdose's points-for-chained-kills dynamic was recently stolen by *The Club*. Neither are worthy of your time.

PCZONE 65

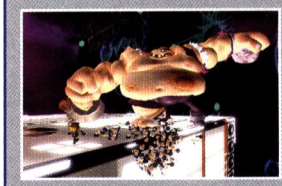
PCZONE Top 5 budget games



ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II
PRICE £15, Sega
This is huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people hacking each other to shit and back.

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

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



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

SID MEIER'S PIRATES
PRICE £15, Steam
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything. This isn't only a Top 5 budget list: it's an entire encyclopedia.

BUYER'S GUIDE

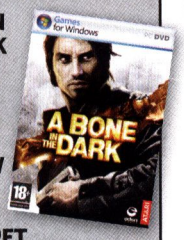
Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZONE Top 5 GAMING SNACKS

1. FLAKE 3 ARENA
2. STAR BAR WARS: GALAXIES
3. ASSTWIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES
4. CANNON KIT-KAT
5. HOSPITAL TYCORN FLAKES

PCZONE Top 5 GAMING PORN TITLES

1. A BONE IN THE DARK
2. CALL OF BOOTY
3. RAINBOW SEX
4. THE SECRET OF SPUNKY ISLAND
5. LEGOVER BATMAN



PCZONE Top 5 POOR WEE MITES

1. THE KID WHO GOT SPIKED
   PREY
2. MAX PAYNE'S NIPPER
   MAX PAYNE
3. DEAD-EYED PIETER
   BROTHERS IN ARMS
4. CRUSADER KIDDIES
   CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
5. THE BABY IN A PRAM (WHICH WAS A GUN)
   (BIOSHOCK)

FPS

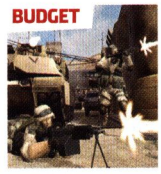
Must buy!

HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.

BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%
The psion of *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

TEAM FORTRESS 2
PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III
PCZ Issue: 189 – 90%
The daddy of online shooters returns with a mule-kick of intense deathmatch, epic vehicles, high-speed combat, Warfare mode, and a graphical sheen that outdoes its ageing insta-gib rivals.



BUDGET

BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 – 94%
If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.

CRYSIS WARHEAD
PCZ Issue: 199 – 92%
The standalone expansion may only take a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains a few moments of fantastic action storytelling, and improved alien AI.

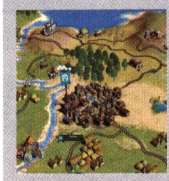
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
PCZ Issue: 188 – 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.

Strategy

Must buy!

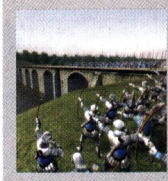
COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
Despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one is a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with so many positives in one sentence, you know it must be good.

WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%
A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.

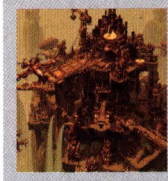


CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.

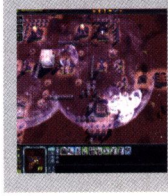
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue 193 – 91%
This startling beauty came from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%
Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation.



SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

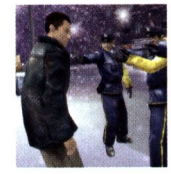
Action/Adventure

Must buy!

GEARS OF WAR
PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%
Who knew the all-conquering console title would work so well with a mouse and keyboard? *GOW*'s skirmishes against the aggressive Locust Horde are enjoyably tactical, while its cover system and difficulty level combine to make you genuinely fear the bullets flying around you. With the battle against the almighty Brumak near the game's close, the PC has the best version of an already excellent shooter. So hooray for us.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%
Showing its wrinkles a bit now, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that Payne is still a force to contend with.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS
PCZ Issue: 155 – 92%
To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious – *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.

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.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4
PCZ Issue 197 : 82%
Best played on a pad – but entirely comfortable on the keyboard – this is long hours of insane hack 'n' slash action and doolally cutscenes. Expect huge boss fights and an exhilarating slog through massive crowds of demons.

MMOs

Must buy!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%

Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.

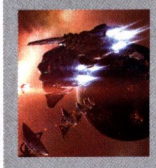
NEW ENTRY!

WARHAMMER ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%

Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare scenarios. Brilliant.

LOTR ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%

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



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%

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

GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%

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

Simulation

BUDGET

X³: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

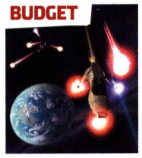
Finally, a space sim to better *X²: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited?

IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%

While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%

This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



BUDGET

FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 – 84%

If *X³* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.

SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%

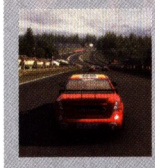
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!

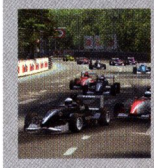
GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%

Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%

Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the *TOCA* and creates a Hollywood-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges.

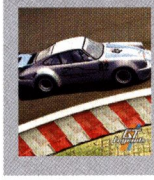


LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 – 90%

Online racing at its best. *LFS* has realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. A remarkable achievement by such a small and talented team.

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%

This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%

While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.

Oddball

Must buy!

SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%

This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.

PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%

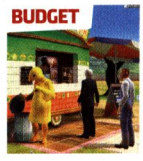
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.

GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

The god game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.

VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 – 85%

Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddy-looking graphics – it's a keeper.



BUDGET

THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 – 95%

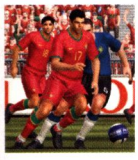
Life as a movie mogul – games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Build a studio and make your own films. Brilliant.

Sport

Must buy!

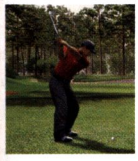
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%

The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, *FM* succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 – 87%

Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06
PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%

Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, *Tiger 06* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.

FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 – 80%

A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

NHL 08
PCZ Issue: 187 – 80%

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

Role-playing games

Must buy!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%

Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.

MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 – 92%

Possibly BioWare's best game since *KOTOR*, with a new combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and space sex – it's a modern must.

THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%

Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.

BUDGET

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 – 94%

This could be the most intimidating, yet wonderful, game we've ever played – the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.

BUDGET

DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%

This is the benchmark in FPS RPGs. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of gaming.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

November

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR	BLIZZARD/ACTIVISION
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009	SEGA
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	ROCKSTAR
LEGENDARY	ATARI
LEFT 4 DEAD	VALVE
LOTRO: MINES OF MORIA	CODEMASTERS ONLINE
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: STORM OF ZEHIR	ATARI
SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL	ASCARON
SAINT'S ROW 2	THQ
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD	EIDOS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING	BLIZZARD

December

DAMNATION	CODEMASTERS
PRINCE OF PERSIA	UBISOFT

Early 2009

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR	SEGA
F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN	WARNER BROS
MIRROR'S EDGE	EA
STREET FIGHTER IV	CAPCOM
VELVET ASSASSIN	GAMECOCK
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR 2	THQ

TBC

CHAMPIONS ONLINE	2K GAMES
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
DIABLO III	BLIZZARD
MAFIA II	2K GAMES
STARCRAFT II (x3)	BLIZZARD

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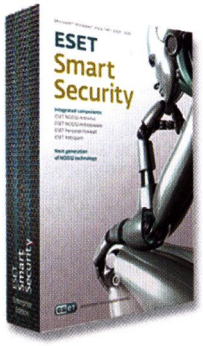

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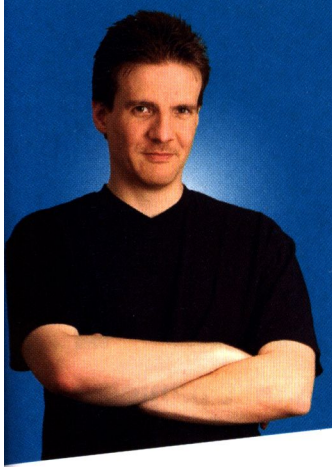


PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Vista smash

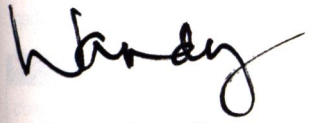
VISTA HAS BEEN the subject of a trainwreck discussion at Dear Wandy (forums.dearwandy.com), with 64-bit evangelists making the point that the x64 version has become a stable and valid choice for *Windows* users. This 32-bit user remains unconvinced.

There is some truth in the pro-64 argument. You can now choose between 32 and 64-bit versions for drivers, and when downloading new software or benchmarks, you may have seen a link for 64-bit users. The days of 32-bit operating systems and applications are certainly numbered.

But before you dash to upgrade, there are things to consider. *Vista* x64 is still *Vista*, only with wider memory management, added system security and the ability to handle huge amounts of RAM. These won't give you a noticeable speed boost – for that you need a new processor and video card. Nor will it be more stable – *Windows* goofs that need patching from Microsoft usually apply to both 32 and 64-bit versions.

Secondly, the games and programs on your PC now are all 32-bit, and on *Vista* x64 they need to be pushed through an emulation process called WOW64 before they work. There's no performance hit, but there's also no real gain, and the RAM available to them is still capped.

Until more native 64-bit games appear, *Vista* x64 remains a leftfield choice for home users. Think carefully before installing it.



Phil Wand, hardware editor

NO GOGGLES BOX

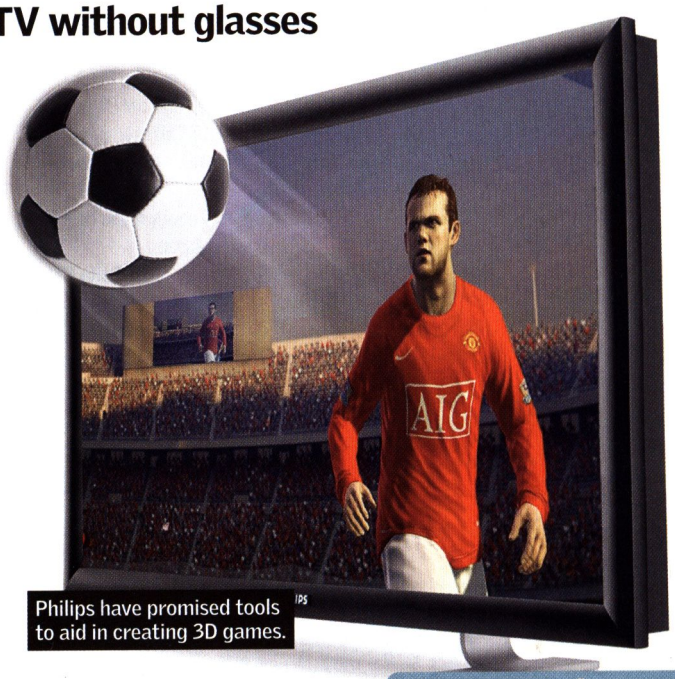
Philips creates 3-D TV without glasses

MANUFACTURERS HAVE BEEN tempting us with 3-D games for years now, but their ideas have always been poor products.

Each time the effect has been too weak, or the effort needed to see beyond two dimensions has been too great. Silly glasses, sitting motionless a set distance from their screen – hardly a surprise that few people were interested. No sales means no users, and no users means no support from developers.

The difference now is that Philips have been working on 3-D LCD technology for over a decade, and their 56in, 3840 x 2160 resolution, Autostereoscopic 3-D HDTV looks to be their most promising pitch yet.

The benefit of the company's autostereoscopic technology is that it has a wide 160° viewing angle and there's no need to wear glasses. The set also includes slanted multiview lenticular lens technology, which filters out the artefacts associated with moving 3-D images, plus display signal processing, 2-D/3-D dual-mode technology, and real time 2-D to 3-D content conversion.



Philips have promised tools to aid in creating 3D games.

The downside? The price, of course. You'll need upwards of £12,000 to buy one, but that's not far off the cost of the first generation of domestic plasma screens and HDTVs.

philips.com/3dsolutions

News round-up

Industry insiders are predicting a pre-Christmas 2009 launch for what we now call *Windows 7*. Screenshots suggest that its look and feel is based on *Vista*, but with the actual workings rewritten. Of concern is that the team that created *Office 2007*'s overwrought ribbon interface have been put in charge of *Explorer*. Help.

microsoft.com

Let's not forget DirectX 11, the successor to DirectX 10, which will appear in *Windows 7*. I'll not get you too worked up, given how 10 has been something of a damp squib, offering none of the speed and pizazz Microsoft promised us.

gamesforwindows.com

SOLID TALENT

Flash storage is affordable at last

How about running *Windows* on something that's smaller, faster and longer-lasting than a hard drive?

Solid-state drives (SSDs) do away with moving components. It means they're silent, start instantly, and have seek times that make their mechanical equivalents look like clockwork toys. Only problem is that they're much more expensive.

That said, US manufacturer Super Talent have made 64GB and 128GB variants of its SSD MasterDrive line available for $179 and $299, meaning they're the cheapest SSD drives yet.

They're not that fast, but they do sound a death knell for your mechanical hard drive.

