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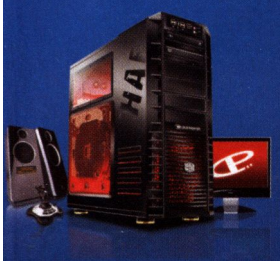

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THE NEW GIRL

WELCOME TO MY first issue as editor of *PC ZONE*, where I've stepped into some very big shoes, which my large lady feet almost fit. Dep ed Steve did a great job holding the fort while a replacement editor was found, in fact Steve and the rest of the team have made me feel very welcome, and I'm sure you will too. Let's just think of this as the first day of the rest of *PCZ*'s life.

Speaking of new starts this month's edition of the magazine comes with a special 2009 preview giving you a glimpse as to what delights await you in the New Year, from *Empire: Total War* and *F.E.A.R. 2*, to *Watchmen* and *Dawn of War II* (the tyranids are coming!). Closer to home, we've reviews of *Prince of Persia* and *Quantum of Solace*, and *GTA IV* finally arrives on PC. Take a look at the DVD too as we've an exclusive *Tomb Raider: Underworld* demo.

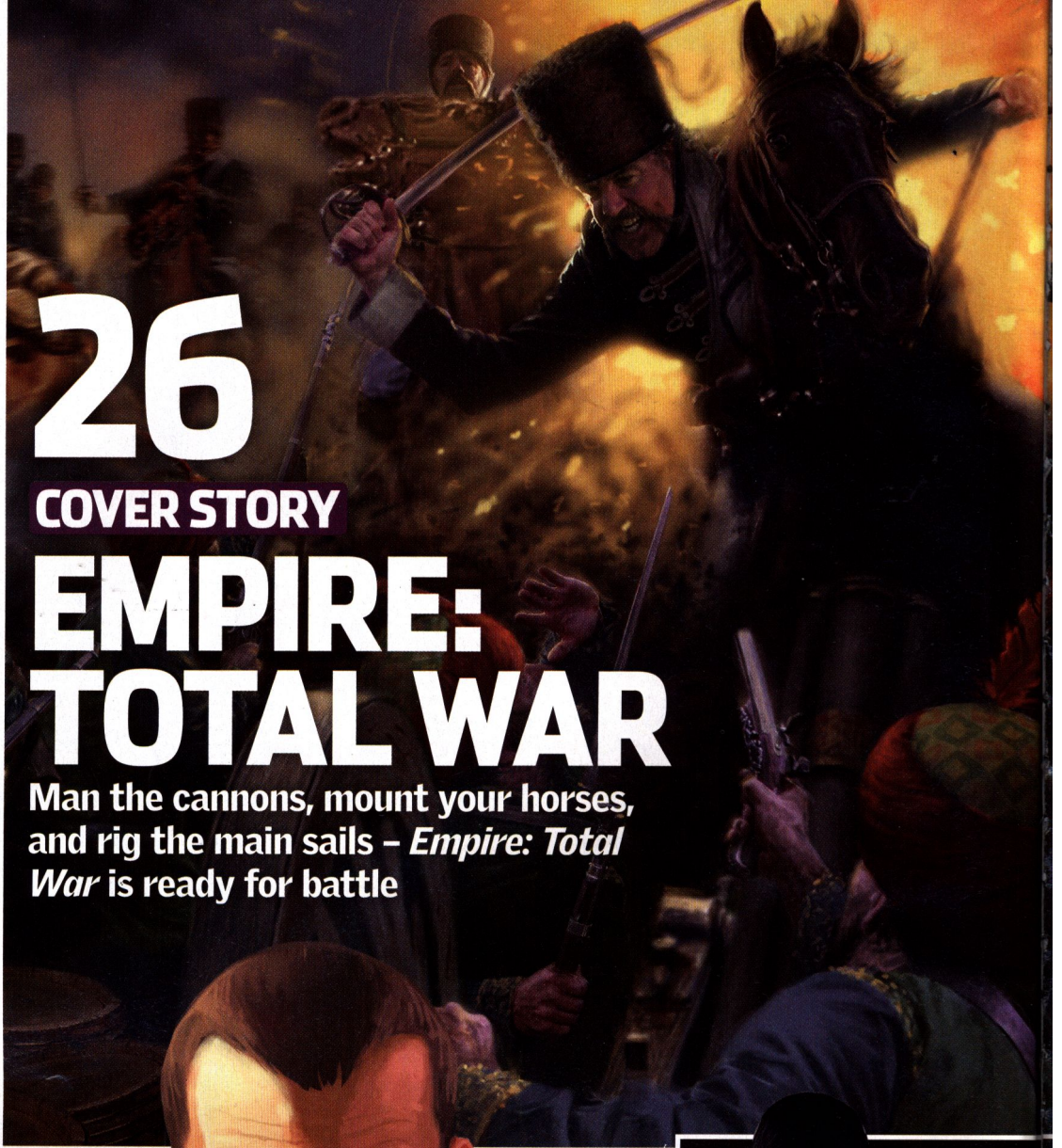
As I'm just not very funny, I'm leaving it to the experts, so all your favourite writers continue to grace our pages this month, with Hill, Porter, Log and Korda contributing to sharp, witty and most importantly, hairy manly copy all for you.

For any feedback on this issue, just email letters@pczone.co.uk or head to the forum on our website, pczone.co.uk, we'd love to hear what you think.

All that leaves me to say is Happy Christmas from myself and the team, we look forward to seeing you in 2009.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com



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Man the cannons, mount your horses, and rig the main sails – *Empire: Total War* is ready for battle

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The crime spree has arrived on the PC at last!

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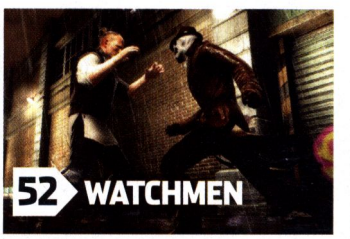

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Subscribe and get a copy of the *Lord of the Rings Online* MMO!
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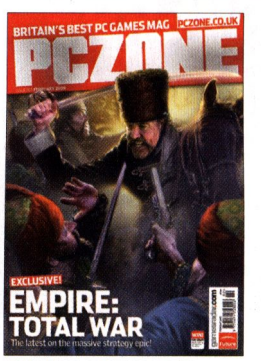
68 PRINCE OF PERSIA

Can the new Prince out-do his predecessor?

100 FREEWARE

David Brown **plays with balls before breaking an athlete's legs while learning how to run.**

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



26 EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 105 words...

We look at the most exciting games that'll elbow drop their way onto your hard drives in 2009, and Mystic Will gives us his predictions for the big shock announcements of next year. We then ruthlessly critique *GTA IV* and *Prince of Persia*, and David Brown gets his teeth into *A Vampyre Story*, *NBA 2K9* and various other games, proving he is the greatest reviewer of all time (guess who wrote this bit!) Finally, we challenge you all to beat our score of 32m in *QWOP*, the most annoying browser game in history, perhaps.

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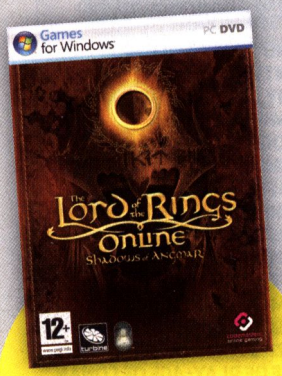

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Full offer details on page 106.

MEET THE TEAM

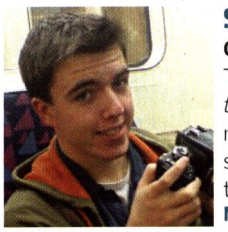
Introducing *PC ZONE*'s newest new person...

ALI WOOD

UberFragMeisterin

AGE: 31
LIKES: Sunshine
DISLIKES: Brown food
FANCIES: A cup of builder's tea
FAVOURITE GAME: Hide & Seek
NOW PLAYING: Take That

Ali's first task on entering the decadent halls of Zone Towers was to whip us back into shape. Unfortunately, she took this to mean actually making us do work, turn up on time, not take two-hour coffee breaks and basically spend our days actually writing the magazine. Other than that, she's been telling us that *Chinese Democracy* isn't as bad as some people are making out, attending lots of meetings and successfully breeding giant pandas in captivity.



STEVE HOGARTY

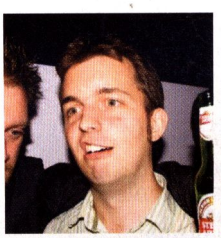
Chocolate fiend

The office was graced by a *Sonic the Hedgehog* advent calendar this month, which our deputy editor snaffled before munching away on the treats contained within.
NOW PLAYING: ***Left 4 Dead***

DAVID BROWN

Shooting hoops

When Dave handed *NBA 2K9* a very high score, basketball illiterates in the office questioned why. He said it was due to the accurate models of the players' big shorts.
NOW PLAYING: ***NBA 2K9***



WILL PORTER

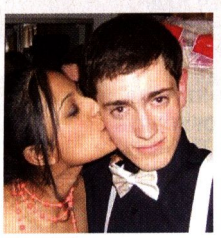
Fortune teller

Down in Brighton Will has been predicting the future, saying we're going to die in a boating accident, so we've stopped returning his calls.
NOW PLAYING: ***Penny Arcade Adventures: Episode 2***

JON BLYTH

Car jacking for coins

Because Log took reviewing *GTA4* so seriously, he started stealing cars for fun. His review was subsequently filed from Parkhurst.
NOW PLAYING: ***A Vampyre Story***



ED ZITRON

Receiving flak

Our MMO expert Ed has angered loyal *WOW*ers as he didn't think *Wrath of the Lich King* was 'all that', as they say in the States. He's too busy partying to care, though.
NOW PLAYING: ***Mines of Moria***

MARTIN KORDA

Rattling his sabre

Korda turned up at a briefing for *Empire: Total War*, wearing an eyepatch and missing one arm. He'd clearly taken realism too far.
NOW PLAYING: ***Empire: Total War***

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... A shiny new editor has arrived, and peace has been restored to the *PC ZONE* office.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... A shiny new editor has arrived, and we have to stop turning up to work drunk at 1pm.

What we've been talking about...

CHINESE DEMOCRACY **11mins** Is it rubbish? Is it great? Is it years and years too late?
PLAYSTATION 3 **4mins** Steve's built a rocket booster ostrich!
LEFT 4 DEAD **78mins** Reloading! Reloading! Reloading! Reloading! Shit, TANK!
BASKETBALL **5mins** Dave has been boring people with tales of the Utah Jazz's exploits.
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV **10mins** Our fears were allayed, it is officially a good port!
ADVENT CALENDARS **6mins** Steve sparked angry scenes when he commandeered the *Sonic* chocolates.
REGGAE MUSIC **2mins** Dave had a night out wearing a dreadlock wig and dancing to Toots and the Maytals.
2009 **43mins** Only 12 months to go before we can say "2010" and feel like Buck Rogers.
BIG BRITISH CASTLE **8mins** Art editor Matt produces a licence fee rant worthy of the *Daily Mail* letters page.
THE WATCHMEN **3mins** Why is that guy blue? Shouldn't he put some clothes on?

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.
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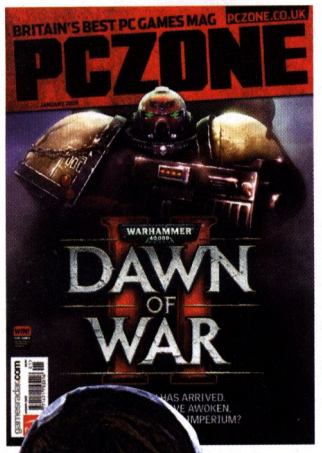


Returning again to deal with your rants and raves, it's deputy editor *Steve Hogarty*

KING OF LETTERS

ZOMBIE MORALS

Games are a test of character. This has been said before, but with *Left 4 Dead*'s recent dominance over my gaming time, I think such sentiments could do with being repeated. If for no other reason than the fact that once again, I've had to listen to the judgements of those who have never played a game, yet believe strongly that *GTA*'s gameplay goal of stabbing babies is wrong and will corrupt our youth.

Planescape: Torment asked us, "What can change the nature of a man?" and left the answer up to the player, never daring to tell us what was right. *Deus Ex* said to us, "Here are some enemies. Or they might not be. Kill them. Or don't. Either way, morality is merely the construct of the opinions of others, and perhaps the nature of humanity is that–" At which point we all said, "Alright *Deus Ex*, calm down, I only asked for a pistol."

And now we have *L4D*, a test of character that brilliantly serves to show us our own true personality. If a friend falls in the woods, and everyone else has reached the safe room, does he make a sound? If two members are wounded, and one is a close friend, which do you save first; your friend, or the one with the pipe bomb?

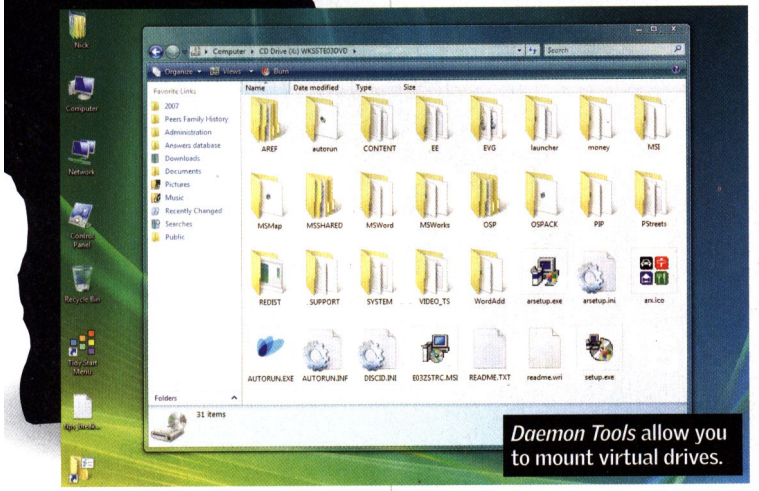
Perhaps what *L4D* implies is that when it all goes to hell... we survive, because deep down we're as cold and calculating as the zombies that ate our friends.

Nick 'Brax' Brakespear

Interesting stuff. We'd love to get stats from Valve showing how often people heal players from their friends list before others. Or if the extra help Zoey receives is statistically significant. We certainly feel more loved when we play as *L4D*'s only female survivor...

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.)



UPDATES

I was updating *Vista* yesterday with *Windows Update* when, in the middle of an update, I got this message about updates: "To check for updates, you must install an update for *Windows Update*." I promptly shat myself in confusion.

Peter Rooney

What's the most idiotic *Windows* message you've seen, readers?

DAEMONISED

I finally managed to install a retail copy of *Fallout 3*, a game which I've been looking forward to for ages. I have a gaming rig built for pleasure, have over 100 (count 'em!) games, all retail, all legit. I like to go to my mate's house and LAN all night long. Shifting rigs about is frought with danger, and the last thing we need is a busted PC, so the games stay at home, less to carry.

We don't bother taking our original (read this, you software bastards!) games, as we play loads, and so we use disc images, loaded onto *Daemon Tools*. We do not have any pirated software on our machines, and yes my mate has all originals too! We make the images from our own purchased software, and up to now I've not had any bother.

Except with *Fallout 3*. I cannot play the game because SecuROM doesn't like

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Epic's Cliff Bleszinski's not letting PC owners near *Gear of Wars 2*, harumph.

"I know how to pirate software, I know where to get it from, but I choose to support the industry"

that I've got disc imaging software installed. I've had to resort to downloading a fixed executable to run it, and you know what? It pisses me off. I have spent thousands of pounds of hard-earned cash faithfully buying original games. I know how to pirate software, I know where to get it from, but I choose to support the industry, and they turn round and treat me like this. C**ts.

The law states that we are innocent, until proven guilty. I have not been found guilty of the crime of piracy. Therefore I am innocent. I do not want to be treated like a thief, with suspicion. And for all their efforts, *Fallout 3* is on the web to download anyway.

SecuROM solves jack all apart from pissing people off who just want to play games. Get rid of it. It stinks. I can go to a website right now, download a game, burn it to disc, run it with a cracked executable and they can't do anything about it. But I won't, because I am a decent human being, and I would like to be treated as one.

Mark Wilde

After reading with disappointment that *Gears of War 2* will not be coming to PC, with Cliff Bleszinski from Epic citing the fact that high-end PC gamers will be "savvy" enough to be able to pirate software, I though that Clifford might be interested to note that the two people I know with Xbox 360 consoles both had the game some two weeks prior to release on a shiny gold DVD-R. Clearly Mr Bleszinski underestimates the "savvyness" of his Xbox 360 customers!

My point to him would be that a so called "high-end" PC gamer who will be prepared to shell out £1,500 plus for a mighty game-devouring behemoth is not going to blink at the trifling sum of £30 for any decent game, where as the people paying less than half the price of a top-end video card for an Xbox might baulk a paying a third of the price of their console on some 8-10 hours of gaming! Remember your roots Epic, that's what I say!

Greg Stinson

Cliff Bleszinski is a tosser. So I'm supposed to be pirating software now just because I have a high-end gaming PC? Well I've been PC gaming for 13 years and do not have one pirated game in my collection. I don't believe in piracy

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

Sent in by Todd Ingram

PC ZONE score: 86%

Strategy fans and one-armed gamers will rejoice at the release of the long awaited third *Red Alert* instalment. The game hits the right notes and delivers the old-school *C&C* formula fans are baying for, freshening up the look with a reminiscent cartoon art style, as well as updating and expanding memorable *Red Alert* music and sounds. However, the game falls relatively short in its level of complexity and depth, reducing the game towards a shorter blast of familiar fun. Sort of like playing hide and seek with your adult friends, except with significantly less War Bears.

Your shout: 80%

War bears, we love you.

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

ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

Oi Hoggy! I once bumped into u but haven't seen u since. I miss u. When we getting together. LOL... no I'm not bored. why do you ask?
king_clueless

Look, about that... I'm, well, I'm bumping into other readers now. Sorry you had to find out this way.

They really fucked up with this latest *Call of Duty*. Mmm, stare at the black screen.
Empee

Have you tried turning it off and on again?

Did BioWare give you any info on a release date for *Star Wars: The Old Republic* or even a date for the beta release?
Matt

They're not talking about release dates yet.

SW:TOR – out when it's done.

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 NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.

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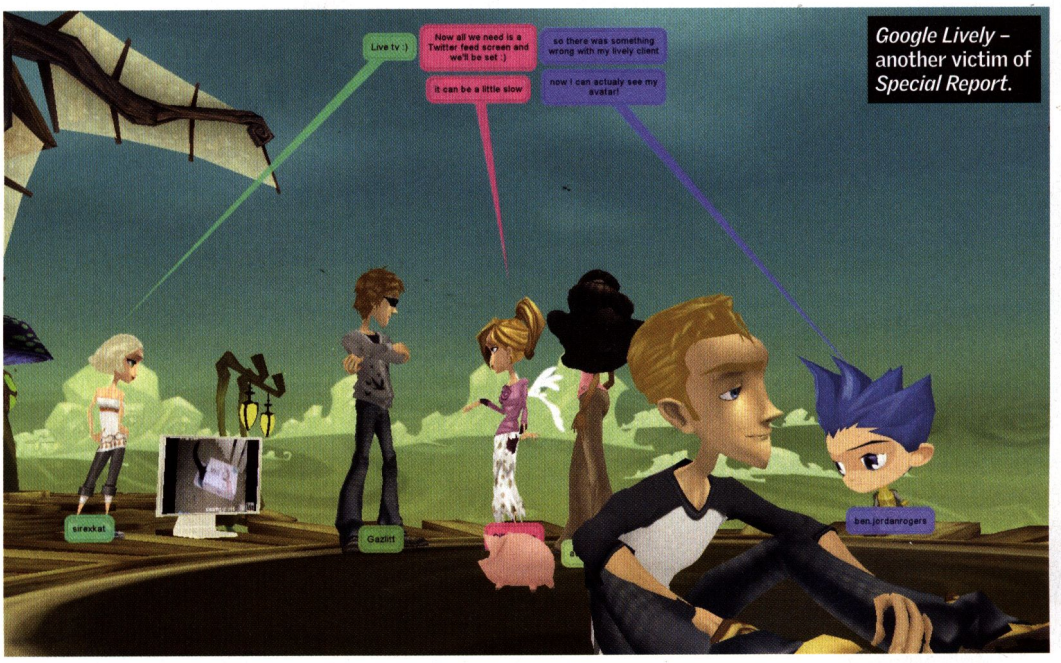


Google Lively – another victim of *Special Report*.

"The curse of Pavel Barter's *Special Report*: he celebrates *Google Lively* only for it to fold as we go to press"

and like many other innocent gamers I'm totally fed up being regarded as a criminal and have now put Epic games on my 'do not buy' list along with those which use SecuROM and other intrusive methods of DRM.

In short, 'Cliffy' can shove his games up his arse. Please feel free to pass my comments on to him.
Richard Smith

We receive three kinds of email from readers: ones about DRM, ones about how much you hate CliffyB's opinion that high-end PC gamers are more likely to pirate PC games, and pictures of Log as a waxwork. We can't tell which are the most passionately written.

NOT SO LIVELY

Picked up the last issue of *PC ZONE* today and read the article regarding *Google Lively*. Had some interesting things in there, "What *Lively* does have is potential, or so reckons Kevin Hanna", "Reportedly, third-party developers are already exploring *Lively*'s possibilities", and "He contends *Lively* could be a godsend for PC gamers".

So I thought I'd check it out and see what the big deal is, after all, I trust *PC ZONE* and *Google* are always coming out with great stuff. Went on there, it downloaded and the message appeared "Lively will be shutting down after 31 December 2008".

No much of a godsend then eh?
Sean Callaghan

It's the curse of Pavel Barter's Special Report: first he criticises *Games for Windows Live* only for it to transform, now he celebrates *Google Lively* only for it to fold the day we go to press. What will the man destroy next?

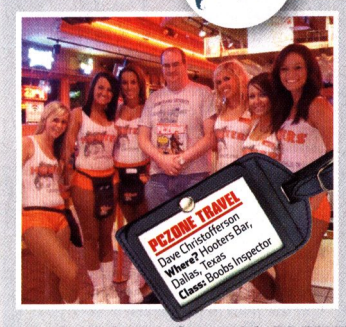
MOONLIGHTING

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Warwick Castle. Well, imagine my surprise when I turned a corner to find Log brandishing his weapon in full medieval armour! Do you pay this multi-talented man so little that he has to scrape a second living imitating waxworks? Give the man a pay rise!

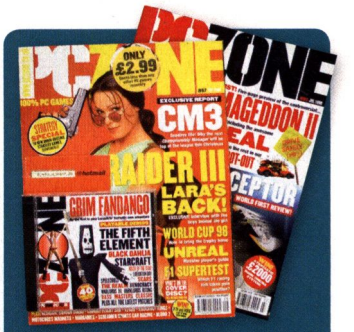
Anyway, thought you might like a pic that I took to document the encounter. We had a great day, one in which I also discovered that medieval soldiers carried a knife called a bollock! What more could you ask for in a day out? "Daddy that soldier's having his bollock sharpened!".

Maybe it's time for a look-a-like section? Only not a porn-a-like section; that would be disturbing! No, I mean NO.
Andrew Cull

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



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



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

Y2K

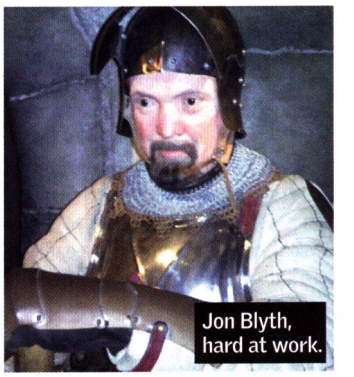
Is anyone else sick of all the Millenium Bug bullshit that's doing the rounds – the stuff that goes on about how many 'everyday appliances' have microchips in them which will obviously burst into flames the moment 2000 ticks into place? Who writes/thinks of this rubbish? Is there a special exam for people who want to write for the tabloids, to ensure their stupidity?
Robbo6

Admit it, you're shitting yourself.

YOU BET

Last month my sister appeared in *Star Girl* magazine. She said I couldn't get in any mag as long as I live. Please print this (I've got £5 bet on this one).
Louis Goff-Beardsley

It may be 10 years late, but you've won the bet. Don't forget to adjust for inflation!


Jon Blyth, hard at work.

The truth is out: this is the real reason Log left *PC ZONE*. We paid that man so little that he's buggered off to pursue a full-time career in imitating waxworks. His first big gig is down the road from Zone Towers, at London's Madame Tussauds. PCZ

WIN! WOW TCG GOODIES

Win! A mind-boggling array of really nice *World of Warcraft* stuff

YOU WANT STUFF? We've got stuff and, coincidentally, we're willing to give it all away to you, our lucky readers. It's all *World of Warcraft* related too, so if any of you are currently poopsocking away while trying to get through Northrend and make it to level 80, you just very well might be interested in this awesome competition.

The full list of prizes that will be won by one of you lucky so-and-sos can be seen by moving your eyeballs slightly to the right, taking in a previously unread part of this page, but if that's too much effort we'll just let you know right here that you can get a complete set of *Drums of War* Loot cards, *The Burning Crusade* and *Wrath of the Lich King Collector's Edition* expansion for *World of Warcraft*, some signed artwork and various other collectable card booster packs and so on.

We got our Fisher Price calculators out and figured out that the total value of this lot is £1,300. Just think of how much more complete your life will be if you win this. Think, I say!

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN WIN!

- Complete set of *Drums of War* loot cards
- *Wrath of the Lich King Collector's Edition*
- *Burning Crusade Collector's Edition*
- *Drums of War* PvP deck
- *Drums of War* booster display
- Signed Alex Horley card
- Signed artwork print
- *Black Temple Raid Deck*
- *Darkmoon Faire Collector's Edition*
- *Feast of Winter Veil Collector's Edition*
- *World of Warcraft* Minis Deluxe Starter
- *World of Warcraft* Minis Boosters x3

Q What is the name of the hero class introduced in *Wrath of the Lich King*?

A) Graal Knight **B)** Death Knight **C)** Michael Knight

To enter send a text message to 87474. Start your message PCZWOW, then a space, then enter A, B, or C, then a space, then your name and email address.

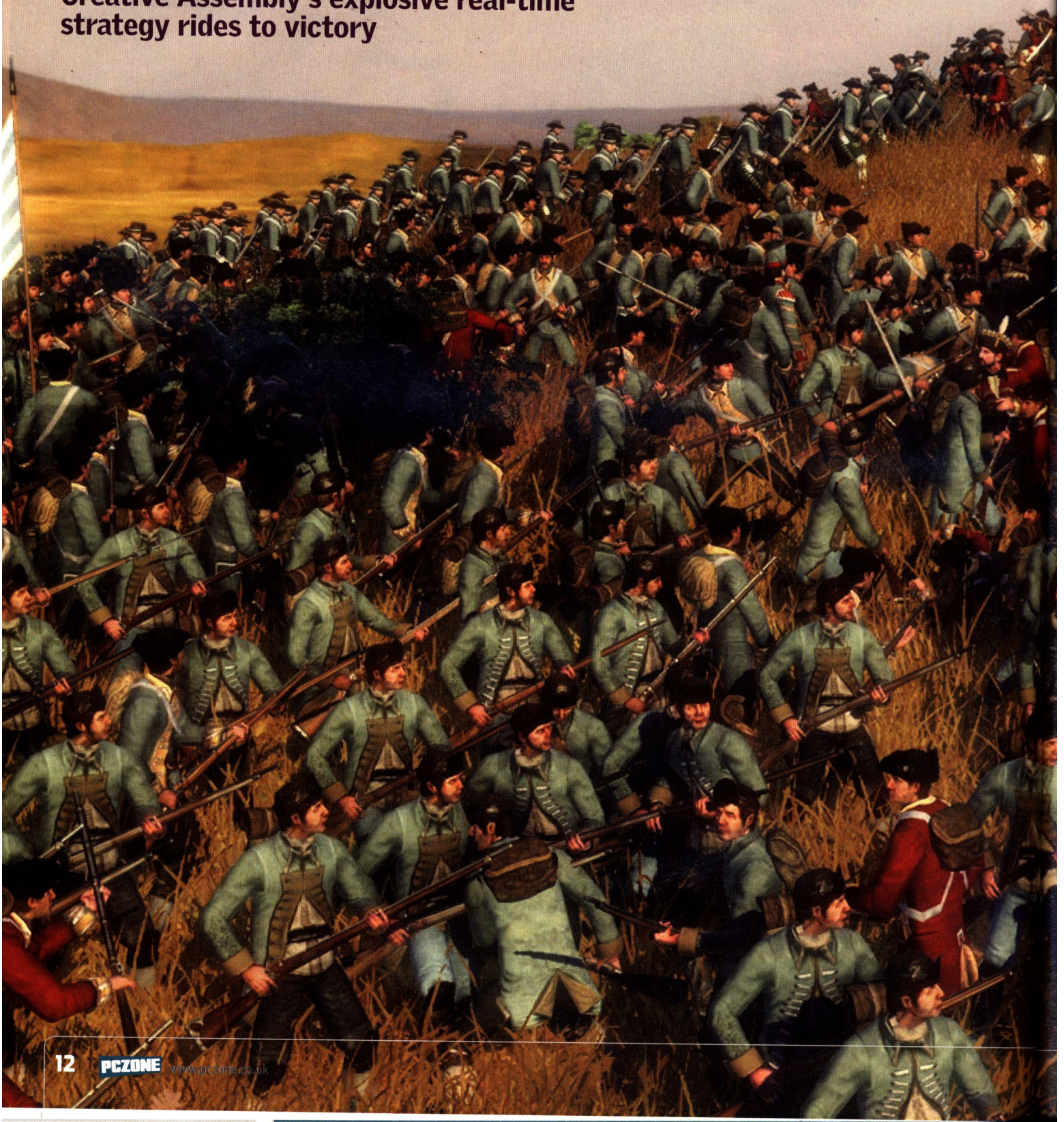
It only costs 50p and you can enter as many times as you like. Competition ends 21 January 2009, entries received after this date will be laughed out of the building. Standard competition and texting rules apply (see below). If you don't want to receive details of further offers and promotions from Future Publishing or other companies, then please put the word NO at the end of your message. If you ignore this technology you can enter by sending a postcard to *WOW* Cards Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at snipurl.com/futuretcs. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

COVER STORY

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly's explosive real-time strategy rides to victory



DOES THE MAN grow the moustache? Or does the moustache grow the man? Whatever the case may be, our cover is the irrefutable proof that moustaches are badass. *Empire: Total War*'s got thousands of them either riding about on horseback, leaping gracefully over walls, or out at sea having some frankly astounding naval battles. We've visited Creative Assembly, played the whole thing, rooted around in the game's multiplayer modes and poked holes in more sails than we'd care to remember, all to bring you an in-depth preview. Will *Empire: Total War* sink or swim?

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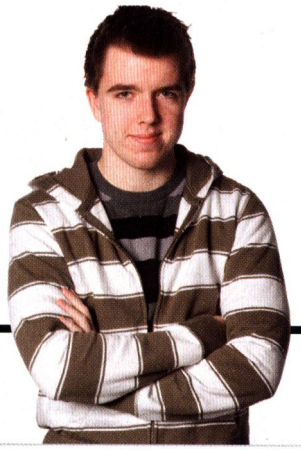


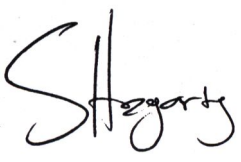
Garry's mod 2D

HAVING SPENT SEVEN minutes trawling Wikipedia, I can now offer you a badly researched history lesson. IBM invented XGA displays back in 1990, allowing the popular 1280 x 768 resolution to be used on PCs. Last weekend, a full 18 years since PC users first put 768 pixels on top of one another, I bought a pricey console that prides itself on its ability to display a stack of 720 pixels. It was a PlayStation 3, and I only bought it so I could watch movies in big-o-vision – because apparently DVD just doesn't cut it these days.

One game on the so-called PlayStation 3 is *LittleBigPlanet*, a platformer that allows users to create levels limited only by their imagination and the flimsy piece of plastic Sony seem to think passes for a control pad. Players can upload their levels and clap gleefully as other people go and play them. That's what I did, at least.

And that's brilliant, sure. I feel like I'm playing a PC game that's gotten lost and ended up on a console, but much like high-definition gaming, we've been doing user-generated content on the PC for decades.

Valve Hammer Editor, UnrealEd, Build.exe, Garry's Mod – the fuss over *LittleBigPlanet* is the perfect time for PC owners to feel smug, knowing that we were there first, and have been ever since. And we didn't even need Stephen Fry's help.



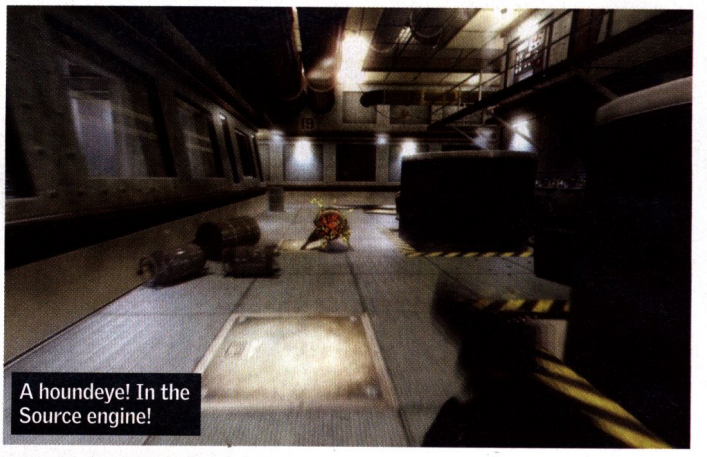
Steve Hogarty Deputy editor

RETURN TO BLACK MESA

Black Mesa Source mod finally nears completion

DEVELOPER Humble modders **WEBSITE** blackmesasource.com **MOD FOR** Half-Life 2 **ETA** Early 2009

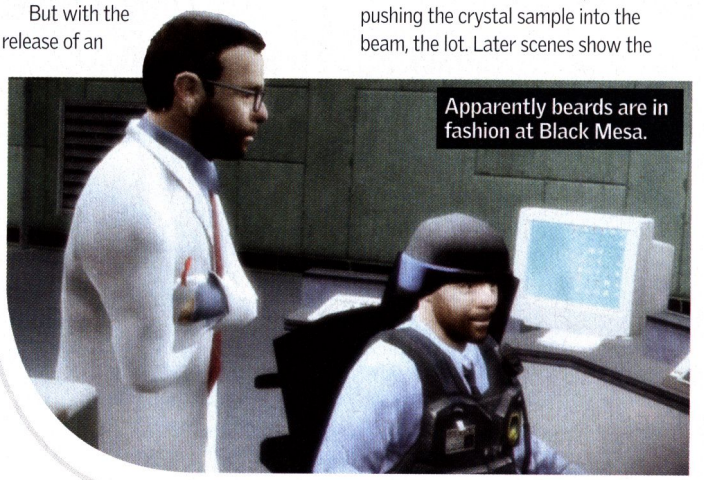
RARELY DO MODS elicit such a strong reaction as to uproot themselves from our Freeplay section and land with a gentle thud into our real games news section. Not only has *Black Mesa Source* done exactly that, but it's been in development for an incredibly long time too. In fact, speaking with Valve's Chet Faliszek last year we discovered that the *Half-Life 2* developer has shown great interest in what the modders are up to, though they admitted they thought an eventual release was unlikely.



A houndeye! In the Source engine!

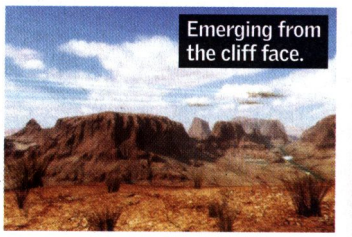
An undertaking of this scale, that is, converting *Half-Life* to the Source engine in its entirety, would be far too much work even for Valve, Chet admitted. That a mod team was even attempting it is wildly ambitious – *Black Mesa Source* was assumed to be a hopeless timesink for all who worked on it.

But with the release of an in-game trailer and the promise of an impending release, interest has been rekindled. The movie shows the opening scenes of *Half-Life*, the train ride, approaching Barney at reception, pushing the crystal sample into the beam, the lot. Later scenes show the tentacled creature, which terrorised Gordon in the original game, violently attacking a scientist. The whole thing simply looks incredible, having been updated from the original Source engine to the slightly shinier *Orange Box* version.



Apparently beards are in fashion at Black Mesa.

Easily the best thing to happen in mods since Garry Newman, *Black Mesa Source* will, hopefully, inspire a new generation of modders to work on decent projects. If we play another zombie mod, we might just slit our own throats. Check out the movie at pczone.co.uk.



Emerging from the cliff face.

STOP PRESS!

LEGO POTTER?

A LEGO Harry Potter title is planned. The boy wizard is one of the few LEGO franchises without a videogame, so its platform credentials are still a mystery.

ATARI ON TRACK

The publishers have announced they're working on new *Dungeons & Dragons, Baldur's Gate, Neverwinter Nights* and *Test Drive* titles to be released after 2010.

MIDWAY SOLD

Developers Midway have had their controlling stake bought by a private investor for £68,000. That's the same as a nice car, which may say something.

PC ZONE GAMES OF 2009

26 **Empire: Total War**
Korda mans the cannons and fires a salvo of info your way.

36 **F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin**
Porter muses and scares an 8 year-old.

44 **Mystic Will**
With sight beyond sight, Mystic Will divulges the future of PC gaming.

Stalking still features.

Now more 3D than ever.

NOT RID OF RIDDICK

Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena approaches release

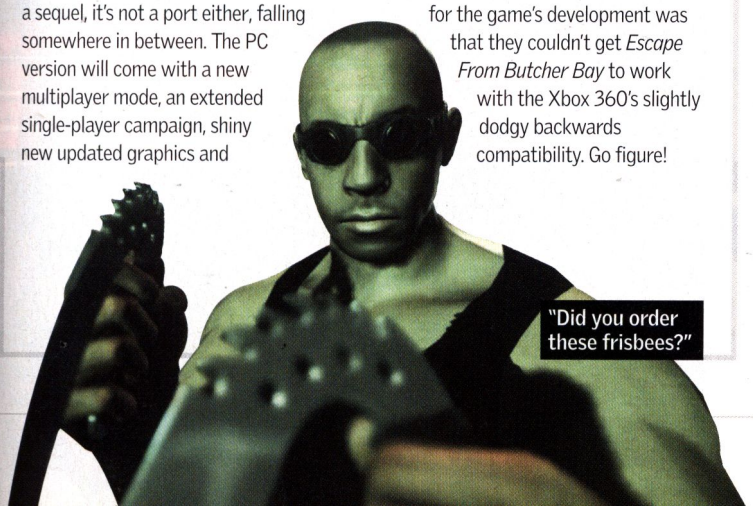
PUBLISHER Atari **DEVELOPER** Starbreeze **WEBSITE** riddickgame.com **ETA** Early 2009

CALM YOUR LOINS, it's not a proper sequel to the vastly underrated first-person puncher *Escape From Butcher Bay*. Instead it's a re-imagining of it for the benefit of the current generation of consoles.

So while *Assault on Dark Athena* isn't a sequel, it's not a port either, falling somewhere in between. The PC version will come with a new multiplayer mode, an extended single-player campaign, shiny new updated graphics and re-recorded sound.

The game was announced a while back, but we'd forgotten about it until Atari picked it up this month and released some nice screenshots.

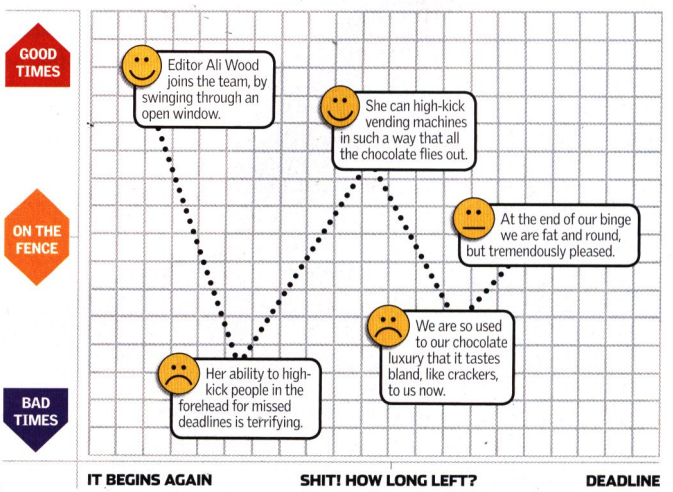
According to Starbreeze's lead designer, Ian Stevens, the main reason for the game's development was that they couldn't get *Escape From Butcher Bay* to work with the Xbox 360's slightly dodgy backwards compatibility. Go figure!



"Did you order these frisbees?"

STUFF **Publisher JoWooD have apologised for the bugginess of *Gothic 3* expansion *Forsaken Gods*, saying: "The game was released this year because that was what we and the community desired. JoWooD and Trine have worked under a lot of pressure, and to repair some of the mistakes we released the game with a patch, hoping to make it better. JoWooD Productions would like to present their apologies to the fans for releasing an unsatisfying game." Oh JoWooD, we forgive you. C'mere and give us a hug.**

Life is a roller coaster



SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES

He shoots, he scores. *Pavel Barter* hits the high notes of game composition

Reporter
Pavel Barter

WHEN HE STARTED MOOTING the idea of an orchestra playing music from videogames, people thought the veteran composer Tommy Tallarico was off his rocker. It took him three years to convince publishers and developers that he was sane. "Imagine me making a call to Taito in Japan, asking them for the rights for the score of [1983 arcade hit] *Elevator Action*. "I'd like to play the theme tune to the game at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Hello... hello?'"

Naysayers were forced to eat their hats when Video Games Live (VGL) premiered in 2005 at the Bowl to around 11,000 punters. Since then, the show has toured worldwide, performing music from *Final Fantasy, World of Warcraft, BioShock* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as venturing back to the days of *Tetris, Space Invaders,* and *Pong*. VGL even hit the US Billboard charts in August, 2008, with an album of string-tastic tunes.

Tallarico, readying himself for a show in Boston as we speak, is chuffed. Having grown up watching his cousin Steven Tyler, lead singer of *Aerosmith*, on stage, he always dreamt of producing a flashy show. And VGL is that realisation.

VIDEOGAME CONCERT

"What makes VGL unique is that everything is completely synchronised to video, rock 'n' roll lighting, special effects, a stage show production, and interactive elements with the crowd," he says. "I like to explain it as having all the power and emotion of a symphony orchestra and choir, the energy and excitement of a rock concert, mixed with the cutting-edge visuals, technology, interactivity and fun of videogames."

The composer knows the score, having worked on over 275 titles since 1991 – *Unreal Tournament, Lineage* and the *Test Drive* series amongst them – and has seen game compositions transform from staccato bleeps into symphonic raptures. These days, many renowned movie composers work on game soundtracks: from *Lord of the Rings* composer Howard Shore, to Academy Award winner Bill Conti (who wrote the theme tune for *Rocky*, and went on to score *The Godfather* game), and Danny Elfman (who scored *LEGO Batman*).

While the pay package is alluring, games tend to put music to the fore, rather than hiding it behind dialogue. You might hear John Williams' *Indiana Jones* score for a combined total of three hours over the course of a year; play *World of Warcraft* and you probably devour Jason Hayes' work for 30+ hours a week.

"There's definitely more freedom with games," says Jason Graves, who wrote the soundtrack for *Dead Space*. "Part of it is the nurturing, creative aspects of games – also the amount of music that needs to be composed and implemented in such little time. Instead of being restrained to specific timings from a film, I stretch out and simply compose an idea, like combat or exploration, for several minutes at a time. The other biggest difference is the interactive aspect of game scores – an interactive score has more requirements than a traditional, linear film score."

Jack Wall, Tallarico's VGL cohort – who wrote music for *Splinter Cell* and *Mass Effect* – keeps the story arc in mind when working, building melodies around a three-act structure. Genre plays a major role in composition – RPGs, for example, are more story-driven than RTSs – while third-party development tools allow composers to wrap their earholes around a game before putting treble clef to paper.

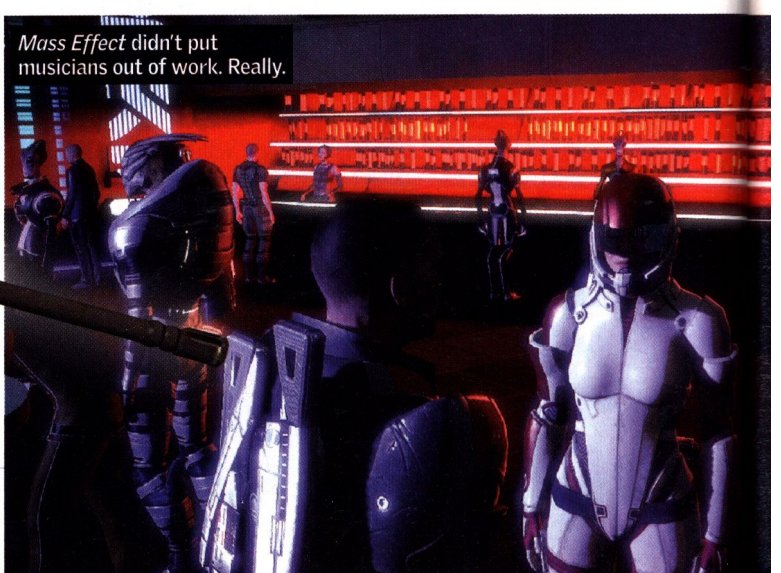
SCARY TUNES

Graves spent two years working on *Dead Space*. For the adaptive music, he referred to visual walkthroughs and regularly visited the EA offices to play the game so he could score scenes by experiencing the creature encounters and pant-soiling shocks. Graves would compose music for a level and the audio director then fitted it

Jack Wall, *Mass Effect*'s head musician.

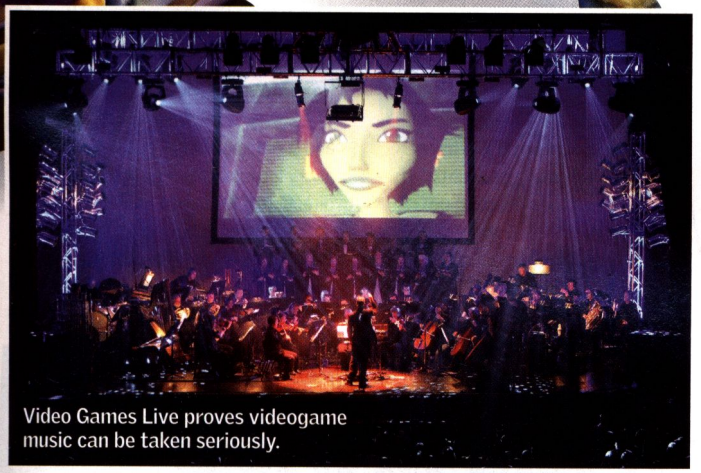
Jason Graves, composer of *Dead Space*.

Hitman has a classic score.



Mass Effect didn't put musicians out of work. Really.

World at Warcraft may have introduced a new generation to classical music.



Video Games Live proves videogame music can be taken seriously.

Cool, calm, and composed

Four stunning PC game scores

SILENT HILL (AKIRA YAMAOKA)

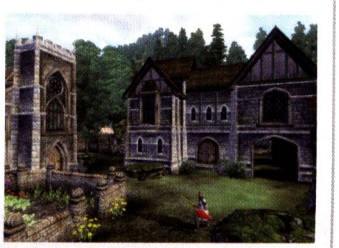
Most of the early game composers couldn't find a note in a bank, but *Silent Hill*'s melodies were uplifting, unnerving and drenched in loss and regret: all at once. *E minor* is the saddest key of all, especially when a disfigured nurse is trying to stove your brain in with an axe.

BIOSHOCK (GARRY SCHYMAN)

When you think of *BioShock*'s music, you think of the finger-snapping cabaret of Bing Crosby, but Schyman's melodies wrapped around the walls of Rapture as succinctly as the Art Deco decor. *Cohen's Masterpiece* is a standout, sounding the thin line between genius and lunacy.

DEAD SPACE (JASON GRAVES)

Graves drew on influences from Jerry Goldsmith, the composer of *Alien*. "I love Jerry's rhythmic style, especially being a classically trained percussionist. All those odd meters bouncing around and syncopated rhythms lend themselves to being unpredictable and catching the listener off guard," he says of *Dead Space*.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION (JEREMY SOULE)

With its dreamy, medieval-esque score, Soule's orchestral manoeuvres add to *Oblivion*'s sense of scale and mythology. Passing through long grass to the tune of *Wings of Kynareth* make you want to dress in a white shawl and head down to HMV to buy Enya's back catalogue.

into the game to see how it interacted with the gameplay. When it came to recording, no expense was spared.

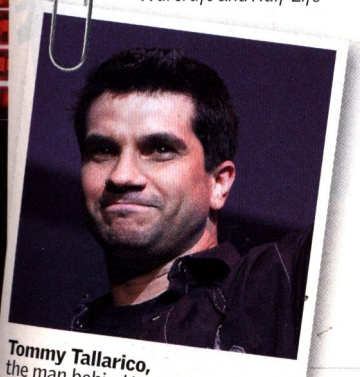
"There were two recording sessions for *Dead Space*. The first was in Seattle with the Northwest Sinfonia: about 65 players total. The second one was at Skywalker Sound with another 65-piece orchestra plus a 20-member choir."

