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PCZONE

ISSUE 200 DECEMBER 2008

200th
Issue Special!
Your favourite **PCZ**
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TINY COMPO

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of the plague cure
that features in the
original Deus Ex?

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DEUS EX 3

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A full-length photograph of James Bond, played by Daniel Craig, standing on a rocky, desolate landscape. He is wearing a dark, well-tailored suit with a white shirt and a dark tie. He holds a black submachine gun in his right hand, angled upwards. His left hand is in his pocket, and a silver wristwatch is visible on his left wrist. The background is a vast, open, light-colored sky.

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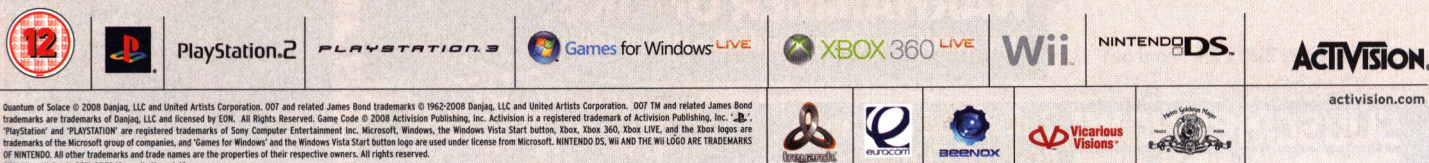
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PCZ ALLSTARS

THERE IS SOMETHING special about *PC ZONE*. What readers who've been with us from the start will be aware of is that there's a thread that has run through this magazine from issue one all the way through to today, our milestone 200th issue. It's a feeling of shared history, of hands across the ages and the brilliant fact that someone like me, in my first weeks of editorship, can receive an email from someone who worked on the magazine seven years ago, irreconcilably angry that we were running adverts for a once-bitter rival. ("What are you thinking of you stupid bastards?", being the turn of phrase used).

It's an as-yet unbroken chain of camaraderie, and so for our bicentennial issue I decided to call the chickens back to roost. In times of need it turns out that the editor of this magazine merely has to stand on the rooftops brandishing an ancient sword and shout "PCZ! Ho!" and the faithful troops will gather.

As such it's with great pride that I present you with an issue that unites 26 of the people who've made *PC ZONE* what it is over the past 200 issues. What's more, to celebrate, we've got the world exclusive on the long-awaited next chapter of the greatest PC game of all time: *Deus Ex 3*.

Some people say that *PC ZONE* isn't as good as it used to be, but for this issue at least they can shut up.

Today we are.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor

wporter@futurenet.co.uk



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WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

Deus Ex 3 unveiled! The remarkable new prequel to the nano-augmented RPG shooter



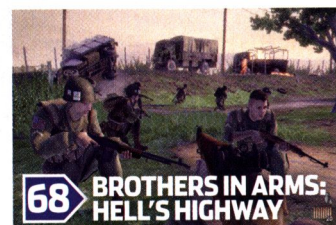
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WARHAMMER ONLINE
Our verdict on the would-be *WOW*-killer.

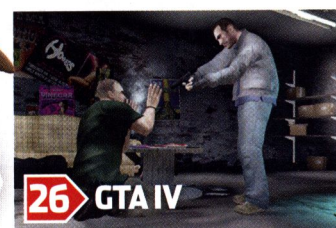


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See page 106





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Celebrating 15 glorious
years of the UK's no. 2
PC games magazine

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

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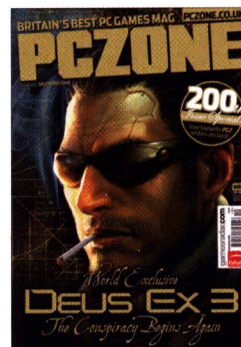
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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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102 FREEWARE

Fun with *Steve Hogarty*, as he plays *Karoshi Factory*, a game that involves killing himself and his friends!

Too busy? PC ZONE in 59 words...
It's the 200th issue. Starts with a load of ex-staffers wibbling on about how great PC ZONE is, as if anyone really cared what those splitters think. Smith and Spector chat about *Deus Ex* and *Invisible War* while we exclusively unveil the new game. And tons of games get rated including *Warhammer Online* (great) and *Euro Truck Simulator* (shit).

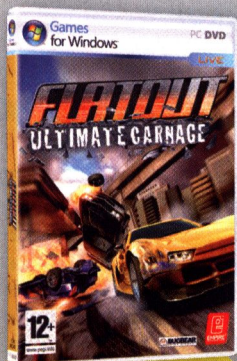
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MEET THE TEAM

How they all lived happily ever after

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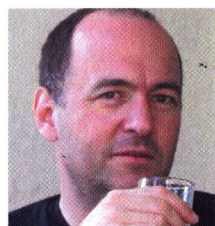
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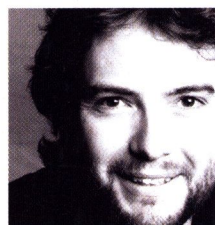


PAUL LAKIN

Original Chief, 1993-1994

The man who edited *PC ZONE* into existence now has, 15 years on, a proper job. A very proper job. With the Foreign Office. At the High Commission in Nicosia in Cyprus.

NOW PLAYING: Bureaucracy



JOHN DAVISON

Later Chief, 1994-1998

Former editor and publisher Davison now works in the USA, persuading worried parents that games don't all involve murder. Well, *The Sims* doesn't. Much.

NOW PLAYING: *Spore*

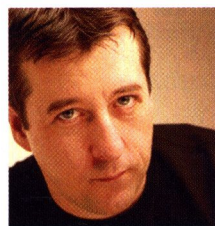


JEREMY WELLS

Another PCZ chief, 1994-1999

Inbetween working on mobile phone games with THQ, Wells emailed us a *PCZ* memory deluge. The best? The time a pornographic *Doom* .wad was put on a *PCZ* CD.

NOW PLAYING: *FM2008*

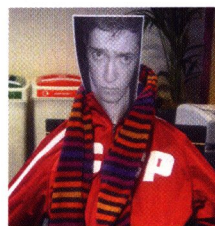


MALLO

King of grabs, 1996-1999

After living in LA with porn stars (who made a right racket) Mallo is now back in sunny Doncaster working on the relaunch of the 'not porn, it's erotica' girlskissing.co.uk.

NOW PLAYING: *Portal*

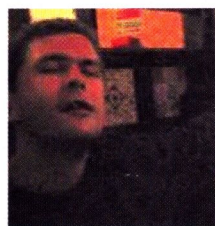


ED ZITRON

Quitter and Surrender Monkey #2, 2007-2008

Zitron has left the building. He says he's moved to New York, yet we've spotted him outside our office smashing bin lids together, naked.

NOW PLAYING: *Spore*

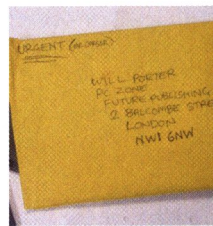


DAVE WOODS

Chief gambler, 1999-2005

Woods (ladies man and fondler of editorial assistant hair) is back at Dennis Towers, editing *Poker Player*. His picture in said mag makes him look butcher than he is.

NOW PLAYING: *Old Maid*



DUNCAN MCDONALD

AKA Mr Cursor, 1993-1998

Now living far away from PC tech, Dunc had to send us this month's back page on floppy disks and in the post, with 'Urgent' scrawled on it in Biro. He is our hermit-like hero.

NOW PLAYING: *Pirates! Gold*

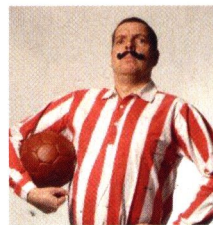


PAUL PRESLEY

Timeless PCZ firmament

Once the pony-tailed *PCZ* stalwart, Presley now heads up MMO mail-order magazines about *EverQuest II* and *EVE Online*. Richie Shoemaker edits the latter.

NOW PLAYING: *EverQuest II*



JAMIE SEFTON

Quitter and Surrender Monkey #1, 2002-2008

Sefton has become the face of games development. Well, Yorkshire games development. It isn't a good face, but it'll do the job. Maybe.

NOW PLAYING: *Spore*

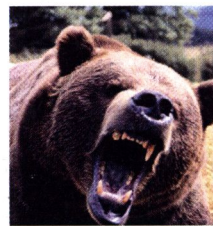


RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Faerie Queene, 2000-2003

A catalogue of photos with her hair dramatically tousled can mean only one thing: Rhi's important now. Honestly, we get sent press releases about her and everything.

NOW PLAYING: *WOW*



MARTIN KORDA

"Bear! Beware...", 2000-2004

After writing duties on recent console racer *Pure*, Namesless recently helped Bethesda show off *Fallout 3* and has written for forthcoming shooter *The Protector*.

NOW PLAYING: *Red Alert 3 beta*



CHARLIE BROOKER

Prodigal Son

Brooker is in *The Guardian*, has written books, and is working on a zombie sitcom for Channel 4. His success makes us angry. Our renewed reliance on him angrier.

NOW PLAYING: That HGV game

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER TINY COMP: For your chance to win tiny TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474 or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Comp, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a clock from IKEA's PS range (pictured). It's just like the one in *The Sims 2: IKEA Home Stuff* content pack. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send

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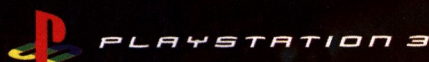
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LETTERS



Will Porter sends you to a haunted house and jiggles around all the time



KING OF LETTERS

WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're 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.)



HISTORY REPEATING

Not a single review of *Spore* has mentioned EA's battle against common sense – their anti-piracy measures have reared their ugly scrotes yet again and struck a blow for the capitalist agenda. Didn't they learn from the furore over *Mass Effect*? And SecuROM? Arbitrary limits on how many times we can install a piece of software we've spent upwards of £40 on are insulting to the end user.

I'm aware I can call EA after my third installation to ask them politely if I may continue using their product (because it will always be 'their product'), but what a bloody cheek.

It really winds my tits up when publishers tar criminals and legitimate

users with the same clumsy brush. And don't get me started on the game itself, four hours of mindless rubbish before an endless and under-featured *Galactic Civilization* wannabe? 95%? Disappointment all round.

Miles Davies

The publishing mentality on stuff like this is that in weathering the storm of disgruntled online punters, piracy can be kept at bay for a little while at least. Which seems a little silly when *Spore* leaked online several days before its release. Again, sorry for not flagging the copy-protection issue up. At the time of going to print no-one had told us about it, we'll be sure to bang twice as hard with all future EA releases.

As for *Spore*, its casual sensibilities were always going to cause a divide. I've been enchanted by it myself as, despite its simple mechanics, it makes me feel the way I used to when playing gaming's innovators, like *Dungeon Keeper* and *Populous*. There's been nothing like *Spore* in a decade, and I love it for that. Is it perfect? I think we can agree that it isn't. Is it important and brilliant? Definitely.

DANISH MENTALIST

Hey Mr. Porter, I just want to shower you with praise. You're AWESOME! Well, you might be as fallible a human being as anyone else, or worse, but your writing is outstanding; an oasis in the desert of game journalists.

The rockpapershotgun.com guys do, however, equal your genius in their own way – and they're also Brits. Big sites like Gamespot and Gamespy not only have almost the same name, they're also equally boring to read. Unfortunately, so are your fellow *PC ZONE* guys – they don't reach YOU at all.

It's wonderful to not only be forced into a world through simple words, but also in a sarcastic and crass way that

amuses and shocks me, sometimes at the same time, sometimes alternating in a quick succession.

I've now put your articles in the same personal archive as those by Hank Stuever (*Dead Inn* is a masterpiece), Hunter S. Thompson and his Gonzo-classic about the Kentucky Derby, and Evan Wright's *The Killer Elite*.

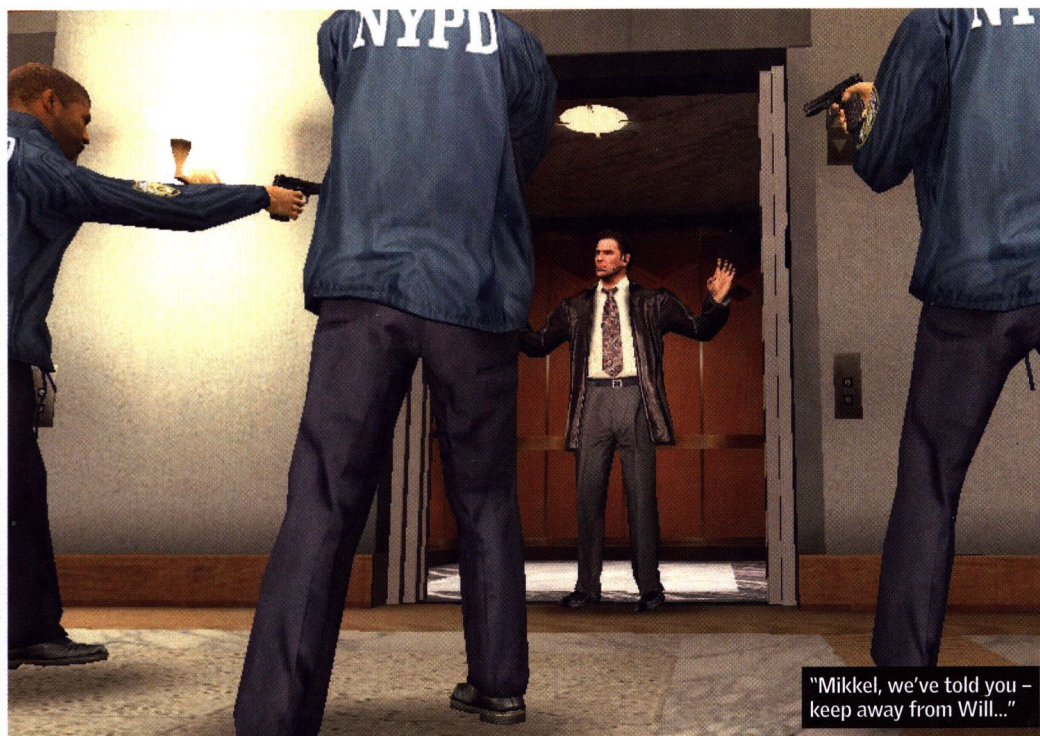
If you have a few moments, would you please tell me where you have your inspiration from? Whose writing do you admire? What ideology do you put into your texts?

Mikkel, Denmark

As fallible a human being as anyone else? Or worse? My fellow *PC ZONE*



Spore: Causing debates about both shittiness and DRM.



"Mikkel, we've told you -
keep away from Will..."

guys not reaching ME at all? Mikkel, I have to admit I'm vaguely terrified by you. I wouldn't have even printed your letter if it weren't for co-workers, who don't reach my standards, finding it amusing and demanding that I did.

To answer your question - I admire early *Loaded* magazines, Bill Bryson, Terry Pratchett and, above all, mid-to-late '90s *PC ZONE*. Which is probably why I find myself where I am today, trying to drag everyone back for issue 200.

I don't have much of an ideology, but am open to suggestions.

Club Band or *Dark Side of the Moon* (yes, I'm even older than Log); they're a special event and should be presented accordingly. Bring back the cardboard! You know it makes sense. Rant over.

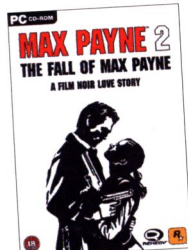
Onslow

Stunning game boxes - like that of *Morrowind* or any big old cardboard affair from my youth - don't happen much these days but you can guess why. First up, with a decent box, some "Making of..." DVDs and

a plastic figurine publishers can flog a Special Edition of the game to the punters - getting a little more money from the fans and scraping a little back from those wanting the goodies who'd otherwise consider piracy.

Secondly, today - and more than ever before - retailers, especially supermarkets, demand specifically sized products for their specific-sized shelves.

Thirdly, smaller boxes means more on the rack.

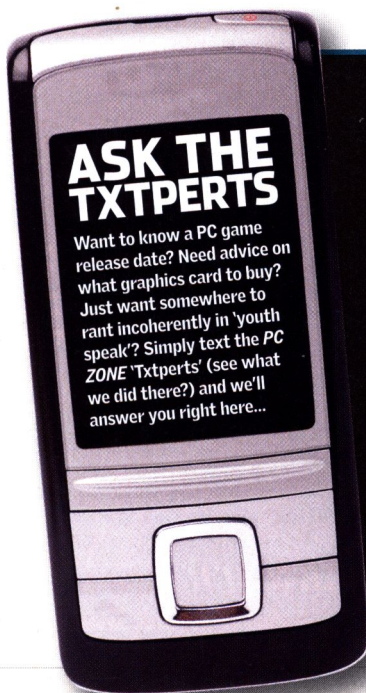


BOXING HELL

Steve is absolutely right in his rant about the decline in quality of the PC games box!

The worst of the lot was *Half-Life 2* and its *Episodes*. I'm sorry but a game like *HL2* should not be released in a poxy DVD case with a single sheet "Quick Reference Card", without even a manual!

Great games deserve the best presentation, ones like *Max Payne 2*. Great games are as big an event as great albums like *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts*



Oi, where did *NeverQuest* go? Oh, and here's a swear for good measure: tits.
Elliot Benson

After its hiatus *NeverQuest* is back for one final, glorious turn around the block for issue 200. Will it ever be back? Who can say...

Will *Gears of War 2* get a PC release?
James Lancaster

Not according to Epic. They don't seem to love the PC as much as they once did. They'll come back though, they'll come back on their hands and knees asking for forgiveness. Just you see.

How the hell did I get here? Standing naked in somebody else's room?

Anon

Not sure Jarvis.



SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Sent in by Matt Bradshaw

PC ZONE score: 89%

I've always been a great fan of the FPS genre, ever since the good old days of *Doom*. As such, it pisses me off every time I hear people say how great *Call Of Duty 4* is. The graphics are sweet, sure, but the gameplay sucks.

You go into a combat area, get flanked with endless, repetitive AI drones who all look the same, clear 'em out, move forward, repeat. That's it!

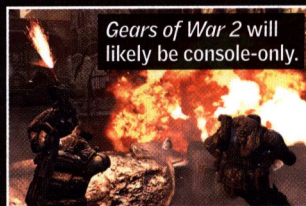
Back in *Doom* you killed the same imp over and over again, and cloned demons abounded, but I could get over that, what with them being an evil race of imps and demons! But surely killing the same terrorist for the thousandth time can't be right. Lame!

Your shout: 53%



Full... metal... jacket.

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Gears of War 2 will likely be console-only.

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Warhammer Online – bloody good.

Fourthly, originality and the power of the imagination sadly died in 2004, but it went curiously unreported.

BOXING PRICE HELL

Never once have I felt the need to put finger to keyboard and tap out a letter to you but I now feel now is my time. 95% for *Spore*? Evidently I need this game so I go to the shops on release day, but

£35? Are you joking? That's nearly a month's worth of nappies (for my daughter, not for raid nights), so dejected and deflated I left the shops in disgust.

I come home and log on and find that I can buy direct from the publisher. Great stuff, cut out the middleman and save some money. But EA are selling it for £39.99, excuse me WTF? How can they justify that when there's no DVD to make, no packaging and no manual?

More searching finds a direct download from D2D for £31.99 which is getting better. Then I find a high street seller's website offering the same game they were trying to flog me to my face for £35, now at £26.99 which is

nearly £10 cheaper. (B in GCSE Mathematics by the way).

And you know what really galls me? The fact that in 2-3 weeks time there will be a sale on and everyone will be offering it for £19.99. It's quite a strong case for piracy to be honest.

Mike Mclean

There've always been ways to get PC games cheaper, anyone remember those massive lists of games from companies like Special Reserve in the good old days? (And could this Letters page get any more rose-tinted? It's no wonder that PC gamers are being driven into online sales and yes, I suppose, piracy by this sort of thing – but then again games have always been around the £30 mark. Perhaps you should be thankful that the myriad of buying

options available to you means that it is actually possible to grab a bargain online? Just saying...

WOTS UR PROBLEM?

"Is it gud or wot?" On the cover of "Britain's best selling games mag?" It hardly seems fair to lament a lack of mature and visceral game content due to the threat of censorship (as per the editorial) and to lambast pop-culture phenomena like *The Sims* (PC ZONE's passim) for pandering to the lowest common denominator when you emblazon that barely coherent nonsense on the bleedin' cover now does it? Bad PC ZONE.

I've been stealing your magazine from the newsagent for nearly 12 years now – anymore of this poppycock and I'll have to start stealing *PC Gamer* instead. Straight to bed with no pudding for you!

Disgruntled Dan in Oxford

It wasn't us, it was Orc-speak. If you don't get it you don't have a good enough awareness of *Warhammer*. And why not just steal us both a copy of *Viz* and a packet of Maynards Sports Mixture while you're at it? And the contents of the till? If there's one thing I hate, it's a shoplifter that lacks vision.

I WANT MY 0.1%

Dear PC ZONE,
If PC ZONE's first issue was in April of 1993, and you've produced 200 issues over 15 and a half years (186 months), that works out at 12.9 issues a year for 13 issues a year magazine.



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

PRETTY LADY

Surely the next step for *Tomb Raider* would be to use digitised characters, like in *Mortal Kombat 4*. Surely that would make all the Lara Croft fans blind...

Noel Wallace

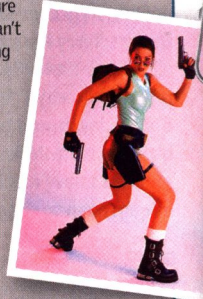
A digitised Lara, hanging from a digitised branch, jumping onto a digitised branch. That would be so rubbish the fact that you're speaking from the past barely saves your blushes. That's just the sort of thing a stupid '90s person would say.

SPEAKING OF

Please put a poster of Nell McAndrew in your next mag. She has to be the best *Tomb Raider* model ever, and I need one to go on my blank, desolate wall. I'd try and paint the picture on my wall but I can't paint and by placing a crap painting on my wall I'd be disgracing the wonder that is Nell McAndrew.

Ben Campbell

You'll be relieved to know, 10 years on, that Nell McAndrew has never stopped being pretty – and in fact got even more sexy at the turn of the millennium. A fact not lost on the judging panel that named her Yorkshire Woman of the Year in 2003. So Ben, be assured that your years of furious masturbation have not been in vain.

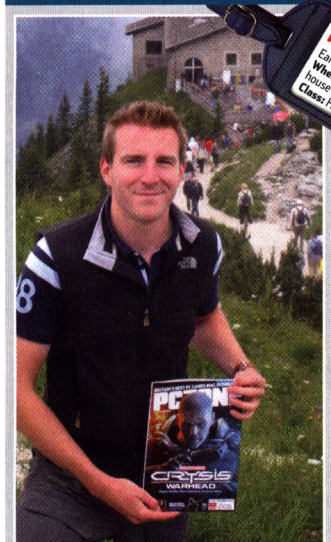


My question is this: where is my 0.1% of an issue? And don't try and fob me off by claiming that the short-lived ZX supplement was it. I've had it up to here with you lot, honestly.

Clive Spencer

No-one likes a smart-arse Clive. **✉**

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



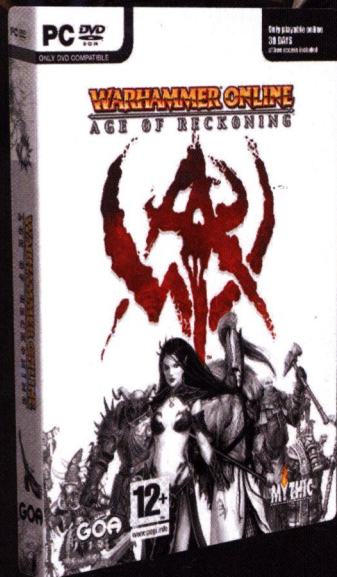
We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

War is everywhere

"This could be the best thing to happen to MMO gaming since Orcs."

PC GAMER

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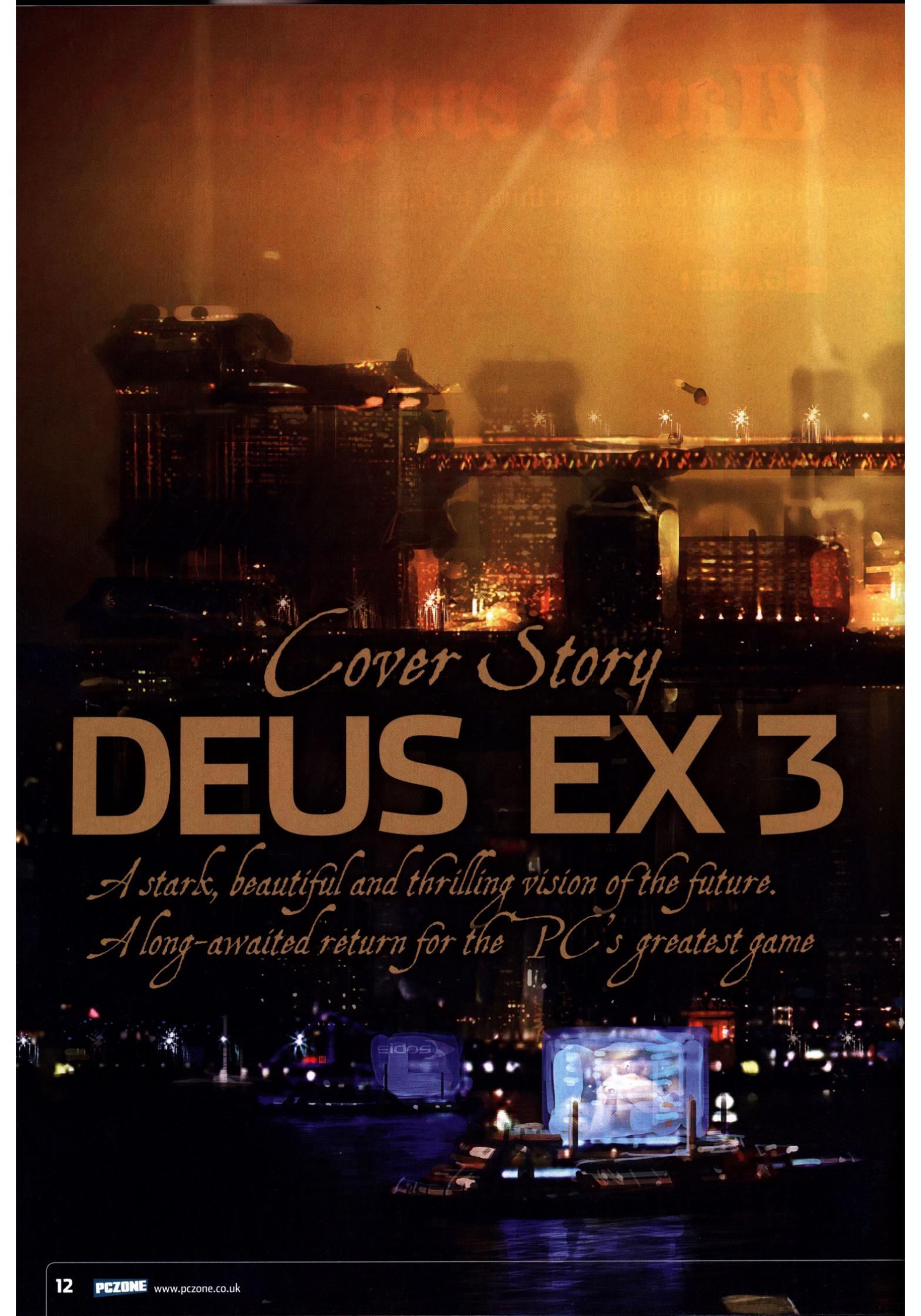
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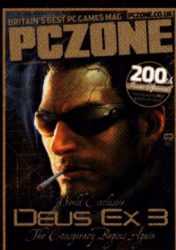
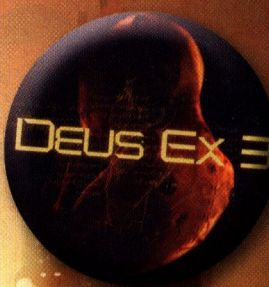
MYTHIC
ENTERTAINMENT

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Cover Story
DEUS EX 3

*A stark, beautiful and thrilling vision of the future.
A long-awaited return for the PC's greatest game*



DAUNTED IS NOT the word for Eidos Montreal – faced with the task of following in the monolithic, nano-augmented footsteps of Ion Storm and the original *Deus Ex* – the game we consider as the greatest PC title of all time. Yet rather than simply cut-and-paste JC Denton's first adventure, what's being created here is a fascinating, intelligent vision of the future. Da Vinci-inspired technology, futuro-renaissance fashion and neon-flecked grime: it's the world of *Deus Ex*, but re-imagined in unexpected new ways. Its creators could be crowned as kings. Or, better than kings... gods!

Page

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**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

Bad Portal

I 'VE GOT FIVE different EA accounts. One works on the *Spore* website; one works on electronicarts.co.uk, but not EA.com; another one seems to exist only for *Battlefield 2142*. When I reset my password on the *Spore* website, it changes the password I use for the EA Download Manager (and leaves my *Spore* one the same). When I logged in to the US EA site, I was taken to a page demanding to know which flag I swore allegiance to. I was then jettisoned to the UK site, asked for my age, and then made to log in again. When I tried to create a *Spore* account I was told that my email address doesn't match anything in their system. Well of course it isn't on your system – that's why I'm registering. Durr.

This corporate schizophrenia even reaches my hard drive. Why do I have a folder called EA GAMES and a folder called Electronic Arts? And My Documents folder is a mess, there's a *Battlefield 2* folder, a *Battlefield 2142* folder, folders called EA Games, Electronic Arts, and another called My *Spore* Creations. And there's a mysterious folder called Program Data sitting loose on my C: drive. It seems that with each new game they think of daring new ways to organise their folders, and in the process they leave your computer strewn with shite along the way.

The solution? Stick the entire drive in a folder called 'EA SHITSTORM' and try not to think about it.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND

Can *Metro 2033* get the jump on *STALKER*?

PUBLISHER THQ DEVELOPER 4a Games WEBSITE www.thq-games.com/uk ETA TBA

S O YOU'VE TORN yourself and a few colleagues away from your parent company. A blazing shard of ingenuity splintering from a cosmic meteor, you're about to tear through the stratosphere with your own ideology and personality. You're a young new development studio, and it's time to distance yourself from the one's you left behind. Or you could make something that looks just the same as *STALKER*.

4a Games are a talented offshoot of GSC Gameworld, and their first project, *Metro 2033*, looks every bit as

radioactive and post-disastrous as the game they cut their teeth on. That's no bad thing, as despite these parallels *Metro 2033* is promising a more refined experience than *STALKER*, driving the action along the urban architecture of a nuclear war-ravaged Moscow.

Tribal communities have been driven underground by a toxic atmosphere and surface-dwelling mutants, with Moscow Metro stations acting as hubs of activity.

Each excursion to the surface will be almost expeditionary in nature. Filters on your gas mask clog with toxins, your visor fogs with condensation, and attention must be paid to your air supply.

The mutants are rather more specialised than *STALKER*'s too – huge bat-winged creatures stalk the city, while gorilla-like monstrosities who'll only attack if you stop staring at them promise to shit us to our very core.



STOP PRESS!

HALO CAN YOU GO?

With the close of Ensemble, the guys working on the fabled *Halo* RTS, released screenshots seem to indicate they had been working on a *Halo* MMO. Shocking.

ORIGIN OF F.E.A.R.

Reroute your synapses, *F.E.A.R. 2* and *Project Origin* are now one and the same. Warner Bros have successfully bought the *F.E.A.R.* name.

BETA OFF ALONE

Euro-publisher GOA have messed up promised beta access for thousands of pre-orders of *Warhammer Online*, and sparks now fly between them and EA.

26

Grand Theft Auto IV

The fastest-selling game of all time screams onto PCs.



34

Mirror's Edge

Rhianna Pratchett delivers some tales from the edge.



40

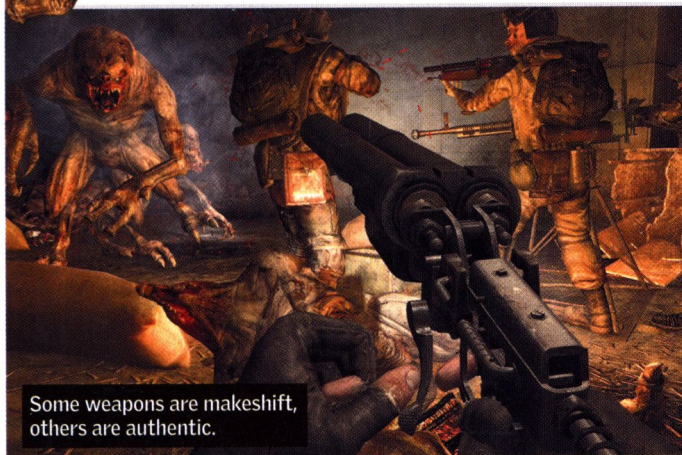
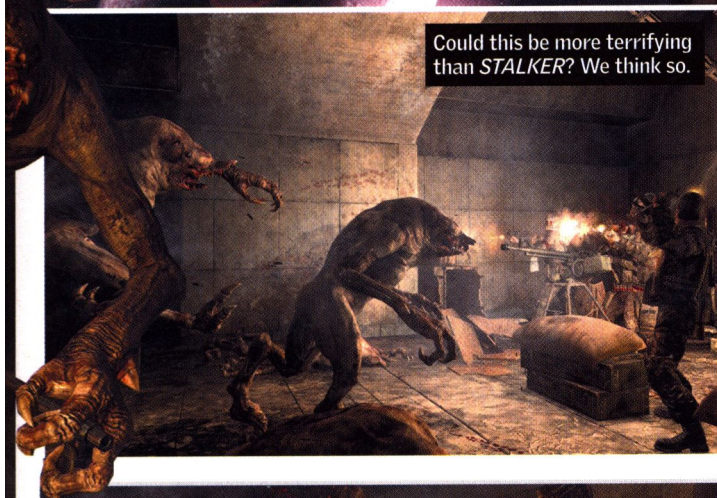
Deus Ex 3

The long wait is finally over. Trigger your nano-augmentations... now...



These tall mutants are psychic, killing with a wave of their hand.

Could this be more terrifying than *STALKER*? We think so.



Some weapons are makeshift, others are authentic.

STUFF

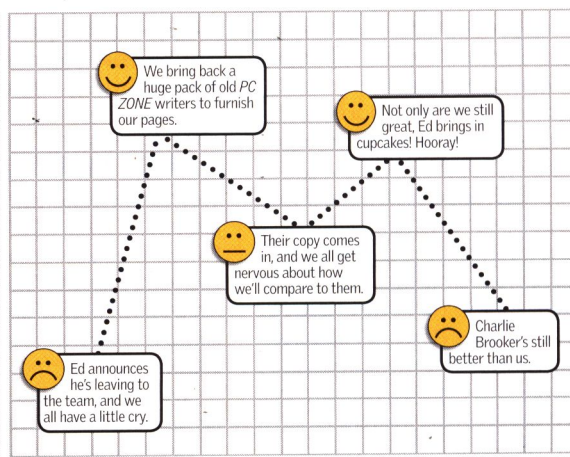
We asked Tom Chilton, lead game designer on *World of Warcraft*, whether 'poopsocking' really existed. Blizzard's official response followed. "What?" asked Chilton. "Poopsocking," we repeated blankly, "surely you must have heard of poopsocking?" "I've never heard of that," claimed a bemused Chilton. "Poopsocking!" we insisted, "It's when you poop into a sock to avoid having to leave your PC when playing MMOs." Chilton paused, "No, no... I highly encourage players to use the restroom..."

Life is a roller coaster

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

REALLY BIG ART ATTACK

Painting pretty pictures for the worlds of PC gaming



TITLE Canyon Dwelling
ARTIST Tyler West **GAME** Guild Wars
"A real standout piece, this one. The image says it all." *Louis Marchesano*



Reporter
Pavel Barter

SOME MONTHS BACK a UK newspaper published a report about "al-Qaida's terrifying vision of a devastated America in

the wake of a nuclear attack," which was discovered on a "terror forum". No, not the *PC ZONE* boards, but a place where extremists get together to talk about glooming up the world with nasty behaviour. As it happens, the terrifying vision of a post-nuked Washington DC was in fact a piece of concept art, titled 'Capitol', created by artists working on *Fallout 3* for Bethesda.

The newspaper made a retraction and Bethesda stayed schtum, but the incident says something about the visceral force of videogame concept art. Great artists can be the impetus for visionary games – look no further than *BioShock*, whose conceptual evolution can be traced in the downloadable book *BioShock: Breaking The Mold*.

"The fans appreciate it a lot," says Daniel Dociu, concept artist and chief art



TITLE Rooftops **ARTIST** Daniel Dociu **GAME** Guild Wars

"The pieces that I'm most intrigued by are the ones based on ideas with a lot of potential that, because of technical limitations, were underutilised. I don't abandon these ideas, but store them away to be revived and reprocessed when the time is right." *Daniel Dociu*

director for *Guild Wars*. "Oftentimes, a game will ship with a collectable art book. We get a lot of fan mail on the quality of the art in our games. It makes all that effort worthwhile."

