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PCZONE

ISSUE 178 MARCH 2007



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PHANTOM EXPOSÉ
We reveal the truth
about Infinium Labs' PC



ARMED ASSAULT
Reviewed! The follow-up
to Operation Flashpoint

WIN!
TINY COMPO
What was the name
of the very first
Elder Scrolls game?

future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

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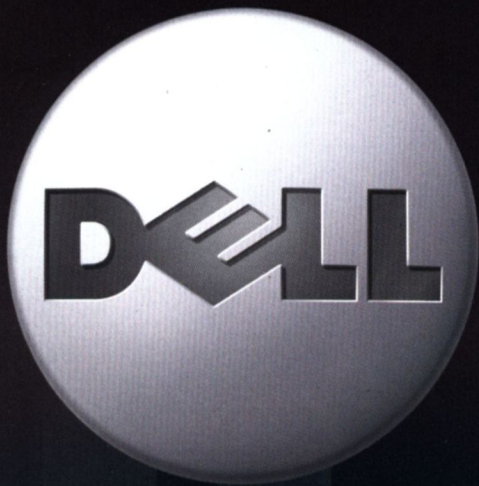
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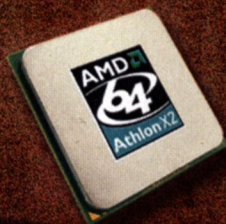
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COVER STORY

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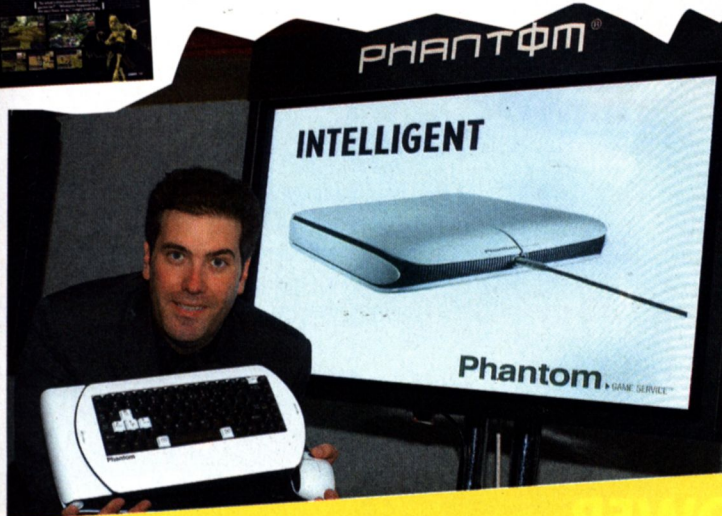
ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION SHIVERING ISLES

Has the world gone mad? Why yes, it most certainly has...



NEVERQUEST 121

"Oh no!" Screams Da Wee Ninja. "I let Steve Hill die!"



PHANTOM CONSOLE 54

DISCOVER THE GRIPPING STORY OF THE PC THAT NEVER WAS!

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



- 46 OBLIVION: SHIVERING ISLES
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Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 58 words... "Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls! Welcome to this month's *PC ZONE*! And what a show we have for you! Men with guns, controversy-laden companies, an insane island chain and Jonathan 'Log' Blyth driving a clown car while holding a bucket of water! But first... Ms Suzy Wallace upon the trapeze!" Da da daddle-addle da da doo-dah etc.



BLURRED VISION

AT THE RECENT CES gizmo show in Las Vegas, Microsoft revealed that a wireless Xbox 360 controller could control the actual desktop of Windows Vista. It's another blurring of the line between console and PC - but is this what us PC gamers really want?

The fact is that a mouse and keyboard have certain undeniable advantages over traditional game controllers - examples include aiming accuracy in first-person shooters, dragging-and-dropping in real-time strategy games and the ability to input text easily.

OK, for titles such as *Pro Evo*, an Xbox 360 controller plugged into your bulky games box is a sensible idea, but do you really want to play the new *Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars* with it? I've played some excellent blasters on console (*Gears Of War* being the most recent), but you can't approach the immediacy and accuracy of mouse-aim with an analogue stick.

Blizzard's game designer Jonathan LeCraft recently told gaming site Pro-G that "you really do need a keyboard to play *WOW*," dumping on the idea of doing a console version of the mighty MMOG. That's why I remain wary of Microsoft's forthcoming FPS *Shadowrun* - an attempt to have Xbox and PC players happily playing together by dumbing down the mouse controls. If the PC is to continue as a bastion of games innovation and technological advancement, we need to play to its strengths as a platform. Rant over.

Jamie Sefton, editor

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As indie as... Erm... Shed Seven? Or whatever you might be listening to these days...
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Like Gordon Brown's little red briefcase, only a bit more game-y
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REVIEW

60 ARMED ASSAULT

Exclusive review! Can *Operation Flashpoint* be bettered? Time to get shot up and find out...

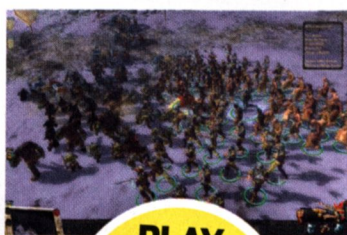
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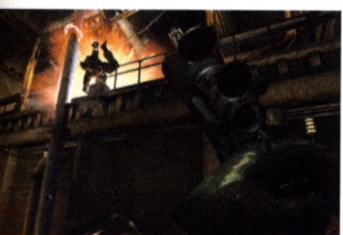


PLAY LOTRO: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR NOW!

42 UPFRONT Frontlines: Fuel Of War



20 UPFRONT Parabellum



FREE LOTR ONLINE BETA KEYS UP FOR GRABS! 39

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware
Steve Hogarty's broke again - Internet, we need you!
SAUERBRATEN
Create the heavens and the Earth, and see that it is good.

INFINITE MARIO BROS
Go on and on and on...

KNYTT
No longer the preserve of ageing ladies

PLUS OR MINUS
Paula Abdul knew that opposites attract too. Wise woman.

ICHOR
Mixing fluids fun again

WARGAME OF THE MONTH
OMERTA

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

FREE GAMES!

108 FREEWARE
Mock your graphics card with a collection of games that could probably run on a 286 powered by an exercise bike!

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UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

What do all our wonderful titles actually mean?

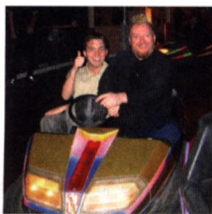


WILL PORTER
Deputy editor
AGE: Can't remember
LIKES: Deputy editing
DISLIKES: Physical violence
FANCIES: His girlfriend, still
FAVE GAME: *Fallout 2*, still
PLAYING NOW:
WOW: The Burning Crusade

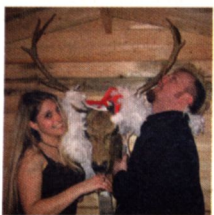
A deputy editor is a person who, in the absence of the real editor and the real editor's pets, becomes the editor by proxy. The fact that Will is second in line to the *PC ZONE* throne has not gone unnoticed by Jamie, who must constantly fend off attempts on his life from his voracious understudy. Will can also often be heard singing altered lyrics to Bob Marley's *I Shot The Sheriff*, with the words 'the deputy' replaced with 'me'. Will also runs the Upfront section, which requires him to remember so much stuff that he's forgotten his age and his shoe size.



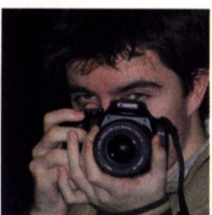
JAMIE SEFTON
Editor
An editor is a person who sellotapes all of the pages together to create a real working magazine. Jamie must also pretend to be nice to people on the phone, before hanging up and swearing.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Medieval II: Total War



JON 'LOG' BLYTH
Staff writer
A staff writer is the equivalent of a vague hand gesture and a request to "just do something, you know, and have it done by the time I get back - and don't skimp on the funny, you worthless shit!"
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
WOW: The Burning Crusade



SUZY WALLACE
Reviews editor
A reviews editor is a person who must deal with tardy publishers every day. So many CDs of review code pass through Suzy's hands that her fingers have become long and spindly like spider legs.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Test Drive Unlimited



STEVE HOGARTY
Staff writer
Contrary to popular belief, you can have too many staff writers. This fact is constantly mentioned in front of Steve to instil a permanent sense of insecurity and to improve the quality of his work.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Garry's Mod 10



KEVIN PRUITT
Deputy art editor
A deputy art editor is indistinguishable from an art editor until you get up close and notice that, while they both have a mastery of Photoshop, only the art editor can name every colour in a 32-bit palette.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
"Nothing - I'm an art guy!"



ANTHONY HOLDEN
Freelancer
A freelancer is a special thing. They work for all sorts of different magazines writing all sorts of different things. They generally get paid per word, even if they're tiny words like 'a' and 'the'.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Sex Tetris

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... Our Xworks PC being upgraded for a second time. It now has the ability to shoot lasers!
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Our Xbox 360 pad for Windows not working, then working for a minute, and then not working again. Stupid thing

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

- LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER** 31 Mins What the hell have we been doing this past month? We honestly can't remember
- ORGRIMMAR** 22 Mins Log constantly misspells the capital orc city 'Ogrimmar'. He clearly doesn't even deserve a Gurky
- 'SCROLLY-POLY'** 1 Min As meetings drag on, our ideas for the cover text really can get desperate
- CHURCH...** 40 Mins If you go to church and sing but don't believe in god, are you stealing Jesus's energy?
- GURKY** 54 Mins How much our exclusive in-game *WOW* pets rock, and how Log didn't get his
- KNIGHT IN MODERN TIMES COMPO** 131 Mins We laughed either with or at all of your drawings
- ...AND THEN GOD** 16 Mins Does he exist? Doesn't he exist? Somebody should really look into this
- LEAKING MILK** 5 Mins Our coffee machine began leaking milk all over the floor. Are the machines revolting? It's likely
- BRIDGET JONES 2** 12 Mins Will watched it last night and unashamedly claims he really liked it
- SEX AND THE CITY** 19 Mins Is it possible to watch every episode in a gruelling 36-hour binge? Our managing editor reckons so

WIN! Aw, little tiny compo is so tiny that most people don't even notice it. The chances of winning if you enter are absurdly high. Tiny compo 176 was won by Alan Powell and his Action Man postcard from Cardiff. That's where Torchwood lives. Maybe this guy is Torchwood! He gets a prize either way. Send this month's entries to 'My what a small compo', PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Don't forget to mention your most anticipated PC game too!

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

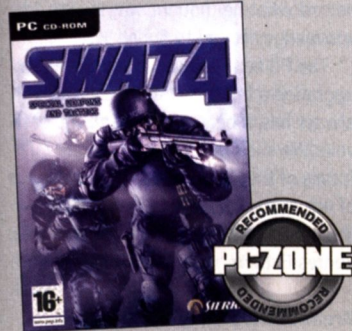
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After reading last month's mag I came across a letter saying that if you have ads in games you should have free games. Does that mean this mag will also be free? On nearly every other page there is an ad of some sort. If you hate ads so much then get rid of them or give us free magazines.

Alfred Cotton

Good point Alfred, but we simply wouldn't be able to make the PC ZONE you, er, love, if we didn't charge for it. However, if you're skint, don't forget that for the best online PC games news, features, reviews, movies, downloads,

comments, forums and more, you can always hit www.pczone.co.uk - it's absolutely free (thanks to ads).

STALKING VALVE

Thought I'd send you this photo from last week after we enjoyed a massive *Team Fortress 2* and *Portal* test at Valve's offices in Seattle at 10.30pm! From left to right: John Morello (*TF2* animator) with minigun, David Monks (*Natural Selection* SFX) with two copies of *PC ZONE*, Garret Rickey (*Portal* designer) with PIAT, large valve (Valve lobby furniture) with one *PC ZONE*, Matt Boone (*TF2* coder) with grenade launcher and Jeep Barnett (*Portal* coder) with two *PC ZONES*.

Dave Monks (developer on *Half-Life: Natural Selection*)

Nice one Dave, but you could have nicked a cuddly Vortigaunt toy for us while you were there...

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED!

Having just read the article 'Death of the PC?' (issue 175), I felt compelled to join the crusade. I have four children, all of whom are very much aware of the PC, the Internet and the world of games. They've all gone through various game consoles ranging from GameBoy to PS2 to Xbox and DS Lite, and have come to realise that the major gaming platform in the world today is the PC. There are a total of nine consoles in my house, which have all been tried and tested but unsurprisingly ended up in the corner of the bedroom collecting dust.

Last year I built my own first custom PC, and my kids were amazed at how easy it was and immediately wanted to try it. It's amazing when you can see the progress a child makes in areas like social skills, hand/eye coordination, the meaning of right and wrong, the understanding of moral choices, being able to multi-task, processing information (I could go on).



My younger son recently got an award from school for a history essay on the Roman empire, much of which he based on *Rome: Total War*. His enthusiasm was unsurpassed because he had what he thought was a knowledge second to none!

The PC has never changed. It's been upgraded a bit, but it still stands as it always has, a beacon of light in the dark void. We shouldn't worry about the future of the PC - it's safely in the hands of our children and their children and their children's chil... Oh you get the idea.

James Brown

Great stuff. If only reactionary papers like the *Daily Mail* would read your comments James...

JABBA THE HUTCH

Earlier this week I was told that my pet rabbit (Maurice) had died. I'd only had him for a few years and there seemed to be nothing wrong with him, so it came as quite a shock. Now we have just one other, rather lonely rabbit, and I have no companion when playing PC games. I used to have him on my lap when I played games and I could find him, but now I play *Knights Of The Old Republic II* alone. So, I've decided to recreate him



WIN!

Letter of the month

Marillionaress

The recent review of a *Heroes Of Might & Magic V* expansion (issue 176) ended with the following comment: "Led Zep this isn't, but then thankfully, it's not Marillion either." As Marillion's manager I would like to know what this means! Could it mean Led Zep are a four-piece band and Marillion have five? Could it mean that Led Zep's drummer is dead but Marillion's isn't? Or perhaps you were trying to slate Marillion and failed very badly as it didn't make sense.

I am sure you are one of the thousands of people who haven't heard anything by Marillion since the late 1980s, as radio doesn't play people over 30 any more. If you send me your address I'll send you some music to listen to as I'm sure you would enjoy it. If you don't and still want to take a pop at a band who have continued to tour and release records for over 25 years, then at least it will be an informed pop...

Lucy Jordache, communications manager, Marillion

Well done Lucy, you've won a graphics card for Marillion! Say hi to Fish, even though we know he's left the band...



ONE OF THESE!

Can you feel the love tonight? Here at *PC ZONE* we're awash with it, which is why if you write us a letter and we deem it to be the best of the month, we'll reward you with PNY's limited-edition 7600GT PCI-E *Splinter Cell* bundle, retailing for £99.99. For more info on PNY Technologies, please refer to www.PNY-Europe.com

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

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

SAY WHAT?

"My son recently got an award for an essay on the Roman empire, largely based on *Rome: Total War*"

James Brown proves once and for all that games are educational

in Jedi form, so that he may be preserved and glorified for a long time to come in the game he seemed to pay the most attention to. Maurice: a great pet, a mighty Jedi Consular.
Jack

Very moving Jack – let's just hope that your meddling with Force Resurrection doesn't turn him to the Dark Side.

BIOSHOCK-ING

After reading your 'Games of 2007' issue, all I can say is "Wow!" I can't be the only one salivating over *BioShock* – the sinister plot, the amazing graphics, the underwater theme – could this finally be a game that will rival *System Shock 2* in its capacity to make me hide under the desk? Here's hoping. I'm already saving up for a kick-ass rig to ensure that I can play this as smoothly as possible. 2007 is going to be one hell of a year for PC gaming!
Dave Houghton

Absolutely Dave – although last year was pretty good, 2007 promises to be a real golden era with *Crysis*, *C&C3: Tiberium Wars*, *Spore*, *Alan*

Wake, *Assassin's Creed*, *Hellgate: London* and tons more. See the 'Say What?' column on the right for more comments from the forum on Irrational's shooter-RPG.

UP IN ARMS

I want to rant about the latest and greatest innovation to *Counter-Strike* – dynamic weapon pricing. My first taste of this came today as I logged on to the *PC ZONE* server to play a few rounds of *Dust 2*. I started the round with \$2,000, easily enough money for my favourite piece of hardware, the Desert Eagle, along with some nice comfy Kevlar, fetching headgear and a bag of chips and a pint on the way home. Rapidly tapping the familiar buttons to make my purchase, I was taken aback when nothing happened. It seemed that a Desert Eagle was going to set me back over \$6,900, while Kevlar was over

\$2,000. I was gobsmacked. Browsing my options, I found them very limited – the Uzi was cheap because nobody wants an Uzi. I then died because I'd spent so



BioShock does look like it's shaping up to be proper freaky. The Little Sisters in particular are great.

Dogen_D_Derrible

Thank Christ I've just bought a new rig, my mouth is WATERING just looking at that game...

Craicx

I love the way some of the characters have their own stuff to do and won't bother you unless you annoy them. Unsure if it will be as scary as *System Shock 2* considering the underwater setting as opposed to derelict spaceship (space scares me).

jonny_p66

Hey, you can suffocate in both. And you can't see space leaking into the Von Braun or Citadel Station...

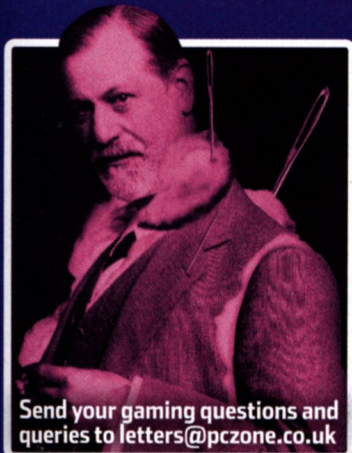
TheTingler

As someone mentioned, there's a chance it might turn out more like *Deus Ex 2* than *System Shock 2*. I hope this isn't the case though.

Salmon36

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

PINK FREUD After our metallic Dr Jung wiped his memory banks in a tryst with a babe magnet, we fashioned Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) from flesh, fabric and pins. With his research team of 700 toy poodles, Pink Freud exists only to answer your questions...



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

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q I've heard that *Sin Episodes* might be on the verge of disappearing into a hole in the ground. Say it ain't so.
Sam Peckham

A It would perhaps be fair to say that the *Sin: Episodes* are currently in hiatus, what with studio co-founder Tom Mustaine upping and leaving along with a number of other departures. There is not a shred of evidence, however, that the battles in Freeport City are irrevocably over – even though Mustaine is on record claiming that Ritual have had difficulties simply keeping up with the Source engine as it romps ahead with updates. Ritual remain very much an ongoing commodity – although whether Elexis Sinclair will appear once more in truly episodic form is up for question.

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q When's this new Indiana Jones game I've heard about coming out then?
Ben Brook

A Beyond its showing at last year's final E3, nothing has emerged on Dr Jones' latest foray – which leads me to believe it will get a Christmas release at the earliest. Beyond its oddly monikered Euphoria physics engine that seamlessly blends character animation with the things bouncing on and around the famed archaeologist, only a paltry two extra nuggets of information can be wrested from the Lucas ranch. The year is 1939, and you'll visit San Francisco. And, of course, the relics of an as-yet unannounced civilisation.



THIS WAR IS YOUR WAR



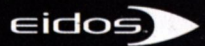
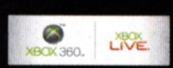
UNPRECEDENTED CONTROL



AIR, SEA & UNDERSEA ACTION



ONLINE MULTIPLAYER



FEBRUARY 2007

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COVER STORY

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION SHIVERING ISLES

Don't play that, play this. This is the heavy, heavy monster sound of madness. As *Oblivion* goes one step beyond...



AFTER HAVING YOU plough countless hours into the original *Oblivion*, Bethesda want you back in the saddle. And to coax you in, they're not just having you visit the country next door – they're figuring that once you've seen one medieval church several thousand times, you've probably seen them all, so you're going back into one of the many planes of Oblivion. But not one of the lava-filled, fire, brimstone and acrid smoke variety you're used to – this one's a lot more psychological, mushroomy and quite, quite mad. Take this lady, she looks quite sane in her lovely gold armour – but deep down she's a full-on psychopath. Why? How? Read on and find out...

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UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

PRODUCT RECALL

ONE OF THE more unusual side-effects of doing this job, alongside getting fat and learning not to talk about it at social gatherings, is that I now know more about the geography of imaginary places than I do the real world. "Where's the auction house in Thunder Bluff, Will?," "Is Cyrodill spelt with one 'i' or two?," "In the Forgotten Realms was Port Llast to the north of Neverwinter?" But sometimes dear reader, my inner atlas of place names created by Pepsi-sucking American developers lets me down and something terrible is put through the printing pages.

Which is why, with heavy heart, I have to put on my special deputy editor suit, tie and dashing cape to inform you that for several months we have been spelling Orgrimmar, capital city of Azeroth's orcs, incorrectly. We apologise unreservedly for any distress caused by the recent occasions in which we have been spelling it 'sans r' as Ogrimmar. And, indeed, express our deepest apologies to Blizzard for this most unfortunate sequence of events. After a lengthy investigation, the weak link has been identified as one Jonathan Blyth who has been disciplined accordingly. It's widely thought that he was drunk at the time, but I am aware this is no excuse – as indeed is Jonathan.

The High Court has demanded that a substantial payout to readers traumatised by these events should be made available, and those affected are advised to send all their bank details directly to myself. Thank you.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

OI! GET OFF OUR LAND!

Exclusive! Aliens settle their differences in our backyard in *Universe At War: Earth Assault*

ON THE EVE of the release of *Supreme Commander* comes another challenger for the RTS crown – an effort from the creators of *Star Wars: Empire At War* that's not only going to wipe out the population of planet Earth, but is also so deep that it'll make your mouse weep.

"The first mission starts off in Washington DC, and it gets hit HARD," smiles Adam Isgreen (the man with the deranged job title of 'design visionary' at developers Petroglyph), in a dainty preamble before we leap into *Earth Assault's* staggering list of original features. "Almost every continent is going to get devastated. Australia might make it out alive... We'll see."

"The year is 2012, and humans have just found out that they're not alone in the galaxy. Not only are they not alone, but the new arrivals aren't friendly in the

least," continues Isgreen with knowing understatement. "The invaders are not here to conquer – they're here to harvest."

"Massive walking machines consume plant, animal and mineral without distinction. Press gang-like hordes of invading ground troops herd humans into enormous mass drivers, launching them up to the invader's ships that orbit the planet, never to be seen again. Our game begins on the eve of the last day of human resistance... Or is it?"

The aim, apparently, is to create the most customisable RTS of all time. While you will build and command units as in any other RTS, each unit will have several different uses on the battlefield. In addition, your walkers and vehicles will have numerous 'hard points' to slot enhancements into, while your production facilities will be upgradable in many different directions during battle. You'll

also be able to steer your research tree between offensive, defensive and experimental technologies.

Earth Assault will also let you customise on-the-fly, using something called 'tactical dynamics' – so while your goliath units are knocking bells out of each other, you can happily rework tech trees, retrain your units and swap weapons as you please.

"We wanted to create very different experiences as you play each faction. Every side doesn't need a 'heavy tank', every faction doesn't have to have the same resource worries, and every unit doesn't need to function like something on another faction," explains Isgreen. "Is this risky? Sure! We're hoping that players will take the leap and embrace a game where you think and respond differently."

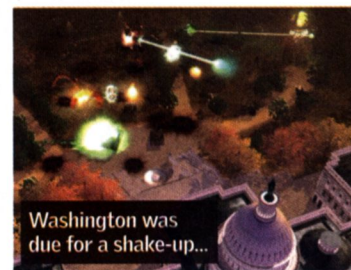
The rabbit hole runs much deeper than this though. You'll also have to deal with



We're not reading anything into the fact that they're red.



It seems Asimo was no match.



Washington was due for a shake-up...

STOP PRESS!

CROSS PURPOSES

Dark Messiah creators Arkane are working on a game called *The Crossing* which fuses a single-player game with online play.

THE PROFESSIONALS

The Cyberathlete Professional League are creating their own competitive FPS under the command of ex-*SIN Episodes* man Tom Mustaine.

CAPITAL FUNDING

Flagship Studios have made it known that some of the online features of *Hellgate: London* will come with a subscription fee. Hands-on details next issue.

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LOTRO: Shadows Of Angmar

The game for anyone who's ever thought: "Stuff this, I'd rather be a hobbit minstrel."



46

Oblivion: Shivering Isles

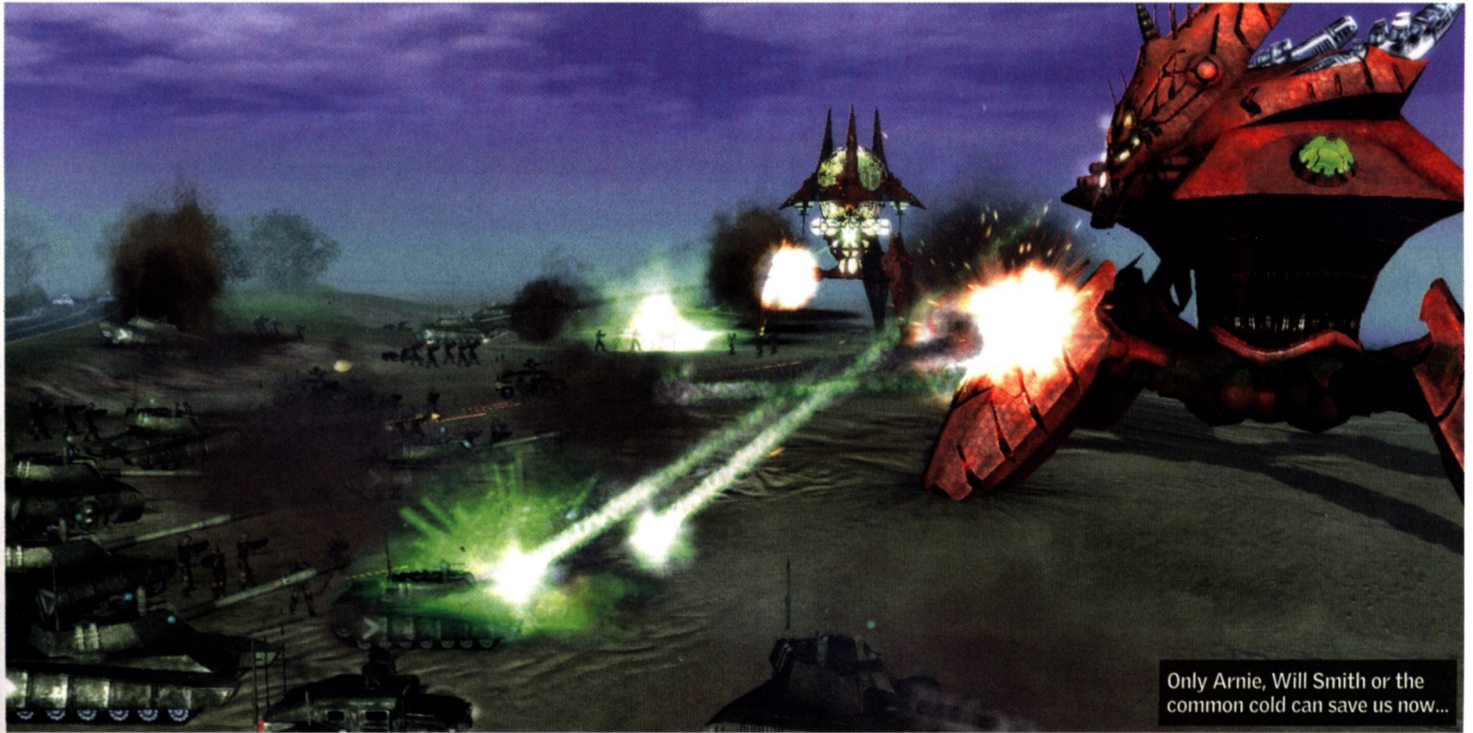
I'm just nipping off to the realms of insanity, does anyone want anything?



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Phantom exposé

Read all about it! Scandal! Fraud investigations! It's the incredible story behind Infinium Labs...



Only Arnie, Will Smith or the common cold can save us now...

the Risk-style complications of fighting on a persistent representation of Earth – choosing whether or not to bring in reinforcements and heroes from other territories. That's right, the game's got hero characters as well, each with three or so different battle modes. Beyond this, you'll have to juggle resource gathering, battles that are affected by what time of day or night it is, panicking locals getting in the way of battles, collapsing structures like skyscrapers, forests that burn and even radiation sickness.

To start with though, you play as the quickly decimated human forces as a bit of a tutorial, before the Hierarchy (the walker-packed human harvesters on show here) are joined by intergalactic buddies and Earth becomes a playground for them to express their grievances.

A grand RTS universe with a story with more bumps and revelations than a series of *Battlestar Galactica* is promised – but can a game that's seemingly as deep as the ocean still be fun and easy to play? More next issue...

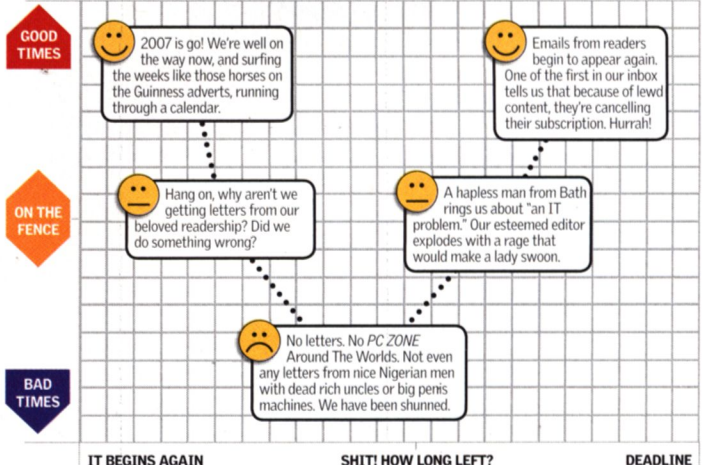
Yes, they've been watching a lot of *War Of The Worlds*.



STUFF

John Carmack has opened the door a teeny-tiny bit on the new game from id. Built on a heavily enhanced *Doom 3* engine with the MegaTexture technology from *Quake Wars*, it's not going to be your standard FPS fare, and it's "different from anything else they've done". Plus, development on the *Doom* franchise may well have been farmed out in the same way *Quake* and *Wolfenstein* have been. Intriguing...

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER





BULLY FOR YOU

Forget about Rockstar console controversies, bullies are busy picking on kids and causing mayhem in online PC games...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

BULLIES - YOU'VE GOT to pity them.

They live like emperors at school - dishing out nuclear wedgies, pinching pocket money and calling your mum a slag - then fall from grace as soon as they're expelled. At best, a former bully gets to ask: "Do you want fries with that?" Most likely though, he'll drive a stolen Toyota into an ATM and do three to five in Wakefield.

Apart from amusement arcades, parks and bicycle sheds, bullies enjoy hanging out online, where they're known as griefers, snerts, twinks or hateful dicks. They can be found flaunting their ASBO-meriting behaviours in *WOW*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Battlefield*... Even *The Sims Online*. And on that note: *Daily Mail* readers, bury your heads in your embroidered pillowcases. The following will get you all in a tizzy.

According to Microsoft.com: "Typical griefer behaviour includes: taunting others, especially beginners; thwarting fellow team-mates in the game; cheating; forming roving gangs with other griefers; blocking entryways; luring monsters

towards unsuspecting players; or otherwise using the game to annoy a convenient target or to harass a particular player."

The seeds of intimidation were sewn back in the late 1990s in *Ultima Online*, when carpentry griefers sandwiched unsuspecting players with household furniture. One prankster would chuck a chest of drawers in front, another lob a piano to the rear. The result: your avatar ended up as immobile as a grandfather clock on the *Antiques Roadshow*.

POOR ROLAND

Amusing tomfoolery soon descended into downright nastiness as Player Killers in MMOGs like *EverQuest* lured newbies into hidden areas, often under the premise of friendship, then stove in their heads with axes and stole all their possessions. Although mutual murder is part and parcel of many games, a level-50 player gets little reward or benefit from executing a newbie. Only sadistic satisfaction.

And so griefers became the bane of online worlds. One *Battlefield 2* griever boasted about how he took advantage of a glitch to ride the wing of a plane, shoot the pilot in the head upon take-off and then parachute to safety. In *The Sims*

Online, an opportunistic madam called Evangeline set up in-game brothels, then forced newbies into virtual sex slavery.

ANOTHER WORLD

Second Life, the massively hyped online world, attracts the most inventive of griefers. Urizenus Sklar, editor of the *Second Life Herald* newspaper, elaborates: "The most common form of *SL* griefing involves the use of push guns that can kick your avatar into the stratosphere or into a neighbouring region of the game space. Other weapons replicate and then follow you. I was once pursued relentlessly by a flock of clucking chickens, which was funny for a few minutes."

Second Life even has its own griever terrorist group. The W-Hats, as they're known, have spread the infamous Goatse image (you do not want to know) all over *Second Life*, and recreated the 9/11 attacks - complete with twin towers, crashing planes and falling bodies. They 'live' in a fortress that's decorated with swastikas and giant penises, and their grieving pièce de résistance came in the form of a WMVD (Weapon of Mass Virtual Destruction) that crashed the virtual world's grid and prompted Philip Rosedale, *SL* creator, to call the FBI.

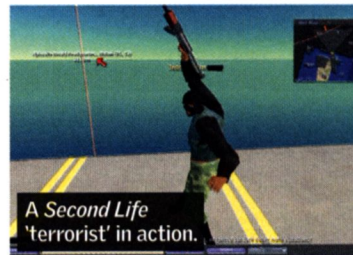
Such anarchistic behaviour might sound like a giggle, but MMOG developers and gamers consider it as serious as cancer. "If you were attacked all day long it would effectively force you from the game," frets Sklar. "Many people have left *Second Life* because of the griefing. Furthermore, lots of events have been griefed, which can't make the corporate sponsors very happy."

ANALYSE THIS

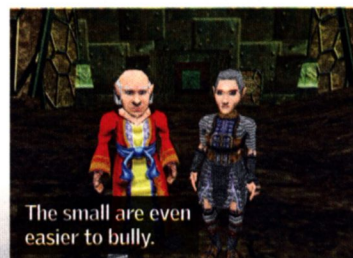
Why do people cyberbully? John Suler, from the Department of Psychology at Rider University in New Jersey, and author of *The Psychology Of Cyberspace*, explains: "There may be a rebellious or anti-social aspect to their personality, in that they like to disrupt what they



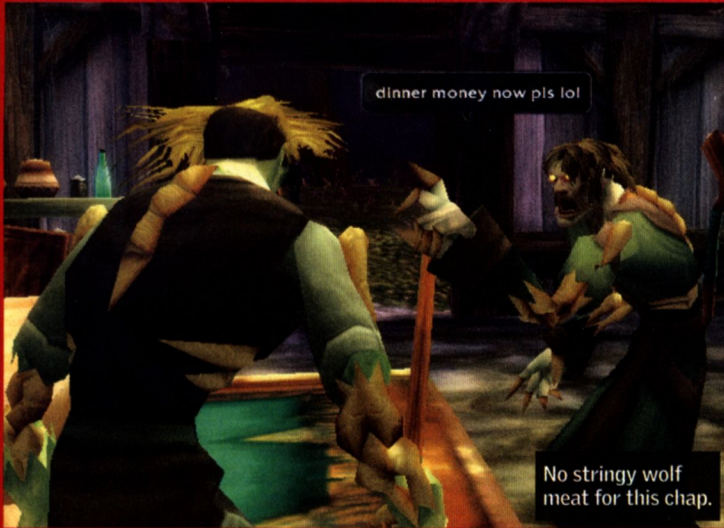
Bullies infiltrate everything from *EQII* to Internet backgammon.



A *Second Life* 'terrorist' in action.



The small are even easier to bully.



perceive to be the accepted rules and authority, or they're jealous of the accomplishments and friendships they see around them, or they may just need some kind of target, any target, for their frustrations. For some people it might even be a 'do unto others what was done to you', in that they're recreating online what might have happened to them in their lives."

A STEP TOO FAR

The agit-anarchism of W-Hats could be considered an artform of sorts, but when it comes to picking on children via VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), there are no excuses. *Battlefield 2* fan Mat Westhorpe recalls an incident when he was playing on a European server, waging war on the Strike at Karkand map.

"Five players were in our squad and a sixth player joined. Unfortunately, Little JohnnyUS instantly failed to endear himself to Captain Tourette by spawning on the far side of the map rather than with the squad. Little JohnnyUS spoke on the voice-comms in a high-pitched American accent and was clearly quite young.

"Captain Tourette: 'F*** off little boy. What did you join my squad for?'

"Captain Tourette: 'You f***ing fat little Yank. Have your balls even dropped yet?'

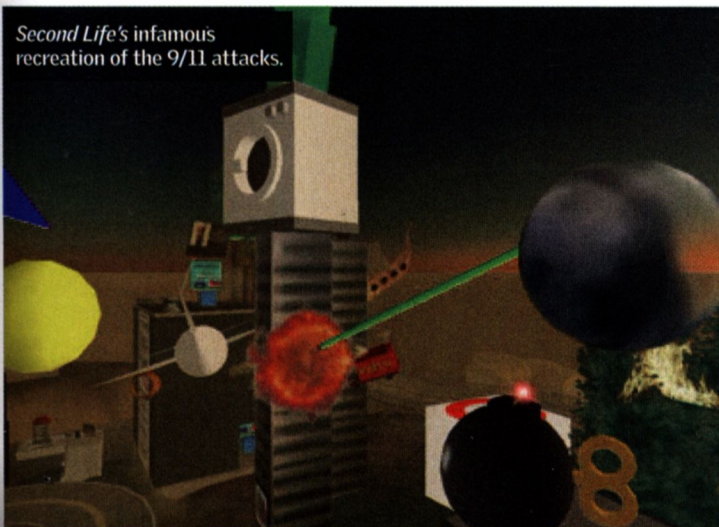
Westhorpe continues: "There were several more tirades from Captain Tourette before Little JohnnyUS left the squad.

"Voice communication is much more intimate than written abuse and its potential effects are far more severe. If someone were to receive an anonymous abusive or threatening phone call at home, the recipient would consider contacting the police. If the recipient were a child, the potential emotional damage could be incalculable. Is VoIP any different?"

DOING IT FOR THE KIDS

In response, EA's UK community and customer service manager Sam 'Protagonist' Bennett said: "Gaming online naturally generates communities, which greatly enhance the sociability of gaming. Given the anonymous nature of interacting online, there may occasionally be risks associated with real-time interaction with unknown fellow players.

"The gaming industry is committed to an online game-rating system to help protect minors from unsuitable content in the context of online gaming and to educate parents to help ensure safe



Good grief

How to raise hell in four (extremely annoying) steps...



Spamming

Rain grenades down upon an area, resulting in an unavoidable artillery barrage and massive loss of online life. As sadly found in many a spawnpoint near many a bout of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* these days. Sigh.



Corpse camping

Loiter around a dead PC's corpse in *WOW*. When he returns to recover his body and his defences are low, kill again. Alternatively, repeatedly kill a 'quest completion' NPC leaving noobs lost and confused. Sadism with a touch of necrophilia, then.



Spawn camping

Kick back near a spawn location, then murder every player that appears. Dodgier than a backstreet abortionist, this form of skullduggery is popular in games like *Quake* and most other shooters since the dawn of time. Don't camp kids!



Form a Mafia

Unite with fellow bullies and demand bribes off quivering newbies, run cartels and block access to desirable areas in the game. After all, what better larks can be gained than from the undiluted misery of others? You gigantic, life-hating wanker.

Second Life has its own griefing terrorist group. The 'W-Hats' have recreated the 9/11 attacks, spread the Goatse image and 'live' in a fortress decorated with swastikas...

online play for minors. With regards to harassment or abuse of any kind between players, EA is committed to ensuring that offenders, when reported, are dealt with swiftly and firmly."

And here's where griefing takes a decidedly darker twist. "Other forms of griefing involve obscene or racist behaviour typically targeted at individuals or groups. Stalking is also a possibility," according to Urizenus Sklar.

When griefing turns really nasty, what can we do? A company called Crisp Thinking has developed an Anti-Grooming Engine (AGE) that 'protects young people from external threats' -

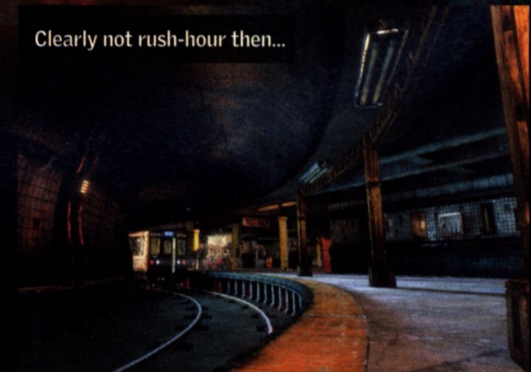
online predators in particular - and is compatible with games, while many online worlds believe that self-governing is their best option. Like real-life bullies, these virtual troublemakers are perhaps best ignored. Let's keep the *Daily Mail* out of this, and just pity the bullies. **PCZ**

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



Clearly not rush-hour then...



EXCLUSIVE!
IF YOU SEEK PEACE...
PARABELLUM

Martin Korda prepares for war in Germany's answer to Counter-Strike

DEVELOPER Acony PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE www.parabellumthegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

- An online strategic FPS with linked missions ✓
- Distinct and original game modes ✓
- Mouth-watering selection of weapons and equipment ✓
- Powered by Unreal Engine 3 ✓
- Lack of mission objectives ✗



QUESTION. WHY HAS nobody ever managed to develop a game that can come even close to dislodging *Counter-Strike* from its lofty perch atop the strategic online shooter pile? Answer? Because no-one has ever tried taking the *CS* template, retaining all that is good and adding in an original slant, that's why. Well, at least not until now they haven't.

Created by fledgling developers Acony – a team formed from an array of industry veterans – *Parabellum* seeks to infuse the *Counter-Strike* template with more strategic and tactical depth by linking a series of missions together to create one massive, objective-driven online battlefield.

Intrigued, I jetted off to Germany to take a look at the game, though nearly didn't make it after the PR guy got us lost in the Black Forest. We eventually stumbled across Acony's offices by sheer luck, but

only after several futile attempts to communicate with a bemused German woman in a petrol station, largely by shouting at her in English and pointing at a crude hand-drawn map. Luckily, the tribulations proved well worth it.

BAKED APPLES

Powered by Unreal Engine 3, *Parabellum* is already looking mightily impressive in the visual stakes, despite being a year or so off completion. Once you dive into a level, your first task is to join either the highly-trained US anti-terrorist Delta team or the despicable Black November terrorist faction, intent on turning the Big Apple into a charred core with a fat-arsed bomb.

"There's a 20-megaton nuclear warhead somewhere in New York City that's been planted by a terrorist group

called Black November, which has an ex-military background," explains Frank Trigub, director and game designer at Acony, who's presenting the game to me. "Opposed to them is Delta, a real world counter-terrorist unit."

Once you've pledged your allegiance, the clock starts ticking, and it's up to you and your team-mates to either find and defuse the bomb before it goes boom or to stop the counter-terrorists from getting anywhere near it.

"We've broken New York down into 12 sectors," continues Trigub. "Across these sectors we want to show all the different faces of New York. There'll be skyscrapers, backyards, residential areas, parks, airports and subways.

"When we were looking at most of the multiplayer games out there, we realised that they're just a collection of

THE STORY SO FAR...

ACONY



3... 2... 1

The company is formed in the small German town of Villingen-Schwenningen.

2004



COUNTER-ATTACK

Having resolved to beat Counter-Strike, Acony begins work on Parabellum.

2005



HANDE HOCH!

Police are called in when a passer-by spots an Acony employee with a replica gun.

2006



ENGLISH INVASION

Police are alerted again after a PR man charges into a petrol station yelling "Vere iz Acony?"

Late 2006



Tempers flare as the 4.15 to Basingstoke is delayed again.

The terrorists can second-guess the CTs by voting for maps in which to set up ambushes

unconnected maps. We thought, wouldn't it be cool if all the maps in the game connected together? In *Parabellum*, each level is just part of a bigger picture as we're building a city out of these levels."

GO, GO, GO!

From a top-down 3D strategic map, you and your compadres will be able to see a tactical breakdown of New York, packed with honking cabs and towering skyscrapers. This tactical overview will contain up to 12 interconnected levels, one of which houses the aforementioned nuclear device. Whenever Delta team wins a level, they'll be given a hint as to the location of the bomb.

"In this mode, called Public Warfare, Delta team can vote for which level to



Someone didn't mind the gap...



play next," explains Trigub. "So you might get the choice of going through the subway or through the backyards, depending on what your team's strengths are."

"But surely that's not fair?" I hear you cry. If the CTs get to vote for which map to play next they'll have a massive advantage, right? Well, that would have been the case had Acony not already been way ahead of us.

IT'S A TRAP!

While Delta team members can vote for the next map, Black November players have the opportunity to second-guess their opponents by voting for maps in which to set up ambushes. If the map that Delta selects is the same as the level chosen for an ambush, the terrorists will be given several

This fellow appears to have eaten my pineapple.



Boom, boom, boom

There's more than one way to shake a room



You throw one pebble and look what happens...

You want special effects and explosions? You got 'em. Acony are going to great lengths to ensure that each level will be packed with detail and, more importantly, the potential for some serious pyrotechnics.

Each level will feature highly destructible environments, with tanks that gush jets of water and pipes that let off steam when punctured by bullets. You'll also encounter plenty of gas tanks ripe for the riddling, which will set off *Doom*-style chain reactions of explosions throughout buildings, cremating anyone who's inside and causing stone to splinter and glass to fly.

Throw in the stunning atom bomb explosion effects (when the terrorists win) and you're left gawping at what could well prove to be one of the most explosive and spectacular online shooters to date.

This guy *hates* plastic chairs.



precious seconds headstart in which to get into position and prepare a nasty welcoming committee for their counter-terrorist friends.

To make matters even more interesting, *Parabellum* will also feature a handful of zones with special abilities. Should you and your team successfully capture these areas, you'll find yourself with a massive strategic advantage.

"We have some areas that have special abilities," says Trigub. "One is a subway. If you go into a subway sector, you can move through the city much more quickly." Providing there are no signal failures, of course...

IN THE ZONE

Other zones with special abilities will include a helicopter pad that allows you to call in chopper support. This strategic eye in the sky will enable you to identify the whereabouts of the enemy, allowing you to launch coordinated attacks on an unsuspecting foe. Mortar zones, meanwhile, will enable you to pound enemy strongholds before storming them on foot, while airports will give you the option of calling in air strikes.