A lot of people think of memorable game composition in console-y terms (*Mario*, *Zelda*, *Castlevania*, *Sonic*, etc.) but since the turn of the century, PC titles like *Hitman*, *Warcraft* and *Half-Life* have frequently scooped awards.

"I always try to write catchy melodies for my PC games," says Jack Wall, who also composed for *Myst*. "PCs have less limitations than consoles – they often have multiple hard drives to stream off. In consoles you only have one stream and that can pose problems."

What about the increasing use of licensed music in games? Does that also pose problems, leaving the composer homeless? Wall reckons not, saying it comes down to what works best for a game. Ironically, some musicians say that composers remove them from the equation, due to the prevalent use of sampled scores.

"When it's appropriate to score with a live orchestra, I'm going to do it every time," says Wall. "I need as many tools in my bag as possible to get the best result. For example, 90% of *Mass Effect*'s music was electronic – I used those tools instead of bringing in a bunch of live players, which I usually do on most of my games. Using sampled scores isn't about cutting anybody out, it's about what's right for that game."



Tommy Tallarico, the man behind Video Games Live.

FIGHTING PREJUDICE

Composers still face stuffy attitudes. Even after the cultural expansion of game music, the classical hierarchy still look down on it. The reality is, though, symphonies across the world are dying because they're not connecting with younger generations. You either adapt or perish, and ventures like Video Games Live invigorate the art form.

"When we work with an orchestra for the first time," says Tallarico, "some musicians inevitably page through the music and say '*World of Warcraft*? *Sonic the Hedgehog*? What is this?' You see the older generation – the refined guys who have been doing this 30-40 years – looking at it with apprehension. But when they play the music for the first time, they realise it's legitimate. Our inspirations are rooted in classical music: Beethoven, Mozart, Strauss.

"Besides, when Tchaikovsky debuted the *1812 Overture*, he had live cannons firing on stage at the appropriate times. These guys were showmen! If he was around today he'd be using fancy lights, laser, video, whatever it takes. If Beethoven was alive today, he'd be a videogame composer. Make no mistake about it." PCZ

"Games put music to the fore, rather than hiding it behind dialogue"

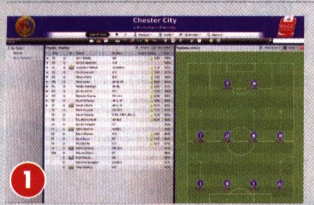
Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

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

PC ZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

1	NEW	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009	Issue 202 – 90%
2	NEW	CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR	Issue 202 – 84%
3	NEW	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING	Issue 202 – 86%
4	NEW	LEFT 4 DEAD	Issue 202 – 93%
5	↓	COMMAND AND CONQUER: RED ALERT 3	Issue 201 – 86%
6	↓	FALLOUT 3	Issue 201 – 91%
7	↓	SPORE	Issue 199 – 95%
8	↓	FAR CRY 2	Issue 201 – 90%
9	↓	THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE	N/A
10	NEW	TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD	Issue 202 – 76%
11	↓	THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE	N/A
12	NEW	NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER	Issue 203 – 68%
13	–	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST	N/A
14	NEW	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: STORM OF ZEHIR	N/A
15	↓	CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE	N/A
16	↓	FIFA MANAGER 09	Issue 203 – 67%
17	↑	CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE	Issue 188 – 89%
18	↓	PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009	Issue 201 – 85%
19	↓	CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION	Issue 200 – 88%
20	RE	MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION	N/A



1

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
It didn't land with grace, what with those Steam issues, but it remains a tower of management genius. In 3D!

2

WRATH OF THE LICH KING
The biggest game ever. The most northernly continent ever. What could go wrong? Just the woman with elf ears on breakfast TV.

3

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR
It's better than expected, but does anyone else think it's a mite gratuitous? No? Just the charts commentator? Fine.

4

LEFT 4 DEAD
Sudden we're playing games together even further into the night, and all of a sudden we care about our Steam friends list.

Do the Chinese like dungeons more than us?

NOT A KEEPER

We've got some good and bad news for you

WEBSITE ea.com

EA HAS DECIDED to release a new *Dungeon Keeper* game, people! What's more, it's an MMO, surely news that will have people up and down the country scaling the walls and setting up celebratory bunting in the streets. So, when's it coming out, you ask? Well, we don't know. And, before you start inviting everybody to your street party, it might also be worth you knowing that the game is currently only scheduled for release in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau.

I can hear the frantic tapping of keys and scribbling of inked quills already, angry letters being sent flying in the direction of EA as you read this. There isn't a crumb of comfort to offer you, dear readers – there doesn't seem any hope of it making its way to our shores. Unless it does really, really well and EA wants to milk some more cash from the franchise. We can but hope.

ZONE CURSE

PC ZONE Special Report kills *Lively*

WEBSITE lively.com

THE PCZ KISS of death, widely blamed for *Daikatana*, returned last month as Google canned its new gaming portal mere days before the magazine featuring it hit shelves. Pavel Barter's bold claim that an initial play had "all the allure of herpes", before underlining what was still an interesting casual gaming premise, may well have delivered the primary coloured game space's final blow.

"When you take these kinds of risks not every bet is going to pay off," Google pointed out, in a blog post written perhaps with *Chrome* too in mind. A bold idea then, but something that was born as a 3D chatroom and died as a 3D chatroom – with only excited talk of games and actual stuff to do, rather than just talking to a woman with pink hair from Poland.

We done killified your home, lady.

IT LIVES AGAIN

Microsoft gives Games for Windows LIVE another go. *Will Porter* is resigned to it

WEBSITE gamesforwindows.com

IF THERE WAS ever a good example of a company moving its less-talented staff down the ranks to an area where the suits weren't paying that much attention, it was demonstrated by the last version of Games for Windows LIVE.

Anyone – even your mother – could have told you that PC gamers wouldn't want to pay for the right to go online, to use a program mapped around a 360 controller, to play crap games like *Shadowrun* against console players or to garner achievement points. That said, since we've gotten used to chasing them in *Team Fortress 2* and *Left 4 Dead* that last criticism should be taken back.

In any case, it was a failure of epic proportions. As those who've perhaps tried it out through the release of *Fallout 3* will testify, however, the new iteration is a lot better. The whole shebang has been free since July (Microsoft hasn't taken as long as you might have thought to wise up) but it now looks a lot more like a PC program.

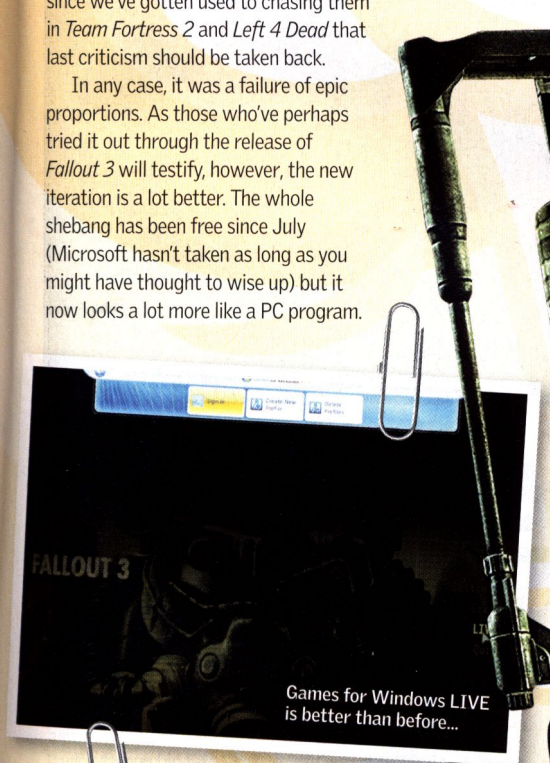
That said, it is still a little floaty and toggle/option free compared to its erstwhile vanquisher Steam. Though thankfully it can now be run as a standalone application.

There are several big name games now tied to the service, notably *Fallout 3*, *GTA4* and *Dawn of War II*. For the former, Bethesda (and presumably Rockstar with *The Lost and the Damned*) are keen on getting a rock-solid delivery route for paid-for downloadable content rather than something resembling *Oblivion*'s noob-unfriendly download site.

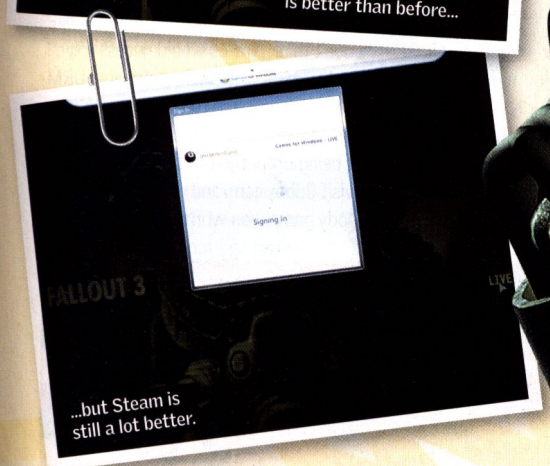
Talk to Relic, meanwhile, and you will find out that its preference came from the availability of acres of server space Microsoft have humming in their basement. If it can cater for the 360 launch of *Halo 3*, it explains, then they'll more than make do for us.

In a marketplace where people will be able to download indie games, movies and the like, there's no doubt that this second attempt at online gaming is a far worthier effort than the first. But won't Steam's permanent presence in the bottom right-hand corner of your screen and its steadily growing friends list deter you somewhat?

With the soon-to-expand EA downloader chuntering morosely in the background and the Acti-Bliz conglomerate sitting on the Battle.net, these are interesting times indeed in the digital landscape, and our system trays are about to get busy. Microsoft's reworking of Games for Windows LIVE still doesn't feel right, and for the past five years the opposition has been gathering steam. (See what I did there?)



Games for Windows LIVE is better than before...



...but Steam is still a lot better.

"There are several big name games now tied to the service, notably *Fallout 3*, *GTA4* and *Dawn of War II*"

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

BRACE YOURSELF. THE Man Who Knows is about to cover its most reprehensible, vile and filthy story yet, one that emanated from an advert on that odd flatmate recruiter and sexual activity coordination tool Gumtree.com.

In this instance, we're horrified to report, a posting that read "Want it from behind while you play *Super Mario Brothers*? Age: 28".

This means that not only must we discuss the more **exotic exercises** that are required during hot man-on-man action, but we must also discuss consoles while we are at it. For very shame.

"Do you love to play *Super Mario Brothers* on the Classic Nintendo System?" it continued. "Do you like to get **tagged from behind** while you do it? This is the post for you then."

"I must hear the fireworks. When level two begins and Mario walks into the pipe, I will penetrate you"

So began the Gumtree entry in all innocence, before revealing the **Brighton hotel** where such naughtiness was intended to take place.

"When you reach the end of level one, make sure to trigger the fireworks. This is vital to the entire experience. **I must hear the fireworks.** When level two begins and Mario walks into the pipe, I will penetrate you... DO NOT take the **secret level skip**."

Rumours that pop-singer Sting correlates his elongated bouts of sexual activity alongside five-hour games of *Civilization IV* remain unfounded.

Impossibly, the Gumtree posting then becomes **even smuttier**, including a detailed description of what will happen upon defeating Bowser and rescuing the Princess – which as any fan knows is **not the game's climax**, though this discrepancy does not seem to bother the deviant. The post ends thusly:

"If I am impressed you may continue playing and I will continue to pleasure you. If I am not, **I will turn the Nintendo off** and return to the bathroom. At this time you may clean yourself with the towel that is beside the bed. Turn the lights on, **redress yourself and leave**."

The filthy posting was removed shortly after appearing on Gumtree.com, though your intrepid reporter cannot tell you whether that was due to website moderation or wish fulfillment.

BIG TRAIN

Steampunk pornulator horrifies one and all

WEBSITE thevelvetexpress.com

HAVE YOU EVER wanted to watch simulated intercourse take place on a badly rendered and dimensionally suspect re-imagining of the buffet car of a luxury train from the '30s? Well, who hasn't? Thankfully, Dutch developers Artmunk – creators of *LoveChess*, the erotic chess game (lovechess.nl) – have heard the call of the tens, nay hundreds, of sweaty-palmed rail fetishists and created vintage porn simulator *The Velvet Express* – yours for a mere £23.99 download.

Do we have a challenger for the worst sex game, and indeed worst game, since *Lula 3D*? It may have 60 positions, gas masks, an on-board machine with metal pincers that squeeze rude bits and a man with a neatly trimmed beard – but we remain unconvinced. You get more on the last train to Colchester on a Saturday night.

I do hope he's brushed his teeth.

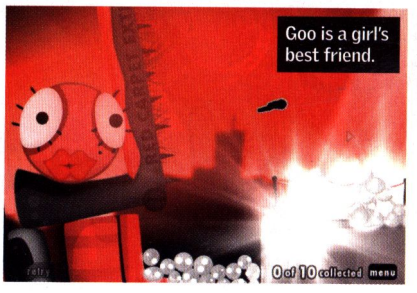
PIRATE SCUM STEAL GOO

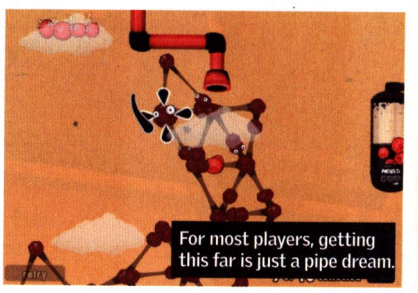
Indie developers beset by file-shared downloads

WEBSITE 2dboy.com

REGULAR READERS WILL know of our deep love for independent development heroes 2D Boy, who single-handedly created the joyful timewaster game of the year with the ingenious *World of Goo*.

But now it's been revealed that around 90 per cent of people playing the game haven't paid for it. 2D Boy don't think pirates would necessarily have bought the game with an impregnable DRM attached, but it's depressing to see black-and-white figures showing such talented soldiers of fortune not being properly rewarded. For the full run-down visit 2dboy.com, and while you're there buy the bloody game. You won't regret it.





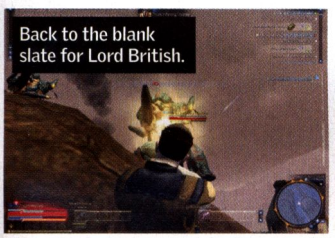
TABULA RASA POWERS DOWN

Lord British flips coin. Comes down tails

WEBSITE eu.rgtr.com/en

TABULA RASA WAS original, fun and worth a blast – but a lack of high-level content and a general lack of interest has led to space tourist Richard Garriott removing the memory chips from the game's servers. Well, his minions will be doing so on 28 February anyway – Lord British has already buggered off.

While it's sad to see an MMO with so many good gameplay ideas bite the dust, the least being an first-person mode, NCsoft promise to give *Tabula Rasa* a good send off, as well as a month of free play starting 10 January. In all honesty, you'll be able to canter through the best content in a month, so if you fancy some free (doomed) MMO action then hop on.



Back to the blank slate for Lord British.

All sorts of monsters are now homeless.

HACK LEAVES LINDENWORLD

Virtual journalist goes back to RL

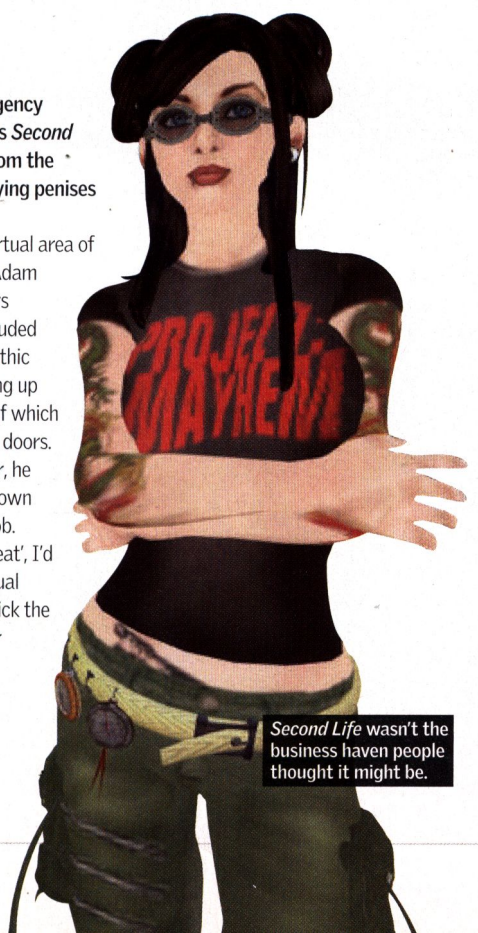
WEBSITE uk.reuters.com

ESTABLISHED AND RESPECTED news agency Reuters has moved its *Second Life* correspondent away from the internet's famed home of flying penises and avatar bordellos.

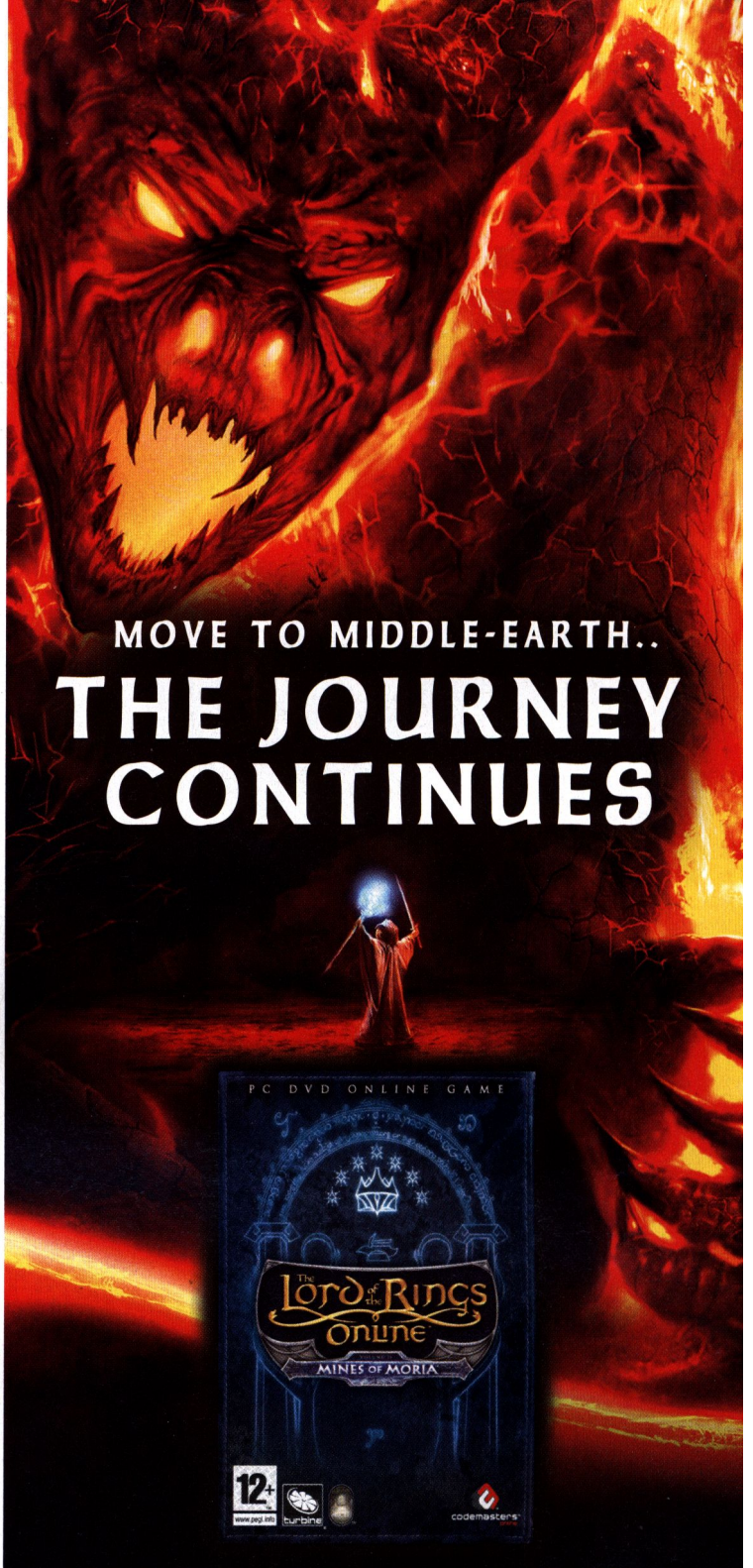
Initially installed in the virtual area of Sadville, in-game journalist Adam Pasick (known as Eric Reuters in-game) had duties that included reporting on all of the megalithic corporations that were setting up online headquarters – 9/10 of which have now closed their virtual doors.

As of last month, however, he has been whisked out into grown up journalism and a proper job.

"As part of walking my 'beat', I'd get invited by sources to virtual nightclubs, where I'd right-click the dancefloor to send my avatar gyrating," explained Reuters, who is now free from the shackles of simulated boob wiggle. "It was about as fun as watching paint dry."



Second Life wasn't the business haven people thought it might be.



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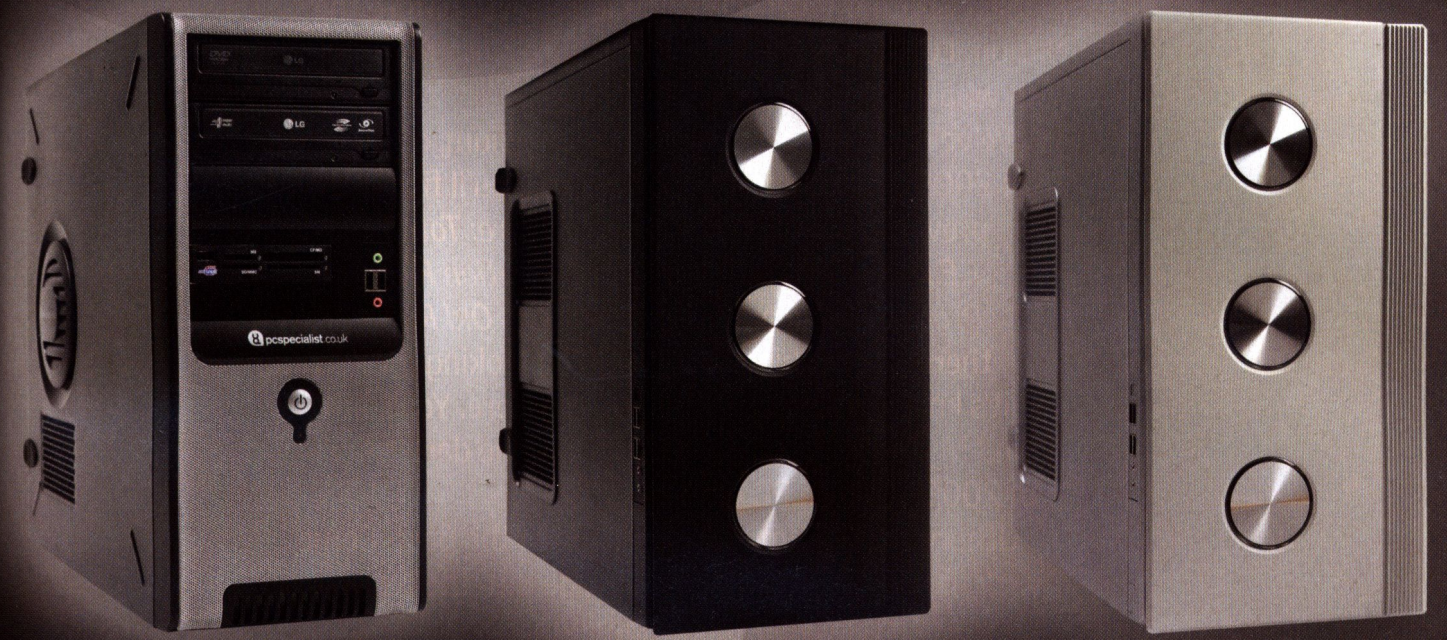

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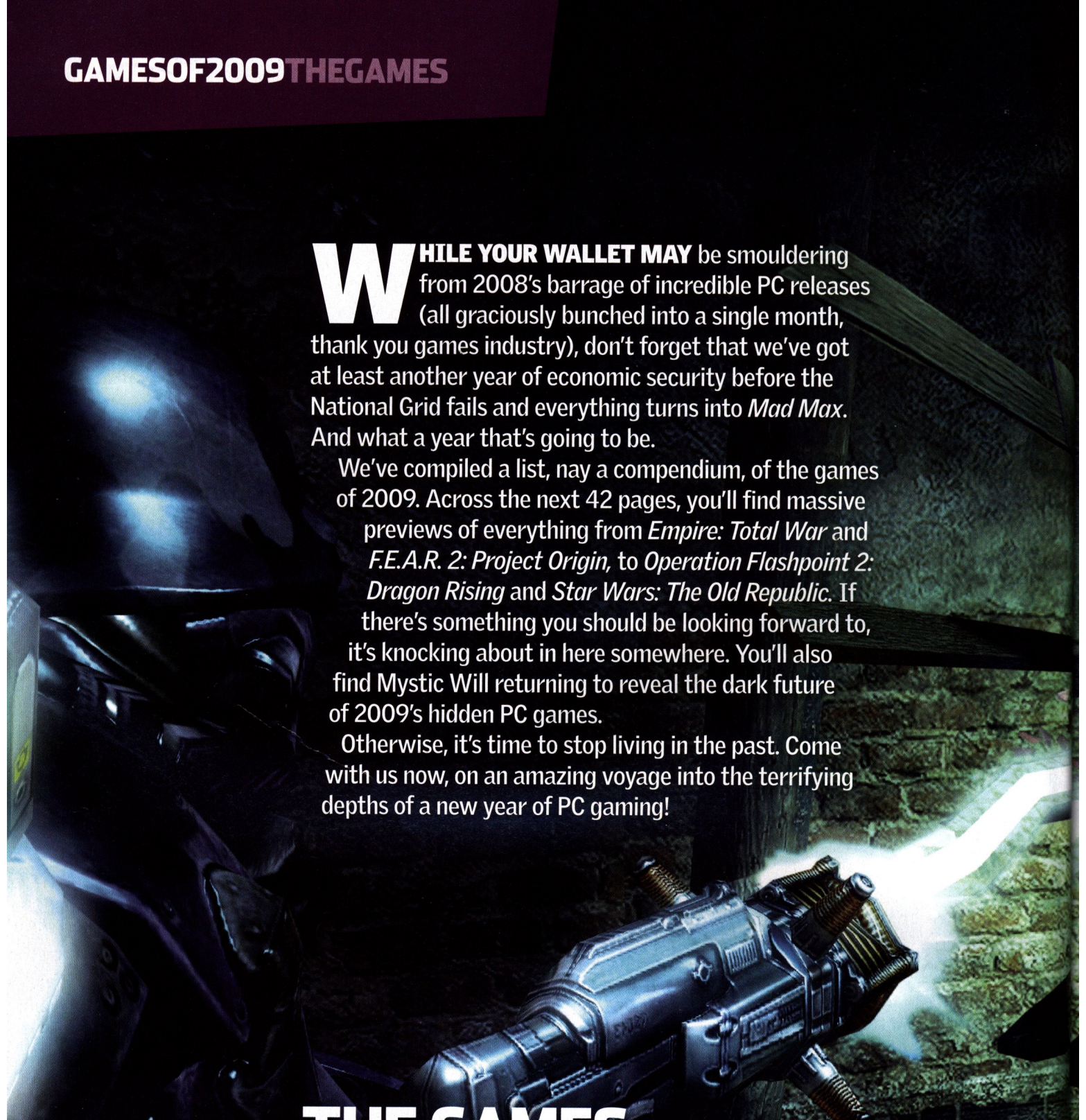

WHILE YOUR WALLET MAY be smouldering from 2008's barrage of incredible PC releases (all graciously bunched into a single month, thank you games industry), don't forget that we've got at least another year of economic security before the National Grid fails and everything turns into *Mad Max*. And what a year that's going to be.

We've compiled a list, nay a compendium, of the games of 2009. Across the next 42 pages, you'll find massive previews of everything from *Empire: Total War* and *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin*, to *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. If there's something you should be looking forward to, it's knocking about in here somewhere. You'll also find Mystic Will returning to reveal the dark future of 2009's hidden PC games.

Otherwise, it's time to stop living in the past. Come with us now, on an amazing voyage into the terrifying depths of a new year of PC gaming!

THE GAMES

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34 ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

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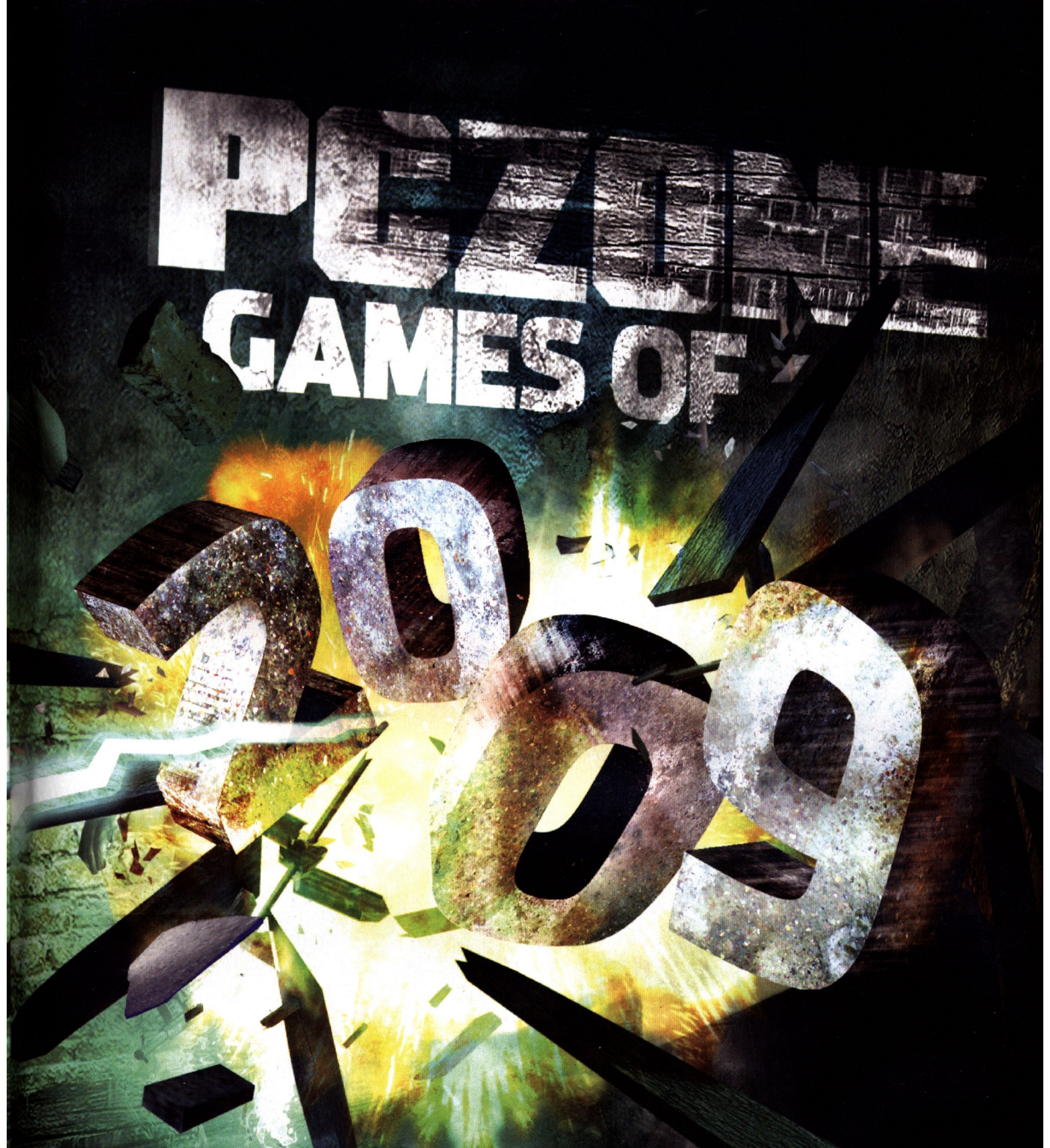

26 EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

36 F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

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65 TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE

65 TOM CLANCY'S HAWX

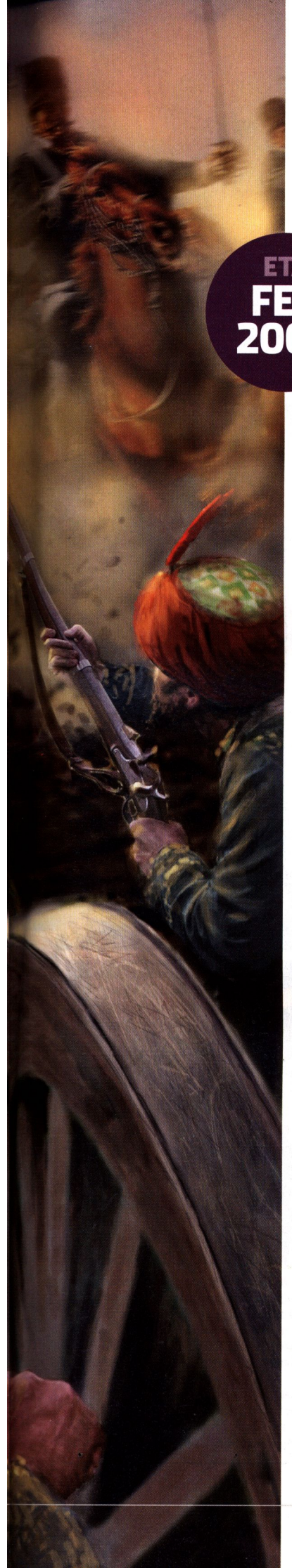
52 WATCHMEN

56 WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

65 WHITE GOLD: WAR IN PARADISE

42 WOLFENSTEIN

He'd better hope that pistol misfires.



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PCZONE GAMES OF 2009

DEATH OR GLORY...

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

***Martin Korda* clocks up some exclusive hands-on time with the latest code of Creative Assembly's epic RTS**

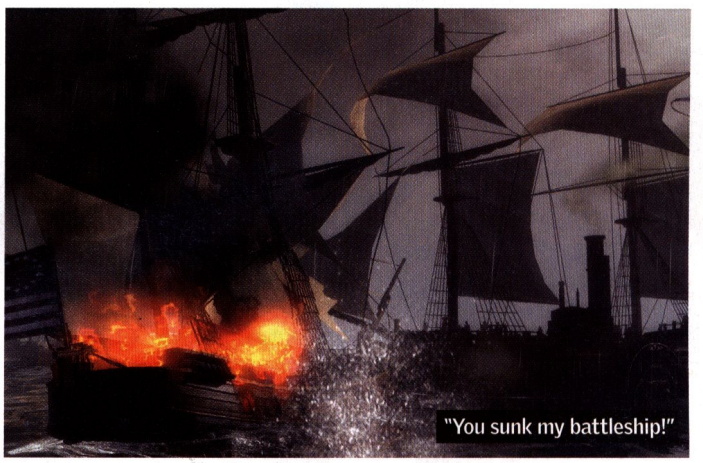
DEVELOPER The Creative Assembly **PUBLISHER** Sega **WEBSITE** totalwar.com

WAR SHOULDN'T BE this much fun. War should be hell and suffering, the debasement of mankind. It should be scooping beans from a can with the rib of a dead comrade then swallowing it into your dysenteric stomach. But not fun. Only *Empire*, Creative Assembly's most ambitious and epic *Total War* game to date, is just that. Fun. How do I know this? Because I've just spent two hours playing the latest code, and as my fingers fumble to strike the correct keys to type these words, I can't help feel that *Empire* has the potential to utterly eclipse its illustrious predecessors.

During my playtest, I sampled *Empire*'s Road to Independence campaign: a series of bite-sized, story-driven episodes based on the American War of Independence.

THE LOWDOWN

Breathtaking visuals	✓
Expansive campaign map	✓
New story-driven mode	✓
Naval combat	✓
There's still two months left before it's released	✗



"You sunk my battleship!"

Divided into four chapters, The Road to Independence is likely to offer a more focused experience for newcomers daunted by the prospect of diving straight into the largest *Total War* turn-based campaign to date. Episode one begins circa 1607, with you marshalling the British as they try to gain a foothold in the US and hold off the natives, who've impertinently lived there for many thousands of years without a letter of permission from His Royal Highness.

Chapter two sees the natives on the back foot, but augmented by the military might of the French. (Stop sniggering. The French were quite the military power back then.) As the Brits you must defeat this unlikely alliance in short order.

Chapter three tasks you with leading the Americans to victory over the Brits in the War of Independence, and it was this episode that provided the setting for my session.

SET ME FREE

Unlike the main campaign, The Road to Independence isn't just an open sandbox, as each chapter is punctuated by CGI cutscenes detailing the birth of the

An unlucky fall meant Bruce impaled himself on the iron grass.

modern-day US. While purists may scoff, the cutscenes I witnessed were adequate proof that the plot should add an extra layer of depth and meaning to your actions. Also readily apparent was the more focused nature of these episodes, making them ideal for newcomers before they're thrown into the main campaign in the final fourth chapter.

BUNKER SHOTS

Chapter three kicked off with a real-time 3D recreation of the Battle of Bunker Hill, an epic clash between the Brits and Americans on an undulating battlefield dotted with patches of forest. Playing as the sovereignty-seeking Yanks, my heavily outnumbered forces began atop a hill. The interface, familiar yet distinctively different from *Medieval II*, took just seconds to learn, allowing hostilities to quickly commence.

Calling upon nearly a decade of *Total War* experience I arrayed my troops at the hill summit, though one fundamental difference forced me to reassess my tried and tested tactics. While cannons and muskets featured in *Medieval II*, they were so wayward as to verge on useless. *Empire*'s gunpowder weapons now have accuracy to match their power, creating a new set of variables when outlining your battle plan.

Horse-drawn cannons allow for the rapid deployment and movement of your artillery. Whereas shifting artillery was previously akin to pushing a bear up a downward escalator, cannons can now be moved to a new location in seconds. Placing them intelligently is also paramount. This became painfully apparent when I sent a cannonball scything through the spines of dozens of my own troops standing directly in front of my artillery. It was a flash of military genius to rival even Field Marshal Haig's brilliant WWI strategy of marching thousands of men towards German machine-guns.

With the Brits advancing up the steep gradient from three directions, I wheeled my cavalry around their left flank in a bid to drive a wedge through the heart of their forces. My men bayed a war cry that mingled with the stampeding hooves of their mounts, charging for glory with swords outstretched, racing past an

Blighty: land of the cheerfully subjugated and German monarchs.

Promotion of War

What you know not who you know

Promote ordinary soldiers to the rank of General.

Unlike *Medieval II*, generals in *Empire* are no longer inbred big-eared family members with a penchant for their sisters, but highly-trained military minds schooled in the art of warfare. The more experience and prestige a commander amasses, the greater their sphere of influence becomes. Whenever an enemy army enters a general's sphere of influence, it's forced into a battlefield confrontation. Of course, generals are also prime battlefield targets, so it's just as well that *Empire* now allows you to promote regular soldiers to the rank of general.

Recruitment has also been given a makeover, with commanders able to request certain troops, which will be trained in nearby towns and automatically dispatched to join up with his existing forces. However, venture into enemy territory and you'll first need to track back into friendly regions before reinforcements will set out to join you.

Naval battles will be as visually impressive as the land ones.

There aren't many of them but the British troops will be among the best in the game.

abandoned farm before collapsing en masse as a group of garrisoned enemy snipers parted them from their brains as they rode past. This was going to be tougher than I thought.

Moments like these proved Creative Assembly's commitment to ensuring that *Empire*'s AI is a marked improvement over the irritatingly predictable and moronically static opposition tactics we often witnessed in *Medieval II*. Where troops once attacked in a single tide they now spread out and probe, searching for gaps in my lines to divide my forces.

Still smarting from the loss of half my cavalry and with the advancing Brits tenderized by some well-placed cannon balls, I ordered my troops to open fire. A cloud of smoke formed from 500 musket puffs as balls of lead cut into the enemy ranks. Scores of Redcoats dropped. The bombardment continued, each volley reducing the enemy's forces by 10 and sometimes 20 men. The two armies traded salvos as they closed, each volley more devastating than the last. With a single mouse click I changed my troops' attack orders to melee and sent a sea of blue uniforms sweeping down the hill at the enemy.

Zooming into the action revealed a previously unmatched level of battlefield realism and detail, with each motion captured soldier actively seeking out an opponent before engaging in a mortal shoving and stabbing match. Men toppled into the mud, squirming with terror before receiving a deft bayonet jab to the windpipe. After a titanic, 20-minute struggle the tide turned my way with the enemy hightailing it thanks in no small part to a bullet to the British general's head that broke his men's morale.

With the real-time battle ended, it was time to test out the

The moustache is a bit showy-offy.

A god's eye view of warfare

Creative Assembly have rebooted *Total War*'s campaign map

campaign map. Once again, while initially familiar to any *Total War* veteran, the first impressions proved deceptive with further probing revealing some subtle nuances.

One of the most fundamental transformations was how regions were pocked with settlements. While the capital city remains the heart of each one, a series of smaller towns also make up your holdings. A region can still only be captured by conquering the capital, but you now have other options too. With the Battle of Bunker Hill successfully navigated, I advanced my troops into enemy territory, only to find the Brits firmly entrenched inside the towering walls of the region's key city. But with the outlying towns only lightly defended, I channelled all my efforts into attacking them instead, strangling the region's income and forcing the hiding enemy into the open for a face-to-face confrontation.

WAR GAMES

In a clear attempt to provide greater flexibility, Creative Assembly have expended a great deal of effort in fleshing out *Empire*'s non-combat features. The developer even claim that you'll be able to play the whole game with the minimal amount of conflict if you're canny enough, though sadly my playtest wasn't long enough to test this theory.

Empire's diplomacy system has been greatly streamlined, with a single diplomatic interface negating the tedium of micromanaging individual diplomats on the campaign map. Alliances have become far more complex affairs, and you can even try to manipulate other nations to do the fighting for you. Attack an enemy and your allies will be reluctant to come to your aid, but goad your foe into an invasion and your allies will send reinforcements without hesitating. Ally with a faction sandwiched between you and your enemy, and the opposition will have to come through them, before they can get to you.

One of the best ways of needling the enemy is to use a new unit called the Gentleman. This loveable rogue can be sent into enemy territory to duel opposition commanders or assassinate dignitaries, allowing high rankers to be eliminated without the need for battlefield confrontation. Wipe out a number of a faction's generals and they'll declare war. The Gentleman also has several other key skills. Ensconce

PIXEL PERFECTION

Battle locations will now be pixel-based, rather than the old grid system. This means that selecting the right place to attack or defend will be even more important than before.

THE INTERFACE

Series veterans will feel immediately comfortable with the controls. Creative Assembly have been working hard to add complexity without compromising on the general ease of use.

British troops will be low in number, but high in quality.

Red against blue, the conflict that can never end.

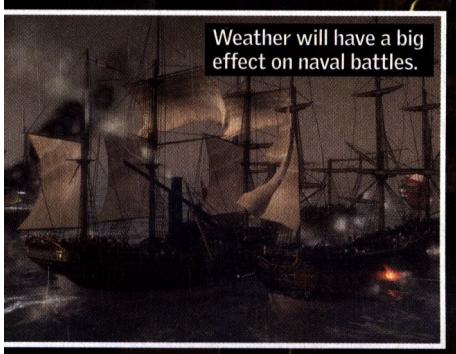
I think the Dutch are going to win this one.

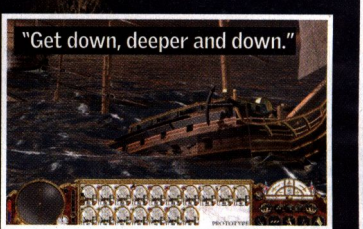
him in an enemy's university and he'll steal their research, or if he's placed in one of yours, speed your discovery of new technologies. The Rake is another debuting unit that acts as an all-in-one spy, diplomat and saboteur, making for a far more streamlined approach to subterfuge.

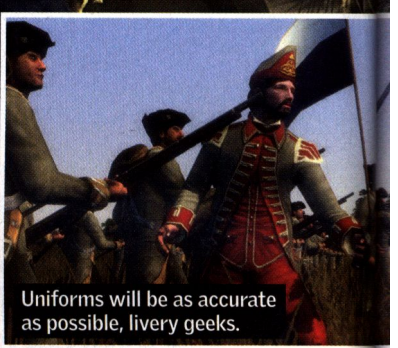
GETTING WET

As my playtest drew to its inevitable close and with both the land battles and campaign map exuding the kind of potential that should have every strategy gamer palpitating, there was just

No, Horatio Hornblower won't be in it.


Weather will have a big effect on naval battles.


"Get down, deeper and down."


Uniforms will be as accurate as possible, livery geeks.

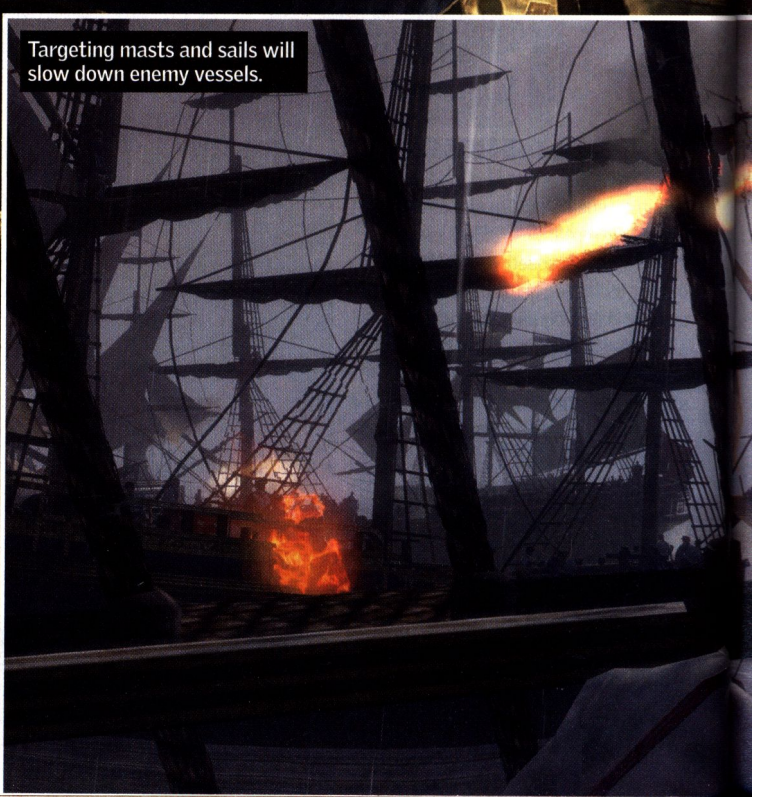
Mind Games

The cerebral cortex is mightier than the bayonet

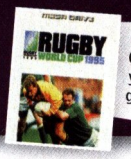
Research will play its most prominent role yet in a *Total War* game.

If you're the kind of strategy gamer who likes to use their mind just as much as their might, *Empire*'s research makeover will come as welcome news. A far greater emphasis is being placed on research flexibility, with extensive philosophical, military and industrial research trees on show. Focusing on any one could fundamentally transform the way you're able to approach the main campaign.

Military research allows you to improve drilling, increase cannon size, develop advanced artillery, and even basic chemical weapons such as quicklime. Research industrial upgrades and you'll gain access to better agricultural technology and metal forging techniques to strengthen ships' hulls, while philosophical upgrades will help improve your society's happiness and wealth.


Targeting masts and sails will slow down enemy vessels.

THE STORY SO FAR... THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY



IN THE BEGINNING
CA spend their first years porting sports games for EA.

1987

THE 3RD DIMENSION
Shogun: Total War is created in 3D from a 2D *C&C* clone.

1999

NOT BUILT IN A DAY
Rome: Total War's groundbreaking 3D engine raises the bar.

2004

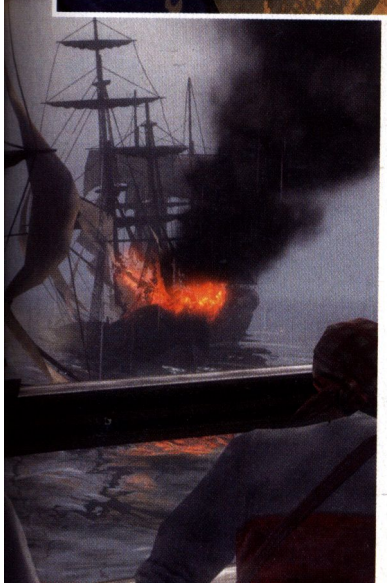
GET MEDIEVAL... AGAIN
Looks good but marred by AI bugs.

2006

"I can't help feeling that *Empire* has the potential to utterly eclipse its illustrious predecessors"

Epic in both scale and feel, *Empire* should be another triumphant notch in CA's belt.

Cavalry will still be important, despite the rise of gunpowder.



enough time to sample Empire's all-new naval battles.

These watery conflicts proved far slower, more considered affairs than their terra firma equivalents. Wind speed and direction were major factors in determining the manoeuvrability of vessels, with ships battling the elements while exchanging cannon fire with a British fleet.

Turning each ship so that enemy vessels came into a hull's shooting range proved the greatest challenge, one made all the more difficult by the need to manually reload cannons after firing at the enemy.