GAMES TO GALLERIES

Even the wider art world is paying attention. At the recent E3, the Into The Pixel exhibition paraded top concept art, selected by a jury that included Louis Marchesano, curator of prints and drawings at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

"During the submission stage, we ask for everything to do with videogame art," he says. "Even the proverbial drawing on a napkin. There are seven or eight jury

members, three of us are from the museum world, the rest from the videogame industry. Of about 250 entries this year, we chose 16."

So is some game concept art up there with Picasso? "The approach is to look at the entrants and judge them on their merits," says Marchesano, diplomatically. "I don't compare them to Rembrandt, although obviously a lot of the artists have gone to art school and draw upon a vast tradition of Western and Asian art.

I'm not here to give this work my seal of approval – I'm here to judge what these people are doing based on their merits. And there's no doubt that some of these guys are incredibly talented."

Not long ago, concept art was considered as useful as tits on a bull, as PC games, even in the early '90s, were too underdeveloped to merit an artistic angle. "A lot of companies were winging it and borrowed ideas wherever they could find them with little concern for stylistic consistency," says Dociu, who started in the business around 1990. "I was lucky enough to land my first job with Square Enix. The Japanese had a lot more tradition in terms of respect for the visual side of games."

These days, there are many concept artists, but their creative backgrounds vary. Dociu – who went on to create concept art for titles like *FIFA* and *SSX* – studied industrial design, and so brings an architectural slant to his creations. Tyler West, who has worked on *Guild Wars*, *Godfather* and *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, studied product design and entertainment illustration. You see, despite salutations at events like Into

"Concept art is crucial in order to envisage a game... it is the foundation for the most memorable titles"



TITLE Capitol **ARTIST** Craig Mullans **GAME** Fallout 3

"There were a lot of entries of destroyed cityscapes, but there is something about the way Craig Mullans can manipulate perspective and give you a sense of the depressing weight of what happened to this city, that most of the others weren't able to capture." *Louis Marchesano*

The Pixel, concept art is still more functional than fine art; so don't expect *World of Warcraft* sketches to adorn the Tate Modern just yet.

"Concept art is the one discipline that requires both design and illustration abilities," reckons West. "That's what makes it really challenging and a lot of fun, as opposed to something that is hanging on a wall, where it is objective. It is something that has to be somewhat functional – it gets handed off to the modellers, the lighters, and the animators, who then have to make it a reality inside a game: a 3D object."



TITLE Farm **ARTIST** Jeff Ballinger **GAME** Team Fortress 2
The initial run of *TF2* maps paraded this pastel-block rural style, and recent maps have only just begun to move away from this concept.

Concept art serves two functions. The first is to inspire the team – so they can "add to your vision, as opposed to simply executing it", according to Docu – and the other is to provide a blueprint for the production team. In the latter, more technical, area, concept artists are under increasing pressure due to outsourcing.

ARTISTIC GLOBALISM

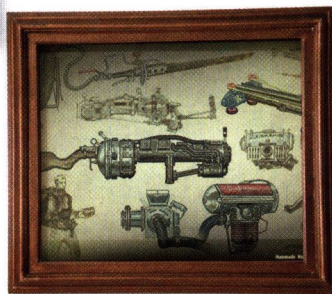
A recent report predicted that art outsourcing will increase to £1.4billion by 2010, representing around 40% of the total cost of game development. Some studios already source up to 60% of their art content overseas. Such is the degree of art outsourcing to places like China, India and Eastern Europe, that EA and THQ have set up their own middlemen companies to handle their art trade.

This an age-old story, really. For many years the movie



TITLE City 17 **ARTIST** Jeremy Bennett **GAME** Half-Life 2: Episode 2

The striking imagery of the smouldering remains of Half-Life's City 17 has been extensively realised in Valve's artwork. As the *Episodes* move away from the original's urban setting, the concept art reflects this by showing the city at progressively farther distances.



TITLE Homemade weapons **GAME** Fallout 3

Designing new weapons for an alternate future obviously relies heavily on a wealth of concept art, such as the designs shown here.

industry hired craftspeople for as long as they needed them, then fobbed them off. But for those concept artists in full-time employment, outsourcing does not make life any easier. With overseas teams handling other areas of development, speeding up the whole process, the pressure on concept artists to deliver the goods – on time and in sufficient quality – is immense. What's more, improved graphics and growing game worlds means greater workloads for gaming's Van Goghs.

"With technology advancing at the rate it does, you need to provide ideas for these machines to process, so it's critical to employ people capable of generating these ideas," says Daniel Docu. "Just a few years ago, a staff of three or four concept artists was a luxury. Nowadays, a team with a dozen concept artists still can't cover it all. *Guild Wars*' outsourcing

partners require tighter, more precise blueprints. They don't want to take chances or fill in blanks."

Another concern is the surplus of new artists obsessed with creating characters instead of environments. "They all want to design the next Lara Croft, or the next hot chick in spandex and pointy ears," says Docu. But these illustrators forget that the majority of screen real estate is in the environment. It is the backdrops, as *BioShock* proved, that emote a game's essence. Concept art is crucial in order to envisage the setting and style of any game, but great concept art is the foundation for the most memorable titles.

"Computer resolution is getting better and there is so much room for detail," says West. "If you don't design a game's environments, characters, and objects first, you're going to be miss something. It's as important as concept art for film, maybe more so because it is so interactive, everything is 3D so things really need to be figured out in 3D. Concept art, you could say, is the starting block for inspiration." **PCZ**

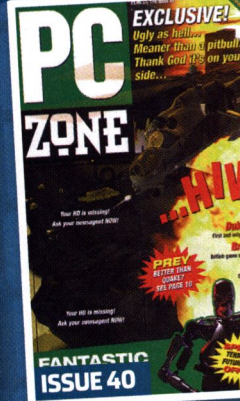
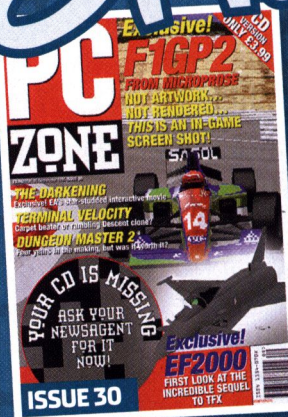
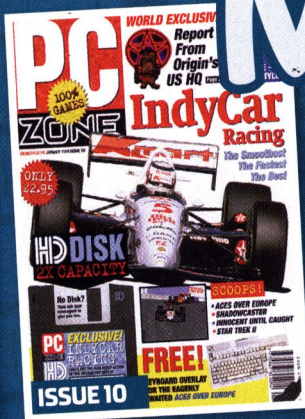
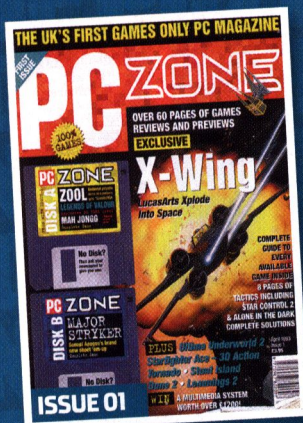
Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

PCZONE

Memories



A SELF-CONGRATULATION

After 15 years at the top of the PC gaming magazine pile (for some of the time) voices from PCZ's past share their most cherished moments...

the LARA CROFT CRUELTY ZOO



Hi everyone! Lara Croft here, to tell you all about my exciting new family zoo! As anyone who's followed my adventures will already know, I really hate animals. I can't stand the things. Let's face facts: they're lazy, they smell, and they're really really stupid. That's why I shoot them at every available opportunity. Bang, bang, bang I go. Bang bang bang. It's the only language they understand. The rotten little fur-encrusted bastards.

Now, thanks to my new zoo, you have a chance to join in with the cruelty, first-hand! Designed with the little ones in mind, my unique Cruelty Zoo is the ideal day out for anyone who's sick to death of the British public's mindless fawning attitude towards anything with four legs. But don't take my word for it... take a look at what's on offer and make up your own mind!



The way supertests used to be.

The Aviary

The only bit of Cruelty Zoo that we can publish. pages, with a can buy. Owls, parakeets, toucans... you name it, it's here... but not for

Li'l Bleeders

It's not just the exotic or endangered species that deserve a kicking. There's the little rural besties to consider too. Anyone who loves



"I'LL NEVER FORGET how sick I felt when I realised that Charlie Brooker's Cruelty Zoo was in my section. 'Oops,' I thought, 'It was my fault the magazine got pulled from the shelves...' To his credit our publisher didn't hold it against me!"

Paul Mallinson, 1996-1999



Macca: our violent past.

"FUNNIEST MOMENT?"

WHEN we were pulled off newsstands in '98, explaining to Felix Dennis (old owner of PCZ) why we'd published a cartoon of a child chainsawing an orangutan in half. You had to have been there. And I very nearly wasn't for much longer.

Tim Ponting, 1993-2000

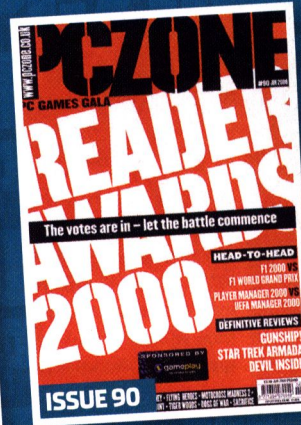
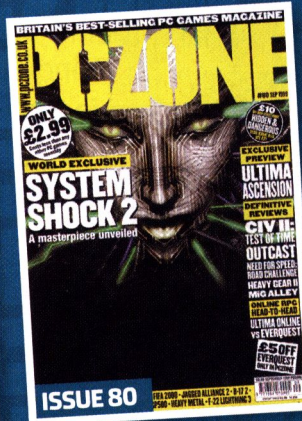
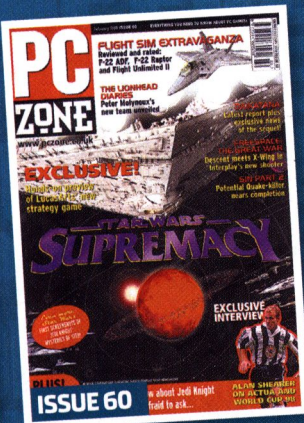
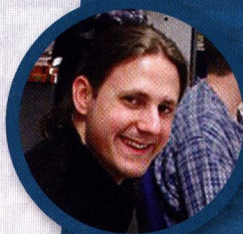
"SIX MONTHS INTO the job I spent a night of vague terror and non-participation in a Prague strip club/brothel. Afterwards, sitting in the back of a limo at 5am a large bald gangster, assigned to me for reasons unknown, handed me a loaded Beretta. In my drunken haze I didn't know what to do, so just laughed and laughed and pleaded that he take it back."

Will Porter, 2003 - present

"Getting paid to develop a Doom obsession. Playing Doom. Writing and spooging about Doom in every issue. And then - my proudest moment - representing England in the World Doom Championship. And being knocked out in the first round by a 14 year-old with a moustache."

David McCandless, 1993-1998

"Slapping the sweat off Mr T's back seconds after he called me 'A powerful man,' and picketing the Greek embassy with Hill before making a swift getaway as two security guards chased us through the streets." **Martin Korda, 2000-2004**



"ED. WHAT'S YOUR eBay name," screamed Jamie Sefton down the phone. 'Uh, editron?' I replied. 'Ed, tell me honestly, are you selling magical axes on eBay?!' he interrogated. '...no?' There was an uneasy silence.

stacks of nicotine-stained back issues, strata of prehistoric dust and the complete absence of a clean, corporate presence. It was a grittier, sweeter era."

Mark Hill, Freelance wunderkind

"I remember Mark Rein coming to demo the first *Unreal*, and everyone wishing the guy would fuck off so we could play *Quake*."

Richie Shoemaker, 1997-2002

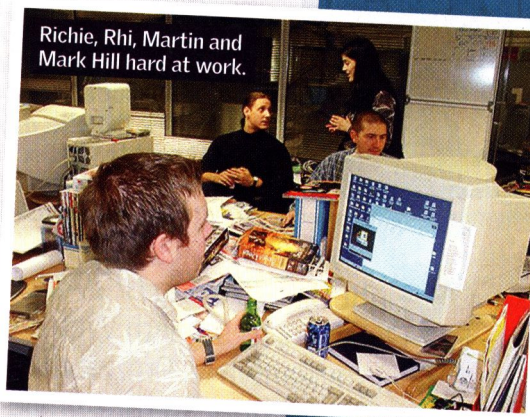
I heard clicking. 'Oh, right. Well. Right. Have a good day, mate.'" **Ed Zitron, 2007 - present**

"MY FAVOURITE MEMORY has to be of the original PC ZONE basement office: a museum of obsolete hardware,

"A TEL AVIV" brothel, the Jimmy White incident, the Playboy Mansion (twice), flying a plane over Arnie's house, meeting Johnny Rotten, crystal meth addiction - they'll all be in the book. But for sheer communal comedy, Woods

falling asleep (and snoring) during an E3 presentation of *STALKER* never fails to raise a smirk."

Steve Hill, freelancer and genital obscurer



Richie, Rhi, Martin and Mark Hill hard at work.

"E3 WAS NEVER less than hilarious. From Hill getting accosted by a fat American with the line, 'Maybe you'd like for me to feed you some cake,' to Sefton's angry efforts at buying beer with a Northern accent ('Three bottles beer'; 'I beg your pardon sir?'). The games weren't bad either..."

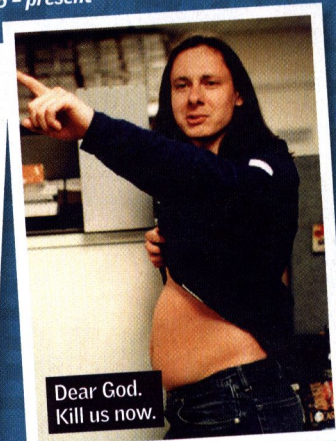
Dave Woods, 1999-2005

"THE WAR BETWEEN PC ZONE and PC Gamer went nuclear in '96, when the *Quake* shareware came out. We delayed ZONE's release by a week to get it on our cover disc and beat Gamer to the shops. They were fucked, and we loved it."

John Davison, 1994-1998

"In 1999, I wrote a few bits for a then-popular internet site called TV Go Home. The site's anonymous writer accepted a few of my submissions, and asked me if I'd thought about reviewing games. I was working 70-hour weeks at the time, so I never really bothered. If I'd known it was Charlie Brooker, and the magazine was PC ZONE, my life may have turned out very differently. I didn't. It didn't. I can never be happy."

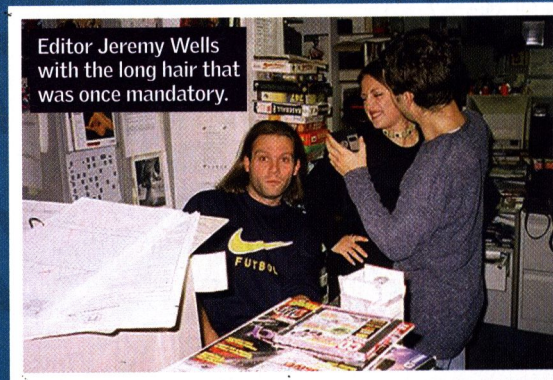
Jon 'Log' Blyth, 2006 - present



Dear God. Kill us now.

"Castle Ronneberg on the *Divine Divinity* press trip. A German chateau-cum-museum populated by the little old man who ran the gift shop and the little old man who collected wood for the fires. Sitting in the working medieval kitchen, I imagined I'd gone back 500 years to a time before deadlines, page counts and enforced caption writing."

Rhianna Pratchett, 2000-2003



Editor Jeremy Wells with the long hair that was once mandatory.



Pre-Porter, Dan Emery would be the token fake woman.

UPFRONTFEATURE

"E3 2004. Myself, Hill, Woods, Mallo, Prezzer and Korda hit LA for a week of utter debauchery (and PC games), featuring porn valley parties, urinating in the Playboy Mansion garden, *Half-Life 2*, the Ram-a-lang-a-ding-dong hotel transvestite bingo and Sunset by cab. Bring back the old E3 I say!"
Jamie Sefton, 2002 - present

"MR CURSOR AND his mate Cully decided to visit ECTS [the defunct British version of E3] and film their experience. Cully was carrying a large photo of a WWE wrestler and halfway during interviewing marketing directors, CEOs, lead programmers and such, he'd whip it out, hold it up in front of them and say to them 'Waddaya reckon to that?' at which point the interview would usually be terminated by some over-zealous PR who sensed a publicity nightmare."
Jeremy Wells, 1994-1999



Note Prez's Simon Cowell look. A true trend-setter.



PCZ hit E3 '98 with typical gusto.

"AT THE LAUNCH party for *The Movies*, I was determined to drink away Peter Molyneux's ill-gotten profits. So I scooped fizz-wine into my gob all night, was sick in Piccadilly Circus, fell out of a taxi and didn't turn up to work the next day. Sefton told me off next to the fax machine. I didn't know where to look."
Steve Hogarty, 2005-present



"My very first Fight Club, playing *BF1942*: Korda's piloting a B17 Flying Fortress, with Wee Jamie and myself as gunners. Meanwhile, Prezzlewick is hot on our tail chasing us down in a Spitfire, while we all shout obscenities at each other. All whilst munching on pizza. This is work?" **Suzy Wallace, 2003-2007**

It's a tough life at PC Zone.

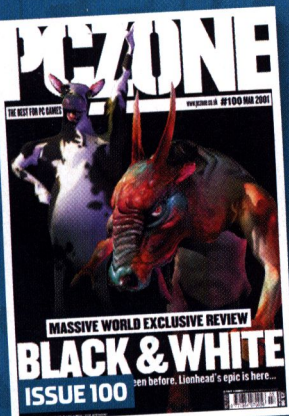
"MY FAVOURITE PC ZONE moment? None of it. It was hell; worse than Afghanistan. Paul Lakin used to hurl furniture around the room like the Hulk. David 'Macca' McCandless and Duncan 'Mr Cursor' McDonald once kicked a dog to death in the office. ('For a laugh,' they said - well the dog

certainly wasn't laughing. No, it was vomiting blood. And fur. I don't know much about dogs, but I know that's not how they laugh).

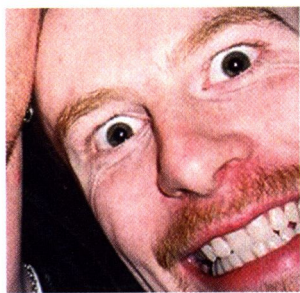
"During a press trip to Atlanta, Jon Davison and Jeremy Wells got drunk and pushed me down the world's second deepest well; I broke every bone in my head and hands. I spent half my time cowering in fear and the other half desperately scrabbling around on the floor for an object sharp enough to cut my own throat with.

"Don't let anyone else's happy memories convince you otherwise: life at PC ZONE was an unrelenting nightmarish heck, the likes of which I hope to never experience again."

Charlie Brooker, freelancer and evil genius



"THOSE RARE OCCASIONS when Duncan, Macca or Patrick got their copy in vaguely on time. Apart from that it's all a blur of long hours, long drinks and winning the Champions League with Cambridge United in an earlier (and easier) version of *Championship Manager*." **Paul Lakin, 1992-1993**



Paul Presley,
Grand old man of PC ZONE

"GIVEN THAT I have been latched onto ZONE almost throughout its entire existence, it's hard to pick out any one single event as the most memorable. But what sticks most in the mind, long after the hazy recollections of drunken nights, foreign adventures, and hair-lowering escapades is that indefinable concept of the PC ZONE 'spirit'.

Back in what is loosely described as 'The Golden Age' of ZONE, when it strode the gaming industry like a colossus of words, screenshots and allusions to game playing, everyone involved felt a sense of brotherhood.



Who invited Holden's stepmother?

"We were more than just a team, we were a family. A family of scoundrels, egotists, health risks and fanatics. And a family of the most brilliantly talented, creative and dedicated individuals that ever created magazines. As someone who has experienced more publishing industries than is healthy, what PC ZONE had was something beyond a mere working relationship. PC ZONE was a Place To Be. Somewhere to go. Whatever the time of day, day of the week or month of the year. It was a post-nightclub chill-out room, a pre-pub drinking lounge, a home where you were always welcome. People came to ZONE's offices because that was what you did.

"Not to say there wasn't a work ethic. Come rain or shine, the magazine made it out every month, each issue filled to the brim with the most intelligent and consistently hilarious writing, eye-popping design work and an acceptable quota of spelling errors.

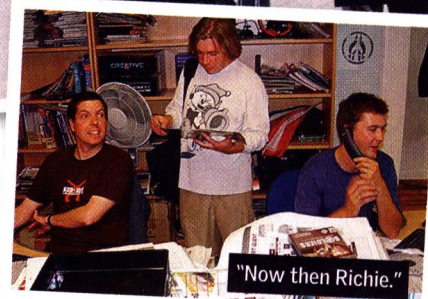
"Even on deadlines, ZONE would work hard, go out and party, then go straight back to the office en masse, to carry on through the night. Even if you didn't have any work on for them, you'd turn up in the evening to hang out and show support, to have a game of *Doom* or *Quake* against Macca (and lose), to skin up over by the art desks, to hear Mallo rant about "UNprofessionalism", to just belong to this incredible collection of talent, to take it all in and hope your own contribution was somehow worthy of them.

"Somewhat inevitably was that this pride, this talent – this spirit – seeped into every page of the magazine. You couldn't be a reader of PC ZONE and not feel as though, in some way, you belonged to this family just as much as the people putting it together. ZONE was as much infused by its readership as the readers were by the magazine. Most magazines have a definite line, a feeling of 'You' and 'Us' ZONE was different, its readers were as integral to its success as Brooker's cartoons, Hill's cynicism or Mr Cursor's insanity. Thanks to the contributions we asked of you the reader, we became as proud of the characters that lived in our forums, Fight Clubs and ZONE Chats as any of the paid writers.

"All magazines go through ups and downs, yet somehow because ZONE was always greater than the sum of its already mighty parts, the ZONE spirit continued throughout the magazine's life, from the first issue through to this one. Whatever was thrown at it, wherever the magazine was being produced for whichever corporate behemoth, whoever made up the cast list, from the Lakin and Scottford all the way through to Porter,



Dave Woods: big boy hunter extraordinaire.



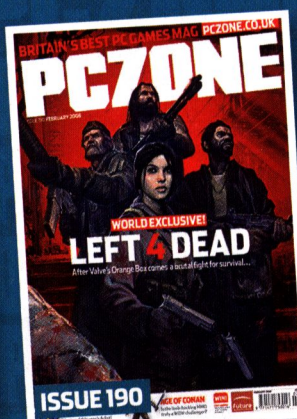
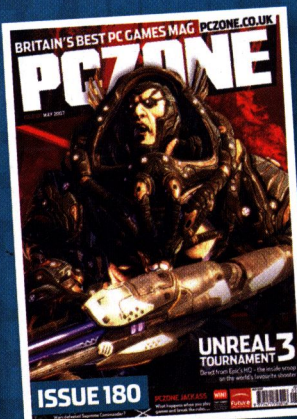
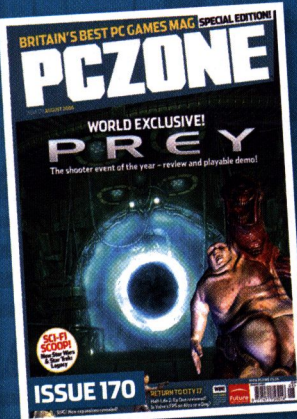
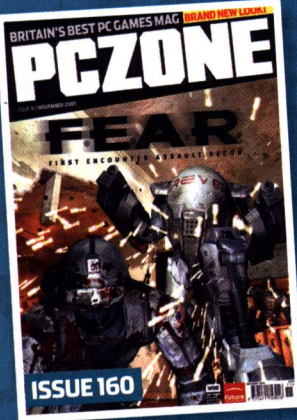
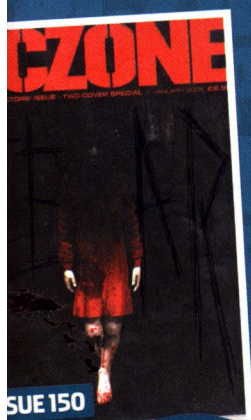
"Now then Richie."

Log and Hogarty today and everyone in between, that spark never died. The family was always there, even when the days seemed dark.

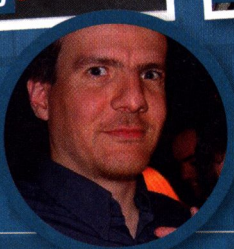
"Whatever the future holds, that sense of brotherhood, that spirit, will never die for as long as there are people who can raise their heads and with pride in their voice say the words, 'Yeah, I used to work for PC ZONE.'"



This hobbit visited us once and we never printed his picture. 'Till now.



"Buying the first issue in 1993 and subscribing the moment I put it down. Had someone warned me that years later I'd be sat in a room watching Macca and Mallo take it in turns to see who could produce the whiffiest bum-egg, I'd have probably held off for PC Gamer." **Philip Wand, Hardware Guru**



PCZONE Charts



- 1 **NEW** **SPORE**
Issue 199 95%
- 2 **NEW** **THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE**
N/A
- 3 **NEW** **STALKER: CLEAR SKY**
Issue 198 88%
- 4 — **THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 5 ↑ **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 89%
- 6 ↓ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 7 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: FREETIME**
Issue 200 74%
- 8 **NEW** **MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES**
Issue 200 73%
- 9 ↑ **SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE**
Issue 193 91%
- 10 ↑ **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**
Issue 180 85%
- 11 **NEW** **EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR**
Issue 200 40%
- 12 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV COMPLETE**
N/A
- 13 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**
Issue 188 38%
- 14 ↓ **CRYSIS**
Issue 188 92%
- 15 ↓ **MASS EFFECT**
Issue 195 92%
- 16 ↑ **MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X DELUXE**
N/A
- 17 ↓ **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR - SOULSTORM**
Issue 192 81%
- 18 ↓ **ASSASSIN'S CREED**
Issue 194 72%
- 19 — **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 20 **RE** **THE ORANGE BOX**
N/A



1

SPORE

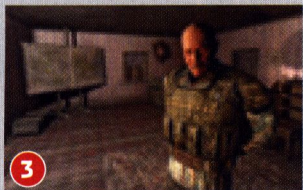
Our 199 review caused a stir on the internet, but we stand by it because *Spore* is an gem, covered in sugar, wrapped in nougat.



2

THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE

We haven't reviewed it, and we probably will end up doing so with more bile than our toilets after a night's salt eating.



3

STALKER: CLEAR SKY

The free-roaming Chernobyl-'em-up was still rough around the edges, but what can we say? We're happy to see it anyway.

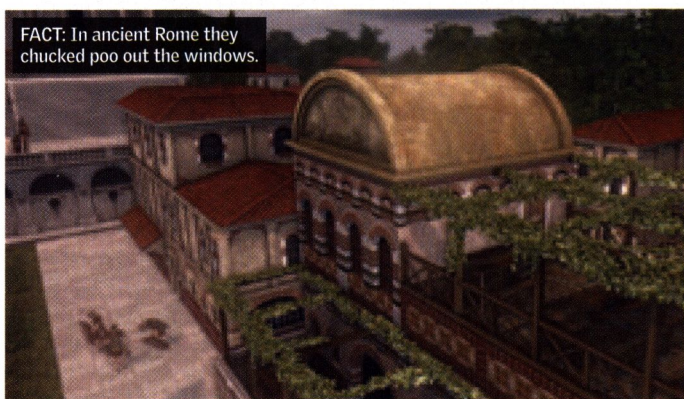


8

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

An imperfect chunk of open-world warfare that, when mined for delicious fun, can spit forth oil derricks worth of joy.

FACT: In ancient Rome they chucked poo out the windows.



CAESAR SALAD

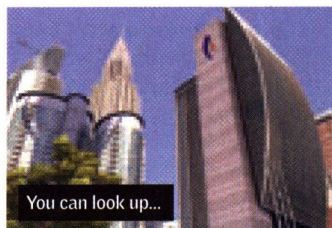
Imperium Romanum sequel arises

WEBSITE www.imperium-game.com ETA 2009

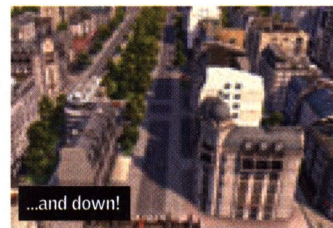
THE FIRST ONE was an oddly captivating experience, which is why we think *Imperium Romanum II* is more than worth mentioning here. This city builder puts you in the sandals of a patrician of a small town aspiring to become the governor of Rome. What grabs you is the *Football Manager*-level of stat-crunching involved in diplomacy, and this time around it's all done up with prettier graphics over larger maps, a

persistent main character and an improved battle system.

SimCity-style disasters have arrived too, with unlucky town planners experiencing plagues and fires. Climbing the game's social ladder will require sucking up to some famous Roman figures, including Julius Caesar, a leader so great they called all who came after 'Caesar' (which formed the words Kaiser and Tsar, but not King, which is derived from 'kin'. We love etymology).



You can look up...



...and down!

INNER CITY PRESSURE

Cities XL takes city building online

WEBSITE www.citiesxl.com ETA Spring 2009

CITIES XL IS merging a handful of games into one. A city builder from Monte Cristo, the guys who created *CityLife*, *Cities XL* looks to take the genre into some interesting new arenas. First off, your city acts as a persistent location on a planet populated by other players' cities. The game also allows players (for a couple of quid each) to bolt *Tycoon*-style add-ons to the vanilla experience.

For example, the *Ski Tycoon* pack lets you designate pistes, and hire and fire resort staff; the *Metro Pack* can plot bus routes around your city; and the *Theme Park* pack will turn the game into a pared down version of *Rollercoaster Tycoon*. All of these affect your city's stats and standing, increasing your economy and the population's wealth. It's a smart approach to a city builder. We just hope they've got the gumption to pull it off.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

THE MEN TURNING GAMING ON ITS SIDE

BLUE OMEGA'S RICHARD GILBERT, PRODUCER ON *DAMNATION*, AND JACOB MINKOFF, LEAD DESIGNER

A *Wild Wild West*-style shooter with more up and down than side to side? Interesting, sure, we ask Blue Omega to take us deep, deep down into *Damnation*'s topsy-turvy vertical gameplay...

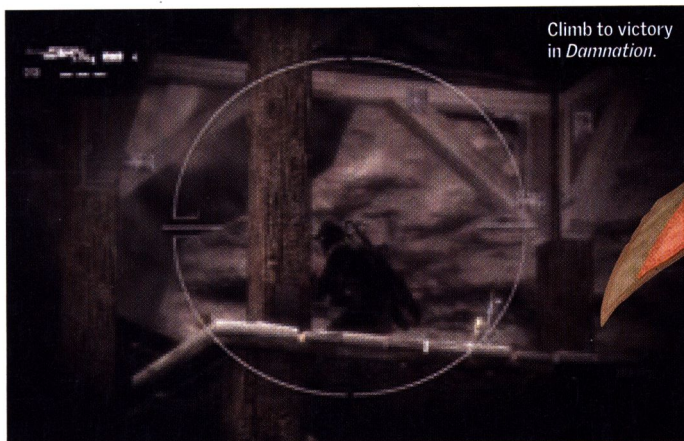
Q So what's going on in *Damnation*?

A RG The American Revolution has gone on for 40 years, the Industrial Revolution is beginning, and the country has collapsed into a state of chaos and anarchy. The leading industrialist at the time has decided to bring his own brand of order back to the country, and does what every maniacal dictator would do and builds an army and crushes everyone in his path.

Explain the whole verticality thing...

JM We've always talked about taking the shooter and going vertical with it, and what we mean by that is allowing the player to traverse vast environments that are not only made up of miles of horizontal distance but also thousands of feet in height. It opens up the game to vertical tactics.

Let's say you have this big town square, and there's this building at the end with a whole bunch of snipers in it. Now, you could go through the square and try to dodge the sniper fire. Or you could climb a lamp post and jump in



Climb to victory in *Damnation*.

through a window, use the building to get to the roof, jump across to the roof of the sniper building, drop in through the skylight and pop the sniper in the head with your pistol.

How will multiplayer work?

JM We've taken the traditional capture the flag gameplay and turned it on its side. There's a flag at the bottom of the map and one at the top, and it could

take you 10 seconds or less to actually get down to the flag – you'd slide down a ladder or something like that, but it's going to be a lot harder to get back up. You'll have to use those verticality tactics to do that.

RG It has a completely different pacing to any multiplayer shooter you've ever played. Usually it takes exactly the same amount of time to get from one base to the other and back. But now you get the

instant gratification of getting that flag, but getting back will be where the challenge comes in.

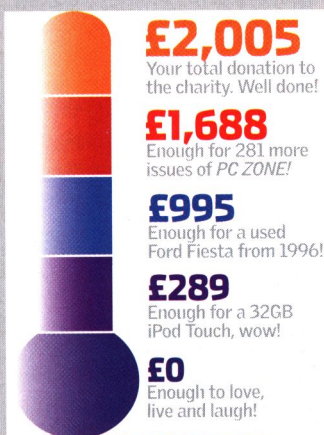
As it's more difficult to defend a lower position than it is a higher one, you'll get some teams thinking, "We don't care if you get our flag, we're going to climb up into your base and stop you getting back." The tactics being used are completely different to what you've played before.



tat ZONE

A single party popper split the air asunder in the *PC ZONE* office today, as the Tatzone Totalizer finally hit that crucial figure of £2,005. Give yourselves a pat on the back, readers, as you've done the most noble thing known to humanity. You've bought enough branded key rings, pens and XL gaming T-shirts to bury a sickly youth up to his neck in Gameboys. Tatzone will be taking a well deserved break now. See you soon!

All proceeds from Tatzone are going to the Entertainment Software Charity. Visit snipurl.com/escharity for info on the ESC.



TATZONE TOTALIZED

Celebrating 40 years of charitable tat haulage

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	CRYSIS WARHEAD T-SHIRT Won't turn you invisible, or into a violent cockney.	£16.00	10
	SPEEDBALL 2 BASEBALL SHIRT Large size. Very retro. Rather tasty.	£16.50	6
	ALAN HANSEN'S SPORTS CHALLENGE We made Alan look like Hitler. So we didn't sell it.	£0	0
	ANKH FROM ANKH It's an ancient symbol of life. Apparently, life isn't worth much to you people.	£1.60	7

THE MAN WHO KNOWS



THE INTERNET, A disgusting place, has yet again sprung a leak of moral turpitude. With its telling banner of "Unhappy with your wife? Click here for virtual sex!" the people who brought you an even filthier version of *Second Life*, the sleazily handled Redlight Center (www.redlightcenter.com) have returned with an updated version: **Rude Virtual** (www.rudevirtual.com).

The calendar of planned in-game events at Rude Virtual on the day of the return of *The Man Who Knows* ran as follows:

3pm Wedding of Crème_OfWheat and Jenny_Snatch

4.15pm F**k Fest

5-9pm Beach Party

8pm Remembering September 11th

"Creationist website antispoire.com baited forward-thinkers"

A sex scandal has rocked the kingdoms of the Hyborian Age to its very server code, resulting in the dismissal of one of *Age of Conan*'s GMs, after a call out to a glitched raid ended in pornographic shenanigans.

When putting down his weighty toolbox after a job well done, said GM was propositioned by a buxom player known as Fastolf with the line, "You know, on these cold winter nights... all I want is to be mounted." And mounted she was, until Fastolf revealed her true testosterone-packed colours and demanded 100 gold to buy his/her silence. The fact that said GM lost his real-world job, suggests he didn't pay enough.

Fastolf was last seen climbing into a limo with Man United winger Cristiano Ronaldo, and media enquiries should be directed through Max Clifford's PR agency.

Satire has struck the internet, with devastating effect. Vehemently creationist bible-bashing website antispoire.com baited forward-thinking individuals with an unstoppable torrent of Will Wright hate.

"It seems Will has switched gears from evolution to creation and is trying to say that in 18 days, *Spore* users did what God did in seven," fumed the site. "So all of *Spore* users add up to 38% of God. Just another direct attack from a man who thinks he's unstoppable."

Trolling, death threats and money-earning worldwide hit-counts ensued. The website was shown to be a hoax when it descended into a rubbish Rickroll gag, which blog commentators of nine months ago found really, really hilarious.



Then came a spider tomb raid beside it

HEADING BACK UNDERGROUND

Will Porter frowns at *Tomb Raider: Underworld*

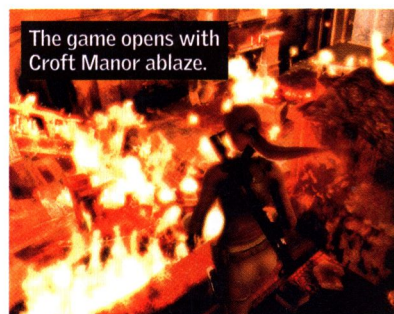
WEBSITE tombraider.com ETA November

AS AN ENTERTAINMENT package I thought *Tomb Raider: Legend* was flawless. Well, apart a bit of dodgy combat, dodgy boss battles and a few other dodgy things.