"Capturing these zones can change the game drastically," continues Trigub. "Trying to get through an open area like a park will be very hard if the enemy has mortar support. In this situation

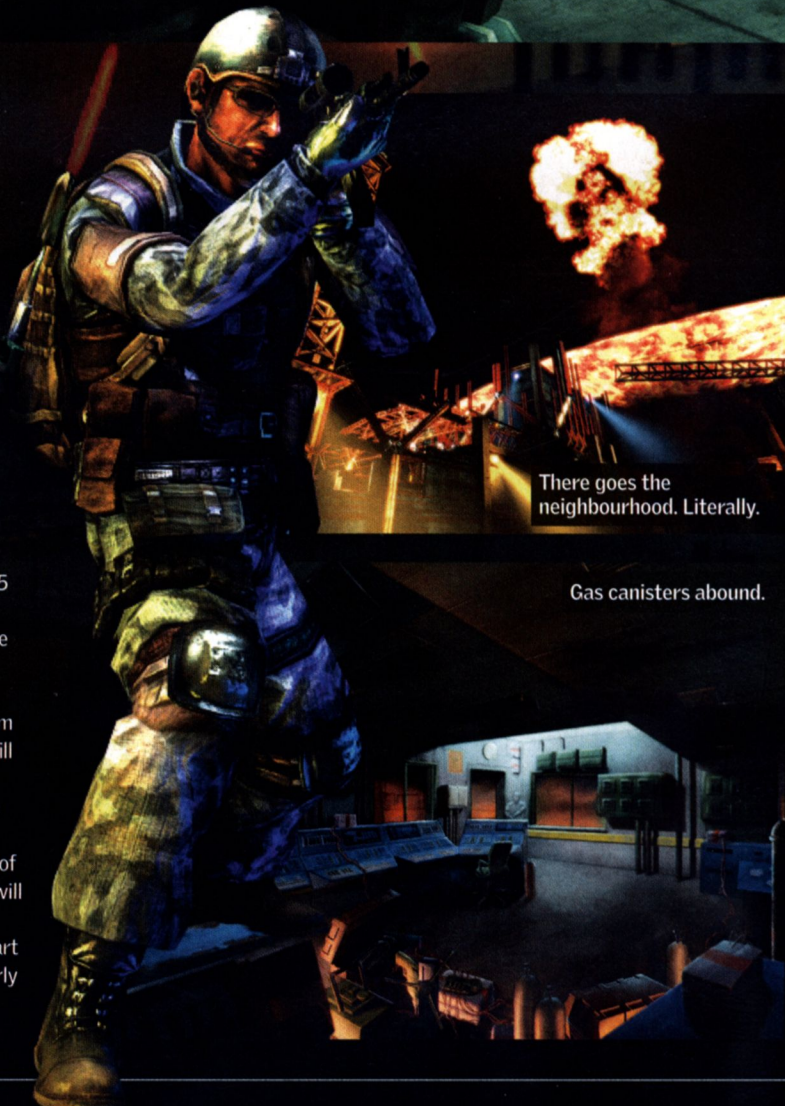
you'll want to try and approach the enemy from a different zone."

Parabellum will feature three distinct playing modes, which should allow you to enjoy the game in a format best suited to your playing style and schedule.

As well as Public Warfare mode, there'll also be two other ways in which to play. Classic mode will bear more than a passing resemblance to Valve's online flagship, with two teams (terrorists and CTs) fighting on solitary maps.

On the other end of the spectrum is Strategic Warfare mode, aimed primarily at clans with its unusual 5v5 gameplay. Each team will begin with five squads of five soldiers that can be moved around a tactical grid of New York. Whenever two squads meet on the strategic map, the action will zoom into the level where the two teams will battle it out for control of the zone.

Here's the twist. Each one of these five units begins with 100 health. However, should one team lose three of its men in one level, the unit's health will go down to 40. "The next time that squad is attacked, each player will start with 40 health," explains Trigub, clearly picking up on my concern that some players might be forced to sit out for



There goes the neighbourhood. Literally.

Gas canisters abound.



"Now, did I park on level 3B or 4B?"



Can these dark interiors match the simple charms of *de_dust*?

long periods should they die in earlier rounds. "If they're all killed, the entire unit is wiped out and removed from the strategy map. A good strategy can help you win over a team with better individual players."

PICK UP AND PLAY

After the presentation, it was time to get bloody. Jumping onto a server packed with hardened testers, I was surprised to find how quickly I became accustomed to the game's intuitive interface and welcoming gameplay.

Each round began with a loadout phase. Rather than using *Counter-Strike*'s familiar credit system, *Parabellum* places no restrictions on your choice of weapons and equipment. If something fits into your size-sensitive inventory, you can carry it – a feature that could well help prevent the uphill struggle faced by *Counter-Strike* teams who haven't registered a victory for two or three rounds and are short on cash.

While the action felt very much like *Counter-Strike* – though with considerably less satisfying weapons – it was the strategic elements that proved of most interest. As my teammates and I moved our squads around the tactical grid of New York, a fascinating game of cat-and-mouse unfolded as we and the enemy charged towards the strategic locations in order to gain a valuable tactical foothold.

Thankfully, however, these strategic moments were kept brief by a stringent time limit that had us quickly back in the danger zone for some more shooting mayhem.

THE LONG MARCH

While the first-person action is still some way short of stacking up to the likes of *Counter-Strike*, *Parabellum*'s well-paced, cleverly designed levels and frenetic yet strategic gameplay suggests plenty of promise. The unique tactical slant provided by connected

The way of the gun

When a gun isn't just a gun...



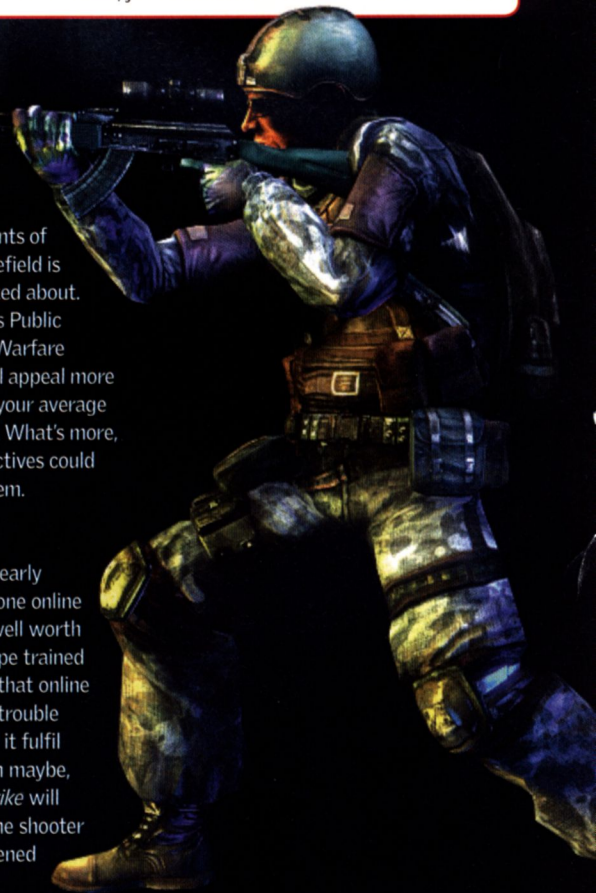
Gun fetishists will be well catered to.

Parabellum's arsenal is already looking impressive, with 12 lovingly recreated real-world boomsticks on offer, along with seven modifications such as sniper scopes, laser sights and silencers. You'll even be able to equip knives, which can be pulled out of your enemies once they've stopped twitching. Delta team will be able to call upon a collection of highly accurate weapons, such as the recoil-friendly M4, while Black November players will have access to a more powerful, though slightly less accurate arsenal, including terrorist mainstay the AK-47.

Once you've selected your weapon, you'll be able to load it with three different ammo types, each with specific benefits and drawbacks. Armour piercing rounds, for example, can punch through up to 20-inches of concrete but will cause relatively low amounts of damage when they come into direct contact with flesh. Soft-point bullets and full metal jacket bullets have different properties. In some cases, you'll even be able to bounce bullets around corners.

levels and the ability to coordinate the movements of your forces over a battlefield is well worth getting excited about. However, modes such as Public Warfare and Strategic Warfare currently look like they'll appeal more to hardened clans than your average online weekend warrior. What's more, the lack of mission objectives could also prove to be a problem.

With 11 months of development still to go though, and with much early promise, *Parabellum* is one online tactical shooter that's well worth keeping your sniper scope trained on. It's familiar enough that online gamers should have no trouble accepting it, and should it fulfil its ample potential, then maybe, just maybe, *Counter-Strike* will have a team-based online shooter to feel genuinely threatened by. Maybe. **PC7**



UPFRONT **COMING SOON**

**COMING
SOON...**

JADE EMPIRE

Reheated Chinese leftovers or a prawn cracker?
Will Porter unsubtly gnaws a fortune cookie...

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE jade.bioware.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

- Made by the wonderful BioWare brigade ✓
- Surprisingly pretty given its age ✓
- Storyline owes a lot to *Star Wars* ✓
- Makes you feel all *Crouching Tiger-y* ✓
- Still potential for console hangover ✗

ETA
MARCH

HANG ON A minute. So I'm the last of an embattled group of mystical fighters, killed off by the forces of an evil empire, yet as a baby I was smuggled away and secreted far away in a rural community where my presence would not be felt? And I've been sent by my master into a 'spirit cave' where I'll learn about my true self, and later be spoken to by glittery blue/pale ghosts trapped between life and death? This rings a bell that's somewhat far away and relatively long ago...

A play through the first hours of the PC special edition of *Jade Empire* reveals that it treads the boards of *Star Wars* with a glee thoroughly untouched upon in the opening acts of sci-fi amnesia in either *KOTOR*. That's not to belittle what BioWare have created here though – from the off you're embroiled in a deep, wordy and FMV-packed narrative, nimbly facing off against evenly paced tutorial sections.

It doesn't really feel like a converted Xbox game in the way that the *KOTORs*

did either. Yes, the areas you find yourself in are often tight and contained, but the lush, colourful, almost hand-drawn locations and smooth character models and animations easily brings your 'console conversion' guard down.

SWEET NOT SOUR

The rejigged combat on PC works well too, even if it does take a while to get used to its intricacies – blocking, dodging, focusing power and dancing between light and heavy attacks. You can also specialise in any one of approximately a gazillion different fighting styles, and three or four of these are available in the game's opening martial arts school, bandit attack and swamp-set scenes.

As you level-up, you put points into your favoured disciplines as well as the usual character improvement ones, while there are also a ton of magical shiny gems that you can lodge in your ancestral amulet to stick a few pluses into the areas where you need them most.

You see, something is rotten in the heart of the *Jade Empire*, and it's having an impact on people who've shuffled off their mortal coils – the path to the afterlife has been blocked and there's a whole lot of spectral huffing and moaning going on.

Because of this, you can prepare for a few ghost-based variants on BioWare's staple moral dilemma template, mothers wracked by guilt after the death and reappearance of their infants and the like. There's also quite a few demons that look like bipedal rhinos and some horses knocking about – but they're more a sign of the *Jade Empire* being a bit odd rather than something more sinister.

Whether the changes shackled into the *Jade* redux will prove mostly cosmetic remains to be seen, as does whether the tight confines of the game and its comparatively short playtime will grate in a PC sphere not exactly neck-deep in roleplay rivals. But, four or five hours in, I certainly feel like a sexy kung-fu fighter. And that doesn't happen every day. **PCZ**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

EGG FRIED NICE

BioWare have strived for oriental authenticity, even creating their own linguistically sound language for the land's old, traditional tongue. No Duke Of Edinburgh-style gaffes here.

EXTRA CRISPY DUCK

The passage of time and ramping up of processor power means that PC owners get a barrage of new visual effects and heightened resolutions. We'd only moan otherwise.

NPC DIM SUM

The megalithic powers of the PC means that BioWare can play with the numbers and varieties of enemies on-screen at any time. So battling in *Jade* is a few shades of 'epic' more than before.

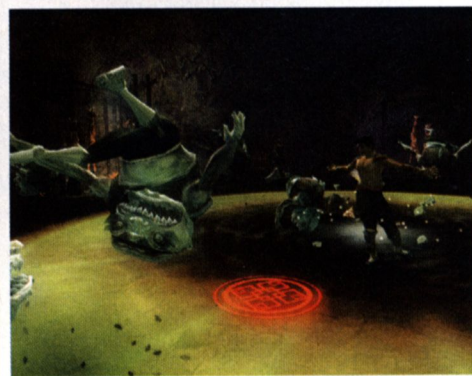
WONTON DESTRUCTION

Marvel can't sue, as these claws happened several thousand years before adamantium got anywhere near Wolverine's bone marrow. Just try it Stan Lee! You can't argue with history!



It's refreshing to play an RPG with a setting that's recognisable, but also a million miles from Tolkien.

Four or five hours in, I certainly feel like a sexy kung-fu fighter





It's the Braid-y Bunch. ROFL!

WHEN SIX TRIBES GO TO WAAARRRGHHH... WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Jon Blyth once again pokes his inquisitive head into the *Warhammer* cauldron

DEVELOPER EA Mythic PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.warhammeronline.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 171

THE LOWDOWN

- Beats *WOW* by actually featuring a real war
- Mythic's fabled RvR with a more appealing backdrop
- They're the best orcs you'll ever fight
- Good balance of guts and humour
- What if PvP is scary and you don't like it?

YOU CAN'T GET my mother to watch *Star Trek*. You can tell her it's just like any of the other programmes in funny clothes, but she'll just fold her arms and say, "I don't like it." She's the same with goblins. The first crackle of magic, runes or friendly trees and she's in the kitchen watching *Maid In Manhattan* for the 30th time. So my mum, who reads *PC ZONE* because I've told her that 'staff writer' is a highly prestigious position, is probably beginning to despair. *World Of Warcraft*, *Lord Of The Rings Online*, *Warhammer* – what has become of her son, who once loved to play in the daylight?

Well, his skin may be paler, but he's happy. Happy that *WOW* has broadened MMO appeal so much that it's on *South Park*, and happier still that two monster fantasy newcomers are about to be set upon us. But for new chums such as *Warhammer Online* and *LOTRO*, making an impact on the scale required to get a permanent place in the MMO pantheon is difficult.

Witness the online loneliness of *Auto Assault*, the now subscription-free *Archlord* and, erm, *Roma Victor*. Admittedly, *LOTRO* developers Turbine have the massive franchise appeal of Middle-earth on their

side, but then EA Mythic have nearly unsurpassed experience in multiplayer RPGs that dates back to CEO Mark Jacob's 1984 MUD, *Aradath*. He remembers when all this was ASCII, far as the eye can see.

GIVE PEACE? NO CHANCE

But while the competition between these new MMO heavyweights is sure to be fierce, the two are actually very different games. Unlike *LOTRO*, for instance, don't expect *Warhammer* to start off in a time of relative peace. This is *Warhammer*, not Middle-earth, and living memory doesn't have much in the way of peace, even among relatives. For a start, Chaos Marauders have been threatening the stoic warriors of Nordland for centuries, but with their plague tearing through the town of Grimmenhagen, they seem closer than ever to taking control.

Meanwhile, The Bloody Sun Boyz, the vintage band of greenskin hooligans led by the performance-enhanced orc Grumlok and his shoulder-mounted goblin Shaman Gazbag, have taken over

and vandalised Eight Peaks, traditionally dwarf country. Still hungry for bloody conquest, they're looking to take over Karaz-A-Karak, the dwarven capital. Why? Pretty much because they hate dwarves as much as they love fighting.

That so many areas are on the brink of collapse isn't just hollow, scene-setting drama. As EA Mythic's Steve Perkins says: "In our game, you're joining an ARMY." His capitals – he totally means it. Mythic invented realm vs realm (RvR) combat with *Dark Age Of Camelot*, and have had years to develop and refine the experience. The battlefields of *WOW*, for all their frantic point-capturing, feel like little more than a distracting side-game in areas kept artificially on the brink. In *WO:AOR* (or *WO* to its friends) you'll capture whole areas, plunder cities – even capital cities – for loot uniquely available to the RvR players. You can play old-fashioned player vs environment (PvE) if you like, but the war will find you in the end.

Moreover, players of *Camelot* had to wait for this kind of combat as a high-level endgame; in *WO*, you'll be able to

ETA
LATE
2007

THE STORY SO FAR...

EA MYTHIC



Adventures Unlimited Software Inc.

Mark Jacobs' first company launches a MUD called *Aradath*.



1984

Interworld

Jacobs new company had such a good name that someone else chose it too...

1995

So they changed it to?

Mythic Entertainment, who launched the popular *Dark Age Of Camelot* in 2001.



1997

EA Mythic

In June 2006, EA purchased Mythic for an undisclosed sum. My, haven't we grown?

2006



"Did you put 7pm on the invitations?"



Levelling up for dwarves is rewarded with silky ginger beards.



Was that a smile? Yes it was. Who's a happy orc?



Rivers of blood, blood-red skies, you get the drift.

take part in the faction power-play from an early level. You'll even be able to build your character entirely from RvR missions. You'll miss out on some similarly unique PvE rewards, but at least no-one will come up to you and emote a clucking chicken.

Before you get to take down capital cities, however, there's lower-level PvP to fill your hours. In everyday world skirmishes, players are left to their own devices by the servers. Battlefields aren't like *WOW's* instances - they're free-for-alls with reinforcements potentially arriving at any time, depending on who's online. If you want a more controlled environment, you can play a scenario, in which teams are balanced using a point system, distantly akin to that used in setting up a game of tabletop *Warhammer*. Any player imbalance is adjusted automatically by NPCs joining the fray, a feature that'll also reduce waiting times for these instances.

The looks, meanwhile, are as important to *Warhammer* creators Games Workshop as

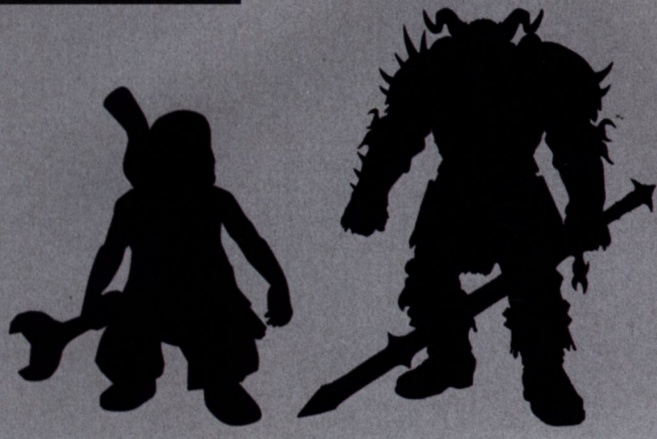


Mythic invented RvR combat with *Dark Age Of Camelot*, and have had years to refine the experience

What's that coming over the hill?

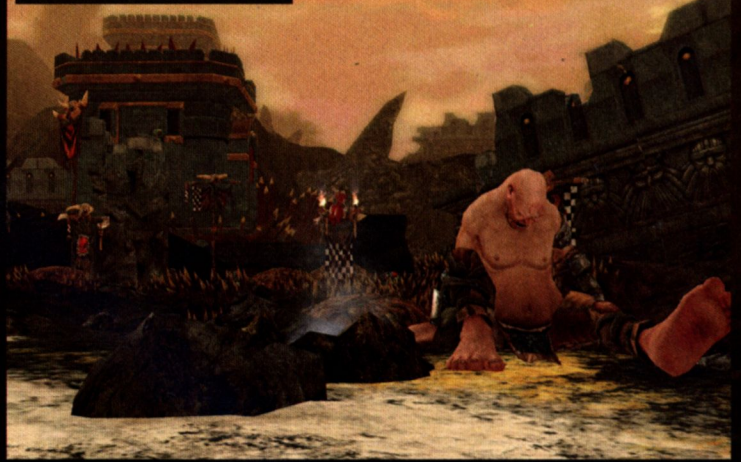
I see a little silhouette, oh, of an orc. Scaramouche! Scaramouche!

Spot the Chaos Warrior.



Mythic are using the 20-yard rule of visual design, which works on the fairly accurate assumption that people don't have time to rely on pixels when making strategic decisions in the thick of battle. So if you can't see it from 20 yards away, it's not an important physical feature. Orcs will grow in stature, dwarf beards will become more elaborate, and you'll be able to stylise your character in terms of colour, trophies and so forth. But for practical reasons, what you're fighting is instantly recognisable from a distance. "A skull cap, glowing staff and beard to the floor means a high-level Rune priest," explains Steve Perkins. "And an axe-wielding orc in heavy armour is a high-level Black Orc, and you'd better run..."

Warhammer giants: least appealing breasts in fantasy.



"What do you mean Bonios haven't been invented yet?"



they are to fans, and Mythic are working closely with the RPG gurus to get the visual feel right. Like *WOW*, your character's basic 'look' will depend less on 50 cheekbone sliders and more on race, class and level (see 'What's That Coming Over The Hill?', above).

Getting the look right isn't obvious; *Warhammer* lore has been drawn in many different styles, and now needs to be tailored to work within an MMO. "*WO*'s art style," explains Perkins, "is definitely influenced more by the miniatures than the cover paintings. This makes sense – the miniatures are crafted to be recognisable as you look down at them from the table. We need the same effect to aid in RvR grouping and combat."

Whatever you do, just don't call it cartoony. One of the prototype designs for the dwarf train was rejected last year because it looked like a demonic Thomas the Tank Engine, and Perkins is acutely aware of the balance to be

struck between dirt, blood, struggle and an enjoyable play experience. "Just wait until you see how Chaos is coming along," he insists. "No 'cartoony' demons there..."

EVIL IN WAR

Personality too is important. Whereas 'proper' role-playing in a lot of other MMOs seems to be the preserve of tedious escapist who think role-playing equates to talking a bit medieval and saying you really, really hate the other guys, playing in character in *WO* could turn out to be half the fun. Take the hooligan orcs. A far cry from the misunderstood Shamans of *WOW* or the monstrous puppets of Sauron in *LOTRO*, the orcs love war, almost for war's sake. They love humiliating the dwarves, defiling their buildings and cutting off their cherished beards for trophies.

More to the point, the way the different classes benefit from certain combat styles will force players into a kind of role-playing. Dwarves are better at holding a location, with sniping

The people you'll see, the places you'll go Nobody said they'd be friendly though...



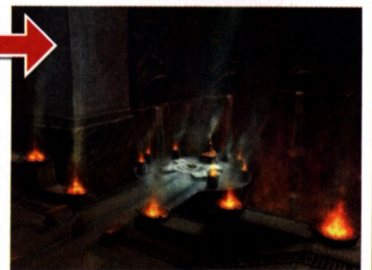
NORDLAND: It only looks idyllic because there's no-one there. If even one person was on this field, he'd have declared war on himself on principle.



EIGHT PEAKS: Once occupied by the dwarves and an important trading route, it's now a graffiti-covered shithole ruled by the Bloody Sun Boyz.



CHAOS WARHOST: Meet Tzeentch, whose Chaos army is on the march in Nordland. He's the god of change and evolution, and arch-enemy of Nurgle.



KARAZ-A-KARAIK: The dwarf capital. If you're not quite into your fantasy enough to say words in native languages, you can call it Everpeak.



"I'm a disapproving boar. Tusk tusk."



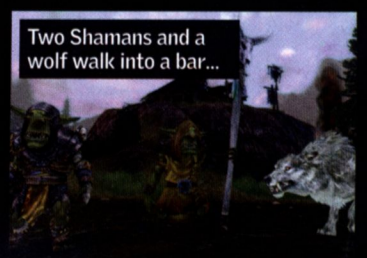
Giant spiders in fantasy games... Sigh.



His bark's worse than... Oh, never mind.



Stop! Hammer time...



Two Shamans and a wolf walk into a bar...

engineers drawing in the enemy, and Runepriests buffing the Hammerers to cause maximum damage. Meanwhile, goblin Shamans draw power from conflict around them, so will be forced to get close to the action.

The characters have to be strong, of course, because that's the source of *Warhammer's* infamous humour. The six main playable races each play their roles, like one of the darker episodes of *Friends*. The abilities of Black Orcs, for instance, reflect their unsophisticated methodology. Well, that's if the 'Right in the Jibblies!' attack is anything to go by. Idiomatic NPC goblins, on the other hand, will be baffled by dwarven engineering skills, to the point of putting their heads inside them to try and figure it out.

Some of it rings depressingly true, too – take the supposedly good-guy Empire Witch Hunter class. Dedicated to the cleansing of heretics, they'll happily expand heresy to include anyone who needs killing. War is hell-arious.

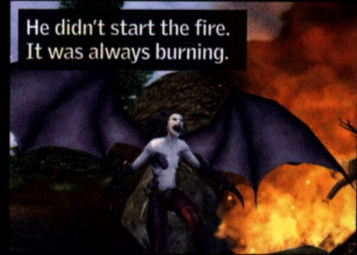
Warhammer's attitude is summed up perfectly by associate producer Josh Drescher, and the way he recently

One of the designs for the dwarf train was rejected because it looked like a demonic Thomas the Tank Engine

phrased *WOW* quests. He thinks the "kill ten squirrels and collect some magic daisies" brigade are missing out on proper war. But how to turn a such a player into a bloodthirsty RvR fanatic? Mythic know it's a conversion process for some, so they're going to coax you into the battlezones. At first with a mission to find someone. Then maybe you'll have to help out a little bit. Then kill a specific person, then... Well, by then Mythic reckon you'll be hooked, so it's more likely you'll need coaxing out.

THIS WAR NEEDS YOU

Certainly, playing against other humans can be frustrating. They don't just stand there, and they don't run away at predictable low-health triggers. They jump around like idiots while you're trying to smite them, and they come back with higher-level mates when you




He didn't start the fire. It was always burning.



"Mr Giant, you dropped your spanner."

kill them. For most MMOs, this is something to be feared and shunned. *LOTRO*, for instance, is primarily you against the computer, with Monster Mode offered to placate the PvP nuts. For Mythic, however, it's PvE players who are nuts – why play identical, instanced dungeons when you can have the infinite variety of huge, human-populated wars? Perkins namechecks *Counter-Strike* more than once.

END GAMES

With such a refreshing take on MMO combat, *WO* should have no problem getting followers. The Chaos Hordes are a stunning bunch of freaks, and if you're into PvP, it'll be as natural as a barrel of ducks rolling into a pond. But Mythic will be aiming to pull customers from *WOW* and the *Warhammer* fanbase, rather than converting players from their own game, *Dark Age Of Camelot*. To get the most out of the game, players of non-PvP-orientated games will have to pull their socks up, hone their tactics and – how to put this delicately – grow a set of balls. 

LIKE A VIRGIN

This is (supposedly) a fresh virgin, fully prepped and ready to be sacrificed by your evil self. As in *Fable*, you're faced with some tough moral choices. Unlike *Fable*, it's more of a decision between evil and a lot eviller.

TAKE MY WIFE

Once your reputation spreads, the general public will fear you. Capitalise on this by forcing towns to pay you a steady supply of gold in exchange for not sending your minions to dismantle their buildings.

**HOT
SHOT**

OVERLORD

DEVELOPER Triumph Studios **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEB** www.codemasters.com/overlord **ETA** Summer **PREVIOUSLY IN...** N/A

EVEN THOUGH YOU might have long since stopped wearing your 'It's Good To Be Bad' T-shirt in favour of more sophisticated clothing, you can never silence the little voice in your head that urges you to laugh and point at the homeless, or kick orphans in the stomach. *Overlord's* the sort of game which will satiate your well-suppressed evil ego, allowing you not only to be a complete bastard, but also to control a small army of *Pikmin*-style minions in a *Fable*-style world, with a dash of fantasy humour and brilliant character design added for good measure. We reckon it could (literally) be wicked.

OVERLORDING IT

This is you, the evil Overlord. You were vanquished by some pesky heroes 10 years ago, but now you're back. The story mode has you murdering the leaders of seven kingdoms, each representing a deadly sin.

ECO-EFFICIENT

Minions use whatever they can get their hands on. They'll often be seen wearing pots and pans or wielding gardening tools after raiding a house. Run them through this pumpkin patch and they'll even use the pumpkins as helmets.

FLY MY PRETTIES

Your minions are the stars of the show. Order to them to raid a house and they'll clamber through the windows and down the chimneys, killing the occupants and leaving the place in ruins.



THE BEST FLIGHT SIM DEVELOPER IN THE UNIVERSE

Steve Hogarty on Oleg Maddox's *Storm Of War: Battle Of Britain...*



www.ubisoft.com | ETA: Summer

FLIGHT SIM GURU Oleg Maddox was born with planes on the brain. From an early age, his fascination with flight manifested itself in his collection of model and radio-controlled aircraft. He went on to work as an aerospace engineer in Moscow during the Cold War, and when Russia no longer needed people to think up ways of strapping bigger guns onto planes, he was spat out on to the cold, harsh streets and forced to start developing games (which he rather enjoyed, truth be told). Having only had the chance to actually fly a plane a handful of times, a car accident left him

with injuries preventing him from taking to the skies again. So he turned elsewhere, to the world of flight sims.

So goes the prologue to the flight sim developer's current role as team leader at IC: Maddox Games. If you already know who Maddox is, you've most likely played *IL-2 Sturmovik*. However, the man's career actually began with FPS titles *Z.A.R.* and *Madspace*, games that were hugely popular in Russia – more so than *Doom* and *Quake*.

He was also (allegedly) associated with a game called *Sex Tetris*, insofar as he supplied the (non-rude) background photography. If that's not mind-boggling

enough, Russians genuinely regard him as we would John Carmack or Will Wright. Maddox is huge in Russia, and he's busy putting the final touches on *Storm Of War: Battle Of Britain*, the game that may well make him a household name all over the planet. Like Jade Goody.

So why choose the Battle of Britain as the setting for his latest masterpiece? According to Maddox, it's all to do with appeal, as many more people will find Britain's fight for air superiority more interesting than distant and generally unheard of battles on the Russian front. *SOW:BOB* will improve on *IL-2* in almost

every sense. The skies are more detailed, the visuals more refined, the renowned physics modelling more realistic than ever and enemy AI has been reworked to allow for raids containing hundreds of aircraft.

Of course, all the stuff that made *IL-2* special remains intact. Take a few hits and the game's intricately detailed damage model reveals the guts of your plane and affects the handling in real time, and the absurdly detailed and fully animated cockpits are a testament to the research carried out by pilots and enthusiasts alike. Save perhaps for *Sex Tetris*, this could be Maddox's finest moment yet.

THE TRACK PACK

If the kids get *TrackMania: United*, they will never be divided

www.trackmaniaunited.com | ETA: March

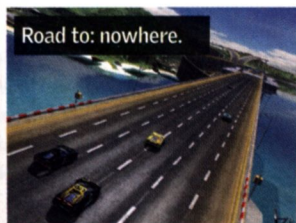
THERE'VE BEEN PLENTY of 'ultimate' editions of games in the past. Often the last squeeze of milk out of the cash cow, these desultory compendia typically comprise the original game, the official expansion pack, a crap sequel and one or two 'never before seen!' levels. *TrackMania: United*, on the other hand, is a beautiful amalgam of the game's previous forms, caught in the prime of its life rather than as a decaying elder statesman.

Existing TrackManiacs will be all too aware that the series has never relied purely on its ridiculous loops, insane speeds and pixel-perfect ramp jumps. They're the best bits, yes, but they are merely the main course to a gamut of subsidiary dishes such as arena-bound F1/buggy hybrids, snow tracks that make for almost bobsleigh conditions and rally courses that may not make Colin McRae lie awake in bed at night, but are certainly fun. And

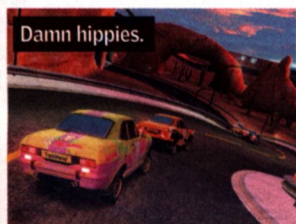
now, for the first time, they're all together in one incandescent bundle of love.

The most important thing, though, is the way the game seamlessly stitches the *TM* community features into the interface – something that, since *United* is already available in foreign parts, we've been happily checking out for the past few weeks. Instead of having to be all social and find and join a clan, these days if you fancy competing in a tournament it can be all be found with the in-game browser, known as ManiaLink.

From here, you have your own little corner of the *TM*-verse, enabling you to sell your cars and creations for the in-game copper currency, while buying from a myriad of user-created content from fellow devotees. It's genuinely impressive stuff, even though everyone online is seemingly a million times better than we are. But maybe that's just us.



Road to: nowhere.



Damn hippies.



It's all about the fraternité, mon ami.



Richard Hammond not pictured.

PCZONE CHARTS

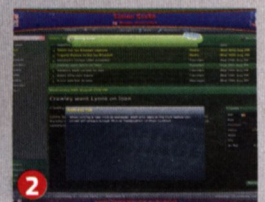
ChartTrack

- 1 **FIFA 07**
Issue 174 84%
- 2 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 90%
- 3 **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
- 4 **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 5 **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 175 91%
- 6 — **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
Issue 174 86%
- 7 **COMPANY OF HEROES**
Issue 173 93%
- 8 **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 82%
- 9 **WARHAMMER 40K: MARK OF CHAOS**
Issue 176 82%
- 10 **WARHAMMER 40K: DOW – DARK CRUSADE**
Issue 175 88%
- 11 **NEW** **LOTR BFME II: RISE OF THE WITCH KING**
Issue 176 80%
- 12 **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 69%
- 13 **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 14 **RE** **LOTR: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%
- 15 **NEW** **RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS**
Issue 177 82%
- 16 **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 17 **AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE WARCHIEFS**
Issue 175 72%
- 18 **GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL**
Issue 176 89%
- 19 **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 20 **RE** **DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC**
Issue 174 84%



FIFA 07

With few major releases of late, the goal-hanging *FIFA* series gains the ascendancy with all the grace of a stilt-wearing Peter Crouch.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

All the fun of football management, without the stress, the sex with the club secretary or the thousands of pounds in bung money.



THE SIMS 2: PETS

So when the kitchen inevitably gets set on fire, do the fluffy puppies get engulfed in flames? An interesting experiment beckons!



THE SIMS 2

The Sims has made so much money that 50 obese Americans have been hired to sit outside EA gargling coins to entertain corporate guests.



Dear Log,

You recently tempted me back into *World Of Warcraft*, somehow coercing me to restart as a Horde character when there was nothing whatsoever wrong with my lovely Alliance Night Elf, ElfieMoon. Well here's news: I'm going back. The Horde are nothing but nasty-minded, noob-accusing bastards. I'm off home.

Will Porter

Dear Will,

How your heart must swell, knowing that you act with nobility and pure-blooded heroism for the good of all Azeroth. Mother Porter can at last be proud. Here's the big difference between the factions - the Alliance think the Horde are evil, which they're not. The Horde just think the Alliance are arseholes, which they all are, including your precious little ElfieMoon.

Jon 'Log' Blyth

Dear Log,

The fact of the matter is that the Horde attracts twisted, ill-minded individuals to its cause. I'm off doing proper fantasy with dwarves and little gnome people while you lot spend all your time pretending to be big scary monsters and grieving each other. You just don't get that sort of crap on my side of Azeroth. You lot are scum, plain and simple. I'm happier as a Night Elf, and also a better kind of person. WP

Dear Will,

So you pay money to walk around in a virtual fairyland for obsessive compulsives, but also need to feel that you're a better person for doing so? Sure, we get our share of tedious, yelling 11 year olds, but it's not a matter of good versus evil, it's a matter of fun versus deluded. You're nothing but a wet tart who sees *WOW* as a way of proving you're lovely. JB

Dear Log,

OK, try this on for size. It isn't just Horde people I don't like. It's the whole Horde world. The Undercity is badly designed and boring. The vast plains around Orgrimmar are just dull, dull, dull. I'm sorry, but if the Horde didn't have Thunder Bluff then there would be no appeal whatsoever. Alliance FTW forever. WP

Dear Will

I'll give you that - Undercity is a horribly designed place. It's repetitive, bland and completely funless to walk around. But I'd rather be in a soggy mud hut with people I like than a golden palace filled with Alliance imbeciles like you. Enjoy walking around your pretty purple forest, Will. Just remember that it's a forest filled with the very worst kind of tit. JB

ENTER THE 'VERSE

Battlestar Galactica and Firefly MMOs to compete with Stargate Worlds?

WITHOUT WANTING TO betray too much fandom, how good would this lot be? We'll start with what's definitely happening: *Stargate Worlds*. Using Unreal Engine 3, the game is of course based on the concept of worlds separated by interlocking portals on different planets. The competing races that all look a bit the same and vast amounts of back-history are perfectly suited to the MMO format - even if we did say exactly the same thing when *Star Wars Galaxies* was in the offing. Developers Cheyenne Mountain will be hoping to avoid the fate of the cancelled *SG-1: The Alliance*, while presumably hoping to sign up the vocal talents of MacGyver.

Firefly, meanwhile - the bountiful, beauteous TV cowboy western in space that was cruelly cut short by short-sighted execs at Fox, then rescued by Universal, then spurned by thoughtless cinema

audiences, is also up for the massively multiplayer treatment. Rabid fans like us would say that its 'Imperial motherland versus rebellious colonies' setup would again perfectly fit the MMO bill. Others would sit back in mild surprise that this could be the first MMO to truly have 'prostitute' (or 'companion') as a career option. Expect it to be more of a prequel though, or at least pre-*Serenity*, since it's been licensed from the fools at Fox rather than Universal.

Finally, VU may have denied it - but something is certainly up in the recently rediscovered universe of *Battlestar Galactica* - and there's an 'investor presentation' floating around on the Web to back it up. It might not be an MMO - it's described as a 'short session' game - but if we get to fight Cylons in spaceships while sexy robots invade our minds then we'll presumably be happy forever.



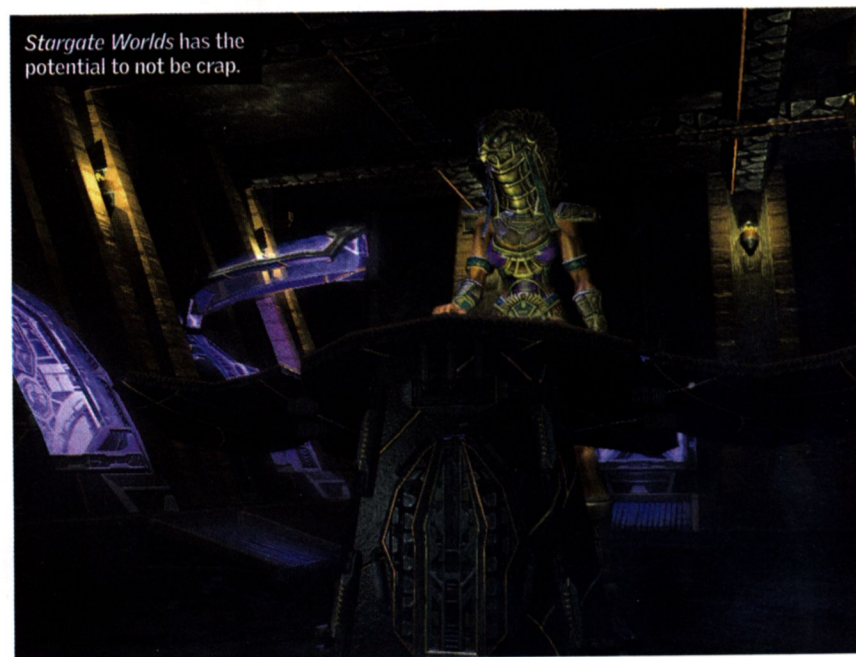
Battlestar MMO: geek heaven.



The history of SG-1 games is short and unhappy.



Firefly: to live on in MMO form?



Stargate Worlds has the potential to not be crap.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who made gaming an artform



ERIC CHAHI - CREATOR OF *ANOTHER WORLD*

Now on the verge of its 15th anniversary, *Another World* was for many a revelation: an indication of just how good and beautiful videogames could be. With an updated re-release igniting new interest in the game, we cornered its designer to find out about the game's creation, and where the hell he's been all this time

So how did the original creation of *Another World* come about?

"I was very focused on illustrations at that time of my life - I even envisaged leaving the games industry and going into that field. What I really wanted was to create a truly immersive game in a very consistent and living universe with a movie feeling. I never wanted to do an interactive movie - a term which I consider inappropriate and pejorative - but extract the essence of a movie, the rhythm, the drama and put it in a game. To immerse the player, I decided to leave the screen free of energy bar, score, life icon - everything must be in the universe. That was very new."

Fifteen years on, it's still seen as new... Why do you think that (*Flashback aside*), no other game really followed in the cinematic footsteps of *Another World* in the years that followed?

"In terms of being cinematic, at that time it was very hard to create pictures with polygons. There were no tools on the market, so in-house tools were the only solution and they weren't as good as today's Internet

Flash tools. It was the end of the 16-bit era, and CD-ROMs and 3D Studio were arriving. The use of 2D polygons to create movie sequences was no longer the only choice and flat animation was also less attractive than detailed pictures. Often developers were using 3D for the cut-scenes and other techniques for the game proper, which resulted in a real lack of unity."

So what have you updated in the 15th Anniversary edition?

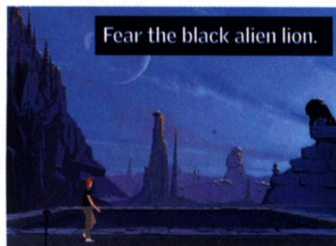
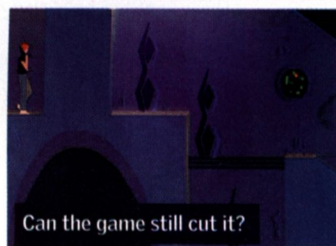
"Well, the backgrounds are now enhanced in high-resolution. Plus, the polygons were initially designed in low resolution for the Amiga, and when I enlarged them on today's computers some of the polygons looked really weird, so I had to fix that. In addition to the music and sound being remixed, the gameplay is more fluent. It's a little less forgiving, but it's still the same game. It's not a remake but a re-issue, with its own strengths and weaknesses. *Another World* is a hard game, especially for today's gamers who are not used to such trial and error gameplay, but it is worth the effort."

What else have you been up to in the 15 years since *Another World*?

"After *Heart Of Darkness* (1998's highly anticipated, yet poorly received platformer), I needed to take a break with no pressure. So I've been travelling for a while. But I do need to be creative. I like to express myself in different fields, like abstract painting, photography and sound synthesis. In 2004 the desire to create a new, original game started kicking in, so that's my next goal."

What games or designers do you think are keeping the spirit of *Another World* alive in today's gaming world?

"Fumito Ueda's *Ico* and *Half-Life* share some common points with *Another World*. But for me, the true essence is to bring a personal and coherent vision to a game. Something that's lost in today's industry is where personality is diluted in huge teams and marketing objectives. I admire people like Tim Schafer (*Psychonauts*), Keita Takahashi (*We Love Katamari*), Ron Gilbert (*Monkey Island*), Peter Molyneux, Fumito Ueda and Michel Ancel (*Beyond Good & Evil*), who try to bring a strong spirit into their games."



tat ZONE

If our office were to star in a *Power Rangers* episode, then in all likelihood the discarded, forgotten and much maligned tat that lies beneath our desks would randomly combine to form some sort of tat monster, which would in turn terrorise London. To prevent this from happening, not only do we have a secret word that we say in unison when trouble is near, but we sell off gaming paraphernalia on eBay under the tag PCZoners whenever a new issue hits the shelves...

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



THIS MONTH'S TAT



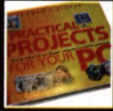
IOTACLE STUDIOS BAG
Unwanted yet lovely gift from the *GTR2* publishers.



WARHAMMER ONLINE BAG
Containing random goodies, orc limbs, etc.



COMPANY OF HEROES HIPFLASK
Since neat liquor numbs the horrors of war.



PRACTICAL PROJECTS FOR YOUR PC
Got sent it, don't want it. You want? You buy.

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	STALKER MILITARY BAG Good sell, even if we accidentally wrote 'Shadow Of Cherboby!' on the listing.	£50.00	21
	ELVEON INFLATABLE SWORD Personally given to a <i>PC ZONE</i> representative by a lady in a bikini.	£11.01	7
	SIGNED OFFICIAL PCZONE XMAS CARD What? Come on guys! This is a priceless piece of <i>PCZ</i> heritage!	£5.07	3
	FM2007 T-SHIRT That's right Sega, 'Soccer Moms are easy'. Easy to sell <i>Football Manager 2007</i> T-shirts to that is!	£5.50	3

"Riddle me this, riddle me that.
Who's afraid of the big pile of tat?"

**SIGN UP FOR
THE LOTR BETA
NOW - TURN TO
PAGE 39!**

Clubbing just isn't
the same these days.



*Gardener's World: Middle-earth
was not a great success.*



LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

Ed Zitron kicks the hobbit and finally makes something of himself...

DEVELOPER Turbine PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE www.lotro-europe.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

- MMORPG set in Tolkien's Middle-earth
- Lush looks drawn from the books rather than the films
- Story-driven, cinematic quests put you right into the story
- Plenty of content for solo and group adventuring
- Evolutionary rather than revolutionary gameplay

THIS LATEST STAB at recreating the hallowed lands of Middle-earth doesn't mess: from the very start you're dabbling in and around the much loved and extraordinarily well-known Fellowship storyline, spanning the lovingly recreated lands of Eriador. Be it clearing the path for Frodo and Sam with Boromir, or bumping into much-loved tree-hugger Tom Bombadil, you'll be thrust into your own personal story within the events of Middle-earth, without necessarily infringing on the adventures of certain furry-footed ring-bearers.

While in Azeroth your beginnings are decidedly humble, your first minutes in Middle-earth thrust you into a fantasy romp of epic proportions. Even the hobbits get their fair share of scares from the off, watching as ring wraiths stare down their friends in search of the Baggins boys.

Turbine haven't re-invented the wheel, but instead have tried to roll it in a *Guild Wars*-esque direction of having a gigantic, over-arching quest that affects everything you do. Not to say there aren't a bevy of side-quests, but there is an emphasis on

putting you into a storyline as vast as Peter Jackson's pre-Atkins gut.

ANGMAR MANAGEMENT

While it's hard to call it generic, what with the landmark source material, the starting races are exactly what you'd expect from a *Lord Of The Rings* game: dwarves, hobbits, elves and men, each with their own particular starting areas (though the dwarves and elves share theirs). Each race gets their own little side-instance that teaches you the controls and eases newbies into the gameplay, while at the same time setting the scene for the rest of the game. Though training missions aren't anything new, they directly lead into the rest of the game's quests and are worth a once-through, even if you have to groan through the 'press W to move forward!' prompts.

