

PCZONE

ISSUE 197 SEPTEMBER 2008

IT'S FINALLY HERE!



WORLD'S FIRST PLAY!



Fallout 3

We walk the wastes! The bomb drops on the game of the year!

ALONE IN THE DARK

Reviewed! Who turned out the lights?



ROLEPLAY SPECIAL!

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TINY COMPO
What is the name of your game's companion in the Fallout games?

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'AN EVOLUTIONARY MMO' PC ZONE

'A BLOCKBUSTER EXPERIENCE THE MMO
COMMUNITY HAS RARELY ENJOYED' PCGZINE

'BREATH-taking!' MMOZINE

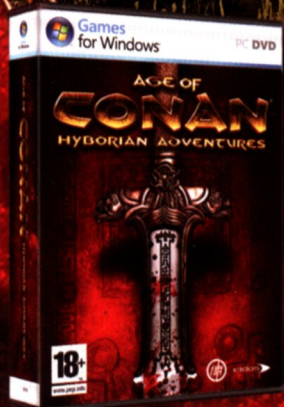
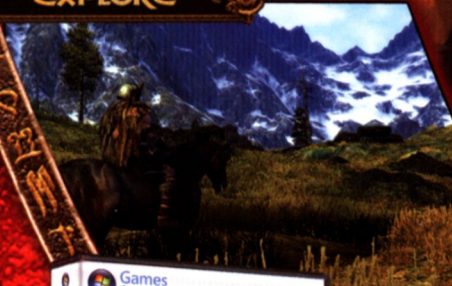
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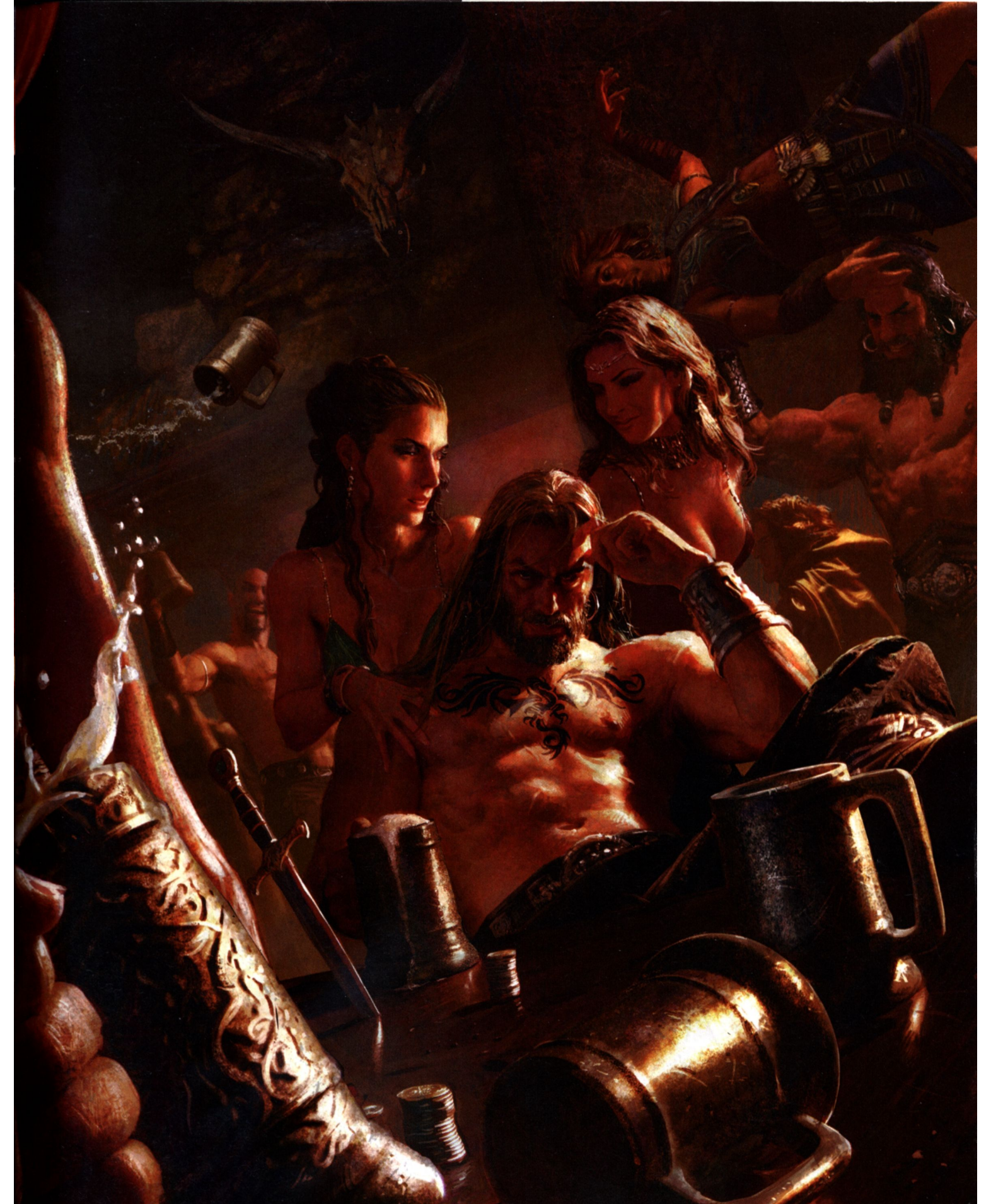
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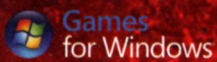
EXPLORE



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LOOKING BACK

USUALLY I USE my column to discuss insignificant matters, stuff like the "Can dogs look up?" debate. (Before you ask, they can – but it doesn't come naturally to them and as such when they're looking for something or trying to work out where a specific sound is coming from, the direction 'up' is often the last place they'll look).

This month though I want to dedicate myself entirely to the topic of our online game reviews, something brought into sharp focus by last month's 73% review of *Age of Conan*. These days the quality of an online game fluctuates the longer it's been on the market – bugs are fixed, updates are released, strong communities come and go. I just want to underline that from now on with all games of this nature (whether we're talking *World of Warcraft* or *Battlefield Heroes*) we will be returning to games to reappraise them; to see which direction their creators are taking them in and what they're improving or, indeed, systematically destroying *Galaxies*-style. We're not going to start rescoring games, that would get confusing, but should a game like *Age of Conan* get its act together in the months to come then we will certainly let you know. We will be back with a comment or two on its PvP siege combat, for example.

Anyway, hope that's nailed our colours to the mast. Which, incidentally, if a dog were interested in he wouldn't be able to see because a) he wouldn't think of looking up the mast to see them and b) dogs are colour blind.

Will Porter

Will Porter editor
wporter@futurenet.co.uk



48

COVER STORY

FALLOUT 3

Head back into the nuclear wasteland with the Vault Boy. Exclusive in-depth preview of the year's hottest RPG

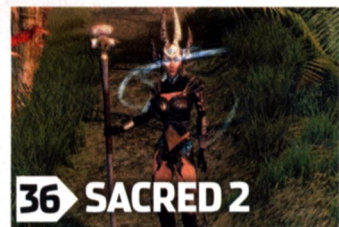


64 DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Possibly the best console port we've seen in ages.



102 SPORE CREATURE CREATOR



36 SACRED 2



40 DUNGEON HERO

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See page 91



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BLOGS!**



34 **DIABLO III**
First look at Blizzard's classic point-and-kill action RPG

PCZONE CONTENTS

In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

UPFRONT

- 16 SPECIAL REPORT
- 18 STALKER: CLEAR SKY
- 20 OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2
- 22 HOT SHOTS - TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
- 24 LEFT 4 DEAD
- 26 MIRROR'S EDGE
- 28 VELVET ASSASSIN
- 32 SPORE CREATURE CREATOR
- 34 DIABLO III
- 36 SACRED 2
- 40 DUNGEON HERO
- 42 ALPHA PROTOCOL
- 48 FALLOUT 3

REVIEWS

- 60 ALONE IN THE DARK
- 64 DEVIL MAY CRY 4
- 68 GUMBOY TOURNAMENT
- 69 BEAUTY FACTORY
- 69 TERRORIST TAKEDOWN: CONFLICT IN MOGADISHU
- 70 CHAOS THEORY
- 72 STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME
- 73 THE SIMS 2: IKEA HOME STUFF
- 74 CRAZY MACHINE 2
- 75 DRACULA: ORIGIN
- 76 ROOGOO
- 77 THE EARLY DAYS OF FLIGHT
- 77 BELIEF & BETRAYAL

- 78 DREAMLORDS: THE REAWAKENING
- 79 THE AMAZING BRAIN TRAIN
- 80 BUDGET
- 82 BUYER'S GUIDE

HARDWARE

- 85 HARDWARE NEWS
- 86 DEAR WANDY
- 88 HARDWARE REVIEWS
- 90 HARDWARE BUYER'S GUIDE

FREEPLAY

- 94 DISC PAGES
- 96 FREEPLAY NEWS
- 98 FREEWARE
- 100 MODS & MAPS
- 102 ONLINE ZONE

LOOKING BACK

- 106 RETRO ZONE
- 108 DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY - RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2
- 113 NEXT MONTH
- 114 BACK PAGE



WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



- 34 DIABLO III
- 48 FALLOUT 3
- 60 ALONE IN THE DARK



93 FREEPLAY

A penniless Ed Zitron offers you a weighty hamper of free mods, maps, games and add-ons

Too busy? PC ZONE in 76 words...

Log's *Fallout* fears are assuaged with by a seemingly relentless gush from man Porter, there's word from new titles like *Mirror's Edge* and *Diablo III*, and Log learns the difficulties of language at a German RPG festival. *Alone in the Dark* turns out shit, and *Devil May Cry 4* turns out just dandy. Meanwhile, Steve and Ed circle each other on a rooftop, each waiting for the other to make the first, and most dangerous move.

MEET THE TEAM



The speed, the strength, the heart to be a winner...

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Full offer details on page 91.



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Reviews Editor

AGE: 34

LIKES: Lists

DISLIKES: A lack of bullet points

FANCIES: Clowns

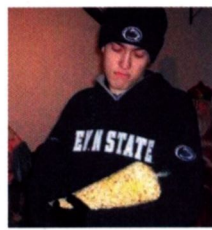
FAVOURITE GAME: *Fast Food*

Tycoon

NOW PLAYING: *Golf Resort*

Tycoon

As another month of reading books about internet languages passes another website stumbles from Log's loins. This time it's Listopia, a site dedicated to hilarious lists, such as "Even more Reasons Why Beer Is Better Than Women," with entries like "Women do not make a cool 'pssh' sound when you rip their heads off". When he's not doing this he can be found hastily scribbling articles for the national press while loudly talking about goblins to suggest he's doing his real job.



ED ZITRON

Man for all seasons

Lured to the den of *COD4* by the rumour that the levelling virus had spread to non-MMO territory, young Ed has recently been shot while searching for a /dance emoté.

NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty 4*

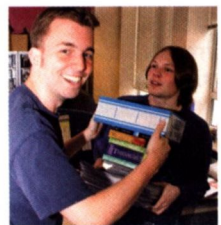


STEVE HOGARTY

Smooth Operator

This month Steve was sick on the Tube. To avoid a mess he puked in his bag, before casually dumping the vomit at Stratford station.

NOW PLAYING: *Spore Creature Creator*



ANTHONY HARE

Experienced Worker

The days of work experience slaves being used as coffee gofers are gone. Instead, we had Anthony move heavy stuff from one end of the office to the other. Then back.

NOW PLAYING: *Bloodstone*



WILL PORTER

Rock Chaperone

Will recently looked after rock pups Airbourne at the *Metal Hammer* awards before buying drinks for Dimebag Darrell's widow and Max Cavalera. He rocks hard.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallout 3*

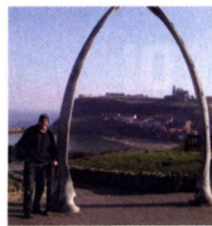


JAMES ROFF

Art Master

Hobbled by a Mac with the memory of a mayfly, this month Roff's been double-clicking on psd files and raising his eyebrows at people in a forlorn fashion. Apple scum!

NOW PLAYING: *Adobe InDesign*



JAMIE SEFTON

Alone in the Dark

Every half-hour a phone call from Sefton's ice-palace would regale us with angry shouts about "fookin' bats", "stupid fookin' cars" and general "fooks". It's grim up North.

NOW PLAYING: *Nothing at all*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... The *Spore Creature Creator*, *Iron Man*, the healing power of rock.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Having ideas at inappropriate moments, broken pens, Pear Cider.

What we've been talking about...

MARINE BIOLOGY 22min It sounds really exciting, but when you get into it it's all about alkalis and how salty water is.

ALONE IN THE DARK 75min We're genuinely sorry for covering this game to the extent that we have.

BELKIN DAVROS HAND 3min A weird power glove called the N52 that actually somehow makes gaming harder and doesn't have enough buttons for *COD4*.

THE END OF THE RUSSELL T DAVIS ERA 21min Actually, we'll probably miss the big tubby man-kiss fanatic. Eventually.

LIMBO OF THE LOST 32min A game that doesn't just steal from other games, but has half-arsed pub songs once you finish it.

'ALLO 'ALLO 96min With Porter as editor an *'Allo 'Allo* back page was sadly inevitable.

PYRO ACHIEVEMENTS 22min The hadouken taunt death is the most humiliating of deaths.

A LARGE AMERICAN MAN... 4min ...who fell over in a strip club and then started crying.

TF2 ACHIEVEMENTS IN GENERAL 48min Why release class updates one at a time and flood servers with idiots?

GAME FRANCHISES THAT SHOULD RETURN 27min Essentially the entire Bullfrog back catalogue.

WIN!



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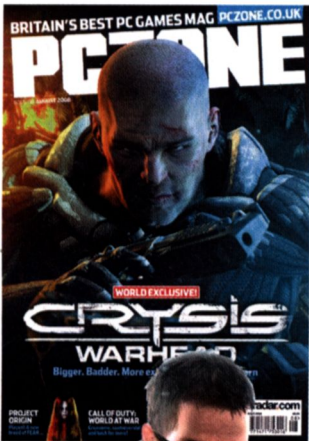
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LETTERS



Just for the record, *Will Porter* always opens the perfume-scented envelopes first



KING OF LETTERS

STEAM WORKS?

Valve are almost single-handedly keeping PC gaming going by sticking to their guns and releasing well-polished games that deliver what they're supposed to. And what's more they offer very good support thereafter. Anyone who's into gaming will have experienced some pure DRM shite with *BioShock* when it used online verification, but Steam does that too – why do people accept it more easily?

For one, you don't get any limited installs nor do you have to contact a company like SecuROM if something goes haywire or someone hacks your account. You can, at any time you like and to any

computer you want, download any Steam game you have. The only caveat is that you can only log into your Steam account on one computer at a time. That's not at all bad.

Steam also keeps your games up to date, there's an ever-widening collection of games to buy. I was even able to get the *Hexen* games! Oh cherished, gauntlet-clad memories!

PC gaming needs a Steam-like service to encompass all PC gaming and Steam is the best program for the job, particularly since Valve have released a development kit to allow developers to tie games closer to Steam and even give them achievements to rekindle new life into them.

John Murphy

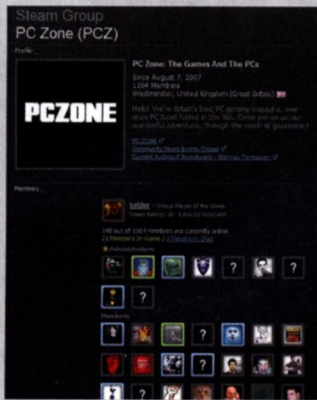
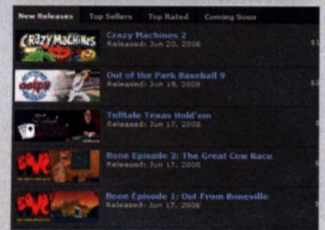
Today it seems unbelievable that only four years ago the *PCZ* phone lines were burning white hot with gamer indignation in Steam's troubled first days, months and years. What with Steam Cloud (page 14) and *Left 4 Dead* (page 24) on their way Steam does seem to be turning into the service you describe, but I'd love to know whether any of our readers are still having problems with it. In the eyes of the *PCZ* readership, has Steam turned from *PCZ* gaming bogeyman into a Prince Charming to rescue us from our woes?

If you've got a burning opinion that you simply must share, then chuck it at us and we'll have a big old debate.

WIN!



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



WHICH MMO?

The last MMO I played was *Star Wars Galaxies*, so you're probably laughing at me and wondering if I was one of the poor saps who got royally screwed over by Sony Online Entertainment when they decided it needed *WOW*-ification. Well I was... twice.

My problem is I hate fantasy games – I really am not a fan of magic. Yes yes, I know what you're thinking: the *FORCE* is magic. Well it kinda is, but at least I could swallow that in a sci-fi way. But I want spaceships and laser guns, not runestones and goblins.

I want to play another MMO but there's nothing quite like *SWG* out there that I've seen. I want to have my

character and his friends run around on a planet, killing mobs, before everyone hops in my spaceship and we blast around space a bit before going back to my house for tea, and tweaking the position of my furniture. Is there anything else like that out there?

I'm ideally after a mainstream game that's going to get the proper support/updates and have more than a few thousand players online. Oh and never again will I touch anything breathed on by SOE, I'm not having that sort of thing happen to me again!

Hugo aka "Catman Does"

Well the clearest option for you is *Tabula Rasa*, which not only



Tabula Rasa: humanity's survivors grind for victory.



"Crytek's stance of developing *Crysis Warhead* is just what the games industry needs: a bit of reality"

Shaun Pugh thinks Crytek have come over all sensible

has laser guns but also has space aliens coming from upon high.

There aren't any spaceships you can buzz around in as yet, and I doubt there ever will be, but it puts a neat sci-fi overlay atop the usual fantasy grind and is a laugh with a bunch of friends.

If it's space blasting you're after, then keep an eye on *Jumpgate Evolution* - which is essentially an MMO of *Freespace* and in my eyes has huge potential.

If you're willing to wait even longer than BioWare are rumoured to be working on an MMO version of *Knights of the Old Republic*. Which would rock both your box and my box, heavily.

CRY SPECS

Congratulations to Crytek for *Crysis Warhead*. It's an important game, since so many recent releases have been pushing PC hardware beyond their capabilities, which is a bit mad when you consider PCs are now outperforming multi-million pound supercomputers in some graphics applications.

I can't afford a £3,000 rig, and probably not the electricity to run it either, so Crytek's stance of developing the game to perform well on achievable hardware is just what the PC games industry needs: a bit of reality.

Shaun Pugh

True enough Shaun, but don't forget that Crytek have really been forced into recognising this through misadventures with the original game's sky-high specs. Other developers have learnt from this lesson too, even if efforts to 'future-proof' MMOs like *Age of Conan* can end up in some eye-watering demands for the highest quality graphics.

The very nature of our chosen gaming platform though, means that some games will forever be

asking for hardware that goes above and beyond the money in your pocket.

DIRTY SEX

After re-reading your *Spore* article from way back last November, I was left mystified as to why game publishers have to go to such lengths to keep sex out of games.

I teach secondary school science, and reproduction is covered in year 7. That's kids of ages 11 and 12, fresh out of primary school! The kids are fascinated



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...

Issue 194 is 22cm wide but issue 195 is only 21cm! What's going on PC ZONE?

Tim Davies

It's all part of a global conspiracy. You are the first to discover it.

What date will *Left 4 Dead* come out?

Jacob

They have said November, but bear in mind this is Valve we're talking about.

Any idea if there going to make any more expansions for *The Movies* or *Oblivion*?

Anon

Yup. None for either. Sorry.

I hope *Wii Fit* comes out on PC. Then it'd be called *Wii PC Fit*. Sounds like a short, athletic policeman.

The Hippie Farmer

We hope for that too. Imagine the hilarity.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

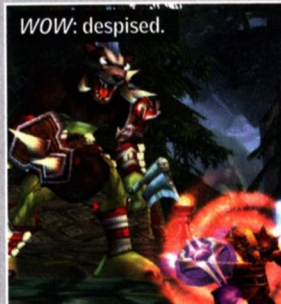
Sent in by Matt Waters

PC ZONE score: 95%

This game is the crack of the gaming world, only perhaps more addictive. If Blizzard were to start bundling a free pack of Carlsberg, a DVD rental and a van full of Maynard's Wine Gums in with the *WOW* subscription each month, I still wouldn't see fit to restart playing the game. The first levels are fun to play through, but once you reach its later stages everything gets far less cutesy and the cash cow nature of the beast comes to the fore.

I'd go as far as saying that *World of Warcraft* has set a new benchmark by being the only game that I've ever come to truly despise.

Your shout: 30%



WOW: despised.

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by it all, and are always full of relevant and good questions. The curriculum covers both human and animal reproduction, and my pupils are exposed to videos and presentations all about sex for a good few weeks of lessons.

Given this, why do people feel the need to hide sex in games like *Spore*? The kids already know what's going on behind those tribal walls after all those mating dances. It needn't be graphic but it should be there!

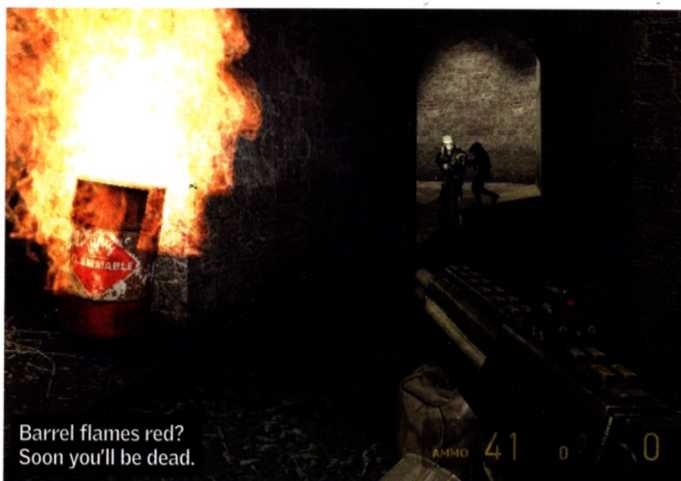
Mark in Liverpool

Not everyone shares your worldly-wise viewpoint Mark, and a family-friendly game like *Spore* has to be deemed good and holy by everyone from the pupils at your own Liverpoolian school to those living in the deepest, most central parts of Bible Belt America.

Plus, have you seen the animals people are making with the *Creature Creator*? Do you honestly think watching two penis slugs writhing together is a good idea? That corrupts my own mind, let alone that of a nipper...

BARREL O' LAFFS

You yourselves have alluded to it in many reviews: why is it a staple of every FPS for the bad guys to have exploding barrels scattered all over their bases? Especially near machine gun nests.



Barrel flames red? Soon you'll be dead.

Even *BioShock*, one of the most original games in a while, kowtowed to the convention. Despite being so many fathoms below the sea with electricity provided by deep sea vents and magma flow, for some reason Rapture still needed a supply of exploding barrels!

Now I don't profess to be the most neat and tidy of people, but if I had a stock of barrels that were capable of exploding, I wouldn't stack them in corridors, especially near Ryan's office or the Big Daddy factory. Even *Red Alert* had exploding barrels! Perhaps if the Soviets had focused more on building mammoth tanks than exploding barrels the course of the *Red Alert* series might have changed.

Occasionally there's a tenuous reason for them to be there - in *Doom* there were levels like "Toxic Refinery" and so on. But *Call of Duty 2*? Storming a Nazi base which has exploding barrels stacked next to machine gun nests? How did the Third Reich last so long if their defensive positions were located next to liquid high explosives?

I remember you ran a series a year or two back with experts who ranked games on how close to reality they were, did you have any luck with an "exploding barrel expert"?

Mark Gidden

We did get a barrel expert into The Professionals back in issue 170. He exclusively revealed that if explosive barrels were to contain a light spirit, such as petroleum or acetone, there would be a chance of them exploding when shot. And that the sound that rolling barrels made in *Donkey Kong* was "surprisingly accurate". You read it here first.

JOB PLZ

Hi my name is antony lake i am a game reviewest i was wondering if i u would like me to review some games for u plz email me for futher deatalis

Antony Lake

Sure Antony, we need someone to attend E3 for us this year and you appear to be just the man we need. Email me your passport details and we'll make you a legend...

What's on the PCZ hard drive?



MULTIWINIA

The stickmen are back in their retro wireframe terrain, and they're not nearly as twiddly - Multiwinia is going to seal Introversion Software's reputations as Britain's most consistently brilliant software company that no bugger's heard of.

DWARF FORTRESS

Flirtation with the *Rogue*-like ASCII city builder becomes deep, deep addiction. Almost *Sims*-like in its low-fi dwarven management, look out for its grand reappearance in next month's Freeware.

PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL

Because no-one has done big daft gibbing better since. Even though the rollercoaster made Will sick.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

THIS MONTH: JOWOO

GEARS OF WAR

I have a few issues with this game, but I love the visceral and intuitive fighting mechanic.

C&C: THE FIRST DECADE

The original C&C reminds me of how patient I used to be. Now I find myself screaming at the monitor when I can't find the last enemy soldier tucked away in one corner of the map.

CALL OF DUTY 4

TF2 is a better balanced game, but COD4's multiplayer is pure adrenaline.

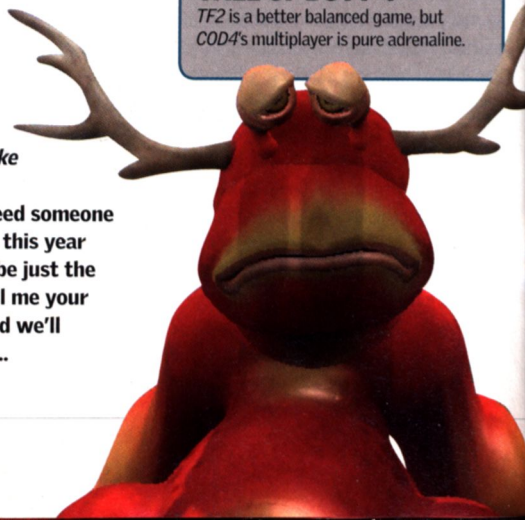


PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD

STRANGE AIRPORT STEWART BAINBRIDGE SPECIAL!



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COVER STORY

FALLOUT

A ruined civilisation. A shattered wasteland. A brave new world. Can Bethesda rise to the challenge?



3



FALLOUT IS GAMING royalty: it was original, it was different, and it came at the creative peak of one of the greatest roleplaying game studios of all time. As such, the battle for hearts and minds that former goblin-specialists Bethesda face when rustling up *Fallout 3* is monolithic. So have they created a game that's simply *Oblivion* with a brown palette and Mad Max haircuts? Or have they been slaves to the *Fallout* model and created something that will smash our rose-tinted spectacles? *PC ZONE* boss Will Porter was invited over to Bethesda's Washington HQ to sink hours into the game, and he came back smiling.

Page
48



Irrigation

I'D SEEN SCREENSHOTS of *Dwarf Fortress* (snipurl.com/dwarves) before, an astonishing grid of colourful ASCII symbols resembling the sight of a command prompt puking all over your monitor.

I knew what it was supposed to be (you know, grass and stuff, with some dwarves and donkeys on it), but my brain couldn't begin to make that leap of perception – at the best of times it has difficulty looking at a bunch of pixels and going, "Oh look, that's people." So I buried *Dwarf Fortress* in the darkest recesses of my mind, convinced I could never love it.

Exactly how *Dwarf Fortress* made its way back from that place is a mystery, but as I type I'm half-watching floodwaters (a bunch of blue 7s) drain from the mined-out hollow my dwarves had intended on using as their first underground farm plot (a bunch of tildes). A freak irrigation accident took the life of one miner (a smiley face symbol), a dwarf whose fate was decided when I locked the emergency floodgate (a plus sign), trapping him in the farm with the rising water. The crop (purple percentage icons) was ruined, leading to starvation, madness and the harvesting of kittens among the fortress' migrants and peasants.

So I'm officially blowing *Dwarf Fortress*'s trumpet and recommending that anybody who, like me, was repelled by impenetrable visuals give it another chance. Grab that dwarf's trumpet and blow with all your might.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty section editor

STEAM CONDENSATION

Valve speak out on the future of Steam and the health of PC gaming

IN THE RUN-UP to the November release of *Left 4 Dead*, the strange grey-green window that is your Steam interface is due for some tweakage. Steam Cloud is imminent, so we gave Valve a shout to explain what the cloud was about.

"When you've got Steam and you move from one PC to another," explains Valve's face-to-the-world Doug Lombardi, "you log in and your games are all available to you, so you can download them whether you're at your mom's house on her PC or you're on a new machine, or one that you're going to upgrade or whatever."

"What we haven't done in the past though," he continues, "is saved the 'states' if you will, the other pieces of the game. We've just given you the raw meat files of the game." Steam Cloud, then, will store your save games,

multiplayer configs, screenshots and even, in time, in-game movies somewhere in Valve's section of the internet, allowing you access to them from your Steam account on any machine you see fit.

"Then through Steam Community you'll be able to share these things and everything will plug in and just work," explains Doug.

So how will this affect, say, a game of *Left 4 Dead*? "Well there's this weird mix of altering a multiplayer game experience to look and feel a little bit like a single-player experience," explains Lombardi. "So you can imagine playing a couple of the maps in one of the campaigns, or having finished a campaign and a half one night, and then calling it quits. You'll schedule something using the Steam Community with the guys you played with the night before, and if one is on a different machine or whatever, as long

STEAMWORKS

as he logs in he's good to go and he's synced up with that server."

The other reason we're talking to Valve concerns their recent offensive against the belief that PC gaming is in jeopardy. How could it be when (staggeringly) the year-on-year profits of the retail arm of Steam are up by 206%?

"The part of the story that isn't being told is that online stuff is going crazy, and I'm sure the guys at Blizzard can give you some staggering numbers as well," explains Lombardi from a presumed bathtub of petty cash. "But that and continued growth at retail are growing in parallel, and they're pretty much why we think the PC is a great place for making games. It's just a matter of how you're doing your business in that space".

Not everyone is a Valve or a Blizzard though, in fact only Valve and Blizzard are, and while other companies may not have caught the online retail wave – the firmament of PC gaming is certainly shifting with the Steam explosion.

"What happened is that indie has moved up in the ranks, through things like Steam and places like PopCap – the sort of game that blurs the usual casual or core game. *Trials 2* is a good example of that, *Audiosurf* is a fantastic example, and *Portal* is kind of in that area, I'd argue. Those guys popped up and really 'ghettoised' it if you will."



Trials 2 uses Steamworks' achievements to ramp up the fun.

STOP PRESS!

SPORE GALACTIC

A US retailer has detailed a *Spore* collector's edition that includes a "Making of..." DVD and a "Premium" 100-page *Galactic Handbook*.

GUERRILLA TACTICS

THQ have released footage of *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, the third-person sequel to the fully destructible Mars-based shooter – more next month.

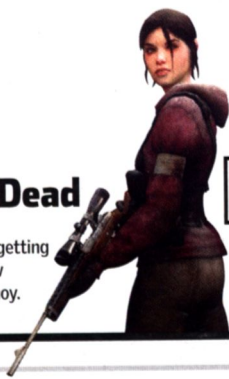
PIPEBOMB

Duke Nukem Forever update: the 3D Realms careers page features another thumbnail screenshot of Duke holding a pipebomb. Phwee!

24

Left 4 Dead

Valve's zombie spectacular is getting a facelift - new screenshots ahoy.



40

Alpha Protocol

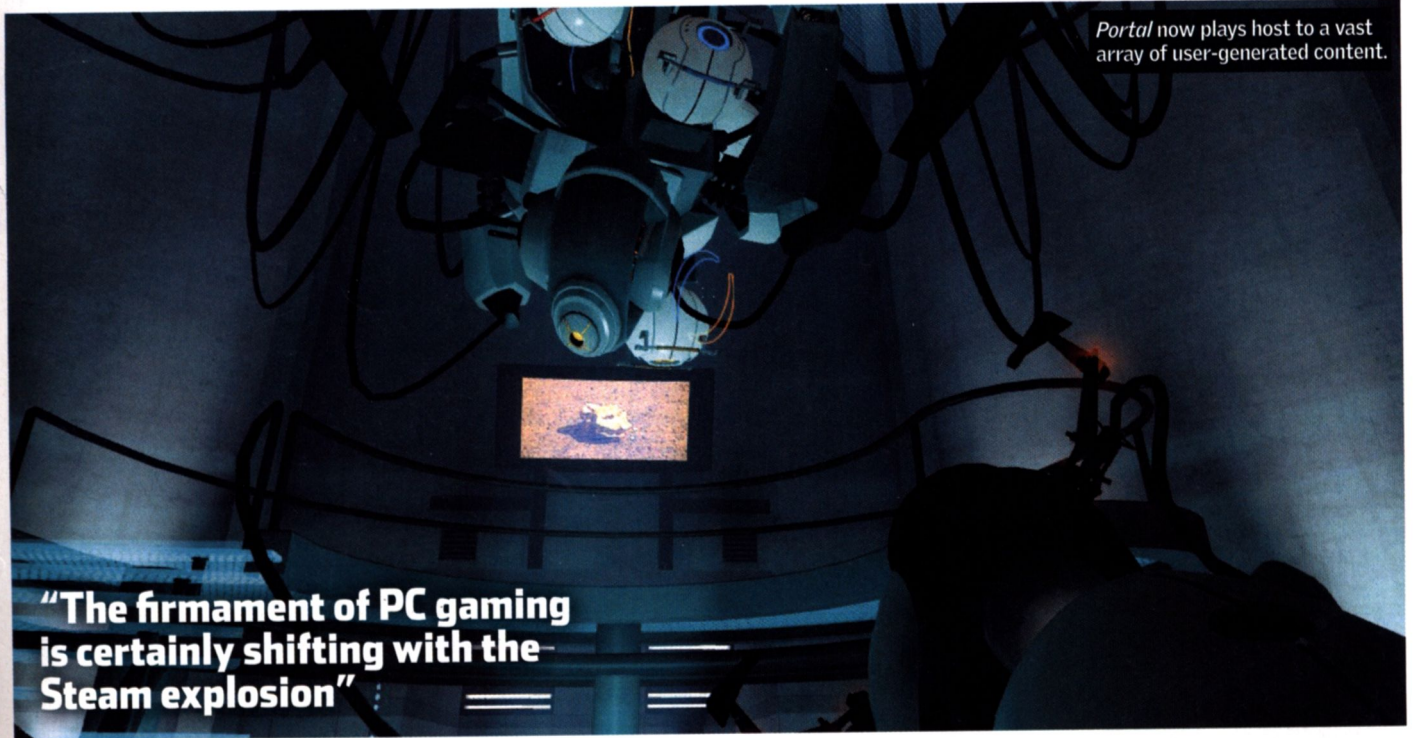
Martin Korda goes deep undercover in this world-spanning spy thriller.



48

Fallout 3

Will Porter strides into Bethesda's vision of a post-nuclear playground.



Portal now plays host to a vast array of user-generated content.

"The firmament of PC gaming is certainly shifting with the Steam explosion"

So do Valve agree with us that the indie and freeware explosion has come at the cost of the mod community? "Yes", states Lombardi with a remarkable degree of finality. Care to offer more? "These guys have gotten smart and they've stepped it up. They're organised and they've either gone to university and they're coming out of places like DigiPen Institute of Technology [see *Portal*] or they're *Audiosurf*."

"And they're just getting smarter and more organised and being more direct about what it is they're trying to accomplish rather than hoping to God that they ship this free thing and maybe somebody like Valve or Epic sees them and gives them a job. That's a really high wire act to pull off." You heard it here first: modding is endangered, PC gaming is alive, and Valve are richer than Croesus.



Audiosurf - a triumphant meeting of indie genius and Steamworks magic.

STUFF

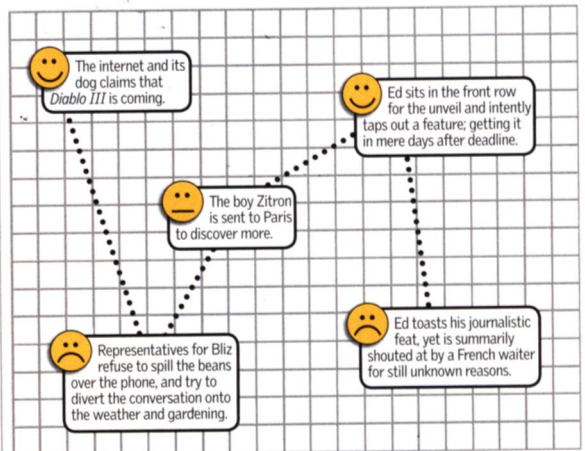
If you log onto www.instantaction.com, you'll be able to sign up for an account and play the browser-based *Fallen Empire: Legions*, the Tribes-alike from the boys at *Garage Games*. It looks and plays smoothly, and has all the skiing, jetpacking and shooting you'd expect, wrapped in *InstantAction's* front end, which allows you to chat with other users and plan your games. There're plenty of maps to play with, but only two open at first, so prepare to plug away to see more of the game...

Life is a rollercoaster

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



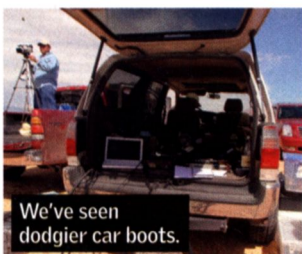
IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Do gun sound effects give games a bad name?



We've seen dodgier car boots.



More ejected brass than a second-hand tuba shop.



Reporter
Pavel Barter

NCESSITY, SOME SAY, is the mother of all invention. So it was that the audio crew on BioWare's *Mass Effect*, upon discovering that they weren't going to get their hands on an assault rifle from 2183AD, were forced to use their brains. After experimenting with a barrage of Foley effects, they began to combine real gun sounds with clever tweaks. "The assault rifle was created using the sound of a .50 calibre Browning with an Indy racing car sampled at the tail end," says Michael Kent, associate audio lead.

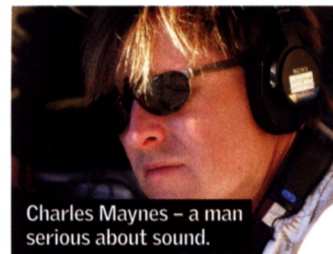
Developers, you see, are a creative bunch when it comes to gun sound effects. And this doesn't always involve a strict adherence to reality, which has left *ZONE* reader William Richardson irked about such economy with the truth: "No shooters have decent gun sounds," he complained in last month's Letters page. "If you've been around live fire weapons, or to one of those military re-enactment battles, then you'll know what I mean."

He has a point. Guns are loud, scary and weigh a ton. But developers aren't a pack of wussies who prefer recording cars backfiring. Far from it. Hollywood sound genius Charles Maynes has recorded gunshot effects for games as diverse as *Medal of Honor*:

Airborne, *Call of Duty 3*, and the upcoming *Resident Evil 5*. He's also respected in the movie business.

"I'm primarily a film sound designer," he says. "I've worked on over 50 films during my career. Some of them include *Planet Terror* and *Grindhouse*, *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Twister*, *Starship Troopers*, *Constantine* and *U-571*."

"The parameters for recording weapons are similar for games and film



Charles Maynes - a man serious about sound.

actually, the only real variable is the number of rounds shot."

The artillery you hear in most big-budget games is the real deal. With Maynes, the process begins with him getting his hands on guns. Lots of guns. "I've a team I rely on for research," he says. "We arrange for appropriate weapons through motion picture prop rental houses, then we organise ranges and insurance coverage for the sessions."

Shooters like *Medal of Honor* and *Rainbow Six* require enough weaponry to overthrow a small country. Though how British devs Creative Assembly record historically accurate weapon sounds for *Empire: Total War* is a different matter, especially as they're rumoured to be recording real muskets.

BANG BANG!

The process of actually capturing the sound, however, is a complicated affair. Composer and sound designer Luke



There was little he could do when the microphones attacked.



Medal of Honor: Airborne featured gun sounds from every angle.



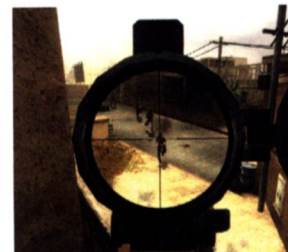
Gunning for victory

Audio designer Luke Hatton mods it up with *Half-Life 2*



Listen and learn

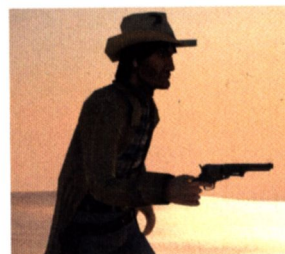
"First, reference a game's existing audio. The sound designers usually have good reason for creating a sound a certain way. In *HL2*'s Source engine there is a feature that lets you produce close and distant sounds in one audio file, blending the left (near) and right (distant) channels based on where the gunshot emits. That gives *Day of Defeat: Source*, *Insurgency* and *Fistful of Frags* a great ambient sound - distant weapons pop and crack."



Use your initiative

"If realism and accuracy isn't required then my usual process is to just go nuts recording all manner of loud BANG sounds to screw up and make something powerful.

"In the past I've used dozens of different kick and snare drums, planks of wood and martial arts pads being slammed together, balloon pops and even human vocal sounds recorded close to the mic."



Turn it up to 11

"For the *Half-Life 2* mods, it was important to get tons of power behind the fire sounds. I needed to boost the sound across all of the frequencies so that it would play back loud and aggressively in the engine.

"When implementing the weapon sounds, they needed to be scripted as 'gunfire' so the engine knew how much DSP (echoes and reflections in a room) to measure and how far the sound would travel across a map."



COD4's gunshots were dialled down, for the sake of your eardrums.



"The artillery you hear in most big-budget games is the real deal"

Hatton, who created audio effects for mods like *Battlefield 2142*'s *First Strike* and *Half-Life 2*'s *Insurgency*, explains.

"Place several microphones near and away from the gun. It's important to capture the loudest part in one source and the quieter trails and reflections in another. Later you can easily blend the two mic sources together to make up the fire sound.

"At a weapons shoot, it's also an ideal time to put a mic by the target and shoot various surfaces - wood, metal, glass - and capture some of those impact sounds."

Without a little techno dabbling, gun effects quickly grow tiresome. Teams behind games like *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* might start with an ultra-realistic AK-47, then dial it down

so it doesn't sound like the devil gnashing on your innards. Like the effects of bullets, the sound of gunfire has to be fictionalised to a degree - the challenge is to do so without making it sound ridiculous.

