

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

PCZONE

ISSUE 183 AUGUST 2007



EXCLUSIVE!

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The Russian empire strikes back!



BIOSHOCK HANDS-ON

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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

44

WORLD IN CONFLICT

Fast, deep and gorgeous – is this Cold War stunner the future of strategy?

WATCHDOG 100

You wag your finger at Ubisoft, they calmly answer back

BILZARD
SPECIAL

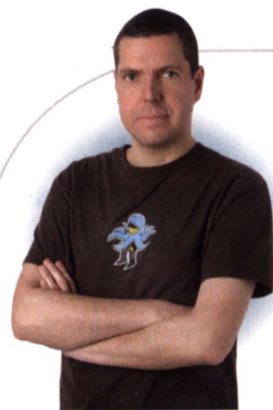
STARCRRAFT II 20
THE TOP-SECRET ANNOUNCEMENT
THAT CAUSED KOREAN GIRLS TO GRUNT

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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34 BIOSHOCK
20 STARCRRAFT II

Too busy? PC ZONE in 55 words...
Imagine everyone in the mag in a doctor's waiting room. Conan, king of Hyboria, has just snaffled the last *Woman's Realm*, leaving a disgruntled Big Daddy from *BioShock* with a battered *Reader's Digest*. The Russians are in with the nurse, and the receptionist just got Zerg-rushed. Who's the doctor? Why, it's Colin McRae! *Fonz-like applause*



VISTA RANT

IF MICROSOFT WANTS to impress upon PC lovers that Windows Vista is the next step in gaming, then so far they've spectacularly failed. Every format needs its 'killer app' and so far, all we've had is an extremely lacklustre *Halo 2* port, and as you'll read on p78, an average Xbox 360/PC-crossover shooter, *Shadowrun*. And that's without mentioning Vista's compatibility with existing games, as well as known conflicts with hardware such as soundcards.

Shamefully, it's an utter mess at the moment. The PC is the most versatile platform for games – fact. Where else can you play online shooters such as *Counter-Strike*, ambitious RTS games like *Supreme Commander*, thousands of free games and mods, a heap of arcade MAME titles and MMOs like *World Of Warcraft*?

I'm sure that the situation will get better – everyone is waiting for *Crysis*, the stunning game that will truly kick off the DX10 graphics revolution in beautiful style. However, in the short term, the confusion over compatibility, the price structure of Microsoft's PC online gaming community – Games For Windows LIVE, and the lack of must-buy Vista titles is hampering the PC's development as a leading games platform. Bill Gates, outside now...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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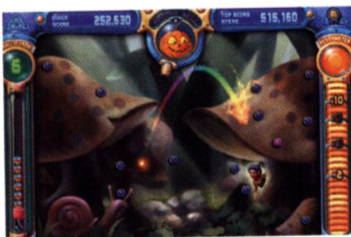
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Colin may be shy of the limelight, but the game that bears his name is a muddy corker...

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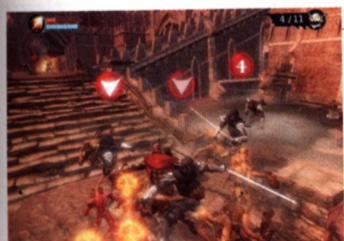
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FREE
MAD
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GAME FOR EVERY
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Join us as we revel in an era of gaming that most would rather forget. All hail the interactive movie!

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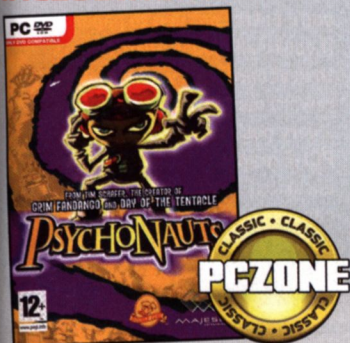
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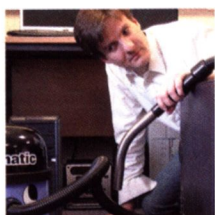
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Turn to page 118 for more information

Closing date: December 31, 2007



PHIL WAND

Minister of the Interior

AGE: 37

LIKES: Olives and marzipan

DISLIKES: Mint chocolate, wasps

FANCIES: Sophie Lovell Anderson

FAVE GAME: *Desert Combat*

PLAYING NOW:

Supreme Commander

The long-suffering elderly relative of the PCZ collective, Wandy's role is to dole out guidance on technical and sometimes moral issues to members of the team. In fact, should any of us ever find ourselves standing over a dead body with a smoking gun in our hand, then it would certainly be Wandy to whom we'd confess our crime. He'd only be able to respond in binary, but that's half his charm. Also, he once had a hand in doing grumble websites for softcore mags like *Knave* and *Fiesta*. He keeps that relatively quiet though. We found out on Wikipedia.



WILL PORTER

Chief of Staff

Porter's attempts to re-engage with his inner headbanger at the Electric Ballroom finished with never-ending neck pain and him fishing chips out of a bin at 4am. Equally vile and delicious.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Shadowrun



SUZY WALLACE

Minister of Justice

This month, Suze has spent most of her time looking at lolcat pictures on the interweb and saying stuff like: "O hail! I am in ur office organizin ur reviews." She also likes cheezburgers.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Colin McRae: DiRT



JAMIE SEFTON

President

Sefters spends most of his time in heated negotiation with evil games publishers, sealing the deal by getting a photo of them shaking hands and waving pieces of paper in front of airplanes. It can't fail!

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Sensible World of Soccer



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

MP for Clapham North

Log's big news is he's just been to Korea, but the bigger news is that a cruel lady confiscated his bottle of vodka before he got on the plane. Next time, he'll disguise it as baby milk.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

32nd America's Cup



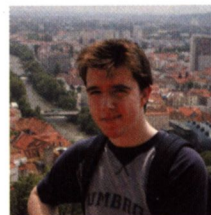
MARTIN KORDA

Head of ursine-relations

Our Martin is so frighteningly nice that famous game developers grab hold of other PCZ writers simply to enquire as to the status of his health. Our response is simply to tell them that he's hungry.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Medieval II: Total War



STEVE HOGARTY

Minister of Disinformation

After his sudden usurpation of the UpFront section's throne, Steve has been toying with absolute power. It may corrupt, but he's honestly too busy signing death warrants to care...

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

World in Conflict beta

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... Lolcats, lol dogs, lol bots, a dinner with Hal Toddingsbrook and Walthamstow stadium
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Stupid FMV adventures, Windows Vista (still) and Spurs' spiralling membership costs

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

MINT CHOCOLATE 44 Mins Will and Wandy loathe it. Yes, that includes Mint Aero and After Eights

BEAR FACES MADE OUT OF MEAT 23 Mins And which order you eat their constituent parts. Log goes for the eyes

GETTING TO WHITBY 12 Mins "How much?" We're paying for a train to get us to the north of England, not bloody Mumbai...

PUNCHING IN MIKA'S FACE 16 Mins "For farck's sake, will you turn that farcking shite off? Jesus..."

WILL'S NEW COLUMN'S NAME 343 Mins Willy Nilly? Will's Vista? Free Willy?...

"THEY'RE MAD IN KOREA!" 39 Mins No, they're just different. And you're being entirely culturally inappropriate...

STEVE'S REGENT'S PARK KRONENBERG ADVENTURE 43 Mins Hiding in bushes, running from security and other youthful night-time japes

WHO'D PLAY BJORN THE UNICORN IN PEGGLE: THE MOVIE? 43 Mins Currently in the running are Dustin Hoffman, Eric Idle and Leonard Nimoy

PANTIES 15 Mins Only porn stars wear panties. Real women wear pants or knickers. Not sexy, but true

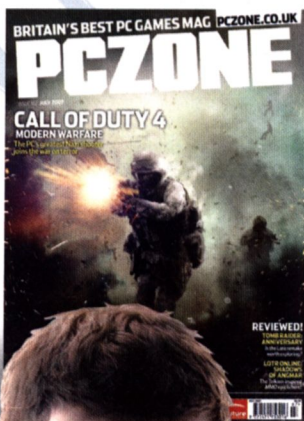
FALLOUT 3 IS GOING TO BE TOTALLY BRILLIANT 34 Mins I mean, have you seen this concept art? How can this possibly fail?

WIN!

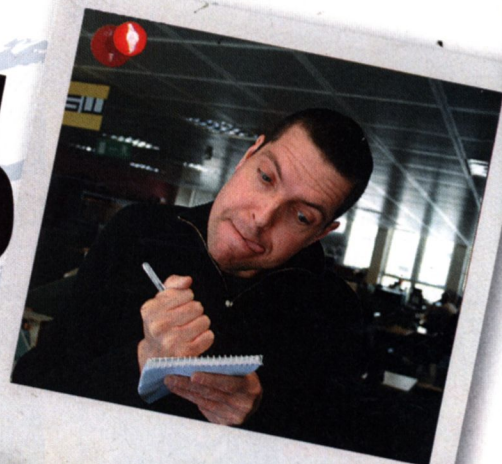
Oh hai Tiny Compo! I is in your mailbag stealin ur entries. Wut? Want cheezburger? Not want kthx! I can has winner? Thx. I has a winner: Peter Hadlam from Barry in Wales. Peter Hadlam from Barry in Wales has flavor nom nom nom lot. I are in games box sending him goodiez. Want goodiez? Not want goodiez? Snd entries to Tiny Tea Tree 183, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. kthx bye.

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. Chirp chirp!

LETTERS



Write them, type them, grill them, poach them: any which way, **Jamie Sefton** loves a good letter...



KING OF LETTERS

EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

A while ago I pointed out to my brother that there was a mistake in *Half-Life 2*. Whenever I used the hovercraft to travel forwards quickly, if I then suddenly pressed the reverse key with a direction key, the vehicle would always manoeuvre in the opposite direction.

"Ah, touché," said my brother. "A hovercraft uses a giant fan as a means of propulsion and flaps for steering. This means that whenever the propulsion is reversed, so is the steering." Fancy.

While playing through the opus, I also learned smart things about buoyancy, weight distribution, inertia and object parabolas. I swear, on some days I've just sat on my arse playing games all day and I've learnt more from doing it than when I went to school.

I also have a fast connection to the internet, so if I have a query, the answer is only

Learn while you hover.



ever minutes away. Not only that, but this fast connection enables me to clash with more intellects online than could ever have been possible ten years ago. I would post on the forums, but sometimes people frighten me.

Amb

I'm actually all for schools using games to teach kids boring subjects – imagine how much more engaged you'd be in a physics lesson if instead of hearing a balding bloke wibble on about inertia, you'd get to play with *Garry's Mod*? The government know that most stuff you learn at school is pretty useless, it's just somewhere to put kids for most of the day – like

WIN!



Want to be King Of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're all modern-like, fingers to keyboard. Every month, we'll reward our chosen royalty with a very posh XFX GeForce 8600GT PCI-E graphics card. For more info check out www.xfxforce.com. You can also buy at www.dabs.com for £94.98 – using the product code PV-T84J-UDF3.

open prisons for juveniles. This gives all parents a break and allows us adults to enjoy life for a few hours without being harassed – result! Maybe you can use your brand new graphics card to taunt the teacher that told you "playing games won't get you anywhere..."



NFS: Most Wanted – but not by Julian Callan.

101 BEST GAMES EVER?

The June issue caused quite a few thoughts to pass through my brain as I inwardly digested your decisions, so I thought I'd share them with you...

1. "How can they possibly rate them so low?" *The Movies* at no.81, *Thief* at no.55 and worst of all, *Planescape Torment* only at no.61!

2. "That must be a typo." *The Sims 2* at 51 – surely that should read 2,051?

3. "Nice to see them in the top 50." *Syndicate*, *X-Com: UFO Defence*, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* and *Fallout*.

4. "How can they be so high, perhaps it's just my taste in games?"

Civilization IV at no.3 (dull) and *Doom* at no.8 (repetitive).

5. "If *Half-Life* and *Half-Life 2* are both in the charts, why aren't the following..." *System Shock* as well as *System Shock 2*, *Baldur's Gate* as well as *Baldur's Gate 2*?

6. "How can they possibly miss out that one entirely?" *Ultima Underworld*.

7. "At least they got no.1 right!" *Deus Ex* is still the undisputed king! Keep up the good work.

Dave Arnold

You're not serious, are you? Please tell me putting *Need For Speed: Most*

"I woke up thinking *Dark Messiah* has to be one of the best games I've played"

Gareth Gilmore finds joy in yesterday

Dark Messiah:
misleadingly bright.



**SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC

Sent in by Glen Eadie

PC ZONE score: 82%

I bought *SH4*, the 'limited, only 3,000 made' edition for £49.99. However, within a few hours of play, my worst fears were realised. Bugs you said? The game is bugged! Some of the things we have to put up with include regular forced-retirement after one mission when accepting command of a new submarine, no matter how successful your combat patrols may be, no torpedo info, plus the chronometer radar and sonar functions are stuffed! On top of that, until fans got involved Ubisoft were resistant to even the concept of a patch 1.3. It's back to *SH3* and *The Grey Wolves* free add-on for me...

Your shout: 69%



Silent Hunter 4:
a bit bugged.

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

Wanted in the '101 Best Games Ever' was some kind of joke to see if us readers are awake? Where's *DEFCON*? *Lands Of Lore III*? *LEGO Star Wars*? And to a lesser extent, *Postal 2*? (Well, maybe not *Postal 2*...) The rest of the list was fairly bang-on though, but *Max Payne 2* only at 16? For shame. Anyway, great magazine!

Julian Callan

Thanks to everyone who sent in the tons of emails, letters and texts about our '101 Best Games Ever' feature. It took the team weeks of exhausting arguments and violent brawls to compile, but we would have been surprised (and disappointed) if no-one disagreed with us. This is your magazine after all. Keep sending in your choices of best PC games ever.

SHOP STROP

I'd like someone to explain to me why the section devoted to PC games in High Street shops is so pathetic. I've played the best the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3 have to offer so far, and my PC urinates all over them.

A PS3 costs about £420, a decent HDTV brings the cost up to at least a grand. You can buy a decent custom-built PC for less than £400 (that's with an AMD 4200+, a gig of DDR2 RAM, a 250GB HD and a 7600GT), and for a bit more you can bung in another gig of RAM and an 8800GTS. Let's face it, it's a bloody bargain. Why aren't more shops and software

developers exploiting this vast untapped resource?

Simon Baldwin

Yes, it's a mystery. Microsoft launched the Games For Windows initiative earlier this year to create a more unified PC 'brand' and therefore more shelf space, but I'm yet to see any significant increase. The only thing left to do is go into the nearest games shop and smash every single box that isn't for PC, shouting "Vengeance!" Although, erm, that might be illegal...

SAVE YOUR ZONE!

I'm sat down on my lunch break and I stumble on an old mag of yours and start to read it. What's this? A review I never actually read - *Dark Messiah Of Might & Magic*. The game sounded OK, but at the time I had other loves on my mind (*WOW: Burning Crusade* and *Company Of Heroes*).

I had 20 minutes left, so I thought I'd take a walk to my local games store, and there I saw a silver shimmering box; *Dark Messiah Of Might & Magic*, and it was only £15. (*Collector's Edition*, too.)

I bought it, got home, installed and played it, then woke up the next morning thinking that this has to be

ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

If I buy a pc with vista as the os, are there only certain games that will run?

philip caswell

Vista works with most games, but it's a pain. We're all going to have to get used to it though.

An easy mistake to make, but the White House has a tit in it, not on it, Jon Blyth.

Geoff

Good point.

I've poked Will Porter. Am I bad?

davidPanik

No, but we recommend you wash that finger.

Any news on *Diablo 3*?

Will V

Blizzard announced *StarCraft II*, but no *Diablo 3* - we reckon it's in the works though.



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

By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receiving details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.

STALKER: nearly a never-ending story.

"THQ should be slapped with a wet fish for steering people down the boring ending..."

Chris Long doesn't mince his words

one of the best games I've played in a long time and yet so nearly missed.

So, if you have an old copy of *ZONE*, don't chuck it, store it. You never know when you might read it again and buy something that you'd forgotten about.

Gareth Gilmore

Glad we could be a help to you Gareth. I'm sure many other readers save their copies of *ZONE* - email us a photo of your collection, and the reader with the most comprehensive collection wins an exclusive signed Certificate Of Excellence and a new game!

MULTIPLE CHOICE

First, I'd like to congratulate THQ on making one of the best first-person shooters I've ever played in *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*.

However, there's more than just one ending to this game: some you can choose and some you can't. After making it most of the way through the game, I came to the point of either talking to some guy near the beginning (which meant a mighty trek back), or carrying

on to the end - I chose the latter. After completing the game I was mightily disappointed by the final level and ending, so I looked up the other endings online.

To my surprise, I found out there's a whole different ending with new choices and a whole new great level that I missed due to not going back to talk to this bloke. This should be broadcast to the masses so they can enjoy it, and THQ should be slapped around the face with a wet fish for steering people down the boring ending road. Why did they even put it in?

Chris Long

That's a growing difficulty for developers - giving games enough freedom to let everyone enjoy a unique experience, without allowing them to bypass some great set-pieces. I have a similar grievance with BioWare for *Knights Of The Old Republic* - I completed it without bothering with HK-47 and have now (according to Will) missed out on the game's best character. Let us know what you think - have

you missed a great gaming moment by accident?

DAS IS NEIN GUT

Having read issue 181's Special Report 'Banned In Germany', I was shocked and bewildered. We're all growing up in a society of censorship and sensationalism, and I'm at a loss as to the merits of all these forced moral guidelines and public demonising of games.

Having witnessed uncut footage of a war zone conflict, censoring the results of such extreme violence can only do more harm than good. The censors would rather we see a man drop dead with a mere splatter of blood when shot, or to show small physical signs when punched and kicked. But this is to belittle the devastating impact a high-velocity bullet (or any act of violence) can have on a human body. It also leads young minds to believe that what they're seeing is a real portrayal of such violence.

Surely having such an unreal perception of violent acts leads children not be de-sensitised to real violence, but rather to the censored violence they're witnessing? It's always easier to blame a game, a movie or music for the terrible things that a young adult can do than to grapple with the complex issues present in our lives, from bullying to mental illness.

Lee Hopkins

I'm amazed that violent games are banned in Germany, who you'd think would be a forward-looking, liberal Western country (yes, I said that with a straight face). Epic's soon-to-be-on-PC *Gears Of War* - one of the biggest games in the world - is not for sale in Deutschland, for example. There's absolutely nothing wrong with violent games - at all. In fact, I want them to be more violent. *Soldier Of Fortune 3?* Bring. It. On. **PCZ**

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

EETS

www.eetsgame.com

Bright colours, cute characters and fiendish puzzles, *Eets* is the perfect remedy to a hard drive filled with gun-toting terrorists.

SUBLIMINAL FLASH

www.wordofmouthexperiment.com

Flashes annoyingly reassuring messages on your monitor. We don't need it however, because we're all attractive, confident people.

CRAPCLEANER

www.ccleaner.com

An amazing piece of software that cleans needless crap off your hard drive. Managed to clear gigs of space on our machines.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

THIS MONTH: [PTG] SHOGUN (AKA NICHOLAS TATE)

POINT OF EXISTENCE 2

www.pointofexistence.com

A must-have for *BF* fans. It has maps like *Fallen* which is infantry-only, and *Highway To Hell*, which is armour-based. It kicks ass. Buy *BF2* just to play this...

COMPANY OF HEROES

www.companyofheroesgame.com

Does this need explaining? *COH* reignited my love for the RTS. Great multiplayer, excellent single-player and it allows you to focus on tactics rather than resources.

HALF-LIFE 2: EP ONE

half-life2.com

Since I've upgraded to Vista, I couldn't be bothered to put all my completed games back onto my hard drive - although *Ep One* made it. It's good, but too short.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit the forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



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





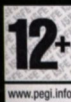
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COVER STORY

WORLD IN CONFLICT

As the explosive RTS draws closer, it looks more and more likely to be one of the hottest of the year. We get stuck into the multiplayer destruction...



WE CAN'T THINK of a better time to feature a game about an alternate-reality Cold War on our cover than right now. Putin is crushing porcelain models of Big Ben with his robotic iron fist. Blair/Brown are walking between important-looking buildings and black cars looking distraught and holding files ever more frequently. And men with funny names are eating uranium or something. Why not escape from this harsh reality with *World In Conflict*, where a hypothetical outcome to the historic political standoff sees the Reds attempting to spread communism ever deeper into our freedom loving world. What a relief...

PAGE

44





PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

The mystery machine

THIS MONTH IS a month of mysteries. Who blew up the Cutty Sark?

Who is Barry Stott and what is his connection to Cillit Bang? It's puzzling, yes; but this month is also a month for solving mysteries.

The season finale of *Lost* probably cleared something up, for example; but more importantly we finally got to see exactly what the folks at Blizzard were hiding up their cavernous sleeves, and it turned out to be *StarCraft II*. Was there ever any doubt? Well, maybe there was that brief period during which some of us honestly believed they were about to roll out a *Galaxy Of Starcraft* MMO (pah!), but for the most part we saw it coming with cautious certainty.

Now the biggest mystery is just how Blizzard managed to keep it a bloody secret. Did they divide the work up into such tiny chunks that the developers didn't even know what they were working on? So that, if asked, they could merely say, "I'm modelling a fingernail, and I really can't tell why"? Or did they simply kidnap everyone's wives and children back in 2003? It really is a mystery (imagine a ghost shrugging here, to emphasise the mysteriousness).

In other news, *World In Conflict* is so much fun, and people are going to love it. See page 44 for more on that.

Oh, and I'm not Will Porter either, so you'll be seeing a slightly different face atop this column of text from now on. And a much nicer signature to boot. Just look at it.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

CORPSE PRIDE

An original LucasArts adventure? Well, almost... Bill Tiller tells us *A Vampyre Story*

www.amegames.com/vs | ETA: Q4

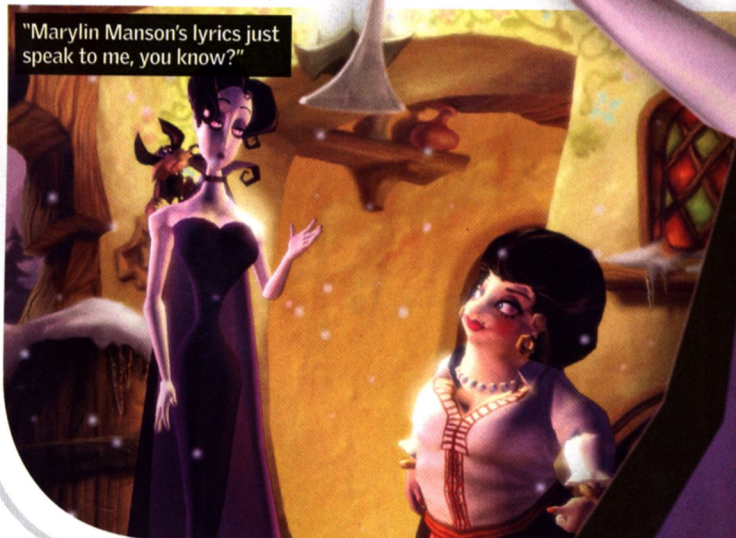
OH, TO BE a LucasArts veteran. To have lived through the days of *Monkey Island* and *Full Throttle*, and slipped away when it became about bad *Star Wars* games. To live as some sort of renegade idealist, criss-crossing the country on a Harley, rounding up a posse of old friends and starting your own development studio to produce a completely original adventure game. It's been done – a few times now in fact, (just look at *Psychonauts*) – so could we be about to see it happen again?

A Vampyre Story is the brain-baby of game-art guru Bill Tiller. It stars Mona de Laffite ("after the loading dock in the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* ride at Disneyland," explains Tiller), an unwilling

vampiress who finds herself sharing an adventure with Frederick, her friendly bat companion. Expect pointing-and-clicking on a classic LucasArts level, with vampiric abilities such as shape-shifting playing a part in the game's puzzles.

So, can we expect funny? *Monkey Island*-funny? "Sure," says Tiller, "after all, it's a comic adventure! Many people seem to think it's like *The Curse Of Monkey Island* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, just in the horror genre instead of the pirate

genre. So, while the game has a darker subject matter and art style than a pirates-in-the-Caribbean setting, and



"Marylin Manson's lyrics just speak to me, you know?"

STOP PRESS!

JOHN WOOS SPECTOR

Warren 'Deus Ex' Spector has joined forces with John 'Hard-Boiled' Woo to work on a modern-day ninja game which could well be the best thing ever.

THE PENNY DROPS

Gabe and Tycho of web comic *Penny Arcade* have revealed their new adventure game: *On The Rain-Slick Precipice Of Darkness*. Interview next issue!

SUPER GRIMM BROTHERS

American McGee, scrabbling to claw back some credibility after *Bad Day LA*, is working on *Grimm*, a 'twisted fairytale' based on the works of said brothers.

20 Blizzard feature

Jon Blyth travels to the parallel world of 'Korea' and discovers *StarCraft II*.



34 BioShock

Will Porter dances his way into the heart of Rapture with a mighty, thunderous jig.



44 World In Conflict

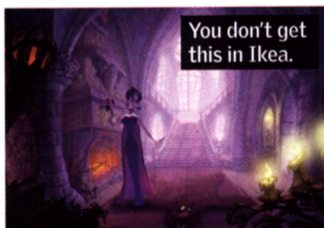
Steve Hogarty orders the deaths of thousands and the grievous injury of millions more.



definitely has its own style, we're striving to produce a game that's both very funny and unique. Our writer, Dave Harris, is one of the most talented and most funny persons ever to walk the face of the earth, and also a LucasArts veteran, so *Monkey Island*-funny is probably a good way to put it."

Just as we found with *Psychonauts* and the recent batch of *Sam & Max* games, the spirit of the old LucasArts classics is seemingly alive and well in *A Vampyre Story* – not just in the writing, but in Bill Tiller's own art style too.

"There are a lot of influences on my work," Tiller tells us. "One of my favourite artists is Edward Gorey. He might be not that famous in England – he did these great black-and-white ink drawings of



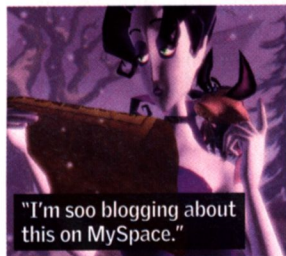
You don't get this in Ikea.

Victorian aristocrats in macabre and funny situations. He's the main inspiration, along with Dr Seuss and Tim Burton. Originally we were planning on making the game in black-and-white, using the Edward Gorey pen-and-ink style. But we abandoned it when it became clear the colour version looked better. I still want to do a short pen-and-ink-looking mini-adventure game, maybe some day."

And, as some sort of litmus test of point-and-click heritage, how many tree stump gags can we expect in the new game? "That tree stump joke never gets old," laughs Tiller. "There'll be a lot of references and homages to 'the old days' – but what exactly, you'll have to wait and see!"



The vampire/mirror gags are of a high standard.



"I'm soo blogging about this on MySpace."



Only three more legs to talk off.

WIN A LIMITED EDITION BIOSHOCK T-SHIRT

'Little Sister' shirt pretty damn cool

www.threadless.com

Wearing light garments on our upper bodies is something we simply love to do at *PC ZONE*, and thanks to internet-based T-shirt manufacturer Threadless, we can elicit knowing smiles from strangers who notice our trendy apparel. Threadless recently teamed up with Irrational Games to create a *BioShock* shirt, and we've got five of them up for grabs. All you have to do to be in the draw is answer this question:

Which of these would you NOT find in the city of Rapture?

- A. Branch of Dixons
- B. Creepy little girl
- C. Man with a drill on his arm

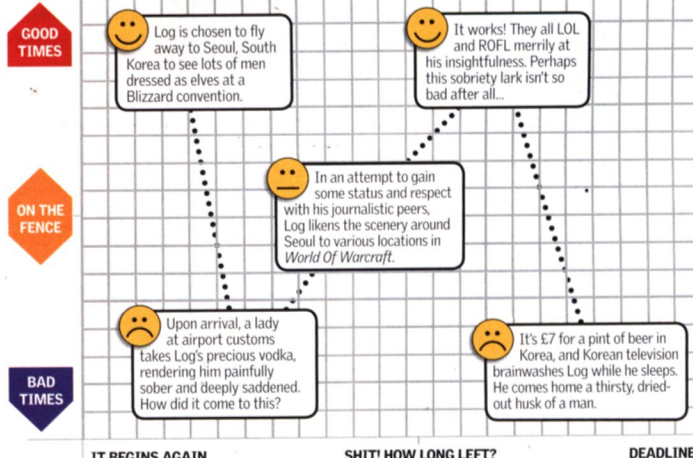
Just text 'THREAD' followed by your answer, your name, address and your T-shirt size (S, M, L, XL or 2X – ladies' sizes too) to 80889, before July 18, 2007.

For full texting competition rules, see the *WOW* compo on page 31.



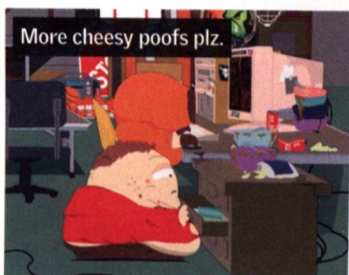
STUFF For the second time, *Duke Nukem Forever* developers 3D Realms have accompanied a job advertisement with a tiny 'in-game' screenshot of their eternally delayed sequel. In *Duke* creator George Broussard's own words, this is a "real-time in-game asset, like the last job ad shot. Taken from a game level with a dark background, on purpose, because we wanted to focus attention on the character." It's a whole 220 pixels wide, so take your time with it.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



ME AND MY AVATAR

Pavel Barter investigates the psychology behind the larks and loves found in the humble MMO...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

TWAS ON THE road to Rithwic, in ye olde worlde of *Asheron's Call*, that a travelling warrior encountered a peculiar scenario. A cow was (slowly) beating up a young mage. The mage offered no resistance, standing motionless before a barrage of bovine abuse. The warrior drew his weapon, but the mage yelled: "Don't kill the cow!" The warrior was perplexed. "I want the cow to beat me up so I can raise my defence," explained the mage, "and that's very important later in the game." The warrior went about his way, savage mooing ringing in his ears.

This is but one of thousands of stories collated by Nick Yee, an American researcher at Stanford University. As part of his Daedalus Project, Nick explores the sociology of MMORPG worlds. "For some players, such as guild leaders, playing a game can be more stressful than their daytime jobs," he says. According to Yee's research, gamers spend an average of 20 hours a week glued to their monitors – a statistic confirmed by Paul Younger, editor of *worldofwar.net*.

"Each of us plays around 20+ hours each week. We'd love to put in more, but we have to look after our website. We plan on adding new staff shortly to increase the amount of hours we play."

Loads of online worlds are waiting to consume your every waking hour – *EverQuest*, *Anarchy Online*, *Guild Wars*, the spanking new *Lord Of the Rings Online* – and devotion to avatars is running at

an all-time high. Photographer Robbie Cooper has even just released a book which features proud gamers standing alongside their online characters called *Alter Ego* (www.alteregobook.com).

SAY CHEESE!

"When I started, I thought it might be hard to persuade people to be photographed," he explained to *ZONE* when describing his mammoth project. "This was based on a stereotype not just of gamers but of the internet and the kind of people who use it for entertainment. At one point, I was getting 50 emails a day from people who wanted to be photographed. So that was completely wrong. Generally, people have been really hospitable and open."

But how about the, um, somewhat obsessive nature of your average MMOG monster? For example, *South Park's* 'Make Love, Not Warcraft' piss-take was warmly received by most *WOW* fans. But the hardcore ones, like an orc called Raynre, were horrified to discover glaring errors in the episode.

"I was saying to myself 'those people aren't level 40. Look at that armour! There's no way they could make it to the Arathi Highlands and live long enough.'"

Whether you dip in and out of MMORPGs or you're full-time, there's no avoiding the strange psychology of these games.

"Some social norms transfer into virtual worlds," explains Yee. "Personal space is one example. While it's possible for avatars to walk through each other, most players maintain appropriate distance. Standing right in front of someone, looking right at them, is as psychologically uncomfortable as it is in physical space."

IN MY OTHER LIFE...

The illusion of a real, living world allows players to revel in different identities. Flynn De Marco, editor of *GayGamer.net*, agrees. "There's documented proof that straight guys play as women online. They find that people are nicer to them and in some cases even give them items like treasure or armour. I'd venture to say that a good deal of the female avatars you see in any given MMO are played by men." While some players camp it up – "I'm a laydee!" – others are happy to be themselves. "There's quite a large gay presence in MMOs and it gets bigger all the time," says Flynn. "There's a huge number of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual,





Philip Rosedale of Linden Labs, in both cyberspace and reality.

and transgender) guilds in *Warcraft* and many LGBT groups in *City Of Heroes* too."

Beyond in-game quests, what do manic MMO miners spend their 20+ hours a week doing? "It depends," ponders Nick Yee. "This is why the social dynamic of MMOs is interesting. Some players want to level, others just want to hang out." And some go fishing. Like Tim Howgego, who set up a *WOW* site called Extreme Anglin' (www.capsu.org/wow). What's the biggest he's ever caught?

"A 92lb Mightfish that was twice as heavy as the gnome that caught it. The best: Mr Pinchy, a lobster who grants you three wishes. One of Pinchy's wishes is a Magical Crawdad, a small lobster-like pet that follows your character around."

LORDLY PURSUITS

Although *Lord Of The Rings Online* was only launched a couple of months ago, players have already found plenty of stuff to keep themselves occupied, aside from following the main mission

structure (or leaving their homes and interacting with reality).

"People are having a lot of fun playing with the in-game music system and crafting wares for sales in the auction house," says Ed Blincoe, senior product manager at Codemasters. "Many socialise with their new community friends in the Prancing Pony in Bree, and a bunch of music festivals have broken out. Players also gather to smoke pipe weed and drink."

For some gamers though, online worlds offer more than just hanging around getting stoned. We're talking about the most sacred of all MMORPG beasts: the one with two backs. "Some players are physically dating someone they first met online," confirms Nick Yee.

"What's interesting is that many of these players don't think their relationships would have happened had they first met face-to-face." Gary Fay, an Australian *World Of Warcraft* devotee, is one such lucky devil. Gary had been playing *WOW* "all day, every day, not spending much

Use your illusion

MMORPGs are stuffed with superstition and urban myth



Like a prayer

'Enchanting' magical items is a dangerous business in *Lineage 2* – reaching +3 is a cinch, but get to +4 and you run the risk of breakage. So, some players always enchant in churches, under the impression that a holy place improves their odds.



Disco inferno

In the early days of *EQ*, players talked about mob (NPC) respawning. "Will enemies appear if we wear funny hats?" they pondered. "I know," someone decided, "let's dance. That'll make 'em come!" Thus, the ridiculous spawn dance ritual was born.



Pissed as a newt

EverQuest again. Some gamers reckoned if they got drunk, they'd be teleported to a 'special location'. They'd decamp to the countryside, get plastered and be beaten up by passing gangs. Where are they now? Probably under a bridge...



Only coddling

"Some players noticed it was easier to catch specific fish after midnight, or thought the higher their skill, the fewer fish escaped. But nobody was sure." Tim Howgego's Extreme Anglin' website busted all these myths about *World Of Warcraft*.

"There's documented proof that straight guys play as women online. They find people are nicer and give them gifts"

Flynn De Marco, editor, GayGamer.net



Residents of an *EQ* role-play server reacting to a nearby cry of 'LOL!'.

time in the real world" when he met an elf-like babe called Alinta.

Gary finally plucked up the courage to fly to Western Australia to see her. "I was nervous, but I knew there was a connection between us that's hard to describe. We loved each other before we had even met." Aww... Thankfully, Alinta wasn't a hairy-backed trucker. The pair moved in together and "continued to play *WOW*, side by side on two computers". Finally they took the plunge and got married. In *World Of Warcraft*. "Seeing as the game had tuxedos, dresses and wedding chapels, it seemed

like the best way for us to show our love."

MMORPG fans are certainly committed, some 'committed' in the old-fashioned 'incarcerated due to madness' sense, others not. "Role-players take their in-game characters very seriously," nods Ed Blincoe. "As *LOTRO*'s world expands, we expect people to become more so."

So while you dip in and out of sports and action titles, spare a thought for hardcore MMO gamers and that mage, somewhere now in exile from the defunct *Asheron's Call*, who's still searching for another cow to slowly lick him to death. **W**



Alter Ego: showing we can be heroes.

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



KOREA AS FOLK

Before making the announcement you're all waiting for, *Jon Blyth* talks about his nice holiday to Korea

BLIZZARD SPECIAL

me



The one on the right is fingering me.



Plush Murlocs – highly desirable.

I WAS SENT to Seoul for three days, to cover the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational 2007. This is a large competition in *Warcraft III* and *StarCraft*, and the culmination of year-long ladder competitions on Blizzard's Battle.net site. Normally, this wouldn't warrant a press trip, but Blizzard were unveiling a new game. Speculation was wild, but everyone had guessed it was *StarCraft II*; nine years on, the original game is still huge there.

So, just two days after the historic train journey between North and South Korea that *would have* symbolically reunited the countries (if it hadn't been a total one-off), I arrived at the event, and found myself in an Olympic stadium. I was surrounded, I estimated, by about 10,000 people. This estimate was reached via a scientific process of hand gestures, air doodles and mime between myself and my Korean neighbour. I got enough nods from the polite gentleman to convince me that I was right in my estimate – either that,

or that I should shut up now because Blizzard CEO Mike Morhaime is speaking, and he hadn't come here to play charades with the idiot British.

All the Blizzard honchos were there: Mike Morhaime, the diminutive CEO; Chris Metzen, the creative mind behind the storylines; a long list of artistic directors and gameplay engineers, among whom the 'baby' had been at Blizzard for eight years – all walking around, happily engaging with anyone who'd talk to them. (Albeit with a powerful brief not to talk about vast swathes of information.) They're pretty good with secrecy, though – four years of *StarCraft II* development and not so much as a peep to the outside world.

CALM DOWN, DEAR

The stadium was packed. Immediately behind me was a block of young girls who would punctuate every stage of the proceedings with screams and dramatic intakes of breath. At one point I even had to look around to try and

Etiquette What not to eat

Steam and plug sockets = delicious.



Most people are aware that sushi is often raw, generally seafood served with self-contained portions of rice. Some people will also know that sashimi is the same thing, without the rice. I've had plenty of sushi, but I've never had sashimi in a restaurant before, so let me spare you the embarrassment I went through. You are not supposed to eat the balls of tasteless fibreglass that keep the fish company. First, they're so big and revolting that you couldn't eat a whole one, even if – as I did – you smothered it with soy sauce and wasabi. And when you're finally told by the PR lady that it isn't supposed to be eaten, the waiter looks at you like you're a massive tool when he takes away one heavily seasoned, light brown, half-eaten ball of inedible crunch from your side plate.



The look says it all – she hates those fricking clowns.



Ten minutes later, their grundies were on the stage.

figure out which one of them was making a really undainty grunt. I'd read that Koreans were deeply into their *StarCraft*, not to mention their *Warcraft III*. I was aware that the best players were celebrities – even if (in the back of my mind) they were celebrities in the same way that Hurricane Higgins and Eric Bristow were celebrities. But I certainly wasn't anticipating a level of sexual tension that would cause British women to catapult their knickers onto the stage.

Things sho' be different. We might call ourselves gamers, and the gentlemen among us might roll our eyes when we oh-so-laddishly bemoan the difficulties of balancing our game-life and demands of our partners and families. But at least most of us can fit a relationship in there somewhere. Not so for the Korean professional gamers, who spend 13 hours a day practising, with precious little hope of reaching the top rung where the annual wage is between around \$100,000 and

\$200,000. At the lower end of pro gaming, it's all play and no pay, and the thought of satisfying your more carnal urges is more than tempered by the fear that it'll rob you of your cutting edge. You just can't afford to have your brain throw up blipverts of your girlfriend's tits while you're fending off a multi-pronged Zerg Rush. *StarCraft* even allegedly claimed an amateur's life in 2005, after a 50-hour session caused a guy's heart to cave in.

THEY CARE A LOT

But this kind of talk belongs in a tabloid; every country and every activity has its own madness and obsessions, and it wasn't *StarCraft* that killed him. Some people like food, some people drink sunflower oil from the bottle and shove mince into their tear ducts. It's all a matter of degree.

The best thing about the widespread acceptance of gaming as a valid sport – or rather, the fact that gaming has actually become an aspirational lifestyle – is that events like the Worldwide Invitational actually manage to pull off a sense of genuine spectacle. The areas between the two stadia were open to the public, and there were clowns – costumed teenagers who'd react to the merest whiff of a camera with a deadpan pose, struck in deadly earnest.



Pretty lady, the world press wishes to talk to you.



Hot air balloons – the ostentatious way to hover.



The difference is, these kids were just dressing up, and Bryan Ferry is plainly just a big fox-chasing dolt



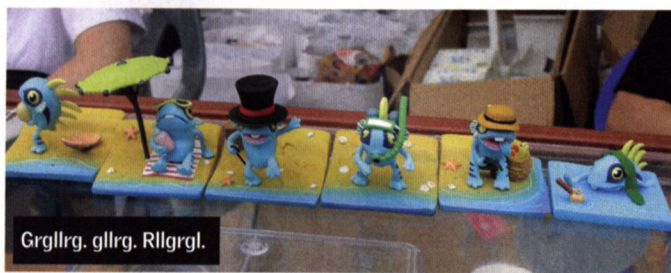
That Elekk's totally checking my arse out.



Things I forgot: only 100ml of liquids through customs.

GRGRLRLRRG!

Murlocs popular with Blizzard staff



Grgllrg. gllrg. Rllgrgl.

Every region gets its own merchandise for Blizzard games, so it was gratifying to see European Blizzard staff in the same queues as the journalists, all trying to get our merchandising fix (and I was overjoyed to see them paying the same amounts as us, too). Although most of the T-shirts were rendered unwearable by massive back-prints and tracts of meaningless English text, the main heroes of the occasion were the Murlocs. Key covers, T-shirts with 'RGGLLRLRLG' plastered across them, water bottles, miniature gurdy statues, plush toys - basically, everyone left Korea with many more Murlocs than they came with.

Me? Well, I've got a 'For The Horde' mug, so that every cup of Kenko is a tribute to the forces of darkness. I honestly can't tell whether that look on your face is jealousy or derision.

Allowing themselves to be photographed out of character seemed to be a big no-no; although it could be argued that the conga line featuring a gangster, an SS Agent and numerous fantasy staples crossed a couple of timelines.

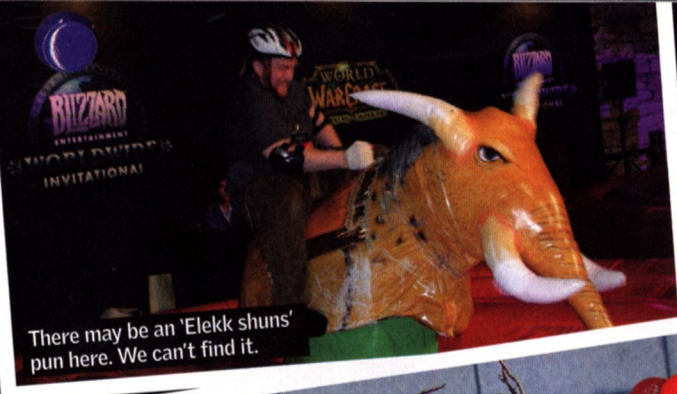
I'M SORRY

And it's at this stage that I have an embarrassed confession to make. Having seen this display of dedication to their performance, I was accosted by a Korean man with a professional-looking video camera. He asked me what I thought about events like this, and apologised politely for not speaking better English. To a man who hadn't bothered learning 'please' and 'thank you' before entering Korea, I was more than a little humbled by this unnecessary apology. But still high from the conga spectacle, jet lag and pineapple sorbet, the first thing that came out of my mouth was: "Hi, I'm Jon Blyth from PC ZONE. I just saw a





From each lamp a wish...
For a fourth *StarCraft* race.



There may be an 'Elekk shuns'
pun here. We can't find it.



Beer's off that way.



Do. Not. Eat.



