BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 199 NOVEMBER 2008

IT'S HERE!

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

THE ULTIMATE PLAYTEST: IS IT GUD OR WOT?

gamesradar.com

NOVEMBER 2008 £5.99

Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

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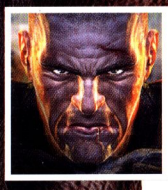
SPORE

Reviewed! Is it the creature creation classic we were promised?



CRYSIS WARHEAD

First review of Crytek's return to paradise

"Gloriously detailed RTS action with precision beyond anything else out there"

PC Gamer

16+

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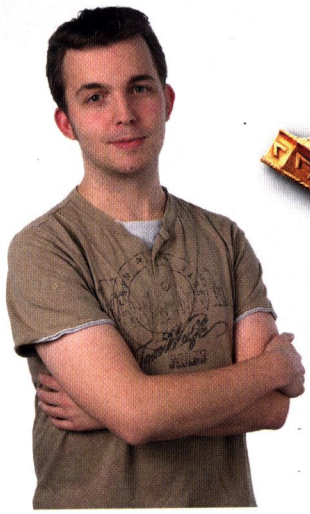
OUT SEPTEMBER 2008



VAMPIRE NIGHTS

WHAT WITH INCREASING game censorship in countries like Australia and Germany, and memories of *GTA* Hot Coffee still lingering in publishers' minds, I'm getting worried that developers restrain themselves whenever they start to dabble in darker, more adult affairs.

You see, I'm currently replaying the excellent *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* (patched up, obviously) and can't quite believe how daring it is. Without wanting to spoil the game, one plot revolves around a character with multiple-personality mental health issues forged through sexual abuse at the hands of a parent. Other plotlines include prostitution, serial killing and more ritual murders than an episode of *Messiah* – it's dark, cleverly written stuff. The sort of content an established medium like cinema could get away with, but in today's climate I honestly wonder if any publisher would seriously put out a game with such dark overtones.

What with *Fallout 3* having to tone down its Australian release and *Manhunt 2* doing the cause no good with its eager-to-shock headline-baiting, I worry that developers would think twice about including scenes that most wouldn't blink at in a 12A film like *The Dark Knight*. I'm not easily shocked, but films and TV manage gut-wrenching punches with a dose of regularity. If I think about it, the only games that have dropped my jaw with their daring have been *Bloodlines*, *Max Payne* and *The Suffering*. I'm still waiting for more.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor
wporter@futurenet.co.uk

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Massive playtest!

Squigs at the ready – that authentic WAR experience is just around the corner...

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If you promise the whole of creation, you'd better be good...

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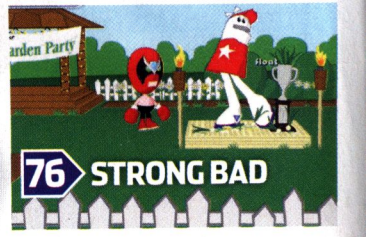
40 KEN LEVINE



76 STRONG BAD

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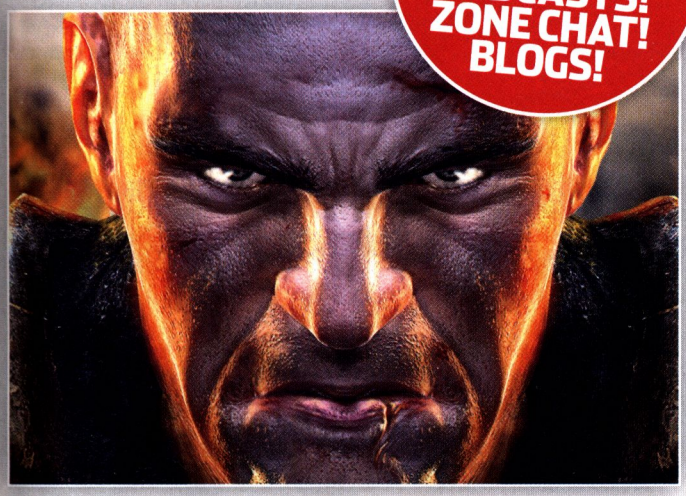

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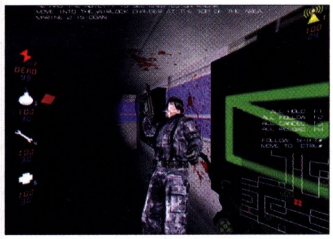

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

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60 CRYSIS WARHEAD
Will the follow-up expansion bring new old stuff to the table?

98 FREEWARE
It'll be a cold day in hell before you prise *Steve Hogarty*'s clenched fingers from his tuppence.

Too busy? PC ZONE in 53 words...
Steve talks to Ken Levine about games, but saves the ice cream chat for his personal blog. Ed cheerfully slings hours at his Squig Herder, and Will gets sent deep into Paradise to play the *Crysis* follow-up. Meanwhile, Log remains uncharacteristically positive about everything he plays, by making everyone else play the crap.

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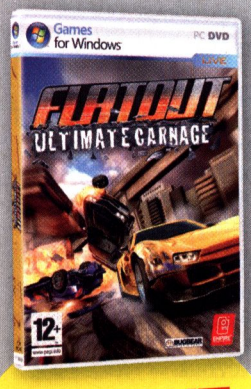

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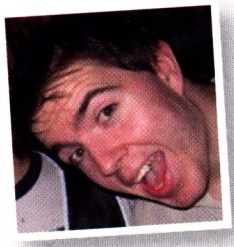
MEET THE TEAM

Bouncing here and there and everywhere

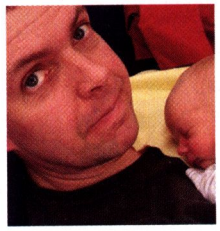


STEVE HOGARTY

Crown Prince

AGE: Too damn young
LIKES: Free holidays
DISLIKES: Hard work
FANCIES: Guinness please
FAVOURITE GAME: *Dwarf Fortress*
NOW PLAYING: *Bionic Commando Rearmed*

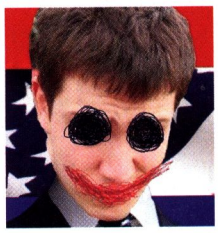
As we write this Steve is at the Leipzig games show, drinking Guinness with various game developers and amazing them with tales such as the time he had two boxes of Cadbury Fingers for tea because they were on offer in Tesco. It's an odd way of securing exclusives, but it works. Steve's in-depth chat with Ken Levine about ice cream went unpublished this month, but we can exclusively reveal that the concept of a 99 Flake is lost on many American game developers.



JAMIE SEFTON

Parental type

In a feat largely thought impossible until recent years, this month Sefters spawned a youngling called Harriet. Apparently she "projectile poos". Terrifying.
NOW PLAYING: The new *PES*



ED ZITRON

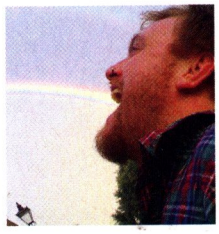
DVD icon

Ed says he dropped Gatorade on Tobey Maguire's shoes. He claims a lot of stuff though, like when you play Oasis' album *Definitely Maybe* backwards it keeps saying his name.
NOW PLAYING: *Spore*

MATT KENDALL

Art Editor

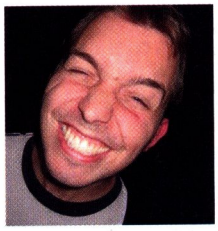
On his first day Kendall brought in a complete picnic set dating from the '50s. If you've been dazzled in a more middle-aged or middle-class fashion then we'd love to hear it.
NOW PLAYING: Adobe *CS3*



LOG

King of all logs

Log's new community comedic website listopia.co.uk stole five working days from this month's magazine production due to sporadic laughing fits.
NOW PLAYING: *Spore*



WILL PORTER

Hate figure

Will woke up in a hotel at half six when his taxi was booked for five. The race to the airport ended with him running into a metal airport sign, and 300 people pointing.
NOW PLAYING: *Crysis Warhead*

COSMO

You (or me)

This month Cosmo continued to enjoy her retirement from educational daytime TV by racking up her *TF2* Pyro achievements. OMGWTFBBQ indeed, Cosmo.
NOW PLAYING: *Team Fortress 2*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... *Spore* and *Crysis Warhead* both coming for review and being pretty damn awesome.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Shocking revelations and the powering down of the Zitronosphere.

What we've been talking about...

SEARCHING 'ANUS' ON WIKIPEDIA 10min Don't do it kids.
PUKEY PORTER 14min Will's moniker in the East European games development community.
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED 26min The more you swear at it, the more you love it. Or so it's claimed...
SPORE 52min The Bumantlers will take over the world. Then your world. Be afraid.
GIANT TORTOISES IN WARHEAD 9min If you carry one into a cutscene the tortoise will still feature. Clever.
WAR VS WOW 88min Fun PvP? In an MMO? Colour us shocked.
SEXY ELVES IN THEIR PANTS 24min It's harder than you'd think to not start an MMO as an underwear-clad elf woman.
FALLOUT HATERS 13min Yeah Oli Welsh of Eurogamer. We're talking about you. You hat-wearing fool.
GAMES MEDIA AWARDS 23min And certain people who just might be taking it all a little too seriously.
DISEMBODIED HANDS 2min So prevalent on game boxes, they truly are the new "man with a big gun".

WIN!

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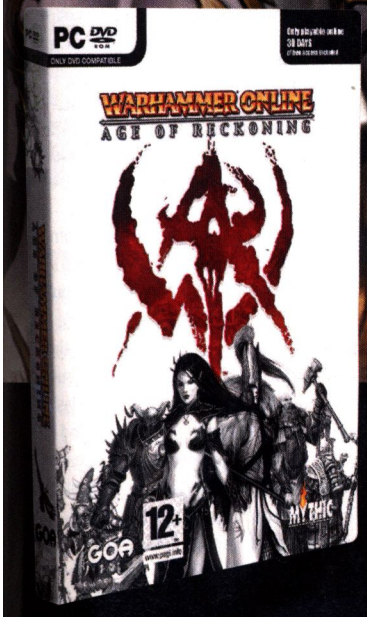
War is coming



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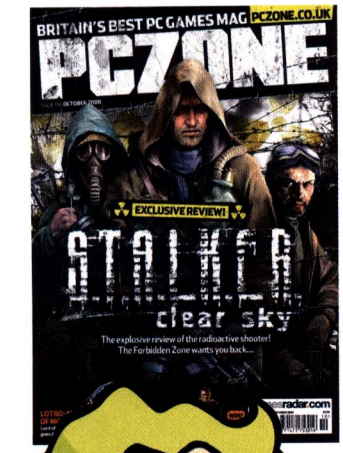
LETTERS



Will Porter **opens up his limited dialogue tree to wanna-be pirates**

KING OF LETTERS

Op Flash: as good as old games get.

HISTORY REPEATING

I was chuffed as chips to read about Good Old Games. I'm in my '40s, so it's hard to remember exactly what games I've played in the past. All I know is that they're not as good as they used to be, and I've said it so many times it has to be true. So GOG almost seems like a tautology – Good is just a subset of Old, surely?

The sad thing is, that this is the most excited I've been about games in the last five years. When other people try to hype me, a combination of resentment and senile bloody-mindedness makes me want to hate the game. Like a lot of people, I was sick of *BioShock* before I'd played it.

But there's no hype here – no drip-feeding PR machines making the internet go mental over a sodding teaser trailer.

I'm just writing, basically, to confess. I'm a stubborn, ageing fart who can only be happy with my own memories. Only Good Old Games has any chance of making me happy.

Norm Pointer (almost retd.)

Good Old Games (www.gog.com) is going to be a great service, of that I have no doubt, but I do worry about how many publishers they'll sign up. It's doubtful that your EAs, your Ubis or your Acti-Bliz corps would sign over franchises to GOG, especially not when there's a chance that an old franchise could be revived.

Personally, I feel that the chances of us getting a *System Shock 2* or an *X-Com* through this are low. But then again there are a few gems on the start-up roster, not least *Op Flash* and the original *Fallouts*. Hopefully, this will be a success – which will in turn persuade the big boys to turn their back catalogue loose on the world.

Also: wake up granddad, new games are great!

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.)

A true notch on the *Fallout* bedpost?

FALL IN LINE

The other day I found myself wondering why Bethesda decided to call their new game *Fallout 3* rather than *Fallout*. I'd say that, despite the obvious homage to the systems and roots of the first two games, the new game is totally different. It's being made for consoles as well as PC, it's a different graphic style, different perspective and comes seven years after the last game (not counting *Tactics*). So if you look at the audience, there has to be a load of people out there (especially those buying it on console) that have no idea what the first two titles were.

In the movies you get re-inventions of franchises all the time: the last *Superman* film wasn't called *Superman 5*, the latest Batman films are entirely separate from the Schumacher turds of the late '90s. Do you not think that in this case it would have been acceptable simply to call the game *Fallout*? Or would you say that this is not the done thing with games? Would there have been even more of a backlash? Personally, I say they could have called it *Fallout* and got away with it. I suppose a middle ground would have been to call it *Fallout: Something*, but that's a road nobody would want to go down. Nobody likes a colon, do they?

Rob-ust

If you talk to the guys making *Fallout 3*, they'll tell you that the reason Bethesda bought the

"Please remove *IL-2 S*
from your Simulation
not simulation it's sh

Chris Goodwin. Getting things spectacula

IL-2 Sturmovik, proving Chris Goodwin wrong since 2001.

franchise was because they had so many *Fallout* fans desperate to continue the series. This could be bullshit, but I didn't get the impression that it was – the fact of the matter is that *Fallout 3* is being built with solid ties to the old games, and flatly calling it *Fallout* or *Fallout Returns* or whatever wouldn't really imply that.

Also, in this day and age if Interplay (or anyone else) were making the game then you could guarantee it'd be coming out on console and have taken a sizeable steps away from the isometric. Just look at the direction they were pulling *Fallout* in with *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* on Xbox.

Also, I dislike colons too.

STURMO-SHITE

I've been a loyal subscriber over the years and your reviews have always been pretty spot on, so while waiting for the next batch of top releases to arrive I looked at your recommendations of older games. *Far Cry*, *Silent Hunter 4*, *Freelancer 2*... all that palaver. As such, even though I never really got into flight simulators, I thought I'd borrow my friend's flying goggles and experience the thrills of dogging in the air (so to speak). I've heard a lot about *IL-2 Sturmovik*, and as such bought its *Forgotten Battles* expansion.

You had me over good and proper. Never have I been so disappointed. Unless you were born in the sea with eight limbs there is no way you can manage all the controls on the keyboard: it's like playing *Twister*. Then there are the graphics – presumably produced by a piece of freeware called *Build Me A Really Crap Computer Graphic Model*.

Please remove this from your Simulation list in your magazine – it's not simulation it's shitulation – add that to your dictionary! This game is nowhere near on par with the other back-catalogue titles you recommend.

What were you thinking, you now owe me five pounds for the game (including postage) and a million pounds to the harm it's done to me mentally and physically.

Chris Goodwin

Oleg Maddox acolyte Steve Hogarty responds to your complaint thusly: "Wrong. You've done a wrong all over our Letters page. Get a joystick and lower your graphical expectations. Otherwise, you haven't even said what you don't like about the game, so I've very little to respond to other than your incredible ability to expand your absolute wrongness into every incorrect crevice of your argument. You fly up into the air, you fire guns at other planes, they have

their bits come off downwards to demise. And utmost at nine ya

PC ZONE we see Dan in the pub all the as such we'd probably be biased.

Actually: 99%

Just thought I'd mail in to say that I thoroughly enjoyed Dan Marshall and his mate Ben's (not sure of the surname) recent opus *Ben There, Dan That*.

I booted it up off your cover DVD remembering the vague love I once had for all things LucasArts and, while I'm not going to say it had me having hilarity-induced convulsions, I will say that it made for an entirely entertaining half-hour while my wife was making my tea. Dan and Ben are clearly funny chaps, at least when in 2D, and they're not bad at puzzles either.

I will certainly return to the game the next time my wife makes my tea, which really isn't often enough.

Your shout: 76%

Tea-time adventure.

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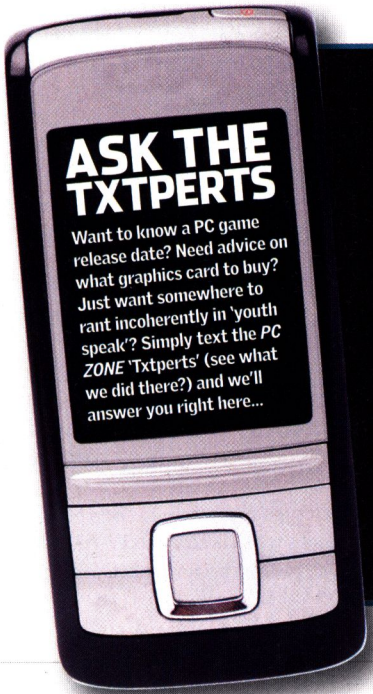

ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

Can u tell me what 'out of delta time' means? It only happens when running some games...

Olly

It's a problem where dual-core processors clash with games. I'll get Wandy on it for you.

Will you let us know when it's safe to approach *Windows Vista*?

Sam

So long as you don't go for 64-bit *Vista* and your hardware can handle it, it's safe now.

I'm trying to find a *Mortal Kombat*-style arcade classic. Fighters included a boxer, a werewolf and a dinosaur called Riptor.

Anon

That would be *Killer Instinct*. Not a PC game, but a shoddier version did appear on N64.

Not on PC. Fun though.

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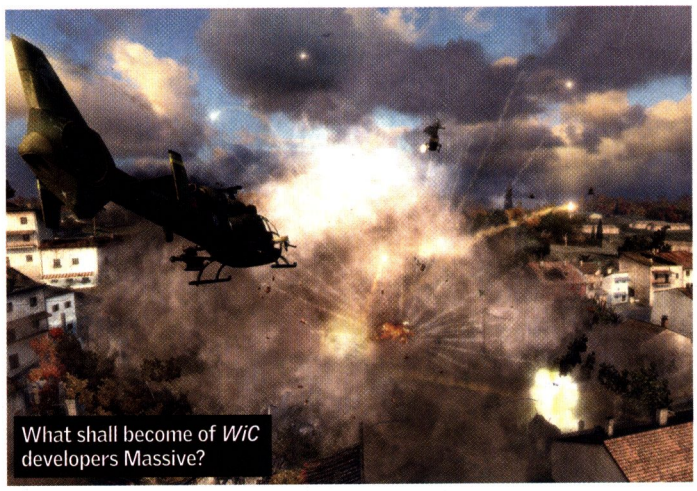
their bits come off and they spiral downwards to their gritty, fiery demise. And it's all done with the utmost attention to detail, a paltry nine yards of ammunition and unerringly recreated sound that gives you an honest appreciation of the feats of aerodynamic engineering involved throughout. Name a better World War II flight sim (*Combat Flight Simulator* can piss right off), and I'll eat my own nuts."



What shall become of *WiC* developers Massive?

CAMPERS UNITE

I tell you, I love sniping. It's great. So many people complain about it, because you camp and can kill people with less chance of them returning fire, but a really good sniper in, say, *Team Fortress 2* knows how to position themselves properly and has real skill.

I always get called a camper and a cheat whenever I spend any amount of time in one spot, even though that's the trade-off – Snipers just aren't good when they're running about the place like ninnies, and when someone runs at us, we're toast.

We're meant to be deceitful support acts that pick off enemies from a distance, and that's part of the fun (and the fear) – we know that any moment when we're staring down the scope that someone could be behind us ready to fill us full of lead. So leave camping snipers alone, we're just doing our jobs!

Michael Robinson

It's a bit different in *TF2*, because one of the roles of the Spy is essentially to cancel out Sniper ascendancy by stabbing them in the back of the head. If people are moaning about you in *TF2*, then I suggest you find a different server to play on – you're clearly in combat with divots.

Camping isn't the issue it once was in the days of straight out-and-out deathmatches, but those incapacitated by headshots from a well-hidden sniper will still latch onto the most obvious retort when you show your skill.

Then again, those guys that hide in some cupboard or something while you're watching the final couple of kills in a round of *Counter-Strike* – man I hate them.

CAPITALISM

Can you explain what the hell is going on with all those games like *Brütal Legend*, *Ghostbusters* and all the Vivendi whatnot? I can't really get a handle on why all of a sudden the games I'm most excited about have been dumped on the kerb-side.

Gaz Shingler

Essentially, a load of titles have been cast by the wayside after the Acti-Bliz-Vivendi merger and at the time of writing the games you mentioned and other stuff like *Leisure Suit Larry*, the new UK-developed 50 Cent game and the *World in Conflict: Soviet Assault* expansion have been left homeless.

The smart money is that, in their drive to beat EA at their own game, the Acti-Bliz conglomerate want to sell off as much as they can to rack up some obscene EA-beating year one profits.

Interestingly, this means that if Warner Bros' pockets are deep enough they could buy the *F.E.A.R.* name back, and release their next Alma shooter as *F.E.A.R.: Project Origin*. Crazy but true.

DIVE!

In you review of *Dreamlords* the other month the mighty Korgon analogised the game thus: "If this game was a cabaret act it would be Brian Blessed, wearing a set of fake comedy breasts, yelling that he's a sexy woman".

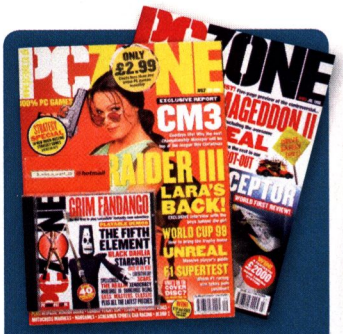
This painted such a great picture in my head that I had to make it reality. I hope it amuses you guys as much as it did me.

Wetfish

That's great Wetfish. To show our thanks we shall send out War-Rocket Ajax to bring back your body. PCZ

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD

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



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

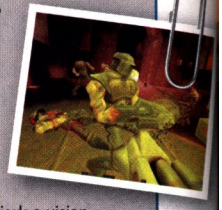
SITH TOO EASY

On the back page of issue 63 of PC ZONE, someone mentioned that *Mysteries of the Sith* was too hard. That man needs help, fast. I completed it in two weeks. OK, it was tough, but not that tough. It's still one of the best games I've ever played though.

James Storey, South Yorks

Two weeks? It took you two weeks to complete an expansion pack and you're writing into a magazine to boast about it? I reviewed one the other day and it took a mere five hours. Gamers of the past: hang your collective heads and more cost effective buying habits in shame.

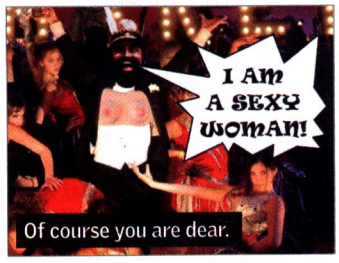
I WANT QUAKE II



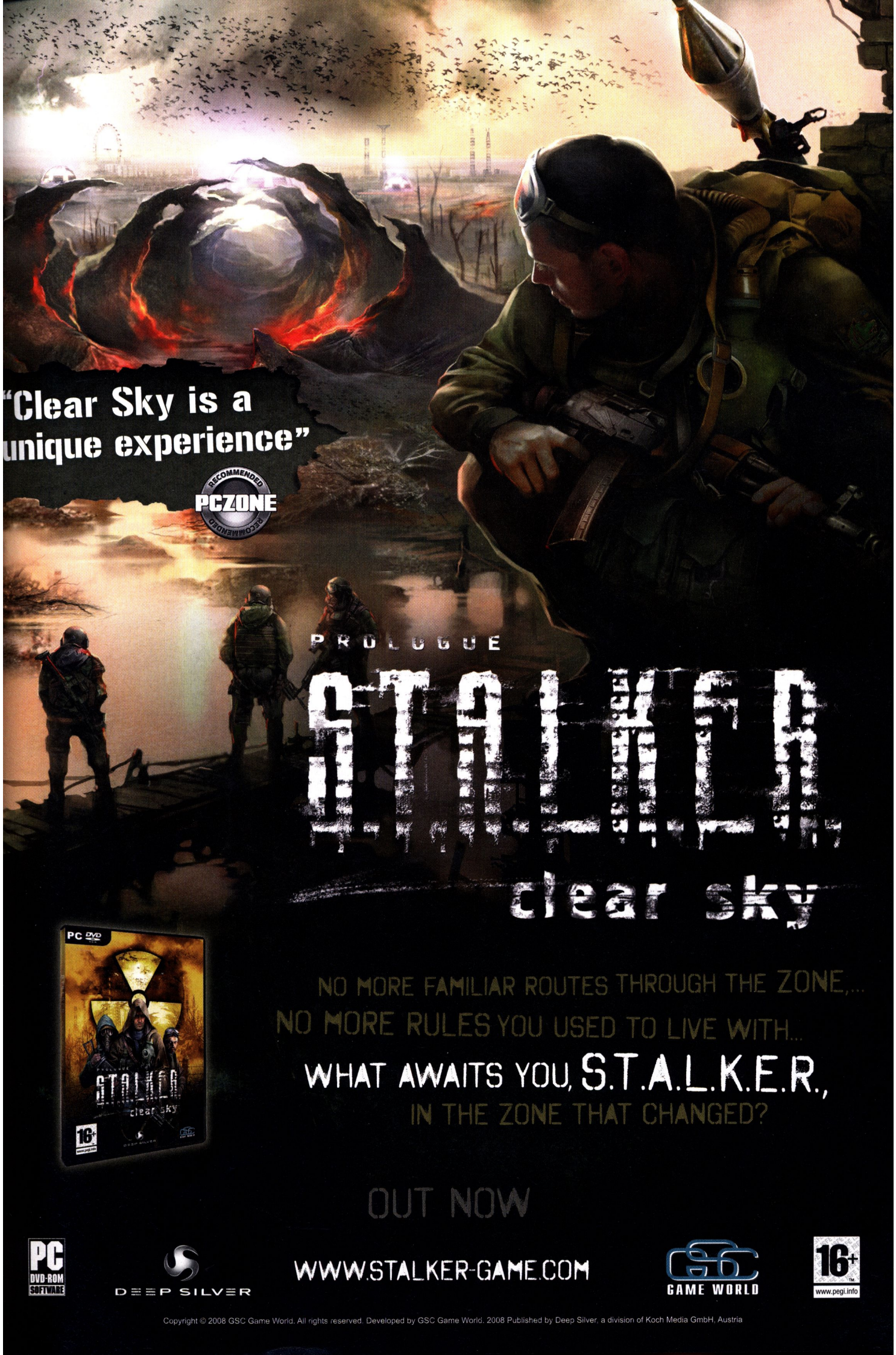
I have a Pentium 166 MMX with 16MB RAM and no 3D accelerator card. Should I buy *Quake II*? I think *Quake II* is one of the best looking games I've ever seen, but I don't want to play in jerk-o-vision.

J, Wembley

If memory serves, that should do it. However, it should be noted that *Quake II* isn't as good as everyone's saying it is, and buying that MMX chip was a waste of time – it'll be getting absorbed by other technology any month now. Helps you play that crap *Pod* game though doesn't it?



Of course you are dear.



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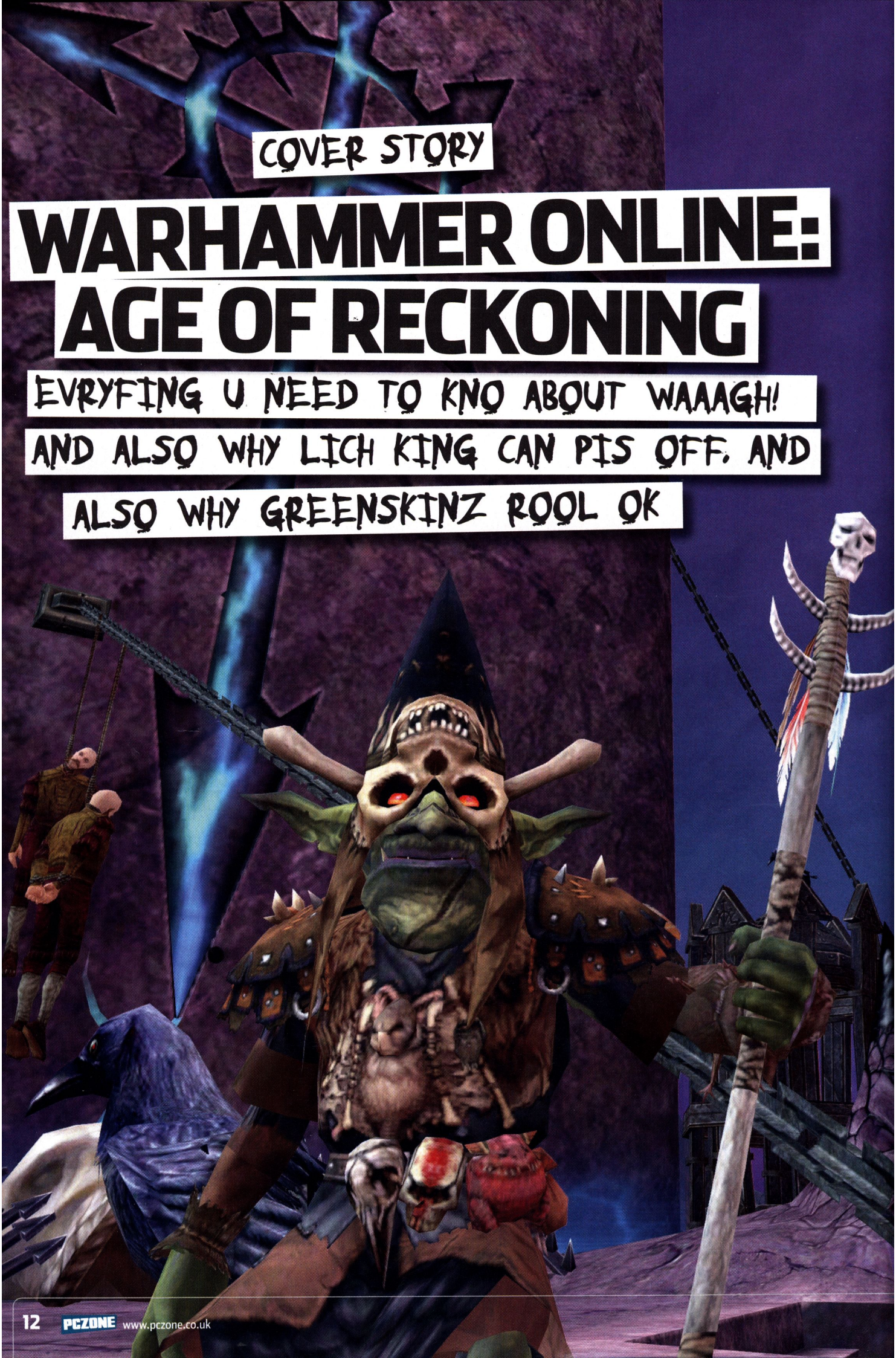


COVER STORY

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

EVRYFING U NEED TO KNO ABOUT WAAAGH! AND ALSO WHY LICH KING CAN PIS OFF. AND ALSO WHY GREENSKINZ ROOL OK

EVERY BRITISH MAN of a certain age has a dark *Warhammer* secret. Whether a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker, if you stick a bunch of them in a room with miniatures and oddly shaped dice they'll know what to do. So the success of a *Warhammer* MMO is a no-brainer. Unbelievably though, Mythic have made a game worthy of the licence and the hype – mixing genuinely revolutionary MMO gameplay with the humour and the outlook of the Games Workshop warhorse. The WAAAGH! has begun, and it's unlikely to ever cease...

Page 42

Pro gamerz TV

I'M WONDERFULLY LAZY. Everything in my room can be controlled remotely and all the remotes live next to my bed. Waking up at 3pm on a Saturday, I can make full use of the TV, the Sky box and my *iTunes* library, and pretty much lead a rich and fulfilling existence without ever having to roll my fantastic mass of a body out of my festering slumber zone. The only effort I exude is that required to prise open my eyelids in order to allow the entertainment to seep into my sleepy retinas. Long ago I surpassed the need for human relations, and as such my vocal chords have withered to the point where I can only emit raspy croaks – usually reserved for when Peter Serefinowicz says something funny.

Last weekend, I fell asleep watching *Road Wars* on Sky Three, and when I woke up a day later, there was some show on where people honestly believed videogames were a kind of sport. My remote control had somehow become lost. I wasn't still dreaming though, there were commentators narrating a game of *Soul Calibur*. Astonishingly tall gamers were 'smack talking'. Attractive presenters could barely veil their disinterest as they struggled to extract personality from the players. And a hired crowd cheered and booed on cue. It was terrible.

Shocked, but unable to stop the TV's wittering, I rolled over and forced myself to sleep. When I woke up again, *Road Wars* was back on.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

CASTING A RED SHADOW

Red Alert 3 cast revealed! Explosion of hammy acting results!

PUBLISHER EA **DEVELOPER** EA **WEBSITE** ea.com/redalert **ETA** October

IN A MOVE that continues *Command & Conquer*'s rich tradition of shoehorning cheesy actors into its games, *Red Alert 3*'s cast list has been revealed alongside a new trailer, showing some of the greatest bad *C&C* acting yet.

Fronting the cast – and doing so with plenty of front – is Jenny McCarthy, taking the role of sexy special ops lady Tanya. Other feminine totties include *Hollyoaks*' Gemma Atkinson as Allied Lieutenant Eva McKenna, and Kelly Hu as the sexy lady from the Empire of the Rising Sun (Japan).

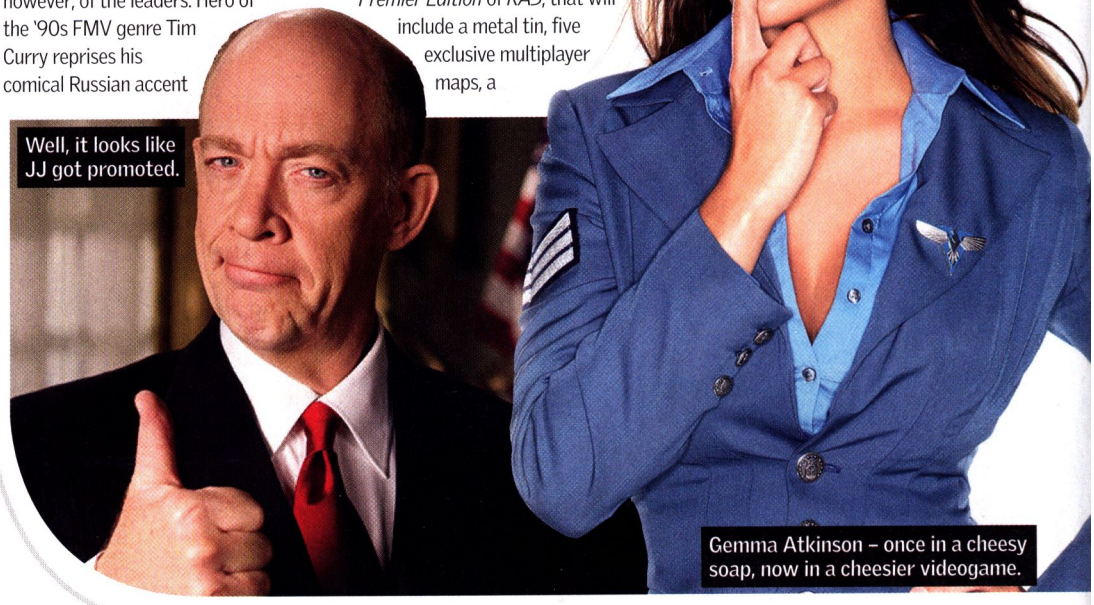
The greatest announcements are, however, of the leaders. Hero of the '90s FMV genre Tim Curry reprises his comical Russian accent to play Premier Cherdenko, the evil Russian who creates the violent universe of *RA3*, while *Oz* and *Spider-Man*'s J.K. Simmons plays the president of the USA.

Best of all is the appearance of George Takei as Emperor Yoshiro of the Empire of the Rising Sun. Giggles are guaranteed as Takei's voice features some deliberately comedic bad dubbing.

A worthy extra mention must go to the brilliantly underrated Jonathan Pryce, hero of *Brazil* and the villain of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, as a slightly uptight British man who will be indignant about something.

On the horizon is also the *Premier Edition* of *RA3*, that will include a metal tin, five exclusive multiplayer maps, a *Making of...* DVD, soundtrack, and a beta key for an as-yet unnamed game.

We have a hands-on of *RA3* on page 32 to whet your appetite for next month's review. So buckle down and get ready for the silliest war story ever told.



Well, it looks like JJ got promoted.

Gemma Atkinson – once in a cheesy soap, now in a cheesier videogame.

STOP PRESS!

CONAN ROARS
A garbled message from a Leipzig games show meeting with Funcom tells us *Age of Conan* is getting an expansion featuring Serpent Men. Yay?

LORRA FLORA
The axed flora editor for *Spore* will appear as an add-on, EA claim. Whether or not we'll be expected to fork out cash to design tulips is another matter.

GTA IV PC DETAILS
Higher resolution, mouse support, expanded multiplayer and recordable action bursts. The latter of which is, ooh, just like in *Carmageddon* – which came out in '97?

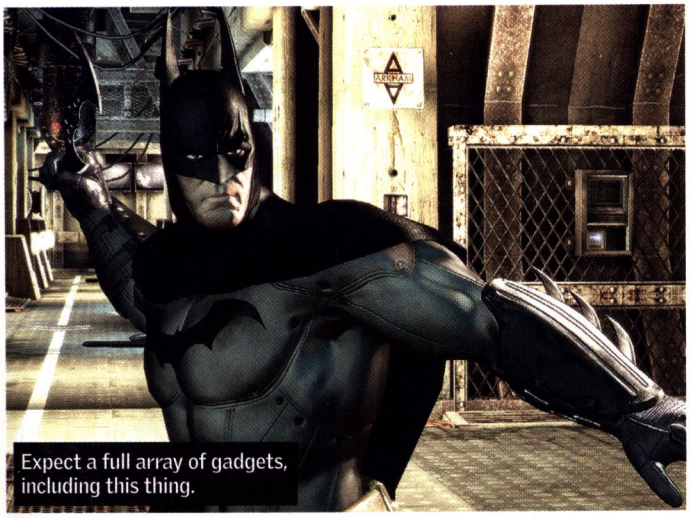
28 **Empire: Total War**
Oceans and boats and wars, oh my, Martin Korda sets sail.

36 **Wrath Of The Lich King**
A whole new world of content for the world's biggest MMO revealed.

42 **Warhammer Online**
Played to death after death after death after death.

Powered by Unreal Engine 3, lunatics have never looked so good.

The Joker won't be the only villain. We'll see Killer Croc and The Riddler too.



Expect a full array of gadgets, including this thing.

BAT THERAPY

Batman: Arkham Asylum opens its gates, slaps its mother

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

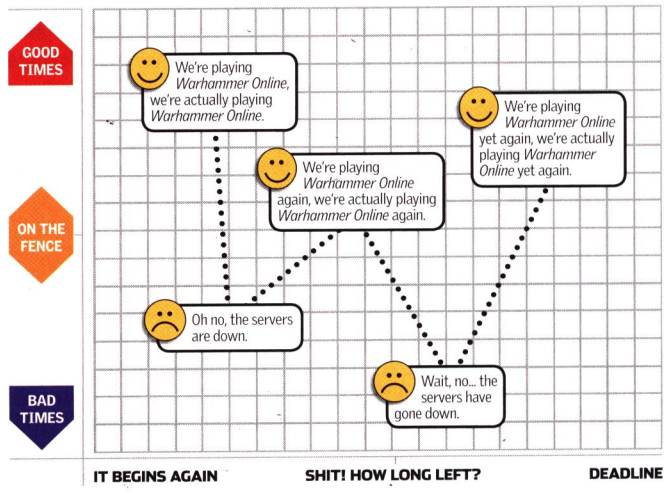
POST-*DARK KNIGHT*, there's a rush of expectant joy with this upcoming Batman project. Developers Rocksteady promise a new Bat-tale set in and around the eponymous Gotham prison/mental hospital, encompassing a wide range of villains, from Penguin and Joker, to Mr Freeze. (Not a million miles from the first *Riddick* game, really.)

Negotiating the game's open-world island, you can use your brain as much as your fists, with new detective abilities – such as lifting fingerprints – together with the toys from Batman's belt. And, of course, you can always swoop from the rafters, boots first, and kick a goon's face out through his arse.

What's won us over is the dark visuals, a promise of authentic voice-casting and the potential link with the classic graphic novel of the same name. The graphic novel *Batman: Arkham Asylum* – by Grant Morrison and David McKean – sees Batman brought to Arkham Asylum after Joker drives the staff insane and takes over. Instead of a battle with the Joker, Batman is forced to examine whether he is as insane as his nemesis. Translating the novel's psychological themes into an action game will be hard work, but worth it..

STUFF **You there, yes you sir. As we career towards the *PC Gamer* *hackspit* Showdown, we're throwing some 250 free tickets at anybody who takes the time to register at www.futurecomps.co.uk/showdown. It's like the most wonderful sort of confetti you could imagine. So if you want to attend this year's best gaming party (ever since the one full of drugs and hookers was shut down) and go hands-on with *Left 4 Dead*, *Mirror's Edge* and an arse-ton of other games, go to the website above and get registering!**

Life is a roller coaster



TALES OF TELEMETRY

Hoovering up stats on your in-game habits, telemetry is a fountain of knowledge

Amount of space taken up in this screenshot: 80%.

Reporter
Pavel Barter

THE BEGINNING, SOME say, is the most important part of any endeavour. With that in mind, the console version of EA's *Burnout Paradise* was shaky from the off. At the start of the game, you were directed toward a Drive-Thru garage to get your car repaired, but around 7% of players opted to explore Paradise City instead. The result: a significant portion of players blundering through modes like Road Rage and Marked Man without knowledge of the Drive-Thru mechanic.

Rather than berate this particular 7% for their oafish ways, San Shepherd, *Burnout Paradise*'s senior producer, wonders where he and the rest of the development team went wrong. "It taught us that tutorial or help information wasn't getting across – that we're not doing a good enough job of communicating." The PC version of *Paradise*, says Shepherd, will not repeat this gaff. In fact, after monitoring a plethora of player habits, Shepherd and his team have pledged to make the entire game a marked improvement on the original.

When playing *Team Fortress 2* there is a **56%** chance of Blu team wining on cp_gravelpit

The average play session of *Half-Life 2: Episode One* is **34mins**

LET'S TALK STATS

Telemetry, or metrics as it's also known, is becoming a crucial component for developers. Play a game online, and there's a good chance that a central server is keeping tabs on your vital stats. In *Half Life 2: Episode One*, the average completion time is 5h 35m, and the Urban Flight level has the highest number of deaths. Also, according to Valve's Steamworks service, 50.48% of players reach the final map, but only half of those finish the game (they can't be arsed to read the credits apparently).

According to Valve's Steamworks service, **58.5%** of players reach the final *HL2: Episode 1* map, but only half of those finish the game

MMOs source even more juicy stats, according to Reynir Ari Guðráðsson, lead game master for sci-fi business MMO *EVE Online*.

"We track everything we can in relation to the characters, including movement, actions, market transactions, productions and agent interaction. It allows us to provide the detailed customer support."

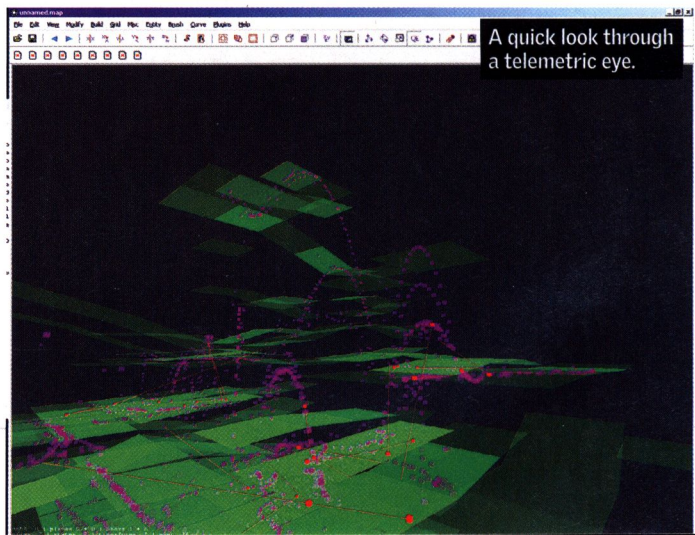
Darius Kazemi, president of metrics middleware company Orbus Gameworks, says telemetry serves a function that quality testing simply can't fill. In his former job as a QA tester on *D&D Online*, he tracked bugs by measuring player habits – "if everyone dies at a given location, maybe there's a problem." While working on *Lord of the Rings Online*, he began developing more complex systems. "It's an enormous boon to any developer to know how people are playing your game. Without metrics, you have to rely on forums. People will say, 'this particular ability is totally unbalanced'. You can do an investigation, but you have to balance their intuition against yours. Metrics let you see at how an ability performs in the field."

Telemetry, reckons Kazemi, really benefits MMO players. Research into popular character builds can inform on the creation of new classes and makes the process of tracking in-game economies easier.

Noah Ward, *EVE Online*'s lead game designer concurs. "Data and statistics help with balancing issues of all kinds. They can tell us which missions or weapons are popular or unpopular. They also tell us which player is the richest and what they are doing to stay on top of the heap. Statistics also act as a guide for future expansions and help us understand where we should devote our development resources."

Now the top dogs of publishing and development are getting in on the act. EA's San Shepherd says telemetry can

The chance of being hit by a fired rocket in *Day of Defeat* is **47.3%**



A quick look through a telemetric eye.

It turns out that only

5-10%

of players watch long animated sequences

"I just can't win, man. You're the best tick-tack-toe player."

A Shark's Tale

Frank Lantz and Kevin Slavin, of New York's area/code, talk about *Sharkrunners*, a game for Discovery Channel that incorporates real sharks

Q What kind of game is *Sharkrunners*, in terms of gameplay and goals?

A It's a game of oceanic exploration and high-stakes shark research. Players take on the role of sharkrunners: marine biologists who seek to learn about sharks through observation. Ships in the game move in real time, so players receive email and/or SMS alerts during the day when their boat is near a shark. Players login, choose crew members and an approach technique, and then collect various data from the nearby sharks.