"We are always fighting against a dynamic range of issues regarding the reality of gunfire," admits Maynes. "The biggest issue is that a game gun is fired far more than one would hear a movie gun. Game sounds have to be designed for repeated use, which might demand them to be a little less dynamic. This issue is brought to focus on nearly every title I have ever played - the sounds have to be emotionally satisfying, without being sonically draining."

Hatton adds: "In the end you do what's needed. If a gun's called the BFG, you know what's required."

PWEW PWEW!

When it comes to fictional weapons in futuristic shooters, anything goes. The *Mass Effect* team were influenced by gun sounds in movies like *Terminator*, *Aliens* and *Blade Runner*.

"*Half-Life 2* was also a big influence," says Michael Kent. "When

you shot a gun in *Half-Life 2* it felt powerful. That's the most important thing for the player: empowerment in the world you are playing in." *Halo*, which implemented different gun sounds for friends and foes, was another influence on BioWare's game.

But *Mass Effect*'s orchestra of violence did not come easy. "We went through many different iterations on the weapons," says Steven Sim, the game's audio lead. "It was tricky to come up with sounds for weapons that don't exist in the real world, especially ones that fired powerful projectiles the size of a grain of rice.

"Many sound layers were the order of the day, and a lot of experimenting with pitch shifting and using sine waves to add oomph to the bottom end. Mapping a bunch of sounds out on a MIDI keyboard helped as we could audition lots of different combinations."

Active imaginations are just as important in mods. For *Half-Life 2*'s *Fistful of Frags*, Hatton scraped pieces of wood against each other to emulate the sound of a bow being gripped, and for an arrow being drawn back, he recorded leather snapped taught.

"Sometimes I rely on my vocal chords, in this case for the arrow fight," he says. "Extra layers of sounds are slapped on top - such as high-speed motorbikes or race car drive-bys - which can be sped up and pitch shifted to unnatural levels."

The truth of the matter is, does it really matter if guns in games don't sound exactly as they should in reality? As long as they suit the zany videogame world you're playing in, who gives a hoot? But whatever happens, devs promise to keep experimenting with guns in their quest for perfect sounds.

"The future?" ponders Charles Maynes. "Perhaps more dynamic detail and more realistic attributes such as magazine capacity. More variety is always good." **PCZ**

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

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

Welcome to the magic factory.



PCZONE Charts



1	—	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008 Issue 188 90%
2	NEW	AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES Issue 196 73%
3	NEW	SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE Issue 193 91%
4	NEW	MASS EFFECT Issue 195 92%
5	NEW	ALONE IN THE DARK Issue 197 55%
6	↓	CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE Issue 188 89%
7	↓	CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE N/A
8	↓	THE SIMS 2: FREETIME Issue 194 70%
9	NEW	LEGO INDIANA JONES: ORIGINAL ADVENTURES Issue 196 80%
10	↓	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST N/A
11	↑	THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE N/A
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18	↓	CRYSIS Issue 188 92%
19	RE	AGE OF EMPIRES III Issue 162 84%
20	↓	MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION Issue 175 91%



2 AGE OF CONAN
Conan is stuffing his loincloth with cash after the success of his very own MMO. Well done sir.



3 SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
The European shelf release means that that guy will stop phoning us up to ask where he can buy it.



4 MASS EFFECT
Going strong on PC, despite a hailstorm of icy DRM controversies, here's a game you definitely need to play.



5 ALONE IN THE DARK
We review the hell out of this on page 60 and it gets a slating. Too late to stop people buying it though, you mentlers.

IN THE ZONE

STALKER: Clear Sky nears completion. Excitement builds

WEBSITE stalker-game.com/clearsky ETA August

A TRIUMPH OF vision and of tardiness, *STALKER* was a game that dared to dream and push the FPS genre a little further than your average corridor affair. So *Clear Sky* has a massive reputation to live up to.

The lead character in *Clear Sky* has been revealed as a chap called Scar, who'll be on the trail of the original's Strelok in a Forbidden Zone with all the dangerous areas swapped around.

"There are a lot of changes between *Clear Sky* and *Shadow of Chernobyl*," explains GSC's face man and itinerant rock musician Oleg Yavorsky, clasping his hands and reclining in an oversized leather chair. "There's more advanced AI, and more interaction with NPCs than ever before – especially in the war of factions, which is something we've invested most of our efforts into, aside from improving the base technology of the game." And it's more than just making them chattier, too – the heavily publicised AI teammates who accompany you on missions fight intelligently, prepare ambushes, hide behind cover, retreat and protect you when you're low on health.

Also new to the game are shortcuts between different areas of the Zone that you can pay experienced stalkers to take you through, meaning that a heap of time-consuming walking can be exchanged for a dash through various

radioactive valleys of death.

Weapons, meanwhile, will be tuneable, powerful artefacts will be hidden deeper within fields of anomalies, and there'll be more rabid animals than ever before. The prime ambition for GSC though, is to make *Clear Sky* slick and to finish it.

"Players will see the game is a great deal closer to the original vision of what *STALKER* was meant to be," confides Yavorsky. "The first game was very experimental, and brought a lot of new things to gaming. It was a weird mix of shooter and RPG. *Clear Sky* is pretty much my dream game, and we're definitely getting there, step by step."

We'll have the exclusive review of *STALKER: Clear Sky* in the next issue, so keep them peepers prepped.



A stringent eye test is not required in Stalker recruitment drives.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

THE MAN WHO BROUGHT US THE BLOB

ALEX AUSTIN - THE LEFT VENTRICLE OF THE BEATING HEART OF INDIE LEGENDS CRYPTIC SEA



Creator of some of our favourite indie games, including *Gish*, *Golf?*, and *Pontifex* (aka that game where you build bridges), Cryptic Sea (crypticsea.com) are not only a supremely talented duo, but an awesomely cool pair of dudes. We speak to co-founder Alex Austin about all things indie...

Q Where'd the idea for *Gish* come from? A blob of tar isn't exactly the most orthodox of lead characters.

A Edmund [McMillan, co-founder of Cryptic Sea] came up with the idea, I'd like to say he was on some cool mind-expanding drug at the time but he was too influenced by Nancy Reagan in the '80s to ever do any.

Why is it that we find ourselves enjoying music in indie games far more than we do in commercial games?

Gish's music was done by Estradasphere (estradasphere.com), they're an indie band who are also from Santa Cruz, so it worked out pretty well. I think indie game music is different because there's some developers who are also pretty talented musicians, like Jon Mak (of *Everyday Shooter*) or Kyle Gabler (of *World of Goo*), or they know musicians who aren't as well known.

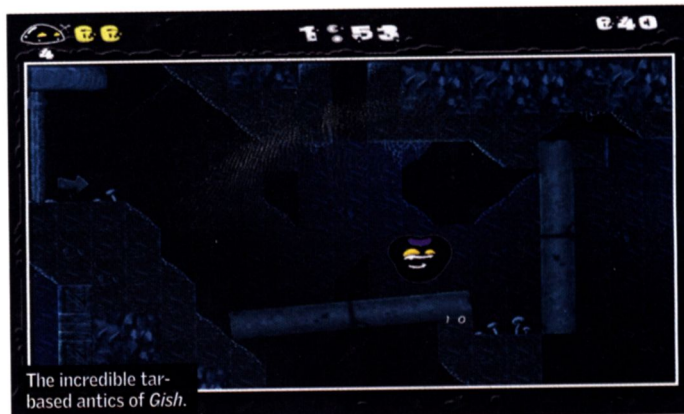
How's *Gish 2* coming along?

I have been working on a completely

new physical structure for *Gish*, which will allow us to do some new things with gameplay, such as *Gish* getting smaller when he's damaged. We also plan to have some items in the game that will change *Gish* physically and allow the player to reach new areas.

Have you ever had the opportunity to join a commercial dev team?

I've had some offers, but I've chosen to stay indie so I have the freedom to make whatever I want. I see games as having a huge amount of potential, and I want to be in a position to explore that potential. Right now we have an opportunity with *Gish 2* to create something that people haven't seen before. I can't say specifically what that will be at this time, but it will be more than just physics and graphics, it will be actually meaningful gameplay. I can say this: *Gish 2* will be better than Peter Molyneux said *Fable* would be.



The incredible tar-based antics of *Gish*.

How profitable is indie games development?

I make enough to get by. But I've been doing the starving artist thing for long

enough, so if I'm not rich by the end of this year I'll probably sell out.

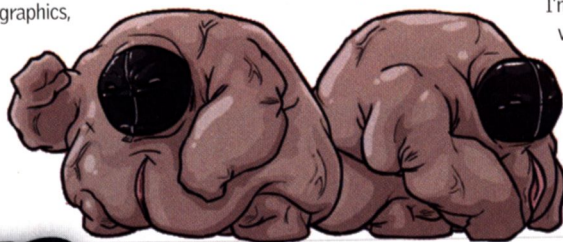
So are you working on anything else?

I'm working on a few things. One is a new version of *Pontifex*, another is a mix of *Red Baron*, *TIE Fighter* and *Joust*.

Ever going to finish *Golf?*?

Nope.

That's rubbish. We don't like you.



tat ZONE

Purchase authentic game tat not available anywhere else!

We've things in this office you'll never see on the shelves. How about a pair of socks which when worn side-by-side resemble Gordon Freeman's face? What about an old unlabelled plastic tub of *Red Alert 3* shower gel? Or a collection of *The Sims 2* crack pipes? The list goes on, and our unassailable generosity is compelling us to auction them off to you four bits at a time. Look for the 'PCZoners' tag on eBay, and get bidding monsieur.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
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Honest, just visit
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**ARGUE
THE
TOSS**
THIS MONTH:
TF2 CLASS
UPDATES



Dear Jon 'Log' Blyth,

I'm upset Log. *Team Fortress 2* has been ruined by its very creators. *TF2* is a high-on perfectly balanced game, so why are Valve releasing achievements and unlockable weapons that encourage every buggler to play as the same class? I've just come off a Goldrush map inhabited only by Pyros. Not only am I singed but I'm immensely saddened.

Will Porter

Dear Will,

I'm enjoying the madness. I reckon if the game was a cartoon – which it should be – this is exactly what it'd be like: 24 people trying to kill each other with hadouken taunts for half an hour. It'll end quickly enough, so embrace it!

Jon 'Log' Blyth

Log,

End quickly enough? There are still seven to go! I'll admit that I find the Pyro the most staggeringly annoying class to fight against anyway, but the fact is that every server is full of nincompoops desperate to unlock these ridiculous achievements rather than actually play the damn game properly. I'm sure that these small-minded idiots are having a whale of a time, but being put in a team full of them is like being in a class of over-excited school-children. Armed with flamethrowers. WP

Will,

Perhaps I just enjoy the chaos because it hides the fact I'm shit, but at least I'm not just covering up my hatred of the Pyro in some worthy rant against imbalance and idiots. We didn't hear a peep from you when it was Medics – why was that? Because you were probably playing as your boyfriend, the Scout, and could pretty much kill everyone. If you hate stupidity so much, get on a server that doesn't allow imbalanced teams and stop fouling up my listening air with your big griping mouth. JLB

Log,

What possible gamer could ever complain about a sudden influx of Medics making you die less and play better? Just think of the chaos to come, use your head! Matches of pure Scout-runs, corridors full of Heavies that no other player can infiltrate, gun emplacements in every corner of every room, Spies everywhere... everywhere! This is chaos, and I demand order – *TF2* is spinning out of control with its top-heavy achievement love and I'm being killed ALL THE TIME. WP

Will,

I see it, Will! It will be marvellous! A map populated entirely by Spies would be awesome! Engineer week will be the most incredible week of sentry spray, with ammo everywhere! No bases will get captured in Sniper week, I suppose, but Heavy week can't fail to be anything other than sexualiciously magnificent. I know you've got a point, Will, but I think we'll look back fondly on all this, and it would annoy you a lot less if you played with your friends and stopped barging into servers going "OH HAI I AM A EDITOR OF PC ZONE, GIVE US A BISCUIT". JLB

Log,

I like biscuits. What can I say? WP

WE HAVE IGNITION

Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising screens emerge in a hail of gunfire

WEBSITE codemasters.com/flashpoint2 ETA Winter 2008

WHEN BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE, developers of the original *Operation Flashpoint*, broke away from Codemasters to create *Armed Assault* (PCZ issue 178, 84%), Codies were left holding the *Operation Flashpoint* name, and with it the expectations of devoted *Op Flash* fans everywhere.

"Experience the intensity, diversity and claustrophobia of realistic modern warfare," *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising's* tagline promises, and judging from the screenshots, Codies aren't about to let fans down.

The setting this time around is the oil-rich island of Skira, an imaginary front for an imaginary conflict that includes not only Russian and American forces, but the Chinese too. What we've seen shows the US Marines engaged in a heated, long-distance battle with Chinese

infantry as they try to recapture Skira's exposed air field from all angles at the outset of the second mission. This is the essence of *Flashpoint* – intense conflicts spanning huge distances.

Proudly claiming to be a modern warfare simulator, *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* spits in the face of recent shooters with a slew of extremely depressingly realistic features: one bullet is enough to kill anyone, and when shot in the leg, don't expect to hide in a corner and wait for the pulsing red vision effect to recede – you'll simply bleed to death.

Codies knew they had a massive pair of military issue boots to fill with the *Operation Flashpoint* licence – and from this glimpse alone, the authentic military behaviour at the original game's core seems to have survived Bohemia's departure. We'll have more details in our next issue.



Not strictly in-game, but we're assured it'll look this nice.



Air vehicles will play an important role, as ever.

COLONIZE THIS

Sid Meier's *Civilization IV: Colonization* refurbishes a '90s classic

WEBSITE civilization.com ETA Autumn 2008

THOSE OF YOU who are young enough to sit in your own filth may not remember Sid Meier's *Colonization*. Lucky for you – and other strategy fans – Firaxis are revitalising the classic trading, warring and colonising gameplay with slick new graphics and, of course, the well-respected multiplayer dingdongs of *Civ IV*.

The thrust of the gameplay focuses upon establishing a colony and harvesting raw materials (sugar, metal) from an area, then refining them into something useful (rum, tools) that they can sell by sending ships back to the motherland.



As well as your casual resource gathering, there's a great deal of public relations to do. Any colonised land will most likely have a bunch of natives – friendly or otherwise – that you'll need to keep happy. The closer you get to them, the more rewards you'll get – rare goods or training for your colonists – but that may not stop you from crushing them under foot once you're strong enough to beat a bunch of spear-waving aboriginals. Go history!

Other nations will be more of a challenge to take on, including your homeland, which will put pressure on you through taxing goods you sell to them. Ultimately, you may need to oppose your own



Surely this giant horse will consume us all!

people, hoping to gain sovereignty, America-style.

Civilization IV: Colonization is looking like a straight-up re-creation of a classic, rather than a hastily fashioned expansion pack made for quick nostalgia-bucks. Firaxis are working hard to bring us the game in time for Autumn this year, and we'll bring you news of it from lands afar once our ships return.



They said 50ft wagons were stupid. But who's laughing now?

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1



TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE tombraider.com ETA November '08

EIDOS PROBABLY FOLD their arms defiantly and look hurt if you say it, but featuring an almost constantly saturated Lara Croft in the latest *Tomb Raider* game is less technological innovation, and more perverted titillation. As such, we should all feel a constant throb of shame as we guide Lara along her most adventurous quest yet, through damp dungeons, rainy ruins and inclement Incan temples. By the look of these screens we'll also be feeling immense joy though, with more open level design, less signposting, and the ability to send animals to sleep rather than murder them. *Underworld* is certainly set to please.

7



The Bigger Picture

1 KRAKEN TIME

Turns out these guys are happily living at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, blocking entrances to ruins which Lara hopes will lead to the Norse underworld of the game's title.

2 UMBRELLA-ELLA-ELLA

Underworld will see Lara visit not only the Mediterranean, but rainy Thailand, the jungles of Mexico, and the Arctic Sea. She'll also zip about on a variety of vehicles. Like usual.

3 NIMBLE NELLY

Wet surfaces make it difficult for poor Lara to get a firm grip, meaning she might slip and smash her face off some rocks and drown in two inches of water.

4 TECHNO-WONDER

To keep her from harm's way, Lara's got a sonar map that reveals hidden passages, and a (presumably waterproof) PDA that offers helpful hints on demand.

5 BELOW THE SEA

Lara can now fire RSPCA-pleasing tranquiliser darts at the hapless animals she encounters, rather than mercilessly executing them. This shark will be just fine.

6 ADRENALINE BURST

With a claimed 1,700 moves (hrmm), Lara's more acrobatic than ever before. Adrenaline Moments slow time for increased precision, allowing her to deftly navigate tricky jumps.

7 GOING PLACES

Underworld gives you more freedom to carve your own path through the level, with open-ended puzzles and less clearly signposted grapple points and ledges.

2

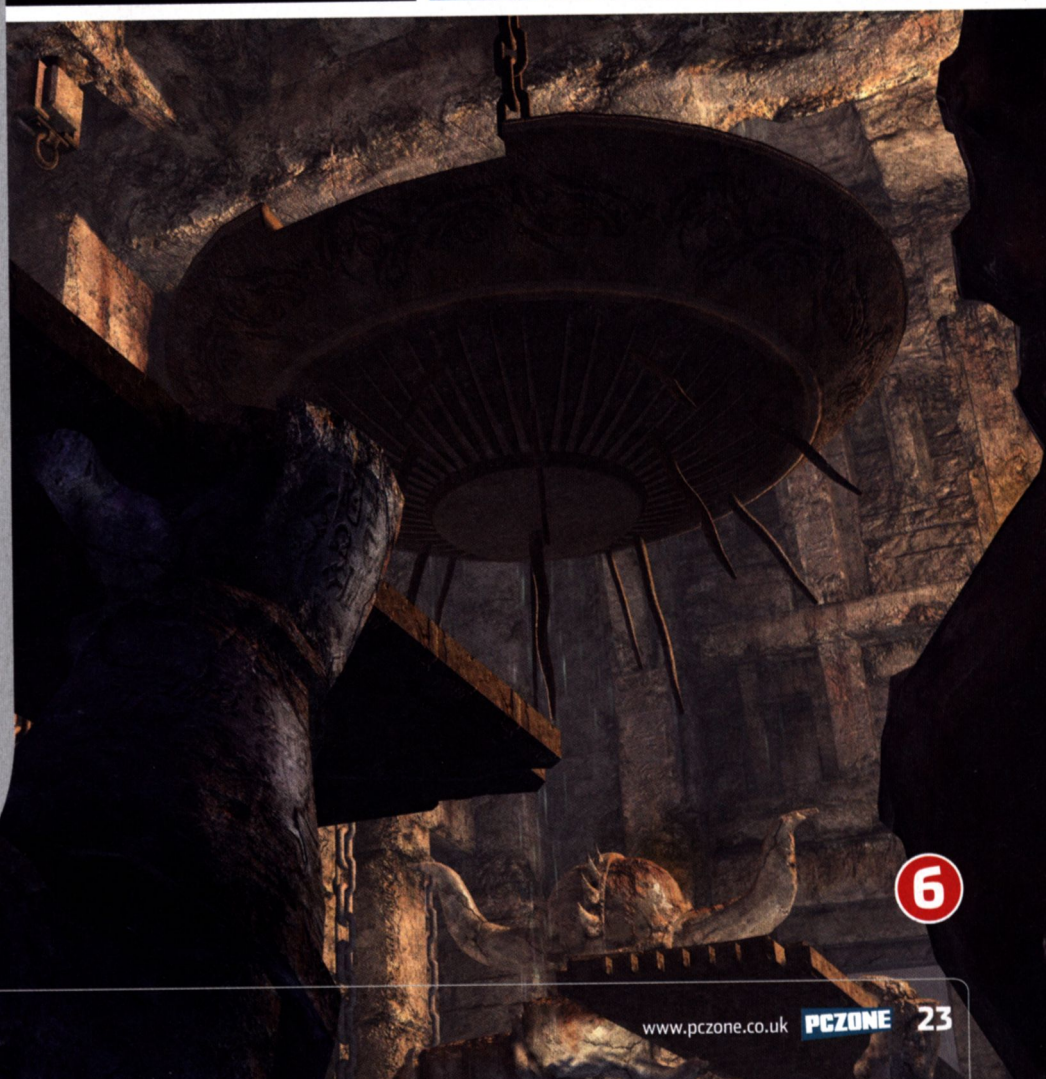


3



4

5



6

GRINDHOUSE OF THE DEAD...

TRICK OF THE LIGHT

Valve's Jason Mitchell is giving *Left 4 Dead* a visual overhaul, Steve Hogarty braves the living dead to find out how

ETA
WINTER
2008

DEVELOPER Turtle Rock/Valve PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE l4d.com

SELF-SHADOWED NORMAL MAPPING. That got you sitting up in your seats didn't it? Forget zombie hordes for a second, put the intricate and sophisticated animation system to one side, and focus on what's going to make *Left 4 Dead* special: self-shadowed normal mapping. What's self-shadowed normal mapping? We had no idea, so we picked up the phone and asked Valve.

"The flashlights are really tied into the gameplay," begins Valve's technical superbrain Jason Mitchell, paving the way for the incoming jargon. "In our past games they were attached to the player, but in *Left 4 Dead* they're attached to the weapons.

When you reload or use a shove attack, your flashlight tracks that weapon as it moves and points off towards the ceiling or somewhere. So you can't see for a certain amount of time because your light's not pointing straight ahead."

This is an effect greatly enhanced by the darkness of *L4D*'s urban levels, where a group's ability to cast light into menacing corners could make the difference between life and being strangled by a prehensile tongue.

SHADOW AIDES

"Shadows are an important visual cue too," continues Mitchell. "They help you tell where things are in 3D space. So as you're strafing around you're seeing those shadows move and change in a

natural and believable way – you're able to quickly perceive that space."

On paper, and even in screenshots, it'll seem like nothing more than a visually pleasing effect – and one, we hasten to add, that's been seen in other PC titles. In motion though, when surrounded by 30 infected maniacs, the shadows give a staggering degree of unconscious feedback, and spatial awareness. Now here comes the science.

"In self-shadowed normal mapping," begins Mitchell, having taken a deep breath, "instead of doing all your light calculations on strictly flat polygons, you have a texture map that contains normal information mapped to those polygons, and locally, you're changing the lighting."



Four roving flashlights will make for impressive dynamically lit scenes.

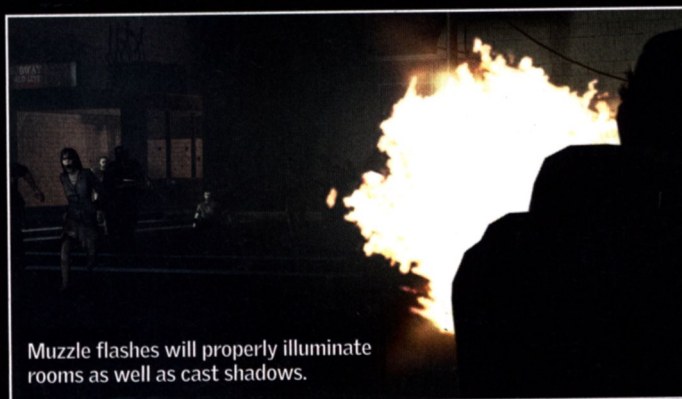
We'll cut to the final product of this tech-wizardry, which is a subtle but striking lighting effect that goes way beyond your average bump mapping. If you've ever placed a torch along a brick wall and seen how the light picks out and exaggerates every detail of the surface, that's what's happening in *L4D*. Combined with the other visual effects Valve are bolting on to the Source engine it makes a serious difference. A number of per frame post-processing effects are being employed to ensure *L4D* will be nothing less than a feat of visual engineering (see Horrifying box).

"Left 4 Dead will be nothing less than a feat of visual engineering"

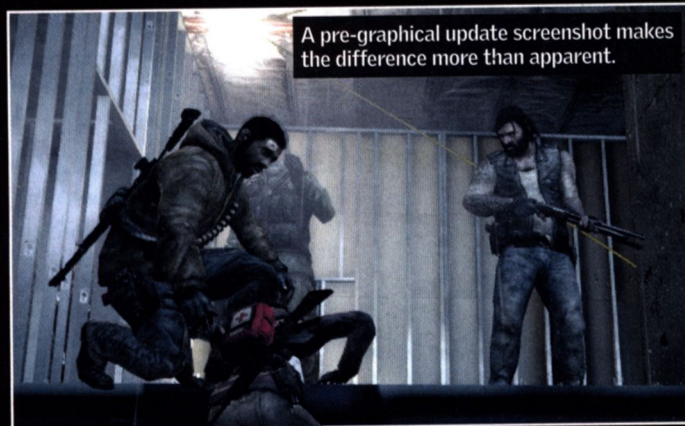
a service which will store your save games and configurations online (see page 14). This means your campaigns can be saved and resumed from anywhere at any time, even if the friends you were playing with have gone on a holiday.

Outside of all this, I suppose it's worth reminding ourselves that *L4D* itself remains an energetic and often terrifying co-op shooter – a tense and

bloody adventure through four varied campaigns in which you play the role of either a human survivor or one of five uniquely talented infected antagonists. Swarms of AI infectees time their scares expertly, running and clambering across the level with bowel-loosening urgency, and campaigns peak with thrilling stand-offs worthy of Romero, Peckinpah or Leone. Now we can be certain it'll look the part too. **PCZ**



Muzzle flashes will properly illuminate rooms as well as cast shadows.



A pre-graphical update screenshot makes the difference more than apparent.

TALK IN COLOUR

"The filmic post-processing is, from a stylistic standpoint, useful for evoking the style of a classic horror movie," explains Mitchell. "We also view post-processing as another communication channel with our players. There are subtle ways of interacting with the player, think of the soundtrack to a feature film for instance.

"We'll use music in that way, but we'll also use the post-processing to communicate game state, for example. So when the player is injured we'll change our colour correction operation to desaturate the environment."

"The stuff they did in *Grindhouse* was similar," smiles Mitchell, talking about the double-feature version seen in the US, "they did colour grading as well, though they were trying more for the '70s look. They were also going for a damaged film look, so they'd have scratches and areas of overexposure – we're not going for that exact look, but we're certainly in the same vein."

Just as Steam Community came into existence a month or two before *Team Fortress 2* arrived, *L4D* will have its arrival preceded by Steam Cloud,



Horrifying

How Valve are bringing horror movie visuals to *Left 4 Dead*

COLOUR GRADING

In the movie industry, exposed film can be run through a colour grading process to apply tints and colour changes to the picture. *L4D* will employ similar effects. The game reduces the strength of colours in an environment while keeping teammates saturated and noticeable. "We use that to enhance gameplay," explains Mitchell, "it's not merely a stylistic thing."

FILM GRAIN

Just as you'd see on a projected film, grain is a low-level visual noise, a sort of subtle static effect that will be laid over *L4D*'s action. Grain won't be an overbearing effect, but it will be extra strong in darker parts of the screen, to imply more detail to the eye. Grainy dark alleyways also add a level of horror movie tension, and lend a feeling of thickness to the shadows.

Before



After



CONTRAST ENHANCEMENT

This effect sneaks into action in the more well-lit areas of the game. Contrast enhancement is something you'll have come across if you've dragged photos from your digital camera into *Photoshop* – adjusting the contrast helps to more clearly define the light and dark areas of an image. *L4D*'s contrast enhancement won't be too different, except it'll be carried out on a frame-by-frame basis.

VIGNETTING

In vignetting the corners of the screen are darkened slightly. This happens with certain film lenses, but it often creates a pleasing effect. In *L4D* it's used to frame the screen, and again, it's subtle and effective. Combined with the other effects, it creates a unique look and feel to the game. What's more, it's not computationally expensive – you won't take a performance hit.

GLEAMING THE CUBES

MIRROR'S EDGE

Jon 'Log' Blyth squints and asks – who's the fairest up that wall?

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.dice.se

ETA
TBA



WHEN THE TRAILER for *Mirror's Edge* hit the internet, DICE freely admitted they were pleased by the public's reaction. There were, however, accusations of prerendering from the predictable blood clot of cynics. Being taken on a tour of two levels, they're obviously keen to prove that the action was real, rather than some conniving plan to trick the internet into an unjustified gush.

Mirror's Edge is beautiful – from the cutscenes, which take place in both 2D animation and chunkily stylised motion-captured 3D – to the in-game depiction of a crisp, clinical city which isn't as sci-fi or fictional as you might assume it is.

"It's a city that doesn't exist, but it's a contemporary city," explains O'Brien,

the game's senior producer. "We've taken things that are happening in the world, whether it's social, political or architectural, and combined them into one place." The game consciously distances itself from far-future concepts and military dictatorships, instead using a nanny state that monitors the flow of information, and gets shirty when data gets out. And here, shirty means "attack you with helicopters".

You play Faith, one of the city's runners – a courier who transports valuable information around the city, under the always-sniffing noses of the authorities. She's aware of the dangers of her job – to spend your working day launching yourself off pristine blue-white surfaces and performing absurd acrobatics, you have to be. The dangers were driven home when her sister was murdered. This all builds up as election posters adorn some of the buildings, bellowing the name Callaghan from shiny glass buildings while cutting

deliberately understated combat.

That's not to say you won't have access to guns – "We're men, we're stupid, we like guns," admits the unnamed man playing through the demo levels. But they're not just lying around – you have to wrestle them from your enemies. There's no ammo, either – and killing someone with a gun then walking over them won't magically refill the one you're using. As if that wasn't enough, substantial weaponry will hinder your moves – meaning you'll soon have to leave that shotgun behind. Behind the stylised superpowered jumps and crisp, cartoon aesthetic, this is a bold move towards reality.

"Behind the superpowered jumps and crisp, cartoon aesthetic, this is a bold move towards reality"

workers in a dozen offices from natural light. A safe bet is that he's a shady sort with a lot to hide. A slightly less safe bet is that he bummed a zebra.

1ST-PERSON PARKOUR

The classic run-and-jump games *Prince of Persia* and *Tomb Raider* are played in third-person, so it's immediately strange to have a game like this played through the eyes of the protagonist. What's also odd is that it feels so right – with Faith's hands coming into view as she sprints, and emphasis split three ways between acrobatics, puzzle exploration and the

Reality is also evident in the level structures. A massive cylindrical level may seem like a fantastical futuristic structure design built purely to show off Faith's free-running skills – but it's based on a real-life Tokyo storm drain. The inspiration for the whole game's locations is rooted in real places, with a lot of research having gone into places that would be visually impressive and could provide a solid puzzle-platforming challenge for Faith.

The controls have been tailored to suit the new perspective in this 3D acrobat, and are so streamlined

THE LOWDOWN

- It looks absolutely amazing ✓
- A new first-person take on *Persia* and *Croft* ✓
- An "honest" world and play style ✓
- The birth of another gaming heroine ✓
- No pew-pew laser guns ✗
- Geared more towards consoles ✗



Realistic locations, ridiculous moves.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**MIRROR'S
EDGE**

PINBALL ILLUSIONS
Pinball is like a lady – two flippers and a multiball jackpot.

1995



BATTLEFIELD
You can't say DICE without nodding at the *Battlefield* games.

2002-2007

BATTLEFIELD HEROES
A new look for *BF*, as DICE take a stroll down *TF2* boulevard.

2008



MIRROR'S EDGE
Another new look makes this a franchise waiting to happen.

2008

You can't take the shooter out of the first-person...



Hello down there

The niceties of unarmed combat

Runners travel light, so Faith's combat relies more heavily on her gymnastic skills than her ability to carry guns, no matter how B or F the G is. All that running and jumping around must really tone those legs – so it really does make sense that she overcomes people by wrapping her thighs around their face. It's probably the reason they decided on a female protagonist – *GoldenEye* would have been slightly less arousing for the crush fetishists out there if neck-snapping Xenia Onnatop had been played by Nicholas Lyndhurst. But then, you could probably say that about any of the most popular erotic films – none of which would benefit from Lyndhurst standing around with an over-full shopping trolley, looking like he's too embarrassed to ask where he parked his car.

And do we detect, in the eyes of that man below who's dressed a little bit like a ninja, that at the edge of his mind, this is how he wanted to die? And look at those eyes. If I didn't know better, I'd say that a single tear of happiness and final, contented resolution is running down his cheek, from eyes that I can only describe as laughing.

they're virtually featureless. Press one button and you'll jump, climb, or do many of the other skyward activities that are associated with up. Press another and you'll power slide, or parachute roll to avoid damage from a high fall. The trick is in the timing and the real skill comes from chaining moves together with wall walks and tightrope-walking. Eventually, you'll pull off satisfying combos that become essential as the buildings get progressively more challenging.

Mirror's Edge is a visual smack in the gob, and if it's as much fun to play as it is to watch one of the men who made it run around two of the levels, then we'll have a massive, gleaming hit on our hands. **PC7**

You should see what she does to her enemies.



ETA
**AUTUMN
2008**

THE LOWDOWN

- Interesting premise ✓
- Brings character to faceless Nazis ✓
- Stealth system looks effective ✓
- Could get repetitive ✗
- Still needs a lot of polish ✗

A HISTORY OF VIOLETTES

VELVET ASSASSIN



A morphine-riddled *Ed Zitron* beckons Nazis into dark alleyways wearing only his pyjamas

DEVELOPER Replay Studios PUBLISHER Gamecock Media WEBSITE replaystudios.de

IF THERE'S ONE thing that's definitely missing from shadowy stealth games, it's the ability to inject yourself with morphine, slow down time and cavort in a sexy nightdress. Fret no further though because *Velvet Assassin* lets you do just that, as well as stab, shoot and garrote your way through the '40s in the most bizarre period piece since *'Allo 'Allo*.

You see, injured secret agent Violet Summer has been left comatose in a hospital after a mission gone awry, and is reliving her past adventures in a series of dreams. With me so far? These dream missions – based on the life of Violette Szabo (see History Lessons) – span Violet's career as a secret agent, from assassinating Nazi commanders to helping other agents escape the Third Reich's clutches. Grimmer still, at one point she even has to deliver a cyanide capsule to an agent to save British secrets.

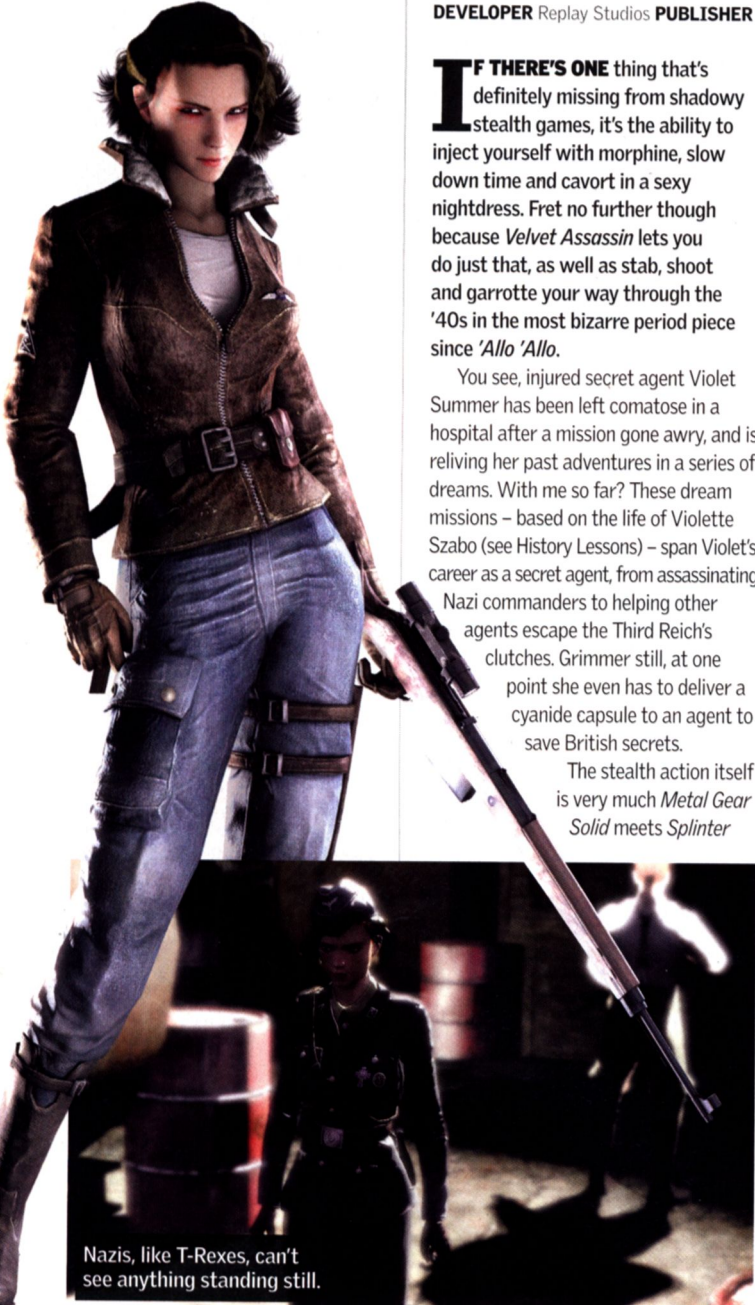
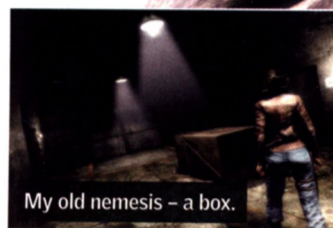
The stealth action itself is very much *Metal Gear Solid* meets *Splinter*

Cell, with an indicator showing you how well-concealed you are depending on the light and sound you're making. You can either go for the classic secretive slit-of-the-throat, or, as your arsenal improves, a more direct, bullet-ridden approach, with the caveat being that you'll soon garner the attention of Hitler's finest.

Stealth-wise, developers Replay Studios have created an intricate system: your shadow casting itself across a soldier's view, or the crackle of glass underfoot might cause a nearby enemy to investigate. This, if you're canny, might lure him into a dark alleyway and into the loving embrace of your knife.

You can also expect a dash of action though. Another section sees Violet playing cat-and-mouse with a sniper in the Warsaw Ghetto, dodging bullets and trying to find enough cover to fight back as shots ricochet off parked cars and street furniture. This may be a dream, but it's still life or death.

You're not up against a faceless menace either, the boys at Replay are dead set on fleshing out the lives of the individual soldiers that Violet eventually kills. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* touched on this mechanic, allowing you to listen in on one poor soul's rash that got worse as the game went on. In *Violet Assassin* this attempt to add depth to your opponents is born from the belief that WWII



History Lessons

A little bit about *Velvet Assassin's* inspiration...

Violette Szabo joined the women's branch of the British Army, the Auxiliary Territorial Service, in 1941. In 1942, shortly after she gave birth to her daughter, Szabo's husband was killed at the Battle of El Alamein. Afterwards Szabo offered her services to Churchill's spies and saboteurs: the Special Operations Executive.

The SOE sent Szabo into France to organise French resistance cells. On her second mission a German army unit tried to capture her cell. Szabo single-handedly kept the Nazi unit at bay using a Sten gun, allowing the leader of her cell to escape. After her capture she was interrogated, raped, tortured, imprisoned in concentration camps, and finally executed in 1945. She was 23 years old.

In 1947 Szabo was posthumously awarded a George Cross – the highest award for bravery a civilian can be given.

Replay Studios have used Szabo and her life as a template to make Violet Summer a deeper, more engaging character.



Real source material!

THE STORY SO FAR...
VELVET ASSASSIN

VIOLETTE NOTIONS
Violette Szabo joins the Special Operations Executive.



RE-WIND
Replay is set up by Marc Moehring and Sascha Jungnickel.

IT'S A MIRAGE...
Replay announce a WWII PC stealth game, *Sabotage*.



I'M TELLIN' YA IT'S...
...and is renamed *Velvet Assassin* when Gamecock take over.



1942

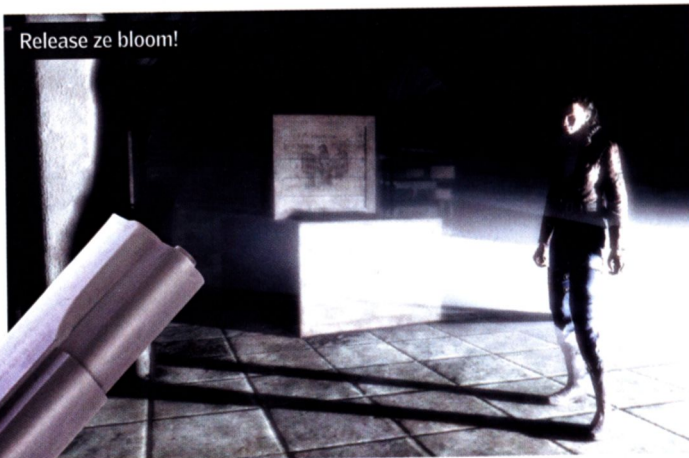
2002

2005

2008



Release ze bloom!



Easy on the eye shadow love.



"A female secret agent makes for one of the most original premises in WWII games yet"

games are usually based on the activities of larger-scale armies, rather than soldiers' day-to-day work. This is shown through a series of letters that you can pick up, based on real-life missives home from soldiers; intended to give shape to those who are usually just moving targets with a penchant for machine-gun emplacements.

MORPHINE FUN

As mentioned, you have the ability to shoot up with morphine. Essentially, as Violet lies on her hospital bed, doctors watch her for signs of distress and pump her full of the opiate when she needs it.

At these points Violet can pick up syringes of morphine that can then be used to activate bullet-time – a bullet-time that turns Violet's tight catsuit into a skimpy nightdress. I was shown this minutes after being assured Violet wasn't going to be objectified. The noise I made was a puzzled "hmmmm".

While I can see how *Max Payne's* slow-mo mechanics make sense in an action game, whenever Violet

slows things down she has to run over and stab someone in the same way she's already done five times before – only a bit slower. And although Replay say morphine will be rare, there's a concern that this negligee-time could prove a detraction from some otherwise very serious subject matter.

There's another concern that the stealth element could become rather repetitive. Then again, some of the ideas going into the game show a degree of cleverness that may well spread into the rest of the game. You can pull the pin from a soldier's grenade without him realising, for example, turning him into a walking time bomb.

Also having you take the role of a female secret agent makes for one of the most original premises in WWII games yet. The world needs another Cate Archer, and up till now there hasn't been much hope for one.