Interestingly though, the developers want to start the game off on a good foot - you're a hero from the start. "You're not the shoe-maker of Middle-earth, but one of the adventurers -

you're going to change the world," explains Turbine CEO Jeff Anderson as I take my first steps into the fray.

A CLASS APART

Angmar's class system is a mishmash of the last few years of MMORPG development, taking some of the best parts and trying to make something that fits into the *LOTR* canon: put away your robe and wizard hat, there's little magic here. Champions are essentially like *WOW's* warrior class, building 'furor' (rage) to use their bigger attacks. However, they take more of a damage-based role, with Guardians being more defensive, taunting enemies away from weaker players.

Captains buff their group and hold down the enemy. Burglars do what Rogues usually do in other games, with trips, stealth-attacks and debuffs, and Hunters are essentially hunters from *WOW*; ranged damage with a bow, using traps to gain the advantage.

The really interesting classes are the Lore-Master and the Minstrel. Lore-

ETA
SPRING

THE STORY SO FAR...
TURBINE



The creation
Turbine are formed by a group of MUD enthusiasts and entrepreneurs.

1994

Love it when you call
Microsoft publish the Turbine-developed *Asheron's Call* to reasonable acclaim.

1999



Give me that...
Four years later, Turbine take full control of *Asheron's Call* from the Gates' boys.

2003

Dragon's roar
They release *D&D Online: Stormreach*, using authentic *D&D 3.5* ruleset.

2006



The giant Hula Hoop prank was a hit in Middle-earth.



These lovely hills are full of angry little goblins.



Real men don't play as elves, no matter how nice their architecture is.

Masters are a mixture of healing, curing, direct-damage and debuffing, created mostly to remove the annoyance of needing one particular magic class. Minstrels have a similar jack-of-all-trades feel to them, harking back to *EverQuest's* bard class without the tiresome necessity of constant song-weaving.

Regardless of class though, you're going to be able to solo very comfortably. Much like *WOW*, Turbine are promising comfortably soloable levelling into your 30s (with the current cap being 50), allowing casual gamers to not so much breeze but ease their way through content.

Power-gamers will be pleased to know that there's a certain satisfaction (and the same random-loot possibilities and auction-house systems as *WOW*) of grinding your way through goblin camps, or into the top of a fortress to take out a big, bad guard captain, just because you can. The strange feeling is that you know you've done this before – but

the immersion of Middle-earth is something else entirely.

KEEPING IT REAL

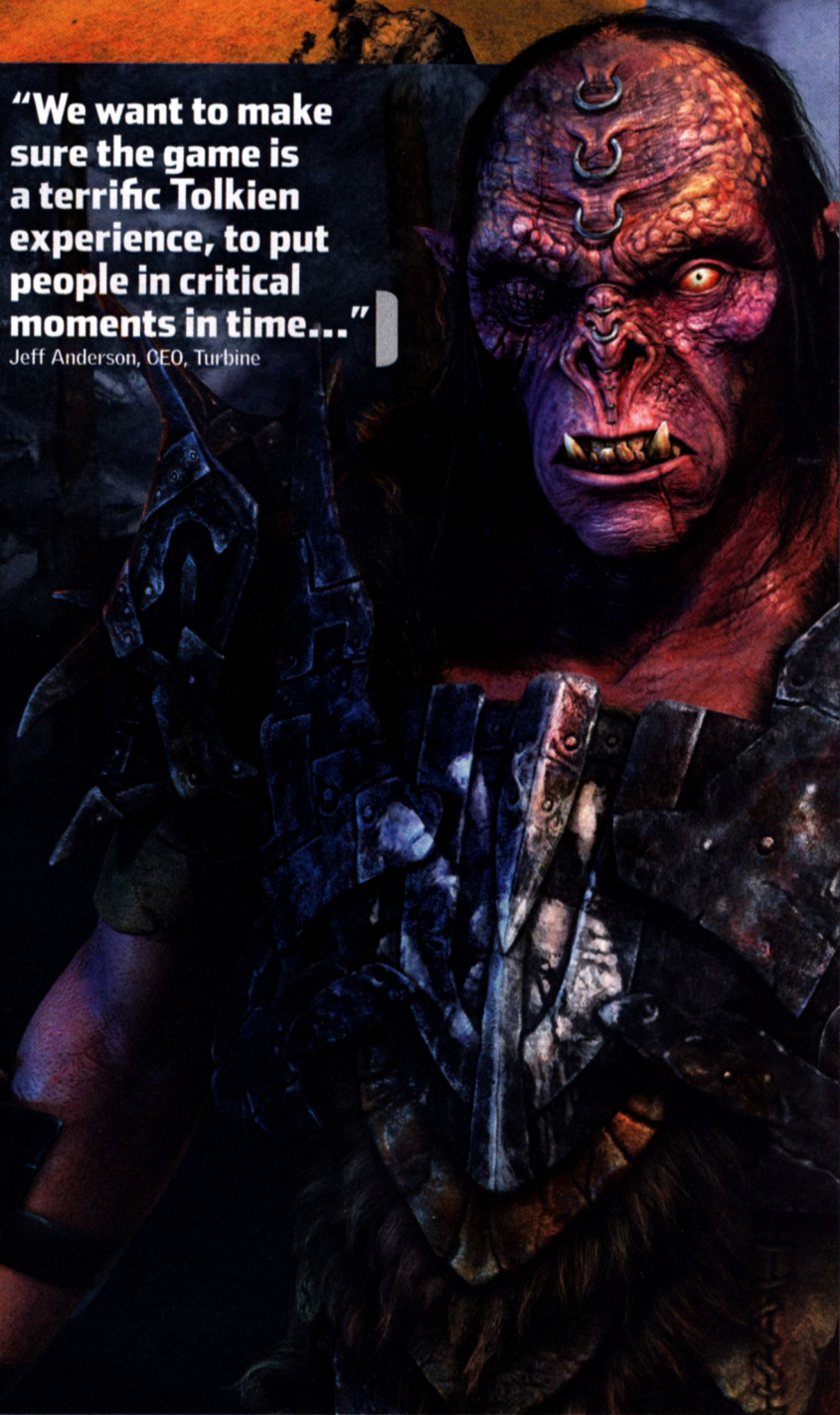
There's a real sense of wonderment to some of the environments you see. The Iron Hills (the starting area for dwarves and elves) are a bit like Dun Morogh, gigantic rolling hills of snow and ice but with a very stone-borne feel to them. Unlike *WOW*, Turbine have gone for a somewhat realistic feeling (as realistic as you can get with dwarves and elves), thus everything has a very immediate 'Wow!' factor to it – and not the Blizzard-made one, either.

Instead of easing you in with wolf-killing and kobold problems, *Angmar* forces you into a sense of being part of something really epic. Quests lead you over hill and over dale, ranging from simple goblin-bashing to



"We want to make sure the game is a terrific Tolkien experience, to put people in critical moments in time..."

Jeff Anderson, CEO, Turbine

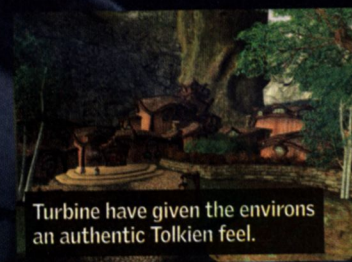
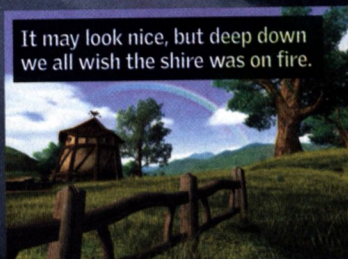




The inspiration for Tom Bombadil's design came from The Wurzels.



It may look nice, but deep down we all wish the shire was on fire.



Turbine have given the environs an authentic Tolkien feel.

Monster madness

With friends like these, who needs hobbits?



Running a triathlon in armour is no fun at all.

While many people enjoy the adventures of goodly midgets and men with beards, some have the urge to be a nasty bastard. If that's you, then there's 'Monster Play', Turbine's answer to *EverQuest's* ill-fated 'Project M'. With select areas set aside for PvP combat, players start off as the little people – the goblins, for example – and eventually work their way up to being the big boys, like the Uruk-hai. However, while these monsters won't be persistent characters, they'll still be able to complete quests and CTF objectives, and gain points for doing so (much like the *WOW* battlefields). You can then upgrade to bigger, badder monsters, and transfer upgrades to your main do-gooder characters, who, in a weird circle-of-life fashion, can then go to these same areas and battle other people's monsters. It's an intriguing take on the PvP format, and could be a lot more rewarding to both casual and hardcore players.

eventually chasing down a dwarf-betrayer. The game pulls you in by making every quest have a meaning – an actual reason for it being there, as opposed to the random nature of *WOW* quests. As Turbine man Jeff Anderson indicates: "We want to make sure that the game is a terrific Tolkien experience... We want to put people in critical moments in time."

HE'S BEHIND YOU!

Kicking off with a bang, a noob character begins by joining Gimli in a mine in Thorin's Halls, murdering cave-monsters and trying to stop an old dwarf from wasting his time cracking open a wall. All this, only to see it shatter in front of him, and watch in horror as a bloody great troll sends him tumbling across the floor, dead. As your life flashes before your eyes, big-and-bearded Gandalf jumps in to save the day, cracking a hole in the top of the cave and turning the bastard to stone.

Actual levelling is done in much the same style of *WOW*, with the usual state of killing things and doing quests rewarding you with experience. Predominantly, quests require you to get to a certain goal, for example, making it to the end of an instance alive to view *Angmar's* equivalent of a cut-scene – usually a chunk of storyline unfolding in front of you. To mix things up, Turbine have given players something a little different, using Xbox

360-ish achievements to keep you playing. As a champion for example, you can get stat upgrades by using certain attacks more.

MONSTER MASH

These achievements can also be unlocked by visiting certain places, killing certain monsters or just doing the right thing. The rewards vary from a paltry title at the end of your name to traits, which add depth to character customisation beyond simple gearing-up. What's more, with a lot of these coming from character achievements, there's a lot of potential for diversity. Plus, with class boundaries being somewhat diverse, there's the ability to ready yourself for a lot of situations.

Groups and guilds will be pleased to know that fellowships and kinships look easy to set up too, the latter being a case of inviting whatever members you want, with no limits to how many or few people you can have in each guild.

Angmar's fellowship system is a similar take to *EverQuest II's* heroic opportunities, using a combo system that allows you to damage your enemies or heal your group with the right series of moves. While not rocket science, it allows for a bit of variety to the otherwise stoic MMORPG cliché of bashing your number keys and staring wide-eyed at your health-bar.

Since the beginning of development, Turbine have had an uphill battle to

The monsters of LOTRO

A quick look at some of the beasties you'll face in Middle-earth...



The bread-and-butter of any fantasy game, orcs and goblins are out in full force from the word go.



The Uruk-hai are a nasty mix of brains and brawn, and are a mid-to-high range baddie – you'll find them lurking around the Bruinen Source.



Trolls are big, bad bastards that you'll find on the way to Angmar – they come in both the wild and armoured varieties.



The Nazgûl will scare you shitless, shortly before cutting you in half – they're Sauron's nastiest weapon and your biggest nightmare.



Newbies will enjoy the safety of Hobbiton.

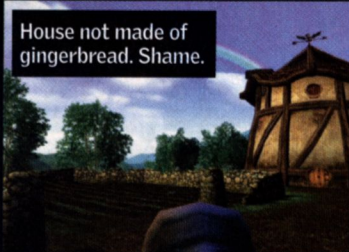


Thanks to *LOTRO*, Eldarion house prices have skyrocketed.

extinguish the fires of past development hell and push *LOTRO* to be a competitor in the MMO industry – especially with its intention of being the "one game to rule them all". They've taken bits and pieces of other games, from the tactile feeling of combat in *WOW* and the deep quest system in *EverQuest II*, and then built upon them to make a significant whole immersed in the Tolkien mythology. As far as things are shaping up so far, it's thoroughly enjoyable, immersive and fun stuff.

It remains to be seen whether or not *LOTRO: Shadows Of Angmar* can

truly challenge *WOW*. It's got a great deal going for it and feels like a wild fantasy-adventure rather than the salacious grind of every other MMO out there, but it's not doing a great deal more than pushing an extremely strong game-world. It's going to be a case of seeing whether content beats innovation, and whether Turbine have created a strong enough supporting cast of quests and characters backed by an addictive enough game to steal people away from Blizzard. Only time will tell – and when it does, we'll let you know. **PCZ**



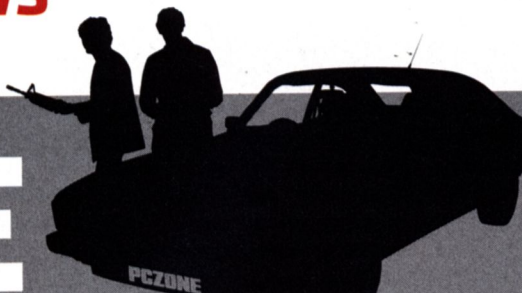
House not made of gingerbread. Shame.

PLAY IT NOW!

Free LOTR Online: Shadows Of Angmar Beta keys up for grabs!

No, this isn't a sneaky trick by the minions of Mordor – you could be playing Turbine's *Lord Of The Rings Online* game now! Codemasters are giving away Beta keys throughout February exclusively through www.computerandvideogames.com – just hit the website and follow the links. Don't worry – if the allocation of keys has gone for the day you apply for, more will be released the next day on the CVG website.

Free Beta keys for *LOTRO Online* at www.computerandvideogames.com



THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

IF YOU SPENT your childhood in fear, after your mother told you that looking at the food going around on the platform would make your eyes fall out, you're not alone. John Bows knows all about microwaves – about the "instantaneous disruption of the electrical signals in the brain, causing loss of

gross motor function", and the "inevitable long-term loss of brain function as well as changed behaviour patterns". And it turns out that your eyes do explode out of your face. This month, John rates microwaves from four games, and one obnoxious, unfunny viral from 1999...

THIS MONTH: MICROWAVES

Expert: John Bows
Job: Technology development manager
Expert pedantry: Microwaves and safety issues in PC gaming



F.E.A.R.: EXTRACTION POINT



"I'm worried about the turntable, it looks small and possibly metal, typical of late 1980s Matsui ovens, and the internal bulb failure

points to an old oven as well. Military personnel should therefore be careful about using this oven for reheating rations, as uneven heating could result in a risk of scalding and microbiological growth if not eaten straight away. The location of the mains power supply is not obvious, and the wooden floor and shoddy wall point towards a make-shift structure unfit for long-term use of the microwave. However, the oven has a safety interlock in the door frame, so the general design features look present, if not entirely fully functional."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Extracted power point

HALF-LIFE



"This is an early 1990s model judging by the square sections and plethora of buttons. The metal mesh that should be clearly

visible within the door looks absent; this would result in leakage well in excess of the safe limit of 5 mW/sq cm, and even worse, transmission of microwave radiation. Eyeballs and testicles would be at immediate risk as such organs have limited blood supplies which cannot dissipate rapid temperature rises like the rest of the body. The turntable is also a dodecagon, an expensive choice with no functional benefit at all."

PCZONE
★★★☆☆
Half-arsed



THE SIMS

"A more modern-looking oven with classy curves and styling, late 1990s to early 2000s I would guess, an 800W model. Its location next to the sink is a show-stopper for safe operation. No electrical points would be placed so close, so how is the oven powered? The time display is clearly on, the hazy appearance of the door suggests the internal light is also on, so the socket

must be behind the oven. While the design looks generally correct, the control pad does not look particularly ergonomic or customer-friendly."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Wave machine



SAM & MAX

"This oven is positioned in a food service location, where I'd expect to see a heavy-duty commercial oven. It's not equipped for this, the power output would fall or fail and the oven's power dial settings are inadequate too – the maximum setting is 100%, which is quite ridiculous. Sam's suggestion of placing

Max in the oven is in poor taste too; he could suffer grievous thermal injury and direct exposure to microwave radiation could cause massive internal damage."

PCZONE
★★★☆☆
FSA non-compliant



JOE CARTOON'S HAMSTER IN A MICROWAVE

"The cavity is well lit, but I can't see the internal extraction mesh and plastic cover for the microwave waveguide feed. The hamster's survival implies the mains voltage supply is very low, while the power output from the magnetron drops off sharply, so the hamster would be irradiated by a few watts rather than the oven's nominal power output. The hamster's blood supply could

just about dissipate the temperature rise. It's surprising that a commercial oven would be susceptible to mains voltage fluctuations – it really needs a service."

PCZONE
★★★☆☆
Not funny and incorrect

WINNER: THE SIMS

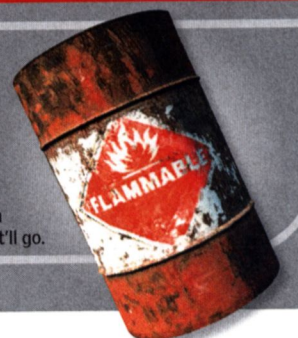
A disappointing batch of microwaves perhaps, but *The Sims 2* wins by a nose by paying attention to safety regulations and basic microwave science. And perhaps by not just drawing the thing from memory.

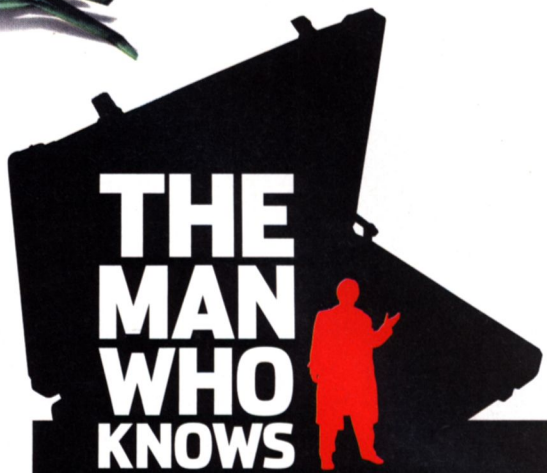
ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

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

- *Glass bottle manufacture
- *Torches
- *Crates
- *Locksmithery
- *Burglary
- *Nazi uniforms
- *Foreign accents
- *Monster noises
- *Vending machines

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





Gaming with a **Christian bent**, never a stranger to these pages, has once more thrown what should have been a **benevolent dove of peace** and gaming goodwill into the grinder of other people's opinions. **Left Behind: Eternal Forces**, an RTS game based in the last days of Earth and the battle between the **Tribulation Force** (godly) and the **Global Community** (satanic) has pissed off opinionated people of every creed and colour. The Council on **American-Islamic Relations** has been angered by the muslim and arab-sounding names of enemy units. The **sensible shoes-wearing** Christian Alliance for Progress have got mardy since they believe the game pimps the ideology of religious warfare – having god's squads **convert the masses** to fundamentalist Christianity or else **kill**. It's even thought that **women** would be **rather put out** to discover that their in-game career options are limited to being only **medics and musicians** (and not soldiers, evangelists or builders), but thankfully they've all been too busy baking **apple pies** and looking after **children** to notice. So far, it doesn't appear that anyone's consulted the buddhists about what they think, but they'll probably concentrate on the fact that the game itself is **turgid, shite** and a complete waste of time and energy. Buddhists are sensible like that.

In other news, **Nolan Bushnell** founder of **Atari** (the *Pong* and burying *E.T.* in the desert variety, rather than the 'why isn't *Boiling Point* finished?' one), has successfully merged three previously opposing forces: **videogames, food and sex**. What some at first presumed would be the best **variety of pornography** ever created is actually a **restaurant**, where dating couples can avoid dangerous levels of **social interaction** by playing games on its touch-screen tables – whether it be a somewhat self-referential game of *Ping* or a bout of quickfire general knowledge questions. The restaurant, known as **uWink**, is thought unlikely to translate to the UK since the custom of men **piling 50p coins** into a *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* machine while their partners hold the drinks and stare absent-mindedly into space is thought unshakable.

“Women may also be put out by their limited roles, but they were too busy baking pies to notice...”

DARK DILEMMAS

Think of a *Penumbra*, any *Penumbra*. But mainly *Penumbra: Overture*...

ETA: Q1 | www.penumbra-overture.com

EVER SINCE THE tech demo of *Penumbra* graced the pages of Freeware, we've wanted to know more about the three episodes that shall herald its commercial release – the first being known as *Overture*. Having played it, we can report that the spooky puzzle 'em up is as hardcore as some of the most anal of yesteryear's point-and-clicks – so gib-loving maniacs should look away now.

Built upon a neat engine that lets you physically pick up and drag various objects in your darkened environs or pull back your weapon ready for a smiting, the puzzles of *Penumbra* are stupendously hard. Totally, crazy hard.

It expects you to decipher morse code beeping over a radio for example, follow instructions from text books you find scattered around a mineshaft to get a generator going and use a broom to knock down a

fuse from a very high shelf. It's brainache captured on a shiny disc, a compendium of things that would annoy you in other, faster-paced games – but this time, it's strangely part of the appeal.

Don't come here looking for combat either, since *Penumbra's* independent Swedish developers much prefer you to hide in dark corners from wolves or run away from spiders (lighting trails of paraffin and shifting heavy boulders as you go to delay their scuttering) than stand your ground.

Don't get us wrong, in its current form the game is pretty clunky. However, it's also creepy, and you can't help but love the way you have to physically push or pull doors open with your mouse. With polish, we could certainly be looking at a thoroughly engaging indie production and if you haven't already done so, download the tech demo from the *Overture* website.



HALPER

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Anthony Holden sniffs out the co-creator of *Frontlines: Fuel Of War* and chats about life after *Desert Combat*

Who are ya?



NAME Joe Halper

DEVELOPER

Kaos Studios

POSITION

Senior producer

AGE 36

FIRST GAME

Desert Combat

GAMES WORKED

ON BEFORE *Battlefield 2*

FAVOURITE GAME *Desert Combat*

and *Texas Hold 'Em* on Xbox



Q Give us a bit of background on Kaos Studios...

A "Kaos Studios was started in late 2005 by the core members of Trauma Studios. We're most known for our work on *Desert Combat*, as well as *Battlefield 2*. We were DICE New York, and then we became Kaos."

What was your actual involvement on BF2, as Trauma Studios?

"Mostly we did the R&D. *Desert Combat* was pretty successful and DICE wanted us to develop some of the features on *BF2* and prototype them. They had a new engine which looked great, and while they worked on that we created things like the Commander system, the artillery strikes, the squad systems and the VoIP. It worked out pretty well, and as a result we were acquired and became DICE New York. At the same time, EA started buying DICE, and that was business, that's fine. However, they wanted us to move to Stockholm, and we had a really good team, so we decided to stay in New York and started communicating with THQ. And they said, 'Great, let's go.'"

So what's Frontlines all about?

"We wanted to create a fast-paced, modern military experience – like *Desert Combat* – but instead of present-day weapons and situations, looking at what might be coming. The game is set 20 years in the future, and it's based on a what-if question, which is 'what if our global energy supply runs out sooner rather than later?' And the answer, basically, is global depression and chaos, and our fiction results from that worst-case scenario. It draws from current events, and creates a gritty future with a real-world feel to it. Which was the same thing we tried to

do with *Desert Combat* and the liberation of Kuwait."

What's the main difference between this and Desert Combat?

"Well, we have a really strong multiplayer background and people are expecting that from us, so we're definitely going to deliver on that. But one thing we always wanted to make sure of with *Frontlines* was that the single-player is a huge focus. It's not a bot-match – it's a very story-driven, cinematic single-player campaign. As gamers, we really wanted to break away from certain linear gameplay elements and give the player more choice. 'Do I want to be a sniper? A machine-gunner? Do I want to drive a tank? And how do I want to take this city?' So it's a bit like a combat sandbox, but it's based on this frontline mechanic which constantly moves through the level as you take new objectives."

Given that you provided a lot of the ideas for BF2, how do you feel now that you're effectively competing against it?

"We're not too worried. We know that there are features in *Frontlines* that are original, but it's also a combination of experiences from other games. We've combined the non-linearity of *Battlefield* and the intense firefight feeling of, say, *Call Of Duty*. That's the simplest way of putting it."

You're doing an Xbox 360 version as well. Do you still see hardcore PC gamers as your core audience?

"Yeah. We'll appeal to the layman too, but hopefully they'll become hardcore gamers as they play the game... The challenge for the Xbox 360 users is the control mechanism, but the interface is very intuitive."



Kaos have come a long way since *Battlefield* modding.

"We wanted to create a fast-paced, modern military experience, like DC"



The battle's 'frontline' dynamically pushes back and forward while you play.



How many barrels does one tank need?

You've got a lot of destructible scenery in the game. How will that affect gameplay?

"What we didn't want to do was bring buildings right down to the ground, like the entire structure. If that happens too much, you can get kind of 'destruction fatigue' from that. What we wanted was to make it more strategic. So, if you have a wall, you can create a new path by blowing through it. Or if you have a bridge, you can blow it up to impede the enemy. But you can't just lay waste to an entire city."

Have you got a favourite weapon or tactic at the moment?

"The remote-controlled drones, like miniature recon helicopters and robot cars packed with C4 – I love those. But I also love things like the blowtorch. It works like a repair wrench for repairing vehicles and so on, but you can see the flame from miles away. Plus, it's like a beacon – some guy will be repairing and you know they're going to have a new tank or whatever if they finish. So they're frantically welding, like 'come on, come on!' and everyone else is running at them, like 'kill him, kill him!' It's great fun." **PCZ**



"This is no time to rest your head on my lap..."

JOE HALPER

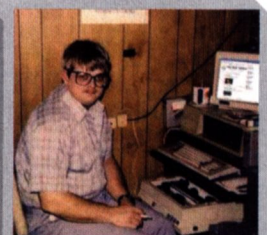
Where he turns for inspiration...



The team: Joe never ceases to be amazed by the creativity produced by his colleagues.



Military stuff: Before *DC*, Joe made training apps for the US military. He has a thing for tanks.



Game fans: Some may smell odd, but Joe loves hardcore forum-dwellers. "They're inspiring," he says.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment **PUBLISHER** VU Games **WEB** www.worldinconflict.com **ETA** Q2

IT'S BEEN NEARLY a year since we brought you a first look at Massive Entertainment's *World In Conflict*. Their first game since *Ground Control II*, *World In Conflict* is set in the Cold War '80s. The Soviets, instead of going Perestroika, have invaded Europe and the US, leading to a three-fronted war where everyone's got nukes. And everyone loves nukes.

We were told how the game was set to combine real-time strategy with the basic setup of a *Counter-Strike* match – starting players off in one corner of a map, letting them tool up with tanks and planes instead of flashbangs and AKs and then watching them run riot. It's a difficult feat of imagination, and – presumably – equally difficult in execution. But these shots confirm one thing: it's going to feature some staggering scenes of destruction so delicious, they'll take the roof off your mouth and eat into your brain...



The Bigger Picture

1 KA-BOOM!

Awesome it may be, but the nuke isn't to be used lightly – and in single-player, only when historically appropriate. Used intelligently in multiplayer, however, the weapon can provide a match-defining moment.

2 INTO BATTLE

While the armament tool-up stylings might smell of *Counter-Strike*, a multiplayer sesh of *WIC* also reveals more than a little homage to *BF*. As your units swarm over the map you'll be keeping hold of command points – the more you dominate them, the more you win.

3 B-B-B-B-BUILD

Should you hold onto one of these command points for a good amount of time, Massive are currently toying with the idea of letting you truly dig in and build fortifications to help you fend off the enemy. Which, actually, wouldn't be a bad idea for *Battlefield* either.

4 NOT GUILDFORD, THEN

Previously, Massive would only confirm a 'contemporary suburban setting' – but now they've told us that single-player campaign is set to cover a desperate war on American soil, Europe and eventually deep into Russia.

5 MASSTECH-AWAY

According to Massive, the potential first-person mode has a 50/50 chance of making it through, depending on how it fits the gameplay. The spiffy Masstech engine could cope with it with no hassles, mind.

6 WHO CAN SAY?

You'll play as NATO, the US or the USSR (pictured is a US base). Will the forces be markedly different? Does the game live up to these gobsmacking screenshots? Will the damn thing work?

7 BLAME IT ON THE WEATHERMAN

It looks gorgeous, but that's the only function the weather serves. Their experience with *Ground Control II* made Massive realise that changes in terrain and tactics attributable to the weather only confuse people.





THE DAEDRIC ENCOUNTER...

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION SHIVERING ISLES

"You don't need to be mad to quest here" yells an increasingly unbalanced *Will Porter*. "But it helps!"

DEVELOPER Bethesda PUBLISHER Bethesda/2K Games WEBSITE www.bethsoft.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

- Bizarre and brilliant setting
- Deeper script, more engaging NPCs
- New enemies, weapons and spells
- You get a magic butler of sorts
- Doesn't tweak the gameplay proper

ETA
APRIL

AS JOB INTERVIEWS, go it'll be short and relatively painless. It's just you, a disinterested chap named Haskill, a bare room, a desk and a chair. After such an imposing entranceway, surrounded by otherworldly vegetation, that's leeches through its tableau of linked screaming faces into the lands of Cyrodiiil, you were perhaps expecting something a little more grandiose within. Then, as the interview concludes, the dull, featureless walls melt away into a cloud of butterflies. And then it happens: you're somewhere slightly mad.

The setting is the torn realm of the daedric Prince of Madness, one Sheogorath, if you haven't been keeping tabs on your *Elder Scrolls* lore. Bethesda's stated aim is to create a new self-contained land where the characters are more tightly defined, where dialogue is richer and where their quest designers can stretch their imaginative powers to the full, under the broad canopy of the insane, the unstable and the downright psychotic.

The Shivering Isles represent madness itself – eternally split both physically and politically between the bickering forces of Mania (wild-eyed, unhinged) and Dementia (paranoid, gloomy, depressed). Sheogorath rules over them all, but his realm is in danger – under threat from the blank conformity of the Knights of Order who have begun to appear on its fringes. And guess what? That's where you come in.

"Well it's a geographical split to start with – there's a giant ridge that runs the breadth of the island," explains *Shivering Isles* lead designer Mark Nelson when I quiz him about Bethesda's new psychological leanings. "The highlands are the lands of Mania and the lowlands are the lands of Dementia. Art-wise, Mania is a lot more vibrant, colourful – almost over-saturated in parts. In the lowlands, in Dementia, it's really more of a creepy atmosphere. A lot of mosses hanging out of dark trees and stuff – it's a very claustrophobic feeling that's meant to evoke more of a hard feel to it. Obviously we don't do survival horror, but it's a creepier place in general."

MENTAL AS ANYTHING

This ridge even runs through the capital city of the isles, New Sheoth, splitting it in two in true Berlin Wall-style. The stunning fountains and impressive waterfalls of Mania's half of the city (known as Bliss) are a sight to behold, yet they drain into the half ruled by Dementia (known as The Crucible), and there the water congeals into dank, stagnant piles of sludge in the arse-end of the city. It's a land split between *Alice In Wonderland*-style exuberance and the type of ancient and gloomy forests in which hobbits always seemed to be getting lost in the *Lord Of The Rings* movies.

"The people themselves are very different too," continues



He's still got the fire in his belly.



"And so I said: 'Don't be so shellfish!'
Hahahahaha. OK, just kill me."



Her dreams of being a fire-fighter were short-lived.

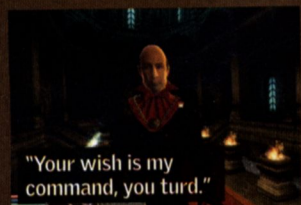


The Shivering Isles represent madness itself – eternally split between the bickering forces of Mania and Dementia



You rang m'lord?

Haskill - the chamberlain who does more than iron the master's socks



"Your wish is my command, you turd."

Every demonic overlord needs an accomplice, whether it's a helpful Igor, a cunning Grand Vizier or a blue blob whose job it is to fetch food and warily tread around a giant trapdoor. Sheogorath has Haskill, his loyal chamberlain, who, despite his own misgivings, is at your beck and call too. "He's my favourite character!" smiles Mark Nelson. "He's almost Alfred from *Batman*. He doesn't think much of you to start with. He just thinks 'Another mortal, god... I've got to deal with this guy?' He's very put upon, and he's probably nuts too - but you're not exactly sure how or why." His domain isn't simply fluffing the pillows either, as to his barely concealed annoyance you'll be able to summon him whenever you get stuck while questing. If you're at a genuinely tricky bit he'll give suggestions, or if you're just wasting his time he'll make a few choice comments and leave. You just can't get the staff these days...



Sheogorath: more regal than your average lunatic.

Nelson. "The residents of Mania tend to be, well, manic. You get a lot of obsessives, bizarre artists and the like, who are insanely creative but insane nonetheless. Whereas in Dementia you find the psychotics, the paranoid - people who are afraid of things they've created in their own minds." And who wouldn't be a little disturbed, for example, if you lived in the town of Split on the Mania/Dementia divide where suddenly there are two versions of each resident?

OFF TO MEET THE WIZARD

Once the fog of butterflies dissipates, you find yourself in a walled area known as The Fringe, and to escape this there's the small matter of getting past the goliath Gatekeeper that adorns this magazine's cover - a terrifying construction of the body parts of various creatures whose job description provides a fair amount of the plot later on. Once you're past him though, you'll find yourself searching out the man of the moment: Sheogorath. And once you meet him, alongside his loyal

"He's the god of madness, and tends to speak in unintentional riddles and go off on tangents about puddings..."

Mark Nelson, lead designer, *Shivering Isles*, on Sheogorath

chamberlain Haskill (very much a Jeeves to the big man's Bertie Wooster), the plot starts ticking.

"The first time you meet Sheogorath he says: 'You know what? I need a mortal champion and you're the only one who's made it to talk with me, so you're him. You are my champion'," explains an enthusiastic Nelson. "But you don't really get an idea of what your real job is going to be. Sheogorath only gives you bits and pieces - he doles out information slowly. He's the god of madness, and he tends to speak in unintentional riddles and go off on tangents about pudding."

Right. So anyway, Sheogorath's thought is that if you're going to hold any

sway in his court whatsoever, you ought to go out and start meeting people, helping them out, pissing them off and basically having a cracking role-play adventure. As with the various guilds and orders of Cyrodiiil, your reputation with the houses of Mania and Dementia will rise and fall according to your actions, but there will come a point at which Sheogorath will ask you to make a final decision as to which side you will join and, indeed, of which you shall become leader.

This in turn will have ramifications in later quests and in whose support you'll have as you battle the forces of the rival daedric prince Jyggalag (mentioned once in a book in *Daggerfall*, and apparently hotly discussed on the *Elder Scrolls* lore forums), who's moseying into the madness uninvited. He's attempting to render a genocide of sensible-ness upon the Shivering Isles known as The Greymarch, an ancient event that occurs every epoch



"My back may be exposed, but my ears are 100% protected!"

Aurmazl Ranch



The expansion opens with a flutter.

THE STORY SO FAR...

BETHESDA

Bethesda
SOFTWARES

The land of DOS
Bethesda are older than you think, having been founded way back in the '80s!

1986

Step in the Arena
The first *Elder Scrolls* game, *Arena*, is released. It's very good. (Well, it used to be.)

1994



Morrowind of change
The third *Elder Scrolls* game, *Morrowind*, is released. It's also very good - we all love it.

2002



Realms of Oblivion
The fourth *Elder Scrolls* game, *Oblivion*, is released. Guess how good it was.

2006



Knights of Order: shimmery but dull.



Niben Bay is your access point.

or two that Sheogorath is naturally anxious to avoid. As Nelson points out, it's all very much created in the spirit of Neil Gaiman (author of the *Sandman* graphic novel series and novels like *American Gods*), with concepts like sanity and madness being given form and personality, and having them clash against each other while mortals like you and I toil away beneath them, subject to their every whim.

One of the key things Sheogorath wants you to do is help create another guardian for the Gates of Madness. As such, searching out the original guardian's



The skies outclass *Oblivion's* effortlessly.

Unlikely brainfellows

Bethesda and Double Fine sitting in a tree?



Psychonauts' censors in action.

You couldn't get two games more different in style, format or tone, but thematically, *Shivering Isles* isn't a million miles away from Double Fine's brilliant *Psychonauts* (play it now). Compare and contrast: *Psychonauts* sees you entering a fevered mind and balancing out the fighting emotions and irrational beliefs contained therein, all the while fending off the censors that are trying to extinguish creative thought. *Shivering Isles*, meanwhile, has you adventuring in a land that's a representation of madness itself, playing in and around (if not balancing) opposing psychological forces, while fending off the tide of dreary similitude represented by the emotionless Knights of Order. Almost makes you want to write an essay on it, doesn't it? Almost.



Mania's flora is varied to say the least.

creator and helping him fashion a new one out of body bits is an important part of the main quest, but the chirpy Mark Nelson is reluctant to reveal much more in terms of storyline - and not just to lessen the risk of spoilerification.

ASYLUM SEEKERS

He's equally excited, you see, about the little people - the NPC characters lower down the food chain who may not hold the future of an entire daedric realm in their hands, but are at least entertaining in their own little mentalist ways. There's the chap you come across who's afraid to sleep in his own house in case the walls fall in and crush him, for example, who asks you to find him a truly safe place to sleep. There's the mad woman in the wilderness who is obsessed by having one of everything in the world - from creatures to objects - and whose whims you can only satisfy if you've got a couple of aeons to spare. A more professional obsessive, meanwhile, runs and gives tours around the Museum of Oddities, to which you are asked to become a donor as the amount of bizarre and useless objects in your inventory starts to build up.

Speaking of which, more obsessive fans will be delighted to hear that *Shivering Isles* is due to be the first *Elder Scrolls* game to find a





You'll be able to enter the Shivering Isles no matter how much of *Oblivion* proper you've completed.



Grummite Painbringer

The Shivering Isles – even more bonkers than the Isle Of Man.



Under the banner of madness, the designers are cooking up ingenious and barmy quests as a matter of course

use for calipers – the heretofore useless household implements that have been found (and left) inside the barrels and chests of Tamriel for countless ages.

There's no particular good/bad divide in gameplay this time round, but more of a mottled hue of morals and loyalties. You'll come across a bloke in New Sheoth, for example, who's absolutely desperate to kill himself but can't, since topping yourself is seen as such a crime that there's even a dank, depressing place called the Hill of Suicides for their ghosts to hang out for all eternity as punishment. So it is then, if you choose to help out, that you must figure out an inventive accident to ensure that this poor chap snuffs it without it looking like he's asked you directly.

Seeing as you're climbing up the chain of nobility, meanwhile, you're also expected to grow a healthy disdain for the tiresome adventurers who keep bundling into the realm with the intention of slaying beasts, looting treasure and generally making a nuisance of themselves. As such, one of the main quests is a direct homage to the venerable Bullfrog box of fun that was *Dungeon Keeper*. Sheogorath, you see, has a spare dungeon in Xedilian that he uses partly for testing people and partly

for keeping unwanted mortal visitors busy. Once you've worked your way through its intricacies yourself, it's up to you and a vast array of booby-traps, pits and heavy swinging objects to deal with one such party of have-a-go adventurers who are dead-set on stealing its fictional treasures.

What's more, what happens in the torn realm of Sheogorath stays in the torn realm of Sheogorath, so you could be chief goody-two-shoes back in Cyrodiil and a filthy murdering bastard here and none will be the wiser.

THINGS THAT ROAR

And what role-playing expansion would be complete without a fresh menagerie of monsters – and weapons to repeatedly hit them round the head with? As with the art style and demeanour of the locals, creatures differ according to which subsection of insanity you're adventuring in. A typical beast found in the over-the-top lands of Mania, for example, is the Elytra – a giant ant-like insect with garish oil-spill rainbow patterning, beady red eyes and furiously jabbing pincers. A similarly feared denizen of Dementia meanwhile would be its representation of Hunger – a ghastly pale figure not unlike

Magical mushrooms


Mushrooms mean *Morrowind* don't they? Don't they?




Shivering Isles: heavy on the 'shrooms.

A few of the screenshots lovingly pasted around these pages look a bit fungus-y, don't they? They're definitely heavier on the toadstool than the average grab. And oddly enough, the most mushroomy game we last covered (not counting Nintendo emulations at least) was ooh... *Elder Scrolls III*:

Morrowind. Co-inky-dence Mister Mark Nelson? Yes, apparently. "*Morrowind* was very brown. The whole art style was very brown," he explains in a beige-tinged voice. "Kind of earth-tones – this is a lot more vibrant. To me at least, in my mind, it evokes more of an *Alice In Wonderland* feel than a *Morrowind* feel. Although I think comparisons are inevitable, because there are giant mushrooms. You know, once you see one giant mushroom tree..."



Reconstructing the Gatekeeper is a gruesome business.



Dark Seductresses seduce by chopping you to bits. It's not for everyone.

the tentacle-mouthed zombies in *STALKER*, whose emaciated yet muscly figure roams through rural areas picking off livestock and farmers. Other foes that could be mentioned include the big (the Baliwog that seems to be half crocodile, half frog and more than a little Jabba the Hutt), the small (this season's goblin replacements are known as Grummites) and the ones with sexy chests ("Helloooo, Dark Seductresses!").

As for tools of smitige with which to destroy this evil (and sexiness), Nelson doesn't want to go into too much detail for fear of having to talk to me all week. He does, however, mention a sword known as Dawnfang, that gets powered up the more souls you dispatch – essentially levelling up alongside you. Unfortunately, it resets




Even the fashions are crazy!

itself at night, when it also changes its name to Duskgang, but it's a great idea nonetheless. If you're a particularly magical character, meanwhile, you'll be interested to hear of the addition of what Bethesda are calling 'point-blank area-effect spells', that explode spectacularly around you when they're cast.

CONTENT IS KING

Personally, I didn't have too many problems with vanilla *Oblivion*. I enjoyed every last drop in fact, but I know a fair wodge of people who had one or two reservations. Some of them I have the misfortune of working with on a daily basis. First and foremost, if you didn't like the levelling system, with its insistence that when you got stronger then so did all the bandits hiding behind the trees, then don't expect a magical 'fix' in the expansion. This add-on is all about the content, and not necessarily the belt and braces of the gameplay.

Having said that, if you were of the opinion that interaction with the residents of Cyrodiil was a touch on the shallow side, then to an extent Bethesda agree with you. Nelson himself regrets that they




A face you can trust.

"couldn't quite get to the meat" of NPCs in the original, but with a smaller cast list of around 60 or 70 (excluding monosyllabic guards and the like), the plan is that each will be a fleshed-out and well-rounded individual. Bar the insanity, obviously.

"We've had more time to really get into their heads, to write them up and really be in this realm of madness," claims the Bethesda man. "Some of them are simply quirky – you'd meet them on the street and you wouldn't realise they were insane. Others are just psychotic." And thankfully, as these screenshots more than attest, NPC faces are a bit less puffy this time.

And there you have it: the realm of Sheogorath. One card short of a full deck, not quite in the pink, missing a few screws and most certainly more than slightly



mad. Around 30 hours of play on a mad island around a quarter the size of the original game's Cyrodiil.

The very best parts of *Oblivion* were the ones where its designers were clearly given carte blanche to create something crazy – the stolen ship, the painting quest, entering someone's dreams or watching burning Alsatians rain down on a village of cats. This time, under the expansive banner of madness itself, they're cooking up ingenious and barmy quests as a matter of course. The lunatics have taken over the asylum, and long may they reign. **PCZ**

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GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

It began by promising a new era in PC gaming and ended in a US government investigation for fraud. *Pavel Barter* investigates the ghostly apparition that was the Phantom games console...

THE PLANE BOUNCED back and forth in hurricane-force winds as it hit the Florida runway at high speed. Although the two passengers were comfortably accommodated in first class, this was hardly the season or state to be travelling. Shaken, they disembarked, collected their rental car and proceeded to drive hundreds of miles to their destination: Sarasota City and Infinium Labs, purveyors of the infamous Phantom console.

"We basically travelled all this way to attend a steak and lobster dinner, at which point they informed us that they had spent \$40,000 on an illuminated sign for their office," alleges Jake (not his real name – he asked to remain anonymous), a former Seattle-based Infinium employee. "There were people in my office who hadn't got a pay cheque in a month and they were giving us these bullshit excuses as to why they couldn't pay us. It was clear that they were blowing money left, right and centre on ridiculous things."

Shrouded by a veil of hearsay, the story behind the Phantom is perhaps the most controversial to ever engulf the world of PC gaming. In August 2006, its creators removed all reference to the console from their website (www.phantom.net), effectively consigning it to the vapourware dustbin of history, but questions persist. Was this device real? Could it really have changed the world of PC gaming? What exactly did it do?

BEGIN AGAIN

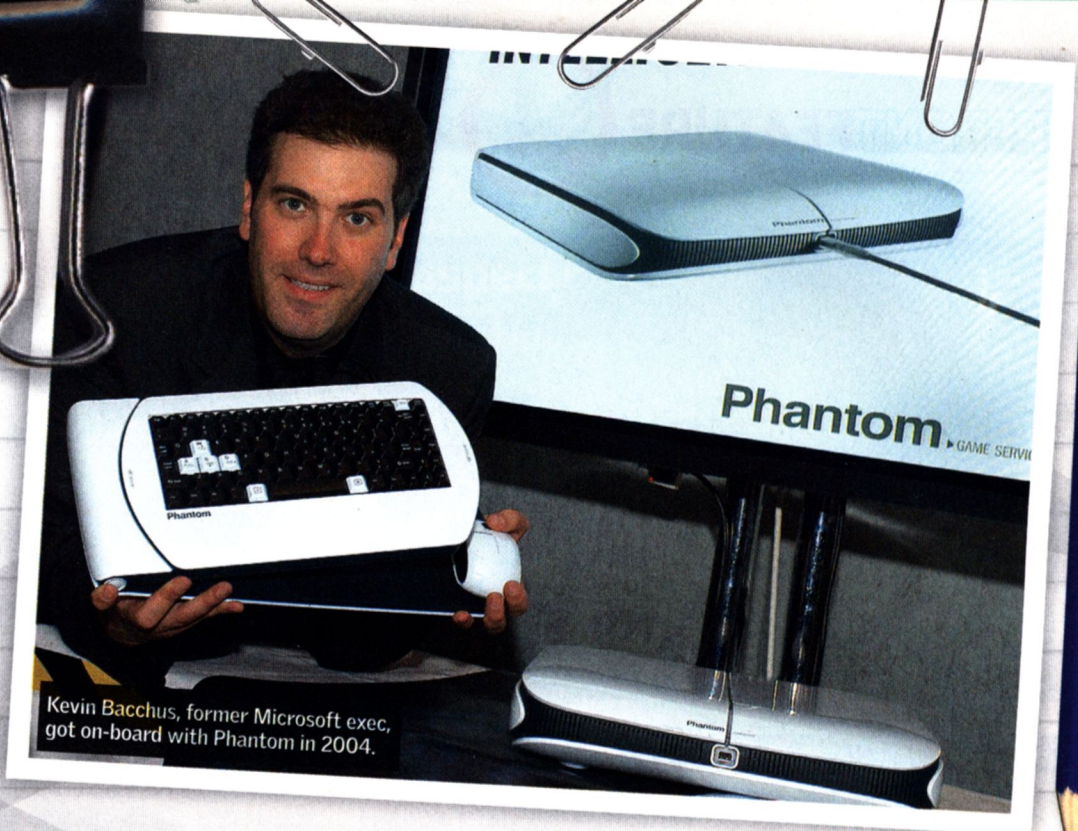
According to Ryan Lane, Infinium's former creative director, the Phantom was: "A PC designed for the living room with one dedicated function: playing PC games. The system was Windows-embedded, the traditional Windows shell replaced with a custom user interface that was focused on buying and playing games. It was always on and online, sort of like TiVo, and had a hard drive but no CD, DVD or other removable data."