Apparently it was
hot in there.

bloke dressed as a Nazi. I think that's brilliant." At this point, the man with the camera – having thankfully not understood a word I'd said – made a grateful nod and walked off, leaving me with a one-ton weight in my stomach, imagining that I could soon be saying "Nazis are brilliant" to hundreds of thousands of Koreans.

What I meant, as I'm sure you've probably inferred from my non-genocidal stance on most things, was that I loved the fact that Korean kids had effectively severed that crisp, Teutonic style from its evil associations, in a way that no Westerner – and in particular Prince Harry or Bryan Ferry – could possibly manage. Ferry recently apologised for saying that Nazi marches and flags were "just fantastic", which isn't that far off my 20-word outburst, to be honest. The difference is, these kids weren't weaned on the horrors of WWII and were just dressing up, and Bryan Ferry is plainly just a big fox-chasing dolt. Where do I fit on this scale? Well, let's just say there's a good reason I have a fear of public speaking.

For a press trip I was cheerfully calling a holiday, the hours were long, and the time to relax was virtually zero.

Drinking neat vodka wasn't so much a way to unwind, more a way of fending off the jet lag-inspired wakefulness that chewed up the early hours, and any hope we had of discovering the heart of Seoul was lost to a reluctance to leave the PRs, around whom the drinks prices were pretty 'Club Tropicana'.

BUDDHA BING

Luckily for us, our hotel was right opposite a Buddhist temple, and it was Buddha's birthday on the weekend of our visit. While we didn't get to see the parade going through town, we did manage to get across to the temple.

What Koreans have done for RTS gaming – ie, made it seem less like the reserve of the socially inept, and less like a waste of perfectly good brain activity – they've also done for religion.

The Buddhist temple was decked with hundreds upon hundreds of multi-coloured paper globes that defied night-time photography (at least, on my crap camera). There was an area where over a thousand red lamps hung just over head height, and from each lamp hung the wishes of one person, out there, for everyone to see. I'm guessing it was "World peace plzthx" rather than

anything more honest and vindictive. However, I'm also willing to guess that tucked away somewhere in those thousands of strips of plastic-sheathed paper were one or two which read: 'Buddha, please let Kim Dong-Soo win at *StarCraft* tomorrow. He is proper fit, and though I know it is wrong, I totally would – in fact, scratch the first wish, can you make that my wish, or can you only take my first answer, like on *The Weakest Link*? Anyway happy birthday Mr Buddha sir.'

SPIRITS AND SEOUL

The day was broken up by costume dance parties, bucking broncos with inflatable Elekk heads, the usual mix of glamorous ladies and inflatable dragons, games (including some highly tenuous links to the Blizzard universe – since when was firing a ping-pong ball into a hole comparable to 'Defending Stormwind?'), arena matches, televised games and merchandising. Alton Towers it wasn't, but between the clowns, mobsters – and yes, Nazis – you'd find yourself walking around in

a daze, wondering why videogames never attract the same sense of carnival in Europe. Even E3 was a synthetic carnival of hype. And while you'd be an idiot to suggest a lack of hype in Seoul that weekend – it was as much about selling *WOW* to the Koreans as *StarCraft II* to us lot – it felt perfectly natural to be here, celebrating the launch of a strategy game with a bunch of kids with massive bows and arrows.

JEUX SANS FRONTIERES

So, what have I learned? Well, I've learned to rethink any enthusiastic comments about Nazism, I've learned that Buddhism has the best statues, and if you put the superficial differences aside, gaming knows no culture. We'd all play these stupid, brilliant games for longer than we should, given half a chance. We just happen to live in a society where you don't get national recognition and celebrity status for being really good at *Total War*. But then, we have lolcats and fizzy vodka, so it just about evens out. **PCZ**



Just one of the angles you won't be playing from.

**BILZARD
SPECIAL**

STAR CRAFT II

THE LOWDOWN

It's the sequel to one of the best RTS games ever



It's being made by Blizzard



They're not reinventing the wheel – they're just changing the tyres



Blizzard genuinely appear to be lovely people



Many fans have impossible demands and expectations



So anticipated, it doesn't need a subtitle: *Jon Blyth* reports from Seoul on the game that will thrill the strategy world

DEVELOPER Blizzard PUBLISHER Vivendi WEBSITE www.starcraft2.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

IN 1998, *STAR CRAFT* told the story of three races in conflict, and it went a little something like this...

The Terrans – human colonists – are torn apart by civil war and find themselves stuck in the middle of a war between the Protoss and the Zerg. The Protoss and the Zerg are enhanced alien races given an evolutionary leg-up by a meddling super-race called the Xel'Naga. The Protoss gained psionic powers that singularly failed to stop them from waging civil war, while the Zerg were given advanced parasitic powers, turning them into a hive-like plague, wiping out or infesting everything in their path.

It was the combat between these three very different races that was the basis of *StarCraft*, and it was the fine balance between their very different modes of combat that made it so breathtakingly unique. *StarCraft* had an elaborately constructed universe, finely tuned combat and a cracking

story. It was, without crawling too far up Blizzard's arse, the greatest RTS of its time, and if you can suffer the dated graphics, it's still among the best.

By revealing the game in Seoul, Korea, the master tacticians at Blizzard chose the friendliest ground possible for their announcement. That said, it was interesting to note the tone of the crowd, after the initial hooting and cheering died down. Occasionally a suspicious or aggressive question would emerge, made more blankly hostile by the translation. In short, I witnessed the birth of a nerd-fury.

You see, Korean gamers love *StarCraft* – it's part of their regular TV scheduling for god's sake – and they've had nearly ten years to imagine how they'd change it if they were king. Now the sequel is real, this nascent reality is fighting against a decade of fantasy. The atmosphere at the event was equal parts excitement, nervousness and

resentment – it was like *The Phantom Menace* all over again.

So, let's ask the questions the Koreans are asking, because their demands are going to have a huge impact on what Blizzard end up providing. Will the adherence to Korean expectations stifle the innovation – the 'big new feature' that we fickle Westerners demand? Will Korean gamers reject the sequel as a reinvention of chess, or will it eventually displace the original game, and cause the gaming TV channels to suddenly look like they're in the right decade?

FOURTH RACE?

This came up again and again; the Koreans definitely want another race. There was much speculation about the Protoss/Zerg hybrid race mentioned in the first game, but no – playable races will remain limited to the Protoss, Zerg and Terrans. The emphasis will instead be on making the three races even

**ETA
WHEN IT'S
DONE**



We can confirm that charred, fiery planets will feature.

more distinct, to make each set of tactics more varied.

How about radical changes to the gameplay then? Again, no. There's still no naval combat. There's still the simple 'minerals and gas' resource management, and the 50/50 division between resources and combat. Blizzard are going out of their way to distance themselves from the 'big new feature' kind of showmanship, instead focusing on developing the features that made the first game so strong.

That said, small tweaks with larger ramifications abound. There's no longer a limit on the amount of selectable items, for example, and the fog of war applies to higher ground – but it's still identifiably and defiantly *StarCraft*.

NEW UNITS

Take a deep breath. Aware of the tactical and visual chaos that ensues from simply slinging more and more stuff at a game, *StarCraft II* is being kept lean. For every new unit, an old

unit must bow out. The victims of this cull will be determined by whether or not they're part of the 'essence' of *StarCraft*. So, Zealots, Siege Tanks and Zerglings are safe, and given new powers. Many other units, however, will face forced redundancy. Lead designer Dustin Browder took us through the demo video, which showcased the new Protoss fleet. Here's a quick summary...

First you've got the Protoss Immortals – slow-moving heavy assault units, with a shield that



The Protoss Mothership shows off its 'Planet Cracker' attack.



Warping in – a great way to throw a surprise party.



The Protoss homeworld enjoys a lull between battles.

StarCraft primer

Hi, I'm only young. *StarCraft* with the what now?



Glowy eyes: suddenly back into vogue.

The reason *StarCraft* was so ground-breaking and its gameplay so enduring wasn't just the storyline or balance, as fine as they are. It was the stark differences between the three races, and the skills required to use them effectively.

So, the Terran forces are efficient and adaptable, with good offensive power but a certain proneness to dying. The Protoss, picked for super-evolution because of their purity of form, are a fast, powerful and spiritual race, and the Zerg are a single-purposed hive-mind. Whichever race you play demands different tactics, and a new understanding; this is why pro gamers are generally allied to a particular race.

It was this break from the usual Red Knight vs Blue Knight approach to RTS games that made *StarCraft* special, and this is the essence Blizzard are seeking to recreate in the sequel.



activates automatically when under heavy fire. In combating them, you'll want to use units with lower firepower, as they won't activate the shield.

The high ground is even more important now, because the fog of war is 3D too; gaining a hilltop vantage will allow you to attack your enemy unseen. The Protoss Stalkers are mean-looking harassment units, and have the ability to 'blink' – teleport to you and me – anywhere in visual range. Send a probe up that hill and you've got yourself blinking access, plus some great purchase to rain down invisible hell on your opponent.

Blinking is a great example of a basic move that offers more devastating possibilities the better you are at the game. You or I might use blink to run away from an infestation of Zerglings, or to run away when we realise we're

hopelessly outclassed. However, Blizzard anticipate that pro gamers will use the ability to pick off enemy units that would easily win if left to fight without intervention. Seeing the tide of combat changed by this ability was one of the things that made the crowd gasp most audibly.

The fact that skill and timing beats straight statistical advantage is a running theme. The new Phoenix ship – a fast, flying Protoss unit – has the capacity to Overload. This is a powerful attack, discharging the Phoenix's energy in an explosive burst – but it's balanced by the need to sit down, recharge and have a think about what it's done. Used with skill, the Phoenix can wipe out entire ranks; used at the wrong time, Overload will leave you prone, stupid and dead.

The new Protoss Colossus – a spider-like unit that houses its control centre

THE STORY SO FAR... BLIZZARD (THE EARLY YEARS)

**BATTLE CHESS II:
CHINESE CHESS**
Long before *Warcraft*,
Blizzard did the Amiga
port of this chess game.

**ROCK 'N' ROLL
RACING**
This game involved
driving, face make-up
and punching!



**THE DEATH
AND RETURN
OF SUPERMAN**
A rather good side-
scrolling beat 'em up.



**JUSTICE LEAGUE
TASK FORCE**
A *Street Fighter* clone
with nine classic DC
Comics characters.



1991

1993

1994

1995



Terran grunts coping what-for.



Phoenix down.

The fog of war is now 3D too, so gaining a hilltop vantage will allow you to attack your enemy unseen

atop four spear-like legs, seems more than equipped to deal with your everyday Zerg Rush, using a beam ray pointed at the floor. Preoccupied with ground threats, the Colossus is hugely vulnerable to air attack.

You get the idea – it's a game of counters, as is every RTS out there. Blizzard's point is that you get good by learning the counters – you get great by developing your reflexes and making eight decisions at once.

The Protoss also have access to Phase Prisms – mobile shields that can float around and protect areas as you see fit. When you combine this with the ability to 'warp in' your units, you can more or less create a Protoss army anywhere in the field. Obviously, get too gung-ho and you'll leave yourself wide open to attack.

As for the Mothership, this is the most expensive and powerful Protoss unit, with a Planet Cracker attack to destroy ground troops, a Black Hole to draw in air units and Time Bomb to slow down all enemies in the area. This includes the cool ability to stop missiles, and it's a nice way to show off the Havok physics engine when the missiles drop harmlessly to the floor when the field wears off.

WARCRAFT 3D?

Another concern among our Korean pals was that, with the move to 3D, *StarCraft II* would be too much like *Warcraft III*, but such worries were soon dismissed. *Warcraft III* was a deliberate attempt to distinguish the two RTS franchises – it had a slower pace, fewer units, less focus on game economics, several skills per unit and a focus on RPG heroes. *StarCraft II*,

meanwhile, is a sequel to *StarCraft* in every way. Massive armies (think huge Zerg swarms), fast action, a strong emphasis on resource management and definitely no heroes. If you're looking for direct first-person unit control like *Rise & Fall*, or innovative display options like *Supreme Commander*, then take your ass to the back of the queue.

TV APPEAL?

This might not be an issue of direct interest to the UK, because the limit of our TV gaming coverage has traditionally been someone on QVC playing a PSP, screwing up their face and saying: "Well I don't get it, but apparently it's all the rage with the nippers." But it's all-important to the Korean pro gaming circuit, and we'll definitely feel the impact of this.

For a start, the graphics will be clean. Particle effects won't be used for the sake of it, as all they do is obscure the action, and beam weapons won't be overdone for the same reason. It's not only the players who have to be able to see what's going on, it's a stadium full of oohing and aahing fans. Expect distinct, sharply animated units and vast, swarming battles – just don't expect daft amounts of bloom, massive beam weapons and smoke all over the place.

HOW ABOUT THE PLOT?

This is another tight-lipped, no-go area. The initial announcement was Blizzard vice president Chris Metzner's unsatisfying assertion that "everyone who survived will have their stories told". As more people nagged about the fourth race, this was extended to a promise that the Zerg/Protoss hybrid would be dealt with. In a meeting the

We built this city on rock. Roll
was hard to come by at the time.



Six chapters in 100 words

A severely abridged and
unhelpful history of *StarCraft*

Evolution's a funny old
thing sometimes...

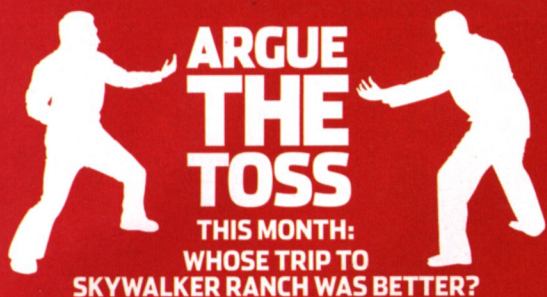


The Xel'Naga invent the Protoss and Zerg, neither of which seem very grateful. The Terran world gets infested by Zerg, and the Protoss hunt them down, attempting to destroy them and everything they infest. Some girl called Kerrigan gets cocooned, and it's not cool. A few civil wars later, and some guy called Tassadar suicide-bombs the Zerg Overmind, and everything's ace again. Or so they thought, until the expansion pack. Uneasy alliances and magic crystals abound, there's a warp gate, and some guy called Duran is trying to get Protoss and Zergs to bum each other until they have babies. THE END.

next day, the only other scraps of plot information were that the game is set four years after the events of the previous game, and that people have been "having adventures" in the meantime. In other words, we were like dogs sniffing at the bottom of the bedroom door.

ARE YOU EXCITED?

There's no doubt that there's a tactical genius at work in the heart of Blizzard. And with all the money, talent and perfectionism at work in the company, there's almost no doubt *StarCraft II* will be a sublimely balanced strategy game in an expertly crafted universe with a staggeringly engaging plot. That's just what we know Blizzard will give us. But will it be enough to supplant Korea's national pastime? And more relevantly, will the expectations of another country mean we get something not to our tastes? Like I said though, Blizzard are master tacticians; so you can start getting excited right about... Now. **PCZ**



Dear Jamie,

I was thinking earlier about the time I went on a trip to Skywalker Ranch in California. You've been too, haven't you? Wasn't it great seeing George Lucas wandering around like he's some sort of normal human person? You did see Mister Lucas didn't you? I mean, it'd be a waste of time going if you didn't. If you didn't see him, then my trip to Skywalker Ranch was considerably more excellent than yours.

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

Did you get the standard tourist guided tour when you visited? How nice. I was actually a guest of George Lucas for several days at the luxury guest houses on the premises, where Steven (Spielberg) and Francis (Ford Coppola) regularly stay over. I didn't see my best mate George, but I like to think he poked his head into my bedroom while I was sleeping and sang soothing *Star Wars* lullabies.

Jamie Sefton

Dear Jamie,

While you were sniffing Spielberg's bedsheets, I was being shown around the actual room Lucas was in when he came up with the idea for Jar Jar Binks. They also showed me a real lightsaber, and, for some reason, Tik-Tok the robot from *Return To Oz*. Tik-Tok smiled at me, but nobody else saw.

Steve

Dear Steve,

Oh. I rode a Skywalker Ranch-branded bicycle for an afternoon around the whole site, leisurely taking in Ewok Lake, Lucas's private vineyard, the Lucas Archives, Skywalker Sound and the Skywalker fire service, where I tried on the actual unique fireman's uniform.

Jamie

Dear Jamie,

Well, when nobody was looking I took Indiana Jones' whip and started whipping things, and then George appeared from behind a tree and said, "Hey, that's amazing. I'll make you the new Indiana Jones," and I said, "OK," and then we made a series of movies and they were really popular in America but never released here.

Steve

Dear Steve,

You're lying now Steve, you liar. And you know what happens when you tell a lie. George Lucas cries...

Jamie

Dear Jamie,

Sorry I can't hear you, I'm flying around in the actual working Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars*. George gave me it for free.

Steve

DELIGHTFUL OBSCURITY

ObsCure 2, the stabbingly good teen horror drama

ETA: September | www.hydravision.com

IF WE MADE a game, we wouldn't condemn it by calling it *ObsCure* (or *Condemned*, come to think of it). We'd call it *Greatgame* or *Goodstuff: The Game*. Always looking for a challenge, Hydravision have gone ahead and made *ObsCure 2*, the sequel to the half-decent survival horror, *ObsCure*.

The first was sullied by some poorly thought-out PC controls and awful camera angles, but the second has hammered things into shape and is knocking out what looks to be a decent and slightly ironic take on the *I Know What You Did Last Summer*-style teen horror movie. They've done this,

and they've managed to put a bit in where you're playing as a girl and you see her pants. That's excellent time management.

Co-op will be the game's biggest draw, allowing two players to play on one machine, combining skills to solve mysteries and push crates. Six different characters (each with, shockingly, their own abilities) are on offer, and the story begins with an allusion to casual drug use and a giant plant appearing on campus. A giant plant? We can almost hear the, "Woah, am I trippin'?" soundbyte already. Bloody students.



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

HALO 2

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

Arriving 25 May 2007



www.gamesforwindows.com

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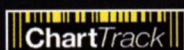
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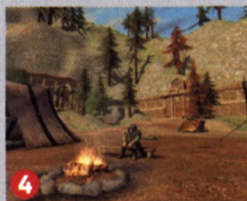
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Games for Windows LIVE

**PCZONE
CHARTS**

- 1 **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
Issue 180 86%
- 2 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 90%
- 3 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BURNING CRUSADE**
Issue 179 93%
- 4 **LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR**
Issue 182 87%
- 5 **THE SIMS 2: SEASONS**
Issue 181 54%
- 6 **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 7 **STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL**
Issue 179 85%
- 8 — **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 175 91%
- 9 **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
- 10 **SUPREME COMMANDER**
Issue 179 88%
- 11 **GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL**
Issue 176 89%
- 12 **THE SIMS: LIFE STORIES**
Issue 181 57%
- 13 **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
Issue 174 86%
- 14 — **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 15 **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 16 **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%
- 17 **ANCIENT WARS: SPARTA**
Issue 182 72%
- 18 **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: SHIVERING ISLES**
Issue 181 87%
- 19 **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 20 **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%



4 LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
Aww, there goes LOTRO, slinking down beneath *The Burning Crusade*. It's a bit symbolic really...



7 STALKER: SOC
The capitalisation of the word *STALKER* perturbs us, we won't lie, but the game is excellent, with endings and eeriness galore.



6 THE SIMS 2
The Sims 2, you total bitch, look what you've done to the charts. You're ruining this family with your chart whoring. Six entries? Gah!



15 AGE OF EMPIRES III
"The Byzantine Empire is how many years old next week?" We're glad *Age Of Empires III* isn't just a series of silly questions like this.

DAMAGE A TROIS!

Hot three-way action in *Sword Of The New World*

www.swordofthenewworld.com | ETA: Autumn

KOREA ISN'T JUST famous for its love of *StarCraft*, it's also a hotbed of MMO action. The latest title to be given a Western makeover is IMC Games' *Granado Espada*, now rebranded for Europe as *Sword Of The New World*.

The setting for the game is a kind of fantasy version of 17th century Europe, which sees you heading off to conquer a fictional New World and pillage its treasures. As the game progresses, you'll develop a dynasty of fighters, which acts as a bank of characters for use in the game. The clever part is, you can take three characters at once into the game world. Not a warlock, a voidwalker and a

gurky – three equally powerful, flexible characters who have their own tactical strengths and role to play.

Considering you use half the keyboard in regular MMOs to play just one character, you'd be right in assuming that things can get complicated; at its most unforgiving, each row of the keyboard can equate to a row of commands for each character. There are five classes – the musketeer, scout, and elementalist join your everyday fighter and wizard – with progress governed by the concept of combat 'stances'. Each stance you learn gives you a new tree of abilities and equipment, and mixing and matching stances and squad-members is one of the key aspects of the game.

With both PvE and PvP action, *Sword Of The New World* feels like a blend of *Final Fantasy* and *WOW*, and starts its open beta soon. As much as we've learned to eye the latest Korean MMO with suspicion, this looks like it might be interesting.



Never know what outfit to wear? This is the MMO for you.



Known to their mates as Hat, Tits and Guns.

WIN! A MASSIVE WORLD OF WARCRAFT GOODIE BAG!

Massive giveaway of exclusive *WOW* swag!

IF YOU'RE A fan of *World Of Warcraft*, you might just emit a screech of Blood Elf glee over this rather special *PC ZONE* competition sent via carrier raptor from Orgrimmar. Thanks to the generous people at Upper Deck Entertainment and Vivendi, we're giving you the chance to win a staggering pile of *WOW* prizes from both the trading card game and the world-shattering MMORPG.

THE WINNER RECEIVES:

- ✓ A special framed original pencil sketch and full colour print signed by *World Of Warcraft* Trading Card Game artist, JonBoy Meyers, who is also known for his work on Marvel's *Spider-Man* and *X-Men* comics.
- ✓ A deck sleeve also signed by JonBoy Meyers.
- ✓ A 'Heroes Of Azeroth' trading card starter deck.
- ✓ A 'Heroes Of Azeroth' trading card booster box with 24 booster packs.
- ✓ An 'Onyxia's Lair' trading card raid deck.
- ✓ A 'Through The Dark Portal' trading card starter deck.
- ✓ A 'Through The Dark Portal' trading card booster box with 24 booster packs.
- ✓ A 'Molten Core' trading card raid deck.
- ✓ A copy of *World Of Warcraft* Collector's Edition.
- ✓ A copy of *WOW: The Burning Crusade* Collector's Edition.
- ✓ A point-of-sale *WOW: The Burning Crusade* cardboard standee.
- ✓ A *WOW* mouse mat.
- ✓ A *WOW* baseball cap.
- ✓ Four *WOW* posters.

Plus four readers will receive runners-up prizes consisting of:

- ✓ A copy of *World Of Warcraft* Collector's Edition.
- ✓ A copy of *WOW: The Burning Crusade* Collector's Edition.
- ✓ A *WOW* mouse mat.
- ✓ A 'Through The Dark Portal' trading card starter deck.
- ✓ A 'Through The Dark Portal' trading card booster box with 24 booster packs.
- ✓ A 'Molten Core' trading card raid deck.

TEXT TO WIN!



You want to win this lot, don't you? Well, all you have to do to be in the draw is answer the following simple question...

Q Which of the following is NOT a land in *World Of Warcraft*?

- A. Azeroth B. Outland C. Belgium

To win, simply send a text message to 80889. Start your message PCZWOW, then a space, then either A, B or C, then a space, then your name and email address. It only costs 50p and you can enter as many times as you like. Competition ends July 18, 2007 and any entries received after this date will be rudely ignored. Standard competition and texting rules apply – see page 9. If you don't want to receive details of further offers and promotions from Future Publishing or god knows who, please put the word NO at the end of your message. If you want to forget all this 21st century nonsense and enter by post, you can do so by sending a postcard to *PC ZONE* *WOW* Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

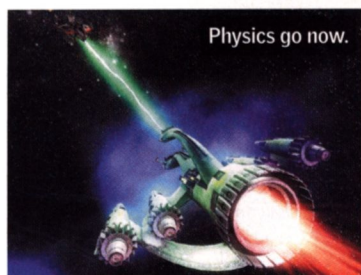
A FORCE TO CONTEND WITH

Space Force: Rogue Universe, the exploding paint tin of space www.spaceforce-game.com

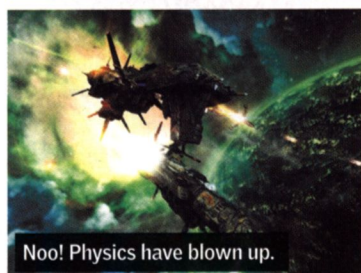
A FASTER, MORE explosive X3 – this is probably the best way of describing what *Space Force: Rogue Universe* looks like right now. We've had a quick gander at some preview code, and besides reaffirming our fears of dying in space and having our frozen bodies spinning gently through bleak nothingness for all eternity, it's shown us that explosions in space are still worth getting excited about.

Exploring, trading, fighting, questing – it's ticking all the essential boxes on the open-ended space romp form, and asteroid-dodgers will be pleased with the pertness of these particular space rocks, as well as the shininess of the space wagons on offer.

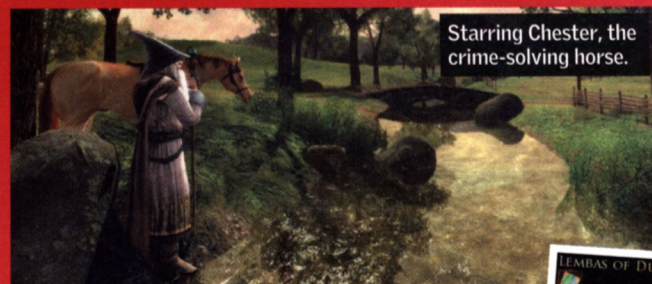
We'll have a full review next issue, where we'll play this game with one hand and X3 with the other, and hum and nod and look back and forth until we form an opinion.



Physics go now.



Noo! Physics have blown up.



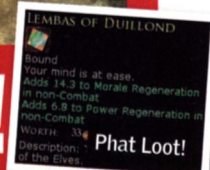
Starring Chester, the crime-solving horse.

FREE FOOD!

Free *LOTR* Online Lembas bread giveaway with this issue of *PCZ*!

FANCY A FREE virtual picnic on *PC ZONE*? On the back of the DVD wallet this issue is a unique code that when typed into the Bonus Code area of your player account in *LOTR: Shadows Of Angmar* (www.codemasters.com/cog) gives you a free in-game Lembas Of Duillond. What the hell's that you may ask? Well, it's that stale Elvish bread that Gollum crumbled up and threw away while blaming poor Sam in *The Return Of The King* film. In *LOTR*, it gives you a 3% XP bonus. Better than a kick in the hobbit balls, eh?

Also, don't forget to download the latest free *LOTR* update that should be out by the time you read this, featuring a huge new area north of the Shire – Evendim – and 100+ new quests. For more info go to www.lotro-europe.com.



Phat Loot!



COMING SOON...

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

Steve Hogarty packs his adventure hat, because he's going on an adventure...

DEVELOPER Funcom PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.ageofconan.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 176

THE LOWDOWN

All of Hyboria is in here!	✓
Hyboria is very big	✓
A new way of fighting	✓
New way of fighting isn't brilliant	✗
Who still likes Conan?	✗

IHONESTLY DON'T have the inclination to grapple with the greased-up homoerotic beast that is the *Conan* franchise. The mulleted barbarian resides at the arse-end of the fantasy genre, with a face made of constantly flexing muscles and many, increasingly large eyebrows. Any credibility he retained from his comic-book outings was dashed by the hilariously bad '90s TV series, and now he's simply an awful stereotype of a fantasy RPG class most people don't choose any more.

With this positive attitude, I took a look at Funcom's MMORPG, *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures*, and realised that they've mercifully taken inspiration from 'old' Conan in his more comic-book, more likeable form – the form people might have found cool once. Besides, you won't actually be playing as Conan, and the only homoeroticism I encountered was an uncapped custom body slider allowing one of my team-mates to spawn with a really huge arse.

Age Of Conan is swinging its great big axe of intent down upon the mainstream, aiming to feel more like a single-player game than its market-hogging peers. How it does this is, for the most part, through its real-time combat system, something relatively unheard of in games of this ilk.

Laid out all around the WASD keys are your attack keys, each corresponding with a direction of attack. Alternatively, you can click sections of a combat rose at the bottom of the screen and marvel as your character swings his weapon, damaging surrounding enemies based on immediate physical contact.

TOO MANY BUTTONS

Genius, you might think. It's about time this happened, you might think. And they're both fair thoughts. The fighting is well animated and feels solid, if a little clunky, and the combo system is plain fun, if a little fiddly. You can even pull off fatalities, chopping off limbs and what-not, as well as dodging and concentrating your blocking power

to one side (much like a flesh version of the *Starship Enterprise*).

However, pointing your character at an enemy while still clicking the right parts of the combat rose on screen is an impossible task, so the responsibility of fighting naturally falls on your left hand. This wouldn't be a problem if your left hand wasn't already moving your character; and so, *Age Of Conan*, it seems, is ideally suited to players with *three hands*. Let's see them stick that in the minimum requirements.

Putting that aside, *Age Of Conan* does place some genuinely interesting baubles on the MMO tree. There'll be fighting on horseback, as well as massive sieges with catapults against guild-owned castles, NPCs who follow daily routines rather than stand in one spot waiting to dish out quests, and DirectX 10 support. If Funcom can do all that well, and if the combat system magically stops being so cumbersome, then we might see a happy revival for the worst fantasy character ever. **PCZ**

**ETA
OCTOBER**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

BIG BAD GUY

As a general rule: the bigger an enemy is, the harder it is to make him die. This is true in *Age Of Conan*. Also, did we mention you can climb on walls? It has nothing to do with this enemy, but you can.

COMBO-RAMA

Age Of Conan will feature many combo attacks. These are achieved by hitting the attack buttons in a specific order. You can equip two combos to begin with, and you learn more as you progress in the level.

BAD GUYS

As you'd probably expect, these blokes want to kill you. The enemies in *Age Of Conan* range from these Picts to massive ogres, along with sexy demon women and demon men who thrust their crotches at you.

MAKE A MELEE OF IT

Swords! This is a sword right here. You can use loads of weapons, and each kind has its own distinct animation. The combat system means you can hit more than one enemy with a single swipe too.



Huge horses, combat and big-thighed men in skirts: could this be the *Conan* revival at long last?

Age Of Conan does place some genuinely interesting baubles on the MMO tree...

"Open your mouth and say 'Arrggh!'"



WET & WILD...

BIOSHOCK

Will Porter smiles nervously and gives the thumbs-up as he slowly begins the descent into the abyss...



DEVELOPER Irrational Games PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE www.2kgames.com/bioshock/ PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

Quite remarkable art design and environments



Dark, subversive and well-told story



Freedom in combat and mutant powers



Fishes at windows



Question mark over quality of gunplay



ETA
AUGUST

ONE THING IS certain: *BioShock* doesn't begin like normal games. There's no initial mission briefing, no assault course or FMV of Hitler's troops marching through Flanders. There's a first-person view of your character stroking a picture of his family, a cry of 'Pull up! Pull up!' then flames, water, bodies and ladies' handbags forlornly floating 2ft below the sea's surface.

The next five or ten minutes are scripted as hell but are probably the most skillfully accomplished mixture of storytelling, art design and sheer interactive panache ever seen in gaming. A bold statement, yes – but as you swim up to that vast lighthouse, hear the clunk as long-unlit lamps flare up as you enter it, read the quasi-communist motivational plaques on the walls and enter the bathysphere hanging moodily above the rippling water, you'll feel that you're entering something special.

Then the descent: a beautiful submerinal art-deco statue in an Atlas pose and a clattering film presentation from Andrew Ryan, the creator turned despot of the underwater utopia of Rapture. There are also whispers in your ears from survivors far below you discussing your unexpected arrival, a sudden unveiling of the city stretching out in front of you, a squid tumbling away from your approach and a whale traversing the gullies between the city's glowering structures. It's one of those special fragments of time that makes you proud to be a gamer. To think that so many people instinctively turn their noses up at games, while among our number lie total works of art like this...

TERRA INFIRMA

Such initial fervour and optimism doesn't always spread itself throughout an entire tenure though (just look at the

Labour Government). So let's bypass the fluff and look at how gameplay works after you've hit the '50s-style Bathysphere arrival lounge.

You've got a charming Irish chap called Atlas muttering in your ear about the best way to survive in Rapture in a fashion nicely reminiscent of Alex Jacobsen and the start of *Deus Ex*. Here, matters largely centre around killing or being killed.

Your first interaction, meanwhile, is with Plasmids and their cheerfully chuntering EVE-power vending machines. This leaves you drifting in and out of consciousness with mutated and Plasmid-crazed Rapture inhabitants known as Splicers ("Is it someone new?") and genetic-material foraging Little Sisters ("Look Mr Bubbles, it's an angel!"), with lumbering Big Daddy protectors inspecting your prostrate body. When



THE STORY SO FAR...

IRRATIONAL GAMES

Shocked by the power
Looking Glass and Irrational's *System Shock 2* is published by EA. It rocks.



1999

It was going so well
Looking Glass go tits-up, and due to legal issues, the SS franchise is bugged.



2000

Capital punishment
EA get grumpy over spiritual SS successor *BioShock* having a capital 'S' in it. Tch!

Capital gains
For no apparent reason, the capital 'S' in *BioShock* is restored. We celebrate.

2006

2007

"Many people instinctively turn their noses up at games, while among our number lie total works of art like this..."



Think NHS levels of hygiene are bad? Try Rapture.



"48, 49, 50... Coming, ready or not!"



Getting enemies to fight among themselves recalls the heady days of *Doom*.

you're back in control though, you've got the power of Electro surging through your left-click finger. This comes in rather handy when a wave of Splicers attack – introducing you to a melee combat system where a neat one-two of a paralysing electric bolt followed by a smack around the chops with a handy wrench is king.

STICK 'EM UP

It's around this point you realise that *BioShock* is quite unlike the slow-paced role-play adventure many were expecting. It is, in fact, a shooter – and a balls-out one at that. As for how much freedom the game grants you, well, the first few hours of *BioShock* are (necessarily as Irrational would argue) linear and didactic. As you move through the arboretums, residential areas and decrepit fun-parks that make for each zone of Rapture, I'm promised that areas will open up and greater freedom will be granted to the player.

However, at the game's beginnings, the focus is on the freedom given to you in your wide range of abilities. You're in the tight confines of claustrophobic, leaky velvet-lined chambers – but through mixing up your powers and the ransacked goodies you've plundered, the aim is to show just how free you are in the realms of enemy annihilation.

MORTAL COMBAT

First up are your various different weapons – pistols, shotguns, tommy guns and your oft-used melee wrench. These, then, can be used alongside your various EVE mutations – and picked up as you play through the game, forcing you to pick your favourites due to the limited, yet wholly increasable, number of mutation slots granted to you.

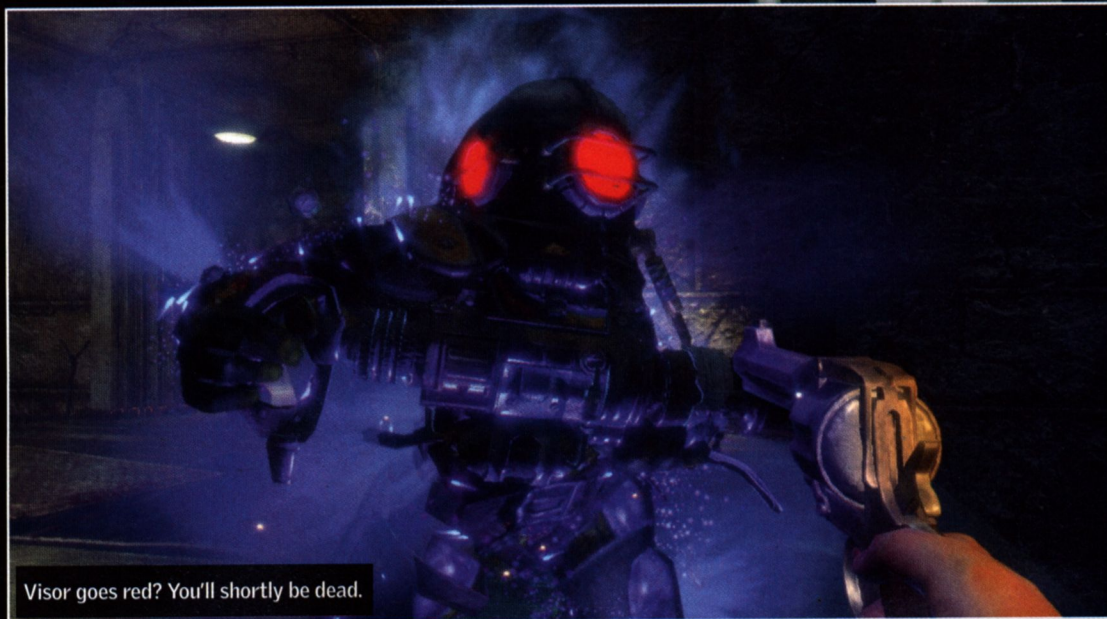
Personal highlights? Well, Incinerate! (note the developer-added exclamation mark) is *Oblivion's* fireball and then some; the Cryoshards freeze-ray is always amusing when an enemy is frozen stiff in a strikingly uncomfortable pose; and the moment where you train yourself up in telekinesis by catching tennis balls

spat at you by one of those posh ball launchers you see on telly is priceless.

When brought into combat and interaction with the environment, meanwhile, the ante is upped. For instance, handy puddles of water can be filled with Electro-shocks or Splicer-splintering ice-power. What's more, you haven't truly lived if you haven't set a teddy on fire, levitated it and hurled it towards a gang of Splicers paddling around in a nearby fuel-spill. It really does take on the air of a combat sandbox arena – with different varieties of ammo adding extra spice with such unlikely delights as Electro shotgun pellets and fiery pistol bullets. Oh, and the ability to attack people with bees.

Enemies come at you thick and fast in the early stages – all wittering on about their own personal fixations and your impending death, while grinding metallic arms on the floor in sparking circles or clambering over walls and ceilings.

However, you don't have to do all the hard work. Whether you hack a terminal to get a security system on your side, or start using your Enrage mutation on a more powerful enemy to get a bit of help from a local heavy, you



Visor goes red? You'll shortly be dead.

International rescue

Worldwide cast adds a touch of class...

Whether it's Atlas's friendly Irish burr as he pleads with you to help him rescue his children, mad despot Ryan's Russian bark or the German tones of the one-time Adam-creator yet apparently reformed Tenenbaum, there's a distinctly cosmopolitan feel to *BioShock* – as you'd expect from a dystopia created by the finest minds on the planet. There's even a British character who uses the hallowed phrase 'It's cold as a witch's tit' – which, if you're a fan of *Freedom Force*, is pure Irrational Games. That and the pain, the blood and the relentless sobbing...



won't necessarily have to use up all your hard-foraged ammunition and harvested Adam. It's wise to keep tabs on your foes though, as they're clever enough to know how health terminals work.

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

One of the primary areas you'll find yourself in is the medical wing of Rapture. Its concourse gives you access to (among other less plot-driven areas roped off from my journalistic foray into the game), a dentist, a crematorium and a plastic surgery. The surgery is the home of Steinman, Rapture's chief beautifier and big bad boss of current proceedings with his chilling mantras of "Flesh becomes clay", and, "Sculpt and sculpt till job done!"

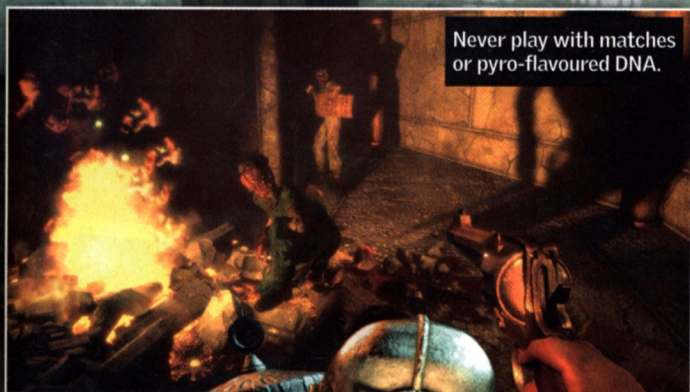
The layout somewhat recalls the more hub-based levels of *Duke Nukem 3D* (*BioShock* certainly isn't afraid of the old *Doom*-style keycard retrieval trick), only with all the cleverness that only the creators of *System Shock 2* could possibly devise. Nurses (not particularly sexy nurses) run screaming hither and thither, and the visual echo



Eat Electro, you evil hook fiend!



"Invent this, teeth boy!"



Never play with matches or pyro-flavoured DNA.



Big Daddies charge you like big metal bulls, sending you flying.



Masks: for weirdos.

of Steinman's deformed assistant bangs on doors screaming that he promised to make her pretty. There's also worrying graffiti and tattered slogan-riddled posters on the walls, the crematorium's occupants aren't quite dead and the insane dentist will certainly see you now.

Unsurprisingly, nerves are jangled with *BioShock* – outside of *Lost*, your average plane crash survivor doesn't have to deal with this kind of shit. Particularly not when the fuselage continues its descent downwards *Abyss*-style and fractures a fragile corridor of the underwater city you're in the process of sauntering through.

FURROWED BROW

Thing is though, I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't raise a few concerns – well, one concern really. As varied as the combat is and as much as it engages your brain and can be moulded to your own peculiar tics and habits, the bare-bones shooting mechanics certainly aren't up to the bar recently raised by *STALKER* and established by *Half-Life*. We're looking at bullet-action that I guesstimate settles around the *Quake 4* level – something that doesn't matter hugely in the face of the remarkable number of aces hidden up Irrational's soggy sleeve, but is noticeable when you play.

And while we're teetering around id Software, here's the most telling thing about playing *BioShock*... Do you remember a moment in *Doom 3* where, apropos of nothing, you were approaching a random door and heard a terrified woman's voice shouting, "They stole my baby!" It was at once shocking and curiously distant from anything in the game, and you could only guess that the baby had become one of those nasty child-moth things. That one singular moment in the entirety of *Doom 3* though, essentially takes place every two minutes in *BioShock*. It's in every message daubed on a wall, it's in every audio log you listen to and every corpse you discover whose unnatural demise you can't help but wonder at.

BIG AND CLEVER

The storytelling, iconography, symbolism and sheer gumption of the game makes it a powerful assault on the parts of the brain that videogames are rarely sophisticated enough to approach.

What's more, if you'll allow me to get all 'BA Hons' on your arse, it's got some frighteningly clever aspirations in there. How so? Well, there's a big discussion on the meaning and interpretation of Utopia and nods to *Atlas Shrugged* and *Citizen Kane*, as well as character backstories that aren't so much clean-slate as engendered in grim communist surroundings and Auschwitz.

All this, and you get the unenviable decision whether to revert the horrid Adam gatherers that are the Little Sisters back into pure and innocent little girls, or rip a pulsating slug-like appendage from out of their struggling bodies to gorge on the genetic goodness that lies within. Such larks! **PC**

The storytelling, iconography and symbolism make *BioShock* a powerful assault on the brain

Insania for Pipe Mania

Ageing classic recruited for hacking mini-game

Rather than simply watching a bar expand from left to right or invent a complicated mini-game that involves mirrors or lots of numbers flapping around quickly, Irrational have plucked fluid-based puzzle game *Pipe Mania* out of obscurity. Essentially, you get a pipe running into a grid, and an exit the water needs to drain from – it's then up to you to frantically click around the screen to find pipes of the correct bendy angle to connect everything up before there's a nasty spillage. And in *BioShock*, you certainly don't want a nasty spillage. Oh, and if you use your freezing power on the machine before you hack it, it makes life easier, as the water in the pipes is half-frozen. Clever, non?



Pipes of peace, it ain't.

THE PROFESSIONALS

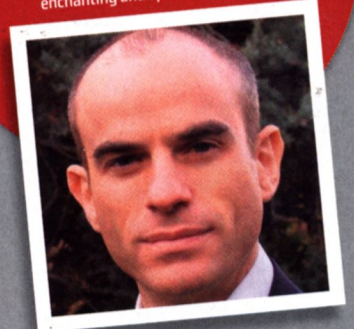
Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

WHETHER OR NOT you believe in the healing power of crystals, games are riddled with the things. Sometimes they talk to you and tell you what buttons to press to make your character jump or eat an entire string of sausages, and sometimes they teleport you, or save your game. The mystery

of enchantments shrouds almost every fantasy game, and we reckon it's time to debunk this particular aspect of the paranormal. As Frank Sinatra sang in his role as the singing sword in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*: "It's witchcraft, wicked witchcraft, and though I know it's strictly taboo..."