How did you go about incorporating real-life sharks into the game?

Real-world telemetry provides the position and movement of actual tiger and grey reef sharks in *Sharkrunners*, so that every shark players encounter corresponds to a real shark in the actual ocean. After tracking the movements of these sharks in the game, players can see them up close in the Discovery Channel show *Mysteries of the Shark Coast*.

What can real world telemetry offer games of the future?

Games like *Sharkrunners* combine the real and the imaginary, between ideas and objects, between information and space. This approach to gaming transforms the physical space around us into a shared game world, brought to life by the choices, actions, and experiences of the players.

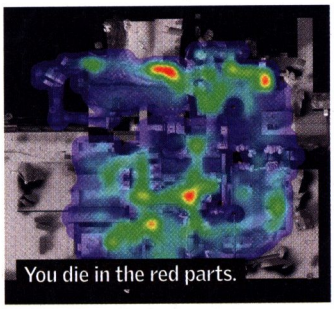
7%

ignored directions at the start of *Burnout Paradise*

save vast sums of money, and spare us the misery of thumbing through abysmal game features. "Some of the EA Sports titles have learned a lot through telemetry," he says. "Like to cut out those long animated sequences that, it turned out, only 5% to 10% of players watch."

You can also learn lots about a game from its geography. Map telemetry in *Burnout Paradise* made the EA team look at the game in an entirely different light. When data concerning crash locations began to pour in, it was clear that players were not wiping out on the City's highways, but in large open spaces like The Airfield (a hidden derelict airport), The Quarry, The Baseball Stadium, and a stomach-churning chasm called Dead Man's Edge.

If everyone was crashing at these places, logic dictated that they must have been hanging out there too. Once *Burnout* was renowned for its mental racing challenges, but now, with its open world milieu, it was allowing people to socialise and crash together. The discovery inspired the developers to develop new content.



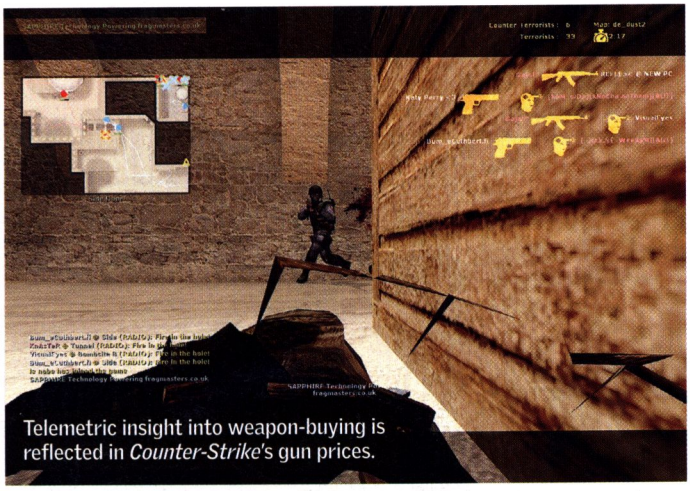
You die in the red parts.

"[For the PC] we are building new islands off of the main Paradise City, and we're able to tailor them to include more of this type of gameplay," says Shepherd. "We've opened up the island to a lot more vertical gameplay and created some fantastic new opportunities for extending the feats you can achieve online."

Half-Life 2: Episode One

6.4%

of players choose "Hard" mode



Telemetric insight into weapon-buying is reflected in *Counter-Strike*'s gun prices.

Telemetry, he says, also informed the team about the popularity of the Freeburn Challenges, in which groups of drivers play co-operatively. They've created Timed Freeburn Challenges for the PC version, allowing groups to beat times for around 70 challenges and post their results to leaderboards.

SPYING FOR GOOD

All this is very jolly, but what about the issue of privacy – is telemetry spyware in disguise? Shepherd, for his part, insists his hands are clean. The EA servers log around 100 different game elements from online players, every 15 minutes, but you're only surveyed if you agree to take part. Furthermore, there's no personal info involved.

"In the case of an MMO, I think developers have the right to monitor what's happening on their servers," continues Darius Kazemi. "And in every game I've seen, subscription data that could identify a customer is kept totally separate from the gameplay data. In the case of a small-scale multiplayer game, or a single player game, I would think that players would expect the metrics collection to be voluntary."

Arguably, telemetry changes the rules of play, allowing gamers to use statistics to their advantage. Also, its ethic of gamer-led content is more in tune with service providers like Amazon's Recommended service than the traditional notion of tastemakers deciding our likes. Regardless, as telemetry becomes more useful for developers, every decision you make in a game, every part of the map you visit, and every time your character dies, could influence the future of PC games.

In *World of Warcraft* the current Alliance to Horde ratio is:

1.2:1

"I believe we're getting to the point where telemetry can be used to define a game's content before it launches," says San Shepherd. "That's certainly what we wish we could have done with *Burnout Paradise*. We are at the point where telemetry can participate in the design of a game." 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

ETA
TBA

HOLY COW...

It's all going off in Metropolis.

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

Steve Hill dons a cape and heroically fights his way through the Comic-Con crowds

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment **PUBLISHER** Sony Online Entertainment **WEBSITE** dcuo.station.sony.com

REMEMBER WHEN IT all kicked off in *City of Heroes* after a swathe of gimps created superheroes that looked a little too much like existing heroes? Marvel Entertainment's legal department came down on them like The Hulk on a bad day, and all half-arsed tributes to existing characters were immediately outlawed. Which made it all the more surprising when Marvel selected *City of Heroes* developer Cryptic Studios to develop (the now comatose) *Marvel Universe Online*, which has formed the base for *Champions Online*.

Whether this was the catalyst for DC Comics to greenlight its own MMO is unconfirmed, but there is definitely a degree of competition between the two companies. *DC Universe Online* was unveiled at the recent Comic-Con in San Diego, and their booth seemed the obvious place to ask about the whereabouts of the rival game. The reply? "It's a piece of crap, and has been cancelled."

Swiftly revealed to be a joke (the "piece of crap" bit anyway), *Marvel Universe Online*'s non-existence did give us time to have a proper gander at *DCUO*, which ironically looks almost exactly like

THE LOWDOWN

Features some 150 authentic DC Comics characters	✓
Based on the artwork of comic book legend Jim Lee	✓
Offers a more physical skill-based approach to combat	✓
You can have a snoop round Batman's cave	✓
You don't play as an established superhero	✗

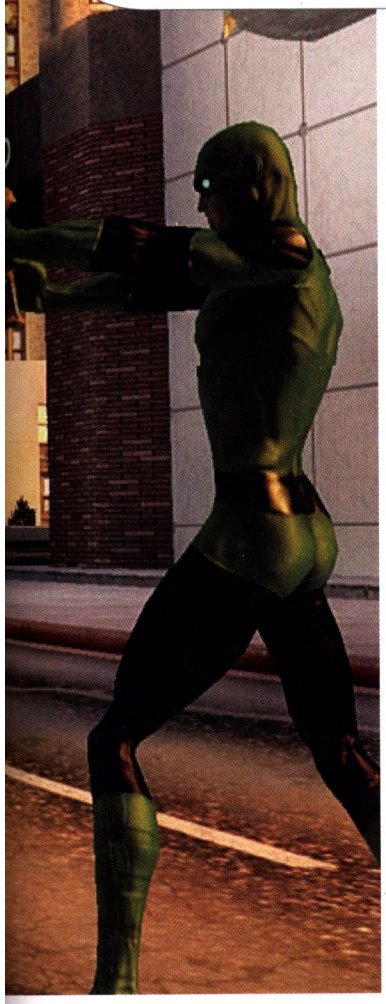
THE STORY SO FAR...
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

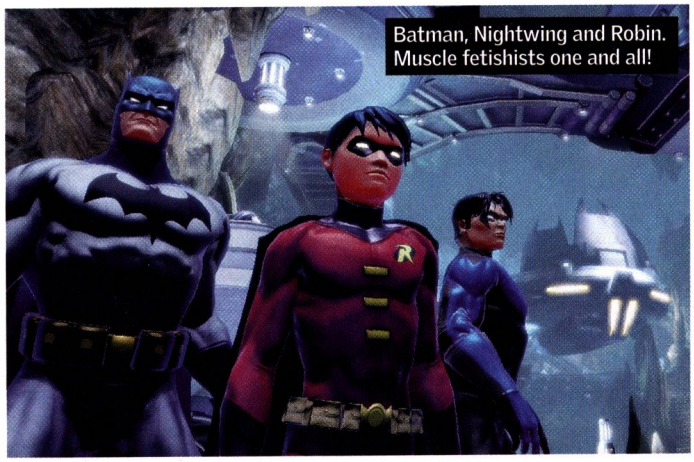
1999 — EVERQUEST
With its launch, a legion of goblin-loving shut-ins was born.

2003 — NOT EVERQUEST
PlanetSide was a MMOFPS. *Star Wars: Galaxies* was muck.

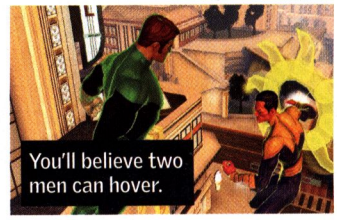
2004 — EVERQUEST II
A legion of shut-ins shut themselves further in.

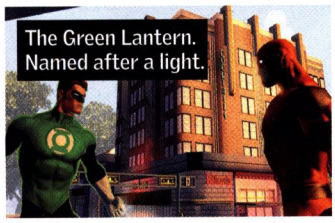
2005 — THE MATRIX ONLINE
SOE promised the Earth with this and delivered dirt.




Batman, Nightwing and Robin. Muscle fetishists one and all!

Bring back Heath!


You'll believe two men can hover.


The Green Lantern. Named after a light.

Superman's abs take another cosmic beating.

He wants to lay off the steroids.

City of Heroes – from the subject matter and colour palette down to its font. However, a closer look revealed an authentic Superman knocking seven bells out of his Bizarro alter ego, something that you aren't able to do elsewhere (apart from that rotten EA console game).

As it turns out, you can't do it here either. If everyone decided to play as Superman or Batman or any of the other 150 or so DC characters, it would not only cause a massive rip in the fabric of the fiction, but would also be extremely confusing for all concerned.

Instead, you create your superhero (or villain) in the traditional way, choose your superpowers, select a cape, and then help out some of the bigger names in their fight against evil (or good).

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

In this instance, I was tossed a pad (it's another extremely console-friendly affair) and given control of a lumbering melee character allied with Superman. By the time we were finished battling with the evil Bizarro, he'd been encased in ice from head to foot, set fire to and punched about the face, neck and torso.

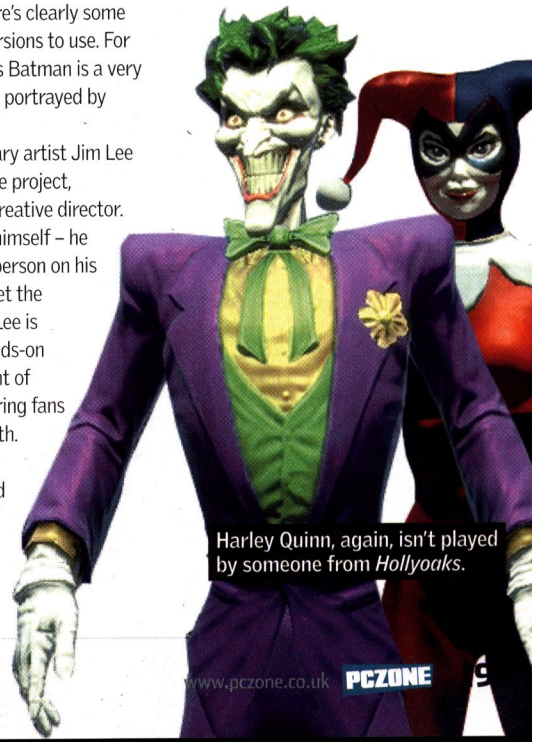
With a distinctly physical approach – using physics, no less – there is a definite sensation of actual fighting, as opposed to MMO's mainstay of grinding away in a pale imitation of combat. As well as dropping bespoke superpowers for fun, the environment played a large part, with vehicles tossed around like crockery at a Greek wedding. With the entire DC canon of characters involved – Wonder Woman, The Green Lantern, Flash, Lex Luthor, Brainiac – there's clearly some debate as to which versions to use. For instance, Adam West's Batman is a very different beast to that portrayed by Christian Bale.

Thankfully, legendary artist Jim Lee is overseeing the entire project, assuming the role of creative director. An avid MMO player himself – he claims to be the first person on his *EverQuest* server to get the Paladin epic sword – Lee is definitely taking a hands-on approach, to the extent of giving demos to slavering fans at the Comic-Con booth.

"This is a one-of-a kind type of game, and a lot of love has already gone into it," claimed Lee.

"*DCUO* is in many ways a reinvention of the traditional MMO; it's a hybrid between a traditional MMO and a button-mashing, action game."

That's a fair description. In the few minutes of my hand-ons dabble I managed to vanquish a number of foes in spectacular fashion without ever knowing what the controls were. If *DCUO* can give the genre a shot in the arm, it will be an heroic effort. PCZ


Harley Quinn, again, isn't played by someone from *Hollyoaks*.

A time for heroes

Look, it's Luke Skywalker and the other guy...

Following the gruelling hands-on demo of *DC Universe Online*, we reconvened to the nearby Sony party to gather our thoughts (with our champagne and canapés). Amid the fans dressed as Catwoman Jim Lee, legendary comics artist, and creative director of the DC MMO, was spotted, defacing a cardboard Batman cut-out.

On closer inspection, it was revealed that he was doing a Rolf Harris, scrawling an impressive Joker peering over Batman's shoulder. It impressed Luke Skywalker anyway, who left the VIP area to have a peek. This encounter was best summed up by a big boy in the bogs, who openly mused: "Mark Hamill and Jim Lee. My God..."

DC Comics' Jim Lee (left) and Mark Hamill.

1

HOT SHOTS

PROJECT ORIGIN

DEVELOPER Monolith **PUBLISHER** Warner Bros **WEBSITE** projectorigin.warnerbros.com **ETA** Winter

AS WELL AS setting fire to soldiers' heads and watching them jump out of windows or chasing flesh-munching Abominations as they leap from wall, to desk, to your chest a new member of the (sort of) *F.E.A.R.* menagerie is the Remnant. Initially looking for all the world like a zombie (seeing as Remnants are essentially deceased briefcase-carrying Auburn residents) they have a psychic power, not only over the immediate vicinity but also nearby dead bodies. They're puppet masters that snake red psychic trails to the recently deceased, encouraging them to forage for nearby weapons and take up arms against you. Just what will that Alma and/or the Armacham corporation think of next?

7

The Bigger Picture

1 FACEACHE
Monolith are ramping up the feeling of bodily awareness far more than with the simplistic punchy-kick business of *F.E.A.R.*, and going mano-a-mano with Abominations is a product of that. When they get close, they gouge.

2 ELEMENTARY, DEAR ALMA
This level takes place at the Wade Elementary school, a place of learning funded by Alma's evil scientist family – and presumably the place she was taken away from before being incarcerated in a metal underground dungeon.

3 TURBULENCE
The city-wide nuke has this plane fall out of the sky, and later you'll battle along its downed wreck – dashing over its wings, and taking cover behind lumps of fuselage. The days of grey corridors could be over.

4 NPC RED SHIRTS
Adding more personality to your squad is another prime intention for the 'lith chaps with *PO*, but it won't stop them sucking allies into vortexes and making their heads explode apropos of nothing should the game require it.

5 MECH IT SO?
We'll be the first to admit that we're not crazy about the prospect of Mech combat in *Project Origin*, but if anyone's allowed to have a crack at it it's the creators of *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division*. Jury remains out, however.

6 ANGRY BUSINESSMAN
The Remnant, essentially an ArchVile with a briefcase, will wreak psychically controlled mayhem – raising the dead and filling them with an urge to forage for weapons and fill you with holes.

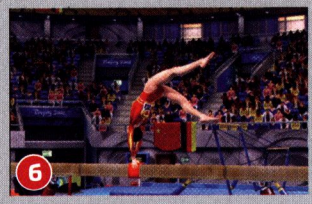
7 ANIMAL TESTING
If this isn't science breaking the boundaries intended by God himself then we don't know what is. Note the Hulk-style ripped trousers by the way, he'd probably look even more disturbing with his withered genitalia hanging out.

PCZONE Charts

ChartTrack

1	—	THE SIMS 2 DOUBLE DELUXE	N/A
2	—	THE SIMS 2 FREETIME	Issue 194 70%
3	↑	CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE	N/A
4	↓	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST	N/A
5	↑	SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE	Issue 193 91%
6	NEW	BEIJING 2008	Issue 199 48%
7	↓	CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE	Issue 188 89%
8	—	THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE	Issue 188 38%
9	↑	COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS	Issue 180 85%
10	↑	CRYSIS	Issue 188 92%
11	↓	ASSASSIN'S CREED	Issue 194 72%
12	RE	UNREAL TOURNAMENT III	Issue 189 90%
13	—	WARHAMMER 40K: DOW SOULSTORM	Issue 192 81%
14	↓	MASS EFFECT	Issue 195 92%
15	↑	MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X DELUXE	N/A
16	RE	WORLD IN CONFLICT	Issue 186 92%
17	↑	THE SIMS 2 CASTAWAY STORIES	Issue 193 48%
18	↓	AGE OF EMPIRES III	Issue 162 84%
19	NEW	WARHAMMER 40K: DOW COMPLETE	N/A
20	RE	SIM CITY SOCIETIES	Issue 189 61%

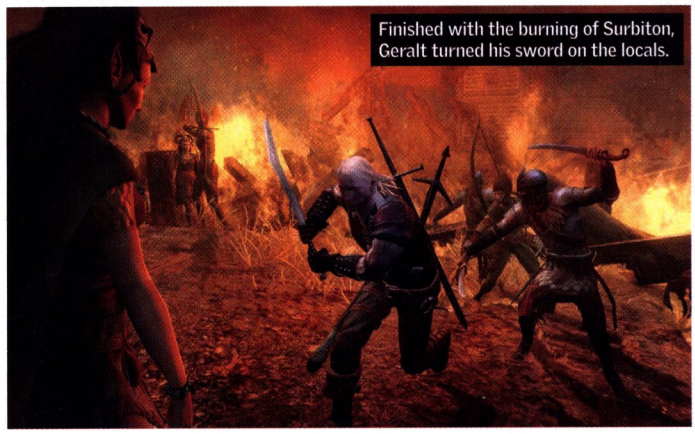
THE SIMS 2 DOUBLE DELUXE
Wow, it's a *Sims 2* expansion. People still buy them, EA still sells them, and we all roll our eyes at them.



BEIJING 2008
People love the Olympics so much that they want to crowd around their PC to experience it.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III
Hello *UT3*! Long time no see! How are we? Oh, what glee! We are so pleased we get to see you here again.

WARHAMMER 40K: DOW COMPLETE
Everything *DOW* related that you can find, in one delightful package.


Finished with the burning of Surbiton, Geralt turned his sword on the locals.

Geralt's adventures have never been this well-acted.

ENHANCE YOUR WITCHING

The Witcher Enhanced Edition is nearing...

WEBSITE www.thewitcher.com **ETA** This month

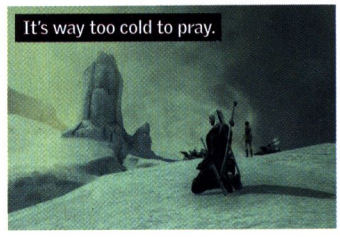
AVAILABLE BOTH IN a brand-new boxed edition with two DVDs and as a free download for registered owners of the original, *The Witcher Enhanced Edition* has arrived at long last. We've played several hours worth of the revamped *Witcher* and the difference is dramatic.

The load times are one of the biggest changes, with the ridiculous waits for loading screens to pass and autosaves to finish disappearing, and the graphical hitches of the original have now been successfully dispersed.

Even better still is the re-translated and re-voiced script, which not only helps the story make more sense, but brings a lot more character and drama to it. The slightest changes to sentences reveal new meaning and clear up plot pitfalls that let the original game down. That, and some *Fable*-style Black Country voice actors have slipped in out of nowhere. And there are new, far more detailed, character models added among the townsfolk that break up the repetitive NPCs of the original.

As well as these aesthetic and aural changes, players have two excellent new adventures – the *Price of Neutrality* (based loosely on the original Geralt tale *The Lesser Evil*) and *Side Effects* – oh, and the *D'jinii Adventure Editor*.

The Witcher Enhanced Edition will be available for purchase this month, as will the patch that will let current owners relish in the new features.


It's way too cold to pray.

LORD OVER MINIONS

Codemasters announces *Overlord II* – crowd excitedly nods

WEBSITE www.codemasters.com/overlord **ETA** 2009

IN A MOVE that may surprise and elate many people, Codemasters are planning to release a sequel to their cartoony anti-hero epic *Overlord* for release next year.

The story sets you against a Roman Empire-esque army of questionable morality, and you, as a man of unquestionably evil morality, must make war against them using the usual hordes of minions that players of the series are used to.

The good news for critics of the last game is that Codies have paid attention to their complaints, giving the Overlord tighter controls over both himself and his minions, which also have their own names, personalities, and mounts.

A big change is the size of the war – there's going to be a huge ruckus, with you leading the charge. "We're really excited about shifting the world to a new era where a Roman-inspired Empire rises as the arch-enemy of the Overlord, which leads to an epic clash between the regimented forces of a sprawling state and the faster, harder, more manic minion horde," chirped Lennart Sas, director and *Overlord* lead at Triumph Studios.

The game's looking like you'll be dealing with far bigger crowds of minions than before, and with any luck the scale of it will feel more like a war, rather than the slightly underwhelming fights of the first game. Expect big barnies with armoured Romans, and mythical monsters all over the shop; much like the gigantic, icy, angry Cyclops from the screenshot to the right.

We've no news on whether Ms Rhianna Pratchett will return to pen the sequel's story, but we'll let you know the moment any new details emerge.

That big guy really doesn't like seal cullers.

Overlord II features happier, angrier, scarier minions.

EXTREME POWER

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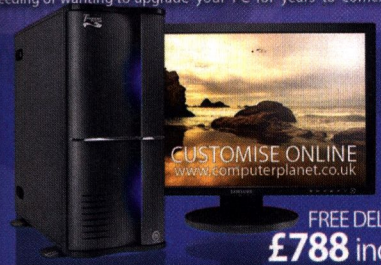

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ARGUE THE TOSS

THIS MONTH: DWARF VS ORC

Dear Jon Blyth,
So, I hear that you like dwarfs better than orcs, for some reason that I'm sure is connected to your beard. Well, it's my opinion – and I've never been told that my opinions are wrong in a way I've ever bothered listening to – that dwarfs are the worst fantasy thing in existence: rude, avaricious, alcoholic toddlers that appear in every bloody RPG out there. Even Gimli was shit, admit it. He was a grumpy sod who did nothing but occasionally push somebody. Dwarfs are rubbish and so, by proxy, are you.
Ed Zitron

Dear Ed,
Take a look at what you're arguing with. I'm a fat ginger bloke with a beard, who spends most of his evenings rolling around drunk. In reality, the only difference between myself and a dwarf is that my centre of gravity's all screwed up thanks to my weirdly oversized head, and I can't forge anything more complicated than a sick note from my mum. You choose what you identify with – so what does that make you? Some meat-fungus snotling wannabe football yob? Get out of my face, and stop bothering me – I'm trying to weave this cool skull into my plastic goatee extensions.
Jon 'Log' Blyth

Log,
They're useless, slovenly, violent types, while you're a tepid games journo from Nottingham who enjoys a small glass of Pinot Grigio if he's allowed out. The dwarfs get all het up about forging and gold, while the orcs realise that they just want to conquer everything for the sake of it. They're wicked, they're evil, and they've got the coolest lore. So shove that up your stunty arse, and shut up. ***EZ***

Ed,
Slovenly? When you write words, Ed, do you pay attention to the accepted meanings of those words? Or do you just gurgle a chain of syllables that sound nice in your idiot baby's brain? It's a real barrier to communication, dealing with someone who uses words so incorrectly. Dwarfs are famously industrious, they're a race of manual-working craftsmen. You're showing yourself up to be as pig-ignorant as the Greenskins you admire, because you're such a reedy real-life impotent. I see the difference between us now. I choose a race I look a bit like, and you choose Greenskins as wish fulfilment. Putting to one side the fact that there are no winners in arguments about MMOs, I reckon I've just won this one. ***JLB***

Log (cc Will Porter),
Well, at least we don't routinely start MMO characters as female elf avatars, and spend long hours getting some sort of vicarious erotic cheapies from the jump animations, and running around flirting with anyone who's stood still for more than five seconds, like some kind of repressed sideshow freak. Now there's some creepy wish fulfilment, right there. ***EZ***

Log and Ed,
Piss off you Dwarven/Greenskin bastards. This is the 21st century, and I can pretend to be anything I like. ***WP***

Listen, I can gargle *House of the Rising Sun* with my blood.

240km² looks pretty big, even from up here.

BRING IT ON, FLASHPOINT...

ArmA II fires off return salvo in the battle of the hyper-real shooters

WEBSITE www.armedassault.com **ETA** Spring 2009

WHILE CODEMASTERS BUSY themselves with the super-shiny *Operation Flashpoint 2*, it's timely that the original *Op Flash* developers Bohemia Interactive have brought *Armed Assault II* blinking into the light – due for release round at the same time as the offering from their former bosses.

While the graphics aren't stunning, visuals were never what made us love the original *Flashpoint* (relentless tactical warfare and remarkable co-op play did the trick there) and with the second bout of *ArmA* Bohemia are also intent on nixing the bugs and the lack of polish that marred their first solo project. In the meantime they've been developing war simulators for the US, UK and Australian armies as well, so as far as realism goes they remain top of the tree.

Story is high on the agenda, with the US supporting a fictional post-Soviet country in their struggle to maintain stability against internal forces – that presumably isn't a million miles away from somewhere like real-world Georgia.

Dynamic conversations with NPC locals and squadmates will shape the narrative and the various situations under which you cower from enemy fire, and of course the whole conflict will take place in the sort of vast battleground that Bohemia have become known for – with 240km² covered.

Sounds of the battlefield are pedantically replicated, with individual noises resonating from each helicopter's rotors, engines and turbines. Even the animation has been radically improved, with Bohemia Interactive's CEO Marek Spanel lending his body to the motion-capture studio to create the 'carrying a wounded soldier' animation.

We'll have the full story on *Armed Assault II* development next issue.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

THE ICONIC WOMAN

MEAGHAN GLYNN, ICON-CRAFTING INTERN FOR *LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE* AT TURBINE

While we all make a large to-do about the big boys, you can't forget that there are people who have to make icons for spells, menus and other fixtures. To give credit where it's due, we caught up with a lady who spends a great deal of her working hours doing just that...

Q So where is your work mostly focused?

A So far I've been working primarily on *LOTRO*. I do a lot of different things, from menus to icons to the weirdest things I get requested to do. I just finished a Toad Biscuit – that's a biscuit made out of toads – that I'm particularly proud of.

How do you turn an idea into an icon? Do you get a lot of descriptions or help from the *LOTRO* team?

Sometimes I have a base to work from, other times I'll just use either concept art from the game, or reference art from other things. The weirdest thing I've ever had to do would probably actually be the Toad Biscuit, because, well, a Toad Biscuit is weird. But there's lots of random stuff that we get, like skills, which have some really, really vague descriptions. They're hard to explain graphically because you have to translate it from the spell to a physical representation, it's difficult.

Sometimes you get told the skill's name and nothing else, which doesn't really help. When you get basic things like "Mashed Potato" or "Potato Seeds" it's easier.

Icons: crafted with love.

What's the toughest icon to make?

Swords and shields are really easy to make, but when you get an icon that says "Rain of Death; enemy loses morale when struck," it's really challenging to find a visual representation.

Any way to make us love icons more?

I love doing really creative things that need me to go looking at concept art, reference art, and make me look for a real 'vision' for them. It's fun when you get to work on something really cool.

There was a time when I had to integrate a theme that my mentor at Turbine was trying to make run through the menus. It was a Moria theme that involved a lot of dwarven architecture, so I was able to do really cool things like have lava spilling all around the menu system. I even had the dwarfs holding up a huge basin of it. It was really cool when it was done.

I really hope to do more stuff like that in my time here...

Meet you outside the Holin Gate at 7.

tat ZonE

Suddenly there came a rapping, as of someone tatting, tatting at my door

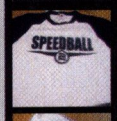
Just as one magazine team's worthless pile of promotional junk is another man's pile of much-desired booty, certain countries of the world have entire economies based around the exchange of large black *Crysis* hoodies, and as such, despite our less-than-impressive wage packets, in some respects we have the wealth of kings. We also sell this crap on eBay under the tag of PCZoners every month when the mag comes out. Care to partake?

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk All proceeds go to charity. Honest, just visit entertainmentsoftware charity.org

esc

THIS MONTH'S TAT

***CRYSIS WARHEAD* T-SHIRT**
Large, black and ever so slightly chilled.



***SPEEDBALL 2* BASEBALL SHIRT**
Large, unironed and wisely without the '*Arena*' tag.

GRAFFITIED ALAN HANSEN'S SPORTS CHALLENGE BOX
With *Cheggers' Party Quiz*.

CRAP *ANKH* ANKH
An Ankh from the game *Ankh*.

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
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	***CHEGGERS' PARTY QUIZ* ON PS2** We're on a bit of a Cheggers frenzy. Our apologies.	£1	5

THE CONTENDERS

The Golden Joystick PC Game of the Year line-up

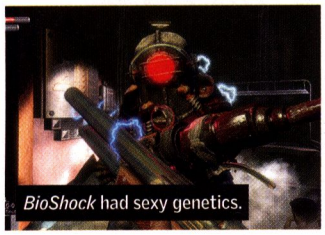
EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT the biggest prize in gaming isn't in how big a pile of money a game makes, it's about how big a chunk of the hearts of the nation it steals. Well, everyone who isn't perched atop a pile of money knows this.

As such the Golden Joystick Awards, what we like to refer to as 'The People's Prizes' or the 'Computer Game Award Show of Hearts', is built to reflect that fact. It's the only awards ceremony that gives you – yes reader, we mean you – the chance to get your voice heard through voting at www.goldenjoystick.com.

Voting ends mid-October, and we'll find out who's won the PC Game of the Year, the Virgin Media Ultimate Game of the Year and all the other plaudits on Halloween: 31 October.

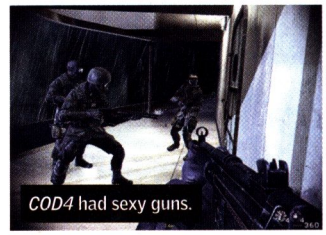
So what game, realistically, does *PCZ* reckon is going to win?

The *PCZ*'s team's tips for winners and losers from last Christmas' and this year's biggest hitters

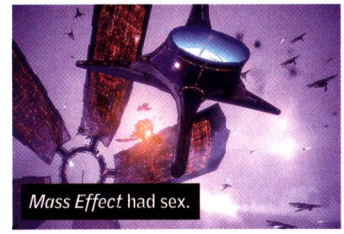


BioShock had sexy genetics.

HL2: Ep2 had sexy ladies.

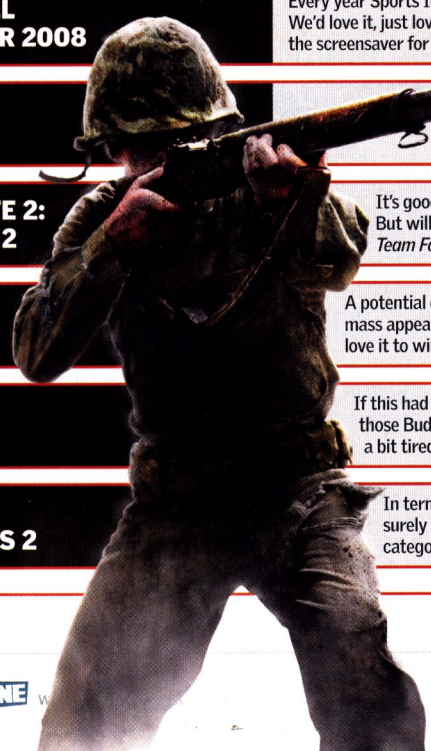


COD4 had sexy guns.



Mass Effect had sex.

THE CONTENDERS	*PCZ* PEARLS OF WISDOM	*PCZ* MADE UP ODDS
AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES	We're not the biggest fans of Conan's online adventures, but don't doubt the power of a community in an online vote. *Hyborian Adventures* has certainly proven that the MMO pie is able to have a few slices that don't taste like Blizzard.	5/1
ASSASSIN'S CREED	Really? Come on. It's pretty, it's demanding and you can jump into hay from 100 feet without breaking your neck – but face it, *Assassin's Creed* isn't Game of the Year material whatsoever.	200/1
BIOSHOCK	Those who appreciated it really appreciated it, and we stand among that number. Then again, quibbles that a lot of people had about its post-twist final act will probably put people off marking it up as the best of the past 12 months.	10/1
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE	With multiplayer still riding high and a near-on seamless solo experience, if we were a branch of Ladbrokes we'd be stopping people playing that roulette game they have and encouraging them to stick a few quid into this instead.	2/1
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008	Every year Sports Interactive turn up looking excited. Every year they are disappointed. We'd love it, just love it, Keegan-style if *Football Manager* won. So if you're a fan get voting: the screensaver for the mind shall take over the world.	15/1
CRYSIS	If the Korean-killing sections were viewed on their tod *Crysis* would have a shout. As it is, sadly, we doubt that anyone's highlight of the past 12 months was being bored by big aliens.	24/1
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 2	It's good, yeah. And it's dead sad at the end what with the brain-popping bit. But will Valve fans honestly vote for Freeman's latest jaunt when *Portal* and *Team Fortress 2* are in the same list? Hmm.	90/1
MASS EFFECT	A potential dark horse this one. Everyone who plays it loves it, but has it got the mass appeal and the community that so many other games on the list have? We'd love it to win, but would it get the voters?	55/1
PORTAL	If this had been released yesterday, it could have walked it. But, like lolcats and those Budweiser Whassarrrp? adverts from a few years back, everyone has got a bit tired of Companion Cubes and cake. Still, totally deserves it though.	20/1
TEAM FORTRESS 2	In terms of ongoing support, vibrant community and non-stop gamer love; surely *TF2* is up there with the big boys? Next year we should have an entire category devoted solely to the most popular class...	4/1



It's a Brave New World

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Games for Windows

Once units have fired rounds, they engage the enemy with bayonets.

SHIPS, I SEE SHIPS!

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Martin Korda **sets sail on a voyage of discovery and carnage**

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

ETA FEBRUARY 2009

THE LOWDOWN

Naval combat	✓
Eye-popping graphics	✓
The biggest *Total War* campaign map ever	✓
Even more tactical land battles	✓
Will the polish match the ambition?	✗

IT MAY HAVE taken eight years, but it looks like the wait may have been worth it. Just shy of its 10th anniversary, the *Total War* series has finally added naval battles to its real time combat arsenal, an inclusion that, if executed with Creative Assembly's usual aplomb and eye for detail, could finally stop the mewling of tens of thousands of fans hankering for a galleon gangbang. Including this one.

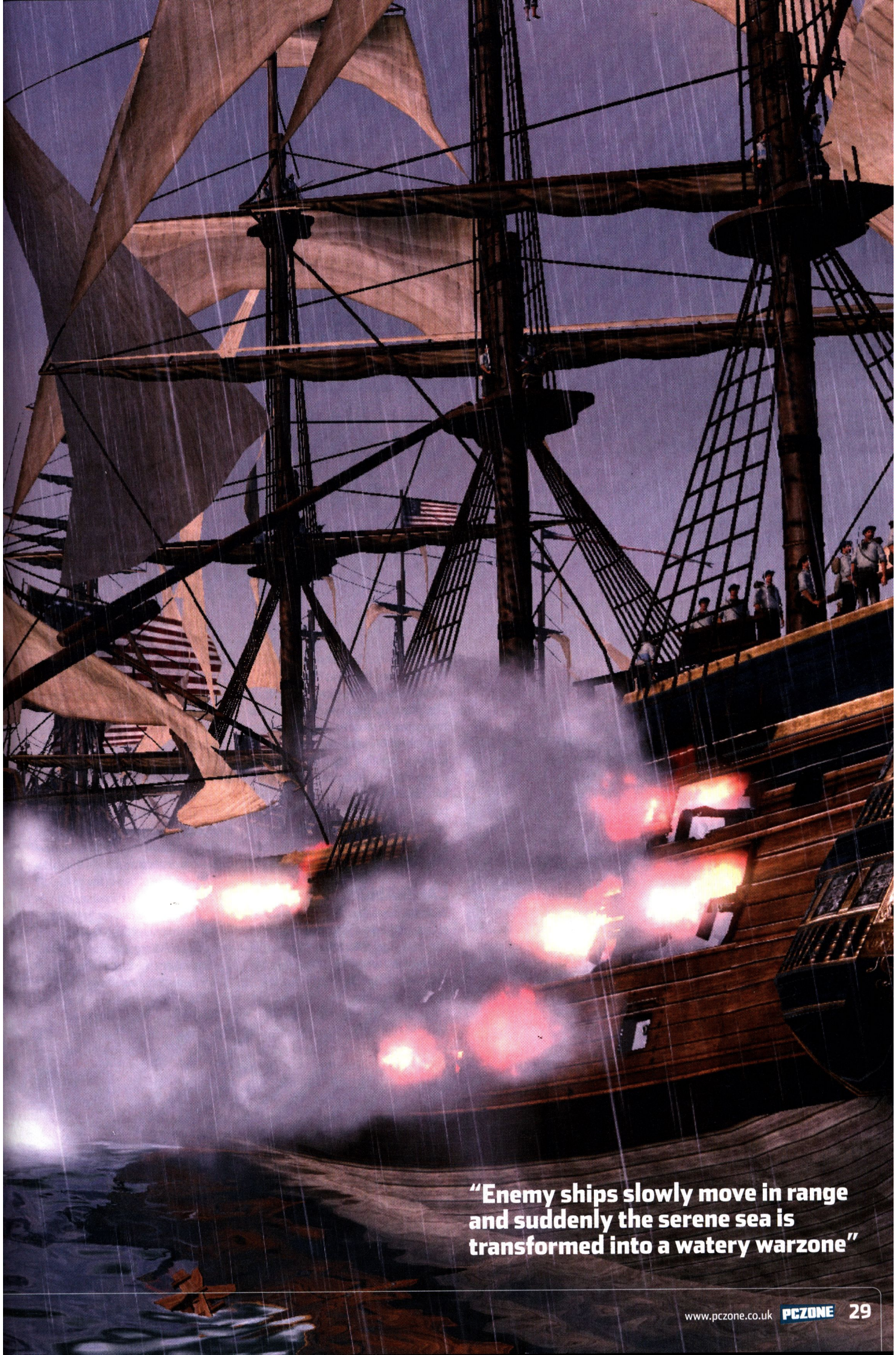
This isn't a responsibility that CA has taken lightly. Acutely aware of the importance of nailing sea warfare, the team has resisted the temptation to inject past games with substandard naval battles, preferring to take its time in order to create sea skirmishes that are every bit as breathtaking as the series' land-based warfare.

If you want proof, just take a look at that sea. Go ahead. Looks realistic enough to take a piss in, doesn't it? That's because one member of the team spent an entire year working on it. A year! Just on the sea! And as for the naval combat...

WATERY GRAVES

It's a calm summer afternoon. Waves lap gently against a fleet of ships as it races towards an approaching armada. Wooden masts creak at the behest of straining sails as the two fleets close in on each other. A mighty 120-gun behemoth leads the charge, its deck abuzz as scores of men prepare for war, while below deck, cannon crews shift nervously, awaiting the onslaught. (I'm a Horatio Hornblower fan, can you tell?)

The enemy ships are now in range and suddenly the serene sea is transformed into a watery warzone. Cannons light up. A barrage cripples an enemy vessel, devastating its main sail, leaving it to the mercy of the sea. As the burning sail plummets it ignites the deck



"Enemy ships slowly move in range and suddenly the serene sea is transformed into a watery warzone"

and in moments the vessel is ablaze, spreading flames forcing countless men overboard. The remnants of the crew battle to contain the fire, but their struggle proves futile as the blaze finds an ammunition stockpile, the ensuing explosion severing the galleon in two. But no, this isn't a naval drama starring Ioan Gryfydd and Robert Lindsay that was never quite as popular as *Sharpe* – all this is happening in-game.

Battlefield smarts

Get ready for some seriously smart AI

After the criticisms levelled at some of *Medieval II*'s overly predictable AI, Creative Assembly are determined to exponentially raise the intelligence of *Empire*'s computer-controlled generals and units. In previous *Total War* games, each faction followed a tactical template. However, *Empire* will feature an AI template for each battle type and goal-based planning for armies, which will hopefully ensure that enemy AIs will employ unique tactics based far more on what's happening around them rather than on preset variables. If CA can pull this off, it could be immensely brilliant.

Weapons such as giant flagpoles probably won't be in the final game.

SHIP SHAPE

Based on a similar control system used for the series' land battles, *Empire*'s naval combat will feature around 20 ships per side, (the exact amount is yet to be confirmed due to ongoing balancing) a number that CA believes will be the optimum amount to ensure peak playability while still providing a grand sense of scale.

"Ships are more complicated than land units," explains lead designer James Russell. "There's more you can do with them. Ships have hulls, crews, different kinds of shot, sails and masts. You need to pay attention to wind direction and they're constantly moving and firing from all sorts of angles and directions. We're looking to get the best spectacle while keeping things manageable for the player."

"You'll also be able to engage in close-quarters combat during these sea-based encounters, by boarding ships"

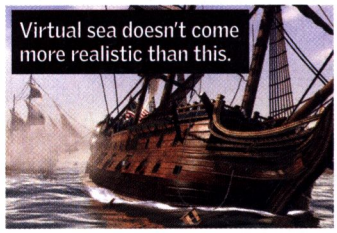
As well as long-range cannon battles you'll also be able to engage in close-quarters combat during these sea-based encounters, by boarding. By navigating your ship parallel to an enemy vessel, your onboard contingent of soldiers will be able to snare an opposition boat with grappling hooks and pull it close enough to board. Should your troops win the ensuing battle, the ship will come under your control and if it contains technology that your faction has yet to research, you'll gain access to it on the revamped campaign map.

Capturing enemy vessels will be made easier by strategically targeting a ship's masts to cripple it. With every cannon ball and musket shot calculated as a physical property (rather than a mathematical damage calculation as was the case in previous *Total War* games), every shot will be subject to real-life physics and trajectories, promising an even more authentic combat experience on sea and land.

Spanning the entire 18th century, *Empire*'s gaming world will be larger than ever before, stretching from India to America and focussing heavily on exploration, conquest and colony building, with naval combat and trade routes playing a big role in proceedings.

"It was a time when trade on a global scale was becoming very important for big imperial countries, meaning that good trade routes were essential," explains Russell. A major new tactic in your empire building arsenal will be to disrupt enemy trade routes by attacking their ships. Trade ships will also be at risk from pirate attacks if they lack the adequate military protection to ensure safe passage from far off lands.

While CA has yet to decide on an exact number, it's likely that *Empire* will feature between 20 and 40 ship types, ranging from sloops (small, single mast ships) to hulking 120 gun admiral ships. Towards the campaign's latter stages, you'll be able to research some deadly vessels including rocket ships; water-based artillery launchers that fling fireworks onto the decks of far-off enemies to set fire to them. Research diligently enough and you'll even be able to construct a steam-powered ship (a rare case of CA employing creative license to include a ship type not of the time period). Free from the restrictions imposed by sails, these battleships will possess a huge advantage by being able to turn on the spot, enabling them to bring their guns in line with enemies far more quickly than conventional vessels.



Virtual sea doesn't come more realistic than this.

LAND AHOY

While CA may have spent vast amounts of time working on naval combat (and ultra-realistic sea, don't forget the sea), it clearly hasn't been neglecting *Empire*'s land-based battles. Subject to the same graphical makeover that's making the sea battles so visually spectacular, the team has put a great deal of effort into improving the variety of units seen in *Medieval II*.

"We wanted to try and create a sense of differentiation between the armies so that they don't look like groups of clones," explains CA's communications manager, Kieran Brigden. "We've added different breeds of horses and more facial and uniform differences. We've also tried to add more variety to the vegetation."

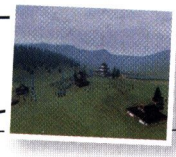
The result is a far more eclectic mix of units, each imbued with the ability to identify an opponent on the battlefield and engage him in brutal motion-captured mortal combat.

With *Empire* set during the technologically rich 18th century, it'll come as no surprise that firearms play a far greater role in battles than in any previous *Total War* game. Troops will be able to learn special drills from generals, including barrages that

If we duck down, maybe they won't see us.

THE STORY SO FAR... THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

2000 — **Shogun: Total War**
Shogun: Total War takes the RTS genre by storm.



2002 — **Medieval: Total War**
Medieval adds siege warfare into the epic *Total War* mix.

2004 — **Rome: Total War**
A new 3D engine and campaign style make *Rome* a leader.

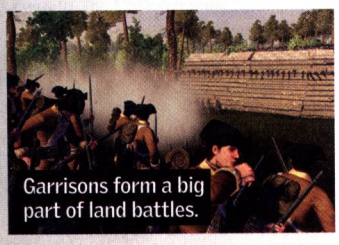
2006 — **Medieval II: Total War**
CA Australia make *Medieval*'s sequel. The UK team do *Empire*.

Larger naval battles will involve around 20 ships per side.

will see well-marshalled regiments letting off salvos a line at a time then dropping to their knees to let the line behind them have a crack, before advancing on the enemy and engaging them with bayonets and blades.

Garrisoning is another new feature. While I didn't get to see it in action, CA feel confident that they can seamlessly incorporate this tactic into land battles, which will once again feature up to 10,000 combatants slugging it out on 3D real-time battlefields.