Games would be purchased online and then streamed to the system. Lane continues: "Think iTunes, but for games. The streaming was the big difference – we optimised the game package to download the bits you needed in-order to start playing right away. This worked very well with linear level-based games because you wouldn't have to wait for a whole 4GB file to download."

Infinium Labs announced their arrival in 2002 with a prediction that their console would make \$35 million within its first year of release. 'Either you guys are sporting weighty cojones or you're seriously delusional', responded the games community. Websites took the piss every other day, and rumours abounded that the company (which went public through a reverse merger) was a stock scam.

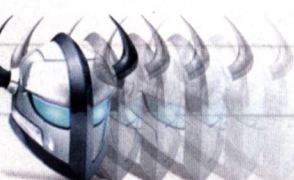
HARD SELL

In late 2003, website HardOCP.com conducted an investigation into Infinium's founder and CEO, Timothy M Roberts, alleging a history of failed



Kevin Bacchus, former Microsoft exec, got on-board with Phantom in 2004.

PHANTOM®



businesses, and "high profile bankruptcies" that cost investors "millions and millions of dollars". The site also sent a photographer to Infinium's 'headquarters' address in Florida, where he reportedly found a shopping mall. The investigation concluded with a message for potential investors: "Personally, we think this is a prime case of 'Buyer Beware!'."

Despite the barrage of cynicism, Phantom seemed a genuine prospect throughout 2004. Infinium hired Kevin Bacchus, a former Microsoft executive who helped launch Xbox, and the company set up an office in Seattle that was filled with highly qualified employees – graduates from Amazon, Real and the like.

Alice Marwick, initially hired to work on Phantom's community features, explains: "We had a decent-sized team of about 35 people. Kevin was a really smart guy and the development team was fantastic. I've worked in the Seattle tech industry for eight years and the technical prowess of this team was among the best I'd ever experienced. The experience, skill, knowledge and enthusiasm were all far above average, even for a start-up. I

"The skill, experience and enthusiasm were all above average, even for a start-up"

Alice Marwick, former Phantom employee

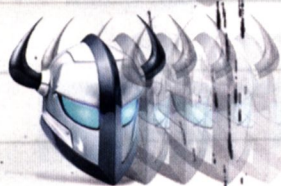




The Phantom's design started out a bit Xbox-y...



...Then got a bit shinier and edgy...



was working with a team of developers that were coding on a daily basis and we had a product that was ready to launch."

SECRETS AND LIES

Infinium Labs was on a high, but it was still reviled. Before 2004's E3, satirical site Penny Arcade published a cartoon that depicted Phantom's booth, each room labelled with words like 'dishonesty', 'duplicitry' and 'flimflam'. At the actual event, Marwick was assigned the task of defending such negative feedback by compiling a '40-page document' that anticipated any negative nit-picking. In a self-deprecating wink to Penny Arcade, Infinium stuck stickers on its booth doors saying 'deceit' and 'lies'.

E3 sparked rumours that the Phantom was an empty shell powered by

PCs, but Ryan Lane begs to differ. "That is completely untrue – we had fully functional prototypes. I even opened one system up for a photographer to show him the circuitry inside!"

By now, numerous developers and publishers had agreed to provide PC games for the platform. One developer, who wishes to remain anonymous, says: "When Kevin Bacchus got on-board, it looked like a real team who were capable of building a real platform. Back in 2004, I think you could have found market space for a set-top box built on the PC with DVR tech. They talked about it going out as a pay-per-game type distribution partnership with cable companies."

"I don't even know if we signed a contract with them," sighs Richard Eddy, head of global communications at Codemasters. "It could have been a letter of intent that we might work with them on PC games. They used one of our PC games – *IndyCar Series* – to demo their system."

E3 2004 was a success, but there were already rumbles of discontent.

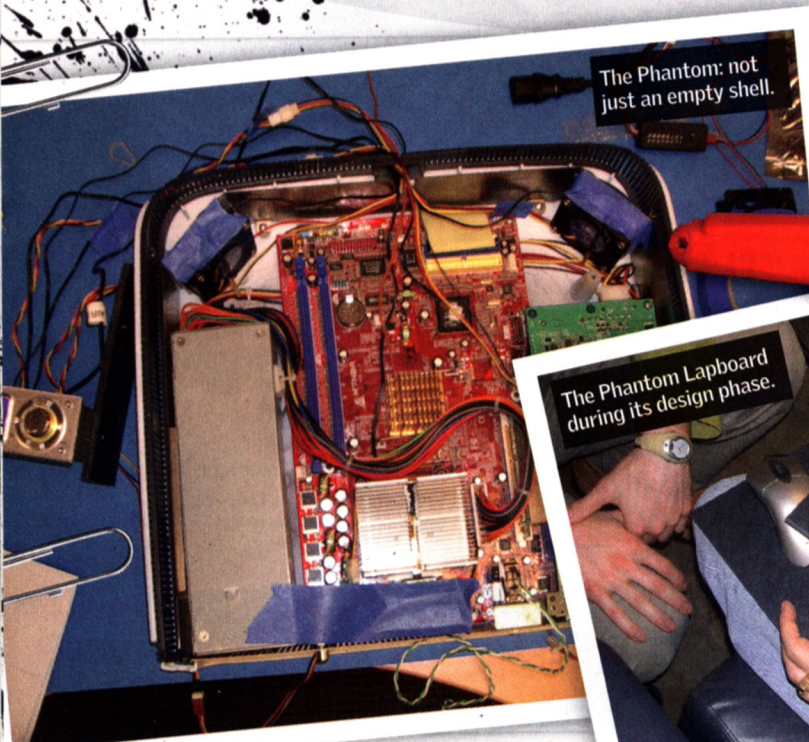
Allegedly, while staff were working 16-hour shifts at the Phantom booth, the Sarasota office was blowing \$5,000 on a single dinner. Our anonymous developer adds: "That E3 show must have cost (Infinium) around \$8 million dollars."

BILLS BILLS BILLS

Trouble loomed, and the trouble spelt '\$'. In September 2004, Infinium announced a list of 22 publishers and developers that were slated to provide games for the console. Then, in November, the console's proposed launch date, there was silence...

The Phantom has been a mirage ever since. So what exactly happened? According to Alice Marwick, who quit working for Infinium in August 2004, there was a severe difference in company culture between the Seattle and Sarasota offices.

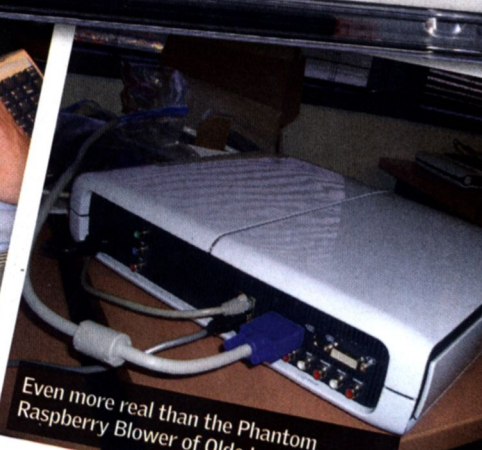
"In software development, it's common to have a conflict between what the marketing team promise and what the development team can deliver, but there's usually some sort of synergy between the two. In this instance, the Sarasota office had been making



The Phantom: not just an empty shell.



The Phantom Lapboard during its design phase.



Even more real than the Phantom Raspberry Blower of Olde London Towne.



...But then went all sleek, ergonomic and Apple Mac-y on us.

promises for a year-and-a-half before development even started. I'd been assigned to work on the packaging team and started to ask a lot of questions. How are we going to distribute our products? What kind of pallets are we using? All logical and logistical questions when you're setting up a supply chain, but it became clear that these questions hadn't been thought through... So I left."

END GAME

By the end of 2004, Infinium's financial woes were evident and employees were allegedly being paid with stock instead of cash. A string of damaging lawsuits hadn't helped. First, in February 2004, the company took HardOCP to court over their investigation. "(We) spent \$230,000 fighting these guys when they sued us for \$20 million for libel in Florida," says the website's owner Kyle Bennett. "Bottom line, we won, they lost."

In April 2004, former employee (and *Duke Nukem 3D* developer) Terry Nagy, filed a complaint in Texas, alleging that Infinium used his industry know-how to generate publicity for Phantom and then unceremoniously dumped him without the payoff he was promised. Nagy mysteriously withdrew the lawsuit a week later and went on to help develop *Prey*. Even Kevin Bacchus, who quit Infinium in November 2005, ended up suing the company for almost \$51,000 in "unpaid wages and accrued and unpaid personal time off", according to his lawsuit filing.

But these were tips of the iceberg compared to the scandal that was about to hit Infinium. In May 2006, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged Timothy M Roberts (who had recently resigned as CEO) with artificially inflating the company's stock price while selling off personal shares. The SEC alleged that Roberts hired a stock promoter to lure investors via a

Allegedly, while staff were working 16-hour shifts, the Sarasota office was blowing \$5,000 on one dinner...

fraudulent 'junk fax campaign', and then made off with \$422,500 by selling 1.3 million shares of his own stock.

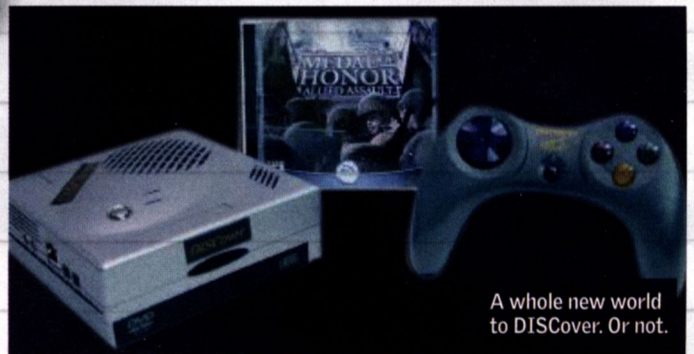
The ongoing investigation hangs heavy over Infinium (which, in July 2006, changed its name to Phantom Entertainment). And it's not over yet. During Phantom's development, the team created a wireless keyboard and mouse designed specifically for PC gamers. The Phantom Lapboard features a 360-degree rotating keyboard and allows gamers to play from their armchairs, up to 30ft away from their PCs.

Phantom Entertainment - who didn't reply to an interview request for this article - initially announced that the Lapboard would be released "no later than October 2006". In December, without a sausage in sight, the company announced new funding buddies (Chicago Venture Partners) and at the time of writing, it's thought it will be on general release in March. Better still, Alienware are rumoured to be bundling Phantom Lapboards with their PC Media Center.

Will the Phantom Lapboard meet its new release date of March 2007? That's anyone's guess. But after enough court battles, controversy and alleged corruption to fill the pages of a Hollywood script, the real question should probably be, does anybody care? **PCZ**

Suspect device

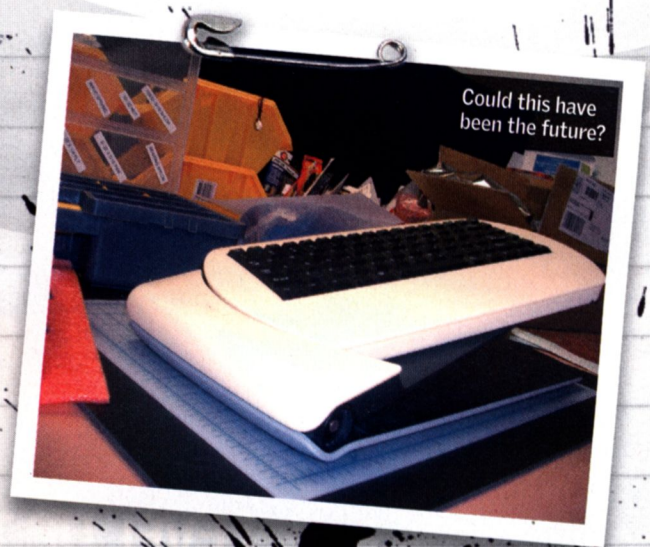
Here's another PC console you won't be playing anytime soon



A whole new world to DISCover. Or not.

Back in August 2003, after taking a wrong turn down a dark corridor at E3, *PC ZONE* sang praises for another console that played unmodified PC games. "Ooh," we crooned. "PlayStation, sod off out of the living-room, there's a new kid in town." DISCover was supposedly compatible with every PC game in existence, and its creator Avi DorEl proudly told Pavel Barter: "Dozens of Phantoms have come and gone, but the fact of the matter is, we have the patent." Better still, the console was set to launch late 2003. Um, hello... Anyone?... We're waiting here...

While DISCover (www.discoverconsole.com) have gone on to introduce "simple, console-like gaming experiences" to PCs and provide the tech for Alienware platforms, their own venture was scuppered when the head of Apex Digital, a US electronics distributor set to manufacture the console, was arrested in China amid allegations of "financial wrongdoing". Hopefully prison didn't cause him any DISComfort.





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PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games



Slimming down

THE FIRST COUPLE of months in the year are always grim. Your head has only just stopped throbbing from all the Christmas parties, your bank balance is still in shock and you're just getting over the guilt of not having kept up any of your noble New Year's resolutions. Couple all this with the lovely British weather and it's hardly the happiest of times. I'd love to say that we've got an amazing reviews section to compensate, but unfortunately, it seems that the industry's still recuperating too, with this month's section being one of the slimmest I've overseen.

However, I'm confident that things will start to pick up again next month, with titles like *Supreme Commander* and *WOW: The Burning Crusade* (keep an eye out for our reviews next month) leading the way for a much healthier, more exciting and all-round better year for PC gaming. Let's just hope that a demented dog and rabbit (*Sam & Max*), some burly soldiers (*Armed Assault*) and shiny supercars (*Test Drive Unlimited*) can keep you going till then.

Sozy Wallace

Sozy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!



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



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

60

GAME OF THE MONTH

ARMED ASSAULT

A worthy successor to *Operation Flashpoint*?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST

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

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

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

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	2GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 64 TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
 - 68 BAD DAY L.A.
 - 70 STAR TREK: LEGACY
 - 72 TOP SPIN 2
 - 73 SPACE EMPIRES V
 - 77 EUROPA UNIVERSALIS III
 - 78 SAM & MAX: EPISODE TWO - SITUATION
 - 79 RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS
 - 80 INDIE ZONE
- All the latest from the world of independent gaming
- 82 BUDGET
- Football Manager 2006, Outrun 2006: Coast 2 Coast, MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3, Cross Racing Championship 2005* and many more.
- 84 BUYER'S GUIDE
- Buy this little lot

PCZONE SWEARS...

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

ARMED ASSAULT

Martin Korda gets armed, dangerous and hardcore in this massively freeform tactical shooter from the creators of *Operation Flashpoint*



DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive
 PUBLISHER 505 Games
 WEBSITE www.armedassault.com
 ETA February 16
 PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The spiritual successor to strategic shooter *Operation Flashpoint*, with massive, open-ended levels, both on foot and in a variety of vehicles.

System requirements **3**

HOW IT STACKS	
BATTLEFIELD 2142	86%
ARMED ASSAULT	84%
JOINT OPERATIONS	83%

MARMITE. THEY SAY you either love it or you hate it. *Armed Assault's* a bit like that. Granted, you can't spread it on a granary doorstep or whip up a hearty beverage with it, but it's the kind of game you'll either want to whisk away to Paris for a long weekend of loving gazes, fond caresses and an overpriced meal, or douse in gasoline and introduce to a box of matches.

Here's the thing. *Armed Assault* is all about recreating the realism of a real-life battlefield, and, as much as most shooters would have us believe, this doesn't involve standing two metres away from an enemy, opening fire and running backwards while shouting: "Die, die, die!"

HEIR TODAY...

Armed Assault is, if you like, the spiritual successor to *Operation Flashpoint*, that massively detailed, realistic, life-sappingly enthralling (though aesthetically challenged and buggy) tactical shooter from the boys at Bohemia Interactive. Which is exactly how you could sum up *Armed Assault*. But more on all of that a bit later.

First off, let's start with a bit of background. *Armed Assault* places you in

command of a small band of US soldiers stationed on the fictional island of South Sahrani. It's a picturesque and idyllic place, where you spend your days training the local goat herders to fire guns, while dreaming of Sarah-Jane back home and trying to ignore the ominous portents of her burgeoning 'friendship' with John, her good-looking next-door neighbour who's funnier, wittier, richer and far more available than you are.

Of course, all that yearning soon becomes irrelevant as the armies of North Sahrani (aka 'the bad guys') suddenly invade – a real nuisance given that the majority of your comrades were shipped back to the US of A (or perhaps shunted to Iraq) only the week before.

The scene is thus set for a truly titanic, hugely tactical and, above all, realistic conflict, in which odds must be surmounted, valiant deeds done and enemies slaughtered in the name of peace, justice, commercialism, expansionism, capitalism, egalitarianism and a host of other isms bandied about by politicians to justify blowing people up. Point is, there's a war on and someone's gotta fight it. And that someone is you, soldier.

The first thing that'll slap you round the chops and demand your undivided attention is the sheer size of each level. You can find yourself sitting for two or three minutes just gazing at the countryside rolling by as you're transported from one hotspot to the next in a humvee without even approaching the boundaries of the map. Dull? A matter of taste. Realistic? Undoubtedly. Of course, if you don't fancy sitting through these moments, you can speed the game up in order to get to the bloody bits, which is a nice touch.

AT ARM'S LENGTH

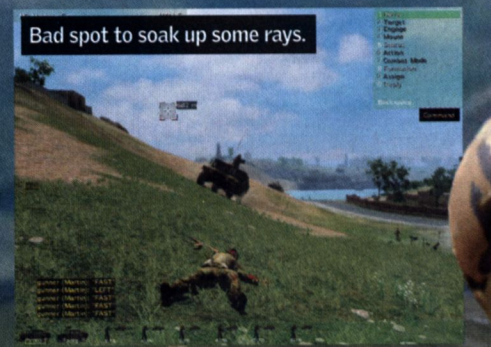
Once you and your squad arrive at a hotspot, you'll quickly find that the ensuing action is unlike most other tactical shooters you've played. Even the ones that claim to be realistic.



Note to self: when taking out a bridge, put the explosives UNDERNEATH!



"And how about an unofficial word?"



Bad spot to soak up some rays.

This will delight hardcore combat aficionados more than a weekend spent in a ditch with only an assault rifle and a box of rations for company...

Battles are usually fought at long-range, with your nearest target often little more than a dot on the horizon. This is something that will no doubt bore frag-loving *Counter-Strike* nuts to within an inch of their lives, but will delight hardcore combat aficionados more than a weekend spent in a muddy ditch with only an assault rifle and a box of trench rations for company. And if realism is your thing, you're going to absolutely go mad over the unforgiving damage system that'll have you reaching for the reload key after just a couple of close encounters with enemy lead. And that's on the easier of the two difficulty settings...



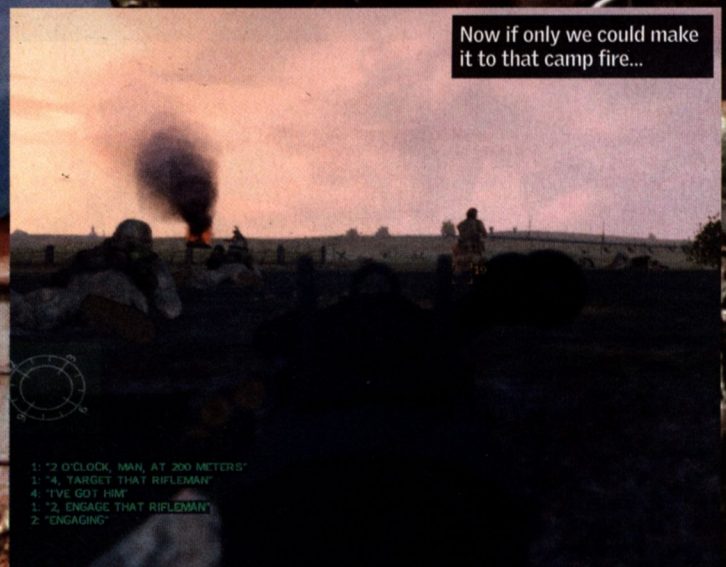
Make sure you keep every angle covered.

Luckily, *Armed Assault's* freeform levels are little short of breathtaking, both in terms of scope and the amount of options they provide. Routes from one waypoint to the next must be plotted on-the-fly, with even a tactical retreat turning into a considered affair as you're suddenly forced to change route to avoid your foes.

The landscapes teem with forests, hills, villages, bridges and a variety of other geographical and structural landmarks that can be utilised or



The third-person tactical view allows you to issue orders a bit more easily.

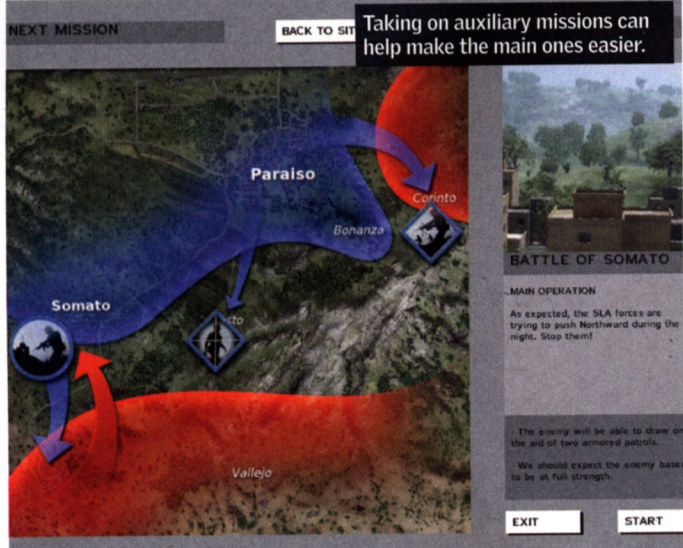


Now if only we could make it to that camp fire...

- 1: "2 O'CLOCK, MAN, AT 200 METERS"
- 1: "4, TARGET THAT RIFLEMAN"
- 4: "YEE GOY HIM"
- 1: "2, ENGAGE THAT RIFLEMAN"
- 2: "ENGAGING"

Choose your own war

Dive into the fray or sucker punch the enemy? The decision is yours...

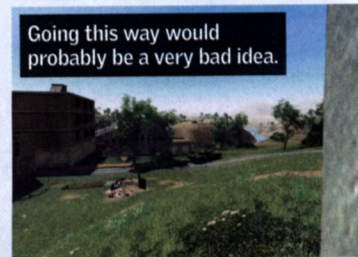
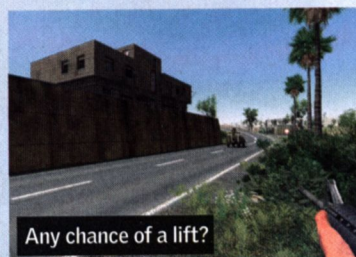


After you complete each level, you're given an overview of the battlefield and presented with several options as to what to do next.

Your choices are divided into main and auxiliary operations. The former is a collection of essential missions that you must undertake in order to progress to the next stage of the game, each replete with an extremely long and challenging set of mission objectives for you to accomplish. If you like a challenge, you won't be disappointed.

However, if you fancy making these main missions that little bit easier, you can take on one of the auxiliary missions - quick, 20-40 minute forays, usually with just one or two objectives. Complete these successfully and they'll have a knock-on effect on the main mission. As Sun Tzu might have once said (had he ever strung the following words together in this order): "The path to victory isn't always a straight line." Or something.

Come out, come out, wherever you are.



avoided as you see fit. Leaves fall off trees, dust whips up into swirling clouds and water ripples in the breeze. Patches of foliage also provide cover for your squadmates, who suck in laboured gulps of air after a long yomp through the Sahrani countryside and shout context-sensitive instructions and responses to one another.

SHIFTING TERRAIN

Every level is a dynamic battlefield in the purest sense - an ever-evolving, constantly changing theatre of war in which enemy patrols roam and T-72 tanks kick up dust as they seek to gain a caterpillar track hold on your territory.

In fact, while we're on the subject of vehicles, there are literally dozens of them for you to drive and pilot. Whether it's an AH-1Z gunship or a nippy jeep, the diversity of the vehicle types is staggering, with each boasting unique handling, armour, turrets and firepower. However, don't expect to be slalomming through forests in a Black Hawk any time soon, as you'll need to put in some serious time behind the stick/wheel if you're going to even begin to master how these vehicles handle.

As if that wasn't enough for you, you can even steal a tractor from a field and use it to chug across the countryside like a vigilante farmer with a penchant for army surplus merchandise. Genius!

Another great option is the ability to call in artillery strikes to pound enemy strongholds before storming their positions. However, with the enemy also

able to do the same to you, you'll need to be wary of much more than the odd stray bullet puncturing your flesh.

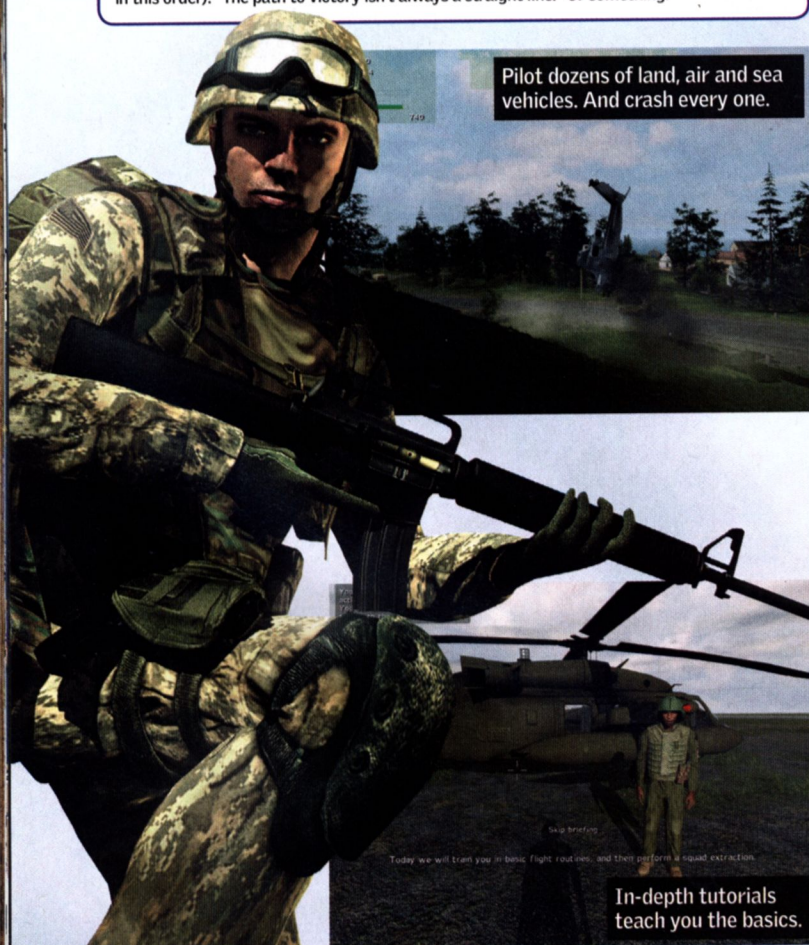
Vehicle combat blends seamlessly with troop warfare, with the best results often coming when you intelligently combine the two. In order to attain a better vantage point of the battlefield, you can enter a third-person tactical view, which allows you to command your forces slightly more easily than with the archaic and cack-handed menu command system - just one example of several poor interface decisions on Bohemia's part. Even from this view, it's still a little too easy to leave yourself exposed while you issue orders in the heat of a firefight.

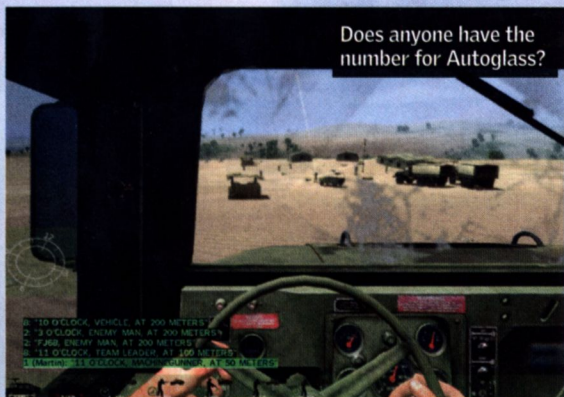
WAR HERO

Now I know what you're thinking. How can you possibly feel like you're playing an important role in the war effort in a game as über-realistic as this? Simple. Despite being just a lone soldier in an otherwise AI-controlled squad, you're often tasked with undertaking integral missions to aid the war effort, such as taking out that key bridge that'll cut off the enemy's supply line, or leading a team of special forces in a raid to assassinate an enemy general.

While you may seem like just a cog in an otherwise gargantuan war machine, you're rarely left in any doubt that your actions can make a difference, which is quite a feat given the game's scope and hardcore approach. Realistic it might be, but *Armed Assault* is still aware that it

Pilot dozens of land, air and sea vehicles. And crash every one.





Does anyone have the number for Autoglass?

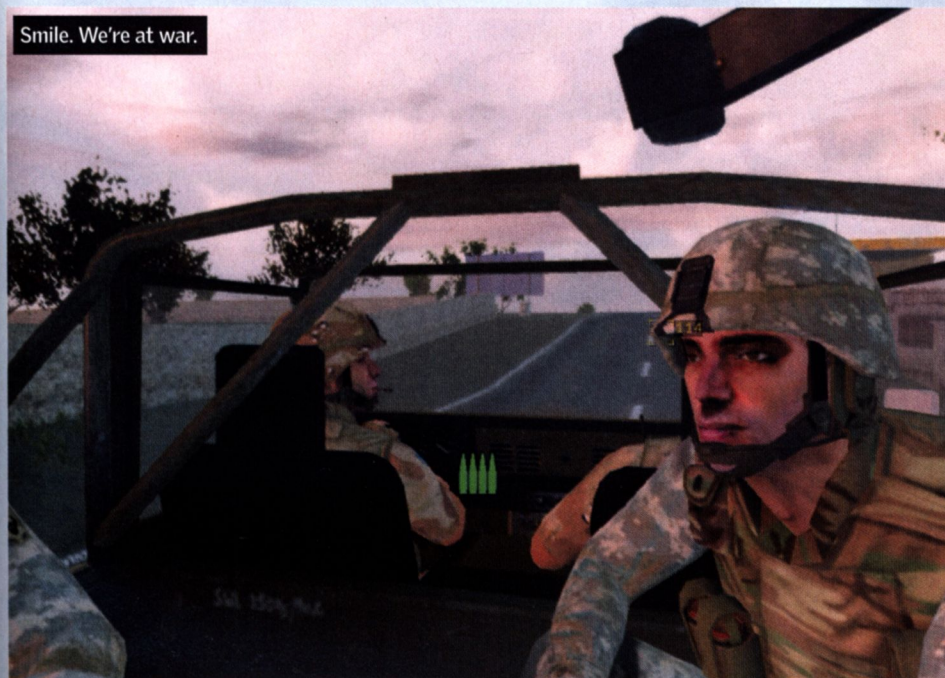


Don't wait till you see the whites of their eyes.



You can either drive vehicles or man their turrets.

You can even steal a tractor and chug across the country like a vigilante farmer



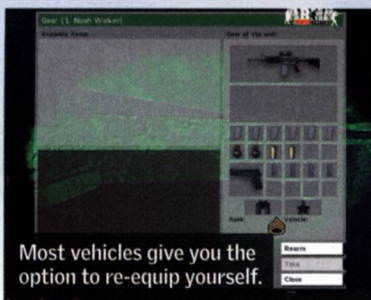
Smile. We're at war.

needs to make you feel special from time to time, albeit in a very subtle way.

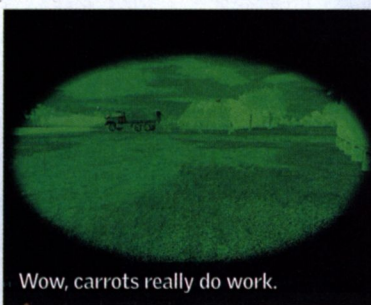
So far then, I'd say it was all sounding rather promising. Well, apart from the clumsy interface of course. But let's not be too hasty, because there are several very good reasons why *Armed Assault* hasn't scored more highly. Want to hear what they are? Course you do...

YES! YES! YES! NO...

While *Armed Assault* may be a stunningly realistic rendition of warfare, it's also a stunningly unpolished one. For a start, there's a creaking graphics engine, inaccessible and ugly briefing screens and some atrociously written chunks of text (though the cut-scene dialogue and acting are decent). There's also occasionally suspect path-finding when the AI gets behind the wheel, erratic day/night transitions, often unclear player guidance and a smattering



Most vehicles give you the option to re-equip yourself.



Wow, carrots really do work.

of inexplicable crash bugs which infect what's an otherwise masterful virtual combat experience.

Of course, the weaknesses are vastly outweighed by the positives, but had Bohemia put as much effort into presenting *Armed Assault* as it did into creating it, this could have been the complete package. It's almost akin to having a gourmet meal served up to you in a polystyrene box.

Ultimately, whether *Armed Assault* is a must-have tonic to sate your thirst for hardcore military action or a bitter and overly tactical chore comes down to your personal gaming taste. That, and to the extent you're prepared to turn a blind eye to the game's lack of sheen.

Love it or hate it though, you simply can't argue that *Armed Assault* is one hugely accomplished modern combat simulator. If that's what you're looking for, you won't be disappointed. **PCZ**

Take the test

Is *Armed Assault* the game for you? Let's find out!

1) I BELIEVE THAT DOOM 3 IS...

- a) A cunning and brain-teasing tactical shooter.
- b) A frenetic run-and-gun blaster.
- c) For six-year-old girls.

2) AT WEEKENDS I LIKE TO...

- a) Read *Heat* while descaling my heels.
- b) Attempt to be active but usually spend my time playing *Counter-Strike* and watching TV shows about washed-up 'celebrities' being humiliated in exchange for one last pathetic stab at fame.
- c) Apply camouflage paint and spend six hours fantasising about being trapped behind enemy lines before cracking one off to a copy of *Soldier Of Fortune* magazine.

3) AN M1A1 ABRAMS IS...

- a) A type of skin cream with Q10 and herb extracts.
- b) Some kind of armoured military vehicle.
- c) The mainstay tank of the US army, named after General Creighton W Abrams and boasting a 120mm turret and top speed of 41.5mph (68kph) – depending on wind conditions.

THE RESULTS

- a) 1 point b) 2 points c) 3 points

3-4: Forget it. This game's not for you. Now go book that manicure you promised yourself.

5-6: You may not be hardcore, but you are partial to a bit of gritty realism. You'll definitely find some enjoyment here.

7-9: You are the target market for *Armed Assault*! Neglect to buy it and the boys at the TA will never bark pointless military jargon at you ever again.

10: Either you're a pathological liar or you can't count. Start again.

PCZONE

Graphics Dated but still fairly detailed
Sound Minimal but realistic
Multiplayer Huge, tactical and time-consuming

- ✓ Just like the real thing
- ✓ Massive, freeform levels
- ✓ Countless vehicles to drive and pilot
- ✓ Extremely hardcore
- ✗ Unpolished
- ✗ Extremely hardcore

84

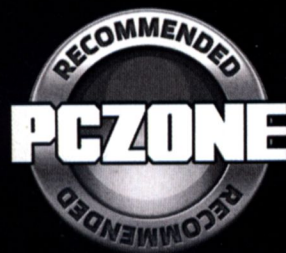
War on a disc



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

Suzy Wallace dons her grass skirt and shades to pick up the keys to this steamy Hawaiian racer

DEVELOPER Eden Games
 PUBLISHER Atari
 WEBSITE www.testdriveunlimited.com
 ETA Feb 16
 PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Go-anywhere driving title set on the lush Hawaiian island of Oahu, combining both on and offline racing in one massive car community.

System requirements	3
HOW IT STACKS	
GTR 2	92%
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED	80%
NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON	78%

WHEN YOU THINK of Hawaii, the images that pop into your mind probably consist of smiling residents handing out flower garlands at airports, palm-fringed beaches, crashing surf and Tom Selleck's impossibly garish shirts. What doesn't instantly spring to mind however is a whole heap of exotic machinery, but that's exactly what Eden Games have sprinkled liberally around the island of Oahu in *Test Drive Unlimited*.

Determined to make *TDU* stand out from the crowd, Eden have gathered together a glorious setting, tons of races and a massive selection of cars that will have enthusiasts dribbling into their Haynes manuals. They've then drenched the lot in features borrowed from the world of massively multiplayer gaming (but stripped of elves and orcs). *TDU* even boasts a persistent online world in which you can create and customise your own avatar and battle it out with others driving around on the server – though with less magic spells and more horsepower.

Oahu provides a massive and lush backdrop to the game, in stark contrast to the normal concrete and tarmac-based settings of racing titles. Upon first booting

the game up, the tropical setting is one of the first things to grab your attention, with its tree-lined avenues and picturesque sandy beaches. Sadly, it's also one of the first things I grew tired of. Yes, I know that's what it's like in real life and I'm also aware that it probably ranks in many people's top five places to visit before they die, but in terms of variety, it can be a bit lacking. Despite the initial wow factor, the visuals can quickly grow repetitive.

However, the vast size of the island is impressive (at least a half-hour drive from one side to another), and should you choose to go for a bit of a wander, there are some real gems of roads to be found. Do a bit of exploration inland and you may stumble across my personal favourite – a twisty mountain road perfect for testing the limits of your vehicle and for ogling the rather pleasant view.

PARADISE UNBOUND

Essential for navigating around this huge island is your GPS unit. It might be a relatively standard bit of kit nowadays but it's laden with features to make your life just that little bit easier, from handy icons symbolising the locations of challenges to

filters and blue lines denoting where you've been on your drive. Once you've travelled a road, you can simply call it up on your GPS and instantly transport there (à la *Oblivion*), saving you from having to drive across the island and also doing your bit for global warming by reducing the emissions produced by your virtual car. Maybe.

A RUN FOR YOUR MONEY

There's a decent range of challenges on offer too. Instead of standard game modes, *TDU* utilises themes – speed, race and time – and the resulting challenges are spread around the island, some offline and some on, and each categorised by the type of vehicle you need in order to enter.

Variety is further assured by a range of bonus missions, which offer a bit of silly fun. For instance, Oahu seems to be overflowing with models who, between botox injections and vomiting into toilets, need to get somewhere in a rush. Pull up next to them, *Crazy Taxi*-style, and you'll be given a 'damage' meter and a time limit in which to get them where they want to go, although I did amuse myself by just picking one up and driving around like a lunatic until they got out in disgust.



Hire jinks

Eat your heart out Avis - this is the kind of car hire we like



Luckily in *TDU*, Eden have realised that not all players will have the cash to buy a new car for every race, so they've added a neat feature that allows you to hire a car. Indeed, as soon as you start the game you'll be directed to rent a car until you've purchased your first vehicle. What might not be so obvious, though, is the fact that if you don't have the right category car for a race and haven't got the money to buy one, you can simply hire one out and enter in that instead. Let's see if they'll force you to take out the insurance option...

Oh how lovely. A police escort.



A glorious setting, tons of races and a selection of cars to send enthusiasts dribbling into their Haynes manuals

Courier missions, meanwhile, require you to deliver a package in a strict time limit, while roadside diners give you the chance to try out some user-created missions. But the car delivery missions are by far the most devious. Handing you the keys to an immaculate supercar, these missions task you with driving to a distant location with a minimum of damage to said auto. Any damage incurred is deducted from your reward, and with an extra bonus should you make it unscathed, they're a great way to boost your cash - provided you can resist the temptation to drive it sideways round corners. Of course, there's always a restart button if not...

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Other players can be found cruising around the roads of the island, and if you should fancy a quick race, you can simply flash your lights at them and off you go. This works remarkably well. Pulling up next to

somebody, winding down the window and actually looking at their avatar sitting in their car provides perhaps one of the coolest moments of the game.

Alternatively, you can compete in the set multiplayer races, in which up to eight players can take part. These, like any other type of online racing, can either prove to be quite tricky against skilled opponents or descend into complete carnage as you all barge into each other off the starting line. It's this multiplayer side that sets *TDU* apart from its rivals, but like any MMO title, the final experience will depend heavily upon the community playing it.

With a large number of people joining in though, the enjoyment should increase tenfold, with other players racing down the roads besides you, creating car clubs, organising cruises, trading vehicles and generally elevating *TDU* above other racing titles. On the down side, as Xbox 360 and PC players





Claim to fame

Recognise some of the scenery? Here's why...



Not quite a 308, but near enough.

Test Drive Unlimited's not the first time that the island of Oahu has been thrust into the limelight. For one, it's home to Pearl Harbor, and it's also played host to such big-screen movies as the dino classic *Jurassic Park*, Adam Sandler's *50 First Dates* and surfing flick *Blue Crush*. The completely bonkers island thriller series *Lost* is also filmed here.

But '80s fans will be far more excited by the prospect of actually being able to don a brash Hawaiian shirt in-game, jump into a shiny red Ferrari 308 GTS (released in a later download) and pretend to be Magnum, P.I. on his home island. Now if only the game had an option for *that* moustache...

won't be on the same servers, the population density is dependent on how many PC players are online.

OUT FOR A SPIN

Visiting the car showrooms around the island is a great experience, allowing you to browse the cars on offer, sit in them, honk the horn, start the engine and generally do your best to annoy the virtual salesman. Each car is extremely well-modelled too, with everything from E-type Jags to Ferrari Enzos looking exactly like their real-world counterparts. As for the interiors, these can be a bit of a mixed bag. Some of them are undeniably impressive – cows have never been put to such a good use as coating the seats of the McLaren SLR – but others can look flat and have poor detail.

Once you've visited all of the car showrooms on offer, motorcycles are unlocked, giving those with a leather fetish, or just a love of two-wheeled transport, an

added bonus. The bikes are insanely quick, tricky to control and near impossible to drive in the heads-up view, but provide a welcome change from the four-wheelers.

The handling of the cars is a weird mix of arcade and simulation, without truly being either, and I never felt truly at home with it. There are times when it feels spot-on, but you'll often find yourself spinning wildly and careening into unmovable obstacles. The handling also varies wildly between different cars, so if you don't want to be stuck with a car that you can barely get round a corner, I'd recommend taking them out for a test drive before parting with your hard-earned cash. Which is fitting, I guess, given the title of the game.

Luckily, you won't need to worry too much if you've just ploughed your pride and joy into a wall, as *TDU* doesn't feature any proper car damage. While you can knock off bumpers and put CPU cars out of action by shunting them at high speed, your own



Biker chick

Not all of the vehicles have four wheels. Let's check out the bikes...



Not wanting to draw too much attention, I don bright yellow *Kill Bill*-style leathers before practising my best Uma Thurman impression.



Out on the road, I have a play about to see just what the bike can do. The handling is tricky, but hang on a minute... Woo-hoo! I can do wheelies!



That's it. I've just been dumped unceremoniously on my arse for the fifth time and my wounded pride decides to head back to four wheels.

The roads are populated by general traffic, which seems to serve no other purpose than to get in your way

machine will carry on unscathed. It does cut down on the incentive to drive sensibly, but this is countered quite nicely in bonus missions, by deducting points for going off-road or crashing.

HAWAII FIVE-O

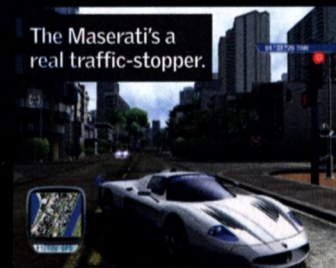
Although *TDU* has lofty ambitions, not everything in the game offers the same sense of satisfaction. As well as the slightly suspect handling and repetitive landscape, the roads throughout the island are populated by general traffic, which seems to serve no other purpose than to get in your way. As hitting this traffic bumps up your wanted rating, this can end up being infuriating, especially in the middle of a race when you've barely clipped a vehicle.

The police also don't blink an eye when you pelt through red lights at 170mph, but once they're onto you, will swerve headlong across the road toward you or even set up roadblocks, forcing collisions and sending that 'wanted' rating even higher. There are also plenty of minor irritations: missions can quickly start to feel repetitive, the new hardcore mode is only available once you've reached Champion status, you can't walk around your house or garage despite having paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for it, and the idle note of a few vehicles is so bad I almost mistook it for a corrupted midi file.

OK, so most of these problems are pretty minor in the grand scheme of things, but added together they create an overriding feeling that with a little more effort, *TDU* could have been so much more. With a spot of luck Eden will see fit to tweak some of these issues, but, assuming busy servers, *TDU* still offers a massive, inviting and involving world for racing fans to gather in and share their love of cars. All with a cocktail on the side too. **PCZ**



Noble and dignified...



The Maserati's a real traffic-stopper.

You can put the AI cars out of action, but not your own.



PCZONE

Graphics Gloriously detailed and impressive
Sound Strange at low revs, great at higher ones
Multiplayer Tons of it

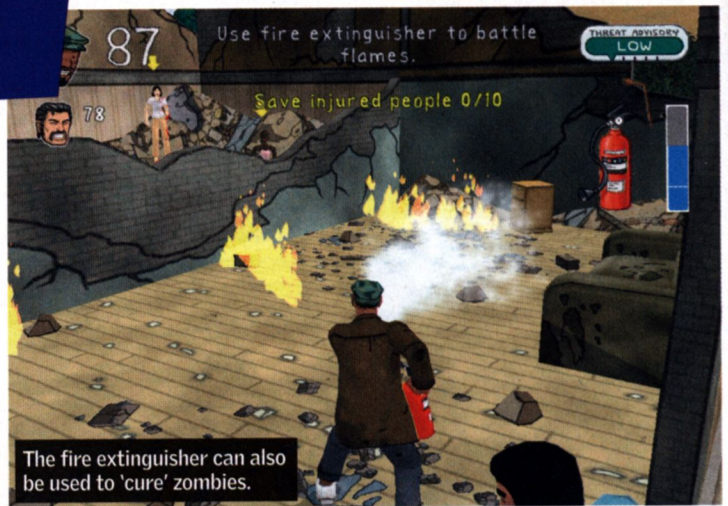
- ✓ Hundreds of races
- ✓ One big car-loving community
- ✓ Luscious graphics
- ✓ Well integrated multiplayer
- ✗ Handling a bit suspect
- ✗ Can feel a bit repetitive

80

Well worth a spin



That green gas turns people into zombies.