While your *Calls of Duty* and *Medals of Honor* have played WWII out as a homogenous mush of rushing soldiers and constant gunfire, *Velvet Assassin* takes it on a much more personal and individual scale. The potential to create a really interesting war yarn is here, even if this probably isn't a genre-defying masterpiece in the making. **PCZ**

 **pcspecialist.co.uk**

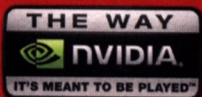


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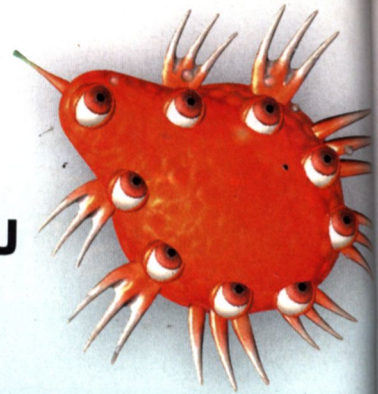
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THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR PCZ-EAU SPORE



Will Porter watches as devious minds are ensnared by the frankly fascinating *Spore Creature Creator*

DEVELOPER Maxis PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.spore.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 193

RECENTLY RELEASED ON the internet – and present on this month's cover DVD – the *Spore Creature Creator* has turned out to be far more intriguing than we ever expected it would.

Just how engaging this utility is has been well commented upon before, with you dragging and dropping mouths, claws, horns, feelers and the like onto the body of your chosen beast. You can put them anywhere, moulding the creature in an amazing number of

ways, while you marvel at just how easy it is to drag out its original silly putty sausage body to your every whim.

What isn't so obvious though is how early the program puts life into your creation. There's no waiting for lightning to strike or an idle Igor to pat on the head. Put a mouth on and the half-formed creature will cough like a newborn or try an experimental whinny, put legs on it and it'll give them a stretch and smile in discovery. Just playing around with this toolset gives you a deep awareness of the countless hours that must have been ploughed into it to make it so simple, so intuitive and so damn slick.

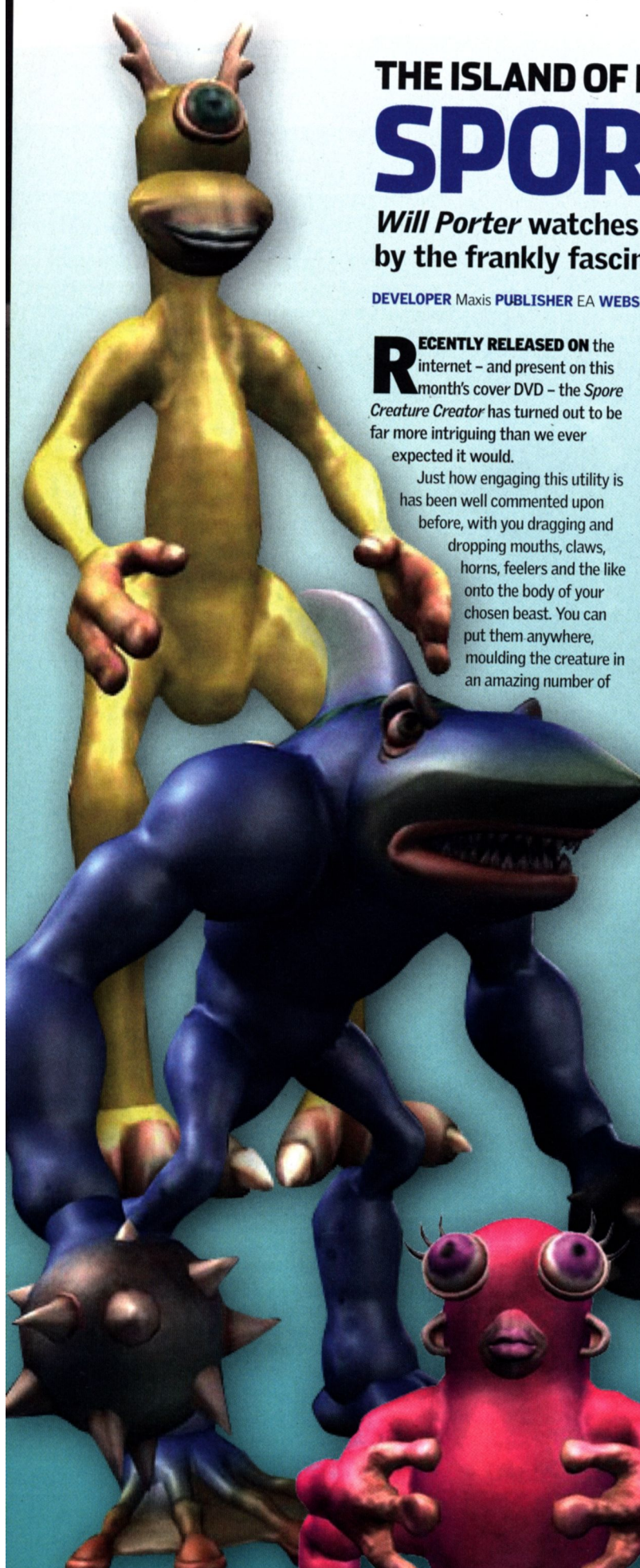
About three-quarters of the appendages and body parts are locked off until you buy the full *Creature Creator*, but you still have the ability to store your creations in your personal

page in EA's Sporepedia (www.spore.com/sporepedia). Here you can also check out the million-plus monsters made by other *Spore* fans.

After the creation process itself there isn't a huge amount to do apart from making your beast dance around, mess about with the colouring or check out what its kids look like – but even this is infused with cutesy magic. When you've got three child-creatures on screen and you order the family to dance, sometimes one toddler turns out to be the thick one – it realises that his kin are halfway through a jig and then joins in out of time.

With a million creations already strutting online as we go to press, any fears that *Spore* was a bit too 'out there' for your average PC user have been quashed. *Spore* is going to make an unearthly amount of moolah. **PCZ**

"Put a mouth on and the half-formed creature will cough like a newborn, put legs on and it'll give them a stretch"





The PC ZONE Menagerie

Read into these what you will

DESIGNATED DEITY: Log

CREATION: Jeff

UNGODLY RESULTS: Jeff started as a crooked spine with a bulbous tip that I think is an egg sac. I put ears on his ovum hutch to encourage pre-natal communication – with his long, elegant neck, Jeff could arc around and whisper encouragement to his precious gut cargo. He has wide, low legs, which are a blessing and a curse – on the one hand, he's stable and an expert limbo dancer. On the downside, he's constantly stubbing his bell-end on rocks. Finally, Jeff is adorned with a number of items from the decorations section. That's because I'm the creationist equivalent of a boy racer, and can't see elegant simplicity without daubing it with hideous reflections of my own taste. If there was a god of gods, I doubt he'd stand for the monstrosity that is Jeff.



DESIGNATED DEITY: Ed Zitron

CREATION: ArgleBargle

UNGODLY RESULTS: My horrible horse-creature at first confused those around me, who were sure that its six legs and back-affixed head would mean it would walk backwards. In fact, it happily walked forward, occasionally scuttling from side to side excitedly, chirping as it went and jiggling its front-feelers. Its two side-opening eyes on its rather scary face may have glared at those who would look at it, but in fact it's a friendly creature, with a big grin and a cheery disposition.

The ArgleBargle is a freak of nature that walks like a beetle yet chirps like a friendly cat, I confidently predict that it will become the pet of the future. He may look like a backwards giraffe with the face of a Boglin, but I love him very much.



DESIGNATED DEITY: Will

CREATION: Giraffhallic O'Beast

UNGODLY RESULTS: I'm not going to lie. My 'thing' was originally of a skin-shaded hue, elongated sausage-wise and then gifted a somewhat bulbous mouthpiece. It was going to be the rudest thing ever, but sadly halfway through my feverish, sweaty design process I remembered that I had two very nice ladies from EA sitting to the left and right of me, who had begun to trade worried glances over the Neanderthal grunting noises I was making.

Knock-knees, a red and yellow hue and leafy sensor antler-fronds were swiftly added to cover up any entrance to my subconscious. Claws, meanwhile, were added to the Giraffhallic O'Beast's derrière to show that while he had been emasculated, he at least remained edgy and hardcore.



AND THE HEAVENS SHALL TREMBLE...

DIABLO III

Ed Zitron can't seem to leave the world on its own for one minute without something going wrong...

THE LOWDOWN

It's a new <i>Diablo</i> game	✓
Purpose-built 3D engine	✓
Single and co-op gameplay	✓
Stronger, more involving story	✓
Who knows when it'll be released	✗

DEVELOPER Blizzard PUBLISHER Blizzard WEBSITE blizzard.com/diablo3

THOUGH EVERY COCKY conspiracy theorist this side of Irvine, California was telling us that this announcement was inevitable, in reality you can only try to predict Blizzard's plans, as their lips remain sealed until the moment when rumour and conjecture become reality.

Diablo III is the real, true-blood sequel to *Diablo II* and its expansion, *Lord of Destruction*. For those who joined the Blizzard fanbase with *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo* is a popular hack 'n' slash series where you slice up hordes of monsters,

gaining experience in a multitude of randomly generated and static dungeons. These games are all about epic, large-scale battles with you (and maybe a pal or two) in the centre, or on top, of a pile of corpses.

Essentially, it's the isometric mega-instance from hell.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

"The core philosophies of this game are based on what we did with the franchise so far, and that's our launching point," explains Brian Morrisroe, self-confessed *Diablo* fanboy and *Diablo III*'s art director. "At the same time, it's been a while since we launched *Lord of Destruction*. The fans are expecting new things, and we're going to give them a fresh, fun experience. Things like the new classes, animated environments, the 3D engine and the new health globe system really freshen up the experience."

Said health globe system replaces piles of potions with glowing red orbs, dropped by slain enemies, that heal you and anyone near you when they're touched. This makes the game

**ETA
WHEN IT'S
DONE**



Monster stubs toe, brings death.



I'm sorry, was he your friend?



Hands up if you've got a hat and aura. Only me? Thought so.

THE STORY SO FAR... DIABLO III

DIABLO
Blizzard releases
Diablo, and Tristram
falls under attack.

1997



DIABLO II
Diablo II is released
and takes the world
by storm.

2000



LORD OF DESTRUCTION
The release of *Diablo II*
expansion causes
rejoicing amongst fans.

2001



DIABLO III
Diablo III is announced
with a guitar solo and
fire dancers.

2008



"Players can bring walls down upon enemies and smack them off bridges. Explosions blow up furniture"

the slog of having to go to town to replenish your stocks of healing potions. The orbs are intended to keep you in the place you want to be – the thick of a gigantic battle.

Another trick Blizzard have up their sleeves is a destructible, animated environment – even if much of the dungeon design will remain as randomly-generated as ever. Players can bring walls down upon enemies and smack them off bridges. Pots shake as you stomp the floor and explosions blow up furniture.

"We're really hoping to push the interactive environments throughout the game as a true tactical motif. It's something we committed ourselves to early on in development, because we wanted to bring them to life and make them a core part of the experience," beams Morrisroe.

DIABLOLICAL

Though details of the story are light on the ground, we do know that it's


been 20 years since the Archangel Tyrael destroyed the corrupted Worldstone at the end of *Lord of Destruction*. This event was supposed to ensure that the forces of Hell were released upon mankind, but this apocalypse didn't pan out.

As nobody has heard from the Archangel since, no-one believes the ramblings of the now-aged Deckard Cain and everything has turned into a somewhat baffling legend. But it's fair to guess that mankind hasn't seen the last of those hellish brutes this time round.

Blizzard's challenge now is to successfully refresh the series without removing what makes it *Diablo*. "Everything we do is about staying true to the franchise. Across the board, we want to keep it old, but bring a new life to it," nods Morrisroe. And like it or not, *Diablo* is a series that has always succeeded in doing the basic hack and slashery well, as proven by the various

pretenders over the years that have lacked the special quality that has made your correspondent play through the single-player campaign of *Diablo II* eight times.

Leaving the interview, Morrisroe and I exchange a final pleasantries, and he notices my shaking hands and glazed expression. He just grins at me and says, "Man, I wish you could play it. If you liked *Diablo II*, you're going to love this."

I certainly think I might. 

Witchdoctor has arrived

Diablo III's first new class

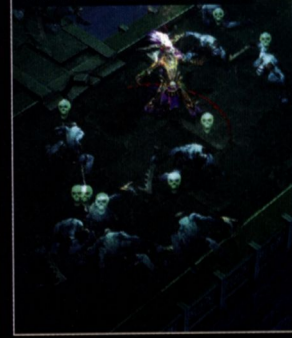
Diablo III's first announced new class is The Witchdoctor (shown off alongside *Diablo II*'s Barbarian), a pet class with a few tricks of its own.

Hopefully different from the annoying bastards from act three of *Diablo II*, they're able to summon weird little creatures that can be detonated at will, or buffed to do a little more damage. You can also raise a gigantic totem pole above your head, terrifying enemies and scattering them across the battlefield. If you're good those fleeing may even collide with another Witchdoctor skill, the Wall of Zombies. Much like *Diablo II*'s Necromancer Bone Wall, you can use it to block any one area with a wall of tearing, clawing undead.

As well as these base abilities, he's able to do your classic damage-over-time moves, as well as make enemies attack each other in a fit of madness, and, of course, blow things up with gigantic fireballs.

How he'll fit in with the similar-ish Necromancer (who I hear is still a part of the game) is not immediately obvious, but we're sure that Blizzard will find a way to define each class with their usual astuteness.

That's right, my precious skulls. Hover over them.



An ideal pet for families with small, edible children.



SPRECHEN SIE KOBOLD?

Jon 'Log' Blyth sees *Sacred 2* at a German RPG convention, and learns the language of fantasy

DEVELOPER Ascaron PUBLISHER Deep Silver WEBSITE www.sacred2.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 189

YOU MAY THINK of yourself as a humble and thankful type – but when was the last time you thanked the unlikely set of universal constants that allow human life? When was the last time you looked at the internet, and thought, "Shit, that's a bit good isn't it?" And, assuming you're not reading a translation, when was the last time you realised how lucky you were to speak English?

I'm at an RPG convention in Munster, Germany, to play *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel*, the sequel to 2004's well-received action RPG. The MMOs are here – *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* and *Age of Conan* jostle for attention, whilst *World of Warcraft* confidently settles for a trading card game stall. Between these stalls, live-action features heavily – solid wooden racks laden with savage looking

weaponry that you can pick up with two fingers and snap over your knee. Let's not talk too much about the paper RPG section, because it's a bleakly unattended affair – but the tabletop gamers fill out their section with a heroic tumble of dice.

Oddly, the newest and most desperate kind of roleplay – *Guitar Hero* – has people playing on a big screen in one corner. Call me an arthritic mid-life fart, but I'd rather pretend to be a bloody wood elf than some bollocky rock star.

I like my fantasy to be completely unattainable, and pretending to be someone who can play the guitar seems scandalously weak. Thus assured of my own superiority, I earlier jumped into the queue to play a round of the closed beta PvP on *Warhammer Online*, and here my linguistic insecurities kicked in. As the queue progressed, I saw an official looking man asking everyone a question. I strained to hear his question, thinking that I could at least isolate a word or

in Europe than in the UK. It had a robust and entertaining combat system, which only rarely succumbed to the fatigue of repetition that the genre is known for. There was plenty of compulsive loot-gathering, quests, and characters; all the things that anyone on a *Diablo*-esque dungeon crawl could have asked for.

Deep Silver clearly earned fantasy cachet with their first game: Germany's seminal speed metal bards are on the convention's main stage. Blind Guardian also recorded the game's theme song, and are – a poster proclaims – a "band of the first hour". The sequel – at least what was on display – looks sumptuous. The most exciting things aren't playable yet; the mounts looked stunning, with nifty combat moves available on each. My eyes were caught by the tiger, who was making a stomp sound.

"Everyone loves the tiger," complains the man showing me the opening levels.

"I'd got 'keine' and 'kleine' mixed up. Instead of saying 'I speak no German', I'd said 'I am speaking, little German'"

two, to prepare an answer. Nothing, not a peep. When he finally asked me the question, I tried to apologise by slowly saying, "Ich spreche kleine Deutsch."

It was a poor effort, in many ways. Gramatically bum, and I'd got my "keine" and "kleine" mixed up, so instead of saying "I speak no German", I'd said "I AM SPEAKING, LITTLE GERMAN". Like a big ignorant troll. How much of this mental process the man noticed, I'm not sure. He instantly switched to English and said "do you want to be the good guys, or the bad guys?" – before handing me a simpleton's lollipop.

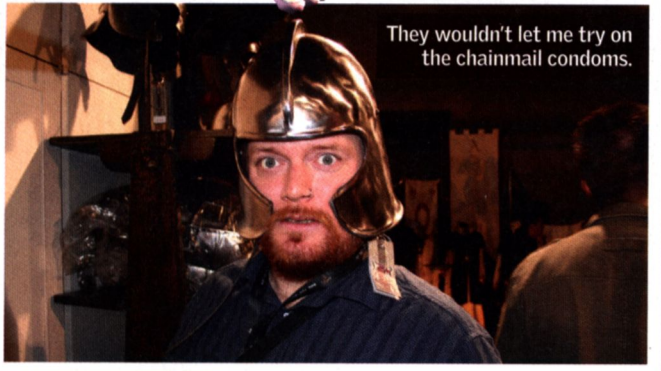
We have the luxury of being understood. This'll all become relevant later, but let's get back to *Sacred 2*. Although well-received by critics, the first was much bigger

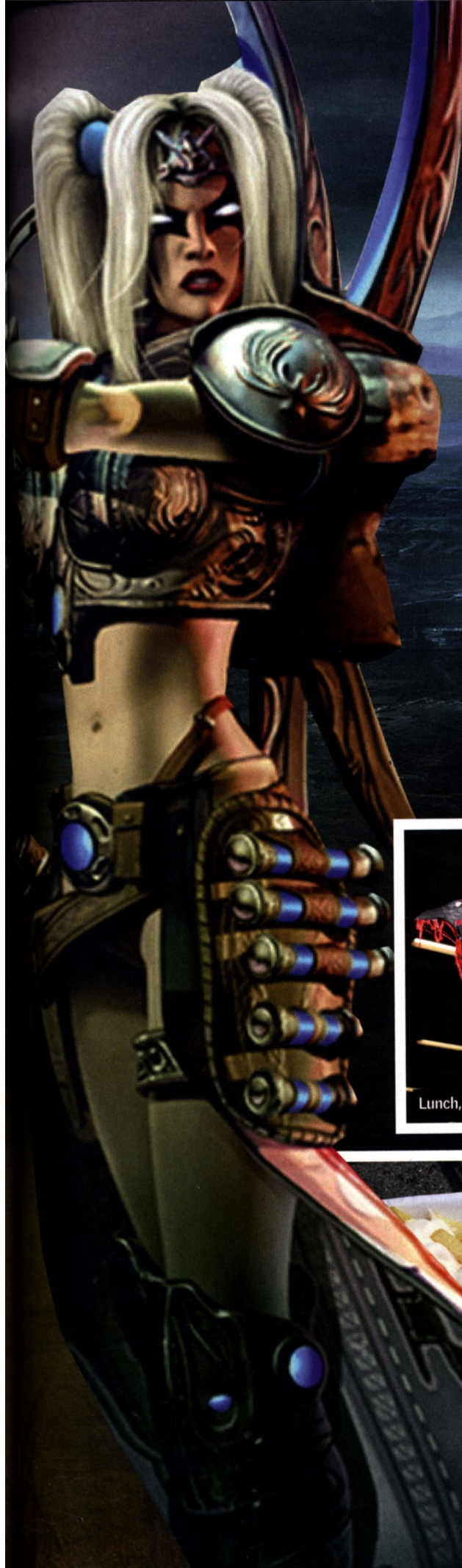
"You shouldn't have made the fur look so nice," I answered – this is some of the shiniest, furriest fur you'll see.

Moreover, the interesting classes of the first game have been built on; the first game had Vampiress and Seraphim, now we have Shadow Knights and the quirky Temple Guardian. The Guardian in particular seems excellent – he was technically under wraps, but from what I could get people to say, he sounds arcane, mechanical and gruesome, and I liked the cut of his gib.

MANY BLESSINGS

Multiplayer was important in the first game – four-player co-op, and 16-man servers – and they're building heavily on that in the sequel; with a dip-in approach that edges the game towards





SNEER AND THERE

It's too easy to judge

The idea of sending me to an RPG convention was that I'd come back with a sneer on my face. What no-one realised is that my allegiances lie with the goblin-snoggers. When I saw a midget dressed in an unconvincing Link costume, I thought "Power to you". Even the anaemic ginger-wigged elf, who was so slappable that people were running at him with palms raised, only brought a "well, different strokes for different folks" from my soul. I might have left these people behind when I put down my 10-sided dice and devoted my life to glamorous adventures and mystery-solving, but by the gods of the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, they're still my people.



"Using my freshly-learned ice spells on a group of spiders, I managed to accidentally kill a fellow adventurer"




The worst part of installing a patio is removing the dude with a sword.




Do my pits need shaving?




Why didn't someone tell me I was on fire?



Might want to take out your ball-gag first.



Our money's on the terrifying rock beast.



an MMO. The point is to make it easy enough to allow quick and fluid link-ups. It'll be released on the Xbox 360 too, so ease of multiplayer connection will be a priority.

One thing the first game wasn't lacking was size and variety. What's on display now are the distinct environments we'd expect, from spider-infested woodlands, to canyons and towns. Importantly, the whole online area is geared to PvP, so using my freshly-learned area-of-effect ice spells on a group of spiders, I managed to accidentally kill a fellow adventurer. A nearby tut caused me to whistle innocently. Well, serves them right for following the evil path.

That's another new feature for *Sacred 2*: you can follow light or dark quest paths, depending on your starting race. This also gives you your PvP factions in multiplayer, and in the single-player, it increases replayability.

WHAT'S THE STORY

This is all encouraging – improvements are definitely being made. However, the main part of the first game that was repeatedly dragged into the garden and duffed up, was the storyline. If you're the kind of person who thought the coolest

thing about *Final Fantasy VII* was realising that the Mimic spell could let you endlessly chain the Knights of the Round summon, then the storyline might not be so important to you. If, however, the moment of Aeris' death was the moment that you knew you had to play this game to the end, just to get your revenge on that bastard – you'll want to some emotional investment in your characters.

And there's something alienating about obviously translated text. Obvious translation is bad translation and it turns characters into caricatures and people into pixels. I met Helga Parmiter, the woman in charge of localising *Sacred 2*. She's a native German, but she married a British soldier and spent a lot of time travelling around England. She's hypnotic to listen to; partly because she's lovely and funny – but also because her voice takes a full tour of Britain in every sentence. She's a Brum, Geordie and Essex girl, wrapped up in a friendly package that you would probably guess is called Helga. And she's dressed as a serving wench.

"This game's script is not just double, it's three times the original game, so it's a massive job," Helga says. She left midwifery to translate games; as a former *EverQuest* hardcore player, she has a long-standing love of fantasy gaming, and a dissatisfaction with the standard of German translations. So, is it a royal pain in the arse to be a German-speaking gamer? In terms of fantasy gaming, yes.

"I pay extra and wait longer for English versions of games. *Diablo* has a terrible German translation. *EverQuest 2*'s was terrible, too." Why does it go wrong, so often?

"The localisation process is the most underestimated part of making a game. A lot of people use agencies – you send a sample text to them, and it goes to someone with a knowledge of video

games and fantasy and it's perfect. The next lot you send might go to someone who's used to writing technical manuals. I mean, I couldn't write such a thing, I wouldn't know where to begin."

That's why Helga's here. Having decided she wanted to translate into English – a language which she says has more scope for creativity in the fantasy world – she rang up Ascaron's Birmingham offices and did her best Lenny Henry impression, to fool them into thinking she was the native Brit asked for in the job description. By the time she came clean, they'd already decided to give her the job.


THIS IS A LOCAL GAME

Another explanation for games having bad translations is the fact that reams of the work can be done in a creatively sterile environment of a spreadsheet.

"You sometimes have words, that are utterly without context," Helga explains, "and sometimes there are four or five possible translations. If you just look in the dictionary and take the first one, it can be completely wrong." This explains phrases like "prices are sinking!" and "band of the first hour."

That's why Helga prefers to translate when she has knowledge of the scene, preferably looking at it – otherwise it's like writing captions for a picture you haven't seen.

Sacred 2 is too far from completion to offer anything other than optimistic enthusiasm. There are dozens of lovely touches that slapped me to attention, and the world and translation have been given loving investment. You simply don't get a tiger's coat that lustrous without caring about attractive tigers. With a translation as tight as Ascaron seem intent on supplying, *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel* stands a much better chance of breaking the into UK consciousness than its predecessor. **PC7**



Skegness Pier, 1985.

DUNGEON HERO

Steve Hogarty delves too greedily and too deep into Firefly Studios' blood-stained adventure

DEVELOPER Firefly Studios PUBLISHER Gamecock
WEBSITE heroherohero.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 185

ETA
SPRING
2009

THE LOWDOWN

- Realistic fantasy
- Graphic novel style storytelling
- Free-roaming city hub
- Combat a bit floaty?
- Not for statistic lovers



See, not totally in a dungeon.

THE STORY SO FAR... FIREFLY STUDIOS

FORMED
Firefly is cut in marble by Simon Bradbury and Eric Ouellette.

1999

GOING STRONG
In *Stronghold* people make castles from rock, but not sand.

2001



AND ANOTHER
Stronghold 2 is released. Castle enthusiasts go crazy.

2005



DUNGEON HERO
One thing's for sure, castle fans will be sorely disappointed.

2009



Welcome to Planklands.
You'll never leave!

FIREFLY STUDIOS DON'T seem overly keen on the word "dungeon". If the title isn't being partially obscured by an arc of blood, or fading into cavernous darkness, or harangued out of a URL through repetition (heroherohero.com), it's being contradicted by the game's setting, which isn't dungeon-based.

"It's not really in a dungeon," muses Simon Bradbury, Firefly's head honcho, "and you're not a hero either. We should've called it *Not Really In A Dungeon Psychopath...*"

DUNGEON FETISH

Having quietly made a name for themselves in the buzzing castle-building RTS niche (selling a cool four million copies of *Stronghold*, they're keen to point out), Firefly are turning their attention to the action RPG genre with *Dungeon Hero*. Ask them to name one thing

they hate about the fantasy genre as it stands, and they'll wheel out the same response with bristling enthusiasm.

"Personally I'm a big fan of *Dungeon Master* on the Atari," reminisces Bradbury, "and then following on from that, *Dungeon Keeper*. But in my mind things have sort of stayed the same since: you go into a room and objects have been plonked in there, it's very Tolkeinesque, there's wolves in that room and a giant spider in this room and two trolls over there. We want to do a game that moves things on."

You only really notice how artificial fantasy is until it's pointed out in these absolute terms, and it's a haunting realisation that'll have you waking up in terror. Just where do goblins shit and what happens to the dismembered corpses you leave behind?

JUDY TRENCH

Dungeon Hero has you in the starring role, a psychopathic anti-hero from the surface, introduced through the insane garblings of one goblin who escaped your wrath long enough to tell his mates about your imminent arrival. Through some unseen masterful diplomacy on the goblins' part, you

Bad goblin! No cuddles!



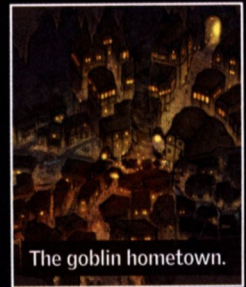
Inner City Living

Dungeon Hero's ever-changing hub brims with life

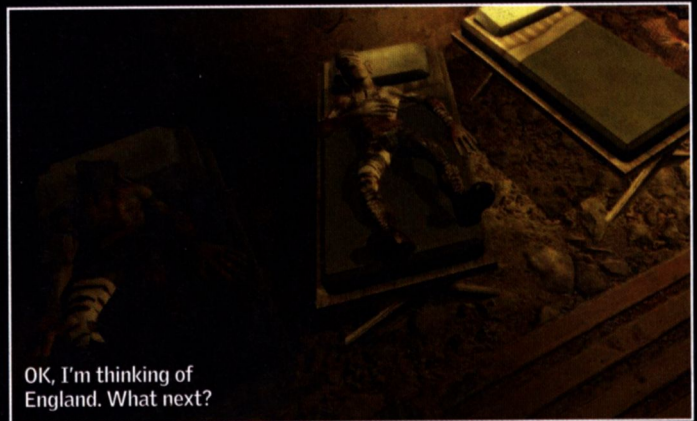
The goblins, though not strictly known for their mining expertise, have dug right down to the infinite abyss of death itself unleashing a torrent of evil.

Acting as a hub, housing NPCs who'll herald your passing by murmuring clues leading to optional quests, or by just outwardly praising your deeds, the city will change as the game goes on.

Larger and larger districts succumb to the encroaching darkness, and what begins as a wisp of noxious gas seeping through a crack in the floor becomes something altogether more sinister until, presumably, the opposing goblin armies will set aside their differences to save their collective homeland.



The goblin hometown.



OK, I'm thinking of England. What next?

become enlisted in a war against the rival goblin clan and it's here, in the goblin trenches bordering no-man's land, that Firefly's presentation begins.

"We've just left the door from the city," explains Bradbury, "this is where the goblins' wounded are and their supplies." The sky is sketched with burning mortar bombs, and along every wall of the trench there's something happening – a unique NPC animation, a few lines of overheard dialogue, a medic sawing through a wounded soldier's leg. "We'll have more NPCs here, we'll have medics with stretchers running along the trenches – just to give it more life."

The goblin pile-ons carted out for our previous peek at this dungeon crawler-stroke-action RPG have been stretchered off to some developer's workdesk in another room, and what I see of the close-quarter combat is a more timid affair. Take a defensive stance when surrounded by enemies and you can counter-attack in four

directions, slamming your shield into a guy's face, or kicking him in the stomach with your tree trunk legs. While this is a visceral style of melee, at this point in development it's not all that weighty with no feeling that blows are connecting with foes – at least not to the degree shown in early gameplay footage, and (a cruel comparison I know), certainly not with *Diablo III's* cinematic aplomb.

And that's potentially a problem for *Dungeon Hero*, as its RPG leanings aren't ready to back up any slack in the combat. There are no tenuous stats to worry about, instead you'll work your way through a skill tree, the combat component of which comprises of new forms of violence. "If you spend your skill points on a headbutt," states Bradbury with pride, "you'll be headbutting goblins in your next fight."

Firefly have got the best part of a year before they put *Dungeon Hero* to bed, so they've got the benefit of the doubt (especially as they're on the cusp of a revelatory new build for E3) – and with a developer so enthusiastic, ambitious, British and so deserving of the adjective 'plucky', we're hoping more than usual that they can follow through on their promises of a realistic dungeon romp, whether it be inside a dungeon or not. **PCZ**



Who'll clean up this mess?

NONE SO BLACK...

THE OBSIDIAN FACTOR

Martin Korda reports on the fall of Black Isle, the rise of Obsidian, the evolution of the RPG and the creation of *Alpha Protocol*



AT ITS PEAK, Black Isle Studios was one of the leading RPG developers on the planet. From its loins sprang a succession of hit games including classics such as *Fallout* and *Planescape: Torment*, as well as the solid *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale* series. In 2003, with a string of hits to its name and *Fallout 3* being developed, the future of the RPG genre rested in the company's palm.

So when Interplay laid off the entire Black Isle team in December 2003, the entire gaming industry was shocked. But you can't keep a good developer down, and having left Black Isle Studios earlier in the year, its founder Feargus Urquhart wasted little time in setting up Obsidian Entertainment.

END OF AN ERA

"Black Isle was doing pretty well and was making a profit for its division at Interplay," recalls Chris Avellone,

Obsidian's creative director and co-owner. "There were other divisions that weren't performing as well and as a result, we kept being asked to deliver games faster and faster with fewer resources. The timelines were just crazy." After so many years of prosperity, the company suddenly found itself reduced to a cash cow, forced to churn out products at increasingly rapid rates, a factor which Avellone believes severely stymied the team's creative juices.

"We were asked to generate a large number of products quickly, but that's not the same as generating satisfying products," he explains. "We were using the Infinity engine again and again, making lots of *Icewind Dale* products. I'm proud of those games and I enjoyed working on them, but we weren't doing anything groundbreaking with them, we weren't pushing the RPG genre. But we felt that *Fallout 3* and *Baldur's Gate 3*

and would be our chance to take the RPG genre forward." But it wasn't to be. Interplay gave up its rights to *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale* licences, a setback that was followed by an even more crushing blow a few months later.

"The management refused to support *Fallout 3* (then known as *Van Buren*) because it believed that a *Fallout* RPG wouldn't sell," says Avellone. "We'd been working on the game for 18 months and had a demo up and running, then they cancelled the project. So Feargus resigned. Once he left it became



Fallout 2 - an instant classic.



Icewind Dale - a crazy name.


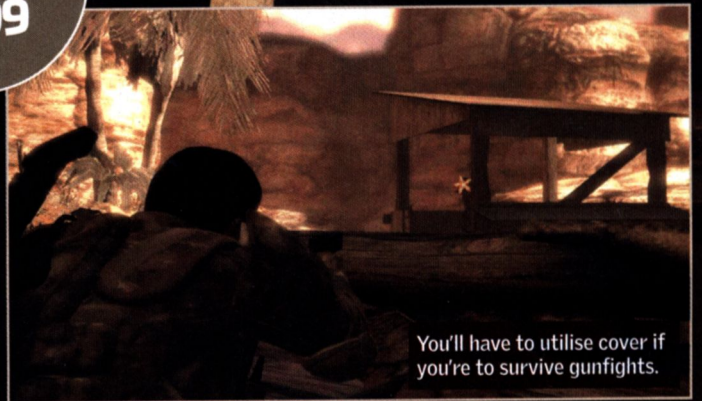


Planescape: Torment - a firm fan favourite.

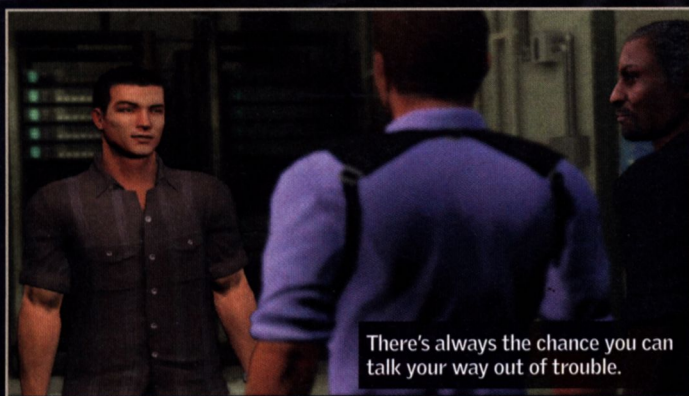
A large, high-quality screenshot from a video game. It features a man with short dark hair, wearing a brown leather jacket over a dark shirt, looking off to the side with a serious expression. A woman with long, vibrant red hair is positioned behind him, her hand resting on his shoulder. The background is a dimly lit, ornate interior with classical architectural details.

**ETA
SPRING
2009**

"Black Isle found itself reduced to a cash cow, forced to churn out products at increasingly rapid rates"

A screenshot from a video game showing a character standing in a stone-walled courtyard. The character is wearing a dark shirt and jeans, holding a handgun. In the foreground, there are several dark, indistinct shapes that could be bodies or equipment. The architecture features large stone arches and walls.

If all else fails, there's always extreme violence.



There's always the chance you can talk your way out of trouble.

Jack of all trades or master of one

What kind of spy will you choose to be?

GUN LOVER

Specialise in armed combat and you'll be able to choose whether you want to master pistols, assault rifles, submachine-guns or shotguns.



HACK NOT SLASH

If you believe that knowledge rather than physical prowess is the key to success, then hacking will be the skill of choice for you.



ACTION MAN

Mirror Jason Bourne's style as you master unarmed combat and the ability to leap from one building to the next in pursuit of your foes.



SHHHHHHHH

If shooting people till they're dead isn't your style, then perhaps you'll be more inclined to master the art of sneaking through the shadows unseen.



clear what a predicament the company was in. It was also like the spine had been ripped out of the team. Then Feargus set up Obsidian and I and a bunch of other people from Black Isle joined him there."

NEW DAWN

And so began a new era for many members of the Black Isle team as they embarked on a quest to return to the principals that had served them well, before the dark days of ridiculously short development cycles stifled their dreams of advancing the genre. Or so went the plan.

After spending several years working on *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II - The Sith Lords* the game was rushed to completion at the publisher's behest and thereby missed out on greatness with a fudged ending. *Neverwinter Nights 2*, meanwhile, was a good outing, yet it was buggy and failed to really hit its stride until its expansion, *Mask of the Betrayer*, arrived.

The hope then is, that with their own game and a more understanding publisher, Obsidian are finally going to be able to get some of that old Black Isle magic out of the bag. The game being *Alpha Protocol*, an RPG that casts you as CIA agent Mike Thorton who's battling to clear his name, and save the world, after a failed mission sees him disowned by the Agency.

"A licence is a blessing and a curse," explains Christopher Parker, executive producer and co-owner of Obsidian. "When we worked on *D&D* games, we were just thinking about how to replicate the *D&D* world and rules.

That's both incredibly confining and incredibly simple to do. You don't have to think about it too much. However, when you're making something new, you're happy that you don't have to worry about implementing certain existing rules like Charm spells in *D&D*. It's also great that you don't have any boundaries constraining you."

For *Alpha Protocol*, Obsidian began with a blank canvas in order to create a new RPG rule set: an open, classless system that will allow you to keep your character creation dynamic and organic throughout the course of the game.

OLD AND NEW

One of the fundamental differences between the Black Isle and Obsidian teams is the injection of new talent brought in to complement existing artists, designers, programmers and writers. This includes several members of the Troika Games team responsible for the flawed RPG masterpiece *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines*.

"Once we'd set up the core team we found that a lot of other people from Black Isle wanted to join us," recalls Avellone. "Then we employed some great people from other companies such as Troika, which was a really talented company that sadly fell foul of the age-old start-up developer problem of getting too focused on one game and not signing a contract to begin the development of another one.

"When we drew in people from other developers, they brought the best practices from their companies and as a result, made Obsidian a better



Assassin's Creed? Is that you?



Tiled subway platforms - a treat for genre fans.

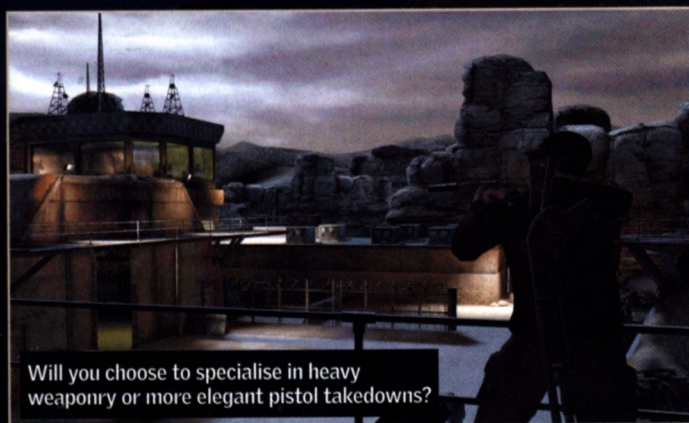


The queue for ice cream was getting ridiculous.

company than Black Isle ever was. We were exposed to lots of new and different ways of creating RPGs."

Perhaps it's partially due to the influence of these new staff members and partially down to Obsidian's desire to push itself into new RPG realms that *Alpha Protocol* is moving away from the stat-based combat of its predecessors, replacing it with real-time gunfights and slugfests where success relies as much on player skill as on character stats.

"The hope then is that Obsidian are finally going to be able to get some of the Black Isle magic out of the bag"



Will you choose to specialise in heavy weaponry or more elegant pistol takedowns?

Borrowing heavily from the tactical mechanics of *Gears of War* and *Rainbow Six: Vegas* (where using cover is an essential component in the action), *Alpha Protocol's* combat is shaping up to be far more involved than previous Obsidian RPGs.

By adopting this real-time approach Obsidian has cracked open a whole new set of possibilities, such as the ability to zip line into the heart of a Middle-Eastern enemy's base then open fire

on a small army of terrorists while darting from one point of cover to the next tossing grenades into their bunkers, or chase foes, *Assassin's Creed*-style, over the rooftops of Rome – before strapping them to a seatless chair and pummelling their undercarriage with knotted rope until they spill the information you require to complete the next stage of your quest. Well, maybe not that last part, but you get the idea.

ACT AND REACT

Alpha Protocol's set pieces are certainly shaping up nicely, and the ability to control your character in real time in every situation promises to give you far more control over the way you approach each and every mission. The key here is Reactivity, a system which Obsidian believes will allow you to approach every situation in a myriad of ways, with your choices dynamically forging Mike Thorton into the spy of your choice.

"In most RPGs you complete a quest for a NPC, pick up your reward and then you repeat the process over and over again," explains Parker. "We want to take that a step further, which is where Reactivity comes in. Reactivity is caused by how you



Bringing then into the now

Obsidian brings fantasy RPG elements into a modern setting

For all of its contemporary spy themes, high-tech gadgets, weapons and reactive gameplay mechanics, *Alpha Protocol* is still a good old fashioned RPG at heart. Despite these modern-day themes and technologies, Obsidian are determined to include all of the staple elements that made its past RPGs such as a success, such as the ability to customise Mike's physical appearance before the game begins and allocate Advancement Points to 10 different skill sets, which you'll develop throughout the course of the game. Loot is also set to receive a modern-day makeover, with electronic safes replacing the padlocked chests of yore. Collect enough money and you'll be able to buy a wide variety of weapons and armour types from arms dealers – aka the blacksmiths of the 21st century.



Alpha Protocol is an RPG, but it won't have plate mail.

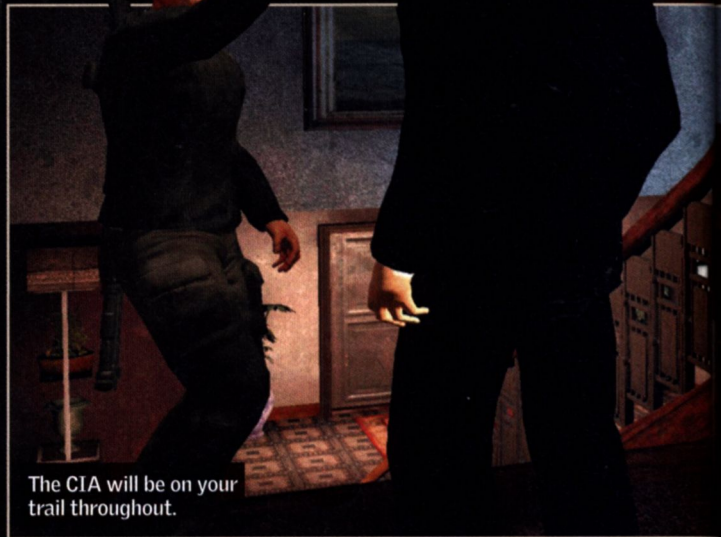
approach each mission, who you talk to, how you talk to them and what intelligence you gather."