Placing your men inside buildings will give them a huge defensive advantage against advancing foes. However, this won't be without its risks, as your men will be far more likely to come under artillery fire as the enemy attempts to flush them out into the open. Garrisoning will be particularly effective when defending a city from an enemy attack (city defences will constitute the majority of the game's siege battles). By ensconcing your men within buildings, hostile armies will be forced to take your town building by building and street by street, running the risk of suffering major losses against your well-protected and elevated units.



Garrisons form a big part of land battles.

WEATHER WITH YOU

Empire's weather system has also received some loving attention, and will play a far more influential and dynamic role in determining the outcomes of land and sea battles.

Troops battling in downpours will have to contend with quagmires created by a combination of increasingly saturated soil and schlepping booted feet. As the rain continues, the ground will slowly degenerate from firm soil to sticky mud, slowing troop movement and ensnaring horse-drawn artillery in an inescapable bog. The dangers of hostile weather conditions will be even greater at sea, where bucking waves and swirling winds will make navigating your fleet during combat infinitely harder.

With its revamped visuals and spectacular looking naval battles, *Empire* is shaping up to be the most ambitious real time strategy game of all time. But with the era's propensity for ranged combat, CA faces a whole new host of challenges as it seeks to maintain *Total War*'s dominance over the RTS genre. PCZ

Bigger, better, more productive

Empire's campaign map to be larger but more streamlined

While CA is presently holding off the full unveil of *Empire*'s revamped turn-based campaign map, the developer did reveal some other details.

Diplomacy has received a makeover, with negotiations now taking place on a diplomacy screen, meaning no more traipsing around with a diplomat. Allied nations will no longer break allegiances without warning and will give out subtle clues before attacking, such as hijacking a trade route.

Religion's influence has been reduced, but social classes (the rich and the poor) will have greater sway over your decisions. Thanks to a universal taxation system, you'll be spared micromanaging taxation, while the amount you tax each class and your decisions will determine whether each group supports you or rises up against you. If one class becomes too disillusioned they'll start a revolution, which you'll be able to support or attempt to quell. Though if the latter fails, you may find your head being used as a urinal by stray dogs outside your capital's gates.

Firearms played a major role in 18th century warfare.

The kids' party turned sour when the clown turned up drunk.

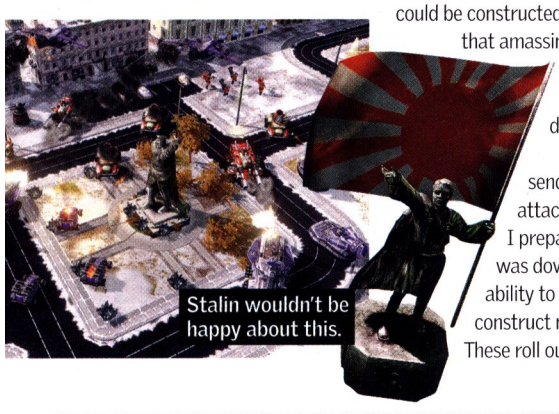
NO ALARM OVER RED ALERT 3

Martin Korda's bear-baited hands-on hints at greatness

Mmm... base rushing.

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN living in a Siberian igloo, you'll know that *C&C: Red Alert 3*'s release is bearing down on us like the Red Army on a vodka factory. With the code virtually finished, we got our hands on the multiplayer game and played as the Soviet Union against the technologically advanced Empire of the Rising Sun (aka Japan).

The Soviets felt instantly familiar. Possessing a linear, old school base building model confined by a build radius and sporting heavily armoured units such as the Apocalypse tank – similar to *C&C*'s Mammoth with its dual turrets and equipped with a magnetic harpoon for pulling in nippier foes – the Pinkos were all about brute force. However, their build restrictions (only one building could be constructed at a time) meant that amassing a force took time. This is a problem that my opponent didn't face.


Stalin wouldn't be happy about this.

My foe's ability to send several waves of attacks against me, while I prepared to send out one, was down to the Empire's ability to simultaneously construct multiple buildings. These roll out of construction yards and can be deployed anywhere on the map.

The Empire's units also proved far more versatile than my rigid combat vehicles, often fulfilling dual roles thanks to their transforming abilities. The Sea-Wing is a submarine that can seamlessly transform into a bomber, while the Jet/Mecha Tengu is a walker that doubles as a fighter.

TO WAR!

After safeguarding my base by building Tesla Coils and the morally reprehensible Iron Curtain (which casts a protective field over buildings while wiping out any nearby infantry units), I sent out my Ore Collectors to amass the game's only resource. I also packed our base with Super Reactors that generate vast amounts of energy, but could easily destroy half the base should the enemy successfully target them.

Once I'd constructed a balanced force packed with War Bears (bears in armour), MiG Fighters, Twinblade helicopter gunships, nippy four-legged Sickle walkers, Apocalypse tanks and some devastating Kirov Airships (slow but durable blimps which release a barrage of bombs on their targets), I made my way towards the enemy's base and ploughed in, wiping out an opponent who'd spent his resources on forays into our territory, rather than on base defences. The fool! Ha ha!

At a little over 20 minutes, the skirmish felt like the perfect length for such a frenetic RTS. While the visuals weren't the step forward from *C&C3* that I'd hoped, the breakneck action was instantly recognisable and accessible while the cheesy humour and imaginative units that have typified this spin-off series carried enough promise to suggest this could be the best *Red Alert* yet. PCZ

"The iWear is technology for technology's sake, and for that reason alone, we love it"

Some awe may be feigned for effect.

YESTERDAY'S FUTURE IS HERE

With the headset on, this looks more 3D and a bit blurry.

The Vuzix iWear – helping *Jon Blyth* look stupid and feel alone

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WEBSITE vuzix.com

WE'VE BEEN ON the precipice of the same future for 30 years. The same robotic vacuum cleaners that appeared on *Tomorrow's World* in the '80s are still there – they're smaller now, but just as useless. The same mind-reading gadgets are being touted – although now, they're five times as accurate at measuring how hard you're squinting.

Virtual reality goggles are definitely a part of this jaded subset of technology. The first commercial forays into "total immersion headsets" died out when a judge decided that strapping a CRT TV to a child's head was forbidden under the Geneva Convention. But the technology has shrunk and improved to the point where it's now available to buy for £250.

No-one can see me.

The Vuzix iWear (vuzix.com/iwear) is a pair of chunky, but manageable glasses, with earphones incorporated into the design. Vuzix are constantly releasing driver updates to allow the glasses to interpret the visual information from game engines to give stereoscopic 3D effects, which (in *Half Life 2: Deathmatch*, at least) isn't that bad. Although with a maximum resolution of 640 x 480, you'll have processor power to spare.

POINTLESS TECH

However, although the way the dual screens envelop your head (glaring gaps above and below your eyes excepted, unless you fork out for the Immersive Eyeshield accessory), you're less focussed on the pixel count than the disorientation. Using the mouse to look around and the keyboard to fire, everything's smooth and under control. Turn on the head-tracking sensors, and the fact that this technology is "a couple of years off, yet" becomes apparent. It's jittery enough to make multiplayer suicidal, and although it's an excellent tech demo of where things might go in the future, that's not much consolation to someone who's spent a quarter of a thousand pounds on a pair of low-res shimmer-goggles.

Where you'd use them is a mystery; certainly not on public transport, you'd miss your stop. The non-PC versions of the goggles (ranging from £100-£300) seem slightly more sensible, but even then the only use we can think of is if you're forced to go to a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fancy dress party, and you really don't want to talk to anyone.

The iWear is technology for technology's sake, and for that reason, we love it, and we're glad it exists. But we won't be buying a pair, yet. PCZ

My First Virtual Reality

A quick peek into the origins of UK VR

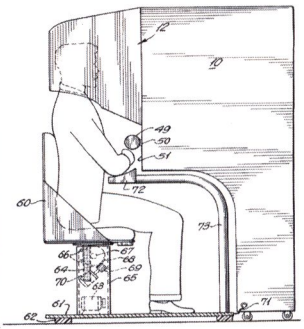
Virtual fingerbangs for everyone!

In 1992, a virtual reality shop opened in Nottingham. Legend Quest offered players the chance to put on a large TV hat and a magical glove. Held in front of your face, you could see your gloved hand in the virtual world. Bold adventurers, having seen VR in *Knightmare*, queued up to stand in a shop window and wave their arms around.

This venture was doomed to be short-lived for two reasons. First, most people got killed by a triangular spider in the first room, whilst failing to take a key from a pedestal with the shitty glove. Secondly, putting players in the shop window to advertise the product would have been more successful if everyone didn't look like a flailing prick. At least you can keep Vuzix to your bedroom...

Nonsensorama

The sights you'll smell



This is the patent for one of the first VR cabinets made in 1955. The Sensorama let you experience a bicycle ride in a park. The machine was equipped to blow air into your face, and squirt fragrances into the waft. Only the physical benefits of exercise and fresh air were sacrificed, and that's hardly why people go cycling through parks.

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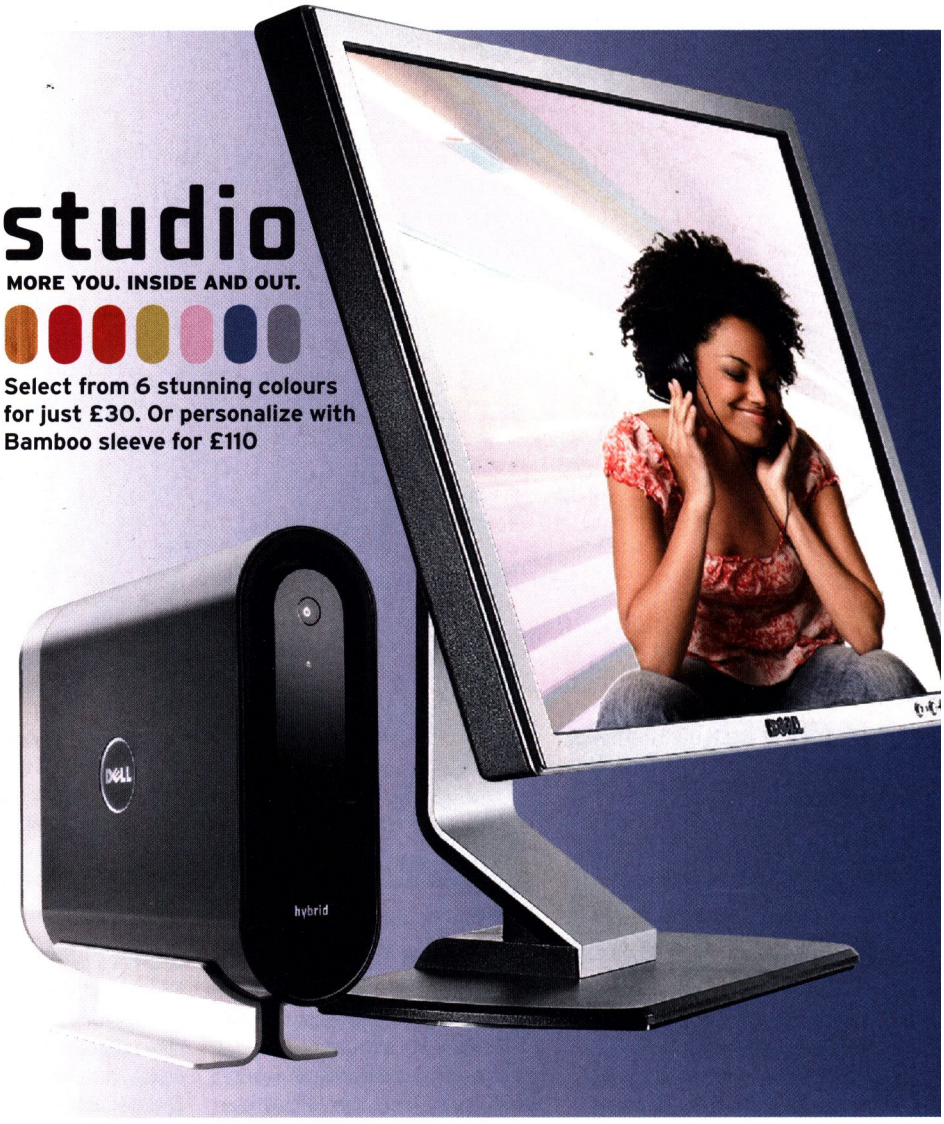

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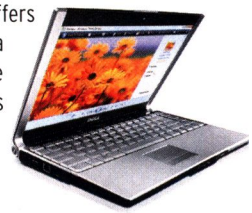

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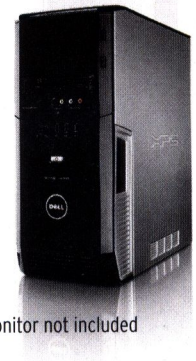

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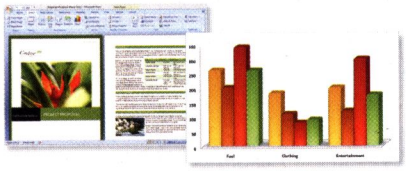

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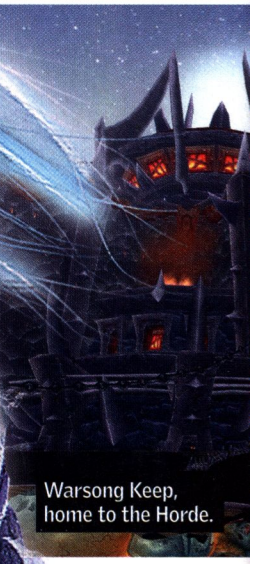


Warsong Keep, home to the Horde.

THE LOWDOWN

More content for higher players	✓
Death Knights are great fun	✓
The chance to take the fight to Arthas	✓
Less inventive than *Burning Crusade*?	✗
Its rivals are catching up	✗

"You're part of a Scourge army, and have to murder, poison and obliterate innocent people"

WARCRAFT: LICH KING

A cold-hearted *Ed Zitron* grinds the face off the beta release of Blizzard's Northrend adventures

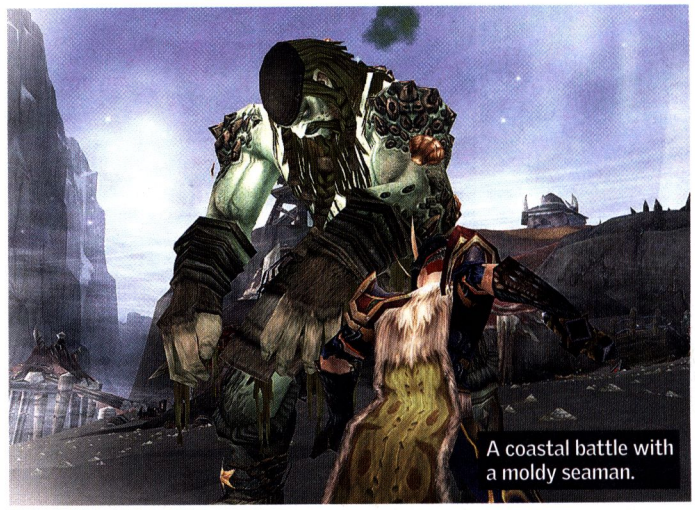
DEVELOPER Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Activision-Blizzard **WEBSITE** wow-europe.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 191

WRATH OF THE *Lich King*, the second expansion to *WOW* in its four year tender, has had the same build-up as the second coming of Jesus. Men with loudhailers on street corners, excitable nuns... the works. So it was almost a surprise to find ourselves finally exploring Northrend, the frozen continent and home of the Scourge's leader The Lich King. The expansion lets would-be grinders level all the way up to 80, as well as introducing achievements, graphics upgrades and a new hero class: the Death Knight.

For those unfamiliar with *Warcraft* Lore (and who missed our Lich King special back in issue 191), The Lich King was once the son of the King of Lordaeron, Arthas Menethil (and, in part, the Orc chief Ner'Zhul). Through *Warcraft III* and expansion *The Frozen Throne*, he picked up the dread sword Frostmorne, travelled to Northrend and became an all-powerful undead monster – getting some free spookily glowing eyes and power over the undead.

Mammoth fun.

I love the smell of the Necropolis in the morning.



A coastal battle with a moldy seaman.

Wrath of the Lich King takes place some years after his undeadification, with both Horde and Alliance players intent on doing their best to take down Arthas and putting the kibosh on the dratted Scourge once and for all.

DEAD DROP

All very dramatic, I'm sure you'll agree, and what's more, it's a neat segue through to the hero class that serves as an introduction to the war on Northrend.

The Death Knight is available for creation on reaching Level 55, running as a character that acts in parallel with your own. So, technically, if you haven't played through *Burning Crusade* yet, you could happily create a Death Knight and run him through Outland and then onto Northrend. In fact, everyone has to. He/she/it plays unlike any of the other classes. You have three pairs of runes (unholy, blood and frost), and each of your spells uses a combination of them. You also have a runic power gauge that fills depending on what you cast and kill, allowing you to unleash abilities such as Death Coil; a spell that either does direct damage or heals an ally depending on who it's cast on. Death Knights start in the flying city of Acherus: The Ebon Hold, floating above The Eastern Plaguelands like an angry blimp.

You're immediately greeted by none other than the Lich King, who recruits you into his evil forces and demands that you eliminate the inhabitants of the nearby Scarlet Crusade villages.

These first steps as a Death Knight are gruesome: you're part of the Scourge army and thus have to murder, poison and obliterate innocent people for your master, while spitting at the mortals that cross your path.

I won't spoil the eventual conclusion of the quests, but I can say that they take a few hours to complete, and that they're utterly brilliant. The starting zone is instanced, and changes several times throughout the experience as the storyline advances. The quests, meanwhile, cleverly award you talent points and loot as you go, meaning that once you leave the relative safety of the Ebon Hold you're at Level 58 with quality gear, an epic mount and a full stable of talents – a proper badass, relatively speaking. It's also massively impressive how well Blizzard integrate the Death

Barbershop quartered

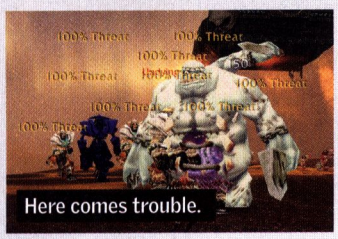
Other smaller additions to *Lich King*

Minor treats include the fact that you can now change your character's hair at the Barbershop, found in the capital cities of each race. Mounts are now learned, like spells, and instead of taking up valuable inventory space, they're now called upon from a new part of the pet menu. You also keep your vanity pets (kittens, turtles and the like) in these same menus. Achievements are now part of the game, rewarding you for reaching certain levels, exploring areas, reading books, and even falling a certain distance without dying. Most of them give you points that potentially can be spent on new vanity pets and other as-yet-unnamed items. Achievements will be retroactive, so you don't have to re-complete old content.

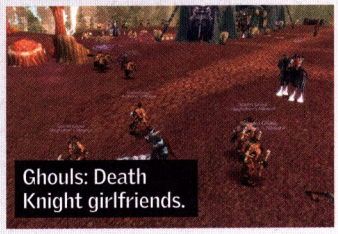
Zeppelins don't really rival The Dark Portal.

The new weather effects are dramatic.

A punchup at the renfest.



Here comes trouble.



Ghouls: Death Knight girlfriends.

Knights lore-wise into Azeroth. You start your crusade as a lowly, mindless scourgeling, but once you leave The Ebon Hold you're a free man.

Death Knights can fit into any playing style, with blood, unholy and frost builds erring on the side of damage, PvP and tanking respectively, making this one of the most accessible and versatile RPG classes ever. They've also nailed the feeling of being powerful, with abilities that can let you deal with most situations whether you're alone or in a group.

I have concerns about how Death Knights will balance with other classes, but as it stands they seem to fit neatly into most grouping scenarios without causing penis envy.

As mentioned before – the slightly annoying part of being a Death Knight is that you'll have to fight through *The Burning Crusade* to access Northrend.

Replaying old content may be a jarring prospect for experienced grinders, but the Death Knight experience is fresh enough that it's a lot less painful than you'd think. That, and the new influx of level 58 players, should give a little extra life to *The Burning Crusade* content – hopefully allowing those left behind the chance to play catch-up. Then, once you finally reach level 68, you can finally grab a Zeppelin or boat to Northrend from either of your side's capitals.

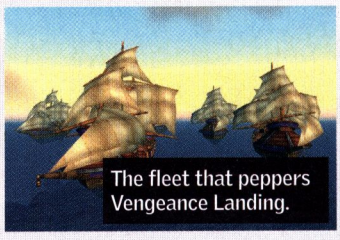
As of going to press, the beta hasn't been open more than two weeks, but there're already a few 71+ Knights around Northrend. (Typical.)

COLD AS ICE

Northrend itself, as Blizzard have said many times, isn't a continent purely made of ice. It's got lush greenery, gigantic cities (including the Nerubian home of Azjol'Nerub) and even a forest set ablaze by the newly-awoken Viking-like Vrykul. Depending on where you land, there's a stunning amount of quests available to you. At first they're mostly concerned with pissing off the other faction and cementing your foothold on Northrend, but once you advance further into the cold wastes you'll see more of the Scourge, the Vrykul, and the other indigenous fauna.

You'll also meet up with other *WOW* lore-staples, such as the Explorer's League and Hemet Nesingwary, as well as the perennial dickheads from the Venture Corporation. Unlike your trip into Outland, Northrend hasn't been kind to its new explorers, with some members of the League turned mad. This insanity has caused a civil war between them and the Druids for the Ethical and Humane Treatment of Animals, D.E.H.T.A. A relatively inane pun, yes, but one made up for by the fact that there's an entire area composed of wildlife and poachers in the Borean Tundra, and if you kill one of the animals, the D.E.T.H.A druids will be enraged and for three minutes you'll be a legitimate target for their members. So while they're crazy activists – a kind of paramilitary RSPCA – at least they have short memories.

This D.E.H.T.A. situation also leads to one of the more inventive quests I've seen so far, which culminates in riding



The fleet that peppers Vengeance Landing.

New models, new danger.

THE STORY SO FAR...
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

2004 — **A DECADE ON**
WOW marks the 10th anniversary of the franchise.

2007 — **BURN, ORCY, BURN**
The Burning Crusade expansion is released three years later.

2008 — **THE BIG WAR**
WOW reaches 10 million subscribers: an MMORPG record.

2009 — **WHICH KING?**
Having played through Northrend, *WOW* addicts bray for more.

"Northrend hasn't been kind to its new explorers, with a few of the League turned mad"

Warsong Hold's Horde forces are locked in a battle with the Lich King's Nerubian force.

Shadow play

A new shadow system in *Lich King* adds a massive amount of depth, with bigger objects creating huge, hulking shades of darkness

Without shadows.

With shadows.

a mammoth to war against an army of poachers and their leader, Kaw. It also introduces the new UI for controllable units, such as Kodo and Cannons, each with their own hotbar and special attacks. Each time you control one of these is fun yet also a little dissonant, as at present they still feel steeped in *WOW*'s not-quite-realtime combat. However, they are still a departure from the usual slog of collection and kill-quests, which Northrend remains intent on throwing at you.

No-one ever said the grind was going away, and I'm probably the most grind-tolerant chap around, but playing through the first 15 to 20 hours of content in Northrend, left me with a lack of awe. I wasn't underwhelmed or overwhelmed – I was simply whelmed. It cannot be argued that there was a real cogency to the entirety of *Burning Crusade*, but now we're into *Lich King* the quests range from the good solid fun mark, to a bit dull.

Blizzard are usually famed for bar-raising, but thus far I'm yet to see much that leaps out as overtly new or fresh. For example, the first few quests of Vengeance Landing, the undead entrance to Northrend, are almost identical to *The Burning Crusade* – there's a bombing run, a few kill quests, and then one where you have a hound that faithfully follows you. (Although you don't have to sift through shit at any point on this one.)

STRANGE QUESTS

Another worried shrug came when, on arriving at a Tauren encampment, I received a quest that involved killing rams and another that made me pick up hippogryph feathers. I pressed M and, unbelievably, I was in the buzzing new continent of Northrend and not the bloody Hinterlands. True enough, quests like these will always be a part of *WOW*, but while *The Burning Crusade* had a few of them strewn about, it got away with it due to the dramatic locations and otherworldly vibe. They weren't so much of the "kill these kobolds, they're ruining the flowers," vein.

Northrend's content is good then, but my immediate concern is that it doesn't have that same drive and vigour that made levels 60 to 70 so enjoyable. I'd be lying if I said it wasn't fun, but from my limited time at the frozen end of Azeroth I rarely felt like a hero in a great saga – I felt more like a good Samaritan with knives and ADD.

It's not that it's broken – in fact, for a beta, it's all looking slick – it's just that it lacks the adventurous atmosphere, innovation and general newness that usually pervades most fresh content from Blizzard. It's scary to say, but one word I couldn't bring myself to write about the *Lich King* was "exciting."

But remember, this is Blizzard – a company that is full of surprises. The huge changes that took place in the original *WOW* beta show their willingness to take things back to the drawing board and hold back content until it's ready. There's always the chance that they have something reserved to spruce up the content.

The question is how much will Blizzard do to pump variety and atmosphere into the game, to make it as astounding as the Death Knight. PCZ

BEYOND THE SEA

Irrational Games on the successes and failures of an underwater adventure

ONE YEAR SINCE the release of *BioShock*, we find 2K Boston's creative director Ken Levine, lead programmer Chris Kline, and lead designer Bill Gardner, sunning themselves on Brighton beach. Steve Hogarty shoots the breeze with the creators of 2007's game of the year.

From left to right: 2K Boston's Bill Gardner, Chris Kline and Ken Levine.

Q **It seems people like to attribute the success of *BioShock* to Ken Levine – it's become Ken's game in a way, don't you think?**

A **Ken Levine:** Yeah, some people don't see it as a team effort, that's why I bring these guys out here and make sure Chris and Bill are talking. You've got to make sure people are aware of the contributions of the team.

Chris Kline: I don't think anybody on the team thinks Ken is hogging the limelight, we're happy that somebody can go out there and effectively communicate with the press. You need one person with one message if you want something to get through clearly.

Bill Gardner: Frankly Ken does a fantastic job with it all. But we all rally behind him and believe in what he says and does. He does drive us, and kicks our ass a lot of the time. The feedback he gives us sometimes makes you want to bang your head on the keyboard it's so simple. You know like, just talking about the way we lay out a corpse, or moving it a little bit to change the entire scene. Just look at the results, and you see it's worth getting behind that vision he has.

BioShock's Big Daddies – softies at heart.

the good stuff and not for the bad. Sometimes my taste needs readjustment too, and Bill or Chris will come to me and say "Dude, seriously, this section of the game is messed". So I have to listen to these guys. Outside the work they're doing, their taste comes into it heavily. But at the end of the day, if you like it or hate it, the decision for it to be in the game was mine.

Having worked on the *Thief* games, what's your current perception of the stealth genre? It seems the *Splinter Cell* series is beginning a spiral into obscurity.

BG: I'm interested to see what Ubisoft do with *Conviction*. And certainly *Metal Gear* is stepping away from stealth, it's a lot more action oriented. I think the stealth genre's due for a big shake up to be honest. I don't know who, when, where or how it's gonna happen, but I do feel it's due for a reinvention or re-imagining.

KL: It's funny because despite working on *Thief*, I'm not a huge fan of stealth games. As a gamer I don't really enjoy it that much. Not to speak badly of the stealth game. It has to be integrated into some larger gameplay element. Like, my backstabbing druid in *WOW* has really good stealth, it's very simple.

CK: Blizzard went game-y with it, that was the key.

KL: And after 193 hours you realise how close you can walk to that fucking Murloc before he sees you.

BG: It's primarily a feedback issue, but also a matter of what the penalty for being spotted is – that's where most stealth games go wrong.

KL: We actually talked about this in a design meeting the other day. The days of falling off a ledge and dying are gone. Failure shouldn't be a binary state. *Thief* didn't have a binary failure state, it had a recoverable failure state, but it was tough. Games are moving towards modulating reward rather than failure. I think that's a positive development.

BioShock was tuned so that a lot of people would get through it. In future we'll be thinking about how we allow that, but how we also give the hardcore players a challenge. We released that patch for *BioShock* to remove the vita chambers for example, something we probably should've done from the start.

Most people who play games aren't like us. They don't jump into the options and tweak their ini files, so we've got to be careful because the settings we leave as default are the ones most people will play. I'll say this very clearly so I don't get misquoted – in our defaults, we'll err towards the not-insane-hardcore-guy. In the options, because hardcore guys go through options, we'll want to expose things like turning off the Vita Chambers.

Were you aware during development that *BioShock*'s third act was lacking?

KL: Not to spin it, but I think what happened was we underestimated the players' reaction the Ryan scene. I had high hopes for that scene, but the sort of mind fuck that did to people left them without much to hold on to afterwards.

It raised the bar to a point the game really couldn't reach again.

KL: Yeah, and if we didn't have that – say you met Ryan, had a gunfight and you shoot him – it would've lowered the negative reaction to the final third of the game because they wouldn't have had that high to compare it to. I try to be honest about this: we ran out of a little juice there and we didn't really recover. We probably should've gone to the exit a little more quickly at that point.

The final boss battle was somewhat anti-climactic too.

KL: I think that was a question of not knowing thyself enough. Where we were bold enough to include that Ryan scene, the expectation at the end is that this is a big boss – the guy who's been taunting you – so we're gonna jump on his head, shoot him in the weak spot and he's gonna die. So we defied convention with Ryan and then played into convention's hands at the end, and I'm not sure that's who we are.

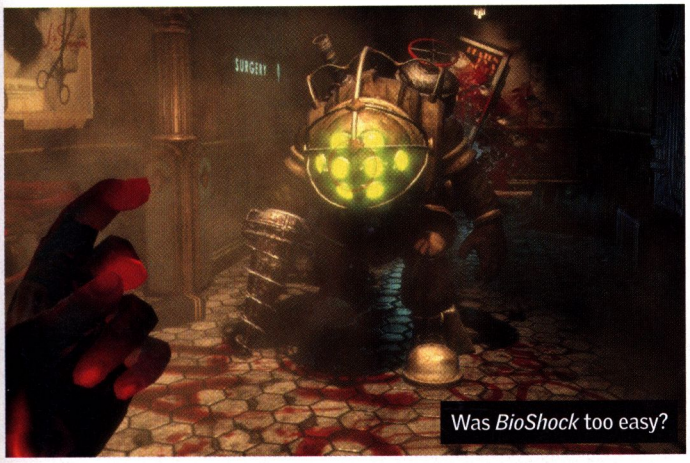
But on the other hand we asked, what is the audience going to want at the end of this thing? And I think we should've had more faith in ourselves and done something more radical. PCZ

"Most people who play games aren't like us. They don't jump into the options and tweak their ini files"

KL: With great power comes great responsibility right? When we had the copy protection issues come out, I was out there talking about the product, I didn't run away from that. And frankly I got some nasty fucking threats. I think it's important that somebody takes responsibility, and at the end of the day my job as creative director is to sort of be the arbiter of taste.

When I talk about the narrative problems in the third act, I don't say it's Bill's fault. I'd be wrong to take credit for *Thief* games, I think they were amazing products, with Eric Brosius' audio, the cutscenes and the tonality of it, it was gorgeous – especially knowing the limitations we had. Stealth gameplay is really tough to get right. You always end up with a stealth sequence in so many videogames, and that fills me with a twinge of regret because when those are thrown in, it has to be a really seamless part of the product.

For stealth games to work properly, you almost have to not know it's a



Was *BioShock* too easy?

IT'S HERE!

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

IT'S RAW! IT'S WAAAGH! IT'S LIKE NOTHIN YOU'VE PLAYD BEFOR. JON BLYTH IS YOUR GUIDE TO THE FURST STEPS INTO MADNES

THE UPCOMING LAUNCH of *Age of Reckoning* has lit a cold fire in many guts. Suddenly, unexpected people are popping up and showing a surprising knowledge of words like Tzeentch, Khaine and Sigmar. Who knew, when we were reading those rulebooks and manuals all those years ago, that Games Workshop were laying their dirty lore eggs in our fertile teenage brains, set to hatch as adults?

If you're a fan of any comparable MMO, we definitely can tell you how you'll feel after spending your first 20 hours in *WAR*: you'll be awe-struck and overwhelmed. You'll have about five characters on the go, and you'll be trying to decide which one you'll take into the higher levels first. You'll be considering a graphics card upgrade. Having spoken to a number of people who've played the opening zones of *Warhammer Online*, there's a surprising consensus: it beats the living shit out of *World of Warcraft*, and no-one wants to go back.

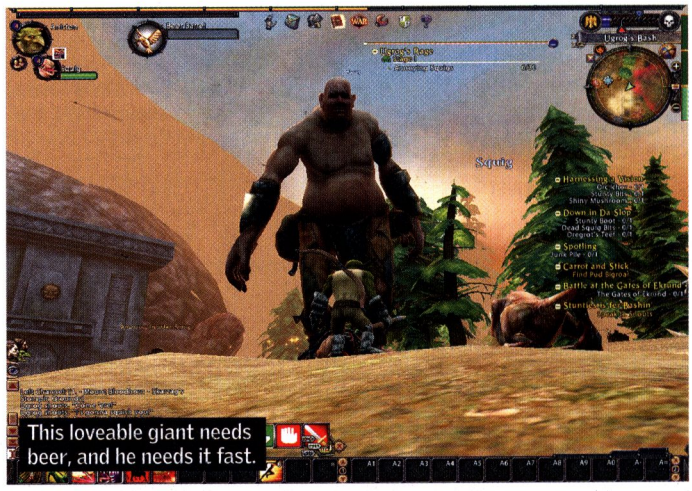
We'll have our full review next issue, but we simply couldn't resist spending an issue telling you exactly what you'll discover should you choose to drink down a free trial draught of Mythic's canny poison.

GETTING DRAFTED

The first decision you'll face is which faction you want to join – Order or Destruction. These are actually called realms, and aren't to be confused with *WOW*'s realms, which are fancily named servers. You then decide which army to join: the Order have High Elves, Dwarfs or the human's Empire, or if you prefer Destruction, you can choose from Dark Elves, Greenskins (Orcs, Goblins, Giants and the like) and Chaos (humans corrupted by demonic forces). These choices decide which opening storylines you'll encounter.

For instance, choose to be a human from the Empire and you'll find yourself in the battlefields of Nordland, with almost no time to get used to your class before you're attacking the hordes of Chaos. Choose to be the fungal Greenskins, and you'll be thrown into a siege of a dwarven fortress, and onto the stunties' ramparts using catapults. Join the pious High Elves in their battle against the Khaine-worshipping Dark Elves, and you'll find yourselves defending a continent that's had a ruddy great ship full of the bastards driven into the side.

So the opening areas... they're not tranquil. Enemies are always close by, and the rate at which defeated enemies reappear leaves you little time to hang around. You'll be safe from PvP for the first few levels, if you want to be – and you can play a fully PvE game and still benefit your Realm. But it's quickly very obvious that the *WAR* effort is really about killing other players.



After spending 20 hours in WAR, you'll be awe-struck

Death is so much a part of the *WAR* experience, when you're killed you're told "don't worry, it's a part of the game!" Although its cheerful optimism is queerly at odds with the Warhammer World, it's how the system works. You're instantly resurrected, with no penalty beyond the XP and renown you just gave to the opposing army. If the spawn point is close to the RvR battlefield, you'll be back in the fray in under 30 seconds, hunting the bastard that killed you.

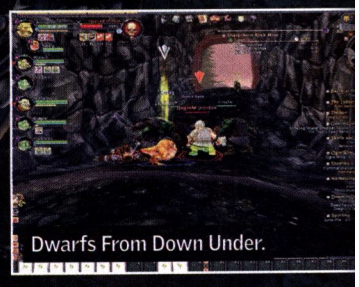
Progress is quick. Killing AI mobs gives you experience, but killing other players gives you experience and renown. Experience levels you up, with every level bringing you new abilities, tactics and morale powers. Meanwhile, renown levels give you points to spend on a separate, RvR-focused tree, giving you a chance to personalise you character with stat boosts and tactics. From level 11 onwards, you get mastery points too, which give you the chance to specialise in one of your career's three paths. These are unique to every class of every race – although there's some thematic overlap.

This is all far from simple. From the early levels, you'll notice that most of your attacks have a side-effect, or a dual purpose that needs to be factored in. Learn quickly as it won't be long before you've got another one.

If you've played any traditional MMO, you'll have learned to hate fetch quests. Because *WAR* shifts the focus onto group activities, the solo fetching quests are kept simple. Better than that, the drop rate – the bane of *WOW* players – has been removed. If you need black wolf paws, they'll always be found on the ends of dead black wolves' legs. While saying that sounds ridiculous, players of *WOW* will testify to the insulting amount of time you can spend killing Satyrs in Ashenvale, only to have their horns disappear when they die, 75% of the time.

This is a basic distinction, but one that is important: *WOW* feels like it's making you play. Throughout the early levels, *WAR* cheerfully lets you play. You do what you're do because you're having a good time.

By level 9, your Chaos armor is coming together.


Dwarfs From Down Under.

The Blue Horror loves you.

Hot and heavy priest chat

Call 0898 50 50 50

"Super Fantasy Team Friendship, reporting for duty."

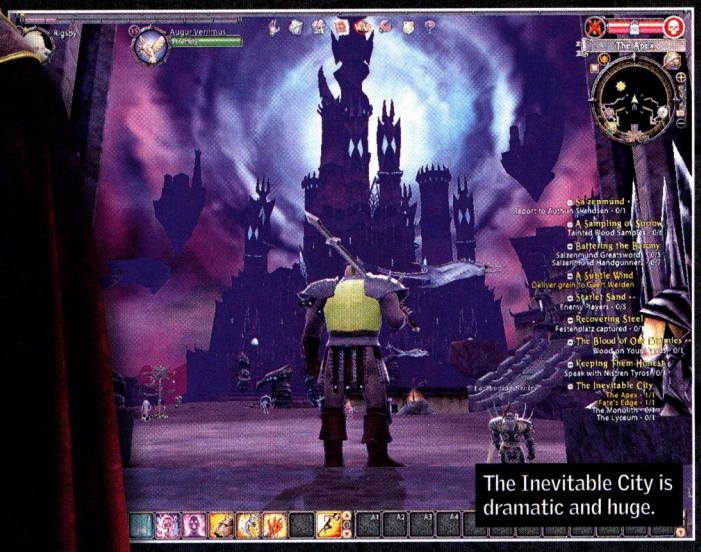
Healing classes aren't your traditional priests in *WAR*. The usual way of tailoring a priest to be a decent fighter is to curtail their healing abilities. However, the Empire's Warrior Priests can't heal from a well of regenerating mana – they have to maintain a pool of Righteous Fury with their damaging attacks. Dark Elf Disciples of Khaine do the same, but the High Elf healer (the Archmage) gains momentum in either damaging or healing attacks: maintain your rage and you're a solo PvE machine. Build up your tranquility, and you'll be a team-playing healbot.

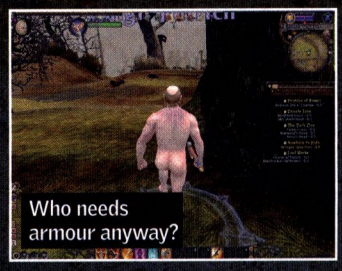
To help this dual function, you've got two targets – one for attack and one for healing. It's a good system – although the compromise to distinct healing roles does sometimes mean that less-disciplined healers will forget what they're there for. If they do, simply yell "FFS HEALER WTF", respawn and do it again.

IT'S HERE! WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

A Chaos horde invades the once-serene Empire.

Naked and violent – that's our dwarfs.


The Inevitable City is dramatic and huge.


Who needs armour anyway?

My Demon and Me.

PUBLIC QUESTING

"We're just killing this massive demon, yeah, come over if you like"

As well as experience and renown, your influence in an area can be traded for rewards. As you progress through your race's storyline, you'll stumble across the public quests (PQs). These are how you earn influence and are Mythic's moment of genius.

Taking place over a number of stages, as you enter a PQ area, you'll be notified what the objectives are and what stage everyone's at. Regular PvE quests take you into these areas too, giving you the chance to join in with some Realm-boosting missions at nearly any time, and without having to join a party or enter an instance. The group's best performers will get a loot bag, too.

THE DRUNK GIANT

An early Greenskin quest, this is the one that Mythic have been touting for ages – certainly before they were snapped up by EA. In tabletop *Warhammer*, Giants are solo units that are roughly equivalant to a platoon of goblins, which is why they're not a playable race. This Giant is having trouble with a host of Squiggly Beasts. As you enter the PQ area, you'll see him running around, surrounded by the bouncing creatures.

Your first part of the quest is to kill them all, but by then the Giant is exhausted; and won't move until you fetched him 25 barrels of beer – unfortunately, Squigs like beer too. Once you've got him pissed, he'll finally grab the spiked ball and attack the dwarf fortress, leaving you to face the finale: waves of superior Champion dwarfs, headed up by a hugely superior Hero dwarf.

This requires a balanced team of five – or two idiots and a charitable level 12 Black Orc, which is what we had.

THE BLOODHOWLER

Over in the Chaos starting zones, the first PQ you'll find involves a group of your witches performing a summoning ceremony. They're under attack by a crowd of easily despatched Empire soldiers. In the early levels, you can handle about three or four mobs at once before you start feeling prone, giving you a chance to try out all your moves.

Once you've killed these guys, stage two begins, and you have to defile their graves. However, Empire Champion units have been alerted. You can't take these guys out alone but a couple of you should be able to manage it, if you're careful. With all the graves disrespected, the summoning process finally begins – only to have Wizard Lord Mathus arse it all up, producing Kar'Thok The Bloodhowler.

Essentially a massive red spiny demon dog, Kar'Thok dishes plenty of damage out – and once he's taken a certain amount back, he just starts running around the summoning circle. People naturally chase him, and this is how I was introduced to Public Quests – running past a scene that looked like a drug-fuelled finale to an episode of *Benny Hill*. That's the brilliance of WAR's public quests – you just want to join in.

FINGS FOR U TO KNOW

WIL PORTER AND ED ZITTRON COLATE SUM INTERESTIN STUF WOT MITE HELP

THE ARMIES

ORDER

Dwarfs

Player characters of short stature begin in the mines of Dwarven capital Karaz-a-Karak, known as Everpeak by humans, besieged by Greenskin forces. As ever, dwarfs are a hardy bearded bunch excelling in engineering. As such their mount is a Da Vinci-esque autogyro that slightly raises them off the ground.

Are these hats necessary?

Empire

With a culture loosely based on early modern Europe these humans are religious, conservative and show trappings of the medieval. They're locked in battle with corrupt human followers of Chaos, but their quests cover topics like the subjugation of peasants and being bastards to maintain the rule of Emperor Franz.

High Elves

High Elves are on the poncy side: high art, high culture, high noses with which to look down on everyone. Smarting from the split with the Dark Elves, they're intent on preserving their culture. If they were British they'd live in Surrey, agree with the *Daily Mail*'s politics, but read the Arts section of *The Guardian*.

DESTRUCTION

Greenskins

Comprised of a melange of orcs and goblins, Greenskins speak and act in the manner of '80s bovver-boys. WAAAGH!, meanwhile, is a Greenskin blitzkrieg – a rush of angry marauders sweeping across the lands of their enemies. This is happening in *Age of Reckoning*.

Chaos

Members of Chaos worship one of four sparring gods, but *WAR* has player characters following Tzeentch – the one of change, manipulation and hope. These humans start out normal and butt-naked, and get steadily more eye-glowing and armoured as the fight against the stolid Empire gets more and more involved. They're cool, but you wouldn't invite one to a party.

Chaos Magi are permanently grumpy.

Dark Elves

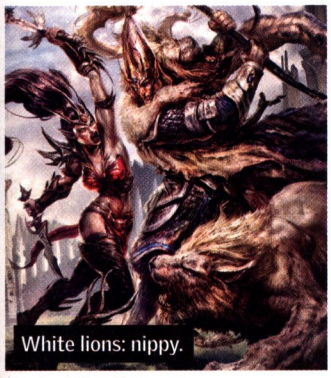
Split from the hoity-toity High Elves aeons ago, the Dark Elves (who are dead sexy and practically in the nip) worship Khaine, the Elven god of murder and are rather keen on moral grey areas such as slavery. *WAR* features the Dark Elf invasion of the elven motherland, and it's their magical prowess that has also boosted the Greenskins and allowed them to form a WAAAGH!

Swing low, sweet warrior priest.

IT'S HERE! WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

THE CLASSES

Dark Elf Witch / Human Witch Hunter
These build up either bloodlust and interrogation respectively, doing the most damage by flanking opponents, unleashing incredibly damaging attacks when fully equipped with their different energies.


White lions: nippy.

High Elf White Lion
A damage-based class that fights alongside a gigantic war lion, letting the great cat take most of the damage or fighting alongside it in a *WAR*-style buddy comedy.

High Elf Shadow Warrior
The Shadow Warrior can either be an effective ranged attacker or a deadly frontline melee master, depending on the stances he chooses. These can be swapped mid-battle to adapt to changes in combat.

Shadow Warriors have terrible teeth.

Dwarven Ironbreaker
A tank class that builds up a grudge metre by taking damage, said grudge making attacks much more powerful. He can also make a group mate an oath friend, gaining grudge from their damage too.

Dwarven Runepriest / Chaos Zealot
These support classes lay spells on their group mates and themselves to allow them to do extra damage, absorb attacks and restore their health, while also doing a little damage themselves.

Chaos Chosen
Using auras to weaken foes and strengthen allies, the Chosen is a tank class that can be an out-and-out damage-dealer or a meatshield.

Chaos Marauder
Using a selection of mutations, the Marauder focusses on doing as much damage as possible specialising in either direct damage, debuffs, or more defensive moves.

Empire Bright Wizard / Dark Elf Sorcerer
These damaging spellcasters build up a reserve of energy as they do more powerful spells, raising the chance of critical hits, the damage from said hits and the chance that they'll explode and hurt themselves.

Chosen are self-conscious.

Dark Elf Disciple Of Khaine / Human Warrior Priest
These healer classes both use offensive attacks to build up separate pools that effect their healing, requiring them to stay in the heat of battle to fuel their strongest abilities.