What I mean is that I found it struck the balance between modernity and tomb-ness remarkably well (the Japanese and Arthurian museum levels being among the best) and I loved the way that wall-crawling and artifact stealing was complemented by a white noise background of chatter from the backroom cohorts Zip and Alister, meaning dips into boredom were rare.

Basically *Legend* was slick. So it distresses me when I see that *Underworld* has dispensed with much of this evolution of Lara into a more modern form of constant entertainment and replaced instead by, from what I've seen so far, easily interchangeable tombs. Tombs in different countries, but tombs nevertheless.

Yes, we always banged on about Lara's true home being underground as Core Design took her to Paris



The game opens with Croft Manor ablaze.



Yeah. Vehicle bits remain sadly intact too.

and Venice in their God-awful third and fourth iterations, but *Legend* struck a balance so precise I worry *Underworld* is fixing something non-broken the behest of the forum-bound fanboy morass.

Still, the slo-mo blade dodging that replaces button-mashing quick-time events is excellent, as the shark harpooning and what Eidos still, lovingly to as Lara's 'next-gen ponytail' for about the fifth in a row.

What I need to underline, though, is that this appears to be very much a sequel to *Anniversary* rather than *Legend* – sure it's got motorbike chase (promised to be far, far more advanced than those *Legend*), but the expanded hitlist of endangered animals getting slow-motion bullets to the cranium very much the hallmark of the more traditional *Tomb Raider* approach. In itself, this is a good thing, but can't help feel that in some areas a step backward being taken, sexy boob-dew, or no.

I'm ready to be proved wrong, however.

HALL OF FAME

We're not the only venerable institution y'know...

WEBSITE www.goldenjoystick.com

WE LIKE TO pretend that *PC ZONE* is special because it began somewhere within the distant folds of time (1993), but the truth is that the Golden Joystick Awards have been going even longer. Yes, in 1983 the winner of the best arcade game was *Manic Miner*, the best original game was Imagine's *Ah Diddums* (odd, seeing as it was rubbish) and the Ultimate Game of the Year (now the Virgin Media Ultimate Game of the Year, sponsorship fans) was the great *Jetpac*.

Over the years we've seen Jonathan Ross shout "Oh, fuck off Crash!" as a man dressed as a console Bandicoot wandered through the door, and Justin Lee Collins tell the audience that our assistant publisher eats his own shit (not true). But little can compare to these snapshots from years past of people with big hair and amusing glasses.

The Golden Joysticks, now in their 26th year, return on 31 October.



26th ANNUAL GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS

The hit list

Recent PC game of the year winners

- 2002** *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*
- 2003** *Championship Manager 4*
- 2004** *Doom 3*
- 2005** *Half-Life 2*
- 2006** *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*
- 2007** *Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar*



Alan Carr gets butchered by the day...

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MEM 4GB Corsair 800 MHZ DDR2
HDD 500GB Spinpoint SATA-II HDD 16MB
GFX NVIDIA GeForce 9600GT 512mb
PSU 600W PSU
CAS ThermalTake Tsunami
DVD 18X Dual Layer DVD/RW
MTB Asus P5K/EPU S/L Motherboard
SND 7.1 Surround Sound
LAN Broadband Ethernet Lan
OS Windows Vista Home Premium 64-bit
WAR 1 Year Warranty
SUP Lifetime Technical Support
DEL FREE UK Mainland Delivery

CPU Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6850
MEM 4GB Corsair 800 MHZ DDR2
HDD 500GB Spinpoint SATA-II HDD 16MB
GFX NVIDIA GeForce GTX 280 1GB
PSU Hiper Power 880W Low Noise
CAS Antec 900 Gamer Case
DVD 18X Dual Layer DVD/RW
MTB XFX 780i Gaming Board
SND 7.1 Surround Sound
LAN Broadband Ethernet Lan
OS Windows Vista Home Premium 64-bit
WAR 1 Year Warranty
SUP Lifetime Technical Support
DEL FREE UK Mainland Delivery

CPU Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650
MEM 4 GB Corsair 1333 MHZ DDR3
HDD 300GB Raptor Gaming HDD (10k rpm)
GFX 2 x NVIDIA GeForce GTX 280 1GB (SLI)
PSU ThermalTake 1200W Toughpower
CAS CoolerMaster Cosmos S
DVD 18X Dual Layer DVD/RW
MTB EVGA 790i Gaming Board
SND 7.1 Surround Sound
LAN Broadband Ethernet Lan
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CRIME SPREE...

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

Guns don't kill people, *Steve Hogarty* does

DEVELOPER Rockstar North PUBLISHER Rockstar Games WEBSITE rockstargames.com/IV

THERE'S AN OUTSIDE chance that you've heard of *Grand Theft Auto IV* already. A little-known game from an obscure Scottish developer, it sold a paltry 631,000 copies on its first day of release in the UK, breaking the record for the roundest number of things ever sold in a 24-hour period.

GTA IV is big news of course, a giant of a game whose shocking popularity on consoles is so graciously matched by its stratospheric quality. A city based on New York acts as a backdrop to a complex freeform game, a story spanning well over 10 hours, and the best acting, action and humour you'll find this side of movies and TV.

Rockstar invented open-world gaming, and with *GTA IV* they filled that open world with detail and nourishing choice. It's a game where you're never at a loss for something to see or do, or someone to shag or murder. It's a masterpiece.

The PC version is something we've spent many a breakfast time worrying about. "Firstly," we'd muse as we waved our spoons, "does it even exist?" It does, I've played it. "Secondly," we'd ask, muesli flying in the air, "how long will we have to wait?" Just a short while, it's here in November. "Thirdly," we'd enquire, making stabbing motions with a butter knife, "how will it play?"

ETA
NOVEMBER

PORT AUTHORITY

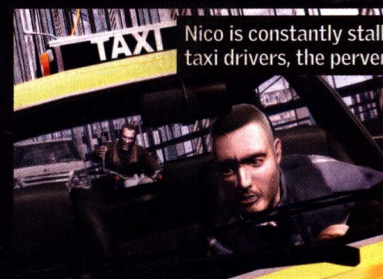
Well, stick a 360 pad into your USB port and it's almost impossible to tell the difference between the PC and the console version. Besides the obvious improvements in resolution, draw

THE LOWDOWN

- Huge, beautiful, living city ☒
- Overflowing with detail ☒
- So many excellent characters ☒
- So much to do ☒
- Better on a pad ☒



Flipped cars no longer turn into time bombs, but you'll see plenty of explosions.



Nico is constantly stalked by taxi drivers, the pervert

THE STORY SO FAR... GRAND THEFT AUTO

GRAND THEFT AUTO
The original, and some might say the best. They're wrong.

1997



GTA III
The series bursts into 3D, and politicians vomit in disgust.

2001



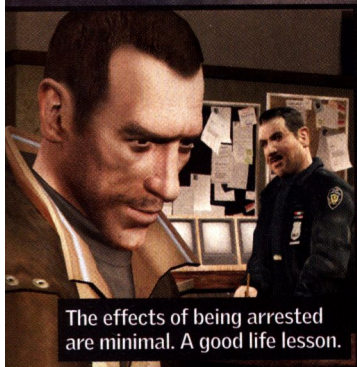
GTA: SAN ANDREAS
The biggest and most controversial of the GTA games.

2004

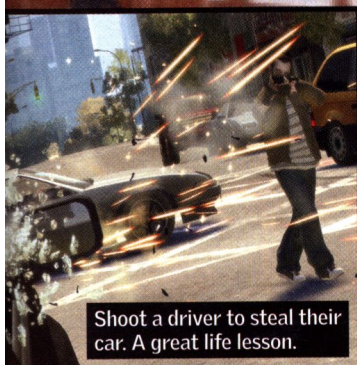


GTA IV
The series' pinnacle. Running people over has never been so fun.

2008



The effects of being arrested are minimal. A good life lesson.



Shoot a driver to steal their car. A great life lesson.

distance and some texture qualities, it is take-for-take a carbon copy, as flawless a port as you could hope for.

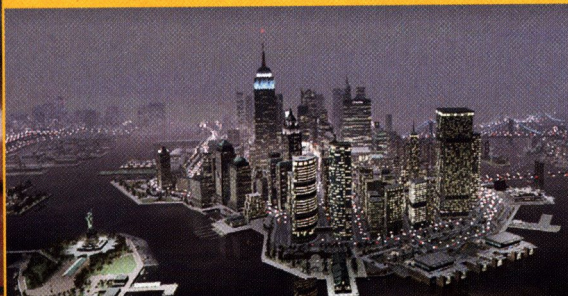
Being published under the *Games for Windows LIVE* umbrella means perfect gamepad support right out of the box too, as well as online support similar to Xbox LIVE's. Achievements, the ability to jump into and out of online games without needing to move to your keyboard to switch servers – it's probably the first time you can begin to appreciate the usefulness of Microsoft's clunky online service. Combine that with the fact that Gold membership is now free, and we could be ready to get off our high, anti-Microsoft horses.

BACK TO THE PAD

Downing the pad and taking to a more traditional keyboard and mouse setup throws out a few concerns however. These range from niggling things such as motion blur as the camera whips about your character (perfectly acceptable on a smoothly panning analogue stick, not so much on a twitchy mouse) to more pressing problems such as camera controls while driving.

A jaunt through the options menu will no doubt remedy the former, but the latter seems to be trickier to fix.

Multiplayer GTA IV PC'S MP, LOL



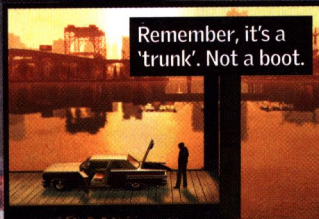
Liberty City: New York with more crime and less Zitron.

Expanded multiplayer for the PC version has been mentioned by Rockstar, though what that'll encompass is a mystery. We'll certainly be receiving the 15 game modes that shipped with the console versions, as well as access to the Rockstar Social Club.

A sort of Facebook for virtual criminals, the Social Club will keep track of all of your stats, even little things like how far you've run on foot. Otherwise, multiplayer modes allow car racing, deathmatching, and capture the flag and VIP protection-style games too.

The expanded nature of the PC version implies an increased player count – so don't be surprised to see up to 32 players rocking out.

Not an effective way to destroy gunships, but it looks nice.



Remember, it's a 'trunk'. Not a boot.

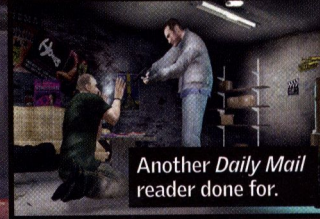
Players of the console version will be aware of the camera's tendency to lag as you take sharp corners, compelling you to make liberal use of the right thumbstick. A similar tactic when using a mouse requires not a minute gesture of the thumb, but dramatic, theatrical sweeping movements.

Even on-foot shooting sections play out better on the pad, such as the

effort Rockstar have put into getting it right on console. Unbelievably, locking on to enemies and flicking the left thumbstick up to snap out a headshot feels far more satisfying than the precision offered by a mouse.

And get this: there was no custom radio station in the preview build we saw. Whether this feature, which allows you to play your own music through the radios of Liberty City's cars, boats, helicopters etc, will appear in the final release is unknown, but if we can't listen to our Stephen Fry podcasts while reversing over hookers' faces, we'll be unaroused.

This points to the PC version of *GTA IV* having an inseparable bond with its console roots. And that's no



Another *Daily Mail* reader done for.

bad thing as long as you're prepared to pick up a 360 pad, which you really should be by now. Keyboard and mouse controls stumble on a few counts, mostly through no fault of Rockstar's, but instead because analogue controls benefit *GTA IV* in almost every aspect. It's a world with the sort of believability that'll make you want to walk at a certain pace, drive at a certain speed and corner in a certain way. A keyboard's digital input is a barrier to that. So we should all get 360 pads. Sigh. **PCZ**

"GTA IV is a game where you're never at a loss for something to see or do, or someone to shag or murder"

1



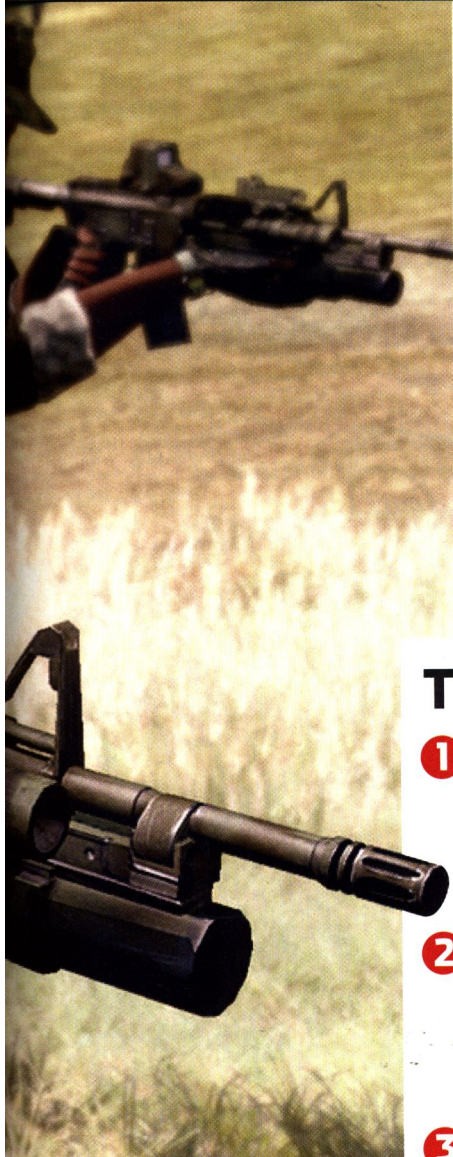
ARMED ASSAULT 2

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive PUBLISHER 505 Games WEBSITE www.arma2.com ETA Spring 2009

CODEMASTERS MAY HAVE the *Operation Flashpoint* name, but Bohemia Interactive have the soul. Whereas the first *Armed Assault* game was a flawed, ugly, over-difficult, but fundamentally excellent, example of combat simulation, *Armed Assault 2* looks like a different game altogether.

Meticulously designed real-life weapons and vehicles, accurate from their profiles right the way down to their bolts, turn *Arma 2* into a large-scale military sandbox. Though fictional, the land you'll be fighting around is based on real satellite imagery of an unnamed part of Eastern Europe, and even includes four castles from the area.

6



The Bigger Picture

1 MILITARY MIGHT

There are 40-odd customisable army-specific guns in the game. They're all intended to be as realistic as possible – the ammo types won't just deal different damage, they'll have their unique style of tracers too.

2 UNDER FIRE

Over 50 types of vehicle are in the game, including APCs, Mil Mi-24 gunships, and basic civilian vehicles. All vehicles will be specific to each side. But that doesn't stop you nicking an amphibious truck and driving it into a lake.

3 CHERNARUS

The fictional, post-Soviet country of Chernarus is the setting. Ravaged by a long civil war and plagued with an unstable political system, there's a delicate balance of factions at play. It's a country of insurgencies, counter-insurgencies, warlords, breakaway states and martial law.

4 FACT AND FICTION

Although the game is fictional, the story is as realistic as the action. Bohemia claim it "blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction". With recent news, the old NATO vs Russia themes have a chilling resonance.

5 BOHEMIAN LIKE YOU

Arma 2's new version of the Real Virtuality engine supports multicore processors and Shader Model 3, and has a litter of other stuff such as "hemispherical lighting". This means that it will feature the most realistic dogs ever.

6 UNIT

There's a new emphasis on characters in your squad. 'Eightball' is the linguist and son of a lawyer; 'Coops' is the college dropout turned recon guy; 'Ice Cold' Randy Sykes is a black ops marksman; Brian 'Scarlet' O'Hara is the ex-Navy medic. These are the guys who make up Razor Squad. Grrr.



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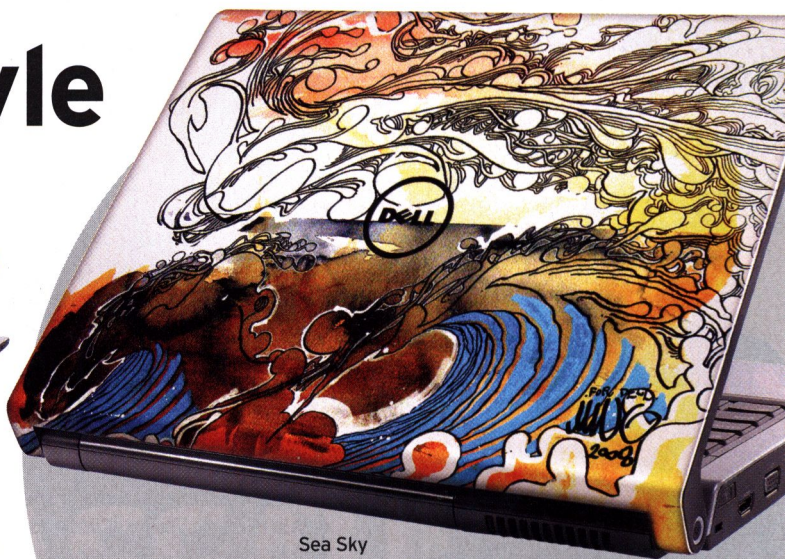
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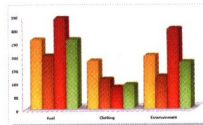


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Tyranids are the Zerg of *Warhammer 40k*. See also: the Scrin.



QUICK, CALL RENTOKIL

The bugs have arrived in *Dawn of War II*

WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com ETA Spring 2009

SO IT WAS Tyranids all along. That was the great secret Relic were alluding to in their previous teaser video. Not Ork spores or a new race of Deep Crows, but playable, hive-minded, exo-skeletal Tyranids. An unstoppable force of nature smearing itself across the Imperium, devouring planets, and pushing outwards towards the furthest reaches of the galaxy.

They dissolve into the potent RTS mix of *Dawn of War II* perfectly, with brood nests acting as spawn points for the insectoid menace, massive Tyrants acting as powerful commanders, and a hive-mind mentality which filters into your military tactics. Tyranids connected to the hive glow green as they channel the thoughts, knowledge and intentions of every tyranid around them. But kill their squad leader and they become bewildered and panicked, having had their bearings violently ravaged. They scuttle madly; still a threat but a mindless one.

The Space Marine strike force have a more dynamic single player campaign, one which forces you to choose your fights as they come. Rewards such as powerful new weapons will tempt you away from the more humanitarian rescue missions, as up to three different calls to arms will be demanding your attention at any given moment.

Commander-exclusive items such as jetpacks are also available, liberal use of which was made in the demo we were shown. Not only do the packs launch your men over walls, but they'll come down hard on whatever's on the other side, crushing enemies and deforming the terrain.

With the inclusion of *Warhammer 40,000*'s most terrifying creatures, *Dawn of War II*'s fiendish roster is bound to please fans. And even if you're not a fan, you can't argue that a single-minded bipedal cricket with two-storey scythes for forearms isn't one of the best enemies that could've been included. **PW**

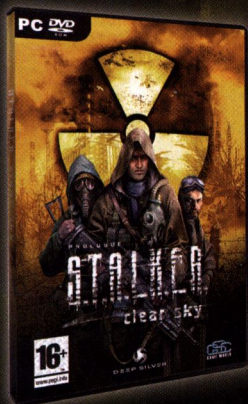
The giant Hive Tyrants can rule an entire planet's worth of Tyranids.

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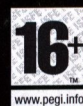


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URBAN FOX...

WOMAN ON THE EDGE

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE mirrorsedge.com

Rhianna Pratchett – ex-ZONE scribe and story designer on *Mirror's Edge* – talks us through her work with DICE

RUNNING THE EDGE

"Runners are part extreme athlete, part courier, who work in networks across the city. Each network has a hub controlled by a Tracker who may have several Runners under their watchful eyes. The Runners deliver small packages and data across the city, evading the street-based security cameras and the heavily monitored regular communication channels, by using parkour and free-running to move across the rooftops. As long as they stay out of sight and trouble, the cops usually leave them alone. They're too much like hard work."

The trip to the world's second deepest well had gone terribly wrong.

Good job on the roofs, my council tax.



CITY LIFE

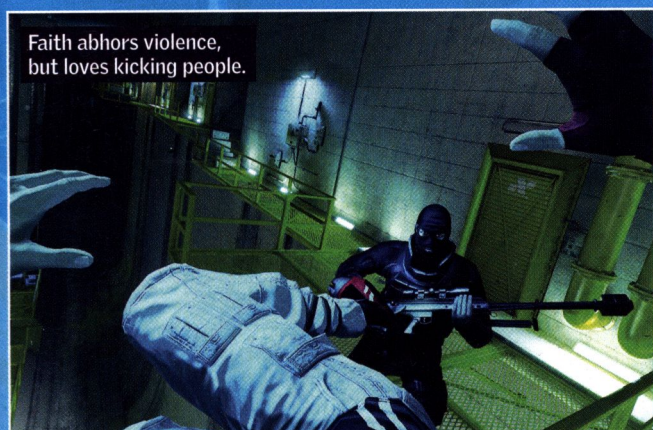
"It's easy to dismiss the city in *Mirror's Edge* as your usual dystopia. But it's not that simple. This city is more like a nanny state taken to extremes. Many inhabitants are very happy. They have the best housing, good schools, affordable health care and many other benefits – all provided by the good old city. As long as you're willing to give up a certain amount of personal choice and mental freedom, a very comfortable life can be yours. If you're not, you're on your own."

Weapons slow Faith down, so she uses nifty martial arts.



YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

"In *Mirror's Edge* you step into the well-worn shoes of Faith. In her past, she's seen the city change and remembers those who fought against it, even though she no longer considers herself to be one of them. She wants to just get by as best she can with a modicum of free will. Faith's not looking for trouble. Unfortunately, when Kate, her estranged sister and cop, is framed for the murder of a local politician who's running for mayor, trouble finds Faith."



Faith abhors violence, but loves kicking people.

MERCURY RISING

"Merc (Mercury) is Faith's Tracker. Trackers are responsible for planning the jobs and keeping watch over their Runners. As well as using devices which allow constant communication and monitoring, Trackers have expert knowledge of the city. Merc was a founder of the Runners. These days, due to a sedentary job, regular pizzas and strong coffee, he doesn't have his old physique. He cares about Faith, despite meeting her when she broke into his hideout."



Kate can pull impossibly large objects from her big hair.



With that costume, surely this man knows he's one of the bad guys.

MAN FALLING OVER

Jon Blyth goes hands-on with the self-same gymnastic vertigo provider



Jon Blyth once peered over the edge of a multi-storey.

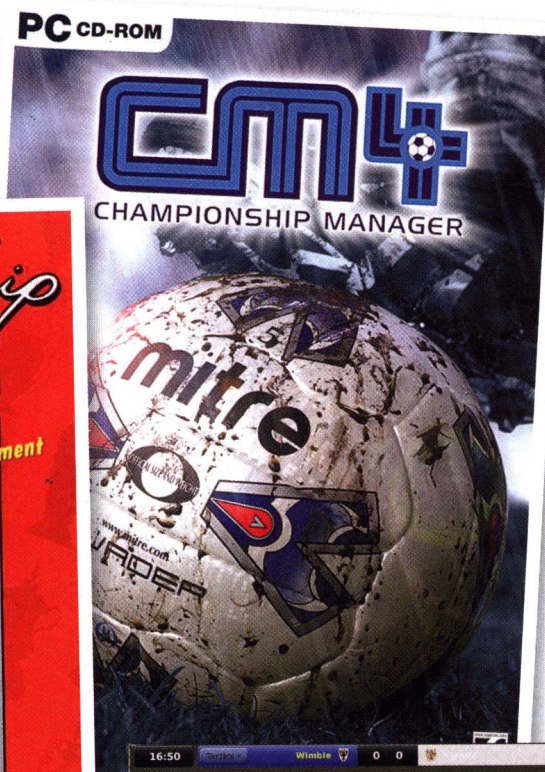
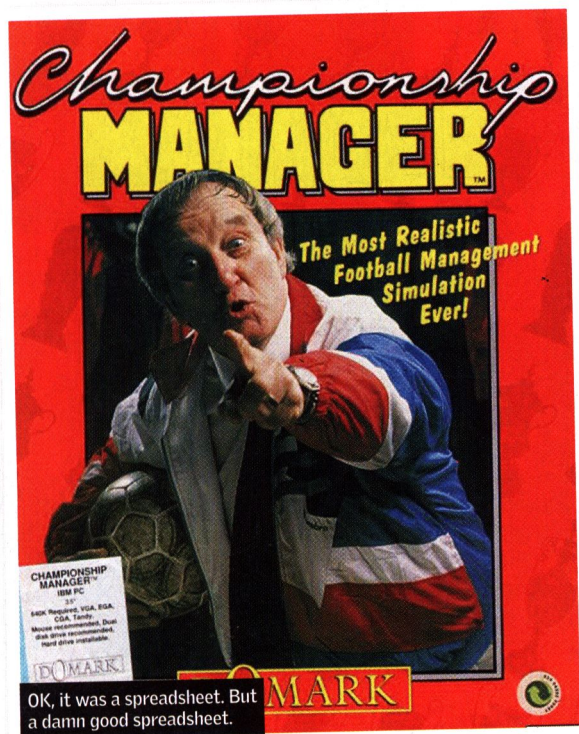
THE DECISION TO put *Mirror's Edge* in the first-person was a strange one – no fast-paced acrobatic game, from *Sonic* to the *Prince of Persia*, has put you inside the protagonist's eyes. If you've tried playing *Trials 2* in the rider's camera mode, you'll see why – it's just impossible. *Dark Messiah* did it, but that was melee combat and RPG action, not free-running acrobatics. So DICE's decision to make this game a first-person runner is brave.

Using the first person to navigate – rather than train a reticule on a man's head – is done so skilfully in *Mirror's Edge* that the sensation of running is breath-taking. I mean that literally – as you run towards a ledge, accelerating towards the brink, you'll only resume normal respiration once you've landed. If you pulled the camera back, you wouldn't really be doing anything as spectacular as in POP. But the mix of the clean graphics, visual effects, perspective and immersive sound effects of Faith's thudding footfalls and breathing make it feel new. With the *Prince* and *Lara*, you cock your head while you're playing. With *Mirror's Edge*, you hold your breath and nod hopefully.

As you'd expect – and as has been promised – the controls are intuitive; simple enough to give you the feeling that you're better than you are. Faith's 'RunnerVision' provides a sci-fi free explanation as to why you notice things you'll be able to reach. The first-person perspective gives a real sense of solidity and presence, and the occasional sense of vertigo that comes from looking down from a ledge is excellent. The perspective could have been the game's stumbling block, but it turns out that it's a warm stroke of genius.

Traversing this clinical dystopia is only very rarely anything other than a pleasure, and having the emphasis shifted away from gunplay and combat is honest and welcome. The infrequent moments of lethal pratfalls that don't feel like your fault aside, *Mirror's Edge* is holding together excellently. **PCZ**

"In *Mirror's Edge* the sensation of running is breath-taking. I mean that literally"



Reasons to be addicted

Why Harry Redknapp swears by *FM 2009* (allegedly)

Football Manager 2009 boasts plenty of features that move it further away from its spreadsheet origins.

There's a new 3D match engine, a TV view, improved assistant manager feedback, realistically unscrupulous media feedback, press conferences and improved club finances. And there's even (heaven forbid) female managers.

Yet, as ever, it's the database that should keep *FM 2009* ahead of its rivals, these days containing 350,000 players in over 5,000 clubs from 50 countries.

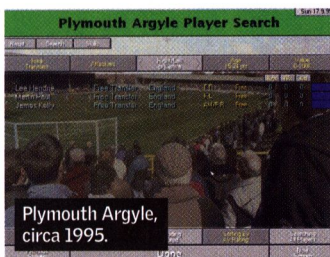
THE CURSE OF FOOTBALL MANAGER



Former editor *Jeremy Wells* tells of his long-standing *Football Manager* addiction

FOOTBALL MANAGER, SOON to appear in its 2009 rendition, has come a long way since the game first appeared on PC some 18 years back. It got married to Eidos (nee Domark), divorced, changed its name and is now living with Sega; but the game of champions is still as addictive, as thousands of puffy eyed footy fans across the country will testify.

Back in the days when things like the Xbox were merely a twinkle in Bill's eye and the PC ruled the world of gaming,

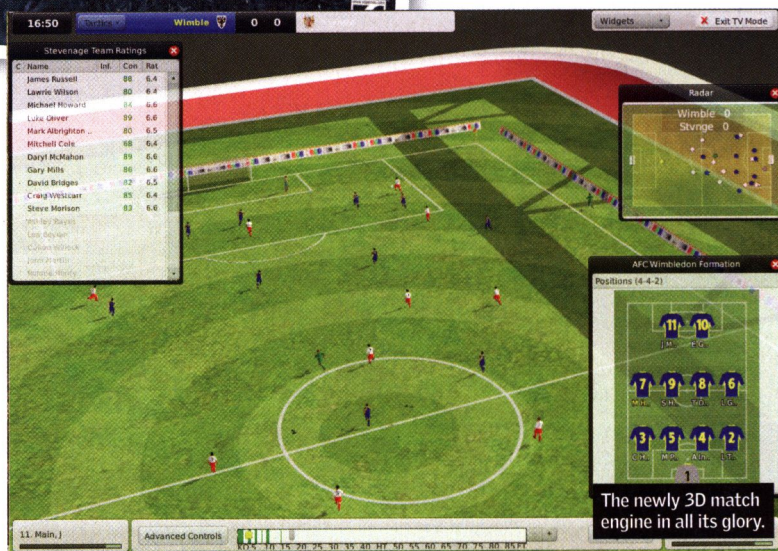


Championship Manager (as it was then known) was a strange bedfellow to the likes of *Quake*. When a new build of *CM* was proffered, usually around the start of the new football season, most of the reviewers who inhabited the *PC ZONE* office (self-proclaimed football fans) would turn their noses up in disdain at the thought of being forced to spend hours pondering the intricacies of what the then Chelsea-loving deputy editor shamefully described as an over-blown *Excel* spreadsheet, which had all the appeal of completing an online expenses report for the taxman.

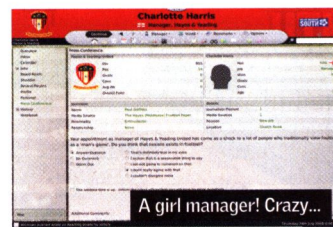
There were two however that knew better. Myself and Patrick McCarthy wore the baggy eyed stare of those who had completed a whole-nighter getting

their team into Europe. We both had the craggy RSI hand affectionately known as 'The Claw' that came from gripping the mouse too tightly as we watched possession bars flicker up and down on the screen just before dawn in a cup final. And both of us would freely admit that when we saw a car number plate that featured the letters 'DMC' or 'AMR' our brains instantly thought of a defensive midfielder and an attacking right winger, and not of the dangers of on-coming traffic. We'd quietly discuss the raw diamonds that we'd found by tirelessly sweeping the lower leagues – some who have actually made it in the real world of Premier League football (the likes of Danny Murphy, Jermain Defoe and Thierry Henry) and many that failed to live up to the in-game hype (Neil Lennon, Ibrahima Bakayoko, Cherno Sambo and Leon Knight to name just a few).

"New database and features that are sure to cause fans sleepless nights"



The newly 3D match engine in all its glory.



We knew that we on to something special, and that it was only a matter of time before the rest of the football-loving world discovered the power and appeal of this RAM-hungry monster. Historically, *Football Manager* has been so accurate that it allowed its players to win pub bets, and impress fellow revellers with performance predictions during international tournaments.

Now *Football Manager 2009* is upon us, with a new database and features that are sure to cause fans of the original to suffer countless sleepless winter nights, as they snap up Stephen Appiah on a free and sell Lorik Cana for tens of millions... **FM**

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PlayStation 2

PLAYSTATION 3

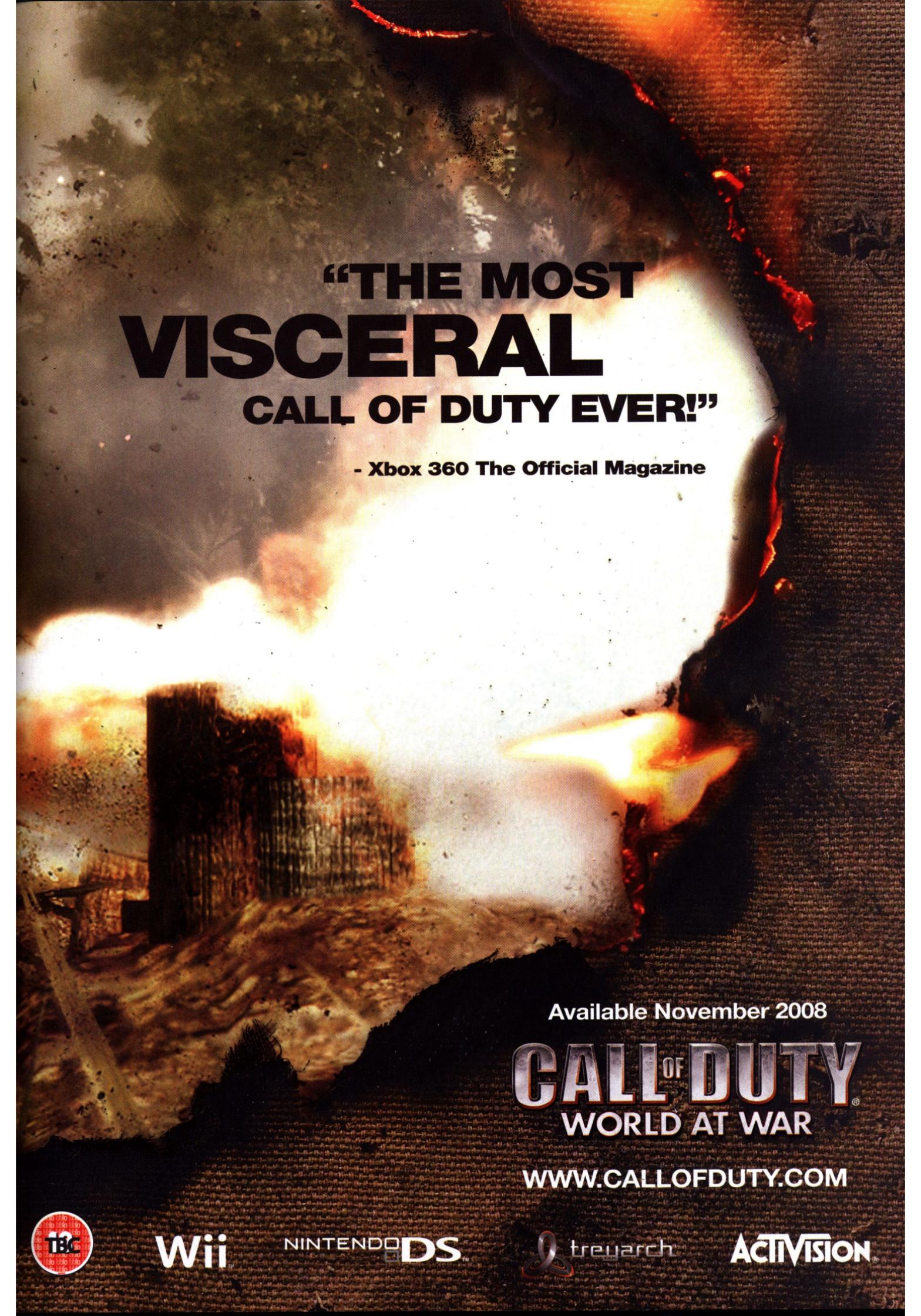


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- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Trying to stay true to the original | ✓ |
| Deep and intriguing plot | ✓ |
| Open-ended and reactive world | ✓ |
| Cyberpunk Renaissance art style | ✓ |
| May not please hardcore fans | ✗ |

Shanghai 2027: the rich live above, the poor below.

Awaking a sleeping giant...

DEUS EX 3

Martin Korda goes to Eidos Montreal to discover what the new developer has in store for the legendary franchise

DEVELOPER Eidos Montreal PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE www.deusex3.com

THERE ARE GREAT games. There are legendary ones. And then there's *Deus Ex*, a game that transcends both categories. Untouchable. Timeless. Revered. Eight years ago, Warren Spector's open-ended, freeform RPG reinvented its genre. Since that day the game has enjoyed a special communion with this magazine, placing first in last year's *PC ZONE* Top 100 games of all time chart, its legacy undiminished despite a disappointing, watered-down sequel (*Invisible War*).

Given this magazine's history with the franchise, it's perhaps fitting that *Deus Ex 3* adorns the cover of our 200th issue, a fact made all the more poignant by developer Eidos

Montreal's revelation that it's seeking to create a game that stays true to the original's concepts, yet pushes the gameplay and world forward. Yet ironically, *Deus Ex 3* isn't a follow-on, it's a prequel. Set in 2027 (25 years before JC Denton's evil-thwarting heroics), the game casts you as Adam Jensen, a private security officer working in the employ of Sarif – a leading US biotechnology firm specialising in the research and production of biomechanical augmentations. This is a time before UNATCO, when Ambrosia was little more than a glimmer in a scientist's bifocals.