One example of how this system will work will be when you're faced with an enemy you can either kill, arrest, or accept a bribe from. "If you kill him you'll be able to take his stuff, but if you accept his bribe, you'll be able to use him throughout the story to buy new items that you wouldn't have access to otherwise," reveals Parker. "If you arrest him, you'll get all of the brownie points for doing what you were supposed to

do, as well as helping yourself in future missions by using information that he provides. It's completely up to you.

"But while each outcome will be different, we're being very careful never to penalise the player for the choices you make. We want to make sure that your choices simply change the way the game reacts to you and the paths it leads you down."

Reactivity will play a major role in the way you approach each mission. Arm yourself with a silenced pistol and creep your way around an office block in order to gain access to its computer files and you'll find Mike turning into a master of infiltration, a spy who can slink in shadows unseen. However, opt to arm yourself with an assault rifle and bulldoze your way through each level, and Mike grows into a hardened killer



The CIA will be on your trail throughout.

"Alpha Protocol is starting to look as though it could be the game that Obsidian have been dreaming of"

with a penchant for mass destruction and the subtlety of a bulldozer in a library.

TALK TO ME

Reactivity will also play a major role in how you speak to NPCs, with the game using a dialogue system conceived during the Black Isle days.

"A lot of the approaches that we have for Reactivity and building dialogue tools are modelled on what we did at Black Isle," reveals Avellone. "We wanted to build a real sense of reactivity for the conversations in *Alpha Protocol*."

What this ostensibly boils down to is a time-limit based response system, which gives you just seconds in which to choose the manner of your reply.

"We're trying to create tension by only giving you a limited amount of time to select a dialogue option and only one chance to do so," explains Parker. "Our

dialogue stance system allows you to choose the style of your response, but we're also making sure that there are no wrong answers, only very different types of consequences. If you choose to play the entire game as a suave spy, you'll get different rewards than if you are aggressive.

"Most people will try to tune how they speak to different characters, and there'll be rewards for this style of play too."

Opt to be professional and you'll come across as aloof and focused only on the mission in hand. However, choose to respond aggressively and you'll be shamelessly flirting with anything in a skirt and making condescending comments to male NPCs in no time. You'll also be able to opt for a suave approach to dialogue responses (a bit like pre-Daniel Craig James Bond) while

Somewhere to lay your head

Stock up and get connected in a worldwide network of safe houses

Even a renegade spy needs somewhere to rest up and call home, and in this department, Mike Thorton will be spoiled for choice. Dotted around the world will be a collection of safe houses set up by renegade CIA agents who've also been disowned by the agency. In fact, *The Alpha Protocol* is a procedure whereby a rogue spy can join this network and use its resources.

Inside these high-tech hideouts you'll find a cornucopia of resources that will help you prepare for your forthcoming mission. A well-stocked armoury will allow you to kit yourself up with upgradeable weapons, with upgrades ranging from Critical Hit boosts to improved rates of fire. What's more, safe houses will also allow you to email or phone your contacts in order to set up meetings and watch news reports that provide feedback on your most recent mission.



Safe houses will act as hubs between missions.





And now... Asia.

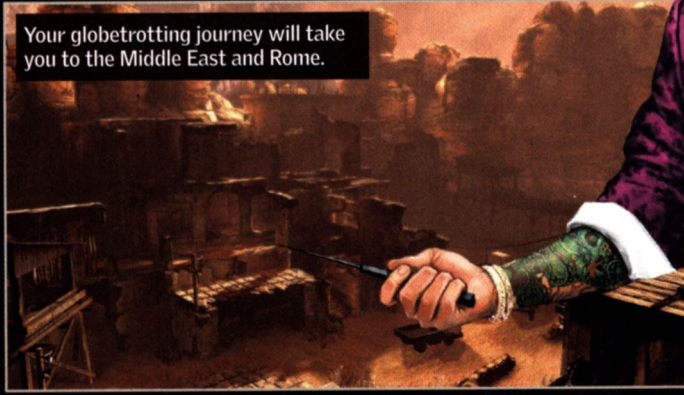
certain situations will throw up a fourth option, such as pulling out your gun and doing your best Dirty Harry impression.

ON AND UPWARDS

With a host of new gaming mechanics, a new rule set and a skill system broken down into 10 key categories ranging from weapon proficiency to stealth and hacking skills, *Alpha Protocol* is starting to look as though it could be the game that the Obsidian team has been dreaming of making for years.

"When we set up Obsidian we were slightly differently focused compared to when we were at Black Isle," says Avellone. "We knew what RPGs we wanted to make and we wanted to get away from all the constraints, like having to use an existing engine, and only having a few months to develop the game. We've been given the chance to do that with *Alpha Protocol*."

Having been thwarted in its attempts to create a groundbreaking



Your globetrotting journey will take you to the Middle East and Rome.

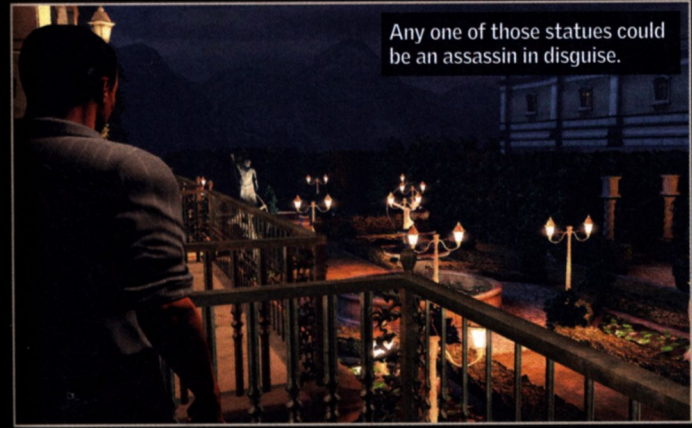
RPG that would take the genre to new heights by the constraints imposed on it during the last few years of Black Isle, and having been forced to watch as the likes of BioWare and Bethesda establish themselves as leaders in the RPG market, the Obsidian team has a chance to prove they can compete with the big boys.

"With *Alpha Protocol*, we want to build an RPG which is a lot like the

Baldur's Gate 3 and *Fallout 3* that we were envisioning while we were at Black Isle," says Avellone. "We want to try and push the genre forward and make good RPGs."

"When we were at Black Isle, it was so demoralising having to do the same thing over and over again. If we were lucky we were able to develop a new system for a game, but it wasn't really what we wanted to do. That's why we formed Obsidian - to create the RPGs we wanted to make at the level we wanted to make them."

Looking promising with a year of development time still remaining, *Alpha Protocol* may just be that RPG. After all the trials and tribulations that this team has had to endure, here's hoping it is... 



Any one of those statues could be an assassin in disguise.

WHERE THE WIND BLOWS...

FALLOUT

3

Will Porter sits on Bethesda's doorstep gnawing an iguana-on-a-stick in a threatening manner while they decide whether or not to let him in...

DEVELOPER Bethesda PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com

I INTENDED, UPON leaving Vault 101, to strike out west in true pioneer spirit. To begin with, I wasn't interested in Megaton and I wasn't interested in hunting down my errant father – I just wanted to push *Fallout 3* as far as it would go. Sadly west wasn't on the menu (Vault 101 backs onto a mountain) so with the less catchy epithet of "Go north-east, young man" ringing in my ears I set off on a post-nuclear hike to see what I could see.

An hour later I was standing on a jut of highway sticking its nose over the lip of a nearby hill, a bombed-out town in the Bethesda district of Washington DC. I'd come up to peek inside a truck balanced precariously over a 50 metre drop, but stopped to admire the view. To the south the half-dried up Potomac River meandered past the remnants of the capital, where I could just make out the Washington Monument. Everything was brooding under an atomic sky while cheery '50s music discussing the prospect of "seeing my sweetheart again" was piped from my wrist-mounted Pip-Boy. In my entire five hours of playing *Fallout 3*, this was the highlight.

You see, my first reaction to playing *Fallout 3* was how empty it felt. There are wandering monsters and pockets of Raiders here and there – but the feeling of stalking through a barren wasteland is like no other.

Bereft of the immersion-sapping load times of *STALKER* when moving between zones and the near-constant wolf and bandit attacks of *Oblivion*, this game is draped with a feeling of solitude. Sure, the tranquillity of my Route 355 vantage point would soon be lost when my attempt to negotiate the descent resulted in a 50 metre fall but, in its early stages at least, *Fallout 3* does have that vital feeling of being alone on a brutal and vast frontier.

POWER OF THE ATOM

Of course, this chance to capture some me-time has to be balanced with the frequency at which you could be blowing dogs' heads off and seeing their brains rolling around. As such, even in the wilderness, violence is never all that far away. Cleverly, your UI's compass marks out areas of interest but never gives a clue as to what they are, nor how far away they

ETA
AUTUMN
2008



THE LOWDOWN

As open as you like	✓
Desolate and beautiful	✓
Dialogue and voice-acting better than <i>Oblivion</i>	✓
V.A.T.S. combat great fun	✓
Occasional immersion breaker	✗







Springvale. Population: You.



No-one did cheery propaganda like the '50s.



lie. You simply know that if you keep on walking in a certain direction at some point you will find something, maybe hidden, that will be entertaining.

Obviously you are not alone. Slavers roam the wastes recruiting strays, Super Mutants wage war with human forces, ostracised sentient ghouls live in an area of Washington known as Underworld and the unorganised Raiders occupy many of the wrecked buildings you come across. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood of Steel – they of big guns and power armour – return as the world's Knights Templar, forever at odds with the ruling faction, the Enclave.

Last seen at the close of *Fallout 2* when their oil rig HQ blew up consigning them to the watery depths, 36 years on the Enclave's political powergrubbers are very much part of the firmament. With the Washington landscape to play

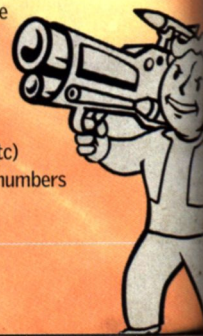
with, Bethesda clearly couldn't resist having the faux-American government return – now led by President John Henry Eden, ably voiced by Malcolm McDowell. Eden's voice resonates through the wasteland much as Wallace Breen's did through City 17, whether on a looped Enclave radio station or through propaganda-delivering eye-bots that roam the barren landscape. His stern barks and calls for Enclave-led unity are punctuated by teeth-grinding patriotic music, leaving no doubt as to who the antagonist of the piece is.

With Eden operating out of a mysterious HQ and the Brotherhood of Steel making their home in the remains of the Pentagon, the DC landscape is going to get fairly bloody.

BRASS TACKS

Is *Fallout 3* *Oblivion* with guns? No, not really. While it's true that when you enter houses and watch people go about their business it instantly smacks of the last rendition of *The Elder Scrolls*, it seems that the old *Fallout* sensibilities and mannerisms are here as foundation not lip gloss.

Character S.P.E.C.I.A.L. stats (luck, perception, etc) return as the base numbers



THE STORY SO FAR...
THE FALLOUT SERIES

Fallout
The vault dweller searched for water. And saved the world.

1996



Fallout 2
The dweller's scion searched for a CECK. And saved the world.

2001

Fallout Tactics
The Brotherhood of Steel didn't search, but did save the world.

2005



Fallout 3
As well as searching for your dad, chances are you save the world.

2008

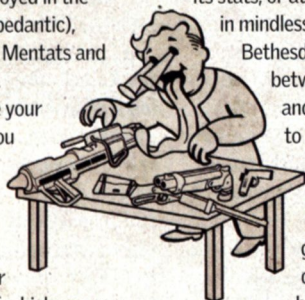


The falling baseball bat suggests this was not a fair fight.

"It's hard to think of how *Fallout 3* could have been tied closer to what has gone before"

for your character, for example. These can be boosted and drained by the full host of addictive stimulants present in the first games, such as strength-harboring Buffout, the more traditional narcotic of Jet (the factory for which was technically destroyed in the earlier games, if I'm pedantic), intelligence-boosting Mentats and rage-infusing Psycho.

On top of these lie your skills (the numbers you can raise each time you level up, making you better at bartering, small guns, medicine, repair and the like), three of which you can specialise in and gain double the advance when it's gratz-time. While we're on levelling, it's important to underline that *Fallout* does address one of *Oblivion's* biggest foibles: the fact that as you levelled up, the entire world levelled up with you. In the wasteland, as in the original *Fallout* games, the further you stray the more dangerous things get – as I discovered during my lonesome trudge into the glorious north-east and was increasingly battered by



the mole rats, bloatflies and Raider bases I came across. However, enemies that lie along the plotline will be levelled to match you so that the difficulty curve is kept to Bethesda's heel.

Whereas *Oblivion* hid away many of its stats, or at least let you batter away in mindless ignorance, in *Fallout* Bethesda have pulled the link between player experience and player statistics closer to Black Isle's model.

As in the original games, your skill specialisations not only give you options in conversation (my medical bent would later lead a doctor to confide a patient's medical history to me, for example), or show themselves concretely in percentage strike-probabilities during V.A.T.S. combat, but are integral to your performance – such as when I disarmed the century-old nuclear device threatening the town of Megaton, having guzzled Mentats to make me extra brainy.

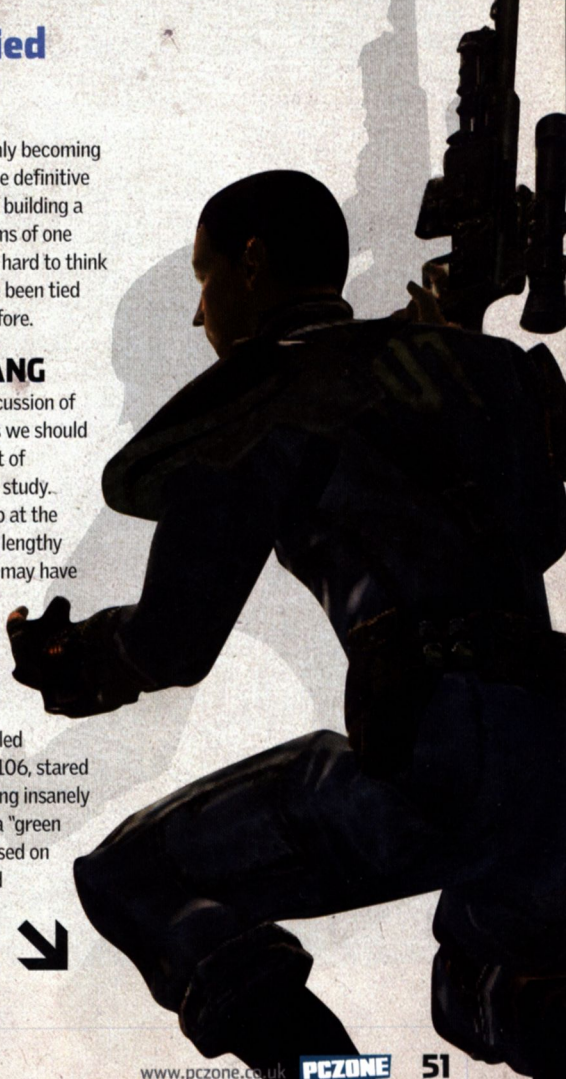
Having played the game for only five hours, and with many of the hang-ups

people had with *Oblivion* only becoming apparent after 50, I can't be definitive about this – but in terms of building a modern game on the systems of one that's now 10 years old, it's hard to think of how *Fallout 3* could have been tied closer to what has gone before.

CRAZY WOLFGANG

Before launching into a discussion of *Fallout 3's* combat, perhaps we should take on an isolated moment of mindless violence as a case study.

When I finally rocked up at the gates of Megaton after my lengthy sojourn in the north-east, I may have seen a lot but I wasn't the most tooled-up road warrior the apocalypse had ever seen. In my journey so far I had come across the rusted, water-filled underground hulk of Vault 106, stared at a bearded trader jabbering insanely about "the great one" and a "green mountain" before he collapsed on the spot, and I had ferretted around a burnt-out school shooting punks and collecting charred books.



Fallout Miscellanea

Other exciting things that happened on my holidays in an apocalyptic nuclear horror-show



- You can wait at a location for a specified amount of hours as you can in *Oblivion*, but this time you see time spinning past with everything getting lighter or darker, rather than staring at a blank load screen.
- I met a ghoul who wanted help making an new narcotic called Ultra Jet.
- Lockpicking works through a fun minigame in which you search for the sweet spot in a lock with a hairpin and a screwdriver (hairpins being the equivalent of *Oblivion*'s lockpicks). This demands more skill than *Oblivion*'s variant, works well with keyboard and mouse, and can be bypassed, but you risk breaking the lock forever if you try to force it.
- The noise of the Pip-Boy turning on is the same as the sound played when combat ended in the original *Fallout* games.
- You can find Stealthboys to make you go invisible. In general, stealth movement is far, far better than what was in *Oblivion*.
- The Rock-it launcher lets you lob everything and everything in your inventory at the enemy. Game director Todd Howard claims he once took a Super Mutant's head off with a teddy bear.
- There are prostitutes in the game, and I paid 120 caps to sleep in the same bed as one. Either I slept right through it, or you don't get to see anything.
- The Megaton sheriff's son looks just like Gary Coleman.
- There's a reference to *Family Guy* in one of the Vault Boy posters, featuring someone who looks much like Herbert, *Family Guy*'s paedophile.
- *Fallout 3* is far better optimised for PC play than *Oblivion* was. Map screens, inventories and keyboard control don't feel 360-fied in the slightest.
- At one point I accidentally drank brown toilet water assuming I was going to urinate.



Either he's got a big ribcage, or he's lost weight.



Hanging corpses indicate dangerous areas. And smelly ones.

"I have never had so much fun with a first-person roleplay system"

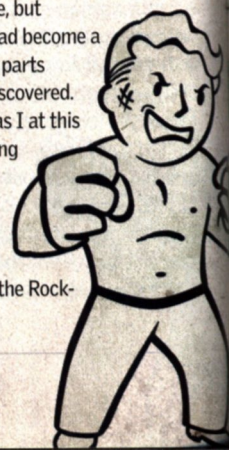
What I certainly didn't have was many decent armaments apart from a purloined sniper rifle with no ammo, a crap hunting rifle, a dodgy Chinese pistol and a machine-gun that was gradually breaking down, becoming increasingly ineffective. At this point I didn't know I could cannibalise parts from weapons I picked up and use my repair skills to fix my guns. I had been, what we call in the business, somewhat of a noob.

So it was with great joy, then, that I met Crazy Wolfgang and his Travelling Junk Store – a man willing to barter with me for a shotgun (one of my favourite *Fallout* weapons). *Fallout 3* runs on a similar cash/trade system to the previous games, meaning that on top of the currency of bottle caps you can throw your possessions into the bargain. Sadly, my ploy of wandering around radioactive Washington poking things hadn't been all that lucrative so far – and I can only imagine that outside of the bartering screen my offerings of pool cues, burnt books and pistol ammo

was roundly sneered at by Herr Wolfgang. It was at this point that I decided to kill him with a grenade.

I watched Wolfgang and his guard wander off, away from the guarded gates of Megaton. I then chased after them, stuck myself in sneak/crouch mode, approached the German-monickered rag-and-bone man from the rear and performed a good old-fashioned pickpocket. Rather than pick stuff, and undoubtedly get caught, I slipped an armed grenade into his trousers and backed off. Wolfgang turned towards me and frantically began to slap at his legs to find the offending article, but unfortunately had become a shower of body parts before it was discovered.

So happy was I at this event that, having rushed forward and taken his shotgun, stimpacks and schematics for the Rock-





The skeletons of the Jetsons lie within.



it launcher I forgot about his companion, who fired his rifle from point-blank range at my head – causing a critical, blurring my vision and leaving me near death.

I staggered behind a rock, got out my handy Pip-Boy PDA, injected several stimpaks straight into my head and knocked back a bottle of Nuka-Cola Quantum to raise my number of action points. Then I reappeared – entered the V.A.T.S. combat system and discovered that my skills allowed for enough points to enable two blasts to the guard's head, each with a 43% chance of hitting due to his proximity. As it turned out, I only needed one. His headless corpse fell to the ground in slow-motion.

Of course, I could have not bothered with V.A.T.S. – and just aimed for the head without any of the precision or pause in action. But the truth is that the V.A.T.S. system is way, way more fun – letting you feel tactical power when shooting off a giant ant's antennae so that it goes crazy, getting a critical in a feral ghouls leg to cripple it and slow it down, or firing into a Raider's noggin at point-blank range.

BYE CRAZY WOLFGANG

Clearly, all this can happen outside of the system but non-V.A.T.S. combat in *Fallout* doesn't have the clean precision of shooting a weapon in your standard FPS. How could it though, when so many

stats and probabilities are factored into your shot? The nature of the game means that this was never going to be *Operation Flashpoint* – and the fact is that I have never had so much fun with a first-person roleplay system: it's better than *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*, it's better than *Oblivion*, I will even go as far as saying (with the caveat that I haven't played enough stealth combat in *Fallout 3*) that it's better than *Deus Ex*.

V.A.T.S. combat is so gritty, so weighty and so endearingly brutal (just wait until you put three pistol bullets into the temple of a leaping mole rat just before it lacerates your chest with its prominent



UPFRONTHANDS-ON

Amazingly, the Washington DC murder rate is just as bad in 2277.



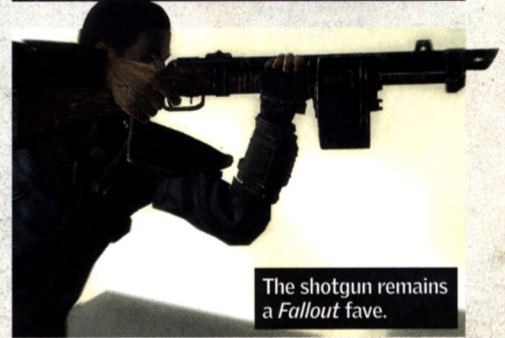
Hunting varmints. *Fallout* style.



Raiders: better than *Crystal Skull*.



Good old traditional S.P.E.C.I.A.L.



The shotgun remains a *Fallout* fave.



"Look upon my works ye mighty, and despair."

Gnipper-style tooth) that you often can't wait to fire it back up again.

I do have a concern that the magic spinny-aroundy camera tricks the game pulls when shots are fired might interrupt the flow of battle (which still rages on around you in slow-motion) but otherwise it's great, great fun.

GO HERE NOW

Those expecting a succession of run-of-the-mill 'go here, fight these men or monsters, kill this particular man or monster, bring something back' *Oblivion*-type missions may well be in for a pleasant surprise too. *Fallout 3*'s missions – perhaps with thought being given to the originals' over-arching quests like "find the water chip" – are more long-running and convoluted than in Bethesda's previous works.

One character in Megaton (the first hub town you're directed to, whose interior is like some multi-layered, nightmare vision of the Swiss

Family Robinson's treehouse) wants you to find her family, and points you in the general direction of far distant Arefu. Once there, before you know it, that same quest has morphed into a tale of a local populace beset by a group of Brahmin-killers called The Family, and the missing characters are revealed to be in any one of three locations, so you're off on a chain of subquests that could take hours to complete.

To add subtlety and texture, meanwhile, smaller quests aren't flagged up in your Pip-Boy. Leo Stahl, son of a local family who own one of the two Megaton bars has a drug problem and hangs around the water treatment plant at night snorting Jet – as you discover either through sharing an affinity with medicine with the local doctor, or by hacking into the Stahls' computer at night and reading their personal logs, while simultaneously opening up their safe and stealing all their worldly goods. Then, when found, you can gabble at him that you're a drug fiend





An EMP blast would probably be best when dismantling this chap.

too and you want to buy off him, or you can very patiently explain how his vices are upsetting his family and persuade him to give up his nighttime pursuits. And incidentally why doesn't he just give you the key to his stash for safe-keeping and/or destruction?

The dialogue and voice-acting throughout seems fine – good even. You shouldn't go in expecting the reams and reams of dialogue that could present itself in *Fallout* of old, but you should expect the same variation, number of replies and tone. Can I vouch for it being better, worse or "Argh! So much worse!" than the old games? No, as I haven't met enough people or delved deep enough into their characters (sorry, nma-fallout.com) but I can scientifically state that both acting and dialogue are at least a bazillion times better than *Oblivion's*. They can put that one on the posters.

Although there's a woman called Moira who sends you off to research her book by stealing food from the Super Duper Mart and disarming mines who does sound a mite irritating.

Fears then? Well enemy battle chatter in the build I played was a bit duff, but is apparently up for a spot of re-recording, and you do have to suspend disbelief from the rooftops to believe the fact that no bugger had fixed an armed nuclear bomb in the century or so before a spunky 19 year-old and a packet of Mentats appeared on the scene.

DESOLATE FUTURE

My biggest raised eyebrow probably swings around the token of appreciation given to you by the Megaton populace if you decide to save their necks. You essentially get a house, complete with Wadsworth the robot butler who can cut your hair and a place to store your foraged Vault Boy miniatures. You can then customise said shack in a variety of different styles through the

local store – with themes like Raider, Science, Pre-war and Love Machine to choose from. To me, this seems incongruous to the post-apocalyptic setting – it may have worked in the prosperous boroughs of Cyrodill, but you honestly feel that in *Fallout* you shouldn't be able to order in much more than a rusty bucket and a blanket.

Away from all the technical combat palaver and the frothing one-way debates over authenticity though, my enduring memory of *Fallout 3* is simply exploring the wasteland. Just standing atop a muddy-brown peak, flipping between radio signals – perhaps Galaxy News reporting the latest on my endeavours before playing catchy '50s music or endlessly cycling haunting transmissions from long-dead triumphant conquerors or desperate survivors. This is a very different game, a very special game, and one I simply cannot wait to contaminate myself with come Autumn. **PC57**



Fallout: The Expert's View

A proper academic-type on the inspirations of *Fallout*



Fallout's vision of the future is a mix of stark, post-apocalyptic reality infused with the more optimistic elements of a '50s sci-fi – like atomic cars and the cheery *Jetsons*-esque antics of Vault Boy. To get a clearer understanding we spoke to Professor Cyndy Hendershot, author of the book *Paranoia, the Bomb, and 1950s Science Fiction Films*, to give us nuclear-savvy next-century Brits a reason to chuckle at just how daft the Yanks used to be.

Q Can you explain '50s America's fascination with nuclear energy? How did it infect the national psyche?

A Americans have such a very strange reaction to the bomb. In one direction, complete and utter fear – that would lead to people constructing fallout shelters and believing the world was going to end any moment. And in another direction, the complete glamourisation of it, where you have rock 'n' roll songs such as *Atomic Love*, and children getting atomic-powered rings in their cereal boxes.



FALLOUT SHELTER

IN BASEMENT

In *Fallout*, people live in vast, sealed underground vaults, constructed during a time of paranoia over Communism before the bombs began to drop. Were any community-sized bomb shelters actually built?

Yes, but they were constructed in the early '60s. President Kennedy had this mandate to build vast networks of fallout shelters. The most famous is The Greenbrier in West Virginia (a shelter built under a luxury hotel) that was built for Congress to survive in.



"Stop children, what's that sound..."

The Greenbrier is a vast underground vault intended to be used in case of nuclear attack, and it wasn't known about by the general public until the early '90s when it was finally declassified.

When did people realise that nuclear energy had drawbacks? Were the real after-effects well known?

Not really, there was a great deal of naivety.

For example, after the Trinity tests in New Mexico [the first above-ground test detonations of nuclear weapons], the glass-like substance that was formed in the explosion – Trinitite – would be sold at gift stores so people would be basically wearing a radioactive necklace. The general public was ignorant, but I think the scientists definitely knew the repercussions.

One of the reasons that people in the '40s weren't aware of the dangers, is that the government banned any publication of images showing the victims of the nuclear bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so it wasn't until the mid-'50s that Americans got to see any photos.

Were there any nuclear-powered cars actually in the thoughts of vehicle manufacturers?

Absolutely. If you look at articles in popular magazines, especially in the late '40s, people envisioned this world where you'd have atomic cars, atomic ships and atomic planes. Also, there's a utopianism attached to it, in the sense that people would say "Hey, maybe we won't have to work or pay taxes any more because we'll have all

this free nuclear power!" So, initially there's this idealism, that then that turns very quickly into fear.

Why has the sci-fi imagery of the '50s left such a mark on popular culture?

I think because it is heralding the beginning of the atomic age, an enormous event in human history – everything changed after the invention of the bomb.

Also, I think the way they looked at these issues, creating ridiculous scenarios, means there's something charming about their naivety. Just the very notion of Duck and Cover, that you can actually survive a nuclear war, which, thinking realistically, would be impossible.

Americans in the '50s, with the propaganda they were getting, did believe they would be fine – you'd just go in your fallout shelter, stay in there for a couple of weeks, come out, and everything would be just like it was when you went in.

The Greenbrier hotel conceals a fallout shelter.



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PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the games

Lucky bag

WELL, I'LL SAY this, and you can read it if you like: it's been a weird old month for PC games. Who'd have thought that 16 years would have transformed a DOS classic into a stultifying, mediocre bag of toss? And who would have believed that an unashamedly console game would have ported so enjoyably to the PC? This is all unexpected – especially with out-of-nowhere *Crazy Machines 2* bumping up the average score.

On the other hand, there's a lot of City Interactive games this month. We didn't even review all the ones they sent us, and won't unless there's a shocking jump in quality. When a single publisher shows itself capable of churning out such a high quantity of shit, sometimes you have to put on a nose peg and carry on like you're not up to your shins in it. However, they do throw relief onto the range of worthwhile mid-range titles that are worth sniffing out.

As for *Supreme Ruler 2020*, we had a problem with our copy that needed sorting, so the full verdict will have to wait until next month.

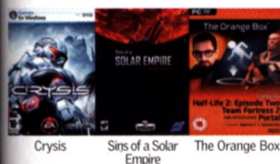
Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, reviews editor

Must Buys!



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



60

ALONE IN THE DARK

The self-contained episodic horror game didn't turn heads and stomachs, so much as fall undead on its arse

The PC ZONE Awards

 CLASSIC (90%+) Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.	 RECOMMENDED (75-89%) Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?	 DUMP (0-19%) PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.
AND THE REST		
 ONLINE ONLY Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.	 EXPANSION PACK See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.	 ON THE DVD Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

ALSO REVIEWED

- 64 **DEVIL MAY CRY 4**
Absurd console action from Capcom.
- 68 **GUMBOY TOURNAMENT**
The indie multiplayer sequel.
- 69 **BEAUTY FACTORY**
Get your oxymorons, right here.
- 69 **TERRORIST TAKEDOWN: CONFLICT IN MOGADISHU**
Mogadogadishy-fishy woo-woo.
- 70 **CHAOS THEORY**
- 71 **FLATOUT: ULTIMATE CARNAGE**
- 72 **STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME**
- 73 **THE SIMS 2: IKEA HOME STUFF**
- 74 **CRAZY MACHINE 2**
- 75 **DRACULA: ORIGIN**
- 76 **ROOGOO**
- 77 **THE EARLY DAYS OF FLIGHT**
- 77 **BELIEF & BETRAYAL**
- 78 **DREAMLORDS: THE REAWAKENING**
- 79 **THE AMAZING BRAIN TRAIN**
- 80 **BUDGET**
- 82 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

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.

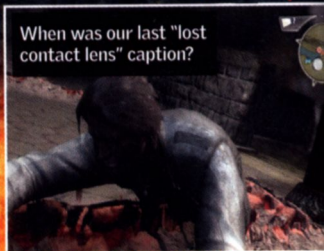


PCZONE SWEARS...

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



Classic peril.



ALONE IN THE DARK

Jamie Sefton goes brooding and introspective, for all the wrong reasons

DEVELOPER Eden Games
 PUBLISHER Atari
 WEBSITE centraldark.com
 ETA Out now
 PRICE £29.99



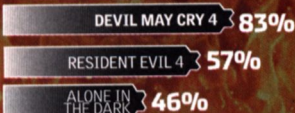
Hand to wire co-ordination.

AT A GLANCE...

Ambitious action-horror game whose innovations are hampered by terrible controls, dull enemies, infuriating driving and unsatisfying combat.

Minimum system requirements: 2.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card. An internet connection is needed to validate game.

HOW IT STACKS



IN MANY WAYS, I should be grateful to *Alone In The Dark*. Over the past few days of playing this horror action-adventure, it's forced me on innumerable occasions to go back and re-examine exactly why I play games. What is the point of this magnificent hobby? Why do we keep coming back for more? The simple answer is that no other medium gives you as much fun. We play games because they're the best form of entertainment on the planet.

Lofty assertions aside, I can now explain why I'm emotionally and physically battered and bruised from hitting my fists on the desk, grinding my teeth, screaming at the screen and haranguing poor Will Porter about my pained experiences - *AITD*, for vast amounts of time, just isn't fun. That's the absolute core of it. There are moments of excellence, but they're consistently punctured by jaw-dropping ineptitude.

FISSURES OF MEN

AITD is a continuation of the HP Lovecraft-inspired series that set the standard for the whole survival horror genre back in the early '90s. Paranormal investigator Edward Carnby returns as

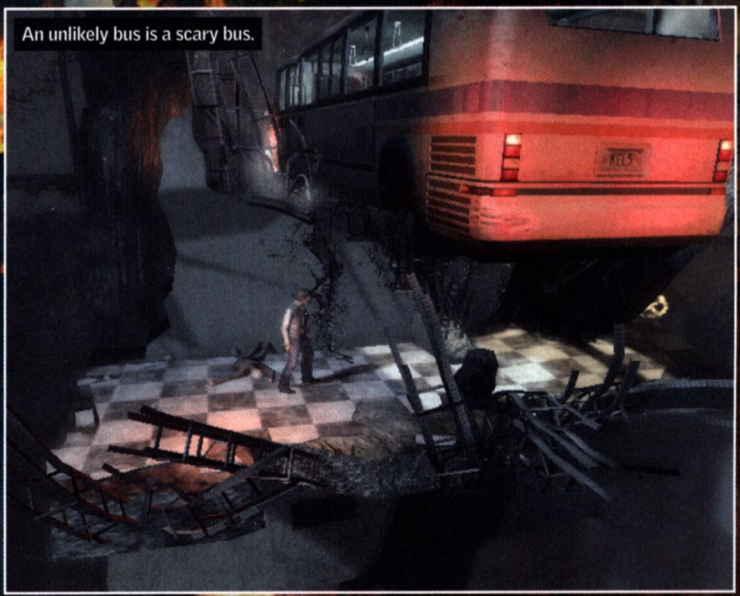
the lead character, although this time he begins his adventure in New York, with that old chestnut amnesia and a newly-discovered penchant for saying "fuck" a lot. After escaping from a nasty antagonist called Crowley (clever eh?), Carnby is then followed around an apartment block by an evil force that cracks open the building, causing massive destruction and some truly awful dialogue - one girl actually says, "These fissures are hunting us!" This action is hectic, and fairly competently done, with rooms collapsing, walls breaking apart, people plummeting to the ground and physics-powered debris falling around you.

The first, and overwhelmingly major, problem you encounter is the game's control system - using the PC keyboard and mouse is virtually impossible. I don't mind using a key-plan for an RTS, but for a console-style action game? You use the standard W, S, A, D to move around in third-person (using the awkward old-style *Resident Evil* "rotate and move" system), but that switches to standard FPS movement when you press Tab to go into a first-person view. To close your eyes and blink, use X; a quick turn is Left Alt; H brings up

healing mode; E is use, etc. As you progress, the game keeps you informed of the growing list of commands, that change subtly in a different context, like when you're in a vehicle for example. However, in third-person, you can't use a fire extinguisher to put out any blazes until you switch to first-person. The same goes for shooting enemies with the gun, or using the torch to fend off one of the game's swirling darkness monsters, both require using the first-person view.

The health system is another example of a mechanic that is overly-complicated just for the sake of it. Instead of just having simple health packs that heal you, *AITD* has first aid sprays that you have to torturously use on every wound of your body in first-person view. If you get a major wound, you haemorrhage and have to find a bandage to wrap around the cut within seven minutes or you die, which is a classic example of semi-realism adding precisely no fun to a game.

The whole system is an utter mess - inconsistent, unintuitive and confusing. The developers obviously designed *AITD* to be used on a console pad, so once you switch to an Xbox 360



controller it all makes much more sense – it's as if you've been trying to open a jar of pickled onions with your feet, only to realise it might be less effort if you used your hands.

DRIP-FED FUN

After giving up with the mouse and keyboard, *AITD* begins to dribble out entertainment, and one of the best things I can say about the game is that you genuinely don't know what's going to happen next. One minute you're dangling from a rope over a lift shaft with fizzing electric cables, the next you're negotiating your way through a dank underground sewer system.

AITD is structured like an episodic TV series, with each individual episode consisting of a number of sequences – and you can skip past any sequence.

It's handy if you get stuck... and you will get stuck, but you sacrifice most of your weapons and items. And you will get stuck. I found myself skipping sequences at quite regular intervals, simply because in places the game is just ridiculously difficult, and also any death results in you being thrown back to the beginning of the level – don't expect quick saves here.

In one of *AITD*'s "car race" action bits (see Carmageddon box out), I was desperately attempting to drive Carnby and his female companion through Central Park. We were being chased by flying creatures that would lift the vehicle into the air and smash it to the ground if I didn't drive fast enough – or knock them off with collisions. In the end, I managed to complete the section, after a frustrating and not-at-all-enjoyable hour of trial-and-error (and swearing), but that lead breathlessly to another incredibly tough sequence in which Carnby had to



Carmageddon

One of *AITD*'s driving sequences in all its annoying detail



"Step on the gas". OK then – here we go! Wow, this looks pretty good with all the buildings collapsing around the car, and... oh darn, you've been killed for not being fast enough.



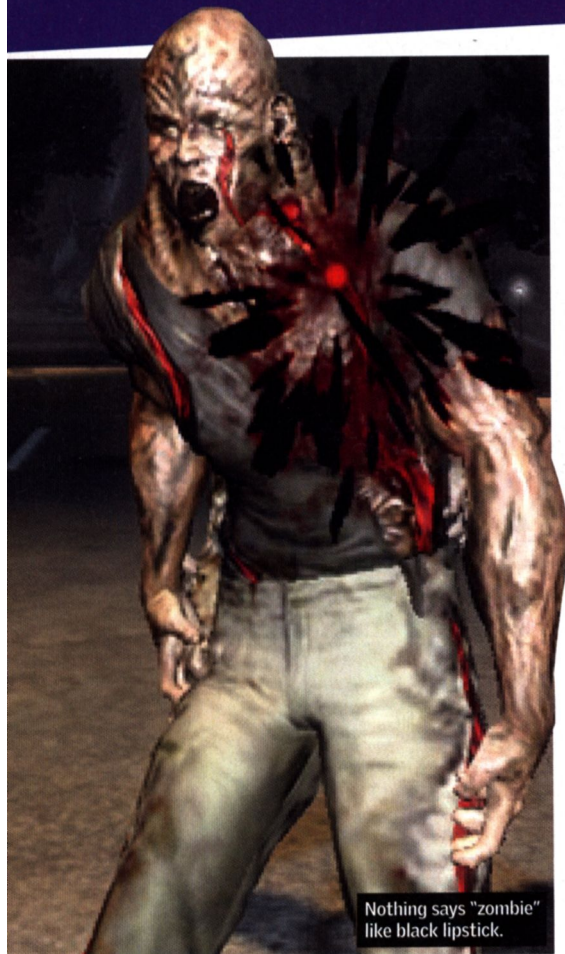
Yes, you got a bit further this time. You have to get your speed up to jump over this large crack in the road – cool, that skyscraper's just collapsed in front! You're actually enjoying this.



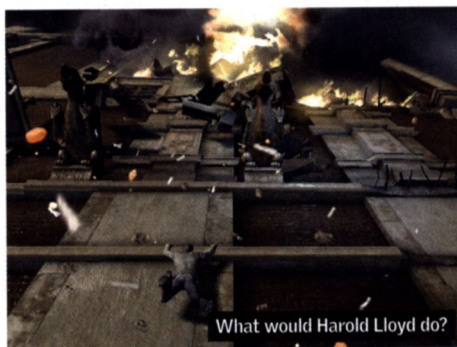
Oh, the car has got wedged in some scenery and the crack has killed you. So you go back to the level's beginning, but surely the end of the level can't be far past that collapsing skyscraper bit?



Repeat until you hit your head violently on your desk. You can skip the sequence, but that would be giving up, right? Eventually you make it to Central Park where a character shoots himself. It makes sense...



Nothing says "zombie" like black lipstick.



What would Harold Lloyd do?



From a different angle, this would have been funny.



Et voilà! Chaise flambée! Bon appetite.

kill a nest of the vampire bastards. At times, the haphazard difficulty and poor pacing remind you of an amateur shooter mod, which hasn't had enough playtesting to highlight and correct any potential areas of player frustration or fatigue.

Another major disappointment are the enemies: after the story setup and visceral cracks appearing in walls, you're suddenly confronted by a bog-standard female zombie straight out of *The Evil Dead*. Other creatures are taken straight from *Half-Life* (headcrabs) or other horror shooters, such as *Doom*, all of which shows off the developers' desperate lack of imagination. Plus, their AI is average at best, as they lurch and make grabs for you, or simply turn away and stand still, as if all their hellish malevolence has finally tired them out.

FLAME-GRILLED

One of the major parts of *AITD* that the developers were keen to hype in previews is the ability to use objects in the environment as weapons.

On encountering a chair, for example, the context-sensitive Use button pops up with an option to pick it up, and using the right analogue stick, you can then swing it about to twat any nearby monsters, although it feels genuinely down to chance whether this works.

Fire is an example of something done well in the game – it looks good, spreads realistically, and if you're holding wooden objects, you can set them ablaze and use them to destroy any of Satan's underlings, on whom ordinary bullets have no effect.

Objects can also be picked up and used to smash open doors that are locked, thrown at enemies, or combined in your inventory (shown by Carnby opening his jacket) to create new uses. So, if you need a molotov cocktail, you combine a tissue or bandage with a bottle, then hold it in your left hand while using a Zippo lighter in your right. If it sounds faffy, that's because it is. You can assign favourite weapon setups to one of four hotkeys (or a separate menu on the 360 pad), but this doesn't work sometimes, so you have to then go back into the inventory during a battle (during which time you still get hit by enemies) and begin your *Blue Peter* "let's make something" session again.

Like much of *AITD*, the idea of creating DIY weapons is a good one, but it's badly implemented and awkward to use. Molotov cocktails explode in your hand if you don't throw them in time, which is another frustrating flourish. Again, semi-realism does not a good game make.