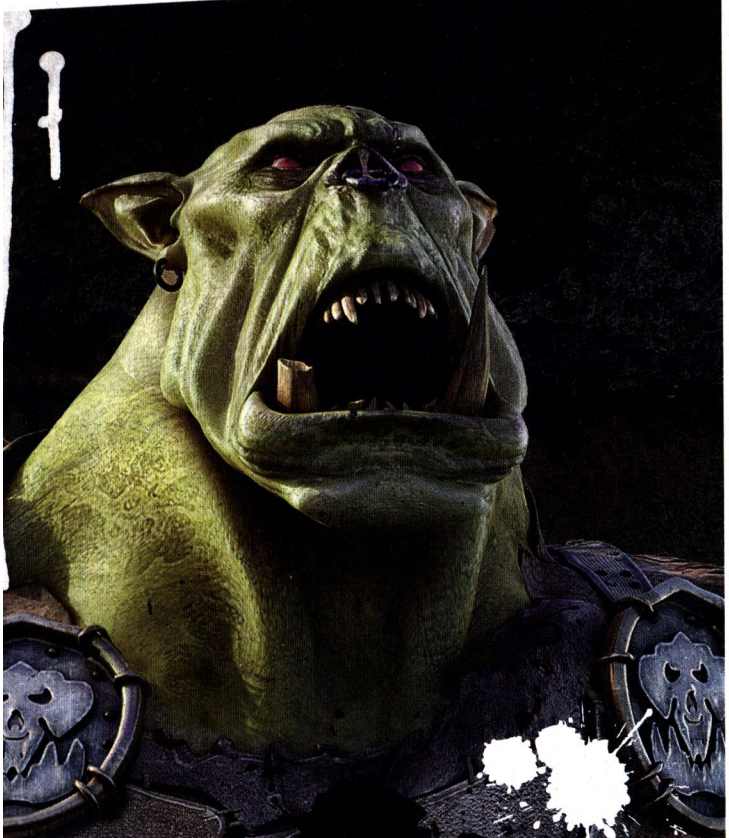
Chaos Magus
The Magus can summon different kinds of damaging demons and lay upon his enemies a selection of different damage-over-time and direct-damage spells, but as a long-range spellcaster, he's rather weak defensively.

Goblin Squig Herder / Dwarven Engineer
While both of them have different pets (mobile squigs vs static turrets), both the engineer and the herder are damage classes that specialise in either long-range attacks or engaging in melee alongside their ultra-damaging pets.

Swordmaster don't own mirr

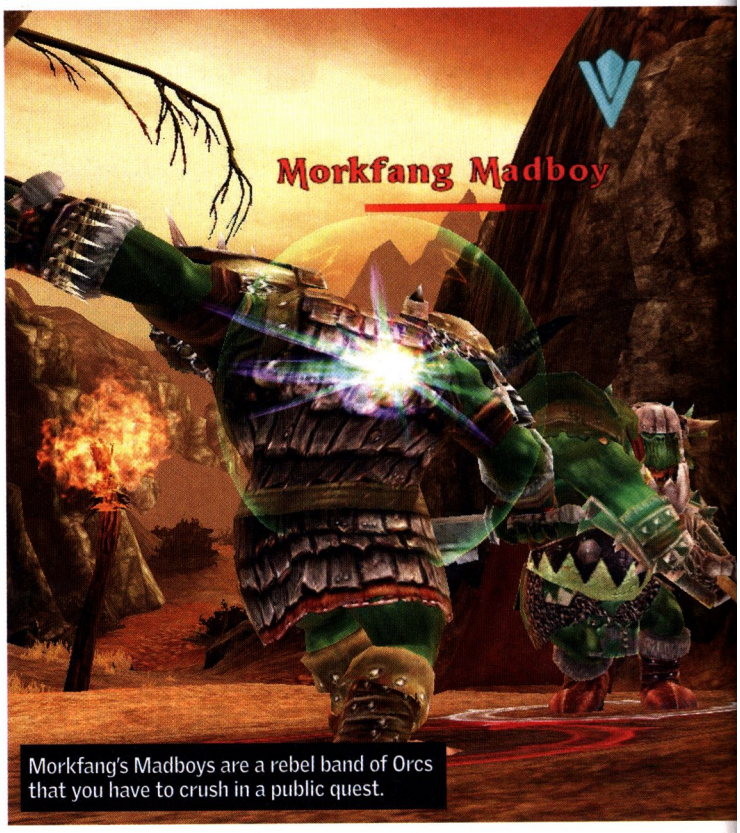
High Elf Archmage and Goblin Shaman
Both of these support classes channel their energies into either damaging or healing abilities. Using one or the other builds favour in its opposite school, benefitting things like its casting time or effectiveness.

High Elf Swordmaster / The Black Orc
These similar tank classes use different attacks that build them up from a status of "improved balance" or "da gud plan" to "perfect balance" and "da best plan", which in turn lets them release devastating attacks.



HIGHER LEVEL KILLINS

ED ZITTRON KILLS STUNTIES AND FIGHTS IN SUM RELM V RELM STUF



Morkfang's Madboys are a rebel band of Orcs that you have to crush in a public quest.

WHILE LOG GOT all frothy and excited over *Warhammer Online*'s opening levels, I was tasked with beating my head against walls until I reached the higher end of the game. You'd think after this kind of intense scrutiny I'd grow tired of *WAR*, but as I got embroiled in the storyline, the atmosphere of the Warhammer World, and the bliss of sheer playability *WAR* provides, I couldn't help but enjoy the game more as I advance.

While we're all used to a playing curve that begins to gnaw at us past the first 20 levels, *WAR* rewards the time invested with rich lore, constant rewards, and some of the most actual 'multiplayer' action in an MMO.

WAR SQUIGS

WAR turns the well-worn MMO structure on its head, by blending PvP and PvE into a mishmash referred to as RvR – Realm versus Realm. In RvR the armies of Destruction and Order do battle across a varied and incredibly packed landscape.

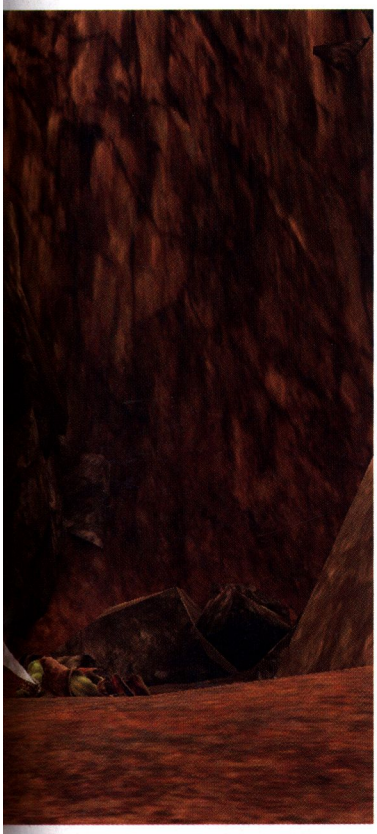
In other MMOs the areas in which you battle other players are either sectioned off or made completely free-for-all, which leads to lower-level players getting mashed into pulp. Solo or even group PvE questing is usually made distinctly unenjoyable due to the fever of warmongering in the direct vicinity. In *WAR*, you'll find the game naturally leads you into RvR combat. At which point a big red warning says "YOU ARE ENTERING RvR TERRITORY" and a countdown to how long you'll have to get the hell out appears. But *WAR*'s RvR combat is fun. Mythic have always been the best at making killing your fellow man/beast a good laugh, and with the emphasis shifted onto helping your realm rather than yourself, you rarely feel alone.

When you defend a keep, or when your realm takes control of an area, everybody on your side receives a burst of renown and experience, which keeps the process of defending and invading both fun and rewarding. It's also varied and treacherous work, taking the simple stages of early public quests to much more advanced PvP levels – like having you break down the keep's door using a siege engine and kill the NPC keep lord, whilst fighting off the defending realm's player and AI forces. Fighting doesn't feel as repetitive as in WOW, simply because you rarely fight alone. Everybody's rewarded for being a team player and everyone has fun.

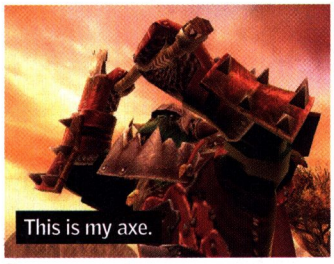
The spoils of the larger battles go to those who contribute, so sitting at the side and hoping to leech off other people's hard work won't get you much. Healers, buffers and fighters

IT'S HERE! WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Dr. Grumble and his Fantabulous Conveyance.



I'm Bogfather.


This is my axe.

This is my pet wyvern.

And this is where I live. It's crap, but it's home.

WAR's take on the MMO doesn't stop with a blending of PvP and PvE

all get rewarded for being part of the fight, and the reward system is fair in its dealing out of loot and renown. This is for both offensive and defensive battles – defensive battles being a counterpoint to the opposing realm's attacks. It's rewarding, even if you're literally standing in front of a keep and shooting down attackers; and if the sides are unbalanced, AI dogs of war will even out the forces.

THE NEW PVP

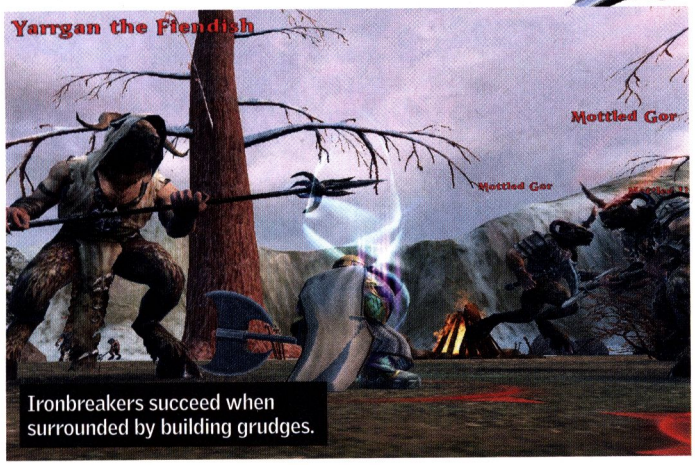
WAR's different take on the MMO genre doesn't stop at blending PvP and PvE into one landscape.

Tactics are passive abilities that you earn through earning renown in RvR, levelling up, and getting masteries (the *WAR* equivalent of talents), or unlocking entries in the Tome of Knowledge. You can equip five of them – three from levelling and masteries, one from renown, and one from your Tome – and they usually give boring yet functional upgrades to your critical hits, armour or the duration of effects.

Morale moves are more interesting. You equip up to four of them and as you continue fighting you build up a gauge that unlocks different ability levels. Some of these are awesome – for example, the Black Orc can fix his target and himself in place, forcing his foe into one-on-one combat (a huge help when drawing attacks off healers). Another level of morale allows him to spin his axe around, whirlwind style, for five seconds, slicing up any enemies standing nearby.

Over time The Tome of Knowledge evolves from a gimmicky way of looking at your quests into a robust way of tracking your development. Within it you can see how much influence you've gained in a particular chapter, and what rewards you can gain throughout, and even track the

The Elves have to deal with a huge WAAAGH! right on their doorsteps.



Ironbreakers succeed when surrounded by building grudges.

quests you've already completed and things you've killed.

The Tome also apes *LOTRO* by rewarding you for a series of tasks, from the silly to the Herculean, with anything ranging from a funny title (click on yourself 100 times as an Orc, and you get "Ow, Me Eye!") to a full-scale tactic (critical hit 100 times, for example). Each tome unlock, as they're known, also gives you a chunk of experience. Trying to see what different things trigger the delightful burst of percussion that accompanies each one is a nice little metagame.

Tying together these core concepts is the atmosphere and lore of the Warhammer universe. In my opinion the one thing that has befallen the bigger disappointments in MMOs (*Hellgate: London*, *Vanguard* and, to a lesser extent, *Tabula Rasa)* is their inability to really draw a player into the storyline and myths of the world.

From the word 'go', be you a Greenskin or a Human or a High Elf, you're steeped in atmospheric content that grounds you in what it is to be that race. While Orc quests are described almost completely in short, angry sentences with "lankwidge like diz," Humans are dramatically ordered to save farmers trapped in their burning homes, shoot Chaos hordes with cannons, and watch as the Nordland is overrun with evil.

This is helped by the combination of a great art team and a great engine, which combine to create the gritty, utterly grim environs of every part of the *WAR* world. Nobody is safe from the taint of evil, and the general feeling is one of constant doom – even in the gloriousness of the Elven vistas of Eataine, you'll find the Greenskins pelting you with squigs from catapults. It gets better, too – run towards the source of the squigs, and you'll find yourself in yet another public quest.

OH MY GORK

And that's par for the course with *WAR*. Everything ties together beautifully. You can't seem to walk for more than a few minutes without hitting a public quest, and

From the word 'go', you're steeped in atmospheric content that grounds you

BEST OF THE QUESTS

We've seen some awesome quests – some exciting, some dramatic, and some hilarious

CANNON CANNING (LOG)

In the Nordland, the humans needed me to man a cannon to attack a huge crowd of Chaos. To run one of these, you click on them and then use them like you would an FPS. I sat in the seat, and blew the living shit out of a whole crowd of Dark Elves, before getting out and running into the fray myself.

MUCK DIVING (ED)

On starting out as a Greenskin, I walked down a path and met with a snotling, who encouraged me to go and search through a pile of rubbish to find a knickknack for him. To my surprise there was nothing in there, only a gigantic pile of that bastard's snotling mates that rushed me from every side.

COW TIPPING (STEVE)

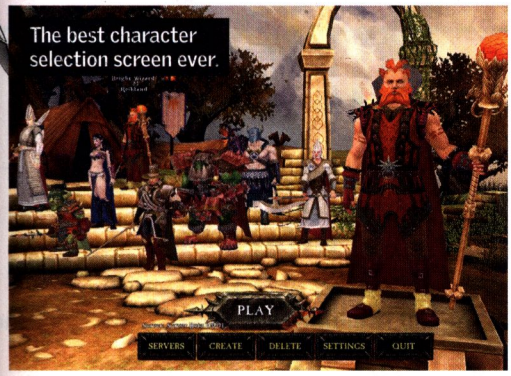
While wandering in a forest near Reikland, I happened upon a cow sitting happily by a tree. Noticing a piece of treasure underneath it, I decided to flip it over on its back to retrieve the loot. The cow went ballistic, but because it was only level two, it died in a single fireball. Sorry cow.

ELF SICKENING (WILL)

Starting out as a dwarf, after a little cannon blasting, a side quest saw me foraging for minerals so that the local barkeep can concoct a brew to blow the socks off a smug elf sitting nearby. Sure, it's a collect-and-deliver quest, but they don't usually suggest that they're leading up to vomiting fey folk.

CATAPULT CHUCKING (ED)

The very best Greenskin quests generally involved myself and my mates being launched from a catapult onto the ramparts of an enemy stronghold, *Prince of Thieves*-style, and then working our way down through the melee to kill any stumpy or elf we met.

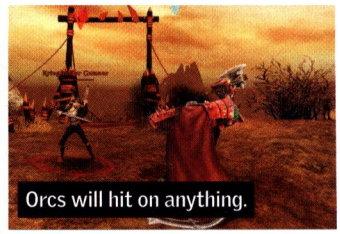


The best character selection screen ever.

Ogres are a little more civilised than most MMOs.

the moment you do, you can click an icon and join the people doing it. Alternatively, you could join a party doing RvR – and the UI will tell you how far away you are, too. A great deal of care and energy has been put into making *WAR* a cogent and fun experience. Even potentially boring classes are refreshingly interesting, like the Bright Wizard and his ability to do huge critical hits – at the very real risk of setting himself on fire. We're not talking cosmetic fire, either – you get damaged, and it's a real risk to your character. This leads to you having constantly low health and repeatedly killing yourself, unlocking a special title in the Tome of Knowledge for managing to explode yourself too many times. In fact, I died more times through self-combustion than by the hands of an enemy.

In the end, the amount of people playing *WAR* will make or break its success. While many MMOs are unpleasant when they're crammed with people (such as *WOW* when *The Burning Crusade* came out), whenever you play *WAR* you'll want them around.



Orcs will hit on anything.

While soloing is as fun as it is in *WOW*, with as many set pieces and quests as you could ever want, the real meat of the game is enjoying it with others.

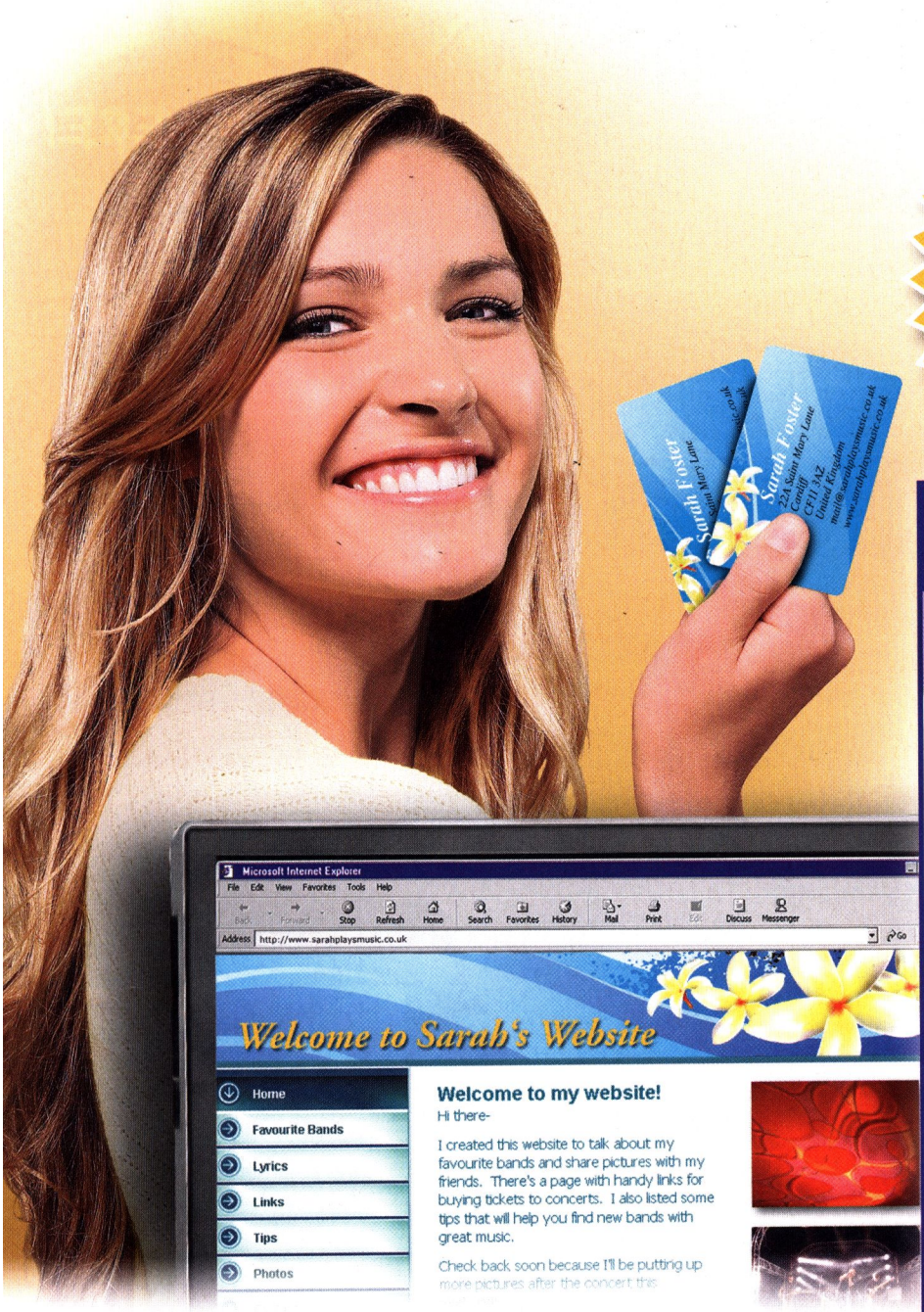
The later public quests require a sizeable party to complete – I formed a war band (read: raid party) near Black Crag to take on the last stage of a keep siege against a bunch of dwarfs. All 15 of us were wiped out by the final boss. This was disappointing, too, as players got quickly demoralised and wandered off to quest on their own. We can only hope they all sat down and did a quick suggestion email about balancing the quest.

A NEW STANDARD

However, this raid was during a closed beta, when there was only a mere 150 people on Order and Destruction. I imagine that once the gates open and the hordes flood in, we'll be seeing 500-a-side, balanced, as promised, by Mythic.

The controlled chaos of the Warhammer World is something to behold, and they've genuinely delivered on their promise to expertly coax the reluctant solo player into the world of massive, player versus player combat, whilst still offering enough PvE fun to entertain everyone.

The *Age of Reckoning* is nearly upon us, and it's exciting. I can say from a fair amount of time playing it that *Warhammer Online* is a slick, deep and enjoyable MMORPG, and will give the genre a much-needed energy boost. Choose a side, warrior, because we're only a few days away from the biggest war yet. PCZ



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PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Fresh air

WHEN YOU START a job involving videogames, people say many predictable things. "Won't that stop you enjoying games?" is a common question. "What are you, six years old?" is another. The final one is "Won't the low financial reward – coupled with the popular and misconceived perception that editorial content is somehow corrupt – contrive to defeat you as a person?"

To these pessimistic, cynical and insulting pricks, I will simply exhale the word "*Spore*". Then I inhale, flex my fingers and allow "*WAR*" to float from my face.

I haven't felt so optimistic since I started: a *WOW*-beater and the most exciting original game of the last 76 years. *Spore* is breathtaking – don't read the review, buy it now, and let it all come as a beautiful surprise.

Both are PC exclusives which I've been playing all night and weekend. And both are from a company easily synonymised with corporate bullshit and greed. What the hell is going on?

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, reviews editor

Must Buys!

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

Spore | Sins of a Solar Empire | The Orange Box

54 SPORE
Me and you, we're going to fill this universe

The PC ZONE Awards

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

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

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

AND THE REST

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

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

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

The PC ZONE gaming machine

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

ALSO REVIEWED

60 **CRYSIS WARHEAD**
Taking cockneys to war.
64 **TANK UNIVERSAL**
64 **LEGEND: HAND OF GOD**
65 **MOUNT&BLADE**
68 **CRUSADER: THY KINGDOM COME**
72 **SILVERFALL: EARTH AWAKENING**
73 **SIMON THE SORCERER 4**
73 **DR DAISY: PET VET**
74 **BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED**
75 **BEIJING 2008**
76 **STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE: EPISODE 1 – HOMESTAR RUINER**
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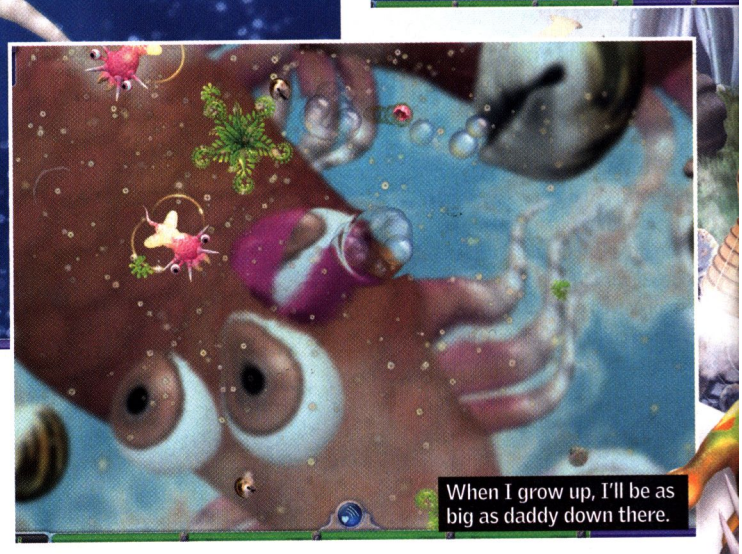
Discounted rallying, kung-fu, and more *Warhammer*.
82 **BUYER'S GUIDE**
The games you should own.

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



SPORE

Jon Blyth dips a toe in the primordial soup

DEVELOPER Maxis
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE spore.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99

AT A GLANCE...

A game in which you go from being an adorable, mewling cell to the rulers of a spiral arm of your galaxy – in just five stages.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM (768MB for *Vista*), a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

SPORE	95%
BLACK & WHITE 2	93%
THE SIMS 2	82%

PEOPLE OF A certain age will often hark back to a time of invention – a time when the spirit of creativity was hampered only by the fact you were essentially programming a big diode. Gamemakers in those days worked alone, and the madness that solitude brings often spat out a decent game. (Though not nearly as often as they say.)

These people, of that same age, will go on to say that modern gaming studios are so large, time spent in development is so costly, and perfectionism and originality are such undervalued commodities, that we're doomed to retread the same old ground until the graphics are so good that no-one cares about the gameplay.

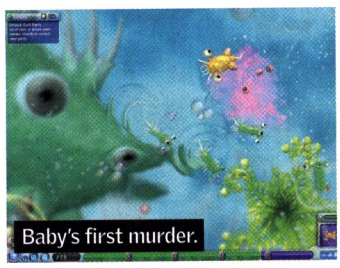
If *Spore* doesn't shut these people up, nothing will. When people say "they don't make games like that any more", *Spore* is five games "like that", which combine to make a game that's never been seen before. *Spore* defies cynicism – it's such a one-off leftfield classic that playing it feels essential. If all those *Sims 2* content packs made EA more inclined to support the development of *Spore*, then suddenly I'm fine with them. The £10 notes of a billion idiot schoolgirls has finally been put to good use.

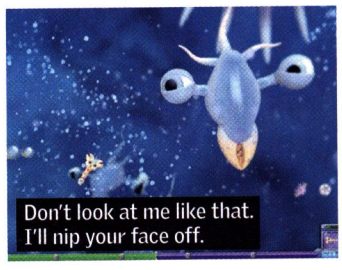
THE CELL STAGE

Before the meteor carrying your micro-organisms collides with the fertile planet that's to become your long-term home, you're given a choice: eat meat or plants. To be honest, this stage is more a creature showcase. As you squirm your way around this new environment, littered with specks of plant life and scraps of meat left behind by a short-sighted predator, the possibilities seem slim. You swim around, dolefully scoffing whatever goes into your gob, until you get big enough to rise closer to the surface. After about a minute, a large creature effortlessly snaps a smaller one in two, and out pops a body part – and in the first sign that this isn't exactly a scholarly simulation of evolution, you move over it to collect it.

There are just six body parts to collect in this stage. If you choose to be a herbivore, you learn to run away, using jets for propulsion and cilia for manoeuvrability. Or you can have aggressive defence, using an electric charge or poison. Meat eaters will probably opt for attack spikes, whereas aspiring omnivores can install the proboscis, which is a piercing weapon that enables you to devour plant cells.

So, you've eaten a bunch of DNA, discovered a few new parts and adapted your creature in the 2D creator. So far, it's all basic stuff. Indie games like *Flow* have done strikingly similarly stuff, and with more repeat playability than *Spore*'s half-hour Cell stage. Return if you like, to redesign



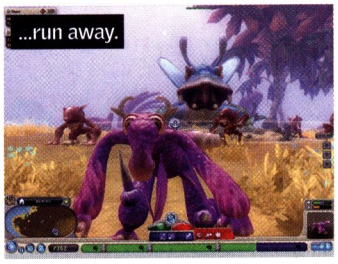


Your creature's timeline: all the important stuff is recorded here.

We're not sure what happens next – either a birth, or lunch.

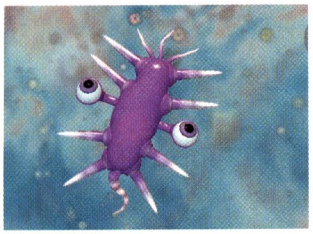
Killing is the easier option – but could you kill that?

Investigate, and...


...run away.

Humble beginnings

It's the last time it'll be this simple



BENDRIX

Bendrix is a vegetarian, who can't move very fast. However, he's protected from most predator attacks by the fact he's got ruddy great spikes all over his body. They're great when jostling for place at the local flora, too.

PONYLUV

Ponyluv's jet propulsion and proboscis make him a cellular dart – only another creature's spikes will stop that sharp hooter from sucking up their blood. With cilia installed as well, he'd be able to turn on a sixpence.

JENNIFER

Jennifer's got more up her sleeve – poison spitters deter pursuers by leaving a trail of purple nasty, and the electric charge damages anyone getting close. These take a while to recharge, but they're very effective.

EFEFFESS

Yes, you can make cock creatures, even at this stage. The vegetarian mouth makes excellent pubes and the electric charge makes for a finely glowing bell-end. Let's just take it as read that every creator can be used to make genitals.

your character, chase achievements, admire the scenery. But there's no real need to go back.

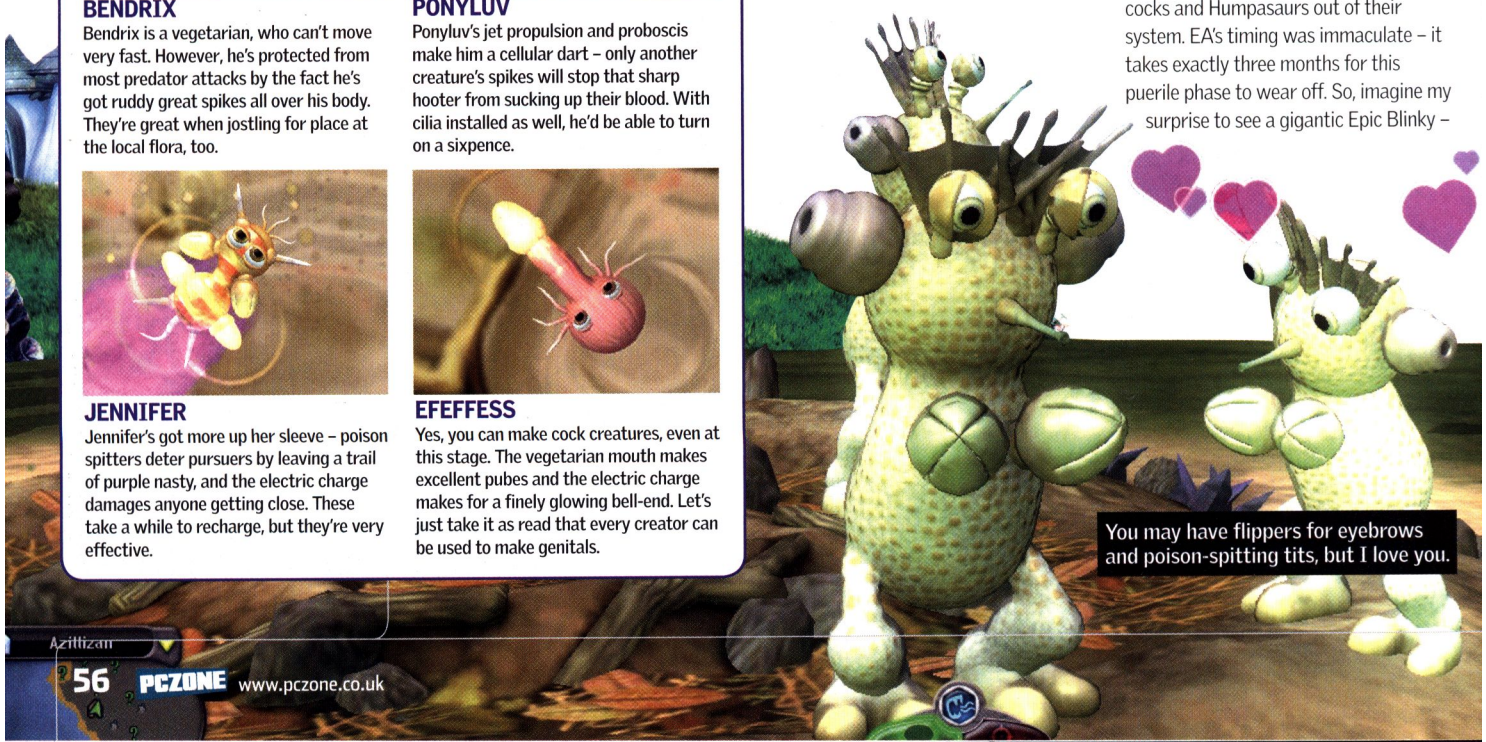
The only thing that isn't brilliant about the Cell Stage, is the game itself. It's a scene setter. A tutorial into the game's spirit of discovery and design, and an introduction to death. Shit happens. Plenty more cells sharing your DNA, mate, don't reckon you're special.

CREATURE STAGE

Collect enough DNA and dry land is just a click away. All your most notable acts are plotted onto a horizontally scrolling permanent record, and evolution rewards you with a special power that will make it easier to behave in a similar way on land. So, if you're a cellular sausage-gobbler, you'll be rewarded with an aggressive ability, the panic-inducing Raging Roar. Herbivores will win the Siren Song, which instantly prevents aggression in surrounding creatures. Mapped to F1, it's basically a Help button to get you out of any trouble you might get into in the Creature Stage.

On land, you no longer gather DNA points by eating – eating's just what you do to stay alive. The focus is now on finding new body parts and interacting with other species. You find new body parts by investigating the skeletons that litter nesting areas, or by impressing (or killing) alpha members of other tribes. That's what "interacting with other species" is. As you grow, you'll be able, and be compelled, to form a pack. Everyone else is teaming up, and no-one's impressed or made extinct by a loner.

This is the stage that contains the Creature Creator – the versatile construction kit that EA released a few months early, so everyone could get the cocks and Humpasaurs out of their system. EA's timing was immaculate – it takes exactly three months for this puerile phase to wear off. So, imagine my surprise to see a gigantic Epic Blinky –


You may have flippers for eyebrows and poison-spitting tits, but I love you.

I always end up hanging out with the nerds.

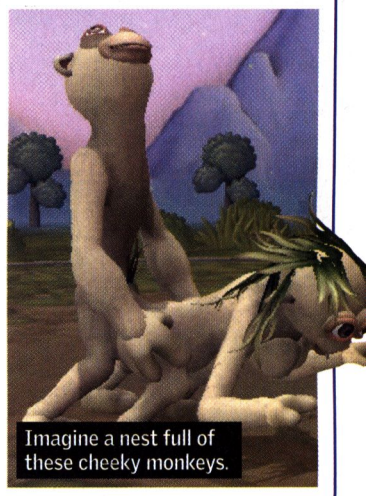
Parental guidance

Will *Spore* destroy your children's innocence?

With the indecent explosion that was the *Creature Creator*'s early launch, it's interesting to see how Maxis are keeping the world clean for the kiddy-winks. The *Daily Mail* must already have a 100 stories pre-written and 1,000 indecent monsters they designed themselves, just for a story headlined, "Is this the most shocking thing a child has ever seen?"

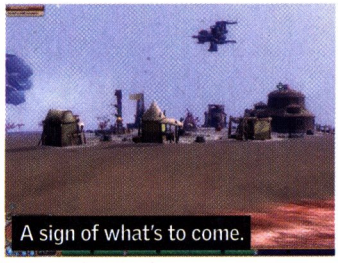
First off, the filtering system is deliberately mysterious – but all of the creatures I made with big, angry cocks didn't make it to the public zone. Perhaps *Creator* was released to help create a vulgarity filter, which would make us all unpaid members of EA's QA department.

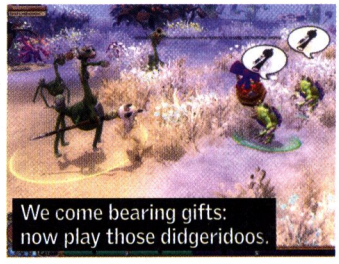
If filth does slip through the net, you can ban that creature from your world, which also reports people to EA. Then you can rest easy, knowing you've made the world a more sterile and sexless place.


Imagine a nest full of these cheeky monkeys.

See him off, I'll be in my hut.

Another step forward to military universal domination.


A sign of what's to come.


We come bearing gifts: now play those didgeridoos.

a massive up-ended ball bag with a mouth-ended dick snuffling at my face. Its creator? Maxis. Hypocritical swine put teeth in a urethra and ate me.

Every body part you find benefits your creature's survival to different extents – each boosts certain of your creature's dozen or so attributes, which enhance your ability to befriend (sing, charm), destroy (bite, strike) or survive (jump, sprint). Out of interest, you'd be surprised how many of the body parts look like tits when you put them on your creature's chest.

This stage can be completed in around an hour – and this time is punctuated by meteor showers, encounters with gigantic, often adorable, but always lethal, epic creatures, and interactions with a nest getting interrupted by alien abductions. The simplicity at the heart of the game so far is completely muffled by the sense of constant reward, implicit storytelling, and progress. And of course, that incredible *Creature Creator*.

You might suspect that the *Creature Creator* is the star of *Spore*. It's certainly

Easter egg hunts in *Spore* can turn vicious.

"Epic Blinky – a massive up-ended ball bag with a mouth-ended dick. Its creator? Maxis"

a brilliant, standalone kit, with many more hours to be spent in it than the Creature Stage game. But the game is still in the early stages of its own evolution, and the world you're playing in is so beautifully realised, your sense of attachment to your creature takes root so quickly, and the personality of the other species roaming the world is so powerful, that even without a plot, you feel like you're in an important story.

THE TRIBAL STAGE

Befriend and destroy enough of the people in your small corner of the world and you develop into a tribe. Your community gets bigger, the world gets smaller, and the camera gets pulled back once again. Having become a dominant species, who can invent themselves out of sticky situations more quickly than evolution can respond, the *Creature Creator* is discarded. Instead, you're given status-boosting clothes to decorate yourself with.

You're given one last chance to get your creature as you want it – and remember, the performance boosts they provided won't be any use to you from now on, so just design something you like. Status and abilities in the Tribal stage is provided by clothing, in which you may find yourself wearing anything up to two hats, and town planning sets the tone of your village – each of the nine huts you can build allow you to equip any of your villagers for a certain purpose.

If *Spore* is a child's game – and up to this point, the appeal to adults is still very much rooted in the game's outstanding charm and flawless presentation – then it's quickly becoming an introduction to strategy gaming. The simple matter (again) of befriending or destroying rival tribes as they appear, is now slightly less simple, as you've got the food supply of your tribe to maintain, a population who are prone to getting killed, and a more mobile and intelligent group of competitors. Charmingly – and a little heartbreakingly – the friends you made in the Creature stage are now reduced to egg-producing pets.

Child-like as the game may still be, there's still scope to try things out, and the hand-holding

Soon you'll be a dead epic monster.

Sad faces is right.

Yes, we find this confusing as well.

Religious attacks are slower, but you get to keep the buildings.

instructions know exactly when to stop and let you explore. If you're lost, the Sporepedia contains everything you could need to know, even if it is in long – and unsearchable – pages.

Using the side panel to select units can be a bit pernickety (it would have been nice to have a double click to select similar units, rather than everyone), but you just don't need quick or complicated selections, because it's still simple, beautiful and mostly sedate.

CIVILISATION STAGE

Dominate your continent and the camera drops back once again. Now we're playing on the global stage. Your creatures are reduced to a squabbling throng, and the smallest thing you can be bothered with are buildings and vehicles. These are created in two new areas, and even if cars and buildings don't have the immediate charm and the range of emotive animations that things with eyes and mouths have, the potential for creativity is still there. If you're having difficulty, just download one of the hundreds of examples made by Maxis, your buddies (just add their email address, you don't need their permission), or anyone sharing their stuff, and see how they did it – there aren't half some clever bastards out there.

An abundance of food is now a given, and the currency moves to spice – a touching nod to one of the earliest RTS games, *Dune II*. Even more touching is the treatment of the epic creatures from the second stage. Remember the massive, untouchable creatures who'd kill you with a single blow? They're roaming the countryside here, too, and even they've evolved into fire-breathing Godzillalikes. They'll blight your early progress – not least of all, because the land vehicle pathfinding is occasionally shit – by destroying your cars with a single fireball. But spice is valuable, and cars are cheap – they're easily replaced.

The moment you invent aeroplanes is when the acceleration towards victory becomes unstoppable (air superiority is a huge and slightly unbalanced advantage in the snowball to the final stage) but it's also when you can finally defeat that monster that stamped on you, all those millions of years (two hours) ago. There's no pleasure in it: you're using planes. It's a land creature. Here, have this Tiananmen Square Medal For Disparity In Combat. This is one of the moments that you realise how far you've come, and what level of individuality you've sacrificed for progress. Look at you, commander of a fleet of aircraft. Where's your soul, big man? *Spore* is the first game that's made me feel a desolate nostalgia for two hours ago.

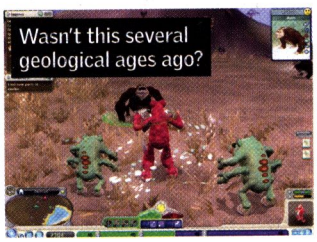
SPACE STAGE

This is a necessary stage, though. As you take over the entire planet, you invent the

Do as I say, and as I do

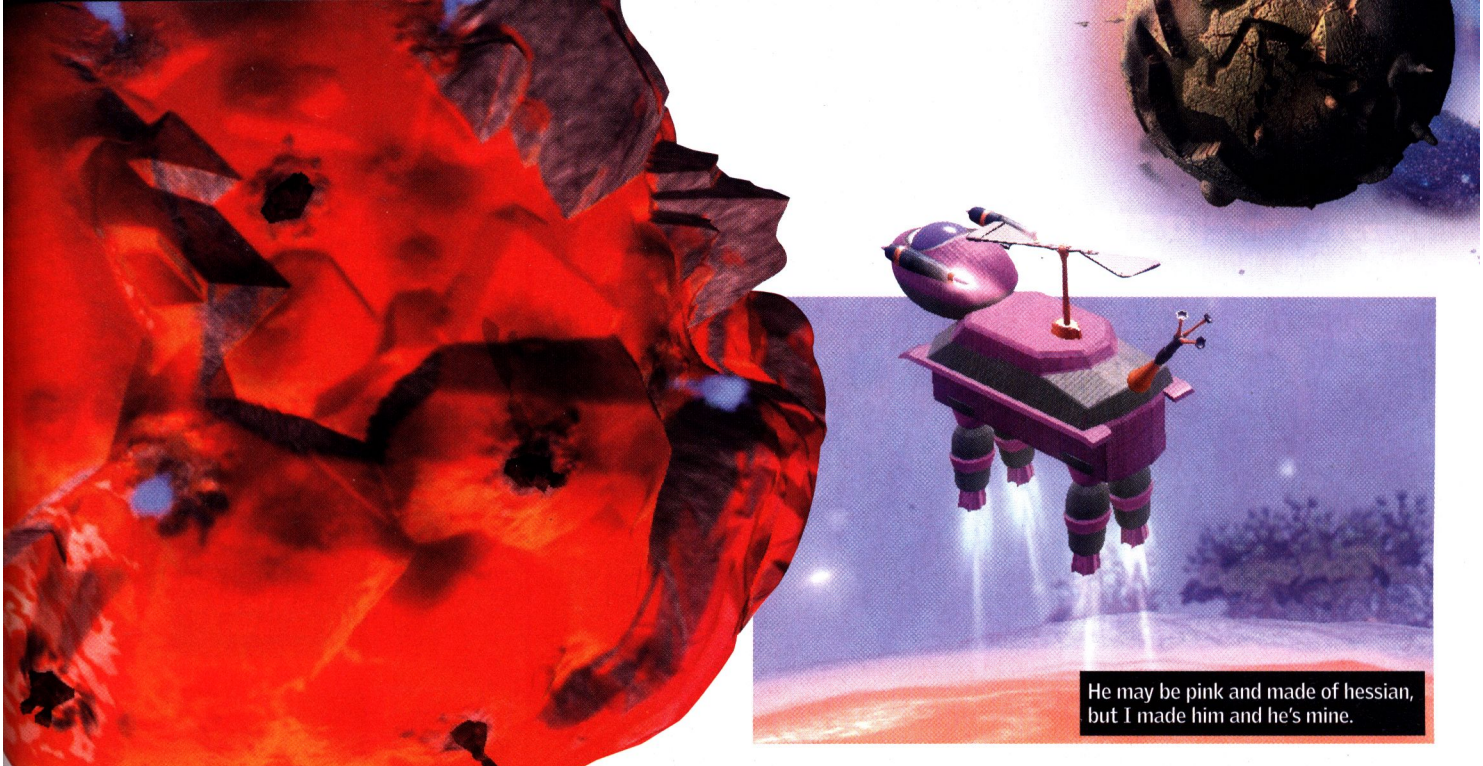
Making friends and influencing creatures

You have four social skills: singing, dancing, looking a bit charming, and showing off. Each species has its favourite, and you'll need the right body parts to make the right moves. But that's not enough. As you progress through the stage, you'll need to join a gang – posing on your own will have little impact on that gang of alphas that's roaming around, looking angry.


Wasn't this several geological ages ago?

To win the hearts and minds of your enemies, simply initiate a game of mimicry. They'll start, you follow – and if the combination of your body parts and the size of your gang allows it, you'll impress them enough to be your allies. This means they can join your gang and you can use their nests to heal. It's a simple game, with just a bit of depth behind it – but enough to see you through the relatively short stage.

The religious superweapon is too big for the screen.



He may be pink and made of hessian, but I made him and he's mine.

At last – free of these tedious planets.

Keep cities happy, and your empire won't rebel.

spaceship. The ocean that spat your cell creature onto the land is now something you'll fly over in the spaceship you made yourself. The creature you once were is now something you'll abduct and place into a new planets' ecosystem. The tribe you formed is something you'll gently encourage other creatures to do, from your position as a hovering god, and the planet that spawned your civilisation is an increasingly insignificant nubbin in a galactic empire.

"The creature you once were is now something you'll abduct and place into a new planets ecosystem"

This may have been where it was all leading, but that journey was vital – if Maxis had just let us play this section without building up to it, the different elements of the world wouldn't have made such sense, the game wouldn't have felt so complete. You're not expected to join in some hack sci-fi writer's lore – the lore is everything you and your friends have done. It's up to you to prove to the other races – who all chose different paths along the progress tree – that your way is the best. Whatever way that is.

This section is played on three zoom levels: first, the planet surface, which you'll need for missions, combat, relic hunting, pirate raids, city planning and colonisation.