Deus Ex 3's vision of the future sees holographic screens flicker atop

ferries moving back and forth in front of the Shanghai skyline, now split into two layers with the rich on the top and the poor in perpetual twilight below. NPCs scuttle hither and thither in the sort of garb you'd see on a futuristic catwalk, but oddly laced with ruffs and antique-style black and gold fabrics. You see, *Deus Ex 3*'s near-future cyberpunk world is teetering on the cusp of a social and technological revolution, so its designers want to create a vision of a new Renaissance. As such the 16th century original, a time of dramatic advancement in art and human understanding, has been heavily researched to nail the look and ambience for this future world.

Some of the reasoning behind this, other than the fact that melding the look of the Renaissance with cyberpunk creates some simply stunning artwork, comes from the human anatomy sketches of Leonardo da Vinci. His sketches of muscles, fetuses and the inner workings of our bodies were the last great leap in human understanding of anatomy. The world of *Deus Ex 3* is being presented as the next one, and much of Da Vinci's work is being used as a jumping-off point.

The game sees humanity gearing up to make great, yet morally ambiguous, strides towards the human augmentation fundamental to the world





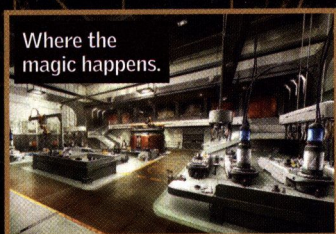
This chap is called Barrett, and he keeps a big gun in his left arm.

of the original *Deus Ex*, a quarter of a century off in the future. Vying for supremacy in this lucrative and ethically dubious field are behemoth multinational corporations, each scuffling for dominance by hiring moles and hackers to pilfer each other's secrets, while factions opposed to these corporations' attempts to evolve humanity scheme to thwart their efforts.

INTO THE FIRESTORM

At the game's inception, Jensen is a no-one, an average blue-collar American worker who heads up security at Sarif. But then one day the path of his life is unexpectedly and irrevocably altered. When a team of black ops commandos break into his company's headquarters using a security plan inked into existence by Jensen's own hand, mass slaughter ensues, leaving him to drag his bloodied frame off the floor and embark on a quest to track down

Where the magic happens.



his employers' killers and unravel the mystery behind a conspiracy that goes deeper than he could ever imagine.

Just like its predecessors, *Deus Ex 3* is placing a heavy emphasis on a powerful, layered plot, one rammed with a succession of moral dilemmas that will tug at the very roots of your beliefs, challenge your humanity and loyalty, coerce you into making on-the-spot decisions that will alter the very course of your character's and humanity's existence. Eidos Montreal is going to great lengths to ensure that the essence of the first two games is captured and fully understood, even drafting in the consultation services of Sheldon Pacotti: lead writer on *Deus Ex* and *Invisible War*. The blessings of both Harvey Smith and Warren Spector have been both sought for and supplied, (see page 43). Nothing is being left to chance.

As the project's lead writer Mary DeMarle explains, a chain of events changes the course of Jensen's life early on in the game. "At the beginning of the game Jensen has a

Eidos are going for an entirely new graphical style.



"Deus Ex 3 is placing a heavy emphasis on a powerful plot"

fundamental choice taken from him and through the course of the story he is going to go on a character arc that is leading him to deal with what's been stolen from him," she reveals.

Further probing yields little extra information, with Eidos Montreal reluctant to reveal too much too soon (the game has literally just entered full production and could be as much as two years off completion). We already know from the teaser trailer, however, that the world is in uproar on the issue of augmentation, those

getting augmented are being treated as pariahs, and that a 'bio-politic' vote has been called.

And what of the promised, multi-layered conspiratorial plot? "As you travel around the world looking to track down the killers and discover their motivations, you begin to uncover layers of conspiracy that go far beyond just the attack on your company," explains DeMarle. "You'll find other conspiracy groups that have agendas and you'll have to find out who these people are and what

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45 →



The office of the near-future.

INTERVIEW

GODS FROM THE MACHINE

The first *Deus Ex*'s creators Warren Spector and Harvey Smith talk to *Jamie Sefton*

WARREN SPECTOR IS in full flow. "It was right before the millennium and everywhere I looked I saw conspiracy theories, with people believing stuff that I thought was just crazy!" he explains. "I thought, what would happen if I took someone that thought the world was black-and-white and threw them into a reality where it's shades of grey and every conspiracy theory was true?" Whatever projects Spector is working on at Disney, he'll forever be linked to the dystopian thinking man's shooter *Deus Ex*.

As will Harvey Smith, who has always fought to maintain his creative vision on difficult projects including the *Deus Ex* sequel *Invisible War* and *Blacksite: Area 51*, and is now working on an atmospheric shooter/RPG for Arkane Studios.

Launched in 2000, *Deus Ex* was acclaimed as a modern classic by critics and gamers alike, and was voted as the greatest game of all time by *PC ZONE*. But how did *Deus Ex* come into existence? Who decided on having three distinct endings? Will Warren Spector and Harvey Smith ever be involved in *Deus Ex* again? Read on...

Q How did you go about creating a whole universe for *Deus Ex*? It must be a daunting prospect...

A Warren Spector: "It is difficult, but it's a ton of fun. You sit down with a bunch of creative guys and you brainstorm and beat your head against the wall until blood forms on your forehead, and at the end of the day, you have your world. It also involved lots and lots of research, reading books like *Behold A Pale Horse* [a book by a former US Naval Intelligence bod revealing apparently top secret

government secrets on UFOs and other conspiracies] and the *50 Greatest Conspiracy Theories Of All Time* (actually I think they're up to 70 or 80 now). We took elements from different conspiracy theories and mashed them together like a DJ to see which ones stuck together."

The characters in *Deus Ex* – such as JC and Paul Denton, Tracer Tong and Gunther Hermann – were essential for the success of the game...

Harvey Smith: "Let me tell you, it was a disaster before we got an additional six months of development at the end of the project – we got that extra time and did this clean-up on it, and that's when a lot of things just

came together. For example, we had just let some characters 'drop off' – there was never a denouement or a wrap-up for them. So we sat down with writer Austin Grossman, who suggested we should go back through the game and write all those characters like Gunther Hermann a proper ending.

"I would constantly push for repeat exposure to characters, then someone else on the team would push back and say, 'Yeah, but that means you have to make them invulnerable!' It was lame to have invulnerability, but the trade-off was you got to have an emotional relationship with the character, so by the time you killed Gunther, you either hated or felt sorry for him..."

Spector: "A lot of the team gave me grief

about Paul Denton because I really wanted to have a family member as a character, but I just thought that saving a bunch of pixels from certain disintegration is way, way less compelling than saving your brother from certain death.

Gunther Hermann and Anna Navarre were there because I needed that contrast between the nano-augmented agents and the mechanically-augmented cyborg characters.

So while a lot of *Deus Ex* is about family, the secondary theme is what it means to be human – at what point do you cease to be human and become something else?"

So what was the thinking behind the skill points and nano-augmentations that players could use to customise their character?

Smith: "It was absolutely key to the whole experience that you could take all these elements from different pools and recombine them in a way that felt self-expressive to you.

If you wanted to be a Navy SEAL from the future who's a one-hit kill melee assassin, you could do it. But then after the player had made a decision, we walled off the other option to give it some bite, and make it more powerful.

Some games now give you access to all of your powers at all times, and they even recharge, so you never have to make any important decisions.

Why did you decide on three different endings for *Deus Ex*?



Maggie

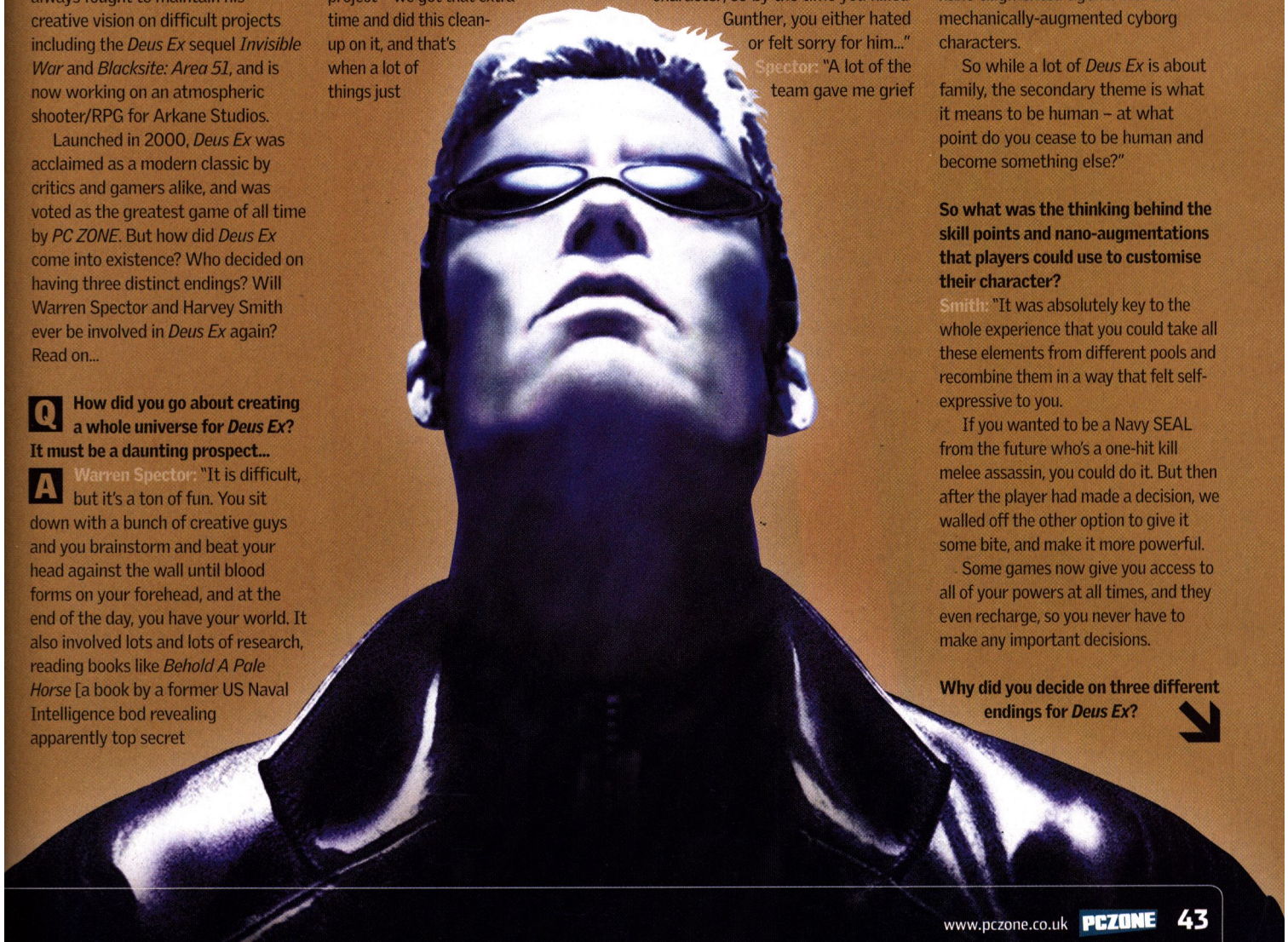
Warren's Spector's dog

Harvey Smith

Lead Designer on *Deus Ex*, Project manager on *Deus Ex: Invisible War*

Warren Spector

Producer and project director on *Deus Ex*, and studio director on *Invisible War*



"The endings were about you deciding how we'd all be best off"

Spector: "Everyone thought I was crazy again, but I just thought if you have a game where all the minute-to-minute choices really belong to the player and you get to pick your play style and solve problems where you want, how pathetic would it be if it was all in the service of a predetermined ending?"

"The specifics of the endings I thought were magnificent, because they all represented different ways the world could be. The endings were about you as a player – not the character – deciding how we'd all be best off. Is the world better in a new Dark Age; or with everyone connected, no personal privacy and governed by a sentient AI; or with all of us separate but with complete free will? Those are interesting questions that games can explore, yet never do."

Deus Ex: Invisible War was released in 2004, and even though it reviewed pretty well, many gamers felt it was a disappointing follow-up...

Smith: "I think that's definitely true. I was very defensive when we shipped the game, but we were being asked to make a console game for the first

time, making it more accessible, and I did make some – not all – of the mistakes. It was a different environment from the first game.

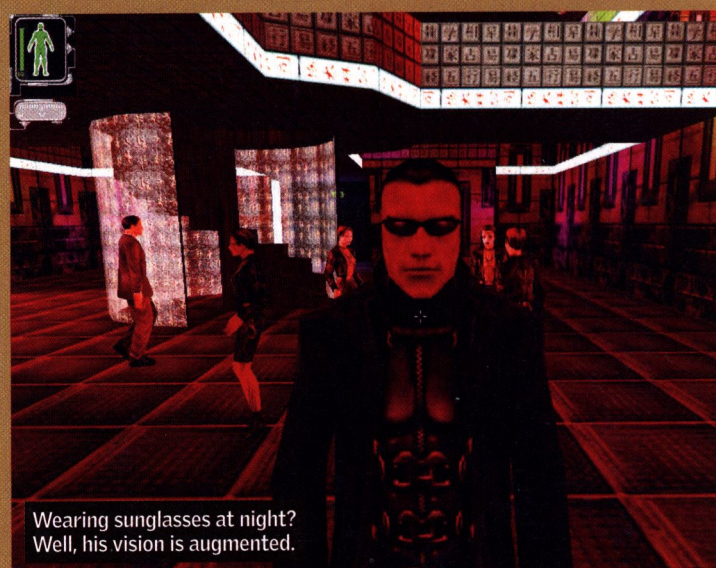
"In *Deus Ex*, Warren was in charge, we were an independent group, and he'd hired a bunch of people like me who were very hardcore about stuff such as atmosphere, improvisational gameplay, story and nerdy RPG systems. I don't even think we considered whether *Deus Ex* would be profitable or not! It certainly never factored into any decision. But by the time you're working with a publisher, they're constantly talking about how many copies you have to sell to break even, and how you reach a wider audience."

Spector: "I personally made a disastrous tech decision. I couldn't stomach the idea of the studio having two different code bases going, and I knew that *Thief* required a really sophisticated lighting and shadow model, so as *Deus Ex* had a stealth element too, I said we should use it. However, the tech didn't come together the way we wanted it to – *Thief* is a very different kind of game, and *Invisible War* required some level-building stuff that the new lighting model didn't support, so the team was really hamstrung by that decision. That and over-ambition. But my motto is 'Fail gloriously!' I would much rather have a team try too much than too little."

What happened with *Deus Ex: Clan Wars*, which became *Project: Snowblind*?



As evil entrance halls go, not a bad one.



Wearing sunglasses at night? Well, his vision is augmented.

Spector: "I thought that a more action-orientated player-choice game set in the world of *Deus Ex* would be cool, so I proposed it to Eidos and they thought it was a good idea and ran with it. I didn't have a whole lot to do with the project, it was a Crystal Dynamics thing, but I think they did a pretty good job."

Did you have any other plans for *Deus Ex* spin-offs?

Spector: "Sure I had plenty of plans – I had a whole story arc. When the second game came around, Harvey was ready to step up and take the lead, and I had a three-story arc that I had conceived, but he didn't want to go where I wanted to go, and took the story in a different direction. But some day it would be cool to go and tell the other three stories. Maybe I should write a novel and put it on my blog someday..."

And what about the new *Deus Ex 3* – have either of you had any contact with the development team?

Smith: "Yeah, I went up to Montreal and looked at it, and the team was great, so it's very exciting. I went for lunch with them, and I was impressed with their materials and thought the direction they were going was fantastic. I'm really looking forward to seeing the game."

Spector: "I've corresponded very casually with some of the guys up there in Montreal and it does seem like their hearts are in the right place, which is awesome. And the cool thing is I get to play a *Deus Ex* game now without knowing everything!"

Why do you think *Deus Ex* remains a classic game that has stood the test of time?

Smith: "*Deus Ex* has lasting appeal because it was a labour of love, it was a clear vision, the team got enough time, we thought about the player first, and we just put a lot of freedom into the game. I've talked to people who have played it again and again over the years, very much like the way you'd re-read a favourite book, and they still find little things; 'I lifted up this rock and there was this thing there!'"

Spector: "We were really trying to push the limits of what games could be, and we were so frustrated – all of us – by the sort of stuck on rails, 20 year-old design ideas that dominated the game business, and really wanted to push things and put players in control – that was our big thing."

"I'm big on rules, and one of the rules was *Deus Ex* is not about how clever you are as a designer, it's about how clever players are. Very few games have even tried to do that, let alone succeed at it. We're probably the most successful game in a very small set!"

Deus Ex QI

Five quite interesting facts about *Deus Ex*

1 'Troubleshooter' was the name of the first *Deus Ex* concept by Warren Spector, and was inspired by Tom Clancy novels and *Die Hard*.

2 The World Trade Center's Twin Towers aren't in *Deus Ex*'s New York skyline because, in the game, they were destroyed in a terrorist attack. This was a coincidence – *Deus Ex* was released in 2000, a year before 9/11.

3 In *Deus Ex*, there's a nod to Los Angeles being destroyed in a 2030 earthquake creating "Arizona Bay". This is a reference to the late, great American comedian Bill Hicks, who often wished for such a disaster.

4 Villain Walter Simon is named after one of Spector's friends, and he took PCZ's favourite photo of Maggie the dog and her master.

5 Nicolette DuClare was created by Smith and Spector arguing over the character, and became a cross between Catherine Deneuve and Sarah Michelle Gellar.

THE STORY SO FAR... EIDOS MONTREAL

TABLES AND CHAIRS

The first employees build their furniture and then brainstorm.



MAY 2007

READY, SET, GO!

With an office and team, development begins in earnest.



SEPT 2007

DEMO EX 3

Eidos Montreal shows a tech demo to Eidos. The publisher likes it.



APRIL 2008

GREEN FOR GO

Almost 18 months on, *Deus Ex 3* enters full production.

OCT 2008

→ CONTINUED ON FROM PAGE 42

they're after. As Jensen gets further into the story he finds he has to make a stand and make decisions based on what he believes to be right."

The *Deus Ex* series has always been about freedom of choice, about making a stand and dealing with the consequences of your decisions and DeMarle is keen to point out that Eidos Montreal is steadfastly determined to keep *Deus Ex 3* faithful to this ethos. "*Deus Ex 3* is all about making choices, who to trust, how to act, who to kill and who to save," she promises. "There'll be multiple endings that reflect your choices and the story will react to your decisions."

SEQUEL WOES

Making a sequel to a legendary game is never an easy task. The ever-evolving gaming market has seen widespread changes these past few years, most notably the rise of next-generation consoles slowly transforming the industry into a mass-market phenomenon.

Marrying innovation with accessibility and widespread appeal is a skill developers have had to quickly learn (and in many ways are

still attempting to perfect). It's an ethos that's at odds with the desires of fervent fans that bay for their favourite franchise to remain utterly faithful to its past. And nowhere are these diametrically opposed requirements felt more poignantly than in the halls of Eidos Montreal, as the development team seeks to stay true to *Deus Ex* while weaving in enough accessibility to appeal to the widest possible audience.

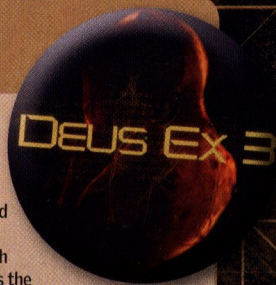
The developers are also fully aware of the hardcore market's crushing disappointment in *Invisible War's* dumbed-down gameplay and the limits imposed on it by the crumbling architecture of the original Xbox, and they're keen to avoid the pitfalls that befell the sequel. As a result, they're restoring weapon-specific ammo to the series and placing a renewed emphasis on experience points and the levelling up of your character.

"We want to make this franchise evolve," explains lead game designer Jean-Francois Dugas. "One thing was clear in our minds, we wanted to respect the core values of *Deus Ex*, to mix genres and ensure that choice and consequence is at the core of the experience."

Psycho babble

It's not what you say but how you say it

As well as the traditional branching dialogue trees made famous by *Deus Ex* and more recently seen in *Fable 2* and *Fallout 3*, *Deus Ex 3* possesses an intriguing new slant on NPC interaction. While the development team was reluctant to say too much at this point, it did reveal that psychology and body language would play a major role in your conversations. By watching an NPC's body language and the manner in which they speak, you'll have to ascertain not only which response is the most effective, but the manner in which you deliver it. Intriguing.



Guards: ripe for small talk.



Augmentations are now a lot more... in your face.

"Making a sequel to a legendary game is never an easy task."

The blend of Renaissance and cyberpunk is, frankly, stunning.

UPFRONT **FEATURE**

Barrett: potentially the Gunther Hermann of *Deus Ex 3*.

"Deus Ex 3 shows both innovation and an awareness of a changing market"

The Ultimate Warrior

Some of the weird and wild augmentations Jensen can access

It's very important to us to provide strong character customisation through augmentation, weapon customisation, inventory management, character interactions, multiple endings and how the world reacts to your actions. We also want to make sure there are multiple solutions to getting past each obstacle."

CHOICE OF PLAY

This variety of gameplay is what provided the original (and to a lesser extent its sequel) such indomitable substance: the ability to approach every situation head-on with blazing revolvers or more subtly through shadow hugging and sabotage. It's here that *Deus Ex 3* shows both innovation and an awareness of a changing market. *Deus Ex* diehards amongst you may want to brace yourself: combat won't be influenced by stats, but will rely purely on your personal marksmanship skills. What's more, the action itself is taking several strides away from the traditional template.



Stealth of the non-shadow variety is key to gameplay.

CLAYMORE

A last resort when facing insurmountable odds, Jensen's body can emit thousands of high-velocity miniature beads that assail his enemies.

MULTI-KILL

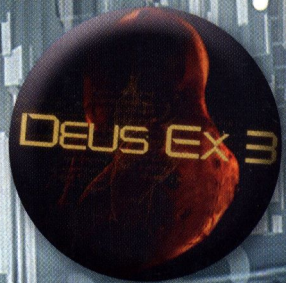
When faced with multiple opponents, Jensen can unleash a combo of devastating martial arts moves, with the action switching to third-person.

BUNGEE JUMPING

Hurl yourself off the edge of a building and tentacles will shoot out of your back and anchor themselves to the wall, slowing your fall.

WALL PUNCH

Can be used in conjunction with the visual augmentation. Spy an enemy on the other side of a wall then punch through it, grab him and snap his neck.



Note the Da Vinci sketches on the walls.

As before you're in a first-person perspective, but the action will switch to third-person when taking cover or when executing special moves and abilities (see *The Ultimate Warrior* box out for more). To demonstrate, Dugas takes us on a tour of one of the game's levels, which is powered by an augmented version of the Crystal Dynamics *Tomb Raider* engine.

Set within a giant biotech lab, replete with humming machinery, Dugas presses Jensen against a wall, causing the camera to switch to a *Gears of War* cover perspective. He leans out, letting off a spurt of bullets that cuts holes into the far side of the lab, while he explains that the game's regenerative damage model will be more *Call of Duty 4* than *Fallout 3*.

Instead of focussing on the way stats influence your combat skills, the developer is pouring its creative talents into a vast array of fully upgradeable and customisable weapons, ranging from standard pea-shooters to futuristic blasters. Scopes, increased magazine capacities and a host of other additions will allow tailoring of your arsenal to your playing style, while limited sums of cash (earned or stolen) will ensure that you'll be forced to choose between buying augmentations or firepower, an option that would appear to support the developer's claim that *Deus Ex 3* will be playable



The morgue: chilling. Also, whiffy.

either as an action shooter or as a more thoughtful stealth, hacking and social interaction RPG.

SNAKE AND HACK

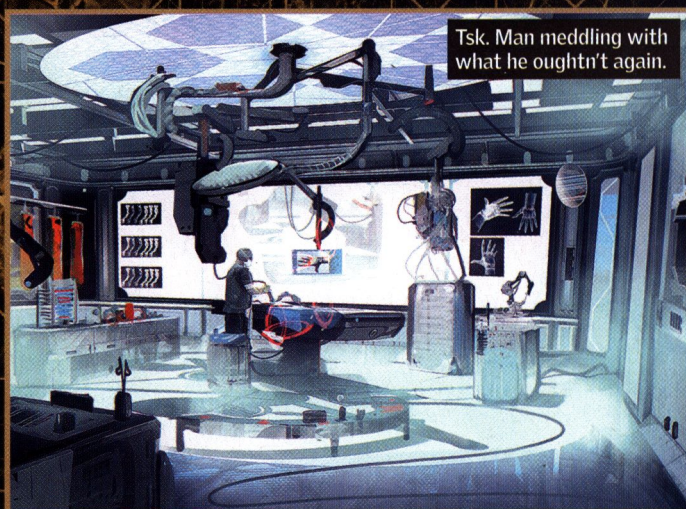
Stealth is also receiving a major revamp and will now utilise cover rather than shadow as its primary function, with a *Metal Gear Solid*-style cone of vision mechanic (available only through augmentation) used to ascertain an enemy's field of view. Hacking is another area receiving a makeover, taking the form of an RTS-style mini game in which you vie with a mainframe for the control of nodes, while simultaneously retaining 180° vision of your



Futuro-fireplaces?



Always with the vats...



Tsk. Man meddling with what he oughtn't again.

Behold the Underground system of the future.



NPC fashion melds today's catwalks with the 16th century.

surrounding area in order to monitor the movements of patrolling guards. You'll even be able to duck down behind the terminal if they pass by.

Joyfully, levels will be as freeform as in previous *Deus Ex* games, with the world reacting in realistic ways to your actions and forcing you to deal with the consequences. There's no word on whether the game will operate on a hub-based template like

the original game, however. "We want to create a reactive world," explains Dugas. "If you shoot in an open area, people will react to you. If there are police nearby they'll get involved. We're even focussing on the world reacting to you in smaller ways, such as people commenting if you walk into the women's toilet rather than the men's." Hmm. To be honest that rings a fair few bells.

"The levels will be as freeform as in previous Deus Ex games"

A view to a kill

Cyberpunk meets the renaissance in striking vision of the future

Sometimes a game's visual style can be overlooked. However, it's pretty hard to ignore here, given the staggering level of research and attention to detail that's being lavished on *Deus Ex 3*'s locales.

Favouring illustration over simulation, *Deus Ex 3*'s art style is striving to be unique. Think *Team Fortress 2* and *BioShock* rather than the host of identikit Unreal Engine 3-driven games currently in the market, and you'll get an idea of what it's trying to achieve.

By melding Renaissance art with gritty cyberpunk themes, *Deus Ex 3* is paying homage to the original game's dark and foreboding visual style while capturing the essence of a world in the midst of a morally ambiguous technological revolution.

Every city will possess its own character, ranging from foreboding fortress-like constructions in Detroit to a stunning multi-tiered vision of Shanghai, where the rich live at the summit and the poor in sunlight-starved streets below.

This is the location of one of the boss confrontations.



A compelling, branching plot. Conspiracy theories. Stealth, combat, hacking. All of these are fundamental to a *Deus Ex* game. But perhaps the franchise's most important element is the ability to augment your character with biomechanical upgrades. Thankfully, *Deus Ex 3* is promising not to disappoint in this department. In fact, it may even surpass the achievements of its predecessors.

At least 20 augmentations have been promised, ranging from stealth to combat, physical strength to social. Become more than you can be, is the mantra Dugas hammers home as he leads us on a sweeping tour of the studio's walls, which are adorned with detailed drawings of the game's myriad cybernetic enhancements. Hands that spew throat slashing metal blades, quadriceps that knot around piston-powered metal limbs, each a different stage that will undoubtedly feature in Adam Jensen's journey from a flesh and bones human to an unstoppable cyborg.

FPS OR RPG

"We have augmentations that cover everything, whether it's combat, stealth, social or hacking," reveals Dugas. "The system lets you choose which augmentations you want to buy and level up and you'll have to choose whether you want to spend your cash on buying and upgrading weapons or augmentations, as you won't be able to afford to specialise in both. This way you can choose to play the game either more as a shooter or a freeform role-playing game."

Deus Ex is a game that holds many dear and unique memories for us all.

For me, it's standing in a smoke-saturated pub as a young pup looking to make his way in the industry, listening to former *ZONE* reviews editor Paul 'Mallo' Mallinson regale me with tales of how he once spent three hours hiding beneath an airliner while monitoring guard patrol routes just so he could find an optimal stealth route to his next objective. Only a game as legendary and unique as *Deus Ex* could command such commitment and passion.

But just like this magazine *Deus Ex* has changed and evolved over the years, different but retaining its essence. Memories of the original game will live on forever, undiminished, but the franchise is entering a bold new era in an ever-changing marketplace. If part three can deliver on its potential while holding dear to the elements that made the original so timeless, then it certainly stands an excellent chance of resuscitating this sleeping giant franchise while catering to hardcore and mainstream alike: shooter fan and RPG die-hard.

If it succeeds, then who knows, perhaps a decade from now in some smoke-free pub, *ZONE* writers old and new will stand huddled, speaking of *Deus Ex 3* with the same moist-eyed adoration as we felt for the original all those many years ago... **W7**

"Excuse me officer. Can you tell me the way to Ryman the Stationers?"

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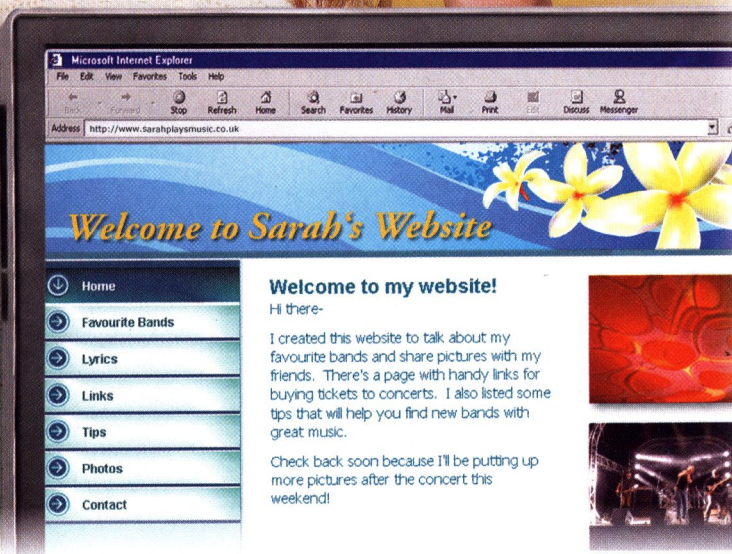
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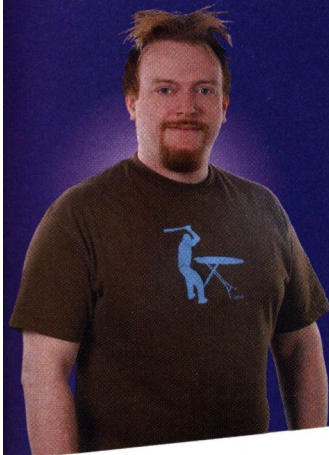
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PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Welcome back

A LOT OF GOOD games this month. A lot of games I'd have liked to have played. But what with the relentless spirit of carnival around here, and everyone coming home to roost, I didn't get the chance. Wand, Shoemaker, Pullin, Wallace, Woods – who are these people littering my section with their strange opinions? Exactly what is a 'Brooker'?

It's like a rugby team of ghosts have barged into the office and started writing ghoulish reviews and features. It might even stop everyone saying "God, I miss issue 74, why isn't it issue 74 every month?" and perhaps the constant howls of "bring Brooker back" will subside for 20 seconds, now we've briefly brought Brooker back from his broadsheet bric-a-brac.

So it's been a lovely month to work on *ZONE*, and now we can all put our heads down and find new and spectacular ways to be unacceptable, unfunny and downright shit until issue 6,000, which by my numeric keypad's reckoning will be in the year 2454. See you in the Jupiter colonies, readers!

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...



52 WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

The vast armies of Destruction and Order mass to hear our final judgment...

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-G2D, (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

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We said "wow" at the beta. Here's WAR, the WOW-beater.
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Cut-price pirates, supervillains, rally drivers and slaves.
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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



"The suit chafes, but nobody dares try and mug me."

Bright Wizards are the artillery of the Empire.



"Yes...yes...I can see into her window from here. She's naked."

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

PCZONE

ONLINE ONLY

ED ZITRON BRACES HIMSELF FOR A LONG, DIRTY WAR

DEVELOPER EA Mythic
PUBLISHER GOA/EA
WEBSITE war-europe.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99 (plus
monthly subscription)

AT A GLANCE...

Large-scale PvP ruckuses and meaty, story-driven questing MMO steeped in lore and war.

Minimum system requirements:

2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB RAM for Vista), and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%

WARHAMMER ONLINE:
AGE OF RECKONING 92%

AGE OF CONAN 73%

THIS IS ONE of the first, if not the first, MMOs to truly sit down and make sure that players work together from the start, shedding the ironic selfishness of a genre that's meant to get people playing together in the first place. It's weird to say it, but until you play *Warhammer Online* and take part in the war itself – taking battlefield objectives, winning scenarios, and fighting in glorious public quests – you'll look back on how much time you spent soloing in *WOW* and sob.

The backstory is that the Age of Reckoning has finally been reached, and the armies of Destruction have decided to lay waste to everything. The forces of Order are trying to hold back the advance.

Mythic have absolutely taken the Warhammer mythos by the horns, embracing every part of the grim fantasy without pulling any punches. While the mollycoddling is there in the sense of players being eased into the game through a selection of easy quests and hand-holding throughout the first few levels, you will be at war with other players well before level 10, and depending on what side you're on, you're going to do something uniquely Warhammer. Orcs kick dwarves off of the side of buildings, the Empire has the warhost on its doorstep and watch as its crops burn and people are slaughtered, and the Dark Elves release gigantic dinosaurs to eat people laying flowers at graves. The atmosphere is one of having no safe haven, one that draws you right into the conflict and gives you the drive

necessary to slaughter your way through lines of your enemies.

And the real beauty of war is that this isn't all fluff – you're at war, from the off, constantly, and it's fun. PvP (or realm vs realm as it's known in *WAR*, and the rest of this review) is an integrated, fun-packed and addictive part of the game.

ORCS, ORCS, ORCS

WAR is still an MMO though, and there are core concepts it hasn't shaken off. You control one of 20 careers (classes), split reasonably evenly between the two realms (sides) of Order and Destruction. Choosing a side locks whichever server you join to that side, to stop people from playing cross-realm spy games with each other.

The realm of Order is made up of the Empire, high elf and



Squig Armour is the Squig Herder's not-so-secret weapon.

Ugrog's got a temper.

with a few notable differences. Careers are less dependent on the usual pool of mana or energy, and each has a special mechanic they depend on to do the most damage. While abilities use action points, they generally depend on some other source to do the most damage.

For example, the Black Orc, as he uses different attacks, moves towards 'Da Best Plan,' a state that lets him unleash his most damaging attacks. The Bright Wizard builds combustion with each attack, doing more powerful and frequent critical hits, but also damaging himself in the process. There's a degree of micromanagement that requires you to be a little more alert than the average thumping of keys. It's not rocket science, neither is it really doing much to advance the basic mechanics of MMO combat, but it's satisfying, playable, and most importantly it works.

BATTLEFIELD DWARF

If you've read any of Mythic's press releases, you'll know they've built *WAR* with the idea of a gigantic battle held firmly in their mind. From the outset, you're introduced to the other side as a marauding force of evil or as your upstart prey. You'll be flung (in the case of the Greenskins, literally, from a catapult) into direct combat with the other side's PvE forces. Yes, it's queuing, and yes, you kill five of something, pick up items or activate things to get experience (with 40 ranks/levels to go through), but

dwarf armies, and the realm of Destruction holds the Chaos Warhost, dark elf House and the Greenskin Waaagh!. The latter is the only non-racial army – it's made up of orcs and goblins – and will probably end up being flooded by roleplaying types who insist on typing everything like the bowyer boy orcs they're playing as. Careers are army specific (see 'Career progression'), split between the archetypes of tanking, healing, ranged damage and up-close melee damage. There's some that overlap, such as the Bright Wizard and the Sorcerer, to keep the lore-monkeys happy without blocking players from their favourite role.

The careers fit reasonably comfortably into the usual class roles,

Tactics and morale

The hot new bits of *WAR*'s character customisation



Dark elves start near a huge warship.

As you level, you gain slots to put tactics in. These are little red icons that you can equip up to three at once by Rank 40. Each one has a different effect on your character, for example, raising your chance to critical hit in certain situations, or letting you do more damage with a certain attack. You can have three career tactics, one gained through levelling; one Tome Tactic, gained from the Tome of Knowledge; and one Renown Tactic, gained through levelling Renown. Morale abilities are offensive or defensive moves that are gained in long fights, or when faced with multiple opponents. As you gain more morale, you unlock even more powerful moves. It makes sense when you're playing, honest.



For Mork! Or is it Gork?