If you die in battle, you lose all your meticulous preparation work, and have to start again – and not everything can be picked up, so you often walk around trying desperately to find a wooden cudgel to set fire to, while a zombie spits blood at you.

AITD feels as if Eden Games has actually decided to design elements of gameplay to specifically piss you off – well, maybe they did – time and time again. It manages to flout one of the most important rules of game design – the player should know that any death they suffer is their fault, and not the game. The platforming sections have no forgiveness, so you can just fall off the edge; a crack in the ground can appear and suddenly involve you in a fatal minigame that makes no sense; the switching between first and third-person means that your character can clumsily fall into an electrified patch of water, etc.

The list of hate gets longer the more you play. Take the driving model, which you'd think Eden Games could've got right, seeing as their main staple up to now has been racing games such as *Test Drive Unlimited*. Well, it's bloody awful. Cars handle like they're made of tin, and glitches mean they often get stuck when you're driving around the open-world

sections of Central Park, or flip you over so you have to just get out and find another. On top of that you get stupid monsters that leap ridiculously through the air to land on your bonnet and punch you through the windscreen, which if you're trying to jump a chasm (a bit of a theme in *AITD*), disrupts the run up and sends you hurtling down the crevice to your doom.

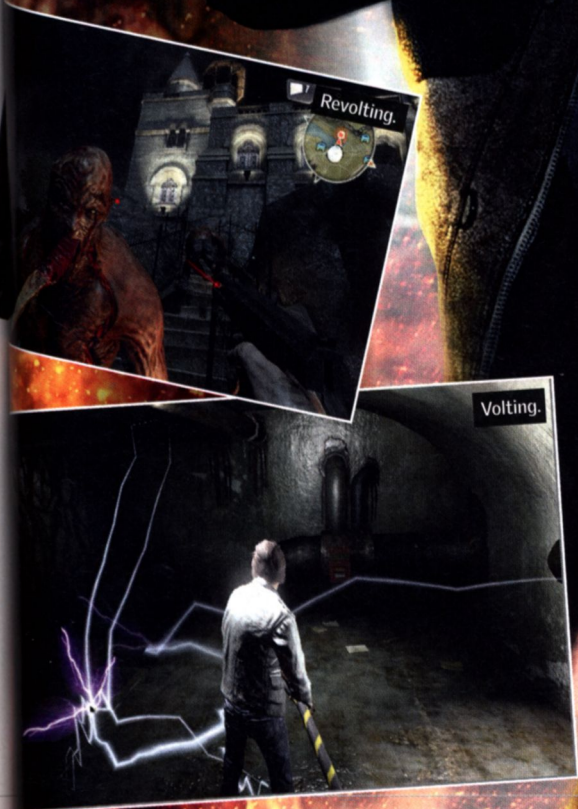
SURVIVAL HORRIBLE

AITD is a bag of pearls and vomit – occasionally featuring inventive ideas, but peppered with bad gameplay design decisions every desperate step of the way. Good: the *Lost*-style "Previously in..." edited sequences, the slick PDA gizmo, fire, the movie-style camera angles and orchestral soundtrack, the first time you bash open a door with a fire extinguisher, and some of the non-combat levels such as the atmospheric sequence in Room 943, that I won't spoil in case anyone buys the game and gets that far.

Bad: everything else.

I was really looking forward to *AITD*, but it just ended up annoying me until I gouged the words "HATEFUL GAME" into my notepad. Unfortunately, that will be my lingering memory. I just hope I don't have nightmares... **PCZ**

"I was looking forward to *AITD*, but it annoyed me until I gouged 'HATEFUL GAME' into my notepad"



PCZONE

Graphics Great in places, dreadful in others
Sound Good music, awful dialogue
Multiplayer No

- ✓ TV-style "Previously in..." montages
- ✓ Decent action sequences
- ✓ You can skip hard levels...
- ✗ ...which is most of them
- ✗ Awful PC controls
- ✗ Frustrating combat
- ✗ You die a lot when it's not your fault

46

The horror...



Nero ruins another demonic street festival.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4



The devil makes work for an idle *Ed Zitron*

DEVELOPER Capcom
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE devilmaycry.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

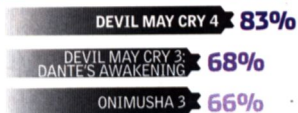


AT A GLANCE...

Action-packed Japanese slasher that redefines how fun and manic a game can be, with some of the most ridiculous set pieces yet seen.

Minimum system requirements:
 3.0GHz Processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), and a 256MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



THERE IS A reason we've given so much space to this Capcom stunner; something that previously seemed destined to arrive mangled during the trip from console to PC. Amazingly though, *Devil May Cry 4* is a slick, PC-enhanced title, not a hastily shoe-horned mess.

This means the game looks great, it's graphically scaleable, you can use a keyboard to play it and, to top it off, it plays like the entire PC development team was briefed with a PowerPoint presentation with the title "Hell Yeah!" while drinking Red Bull and listening to Nine Inch Nails' 'The Perfect Drug'. *DMC4* is ridiculous, enjoyable and uplifting unlike any other title.

For those new to the series, in the past titles you've played as silver-haired smart-arse Dante, the son of the famous goodly demon Sparda who rebelled against his own army to save humanity, but now you control another chap called Nero. The point of these games has always been to chop and slash your way through hordes of monstrosities, interspersed with cutscenes of classic Japanese animé stupidity.

The big difference between these and other JRPGs has always been how the

DMC games have given us a wink and a nudge to say that they realise how silly they are – and *DMC4* takes this up to amorphous out-of-this-world barmy. It takes the greatest pleasure in how over-the-top it can be, and that's just a part of what makes it such outright fun.

BLOODY HELL

You control the game using either the keyboard (don't expect to use the mouse for anything but menus) or an Xbox 360 controller, locking onto enemies, slashing them with your sword or blowing them up with your gun – which, of course, has unlimited ammo.

Your goal, apart from tearing demons to shreds, is to rack up combos by hitting enemies with as many different moves as possible in a constant string without getting hit. The better you get, the more red orbs and proud souls you receive, which can be traded for new moves and items at certain times during levels. A new introduction is Nero's Devil Bringer – that's his big demon arm – which he can use to grab enemies from a distance or pound them with close-range moves.

Eventually, you'll have to get the hang of not only rolling out of the way of attacks, but grabbing enemies with the

Devil Bringer to keep the stream of combo-increasing moves coming. This is tough, but once you do it's incredibly satisfying, especially when you unlock the PC-only Legendary Dark Knight mode (see 'The Dark Knight begins') and have to mince your way through gigantic crowds of enemies.

SMASH AND GRAB

Story-wise, as mentioned you now predominantly play as Nero. In fact, Dante is introduced as a bad guy when he murders Sanctus, the High Priest of the Order of the Sword – a group of religious demon-hunters, of which Nero is a member.

After a brief tête-à-tête tutorial with the now antagonist, Nero has to pursue Dante across all creation, through the city and its outskirts, killing demons and gigantic, absurd demonic entities. These range from your common-or-garden beasts to *Devil May Cry's* trademark nutty-as-squirrel-shit bosses, such as the demon fire lord Berial.

Deadly!

Never accept a cigar from a demon.

That's right - look away from his weird crotch.

Sir, may I invite you to stitch that?

The old "blind them with the reflection off your watch" trick.

"DMC takes pleasure in how over-the-top it can be, and that's just part of what makes it such outright fun"



The Dark Knight begins

One for the hardcore

One of the coolest things about *Devil May Cry 4* are the huge free-for-alls. The problem's always been that wimpy consoles could only manage a few enemies on screen at any one time.

This changes in Legendary Dark Knight mode, unlocked after one playthrough, where you'll find yourself against big, bloody hordes of enemies. This is insanely fun. The game takes the normal 20 or so levels and fills them with enemies, even going as far as to add tougher ones to the earlier areas. It's the equivalent of *The Matrix Reloaded's* Neo vs Many Smiths brawl, except without a load of angry-looking CGI Australians.

Red webs mean a fight.



This boss is amazing – as you leap about, grabbing onto him with your Devil Bringer, he smashes the town apart with his sword, eventually leaving it a smouldering pile of wood.

Aside from boss-bashing and creature-crushing, you'll find a series of jumping and puzzle sections to stave off any potential repetition. These are for the most part bearable in the sense that they're simple, from using the Devil Bringer to jump between gaps, to moving gigantic death Dreidels down hallways. These are nice, inoffensive ways to split up the countless fighting sessions. However, occasionally they are dissonant, getting in between you and what you know is another brilliant boss encounter. The worst, by far, are the two dice games, that depending on your luck can either be quickly completed or take an agonisingly painful amount of time (see 'Rolling in our games') to slog your way through.

DEVIL MAY SHARE

These are bearable forays, though, if you consider how enjoyable the rest of the

game is. Once you get the hang of the combo system, *DMC4* lovingly opens up to let you buy more moves for Nero, ranging from the useful predictability of Air Hike (double-jump) to more obtuse abilities like Enemy Step, that lets you bounce happily across enemy's heads, which is invaluable when you're surrounded.

Later in the game you get to play as Dante, who has the same four styles he had in *DMC3*: Trickster, for dodging; Royal Guard, for reverses and blocks; and Gunslinger and Swordmaster for amplifying your weapons. Dante can also use weapons other than his shotgun and handguns, the most awesome being Pandora – a suitcase of ordnance that has different forms depending on your style, and morphs into a gigantic, daft wheel of death when you use Gunslinger.

Though it's clearly signposted when the changes happen, it's a little annoying when you reach the outset of a Dante level just as you're just getting access to some of Nero's cooler abilities. Also, playing Dante (unless you have Trickster at level three) is a lot more challenging

than playing with Nero, as you'll find yourself a lot further from enemies with the only means of bridging the gap being a Stinger attack – which knocks the opponent away, making combos harder.

The learning curve is steeper again if you try to mix up the styles to score bigger combos, especially Royal Guard. This style seems suicidal until you sit down and work out the timing of every enemy. If you have the patience for that, it becomes a stylish combo-producing machine.

LIVE BY THE SWORD

There's a great deal of replayability in *DMC4*. For each successive playthrough, depending on the difficulty, you unlock extra modes, such as Legendary Dark Knight and the Bloody Palace survival mode, as well as the ridiculously hard Heaven or Hell Mode, where everything – you and monsters alike – dies in one hit.

The only issue is that it can be repetitive – you're doing what you've already done, just against larger, tougher and more numerous bad guys. There's not much more beyond that – the gameplay

Rolling in our games

The worst side puzzle in history

While it's easy enough to say that it's petty to get so annoyed at a puzzle that I write a box-out about it, the dice-rolling game from *DMC4* deserves one. The premise is simple – Nero must hit a big demonic dice and it moves him a certain number of spaces onto blue (gems), red (monsters), white (nothing) or yellow (move to the next yellow on the board) and purple tiles (boss battle, the only way to end the minigame).

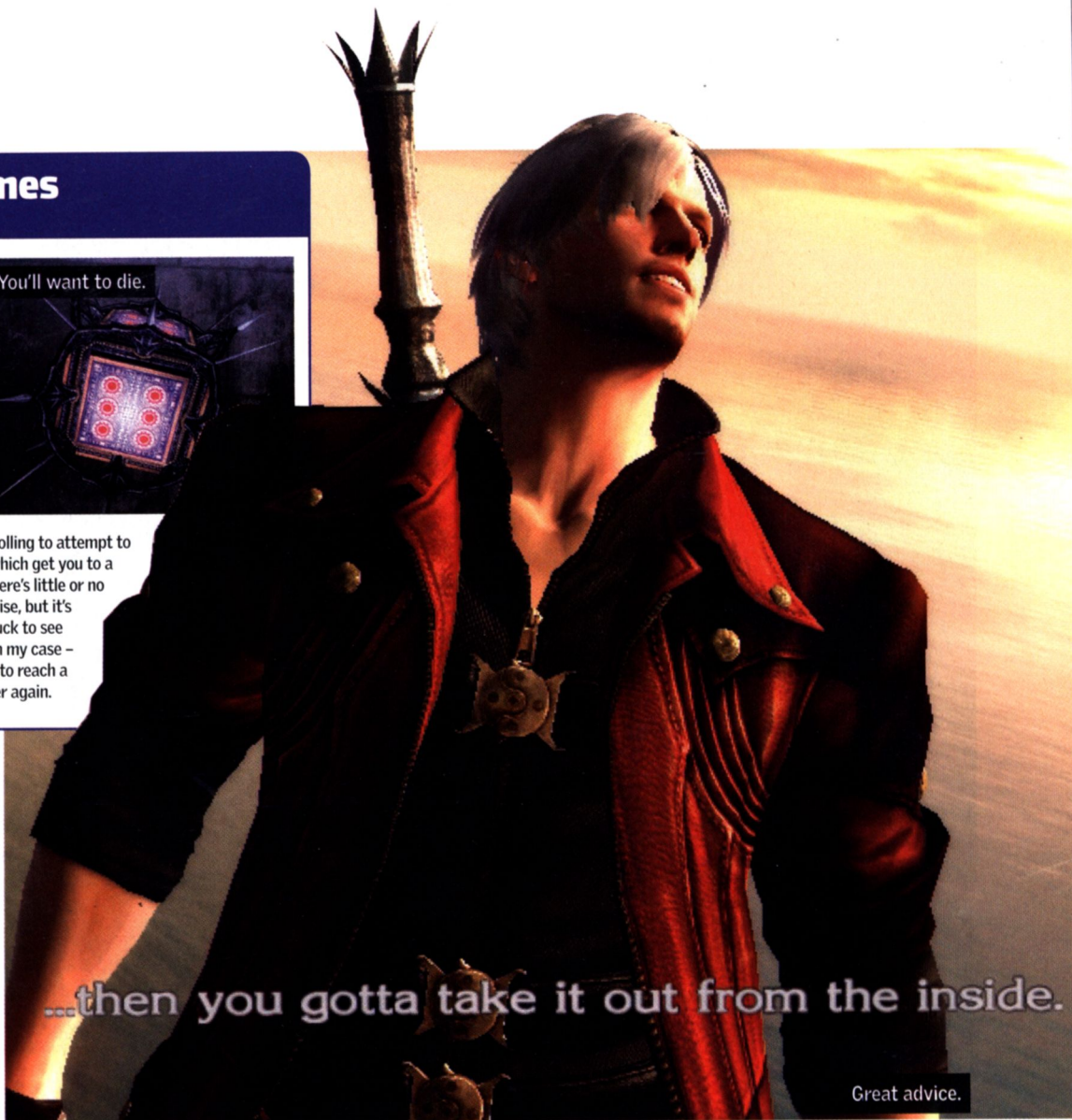
One of the last few missions has you on a circular board, hitting the dice and rolling to attempt to hit either the purple or yellow tiles, both of which get you to a boss battle. Infuriatingly, most of the time there's little or no art to the dice rolls (the internet says otherwise, but it's wrong), and you'll be at the behest of Lady Luck to see whether or not you'll have to fight – as was in my case – your ninth shower of monsters in a row, only to reach a boss on your next go, and have to do it all over again.



You'll want to die.



What's that? You want to bring a devil?



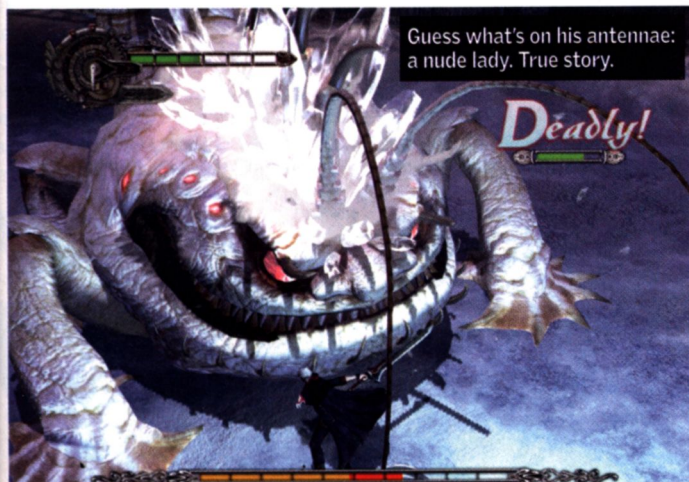
...then you gotta take it out from the inside.

Great advice.

stays the same (regardless of the character changes) for the whole experience, only changing the vistas and introducing more enemies as you go. If the absolute stupidity of what *DMC4* does, from the weapons, to the acrobatics, to the comically OTT and macho posturing of the cutscenes doesn't appeal to you – if you're the kind of person who tuts and rolls their eyes at

sheer dumb melodrama – then steer well clear.

DMC4 is a quirky game – one that has few other titles to compare it to. For the most part, the delivery of console titles of this breed to the PC has been so shabby (*Resident Evil 4*, anyone?) that ports of this quality are a shock. Thanks to a little diligence on Capcom's part, *DMC4* has turned out spectacularly.



Guess what's on his antennae: a nude lady. True story.

It looks as slick and a little sharper than the console version, it plays identically, and the PC-exclusive Legendary mode features more enemies on-screen than the 360 could manage. It's visceral, silly fun, as you'd expect.

I encourage newbies to the series and those who swore off it after the twaddle-tastic port of *DMC3* to pick this title up and wring it dry. There's enough of the cathartic, gut-strewn combat to work out any frustrations you might have, and there's 12 solid hours of enjoyment at the very least – and a great deal more if you want to hone yourself to the fine and speedy digital dexterity that's required to beat Bloody Palace mode.

So, *DMC4* is a good port of an excellent game. While slightly linear, obviously console-led, and a little repetitive, if you suspend your disbelief and let the game take you on a ride, you'll find your pulse pounding like a kettle drum. Any game that brings out an involuntary air-punching "YEAH!" into the middle of a quiet day at the office, has to be doing something very right. *Devil May Cry 4* comes highly

recommended to anybody who wants to play an action game and not some namby-pamby talkathon. Yeah, RPGs. Feel the burn. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Slick, scaleable, and pretty
Sound Hilarious Japanese rock, good voice-acting
Multiplayer None

- ✓ Stupidly fun
- ✓ Addictive as hell
- ✓ Graphically stunning
- ✓ Replayability in bounds
- ✗ Possibly too silly for some
- ✗ Repetitive by nature

83

Dante's in fun, now!



If only the Clangers were here to make this fun.



Rolling... rolling... rolling...



If only we could stick to walls.



The Capture The Flag levels are terrible.

GUMBOY TOURNAMENT

A rolling *Ed Zitron* gathers horrified onlookers

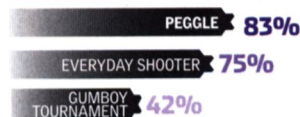
DEVELOPER Cinemax
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £10 (\$19.99)

AT A GLANCE...

A mad multiplayer game that has you rolling up walls, competing with players in games of Capture the Flag, Diamond Collecting and Checkpoint Racing.

Minimum system requirements:
 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



DURING THE QUASI-PLEASURE of playing *Gumbo Crazy Adventures*, you rolled about collecting stars, changing your shape and sticking to surfaces to open up a portal and finish the level. While the game was a one-trick pony, it had fairly entertaining stables for you to frolic through.

Sadly, its more adventurous cousin, *Gumbo Tournament*, takes this action into a multiplayer environment. This move could generously be described as brave, but playing *Gumbo Tournament* for any length of time makes it obvious that this is a game both characterised by frustration and frustrated boredom.

In *Gumbo Tournament*, you must roll against other spherical Gumboys in games of Capture The Flag, Diamond Collection (read: get points) and Checkpoint Racing, which all suffer from only having a few tiny, samey and lifeless arenas that are made even harder to navigate because the stripped-down control system lets you move at a speed akin to a treacle-dunked tortoise. You can control the Gumboy with your keyboard or mouse, the latter being a damn sight more effective, but no less frustrating.

You see, all of the objectives involve some form of accuracy, be it grabbing a flag, hitting another Gumboy, or passing a checkpoint. Yet the Gumboys are floaty, high-on impossible to navigate, and move at a speed that's never up to the task – even when using the woefully short-lived speed power-ups. This means that playing with what few other players are online is genuinely distressing, an endless dance of nine people trying to jump through constantly-moving hoops.

Playing against the computer is somehow less fun, as while you lack precision and control, the computer is able to pull off feats of physics wizardry. You'll watch in awe at the AI's testicular triumph as they roll their balls into just the right spot, like Ron Jeremy at an as-yet-unnamed Olympic event.



Follow the arrow to points!

If *Gumbo Tournament* was a controllable yet dull game it would be passable – maybe even OK. But as it stands its nauseating, greased-pig feel makes it devoid of fun and value. If you're of a tender disposition, hungover, or prone to travel sickness then this balletic nine-player nut-party will send you running to the toilet. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Crisp and cartoony**
 Sound **Bouncy sounds and bleep-blorp music**
 Multiplayer **Up to nine maroons.**

- ✔ It's pretty-ish
- ✘ Hard to control
- ✘ Dull as bricks
- ✘ Just not fun

42

A ball-ache



TERRORIST TAKEDOWN: CONFLICT IN MOGADISHU

Gaming terrorism

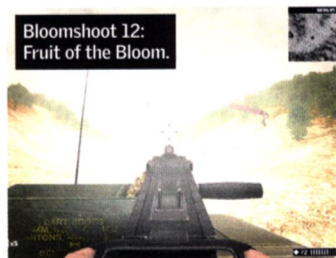
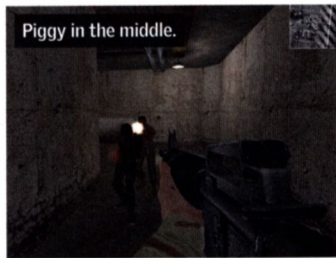
DEVELOPER Groove Media
PUBLISHER City Interactive
WEBSITE snipurl.com/terrortake3
ETA Out now
PRICE £4.99

Minimum system requirements:
A Casio digital watch from the '80s.
And a mouse.

WHILE BAD GAMES are commonplace, it takes real shit for a title to shock us with how terrible it is. *Terrorist Takedown: Conflict in Mogadishu* is a veritable whirlwind of arse, a torrent of trash that engulfs you in perilous laziness and makes you less of a human for the time you spend with it.

You take the role of a generic soldier in an empty looking Somalia, (although this isn't made remotely clear outside of the title) during the United Nation's '93 peacekeeping campaign which was led by the US Marine Corps.

What follows is a terrible game that uses an archaic graphics engine and is faced with ignorance. You follow a linear path, waiting for soldiers to spawn at obvious places so you can shoot them. The game is simpler than *Quake*, uglier than *SiN* and manages to continually characterise everyone in Somalia as a

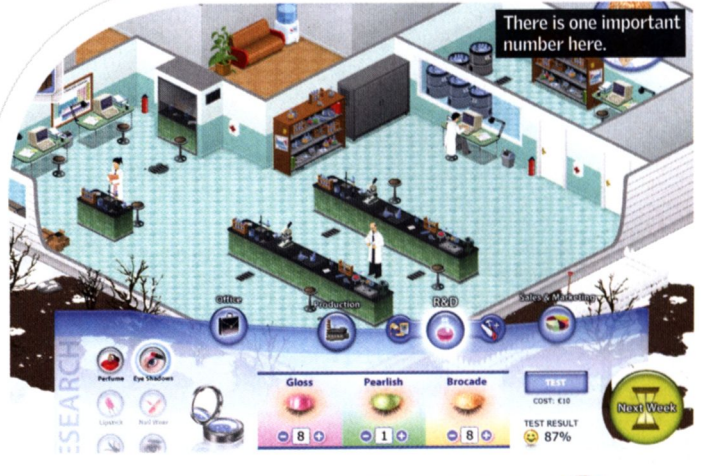
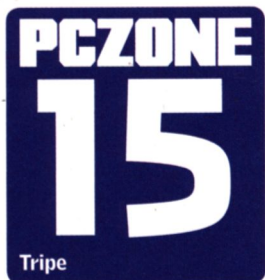


terrorist drone, hell-bent on running head-long into your swift gunishment.

TT:CIM has all the panache expected from giving the LithTech SDK to a drunk puppy, with gigantic featureless spaces and the same three terrorists shooting at you with brainless fervour.

A price tag of five pounds may seem like a bargain, or an excuse, but it is neither. You'd be well advised to buy an indie game or a budget classic, and avoid cynical sweatshop shit like this.

Ed Zitron



BEAUTY FACTORY

Girls are not morons

DEVELOPER City Interactive
PUBLISHER City Interactive
WEBSITE city-interactive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £4.99

Minimum system requirements:
A Casio digital watch from the '80s.
And a keyboard.

WE'VE HAD SOME stinking *Tycoon* games. *Tabloid Tycoon* was a wretched specimen, but it beat *Holiday World Tycoon*, which suffered from a severe diagonal offset that made pointing and clicking impossible. *Beauty Factory* has the distinction of being competently programmed and presented, yet is worse than either of those games.

The press release claims it's fun for girls, because you're making eye shadow. But that's like saying a French abattoir is fun for girls, because there are ponies inside. I've played through this game three times, and I don't remember having fun. Perhaps it was hidden in the tedium.

The game has four screens. The office, which is useless. The production line, in which you change a number to choose how much lippy you make. Hold onto your furry boots though, because in marketing you change two numbers to set your marketing budget and product price. Don't get excited – the second time



I played I didn't use advertising and couldn't tell the difference.

The last room is R&D. Prepare for your socks to be blasted into orbit: this room has got three numbers! Altering a cosmetic's three ingredients changes its overall score – over 80, and you've got a good bit of lip gloss. See how those three numbers collapsed into one? That's lush.

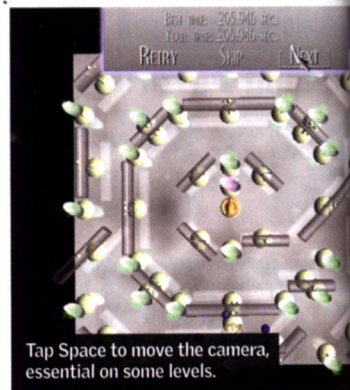
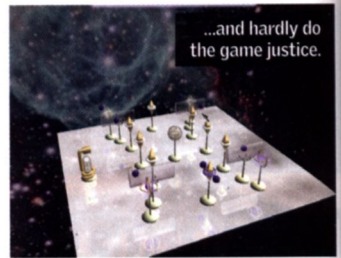
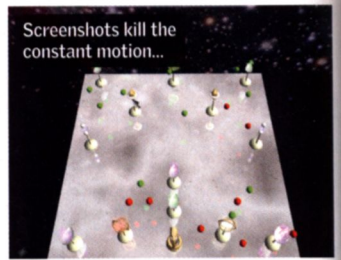
Let's face it: this is a *Tycoon* game where you control three numbers. It is, in short, a turd of a game.

Jon 'Log' Blyth





Just another game in space.



CHAOS THEORY

Jon 'Log' Blyth flaps his bingo wings and kills a butterfly

DEVELOPER blurredvision
PUBLISHER Steam
WEBSITE steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$9.99 (£5)

CHAOS THEORY IS another of the smaller games to get boosted into the public eye by Steam. We've had *Gumboy*, *Gish*, *Audiosurf* and the slightly unjustifiable *Ninja Reflex*, and now it's *Chaos Theory's* turn to look slightly awkward rubbing shoulders with *Call of Duty 4* and *Chuzzle Deluxe*.

The idea is to get particles of one colour to orbit their corresponding Collector nucleus. You do this by propelling the particles towards them at the required minimum velocity. Your tools are charged poles which you can polarise to attract and repel particles, gathering posts to fire them from, and rotating deflective barriers to bounce the balls in the right direction.

This all sounds like classic casual action, but blurredvision make the brave move of alienating bored mothers with

clinical grey levels, odd attempts at art deco elegance, and overtly scientific action. This nerdy edge is perfectly acceptable to me – in fact it's nice not to have a cutesy chipmunk telling me I'm awesome every time I complete a level for once – but I can't help but think that avoiding the approachable colour schemes of the genre will only hurt the game's sales. That said, Steamworks achievements add the occasional and pleasant surprise when they appear in the bottom-right corner of the screen.

Where *Chaos Theory* struggles is the consistency of its levels. There's a good balance of skill, puzzles, and trial and error, but for every level that gives you the thrill of solving a puzzle – or "buzzle", as we professionals call it – there's one annoying level in which you're just clicking without skill or thought.

Persistence pays off though, because *Chaos Theory* pulls through a level 30s lull (you have to complete levels to progress, although you have a limited power to skip them – level skips are earned for completing sets of levels) to provide some genuinely entertaining and lobe-flexing levels.

Later items, such as the gravitron and the duplicator are far more entertaining

than the standard bouncy walls, and should have been included earlier.

Chaos Theory is a slightly alienating, yet eventually rewarding, game that lets you create your own levels. While it's pitched perfectly at a fiver, you might get the nagging feeling that you've played similar stuff in the past for free. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

A puzzle game that's not as deep as it wants to be, but still manages to get under your skin.

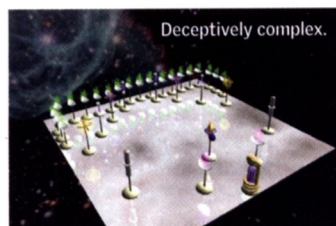
Minimum system requirements: 1GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB for Vista) and any modern video card.

HOW IT STACKS

AMAZING BRAIN TRAIN 70%

CHAOS THEORY 67%

ROOGOO 52%



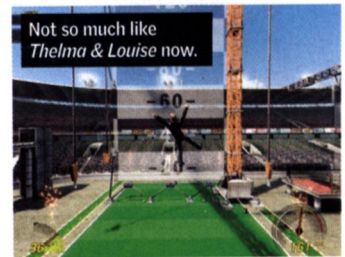
PCZONE

Graphics **Functional, at times confusing**
 Sound **Minimal to silent**
 Multiplayer **No**

- ✓ Requires thought
- ✓ Requires planning
- ✓ Requires skill
- ✗ Requires patience
- ✗ Requires luck
- ✗ Requires money

67

Last orders



FLATOUT ULTIMATE CARNAGE

Jamie Sefton crashes and burns – not for the first time...



DEVELOPER Bugbear Entertainment
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
WEBSITE www.empireinteractive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99



AT A GLANCE...

Burnout Lite, with more destruction, and the ability to send drivers crashing through their windcreens. Great mini-games too.

Minimum system requirements: 2.2GHz processor, 2GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

CARMAGEDDON 2: CARPOCALYPSE NOW!	95%
FLATOUT UC	81%
NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON	78%

WE'LL FORGIVE THE creators of this game for bringing this to PC nine months after releasing it on console, because this smash-'em-up racer is enormous amounts of fun.

FlatOut Ultimate Carnage continues the series' unpretentious arcade racing and has you competing against 11 other drivers in urban and countryside environments so hillbilly, you half expect Boss Hogg to go "Kyuk kyuk" and chase you, while playing a banjo.

FlatOut's major selling point is its OTT physics in the environments, that add to the excitement during races as you career into exploding petrol stations, smash through glass shop windows, skid into picket fences and send rubber tyres bouncing all over the track. Of course the physics also apply to the cars, and you



get a bonus nitro boost the more damage and chaos you cause to other vehicles, encouraging you to flip, crash and wreck your opponents at high speed. The exhilarating effect of this wild destruction is such that you wonder why every other racing game doesn't do it.

As a huge fan of carnage in general, the other major plus point of *FlatOut* for me is the ability to send yourself, and other ragdoll drivers, hilariously crashing through windcreens, complete with comedy scream. This is taken to the extreme in the many silly minigames you can play on your own, or with friends, which involve driving at ridiculous speeds, holding the "throw" button down to create an angle of ejection, and watching as your poor driver is flung violently in the direction of a giant dartboard or high jump to score points.

However, the racing is the meat of the game, and the fact you can accrue cash to spend on better and faster cars, upgrade your motors and unlock new tracks and minigames means you'll have plenty to keep you busy. Annoyingly, the AI is suspiciously good at catching you up, and you can often find yourself frustratingly slipping from the front to the back of the racing pack, if you spin

off or catch an errant bit of track detritus that inexplicably flips your car.

Yet, even the odd bit of weird physics and dodgy AI driving isn't enough to spoil the party – *FlatOut Ultimate Carnage* is more fun than 50 Formula One races, with or without Nazi-themed S&M. (Not that anyone involved with Formula One is, or was, into that.) **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Lovely, with good physics**
 Sound **Awful music, but decent effects**
 Multiplayer **Over Games For Windows LIVE**

- ✓ Destructive racing
- ✓ Hugely replayable
- ✓ Great minigames
- ✗ Occasionally wonky physics
- ✗ "Catch-up" AI annoyance

81

Appetite for destruction



So this is where the bad teeth rumours started.



Unit path-finding isn't the most realistic.



Protect your settlements with mighty walls.



Saboteurs can infiltrate your town.

STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME

Martin Korda goes on an RTS nostalgia trip

DEVELOPER Firefly Studios
PUBLISHER Gamecock Media
WEBSITE fireflyworlds.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

RTS castle on an ultra-hardcore level. It's historically accurate – if you count 2002 as history.

Minimum system requirements:
 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM (256MB recommended for multiplayer), and a 4MB 3D card.

HOW IT STACKS

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR 91%

STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME 42%

FATE OF HELLAS 36%

HOLD ON A minute, haven't we been here before? Yes, it's slowly coming back to me. In 2002 Firefly's *Stronghold Crusader* was heralded as one of the finest RTS castle-building games in the business. Now we have *Stronghold Crusader Extreme*, the same game again, only with an ultra-hardcore campaign and some extreme skirmish levels thrown in for good measure. Who said innovation was dead?

Let's start with the graphics engine, which has clearly been left untouched since the game's original release. As a result, units once considered charming and charismatic can now be dismissed as blurred, twitching splodges on a monitor. However, while Old Father Time may not have been kind to the game's appearance, his withering effects haven't been quite as debilitating to *Stronghold Crusader's* gameplay, which still possesses some beauty.

BUILD THEM UP

If you've never played a *Stronghold* game, the premise is simple. Build a castle, a community and a big army,

then set out to knock down your enemies' fortresses while safeguarding your own. A deep, yet intuitive, settlement management system ensures that building up your fortress, economy and troop numbers is simplicity squared. Farms, hunting lodges and wells must be constructed to feed your citizens, while stone, wood and ore must be mined and stockpiled before expansion can commence.

The array of fortifications that you can tack onto your castle is solid if hardly spectacular, with walls, towers, gates, defensive weapon emplacements and lookout posts comprising the majority of options.

However, a major problem arises once the combat kicks off, and it's here that *Stronghold Crusader Extreme* betrays its age. When two armies clash



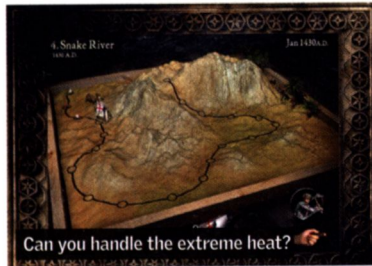
God, that's soily.

Road to Hell

A trail to your own destruction?

If you're looking for the ultimate *Stronghold* challenge, then the Crusader Extreme Trail will be just what you've been looking for.

Featuring 20 linked Crusades-themed missions and some truly titanic battles, strategy gaming really doesn't come much tougher than this. Even the early missions are likely to overwhelm you unless you're a *Stronghold* veteran of the highest calibre and while the idea of titanic battles sounds impressive, attempting to manage these epic slugfests verges on impossible thanks to the horrifically dated visuals. You have been warned.



Contend with the wildlife as well as enemy armies.



they congeal into a giant, mishmash of colours that bear virtually no resemblance to scrapping warriors. Throw in a somewhat cack-handed control interface and you're left trying to identify and direct your troops in futility, ensuring that any type of on-the-fly tactical tweaking is nigh on impossible.

KNOCK 'EM DOWN

Speaking of virtually impossible, let's move swiftly onto the new Extreme missions, which, if nothing else, at least live up to their billing.

Rarely have I come across a set of RTS missions as mercilessly unforgiving as these. Missions start sedately enough as you begin to build up your settlement, but within minutes, you're attacked by massed enemy forces that often wipe you out in the blink of an eye.

Unless you're the kind of person who goes to bed clutching their *Stronghold* back catalogue in moist adoration, you'll probably find yourself completely and utterly overwhelmed by these battles and tempted to strap the DVD onto a firework out of sheer frustration.

Sure, there's fun to be had here, but if you don't consider yourself to be in the

top 10 percent of *Stronghold* players on the planet, chances are you'll find little or no enjoyment from the new Extreme content. And while the original game may still provide some entertainment, it's simply too dated to ever truly feel like money well spent. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics **Archaic**
Sound **Decent music and SFX**
Multiplayer **Fun but dated**

- ✓ Fairly entertaining, despite age
- ✗ Extreme missions are impossible
- ✗ Ancient graphics
- ✗ Not enough new content

42

Money for old rope



THE SIMS 2: IKEA HOME STUFF

A content pack for *The Sims 2*

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

Minimum system requirements:
The Sims 2, 1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB graphics card.

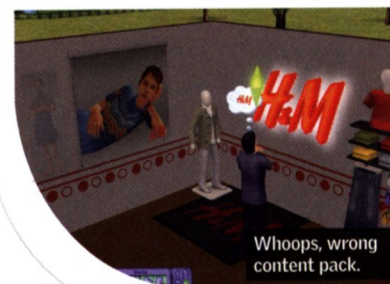
THIS IS A content pack for the videogame series *The Sims 2*. In it, you'll find the following:

EKTORP three-seat sofa, KARLSTAD sofa, KLIPPAN four-seat sofa, IMFORS coffee table, LEKSVIK coffee table, JULES visitors chair, EKTORP armchair, another KLIPPAN sofa, KARLSTAD armchair, POÅNG armchair, EKTORP two-seat sofa, HATTEN side table, LACK side table, EXPEDIT TV storage unit, ODDA wardrobe, ÅNES bedframe, HEMNES bedframe, MALM bedframe, ÅNES chest of four drawers, HEMNES chest of drawers, HEMNES bedside table, MALM chest of two drawers, another HEMNES bedside table, deep abyss instead of a soul, BILLY bookcase, IKEA PS cabinet, HELMER drawer unit on castors, FREDRIK workstation, VIKA HYTTAN table, VIKA GREVSTA table, MYLONIT table lamp, REGOLIT pendant lamp shade, MAREK lamp, STORM floor

lamp, KILA work lamp, LAMPAN table lamp, PREMIÄR picture of Flatiron Building, BILD Doggy Dream picture, SLÄTTHULT decorative sticker, BILD Yin and Yang poster, PJÄTTERYD picture, RIBBA frame, PJÄTTERYD picture zebra, HEMNES mirror, KRABB mirror, MONGSTAD mirror, VÄNNA mirror, IKEA PS rug, RINGUM rug, SVEJE rug, ULDUM rug, FAMNIG HJÄRTA cushion, IKEA PS clock, BLADET plant pots with tray, BENNO CD tower, VASEN vase, IKEA STOCKHOLM vase, IKEA PS tealight holder, RAKET table easel, LACK wall shelf, and a LACK zigzag wall shelf.

I have considered the benefits and cost of this pack, and settled on a representative numerical value.

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE

25

A content pack



CRAZY MACHINES 2

Look out, Ed Zitron's using technology. Wile E. Coyote technology at that

DEVELOPER FAKT Software
PUBLISHER Viva Media/Steam
WEBSITE crazymachines.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$19.99 (£10)



AT A GLANCE...

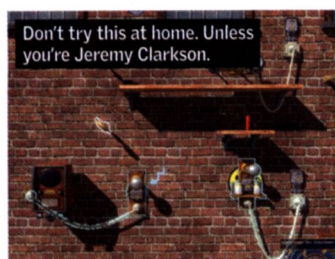
The Incredible Machine's quirky cousin, Crazy Machines 2 is a puzzler that has you building weird contraptions to complete tasks.

Minimum system requirements: 3.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS	
THE EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE MACHINE	89%
CRAZY MACHINES II	82%
ARMADILLO RUN	68%

IN ALL BUT name *Crazy Machines 2* is the successor to '90s classic franchise *The Incredible Machine*. You're set a task – usually sending an object to a specific place – and must utilise a series of seemingly random items to do it. This is a delightfully simple and devilishly addictive premise that *CM2* has fleshed out into a fiendish, moreish, frustrating and wonderful series of 180 different logic-bending puzzles.

New to this series is a slick new graphics engine and appropriately-balanced physics, using Ageia's PhysX engine. Balls bounce realistically down slopes, objects are catapulted and walls crash down as you'd expect them to. This is the kind of off-the-wall crap scientists at The Royal Society get up to with their grant money, I shouldn't wonder.



You start a level with an empty experiment, with elements (ropes and balls, for example) and a selection of anchor points. At this point, the action is paused, but you can start it at any time to see the effect of placing the objects into the experiment field.

At first, this is merely adding things to the experiment and executing the simple objectives. However, within the space of one chapter, it becomes a hulking logic bender that will have even the most introverted genius scratching dandruff into their brain. None of the answers are particularly illogical, but some of them require you to zoom into the playing field and really see the ins and outs of the scientific affair.

The annoying part is that the game lacks a fast-forward button, as you'll find yourself waiting for time-sensitive items to tick over during test runs, only to have your plans scuppered, forcing a finger-drumming repeat.

This isn't as bad as it seems, though, as you'll never feel like an answer was unavailable due to any reason other than your own short-sightedness. And when the solution does eventually dawn on you, you'll feel that sense of achievement that few games provide.