A secondary challenge was gauging which of the three shot types to use. Besides the basic cannonball, you've got chain-shot – half-cannonballs linked together by thick chains. These take down enemy masts and leave ships sitting duck targets for barrages by standard cannonballs that knock gaping holes in enemy hulls. Finally, there is grapeshot. This a canvas bag full of metal balls turns a ship's crew into hunks of flesh, softening up the enemy in preparation for boarding.

While these battles were certainly tense and tactical, it's still too early to make any concrete judgements on them. We'll save that for the review.

Make no mistake, *Empire: Total War* is shaping up to be one the most ambitious war simulations around. Not only is its scope superior to its predecessors, it's also promising to scale previously uncharted heights of accessibility. With land battles bolstered by some radically improved AI and the added tactical dimension provided by gunpowder weapons and the ability to garrison troops, along with a highly promising first attempt at real-time 3D naval warfare, *Empire: Total War* has the tools to take strategy gaming to the next level.

If the polish can match the vision then *Empire* won't just be another war simulation, it'll be pure, unadulterated strategy entertainment of the very highest calibre. Or in a word, fun. PCZ

Sail-by shooting

Keeping it real, but not too much

We were invited to Creative Assembly's top-secret laboratories recently, where kitted up in white coats and surgical masks, we had the opportunity to be the first journalists to test out the multiplayer naval combat. It was pretty fabulous.

It looks great. The sun glints off the rolling waves, individual crewmen man the rigging and we could swear we saw some individually modelled barnacles on the hull of one flagship. Fun with a salty sting of realism. For example, wind affects movement and is tactically crucial in battle, but Creative Assembly hasn't made this too realistic, or only the most aquatic among us would stay in control.

As for the combat, it's impressive both visually and in gameplay. Raking your enemy's sails with chain-shot can bring down masts, and reduce manoeuvrability. Grapeshot wipes out the sailors scurrying about on deck, while regular cannonballs can pierce the hull.

The ship-to-ship combat needs time to learn and specific tactics and intense micro-management of movement and firing is vital. We played only small-scale skirmishes and, having done so, we can't wait to get stuck into some more epic sea battles. This part of the *Empire* 'gamble' has come off without a hitch.

Oh my goodness, can we even print that?

COMING OUT IN 2009, MOSTLY...

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

ETA SPRING

Gearbox's xenomorph-ridden squad shooter emerges

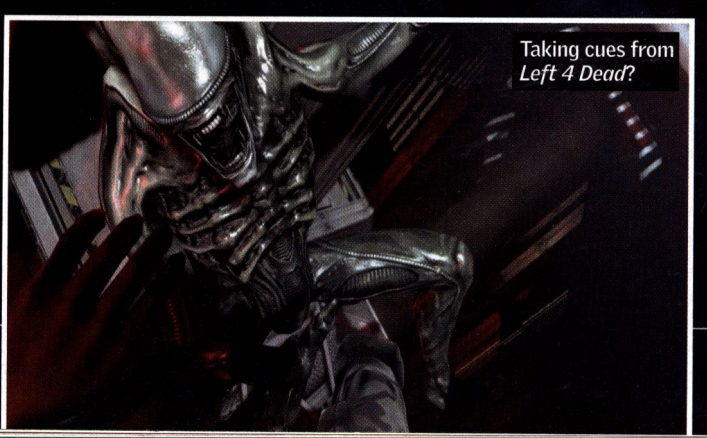
DEVELOPER Gearbox **PUBLISHER** Sega **WEBSITE** sega.con/aliens

DETAILS ON GEARBOX'S squad-based *Aliens* shooter are thin on the ground, but it's safe to declare an official comeback for the shiny black xenomorphs and their facehugging chums in 2009. Between *Colonial Marines* and the mysterious RPG Obsidian is developing, publisher Sega will have the monopoly on shitting you up next year.

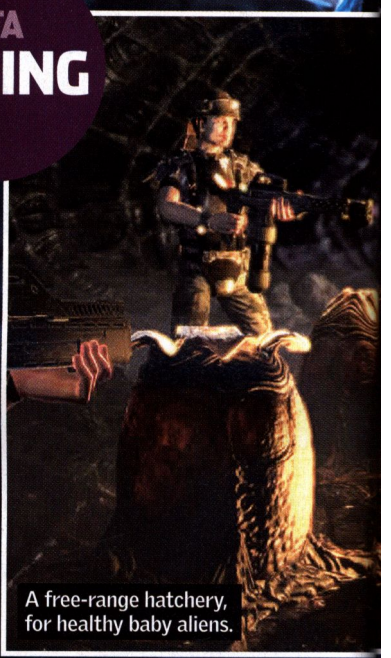
Gearbox are going for the authentic *Aliens* experience with *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, trying their best to remain loyal to the sources and attain the immaculate standards of the movies. You'll be able to do your best Ripley impression as you progress through the game, plagued by both monsters and quick-time events, hammering the keyboard to peel off a facehugger as it constricts your head.

Colonial Marines' main feature will be its four-player co-op mode, designed with each player holding down a specific role. Your squad will likely take the form of the typical soldier/medic/heavy/tech combination, rounded off with that all-important *Aliens*-veneer. The single-player will use a similar squad mechanic, though it won't be the one employed in the *Brothers in Arms* games – the xenomorphs don't tend to hide behind hedges you see. Though they will flank you to bits.

In the single-player game a context-sensitive menu system lets you order the squad to deploy traps, sentry guns and all sorts, most likely while you hide at the back hoping they get eaten first instead of you. We're hoping the interface follows the *SWAT 4* model, which will make the game a delight to play. Although this may not work during an alien rush.



Taking cues from *Left 4 Dead*?



A free-range hatchery, for healthy baby aliens.

The prospect of playing with other human comrades has probably already raised the *Left 4 Dead* flag in your mind. Certainly, we can picture how an alien surge will be similar to a zombie one. There will be significant differences – the motion detector, facehuggers and so on – so don't go running away saying *PC ZONE* said *Colonial Marines* was an *L4D* clone.

While we don't know enough about *Colonial Marine*'s single-player game to get too excited, the prospect of co-op play in *Aliens* is stirring some embarrassing feelings of hot anticipation in the *PCZ* team. **PCZ**

Will somebody please get him a wet wipe?

Motion scanners will ramp up the tension.

Headcrabs are old news, bring on the face-huggers!

"Gearbox are going for the authentic *Aliens* experience, trying their best to remain loyal"

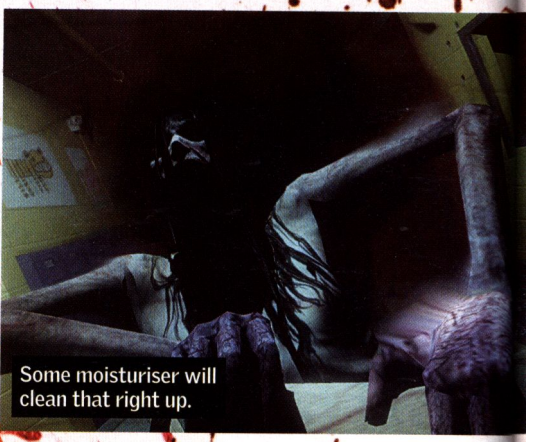
ETA FEB 2009

GIRL, INTERRUPTED?

F.E.A.R. 2 PROJECT ORIGIN

Will Porter **gets a visit from the only eight year-old girl on Earth that isn't into *High School Musical* or *Hannah Montana***

DEVELOPER Monolith **PUBLISHER** Warner Bros **WEBSITE** projectorigin.warnerbros.com **PREVIOUSLY IN** issue 189



Some moisturiser will clean that right up.

"Nope, I'm sorry. Your arse will have to be amputated."

MONOLITH'S SECOND OUTING for her of bedraggled hair and psychic entombment is crash-landing in a very different pool of expectation to the original *F.E.A.R.*. In the past few months, shooters have changed. They've read up on their subject matter and got their NVQs. *Left 4 Dead* has nailed co-op, *Far Cry 2* gave us an open world, *Fallout 3* merged RPG stats with action... the noble first-person shooter, once the most stodgy template of all, is evolving. All of which makes you wonder if a shooter with as strong a corridor ethos as *Project Origin* could be spiralling into the danger zone.

I'm not denying that they're nice corridors. You can't say that Monolith haven't answered their critics. The relentless grey offices and grey slums of *F.E.A.R.*, and its limited selection of copy and paste slo-mo soldiers, have been shaken up more than a little. Environments are more interesting to look at and to fight in, military goons are accompanied by a fuller and more rounded complements of mutants, psychic ghosts and robots, and every level is punctuated by far more dialogue and scripting.

LONESOME SOLDIER

Whereas the original *F.E.A.R.* was a lonely business (with you being part of a team, but coming up against contrivance after contrivance to split you up) *Project Origin* is putting a lot more stock into battling alongside a team of friendly AI, and having them being vaguely fun to kick around with to boot.

After an initial Alma interlude, the game opens with your character (one Michael Becket) sitting in what is essentially a Scooby Doo Mystery Machine for modern well-armoured super soldiers. There's a lot of banter and casual swearing, but as you work your way inside the tower block that you've got to infiltrate, you're already warming to them. They respond to your actions, for example questioning just why you're shooting a statue for no apparent reason, or asking where you think you're going when you start haring off down the wrong corridor.

They're also gently amusing in the ways they interact, with the squad commander demanding that the clearly demarked 'funny' character climb the hundreds of stairs up to the penthouse suite while everyone else takes the lift. Inevitably most of these poor souls are going to die horrible deaths before the end of the game – but from what I've played at least, you'll probably be sorry to see them go.

THE LOWDOWN

More varied environments	✓
Wider creature menagerie	✓
Better characters	✓
Amusing dialogue	✓
Action not instantly Gratifying	✗
Contracted consolitis	✗

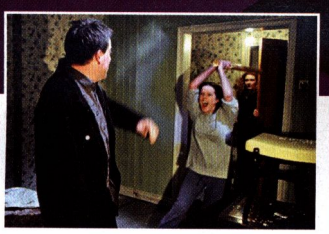
"Why am I more excited about playing my favourite bits from *F.E.A.R.*?"

Bit of a mismatch here.

Copycat Corrie

F.E.A.R.'s connection with a soap

When explaining the plot of *F.E.A.R.* it's best to draw parallels with something familiar. As such, for the layman, the *F.E.A.R.* storyline isn't a million miles away from the recent Coronation Street storyline in which John imprisoned Rosie in his attic in order to pursue a relationship with Fiz. However, in *F.E.A.R.* the imprisoned lady has been used to create an army of supersoldiers and psychically projects images of her as an eight year-old child to scare people, then make them bleed out of every orifice.



In *Coronation Street* the forced imprisonment was curtailed when Rosie hit John over the head with a baseball bat and ran away, while the team behind *F.E.A.R.* opted for a nuclear explosion in which millions died. The similarities are almost uncanny, aren't they?

Something else the first level makes immediately clear is that environments are much more colourful and interesting – albeit with the caveat that the lights may go off at any second. Coffee shops, stunning lift rides, swimming pools, rooftop party locations, antique collections, precarious window cleaner lifts... it's all rather glam.

Blue is the colour.

Everything you experience in the first half hour, though, is building up to the climactic explosion at the end of *F.E.A.R.*, after which point the storylines converge. Your character, Becket, isn't a blood relative to Alma like the original's Point Man, but he is psychically tweaked towards her wavelength. As such, she's trying to convey different messages to you (as well as kill you) at the same time as causing all manner of chaos in the first game. And if that doesn't make her a two-timing hussy I don't know what does. This sensibility towards the untoward also makes you a potential applicant for the slow-motion frivolity that made *F.E.A.R.* famous – and when you get the ability in the second level it's a fair bet that it'll be at the hands of Genevieve Aristide, the Armacham boss you were originally out to apprehend, and who has a fair few skeletons in her closet. As well as howling wall-crawling corpses.

FLASHBANG ACTION

When it comes to action, to start with *Project Origin* has health packs. These were these things that people in olden times used to carry around, before hiding behind a pillar for a little while was found to cure all ills.

As for the bullets actually doing said damage, it's business as usual – elevator doors open, goons with a healthy awareness of how to best use the environment around them rush out, slo-mo is smacked on and giblets (every now and then) fly.

F.E.A.R.'s neat melee combat system has sadly bitten the dust (floor slides and roundhouse kicks replaced by the usual gun butt-slam to the head), but the grenade quota has grown to cover explosions of both electrical and fiery persuasion as well as the usual timed and proximity explosions.

Something that is concerning is that the action does seem slower than before, and that often in all the pyrotechnics it's now hard to see exactly what cleverness your foes are showing off. It's strange to say, but in a grey corridor or a grey courtyard it was clear and evident that what enemies were doing was to do with both surviving and making you dead – in *Project Origin* it's much, much harder to work out what the AI is up to, and as such there's a level of instant gratification that seems lacking.

What can't be denied is that the *F.E.A.R.* menagerie has been spruced up. A later level I played was in a primary school. But it was a primary school with chilling secrets, an extensive underground network and more surveillance cameras and one-way mirrors than they used to have back when I was at Cople Lower School. Inside this educational establishment was a Remnant.

THE STORY SO FAR... MONOLITH

1994 **HERE NOW** Monolith are founded. They make games to celebrate.

1997 **I LIVE AGAIN** *Blood* is released. Now you can kick zombie heads around.

2000 **NO-ONE LIVES FOREVER** Cate Archer appears to critical acclaim.

2005 **ALMA ABOUT** *F.E.A.R.* turns up and turns heads. As well as terrify them.

Energy weapons produce impressive visual effects.

Can I drive your mech?

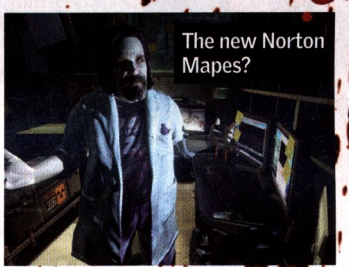
"Fo' sho. Go M.A.D. with it."

Ah, the simple pleasure of stomping around in a power-lifter – drilling strangers with a minigun, then letting off salvos of swirling missiles when it overheats and simple clouds of blood are deemed necessary instead.

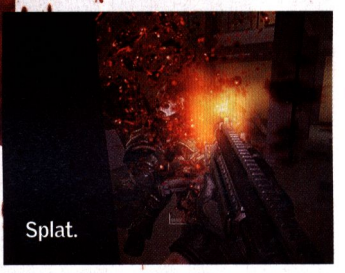
In all honesty, there's little in *Project Origin*'s heavily armoured moments that you haven't seen before in every game with mechs in. Tactics are replaced by relentless gunning, the body count quadruples and it's wise to watch out for anything with a missile launcher.

Here's an interesting fact though: *F.E.A.R.*'s Armacham first appeared in Monolith's *SHOGO: Mobile Armoured Division* mech game.

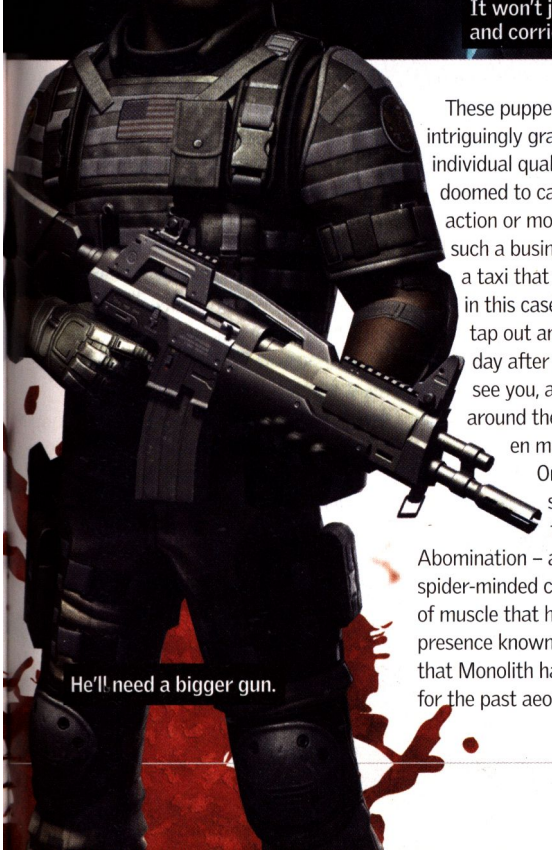
It won't just be bland offices and corridors this time.



The new Norton Mapes?



Splat.



He'll need a bigger gun.

These puppeteer villains are intriguingly granted *BioShock*-esque individual qualities, and so are doomed to carry out their last action or most familiar motion. As such a businessman will be hailing a taxi that will never come or, in this case, a piano teacher will tap out an atonal ditty until the day after forever. Or until they see you, animate corpses lying around them and coordinate an en masse attack.

One of Aristide's dirty secrets, meanwhile, is the heavily publicised Abomination – a wall-crawling spider-minded chasm-leaping bundle of muscle that have been making their presence known in the hospital levels that Monolith have been showing off for the past aeon.

Having finally fought against them, I can underline that they're definitely the best non-soldier opposition that the *F.E.A.R.* canon. They move that little bit too quickly for you to get a clear aim, and excel when there's three or four around you. They can be on any ceiling, any wall or any floor, and as such you can never know where the next assault might spring from. Although, generally, it's from where you're not looking.

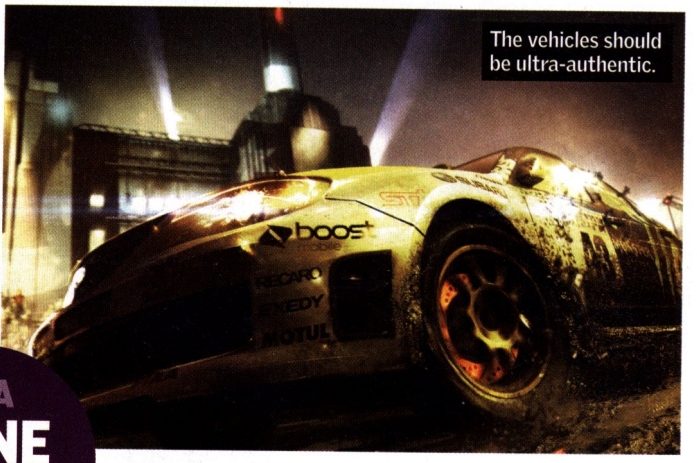
THRILL LACKING

Despite all this, I still worry. My happy smiles as I shot men off roofs and heard their prolonged scream were mixed in with the troubled grimace of someone first being taught calculus. Why do I have to repeatedly tap a key to fend off a boss and kick him in the nuts? Why isn't the shotgun as meaty as it was before? Why when the world at large realised they were a bad idea four years ago have Monolith persisted with invisible (well, ghosty invisible) monsters? And, come to that, having played four of the game's levels from different stages – why didn't I once pin a goon to the wall with a nail through the head? Why, when I'm writing this am I more excited about going back and playing my favourite bits from *F.E.A.R.* rather than this, its immensely graphically superior sequel? Why, reader, why?

Project Origin is going to be a solid, dependable game. It's funny, it's pretty, it's blood-spattered and it's certainly a better structured outing than Monolith's previous galumph through office blocks, basements and cleaning cupboards. Yet in the four levels I've played through the spark of originality, daring and raw passion I felt when I played the first game (hell, even when I saw its first screenshots) wasn't really there. I checked with my trouser department, and it reported back with a definitive negative in the arousal stakes.

Maybe, in distant February, I'll sit down with the game and something will click and the Alma magic will flow back into my soul. The potential for salvation is certainly there – but right now, in the richest and most bountiful season of gaming in aeons, there are some reasons to be fearful for the little girl in the bright red dress. PCZ

There'll be jungle and canyon races in *DiRT 2*.


The vehicles should be ultra-authentic.

ETA JUNE 2009

GET FILTHIER...

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

The legend lives on... in the jungle!

DEVELOPER Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** codemasters.com/dirt

You may have to watch out for gnus on some tracks.

CODEMASTERS HAVE DECIDED to press on with the *Colin McRae* series, despite the unfortunate passing on of the man himself. The developers are determined to make *DiRT 2* a fitting tribute to the famous rally driver.

"Colin McRae was all about the speed, the excitement and the entertainment of rally driving," said Gavin Raeburn, senior executive producer at Codemasters Studios. "Even when we first worked with him over 10 years ago, he captured a freedom and a spirit that enthralled rally fans. *DiRT 2* will be a great tribute to an incredible champion."

The game itself will be jam-packed with all the usual off-road events, challenging players to race across a substantial array of terrains and locations. There'll be canyon races and jungle trails to tear up, while traditionalists will be satisfied with the inclusion of stadium-based tracks.

"We'll be throwing off some of the shackles and constraints that real-world rallying has to abide by," Raeburn commented. "We're pitching players against the most spectacular and dangerous environments in the real world."

As you might imagine, there aren't many proper rally events based in a jungle, so Codies are using artistic license with some of the wilder courses, all rendered in a new iteration of the gorgeous EGO Engine. Codemasters claim the vehicles and courses will be twice as detailed as those seen in *Race Driver: GRID*.

For those of an obsessive nature, there'll be all the officially licensed rally cars you could ask for, including the Group N Subaru. There'll be seven different vehicle classes and Codies promise there'll be no rubbish starting cars at the start. Online play has been augmented with a host of new social and community features, which should hopefully mean multiplayer racing will be as exciting as ever. PCZ

"Colin McRae: DiRT 2 will be a great tribute to an incredible champion"
Gavin Raeburn's aim is for *DiRT 2* to honour McRae

DEUS EX 3

Come along now, back to the future...

DEVELOPER Eidos **PUBLISHER** Eidos **WEBSITE** deusex3.com **ETA** Winter 2009

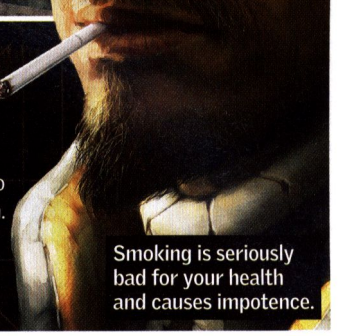
Not a happy bunny.

A penis substitute?

THERE WERE A lot of positives to be taken from our coverage of *Deus Ex 3* back in issue 200, even if a lot of folk have been focusing on the unwanted introduction of a few cyber-tentacles. If you can surmount that brick wall of *Deus Ex* nostalgia preventing you from appreciating anything *Deus Ex 3* is offering, what's left is the incredibly original concept.

Juxtaposition is the word of the day here, with the Renaissance styling of the near future at anachronistic odds with a newly introduced bio-mechanically augmented rights movement. You'll play as an augmented chap called Adam Jensen (with the 'first man' metaphor being put through its paces, you'll note), who'll begin to unravel a terrifying and twisting conspiracy by breaking his hand into bits, and shooting bullets out the hole on the end of his arm.

Whether or not *Deus Ex 3* ends up more shooter than an RPG isn't clear, but you'd be an idiot to condemn it either way.



Smoking is seriously bad for your health and causes impotence.

No bad chicken crossing the road jokes here.

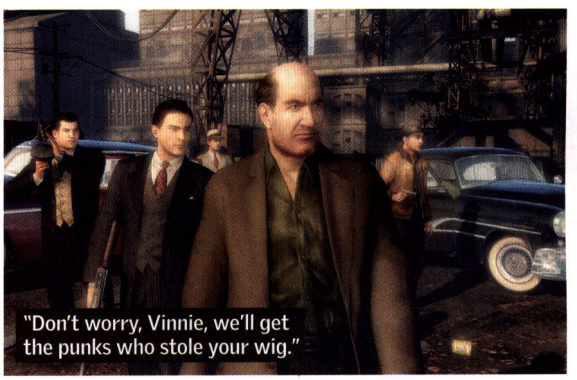
THE CROSSING

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios **PUBLISHER** Valve
WEBSITE arkane-studios.com **ETA** TBC

REMEMBER THIS? A Source-powered gem from the guys who brought us *Dark Messiah*, *The Crossing* inspired much chin-stroking when it was revealed last year. Its ambiguous 'crossplay' game mode piqued our interest.

As far as we can tell, crossplay pitches a bunch of players into a set of intertwining solo games in such a way that your experiences will cross over with that of another player's. So what begins as a co-op game might, because of how the game's story dynamically shifts about, turn into two parallel single-player games, before converging again with both players on opposing sides and having to fight one another. And it all goes down across two alternate versions of Paris. One modern, the other ridden with Knights Templar. It's also got honest-to-God grappling hooks.

All's quiet on the Parisian front for now, butexpect news on *The Crossing* from Arkane soon.



"Don't worry, Vinnie, we'll get the punks who stole your wig."

MAFIA II

DEVELOPER 2K Czech **PUBLISHER** 2K Games
WEBSITE 2kgames.com/mafia2 **ETA** TBC

TAP A BUSIED *Mafia II* developer on the shoulder and ask them what they're currently working on, and they'll give some surprising answers. Newspapers with actual news from the late '40s? A fully functioning virtual carwash? Customisable license plates for your favourite vehicle?

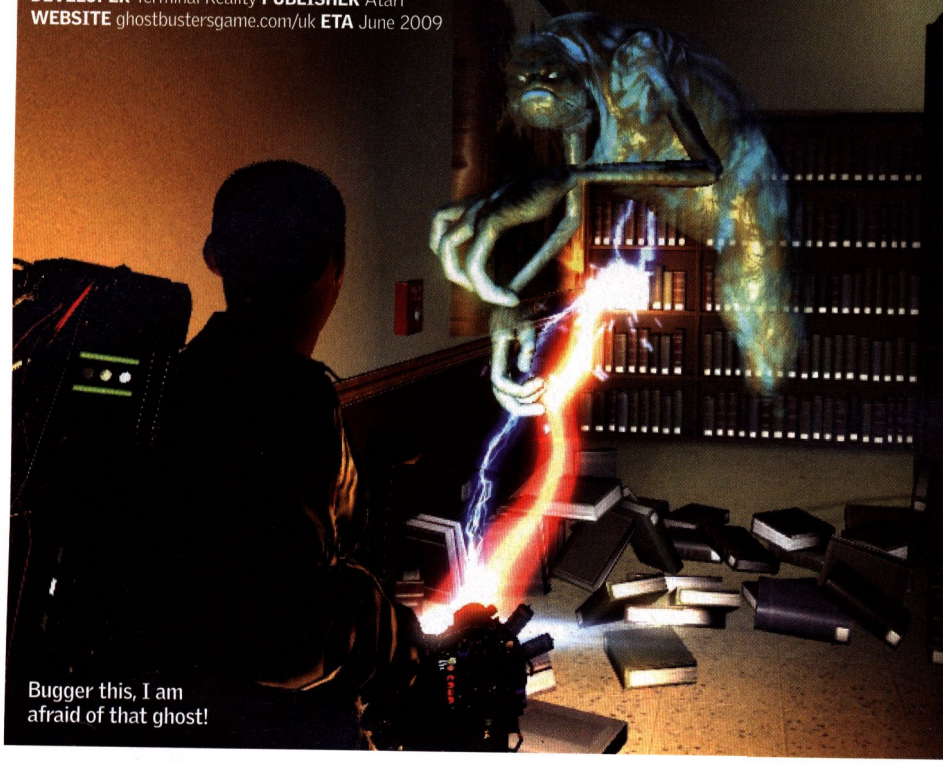
2K Czech are adding a relentless amount of detail to their story-drived *Mafia* shooter, while modestly proclaiming that, unlike *Grand Theft Auto IV* (page 74), the seemingly living city won't be the crowning achievement of *Mafia II*'s. That accolade instead goes to the game's acting and script, with Empire City being the incredibly intricate backdrop to a Mafioso storyline worthy of Martin Scorsese.

Understandably, fans of the original are pleased. Scriptwriters from the first game are returning, and after our trip to 2K's Brno offices we can assure you that already, *Mafia II*'s looking sharp.

GHOSTBUSTERS

Personally I think it's a sign from God

DEVELOPER Terminal Reality **PUBLISHER** Atari
WEBSITE ghostbustersgame.com/uk **ETA** June 2009

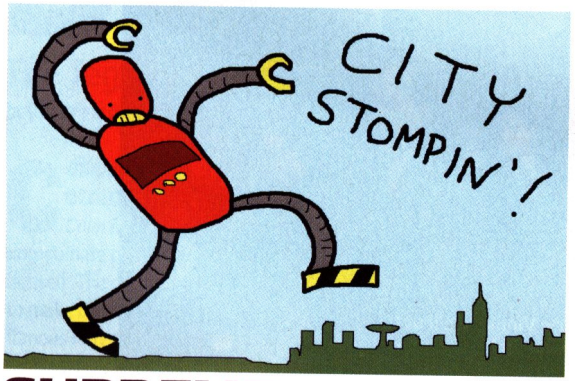


Bugger this, I am afraid of that ghost!

ATARI HAVE NOW thankfully picked up the eagerly-awaited *Ghostbusters* title, but the bad news is that they want to release it along with the film's 25th anniversary. So we"ll be waiting until June.

The game's basically finished, having flown past its supposed October release date, so the hopeful among you can expect a decent bit of polishing to have taken place. It's got all of the original team (yes, even Ernie Hudson), the script is by Dan Ackroyd and Harold Ramis, and with the new story combined with many scenes from the films, it's still looking like a fanboy's dream. Slimer, Stay Puft, they're all here – although we're yet to find out if you get to drive the Statue of Liberty by shouting into a headset.

Rest assured, it's still coming and it's still looking great. Though if it falls by the wayside again you might find us wandering the streets asking "Are you the Gatekeeper?" to passers-by.



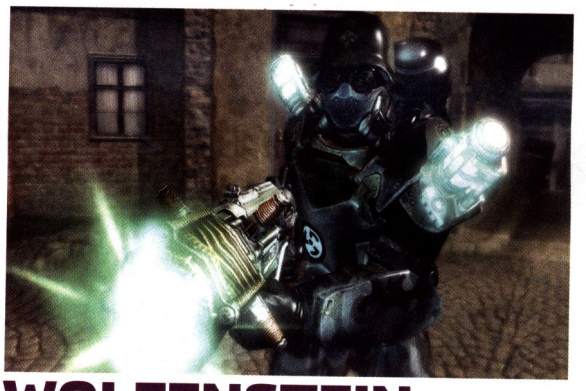
SUPREME COMMANDER 2

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games **PUBLISHER** Square Enix
WEBSITE supremecommander.com **ETA** TBC

WE DON'T KNOW much about the sequel to *Supreme Commander*, Gas Powered Games' epic homage to the classic *Total Annihilation* (hence our lovely made-up screenshot). We know that it exists, that Square Enix are publishing it, and that when you call them, their hold music is the theme tune from the *Final Fantasy* games.

The publisher have stated that they want to branch out from their Japan-only development more into the West. A big robot game may not be as radical as they intended, but we can't quibble with their taste.

Many problems from the first game were fixed in the *Forged Alliance* stand-alone expansion pack (such as the fiddly command bar), so Chris Taylor and his team will have to pull off some really impressive changes to make a worthy sequel.



WOLFENSTEIN

DEVELOPER id Software **PUBLISHER** Activision Blizzard
WEBSITE wolfenstein.com **ETA** TBC

"NAZIS? FANTASTIC! OCCULT stylings? Acceptable. Aliens? Well that's just silly." Response to the new *Wolfenstein* title from Activision was reactionary. This new fangled alien lark just doesn't gel with the down-to-Earth Nazi zombies that we've all grown accustomed to.

Trying desperately to ignore the extra-terrestrials, we're slightly more confident about the actual game itself. Flip-flopping between the real world and green-tinged Shroud dimension will allow for some interesting shooter tactics, and with the alternate reality featuring in multiplayer too, *Wolfenstein* could open the doors to some innovative new play styles.

We're still waiting for some good news about the single-player campaign though, which to be absolutely fair (and we mean this with the best will in the world), looks like generic, blank-faced tosh. Throw us a bone, guys.

MIRROR'S EDGE

Parkour in the big city

DEVELOPER DICE **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** mirrorsedge.com **ETA** January 2009

Tramp gloves for the win.

EA'S FIRST-PERSON definitely-not-a-shoot-'em-up dropped in November for those plucky Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 owners. It underperformed despite its starkly original concept, due to it being released alongside thousands of other games and not being set in WWII.

Hopefully the extra time is to fully optimise the game for PC, as nothing will hurt it more than a shoddy porting (EA's *Dead Space*, anyone?). Still, precise first-person controls are what the PC is made for and being precise is what *Mirror's Edge* is all about. An inch away from that pipe you jumped to? Tough shit, you fall to your death, you try again. Some decent mouse control would work wonders.

There have been plenty of grumbles about the linearity, the shortness and the general lack of replayability beyond Time Trials. Nevertheless it's a really fun and imaginative game and deserves to be played for daring to be original.

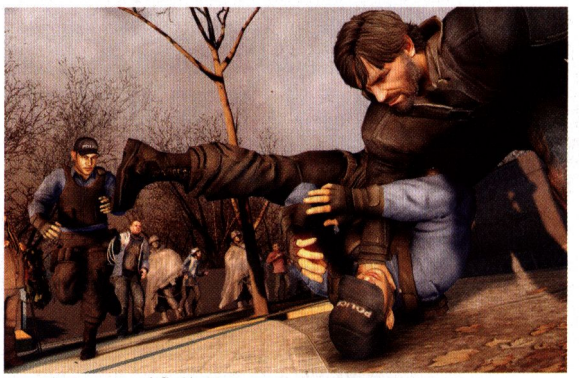
BORDERLANDS

DEVELOPER Gearbox Software **PUBLISHER** 2K Games
WEBSITE borderlandsthegame.com **ETA** TBC

THE GAME WITH a billion different guns comes from a developer with a billion different projects. Not only have Gearbox just finished work on *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*, but they're also working on Sega's new *Alien* shooter, *Colonial Marines*, as well as some new unannounced stuff.

With *Borderlands* you've got a distant future, an alien planet, a vast array of weapons based around a handful of archetypes and factors, and some vehicular combat similar to *Halo*. To that end, the game will feature co-op play, which is always a treat. There'll also be a character development aspect, which should affect what weapons and armour you use and wear.

Our faces hurt from making ever-more shocked expressions every time the weapon count ups, but keep in mind it'll function like those 99,999-in-1 games you get in pound shops: endless variations on a few base ideas. Should be fun though.



SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft
WEBSITE splintercell.us.ubi.com/conviction **ETA** TBC

NOT CONTENT WITH re-inventing Sam Fisher for *Double Agent* (morally dubious, shaved head guy) and re-reinventing him for *Conviction* (Jason Bourne guy), Ubisoft have re-re-reinvented the man. *Splinter Cell: Conviction* was taken back into development after lengthy delays, though screenshots released way back showed Fisher throwing chairs about like a lunatic.

Now everything we know about *Conviction* is obsolete, with that chair-chucking thing having been scrapped. An incoming re-reveal suggests that while the Bourne-leanings will remain, Fisher's origin as a high-tech elite super-spy will be back at the fore.

Gadgets, nightvision, doing that splits thing with your legs, shooting more light bulbs than ever before. Oh Sam, it's like our honeymoon again.

MYSTIC WILL PREDICTS...

He's seen things you people wouldn't believe. Born with the power of sight beyond sight, and also of being able to eat a four-finger KitKat in one go, *Mystic Will Porter* reveals his mighty powers once more

A jazzed-up modern-day war for *BF3* is a certainty.

1. NEW BATTLEFIELD

I THINK IT'S certain that we'll hear of a new *Battlefield* game around the time of release of the delayed free-to-play *Battlefield Heroes*, so as to garner the interest of new players. This time last year I was suggesting that DICE may be tempted to go back to WWII, but with their *Heroes*-shaped offspring strapped to that period that's a no-no.

So I predict *Battlefield 3* will be modern day but, to jazz it up a little, a mixture of arid, urban and green-coloured environments. Destructible terrain and added physics are bound to make their presence felt in a new engine too. I'd be fairly confident in suggesting that the battlefields on which you fight, and the buildings of the towns some maps will have you scrap in, will slowly get blasted apart the longer you fight.

Expect even more personal player development and weapon and apparel unlocks to boot. Oh, and after that's out I'd wager that the engine-mate to *BF3*, as *BF2142* was to *BF2*, will be set in World War II.

Don't hold out for *Team Fortress 3*.

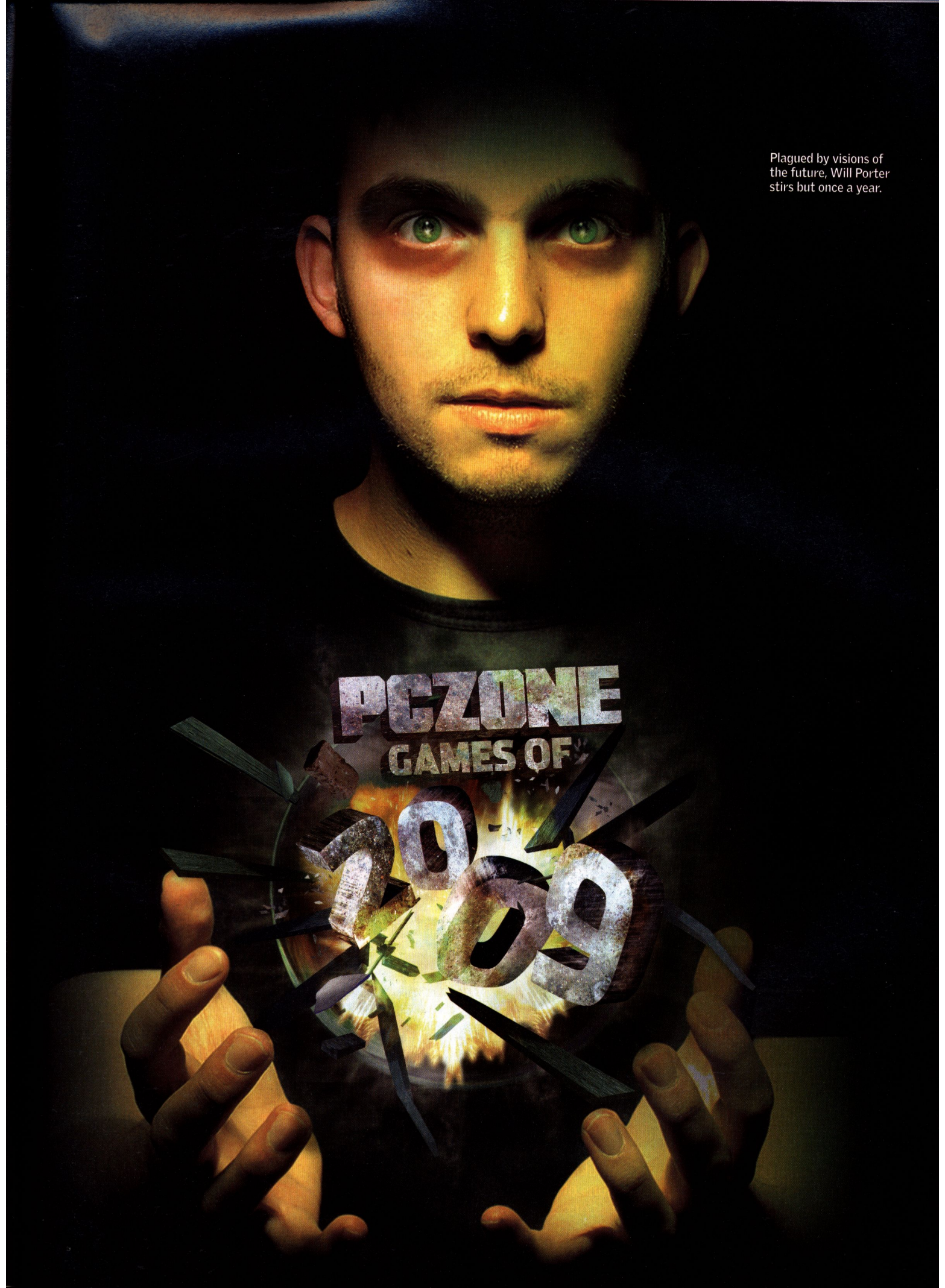
2. VALVE GOINGS ON

GIVEN THAT VALVE have released games for two years in the same time slot, it makes sense they'll be aiming for a similar release in November 2009. If they shoot for the same triumvirate triumph as The Orange Box, *Half-Life: Episode 3* and *Portal 2* are shoe-ins, and I'd say the former would be a prequel detailing the origins of GlaDOS' descent into madness.

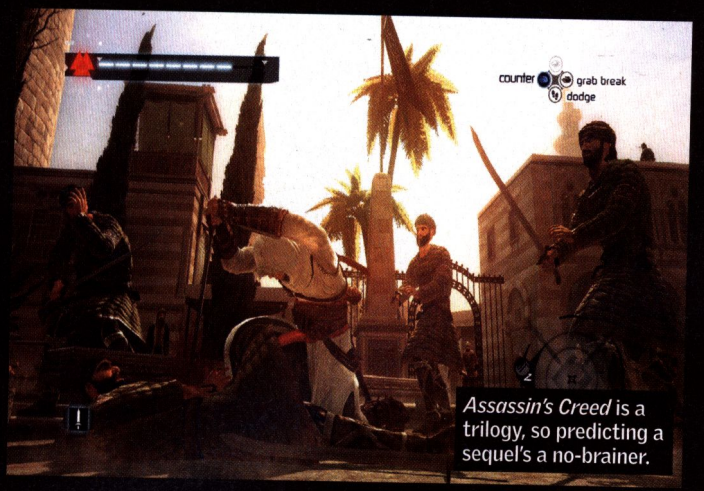
Obviously they'd need a third: maybe *Counter-Strike 2*? This is more "Wouldn't it be cool Will?" than anything mystic, but using *L4D* tech a co-op SWAT vs terrorists game could certainly be built.

Also the 10th *TF2* character, indicated by a *L4D* Easter egg, will be The Civilian. This indicates that the VIP escort mode from *Team Fortress* will make a comeback.

Finally *L4D*'s first downloadable campaign will include a shopping mall, and a pub called the Winchester.



Plagued by visions of the future, Will Porter stirs but once a year.



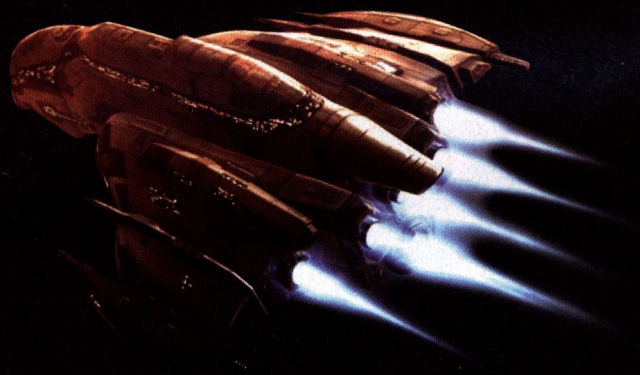
Assassin's Creed is a trilogy, so predicting a sequel's a no-brainer.

3. ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

UBISOFT COULD TIME-HOP their roof-tumbling epic to any era, and personally I'd like to see one in Roman times. A betting man, however, would be advised to put his money on feudal Japan.

Not only would the idea of assassins and secret societies fit in that time period, but in the confusing end-scenes of the original game contained a reference to a Japanese island called Yonaguni. It's a place off the west coast of Japan, where a fabled Atlantis-style civilization once crumbled – and they've got an oddly shaped pile of underwater rocks to prove it.

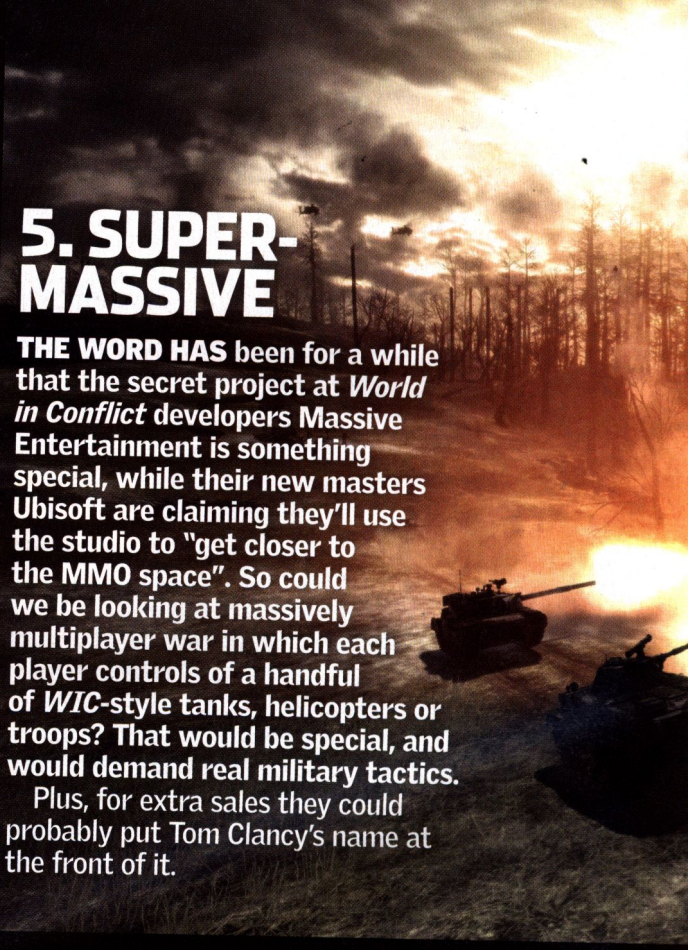
Could *AC2* see you jumping from tall towers into barrels of rice, trying to get information on a sect distantly related to said civilization, in order to defy the plans of those dastardly futuro-Templars? Long shot, but possible.



4. EVE ONLINE FPS

CCP ARE THE company behind the incredibly popular space faring MMO, *EVE Online*. At their recent Iceland-based fan-meet, they spoke about new projects (specifically their newfound interest in the console market). While they twittered on about their business plans, a movie played displaying what appeared to be an FPS set in the *EVE* universe.

I know it's not a particularly mystic leap to make, but I reckon this means we can expect an *EVE* FPS. The footage was *Halo*-like in terms of how it played, with large open arenas set on an Earth-like planet. How CCP will factor in the considerations of their fans and the features of thee MMO when making the FPS will be a point of interest. Also, CCP are working on a MMO based on White Wolf's paper-and-pencil RPGs.



5. SUPER-MASSIVE

THE WORD HAS been for a while that the secret project at *World in Conflict* developers Massive Entertainment is something special, while their new masters Ubisoft are claiming they'll use the studio to "get closer to the MMO space". So could we be looking at massively multiplayer war in which each player controls of a handful of *WIC*-style tanks, helicopters or troops? That would be special, and would demand real military tactics.

Plus, for extra sales they could probably put Tom Clancy's name at the front of it.

X-Com's coming back – get ready.

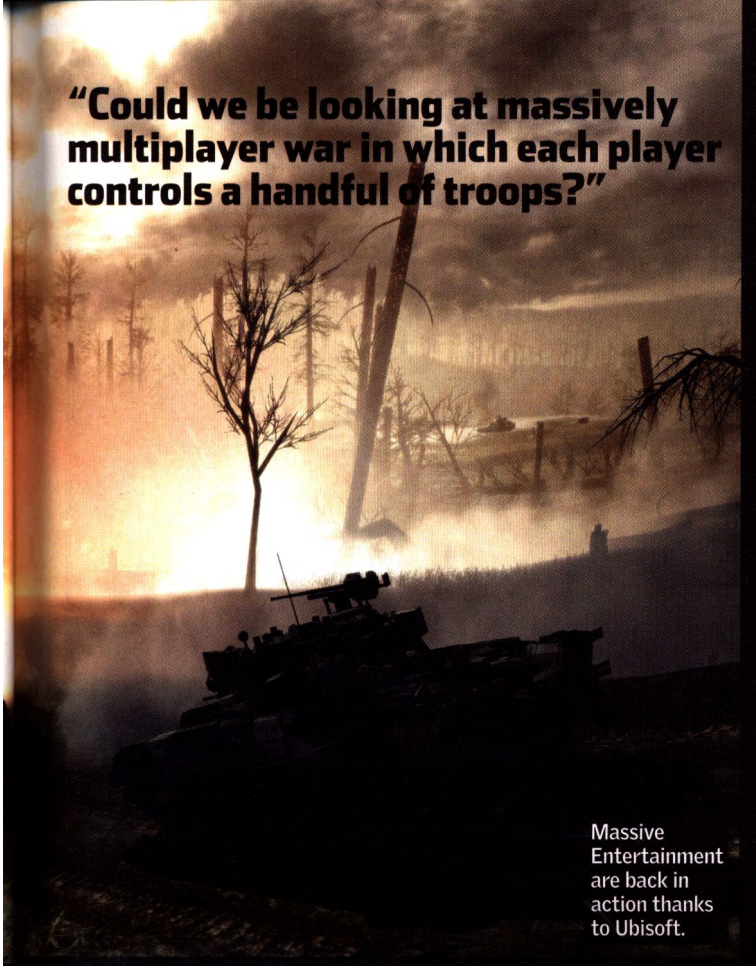
6. X-COM'S RE-EMERGENCE

A YEAR ON the song I'm singing hasn't changed a note, it's merely matured and a little more bass-y. The worst-kept secret in the world is that Ken Levine and his crew at Irrational (sorry, 2K Boston/Australia) are working on an *X-Com* game – legal website leaks and developer loose-lips are testament to that.