The fire extinguisher can also be used to 'cure' zombies.



The obligatory sniper rifle screenshot.



BAD DAY LA

Sam Kiildsen just had a bad day. Why? Because he spent it playing this...

DEVELOPER Enlight Software
PUBLISHER Lexicon Entertainment
WEBSITE www.enlight.com/bdla
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

A third-person battle through a cartoonish Los Angeles beset by terrorists, meteor showers, earthquakes and zombies.

System requirements 2

HOW IT STACKS	
GTA: SAN ANDREAS	92%
PSYCHONAUTS	90%
BAD DAY LA	19%

ON PAPER, *Bad Day LA* sounded quite promising: an adult, comic-book-inspired satirical adventure through Los Angeles in the midst of its most disastrous day ever. All the nasty things Americans have been told to fear in recent years – terrorists, earthquakes, biological warfare, tsunamis – have, by chance, hit the city at the same time, and you're the poor sod who has to battle through it. Yeah, we thought: a bit *GTA*-esque perhaps, but it'll do.

As it turns out, it certainly won't do. Despite the guiding hand of 'celebrity' design guru American McGee, *Bad Day LA* is an unpolished, bland mess of a game that doesn't deserve a single megabyte of your hard disk space.

First of all, it isn't even funny, and the satire is about as cutting as a plastic spoon. Anthony, the character you play, is a loud-mouthed, skirt-chasing misanthrope with a grating voice, and most jokes seem to revolve around him insulting someone, killing innocent people by

accident or getting into some kind of personal hygiene-related trouble. *South Park* can do this kind of stuff well, because the writers take comedy seriously. *Bad Day LA*'s writing is lazy and uninspired.

NO FUN ZONE

More importantly, the game itself just isn't fun to play. Forget a free-roaming romp around LA: here you're hemmed into a small area of the city and given a mission or two to complete before being allowed to move on. The tasks usually revolve around saving people (by putting out fires or healing injuries) and killing terrorists, but the mechanics of the game take any notion of skill or fun out of this.

Terrorists, for example, spawn in front of your eyes or – more likely – right behind you, shooting you in the back when you think you've cleared an area out. Likewise, cars will often drive up from blind spots and run you down, resulting in insta-death. This forces you to quicksave constantly, breaking up what little flow the game has.

Bad Day LA is also a technical disaster. Quitting out of the game twice

crashed my PC, and this is the first time I've played a game with no adjustable resolution or graphics settings beyond 'contrast' and 'brightness', so it ends up looking like shit as well as playing like it. This isn't bad, it's chronic. **PCZ**

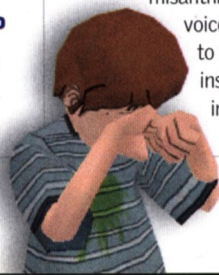
PCZONE

Graphics Low-res rubbish
 Sound Woeful voice-acting and effects
 Multiplayer No

- ✓ Unusual art style
- ✗ Technically unpolished
- ✗ Stupid enemy spawning
- ✗ Not funny
- ✗ Not fun to play
- ✗ Low-res visuals

19

Bad as in bad



CRACKDOWN



*Limited time offer—see www.xbox.com/halo3. Xbox 360™ hard drive, Xbox Live™ Gold required. Crackdown™ developed by Real Time Worlds Ltd. for Microsoft Corporation. Crackdown, the Crackdown logo, Real Time Worlds, and the Real Time Worlds logo are trademarks of Real Time Worlds Ltd. in the United States and/or other countries. All rights reserved. © 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, Xbox, Xbox 360, the Xbox logos, Xbox Live, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

Carry the scales of justice in one hand, and a two-ton truck in the other.

You're a genetically enhanced agent of justice authorized to do whatever it takes to sweep the criminal scum out of Pacific City. From the streets to the rooftops, use anything you can get your hands on to show the thugs that crime doesn't pay. And for the ultimate payback, combine forces in co-op play for twice the destruction and double the retribution. **All Justice. No Restraints.**



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REVIEWS STAR TREK: LEGACY

Harvesting Station
Harvesting Station 83

Harvesting Station
Harvesting Station 83

91 Mm

Man, you should have seen Harvesting Station #82. Wow! What a rush that was!

STAR TREK: LEGACY

"It's worse than that! It's dead, Jim!" mutters *Will Porter*. "Dead Jim! Dead!"

DEVELOPER Mad Doc
PUBLISHER Bethesda/Ubisoft
WEBSITE
startrek.bethsoft.com/
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Every generation of *Trek* gets the space combat treatment in what proves to be a yet another disappointing outing for one of the best sci-fi franchises ever. Not that we're bitter.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

FREELANCER 84%

HOMEWORLD 2 81%

STAR TREK: LEGACY 52%

YOUR AVERAGE STAR TREK episode, say a *Next Generation* one sometime around season five or six, runs thusly. First, new planet discovered. Second, slightly dull dispute about crop irrigation or something. Third, dull warbling about the prime directive. Fourth, Counsellor Troi senses discord or infinite sadness. Fifth, they find out it was the Romulans all along. Sixth, the episode's special effects budget is expended when something in space blows up. Seventh, Data looks bemused.

Your average mission in *Star Trek: Legacy*, however, runs a bit differently. It may start with those assuring blue episode titles in the top-left corner, but what follows are more breaches and explosions than any budget could allow. Space battles are here by the space bucketload... Which must make for a wonderful game, must it not?

Legacy can and will make you want to hurt things. No, I take that back – *Legacy* will make you want to kill things and then hold them between your teeth while you repeatedly slam them into broken glass. I might be a tad hysterical here, but it's taken something that's dear to my heart

(*Star Trek* in its several generational forms), then haphazardly wandered towards a gameplay model that would have made me mildly gleeful, and proceeded to throw a veritable sensor array of glitches and oversights into the works that stop the show far short of a recommended purchase.

MAKE IT NOT

The story, as it is, isn't bad (see 'Unfinished Symphony', opposite) – and it certainly is nice that they've roped the whole 'four pip' captain gang in for voice duties. But the game is just so unwieldy (less so on 360, so read into that what you will), its controls so flailing in their driftiness and its map screen so sluggish and ill-conceived that just thinking about it earlier caused me to dry-heave.

Once you've got used to the idiosyncrasies of *Star Trek* combat (predominantly based around exactly which angles you can fire from – a factor not helped by the game's poor tutorial system), it's fair to say that its levels are relatively varied – even if they always do revolve around interplanetary fisticuffs.

Each one begins with the relevant captain speaking as the voice of their ship (there are no cut-scenes beyond ship

exteriors – giving a one-vehicle, one-voice *Thomas The Tank Engine* ambience to affairs), and a variety of twists and turns play out from then on.

A significant problem then arises, however, since the lack of an in-mission save feature coupled with wavering difficulty levels and sections that can last anything up to a half-hour leads to quite remarkable levels of frustration. Call me prissy, but when I play a rock-hard level four times over for half-an-hour at a time and I get killed in its closing act EVERY SINGLE TIME, then I think I deserve to get a little upset.

THREE'S COMPANY

What's more, the action itself is rather shallow, tactic-less and difficult to follow – something compounded by the fact that issuing decent orders to the other three ships in your entourage is nigh-on impossible. Sure, you can take each over individually – but trying to get any battleplan going other than my own constant "bundle in on that big bastard there!" ruse is rarely an option.

Far from a slow, gradual drip of goodness into your federation flotilla meanwhile, the game unlocks über-ships to buy remarkably



Space is more often cloudy than black in *Legacy*.



Planet sizes are hardly realistic.



Space: dull.

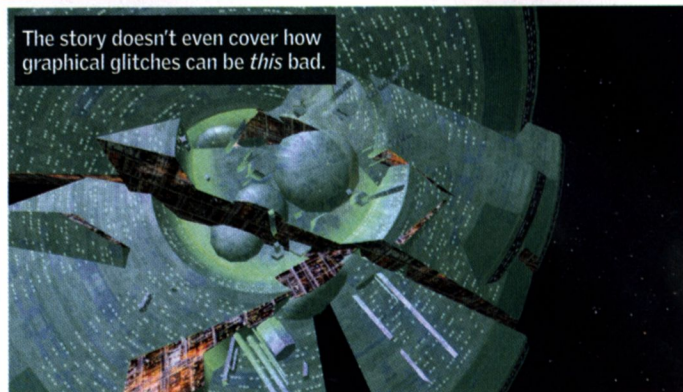
Legacy will make you want to kill things, and then hold them in your teeth while slamming them into broken glass...



The Defiant: as manoeuvrable as a spade in treacle.

Unfinished symphony?

Assessing the narrative of *Legacy's* continuing mission...



The story doesn't even cover how graphical glitches can be *this* bad.

Our story begins with Archer (him out of *Quantum Leap*) helping out a Vulcan scientist who then, it turns out, may or may not have something to do with a Romulan-spread planetary plague. The story progresses from there and for what it's worth it isn't bad, if a little disjointed - presumably since, as the game's writers have already claimed, much of the backstory and a fair chunk of important events hit the cutting-room floor. If you're not fussy about things like plot or characterisation though, then there's always skirmish modes and multiplayer to keep you occupied. Which is like normal campaign mode, only more aimless.



early in each generation of the game - providing the most non-gratifying instant-gratification you may ever experience.

In even the bleakest, most mundane of *Enterprise* episodes though, there was always the morale-lifting possibility of Jolene Blalock needlessly being infected with something and being shamelessly stripped of clothing, greased in sci-fi lube and placed in a decontamination chamber. Does, I'm sure you'll be wondering, *Legacy* have a saving grace - a metaphorical erect Vulcan nipple peeking out of the murk?

Well yes it does - but only in what the game could have been. Even the most steely-hearted of *Trek*-fans won't feel a tingle of excitement as they hear the enthusiastic bark of Shatner, go into battle with a Bird of Prey, see Deep Space Nine orbiting Bajor or first bear witness to a Borg cube. But, sad to say, the lumbering combat, laborious controls, frankly bizarre collision detection and remarkably glitchy graphics really put a bit of a kibosh on things. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **A**lright from a distance, terrible up close
 Sound **A**dequate, despite the great cast
 Multiplayer **T**here, but combat still frustrating

- ✓ It's *Star Trek!*
- ✓ Interesting mission structure
- ✗ Floaty, unresponsive controls
- ✗ Laughable save system
- ✗ Dull combat

52

Resistance is worthwhile

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THE ORIGINAL DAWN OF WAR



TOP SPIN 2

Forty, love

DEVELOPER Aspyr Media
PUBLISHER 2K Sports
WEBSITE www.topspin2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99
System requirements 3



TENNIS STICKS ARE one of those items most people own, but very rarely use except for brief moments when they remember they have it (which usually involves swinging it around the room saying "Ooh, I forgot I had this," before putting it back in the cupboard). It's a similar story with tennis games; you buy them because it fills a gap in the collection rather than having any real desire to play it.

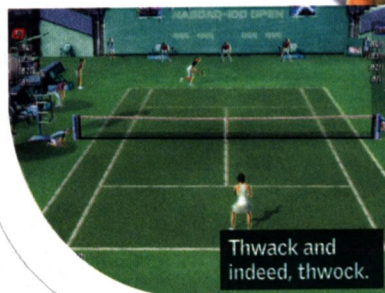
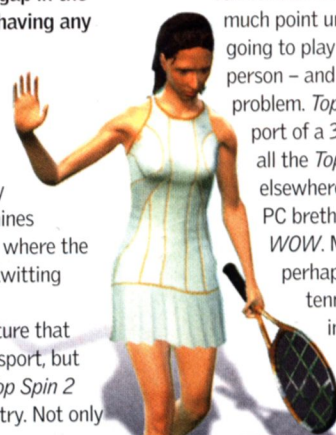
The thing with tennis (the real thing, I mean), is that it's a game of quick-fire strategy, where the play of the ball always outshines any kind of finesse, and where the glory always falls in outwitting your opponent.

Few games can capture that kind of intensity in any sport, but I'd say the makers of *Top Spin 2* have had a damn good try. Not only

is the game accessible, it has a couple of novel game-modes to kick back with and offers a pretty exhausting career mode too. It's also quite technical, but it reveals itself in layers, a bit like *Pro Evo*.

However, like the real thing, *Virtua Tennis* and *Pro Evo*, there isn't much point unless you're going to play against another person – and therein lies the problem. *Top Spin 2* is a PC port of a 360 game, hence all the *Top Spinners* are elsewhere, while your PC brethren are playing *WOW*. More fool them, perhaps, but that's tennis for you. Back in the cupboard it goes then.

Richie Shoemaker



PCZONE

71

Better than cricket



If *Civ IV* is king, *SEV* is the ultra-brainy military adviser who smells of wee.

SPACE EMPIRES V

Welcome to deep space

DEVELOPER Malfador Machinations
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE www.spaceempires5.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$39.95 (£21) (Steam)

System requirements **1**

THERE ARE THREE types of gamer in the world: those who prefer the more accessible space conquest on offer in *Galactic Civilizations*; those who'd rather go sink their nuts into something more treacly with *Space Empires*; and those who couldn't care less for either and if they wanted a *Civ*-style game, thank you very much, would get the one with Sid Meier's name on the box.

So, like *Civ* in space (but with treacly nuts), *Space Empires V* continues in line from its predecessors, with the aim to guide a civilisation to galactic glory by means of exploring, expanding and exterminating, either through combat, by economic means or cheating. What's new to this incarnation are 3D graphics (which are OK) and loads more depth. And we mean loads.

Space Empires V is so deep you could strap a giraffe to each leg and



Designed to make you feel stupid.



AI is good, but *GalCiv's* is better.

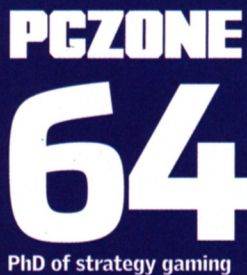
still not touch the bottom. What's more, the game revels in its own complexity, with sinuous menu options that take you further down roads than perhaps you want to be. Oh, and did we mention that it's slow too? It is: slow-paced and processor-intensive.

Saying that, like swimming in a vast body of molasses attached to a couple of long-necked ungulates, once dry land is spotted, the drive to continue is strong. However, unless you're utterly devoted to the genre, are single and/or housebound, *SEV* is a difficult game to recommend.

Richie Shoemaker



Here comes the sun. Or another planet of some sort.



WARHAMMER™
40,000

DAWN OF WAR

DARK CRUSADE™

DOES NOT REQUIRE THE ORIGINAL WARHAMMER® 40,000: DAWN OF WAR GAME TO PLAY

"THE BEST EXPANSION PACK EVER"
- PC GAMER UK



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Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about



Windows Vista is the brand new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's also primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it in the near future.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the next-generation interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game

footage of *Crysis* at www.crysis-online.com. You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from one single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, then you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games that are unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free.

Game information

Click on any game icon and here you'll see information about who made it, when you last played it and what version you have.



See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder where you can access your saves.

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance that your PC will run Windows Vista without any upgrades at all, especially if it's already capable of playing the latest 3D games. However, all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your current PC meets the necessary hardware requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready. Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful your

processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating to find out how well your PC will run Windows Vista.

Media Center

The brilliant Windows Media Center lies at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect your PC to your HDTV and browse your music and videos. Also, with Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play back, record and timeshift TV programmes! Get Windows Media Center Extender and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, it has this Extender capability built into it.

All your games

All your games are now stored in one handy location. Install a Windows Vista game and its icon will appear here.

Game rating

All games designed to be played on Windows Vista are rated, so you can see if your system will be up to playing them. You can also stop the kids from playing ultra-gory games that have adult age ratings.

New built-in games

Old classics, such as *Minesweeper* and *Solitaire*, have been improved and updated with Windows Vista, plus there are a few additions, such as *Purple Place* and *Mahjong Titans*.

Get more from your PC with Windows Vista: The Official Magazine

Whether you're already running Windows Vista, or thinking about upgrading, the Windows Vista Magazine tells you everything you need to know

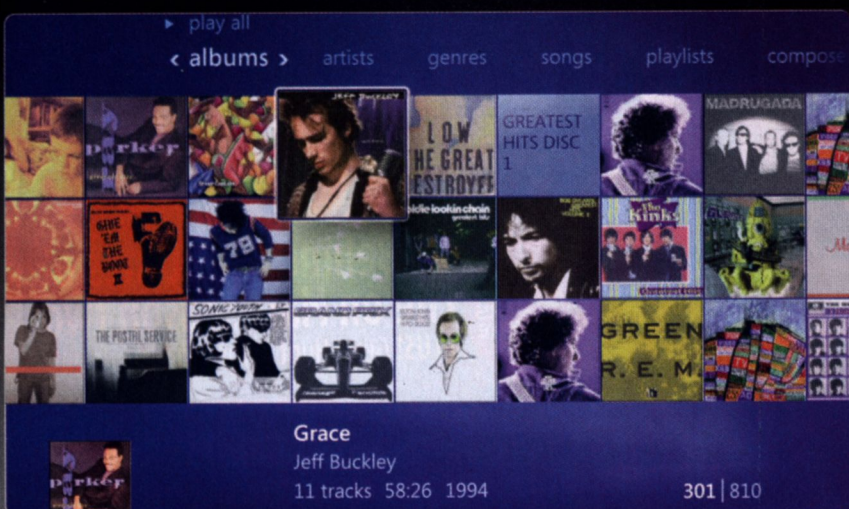
We'll show you...

- ➔ How to tell whether your PC will run Windows Vista
- ➔ Simple, cost-effective upgrades to get your PC into peak condition
- ➔ PCs you can buy today that will run Windows Vista at its best
- ➔ How to install Windows Vista and be up and running in 30 minutes
- ➔ What you can do with Windows Vista that you couldn't do with Windows XP
- ➔ Great new hardware and software that runs under Windows Vista
- ➔ And much more!



Issue one is out now for just 99p!

Find out more at www.windowsvistamagazine.co.uk



EASY BROWSING Intuitive menus help you browse your music collection.

'AVE IT!

Oi! You!
Look what you
get inside your
favourite SF mag
this month...

THE FOUNTAIN
WEIRD BUT WONDERFUL

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA
INTERVIEWED
JAMIE "APOLLO" BAMBER SPEAKS

LOST
BEN'S SECRETS

TERRY GILLIAM
REVEALS HIS INSPIRATIONS

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★ THE EARTH'S GREAT... FANTASY MAGAZINE ★

HEROES

The US TV smash
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You're gonna love it!

PRIMEVAL

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dinosaurs challenge
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Life on Mars season two
PLUS! Gene Hunt comes round our gaff

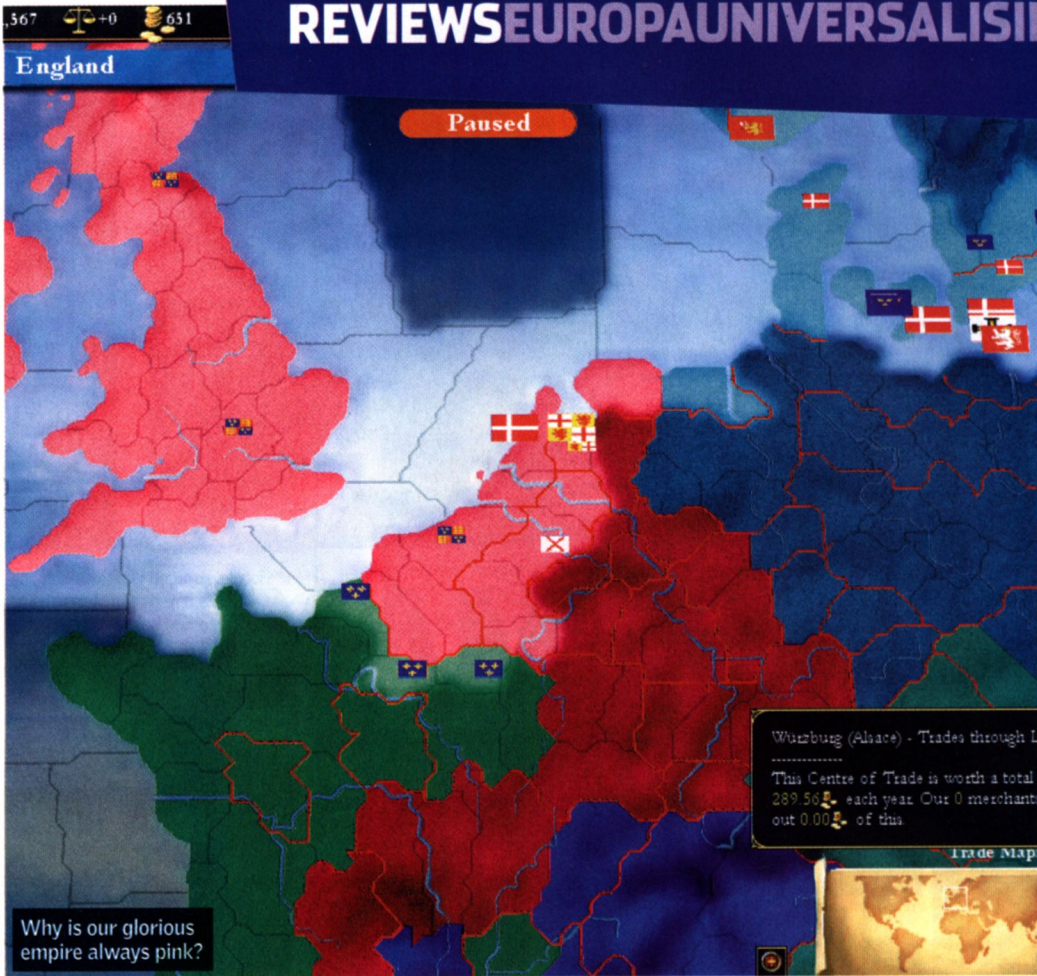
How many Bowie references can you spot this issue?



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EUROPA UNIVERSALIS III

The world is flat, but *Richie Shoemaker* is too busy annexing Russia to notice

DEVELOPER Paradox Interactive
 PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
 WEBSITE www.europauniversalis3.com
 ETA Out now
 PRICE £29.99



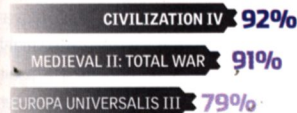
AT A GLANCE...

Real-time 'grand strategy' where you can discover America, take over the world and become the greatest leader in world history.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS



IF THERE WAS ever a gaming equivalent to *Football Manager* in the domain of historical global domination, then *Europa Universalis* (and its WWII offshoot *Hearts Of Iron*) would have to be it. Perhaps in terms of pure numerical depth the comparison is a touch ambitious, but in bringing together areas of foreign policy, trade, development and warfare, few games have been so successful at weaving all the threads together, especially within such a rich tapestry as post-medieval European history. OK, the graphics were a bit knob, but like *Footie Manager's* rudimentary dancing discs, *EU's* Risk-style map and cute icons did the job adequately enough.

Which brings us neatly to *Europa Universalis III's* headline feature – 3D graphics. Don't get too excited – it hasn't gone all *Total War* (intriguing though the prospect is). Rather, in place of the static 2D map that was probably knocked-up in MS Paint, we're now treated to a zoomable atlas, with textured lapping oceans and soldier pieces that poke at each other with all the enthusiasm of a road-sweeper encountering a dog turd.

Underneath the GPU-friendly visuals, the game is essentially unchanged. Choose a country, set yourself a goal and see how you get on through 300 years of history. The beauty of it is that the game doesn't place any restrictions upon your ambitions (or lack thereof).

HOLD THE LINE

As ever, the combat could hardly be termed exciting, but the challenge is more about maintaining your military and making sure the populace is behind you. Yes, you are expected to behave in certain ways to other nations, but the game allows you to be cunning, or as cunning as you can be against computer AI.

With the overbearing Catholic faith adding another layer to the grand strategy, and other countries reacting to events as they emerge (rather than as part of what was, in previous outings, a jarring historical script), the game makes for an authentic Machiavellian experience.

EU3 is a game that is easy to lose many hours and weeks to, although for the time being the non-existent *Total War*-style battles will have to be played out in your own tiny mind... **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Improved rather than impressive
 Sound Minimal, as it should be
 Multiplayer Good options that most will avoid

- ✓ Wonderfully layered historical strategy
- ✓ Endlessly replayable
- ✓ Rewards long-term strategic thinking
- ✗ New graphics aren't particularly special
- ✗ Historical deviations may upset purists

79
 Old world order



To its credit, the game never makes a 'rat race' joke.



"Stop! That's vital to plot progression!" PIG!

SAM & MAX: EPISODE TWO - SITUATION: COMEDY



Jon Blyth on the dog and rabbit-thing's TV debut...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE
 www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9/£5 per episode
 (\$35/£19 for all six)



AT A GLANCE...

If any animal is inclined to solve crimes, it's the dog. In this case there's also a naked rabbit. He helps with the crime thing too.

System requirements 2

HOW IT STACKS

PSYCHONAUTS 90%

S&M: EPISODE TWO - SITUATION: COMEDY 82%

S&M: EPISODE ONE - CULTURE SHOCK 80%

IT WAS A relief for everyone at PC ZONE that *Sam & Max: Episode One - Culture Shock* was as good as it was. It proved Telltale's ability to resurrect the freelance police without turning them into soulless zombies. It looked right and sounded right, with strange locations, strong characters and a stronger script. You got checkboxes? We got them check, checkity-checked. So, is the second episode as good? You bet your sweet heiny it is.

Situation: Comedy begins, as did the first episodic chunk: in your office, on the same street that dominated the first episode. Well, I say it's the same street. Sybil has reopened as a tabloid newspaper, and Bosco is pretending to be an Englishman to hide from certain government conspiracies. Jimmy The Rat, meanwhile, has shaved his body and is driving around like a maniac. You don't feel cheated by repeating the same early screens, and in any event, you'll soon be off to the TV studios.

TV QUICK

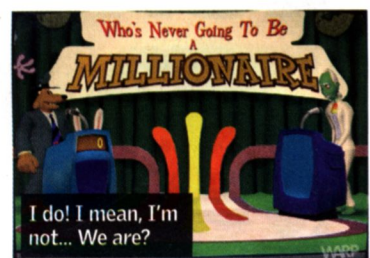
Your mission? Myra, a sanctimonious and matriarchal chat show host, has taken her audience hostage and is constantly showering them with increasingly unwanted gifts. So, it's off to the TV studio, where Myra's show has absorbed all of the studio

staff, leaving you to star in and make all the other programmes yourself, with a supporting cast that includes a harried director, the child star Soda Poppers from *Episode One*, and a colourful camp chap who has a self-help book named after vomiting.

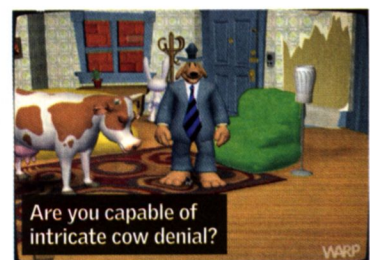
DON'T HAVE A COW

And this is where *Situation: Comedy* wins out on *Culture Shock*. All other things being equal, it's even funnier. Telltale have a rare knack for warm characters and sharp dialogue, combining to form a constant jet of hot, sharp jokes. Allow me to make one specific gush. One of the sets at the studio is for a sitcom called 'Midtown Cowboys'. The set-up is beautiful - a belligerent landlord with a strict 'no-cows' policy rents out a room to a couple of aspiring urban cowboys. Who, you guessed it, keep their cow in the living room. The second the theme tune kicks in - an upbeat jingle topped off with a burst of "they're probably hiding a cow" - you'd have to be inhuman not to slide off your chair in unbridled joy.

The whole game is a slice of playable comedy. Every line has some form of joke, and following the *Family Guy*/*Airplane* rule of scattergun comedy, you'll forgive terrible jokes, because you've heard another good one by the time it's registered. In fact, I came away from the game ready to write a



I do! I mean, I'm not... We are?



Are you capable of intricate cow denial?

job application for Telltale, utterly convinced they must have the best lives ever.

Does the game suffer? Well, it's still short, but then again it's still cheap, and still part of a series that will eventually form great value. The difficulty level is about the same as the previous episode, which makes for two to three hours for a puzzle fiend, and - cough - four hours for me. Think of it as a night in. An occasionally frustrating night in, admittedly - the driving puzzle was again the weakest link, and was solved in anger

Red herrings

The puzzles may be a bit fishy, but it's all in the name of comedy



Cow and chicken: natural enemies.

Ah, the red herring. A device made depressingly literal by waggish adventure game developers in the 1980s. Then made ironic, when the herring turned out to be useful after all, in the agitation of a bull, perhaps. We're more sophisticated now, and while there are many red herrings in *Sam & Max*, they're all simply a cue for a joke. There are as many jokes as mouse clicks – more, in fact, as there are sometimes several possible conversations in each scene. If you replayed *Culture Shock*, for example, you might have noticed it playing a little differently in the psychoanalyst scene...



Sam and Max sport tiny nuclear explosions.

Telltale have a knack for warm characters and sharp dialogue



Those irritating child-men are back.

rather than logic or skill. Also, the fourth or fifth time through a conversation you'll be glad of the ability to skip speech.

This is an adventure game for anyone who loves adventure games, anyone who loves to laugh, and anyone who loves seeing animals represented as gun-toting sociopaths. And who can't admit to at least two of those? **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Perfectly stylised
Sound New voices have wiped old ones from memory
Multiplayer A friend could help you

- ✓ They crack me up, lil' buddy
- ✓ Excellent script, excellent acting
- ✓ We're even more excited about *Episode Three*
- ✓ A fun way to fill a single evening
- ✗ Not hard enough for puzzle nuts
- ✗ Driving mini-game - not the best

82

The good life



His dentist is a big-time Brazil fan...

RAYMAN: RAVING RABBIDS

Manic mini-games and mad bunnies

DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.raymanzone.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

IMUST ADMIT to not liking the limbless French platforming hero's previous games, having dismissed them as sub-*Mario* kids' fodder with unfathomable Gallic humour. However, having just slammed a toilet door in the face of a cartoon rabbit straining to have a dump, I find myself grinning like a lobotomised audience member of *The Price Is Right*.

Created by Michel Ancel, the man behind the *Rayman* series as well as *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Raving Rabbids* sees Rayman captured by a bunch of psychotic bunnies who throw him into a gladiatorial arena and challenge him with an eclectic collection of over 70 daft but entertaining mini-games.

Expect to be disco dancing (rhythm action by tapping the left and right mouse buttons); throwing Daisy the cow (a discus-throwing sports event played by rotating the mouse 360-



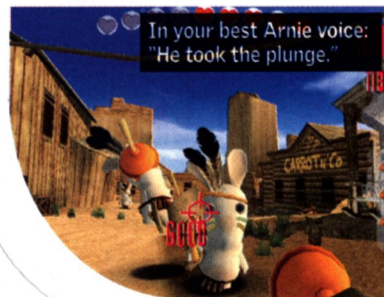
Rayman gets his freak on.

degrees and pressing a button to fling the startled moo-er); and saving baby Globox (a *Time Crisis*-style on-rails shooter with sink plungers).

Despite the odd dud game every now and again, most are decent throwaway thrashes, but I can't help thinking that this would be far more enjoyable played on the Nintendo Wii console's remote controller – which is obviously what *Raving Rabbids* was designed for.

On PC, the simple thrills become depressingly desk-bound, with the clunky mouse control not quite matching the wildly exuberant art style, animation and sound effects. *Raving Rabbids* has multiplayer, but it's the impractical offline variety of gathering round the monitor. Ultimately, it's decent, short-lived fun, but is this really what you bought your games PC for?

Jamie Sefton



In your best Arnie voice: "He took the plunge."

PCZONE

63

A little too Wii-centric

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

IndieZONE



So there's a rabbi, some footballers, a paddle and a spaceship. *Martin Korda* searches for the punchline...



THE SHIVAH

DEVELOPER Davelgil Games
WEBSITE www.davelgil.com PRICE \$4.99 (£3)

WITH RETAIL-RELEASED adventure games in short supply these days, we're often forced to look to the indie scene for solace and fulfilment, though admittedly they're still a rare gem to find.

Well, search no more because *The Shivah* is a top-notch adventure game set in New York, which casts you as a disillusioned rabbi who's questioning his very way of life.

With attendances at his synagogue at an all-time low, he's just about to pack the whole thing in when he suddenly inherits \$10,000 from a deceased parishioner. I won't spoil the plot by saying any more, but I will tell you that it's of

an extremely high standard and full of surprises that'll keep you guessing till the end. Add to that some convincing voice acting and an understated but subtly powerful musical score, and you're left with one shining jewel of a game.

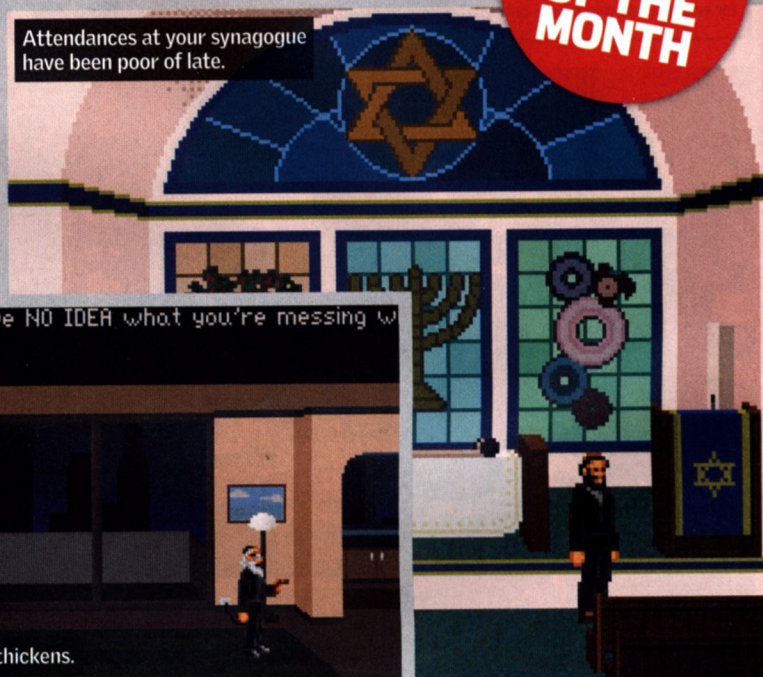
Sure, the visuals may look ancient and the whole affair is pretty short lived, but for three measly quid, *The Shivah* is a must-buy for any adventure fan looking for a few hours of point-and-click entertainment.

PCZONE
80

Attendances at your synagogue have been poor of late.

You have NO IDEA what you're messing w Stone.

The plot thickens.



Locations range from ancient Egypt to the Wild.

More power-ups than you can shake an alligator at.

BOOM VOYAGE

DEVELOPER Kraisoft WEBSITE www.kraisoft.com PRICE \$19.99 (£11)

THIS IS ONE of the best *Breakout* clones I've played in quite some time. The luscious 3D visuals, quality sound and well-paced action help enhance the age-old gameplay mechanic of bouncing a ball off a moving paddle in order to break columns of bricks.

Admittedly, there's not really all that much that's new here, but what *Boom Voyage* does do, it does with aplomb. The exotic 3D structures crack and sag as the

balls smash into them, while a staggering collection of power-ups that change the length of your paddle, game speed and the type and amount of balls in play make this a thrilling and visually pleasing pastime. You can even grab power-ups that allow you to fire bullets at the structures and call in alien attacks that bomb the bricks below them.

The sheer attention to detail is superb and had a few more novel ideas been in evidence here, then *Boom Voyage* would have scored even more highly. If *Breakout*'s your bag though, you'll love it.

PCZONE
71

RIP 3: THE LAST HERO

DEVELOPER White Elephant Games WEBSITE www.elephant-games.com PRICE £10.89

THE WHITE ELEPHANT team are back once more with the third instalment of their entertaining RIP arcade shooter series.

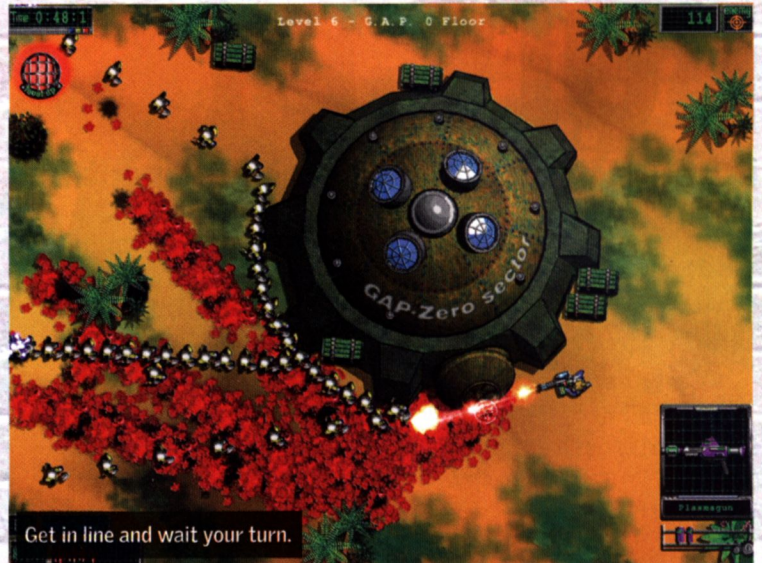
With the planet under the control of an evil dictator who's backed up by an army of cyborgs, it's up to you to single-handedly overthrow his evil reign by blowing seven shades of excrement out of horde upon horde of his mechanised armies.

The Last Hero is even more packed with weapons and upgrades than its two predecessors and now boasts six rather than three characters to play as.

Shame then that it also features some irritating enemy AI path-finding that often sees columns of your opponents trapped behind inanimate objects and some excruciatingly nonsensical translations.

The new multiplayer option is a welcome addition, but despite some decent new vehicles to drive and fittingly humongous (if overly predictable) bosses to blast, there's little here to recommend over the previous title, *RIP: Strike Back*.

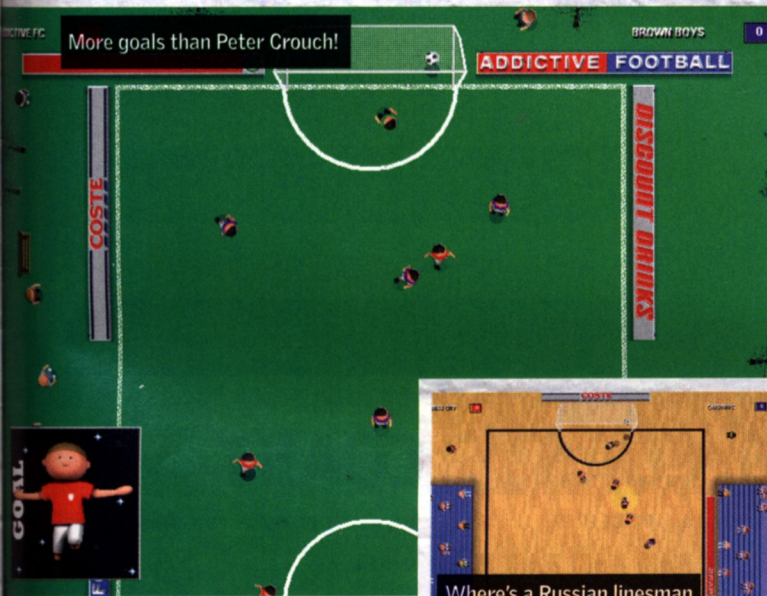
PCZONE
59



Get in line and wait your turn.

ADDICTIVE FOOTBALL

DEVELOPER Addictive 247 WEB www.addictive247.co.uk PRICE \$1995 (£11)



"IT'S FOOTBALL NOT soccer!" proclaims the message at the start of the game. Only thing is, it's not. While this top-down five-a-side soccer sim does provide some glimmers of entertainment thanks to its end-to-end, all-out attacking gameplay, it's simply too riddled with shortfalls to be able to recommend.

For starters, the inadequate control system lacks a 'change player' key, meaning you're left at the mercy of the auto-change function, which often leaves you well off the pace. What's more, all the players are clones, collision detection is suspect and the four playing surfaces (grass, astro, indoors and concrete) seem virtually

identical in all but appearance.

Once you get to grips with the controls and simplistic playing style, you can ping the ball around fairly convincingly, but with a lack of depth and variety, this isn't so much addictive as a fleeting novelty.

Stick with *New Star Soccer 3* or *Sensational Soccer*: they're far more entertaining and realistic portrayals of football (not soccer) than this threadbare though entertaining attempt at reproducing the beautiful game.

PCZONE
55

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

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



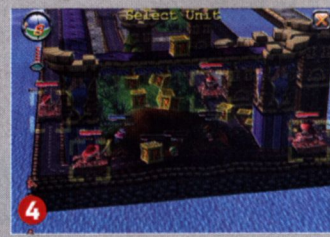
NEW STAR SOCCER 3
www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie-gaming footy experience currently available.



MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NAKED WAR
www.zee-3.com | Reviewed Issue 177

A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



LAGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT
www.wolfire.com | Reviewed Issue 162

An ambitious and extremely entertaining third-person action/adventure in which you play a killer rabbit bent on revenge after his entire family is murdered. Inspired stuff.

BUDGET

Because we're all skint at the moment...

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gpssoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

SPORTS INTERACTIVE REMAIN the kings of the stat-heavy football simulation, regularly trouncing inferior opposition with every new version of *Football Manager*. Although *FM2007* (issue 175, 90%) remains the first-choice for fans who want the latest teams, players and additional features – such as affiliate clubs – last year's iteration is, like Rob Hulse, a good bargain-buy for the cash-strapped.

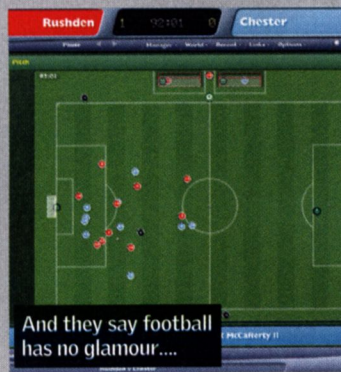
Football Manager 2006 can suck you into a five-hour session quicker than Mourinho can bait opposition managers. It does this by including a streamlined interface, a better match engine that alerts you to injured players with an on-screen icon, as well as other features such as half-time team-talks, physio reports and Quick Tactic which allows for changes on-the-fly.

Also, if you're completely new to the *Football Manager* phenomenon, there's

an excellent tutorial to help ease you into that sheepskin manager's jacket. If you love football and think you can handle the grief from your other half, buy it. Be warned though: *Football Manager* is chronically addictive.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE 86



BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH



Thursday 21st Aug 11th August 2006

24. Kevin Ellison
Wing Back (Left), Attacking Midfielder (Left), Hall

Player Profile

Personal Details	Technical Attributes	Mental Attributes	Physical Attributes
England	Corners	10 Aggression	11 Acceleration
Uncapped	Crossing	9 Anticipation	9 Agility
23.2.1979	Dribbling	11 Bravery	9 Balance
26 years old	Finishing	11 Composure	11 Jumping
WB L, AM L	First Touch	9 Concentration	10 Natural Fitness
Left Only	Free Kicks	9 Creativity	9 Pace
188 cm	Heading	13 Decisions	9 Stamina
13 at 0 Ru	Long Shots	9 Determination	10 Strength
Value £11,000	Long Throws	9 Fear	8
Basic Wage £1,000 per week	Marking	9 Influence	0 Other
Contract Expires 30.6.2007	Passing	7 Off The Ball	10 Goalkeeper Rating
	Penalty Taking	9 Positioning	13 Condition
	Tackling	9 Teamwork	Form 7-6-7-6-7
	Technique	9 Work Rate	13 Morale
			Very Good

Selection Details

Injuries None
Bans None
Fitness Match fit

Statistics

	Apps	Cls	Assts	MsM	Yel	Red	Yls	Pas	Sh	F	Fouls	Ft	Ag	Av
Non Competitive	2 (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6-40
League	0 (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7-48
Cup	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Continental	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
International	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Overall	0 (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-

Football Manager: more addictive than Frosties.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Indulging in free boozy lunches galore: **Saving: At least £500**

Clare getting two jumbo bags of discounts at Iceland: **Saving: £10**



Iceland

Steve shaking the toner in the printer, therefore getting another 17 pages out of it: **Saving: 37p**



OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gpssoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

UNLESS YOU WORK on the set of *Top Gear*, live near a German motorway, regularly break the law or are easily thrilled at low speeds, driving is, in reality, a bit dull.

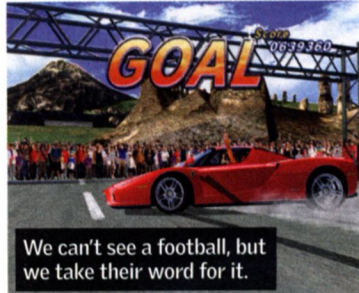
Not only that, but skidding around corners doesn't work like it does in games like *Outrun*, where getting around bends takes nothing more than a flick of the wrist and a tap of the brakes before you can sit back and let entirely untrue physics carry you along safely.

Coast 2 Coast offers as pure an arcade racer as you could imagine, remaining loyal to the series in almost every aspect.

Over its 30 tracks and its 15 cars, the challenge resides in shaving seconds off your best times, while an odometer which runs constantly unlocks new content as you hit certain mileages. *Coast 2 Coast* is amazing fun, and at a tanner you can't go far wrong.

Steve Hogarty

PCZONE 73



MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

IF YOU believe two wheels to be better than four (and we're not just talking about trying for your two-wheel bonus in *GTA*), then *MotoGP 3* will be right up your, ahem, street.

As the defining motorbike title on PC, this latest addition features all the two-wheeled racing that you could possibly hope for, with glorious graphics to boot. Not that you'll ever truly get time to appreciate them as you zoom past, but it's nice to know that the developers have made the effort at least.

If the idea of extra-sensitive handling and leaning into corners just doesn't appeal, you can also sample the new Extreme mode. Think *Need For Speed* but for bikes and you've probably already got a good image of the street-based, arcade-style racing that this offers.