Then the solar system level, you can communicate with planets, explore for unusual signs, and spot planets that might be ripe for a few of your race to set up sticks. The final level is the galactic level, which slowly develops from your home planet into a complicated web of your empire, and those of your rivals. Deal with them in the way you've become accustomed – just don't expect it to be easy and simple any more. You've had your training. Armed with the skills you've earned from your behaviour throughout the game, the simplified three-way progress trees are now dropped in favour of a large bank of badges. Progress in any direction will unlock badges, each of which shoves you along the final progress bar, to omnipotence. There are many areas in which you can specialise – you might want to colonise new planets, establish trade routes, harvest the different kinds of spice and trade them directly, hunt for artifacts, explore, or befriend new races by doing planetside missions for them. They're all slightly interdependent, of course, but the size and depth of this stage of the game is so extraordinary – yet so coyly concealed, and slowly unfolding – that you're only briefly daunted by the new cosmic scale.

Whichever way you play through *Spore* – as a stripy balloon-headed warmonger, a vegetarian god-bothering octopod, or a hyper-priapic space tycoon – you'll constantly feel like your gut is dropping away from you. It's like showing your mum *Google Earth*, only this time you're your mum.

Spore's self-referential nature – the way that the other stages are implied to be going on in the background of the one you're playing, make *Spore* bewilderingly coherent. It's so intelligently structured, with such a consistently beautiful style, that to complain about what double-clicking selects and doesn't select in the Tribal Stage is just petty. This isn't a return to old-fashioned gaming. It's an incredible, never-to-be-repeated journey. The only thing greater than *Spore*'s ambition and scope is its near-perfect execution. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Beautiful yet functional
Sound	Charming. But too much meeping
Multiplayer	You see what everyone else makes

- Ambitious
- Coherent
- Passionate
- Intelligent
- Utterly stunning in scope
- Gets kids into proper games

95

Godlike

Global warming is no longer an issue. Gore can retire.

No barrel goes unexploded.

Icy Sparkle licking strikes again.

"Can I keep him?"

CRYSIS WARHEAD

Will Porter wonders when it was that cockneys gave up dancing around chimneypots and became brutal killers

DEVELOPER Crytek
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE crysiswarhead.com
ETA 19 September
PRICE £19.99

CLASSIC • CLASSIC PCZONE CLASSIC • CLASSIC

AT A GLANCE...

A short but exceptional standalone expansion from the Crytek boys. Explosive, frenetic and very special indeed, blimey guv'nor.

Minimum system requirements:
XP: 2.8GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA GeForce 6800 GT or ATI Radeon 9800 Pro.
Vista: 3.2GHz Pentium 4, 1.5GB RAM, and a Radeon X800 Pro.

HOW IT STACKS

FAR CRY	93%
CRYSIS WARHEAD	92%
CRYSIS	92%

I DON'T BELIEVE that any game has ever created the rubric of an astounding action movie around the player as well as *Crysis*. The very best actioners have a tangible feeling of chaos and seat-of-the-pants decision-making, films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *Die Hard*, and *Crysis* just nailed the sensation that astounding action scenes, made possible by your decisions, were falling in fiery pieces around you. *Crysis Warhead* pulls this same trick again, only with extra Schwarzenegger. No, three Schwarzeneggers. Actually 10 Schwarzeneggers, each smoking three cigars, driving a burning Humvee into an oil refinery.

But of course, *Crysis* had issues. Some adored it despite its flaws, others were miffed by it – the *PC ZONE* mailbag was a criss-cross of sparring Nomad-based opinion. However, what is undeniable, is that the decision to replace free-form Korean-throttling tomfoolery two-thirds of the way through the game with relentless alien bashing was stifling; sky-high system demands shut out people unwilling to play the game with half the engine switched off, and the North Koreans' AI would occasionally have soldiers standing blankly on a beach with nothing but a worried grimace. *Warhead* promised to fix all this, and has done so with aplomb – plastering up the holes of Crytek's earlier effort, and then using any leftover plaster to mould frescoes and porticoes to make the whole affair more attractive. What with its budget price and improved multiplayer, there's more than enough here to cheer nay-sayers.

PSYCHO

With a runtime of five hours, there's an argument that says in older, more innocent times *Warhead* would be known as an expansion pack. Despite its standalone nature, this is perhaps true: it follows the concurrent travails of a different character, it's budget-priced, it adds some super-powered weapons, it features the same menagerie of foes, and it has a story that doesn't hold water.

Then again, to call it a mere expansion would be a huge disservice to a game that's so uniformly excellent in its art design, ballsy level concepts and exceptional gameplay. It's from the Paul Ross school of criticism to label something as a "rollercoaster thrill ride", but if *Warhead* doesn't fall under that umbrella then I don't know what does. Apart from, maybe, *Spy Kids 3*.

The hero of *Warhead* is Psycho, the angry cockney from *Crysis* whose

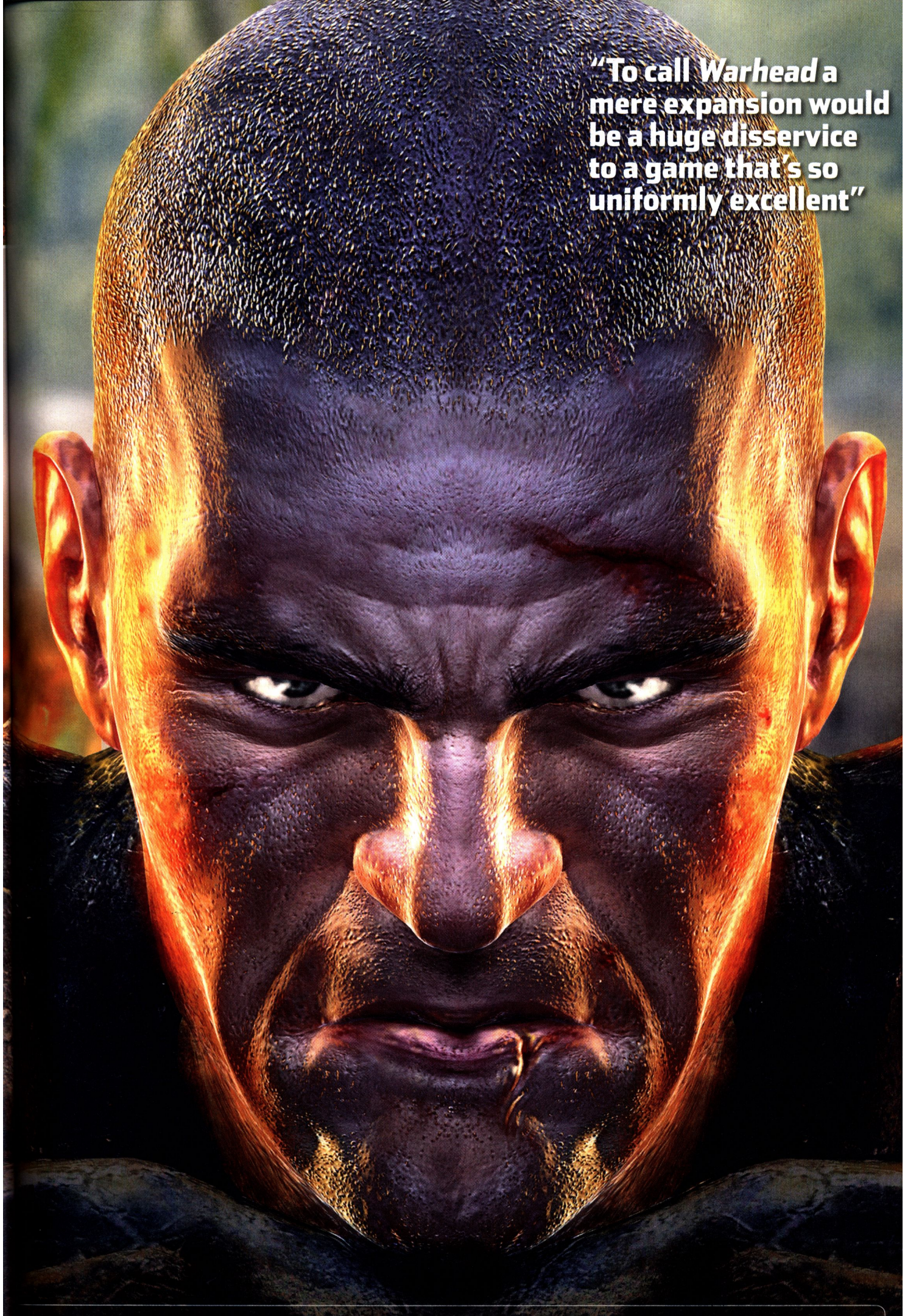
Warhead to head

Crytek give multiplayer glory another crack

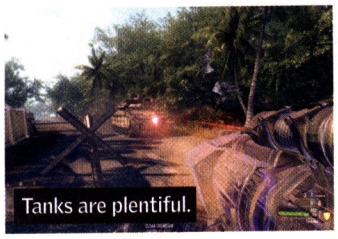
Crysis' Power Struggle mode was decent if you buried yourself deep inside it and played with subterranean friends, but it was too complex to catch the hearts of the online hordes. *Warhead* makes everything more obvious: more arrows, less UI clutter and more visual parallels with *Battlefield* and *Counter-Strike* – the games it so consciously melds together.

The impetus on team deathmatch has also been upped, with spawnpoints that keep you with friendlies, and some excellent new maps around mountain-top monasteries, graveyards and treehouses.

Now present as a separate package entirely, called *Crysis Wars*, it's likely to arouse more interest than before – but it still won't challenge the big boys.


"To call *Warhead* a mere expansion would be a huge disservice to a game that's so uniformly excellent"

Get to the choppah. Then blow the choppah up.


Tanks are plentiful.

Roller-skates left on the jungle floor: fatal.

dialogue is (praise the maker) both improved and somewhat distilled from his previous appearance. He even gets a catchphrase that manages to raise three individual laughs on the three individual occasions that it's used.

The MacGuffin of the piece, meanwhile, is a piece of alien hardware that the Koreans have snaffled from beneath the noses of the American forces – and it's down to you to follow it over frozen sea, through a decrepit mine and along rattling train tracks.

One of the most striking things about *Warhead* is the way it shakes the template *Crysis* snowglobe and has its constituent parts drift and settle into surprising new patterns. In *Crysis* encounters with enemies were heavily cordoned off from each other, in *Warhead* anything goes. Nanosuited enemies, revamped aliens, bog-standard Koreans, a whole bunch of the monolithic Hunter tentacle beasts... they all tumble out of the Crytek level design tombola in an unpredictable order, often fighting against each other in-between times.

The most awe-inspiring level starts off with you fighting Nanosuits, then moves into a remarkable hovercraft chase over frozen seas: it's simply a triumph in art design. Frozen waves, suspended by a sudden alien ice blast, stand in arctic silence as they crash against the hulls of battered ships – after which the level is punctuated by Korean battles against a goliath Hunter, squad combat against aliens, and a fight with another Hunter that puts the closing boss of the original to shame. It's a frenzy of intelligent and original level design, far away from the *Far Cry* model that *Crysis* aped. And this is only the second level.

In fact, there are only two sections that are the traditional 'survey, sneak, attack' levels – *Warhead* encourages you to be constantly on the move, often in vehicles with big guns, and always with fire and broken fuel storage tanks left in your wake. However, this is not to say that you can't take your time if you want to. Another level begins atop the back of a train, complete with various miniguns on its sides, that rattles through a valley to the other side of the island – complete with a brief sojourn in the ice sphere.

Now you could happily sit there on the guns and protect your metal steed from the many and various helicopters, jeeps and small encampments along the way – but if you fancy some elongated *Predator*-style hunting then there's nothing at all stopping you from jumping off and catching the train up later. In this way both pyrotechnic-demanding sorts and sneaky snipers are catered for, and replay value is virtually guaranteed.

Once again, the Nanosuit's different modes (armour, invisibility, strength etc.) lets you add skill, finesse and trickery to your tactics – even if the constant bombardment and increased number of on-screen enemies will entice you into staying armoured a smidge more often than in *Crysis*. Still, the feeling of successful showboating among the Korean heavy armour is a paramount joy.

ADDICT

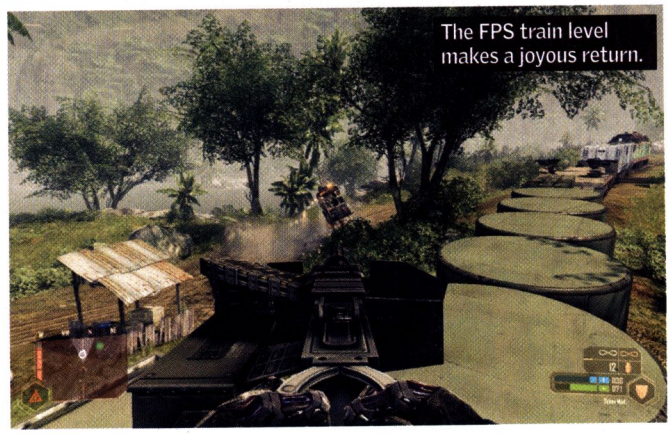
I could prattle on about how great the mine section is too, but I'll start giving away each and every level. Suffice to say, when I heard over the radio "You're going to have to go through the nearby mine," a

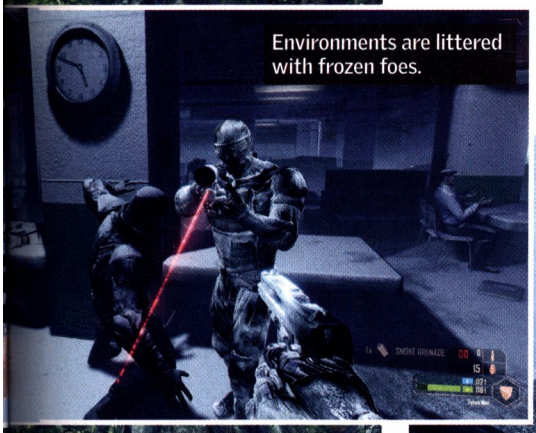
Psycho's performance

Can I play it this time round?

The screenshots you can see lovingly placed around these here pages were taken on the machine I first played through the game with: a 3GHz Core 2 Duo processor using 4GB RAM and a graphics card with 1GB of memory (an XFX PCIe GTX280). This rig, unsurprisingly, could take *Warhead* to its graphical summit.

I also played the game on Crytek's slightly more realistically specced machine, equipped with a 2.66GHz Core 2 Duo E6750 processor, 2GB RAM, and a 512MB NVIDIA GeForce 8800GT card. This is essentially the sort of machine that could previously run *Crysis* at a decent rate (somewhere that lay between medium and high settings with little pop-up), and this is the standard of machine that the CryEngine is now more suited to – giving you access to the higher-end graphical functions of the original and a few more besides. Entry-level specs, meanwhile, remain the same as last time around: a 3.2GHz processor (2.8GHz for those with *XP*), 1.5GB of RAM (1.0GB for *XP*) and anything above an NVIDIA GeForce 6800GT or an ATI Radeon 9800 Pro (Radeon X800 Pro for *Vista*). If your PC occupies this rung then don't expect miracles, but if you gritted your teeth and got through it last time then fill your boots.


The FPS train level makes a joyous return.



Environments are littered with frozen foes.

Certainly a scenic way in which to perish.

Can't beat a bit of base invasion. Die Korean, die.

little bit of me died inside (because I think we've all been damaged by three-texture FPS mine sections over the past decade or so). As it turned out though, it was so wonderfully envisaged, so entirely mine-like and so full of loose equipment to throw about the place that it was probably my favourite part of the game. Plus, you even get to pick up rats and throw them at people. Also: they squeak.

But are the aliens better? Well, a fairer question might be "are the aliens as oddly unexciting as last time round?" – the answer to which is a straight no. They're a lot more dynamic now, they get into scrapes with the Korean army and they jump from rock to rock with AI routines that have a lot more in common with your be-nanosuited foes. They're good fun to be around (apart from when there's too many pumped in, which certainly occurs at one point), but certainly still not as engaging as the human vs human combat found in the game. Still, the improvement is marked – just as it is with Korean AI that may not have a vast number of new tricks for you to be flanked by, but still makes it unlikely that you'll come across a soldier displaying gormless brain-funk.

The game does stumbles somewhat in its mundane tale of camaraderie with a rogue pilot called Sean O'Neill. He makes Han Solo-esque flying visits every now and again, and stars in a sequence of confusing audio flashbacks between levels. This never dips into a naffness that particularly harms affairs, mainly because the forever-just-out-of-reach container provides enough impetus, but it seems misplaced nevertheless.

Another storyline talking point the game is sure to raise focuses on a scene shortly after a bridge encounter towards the end of the game. *Warhead*'s cutscenes are a lot longer and better produced than those in *Crysis*, and this one deals with the unasked question of exactly why Psycho is called Psycho. Just what effect does power-throwing ovens at people have on the human psyche? The resulting cutscene is either one the best moments in gaming ever, or one of the most embarrassing.

Explosions aren't even this good in real life...

I honestly, truly am unable to make up my mind.

INSANE

As with *Crysis* the best experiences you'll have with *Warhead* aren't anything I can predict here – and that's half its magic.

The most thrilling event that happened to me came from a casually thrown grenade in *Warhead*'s closing airstrip level – a jeep thundered around the corner of a nearby hangar and drove toward me with what could only have been the intention of running me over. With beautiful timing its back-end was directly above my hopefully lobbed grenade at the point of ignition. The jeep's fiery hulk was then somersaulted directly over my head, before landing on the remnants of its smouldering wheels a few metres behind me.

This sequence could have been dropped in from one of the very best action movies – and yet it was completely unscripted.

Warhead honestly is the finest burst of action gaming released so far this year, and if you're canny then you'll be able to pick it up for a mere £15 from online retailers. It's a five hour tour-de-force that's plugged the holes in *Crysis* with diamonds; underlining just what a shame it was that those holes were there to steal outright greatness last time round. Psycho is many things but, as he'd tell you just before thowing you into the sea, he's certainly no muppet. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Astounding, imaginative, demanding
Sound	Great music, great ambient noise
Multiplayer	An improvement on *Crysis*

- ✓ Cheap, violent, thrill-providing
- ✓ More likely to perform on a medium-spec PC
- ✓ *Crysis* bugbears ironed out
- ✓ Exemplary level design
- ✗ Short. Iffy sub-plot

92

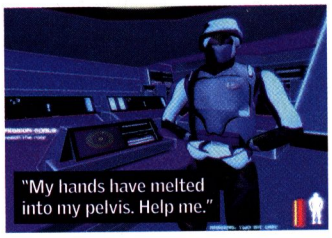
Perfection in miniature

TANK UNIVERSAL

No, tank you – niversal

DEVELOPER Dialogue Design
PUBLISHER Meridian4/Steam
WEBSITE tankuniversal.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $9.99 + tax (about £6)

Minimum system requirements:
2.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB video card.


"My hands have melted into my pelvis. Help me."

A steaming tank: bad.

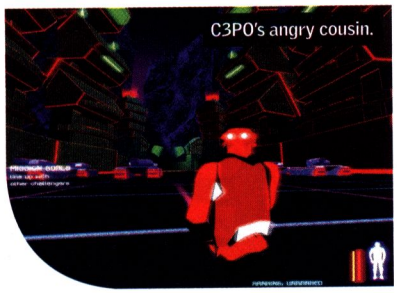
THOUGH YOU WOULDN'T guess it from the title, screenshots or, indeed, actual game, in *Tank Universal* you play a wrinkled old man with failing health, called George. George has been to the 'doctors' and been advised that the best cure for his illness is a strict course of tanks, missiles and explosions, taken through a VR headset. George totters home, sticks the helmet on, and that's the off-putting premise of the game.

So now you're in a futuristic *Tron*-like world, walking around in first person, admiring the basic-but-colourful visuals, wondering where all the tanks are. Eventually you end up getting involved in some sort of nonsense plot about aliens and robots attacking each other and endless boxes of ludicrous dialogue to skip through with the space bar.

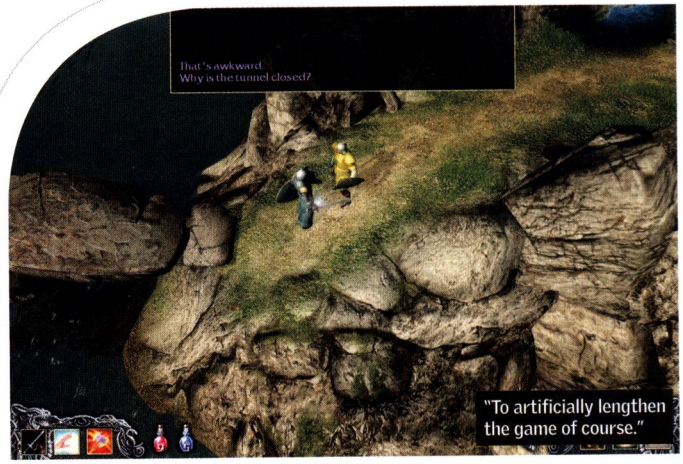
Eventually, you find the tanks and roll through 20 levels of large-scale capture the flag-type battles, that play like '80s classic *Battlezone*. There are upgrades for the tank, a variety of AI allies and enemies, on-foot sections and a flimsy story. While the handling of the vehicles is oversensitive and occasionally frustrating, the trajectory-based missile warfare is actually very satisfying.

Tank Universal is a small-scale indie game. It has no multiplayer or online mode and there are a good few graphical, audio and control glitches. But there is a solid, immersive and occasionally fun game here, with plenty of retro appeal, and for around a fiver through Steam, it's worth a look.

Chris Jones


C3PO's angry cousin.

PCZONE 64
Trundles along



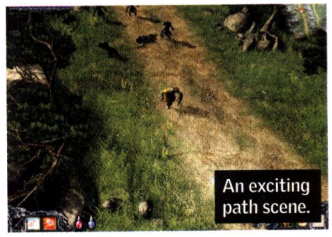
LEGEND: HAND OF GOD

Holy, heavenly glove

DEVELOPER Master Creating
PUBLISHER dtp
WEBSITE www.legend-game.com
ETA 26 Sept
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 or Radeon X1650 graphics card with 256MB RAM.

It's not teabagging, it just looks like it.


An exciting path scene.

ONE THING THAT most great games have in common is the absence of an extremely annoying, and nauseatingly vocal, faerie cursor. It's a supreme example of an attempt to verbally flagellate the player, and what with the rage it makes you feel, it's hard to remember that *Legend: Hand of God* is actually the very definition of average.

With a plot as templated as any Steven Seagal movie, only with fewer snapping limbs and crushed throats, *Legend* plods along like the sub-*Diablo* clone that it is. As the hero, who sports an out-of-place American accent, your job is to recover the three shards of the *Hand of God*, a mystical talisman that can be used to defeat the supreme evil. And so on.

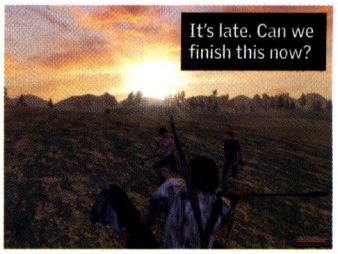
For the undemanding player, there is all one would need to wile away a few hours – a reasonable pseudo-class system, a decent amount of loot to be gathered, pleasant graphics and a relatively large game world to romp about in. Other than some niggles with the camera and the controls, it's all quite bland and inoffensive. So insipid, in fact, that it is a struggle to recall much that is actually specific about it, with even the combat being stripped down to monotonous left clicking.

When it comes down to it, there's only one thing this humble scribe will be remembering from *Legend: Hand of God* – and that is that bottom-slappingly awful faerie cursor.

David Brown

They really should invent bigger potion flasks.

PCZONE 52
God bothered



MOUNT&BLADE

Jamie Sefton can lead a horse to water, but he can't make it play poker

DEVELOPER TaleWorlds
PUBLISHER Paradox
WEBSITE taleworlds.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £15

COMBINING HORSES WITH sharp objects doesn't usually end up in fun – as anyone who's seen *Equus* will agree. However, *Mount&Blade* is a half-decent stab at the open-ended medieval RPG, especially considering the game began as an indie project by a Turkish husband-and-wife development team. Imagine those arguments.

The setting is in the harsh, peasant-swamped land of Calradia where many different factions are vying for control – God knows why, as it's actually a very dull place, with little much else for the population to do except look miserable or indulge in malnutrition. You begin the game by creating a character – male or female – and by choosing a series a multiple choice questions about your family and your upbringing, you define a character with a modicum of stats. These range from strength and agility, to weapon proficiency and those essential prisoner management skills.

NEIGH LAD

Mount&Blade's structure is rather like the *Total War* games, with a map screen you can use to move your character and any recruits between the settlements, and if you encounter any random attacks, you can choose to surrender or join the battle in full 3D. It's here (and in the fight-for-cash battle arenas in the larger towns) that you have to employ your riding and combat skills to survive, using the standard WASD keys to move and the left-hand mouse button to strike enemies or fire arrows.

While the horse handles rather well, the heralded mounted combat is patchy. The archery is OK but largely ineffective with large numbers of enemies, and the sword/knife/axe hits are annoyingly random in their effectiveness (which applies to on-foot fighting too).

Hiring recruits for battles with more than 50 units, visiting taverns for the local gossip, trading items for more cash, upgrading your weapons and be-hooved companion, racking up quests and claiming the throne in a bloody coup will provide much entertainment, but they won't dispel the feeling that despite the horse-based combat, *Mount&Blade* is really an anorexic *Oblivion* set in a budget version of Tolkien's Rohan. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

A once-freeware title with enjoyable horse-riding/combat and role-playing elements, set in an achingly bland medieval world.

Minimum system requirements:
766MHz Pentium, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION 95%
THE WITCHER 88%
MOUNT&BLADE 62%

PCZONE

Graphics Adequate but boring
Sound Repetitive orchestral music
Multiplayer No

- Good horse-riding
- Some addictive RPG elements
- Combat is hit-and-miss
- Generic medieval world
- Still feels like freeware

62
Lacking horsepower

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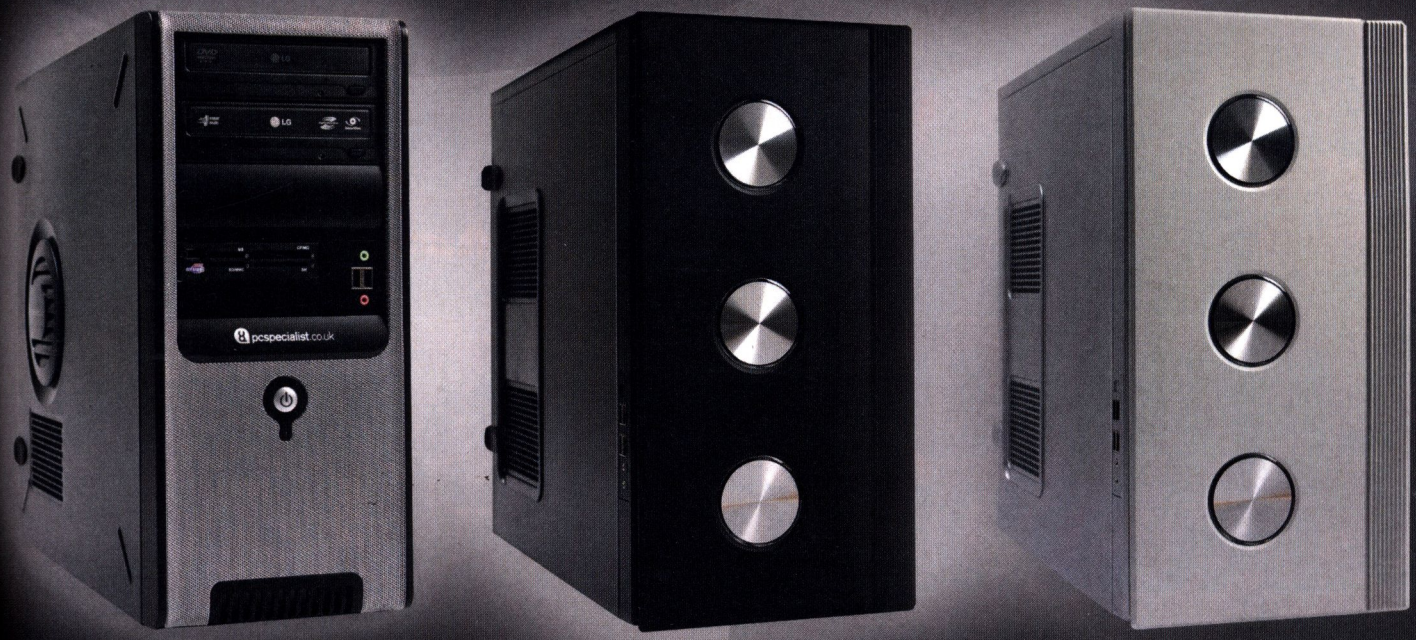

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CRUSADERS: THY KINGDOM COME

Jon Blyth travels around the world, spreading the gospel of how's your father

DEVELOPER Neocore
PUBLISHER Virgin PLAY
WEBSITE www.neocoregames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE €39.99 (£30)

IN THE 11TH century, crusades were all the rage. Started by Pope Urban – possibly the coolest pope name to date – it must have been reassuring, knowing that your religion was so right, that other people were killing each other about how right it was. How right must something be, for people to go that mental?

Crusaders: Thy Kingdom Come is a large-scale military strategy game, which players of *Total War* will immediately recognise. The WASD and mouse camera controls will be familiar, the strategies of pitting mounted units against foot soldiers will be comfortable, and the different unit formations and advantages of terrain will be already lodged inside your head, ready to carry you more easily to a victory.

But where *Crusaders* fails to innovate and re-invent the genre, it does a good job of specialising in the Crusades setting. The five leaders' powers come in handy, the secondary objectives are something that the game makes it worth going back to, and the religious relics are a nice way of working game-like stat bonuses into a 200-year religious conflict that was pretty low on levelling up.

This is a relaxing game (mainly thanks to the time accelerator only going up to x2), with combat playing out sensibly, and the skirmishes looking surprisingly good up close. The sound is inoffensive and never breaks your immersion – units don't vocally respond to an order, so blessedly you don't listen to 30 synonyms for OK like usual.

Crusades just doesn't reach the depth or the heights of the *Total War* games though. That may be an impossibly cruel comparison, but it's one that's forced by the blatant similarities of this game.

Developers Neocore side-step the still-warm potato of Muslim vs Christian crusades, by letting you play through the Muslim campaign, and – thankfully – by declining to reference current difficulties. Also, the manual self-deprecatingly refers to the game's treatment of religion as "idealised" – which I took to be their way of saying the whole affair was as corrupt and indecent as hell. But then, you read into these things what you want to believe, don't you? Who cares what the book actually says? PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

A low-tech military strategy game, very much in the vein of *Medieval: Total War*. Any game would suffer with that comparison, but this is a surprisingly solid effort at epic warfare.

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA 6600 or ATI Radeon X700 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR	91%
CRUSADERS: THY KINGDOM COME	70%
STRONGHOLD CRUSADER EXTREME	42%

PCZONE

Graphics	Perfectly functional, if dated
Sound	Knows its place
Multiplayer	Two players, LAN or internet

- Tactically solid
- Interesting period of history
- Nice gameplay tweaks
- Compares badly to *Total War*
- But then, what doesn't?

70

Forgiven its trespasses

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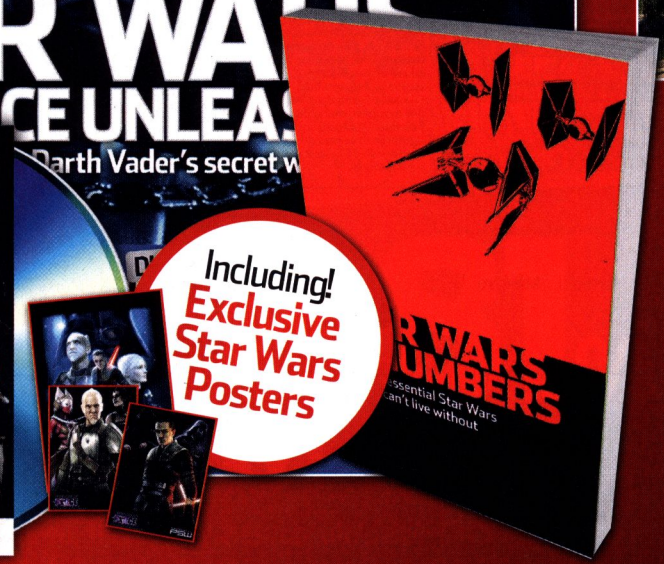
Darth Vader's secret w



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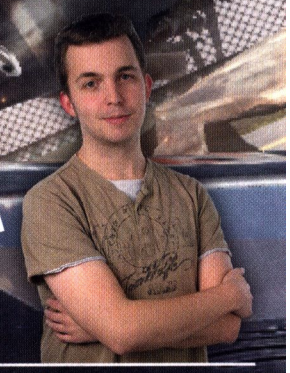

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED **81%**

When the original *FlatOut* appeared we tagged it the *Half-Life 2* of racing, partly because it had physics objects and partly because in those days most things were compared to *HL2* as a matter of course.

What it was, in fact, was an original, amusing and wonderfully daft racer that let you hurl ragdolls through windscreens and through burning hoops, and compete in frantic detritus-packed derbies.

Now *FlatOut*'s third iteration, *Ultimate Carnage*, is undoubtedly the series' finest outing – with even more destructible environments and some very solid racing.

As such, as ever, I'm chuffed to be giving it away to new subscribers. So subscribe, enjoy and don't bother buckling up. Apart from in real life where you really should.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor

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It's amazing the effect a simple black outline has.

Here, have an attack move.

Hi, I'm the king. Give us a quest.

SILVERFALL: EARTH AWAKENING

Jon Blyth fails to completely click with the *Silverfall* expansion

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo
PUBLISHER Ascaron/Steam
WEBSITE www.silverfall-game.com/en
ETA Out now
PRICE $29.99 (£16 plus tax)

THE FIRST *SILVERFALL* game was a visually appealing tousle through the well-trod genre of action-RPG. Set in a world where nature vies against technology (a battle as illogical as it is time-honoured), you pick up the action as the leader of the town of Silverfall. You're a hands-on kind of leader, though, so it doesn't take long before you're running around the outskirts of the town you run, employing the tactics you've learned in your first adventure. Namely: run within range, attack until it looks like you're going to die, then run away and regenerate. Repeat until all enemies are corpses.

For a game that didn't really innovate beyond a simple graphical trick, the first game did a lot of things wrong. The frame rate often dipped to single figures; your equipment wasn't re-equipped when you finally got back to your corpse – basically the game wasn't a friendly one to play. That's much better now with WASD and numeric pad controls backing up the mouse control. MMO players should immediately remap the numbers to the main keyboard, at which point it'll all fit together.

Eighteen months have passed, so the frame rate issues have faded. Little niggles like the cursor in your mini-map often facing in unintuitive directions have been sorted out, and you don't have to suffer the indignity of getting dressed whilst the same mob that just killed you tries to pull the same trick twice.

Earth Awakening is still a difficult-to-love game, with over-written scripts in tiny fonts that you're forced to read to make sure you're accepting a quest. Starting out with a level 45 character (or importing your *Silverfall* hero) means you're instantly decked out with excellent-looking weapons, but even the game's visual appeal can't snap you out of the repetition of combat. Exploration is hampered by annoying obstacles, untraversable shallow inclines and loading screens. It's a compliment, however, that the world is beautiful enough to make you want to explore it in the first place.

This is a definite improvement, but the combat never lives up to the promise of the graphics. If you haven't played the original, *Silverfall: Earth Awakening* isn't too hard to pick up. It's just very easy to put down, too. PCZ

Don't we fight in the first game?

AT A GLANCE...

A standalone expansion, *Earth Awakening* adds playable Dwarves and Lizardmen to the world, and introduces a renovated UI. It's better, and fun enough, but still not quite there.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4 or better, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card (NVIDIA FX 5200 or better).

HOW IT STACKS

SPACE SIEGE	83%
TITAN QUEST	81%
SILVERFALL: EARTH AWAKENING	61%

PCZONE

Graphics	Distinctive characters and attractive world
Sound	Well acted, repetitive background music
Multiplayer	8 players co-op or PvP on LAN or internet

- ✓ Good-looking
- ✓ Classic action-RPG action
- ✓ Strong story
- ✗ Overdone dialogue
- ✗ Combat falls short
- ✗ Easily diddled

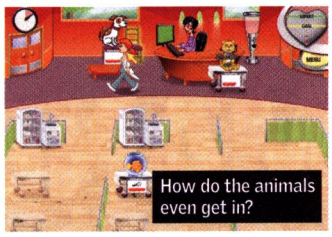
61
Still drowsy

DR. DAISY: PET VET

Casual is not an excuse

DEVELOPER Zemnott
PUBLISHER ValuSoft
WEBSITE steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $20 (about £10) plus tax

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz Pentium 4 processor, 32MB graphics card and 256MB RAM.



HAVE YOU PLAYED *Rootbeer Tapper*? Did you like *Rootbeer Tapper*? Good! Go play it. It's the same basic time-management game as this vague take on the theme, only it's more exciting, and you can probably find it for about £10 cheaper.

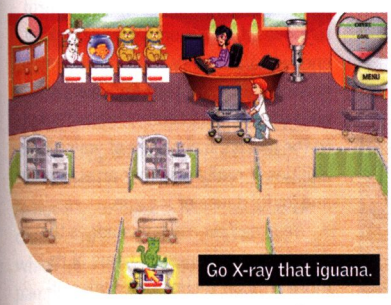
As Dr Daisy, you must move pets from the registration desk to the examination table, examine them and then administer treatment. Occasionally you will also find yourself having to use extra equipment, such as the X-ray machine or the coffee maker. The latter speeds Daisy up, teaching children that caffeine is a wonderful way to meet targets and enhance performance.

The key to "combos" is constantly having a stream of animals either being registered, examined or treated, and then treating them before they get sad and disappear, teaching children that death doesn't exist. Endure this mediocrity for long enough, and you'll get enough points to continue. Or you could stick around and get good enough to shoot for the expert rating, which earns you a high pile of nothing.

While there are a few levels that spin out the carpal tunnel symphony that is *Pet Vet*, they're just vague elaborations of clicking in slowly but surely less convenient spots. This is basically a Flash game, you're paying £10 for.

Casual gaming can be good. This, however, is a symptom of the flood of low-quality but probably profitable shit that's turning Steam into a £5 spinning rack in Tesco.

Ed Zitron



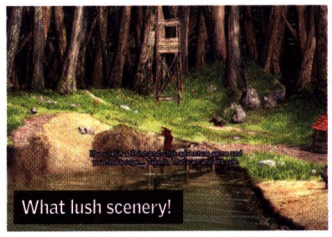
PCZONE 10
Louse M.D.

SIMON THE SORCERER 4: CHAOS HAPPENS

Who needs school and reality?

DEVELOPER Adventure Soft
PUBLISHER Playlogic
WEBSITE www.adventuresoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM, 64MB video card (GeForce 3 or higher).



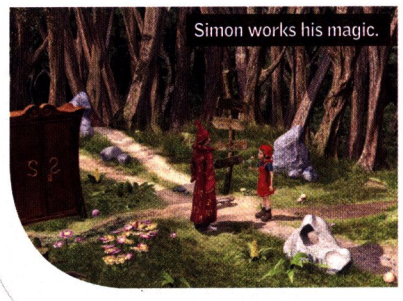
IF SIMON THE Sorcerer's mum saw what Simon does in his bedroom while he's alone she'd be shocked beyond all reason. He potters around excitedly describing everything he sees like a horrible, insane 3D Billy Connolly. "My beloved table. A lot of space for useful things, and my feet too!", he'll enthuse to absolutely nobody at all. Every adventure game does it of course, but Simon's outward musings make him seem like a proper mental.

Chaos Happens is an arena in which the desire to solve puzzles struggles with your unwillingness to click on anything present in case Simon's inane twitterings drive you to slit your throat.

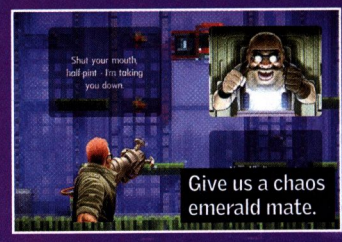
The fourth game in this series sees the boy wizard return to the Magic Kingdom to find that he's been replaced with a doppelganger. This double's been carrying out tasks for the locals, but is, according to them, a boring, inoffensive guy. So, with his edgy personality at stake, Simon sets out to discover who his lucklustre counterpart is.

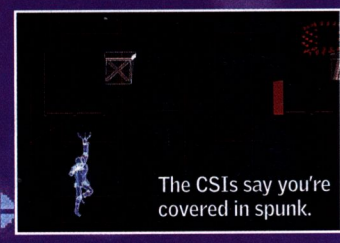
Though it bluntly mocks fantasy convention, is regularly self-referential, and tries to make you smile, any sense of endearment is trampled by dire voice acting and embarrassing humour that smacks of trying that bit too hard. If over-enthusiastic exclamation marks had their own game, this would be it.

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE 51
Chaos happened





RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

Steve Hogarty's left arm rusts in the rain...

DEVELOPER Capcom
PUBLISHER Capcom
WEBSITE bioniccommando.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $15 (about £8 from Direct2Drive)

AT A GLANCE...

A platformer from yesteryear, scrubbed up, reanimated and sent out into the world. At £8, it's a bargain – just forgive its retro leanings.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 GT graphics card.

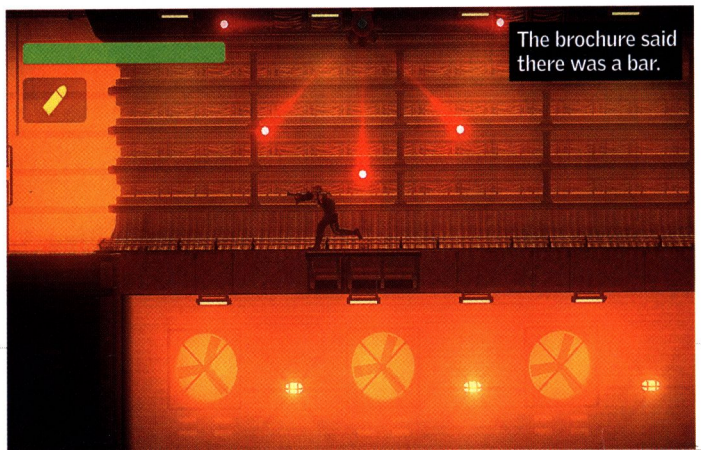
HOW IT STACKS

CAVE STORY	N/A
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED	80%
TAITO LEGENDS	60%

REMEMBER WHEN WE could have games about war that didn't parade about the place trying to out-reality everyone around them? Those wintr'y eves when we could sit around our Nintendos and, with all the sobriety of a man about to watch a serious documentary about Gulf War ethics, fire up a game about a commando with a bionic arm who swings off things and kicks people in the face with his iron boots?

I don't, because I hadn't played the original *Bionic Commando* until I was assigned to this review. So any sheen of nostalgia over the original is blasted away by a condensed stream of my own ignorance. I can't be alone – although it's touted as a classic, proponents of the original are now lawyers, surgeons and architects who've got more important things to think about. That's why Capcom have brushed it up and sent it out – to raise awareness of bionically-armed commandos in the run up to their sequel (simply titled *Bionic Commando*, and still mostly under wraps).

A side-scrolling platformer lacking in a jump button, *Bionic Commando Rearmed* forces you to rethink the genre basics by giving you a grappling hook for an arm. It's this tool that you use to traverse the game's levels, a chain that shoots out at 45° angles, latches on to any ceiling it can find and allows you to swing from it. Tapping the grappling hook key reels the hook in, either pulling you up or pulling an object towards you. Another key fires the weapons you unlock as the game goes on, most of which will only fire horizontally.



PAST PRESENT

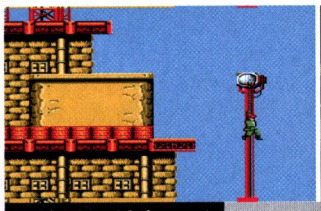
Such restrictive controls take some getting used to, the horizontal firing itself forcing you to use the bionic arm to move into position before attacking enemies. Verticality, then, plays heavily in almost all aspects of *Rearmed*, and once your fingers become accustomed to the mechanical nature of your bionic abilities, it really becomes an elaborate and joyful dance of a game.

Rearmed even acknowledges the counter-intuitiveness of some of its more difficult techniques, with self-

"A masterful remake, even if it's one you'll never muster the patience to finish"

Bona Fide

I can't believe it's not *Bionic Commando*


Pixels! Stupid the past.

Hurray for now!

Eight bits? But I'm still hungry...

It's a veritable bit banquet!

Having never played the original *Bionic Commando*, I dusted off my old NES and a copy of *Commando*, hooked the whole thing up to some specialist screenshot grabbing software, and proceeded to take some comparison screenshots between it and *Rearmed*. Turns out they're fairly identical. Enough to make a lady swoon? I wouldn't rule it out: just look at those spotlights. Some newly added challenge rooms spice things up a bit, offering timed courses in which to test your bionic abilities to their limits. Otherwise, even the *Cannon Fodder*-style top down bits are intact. They crop up whenever you encounter a roving anti-air unit on the level select map.

deprecating humour peppered throughout the game's tutorial.

A play of the NES original shows that the dialogue has been completely rewritten, transforming the mood of the game entirely. Hacking communications reveals hilarious conversations between enemy forces that details the weak spots of that level's boss fight, often referencing the original game, even taking the piss out of *Metal Gear Solid*'s extended Codec conversations.

The boss fights themselves are all starkly original, a throwback to true retro ingenuity.

This rigorous adherence to the original game pulls it down towards the second half however, as the levels and enemies turn on you unfairly, with hidden, impossible-to-avoid pits and infuriatingly difficult-to-kill enemies. The fashion at the time of course, was to make your closing levels as hard as crusty dog shit to beat, a tendency which now leaves a foul taste in our pampered mouths.