Career progression

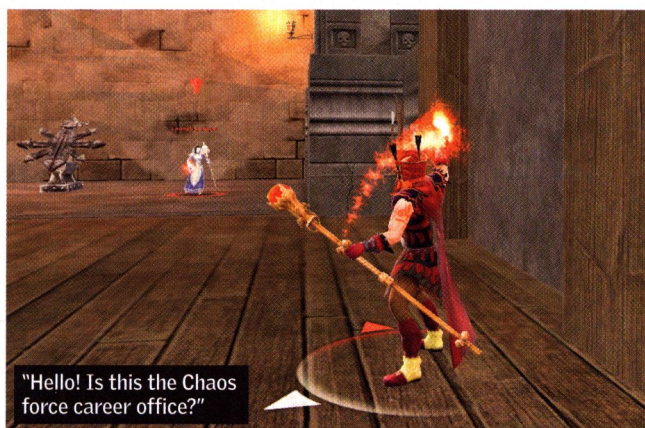
What makes *WAR*'s careers so special



"Issue 200 has a *Deus Ex 3* feature? To Kotaku!"



"I love you, Captain Peppermint."



"Hello! Is this the Chaos force career office?"

Mythic have streamlined the process so that you're not doing too many mundane quests. Everything has a "point" to it, and thankfully, you'll always find the items you need on the monster you kill. If you're getting dwarf skulls, you can bet that each dwarf you kill will drop one, and there's a welcome lack of quests involving the butchery of random wildlife. They're there, and yes, there's a butchery trade skill, but at least there's something approaching a storyline behind them.

usually sends chills down people's spines, but *WAR* introduces open groups that you can choose to join automatically. As everybody receives the experience and influence from the public quest, and you can't really advance them on your own, PQs grow a spirit of teamwork within even ardent soloists. *WAR* opens up grouping to those who would not group, and gives them pause to consider doing it

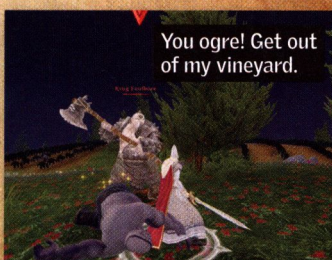
YOU'RE INTRODUCED TO THE OTHER SIDE AS A MARAUDING FORCE OF EVIL OR AS YOUR UPSTART PREY

There was a danger that Mythic could have made anything PvE-related—effectively foreplay for the player vs player environments, as they did with *Dark Age of Camelot*. But there's a strong marriage between both RvR and PvE content. The most obvious – and arguably the most enjoyable – is the public quest system. These are essentially walk-in quests that rely on groups of people to complete. You complete objectives to advance the quest through stages (See 'The anatomy of a public quest'), gaining influence and experience as you go, with the biggest contributors (those who do the most damage, buff people the most, heal the most) rolling dice for the biggest rewards from the quest. The influence you gain is specific to the chapter of the game's story you're on, and as you gain more you get access to Basic, Advanced and Elite rewards.

The idea of grouping with strangers

in the future. While there's a lot of good, run-of-the-mill questing to be had, these public quests pervade the entire game, and are rewarding and fun on a scale that trumps almost anything we've seen in *WOW*. The later ones even have raid-style content, and making a warband (a raid party) is as simple as right-clicking and selecting "form warband."

Public quests also help tie together the PvE content with RvR. There're some (such as the Kron Komar Gap) where both realms actively complete a public quest in front of each other, with real



You ogre! Get out of my vineyard.

The general aim of *WAR*'s careers is to get players into the fray – so there isn't one that can't make themselves useful in a scrap, no matter what play style they have.

The Disciple of Khaine and Warrior Priests' healing abilities are rooted in their offensive abilities, and are good enough to hold their own even against the tougher melee opponents.

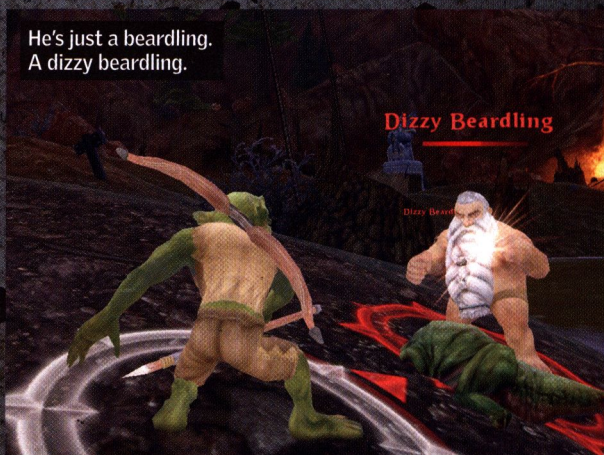
Bright Wizards and Sorcerers build a pool of energy that, when full, gives them a 50% extra chance to critical hit and double critical damage, at the risk of exploding.

Even basic melee careers, like the Black Orc and the Stabbin' Squig Herder, are kept lively by their adaptability. Squig Herders have three types of squig that adapt to any solo or group situation, and Black Orcs are equal parts damage-dealer and super-tank.

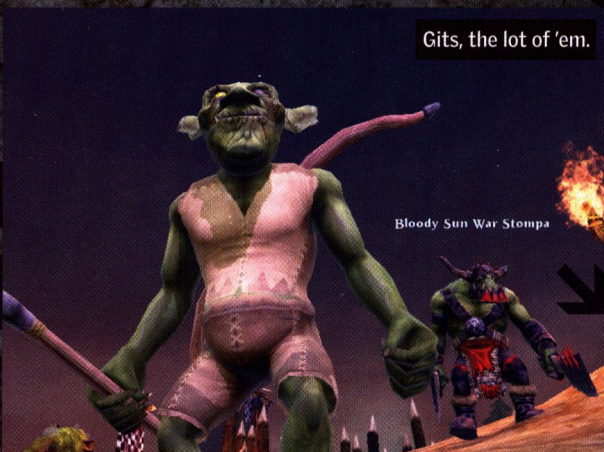
One of these men dies after the spell hits. Not sure which.



He's just a beardling. A dizzy beardling.



Gits, the lot of 'em.

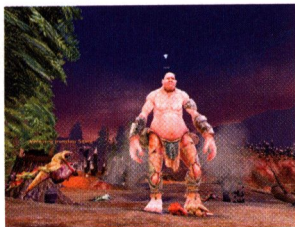


The anatomy of a public quest

How you progress through the first Greenskin public quest...

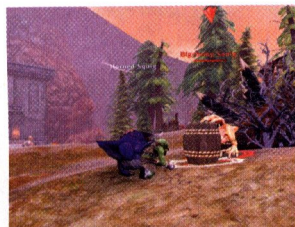
As a Greenskin, you can find yourself in a public quest outside a dwarf fortress, with the only way to lure out the inhabitants is to get a giant to bash down the door. The problem is, the only one available isn't being cooperative.

Remember: anyone in the area completing these objectives contributes to the total.



SLAY 30 SQUIGS CHASING UGROG

Ugrog's being bothered by a horde of jumping, nipping squigs, and he won't do anything until you kill them.



GET UGROG 20 BARRELS OF BEER

Being a good bald-headed thug, and tired out by the squigs, Ugrog refuses to do anything until he's had some beer.



DEFEAT DULGREK IRONMANE'S FORCES

The Giant breaks down the fortress' gates. Dulgrek Ironmane storms out, killing Ugrog, before flooding you with dwarfs and attacking you himself.

players killing both each other and AI soldiers to advance their separate quest. The reward for doing so is not only influence, but control of the surrounding area and access to extra facilities and quests. It's a lovely surprise how well integrated and commonplace they become, too. It's so common for MMOs to talk about new hot features, and then fail to integrate them meaningfully into

An early Greenskin quest gets you mobbed by Snotlings.



the game, that we were ready for public quests to be a let-down. They aren't.

What's shocking is how thoroughly enjoyable RvR is, even for people who're reluctant to face up to PvP combat. It's introduced very early on, with a selection of quests from a war camp where you're given quests, much like NPC-related ones, but relating to real, live players. You descend into specific RvR areas to capture objectives, which can provide tactical advantages (healing boons and NPC guards) and fight your fellow man. Killing him nets you both your normal experience and "renown," which levels a completely separate pool of 80 Renown Levels, with their own rewards, tactics and morale (see 'Tactics and morale').

As you advance, these objectives become bigger and harder to conquer, ranging from a gun emplacement to a gigantic keep surrounded with soldiers, with rewards to match the scale of the effort. Each time you complete one of these smaller objectives, you bring the current area closer to being under your control. The reward for doing so, apart from accessing more content and annoying the piss out of the enemy, is the huge boost to your renown and experience gains – a controlled territory can give you anywhere up to 20% extra renown and experience. This keeps the war constantly fresh, as arriving in a zone to find you're not netting those gains gets you fired up to rip somebody's guts out. That, and you get experience and renown for killing them, so the risk

versus reward of going after a skilled opponent makes it genuinely tempting.

There's a real synergy between renown and experience. As you gain renown levels, you can buy new equipment that's useful for both questing and RvR. The same goes for quest rewards, which are less rewarding but less time-consuming than your average man-barney, and still manage to gear you up reasonably well. In fact, WAR caters very convincingly to the PvE-aholic, but also leaves a tasty-looking trail of

sound MMO that's actually a multiplayer game, with enticing elements for both the lower and higher-end players. An issue, however, is how much high-end content will be available that caters to large-scale PvE grinders. While there are dungeons and there are raid encounters, it remains to be seen just how much there is in comparison to *WOW*, *Age of Conan* and *EverQuest II*. There isn't, however, any question of the quality. Mythic have done exceedingly

A BRILLIANTLY EXECUTED SYSTEM THAT OOZES WELL- REALISED LORE

breadcrumbs to the RvR dark side, with experience rewarding quests for getting involved. It's also far less time-intensive than anything in *WOW*'s PvP-circuit, as in a 15-minute game you can run into an RvR battlefield, chop a few heads off, and then bugger off to Tesco. It's a simple, well-designed and brilliantly executed system that oozes with well-realised lore and the necessary atmosphere to draw you into the conflict.

THE RECKONING

Mythic have used the Warhammer licence well, and created a structurally



Witch Hunters build up interrogation to unleash executions.

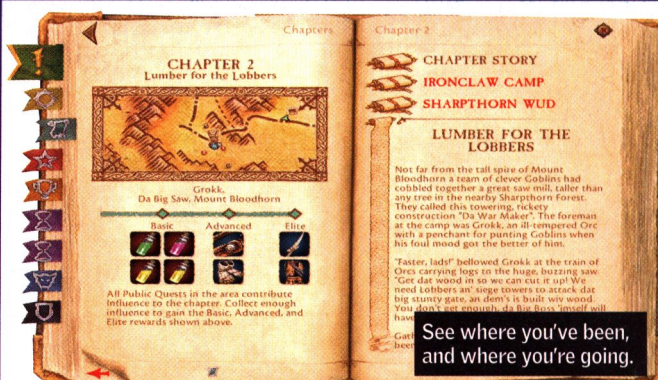
Bernhard Werh: Rebellious Provok

Rebellious Instigator

Hunt down the rebellious with the Empire's angriest soldiers.

Tome of Knowledge

Quest journals are so passé...



The Tome of Knowledge, rather than being a simple place to read your quests from, catalogues your escapades over the various chapters of the *WAR* storyline, as well as rewarding you for completing certain tasks.

Kill 100 squigs, and you get a 500 experience reward. Click yourself 100 times and receive the title 'Ow My Eye'. More complex Tome Unlocks, as they're known, will require you going across the entirety of the Warhammer World, but reward you with Tome Tactics specific to the achievement.

The TOK also keeps track of where you've been, how many things you've killed, and just how much experience fulfilling its dark desires has netted you.

well in creating interesting, story-driven quests, and have created the first major advance in the genre – public quests – since content was instanced to avoid players cramming together.

Ironically, that's actually what makes *WAR* such a joy. The reason that instanced PvP areas in MMOs, like *WOW*'s Battlegrounds, exist are to make it so that progression isn't reliant on static content in areas. Mythic have taken this idea and put it on its head, making it a good thing when an area is crammed with people trying to do the same thing by rewarding everybody for taking part. Even when you're not a top contributor in a public quest, you still receive a bounty of influence and experience. In RvR battlefields, defending Keeps and other areas from assaults still rewards everybody for being in the area. The land even changes as realms take control of different areas, taking away the classic MMO-stodge of static, immovable content.

WAR is the first true push in years to try and make MMOs more, well... multiplayer, and it succeeds because it doesn't forget that games should be fun. By giving players so many options and making everything so cohesive and interesting, Mythic will score many disenfranchised Battleground-lovers, along

with a slew of bored PvErs from a multitude of games with broken promises. Ultimately, their ongoing support and the amount of people that play *WAR* will be what makes or breaks the game, mostly because it gets more fun when more people get involved.

For now, it's up to the players. This is such a strongly community-driven game that it guarantees that there will be some bitter, angry struggles in the Age of Reckoning, and we hope that Mythic (and European publishers and server-runners GOA) are prepared to support it. The license is strong, the game is great, and the quality of the content is second-to-none. If servers are stable, players are listened to, and expansion content is as well tweaked, inventive and superbly written as its launch material, this could be the game that savages *WOW*'s subscription numbers: **PCZ**

This sexy lady is part of the opening cutscene.

PCZONE

Graphics: Crisp, cartoony, colourful
Sound: Epic orchestras and grumpy orcs
Multiplayer: Of course

- ✓ Fantastic lore
- ✓ Public quests are amazing
- ✓ Fun to play with others
- ✓ PvP at its most accessible
- ✓ RvR combat is brilliant
- ✗ Enough high-end PvE stuff?

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WOW's reckoning

DEAD SPACE

Jon Blyth wanders through a deserted spacecraft with the eerie feeling that someone, somewhere is staring at his arse



DEVELOPER EA Redwood Shores
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE deadspace.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

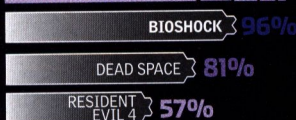
AT A GLANCE...

The organic gunk and gravity play of *Prey*, the movement and presentation of *Resi 4*, and the storyline of *BioShock* – a classic hamstring by awful controls.

Minimum system requirements:

2.8 GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB RAM for Vista), GeForce 6800/ ATI X1600 Pro or better graphics card. DRM requires internet connection for online authentication.

HOW IT STACKS



WHEN YOU STOP playing *Dead Space*, there's one thing that you'll want to do. However much your brain might be full of the storyline, and however much your nerves are shredded from the game's canny efforts to keep you stressed, there's only one thing that you'll want to talk about to taxi drivers, passers-by and the robin's egg in your window box: the controls.

For a game that excels in so many ways, it's a stark-bollock shame that the

third-person manoeuvring is such a fundamentally alienating and pervasive one. If you choose to play with mouse and keyboard, you can actually blink twice before Isaac responds to you. And when he does respond, the game filters your hard-earned world-class marksmanship skills through a gamepad nubbin translator. It's so badly implemented that even using the menus with the mouse is near impossible.

You do become accustomed to it – just as a three-legged dog still runs around and licks his dick – and take it into account. At some points, it even adds to the game's excellent sense of claustrophobia. To their credit, this might even have been Redwood's intention. But in more intense moments, the three-legged dog cocks its leg and falls over, becoming purely frustrating instead of gripping.

Apart from this, the rest of the controls map thoughtfully onto the keyboard. You'll still enjoy the massive wall of style and action set-pieces the game hurls at you. But if you want to feel like you're doing anything other than teasing an invisible wig on your mouse mat, use a gamepad. It's slower than it needs to be, but an Xbox 360 controller makes the game feel better.

For the rest of the review, let's just assume PC owners have too-high expectations, and let's treat the laborious lag as a way of cranking up the suspense through hamstringing the player. Having got that choking nugget off my chest, I'd like to tell you how good *Dead Space* is.

DEAD GOOD

Dead Space is very good. The storyline sees you taking the reactive role of





A lack of legs won't dissuade most enemies.



"This window sure is a... pane."

Isaac Clarke, an engineer with a cool hologram-belching suit who does what he's told. The crash landing on the mining ship Ishimura leads almost immediately to a conflict with a race of alien creatures that devour dead human flesh. Devour is the wrong word: occupy, mutate, and monsterise hit closer to the meaty mark.

The ship you enter is freshly deserted, thanks to the infestation, with evidence of the crew's political turmoil, and their descent into delusional terror documented in audio logs. In another classic game narrative sashay, you're guided by two surviving crewmates through your objectives. As the extent and effects of the necromorph invasion becomes clearer, and the mysterious woman you're there to rescue becomes ever more mysterious, the storyline works well. It's no *BioShock* – although

at times you do want to check the windows for passing sharks – but it's presented so slickly, and with such coherent Levine-ian style, that you can't help forgive the jaunts into cliché.

The first thing that leaps out at you is that graphical flair. This is a future that was designed to look good over a hero's shoulder – a world of interactive, holographic HUDs. The hackneyed expositional device of discovering audio logs is expanded, with videos that are weaved naturally and unobtrusively into the game's fiction that you can watch while moving. The UI has been completely sewn into the gameplay – especially impressive for a game with a basic inventory and 3D map.

The second unique selling point is the centrepiece of the combat (and the reason why *Dead Space* is somewhat controversial) – tactical dismemberment.

"The ship you enter is freshly deserted, the crew's political turmoil recorded in audio logs"



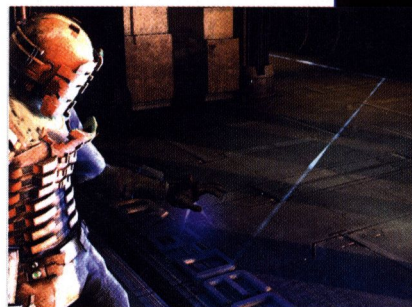
Disgusting things are constantly grabbing you.

Hansel and Metal

A digital fox ate my laser breadcrumbs

The game's breadcrumbs feature is a blessing and a curse. It's a line that shows the fastest route to your next objective, which is the opposite of what a trail of breadcrumbs is used for, but nevermind.

If you're hunting down a group of poison-gasping mutants, for example, it'll take you straight to them. However, the temptation to use it is far too much. This can turn the *Dead Space* into a parody of choiceless obedience to rival *BioShock*, and you'll soon realise that you'll be missing out on the nodes, cash, and pawnables that you'll need to buy upgrades and weapons.



REVIEWS DEADSPACE



You can sink half a dozen rounds into a basic necromorph's torso, and it won't be particularly effective or satisfying. Aim for the creature's joints, however, and you'll end up with a rather more pleasing severing effect. So killing a creature, means you have to move your aim around – which makes it instantly more engaging than sniping headshot after headshot. It's deeply gratifying, if that's not too worrying a word to use in this situation. Take the legs out first to slow it down. As it drags itself towards you, shoot off an arm. It's like a jokeless re-enactment of *Monty Python's Black*

Knight, and even though it works very well, it's just the kind of thing that'll get your game banned in Germany. And Japan. And China.

The weapons are built for the job. The plasma cutter fires three bullets and has two settings – aligning the three shots horizontally is ideal for removing a leg, and vertical is better for slicing off an arm. Other weapons operate on a more traditional level – the pulse rifle feels like a machine gun, even if it is one that seems designed to explode shins. The flamethrower is great for dispatching the swarms of tiny

nippers that clamber all over you, and the ripper fires out a circular saw that hovers in front of you. The weapons all feel impressively different.

What's more, your weapons and suit can be upgraded using the power nodes that are found around the ship, when you stray from the laser breadcrumbs (see *Hansel and Metal*). It's a fairly mean-spirited process: each weapon has its own map, onto which you have to install said power nodes. You have to go from left to right, and each node must be adjacent to another installed node. But not every point on the design

"Aim for the creature's joints and you'll end up with a rather more pleasing severing effect"

Are you the UI fell in love with? As EA like to say, it's in the game



INVENTORY

Works well on a gamepad, but you have to use the arrow keys on the keyboard. Mouse, anyone? Ideal for this sort of thing? Mouse?

AMMO/AIM

It's not just a gun sight – you also use it to aim your stasis and kinetic powers. And circular saws. And leap from wall to wall in zero-G. Basically, just 'cos you're aiming, don't mean you're shooting.

BAR ON BACK

Your health seems to drop to halfway quickly, and stay in the red for a while. We reckon it's the same reasoning behind cars saying their tanks are empty before they actually are. Mind games.

STASIS CHARGE

This is how much more you can slow time. You can recharge it from wall-dispensers or using items from the shop. It's also a power you'll need for some bosses.

"What? I got hungry."



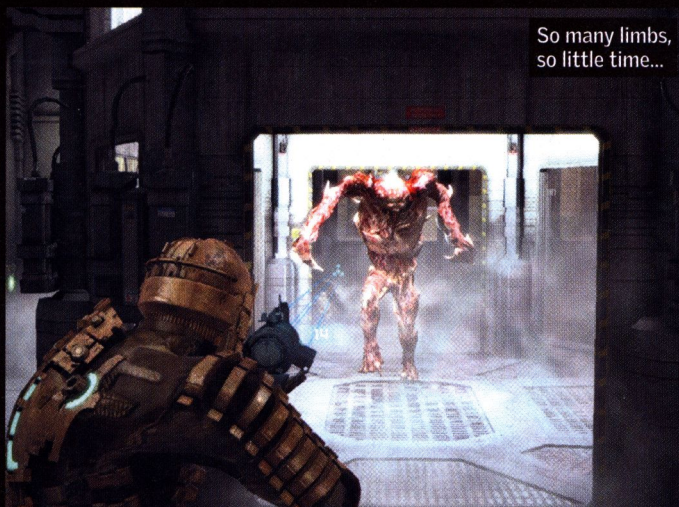
I don't think this guy needs shooting.



A trendy helmet indeed.



Bad flesh. Go sit in the corner.



So many limbs, so little time...



Like old buddies.



Centrifuge hilarity.

corresponds to an actual upgrade – for example, you'll need at least three to get a health upgrade for your suit. Power nodes are too rare in the world for this to feel fair – it's a bit like the sprawling Sphere Grid system in *Final Fantasy X*, only with a fraction of the slots. And most of the slots don't do anything.

ZERO-G FUN

Power nodes can, however, be bought from shops, along with ammo, weapons and suit upgrades. They're not that cheap, and you soon realise why the ammo seems so bountiful at the outset: if you save ammo through the efficient dismemberment of necromorphs, you'll have plenty spare to sell at the shops. If you're hot on levelling up your gear, you'll be forced to think of bullets as money. Once you start down that path, the game actually becomes more tense, and you'll be forced into using your other powers to despatch enemies.

You're given these powers early on – like a time-slowing stasis power that's required to slow down a fast monster, and set about safely vivisectioning it. The other power is kinetics – the

game's gravity gun. If you run out of ammo, you can resort to slinging stuff at the mutants instead.

The final novelties of the game are the zero-G areas. This is one area where the dodgy mouse controls really destroy the fun. Bouncing from wall to wall is great (and would have been better if you could fire at things while you float), but once you land, you feel about three times more unsure of where you are than you should do.

Some of the game's minor elements don't work. Instant-death floor panels are annoying, and one autosave seemed to put me further into the game than I previously was. Another death put me

exactly where I was before, with the same low health, and the same swarm of necromorphs descending on me. These were rare moments, however – and the absence of health regeneration does add to the overall sense of doom. When it comes to this oppressive atmosphere, *Dead Space* has a relentless surfeit. You're constantly under fire, the sound effects never let you forget that something's close by – even if it's not bothered with you at the moment – and the level designers do a great job of tricking you into a couple of startling mistakes.

Basically, *Dead Space* is a potentially great game that's hamstrung by an

attempt to completely ape a console controller with a mouse and keyboard. If you're a PC fundamentalist, then this is just another reason to hurl eggs at EA's windows. If you've got a gamepad, and want to enjoy one of the most atmospheric and morbid games of the year, then you should absolutely fill your boots. After all, you never see a three-legged dog looking sorry for itself. **PCZ**

"So, you seen *Evil Dead*?"



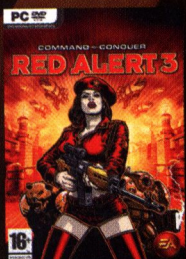
PCZONE

Graphics Coherent and sharp
Sound Excellently atmospheric
Multiplayer Nada

- ✓ Magnificent UI
- ✓ Great jumpy atmosphere
- ✓ Dismemberment is excellent
- ✓ Great weaponry
- ✗ Dogshit mouse controls

81

Shock to the system



Choose a side. 31.10.08

Go to battle with one of three different factions in the new Red Alert 3. Win glory for the Soviet Empire, defend the homeland with the Allied Forces, or combine technology and mysticism with the Empire of the Rising Sun. Play online with a friend or choose from a group of AI commanders and fight to see who controls the land, sea, and air. Join the fight today!





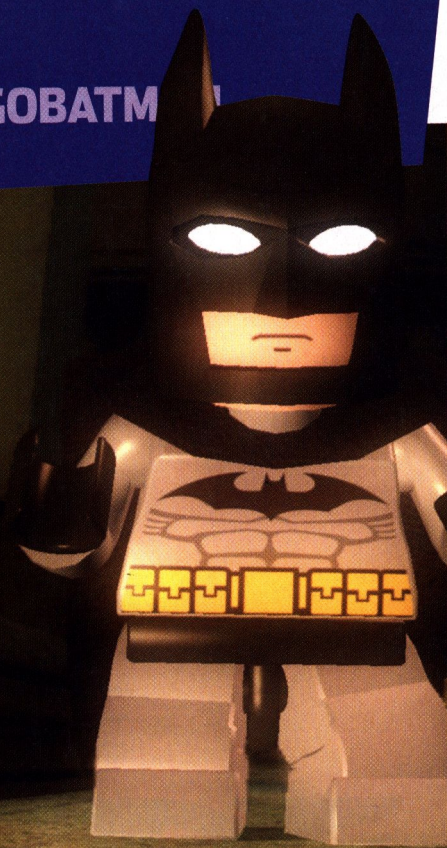
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Underneath the garb he's just a regular LEGO man.



Two-player co-op is available at any time.



Clayface steals the show.

LEGO BATMAN

Dinner, dinner, dinner. Dinner, dinner, dinner. *Will Porter!*

DEVELOPER Traveller's Tales
PUBLISHER Warner Bros
WEBSITE legobatman.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The Dark Knight swaps brooding melancholy for watching a plastic Robin falling over a lot and then rolling his eyes in a withering fashion.

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM (512MB for Vista) and a 128 MB graphics card. A gamepad is strongly recommended.

HOW IT STACKS

LEGO INDIANA JONES **80%**

LEGO STAR WARS: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY **80%**

LEGO BATMAN **79%**

HAVING RUN THE gamut of opportunity chez Lucas, *LEGO Howard the Duck* notwithstanding, Traveller's Tales have taken quite a risk with *LEGO Batman*. Half the charm of their *Star Wars* and *Indy* plastic re-renditions was their subversion of fanboy familiarity: randomly placing Stormtroopers in Jacuzzis where there should be an escape pod, or putting a C-3PO helmet in *Indy's* mitt rather than a golden idol. While you played them you were always looking forward to the next major set piece, wondering how the LEGO treatment would rub off on scenes of Nazi-melting, ewok slaying or Greedo shooting (first).

So the day Warner Bros left the Batman franchise on TT's Cheshire doorstep there must have been many heads being scratched. The final decision

(or instruction) was that *LEGO Batman* should not reference any specific film, comic or TV show but draw from the collected consciousness of all of them – leading everyone into familiar territory, but never letting us see the guidebook.

HOLEY COMEDY

At one level this has hurt *LEGO Batman*, there's a level of parody that simply isn't there anymore. Charming as Robin falling over is, wonderful as it is to see the Riddler's bouncing sneak-walk and amusing as Poison Ivy's deadly snog with LEGO guards might be – the comedy is gentle and rolling, moments of bath-hilarity are far thinner on the bat-ground.

Then again, not having to walk the fine line between rolling boulder and Mongolian bar fight has also proved a double-edged sword, freeing up the level design and allowing for some frankly

ludicrous stuff to be made out of LEGO that wouldn't have fit into prior canons: *Aliens*-style lifters, giant Riddler-operated mechs, lumbering giant Venus fly traps, hovering sludge-hoovers... there's some great stuff in here.

The game's meat is a series of three separate episodes of vigilante crime-fighting, replacing the usual three movies of the previous *LEGO* games. Each contains five levels with a particular bad guy as its theme and eventual boss, and gameplay is pretty much business as usual. Hoodlums need smashing into bits, street furniture needs smashing into bits, bouncing LEGO bricks needs turning into many and various intricate machines and many, many widgets need collecting (if you're that way inclined). As ever, there are two characters charging around causing affray amid the plastic criminality, so if you are proud possessor of a young one or a well-meaning spouse then you're only a hurled gamepad away (or a pair of cursor keys) from some heavily refined LEGO co-op.

The back end of said episodes is the Batcave, a hub that sadly isn't half as engaging as the Mos Eisley Cantina or Indiana's university. Then again, this also links through to Arkham Asylum, which where you'll discover that each bout of crime fighting has an equal and opposite prequel of crime causing, posing you as the villains setting up the escapades you've undone as the Caped Crusader and Boy Blunder.

What with the superpowers of the DC villain menagerie extending far beyond the rule that women have a double jump, this is where the Batman

Poison Ivy paid £14.99 for her Venus Fly Trap kit.





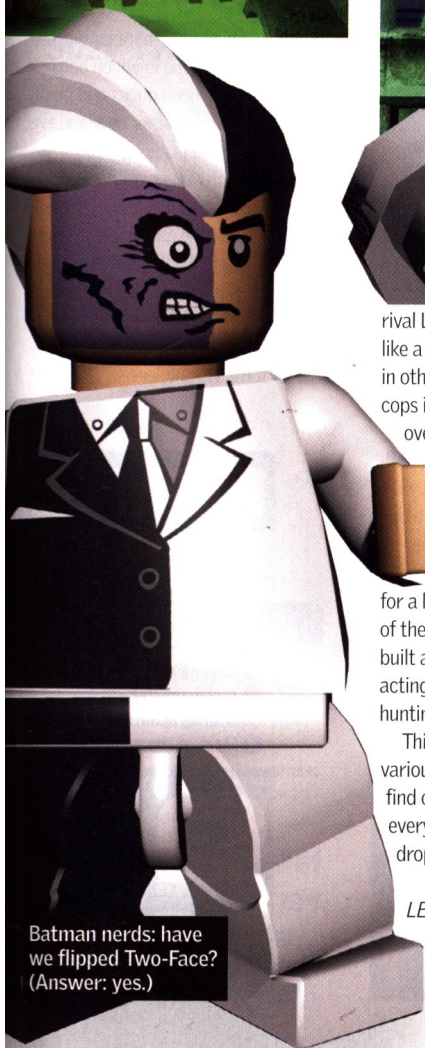
Two-Face has 10 hearts, like a cow.



Vehicle sections get more exciting than this.



"Psychic mind powers go!"



Batman nerds: have we flipped Two-Face? (Answer: yes.)

license pays dividends. For a start, meatier characters can knock rival LEGO people miles, the Riddler acts like a puppeteer controlling characters in other rooms, and Mr Freeze can turn cops into ice cubes or freeze platforms over tanks of chemicals. Having different abilities for each character is nothing new, but the superpowered nature of Batman's foes makes for a lot more variety, while the design of the game means that they have levels built around their talents rather than acting as a tepid unlockable when you're hunting for extra widgets in Freeplay.

This is further complemented by the various suits that Batman and Robin find on their travels – which cover everything from gliding, to bomb dropping and brick hoovering.

A lot of the faults with previous LEGO games were overlooked due to the original and clever treatment of hallowed source material, and as such things could have

become a little dicey with the Lucas-stabilisers removed – but aside from occasional lacks of signposting, the game has been noticeably tightened. Make no mistake, we're covering the same ground as before here (the next LEGO game really should go to new places, rather than refine the template even further) but if you're looking at this as a game for your kids it's the tightest, most charming and intricately designed treasure that I've come across in aeons.

Honestly, the vehicle sections where you're charging around Gotham in the Batmobile towing a truck on a cable or simply pootling around an ice cream factory in a forklift are a paramount joy.

ONE FOR FANS

If you're of an age where you're in possession of tufts of body hair in dangerous places then it's a slightly different story – the nuts and bolts of LEGO Batman make it a better game, of that there is no doubt, yet the scene-by-scene fan-pleasing nature of LEGO Lucas fills you with a sense of anticipation and recognition that's near impossible to recapture, unless you're replicating

Where next?

Other Warner Bros franchises likely to go the LEGO way



Need more plastic...

LEGO MATRIX

Slow-motion, leather, automatic weapons and smiling agents cheerfully being blasted into constituent parts to the sounds of Rage Against the Machine is what the gaming world needs.

LEGO HARRY POTTER

They'll probably wait until the final films are coming out, but with LEGO Potter toy designs already kicking around there's no doubt in my mind that we'll find ourselves smashing up a LEGO Diagon Alley in the next couple of years.

LEGO LORD OF THE RINGS

After the WB takeover of New Line this is possible, but wherever there's Tolkien there's ultra-confusing rights issues. Then again, just how much fun would it be hitting a LEGO Christopher Lee with a big stick?

LEGO SUPERMAN

An obvious sequel to LEGO Batman, opening the game up to the wider DC catalogue of heroes, villains and intrepid news reporters. Superman is probably riper for pastiche than Batman, and his power of flight would certainly bring something new to gameplay.

something like Predator in a LEGO Schwarzenegger game.

LEGO Batman further cements Travellers Tales' place as a jewel in the crown of UK games development – but to keep the grown-ups reeled in they need to concentrate on stuff where everyone knows the words. **PCT**

PCZONE

Graphics Crisp, charming, LEGO
Sound Batman music sublime
Multiplayer Lives and breathes co-op

- ✓ Best-designed LEGO game
- ✓ Villains are great fun
- ✓ Hugely imaginative
- ✗ Batcave hub not great
- ✗ Lacks the Lucas appeal

79
Irony deficient



PEGGLE NIGHTS

Steve Hogarty's got the Ultra Extreme Fever

DEVELOPER PopCap
PUBLISHER PopCap/Steam
WEBSITE popcap.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.95

FOR PUZZLERS, IT'S nepotism or bust. The genre incumbents are unyielding colossi, and you have to be the offspring of *Zuma*, the cousin of *Iggle Pop* or to have made out with *BookWorm* before a crowd of peers begins to consider parading you about on their shoulders. *Peggle Nights* has such rich blue blood coursing through its veins, being the sequel to 2007's seminal *Peggle*. However, it has clutched so firmly to its materfamilias' bosom, it's in danger of choking on a milky nip. This isn't the bold, radical re-invention of *Peggle* we'd been hoping for, the metaphorical metempsychosis of Bjorn the Unicorn to some higher plane of Peggling. *Peggle*, it would seem, breeds only more *Peggle*.

Peggle Nights is an accomplished isomorph of the previous game, treading the same peg-strewn ground, but taking well-known characters such as Renfield (the pumpkin) and giving us insight to their secret, aspirational dream worlds. Some are fanciful, such as Bjorn's deeply held desires to become a superhero. Others are somewhat more emotionally engaging. Tula the soilbound sunflower

dreams simply of mobility, her dream-legs allowing her to travel the world across five levels. Her saga ends with a languid acceptance of her condition. "That was a fun dream," she sighs, "but now it's time to go back to the soil." Few games approach such subject matter, and fewer still with such gravitas.

HOMOGENY

Sadly, *Peggle Nights* posits scant innovation. Pegs are sculpted more closely around background artwork, and the art itself threads narrative through the progression of levels. The opening classical strains have been replaced with Debussy's evocative *Clair de Lune* now easing the player into what can only be termed the "action". Meanwhile, the quintessential level-ending epiphany of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* nails home the gameplay's damning similitude.

Would we have been happier with an isotopic excursion? One in which pegs were swapped for neon ducks and points were metered in altogether new and ever more unpredictable fashions? It's unthinkable. With *Peggle Nights* PopCap have come good on a promise, and the familiarity serves the game well. As ever, David Hilbert's and Wilhelm Ackermann's classic text, *Principals of Theoretical Logic*, is essential reading if you plan on nailing Ultra Extreme Fever on Lord Cinderbottom's closing levels. **PCZ**

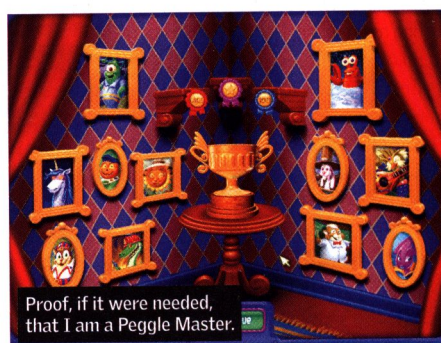
AT A GLANCE...

Fire the ball at the pegs to make the pegs disappear. Music happens when you clear the screen. Sounds stupid, but it's terrifyingly addictive.

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

HOW IT STACKS

PEGGLE	83%
PEGGLE NIGHTS	80%
PIPE MANIA	54%



PCZONE

Graphics Delicious and sweet
Sound Best use of *Clair de Lune*
Multiplayer Two players on one PC

- ✓ Addictive and joyous
- ✓ New medals
- ✓ A new master
- ✓ Sounds beautiful
- ✗ More of the same

80
Bjorn again



SO BLONDE

Suzy Wallace goes back to her roots...