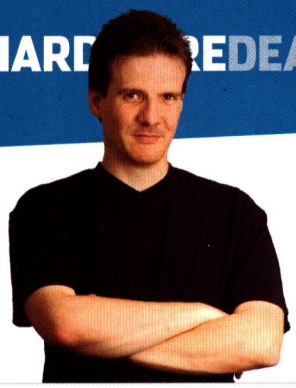
supertalent.com

Get ready to kiss your hard drive goodbye.

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY JON BLYTH

ZALMAN LQ1000: One of the pseudonyms Salman Rushdie used during the *Satanic Verses* fatwa. During this time, he pretended to be a Terminator unit. **AUTOSTEREOSCOPIC:** The longest word available to describe "things that look 3D without the use of 3D glasses". An alternative is to ask your mum to run screaming towards you – and this doesn't cost £12,000, unless your mum's Posh Spice. **GAMING ROUTER:** Someone who sits next to you, saying "I saw something shiny there, go back", and "you just came from this way". If you give them the controller, they will usually say "no thanks, I don't like games". **LUXMATE:** The mate you'd rather go to the pub with, given a choice, and who your sub-lux mates accuse you of bumming because they're jealous.



DEAR WANDY

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

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

Q SHORT PROBLEM

In issue 196 you responded to my query about low-profile graphics cards for my Dell Inspiron 530s.

Since your reply, I have pursued the problem and checked out the HD 3450 series you suggested and the Club 3D website (www.club3d.nl) seems to suggest that their HD 3450 has a low-profile variant.

I would be very happy if you could let me know your thoughts.

Dr Colin R Pool

Low profile, high power. Will Dr Colin need a new PC?

A *I do remember saying that you'd never find a 512MB card for your case, and yet Club 3D's Radeon HD 3450 512MB Passive Low Profile suggests that I was wrong. Let's keep that between ourselves, eh?*

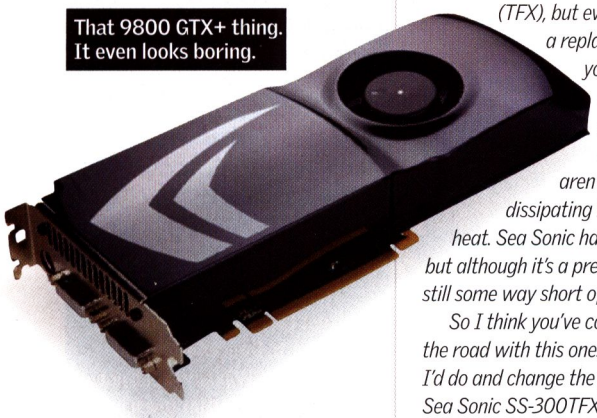
There's more to it, though. Your Inspiron 530s has a 250W power supply unit, and Club 3D ask that their shorty card is fed with a "high quality" unit of 400W or more. Generally, a PSU is just as upgradable as a graphics card, a hard drive or memory, but yours is a lady's slimline case and that makes a swap to something more manly very hard indeed.

I'm pretty sure that Dell's PSU conforms to a recognised form factor (TFX), but even if you could find a replacement I doubt you'd find a TFX model of the required wattage, as small PSUs aren't capable of dissipating big amounts of heat. Sea Sonic have a 300W supply, but although it's a premium product it's still some way short of your target.

So I think you've come to the end of the road with this one. You could do what I'd do and change the factory PSU for a Sea Sonic SS-300TFX Active 300W and chance your luck, but don't say I didn't warn you that it's not the ideal solution.

I can only find one UK trade supplier for the SS-300TFX: Hamiltone of Portslade, Sussex (hamiltone.co.uk). If you ask them nicely they may oblige.

That 9800 GTX+ thing. It even looks boring.



Q NINE IRON

I'm thinking of upgrading my current PC in the near future. I currently have a Core 2 Duo E6850 running on a D975XBX2 motherboard with a GeForce 8600 GTS graphics card and 2GB RAM.

I'm thinking of buying a new 9800 GTX+ graphics card and another 2GB RAM, and my question is whether you think this would offer me a huge step up in performance, or whether I should wait until I upgrade my processor.

Also if I use my current setup with the GTX+, what kind of power supply would I require to get the best out of it?

Michael Richards

A *If you're running* XP *rather than* Vista *I'm not sure you'd notice the additional memory, not unless you're into media encoding, rendering CGI or hosting SQL databases, none of which are likely. Put the money in your bank instead.*

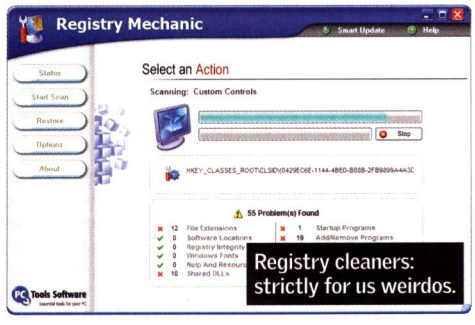
As for your choice of graphics, the 9800 GTX+ is something of a nowhere card – one that adds unnecessary fluff to a line-up of products most buyers have a hard time understanding anyway. The original 9800 GTX (issue 196, 74%) was an overpriced disappointment, barely faster than its predecessor, and the GTX+ is the same card with a die shrink, price cut, higher clock rate and that annoying plus symbol on the end. You'll not find your games improve much.

You'd be better off smashing open your freshly fattened piggy bank and buying a £170 Radeon HD 4870 or a GeForce GTX 260, both of which will give you more twang for your buck.

Q CLEAN LIVING

Is there any way of getting rid of all the excess flab in my registry?

Recently I uninstalled a whole bunch of applications I no longer use, yet when



Registry cleaners: strictly for us weirdos.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

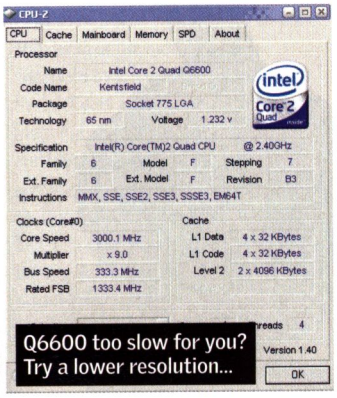
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.9	17 SEP 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 178.13	25 SEP 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.18.0004	30 JUL 08
CREATIVE	CREATIVE ALCHEMY 1.20.04	01 AUG 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.18.0001	17 JUL 08

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

"Was there a registry cleaning convention that I missed? Why is everyone now obsessed by dead links?"



I run Regedit I can still see hundreds of entries that still link to them. While I could go through and delete them by hand, there must be some way of doing it all automatically.

I've searched on the web and found numerous registry cleaner products, but how trustworthy are these things?

Simon Costello

A *This is the third issue on the run in which people ask about registry cleaners. Was there a registry cleaning convention that I missed? Why is everyone now obsessed by dead links?*

You all need to understand that the odd hole in your Windows *registry isn't going to impact* XP *or* Vista *system performance at all. My registry totals 136MB, and after using a cleaner to remove a few bytes of crap here and there it's still 136MB. Only obsessive types who hate browsing through entries pointing to files long since deleted (i.e. me) should be bothered by this, and normal users – for whom the registry is a mystery – should be wary of third-party tools which give it a haircut.*

As you've found, there are billions of cleaners on the market, none of which – as far as I know – are open source. That means you have no idea what they're doing when you run them, and your PC and data is thus at the mercy of some unknown Lithuanian programmer.

The one tool I do trust is Registry Mechanic, *principally because it's a well-known, long-standing product from an Australian developer recently acquired by Symantec. Don't go kidding yourself that it'll speed up your system – it really won't – but if you feel you must go snapping off the dead twigs in your registry, that's the one I'd go for.*

Q FOUR UP

I'm considering overclocking my CPU by increasing the BIOS FSB.

I've seen that the Q6600 will run at 3GHz, though I'm concerned whether my CPU cooler will be able to handle the extra heat generated.

My current Cyberpower system has a ASUS 5PQ PRO with 4GB DDR2-1066 RAM and a Thermaltake Blue Orb II.

Paul

A *You're right to ask questions about cooling because the Q6600's four cores can really pump out the heat when stressed. Going to 3GHz with a fan isn't beyond the realms of possibility, but I'd not be surprised if you saw temperatures reaching the high 60s under load. People have reported getting as high as 4GHz on air alone, but the thing is – they're lying.*

Thermaltake (www.thermaltake.com) make some of the world's best CPU coolers, and the Blue Orb will deal with a Q6600 running a minor lift in speed. Do please get in touch once you've done it and let me know what happens.

My own preference is for leaving chips just as their makers intended, but I understand that getting more speed for free can be satisfying. Just don't come running to me when your games crash.

Q STRIKE ONE

I'm writing to let you know that I had a very similar issue to Ben Jordan in issue 199. My PC was bought from Overclockers (www.overclockers.co.uk) in February and has a Striker Formula motherboard with X9650 CPU and two 8800 GTXs.

The symptoms were random crashes, BSODs (sometimes related to graphics DLLs) and memory issues. One day while I was waiting to get through to technical support I decided to look into the BIOS again. What I found was that my processor was only supported by a recent revision: 1602.

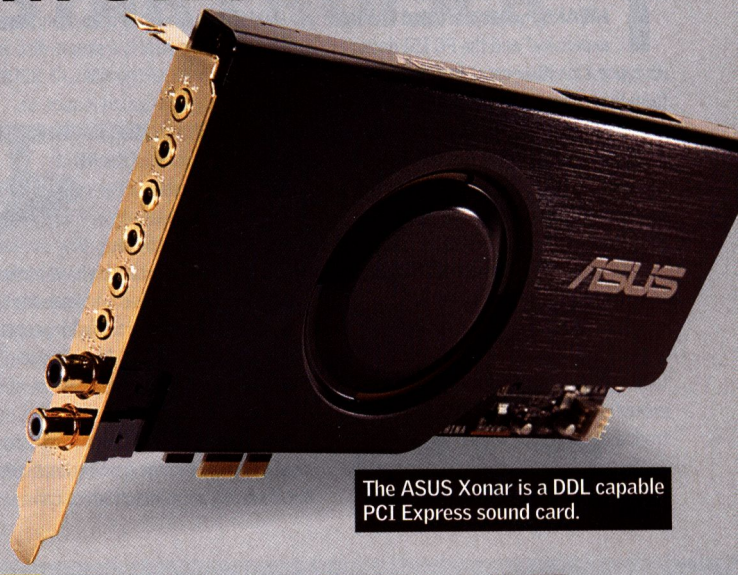
Anyway this new BIOS version has transformed my PC into a completely stable system and games that caused problems now run like a dream.

I hope this helps!

Matt Mangan

Thanks for sharing. Here's hoping Ben is still an avid reader and hasn't done something stupid like buy an Xbox. PCZ

ELEMENTRY LESSONS IN PC TECH...



The ASUS Xonar is a DDL capable PCI Express sound card.

07 DOLBY DIGITAL LIVE

Dolby Digital Live is a way of putting your game audio into a surround format that can then be understood by your speaker system. What you hear is 5.1 channel sound, which comes from two front speakers, two rear speakers, a centre speaker and a subwoofer.

To make it work, you need a Dolby Digital-equipped speaker system or home cinema setup, and a sound card that supports DDL.

A single digital cable connects the back of the card with the speakers, and as long as you've enabled DDL in your card's control panel, it should all just work.

There are a number of cards which support Dolby Digital Live technology, including Auzentech's 7.1 Prelude, ASUS Xonar and Creative's X-Fi Titanium. Any hardware capable of creating a DDL source signal can transport all audio from your PC – whether it's music, movies or games.

Don't confuse Dolby Digital Live with DTS Connect, the latter being a rival technology from manufacturers Digital Theater Systems.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(al4omega) My PC has been freezing and it appears to be connected to the temp. It doesn't crash to desktop, it just freezes. The CPU is cooled by a stock cooler. The case has three Hyper 120mm on the side, one on the top, one at the front for the HD cage and a rear exhaust fan. Core Temp tells me I'm getting Core0: 53°C, Core1: 56°C, Core2: 60°C, Core3: 48°C. (Tetras) I suspect one or more of the pushpins on your stock cooler is not fully engaged because those idle temperatures are pretty high. I'd also try the latest version of Real Temp (snipurl.com/realtemp) before you do anything. (Wandy) Official Wandy secret: I still can't get those bloody pushpin coolers to slot home first go.

SENNHEISER PC 151

PRICE £35 **MANUFACTURER** Sennheiser **WEBSITE** sennheisercommunications.com

TRANSLATED, 'SENNHEISER' MEANS "good quality but bloody expensive" and the PC 151 doesn't disappoint in either case. At £35 these form Sennheiser's budget-priced gaming communicators – a price higher than other companies' top-end gear.

As expected from Sennheiser, this headset lacks gimmicks – it just does everything right, in an unassuming way. The headband and earpieces are light enough to wear for hours, although the speakers fall between being less-than-comfortable and uncomfortable. Despite their lightness, this headset is tough enough to be thrown into a bag or trodden on by an unsuspecting spouse.

Thought has also been paid to smaller details: the cable could reach into orbit (no danger of these cans pulling off if you suddenly stand mid-game) and the in-line volume control is a simple disc and a mute switch.