THIS MONTH: ENCHANTMENTS

Expert: Dan Kahn
Job: Practitioner of the healing arts
Expert pedantry: Crystals, enchanting and spooky weird stuff



THIEF



"The human eye is an excellent light meter – so using the light gem to see how much darkness you're in seems to be a gameplay mechanic rather

than an esoteric technique. To stretch a point though – crystals have been shown to have a piezoelectric effect when exposed to light – they generate electricity the brighter it is. So, if you were sensitive to 'energy', you'd discern the change in the crystal's energy signature. It's far easier to use your eyes, though."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Pointless crystal usage

STALKER



"Artefacts or crystals to enhance performance are in use by top athletes and horse trainers. They can increase strength and stamina, and

decrease recovery time from intensive training. The theory is that it maintains the athlete's bio-field coherency and therefore performance. However, it's a subtle yet powerful effect when taken as part of an overall training regime. Crystals can exude radioactive gases, such as radon which may increase your chance of lung cancer in 20 years. Also, while some crystals will provide an enhancement effect, if not cleansed and 'recharged' regularly they can have a negative effect."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Not cancerous enough



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

"The hearthstone transports the user back to a safe haven. It's obviously a gameplay mechanic, designed to make playing the game a bit easier. I've experienced crystals materialising and dematerialising, but never a crystal dematerialising and rematerialising a person. At the end of the day, it'd be more about the person themselves rather than the crystal or stone. If it could be done, it wouldn't be just because they had a stone. What I'm saying is, 'Pffffff, what utter nonsense!'"

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Completely ludicrous tosh



OBLIVION: SHIVERING ISLES

"Ah, the Duskfang Sword – intelligent swords exist! I know of one called 'Lydia' looked after by my late friend Dr Glenn Morris. In *Path Notes of An American Ninja Master* he writes: 'I have an old sword. One night as I was meditating it became cold and a woman's voice said: 'You keep that ninja-to sword beside your bed instead of me. Don't you know I deserve better than this?' She's been easy to handle ever since... And sometimes seems to move on her own too!'"

PCZONE
★★★★☆
This is a sharp one



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

"Soul gems gave me pause for thought as I'm not in the habit of killing beings in order to trap their energy for later enchantments! This is getting into 'Sith' territory. The mechanics here are quite involved, but it's probable that 'energy' could be stored in this manner for later use by a skilled practitioner of the magical arts. However, any effect would tend to be more along the 'powerful but subtle' variety rather than fireballs erupting from a wand."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Bit too flashy

WINNER: OBLIVION: SHIVERING ISLES

That sly 'come hither' stare bags it for the charming magical sword. It might not sing or talk, but the RPG expansion's spooky blade's got personality by the bucketload.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

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

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

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





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WILL PORTER PRESENTS

THIS MONTH: MORE STALKER

One of the many vitally important issues that's been plaguing my thoughts recently is that of the continuing adventures of *STALKER*. Two new products from the 'STALKER universe' are promised – but just what could they be? The game's bizarre alternate endings were all pretty conclusive, leaving your character variously dead, blind, crushed or lying in a green field with a pretty dragonfly (and presumably dead). Despite this, I think it's safe to assume that the Zone will be free to explore once more in an expansion pack (perhaps with a completely new character). There's apparently a ton of environments that were wiped from vanilla *STALKER* to get it out the door, so to sweep those bits and bobs off the cutting-room floor and into those many hazy areas of the map surely wouldn't be a huge task. The holy grail though, and a path that I'm oddly convinced they'll follow out of sheer imbecilic optimism, is an improved multiplayer/co-op system that will allow you to traverse the wastes at the same time as others. Can you imagine how good that would be? Getting the coordinates to a priceless artefact and sneaking around the map in direct, bullet-ridden competition?

Otherwise, there's the probable sequel. But given that developers GSC Game World are big on authentic real-world locations, and that we now intimately know the ins and outs of Chernobyl, just where would it be set? A bombed-out Kiev (where GSC are located)? A previously unknown ex-Soviet military facility? The same Pripyat setting but further into the future and even more devastated by nuclear fallout? The more I replay *STALKER*, the deeper I fall into its mentality and ethos – it's a game where the best moments are just you wandering around the landscape completely on your lonesome, listening to the sorrowful sounds of the environment and keeping an eye on the wildlife warring in the distance. Warts and all, if there was ever a game more haunting than this, I'd like to play it. The follow-ups can't come soon enough.

**But just
where would
the sequel
be set?**



We're no longer tempted to omit the 'f' from *TimeShift*.



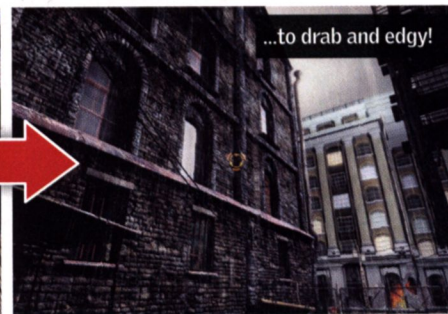
From cartoony and bluish...



...to dark and edgy.



From drab and bluish...



...to drab and edgy!

IF I COULD TURN BACK TIME...

***TimeShift* – once dull, staid mediocrity,
now potentially good**

www.timeshiftgame.com | ETA: Autumn

YOU MIGHT HAVE played the demo for *TimeShift*: it was dire. Blocky textures, awful AI and a general feeling of being forever locked in the ambience of dull 20th-century FPS-dom. If Atari had gone ahead and released it then, it probably would have scraped a review that read 'great concept, shit game' and no bugger would have bought it. However, with new publishers Vivendi on-board and a hefty quotient of extra dollars pumped in, the skies seem to have brightened somewhat.

Previously, the game had a brightly-coloured steampunk flair, but that's been ditched for darker, grittier (and hardly coincidental) *Gears Of War*-stylings. A move to placate the masses, yes, but only a fool would have claimed that a game that looked

like moody Playmobil would be much cop. What still shines through is the concept of being able to pause, rewind, fast-forward and generally muck around with time. You can still, for example, freeze the action, nab a chap's gun from his hands then shoot him in the head.

Elsewhere, the story has been totally revamped, with quiet early levels replaced by a gigantic battle in a wrecked city (cough... *Gears*) and the rather kiddy blue moto-tricycle swapped for an ATV that's a tad darker and sexier. It's a bit like going from *Batman Forever* to *Batman Begins* all over again. Whether the redoubled grit and grime and total removal of 'high camp' has truly taken the game somewhere a bit more special remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it can't be as bad as that demo they regurgitated last year...

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The guy who makes World In Conflict go boom



THOMAS BENGTSOON - FX GUY AND 'MR EXPLOSIVE' AT MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Quiet, well-mannered Thomas Bengtsson has a sinister secret. When he shuts his eyes he sees flames and death, and when he opens them again he recreates it on the screen in front of him. He's the man responsible for the stunning blasts in *World In Conflict*, and formerly on the *Ground Control* series. And he's very good at his job...

So how did you get into creating explosions? Did you like to blow things up as a child?

"No... No more than any other kid - perhaps a tree every now and again. Sometimes just tree stumps. I then went on to do a lot of the effects in *Ground Control I* and *II* and people seemed to like what I did, so it's run on into *World in Conflict*."

OK, so something needs blowing up. How do you design the explosion?

"Essentially I start out looking at reference material of whatever variety of explosion I'm going to make, and often pause the movie and watch it frame-by-frame to see how the explosion billows out in its first seconds. Most of the time I combine a 3D wireframe mesh and the particle effects in our particle editor, which themselves have texture animations I've made in separate programs."

What do you reckon is your favourite explosion?

"For a while it was the nuke, but now it's probably the Russian fuel bomb. It looks

totally different from the others, and spreads out and develops in a really original way. There are loads to choose from though - different units, different surfaces, fire, smoke, bullets. All that cool stuff."

How about that nuke though? That's pretty cool...

"That one was a hard effect to create - it took loads of experimenting before I was satisfied. It had to look really good from all

directions, because the camera is just so free in the game. Some explosions take an hour to create, and some of the bigger ones a week or longer."

Do you try to make the explosions as true to life as possible or do you just go for what looks most spectacular?

"Both really; I'm trying to merge the two. Real-life effects and explosions often aren't that much fun to watch."



Fire down below. And lots of it.



An explosion to be proud of.



The mind of Vladimir Putin. Yesterday.

tat Zone

You know, eBay is a tricky mistress. If you're not being outdone by power-sellers you're getting political about what colour of star the auction gods have decreed best represents your reliability. For the past few years though, we at PC ZONE have sailed these tempestuous seas to distribute gaming paraphernalia to the masses. If you want to join in with the charity tat extravaganza, then check us, under our tag of PCZoners, whenever a new PC ZONE appears in the newsagents.

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



THIS MONTH'S TAT



WOW CARDS

A handful that we didn't give away. Only four different cards though.



MONSTER MADNESS BEANIE

So you too can be like the nice one out of *Skins*.



LOST PLANET T-SHIRT

Medium sized, slight coffee stains due to 'accident'.



USB HAMSTER WHEEL

Turns as you type! It's some sort of rubbish hamster black magic!

Q: 'Where did you get that tat? Where did you get that tat?' A: 'eBay, why?'

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	USB HUMPING DOG Thank god it's gone. It's been making us feel a bit tacky since it arrived...	£5.51	4
	DOFUS ART BOOK The French-free MMO artbook sets the auction world alight. Almost.	£10.50	6
	SECOND LIFE: THE OFFICIAL GUIDE Odd how the BBC and Channel 4 News always skim over the virtual brothels...	£12.50	10
	AFC WIMBLEDON SHIRT Keeping it real with the south-west London football team of champions. Well, maybe one day, eh lads?	£21.23	9



City not built on rock and roll.

ENTER THE ENDGAME...

CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD

One cigarette cuts eleven minutes off your life; one game has cost *Will Porter* over a year. Maybe more...

DEVELOPER Firaxis PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE www.2kgames.com/civ4/ PREVIOUSLY IN... 182

THE LOWDOWN

Absolutely goliath amount of content	✓
Superb espionage and corporation systems	✓
Hugely tweaked endgame	✓
Twelve hugely original scenarios	✓
You won't get no sleep	✗

QUITE OFTEN, I find myself going off on one about games I feel passionate about, and realise five minutes later that the room has gone silent and everyone has started looking quizzical. It's an occupational hazard of sorts: the unwitting social mishap of a gamer forgetting the company he's in and the fact that not everyone will understand a metaphor based on the intricacies of *de_dust*.

My very worst experience of this though came when I was drunk in a Wetherspoons on Bedford High Street, talking to a random group of pretty nurses and with almost Machiavellian prompting from an associate. Stupidly, I embarked on a solo discussion on exactly why *Civ IV* suffered from not having a diplomat unit. This is a true story. Honestly, I didn't have to get my coat – it was handed to me.

Never mind though, because the sneaky technology stealer is back! Or at least the essence of him is, now under the guise of a brand-new espionage system – just one of the countless features being jammed into *Beyond The Sword*. It's an expansion designed primarily to flesh out the later parts of a bout of *Civ*, and simultaneously a compendium of professionally created mods

that veer so sharply from the usual template that they could be another game entirely. This thing is just gigantic – I'm going to have to take two weeks off work just to review it.

SPY VS SPY

So you've got your spies, invisible to all but other spies, setting off revolutions in rival cities, poisoning water supplies and whispering 'how about that Will over in the Willish Empire? You'd love to be more like him wouldn't you?' into the ears of the populace.

Then you've got your Great Spies sauntering around, and situations of Cold War-intensity when other nations start ramping up their counter-espionage: it's almost a means of combat without

sending the boys in. Alongside this, Firaxis are looking at the fact that come endgame, religion doesn't seem to matter as much as it does in the early days of a civilization.

In a move that could have a good few 'capitalism is the new religion' PhDs being thrown around, come modern times, corporations will be spreading much as the word of god once did. It's all based on resources this time round though, with your corporation execs being spread out from your multi-conglomerate HQ, piling cash and influence into the home nation – even if this greed may well give opponents access to your oil or mass-produced fizzy drink supplies.

The primary *Civ* climax (one of several) is the race to build a spaceship to take your little *Civ*-chaps over to Alpha Centauri – but now the space race is going to get a little more involved. Rather than simply being the first ones into the big black, there'll be extra technologies to probe before take-off. This means that you could well take-off the minute you get the ability –



Drive tank, shoot gun.

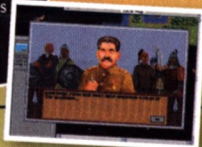
ETA
AUGUST

THE STORY SO FAR...

CIVILIZATION

Beginnings
Mr Meier conjures up *Civilization*. Things become turn-based.

1991



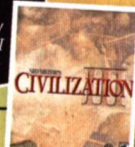
Scouts sent out
Civ II gets on Windows 3.1: graphics prettier, gameplay tweaked.

1996



Granary built
Despite a later stumble with *Play The World*, *Civ III* refines goodness.

2001



Golden age
The *Civ* template is given a loving polish by Firaxis. *Civ IV* is officially wonderful.

2005



Hats and shields? They must be off to a wedding.



A river runs through it.

but Napoleon could spend a few more turns researching things, then end up flicking V signs at you as he's overtaking with his go-faster stripes and more efficient propulsion system.

IT'S A MONSTER

As previously stated, there's a lot in here. Twenty-five new units (including paratroopers and tactical nukes), 18 buildings, a massive 16 extra leaders, ten fresh-faced civs and eight new wonders. But compared to sheer scale of the 12 scenarios being packaged with the game... Well, there's no comparison.

There's *Afterworld*, a tip of the hat to *X-Com*, with hit-points and campaigns where you control a team of five futuro body-tanks quelling an uprising of machines gifted with human sentience. There's *Next War*, a tip of the hat to *DEFCON*, that's set after 2050 and comes with a full armoury of

Not as you know it

Final Frontier scenario boggles minds



It really is the Final Frontier...

Fed up with conquering an approximation of planet Earth? Then simply conquer the galaxy instead. Final Frontier will have you colonising star systems, creating star-bases and spreading your influence to the far corners of existence in a time where all contact with Earth has been lost and humans occupy deepest, darkest space. It's a complete remake of the *Civ IV* mechanics in their entirety, and the best thing about it is that all the leaders have had a sci-fi makeover – so a toga-draped Caesar now pops up on flickery sci-fi monitor. I half wanted him to be wearing a giant mech-exo-skeleton – but I suppose beggars can't be choosers.



Tiny trees!

devastating nuclear strikes and gigantic Mechs. Then there's Charlemagne, a tip of the hat to the legendary French king. In this, you have to conquer all of western Europe, kissing up to the Pope by spreading his brand of religion and warring with Saladin, then receiving some natty fighting units.

Y'see, it's a blend of traditional and the off-the-wall, with Final Frontier so far from that wall that it's left the room (see 'Not As You Know It', above).

For *Civ*-philes, this is Valhalla: the mother penguin of Firaxis effortlessly spewing the finest of gaming fish-guts into the clamouring open mouths of its fans and floating voters alike. I'm going to tell every stranger I meet all about it; even the sexy ones. Social exclusion be damned and Sid Meier be praised. **PCZ**



The DX10 version in all its glory.

THE LOWDOWN

Unbelievably pretty	✓
Must we say it again? It's got nukes!	✓
Multiplayer is extremely tight, fast and fun	✓
Single-player set to be a hoot too	✓
Feels a bit like <i>Ground Control II</i>	✓
Requires decent team-mates	✗

WORLD IN CONFLICT



Steve Hogarty discovers that the Cold War is hotting up again. Those pesky Russians...

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment PUBLISHER Vivendi WEBSITE www.worldinconflict.com PREVIOUSLY IN 181

SWEDEN'S GREAT. DID you know that, in Sweden, they don't call it The Carphone Warehouse? Oh no, the Swedes realised that they're not selling carphones, and they're not selling them in warehouses, so they call it The Phone House instead. They cut out the needless verbiage and hit you in the face with a sledgehammer of raw facts. Here's a house, it sells phones.

It's this very same no-nonsense attitude that you'll invariably find in *World In Conflict*. Here's a strategy game, it sells explosions. Here's a game

that's invented a new way of sorting wheat from chaff, a game that appeals to strategy fans as a KFC boneless meal appeals to a chuckling fat man.

I don't want to make it sound like I've turned my back on the various elements of the RTS genre that involve base-building and meticulous unit production, because I haven't – but my god, what Massive have done with *World In Conflict* is so excitingly good that I really could. They've remodelled the RTS genre and yet have ended up with something that is, on the face of it, far more immediately captivating, far more strategic and far more fun to play. They've purified it, and now it sits on a happy middle-ground between those who hate and those who love the RTS genre.

MEATBALL MARINARA

Before they show me the game, we sit down to a smorgasbord of Swedish pizzas (while the testers dig into a lesser, Burger King smorgasbord). After this, Massive are ready to show me some of their new multiplayer game modes. We've already sampled Domination mode, which works in a similar way to

Battlefield's control point system. The more control points you capture and hold, the faster your team rolls giddily towards victory.

Each control point is made up of two or more adjacent areas you must sit your units in, and by choosing to sit tight in those areas you can fortify them with bunkers and anti-vehicle weaponry. Of course, sitting tight prevents you from pushing forward, so as with many choices in *World In Conflict*, communicating your intentions to your team-mates becomes paramount.

It's handy then, that *World In Conflict's* VoIP and chat system works not only in the game itself, but on every loading screen you encounter. "Nice loading screen!" you might shout to your internet buddy. "After this we should properly trounce the opposition! What say you to that?" And you know what? He would probably agree – such are the joys of talking through a loading screen.

When you come across somebody who's managed to defend a position long enough to fortify it up to the eyeballs, the rock-



ETA
AUTUMN



THE STORY SO FAR...

MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Ground Control

Massive squeeze out a great RTS. Not bad for your first go Massive, not bad at all.



Ground Control II

They did it again! These boys have talent endlessly beaming from their faces.



Third time's a charm

We break the news that Massive are at it again, and hopes are high for another hit.

World In Conflict

This bit of text will reveal nothing more about *World In Conflict*. Read the rest.

2000

2004

2006

2007

Look at that guy in the bottom left - he has no idea what's going on.



The only good countryside is an exploding countryside.



They've remodelled the RTS genre: this is far more captivating, more strategic and fun to play...

The enemy can follow smoke trails back to your artillery. Like Hansel and Grettel, sort of.



Nukes shmukes

The fuel air bomb is where it's really at...

Yeah, you might think the nuclear bomb is the granddaddy of all explosions, but I've found a new favourite, mostly just to be different. The fuel air bomb is a two-part process, in which a plane zooms overhead and drops a large quantity of flammable liquid into the air. Then, just as people begin to think "hah, that stupid plane just dropped funny-smelling water on us, it has merely ruined our clothes", the pilot ignites the cloud of fuel, and it goes 'whumph!' and all are killed by a cloud made of fire.

It might not be a show-stopper, and it might not leave lasting damage, but it looks pretty funky and is a horrible way to perish.



Nukes: silly, really.

paper-scissors analogy comes charging into action.

ROLE UP, ROLE UP

Each unit has its secret nemesis, its militaristic phobia, its dark strategic allergy. A building filled with dug-in infantry falls prey to long-range artillery controlled by whoever chooses the support role (each team is commanded by anything up to eight players, each choosing one of four roles). That long-range artillery is susceptible to tank attacks (controlled by the armour role), and similarly, those tanks will be wasted by a quick-thinking heavy helicopter (air role, and the final one is the infantry role, if you haven't already realised).

The role you choose determines which units you can purchase (although it's possible to buy units from other roles at a premium), and your purchases are airdropped in at regular intervals. You're only ever commanding a small clutch of

units too, and that means your attention is never spread too thinly.

It's a gradual learning curve, but one that never lets you slip. Shy newcomers and men with silly girly voices can co-operate fully in multiplayer without ever needing to utter a word, thanks to the ability to pin notes to the battlefield and give pre-vocalised orders with a handy rose menu. Besides, just watching what your fellow players do with their units will tip bucketloads of strategic knowledge down your newbie gullet. That's especially true when you're me, and you're playing with and against lead designer Magnus 'Soundboy' Jansen and some Whopper-fuelled playtesters. Playing, for the most part, on those new multiplayer modes I mentioned earlier.

PULLING POWER

The first of these multiplayer modes is Tug Of War, in which a line of command points splits the playing ground in two.

Massive boot up a map based in the war-ravaged Soviet countryside, a featureless sprawl of toasted forest. On either side of this map, opposing armies attempt to simultaneously control every point along the line, something that's easier screamed down a microphone than done.

Over the course of the conflict, TA points are acquired and used to call in specialised attacks such as extra artillery or airstrikes. Every player accumulates these points, and can choose to stockpile them or hand them over to somebody else – an act that allows the recipient of such goodwill to call in the one thing *World In Conflict* is becoming synonymous with: the tactical nuke.

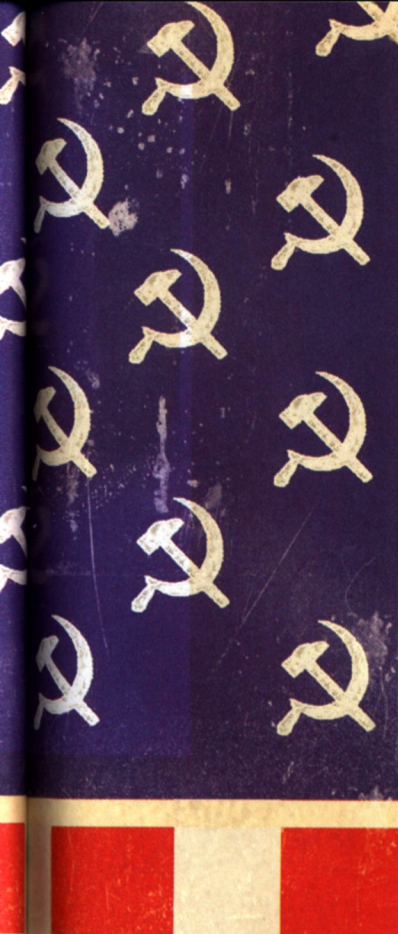
Enemy units are only visible if they're in sight of one of your own (or your team-mate's) units, meaning recon is invaluable when deciding where to drop the big one. But in Tug Of War, it's possible to see who's controlling any given point on the front line, and if it's

NATO comes into the single-player game later on.



Units leave tracks and ruin meadows.





Run towards the light!
Run like the wind!



carrying a message: don't break stuff you might have to hide inside of later on. Oh, and that war is bad.

The particular map we play Assault on sees us working our way uphill through a sunny European town, capturing churches and streets with a wonderfully carefree attitude towards collateral damage. As we meet a solid wall of defence, we're forced to roll out bigger and bigger weapons, working our way up through tank busters, daisy cutters, long-range artillery and fuel air bombs. In time, everything on the hill is reduced to a fine smouldering powder, and the sky is turned a dark, ominous brown. Compare that to good old *Red Alert 2*, whose nukes simply deleted every building and left a glowing green patch that made soldiers bleed from their pores. Proper damage modelling has come a long way, and it looks spectacular.

INNER CONFLICT

Before I wave goodbye to Massive, they briefly allow me to run through a single-player level, revealing slightly more of *World In Conflict's* 'Russians invade the USA' alternate-reality timeline. It begins in an American town still a little dizzy

This game really does
have a lot of tanks.



We're in ur bildinz shootin ur tanks

Or, 'How infantry got his groove back'

Not a great deal has been mentioned about the infantry role in *World In Conflict*, perhaps because it's the most difficult role to master in multiplayer and so everybody's been afraid to try it out. It harks back to those halcyon days of infantry management, where you'd produce plain troops, anti-air troops, anti-tank troops and groups of snipers, before sending them forth into the fray. But not without due care and attention though, oh no, one must use the cover of trees and buildings to disguise their movements. Once inside a building, infantry are devastating to puny flesh-men and armour alike, until an artillery barrage or a continuous tank assault reduces their defences to naught.

Tanks in a barn, doing no harm.



Oh, and tanks can run them into the ground too – that was probably the first thing I tried. Disappointingly though, the build I played had no bloody tank tracks leading away from the crumpled corpse. Maybe they'll add that in a patch.

having been bombed, with a handful of military-types, each with 'hang-ups'.

It then heads back in time to the fall of Europe and the struggles of NATO, where each of the characters originally met and explanations for their current attitudes to one another are provided.

It's clever storytelling, and nice narrative touches such as an army general using a tourist guide for a small American town as an impromptu strategic map assure you that some thought went into the single-player campaigns.

And I've mentioned all this without

once blubbing about the simply astounding camera – the ability to zoom down to eye-level and look up at the sky or survey the fiery battlefield all the way out to the horizon. Oh, and how if you zoom in on units you can hear their radio chatter. And how in single-player, if you go after an objective your AI team-mate has been assigned to, he'll have a go at you for showing off, *Starwing*-style.

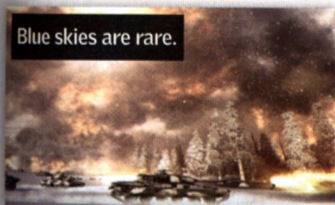
The fully 3D mega-map too, which has had the wind taken out of it by *Supreme Commander's* own 3D battlefield map, has its own charm, allowing you to see everything at once, in real-time, like some malevolent god or high-flying seagull. Even the bugs in the alpha code are pleasing, with the increasingly prevalent smoke from explosions gradually rendering the entire battlefield unviewable through a thick and hilarious smog.

Purists might scoff at *World In Conflict's* arcade-like attitude to our humble RTS genre, but they'd be wrong to do so. It's going to be awesome – a genuinely new and perhaps revolutionary take on modern combat strategy. And you can quote me on that come autumn. **PCZ**

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT

After a skin-of-the-teeth defeat, we move on to another game mode, Assault, which will be immediately familiar if you've played *Unreal Tournament*. In it, a series of objectives are presented to the attacking team, who have a certain amount of time in which to move through the map, completing these objectives. The defending team must simply prevent the attackers from doing all of that, and when the clock runs down, the teams switch roles. The defending team then have to try to barricade themselves in streets they'd previously bombed the crap out of, and might find a single ponderous moment in which to allow pangs of regret to flit through their minds. See? *World In Conflict* is

Blue skies are rare.





HAZE

DEVELOPER Free Radical PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEB hazegame.uk.ubi.com/ ETA Q4

VENERABLE BRIT OUTFIT Free Radical, headed by 'Dr' Dave Doak who was one of the driving forces behind thumb-destroying N64 classic *GoldenEye*, have never been big shakes on PC. Psi-powered actioner *Second Sight* wasn't great, and the *TimeSplitters* franchise couldn't be more console-centric if it tried.

Haze, on the other hand, could redress the balance. It has you as a performance-enhancing, drug-guzzling super-soldier, owned by an evil futuro-mega-corporation known as Mantel. In fact, the set-up is practically *Deus Ex* – with the drug dependency of *Star Trek's* Jem Haddar bundled in. With four-player co-op, slick scripting, the usual wide range of environments you'd expect from the *TimeSplitters* chaps and many inner-musings on morality, war and such, it's better than its Pine Fresh-title would at first suggest...





The Bigger Picture

1 VISOR INSIDER

You play as Shane Carpenter, a battle-drug addled super-soldier adopted by the Mantel Corporation when your mother was killed in a terrorist attack. Terrorists that may well have links to the South American faction you're hunting down.

2 MOTOR RUNNING

You and your buddies have access to a fair amount of vehicular hardware. *Halo*-style frenetic motoring and gunning ensues, with plenty of ramps and jumps left casually lying around the landscape.

3 SEE SOME SENSE

Self-administration of Nectar gives you nigh-magical battle powers. Perception that lets you see your foes in an orange outline, Foresight that lets you see the damage range of grenades and Focus prompts more precise aiming.

4 TOTAL UNDERDOSE

Free Radical reckon *Haze* has a moral backbone. At certain points, the Nectar levels in your bloodstream will dim, and you'll react to the horror of the bloody corpses you come across. Hmmm.

5 SHOOT AND KILL

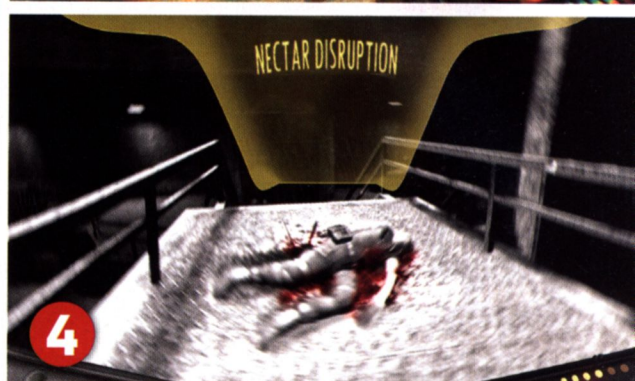
Haze features scripted multiplayer missions not unlike those of *TimeSplitters*, which themselves are much like *UT*'s Assault mode. Multiplayer is a speciality at Free Rad towers, though much could be lost in the transition from console.

6 LOCATION, LOCATION

There are 12 environments to fight in. We've seen swamps, factories, mountain-side observatories and plenty of jungle foliage. South America is pretty big, so they have a lot to choose from.

7 GUERRILLA IN OUR MIDST

An overdose of Nectar sends you into an overdose frenzy. You won't be able to tell friend from foe, and you'll spray fire at everything – meaning that Co-op 'friends' may decide to shoot you dead.



MR FISHER GOES TO WASHINGTON...

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

One-time super-spy Sam Fisher is out of the shadows and on the run. *Will Porter* still needs some convincing...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE www.splintercell.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

They're trying something new



More like the new breed of spy books and movies



Great interaction with the environment



It was pretty good as it was



Hmm... Not sure



ETA
Q4

ICAN SEE what they're doing, and in many ways it makes sense. Modern spy tales like *The Bourne Supremacy* and *Mission: Impossible* are all about being on the run, losing yourself in the crowd, being relentlessly pursued by corrupt former employers and getting away at the very last minute. Why not, then, take *Splinter Cell* out of the shadows and place it within the popular 'good guy made to look bad, so good spy agency (who are actually bad) chase him around until he can prove his innocence through mad secret agent skillz' genre?

Well, my main argument would be that *Splinter Cell* was previously, amazingly enough, the last bastion of 'pure' stealth gaming. And I'd then proceed to make a lot of huffing, puffing and spluttering noises. But Sam Fisher is Ubisoft Montreal's baby, and seeing as *Conviction* has been in the works for years in the hands of the team who developed the original *Splinter Cell* (in the same way that *Assassin's Creed* is the remit of the gang who created *Prince*

Of Persia: Sands Of Time), then just maybe I ought to give them their dues and have a little faith.

FISHER ULTIMATUM

Fisher is on the run from his previous employers at Third Echelon, which has taken his usual hi-tech gadgetry and limitless business-class air travel off the menu somewhat. For the most part, then, *Conviction* takes place in and around Washington DC, with many of its landmarks serving as backdrop for Sam's exploits. This isn't just so they could have a 'chasey chasey' sequence with alerted guards around the toes of Abe Lincoln either, but also because there are plenty of people shuffling around staring at things.

You see, *Conviction* is big on using crowds to disappear in or distract guards. For instance, if you want to get rid of a security chap so you can pass by undetected, you can wander into the

Fingerless gloves are so '80s. How embarrassing.



Time for another fun game of 'Where's Sammy?'



crowd and nick a laptop. The owner will point and bray at you, the guards will rush over, then you can stick your hoodie up (yes, I know) and run off into the secure area. You see? Genius. Not exactly sliding down a rope, doing a forward roll and stabbing someone in the neck, but there you go.

Similar distractions could come from, say, shooting the gas tank on a hotdog stall and watching bystanders run away while the guards rush over and scratch their heads. Otherwise, you could simply look shifty in front of one of the US's many buzz-cut-enhanced state protectors, lure him down an empty path and do unspeakable things



Sam's latest hi-tech gadget - the GX-88 stackable chair.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**SPLINTER
CELL** BY UBI **CONVICTION**

Fisher king
Splinter Cell appears on the scene and the world is a better, darker place.



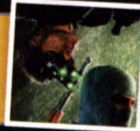
2002

King Fisher
Pandora Tomorrow is pretty good, and has an ace new multiplayer mode.



2004

Fisher price
Chaos Theory is released with a two-player co-op mode to die for.



2005

Fisher(man)'s friend
Splinter Cell: Double Agent is a bit buggy on PC, but also a bit good to play.

2006



Which Baldwin brother is that?
We can never remember...

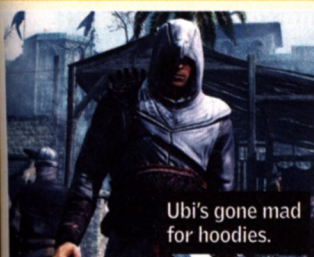
to him to render him unconscious. It's all rather a sandbox affair, so if you're thinking that it all sounds a little like *Hitman*, you're bang-on: Fisher has stolen Agent 47's clothes and is dancing a little jig. You won't be able to slaughter the innocents though (they'll simply run from gunfire) as you're misunderstood rather than suddenly psychotic, but the rudiments of Io's merciless killer are there nonetheless.

While you're being chased hither and thither, it's the manipulation of the environment that'll save your bacon –

something made possible by some stunning animation techniques that'll have Sam lifting and throwing tables, desks, barrels, enemies and essentially whatever's in his way just as he would in the real world. Long gone is the forever-friend that was the 'crouch for no reason and pick up stuff' sequence. This means that you can stack items against a door to make sure pursuers can't get in, rearrange a room so it looks like you haven't been lummoxing around in it so as not to alert guards, or simply throw very heavy objects at people intent on arresting you. It's all very physical, and entirely in keeping with the new aura of breathlessness that surrounds the game.

Assassin's Creed nixed?

Ubi's *other* game doubtful on PC



Ubi's gone mad for hoodies.

Sorry to say, but the chances of the astounding-looking *Assassin's Creed* hitting the PC are getting dim. And the chances of it arriving at the same time as the console version are nigh-on dead. It's just gone too quiet – PC folks weren't allowed near it at the recent Ubidays event in Paris, and we've always wondered exactly how they'd transfer the game's intuitive gamepad controls onto mouse and keyboard. This isn't concrete, just the opinion of one games journalist singing in the darkness, but don't get your hopes up, parkour fans...

FEAR OF THE NEW

If I'm sounding a bit lukewarm about all this, it's because I am. Maybe it's my internal 'not broke, don't fix' mantra echoing around my brain (not that the PC version of *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* wasn't broken in many ways). Or maybe it's something as simple as its vague similarity to that godawful, flag-waving lump of shite that was Nicolas Cage's *National Treasure*. I don't know – I'm just so used to being overwhelmed by the potential of new *Splinter Cell* games that when I'm simply 'whelmed', it comes as some surprise. Make me see that I'm wrong Mr Ubisoft...

I know you have it in you. **PCZ**

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	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	✓
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	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	✓
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	1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	18 pgs
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REVENGE OF THE FNV

PAVEL BARTER MUGS FOR
THE CAMERA AND TRACKS
THE SORDID HISTORY OF
INTERACTIVE MOVIES...





"YOU'RE NOT DEALING WITH SPRITES AND POLYGONS BUT REAL PEOPLE AND REAL ENVIRONMENTS. THERE'S NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT..."
ROBERT PAULSEN, THE COALITION TO BRING BACK FMV

DEEP IN THE bowels of gaming's bargain bin, somewhere between *Smurf: Rescue* and *Daikatana* resides a peculiar oddity: the FMV interactive movie. Sporting titles that wouldn't look out of place on the Playboy Channel – *Voyeur*, *Tender Loving Care*, *The Dark Eye* – these rusty relics promise titillation, mystery and comedy moustaches. But, needless to say, they never really lived up to expectation.

Interactive movies may be an odd cultural throwback to rival virtual-reality headsets but for some people, like Robert Paulsen of 'The Coalition to Bring Back FMV', they are visual Viagra.

"These games combined the campy cult movie experience with the interactivity of videogames," he swoons. "In theory, the only thing more fun than watching a movie is controlling a movie, right? In these games, you're not dealing with sprites and polygons but real people and real-world environments. There's really nothing else like it."

Ain't that the truth, although even the biggest FMV fan is quick to question the quality. "Their bad reputation is definitely deserved. About 85% of these games were downright awful. Another 10% were merely mediocre, but about 5% of the games were truly interactive and well made."

LA CONFIDENTIAL

FMV games first snuck onto gaming's radar in the form of early '80s animated arcade laserdisc adventures like *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*. Naive gamers quivered with excitement at the thought of 'controlling' a cartoon – ignoring the fact that titles were about as interactive as a cadaver. Californian Jim Riley wrote and directed 12 live-action adventure games and is today renowned as one of FMV's biggest svengalis. For better or for worse.

Riley recalls the birth of gaming's mutant child. "I was doing documentaries and commercials in Los Angeles and was invited by (*Pong* creator) Nolan Bushnell to join his

company. They were developing interactive kiosks, doing interactive advertising and interactive retailing. In 1983, we walked around a videogame convention in New Orleans, and Bushnell said, 'Where's all this going?' I said, 'It's taking interactivity in games and applying it to real image.'"

FINDING NEMO

In 1986, Riley teamed up with Tom Zito, another Bushnell employee, and presented a concept to toy-makers Hasbro: a console called NEMO that would use VHS tapes instead of cartridges. "The first product we rushed to market was the original *Night Trap*, which I wrote and directed. It wasn't a cinematic feat in terms of great acting, great storytelling or great anything, but it was the start of live-action interactive."

But Hasbro scrapped the NEMO project when faced with a humungous software development bill. "It wasn't until 1991 that we reformed into a company called Digital Pictures – we were the first to figure out how to put full-image interactive material on a CD-ROM," says Riley. "*Night Trap* spearheaded the FMV trend in the 1990s," Paulsen agrees.

The early '90s was the perfect climate for FMV. Sega launched their CD add-on for the Mega Drive and PC gaming grew up via CD-ROM. A glut of interactive B-movies flooded onto the PC platform: from soft-core filth (*Phantasmagoria*) to sci-fi bollocks (*The Daedalus Encounter*). So how did they



Space Pirates, ahoy!

Phantasmagoria: best forgotten.



Mad Dog McCree: coming to a multiplex near you!



work? David Foster of Digital Leisure, which distributes old FMV titles for PC, explains the science.

"The sequence of video clips is based on input from the player. The games are reaction-based (the move the player makes, or doesn't make, determines the game flow) or question-based (video pauses and the player decides on the next action)."

THE REAL THING

Thus, FMV titles ranged from time-based button bashers (*Brain Dead 13*), rail shooters (*Sewer Shark*) and adventure titles (*The Pandora Directive*). Only there was one important difference to conventional game trash: you got to diddle real actors, sending them down dark alleys for a beating and worming your way into their brains like John Cusack in *Being John Malkovich*. At least, that was the theory.

It's surprising how many respected actors signed up for FMV. *Ripper* starred lizard-faced Christopher Walken and *Indiana Jones* crumpet Karen Allen; *Tender Loving Care* featured two-time Oscar nominee John Hurt, while Ned Beatty, the bloke molested by hicks in *Deliverance*, appeared in *Loadstar*. Did any of these bone fide stars know what they were getting themselves into?

Probably not, reckons Steve Eastin, who appeared in TV shows like *The A-Team*, *Wonder Woman* and *Little House On The Prairie*, before taking the lead role of Commander Reece in *Ground Zero Texas*, one of the few FMV titles not released for CD-ROM. "When I got a call to audition for *Ground Zero Texas* I thought it was just a film," he drawls. "I was thrilled because I was the main actor."

What did the role entail? "Reece was a soldier of fortune, so it was physically demanding."



Seventh wonder

Ensemble Studio's Graeme Devine, *Quake III: Arena's* designer and forefather of file compression, on FMV's finest moment, 1993's *The 7th Guest*...

WHAT GAMEPLAY INFLUENCES DID YOU TAKE TO THE TABLE FOR *THE 7TH GUEST*?

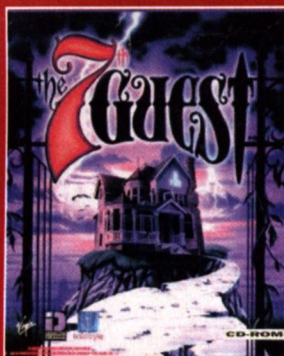
"*Twin Peaks* had just started in the US and I watched it religiously. Virgin Mastertronic had the licence to *Clue* (*Cluedo* in the UK), and we thought we could leverage that and make something like 'David Lynch does *Clue*'."

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO USE CD-ROM?

"Myself and Rob Landeros had promised the CEO of Virgin Mastertronic a floppy disc version of the game, but we had no intention of following through on that. It seemed insane to us that people's idea of a big breakthrough for CD-ROM storage was text, so we left and formed Trilobyte."

HOW DID *THE 7TH GUEST* IMPACT UPON THE GAMES INDUSTRY?

"We sold a lot of soundcards, CD-ROM drives and 486 processors. In the end, we sold more than 3 million copies of *The 7th Guest*. We didn't make an awful lot of money from it (that's another story), but we sure left a mark on the planet for a little while."



The set for *Ground Zero Texas*, looking more than a little like a *Star Trek* away mission.



Night Trap was every parent's worst nightmare.

"THEY KEPT RE-SHOOTING SCENES, AND STUNTMEN GOT THE SHIT BEAT OUT OF THEM OVER AND OVER"

STEVE EASTIN, COMMANDER REECE, *GROUND ZERO TEXAS*

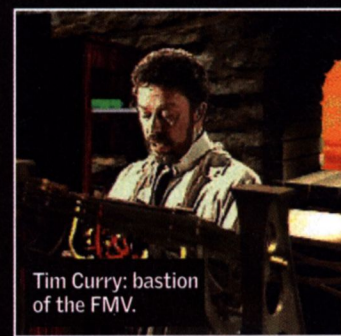
There was a lot of technical jargon, talking into the camera and the like. The main difference (between FMV and conventional movies) was that they kept re-shooting the same scene, especially green-screen footage of the guys getting killed. The stuntmen got the shit beat out of them over and over again."

Robert Culp, a respected character actor who appeared in classic shows such as *Rawhide*, played Reed Hawke in saucy escapade *Voyeur*. "We worked in a round set and everything was CGI'd in later on. Tables were represented by cubes, as were the chairs. It was difficult to work in such artificial surroundings and to tell a real mystery story because the format was so highly stylised," says the 76-year-old, who recently voice-acted Dr Wallace Breen in *Half-Life 2*.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Most FMV productions were about as stylised as a Hull Christmas panto, but some sported mega budgets. "*Ground Zero Texas* cost \$3 million," says Steve Eastin. "They recreated a Texas town in the high desert of Northern LA county. There was a lot of money spent on sets, wardrobe, aliens, make-up and explosions!"

Other productions wallowed in the endless possibilities of 'real live action', showing more arse than Lindsay Lohan after a feed of pints. Roberta Williams, who created Sierra's *King's Quest* series and displayed her norks on the cover of 1981's text-based *Softporn Adventure*, produced *Phantasmagoria* - a game



Tim Curry: bastion of the FMV.

that featured intrigue, espionage and a bit of rape. Meanwhile, Jim Riley's \$1.3m *Night Trap* console release caused a storm of controversy upon arrival.

Night Trap assigned you with the task of stopping a gang of bloodsuckers from spoiling a girly slumber party. "It was going to be a group of girls who are attacked by terrorists but, ironically, there were issues about repeatable violence. We needed a harmless plot device, so I came up with vampires," recalls Riley.

SUCK IT UP

"As the story evolved, we started wondering 'How do they extract the blood?' That's when I came up with a Trocar, a big syringe. Up against the games of today, it's about as extreme as a Martha Stewart gardening simulator."