As such this year we can expect its announcement alongside videos of all manner of *SWAT 4*-esque, co-op infiltrations and alien hunting. Seeing as 2K gained the license through taking over Sid Meier's Firaxis, who have the keys to the old Microprose locker, at one point there must have been some interest to do an *X-Com* game.

"The worst-kept secret in the world is that Ken Levine and his crew are working on an *X-Com* game"

"Could we be looking at massively multiplayer war in which each player controls a handful of troops?"



Massive Entertainment are back in action thanks to Ubisoft.

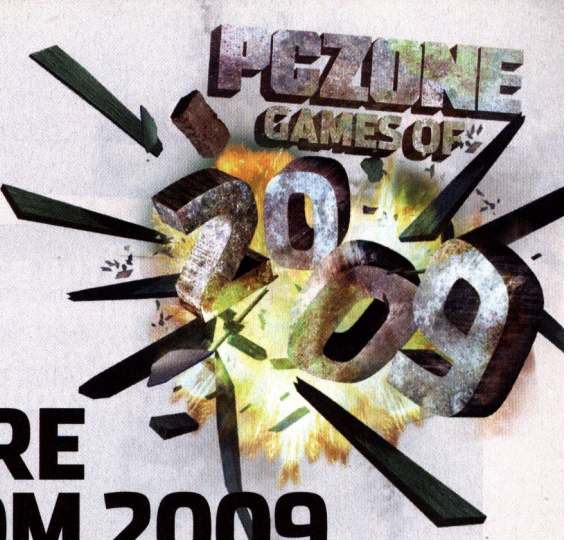
7. BLIZZ BUZZ

WHO CAN GUESS at the strange ways of Blizzard? Splitting *StarCraft II* into the Terran, Zerg and Protoss packages of *Wings of Liberty*, *Heart of the Swarm* and *Legacy of the Void* was a step beyond the remarkable powers of even Mystic Will. However, I'd guess that at least two of these will surface in 2009 (the first perhaps in spring/summer, the second around Christmas) with full multiplayer unlocked from the start, but with more maps and perhaps more units filtered in with each expansion.

What with growing buzz on what is suddenly a real challenger to *World of Warcraft* throne as *Star Wars: The Old Republic* rumbles into view, I'd also be surprised if the goliath Acti-Bliz corporation don't rattle sabres back at EA with, at the very least, the name of the MMO that Blizzard are developing alongside *WOW*.

And while we're on it: there'll be an underwater expansion announcement, with new races including playable murlocs. If I say it enough times: it will happen.

Blizzard – the developer that never sleeps.



MORE FROM 2009

MEDAL OF HONOR: MODERN DAY

Airborne didn't do the back-flips sales-wise that a once mega-franchise really deserved. Seeing as all the cool kids are doing *Modern Warfare* these days, and it's been scientifically proven to not offend Middle Eastern people if done right. Expect an EA war shooter in a faux-real war to be announced in 2009.

SYNDICATE 3

Strongly rumoured to be in development at *Darkness/Riddick* developers Starbreeze, you can guarantee that in this day and age *Syndicate* will have become a cyberpunk four-man, first-person co-op game rather than the 'lead around and click' isometric joy it once was. Great scope for crowd scenes (what with the persuadertron), character bodily upgrades and mindless bloody violence, however.

SPLISH-SPLASH

What with last year's announcement that Bethesda had set up a development partnership with Bromley's own Splash Damage, we can expect to start seeing the fruit of their labours trickle through. *Fallout: Wars* or a Cyrodiil-set multiplayer siege simulator? Or just a whole new franchise of multiplayer shooty-bangs?

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

With one of the biggest teams Ubisoft have ever put together feverishly working on it, *Conviction* will reappear this year in far more sparkling form than it did previously. Expect it to be far more Jason Bourne-y than ever before.

BIOSHOCK 2

Being coded at 2K Marin by a mixture of established Rapture devs and fresh talent, the teaser trailer for *BioShock 2: Sea of Dreams* shows a saved little sister gazing out to sea while a sand city builds itself behind her. A potential foe for you to battle, or the lady you'll be playing? I'd plump for the latter.

HITMAN NEW

Io have been too coy of late, and Eidos haven't got much to keep the cash tills chinging apart from the lady Lara. If they're not aiming a *Hitman* game squarely at 2009's festive period then I'll be a bald-headed, sniper rifle-toting monkey's uncle.

C&C: GENERALS II

Seeing as a return to the *Tiberium* universe would seem too soon, and *Red Alert 3* will undoubtedly be serviced by an expansion pack, our annual *C&C* burst will surely be in the form of the more po-faced *Generals* variety. EA have also bought the website generals2.com, to add a little substance to the proceedings.

CONSOLE CRYTEK?

They've been mumbling about it for ages, so surely this is the year that the PC loses Crytek as solely a PC developer? Expect new franchise announcements, and expect to have to grudgingly share the spoils.

MODERN WARFARE 2

The next 'official' *Call of Duty*, as in developed by the mighty Infinity Ward, is due for touchdown in 2009. Expect it to be modern day, and expect it to follow a 'not broke, don't fix' template. As ever.

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Nearly here. I can feel it in my waters.

"If they want to sell the game on the merits of a single-player experience, Blizzard will have to make that experience worthy of your attention"

The first campaign, *Wings of Liberty*, will follow the Terrans.

ETA LATE 2009

MY GOD, IT'S FULL OF...

STARCRAFT II

Campaigns cleft in twain, and twain again

DEVELOPER Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Activision-Blizzard **WEBSITE** starcraft2.com

BLIZZARD HAVE DONE a curious thing, splitting *StarCraft II* into three separate releases. The first will herald the onset of the Terran campaign, and will be titled *Wings of Liberty*. The second will be the Zerg-based *Heart of the Swarm*, while the third will be the Protoss-focused *Legacy of the Void*. To break it down even further, the Terrans are the humans, the Zerg are the insectoid race, and the Protoss are the hyper-advanced psychic aliens. Although you already knew that, didn't you?

The reasoning behind the splintered releases is that in order for Blizzard to fully explore the texture and narrative of each of *StarCraft*'s supposedly deep and intricately structured factions, they'd each need their own lovingly directed campaign. While each release will feature a full multiplayer component featuring all three races, the single player facet of the Terran release, *Wings of Liberty*, will be comprised of 25-30 bespoke missions. These won't simply be a smattering of vaguely connected skirmishes but a real, story-driven adventure.

"We're aiming to push the boundaries of storytelling and character development in RTS games through the unique single-player campaign design of *StarCraft II*," claim Blizzard. "Players will be able to choose their mission path and technology upgrades for their army as they advance through the campaign. In order to make these choices meaningful while creating an epic story and well-developed characters for each faction, we needed to focus on a single race for a large number of missions."

Purple is the new brown...

Does this mean Blizzard's *StarCraft II* is going the way of Relic's *Dawn of War II* (page 56), with smaller squad-based combat? It's possible. If they truly want to sell the game (three times, no less) on the merits of a single-player experience, Blizzard will have to make that experience worthy of your attention (three times, no less). Of course, with a multiplayer experience as tight, tempered and tenacious as what we've been shown at BlizzCon, it might not matter how *StarCraft II* plays by itself. PCZ

The Wizard can choose from a range of elemental magic.

ETA LATE 2009

DUNGEON CRAWLING...

DIABLO III

Every little thing she does is magic

DEVELOPER Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Activision-Blizzard **WEBSITE** blizzard.com/diablo3

Three times as vibrant, but five times as violent...

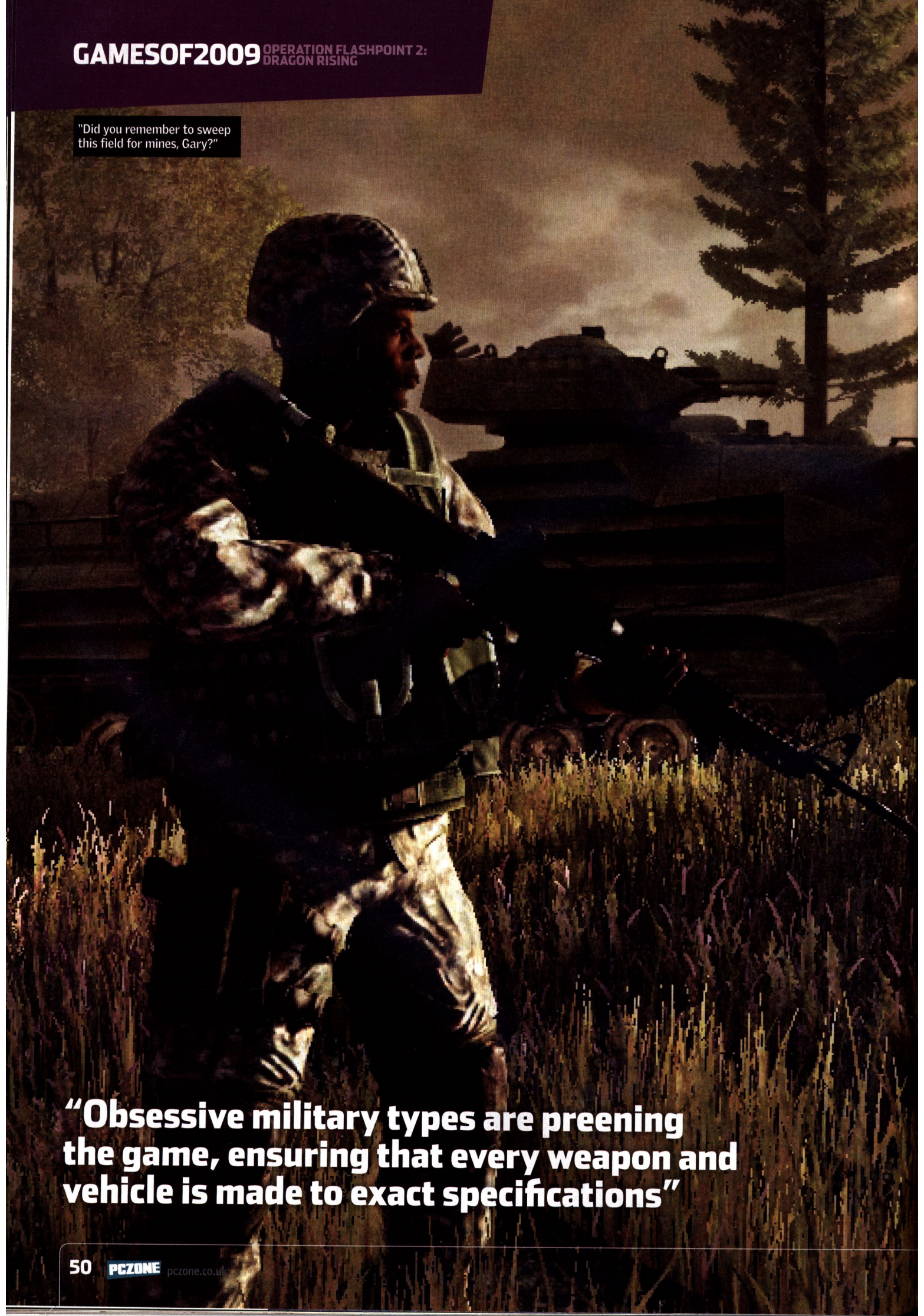
DOMAIN NAME SQUATTERS are an ambitious bunch, greedily snapping up potential domain names for every imagined *Diablo* sequel right up until *Diablo 10* (even diablox.com is taken, which could've been a great name for a *Tetris* clone). Your heart might skip a beat if you happened upon the Blizzard-owned Diabloll.com – but this is to catch people looking for *Diablo II*, not Blizzard's way of hinting at a far-flung sequel. My point is, with a good eight years between *Diablo III* and its forebear, these guys are planning on selling a domain to Blizzard in 2065.

"The hack 'n' slash has risen and fallen, and *Diablo III* aims to bring it back into fashion with aplomb"

Returning to 2009 however, PC gaming's become so enlivened in the past decade that a great many people will never have even played *Diablo II* (it's available to download from the Blizzard store, as it happens). As a genre, hack 'n' slash has risen and fallen, and *Diablo III* aims to bring it back into fashion with aplomb.

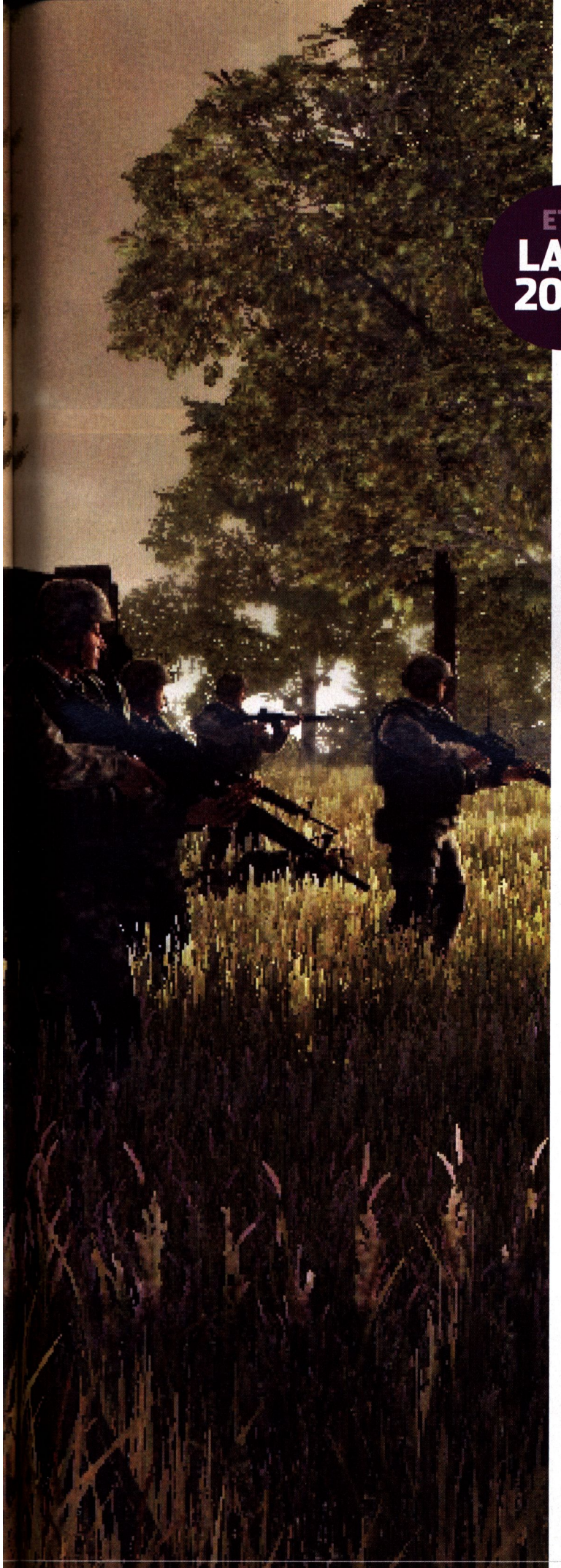
The recently revealed Wizard class replaces the Sorceress class of older Diablos. An obvious user of magic, the Wizard uses such nifty spells as magic missile and a Sith-style lightning ability which jumps fatally from enemy to enemy. Slowing down time isn't beyond the Wizard either – the class can encapsulate themselves in a self-contained bubble of what can only be described as gloopy time, inside of which time moves all lovely and slow, showcasing the physics-enabled world.

The Wizard joins the Witch Doctor (who is able to summon creatures to his aid) and the Barbarian (who can hit lots of things) in *Diablo III's* five class line-up. With two more classes to be revealed, we'll have more on *Diablo III* in the coming months. PCZ



"Did you remember to sweep this field for mines, Gary?"

"Obsessive military types are preening the game, ensuring that every weapon and vehicle is made to exact specifications"



PCZONE GAMES OF 2009

ETA
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2009

Tanks will feature heavily in *OpFlash 2*.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING

Codemasters' inject some realism into our modern warfare

DEVELOPER Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters
WEBSITE codemasters.com/flashpoint2

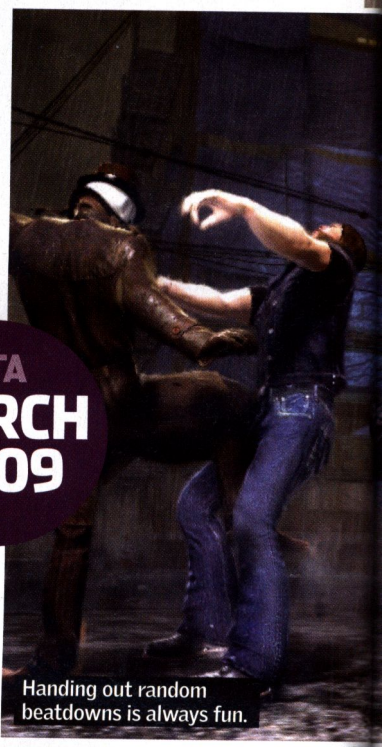
UNFORTUNATELY PEGGED AS the 'other' ultra-realistic modern war sim, *Operation Flashpoint 2* has some catching up to do. In terms of impressing the hell out of us *Armed Assault II* is racing ahead, throwing its cards on the table and calling *OpFlash 2*'s bluff. Which is the more realistic of the two? Who's got more pixels? Who's got the most precise ballistics? It's like some sort of simulation top trumps.

To be fair, *OpFlash 2* has just left the gate. Though visually it's bounding ahead of *ArmA2*, we're left wondering about that all-important surfeit of indigestible attention to detail. Broods of obsessive military types are preening the game, ensuring that every weapon and vehicle is made to exact specifications. Immense spreads of landscape provide an ideal battleground for long-range, modern warfare. The AI playbook will rely heavily on tactics used by the US Army. But until these elements are seen working in tandem in a proper, playable version of the game, we're left pawing at these lovely in-engine screenshots.

We've seen a running prototype, a nowhere-near-final version of the game engine displaying the island of Skira. We've seen in-game sequences in which a platoon of soldiers under heavy mortar fire make their way uphill with a handful of APCs. There was an impressive amount of volumetric smoke in that one, more than we'd ever bore witness to before. This is a literal "fog of war" which appears in real combat claim Codies, produced by the combined heavy gunfire of the platoon. The ejecting brass makes a smell similar to farts too, we're told. Which is proof that some things are better off not simulated. PCZ

"Eat light, suckers!"

Doesn't look happy to me.


Handing out random beatdowns is always fun.

ETA MARCH 2009

IT'S 10 TO DOOMSDAY, MOVING FAST...

WATCHMEN

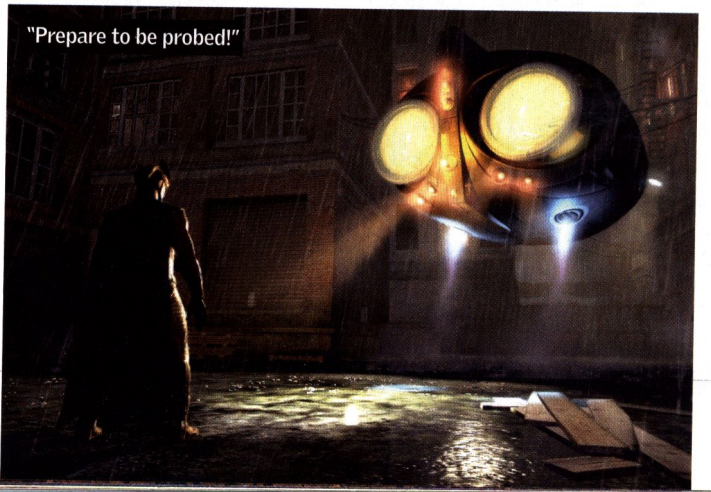
Jon Blyth wonders where the heroes have gone

DEVELOPER Deadline Games **PUBLISHER** Warner Bros. **WEBSITE** deadline.dk

WHEN TALKING ABOUT the *Watchmen* graphic novel, it's difficult to avoid words like 'revered', 'important', and 'really, really, good'. The phrase at the top of the cover – "One of Time Magazine's 100 Top Novels" – shows how much respect *Watchmen* commands. In the '80s, it was hard to get people to call them graphic novels instead of comic books. Going a step further, and getting a serious magazine to drop the word graphic altogether? Well, that let everyone know this was a bunch of pictures and words that properly qualified as grown-up literature.

While you, the educated reader, will have read the book six times, and completed your doctorate in the works and quirks of snake-worshipping anarchist Alan Moore, but for everyone else, let me describe *Watchmen*. It's set in an alternate '80s, in which the US won Vietnam, the threat of nuclear war looms thick and soupy, and superheroes were generally equipped with body armour and powerful punches instead of laser vision and ice breath. The notable exception being Dr Manhattan, whose atomic disintegration and self-willed reconstruction gave him God-like powers over matter. He now exists beyond humanity, and has the power to see time's line from the outside; although, cripplingly, not the power to change its direction.

In the book, the age of the superheroes is over. The once-prolific villain Screaming Skull is referred to only in passing, in the first chapter – he's given up villainy and focused on raising a family. After a period of civil unrest and resentment, costumed vigilantes were made illegal, with the passing of the Keene Act, which forced masked crusaders to register with the government. Only the brain-bollocked Rorschach maintains his crusade, cheerfully torturing his way to confessions and resenting the other sell-outs who unmasked themselves or went into hiding. If you've even got the vaguest interest in an intelligent look at the world of heroes, this fantastic book is where you should be starting.


"Prepare to be probed!"

AND... REST

Which brings us to the game. Thanks to a combination of two loose briefs from Warner Bros – which can be paraphrased as "make an orsum game plz", and "you have 10 months starting NOW lol" Deadline have decided to make an action brawler – available only for download to the PlayStation Network, Xbox Live, and – it's tentatively suggested, though not confirmed – Steam customers.

"We know it's not going to speak to everyone – there's a lot of action in the game, and not much action in the book," admits Deadline. Being generous, the choice of genre makes some sense. What's the alternative? Contemplative point-and-click mystery? *LEGO Night Owl*? *Call of Duty: The Comedian Goes To 'Nam*? *Dr Manhattan's Populous*? It's not a book

"Superheroes were generally equipped with body armour and powerful punches instead of laser vision and ice breath"

Losing the plot

When games don't do stories

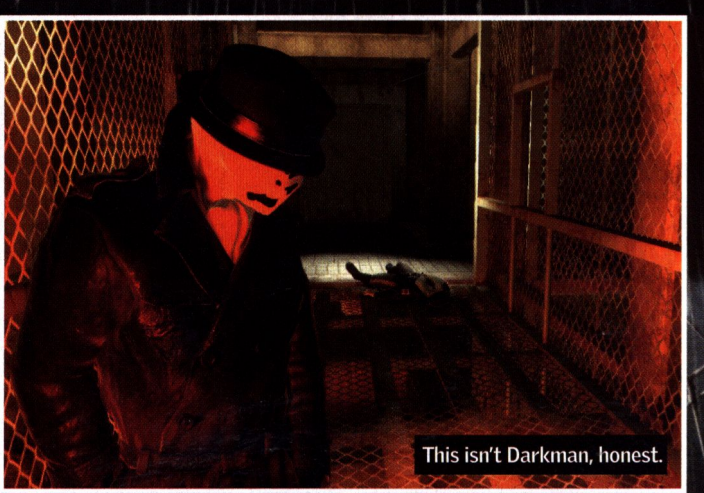
Games, when they try to be interactive stories, will always have to balance the impact you can make on the world, with the exponential increases in work these options create for the writers and developers. To keep it workable, you either have to funnel big moral decisions into an insulting absurdity (eg *BioShock*'s 'Kill Little Girl?' Y/N) or render any impact you have to be basically meaningless, beyond a new hat and a vendor discount (all MMOs). Even when you try both, something has to give – the NPCs in *Fallout 3* don't react convincingly to events around them, and in a world so otherwise full and open, it's a belief-draining moment.

Rorschach's hat protects him from men with no necks.

THE LOST WORDS

Dead Space originally had a lot of scripted dialogue. Much more than made it to release. Whereas this will have upset the original scriptwriter, and the gamer will never know what he's lost, the game is well-paced enough to suggest it was a good idea. Video logs were woven into the gameplay cleverly, and not so often as to break the sense of isolation. Unforgivable controls aside, *Dead Space* is an excellent example of economical storytelling. *Mirror's Edge* gets it wrong, but in a curious way. Whilst the storyline and characters almost completely fail to charm or engage the player in the game itself, it's difficult to tell from the game whether that's the result of bad editing. One cutscene has been reduced to Faith simply running, which breaks the game's pattern of exposition, and feels like a confession: "We've not got any story here, so have a bit of running." *Mirror's Edge* has an accompanying comic – as does *Dead Space* – so hopefully the story and world will come to life in that. Certainly, the full emotional impact of living in a city in which information is now forbidden – or how that even affects a normal person's life – is brutally neglected in the game.

The impromptu urban dancing contest ended badly.

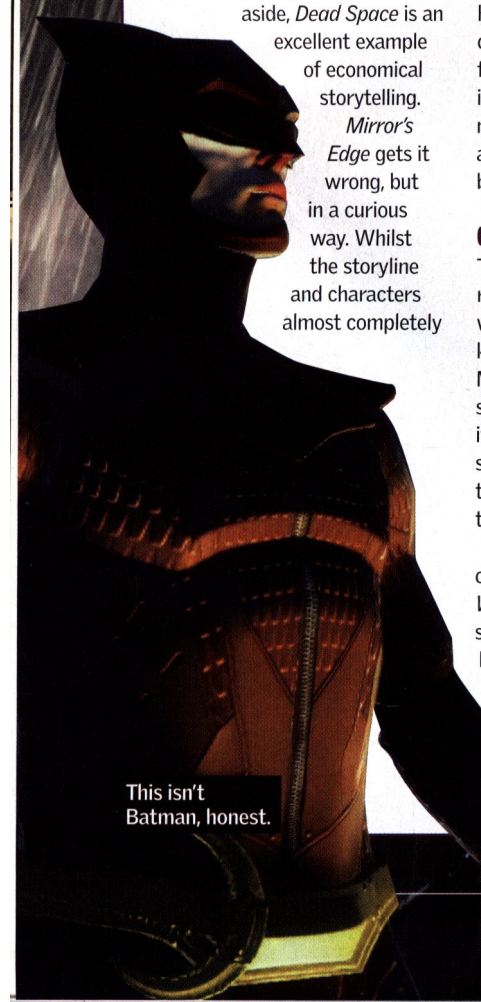


This isn't Darkman, honest.

COMIC MOMENTS

The *Watchmen* book forces the reader to focus. In the scenes where the newsvendor talks while a kid is reading a comic book, it's like Moore is defying you to try and do something else while you're reading it. He's giving you two stories at the same time – you really do have to take off your headphones, and put that Rubik's Cube down to read it.

The decision to remove a serious or complicated storyline from the *Watchmen* game was probably sensible. Disappointing, maybe, but reassuringly respectful of the original work. We can only hope that the game is priced to reflect its length and simplicity of play.



This isn't Batman, honest.

"The decision to remove a serious or complicated storyline from *Watchmen* was probably sensible"

THE WATCHMEN IN FULL

Except for Captain Metropolis, who was shit

NITE OWL
In the novel, Nite Owl is a defeated man, whose weakness runs deeper than his inability to save the world from atomic war. With a flying craft, use of technology, and his allegiance to a flying nocturnal animal, Nite Owl is a fragile Dark Knight.

RORSCHACH
Rorschach is an infectious sociopath, who curdles the shallow optimism all around him. But even he looks back fondly to when he and Nite Owl fought thugs in alleyways. The game has Rorschach at his happiest, and most moderately violent.

SILK SPECTRE
The lovely Silk Spectre has complex relations with Dr Manhattan. Not surprising as he sees as much beauty in the vast, featureless chasms of Mars as he does in her tits. She took the Silk Spectre mantle from her mother, who's a right fruity old mare, bless.

OZYMANDIAS
The smartest man in the world, Ozymandias can watch dozens of TVs at once, and gave up his inheritance to become a self-made man. The proud owner of a GM tiger called Bubastis – he's the most earnest in his efforts to save the world.

DR MANHATTAN
The only true superhero, Dr Manhattan is as close to a god as possible. Sadly, his ability to see time in both directions leaves him doomed to live his life as he knows it must go, to the point where he is surprised by things he's long known were coming.

THE COMEDIAN
The punchline for humanity's capacity for unimaginable evil is the hope that they're cursed to feel. The Comedian's insight into the superhuman condition makes him an amoral, hedonistic dick – but even he's treated sympathetically.

that was written with gaming in mind, so Deadline were forced to retreat to the time, often referred to in the book, when superheroes were legally allowed to tackle thugs and villainy. And they don't have dramatic superpowers, so a *Streets of Rage*-style brawlfest slog is the obvious choice. It's just six worlds and a universe away from the complexity and depth of the book.

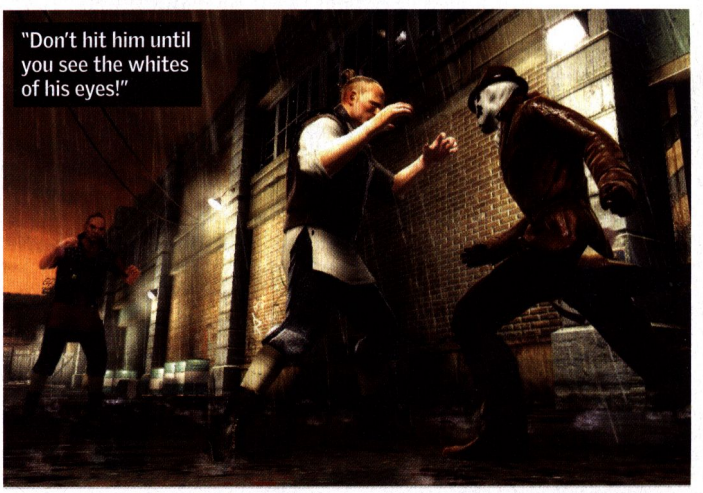
There are two playable characters. Nite Owl, a man not unlike Batman in his use of technology and a large inheritance. And there's Rorschach, a troubled young man with a sociopathic inclination to see the world in terms of good and evil. Nite Owl has a more controlled combat style, and relies on his electrified suit. Rorschach is a street brawler. Deadline say playtesters are evenly split in their choice of character, which is what the company wanted.

The dev team are aware of the revered status of its subject matter. They've been careful not to introduce new characters so they're painting from a profoundly finite palette. So, they have chosen the least-developed foes, giving them a chance at some creative development. Underboss and Jimmy The Gimmick – two characters who are briefly referred to during a bar scene in the book – are the characters you'll be fighting against. And yes, there will be a sewer level.

LOTS IN A NAME

Combat features fast and heavy attacks and combos, with each character having a distinct play style. Deadline's adherence to the book forbids them giving combos names like "Spinesnorter" or "Wobbly Bob". So Rorschach's longest six-button combo is called "Even More Damage". Although the book's original artist, Dave Gibbons, was on the team for the semi-animated comic-book cutscenes, the cooperation between film studio and game developers has been minimal. The game's authenticity and similarity to the film is a credit to Deadline's vision.

The developers have also reined in their ambitions. As it stands they have a competent, unambitious slog through a series of thug-smattered streets. They freely admit the storyline – and the gameplay – is thin on the ground. It had to be this way – anything else would feel presumptuous, and be eclipsed by the source material. And any attempt to create a complex game was prohibited by the time constraints of the movie schedule.



"Don't hit him until you see the whites of his eyes!"

Watchmen looks set to be a good-looking and competent brawler. In a niche of the gaming market where developers are working on unit-shifting products, Deadline have been sensible, sincere and uncynical, and limited their ambitions to delivering a short, canonical romp. Their engine – the Kapow – looks fantastic, and the combat connects impressively.

You might, however, be wondering who the game is actually aimed at. And you'd be part of a big club. PCZ

ETA MARCH 2009

IT'S 10 TO DOOMSDAY, MOVING FAST...

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

***Will Porter* still isn't sure those shoulder-pads are strictly necessary**

DEVELOPER Relic **PUBLISHER** THQ **WEBSITE** dawnofwar2.com

THE FIRST THING that comes to mind when I think of the original *Dawn of War* is a game with so may laser blasts per second that it was surprising there was no seizure safety warning placed in between the logos as it loaded. If you've only kept a loose grip on the development of *Dawn of War II* you'd be forgiven for thinking the new, more personalised and *Company of Heroes*-y approach to *DOW* would diminish this in some way. Not a jot. The swarms of laser-fire may have been cut down a little, but where the original game could overwhelm you in non-stop pyrotechnics, here you're so emotionally invested and buried in the action that the intensity never lets up.

There you'll be, readying yourself to kill some Eldar on a rainy, windswept planet you chose to visit from a blinking, somewhat non-linear, collection of missions. First up you'll have your commander, who you can name yourself and as such henceforth shall be known as MrBigjobs. Next up, you'll have your Assault squad who are adept at getting into the action with their big stompy metal boot and short-burst jet pack, your sneaky snipey Infiltrators and the brutish Devastators who walk loudly and carry big guns. The abilities of each variety of squad correspond with each other perfectly, and as you play you'll develop your own preferred tactics – and what's more be able to tweak your gruff and rude supersoldiers towards tactical zen. Wargear, Accessories, Attributes and Abilities are all earned in blood and experience points on the battlefield, but if the first thing you save up for isn't a chainsaw-sword for MrBigjobs then you're deranged.

Joan Collins would be proud of those shoulder pads.

LIVE WARNING

As you play, the lack of base building is more than welcome. There's no babysitting, levels are short and sweet, hunkering down is due to necessity not habit, and if reinforcements are needed and not dried up, they are rocketed in from outer space with much visual and physical hullabaloo. Tactics are brought to the forefront and the brain is forced to whirr at a good click to keep up.

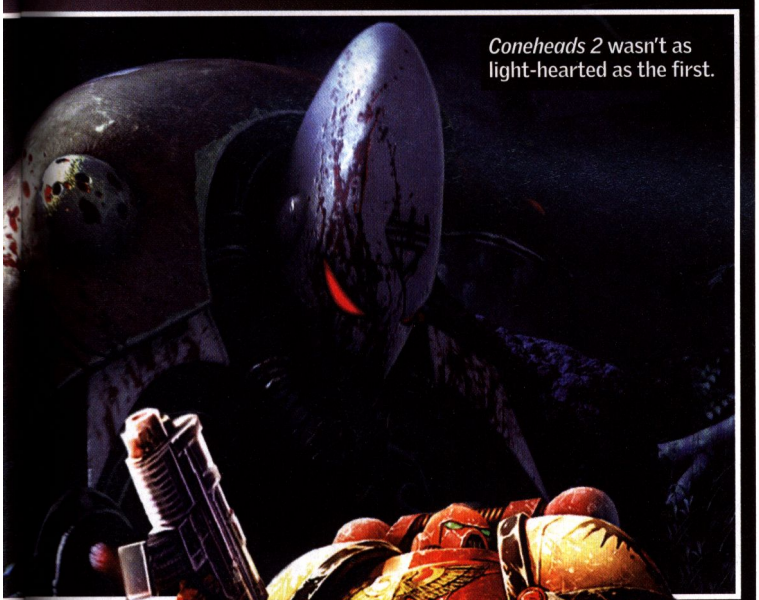
We'll have a deeper examination of *DOW2*'s multiplayer next issue, but angry base enthusiasts can be soothed in that Relic are treating single and multiplayer games as different beasts. Multiplayer needs a lot more structure and pacing and so is a traditionalist affair, and as such has both resource-gathering and base-building. Be warned however that it'll all work through the coils of Games for Windows LIVE, whose incoming revamp we're all hoping won't be as utter ill-thought horse manure as the last time round.

Single-player wise it'll remain a solitary Space Marine campaign to play through for now, while playable single-player excursions for the Ork, Eldar and Tyranid forces wait in the wings for a flurry of expansions – a ploy Blizzard have picked up for with *StarCraft II*, releasing each single-player campaign seperately (not the first time Blizzard has raided *Warhammer* for ideas).

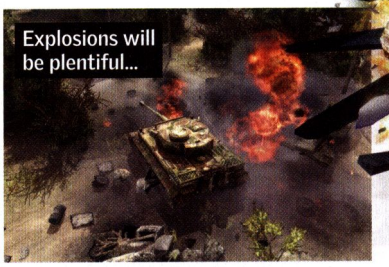
With *Company of Heroes* and *Dawn of War* Relic managed to capture the command post of our hearts and fended off wave after wave of pretenders to it, and it looks like *Dawn of War II* will allow them to dig even deeper. But they won't build a base there. Cardio-vascular bases are a no-no.

"The original game could overwhelm you in non-stop pyrotechnics, here you're emotionally invested"

He looks better with the helmet on.



Coneheads 2 wasn't as light-hearted as the first.



Explosions will be plentiful...

COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR

Yet more daft American spellings

DEVELOPER Relic **PUBLISHER** THQ
WEBSITE companyofheroesgame.com **ETA** Spring

RELIC ARE STRIPPING World War II RTS gameplay to pure, adrenaline-fuelled, finger-on-the-trigger gaming with the new *Company of Heroes*.

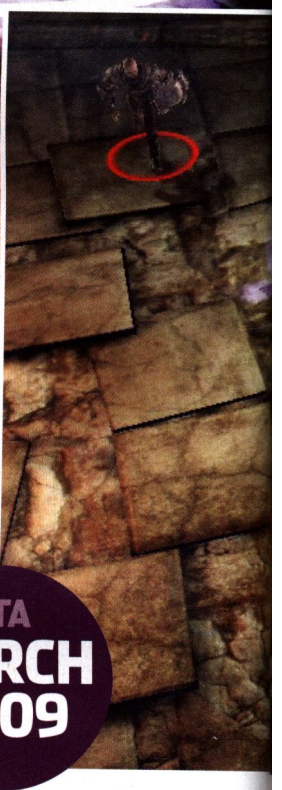
Gone, in single-player at least, are control points and micromanaging expansion, manpower, munitions and fuel. Instead, you simply have objectives to fulfil. *Tales of Valor* is the gaming equivalent of a book of short stories; three mini-campaigns followed by a potential two others, each telling a story of bravery against desperate odds – such as controlling a German Tiger Ace Panzer tank against a town full of Allied troops in the eminently destroyable town of Villers-Bocage in Normandy. Direct control means that you'll be the one firing the shells and agitatedly waiting for the steel beast to reload, although you could sacrifice this ability and have a few extra troops to command instead. You'd be a fool to do so however, as tank control brings a new level of tension, fear and pressurised decision making to the fray.

Changes to the multiplayer game haven't been confirmed, but you will be choosing armaments pre-game, encouraging distinct playing styles. Will the easy access stylings of single-player agitate the faithful? With Relic's prowess considered, we're probably safe on this one.

...infantry will be less expendable...

...and tanks will be just as devastating.

"Can't we talk about this?"



FIERY TEMPER...

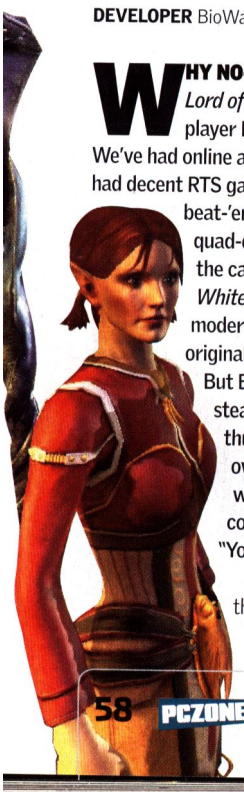
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

ETA MARCH 2009

***Will Porter* sees what came between the Neolithic and Bronze**

DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** dragonage.bioware.com

WHY NO-ONE HAS created a *Lord of the Rings* single-player RPG is a mystery. We've had online adventuring, we've had decent RTS games, and we've had beat-'em-ups with Gandalf-quad-damage-combos but, the canned *LOTR: The White Council* aside, no modern RPG from the original fantasy universe. But BioWare are about to steal this unused thunder with their own world, but one which reeks of coneys, Sarumans and "You shall not pass!".



After playing through your origin tale, of which there are two for each of the different playable races, you'll find yourself preparing for the battle of Ostagar, a towering city in the human lands of Ferelden, upon which the undead Blight are marching. Here so many Peter Jackson-shaped bells are rung it's untrue (that's his old chubby shape as well by the way) – the Fereldens have a thing for dogs, just as the Rohan love horses; there's a nearby country they won't ask for help from because of past grievances; there's a pyre that needs lighting to signal another army to enter the battle; and a bunch of growling monsters sitting outside the front door.

That's the setup then, but you'll clearly have been up to other mischief or valour during your time in Ostagar – before being asked to lead a party into a Blight-infested tower to light some sticks on fire. Depending on your origin (man or elf, high class or low class etc) people will react to you in entirely different ways and you'll burrow into entirely different conversation trees. Elves, for example, are second-class citizens in this world – so being lithe, sexy, pointy-eared and communing with nature won't get you too far. Instead it's more likely that you'll be confused with another elf, seeing as all of you look the same anyway. This theme of racism is helping make *Dragon Age* stand out as an RPG for the mature player who wants their fantasy dark.

While in Ostagar you'll finally conduct the ritual that confirms you as a Grey Warden: the Jedi of the piece who have been long-ignored by the complacent world at large. Sadly though the Blight have been growing in number in old dwarven halls and caverns, and have recently come across an Old God dragon (*cough* Balrog *cough*) that's whipped them into surface-smiting shape. This explains the shrieks, fanged skeletons, blight wolves, devouring corpses and ogres striding ominously into view outside Ostagar then, but how shall you slash them to bits?

Your party can contain up to four people, and seeing as this is BioWare they'll all be integral to your game plot-wise, and you might be able to do sex with them to boot. Fighting-wise however, as in *Baldur's Gate II* you can directly control them or let the computer fill in the blanks – and everything happens in real time, although if you want to pause the action and dish out

A loose match can cause all sorts of problems.

Like *Baldur's Gate* all over again.

"*Dragon Age: Origins* is looking every bit the successor to *Baldur's Gate* that we've been promised"

a few orders while mopping sweat from your brow you certainly can. Different combat talents can be used (berserk stances, shield bashes, flurries of blows etc) and pre-scrap buffs are, of course, de rigueur since flaming swords and the like are never less than useful.

FIRE PHYSICS

What is most impressive about *Dragon Age*'s combat system are the magical abilities. Too often in roleplaying games the arrow-firing and sword-waving characters get the grittiest and most realistic combat. A magic user's fireball has never really been anything more than an extravagant projectile that discharges for a measly amount of damage. Here though, they have weight, grit and beautiful spreading flames. These magic explosions act like real fire rather than a way to remove exactly 20 health points. Cast a spell that rubs flammable grease over all and sundry means an inferno is yours for the creating. Conversely an ice-based spell can extinguish said grease-fuelled infernos, making the area chilly and (we assume) slippery, but cool to walk on.

Spells can be coordinated and even merged to tremendous effect, so playing as a magic-thrower in *Dragon Age* will be a real possibility for those who normally avoid such a class like the Wailing Death.

Dragon Age: Origins is looking every bit the successor to *Baldur's Gate* that we've been promised. Too often games are labelled as epic, but we can't describe this game any other way. PCZ

PCZONE GAMES OF 2009

ALPHA PROTOCOL

Putting right what *Quantum of Solace* did wrong...

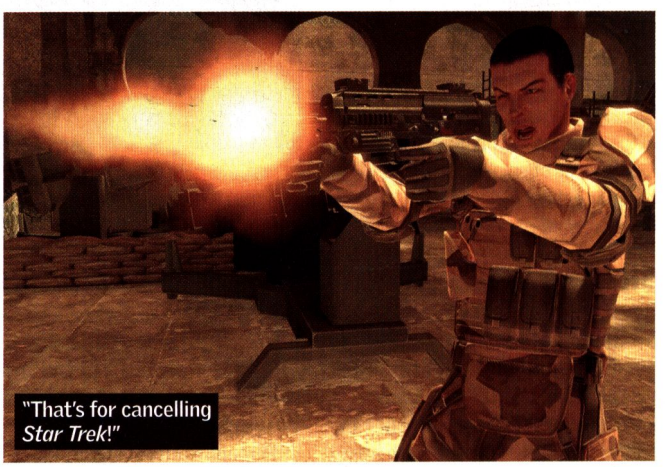
DEVELOPER Obsidian **PUBLISHER** SEGA **WEBSITE** sega.com/alphaprotocol **ETA** Spring

***ALPHA PROTOCOL* IS** no Bond Girl, nor is it Daniel Craig standing up in the sea and making ladies with horses swoon. However, it has a brilliant concept, and developers with impressive CVs intent on bringing the international conspiracies of the movies into an RPG.

As Michael Thorton, a secret agent gone rogue much as Tom Cruise did when he killed all those poor fish with chewing gum in *Mission: Impossible*, you'll operate out of safe houses in Rome, Taipei and Moscow, tooling Thorton up with all manner of armaments and slot any advancement points you've earned through completing missions into your various espionage abilities. The idea is that you can make your own model of secret agent, whether a stealthy Sam Fisher, a James Bond bruiser or an Inspector Gadget gadget man.

Right now your interest could be lukewarm, but by the time *Alpha Protocol* is out we think you'll find escape is impossible.

"Not the face!"



"That's for cancelling *Star Trek*!"

"The idea is you can make your own model of secret agent"

Will the gameplay live up to the promise of the brilliantly imaginative characters?

DEITIFIC...

DEMIGOD

Ambitious hybrid edges closer to release

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games **PUBLISHER** Stardock **WEBSITE** demigodthegame.com

THERE AREN'T MANY games slated for release in 2009 that are as ambitious as Gas Powered Games' *Demigod*, and certainly not many with as much to prove. The company's last game, *Space Siege*, was beloved by some, loathed by others. GPG has quite a bit of work to do in order to recover some of its lost fans.

For what it's worth, *Demigod* is based on Defense of the Ancients – an old mod for Blizzard's *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* – and will attempt to fuse elements of the action, RPG and RTS genres together into one gargantuan lump of a game. Using heroes to either overpower the enemy with their own mighty abilities or raise a force of smaller units and command them in battle will be key to victory.

Do those swords really need to be that big?

ETA **FEB 2009**

SHARED WARS

One of the most striking things about the game is the visual style. Consider the character called 'The Rook', who is basically a walking castle (it's like chess, innit). Each hero (the titular demigods) has a range of different powers with which to wage war on his enemies. The combat itself is set to be visually spectacular, with a 'strategic zoom' feature that can take you right into the heart of the action.

Perhaps the most important element of the game will be how well the persistent online world performs. Signs are promising – players will pick one of the demigod characters and their battles go some way to helping the overall cause of that faction. You won't just be fighting for yourself, but for every other player who happens to have chosen the same character as yourself.

As is the fashion in these materialistic times, an achievement system will also be built into the game, so you can see just how well you've been doing. As you play, your character will be able to earn and pick up new items, while developing new abilities. It all sounds weighty and intriguing, especially those persistent online conflicts. We're just hoping the game does the concept justice when it finally emerges early next year. PCZ

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2009

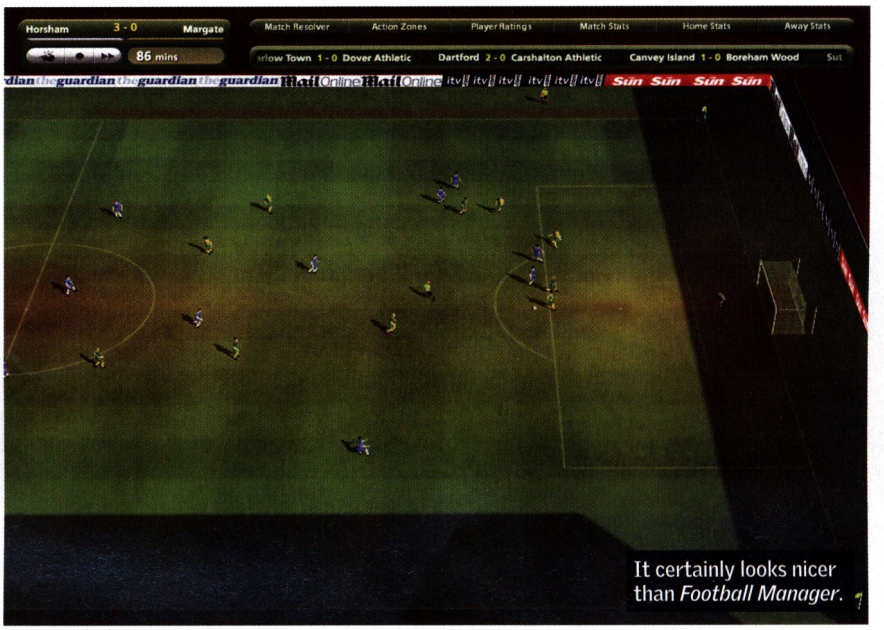
Perennial underachiever facing another uphill battle

DEVELOPER Beautiful Game Studios **PUBLISHER** Eidos **WEBSITE** championshipmanager.co.uk **ETA** TBC

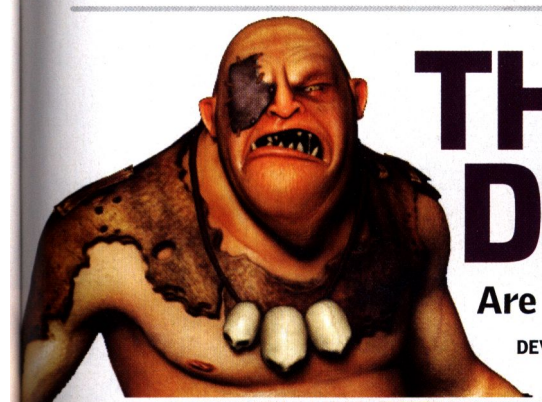
LET'S NOT SUGAR coat the situation here, Eidos knows that the *Championship Manager* name is dirt since the original developers scarpered. But in the face of this adversity they're pulling out the stops in challenging their footie management rivals in April – it's even got a 3D match engine of all things. We'll have our first real hands-on with the "other" football management title next month. Clearly, *Champ Man 2009* is not being set up to be a title that can be casually dismissed.