Importantly, the sound is spot on. There's virtually no difference at all between the quality of the PC 151 and Sennheiser's more expensive headsets. The PC 151 has a little less dynamic range, but you'll be hard pushed to tell. Nothing sounds compressed or distorted, so in a heavy firefight, people's voices can still be heard. And a noise-cancelling mic means people will be able to hear you too.

The PC 151 is more expensive than most other mid-range gaming headsets, but it's really a top-notch set of cans.

SPECIFICATION

Connection: 2x 3.5mm jacks
Back type: Closed
Frequency response (speaker): 18-22,000Hz
Frequency response (mic): 80-15,000Hz
SPL: 118dB

PCZONE 90
Quality, without expense

MAXELL MXL-1191

PRICE £79 **MANUFACTURER** Maxell
WEBSITE www.maxell.eu.com

USB HEADSETS ARE not the greatest idea. Swapping the processing power of hardware-accelerated sound cards for a software-based solution is a step backwards. But if all USB headsets were up to Maxell's standards, we'd change our mind.

The MXL-1191 is simple to install. Plug in the cord and *Windows* disables the on-board sound card. Controls for volume, mute, answering the phone and push-to-talk work without needing drivers. And they're wireless.

Despite the lack of cabling these cans don't suffer quality-wise. The proprietary signal is in the crowded 2.4GHz frequency, but a room full of DECT phones, WiFi routers and Bluetooth headsets didn't cause any interference. And you don't need batteries, as the headset recharges on a small USB dock. It only lasts a couple of hours, but the charging lead is just about long enough to reach from the desktop.

Sadly, Maxell have omitted positional sound processing, sticking with the traditional two channels, so games can sound flat. The actual speaker and microphone quality, though, is exceptional. Maxell is an old audio name, but these cans are so good you can hardly tell the difference between these and the Sennheisers.

SPECIFICATION

Connection: USB/Wireless
Back type: Closed
Frequency response (speaker): 10-30,000Hz
Frequency response (mic): 20-20,000Hz
SPL: 102dB

PCZONE 87
Wireless wonder

NOVINT **FALCON**

PRICE £165 **MANUFACTURER** Novint **WEBSITE** home.novint.com

THE NOVINT FALCON'S three hinged arms enable mouse-style control of an on-screen cursor and depth in the movement. It's enhanced by a force-feedback system that delivers feelings of surface and motion. In the tech demo, 3D objects, and bumpy, ice, rubber and sandy surfaces all feel real.

But the Falcon falls on its face when it comes to games. While moving an object around in space, it works. Trouble begins when it takes over mouselook duties. It just isn't loose enough to give the freedom or speed of movement that gaming requires.

Software that plays to the Falcon's strengths amazes, but current games do little to sell it.

PCZONE 65

LUXMATE **525 STAR CRUISER**

PRICE £42 **MANUFACTURER** Genius **WEBSITE** www.genius-europe.com/en

THIS KEYBOARD FROM Genius combines the standard QWERTY setup with a programmable game pad. The result is a very long board, but one with a rather nice transparent surround, and that is surprisingly comfortable for everyday use – the main keyboard feels a tad old-fashioned, but it does the job.

The 26-button pad has four different presets and while the layout can take some getting used to, having all those macros close by is really fun. The only potential problem with the Cruiser is endurance: there are far tougher boards that can better withstand the hammering keystrokes of hardcore gamers for the same price.

PCZONE 82

SITECOM **300N GAMING ROUTER**

PRICE £104 **MANUFACTURER** Sitecom **WEBSITE** www.sitecom.com

THE 'GAMING' PART of the 300N's name comes from a pair of features that other dual-band modem/routers lack – and which are meant to improve your online gaming experience.

The first is an enhancement of a standard router's Quality of Service. Genius says StreamEngine recognises and prioritises games traffic over normal packets of data. This kills lag, but there's a difference in ping and reliability over other routers we've tried. The 300N is also preconfigured to open required ports for recognised games, cutting the chance of random connection errors. All good, but most people use ADSL broadband, making the 300N's £100 a lot of money to spend on top of an ADSL modem, just to get some increases in ping times.

PCZONE 85

ZALMAN **LQ1000**

PRICE £420 **MANUFACTURER** Quiet PC **WEBSITE** www.quietpc.com

AIR-COOLING AND water-cooling systems have the same problem: where to send the heat.

With a liquid-cooled system, unless there's an external reservoir with some sort of cooler (which is often loud and large) it won't deliver low temperatures. Internal water coolers may take up less room, but are prone to heat build-up.

So Zalman's LQ1000 is something special. It combines the GT1000 chassis (5mm plates of aluminium double up as a passive heatsink and bullet-proof armour) and a Reserator XT water-cooling system. The radiator is built into the door, with an optional 22in fan to pull heat away from the components. The price is high, the result is stunning. The LQ1000 looks awesome, is roomy, quiet and far more effective than just a Reserator.

PCZONE 89

Reviews by Adam Oxford

REMEMBER: GAMES ARE REALLY JUST SHAPES

Games are shapes, perceived by an easily fooled brain. Human vision is a similar illusion, drawn from assumptions about size and motion. Who's to say that life isn't a game? Only the police, who will arrest you when you attack people with a crowbar.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at *PC ZONE*, but these are the bits we just adore

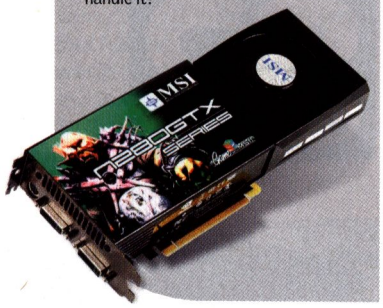
LOADED?

GRAPHICS

N280GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420
MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

Fast graphics don't come cheap, and NVIDIA's 200-series flagship is reassuringly expensive. There are four power modes on offer, PhysX support, and a batting average better than any other. Plus there's 1GB DDR3 and many other enhancements that deliver performance around 1.5x faster than any predecessor. Can your credit card handle it?



PROCESSOR

CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775

EXPECT TO PAY £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.co.uk

A silly price makes for awesome power and magical performance. Not only will your Extreme Edition chip cost you the same as several entire PCs, but like everything else in your PC it'll be obsolete in two years. If you've got the money, what the hell!

MOTHERBOARD

D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.co.uk

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about their products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD

WD7500 AAKS

EXPECT TO PAY £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEB wdc.com

Almost as fast as the 150GB Raptor, but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to be spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN

SM226BW

EXPECT TO PAY £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung
WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

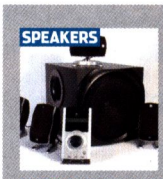
SOUNDCARD

SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. Games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off from your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

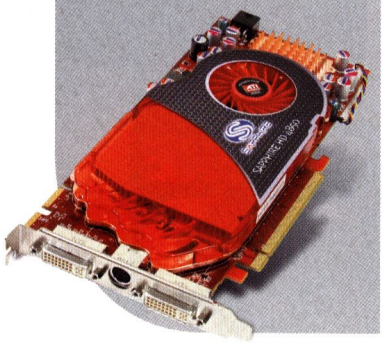
SKINT?

GRAPHICS

HD4850

EXPECT TO PAY £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE sapphiretech.co.uk

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down, idiot. Go and buy one.



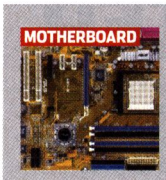
PROCESSOR

CORE 2 DUO E2180

EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk

At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD

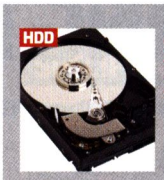


CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

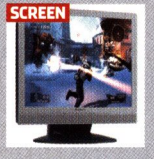


CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

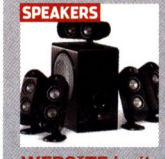
SOUNDCARD

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £20
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS



X-530

EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk

Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

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The Best Games Of 2008

Voting for this year's Golden Joystick Awards closes on October 27th.
Visit **www.goldenjoystick.com** on Friday October 31st to watch the awards live and find out who claims the ultimate gaming accolade!

Full results are also available online from October 31st.

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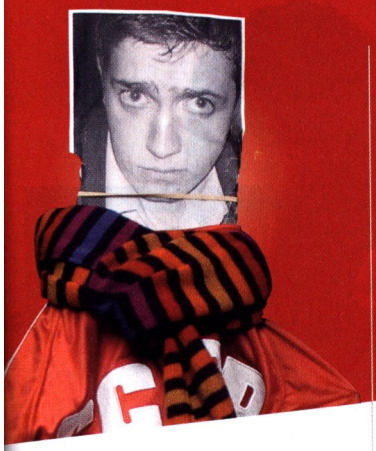


PCZONE FREEPLAY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

For the man who has nothing

Paper Ed speaks

HELLO ED-FANS! You might have heard that I've left *PC ZONE* magazine to pursue a fashionable career in New York City. But that was just my physical, non-paper form! What's left is me, Paper Ed, and I'm the only one prepared to tell it like it is.

When I'm not ranting about Bill Roper, the early days of *EverQuest*, and how me and the lead designers of *World of Warcraft* used to hang out in a magic cave, I like to think long and hard about the future evolution of multiplayer gaming. I mean, just look at what we're covering this month. BioWare's *The Old Republic* is taking the traditional offline roleplay game and placing its story and emotion into the realms of the MMO; *World of Goo* is taking the traditional offline puzzle game yet tying in online scoreboards... and next month we'll be reviewing a shooter, in the form of *Left 4 Dead*, that has been built from the ground up as a co-op experience.

The days of playing on your lonesome are well and truly over and, yet again, the PC is at the very forefront of this brave new world. Who knew, all that time ago, when I was sitting on my paper sofa, munching paper pastries, my paper fingers an *EverQuestian* blur of commands and counter-commands that I was one of a precious few at the outset of a remarkable revolution.

Some people say that I'm merely a printed out piece of A4 tied to a skateboard and wearing a hoodie, but to that I take exception. I am everything that online gaming has been built upon for the past seven years. I am the paper alpha and I am the paper omega. The online world spins on, and I am at its core.

Ed Zitron

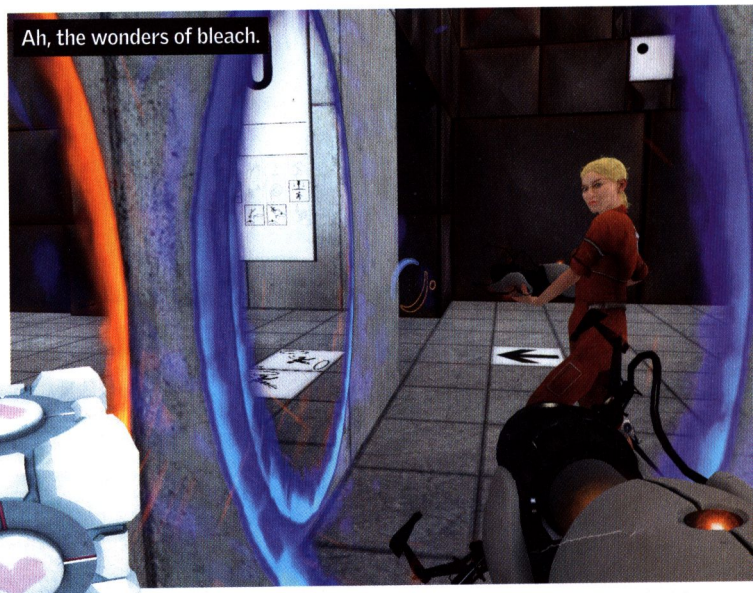
Paper Ed (not really Ed)

PORTAL PRELUDE

It's hard to overstate our satisfaction

WEBSITE www.portalprelude.com **MOD FOR** *Portal*

THE GREATEST THING, among many, about *Portal* was that it always gently teased the brain rather than beat you round the head with its cleverness. The problem with *Portal* mods is that your average bedroom coder has no such qualms about head-beating, and *Portal: Prelude* certainly isn't a head injury-free walk in the park. It perhaps doesn't help that, a year on from *Portal*'s release, the teleportation-understanding synapses of many gamers will have become a little rusty. But that doesn't stop *Prelude* being a prequel pick of the *Portal* pops in terms of modding over the last year.



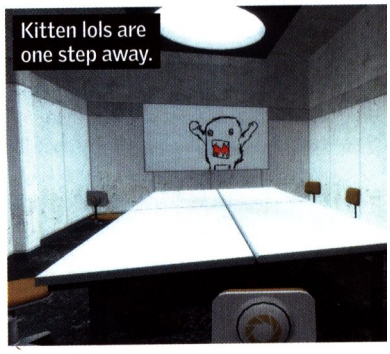
Ah, the wonders of bleach.

Neatly dovetailing into the *Portal* storyline, unofficially mind, the game's structure is extremely good – while the jabbering robotic voices of the scientists watching you (a lady called Abbie, who's Chell with bleached hair) aren't exactly GlaDOS, but at least have their slightly mistranslated hearts in the right place.