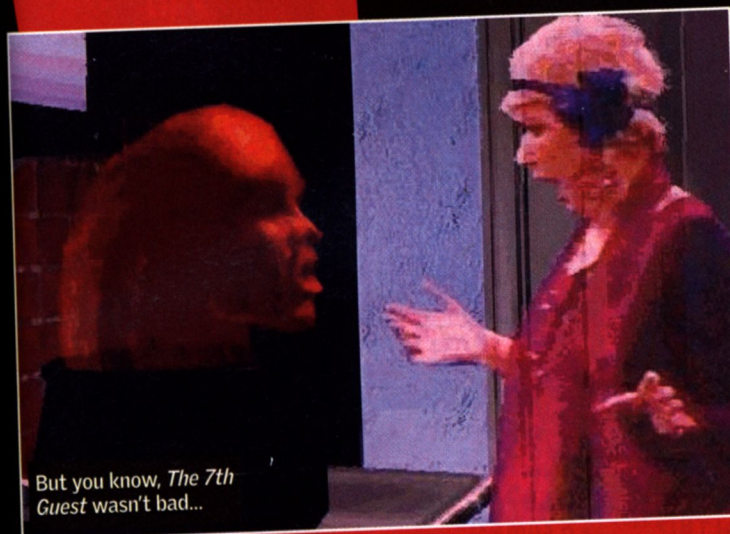
However, at the time, a scantily clad lady getting her faced sucked by a giant plunger was too much for politicians. "It is a sick, disgusting videogame," ranted senators, pulling the title from shelves



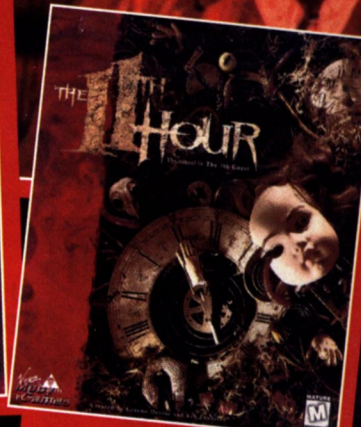
"Hand me the f***ing keys!"
"In English, please?"



...And Tex Murphy certainly
had a way with the ladies.



But you know, *The 7th Guest*
wasn't bad...



The X-Files: The Game, the genre had
all but died out. "It was a fad. Like the
hula-hoop," sighs Robert Culp.

FMV EVOLVED

Today, live-action FMV, in games
like *Command & Conquer*, is entirely
non-interactive. Arguably, FMV games
were never interactive and the entire
movement was a piece of crap, but
don't write it off that quickly. Versed in
the ways of interactive media, Tom Zito
went on to found successful software
application Garageband.com (for the
Mac, grrr), while Jim Riley produces
visual effects for shows like *CSI: Miami*
and *ER*.

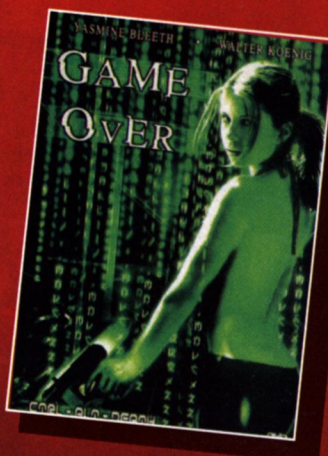
You see, although these guys failed
to bring interactive movies to life, they
invented live-action interaction, a
medium that's only now beginning to
make waves on the internet and TV.

"We believe that with one or two
new titles this genre can be renewed,"
adds Robert Paulsen. "Future
generations will look at pioneers of the
genre, such as Jim Riley and Tom Zito,
not as failures in the game industry, but
as innovators of live-action interaction."
Is that a wrap for interactive movies?
Wait and see. **PCZ**

Lights, camera, traction

FMV leftovers + *Baywatch* babe = car crash...

What can possibly be worse
than a bad live-action FMV
game? How about a bad live-
action FMV movie. *Game Over*
was a straight-to-video flick
that collated snippets from five
Digital Pictures disasters
(*Maximum Surge*, *Corpse Killer*,
Prize Fighter, *Supreme Warrior*
and *Quarterback Attack*) into
95 minutes of cinematic muck.
The woeful storyline - a computer
programmer has to play all these
games in order to save the world
- is splattered with grimy FMV
footage. Not even the inclusion of
Baywatch's Yasmine Bleeth saved
this film from living up to its
tagline, CTRL-ALT-DEATH.



and starting the videogame rating
system as the US knows it today.

With or without controversy,
interactive movies were doomed from
the outset, and big-budget titles like
Wing Commander III stuttered under
the weight of their own ambition.
Robert Paulsen explains: "It wasn't so
much that the genre failed, but that
technology failed the genre. The ideas
were just too far ahead of the technology.
The budgets for these games got bigger
but the end result was always the same
- CDs couldn't hold the information
needed to give the games good video
quality and true interactivity."

Titles like *The 7th Guest*, one of the
first big-selling CD-ROM games, broke
the technological mould with 640x320
FMV at 15-frames-per-second, while
games like *Dracula Unleashed* skirted
limitations by creating a sprite-based
foreground against an FMV background.
But by the time of 1998's doomed

LIFE IN FMV HELL

MY NAME IS Will Porter and sometimes I do stupid things. Sometimes it's small-fry stuff; taking the remote control into the kitchen and leaving it by the kettle perhaps.

Other times though, I really push the boat out with my sheer idiocy. Like suggesting that we do a large feature on the shite FMV games of the mid-'90s, in which I play a bunch of them so that everyone can have a good lol at my pain. What a prick.

And so, after what equates to two entire days of watching sub-American soap-acting and the doeful wobble of some truly botched early attempts at surgical breast enhancement, here are the fruits of my hard labour.

I've reached the stage that the emotions that run through my body whenever I install one of these bastard things approximate to the grim anticipation and pathetic inevitability felt by a diarrhoea sufferer on his fourth toilet trip of the night. It's destroyed my life, my self-esteem and my faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. I hope you're happy, you bastards...

Will Porter

USUALLY, PCZ OPERATES ON A 'ONE STAR BAD, FIVE STARS GOOD' BASIS. HOWEVER, IN THE INTEREST OF NOT ENCOURAGING ANY LIVING BEING TO PLAY THESE GAMES, IN THIS INSTANCE THE GOALPOSTS HAVE BEEN SHIFTED SOMEWHAT...

★★★★★: A BIT SHIT
★★★★★: FAIRLY SHIT
★★★★★: PRETTY DAMN SHIT
★★★★★: EXTREMELY SHIT
★★★★★: UTTER SHIT

PHANTASMAGORIA (1995)

HOW IT BEGINS:

A screaming lady with long blonde hair is in a scary place that involves her being strapped into a torture chair. But that's not all; it's so scary that the camera flings itself around like a stunned wasp, and actual tons of fake limbs hang around from everything. She wakes up in bed with her husband, a man with a ponytail normally reserved for the sweatiest men from Porn Valley, California. BUT ACTUALLY SHE'S STILL DREAMING AND IS IN AN IRON MAIDEN. Then, she wakes up again. She kisses the porny bloke, who is blatantly evil.

HOW IT WORKS:

After a breakfast scene in which there's much lumbering conversation that makes you want cave your own skull in with your sub-woofer, it's established that the newly-weds have just moved into a gigantic scary mansion apparently once owned by a nefarious magician called Carlo someone. Rather

than ring up to check who her gas supplier is, the lady's first instinct is to wander round in front of a blue-screen, making stilted movements and looking at dull paintings in the worst attempt at point-and-click mankind has ever conceived.

RUDE-O-METER:

Sex and violence is certainly lacking in the early bits of the game. Jumping ahead through the discs reveals my version has the controversial 'rape' scene edited out. However, if it's like the rest of the game then it's probably the ponytailed porn man mugging the line, "I may be dressed as an evil clown, but you are my wife and you WILL have sex with me!", followed by a clumsy cut to the blonde woman trying to do an impression of Jack Nicholson's wife in *The Shining*. When I played the ending through and bugged it up the lady got her head cleaved in two by a swinging scythe, which was both grim and strangely satisfying.



One of several potentially grisly endings.

ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

Ponytail man starred in *Witchcraft II: The Temptress*, while screamly lady once had a (I think, non-naked) role in Channel 5's once-famed late-night wankathon *Hotline*. Brilliantly the twosome fell in love on set, and could well be trading stilted sexual innuendo and vague platitudes to this very day.

RATING

★★★★★



STARTREK: BORG (1996)



HOW IT BEGINS:

Sauntering through a *Star Trek* ship and ambling into a meeting only to be chastised for your tardiness, you're struck by two things: the acting isn't great, and in the *Star Trek* universe, bras must have been eradicated. Nevertheless the Borg are at it again, and you're being evacuated. BUT MAYBE YOU'RE NOT AS OMG Q HAS JUST TURNED UP AND WANTS YOU TO HELP HIM OUT.

HOW IT WORKS:

The irascible, and in my opinion truly brilliant, John de Lancie is leaping



Q experiencing the best of both worlds.

around as Q, gurning at the camera and generally being the shiny shining light he's always been throughout *TNG*. Taken back in time and put smack-bang into the middle of the battle of Wolf359 (Wolf359!) and placed in some bloke's body, it's up to you to save the life of your own father. Oh the drama! Oh the shaky set and dry ice!

RUDE-O-METER:

No rudeness whatsoever. Not even a drop of lewdity. Obviously Q is a bit rude – snapping his fingers at you and making you make fast judgments on what to do next. And giving you a savage taunting whenever you get turned into a borg or stuff blows up

(which happens quite a lot, given the game's multiple strands).

ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

The supporting cast have done tons of other stuff like *I Want A Dog*, *A Town Without Christmas*, *Diagnosis Murder* and *Walker, Texas Ranger*. John de Lancie meanwhile has done... Er... Lots of other stuff. And was in *Stargate* for a bit.

RATING

★★★★★



TENDER LOVING CARE (1998)

HOW IT STARTS:

John Hurt, yes John Hurt, recruits you as some sort of time-travelling fly-on-the-wall psychiatrist who watches a Shannon Tweed-style soft-core sex romp. (If you don't know who Shannon Tweed is then Google her – or, again, watch 2002-era late-night Channel 5.) There's a mental lady who doesn't want to admit her daughter is dead, her beleaguered husband and a sexy blonde psychologist who's been hired to constantly undo and do up her loose-fitting porn-blouse.

HOW IT WORKS:

You watch the (actually, quite well acted) movies, snoop around a 3D recreation of the house and prepare for mild titillation at its most titillating-est. John Hurt gives you a psychoanalytical test every now and then on what you think is going on, or shows you a bunch of Edward Hopper paintings and asks you sex questions. That's right: sex questions. "Do you like watching people through windows?" "What's more important, sex or food?"

"How much would you say you think about sex?" "Sexy sex-sex, sex?"

RUDE-O-METER:

Really rude actually. Answer the questions in a certain pattern, essentially clicking the button that says 'pwhoar!' when requested, then you get to see naughty stuff. So if you've been a prude then you'll see the blonde psychologist with her bra on, and if you've been a wide-eyed sexpest then it'll be totally off! Who knew that the mysteries of the brain could prompt such fluttering of eyelids and knickerless uncrossing of legs?

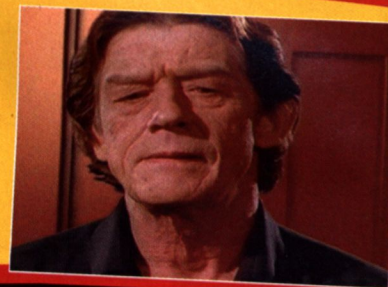
ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

The mad lady has been in something called *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, the woman who takes her clothes off has been in an episode of *Acapulco H.E.A.T.* and John Hurt has been in tons of good stuff, obviously, like *V For Vendetta*.

RATING



Cue sex shenanigans.



X-FILES: THE INTERACTIVE ADVENTURE (1998)

HOW IT STARTS:

It starts, as it always does in *X-Files*, with a warehouse. Mulder and Scully enter stage-left, find some mysterious black powder stage right and armed goons appear from the rear before being struck by some kind of blinding light. But then, oh the calamity, both Mulder and Scully get kidnapped and you set off on their trail. It's just like when Scully was shoved in some bloke's car boot for several episodes, but it's been done for budgetary reasons rather than Gillian Anderson getting up the duff.

HOW IT WORKS:

You click through various static scenes of offices, motels and the like – waving a crap torch, tapping unknown phone numbers into your mobile and getting hold of one of the conspiracy nerds Mulder hangs out with. Agent Skinner hangs around with you for the starting bits, looking grumpy and asking, "What the hell are you doing?" whenever you try to give him random pieces of paper you've obtained on your

travels. When you're totally bored you can whip your gun out, take aim and shoot him in the head. This happens quite soon into the game.

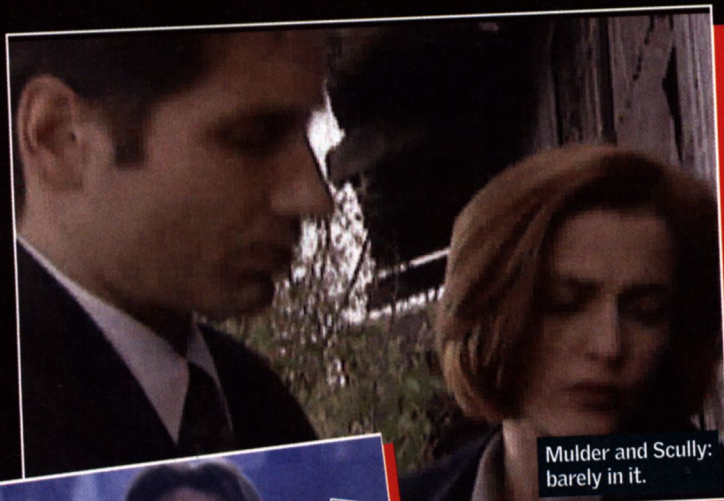
RUDE-O-METER:

Again, disappointingly not rude. This does not, however, stop ladies you come across smiling that little bit too much – what with the director clearly having whispered, "They're nerds! Flash a little leg and they'll love it!" just before the camera rolled.

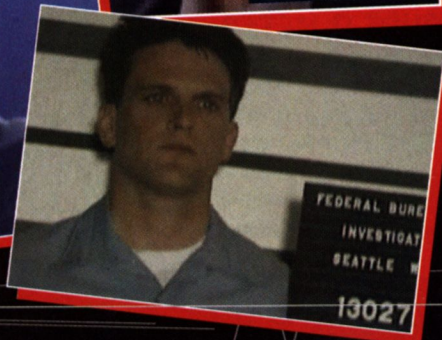
ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

Aside from the obvious stars, none of the B-list characters have had any success in anything at all. Even in the shite-addled realms of FMV gaming this is a poor, and telling, show.

RATING



Mulder and Scully: barely in it.





VOYEUR II (1996)

This is just *too* sexy....



HOW IT STARTS:

You're in a creaky cabin with a telescopic zoom lens watching a bunch of talentless actors bickering over the reading of a will. We're talking proper *The Bold And The Beautiful* faints, swoons, glowers and vacant drug-addled drifty eyes. Then they all bugger off, and you randomly click on other windows in the building to attempt to follow the plot and/or work out which rooms the nudity happens in.

HOW IT WORKS:

Essentially someone is going to get killed, and it's up to you to watch the right conversations. Easy enough you might think, but the game also does ridiculous stuff like turn your camera off halfway through because you didn't wander round your hut at the start turning the lights off to conserve enough power to last the entire game. Now that's a gaming contrivance guaranteed to annoy to the limit.

RUDE-O-METER:

This totally isn't half as rude as I thought it would be back when I was a mere teenager. I count one bare male arse, a lady being slightly spanked, a woman getting into a hot-tub and a lesbian lip-locking session about as convincing as two shop dummies lying against each other in a storage cupboard. Hardly the hotbed of naughtiness suggested.

ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

Red Shoe Diaries 3: Another Woman's Lipstick, Stripped To Kill II: Live Girls, Full Exposure: The Sex Tapes Scandal and *Captain Planet And The Planeteers* lie among the bristling resumés of the *Voyeur II* posse. I'm hitting Amazon *right now*.

RATING
★★★★★

DAYS OF OBLIVION II: THE FROZEN ETERNITY (2000)

HOW IT STARTS:

OK, settle down. Peasants attack a Venetian scientist in a bad wig, all of whom are a little too excited to be on camera. Then a magic thing is thrown in the sea, before a long soliloquy by the game's star – a Eurotrashy man in an Elvis suit wearing over-large sunglasses. We're then treated to the sight of a badly trained ninja taking out a German OAP next to a skip. The adventure begins!

HOW IT WORKS:

It's a point-and-click affair, but it's also entirely in German, so it's hard to tell what the hell is going on if you're a crap Englishman like me. Nevertheless, after ten minutes of hard graft I'd been threatened by an old lady with a shotgun before sweet-talking her into giving me a bowl of some sort of pudding. After a quick chat with a vampire I got really stuck though. Which was unfair, as I can't remember the last time I laughed this hard at something so amateurish.

RUDE-O-METER:

The game box promised nothing but lewdness and naughtiness, but the reality of the situation is far distant. A quick skip and dance through the .wmv files of latter CDs however reveal ten FMV monologues from a bikini lady apparently coated in bee's wax and a video of someone touching herself in front of a mirror that you can watch during space-taxi rides in the game.

ACTORS HAVE ALSO APPEARED IN:

Every single person involved in this travesty of gaming seems to have gone underground or, presumably, onto those phone-kissing chat-line adverts you get every two minutes on German TV. If anyone has their forwarding address, then feel free to pass it on. **PCZ**

RATING
★★★★★



SO WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

TODAY'S LESSON HAS BEEN TO LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE. IF A GENRE IS RENOWNED FOR ITS SHITENESS, THEN THERE'S NO REASON TO START POKING IT WITH A BIG STICK TO SEE IF THERE'S STILL LIFE IN IT. THERE ISN'T: THE DREAM IS OVER. AND BEFORE YOU START WRITING LETTERS, I'M AWARE UNDER A KILLING MOON AND THE 11TH HOUR WERE QUITE GOOD. I'M JUST FEELING A BIT DELICATE TODAY, THAT'S ALL.

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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

N00b part two

AFTER MY COLUMN a few issues ago discussing my mum's entry into the world of computing, I received an angry letter from reader Carol Fox...

"Dear Miss Wallace, I read your n00bs column in the June issue and became angry. You didn't come out of your mum's womb fully computer-literate missy! How dare you and other snot-nosed brats (mine included) make fun of their mothers who are just discovering computers - we didn't have them in school. You owe your mother and the rest of us a big apology."

As I didn't feel like I'd insulted my mum, I forwarded her both my original column and the incensed letter of reply from Carol via email, to get her opinion.

A few hours had passed without reply when I got a call. It was my mum. Chuckling away, she admitted: "I wasn't offended at all and was just writing a lengthy reply defending you but when I went to send it, I managed to lose the email and accidentally shut down my computer by mistake."

No further comment needed.

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

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



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

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COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

Rally round to find out if Colin's back in pole position with his latest mud-splattered opus...

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 ZONE gaming machine

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



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Buy this little lot

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

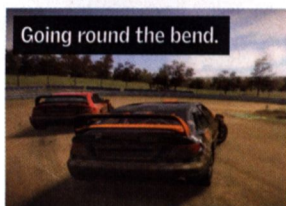


COLIN MCRAE: DIRT



Suzy Wallace braids her hair and dons some chaps before getting down and dirty....

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE
www.codemasters.co.uk/dirt
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Crams every major discipline of off-road racing into one package, with fantastic graphics, excellent sound and a decent career mode.

Minimum system requirements:
 3GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT **88%**
 TOCA RACE DRIVER 3 **85%**
 COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005 **80%**

ICAN STILL remember where I was when I heard the news. At a press event at Rockingham race-track, a Codemasters representative quietly whispered it in my ear. My jaw fell. The sheer incredulity of it stunned me. One of my ways to measure the year's passing, one of gaming's staple titles wasn't going to see a release in the year of 2006. Was it even possible for a year to pass without another edition of *Colin McRae*? Would the world stop spinning? Had Codemasters finally got bored of the title?

Fear not though, because behind closed doors, the Codies team have been busy with the latest edition and now we've had a chance to slide sideways round the full game, we can happily report that *Colin McRae: DiRT* is well worth the wait.

First things first. This is not the *Colin McRae* you've played a hundred times

before. Everything from the sound effects through to the graphics, even to the game modes has been stripped down and built back up again to create a completely new experience. Whereas before, playing one *Colin McRae* title meant you'd pretty much played them all, now the game has changed almost beyond all recognition. It seems that Colin's not only been resurrected, but reincarnated in a vastly superior form.

SHINY AND NEW

Drawing on their multi-motorsport experience with *TOCA Race Driver 3*, Codies have introduced a raft of new racing genres to the game. No longer just restricted to plain rallying, this time round, they've managed to cram in practically every type of motorsport that features copious amounts of mud and dust, demanding that a car wash and a well-equipped mechanic be standing by at the

end of each race. While standard rallying still plays a big part (appearing in RWD, FWD and 4WD forms), there are also five newcomers to the scene: Crossover, Rally Raid, Rallycross, CORR and Hill Climb (see 'Wacky Races', p66).

But let's start at the beginning. From the moment the flashy new floating 3D interface pops up (reminiscent of Windows Vista, with the exception that everything works), the Scot of the title is conspicuous by his absence. Instead, your presence is greeted by the American tones of Travis Pastrana (see 'Wunderkind', p67), motocross legend, rallying newcomer and all-round nice guy (makes you sick, doesn't it?).

Quite why Colin's disappeared is a mystery; you see his name popping up in races as you pip him to the post, but that's as much of an appearance as he makes. I guess middle-aged Scottish guys just don't pull in the crowds like an all-American urban hero who does backflips on motorbikes, says "Awesome!" way too much and commands instant respect from any beanie-wearing kid.

SEE THE PYRAMIDS

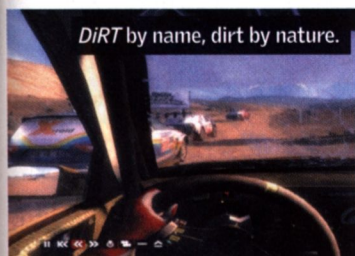
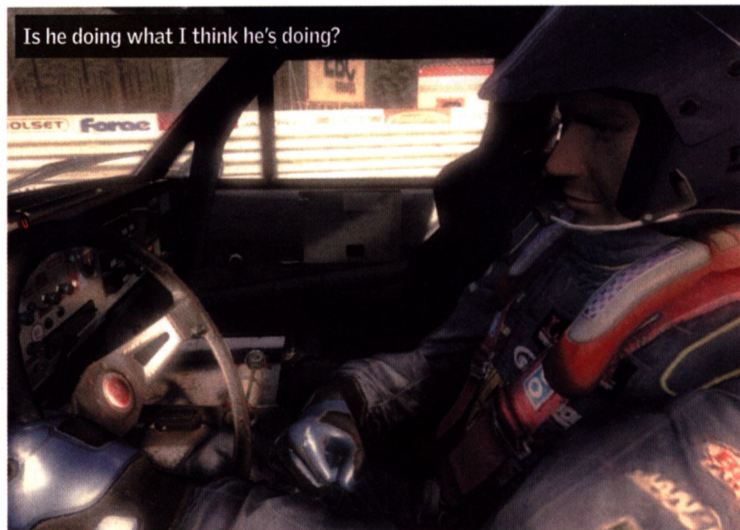
Three modes are open to you: Career, Championship and Rally World, although the latter's really just a free ride mode. Championship mode offers some classic *McRae* gameplay, with its selection of rallies that you can compete in, stage by stage. But what you should be most interested in is the Career mode. Selecting this option swoops you off to a flashy pyramid-like structure.

Starting at Tier 1 at the bottom of the rung, there are 11 different races, with each tier featuring one less race – all the

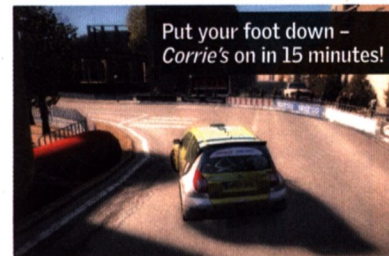




The different driving styles are a breath of fresh air for the *McRae* series.



This is not the *Colin* you've played a hundred times before. Sound effects, graphics and game models have been rebuilt from the ground up...



way up to Tier 11 at the top. Progression through the tiers is dependent on winning points from the races in the tier below.

Moving up in the world offers faster cars and more difficult tracks, going from straight roads to ones in which your co-driver will barely be able to keep up with the twists and turns. This pyramid structure cleverly offers lower-level drivers plenty of chances to experiment or stick to their best events, only to force you to master them all at the higher levels. There's also a difficulty level that can be set for each race, hopefully preventing you from getting stuck on any tough races.

Or should that be stuck in the mud...

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

The new genres bring their own unique features into the fold and despite a definite similarity running through them, the resulting selection of races help to make the game feel huge and varied. The different driving styles are a breath of fresh air and unlike the unwieldy number in *TOCA3*, the smaller variety feel more enjoyable, better implemented and more essential to the game. Plus, there's no monster truck racing. Thank god.

But don't think that if you didn't get on

with the arcadey handling of previous *Colin* titles you'll be any more accommodated here. Each race provides a distinct lack of grip on the road, from the muddy circuits of *CORR* to the dusty winding trails of the Hill Climb. Luckily, the handling varies significantly between cars too. Jump from a 4WD rally car to a RWD and you'll instantly notice the difference, with the back-end kicking out under power and offering plenty of butt-clenching moments as you narrowly avoid (or don't) large immovable objects on the roadside. If

I had to criticise, I'd point out that it's quite tricky to keep a sideways slide going, but with the vehicles successfully going round corners anyway, it's hardly a problem.

SILVER MACHINES

If, like me, cars are your thing, then there's a good selection of machinery to get excited about. Hillbillies are catered for by the Hill Climb big rigs; basically, the working end of an articulated lorry, complete with oversized spoiler big enough to have a picnic on. Old-schoolers will surely appreciate the



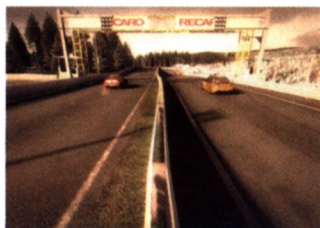
Wacky races

We explain the different types of racing on offer....



Rallying

If you've played *Colin McRae* games before, you should have a good idea of what to expect from this. Point-to-point racing on your own along dusty trails, twisty tarmac and through towering forests. Available in FWD, RWD and 4WD formulas.



Crossover

If you've watched rallying, you'll recognise these as the special stages. Head-to-head racing between two cars around a twisty, tarmacked circuit, with lanes crossing over and swapping places before arriving back at the finish.



Rallycross

Popular in Europe, Rallycross is simply a mish-mash of off- and on-road racing. Racing in a pack round a circuit, you're required to guide your vehicle round both the silky smooth tarmac section and also the more treacherous off-road part too.



Rally Raid

Taking its cue from the Dakar Rally, Rally Raid features a host of souped-up SUVs that have been taken from the streets of Chelsea and dumped onto the raised dust tracks of America. The key here is keeping your speed up.



CORR

Basically off-roading for Americans, Championship Off-Road Racing features circuit-racing round dusty/muddy circuits. You'll be racing light and nimble buggies or heavy trucks, but make sure you're expecting lots of body contact in corners.



Hill Climb

The craziest discipline here, Hill Climb involves driving insanely-powerful vehicles up trails, most notably the infamous Pikes Peak. Watch out for huge drops on either side, along with twisting corners and breathtaking views.



legendary fire-spitting Audi Sport Quattro S1 and the classic Renault 5 Maxi and Lancia Stratos HF. Plus, there's a host of modern machinery to get excited about too, such as the modified Lotus Exige and the Mitsubishi Evo IX. Or, if everything I've just said means absolutely nothing to you, that's a lot of cars that go fast. The only vehicles I didn't enjoy as much were the CORR buggies, although that was more down to their fragile nature and consequent pile-ups than the handling.

YOU'RE GORGEOUS

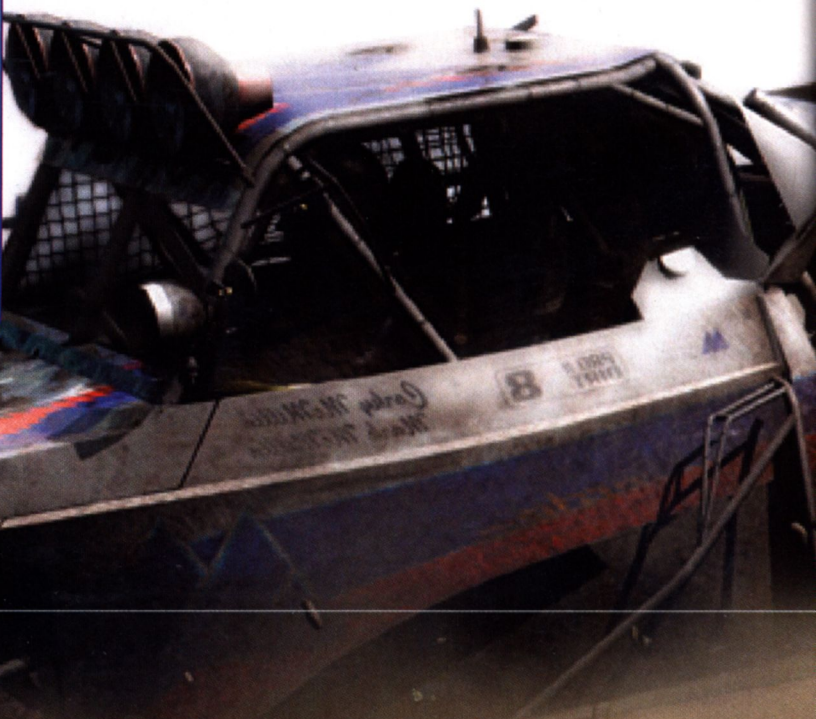
Rest assured though, whatever car you choose, the gorgeous new Neon graphics engine makes everything look amazing. Instead of re-using old assets, Codies have started again. The result is a stunning engine, which despite a bit of over-reliance on bloom effects, produces some spectacular screenshots. It's almost a shame that thanks to the speed of the game, it's only when everything's paused or on replay that you even have time to

notice just how good it looks. Each vehicle's modelled with painstaking attention to detail, from bolts on spoilers to interiors.

The tracks look fantastic too, with their amazing draw distances allowing you to see into the distance. Sunlight filters through the tree-lined tracks, with the resulting shadows being reflected beautifully on your car. Trees, bushes and vegetation are all modelled and smoke, dust and spray are all thrown in too, with the mud that builds up on your car during a stage being a particularly nice touch.

EAT DIRT

Let's face facts though. This is a rallying game and you're unlikely to make it through an entire stage without suffering at least a few dents. Still, at least you get to see the excellent damage engine in full effect. Panels get scraped, bumpers crumple and fly off, windows smash and everything has a technical effect on the way your car drives too (à la *TOCA3*), meaning as





No *McRae 2006*, but *DiRT* more than makes up for it.

always, danger lurks in the form of trees, road-signs and other immovable objects.

If you do stray off the beaten path, small trees and bushes will bend and slow you down before snapping, while bigger trees and solid objects like walls should be avoided if you fancy continuing. More than once, I was about to cross the finish line first, only to crash into the surrounding wall and irreparably write my car off, to an accompaniment of swearing. The game's accompanying sound effects are worth a mention too, with some excellent wastegate chatter (the part that sounds a bit like a canary every time you let off the throttle), turbo and engine noises filling your ears.

But now for the bad news: all of these tip-top effects come at a cost. You need a monster of a machine to run the game how it's supposed to be played. Devoid of DirectX10 features, you'll at least be spared from having to endure Vista in

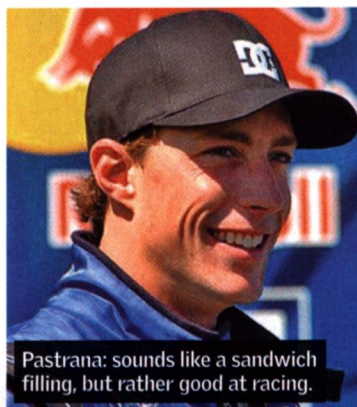
order to play, but recommended specs include an Intel Core 2 Duo, 2GB RAM and a 768MB graphics card. That's a pretty hefty set-up. Even on our über games machine, we experienced the odd bit of slow down, and lesser systems will be hard-pressed to keep up the pace.

BILLY-NO-MATES

Another disappointment is on the multiplayer side. Although there was talk of 100 players competing simultaneously, that's a bit of a fib. With the only options being the point-to-point races of the Hill Climb or Rallying stages, each player is given their own instance of the track, with the times simply being compared

Wonderkid

Who the hell is Travis Pastrana? Here's all you need to know....

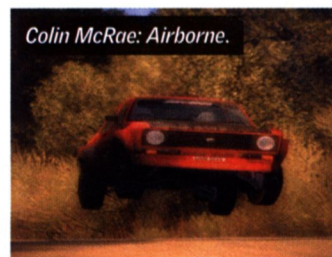


Pastrana: sounds like a sandwich filling, but rather good at racing.

Pastrana is one of those annoying guys who mocks the general population's total ineptness by being great at everything he tries. Starting off in motocross, he's probably most famed for being the only rider to ever attempt and pull off a double back-flip (at the 2006 X Games). But not content with being good on a bike, he's turned to rallying too, signing up with the Subaru team. Pastrana and Colin McRae took part in the first Rally Car competition to feature in the X Games. Though McRae was leading the way and looked sure to win gold in the event, he rolled his car in the last corner and Pastrana took first place. Yes, he really is that annoyingly talented.

once everyone's finished. This is a shame, as featuring the circuit races online would have really given the game a great web presence. Plus, I'd love to try out my 'PIT' manoeuvre on some unwitting players.

Annoying as these downsides are, they're still only minor detractors from what I reckon is McRae's finest outing to date (minus, of course, Colin himself). The new types of racing offer far more variety of gameplay, the sound effects are impressive and there are eye-searingly gorgeous graphics and an excellent career mode to boot. It appears that *DiRT*'s rejuvenated the tired old *McRae* formula and put it back onto the pole position of rallying titles. As Travis Pastrana would say: "That's awesome." **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Finger-lickin' good
Sound Surprisingly good
Multiplayer Up to 100 but not all together

- ✓ Gorgeous graphics
- ✓ Enough variety to keep you hooked
- ✓ Great career mode
- ✓ Excellent damage model
- ✗ Disappointing multiplayer
- ✗ Requires an über system to run properly

88

Ooooh Colin, you're such a dirty boy



32ND AMERICA'S CUP

The king of sailing sims gets a makeover

DEVELOPER Nadeo
PUBLISHER Focus Home Interactive
WEBSITE www.virtualskipper-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
 1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM
 and a 32MB graphics card

WHEN YOU TELL someone you're reviewing a game called *Virtual Skipper*, they generally laugh, then look at you in a way that suggests they respect some of your career choices less than others. Perhaps this is the thinking behind the re-branding of *Virtual Skipper 5* to the more sporty, dynamic *32nd America's Cup*. To give the game that instant appeal, and rope in the casual sports gaming set.

Those people might be confused. For a sporting game, *32nd America's Cup* remains one of understated skill and patience. On longer games, the first five minutes will be spent jostling behind the line to get the best starting position – but that's the point; it's realistic, the regatta has rules, and even the inclusion of an arcade mode for clueless landlubbers won't suddenly transform

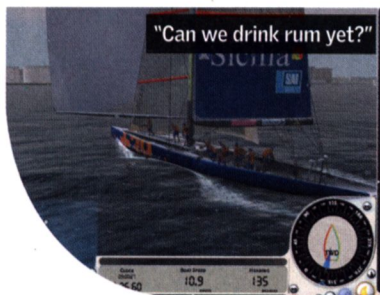


the realities of sailing into a grenade-tossing deathmatch.

This is basically *Virtual Skipper 4* with a makeover and a purpose; the sound effects, the (essential, for beginners) training missions, the charming typos and the concept of sailing a boat around for a while are all there, all pretty much the same. But it looks slicker, the single-player campaign is more involved and the multiplayer works well. In short, this is really good, albeit inescapably and transparently niche.

If you don't laugh when the words 'virtual' and 'skipper' are put together, then you're almost guaranteed to enjoy this. Hell, play it anyway – at least you'll be able to take the piss out of sailors with some of their own words.

Jon Blyth



TAKING BACK CONTROL

The game pad that's got all other controllers on the run...

Every discerning gamer needs a good game pad in the palms of their hands. It doesn't matter whether you own a PlayStation 3, a PlayStation 2 or a PC, or if you prefer first-person shooters to flight simulators. Fortunately the Run N' Drive from Thrustmaster has all bases covered.

Compatible with the next-gen PS3, as well as PS2 and PCs, the revolutionary game pad's signature feature is its optical wheel handily located on the D-pad. Fitted with an optical sensor for extra precision, you can use the wheel to take corners cleanly in the latest racing games such as *MotorStorm* and *Ridge Racer 7*; zoom in on enemies for the perfect shot in *Resistance: Fall of Man*; hit an unstoppable winner in *Virtua Tennis 3*; or perform death-defying stunts in flight sims. An automatic centring system and two sensitivity modes give you further control.

We're also impressed with the ability to map and save two types of controller configuration, with your buttons, triggers, mini-sticks and optical wheel settings stored even when the Run N' Drive is

unplugged. This makes it the perfect pad for games such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series, where you're constantly switching between running around on foot and getting behind the wheels of vehicles. It means there's no longer any need to pause the action in order to check the button configuration for different sections of a game.

The Run N' Drive's unique design means it's comfortable in your hands even after a long and hard gaming session. And yet you'll still find all the standard mini-sticks, D-pads and buttons of other controllers, plus three buttons on each shoulder – one pair being analogue controls perfect for mapping acceleration and braking.

Putting the fun back into your PlayStation gaming comes at a wallet-friendly price too: the Run N' Drive is available at GAME stores for only £19.99 as well as all good retailers. Don't miss out on the chance to gain the competitive gaming edge!

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The things you can achieve with slave labour...



All this marauding is thirsty work.

DEVELOPER Triumph Studios
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE
www.codemasters.co.uk/overlord
ETA June 29
PRICE £34.99

OVERLORD

Suzy Wallace likes nothing better than lording it up. Lucky she's reviewing this game then...

I STEP INTO bright midday sunshine. Before me lies a textbook country vista: rolling hills stretch off into the distance, blanketed by lush green grass. Flowers angle their heads towards the sun and a flock of sheep nonchalantly chew upon the grass. It's an idyllic scene. But the peace is about to be shattered.

Smirking maliciously, I project my will to the diminutive creatures standing next to me. Their howls of laughter fill the air as a handful of them rush over to the nearest group of ovines and start attacking them with the pieces of wood they've picked up as makeshift weapons. One even gets on a sheep's back, riding the panicked beast round the field before it too is sent to the big shepherd in the sky. PETA are probably preparing a lawsuit right now.

EVIL KНИЕVEL

It's a typical scene from *Overlord*, the game in which you play an evil warlord with a host of mischievous goblin-like minions at your command. Set in a lush fantasy world with a slightly dark sense of humour, your task is to defeat seven heroes and gain uncontested dominion over the realm. For a quick idea of what the game's like, the settings (and the strong country accents) instantly bring *Fable* to mind, while the gameplay has more in common with Nintendo's *Pikmin*.

As well as conquering and pillaging, you also have to recover various items strewn around the levels in order to upgrade your private tower into the ultimate evil 'crib'. That includes opening up a forge where you can create upgraded armour and weapons by sacrificing your minions, getting yourself a buxom wench and decorating the place to your evil tastes.



Loot, burn, pillage, repeat.



Getting the minions to sort the pantry was a mistake.

However, it's the minions themselves that are the highlight of the game. You start with only brown minions (strong attack) but will soon rescue three more hives, bringing the red (fire-resistant, can throw fireballs and put fires out), blue (water-resistant and can heal other minions but weak to attacks) and green (resistant to poison and possessing a good stealth attack) minions under your control too. With only a limited number of minions at your disposal at any one time, you'll use these little critters to

rescue tower parts, take down enemies (after which you can harvest their life force, therefore earning you more minions) and generally pillage everything in sight. After all, evil overlords don't spend their days making daisy chains and cuddling kittens.

SHEEP LOVERS

Your minions are highly entertaining too, with some amusing dialogue, excellent voices (I detected a hint of Cartman more than once) and a liberal dose of humour –



"Wait! We just wanted to borrow some sugar."

AT A GLANCE...

Unleash your inner evil as you solve puzzles, defeat enemies and retrieve parts of your tower with the help of your impish minions.

Minimum system requirements:

2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

DUNGEON KEEPER 2 94%

FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS 84%

OVERLORD 72%



Much amusement can be had by dunking non-waterproof minions.



Anyone for a snakebite?

Even the most devout of animal lovers will chuckle as your minions jump onto the backs of the bleating sheep



"Bundle!"



Memories of *Oblivion*, anyone?

even the most devout of animal lovers will chuckle as they jump onto the backs of the bleating sheep. They'll also pick up whatever they find lying around to use in battle, which occasionally yields amusing results (such as pumpkins used as helmets). And of course there's a strange sense of satisfaction to be gained from trashing everything you see. Though perhaps that's an issue for my therapist.

The game is pretty fiddly when played with mouse and keyboard, but is much better with an Xbox 360 gamepad (or equivalent), where the dual analogue sticks perfectly fit the character/minion control. Once you're controlling your minions, the *Pikmin*

similarities become self-evident. Direct your minions to swarm a creature and an indicator of how many are attacking it appears above its head. Objects that need to be retrieved have numbers above them indicating how many minions are needed to carry them. And when you first meet the giant frogs, you almost find yourself starting to look for spaceship parts.

LIVING IN FANTASY LAND

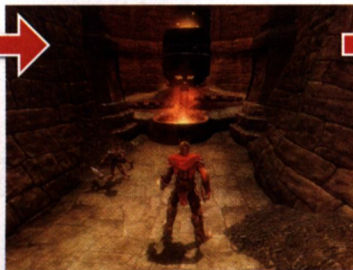
Despite a lack of originality in the settings (elfen forests, dwarven mines, swampy caves... *yawn*), some good artistic design largely saves the day. The forest of the elves is a particular highlight, with its misty waters, pulsating roots, giant frogs and luminous toxic plants.

Lesser evil

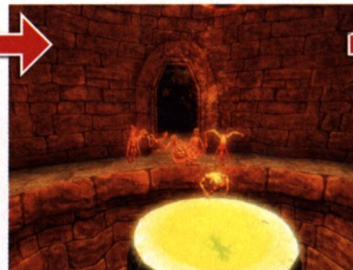
Is your evilness not powerful enough? Would you like to do something about it? Here's how...



These halflings are giving me more of a beating than I care to admit. It's frankly embarrassing, and I need to do something about it, pronto.



A quick nip back to my evil tower, down a dark staircase, and here I am in the forge. Let's get ready to make some new bling.



My minions aren't just ready to fight but also to be sacrificed in order to upgrade my possessions. Just look at the little blighters jump in, bless 'em.



Oooh, now my sword sparkles, causes more damage and even has a fire damage effect on it. Reckon I could do with a few minions back home...



Too many cooks...

Connecting these levels is open countryside, populated by inbred peasants (I assume by the fact that there's only a handful of different character models that they're all 'well acquainted' with one another) and a lot of sheep. Strangely though, the game is devoid of a map, leading to a fair bit of aimless wandering – a real issue in a game where you're free to go where you want.

The enemies are another highlight, especially the boss battles. From the halfling leader who's eaten the entire village's food supplies and now rolls around like a beach ball (and who, rather disgustingly, has to be finished off by popping him), to super-violent unicorns, cackling succubi and aquatic serpentine menaces, some real thought has gone into creating these and the different methods required to defeat them.



Ah, some fellow evil-doers – shall we spare them? Nah.

EVIL PUSHOVER

Unsurprisingly though, even evil overlords have issues. For one, your main character is disappointingly weak. This is the guy meant to be the epitome of evil and yet, more than



The seven heroes loosely embody the seven deadly sins.



Yeah right, it's a glandular thing.

once, I found myself getting my butt handed to me by an insect. Evil overlords just aren't what they used to be. Healing points often feel too far apart and there are times when you have the wrong mix of minions or not enough of a particular type, forcing you to trudge back through levels. Multiplayer proves to be a confusing affair, with nothing to differentiate between one player's minions and another.