DEVELOPER Wizarbox
PUBLISHER DTP Entertainment
WEBSITE soblonde-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

SHE'S HOT, SHE'S blonde and she's barely 17. But she's also a royal pain in the arse. Sunny is the main character in *So Blonde*, a point-and-click adventure with an old-school LucasArts feel, which revolves around a ditzy heroine who, after falling from her cruise ship, is washed up on a tropical island populated by pirates. Sounding familiar?

With a story written by Steve Ince (of *Broken Sword* fame) and promised by the website to be "wacky" (which rung alarm bells), I'd hoped for a heavy dose of irony, but was instead given shopping mall and cell phone jokes. The puzzles aren't bad once you get back into that convoluted 'combine tubing with bellows to make a milk frother' mindset, and there's also a handful of minigames

thrown into the mix, all of which are patronisingly simple, especially as they come with auto-win options. Annoyingly, the game insists on making you run from one end of the island to the other, and with too-long loading times between screens for a 2D game and no chance to skip to an area, this becomes tedious.

SO PRETTY

Thank God for the graphics then. While the 3D characters are OK, the backgrounds are lush, vibrant cartoon 2D affairs, teeming with quirky details and animation, and loads of interactivity.

The game also has a bunch of pop culture references, including a manhole cover in the jungle bearing the code from *Lost*, an encounter with Elvis and the somewhat obligatory nods to *Monkey Island*, given that the game seems to borrow liberally from it. And would you believe it, there's also some fairly decent voice acting on offer.

There's plenty to see and do, but I can't shake the feeling that with more adult humour and irony, *So Blonde* would have been much more. But I'm a blonde myself. What would I know? **PCZ**

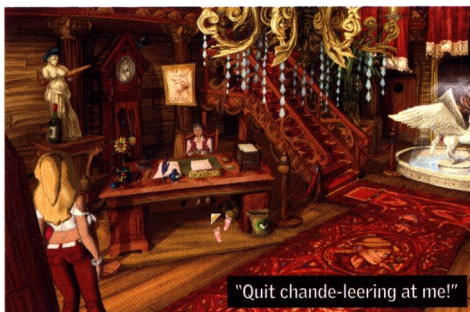
AT A GLANCE...

A worthy attempt at a trip back to point-and-click's LucasArts heyday, but forgets the humour that makes those old games great. Pretty though.

Minimum system requirements:
 1.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

BROKEN SWORD: THE ANGEL OF DEATH	78%
SO BLONDE	61%
LULA 3D	31%



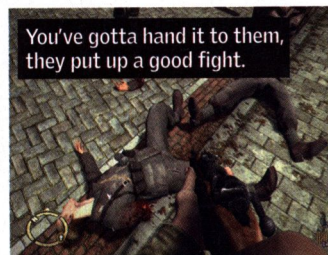
PCZONE

Graphics Best bit of the game
 Sound Tropical tunes and good voice acting
 Multiplayer No. Refuses to share

- ✓ Vivid, busy backgrounds
- ✓ Lots to see and do
- ✓ Decent voice acting
- ✗ Could have made more of the subject matter
- ✗ Too much running about
- ✗ Loading times seem excessive

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Bit of a dumb blonde



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Richie Shoemaker thinks junction 12 of the M6 is particularly nightmarish

DEVELOPER Gearbox
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
brothersinarmsgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

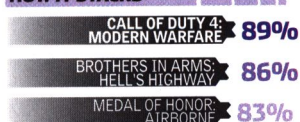


AT A GLANCE...

Gory WWII FPS with realistic flunky fun and enough emo cut-scenes that even conscientious objectors will enjoy themselves without too feeling guilty.

Minimum system requirements:
2.6GHz dual-core CPU, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS



ACTUALLY, THE TYPICAL Dutch snelweg is a pleasure to drive along. Not as well administered as your high-end German autobahn, but definitely a damn sight more pleasurable to navigate than a motorway here in England. Odd then, that the road referred to in the title of this latest game, today largely part of the A50 from Eindhoven to just west of Arnhem, is given such a bad rap. It has its moments, but it's far from hellish.

That said for a couple of weeks back in September 1944, it was rather backed up with traffic. Monty had some daft plan to drive into Germany and have the war tied up by Christmas, but he was aware that if the Germans snagged onto his kooky nonsense, they'd put a stop to it by blowing up the bridges along the way. Had there not been a war on, it might have just worked. The bridges weren't the problem though. As it turned out, what was bugging things up was the single road and the thousands of troops fighting their way up it, of which, in this latest WWII shooter, you are one.

Hell's Highway isn't so much about Monty's "Glorious Failure" as it is a story about a bunch of soldiers doing their job. Which in the context of '40s foreign policy, mainly involves killing Krauts. The bunch of soldiers in question are survivors of – and replacements to – the

recon squad that so gallantly fought across Normandy in the first two games.

As such it's advantageous, though not strictly necessary, to have a grasp of what happened in *The Road to Hill 30* and beyond. It certainly helps if you want to grasp the characters under your command rather than just control them, so that, even though you can't change whatever fate may have in store for them, if nothing else you'll have a decent narrative to wrap yourself in, inbetween trying to shoot the bad guys that are between you and your objectives.

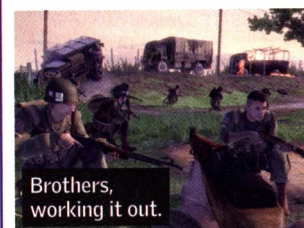
REAL GUNPLAY

On the face of it, this third *Brothers* game isn't much different to the first two. Whilst *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* continue to do charge heroically down FPS alley, *Brothers* prefers you lay down suppressive fire, keep the enemy occupied while you or one of your squads goes round the side and sticks it to 'em like proper soldiers. Then, when the fighting's over, you can question the futility of it all (war, silly, not the game. Games are fun), while the next mission loads up.

War, hints the title, isn't about duty or honour: it's about brotherhood. In arms. Until they get blown off. Then it's about trying to find a nurse who'll walk you off in a hospital bed.


At arm's length

When co-op play isn't co-op



Hell's Highway is a game that is focused around co-op play, so it's unfortunate that the main route is only open for soloists. The promised multiplayer co-op mode was dropped during development, leaving instead a multiplayer game that's potentially good, but since no servers were up, nor other pre-release players around to join us, we couldn't test it out.

Unless you've played a *Brothers* game, the all-important suppression mechanic is initially odd, until it makes complete sense. Basically you shoot in the direction of the red spots floating in mid-air, get your squads to do the same, then when they turn grey, move around until you can get clear hits on the German soldiers beneath. Yes, I've deliberately made that sound stupid and abstract, because it is. It also works brilliantly. If you want a real challenge – and there is none so challenging in

A full-page photograph from a video game. A soldier in a helmet and goggles stands over a fallen soldier in a war-torn city. The fallen soldier is holding a rifle and has his head in his hands. The background shows a brick building with arched windows and a cobblestone street. The scene is lit with a warm, orange glow, suggesting fire or a sunset. The text is in a bold, white font in the top left corner.

"Hell's Highway is about a bunch of soldiers doing their job. Which mainly involves killing Krauts"

"Don't worry, I once lost my sandwiches. You can have one of mine"

Gymnastics are a side-effect of grenade explosions.



any FPS – try the game on “authentic mode” with all the spots and crosshairs turned off. That’s how the brothers really did it.

CHANGING GEAR

While the gameplay evolutions are small, *Hell's Highway* has a much more intense feel about it than previous games in the series. *Hill 30* was more in line with other FPS games, only with plenty of right-click ‘go there’ trickery to give the feel of being there. *Highway* takes the realism up a notch, ironically by being less realistic: the ghostly situational awareness camera that destroyed the mood somewhat in *Hill 30*... (even though it was optional) has been ousted in favour of pulling the camera out into a third person, over-the-shoulder viewpoint whenever you hunker down behind cover. As the game doesn't pause things, the combat feels much more in your face as a result, even though it's behind your shoulders... as weird as that sounds. Apparently it's like *Gears of War*, but

I've never played that, so I'll say it's like *Killswitch* (yeah, just me, I know). In any case it's good. Really good. Bullets crack around you, and the realities of combat feel much closer when you can see more around you than a myopic first-person view might allow. The camera almost never goes haring off in odd directions either, which is something of a pleasant surprise.

Squad AI is almost perfect too. Only once did a squadmate get himself stuck running on the spot, and he was decisively picked off for his hesitancy. Squad members will run through you and give you a little jink, probably because walking through other bodies looks weird and unrealistic, but here it's a mix between the two that neither looks silly, nor will have you trying to thread your way between bodies and wishing you were playing *Medal of Honor* instead.

“In completing the game you just want to keep going, which is always a good sign”



Silly place to hide really.

Your buddies will pick their targets, find cover for themselves and generally do their duty. They won't take risks though, that's your job.

FAULTY, BUT RICH

It's hard not to like *Hell's Highway*. Even though the tank-driving bits are pure arcade, they are a welcome break in the tense action. The game has its moments of cloying melodrama, but doesn't shovel it with as much violent fervour as other shooters (such as *Gears of War* – so I'm told). I'm not sure if the slow-motion zoom shots of Germans losing their limbs and headshots hitting home rather distract from the war is hell theme, or add to it. It happens so often than the impact is lost after a while, making the game feel more gratuitous than gritty.

More annoying repetition comes from the dialogue of your comrades. By the time you actually get to fighting along the eponymous highway, hearing “They're not all gonna miss Baker!” again and again from your platoon will have you wanting to turn into the lone gun hero the game tries to keep you from playing.

Then there are the countless doors that can't be opened (I think one door is kicked in during a cutscene), the walls that are just that little bit too high to climb, the sofas and windows that are immune to gunfire. All needless funnelling through the maps.

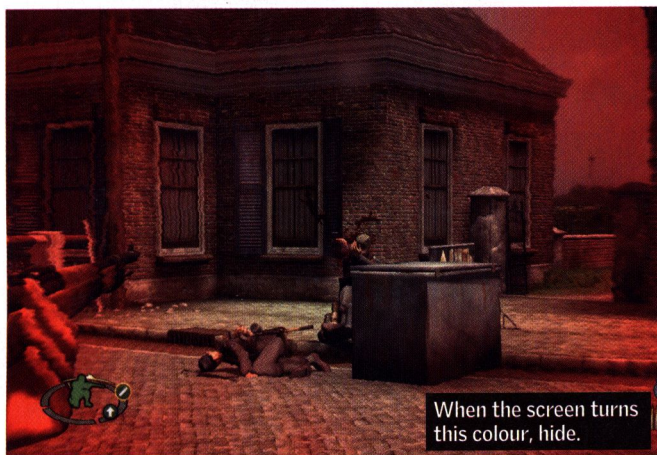
And yet the series is still proudly moving forward. It's just so likeable.

The first game was a solid start, and each game is making steady advances while other series are stumbling about in sequel hell. For all its faults *Hell's Highway* is a rich experience that should be played through at least twice, because in completing the game you just want to keep going; which is always a good sign.

Thankfully a fourth game is promised, almost certainly to be based during the Battle of the Bulge if historical accuracy is to be maintained, which means that there are deeper, colder bells for the developers still to mine before the road to Berlin is finally reached. **PC7**

The Big Red... ummm

Dying in *Brothers in Arms*...



When the screen turns this colour, hide.

There isn't so much a health bar in this game, as to what amounts to various stages of “oh shit!”. The more red the screen, the closer to death you are. Find cover and catch your breath back. Or keep charging and hope a bullet strikes into that last German guarding the farmhouse before his rips into you. As thrilling as it is unrealistic.

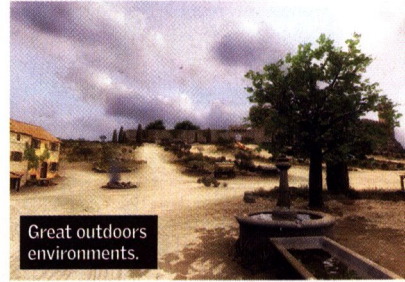
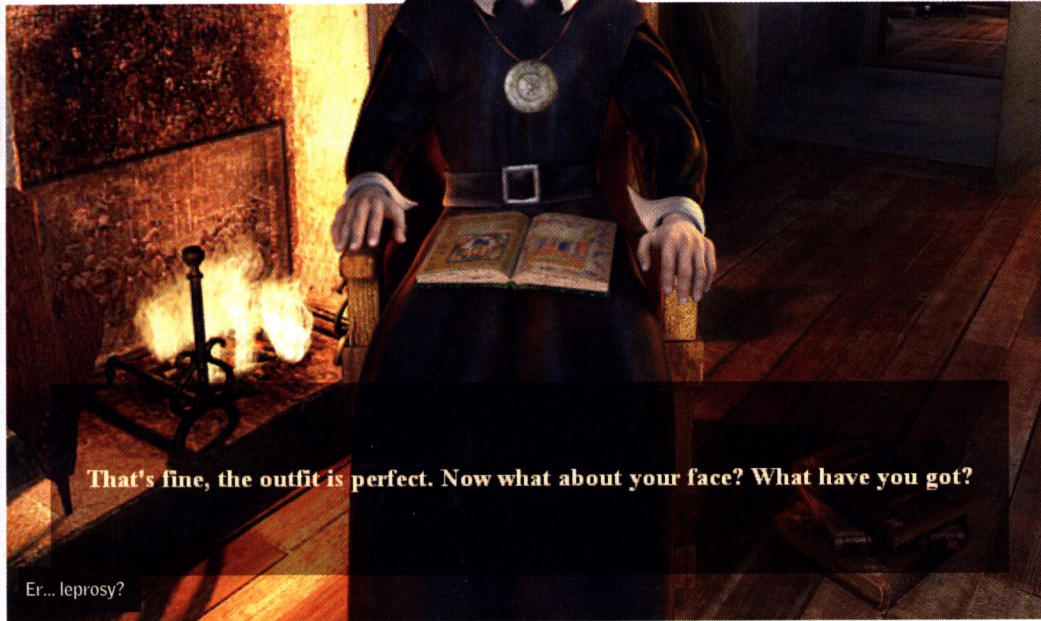
PCZONE

Graphics Detailed, smooth and war-like
Sound Dense and doom-laden
Multiplayer Rather pruned

- ✓ Tense combat
- ✓ Clever AI chums
- ✓ Good story
- ✓ Great cut-scenes
- ✗ Unrealistic enclosed maps
- ✗ Bolted-on multiplayer

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A solid advance



NOSTRADAMUS - THE LAST PROPHECY

Chris Jones predicts random clicking and bad voice acting

DEVELOPER Kheops Studio
PUBLISHER Lighthouse
WEBSITE
 nostradamus-thegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

A medieval adventure about the old know-it-all with some nice visuals, good puzzles and the odd bit of cross-dressing.

Minimum system requirements:
 800MHz Pentium III, 256MB RAM
 (512MB for Vista), and a 64MB
 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE 80%
NOSTRADAMUS - THE LAST PROPHECY 69%
AGON: THE LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO 35%

NOSTRADAMUS PREDICTED A fair few things in his time. The Great Fire of London, Napoleon's empire and the rise of the Third Reich. What he probably didn't predict was that he would be commemorated in a point-and-click adventure for the PC.

Still, in this medieval puzzle-solving affair, you play the famous seer's daughter, Madeleine, who gets roped in to stop her dad's last, and most disastrous, prophecy from coming true. With no obvious option to buy dad a copy of the *Racing Post* and leave well enough alone, it's up to you to go around, picking up stuff, mashing it together, and using the slightly tacked-on device of your father's astronomy charts to get things to happen.

Seeing as there's a constant dripfeed of adventure games passing through the PCZ office, mostly hovering between tolerable and passable, it seems pertinent here to point out that Nostradamus is not awful. In fact it's pretty good.

The game's approach to point-and-clicking is pitched somewhere between the static backgrounds of *Myst* and the first-person stylings of the *Sherlock Holmes Adventures*. You can turn

through 360°, but you're stuck in the centre of each scene, like a giant puzzle-solving pole, clicking between doorways to move around. At first this is frustrating and can cause a peculiar sense of dizziness, but after a while it becomes fluent.

Each room and scene is painted beautifully, with an impressive attention to detail. Character models are believable and unique, enabling the game to really evoke its 16th century setting.

However, the flaws are a cliché of the genre. An average script is voiced by actors who must actually be trying to be bad. Also, some puzzles are wilfully obtuse, with a few leading to that adventure game no-no: instant death.

That said the inventory system has some good ideas, with scope to manipulate, cut and tweak objects you pick up. Only a slight sense of over-



complication and a lack of tutorial hinders your progress. But that shouldn't deter you, if you've slogged your way through some of the less well-made examples of the genre.

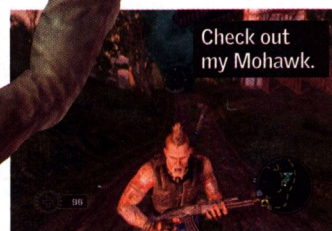
With an intriguing story, visual flair and cunning puzzles, *Nostradamus* is an unexpectedly and unpredictably decent point-and-click game. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Pretty and detailed**
 Sound **Harmless music and terrible voice acting**
 Multiplayer **No**

- ✓ Great setting and visuals
- ✓ Clever, well-integrated puzzles
- ✓ Nice inventory ideas
- ✗ Shocking acting
- ✗ Some over-complications

69
 Forewarned, forearmed



MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES



Ed Zitron is a street-walking cheetah with a heart full of napalm

DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE pandemicstudios.com/mercenaries
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Madcap open-world third-person shooter that lets you pilot tanks, helicopters and boats, as well as call in vicious airstrikes.

Minimum system requirements:
 3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 256MB video card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS **92%**

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES **73%**

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL **70%**

SOME GAMES SHINE out as a labour of love. Others are transparently slapdash efforts that have the stink of unseemly urgency about them. The PC version of *Mercenaries 2* is both.

EA have taken the stupid, ballsy fun of the console version, and done the absolute bare minimum to make *World In Flames* work on the PC platform. Menus are demoralisingly navigated with the up and down arrows, and the keyboard control method is pretty much akin to eating mashed potato with a knife (see 'Infamous conversion'). If you happen to own an Xbox 360 controller, the game becomes a flawed, lunatic masterpiece. It's a repetitive, addictive, lovingly rough shooter that is 75% moments of sheer elation and 25% utter, cat-punching frustration.

OIL AND BLOOD

Mercenaries 2 kicks off with you doing a job for Roman Solano, a Venezuelan businessman, who asks you to free his friend, a general. On executing this tutorial mission, you're double-crossed

and thrown penniless and hungry for revenge, right into the middle of a military coup. Solano is taking control of a country full of oil – cue a weak quasi-political plot full of stereotypical characters and political statements about as complex and controversial as "Aren't oil companies bastards?"

The one thing you can rely is a great many explosions as you roll through the country as one of the three characters,

each of whom have a special ability, be it speed (Jen), more ammo (Chris) or faster health regeneration (Mattias).

They each approach situations in a slightly different way, but for the most part your goal in any mission is to bring down a ton of ordnance onto particular targets. You gain missions from different factions, be it Universal Petroleum (generic American oil company), the People's Army of Venezuela (the





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Cars have a satisfying weight to them.



Spider-Merc,
Spider-Merc.

country's generic rebellious military types), or any of the other generic stereotypes. Their story-based missions usually boil down to blowing up a particular building, taking control of an outpost, or assassinating someone that is highlighted on the map screen.

As a mercenary, you can attack these missions however you want to. If you have a sniper rifle, you're able to assassinate a target from across a hill, and it's wonderfully satisfying to do so. If you'd rather run in, drop an indicator, and run hell for leather as an artillery strike obliterates the target (and his entourage), that's also fine. You can even get a tank delivered, blow a hole in a wall, and then run the bastard over – it's up to you. One of the most wonderful things about the game is how it really does let you finish a mission how you want to, even if it makes it a lot easier (or more explosive).

"Mercenaries 2 shines in the hands of those who take it for what it is – an A-Team simulator"

Even better is the contemporary orchestral soundtrack, which gives everything that edge of epic combat. Playing the game is like being in a high-budget action movie with explosions, clichés and stereotypes galore.

TURN AND BURN

You're paid with two currencies: money and oil. The black stuff can be picked up once you recruit a chopper pilot, and used to pay for the delivery of supplies, air strikes and vehicles. You spend your cash on bribes to get on the good side of factions (if, for example, you blew up Universal Petroleum's CEO with a jeep bomb and need to make up), supplies, or extensions to your oil storage.

This micro-management is fairly low-maintenance, and at times can even add a little adventure to the proceedings when you decide to nick a gigantic oil canister, rather than blowing it up.

Infamous conversion

Pandemic and EA each need a slap

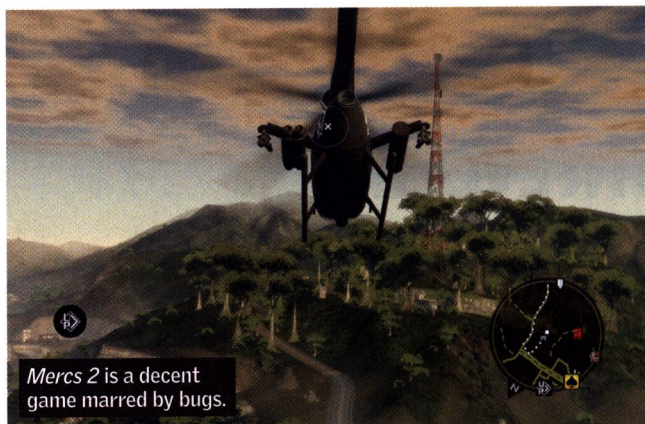
For starters, the menu system in *Mercenaries 2* is utter crap – you'll select an option on it and then have to press space to actually choose it, instead of just clicking the mouse.

Also, in any and all quick-time button pressing events – such as hijacking a tank – you don't get the actual key-bindings on-screen, just a vague picture

of the command (reload or jump, for example). Put in a 360 controller and the correct button presses appear.

Resolutions are also limited, and on the two PCs we installed it on, anti-aliasing would not work, regardless of how many times we selected it and restarted the game.

Thanks a lot for the great port, guys!



Mercs 2 is a decent game marred by bugs.



Ultimately though, *Mercenaries 2* is repetitive. Regardless of how satisfying it can be, you can't get away from how you really are doing the same thing over and over again. It's kept reasonably fresh by the different faction missions, and how individual most parts of 'Venezuela' are, but it lacks the sheer life of the *Grand Theft Auto* series. You'll hear the same phrases from the same four soldiers repeated 90 times a minute, see the same cars, tanks and helicopters everywhere, and do mostly the same thing for each faction. On top of this are some really bizarre bugs – soldiers killing themselves by falling off things, or your helicopter pilot crashing into an obviously placed tree.

The most fun you'll have is when you make your own little meta story in the midst of a situation gone wrong, or find an ingenious solution to a tough mission. This self-generated creativity is what will keep you coming back to *Mercenaries 2*, regardless of its flaws, as you really feel like an unstoppable, raging badass. It falls short of a whole-hearted recommendation, because it's a

staggeringly lazy port that isn't worth buying if you haven't got a gamepad. As a sandbox game, it shines in the hands of those who take it for what it is – an *A-Team* simulator – but as a narrative shooter, it falls flat. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Pretty yet flawed
Sound Repetitive voice-acting, great orchestral soundtrack
Multiplayer Two-player online co-op

- ✓ Addictive
- ✓ Fantastic soundtrack
- ✗ Lazy port
- ✗ Strange bugs
- ✗ Repetitive

73

Cut throat



The Minis are the most fun in multiplayer.

GTR EVOLUTION

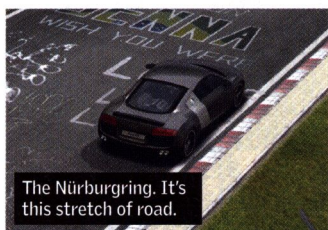
Fast and the fastidious

Developer: SimBin
Publisher: SimBin
Website: steampowered.com
ETA: Out now
Price: \$29.99 plus tax (about £17)

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz Pentium 4, 256MB graphics card and 1GB RAM.

IGNORE THE NAME. *GTR Evolution* is a standalone expansion pack for *Race 07*, with new cars, new tracks and SimBin's first arcade mode. Arcade mode means you no longer have to fart about qualifying, nor waste time buried in a tyre wall trying to work out which button reactivates the driver aid you unwittingly deactivated moments before the last bend. Other modes have the usual crazy settings for unhinged people, and multiplayer thrusts you into an online asylum of imbeciles and anoraks.

The game engine still has a whiff of the '90s about it, and the physics engine is from that alternative reality where vehicles handle like go-karts or plough over chicanes like soapy-bottomed filing cabinets. *Race 07* owners who've been drooling over SimBin's newer Lizard engine might wonder if they should spend the £17 on crisps instead. Then there are the myriad minor irritations,



The Nürburgring. It's this stretch of road.

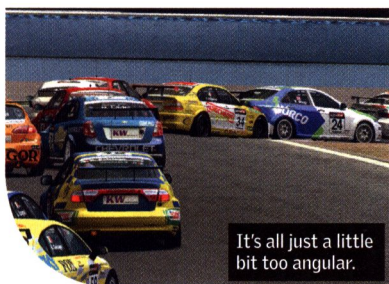


You should try driving from this angle.

such as being penalised for clipping a corner when heading backwards across it out of control, or are instantly pitted for goofing about in arcade mode.

It'll probably come as a shock to hear that none of this matters. The nuts and bolts of the game – its ease of use, the noises it makes, how much fun you have – hold the thing together so tightly that you don't hear the odd rattle and squeak. It'll annoy you every now and then, but you'll be unable to resist coming back. Like being married to Cheryl Cole.

Philip Wand



It's all just a little bit too angular.

PCZONE
80
Worth it for the sounds



Swap those gems! Sweep 'em good!

GEMSWEPPER

Essentially Minesweeper for toffs

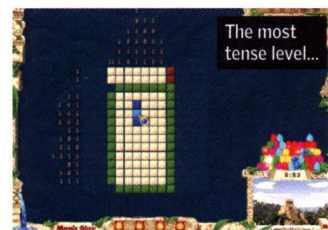
Developer: MumboJumbo
Publisher: Funsta (Codemasters)
Website: mumbojumbo.com
ETA: Out now
Price: £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
Honestly, you'll be fine.

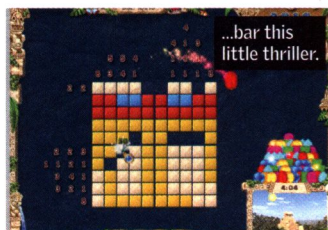
SO THIS IS what it's come too, eh? From editor to budget monkey in just over three years. Maybe it's all I'm fit for. At 38 the reflexes aren't as sharp as they were and the brain cells could definitely do with a gentle workout. Which, luckily, is no more than *Gemsweeper* provides.

This game provides an array of grid puzzles for you to solve, using the numbers on the top and side to uncover gems and avoid the cursed squares. So, if you've got a 5 x 5 grid and there's a five on one of the rows or columns, you can safely uncover all the squares by clicking individually them, or click-dragging the row to save time. Later in the game it gets a bit trickier in that you have to work out which individual squares you can change safely and then work from there to complete parts of the other lines until the puzzle is complete.

And that's about it. It's playable but the trouble is it takes an age to get to a



The most tense level...



...bar this little thriller.

puzzle that's going to tax you and by then the chances are you'll have found something else to occupy your time. Even if you persevere I'm not sure you should actually pay for as mild a diversion as this, given that there's so much out there that you can download legally for free.

PC-puzzle-based-industry-killing comments aside though, this isn't bad. It's strangely hypnotic, contains a certain charm and definitely kills an hour or two when you need to give your water-cooled graphics card a rest.

Dave Woods



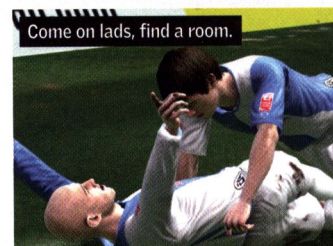
PCZONE
52
Where casual goes to die



It's even possible to score from free kicks.



The winner of the shiny head competition.



Come on lads, find a room.



What happened next?

FIFA 09

Steve Hill comes off the bench for one more effort...

DEVELOPER EA Canada
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.easports.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Last-gen FIFA with PC controls.

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008 **87%**

FIFA 09 **74%**

UEFA EURO 2008 **68%**

AS IS THE lot of the PC gamer, this isn't the same game that is currently looking very tasty on the next-gen consoles, but as ever is instead the umpteenth iteration of 'old' FIFA. As if to emphasise the point, our review copy announced itself with an all-singing intro video that ended with the words *FIFA 08* emblazoned on our PC's screen.

We spent a couple of minutes making sure the game was indeed *FIFA 09*, and that there were indeed some features unique to the PC: specifically two all-new mouse and keyboard control systems, perhaps included as an acknowledgment that it's virtually impossible to satisfactorily set up a joypad.

First up, you can control the player with the keyboard and pass using the



England beating Croatia 4-1? As if...

mouse, something that is initially like trying to simultaneously rub your belly and pat your head. However, with practice it becomes vaguely manageable, enabling you to genuinely play the ball into space. Furthermore, in what seems like a Wii-style gimmick, tricks are performed by holding down the middle mouse button and 'drawing' the trick on screen - so sketching a circle will result in a 360° turn, for instance.

MOUSE TRAP

A nonsense, but there's more, with a mouse-oriented mode that sees the player in possession haplessly chasing the cursor as you make him dance around the pitch. It's a bit like driving a car with your tongue, but perversely is all the more satisfying if you manage to score. All the same, while it's gratifying to see some concessions made to the PC, we struggle to see either control method replacing the humble joypad.

This year, goal feasts seem to be the order of the day, as the review kicked off with a 4-3 win, followed by a succession of high-scoring affairs, accompanied by the crowd singing the sanitised, "You're so bad it's unbelievable."

Elsewhere, the Be A Pro mode (where you control one player over the season) is still an utterly absurd concept, and there's a footwear-sponsored live update feature that also enables you to buy further leagues. The commentary is still the best around, the graphics are OK, and there are about 10 million official licenses. All the same, we've seen it all before. What year is it again? **PC7**

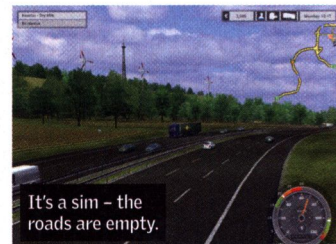
PCZONE

Graphics Average
Sound Superb commentary
Multiplayer Yes

- ✓ Instantly playable
- ✓ Highly authentic
- ✓ Fantastic commentary
- ✗ Not PC friendly

74

Kicking it old school



EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR

"I like trucking, I like to truck," sings *Charlie Brooker*. But he's lying

DEVELOPER SCS Software
PUBLISHER Excalibur
WEBSITE eurotrucksimulator.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Drive your rig along the motorways that connect Europe's major cities ferrying plums to Frankfurt, bon-bons to Marseille, and pork tits to Dundee. Do what you like.

Minimum system requirements:
 3GHz Pentium 4, 2GB RAM, and a GeForce 6800 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

TRAINZ RAILWAY SIMULATOR 2004	66%
EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR	40%
BUS SIMULATOR 2008	22%

OH THANKS, *PC ZONE*. You bring me back from the dead for one last review and what do you give me to look at? A game in which you drive a lorry full of tomatoes to Lyon. I thought the whole appeal of games was that they let you do things you can't do in real life, such as shooting a Nazi or jumping over a grinning daffodil and landing on a moving cloud. Not so here. As glamorous exercises in escapism go, *Euro Truck Simulator* is on a par with fishing hair from a plughole.

The gameplay: pick a truck, pick a cargo (Sugar! Electronics! Frozen food! It could be literally any pedestrian item you can think of!), then drive it from one location to another. Along the way, you have to fill up at petrol stations and nap. You also have to obey traffic lights and avoid crashing. You don't get to do any of the other things truck drivers are famous for, like wanking over porn in lay-bys or knifing 19 year-old hitchhikers, so the tedium quotient remains fairly constant.

NO RIDES FOR RIDES

Most of the time you're just trundling slowly down a dull motorway. While you're driving you can look around the cab by sliding the mouse about. Yet when your eyes alight on the empty passenger seat beside you, it can get poignant. The road is lonely and monotonous, and there's so little to do you end up staving off boredom by holding negotiations with God in your head.

Then you arrive at your destination, at which point there's an infuriatingly fiddly bit where you have to reverse the trailer into a

docking bay. I left the experience more resentful of humankind than when I started, which indicates this game isn't aimed at me. The score reflects my take on the damn thing. Add 50 points if you want to drive a truck through some dull sections of Europe. Like a prick. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Occasionally shiny trucks
 Sound Use iTunes at the same time, it's like you've got a radio
 Multiplayer Truckers truck alone

- ✓ Realistic driving
- ✓ Massive road map
- ✗ Really frigging dull
- ✗ No passengers
- ✗ Lack of any variety
- ✗ Induces misanthropy

40
 Truck truckity truck



PIPE MANIA

Playing the pipes of piss

DEVELOPER Razorworks
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
WEBSITE empireinteractive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:
Your mobile phone could run it.

WHEN PIPE MANIA was released in 1989 it was an original and addictive puzzler. The game involved building a pipeline to carry gooey 'flooze' to a drain without spilling it out over the play area. If you've played *BioShock* you'll recognise it as the hacking mini-game. And you may also have chanced upon various free Java-based versions on the internet. Nearly 20 years on from the original release and Empire has decided it's time for an official remix. So, is it worth it?

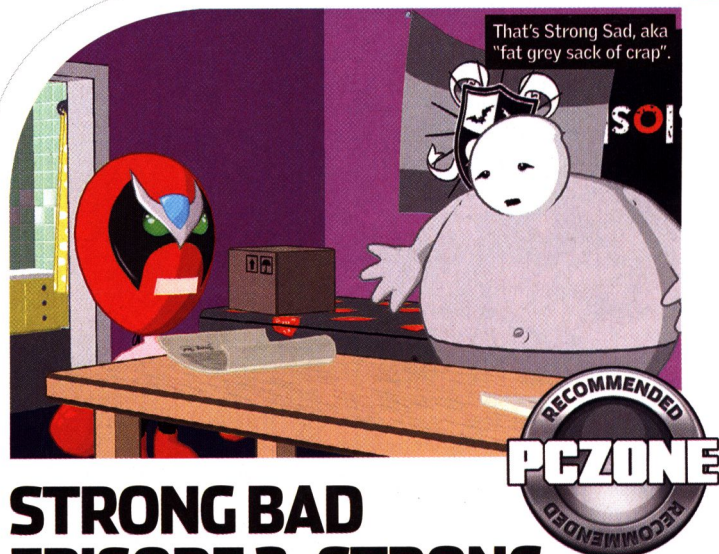
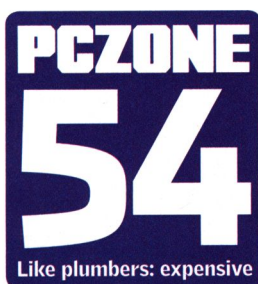
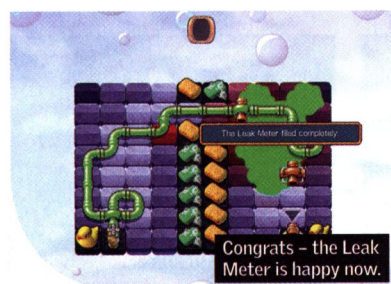
The 56 stages are divided into seven themed zones including sewers, the internet and railroads. New plumbing problems posed include valves that speed up the flooze; rubber ducks, rocks and flames that are impassable; and fists that come randomly smashing down on your carefully laid out pipeline forcing you to make hurried repairs. You'll also find one-way pipes and treasure pipes that award bonuses if you can pump your flooze through them.



These are reasonable twists that liven up what is ageing, tired gameplay. The trouble is, it's just ridiculously bad value for money at £20. For what is essentially three to four hours of entertainment you'd expect to download something like this onto iPhone or some other handheld digital receptacle for no more than £4.99.

While *Pipe Mania* is a pretty good remake, shelling out £20 when you can play perfectly good Java-based versions for nothing online is simply money down the drain.

Keith Pullin



STRONG BAD EPISODE 2: STRONG BADIA THE FREE

Stong Badia the \$8.95

DEVELOPER TellTale Games
PUBLISHER TellTale Games
WEBSITE homestarrunner.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$8.95 (£5.00)

Minimum system requirements:
1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 32MB video card.



RIGHT, I'LL ADMIT it. I'm writing this half-page review as a cheeky front to get into the 200th issue of the mag. But as far as review code goes, I could've done a lot worse than discovering TellTale's quirky adventure *Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People*.