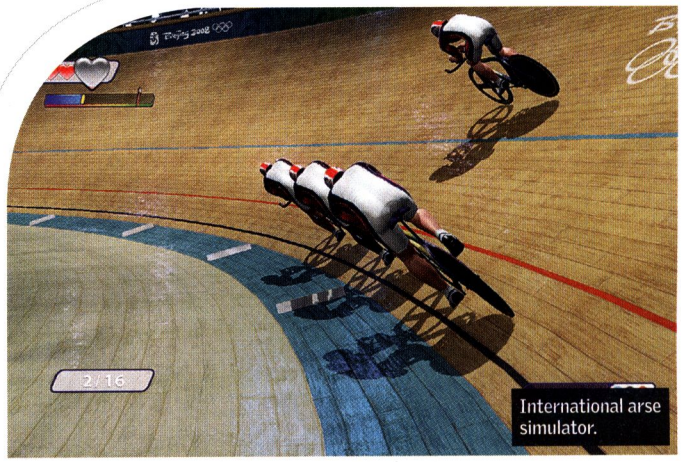
For eight quid though, *Bionic Commando Rearmed* is a masterful remake, even if it's one you'll never muster the patience to finish. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics Basic, but pleasing
Sound Brilliant retro remixes, and shooty bang noises
Multiplayer Two-player co-op

- ✓ Immense fun
- ✓ Ace retro tunes
- ✓ A joy to control
- ✓ New challenge room mode
- ✗ Becomes unfairly difficult

80
Commanding

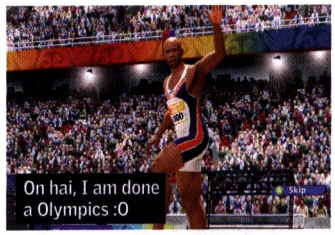

International arse simulator.

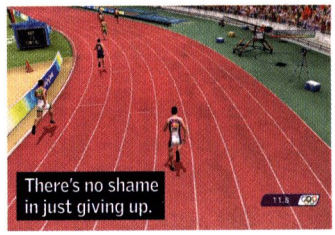
BEIJING 2008

A bit late for the opening ceremonies

DEVELOPER Eurocom
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE olympicvideogames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Minimum system requirements:
I2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and an NVIDIA 8000 graphics card (Pixel Shader 3 support required).


On hai, I am done a Olympics :O

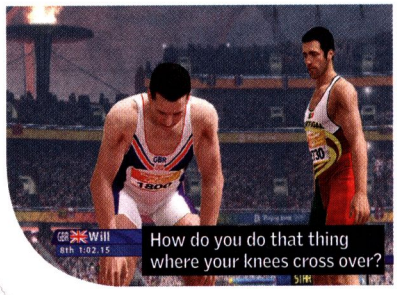

There's no shame in just giving up.

THIS MAY CAUSE controversy, but I have never considered tapping two buttons in rapid succession or endlessly waggling a joystick to be fun. It wasn't fun when I was playing *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge* in 1988, and it sure as hell isn't fun now. In fact, the only factor that remains fun about the experience is watching the pained expression on a fellow player's face as they trigger the early on-set of arthritis while systematically destroying their 360 gamepad. (Because, as ever, this isn't a PC port that's been particularly laboured over in the SEGA HQ).

What I won't take away from *Beijing 2008* though is that it's a slick package with far more sports covered than you would otherwise expect (38 in all – including stuff like judo, gymnastics and diving) each with faintly interesting methods of control that go slightly beyond the long-established *Track & Field* template and into the realms of rhythm action and precision D-pad twiddling.

The problem is, three-quarters of the events are 24-carat bollocks – and in the remaining fields the Olympian skills of AI competitors far outweigh your own nandrolone-free digits. The videogame rendition of the Beijing Olympics is a smooth and shiny one, and vaguely fun in two player, but its frantic, pointless, Sisyphean button mashing couldn't stand at greater odds to the human drama, elation and despair of the real thing. Avoid. PCZ

Will Porter


How do you do that thing where your knees cross over?

PCZONE 46
Barely qualifies

Having no arms isn't a worry if you're upbeat about it.

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE: EPISODE 1 – HOMESTAR RUINER

Strong, cool, bad, attractive – *Jon Blyth*

DEVELOPER TellTale Games
PUBLISHER TellTale Games
WEBSITE homestarrunner.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $8.95 (£5.00) ($34.95/£18 for 5 episodes)

IT'S EASY TO assume that everyone knows about *Homestar Runner* – the Flash cartoon site that refused advertising, instead funding itself entirely through merchandise sales. But that's almost certainly not the case.

For most people, discovering the depths of its edgy-cute pop-mangling universe is a personal thing. A friend directing you to a cartoon of a wrestler-looking guy answering an email. An inexplicable video of *They Might Be Giants* singing with a puppet. Any trace of curiosity, and you're lost. Trawling through the site's archives, games, skins and unlockables will take weeks, but at least you'll know why people went mad for *Trogdor* in *Guitar Hero II*.

HOME START

So, if you haven't been to the *Homestar* site (homestarrunner.com), go now. Think of it as 72-hour demo, and if you don't even feel a vague tingle, then skip this review. If you like the site, you'll enjoy this game more for being in on the jokes.

Being centred around Strong Bad, the wrestler-looking guy I mentioned in the first paragraph, the game starts off with an email. Read from his beloved Lappy – a personalised pre-Pentium laptop – this message is a challenge to "kick the snot" out of Homestar Runner, the lovey-dovey nasal star of the website. Not keen on the snot imagery, Strong Bad decides instead to humiliate Homestar, and that's where you take over. Can you break up his relationship and humiliate him in his favourite sport? Maybe get the guy a criminal record?

With a near-identical user interface, and the same helpful (but not obvious) hint system used in *Sam & Max*'s episodic adventures, this should take an evening to complete – maybe getting up early the next day if you want to get all the optional stuff. It's these non-essential bonuses that make *Strong Bad* feel like more of a complete game. Whereas *Sam & Max* had the optional bumper stickers

AT A GLANCE...

The universe of *Homestar Runner* gets its first commercial game – an episodic point-and-click adventure with plenty of hidden extras to keep you going.

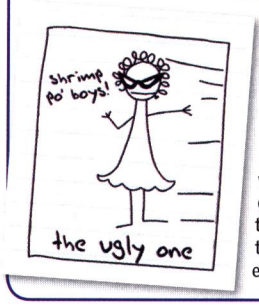
Minimum system requirements:
Pentium 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB 3D-accelerated video card (64MB recommended).

HOW IT STACKS

SBCG4AP:E1-HR	80%
SAM & MAX EPISODE 2.03	75%
BONE – THE GREAT COW RACE	67%

THE UGLY ONE

When childlike misogyny is ace



Strong Bad is a ladies' man. In his mind, ladies like nothing more than a man in a house, flexing at them through the living room window. It's this understanding of the female brain that leads him to draw *Teen Girl Squad*, a cartoon in which a bunch of girls talk about shoes and looking good, before getting dismembered.

The girls have their own section on the *Homestar* website, but the best optional quest in the *Strong Bad* game is assembling all the lost ideas in order to create the best possible *Teen Girl Squad* strip. It's so intuitive that it doesn't need any explanation, so I won't bother to explain it here. Just make sure the girls all die, OK?

Get the feeling that this statue won't survive the season?

(which made no difference and were won through an easy, pointless game) here, you win Coach Z's Mysterious Trophies and learn about the backstory to your favourite game, *Snake Boxer 5*. How you win the trophies isn't explained, but you can check your progress at any time and try to work out what those percentages mean.

LAUGH A MINUTE

Like *Sam & Max*, this is essentially an interactive comedy show. The puzzles aren't hard enough to stump you for long and the dialogue options are limited. But to complain about that is as fair as criticising a ballet dancer for losing a boxing match. This is straight-up entertainment for fans of the *Homestar Runner* world. But if the universe is too sweet for you, or just don't like the humour, then you won't like this game.

But then, this was never going to be for you, was it? Why are you even reading this review? You can't be hoping we'd hate it, you've already seen the score. Why bother reading a load of irrelevant stuff that doesn't concern you, stupid face? Why don't you go and read a book that tells you how to not be a big stupid face? PCZ

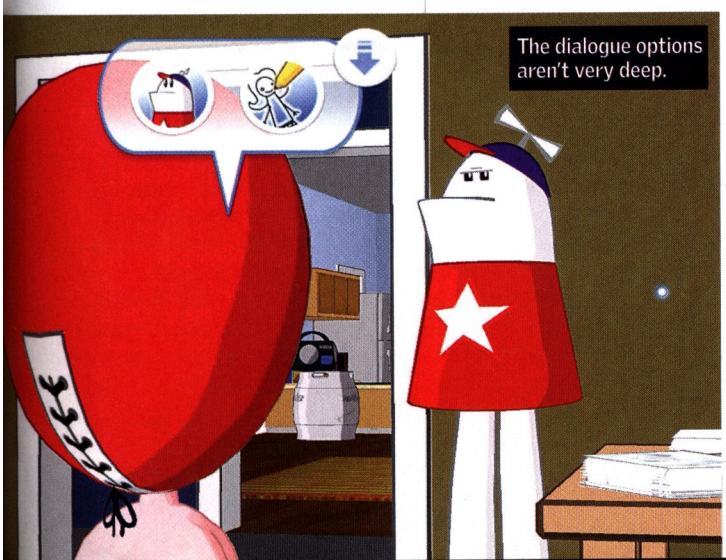
PCZONE

Graphics *Homestar Runner* in bold 3D
Sound Great music, fine voices
Multiplayer No

- ✓ Excellent humour
- ✓ Good puzzles
- ✓ A good range of diversions
- ✓ Funnier than *Sam & Max*
- ✗ Being character-savvy helps
- ✗ Not convinced by the onion

80

Brilliantly quirky


The dialogue options aren't very deep.

It's like *Schindler's List* for phone boxes.

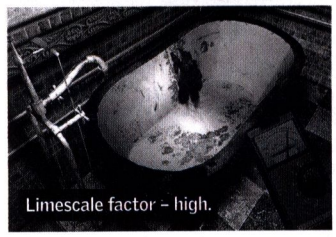
THE LOST CROWN

It's probably behind the sofa

DEVELOPER Darkling Room
PUBLISHER Lighthouse Interactive
WEBSITEthelostcrown.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 128MB DirectX 9.0c compatible graphics card.

Get her!


Limescale factor – high.

DEVELOPER DARKLING ROOM have tried to tell "a ghost-hunting adventure", which is commendable given the scarcity of such games (especially with the *Ghostbusters* hiatus), but unfortunately they've let themselves down in several key areas.

Voice-acting is the first you'll notice. It's really hard to put into words how excruciatingly bad the acting is, but the phrase "unnecessary pauses" comes to mind. Combined with an often stupid script, the spooky atmosphere the game craves disappears. When main character Danvers enters a phonebox and exclaims "What's this?" upon seeing the (gasp!) phone, I wanted to punch him. This feeling would constantly return, as he's an unlikeable sarky shit.

Being pointlessly overloaded doesn't help it either, with many unnecessary areas and examinable objects (a mouldy Toilet Duck?). The player isn't so much solving puzzles as wandering around aimlessly, hoping for something interactive. The unskippable dialogue and blocky animation doesn't help either.

What makes me downright sad reviewing *The Lost Crown* is that all the way through I was thinking "If they'd just done that, that, and that this would be a very enjoyable game". They didn't, so it's an awkward, confusing mess of an adventure that I can't recommend. It's got a cool *Sin City* art style and it can get a bit scary, but not nearly enough.

More effort next time please, and see me in my study afterwards. PCZ

Chris Capel

When your hamlet needs a haunting, just call Rentaghost!

PCZONE 54

Boo

STATE OF PLAY

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

THIS MONTH...
EVE ONLINE

PUBLISHER CCP Games **WEBSITE** eve-online.com **PRICE** €20/£16 then €15/£12 per month **REVIEWER** Ed Zitron

IT'S BEEN ALMOST 50 issues – that makes it nearly four years – since we took a proper look at *EVE Online*, in the form of the *Exodus* expansion issue 152, 91%, and it's the understatement of the century to say a lot has changed. In those years *EVE* has had several expansions and one of the most radical graphical overhauls of any MMO. CCP have done an incredible job of keeping *EVE* relevant, given how inaccessible the game can feel to even the most MMO-savvy newcomers.

To start off, players can now effectively play *EVE* without paying real money. While there's still the $14.95 per month option (and you can now download the game through Steam), people can actually buy game time with real money to sell to other players in-game, using *EVE*'s ISK currency. It's a fascinating setup, and one which sees many players mining their hearts out to keep up their habit. CCP supports this process officially, and eventually players can, in theory, pay for their entire subscription through in-game labour. It takes a fair amount of ISK to pay for a 60-day code (about 400 million) from the Timecode bazaar, but it's still an interesting way to get off paying real money for things. CCP still get revenue for it at the end of the day, so everybody's happy.

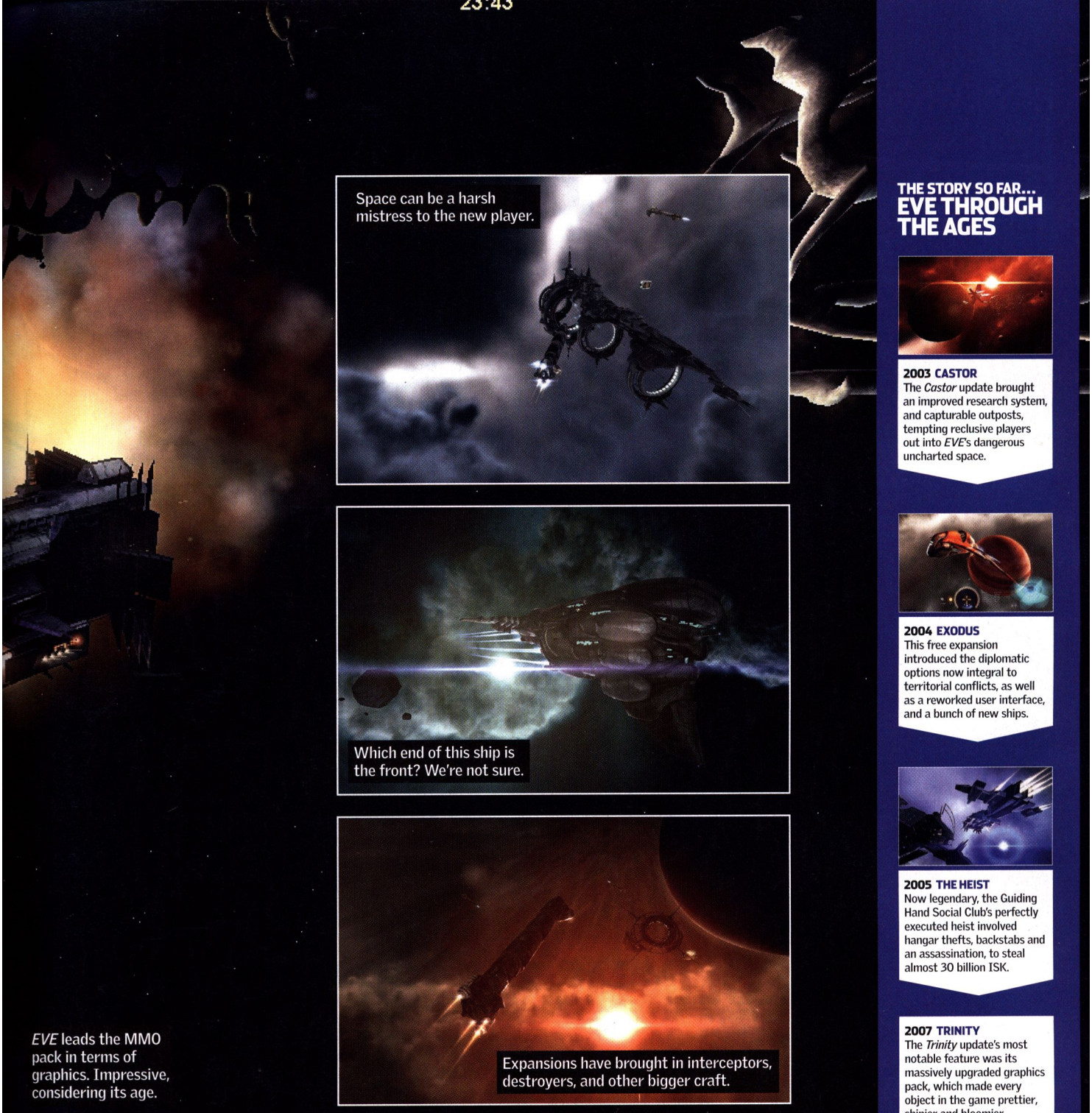
PLAYER INPUT

There have been nine expansions in all, and each has added layers of complexity to *EVE*. The key to this has been the amount of content that players can generate themselves, including conquerable stations that anchor the gigantic war that spans Tranquility (still the only *EVE* server) across the outer regions of space. And players can now build outposts – smaller stations that are easier to maintain – while corporations can now also create the absolutely terrifying Titan class craft, of which only a few currently exist in game, mostly owned by the gigantic Band of Brothers corporation.

If you haven't played since the early days, you'll quickly realise on leaving CONCORD (i.e. policed) space that there's a player-driven war between gigantic alliances and factions that's astonishing in scale and organisation.

If you're of a cosmetic bent though, and need to have every game you play looking spingly spangly, the new graphics engine, released in December 2007 with the *EVE: Trinity* patch, is a big deal. It upgraded the game to DX9 and generally made it more graphically competitive. So competitive in fact that it's easily won the contest of being the best-looking (and performing) MMO.

Alongside these huge updates are accessibility, UI and gameplay tweaks that have streamlined a great deal of the teething problems the game had. New players will still have a very demanding and verbose tutorial to conquer, with seemingly endless dropdowns to select and things to click, but once you've passed through it in its several-hour entirety, you'll find an



EVE leads the MMO pack in terms of graphics. Impressive, considering its age.

Space can be a harsh mistress to the new player.

Which end of this ship is the front? We're not sure.

Expansions have brought in interceptors, destroyers, and other bigger craft.

MMO deeper than any other. CCP is planning, in the near-distant future, to let players walk around space stations, as well as let you fly onto the surfaces of planets. The very concept of this is somewhat ball-quaking for space ace wannabes, opening up a whole new level of potential warfare and avarice.

EVE is still cutthroat, ruthless and unfair. You will get ganked, pod-killed and insulted. The minute you step outside of the secure systems you're considered fair game for any passing player, and death leaves you shipless and (depending on how much you've invested in your clone) could set you back weeks of character development. However, there are now many helpful players who'll teach you the ropes (though they may backstab you later) as well as helpful tools like EVEMon (evemon.battleclinic.com) that help you plan your learning and skill paths.

The inaccessibility factor is still there, but CCP and the players have done a great deal to open *EVE* up to a larger audience. It's still not for everybody, but I heartily recommend that those who have taken a sabbatical from the game to log back on – and indeed for *EVE* virgins to jump in at the deep end. It's the most fascinating virtual world that online gaming has thrown up yet, and it's an amazing thing to play a part in.

"It's one of the most engrossing massively multiplayer games I've experienced full stop."
88% – *PCZ* #130, July 2003

VERDICT

For years now CCP has been churning out stellar (and free) content updates, and has taken steps towards uncharted MMO territories with the Council of Stellar Management. Persevere through those first hours and you'll find that *EVE*'s star is rising. PCZ

THE STORY SO FAR... EVE THROUGH THE AGES

2003 CASTOR
The *Castor* update brought an improved research system, and capturable outposts, tempting reclusive players out into *EVE*'s dangerous uncharted space.

2004 EXODUS
This free expansion introduced the diplomatic options now integral to territorial conflicts, as well as a reworked user interface, and a bunch of new ships.

2005 THE HEIST
Now legendary, the Guiding Hand Social Club's perfectly executed heist involved hangar thefts, backstabs and an assassination, to steal almost 30 billion ISK.

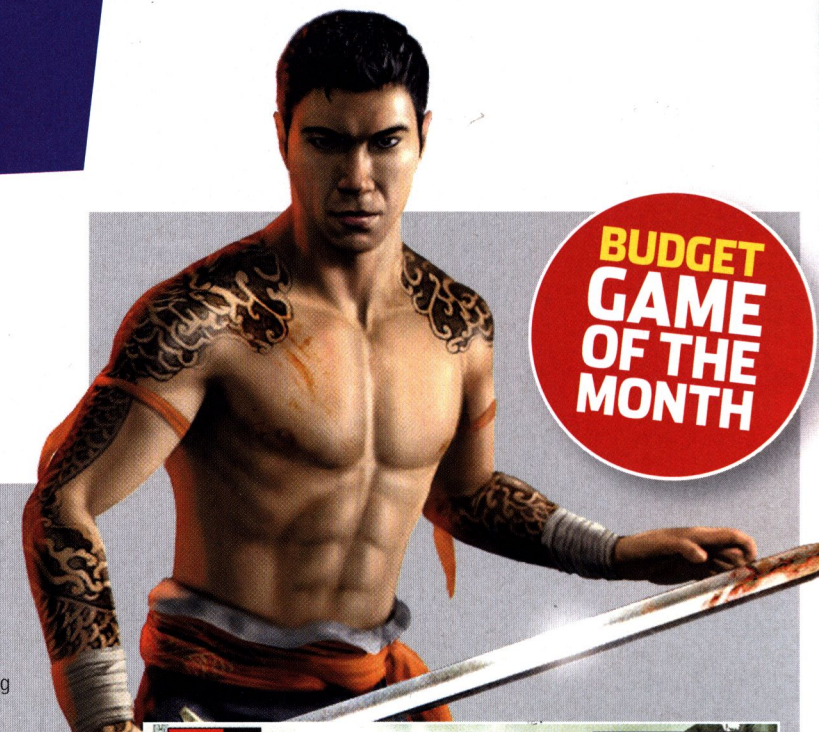
2007 TRINITY
The *Trinity* update's most notable feature was its massively upgraded graphics pack, which made every object in the game prettier, shinier and bloomier.

2007 INTERNAL AFFAIRS
After an alleged case of misconduct, CCP made an internal affairs unit, known in-game as Arkanon. These guys monitor the activities of 'privileged' players.

2008 CSM
The Council of Stellar Management is formed. This real-life democratically elected body represents the interests of *EVE*'s players. A world first for MMOs.

BUDGET

***Jon Blyth* finds moths in his wallet and sells them on eBay**



BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

JADE EMPIRE

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

WE HAD TO wait two years for the game to reach the PC from the Xbox – if you decided to wait another year for it to drop to a tenner, then your tactical thrift is about to pay off.

This fantastic chop-socky fighting RPG saw the introduction of real-time combat to BioWare's traditional mix that they developed further with *Mass Effect*. But *Jade Empire*'s vast selection of (occasionally brilliant, occasionally rock-hard) fighting styles keep variety in the gameplay throughout.

With BioWare's expert and loving conversion to PC, the controls are full-on, but considerately handled. Moreover, the morality system is less bludgeoning in its treatment of good and evil than *KOTOR*, and some RPG elements have been carefully trimmed back for a less fussy approach.

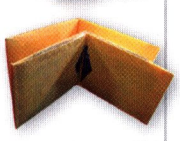
Whether or not the lack of a detailed inventory was purely down to its Xbox roots isn't clear, but it makes for a deeply slick adventure with some memorable characters and jaw-dropping moments. Utterly excellent.

PCZONE 90

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Will was present the day before an ex-PR's credit card ran out.
Saving: A lot of drinks

Steve made a paper wallet from a design on instructables.com.
Saving: £160 on a Swarovski crystal wallet



Drinking copious amounts of Red Bull instead of those posh Cappucinos.
Saving: 40p a go

COLIN MCRAE DIRT

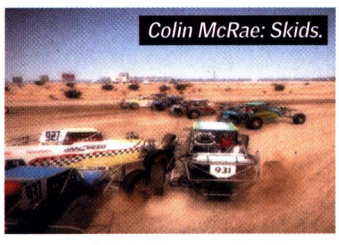
PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** mastertronic.com **PRICE** £9.99

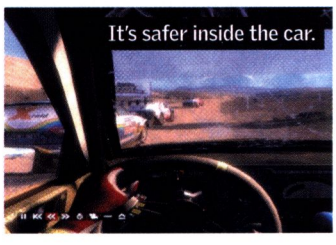
SOMETIMES, OVER TIME, the world changes and the language of a review will become strangely tasteless. So it is with our original review of *Dirt*, when Suzy Wallace said: "Colin's not only been resurrected, but reincarnated in a superior form." A comment that makes us cringe given last year's sad events.

Still, *Dirt* marked the return to excellence of a racing series that had become a little crusty. It was completely overhauled, with the latest Neon engine making even dirty cars look gorgeous. An 11-tier pyramid system of 66 races covering a variety of driving styles allowed you enough flexibility to get to the top, with a wealth of unlockables to keep collectors coming back.

With only a weak multiplayer and lacking Colin's voice, this is a great final game to a much-loved, and now very sadly ended, franchise.

PCZONE 89





TWO WORLDS: EPIC EDITION

PUBLISHER Southpeak Games **WEBSITE** southpeakgames.com **PRICE** £20

YOU CAN'T REALLY call it a flawed masterpiece – *Two Worlds* was a unhappy cluster of bugs that marred an otherwise playable and enjoyable game. Now patched to be a damn sight more fun and a lot more playable, it's been bundled with its two expansions and essentially plays like a single-player MMO. You're part of a generic fantasy world, killing generic fantasy enemies, gaining better gear and completing quests that are tied together with a variety of hilariously awful cutscenes and outstandingly dire dialogue.

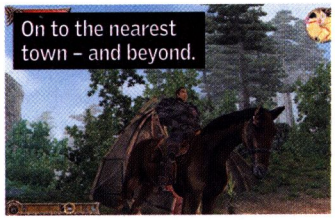
Out of this seemingly unspectacular mess steps a rather enjoyable game, once you get a handle for the quirky controls and inventory, with a smooth romp of a levelling curve and at least 10 hours of pleasant hack-and-slashery, along with the ability to combine weapons together to make them stronger – which can be exploited to make you ridiculously powerful.

Twenty quid may not be super-budget, but there's plenty of click-and-slay action for those who want it.

PCZONE 68

Don't touch what you can't afford guys.

A strong chin helps you win.


On to the nearest town – and beyond.

WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS

PUBLISHER Namco Bandai **WEBSITE** namcobandaigames.eu **PRICE** £10

WITH *WARHAMMER* FANS waiting patiently to surrender a monthly stipend and a substantial fraction of their lives to *Age of Reckoning*, it's a timely re-release of the thoroughly acceptable fantasy RTS from Black Hole Entertainment.

The game suffered from some presentation issues – the dated world map will make you wonder what you're getting into – but the core of the game is solid, meaty strategy. You keep your troops from one battle to the next, so you're forced to consider casualties, and not just push for a map victory against all reason. You'll have to use height advantage, line of sight, flanking manoeuvres and combined arms to finish levels with enough troops to get to the next town.

This isn't a game without problems, but *Mark of Chaos* will give a wedge of pleasure to any fans of RTS games or *Warhammer*. If you're both, then our recommendation is to fill your boots as quickly as possible.

PCZONE 72

Moar war.

And the rest...

Avoid unnecessary cash torching

ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

PRICE £4.99, Sold Out

Alone In The Dark is not a game series that's aged well over the years, but this is still better than the latest game.

PCZONE 58

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007

PRICE £9.99, Mastertronic

A game heavily reliant on statistics – now parted from its database. As ever, while there are still *Football Manager* games you should buy them.

PCZONE 46

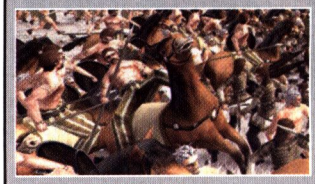
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: DRAGONSHARD

PRICE £4.99, Sold Out

A town-building strategy game that blends elements of RPG and RTS. Not very original, but interesting enough.

PCZONE 72

PCZONE Top 5 budget games



ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, Sega

This is huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people hacking each other to shit and back.

FAR CRY

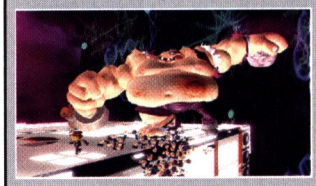
PRICE £5, Sold Out

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

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse (or, in *Oblivion*'s case, slightly worse) than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

To lighten the tone, here's Tim Schafer's psychological platform adventure. You won't have more fun until *Brütal Legend* comes out. Whenever that is.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES

PRICE £15, Steam

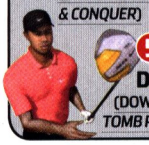
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything. This isn't only a Top 5 budget list: it's an entire encyclopedia.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZONE Top 5 GOOD GAMES GONE BAD

1. **TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 08 – 50%** (DOWN 44% FROM *PGA TOUR PRO*)
2. **ALONE IN THE DARK – 55%** (DOWN 42% FROM *ALONE IN THE DARK 2*)
3. **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER ONLINE – 52%** (DOWN 41% FROM *CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3*)
4. **TIBERIAN SUN: FIRESTORM – 58%** (DOWN 37% FROM *COMMAND & CONQUER*)
5. **ANGEL OF DARKNESS – 68%** (DOWN 37% FROM *TOMB RAIDER*)



PCZONE Top 5 GAMES WHERE YOU GET A FREE BOOK

1. **DUNGEON SIEGE II**
2. **DIVINE DIVINITY**
3. **ELITE II**
4. **THE UNORTHODOX ENGINEERS: THE PEN AND THE DARK**
5. **FREDERICK FORSYTH'S THE FOURTH PROTOCOL (UNFORTUNATELY)**

PCZONE Top 5 WORDS WE LEARNED FROM PC GAMES

1. **FALCHION** (DUNGEON MASTER)
2. **WHETSTONE** (THE SAGA OF ERIK THE VIKING)
3. **TRIREME** (CIVILIZATION)
4. **PHALANX** (AGE OF EMPIRES)
5. **SPINEL** (RESIDENT EVIL 4)

FPS

Must buy!

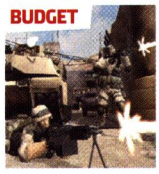
HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes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

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

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

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

BUDGET



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

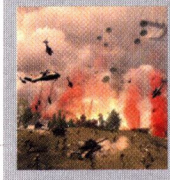
CRYSIS
PCZ Issue: 188 – 92%
A retooled, condensed *Far Cry* for newer hardware, with *Crysis*'s neat nanosuit and 'anything can happen' action-bubble mentality making it a winner. The last act falters, but the Korean-bullying is endlessly replayable.

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.

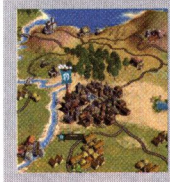
Strategy

Must buy!

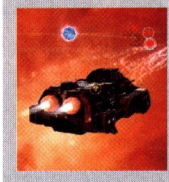
COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
Despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one is a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a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



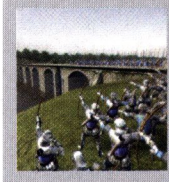
WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%
A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



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 stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

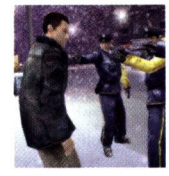
Action/Adventure

Must buy!

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

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

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



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

BUDGET

PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.

BUDGET

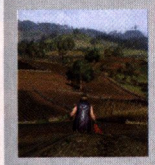
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.

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

MMOs

Must buy!

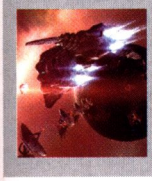
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



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

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.



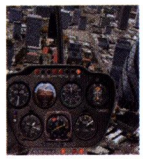
EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

Simulation

BUDGET

X³: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X²: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited?

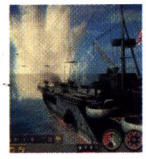
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

BUDGET

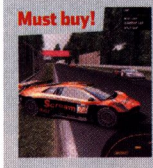
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 – 84%
If *X³* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



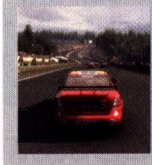
SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the *TOCA* and creates a Hollywood-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges.

LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 – 90%
Online racing at its best. *LFS* has realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. A remarkable achievement by such a small and talented team.

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC.

GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.

Oddball

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

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

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

PEGGLE DELUXE
PCZ Issue: 183 – 83%
A weeping unicorn and a sequence of bagatelle-inspired peg-bouncing brain-twisting puzzles combine to make a casual game of unparalleled addictiveness. If you doubt us, you haven't played it.

BUDGET

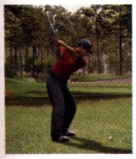
THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 – 95%
Life as a movie mogul – games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Build a studio and make your own films. Brilliant.

Sport

Must buy!

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%
The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, *FM* succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 – 87%
Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06
PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%
Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, *Tiger 06* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.

FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 – 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

NHL 08
PCZ Issue: 187 – 80%
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like *Speedball*!) to our PCs, the latest *NHL* is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

Role-playing games

Must buy!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.

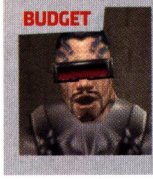
MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 – 92%
Possibly BioWare's best game since *KOTOR*, with a new combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and space sex – it's a modern must.

THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.

BUDGET

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 – 94%
This could be the most intimidating, yet wonderful, game we've ever played – the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.

BUDGET



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in FPS RPGs. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of gaming.

INCOMING!

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

September

BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY	UBISOFT
CRYSIS WARHEAD	EA
MEN OF WAR	1C
MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES	EA
RED ALERT 3	EA
RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS	CODEMASTERS
SPORE	EA
THE WITCHER ENHANCED EDITION	ATARI
WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING	EA/GOA

October

A VAMPYRE STORY	ASCARON
CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION	2K GAMES
CRYOSTASIS: SLEEP OF REASON	1C
DEAD SPACE	SEGA
FALLOUT 3	BETHESDA
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009	SEGA
LEGO BATMAN	WARNER BROS
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD	EIDOS

Autumn

FAR CRY 2	UBISOFT

Winter

LEFT 4 DEAD	VALVE
PROJECT ORIGIN	WARNER BROS

TBC

DIABLO III	BLIZZARD
MAFIA II	2K

YOUR DEFINITIVE GUIDE
TO Wii™ AND DS™ GAMING

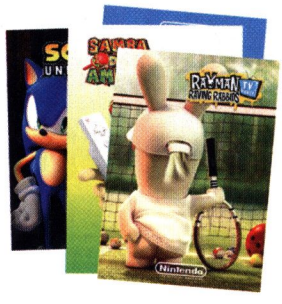
Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

WARIO LAND
THE SHAKE DIMENSION

Nintendo's raging rudeboy goes back to basics in this corking Wii platformer. Exclusive review inside!

FREE GIFT!
NINTENDO POSTER PACK



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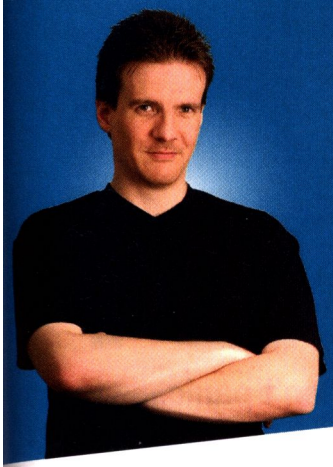


PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

MS Paranoia

THE ADDITION OF a firewall to recent versions of *Windows* has done little but confirm the fears of non-savvy PC users who now believe everyone really is out to get them, and that whatever Microsoft is doing, they should be doing too.

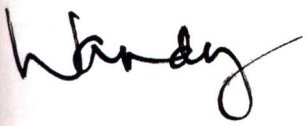
Look, I know I keep coming back to this subject, but it's important. If you're a home user behind a properly configured modem router, adding a software firewall will often cause more problems than it solves.

Any ne'er-do-well attempting to bust into your network is not going to get further than your router, and the only time data from the outside reaches your PC is when you initiate things. The router keeps track of each time you start a connection, and through the magic of NAT you see what the other side says in response.

If you haul its instructions from the bin, you should find your router is blessed with a hardware firewall anyway. Make sure it's set to deny all inbound requests – that's all most people will ever need.

The one reason you might want to install a software firewall is if you're looking to stop outbound information such as a Trojan phoning home. But an up-to-date anti-virus/malware tool should stop this anyway, and as long as you don't go downloading stuff whose origins are unknown, you'll be fine.

Contrary to popular belief, the best form of defence really is common sense.

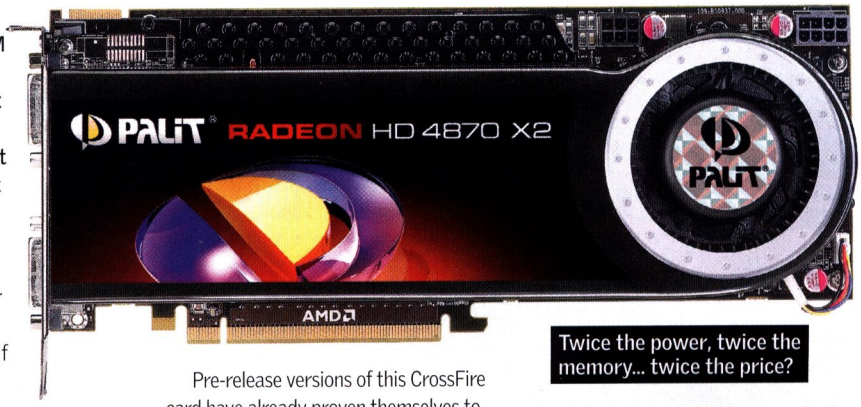


Phil Wand, hardware editor

X2, BRUTE

Massive new Radeon eats GeForces for lunch

TWIN GPUS AND 2GB of DDR5 RAM mean you're not going to be able to sneak AMD's massive new Radeon HD 4870 X2 past the missus – not without her noticing the grin on your face or the huge bulge under your coat.



Twice the power, twice the memory... twice the price?

It'll also have a major impact on your credit card statement, though if you buy two of them together the noise from the sudden impact on your bill might be enough to drown out any complaints from partners – and let's face it, most X2 owners aren't into doing things by halves.

If preliminary benchmarks are true, and AMD can keep the cost under £300, NVIDIA will be doing more than slashing the price of their flagship GTX again (variants of which can now be found online for nearer £200). They'll likely be buying Radeons themselves.

Pre-release versions of this CrossFire card have already proven themselves to be roughly 25% quicker than the GeForce, with the X2 barely troubled by vast resolutions and heaps of detail. Only two GTX 280 cards strung together in SLI are in the same ballpark, though this configuration is likely to cost more than your PC.

The only question is, can AMD's drivers deliver performance in games across the board? If they don't, the X2 could be sunk.

palit.biz

GUARD DOG

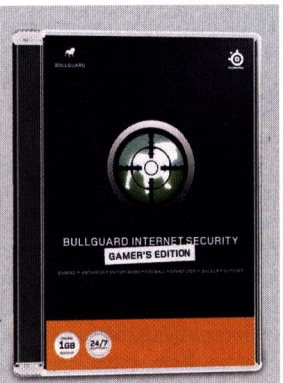
Give your PC some bite

BULLGUARD GAMER'S EDITION **offers full protection for those of you who use your PC more for play than for work.**

The £40 package includes full anti-virus, anti-spyware and spam filter features, and comes with 1GB of online backup. You can now do all the things I've been pestering you to do for years.

Gamers get a number of features specific to their needs, including a unique system mode which prevents pop-up status messages when they're playing (meaning they won't be thrown back to the desktop) and which delays system scans and backups until after they've finished.

www.bullguard.com



Bullguard – security software with bite.

News round-up

IBM's X-Force Trend Statistics unit details how often developers address security flaws in their products, and this year Apple have taken the top slot. With more software vulnerabilities and exploits than Microsoft, the Macintosh maker blamed a rise in "Web application flaws" for their problems. Next time your friend goes on about the secure ruggedness of *OS X*, laugh.

ibm.com

NVIDIA posted a net loss of more than $120m last quarter, the company including a near $200m bill for the replacement of "anticipated customer warranty" claims. There are rumours that the G84 and G86 GPUs are broken, and that the company is about to quit the chipset business, too. Both seem improbable – even with the X2 ready to dominate – but I'll keep you updated.

nvidia.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY JON BLYTH

FUSION PANTHER: A creature that is half panther, and half panther. Although they look just like a panther, fusion panthers are often crippled by identity problems, and can be known to overcompensate by showing off at parties. **NAT:** What loud people called the famous singer and jazz pianist before a clerical error in a nearby colliery made him the King of all Coal. **TREND STATISTICS:** "Your hat and skirt combo is one standard deviation away from not being shit," is the kind of thing a particularly bitchy trend statistician would say. **MAHJONG:** Carl Jung's slightly inaccurate mother. **STRIKER II:** A five-dimensional cartoon about a footballer who inseminates himself and fathers an intergalactic soccer team on a proton.

DEAR WANDY

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

PROBLEMS?

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

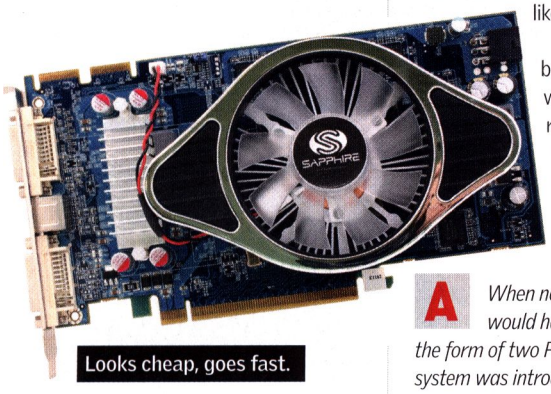
Q HP SOURCE

I've added a new processor, a new hard drive, re-installed this and that, and a few hundred pounds further down the line, my HP Pavilion t860.uk machine is less usable that when I first bought it as "repaired" from Staples.

I'm willing to spend between £400 and £600 to replace or upgrade it, and I want more of a gaming PC. I'd prefer something compatible with the RAM I was given for my current setup. I have a GeForce 8500 GT card, which I'm told was quite good when I got it last year, and if it's decent by today's standards, I'd like to use that card again.

Of course, if there are better cards which come with a PC in my price range then I'd go for those and give my current graphics card to my brother.

Carl Hemsley



Looks cheap, goes fast.

A *When new, your HP desktop would have had 512MB RAM in the form of two PC3200 sticks. The t860 system was introduced in February of 2005 and now in 2008 it's ancient history, memory sticks included.*

Today, you can go much faster on less electricity, and there's really no point cannibalising any old components – give the entire thing to your brother, an aunt, or throw it out of a second floor window to see what happens. Just make sure you keep the hard drive – that's worth hanging on to.

There are countless replacements available within your budget. While you could choose a big-name manufacturer, be aware that companies are relying increasingly on developers to bolster their tiny margins. This means that almost all known brand PCs come spoiled with junkware, like hypodermic needles strewn across an empty beach.

Chillblast's £500 Fusion Panther has a reasonably useful looking configuration, though I'm not sure about their choice of video card – make sure you email them for a faster alternative that would still leave you within budget.

Wired2Fire's Diablo Ultima seems a better bet, with a faster processor and overclocked GeForce 8800 GT as standard. Though it's £628, which is more than you want to spend.

My best advice is to go shopping. Browse the ads in mags and online for machines inside your limit and, where necessary, see if you can customise the specification to include a Radeon HD 4850. This will demolish the GeForce 8800 – now standard fare for this price range – and yet it's not much more cash.

nForce, *Vista* and games... a recipe for hair loss.

Q STRIKEOUT

In April I bought a new PC: its got an EVGA 9800 GX2, 4GB RAM, ASUS Striker II Extreme, X-Fi Fatality, Cooler Master M850 PSU, X9650 processor and 64-bit *Vista Ultimate*. My joy at being able to play *Crysis* on max was tempered by lock-ups, with the screen giving a wobble and a freeze after anything from five minutes to an hour.

When I bought it, the sales bloke told me to be patient with the drivers. However, almost three months down the line and only being able to play *Mahjong* without the fear of another freeze has left me mightily pissed off.

I've contacted EVGA, but as the card is not overheating, artefacting or showing other signs of damage, they've only suggested uninstalling/re-installing drivers. This hasn't resolved the problem. I've actually had a couple of BSODs as well as the monitor switching itself off mid-game. I've submitted a bug report to NVIDIA but I have had no reply. I'm not exactly sure what to do next.

Ben Jordan

A *It pains me to tell you, but I think there are at least three things wrong with your configuration.*

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.6	21 JUL 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 177.41	26 JUN 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.18	2 JUN 08
CREATIVE	CREATIVE ALCHEMY 1.10.01	15 MAY 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.18	2 JUN 08

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

"As your random freezing is linked to gameplay this makes me think that it's the NVIDIA drivers"

The first is the Striker II Extreme: this nForce 790i motherboard has a reputation for delinquency with certain graphics cards, RAM types and clock settings. My advice would be to update its BIOS, reset everything to default values (do not overclock), and run a memtest on each module to make sure you're not playing with broken sticks.

You also have Vista 64-bit, *an operating system which requires you to waste time with 64-bit applications and 64-bit drivers that have no obvious impact on your system's performance. Install the just-as-fast 32-bit version instead and I'd wager half your troubles will just evaporate. You'll also spend less time searching fruitlessly for 64-bit versions of everything.*

Actually, the fact your freezing is so random but inextricably linked to game playing leads me to suspect it's the NVIDIA drivers. Heat build-up or a zapped DIMM module would normally give more consistent symptoms, and also at the desktop. I've not had much luck with NVIDIA drivers and Vista *myself.*

Q FIRE FACTS

I've been using *Firefox* ever since you recommended it some years ago and I'd like to upgrade. I have a number of extensions (mainly relating to tab behaviour) and my prime concern is that I'll lose all my passwords. I've tried everything that I can think of. Is there a way of 'manually' upgrading? I hate leaving such important things to setup programs! Is there anything I can do?

Om nom nom nom.

Wal Mart

A *Copy your active* Firefox *profile and search engine presets to your desktop, uninstall, delete the crap that extensions leave behind, and then run the* Firefox 3 *setup. Once this has completed, you can copy it all back.*

Your profile is located at %APPDATA%\Mozilla\Firefox\Profiles. *Type that into* Windows Explorer *and it'll magically appear. The files you need from here are bookmarks.html, key3.db and signons2.txt (which you'll need to rename to signons3.txt).*

Now go to %PROGRAMFILES%\Mozilla Firefox *and copy the searchplugins folder for your search engine presets.*

You shouldn't need tab add-ons in Firefox 3 *because much of the behaviour of these popular extensions has been duplicated in the core program. If you've any more problems, let me know.*

Q JAVA BEEN AND GONE

Doing a bit of spring cleaning I noticed two Java updates. I uninstalled what I thought was an older version and, you guessed it, now an application I need for my business won't work. Rolled back and still no joy.