While *Overlord* has some good ideas, its minor issues can be frustrating and time-consuming, and after a while the 'puzzle solving' starts to feel a little repetitive. On top of that, the balancing could do with some tweaking, with some enemies too hard to defeat and some bosses too easy.

However, playing as a character devoid of morals is still very appealing, and smashing up everything in sight does provide a massive dose of stress relief. Shame there weren't any sharks with frickin' laser beams on their heads though. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Fantastical and vivid
Sound Minions' chatter is quite amusing
Multiplayer Yes, but very confusing

- ✓ Minions are amusing
- ✓ Varied boss enemies
- ✓ Rich artistic style
- ✗ Where's the map?
- ✗ Balancing/multiplayer issues and backtracking
- ✗ Not enough evilness

72

Not quite lord and master



ALPINE SKI RACING 2007

The ski to success...

DEVELOPER 49Games

PUBLISHER JoWood

WEBSITE www.alpineskiracing2007.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

Min system req:

1GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card



I'VE NEVER BEEN that partial to skiing, instead preferring the far cooler pastime of snowboarding. But I can still see the appeal of hurtling down a slope at nearly 100mph dressed only in a suit that's tight enough to make your eyes water.

This year, Bode Miller has been joined by Hermann Maier too (the American obviously not proving popular enough this time around). What's more, there's not one second goes past that you're not reminded of it, with the commentators bringing up his name roughly every millisecond.

There are five different events, with the best being the speed downhill which sees you don a giant



orange condom and what looks like a welder's mask before hurtling down the slope. These events are surprisingly fun to play the first time around, and the career mode, with its supporting cast who look like they're comedy placeholders rather than the real

thing, is entertaining enough too.

The entire package is wrapped up in a pretty engine, with sparkly crisp snow and towering pine trees to avoid.

After a while though, things all start to get a bit repetitive and tedious, with many of the events blending into one big blur of weaving between flags in the snow. Which, funnily enough, is exactly what everything looks like after a good night of apres ski anyway.

Suzy Wallace



PCZONE

61

Break a leg

ARE YOU EVIL?



It's fast, frantic and occasionally fun.



You know what they say about monsters with big shoes...



You're expected to use a 360 pad, but mouse control is OK.

MONSTER MADNESS: BATTLE FOR SUBURBIA



Dan Griliopoulos remembers that only the very, very dull call themselves mad...

DEVELOPER Artificial Studios
PUBLISHER Southpeak Interactive
WEBSITE www.monster-madness.com
ETA July 15
PRICE £35

AT A GLANCE...

Zombie-comedy-combo with good multiplayer and personality issues.

Minimum system requirements: 1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORMS 4: MAYHEM **80%**

MASHED **64%**

MONSTER MADNESS **59%**

SOME THINGS ARE a bit dull when you're on your tod: swingball, chess, cottaging... The list is endless. The adage works for some games too: *Worms*, *Gauntlet*, *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* – all no fun without a pal. And, even though it will never be as fondly remembered, now *Monster Madness* has joined this league.

Essentially, you take control of one of four hormonal cartoon teenagers battling an undead invasion in their home town. It's all done in an isometric 3D perspective with you using the mouse to aim and WASD to move about. As you go around, you collect tapes, pipes and other crap which a biker chap makes into weird and functional weaponry. Vehicles are thrown into the mix every now and then (whose controls are far better suited to a gamepad), and all the time there's endless waves of zombies, lobbing physics items or trying to eat you.

The first problem with the game is the so-so combat. The enemies mostly rush straight for you. Every now and then you get trapped inside a ring where you've got

to fight a set number of monsters or kill a big boss before you're allowed to progress to the next bit. All you can do is just run around in circles and pound them till they're dead; there's precious little in the way of tactics or variation. With four players on-screen, things can get heftily confusing too.

NOT COMEDY GOLD

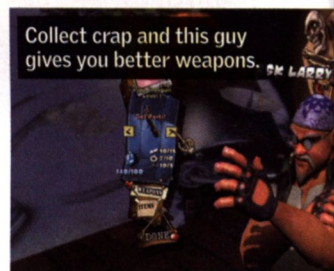
It's also an odd mix of different art styles. You can see that the original design wasn't working, so they've drenched it in olde-worlde filters, leaving it neither endearing nor professional but near to both. An irrelevant plot runs alongside this with a comic-book style that's not quite slick enough and definitely not well-written. Mostly it skips the funny bone and clumsily shatters your serious femur. That said, the monster designs themselves are excellent, and the music is pure Danny Elfman, like a wacky uncle playing the Batman theme on a ukulele.

It's sad that there are no great *Gauntlet*-style hack-and-slash multiplayer games anymore. Despite its flaws, this is

the best that an old workhorse of a genre has to offer so, if you must play it, play it with friends. Don't expect too much though... **PCZ**



Hack. Shoot. Repeat.



Collect crap and this guy gives you better weapons.

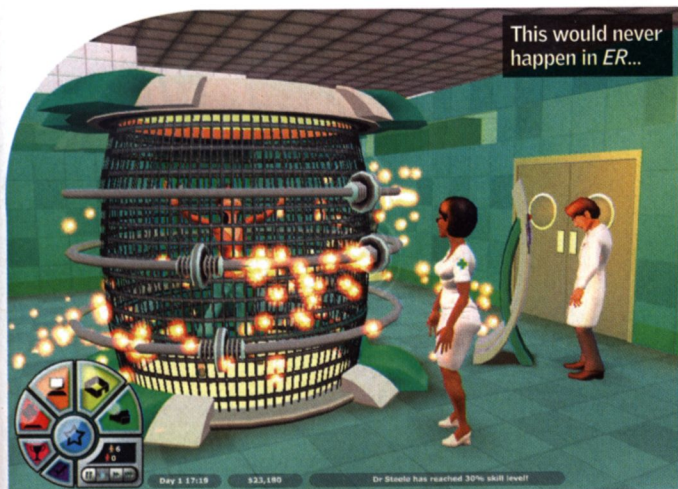
PCZONE

Graphics A blotchy and weird work of love
Sound Kooky soundtrack, perfect for the game
Multiplayer The best bit, 1-4 deathmatch/co-op

- ✓ Friendtacular co-op
- ✓ Great soundtrack
- ✓ Imaginative monsters
- ✗ Dull actual combat
- ✗ Tedious crap-collection mechanic
- ✗ Expensive for what it is

59

Average zombies ate my mediocre neighbours

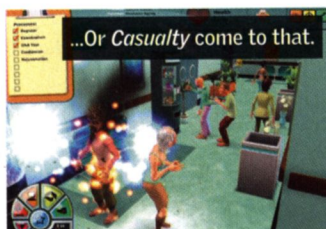


HOSPITAL TYCOON

Throwing a sickie...

DEVELOPER Deep Red Games
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.codemasters.com/hospitaltycoon
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

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



FED UP OF hospital waiting lists? Sick of long queues, rubbish doctors and hospital super-bugs? Reckon you could do any better? This hospital simulator gives you the chance to succeed where Labour have failed, borrowing heavily from Bullfrog's classic, *Theme Hospital*.

The best parts involve watching patients' new ailments, from lycanthropy to monkey nuts (which, unfortunately, is not as rude as it might sound). After all of that, you then get to marvel at the subsequent bizarre treatments to cure them. Unfortunately, everything else is just a case of providing the right machines and rooms, and it all lacks any real sense of engagement.

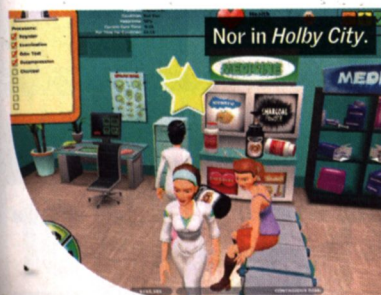
At the end of each day, the story mode subjects you to a humourless series of clips which are meant to

detail the social events between your staff. However, instead of adding extra layers to the story, these vignettes feel like little more than a tacked-on afterthought and add nothing to the gameplay.

You can't seem to get the staff nowadays either. All three of my janitors spent their time socialising in the staff room while the rest of the hospital wallowed in dirt and puddles of sick, and some patients wandered around aimlessly until they died, instead of registering like a good patient should. This was compounded by the lack of control you have over both patients and staff members.

Sadly, ten years on, *Hospital Tycoon* has added nothing new to *Theme Hospital*'s stellar gameplay and ends up feeling, a bit like its subject, cold and clinical.

Suzy Wallace



PCZONE
47
 Super-bugged

...OR
REALLY?
EVIL?



Renfield's Spooky Ball power is the professional's choice.



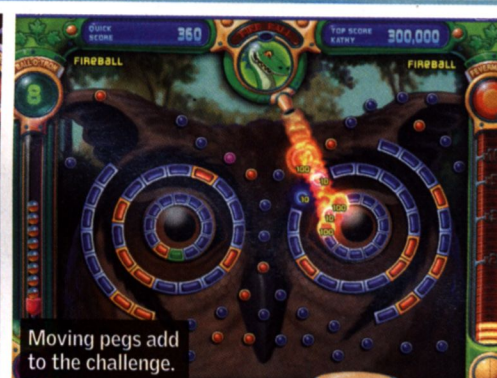
Wow, could this get any more extreme?



Oh my god, it totally just did!



Each character has a set of themed levels.



Moving pegs add to the challenge.

PEGGLE

Steve Hogarty's got the Extreme Fever

DEVELOPER PopCap Games
PUBLISHER PopCap Games
WEBSITE www.popcap.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$19.95 (£10 on Steam)



AT A GLANCE...

Extremely basic fun with unicorns and a level called Bjorn's Gazebo.

Minimum system requirements:
700MHz processor, 256MB RAM and a DirectX 7.0 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PUZZLE BOBBLE 94%

PEGGLE 83%

PUZZLE BOBBLE 2 30%

LIGHTS AND SOUNDS and magic, that's what *Peggle* is made of. We've described it to ourselves in many different ways – that wondrous bastard child of bagatelle and pachinko, the senile pinball bitch from the planes of insanity, upside-down crazy *Breakout* with gravity. Whatever description you use though, it's captivated us to an embarrassing degree, strengthening its grip with every Ultra Extreme Fever shot.

If I were to start plainly laying out *Peggle*'s mechanics in front of you, you would think us quite mad for becoming hopelessly entangled in it. The game tosses you the task of clearing each level of orange pegs by launching balls from your lofty cannon. Each level is comprised of a screen filled with patterns and designs of pegs – blue ones are the point-swilling fodder, pink ones are point multipliers and green ones activate your current character's special power.

A critical ounce of skill is involved in the initial aiming of your shot, whether it's to nail that crucial pink peg or bank shot off a blue, but after

the second bounce things are entirely in the hands of luck.

This is where *Peggle* amazes, because in your head, everything that's happening has been directly caused by your sheer talent. Each peg lights up as it's hit, with satisfying 'pings' increasing in tone. Hit the glorious 25,000 points barrier and your Fever Meter starts to flash, and subsequent peg hits resonate with booming 'PONG!' noises. Hit 75,000 and it literally sounds like god screaming in a wind tunnel.

THAT'S LIQUID PEGGLE

As your ball approaches the final orange peg, time slows down and the camera pans in close to the action. A drum rolls, ramping up the tension for that split-second before the final peg is struck. Fireworks scream and a roaring choir belt out *Ode To Joy* as your ball turns into a rainbow-trail generating orb. Buckets rise from the bottom of the screen, offering a final resting place for your ball, and a nice bonus should it fall in the right one.

It's stupid, flashy fun, and you'll become so thoroughly absorbed that

you'll punch the air victoriously, congratulating yourself for clicking in the right place and watching a ball bounce around the screen. Reviewing the thing is our first step towards rehabilitation. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Colourful and delicious
Sound Best use of *Ode To Joy*
Multiplayer Two players around one PC

- ✓ Addictive and happy
- ✓ Challenges mode will keep you interested
- ✓ Developers clearly had fun making this
- ✗ Playing against the AI is rubbish
- ✗ No online play

83

Joy: The Game

OVERLORD™



MINION APPLICATION FORM

NAME: KILLER BILL

HOBBIES:
EXECUTIONS (✓)
BLOODLUST (✓)
KIDNAPPING (✓✓ V. EVIL)

ADDITIONAL INFO:
I LOVE SUDOKU!

FAILED

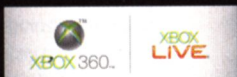
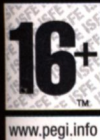
THINK EVIL. BREED EVIL. CONTROL ALL.

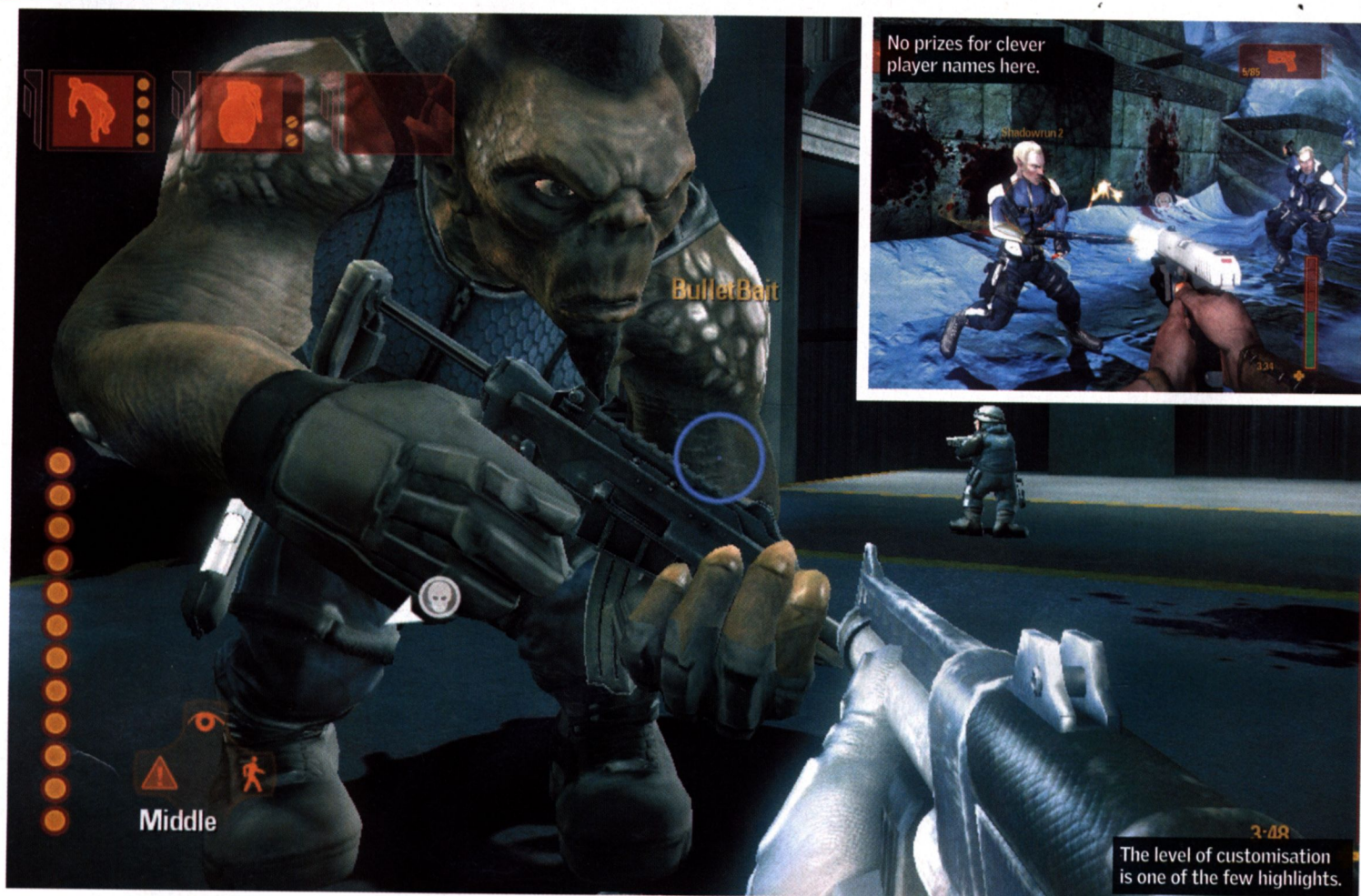
TO BECOME OVERLORD, BEING EVIL IS NOT ENOUGH. WITH AN ARMY OF SLAVISH MINIONS AND INCREDIBLE POWER AT YOUR DISPOSAL YOU NEED NEVER GET YOUR OWN HANDS DIRTY AGAIN.



TO SEE IF YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE THE OVERLORD VISIT:

www.codemasters.com/overlord





SHADOWRUN

Will Porter finds another reason to delay his sadly inevitable Windows Vista purchase

DEVELOPER FASA Studio
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE shadowrun.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Science, magic and about a teaspoon of joy combine in a mediocre shooter you can play with your Xbox buddies.

Minimum system requirements:
 Windows Vista, dual-core processor,
 2GB RAM and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

QUAKE III: ARENA 89%

HALO 2 60%

SHADOWRUN 58%

I PLAYED **SHADOWRUN** in a room of eight people, and the whole time we were playing nobody laughed. Nobody congratulated each other on a particularly skilful kill, nobody giggled at an embarrassing death and absolutely nobody slammed their mouse on the desk and screamed in anger at a kill they felt cheap or unfair. In short, as a PC deathmatch vehicle, *Shadowrun* is a failure. It's a joyless grind, mediocre on 360 and simply pointless on PC.

It's frustrating too since, alongside some isolated sparks of genius, there's a good premise here. You begin each round as you would *Counter-Strike* – using money you've earned to buy bigger and better weapons and equipment. In a stunning twist though, you don't simply buy (crap, ineffective) weapons, but also invest in different magical and technological abilities. These power-ups can then be stored in the buttons labelled 1, 2 and 3 on your keyboard and brought out to play whenever your magic-o-meter isn't

drained of tech-juice. It's a decent enough system that (alongside a choice of races to play as) lets you build your character into a semi-personalised *Team Fortress*-style class. It also means that the action cascades from basic shooty-cuffs into ever more crazed fragfests – dwarves swooping around on gliders firing mini-guns into the fray, katana-wielding elves with upgraded reflexes automatically swiping bullets away and life-giving trees sprouting at tactically significant bottlenecks.

SHOOT, SHOOT, SHOOT

It sounds cool, and is cool, and when supplemented by the RPG-inspired magical ability that lets you summon a terrifyingly strong minion to guard a particular area, you can't help but think that someone deep in FASA Studio is a rather switched-on individual. It's like they're a struggling football team with an ace midfielder like a Joe Cole or a Gerrard showing off all manner of fancy footwork and unexpected

dashes towards goal, all of which is made thoroughly ineffectual by the crap standards of everything else around them.

Nonetheless, stuff like the magical resurrection ability that lets you 'do a Lazarus' on dead team-mates (who then slowly bleed to death after you've snuffed it yourself) brings a genuinely clever twist to the capture the flag and team deathmatch games on offer.

Put into a well-produced *UT* mod or created with a decent engine in a PC-only game, all this would be a fairly tasty proposition – this much is undeniable. But unfortunately, the way *Shadowrun* looks and plays acts like a local anaesthetic on the joy department of your noggin – you're aware of what the game is doing, but are thoroughly incapable of feeling anything about it. It's mood-deadening lithium in gaming form. Sluggish, poorly balanced and graphically average, with kills that feel like the result of pure luck as opposed to any form of skill... I could go on.

Country cousins

How interested are we in playing against Xbox 360 owners?



I don't know anyone who plays PC games *and* is rabidly keen on playing with one of their friends who owns a 360. Honestly, not one single person. Not a solitary sausage. I also think it's quite a mundane concept that will only be fulfilled by sub-standard games like *Shadowrun*. So this is an appeal to the *PC ZONE* readership – if the concept of playing against 360 owners flicks your switch and makes you get a right sweat on, then please, please get in contact. Similarly, if you want to earn Gamer Points on your PC then please email us at letters@pczone.co.uk. I'm currently unaware of your existence, and in this day and age, all minority groups should be catered for.

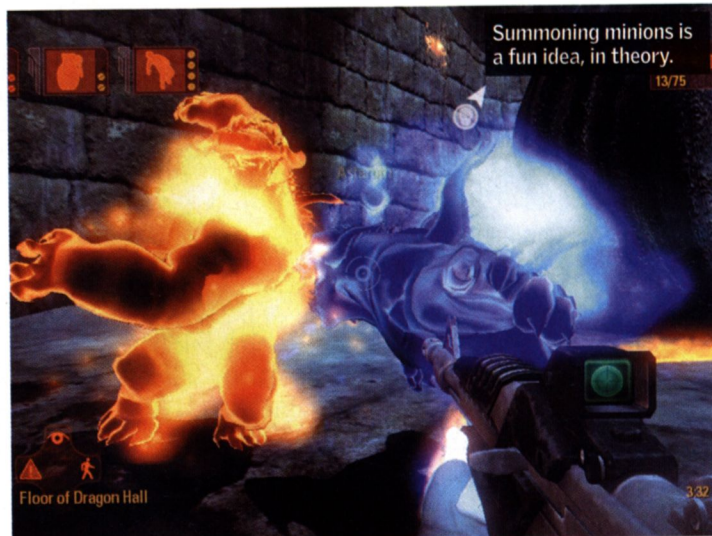
The sparkles indicate he's really clean. We think.



No, I will go on. In fact, I'm contractually obliged to go on. There's not even that much here to play: nine poorly designed maps (although there's one that's essentially a giant set of steps that's quite good) and two generic multiplayer game modes. Single-player, meanwhile, is so sparse that it's barely worth mentioning, while bots are almost on the *Battlefield 1942* level of pure bloody stupid. In simple gameplay terms, meanwhile, you often find yourself dead without quite understanding how, and despite the resurrection process it can be extremely frustrating lying dead while the battle rages on several levels above you.

DULL, DULL, DULL

In short, if there's an FPS somewhere out in the ether that will prove that PC gamers and Xbox 360 gamers can play a happy song together in eternal happiness like ebony and ivory, then this is certifiably, undoubtedly and categorically not it. The battle to level the playing field between



The best thing about the game is that it's senselessly tied to Windows Vista, so no bugger will end up playing it



mouse and gamepad has simply left the PC version of *Shadowrun* woolly, hollow and redundant. There are moments when the rock-paper-scissors mentality of the magical and technophile powers available suddenly connect, and for the length of

one firefight the game becomes exactly what its creators intended it to be: fun. Such moments are fleeting though, and lost in an avalanche of dross. In all honesty the best thing about this game is that it's senselessly tied to Windows Vista, so no bugger will end up playing it.

I don't have an irrational hatred of Microsoft – I'd love to report more positively on what they're up to with stuff like this. However, if they want to avoid being labelled as the numero uno evil corporate overlords of PC gaming, they're honestly going to have to pull their socks up. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Functional, not stunning
Sound Functional, not stunning
Multiplayer That's all there is

- ✓ Neat premise
- ✓ Some excellent gameplay ideas
- ✗ Dull to play
- ✗ Dull to look at
- ✗ Largely a bastardised mess

58

ShadowBUM, more like



Straight to the top

The pure thrill and excitement of PKR has made us the fastest growing online poker room in the world.

Thousands of new players are joining every day to experience the thrill of poker the way it was meant to be played – with mind blowing 3D graphics, infinitely customisable characters and our unique Emote Control system that puts you in the heart of the action.

Find out for yourself how PKR is changing the way online poker is played forever.



PKR
let's play

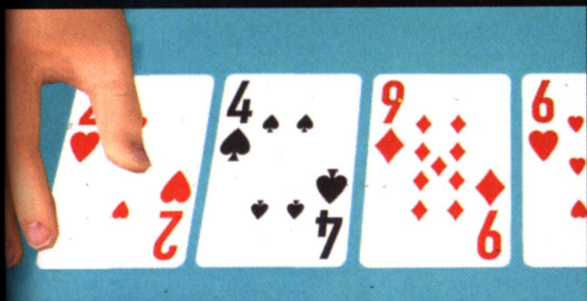


"The future of
online poker is
here..."

Poker Player

"Online poker is
about to take a
giant step
forward"

Inside Poker



"It rocks!"

FHM



Screen resolution stops and ends at 1024x768, and perhaps that's a good thing.



Terrain matters, but not much.



And here we have Marcus modelling the latest designs from Carthage...

THE HISTORY CHANNEL: GREAT BATTLES OF ROME

Richie Shoemaker could never stay awake during history lessons...

DEVELOPER Slitherine Software

PUBLISHER

Black Bean/Koch Media

WEBSITE

www.slitherine.com/games/

thcgbor

ETA Out now

PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

Imagine *Total War* ported to a PSP, with the gameplay stripped out, then ported back to PC.

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

ROME: TOTAL WAR 93%

LEGION ARENA 48%

THC: GREAT BATTLES OF ROME 30%

WITHOUT A HINT of shame, I'll admit that I've fallen asleep at the keyboard many times, in every case blissfully drunk and with *EVE Online* piping its ethereal space orchestrations into my ears and its grand vistas wavering before sliding eyes. Playing *Great Battles Of Rome*, despite being wired on two litres of a certain carbonated soft drink, I meandered into sleepy oblivion due to being thoroughly bored.

Clearly the title refers to the actual battles being great in the reverential way all ancient periods of organised slaughter are categorised, because the battles represented here are anything but.

Let's not mince words. The 3D camera is pointless, neither offering anything

interesting to zoom into, nor any kind of tactical insight. The interface doesn't help things either, as to scroll the map you have to push the mouse to the edges of the screen as the cursor keys just rotate things, and can't be remapped. If we didn't know better, we'd suspect the game was a lazy port... Oh look, there's a PSP version available, and it says on the feature list 'intuitive user interface for PSP'.

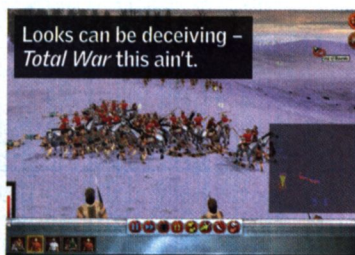
FIGHT THE POWER

As for the so-called 'great battles', they begin with you placing your armies along the bottom of a map, setting formations and selecting hold or advance orders. Once things kick off, troop formations can't be changed, and while you can still issue orders during this real-time phase, the game favours a system where once a command is given, you have to wait for your order bar to refill like some kind of health bar. The idea behind it was obviously to simulate battlefield delay, but it comes across as arbitrary and almost ruins what's otherwise an near-average combat system.

Thankfully, the sword-clash sections are short (a bonus for commuters), and

the post/pre-match unit set-up is actually handled quite well (ie, not shit).

Not having seen much of the History Channel's output, it would be churlish of me to suggest the game that bears their endorsement is a fitting tribute. However, on the basis of this title, I certainly have no desire to subscribe anytime soon. **P47**



PCZONE

Graphics Lazy
Sound Uninspired
Multiplayer Why?

- ✓ Free Hitler Channel clips
- ✓ Cures insomnia
- ✗ Unexciting
- ✗ Unrewarding
- ✗ Uninteresting
- ✗ Ungood

30

History retreating



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

indiezone



"This state of independence shall be..." hums *Martin Korda*

GRIMM'S HATCHERY

DEVELOPER Amaranth Games WEBSITE www.amaranthia.com PRICE \$19.99 (£10)

GRIMM'S HATCHERY ATTEMPTS to meld a variety of ideas and genres without ever quite nailing any of them. After your father leaves his worldly possessions to your brother, you're left to suffer the ignominy of breeding animals in order to survive, and if you earn enough gold, reclaim your birthright by having your brother thrown out of the house that should rightly be yours. After all, who was it that cleaned up father's piss stains off the couch every evening, hmmm?

After purchasing animals from the local market, you get to watch them waddle around your farm, some laying eggs which you can then sell in towns and markets. While watching your livestock squeeze one out, you also have



Even games have their social hierarchies.

to tend to their dietary needs (one mouse click) and fend off marauding monsters (300,000 mouse clicks) that infuriatingly always appear from the same side of the screen. Some half-decent RPG quest elements and slick presentation do raise interest levels somewhat, but essential it ain't.

PCZONE
56



'Ye' and 'Olde' instantly spring to mind.

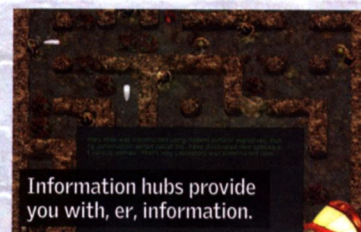
MARS MINER

DEVELOPER RetroStyle Games WEBSITE www.retrostylegames.com PRICE \$19.95 (£10)

LET'S FACE IT, *Bomberman* games were always about multiplayer and trapping your opponents in a Semtex sandwich. The single-player games though – they were a bit shit.

Mars Miner is a *Bomberman* copycat centring on a story-driven SP campaign. Trapped on Mars after your ship malfunctions, you must work your way through a series of locations, blasting rocks and avoiding the wildlife from stripping you of your flesh and using your bones as toothpicks.

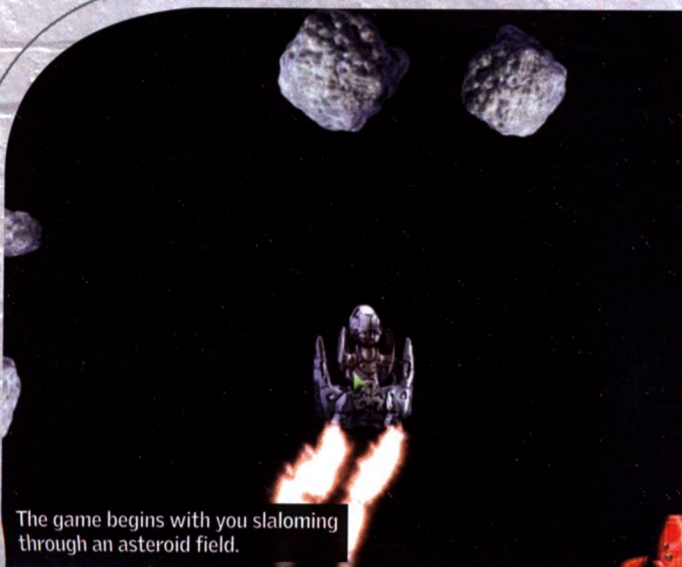
A lack of player guidance and info, along with a grim colour palette compound an already mundane experience, and make you hanker for the fun and vibrant colours of the original. Although there are some merits



Information hubs provide you with, er, information.

here, like background info that can be downloaded from info hubs and plenty of intelligent enemy types, *Mars Miner* is still a world away from the unadulterated fun of the series that inspired it.

PCZONE
55



The game begins with you slaloming through an asteroid field.

ROMAN BOWL

DEVELOPER CopleyGames WEBSITE www.garagegames.com/products/164 PRICE £14.95 (£8)

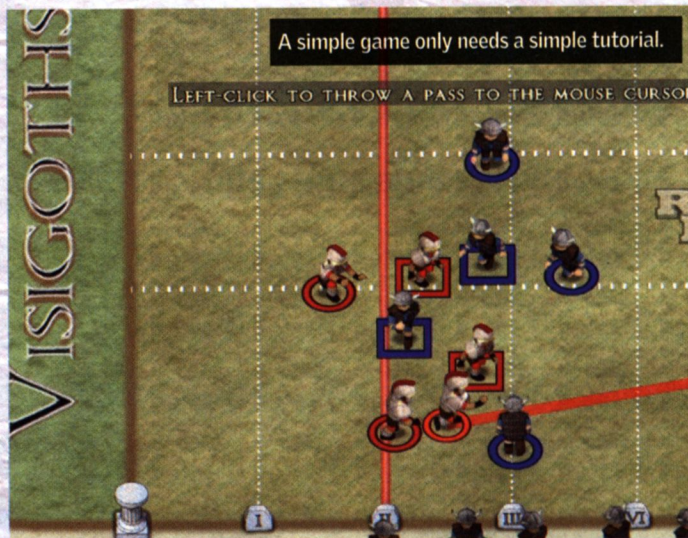
AMERICAN FOOTBALL HAS never really caught on in this country. Perhaps it's the ridiculous shoulder pads that look like something from an '80s stockbroker movie about a hard-nosed woman battling to make her mark in a male-centric world. Point is, American Football games haven't either and *Roman Bowl* – a simplified version of the sport – is unlikely to buck that trend.

That's not to say that it's not fleetingly enjoyable. Controlling five players on a Roman-themed pitch, you get five chances to score a touchdown before possession reverts to your

opponents. The mouse control interface is blissfully intuitive, meaning you never struggle to execute your plays, while the streamlined action means you're spared the usual deluge of tactical decisions and endless pages of stats.

On the flip side, *Roman Bowl's* longevity is comparable to the lifespan of a gnat that's been prematurely wiped out by a stray boot, while an absence of any kind of multiplayer modes or substantial tournaments ensures you soon get bored. Fun, but ultimately forgettable.

PCZONE
52



GUNSTORM II: STARVIXEN

DEV Cornutopia WEB www.treality.freeserve.co.uk PRICE \$16 (£8)



Playing 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' with the cosmos is pointless.

HERE'S A LITTLE equation to get your cerebral muscles working. *Asteroids* + tiny enemies + plodding action + repetition + 1980s sound effects = ?. Any ideas? Anyone? That's right, it's *Gunstorm II: Starvixen*, a space-based blaster that's far less challenging than the mathematical conundrum you've just solved with aplomb.

Forget the tacked-on plot, this is a bog-standard *Asteroids* clone with an alien ship twist, only the action is so cumbersome and samey you'll struggle to make it past the first hour without the aid of stimulants.

The excellent mouse control interface is made virtually redundant as *Gunstorm II* makes that most heinous of *Asteroid* clone crimes of often being easier if you simply stay in one spot and swivel on your axis. Turn and zap, turn and zap, turn and zzzzzz...

In fairness, there is some potential here and later levels do liven up. However, with the early tedium proving so overwhelming, it's unlikely you'll hang around long enough to enjoy them.

PCZONE
42

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.



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 must kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



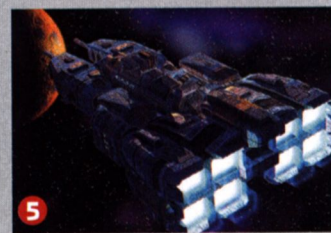
MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed issue 163

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.



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

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



MR ROBOT
www.moonpod.com | Reviewed issue 181

Like an isometric *RoboBlitz* with zany RPG-style combat, you play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

BUDGET

It's a Sid Meier garage sale!

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

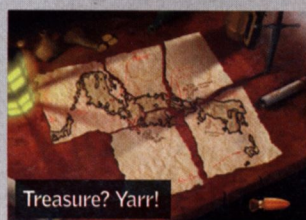
PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$29.95 (£15)

WITH THE THIRD exhausting *Pirates Of The Caribbean* movie currently playing at your local cineplex, you may be in the mood for a bit of pillaging, treasure-hunting and "Ha-haaaar"-ing.

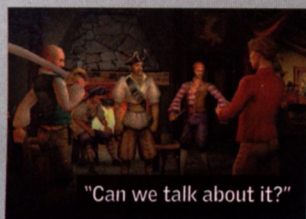
Sid Meier's Pirates! is a 2004 3D remake of the famous developer's 1987 game, where you can live the life of a Caribbean sea captain, enjoying daring ship-to-ship battles, trading, pilfering, swordfighting and dancing – the latter to woo rich Governors' daughters for a girl in every port.

Pirates! has a decent plot, involving you seeking family revenge on the Spanish nobleman Montalban, but you're able to take on any quests in any order – the freedom to express yourself how you like in the game-world being one of this and the original game's major plus points. The stealth-lite sneaky bits around town are a bit rubbish, but I'm being picky – this grog-fuelled classic is still worth spending your pieces of eight on.

Jamie Sefton



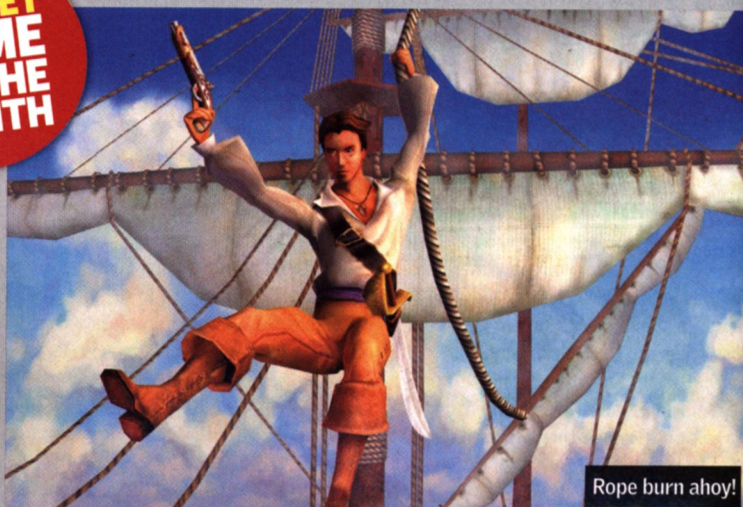
Treasure? Yarr!



"Can we talk about it?"



"I said get off!"



Rope burn ahoy!



Chink, chink, slash, chink, chink, slash...

**PCZONE
83**

SID MEIER'S RAILROADS!

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

ANOTHER SID MEIER game! With an exclamation mark again! Because that makes trains sound that little bit more thrilling!

Actually, if you're the type who frantically writes numbers down at the end of a platform, then *Sid Meier's Railroads!* will definitely get you steamed up, providing more signals, moving pistons and gleaming engines than York Railway Museum. Build up a Branson-like business empire using all the economic power you can muster, starting at the dawn of rail and going right up to modern times, when a cheese sandwich can cost more than the fare.

As well as single-player, you can also choose to play a historical scenario as one of the great railway pioneers from around the world, including George Stephenson. Featuring lovingly detailed graphics, a simple interface and extensive multiplayer options, *Railroads!* should please the trainspotter inside you. Just don't forget your flask and weak lemon drink...

Jamie Sefton



Choo choo!



Woo woo!

**PCZONE
78**

**THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**

Clare off ill
for a week:
Saving: £60 in
food & booze

Jamie getting
a round in
up north:
Saving: 40p

Kevin buying
a half-price
Alan Carr ticket
from a tout:
Saving: £8.50



CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$2995 (£15)

YET MORE SID MEIER? Yep, but this time with a distinct lack of excitable punctuation – although this expansion pack for the magnificent *Civilization IV* is worth a peek.

Warlords supplements the main game with a series of gameplay tweaks and campaigns based around the novel idea of killing people and taking their land. Each of the six new historical scenarios

features warlord units such as Genghis Kahn for monstrosity through Asia, and Alexander for debauched Roman Empire-building. Other scenarios include the Barbarians, whose sole purpose is to destroy the modern world, and the Vikings, who enjoy bearded raiding parties from their homeland.

All the new races have unique units (such as the Celt's Gallic Warriors),

technologies and research trees, and all are accompanied by new music, animations and voices.

Warlords is a top add-on pack with plenty inside, but if you're skint, you might want to save your groats for the forthcoming *Civilization IV: Beyond The Sword* (page 32).

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE
71



RACE

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$1995 (£10)

IF THERE'S ONE title to get Suzy hot under the collar, it's the *GTR* driving series from Simbin, creators of the first and second Driving/Racing games in our Buyer's Guide over the page.

RACE is by the same petrol-sniffing enthusiasts, but is a slower-paced World Touring Car Championship racing simulator, focusing on finely-tuned everyday vehicles such as BMWs rather than 600bhp Ferraris.

As a result, although the driving model is accurate, the racing is easier, sometimes resulting in a bit of an underwhelming driving experience. Even the graphics aren't as lush as the *GTR* series, and the car sounds are very samey compared with the growling engine noises of its faster siblings. *RACE* is a solid entry-point racing sim, but if you prefer your cars with more oomph, try *GTR2* or *GT Legends*.

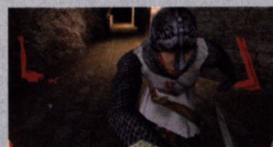
Jamie Sefton

PCZONE
67



And the rest...

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



ARX FATALIS
\$9.95 (£5), STEAM

Arx Fatalis is the earlier game from Arkane Studios, makers of *Dark Messiah*. It's graphically inferior to the latter and other RPGs like *Oblivion*, but *Arx Fatalis* is still atmospheric, with depth, detailed NPCs and an inventive mouse-based spell system.

PCZONE
77



X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP
\$4.95 (£2.50), STEAM

Why are ancient turn-based combat games suddenly appearing on Steam, 2KGames? Could it be because you've got a new *X-COM* game in the works at Irrational? Whatever, thanks, because *Terror From The Deep* remains pure budget joy.

PCZONE
80

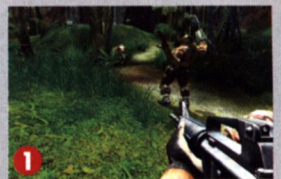


HEROES OF THE PACIFIC
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Arcade flight sim action recreating WWII aerial derring-do from Pearl Harbor to Iwo Jima. *HOTP* is an uncomplicated blast, allowing you to fly a mix of planes in pure fun missions packed with dogfights, torpedo runs and great explosions.

PCZONE
69

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

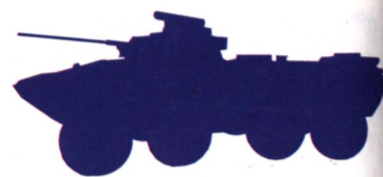
A long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW*'s glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



5 PSYCHONAUTS
\$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM
Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'O'

- 1 **THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR VOLUME 1: 1939-1955**
(ISSUE 68)
- 2 **OPERATION FLASHPOINT**
(ISSUE 104)
- 3 **OFFICIAL FORMULA ONE RACING**
(ISSUE 77)
- 4 **OUTWARS**
(ISSUE 64)
- 5 **OVERLORD**
(ISSUE 183)



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES THAT WE'VE WASTED MOST HOURS IN

- 1 **GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY**
(SUZY - ISSUE 131)
- 2 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
(STEVE - ISSUE 152)
- 3 **CIVILIZATION**
(WILL - ISSUE N/A)
- 4 **PEGGLE**
(LOG - ISSUE 183)
- 5 **PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 1-6**
(JAMIE - ISSUE 136-175)



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES THAT WERE CRIMINALLY SHORT

- 1 **MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**
(ISSUE 136)
- 2 **FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS**
(ISSUE 160)
- 3 **LEGO STAR WARS**
(ISSUE 155)
- 4 **NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON**
(ISSUE 176)
- 5 **PARIAH**
(ISSUE 155)



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 freeform action and the best sniping game you can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE
PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%
Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2
PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%
Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.
PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%
With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
PCZ Issue: 179 - 85%
Despite being a bit on the late side, *STALKER* remains a fantastic outing for PC shooters with its unique setting, great action and genuine attempt to do something new.

Strategy

Must buy!



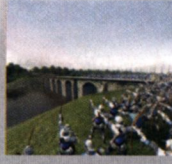
COMPANY OF HEROES PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Massive battles and huge armies comprising of thousands of air, sea and land units? Tick. Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? Tick. One of the most unique RTS titles around? Tick.



C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS PCZ Issue: 180 - 86%

A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but TTT manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs



Must buy!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW's* *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



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



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

Sport



Must buy!

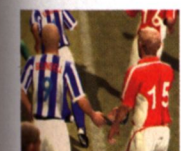
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07
PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

Simulation



Must buy!

X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



BUDGET

FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedos, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship sinker.

Driving/Racing



Must buy!

GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TRACKMANIA UNITED
PCZ Issue: 179 - 86%
Now with online play and community via broadband, this previously Gallic institution is a total joy to play. Not your conventional racer, and so fast it'll make your eyes do backflips.

God games



Must buy!

THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source Engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jpegs. Try it out and see for yourself.



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.