There's simply no other title on two wheels that comes close, and it's far less muddy than the real thing. If you're partial to a spot of head-to-toe leather, grab a copy now.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
71



CROSS RACING CHAMPIONSHIP 2005

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

CRC2005 SLOTS NEATLY into the gap between titles like *TOCA* and *Colin McRae*; a gap that many people probably aren't even aware exists. It covers rallycross, a motorsport that makes use of both man-made and natural surfaces; and also offers you the chance to slide around in autocross, off-road, rally-sprint, rally, road-racing and circuit-racing.

Managing to bridge the gap between hardcore driving sim and arcade racer, *CRC* offers plenty to do with an extensive career mode, time trials and more, all giving you the chance to keep your car filthy and the local car wash raking in the cash. Graphically it's more Ford than Ferrari now, but there's still plenty of sideways fun to be had here on a shoestring budget.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
60



And the rest...

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



MX VS ATV UNLEASHED

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

THQ's clash of offroad vehicles still offers a very pure, hill-jumping bike experience with plenty of enjoyment in the included track editor. An easy single-player game and aged visuals brings it down a notch, but it's still worth a quick blast.

PCZONE
59



VIETCONG

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

It wasn't bad on release but over three years on, *Vietcong's* suffered from being in the jungle so long. Occasionally tense firefights and great '70s tunes don't make up for aged graphics - even the sequel's badly dated. Way past its prime.

PCZONE
42



SPARTAN

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Build cities, amass armies, trade with other nations and then slaughter them all in a real-time 3D battle. It might sound like a *Total War* title, but whereas that would be a joy to play, this is about as much fun as grating your elbows.

PCZONE
17

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1

FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity-gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3

THE MOVIES

£9.99, ACTIVISION BEST OF RANGE

A great movie-studio management title that transcends the genre by also offering a raft of brilliant film-making tools. Home-made machinima ahoy!



4

ROME: TOTAL WAR

£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

Long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW's* glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



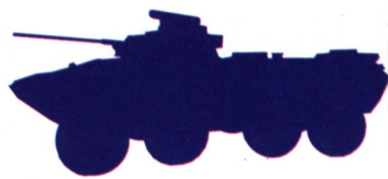
5

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A flawed masterpiece, *Deadly Shadows* may have been compromised by its dual-development, but for suspense and level design it can't be faulted.

BUYER'S GUIDE



The bestest games your money can buy...

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'J'

- 1 JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH** (ISSUE 62)
- 2 JEDI KNIGHT: DARK FORCES II** (ISSUE 55)
- 3 JANE'S F-15** (ISSUE 64)
- 4 JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST** (ISSUE 115)
- 5 JETFIGHTER III** (ISSUE 47)



PCZONE TOP 5 COOLEST SIDEKICKS

- 1 ALYX VANCE - HALF-LIFE 2** (ISSUE 148)
- 2 MAX - SAM & MAX** (ISSUE 175)
- 3 GLOTTIS - GRIM FANDANGO** (ISSUE 71)
- 4 MONA SAX - MAX PAYNE 2** (ISSUE 136)
- 5 FARAH - POP: THE SANDS OF TIME** (ISSUE 136)



PCZONE TOP 5 MOST ANNOYING SIDEKICKS

- 1 ROSH PENIN - JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY** (ISSUE 133)
- 2 GOOD/EVIL CONSCIENCE - BLACK & WHITE** (ISSUE 100)
- 3 XANA - DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC** (ISSUE 174)
- 4 ANY OF YOUR WINGMEN - NFS: CARBON** (ISSUE 176)
- 5 JC - SIN** (ISSUE 70)



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freemove action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE

PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. *World War II* at its unforgetting best.



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Rentaghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



BATTLEFIELD 2142

PCZ Issue: 174 - 86%

Adding bucketfuls of novelty mechanical future-warfare, *BF2142* pushes the *BF* formula ever closer to perfection with its exciting new game mode - despite not being revolutionary by its own merits.

Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *ROM*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF DARK CRUSADE

PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%

Proving that not all strategy titles have to be based upon historical or fantasy settings, this standalone sci-fi expansion offers tons of blood-spattered and frenetic action - no 12-sided die required.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freemove and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercs multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW's Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
EVE online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



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



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT
PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE
PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



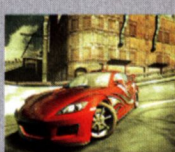
GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3
PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as oxygen. With a huge collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games



THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE
PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%
Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals.



EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport



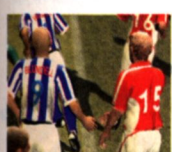
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07
PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. *PES*-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

RPGs



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.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

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

February

ARMED ASSAULT
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY
MAELSTROM
RESIDENT EVIL 4
SUPREME COMMANDER
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
TIMESHIFT
UFO: AFTERLIGHT
WAR FRONT: TURNING POINT

505 GAMES
EIDOS
CODEMASTERS
UBISOFT
THQ
ATARI
VU GAMES
ASCARON
ATARI

March

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES
ALONE IN THE DARK
BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007
GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2
SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL
SILENT HUNTER IV
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE
TRACKMANIA UNITED
VIRTUA TENNIS 3

EIDOS
ATARI
CODEMASTERS
UBISOFT
TBA
UBISOFT
THQ
THQ
ASCARON
SEGA

Q1 (unspecified dates)

INFERNAL
LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
PENUMBRA: OVERTURE
SOCCER FURY
SPELLFORCE 2: DRAGON STORM
STRANGLEHOLD
THEY HUNGER: LOST SOULS
THE WITCHER
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY
WORLD IN CONFLICT

PLAYLOGIC
CODEMASTERS
LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT
NCISOFT
JOWOOD
MIDWAY
VALVE
ATARI
EIDOS
VU GAMES

FREE!

TOTAL

F



2 FREE POSTERS!



EXTRA 16-PAGE

SPY SPECIAL!

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SPIES IN THE MOVIES

TOP SECRET!

Damon & Jolie uncover **The Good Shepherd**

EXCLUSIVE!

DE NIRO: THE ONLY INTERVIEW



MARCH 2007
ISSUE 125
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23

WEIRDEST MOVIES EVER

DIARY OF A STAR WARS EXTRA

HANNIBAL LECTER

Those difficult teenage

SPIES, LIES AND A LEGEND: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT DE NIRO, EVERY NEW FILM AND DVD REVIEWED, AND SOME RATHER COOL POSTERS.

TOTAL FILM
The Movie Magazine
You Can Rely On.



Phone home

TWELVE MONTHS. TWELVE whole months locked into a contract with a phone I wanted to trample underfoot. My SPV M5000 has been the only mobile I've truly despised and the only one I've continued yelling at after hanging up. I would have done anything - drink bleach, even watch *Armageddon* - if I knew Orange would have given me back my Treo.

Doubtless you're bored of my phone problems by now, but this month I'm finally free of the thing. And I wanted to remind you that you should never, under any circumstances, buy any portable device that runs Windows.

Over the years, XP has become quite tolerable, and the idea of having something so familiar in your pocket is really quite appealing. That's what I thought too. If you stop and think for a second, Windows is a bitch when it's run by a processor you could fry an egg on; try and imagine how retarded it gets when powered by a potato.

Yes, you can synchronise appts, share contacts, check email and open Word. You can connect to the Net in wireless hotspots and watch iffy videos on a passable version of Media Player.

But such things lose their importance when they're performed in slow-motion; when your ringtone stutters and your SMS messaging program takes 20 seconds just to start. There are also lock-ups and crashes to endure, together with a battery which needs charging at least twice a week. Windows is great. Just not in your pocket.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

LOW PING BASTARD

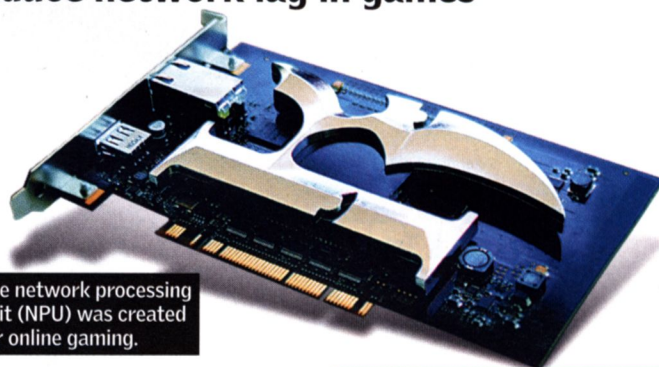
Dedicated hardware to reduce network lag in games

THE KILLER IS an NIC (Network Interface Card) with a difference. It has its own operating system, its own 400MHz CPU and 64MB DDR RAM to handle all your system's network traffic, leaving your processor free to concentrate on other things.

Like playing games. Not only does your ping drop, but your frame-rate increases. Manufacturers Bigfoot Networks claim that gamers can experience a 40% or better improvement in FPS while playing *World Of Warcraft*, and a 23% improvement for *F.E.A.R.* Results will of course vary depending on system configuration, but the theory is sound.

Killer's architecture features a number of cheesy-sounding 'technologies', dubbed GameFirst, MaxFPS, PingThrottle and UltimatePing. What's most exciting about the card is its Flexible Network Architecture, or FNA, which allows third parties to develop applications which run on the card itself.

These 'FNApps' can be anything network-related - firewall, Web server, mail server, peer-to-peer tool - all of which are executed by the



The network processing unit (NPU) was created for online gaming.

Linux kernel inside the NIC, meaning they can run without having any detrimental effect on the host system. Bigfoot Networks have recognised the potential here and are offering \$15,000 to anyone wishing to develop FNApps.

The only problem is, I'm not fully convinced that Killer actually works, let alone is worthy of its monstrous \$300 price tag. Wait for the review. www.killernic.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

If you made the switch from Internet Explorer to Firefox, you'll doubtless be pleased to hear that, during 2006, Microsoft's browser was vulnerable to attack via critical flaws for a total of 284 days. Firefox, on the other hand, was left open for just 9 days. www.getfirefox.com

Seagate have claimed that they'll be producing a 37.5 terabyte hard drive within the next three years. The technology which enables this is called perpendicular recording, and while the exact details are a little thin on the ground, it does mean that just one square inch of hard drive space will be able to store an astonishing 6,400 gigabytes of crap. www.seagate.com

AMD's new R600 Radeon line-up - don't forget now, AMD bought ATI - has suffered another setback, and is not likely to appear on shelves until the first few weeks in March. As mentioned previously, you can expect NVIDIA to refresh its G80 line-up in time to take the wind from ATI sails. www.amd.com

READY, STEADY, BOOST

Enhanced by Windows ReadyBoost
Apacer promises 40% performance increase for Vista

PUSH A USB pen drive home on any Vista machine, and as long as you have 64MB free you'll be prompted to 'speed up your system' by reserving space for Windows data.

Microsoft have dubbed the technology ReadyBoost, the idea being that your PC will cache important files on any USB 2.0 flash memory device between 256MB and 4GB capacity, thus boosting system speed markedly.

Apacer claim that their



Vista is able to cache its data to flash memory devices, thus improving speed markedly.

Handy Steno products are able to improve Vista system performance by 40% or more, and that in specific circumstances, the devices are between eight and ten times faster than any hard drive. www.apacer.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

HOME THEATRE: Having a telly with some extra speakers attached. Better home theatres have more speakers dangling from increasingly unlikely places. **CONROE:** Google tells me this is a place in Texas, but I'm convinced there was once a TV detective called Conroe. He was like a halfway house between Monk and Frost, and always got his man. **APACER:** Having a Diet Coke halfway through your ten-pint session, just so that, by statistics, you don't fall into that undesirable 'binge drinker' category. **ANTEC:** Why, technology for ants of course - such as teeny iPods. Actually, do ants even have ears? Try shouting at one, and then let us know how it reacts.



GEFORCE 8800 GTX & 8800 GTS

GTX PRICE £420 **MANUFACTURER** XFX **WEBSITE** xfxforce.co.uk
GTS PRICE £305 **MANUFACTURER** XFX **WEBSITE** xfxforce.co.uk

THERE'S AN AWFUL lot of crap in my house, and I've recently taken to throwing large amounts of it into this magical garbage can called 'eBay'.

Gone is a DVD featuring Northumberland stand-up Ross Noble, who I found as funny as an outbreak of haemorrhagic fever at an orphanage for disabled children; and gone is a SATA RAID card which looked as though it had fallen out of a cereal packet.

As well as peddling my wares, I've also been looking to buy a GeForce 8800 GTX. On eBay, it's possible to find all kinds of technology going for dubious money, the seller most likely having pinched it from the stockroom of their High Street employer to feed a *World Of Warcraft* habit. Half-price laptops, 50-inch plasmas for 25-inch money, that sort of thing, with second-hand stuff cheaper still.

Sadly, a used 8800 GTX is one of those things that no amount of money

can buy, for the simple reason that nobody wants to sell. Even if you're a thieving shop assistant with a crippling MMORPG subscription, there's nothing more rewarding than having NVIDIA's G80 chip inside your PCI-Express slot. And so that's where they all stay.

BLOODY GREAT

There's little point me describing the new GPU's improved efficiency, or its stream processors and ROPs. I don't see why I should go into great detail about the card's DirectX 10 capabilities, because the Vista drivers don't work and nobody's written a DX10 game yet.

What I will tell you is that the two XFX models I've had the pleasure of using over the last couple of weeks are the fastest single-processor products I've ever tested, and are the first cards I've used which are able to treat intensive effects such as AA and AF as improvements rather than as handicaps. In many circumstances, both the

GTX (36.8 billion/sec fill rate) and the GTS (24 billion/sec) are twice as fast as the previous generation and are about as 'future-game proof' as you can get.

OH IT'S SO BIG

Online, you'll find exhaustive reviews and needless benchmarks highlighting how it's possible to get 21.6fps in *Oblivion* when run at 1920x1200. I don't give a shit. All I care about is how buttery-smooth my games will feel when run with full everything on a standard flat panel, and here the 8-Series has no equal. Buy whichever one you can most easily afford (probably neither).

The only things you need to consider are space and power supply. The GTX demands a 450W PSU and is more than ten inches long; the GTS is shorter and sips electricity in a more ladylike fashion, but still requires 400W. And if you add one of these monsters to an old Pentium-based system, all you'll do is make its limitations more obvious. You need a huge processor too. **PCZ**

PCZONE
8800 GTX
93

PCZONE
8800 GTS
93



FC-ZE1 FATALITY CHAMPION

PRICE £250 MANUFACTURER Zalman WEBSITE zalman.co.kr

THE FC-ZE1 IS the rapper's Bentley of PC cases: elegant, exclusive and built from high-grade materials, it doubles as a monument to bad taste and mental retardation.

Take the side panel, under which are the words: 'Caution when viewing internal components, protective eyewear is recommended.' That's not funny, not necessary and not on a sticker you can peel off, fold up and toss in the bin. Zalman have laser-etched it straight into the aluminium, along with other messages like it and at least one spelling error.

The case is also littered with irritating flaws. For example, not only is the side-door hung on fixed hinges, preventing you from removing it during an installation, it also doesn't fully open. Lay the case flat to install a new board and its weight goes unsupported, causing the panel to which it's hinged to flex alarmingly. What were Zalman thinking?

Then there's the hard-drive mounting system which, while a clever departure

from the norm, sits directly in line with the front fans and thus totally obstructs airflow. It wouldn't be such a big deal were it possible to add extra blowers, but where are the extra mounts? There are precisely none.

Smaller issues include thumbscrews which, when tightened, chew straight into the soft aluminium underneath, and poor metal finishing along panel edges. There are also no internal PSU mounts, and the backplates are the disposable pop-out type rather than decent screw-down fittings. Plus, it's not even that quiet and is also ridiculously expensive.

PCZONE
55

HFX MINI BUNDLE

PRICE £750 MANUFACTURER mCubed WEBSITE mcubed-tech.com

MCUBED DESCRIBE THEIR HFX as a 'lifestyle' product, meaning if you aspire to wearing Louis Vuitton sunglasses at the wheel of a BMW, skip this review and head straight for the shops.

It certainly feels like something from a 'lifestyle' brand (think expensive and heavy), and unlike the FC-ZE1 (above), there's no sense that your money has been frittered away on pointless ornamentation. The HFX gets its rugged good looks from a passively cooled, totally silent design, and will be right at home alongside existing high-grade AV equipment.

But wait. Don't go thinking you have freedom to make this into a new home theatre machine from left-over PC components. While you can use any standard ATX motherboard, the HFX only makes sense when built to mCubed's suggested specification – in other words, you need to buy the 'bundle' you see here. This adds the company's own silent processor cooler, front display panel, remote control, fanless external power supply, twin hard drive caddy, mini DVD writer, additional sound and video connectors, plus two PCI



and one x16 PCI-Express riser cards.

The problem here is that the bundle sets you back a whopping £750, and that's before you add motherboard, processor, memory sticks, hard drives, soundcard and TV tuners. You'll have to be really obsessive

about noise to slap that kind of money on the counter, especially when you can buy a slightly noisier, significantly cheaper machine, leave it in your second bedroom and use a Media Centre Extender to bring it to life in your lounge.

PCZONE
67

HOW TO... SPEC A HOME THEATRE PC

Need:

Credit card

Time:

4 hours

Difficulty level:



Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Jamie Sefton

Want to build a new system with Windows XP Media Center Edition to enhance your TV viewing? *Phil Wand* shows you how

PUTTING A PC in your living room might seem like a bad idea, but it's something that can change the way you watch TV. This is because, while you might imagine such a setup would merely encourage you to spend the rest of your days on a sofa surrounded by Celebrations wrappers, experience in the Wandy household suggests you actually spend more time doing other things.

Being in another room no longer means you might be missing something. Your Home Theatre PC (HTPC) will

gobble up data from around the airwaves, and arrange your programs neatly on a hard drive for consumption at a time that's suitable to you. Of course, your HTPC will also play DVDs, CDs and games.

Building the right box is no different to building the right games rig. You just need to have an idea of what goes inside, and a budget to work to. Read the following five-step guide, then reach for your browser and your wallet. Enjoy TV again!

01 Case

If it looks like a PC, everyone will think it's a PC. As a general rule, your new machine should appear to be partnering your television rather than your washing machine, and should be as plain a design as possible.

You're going to be operating it via remote from the couch, so anything other than an 'on' button is pointless. Avoid models with LCD displays, as they're not only more expensive but you also won't be able to read them from a seated position.

Look for cases which accept both ATX and microATX motherboards, and which are cooled by slower, and therefore quieter, 120mm exhaust fans.



SilverStone have a large range of HTPC enclosures.

Recommended enclosures:

Antec NSK2400 (£60), Antec Overture II-UK (£82), SilverStone Lascala LC20 (£85), SilverStone Lascala LC03 (£85), Ahanix MCE301 (£165), Zalman HD135-B (£240), mCubed HFX (£600).



A Media Center PC, Home Theatre PC or most commonly just HTPC, is a system that's been designed to display DVD films, downloaded movies and recorded programs on your living room TV. They're built to be quiet, energy-efficient and accessible via remote control, much as you would access a DVD player or set-top box. Typically, an HTPC will run Microsoft Windows XP Media Center Edition, often abbreviated to MCE, and will integrate at least one tuner card allowing you to display and record TV programs. MCE will also run your favourite games. One of the key features of MCE is its electronic program guide, or EPG, allowing you to browse, highlight and save current and upcoming TV programs and whole series with just a few clicks.

02 Power supply

Your HTPC's power supply will be the component that creates more racket than all the others put

No fan. More heat.



together. Unless you want every tranquil moment in every movie violated by the sound of a distant leaf blower, you need to buy a specialised unit rated at a noise level of 20db or less, and with an efficiency of 80% or better. A more efficient supply creates less heat, and less heat requires less movement of air.

Be careful about choosing costly fanless products, especially if

you've chosen a slimline case. While fanless PSUs create no noise at all, they're likely to get seriously hot if you ever use your HTPC to play games.

Recommended power supplies:

Seasonic S12 430W (£50), Antec Neo HE 380 (£55), OCZ PowerStream OCZ420ADJ (£65), OCZ GameXStream 600W (£75), SilverStone Nightjar ST-30NF Fanless (£80), Antec Phantom 500 Fanless (£100), YESICO FL-550ATX Fanless (£150).

03 Motherboard and processor



Get a boxed E6300 with Intel's own fan.

More bad news for AMD. The Core 2 Duo is not only more powerful than Athlon, it also uses significantly less power. And while entry-level X2 processors will sip your electricity genteelly, there's a reason AMD haven't updated the 'competitive benchmarks' section of their website since Conroe's launch.

Get the Core 2 Duo E6300 chip, and make sure that if you're using a

microATX case like the Antec NSK2400, you choose a microATX platform such as the ASUS P5B-VM. As for cooling, well, I've found the standard Intel cooler to be unobtrusive on entry-level chips. Save your money.

Recommended motherboards:
ASUS P5B-VM (£95),
Intel D975XBX2 (£150).

04 Graphics card

In choosing the right graphics card, you need to remember that HTPCs are not about 3D performance. They major on being quiet, energy-efficient and on the ability to connect to TVs and plasmas. So you don't need high-end products, nor do you need SLI or CrossFire.

What you want is a silent GeForce or Radeon with HDMI output and HDCP compliance. And

while you might wrinkle your nose at such foreign-sounding terms, these are standards and will be on the back of the next digital TV you buy. If your existing set doesn't have HDMI, you'll need to buy an adaptor.

Recommended graphics cards:
ASUS EAX1600PRO/1 (£80), Sapphire Radeon X1600 Pro HDMI (£80),

You need HDMI.

GIGABYTE GV-NX76G256HI-RH (£100), ASUS EN7600GT/HTDI/256M (£110).



05 TV tuner

The key thing here is that you need two, not one. A so-called twin-tuner card will allow you to watch one channel while recording another. Only having a single device limits you enormously, and it never ceases to amaze me that big-name manufacturers are still making single-tuner products. Should you see a Sony Vaio VGX-XL100 on special offer with £200 lopped

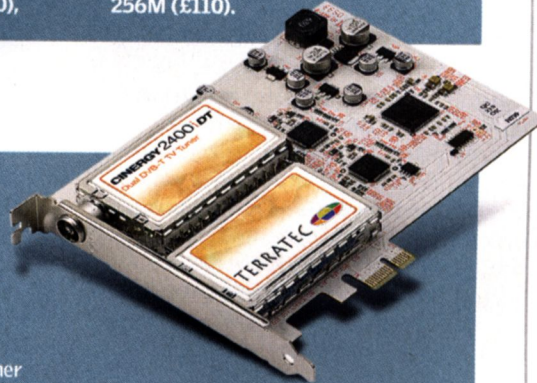
from its price tag, it's cheap for a reason. They can't sell it.

So don't make Sony's stupid mistake. Make sure you buy either two tuner cards, or better still a single card with two tuners on it, such as Terratec's Cinergy 2400i DT MCE Edition.

Recommended tuners:
Leadtek WinFast DTV1000-T (£31),

One card. Two tuners.

Compro VideoMate T750 Twin (£55), Hauppauge WinTV Nova-T 500 Twin (£75), Terratec Cinergy 2400i DT MCE Edition Twin (£75) Hauppauge WinTV HVR-3000 Triple (£90).



Xbox and Vista

Windows Vista incorporates a feature called – unsurprisingly – Media Center, which allows you to manage all your digital entertainment with a remote control. It'll be available from launch. The Xbox is one of a number of solid state boxes that can be used as Media Center Extenders. These are silent devices which sit in your living room, and act as a 'front end' to a Media Center PC elsewhere in your house. Using an Xbox as a Media Center Extender means your TV viewing room can be returned to silence, with all the noise and clutter pushed back to your study or bedroom.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Q What if my TV doesn't have HDMI input?

A Go for the GIGABYTE GV-NX76G256HI-RH, which is basically a GeForce 7600 GS with both an S-Video and DVI connector alongside the HDMI.

Q Do I need anything else inside my HTPC?

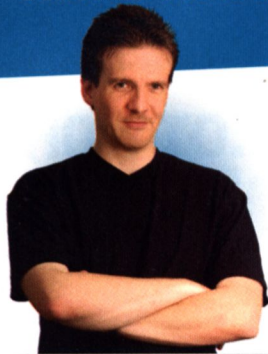
A Yes, of course. You still need a large hard drive, preferably 500GB or more, on which to store your programs. You also need at least 512MB memory and a DVD drive, along with a wireless keyboard and mouse.

Q What about a remote control?

A You can buy Microsoft's remote control for Windows XP Media Center Edition from most online retailers for around £25. The device comes with its own USB infrared receiver.

Q Will I need a TV licence?

A In a word, or perhaps two... Er, yes.



DEAR WANDY

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



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Overdone it with the spray-on tan? Wife left you after you played *WOW* for 672 hours solid? Realised you've sold your soul to the devil staying in that job for the past 16 years? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.12	13 DEC 06
ATI	CATALYST VISTA 6.91.100.52.1	13 DEC 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 93.71	2 NOV 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 96.85 FOR VISTA	17 OCT 06

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.09.0007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 2.11.0000	10 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY AUDIGY 2	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4.2.09.0016	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA 2.11.0000	11 OCT 06

DOWN THE WIRES

Q I'm not a *PC ZONE* reader, but I've just found your column on the CVG website and I have a wireless question I hope you can help with.

I'm running an old PC - we're talking Windows 98 here - and want to go wireless because I can then take my Nintendo DS and Wii online. Can I even do this with my setup? I get my broadband from NTL, so have that little blue cable modem linked to my PC via USB and not Ethernet.

I'm not worried about making the PC wireless as I plan to scrap it and get a new one once Vista turns up. But I'm very keen to take my Nintendo products online in the meantime. Can I do this? And if so, what can I do to prevent the front of my house becoming a wireless hotspot?

Anthony Hulse

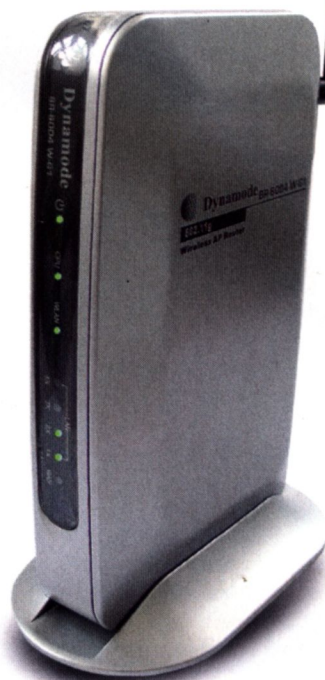
A Anyone can create a wireless network with NTL broadband. Dropping the wire means you can connect any number of devices to the Internet, such as a PC or a games console, from anywhere in your house. All you need is a wireless router to partner your existing cable modem.

While you could shop around endlessly and sift through wildly inaccurate information on forums, my advice would be to visit the NTL shop at ntlshop.ntlworld.com and spend £30 on their Dynamode BR6004W-G1 router. You'll then have an NTL-approved wireless product on an NTL connection, meaning you're far less likely to have protracted compatibility arguments with technical support should a problem ever arise.

Setup is a breeze. Cable companies no longer require you to use arcane practices such as MAC address cloning when you add network hardware, so all you need do is connect the modem and Dynamode router with an Ethernet cable. The latter incorporates a 4-port switch, so you'll still be able to connect wired devices such as your shit PC.

In addition, the BR6004W-G1 incorporates a half-decent firewall - actually, it's more than enough for home use - and protects your wireless data with three encryption standards (WEP, WPA and WPA2). These should allay any fears that you'll turn into a hotspot for ne'er-do-

Reasons to be cheerful: it's cheap.



wells hanging about outside your front gate, although the Nintendo DS does only support WEP. If you're genuinely concerned about security, you should be using WPA2. At present, only the Wii supports this.

Q WANDY IS A CULT

I'm in search of a new graphics card for Christmas, seeing as my computer doesn't actually have one (it's onboard). So I write in hope that you could find me a good card on eBay as I know nothing about them and there are so many variants. I

don't quite see the point of all the XTX XT GT and GS nonsense, but there must be a reason because the prices differ so greatly.

I have a budget of £170 and I'm hoping I can get a pretty good one from eBay for that money. If you could help, I will happily create a cult in your name and someday you will rule the world.

Ryan

A You don't say whether your PC has an AGP or PCI-Express port, or indeed whether it has a port at all. Because if we assume that your machine has been powered all its life by some wheezing piece of crap stuck to your motherboard, there's a high chance you don't have the appropriate hole for a new card - any new card - and are thus somewhat snookered.

Take the Dell my parents bought a year or so ago. While cheap and powerful enough for their needs (and with a 17-inch LCD and printer thrown in), its motherboard looks like Action Man's crotch. There's no way it'll ever be fit for anything but browsing pictures of grandchildren and emailing Auntie Betty about her Pekingese.

So, anyway, because you've not told me what you have, I have no idea what to suggest. All I can tell you is that the Radeon X1950 Pro is the best card within your budget, and is available in both AGP and PCI-Express flavours. If you do discover that your machine has room to upgrade - Google the model number and look for 8x AGP or x16 PCI-E - that's the one to get.

As for buying from eBay, I'm always loathed to advise anyone to do so unless you know exactly what you're letting yourself in for. Because if you buy from a store with a credit card, you gain additional consumer rights which are lost when you buy at auction. Be careful.



The X1950 Pro is a great card in both AGP or PCI-Express guises.

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"If you could help, I will happily create a cult in your name and someday you will rule the world"

Has Wandy done enough to nudge Ryan into action?

X MARKS THE SLOT

Q I currently have a Packard Bell iMedia 2569 and need your opinion. Can this machine carry a card like a PNY 7600 GT? Would it fit my motherboard and fit my case? Will I have to upgrade my power supply and, if so, what to? I've only just got into high-spec gaming, at which the machine struggles. Will it struggle for any other games?

Miles Croxford

A According to Packard Bell's website, the iMedia 2569 has an MSI MS-7301 motherboard together with a x16 PCI-Express slot, meaning that you should be able to host any PCI-Express video card. Because you have a midi tower case, space shouldn't be an issue.

However, I've not been able to find out how awful your power supply is. It's likely to be rated somewhere between 250-350W, meaning that while the electricity-hungry 7900 GT and X1950 Pro are out of the question, you should be able to get away with your chosen 7600 GT. And if you go for one of the fanless variants, such as the silent GIGABYTE GV-NX76T256D-RH, you'll be putting even less of a strain on the PSU.

In addition, your iMedia is compatible with the latest Core 2 Duo chips, opening up the possibility of some serious upgrades later in the year – although your next purchase needs to be a beefier power supply. Before choosing random products from online retailers, pay a visit to www.fspgroup.co.uk and email them with your system's details, explaining what you want to achieve. They should be more than happy to help out.

DUAL FUEL

Q My current PC uses an ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe motherboard with two 512MB PC3200 DIMMs running in dual-channel mode. I want to upgrade this to 2GB but I'm not sure if I should buy two



Silent variants of cheaper cards need less power.

more 512MB chips or a single 1GB DIMM – bearing in mind that I'd like to keep the system running dual-channel. I'd really appreciate if you could advise which I need to get.

Derek Ward

A To keep using dual-channel on your A8N-SLI, you just need to make sure that the memory size is equal across the board's two channels. In other words, the total memory in slots A1 and A2 should equal the total memory in slots B1 and B2. What this means is that you can leave your existing 512MB DIMMs where they are, and simply push two more PC3200 sticks of the same CAS latency into the spare slots.

However, I should point out that my experience with dual-channel is that it makes bugger all difference to the end use experience. There are many things that impact system performance, and dual-channel isn't something ordinary PC users should dwell upon. It's a relatively minor feature that was celebrated by bored marketing departments, the end result being that memory vendors now have twice the profit because they now sell their RAM in pairs. **PCW**

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

Free and decent anti-virus protection. Now there's no excuse.

20 ACTIVE VIRUS SHIELD

COSTS FREE FROM www.activevirusshield.com

Remember that anti-virus scan that you keep meaning to do, along with backing up all your work just in case something nasty wriggles in? Well, put this magazine down and do it now.

Based on tried-and-tested Kaspersky code, AOL's anti-virus utility offers free protection to all Windows users providing they're willing to hand over an email address in return for an activation code. The program gives real-time scanning of all worms, viruses, trojans, adware and spyware, jokes, rootkits and riskware – software that isn't innately a threat but which can be exploited to create a mess of your system. It will also intercept infected emails and updates itself automatically.

There are virtually no downsides to using

Active Virus Shield. Unlike its main competitor, Grisoft's dog-eared AVG Anti-Virus Free, it looks and feels like a commercial product rather than something that comes bundled with a £799 modem. You also get protection from spyware and a reasonably warm feeling knowing that it will be a PR disaster for AOL if they ever cancel it. And so they probably won't.

That said, the license you receive when you register isn't lifetime but expires a year from the date it was created, meaning that there's still a chance AOL may back away from the idea. Which would be a shame, because I've found it to be one of the better anti-virus products I've used: it's dependable, easy to use and doesn't hog system resources.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Question: (scallywag_88) I was just wondering whether floppy disk drives are needed any more or can I make do with just a DVD drive with my new PC?
Answer: (grrrpoop) Buy a floppy and a ribbon cable. Keep it in a box somewhere. (Wandy) I've not used an A: in absolutely years. There is the odd occasion where the SATA controller on your motherboard isn't seen by Windows setup and you need to provide the driver on a floppy, but aside from that they're old and crap and totally redundant.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

WATCHDOG



Not all companies are bad – but if they are, write to us for help...



THE ACCUSED: EPCBuyer

PROBLEM: Money not refunded for product never received

Back in August, reader Chris Gaskell placed an order at www.epcbuyer.com for a new power supply. After some time and several chasing emails, the item had not appeared, so with the order still showing as 'not yet dispatched', Chris decided to contact EPCBuyer to cancel it, asking that a full refund be made to his credit card. They replied stating that this would be done, but after four months and several more emails the money still had not been returned. Says Chris: "I would like to believe that this is merely a case of processes breaking down, but I cannot help but worry that I might be the victim of something more crooked."

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Wondering where things could have gone wrong, we spoke to EPCBuyer. They stated: "EPCBuyer is still in the middle of internal system restructure. This has unfortunately resulted in various communication issues which we're still in the process of resolving. Thank you for attaching Mr Gaskell's information which we have investigated, and can confirm that we have reversed the original transaction. We would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused and thank PC ZONE for bringing this to our attention."

FINAL VERDICT: Money refunded – hurrah! Justice prevails again.



THE ACCUSED: Cube247.co.uk

PROBLEM: Faulty new computer

Reader Keith Duffy ordered a brand new PC through Cube247's website, but only got two weeks of enjoyment out of it before one of the hard drives developed a fault and the machine had to be returned for repairs. Less than a week after his machine had

The screenshot shows the EPCBuyer website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Help, About Us, Returns, View Orders, Contact Us, Login, and Register. Below this, there are promotional banners for '3 YEAR WARRANTY' on PC deals and 'DEALS of the DAY' featuring various computer components like Kingston USB drives and AMD processors. The website layout is typical of an e-commerce site from that era.

been returned, it developed a similar fault. Cube247's technical support line explained that it could be a BIOS bug, but that he should monitor the situation and call them back in a week. However, later that day, his machine shut down and wouldn't boot at all. Understandably peeved, Keith called and asked for a full refund, but he was told that Cube do not offer refunds and that he'd have to return his system for repairs. After some debate, the office manager offered to investigate the possibility of a new system but Keith thought she had become "extremely rude and aggressive", and got in touch with Watchdog instead.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: A bit worried about Keith's mention of Cube247 not doing refunds (as he was perfectly entitled to one), we got in touch to get their side of the story. Their office manager informed us that: "A few days after his machine was

repaired, Mr Duffy called back and said his PC was not booting. I advised Mr Duffy that we would collect his PC and look at it immediately. He did not want this as he said he no longer had faith in the PC. I asked him what he would like me to do and he said either a refund or a replacement PC. I said that I wanted him to be happy with his purchase and I would gain authorisation to build him a brand new PC. At this point he started to get very angry that I personally could not give authorisation for this. I told him I could place him on hold and get this authorisation but he was not interested in talking to me any more." She then stated that: "We honoured our word and collected his PC and a brand new replacement is leaving our workshop for delivery tomorrow."

FINAL VERDICT: New working computer received but repeat orders look unlikely. P27

After four months and several more chasing emails the money still had not been returned!



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

There are a few things PCs don't really mix with, namely swimming pools, lightning strikes and small children. Reader Thomas Harney's had his Microsoft wireless mouse and keyboard for quite some time without any problems, but when his daughter came to visit with his grandson, a bottle was dropped on to the keyboard breaking one of the legs. With the keyboard still working and Thomas not too bothered, he rang up Microsoft to see if they could send

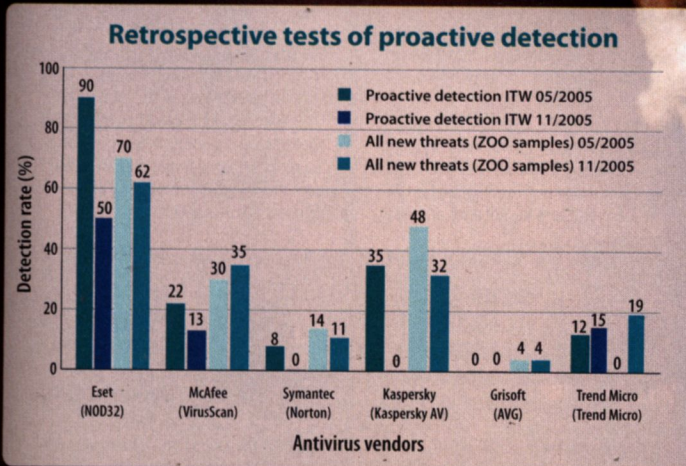
him a replacement leg. A customer service representative explained that they couldn't just send a new leg and that the keyboard was currently out of stock, but they would send out a replacement unit free of charge when it came back into the warehouse. A few weeks later, Thomas received not only a brand new keyboard but a new mouse to go with it. Feeling compelled to tell someone, he says: "Thank you to Microsoft for the excellent customer service."

Still using yesterday's tools to fight tomorrow's threats?



We protect your digital worlds

Eset is a global provider of security software for businesses and consumers. ESET's award-winning, anti-threat software system, NOD32, provides real-time protection from known and unknown viruses, spyware and other malware. NOD32 offers the smallest, fastest and most advanced protection available with more Virus Bulletin 100% Awards than any other antivirus product.



Norton and Symantec are registered trademarks of Symantec; Kaspersky is registered trademark of Kaspersky Lab; VirusScan and McAfee are registered trademarks of McAfee; AVG and Grisoft are registered trademarks of Grisoft; Trend Micro is a registered trademark of Trend Micro Incorporated.

Source: www.av-comparatives.org (May–November 2005)

The most advanced protection against viruses, worms, trojans, spyware, adware, phishing and other malware.

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NOD32
antivirus system

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO GOOD IF YOU'VE GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Want to know the best kit around right now, however much cash you haven't got? Read on...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

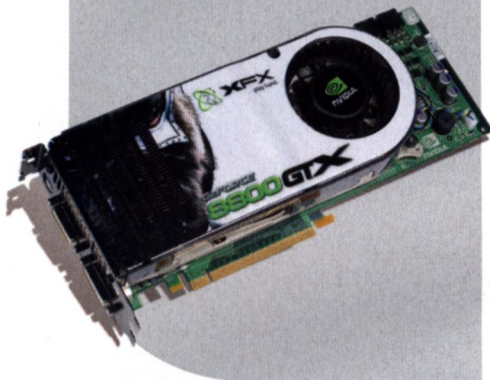
8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

It would have been nice to have an ATI card against which we could compare the flagship GeForce, but the new Radeon isn't due for at least a month. So NVIDIA's DirectX 10 heavyweight won by default. It's still the fastest video card you can buy, but be careful - there are no Vista drivers yet.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

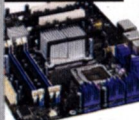
PAY £790

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XB2

EXPECT TO PAY

£155

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XB2, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£175

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY

£250

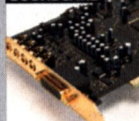
MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£195

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

RADEON X1950 PRO

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT - the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY

£126

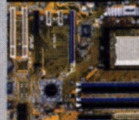
MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Allendale E6300 might be a stripped-down Conroe, but don't wrinkle your nose: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROE FIRE ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY

£65

MANUFACTURER

ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY

£41

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

£142

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710s is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time, 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games too.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£37

MANUFACTURER

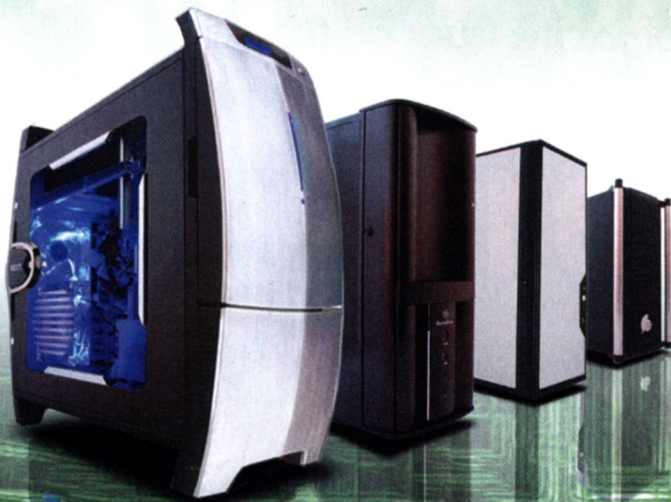
Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

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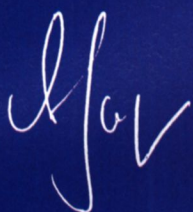
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Andreas Gauger, Chairman of the Board



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- ✓ 250 developers work in our Data Centre continually improving products
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1&1 Control Panel	✓
FTP access accounts	1

MARKETING TOOLS

New SimpleSubmission	✓
New Google Sitemaps	✓
New 1&1 SMS Manager	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

Free 1&1 WebsiteBuilder	8 page
Automatic Updates	✓

DOMAIN NAMES

Domain Registration	from £2.99
Domain Transfer	✓
External Domains	20
DNS Management	✓
Masked URL forwarding	✓
Domain Contact Management	✓

E-MAIL

IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	20
Massive 2 GB Mailbox capacity	✓
Advanced anti-spam tools	✓
E-mail aliases	250
Autoresponders	✓
Unlimited e-mail forwarding	✓
Catch all e-mail addresses	✓
Account virus scanning	5
1&1 Webmail	✓

EXPRESS SUPPORT

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Moneyback Guarantee	✓

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PACKAGE FEATURES

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FTP access accounts	5
Boosted Monthly Traffic included	20 GB
1&1 Control Panel	✓
Unlimited amount of websites	✓
1&1 WebspaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

New 1&1 Traffic Booster worth £150	✓
New 1&1 SMS Manager	✓
1&1 WebStatistics	✓
1&1 WebElements	✓
1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

New 1&1 Blog (Linux only)	✓
1&1 Dynamic Content	✓
1&1 WebsiteBuilder	12 pgs
1&1 Photo Gallery	✓
1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	12 pgs
1&1 PDF2Web Converter	✓
Personal Merchandise Shop	✓
1&1 Multimedia Archive	✓

Free Full Version Software worth £400	✓
FrontPage Extensions supported	✓
Ready-to-run CGI library	✓
ASP Scripting supported	-
PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓

DOMAIN NAMES

Included .co.uk domains	1
Sub-domains	50
Complete DNS Management	✓

E-MAIL

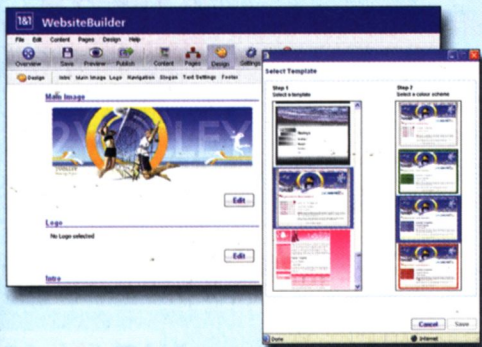
Boosted IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	400
Autoresponders/e-mail aliases	✓
1&1 Webmail	✓
Virus Scanning for Accounts	5 Acc.
Spam Filtering	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓
Daily backups	✓
Password protection	✓

EXPRESS SUPPORT

24/7 Express Support (inc. e-mail)	✓
Step-by-step online guides	✓
Online account management	✓



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	FTP access accounts	10
Boosted	Monthly Traffic included	40 GB
	1&1 Control Panel	✓
	Unlimited amount of websites	✓
	1&1 WebSpaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

New	1&1 Traffic Booster worth £250	✓
New	1&1 RSS Creator	✓
New	1&1 Site Checker	✓
New	1&1 SMS Manager	✓
	In2Site Live Dialogue	✓
	Chat Channels	5
	1&1 WebStatistics	✓
	1&1 WebElements	✓
	1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓
	1&1 WebDatabase	✓
	Customisable Forums	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

New	1&1 Blog (Linux only)	✓
	1&1 Dynamic Content	✓
	1&1 WebsiteBuilder	25 pgs
	1&1 Photo Gallery	✓
	1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	18 pgs
	1&1 PDF2Web Converter	✓
	Personal Merchandise Shop	✓
	1&1 Multimedia Archive	✓
	Full Version Software worth £400	✓
	FrontPage Extensions supported	✓
	Ready-to-run CGI library	✓
	ASP Scripting supported	-
	ASP.NET, .NET Framework	-
	PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓
	Database	2 MySQL

DOMAIN NAMES

	Included .co.uk domains	3
	Sub-domains	300
	Complete DNS Management	✓

E-MAIL

Boosted	IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	1,000
	Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓
	1&1 Webmail	✓
	Virus scanning for accounts	10 Acc.
	Spam Filtering	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

	Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓
	Daily backups	✓
	Password protection	✓
	Shared SSL or optional dedicated SSL Certificate	✓

EXPRESS SUPPORT

	24/7 Express Support (inc. e-mail)	✓
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	FTP access accounts	75
Boosted	Monthly Traffic included	100 GB
	1&1 Control Panel	✓
	1&1 WebSpaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

New	1&1 Traffic Booster worth £300	✓
New	1&1 RSS Creator	✓
New	1&1 Site Checker	✓
New	1&1 SMS Manager	✓
	In2Site Live Dialogue	✓
	Chat Channels	10
	1&1 WebStatistics	✓
	1&1 WebElements	✓
	1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓
	1&1 WebDatabase	✓
	Customisable Forums	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

New	1&1 Blog (Linux only)	✓
	1&1 Dynamic Content	✓
	1&1 WebsiteBuilder	25 pgs
	1&1 Photo Gallery	✓
	1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	25 pgs
	Personal Merchandise Shop	✓
	1&1 Multimedia Archive	✓
	Full Version Software worth £400	✓
	FrontPage Extensions supported	✓
	Ready-to-run CGI library	✓
	ASP Scripting supported	-
	ASP.NET, .NET Framework	-
	PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓
	Database (8x MySQL, MS Access/2x MS SQL)	8 MySQL
	SQL Import	-
	Cron Jobs	✓

DOMAIN NAMES

	Included .co.uk domains	5
	Sub-domains	1,500
	Complete DNS Management	✓

E-MAIL

	IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	1,500
	Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓
	1&1 Webmail	✓
	Virus scanning for accounts	20 Acc.
	Spam Filtering	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

	Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓
	Daily backups	✓
	Password protection	✓
	Shared SSL or optional dedicated SSL Certificate	✓
	SSH Access	✓

EXPRESS SUPPORT

	24/7 Express Support (inc. e-mail)	✓
	Step-by-step online guides	✓
	Online account management	✓

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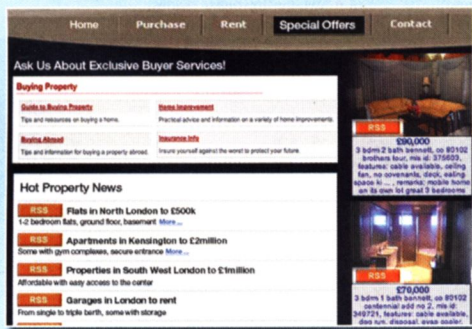
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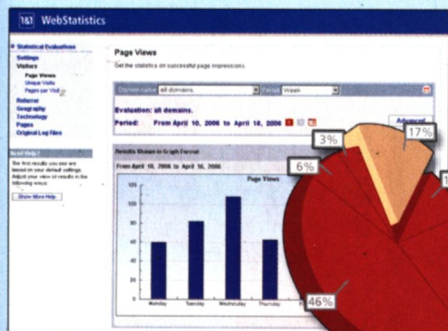
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FTP access accounts	100
Monthly Traffic included	200 GB
1&1 Control Panel	✓
Server Priority	✓
1&1 WebSpaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

New 1&1 Traffic Booster worth £300	✓
New 1&1 RSS Creator	✓
New 1&1 Site Checker	✓
New 1&1 SMS Manager	✓
In2Site Live Dialogue	✓
Chat Channels	25
1&1 WebStatistics	✓
1&1 WebElements	✓
1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓
1&1 WebDatabase	✓
Customisable Forums	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

New 1&1 Blog (Linux only)	✓
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1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	25 pgs
Personal Merchandise Shop	✓
Full Version Software worth £400	✓
New Dreamweaver MX 2004	✓
FrontPage Extensions supported	✓
Ready-to-run CGI library	✓
ASP Scripting supported	-
ASP.NET, .NET Framework	-
PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓
Database (15x MySQL, MS Access/4x MS SQL)	15 MySQL
SQL Import	-
Cron Jobs	✓
Advanced Developer Tools	✓

DOMAIN NAMES

Included .co.uk domains	10
Sub-domains	3,000
Complete DNS Management	✓

E-MAIL

IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	3,000
Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓
1&1 Webmail	✓
Virus scanning for accounts	100 Acc.
Spam Filtering	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓
Daily backups	✓
Password protection	✓
Dedicated SSL Certificate	✓
SSH Access	✓

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Step-by-step online guides	✓
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PACKAGE FEATURES

■ Hard disk space	10 GB
■ Monthly Traffic included	500 GB
■ Included SSL Certificate	1
■ MySQL Databases	UNLIMITED
■ Data transfer speed	100 Mbit

FREE SOFTWARE

■ Plesk 8	✓
■ Virtuozzo	✓

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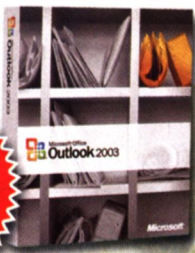
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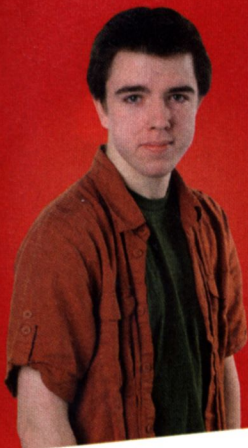
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FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

The Irish way

IF YOU'VE A decent PC and you live in the Irish countryside, you'll find very few reasons to leave the house, and even fewer reasons to be awake at any socially acceptable time. I discovered this when I went back home during my holiday and spent almost every evening playing *World Of Warcraft*, going to bed at 6am and then waking up again for dinner.