First off, the match engine is looking (graphically) pretty darn spiffing in comparison to *Football Manager*'s bland offering, although whether the actual footballing fundamentals come up to scratch is a question that can only be answered once our fingers are in the pie, so to speak. The rest of the game's interface has undergone another overhaul, with BGS believing they have achieved a "more flowing experience that's easier on the eye".

Recent *CM* games have fallen down in a number of key areas – the matches have been unrealistic and the game itself has felt overly simplistic. Eidos are cottoning on to their franchise's shortcomings though – a plain indication that things could be about to change. PCZ



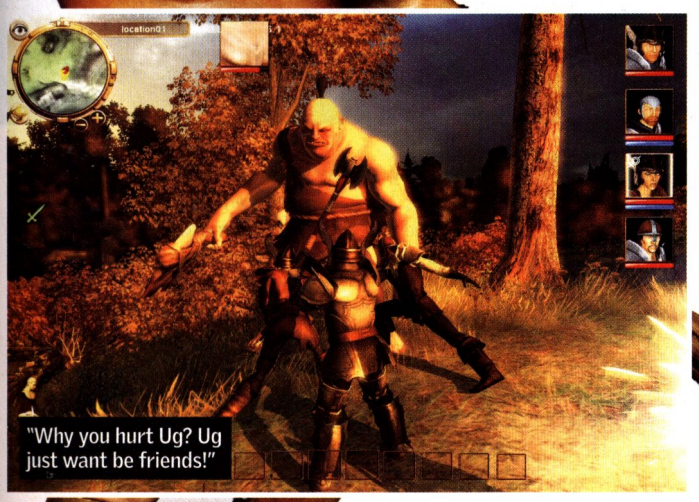
It certainly looks nicer than *Football Manager*.



THE DARK EYE: DRAKENSANG

Are you giving me the eye, son?

DEVELOPER Radon Labs **PUBLISHER** dtp entertainment/Eidos **WEBSITE** drakensang.com **ETA** Early 2009



"Why you hurt Ug? Ug just want be friends!"

THE DEVELOPERS OF *Drakensang* (*'Dragon Song'* in English) **haven't been slapping the arse of creativity until fresh ideas fall out. The game is pretty much fiercely old-school and traditional in its approach to the role-playing genre.**

Drakensang will be playable from a zoomed-out, isometric perspective, with a party of adventurers under your control taking part in a big quest to save the world.

Looking at it from a positive point of view, we're hoping that what pours out of the release pipe at the end of the day is akin to something like *Baldur's Gate*.

Story-wise, the universe is based on the most famous and bestselling (on the continent at least) German paper-and-pencil RPG on the market, *The Dark Eye*.

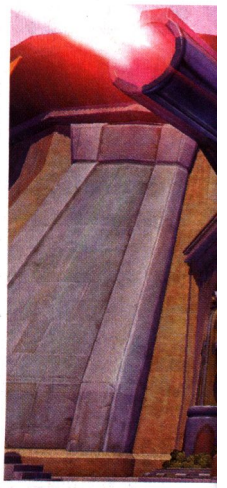
A number of writers who have worked on the most recent content of the wider game have been involved with producing the script and plot for *Drakensang*, so at the very least it will be authentic. Let's just hope it'll be fun too. PCZ

MY NAME IS L CAS...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

How Bio are are turning the MMO on its head

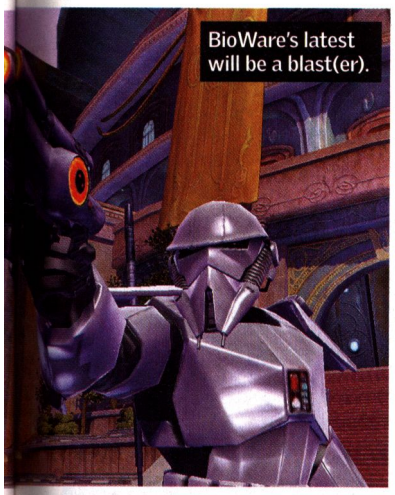
DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** swtor.com **ETA** Late 2009

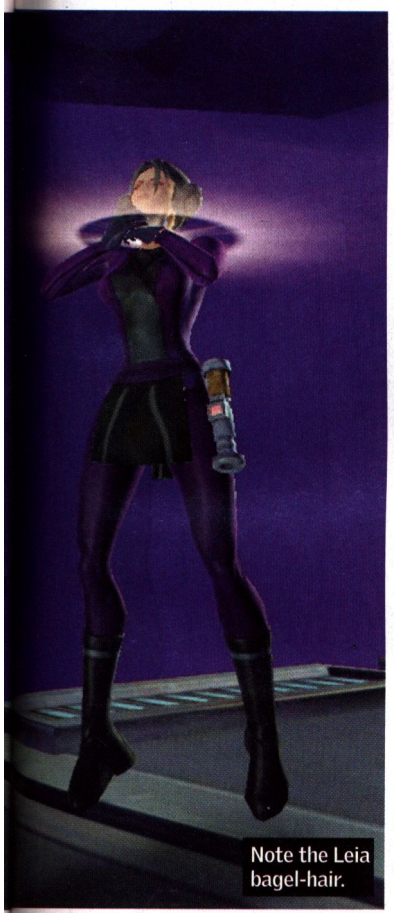


BIOWARE'S MMO HAS darted back under the covers like a shy sci-fi starlet, having revealed itself in issue 201. The developers are promising more story content than any other BioWare title to date, with a focus on heroic characters and epic adventure. No more fetch quests, no more searching for truant hats or missing rocks, instead we'll be starring in our own multiplayer legend spanning an entire galaxy.

If such claims were being made by anybody but BioWare, our bullshit detectors would be deafeningly loud. But with a writing team four times as large as BioWare's when they were developing *Knights of the Old Republic*, this could be a promise the company can follow through with. And while MMOs like *Warhammer Online* and *World of Warcraft* subscribe to notion that one guy is no more or less special than the next guy, *The Old Republic* is setting out to make every player feel like a genuine hero. Baying lackeys will follow you in the form of companion characters (a staple of BioWare titles) and it's through these sidekicks that *The Old Republic* will no doubt make you feel head and shoulders above other players.

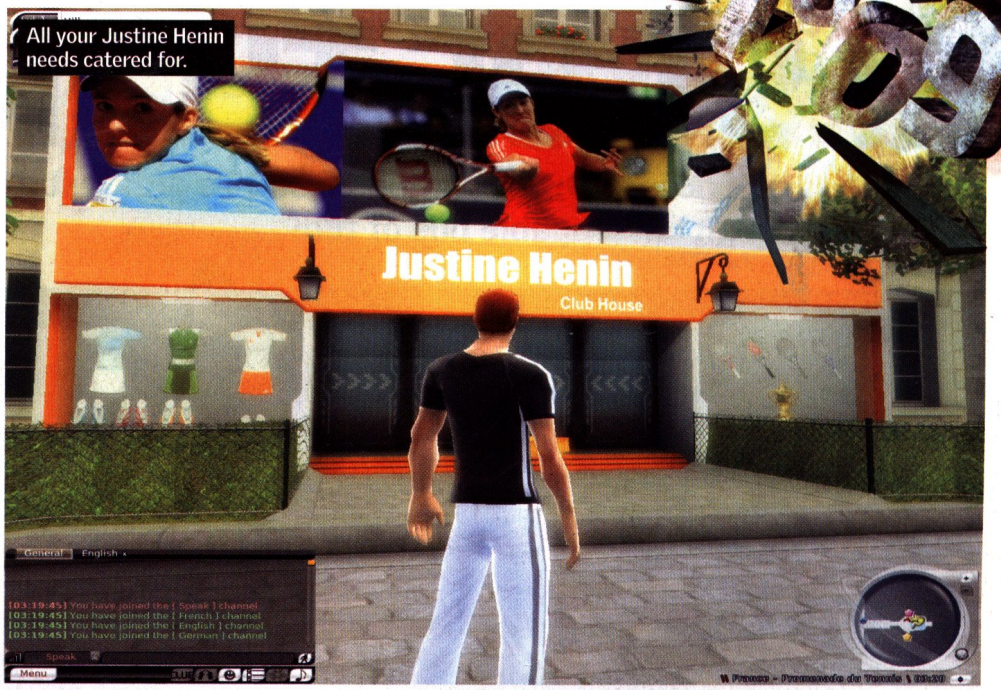
Each of the game's classes will claim their own individual story arc. For example, the Jedi class pitches you into the new Jedi Academy, where you'll no doubt be put through your paces in a


BioWare's latest will be a blast(er).


Note the Leia bagel-hair.

similar fashion to *KOTOR*'s own Jedi enrollment ceremony: finding your first lightsaber crystal, building it, picking out a robe, reciting the Jedi code of honour while swearing on your mum's life – it's all part of the class experience.

We'll admit, the chances of this touching down in 2009 are as likely as discovering a tiny man living inside your anus (it happens), but any forward-thinking PC gamer has got to have *The Old Republic* on their radar.



All your Justine Henin needs catered for.

BALLS...

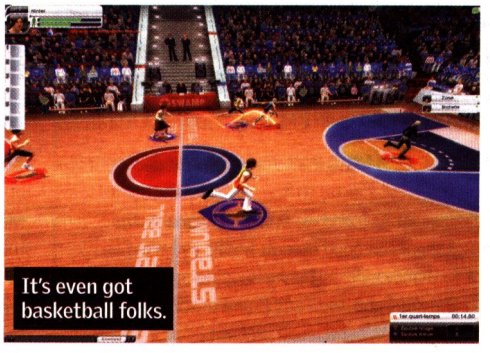
EMPIRE OF SPORTS

Offering hope to armchair fans across the globe

DEVELOPER F4/Infront **PUBLISHER** Empire of Sports **WEBSITE** empireofsports.com **ETA** Late 2009

IN THE REAL world we may be pasty chocolate-wristed slugabeds who would burst into tears at the mere hint of physical contact. However, once we switch on our PCs we become muscular behemoths, bestriding virtual worlds with aplomb. Probably. What we're trying to say is that there's some game coming out that melds the unlikely bedfellows of competitive sports and massively multiplayer online roleplaying.

Empire of Sports will enable you to tour the world in the role of a Jack-of-all-sports, taking part in competitions against other like-minded souls. As it stands, the game will launch with six sports available, a somewhat incongruous set of football, basketball, tennis, track and field, skiing and bobsleigh. Yes, multiplayer bobsleigh. Apparently it's all in the leaning. While the bloke at the front steers, his three passengers will be able to shave seconds off the time by leaning at the right time.


It's even got basketball folks.

As for the rest, it's a very PC-specific approach, with tennis requiring you to point the mouse where you want the ball to go. It's a similar story in the basketball and the football, with the mouse control proving comparable to the latest PC *FIFA* title. As for the skiing, it's again about leaning – albeit in a more pronounced fashion – and the track and field harks back to the keyboard-bashing days of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*.

"While the sports may not seem compatible, there'll be crossover"

Despite the sporting theme, it's an RPG at heart, with stats improved by training and competition. And while the sports may not seem compatible, there'll be crossover. So if you're quick on the athletics track, that will transfer to the football pitch. Furthermore, guilds will exist in the form of clubs, replete with managers responsible for picking teams.

As for the all-important business model, it'll be free to play, but with performance-enhancing items available through micro-transactions for those who don't have the time to put in the hours at the virtual gym. If you like the sound of it, the 'prologue' is currently available, otherwise known as the beta.

BEST OF THE REST

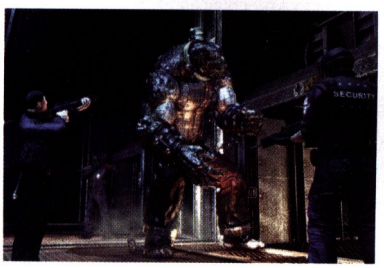
But wait, that's not all! Our round-up of 2009's greatest games continues, like an unstoppable bus of fun!

Burnout Paradise's bikes promise even faster races...

BURNOUT PARADISE

DEVELOPER Criterion **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE criteriongames.com **ETA** Summer 2009

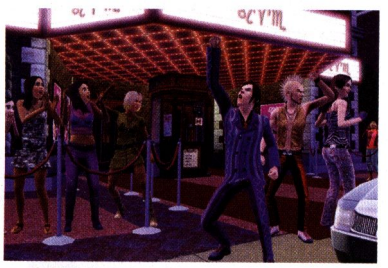
CRITERION FIRST HINTED at a PC version of the spectacularly fast and destructive racer in the *Burnout Paradise* splash screen. A license plate read 'PC 08' which means our beloved PC version is a slippery one. Fear not, as all of the downloadable content from the consoles – bikes, new cars, and maybe even the fighter jets – are being bundled into what will soon become the PC version.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

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

BATMAN'S BEEN CAMP, sometimes he's made of plastic, but now he's as dark as his movies. Set in the titular asylum, you'll have to punch your way to success in this thumpingly good adventure. Includes detective bits!



THE SIMS 3

DEVELOPER Maxis **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE thesims3.com **ETA** Early 2009

GENUINE UPDATES FOR *The Sims* with decent content are OK, but try to flog us a sofa and some wallpaper for £10 and we'll act all indignant. *The Sims 3* should be good though, hopefully taking us back to that wonderful honeymoon period we had with *The Sims* and *The Sims 2*, and to some extent the *Pets* pack. What a laugh that was.

RAGE

DEVELOPER id **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE idsoftware.com **ETA** Late 2009

THE HOPEFUL AMONG us are wishing for an end-of-year release for id's new shooter-racer hybrid. Melding off-road 4x4 racing with exploration, roleplaying and shooting, it's set to bitch-slap at least three genres. You can upgrade your car as you win post-apocalyptic races. Think *Fallout 3* mixed with *Colin McCrae* and you'll get a feel for *Rage*.

FUEL

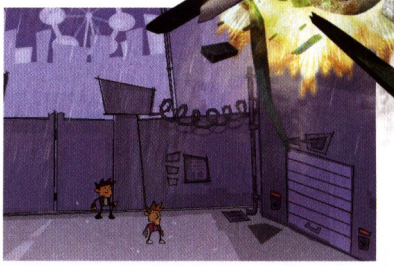
DEVELOPER Asobo **PUBLISHER** Codemasters
WEBSITE asobostudio.com **ETA** Summer 2009

COVERING 5,000 SQUARE miles of western America, *Fuel*'s playing area is the biggest seen in a driving game (unless you make car noises while moving about in *Google Earth*). We equated that the procedurally generated world covers the distance between Sheffield and Hull. We're playing it next month, so we'll give you our thoughts in issue 204.

LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST

DEVELOPER Pandemic **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE pandemicstudios.com **ETA** Spring 2009

CAST YOUR MIND back to *Star Wars: Battlefront*. This is what Pandemic are about to do to *Lord of the Rings*, a license with far more large-scale land battles than Lucas's space fairytale. When asked if we can slide down an Oliphant's trunk as Legolas, the game's producer winked and said "we'll see".



TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE

DEVELOPER Zombie Cow **PUBLISHER** Zombie Cow
WEBSITE zombie-cow.com **ETA** Summer 2009

DAN MARSHALL'S INDIE hit *Ben There, Dan That* was a roaring success, and with donations literally trickling in he's been inspired to create a sequel. The title hints at wonderful time-travelling japes, albeit drenched in that wily Brit-wit that's so often missing from real, proper games that you pay for.

WHITE GOLD: WAR IN PARADISE

DEVELOPER Deep Shadows **PUBLISHER** TBA
WEBSITE whitegold-game.com **ETA** Early 2009

***WHITE GOLD* WON'T** be a *Far Cry 2*, but it'll offer an interesting take on the open-world paradisiacal shooter. Deep Shadows' *Boiling Point* will be this title's benchmark, and so the developer are rightly looking to provide a more polished release this time round.

PRECURSORS

DEVELOPER Deep Shadows **PUBLISHER** TBA
WEBSITE precursors-game.com **ETA** Late 2009

KEEN TO ENSURE they're a breath away from releasing two duff products instead of one decent one, Deep Shadows are making *Precursors* alongside *White Gold*, using the same engine. The hook is *Precursors*'s many varied planets, and the ability to fly between them in an honest-to-God spaceship, boarding other ships and fighting in their interiors.

ARMED ASSAULT II

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive **PUBLISHER** 505
WEBSITE arma2.com **ETA** Early 2009

YOU DON'T GET excited about *ArmA2* the way you get excited about games. Its the sort of excitement an engineer gets when he sees the Golden Gate bridge and goes "phwoar!". It's full of the gritty reality of the actual stuff soldiers have to deal with. *ArmA2* will be hardcore warring, for the battle-hardened elite.

TOM CLANCY'S HAWX

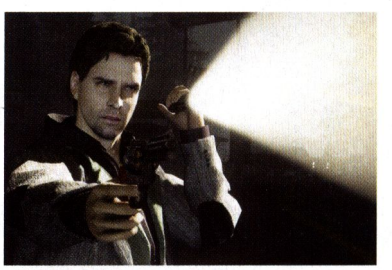
DEVELOPER Gearbox Software **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft
WEBSITE borderlandsthegame.com **ETA** Early 2009

***HAWX* HAS LITTLE** to do with Tom Clancy, being about air combat thrills combined with *Ghost Recon*'s high-tech gadgetry. *HAWX* is a game that makes you want to type 'high-octane', before you stop and realise that's a meaningless superlative.

METRO 2033

DEVELOPER 4a Games **PUBLISHER** THQ
WEBSITE 4a-games.com **ETA** Summer 2009

AN OFFSHOOT OF GSC Gameworld, developers of *STALKER*, 4a Games are putting together something that's similar to the game they cut their teeth on. *Metro 2033*'s dank vision of an irradiated Moscow crawling with mutants might not be original, but if it pours *STALKER*'s atmosphere into a linear playing experience it could be a terrifying adventure.



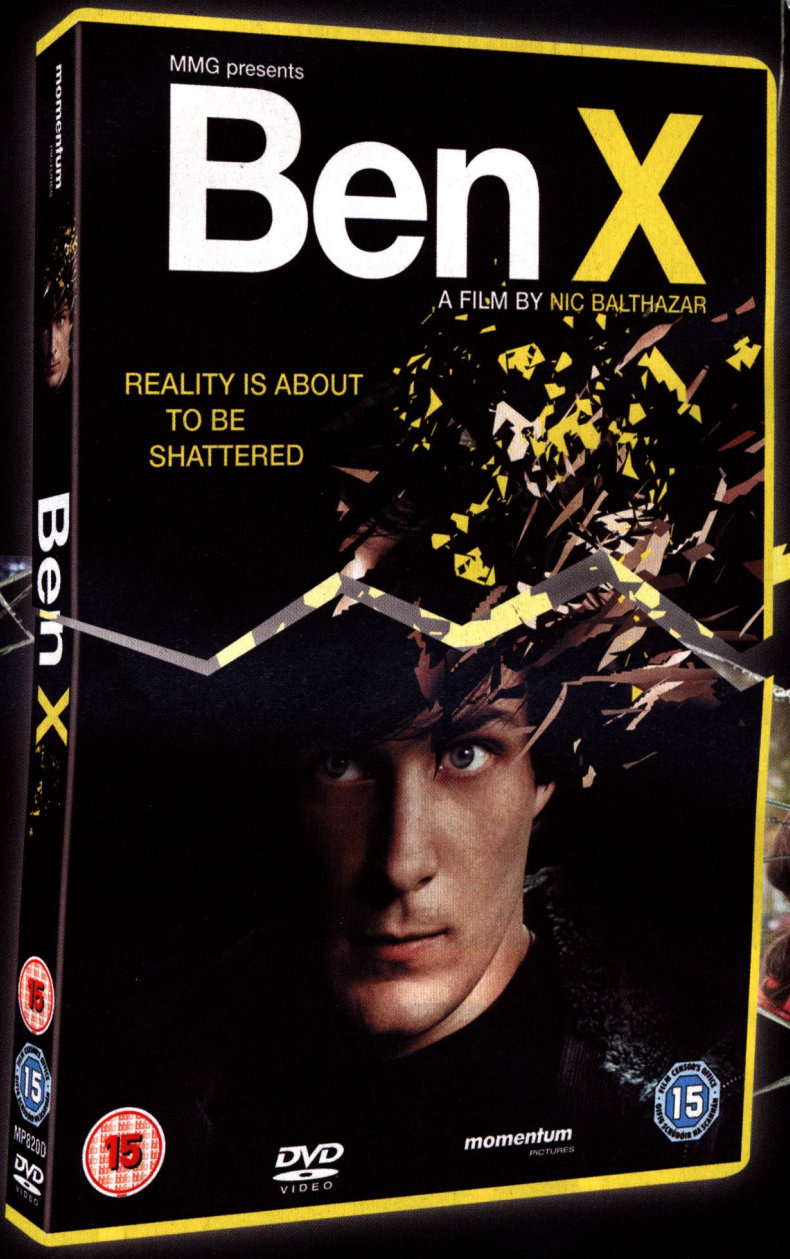
ALAN WAKE

DEVELOPER Remedy **PUBLISHER** Microsoft
WEBSITE alanwake.com **ETA** Late 2009

POOR ALAN'S MISSED his alarm, there was a passenger alarm on the Tube, a mean-looking cat was blocking his door – whatever the reason Alan's late. Very late. In fact, he's so late a forum post from a Remedy employee confirming that *Alan Wake* still exists was newsworthy. But rest assured, Alan's still coming next year. Maybe.

REALITY IS ABOUT TO BE SHATTERED

INCLUDES ARCHLORD THE ONLINE RPG GAME



"Packs excitement, emotion and originality that really bytes" - i-D

ON DVD VIDEO DECEMBER 29

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momentum PICTURES

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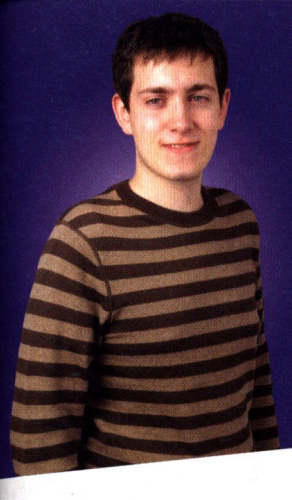


PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Home theatrics

THERE ARE SOME games that I'll only play on my 360 or PlayStation 3. But my consoles and PC now share the same speakers, wireless keyboard and 46in HDTV, and so they all sit alongside my TV stand like good friends sharing nachos. This means I now feel just as inclined to start up a game on the PC as I would on a console. In fact, it's more likely I'll game on the PC, as invariably it'll run a bit smoother.

Despite this the living room is still an alien place for a gaming PC (I'm ignoring *Media Center* PCs, because everyone does), but I firmly believe that the sofa is the future is for PC gamers. If we want to get rid of the stigma that PC gamers are shut-ins, then we need to take the world's living rooms by storm. I'll get the trebuchet.

This month has a selection of delightful reviews, both cross-platform and otherwise, including the *Prince of Persia*'s dynamic return, the naughty *Penny Arcade*, the quirky *Quantum of Solace*, and *Mines of Moria*, an underground expansion.

Ed Zitron

Ed Zitron,
Freelancer

Must Buys!

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

Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead Red Alert 3

68 PRINCE OF PERSIA

Will the franchise's new Prince, new world, and new art style, match the success of its predecessors?

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

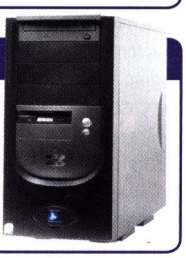
ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.

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: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

72 **LORD OF THE RINGS: MINES OF MORIA**
We delve into the first major paid-for expansion for the Tolkien MMO.

74 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
We return to Liberty City for the definitive review of the definitive sandbox crime game.

78 **QUANTUM OF SOLACE**

79 **PENNY ARCADE: EPISODE 2**

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MYSIMS

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RHIANNON : CURSE OF THE FOUR BRANCHES

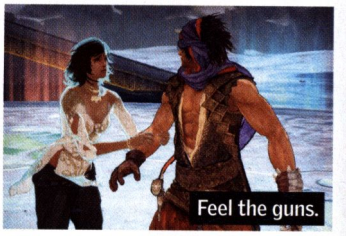
85 **FIFA MANAGER 2009**
NBA 2K9

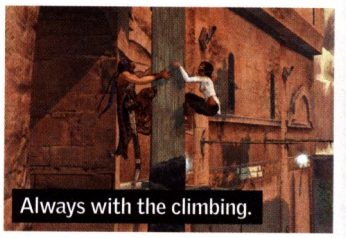
86 **STATE OF PLAY: AGE OF CONAN**

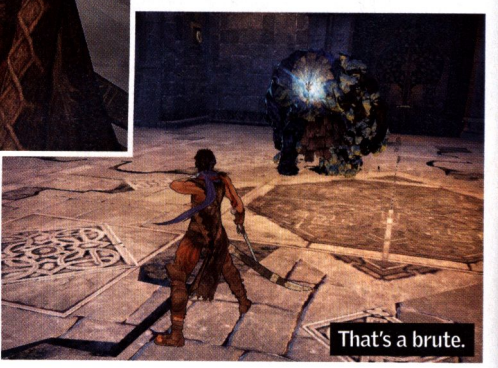
88 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

PCZONE SWEARS...

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







PRINCE OF PERSIA

Steve Hill loses a donkey and finds a Princess

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE prince-of-persia.com
ETA 12 December
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

The long-running series returns with a fresh Prince, a Princess sidekick, and the *Assassin's Creed* engine.

Minimum system requirements:
2.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for *Vista*), and a 256MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

PRINCE OF PERSIA	86%
PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN	83%
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES	75%

YOU'VE GOT TO feel sorry for the poor old *Prince Of Persia*. While he has a reasonable case for pioneering the whole prancing athletically around exotic lands shtick, his thunder was unceremoniously stolen by a big-titted harlot from the Home Counties. Yet while the man on the Clapham Omnibus knows who Lara Croft is, nobody in the real world has ever heard of the Prince. You'd think he would be bitter and twisted about this, and we could be reading too much into it, but there's a bit in the game where the Prince himself, in one of his more eloquent moments, describes tomb raiding as a "glamorous reclamation of the past".

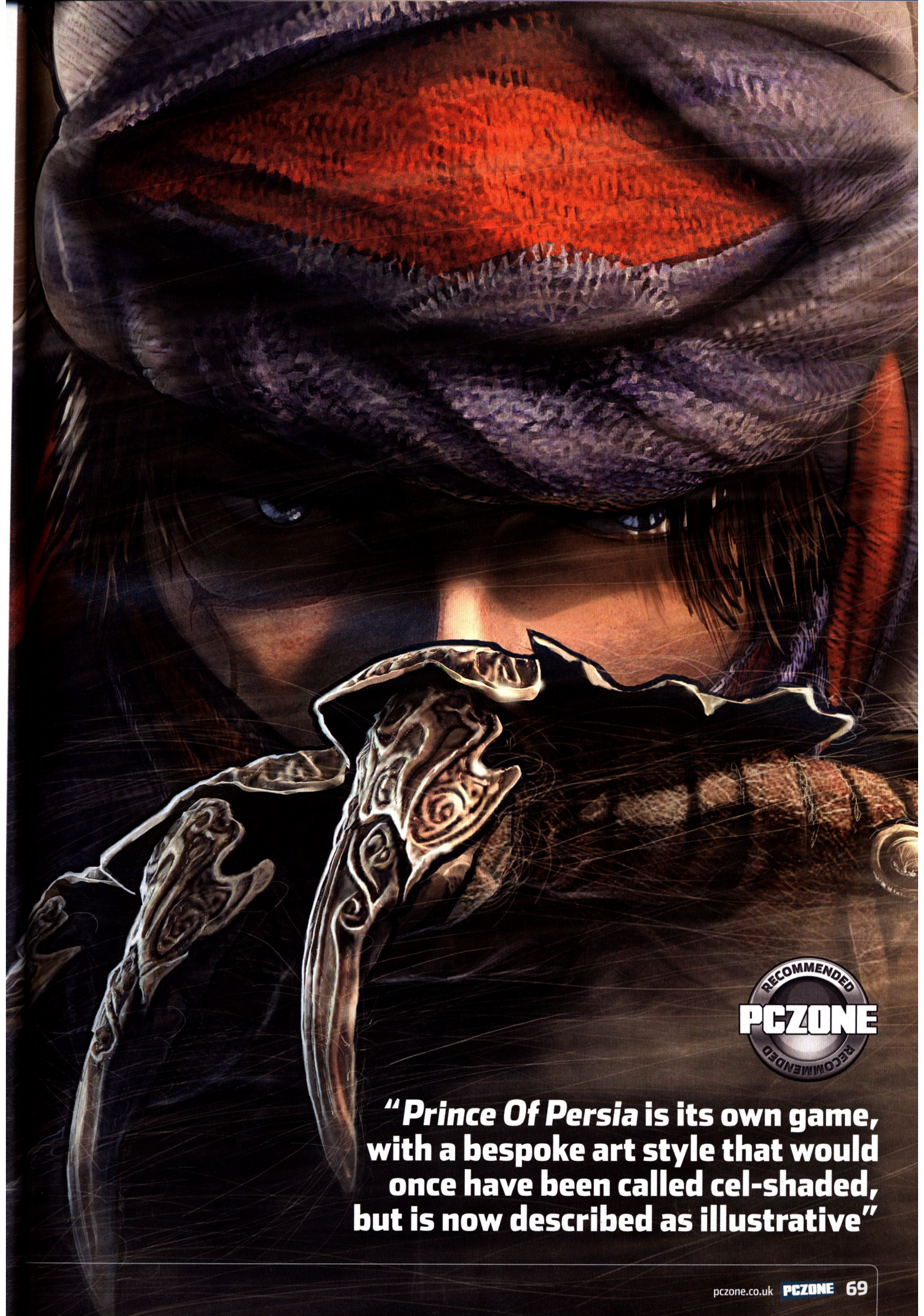
There have been several attempts to reclaim the *Prince Of Persia*'s past over the years – ranging from the mediocre to the tolerable – of which this outing is nothing less than the very latest. Reverting to the original moniker (no *Sands of Time* or *Warrior Within* gubbins) it has already been described by an overpaid marketing skunk as "a re-imagining of the franchise". Hardly a visionary statement, it's the same glib sound bite that Tim Burton wheeled out before summarily pissing in the eyes of *The Planet Of The Apes*.

CARTOON GAMING

Prince Of Persia's so-called re-imagining takes place courtesy of the same graphics engine as *Assassin's Creed* (there's even a secret skin that enables you to play as Altair from that game), however, while the huge vistas and vertiginous topology are comparable, *POP* is very much its own game, with a bespoke art style that would probably once have been called cel-shaded, but is now described as illustrative.

Falling somewhere between Saturday morning cartons and a fully-fledged Disney feature, whatever it's called, it's extremely impressive, throwing you into a consistent, visually stunning fantasy world that screenshots can't really do justice to. With no heads-up display or gaming baggage such as ammo counts and weapon selection, it's a bold move away from the current trend of ultra-realism, and a welcome one at that, like stepping into a fairy tale. Perfectly suited to the subject matter, it conjures up such touchstones as the Sinbad and *The Thief of Baghdad* movies.

And while the story of *POP* may not be remembered with such affection, there is one somewhere, the details of which are inevitably absolute poppycock. As a very loose synopsis, once upon a time there were two brothers who fell out, resulting in the world being a constant battle between corruption and healing, dark and light, with evil represented by oozing black pus, and good by flowers and butterflies. As a fan of good stuff, it's your job to heal the land from corruption and reclaim the fertile grounds so that everybody lives happily ever after.



"*Prince Of Persia* is its own game, with a bespoke art style that would once have been called cel-shaded, but is now described as illustrative"

Good double-teaming.

That's her old man.

Elika starts the healing process.

If this guy's a prince, standards have slipped.

More pragmatically, to start with you're some bloke in an ornate waistcoat wandering through the desert with a donkey laden with stolen gold when you stumble across a damsel in distress. That damsel is a Princess called Elika, and doing the decent thing you save the day through what is essentially an interactive tutorial that teaches you the basics of swordplay, climbing, dropping, wall running, ceiling running and all that stuff.

TAP-TAP COMBAT

While there's some initial swearing, controlling the Prince soon becomes second nature, with a mouse and keyboard proving adequate for even the most athletic of moves. However, so stringent are the paths through the game that it soon becomes apparent that you're not doing much more than pressing the right key at the right time. Clearly, we're exaggerating slightly, but it's fair to say there isn't a great deal of skill involved, as there's a distinctly binary approach to the gameplay in that you either do something or you don't.

As for the sultry Elika, once you've rescued her she follows you around like a pretty pot of glue, proving to be not so much a damsel in distress as a guardian angel, helping you out of scrapes using some fairly nifty magic. For instance, if you attempt a jump that is too far, press E for Elika and she'll fly through the air and give you a helping hand. Further, in what is arguably one of the game's biggest deals, even if you don't ask her for help, should you be plummeting to your death she'll appear and haul you to safety in the nick of time, ensuring that at no point in the game do you ever actually die.

While it might sound like a feature that makes the game too easy, Elika's life-saving is a permanent quicksave, and is arguably an extremely elegant way of overcoming the immersion-breaking concept of saving and loading, a quandary that gaming's greatest minds

The Ice Queen
Princess of hearts

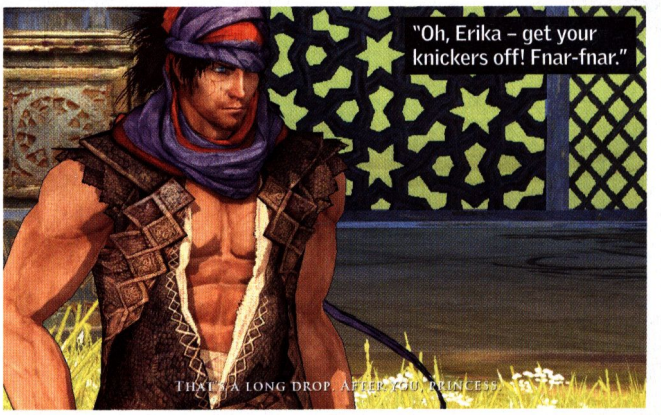
Seemingly voiced by the same emotionless woman who does every female character in every game, the Princess rarely breaks out of her monotonous range, even when in peril.

Undeniably eye-catching, she's nevertheless weirdly asexual, although perhaps this is an automatic response to the Prince's banal overtures. While she comes across as a little girl lost in the opening sequences, she saves your life countless times. She's also like a mystical GPS system, emitting a magical orb that shows you exactly where you need to go.

Nice bit of tomfoolery.

The Fresh Prince Of Bell-end

What a berk



Proving anything but regal, this is arguably one of the most misjudged examples of scriptwriting to sully the already dismal world of games scripting.

Despite fighting for the future of humanity, the so-called Prince comes across as if he's auditioning for the next *Bill & Ted* movie, spending the entire game trying to get into the Princess's knickers, reeling out appalling gags, and even resorting to a lengthy and witless game of I Spy. There would be more dignity in silence.

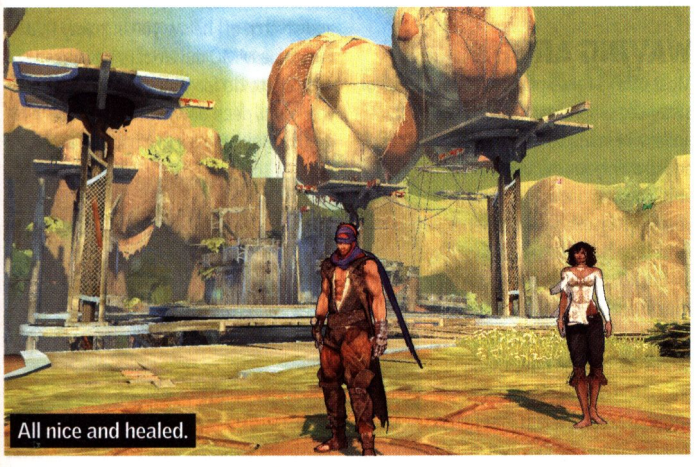
And he does himself no favours by fighting her dad and inadvertently dancing on her mum's tomb. A class act.

have grappled with since the three lives of *Space Invaders*.

As for the overall structure of the game, you dart about a hub-based environment fighting minions of evil and then healing the relevant area. Or more accurately, Elika heals the area while you stand by making wisecracks. In many ways the game is more about the Princess than the alleged Prince, and she even joins in with the combat, throwing in some magic while you stick to your sword, gauntlet and an acrobatic attack. With a fixed camera view, defeating beasts is a matter of stringing the right combos together, and rhythmically tapping the right button in a series of quick-time mini-games. The environment can also come in handy, as it's possible to kick a monster off his ledge.

While the early monsters can be laid to waste with a few lashes of your trusty sword, you do eventually have to resort to the various combos. When these go right, they can be spectacular, but the combat is one sticking point that might turn people off. Indeed every time we stormed off in disgust during the review it was a result of boredom having circled a monster for 10 minutes, pressed pause to access the combos menu, attempted to remember a couple and then spent valuable minutes of our lives chipping away at his health bar, which replenishes if Elika has to save your life.

Almost as tacit acknowledgement of this time-sapping routine, some of the bosses will piss off halfway through a fight, only to reappear later to enable you to finish off the job. With the bosses becoming progressively harder as the game continues, they each take longer to beat, and given that you can't actually die, time is your only currency.



All nice and healed.

Well, time and your fingers, as this is an area of the game that betrays its console roots. Tapping out combos on a pad is less ruinous, both to the hardware and to your index finger, which can seize up in the midst of a long scrap. Repetitive strain injury notwithstanding, having beaten the boss and healed the land, collectable 'light seeds' magically appear, a certain number of which grant Elika further powers enabling her to access more of the land and perform more healing. These can be collected during some more predetermined platforming, and so it goes on, an essentially repetitive, if spellbinding and occasionally exhilarating, tour round a magical world with a Princess hanging off your back, a few nonsensical cutscenes, a clutch of rudimentary puzzles and some vaguely sinister-dream sequences.

MIXED BAGGAGE

Hardcore gamers will inevitably dismiss *POP* as not being challenging enough, but you'd have to have a steel heart not to be slightly seduced by the fantastical setting. That said, the magic is shattered the minute the Prince opens his mouth, proving to be an appalling dullard. All the same, this is a brave attempt at doing something different in a gaming marketplace littered with war and aliens. Despite being the work of Ubisoft Montreal, it's probably as far away from a Tom Clancy-branded title as it's possible to get.

And despite an original approach to the gameplay, in many ways *POP* is imbued with an old-school sensibility: kill the boss, save the girl. Although she spends a lot more time saving you, and you do sometimes feel like a spare prick at a wedding, bringing little more to the party than a series of excruciating one-liners and some functional swordplay.

All the same there's a definite elegance to the action, with the sublime animation complementing the setting, and a superbly realised colour palette that visually demonstrates the difference between the corrupted and healed areas. It's undeniably charming, but how long you remain charmed depends largely on your patience. PCZ

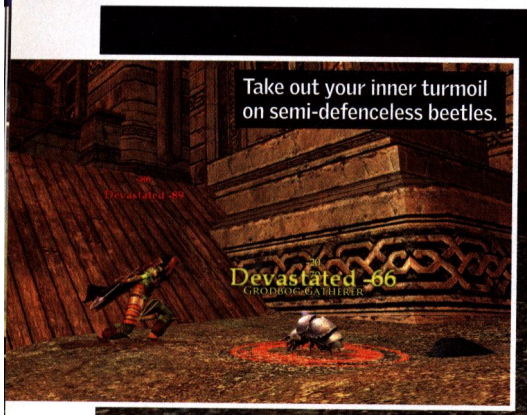
PCZONE

Graphics	Uniquely illustrative
Sound	Dramatic music, abysmal chat
Multiplayer	Just you and the princess

- ✓ Distinctive graphics
- ✓ Fluid gameplay
- ✓ Exhilarating action
- ✗ Lengthy battles
- ✗ Awful script

75

A magical world



Take out your inner turmoil on semi-defenceless beetles.

Land of the small and hairy.

It wouldn't be fantasy without goblins.

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

ONLINE ONLY

EXPANSION PACK

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: MINES OF MORIA

This isn't the first time *Ed Zitron* has followed a bearded man into the dark

DEVELOPER Turbine
PUBLISHER Turbine
WEBSITE lotro-europe.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

The first expansion for *LOTRO* that you have to pay for, sets a high standard with an incredible new locations and levellable weapons.

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

HOW IT STACKS

WOW: THE BURNING CRUSADE	93%
MINES OF MORIA	85%
EVERQUEST II: DESERT OF FLAMES	75%

THERE ARE A lot of good things to say about how Turbine have approached *The Lord of the Rings Online*'s source material. They have carved from Tolkien's words a remarkably individual game world that not only bears very little resemblance to the ridiculously popular films, but also to any other MMO in the industry.

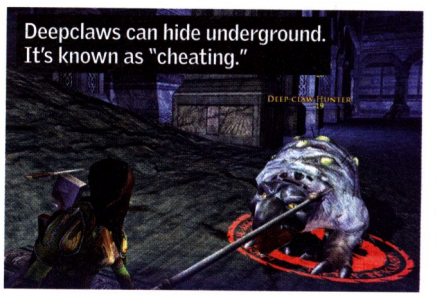
Say what you will about how the gameplay in *LOTRO* is similar to that of *World of Warcraft*, but what makes this MMO special is how well it immerses you in a quality atmosphere. And Moria is, frankly, the most atmospheric game world I've seen in a while.

Bizarrely, you actually start outside Moria, and unlike *WOW*, *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online* or any other MMO, you spend a fair amount of time unlocking the expansion's extra content. It's somewhat of a large-scale tutorial for the new legendary items, weapons that level with your character (see box out), as well as a scene setter for the rest of the expansion as you fight The Watcher in the Water and break through the Hollin gate.

WAVING AROUND

Most of this takes place in cinematic solo instances where the Watcher's slightly underwhelming tentacles whip at you and drown your dwarven allies, until you can come back with your well-levelled weapon and fight it back into the depths.

Luckily, you can put away your thesaurus of the mundane once you enter the halls of Moria, as Turbine have made one of the most astonishing in-game areas ever. This sounds hyperbolic until you travel around the titanic interiors of Khazad-dûm, riding through hallway after hallway of ruined dwarven masonry. Everything – even the most benign hallways housing your average merchants – seems to tower above you and stretch off below you in a way that I imagine MMO developers have been wanting to do for years. Even though you know, deep down, that the huge drops below you lead to nothing and


Deepclaws can hide underground. It's known as "cheating."

Is that a severed head in your hand or are you just pleased to see me?

Legendary Weaponry

Well, you levelled a character, why not a sword?

As if there wasn't enough of an addictive quality in creating character after character in every MMO under the sun, *LOTRO* has coined the next step along the dark path: levellable items.

Legendary items have their own separate experience pool and gain levels along with your character, earning points that can be spent on legacies. These can make you hit harder, faster and enhance your moves, and you can socket the items to give you stat gains. It'll be interesting to see how pervasive these weapons will become in a few months, and the number of different combinations that people put together – especially considering that each item has 30 levels, and you can level six of them at a time.

Mark my words, other MMOs will be copying this very soon.

Crows and wolves plague the first hour of *MOM*.

that the hallway ahead of you probably just has more goblins in it, Moria succeeds in instilling true dread, giving you a stomach-churning romp to level 60. This expansion recreates that horrible uncertainty from the days of *Ultima Online*, where you'd creep down a hallway unsure of whether you were about to get ripped in two by something in the dark. It's varied too, with the expected instances including some awesome historical quests – including a battle against a Balrog and others – that let you understand how Moria became the way it currently stands.

Players can also start playing as a Runekeeper or a Warden, *LOTRO*'s two newest classes. The Runekeeper is a classic magic user class, focusing on either doing massive damage or healing their teammates, with each damage/healing spell making its particular school more effective. The Warden strings together abilities to activate gambits, that can be offensive or defensive depending on what you choose to make each one with. They're both interesting additions to *LOTRO*, and their utility shines in both solo and group situations.

DON'T WALK ALONE

This is all good, but once in Moria there's a certain point you shouldn't travel alone. This is both for your safety and your own enjoyment. Attempting to frolic around this expansion like a whimsical knob-end can and will get you killed (trust me, I've tried it). Turbine have made Moria inhospitable to an extent – while you won't get killed in the safe areas, travelling outside of them on your own is a risky, slow-going business, and only when you can team up with one or two friends does the world really open up.

While it sounds obvious considering that *Mines of Moria* is a high-level expansion, it's not a forgiving solo product. This isn't to say it's impossible to go it alone, and it's certainly not like *Vanguard* or *Age of Conan* as far as solo-unfriendliness, but there's so much content that is both more enthralling and fun when you've got back up.

As the first paid-for expansion that Turbine have done for *LOTRO*, *Mines of Moria* shines. While it's hardly the most revolutionary product ever to be released, what it tries to do it does well. There may be extra levels to grind through, but *MOM*'s treats are in the form of juicy lore and an actual storyline that digs hungrily and deeply into unexploited Tolkien myths. If you're into *LOTRO*, you should be buying this immediately, and if you're not, now might be the time to sign up. PCZ

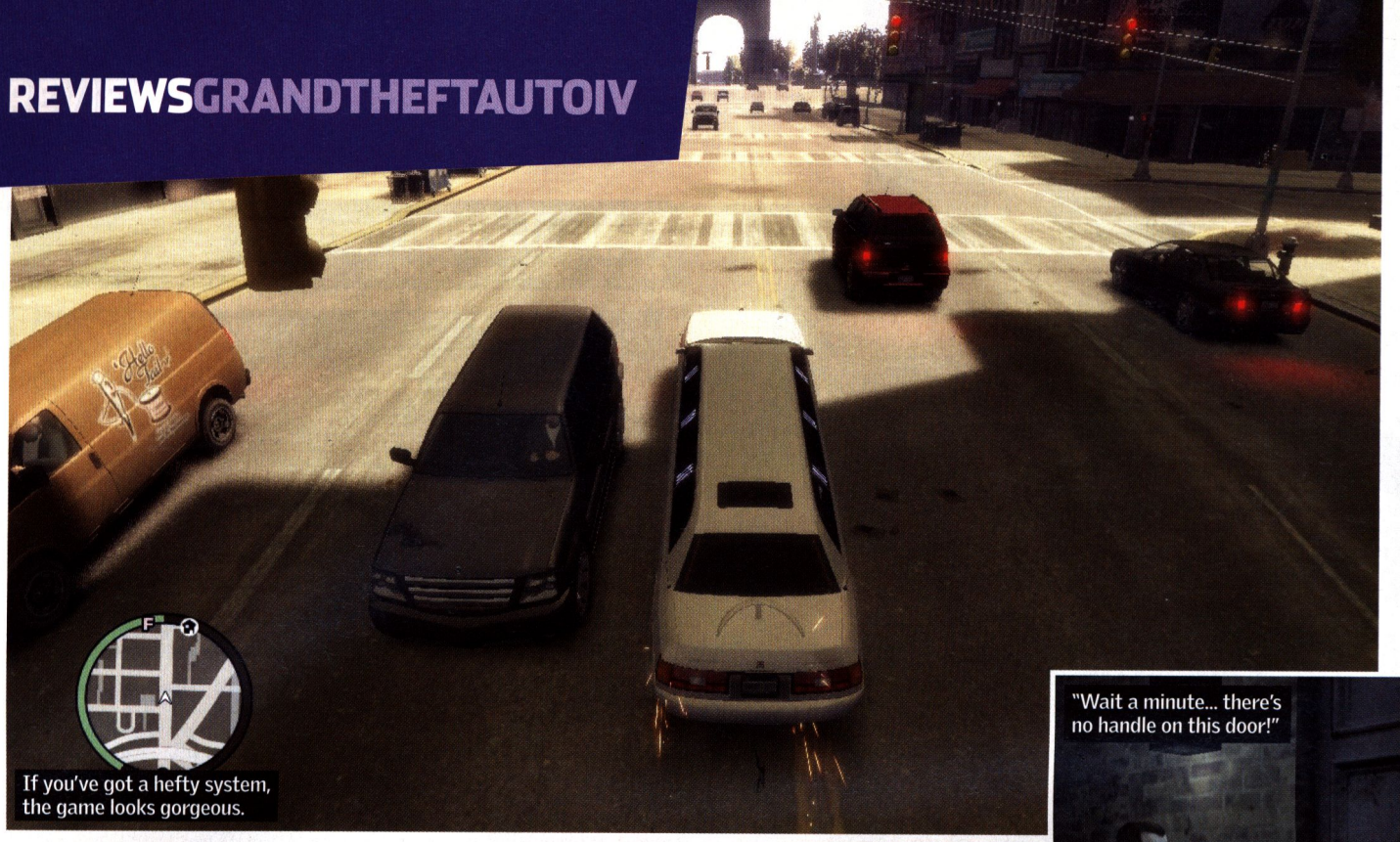
PCZONE

Graphics	Huge and beautiful
Sound	Terrible accents and epic orchestras
Multiplayer	Only

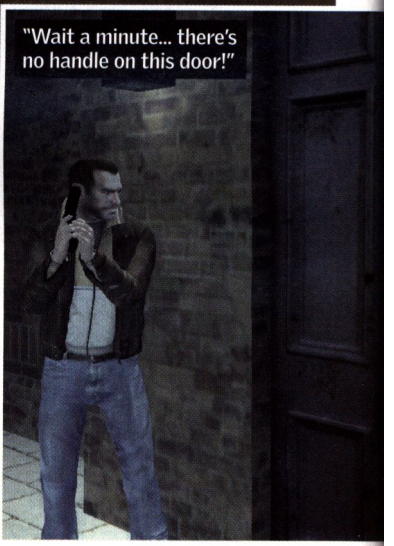
- Stunning scale
- Excellent new classes
- Legendary items are useful
- Somewhat linear at times
- Voice acting is awful

85

We dig it



If you've got a hefty system, the game looks gorgeous.