Rather than gently build you up with different ways to complete levels, as Valve did, *Prelude*'s tactic is to throw many and varied styles of puzzle into the mix, meaning that you'll find your mind changing gear more times than a granny stalled at traffic lights.

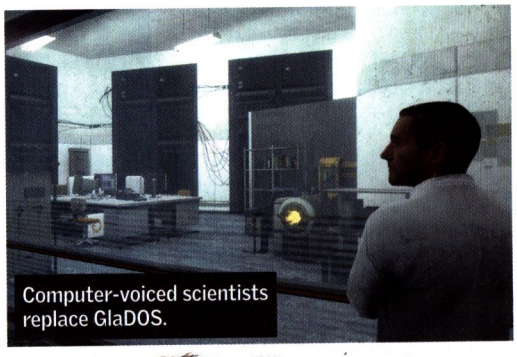
There'll be head-scratchage and FAQ-checking, of that there is no doubt, but there'll also be moments of huge satisfaction when a well-timed *Portal* jump ends in glory.

With better voice acting and dialogue a possibility in a future re-release, *Prelude* is certainly worth checking out – not least for its bizarre usage of Nine Inch Nails instead of the usual *Still Alive* jingle. A* for effort, B+ for execution.



Kitten lols are one step away.

Through the round window.



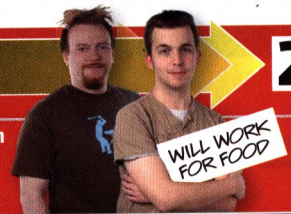
Computer-voiced scientists replace GlaDOS.

PCZONE FREE-O-METER

0 HOURS

289.7 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

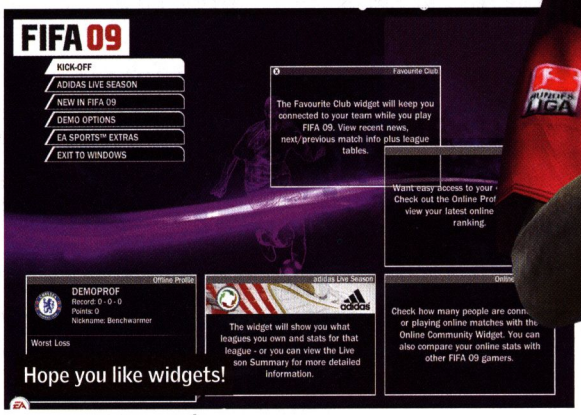


Demos

***Steve Hogarty* rounds up our free DVD**

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover disc support. Or email **support@futurenet.co.uk,** including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



Hope you like widgets!

FIFA 09

Pass it to me, baby

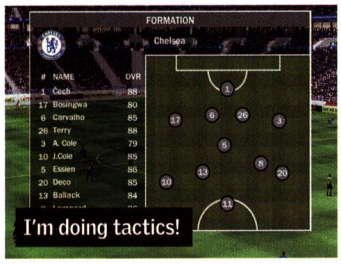
WEBSITE fifa09.ea.com

I HAVEN'T TOUCHED a FIFA game since *Road to World Cup*, but even back in '98 I had the idea of a mode in which you controlled just one player. This demo of *FIFA 09* features this mode, and they've called it 'Be a Pro'. This name is inaccurate, as I spent 90 minutes chasing after the ball, trying to nick it from my own team, refusing to pass the ball once it was in my possession and acting silly during free kicks. I was as professional as a fart in a board meeting.

The demo also gives you the chance to see the widget-based menu. I don't know if that's new or not, but it's sort of interesting if you like positionable data outlets. You can get your online stats fed through to the main menu, and things like that, but for some reason all that HUD tomfoolery brings my FPS crashing to the floor. If we had to pay for demos, I'd be really quite annoyed about that.

Jonny Funlegs makes his play.

"Hello. I earn as much as 50 nurses."

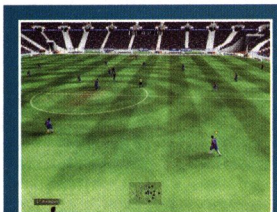


I'm doing tactics!

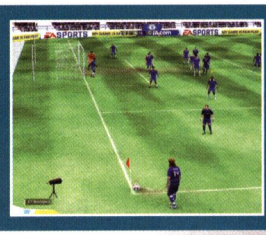
DIARRA AND PEPE
I'm in the bit leading up to where you run out on to the pitch, and who do I spy but two men called Diarra and Pepe. Rather close to 'diarrhoea' and 'pee-pee', no?

KICK IT TO ME
I'll never get near the ball if they keep kicking it about over there. Using the shift key I sprint towards the ball, totally planning to get it, score a goal and win the game.

ALL ABOUT ME... AND MY GAME OF FOOTBALL



PASS ME THE BALL
No time for circles now! The ball is off again, and I'm hot on its heels. I keep the shift key held down to ensure I always run at full speed. This way, I'll win.



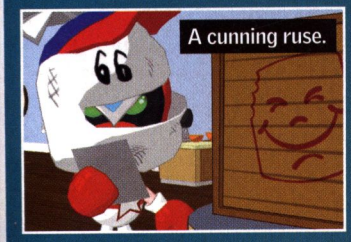
JACK CORNER
A kick out from the corner post! The joke's on him – unless he can curve the football dramatically the chances of him scoring are slight. I run in circles to celebrate.

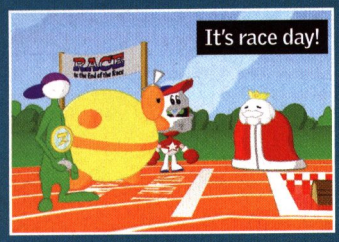
STRONG BADIA THE FREE

The free demo, that is

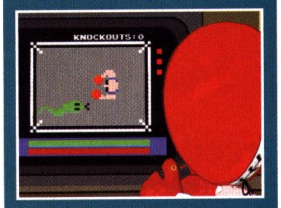
WEBSITE telltalegames.com

IF YOU WANT a demonstration of the sort of humour you'll encounter in *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, you need go no further than the *PC ZONE* DVD. If further convincing is what you're after, then head to www.homestarrunner.com and engage your brain in a selection of some of the hundreds of Strong Bad emails on the site. It's good, character-based comedy, and the episodes are short enough so that you never tire of their throaty voices and funny walks. Try it out right now!





MINI-GAMES



SNAKE BOXER
In *Episode 1*, you had to box a series of increasingly pugilistic snakes.

MATH KICKERS
In *Episode 2*, you'll have to punch hoodlums in order to balance equations.

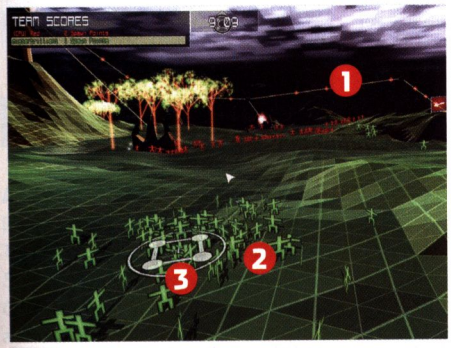
MULTIWINIA

The whole world's a pixel

WEBSITE introversion.co.uk/multiwinia

INTROVERSION'S SPANGLY NEW RTS *Multiwinia* is reviewed in this very issue, but as this section of the magazine is being written first (yes, we write it back to front), I've no idea how it's fared. That said, I've played this demo and I adore it.

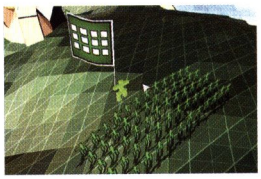
From the standpoint of someone averse to strategy fare, I'm captivated by the fluidity of the units and their intemperate gung-ho personalities. As much as a collection of 14 pixels can be said to have a personality. Have a go immediately – it's on the DVD!



1. **Soul Wire** I call this 'soul wire'. These dots go to spawn points, where they turn into new Multiwinians!
2. **Multiwinians** These Multiwinians are a rapacious lot, and can form up in defensive positions, or tell others where to go.
3. **Great crates** Just like in *Worms*, crates will drop from the sky, delivering unique weapons and vehicles for you to use in your fight.

OFFICERS

Skills to get kills



FORMATION
Formations are powerful, but they're weak when attacked from the sides or behind. Excellent for defending control points.

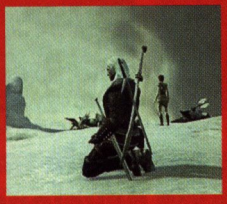
POINTER MEN
Pointer men stay in one place and direct Multiwinians to a point on the map. Useful for sending a stream of units to a certain place.

HOT DOWNLOADS

PCZONE

THE WITCHER

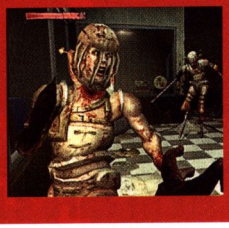
www.thewitcher.com



This patch transforms vanilla *Witcher* to the much improved *Enhanced Edition*. All of the foibles of the hit RPG are vanquished, new voice acting is added, along with more sweary conversations.

THE SUFFERING

snipurl.com/freesuffering



The Suffering is now out for nowt, but with a load of ads mixed in. It has a console bias, but also smart design, intelligent gore, and a sweary opening scene featuring a paedophile being eviscerated. Yay.

BEST OF THE REST

What is on the pages opposite is not the whole of our cover disc's content. Here are the other demos and movies that you can enjoy. Or not, if that's your will.

NIKOPOL: SECRETS OF THE IMMORTALS

WEBSITE snipurl.com/nikopol

When your game attracts comments like "the stylised look hides a deeply flawed game", you know the art guys are muttering "you screwed our graphics up" to the programmers.

FASHION APPRENTICE

WEBSITE snipurl.com/fashionapp

You can leave your hat on – in fact, it's positively encouraged. As long as it's a fashionable hat! Because you won't get far as a fashion apprentice in that battered old top hat, and worn out knickers!

DRAGON AGE

WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com

A *Dragon Age* demo? Lemme at it! Slow your ponies, lads – this is a movie. However, why not pretend you're playing the demo? Just hammer your keyboard repeatedly, screaming at the lack of response.

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

WEBSITE www.callofduty.com

What's the matter, *Call of Duty*? Didn't you like *Modern Warfare*? Or did you just remember the Pacific invasion thing in WWII?

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Freeware

Steve Hogarty spreads freedom and free games

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content from across the world of the internet. You want free games? We got free games. You want movies? We got free games. Shreddies for breakfast? You betcha, free games. This month, save the world from aliens, stand next to a lady of ill-repute, tongue yourself through space, make improbable dives, avert fate, see *Far Cry* in a browser, and strap yourself to a rocket.

IJI

Domo arigato, Mister Komato

DEVELOPER Daniel Remar
WEBSITE remarise/daniel

LET'S BE HONEST, freeware games that can hold your attention for more than 15 minutes are as common as hen's tits. *Iji* is one of these rarities, creating a pit in your stomach that makes you feel like you've nicked something worth paying for. The end result of four years of labour, this 2D adventure touches on the sort of gameplay elements seen in *Deus Ex* and *System Shock 2* – an approach whereby enemies can be avoided rather than killed, things can be hacked rather than destroyed, and faces can be kicked rather than shot. And it's astonishingly well done.

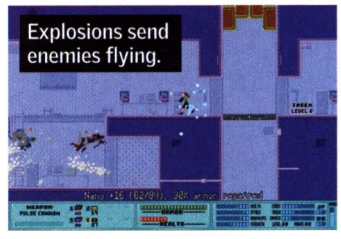
Your bionic character can be upgraded in seven areas, from stats like strength (allows you kick ever-larger enemies to the floor) and cracking (allows you to hack terminals and combine weapons), to skills that allow you to use the more powerful weapons of the game's two alien races. A single stat can be advanced when you level up, with enemies dropping what is effectively XP.

A cap of five levels per sector means you're forced to specialise too – pursue your cracking skills and, rather than face a large enemy head-on, you can sneak behind them and hack their weapon instead. Goading them into attacking you then causes the gun to malfunction and explode satisfyingly in their hands.

Enemy weapons give out smoky warnings before they fire.

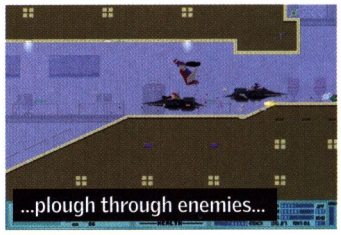
The plot is surprisingly decent for a freeware title too, with the relationship between the lizard-y Komato and human-y Tasen enemy forces being unfurled through liberally placed logs and journals. Some are slightly too verbose, sure, but there's light humour and good writing to be found. The visuals resemble *Flashback*, only with more explosions. Weapons feel weighty, blasts are to be feared, and knocked enemies crash into and destroy furniture. There's a great feeling of impact with every animation.

You'll come away from *Iji* feeling gratitude towards its creator. Its characters, enemies, storyline and style make it clear that a lot of care and attention's been paid to its development. And at the time of writing, the developer doesn't even have a donate button on his website. Fancy that.