Role-playing games



Must buy!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



BUDGET

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



BUDGET

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



BUDGET

DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
PCZ Issue: 176 - 86%
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

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

Rest of Q2

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARRIOR 2
LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

UBISOFT
CAPCOM

Q3

BIOSHOCK
BLACKSITE: AREA 51
CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS
CRYSIS
ELVEON
EMPIRE EARTH III
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH
HELLGATE: LONDON
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN
LEFT 4 DEAD
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
MEDIVAL II: TOTAL WAR KINGDOMS
MOTOGP 07
NEED FOR SPEED: PRO STREET
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER
ROGUE WARRIOR
SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
SPEEDBALL 2
STRANGLEHOLD
TIMESHIFT
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT
THE WITCHER
WORLD IN CONFLICT

2K GAMES
MIDWAY
2K GAMES
CODEMASTERS
THQ
EA
TBA
VIVENDI GAMES
THQ
NCSOFT
EA
EIDOS
VALVE
EA
SEGA
THQ
EA
ATARI
TBA
CODEMASTERS
FROGSTER INTERACTIVE
MIDWAY
VIVENDI GAMES
SEGA
ATARI
VIVENDI GAMES

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. 🗑️

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.

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.

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*.

Discover the secrets of great digital photos – only £3.99 with free tips cards!

Whether you're already running Windows Vista, or thinking about upgrading, *Windows Vista: The Official Magazine* tells you everything you need to know

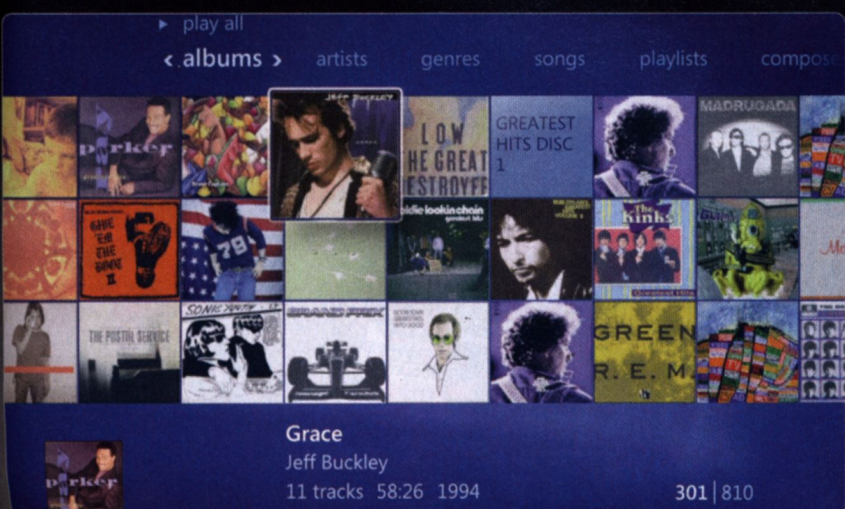
We'll show you...

- ➔ 20 ways your PC makes you smarter
- ➔ The secrets of getting your old games working in Windows Vista
- ➔ How you can watch TV on your mobile
- ➔ Advice on making home movies that don't bore the viewers rigid
- ➔ Simple tips that'll improve every digital photo you take
- ➔ Great new hardware and software that runs under Windows Vista
- ➔ And much more!



Issue six is out now for just £3.99

Find out more at www.windowsvistamagazine.co.uk



EASY BROWSING Intuitive menus help you browse your music collection.

PC GAMER[®]

BRITAIN'S **BEST-SELLING** PC GAMES MAGAZINE

CRYSIS

THE SHOOTER EVOLVES

Why *Crysis* is the most important FPS since *Half-Life*

PLUS STARCRAFT 2

First screens and info direct from Korea

HOT GAMES

Call of Duty 4, Tabula Rasa, Medal of Honour Airborne, Bioshock, Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts and more...

17 NEW REVIEWS

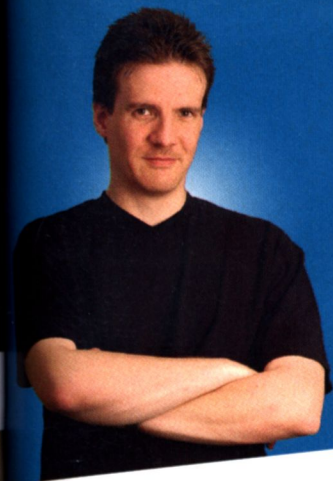
Tomb Raider Anniversary, Overlord and more...

AND HOW GAMERS WILL SAVE THE WORLD

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NEW ISSUE OUT NOW!



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Stop. Start...

LAST WEEK, A new Dell Dimension was adding to the assemblage of grey hairs on my head by locking up for 20 seconds and then carrying on as though nothing had happened. There was no warning as to when the freeze was about to hit and there were no pieces to pick up afterwards. It would stop functioning, then cease to stop functioning a short while later.

I found a whole heap of entries in the Event Viewer explaining that the OS had lost contact with the onboard RAID controller, and I noted the time-stamp on new log entries coincided with when the machine was having one of its strops. So this was an Intel problem. I pulled on my internet shoes and went for a poke around the web.

Straight away it became clear that there were many thousands of angry messages dotted all over the place – from Microsoft TechNet to Dell's own discussion forums – painting my exact problem in vivid detail. In addition, it seemed that the issue wasn't just with my model of Dell, but was endemic to Vista owners with integrated Intel RAID controllers on their motherboards – for example, the ASUS P5B Deluxe and ASROCK ConRoeXFire-eSATA2 from our very own Buyer's Guide.

With the bottom of the page now looming, I'll cut a long story short. I fixed my particular problem by installing a little-known Vista hotfix (KB932094) and downloading the latest RAID drivers. Intel and Microsoft: the bad dream team.

Wand

Phil Wand, hardware editor

SILENT RUNNING

SAPPHIRE says shhhhh...

SAPPHIRE ARE MAKING a passively cooled HD 2600 XT ULTIMATE product due for launch at the same time as its HD 2600 and HD 2400 products.

The company claims the card will remain true to the brand's remit of overclocked performance capability and noiseless

operation. Along with the HD 2600 XT and HD 2400 XT, the ULTIMATE flagship has ATI-designed high-speed RAM, dual-link DVI outputs and onboard 5.1 audio down the HDMI wire to a high-definition set.

The HD 2600 PRO variant uses GDDR2 in place of the XT's GDDR3 memory, and both



Piped down: Sapphire's new HD 2600 XT.

2600 and 2400 HD-branded cards have ATI Avivo HD Video & Display Technology for HD content – a feature absent from the HD 2900 XT. www.sapphiretech.com

	HD 2600 XT ULTIMATE	HD 2600 XT	HD 2600 PRO	HD 2400 XT	HD 2400 PRO
Memory configuration	512/256MB GDDR3	512/256MB GDDR3	512/256MB GDDR2	256MB GDDR3	256/128MB GDDR2
Memory clock	1400MHz	1400MHz	1000MHz	1400MHz	800MHz
Engine clock	800MHz	800MHz	600MHz	700MHz	525MHz
Display connectors	DVI-I + DVI-I + VIVO	DVI-I + DVI-I + VIVO	DVI-I + DVI-I + TVO	VGA + DVI-I + TVO	VGA + DVI-I + TVO
Integrated audio	5.1 surround via HDMI support	5.1 surround via HDMI support	5.1 surround via HDMI support	5.1 surround via HDMI support	5.1 surround via HDMI support

DELL INDIRECT

World's largest PC maker hits retail stores at last

HAVING SOLD DIRECT for more than two decades, Dell has said it will start selling its machines through 3,500 Wal-Mart stores in the US, Canada and Puerto Rico.

It's a big step for a company whose profits have been off-colour for some time now, and whose chairman wrote a book on business strategy titled *Direct from Dell*. The move to selling in stores – where millions of potential buyers walk the aisles every day – was widely predicted.

The relevance to UK customers is of course that we could soon be

shopping at Asda for our bread, bananas, desktops and laptops, as the supermarket chain is owned by Wal-Mart. www.dell.co.uk

You'll still get second-rate support.



NEWS ROUND-UP

Sony have created a video surface just 0.3 millimetres thick, meaning it flops around like a piece of paper when you pick it up. The surface is made from combining an organic electroluminescent display and organic TFT. At present, it's available only as a 2.5-inch diagonal screen, but the time when you can flick through a dynamically updating internet newspaper while on the toilet is not far off. sony.com

Web counter stats show that while IE still has the lion's share of the browser market, its lead has been slashed to just over 60% from highs of around 90% just a few years ago. Firefox is now past a quarter share, with Apple owners proving you shouldn't believe the hype: they account for less than 4 in every 100 browsers. w3counter.com

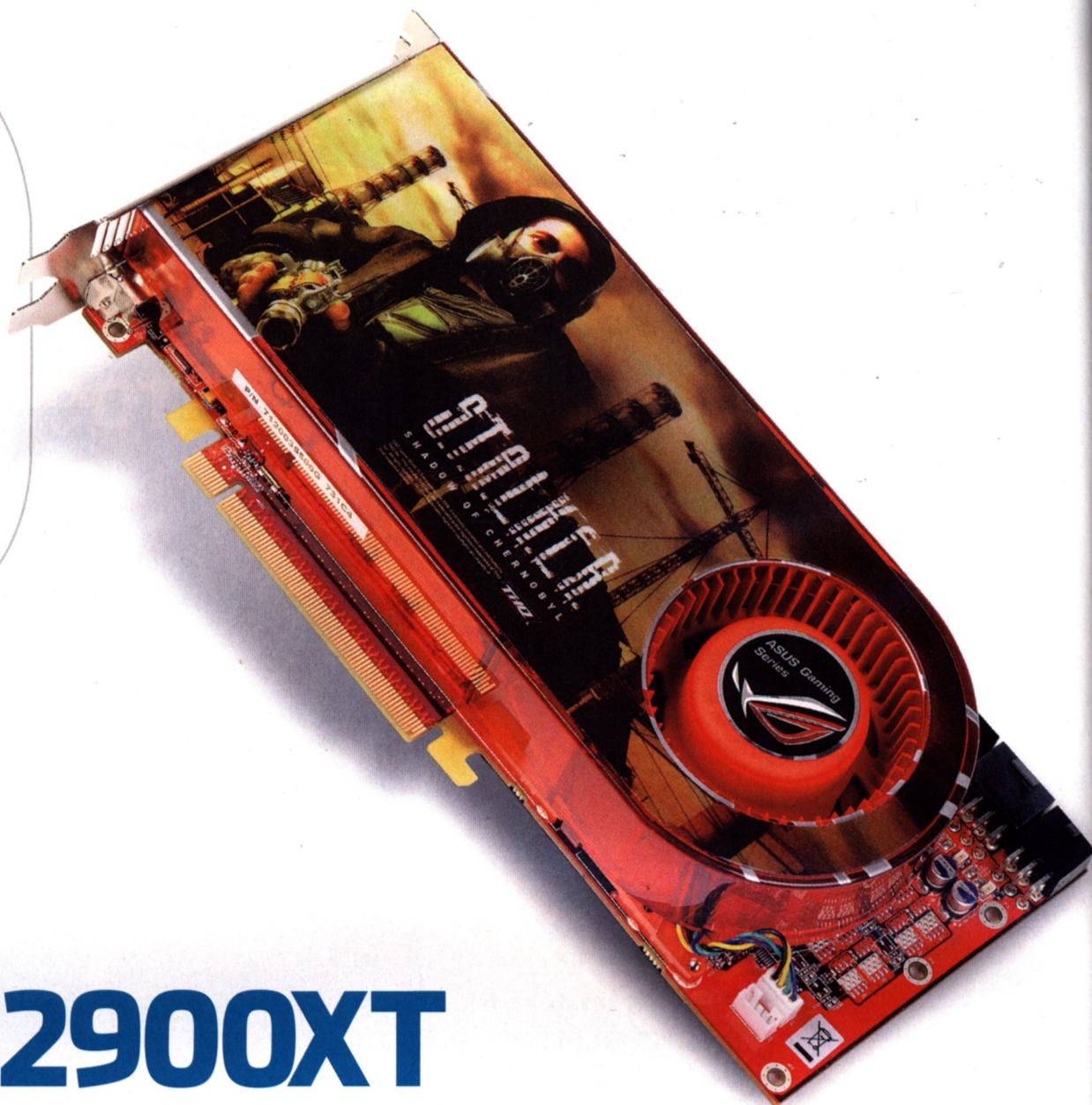
WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

Passive cooling: The particular method of cooling our gaming rigs at ZONE Towers, by blowing into the holes in the back. **Electroluminescence:** Pretty lights that live inside microwaves and light bulbs, and especially inside light bulbs in microwaves. **OneCare:** We're fairly certain that Microsoft's OneCare is more golden helicopters for Mister Gates. We're literally shaking our fists. **Print Screen:** The button that everybody thought, when they first pressed it, would actually print the screen. It made sense at the time. **QuickTime:** "The time just flew by," you might say. "Yes, it was a QuickTime," Steve Jobs would undoubtedly jest.

LATE ARRIVAL

The Radeon 2900 XTX – not the lesser XT model here – was supposed to be the card that sideswiped the 8800 GTX and Ultra from the performance throne, where they'd both been languishing unchallenged for ages. *Supposed* to be. Production issues meant the launch date was delayed, and there were even rumours that ATI's flagship wouldn't make it out of dry dock. But there's light at the end of the tunnel. New R650-based products are due later this year, and will appear on shop shelves as the Radeon HD 2950 XTX and Radeon HD 2950 XT. By then though, there'll be bigger and badder high-end GeForce's out to get them. It's not looking that peachy for AMD, is it?



EAH2900XT

PRICE £265 MANUFACTURER ASUS WEBSITE www.asus.com

AMD's 2900 XT is not the fastest card you can buy, and as such it lacks the surprise and delight of its predecessors. It turned up on shelves last month with a sticker price revised to pitch it against the 8800 GTS instead of the GTX, against which it has no hope.

Unsurprisingly, everybody stopped caring. Despite record levels of complexity – the new Radeon's R600 chip has over 700 million transistors, more than any rival – and a raft of new features, the end result is that it goes almost exactly like the GeForce GTS many of you already own. Only hotter and noisier.

At this point, it's worth stressing that the XT is more than half a year late – not so we can laugh at AMD's ineptitude, but so that you're aware of all the

consequences. Because the Raddy's biggest problem isn't that it's merely just as capable as NVIDIA's third-in-command GTS, but that in the last six months, the enthusiast community has been focusing on the competition.

What this means is that anyone buying a new GeForce will enjoy a significantly higher level of help from search engine results. It means that the average forum dweller will be more likely to help you out of trouble, and it means technical support lines at games publishers are well-armed with issues and resolutions (OK, so maybe I'm exaggerating there).

FAST AND SPURIOUS

We know the Radeon is a reasonable contender at this price, but we don't know if driver tweaks and games developers will be

able to really make it shine. If anything, the first DirectX 10 benchmarks have shown that while a new breed of reality is finally making its way onto our screens, it's doing so at a measly 19-frames-per-second. The hydraulically smooth next-generation gameplay Microsoft promised us just hasn't materialised, meaning most of us don't care whether Radeon or GeForce win this round. Right now, neither are cutting the DX10 mustard.

If you're a Radeon fan, ASUS's EAH2900XT makes a reasonable choice, mostly because of the super *STALKER* bundle. But in all honesty, the company's 320MB EN8800GTS makes more sense, partly because it's £70 cheaper at just £195, but mostly because it'll deliver the exact same performance in the games you're currently playing.

PCZONE
79

NFORCE 650I ULTRA

PRICE £85 MANUFACTURER XFX WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

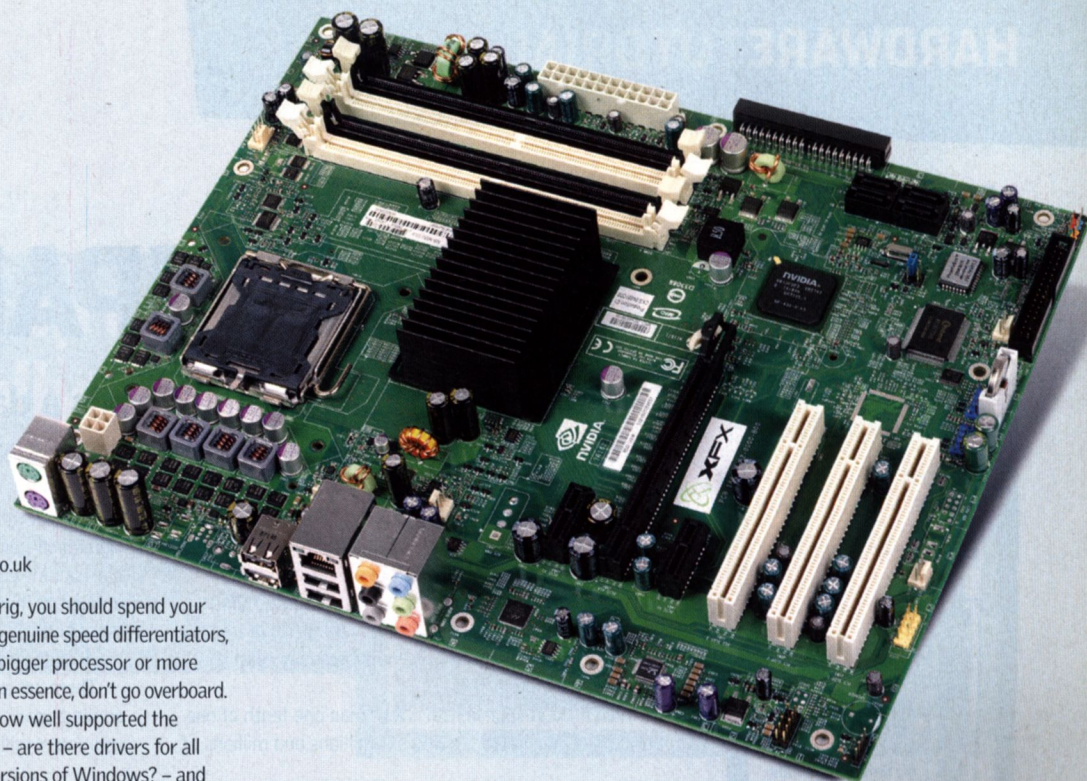
THE 650I ULTRA is a delightfully uncluttered board aimed at the budget enthusiast market; that is, anyone who can't afford the 680i SLI.

This means it'll be bought by the sort of people who enjoy wringing extra benchmark points from their system in exchange for making it hot and unstable. Having said that, the way XFX's 650i is able to shrug off some serious BIOS tweaks is really rather fun: it makes you wonder why anyone would want to spend the extra on a 680i, or indeed on any other performance-oriented product.

Yet again the benchmarks show that one Intel board is much like another, and that in choosing the right platform for

your own rig, you should spend your money on genuine speed differentiators, such as a bigger processor or more memory. In essence, don't go overboard. Look for how well supported the product is – are there drivers for all current versions of Windows? – and what comes in the box.

The only thing against the XFX is its lack of support for SLI and SLI-ready memory. To enjoy these features you need deeper pockets, but before reaching down there you should ask yourself if you really need to. The 650i is quick, well presented and superb value for money. Seriously now, why spend more?



PCZONE
89

SPECIFICATION

CPU Intel Core 2, Celeron D, Pentium D 9xx/8xx
Chipset NVIDIA nForce 650i Ultra **Memory** 4 x dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533 (8GB max)
Expansion 1 x PCI-E x16 SLI support, 2 x PCI-E x1, 3 x PCI **Audio** HDA (Azalia) **Internally** 2 x USB (2 ports), 1 x FDD, 1 x IDE (2 devices), 4 x SATA **Externally** PS/2 keyboard and mouse, 1 x Serial, 1 x SATA, 2 x LAN, 4 x USB
Warranty 36 months

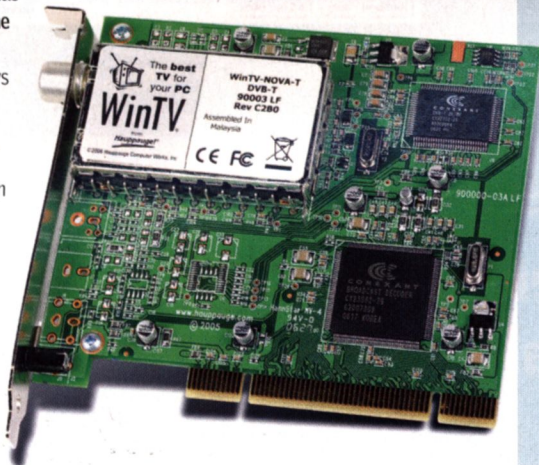
WINTV NOVA-T

PRICE £34 MANUFACTURER Hauppauge WEBSITE www.hauppauge.co.uk

THE NOVA-T HAS been around so long that its price has now dropped below the average game.

It's a PCI card that allows you to watch and record Freeview on your desktop. The USB version used to cost around £5 more but can now be had for £10 less. Since the stick doubles as an IR receiver – with the PCI version, you need to trail a wire from behind your PC in order to use the remote – it also makes more sense.

It's not a bad product by any means and is worth the £35 outlay, but £10 more buys you the twin receiver Nova-T 500. Additionally, Hauppauge's software bundle hasn't been touched since the 1990s and feels badly dated. You need to use the Nova-T with Media Center Edition, or subscribe to an online service such as DigiGuide and create your own channel listings for applications like MediaPortal.



PCZONE
71

LOOK 313 MEDIA

PRICE £30 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk



OH, GOODY! **ANOTHER** camera in the £25-£35 price bracket that doesn't have an integrated microphone.

Manufacturers need to wise up here. Logitech's QuickCam Pro 5000 is available for similar money, and yet it gives you all you need to have proper video conversations over Skype: no need to plug in extra wires, just start talking and waving. Instead of a microphone, Genius provide stereo speakers. These are a nice idea and are pretty decent, but given that you'll probably be using a headset anyway, they're largely pointless.

There are further issues. The software supplied is awful, the camera creates sneaky start-up entries in your Registry each time you connect it, and whenever you open your capture application,

messages appear in the system tray area telling you you've done just that. It means that when you start recording there's always an annoying 'pop' at the start.

On the plus side, the picture quality is first-rate. But that's it.

PCZONE
60

HOW TO...

AVOID GETTING SPAM

Need:

Internet connection

Time:

Ongoing

Difficulty level:

Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Jamie Sefton

Getting more than ten junk emails a day? *Phil Wand* may have a few anti-spam tricks to teach you...

THEY SAY THAT almost all email is unsolicited junk these days, which explains why my mother knows a wide variety of penis enlargement techniques. The reason there's so much spam flying about the place is because of a tiny minority of idiots – presumably with tiny willies – who actually read it and act upon it.

Even if the response rate is less than one tenth of one per cent, when you're sending out millions and millions of

messages every day of every week, that's still a significant number of replies to be getting. The problem has become endemic and costs businesses a serious amount of money – far more than the spammers ever own. And despite tougher measures and bigger fines, it's all getting worse.

There are a number of things you can do to effectively combat spam. And if the spam stops getting through, the spammers will surely go home...

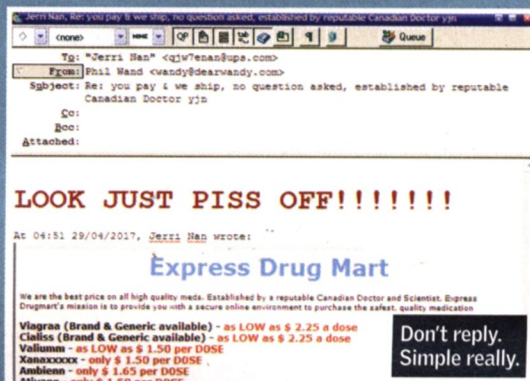
01 Never reply to spam

There's a temptation to write back to the jackass who's sent you two dozen identical emails regarding your SPECIAL PHARMACY DISCOUNT, but you should never ever reply to junk email.

The first thing to remember is that, in all likelihood, nobody is going to read your protest. The typical spammer won't be using a real email address, and instead will want you to click on a link contained within his or her message. That's how they make their money.

The second thing to remember is that even if the email address was genuine and someone was actually monitoring it, the fact you have responded will only highlight you as someone who's stupid enough to read and act upon spam. Meaning you'll end up with more.

In addition, you should never follow 'unsubscribe' links unless the sender is a reputable, identifiable company such as Amazon or Tesco.

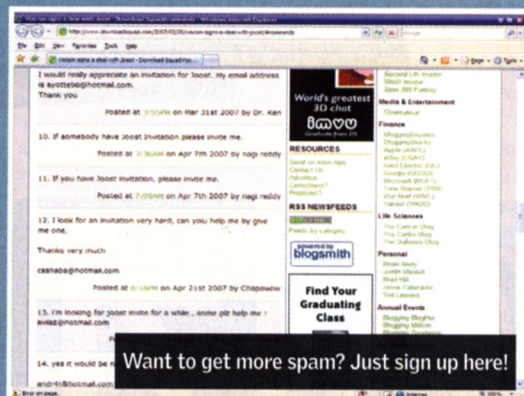


Spam and Open Relay Blocking System at www.sorbs.net is a service which sends email through publicly-accessible servers and tests to see if spammers are able to exploit them. After sending mail, if you receive errors about SORBS DNSBL entries, your provider has been identified as a source of spam. **Challenge/response** is a system used by providers such as No-IP.com: It assumes all incoming messages are spam, and sends out a challenge asking the sender to identify himself or herself by following a link. Since spammers don't read email, anyone clicking the link is a genuine sender. **Greylisting** works by delaying inbound messages. When mail first arrives, the receiving server sends an error to the sending server saying 'busy, come back later'. Spam servers typically ignore errors and so their mail is never resent, meaning you never get to see it.

02 Stop littering the internet with your details

Would you leave your credit card details in a comment on someone's blog? Would you post your home telephone number to a public forum? Would you be happy putting your bank sort code and account number on your MySpace profile?

Of course you bloody wouldn't. So stop leaving your email address all over the damned internet, would you? Ne'er-do-wells are just as keen to scoop up your contact details as they are to have your money, and by scattering them on every page you visit, you're leaving your inbox wide open to spam.

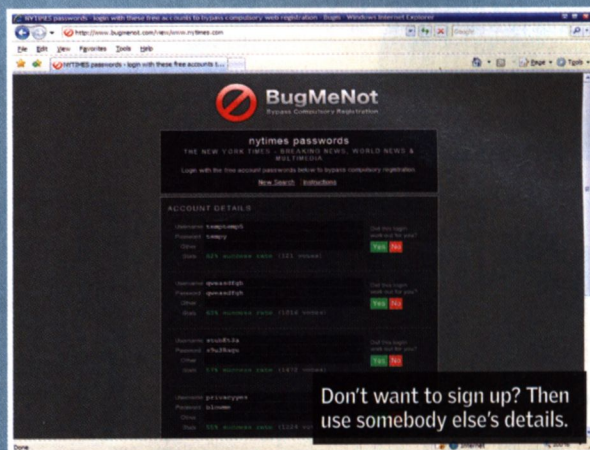


03 Stop signing up to things you don't really need

Just in case you're not fully convinced that your email is a sought-after commodity, take a look at any website which gives you something for free – whether it's a newspaper, train timetable or image host, they all want your details. Why? Because details are a breach of your privacy: a direct

line to your eyeballs and your wallet.

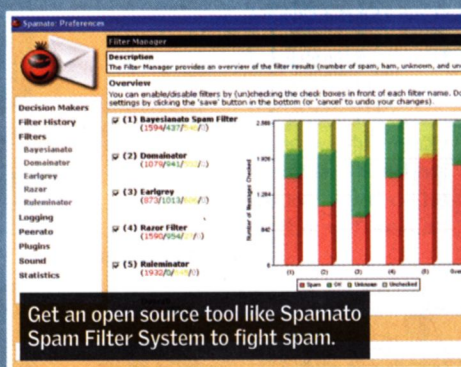
Unless you're buying something, never hand over your address. Instead, pay a quick visit to www.bugmenot.com, enter the URL of the site that's forcing you to register and browse free logins that other people have created for you.



04 Use spam-fighting tools in your email

Use Yahoo! Mail or Gmail? Then you know you can already protect yourself by highlighting junk email and marking it as spam. In doing so, you're 'teaching' the system what sort of things you don't want to see turning up in your inbox, so they're less likely to do so.

The same kinds of tools are included with applications such as Mozilla Thunderbird and Qualcomm Eudora, allowing you to make your chosen email program more intelligent about spam the more you use it. If you're using Outlook or Outlook Express, download MailWasher from mailwasher.net, Spamato from www.spamato.net, or buy Cloudmark Desktop from cloudmark.com/desktop. You can also download products from anti-virus companies: McAfee's SpamKiller and Symantec's Add-on Pack for Norton 360 and Norton Internet Security 2007 are two such examples.



QUESTIONS

Q I get emails from people accusing me of spamming them. What gives?

A Spammers will regularly forge their messages to look like it's coming from a legitimate source. If someone's accused you of spamming, the best approach is simply to ignore it.

Q I already have spam-fighting tools in Outlook. Can't I just use that?

A You can fight spam more effectively by using at least two different approaches. However, if the Junk E-mail Filter in Outlook is doing the job, there's no harm sticking with it.

Q My ISP isn't interested in spam.

A You can always rent a server and set up your own mail system, using freely available spam-fighting tools such as Anti-Spam-SMTP-Proxy (ASSP), but it's really not for the faint-hearted.

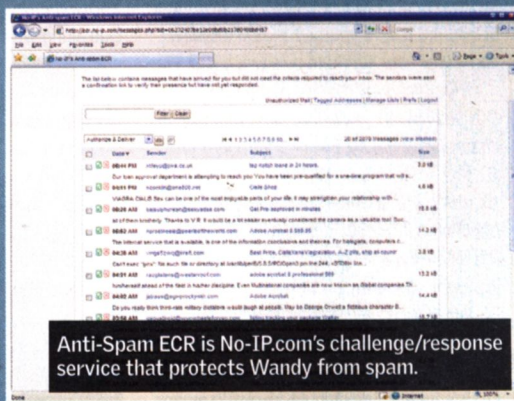
Q Is there an alternative to email?

A Yes. Phone your recipient and talk to them instead.

05 Host your email with a decent provider

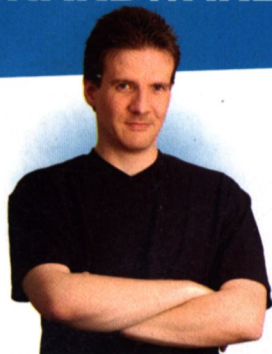
Big companies have big networks, meaning they're not only subject to the most abuse but are often the slowest to respond to it. Quite regularly, you'll see a Tiscali or 1&1 mail server blacklisted at SORBS, meaning that any message you send through them is likely to bounce back with an error identifying you as a spammer.

More and more companies are fighting spam though, so consider moving your email away from your current provider or free Web service. Spam fighters charge money, but they do employ all the latest techniques – challenge/response, whitelisting, greylisting, plus many others – so you won't get any.



Be Proactive Don't let them get away with it...

Want to know where spam originates? Create a new address each time you use it. Say you're signing up for a new Ocado account – create a new address: your.name.ocado@domain.com. If you receive emails here from anyone other than Ocado, then lodge a complaint that your address has been passed on.



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... So busy playing *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* that you forgot your own anniversary? Partner just booked you on a summer holiday with his or her parents? Realised too late that smashing the screen is not the way to install more memory on your laptop? We can't help with 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.

PRE-BUILT AWESOMENESS

Q Through a scheme at work, I have the chance to buy a gaming PC for a maximum of £2,500, including VAT. There is a caveat, though: it has to be a pre-built system – either straight off the shelf, or custom-built by a company to a given specification – and cannot be £2,500 worth of component parts.

So far, I've spent a month comparing full systems and playing around with system configurators on websites, but I don't have the technical knowledge to make an informed decision.

So I'd be grateful if you could please recommend a system – including all peripherals – that's not only top-end now, but which would not need an upgrade for a some time to come.

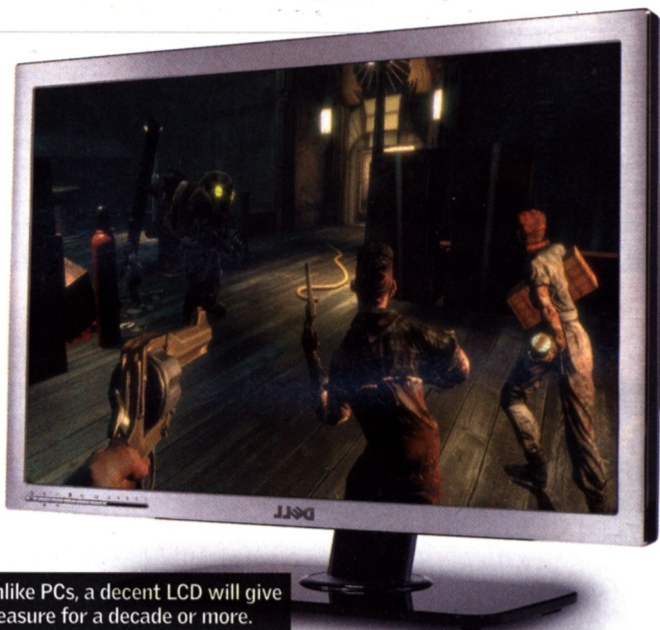
Tony Lindon

A I'm more than a little intrigued by this scheme, chiefly because you don't explain exactly what's involved. I don't know whether your employer has given you the whole £2,500 to buy a new PC, or if you're able to purchase it through a tax dodge or perhaps some crazy credit plan and save yourself a bob or two that way.

I'm not just being nosy. Two-and-a-half grand is a needlessly large sum to be throwing at a swiftly depreciating asset you will use almost exclusively to play games, so unless the scheme involves a serious handout of free cash or a substantial discount, I'd save yourself a lot of anguish and lower your sights to nearer £1,500.

If you read my round-up of gaming PCs last month, you'll have seen that the champion Chillblast Fusion Hydra was just £1,100. It featured a GeForce 8800 GTX together with a Core processor and handsome 3GHz overclock, all of which left it more than capable of demolishing any game currently on sale.

While you could go for Chillblast's £2,500 Fusion Raptor – specifications here include a Core 2 Quad and pair of SLI GTX cards – all you'd be doing is throwing money at a rig that you'll be itching to upgrade by this time next year. Big-ticket stuff is a wet dream for rich gamers but is seriously poor value. Once you accept the fact that there's a honeymoon period with every PC and no magical specification that prevents you



Unlike PCs, a decent LCD will give pleasure for a decade or more.

from growing bored of it, you'll do the sensible thing and stick with comparatively inexpensive mainstream products.

If you feel you have to spend right up to your budget, get the Fusion Hydra and Dell's 30-inch 3007WFP-HC flat panel display. While the PC might date, a decent screen will always be gorgeous.

STOP AND START

Q In January, I bought a few new parts and performed an interim upgrade. I already had an XFX 6800 GT and 2GB DDR-400 RAM, along with two 250GB HDDs. I bought an E6300 Core 2 Duo along with an ASRock 775Dual-VSTA and a nice Shinobi case complete with a Winpower 500W PSU. Since then I've been experiencing problems.

I'm running an up-to-date XP Professional x64 Edition installation with the latest NVIDIA drivers and latest BIOS, but I'm getting this weird lag in games. Thinking it must be the power supply, I went and bought a Seagate 600W PSU as

I thought it wasn't giving me enough juice. After the installation, the problem was still apparent – leaving either the motherboard or graphics card as the culprit.

I'm at a loss as to what's going on, as I've tried BF2, BF2142 and CS:S all on low settings and still the problem occurs. What should I do? I've run an AVG anti-virus scan, spyware search, adware scan, Windows Defender scan and a Windows Live OneCare scan from their safety scanner. I'm now at a loss...

Scott Fergusson

A First, the fact Microsoft chose the name 'OneCare' for their support package shows just how little they really know. I like to imagine that the American who made the decision has one of those daft colonial names they have over there, like Randy Bender or Drew Peacock.

Second, I think this is a Microsoft problem. There's a Knowledge Base article titled 'Game performance may be poor on a Windows XP-based computer that is using a dual-core processor', and relates to how your operating system and your dual-core processor interact with one another.

In short, it's a power management problem affecting multiple CPUs that support ACPI processor performance states and can – in theory at least – be solved with a simple hotfix. Google for KB896256 and then download Microsoft's fix dated December 19, 2006.

DRIVER WATCH

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 74	18 APR 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 158.22	2 MAY 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 158.18 FOR VISTA	2 MAY 07

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.09.0007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 2.13.0012	15 MAR 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY AUDIGY 2	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4 2.09.0016	16 MAR 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA 2.12.0002	



Fancy a quick OneCare?

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"I like to imagine the American who made the decision is called something like Randy Bender or Drew Peacock"

Wandy does his bit for Anglo-American relations

And by the way, as a gamer, that 64-bit operating system is doing you no favours. Not only is the x64 Edition meant for other, less frivolous apps, but now that driver authors are working on porting everything to Vista, you're less likely to find the correct software to accompany your hardware. This is something else that can have a marked effect on your gaming performance. I'd be inclined to revert to 32-bit if and when you make the move to Vista.

APPLE BAD

Q To put it bluntly, QuickTime sucks. Is there a free, open source alternative out there that will play MOV files without running sluggishly in Windows, not look like a Mac program, not stealthily installing rubbish music software and will actually let you view movies full screen? If such a program exists it would make me slightly less bitter with the world.

Andrew R

A You can download QuickTime Alternative for free from snipurl.com/qtalt and enjoy QuickTime movies without having to wrestle with the QuickTime interface. You can watch MOV flicks either in a standalone player – which supports full screen – or streamed in your Web browser.

Like you, I find Windows versions of Apple products irritating. Because they're developed to ape the look and feel of MacOS, they're unintuitive, unfamiliar and slower than anything created from standard Microsoft building blocks. Double-click the caption bar of that dreary grey whale iTunes to see just how depressingly slow it is, and how dated it looks alongside other apps – especially on later versions of Windows. And can you imagine the backlash from Macintosh owners if their Microsoft products copied the look and feel of Vista? No, neither can I.

GOT NO GO

Q I just splashed out on a Dell XPS M1710. I walked into my local

Virgin Megastore to buy a USB stick and walked out with a bloody laptop. Wife not impressed. My problem is thus: I didn't read the specs properly and have found that I have bought the Go 7900 GS version and not the Go 7900 GTX as I'd have liked. I live in the Middle East and there's a strict no-return policy unless the unit is defective.

Aside from taking a claw hammer to the bastard, is it possible to upgrade the video card? Also, being in Qatar, Dell memory modules for the XPS are not available here – do I need to have a specific type or can I substitute another brand?

Chris Butler

A Very few laptops are designed to allow end users to swap out components, and the XPS is one of them. However, because it's such a lovely machine, and because the whole point of getting the M1710 is enjoying the Go 7950 GTX, I would be inclined to get in touch with Dell or a Dell spare parts specialist and tell them exactly what you've done. Don't bother talking with their helpdesk – what you want is not on the script and so you'll get nowhere.

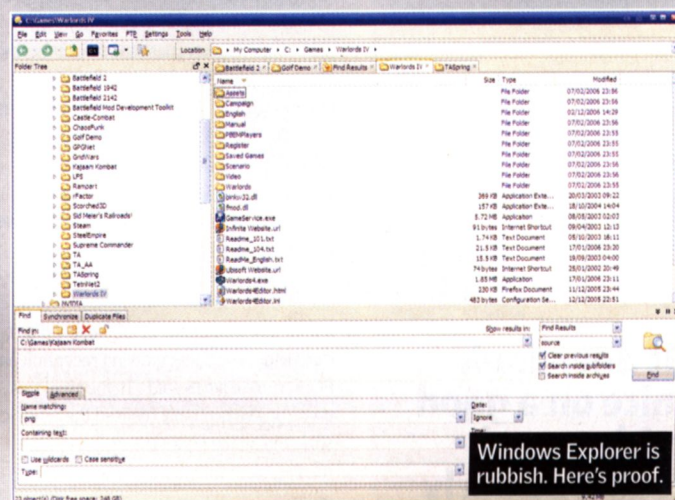
Although the video component you need is not a retail part, it has to exist in some form or another. You will then need an authorised technician to remove the GS and fit its replacement, otherwise you'll bust the warranty.

As for the memory, that's an easy change – visit crucial.com and follow the steps in their memory configurator to find out what you need. **PCZ**

Why not mate yours with a higher spec model and steal the offspring?



50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



25 DIRECTORY OPUS

COSTS £35 FROM www.dopus.com

One of the tragic things about Vista is the fact that Microsoft failed to address the shortcomings of its most-used application, Explorer. They chose to dumb it down and have it behave more stupidly for the majority of users whose knowledge of PCs extends no further than their Web browser.

So instead of adding tabs like in Firefox or Internet Explorer, you still have to open multiple instances to look at the contents of multiple folders. Plus, rather than attempt to simplify what should be the least painful task in any operating system – working with documents, wherever they are – the interface is now manifestly busier than before.

There are more buttons, more idiot-friendly features, and a pointless new

'Favorite Links' sidebar right where you expect the directory tree to be.

In addition, most of the Vista 'new look' is dead space, meaning that if you're using Aero for eye candy, everything underneath on the desktop shows through and makes it appear even busier than it already is.

For anyone who wants power, simplicity and the ability to breeze around your HDD with ease, look no further than Directory Opus. Now on its ninth incarnation, the program gives you useful tools such as one-click file duplication and tabbed Explorer windows, together with genuinely useful navigation aids such as breadcrumbs and even integrated FTP. It is without doubt the finest and most powerful file management tool available, and should be on every power-user's hard drive.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Staeus) I've recently been getting randomly coloured dots on my screen and lately they're becoming much worse. Is my monitor on the way out? Is there a simple solution? (Wandy) If your LCD monitor is showing brightly-coloured dots, they're known as 'dead pixels' and are quite common. Sadly, you can't fix them. If the dots move between power cycles, it's more likely that your video card has a hardware fault. In addition, you can't use Print Screen to share problems with your monitor because its physical properties aren't linked in any way to your PC.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

It does look nice on a good video card, but it's clearly a buggy, unfinished piece of shit

WATCHDOG



Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...



THE ACCUSED: Ubisoft

PROBLEM: Poor QA on recent titles

Over the past few months we've noticed a growing number of readers who have been having problems with Ubisoft titles. In particular, three games stood out from the others by the sheer number of readers unhappy at the unfinished state the games were in – *Resident Evil 4*, *Silent Hunter 4: Wolves Of The Pacific* and *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*. A quick flick through our forums and the Dear Wandy forums offered the following damning comments...

Resident Evil 4 – Widely regarded as one of the best games of the year when released on console in 2005, *Resi 4* didn't exactly get the same glowing reception on PC. Forumite jkh13 said, "If you have this game you've probably realised the graphics suck and all the lighting and shaders are missing from the game, making it look entirely lifeless."

Silent Hunter 4: WOTP – While *Silent Hunter 3* captured the hearts of sub sim lovers everywhere, not everyone was so keen on its sequel. Dear Wandy regular Shodan rants, "*SH4* is total wank. It runs like total shit and all the so-called fancy effects like post-processing and normal maps are just there to hide the horrid textures. You can't have AA and when you up the res, it just stretches the image! It's a total shambles. Patching it made things worse, as when you press the 'A' key it crashes the game! I had high hopes for this game but Ubisoft seem to be allowing naff PC games to be published."

Splinter Cell: Double Agent – Sam Fisher's latest outing might have put him deep behind enemy lines, but not everyone was on his side. Angry reader OneOne complained that, "It does indeed look nice on a good video card, but it's clearly a buggy, unfinished piece of shit. I've been playing it for about two hours, and in that time, it's crashed twice, each time requiring a hard reset. It also has an ambivalent attitude to save-games – specifically, it doesn't always load the one you want."



Too many games are scuppered by lack of QA.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Wondering what Ubisoft's take on the matter would be, we got in contact...

"One of the biggest problems of developing products on the PC is the constantly shifting sands of specification and almost infinite configuration options available to consumers. Ubisoft is certainly not alone in this – it's an issue facing every single PC developer and publisher. We are very committed to helping our customers get the best experience from their games and for this reason we publish a tech spec guide on every PC game box and provide 24-hour web-based customer support in the UK, plus 12 hours a day, seven days a week live phone support.

"Whilst we endeavour to correct any technical issues through a thorough testing procedure, it is not always possible to be aware of every issue before a product goes live. The reason for this is that the quality check is carried out by testers using system configurations that are within the game's recommended specifications, however, the game is still likely to be purchased by tens or hundreds of thousands of customers with a massive variety of configurations, some of which may cause conflicts or fall below the recommended or minimum specs.