The postcards you see with pictures of Ireland on them are usually accurate. It's just fields (with 2MB broadband running underneath), and old men in pubs drinking Guinness. Everybody lives at least ten miles from one another (which equals an infinite distance if you can't drive), it rains a lot, and there are so many cows that they could probably overthrow the human folk if they organised themselves.

That's why Irish people, when we're not eating potatoes and dancing, play *WOW*. And I don't think anybody can blame me for going up ten levels in about a week...

Steve Hogarty

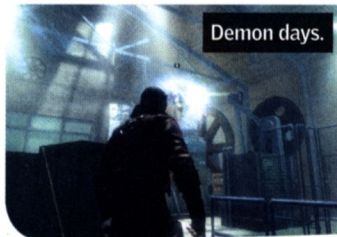
Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

Blooper reel



Find the bottle of Axe deodorant on a ledge in the Fremont Street level, then shoot it twice to have a chuckle-worthy (and heavily sponsored) *Rainbow Six: Vegas* blooper reel play in your HUD. This is the sort of in-game advertising we approve of, especially when the guy gets kicked in the arse.



Demon days.

100 Demo pages

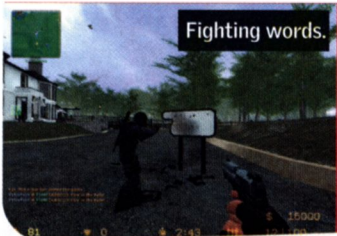
Try out the latest games right now!



Wolf like me.

102 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Fighting words.

106 Fight Club

The PC ZONE scrap-athon continues on. How did you do?



Turn on the bright lights.

108 Freeware

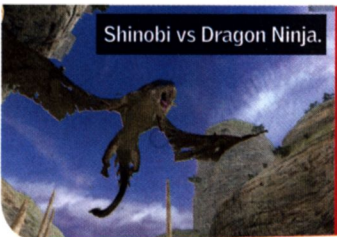
The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Monkey wrench.

110 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Shinobi vs Dragon Ninja.

114 Dark Messiah

Don't go hacking and slashing just yet, read our guide!



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

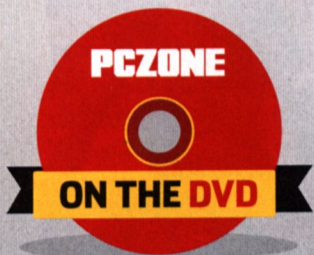
342.1
HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up our free DVD...



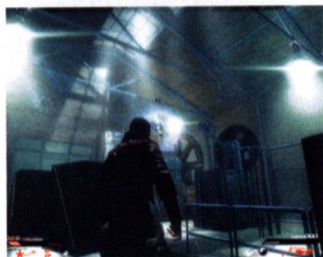
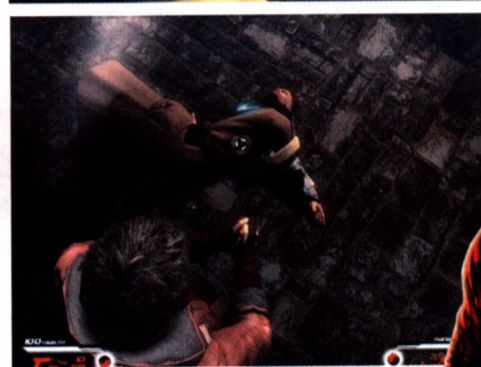
Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

INFERNAL Finally, a game where you get to kill good monks... www.infernalgame.com

IN THE BATTLE between good and evil, who'd have guessed that the good could in fact turn out to be evil? It's like the ultimate plot twist. You play Ryan Lennox. Ryan used to be good, but he was a bit evil for *them*, so now he's evil, which – now that good is threatening to unbalance the delicate scales of good and evil – makes him the good guy again, just using the cooler powers that evil people have.

Turns out that god blinks once a millennium, but being god, his eyelids are like the tomb door from *Indiana Jones*, so it takes ruddy ages. EtherLight, the people battling for goodness, have decided to take the opportunity to wipe out evil once and for all, so that's why – in this demo – you'll be killing a bunch of techno-monks and getting to grips with a few of your new demonic powers.

If you're sick of all that high-minded, 'You choose to be good or evil! Every act influences the game world!' stuff, and feel that evil shouldn't be a cool choice but a moral obligation, then the *Infernal* demo has no place not being on your hard drive.



SATAN CHAT

You spend cut-scenes talking to some husky agent of darkness in an earpiece. It's supposed to sound like the devil, but it sounds more like *Coronation Street's* amorous pensioner, Phyllis Pierce. Pretty, damn, evil.



SOUL DRINKING

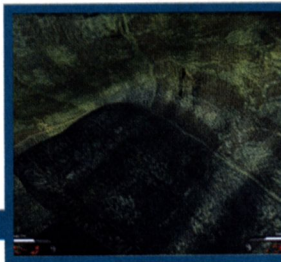
When you've killed someone, you can milk their souls for extra health. More curiously, they can make your body fly around a bit, which gives them magic shurikens and bullets. Don't question the powers of darkness, mortal.

DARK, MAN Behold the antics of the evil ones...



MONK BOSSES

If you were upset that the terrible film *Bulletproof Monk* didn't live up to its brilliant title, you'll get the chance to fight a proper monk of the bulletproof variety. Therapy for disappointed movie-goers everywhere.



CURTAIN PHYSICS

Even without an Aegia PhysX card, you'll still get amazing demonic physics like this curtain billowing over your head. If you do have the card, it'd be cool if a million centimetre cubes bounced off your arse at the same time.

THE MARK

Not Owen or Lawrenson, but dirty terrorists... www.themark-game.com

NUCLEAR BOMB! LONDON! Terrorists! Argh! Well, that's what the breathless civil servant probably said as he arrived at the PM's office. "Calm down, Jenkins," said Tony. "We've sent a couple of soldiers in, it'll be tip-top by elevenses."

What those soldiers had to deal with – ear-bending dialogue, political climate-straddling plot and crazy bastards pulling their shirts above their heads and running towards them with

bombs on – would entertain in such unintended ways, that we simply cannot recommend that you install and play this demo enough.



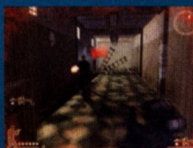
ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET...

My friend at school was called Mark. Hello if you're reading!



THE THINGS SOLDIERS SAY

The Mark proves that it really is cool to shout, "Yes, now you're dead, aren't you!" to someone you just shot in the head. You really like killing people.



SANDY FLETCHER

That's the name of one of the heroes, and it's the strongest, most heroic name in counter-terrorism since Ted Patterson chased a bee out of Parliament.

WARFRONT: TURNING POINT

A lot of war, a bit of front and a fair point www.war-front.com

WHEN ANYONE WRITES the word Hitler, they get a little naughty thrill. Whether you're accusing someone on an Internet forum of being worse than him, or singing that one of his balls resides in one of Britain's premier entertainment venues, it's impossible not to feel a bit like you're swearing.

That's why writing about PC games is so liberating – I've written Hitler more times than I care to mention. It's like the time I found out there was a kind of sword called a bastard. RTS fans should install this alternate-reality take on WWII (which historians call The Hitlerzone) immediately, because it's pretty good.



1 Explosions are the best bit about war. Vehicles, buildings, everything just blows up all the time, and all the soldiers stop and say "coool".

2 A lot of people will say stealth bombers weren't in WWII. They just want WWII games to be boring, so tell them to shut up and go away.

3 This tank has been surrounded with sandbags by a group of naughty German pranksters. Ten points from Slytherin!

TURN AROUND

Bonnie Tyler demands it...



EXOSKELETON

The developers admit it's a tribute to *Aliens*. Good choice – Nazis on *Back To The Future 2* hoverboards would have been rubbish.



ICE SPITTER

It's alternate reality. No-one's granddad was encased in ice, only to melt a few seconds later after taking a few hit points damage.

THE BEST OF THE REST



STRATEGIC COMMAND 2: BLITZKRIEG

To celebrate the recent release of the v1.05a super-patch, which fixed bugs and improved the AI, here's the latest demo of this strategy game, which leads the market in the 'not nearly as awful as it looks' category. www.battlefront.com



FOR LIBERTY!

If you say "For Liberty!" often enough, it's almost impossible not to pronounce it "Fliberty", which sounds like a fun game. We think *For Liberty!* is fun too though. Just not as much fun as *Fliberty*. www.huszargames.hu



ERAGON

Give up your mouse to the two-hands-on-keyboard charms of *Eragon*, the only fantasy universe that has people saying: "Is that supposed to say dragon? Eragon's a daft name for a dragon..." www.eragongame.com



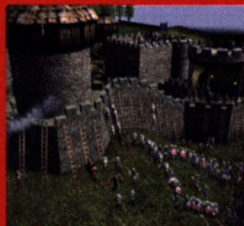
SONIC RIDERS

If your gaming icon has never quite captured the charm of his 2D outings in gaming memory, then there's only one thing for it – put the spiny sod on a hoverboard and race him around. It can't fail, Sega! www.sonicriders.com



STRONGHOLD 2

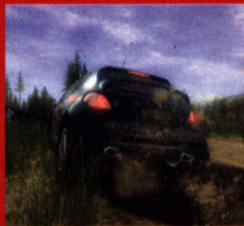
www.gamershell.com/download_17186.shtml



It's not a new game, but it's a new demo – three missions, one campaign and a tutorial designed to re-pique your interest in a neglected game. And at 240MB, it won't block up the Internet like a ping-pong ball up your Henry either.

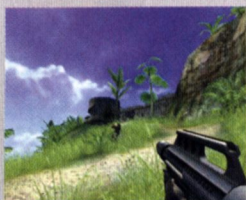
XPAND RALLY XTREME

www.gamershell.com/download_17170.shtml



Even *Tomb Raider* won't let you go to Malaysia and Italy in the same demo. And the driving levels in *Legend* weren't half as realistic, either. Loses on the tits front, but you can't have it all.

SNIPPETS



FAR CRY SDK UPDATE

www.crymod.com
Crytek have, as the snippet title would have you believe, updated the CryEngine SDK to a new and improved version, making the lives of many *Far Cry* modders that little bit easier. So if you wouldn't mind tottering off and making a few mods, that'd be great. You've no excuse now, have you?



SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

si.planethalflife.gamespy.com
Popular *Half-Life* mod *Science & Industry* has received a significant update to version 1.1, now featuring "new movement techniques, an updated HUD, a new announcer, support for alternative game modes, as well as weapon balance changes and bug fixes." Go see.

ARCHLORD GONE FREE

Popular MMO goes the way of the *Guild Wars* tribe...

www.archlordgame.com

FIRST IT WAS going to have a monthly subscription fee, then it was going to have a proposed tiered payment system in which 'gold' members would get better stuff for forking out more cash. Finally, it was released with the initial payment plan, having scrapped the tiered system after it was ridiculed by people all over the Internet.

Now, *Archlord* is scrapping their subscription fee altogether, while still

offering free updates and expansions for the MMORPG, including the upcoming *Episode 2: Season of Siege*. *Archlord* now just requires players to purchase the client, with the option to legitimately buy in-game cash with real-life dollars.

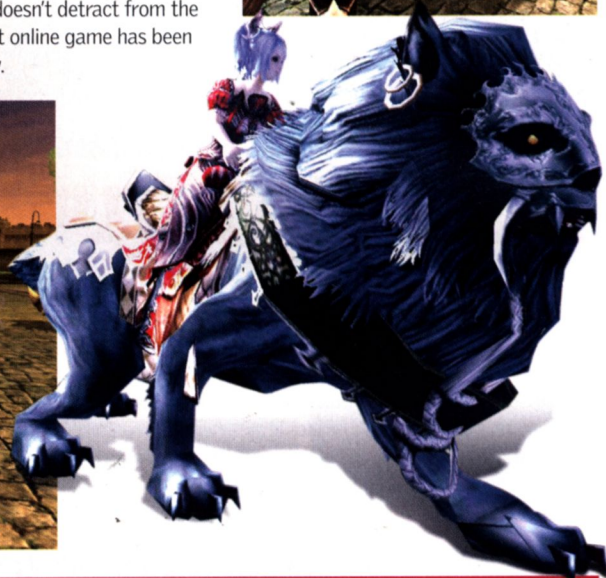
Is it a way to get more people playing after initial reactions weren't as positive as Codemasters would have liked? Of course, but that doesn't detract from the fact that a decent online game has been made free to play.



"When I said I wanted to ride something big and horny..."



No arches or lords here. Very odd.



Our ones have chocolatey fingerprints all over them now.



Wii ON MY PC

Ninty's console bows down to the beige box

carl.kenner.googlepages.com/glovepie_download

LUCKY ENOUGH TO own Nintendo's snazzy new console? Or maybe, in an act of desperation after the thing sold out, you bought a sole Wii remote and waved it around at the TV in vain.

Well, why not use it to control *Half-Life*? Why not use it to drag your desktop icons around the screen and arrange them into rude shapes? Are you saying, "because Wii remotes don't work on PC"? Because if you are saying that, then you sir, are incorrect!

The Wii remote does work on PC thanks to some nifty (and of course entirely unofficial) drivers. On the other hand, as one YouTube user succinctly put it, "you could just get a mouse, you c***". Quite.



"Look at me! I'm role-playing!"

RPG IN UT2K4

Eldervale brings roleplay to *Unreal Tournament* eldervale.ut200xfiles.com | Mod for: UT2004

OH LOVELY UT2K4 engine, look at you there now, providing platforms for all sorts of mods and games. You are the cake tray of their dreams, upon which dreamers can manufacture cakes and mods.

This time, somebody's using the *UT2K4* engine to make an RPG in the style of *Chrono Trigger*, *Golden Sun* and *World Of Warcraft*. At the

moment, *Eldervale* is just a collection of pretty screenshots, but when it's done it should be a whole lot of good.

The creators only intend it to be a short prototype lasting ten minutes or so (a worrying trend it seems), and they might (if they can be arsed) make something longer in future. It's certainly something to keep an eye on though.

SNIPPETS



JC NOW IN HD

www.hdtp.net
There's now an update in the High Definition Texture Pack currently in development for *Deus Ex*. JC Denton has now received a lovely new model and a far more defined face. When asked how he feels about this, the cyborg secret agent responded, "pretty".



RAILROADS! LIVERIES!

www.firaxis.com/games
Firaxis have been working on the *Railroads!* - *Sid Meier's Railroads!* that is. They've created four new liveries (the colours what be painted on the sides of them trains) for free download. Ever wanted an A4 Mallard painted in the style of the Union Jack flag? Well, it's here if you change your mind.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH CIVCITY ROME



V1.1 means that "lions no longer speed up when on roads". Not sure about grass verges though.



Two teams building two forts and then duking it out - fantastic.



Our genius fort design at the recent PC ZONE fightclub.



Ramps allow quick exits from your fort.

MAY THE FORTS BE WITH YOU

We speak with Taylor 'Stieffers' Stieff about the excellent *SourceForts* mod for *Half-Life 2*

www.sourcefortsmod.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

PCZ: Who are you and how do you spend your time?

TS: "I'm Taylor Stieff and I'm an artist on the *SourceForts* team."

PCZ: How did the original premise for *SourceForts* come about?

TS: "Emergent gameplay is the core of *SourceForts*' popularity. The basic idea was to let the players create part of the game for themselves - and so *SourceForts* was born."

PCZ: A *SourceForts* trailer recently appeared on Steam. What's it like to have this unofficial pat on the back from Valve? Have they been in contact with you?

TS: "The Steam trailer tripled our player count - we're grateful for the publicity. It really helped to convince us that the mod has a solid future, and we're sticking to it. I wouldn't say we've been in close contact with Valve though."

PCZ: The core gameplay allows for fantastic and varied fort designs, was

this always intended? Or did things like the infamous 'Big Ass Tree' design happen spontaneously?

TS: "Most of the emerging fort designs were never intended, or even considered. The entire architecture of forts has been changed ever since the release of the game over a year ago. Of course, some less functional fort aspects have stuck around, such as the 'Big Ass Tree' design, or sky-fort, only because they look cool. The whole idea of the game is for an unlimited number of fort designs to emerge - that way, the game is never the same and always personalised to its players."

PCZ: Do you think modern games, including *Half-Life 2*, are using physics as much as they could be? Or is it a feature to be used sparingly?

TS: "At the moment, it seems that no-one has really committed a game to physics, but rather built something that can be wrapped with physics. Total physical immersion is approaching fast, and games like *SourceForts* are the first of the genre."

PCZ: The mod's had various releases - so what have you guys learned along the way?

TS: "The biggest thing we've learned is never to doubt yourself. We've had seemingly terrible ideas be implemented and turn out great."

PCZ: What do you plan for the future? Do you think modding is a gateway to job placement at professional studios?

TS: "Right now, we're just concentrating on the mod. It'll be a better resumé line if it's a total conversion though. Most of us are just in it for fun, though."

PCZ: Finally, what's in store for version 2.0.0 of the mod?

TS: "Version 2.0.0 will be our huge step from mod to total conversion. It will feature all new player models, weapons, blocks, maps, textures and anything else you can think of. It's also set to feature some intense new game-modes that will be revealed when it's launched - you'll just have to wait and see."

Movie of the month

CRYSIS

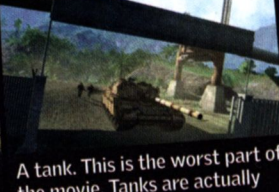
The latest *Crysis* movie can be found on our DVD this month, and it's by far the most impressive game movie ever made. That's including the live-action version of *Super Mario Bros*. Honestly, this fly-by will leave you stunned and then make you cry on the way home from work.



We accidentally printed a photograph instead of... No wait! Hold on! This is it!



A big pipe going across the base. Jesus Christ almighty. Best pipe ever.

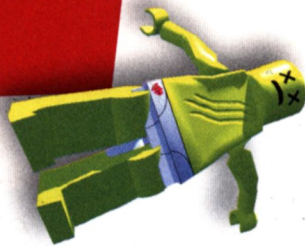


A tank. This is the worst part of the movie. Tanks are actually very boring.



But this guy's got a massive gun - there's no way he could hold that in real life.

BRICKING IT



Brickfield merges LEGO with the hilarity of modern war brickfield.immortal-forces.net | Mod for: Battlefield 2

LEGO, ENJOYED BY CHILDREN and weird sweaty folk who live with their parents, is a product which has enjoyed healthy representation in games. By that we mean it's had two decent high-profile games with the *LEGO Star Wars* series, and a few interactive CD games taped to the fronts of packets of Corn Flakes.

Brickfield is a total conversion for *Battlefield 2* which aims to replace every character, vehicle and weapon with their LEGO equivalents. That means the troops will become loveable yellow-faced plastic people, their weapons will become shiny cylindrical tubes and their vehicles will

look like they were constructed by an eight-year-old, or at least a work-experience kid at Hamley's. Even things like explosions will be swapped out for large red 'BANG' animations, trees turned into LEGO trees and roads will be converted to meet LEGOLAND standards.

It's definitely a lot more interesting than mods which add a new type of grenade, or adjust the time it takes for a soldier to go prone based on how enthusiastic they feel about the war. However, it's still some way off completion, despite looking as polished as the blocks themselves. Also, we feel obliged to mention it's got Mr T, and hoverboards.



This is a bit more like it.



In an ideal world, enemies would be made of K'Nex.



Show-off.

"Crazy fool!"

IT'S-A ME!

Mario Kart: Source breaks genre boundaries, copyright laws www.mks-mod.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

WE KNOW FULL well that the chances of this making it to release are slim, what with Nintendo furiously protecting their intellectual property in the wake of releasing their latest console, like some cartoon eagle watching over her primary-coloured eggs.

Still, it's not a mod we want to ignore, if only because of its gutsy and ignorant approach to copyright law. *Mario Kart: Source* is a complete conversion of Nintendo's most famous racing game to the *Half-Life 2* engine, basing itself on what the developer believes to be the best iteration in the series, *Mario Kart 64*.

Now, while we all know that the DS version is far better, you just have to look at some of these renders to see how good this could be. *Mario Kart: Source*

promises to feature 16 characters, an unknown number of weapons and levels, as well as the series' trademark powerslide. Of course, whether it'll ever see the light of day comes down to how attentive Ninety lawyers are, but we can hope – maybe they're being distracted by a drawing somebody did of Yoshi or something.



The many sides of Luigi.

Microwave curries are so handy.



OOOH SOURCE-Y!

Black Mesa: Source re-emerges from the darkness

www.blackmesasource.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

DESPITE BEING well aware that between media releases, mod teams are often hard at work on their next big cache of images, we like to think that they go into hibernation. Somewhere warm and with speedy broadband access.

Admittedly, the guys behind *Black Mesa: Source* have some pretty good excuses for their year of media silence, with scary words like 'hacking' and 'deleting' being among

them. Not to fear though, because they're back with a fresh selection of media to "ooh" and "aah" over.

Of these, we're particularly keen on the zombie scientist (complete with long fingernails – just our type). What's more, with other creatures (including bullsquids), updated weapons and revamped levels on offer, there's plenty to remind you just why you were so excited about this mod a year ago.

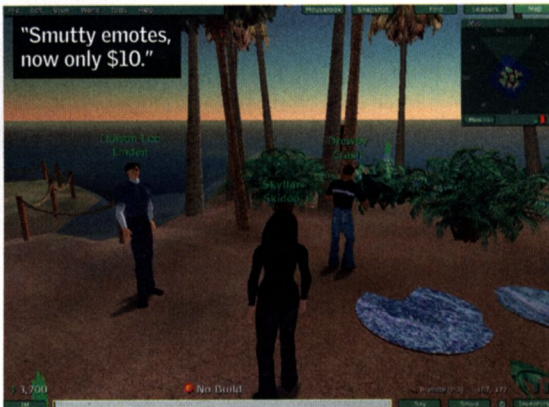
PARANOID?

Paranoia has us on edge

paranoia.level-design.ru | Mod for: Half-Life

PROVING THERE'S LIFE left in the *Half-Life* modding scene is *Paranoia*, an in-development mod which sees you assuming the role of a Russian officer in the secret service. The single-player mod's numerous objectives see you defending military bases and other secret Russian oddjobs, but more interestingly the mod looks far better than anything the old engine ever seemed capable of.

The developers have added motion blur, new lighting systems and a 3D sky box to create the best-looking *Half-Life* mod around. Plus, alongside realistic architecture, weaponry and character models, it also looks set to be a great mod to play too.



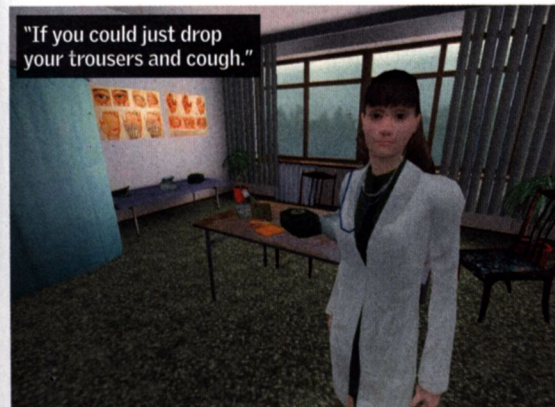
ACES HIGH

Second Life's spending habits explored...

www.secondlifeherald.com/slh/2006/12/626000_spent_in.html

EVER WONDER WHERE most of the money in seedy MMO *Second Life* is going? Well, a recent experiment conducted by the folks at *The Second Life Herald* revealed that 80% of in-game transactions were explicitly spent on in-game gambling.

Even more interesting is the fact that, of the 20% that's not obviously being spent on gambling, 12% is going into the tips jars of smutty dancers. With in-game currency being transferrable into cold-hard cash, that works out at *Second Life's* internal gambling industry being worth \$110 every two days. Which is quite a bit, for an MMO.



PCZONE TOP 5 FREEWARE GAMES



1 GOLF?

www.golfquestionmark.com
A beautifully surreal and artistic rendition of the classic sport. Obscenely funny with two players and a fantastic game to boot.



2 N

www.harveycartel.org/metanet/n.html
Old-school platforming mixed with new-school style. Not that new schools are stylish, but *N's* inertia-harnessing physics are gloriously entertaining.



3 RROOTAGE

snipurl.com/rRootage
Concentrate your fire on procedurally-generated bosses while avoiding massive amounts of bullets in what we reckon is Kenta Cho's best shooter.



4 NETHACK

www.nethack.org
A real oldie, but still as deeply involving now as it was back then. Some aspects of this freeware RPG classic have simply yet to be bettered.



5 NARBACULAR DROP

www.nuclearmonkeysoftware.com
We only love this because we can't play Valve's *Portal* right away, but this mind-boggling dimensional puzzler is simply amazing to play.

FREEPLAY FIGHT CLUB

Fight Club



First rule of Fight Club: don't mention the war...

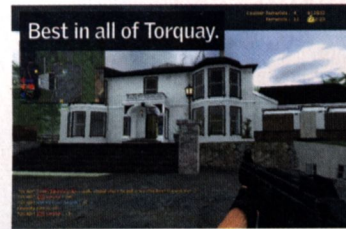
WE'RE NOT COMPLETELY rubbish at *Counter-Strike: Source*. It's just that by and large, you're considerably better at it than we are, and this means that comparatively we look cack-handed when we try to play it.

This month however, Fight Club wasn't merely about the monthly bloodthirsty slaughtering of *PC ZONE*. Instead, it was a hilarious romp through one of the best-known sets in comedy history - *Fawlty*

Towers. Moose antlers that fall off; reception bells that ring; closets that can be hid in, Manuel quotes to be found - everybody had maximum fun, especially Sefton, who attempted to run into the kitchen through a door which Mister O'Reilly hadn't built yet.

Next Fight Club is at 6pm on Thursday, February 8, where we'll be playing *BF2142*. Details will be appearing on our forums at www.pczone.co.uk shortly. See you then...

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!



MAN MADE



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ZONE CHAT

Because talking really is the cure...



AS FAR AS ill-conceived competitions go, this month's ZONE Chat competition ranks alongside 'running headfirst into one another' endurance trials.

Our ingenious plan involved getting you to prank-call Ben, a friend of PC ZONE, who works on our sister magazine *Official Xbox 360*. We assumed our positions, occasionally peeking at our

victim and giggling, frantically pointing and mouthing "it's ringing!" when the phone eventually rang. Unfortunately, he was so engrossed in a game of *Gears Of War*, he didn't bother answering.

Urging ZONE Chatters to cease their relentless calling, we changed the competition to a far simpler one, asking readers what was happening on a certain

page of the magazine. Bald_Beauty triumphed with his prompt 'bird stood on chair', and so won a 10tacle Studios bag and a copy of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* Get in!

Next ZONE Chat will take place at 5.30pm on Wednesday, February 7. Do come along!



How to join in!



If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps due to a crippling case of camera shyness in the face of our rampant screenshotting – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some PC ZONE staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
 Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
 Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
 Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
 Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
 Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- 1 **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
- 2 **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- 3 **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- 4 **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- 5 **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- 6 **PREY**
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
- 7 **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- 8 **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
 Listed in NovaWorld



HELL

MARCH 2007



Freeware



Steve Hogarty's broke again – Internet, we need you!

Freeware brings you the best free games the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month, create your own FPS levels, play *Mario* forever, swirl some pretty colours and get down to some extortion.

SAUERBRATEN

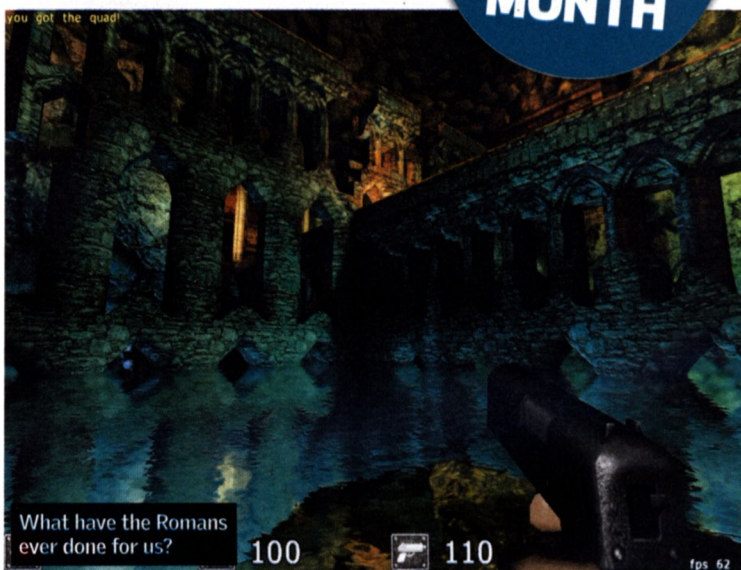
Create the heaven and the Earth, and see that it is good Dev: Wouter 'Aardappel' van Oortmerssen | sauerbraten.org



AS REGULAR READERS of Freeware might be aware, it's hard for free FPS titles to hold their heads above the tide of freeware games. When they choose to roll up alongside commercial shooters rather than carve their own niche, it only serves to highlight their inherent low-budget inadequacies, like a vacuum cleaner built from toilet-roll tubes and a hand-held fan comparing itself to a Dyson. These amateur titles need to have 'Never Before Seen' features, or at the very least 'A Really Good Feature You Might Not Have Seen Before'.

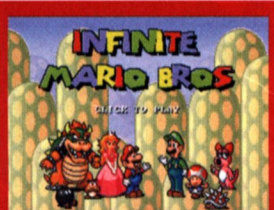
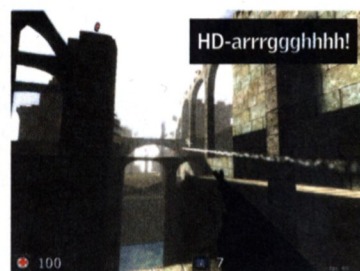
Sauerbraten is such a game, and is a free FPS whose sole mission isn't to ape the joyous deathmatch experiences of *Quake II*. Instead, it apes the joyous deathmatch experiences of *Quake II*, while letting you build maps in-game. In fact, *Sauerbraten* is more of an editing tool than a shooter.

At any point during the game, you can enter the menu screen (a nifty feature in itself as it floats in 3D space in the level), and drop entities such as enemies and light sources into the level, as well as edit and generate geometry to create rooms and walls.



It apes the joyous deathmatch experiences of *Quake II*, while letting you build maps in-game

Of course, if you'd rather play instead of build, *Sauerbraten* provides plenty of pre-built maps in both multiplayer and single-player modes. The engine's also being used to create an RPG called *Eisenstern*, and a separate commercial title too. If that's not enough to convince you, just look at the pretty water effects. We're suckers for pretty water effects. Also, the sooner somebody rips off those floating menus, the better.



INFINITE MARIO BROS

Goes on and on and on...

Dev: Markus Persson
www.mojang.com/notch/mario

AS LONG AS Nintendo doesn't find and destroy this Java webpage by the time this magazine hits the shelves, we think you'll find this is quite a treat if the ends of *Mario* games tend to terrify you. It randomly generates a *Super Mario Bros 3*-style world map, complete with levels and castles. It then randomly generates each level in the style of *Super Mario World* from one of a handful of themes. So that's above-ground levels, below-ground levels and castle levels.

The random nature of the levels means that after five minutes it all begins to look the same, but the controls are spot-on and it feels just like *Super Mario World* to play. It might feel a tad soulless, but it's an interesting experiment nonetheless.

KNYTT

No longer the preserve of ageing ladies Dev: Niffilas | knytt.ni2.se

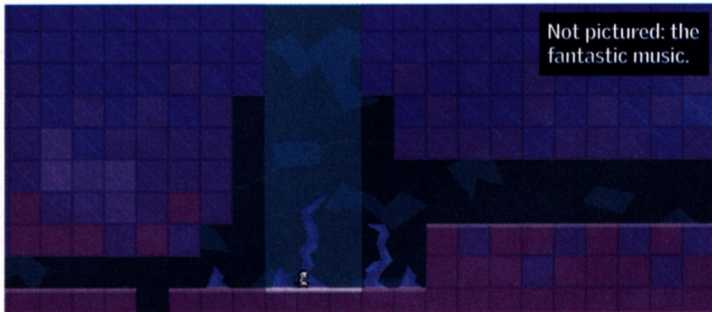


LONGEVITY IS A feature most freeware titles are lacking in, but *Knytt*, from the creator of one of Freeware's favourite games, *Within A Deep Forest*, is overflowing with content. It just doesn't seem to ever want to end.

It's a basic platformer, casting you as a tiny sprite-man capable of climbing vertical walls and jumping. Having been abducted

by a UFO which then crashed into a planet, you must run and jump about the beautifully stylised world, collecting the scattered parts of the broken ship.

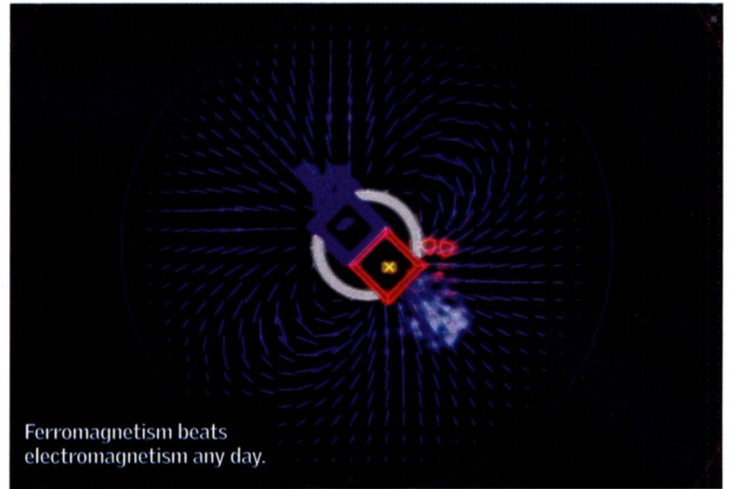
Most of the joy, however, comes from exploring the vast world, which stretches in every direction for some brilliantly interminable distance. A must-play.



Not pictured: the fantastic music.



Look! It's that UFO I was talking about.



Ferromagnetism beats electromagnetism any day.

PLUS OR MINUS

Paula Abdul knew that opposites attract too. Wise woman...

THIS GAME, WHICH is actually called '+-/', but that would look silly as a headline, sees you controlling a magnet with, as magnets tend to have, a positive and negative end. Positive and negative particles fly about the screen and are attracted to the oppositely charged end of the magnet, and the magnet can be deftly rotated with a flick of the mouse wrist.

As the particles begin to pile up on the sides of the magnet, you must rotate it in such a way as to make the particles collide and destroy themselves. Which is actually really hard to do, but fun to watch.

Dev: rale | www.experimentalgameplay.com/game.php?g=308

ICHOR Making fluids fun again

Dev: Soylent Software | www.soylentsoft.net

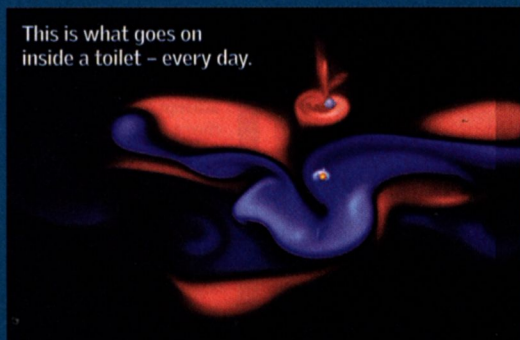
THE BEST PART of painting a watercolour, as any artist will tell you, is the bit where you dip your dirty brush into a clear cup of water and watch the colourful swirls of paint dance and coil in a silently cacophonous interaction of fluids embracing and endlessly interacting with one another, the fundamental physics of the universe

dictating their every motion until the whole thing turns the colour of piss. The worst part is getting red on you.

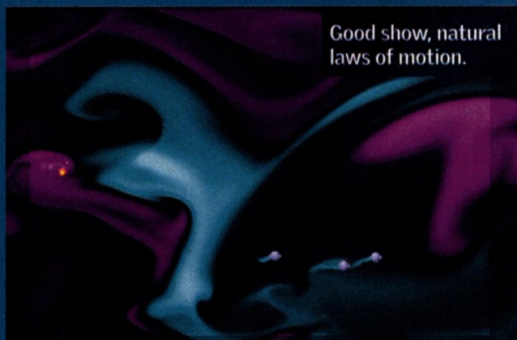
Ichor is a game which looks a lot like the former, using fluid physics to create pretty swirls on the screen. You control a floating point, constantly emitting a flow of smoky liquid and filling the screen with your colour. The

aim is to avoid the enemy's colour, as flying into it makes you explode and die. And of course, you've also got to try and envelope the enemy in your own fluid to make them explode and die. Despite looks to the contrary, it's rather CPU-intensive, as all those fluid calculations take their toll. It's still well worth playing if you can though.

This is what goes on inside a toilet - every day.

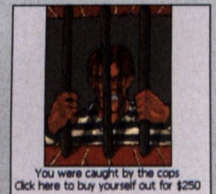


Good show, natural laws of motion.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

OMERTA



You were caught by the cops. Click here to buy yourself out for \$250

Dev: Omerta Games Ltd
www.barafranca.com

It's a shame that the MMORPG industry is such a tough nut to crack, with massive risks needed to have any hope of success, and even then it's never known whether people will stop playing. It's for this reason that MMORPGs are mostly full of orcs and wizards and not, as we'd love to see, set in WWII, or in a zombie-ravaged city - or in a 1930s mafia world.

Omerta is as close as you can get to the latter, a mafia-themed text-based multiplayer online game - and for a free car courtesy of the developers, register with the code 'carrion'. Start out extorting kindergartens for some cash, before smuggling liquor between the game's cities and raking in the big bucks. Buy some protection, work your way up through the ranks and become The Don. Somebody make a full-blown MMORPG of this please.

DEFCON MODS



Jon Blyth is looking for new ways to annihilate the world Find all these mods and more at: defcon.s4l.dk/?modlist

INTROVERSION'S FIRST GAME, Uplink, cast you as a hacker from the 1980s. It was so reminiscent of the hacking scenes from movies – and in particular *WarGames* – that your thrills came as much from playing a movie cliché as pretending to be a real

hacker. *DEFCON* completed the *WarGames* homage with thermoglobal nuclear war.

DEFCON hardly seemed like a game that you'd instinctively want to mod; the graphics and sound were sparse, effective, minimalist. The map was the

world. *DEFCON* had the soul of a brilliant boardgame. What's to mod?

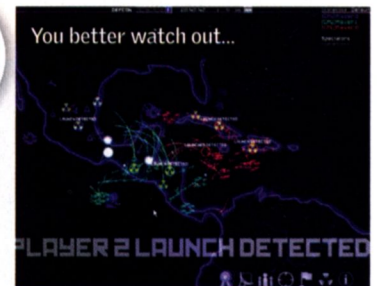
But when you love something you try to change it, and there are dozens of adaptations out there. Comical graphic tweaks and stupid maps prick the earnest morbidity of the game, making

them funnier than they should be. Others have drawn attention from the Introversion devs on the forums, including *Ghost Hack*, listed below.

Here's our progressive round-up of the alterations people have made – from humble tweak to ambitious recreation...



See the world, then nuke the lot.



DonkeyCon

At the most basic level, we have people who model their mods around a 'con' pun. In *DonkeyCon*, your nuclear war is waged by none other than Donkey Kong, who hurls Intercontinental Ballistic Nuclear Bananas at enemy cities. It's not really changing the game in any way, but you can say "heh, monkeys" while you play.

Middle-Earth

How does Tolkien's world fit into *DEFCON*? Into what Middle-earth weapon does the nuclear bomb translate? Someone's going to have to come to terms with the fact that not every game can be convincingly warped to reference *Star Wars* or *LOTR*. And yet... Seeing Sauron's eye reproduced in that neon outline...

WorldCon

Efforts to make the playing field look more realistic, like *WorldCon* and *SatCon* may be detracting from the charm of the original, but they do make it look good in a different way. *WorldCon* tried to mute the colours of *SatCon*, because it drew attention away from the nuclear war. You've got to prioritise these things.

Australia Map

It was tempting to feature the map that was shaped like a banana, for a running monkey theme, but in the end this map clinches it. Australia was utterly missing on Introversion's map, and this is one disgruntled Australian's attempt to give Oz its own nuclear war without bothering the rest of the world.

Ghost Hack

At the more audacious end of the scale is this attempt to change the theme from global warfare to a simulation of a brain-hacking attempt. It's been a bit quiet in the last couple of months, but hopefully it'll get finished; anything that claims to bring together *DEFCON*, *Uplink* and *Ghost In The Shell* has to be worth a look.

MONKEYS OF DOOM



Steve Hogarty investigates an ape escape monkeykombat.planetquake.gamespy.com | Mod for: Doom 3

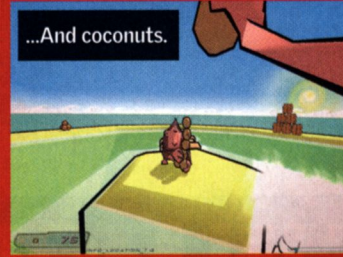
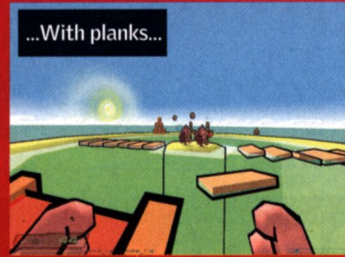
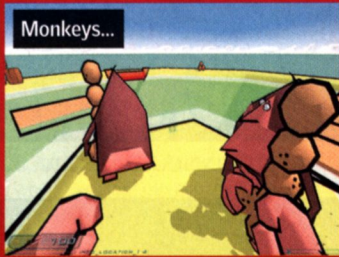
IT'S ALWAYS A good sign when random people stop doing what they're doing to ask what's happening on your monitor, and when piles of paper get chucked to the floor as somebody marches over and demands to know what monkey's doing with those coconuts. Herr W's *Monkeys Of Doom* attracts such attention, with its bright cartoon graphics and simple, monkey-based objective to fulfil.

Oddly, there's something about the Doom 3 engine which lends itself perfectly to the cel-shaded style, and *Monkeys Of Doom*, while currently just a very basic prototype for what will hopefully become a full, well-rounded mod, is one of the best-looking mods we've had the pleasure to play.