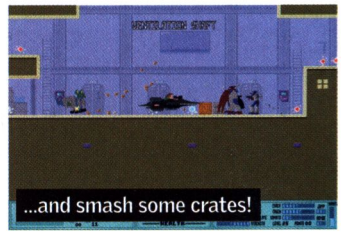


Explosions send enemies flying.

Hijack a speeder...

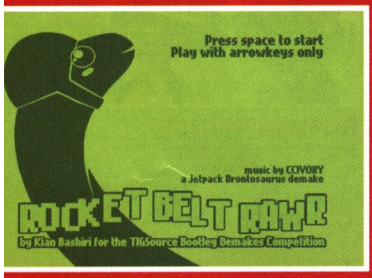


...plough through enemies...



...and smash some crates!

"*Iji*'s characters, enemies, storyline and style make it clear that a lot of care's been paid to its development"



ROCKET BELT RAWR

DEVELOPER Mazapan
WEBSITE mazapan.se

THIS MONTH'S FREEWARE contains no fewer than two entries from TIGSource's oft-lauded *Retro Demakes* competition (www.tigsource.com/features/demakes). *Large-Scale Vehicular Stealing* is just across the page, spouting its retro-NES stylings, while over here a demake of *Jetpack Brontosaurus* has scaled things down even further.

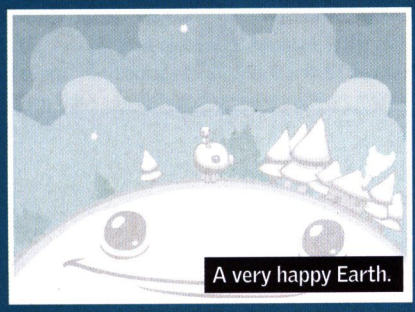
The original (jetpackbrontosaurus.com) had you tearing through a stellar dreamworld pursuing fruit, and this Gameboy-esque remake has you doing the same thing. *Rocket Belt Rawr* is very basic, but it's our cue to point you towards the competition itself.

Soundless Mountain II, for example, is a play-by-play remake of *Silent Hill II* as a SNES RPG. *Corner's Shiny* is a platformer based on *Mirror's Edge*, with a piss-take of the runner's eye feature. And most impressively, *Gang Garrison II* is a 2D multiplayer shooter which apes the previously thoroughly inimitable *Team Fortress 2*, phew.

AETHER

From the skies above

DEVELOPER Edmund McMillen **WEBSITE** thisisacryforhelp.com


A very happy Earth.

EDMUND MCMILLEN, INDIE man behind the superb *Gish*, has been smudging his brain thoughts onto the internet a lot lately. *Aether* is one of his friendlier works, a Flash puzzle game about a boy who rides his imaginary squid through space, landing on new planets and solving obtuse mysteries.

Using the squid's tongue to latch onto small clouds and moons, you tug and swing yourself skywards, eventually breaking free of the gravitational pull of the planet you're on and launching yourself into space. Following a marker to one of the four other planets, you'll encounter characters with plaintive and often depressing musings, and planets who need their colour restored.

The freely swinging and flying squid creature is a joy to control, and while the ending is slightly haunting, you'll come away feeling emotionally bloated. Honest.

Whoops, did we just spoil the ending?

AVERT FATE

Engines of the world unite

DEVELOPER Unity Technologies **WEBSITE** unity3d.com

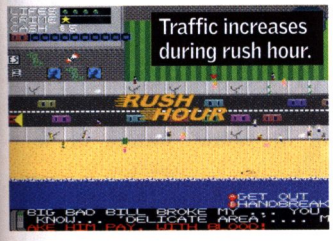
A SHORT TECHNOLOGICAL demonstration of the potential of the Unity engine to create inexpensive, fully 3-D, large-scale first-person shooters locally, *Avert Fate* (unlike this sentence) will take up moments of your time. Also unlike that sentence, it's worth persevering with to its end, as it features a rather spectacular and unexpected encounter.

Take a look around the Unity website for some other tech-gems, such as an instantly loading poor man's *Far Cry* crowbarred into a browser window, and a lighting demo in which you can grab furniture and lamps and chuck them about to watch the shadows fly. It's all very interesting, and already it's led to fully featured games such as *Off-Road Velociraptor Safari*.

LARGE-SCALE VEHICULAR STEALING

Auto crime goes retro

DEVELOPER Zombie Cow/Popstar **WEBSITE** www.zombie-cow.com/?p=249



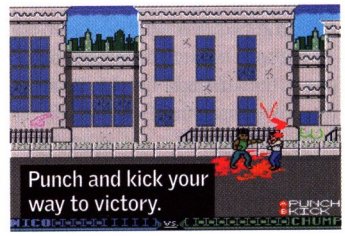
Traffic increases during rush hour.

AN ENTRANT TO the wildly inventive Retro Demakes competition over on TIGSource.com, *Large Scale Vehicular Stealing* takes the next-gen marvel of *Grand Theft Auto IV* and converts it to a sort of dodgy bootleg 8-bit NES ROM version.

This immediately brings it in line with the top-down *GTA*s of old, naturally, but the features of the most recent game have been pared down to *Double Dragon*-style fight scenes and an inexplicable prostitute mini-game in which you simply stand motionlessly next to a promiscuous woman while your health slowly regenerates. Copious blood sprites replace that all-important ribaldry, which works for us.

Possibly more offensive than the real *GTA*.

Tiled loveliness.


Punch and kick your way to victory.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

DIVER

DEVELOPER Jeff Weber
WEBSITE snipurl.com/divergame

I. CAN'T. GET. The. Hang. Of. This. But maybe you can. Using mouse gestures to control the arms and legs of a tiny on-screen stickman perched atop a cliff, you must have him dive into the sea, landing cleanly and between two buoys. The tutorial is excellent, guiding you through your very first splash, but a few levels in I was befuddled, smacking my face into rocks.

The controls aren't intuitive and so there's a learning curve to overcome, but the game allows you to very quickly retry your dives, luring you into a rapid succession of fatal, addictive leaps. In fact later levels require you to use protrusions to your advantage; as long as you enter the water at a nice angle and in the right place, your injuries won't affect your score.

Extended play

Mods, maps and updates for your games

If this cabbage shield breaks, I'm done for.

MEDIAN MOD 2008

PCZONE ON THE DVD

This isn't your average mod

WEBSITE snipurl.com/media2008 **MOD FOR** *Diablo II*

MODDING IN GENERAL can be a scary task for a person, even for games deliberately engineered to be tinkered with like *Half-Life 2* and *Neverwinter Nights*. So you'll understand why we say that Brother Laz's modding of *Diablo II*'s very foundation is a monument to modders everywhere.

Installed by dragging a file of around 30MB into your *Diablo II* folder, *Median Mod 2008* completely rewrites the skill system and each of *Diablo II*'s classes, not so much fixing Blizzard's (admittedly very) few mistakes, but enhancing and changing the roles of the characters. The mod also adds new attacks and new builds to the game that Blizzard never thought of. There are even new monsters, as well as some ridiculously difficult Uberquests that will wipe out anyone but the highest-level grinder equipped with *Median 2008*'s new selections of armour.

There are even quests that let you play as the Archangel Tyrael or Baal, though getting to them is rather difficult to say the least.

There's one quest where you have to charge through a town full of invisible, lightning fast and invulnerable zombies, trying desperately to reach a safe spot where they'll leave you be. This is the kind of originality that gives *Median* the kick to make you want to play through *Diablo II* a few times, just to vault up the ridiculously varied skill trees that the mod adds.

The one downside is that you can't play over Battle.Net (www.battle.net) for obvious reasons. However, you can play this multiplayer over a network, or over the internet using a LAN-spoofer like *Hamachi* (snipurl.com/hammy).

Playing over LAN or *Hamachi* works even better than Battle.Net, as you won't have to worry about having to deal with those insipid 14 year-olds who spend too much of their young lives grinding rather than going to school or making friends in real life.

Even better still, Brother Laz is planning to release a sequel to *Median Mod 2008* by the end of the year. Called *Median XL*, it promises to pump even more life into *Diablo II*, before we even get a release date for *Diablo III*.

"*Median* adds stuff to *Diablo II* that Blizzard never thought of"

SURVIVAL 101

A torch, a torch, my kingdom for a torch

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/survival-101 **MOD FOR** *Half-Life 2*

DARK, DARK AND more dark. If survival horror meant "turn off every light within a five-mile radius" then this home-made *Half-Life 2* mod would be challenging *Resident Evil*. However, the frequent scrabbling around in pitch blackness with a torch that runs out of battery power isn't always fun – and neither is the confusing level design, which often results in you having to try every single door to find an exit while the game throws dozens of fast, screaming headcrab zombies at you.

A nice touch, however, is the massive homage to *BioShock*: a radio that's used to deliver essential objectives. Although hearing a nerdy-sounding level designer, rather than a lively Irish rogue diminishes the effect somewhat. Then again, you can't complain about voice acting that aims higher than the "Hello, Dr. Freeman," and "Here, take some ammo!" NPC yelps taken from the main game.

For a mod, *Survival 101* is worth a download, but it can get tedious rather quickly.

This is one of the brightest areas in the entire mod.

The underside of our desks.

DEAR ESTHER

...you were great on *That's Life*

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/dear-esther **MOD FOR** *Half-Life 2*

***DEAR ESTHER* IS** a ghost tale told through first-person open-ended narrative exploration. If this sounds pretentious, it is; but this mod from the University of Portsmouth is a wildly original piece of storytelling with fantastic voice acting by the male narrator, and atmospheric music featuring mournful piano, strings and distorted soundscapes.

However, the major flaw in this no-gun experiment is that *Dear Esther* doesn't guide you through the mod. There are certain visual clues, but you end up walking around, desperately trying to work out where to go next. Yet, despite moments of teeth-grinding, *Dear Esther* keeps pulling you back into the game to hear more about the narrator's life and this strange island.

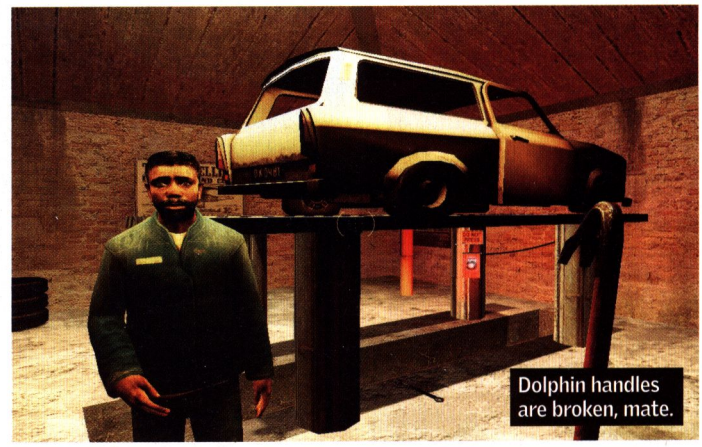
THE CITIZEN

Swap you this shotgun for that crowbar.

I'm not a number, I'm a Freeman...

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-citizen
MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

THE BEGINNING TITLES proudly say this mod is "A Spare Time Production". Nice. *The Citizen* is another mod for Valve's flagship shooter, but instead of Gordon Freeman, you play as an ordinary member of Joe Public in the middle of the City 17 invasion by the Combine aggressors. The mod creators have clearly spent a lot of time recording dialogue and programming animation for the characters in the game, and although rather patchy (the north-eastern brogue of some of the Resistance leaders is somewhat incongruous) it's confidently executed and does add to the unique feel of the add-on.



Dolphin handles are broken, mate.

The first level begins with you sneaking around avoiding Combine, but after a frustrating level in the sewers with some random door opening button sequences, *The Citizen* opens up into a decent adventure where you'll be firefighting in a shop one minute, and hurtling around the narrow streets in a boat the next. While it has its amateur hour moments, *The Citizen* is worth playing – if only to witness a Geordie firing guns at the Combine and shouting "shoot him in the face!"

Online Zone

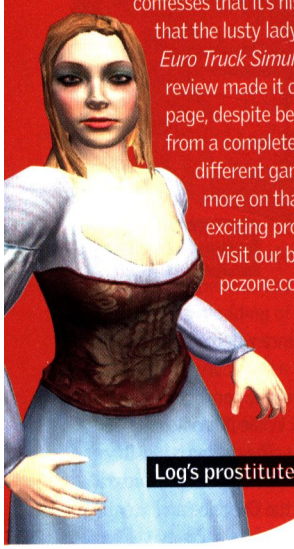
Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just visit pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, podcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!

PC ZONE! *PC ZONE*! It's the name of the mag you own! Well, you own a copy of it; the magazine itself is the possession of Future. So don't come around here telling us what to do, because we'll just look at you quizzically, and carry on playing slapsies. However, owning a copy of the magazine has its advantages; although anyone reading this will probably be wondering exactly what they are. Hooray for *PC ZONE*!

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

ERRATA ON THE blog this month, as faulty news reports on our *Deus Ex* feature in issue 200 created a slight stir on the internet when they didn't sufficiently emphasise the important of experience points. For a game with such a pre-installed backlash attached, this was enough to get everyone assuming that *Deus Ex 3* was more shooty-bang stupidity. It's such a strong theme, everyone's been talking about it in the forums, too – what you lot think is over there, to the right.