With an editor and the ability to download other players' creations from the game's website, along with the hours of built-in content, *Crazy Machines 2* is like finding a tenner in the pocket of a new pair of jeans. Go out – or even stay in – and buy it, as that's all it costs. **PCZ**

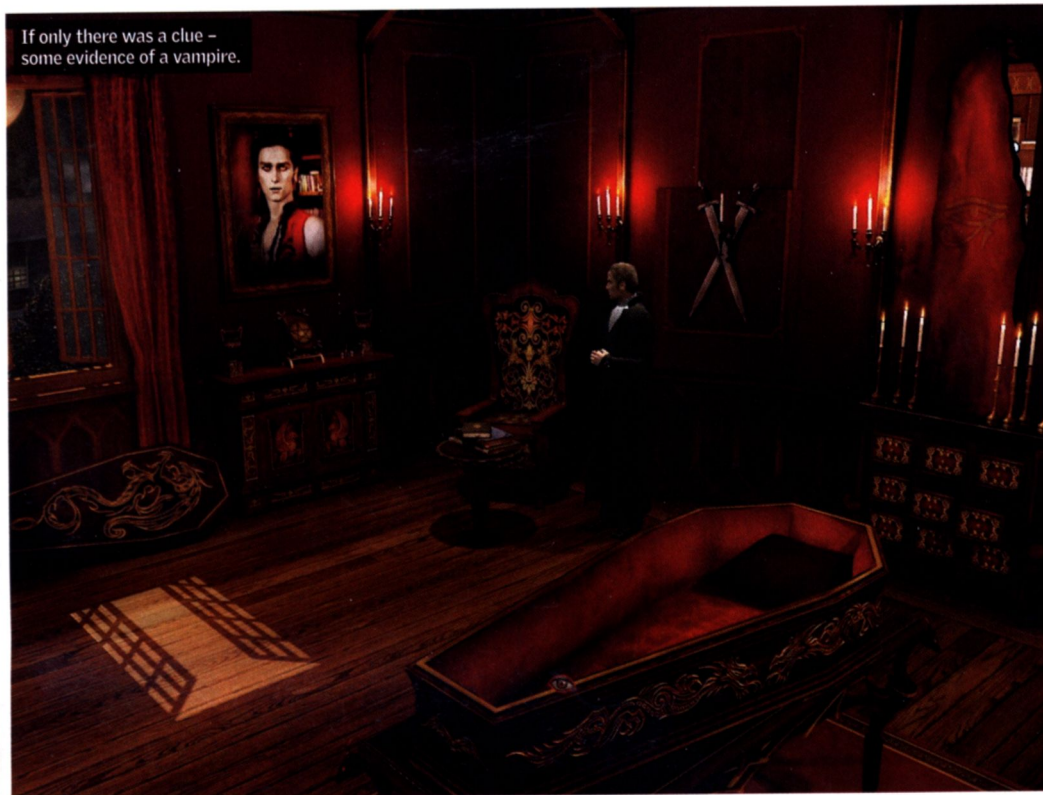
PCZONE

Graphics: Gorgeous, bouncy and colourful
 Sound: Quirky music and silly voices
 Multiplayer: Downloadable content

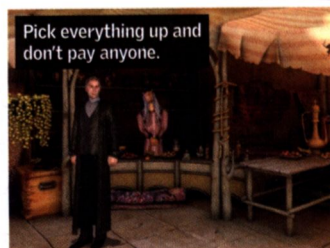
- ✓ Pretty
- ✓ Addictive
- ✓ Extensive editor
- ✓ Download other people's labs
- ✗ Later levels really hard
- ✗ Too cartoony at times

82

Inventive



If only there was a clue – some evidence of a vampire.



Pick everything up and don't pay anyone.



Cairo – where vampires buy to let.



Superstition: religion's less organised sister.

DRACULA: ORIGIN

Jon Blyth reflects on yet another Gallic point-and-click

DEVELOPER Frogwares
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE www.dracula-origin.com/en
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

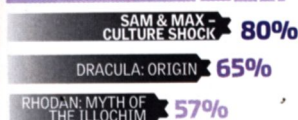


AT A GLANCE...

Another earnest point-and-click with slightly alien humour and stilted language. Above-average in a genre where average isn't saying much.

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

HOW IT STACKS



WHEN REVIEWING THIS game, I'd toyed with the idea of a deconstruction of the point-and-click genre (from the point of view of a vampire) or a pencil drawing about how the game made me feel. In the end, I settled on pointing out a good, a strange and two bad things about *Dracula: Origin*.

A good thing are the puzzles. There is the usual collection of item-combination nonsense that can easily be solved by mindlessly dragging everything around until something happens, but *Dracula: Origin* has a pleasant bias towards logic puzzles and single-screen brain-teasers. This makes it feel a little like *Perplex City* cards, or the DS's *Professor Leyton and the Curious Village*.

One of the bad things about *Dracula: Origin* is the game's hidden workings. Event triggers, that are presumably there to stop scum walkthrough users, hamper genuine progress.

To risk a minor spoiler, take the very early puzzle to open the shed. You have to scratch away the moss that covers a grave. You reveal the information that's useful and – hurray – you have the combination to the lock. But the option

to unlock the shed doesn't appear until you scratch away enough moss to trigger an outburst from your protagonist. In a genre where wits are pitted, this kind of failure of in-game logic is a rather large annoyance – and that's not the only time it happens.

A strange thing is the game's sexiness. Speaking to the developers, I was surprised to learn that they'd focussed on Dracula for his lurid winkle appeal – nearly half of their customers are female. Sure enough, the box art has the prolific monster reclining on a chair, idly tilting a glass of wine with a face that says, "I may not have a circulatory system, but I've still got fingers". Girls, may I point you to xtube.com?

The other bad things are the acting and the script. But not that bad. For a French story about Victorian England and Romanian folklore that takes you to Cairo, the game was almost guaranteed to be risible. That it manages to be enjoyably naff instead is something of an achievement.

Dracula: Origin is a good puzzler if you're prepared to not only outwit, but second guess the quirks of the development team. I won't slip into

patronising cliché by starting a sentence with "if you enjoy erratic French-developed point-and-clicks," but I will say that I enjoyed it – but after some of the games I've enjoyed this month, sometimes I think I'd enjoy getting punched in the knees. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Clean but not dazzling
 Sound Atmospheric but quickly repetitive
 Multiplayer Play with your reflection

- ✓ Good puzzles
- ✓ Bearable acting
- ✗ Irritating triggers
- ✗ Slightly stilted

65

Sucker MC



Volcanoes, the natural habitat of the ninja cluster.



Stacks to see, but not to do.



Probably the highest score on the page.



ROOGOO



"How do Roogoo what you do to me?" asks Anthony Hare

DEVELOPER SpiderMonk
PUBLISHER SouthPeak Games
WEBSITE snipurl.com/roogoo
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

TRYING TO JAM the plastic triangle into a circular hole is a challenge that many of us had to overcome as children, in the merciless battlegrounds of pre-school. For the characters in the world of *Roogoo* it's a matter of life and genocide, as the geometrically shaped meteors threatening their world can only be stopped by catching them in a set of spinning discs.

The bright colours, nonsense plot and simple controls mean that it doesn't take someone with a PhD in fun to work out that *Roogoo* is meant for the casual market. This is one of those games with a very simple task that doesn't change significantly, but just gets harder until you're finished.

Roogoo takes the simple concept of matching shapes to holes and adds the potential to get it horribly wrong. The idea is to guide the different shapes that trickle down the screen into matching holes by rotating the discs, thus creating stacks of identical shapes that disappear once they reach the final disc.

While this might sound like the most brain-sappingly tedious task, each level does more than change the background. To make things a bit more interesting

there's a cock-up gauge that puts a limit on your mistakes and ninjas who shred your shapes into the confetti of failure.

Slowly introduced obstacles such as shutters, speed boosts and flipping platforms keep the challenge fairly constant, but frustration sets in when flying creatures pick up your neatly arranged stacks and lift them back up the chute, drawing the process out unnecessarily. That said the game's difficulty curve rises gently, until the last few levels when it suddenly shoots up at a right angle.

Roogoo is the very definition of a casual game. While it does nothing spectacular, it has enough pretty colours and plain, shallow addictiveness to hold your attention for the two or three hours the game lasts. There's no real replay value beyond chasing a needlessly perfect score, so any extended life has to be drawn from the disappointing offline split-screen multiplayer.

If you're interested in colourful, casual games and have huge bundles of tenners burning holes in your mattress, then it might be worth peeling one off to buy this game. Before putting the rest of your cash into an environment more sensible and *Peggle*-shaped. **PCZ**



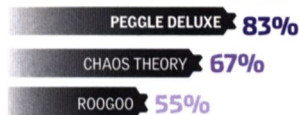
Hard hat recommended.

AT A GLANCE...

A shape-matching game based on a toy for infants, that provides adult-sized frustration.

Minimum system requirements:
 Comes in two versions – one for old PCs and one for middle-aged PCs.

HOW IT STACKS



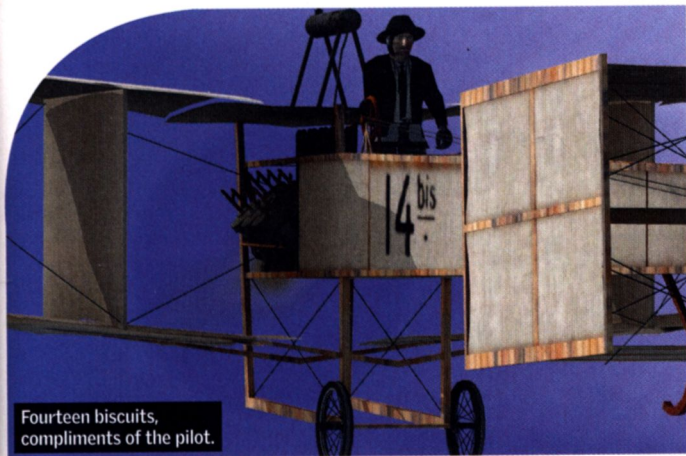
PCZONE

Graphics **Lifted from a children's book**
 Sound **Upbeat, simple and repetitive**
 Multiplayer **Like single-player, with a mate**

- ✓ Good for killing an afternoon
- ✓ Addictive as a bag of sweets
- ✓ Cheap as posh chips
- ✗ Repetition sets in after a while
- ✗ No replay value

55

Cheap and cheerful



Fourteen biscuits, compliments of the pilot.

THE EARLY YEARS OF FLIGHT



Back when Heathrow was a village

DEVELOPER First Class Simulations
PUBLISHER First Class Simulations
WEBSITE contact-simulations.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

Minimum system requirements:
Flight Simulator 2004/X, and a lot of patience.



THEY MIGHT BE hilarious when sped up and accompanied by the *Benny Hill* tune, but the early days of flight were dull. At least they are now, as we have fighter jets.

Sure, the Wright brothers probably pissed their pantaloons as their shed of a plane awkwardly flopped upwards for a bit and Amelia Earhart probably let slip a giddy fart as she spluttered skywards for the first time, but when you're trundling down a runway in what looks like a bunch of cardboard boxes tied together with wool you realise that the early days of flight were actually rubbish, and not fun at all.

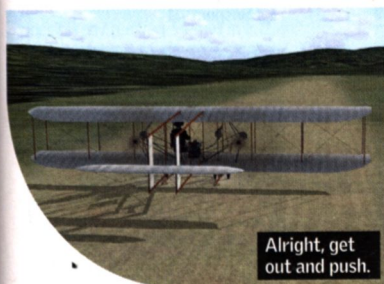
This unofficial expansion for *Flight Simulator 2004* and *X* attempts to recreate the ramshackle beginnings of our conquering of the skies. Not wanting to undersell one of mankind's greatest achievements, the pack includes five of the earliest heavier-

than-air aircraft (to quote the Wright brothers, "only arseholes fly balloons") and three missions. The models are of *FS2004* quality and so lack some of the nifty new views and effects *FSX* provides, while the already lacklustre missions are ruined by *FSX*'s ground scenery, which places trees right in the way of famed aviator Louis Bleriot's take-off en route to Dover.

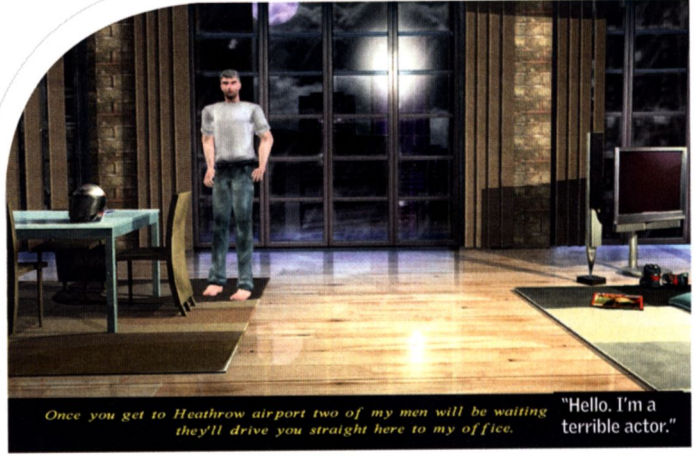
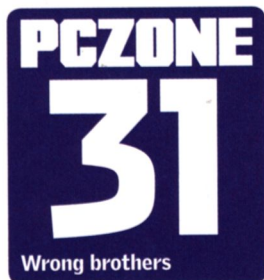
Without the spectacle of invention, what you're left with is the tedious job of flying the contraptions – a tiresome, effort-sapping (and at £25, overpriced) slow-motion crawl through the air.

Yes, it's got polygonal gentlemen with stately moustaches wearing their 'trying to leave the ground' faces, but this won't tickle your balls even if you're famous for being bat-shit crazy on old planes.

Steve Hogarty



Alright, get out and push.



Once you get to Heathrow airport two of my men will be waiting they'll drive you straight here to my office. "Hello, I'm a terrible actor."

BELIEF & BETRAYAL

An unbelievable mess

DEVELOPER Artematica
PUBLISHER Lighthouse
WEBSITE beliefandbetrayal-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
 1.2GHz Processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), 64MB graphics card.

THERE'S A MACHINE that spits out terrible point-and-clicks. What fuels this dismal contrivance is a mystery: perhaps it is the tears of those who are forced to play its accursed produce.

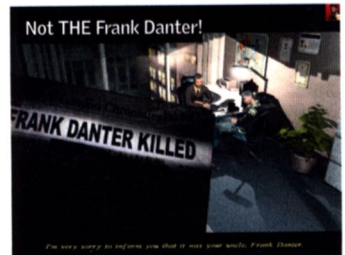
The latest excretion of this technological nightmare, *Belief & Betrayal*, takes place in the present day, as an idiot journalist (you) is drawn into a confusing hash of a mystery by a set of uninteresting characters.

In the style of a 15 year-old's attempt at a conspiracy story, you're investigating a grand scheme involving the Knights Templar, The Vatican and a fair share of double-crossing. Because everybody knows that a good story involves some rug-pulling, and a few dozen (according to the blurb on the box) "baffling clues."

Matters are made worse by the pre-2003 3D models, the atrocious voice acting, and the shocking writing. Conversations are unnatural, verging on comedic, with extreme exclamations



Daddy loved horses. Also, daddy drank.



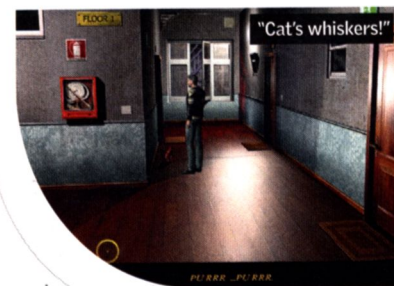
Not THE Frank Danter!

It's very sorry to inform you that it was your wife, Frank Danter.

such as "Cat's whiskers!" erupting from your character at the slightest hint of anything you might like to click on.

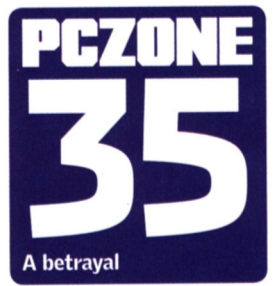
B&B is, at best, a less-than-average adventure that isn't hauled out of mediocrity by the faintly interesting way it lets you jump between characters to solve puzzles together. The factory that pumps out these games will never die – it has long since adapted to feed on its own moribundity. All we can do is wait for a gem; and *Belief & Betrayal* isn't it.

Ed Zitron



"Cat's whiskers!"

PIRRR...PIRRR





You're often forced to keep your Dreamlord well out of harm's way.



Your Dreamlord can call upon an array of spells.



Making tactical manoeuvres is virtually impossible.



Bizarrely, all resource management is conducted on the website.

DREAMLORDS: THE REAWAKENING

Martin Korda dreams of one day finding a decent MMORTS

DEVELOPER Lockpick Entertainment
PUBLISHER Lockpick Entertainment
WEBSITE dreamlords.com
ETA Out now
PRICE Free, but €999 for extra resources

ONE DAY AN MMORTS will appear that captures the dynamics of online warfare. *Dreamlords: The Reawakening*, the follow-up to the risible *Dreamlords*, most certainly isn't that game. Trapped in a split-personality limbo, it feels like a substandard MMORPG with a few RTS ideas tacked onto it. If it were a cabaret act, it'd be Brian Blessed in a set of fake boobs, bellowing that he's a sexy woman.

You play a Dreamlord (a mystical and powerful hero) who must save the world from evil. One section of the game is played from an in-game strategic map divided into territories which your armies must attack in order to amass Soul Shards and Gnosis (the game's main resources). There's also a third resource called Tribute, which you can

use to make your followers happy and summon powerful items, but this costs you real money (£8 per 10,000).

The resource management part of the game is done from the game's website, meaning every time you want to tweak your research tree or reassign your workers, you have to exit the game. What were they thinking?

DREAMBORED

The Reawakening falls short in too many areas. Battles are tedious, often consisting of identical encounters between your armies and pockets of enemies. The atrocious camera and poor control system ensure that you can pretty much forget about executing any tangible tactical manoeuvres.

Your Dreamlord is easily the most interesting thing about the game and can be equipped with flashy armour and fearsome weapons, of which there's an excellent collection. He also wields offensive and defensive magic, and this hardness may explain why enemies ignore your troops and charge straight for him. The resulting *Benny Hill Show*-style chases as you try to get your Dreamlord to safety make a mockery of the game's RTS pretensions.

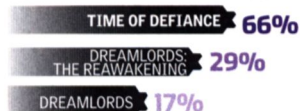
Uninspiring, confusing and often tedious, *Dreamlords: The Reawakening* seems to have learned little from its predecessor. If it wasn't free-to-play (a merit *Dreamlords* lacked), then it would be a prime candidate for a Dump award. As a result, it's more of a squitty fart than a full blown follow-through. **FWT**

AT A GLANCE...

Online free-to-play MMORTS set in a fantasy world, that's neither exciting nor interesting.

Minimum system requirements: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



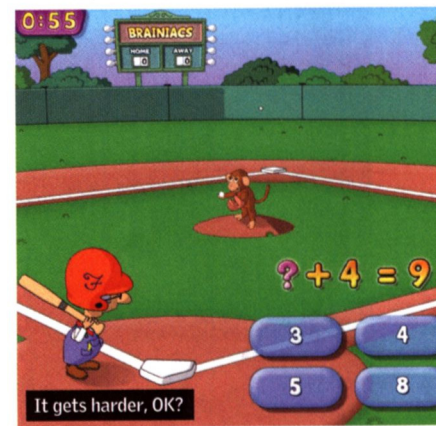
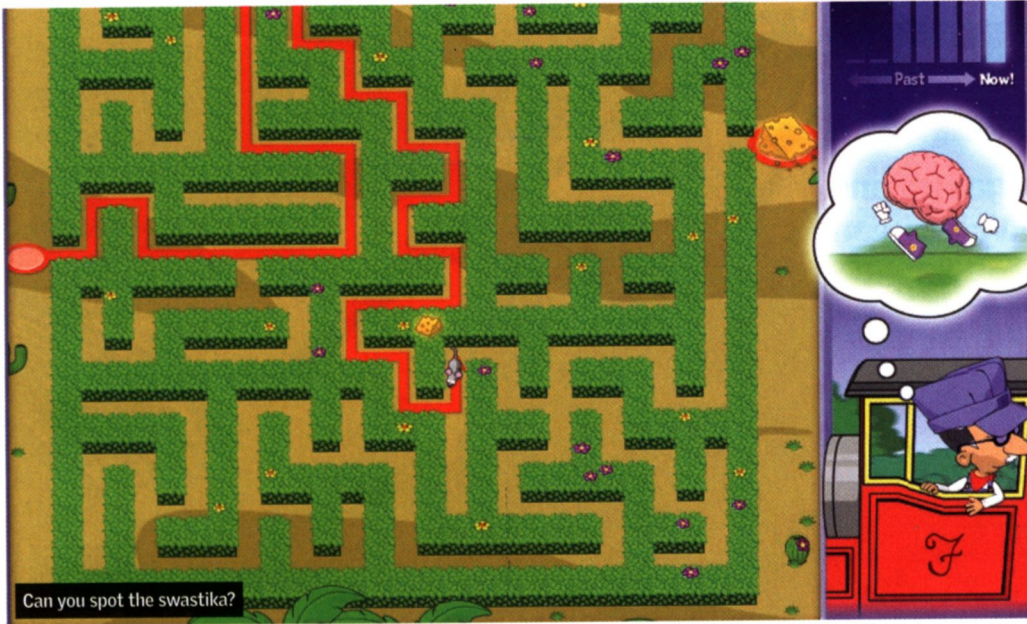
PCZONE

Graphics Dated
 Sound Great music, but terrible SFX
 Multiplayer It's an MMO

- ✓ It's free-to-play
- ✗ Poorly designed
- ✗ Terrible camera controls
- ✗ Threadbare RTS elements
- ✗ Suspect AI

29

Should've stayed in bed



THE AMAZING BRAIN TRAIN

The clever ones are always ugly, howls gorgeous *Jon Blyth*

DEVELOPER Grubby Games
PUBLISHER Grubby Games
WEBSITE grubbygames.com/tabt
ETA Out now
PRICE Around £10 (online)

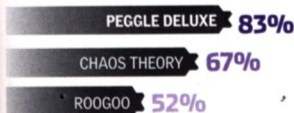


AT A GLANCE...

Grubby Games get as close to the phrase *Brain Training* as is legally possible, by putting a brain in a train.

Minimum system requirements:
 Windows 95(!), 500MHz or faster processor and 256MB RAM.

HOW IT STACKS



I'LL ADMIT, I'M not the biggest fan of Professor Fizzwizzle's adventures: it's not that there's anything wrong with the games (except for *Fizzball*), it's just that the art design seems unnecessarily fussy. Cuteness suffers when it's given too much detail, just as a cheerful drawing of a cock becomes slightly disturbing the second you start drawing veins (or any more than six pubes) on it.

There. Now I've got that off my chest, and made this review of a child's game slightly inappropriate, I can admit how much I enjoyed *Amazing Brain Train*. This is Prof. Fizzwizzle's most varied and entertaining outing yet with 15 games, falling into five broad categories, including Spatial, Number, Planning and Memory. I've forgotten the



last one. I suppose I should have planned ahead by writing it down.

Some of the games are slightly disappointing, but the majority are pleasingly challenging games that creep skilfully from easy to rock hard. There's also a Quest mode, in which you ferry stuff, in your *Amazing Train*, between some farm animals, who are as obnoxious as they are hideous. The train is powered by an electrified cortex in trainers, so you must fuel it with answers: do well and you'll have to play fewer games to get to your destination. Quest mode then, is an odd mix of intelligently designed and paced puzzles and semi-entertaining nonsense, such as a chicken who won't eat a donut unless you bring her false teeth and a letter Q.

Of course, the puzzles are slightly derived – humans have been making puzzles for millennia, it's a well-trod meadow. But *Amazing Brain Train* houses a few genuinely entertaining games in a rewarding framework, with a collection of trophies that range in difficulty from 'inevitable' to 'you'll be lucky'. If anything, they could have gone easy on the Quest mode, and spent the effort on more minigames and the ability to compare your score against friends

online. It's all very well getting an A, but half the fun of being clever is rubbing everyone else's face in it.

If you've got moderately studious children, or just like to reassure yourself that you're not thick: either play word games on Facebook or buy this perfectly pleasant game. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Slightly upsetting
 Sound Perfectly OK
 Multiplayer Set up more than one account

- ✓ Well-paced tests
- ✓ Plenty of character
- ✓ Good test mode
- ✗ Pointless quest mode
- ✗ No online features



BUDGET

Will Porter plays cheap games and eats cold cans of Tesco Value beans



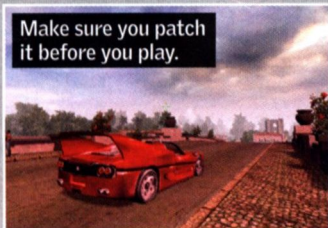
**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: mastertronic.com PRICE: £9.99

IF YOU'RE a gamer of the "I bought you! Entertain me!" variety that wants seamless, get-up-and-go fun without the chance of breaking a car five minutes away from civilization, wandering back through the jungle, and getting killed by an angry snake just before you get back – don't buy *Boiling Point: Road to Hell*.

Make sure you patch it before you play.



Boiling Point runs better on modern hardware now, although to be frank this game was never going to be pretty. The prime audience are those interested in the ways that games are created and how a concept of pure ruddy brilliance can be buried under bugs and idiosyncracies that are often hilarious in their omnipresence.

The game's oddly translated, it needs patching desperately, the combat is iffy and if you manage to fly a plane you're a better gamer than any of us – but its sandbox envelope pushing makes it the most interesting failed experiment of the past five years.

**PCZONE
75**



Bazooka > sniper rifle.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Carb addict Richard laid off pasta sandwiches and rice and gnocchi puddings for a month.
Saving: £20



Caffeine addict Ed forgot to eat one day.
Saving: £5



Gambling addict Log reduced a fruit machine's stake to 10p a go, instead of 30p.
Saving (imaginary): Lots and lots and lots.



LOST PLANET: COLONIES

PUBLISHER: Capcom WEBSITE: lostplanet-thegame.com PRICE: £19.99

LOST PLANET STICKS you in a harsh frozen environment, where swarms of hostile alien insects attack you for warmth. Like in *Dundee*.

Colonies is a semi-budget re-release of *Lost Planet*, that adds new single and multiplayer modes, weapons, playable characters and cross-platform battles against Xbox 360 peeps – if you sign up to Games for Windows LIVE! of course.

It's a reasonable blaster, but the new modes don't bring in much. Score Attack involves killing enemies to rack up points that you can upload to an online leaderboard, whereas Time Battle involves fighting one boss after another.

Add to this clumsy platform sections, often-tedious combat and an annoying and unforgivable checkpoint save system, *Lost Planet: Colonies* is a vague effort to breath life into a game that was on thin ice already.

**PCZONE
61**



Shoot the massive glowing weak spot.



Something's happening. Shoot it!



Ol' jet legs flies again.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: DELUXE EDITION

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: mastertronic.com PRICE: £9.99

JUST HOW MANY times has *Neverwinter Nights* been released now? How much more love and/or money can be extracted?

First there was *Neverwinter Nights*. Then the *Sold Out* release. Third came *Neverwinter Nights Gold Edition*, with the *Shadow Of Undrentide* expansion. *Neverwinter Nights Deluxe - Special Edition* added *Hordes of the Underdark*. Fifth came *Neverwinter Nights*, solo, then a team-up with *Temple of Elemental Evil*. Seventh was *Neverwinter Nights Deluxe Edition* (a cheaper version of the *Special Edition*), and now we have the self-same *Deluxe Edition* in a new box! Eight variations of the same game!

While this release has the original game and its expansions, it lacks the excellent downloadable Premium Modules. Still, there are months of play here.

PCZONE
77



I reckon the massive caravan is this way. Follow me.

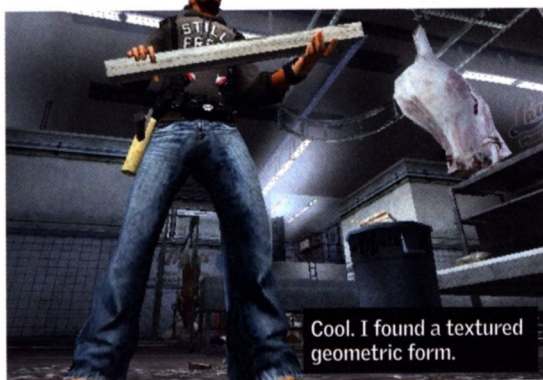
MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

PUBLISHER: Mastertronic WEBSITE: mastertronic.com PRICE: £9.99

EASILY THE MOST ludicrous game title in living memory (what, he's out of bed and feeling a bit stressed?) *MEGU:CUP* is a third person graffiti-'em-up featuring all manner of ropey sub-Lara acrobatics and fisticuffs.

This is proof positive that fashion brands and games don't mix, at least not when done in such a generic, depressing and 'down with the kids' manner. For a supposedly hip guy, Ecko's videogame incarnation looks like a pissed uncle dancing at a wedding, oblivious to the fact that his wife, *Jet Set Radio*, is copping off with the tagging missions from *GTA: San Andreas*.

PCZONE
42



Cool. I found a textured geometric form.

And the rest...

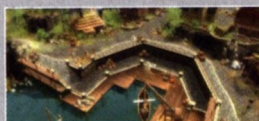
Avoid unneeded money-fritterage



STRONGHOLD LEGENDS

PRICE £9.99, Mastertronic
This game added all manner of fantasy nonsense to *Stronghold*. While it's an average RTS, it's not a patch on how much fun the series used to be.

PCZONE
57



THE GUILD UNIVERSE

PRICE £19.99, JoWood
They're Sims, only medieval and German! Despite the intricate micro-management, there's fun to be found here. After all, it's got pirates.

PCZONE
62



EIDOS EVERYTHING PACK

PRICE \$99.99 (£50), Steam
Every *Commandos*, *Deus Ex* and *Hitman*, two *Tomb Raiders*, *Just Cause*, *Kane & Lynch*, *Project Snowblind*... 20 games for £50. That's a decent deal.

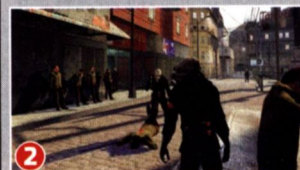
PCZONE
78

PCZONE Top 5 budget games



1 DEUS EX

PRICE \$9.99 (£5), Steam
After winning every Best Game Of All Time award around, it doesn't need flattering here. So, we won't. Buy this stupid idiot game for cretins today.



2 HALF-LIFE 2

PRICE \$19.95 (£10), Steam
The game that not only invented the 3D see-saw physics puzzle, but refuses to stop using it to this day, despite our repeated protests.



3 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £4.99, Mastertronic
The precursor to *Oblivion*, Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG offers cheap goblin-bashing.



4 PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE \$19.99 (£9.99), Steam
Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this quirky title into the stratosphere of the platforming greats.



5 SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE \$29.99 (£15), Steam
Pirates! has the polish expected from the the Meier name, and is more instantly fun than any game in the *Civ* series, without sacrificing depth.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Don't stop buying them until they're bought



PCZONE Top 5 WAYS OF TEACHING YOU TO CROUCH

- BROKEN ELEVATOR DOOR** (HALF-LIFE)
- CAVE DEBRIS** (FAR CRY)
- ROCKY OUTCROP** (CRYSIS)
- DISGUSTING PIPE** (PREY)
- BROKEN ELEVATOR DOOR... AGAIN** (DUKE NUKEM 3D)



PCZONE Top 5 ASSAULT COURSES

- HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE**
- CALL OF DUTY 4**
- MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT**
- PSYCHONAUTS**
- THE KRYPTON FACTOR**



PCZONE Top 5 REASONS TO JUMP

- SECRET NIGHT-VISION GOGGLES** (DUKE NUKEM 3D)
- HACKING HIGH SECURITY CAMERAS** (BIOSHOCK)
- NAVIGATING RUBBISH XEN** (HALF-LIFE)
- DRAMATIC LEAP FROM TITAN** (BATTLEFIELD 2)
- IT'S HOW SOLDIERS AVOID BULLETS** (ANY ONLINE GAME)



FPS

Must buy!



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



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



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



UNREAL TOURNAMENT III
PCZ Issue: 193 - 90%
The daddy of online shooters returns with a mule-kick of intense deathmatch, epic vehicles, high-speed combat, Warfare mode, and a graphical sheen that outdoes its ageing insta-gib rivals.



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



CRYSIS
PCZ Issue: 188 - 92%
A retooled, condensed *Far Cry* for newer hardware, with *Crysis*'s neat nanosuit and 'anything can happen' action-bubble mentality making it a winner. The last act falters, but the Korean-bullying is endlessly replayable.



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

Strategy

Must buy!



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



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



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



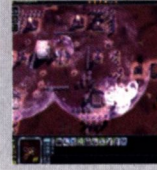
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue: 193 - 91%
This startling beauty came from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



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



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



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

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



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



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



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



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



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.



LEGO INDIANA JONES
PCZ Issue: 196 - 80%
An amalgam of plastic bricks and classic Hollywood action, *LEGO Indiana Jones* is a relaxing trip through the whip-cracking archaeologists' three best movies, and one that will effortlessly coax giggles from your lips.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



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



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
EQII gives the original game a much-needed lick of paint, and adds a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A timesink in a good way.



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



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

Simulation

BUDGET



X2: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



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, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a Hollywood-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. *LFS* has realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.

Oddball



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



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



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



PEGGLE DELUXE
PCZ Issue: 183 - 83%
A weeping unicorn and a sequence of bagatelle-inspired peg-bouncing puzzles combine to make a casual game of unparalleled addictiveness. If you doubt us, you haven't played it.



THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul - games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Build a studio and make your own films. Brilliant.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, *FM* succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 - 87%
Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, *Tiger 06* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.



NHL 08
PCZ Issue: 187 - 80%
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like *Speedball!*) to our PCs, the latest *NHL* is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



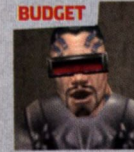
MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
Possibly BioWare's best game since *KOTOR*, with a new combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and space sex - it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
This could be the most intimidating yet wonderful game we've ever played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in FPS RPGs. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of gaming.

INCOMING!

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

August

CUSTOMPLAY GOLF 2
SPACE SIEGE
STALKER: CLEAR SKY
SUPREME RULER 2020

CUSTOMPLAY GAMES
SEGA
DEEP SILVER
PARADOX INTERACTIVE

Summer

A VAMPIRE STORY
MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES
BEN THERE, DAN THAT
SPORE

ASCARON
EA
SEE NEXT ISSUE
EA

Autumn

FALLOUT 3
FAR CRY 2
GHOSTBUSTERS
LEGO BATMAN
RED ALERT 3
WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

BETHESDA
UBISOFT
VIVENDI
WARNER BROS.
EA
EA / GOA

Winter

LEFT 4 DEAD
PROJECT ORIGIN

VALVE
WARNER BROS.

TBC

MAFIA II
MIRROR'S EDGE
RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS
PRINCE OF PERSIA
STARCRRAFT II
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

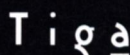
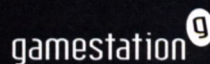
2K
EA
CODEMASTERS
UBISOFT
BLIZZARD
BLIZZARD

08

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE FESTIVAL

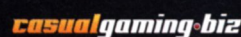
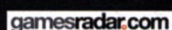
Expanding the Creative Culture of Games
10th - 12th August 2008

For more information visit
www.edinburghinteractivefestival.com



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PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

GRID times

HAVE YOU PLAYED *RACE Driver: GRID* yet? This game gives you one of those rare experiences where variety and sensational visuals more than make up for horrid console-oriented game mechanics. Those of you with high-powered hardware will almost certainly love it.

Now, I do realise that pretty much everyone has been talking up the way it manages to stick in the middle lane, overtaking dull arcade racers while at the same time staying clear of twitchy driving sims, but it's still easiest to drive using a gamepad. And that can only mean one thing.

Hook up a wheel – any wheel – and even after fine-tuning all the fine-tune bits you'll find it a challenge to keep your motor travelling in a straight line without ping-ponging it endlessly between rows of shrieking bystanders. Swap the wheel for a gamepad, drive the cars like you were sat on a funfair dodgem, and you'll finish on the podium every time.

So it's not that challenging, there aren't many cars, and the PC installation scoffs a ludicrous 10GB of your hard drive, but it's never left me bored. Even now I catch myself cooing at the screen, amazed at how real the rear lamp clusters look, or uplifted by the way that achingly beautiful Lamborghini motif catches the light.

I'm not sure if I'll snap out of it, but right now I'm certain of one thing: I need a bigger processor.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

THREE FIGURE GTX

NVIDIA's new graphics card line-up missing a digit

A BRAND-NEW NAMING convention heralds the arrival of a brand-new GeForce graphics line, complete with brand new bullet points for the back of the box.

There have been so many changes to the GPU's feature set that NVIDIA changed the product name: what many thought would become the 10-series is now the humble-sounding 200-series, presumably after the company's second-generation unified shader.

New features include integral PhysX support and four-stage power which enable the new cards to work on as little as 25W. Rather than just having 2D and 3D modes, power increases gradually depending on what you're doing, starting at desktop apps through high-def video playback and on to next-generation games playing.

The card seen here is MSI's version of the flagship 280GTX, with 1GB DDR3, a wider 512-bit memory interface, plus promises of a 20% improvement in texturing efficiency and between one and two times the power of any existing



MSI's super-fast MSI N280GTX costs more than £400.

8- and 9-series card. To top things off it's three-way SLI ready and yours for £400, with only an overclocked GX2 able to give it a run for its money. msicomputer.co.uk

LIVING IN A BOX

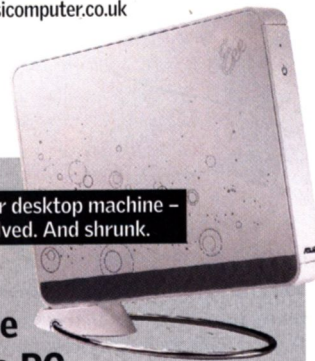
ASUS release immobile version of their mobile PC

THE ASUS EEE Box Mini PC follows the lead of the company's Eee sub-notebook by being small, silent, and the same price as a console.

Just £199 buys you Intel's 1.6GHz Atom N270 processor, GMA 950 graphics, Azalia ALC888 audio, 802.11n wireless, gigabit LAN and Windows XP Home Edition. There are numerous USB slots, DVI out and a multi-format card reader. The only thing it lacks is an optical drive. In all it weighs around 900 grams.

While it's not going to be ideal for *Crysis* players looking to move out of their bedrooms, it will let you watch IPTV streams, download stuff and play *Peggle*. To the lounge! uk.asus.com

Your desktop machine - evolved. And shrunk.



News round-up

Microsoft have discontinued *Windows XP*. If you're buying a PC from HP or Dell, you can still purchase a downgrade option when buying a system with *Vista Premium* or *Ultimate*. This means the machine will ship with Microsoft's disappointing OS but will have *XP* on the hard drive. dell.co.uk

The arrival of AMD's 9800 GTX-pummelling Radeon HD 4850 has forced NVIDIA to slash prices on most of their 9-series products and introduce a tweaked-for-speed 9800 GTX variant, the GTX Plus. The HD 4850 costs less than £150 and yet it snaps at the heels of cards that cost twice as much. ati.amd.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS
BY JON BLYTH

IPTV: Defensive, outlandish and somewhat childish statement made by Rupert Murdoch when it was suggested that he might not understand the challenges TV faced in the internet age. **LIQUID GAMER INFINITY:** A lubricant synthesised from the opinions of online teenagers – just one millilitre on the soles of your shoes will allow you to slide to Norway. **DR O'POSSUMS'S SICKENING BOOB MACHINE:** An imaginary creation that pops its head up whenever there's a shortage of ideas in a hungover man's brain. Also gives us the chance to see if anyone reads this shit – the first three emails to jblyth@futurenet.co.uk get a free game. **TRAVELLER 525:** A quest-giving NPC in Flagship's next MMO, Traveller 525 will be identifiable as British from the fact he will go, "Oo-ar, duck, 'appen i's bostin' fer a tom tit", and will be gay.



DEAR WANDY

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



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite

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



When replacing a PSU, avoid products with a 'Real Power!' graphic on the box.

Q HERE WE GO AGAIN

I built a new PC about a year ago based around an ASUS P5KC motherboard, Core 2 Duo E6750, 2GB RAM, MSI Radeon HD 2600 XT and *Vista Home Premium*. The system works fine and for most games plays everything without bother – there was slowdown in *Crysis*, but *Call of Duty 4*, *Gears of War* and *Half-Life 2* play fine.

I'm now looking to improve my graphics performance. I play a lot of games, including *Half-Life*, *BioShock*, *Crysis*, *Total War*, *Company of Heroes* and others – should I purchase a second HD 2600 XT card and install it in CrossFire mode, or should I purchase a new card? If so what would you recommend? I have £150 to spend.

Patrick Sheridan-Ross

A In the last Dear Wandy, Robert Wallace asked whether adding a second GeForce 8600 GT to his setup was worth the effort, so I apologise for answering the same question twice.

I'm not a fan of CrossFire or SLI, nor have I ever been. Not only are you spending money in two products that are obsolete the moment you buy them and whose resale value halves the moment you reach for a screwdriver, you're also getting a poor return on your investment. You might see big improvements in synthetic benchmarks, like 3DMark06, but when you play games you'll not be wowed by two £50 cards. Perhaps a year ago you



Aiiiiiiiiiiii!!!! The Force finally meets its match.

might, but not now. You'll certainly not be playing *Crysis* at any meaningful frame rate.

Sell what you have and get an 8800 GTS 512MB card instead.

Q GAMES A TURN-OFF

I recently had my computer upgraded with a GeForce FX 5500 and an HP DVDewriter. The problem is that a few of the games I have cause the machine to switch itself off while I try to play them. I've had to sell a few, but the same thing has happened to *Tomb Raider: Legend*. After about 10 minutes of playing the game, the whole system turns off.

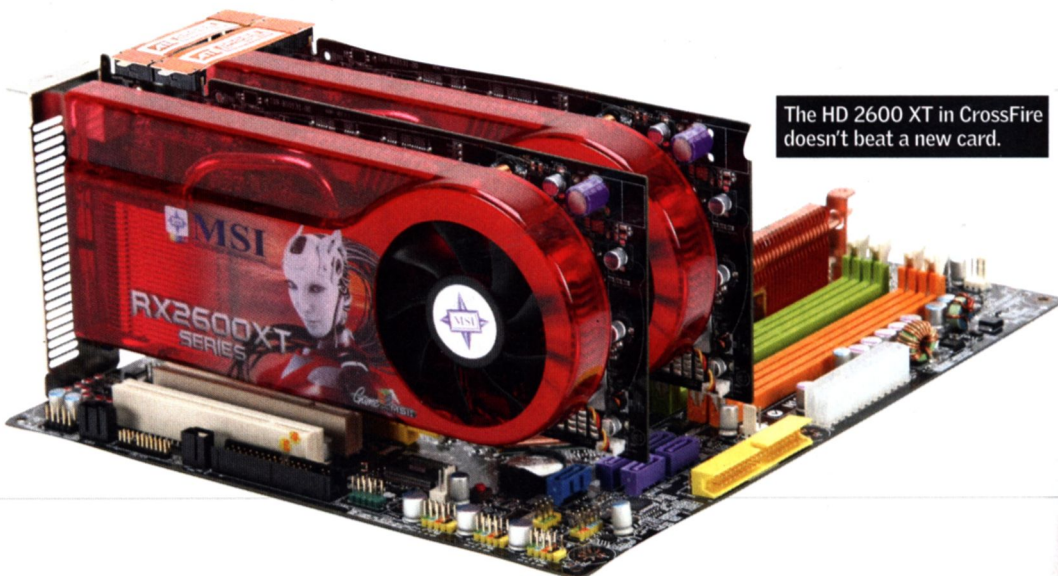
Please help me, as I had a stroke last year and all I do is use this thing to play.