"Wait a minute... there's no handle on this door!"

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

Citizens beware – *Jon Blyth* is back behind the wheel

DEVELOPER Rockstar North
PUBLISHER Rockstar
WEBSITE rockstargames.com/IV
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

POETRY HAS BEEN described as the hot rawness of suffering and experience, analysed with the benefit of distance. I forget who said that. Someone who fancied themselves as a proper smart arse, for sure. The point is, if your partner tells you they no longer want to be with you, you shouldn't whip out your iPhone and start tapping a sad limerick into your Notes application. Give it a couple of hours, until you're properly over it.

The last thing I'm trying to do is compare videogame reviews to poetry (for a start, videogames don't rhyme, and they're never written by poets), but something about that old English lesson rings true with *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The madness of the game's release earlier this year, the plague of perfect scores, the unprecedented positive two-page review in *The Sun*, the man who got stabbed in the queue... it's over now, and the PC version won't make such a splash.

Which isn't particularly fair, because the PC version does most things right, and is a better experience: you've got the easy change between mouse and keyboard and gamepad – with both working excellently, and both especially useful in different situations. You've got the user-defined radio station, which is slightly simpler to use than in *GTA3*, which felt a tiny bit like hacking. Let's get the basics out of the way quickly. You play Niko Bellic, an East European who has been mentally toughened, and morally blunted, by the Bosnian conflict.

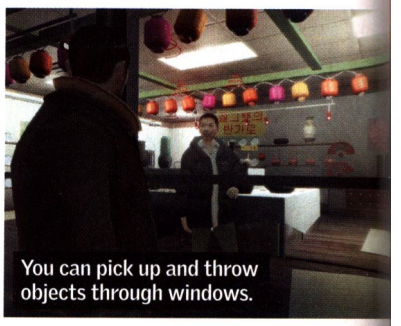
CITY OF DREAMS

Attracted to Liberty City by the colourful lies of his cousin, Roman, he arrives to find that all is not as he expected. Far from finding himself neck-deep in those lovely titties that ladies have, Niko finds he has to bail his cousin out of debt, and prove himself to the local characters and gangs, all of whom require him to drive around and shoot people.

So *GTA4* has the same structure as previous games. The world is more complicated, but the fundamental business of completing the game is deflatingly identical. Considering the effort that's gone into the game to make an immersive, fluid experience, it seems like a '90s relic to have cutscenes triggered by driving onto a blue circle (or yellow arrow) but that's how it works. There are just more stylish transitions that make it feel a little more movie-like.

Even with the missions, it can still feel like you're being spoon fed step-by-step instructions – and the continuing lack of mid-mission checkpoints can lead to real mission fatigue – but that's about the extent of my bitching covered. There's a lot to frustrate and annoy in *GTA4*, but since when could you enjoy the pleasure of success without tasting failure?

Exploring the world and interacting with the characters that provide the real addiction and fuel of the game: you'll become oddly fond of the steroid junkie, Brucie. You'll enjoy the company of



You can pick up and throw objects through windows.

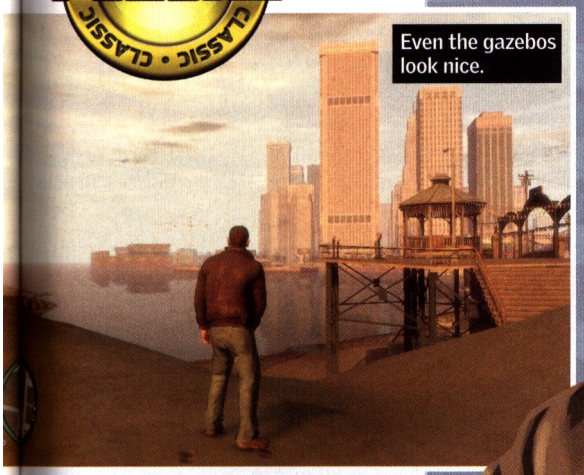
AT A GLANCE...

The ultimate sandbox driving game gets its PC release long enough after the consoles for the air to have cleared.

Minimum system requirements:
Vista SP1 or *XP SP3*, Core 2 Duo 1.8GHz or Athlon X2 64 2.4GHz processor, 1.5GB RAM, and a 256MB NVIDIA 7900 or 256MB ATI X1900 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	91%
FAR CRY 2	90%
BULLY	89%



Even the gazebos look nice.

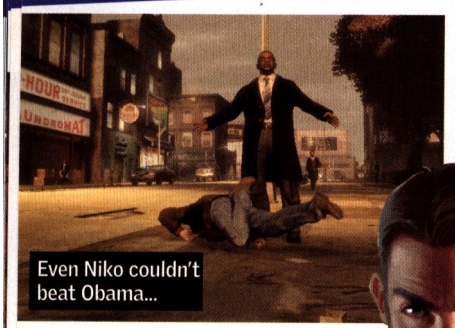
Packie and his extended family. Despite the lingering simplicity of the *GTA* gameplay, the world is rich, detailed and just so much of a damned pleasure to spend time in that you can forget the lack of fundamental renovation.

You can watch TV or catch up with Liberty City radio stalwart Lazlow's descent into Alan Partridge obscurity. Walking around, things happen. The city is harsher – cars will drive into you now while crazy homeless guys will get escorted into a police car. Driving slowly towards someone will cause them to hold their hands out convincingly. Walk into a businessman, you might start a fight. Do the same with a muscular security guard, they might run away screaming. Bump into anyone else and they'll drop what they're carrying and walk off, in a drugged stupor. It's not perfect. It's just very, very good.

Apart from the world at large, there's a much deeper relationship with key people in the game. It's a system that puts the depth of *Far Cry 2*'s buddy system to shame, although with a cost to your

Fingerless gloves – just like Bennett in *Commando*.

"Despite the simplicity of the gameplay, the world is rich, detailed and just so much of a pleasure to spend time in that you can forget the lack of renovation"


Even Niko couldn't beat Obama...

This is going to end badly...

He looks a bit like a young Alan Rickman.

Playing with friends

Multiplayer cops and robbers

Some missions have multiple outcomes.

This is the first time multiplayer's been properly integrated into a *GTA* game (not counting mods). Not only that, but the PC's version has received a glossy finish. The most striking improvement over the console version is the doubling of the allowed number of players per game: from 16 up to 32. This transforms most of the game's staggering 15 game modes into incredibly hectic (and explosive) affairs. Most of the obvious uses of a huge city, guns and cars have been included in the roster of multiplayer game modes (like 'Cops and Crooks' – teams of cops vs criminals – and 'Race', a standard cross-city racing game), and a Free Mode allows you to dick about with 31 other people without rules.

sense of relaxation. Interaction with these people takes place through your mobile phone. And it's this phone that fills the time, eliminating any sense of free time, exploration and rampage-hunting that *GTA3* had. If you have any kind of social phobia you'll turn the phone off – as you meet more people, they'll all call you and want to hang out.

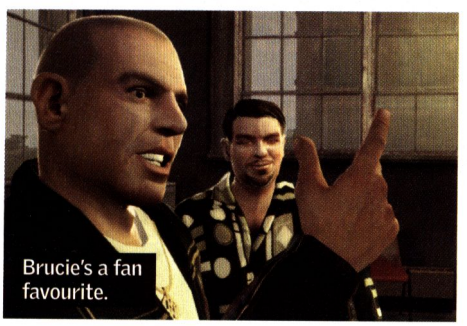
Whilst trying to avoid spoilers – a faint absurdity, given that everyone's been talking about the game for six months – this method of allowing you spend non-productive time with the characters is strikingly effective at one twist in the game. It gives a certain... plot development a savage sting, to have voluntarily spent non-productive time in someone's company, when you would have rather been doing something else. It's so precisely like some real-life relationships that reproducing it in a game so naturally is a genuine stroke of genius. For the other relationships, however, their demands maintains a sense of continuing obligation (they can stop liking you, if you ignore them) without a correspondingly steep payoff.

NEEDLESS MATES

Free cab rides are only good if you're penniless, and the free weaponry from Little Jacob is rarely required, as you don't get your guns confiscated at the hospital, and can always reload the last autosave, which happens after every successful mission and date.

With exploration, multiple mission chains, the always excellent radio stations, and your phone going off, the world is never anything other than hectic. If you throw the frankly piss-taking side mission of shooting 200 pigeons to unlock a helicopter into the mix, then you begin to wonder if you need the hassle.

As far as the combat is concerned, the PC version is an improvement, and the addition of cover makes it feel up-to-date. You can use mouse and keyboard, a gamepad, or swap between the two. This makes the game easy to control, but the combat still falls somewhere between basic, repetitive and enjoyable.

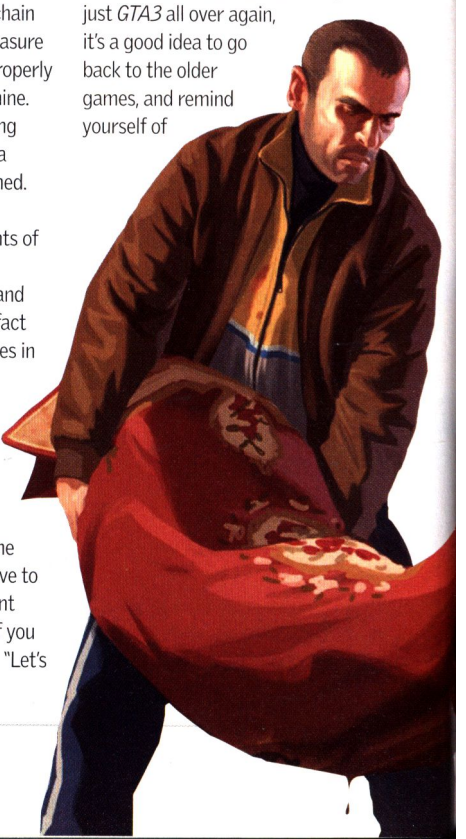

Brucie's a fan favourite.

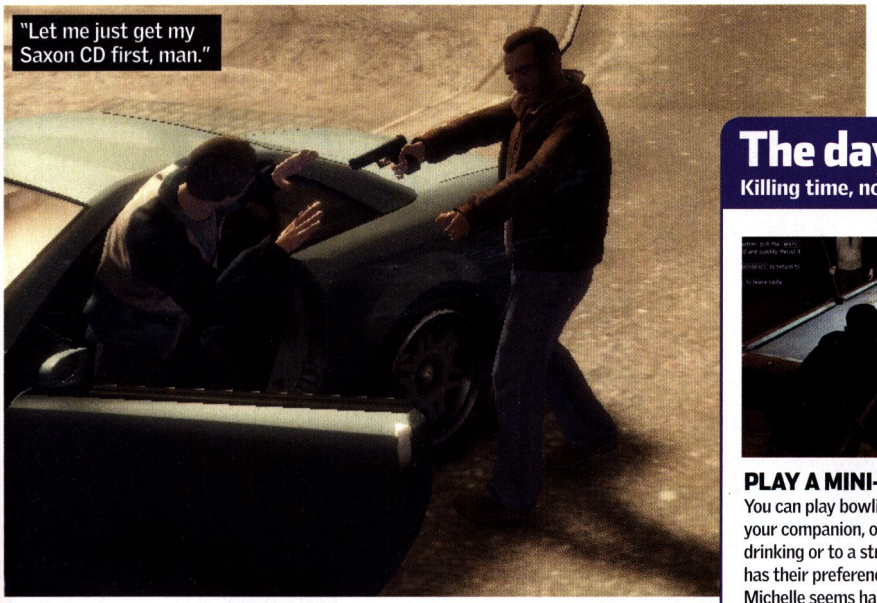
The driving model can be oversensitive, so finding a car that handles well is a pain. Corners force you to slow down, the handbrake turn will generally flip you 180°, and the camera can be a pain in the arse in tight corners. But if you follow Brucie's mission chain you'll end up with a car that's a pleasure to drive. Just be sure you park it properly when you save, because I've lost mine.

In terms of the story you're being told, and taking part in, there isn't a game as well-scripted and performed. Some people complain that Niko's character becomes lost to the events of the game, but that's part of it: he's making unconscionable decisions, and there's no attempt to disguise the fact that he's damaged from his activities in the Bosnian war.

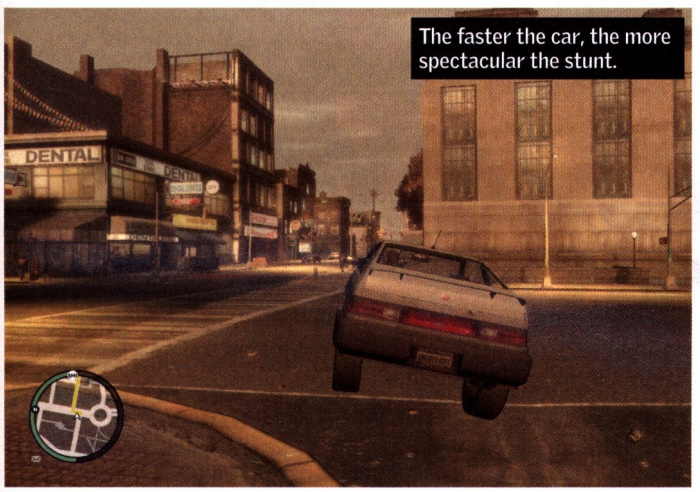
Even though the developers couldn't have scripted Niko for every decision you'd make, there's already so much script that it defies belief. Take the missions in which you drive someone to a destination – if you fail, and have to start again, Niko will have a different conversation with the passenger. If you fail again, they'll say something like "Let's just listen to the radio." This really does make a difference. It shows Rockstar care more than they're required to. It makes the world fuller, more real. And it makes the game easier to love.

Whenever you get the feeling that it's just *GTA3* all over again, it's a good idea to go back to the older games, and remind yourself of





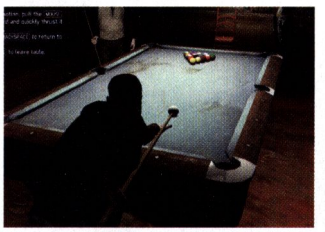
"Let me just get my Saxon CD first, man."



The faster the car, the more spectacular the stunt.

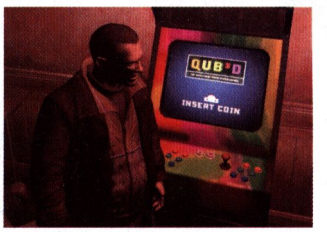
The days are full

Killing time, not people, in Liberty City



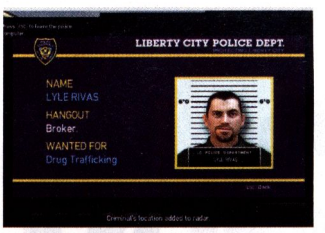
PLAY A MINI-GAME

You can play bowling, darts or pool with your companion, or you can take them drinking or to a strip club. Every character has their preferences. Although posh bird Michelle seems happy enough when you turn up to pick her up in a garbage truck.



PLAY A VIDEO GAME

Bully had a racing game and a rubbish sumo wrestling game, and *GTA4* has a slightly 3D adaptation of *Tetris*. You can find it in pool hall, where you'll end up with Little Jacob. Although it's not brilliant, you can still lose an hour to it.



BAIT THE COPS

It's difficult to get more than two stars. Sure-fire winners are driving around the airport for an instant four-star terrorist alert, or driving to Western Island before you're allowed – that'll bag you the full six stars, and a near-inevitable death.

DATE A LADY

Try as you might, you can't make Niko gay. However, once you're halfway through the game, Niko's dating options expand: will you date the demanding high-maintenance girl, or homely Kate McReary? God help you if you try both.

"The PC version is being sold as the definitive version – as it always is, when it arrives late"

"It's only a wine stain, do we have to chuck it?"

the chasm between them. Go and look at the cuboid hedges in *San Andreas*. We've come a long way, and the new RAGE engine does a fantastic job (particularly in the PC-exclusive video editor).

Chases are the most annoying missions, with arbitrary fail distances and those alternately under- and over-responsive car controls. At other times, it all comes together magnificently. Driving towards a raid, I picked up some blue flashing interest – assuming that they'd magically forget me the second I drove over it, I drove onto the mission trigger point.

I was impressed beyond all traces of cynicism when the mission developed into a three-way shootout between the Mafia, cops, and the Irish gang I'd become involved with. This made it easier for me to escape into the river, which led to the whole thing becoming a high point of the game.

PC PERFECTION

The PC version is being sold as the definitive version – as it always is, when it arrives late – and with a full installation that'd fill the entire hard drive of a first-generation 360, we've got the right to expect something special. Rockstar have delivered a fantastic PC experience, marred only by a demanding game engine and the need to reduce the default settings. (Unless you're on a high-end PC, *GTA4* will leave you feeling emasculated.)

Then there's the video replays, which have been incorporated into your mobile. If you fancy making some East European-themed machinima, or want to make Niko bum a letter box, then just tap F2 to record the last 60 seconds of action to the hard drive. Then, you can replay and edit the action from any angle. It's a simple but effective process, that guarantees PC creatives hours of fun, and Rockstar plenty of YouTube exposure.

So, *GTA4* has gone through its stages of wild acclaim and mild backlash – but the PC version brings enough additions and improvements to the fundamental *GTA4* experience to make it an essential purchase for anyone who hasn't played it yet. And if you have already played it... you still might be tempted by that bumming a letterbox thing. PCZ

PCZONE

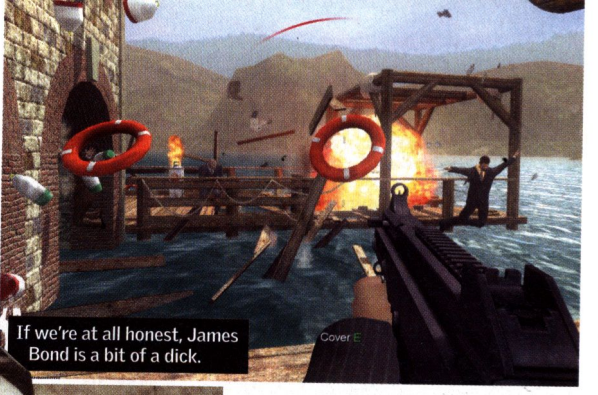
Graphics	Great town, dodgy people
Sound	Fantastic music, great acting
Multiplayer	More, more, more!

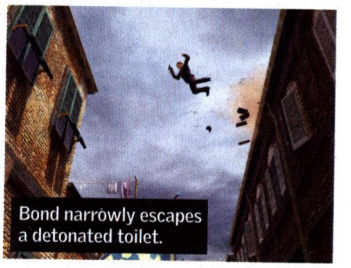
- ✓ Liberty City is beautiful
- ✓ Involving world and characters
- ✓ Very funny
- ✓ Plenty of non-mission stuff
- ✓ The game itself isn't bad
- ✗ It's *GTA3* Mega Plus Plus

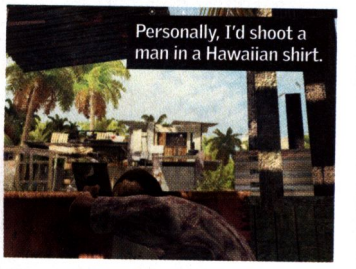
91

The definitive release

The quick-time events are reasonably bearable.


If we're at all honest, James Bond is a bit of a dick.


Bond narrowly escapes a detonated toilet.


Personally, I'd shoot a man in a Hawaiian shirt.

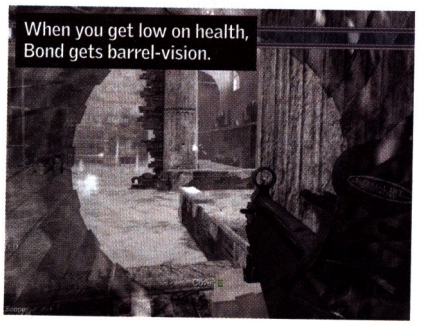
QUANTUM OF SOLACE

A sharply-dressed *Ed Zitron* puts aside drinking and sex to review a game

DEVELOPER Treyarch
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE 007thevideogame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

NOW, I KNOW what you're thinking. A movie tie-in, published by Activision, with movie likenesses. Well hold your horses, because *Quantum of Solace* is playable, fun and, while nothing astonishing, is a good laugh for any Bond fan. Taking place over the course of the eponymous movie and the previous *Casino Royale*, you take the role of Daniel 'Moodiest Bond Ever' Craig as he lays a steadily more inconceivable amount of bullets into the hides of Her Majesty's enemies.

Thankfully, Treyarch have learned a fair amount from the rest of the genre and console Bond games *GoldenEye* (the Rare one) and *Everything Or Nothing*. *QOS* focuses heavily on throwing enthralling setpieces at you, doing its best to take your attention off the tight, yet generic, gameplay. Beneath the hood of exploding helicopters and falling debris *QOS* plays like *Rainbow Six: Vegas 2*. You'll predominantly play in FPS-mode, but you can 'stick' to cover, flipping to third-person Craig-O-Vision, blind-firing or popping up to shoot.


When you get low on health, Bond gets barrel-vision.

A QUICK FLING

This isn't badly done, either – many games casually ruin themselves with a shoddy *Gears of War*-style cover system, but *QOS* happily copies and refines it. In fact, *QOS* does a great deal right. It looks the part, it controls perfectly well on a keyboard and mouse, and it has some honest-to-God moments of goodness.

Treyarch have taken as much as they can from the licence – everything has a slick, gadgety feel, and they even (much like EA's *Everything or Nothing*) commissioned a game-only theme song.

The problem, honestly, is that as well as only being a few hours long – six at the very most – nothing *QOS* does is amazing. There are times when you'll be excited, elated even, by some of the cool things going on around you, but the gameplay and experience, once you lose the initial James Bond veneer, is rather generic.

Overall, the Bond setting makes it fun and the setpieces (as utterly linear as they make everything feel) do keep *Quantum of Solace* exciting. It's tight, it's enjoyable, it looks good, and while it sits comfortably under the "Pfft, well it'll never be as good as *GoldenEye*" umbrella, it's one of the few Bond games that come close to the N64 classic. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

It ain't *GoldenEye*, but it's the best Bond game for a while. Yet it still falls short of being something exciting.

Minimum system requirements:
3GHz processor, 512 MB RAM (1GB RAM *Vista*), and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

GEARS OF WAR	90%
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2	83%
QUANTUM OF SOLACE	68%

PCZONE

Graphics	Slick, but bland
Sound	Orchestral manoeuvres and explosions
Multiplayer	Yes

- ✓ Great fun
- ✓ Slick production
- ✓ Awesome set-pieces
- ✗ Generic as all buggery
- ✗ Repetitive

68
HM's slick trigger finger

PENNY ARCADE: EPISODE 2

Will Porter does rude things to plump plums

DEVELOPER Hothead Games
PUBLISHER Greenhouse Interactive/Steam
WEBSITE rainslick.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $14.99

AT A GLANCE...

JRPG combat meets old school point-and-click, with a fair contingent of rude words and mock-swooning. Lovely art style too.

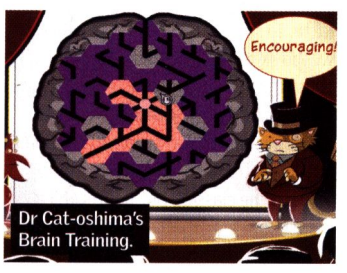
Minimum system requirements:
1Ghz Pentium III processor, 512 MB memory, and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PENNY ARCADE: EPISODE 2	85%
PENNY ARCADE: EPISODE 1	83%
SAM & MAX 205: WHAT'S NEW, BEELZEBUB?	84%

THE WAY THAT *Penny Arcade* **has transmogrified into the mode of entertainment it's been mocking for the past decade is hardly the road most commonly travelled. The** *On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness* **episodes are half point-and-click adventure, half-JRPG combat, and half fruit-fucking nonsense, with everything taking place in a bizarre quasi-Victorian world of Dusty Bin-esque orange-shagging robots, fighting monkey robots and howling mental patients.**

That said, it all works really well. The Dickensian trappings allow Gabe and Tycho's verbose wordplay to settle in nicely, and serves as a fine backdrop for all kinds of cussing and testicle humour. This episode sees you (a self-created, hoe-wielding random – recruited into the ranks of Tycho and Gabe, or beamed over from the last episode) facing off against an evil asylum owner who's refusing to let fruit fucker creator Dr Crazoir out of his facility, and later setting off in pursuit of Fruit Fucker Prime. Seeing as this is an old-school point-and-click at heart, pink flowers and chocolates need finding to persuade an old lady to open a door, a 14mm bolt needs putting in a gold-plating machine, and a rich man needs to be murdered so that you can use his debit card in order to steal a million dollars. All that lovely stuff.



NEO-VICTORIAN FUN

Combat's been tweaked from Episode 1, but hasn't changed from its *FFVII* trappings. Your threesome stand opposite a collection of foes and each have three attack circles that consecutively fill up with juice – the first being an inventory of buffs, debuffs and diversionary fruit, the second a basic attack, and the third a mini-game infused super-attack. Time your three heroes' actions and they'll join in on group attacks – whether it be with your hoe, Gabe's shotgun or Tycho's Wolverine mitts. It's a great system and a diversion of equal quality to the rest of the game. The cluttered inventory system is still a pain, but space bar-tapped blocks are now easier to predict and numpties, like myself, can bring the difficulty down should combat become a massacre.

Having banged a drum with 'Do you remember LucasArts when they weren't shit?' etched on it for most of my adult life, *Penny Arcade* is giving me a warm and glowing sensation. It's not perfect – fighting can get repetitive and the points and clicks don't run as deep as they once did, despite the presence of Ron Gilbert. It is, however, a great reimagining of an obliterated genre. And it's better than *Sam & Max*. Who don't fuck fruit. PCZ

PCZONE

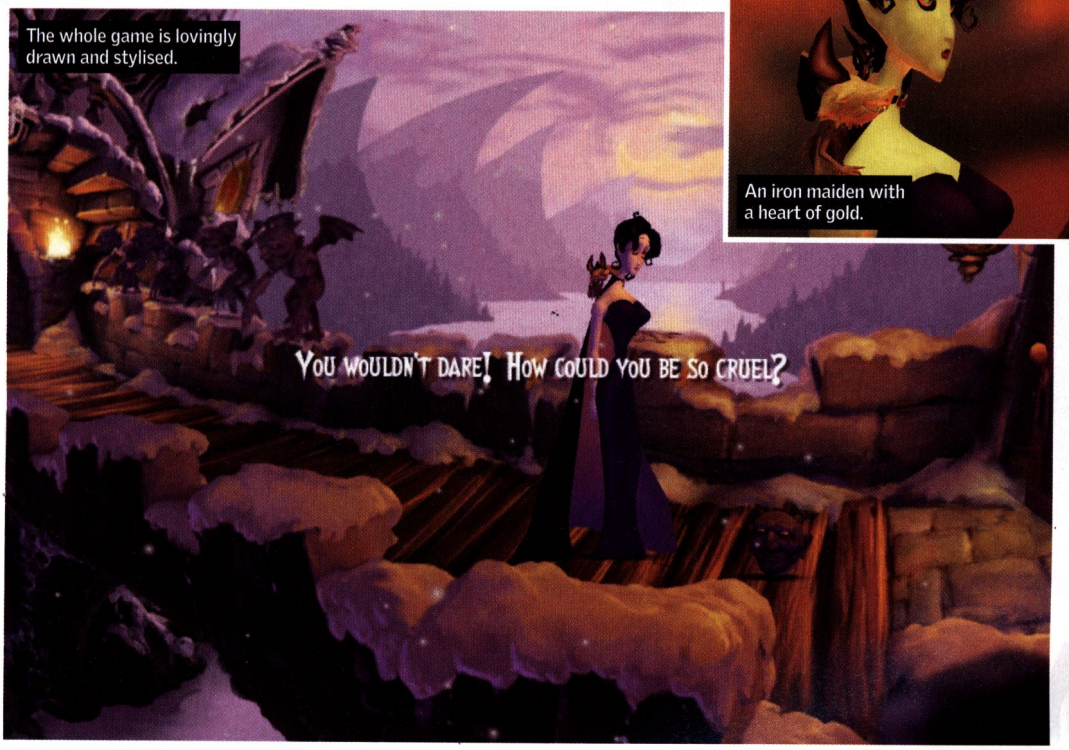
Graphics	Lovely, colourful, Gothic, fruity
Sound	Lack of voice-acting actually helps
Multiplayer	AI only

- Funny and engaging
- Improved combat system
- Makes you part of a gang
- Better than *Sam & Max*
- A bit too much fighting

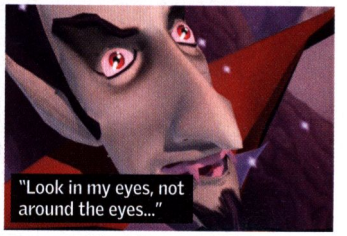
85

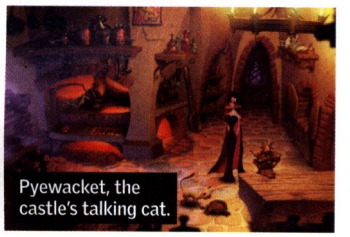
Eat that VGcats

An iron maiden with a heart of gold.



The whole game is lovingly drawn and stylised.


"Look in my eyes, not around the eyes..."


Pyewacket, the castle's talking cat.

A VAMPYRE STORY

David Brown gets ready to adventure like it's 1993

DEVELOPER Autumn Moon
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE avampyrestory-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

Deliciously old-school adventure that evokes the spirit of classic LucasArts point-and-clickers.

Minimum system requirements:
1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

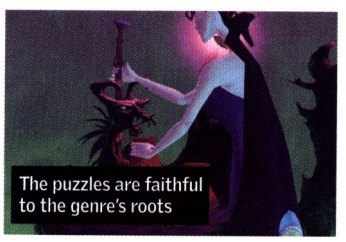
HOW IT STACKS

SAM & MAX SERIES 2: EPISODE 5	84%
A VAMPYRE STORY	73%
SIMON THE SORCERER 4: CHAOS HAPPENS	51%

JUST LIKE THE titular creatures of the night, adventure games are currently proving that, for a dead genre, they've still got some life left in them. *A Vampyre Story* is by far the best of the recent crop (apart from the *Sam & Max* games) and has been seen by many as a triumphant return to the heyday of the point-and-clicker. But does it live up to expectations?

The answer is largely yes, thankfully. What *Vampyre* does well is to recapture the essence and feel of those halcyon days in the early-to-mid-'90s, where point-and-clickers ruled the land and Core Design was better known for producing *Curse of Enchantia* than it was for Lara Croft.

There's nothing that's really out of place or genuinely revolutionary on view. The puzzles are strictly 'use object with another' and involve some lateral thinking here and there. Thankfully, there's never really any point where you hit a brick wall – a slimmed-down design model means there aren't too many things to randomly click on. As such the solutions tend to present themselves a little more readily than they did back in the day.


The puzzles are faithful to the genre's roots

Those of you who have a substantial knowledge of games like *Monkey Island* and *Full Throttle* (the title that *Vampyre* reminds me of most) will recognise a few in-jokes and references from time to time. Froderick the bat, who is your constant companion, voices his hatred of purple tentacles at one point, claiming that he much prefers green ones. As do we all, Froderick.

AURAL ACID

Unfortunately, there are a couple of issues that hold the game back from being a genre classic. Firstly, the voice acting is very much a matter of personal taste. To some it will be fine; to others, it will be like pouring acid into your ears. It doesn't help that the humour can appear a little forced at times – but maybe that is just me being overly cynical. The game is also a tad short when compared to some of the classics, but there's still a good number of hours to be wiled away in Draxsylvania.

All in all, look no further if you are thinking of purchasing a game that doesn't involve explosions, the permanent maiming or butchering of enemy combatants or some form of zombie-type creatures heading your way. *Sam & Max*, *Strong Bad* and now *A Vampyre Story* – adventure gaming hasn't been this strong in years. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Hand-drawn lushness
Sound	Voice acting can grate slightly
Multiplayer	Nope

- ✓ Classic adventure gaming
- ✓ Puzzles aren't too hard, but they aren't too easy
- ✓ Interface easy to use
- ✗ Voices can be annoying
- ✗ Hit-and-miss humour

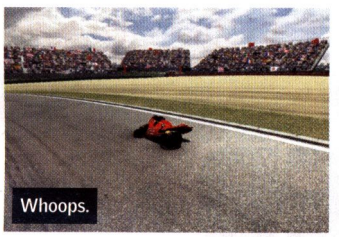
73
Long in the tooth

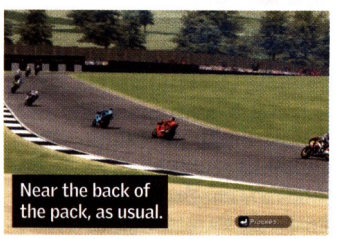
MOTOGP 08

Repeated trips to the tarmac abound

DEVELOPER Milestone
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE snipurl.com/motogp08
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Minimum system requirements:
Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM (1GB *Vista*), and a GeForce 660 series or RADEON X1600 graphics card or better. Pixel Shader 3 required.



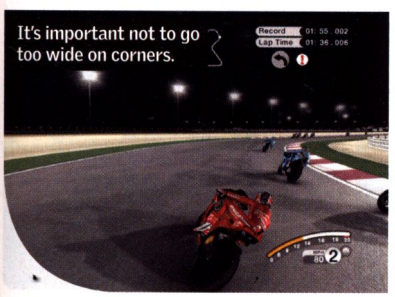


THE LONG-STANDING *MotoGP* series has undergone a few changes in its time, with this year's version being placed into the hands of Capcom. As far as the layman is concerned, the transition has been painless and has brought forth a solid simulation of the sport. Veterans will no doubt find fault with small issues in the racing model, tracks and various things like that, but for the newcomer or the casual racer, *MotoGP 08* is a pretty decent racing game.

This isn't damning with faint praise, as it's impossible for a motorbike racing game to appeal to a broad audience, so the only real goal it should have is to make sure the sport's fans are happy. Developer Milestone have included enough tracks, riders and race options to keep all but the most rabid enthusiast happy. There are career, quick race, time attack, championship, challenge and multiplayer modes, plus licensed riders, bikes, tracks, teams and classes. The visuals are solid and the sound is reasonably authentic.

However, the main problem facing *MotoGP 08* is the one that plagued its predecessors – racing on two wheels isn't as much fun as it is on four, especially when a lot of a new player's initial time with the game will be spent rolling around on the gravel. Still, it can be good fun when you've got the hang of things.

David Brown



PCZONE 68
Fun, limited appeal

MYSIMS

Sims go casual(er)

DEVELOPER EA Redwood
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE mysimskingdom.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
XP: 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM, and a GeForce 4 MX or a Radeon 8500 graphics card or better. *Vista*: 2.4GHz, 512MB, and a GeForce 7 or a Radeon X1600 graphics card or better.

WHEN HOMER SIMPSON uttered the immortal words "That wasn't part of our deal, Blackheart! That wasn't part!" he may have been talking about Bart apparently being kidnapped by an evil ivory dealer. However, he might also have been talking about me being forced to review *MySims*, with the part of the cruel ivory dealer being taken by the draconian Steve Hogarty.

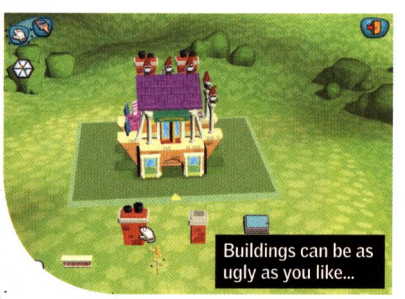
The Sims wasn't casual enough for a Wii/DS audience apparently, so EA have created a spin-off series that ramps up the cuteness levels and turns everyone's favourite wall-'em-up into a twee sandbox game, where you can build houses and objects using a *Spore*-esque creation utility, all with the goal of making your town 'the place to be'.

As a game aimed at children, it provides more than enough content to keep creative youngsters quietly occupied for hours, which will be pleasing news to beleaguered parents everywhere. Just plonk the sprogs in front of this at Christmas and you can enjoy getting lightly toasted while they attach flamingos to the front of their first house.

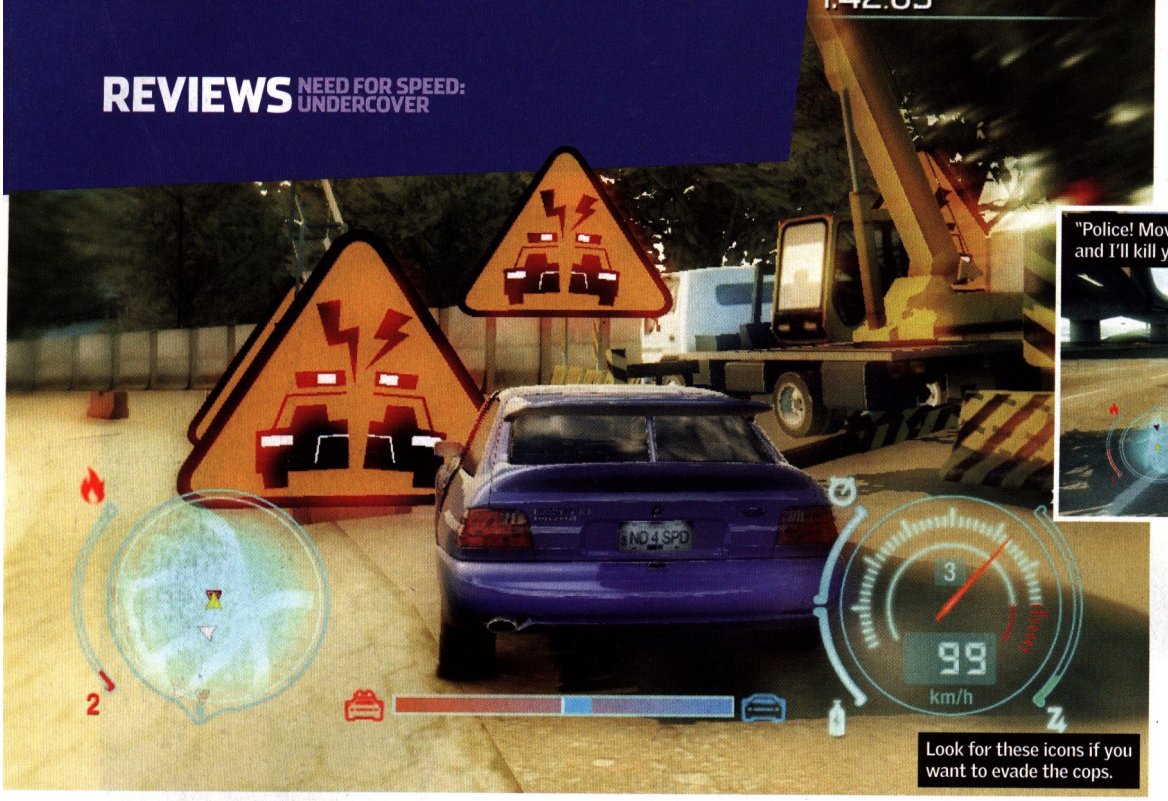
Adults will probably want to steer well clear, of course, unless supervising said youngsters when they venture online to meet other players, whereby they can share created objects and play games like Hide and Seek.

This is probably one of the best child-only games we've seen – after all, it isn't just a badly disguised platform yawnfest with a superhero plastered on the box – this will genuinely engage the creative side of a child. Just knock 30 off the score if you aren't in primary school.

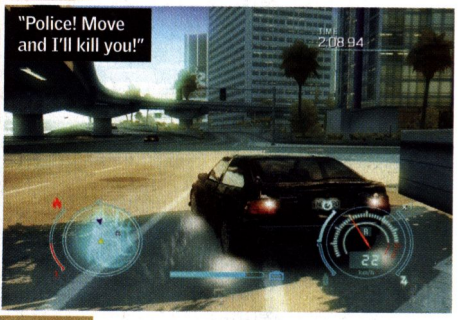
David Brown

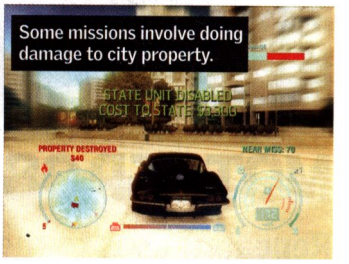


PCZONE 70
Too cute for adults



Look for these icons if you want to evade the cops.





NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

David Brown has a banana in his tailpipe as he goes deep undercover

DEVELOPER Black Box
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE needforspeed.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

FIRST THING'S FIRST: *Undercover* is better than *ProStreet*. **However, it isn't the messianic return to form that people were hoping for, despite the return of the police and their instruments of road safety enforcement. There's also a feeling of it being a little too polished, not just because all the vehicles are so ridiculously shiny.**

The basic premise of the game is that you are an undercover cop attempting to infiltrate a ruthless gang of illegal street racers who have been getting involved in the international drugs trade, the scoundrels. Your boss (a predictably alluring female operative called Chase Linh) urges you to carry out increasingly outrageous breaches of the peace in order to attract the attention of the criminals, which involves chasing people around, winning illegal races, wrecking property and cars, and that sort of thing.

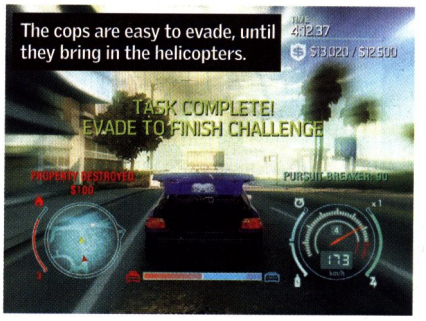
Unfortunately, you have to do so many of these things that everything gets very samey, very quickly, which is a shame because the actual races are reasonably good fun and give a great sense of speed. You just have to do so many of them (and for most of the game they are very easy) all excitement is quickly drained from the action. There's also a love interest to ogle (Christina Milian, Z-list female celeb fans) but her idea of a romantic first date is, predictably, street racing. Lovely.

OPEN UNI DULL

As for the police chases, they, like the regular racing, are exciting at first, but become duller than a documentary on farming practices in Lower Saxony during the Middle Ages. Combine this with the generally unsatisfying crashes and you've got little reason to reach the latter stages of the plot.

EA Black Box have tried to introduce some longevity with the levelling up of your character, drip-fed customisation options, online modes and an extensive range of shiny vehicles to drive around in, but when the actual action is as repetitive as it is, you'll probably not want to bother earning the cash to buy a McLaren F1.

While a budding online community may well spring up around the Cops and Robbers and the Heist modes, the single player won't be retaining the interest of anyone bar the most dedicated car-whoring enthusiasts. PCZ



The cops are easy to evade, until they bring in the helicopters.

AT A GLANCE...

The cops make their return in the latest edition of the popular vehicle-pimping action racer.

Minimum system requirements:
XP: 3GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card. *Vista*: 3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 512MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED	88%
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER	68%
NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET	64%

PCZONE

Graphics	Slick and shiny
Sound	Airbourne on the soundtrack
Multiplayer	Decent

- ✓ Great sense of speed
- ✓ The cops are back
- ✓ Initially exciting...
- ✗ ...but gets boring quickly
- ✗ Unsatisfying crashes

68
Need for sleep

Hitchcock would be proud.

"Dr Bean? Oops, sorry, wrong game..."

Excuse me, your hand is on fire.

LEGENDARY

David Brown is the stuff of legend, unlike this game

DEVELOPER Spark Unlimited
PUBLISHER Gamecock
WEBSITE legendarythegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

A SHORT WHILE into *Legendary* you meet up with a female sidekick. Later on, you find yourselves together in a small room communicating with a man by monitor screen, who looks both respectable and evil. Your character says nothing. Earlier, you are rescued from danger by a policeman/security guard who bumbles about affably before dying on you. I'm not going to name the obvious 'reference point' for these particular ideas, as I think it is pretty obvious.

Legendary is a game that has surprisingly little going for it. For a start, it has been released when so many other games are clamouring for your attention and, unfortunately for Spark Unlimited, it doesn't do much to make itself stand out.

It would be a little harsh to say the word 'generic' was invented for *Legendary* (perhaps the choice of name was deliberately ironic) but I'm struggling to think of anything that I really thought was 'good'. Oh, here's one: the opening scenes of destruction and mayhem were pretty exciting. Well, they were until I realised I wasn't in any real danger and they then became an exercise in just finding the way through the rubble. The massive 'wreckage' creature that carves a path through the city is excellently done too. It is much easier to just rail against everything that I found boring or just terribly average. I've never been one to make things difficult for myself, so here goes.

NOT FOR HIGH JUMP

Your character, Deckard, cannot jump more than 10cm off the floor; I got stuck in the scenery twice in the first 10 minutes; all doors in major cities are sealed by keypads that can be 'bypassed' by jamming two wires together; you can't jump when standing in a puddle of water; respawning is too frequent; the weapons feel very insubstantial, and so on.

There's nothing that's absolutely terrible about *Legendary*, just that the whole thing feels insipid and uninspired, as if the developers became fed up with the project and finished it as quickly as possible. There's no sign that any real love or attention has been put in and, therefore, players will feel very little beyond apathy and a gnawing sense they are just wasting their lives playing it. Which sadly is pretty much what Spark Unlimited seems to have done. PCZ

Decapitate a werewolf to defeat it.

AT A GLANCE...

First person shooter that attempts to do new things, but fails spectacularly.

Minimum system requirements:
2.6GHz processor, 2GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), GeForce 7600GT/Radeon X1600 or better.

HOW IT STACKS

PCZONE

Graphics	Dated, inadequate and moribund
Sound	Acceptable
Multiplayer	It's there, but it isn't anything special

- ✓ Opening cinematic
- ✓ Wreckage Monster
- ✗ Entirely average
- ✗ Rubbish graphics
- ✗ Does little new and does it badly

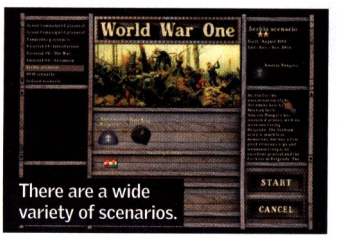
50
Monstrous

WORLD WAR ONE

Tally-ho and yippety-dip lads!

DEVELOPER AGEOD
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE ageod.com/uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
Pentium 4 1.8GHz processor, 2GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.



ONCE WE FOUND out this game was coming to us from the boffins at AGEOD, we knew it was going to be hardcore all the way. *World War One* is almost sadistically detailed, with over 50 pages of overview stats available when you start any scenario or Grand Campaign. Needless to say, if you thought *Hearts of Iron* was too detailed, you need to stay 100 yards away from this game at all times. It might be wise to take a restraining order on yourself, just to make sure.

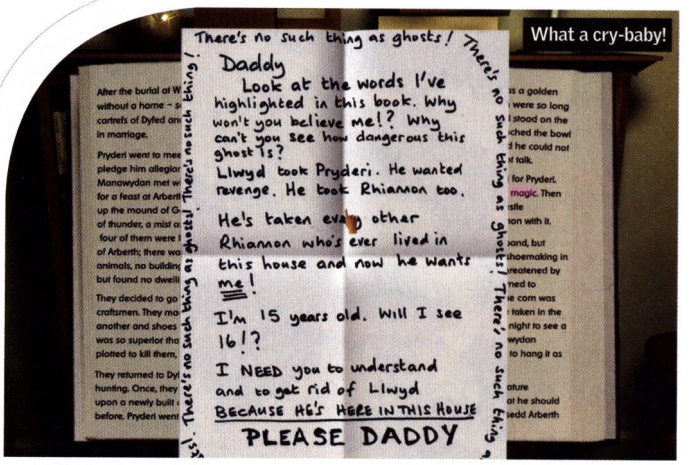
For those who are inclined to dive into the deep waters of AGEOD's latest, you'll probably have a whale of a time. The map of Europe is absolutely vast, with thousands of territories to pore over and covet, plus there are huge amounts of diplomatic, economic and political options to consider.

Sadly, sheer depth doesn't guarantee a good game and there are issues plaguing *World War One*. The text-based tutorial is infuriatingly prosaic and tedious to plough through and the AI is often slow at calculating its moves, leaving you twiddling your thumbs between turns. Combat is dull and it's difficult to figure out why you've won or lost, plus the interface is a overly fussy with your mouse clicks at times.

If you can get past the inhospitable veneer, you'll be drawn into a massive time sink, with so many outcomes it's probably never exhaust them. That's if you have the patience to get that far. Even as a qualified historian, I don't.