"Most of the customer support feedback we encounter at this stage has simple solutions related to drivers or Windows configuration problems. When a problem gets more complicated it immediately goes back into QA, and where possible, post-release FAQs and patches are created.

"With *Resident Evil 4* for instance, we recognised very quickly after release that

some customers were experiencing difficulties launching the game due to a "d3dx9_30.dll was not found" error, so we tested it and published an FAQ to solve the problem. For *Silent Hunter 4* we have published two patches to support unexpected issues, and likewise for *Splinter Cell Double Agent*. FAQs, patches and access to other product support can be found at www.ubi.com.

"Ubisoft will strive to continue producing high-quality PC products and if issues are identified post-release, we will fix them wherever possible, and as fast as possible. It might sound like a cliché, but we really do take customer feedback very seriously and you can rest assured that your readers' concerns have been fed directly back to development."

FINAL VERDICT: While it's good that Ubisoft have recognised the problem, it's certainly not a problem limited to them – most if not all the big publishers have released buggy, unfinished games at some point. While we appreciate that some publishers are working on this problem, we remain concerned about the growing number of games being released that require a patch straight from the box. Whether our investigation changes anything or not we'll have to wait to find out, but let's hope that all publishers realise that PC players want the game to feel finished and polished on release – not after six months of patches. Let us know your thoughts on the issue, and we'll look into conducting a more detailed investigation in a future issue. **W4**



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

Motherboard marred? Joystick jammed? Processor past it? It's time to go shopping...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

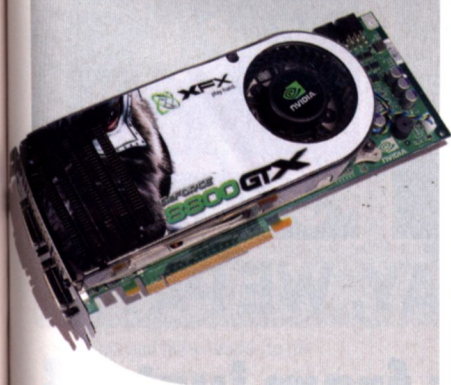
8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370

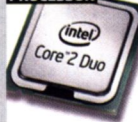
MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

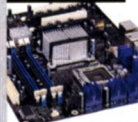
PAY £600

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEB intel.com

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

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £149

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY £250

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

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 £105

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEX-FIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £52

MANUFACTURER ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30

MAN Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19-inch screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280x1024 panel offers greater depth than the 1440x900 panel of its sibling VA1912w.

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.

READEROFFER

MAD 4
GAMES



FREE GAME FOR PCZONE READERS!

This month, we've come up with a brilliant reader offer. Download the brand-new PC GAMING mobile store to your phone and get the awesome mobile RPG adventure *Dark Horde* for free!

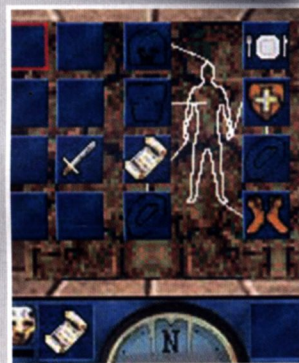
HOW TO GET YOUR FREE GAME

1. Text PCZONE to 62344
2. You'll receive a message containing a download link
3. If your phone prompts you to download, say 'YES'

DARK HORDE

A superb and atmospheric first-person RPG adventure, with tons of levels, monsters, collectable items and puzzles. Absolutely free!

TEXT PCZONE TO 62344



YOU PLAY, WE PAY!

Choose from the best mobile games from just £3

MAD4GAMES' mobile store lets you download all the latest and greatest mobile games from just £3 each. No need to worry about hidden costs or sneaky subscriptions – you only pay when you actually buy something!



LEGO STAR WARS II
In pieces you will be in this galactic sequel



NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON
Tune your motor to perfection, then hit the streets



RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS
Take control of an elite team in Sin City



PROBLEMS? Check the 'help' section at www.mad4games.com/faq or call our automated helpline on 0870 737 0080 (national rates apply)

NO CLUBS, NO SUBSCRIPTIONS, GUARANTEED!

PC ZONE and its partners will NOT charge you to participate in this promotion, but the process involves two downloads and requires a WAP and/or data connection for which your operator may charge at your normal rate. Offer expires July 19, 2007. Download and use of the game in this special offer is subject to GPRS coverage, handset capability and network availability. Offer available on UK networks only. At peak times, SMS traffic may be subject to network delay. Once connected, the service will check product compatibility with your handset, or for a full list of compatible handsets and help on other issues, go to www.mad4games.com/tandc/future.html. By participating in this promotion, you agree to abide by these terms and conditions and by our full terms of service published at www.mad4games.com/tandc/future.html. LucasArts and the LucasArts logo are trademarks of Lucasfilm Ltd. © 2006 Lucasfilm Entertainment Company Ltd. or Lucasfilm Ltd. and TM as indicated. All rights reserved. © TT Games Publishing Ltd 2006. Published by THQ Wireless and TT Games under license from the LEGO Group. LEGO, the LEGO logo and Minifigure are trademarks of the/sont des marques de commerce de/son marcas registradas de LEGO Group. © 2006 The LEGO Group. All rights reserved. THQ, THQ Wireless and their respective logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of THQ Inc. All Rights Reserved. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are property of their respective owners. Need For Speed: Carbon © 2006 Electronic Arts Inc. Electronic Arts, Need For Speed, EA and the EA logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. All Rights Reserved. Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX MR – Mitsubishi and Lancer Evolution names, emblems and body designs are trademarks and/or intellectual property rights of MITSUBISHI MOTORS CORPORATION and used under license to Electronic Arts Inc. Dodge Challenger Concept, Dodge HEMI and their trade dress are used under license by Electronic Arts. Rainbow Six: Vegas © 2006 Gameloft. All Rights Reserved. Published by Gameloft under license from Ubisoft Entertainment. Rainbow Six, Red Storm and the Red Storm logo are trademarks of Red Storm Entertainment in the US and/or other countries. Red Storm Entertainment, Inc. is a Ubisoft Entertainment company. Ubisoft and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the US and/or other countries. Gameloft is a trademark of Gameloft in the U.S. and/or other countries.

**PCZONE**

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

FREE GAMES!

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Up in the world

WHEN STEVE MOVED to the UpFront section, such were the celebrations that we all put our backs out doing high-kicks. When the four-day party drew to a close, and empty cans of Red Stripe tumbled from our snoring chests, something occurred to us; Steve used to do Freeplay, and if no-one else took the section over pretty sharpish, we'd be missing the reddest section of the magazine.

So, it comes to this. My idyllic first year at ZONE, which has mainly seen me lolling like a ragdoll in a swivel chair, has come to an end. I'm now a creature of responsibility, of time-management, and the Crown Of Free has been handed on. Be sure to email your suggestions, comments, complaints and filthy tirades to me at jblyth@futurenet.co.uk.

Steve will still be doing Freeware though, because that's his favourite bit of the mag. I see, it's going to be like that...

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer

Try this!

Halo 2 does a nudeybum

OK, first you'll need to get your hands on a copy from the initial run, because it's been removed now. Got that? Now go into the map editor, where a man will get his bum out. Not terribly erotic, but it did delay shipping by a couple of weeks. Because god knows what'd happen if anyone saw a bum.



104 Demo pages

Try before you buy. Then at least you know if it's rubbish or not



106 News

What's happening in the land of the free



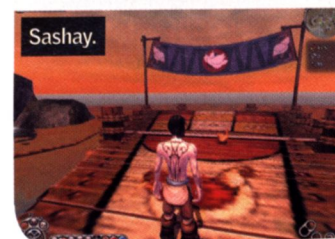
108 Freeware

Where sumo wrestlers meet the Rubik's snake



110 Play!

Some new mods, and a StarCraft retrospective



114 Jackass

This month, we're stopping big bullies from killing digital animals

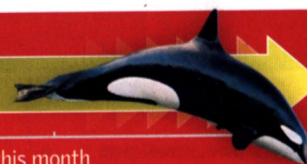


116 Online Zone

Fight! Chat! Forums! Blogs! And Postcards From The Edge...

**PCZONE
FREE-O-METER****0**
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

**411.0**
HOURS*

Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up our free DVD

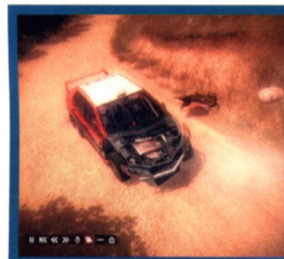


COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

It's pure, unadulterated filth www.codemasters.com/colinmcrae/

IN THE REVIEWS section of this very issue, Suzy gives you the definitive review of McRae's latest arcade/sim hybrid driver (p64). It's definitive, because Suzy's real-life driving skills are second to none. It's no exaggeration to suggest that Suzy could drive a Cinquecento over a dozen buses, before gracefully pirouetting on a single wheel and causing the bonnet to flap up and down with a jubilant parp. I, on the other hand, am an abominable sod of a motorist, whose real-life driving achievements to date involve a medal for reversing into a skip, and a big flapping ribbon for driving my mum's Capri through a hedge.

This demo lets you drive around Italy at two difficulties, normal and very easy, and you get the choice of Ickler buggy, Evo IX and another car that probably means a lot more to someone who cares about that sort of thing – in which case, you should be reading Suzy's review. All I'm interested in is seeing if I can get as much fun as she did out of the game, even though I'm so crap that a *Top Gear* presenter would rather grate his shins than watch me drive. One way to find out...



BONNETS UP

I started the carnage by ripping the bonnet off. I mean, do cars really need bonnets? This is relatively easy, and can be achieved by driving into walls. If it doesn't immediately jettison, just drive into more walls.

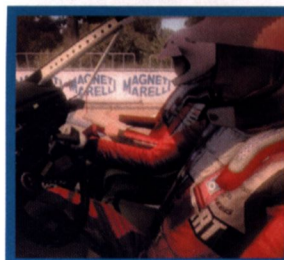


DOORS OFF

After flapping open a few times, I finally managed to rip the driver's door off by a combination of driving into walls and scraping along cliff walls. This is a more advanced technique, and one which made me look super-cool.



I DON'T LIKE DRIVING IN MY CAR Not just dirt, but skid marks too...



CHECKING OUT

I finally finished, admittedly about two minutes after the winner. He won the race, but come on, who had more fun here? Not him. He's only a computer, he can't even have fun. Therefore I win and am great.



FLIPPING OVER

Now this one is a real challenge – on very easy mode, it's virtually impossible to flip the car. And when you do, it glides back onto its wheels like a tortoise in a



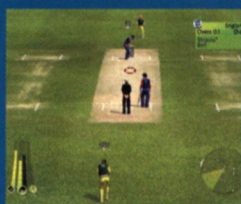
BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007

Lara's craft www.codemasters.com/brianlara/

AH, CRICKET. CRICKET. Would that mater could see us, lolling giddily on the grass verge, imbibing litres of Skol Super and hollering god-knows-what to the unfocused white dots in the distance. Cricket!

You think you've played cricket? You've played nothing of the sort. Or if you have, it was probably Brian Lara's 2005 version, which they played with saucepans and palmfuls of mince. This is now

cricket for tomorrow, people. Oh, and have a pen ready, as you'll need to note the controls flashed up on the welcome screen. Like the real thing, it ain't intuitive.



CRICKETING FACTS

Understanding cricket is so very simple...



BACKSTOP

It's this guy's job to stop the other team from scoring a Golden Henry, which they do by sliding a grubhunter into the tinker's crinkle. Once they've managed this, they get a three-minute trolley dash in a Tesco Metro.



REFEREE

The referee has a vast arsenal of punishments available to him. By declaring a player "Aghast", that player must feign motionless, dumb surprise at goings-on for three rounds, or until someone crawls between his legs.

LOST PLANET

Someone find it, then www.lostplanet-thegame.com

NO, WE DIDN'T get the screenshots from the 360 version of this enjoyable action-adventure. It's just that this in-progress demo still has a few obvious console hangovers – like 'Press B' – from the porting process.

This (the XP version) scores points over the 360 version by not having the aggravatingly slow turn times – although

the bloom's been turned up so scandalously high that visibility is.... Well, it's like you're walking through a snowstorm, so kudos to Capcom, I suppose.

At one stage I ended up walking out of a tunnel the way I'd entered it, without even realising that I'd done just that. It's the most spectacular disorientation simulator since huge doses of drug.



1 SPAWN POINT

Standing this close to an alien spawn point is pretty dumb, but then it does add a spicy edge to the proceedings.

2 BARRELS

One day, someone will make an exploding barrel domino rally, and spell my name in ash craters. This would be, like, so romantic.

3 INSECTS

They may just be insects, but inside each one is delicious hotness, which you need to live. If you call devouring bug gibs living.

ANTI-BLOOMERS

So icy, so I don't see



FILTHY GLARE

All the processor power we have these days, and they're using it to dazzle us in real-time. Useful gameplay mechanic, developers!



INDOORSY

And when you're indoors, still the massive bugs come. Here's a tip – try to aim for the clearly delineated, glowing weak spots.

THE BEST OF THE REST



SAM & MAX: EP 6 - BRIGHT SIDE OF THE MOON

www.tellegames.com
Voilà – the complete package! This is the more than adequate resolution to a series which often veered wildly into uncharted realms of likeability and self-referential fun.



32ND AMERICA'S CUP - THE GAME

www.virtualskipper-game.com
A Virtual Skipper by another name is still as sweet, and this compelling, realistic and actually popular regatta sim comes just over a year after its predecessor.



THEATRE OF WAR

www.battlefront.com
The title of this new RTS conjures an image of *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, with a big Welshman bellowing at a man in make-up. There are no rumours that this is actually a secret level of this WWII strategy game.



ANOTHER BIOSHOCK VIDEO

www.2kgames.com/bioshock
It's the game that keeps getting closer, and here's another tantalising video that'll have you amputating a leg, just so that you can more effectively chew on your calves in anticipation. You'd think the excitement would have dulled by now, but no...

**PCZONE
HOT
DOWNLOADS**

STARCRRAFT 2 GAMEPLAY TRAILER

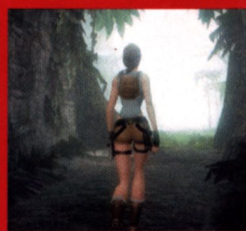
www.computerandvideogames.com/article.php?id=164424



You've read our feature on Blizzard's latest (p20), and now, at long last you can see the Protoss showcase video as it was played to the press in South Korea, with Dustin Browder's commentary discussing the newest rocks, papers and scissors in the genre.

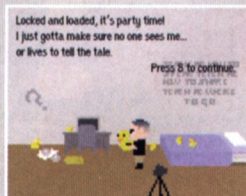
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

www.gamershell.com/download_19299.shtml



A bit late coming, but the demo has finally made it. Gawp at Lara's norks and the way her holster sits just-so, then play a level from Peru in this updated, glittery tomb attack. Played alongside the original, it'll cure your fluffy nostalgia forever.

SNIPPETS



WORLD SIGHS AT FIRST VIRGINIA TECH GAMES

www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/378086

Last month we did a round-up of gaming responses to headline tragedy – and Flash Games have almost taken over playground jokes as the fastest, most tasteful response to any public outpouring of grief. It's not very good either, but did you expect anything else?



FRAXY CRAB BATTLES

indygamer.blogspot.com/2007/05/fraxy.html
The Japanese create-your-own-boss-battle shooter has been tickling the creative glands of indie game-players, with creations ranging from giant crabs to fiery salamanders. The swinging camera takes some getting used to, but *Fraxy* is a great tiny shooter once you've got the hang of it.



FALLOUT, FREE

Play Black Isle's arrested development

www.nma-fallout.com/article.php?id=35862

BLACK ISLE STUDIOS may have gone the way of Atlantis, but a precious nugget of what could have been has bobbed stubbornly to the surface. The Van Buren tech demo illustrates well how far the developers of the troubled Black Isle team got in *Fallout 3*, before

financial difficulties forced Interplay to shut them down.

It's a tantalising buggo taster that can only mean frustration for fans of the series worried about the direction that Bethesda may now take their favourite RPG. It's not pretty, it's not finished and

the text is difficult to read, but five minutes after installing it, we'd already punched two dogs to death.

Its main appeal is to hardcore fans, but if the idea of playing a demo for a game that'll never come out doesn't bother you, download this right now.



BARBIE QUEUES FOR MMO

Life in plastic, it's... Well, it's plastic

www.barbiegirls.com

ACCORDING TO OUR demographic research, we've got one seven-year-old girl in Newport who sometimes reads *ZONE* while her father watches videos of the latest *BioShock* gameplay. Hi Gwen, this one's for you.

Barbie™ Girls® is a highly branded mini-MMO set in Barbie's super-fashionable world. It lets you create your avatar, decorate your home, develop a crippling distaste for your own body that will linger well into adulthood, and play rudimentary finger-painting games. Play games for

Barbie Bucks, spend Barbie Bucks on handbags. The snazziest stuff is reserved for people who've bought actual Barbie products, naturally. They're not a bloody charity, you know.

Chat is bizarrely censored at the moment. Strange words like apples, strudel – all the ingredients of an Apple Strudel, in fact – were stricken needlessly from the record. Luckily, this gave us just the reason we needed to log out and stop talking to any online participants about German desserts.

A FREER KOREA FOR RPG-ERS

Cabal Online drops the monthly fee

www.cabalonline.com

CABAL ONLINE, THE Korean-developed MMORPG that puffs out its chest and describes itself as "the revolution of action", is to drop its monthly fee from the end of June.

The replacement system, as you've already probably guessed, will be a generous 'free-to-play' system, coupled with new and sinister 'premium services'. Item shops will pop up in the world, allowing characters to spend

purchasable in-game cash on special items and features.

If you spent two quid on *Oblivion's* horse armour, it's easy to imagine blowing a substantial part of your inheritance on gigantic swords and helmets with which to score essentially meaningless victories over people you'll never meet. You might well be saving €10 a month, but how much will you be spending on tiny imaginary hats?

THE MIDDLETON MYSTERY

A bunch of schoolkids are making a game to publicise a stately home. Project manager Steve Manthorp tells us about it...

PCZ: Have you done anything like this before?

SM: "I've been doing stuff associated with gaming and heritage since I ran a project to build Cartwright Hall as a map for *Unreal Tournament 2004* (snipurl.com/cartwright). It was a stunning map and it was really popular. It's still downloaded today, too – it's a wonderful place for a massacre."

PCZ: How did they feel about their building being covered in gibs?

SM: "Cartwright Hall loved it! It was a promotion for them. They'd done some research which said that young children never come to any heritage building, because they just don't know what's behind the doors. This map was just to give the kids some a prior experience of what was on the other side. Attendances went up 25% after the map was released; we didn't do good enough research to give all the credit to the map, but it can't be pinned down to anything else."

PCZ: Is what you're doing at Belsay Hall similar to that?

SM: "It's different in the sense that I'm working with Lateral Visions, a company who've spun off from Codemasters, and they've developed their own game engine, which is

absolutely superb for the first-person adventure we're going to make."

PCZ: So it's an adventure, not a shooter?

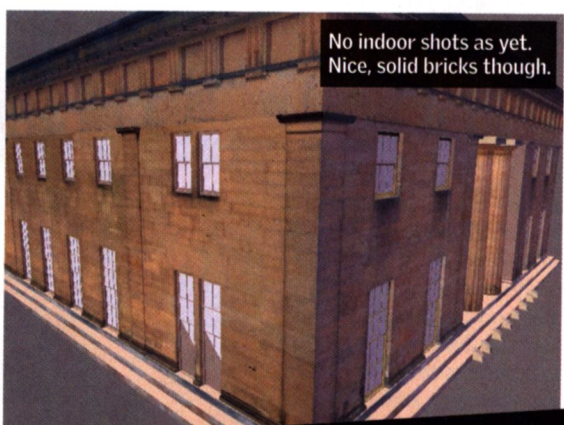
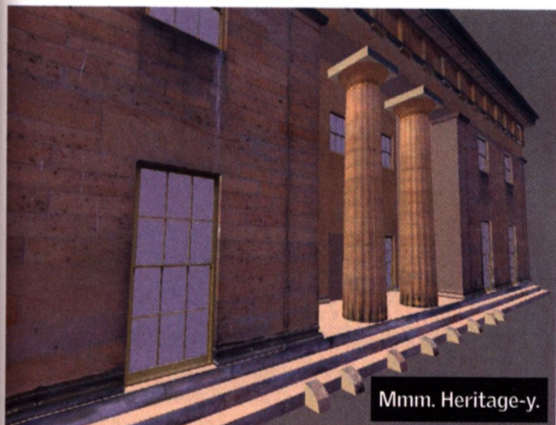
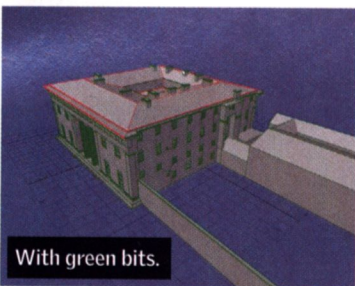
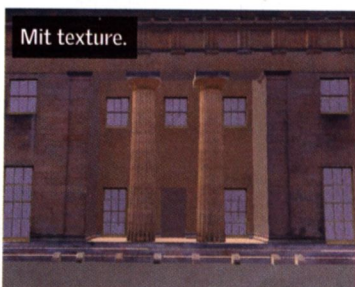
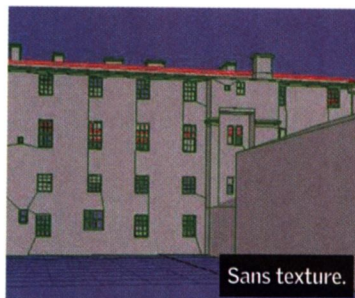
SM: "It's interesting working with English halls – they have priorities and taboos, and then there's a group of children who've got their own very different priorities. So it was a matter of finding common gaming territory. They've come up with a barking mad plot, but it brings in a great amount of oral history without being too naff. There's some spooky moments, and some genuinely clever puzzles they've come up with too."

PCZ: Are the kids enjoying what they're doing? Are there any of tomorrow's developers?

SM: "Making games has almost replaced being a fireman as the aspirant career. It's amazing how literate in games they all are – there's one lad who plays games a lot, but even the casual gamers know all of the protocols of games – they know the clichés, the rules, the mechanics. They're very clever kids."

PCZ: And they're keeping focus?

SM: "Yes. The sense of ownership is tremendous – it's their game and they're so proud of it."



SNIPPETS



SECOND STRIFE

<http://snipurl.com/1m0mm>
Fresh from the Belgian cases of 'virtual rape', *Second Life* is now dealing with allegations of child pornography in Germany. It's difficult to sort out fact from fiction, but it's fair to guess this is a blend of truth and bullshit, as sensationalised as it is disturbing.



MACHINIMA SYNOPSIS FUN

<http://snipurl.com/1m0oe>
"Previously, on *Lost*: Hugo is becoming crazy with fishes. Jin needs his wife but she is watering plants in her secret garden." In the entertainment wastelands of machinima, this isn't all that bad.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL



From v1.00003 onwards, all non-existent grenade launchers will no longer be able to fire.

Movie of the month MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Medal Of Honor: Airborne is EA's attempt to breathe fresh air into the WWII shooter. *Call Of Duty* may have changed time zones, but *MOH* has changed gameplay; you start anywhere in the level, and the game reacts to your presence and threat, supposedly making every game different. Watch on...



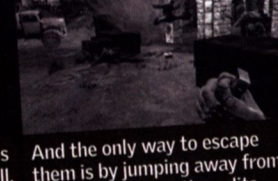
Some Italian ruins, about to go kaboom thanks to some '40s boom-shack-a-lack.



You might defend a crossroads like this chap. Depends where you land. Could be anywhere.



Sniping is one option. Grenades are also pretty useful for... Well, blowing stuff up, since you ask.



And the only way to escape them is by jumping away from them while doing the splits.



Freeware



"Freedom! I won't let you down..." sings *Steve Hogarty*

THE BLOB

Das ist gut blobben, ja

Dev: German students at Utrecht University | snipurl.com/pcz_blob

YOU CAN SEARCH the nooks and crannies of the entire internet kingdom for a decent *Katamari Damacy* clone, and you'll probably find nothing more than a 2D Flash version (which incidentally is really fun, and you can find it by pointing your browser towards www.razoric.com/games/Katamari-Damacy).

Dig a little further though and you might stumble upon *The Blob*, which, while bearing a passing resemblance to the demented PlayStation roll 'em up (and therefore demanding the obvious comparison), is very much ploughing its own colourful furrow.

You're a blob, and you've crash-landed on a planet devoid of pigment, apart from some primary-coloured civilians. Roll over these people to grow bigger and to absorb their hue-y goodness. Roll over a yellow guy to become yellow, for example, and then roll over a blue guy to become – think back to primary school art class here – green. In your colourful state, you bounce into buildings, trees and cars to colour them in, making your way through the city and gradually making the whole place look nicer.

Painting the city is addictive, and probably therapeutic on some level too. There are 17 special landmark buildings that require you to hit a target somewhere on their surface while painted a specific colour – this usually involves a 'gently does it' *Marble Madness*-style approach, all the while avoiding absorbing the wrong colour on the way to your intended destination.



Like a birthday cake, only not so tasty.



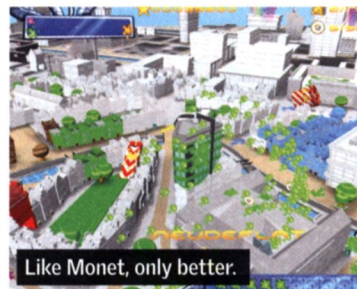
Look at the cute trees and cars!



Bounce into buildings, cars and trees to colour them in

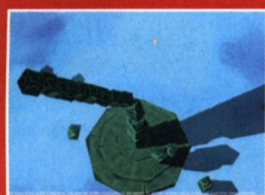
There are also some coins to collect, if you're into that sort of thing. INKT agents will turn you black if you absorb them, meaning you have to dip yourself in water to become clean again, at the expense of body mass.

Think *Alien Hominid* crossed with *Katamari Damacy* and the paint bucket tool in MSPAINT, and you'll understand why we love *The Blob*. It's brilliant, stylish fun.



Like Monet, only better.

Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month, paint the town red, green and blue, pile 'em up, watch them wobble, knock 'em down and shoot the bastards...



HIGHPILED

Look out, it's gonna fall!

Dev: Polycount Productions
www.highpiled.com

A FEW THINGS to keep in mind if you're developing a game that asks the player to place blocks on top of one another. First, make it so that the blocks are all the same shape, because having some blocks that are slightly irregular only makes what should be a simple task needlessly complicated. Second, make it so that you can rotate the blocks, and not have their corners crudely teetering over the edges.

But most of all, make it so that the blocks near the bottom don't jitter about like cube-shaped kittens. Make it so that if I have a high pile of blocks, it can stand freely without shaking itself to ruins. Can you make that? If you can, let us know, because this first attempt isn't all that bad, really.

BEYOND THE RED LINE

What the frak? Frakking frakkers! Frak frak frak... Dev: BTRL Team | www.game-warden.com/bsg

I'VE SEEN PRECISELY one solitary episode of *Battlestar Galactica*, and several times been trapped between Will and anybody who'll humour him in a *Battlestar Galactica* conversation. I know that Starbuck is a person, and that if you suggest that Café Nero is his nemesis you'll be met with a deadpan stare. I also know that *Battlestar Galactica* is loved very dearly, and the people who love it will seriously enjoy *Beyond The Red Line*, a freeware space shooter built on not only the *Freespace 2* engine, but on pure adoration for what I'm told is an excellent sci-fi series.

This is only a demo, mind you, meaning you can play a training mission followed by two more

missions involving asteroids, Cylons and a constant radio chatter (honestly, it never lets up), before you're kicked back to the title screen. The developers have found the time to add their own voice-acting to the whole shebang too, and you can tell they loved every second of it, right down to the borderline ironic over-usage of the word 'frak' and one needlessly gruff angry commander man.

Multiplayer is included here too, and going online takes the edge off the crumb of a campaign being offered in single-player. Now we just need to let them finish it, and hope that they don't all die in a horrible plane crash over the sea. Over the sea is where the worst ones happen. Let's all hope against that.



What is beyond it exactly?

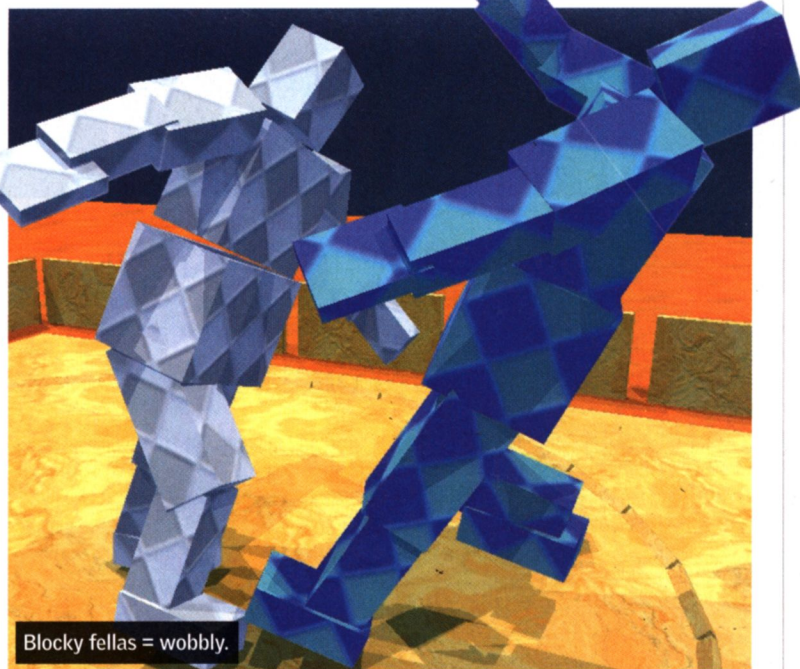
SUMOTORI DREAMS

The embarrassing drunken fight simulator

Dev: Archee | web.t-online.hu/archee83/sumotori

WHAT'S FUNNY ABOUT two drunk men stumbling around one another, trying to push their inebriated enemy to the floor before falling over backwards themselves, and then repeatedly trying to get up but failing? The answer is 'a lot'. Now, remove the, "Oh I hope they don't hurt themselves and/or randomly turn on me" factor of reality, and you're left with *Sumotori Dreams*, a game in which two animated fighters stumble about like hilarious alcoholics.

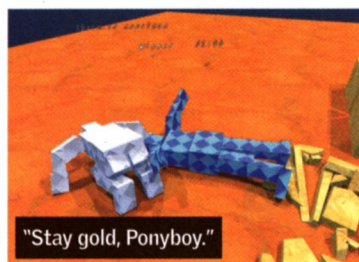
It's all done procedurally with a physics engine, meaning that the file size is a measly 86Kb. Move forward and try to push the other guy down, but once somebody's won, just watch the AI try to right itself. It so desperately wants to stand and face the other combatant to bow honourably, but thanks to physics they can rarely manage it, instead flailing their arms wildly while trying to balance. It's slapstick freeware at its best, and probably the funniest 86Kb ever, if you ignore all jpegs of cats, that is.



Blocky fellas = wobbly.



Oh dear, he appears to have fallen over.



"Stay gold, Ponyboy."



Shouldn't have had that last pint.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

LUMINARA

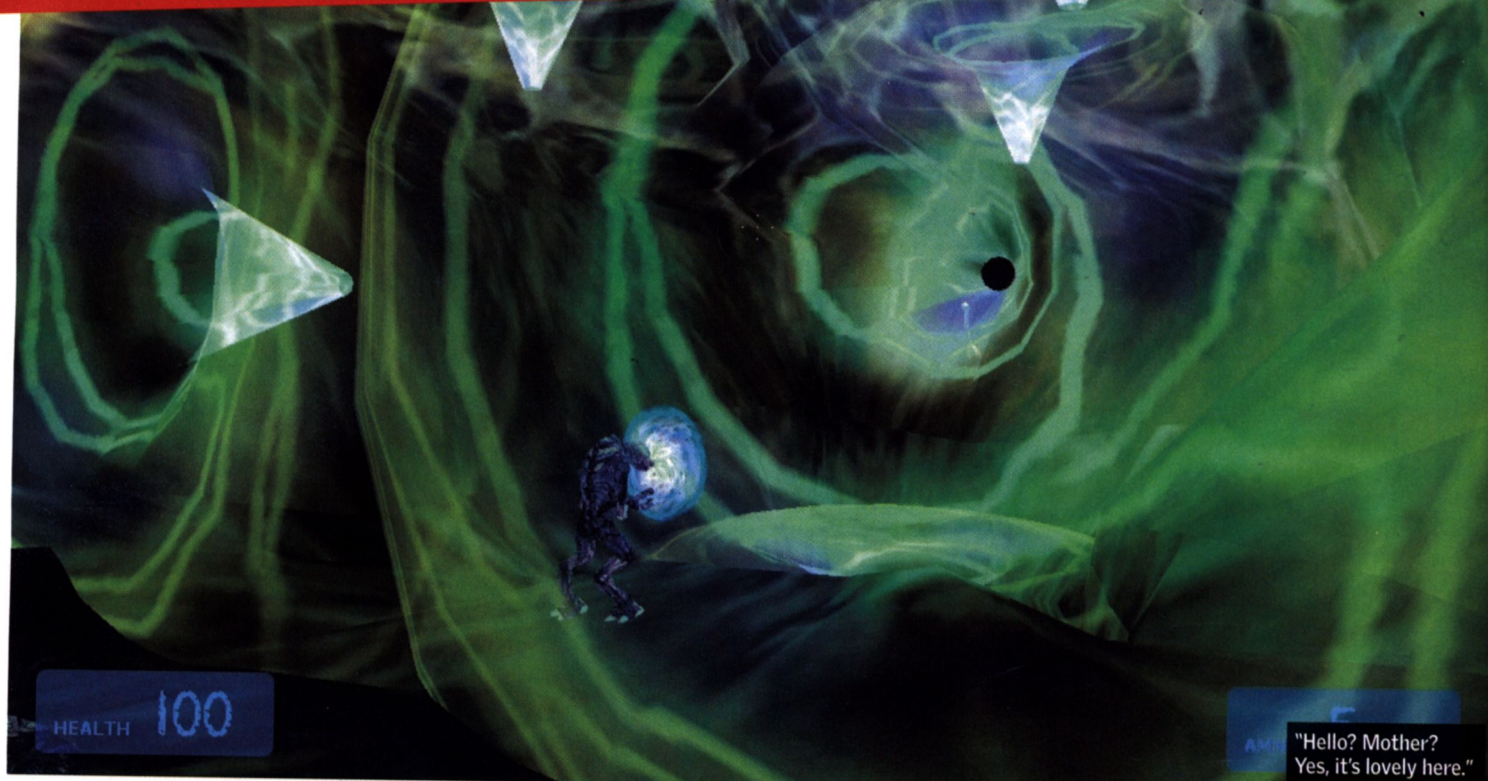


Dev: John Cooney
luminara.fizzlebot.com

Another month, another webgame (of the month), and another Flash game with colourful blinking lights and popping noises. This one's called *Luminara*, and could be described as a *Geometry Wars* clone, but not enough to be slapped clean off the internet by a lawyer.

Move a turret with WASD, shoot with the mouse, avoid shapes, have techno music drilled into your brain, collect power-ups – it's hardly worth explaining how it plays because you've probably played something exactly like it a dozen times before.

Despite this though, *Luminara* gets the mix right. It's probably too easy (or I'm just astoundingly brilliant), but the enemies are cool and change frequently enough too. Of course, if you really like this, there are other *Geometry Wars* clones out there. It's just a matter of looking.



TRANSITIONS



Play: MOD



Jon Blyth reaches for god mode one more time... www.centrifugedesign.co.uk/ | Mod For: Half-Life 2



THERE ARE SOME famous unexplained absences – Lord Lucan's still not bothered calling home, and no-one's added Jesus's awkward teenage years to the Bible yet – but none of them are more mystifying and confounding than what Gordon Freeman was up to between *Half-Lives*. *Transitions*, as it turns out, doesn't even try to answer that question. Instead, it follows an alternate timeline; what if, after destroying Xen, Gordon hadn't walked through that portal?

You probably know what happens in *HL* – if you don't go through the door, the G-for-Grumpy-Man is annoyed. Not crazy-on-all-fours-barking annoyed, just that "how disappointing" kind of annoyed that only truly sinister people can pull off,

without sounding like your mum. He transported you into a battle you had no chance of winning, and the end of your game was to be torn apart by the denizens of Xen. *Transitions* makes that battle just a little less unwinnable.

That's definitely not to say it's easy. For a race that you've pushed to the brink of extinction, there isn't half a lot of them. They spawn in large groups, and so often that you're never quite sure if there's even a finite supply, let alone an endangered few.

At first, this swamping feels like a brutal, unthinking attempt to simply hurl a bullying number of monsters at a hopelessly inadequate bullet supply. On top of that, a dozen vortigaunts on-screen at any one time can seriously

slow down a less beefy PC, so it's not just you that's being bullied, either.

But, finding the shotgun makes the game a little less impossible. Tiptoe-ing around the spawn triggers and picking off the spawns from a safer distance does the same again. But there's nothing quite like giving yourself all the weapons from cheat mode for making *Transitions* a little less punishing. Oh, boo yourselves.

Even learning to manipulate the game, *Transitions* is still shockingly hard in a way that isn't immediately intuitive or rewarding. But it works, it's a good-looking interpretation of Xen, and if you make any progress before you sling your monitor out the window, then the gratification will come. Or you could just turn on god mode. It's up to you.

5.56MM FULL METAL JACKET



Play: MOD



INTELLIGENT DESIGN



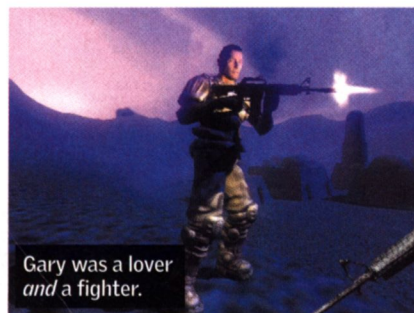
WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

Rat-a-tat-tat doom3.planet-multiplayer.de/5.56FMJ | Mod for: Doom 3

WHO SAID THE *Doom 3* engine was prone to eye-straining darkness? This mod for the underplayed multiplayer game proves that if you just turn up that crazy HDR lighting, you can have bloom just as wincingly dazzling as any *Lost Coast* that Source can throw at you.

5.56mm Full Metal Jacket isn't based on the film – that was a completely different number of millimetres – in fact, there's refreshing little time wasted on back-stories and over-imagined fantasy backdrops. It's just East vs West, a choice of ten weapons over five weapon classes (snipe snipe), and a choice of deathmatch or capture the flag. It's refreshing not to have to buy into a complicated dystopian cyberpunk nightmare, for once.

That also means they can do what they want with the maps, because let's face it, soldiers will kill each other anywhere. So there's a variety of terrain in them; forest, desert, urban and industrial, each with a distinct visual theme (erm, different colours) and a slightly new take on the open-plan or corridor level design. If you know anyone who actually plays *Doom 3* multiplayer, have a little go.



Gary was a lover and a fighter.



Tell him now, or the tree gets it.



JAILBREAK!



Play: MOD



Have you saved your Get Out Of Jail Free card?

www.jailbreaksource.com/ | Mod for: Half-Life 2

OK, THE RULES of *Jailbreak* are simple. If you kill someone, they go to jail. If that seems unfair to you, then stop living in such a dumb, idealistic world. This isn't Christmas, and Santa isn't keeping a list of who cuddled the most panda cubs.

Once you're in jail, you can either languish like Oscar Wilde, escape like Steve McQueen, or get released by your team-mates like... Someone famous has done at some point I'm sure. Or you could simply lose the round when all your team-mates have joined you. If you've not been imprisoned, meanwhile, you can stage a daring release attempt and be a proper hero, defend the captives your team has accumulated, or just pretend it's a normal deathmatch and try to shoot as many people as possible.

It's set in the *Half-Life 2* world, and there's a strong feel of deathmatch about it – you've got gravity guns, for starters – but this is an interesting addition to the basic game dynamic. However, it's still a work in progress,

and there's not much in the way of populated public servers at the time of writing. If you're looking to get a decent crowd playing at this stage, you'll have to set up your own games.



Fire in the jailhouse!



Say no to porridge.

Games For Windows

On May 31, Microsoft launched 'Games for Windows – LIVE', an inelegant title for what could be the start of the Next Big Thing™. For the last decade, the gap between consoles and PCs has been shrinking: consoles have adopted more mature content and online functionality, the system specs have become workably similar and PC developers have started to pay attention to accessibility, stability and making their titles simple to play out-of-the-box.

Microsoft seems to be trying to provide a unified front-end to the player's experience on either their PC or console. The 'Games For Windows – LIVE' front-end is satisfyingly similar to its excellent console counterpart: I can plug my Xbox 360 pad directly into my PC and, as a self-confessed Gamerscore junky, I can now rack up an even higher meaningless number on two platforms instead of just one.

On the other hand, the concept of an equal playing field for console and PC players is a challenge for developers. Some genres are just easier to control on one system or the other, and this falls down when you want to support head-to-head play. The feedback, frame-rate and ability for players to respond to stimuli and the like all need to be identical. Even *Halo 2*, Microsoft's flagship title under the new brand isn't allowing PC players to compete directly with their console brethren.

It's a solvable problem, and some developer is going to make a lot of money proving it, but I warn you: if one day I'm trudging through this year's hot new FPS and some kid starts tearing me a new one because he's playing on an Xbox 360, then this connectivity is going to end with me taking the disc out of my beloved games PC and using it to cut the network cable...

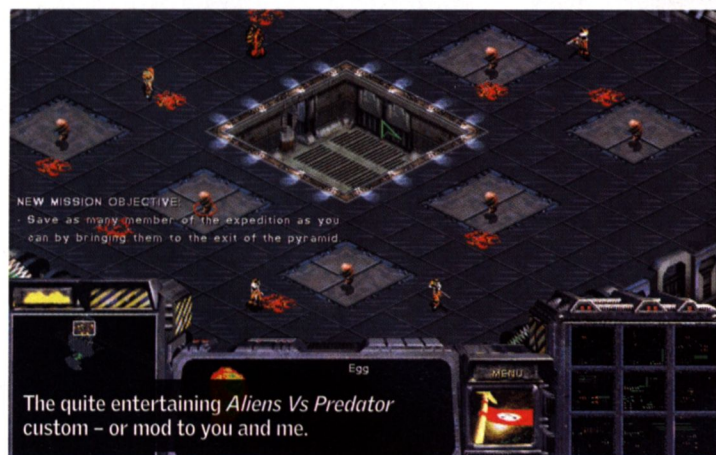
SPORE IS DUE OUT IN 2008 –
WWW.SPORE.COM

FREEPLAYPLAY!

StarCraft Adventures

After Blizzard's thrilling announcement in Korea, *Jon Blyth* discovers that the history of *StarCraft* modding is both demented and hilarious...

IT MAY HAVE fallen from the average gamer's radar until recently, but the original *StarCraft* never died. The *Brood War* expansion became a hotbed for fan-created content, and the home-brewed utilities, maps and mods that sprung up in its wake occasionally verged on genius. Of course, there was a lot of crap too, and talent and intelligence were all too often lost in the glare of devotion. Here's what we mean...



The quite entertaining *Aliens Vs Predator* custom – or mod to you and me.

MAP CRAFT

BLIZZARD UNDERSTOOD THE creative compulsions of their fans enough to provide StarEdit with the game, which allowed players to muck about with maps and alter the goals required. If you're after making a map yourself and want more power than Blizzard trust you with, then you could also use the unofficial TrigEdit; if you're not afraid to get your nails dirty and chipped, then go for StarForge.

Among the maps available for download are a version of *Aliens Vs Predator*, and even a... *Cough...* An RPG adaptation of *Pokémon*. If that sounds

too intriguing to be true, then yes; it's not very good, and the RPG element was virtually zero. But controlling a Zerg Drone called Pikachu is entertaining enough to warrant the download.