I've uninstalled everything, cleaned the registry of any remaining traces using *ccleaner*, then nabbed a fresh version from Sun site. Now the installer program stops with an error: "This installer cannot proceed with the current Internet Connection settings of your system."

The Sun (java.sun.com) site is absolutely crap and I've been searching all day and playing with proxy settings and have got nowhere. I don't know what else to do. I use *Vista Ultimate.*

Dave Horton

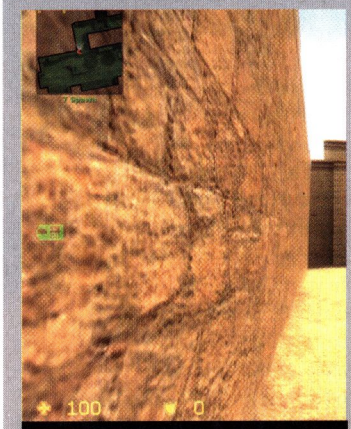
A *As you've probably deduced, the error message is a result of the* Java SE Runtime Environment *(JRE) setup being unable to connect to Sun and download files to complete your installation. While the Sun site suggests it's a misconfigured proxy, their FAQ is really out of date – you're more likely to be stopped by a firewall. Make sure you disable it for the duration of the update, along with any anti-virus software.*

The fact that you've uninstalled all traces of the JRE *from your system and have even used a registry cleaner to tidy up afterwards leaves me concerned you've bitten off more than you can chew, but I'm hopeful that it's just a big-looking error for a very small problem.*

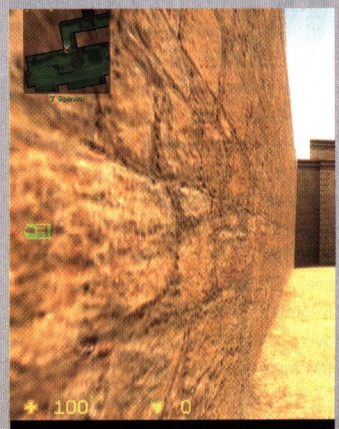
And if you still run into bother, you can always visit java.sun.com/javase/downloads and work your way past the Download buttons and 'I Agree' checkboxes to the JRE *offline installation, which includes everything and won't to connect to the internet.*

Let me know how you get on! PCZ

ALL ABOUT...



Look closely and you can see that the wall isn't sharply rendered.



With AF enabled, the wall texture loses its apparent blurriness.

05 ANISOTROPIC FILTERING

There have been 'AA' and 'AF' knobs in every game made this last decade, but have you any idea what happens on the screen when you twiddle them about?

You learned all about anti-aliasing (AA) in issue 193, but what does anisotropic filtering do? Simply put, it improves the appearance of adjacent textures so that a particular surface that has been painted with them looks continuous and thus, more like the real world.

When a game engine paints a given surface, such as road in a driving game, or a landscape in a flight simulator, it does so by reorienting a pre-rendered tile at an angle and then 'painting' it stretching from the viewer's eye.

As you get further from the surface, the engine will render more and more blocks but at a reduced size to speed up the process. The end result is that things look blurry.

Anisotropic filtering is often a very subtle effect, but it helps bring textures back into clarity and hides the join between tiles so that surfaces become seamless. It requires a fairly hefty amount of processing power, and hence is something you should avoid unless you're using a high-end card.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(Dredj) I've just had a simultaneous pop and loss of power, followed by a horrible smell. My PSU just blew and on a Saturday! No big deal, but if it's taken the system with it then, bollocks. It was a Hiper 525W, may she rest now. (mike.pegg) My Hiper blew a while ago. It made my motherboard do weird things so I had to replace it. (Sobtanian) Been using Thermaltake Toughpowers ever since my Jeantech exploded. (Wandy) I've said this before, but the only PSU I've ever had go 'pop' in a cloud of acrid smoke was a Hiper – and I've had a lot of PSUs over the years. The fatal explosion destroyed my motherboard, RAM and processor. I'd say you should try a Seasonic instead.

GRAPHICS CARD BONANZA!

GEFORCE GTX 260 OC BFG 896MB

PRICE £239 **MANUFACTURER** BFG Technologies **WEBSITE** bfgtech.com

WHILE IT'S NOT the Rolls Royce of 3D cards, the GTX 260 is still a fair competitor for the powerful 280, being based on the same GeForce core. As is traditional for NVIDIA GPUs, the lesser of the cards, the 260, uses the same chip as the 280, but has lower clock speeds and some of the processing area disabled. These changes leave BFG's GTX 260 with a slightly less beefy 576MHz processor speed and 896MB of RAM. Although BFG have overclocked this model to 670MHz for a few more juicy frames per second.

Even though it's the lesser model, there's nothing about this card that is small. It's a monster of a card, even by today's standards. Even if you can get it into your case, you may struggle to slot it into your motherboard. So before buying it, check that its dimensions (10.5 x 3.75 x 1.5in) will fit your PC's case.

Despite GTX 260's big fat arse it's not very noisy, and was the star performer in our rigorous testing. In *World in Conflict*, it was 50% faster than the best AMD could muster - although that advantage gets cut down to just a few fps in *Crysis* (original, we weren't able to try it with *Warhead*, yet) at super-high settings.

We're not completely sure this card is worth the extra money over the HD4870, and for a little extra money you could score a dual-GPU effort (though these may still not be compatible with certain games). However, if a price drop occurs, this card may end up being worth your money in comparison to the somewhat more bloated 280 model.

PCZONE **86**
Pricey but speedy

RADEON HD4850

"ATI goes for brute force with almost four times as many stream processors"

PRICE £114 **MANUFACTURER** Sapphire
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com

WHILE NVIDIA ERRS on the side of more efficient stream processors, ATI goes for brute force using four times as many in its cards, to pump your monitor full of molten DirectX 10 gaming. Ultimately, this all means jack diddly, because they both end up doing much the same jobs, at very slightly different speeds.

ATI also don't subscribe to the doctrine of toning down their cards and selling them cheaper, leaving the GPU almost identical to the HD4870's (reviewed opposite), except with a different kind of RAM. The HD4850 only has half the memory bandwidth available, in comparison to the meaty GDDR5 RAM on the HD4870. This means that you can't simply overclock it to be a 4870, which is a shame, but for the price you're paying it's hard to complain.

In comparison to other cards on the market, the 4850 is a little better than the 512MB 8800GT, one of our favourite mid-range cards, but at a discount price. It's also a fantastic card in comparison to its more expensive brother, the HD4870, if you're gaming on anything under a 22in monitor. At most native resolutions for those LCDs, this is still a pleasing card with good results for the money (with some tweaking and an expensive glass of scotch to blur the textures).

Just don't try and pressure it with *Crysis* or *COD4* with full-scale anti-aliasing and all the settings up, otherwise this little number might end up overheating, as it's not got the meatiest heatsink in the world.

PCZONE **89**
Cheap but speedy

9800GTX XLR8

PRICE £200 **MANUFACTURER** PNY **WEBSITE** pny.com

BARELY FASTER THAN an 8800GTS 512MB, there's never been that much point to NVIDIA's previous best-in-class beyond a few extra fps and a little bit of cash-flashing. A little bit of factory overclocking, though, and PNY have made a card with its own tiny niche. Marginally faster than AMD's best, it's a fine last turn for this series of cards.

It's far slower than the GTX 260, but its smaller form factor makes this a better choice for the size and penny conscious out there. This could find itself a nice home in a well-picked shuttle, or in a smaller form-factor tower, depending on your budget, and if you think its specs are worth the cost.

PCZONE 83

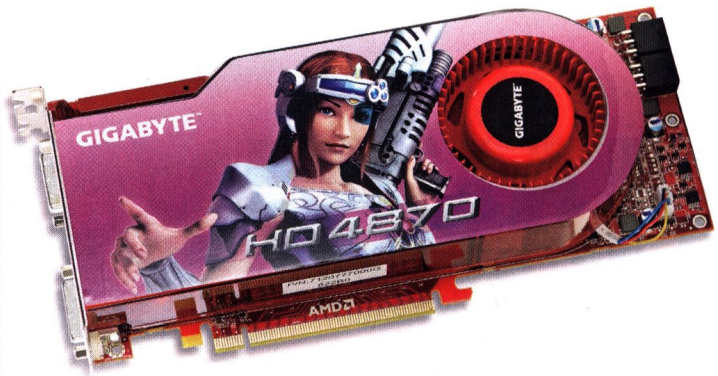
RADEON HD

PRICE £187 **MANUFACTURER** Gigabyte **WEBSITE** giga-byte.co.uk

DESPITE RIDICULOUSLY FAST GDDR5 memory, AMD's top-end chip still doesn't top the 9800GTX, or put itself too high above the 4850, which is, overall, a better card for your money. They're such close cards in terms of performance that you won't notice the difference unless you're the type to push cards to their very limits, and you'll probably save yourself a little money in the process.

This is a decent enough card, if you accept that nothing over £180 makes sense at the moment given the power of the cheaper, lower-end cards. For some really epic performance bumps, wait to see what the X2 version costs and pick it up if you've got the readies.

PCZONE 85



RADEON HD 4870

PRICE £190 **MANUFACTURER** Sapphire **WEBSITE** www.sapphiretech.com

CARDS OF A similar chip are fairly similar these days. The 4870 can't entirely keep pace with the GTX 260, but it is a more than able competitor for the 9800GTX.

Its main rival is the HD4850, which we reviewed this issue. It's meant to be aimed at the GTX 280 market, but it falls short in specs, but for the price it manages to stay competitive with the rest of the industry, even though for the money you could get an HD4850, and have enough change to invest in a little more RAM for your PC – which, in many cases, could improve the quality of your gaming a great deal. The 4870 is still a very nice card, and will handle most of today's titles well.

PCZONE 84

R4850 T2D512

PRICE £125 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **WEBSITE** global.msi.eu

WHILE THIS MSI was marginally slower than its Sapphire rival (reviewed above), it's a margin small enough to only be noticed by the most stat-minded individual.

Both cards run very hot, blisteringly so, and we'd very much advise you not to touch the heatsink during or soon after any session of particularly vigorous 3D gaming, such as *Crysis* or *Call of Duty 4*. This makes this rather inadvisable for Shuttles or any other smaller form-factor case, as even a single-slot cooler won't save your PC from at best running hot, or at worst overheating. This is a shame, as for the price it's perfect to slot into a barebones unit, but ATI's multi-stream ways can work to their disadvantage.

PCZONE 88

REMEMBER:
COMPUTERS DON'T GET HUNGRY OR NEED EXERCISE

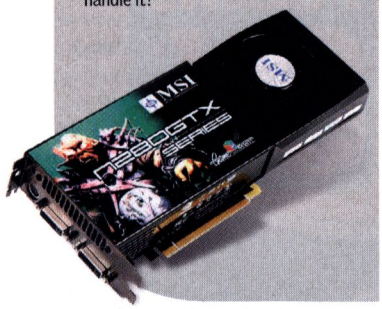
Your PC's USB ports aren't tiny mouths that want doughnuts forced into them, and don't slide Kraft Singles through the fan grill. And definitely don't pour Doritos Hot Salsa sauce into the DVD drive.

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?



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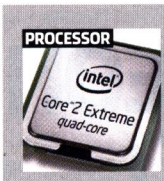
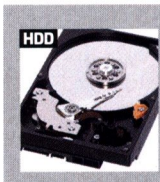


CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775
EXPECT TO PAY £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.co.uk
A silly price makes for awesome power and magical performance. Not only will your Extreme Edition chip cost you the same as several entire PCs, but like everything else in your PC it'll be obsolete in two years. If you've got the money, what the hell!

MOTHERBOARD

D975XBX2
EXPECT TO PAY £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.co.uk
Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about their products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD


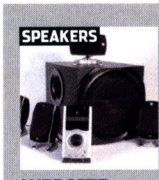
WD7500 AAKS
EXPECT TO PAY £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEB wdc.com
Almost as fast as the 150GB Raptor, but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to be spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN

SM226BW
EXPECT TO PAY £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung
WEBSITE samsung.com/uk
The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

SOUNDCARD

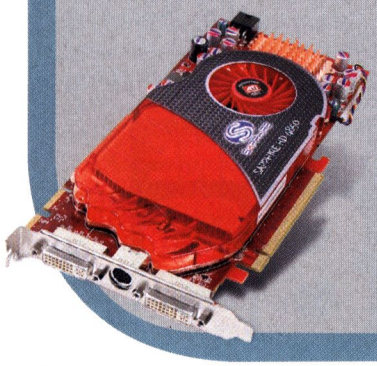
SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS
EXPECT TO PAY £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

SPEAKERS


Z-5500
EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk
The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. Games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off from your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

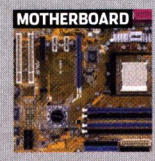
SKINT?

GRAPHICS
HD4850
EXPECT TO PAY £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE sapphiretech.co.uk
This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down, idiot. Go and buy one.

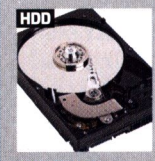


PROCESSOR

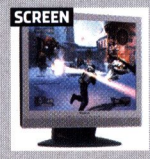
CORE 2 DUO E2180
EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.co.uk
At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD


CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2
EXPECT TO PAY £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com
Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD


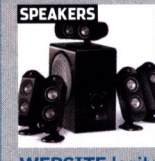
CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II
EXPECT TO PAY £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com
A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for *Windows* to manoeuvre.

SCREEN


VA903M
EXPECT TO PAY £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk
The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUNDCARD

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE
EXPECT TO PAY £20
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS


X-530
EXPECT TO PAY £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE logitech.co.uk
Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

We've got you in our sights

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September 27-28 2008

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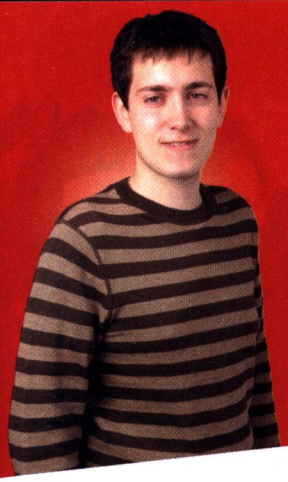


PCZONE FREEPLAY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Money can't buy you these pages

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE GAMES!

Casual Quagmire

THIS MONTH I'VE found myself gaming rather more pragmatically than usual, due to extreme tiredness. You see, while most people play games to relax, as an aside to work, my usual process of playing is to exhaust myself in day-long bouts, and thus when I relax, I can't possibly play a game that has an ending. At best it can have a vague goal – something like "score this many points to go to the next level," but that's it. So, ironically, while it says I've been playing *Spore* this month, one of the greatest games released in a while, I've really been sinking time into *Top Spinner*, the wonderful cricket game from Dr Bennett Foddy (foddy.net/cricket.html), a game in which you hit balls into colourful walls to score the highest points.

While a veritable bounty of new games – *Spore*, *The Witcher Enhanced Edition*, and more – sits in front of me, I can't help but play *Pandemic II*, a deviously addictive strategy game involving disease, or *Ginormo Sword*, a worryingly Freudian RPG grinder. They both require little more than an enthusiasm for clicking to complete, and it's wonderful. Sometimes it's nice to just turn off your brain and click the same Flash window repeatedly for hours without the worry that you'll lose experience or fail to consider some important fact about the game beyond whether you have Flash installed.

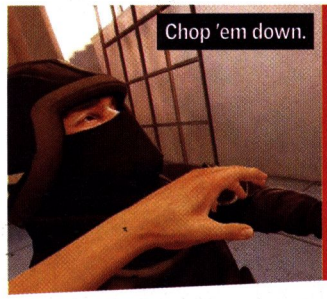
In my waking moments, I've found time to give you a glimpse into the free version of *FreeSpace 2*, Steve talks about said game where you spread disease, and, yet again, we get soundly beaten by readers in a *Team Fortress 2* face-off.

Now I'm off to play more *Top Spinner*, because my mind can't comprehend much else.

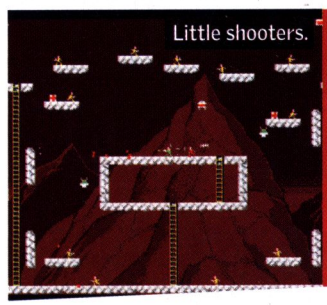
Ed Zitron

Ed Zitron, disc editor

94 Demo pages
A siege in space with crazy contraptions



96 News
FreeSpace 2? For free? Get out of town!



98 Freeware
Boss Hogarty loves a bit of free stuff

100 Play
Play *Half-Life 2* in the stars, and then pop in on *Mass Effect*...

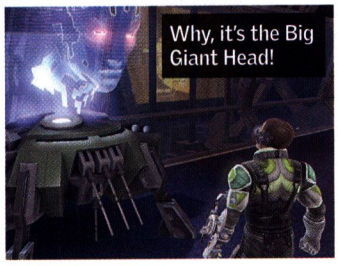
102 Online Zone
I'll shoot you to keep your mouth shut!

PCZONE FREE-O-METER

0 HOURS

932.2 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Demos

Kill insects with *Ed Zitron*

SPACE SIEGE

Stop killing my entire species plz

WEBSITE spacesiege.com

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.

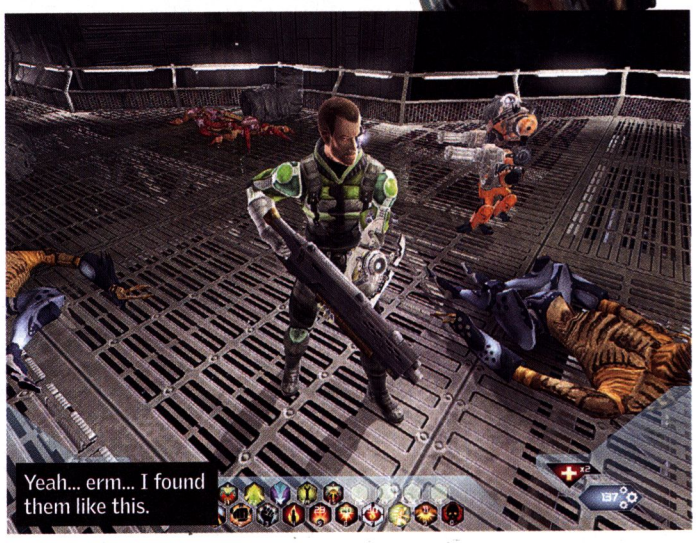
IF YOU'RE HAVING a siege in space, then you'll have to think twice about traditional siege machines. The lack of gravity makes boiling oil an absolute nightmare to tip onto people and makes catapults and trebuchets useless, while without a solid reference point, you're never sure if you're climbing the ladder, or simply pushing it down.

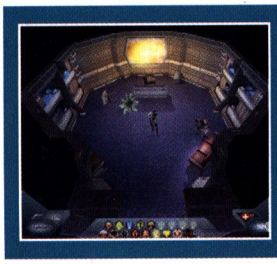
Luckily, in *Space Siege*, you're not actually under siege, so you don't have to worry about any of that. All you have to do is run around, kill all the filthy Kerak invaders, find out why they're intent on wiping out humans, plug metal eyeballs into your face, become best friends with a robot, and find out what it is that's making everyone in the ship go mental.

This demo is just the opening act of the game, but you'll get a taster of the wide range of weaponry you'll see in the title, before you're coerced onto the train that'll take you to the Cold Sleepy Room (stupid for 'Cryostasis Chambers').

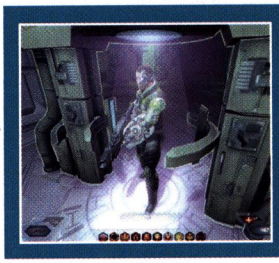
Here's a secret tip – if you want to make it last longer, just stand outside the train shooting things forever. This is one of the rare areas where the aliens will continually respawn, so you've actually got hundreds of hours of gameplay right there.

In all seriousness, *Space Siege* is one of the finer and more enjoyable action-blasters we've played through in the past few years, and while it's hardly going to set the world alight, it's definitely worth your readies in times of boredom.

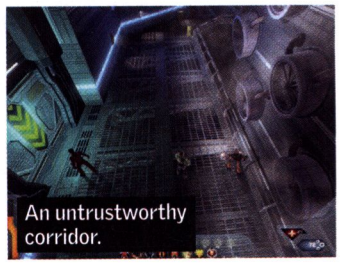




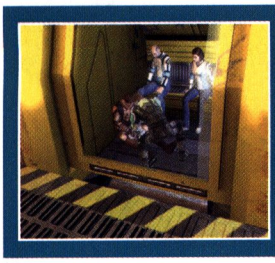
ROOMS
Space Siege is linear, but there are plenty of rooms you can go into. These are an excellent diversion from the game's many corridors, boxes, alien death-walkers, explosions, and moments of hammy histrionics.



SAVE CHAMBER
Pop into one of these, and you'll save your game. And any aliens you kill before you die stay dead. So even people who are really shit at shooters can progress! They also heal you, which is useful in some of the tougher areas.



YOU'LL SEE STUFF LIKE THIS...



SANDMAN EXPRESS
When you get onto this train, it's bye-bo time for Seth. What future awaits him, when he wakes? Bet you £50 it involves aliens. Please note that we won't pay you if we're wrong. We're not even going to bother giving you T&C's.

DON'T CROWD ME, FANS
If you find yourself surrounded, simply let rip with your energy blast. It'll damage everyone and slow them down, allowing an escape. Your close-combat moves are useful in a tight fix.

CRAZY MACHINES 2

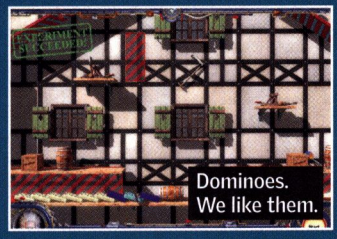
The son of *The Incredible Machine*

WEBSITE crazymachinesgame.com

WE'RE NOT USUALLY ones to gush, but *Crazy Machines 2* (issue 197, 82%) was a game we'd been waiting a while for. With its excellent physics engine and creativity in big lumps, we can't help loving this game, and thus we're happy to give you a chance to play it.

Each level has you organising a set of items on a level so they complete a specific objective, such as shooting a balloon with an arrow or making a ball bounce through a hoop. It's addictive and ridiculous, so give it a try. It's how Dyson started off you know.

Far off in the distance – a puzzle!


Dominoes. We like them.

GEARS OF WHAT?

SQUEAKY WHEEL
Pay attention to where you place belts and gears to get the most out of each power source.

BATTERY ACID
Batteries are a limited power source, but they can give bursts of energy to conveyor belts.

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

Get your motor gunning www.frontlines.com

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF *War* wasn't exactly the most original shooter we've ever played, but this multiplayer demo is a chunk of the best part of the game – playing with and shooting other people. A hell of a lot of people are playing this online-only demo, and you'll be surprised how many are able to put together an intelligent conversation and use tactics.

This demo should also give you a taste for the classes, the vehicles, and the slight peculiarities of *Frontlines* itself.

Select your class and kick some arse.

Shooting options

Some of the ways to kill people in *Frontlines*

SNIPER
You can be a Sniper and snipe things. Except tanks. Sniping a tank is just stupid.

ANTI-VEHICLE
This chap can blow up vehicles with his rocket launcher. And anyone standing close to a wall if he misses.

SPECIAL OPS
Some call them the 'wasps of war', because they're fast, dangerous and sharp-shooting monsters. And they like picnics.

WARNING!
If things start going red, hide immediately. A few seconds after your screen starts doing this, you die.

DISC COMPETITION

WIN! One of five copies of *Space Siege*!

Space Siege **scored 83% in issue 198 with its intuitive, satisfying combat, interesting storyline and glitzy graphics, so we've been kind enough to secure five lucky readers a copy of SEGA and Gas Powered Games' excellent game.**

We like it almost as much as the original *Dungeon Siege*, and we've put the demo on the disc so that you can see just how much fun it was to play.

If you're interested in winning a copy, put this issue's DVD into your PC on Side 1 and click 'Disc Competition.' The entry deadline is the 8 October. Terms and conditions can be found at www.snipurl.com/futuretc. Please include your address in your reply.

PCZONE ON THE DVD

BEST OF THE REST

CODE OF HONOR 2: CONSPIRACY ISLAND
WEBSITE codeofhonor2game.com
Yet another City Interactive-published FPS, *COH2* has you playing as a French Foreign Legion commando trying to stop an impending nuclear disaster. Watch out, this could be a barn-burner.

E3 MOVIE BLOWOUT
WEBSITE e3expo.com
This month we have possibly the most movies we've ever put on a disc, and we've done our darndest to get you some fine, hi-def gameplay footage, trailers and in-game movies of the finest that they had to show at the expo.

PRO CYCLING MANAGER – TOUR DE FRANCE 2008
WEBSITE cycling-manager.com/en
While we can't say we're thrilled at the prospect of managing cyclists, people out there want to. So if you've been on the fence about whether you're one of these people, give this demo a go.

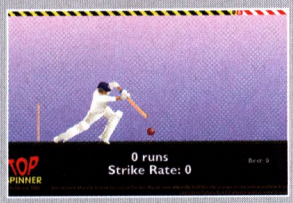
ETERNAL SILENCE
WEBSITE eternal-silence.net
A scarily detailed and immense online-only mod for *Half-Life 2* that combines the best bits of *FreeSpace*, *X-Wing* and their ilk into a wonderful mod that nobody plays enough. Hence we've put it on the disc. Play it!

SNIPPETS

TIME LIMIT

WEBSITE snipurl.com/timelimitzip

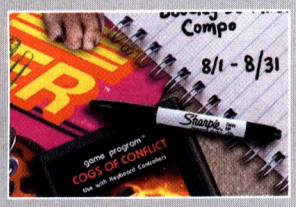
Locking up your entire desktop, this game has you walking through crowds and punching pedestrians, throwing them into the side of your screen. This link leads directly to a Zip file. Because the site's in Japanese and you get easily confused.



HOWZAT!

WEBSITE foddy.net/cricket.html

The horribly addictive *Top Spinner* challenges you to whack cricket balls into score areas as many times as possible without getting out. You need a grasp of rhythm, physics, and the ability to turn off your sound, as the effects are annoying.



DEMAKES DEBUT

WEBSITE snipurl.com/demakecomp

TIGSource have put together another competition, challenging freeware devs to 'demake' popular titles in the style of old games. No use of original game assets or names, though, so expect titles like *Cogs of Conflict*.

FREESPACE 2: OPEN SOURCE

It's been out for a while, but still needs your love

WEBSITE scp.indiegames.us

WHILE SOME MAY remember *FreeSpace 2*, we won't be surprised if some don't. It was a game doomed to obscurity by the mysteries of time, and because of Interplay's sale of Volition to THQ.

In 2002 Volition released the source code to the world, and it's spawned various mods such as *Babylon 5: I've Found Her* (a total conversion based on the TV series's backstory – ifh.firstones.com) and *Beyond the Red Line* (based on Ronald D Moore's revamped *Battlestar Galactica* – game-warden.com/bsg), while owners of the original can still upgrade and play *FS2*'s fantastic main campaign. The excellent work that people have done to make the core game graphically capable in today's gaming climate is utterly incredible, and more importantly totally free for anyone with an internet connection.

In *FreeSpace 2* you play a rookie pilot in the Galactic Terran-Vasudan Alliance, fighting against the annoyingly whiny Neo-Terran Front terrorists and the angry red Shivans. It's happily playable with a mouse, but to get the feel for the speed and immerse yourself in the space combat, you'll probably want to invest in a good joystick. Though, to be fair, the top class ones in 1999 are probably a tenner now.

You can control attack wings and make several ships bundle the bigger corvettes.

The thing that sets apart *FreeSpace 2* from the rest of the genre is the scale of the thing – you're fighting against gigantic ships that make you look like a giblet in comparison to their mighty guns, and, yes, you have to blow them up. You both fight against and alongside these monstrosities, and it makes the whole experience that bit more exhilarating. And it's one of the tightest space combat sims ever. While you still require the original *FS2* to play the original campaign, it's easily tracked down from online retailers.

"You fight against gigantic ships that make you look like a giblet"

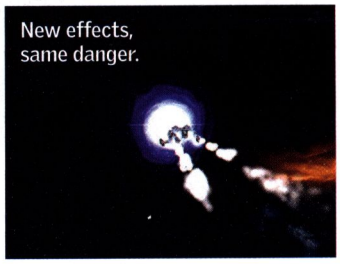
The *FS2* Source Code Project has led to a great deal of the engine being spruced up, with all kinds of shaders, mipmapping and texture upgrades that bring it about as far up to date as the engine can handle. Installing it is as simple as downloading a specialised loader that the project developers have created, with which you can select all the different bits and bobs you'd want added to the game, including some excellent map packs and the ability to play the original *FreeSpace* using *FS2*'s engine.

The *FS2* SCP site includes several tutorials for customising the game for your system, as it can be a bit fiddly when you first start out to make it look perfect, but once you've learned the ropes, you can look forward to playing one of the greatest space games of all time with a glorious up-to-date sheen.

Our hats are off to Edward Gardner and the rest of the *FS2* SCP team – good work people.

Sadly, we can't put *FS2* on the disc for you, so you'll have to get it directly using the project's downloader program from the FS2 SCP website.

In space, nobody can hear you have a quick nap.


New effects, same danger.

Out of my way, capital ship!

HELLO, PANDA

Freeware game combines *Teletubbies*, pandas and *Kill Bill*

WEBSITE snipurl.com/hellopanda

THE GREAT THING about people making things for free is they're not constrained by publishers saying that their ideas are too ridiculous for the prime time. Hence freeware developers like GPTouch Inc can create games like *Hello Panda*, based on the tale of a crack squad of murderous female criminal pandas, that are hell-bent on stealing The Son Of The Sun, a painting that somehow hides a deadly weapon that they want to use for their own dastardly deeds.

Manic bear-on-robot action.

Hello, Athena.

Hello Panda plays somewhat like *Ikaruga*, with enemies dropping from the top of the screen and your panda shooting upwards. You constantly collect blood, which can either be used to upgrade your main weapon or to power your secondary, more powerful weapons. It's got the same controlled chaos as any number of hardcore Japanese shooters, but with unlimited continues and the most utterly insane story we've ever seen.

Even though a great deal of the game is utterly weird, the production values and tweaking of the controls make *Hello Panda* shine brightly amongst available freeware shooters. That, and it has the greatest tagline in history: "What colour is panda? White, black, and red."

BRING A FRIEND BACK TO WOW, GET A REWARD

Blizzard entices players with triple XP, zhevras and more...

WEBSITE legendsofnorrath.station.sony.com

THOUGH MANY MMO fans have probably at least one level 70 character by now in *WOW*, anyone feeling like they've been left behind will find themselves able to level quicker with the refer-a-friend program.

If you refer somebody from the account management section of the *WOW* website, and they buy two months' of time, when you group with them you get a free zhevra mount; triple experience; and a level for another character each time the new recruit gains two.

This is a system that's receiving a great deal of praise, and it's Blizzard's devious way of getting people back grinding.

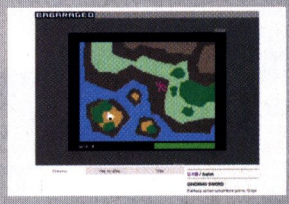
Ride your zevhra to level 70.

SNIPPETS

SPACE COMMANDER FRASIER CRANE

WEBSITE frasier.drule.net

Drule, one of the developers of *Barkley: Shut Up And Jam Gaiden*, is now working on freeware shooter *Space Commander Frasier Crane*. Check Freeplay News next month for a huge interview with Drule and the rest of the TOG guys.

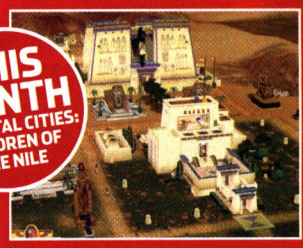


GINORMOUS BLADE

WEBSITE /snipurl.com/ginormo

The retro-styled RPG grinder has grown and grown, and has now become a persistent Flash game where you click repeatedly on monsters with your gigantic sword. It's absolutely brilliant, so give it a go.

Bug-Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE

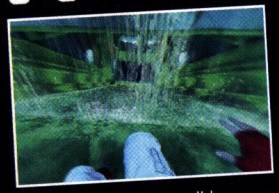
"Fixed children sometimes skating instead of walking."

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

MIRROR'S EDGE

DICE's parkour-palooza is shaping up into an incredibly fluid game, with all kinds of running, jumping and high-kicking that we'd never expect from a first-person game. This movie is almost entirely made up of in-game footage, too, so take a look on the disc...

Faith hates doors so much that she punches them open.


She's a big fan of waterslides.

Not men, though. She's what we in the business call a man-chopper.

Helicopters? She loves 'em. But don't tell her there's a man in the

Freeware

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Steve Hogarty **spreads freedom and free games**

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the internet has to offer. So dedicated are we, that to deliver less than absolute perfection would cause us to choke on our own shame-inspired vomit. This month, explore a rickety old space station, stand on some real dead people, exterminate mankind, exterminate another, smaller group of men, drop a totem and chop off your legs. Hooray!

DERELICT

System Shock lives on in this ambitious tactical shooter

DEVELOPER Erik Hogan
WEBSITE earok.blogspot.com

WHEN A CAT slips a dead pigeon into your mouth as you sleep, you've no choice but to thank the cat for what is frankly an ill thought-out gift. Them's the rules. Similarly, if you're handed a free tactical FPS you've no choice but to listen to the funny voice acting and think "Well at least they're trying" as you fumble for the volume control.

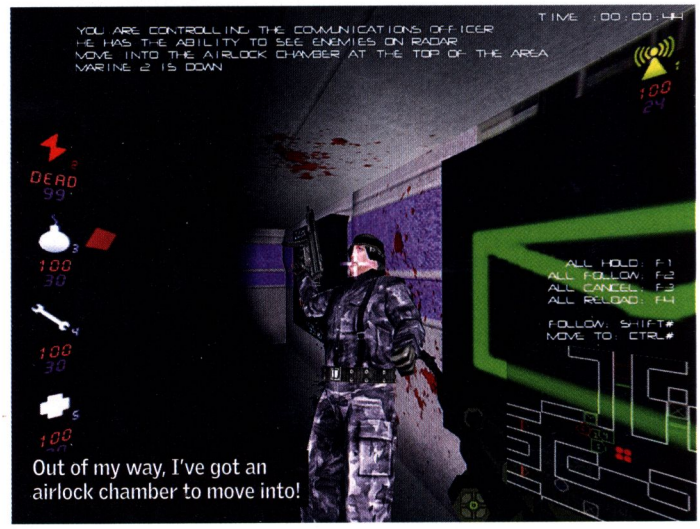
Derelict is a *System Shock 2*-aping tactical shooter, pitching you into an abandoned space station where demons and mutants have torn through the station and left pieces of astronaut strewn about the corridors, cargo bays and toilets. You control one of a unit of five marines, from the communications officer through to a medic and engineer.

Basic commands can be issued, so you've got your 'stop' and 'go here' orders where you'd expect them. The number keys flip you between your men, with the ultimate aim being to keep them in tactically aware positions. That is, have them all facing down different corridors while a single marine unlocks a door, hacks a terminal, blasts through some debris, or heals his colleagues.

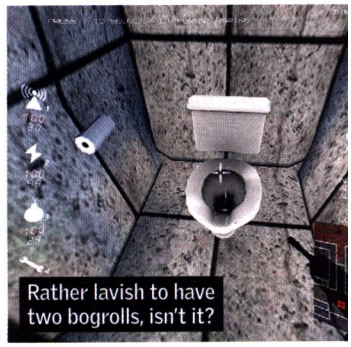
As easy as that may sound, the unending flurry of demons (naked demons, nobody ever stops to wonder why demons don't wear clothes) makes *Derelict* a terribly difficult game. They've got spawn points, the buggers, temporal anomalies from which they spew. It's these rifts that you've got to make sure never to turn your back on.

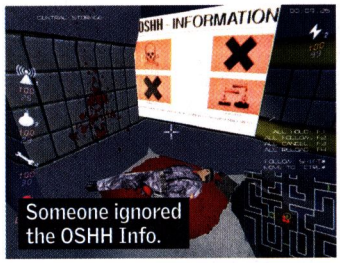
In a shocking example of under-funding, only the communications officer has the necessary equipment to locate the enemy on his HUD map, making him the most valuable member of the team. Otherwise, our old friend the *Aliens*-style proximity detector emits faster and faster bleeps as the demonic hellmen come at you from the dark. *Derelict* is a surprisingly scary game, the single-mindedness of the enemy AI (that uncanny desire to run straight at you, and to hell with trivial things like gunfire) adding to the terror. The music plays its part too, all ominous and edgy.

And you've got to love amateur voicework, which earnestly attempt to give the marines display disparate personalities through accents. It's not easy for a bunch of unpaid actors to put together terrified screams, whelps and shouting matches on a shoestring budget, and considering how technically impressive *Derelict* is, we can't complain. Well, we could, but then we'd be dicks.

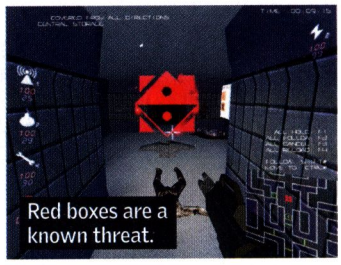


Out of my way, I've got an airlock chamber to move into!

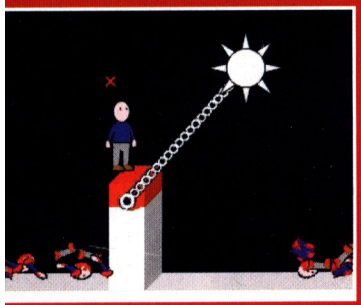

Rather lavish to have two bogrolls, isn't it?



Someone ignored the OSHH Info.


Red boxes are a known threat.

"The single-mindedness of the enemy AI adds to the terror"



DEATHS: DIE ANOTHER DAY

DEVELOPER Jesse Venbrux
WEBSITE snipurl.com/yoyodeaths

AN EXPERIMENTAL PLATFORMER in which the deaths of the previous 50 players are displayed in the form of shattered corpses littered about the level, *Deaths* is an interesting project from Freeware's favourite dude, Jesse Venbrux. It is, in itself, a fairly boring (some might even say featureless, repetitive and rigid) platformer, with spinning spiked balls on chains, regular spikes, and spikes that fire themselves at you. But the premise is enough to make you persevere, the exact point of a previous death is marked with a cross, but the means of death is unclear. Spot a bloody mess under some spikes, and you can be fairly sure those spikes are going to come down to greet you. On some occasions you can even walk along the bodies of dead players to avoid death. It's a clever and original idea we'd love to see expanded upon, even though the game itself is bums.

DESTRUCTIVATOR

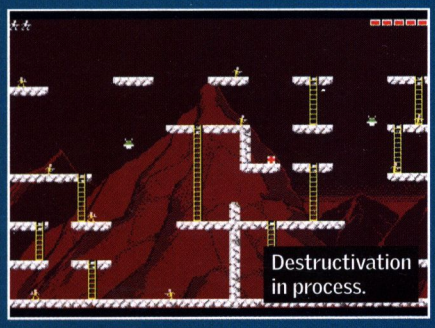
When all else fails, destructivate

DEVELOPER Pug Fugly Games **WEBSITE** www.pugfuglygames.com

JUMPING AND FIRING a gun are the only two things worth doing these days. That and climbing up ladders. At a push, I suppose going back down ladders and ducking is acceptable.

Such a tiny selection of moves makes *Destructivator* a charming platformer: a shooter in which you must clear the screen of enemies before moving on.

If a pixelly enemy trains his gun on you, a laser beam appears that brightens as he prepares to pull the trigger. This visual cue gives you time to duck and avoid the shot.



Destructivation in process.

As the game progresses, your ability to only shoot left and right becomes a terrifying prohibition, especially as some enemies can shoot at any angle. Madly jumping becomes the best way to avoid being shot.

It's no *Bionic Commando*, but *Destructivator* is great retro gaming.

HOW MANY...

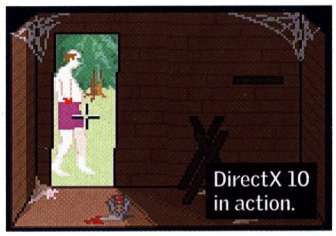
Limbs does it take to change a lightbulb...

DEVELOPER Aki Ahonen **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/howmanygame

THOUGH IT'S EASY to groan at the slew of adventure games that tirelessly run over the same ground, eking out that exhausted style of mundane humour in which a dreary eyed nobody wryly informs you that he doesn't want to put his eye against a lampshade because you clicked in the wrong place, *How Many...* bucks tradition by having the emotionless antagonist maimed and forced to go about his business missing half a leg.

With only two screens, a kitchen and a shed, *How Many...* is less about solving some great overarching puzzle, and more about preserving as many of your character's limbs as possible.

Or, if you enjoy having fun, trying to get him as bloodied-up as his physical form allows before he succumbs to death's warm embrace.



DirectX 10 in action.

That lamp really tied the room together.

PANDEMIC 2

What's that disease where your stomach falls out your arse?

DEVELOPER Dark Realm Studios **WEBSITE** crazymonkeygames.com/Pandemic-2.html

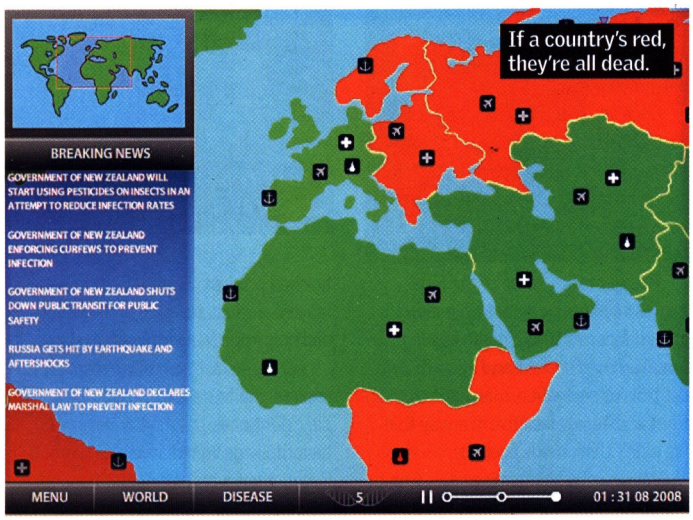
EVER WONDERED WHAT it would be like to be HIV? Ever stopped mid-shower, collapsed to the floor in a naked wet heap and gasped, "Oh god, what if I am SARS?" Well, stop doing both of those things right now. *Pandemic 2* is a strategy game in which you design a disease and choose how to evolve it, evade being cured, and spread across the world.

The aim is to wipe out mankind by balancing your disease's various attributes. Nasty symptoms increase lethality, but also visibility, which in turn allows your disease to be more quickly spotted and the affected areas quarantined. Seaports and airports may be closed, harshly reducing your ability to infect new populations, while hospitals and water stations provide excellent means of passing your filthy little sickness about the place. As more and more people succumb to your disease you earn evolution points, which can be spent on more heinous symptoms or useful resistances.

Every region has a number of safeguards you must be careful to avoid triggering. For instance Madagascar, a panicky island with only a seaport leading to it, is the toughest place to infect, as they'll shut their borders at the drop of a hatful of vomit.

Personally I like infecting everybody, and then all of a sudden evolving into a type of bacteria that makes everybody shit themselves. Sadly, it's never that easy in *Pandemic* to spread yourself everywhere, and without a 3D interface to make yourself a physical manifestation of angry diarrhoea, you'll never live out that dream. However, you will spend hours and hours playing a simple-looking, yet deviously addictive, strategy game with an original concept.

As unpleasant as it sounds.



If a country's red, they're all dead.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

TOTEM DESTROYER

DEVELOPER Gabriel Ochsenhofer
WEBSITE snipurl.com/totemdestroyer

MORE THINGS SHOULD be like Jenga. I daresay everything should be Jenga-like by nature. *Totem Destroyer* is just like Jenga, a game in which you've got to delete a number of blocks from a teetering tower without letting the totem on it fall to the ground.

Undeletable black blocks and slippery green blocks are as complex as the game gets, beyond that you'll be slipping blocks from beneath ever more elaborate constructions, most likely sending the idol plummeting.

Any contact with the earth, even with the gentlest of landings, will force you to retry, but a little bit of forward planning will ensure the totem's safety. I now eat my breakfast atop a stack of bricks, by way of celebration.

Niner, Niner, we've got lag incoming.

ETERNAL SILENCE

We're erasing you, and we're happy

WEBSITE eternal-silence.net **MOD FOR** *Half-Life 2*

IF YOU HAVE experienced *FreeSpace 2*, then you'll feel right at home in the airtight, bug-free and enjoyable world of *Eternal Silence*, one of the most complete modifications for *Half-Life 2* of recent times. The goal in this online game is to take down the other side's corvettes (which are slightly bigger than your craft) as well as their capital ships: gigantic spacecraft that you have to board with a squad of fellow soldiers.

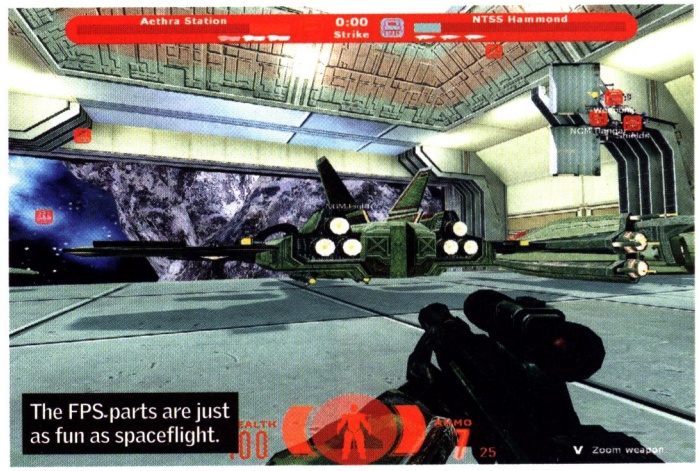
The game is broken into two separate chunks. You'll start each map on foot, jumping into your craft (be it a bomber, a fighter or a troop-carrying gunship) and flying into space and taking on or dodging other craft. There are distinct phases too, that require you to either take out the other team's corvettes, attack (and enter) their capital ship, or defend your own.