David Brown

PCZONE 65
Over the top



RHIANNON: CURSE OF THE FOUR BRANCHES

Ghosts in the heart of Wales

DEVELOPER Arbeth Studios
PUBLISHER Lighthouse Interactive
WEBSITE rhiannongame.com
ETA: Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB *Vista*), and a 64MB graphics card.

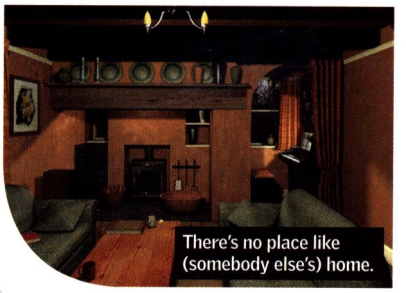
THERE AREN'T MANY games set in rural Wales, which is hard to understand given the area's lore, but Arbeth Studios have decided this would be the best place to set their new supernatural adventure, *Rhiannon: Curse of the Four Branches*. Largely based in and around the farmhouse of Ty Pryderi, a lurking evil must be prevented from exacting a cruel and terrible revenge on those who have wronged it. Exciting stuff!

Well, yes and no. For a start, flick-screen adventures aren't renowned for edge of the seat gameplay. Then there's the excruciating mundanity of the early tasks you are forced to complete – feeding a cat, for example. The interface is a little bit fiddly and there can be some sense of disorientation when quickly trying to navigate around the farmstead and its environs.

Having said that, the three-strong development team at Arbeth have done reasonably well to create a relatively isolated and spooky atmosphere in the game. While things never get pant-soilingly scary, an unnerving sense of loneliness permeates long stretches of the game. Whether that appeals to you is a matter of personal choice – while I appreciated the atmosphere, the tedious nature of the actual gameplay spoilt things a little.

Still, things do pick up later on and there's a relatively rich and varied amount of material to sift through as you progress, especially if you find Celtic myths and legends of interest. So, if you can get over the extremely slow pace of the gameplay, you might find a relaxing-yet-spooky adventure to immerse yourself in on a wet Sunday afternoon.

David Brown



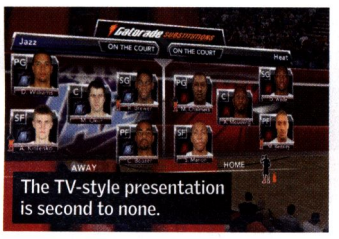
PCZONE 64
Slow and steady

NBA 2K9

Nailing threes and sinking free throws

DEVELOPER 2K Sports
PUBLISHER 2K Sports
WEBSITE 2ksports.com/games/nba2k9
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor (2.8GHz *Vista*), 512MB RAM (1GB *Vista*), and a 128MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 support.



The TV-style presentation is second to none.

TAKE A BOW, 2K Sports. Despite a number of console port-related issues (a lot of which are to do with the controls) you've managed to piss all over the combined efforts of at least three years-worth of NBA Live games on the PC. The fact EA have decided not to bother releasing a carbon-copy version of last year's game is the icing on the cake for 2K Sports, who arrive without any competition to plug the alley oop-shaped hole in the market.

NBA 2K9 is as close as it is currently possible to get to playing a real game of basketball without wearing oversized clown trainers and stretching yourself on a rack until you're 7ft tall. It looks gorgeous too when moving (screenshots don't do it justice at all) and the whole TV-style presentation is brilliantly done.

The in-game action feels physical, with powerful blocks sending players tumbling to the hardwood and glass-rattling dunks made special by their scarcity. If you don't play a proper game of basketball, you'll lose – it's as simple as that. *NBA 2K9* is all about working the basketball and manoeuvring the defence to create open shots, just like in a real game.

All in all, PC fans of the sport should thank their lucky stars 2K Sports have decided to finally bring the game over from consoles, although the port hasn't been carried out as well as we'd have liked. For example, when using a keyboard for control, buttons are still labelled as if they were on a controller, which is sloppy. But once you've learned what number corresponds to what key, you'll be fine, and it's worth persevering as 2K have slammed a 360 windmill dunk into the face of EA Sports with this game.

David Brown

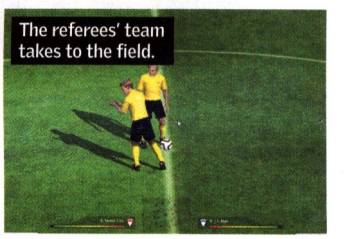
The Jazz take on the Heat in Miami.

FIFA MANAGER 09

My first football management game

DEVELOPER Bright Future
PUBLISHER EA Sports
WEBSITE fm09.de
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
2.6GHz processor (2.8GHz *Vista*), 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 128MB graphics card.


The referees' team takes to the field.

WHEN YOU'RE ASKED to create a family for your character, you know this isn't a football management game aimed at people who'll pore over transfer lists and scout reports.

FIFA Manager contains a number of things that *Football Manager* veterans will consider to be extremely gimmicky, such as merchandising and advertising, appointing lawyers and PR people, the aforementioned family and an in-game football quiz. You can even learn how to play golf so as to 'get on' better with your chairman.

On a positive note, the underlying database is fairly impressive in its depth and it's clear there's been a lot of love and attention paid to it. While it might not match *Football Manager*'s depth, it's certainly a challenger in this respect.

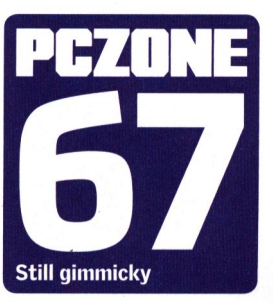
As for the matches themselves, there are some new textures, sounds and a new interface, while the tactics are also different. This time out you'll have a bunch of new settings to tweak, like attacking mentality, time wasting and crossing height/frequency.

The 3D highlights mode is present and as surprisingly dull as ever, failing to accurately represent what's going on behind the scenes, often leaving you ignorant as to why things happen.

Anyway, if you've played one of the *FIFA Manager* games before and came away satisfied, you'll love this one. But there's still nothing to tempt away *Football Manager* devotees – unless you like negotiating advertising deals. There are still too many gimmicks for this series to be taken seriously, some that aren't even accepted by those who prefer this to Sports Interactive's effort. We'd like to see Bright Future focus on improving the in-game engine, scale back the extraneous nonsense and provide a better core game experience.

David Brown

The interface is as colourful and cheery as ever.



STATE OF PLAY

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

Ymir's Pass – pushing DirectX9 just that little bit further.

"This? I got it in Primark."

THIS MONTH...

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

PUBLISHER Funcom **WEBSITE** ageofconan.com
PRICE £22.95 (download) then £10.34/month

DID YOU KNOW State of Play was introduced after we reviewed *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* and received some valid questions as to how one can give a fair and definitive verdict to a constantly evolving online game? We've come full circle now, as we find ourselves once again on the doorstep of Hyboria. Having kept one beady eye on *AOC* for these past seven months, we're ready to return to the MMO to see what's changed, and if it's become any better or worse than when we first reviewed it.

While it was hardly a catastrophic launch, *AOC* was shouted at in the street for feeling soulless upon release, and for lacking an endgame more substantial than one or two larger creatures than usual to smack around. Bar the occasional YouTube video involving a guy repeatedly kicking people off a bridge on his horse, there wasn't as much to do with the game as one hoped. Between cries of censorship, the firing of a GM over cybersex accusations, and the consolidation of the European and North American servers, *AOC* has had a rocky few months. Despite problems, it has kept chugging along happily under the direction of MMO developers Funcom.

There is promise within the hallowed and slightly misogynistic lands of *AOC* – though we can't accuse them of outdated ideas about women folk anymore: a 31 July patch declared that Funcom had now done "the majority of the process to completely equalise male and female damage." How's that for progress? Things aren't, as you'd imagine, perfect. A great deal of the updates for *AOC* so far have been to constantly tweak and balance a slightly chaotic system, and retroactively fix a great deal of bugs that plagued the game from launch. This makes *AOC*, in its current state (and for several months now) a stable and playable experience, but slightly chaotic in the ever-changing realms of balance.

The largest addition to the game by far, though, is the addition of the PvP

Allons-y!

Well, you'd look surprised if you got stabbed.

Introducing Gregory, god of HDR lighting.

levelling system – every time you eviscerate your fellow man, you'll gain a bounty of experience. There are 10 PvP levels, and it's nice to see that one of the original release promises was made good on. Players aren't limited to gaining levels – they can level up and purchase PvP gear, such as armour, accessories and weapons. These change as you gain PvP levels, but also coincide with your "real" level – as in the one you gain from your common or garden quests.

Funcom have also managed to balance the ganking aspect of PvP. If you repeatedly kill the same player, you'll get less XP with each bash, which holds off your average player-hater. A much more necessary and useful system – one that I believe *World of Warcraft* should adopt – is the PvP consequence system. Players who decide to prey on those that are seven or more levels below them accrue Murder Points. Get enough of these, and you get marked as a scumbag and will find yourself barred from major cities. The only way to redeem yourself is to attend outlaw camps (the gankers' equivalent of Alcoholics Anonymous) and take part in quests clear your muddied reputation.

This has been mostly well-received, with a fair amount of noise from those who enjoyed romping around the lands taking out their daily frustrations on their lesser kin. The outlaw camps – and the resultant lore – are a great addition, especially considering as games forget to actually include PvP in their storyline.

Sadly, *AOC* still sits in a problematic flux, and while I would have loved to sit down and tell you all that the points raised in our review are now obsolete, and that Funcom have endlessly improved their game, it just doesn't seem that way. While some criticisms have been dealt with (the lack of content has been addressed with the addition of Ymir's Pass, which still only caters to the 50+ crowd) I can't in fairness say that the core problems with the game aren't present. It lacks a great deal of personality, and needs more work to really make it competitive. This is especially noticeable when Funcom are adding a PvP system that only gives *WOW* the slightest of bother – and, let's be honest here, *Warhammer Online* is far more intricate in that respect, with 70 more levels.

This isn't to say the future is dark for *AOC*. Craig Morrison, the game's new producer, has proven to be transparent and verbose with the community, which is exactly what the game needs. Whether or not *AOC* improves is totally up to Funcom – it just needs a great deal of work, and the competition is only getting stiffer as the months roll on.

"*Age of Conan* gives the feeling that it's revolutionary. But once you pass the infant stages of the game, play becomes all too familiar, all too repetitive and all too unpolished"
73% – PC ZONE #196, August 2008

VERDICT

Despite Funcom's improvements *Age of Conan* still lacks the killer instinct that'll make it competitive with *WOW* and *WAR*. A splendid alternative, but still not one we can immediately recommend.

Ed Zitron

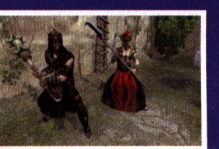
THE STORY SO FAR... AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

JUNE FIGHT CLUB
A huge PvP update fixes a multitude of bugs and succeeds in balancing an initially iffy mano a mano experience.

AUGUST
SUCK MY DISC DRIVE
A Funcom GM has cybersex with a player pretending to be a woman, is blackmailed for gold, and later fired.

SEPTEMBER
LET'S STICK TOGETHER
The *AOC* servers are consolidated to make sure players have enough of one other to kill.

SEPTEMBER
GONE, DAGER, GONE
Producer Gaute Godager leaves Funcom after 16 years, citing feeling "unsatisfied" with some elements of *AOC*.



SEPTEMBER KILLZONE
The PvP experience system is added to *AOC*. Players are allowed to grind through 10 PvP levels, and buy exclusive armour sets.

OCTOBER CONSEQUENCE IS A PREFERENCE
The PvP consequence system goes live, bringing a quick end to the ganking of lower-level players.

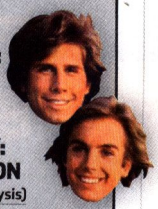
NOVEMBER YMIR PASSES
Ymir's Pass, a huge additional area, is added to the game for free. It gives level 50 and higher places even more varied places to fight and die.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZONE Top 5 GAMES THAT SHOULD NEVER BE

1. **THE HARDY BOYS GAME** (You know the one)
2. **GUITAR HERO: THE BEATLES** (Is nothing sacred?)
3. **CALL OF DUTY: ALIEN INVASION** (aka the final act of Crysis)
4. **THE SIMS 3 CONTENT PACKS** (We've had enough already)
5. **HELLGATE: LONDON 2** (Let it rest in peace)

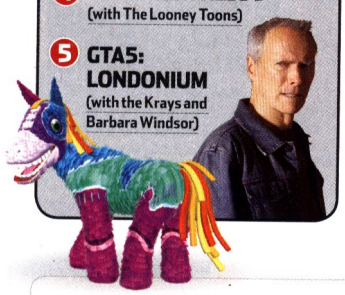


PCZONE Top 5 MAD DOCTORS

1. **YOU** (Evil Genius)
2. **ISAAC KLEINER** (Half-Life 2)
3. **BRIDGETTE TENENBAUM** (BioShock)
4. **GREGOR ZELINSKY** (Red Alert 3)
5. **GORDON FREEMAN** (He must have post-traumatic stress disorder by now)

PCZONE Top 5 CELEBRITY SEQUELS WE WANT TO PLAY

1. **BIOSHOCK 2** (with Adam and Joe)
2. **VIVA PIÑATA 2** (with Clint Eastwood)
3. **SPORE 2** (with Richard Dawkins)
4. **TEAM FORTRESS 3** (with The Looney Toons)
5. **GTA5: LONDONIUM** (with the Krays and Barbara Windsor)



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.

LEFT 4 DEAD NEW ENTRY!
PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%
The only thing the PCZ staff enjoys more than shooting zombies is shooting zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* has – endless killing of mindlessly murderous plague victims, while you chortle and scream with your buddies.

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.

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

FAR CRY 2
PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.

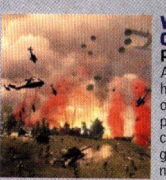
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
PCZ Issue: 188 – 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.

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.

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.



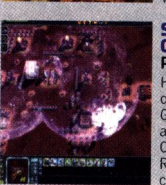
WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%
A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.

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.

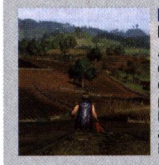
BUDGET
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.

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.



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

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

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

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

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

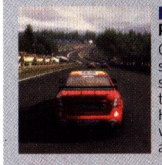
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 – 84%
If *X³* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.

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

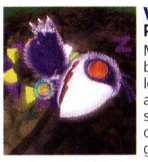
Must buy!

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.

WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, *World of Goo* is simply irresistible.

PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.

GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The god game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.

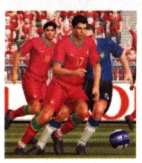


VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 – 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddy-looking graphics – it's a keeper.

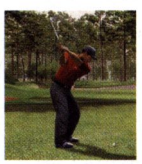
Sport

NEW ENTRY!

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 – 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. This time a 3D match engine and dealing with PRs and the media are new to this addictive football manager sim.



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

January

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	ROCKSTAR
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER	EA
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: STORM OF ZEHIR	ATARI
PRINCE OF PERSIA	UBISOFT

February

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR	SEGA
F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN	WARNER BROS
STREET FIGHTER IV	CAPCOM

2009

ARMED ASSAULT II	505 GAMES
COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR	THQ
MIRROR'S EDGE	EA
SAINTS ROW 2	THQ
VELVET ASSASSIN	GAMECOCK
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II	THQ
WHITE GOLD	DEEP SHADOWS

TBC

ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA
BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM	WARNER BROS
CHAMPIONS ONLINE	2K GAMES
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE
DEUS EX 3	EIDOS
DIABLO III	BLIZZARD
MAFIA II	2K GAMES
METRO 2033	THQ
STARCRAFT II (three of them)	BLIZZARD
STAR TREK ONLINE	TBA
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	EA / LUCASARTS

PC GAMER®

STARCRAFT, DIABLO 3 WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Why Blizzard rule 2009 – and beyond

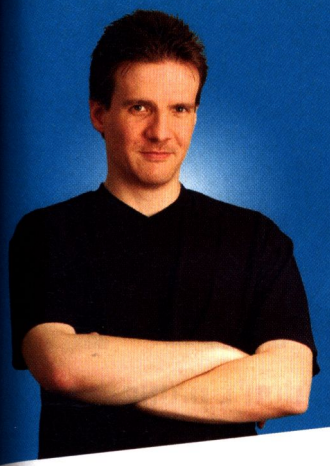
AWARDS ISSUE!
PC GAMER'S GAME OF THE YEAR

THE BEST REVIEWS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING
PRINCE OF PERSIA
LOTRO: MINES OF MORIA
LEGENDARY
AND MORE...

PLUS 2009'S BEST GAMES

DAWN OF WAR 2 › ID'S INCREDIBLE RESURGENCE › **DRAGON AGE** › SIMS 3 › **FLASHPOINT 2 VS ARMA 2** › CHAMPIONS ONLINE › **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR** › STAR TREK ONLINE › **THE RISE OF INDIE GAMING** › MORE

NEW ISSUE ON SALE NOW



PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

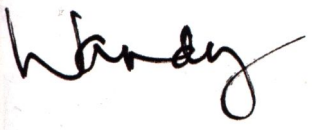
Net shopping

BUYING HARDWARE ONLINE has never been straightforward process, particularly if you're not certain of what you need. Often I have people write to me asking for tips on a particular combination of processor, motherboard, RAM and video card, and it pains me to say that perhaps 10% of the correspondence shows a basic lack of understanding on what they've put in their shopping basket.

For example, choosing a recent Socket B motherboard and pairing it with a Socket T Core 2 processor, or the classic mistake of buying a wireless router for their broadband connection, only to discover the device doesn't have a broadband modem. And I've lost count of people trying to cram old memory onto a new platform and being taken aback at how the little notches don't line up.

Aside from technology steaming ever onwards, leaving owners of older products bobbing about in its wake, manufacturers are still making it hard for the unwary to fit the right products together, and thanks to some stiff legislation (most notably the Sale of Goods Act and Distance Selling Regulations) they end up paying for the consumer's mistake.

If you're shopping online, don't be shy, and ask questions on a tech-related forum. Email a friend who might know. Email me. Do anything except buy the wrong stuff. And any time you slip, don't be harsh on yourself. We've all made that mistake at least once.



Phil Wand, hardware editor

FLASHER DRIVES

Samsung accelerates production of 256GB SSD drive

THEY'RE HORRIBLY EXPENSIVE, but they're here. Samsung has begun the mass manufacture of solid state drives (SSDs) for use in notebooks and desktop PCs. The lid on mechanical storage mediums is about to be nailed shut.

A price of unknown immensity means that most people will stick with hard drives – early prototypes of which were first seen in the '50s – but Samsung's commitment to the production of SSDs means the price won't stay high for long. Consider how flatpanel screens have improved, and how their cost is now but a fraction of what it was, and it's easy to see what we'll all be buying just a few years from now.

Samsung claim that their new 256GB drive doubles the performance of earlier 64GB and 128GB SSDs, making it the best performer in the entire industry. Impressive sequential read rates of 220MB/sec and write rates of 200MB/sec mean that the Korean giant is bullish in its description of their new high-speed drive, calling its performance "disruptive".

You're looking at your next biggest performance gain.

Certainly, the addition of such a fast medium to your desktop PC will mean a potential jump in performance when using *XP* or *Vista* and games that could load up to 10 times faster than before. Fancy playing *Left 4 Dead* five seconds from now? See you in the lobby.

samsungssd.com

SERIAL MUSIC

New USB specification is 10x faster

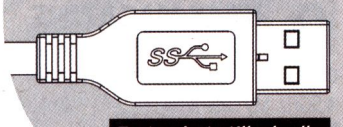
The USB 3.0 Promoter Group has now wrapped up its specification for the successor to USB 2.0.

The new standard, going by the corny moniker of SuperSpeed, or SS USB, should be adopted by manufacturers by the second half of next year and available in consumer products by 2010.

SS USB will be backwardly compatible with everything you own today, and the plastic slug inside USB connectors will be coloured blue to enable users to distinguish it from slower 2.0 and 1.1 ports.

What everyone's excited about is the fact that SuperSpeed will provide a 5Gb/sec transfer rate, a significantly bigger number than the 480Mb/sec offered by USB 2.0 connections.

usb.org



Faster, but still a badly designed connector.

News round-up

The ASUS Eee Top has appeared in the UK. The machine is marketed as an all-in-one touch screen computer that runs *Windows XP Home* and is powered by a 1.6GHz Intel Atom processor. The Eee Top is available online for around £430.

asus.com

Thinking of buying a Blu-ray player for your PC, or perhaps for your lounge? Manufacturers are likely to slash prices of both the hardware and movies to stoke demand, and the Chancellor's VAT drop will make things look even tastier. My advice? Wait for the January sales. You've coped without high-definition movies all your life, so a few weeks isn't long to wait.

sonypictures.com/bluray

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

SUPERWORKSTATION: The highly sought-after desk in the corner of the office with the monitor that faces the wall. **HIS RADEON:** "Best not to disturb Geoff, he's getting his Radeon." "What, in the kitchen? But I just cleaned it this morning." **SOCKET B:** A species of flying insect of the order Hymenoptera, a Socket B may fly out and sting you when you try to turn on your Glade Plug-in. **DISTANCE SELLING REGULATIONS:** Laws successfully introduced in 1889 to reduce the width of shop counters, and the number of incidents of in-store shouting. **SOCKET T:** A type of hot beverage usually served with milk and sugar, Socket T is secreted by most electrical outlets around your home. Just put your lips on one and suck.

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 SUPER WANDY

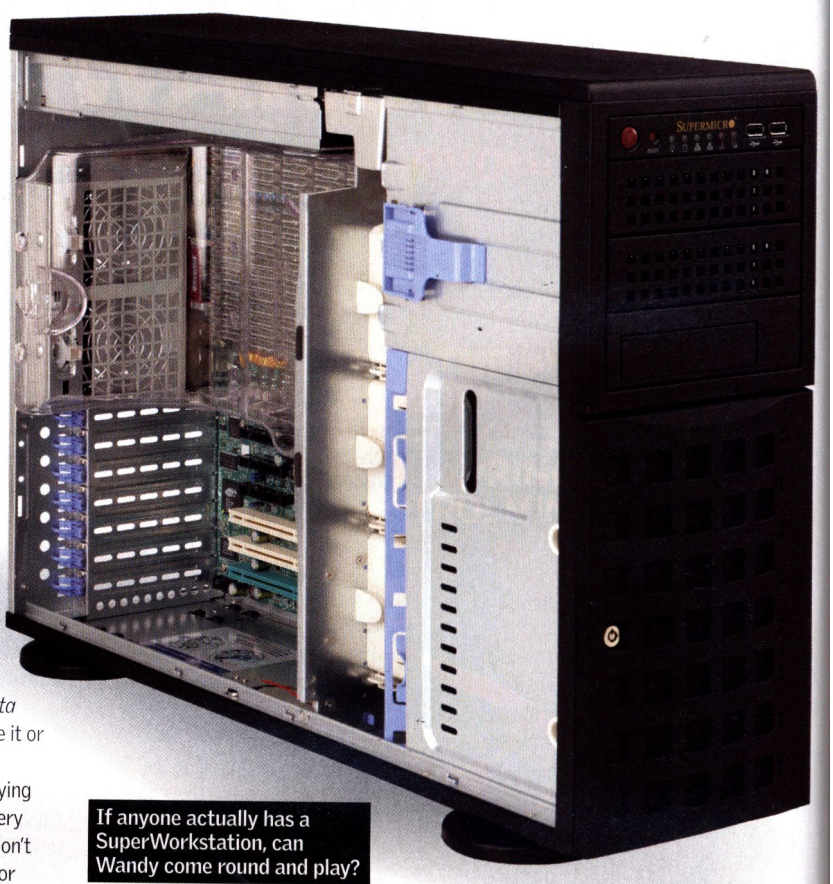
I have a Dell XPS 600 – standard aside from dual 7800 GTXs – and it still runs very well, even though it's over three years old now. I've been considering a new machine and was therefore interested in your "dream system" outlined in answer to Glen Richmond's question.

Unfortunately, you didn't say whether or not this machine can be bought "as one" or needs to be constructed kit fashion from the component parts. If the former can you recommend a stockist, one that will deliver to Belgrade?

I still use *XP* too but in the move lost the original discs. Is it possible to insist on the older OS or do they just bung *Vista* on and expect the end-user to like it or lump it?

Finally, although I've been playing PC games for 25 years, I'm not very hardware/software literate so I don't want any hassle installing things or getting out my screwdriver – which is, in any case, a bit bent and seems to be covered in jam. I'm not even connected to the internet, this being my girlfriend's Mickey Mouse laptop.

Peter Carlson

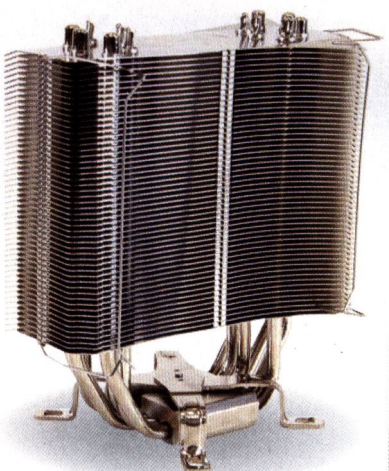


If anyone actually has a SuperWorkstation, can Wandy come round and play?

A *You can buy a very close approximation to my dream PC in the form of the SuperWorkstation 5035B-TB. However, anyone thinking about building their very own wonder PC using Supermicro components should be aware that it's a high-end brand and that you will rack up a high-end bill very quickly. For example, the 5035B-TB (above) is £600, and that's just a case and motherboard!*

Be aware that Supermicro eschew all tweaking features in favour of old-fashioned engineering – I don't know of a single board where the BIOS allows you to do much beyond set the date and time – but for me that's half the appeal. They're rock steady, made like nothing else on the planet, and will last years. If you buy KitchenAid in preference to Kenwood, or Bowers & Wilkins rather than Bose, you'll understand.

UK gamers who aren't DIY fans will need to speak with high-end system builders such as Boston (www.boston.co.uk) to complete the rest. You can ask for it to be supplied 'blank' so you can put your existing OS on your new PC. As for Belgrade residents, Asbis (www.asbis.com) is the distributor for Serbia.



The Thermalright Ultra 120 eXtreme is reckoned to be the ultimate processor cooler.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.10	15 OCT 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 178.24	15 OCT 08

SOUND

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

Q HEAT MAGAZINE

I'm getting a QX9770 3.2GHz CPU. I intend overclocking this to 4.5GHz. My case is an A+ Case Twin Engine/XCLIO A380. I wanted to know what you think the best cooling system is for my processor.

Sam Horner

A *Go for the Thermalright Ultra 120 eXtreme or Noctua NH-U12P ("TRUE" to its friends). But, I doubt you're going to smash the 4GHz barrier by much if all you're doing is blowing air over the top of your QX9770, you're going to need water to do that.*

Q CORE BLIMEY

I'm about to self build and after trawling round all the forums in the world and getting conflicting advice from everyone, I'm thoroughly confused. I've decided to turn to a professional who knows what they're talking about. Is this set up any good? I have a budget of about £500. I already have case, hard drive and so on: ASUS P5Q Pro, Core 2 Duo E8400, Radeon HD 4850 or 9800GTX+, Arctic Power 700W PSU,

"Supermicro eschew all tweaking features in favour of old-fashioned engineering... for me that's the appeal"

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

Core i7 CPUs look set to antique the Core 2 series.

4GB Corsair XMX2 RAM and *Vista x64*. Also, is this system's motherboard and CPU good enough to last a long time with only graphic card upgrades?

Rob Smith

A *I'm not sure what you mean by "last a long time", but any £500 PC you build now should keep you entertained for at least two years, as long as you don't expect to play games released in 2010 on full detail. By then Intel's Core i7 should be the de facto standard for processors, and developers will – as they do now – expect every beleaguered gamer to have one.*

What you've chosen is a perfectly good system, but I'd still be inclined to keep your money in the bank and wait for January next year. At that time we'll see many more affordable i7 processors and i7 motherboards – it's a rung up from what you're buying now, and as a platform will give you a wider grin. Remember that Core i7 CPUs use an entirely different socket design and it won't slot into an existing Core 2 motherboard, hence my suggestion to wait.

Q UPGRADE: THE RETURN

You may, or may not, recall that I contacted you a few months ago in relation to the upgrade of my rig. I took some of your advice on board and I'm now the owner of a Q6600, 2.5GB Corsair RAM and dual XFX 8800GTs.

Since upgrading from my previous system, I'm struggling with graphics in certain games such as *Crysis Warhead* and sometimes suffer from a slowdown. Is there any reason as to why my system will run slow? Is it worth adding more memory, or possible a bigger/faster hard drive? What's the limit of RAM I can use with *XP*? Do you think my system could benefit from returning to running *Vista*?

Any tips or speeding things up generally would be greatly appreciated, as after spending £500 upgrading my PC it doesn't seem a great deal faster than my previous rig, although the graphics are.

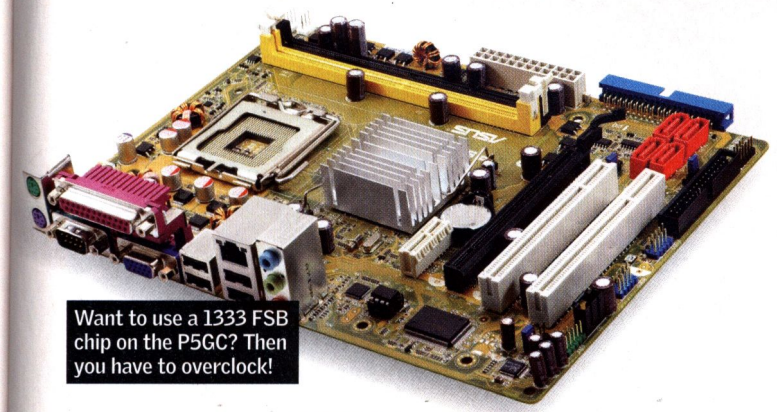
Adrian Dewsbury

A *You didn't explain whether you bought the system complete and what your motherboard is. People buy in components for a little DIY, they can easily forget the small but important things – I've known people to leave out heat compound, and have witnessed CPU coolers where the connector wire ran through the blades, stopping them spinning. A modern board should alert you to a zero-RPM fan, but anything's possible.*

Heave off the lid and remove the heat sink fan from the processor. Wipe away the heat compound and reseat it with fresh stuff. Double and triple check that the fan is pushed home so that there's no movement whatsoever, and make sure it spins freely.

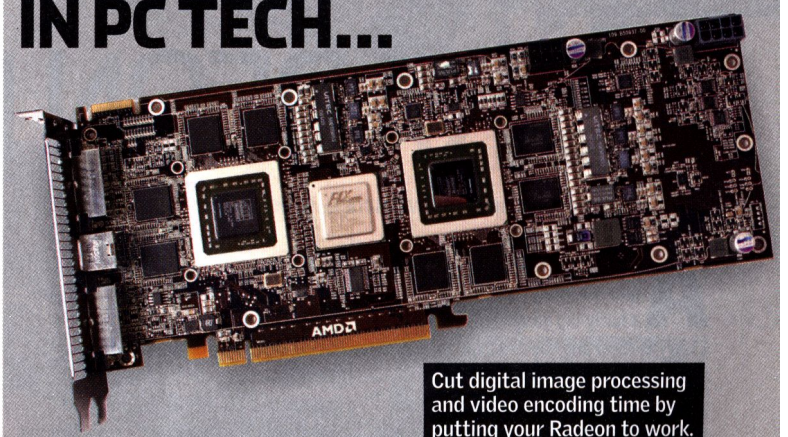
I would also check that your motherboard supports your processor. Older platforms will return the CPU name string – for example, "Intel® Core™2 CPU 4400 @ 2.00GHz" – but if the BIOS doesn't understand the chip's inner workings, you'll end up running at the wrong speed. I mentioned a month or so back that boards such as the ASUS P5GC need you to set the correct bus speeds manually, as mad as that sounds.

You could happily put 4GB in your XP *system and change your hard drive for a much faster one, but I doubt these will have any effect. Upgrading to* Vista *is an option here, because what you have isn't working as it should. Reformatting and installing from scratch is the most effective – if rather unedifying – way of solving your PC problems.* PCZ



Want to use a 1333 FSB chip on the P5GC? Then you have to overclock!

ELEMETARY LESSONS IN PC TECH...



Cut digital image processing and video encoding time by putting your Radeon to work.

09 ATI STREAM

Your central processing unit (CPU) is your computer's engine room. What you may not know is that your graphics card has a graphical processing unit (GPU) that performs broadly similar tasks.

When you consider that the RV770 chip in a Radeon HD 4870 has more than 900 million transistors on it, compared to roughly 700 million in the new Core i7, you should get an idea for just how much technology lies dormant when you're not playing games. For years, developers have been trying to figure out a way of getting the GPU to get stuck in alongside the CPU.

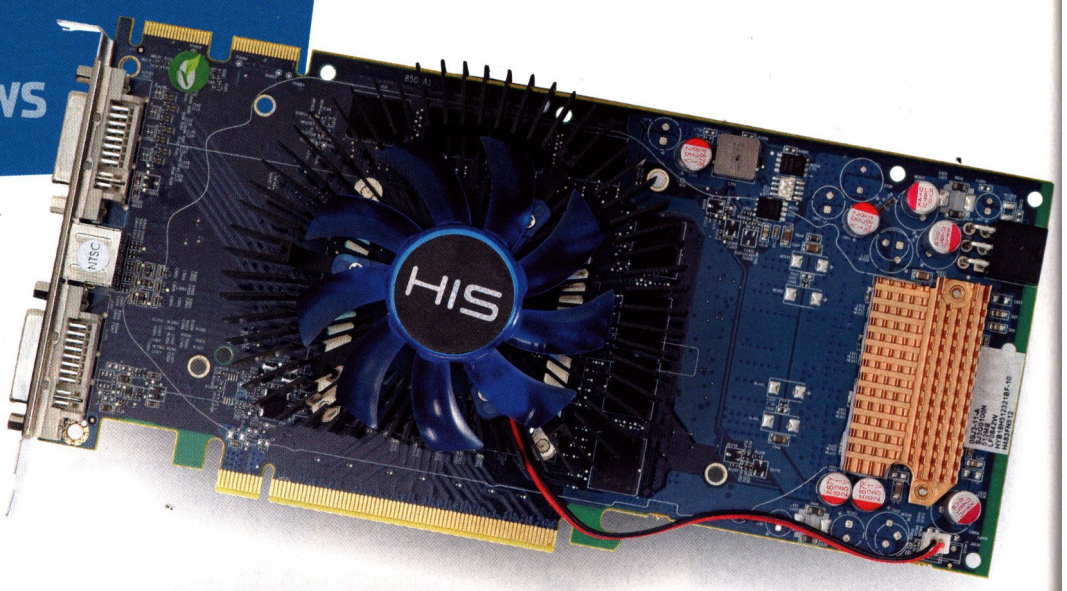
From December 2008, ATI drivers will unlock general purpose computing on graphics processing units (GPGPU), with owners of Radeon HD 4000 series cards getting acceleration of other *Windows* applications, not just games. Known as 'Stream', the GPGPU enabling technology will be available for free in the 8.12 Catalyst driver update.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(Arnie) I am going to buy a new PC soon but I need to know what CPU to get because of the Core i7 coming out. Do I got for the Core 2 Quad Q9650 @ 3GHz or the Intel® Core i7 940 @ 2.93GHz 8MB cache LGA1366? (Wandy) Games like *Left 4 Dead* should use multi-threading on multicore chips to make them smoother, but my tests shows that the opposite can be true: often you need to switch off threaded rendering in the console else your FPS bounces about. Valve say it's caused by the *L4D* engine conflicting with other threads from e.g. video drivers – but I'm not yet convinced. Bottom line, multi-core is where it's at, but we're taking a little time getting there.

HOW WE TESTED

We're not looking for the fastest card, but one that gives the best frames-per-second-per-quid, at a decent resolution. Benchmarking was done using *3DMark Vantage*, *Crysis*, *World in Conflict* and *Fallout 3*. Scores printed were all taken at high detail settings at 1680 x 1050, except for *Fallout 3*, which was at 2560 x 1600. We also checked their noise levels and ease of installation.



HIS RADEON HD4830

PRICE £102 **MANUFACTURER** HIS **WEBSITE** hisdigital.com

ALL THE PRICE cutting that's gone on lately has left AMD with a fairly big gap between the £120 HD4850 and the cheaper – and worse performing – HD4600.

Pre-VAT cut, the brand-new HD4830 was just over the £100 mark in most places – a good price for a card that differs from the HD4850 only in a couple of minor details. It has the same amount of memory on board and a near identical GPU: two banks of shader processors have been switched off to reduce the total count to 640 compared to the 800 on the more expensive card. In addition, clock speeds have been reduced and this HIS version comes with a less elegant, bulkier fan, compared to the sleek packaging of the HD4850. The good news is that the important stuff – like the render units or video processing engine – haven't been changed at all

A quick bit of maths says if you get a HD4850 you pay 20% more for a card that has (roughly) 25% extra processing power, but our tests don't bear that out. The performance penalty for paying less isn't huge, and the fact that this card runs cooler means the potential for overclocking to make up the difference is much greater. It struggles with high detail settings and anti-aliasing, compared to the HD4850, but it keeps pace with the GeForce 9800GT. The two are very evenly matched: the GeForce has the edge without anti-aliasing turned on, and the Radeon with.

SPECIFICATION

Memory: 512MB
Core: RV770LE
Core speed: 575MHz
Memory speed: 900MHz

PCZONE 88
Right for an upgrade

GIGABYTE GTX260 OC

PRICE £220 **MANUFACTURER** Gigabyte
WEBSITE www.gigabyte.com.tw

NORMALLY CONTENT WITH just changing a letter or two to indicate the ranking of a new card compared to its closest stable mate, NVIDIA has taken a different tack here. The full name of the revised GTX260 is the NVIDIA GTX260 core 216. The problem is that the naming convention isn't being picked up by board vendors.

But the difference is there. The older GTX260 had just 192 active shader processors on its GT200 core, while the high-end GTX280 has the full 240.

With just one block of processing units unavailable, this is as close as you can get to having one of NVIDIA's fastest cards without going the whole hog. That's reflected in the benchmarks, where the difference between this and the GTX280 (which is £100 more) is negligible. And, with no real price premium over the original GTX260, the only question would seem to be how do you make sure you buy the right one. That's tougher than you'd expect: the only way we knew for sure with this Gigabyte sample was to examine the graphics BIOS. There's no other indication we had the real thing.

Compared to the HD4870 it's not a definitive killer – it has the edge over other cards of similar price, but not enough to make a huge difference in games. The real clincher is that it's much quieter and more power efficient than AMD's top-end single chip cards, making it just about worth the extra cash.

SPECIFICATION

Memory: 896MB
Core: GT200
Core speed: 576MHz
Memory speed: 999MHz

PCZONE 87
Fast card, clumsily named

NVIDIA GEFORCE 8800GT SLI

PRICE £120 **MANUFACTURER** NVIDIA **WEBSITE** nvidia.com

SPECIFICATION
Memory: 1GB
Core: G92
Core speed: 600MHz
Memory speed: 900MHz

FOR A YEAR or so the only graphics card worth buying was the GeForce 8800 GT. So if you own one, here's a simple way to upgrade: buy another.

Normally we'd try to avoid dual-card setups since they don't really deliver more bang for your buck (and can cause driver issues) but for rejuvenating an old card with a low-price upgrade that gives you better performance than a GeForce 260 core 216 is a no-brainer. Just avoid the cut-down 256MB models at knock-down prices.

PCZONE 85

PNY GEFORCE 9800GT

PRICE £102 **MANUFACTURER** PNY **WEBSITE** pny-europe.com

SPECIFICATION
Memory: 512MB
Core: G92
Core speed: 600MHz
Memory speed: 900MHz

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between a GeForce 9800GT and a GeForce 8800GT? Answer: nothing at all.

You can do three-way SLI with the 9800 series, but that's about it. The only physical change is that some 9800GTs are produced on a slightly smaller manufacturing process.

All the power of a 512MB 8800GT for £102 is a good thing, and it only loses out to the HD4830 with anti-aliasing turned on. But you can't run it in SLI with the older GeForce range, despite the similarities.

PCZONE 86

ASUS EAH4870

PRICE £199 **MANUFACTURER** ASUS **WEBSITE** uk.asus.com

SPECIFICATION
Memory: 512MB
Core: RV770 XT
Core speed: 750MHz
Memory speed: 900MHz

DESPITE HAVING THE bells and whistles of DirectX 10.1, the HD4870 is in an awkward place compared to the GeForce GTX260. It's not got the pace to keep up with the new revision of NVIDIA's card, and doesn't offer the value as the HD4850 below it. Plus, it's big, hot and power hungry.

Don't write it off though – prices are starting to fall rapidly and we wouldn't be surprised if you can find it for £170 by the New Year. That will answer the price question, and there are even quicker 1GB versions of this card out there which can compete with the GTX260 for performance, but these will cost a bit more.

PCZONE 84

BENCHMARK RESULTS

	World in Conflict	Crysis	Fallout 3	Score
HIS Radeon HD4830	37	26.37	35	88%
Gigabyte GTX260 OC	52	42.73	55	87%
NVIDIA GeForce 8800GT SLI	55	46.52	57	85%
PNY GeForce 9800GT	36	27.4	42	86%
ASUS EAH4870	47	41.31	55	84%

REMEMBER:
A PC THAT'S A DUST MITE HAVEN IS A FIRE RISK

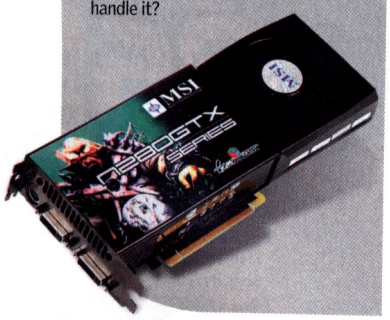
Take the time to empty out the piles of flammable shedded human skin that build up inside your PC. Ignitable material and a great deal of heat are a bad combination. So if your PC is furry enough to stroke, clean it out. Or keep a fire extinguisher handy.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

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

LOADED?

GRAPHICS
N280GTX
PRICE £420
MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk
Fast graphics don't come cheap and NVIDIA's 200-series flagship is reassuringly expensive. There are four power modes on offer, PhysX support, and a batting average better than any other. Plus, there's 1GB DDR3 and many other enhancements that deliver performance around 1.5x faster than any predecessor. Can your credit card handle it?



PROCESSOR

CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775
PRICE £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel
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 within two years. If you've got the money, go crazy and give your PC a hot rod CPU.

MOTHERBOARD

D975XBX2
PRICE £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
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
PRICE £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 spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN

SM226BW
PRICE £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung
WEBSITE samsung.com/uk
The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast (it has a grey-to-grey refresh rate of just 2ms) and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs just a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

SOUNDCARD

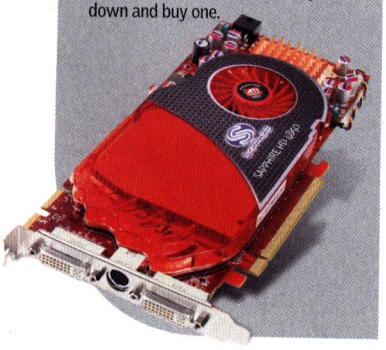
SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS
PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

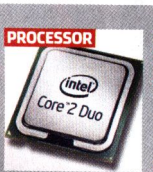
SPEAKERS

Z-5500
PRICE £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk
The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

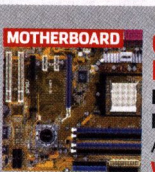
SKINT?

GRAPHICS
HD4850
PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com
This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR


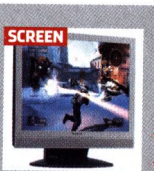
CORE 2 DUO E2180
PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk
At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD


CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2
PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com
Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD

CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II
PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE wdc.com
A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN


VA903M
PRICE £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE viewsoniceurope.com/uk
The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUNDCARD

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE
PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS

X-530
PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk
Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

PCZONE FREEPLAY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

For the man who has nothing

Breaking legs

I'M INTO MY second month here and so I can't ramble on about how I'm new or how I'm being clubbed into a bloody pulp by various other staff members. I actually have to talk about games and things related to them. Because of this, I'm going to spend most of my column talking about the most recent work of a Dr Bennett Foddy.

We've featured his stuff before, of course – *Too Many Ninjas* and *Little Master Cricket* – but this month we have been attempting to run 100m in *QWOP*. This is one of the hardest web games we've played, one that would usually cost us our sanity and our keyboards. So hard was it that we spent the first 30 minutes struggling to beat a record of 4m, achieved in a miraculous forward dive that would have suited an Olympic pool.

Despite the ridiculous difficulty and the teeth-gnashing frustration of actually getting the runner to move more than a centimetre without tumbling to the floor, fantastic fun was had by all. Take our advice and stick the sound on too – the crunching of bone and the screams of agony, enhanced by the *Chariots of Fire* song playing in the background, makes the experience border on the hilarious. If we ever did get bored, a click on the back button would allow us access to Dr Foddy's other classics, before our attention would inevitably turn back to Mr QWOP's running adventures.

So, while you people have been blowing all your money on *Left 4 Dead*, *Fallout 3*, *Football Manager 09* and other big name titles, we've been ensconced in our offices, trying to make a rubber-legged man move like a human being. That's why PC gaming is great, folks.

David Brown, staff writer

VIRTUAL SKIPPER 5

Sail the seven seas for free

WEBSITE virtualskipper-game.com/vsk5

COULD IT BE that a developer has decided to be nice to the gaming public? Surely not! But, unless our eyes have deceived us, we can all now download *Virtual Skipper 5* for free. Yes, for bupkis, nada, zilch. You might have already guessed this, being that this is the first page of the Freeplay section, but it still needed to be said.

Anyway, Nadeo have managed to pretty much capture the market with its "ultimate regatta simulation" (their words). The series has also received the *PC ZONE* seal of approval, with *Virtual Skipper 3* getting a whopping 81% in issue 138.

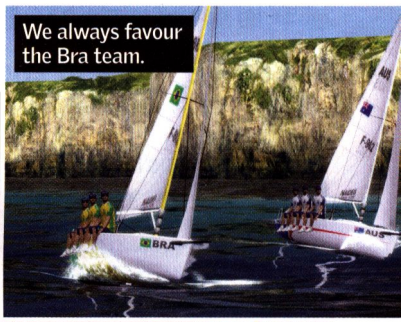
But what are you actually getting for your bandwidth then? The game does pretty well at catering for both the sailing nutters and those who don't know the difference between a poop deck and an Azimuth compass. There's an arcade mode for the landlubbers among you, with Tactical and Simulation options for the veteran seafarers.

There are four types of ships to sail on, including the Trimaran Open 60, the Offshore Racer and the Melges 24. Sadly, there isn't an option to control Knightboat, but that would perhaps have been asking a bit too much.

As with land-based racing titles, *VS5* has a veritable raft of water courses to navigate your way around. There's Valencia, Marseille, San Francisco, Sydney, and Qingdao among others. Nadeo are also excited about how people will react to one of the more exotic courses: the mouth of Vesuvius.

Those with a need to tweak will be pleased with the return of the editing suites, which allow you to change cameras, text, graphics and the seascapes. Once you get fed up of whipping the AI, you can take your sailing skills onto the internet, competing against humans and for a prime position on the online world-ranking leaderboard.

"We are sailing..."


We always favour the Bra team.

The sea never looked prettier.

Remember: don't call them 'boats'.

Demos

***David Brown* guides you through your free DVD**

MULTIWINIA

PC ZONE – it's in the game

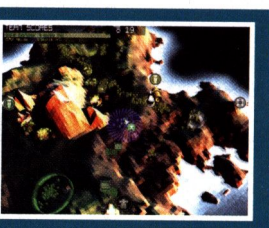
WEBSITE introversion.co.uk/multiwinia

MOST OF US here at Zone Towers love a bit of *Multiwinia*, so much so that Introversion was made aware of our devotion to its game. The kind chaps there were so pleased they showed their appreciation by creating a big old *PC ZONE* logo and plonking it into an exclusive demo just for us.

If you haven't yet experienced this game's retro stylings, what better place to start than right here? Your task is to guide your flat combatants to victory over the AI opponents, using superweapons and a smidgeon of tactical thought to defeat them. Use officer units to marshal your troops into formations, which should help to make your army more efficient at killing.

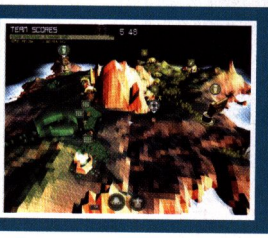
In the demo, you'll be able to play both single and multiplayer games on the King of the Hill, Capture the Statue and Rocket Riot modes, across five maps. The first two are self-explanatory, while Rocket Riot tasks you with filling a ship with Multiwinians and protecting it until it blasts off into space. There's also a comprehensive and straightforward tutorial to ease you gently into things, which you'll probably need to make good use of if you want to actually get anywhere in the game.

STATUE THEFT
To capture your very own *PCZ* logo, start a Capture the Statue game, where one of our glorious icons will drop at some point, ready to be swept up by your glorious Multiwinians.



ENEMY TERRITORY
Unfortunately, your enemies will be out to get the statues as well. You must stop them – the fate of all nations and our very magazine rests on your feeble shoulders, soldier!

"OWN YOUR OWN ZONE..."