There's also an apologetic goodbye blog from Log, who confesses that it's his fault that the lusty lady on the *Euro Truck Simulator* review made it onto the page, despite being from a completely different game. For more on that exciting process, visit our blog at pczone.co.uk!



Log's prostitute.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Deus Ex 3 – your feelings, please?

Personally I'm excited based entirely on hope. I have no knowledge of Eidos Montreal as they are a new team created from team members I don't know anything about, and none of the major Ion Storm talent are with them.

The Tingler

It never fails to amaze how companies can say they are sticking to the "things people love" about a game and then add so many ridiculous things. The new *Wolfenstein* anyone?

PlugHead

It's odd that *Deus Ex* looked close to present day, and yet 25 years earlier in *Deus Ex 3*, it looks 25 years later.

Brax

I like some of the ideas they've got. The second Renaissance will work if you imagine it to be the roaring '20s to *Deus Ex*'s Great Depression. Some of the new augmentations sound a bit odd. Tentacles? A simple zip-line would be better.

JoWoo

As a long-time player of stealth games, I have to say, cones of vision things are bollocks. If you can't tell whether an enemy can see you or not, you're either stupid, or the game isn't very good at establishing its detection rules, or just breaks them.

Brax

I just hope to God that the developers try to use the cover system in a natural way. The last *Splinter Cell* managed it. I think.

Beats12

Chaos Theory, I hope you mean. It had stealth and cover and a light meter, instead of having you hiding in a shadow that wasn't really a shadow and being seen and killed.

Apophis_DD

PODCAST
LONG LIVE THE PODCAST!

Poor sound is the new good sound

FIGHT CLUB

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

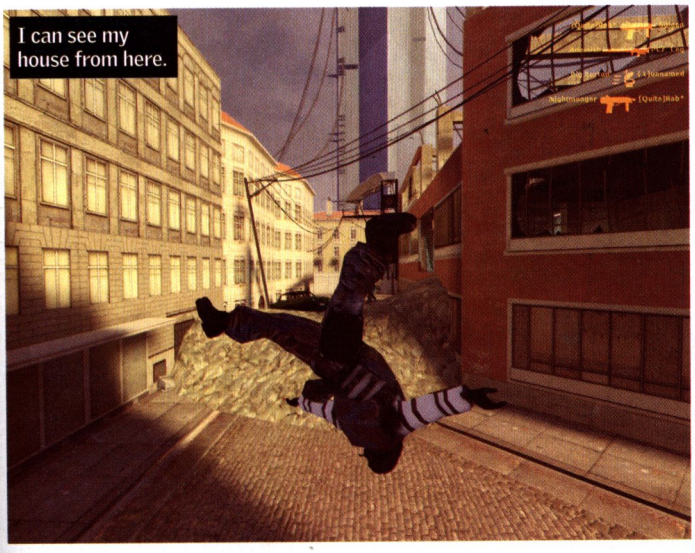
Fighting is what we do to you

FIGHT CLUB IS an adaptable creature, and this month had to sit in the middle of a lunchtime. And it wasn't *Team Fortress 2* (for once).

Fight Club stalwart Sarevok was slightly more visible than most months, because he was sat right next to us in the *PCZ* office. Poor Craig Kirby spent a lot of the week transcribing a two-hour interview with between Log and *Warhammer* motormouth Paul Barnett, so it was understandable that he'd want to spend his lunchtime hurling toilets at the readers who were – indirectly – forcing him to do it. And occasionally at those who were making him do it.

This month's Fight Club is dedicated to Mr Kirby, and the fact he told the deputy editor of *Official Nintendo Magazine* "The Wii is shit," and offered his summary of the Xbox to the editor of *OXM*, "It is shit." We're not sure he spends much time around people.

Join our Steam Community group at www.steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz and get notified of more events, and become instant friends with our thousand strong legion of members!

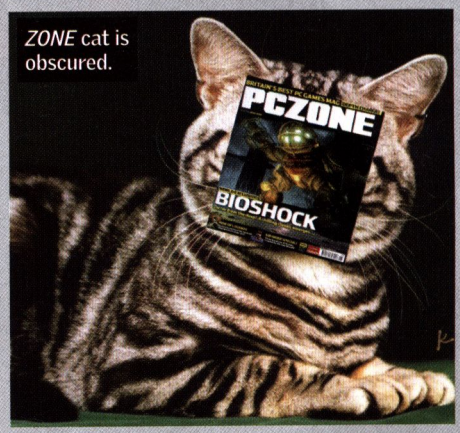


I can see my house from here.

ZONE CHAT

Beat the credit crunch, in style!

THIS MONTH'S ZONE Chat was preceded by a Steam group announcement. Nothing unusual about that, you might think, but this particular announcement contained an unlikely typo. And it was this: Zone Cat.



ZONE cat is obscured.

So enamoured was one reader with the idea of *PC ZONE*'s very own branded feline, he couldn't help himself but conjure up an image of the tortured creature, which we've printed for you right here. Once everybody had finished gawping at the mistake, communication commenced.

On the agenda was, get this, the credit crunch. Turns out nobody really knows what a credit crunch is, but we're fairly certain that subscribing to *PCZ* a few times will stop it in its tracks.

Lucky for us, we've placed our portly pot of *PC ZONE* profits in secure Icelandic banking institutions, thus avoiding the possibility of ever losing our savings. Everybody knows credit crunches can't swim!

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're stuck down a well – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows – some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx

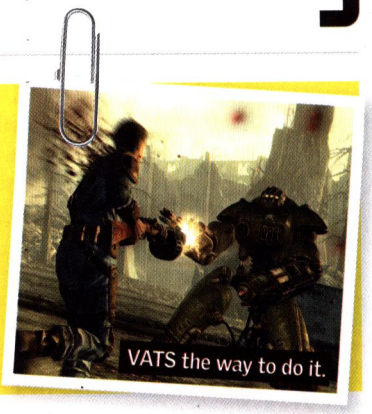
1. **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
2. **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
3. **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
4. **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
5. **ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk
6. **CALL OF DUTY 4**
Coming soon... really
7. **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
8. **TEAM FORTRESS 2**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

***SUPERTESTS* ARE DEAD.** Pubcasts are dead. What has replaced them? Some uncanny hybrid? A pubtest? A supercast? No; we've searched the internet for a word to describe what we've done – we've asked Jeeves, Hotbot, AltaVista, Excite and Lycos – and it turns out what we're actually doing is a "podcast".

Whereas other magazines go into studios and have a complete lack of background fuzz, we prefer to go into a meeting room with a noisy fan and sit around a Dictaphone. If it's good enough for Richard Herring and Andrew Collin's excellent and witty podcast, then it's more than good enough for our wretched flob of a sound file.

We're being poisonously modest, of course – this is obviously the best thing in the world, despite our two reviews on iTunes pegging us at two and a half stars.

Listen – you don't review us. We review you, and we deem you duff. To redeem yourselves, get back out there and start giving us five stars.



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CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them

CRYSIS WARHEAD

Chilly freelancer: ***Chris Capel***

PLAYING *CRYSIS WARHEAD*, I really felt like was playing *Crysis* again. I mean it really felt like it, in that there's pretty much nothing here that hasn't been imported from the main game. Whether that's a bad thing is debatable, as I'm certainly enjoying myself. Again.

Still, *Crysis* itself did feel very much like *Far Cry*, and with *Far Cry 2* showing off its fancy non-tropical island environments (on page 56) there's a real danger of *Warhead* straying into been-there-done-that territory. There's one good reason to go back to *Crysis* though: it's still a great game.

DING-DING, ROUND 2

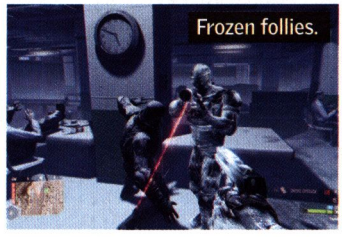
Yes it had issues, but as Will pointed out in his review *Warhead* fixes them all. Mostly. If you're still running a 256MB graphics card, like me, don't expect much more than Medium settings if you're actually considering shooting things.

The sudden disappearance of the Korean forces has now been explained, as they were on the other side of the island fighting Psycho instead. What this means is that the whole of *Warhead* is fun and not just the first half.

Jungle japes.

Korean high-kicks.

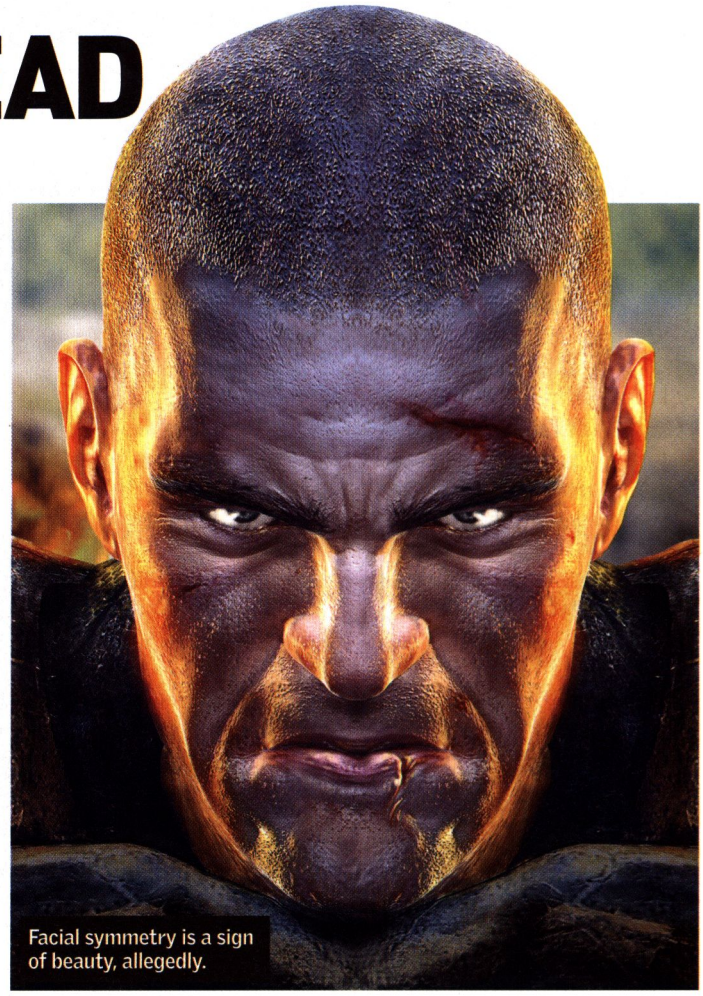
Machine-gun madness.



Frozen follies.

Remember that simple pleasure in *Doom* of getting enemies to fight each other? I still love games that do this, and while *Crysis* shamefully ignored this pleasure, *Warhead* doesn't.

As in *Crysis*, with *Warhead* it's the moments you create yourself that live with you. My favourite here was sneaking past a pack of aliens, discovering a gang of Korean soldiers just over the hill, then chucking a grenade on top of that hill so that both parties went to investigate and clashed in the centre. I intervened to even the odds occasionally, but they didn't notice me until I picked off the last survivor. By uncloaking right in front of him and chucking him down said hill.



Facial symmetry is a sign of beauty, allegedly.

"As in *Crysis*, in *Warhead* it's the moments you create yourself that live with you"

Warhead is more linear than *Crysis*, but the array of options the game gives you (and the improved AI) ensures that no battle is the same twice, even in the claustrophobic mine levels. This makes the price seem even more reasonable.

Warhead's thunder might have been stolen by *Far Cry 2* by the time you read this, but I really enjoyed returning to *Crysis*. It may just be a mission pack ("parallel story" my arse), but it ranks with *Half-Life: Opposing Force* for quality. Still can't run it properly though.

VERDICT **Divine muppetry**

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Troubled with tribals: ***Will Porter***

Is this a princess? Hard to tell these days.

OVER THE FIVE years that I've been at *PC ZONE*, the game treated most abysmally by the world in general is Irrational's *Tribes: Vengeance*. How can anyone hold ire against an FPS that features a doomed romance conducted within 3in of primary-coloured metal armour? Or that stars a sports star princess? Or that has jetpacks?

Replaying *Tribes* hammers home just how satisfying its silky skiing, leaping and precision blasting is, and how bizarre a game in which all the characters are strapped to jetpacks can possibly be. Metal globes float above the landscape, inverted metal pyramids sit in the bottom of valleys, chasms lie so deep you can barely see the bottom... Verticality is a real buzzword in gaming at the moment, but girlfriend – *Tribes* went there and did that four years ago. It also makes me pine for the days of Unreal Engine 2, before everything looked oil-slicked and dreary.

Vehicles have a naff Duplo feel to them, that's very charming.

"Shame on the world for not loving *Tribes* like I do"

This game has everything: charmingly bouncy physics, ragdolls spluttering red smoke as tribesmen career through zero-G, a decent 11th-hour twist, and cool whistling bomb noises. Shame on the world for not loving it like I do.