It takes place on a donut island with a pair of coconut-hurling apes in the centre, which you must defeat by whacking them with your own

coconuts. Barrels offer some protection, while floating planks offer a means of accessing the central bit with the monkeys on.

And that's it really: you can punch the monkeys in the face if you want, but throwing coconuts is the way to go. We'd love to see this expanded into something more substantial, maybe a bigger, more complex island – who knows if this will happen though. For now, it's just the monkeys.



DAWN PATROL

Steve Hogarty is an early bird

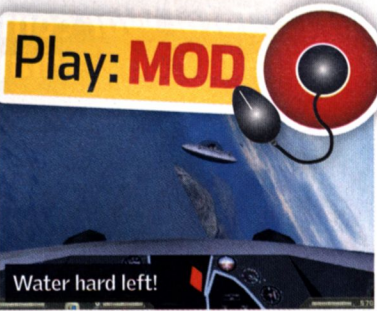


mods.moddb.com/8057 | Mod for: Battlefield 2

IT'S NOT A huge stretch of the imagination – a group of modders make eight WWI biplanes for *Battlefield 2*. They tweak the gameplay so that everybody starts in said planes. They essentially turn it into a combat flight sim, a place in which the more aerodynamically adept can keep on winning and the idiots who always run towards the planes in regular *Battlefield 2* can keep on getting shot down.

Then, maybe because one of the modders realised that things like this should never be taken seriously, they added the mod's best feature – a UFO invasion being repelled by an army of Santa Claus sleighs. Both teams have machine guns mounted somewhere on their fantasy craft, and neither seem to have any advantage over the other. The flight controls seem to have been softened considerably, making for a smoother and easier ride all round, but because machine guns are your only means of attack, actually taking out targets is extremely difficult.

As it's an early version though, these things will no doubt improve. So keep watching the skies.



PCZONE TOP 5 BATTLEFIELD 2 MODS



POINT OF EXISTENCE
Excellent and thorough mod adding tons of new reality-based weapons and vehicles.



PROJECT REALITY
Another fantastic reality mod, adding a British army and a whole host of original content.



SURREAL II
Something a bit less serious, adding bizarre fictional vehicles and scorpions with wheels and stuff.



BATTLERACER
Turns *Battlefield 2* into a lovely racing game, which even saves your best lap times online.



RISING CONFLICTS
Near-future business with prototype weapons and new armies, such as Russia and the like.

IRIS

Steve Hogarty is an Irishman and an *Iris*-man. Geddit?



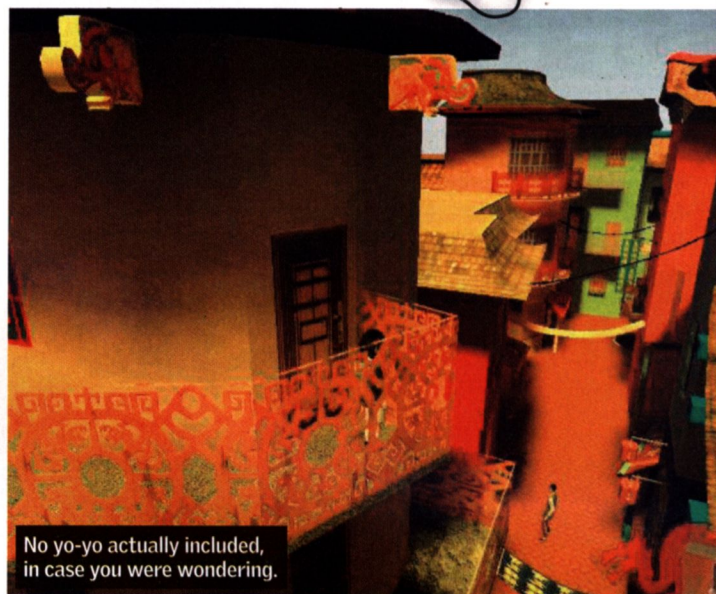
tmsweb.dk/Projekter/Irisenglish/tabid/62/Default.aspx | Mod for: Half-Life 2

THE ABILITY TO go back through time to your childhood in order to alter things in the present is one which would prove handy in any situation. It's also something I won't bother demonstrating with an amusingly absurd example because it's obvious to anybody who's played *Ocarina Of Time*. But this is the power you have in *Iris*, a prototype mod for *Half-Life 2*, a tantalising project developed only as an example of a gameplay concept. It's brilliant too, which makes it all the more painful that the developers have left it so short.

You play as Iris, a girl whose introductory monologue suggests a mysterious past which should by rights take at least an hour to figure out. After five minutes of third-person adventuring however, spanning a few time-based puzzles and some really excellent ideas, the saga ends and you're left feeling

used. It's unpolished, and a few bugs mar it slightly, but *Iris* is primarily about a concept.

It's an example of how innovative mods can be when they try hard enough, and even though it's like going to a yo-yo festival and catching a glimpse of the world yo-yo champion dropping his yo-yo and picking it up using the best yo-yo trick ever before refusing to take part, it's an enjoyable experience all the same.

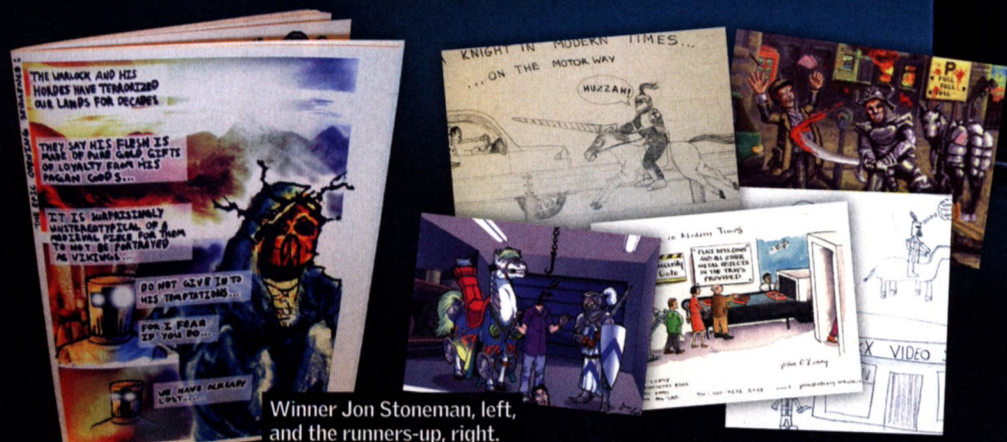


KNIGHT IN MODERN TIMES WINNERS!

Entered our *Medieval II: Total War* competition in issue 175? You may already be a winner!

WHILE ONE OF us hummed Tony Hart's 'Gallery' theme tune, another scrolled each drawing in front of our omnipotent judging eyes, on and on through hundreds of entries for our 'Knight In Modern Times' drawing competition - some of which were mini-masterpieces, some of which resembled the jagged etchings of man dying in pain. About 50 'metal detector at the airport' gags later (only one of those could win, guys), we'd chosen our victors.

So hurl your jealous hatred at Dell XPS winner Jon Stoneman and his merry band of runners-up (named below, right), whose artistic efforts won our hearts as well as copies of *Medieval II: Total War*. We've uploaded all of the winning entries (and some we just liked anyway) to www.flickr.com/photos/pczone for you to comment on and browse through (wondrous web 2.0 thing that it is). Keep reading *PC ZONE* for the best competitions ever thought up!



Winner Jon Stoneman, left, and the runners-up, right.

Main prize: Jon Stoneman
Runners up: Simon Taylor, Alan Murphy, Jonathon Duke, John O'Leary, Mike Clark

CALL OF JUAREZ MAP PACK



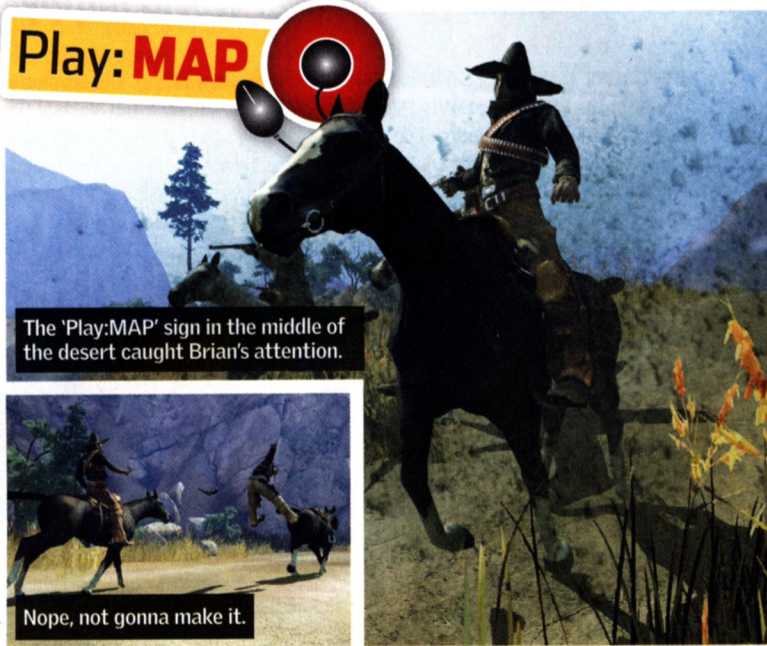
Steve Hogarty gets out his A-Z and flips to J www.coj-game.com/ | Map for: Call Of Juarez

DID YOU ENJOY the cowboy game? We did, apart from when it chucked you out of the game for slapping a horse. Well, here comes the combined force of *Call Of Juarez* developers Techland and Focus Home Interactive, like the witless and clumsy rookie lawman who unwittingly defeats the team of bandits and saves the day.

They've delivered, in a madcap and physically humorous way no doubt, eight new multiplayer maps for the Wild West shooter which will, in their words, give you eight new reasons to draw off your guns in multiplayer mode.

Each map is playable in the game's four online modes, and they don't stretch the theme too much. Small, dusty towns and canyons are the flavour of the day here, and each locale supplies its fair share of fun. If you play *Call Of Juarez* multiplayer, and would like eight more maps, then your situation is oddly tailored towards grabbing this pack off our DVD.

Play: **MAP**



The 'Play:MAP' sign in the middle of the desert caught Brian's attention.



Nope, not gonna make it.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

Don't Call Me Stupid

Outside of the local arcade, I don't ever need to see another 'Game Over' screen, and even then it should be followed by an apology. Why do I need to fail and be asked to start again? Yesterday, I booted up the *Sonic* demo, ran forward 20ft, fell off a ledge, instantly died, deleted the demo and will never play it again.

I've already spent my money, so entertain me! Don't punish me with pointless repetition or a sudden end to my game. A good game makes players feel like they can't fail, that they can only make different choices that sometimes have negative results. It may seem like a semantic difference, but it's actually crucial to making a player want to try again instead of throwing the controller at the wall.

In *The Sims* series, we tried to make every failure case funny. What's funnier than peeing your pants? Nothing! And what's the consequence? You're dirty, so go take a shower. It may cost you time, which is the most valuable resource in the game, but it keeps you playing. In *Spore*, we're trying to make any creature you build feel like a success, no matter how foolish the creation decisions may be, by making any location on your creature's body a valid place to put a new part. If you want to put that mouth on your creature's back, fine - we'll make the eating animation look cool. After all, you're paying us, not the other way around...

And if you do need to kill the player or fail them during a mission, then dump them straight back in the game-world like *Halo* or *GTA3* before they think of something better to do. A good design principle is to just keep removing the features that give the player a reason to stop playing and put down the controller, until the experience only stops through player choice, not through frustration or failure. It should be like Japanese condoms - the choices are large, extra-large and super-large. Nobody wants to feel small.

SPORE WILL BE RELEASED IN 2007 - WWW.SPORE.COM

AEROFAR

Steve Hogarty falls off a blimp www.map-factory.org/?m=445 | Map for: Far Cry



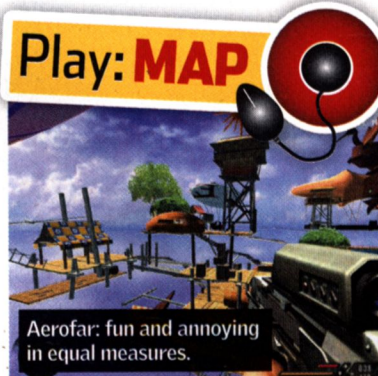
FAN-MADE FAR CRY maps struggle to break away from the game's tropical island theme, either because jungles and water look so nice or because people are just too lazy to think of anything else.

The French guys who made this deathmatch map have managed to buck the leafy trend though, creating a *Far Cry* map containing a multi-tiered fort connected to several docked airships and littered with ladders, platforms and all sorts of adventure park-style fun. It's just like being a kid again, except you're

not outdoors and you're not keeping fit.

Online, the Aerofar map is annoying and fun in equal measures. Falling from great heights is a common occurrence, as is being randomly and unexpectedly killed by people hiding in unknown locations. Keep the number of players down though and it becomes a lot more enjoyable. All of the different routes through the map makes for some interesting deathmatching, and the treacherous falls which loiter around every corner mean you can never be too careful either. Find it on our DVD.

Play: **MAP**



Aerofar: fun and annoying in equal measures.

All the primary colours are included.



Relive *Far Cry* in a totally new way.



Need:

A Steam account for multiplayer
A desire to decapitate, rend,
wound and smite

What you'll get:

- ✔ To kick orcs off cliffs!
- ✔ To kick knights into spikes!
- ✔ To kick necromancers into fire!
- ✘ Tired legs

Make life easier in... **Dark Messiah: Might & Magic**

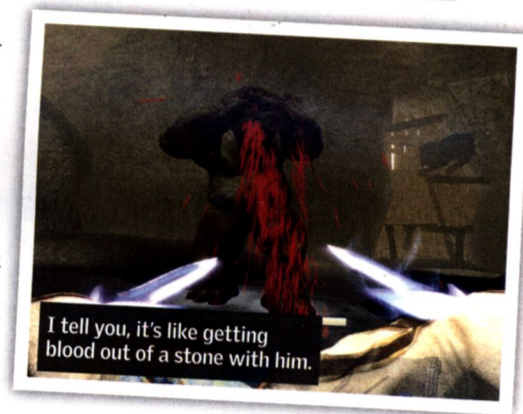
Jon Blyth turns your brutal world happy...

LAST YEAR'S **DARK MESSIAH** promised – as have many others – to revolutionise combat in the RPG format. What it did was provide great cast-and-slash action. Decapitations felt deserved, magic was enjoyable and sometimes cleverly used, and the game took the concept of environmental weaponry to its absurd conclusion. The first thing you'd do when you entered a room was look for a chandelier tied precariously to the ceiling or barrels on a curiously high shelf. But if you're thinking about taking a late journey into the Source-powered world of *Might & Magic*, there are a number of ways you can make your journey less gruelling...



01 SOFTLY NOT CATCHY MONKEY

Stealth is the choice of a few earnest role-players who like to imagine themselves as skipping stones across the puddles of night. Sounds lovely, but *Dark Messiah* isn't the best game for rogues and burglars. The game is weighted towards action rather than RPG, and your efforts to create a crafty assassin will be rewarded with slow progress. You'll miss out on the best spells and slicey-dicey weapons, and face a final boss battle that's totally tilted towards projectile attacks. If you still stubbornly insist on creeping around, make sure you invest in your archery skill.

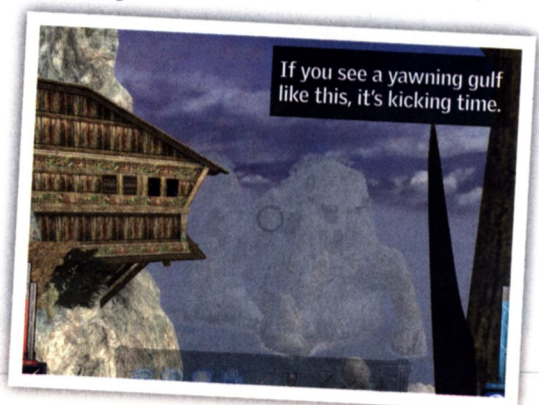


02 Forgery

Forging weapons is an important part of *Dark Messiah*, though you might be underwhelmed by the forges for the first few levels. The only thing you can make is a Long Sword, and you can find those lying around anyway. In Chapter 7, however, you'll find a bar of Flamegold, which you can use to make the excellent Earthfire Sword, which is great for killing those damn spiders. If you don't purify your soul in the Sanctuary of Ylath (see point six, opposite), this is the best sword you're going to get.

03 KICK OFF

The visual clues for quick kills are often pretty obvious – there's more beds of spikes than a Soho S&M parlour. And kicking is often the quickest and most economical way to get them dead. Any sign of a precipice should have you kicking orcs over it like a can-can hooligan, and don't forget that fire is more deadly than the graphics would imply. If you want to give your legs a rest, a fireball into a patch of oil can be a great way of avoiding direct contact.

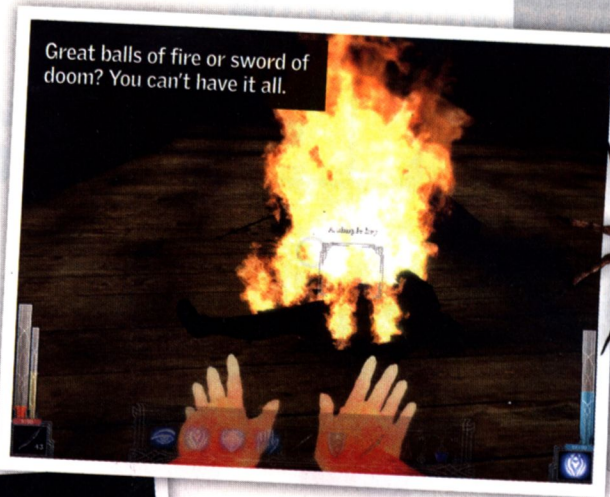


Forge yourself a nice new set of iron underpants.

04 My speciality



There aren't enough skill points in the game to specialise in more than one area. By the time you approach the end of the game, make sure you've got the highest level in one of the disciplines, and build up archery if you don't have other projectile weapons. Having a well-rounded character is not going to help you when you realise you haven't got the skills to wield the game's best weapons. If you want to play the game as an incredible mage, warrior and thief, you're going to have to play it three times, or download some console cheats.



Great balls of fire or sword of doom? You can't have it all.



05 YOU'RE POISON

Poison is one of the most irritating things about fighting the spiders and ghouls in *Dark Messiah*. Antidote potions aren't too common, and if you use one mid-battle you're likely to get re-poisoned immediately. Don't waste antidotes – just heal or potion yourself when you need it. Remember, spiders are susceptible to flames, and an adrenalin-boostered fireball speaks louder than a couple of crap daggers. The Altar of the Skull (Level 6) can be a real test of patience for poison, and it's better not to fight when you can avoid it. Remember, you don't get rewarded on a per-kill basis.



Spiders hate flames. Simple as that.

06 Xana see, Xanadu

Deciding whether or not to get rid of Xana – your kinky, bitchy, demon narrator and internal companion – is a tough one, especially if you're scared of imaginary characters screaming at you. But doing so allows you to use the Sword of the Dragonclaw, and the weapons found in the Sanctuary of Ylath (Chapter 9). They're beyond a doubt the best weapons of their class – almost to the point of imbalance – and you're only losing a 'demon mode' that you probably didn't use that much in the first place. Also, if you don't get rid of her, you'll have to kill Leanna, and she seems quite nice.



The ladies really mess with your head in *Dark Messiah*.

07 PAO-KAI KAPOW

Dark Messiah may reward pure warriors with unprecedented levels of hacking and slicing, but when it comes to the final (final) boss battle with Pao-Kai, you're in for a bummer of a showdown unless you've got some projectiles. A stock of fireball scrolls, a semi-decent bow, anything that means you don't have to run around chasing the flapping sod's tail with a sword that suddenly seems rubbish. It can be done, but warriors be warned – it's not much fun.



A dagger is not much good against an undead flying demon lord.

08 MULTIPLAYER

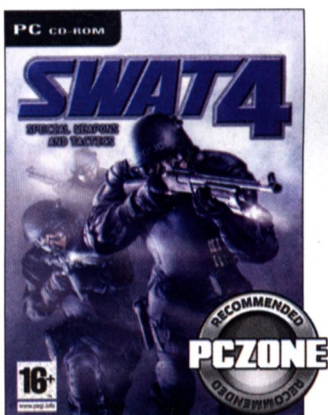
The multiplayer is a whole different barrel of eggs, and strangely allows for more genuine role-playing than the single-player game. Classes not only offer you *Team Fortress*-like skills, but experience, levelling and advanced techniques that can prove devastating. This also means the game can be daunting to beginners, as better players quickly get stronger, allowing them to 'pwn teh n00bs' even more regularly than they normally would. Know your class, use your abilities and remember that there's at least one class you could probably take on effectively. **PCZ**

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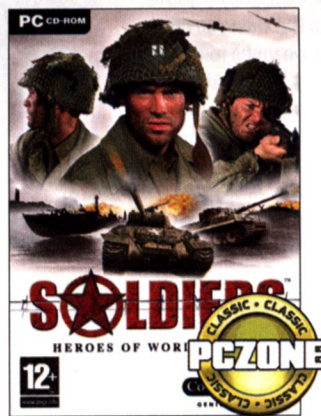
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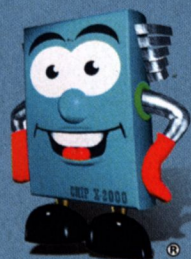
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Retro ZONE

We know that video killed the radio star, but did Videopac kill anybody? No, so stop accusing it...

VIDEOPAC G7000



BUT HOW?

Well, you're not going to need a dual-core SLI configuration. Just the emulator package, a bios file and the cartridge ROMs. They're easily found on the Net – just check out the two links below. Mentioning that this is illegal seems virtually redundant; who the hell is going to prosecute you for playing a really crap version of *Frogger*? Still, though. It's illegal. In fact, just putting these two links so close together is probably going to get us all killed by Godzillas.

Links...

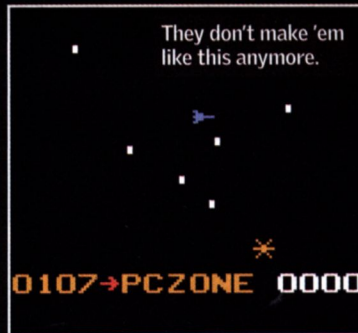
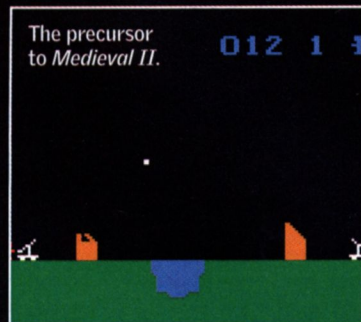
1 O2EM
o2em.sourceforge.net
 The open-source home of the O2EM project.

2 Odyssey 2 Roms
www.videogamearchive.com/emu/o2_rom.htm
 ROMs. Don't use them to emulate games, etc...

BEING BORN IN 1974 and brought up in a pub, I was one of the first kids in '78 to see – and steal money to play – *Space Invaders*. I never realised what a powerful position I was in. I could have befriended people twice my age by saying: "Come to my pub and play videogames." Instead, I embarked on the obsession solo.

The purchase of a Videopac was an act of desperation on the part of my parents to clear their pub of my stubborn, obsessive and prone-to-vomiting younger self. It was plain bribery – they'd get me a console, and I wouldn't upset their customers by screaming, kicking and vomiting on new machines whenever I got killed.

The Videopac G7000 – or Schneider, Jet 25, Siera, depending where you lived



– were localisations of the Magnavox Odyssey2, the first of the post-Pong second-gen consoles. With its keyboard, it prepared young gamers on the righteous path to the PC. There was even a BASIC programming cartridge, allowing you to write programs up to, but barely exceeding, the complexity of INPUT \$, PRINT \$ EATS TOILET PAPER.

The Videopac sold well, despite suffering from a shade of invisibility. There were virtually no third-party

developers (Parker converted four of their arcade games, with only some success), advertising was minimal and in Nottingham, you'd have to trek up to the 5th floor of John Lewis past the carpets to get the games.

When the shiny new ColecoVisions and Famicoms started to come out, there were vague attempts to upgrade, but everyone knew it was time. A million Videopacs sighed, put on their boxes and shuffled off to the garage.

SIX OF THE BEST

The games that failed to change anything

Q-BERT
 Parker's conversion dropped the cubes and lost the foul-mouthed outbursts – the voice synthesiser cost extra.

QUEST FOR THE RINGS
 Gauntlet-esque class selection with dragon avoidance. Warrior, wizard, changeling?

TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN!
 Run into little men, nod your head and your money goes up and down. Baffling.

PACHINKO
 A game of bouncing balls, luck and getting hit on the back of the head by the same ball you bounced around.

BOWLING
 Simply the worst bowling simulator ever. Seriously, it's so awful it creates a sense of empty desolation.

POPEYE
 You're Popeye. That green mess, Bluto. And the pink thing puking on your foot? That's your girlfriend, Olive.

NOW & THEN

Rayman Raving Rabbids vs Gorf

NOW



RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

THEN



GORF



JUST TO BE clear, we're not saying that *Rayman Raving Rabbids* is a collection of five mini-games, each one more stolen than the last. We're likening these two games due to their pick-up-and-playability. *Gorf* uses an eight-way joystick and is a sluggish, laborious affair, while *Rayman* uses the mouse (or Wii remote if you're that way inclined).

Gorf contains five games, one with a blue background, while *Rayman* has over 70 games with names like *Bunnies Are Very Fond of Plungers* and *Bunnies Can't Close Doors*.



The similarities are amazing. But, at least *Gorf* doesn't wear a stupid hat that reads, 'Look at me I'm so ruddy zany and Gallic' and shroud itself in screaming non-sequiturs like a bad episode of *Family Guy*. Somehow though, the entire bunny thing is endearing on some weird ironic level – which ultimately leads us to the reluctant conclusion that with *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, mini-game-based titles have hit a new high. See page 104 for more on how to get a Wii remote and your PC talking...

PLAY IT!

Here in the increasingly irrelevant Play It! boxout, things are hotting up. It's Now & Then time again, and that means it's our time to shine. So you want to play *Gorf*? Well prepare to be vaguely told how...

- 1 Tear off this corner of the page carefully, you'll need these instructions later.
- 2 Now, holding the instructions in front of your face, crane your entire upper body two-degrees clockwise.
- 3 Have a friend gradually pull the magazine away from you, about four inches should do it.
- 4 You should now be reading Jon Blyth's MAME Frame, which tells you how to download MAME. Google the rest. Eat these instructions.



Remember this?

MAME FRAME

The world according to *Gorf* Developer: Midway | Year: 1981

STUFF OFF, WARIOWARE. Get thee behind me, *Bishi Bashi*. *Gorf* is mini-gaming at its plagiaristic conception. Midway's genius – apart from allowing you to spend more money to play the six-lives game – was to steal Namco, Konami and Taito's games, repackage them as a level in their space epic and add a potato robot that hopped through levels.

Play *Space Invaders* – sorry, *Astro Quest* – then *Laser Attack*, then *Galaxians*. The 's' being the only change

from the original game. *Space Warp* featured *Gyruss*-esque swirls, but it was the last level – *Flag Ship* – that pitted you against a BOSS. Bosses were still cool in the '80s, remember. Kill the Flag Ship, get a promotion, repeat on hard.

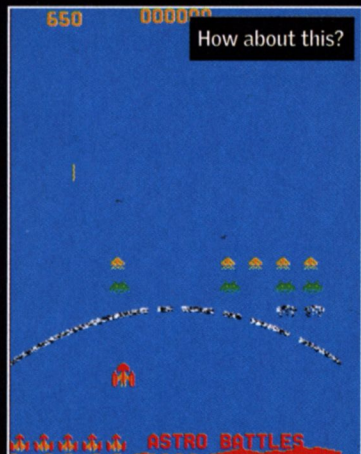
The sequel, *Ms Gorf*, has been lost on an unreadable format in obscure code, but possibly had echoes of the creator's real life – *Gorf* creator Jay Fenton now lives a happy life as a rather good-looking lady.



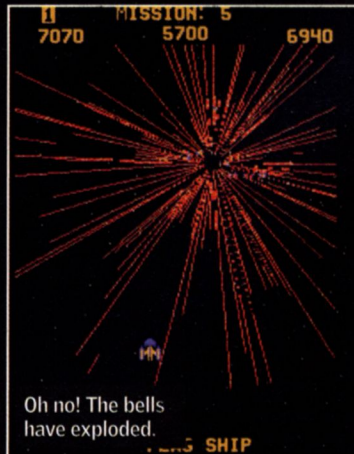
GORF



Does this ring a bell?

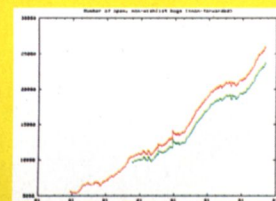


How about this?



Oh no! The bells have exploded.

BACK IN THE DAY...



FOXES AND RABBITS

By Jon 'Log' Blyth

Foxes And Rabbits was a program – I can't in honesty call it a game – that you watched. It was the first program I ever ran on my ZX Spectrum, and I'd had the machine hyped up by an over-eager father. He told me that it could do literally anything, and when I said, "What, anything?", he replied, "Yes, anything!" The machine didn't stand a chance – I expected nothing less than a stream of cuddly foxes and rabbits to come flying out of my TV. It was my first lesson in crushing disappointment; the program simply plotted the population of rabbits and foxes over time. Hypothetical foxes that you didn't even see.

Just a stupid, smelly chart that I hated so much I wanted to scream forever.

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

Magazines
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reading...

they're for
reloading.

The logo for 'jolt online gaming' features the word 'jolt' in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font. A bright yellow lightning bolt strikes the letter 'o'. Below 'jolt', the words 'online gaming' are written in a smaller, blue, lowercase sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a dark, textured background with scattered bullet casing.

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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill bids farewell to *Guild Wars: Nightfall*...

IT'S GROUNDHOG DAY again. Or in my case, *Guild Wars* day. Deadline is imminent, and as soon as I wake – crippled with pain from my sofa-ravaged spine – I know what I must do: check the mail for free stuff, have a long bath and fashion a rudimentary breakfast. After a bit of Sky Sports News, I'm just about ready to throw myself into a fantasy world where flowers stalk the land and insects are the size of dogs. Scarier still are the great unwashed of the online community; a necessary evil, as without human interaction this would be an even more moribund tale. Loosely akin to fishing, it's generally a case of wandering around until some hapless lol-er pipes up: "Are you Steve Hill? What really? No really? PCZ roxx!!!"

I don't have time to f*** about today though, and in order to smooth my passage I ask the editor of this rag to post a missive on the forum inviting (presumably jobless) readers to join me, thus securing immortality within these hallowed pages. With the come-and-get-me plea duly posted, I make the unusual decision to leave the house, strolling round a local park to clear my head before facing the horrors that await.

In bleak midwinter, it's a depressingly grey corner of a once verdant Albion. But

at least the plants aren't attacking me and any insects are easily crushed underfoot. That said, a goat looks at me in a funny way and I hastily beat a retreat. Back at my hi-tech open prison, it's half an hour to *Countdown* and I could do with getting this out of the way. The forum yields a solitary response, and this from the same bloke who stalked me last issue.

PERFECT MATCH

Not a promising start, I dive into Elona anyway (lucky her) and attempt to level-up my weedy Dervish. It's a thankless task, and after a number of senseless deaths I give up and fire up a game of online poker. Two dollars and ten minutes later, I check back on *Guild Wars* to find that I've been inundated with messages. First to get my attention is Seltack The Warrior, who shrewdly asks: "Doing another NeverQuest?"

Next up is a dual assault from Paine Spiritbinder and Duras Spiritbinder, who, by typing alternate words come up with: "Hello Mr Hill, how is *Guild Wars* with you?" "I apologise if we freaked you out,"

"So what's this month's NeverQuest gonna be?" "Whatever happens in the next hour or so," I reply truthfully

says Paine, "but I kinda take it as a pro that I have a fraternal twin." Sigh.

And still they come, with Mathias Armazan beaming: "Oh cool! Hill is online! Where are you? You gotta tell me, I really need to meet you." He offers his undying help and I agree to meet in a well-lit area, where a further reader joins us, by the name of Da Wee Ninja. All of a sudden we have a reasonably formidable party, and Mathias squeals with excitement: "So what's this month's NeverQuest gonna be?"

"Whatever happens in the next hour or so," I reply, truthfully, before explaining that I have some dull quests to carry out.

"Dull quests! Sounds good," cheers Da Wee Ninja.

"Dull quests it is," confirms Mathias.

THWART THE WART

Checking my logbook, it's with no small embarrassment I announce that I need to find an impressive warthog. Even the earnestly enthusiastic Mathias sees the funny side, although as I explain to him and Da Wee Ninja: "You are basically my bodyguards."


It's a role they happily assume, albeit not particularly efficiently, as an attack from a swarm of Preying Lances sees me die an early death. "Oh no!" screams Da Wee Ninja. "I let Steve Hill die!"

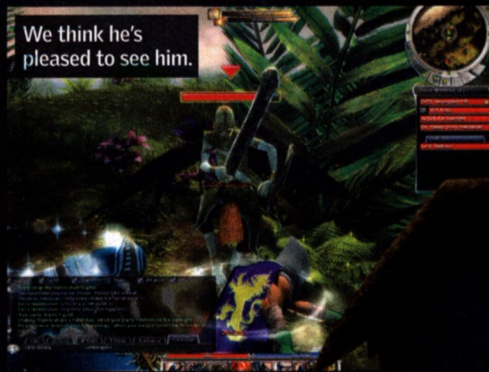
(Un)fortunately, in the land of Elona, death is not permanent and I'm soon back on my suede-clad feet.

"Those quests are more like errands to me," proclaims Mathias, with the arrogance of a man who's wasted hundreds of hours of his life in a fantasy world. In his defence, he bows his head out of respect and asks me if I have any more dull quests.

VODKA TONIC

I've got umpteen, but I tell him to meet me in 20 minutes, as I need to watch *The Simpsons*. He practically starts crying, so I take pity and press on regardless. That's the kind of sacrifice I'm prepared to make for you, the *PC ZONE* reader, another of whom, Kai Darklight, soon joins us. It has to be said, as a bodyguard he makes a great onlooker, and when I'm smote yet again I begin to lose interest in the whole thing.

Somebody called In Vodka Veritas chips in with: "I hope you get paid overtime, working this late," and he certainly has a point. Despite the pleading from my loyal following, my decision is made: "F*** this, I'm off for my tea." 



SUPERTEST

GAMING'S SCARIEST MOMENTS

Because the humble PC has given us some worrisome moments, and no mistake...



YOUR VIEW

Last month we went on about top games of 2007. And our survey said...

Supreme Commander

"I loved *Total Annihilation* and so far the trailers have been jaw-droppingly good - I can tell that Chris Taylor is going to deliver. If he doesn't, I'll have to buy something else."

Jbeckwith

BioShock

"I can't think of any game that has me quite as stoked. Irrational are going to have to do something pretty bloody drastic for me to be convinced that this isn't going to be complete joy on a disc."

Dogen_D_Derrible

More BioShock

"*BioShock* looks to be more my thing than just about anything else. There's also *Spore* on the horizon, but I can't shake the feeling that it's going to be a very light game wrapped in a big concept."

Csdaveuk

STALKER:

Shadow Of Chernobyl

"For the simple reason that it seems to be actually bloody coming out this time around."

Corporate_Sniper

WOW: The Burning Crusade

"It simply has to be *WOW: The Burning Crusade* as my most anticipated game of 2007. Damn you Blizzard and your crack-on-disc!"

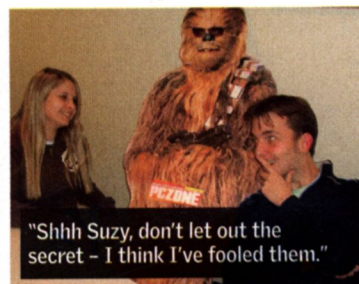
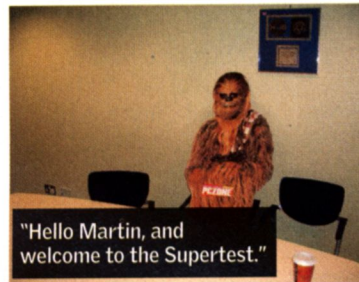
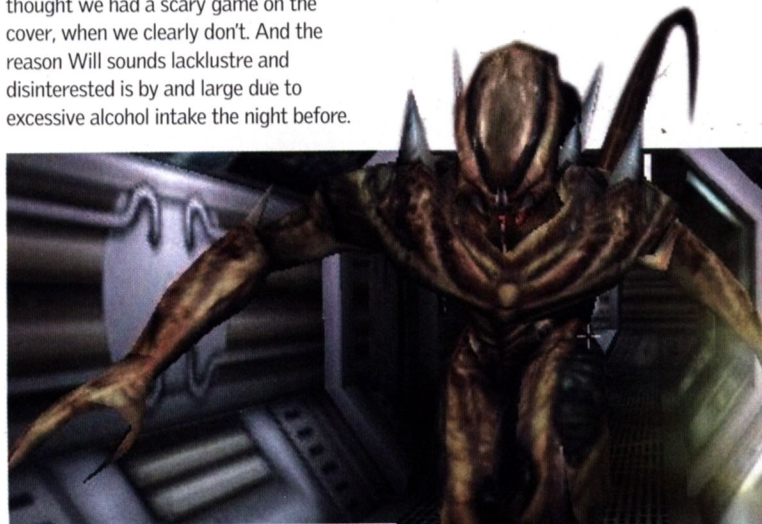
slackdog

ORGANISING A SUPERTEST shouldn't be too hard, you'd think. You put some people in a room, make them talk for a bit then press the 'Off' button. Simple. Until hapless deputy editor Will Porter takes charge that is! Honestly, the man could have an entire sitcom devoted to him - and even then it could only revolve around him falling over.

So anyway - the reason we've got pictures of us with Chewbacca on this page is because Martin Korda came in to help out but Will forgot to take a photo - and Chewie was the nearest equivalent to hand. The reason we're talking about scary moments in games is because Will thought we had a scary game on the cover, when we clearly don't. And the reason Will sounds lacklustre and disinterested is by and large due to excessive alcohol intake the night before.

Nevertheless! Scary shock moments devoured by the team include the varied works of Monolith, yet more *Doom 3*-supporting anecdotes from clueless chump Porter and the now traditional *Thief 3* trumpeting. There was also excitement at the forthcoming *Jericho*, along with some Ravenholm reminiscence.

So, if you've never been to a Korda dinner party and heard the chortling as Martin tells his '*Alien Versus Predator 2* pipe story', then tune on in! Then wander on over to www.pczone.co.uk, enter the warm embrace of our forums and debate our ramblings while vying for possible inclusion in next month's mag. Normal service resumed next month. **PCZ**



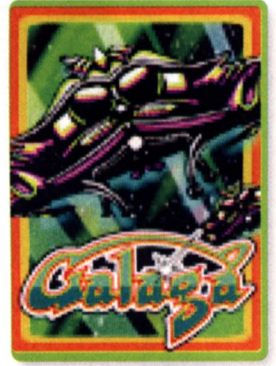
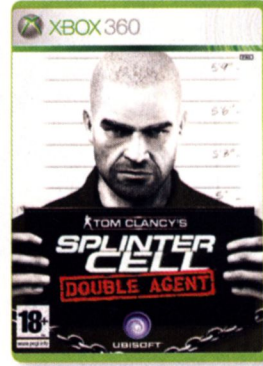
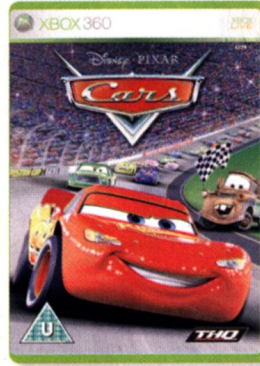
If you've never heard the chortling as Korda tells his '*Alien Versus Predator 2* pipe story', then tune in!



Oh no, hang on - that really is scary.

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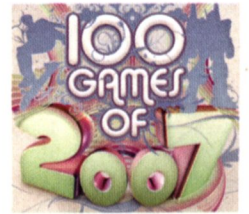
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DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS

Jon Blyth finds out just how the chaos was conjured...



WE WERE QUICK to award *Mark Of Chaos* a recommended award in issue 176, but it certainly wasn't without its faults. However, one accusation you couldn't lay at its door was a lack of respect for its tabletop origins – of all the games so far, *Mark Of Chaos* seems to tip most hats towards the universe's hobbyist core. From 'painting' your troops, to the game novelisation and colour-your-own-standard that comes with the *Collector's* edition, *Mark Of Chaos* takes the *Warhammer* universe very seriously. We spoke to Black Hole Entertainment's creative director Istvan Zsuffa (left) and senior project manager Gabor Illes (right) about the process that took them from having a scant acquaintance with the *Warhammer* universe to becoming fully immersed in the bloody heart of it all...



The Black Hole team were well schooled in *Warhammer* ways before being let loose on the spears and armour.

Always be wary of enemies who carry a two-handed axe in one hand.

01 HUNGARY FOR BLOOD: Illes: "*Warhammer* isn't that popular in Hungary, so only a few of us had played the *Warhammer* tabletop game before starting work on *Mark Of Chaos*. However, most of us knew about the *Warhammer* universe in another way. The *Fighting Fantasy* series of books, created by the founder of Games Workshop, were really popular in Hungary back in the 1980s. After that, we started to learn more about the *Warhammer* universe and our artists spent a lot of time with *Warhammer* art and played with the miniatures too."

"We didn't have to use the values that Games Workshop have in their manuals, we just had to make sure that the characters and historical stuff were true to their world"

Istvan Zsuffa, creative director, Black Hole Entertainment



To Games Workshop – and to many *Warhammer* fans – this universe is far from make-believe.



02 WARLOCK OF TABLETOP MOUNTAIN: Illes: "The guys at Games Workshop told us they didn't want to make a computer version of the tabletop game, because they just wanted us to make a good computer game with their world. But we wanted to use as much of the origin of the *Warhammer* game as we could. Painting the miniatures and making the different armies is a lot of fun and what the tabletop game is all about. Reproducing that fun was our goal."

Zsuffa: "Games Workshop really feel their universe is real, and that they're just dealing with one possible interpretation of that universe. They just said that we had to come up with another possible interpretation of that universe. So we didn't have to use the values they have in their manuals, we just had to make sure the characters and historical stuff was true to their world."

03 LICENCE TO KILL EVERYTHING:

Illes: "Namco bought the licence from Games Workshop, so we weren't involved in that part of getting the licence. But Games Workshop came to Hungary when Namco told them that Black Hole Entertainment were making the game. The producers came

to make sure we had the experience and the knowledge of the *Warhammer* universe to make the game. As I said, we had some experience of the *Warhammer* world, but by the time Games Workshop came to visit us we knew almost everything about it."



04 GAMES WORKSHOP HQ: Zsuffa: "The company is very different to any other we've ever seen. As we said before, the world is completely real to the people at Games Workshop. They talk about the history like it's real, they know every single aspect of it – it's a great place. We saw the museum (where every *Warhammer* figure is professionally painted in glass cases) and we met some great guys. We also visited Bugman's bar, the dwarven bar in the Nottingham offices. It was a really interesting experience – it sounds like I'm just being polite, but I'm not. The only thing we had problems with was the huge amount of beer they could drink. Well, it wasn't a problem, but we were amazed that there are people in the world who can drink that much..."

Drunk Games Workshop staff sadly not pictured.



LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

05 TIME LIMIT: Zsuffa: "It was very easy to make a game in this world, because Games Workshop are very open. We could create our own characters and stories, we could even change the world; the core world of the *Warhammer* universe – especially the old fantasy universe – is very flexible with its facts. We could even change the world maps – not to make serious changes, but in their world slight changes are OK. *Warhammer* maps are notoriously subjective to the person making the map. The only bottleneck was the time involved. We only had 18 months to make the game, which is really short for a game of this type." Illes: "When we say they were open, we mean they were open to discussion. We had to get approval for every single aspect still, and there was a complex approval process – each character had to be approved by Games Workshop."



06 REGRETS: Illes: "If we had more time and could start development again, we'd pay much more attention to the tactical aspect of the game, the connection between the different battle maps. You can't move freely or conquer cities and develop your castles. You can move between locations and enter cities to build up your armies and buy stuff, but if we had more time we'd make it far more complicated, making it a far more old-school tactical map with an open story, with every single aspect paying more attention to the player."



More, more, more: expansions are probable for *Mark Of Chaos*, but will Black Hole be involved?

"If we had more time we'd make it more complicated, ensuring it's a far more old-school tactical map with an open story that pays more attention to the player"

Gabor Illes, senior project manager, Black Hole Entertainment



We can't be certain, but they're probably whistling as they walk.

07 EXPANSIONS: Zsuffa: "We know there's an expansion pack planned, but we don't know yet if we'll be working on it. Of course, we'd hope to be able to work on the pack. For example, four armies is enough for a normal PC game, but the *Warhammer* universe has many more. We'd definitely want to add two or three more armies, as a minimum."

Illes: "We also wanted to make the game more bloody. We wanted to implement decapitations and put real gore on the battlefield. We wanted a lot of blood, with body parts falling away. However, because of the short development time, we didn't have a chance to do this. Because it's a mature game, we'd be able to do everything we wanted to do with more time."



08 DAWN OF WAR: Illes: "We wanted to make a totally different game to *Relic Dawn Of War* was a base-building game, and all the old *Warhammer* fans we talked with told us that they wouldn't want to see another base-building game. Fantasy *Warhammer* is totally different, it isn't about that. It's about huge armies fighting on an open battlefield, so that's why we decided to make it this way. It wasn't an easy decision for us, because *Armies Of Exigo* was a base-building game and that's where our experience is. We had to write a lot of new code and a lot of new AI, but I think it was all worth it." **PCZ**



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This month's question: what band/artist made the first album you ever bought?

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PCZONE.CO.UK Editor John Houlihan 020 7042 4311 The Damned
Hardware Photography In-house
Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

DEMENTIA

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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3300



Printed in the UK by Southernprint

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On sale Thursday, March 1st. Beer was finally legalised in Iceland on this day in 1989, so go and have a pint to celebrate Icelandic Beer Day!



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. We're fickle like that.

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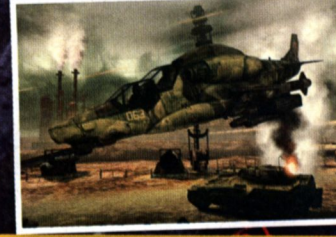
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