Check out my ride.

Once you're inside their capital ship, it's much like *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, blowing up objectives and skirmishing against throngs of defenders, with a team of soldiers (to shoot things) and hackers (to break into things).

This game has some of the most engrossing space combat ever seen in mod form, as the *ES* team has tweaked both on-foot and in-craft controls to perfection, making them tight and hugely intuitive in a way that we didn't think mods could be.

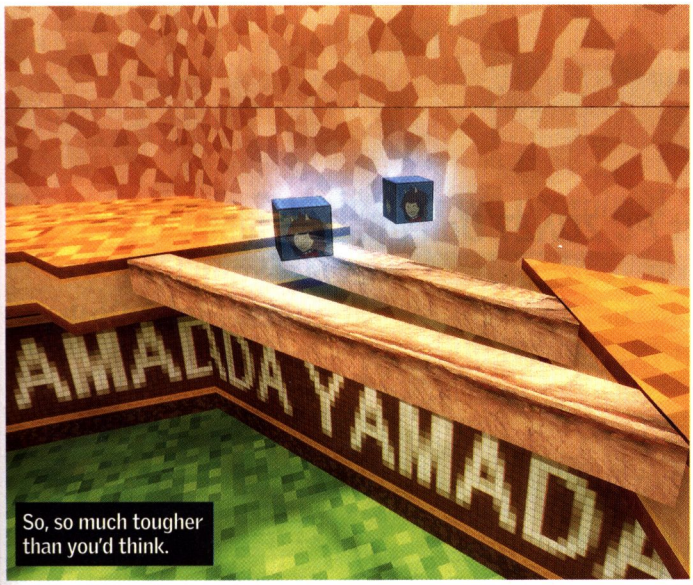
While we're able to give most free-to-play things amnesty from the sheen of a finished product, *Eternal Silence* is a quality product, through and through, and only improves with each update.



The FPS parts are just as fun as spaceflight.

For these last words, we're going to implore you to get on *Eternal Silence* and play, right now. It's sharply developed, beautifully designed and utterly excellent. Because we want everybody playing it we've put it on this month's disc. But it's being worked on all the time so keep checking its website for changes, and we'll have an interview with the developers in the coming months.

And if you haven't played *FreeSpace 2*, it's now available for free from the Source Code Project (scp.indiegames.us), and we've gone into exhaustive detail about it on page 96. PCZ



So, so much tougher than you'd think.

PERFECT STRIDE CONTINUUM

An exercise in futility

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/perfect-stride-continuum **MOD FOR** *Half-Life 2*

BALLET IS THE MOST under-represented art form in *Half-Life 2* mods, according to a survey we just did with ourselves, and thus it's nice to see this tiny mod – weighing in at just under 6MB – bigs up one of the most challenging, yet girly, forms of dance.

You control your dancer by holding the strafe keys and turning, slowly, to build momentum, to eventually make leaps and grab boxes that will, when enough of them are collected, unlock more places to dance. This is fiendishly difficult, because the speed needed to make jumps is ridiculously fast, and the faster you go, the less control you have.

Weaving around the levels needs practice, but once you've mastered the speed at which you turn and get an idea of the size of the arena, you'll find yourself leaping about like a frilly dressed pansy in no time. PCZ

APPELTAART

The product of a cidered-up mind

WEBSITE appeltaartmod.com **MOD FOR** *Half-Life 2*

***APPELTAART* IS ONE** of those tiny *Half-Life 2* single-player mods that exudes charm under its rough edges. It sets the tone perfectly in the first few seconds, with a terribly voiced yet somehow funny G-man telling you to wake up and smell the apple pie, before running away in a cloud of billowing smoke. Naturally, you can deliberately still see him running away as it clears.

Appeltaart is a fun, incredibly silly single-player addition to *HL2*, with a few additional models, monsters and weapons to boot. It's even got series of makeshift achievements, as well as some kind of storyline, though good luck making head, tail, or ear of it. PCZ

This is going to take some expert lying.

BRING DOWN THE SKY

Never trust a terrorist with four eyes...

WEBSITE masseffect.bioware.com **OFFICIAL UPDATE FOR** *Mass Effect*

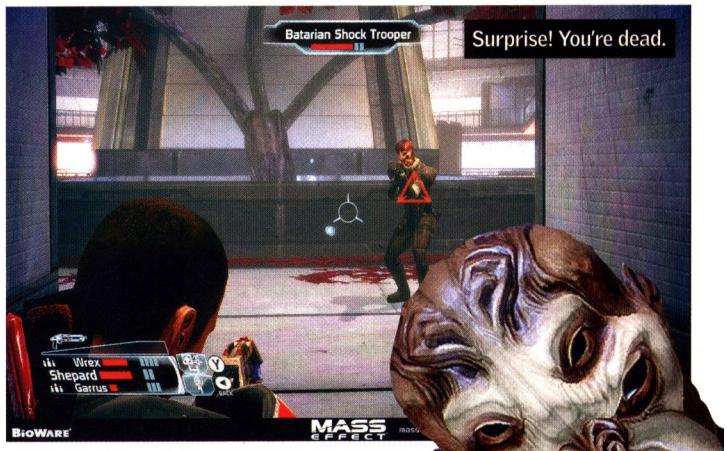
BIOWARE'S EPIC SPACE opera *Mass Effect* is one of our games of the year, so it's with a girly squeal of delight that we point out that the company has now released a mini-expansion, *Bring Down The Sky*. And best of all, you won't have to cough up the £3.40 that Xbox 360 owners had to (you may now snort with derisive superiority).

Bring Down The Sky is set on a mobile asteroid station that has been hijacked by a group of Batarians – a brand-new four-eyed alien addition to the *Mass Effect* universe – who arrived with their slavering canine/reptile pets, the Varren, that have an attack even more vicious than Rod Hull and Emu.

These multi-occular terrorists/freedom fighters are planning on crashing the asteroid, and numerous unfortunate hostages, into the planet Terra Nova below, resulting in the deaths of billions and a sizeable clean-up bill.

Once you access the adventure using the Galactic Map, it's a hugely enjoyable romp around the rocky environment, with Commander Shepard and chums shutting down four giant fusion torches, blasting turrets, avoiding proximity mines and firefighting with the Batarians.

Bring Down The Sky is rather on the short side at around 90 minutes, but who can really complain about a great free addition to the excellent *Mass Effect* from BioWare themselves? Get it now. PCZ



Online Zone

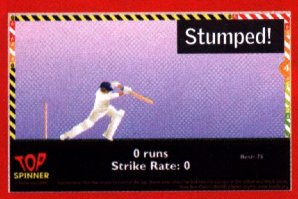
Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just visit pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!

In On the Blog this month we've got a nest of freeware games for you. In on the Forums we've got a discussion about the dwindling shelving crisis happening across the country. The Supertest tackles the topic on everybody's tits: what game has the best Yorkshire accents? Fight Club ignores our desire to play *Call of Duty 4*, and Zone Chat shows our reaction to not being named as part of the *PC Gamer* *hackspit* Showdown.

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

FIRST, AN APOLOGY. In last month's On The Blog we promised, nay, testified to the existence of, a blog in which we made available our last 20 Backpage features, from the *'Allo 'Allo* MMO to our piss-take of a certain other PC magazine's redesign last year. Unfortunately, we have to check though a bunch of legal (we won't dance around the word) shite, before we can give you the stuff. It'll turn up as soon as we can clear it with at least four suits and their pet lepers (sorry... lawyers). Promise.

Meanwhile, here's what you missed on the blog this month. Freeware-hound Steve Hogarty was gracious enough to link to a roster of games he hasn't had the gumption to include in *PC ZONE*'s monthly Freeware section – including an addictive one about cricket. Check it out, and the rest of our blogs, on the website!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Dwindling shelf crisis in Hull?

It's getting to be a pain even finding PC games in Hull, outside of the biggest town centre stores.

All of the big supermarkets have removed PC games in favour of console formats.

Is this becoming commonplace, or just typical of Hull? I can't bear the thought of having to master those damn console handsets – I like the keyboard/mouse mix just fine!

abbamanic

Both my local Tesco and Morrisons still stock PC games, although in Tesco they're not supported to the same level as the Wii and Xbox 360 selections they have in there. Morrisons' prices were especially cheap, though, with games like *STALKER* and *Supreme Commander*, among a few others, going for £5.99.

SunScramble

My local ASDA does PC games. Buying games in supermarkets does seem to be pot luck; sometimes you can find amazing bargains, others ridiculous rip-offs.

cjw101

All the shops around me have given up hope on PC games. Tesco now has a postage stamp of a shelf, ASDA is the same and HMV is going that way. GAME is the only one that's trying, saying that its getting smaller by the day. How dare they give a PSP more shelf space!

shakermaker07

All of that's irrelevant to us tech-savvy PC gamers, though, with both prices and availability being so much better on several websites I can think of. Unless you don't have a letterbox cut into your front door.

SunScramble

Damn and I thought that was some a cat flap for very flat cats. Why oh why did I block it off...

shlobadov

Do you buy games from Tesco? What is the flattest cat you've ever seen (not counting road-killed felines)? Let us know by visiting our forum at pczone.co.uk

PODCAST SUPERTEST
THE UNION JACK OFF

The most British-ish-est games around

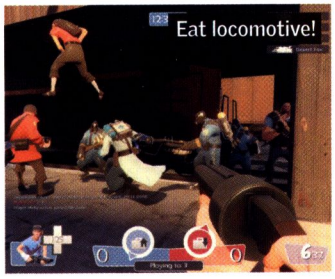
FIGHT CLUB

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

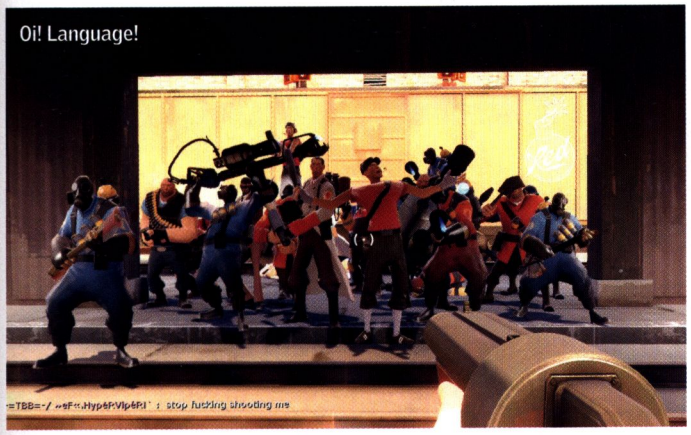
Team Fortress 2 again, like we promised

WE'RE VERY BUSY people you know, tearing through the stratosphere in our Learjets, bellowing at your favourite games developers with megaphones until they give us the information we demand. But once a month we take the time to have an online scrap with the readers, out of the goodness of our hearts.

This month's Fight Club was a chatty one, with no less than five PC ZONE readers taking to their microphones and whispering hushed nothings at us from afar. *Team Fortress 2* served up some delicious maps, on which fights were fought, inexplicable victories were won, and reader Blade (or «~ BLaDé ~» xXx(r) as he likes to be known) earned a mention through incessant badgering. Somebody shouted "we're going to be famous", but we forget who. Also Wacky Wombat was there.



Join our Steam Community group at www.steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz to be alerted of future Fight Clubs.

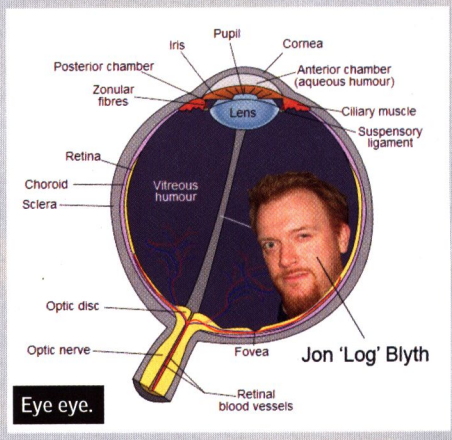


ZONE CHAT

Inaccurate team silhouettes abound

EVER STICK YOUR finger in your eye and notice a black spot appear in your peripheral vision? That's us. We're in your retina, and we don't want to alarm you, but we're naked.

The only way to get us out of there is to come chat with us at Zone Chat, our monthly chatathon in which readers and writers alike speak our brains about games and movies and life.



Eye eye.

This month's Zone Chat focused on the upcoming *PC Gamer* *hackspit* Showdown, an event we'll be at even though the bloody website doesn't even mention us. If you were there you would've heard us whining! Thoughts then turned how we should sabotage the event. Should we dress up as prostitutes and claim that we've been ordered by our rival magazine? Some of you thought so. Others said pouring flagons of coffee on keyboards would be in order. Maybe we'll just sit there obediently and play games. Who knows? It might be fun!

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're 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

1. **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
2. **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
3. **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
4. **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
5. **ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk
6. **CALL OF DUTY 4**
Coming soon
7. **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
8. **TEAM FORTRESS 2**
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

FIRST OFF, THE Supertest is now a subset of the PCZ podcast, which is both on the DVD and online. Check the blog for details.

Second off, we're not talking about games from British developers, but more about games that emanate that unique British mentality, whether it be the rubbish Renaissance Fair kind or Union Jack waving. Actually, let's just say what we're thinking – this is a Supertest about games with northern accents and stuff.

As such, *Fable* was the first thing to fall from our mouths. We gabbled about the Black Country leanings throughout while Will said "alright moi luvvur" about three times. From there conversation moved to *Hellgate: London*, a game with no British soul. As per usual the Discworld point-and-click was brought up for dissection to boot.

Warhammer Online was the inspiration for the Supertest to begin with, its flavour of fantasy bringing roleplaying more in line with traditional British roots than silly old American *World of Warcraft*.

Vault Boy. Will loves him.

Retro zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback of the Month

Gimme those...

GOOD OLD GAMES

Tell Elton it's a sacrifice.

Citizen Kabuto: funny and awesome.

NORMALLY WE HAVE to scratch around for a memory on this page. But this month, we've been slapped flat in the face with an awesome wall of nostalgia. Usually, we have to skirt around issues of legality and twiddle our hair at the idea of being forced into piracy by our love of retro games. This month, we've got an upcoming legitimate and thrilling new service.

Good Old Games (gog.com) is something you'd never be cheeky enough to ask for – a bank of critically acclaimed games from ages past, fixed up to work with modern operating systems, stripped of restrictive DRM, and sold for about £3.

Due for an official launch in the coming months, GOG lacks a resource-scoffing portal interface, tax is included in the paltry price (unlike *Steam*, which slaps on a bonus percentage, in line with the US practice of not advertising prices with sales tax included). The website is clean, easy, friendly and every game you buy has its own forum. So you can have another window open giving a gurgling commentary about how you're up to your knees in delicious nostalgia.

We're completely aware that this sounds like some kind of hokey rewrite of a press release, but we've tried our best to come up with a negative aspect to GOG, and there simply isn't one – apart from the fact that old games are a finite resource, and we might wear out the past. If you can't get excited about one of the most exciting modern developments in PC gaming, you should take a bath with a toaster.

Let's hope GOG's generosity doesn't come back to bite them, in a world where torrents have made everyone feel entitled to everything for free.

But who?

CD Projekt are the publishing team behind Good Old Games. A Polish producer, they've always been at the forefront of technology – bringing CD-ROM games to an unwilling industry back in the '90s. They're best known lately for *The Witcher* and – in that spirit of innovation – the accompanying *Versus* webgame.

The publishers who've signed up to the service so far include Codemasters (with *Colin McRae's Rally 2005* being one of the most recent releases), and Interplay (*Fallout*) who come kit and cabodle with Shiny games like *Sacrifice* and *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*. During the beta, the focus appears to be on getting more and more games into the collection.

gog.com
Keep going there, every day until it opens. And when it opens, buy everything they've got.

Six of the best *All this lot'll set you back under twenty quid*

SACRIFICE
A game of soul harvesting and altar desecration – with James the Earthworm as one of the gods...

FALLOUT
Both *Fallout* games and the *Tactics* game are in the collection, for just £3 each. Stop vibrating, sir.

EARTHWORM JIM 3D
So what if it only scored 44, back in Issue 87? Swap those numbers around and it's nearly a classic!

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO
A comical game with excellent voices and action like *Tribes: Vengeance*.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT
The model of realism, and perfectly timed to cash in on its sequel's hype.

MDK
"What does that stand for?" asked a million parents. "Mother's delicate kiss," replied a million children.

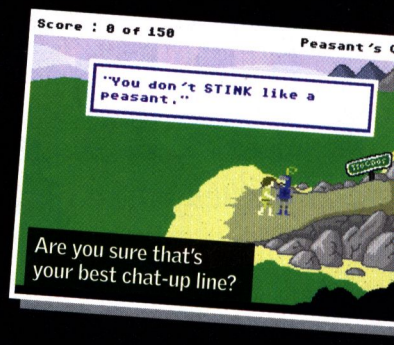
Now & Then

STRONGBAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE vs PEASANT'S QUEST

Coupons – friend to the thrifty hooded villain.

IF THERE WAS one guarantee that *Strong Bad* was going to be brilliant, it's the fact that the guys behind *Homestar Runner* have been making free, and brilliant, comedy games for years. A lot of them are throwaway one-trick ponies with no reason to return after you've gleaned yer chuckles, but *Peasant's Quest* was the trick pony equivalent of Penn & Teller. Most of the games are on the Homestar site, but there are a few that are exclusive to the Videlectrix homepage.

While you're at the Videlectrix site, make sure that you play *Where's An Egg?* – a game that feels exactly like playing *Captain Blood* – and the brilliantly shit text-only adventure, *Thy Dungeonman II*. Even if you hate *Strong Bad's* adventure, their free stuff is worth the money.



Are you sure that's your best chat-up line?

Play it!

Have you got a popular internet browser?

Join us on an odyssey of the obvious, as we try to pad out the concept of "going to a website" to fit our four-point template! Will we manage to avoid mentioning the URLs until point four? Wait and see!

1. Enter your house. Be sure to shake off your umbrella outside, so as not to anger your wife, who has spent all day training the dog to hate you.
2. If you are the lady of the house, tip-toe past the room in which your useless husband is watching *A Touch of Frost* with one hand in his crackers.
3. If you live with friends, or alone – approach your computer with the bold confidence of someone whose life is still their own.
4. Get on the internet and go to homestarrunner.com/games.html. Videlectrix have their own site, too – that's found at videlectrix.com.

Mameframe VANGUARD

ALTHOUGH THE OVERSIZED cabinet and preponderance of buttons put people in mind of the previous year's *Defender*, *Vanguard* was groundbreaking in many ways – it featured progress along a continuous level towards a boss, paving the way for *Gradius*. It also scrolled in more than one direction, setting up the 360° action of 1982's *Time Pilot* and *Sinistar*. SNK's first colour game, *Vanguard* introduced the multiple fire directions that would inspire *Robotron* and *Smash TV* in years to come.

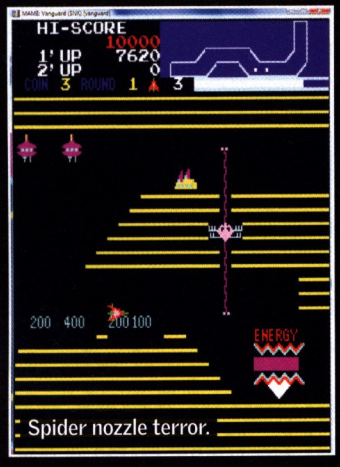
You had to slog through an everyday couple of space levels to see them, but SNK took advantage of the 64 colours available to them, with some brightly coloured and graphically varied waves as you approach the game's *Phoenix*-style bonus boss. It makes dramatic sense to save the best 'til last, like some kind of coin-operated Vanessa Williams. But, honestly, did they really have to make the beginning so shit?

What is MAME?

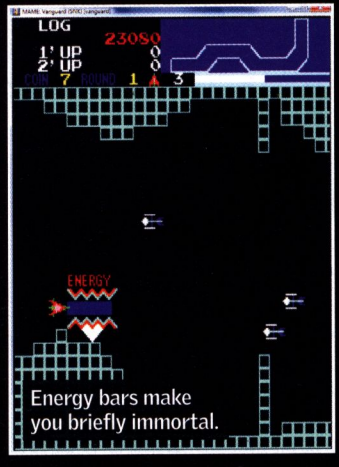
The *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator* currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from mame.net – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it.

The curly worms level – you're near the end.

Zone transitions weren't exactly seamless.

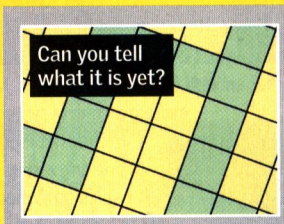


Spider nozzle terror.



Energy bars make you briefly immortal.

Back in the day

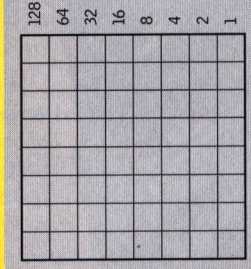


Can you tell what it is yet?

My first sprite

By Jon Blyth

The ZX Spectrum had all the BASIC keywords laid out for you, like a programmer's piano. 0 contained the mystical Poke button. Poke, amongst other things, was the command you needed to create your own 8x8 sprites – but the process started with a pen and paper grid, with the powers of two across the x axis. Colour in the blocks you want, add up each row, and poke in the numbers. Et voila: sprites! Here's the values for my first-ever sprite: 24, 36, 60, 36, 36, 102, 129, 102. Enjoy!



CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

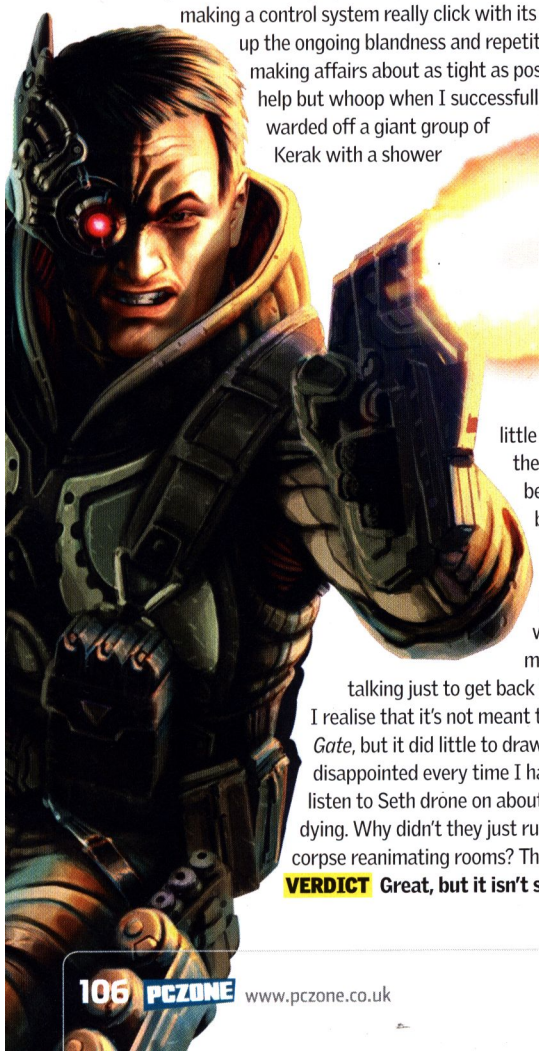
The games we're playing, and why we're playing them

SPACE SIEGE

Interstellar Cowboy: ***Ed Zitron***

WHEN I PLAYED *Dungeon Siege* about six years ago, I hated it. Compared to *Diablo II*, I found it too simple. It amazes me to say then, that while some *Dungeon Siege* fans bemoan the streamlining of the 'siege' mechanic – I'm really quite enjoying it. To be honest, I wonder if they should have stuck the word 'siege' in the title at all; it's a weird tactical shooter-RPG now, and it's obviously had a great deal of effort put into its playability.

There's a satisfying weight to the experience, from the way that you can carefully pick off enemies from afar then wade in with a space-punch to the anarchy of the physics-engine's explosions. It all "works," and I can't applaud Gas Powered Games enough for how well it plays. Many developers miss that crucial step to making a control system really click with its environment. GPG cover up the ongoing blandness and repetition of the vast ship by making affairs about as tight as possible. I couldn't help but whoop when I successfully warded off a giant group of Kerak with a shower of bullets and a super-punch, with my little buddy Harvey peppering them from a distance, beeping like the robo butler I never had.



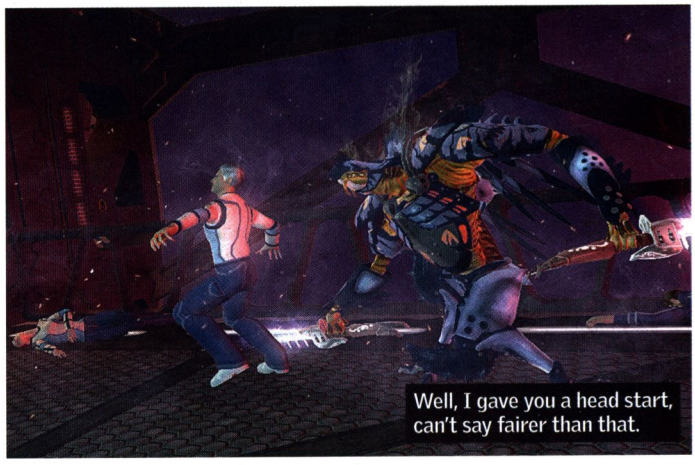
I have to admit though that the only-just-better-than-porno story was predictable and had me clicking through all the talking just to get back to the endless fighting. I realise that it's not meant to be the next *Baldur's Gate*, but it did little to draw me in, and I was almost disappointed every time I had to stop shooting to listen to Seth drone on about how everybody kept dying. Why didn't they just rush everyone through the corpse reanimating rooms? That's what I want to know.

VERDICT **Great, but it isn't sci-fi *Dungeon Siege III***

It isn't electrifying, but it is fun.

Why can't warning lights be prettier?

Come here, you fiend.



Well, I gave you a head start, can't say fairer than that.

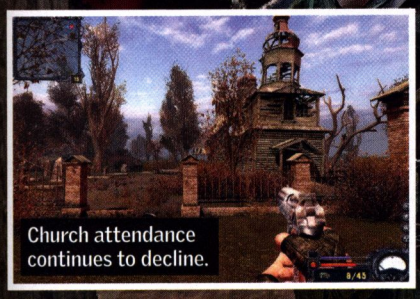
"I whooped when I warded off a group of Kerak with a shower of bullets and a super-punch"

STALKER: CLEAR SKY

Nighttime Marauder: ***Will Porter***

LET'S FACE IT. At first, *Clear Sky* is heftily impenetrable. As with the first game, there's a good hour of acquainting yourself with the ways in which the game is playing you.

The tutorial system isn't great, the way the faction system works isn't immediately obvious in the opening marsh area, the shotgun feels a smidge overpowered and it seems strange that you can turn up late to a battle to discover your allies have won the day without you firing a shot. Just as with *SOC* before it, my first hours in the Zone had me feeling nonplussed.



Church attendance continues to decline.

"There's a greater emphasis on man-on-man action"

But then, after a beautiful sunset, darkness fell – and fell heavily. With it, that old *Stalker* vibe of solitude and nagging fear flooded over me. After what I felt was a disappointing opening, I was back in the Zone. There's a greater emphasis on man-on-man action in *Clear Sky*, and the random faction flare-ups that you're called out to don't always gel as smoothly as I would have liked, but I'm convinced that this is a deep notch in the GSC bedpost. It's rock hard, I use my quickload facility more than I do my PDA, but just like *SOC* before it, *Clear Sky* is a rough diamond. As before, the more of yourself you put into the game, the more you'll get back.

VERDICT **Still endearingly baffling**

SACRIFICE

Ultimate Sacrifice: ***Jon Blyth***

This is a game that's worth sacrificing an evening out for.

I'M REPLAYING *SACRIFICE*, my passion for it kickstarted by its inclusion on the Good Old Games website launch list. When I first played *Sacrifice*, every aspect of the game flew straight through me, and into the darker corners my brain.

Whenever anyone mentioned it, I'd know it was good, but I wouldn't have the foggiest why. I knew it was an RTS, and you had to defile the tombs of your enemies, and the phrase 'Phalanx Formation' stuck in my head, but pressed for details, I was utterly clueless.

Playing through the tutorial again (I decide whether I like development companies based on their tutorials, and *Sacrifice*'s is lovely) those dormant memories sprang to the surface. With the excellent and precocious RTS/RPG gameplay, the soul-harvesting, the balloon-headed god Stratos, and the suspiciously *Earthworm*-esque James, the game is as loaded with humour as it is with testing strategy and blasphemous desecration.

It's great to have had this understated gem gently nudged back into my active gaming vocabulary.

VERDICT **Love them phalanxes**

"As loaded with humour as it is with strategy and desecration"

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

ARCHIE UK
FAHRENHEIT
"After reading the interview with the *Skins* writer in *PC ZONE*, I decided to go back and remember what went wrong (in story terms). Yes, the story does get ridiculous, but the first half of the game more than makes up for it. And it's got the best implemented sex scene I've ever seen in a game. Seriously, it's gotta be worth a play for that alone!"

JONNY_P66
CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS
"It has plenty of violence to get to grips with, but no jugs. Oh well. What can you do? I still like the men in the department store and the bit in the wheely bin."

DAFTVADER
MASS EFFECT
"I'm still trying to get to grips with this one after a few false starts, but so far, it has all the hallmarks of a corker."

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

LEGO STAR WARS

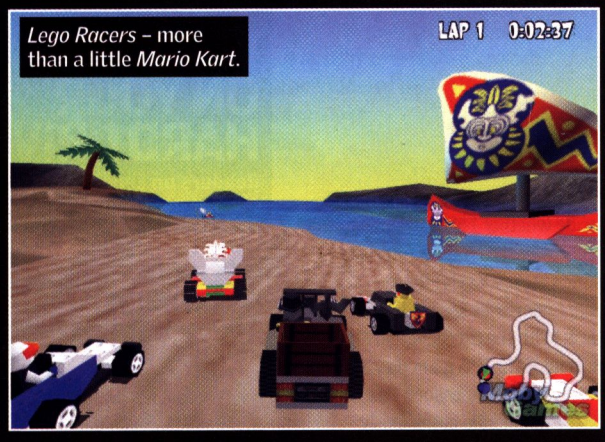
Jon Blyth talks to Traveller's Tales about everything that made childhood cool

IN A WORLD OF computer-generated dragons, super-cute robot refuse collectors and sexy jpgs, children can be slightly less impressed than they used to be with a standard 3x2 LEGO plastic brick.

That's where Traveller's Tales come in – their 19th century-sounding name at odds with their 21st century treatment of the most-loved toys and movies of the 20th century. Jonathan Smith is now Traveller's Tales publishing vice-president and he was formerly development director on *LEGO Star Wars*. He's also an immediately likeable and transparently intelligent man, who appears to enjoy what he's doing. Which is just as well, really.

Here, he talks about how it all came about, how to make good games for children, and his own love of where he's working.

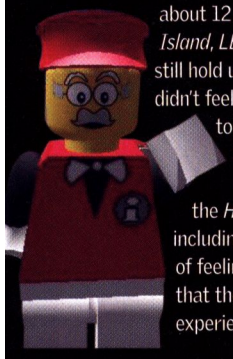
You ever wake up with really crusty eyes?



Lego Racers – more than a little *Mario Kart*.

"Look sir, droids! No actually, Han Solo!"

01 CUBOID BEGINNINGS



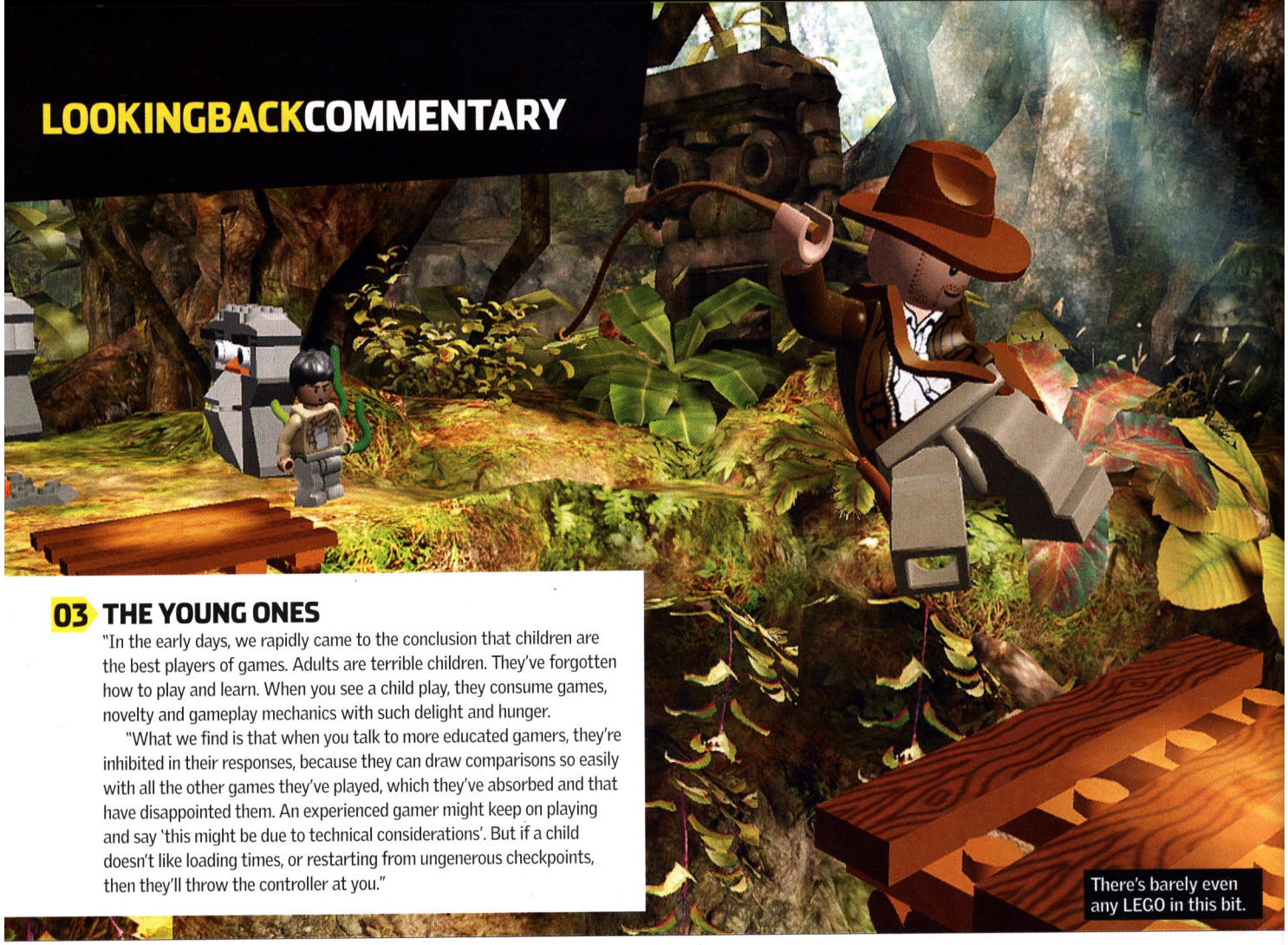
"LEGO Company have been making toys for children for the whole of the 20th century. They started making computer and video games about 12 years ago. Mostly on the PC, you had games like *LEGO Island*, *LEGO Racers*, based on their own franchises. A lot of them still hold up today. They reached a point, some years ago, where they didn't feel they were getting the impact they deserved. So LEGO put together a team headed up by a guy called Tom Stone, here in the UK, who'd come from EA and who'd worked in many roles including being the head of the UK studio that made the *Harry Potter* games. Tom brought in some new people, including me. I'd come from Codemasters. I got the same kind of feeling from LEGO as I got from games. It's no coincidence that the desks of videogame devs are covered in toys. It's a play experience that has a lot in common with gaming."

02 THE IDEA

"Tom said: 'Why not combine LEGO with the world's most famous characters?' So we went over to see Lucasfilm. We were incredibly lucky that it was met with huge enthusiasm and a belief that our games could be fun in a fresh way.

"The team at Lucasfilm saw it straight away. A little further down the line, we started showing *LEGO Star Wars* in the games industry and people didn't get it. Everything feels natural now, with the success that we've had – it seems like such an obvious idea. But when we were saying, 'It's *LEGO Star Wars*, it's all the characters brought to life in a new way,' people were shuffling their feet and looking embarrassed for us. It's only when they played the game that they got it."

Leia looks sexy enough, but we'd rather see her wearing the metal bikini.



There's barely even any LEGO in this bit.

03 THE YOUNG ONES

"In the early days, we rapidly came to the conclusion that children are the best players of games. Adults are terrible children. They've forgotten how to play and learn. When you see a child play, they consume games, novelty and gameplay mechanics with such delight and hunger.

"What we find is that when you talk to more educated gamers, they're inhibited in their responses, because they can draw comparisons so easily with all the other games they've played, which they've absorbed and that have disappointed them. An experienced gamer might keep on playing and say 'this might be due to technical considerations'. But if a child doesn't like loading times, or restarting from ungenerous checkpoints, then they'll throw the controller at you."

04 GROWN-UP APPEAL

"We always made the game for children – and for ourselves. We haven't moved from that at all. But what we didn't expect was that other older gamers would feel the same way we did.

"We know we made a game that we are happy with, because we've been playing it ourselves solidly for two years. We always left a space to put in levels of challenge, depth, replayability, and touches of detail that were relevant for us, as older gamers. We've elaborated on that as we've gone through, but nevertheless – the games are still very much aimed at children.

"We've had no negative reaction from movie fans. The universes and the treatments of these universes, over the years, shows that there's plenty of room for lots of different takes on the characters. We obsess over the relationships between the characters, and the hatred of certain characters, as much as any fan. We know what would be an irrelevant or disrespectful treatment of the world or the characters."

"Tickles!"

When in doubt, have someone fall over.

05 PERSONAL FAVOURITE

"My favourite moments are where someone falls over. If in doubt, have someone fall over. Those are the times that I'll be laughing. My favourite bit in *LEGO Indiana Jones* is in the Well of Souls, when Marion is dropped in. In the movie, she lands on the statue – her dress catches on it. But in our game, she just drops two feet behind Indy, falling flat on her face.

"Also, in the final scene of the *Last Crusade* movie, when Donovan drinks from the wrong grail, there's this horrific process of ageing, and the Grail Knight turns solemnly to Indy. In our game, Donovan explodes and the Grail Knight, this sober character, points at him and laughs. I really enjoyed that – the animators are always coming up with new gags and details to put in the background."

"The animators are always coming up with new gags and details to put in the background"

Chewie never looked great in plastic.

Prepare yourself for humour.

06 TEST THE HUMOUR

"We don't playtest the humour – we watch the cutscenes, and if we laugh, that's great. If we don't, we say 'can we have a man falling over here, please?'. We have a variety of people involved in the making of the game, and everything is reviewed at lots of different stages by lots of different, smart, people; so we all work together to make it as sharp as possible.

"In Indy, there's this scene at the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. It's the scene where Indy is about to collect the idol from the temple and he uses a bag of sand to outwit the trap. We knew that we wanted him to pull something out other than a bag of sand, as there are no bags of sand in LEGO. I think over the course of eight hours, every conceivable LEGO object was tried out to replace the bag of sand, and deemed insufficiently funny."

Check out the LEGO flames at the exhaust. Wicked.

Man-Bat: the least imaginative villain ever.

07 BATMAN

"The new Batman movies are great, but we're drawing on the essence of Batman, as he's been over the decades. The great villains of Gotham City have all had lots of interpretations over many decades now, and the LEGO version of Gotham City distils them. The LEGO representations of the world will be recognisable to any fan of any version, and of course, we're telling our own story. But our Joker is based on the character of the Joker, and not any one individual performance."

This trade negotiation has gone all wrong!

08 ART APPROVAL

"The approval process on the work we've done has always been straightforward. It may be surprising to say, as you've got major media businesses with a lot resting on the investment of their characters looking over your shoulder, but the fact we're expressing our work in LEGO gives us permission to have fun in a way that others can't.

It also gives us a lot of constraints, that we enjoy working creatively within – the marketing people know and trust that everything we do will be appropriate for the youngest children. It's inconceivable that a LEGO interpretation of any world would contain any kind of inappropriate content."

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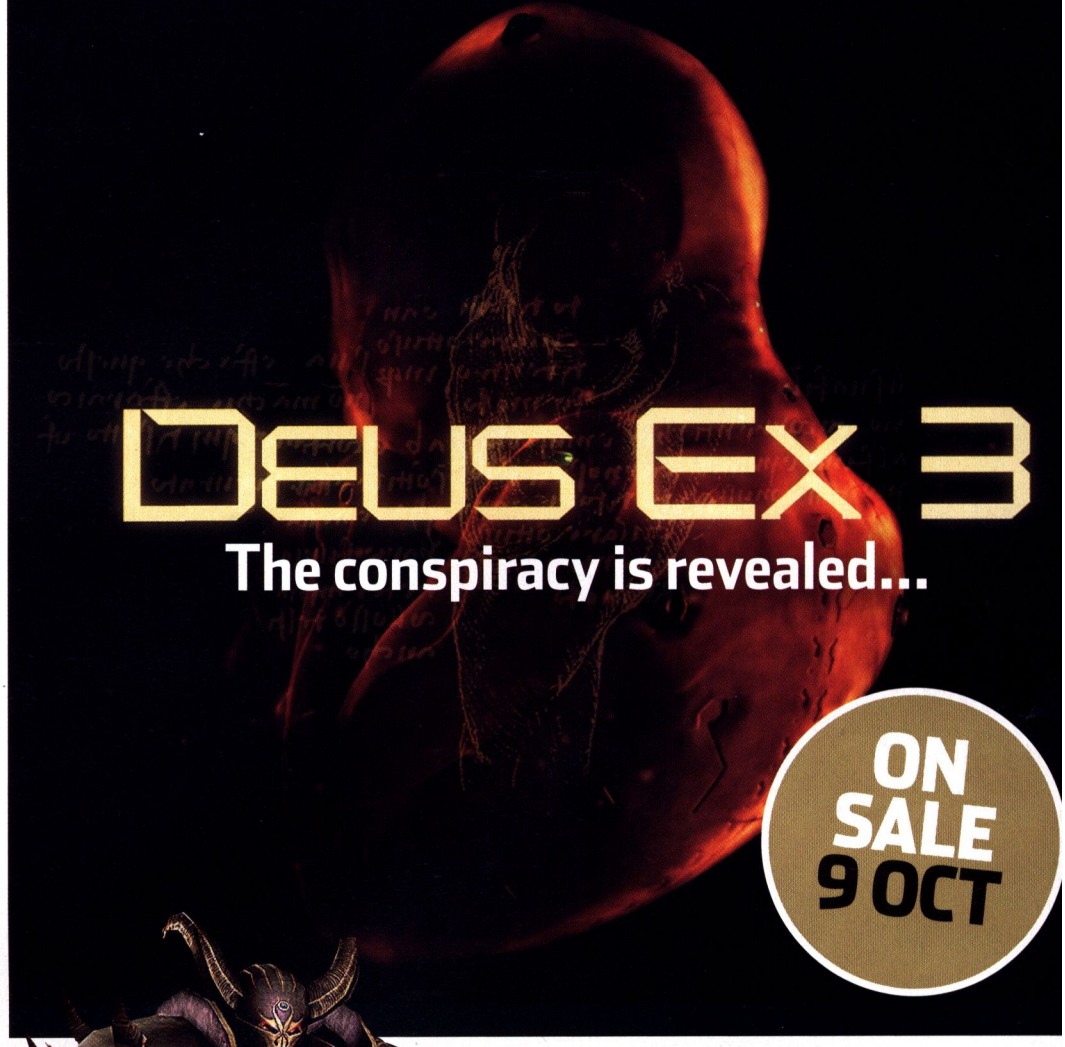

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✔ Ace shoulder-to-shoulder action with a younger sibling or neighbour!
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✔ For just the price of a local phone call, phone a friend and instantly invite them over to your house! (Friend must live locally.)
✔ Your mum can pour you a fizzy drink while you both play! "Leave us alone mum! We're having fun!"

Games for MS-DOS L!VE! Gold tier (£2.46 a month)

✔ Hear your modem make a gnarly 'whrrrrsplushSKREEEEEEEEE' noise! Mint!
✔ Get booted from a Canadian server because of your ping!
✔ Get in deep trouble with the parental units when they read the phone bill!
✔ Get Full, 18-hour access to Microsoft's Games for MS-DOS L!VE!™'s Games for MS-DOS L!VE!™ Friends Service 0898 Hotline – chat with people playing Games for MS-DOS L!VE!™ games today! (After first free access to the hotline, calls charged at 89p a minute. Calls terminate in Guatemala – groovy!)

#2 GAIN BODACIOUS ACHIEVEMENTS

Just completed a remarkable feat while gaming? Games for MS-DOS L!VE!™ records your triumphs in your config.sys file, so you can show all your friends!

ACHIEVEMENT: Autoexec.bat batty!
Successfully run a game having opened up enough extended memory from your pool of expanded memory.

ACHIEVEMENT: Speaker central!
Inform the computer that the sound of the motorbike was passing from right to left three times in a row.

ACHIEVEMENT: WIN!start!
Load up Windows 3.1 for the first time, and play something awesome like Yoda Desktop Adventures or Microsoft Soccer!

#3 PLAY AGAINST FRIENDS ON CONSOLE!

Microsoft are starting a unique campaign in which we release EXACTLY the SAME games on consoles as we do on PC! In time, this will give you the freedom to play against ALL your friends ALL the time! Just imagine, it'll be like your friend that bought a Jaguar so he can play Doom. Only with everything! Don't have a cow, man!
So don't be a newbo! Join in today!

Update: Bill, for some reason this isn't working - we're going to have to scrap the payment system. I'm off to watch Xena Warrior Princess, I suggest we NEVER try anything like this again.

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