StarCraft's been around a while now, and anyone who's played a game for ten years is probably going to be a) Korean, and b) pretty damn good at it. So among the Pikachus and AVPs, some of the single-player maps have been simply designed to test the mettle of the jaded against an AI which has been given all the advantages. If you really want a solid challenge, some of these maps are the place to go.

MOD AIN'T SHORT FOR MODERN

DEVOTED PLAYERS OF *StarCraft* who wanted to make their own mods (called customs in the *StarCraft* universe) would find themselves knee-deep in code; there was no 'friendly' LUA scripting back then, and there certainly wasn't a cheerful-looking *Garry's Mod*. To make the player's work easier, Camelot Systems developed tools

to help people tinker with the game.

There have been a number of utilities since, but this is the one that kicked off *StarCraft*'s turn-of-the-millennium golden age of modding. Epics like *Legacy Of The Confederation* stretched to 20 missions, and worked entirely within Blizzard's characters and world – and there are plenty of others just as big.

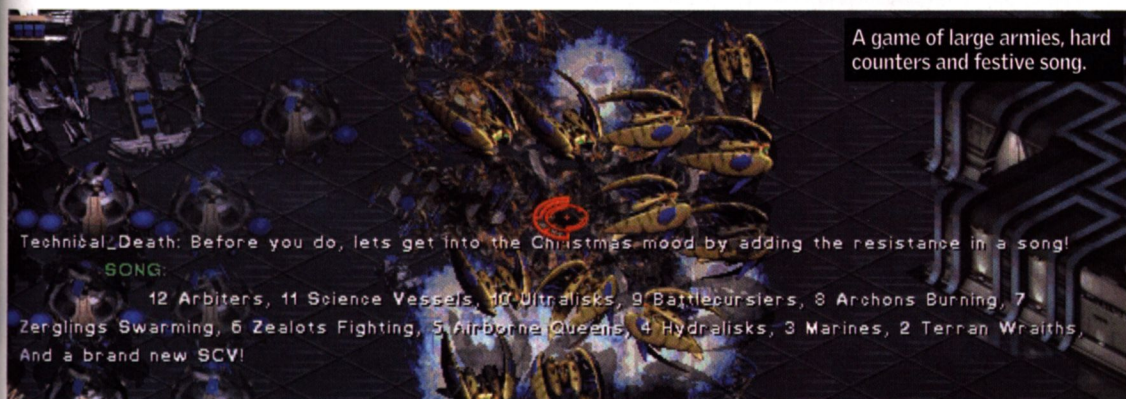
Hours more gameplay with *Fall From Grace*.



THE MOVIES

MOVIES ARE A kind of glorified map, with no gameplay element. The movies you can download still operate within the general game mechanic (if the map's big enough, you can scroll away from the unfolding drama), but they give the creator a chance to tell their story in some of the earliest examples of machinima.

It also gave a couple of people a chance to show off their humour too – the immodestly titled *'Funniest Map'* manages to squeeze in a fart gag and a song, for instance. Then there's *'I'm An Idiot'*, which actually manages to raise a laugh. In it, they allow you to move the camera ahead to see what's behind the door they're talking about. You know what that is? Well, it's your interactive dramatic irony, is that. Pretty sophisticated, eh?



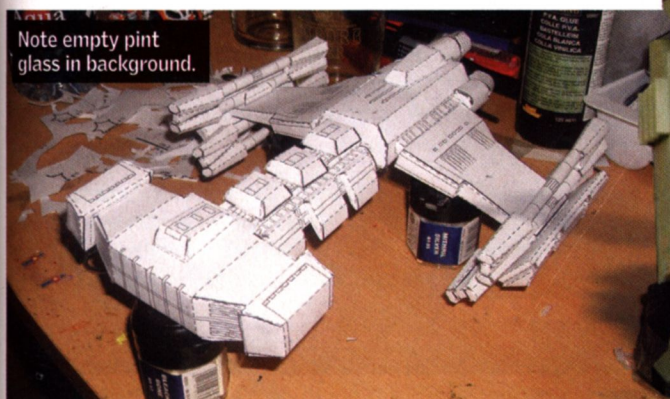
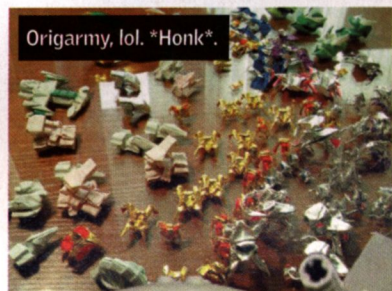
FAN CREATIONS

PHRASED IN A positive way, these fan creations are an inspiring example of players engaging with the *StarCraft* universe, and using their creative skills to bring that world into a tangible form. Of course, you could also say that it ranks alongside heavy-breathing phone calls as a sign of unhealthy obsession. But then, what else are you going to make out of Lego? A little car that doesn't even go toot-toot?

Sticking to the positive spin, some of the stuff out there is impressive – a barmy origami army hints at a genuine creative flair underneath the demented

dedication, and some of the paper and Lego creations are... Well, they're pretty good.

The only reason I'm being snide about this is actually because I'm jealous. I haven't the flair or the time to do stuff like this, and I remember the days before time was devoured by duty, and I could indulge my pointless fantasies in a more creative way than having a quick wank when no-one's looking.



BUT HOW?

You'll need the *StarCraft* and *Brood War* expansion pack, which are readily available in a boxset for around a tenner. The latest version is v1.15, but we patched to v1.07 (available from starcraft.org), which seems to be the most compatible version for the single-player mods we downloaded. Newer modding tools tweaked the settings with the equivalent of a Spectrum POKE command, and the numbers to poke changed in later patches.

Maps can be downloaded, put in the maps folder and loaded from the 'Play custom map' option; mods usually come with their own executable file. It's much simpler than you'd expect to get this ten-year-old game up, running and modded, and Blizzard are making it even easier for the sequel.

THE FUNNIEST THING ON THE INTERNET

Written by PatrickdlBackup at starcraft.org, these are genuine (Google it if you don't believe me) snippets – bad spelling and all – from an amazing list called '10 fun ways to bug a noob!'. We like to think it's the funniest thing that's ever been written by a 37-year-old pretending to be five...

- Send probes to enemy's base and type wakka wakka like crazy.
- Ask how long he is in the shower. After he answers type with your mom! If he doesn't respond, destroy his base and make him cry!
- Nuke the outside of his base like crazy. He will type in: the worlds blowing up! (if hes dumb)
- Use templars and storm everything around him and type: the world is ending! He might type: Oh no, i must save you!!!
- Put an scv next to his base and make it spin around and type: its dancing, and i cant stop it! He should type something like this:
How do you do that? Then you type: uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu daaa.

PC ZONE JACKASS

THE HUNT SABOTEUR



If you're passionate about animal rights, you're probably not reading this magazine, preferring instead to firebomb science facilities in real life. If your conviction is a more vague affair, and you're not sure if you love animals or just hate hunters because it seems a bit rum, then you'll probably prefer to restrict your activities to the online world, where it doesn't really matter. So, in this month's *PCZ* Jackass we ask: how many online pixel-creatures can we save?

Ain't you never seen a skeleton jumping on water before?

Piss off

FISH

THE SET-UP:

From *Zelda* to *Sega Bass Fishing*, spearing our piscine sisters in the gob is as much a part of gaming as trying to hold in a widdle until you finish a level. Nowhere is this more true than in MMOs, thus giving us the fine opportunity to splish, splash and emote like hell in the clear, clear waters of Azeroth.

THE OUTCOME:

In *World Of Warcraft*, the fish don't appear to be bothered by getting jumped on, so people can happily fish between your legs. The best you can hope for is light bemusement, unless you go PvP and start killing people. But that just seemed a bit too PETA for our liking.

VIRTUAL FISH-MOUTHS UNPIERCED:

None. But we did get sworn at, which is really what it's all about.

Yeh I LOVE MOOSE

The murderous equivalent of horses and coconuts.

07:08
4.8 m/s
10.33

DEER

THE SET-UP:

Deer Hunter 2004 is one of the most inexplicably popular online games around. People hide in encampments on quietly populated servers in complete, entranced silence. They invest a lot of time waiting for deer. We 'pretended' to be idiots, persistently referred to the deer as moose, rode into the middle of a hunt on our buggies and screamed "I LOVE MOOOOSSEEE!"

THE OUTCOME:

As we discovered, arousing the fury of the hunter is nothing compared to the satisfaction of watching a group of deer-coloured pixels become slightly less. We saved a bunch of AI subroutines from deletion, and pissed off someone who wasn't causing any real harm to anything. Great work!

VIRTUAL LIVES SAVED:

One. Although we probably forced someone to go out and shoot deer for real.



LIVESTOCK

THE SET-UP:

What is a farm but legalised slavery? We took to *A Tale In The Desert 3*, and decided to give those primitive bastards what for. We ignored the issue of human slavery, because humans don't have big innocent eyes and go moo.

THE OUTCOME:

Visitors to ancient Egypt have few property rights – that is to say, you can't run around smashing stuff that doesn't belong to you. Deprived of chat-spamming techniques and with a relatively small bank of emotes available, it was all we could do to backflip in protest near some sheep. Pathetic, frankly.

VIRTUAL LIVES SAVED:

None. But we did plant and harvest more flax than we care to remember.



CHICKENS

THE SET-UP:

We're beginning to conclude that MMO developers deliberately create worlds where you have to kill as much wildlife as possible, and rarely consider the feelings of animal rights activists. But how about single-player games? Can we disrupt a chicken-kicking competition in *Fable*?

THE OUTCOME:

No, we can't. You can wait, and not kick the chicken, but that's about it. You can't even fart and laugh while the mini-game's on, or scare off the chicken. The only option you've got is to turn your PC off, and that's almost like killing the poor sod. It's a harsh lesson, but one we should all learn: sometimes, you got to kick the chicken.

VIRTUAL CHICKENS UNKICKED:

None – but it's only chickens, it's not like they've got nerve endings or anything.



VERMIN

THE SET-UP:

We took a high-level character in *World Of Warcraft* and entered the starting mission areas of the opposing faction. Emoting a lie-in protest, we heckled the low-level rat-slayers with cries of "that's my pet, omg stop shooting my pet!" If they killed a single precious creature, the gloves were off, and we fully intended to kill them right back.

THE OUTCOME:

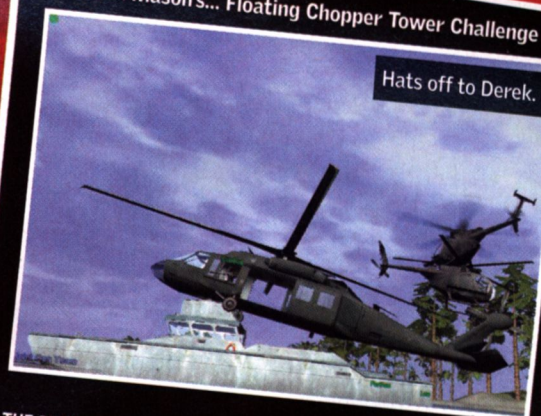
Our characters are mid-level 40, so it was all too easy for people to log on with their high-level alts, or call for help. We weren't on a PvP server, so we had to hover around, hoping the noob would attack us by mistake. Basically, we were ignored. It was undignified, especially when we got owned by the Alliance.

VIRTUAL LIVES SAVED:

Who can really say? Well, we can – none.

READER'S JACKASS

Derek Mason's... Floating Chopper Tower Challenge



THE SET-UP:

In *Joint Operations*, pilot a ship into open water and see how many helicopters you can balance on it. The loser is the one who causes the choppers to topple over. Each helicopter must power down completely when landed. If there are enough of you playing, stay in your helicopter.

THE OUTCOME:

We managed to get five helicopters successfully balancing on a ship – and each other – but by the time we got to a good position to take a screenshot, some fool had toppled them over.

DEREK SAYS:

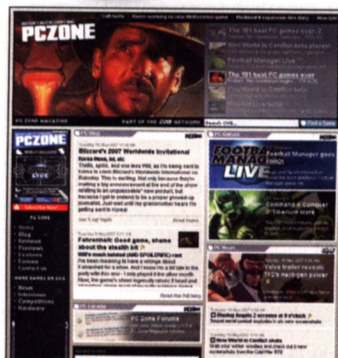
Although it is difficult to judge whether you are in the right position before you land, three or four helicopters can be balanced without too much trouble. However, finding a level with enough available helicopters and ships is somewhat more difficult; you'll have to download a level with plenty.

SEND US YOURS!

Have you played a game in a way that puts two fingers up to the developers and other players? Send your stories and pictures to letters@pczone.co.uk – we'll print the best ones and send you a PC game!



Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk


Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just hit www.pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, podcasts, deathmatch tournaments, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Your opinion counts! Speak your brains on the *PC ZONE* forum...

ON THE BLOG

What's been happening on *ZONE's* web diary this month...

WILL'S HAD A busy month. First, he's been embarrassed by the erotic tat delivered to his desk that included "a copy of exciting German erotic FMV adventure *Days Of Oblivion II: The Frozen Eternity*." Second, Porter had a rant about *Fahrenheit* and its impromptu stealth sections: "ARGH! This takes the form of running around an old US airbase as Lucas Kane, with soldiers seeing you EVERY TIME you get EVEN SLIGHTLY CLOSE to their field of vision."

Meanwhile, Log's been wibbling on about what levels would make the world's greatest game ever. Suggestions included "a post-apocalyptic level where there's been a nuclear war, and you have to rescue the survivors by playing basketball against a ghost"; and a final level, "where everything goes 2D and you have to pop balloons with your spiky helmet before the time runs out, or the factory fills with honey".



"My liking for the Germans has been increased by +16 ever since I heard their Eurovision entry, with the subtitled translation up on screen..."

SunScramble

"There are plenty of 60-90% games that I've thoroughly enjoyed. And *Call Of Juarez* was one of them. The stealth bits suck, but Reverend Ray makes up for it. The final battles are superb and the ending is really good. Probably one of the best Wild West games on the PC."

G_Man_007

"I'm already liking the putdowns in the Txtpters corner thingy in the Letters section. I'd prefer our rambling as we had in the past, but that made the texting comments more valid than they had been before - keep with the putdowns!"

deadmartyr

"My perfect game would probably be the open world of *Oblivion*, but set in a Dystopian future, a bit like *Deus Ex*. In the world, you could

take on contracts to kill people, do jobs for people or even earn money through legal means, such as running a business.

There would be a main storyline running through the game, but you'd be free to jump in and out of it at any point."

psychoseal



Oblivion without the fantasy clichés you say? Go on...

PCZONE PUBCAST!

Download the team's exclusive website-only pubcast NOW!

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our 'PC ZONE Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at letters@pczone.co.uk will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

FIGHT CLUB



43rd rule of Fight Club: toilets > guns

DEATH BY FLYING bathroom furniture was the order of the day in this month's free-for-all, with Will and Log respectively dressing up as a combine soldier and a beanie-hatted resistance fighter to show off their gravity-gun skills. Well, at first it was just Will – a packed server meant that Log was hanging around in the ether until a gallant hero took one for the team by logging off so that *ZONE*'s hairy mascot could join the happy throng. All he wanted for this tremendous self-sacrifice was a mention in the magazine. Ryan2456, you of humorous toilet death and plucky spirit, we salute you.

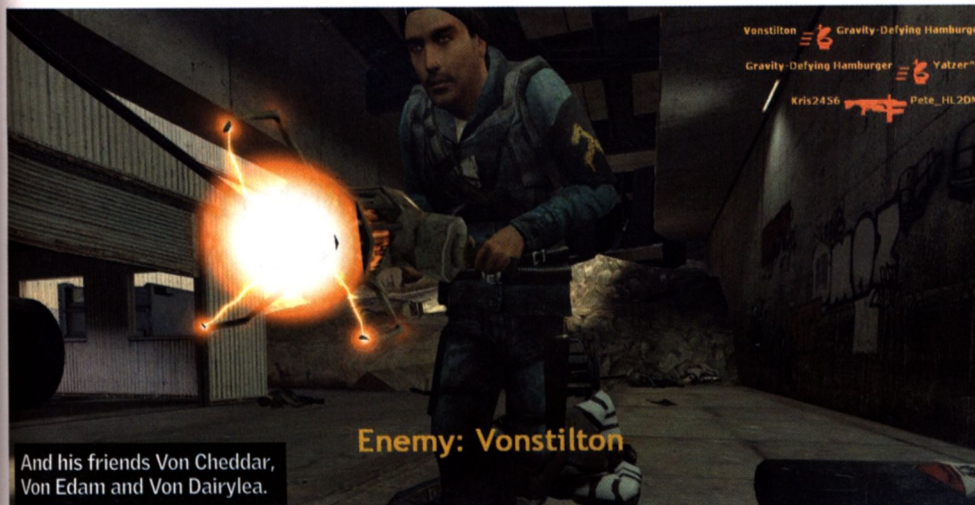
After a posed screenshot that was rudely interrupted by an uncomprehending German who must have thought his killing-spree boat had truly come in, the carnage continued. Unfortunately, Will had remapped his screenshot button to something other than F5 like the chubby-cheeked cretin he is, so the

A flying toilet will do that to you.



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

moment was lost forever... Thanks to Vonstilton, Gravity-Defying Hamburger, Megatron and all the rest for a great time. Join us on Thursday June 28 at 6pm for the next Fight Club, as we play that old chestnut *Counter-Strike: Source*. Check www.pczone.co.uk as the day approaches for more info...



And his friends Von Cheddar, Von Edam and Von Dairylea.

Enemy: Vonstilton

ZONE CHAT



ZONE chatting, across the universe

...ALWAYS CHATTING FORWARDS, cos we can't chat... In reverse. Yes! It's *ZONE* Chat-o'clock again, and this month we chatted across several wide and varied spectra of topics. One of those subjects was this: the new *Aliens Versus Predator* game. Another was this: the rubbishness of *Brothers In Arms*. Punctuating these discussions were regular jokes, including Gowerlypuff's admission that he could not make Fight Club and would therefore halve the attendance, suggesting that only two people would show up! ROFL!

As you can see, *ZONE* Chat was an exciting foray into the jungles of online communication, and all those who took part came away feeling fulfilled. Next month's *ZONE* Chat takes place at 5:30pm on Wednesday, June 27, and if you don't come we'll track you down and tap on your head with increasingly large spoons, beginning with those tiny long ones for stirring coffee, and finishing with a ladle. You have been warned.



How to join in!



If you fancy joining the *ZONE* Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, 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 you've decreed Thursday evenings as non-violent, preferring to play the piccolo – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

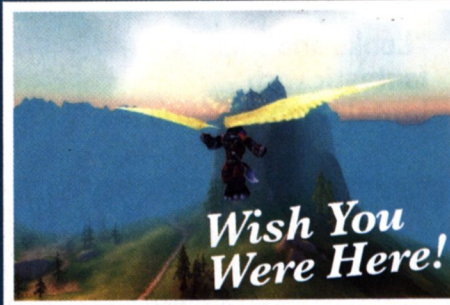
- COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
- HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- PREY**
prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
- BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
Listed in NovaWorld

Greetings from Silvermoon



"Hello PCZ! Am having a lovely time lounging around at the exclusive Silvermoon spa. Taking a break from the grinding by dipping my bottom over and over in a bucket of the finest wines."

Ricicles
(Jamie Malcolm)

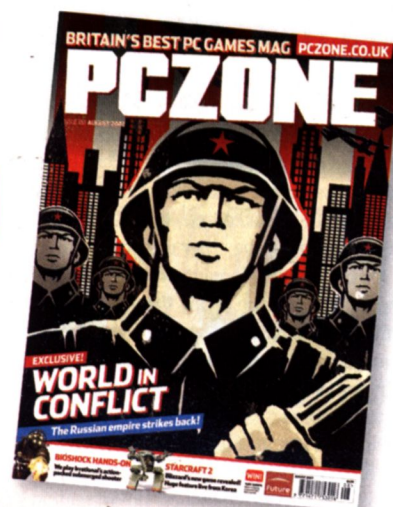


Wish You Were Here!

"Having a lovely time at the Darkmoon Faire in Thunder Bluff. Your dad said I wouldn't dare, but I got on a big glider and landed next to some angry Kodos! Hope that everything is OK in Red Cloud Mesa, it's all-go in the big city!"

Butaqup (Martyn Williams)

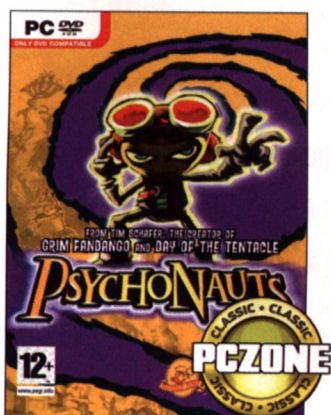
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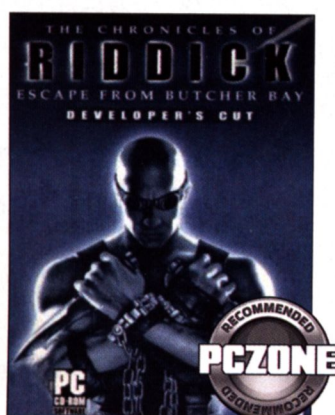
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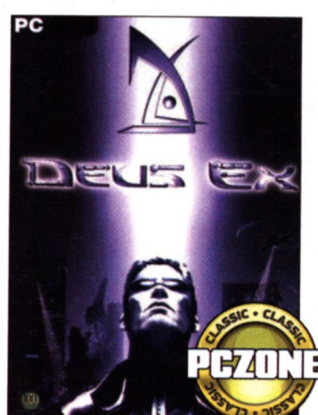
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dazzling, funny and
truly sublime game"
90%



**THE CHRONICLES
OF RIDDICK**
"Looks and sounds
fantastic with
brutal combat" 86%



DEUS EX
"Still remains the
benchmark for
FPS role-playing"
94%



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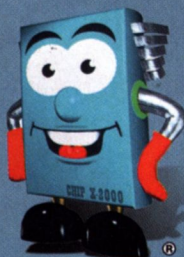
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Retro ZONE

Damned by demand, denied by supply

ACORN ELECTRON



EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

The Acorn Electron has a great emulator, ElectrEm, which drops you straight into the basic screen. Download and unzip the games, put the .uef files into the rom folder. Go to the Electron's boot screen and 'insert' the tape via the menu. Type LOAD "", and the name of the first file on the tape will appear. Respond by typing LOAD "filename", and you'll be playing games in no time.

Links...

1 ElectrEm

electrem.emuunlim.com
The emulator itself. Using this, you can reproduce all of the PRINT and GOTO commands you executed as a child.

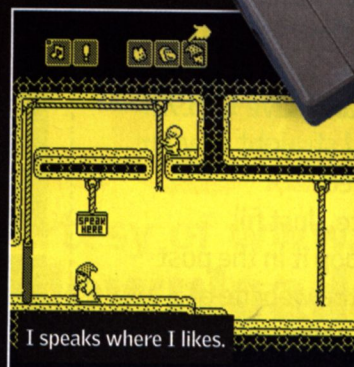
2 Archive

www.stairwaytohell.com/index2.html?page=links
And here's hundreds of the games you'll no doubt be wanting to play.

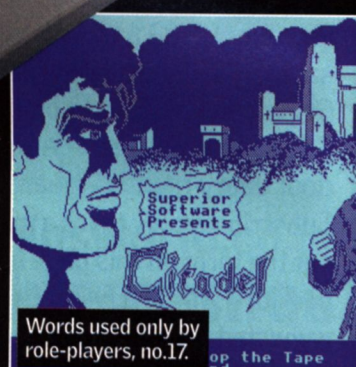
BBC MICRO OWNERS had it bad enough when their parents decided it would be more educational if someone essentially pulled up a paving slab from the patio, painted a keyboard on the top and managed to get *Rockford's Riot* running in big-pixel mode.

But then, someone had to compound the insult and introduce a powered-down version. Well, that's how it was perceived. Nobody in our playgrounds believed that Acorn would release an equally powerful computer for half the price of the Model B, especially when it looked more elegant, too. So the reputation stuck; it was a shit BBC.

The real story isn't just a heap of nerdish one-upmanship – it was one of demand far outstripping supply. The unpopular cousin of home computing could have been a serious contender, if they'd just got enough onto the shelves. One year after the initial Electron launch Acorn had filled a dozen warehouses with their stock and had spent around three million pounds on an advertising campaign. Sure, it's pocket money in these wealthy times, but back then you could have a night out on three million quid and still



I speaks where I likes.



Words used only by role-players, no.17.

have change for some cheesy chips and a doner kebab.

This time, demand didn't meet supply, as everyone had bought a Spectrum, a Commodore, or taken up competitive roller-disco by that stage: Acorn's chance had passed. Everything to follow – Archimedes, RISC PCs – was doomed to worthy outsidership. Now inert, recent rumours of a relaunch have amounted to nowt.

It's not all bad news, though – apparently Interflora were using Electrons in their shop networks until 1999, and BT used them for a bit too. None of this won anyone any friends at school, and if you owned an Electron, you probably noticed that no-one ever spoke to you, and today you're an angry loner, who whiles away your days wishing harm on those around you. Nice one, Acorn.

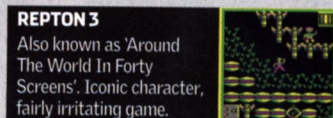
SIX OF THE BEST

Acorn's finest offerings...



IMOGEN

Transforming wizard antics that could kind of claim to have inspired *Yoshi's Island* DS. Nearly.



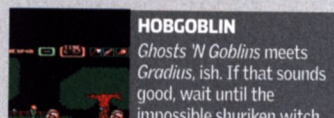
REPTON 3

Also known as 'Around The World In Forty Screens'. Iconic character, fairly irritating game.



FRAK!

Play the yo-yo-toting caveman with fragile knees, in this frustrating but famous platformer.



HOBGOBLIN

Ghosts 'N Goblins meets *Gradius*, ish. If that sounds good, wait until the impossible shuriken witch.



DEPOTMASTER FINSBURY PARK

Move numbers around the screen and pretend they're trains! Amazing.



MONSTERS

A surprisingly accurate rip-off of *Space Panic*. Arcade-perfect, as they used to say back then.

NOW & THEN

Left 4 Dead vs Gauntlet

NOW



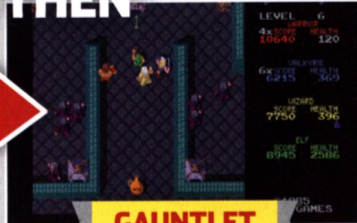
LEFT 4 DEAD

GAUNTLET MAY NOT have had zombies, but it did have ghosts. And what are ghosts, if not walk-through zombies? The birth of four-player co-op, *Gauntlet*'s other similarities are... Plural and tenuous.

First, there's onslaught. *Left 4 Dead* gives the zombies unlimited respawn potential, but *Gauntlet* was the absolute king of respawn, with one pile of bones producing potentially infinite ghosts, and one pagoda-thing being a bottomless well of orcs-things.

Then, there's squabbling. Medkits will be in short supply in *Left 4 Dead*, as are the plates

THEN



GAUNTLET

of delicious dinner in *Gauntlet*. You'll be squabbling over medkits even if you've got full health – you get credit for giving it to a wounded colleague. In *Gauntlet*, it's "Me! Me! Me!", and in Valve's zombie survival game, it's "Me! Me! Me! OK, now you."

Finally, there's the personification of death. What more tragic emblem of death can there be, than shambling, rancid meat, stripped of the love, anger and need for premium lagers that make us human? Only one thing – a big-nosed black shape you can only kill with magic. Shudder, mortals.

PLAY IT!

Gauntlet's a simple matter of getting MAME running. Even an idiot can do that. Just like this...

- 1 Go to mame32.classicgaming.gamespy.com/download.htm – this is the version with the lovely Windows front-end.
- 2 Words you might like to Google at this stage are *Gauntlet*, *MAME* and *ROM*.
- 3 Put the file into the rom directory of your MAME installation.
- 4 Fire up MAME32, refresh your list of available games, and away you go!
- 5 Fear every knock on your door, because you have become a member of the dark underworld of piracy.



MAME FRAME

The roaring '40s...

Developer: Capcom | Year: 1984-2000

SHOOT 100% OF the planes, dodge the bullets and get as many power-ups as possible between deaths. You could even do little loop-the-loops to become briefly unkillable – and this was nine years before *Star Fox* popularised the barrel roll. *1942* was a vertically-scrolling schmup, and as pure as the technology of the time forced everyone to be. No-one finished all 32 levels, it was that need to shoot down 100% of the planes that made it compulsive.

The sequels? Meh. In *1943: The Battle Of Midway*, bullets didn't even kill you,

they just reduced your fuel. Later sequels gave us promotions, side-shots, charge beams, a choice of planes and even the replacement of the barrel roll with bombs. Smart bombs! How vulgar can you get?

The final game tried to get back to the appeal of the original, but 16 years on, vertical scrollers had become a chaos of massive graphics, and *1944: The Loop Master* never quite managed that elegant chaos from games like *Ikaruga*. It wasn't a terrible finale, it's just that nobody was listening.



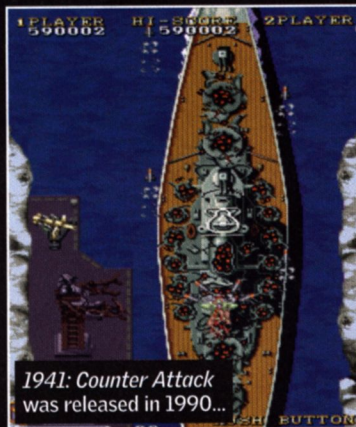
1942

1943: The Battle Of Midway arched into view in 1987.



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.

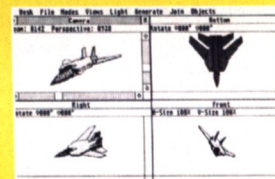


1941: Counter Attack was released in 1990...



...and required more shooting, looping and general derring-do.

BACK IN THE DAY...



CAD-3D

By Steve Hogarty

The manual for CAD 3D (the Atari ST's primitive 3D modelling program) had pictures of entire rooms made with the software, or intricate mugs that, if you blurred your eyes, looked like *photographs*.

I, a mere child, could make brilliant cuboids, and with the help of a tutorial, I could arrange them to make an actual 3D table.

One time, my dad, with a stupid serious look on his face, made a completely random series of lines, bisecting and crossing one another at unlikely angles until the entire screen was filled with some unholy and unlikely shape. I told him that it wouldn't work but he just kept making lines. He hit the 'lathe' button and CAD 3D crashed. The Atari ST never worked again. Floppy disc drive failure, you see.

SUPERTEST

MOST ANNOYING THING



Games can be so stupid sometimes, we just want to scream...

YOUR VIEW

Last month we talked about ways to dress up the WWII genre in new and interesting ways. Here are some of your demented chunterings...

THE CUNNING PLAN

"I want Telltale to give us a *Blackadder* game where you spend the entire time trying to come up with ever more fiendish ways to not go to the front. Get the original writers to collaborate on the script, get Robinson and Atkinson to provide the voices, and I can't think of a worthier follow-up to the new *Sam & Max* games."

Dogen_D_Derrible

NAZI BUNKER TYCOON

"Build exciting bunkers! Add interrogation rooms, command posts and treasure caches! Entertain Nazi VIPs! Repel Allied intrusions! This would be a hit, I guarantee it."

SunScramble

DANCE DANCE FRENCH REVOLUTION

"A WWII dance game, where you groove along to the sounds of the battlefield, firing mortars with your left foot, air strikes with your right and setting patrol routes by clapping one hand."

psychoseal

PIPES OF PEACE

"How about the *WWII Olympics*, where all sides stop fighting for a week and have different comical challenges? Tank Twister, Eye Spy (guess who the spy is), etc etc."

Craicx

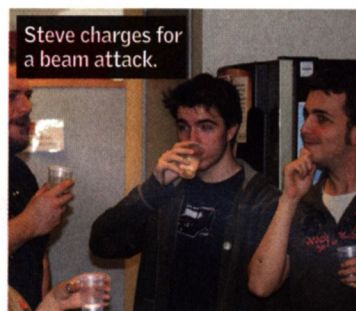
THERE'S A STAGE with nearly every game where you pick up your mouse, raise your arm at your monitor for a couple of furious seconds, then walk into the kitchen to stare at a closed cupboard for a couple of minutes in mute, impotent fury. Then, after you've opened and closed the cutlery drawer violently enough to let everyone else in the house know you're annoyed, you get back to your chair and start it again.

This month, we talked about annoying games – and not the good kind of *Grid Wars* annoying, where the gnarled wood of frustration is slowly smothered in blossoms of triumph (I'm wasted here, that was bloody poetry, was that). No, we talked about unrewarding, unfair, unthinking idiocy.

Vista compatibility, invisible walls, lack of quick-saves, Will's petty quibble with inverted mouses, having to leave the game to reset the resolution or change the controls, hand-holding patronising

tutorials you can't skip – we bickered and carped for the regulation 20 minutes, and then we carried on complaining for the rest of the day about all the stuff we couldn't fit in.

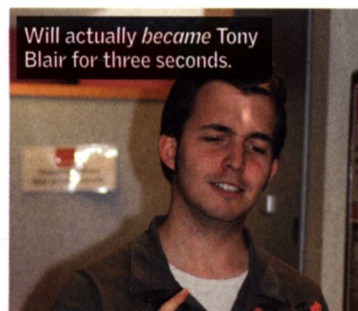
It's always healthy to have a good bitch, and though we felt filthy after this Supertest, we also felt thoroughly purged. If you need a similar vent, log on to www.pczone.co.uk and go to our reader forums, where there'll likely be a dozen curmudgeons noisily typing about what grinds their gears. **PCZ**



Steve charges for a beam attack.



The most genuine-looking photo yet.



Will actually became Tony Blair for three seconds.



The biggest face in the business.



The needless stealth rambles in *Fahrenheit* really got Will's goat.

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill turns to the dark side in *The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar*...

PREVIOUSLY IN NEVERQUEST: two hairy hobbits went hunting for boars, and were brutally killed by bears. Undeterred, the same two hobbits are back: faster, stronger and with a slightly higher level. I, Hillo The Wary, a humble minstrel, have ground myself up to the heady heights of level nine, but still bow in deference to the level 16 Warslow Wobbleguts, aka **ZONE** contributor Dan Griliopoulos, which is actually his real name.

The reunion doesn't go quite to plan, however. While Warslow is safely ensconced in the leafy Bree countryside, I've wandered into dwarf territory, eking out a living by slaying wild animals for coins and favours. Consulting our various charts, we manage to calculate that I'm nine miles from my hobbit mentor, surely too far for my hairy little feet to walk.

Digging out a musty old map, I find myself in my notional hometown of Archet, scene of my original hobbiting, which included the mildly traumatic experience of hauling flailing bodies from burning buildings. The town seems to be back on its feet, and it's not long before one of the locals imposes on my goodwill.

Out of politeness, I run a couple of errands, but soon press on to Combe

where Warslow awaits. There are chores galore to be had, and Warslow is keen for me to reach level 10, promising a surprise that will change the way I see the universe. Sent in search of buried treasure under a hanging tree, we're again subjected to a vicious bear attack. This time we're prepared though, repelling the ursine aggressors via a devastating combination of swordsmanship and expert lute playing.

NIGHT CLUBBING

X marks the spot no less than three tree stumps away, but some frenzied digging yields little more than bear shit and blisters.

While we've been digging, the sun has set, and we come under attack from a Feral Dusk-Wolf, again defeating it by the power of song. Animals aren't the only ones to feel the wrath of our stringed instruments, as we mercilessly slaughter a Blackwold Raider. It feels somehow wrong, but she was swinging a club at us in a threatening manner.

A Blackwold Sergeant is next to be overpowered by fretwork, yielding a crucial quest item. While Warslow continues his blood frenzy, I scurry back to Combe to claim my reward.

I manage to attain the magical level 10, whereby I'm informed that I'm eligible

to enter Monster Play: "Search for the Scrying Pool in the alley and unlock your true potential as a warrior in service to the Dark Lord!"

POOL QUEUE

Said Scrying Pool is in Bree-town, and I set forth as fast as my hairy hobbit feet will carry me, filled with an uneasy mix of excitement and dread. I'm a hobbit. I deliver pies and wear bad hats. There was nothing in my contract about servicing Dark Lords, whatever that entails.

Either way, Warslow meets me there, and instructs me to, "Look deep into the pool".

I'm not sure about this, but Warslow urges, "You first," explaining, seemingly apropos of nothing: "My name in there is Limbs."

"Talk to the pool," he orders and I finally submit, launching myself headlong into the underworld, where I'm incarnated as a Warg Stalker, otherwise known as a dog. Asked to choose a name, my opening gambits of Fido and Rover are already taken, so I settle for the self-explanatory Dogboy. It's like the bowels of Hades in here, and when a giant spider scurries towards me, it suddenly becomes clear why Warslow has called himself Limbs.

Upon my hobbit feet – it's only my mentor in arachnid form.

HAPPY EATER

"What the f*** is all this?" I understandably ask. "You're a spider."

"You're a dog," points out Limbs. "Is this some kind of spider-dog prejudice I don't know about?"

According to my eight-legged accomplice: "This is the place where evil bearded Saruman breeds millions of orcs."

I'm still getting my furry head round my canine form and demonic surroundings when Limbs pipes up: "Do you want to eat some hobbit?"

In for a penny, in for a bit of pseudo-shapeshifting cannibalism. It is almost lunchtime after all.

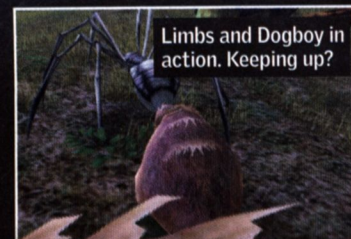
"Let's eat," I bark, and Limbs leads the way, promising to treat me to "a nice little hobbit village I know".

True to his word, it's a charming place and we decide to share a starter, tucking into Hoarhallow Gardener, a female hobbit who goes down a treat. Finally, for the main course we opt for a male hobbit each, although mine is a little on the chewy side, and tries to defend himself with a spade. "Stop playing with your food," says Limbs. **PC7**

"We come under attack, again defeating the animal with the power of song..."



"Doh a dear, a female dear..."



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

Martin Korda revisits the Medieval II battlefields with The Creative Assembly Australia...

HAVING ABLY ASSISTED the UK office with the development of *Rome: Total War* and its expansion *Barbarian Invasion*, The Creative Assembly Australia set about *Medieval II: Total War*, a game that not only had to follow but improve upon its ground-breaking predecessors. The team are now working on the forthcoming *Medieval II* expansion pack *Kingdoms*, so we caught up with designer Dan Toose (left) and senior programmer Dan Glastonbury (right) to find out their thoughts on the company's first major solo project...



Rome's clone armies were replaced by unique-looking troops. And unique is the word we were looking for...

01 **EXTENDING THE EMPIRE:** Glastonbury: "We had a completely new game engine from the original *Medieval*, which allowed us to move the battle engine from being sprite-based to 3D models. Having these 3D models meant we could have far more visual detail over *Medieval*. With regards to building on *Rome*, the aim was to create a far more 'Hollywood' feel, so we added the variation in unit models, better combat choreography and better light controls. From a production perspective, we really focused on quality and I think the look of the game is a testament to that, as well as to the quality of our artists."



02 STATE AGENTS: Toose: "We wanted to give the player more ways to influence their finances, diplomacy and religion, but at the same time without creating any sort of heinous micro-management. The new agents like merchants and princesses are really simple to use, and that was a key part of the philosophy in adding things to the game. The new agents were a means of adding more depth without getting bogged down."

Glastonbury: "Princesses were a part of the medieval experience that we felt couldn't be left out. By adding the other agent types, we tried to capture the feel for the era. At the time, the three merchant city-states of Milan, Venice and Genoa were very powerful; by adding merchants, we wanted to capture that. This was the same for heretics and inquisitors."



03 STONE CIRCLES: Toose: "Having multiple layers of defence for castles was the ideal way to make settlements that were genuinely difficult to siege. We're making castle walls even stronger in the expansion *Kingdoms*, so you may need several cracks at the bigger castles to succeed." Glastonbury: "Siege battles in *Rome* were too easy: besieging a castle is very hard, especially if the people in the castle have a good food supply. We wanted to have multi-turn campaign sieges, where it would take several turns to complete the battle one layer of defences at a time. In-between the battles, each side would be able to restock and regroup. We got the multiple defence layers into the battle engine, but the multi-turn sieges didn't make it."



"To build on *Rome* we wanted to create a 'Hollywood' feel, so we added variation in unit models, better combat choreography and better light controls..."

Dan Glastonbury, senior programmer, *Medieval II: Total War*



04 CITIES AND FORTRESSES: Glastonbury: "Unlike games such as *Civilization*, in *Total War* each city isn't easily maxed out, so you have to really choose which ones are going to be economic or military powerhouses. Adding castles reinforces this and you really want to have a powerful castle near the battlefield to keep your armies supplied with good troops."

Toose: "By having two types of settlements we gave the player a lot more choice about how they gear any given region. Castles produce a better spread of units, but cities make far more money. You need a combination of both to have the most effective empire."

05 SHIPPING BUGS:

Glastonbury: "Since we started with the *Rome* code as the base for *Medieval II*, we were able to address the areas we felt gave us issues. But *Total War* games are by their very nature, huge undertakings. With a code-base the size of *Medieval II* there are always going to be bugs that we don't discover until the code is out in the wild."

Toose: "Bugs tend to cause both the biggest headaches in development, but also help to provide the most laughs. We had one where men climbed ladders with so much gusto that they managed to insert themselves into the chap further up the ladder."

Glastonbury: "The funniest graphical glitch I saw was caused by a change to the collision system for soldiers that resulted in them getting massive repelling forces from the ground. Men would randomly be thrown into the air, screaming and flailing. They were like popcorn in a frying pan."



On its release, *Med II* had more than its fair share of bugs.

If only Monty Python had a quote about eye-poking and sharp poles...



06 MISSING FEATURES: Glastonbury: "A shipped game never resembles what the team originally sets out to create – there are always features that are added or removed for various reasons. You get so close to the product that it becomes like a child and it's disappointing when a feature has to get cut for whatever reason. Multi-turn sieges was one feature we couldn't include, and we also had plans to make further improvements to diplomacy and a completely re-imagined auto-resolve system."

Toose: "There were a few features that we weren't able to put in like moats and being able to control reinforcement armies so you can assemble large forces effectively. These are features we're including in the *Kingdoms* expansion."



"One bug caused men to climb up ladders with such gusto they inserted themselves into the guy above them"

Dan Toose, designer, *Medieval II: Total War*

07 WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION: Toose: "Even though this was our first solo project and there were a lot of green faces in the studio, none of us suffered from performance anxiety, nor stopped to contemplate being compared to the UK studio. We just had self-belief and enthusiasm to do good work." Glastonbury: "*Medieval II* was a chance for this studio to stand on its own and prove itself – from day one of the Brisbane studio this had always been the plan. So it came down to us being masters of our own future and the pressure that comes with that. The core team for *Medieval II* worked on *Rome*, so by the end of *Medieval II* those people had been working on *Total War* for many years."



08 ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT: Toose: "The major area that could have been improved is AI, which is the answer most studios should give if they're honest. That's simply because creating good AI is really hard and the more complicated your game, the more complicated your AI has to be. *Medieval II* is really complicated and thus, we could always keep improving the AI."

"The second area would be balancing, and that's purely because we shipped a game with 21 factions and close to 400 units. That's a ludicrous amount of stats to tune, and so more time would translate to better results. It's something we've examined again with *Kingdoms*. History isn't balanced, and so certain factions are harder to play than others. We balance the game so that when you play in battle mode, each faction has strengths and weaknesses in its unit line-up. Beyond that, we let player skill and geographic opportunity dictate balance." **PC7**

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PCZONE

FUTURE PUBLISHING
2 BALCOMBE STREET
LONDON NW1 6NW

TEL: 020 7042 4720

EMAIL: letters@pczone.co.uk

FAX: 020 7042 4729

WEBSITE: www.pczone.co.uk

This month's question: what's your favourite film?

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PCZONE.CO.UK Editor Gavin Ogden 020 7042 4311

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