FORMATION DANCING
That's much better: use organised lines of battle and a solid front to stem the enemy's advance, so you can grind them to dust under the 2D feet of your troops.

NO EASY ACTION
It'll take more than a handful of men to stop the yellow tide. You'll need to get your army organised if you want to avoid being swamped. Perhaps an officer might be able to help?

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.

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Ransacking temples in the Far East

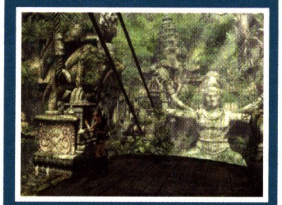
WEBSITE tombraider.com

THE THAILAND SECTION of *Tomb Raider: Underworld* is one of the most visually impressive in the game, with lush jungle vistas, crystal-clear water and beautifully detailed ancient ruins to wander around in.

There are also some tigers to kill, while some sharks are waiting if you fall into the drink. Luckily for you, the Thailand stage is also one of the most fun parts to play, with few frustrating parts to get in the way of the action. As demos go, you certainly get a fair slice of the game to muck about in too, so if you enjoy this bit, you'll almost certainly like the rest of *Tomb Raider: Underworld*.

SITES TO SEE

REMAINS
Your first task is to climb and jump your way to some ancient ruins. A typical day for Lara.



BHOGAVATI
You then have to manipulate a statue to open a passage underneath it.

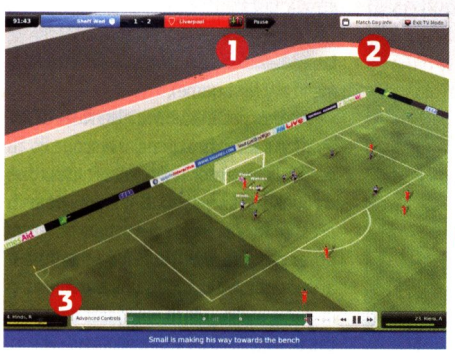
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

Sporting spreadsheets just got sexier

WEBSITE footballmanager.net

THIS YEAR'S ITERATION of everybody's favourite blob simulator comes with one important and obvious difference: no blobs! They aren't gone completely, you can switch to a traditional 2D view if you want, but most players will want to see how the newfangled 3D mode looks in action.

This demo isn't going to bust up your graphics card, but it does make the game feel that much more realistic, even if there are a few little niggles for Sports Interactive to iron out. This demo gives you six months to play through, plus you can carry your saved game over into the full version later.



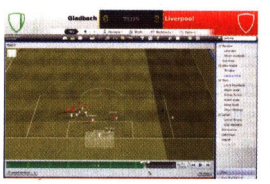
1 Tactics
Next to your team's name is the substitutions button, which takes you straight to the tactics screen.

2 Widgets
The match day info button allows you to view important stats within the TV mode.

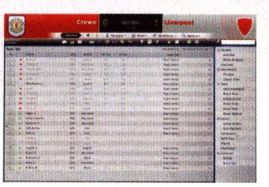
3 Camera
The advanced controls button gives you the option to change the camera view, the match speed and so on.

CHANGES

The old and the new



ENGINE
The new 3D match engine gives you a more accurate view of player movement and of shot position.

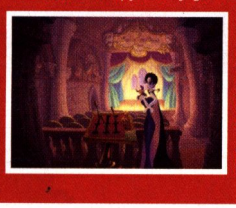


SPREADSHEET
Additions to the main game include press conferences, lady managers and improved reserve team allocations.

HOT DOWNLOADS PCZONE

A VAMPYRE STORY

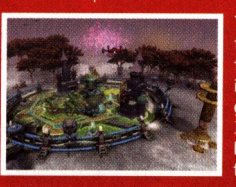
WEBSITE vampyrestory-game.com



Take a bite out of this point-and-clicker that'll make older gamers sink into their armchairs and dream of times past when men snubbed action in favour of puzzles involving chickens.

SPORE 1.03 PATCH

WEBSITE spore.com



This patch will help those who still enjoy fiddling with creatures in *Spore*, do so in a near glitch-free environment. It also gives you 24 new limbs to glue onto your twisted creations.

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.

PENNY ARCADE: EPISODE 2

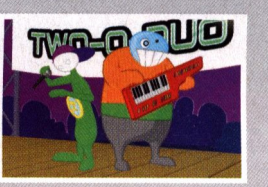
WEBSITE penny-arcade.com

Gabe and Tycho are back, this time with a raft of tweaks, improvements and a less frustrating combat model. If you haven't played the first part, you'll miss a lot of the references.

MOTOGP 08

WEBSITE playmotogp.com

Prepare to taste the tarmac, eat the dirt and fall off your bike a lot. *MotoGP 08* will take some getting used to if you aren't a two-wheeler fan, but that's what this demo is for!



STRONG BAD EPISODE 3

WEBSITE telltalegames.com

Strong Bad's third outing involves a contest between some bizarre beat combos, a few rock 'n' roll in-jokes and the usual standard we expect from our friends over at Telltale.

FIFA MANAGER 09

WEBSITE fm09.de

Not everybody likes the hardcore stylings of the *Football Manager* series. If you are one of those people, EA's more light-hearted game is certain to be more to your liking. Try it here!

Freeware

***David Brown* has no cash, but plenty of games**

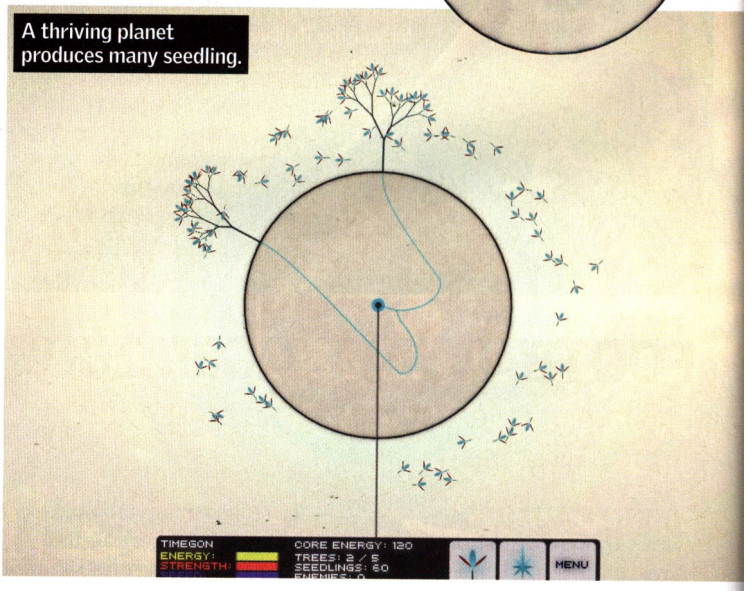
PCZONE ON THE DVD

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content from across the world of the internet. You want free games? We got free games. You want movies? We got free games. Shreddies for breakfast? You betcha, free games. This month, we knock a pillar from underneath a decapitated square head, seed the universe with aggressive trees, paint some balls, build bouncy towers, search for coins, and fail to run 100m.

DYSON

Implant the universe with your seed

DEVELOPER Alex May, Rudolf Kremers
WEBSITE dyson-game.com



THE REAL-TIME strategy genre isn't a popular one amongst freeware developers, So when one does come out, it has the floor to itself. It doesn't mean we won't cast our eye any less ruthlessly over it, but we do appreciate a little effort.

Dyson is a game in which you conquer the universe by spreading your seedlings (units) over the game map, one planet at a time. Once a planet has been occupied, you can choose to assign two types of tree to it. The regular tree produces more seedlings, with which you can continue to expand your mighty empire. The other defends your planets from the enemy, who is doing expanding in the same way you are.

Each planet can house five trees in total, so you need to think about which ones you want producing seedlings and which ones you want to be capable of defending against a sustained attack from the enemy.

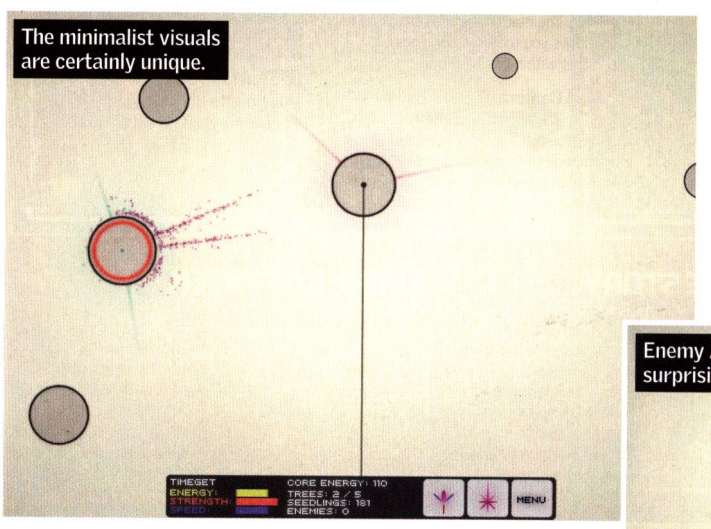
As is usual, playing it safe with your tree allocation will only lead to failure on the hardest levels. It is much better to start as you mean to go on, making planets specialise in seedling production or defence.

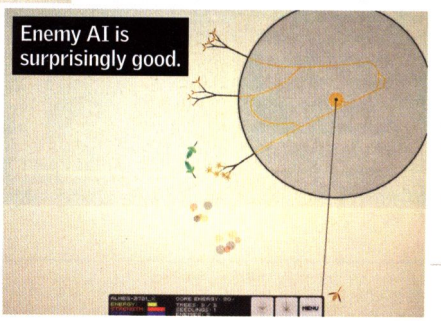
Once you've got a decent base of operations established and a few nearby planets colonised, you'll need to advance into enemy territory. You do this by either using the left-hand mouse button to send all available seedlings orbiting a planet to the frontline, or the right-hand button to send a specific number of your choosing.

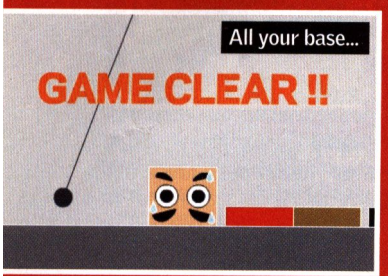
The temptation is to send all your available seedlings into one massive attack, but this leaves you vulnerable to a counter-offensive from your dastardly foe (which is exactly what happened to me in my first game).

There's not that much else to it really, but, for a freeware game, the scope is certainly impressive. As you progress through the levels, you become harder pressed to survive and expand – but it's never cripplingly difficult. Visually, things are pleasingly minimalist, as is the in-game audio, which resonates lightly in the background as your seedlings swarm.

Dyson will certainly keep you entertained for a good couple of hours, which is all you can really ask for.





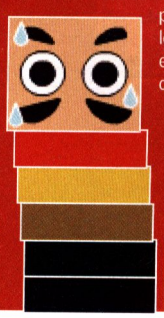


DARUMA GAME

DEVELOPER Naokazu Terada
WEBSITE snipurl.com/darumagame

IF YOU'VE EVER seen the insane adventures of General Lee and co in *Takeshi's Castle*, you might already be familiar with the concept of the ancient Japanese game of *Daruma Otoshi*. Seen in the *Children's Specials* of that esteemed show, a kid perches on the top of a big stack of discs, while his or her parent tries to knock them down with a mallet.

The object of this game is to dismantle the stack without tumbling the child (or in this case, head) to the floor on its side or back. If the stack is knocked over and the head lands properly on the floor, the level is completed. An extra disc is added and the cycle repeats.

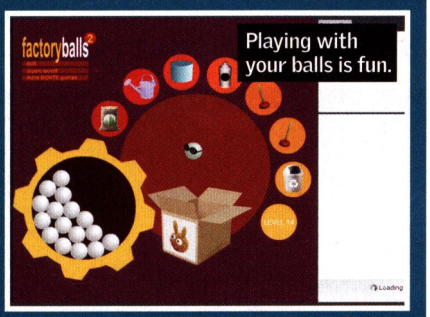


That's about it really. Think of it as a simpler version of *Jenga*, where the object of the game isn't to keep a tower standing, but to knock it down.

FACTORY BALLS 2

Get on the production line

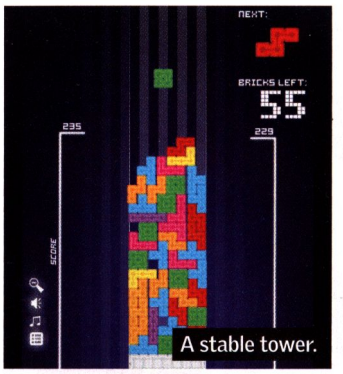
DEVELOPER Bart Bonte **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/factoryballs2

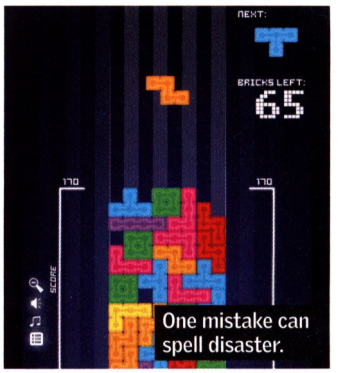


EVERYONE WANTS TO work in a factory, but only a few of us get the chance to stand at the hallowed production line. However, with *Factory Balls 2*, you too can pretend you are working for $8 a month in a Far Eastern sweatshop.

The game is a simple puzzler, with a container of white balls ready and waiting to have crazy things done to them. Click and drag a sphere onto one of the options available. Depending on which of the 50 levels you're on, there are a number of different things you can do to your ball, including covering it in grass, spraying it a colour or attaching rabbit ears.

There's plenty of content here, with later puzzles proving challenging. If you're searching for a way of passing some time, *Factory Balls 2* is as good a choice as any.





99 BRICKS

Scraping the skies, *Tetris*-style

DEVELOPER WeirdBeard Games **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/99bricks

***TETRIS* CLONES ARE** 10-a-penny around these freeware parts, but *99 Bricks* caught our eye with its cheery presentation and different take on the generic block-laying gameplay.

Physics play a part here, as the game's aim isn't simply to just slot falling bricks together into a pretty pattern. This time, you have no walls holding your tower in place and the aim of this game is to built the largest tower you can without it falling over, using 99 bricks.

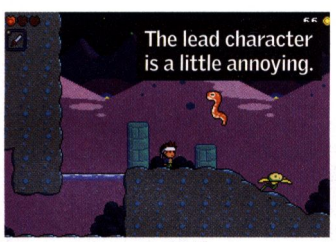
As your tower grows, it can get tricky to keep it steady. One misplaced brick and you will be struggling to maintain the integrity of the structure, desperately trying to compensate for early mistakes by piling the other side of your tower with bricks. Usually, this sort of behaviour ends in disaster, but truly skilled players will doubtless be able to balance things out again, if they're careful and take the bricks' squishiness and bounciness into account.

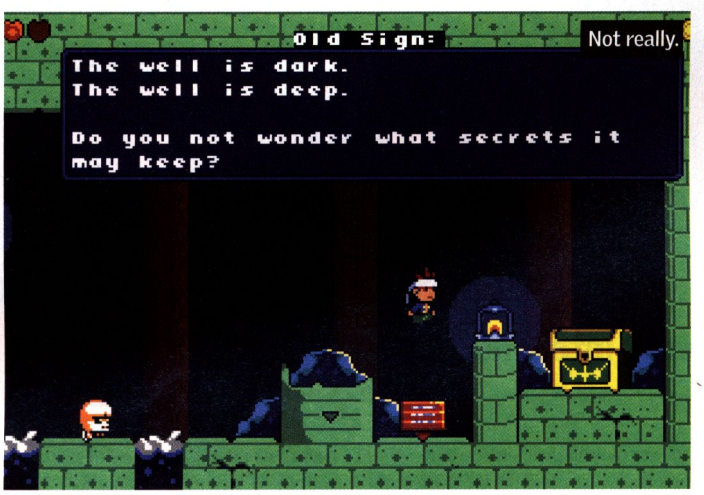
Still, there is definitely a perverse pleasure to be had in seeing your carefully constructed monument fall to pieces in front of your very eyes.

TREASURE HUNTER MAN

Beat the financial meltdown – search for coins

DEVELOPER Origami Hero **WEBSITE** origamihero.com

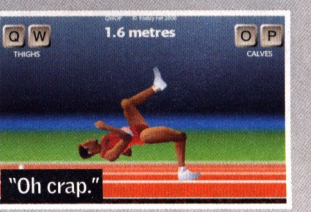




THIS PLATFORM GAME is perhaps as close as you'll get to recreating that authentic *Mario* experience without directly cloning it. Origami Hero's latest adventure involves a 'wacky' teen/young adult on a quest for treasure (as you might have guessed from the title).

The game is pretty tough, so you'll be spending at least a reasonable amount of time dying and reloading – but that is the core of the platform experience. There's also the opportunity to engage other characters in some dialogue, though let's just say this is perhaps the weakest part of the game. In fact, I'm not even sure it is necessary to talk to anyone, bar the main adversaries that bar your way, so you might just be better off ignoring all the game's inhabitants and just concentrating on collecting coins and stabbing creatures.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



QWOP'S OLYMPIC ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER Dr Bennett Foddy · **WEBSITE** foddy.net/athletics.html

WHEN YOU FIRST try to play *QWOP*, you'll probably become enraged within seconds at how absurdly difficult it is. Your athlete, attempting to run 100m, will flop and thrash wildly, tumbling to the hard ground again and again, often accompanied by sounds of tearing sinew and splintering bone.

You control your athlete using the titular keys (Q, W, O and P), each being assigned to a thigh or a calf. It sounds simple, but completely isn't.

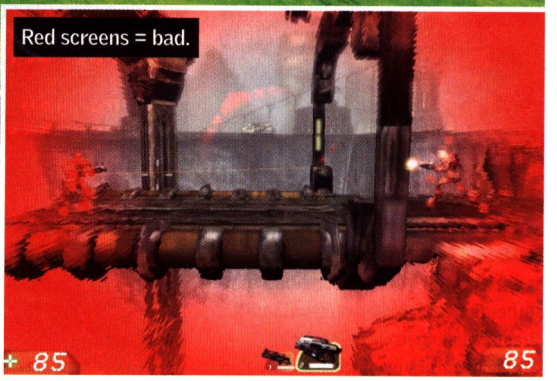
Anybody who runs to the end of the track (passing the secrets hidden at 50 and 100 metres) will have earned the admiration of the *PCZ* staff, whose efforts have resulted in a score of 32m. (We used the cheating shuffle method to get to the end for review purposes).

Extend

PCZONE ON THE DVD

This month's selection of mods, maps and updates for your games

The potential for interesting levels is enormous.


Red screens = bad.

UT2D

Taking *Unreal Tournament* into a new dimension

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/ut2d **MOD FOR** *Unreal Tournament 3*

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered how an FPS would work if it was reinvented as a side-scrolling platformer, now you'll be able to widen your eyes in astonishment as you see *UT2D* in action. Most of the game's features and weapons are still in there, although some (like the sniper rifle) won't work in a 2D environment.

Other than that, *UT2D* offers a refreshing take on the traditional deathmatch dynamic, although it will probably take you a little while to get used to how it works. You turn left and right by moving the mouse in that direction, while using the WSAD keys to jump, crouch and run. You also use the mouse to aim your weapon, which, in the midst of a firefight, can lead to you firing at your own feet as you attempt to turn around.

You'll get used to it eventually, but one thing you might want to avoid is having too many players on one map. If you put in 15 or 16 opponents, for example, you'll just constantly get caught in the crossfire.

There might also be an issue of not being able to find anyone playing it online, which is of course a problem with all non-mainstream mods. The bots do provide a decent challenge, but there is never anything like fighting someone who is equally likely to get confused while taking a corner and blowing his own feet off with a rocket launcher, as successfully frag you.

"UT2D offers a refreshing take on the deathmatch dynamic"

As for longevity, there is sadly only one official map included in the main package, as the author readily admits it is taking him time to convert the regular *UT3* maps into 2D. However, for the budding internet detective, there are some extra maps to be found (some of which can be found on *UT2D*'s moddb page).

THOMAS WAR

More *Civ* than you thought possible

WEBSITE snipurl.com/thomaswar **MOD FOR** *Civilization IV*

SOME PEOPLE CAN never have enough of a good thing, so for all of those out there who thought *Civilization IV* needed more content, the *Thomas War* mod is right up your proverbial alley.

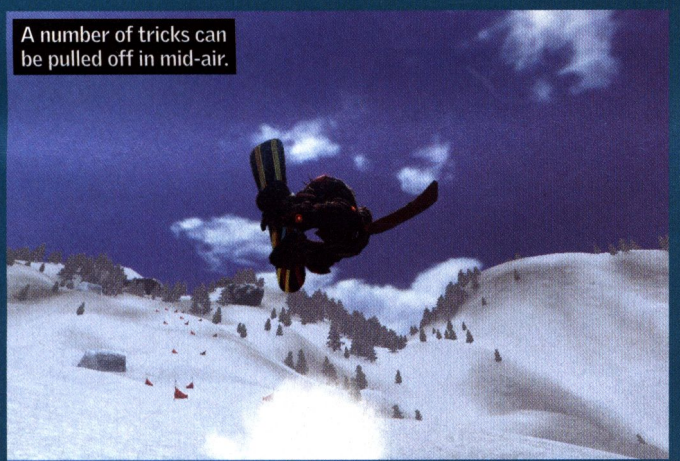
Just a look at the stats suggests this is a whopper of a mod: 68 new leaders, 31 new civilisations, nine new religions, 44 new Wonders, 15 new technologies, 10 new civics, and more besides, except for Nimoy voiceovers.

The mod designer has stressed players won't have to "re-learn how to play" *Civ IV*, so all the basic elements – such as the tech tree – will continue to work in exactly the same way as before. It'll just be bigger.

If you're eschewing the current rash of games in favour of Sid Meier's classic, this mod should provide you many more hours of *Civ*-y goodness.

You'll need the *Beyond the Sword* expansion in order to get *Thomas War* to work, plus your game needs to be patched up to 3.13 or 3.17.

The mod expands the future era significantly.



A number of tricks can be pulled off in mid-air.

SNOWREAL

Get piste off in *UT3*

WEBSITE snowreal.blogspot.com **MOD FOR** *Unreal Tournament 3*

THE DEVELOPERS OF *Snowreal* **say their creation is "the revolution of snowboarding games". This is tosh, but there's still fun to be had trying out tricks and racing down slopes.**

The only major problem you will have is finding other people to compete with you. There's an official server, which should be your first port of call, which can be accessed by pressing F10 while on the server list and then entering: "open 85.236.109.19:7977".

Once in the game, you'll be able to either compete in a tricks competition (jump and waggle about on a board) or plunge down the slopes, making sure to steer between various flags. There's also a level where you have to manoeuvre yourself over a live volcano, which purists would be appalled at.

JURASSIC RAGE III

Shoot dinosaurs in the face

WEBSITE jurassic-rage.com **MOD FOR** *Unreal Tournament 3*

THE ORIGINAL ***JURASSIC*** *Rage* **appeared a few years ago on** *UT2K4* **and the team behind it have been slaving away to produce a new version for** *UT3*.

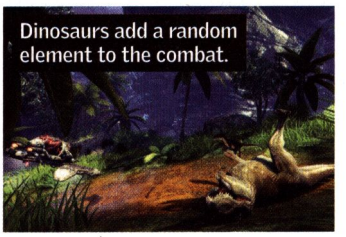
Budding dinosaur hunters now have the opportunity to blow away the tyrannosaurus rex, as well as the usual gang of raptors.

JR3 it is impressive as it significantly changing the game experience. The team are also consistently working on new tweaks and changes. One of their more recent fixes was to allow low-flying vehicles to get chomped by the creatures.

There'll also be other human and AI players roaming the battlefield too (and getting attacked by dinosaurs) so you'll have to be doubly alert to threats. Luckily, the dinosaurs can't carry guns, so you won't have to worry about being sniper by a T-rex.

If you've been yearning for some dino-killing action, ignore the latest *Turok* game and stick this on.

Smaller vehicles can be chomped by the dinos.



Dinosaurs add a random element to the combat.

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

This month, we've welcomed our new editor to the cosy family that is *PC ZONE* and the forumites have been talking about how they both love and adore her already. Elsewhere, we've had a lot of *Left 4 Dead*-related shenanigans going on, dominating both Fight Club and Zone Chat. We're still enchanted by the game, but we feel a bit more stuff is needed. Let us know what you think on the splendid *PC ZONE* forums.

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

Our beloved new boss!

YOU MIGHT HAVE noticed our blogging activities have been curtailed somewhat in the past month or so. We'd like to blame various other parties – server problems, the weather, Liverpool failing to beat Fulham at Anfield – but, unfortunately, it is our own famously lazy attitude that has lead to this state of affairs.

But all was not lost! First up, Ali Wood stepped up to the plate to introduce herself to all and sundry, prompting excitement and chatter on the forums – it is rumoured that Jonny_p66 exploded when he read her scribblings.

We've also managed to talk about idiots ruining online games and noted that you had some strong opinions on what we had to say. We don't mind if you disagree with us, just know that a horse's head will be delivered with your copy of the next issue for daring to question us in the blogs at pczone.co.uk!

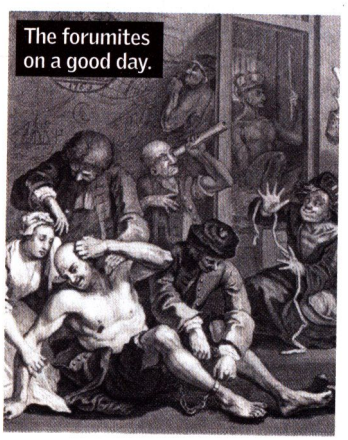
NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Our new editor – the forumites have their (twisted) say

I've just read that Ali Wood is the new editor, so welcome to her, and tough luck Hogarty – you managed to hold it together for the latest issue and I'd have loved to see that new picture of you on every column for every month. I'm more confident that I'll be keeping my subscription now.
deadmartyr

Another first for *ZONE*. (I think, have we had a female editor yet?) Anyway, welcome aboard, Cap'n! Can we keep all of those Hogarty clones though? They could be our mascots. At least now we'll have someone who can play Zoey in *Left 4 Dead* without getting funny feelings...
JoWoo

I don't get funny feelings playing her, but I do when I have to rescue her or something. Like, I want to protect her, because I'm in love with her. You know?
Apophis_dd



The forumites on a good day.

Zoey – everybody's favourite *L4D* character.

"We'll have someone who can play Zoey without getting funny feelings"

Does this finally mark the end of 'blokey blokeness' in the mag? No more E3 booth babe ogling or *Penthouse* party gate-crashing?
Madameye

Oh dear, I can see a plethora of future facepalm moments coming from Jonny. Can't we just lock him in the cellar again?
Musicalgibbon

All the boys are still there doing some freelance and there's a new woman chief... like a huge muscly Amazonian warrior... like Leela from *Futurama*.
Jonny_p66

Well I hope she never comes in here for her own sake.
Liquid_metal

I have visions of *PC ZONE* returning to its former edgy, packed, and just plain likeable glory, and climbing to the top of every other PC mag in a flurry of awesomeness. So no pressure, Ali.
-Doomus-

Muhammad Ali is the new editor??
Ye Ole Sarevok

I feel a wee bit sorry for Steve Hogarty (and all his clones)... I thought he did a damn fine job on issue 202!
Steve33333

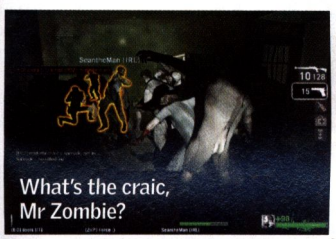
Only just seen this thread. Hogarty did a fantastic job – I've read *PC ZONE* since the first issue, and I sincerely think he's the best writer *PC ZONE* have had in years.
Caff

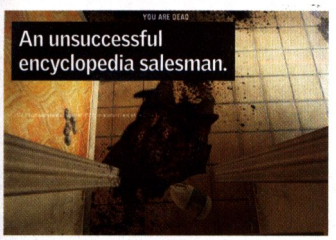
FIGHT CLUB

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

Tanks, vomiting, cowards and dawdlers

THE CHOICE OF *Left 4 Dead* as this month's Fight Club wasn't necessarily the wisest move in the end. We'd intended there to be a split of seven readers to each *ZONE* writer who attended. In the end, our own organisational ineptitude led to three Zoners being on one server and a handful of lucky readers having the chance to either tear us to pieces as the Infected or survive our constricting tongue attacks, vomit breaks and Tank tomfoolery.


What's the craic, Mr Zombie?


An unsuccessful encyclopedia salesman.

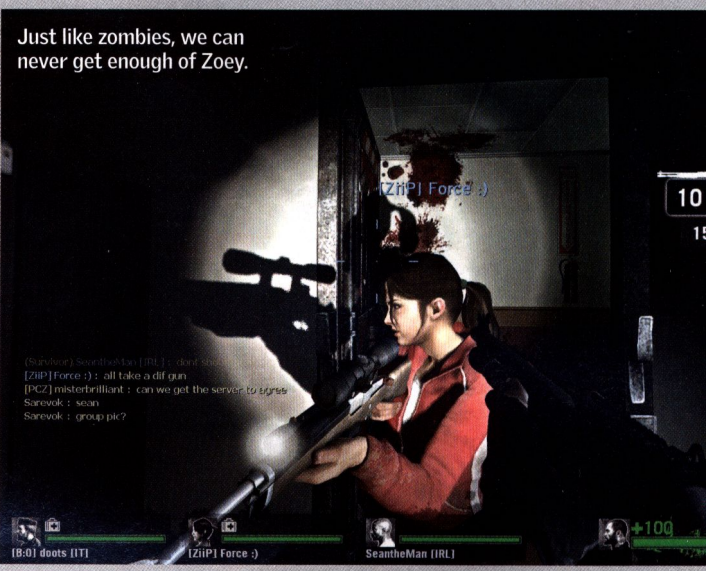
After some rather disastrous server connection attempts, we finally got everything going smoothly and much fun was had by all. The scene was the No Mercy campaign and the first group got off to a really shaky start, progressing too slowly and getting repeatedly pounced and shat on by the Infected. It seems that the key to doing well in Versus mode is to keep moving steadily – dawdling doesn't do anybody any good.

Perhaps the highlight of this month's Fight Club was Mr Plughead devastating the survivors as a Tank, killing all four in one life and earning the achievement for doing so in the process. Later on, forum regular Madameye was callously "left 4 dead" outside the safe room, the other three survivors fleeing to safety and leaving him being torn to pieces mere inches away. To be fair, he accepted his sacrifice was "for the greater good".

If you want to get involved next month, remember to join our Steam community group at steamcommunity.com/pcz, or you'll never be able to hold your head up high in public ever again.

ZONE CHAT

What else but *Left 4 Dead*?



WE LEFT THINGS a bit late for Zone Chat this month and so it was mixed in with Fight Club, in what we imaginatively decided to call Fight Zone (this got squished by the production editor in the end, the swine).

The assembled throng were eager to earn their place on the *Left 4 Dead* game, spamming friend invites to the *Zone* staff on Steam – some were accepted, some were cruelly cast aside in the stampede. Those who didn't make it into the game spent some time discussing how to unlock the Sandvich for the Heavy in *Team Fortress 2*. Others wiled away the hours by discussing how jealous they were of their rivals' ownership of *Left 4 Dead*, while they were left in the dark, unable to feel the sweet caress of a Boomer's love vomit.

[ZiiP]Force, who did actually manage to get into the Fight Club game, angered the masses by claiming that shooting zombies in the face could never get boring, a thought echoed by JoWoo. They're right, it doesn't ever get boring. Tune in next month, when we are hoping to get a proper Zone Chat in for a change.

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been press-ganged by Somali pirates – then join other *PCZ* readers on these public servers. We might even join from time to time, you never know. The latest info can be found at pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Steve Hogarty PCZ_Escaped_monkey
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
David Brown PCZ_Plughead

1. **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
2. **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
   hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
3. **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
   dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
4. **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
   tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
5. **ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
   pczone2.jolt.co.uk
6. **CALL OF DUTY 4**
   Coming soon... really
7. **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
   bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
8. **TEAM FORTRESS 2**
   pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
   pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
   pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

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PCZONE 87

***"Lord of the Rings Online* is an amazing achievement"** Dan Griliopoulos, issue 182

If you're after an authentic Middle-earth experience, *Lord of the Rings Online* has to be it; an MMO based on the most popular fantasy universe ever. Setting the scene for recent expansion *Mines of Moria*, you can choose from four main races, elf, hobbit, dwarf and man and progress through seven classes, from burglars to minstrels.

I'm really pleased to be able to offer *LOTRO* to new *PC ZONE* subscribers; not just a Tolkien fan's online heaven, *Lord of the Rings Online* has plenty for any enthusiast to get their teeth into along with a vast world to explore, from strolling through the Shire to exploring the depths of the Old Forest and there's a friendly community to boot!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood, Editor

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Retro zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

SACRE BLEU! C'EST...

LE FRENCH

SNEERING AT A game obsessed with micro-management and painstakingly realised war machines and calling it 'a bit German' is a common thing, but a phrase that has fallen by the wayside in past decades is to cheerfully decry that a game is 'very French'. They're often lost in the mass of American blockbusters in the nostalgia stakes, but during the first great boom of PC gaming in the early '90s our cheese-loving neighbours pumped out some of the most subtly designed, anarchic and imaginative games ever to have been created.

What makes a 'very French' game then, other than its country of origin? Games like *Little Big Adventure*, *Another World* and *Flashback* all shared creative balls of steel – each of them was pioneering, each of them was nuts, and each had a wildly original art style that remains crystal clear in the memory despite the ravages of time. Each of them, with apparently minimal effort, giving you a perfectly realised world in which, for example, it seemed perfectly logical that elephants, rabbits (rabbi-bunnies?) and odd sphere people could be saved from a dictatorship by chucking a bouncing ball around.

Things we are now entirely used to appeared in 'very French' games as a matter of course. What was the moment you had to make money by going round doing escort missions and the like for the employment agency in *Flashback*, if it wasn't perfectly formed non-linear roleplaying, in a bloody platform game? Hell, with *Alone in the Dark* they invented one of the most solid and engaging genres there is.

Obviously as a country they turn out a lot of shit as well, that can't be denied, but brilliantly – the flame still burns. Both *Fahrenheit* and *Beyond Good & Evil* carried on the tradition of warped Gallic genius, and follow-ups to both are incoming. God bless the French. At least they're good at something.

"Utilisez-vous un chapeau melon?"

"Remettez votre insigne et pistolet!"

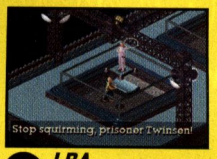
But how? Worth a play?

In the mind, these most French of French games mature like a fine wine. In reality, going back to them can be a shock.

Take *Another World* as an example: you remember it as a perfectly told story, one of the first games where you actually cared for your strange white gorilla friend and you remember all the nude sexy alien ladies in the bath at the end. But you don't remember the constant deaths and the fist-chewing frustration. Everyone must have just had a lot more patience in olden times. *Alone in the Dark*, similarly, is best replayed in the mind.

Flashback, though, remains summarily brilliant, as does *Little Big Adventure* and its sequel in which (brace yourself!) you go to the moon. Hooray for the French!

J'aime bien le rosbif *'Ere eez a list of ze very best videogames zat ze French made hon-hi-hon*



1 LBA
A man in a dress with a fit wife, trapped in an asylum, saves a planet of animals from a dictator.

2 ALONE IN THE DARK
AITD was groundbreaking in that its male hero had a moustache. So few do.

3 THE NOMAD SOUL
A game so willfully arty that you get asked into its world through your PC.

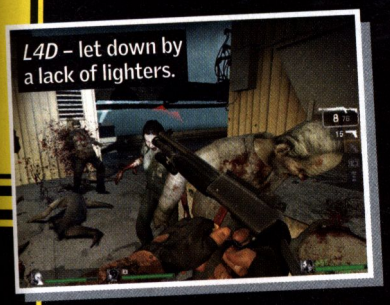
4 ANOTHER WORLD
The closest gaming has to a Mona Lisa. Even if the Mona Lisa isn't as difficult.

5 FLASHBACK
The best thing about *Flashback* was rolling around shooting soldiers in the knees.

6 LOST EDEN
Kings? Dinosaurs? Talking pterodactyls? It was a simple game, but its scope was remarkable.

Now & Then

LEFT 4 DEAD vs BLOOD



THESE DAYS THERE'S only one go-to place if you want to see a zombie that's on fire: your Steam games tray and a little old program called *Left 4 Dead*. In 1997 you had to fire a flare gun at a zombie and watch, awe-struck, as the creaking last days of the Build engine conjured up said pitchfork-bearer running this way and that in a beautiful pillar of flame.

Left 4 Dead may be all that, but do burning zombie heads sometimes fall off in the death throes – and can you then kick them around like footballs? Finally, and most damningly, can one place a Zippo lighter in front of an aerosol in *Left 4 Dead* and lightly flambé the wall of zombies surrounding you? I think not.

Once again the past triumphs in the astounding battles of Now & Then.

Play it! *Discover the arcane form of game distribution known as 'shareware'*

The '90s was a bizarre parallel world in which the bits of games that developers put the most effort into were released for free. Let's examine that process.

1. The developers of a top PC game would finish their game; making sure that the first six levels were better than the rest and the least buggy.
2. Said *Nukem*-clone's first campaign would be placed on messageboards (the nascent internet) and the cover CDs of amazing monthly magazines.
3. The developers would stare at their letterbox waiting for it to be stuffed with cheques. Boxed copies would do the same in a shop, figuratively.
4. We would sit at home eating toast, vaguely intending to buy the full thing. Thereby allowing the capitalists to take over – we created EA.

Mameframe

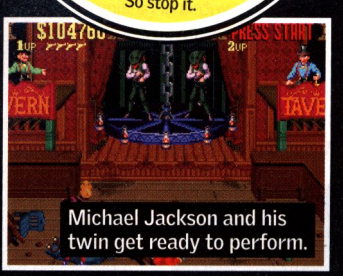
SUNSET RIDERS

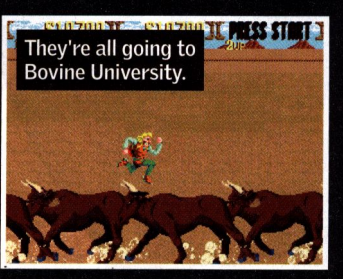
WITH GUNS THAT looked and acted like laser guns and, come to think of it, a fair few prostitution references that flew over the young heads attempting to vanquish its bosses – *Sunset Riders* had everything: bits where you're on a horse, bits when you're swinging from chandeliers... in fact if LucasArts had never made *Outlaws*, *Sunset Riders* would have been the greatest cowboy game of all time.

Sunset Riders is proof positive that cowboy combat doesn't have to be dull and heavy on inaccuracy – it can have guns that go zap and bits where you rescue big-chested women. Wild West gaming is a prime example of a genre that is criminally barren – the campaign for *Sunset Riders 3D* begins right here.

What is MAME?

The *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator* currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from mame.net – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it.





Back in the day

WING COMMANDER

By David Brown

***WING COMMANDER* WAS** better than *X-Wing*. Mine is an unpopular viewpoint, but it's just the way I've always seen it. Don't get me wrong, LucasArts' game was fun, but there's just something about the balls-out machismo of Chris Roberts' space opera.

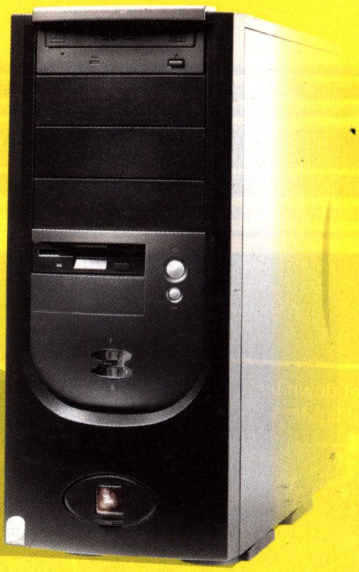
People who see the original *Wing Commander* as a simple blaster are wrong: branching storylines, variable character interactions, and superb action meant this was the first game I ever lost myself in. I genuinely felt grief when one of my flying buddies carked it and their name was crossed out on the kill board.

It's a shame nobody will release another *Wing Commander*. I can't be the only one who'd love to get back into the cockpit and give those Kilrathi another pasting.

CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



LEFT 4 DEAD

Reloading: ***Steve Hogarty***

DON'T THINK ABOUT it too hard, but a few years ago a couple of friends of mine used to enjoy donning Halloween masks and contacting random webcam owners on some instant messaging program. People would scream or laugh at them, or both – it was weird, harmless internet fun. One day they came across a fat, topless man sitting in a bedroom. Before they could disconnect, a baby elephant walked across the screen. Then it came back, and just stood there. A baby elephant, flapping its ears in a topless man's house.

OH, INTERNET!

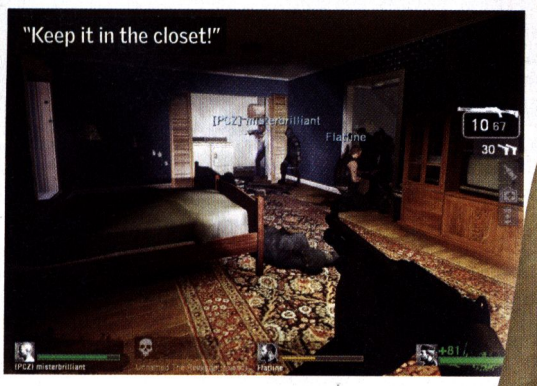
Until I played *Left 4 Dead*, I thought that was the most amazing thing that's ever happened online. Valve's zombie shooter is astoundingly addictive and riddled with moments of glee and elation not found in other online shooters. With either the grinding progression when playing as the survivors, or the giddy persistence when playing as the infected, *L4D* is incredible visceral fun. As long as you're not playing with morons.

Here's a game that couldn't work without Steam and its integrated friends list. Playing with a bunch of randoms always guarantees you'll come up against a dolt who runs between your assault rifle and the milling zombie crowds, or drops his Molotov cocktail on your face while a Hunter tucks into your torso. The campaigns, lengthy though they may be, wear thin too. While the underlying gameplay carries the game, we'll be clamouring for content in a month's time.

That said, the recent demo is missing a great chunk of *L4D*'s charm – those epic campaign finales. I was lucky enough to be playing with three other survivors who were charging through Dead Air for the first time. I can only assume their mouths were as agape as mine during the closing scenes. Even if you hate online shooters, you can play *Left 4 Dead* as a single-player game with a beginning and an end and still expect over four hours of content.

Just stop jumping in front of my bullets please.

VERDICT **Infectious**



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

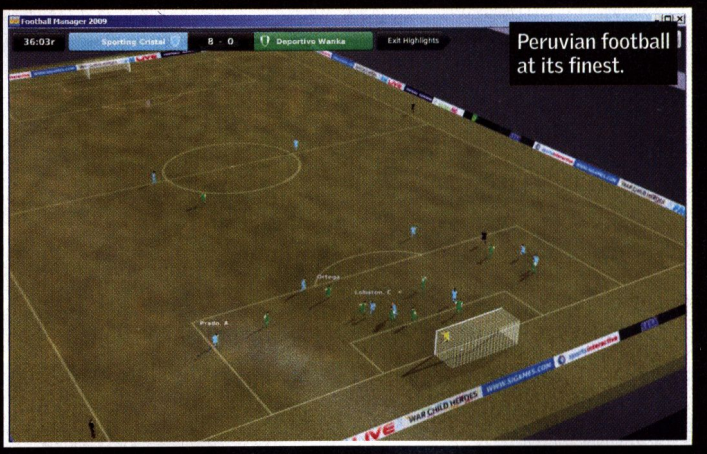
Challenging for the title: *David Brown*

I'VE BEEN PLAYING *Championship* and now *Football Manager* my whole life (at least the teenage-to-adult part of it) and, like a lamb to the slaughter, I've been spending too many hours checking obscure statistics and performance tables to figure out why my Sporting Cristal side has been stuttering in front of goal once again. The Cerveceros (Brewers) are my home town club (home town being Lima, Peru) and, just like Steve Hill with Chester, my first game on any recent *FM* always involves attempting to take Nolberto Solano's old side to the top of the South American game. Not that I've ever succeeded, mind.

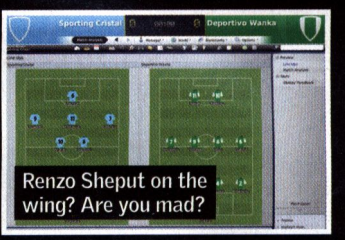
Recent *FM* games have really frustrated me, in a lot of ways. A lot of familiar niggles keep creeping back in – defending seems to be too random, corners too effective, the AI having the ability to score with far higher number of shots than yourself – and I keep yearning for the days when I was actually good at the game and understood how it worked.

With this most recent iteration, my frustrations are (at the moment) yet to be unleashed. It has been tough going, but I'm getting there. One thing I've found is that it is difficult to get your teams to score goals, yet, in contrast to last year's game, it's now easier to keep clean sheets. Nevertheless the match engine seems to be working in a more logical manner, and the 3D engine is still exciting enough to provide "ooh!" moments. Ask me again in six months and I might come back with a list of "this is wrong, this is terrible, why didn't they do this?" points, but today, I'm loving it all over again. Now excuse me, I've got to decide between Wesley Brasilia or Luis Alberto Bonnet as my target man.

"I might come back with a list of 'this is wrong, this is terrible' points, but today, I'm loving it"



Peruvian football at its finest.



Renzo Sheput on the wing? Are you mad?

VERDICT A Ronaldo

PEGGLE NIGHTS

Making unicorns cry: *Will Porter*

SOME WOULD DEEM it wrong that in this, the most bountiful of gaming winters I'm regularly playing *Peggle Nights* way into the wee small hours. I would entirely agree, not least because I am of the firm opinion that PopCap have broken *Peggle*.

Sure, the game is basically unchanged and all that's added is an electric squid – but the real crime is that PopCap aren't aware of the majesty of the game they've created. The only real tactical thoughts in *Peggle* are the initial shot and bounce, and the placement of the moving bucket. This doesn't mean that you can't master it. Tactics are there. However, through the constant use of moving pegs (that's right: moving pegs) PopCap have added an extra random factor that destroys this, taking away lucky trick shots and cool slides and replacing them with random bouncing.

With *Nights* the see-saw of fun decidedly tilts towards its more frown-y end. I mean, some of these pegs even revolve – rectangular pegs revolving! Pegs just don't do that. It breaks the game. It makes it less fun. It takes the essence of *Peggle* away. I am genuinely angry about it. A skillfully designed *Peggle* board doesn't have legions of spinning wotsits, hovering UFOs and vortexes – do they think I am some sort of simple child? Basic, traditional and stationary peggle boards make for good peggling. None of this newfangled nonsense.

I will play their game, and I will complete it in its entirety – but I'm not happy about it. Not at all.

VERDICT Pegs!

Now that's what I call Peggle.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

APOPHIS_DD
LEFT 4 DEAD
I took the Tank on single-handedly in the third campaign over the weekend. Hunter got me just before I escaped on the plane. Bastard.

ALBERTHAMMOND
CIVILIZATION IV: COMPLETE
Never played any turn-based strategy games before seeing this for £10 – an absolute steal!

STEVE33333
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
Every iteration of the game sees me managing Coventry City, my attempts to build the squad, hone some killer tactics and wrap the media round my little finger end up being fruitless.

Tell us what's on your hard drive in the forums at pczone.co.uk

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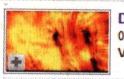
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luvs2splooge (1 hour ago)
wHAT tHE FUCK ARE DEY WEARIN DIS IS WELL GAY fuuuckkkkkk
Reply 0

carnberry (3 hours ago)
Ugh, this is BALLS. BALLS BALLS BALLS i hate eidos they are FUCCKKKKKK fuck edios in the BALLS they are raping my memories.
Reply 0

judydench (1 day ago)
If this is set in the year 2027 that is 25 years before Deus Ex 1 and they are wearing very different clothes to the ones they wear in the first game. I find it HARD to believe that fashion can change THAT MUCH in 25 years. Eidos can fellate themselves in the face with a FUCKCKKCKCK
Reply 0

frodogogo (1 day ago)
i herd dat wen u install deus ex3 it goes back an turns deus ex1 into a shit game is dis tru my frends dad works for EDIOS.
Reply 0

legzupnfartin (1 day ago)
I am gonna mod this to put dicks in it cos that's wat Eidos hav dun so perhaps I don't need to
Reply 0

jon (1 day ago)
Looks alrite doesn't it. Can't really tell how good it'll be from a trailer though can you. Guess we'll have to wait and see!
Reply 0

sarahmichellegellarismywife (4 hours ago)
STFU u fukkin fanboy why dont u just marry eidos????
Reply 0

goku_supersayan (1 day ago)
its liek Matrix but wiv si-fi bits innit. Defo gonna buy this wen ive finnished plyin Halo n Gears..... 360 tho, PCs r 4 bummers
Reply 0

1986ganondorf (1 day ago)
WHEN IS RESLEASE IN EUROP
Reply 0

VernonWells (2 days ago)
I'm not interested in this nonsense. Why can't we have a game based on Commando? It's been 23 years, surely somebody wants to make one. Just imagine how good Bennett would look in a 16x anti-aliased chainmail vest, flat top and pushbroom moustache?
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