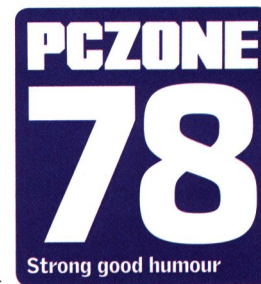
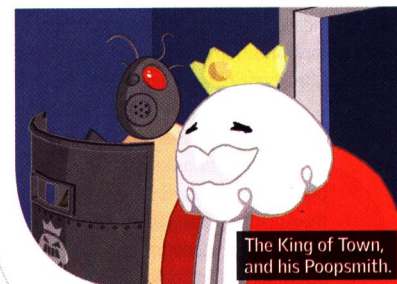
Episode 2 kicks off when our shirtless hero is put under house arrest with a big, explosive collar, for failing to pay his newly-imposed email tax to the unusually stern and giantly moustached King of Town. Escaping and declaring war against the king is your opening puzzle, and kicks off an adventure of one-liners, hilarious videogame parodies and production good enough for the telly (Comedy Central, at least).

Don't worry if you missed the first episode - this is much more standalone

than *Sam & Max* episodes. And the setup is basically *Sam & Max* slotted around Homestar's decade-old web comic. Like *S&M*, environments are lush and the puzzles lean towards the easy side, but as a pint-sized comedy show (with lots of wonderfully animated characters and scenery to click) *Strong Bad* is an excellent evening's worth of entertainment.

This game's also more funny than TellTale's other series; the humour's definitely more *Viz* than *The New York Times*. Replacing *Snake Boxer* is the excellent *Double Dragon* piss-take, *Maths Brothers*, and if you don't chuckle your way through Strong Bad's second episodic outing then there's something deeply wrong with you. Oh, and one last thing: Look mum, I'm in *PC ZONE 200!*

Andy Robinson





CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION



Steve O'Hagan learns Independence Day isn't just about Will Smith punching aliens

DEVELOPER Firaxis
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive
WEBSITE civilization.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Empire building, trade and genocide in an update of Sid Meier's brilliant 1993 turn-based strategy epic.

Minimum system requirements:
1.2GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

CIVILIZATION IV 92%

COLONIZATION 88%

BEYOND THE SWORD 86%

SID MEIER HAS been making strategy games since before you were a dirty thought in your dad's mind, and almost everything he has done is unutterably brilliant. So good is Mr Meier at putting together turn-based classics that you wonder whether it runs in the family. Did his dad design Risk? Was his great-grandfather the guy who came up with Monopoly? Did one of his ancestors think up chess? Only Wikipedia can tell.

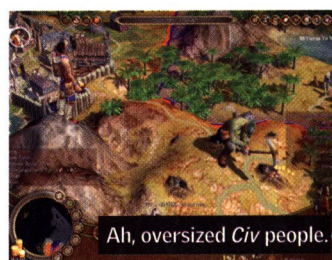
On PCZ's 200th shindig, this reviewer feels honoured to be passing verdict on the latest from the Meier stable, as for me he's the best videogame designer of all time. *Civilization* – upon which this game is based – is the *Citizen Kane* of videogames; a gaming classic destined to forever be remembered and played, like Checkers, Go, Mahjong, or kiss-chase.

The original *Colonization* surfaced back in 1993 and this update is again a brilliant *Civilization*-esque epic where you play one of the first European settlers in the Americas, trying to establish a colonial empire strong enough to fight off the pesky natives and other greedy European

invaders, with the final aim of reaching independence from your homeland.

SLAVE/TRADE

As it uses the same engine and shares similarities in combat and production, from one angle *Colonization* can look like just a glossy *Civilization* mod. This angle, however is the viewpoint of a bitter simpleton. *Colonization* is its own animal, a fabulous beast with claws that can tear holes in your gaming/life balance, its veins coursing with pure strategy-crack, its dung steaming pats of pure gameplay. It vaults a bar of quality far higher than any of the Firaxis-designed mods that form part of *Civilization IV*'s expansions *Beyond the Sword* and *Warlords*.



The game kicks off with you in charge of a boat stuffed full of religious fanatics and venomous criminals, the kind of people who founded the United States, (and to judge by its current government, still comprise it today). With this motley crew of European outcasts, you have the task of founding a colonial empire capable of standing on its own two feet.

Early turns are a simple matter of appropriating some land from unsuspecting and sadly trusting natives, starting your first settlement, and getting a viable economy going. As tends to be the way in games of empire building, there are crops to be planted, trees to be lumbered, ore to be mined, and fish to be caught to feed your hungry





Redskin reservations

Native Americans get it in the neck once more

As in history, movies, books and television, the poor old Native Americans get short thrift in *Colonization*. They start as masters of a continent, living in a state of innocence among its Edenic splendour. They end having been shot, burned and starved out of anywhere worth living, left to rot in the deserts and swamps. You too can take the traditional route and wipe them all out, stealing their land and treasure as you go. Or you take a more gentle route, becoming their allies, learning their skills, buying their land, establishing religious missions in their tee-pees, and plying them with booze and cigars. Either way, they are screwed.

Sadly there's no option to play as the Navajo, or another Native American nation, and drive the white devils back into the sea.



It's nice to see orange and blue crabs getting along.

"The really great thing about *Colonization* is that it goes out with a bang – the mother of all battles"

imperialists. What's immediately impressive is the flexibility you have in changing the professions and specialties of your settlers, who're bussed in on your ships as they nip hither and thither over the Atlantic. One minute, they're picking cotton under the hot sun. The next, some local chief looks at your wagon train funny, so you tool them up with some muskets and send them off to bayonet his squaws. And finally, you change them into missionaries, and send them into the natives' remaining village to convert them into servile Christians, just like all those other poor servants, slaves and assorted underlings busting their balls on your tobacco plantations.

At its heart, *Colonization* is about trading. Sometimes you will barter with the local Indians, who will give you valuable furs and silver for any old shiny tat you can ship over from corner shops in Europe. But mostly you will

trade directly with your homeland in the Old World, capitalising on the apparent legions of folk looking to smoke and drink themselves into early graves with the help of your fine rum and cigars, earning the dollars you need to buy guns, tools, horses and other means of violence. While the number crunching in all of this can be a little scary, once you get your head round it, the challenge of running a successful economy is one of the game's strengths.

LIBERTY CITY

That there are only three types of military land unit (soldier, cannon, cavalry) in *Colonization* shouldn't stop you from wreaking hell on your neighbours. The Indians aren't too much trouble until they get their hands on white man's shooting irons. Your European co-colonisers are a different matter, seeing as they too can call upon heavy artillery. And the army



Swap you one rake guy for two burly blacksmiths.

of the King, sent to kick your arse when you try to go independent, is a juggernaut for which you'd better be ready.

That's the really great thing about *Colonization* – that it goes out with a bang. Unlike in *Civilization* where all too often the game finishes with a screen saying everyone's flown off to Alpha Centauri, in *Colonization* things come to a close with the mother of all battles, when your King sends a twatting great big army over to smash the crap out of you as soon as you dare mention the 'I' word.

In the end, *Colonization* is not quite as awesomely mindblowingly epic as *Civ IV*, but it's not far off. Your sleeping/eating/socialising/working habits may fall rapidly into disrepair, but hey, what comes first – life, or liberty? **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Perfect for the job
Sound Put the stereo on
Multiplayer Yes

- ✓ Amazingly fine-tuned balance
- ✓ Typically addictive
- ✓ Ends with a bang
- ✗ Looks a little like *Civ*
- ✗ Can destroy entire days

88

Pocahontas of strategy

PC Specialist recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

 **pcspecialist.co.uk**

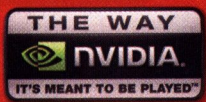


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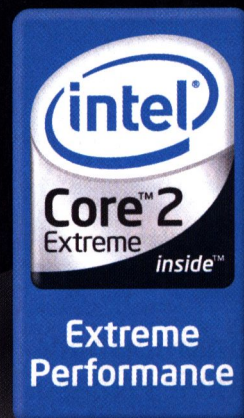
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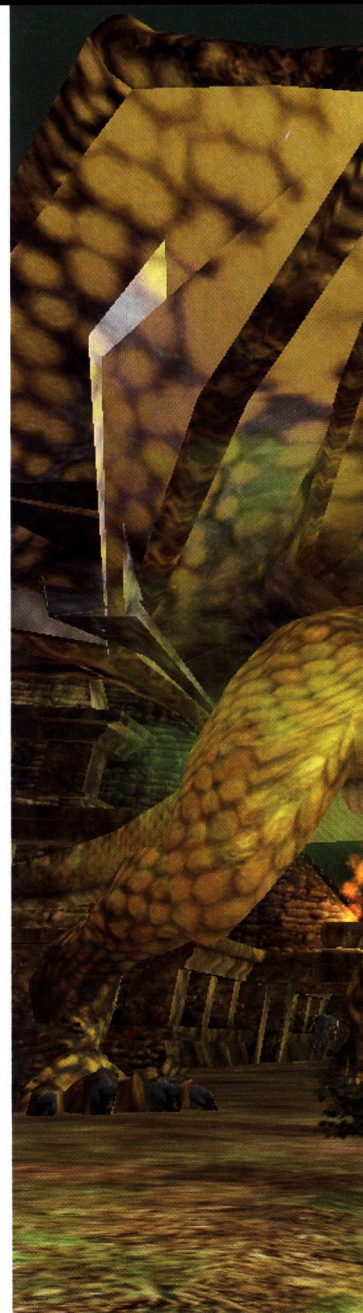
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STATE OF PLAY

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... EVERQUEST II

PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment **WEBSITE** everquest2.com **PRICE** \$39.99 (download) then \$14.99/month

NOVEMBER 2004 SAW fantasy MMOs change forever. Within a fortnight, the two highest-profile titles in the genre's life were released: one raking in millions of players worldwide, becoming a byword for online gaming, and delivering its creators the kind of obscene profits that Bill Gates dreams of. The other was *EverQuest II*.

World of Warcraft's emergence onto the scene dominated media attention so completely that it cruelly overshadowed an MMO that should have been a bigger deal than it was. *EverQuest* was the granddaddy of the genre after all, and without those low-polygon adventures, there wouldn't have been a *WOW*, let alone any of the 12 dozen imitators that have followed.

EQ's sequel struggled through 2005. While the underlying game experience was equally comparable to the media darling rival (and easily merited the high 95% score we... I... gave it), some daring, some say misguided, gameplay decisions were enough of a millstone around its neck that it never garnered enough attention to justify headlines.

HARD WORK

So instead of trying, SOE simply knuckled down, spent the next four years grafting like a bugger and, most importantly, listened to the feedback they got. The result was *EQII* quietly grew and grew, shifted focus, added important new elements such as PvP, balanced and engrossing Tradeskill (crafting) options; introduced new

races, new zones, new cities and new add-on packs; revamped the entire starting experience; changed many, many, many of the gameplay mechanics (including the archetypes); rewarded loyal veterans with epic quests, epic weapons and epic raid dungeons; and, most importantly, overhauled the entire solo experience to make the whole game more attractive to casual gamers. And that was just the tip of the iceberg. To list every gameplay change that happened over the past four years would take an encyclopaedia, but the net result

is that since its launch, *EQII* has altered beyond all recognition, while still holding true to its roots.

To celebrate this, SOE have just come off the biggest marketing promotion in the *EQ* franchise's history, encouraging anyone who even sniffed at the game's box to try it anew, which has reportedly added several tens of thousands of new players in the process. And with *The Shadow Odyssey* – *EQII*'s fifth expansion pack – gearing for release next month, *EQII* has arguably never been in a stronger position than it is now.

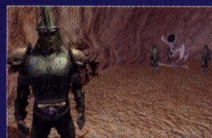
"EverQuest II is the greatest MMORPG ever made. It's a simple fact."
95% PCZ 150, January 2005

Is this a party
or a battle?

THE STORY SO FAR... EQII HAS GROWN AND GROWN AND GROWN AND...

2004 EQII RELEASED

Norrath is reborn 200 years after the original's timeline and a cataclysm reshaped its lands. *EQII*'s impact is overshadowed by *WOW*'s release two weeks later.



2005 BLOODLINE CHRONICLES

SOE release the first 'mini-pack', containing one dungeon instance. Despite costing \$5, this interesting idea doesn't catch on.



2005 PIZZA, PIZZA, PIZZA

A quirky promotional idea sees American gamers to order pizzas by typing /pizza into the in-game chat window. Much cheesy crust-ingestion ensues.



2006 ECHOES OF FAYDWER

EQII's third expansion pack brought a major new race, a new continent and all of the previously released expansions in one box – a practice SOE continues.



2007 RISE OF KUNARK

Expansion four and another new race/continent combo. Zones are made larger to cut down the game's 'loading screen' feel and epic weapons arrive for max level players.

2008 LIVING LEGACY

The biggest promotion in *EQ* history sees invites to return to Norrath being sent to everyone who touched the games, and sees a significant boosts to player numbers.

Amongst other, lesser game mechanic changes, *The Shadow Odyssey* will bring a nostalgic mood, opening classic original-era *EQ* dungeons for all-new questing; adding new zones to the existing plethora of locales; and offering 'dungeon delving', which will vary existing dungeons' content. And, as with all *EQII* expansions, it will also provide new players with every drop of *EQII* content that's been released to date in the one retail package.

FREE TASTERS

Prior to this paid-for substance, the virtual crack dealers will be putting out various freely available game updates ("The first hit's free my man, the rest is gonna cost you...") including Guild Halls. These instanced interior zones will let your merry band of unlikely monikered heroes have a real place to call home, instead of the makeshift player housing bases that have sufficed well enough until now.

Free updates have long been a staple of *EQII*'s progress, regular patches offering everything from minor bug fixes to entire cities and whole new races, and it's this constant refinement to the original's core values that show the true heart of why *EQII* is consistently rated as the Most Improved MMO by anyone who bothers to try it out.

For all the plaudits thrown like confetti by the converted, all the openness and welcoming nature shown by the community to newcomers, and all the care and attention shown by the development team, the Norrathian stigma is still the game's biggest hurdle to overcome. *WOW* still hogs the limelight, its fevered fanbase claiming innovation and development excellence while the truth is that there is precious little in Azeroth that wasn't created first either in *EQII*, or many other fantasy MMOs that aren't as media savvy.

Bitter, much? Grapes tasting somewhat acerbic, old man? Perhaps a

little, and *WOW*'s charms, achievements and playability can't be discredited. But the alternative 'alternative' worlds should not be ignored as a result. To shun *EverQuest II* – a game which offers rarely seen depth of content and craftsmanship, and warmth of community... to let this once-great institution wither through undue overattention to a rival whose only unique virtue is that it happens to sell an awful lot better is a crime. Especially when it pretty much started the whole genre off after all.

VERDICT

Four years of enhancement, evolution and expansion has seen *EQII* evolve into the best fantasy MMO in terms of richly rewarding game experience. Ignore the slanderous stigma and *EverQuest II* offers a staggering level of depth.

Paul Presley

BUDGET

Jon Blyth pretends to be evil on a shoestring

EVIL GENIUS

PUBLISHER Vivendi WEBSITE www.evilplanet.com PRICE £799

UNBELIEVABLY, THIS IS the first time *Evil Genius* has appeared in the budget pages, four years since it first trained a laser beam of bugged charm between the legs of a moderately surprised public.

A tutorial sees your supervillain introduced to his volcano home, controllable henchman, and the minions who run your lair and train up to be specialised units for when the good guys attack. If they start slacking, you execute someone to make sure that everyone remains motivated. It's sensible, amoral touches like that put the try-hards like *Manhunt* to shame.

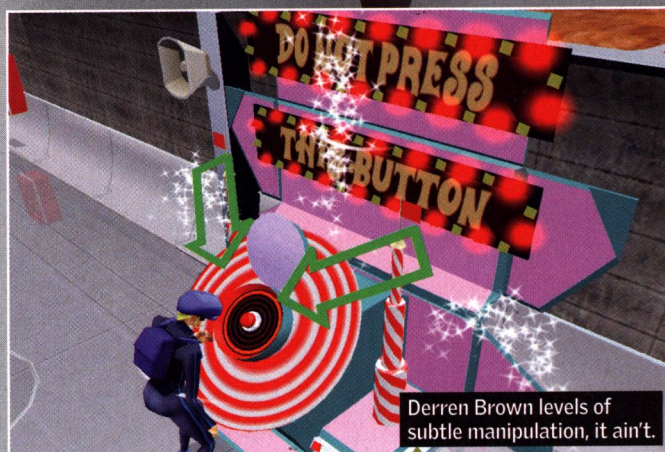


Evil Genius is much deeper than its fantasy-based inspiration, *Dungeon Keeper*, with a world map and global campaign of terror, culminating in the building of your very own Doomsday Device. This all lets you feel like you're playing your own game, instead of a series of numbered levels. The style of the game, not to mention the incredible original score, is so strong that even with the flaws (which have been mostly fixed with official and unofficial patches) it'll stick in your memory forever.

If you've never played *Evil Genius* before, do so now. Or we release the cyborg warthogs.

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

**PCZONE
87**



Derren Brown levels of subtle manipulation, it ain't.



THIS MONTH PCZONE SHAVED MUMMY BY...

Ed clambered onto his mother's back and used Wahl Clippers on her scalp
Shaving: Whole head



Log hid inside a chest freezer, then lunged out at his mother with an Epilady.
Shaving: One matted clump

Steve painted himself the colour of the carpet and hacked at his mam's shins with a Bic Orange.
Shaving: Three tufts



ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE www.steampowered.com PRICE \$8.99+tax (about £5)

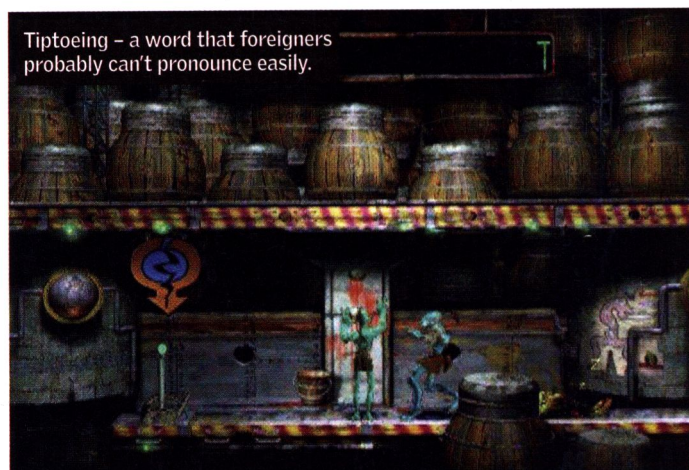
ELEVEN YEARS AGO Abe's gloriously dark world of slavery and casual slaughter first appeared on the PC. And as far as puzzle platformers go, it still stinks of originality, invention, and morbid horror.

Abe is a Mudokon slave, held captive in the mechanical landscapes of the Slig Empire. All he can do is communicate with his idiot brethren, fart (which takes a surprisingly long time to wear thin) and hypnotise guards with his chanting.

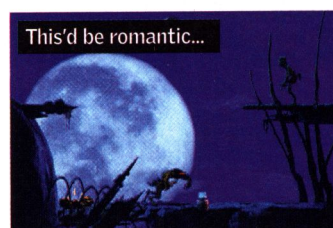
The rules within which you have to operate, and the imagination behind the puzzles, are inventive enough to keep you entertained throughout. And even if you survive the main game, getting all of your Mudokon fellows to safety can agitate your tear ducts to the point of squirting out a little wet.

For the sub-fiver price, *Abe's Oddysee* is completely essential, and it's available with its sequel, *Abe's Exoddus*, for just \$15 (about £8).

**PCZONE
78**



Tiptoeing – a word that foreigners probably can't pronounce easily.



This'd be romantic...



NO TALKING TO FELLOW EMPLOYEES
...if your mouth wasn't stitched shut.

TROPICO 2: PIRATE'S COVE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £4.99

IF YOU HANG around coves, then you're either a pirate, a smuggler, or a privileged English schoolchild having a jolly, dandelion and burdock-fuelled adventure.

Tropico 2: Pirate's Cove takes the management themes of the original game, and adds the familiar twist of being all cool and evil. (Which makes it a good month for cheapskates who get off on lording it up over AI routines.)

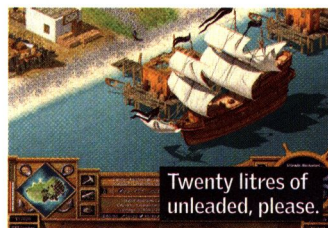
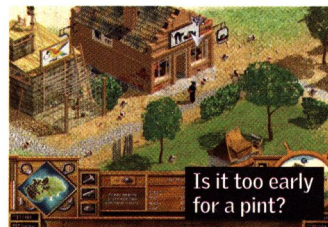
Pirate's Cove isn't a huge leap from the original, using the same engine for a "dated, even for 2003" feel. But that means you can run it on a cheap laptop, which is great – more people should spend their commute overseeing a backwards economy of seafaring plunder and establishing a black market.

As far as strategy and scope are concerned, *Pirate's Cove* is more limited than its predecessor, mainly because of

its piratical theme. The original game could have you specialising in tourism – and pirates have, throughout the years, been consistently indifferent to the tourist industry.

If you're happy with trading a sense of choice for those cool hankies, *Tropico 2* still has plenty of depth and gameplay that hasn't walked the plank.

PCZONE
74



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £4.99

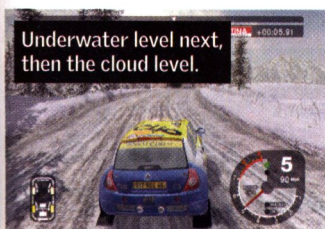
THOUGH IT'S OVER three years old, been superseded by a vastly superior sequel, and sadly lost the man to whom it owes its name, *Colin McRae Rally 2005* can now be yours for the same price as an hour's worth of petrol.

The last official McRally before *DiRT* re-invented the series so refreshingly last year, 2005 honed the series' strengths, with tense racing against the clock, satisfying drift handling and graphical flair. A wide selection of tracks and cars fill out a comprehensive career mode, but it's hard to recommend this game with *DiRT* – which simply outclasses *Rally 2005* in almost every area – being available for a tenner.

But there is a different, more hardcore focus to the earlier *McRae* games, and if you find *DiRT* too arcadey, then this is a will be a well-timed reminder of what has made this series such a mighty and enduring one. Featuring the late McRae in his

penultimate game appearance, *Rally 2005* is a well-executed tribute to a great sportsman, but stumping up just one more blue note will net you that superior *Colin McRae: DiRT*.

PCZONE
73



And the rest...

The others ones to watch out for



CRASHDAY

PRICE £4.99, Mastertronic

Touting itself as a souped-up *Carmageddon*, *Crashday* never cut the murder mustard. But this price drop makes it feel like an almost fair buy.

PCZONE
56



CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

PRICE £9.99, Mastertronic

The fact this game has been relegated to this area shows how little an impact it made. If you must play a *Clive Barker* game, make it *Undying*.

PCZONE
61



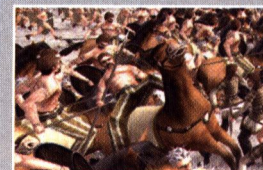
PACIFIC STORM ALLIES

PRICE \$9.99 plus tax (about £5), Steam

When we reviewed it, we said it was "massively ambitious" and "massively unplayable". The latter hasn't changed, and neither has the score.

PCZONE
45

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

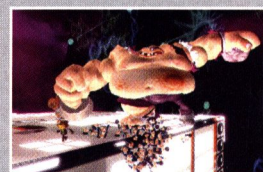
Half-Life 2's been in this list for too long – it's time for *Far Cry* to take the spotlight again. This rock-hard shooter has to be the best FPS to not feature a grabby gun.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

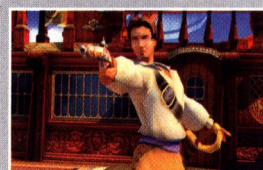
If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse (or, in *Oblivion*'s case, slightly worse) than this epic, sprawling classic.



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. If it ever does.



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.

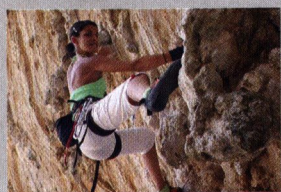
BUYER'S GUIDE



Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZONE Top 5 GENRES YET TO BE COMBINED

- 1 FIRST-PERSON GOD GAME
- 2 TEXT-ONLY FLIGHT SIMULATOR
- 3 MMO POINT & CLICK
- 4 TURN-BASED EXTREME SPORTS
- 5 REAL-TIME EVOLUTION SIMULATOR



PCZONE Top 5 OVERLONG TITLES

- 1 PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES: ON THE RAIN-SLICK PRECIPICE OF DARKNESS - EPISODE ONE
- 2 STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE: EPISODE ONE - HOMESTAR RUINER
- 3 LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH II - RISE OF THE WITCH KING
- 4 STAR WARS GALAXIES: EPISODE III - RAGE OF THE WOOKIES
- 5 DELAWARE ST JOHN: VOLUME 3 - THE SEACLIFF TRAGEDY

PCZONE Top 5 GAMES WITH ALTITUDE

- 1 BATTLEFIELD 1942 (HAS ALL KINDS OF ALTITUDE)
- 2 MS FLIGHT SIMULATOR (HAS SERIOUS ALTITUDE)
- 3 FRONTIER: ELITE II (HAS HUGE ALTITUDE)
- 4 SILENT HUNTER III (NEGATIVE ALTITUDE, BUT IS DEEP)
- 5 PGA TOUR (HAS BALL-BUSTING ATTITUDE)

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.



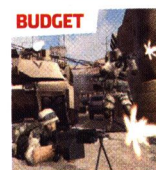
BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
The psion of *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.



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.



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.



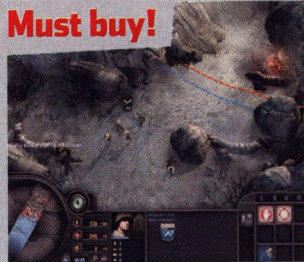
CRYSIS WARHEAD
PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%
The standalone expansion may only take a few hours to complete, but it re-ins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains a few moments of fantastic action storytelling, and improved alien AI.



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

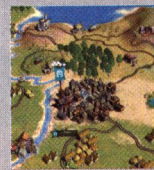
Must buy!



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.



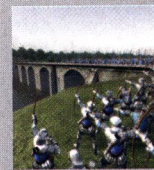
WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



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

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



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



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



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



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



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of 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.

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.

Simulation

BUDGET



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better X3: 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?



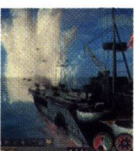
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



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.



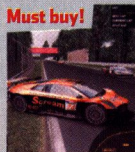
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If X3 is too slow for you, Freelancer should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



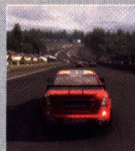
SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

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

NEW ENTRY!



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



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 kiddie-looking graphics - it's a keeper.



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.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



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



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



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



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



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

INCOMING!

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

October

BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION
DEAD SPACE
FALLOUT 3
FAR CRY 2
LEGO BATMAN
MEN OF WAR
QUANTUM OF SOLACE
RED ALERT 3
RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

ROCKSTAR
EA
BETHESDA
UBISOFT
WARNER BROS
1C
ACTIVISION
EA
CODEMASTERS

November

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
LEFT 4 DEAD
PRINCE OF PERSIA
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

BLIZZARD/ACTIVISION
SEGA
ROCKSTAR
VALVE
UBISOFT
EIDOS

2009

DIABLO III
FEAR 2: PROJECT ORIGIN
FUEL
MAFIA II
MIRROR'S EDGE

BLIZZARD
WARNER BROS
CODEMASTERS
2K GAMES
EA

TBC

DEUS EX 3
STARCRRAFT II
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

EIDOS
BLIZZARD
THQ
BLIZZARD

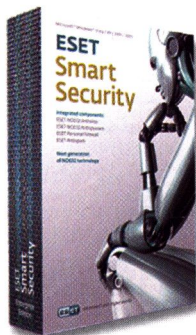


we protect your digital world



DEFENDING AGAINST
VIRUSES, MALWARE
AND HACKERS?
I'LL BE YOUR EYES.

Today, 15,000 new internet threats will be created to attack your computer system. Predicting and intercepting future threats is what we do. In fact, ESET® Smart Security, with its industry-leading ThreatSense® technology, provides faster, more precise, proactive protection against viral threats in one fully integrated solution. **For a free 30-day trial, visit www.eset.co.uk.**

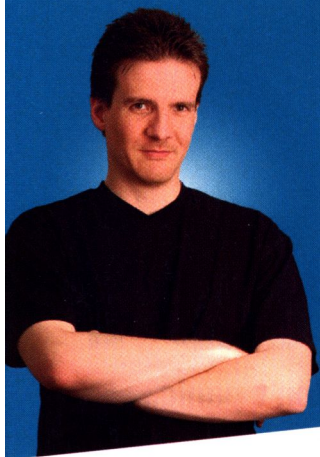


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Smart
Security

A New Way To Think Smart



Antivirus + Antispyware + Antispam + Personal Firewall



PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Printer attack

SOME TIME AGO I recounted the demise of my printer, a device of such shocking quality and poor design that it was me who demised it. One day I simply yanked the thing off the shelf, mid paper jam, and stamped on it until it became a 10,000 piece 3D jigsaw.

More recently, the Samsung laser we have in our office has taken up the ancient Japanese art of paper folding, and whatever document you're trying to print the end result is always the same: a small accordion. The things I want to do to it would make Ted Bundy blanch.

As I loomed over it, willing it to put pleats in my *Word* document, it suddenly dawned on me. While most hardware has improved over time – screen, processor, storage, you name it – printers are stuck in an earlier, darker time, having changed little since when they were conceived.

In 2007, Memjet printing technology (www.memjet.com) promised to give us a CRT-to-LCD-size leap for our paper needs, and YouTube clips of prototypes made it clear why there was reason for excitement, but traditional printer manufacturers snubbed the idea.

Presumably because there's no money in it. A top-grade product won't wear out or be snuffed out, meaning it won't have to be replaced. My advice to the Memjet people is to make it second rate. It's what everyone's used to.

Wand

Phil Wand, hardware editor

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**
BY STEVE HOGARTY

RAMPAGEOUS ASUS

ROG Rampage Extreme mobo is a tweeker's delight

NORTHBRIDGE 22.7% cooler, 96% efficient 16-phase power, 1600MHz bus, 2000MHz DDR3, 2x PCIe 2.0 x16 slots; for £269. The ASUS ROG Rampage Extreme is an X48 platform designed to appeal to people who like numbers and have money.

The stunning looking board uses a ROG Fusion Block: a traditional heatpipe and fan arrangement and an integrated water cooling block to give owners the choice of how they deal with heat.

As with the ROG Extreme Engine power management system, the Fusion

Block system extends to the Northbridge, Southbridge, and voltage regulation components. ASUS say the idea allows for greater overclocking headroom than usual, and allows experiments with high voltage tweaks in the BIOS.

Owners also get desktop management software for the board, *TweakIt*, which allows you to muck about with settings without having to reboot. The *TweakIt* utility also works within games, meaning the results of your fine-tuning are immediate.

The Rampage Extreme supports all LGA775 Core 2 chips, including the later 45nm designs, and is available now.

asus.com



Remember the golden rule: if it looks expensive, it is.



Water and fans keep this CPU chilly.

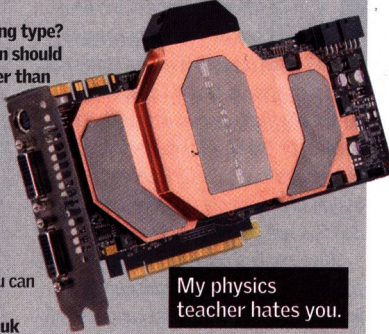
WATER TORTURE MSI wrings 700MHz from H₂O

ARE YOU AN overclocking, water-cooling type? Then MSI's new N280GTX OC HydroGen should interest you. Despite running 17% faster than stock, the £375 graphics card remains 10% cooler than air-cooled competition, courtesy of a micro-channel water cooling design.

Those of you with long memories will recall the HydroGen X48 motherboard of last year which sadly never made it to market.

You'll be pleased to hear that you can buy this GTX online today.

www.msicomputer.co.uk



My physics teacher hates you.

News round-up

Those ever-industrious Chinese are promising a quad-core processor that will rival AMD's and Intel's next year. The chip in question is a 64-bit RISC chip with an integrated DDR2 memory controller and an enlarged instruction set to help it run x86 Windows applications. jcste.ict.ac.cn

Following on from last month's revelation that NVIDIA had set aside \$200m for warranty claims, a legal firm has alleged the company violated the 1934 Securities Exchange Act and has filed a fraud class action suit on behalf of a group of shareholders. The claim is that investors should have been told of the company's unusually high failure rates. nvidia.com

RISC CHIP: A microchip dedicated to calculating risk. Using an in-built speaker, it can make your PC say things like, "That doesn't sound like a good idea, Michael". **ROG RAMPAGE:** The famous ROG Rampage of 1998 saw thousands of members of the Royal Ornithology Group don bird costumes and peck indiscriminately at innocent passers-by. **SAMSUNG LASER:** A tragic yet undocumented event which took place in 1961, during which Sammy Davis Jr opened his mouth to sing but instead fired lasers from his throat into the crowd, killing over 50 people. **TWEAKIT:** A failed successor to *Bop It*, criticised for being too vague in its demands to "arrange it tastefully" and "demarcate it".



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 QUAD DAMAGE

I'm having difficulty with the difference between duo and quad-core processors. Are quads aimed at different applications than duos? Are four cores running at 2.66GHz faster than two at 3.16GHz?

Also I've saved up enough to buy the new Radeon HD 4870 X2. Do you have any major concerns about this card?

Steven Carr

A *The Radeon is a great card. My only concern are the drivers, and whether AMD's monthly release schedule will deliver the performance of which the hardware is capable.*

As for your processor, a dual-core chip is all you really need. Virtually none of today's games take advantage of more expensive quad-core hardware, and in addition you're more likely to be hindered by motherboard incompatibilities – for example, an ASUS P5GC will play host to any duo but will not recognise a quad.

The only reason to buy a four-core chip is if you use your PC for a multitude of tasks besides playing games, or you're trying to out willy-wave your friends. So save your money by sticking with a higher frequency Core 2 Duo.

Q KEEP IT STOCK

I've read that the Intel cooler supplied with its dual-core CPUs isn't that good: true/false?

Austin

A *My experience of the heat sink and fan supplied with all retail (boxed) versions of the Core 2 processor is that it's adequate in terms of efficiency and noise. It's not the quietest or the best for dissipating heat, but today's low-bake CPUs aren't as temperature-oriented as their ancestors and few will bother replacing it.*

If you've had prior experience of stock Intel fans, or have read messages from insane overclockers bitching about the cooler's performance with a 175W heat load, stop worrying.

So unless you're building a home theatre PC and need near-silent operation, or you want a system you can pump up in the BIOS, save your money. Anyway, you can always replace it later.



Bling! Coolers can be cool, but are often a tad excessive.

Q FIND ME A PC

As you know, there's a massive selection of PC brands and systems out there, offering different configurations. I used to be up-to-date with all the latest RAM, CPUs, motherboards and so on, but now I'm just confused.

I have up to £1,600 to spend and I don't need any peripherals. In your opinion, what's the best system available?

Glen Richmond

A *My own 'dream system' costs a smidge over £1,000 and comprises a Supermicro SuperChassis 733T-645B with C2SEA motherboard, Intel Core 2 Duo E8600, Crucial DDR3 PC3-10600 4GB, PowerColor ATI Radeon HD 4870 X2, Samsung SpinPoint F1 1TB, Auzentech X-Fi Prelude and Windows XP. Enthusiasts will bemoan the near total lack of tweak features, but discerning buyers will appreciate the quality, stability and long-term reliability of a Supermicro based system.*

If you're looking to overclock your system, you might want to change the

C2SEA motherboard for something like an X38-based P5E3 – an old ASUS platform but modder-orientated and now available for half its £200 launch price.

Finally, I do realise that DDR3-1333 memory remains relatively expensive and feels untapped in terms of speed (you'd never tell how much you'd spent without lifting the lid), but it's still what we'll all be using a year from now.

Q ANTI-VIRUS NOT DETECTED

I go onto the internet about once a week, and at the weekend when I switched on my PC I found I'd lost my wallpaper and there was an oblong box in the centre of the screen with the following message: "Spyware detected on your computer. Install an antivirus or spyware remover to clean your computer."

I am unable to get rid of this box. I've tried System Restore and even though I've earlier restore points it'll only let me restore on the current day and time.

I have AVG 7.5 and ZoneAlarm running all the time. I have run Spybot,



The Cyber Snipa Stinger is suited to gamers with huge mitts.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.8	20 AUG 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 177.41	26 JUN 08

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.1B	2 JUN 08
CREATIVE	CREATIVE	
CREATIVE	ALCHEMY 1.10.01	15 MAY 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.1B	2 JUN 08

"A dual-core chip is all you need. Virtually none of today's games take advantage of quad-core hardware"

Ad-Aware and AVG and they have found problems, and these have been fixed, however this hasn't solved the problem. I have also run a registry cleaner which found several problems which it fixed.

Dave Burgess

A I'd say you've been infected with Trojan.Blusod or a variant of it. You need to visit snipurl.com/blusod and follow the instructions to remove it.