S Cochran

A This will be one of two things: your power supply, or heat build up. I'm suspecting the former because of the addition of two new components, both of which will have a significant impact on the behaviour of a low-powered PSU.

If you have an older desktop system, the likelihood is that it'll have a 250W or smaller supply under the hood, and the FX 5500 asks for 250W as a bare minimum. Add in the HP rewriter and you're looking at a drain that could well tip the balance of power and cause your machine to shut down. You'll need a new PSU of 350W or thereabouts – it needn't cost more than £25. Go for a known brand such as Antec.

Alternatively, it could be heat build up. Playing a game causes your graphics



The HD 2600 XT in CrossFire doesn't beat a new card.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.5	16 MAY 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 175.16	16 MAY 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.15.0006	14 MAR 08
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 2.15.0004	05 NOV 07
CREATIVE	ALCHEMY 1.10.01	15 MAY 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY, AUDIGY 2, AUDIGY 4 2.09.0016	9 OCT 06

"I admire you for resisting electronic bleating to patch a system that's working, but four years is too long"

card to create lots of heat, so you should take the side of your case off and point a fan at your motherboard.

Also check that your FX 5500's cooler is moving, because if it's a second-hand card it may not. Try cleaning it with a compressed air duster and in the case of it being broken you'll need to either replace the blower assembly or, more sensibly, the card.

Q PHANTOM MENACE

I recently bought a new Toshiba laptop and naturally the first thing I went to do was install *Knights of the Old Republic* to give the graphics and sound a bit of a test on one of my all time fave games.

The game installed well enough, but on trying to launch it an error comes up saying that there's a conflict with some disc emulator software. I went to the SecuROM website to find out more, and it instructed me to reboot with the disc in and right-click either the shortcut or the .exe file itself to bring up the option of Launch Analysis, which could then be emailed to the SecuROM support staff. No such option appears.

The only changes I'd made to the laptop when I encountered the error was to update *KOTOR* to 1.03, update the NVIDIA graphics drivers and download *OpenOffice*. Any help or information you could give me would be greatly appreciated as I need my regular dose of PC gaming before I get the shakes.

Nick Mason

A You should first try SecuROM's updated executable for *KOTOR*, an 8MB download from snipurl.com/kotor. Extract the file from the archive and overwrite the existing *swkotor.exe* in your game folder. In 90% of cases, this gets rid of the "Conflict with Disc Emulator Software detected" error and allows you to play the game.

If this doesn't help, right-click on the executable file above, choose Properties,

and then configure it to run as Windows XP (Service Pack 2) on the Compatibility tab. To start the game, right-click and choose Run as Administrator.

Failing all that, uninstall *KOTOR* and your graphics drivers. Disable any anti-virus software you have running, then reboot and reinstall the drivers from a fresh download from the NVIDIA site. Then install the game but do not patch it to the latest 1.03b version – people have reported issues with the update when running on Vista.

Last ditch would be to repartition your drive and install XP. Most of the *KOTOR* problems relate to laptop users running Vista.


Q BEHIND THE TIMES

Where my old system was happy for years, with no crashes or freezes, I've recently updated to XP Service Pack 2, and my *World of Warcraft* experience is now one of frustration. In busy places it locks up and I lose connection to the server. I know it's SP2 hogging my system resources or something, but what can I do?

David d'Arcy

A I must say, deep down I admire you for resisting incessant electronic bleating to patch a system that's working, but four years is too long. Especially as it's Microsoft years.

There must be a dozen aspects of SP2 which must seem rather alien to you, but which to the rest of us are no more foreign than furniture. I'd suggest that regular disconnects could be related to your firewall, so try running *WOW* for a short while without it.

More likely, though, is that your other drivers are out of date. I'd go through your system, updating every driver you can think of. A better suggestion would be to reinstall XP from scratch, applying SP2 immediately afterwards, and then everything else. 

ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN PC TECH...



A screen grab from DX9 *Crysis*.



DX10's changes are subtle.

04 DIRECTX

DirectX (DX) is a library that makes it easy to create games, by providing standardised codes to control graphics and sound cards, and control devices like joysticks, keyboards and mice to game designers.

Previously, games connected directly with hardware and had to be configured to work with a certain display or sound card. Those who owned a PC running MS-DOS will recall how software would ask you to select whether you had an AdLib, Gravis UltraSound or Sound Blaster card whenever you played. This made PCs feel backward and esoteric, as

developers had to write code specific to each device type. The release of DX did away with all that, and with each subsequent release it has offered more tools and better results for developers and users alike.

The latest version of DirectX, DX10, is now only available to Vista users, with XP users only able to use DX9 or lower.

DX10 was pitched as being many times faster than its predecessor and capable of delivering stunningly realistic graphics. However while DX10 is an improvement over DX9, it's not the quantum leap in performance we were led to expect.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Fergal) I want to get a wireless router which can record the volume of traffic that goes through it. I've been Googling and looking at specs of various routers, but I can see nothing mentioned in the specs. (Heero Yuy) Not many routers offer any form of QoS monitoring or traffic shaping. I know some of Draytek's models do, but they often cost £100+ and are designed for business use. We use them at work for hardware VPNs. (Fergal) I'm going to get a Linksys WRT54GL and flash it with the open-source *Tomato* firmware from polarcloud.com/tomato. There's a nice video on *Tomato*'s home page showing the bandwidth features.

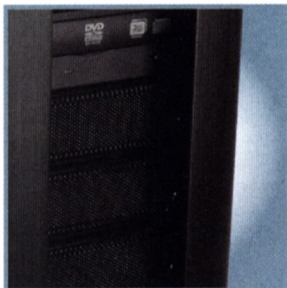
SLI AND CROSSFIRE

ATI's CrossFire and NVIDIA's SLI engines split the work of rendering video across multiple graphic cards, giving a game's resolution and/or frame rate a boost.

We've never been impressed by either system. Compared to buying one high-end graphics card, the performance increase from buying an SLI or CrossFire-enabled mobo and two graphics cards is rarely worthwhile. And both systems only work with certain games.

That said, the Liquid Gamer Infinity SLI delivered far more power than we expected.

"The only part of this machine that hasn't been overclocked is the RAM"



LIQUID GAMER INFINITY SLI

PRICE £1,499 MANUFACTURER CyberPower WEBSITE www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

CCROSSFIRE AND SLI are, at best, overrated. At worst, they're a rip off. That's been the policy on doubling up on graphics cards in these pages since time immemorial. In simple terms running two mid-performance cards in tandem does not give the same performance as running a single, high-performance unit. With this caveat in mind then, let us move on to study the CyberPower Liquid Gamer Infinity SLI.

The clues to what make this gaming PC different are in the name: it's water-cooled and runs two 8800GTS cards in SLI. Normally this wouldn't impress us, but CyberPower are using cooling as an excuse to overclock this PC to stupid levels, while keeping it extremely stable.

The processor is an Intel Duo Core 2 E8400. Out of the box this chip runs at 3GHz. In the Infinity it runs at 4.15GHz: a speed that caused splutters of disbelief in the PCZ office. The 8800GTS cards

are similarly boosted – their core and memory speeds have been pushed from 650MHz and 780MHz, to 780MHz and 1100MHz respectively.

The only part of this machine that hasn't been overclocked is the RAM. Presumably that's because it hasn't been plumbed into the cooling, although you can add more piping if you want. But be warned: this machine is already noisier than most other water-cooled PCs.

Despite our reservations about the long-term benefit of SLI systems, it's undeniable that all these tweaks deliver a dual-card system that can outperform the latest power cards. Benchmark tests saw *Crysis* hit 60fps and *3DMark06* give a score of 19,027. The last speed demon we featured – Chillblast's Fusion Juggernaut (90%, 195) – ran *Crysis* at 30fps and scored 18,267 in *3DMark06*.

The other noteworthy aspect of this machine is the price. Not long ago a

system like this would cost you double this PC's asking price of £1,500.

That said, the Fusion Juggernaut delivers similar performance, across any game – not just ones with SLI profiles – using one 9800 GX2 card. And it comes with a Razer Diamondback mouse, a Saitek Eclipse 2 keyboard, Creative's T7900 surround sound speakers, and a Samsung 24in LCD monitor, for just £50 more.

PCZONE
82
SLI-ppery when wet

PCZ197 HWREV HEADSET AUDIO 770

PRICE £40 MANUFACTURER Plantronics WEBSITE plantronics.com



THIS GAMING HEADSET comes in two flavours – with a USB dongle that provides surround sound, and without. The dongle is handy if you're using onboard sound, but not needed if you've got a decent soundcard.

This headset provides rich and bassy sound, the mic has a noise-reducing feature and can be moved away from your mouth and out of your eye line. These cans are hardly lookers but sit lightly and securely on your head, making for a quality headset.

PCZONE
85

TRAVELLER 525

PRICE £15 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE www.geniusnet.com

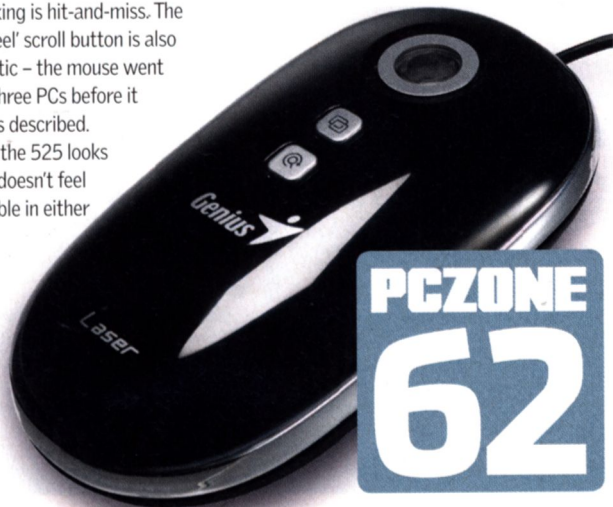
THIS IS ONE of the few modern mice lefties are able to use, as it lacks any of that fascistic right-handed ergonomic design nonsense. On the other hand, it's a bit shit.

Genius have modelled this rodent on Apple's seemingly button-less Mighty Mouse, but they've done a poor job on the 525's rocker switch, so left and right-clicking is hit-and-miss. The 'OptoWheel' scroll button is also problematic – the mouse went through three PCs before it worked as described.

While the 525 looks stylish, it doesn't feel comfortable in either

hand, and – except for two hot keys that are for use with Vista – it lacks any extra controls.

The Cyber Snipa Stinger (93%, issue 196) is a much better option for right-handed gamers and costs only £10. Meanwhile southpaws should go for Microsoft's IntelliMouse, which can be had for less than the 525.



PCZONE
62

NIRVANA N120 PREMIUM

PRICE £34 MANUFACTURER ZEROtherm WEBSITE www.zerotherm.net/eng



ZEROTHERM HAVE MISSED a trick with the Nirvana as it doesn't come in a heart-shaped box. But as "Nirvana" means "extinguishing", it's a good name for this CPU cooler.

Installing this monster isn't simple: the motherboard has to be removed to attach the cooler's backing plate, and it requires a huge case to hold it. But once fitted the Nirvana is definitely secure. Although the fan speed controller is more than a tad ugly when mounted outside the PC's case.

The good news is the Nirvana does a damn fine job. With the 12cm fan on

its lowest setting the temperature of our test PC CPU dropped by 12°.

The Nirvana is pricier than other coolers but it fits Intel and AMD chips and creates an arctic breeze, making it an excellent choice for overclockers.

PCZONE
86



CYBORG KEYBOARD

PRICE £60 MANUFACTURER Saitek WEBSITE www.saitek.com

TWO THINGS YOU need in a keyboard are responsive keys and a comfortable design.

What you don't need are coloured backlights, silver WASD and cursor keys, and touch-sensitive control panels. But Saitek thinks you do.

That's perhaps not entirely fair: the backlighting makes gaming in the dark easier, especially as the WASD and cursor keys can be lit individually. And the Cyborg's 12 programmable keys – six along each side – are great for MMO addicts.

There are more features: the Windows keys can be turned off,

there are media player controls, mic and headphone sockets, a USB connection and a wrist rest.

While some of the Cyborg's extras are sort-of useful, it's tacky, gimmicky, and the keys feel dead.

PCZONE
70

Reviews by Alan Dexter, Henry Winchester and Dave James.

REMEMBER:
CLANKING MEANS
DANGER AND
POSSIBLE DESPAIR

If you begin to hear clanking, crunching or whining coming from your PC, and you're Peter Jones from *Dragons' Den* and you've been paid a lot of money to appear in a BT advert – beware '80s puppetry.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

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

LOADED?

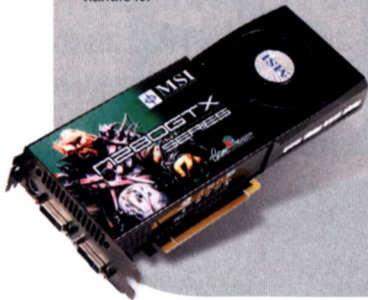
GRAPHICS

N280GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420
MANUFACTURER MSI

WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

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



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775

EXPECT TO PAY £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel

WEB intel.co.uk

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

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

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

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

HDD



WD7500 AAKS

EXPECT TO PAY £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEB wdc.com

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

SCREEN



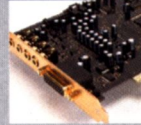
SM226BW

EXPECT TO PAY £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung

WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

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

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. Games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off from your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

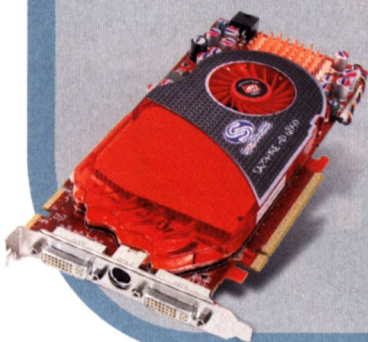
GRAPHICS

HD4850

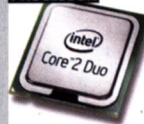
EXPECT TO PAY £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphiretech.co.uk

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down, idiot. Go and buy one.



PROCESSOR



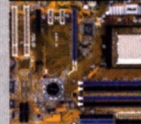
CORE 2 DUO E2180

EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.co.uk

At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £20

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS



X-530

EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE logitech.co.uk

Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

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Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Smash Bros.

The Exclusive Interview

Legendary game designer Masahiro Sakurai reveals all, only in ONM!

FREE GIFT!

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Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

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We chat exclusively with the man responsible for Kirby and Smash Bros.





PCZONE FREEPLAY



Lol, gratis

FREE GAMES!

Living on my own

THIS MONTH HALF of the team decided to leave the office on their various trips, jollies and adventures, with only muggins here to hold the fort.

Sitting alone in an abandoned office fending off phone calls from confused PR people looking for "the boss," and receiving £2,500 in unused notes in a paper bag marked "For Mr Porter's service to Bethesda", was a bizarre experience.

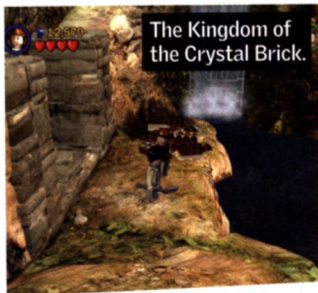
Actually, that'd be far less interesting than what I got up to. Without Steve Hogarty to deal with Freeware, I was left to write my favourite two pages of the magazine, with nobody to tell me that I couldn't use phrases such as "ball-quaking." This also meant that I got to sit down and play through most of the entries for the Procedural Generation Competition, which I've dedicated plenty of space to across both Freeware and Freeplay News.

The realisation of just how much raw talent exists outside of the mainstream industry, and how the internet has given these people a platform to put their artwork online, is truly amazing.

Yes, I called these games art, and while I didn't play them wearing a beret, I do consider what these people are doing as a creative escapade up there with making a song or painting a picture. Games like *Rescue: The Beagles* are an inspiration to any of us who think either PC gaming is dead or that the industry is dying because of Mr Money and his Pound Party. Far from it! With tools such as Microsoft XNA (www.xna.com) and sites like TIGSource (tigsources.com) promoting the free games society, things are only going to get better. And, hopefully, cheaper. Or even free-er.

Ed Zitron

Ed Zitron, disc editor



The Kingdom of the Crystal Brick.

94 Demo pages

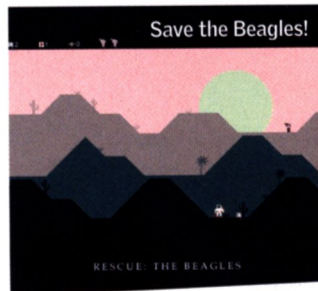
LEGO Indiana Jones and the Temple of Demos...



Spaceships!

97 News

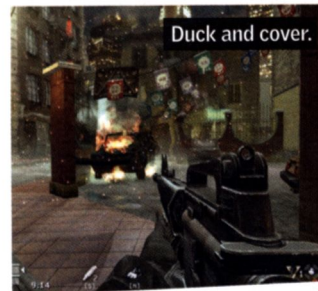
All the news that you'd ever need about free games!



Save the Beagles!

98 Freeware

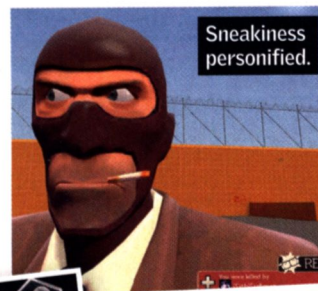
Refuses to spend money for an entire month



Duck and cover.

100 Play

We get a life - and a slew of new Call of Duty 4 maps...



Sneakiness personified.

102 Online Zone

Beating up the readers and talking on the internet

PCZONE FREE-O-METER

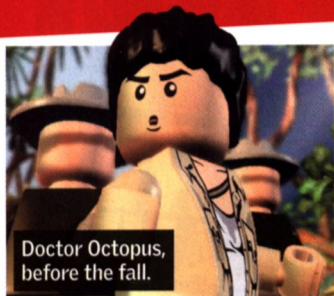


0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



324.5 HOURS*



Demos

Ed Zitron shows you round our disc

LEGO INDIANA JONES: THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

Throw us the LEGO, and we'll throw you the demo

WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com/games/legoindianajones



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.



THOUGH THERE'S WIDE-SPREAD arguments going on in the PC ZONE offices about *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, everyone agrees that the first three *Indiana Jones* films were masterpieces, and thus it's with great pleasure we present the demo of *LEGO Indiana Jones*.

In the demo though you play through the first level of the game – set at the start of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. You walk around with the cowardly Satipo, whipping and digging your way through a jungle, to find an ancient Peruvian temple and take stuff from it, and then high-tailing it out of there before getting annoyed by the evil archeologist Belloq and the local blow-pipe population.

We gave *LEGO Indiana Jones* a hearty 80% in our last issue and we very much enjoyed the brick romps on which the hatted one vaunts. However, the



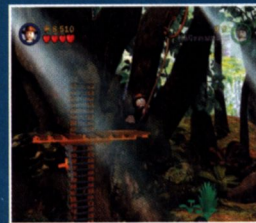
LEGO games can be something of an acquired taste, so we really advise you to give this remarkably long slice of the game a try out. The good news is that this level is a good representation of

what's to come – plenty of enemy-bashing, bit-collecting and brick-building, along with a series of jumping puzzles that should give you a flavour of the full game's quirkiness.



HELPING HANDS

Press K and you can switch between Indy and his helper, Satipo, each with their own abilities. In the full game, characters all have different attacks and jump ranges, that allow you to replay levels and find secrets.



WHIP IT GOOD

Indy's whip can be used by pressing J. It's used as either a ranged attack (reasonably useful for breaking boxes) or to swing across gaps. Later in the level, you'll also find it can get to otherwise inaccessible switches.



CHECK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU BRICK YOURSELF



SCATTER!

When you die, watch out, as all of your LEGO pieces will scatter randomly around the area where you copped it. This is especially annoying if you die near the aforementioned spikes, as they make your pieces hard to retain.



SPIKY DEATH

A word of warning – unlike most LEGO games any and all spikes you encounter will kill you instantly if you touch them. You'll find yourself getting killed a lot whenever they're in the area, so prepare for a bit of frustration.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4

A-bloo-bla-bloo-bla-bloo, I'm a devil

WEBSITE devilmaycry.com

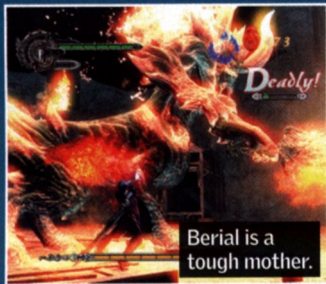
HOLD YOUR HORSES, friend, this isn't a bad console port. In fact, *Devil May Cry 4* not only works on your PC, it works well, shown in glorious DirectX 10 and looking a little smoother than the Xbox 360 version.

This demo gives you a mishmash of the game, letting you play across a time

trial version of the second level of the game, where you eventually face off against the demon boss Berial, one of the most impressive-looking and melodramatic villains of recent times. Turn to page 64 for a review of *DMC4* and an indication of how much you should care.



It looks lush, even on slower PCs.



Berial is a tough mother.

KISS THE DEVIL



THE DEVIL BRINGER

Build combos by using the Devil Bringer (Nero's right arm) to grab enemies from a distance and pummel them at close range.



THE RED QUEEN

Each button press adds power to the Red Queen sword. Each charge dishes out extra damage.

PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES

Whack those nasty fruit-frotters

WEBSITE rainslick.com

WHAT COULD'VE BEEN an outing in self-love actually turned out to be a brilliantly written and enjoyable RPG, and thanks to DVD recordable media, you can now play the demo of this webcomic-based chunk of awesome.

This is a shareware version of *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness - Episode One* (to give the game its full, bizarrely long, title) so if you want to you can get the full thing by paying money to upgrade.



1 Fruit Fuckers

These bastards hump you with their pulp-destroying funnels, but also spit juice at you.

2 Rake-EEE!

The rake minigame requires you to hit space when the arrow hits a rectangle. Do it right every time and you'll hit for full damage.

3 It's'A'You!

You can customise your character at the beginning of the game, and they'll be rendered in glorious 2D cartoon-o-vision as well as in 3D.

THE INTERNET SUPERSTARS



JOHN GABRIEL

Gabe is the rough-houser of the pair, using his fists to do up-close and personal damage.



TYCHO BRAHE

Tycho - the babbling, intelligent one - uses his Tommy gun to blow holes in anything that moves.

DISC COMPETITION

WIN! one of five copies off *Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut!*

While it needs a room-sized supercomputer to run properly, *Assassin's Creed* remains a very playable, enjoyably stabby romp on lesser machines.

Set during the Crusades, you play a young, yet talented, miscreant Altair who goes against the rules of his order of killers. Thus he finds himself falling down a rabbit hole of

unintelligible conspiracy and deceit, all the while murdering people left, right, centre and upwards.

Sounds interesting, doesn't it? Well, if you want, you can enter our competition on the disc to win one of the five copies that Ubisoft have donated to the cause, just go to side one of the cover disc to enter.



BEST OF THE REST



SPORE CREATURE CREATOR

WEBSITE spore.com

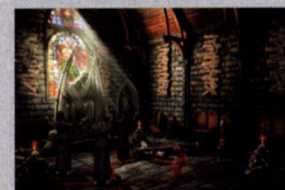
Proving again and again why none of us can be God, the *Spore Creature Creator* (page 32) lets you create your own creatures that scamper about as they will in the full version. Prepare to lose many hours with this contraption.



EXTEEL

WEBSITE www.exteel.com

While many free-to-play MMOs lack the lustre of their paid-for brethren, *Exteel* is a fun game where you suit up in a mecha and beat up other robot-fighters in classic FPS-esque games, like deathmatch and capture the flag.



DRACULA: ORIGIN

WEBSITE www.dracula-origin.com

Another month, another point-and-click demo. And despite our waving of fists at the genre in warning, it comes back strong with this effort involving a Victorian PI learning all about everybody's favourite bloodsucker.



RESCUE: THE BEAGLES

WEBSITE www.16x16.org

While we talked about this game in Freeware this month, we felt it necessary to flag it up here too, as it's on the disc and is one of our favourite Freeware games ever. This is partly because we all believe in dog safety, especially if said safety involves parachutes.

SNIPPETS



FREE PSI-OPS

WEBSITE snipurl.com/psioops
FilePlanet are giving away the fun-packed (and in this case ad-supported) *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* – just be prepared to be bombarded by commercials for Always Ultra during the game. (Not really.)



ROPER PLAYS POPS

WEBSITE www.poxyboggards.com
Flagship Studios CEO Bill Roper wowed fans at a Renaissance Faire this year, by singing and playing the penny whistle and tuba for his band, The Poxy Boggards. So here's a funny picture.



JELLY BELLY

WEBSITE www.kloonigames.com/blog
Kloonigames, to celebrate the first birthday of *Crayon Physics*, have released an awesome mish-mash of *Columns* and *Space Invaders* called *Planet of the Jellies*.

EVE GOES TO WAR

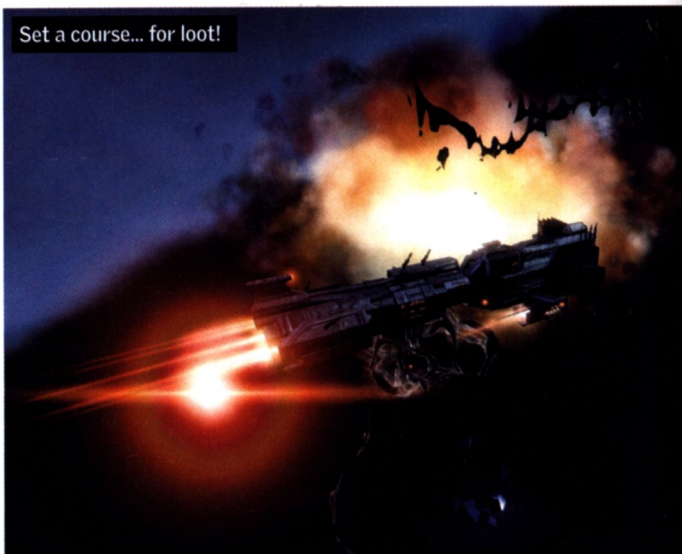
A new patch brings around The Empyrean Age

WEBSITE eve-online.com

CCP HAVE RELEASED yet another huge content addition to *EVE Online* with *The Empyrean Age*. The balance of power between various factions has been shattered and, as you'd expect, players can now ally themselves to some new forces in the usual fashion, gaining missions and safe access to regions of space in the newly-introduced Black Rise area. So called, presumably, because of the dark nature of space.

Each faction can take control of systems within it, their ownership netting them resources and the backing of the police force, CONCORD. There're even hidden complexes that players can take, raising their corporation's standing as well as gaining their faction valuable stead in the ongoing war.

The real-world democracy that is the Council of Stellar Management has also convened for the first time, though as of yet has not made any decisions that really affect the game. However, it seems that the members actually chosen to be flown out to Reykjavik cover the majority of *EVE* players, with even rag-tag alliance Goonfleet getting two of their



Set a course... for loot!

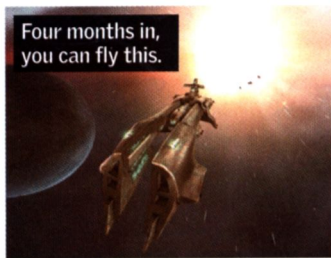
people into the ranks, regardless of many players worrying that the O.O-space Bee-lovers are too edgy to let onto a democratic council.

Overall, the council seems to be balanced between the less warring players and those who hang out in the lawless parts of space. You can find out

about how the council was voted in, and view in exhaustive detail exactly how the population voted, by going to snipurl.com/eevovote and learn surprising facts such as that 97% of the voters were male. We're as shocked as you.



EVE – still prettier than WOW.



Four months in, you can fly this.



PROCEED!

TIGSource randomly creates the Procedural Generation Competition

WEBSITE tigsources.com

AS YOU'LL SEE when you turn to Freeware, we've covered a few of the PGC games, which create new content each time they start. The competition created a flood of new, playable freeware games that range from quirky and weird to outright fantastic.

Though we've covered four of them in Freeware this month, there are actually 60 entries, with some utterly brilliant and weird titles, such as *Mechanical Psycho*, a shooter where you play a

screaming head on tire tracks; *Minus*, a beautiful cartoon platformer that uses numbers to generate a series of cloud-platforms; and *K2*, an amazing 3D space adventure using Microsoft XNA game creation tools.

Head to snipurl.com/procedural and download all 60 of the entries, and turn your eyes to Freeware to take a look at some of our favourites – we'll do our best to cover as many of them as possible in the coming months.



K2 is beautiful.



Artificial Nature is hard as nails.

DIPPING INTO D.I.P.R.I.P

We flag down the guy who turned *HL2* into *Carmageddon*

WEBSITE www.diprip.com

WHEN WE LOOKED at *D.I.P.R.I.P.* in issue 195, we were shocked at how great it looked, how slickly it played, and how professionally the product fit together – it's truly one of the best mods made in years. To help us uncover more on the mighty vehicle-blasters for *Half-Life 2*, we've picked up Pawel Lekki, lead designer on the mod.

Q Where did you get the idea for *D.I.P.R.I.P.*?

A We always liked car combat games like *Twisted Metal* or *Vigilante 8* and there were no such games being made, so we decided to make our own!

Q What was the greatest challenge making the mod?

A Car handling was definitely the biggest challenge. We've written the current vehicle code from scratch. It took a lot of effort to give the cars an arcade feel and yet make it look semi-realistic. There is still a lot of work to be done to improve handling in high lag situations, though.

Q What inspired the environments?

A We took our inspiration mostly from local Polish landscapes. This allowed us to create a lot of material



based on photographic research. We had to give everything an abandoned, post-war feel, so we imagined how things would look like after a major conflict which wasn't resolved with conventional weapons. So our environments are not excessively blown-up, and allow the players to finish the job themselves.

Q How're you planning to expand the game?

A As a first priority we want to add more depth to the gameplay. We are currently working on three new

teampay game modes: domination, capture the flag and assault. We are still in the prototyping phase, but I can already say that driving in a convoy is much more fun than being a lone wolf.

Q Do you think mods are dying?

A Definitely not. I think they are becoming increasingly more interesting to the professional games industry. In the past modding had hardly any support, the community had to build its own editing tools, find ways to rip original content and stitch it back together. Nowadays most games come with editors, like *The Witcher* and *Half-Life 2*, built in modding support and a lot of support from the original game developers.

In my opinion the modding scene is very healthy and with events such as the recently announced second \$1,000,000 Make Something Unreal Contest, it's only getting healthier.



SNIPPETS

For comments and more info, go [here](#) for the blog post. Use mouse to select driver and map. Use arrow keys to change settings. Quality: Medium Screen size: Medium Please note that the settings only take effect when the game is running. Click somewhere on the page if the game doesn't respond.



HOLD ME CLOSER, TINY MARIO

WEBSITE nihilogic.dk/labs/mariokart
Yet again, another computer person has managed to distill a Mario game – this time, *Mario Kart* – into an 11KB Javascript file, which is about the 10th size of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* saved as a text file.

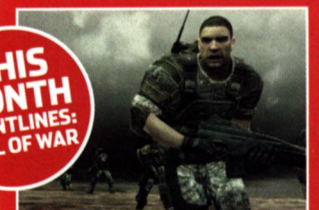


SLAP THEM SILLY

WEBSITE snipurl.com/rosecamellia
The sequel to the game that let you slap women legally, *Rose & Camellia*, is now available. So ignore the morality issues and stock up on Stella while we inform social services.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR



"Players can no longer stick landmines onto their legs."

MOVIE OF THE MONTH PRINCE OF PERSIA

While as-yet-unnamed, the new *Prince of Persia* game looks like it'll be a ridiculous, cel-shaded chunk of brilliant. In fact this Ubidays trailer – along with last month's Hot Shots – have whetted our appetites to waterfall-like proportions, despite this movie's somewhat CGI-ish nature.



A new enemy erupts from a smoldering pile of liquorice...



...on his own, the Prince isn't tough enough...



...but with a little help from his Natalie Portman look-a-like friend...



...he's able to deliver a gravity-defying smackdown. Hooray.



Freeware



Ed Zitron sails the freeboat out onto an ocean of thrift

Freeware is the rock of ages, the very foundation of the magazine, and this month concerns every issue of society. From the rescue of sickly animals from evil vivisectionists, bouncing balls between a bat and a forcefield, robot cats throwing things, rabbits packing laser guns battling with beetles, to running a virtual MMORPG, this section covers everything in life that is worth covering, and for nothing. Zilch. Gratis.

RESCUE: THE BEAGLES

Dog gone it

DEVELOPER Nenad WEBSITE snipurl.com/rescuethebeagles

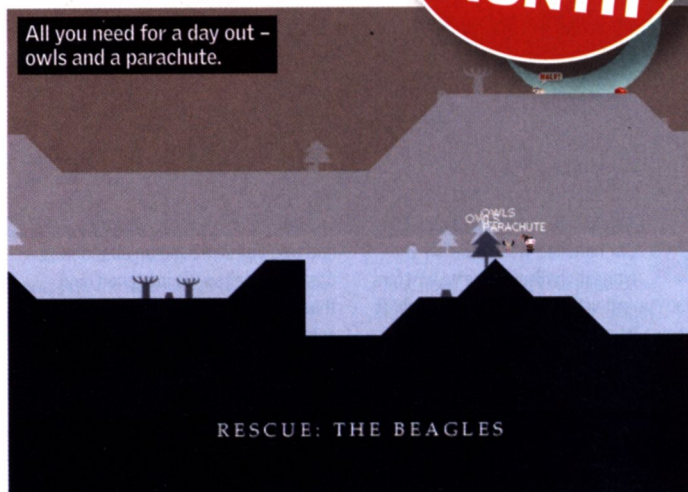


THIS IS AN example of just how dramatic a game name can be when coupled with intelligent colon placement. *Rescue: The Beagles* was developed for – and subsequently won – The Independent Gaming Source’s Procedural Generation Competition (tigsources.com/features/pgc), which challenged freeware game designers to create a game that makes new content every time it starts. If you look around, you’ll see not one, but four of these games have wormed their way into this month’s Freeware. *Rescue: The Beagles* stands above the rest in its delicious polish, addictiveness and sheer pulse-pounding feel.

The story is thus: a cargo plane carrying a shipment of beagles to the dastardly CutLab animal testing facility in the Amita Range has crashed, and a pair of plucky animal rights activists have been dispatched to save the stranded beagles from CutLab employees looking to take them back.

The game is set across three moving mountain ranges, with little beagles toddling around seemingly ignorant of their peril. You have to jump between

All you need for a day out – owls and a parachute.

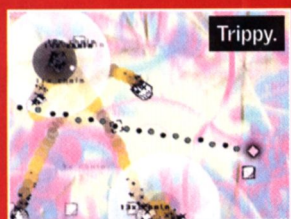


these ranges, using parachutes and ropes to scale or drop large distances, taking care not to fall to your death. Oddly, letting a beagle run off the screen or touch an enemy also kills you.

On the way, you pick up owls that can be used as weapons against CutLab employees. These guys range from the scary-sounding yet bumbling Biohazard Doodz, with their horrible mechanical voices, to the genuinely terrifying

Vivisectors, who chase down the beagles and scream “DOGGIES!” in a voice that can only be described as ball-quaking.

Not only does *Rescue: The Beagles* have a delightful visual style, it also has a great soundtrack, with thick, juicy 8-bit tones that give the game a deliciously bassy excitement, so much so that on my first few playthroughs, I managed to die because I was so pumped up by the music. Woof!



Trippy.

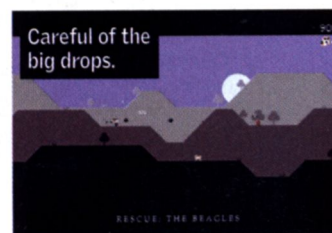
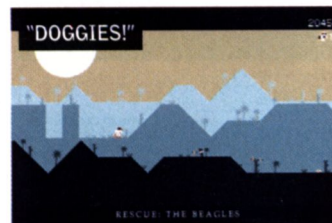
EVERYONE LOVES ACTIVE2

DEVELOPER Kyle Pulver
WEBSITE kylepulver.com

YET ANOTHER PROCEDURALLY generated nicetic, *Everyone Loves Active2* is a hilariously obtuse, blindingly colourful, and grammatically incorrect shooter much in the vein of indie hit *Everyday Shooter* (issue 196, 75%), except that it’s free.

You control Active2 – the thing that’s shooting – with the WASD keys, shooting with the left mouse button and firing a bizarre curve-shot with the right, aiming a crosshair to choose where the shot angles off from. Enemies come from all sides and are utterly unpredictable, with some requiring you to curve your bullets around their shields, and others spitting horrible hovering words at you, such as hearts that say, “Stay away from me.” Just like women.

Enemies explode with a spherical bang that blows up anything nearby, allowing you to create chains of baddie explosions and rack up disgusting amounts of points. Handily, if you’re about to die killing 20 enemies in this way revives you. The entire experience is disorienting but beautifully crafted – an artistic pointapalooza that nobody with sense will turn down.



LASER BUNNY – ADVENTURES IN THE ALIEN DEATH MINES!

What is up, DOCTOR?

DEVELOPER Dugan, Gabor
WEBSITE snipurl.com/laserbunny

GIVE A RABBIT a carrot, and it'll eat it. Give it a laser gun and it'll launch on a wild adventure in a constantly-moving garden. In *Laser Bunny* your furry friend attempts to get out of a yard that's flooding, avoiding a crowd of beetles that stop your escape by teleporting into your path, and ghosts of laser bunnies who, presumably, failed to escape.



A-maze-ing fun.

This is yet another part of the Procedural Generation Competition, and it's an unpredictable yet endlessly playable rush of a shooter that keeps you on your toes.

NIKUKYUU

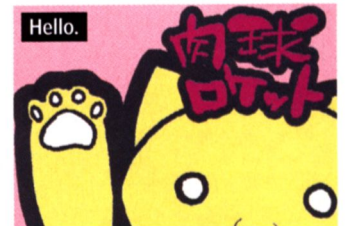
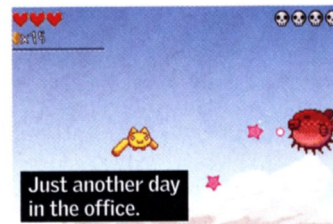
It's raining cats and missiles!

DEVELOPER X680x0同好会 WEBSITE www.x68uec.org/game/nikukyuu

IF YOU RARELY find yourself embodying a robot cat that shoots its arm like a rocket, then quite frankly you lead a dull life. *Nikukyuu* specialises in googly-eyed, anime cat-robots that float on nothingness. This shooter lets you grab enemies out of the sky and hurl them back at remaining foes, while dodging their projectile attacks and charges. Better still, certain enemies when grabbed shoot a trail of

deadly beams before you get bored of them and throw them to their doom.

This is easily one of the weirdest things you'll have come across in a long time. From the title screen, the rocket-cat stares angrily at you, its eyes boggled and its fist raised, waiting to strike. Why does it prey so angrily on the skies of what can only be Japan? What is the rocket-cat's dark agenda? We shall only find out when it's too late.



MMORPG TYCOON

It had to happen

DEVELOPER Mewse
WEBSITE mmorpg-tycoon.com

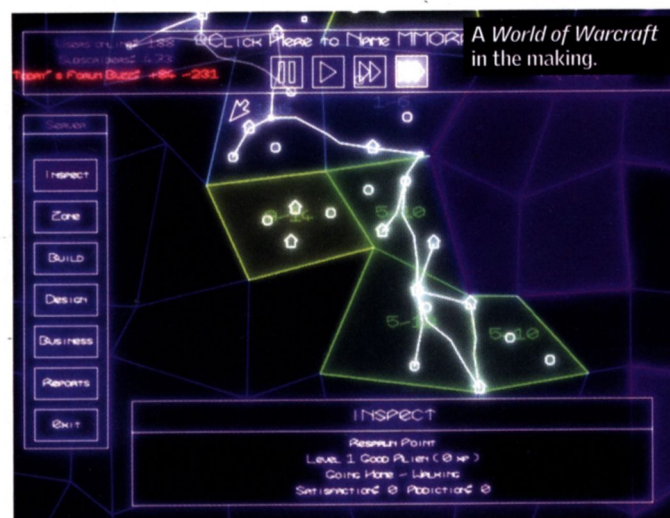
WHAT WOULD IT be like to run an MMORPG? If it's anything like this, it's a lot like *Tron* meets *Sim City*, mixed with a hint of *Railroad Tycoon*. While hazardous in concept, Mewse's use of simple visuals and a great UI makes this an addictive game. You control everything from zone placement and level-ranges, to your employees and the stats used in classes.

For a game developed over a short amount of time it's pretty complex, too, with the ability to zoom in and look at your subscribers wandering around your virtual hamster wheel. You can even see what they're complaining about, which boils down to how easy or hard your game is. As you get more subscribers *MMORPG Tycoon* becomes a balancing act of creating more zones to spread out players, as once a zone flashes red, it's about to crash – and as we all know, a crashed zone makes players unsubscribe in a flash.

You simply have to play this game, even if it's just to recreate that beautiful *Hellgate: London* launch experience.

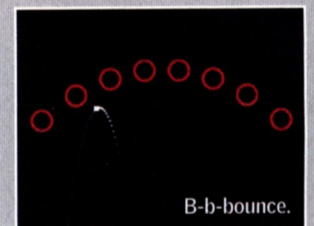


Just like a real MMO.



A World of Warcraft in the making.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



B-b-bounce.

MR. BOUNCE

DEVELOPER pixelate
WEBSITE snipurl.com/misterbounce

THE BIG DIFFERENCE between most *Arkanoid* clones and the browser-game brilliance of *Mr. Bounce* is that this game is not only excellent, but has also been made by someone with a nark on with the genre and a desire to fix it.

In *Mr. Bounce*, you bounce a ball off of a moving pad, but can also, like a snooker game, see its trajectory and control its bounce-height by moving a bar up and down. This gives you a lot of control over the ball – especially as you can also use slow-mo to stop things getting too crazy. That isn't to say that the game is easy – ball-twiddle is limited, and as the levels progress, there are barricades to navigate.

Mr. Bounce is a class act, and makes most brick-breaking games look a bit crap.



The dangers of a dodgy lighter.

GET A LIFE

Preferably not one full of flesh-eating zombies...

WEBSITE www.getalife-mod.com MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

THE TITLE OF this great-but-flawed atmospheric *Half-Life 2* mod is rather appropriate for a team of home developers who have spent over two years working on it. *Get A Life* is a single-player horror mod where you play as Alex Zeminsky, an everyman character trying to find the whereabouts of his sister and discover his mysterious past, while the world goes tits-up and people attempt to shoot or eat him.