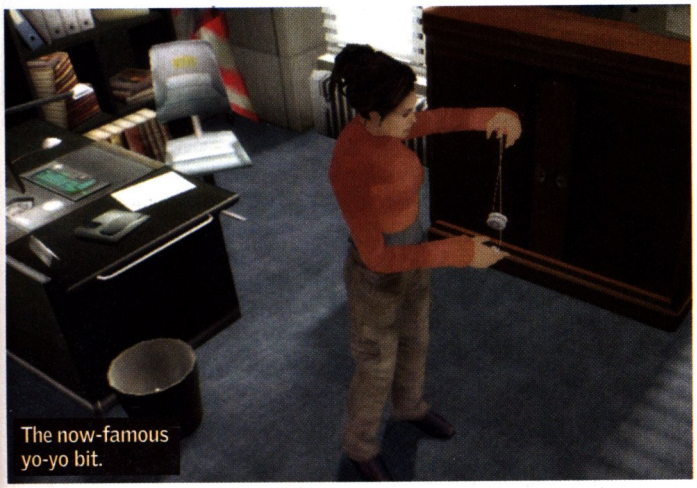
VERDICT **Princesses: peachy!**

You'll believe a tank can fly.

FAHRENHEIT

Hot under the collar: ***Steve Hogarty***

I'D ONLY EVER played the demo of the now-almost-ancient *Fahrenheit*, and having killed the guy in the toilet 12 times over I thought it proper that I buy the full game and see what happens after that. *Indigo Prophecy* (as it's known on Steam and elsewhere in the world), is a genre-blending adventure game. Mouse gestures control actions (but it's easier to use an Xbox controller), while quick-time event sequences (pressing keys as they appear on screen) unashamedly feature throughout.



The now-famous yo-yo bit.

The opening scene (the demo level) is the game's best bit. It just doesn't reach that level of murderous interactivity ever again. *Fahrenheit* highlights some of gaming's most glaring pitfalls too: obtuse puzzles; extensive sequences of non-interaction; and a bit where glancing at a corpse would send my character insane and have him locked in an asylum, so I had to jump out a window (I hate when games do that). The list goes on.

But the characters are excellent, and I really enjoyed the story – even though it goes bat-shit barmy. It's one of the few games I persevered with to its end, mostly for closure, and partly because I wanted to see the sex scene.

VERDICT **You don't see her nipple**

"I really enjoyed the story – even though it goes bat-shit barmy"

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

DARTH_CAREFUL
CRYSIS
"Seriously, what was the fuss all about? It boils down to some fairly good early levels, a baffling *Prey*-style interlude, and a by-the-numbers ending. Shutdown sequence initiated."

JNR218
WARHAMMER ONLINE
"When you get actually get '*Online*', the '*Warhammer*' bit is brilliant."

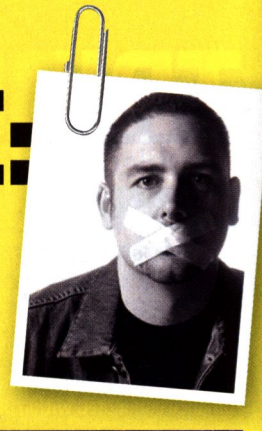
JOWOO
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
"I'm thinking of getting a wheel for this one. A fun racer, but playing it with the keyboard is going to give me a brain haemorrhage."

SAREVOK
SACRIFICE
"Only £3 on GOG.com, so I got it again. Good fun, but hearing 'INVALID TARGET' every 15 seconds does get annoying."

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Jon Blyth captures Paul Barnett and Kate Flack and interrogates them about the art of WAAAGHfare



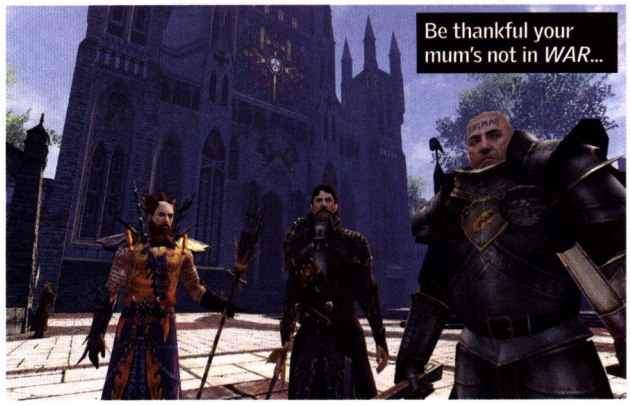
IT'S EASY TO forget that Mythic's creative director Paul Barnett isn't a celebrity of some kind. He's certainly famous in game development circles, simply because he makes disarmingly honest comments and has a mouth that never stops frothing with interesting, and often unpublishable, stories. He's also known to fans of *Warhammer* as the bloke at conventions, getting everyone to talk into his phone's video camera.

Deputy content director Kate Flack (unpictured due to unwillingness to send a bad photo) has a long history with *Warhammer* too. She wrote for the first *Warhammer* MUD, and worked on the first, aborted *Warhammer* MMO.

Jon Blyth met Paul and Kate in the foyer of a hotel, helped himself to the endless bowls of complimentary nuts, and talked to them about making a game.

An unlikely trio, but they get along just fine.

Thorskin's End: cheap gag, or clever pun?



Be thankful your mum's not in *WAR*...

01 WHAT'S IN A NAME...

Paul "There's some fantastic name gags in *Warhammer Online*, literally fantastic name gags – if you know your name gags. There's a great gravestone which marks the death of the dwarf explorer 'Thorskin Thrumek'. So you've got a place called 'Thorskin's End', and if you look at the gravestone, it says 'It was a sticky one'."

Kate "One of the dev's dads is a plumber who's dying of brain cancer. So this dev put his dad in the game as an engineer where he's working with the dwarves on a bit of plumbing. He took a screenshot of it and emailed it to his dad who was like 'Aww, my son's put me in the game. Isn't that awesome!' There's loads of stuff like that."

02 VOICE OF REASON

Paul "All our voice actors were brilliant. You can see the difference, because normal actors come in and move their arms a lot – thinking that that gets picked up by the microphone – whereas these people just come in with their headphones on, sipping at their little teacups, and they can hit any range. You can say 'Can you do it an octave lower than that?', and they're straight on it. They're absolutely astonishing and they're worth every penny."

Kate "The lady who did half the Dark Elf voices is about 45, 50 maybe? Older lady, but she's got that kinda deep sultry voice we wanted for the that class. Her son and his friends are all into Warhammer, and she's now really upset because her son's friends keep taking the piss out of him, saying 'Who is that? She sounds really hot!'"

"The lady who did half the Dark Elf voices is about 50. Older lady, but she's got that deep sultry voice we wanted"

03 ORCHESTRAL

Paul "Our music is performed by a Prague orchestra. Brad Derrick was our composer, we flew him over to Prague to watch it. He walks into the hall with this enormous fur coat and big Elton John glasses. The orchestra hands Brad a baton and says, 'Mr Derrick, if you would'. He looks at the baton and the orchestra, and thinks 'I'm in a bit of trouble here'. Being the American abroad, he picks it up thinking 'This is just going to be terrible,' and he's sweating profusely in that coat. Four steps from the podium, this hand taps his shoulder. It's the conductor saying, 'I think that's for me'. Turns out the orchestra do this with everybody as an icebreaker, and they see how long it is before the person looks like they're gonna lose their mind."

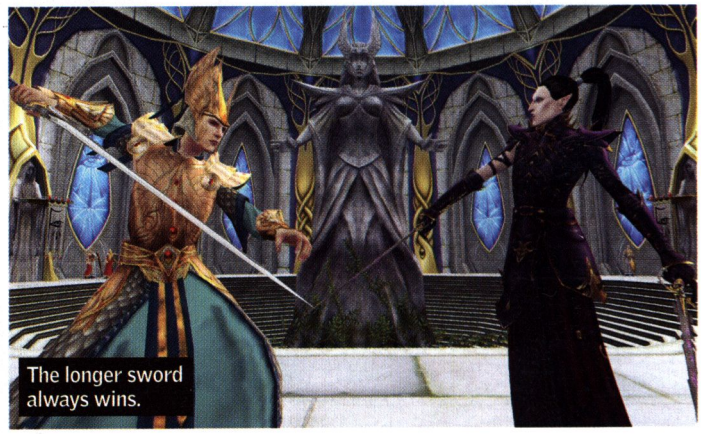
WAR's soundtrack was recorded by an orchestra in Prague.

04 POST-RELEASE PLEASURES

Kate "I have a scheduled time in my day to just relax and play the game and see how people are using it. The people are the fifth participle in the game. They're the bit you anticipate during development and try and design around, but until you see how they're talking, what they're saying, what the slang is, how they're using the game, what they intend to do, you just don't know.

"What I enjoy personally is that the crowd that have come in now aren't so good at RvR because they don't know how to do it yet, so I'm actually playing with people who are of equal ability to me. I can finally play RvR instead of being repeatedly crushed into the ground by our QA team, who are total ninjas."

Looks like a cold front...



The longer sword always wins.

05 SHELVING CRISIS

Paul "I was on Oxford Street in London yesterday. So I go into a game shop (you can guess which one), thinking it'd be great to see *WAR* at maybe number two in their chart, near the top. It's at number 24. It's beneath *Morrowind*. It's six places under *Simon the Sorcerer 4*. There's clearly something terribly, terribly wrong. I ring up our people and they confirm the shop's wrong – it's number one everywhere.

"Two hours later they call me back with the explanation – apparently the shop didn't have any copies left in stock, so they didn't want to put it at number one.

"Somewhere in their numpty logic they decided to put it at number 24 to stop people wanting to buy it. It's one of the most lunatic decisions I think I've ever come across."

"I can finally play RvR instead of being repeatedly crushed into the ground by our QA team"

Kate Flack on the bonus of *WAR* going live

Watch out for those raunchy, face humping Dark Elves.

06 ROLE PLAYING SERVERS

Kate "I don't go onto servers fishing for feedback, because for me it feels a little dishonest. I love watching people playing the game, though. I log on to a roleplaying server and watch people doing their crazy roleplay. A lot of it is really funny.

"The weirdest things motivate them. I was running around in RvR with two other players. We decided to take a battlefield objective and were attacked by a bunch of NPCs.

"For some reason there was a bug with the pathing of a Dark Elf mounted on a Cold One – it kept rearing up into one guy's face. He was going, 'My face is being humped by a Cold One!' We all died, but we had to go back and kill that Cold One because it insulted his honour."

A typical picnic scene in *Warhammer Online*.

"This hat's not too much, is it?"

A brigade of Cold Ones.

07 WAR IS RAW

Paul "They've got these airbrush tattoo guys at Festival du Jeu. I've been walking around the last few days covered in fake *WAR* tattoos. They did over 750 of the *WAR* logo on the first day, but I only noticed something was wrong with it when I saw it on other people – mine looked fine in the mirror. They'd put the stencil on the wrong way around; so 750 people are walking around with RAW written on their forearms. Still looks great in the mirror, though."

08 FOR NOW

Kate "There's an awful lot of decompression happening among our staff at the moment, as you can imagine. Three years of their lives has been spent creating this thing, working on it every day, overtime, obsessively ranting to your wife about it, your kids don't see you because you're making this damn game. And suddenly it's like, 'This is an awful lot of people rating us on *Metacritic*', which is refreshing."

Paul "Ninety-one average, right? Universal acclaim. I want that to be frozen exactly where it is for posterity, so people can see it and go 'Ahh, very clever'. Anyone giving it a lower score should be ashamed of themselves."

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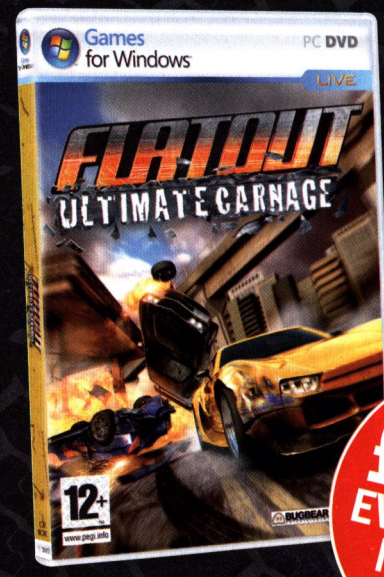

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NEXT MONTH!

HUGE REVIEW ISSUE

That's right. The game avalanche isn't slowing yet...

LEFT 4 DEAD

The zombie apocalypse is upon us. Is Valve's co-op creation going to scoop the plaudits as game of the year? This time next month we'll know...

ON SALE 27 NOV

ALSO REVIEWED

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

After its modern-day heroics, *Call of Duty* returns to the decade and the conflict that made it famous. Can Treyarch fill Infinity Ward's mighty boots?

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

Can the 3-D match engine equal 10 years of hoping and dreaming about it? Time to find out

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

The adventures of Niko Bellic saunter onto PC, hopefully dashing console smirks

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Lara dons a swimsuit menacingly in the dampest *Tomb Raider* yet...

PLUS!

BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION
SAINTS ROW 2
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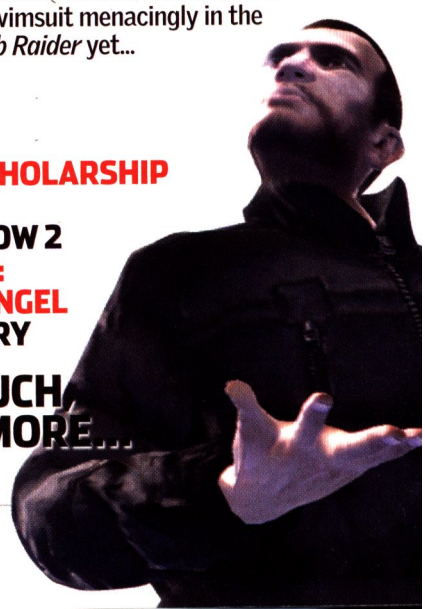
LEGENDARY

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...



IMPORTANT LISTS #442

101 THINGS WE'VE LEARNED FROM VIDEO GAMES

1. It's OK to kill people.
2. Dying doesn't really matter much either.
3. If you're 14, have hair covering your eyes and live in a small village, man up, because you're going to have to save the world.
4. Medicine became obsolete in the year 2004, when doctors noticed that hiding behind a wall caused human health to regenerate to 100%.
5. Eating stuff found on the floor is good for you – your parents were wrong.
6. Some time in the future, Earth will be menaced by hordes of alien spacecraft that fly in predictable patterns and can be killed in one hit. The logical course of action will be to despatch one brave hero in an untested plane/tank/spaceship to take them all on without help.
7. Winners don't use drugs.
8. Buildings may have crates full of goodies on their roofs, so always check, even if it means riding a motorbike up the fire escape.
9. Enemies, rather than approach you directly, behave like Michael Flatley on a conveyor belt.
10. Keycards are only manufactured in primary colours.
11. Tanks will go faster if you turn the turret backwards and keep firing.
12. Anything in the world can be made from food, wood and gold.
13. Most guards forget you unsuccessfully tried to strangle them after walking around for 20 seconds.
14. It's surprising just how useful martial arts are on the modern battlefield.
15. When you get shot, you don't feel any pain, nor does it affect your aim. However, it does cause your vision to turn red for a couple of seconds.
16. If a crown princess is abducted by political dissidents or terrorists it is advisable to avoid using Special Forces and instead hire the services of an Italian plumber or a dizzy egg.
17. Firearms are most simply reloaded by pointing them at the wall and pulling the trigger.
18. Crates only contain one single item, much smaller than the crate itself. The item will usually be in the dead centre of the crate with no supporting packing material.
19. If you're stuck in life and don't know what to do, simply attempt to use every single item in your possession on your obstacle. If none of them work, go back the way you came. You've clearly missed something.
20. You can jump twice your own height, but water will kill you instantly.
21. Wrexham can win the Champions League if you have about 483 full days to spare, 80% of which are spent waiting for *CM04* to load
22. Jumping on turtles' heads is socially acceptable. Unless it's being used as a euphemism for needing the toilet.
23. Contrary to popular belief, you don't gain experience and knowledge by education and hard work. You get it from wandering around the countryside killing wildlife.
24. Princesses float further than plumbers.
25. Despite what logic dictates, the ideal shape for a war robot is not squat, armoured, with a low centre of gravity, but a bipedal humanoid. Ideally with hands to hold a gun, rather than built in weaponry.
26. Black people are slow but strong; women are fast but weak.
27. When you look down, you can't see your feet.
28. Explosives don't work on doors unless they're a bit shinier than the other doors.
29. If working on high scaffolding, beware of gorillas throwing barrels off the top floor.
30. No girls.
31. Always be sure to smash any crates you come across, they will always contain good things.
32. Despite the fact that modern weapons systems are effective over hundreds of miles, in the future all space/air/sea combat will be conducted within about 50 yards of the enemy.
33. Contrary to the strict regulations you might think pilots have to adhere to, you can actually fly any aircraft upside down beneath the Golden Gate bridge without getting in trouble.
34. War is the best fun ever.
35. It doesn't matter where you shoot someone, even if it's in the foot, as long as you do it enough times there will eventually be an immediate transition between alive and dead.
36. There is no practical difference between walking into a weapon and picking it up.
37. In medieval times, women regularly fought in wars, wearing armour that afforded them equal protection to suits of plate mail worn by men, despite only covering about 3in^2 of skin.
38. Most martial arts will teach you how to throw fireballs at about green belt level.
39. Roman and medieval generals had a zoomable and rotatable 3D view of the battlefield, and controlled their soldiers by clicking giant arrows.
40. Everyone speaks English, including Nazis, aliens and the living dead.
41. When your life ends you will be given 10 seconds to decide whether you fancy going again (in some circumstances this may cost you a pound).
42. As long as you are wearing at least one ring you will never die.
43. Pulling out a weapon makes you see a + sign wherever you look.
44. Running from side to side or backwards is just as easy and quick as running forwards.
45. Never trust a giant monkey wearing a tie.
46. Graveyard zombies are predatory homosexuals, who'll strip you down to your Y-fronts.
47. Bus-loads of people will turn up to a mostly empty field to see a man in a hippo costume stand next to a chip shop.
48. Fat people are always evil. If not from the beginning, they will betray you eventually.
49. You can only use a pair of skis once and the only shop selling them at resorts is invariably on the other side of a busy motorway with no visible means of a pedestrian thoroughfare.
50. Not only is it perfectly normal for animals to talk, but their default attitude is "sassy".
51. Modern tank warfare will be replaced in the future by building a very large number of tanks on the battlefield itself, then attacking the enemy's strongest point head-on with hundreds of them at once.
52. You know when you have won a fight down the boozer when your opponent stands still, waiting for you to decapitate him.
53. Prostitutes will judge you on the fanciness of your car and give you 25% bonus health post-sex. This is only in the pre-AIDS '80s. In 2008, you will be tsk-ed at by an Eastern European, which makes you feel sick and guilty, even though you've been stabbing people all day.
54. Karate and driving can both be learned in minutes simply by repeating sequential dance routines as requested by cartoon animals.
55. Wearing a pair of white gloves to work everyday may seem an unwise choice if your chosen career is plumbing, but, in reality, you will never have to dirty your pristine mitts by fishing a swollen, fetid tampon from a shit-clogged outflow pipe.
56. The bodies of your murdered victims will fade and disappear if you wait for a few seconds.
57. Explosives are not stored, as you might expect, in secure containers in controlled environments, but in barrels that are littered around combat zones at random. Highly-trained evil soldiers are quite happy to engage in sustained fire-fights while standing next to them.
58. Doing athletics really hurts your wrist after a while.
59. You can't ever trip over, even when running backwards as fast as you can, firing a shotgun.
60. World War II infantry jargon included such phrases as "lol", "n00b" and "OMG HaXXoR!!11!" Modern counter-terrorist SWAT teams use the same phrases.
61. People wink out of existence when you're not there to see them.
62. On the whole, you can withstand a lot more bullets/punches/magic compared to the other guy.
63. Always shut the door behind you, especially if it looks like it might snow later on.
64. You don't need scintillating conversation get on in life. Two-word commands will do fine.
65. Many, if not all, problems can be solved with a Holy Hand Grenade.
66. Being on the goodies' side doesn't automatically make you winners of The War.
67. You can up your bank balance £1,000 at a time by chanting 'FUND'.
68. Kick enough puppies and you'll eventually gain the strength, wisdom and dexterity to take on ninjas.
69. Food can heal most serious injuries instantly.
70. Even cyborgs/ninjas/special agents able to smash whole cities with their fists and defeat the mightiest opponent in close combat are stumped when confronted with a locked door or box, and have to go find the key.
71. Music spontaneously plays whenever you do anything exciting.
72. Modern military training teaches that the best way to defeat an enemy is to stand stock still in plain view of the enemy and fire wildly. Making sinister noises to reveal your location is good, too.
73. If you notice a discoloured section on a brick wall, try running up really close and pressing on it, for it may give way and lead you to a secret cache of weapons and armour.
74. Bullet holes will gradually disappear, foiling your attempts to draw a cock and balls on the ground with a machine gun.
75. When you've run out of food and stuff, just leave the house and then go back in again.
76. When you kill people, they just disappear. Sometimes they turn into food or money. Or some bullets.
77. You can travel anywhere instantly, as long as you've been there before.
78. When crawling along air-conditioning ducts, if you go forward and back a few times you may or may not see a pair of tits.
79. First aid kits can be applied to your injuries in under a second, and will instantly fix your injuries and make you healthier.
80. Torches only last for one minute, but thankfully recharge themselves over time.
81. If you're in a castle looking for a lost loved one, they're in another one.
82. If you're good enough at trading/bartering – every single shop in the world will reduce their prices specially for you.
83. You can lead a fulfilling and adventurous life, and keep several friends, without ever opening your mouth.
84. You can shoot open a padlock, but locks on wooden doors only ever leave a dent.
85. It is possible to carry an infinite amount of items, including a full sunday roast spread, for no adequately explored reason, without impeding either your speed or clothing.
86. "Sho-ryu-ken!" is the best opening line to start a punch-up in a pub
87. Conversation is easy! Just think of two or three possible responses, and pick the one you think will lead to the greatest reward.
88. Firing a rocket launcher straight into the floor is an excellent idea, and will get you cool stuff, provided you jump into the air as you do it.
89. Women who are experienced mercenaries and can carry multiple heavy weapons do not look like Bulgarian discus throwers, but are lithe, slim, and have very large breasts.
90. The world is packed with unexplored ruins, most of which are packed to the rafters with treasure. Despite this, no-one has yet bothered to explore them.
91. The owners of theme parks/zoos/hospitals are able to pick up visitors to their attractions with a giant grapple, and drown them in lakes without penalty.
92. Being shot in the face is only a minor inconvenience, but going into an area you are not supposed to will result in instant death.
93. Nazis/Alien Invaders/Evil Megacorps are always leaving medical supplies around for their opponents to heal themselves with. Their own soldiers are under strict instruction not to touch them. Ever.
94. The popular third dimension was introduced in the '80s, before which you'd simply shrink and move more slowly to convey distance.
95. You can probably fit another rocket launcher in your rucksack if you carefully rearrange those four ammo clips and that coke can.
96. If someone you don't like is in a swimming pool, simply remove the steps to get out. Then they will be stuck and drown through exhaustion
97. Frogs die in water.
98. You can gaze at a woman's tits for hours on end without either of you becoming embarrassed. However, attempts to mount her from every side like a determined St Bernard will always result in you bouncing off her textured hide.
99. If you win a really big fight, don't relax until you've made sure there isn't a much more powerful robot version of your late opponent lurking in a corner.
100. "Ninja" is the most common occupation on the planet, just above "Secret Agent" and "Alien in Disguise".
101. Comprehensive military training can be acquired simply by climbing a rope, crouching and firing down a range a few times.

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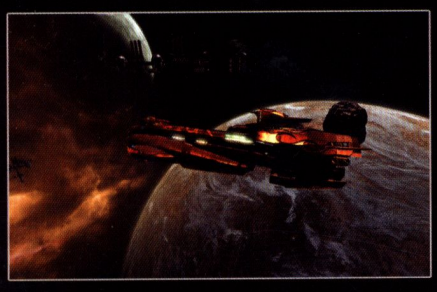
SERVICES AVAILABLE IN VIRGIN MEDIA CABLED STREETS ONLY. Subject to network capacity, minimum term contract. Fibre optic cable technology is the "mother of all broadband" due to factors such as its low signal attenuation, low signal interference rates and high data-carrying capacity. Fastest average actual ping, download and upload times based on Epitiro data for 01/04/08 to 30/06/08 (up to 20Mb fibre optic cable broadband versus BT, Tiscali and AOL ADSL Max). Up to 2Mb is £4.50 a month for first 12 months; up to 10Mb is £8 a month for first 6 months; up to 20Mb is £10 a month for first 6 months (when you take a Virgin phone line for £11 a month). Standard monthly prices for broadband and phone bundle apply after offer period: up to 2Mb & phone (£20); up to 10Mb & phone (£27); up to 20Mb & phone (£31). Offer for a limited period only. Available to new customers only (subject to status and credit checks). You must, at a minimum, take both services included in this bundle for your minimum contract term. If you change any part of this package, standard prices apply. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer. Minimum computer requirements apply. Speed of internet connection assumes components working at optimum speed and capacity. Both cable and ADSL broadband are affected by user volume. Acceptable Use Policy applies. Installation charges apply (starting at £30). Payment may be required in advance. All prices include VAT. Prices quoted are for payment by Direct Debit and e-billing. If you pay by non-Direct Debit methods you will incur a monthly £5 charge, payable to Virgin Media Payments, for payment handling services. Customers not taking the e-bill discount will have £1 per month added for paper bills. Information correct at 09/08. Calls may be monitored. Further Legal Stuff applies. Go to virginmedia.com for details.

TRADE FIGHT BUILD THINK

X3

TERRAN CONFLICT



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