Rather than shoe-horning standard *HL2* characters into a new setting (see the *Old School* mod opposite), *GAL* is a nigh-on total conversion, with new backgrounds, models, weapons and voices – although there are occasional reminders that wrench you back into Gordon Freeman's universe, such as the unmistakable sound of the Combine's death throes. Some of the voice acting leaves a bit to be desired, but the overall creepy sense of dread is captured right from when you start up a generator in the bowels of a deserted laboratory.

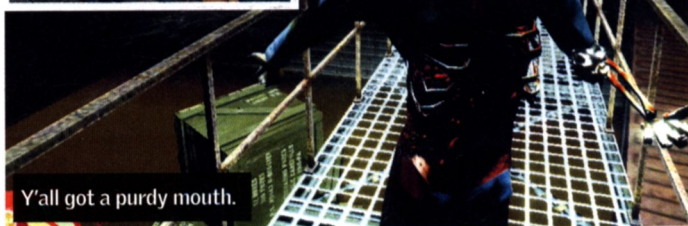
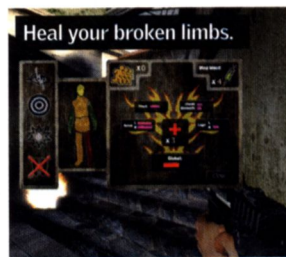
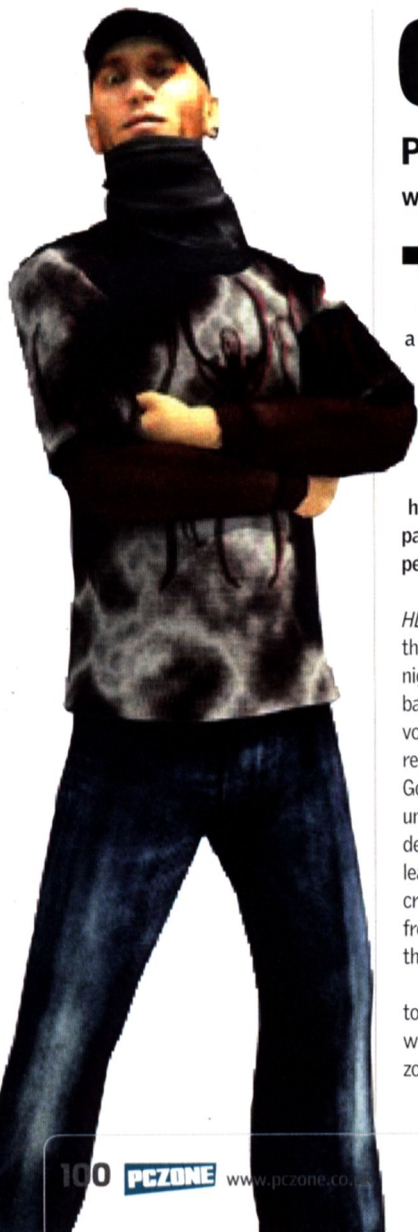
One of the first additions you'll have to contend with is a new health system, where you can heal different 'damage zones' on your body and diseases with

the health packs you pick up. To be blunt, it doesn't work, and the constant healing only detracts from the monster-shooting and story progression. A more successful feature is the classic bullet-time, which provides moments of balletic slo-mo violence as you blast enemies with shotguns and other heavy weapons.

Your armoury is pretty significant, with over 12 items and some guns that are upgradeable with modules such as a silencer. Although if you hated the torch-

or-gun system in *Doom 3*, prepare for more of the same unbearable darkness.

Get A Life is impressive, with scary sequences, inventive flashbacks and a fantastic soundtrack. However, apart from the re-spawning enemies, wildly oscillating difficulty curve and confusing level design, the major downer is its unstable nature, which causes crashes that can interrupt, or completely end your progress. *GAL* is worth playing, but will be a much better when it's debugged.



OLD SCHOOL

We wouldn't be here today if it didn't pave our way...

WEBSITE snipurl.com/oldschoolhl2 MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*



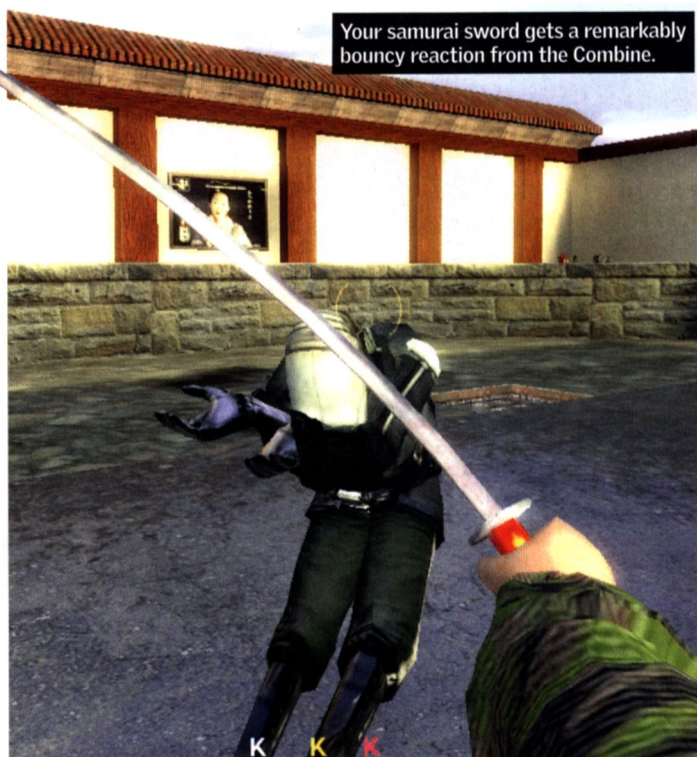
THIS COULD HAVE been awful – take a sophisticated FPS and reduce it to a trawl around incongruous Japanese-style maps looking for coloured keys that open doors.

However, the now-ancient “get key, open door, kill enemies, repeat” formula

is right at home here in *Old School*, with a logical progression through the nicely-constructed levels that have some clever touches – such as a final level set under a dojo packed with zombies.

The oriental setting is pulled off nicely, with sliding wooden doors, Japanese gardens and posters of *Naruto*, although it does feel odd to slice up Combine soldiers with a samurai sword. And it's less slicing as hitting them, as if the sword were a crowbar.

There are a few annoyances – invisible enemies and identical-looking bronze and gold keys – but *Old School* is an enjoyable and mindless way to wring out a few more precious drops of *Half-Life 2* game-sauce.



COD4: VARIETY MAP PACK

Everywhere you go, always take the terror with you...

WEBSITE www.charlieoscardelta.com MAPS FOR *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*

INFINITY WARD'S BLOCKBUSTING modern war shooter is fast becoming the new *Counter-Strike*. However, the game's been out more than six months now, so if you're tired of the same Middle-Eastern and Russian maps, you've finally got some respite in the form of the Variety Map Pack featuring four slick new scenarios.

Broadcast is an enhanced version of the setting of the single-player mission Charlie Don't Surf. Set in a TV station, complete with studios, green room and cameras, this is fantastic for multi-level close-quarter blasting and satisfying destruction of expensive equipment. As well as pretending that you're Natasha Kaplinsky.

Chinatown – a revamp of *COD2* high-spot Carantan – is a typical oriental district, with your laundry, restaurants, lanterns and lion statues – it's a maze of tiny rooms, corridors and open streets for sneaky sniping.

Creek is a large deserted Russian town map with a ravine running right through it, and is great for house-to-house fighting and picking off enemies when you're camouflaged in the deep grassy undergrowth.

The final map is our favourite: Killhouse. This bigger version of *COD4*'s training level is set in a medium-sized warehouse full of fake terrorist targets and faux plywood buildings, and is hilarious when used in a riotous free-for-all deathmatch.

The Variety Map Pack is free to download and utterly brilliant – what are you waiting for?





This month we've watched in horrified awe at the monstrosities our sexually deviated readers have created using the *Spore Creature Creator*; discussed how realism in games isn't as much fun as being stupidly powerful in a realistic setting; been repeatedly set on fire by a plague of pyros and then chopped up; and then talked about what franchises we miss like the desert misses the rain.

Online Zone

Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just visit pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

A Gathering of Spores

This month saw fevered activity from sweaty palmed forum-dwellers with the release of the Will Wright porn-o-matic life creation suite. Here are the very best of their creations, including one that made Apophis_DD internet-famous for its sheer ingenuity and rudeness.



Forumite: Apophis_DD
Creation: Humpasaur
Tony Hart style one-word summary: Scintillating!



Forumite: Grant356
Creation: Unnamed large Willy monster
Tony Hart style one-word summary: Exciting!



Forumite: Moby_matt
Creation: Hendrix
Tony Hart style one-word summary: Hmm!



Forumite: Sunscramble
Creation: Very Strange Martian Mike
Tony Hart style one-word summary: Leggy!

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

THIS MONTH WE'VE been rolling eyes at *Age of Conan's* slightly boring beach starting zone, before launching into a gigantic rant about the internet's reaction to *Mass Effect's* DRM. This argument spread onto the forums though, becoming a multi-page juggernaut from which no man returned the same.

Elsewhere, Golden Joysticks hype brewed contentedly (corporately enforced, yes, but justified) with some decent prizes on offer for those voting (so head on over to goldenjoystick.com magazine-reading chums!)

Later on in the month Zitron posted a blog talking about his hatred of reality-based gaming, and how he liked it better when the world stayed real, but you played a superhuman, able to manipulate a normal world like a toy.

Christ knows who'd want to read that, but hell it kept him quiet for five minutes.



DRM de-DRM.

PCZONE PUBCAST!
NOW BACK ONLINE AFTER A BRIEF HIATUS

SUPERTEST
BABY COME BACK
The series that should return to us...

FIGHT CLUB

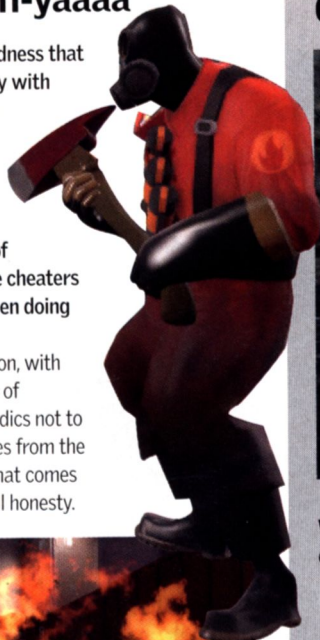


COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

Try to set those shites on fi-yaaaa

LAST FIGHT CLUB missed the bonesaw-fuelled madness that was Medic Mania, but this month coincided perfectly with the introduction of the new Pyro achievements. The worst had passed, but Reds and Blues still had four or five per team, and the fact that their direct damage no longer reduces with distance was a guarantee that many would die, and not many would see where they were going for a while. And, of course, that we'd complain that you were all terrible cheaters and that the Pyros were overpowered. But we've been doing that for months anyway.

With a fast map rotation, there was some ripe action, with newcomer SmellyIrishMan stealing the show in terms of tactical chat and point-scoring. In future, Log asks Medics not to heal him, as he can't stand the responsibility that comes from the symbiotic Medic relationship, or the disappointment that comes from a wasted invuln. He only plays *Minesweeper*, in all honesty.



ZONE CHAT



Chatty Cathy and the Internet Bunch



How on Earth does this industry create so many puerile sex-crazed gamers?

WHEN YOU LEAVE chatters to their own devices, the conversation gets foul. But not even we could predict the filth from those who logged on this month. Someone's wife was even there and she got dead offended, so watch the Ps and Qs next time or the banning bat will make an appearance.

Once everyone calmed down, there was a good talk about the state of *Mass Effect*, how *Crysis Warhead's* toned-down graphics engine will look to your average gamer, and, of course, whether *Age of Conan* deserved a worse score because it lacked patented "Jiggletech" technology.

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: **PC ZONE (PCZ)**. If you don't have Steam, first find out what *TF2* is, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in our Steam group for the date of the next chat event...



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy picking flowers, you big girly-man – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows – some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Ed Zitron PCZ_EdZed
 Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
 Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
 Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
 Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
 Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx

- 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
- ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk
- CALL OF DUTY 4**
 Coming soon
- BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- TEAM FORTRESS 2**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

THIS MONTH'S SUPERTEST had everyone reminiscing about games from yesteryear that we want to come back, but probably stand more chance of being immortalised as 30ft tall monoliths.

The conversation was dominated by a chorus of 'bring back anything made by Bullfrog,' such as the *Theme* games,

Dungeon Keeper and *Populous*. Will and Log suggested that we could make these dreams a reality by planning a kidnap of Peter Molyneux. Another company we all voiced an interest in a return from was Shiny, with a revamp of *MDK* and *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* in high demand.

Ed managed to steer the conversation off the rails and on to

breasts (mermaid breasts in particular) apropos of nothing, but Steve managed to bring things back on topic by hoping out loud that *Elite 4* would be coming soon, before Will bluntly crushed his dreams, and then Ed's when he talked about how good *Freespace 2* was.

The Supertest is on the DVD and you can voice your opinions on our forums.



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

primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the new 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 a single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

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



Game information

Click on any game icon and you'll see information about who made the game, 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 and access your previous saves.

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance your PC will run Windows Vista without upgrades, especially if it's capable of playing the latest 3D games. But 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 PC meets the 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 of how well your PC will run Windows Vista

Super Media Center

Windows Media Center is at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect up your PC to an HDTV and browse your music and video collection. What's more, you can bin your set-top DVD recorder! With Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play, record and timeshift TV programmes. Get hold of Windows Media Center Extender (a device that plugs into your TV) and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, this Extender capability is already built into it.

All your games

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

Game rating

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

New built-in games

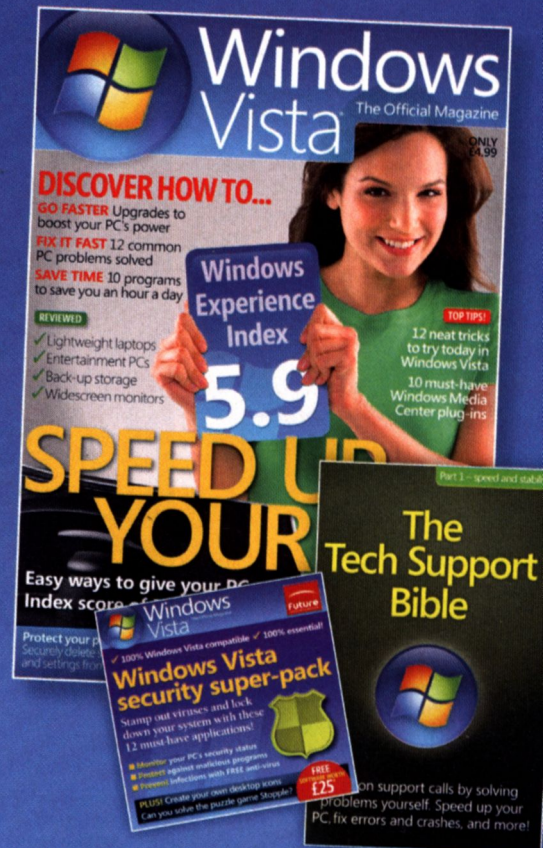
Old classics, such as Minesweeper and Solitaire, have been improved and updated with Windows Vista, plus there are a few additions, such as Purple Place and Mahjong Titans.

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

If you want to get the very best from your Windows Vista PC then pick up a copy of *Windows Vista Magazine*, which tells you everything you need to know

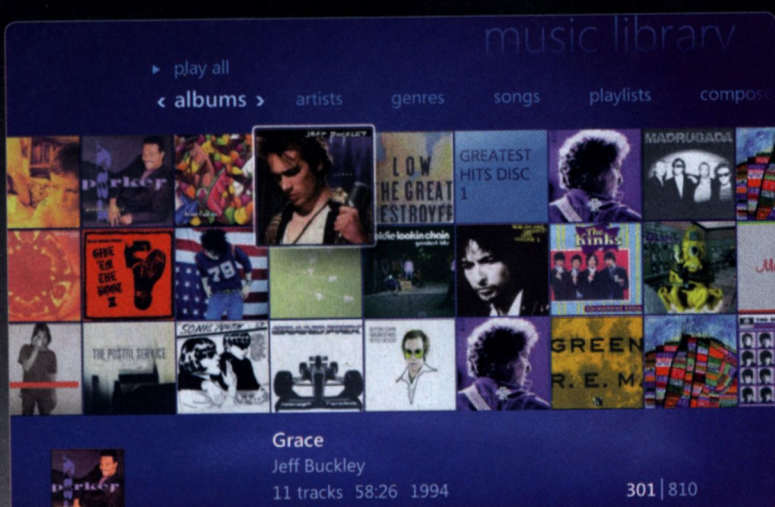
We show you...

- ➔ How to speed up your PC
- ➔ How to fix common problems
- ➔ How to boost stability
- ➔ The best new kit to buy for your PC
- ➔ Great new games and software



Issue 20 is out now

Find out more at www.windowsvistamagazine.co.uk



EASY LISTING Intuitive menus help you to browse through your music collection

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback of the Month

Bad boys, bad boys....

WAD YOU GONNA DOOM

But how?

The Freedoom Project takes advantage of the fact the id have released the *Doom* engine on the friendly GPL licence. You can't play the original *Doom* data without paying for it, or being a massive lousy pirate. And as we all know, piracy is like riding someone else's horse whilst stabbing it in the neck with a pencil. However, the mostly free WAD files made by modders can be used in *Freedoom*, leaving you with a whole bunch of playable free levels, ranging in quality from *Eternal Doom* (huge levels, lots of running) to that infamous mod where you run around shooting ejaculate onto women.

freedom.sourceforge.net

The home for the open-source *Freedoom* project.

www.doomworld.com/10years/bestwads

Should mop the spare hours up.

THE BEST THING about PC gaming – apart from the fact that it's the most awesome and sexually appealing thing a human can do, short of touching a porn star's hair on a bus – is that everything's there on your hard drive, all accessible. Should the whim seize you, you can nip into any damn folder you like and delete half the files. Because you own that PC and are entitled to make it do anything. With console games you can smear marge over the disc in a high-fat dirty protest, but that's about it.

One of the first games to encourage you to tinker with it in a productive way was *Doom*. WAD (Where's All The Data?) files were introduced by id Software to encourage modifications that fans had painstakingly made to *Wolfenstein's* code.

By removing the game data – sprites, textures, maps – from the engine, id opened the modding floodgate and it was approximately four seconds before the first nude WAD was being created by someone who didn't honestly know

Classic *Doom*. It's certainly classic.



whether he wanted to laugh, masturbate or cry.

Mods ranged then – as they do now – from people replacing the cacodemons and imps with Batman and Sam Fox, to map and weapon alterations. *Doom* came out in the same year *PC ZONE* started – historians have yet to decide which event caused the other – and the best WADs still have a place in the hearts of anyone who was around for the birth of



They've very pink aren't they?

PC gaming. And even if you weren't born then, it's well worth a look around, because this is our heritage as gamers. And I don't think I'm using senselessly passionate language when I say that it is our birthright.

Six of the best The WADs that changed a world...



BATMAN DOOM

Louis Vuitton and Marc Jacobs agree – *Doom* WADs are officially 10% more fashionable than LEGO.



ETERNAL DOOM III

Megawads replaced all of the levels – *Eternal Doom* also boosted the map sizes. Too much, in fact.



CHEX QUEST

Breakfast cereal freebie. Devoid of guts, but fortified with the vitamins and minerals a body needs.



GOLDENEYE 64

The console-defining classic was loved by N64 owners – and to be honest, this doesn't do the game justice.



XXX.WAD

The fabled porn textures that somehow made it onto a *PCZ* cover CD. A thousand mid-'90s teenagers rejoiced.



SONIC ROBO BLAST 2

A WAD we've covered in *Freeplay* – colourful, and more fun than any official 3D *Sonic* adventure.

PC ZONE in time

Travel back with us, to PC ZONE's toddlerhood

AUGUST, 1998. THE landscape rolled with a choking fog and mankind had yet to migrate from its squalid huts into the crystal superstructures that would house it in the new millennium. Tips sections hadn't been rendered obsolete by the internet and people would regularly phone up the ZONE offices for advice on how best to shoot things in *Quake*.

In Issue 66, Charlie Brooker reviewed *Final Fantasy VII*, giving it 93% despite saying that "if you encountered a script this hackneyed and unnatural in the cinema, you'd stand up and hurl shoes at the screen".

Valve were a 40-strong team of developers with no track record – although they were two months away

from unleashing *Half-Life* on the world. One of the promises being made was that monsters would "have a sense of smell", which seems like a duff way of saying "they can see around corners". No soldiers ever passed comment on the rankness of your odour, anyway.

Nowadays, when phrases like "shoddy port" and "another nail in the coffin of PC gaming" are thrown about like confetti-like replacements for something interesting to say, PlayStation Zone seems like an unthinkable page. But there it is – a review of PS platformer *Gex: Enter The Gecko* right next to a guide to making your own *Quake* levels. Nothing to do with inventing a section to let you blag free PS games though, clearly.

"Although they are beautiful and submissive animals, it is illegal to go beyond first base with a horse"

Back Page, PC ZONE 66

"You can't deny that some of the best games appear on the PlayStation"

PlayStation Zone, PC ZONE 66

"A hot contender for the throne occupied by Quake II, Daikatana's extended development period is ample proof of Ion Storm's commitment to making the best first-person shooter around"

Previews, PC ZONE 66



Mameframe PHOENIX

PHOENIX IS NOT the most interesting game in the world, yet it has a murky past. This is a fairly straight shooter, with five levels on constant rotation. Two waves of *Galaxian*-style alien birds dive at you, then the annoying bastards settle underneath you before flying up again. Then, there are two waves of eight eggs that hatch into larger birds. Finally, you get to shoot at the spindly-legged and big-craniumed Phoenix King in his armoured spaceship.

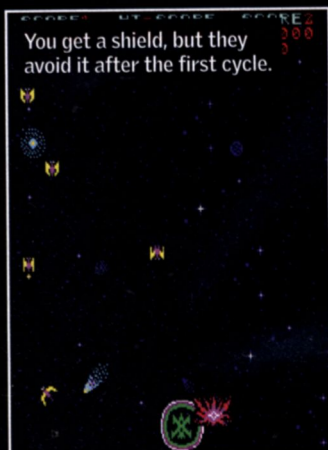
Yes, it's a dull game. And yes, this write-up has been equally dull, so far. The main reason we bring *Phoenix* up is that at the height of its popularity it somehow took on a remarkably non-PC nickname.

Phoenix was played in pubs and arcades at the same time that Joey Deacon appeared on *Blue Peter*. Joey suffered from cerebral palsy and it was the first time most children had seen the condition. His plea for compassion and understanding was lost on the

What is MAME?
The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from mame.net – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it.

nation, and in schoolground parlance the *Phoenix's* boss alien was renamed Joey Deacon, his flying fortress became his padded cell, and the whole game was briefly retitled *Kill Joey Deacon In His Padded Cell*. At this point it's worth mentioning that Joey was never placed in a padded cell, as his condition didn't affect his thought processes.

To our knowledge this phenomenon has never happened before or since.



Back in the day



Alt-tabbing

By Jon 'Log' Blyth

Never mind Games For Windows, what our office-bound chair-dented arses need are games in windows. PopCap understand it, even Blizzard understands it, giving *World of Warcraft's* quick alt-tabability and scaling it beautifully to 400x300, to let it sit happily under a spreadsheet. *SimCity* even used the *Windows* menu bar, so comfortable was it in its dwelling within *Windows 3.1* for *Workgroups*.

That's what *Crysis* needs – stuff pressing "R" to reload, it should be Alt-TWR for Tools... Weapon... Reload. As for changing your suit's mode, what's wrong with control-tabbing through the settings?

Games developers – stop re-inventing the wheel and gives us our tabs!



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

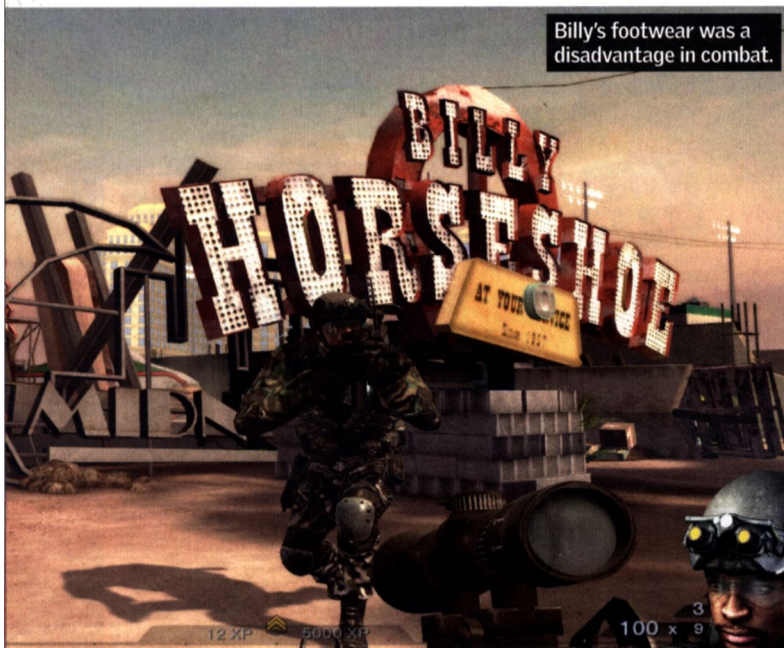
Jamie Sefton shoots crap with JP Cambiotti and Phillippe Therien, creators of the Clancy shooter



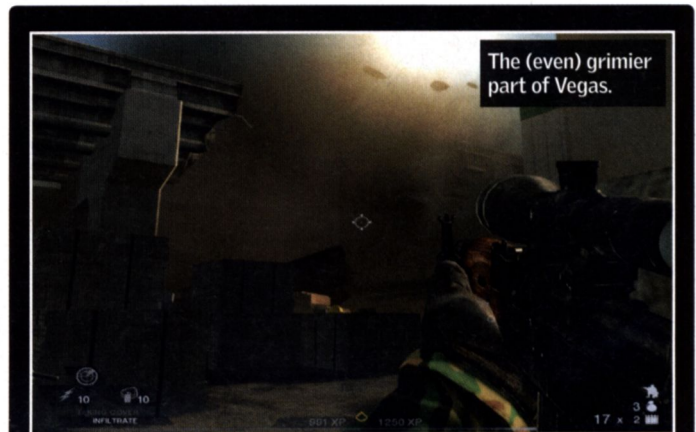
AFTER THE DISAPPOINTING ending of the original *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, we were as happy as Tom Clancy's accountant when we heard that the developers were making a return trip to the glitzy, gambling capital of the world for a sequel.

After tracking down the team in Canada using sophisticated satellite GPS technology (and a phone),

we shoved a snake cam under the door of the Ubisoft Montreal studio to listen in on lead multiplayer game designer Jean-Pascal Cambiotti and game designer Philippe Therien discuss how they avoided massive copyright lawsuits from Vegas hotels, what happens when terrorists become over-friendly, and getting professionals to fit into tight spandex and crouch and crawl around on the floor.



Billy's footwear was a disadvantage in combat.



The (even) grimmer part of Vegas.

01 BACK IN TOWN: Cambiotti: "We really weren't done with the *Vegas* storyline and so we still had a lot of things that we wanted to do, both in the sense of location and in the sense of the story. So we wanted to go to Vegas' old town to show what the terrorists had been up to while we were going around quickly in Mexico. So it's really about filling in all the gaps and making sure that there was closure to the original's story. Therien: "The first game had a bit of an odd ending [a slightly rubbish 'to be continued' affair - Ed], and we knew that, but at some point you just have to ship the game, right? If we had done that without the notion that we would do a second one, I would have felt terrible about it. But in a very, very vicious way I was kind of glad that people were disappointed with the ending because a lot of people wanted more, and that was kind of cool."



02 STRIP SHOW: Therien: "Making sure the locations were different enough from *Vegas* was really about art direction. In the first one we had a lot of the Strip, with the bright lights, but we didn't want *Vegas 2* to look exactly like the first one. So we decided to look more into the seedy back areas and locations when you go off the Strip, and a whole lot of the Nevada desert. It was really just 'What else in Vegas can we show?' and it was a logical choice to move off the Strip - the nightclubs for example, the refinery, all that stuff is about exploring different locales while still being about Las Vegas."

"During the day, it's all grey, it's not that glitzy, it's not that impressive, so we wanted to explore that unknown part of the city that people might not be familiar with and that's what has allowed us to keep the game fresh."

"We wanted to explore that unknown part of Las Vegas that people might not be familiar with"



03

VIVA LAS VEGAS: Therien: "Well, the thing is with Vegas is that we can't recreate it per se because everything is copyrighted – only the general look of the city from the outside is not copyrighted. So what we tried to do was tap the general feel of the city with an amazing Strip in the middle and all that, but we recreated everything for our purposes – we didn't want to have the real buildings anyway, because they're not great for gameplay. So going off the Strip was a lot more interesting. The trick is to make it feel like Vegas, look like Vegas, but not be obviously legally liable for anything."

Cambiotti: "There are a lot of buildings and landmarks in Las Vegas that are actually copyrighted – for example, for one of the missions we had a light show, but the actual light show at one of the hotels we wanted was copyrighted so we couldn't use it!"



"What we did was we tapped the general feel of the city with an amazing Strip in the middle"

04

SWAT TACTICS: Cambiotti: "We've done many, many outings and meetings with the professional SWAT guys. We're making a game that aims to cross that gap between a simulator and making a fun, entertainment product, and our challenge is to take all those really cool real-world tactics and complex rules and make them into something that's consumable for most people."

"We've met with Russian special forces, American special forces, people that had been in Iraq, guys who have been to Afghanistan, police officers, firemen, a guy from the Montreal SWAT team. We take all of what they are telling us, and we ask them also what are the really unusual things that people may not know, and then we take all that and try to make it into a game."



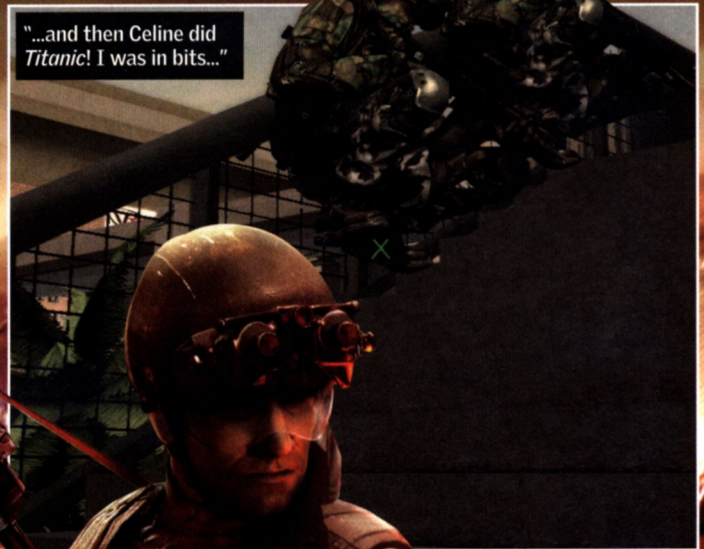
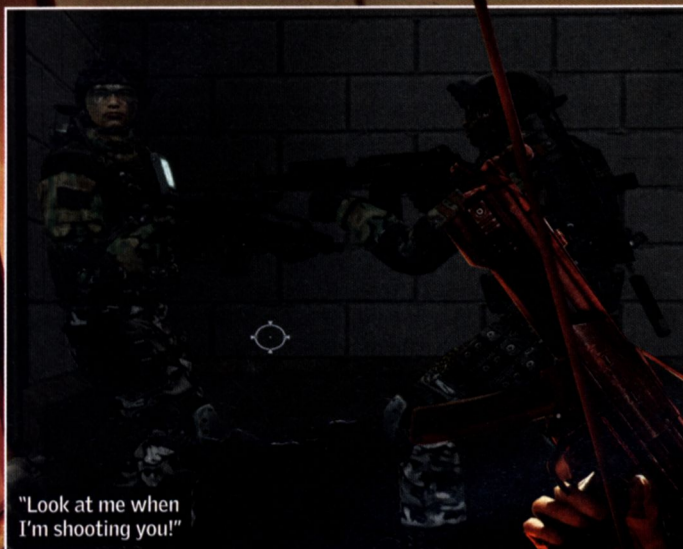
LOOKING BACK COMMENTARY

05 SQUAD MENTALITY: Cambiotti: "Making the squad look and feel realistic means ensuring the AI is aware of the environment, but without cheating, so they have to know where the threats are and react believably. The AI programmers also put a lot of effort on the heuristics – for example, do the squad engage the threat, do they take cover, do they retreat, do they reload? So there's a bunch of algorithms that are set in place to make it feel like this is a real SWAT mission and the challenging part is to make sure that the squad actually works as a team. They need to be tactically aware of one another, so the AI knows when to take cover or provide covering fire for example."

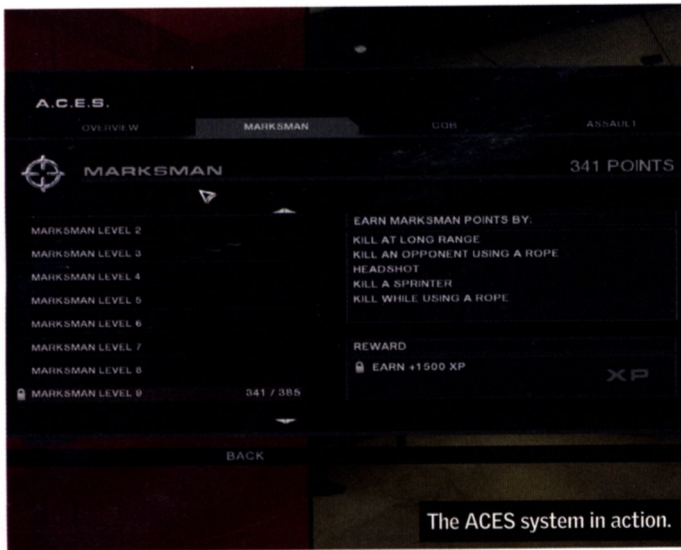
Therien: "We had a hilarious bug though, where our AI would wave! We weren't sure what was going on, but the bad guys would be holding their weapons and yelling at us, but also happily waving..."

06 COVER STORY: Therien: "The cover in *Vegas* was just too slow, and sometimes the camera angles were frustrating, so we looked at fixing all that for the second one. The cover system has become one of the staples of our games and we're really satisfied with the way it turned out. We have people who come up to us and say, 'I was playing this other shooter and I wish I could take cover like you do in *Vegas 2*' and we're kind of the same way now."

Cambiotti: "We feel like we stepped up the cover system in *Vegas 2* because we now have a bullet penetration system which really makes you think about what you're trying to take cover behind, like with a cardboard box you're going to be pretty vulnerable."

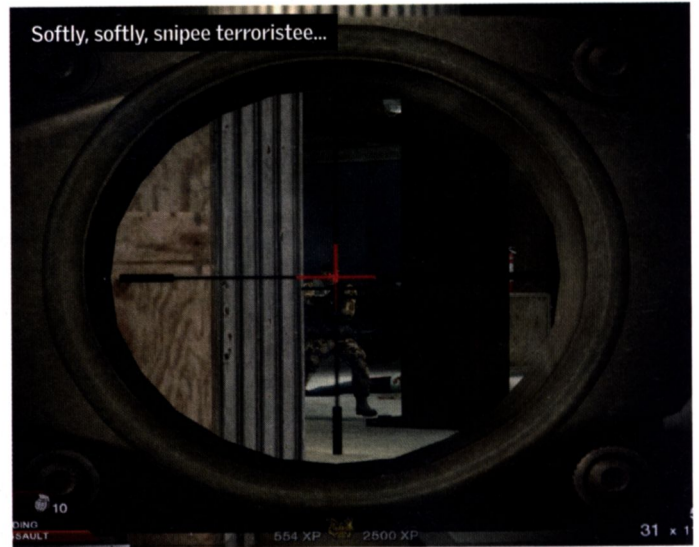


"The bad guys would be holding their weapons and yelling at us, but also be happily waving"



The ACES system in action.

07 SMOKIN' ACES: Therien: "With the Advanced Combat Enhancement Specialisation (ACES) system [weapon unlocks for specific in-game achievements and playing styles] the rewards are given for doing certain things in the game, but on a deeper level, it allows you to understand and appreciate the actual gameplay that you're doing. So people now are able to understand what CQC (Close Quarters Combat) is, what a marksman is – and this is something that we're happy about. Now they know what the game is, why they're doing these actions and they can put a name to it. One of our big objectives was to give everybody a taste of really cool SWAT tactics, while giving those rewards out, and we think that we managed it." Cambiotti: "Well, right from the start we put a lot of effort into improving the multiplayer, taking what worked in *Vegas* and building on that, and at the same time changing some of the key modes like Total Conquest. We reworked the game rules so that it would be more intense but still have the same gameplay. "One of the areas we put a lot of effort into was to try and reduce the amount of time that the player waits before he plays a multiplayer match, so he can join a game in progress. We also reduced the loading times and reworked some of the game modes that were problematic."



08 BULLET POINTS: Therien: "We actually have the technical knowledge and the programming skills to make the weapons very realistic. If there was dirt in your barrel, we could make the gun shoot differently, we could calculate if it was raining, with wind pressure... We could make a life-like simulator that would be extremely accurate. However, is that fun? God, no."

"We look at each weapon and see what makes this weapon unique, then emphasise these features to give them more of a cinematic feel, but only in the sense of bringing out their personality."

"For example, the AK-47 is a weapon that people are familiar with and it has a very distinctive sound, so we've amplified that. We cheat the values because if we didn't, the game just wouldn't work, but as far as how the weapons look and how they sound, that's perfectly accurate. We didn't compromise, right down to the screws on the handle of the weapon."

"We could make a life-like simulator that would be extremely accurate. However, is that fun? God no"



09 MO-CAP MO-FOS: Therien: "All of the animation is motion-captured. The guys do clean it up a little bit when it comes back from the studio, but every single animation in the game was mo-capped in our own broadcast studio here in Montreal. We do put on the gear ourselves when we're in pre-production or we're talking about what we are going to do, but with us not being the most in-shape people in the world, we get professionals to come in. They put on the nice little tight spandex number and go around crouched for a while..."



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**ON SALE
14 AUG**

NEXT MONTH! STALKER: CLEAR SKY

The first review of GSC Gameworld's remarkable return to the Forbidden Zone. The hunt for Strelok begins again

PLUS!



DRAGON AGE
BioWare's PC-exclusive roleplay giant rears its beautiful head.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2
Why the Codemasters war sim could out-do its fabled predecessor.

View patch notes in **English (EU)****'Allo 'Allo: The MMO Client Patch 2.4.2 "De Gaulle Of It!" (2008-05-13)****Quests**

- British Airmen escort quest - Fairfax no longer gets stuck in barrel.
- When escaping through a tunnel from the POW camp, you will now emerge near Edith's mother's bed.

Bug Fixes

- Michelle now does not repeat her lines when giving missions.
- Fixed an issue where avatars dismounting from Little Tank could get stuck on village water pump.
- Fixed clipping glitch where Carstairs would pop his head through a commode and say "Hello!".

FRENCH FACTION

- All catchphrases now have a one-week cooldown.
- Fixed a bug where some females were not sexually attracted to René.
- Quests carried out for the Communist Resistance will now lower your standing with Michelle, to the point where she may point a gun at you.
- Cap removed from René's Feign Death ability. He may now pretend to be his surviving twin brother as many times as he likes.

GERMAN FACTION

- Aspect of the Little Tank: Lieutenant Gruber gains a 24% speed boost from his Little Tank mount, but will be afflicted with Apologetic Wince if struck.
- The growl ability of a pet Von Smallhausen no longer scales with pet Attack Power. Now scales with the Herr Flick class' Disparaging Comment About Height talent.
- Black lingerie of Female German avatar now visible during idle animations while wearing Dire Trenchcoat of Gestapo Arousal.
- Racial ability Indignant Slammer: 5 second resistance to giggling French waitresses reduced by 80%.
- Sound issue fixed - The ENTIRE "Heil Hitler" WAV file now, finally, plays when greeted by quest-giving NPC Hans Geering in the office of Major-General Erich Von Klinkerhoffen.
- New engineering recipe: Cheese Earplugs. Offers immunity to Edith's Banshee Wail attack, but prevents you Eavesdropping on Michelle and Mimi in the larder.

ENGLISH FACTION

- Talent: Sht of a Prisser-by (Undercover British Agent) now increases chance of successful strike by 13/25% and the duration of Rank 1 has been increased to 4 seconds.

BERTORELLI

- Bertorelli now has four feathers in his cap and five medals.
- His eyebrows now synchronise properly when he says "What a mistake-a to make-a".

PROFESSIONS

- **Prostitution**
- Coital Glow buff now affects all Germans whether or not they are equipped with Flying Helmet and/or Celery.

Funeral Directing

- Coffins can now hold land mines but will receive a durability penalty when exploded.

Waitressing

- New recipes, "Explosive Christmas Puddings" and "A Dry White Wine please René", can be purchased from either René (French) or Gruber (German) in Nouvion. These recipes require 250 skill points to learn, and are created from meat found in level 48-56 bears. This will aid players in levelling up their cooking skill to 300 without fishing.
- Rogue-class waitresses now have a 22% chance of discovery when locked in a passionate embrace

Items

- Naughty Nurse item set now gains players access to Von Smallhausen's private quarters.
- Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies now deals arcane damage.
- LeClerc's Eyeglasses of Raised Recognition have had their texture corrected.

The update was successful.

'Allo: The MMO 2.4.2

**'ALLO 'ALLO!
THE MMO****News**

Oh hello there! Well I must say eet has been quite the week! Ze servers will be down for approximately eight hours from 6 am Eastern Seaboard Time. Zis is unfortunate, but eet ees sadly necessary to improve your playing experience. [\[More\]](#)

Good moaning. Today I have collied farty pisses of fan-art for you to peruse at your leisure. If you'd lick to see a picture of Gruber during the recent bum-disposal scare, click here. [\[More\]](#)

Today my blog is delivered through the beautiful medium of peasant song! It's the tale of a wife who sees her husband in the embrace of a serving girl, but thankfully has misread the situation. [\[More\]](#)

Community

ANNOUNCEMENT: If you are interested in the original shows of Perry and Croft's 'Allo 'Allo then DVD box-sets containing two series each are available (RRP of £24.99) from all good stockists. [\[More\]](#)

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