The reason your system is acting peculiarly – for example, you won't be able to change the wallpaper – is because the malware makes changes to your registry to hide certain aspects and behaviour of Windows' interface.

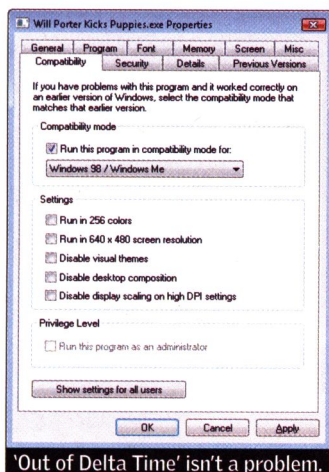
I should reassure you that it's not something that should affect the long-term running of your system, but you might want to take a look at your anti-virus and anti-spyware measures before going back onto the internet.

Q TIME PROBLEMS

Can you tell me what "Out of delta time" means when it appears as an error message after a game crash?

Oily

A Sounds like an old problem Unreal Tournament had with dual-cores. There are several ways

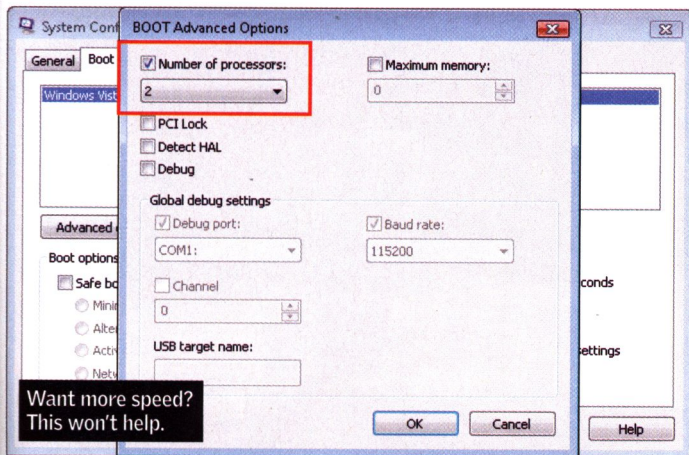


'Out of Delta Time' isn't a problem.

around this, the easiest being to right-click the Unreal executable file, click Properties, then select the Compatibility tab. Check the box to run the game in Compatibility Mode, choose Windows 98 from the list. Click OK and enjoy.

Q UNLEASH THE LEAST

People are always complaining about slow boot times on Windows these days so here's a little trick that should significantly speed up boot times on Vista and XP. Click Start, type "msconfig" into the search bar, go to the



ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN PC TECH...



Lag was a big disrupter of Team Fortress gameplay.

06 PING

If you've joined a game on the internet, you'll be aware of a magic number that reflects your ping. But what do those digits actually mean?

Ping is the length of time it takes for game data to complete a round trip. The data originates on the game server, travels across many miles of wire to reach your machine, and then does the journey back again. This latency is measured in milliseconds, and when it comes to gaming there never has been any middle ground: it's either low or too high.

A small ping has always been associated with smooth and accurate first-person shooter play, whereas a high ping tends to mean that your actions in the game fall behind your actions in real life – a rather disorientating situation known as 'lag'.

Modern games servers are not adversely affected by high ping connections, but a player suffering from high latency is hard to target because the data that describes his position and movements is received comparatively infrequently, and the server makes him appear to jump between points in the game.

Boot tab and click the Advanced Options button. Check the box next to Number of Processors and select the amount of cores you have in your processor.

GM

A I've seen this trick on a number of forums and it simply does not work.

What the Number of Processors option in msconfig does is limit how

Windows uses your CPU. This does not unleash hidden parts of hardware – just the opposite. Its purpose is to help system builders troubleshoot faulty systems (for example, a processor with a failing core) and works as a kind of electronic cork.

By default, Windows uses every part of your processor and any difference in boot time after changing this setting is entirely in your mind. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Ruzz) I've got a Logitech wireless keyboard and mouse, but am getting fed up with searching out batteries for the mouse. Any tips for a good wireless mouse with docking station? (Wandy) Do not buy wireless HIDs, ever. (Ruzz) I hear and, of course, obey. But why? And any recommendations instead? (Wandy) It's all down to your hands, of course, but the mouse most suited to my Germans is the £30 Cyber Snipa Stinger. A big upside for me is that it's not cluttered with buttons you only ever push in error. It's a no-nonsense, high-sensitivity, super-comfortable gaming mouse that also happens to make sense for everyday desktop use. It's a bit ugly and the cable's a bit short, but that's it.

HANNS-G HG281D

PRICE £238 MANUFACTURER Hanns-G WEBSITE hannsg.com/eu/en

BIG SCREENS AREN'T just for making spreadsheets more daunting, and full-screen YouTube videos seem distressingly inadequate. They also make gaming 65% more brilliant. When a screen devours your peripheral vision, there's an incredible sense of immersion. And for strategy fans, big screens can be an advantage.

We've yet to see the 30in monsters fall in price, though, which is where this 27.5in panel comes in.

Although fairly slim, it's not a pretty monitor and the controls are fairly unpleasant. The choice of HDMI over DVI as the input of choice is odd too, meaning that your average 3D card will require a DVI-to-HDMI adapter – which, while delivered with some modern 3D cards,

might be an unwelcome extra expense for most people. The picture can be a bit soft, but for this size and price, you're definitely getting more than what you're paying for.

Anyway, this softness is just about the only criticism we have of the picture quality – the contrast may be slightly flatter than on a great 24in screen, but it's not something that'll bother you. The viewing angles aren't great, but they're good enough for head-on gaming, or for cocking your head slightly when used as a flash second monitor.

If you're a colour purity fascist, you'll need to see this running yourself before



you buy, but for the rest of us the differences are minute.

And like most of Hanns-G's monitors, the HG281D is stupidly cheap; the price feels like an exciting mistake.

For gaming we can't help but nod enthusiastically at this monitor.

PCZONE

88

Hanns in the air

BENQ V2400W

PRICE £320 MANUFACTURER BenQ WEBSITE benq.co.uk

THIS ELEGANT MONITOR spearheads a new wave of thin monitors, that almost warrant the phrase "ultra-slim", or "mega-flat". BenQ go as far as claiming it's the ultra-slimmest, mega-flattest electrowafer in the world. It's a claim they won't be able to make for long, as Acer and ASUS have Mrs Beckham-slim screens on the way.

What we can say is that this monitor is very thin, which is great. But the off-centre stand isn't. The construction just isn't right, and the whole thing feels flimsy and is hard to adjust. Nevertheless, it doesn't take up a lot of room on the desk, yet has a very spacious 24in display. BenQ have got a lot of other things right too. There's an HDMI port – useful for hooking up a console or a set-

top box – and the front panel controls are a vast improvement over the side-mounted ones on previous BenQ panels. They're a little too sensitive to the touch, but clearly labelled and easy to use. Too many monitors try to hide their controls for the sake of aesthetics, making setup a painful experience.

Picture-wise this is a cut above most. Although we'd expect a high-quality IPS panel (the crème-de-la-crème of LCDs) for the price, the response time of this display is brilliant for gaming, and the colours bright and sharp. There's a distinct lack of dynamic range, however, which the artificially boosted contrast ratio can't help – in fact, when you turn



it on, game graphics can look a little bit cut-out, and we settled for leaving it off.

We wouldn't rule out a purchase of this display (especially if your desk space is limited), but it's hard to justify buying it over the Hanns-G, above.

PCZONE

81

Slim shady

**MONITOR
SPECIAL!**



ZALMAN ZM-M220W

PRICE £399 MANUFACTURER Zalman
WEBSITE zalman.co.kr

USING POLARISED FILTERS, dark glasses and an NVIDIA card, this monitor turns 3D games into 3D games. Two images are superimposed and the brain is tricked into seeing them as having true depth. The filters make the picture dark in normal use, but the 2D mode is good thanks to a high contrast ratio and low response time.

However, when you actually get a game running with the proper drivers and settings that take advantage of the ZM-M220W, it really shines. Buy this if you've got the cash about and want to essentially expose yourself to your friends.

**PCZONE
82**



SAMSUNG SYNC-MASTER 2253BW

PRICE £200 MANUFACTURER DGM
WEBSITE samsung.com/uk

A 22IN SCREEN with a resolution of 1680 x 1050 isn't as sharp as a 20in screen with the same pixel count, but don't let that scare you away. Samsung do a good job with this, with the best dynamic contrast on these pages and an astoundingly low refresh rate, giving acceptable picture quality for the price (barring a little light bleed around the edges).

That said, fiddly controls and no height adjustment don't do it any favours, and so it's not a top scorer.

**PCZONE
74**



LG FLATRON M2294D

PRICE £210 MANUFACTURER LG
WEBSITE uk.lge.com

THIS MONITOR HAS a TV tuner, remote control, Scart sockets, an HDMI, and speakers. So really, this is a TV – not an exclusive PC monitor. But as a gaming monitor, it doesn't hit the right buttons on our keyboard of love. The dynamic contrast shows up the limited colour depth, while a fixed stand and dubious aesthetics put it at the bottom of the list looks-wise.

If you're looking for something that can act as a bedroom TV, and a PC monitor, this might work out. It's pretty functional and a good TV, but as a dedicated monitor it's not good enough.

**PCZONE
71**

TECH SPECS



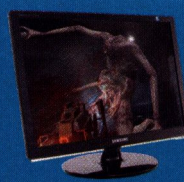
**BENQ
V2400W**



**HANNS-G
HG281D**



**ZALMAN
ZM-M220W**



**SAMSUNG
SYNC-MASTER
2253BW**



**LG FLATRON
M2294D**

	BENQ V2400W	HANNS-G HG281D	ZALMAN ZM-M220W	SAMSUNG SYNC-MASTER 2253BW	LG FLATRON M2294D
PRICE	£320	£238	£399	£200	£210
SIZE	24in	27.5in	22in	22in	22in
RESOLUTION	1920 x 1200	1920 x 1200	1680 x 1050	1680 x 1050	1680 x 1050
RESPONSE TIME	5ms	3ms	5ms	2ms	5ms
CONTRAST RATIO	4,000:1	800:1	1,000:1	8,000:1	20,000:1
WEIGHT	6.7kg	13.7kg	9.5kg	5.09kg	10kg
VGA	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
DVI	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
HDMI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	2x

Reviews by Adam Oxford

REMEMBER:
PCS HAVE
LOTS OF SHARP
CORNERS

As tempting as it is to embrace your PC in thanks for all the things it does for you, remember that cuboid objects have eight sharp corners. If you must hug your PC, roll it up in an Egyptian carpet.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at **PC ZONE**, but these are the bits we just adore

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

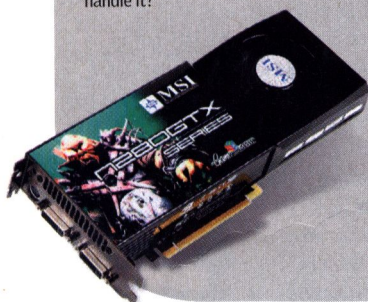
N280GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420

MANUFACTURER MSI

WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

Fast graphics don't come cheap, and NVIDIA's 200-series flagship is reassuringly expensive. There are four power modes on offer, PhysX support, and a batting average better than any other. Plus there's 1GB DDR3 and many other enhancements that deliver performance around 1.5x faster than any predecessor. Can your credit card handle it?



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775

EXPECT TO PAY

£1,000

MANUFACTURER Intel

Intel

WEBSITE 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

Intel

WEBSITE 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



WD7500AAKS

EXPECT TO PAY

£109

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

Western Digital

WEBSITE 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

Samsung

WEBSITE samsung.co.uk

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£130

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

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

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

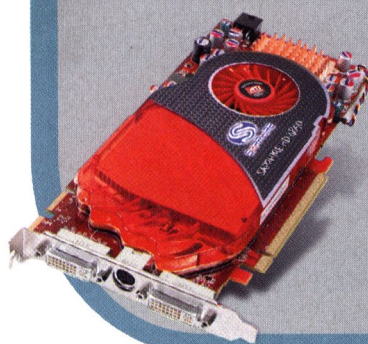
HD4850

EXPECT TO PAY £145

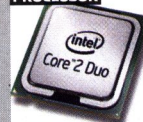
MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphire.tech.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

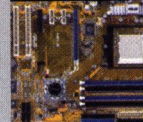
MANUFACTURER Intel

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

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

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

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m is a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£20

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS



X-530

EXPECT TO PAY

£55

MANUFACTURER Logitech

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.



PCZONE
PROMOTION



What does up to 50Mb mean to you?

The Virgin Media boffins are justifiably proud of their fibre optic broadband technology, but in case you need any more convincing we'll let the figures do the talking.

Imagine downloading an entire album in 10 seconds, a song in one second, a TV show in just one minute, a DVD-sized game in under 12 minutes or a goliath HD movie in around 15 minutes. Imagine YouTube without... those... incredibly... irritating... pauses. Or totally lag-free sessions on *Call of Duty 4*. Or all of the above, almost all at once.

Don't you want a piece of that future-proof pie? Then come over to Virgin Media.

Virgin Broadband



Next-gen fragging for next-gen gamers...

ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER nail-biting session on *Call of Duty 4*. You've finally scopped out the lair of the enemy sniper who's been causing your team so much grief, and crept into position inch by painstaking inch. He's history. Your finger slowly depresses on the trigger and... wham! One moment he's crouching directly in front of you, the next he suddenly flits out of harm's way, safe to kill another day. The dreaded lag strikes again. You've lost the match, let your team down, and all because your little sister's been hogging precious bandwidth uploading her photos to Facebook again. War may be hell, but sluggish broadband is even more hellish. We've all been there, and it hurts.

Now thanks to Virgin Media's new up to 50Mb fibre optic broadband service, rolling out later this year, gaming injustices like this will soon be a thing of the past. With fibre optics, latency and lag are all but eliminated, meaning no more lucky escapes by online adversaries, super low ping rates and frag counts that'll soar into the stratosphere. Whether you're hosting network games on your PC, downloading demos from PlayStation Network or the latest patch over Xbox Live, get ready to enjoy blistering speeds. Even better, Virgin Media's up to 50Mb broadband is so fast all the family can happily play, listen, watch and surf simultaneously, meaning arguments are also off the agenda. Thank Virgin Media for that.

Welcome to fibre optic. Welcome to the Mother of all Broadband.

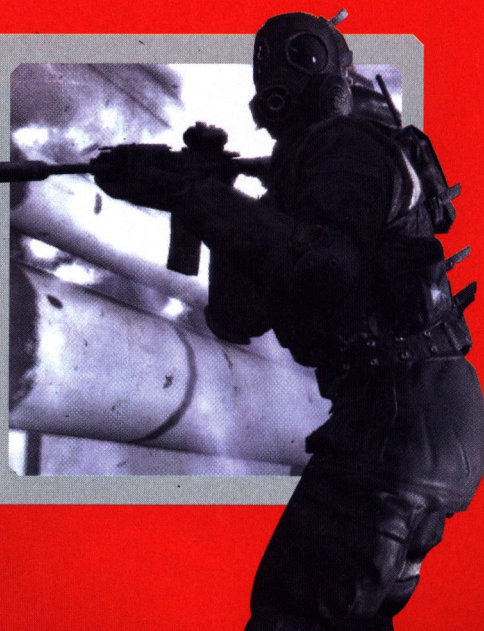
Can I get it?

Until up to 50Mb comes your way, you can choose from three broadband packages, all with the low latency fibre optic advantage: up to 2Mb, 10Mb and 20Mb. Prices start at £4.50 a month when you take a Virgin phone line for £11 a month.

For more information and to check if your street is cabled, call **0800 052 2525** or pop along to virginmedia.com/mother

See – *Fibre* is good for you...

There are two main types of broadband: copper wires and fibre optics. The former has been around since the 1870s, the latter uses strands of glass as thin as human hair to transmit data at the speed of light. One is struggling to keep up with the demands of the web, the other is from Virgin Media. Go to the URL below to see how the magic works...



www.virginmedia.com/mother

Prices quoted are for payment by Direct Debit and e-billing. Services available in Virgin Media cabled streets only. Subject to network capacity, minimum term contract. Up to 2Mb is £4.50 a month for your first 12 months. Standard prices apply thereafter. Offer for a limited period only. Up to 10Mb roll out due to complete 09/08. Speed of internet connection assumes components working at optimum speed and capacity. Both cable and ADSL broadband are affected by user volume. Acceptable use policy applies. Installation charges apply. Information correct at 09/08.

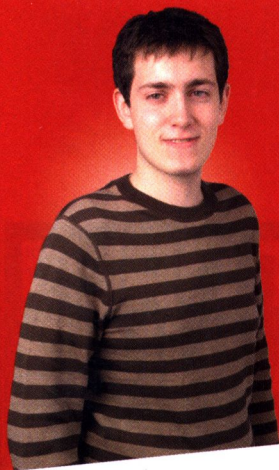
Magazines
aren't for
reading...

they're for
reloading.



Get your ass kicked for free on the
mind-blowing jolt public servers or take complete
control with your own jolt clan server.

Take no prisoners. Accept no substitutes.
www.jolt.co.uk



PCZONE FREEPLAY



For the man who has nothing

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE
GAMES!

Joy Buggy

I'M OFF. I'M gone. Right, now that that's out the way, I have something to actually talk about that's games related. As you may have seen, I reviewed *Mercenaries 2* this month, and while I enjoyed it, its flaws were so blatant that I couldn't possibly give it a recommendation. However, there's a lot to be said about it that's positive, and a lot to be said for what it was trying to do to the action genre. I personally find the ability to deal with a situation in a game using my own ingenuity a lot more pleasant – even if it feels a little buggy to do so. In *Mercs*, I can roll a tank around the side of the base, blow a hole in the wall, shoot the oil canisters and blow up my target. The game's not perfect, it's not without its glitches, but there's something satisfying about not having to choose from "go in the front" or "do a stealthy thing around the back."

Maybe this is why I liked *Two Worlds*? The loveable wonkiness of the thing meant that you could literally kill something by dancing around it for an hour, and in so-doing, you could kill just about anything. But at least I wasn't told "No, you can't do this, you aren't the right level." I don't like boundaries! I don't like being told that I can only do things your way, games! At least when I do the small number of different kinds of missions in *Mercs 2*, I can do them however I well want. If I've got a helicopter ready to escort someone safely home, instead of driving through perilous roads full of 'Venezuelans', I should be able to use the thing to skip the hard parts.

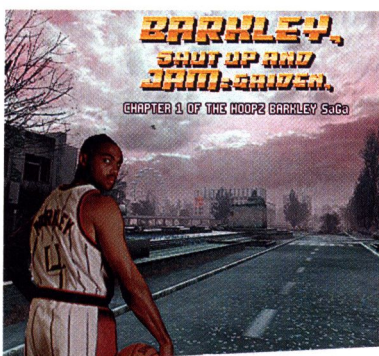
It's been a pleasure delivering all this wonderful free stuff to you though, and I hope that whatever poor soul replaces me enjoys it as much as I have. Goodbye!

Ed Zitron

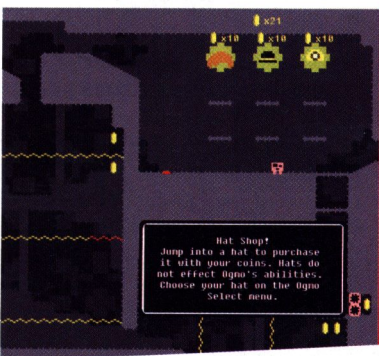
Ed Zitron, disc editor



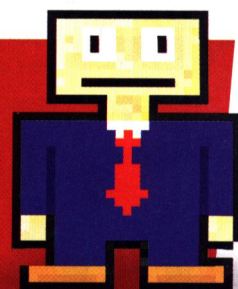
98 Demo pages
Trucks, tanks and orcs. Sadly, not all in the same game



100 News
We talk to the makers of *Shut Up And Jam: Gaiden*!



102 Freeware
Steve "Freedom" Hogarty fights for justice



104 Online Zone
In the internet, the mighty internet...



**PCZONE
FREE-O-METER**

0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

100.1
HOURS*



Demos

Take a peek at what's on your free cover DVD

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.

LEGEND: HAND OF GOD

We are still bitter about Maradona

WEBSITE legend-game.com

IT'S ALMOST AS if the whole industry knew that *Diablo III* was coming way before it was even announced. We've had *Sacred*, *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel*, *Titan Quest* (and an expansion), *Mythos* (dearly departed), and now *Legend: Hand of God*, DTP's effort to take on Blizzard. Well, it doesn't exactly take them on. It more swings near, within at least a few metres, misses, but gets up with a big smile that says "Hey, I tried."

You play as a floppy haired novice, guided by his light elf companion (that's a fairy to you and me), slashing the life out of everything in your way and completing errands, as you'd expect to do in any normal RPG. The storyline involves dwarves, portals, more elves, great evils, and searching for the "Hand of God", the only thing that can save the kingdom.

This quest involves a great deal of clicking in a small period of time, and you'll find yourself killing just about everything fantasy-ish, including wolves, goblins, and even a rather camp-sounding highwayman who has blocked the way into town with a tree. It's a bit weird, but you can find some joy in the



The dandiest highwaymen you'll ever find.



Gah! Lens flare!



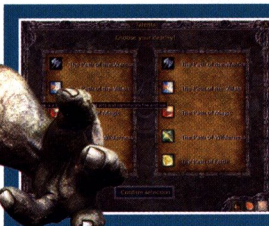
Do you want some? 'Cos I've got some!

reasonably individual character progression system, and there's something to be said for a demo that lasts longer than half an hour.

Legend's out now, and if you like this demo you may as well pick it up, as a *Diablo III* demo probably won't make it onto the disc until some time next year.

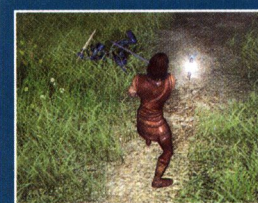


Beat boars, blokes, bunnies and rabbits.



CLASS TIME

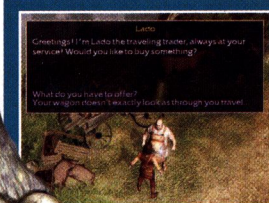
You can pick any two classes and build your character out of them, so if you really wanted to you could be a battle-mage, or a rogue-mage, or something involving fireballs, we suppose.



FAIRY MOTHER OF GOD

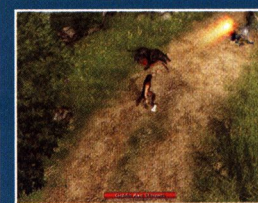
The little cursor is your light elf companion, who cracks terrible jokes about your surroundings and gives unhelpful hints about items that have just dropped.

THE INS AND OUTS OF LEGEND: HAND OF GOD



WHEEL BORROWER

When you meet this portly chap, you can talk to him and cajole him into giving you 50 gold to find a wheel. However, you can also just walk off and take the money, which is what we did.



FUNNY VOICES

One of the worst or best things - depending on how you look at it - about *Legend*, is how terribly written and voice acted the script is. It's on a level with *Alone In The Dark*.

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR

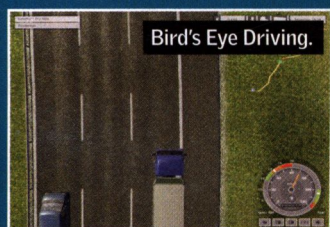
No, you're a truck simulator

WEBSITE eurotrucksimulator.com

WE'RE HAVING TROUBLE imagining how a truck simulator demo might lack any of the features that you'd demand of the full game. Did they take the horn out? Maybe the speedometer is greyed out. Perhaps the collision detection is turned off, so that you

can't drive into a wall once you realise you're playing a truck simulator.

In fact, all they've done is limit you to 30 minutes of trucking. Given that the game works on a one second equals one minute basis, amounts to 30 entire simulated hours of trucking.



Bird's Eye Driving.



Surprisingly lush graphics.

TRUCK A DUCK



COCKPITS

Are they called cockpits? But who cares? Cockpit is one of the best words in the language.



DOZING OFF

If you don't touch the controls you can simulate the experience of falling asleep while driving.

TANK UNIVERSAL

A *Battlezone*/TRON baby for the naughties

WEBSITE legend-game.com

ONCE YOU GET your head around the fact that your bullet nozzle points a different way to your trundle-loops, *Tank Universal* becomes a very playable and stylised game in which a sick old gentleman plays tanks to relieve his illness.

Is tank combat an analogy of the immune system? Are turrets evil nurses? Will the finale cause a pull back to reveal you've been playing in poorly George's eye? We don't know.



Play games and feel better.

WE WILL TANK YOU

Until you are fully tanked



TANK

Tank combat forms the lion's share of what we're increasingly coming to think of as "the game".



TURRET

Turrets are like motionless tanks. If they destroy you, be reassured – they're only killing you because they're jealous.



THING

This thing flies, and tanks can't look up. We'd say more, but we're trying to resist a *Shaun of the Dead* reference.



OBJECT

Looks like you're engaging the opposing team in an artistically stylish independant endeavour, right?

BEST OF THE REST



Because it's our 200th issue, we've put some of our favourite demos ever onto the disc, including *Deus Ex*, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, *BioShock*, and even more.



STRONG BAD: HOMESTAR RUINER

WEBSITE telltalegames.com/strongbad

Telltale's first episode of *Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People* is a great deal of silly fun, and so we recommend you give it a play.



BIRTH OF AMERICA II: WARS IN AMERICA

WEBSITE snipurl.com/americanbirth2

Why exactly they're releasing a game about the War of Independence in the UK is beyond us, but somehow this game has turned out to be a deep, interesting strategy game.



PIPE MANIA

WEBSITE empireinteractive.com

The '80s puzzle classic/*BioShock* minigame has returned with a story mode, even weirder ways of scoring points, and enemies that try and destroy your pipes. It's... well... *Pipe Mania*, which isn't a bad thing.



DYNASTY WARRIORS 6

WEBSITE dynastywarriors6.co.uk

We love the *Dynasty Warriors* games, as you're able to ride into gigantic crowds of enemies on horseback. Neat stuff.

DISC COMPETITION

WIN! One of five special Introversion Darwinia/Multiwinia tins!

We should be seeing a review of Introversion's excellent-looking *Multiwinia* next issue, and after we played the preview we were lucky enough to be able to secure you people these gorgeous tins for this month's disc compo. Inside is a copy of *Multiwinia*, *Darwinia*, a coffee table art book, two foam Darwinians, and eight postcards.

If you're interested in winning a copy, put this issue's DVD into your PC on Side 1 and click on the 'Disc Competition' link.

The entry deadline is 29 October 2008. Terms and conditions can be found at snipurl.com/futuretc. All entries must include your name and address or they will not be accepted.

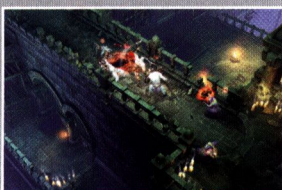
PCZONE

ON THE DVD

News

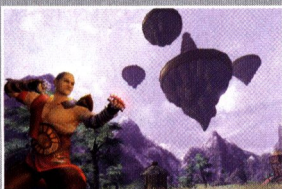
The latest on the stuff you don't need to buy

SNIPPETS



DIABLO III MP CONFIRMED

WEBSITE www.blizzard.com/diablo3
Blizzard have announced some of the new features for *Battle.Net 2*. Players will be able to chat in-game, form clans, use the new matchmaking service to find the perfect team, as well as join specific channels à la *World of Warcraft*.



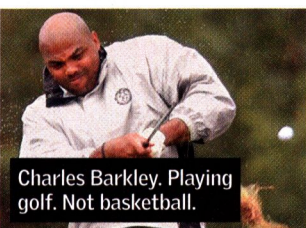
VANGUARD VAULTS

WEBSITE vanguard.station.sony.com
With free game update six, *Vanguard* players will get a completely rejuvenated world, with new character graphics, a new starting zone, and "thousands of bugs fixes," possibly taking the total down to 59,989,999 bugs remaining.



ASHERON'S CALL MAKES 100 UPDATES

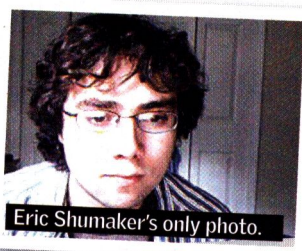
WEBSITE ac.turbine.com
Turbine's MMO dinosaur *Asheron's Call* just had its 100th game update, introducing Societies (factions to you and me) and other interesting additions.



Charles Barkley. Playing golf. Not basketball.

SEMPER GAMES

We face off against the makers of *Shut Up And Jam: Gaiden...*



Eric Shumaker's only photo.

IRREVERENT, CLASSICALLY INTERNET-grumpy yet utterly talented, Tales of Game's Studios are a 10-strong group of developers based across the world who collaborate across forums to make bizarre games like the Charles Barkley RPG (issue 193) and the Wu-Tang Roguelike (issue 196) that are also some of the most glorious pieces of Freeware gaming available today. Eric Shumaker, CEO and Grand Master of Tale of Game's, gave us some of his time, and quite a few of his words on the subject of freeware games.

Q How many people work for/with TOG? Who are they?

A We're a loose group but there's about 10 or so who we call TOGsters. The four main guys are Chef Boyardee (Eric Shumaker), GZ (Jessie Ceranowicz), bort (Brian Raum), and Drule (Daniel Norström). Not much is known about us.

What's with the name?

The name was inspired by the "Tales of..." series. We admire Konami's ability to churn out mediocre anime games. We want to eventually be able to do the same. We're also really enthusiastic about apostrophe's.

Where did you get the inspiration for *Barkley: Shut Up And Jam Gaiden*, and *The Wu-Tang* roguelike?

A lot of people say that we must have



The Wu-Tang and the Wu-Tang Baby is an epic adventure.

been high or on drugs to make games like these, but this is completely false. Only one team member is high during development. That's not to say there won't be Tales of Game's games inspired by psychedelic drug experiences. To the point, we make games that the gaming public wants to see.

Why the weird settings in your games?

The Wu-Tang Clan has already conquered the rap game, the streets, and the hearts

"Only one team member is high during development"

and minds of killa bees worldwide. It's only logical that their next conquest would be a sewer dungeon.

How did you research them?

We had to do a lot of fieldwork to make sure everything we said in the game was accurate. Drule visited with the SBA (the Swedish equivalent of the NBA) and bort and Chef spent a lot of lonely nights at the Library of Congress reading up on all of the basketball players mentioned in the game. Believe it or not, GZ actually

got an interview with the man himself, Charles Barkley!

Actually, we just read the IMDb page about *Space Jam*. We don't know anything about basketball.

Who wrote the story for *Barkley*?

Everyone writes the story for *Barkley*. Each time someone plays the game they create a unique story unlike anything else. It's entirely possible to play the game living as a citizen in Neo New York getting by paycheck-to-paycheck working as a street sweeper. But for the most part it was Chef and bort. GZ did the Liberty Island part though.

What are TOG working on at the moment? What're you guys working on separately?

The team is all over the place at the moment, but there are two major projects worth mentioning. *Barkley 2*, the sequel to *B:SUAJG*, which is going to break away from the RPG genre and be an action-based game starring Hoopz Barkley as the main character.

There is also *Faceless*, a story-driven RPG completely unrelated to *Barkley* and

much more serious in nature. It's been in the works a lot longer than *Barkley* and will be a lot better. The main guys behind it are Hundley (Justin Traub), who was actually a character in *Barkley* and Konix (David Nyari), who did all of the graphics for the Wu-Tang Roguelike, and GZ.

You're obviously talented developers – what draws you to freeware games?
We enjoy working for hundreds of hours and not getting paid for it. It's our opinion that this development process is going to be a new trend in the industry.

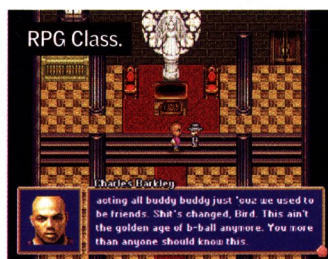
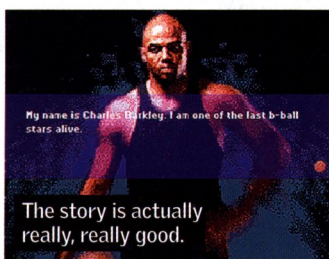
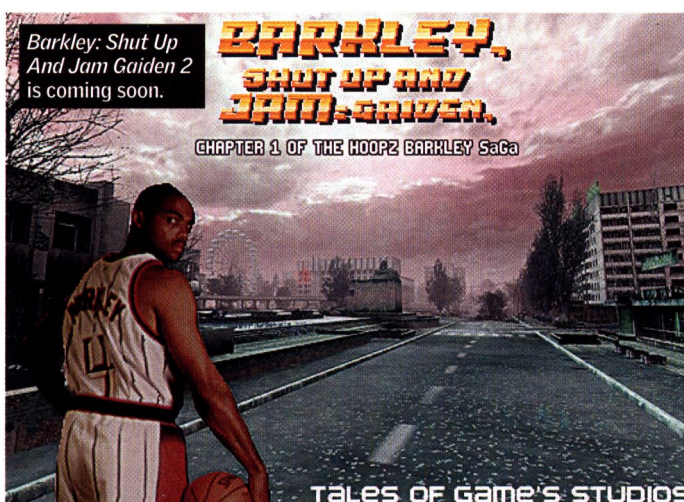
Actually, *Barkley* was the first thing we've ever made so I think it would be a little inappropriate to stick a price tag on it. Also, we stole all of the graphics in the game and broke a lot of copyrights. Don't tell anyone though. Seriously.

About how long did it take you to complete *B:SU&JG*?

A little over a year. Crazy coincidence, we released the full version of the game exactly one year from the day we released the demo. We didn't have that planned or anything, that's just how it happened. There are also two versions of the game too. Chef and bort coded the entire thing in *RPG Maker* (snipurl.com/rpgmaker) – a horrible and embarrassing engine that requires no skill and is used only by children – which GZ translated into *Game Maker* (snipurl.com/gamemaker), which is a better engine.

The translation from *RPG Maker* to *Game Maker* took most of the time.

What do you do when you're not making Freeware games?



"We enjoy working for hundreds of hours and not getting paid for it"

Smoke weed and visit strip clubs. A couple of us are musicians and artists so we like to do that, but we're not good at it. That's why *Barkley's* graphics and music sucked. I don't think GZ does anything besides make freeware games. Chef is really into making videos right now; check out the CBoyarder and gamesmasterjasper accounts on YouTube. Mainly games though.

Do you see yourselves moving into the industry professionally?

No, but if any developers are reading this, please hire us.

Whereabouts are you all based?

Chef and bort both live in the USA, GZ is from Canada, and Drule lives in Sweden.

None of us have solid daily schedules, so even though there are some time zone differences between us, we manage to meet up frequently when making games.

What can you tell us about *Space Commander Frasier Crane*? How far off release is it?

Space Commander Frasier Crane tells the struggle of a hardened space commander who sets out to rid the galaxy of evil. The game features the beloved characters of Frasier and Niles Crane and a custom zoid system. *SCFC* will have a simultaneous release with *Duke Nukem Forever*.

SNIPPETS



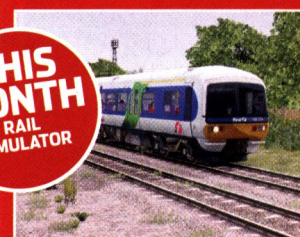
GRAVITRON 2

WEBSITE xout.blackened-interactive.com

Dark Castle Software – developers of excellent freeware shooter *ProtoType*, a remake of the excellent *R-Type* – have created their first ever paid-for release, *Gravitron 2*.

You pilot a small ship through claustrophobic maps, collecting scientists and blowing up reactors before escaping through the same tunnels in a blaze of glory. It's addictive, ridiculously hard and gorgeous-looking, with anti-aliased vector graphics. It's a mere \$5 to buy it, and they've promised expansion packs for free. Buy it now!

Bug-Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH RAIL SIMULATOR

"Removed corn and vegetation from the track on Newcastle-York route"

MOVIE OF THE MONTH RED ALERT 3

As if to answer the question "can this game look any better?" EA just released a new trailer for their RTS threequel *Red Alert 3*, showing some of the excellent, hammy-as-possible acting. With added Tim Curry!



No, Tim Curry! Don't kill Einstein with that electric handshake!



You'll create an entirely new army, led by George Takei!



You'll have to share your Kirov airships with the Allies!



You'll... oh, wait, guess it isn't all bad. Don't panic.



Freeware



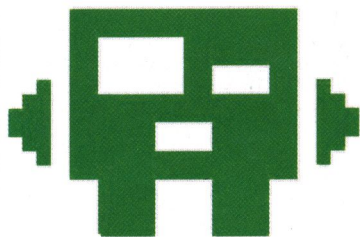
Steve Hogarty spreads freedom and free games

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content from across the world of the internet. You want free games? We got free games. You want movies? We got free games. Pizza for breakfast? You betcha, free games. This month we jump a lot, explode a lot, slash a lot, die a lot, and gather resources a lot, until eventually we have so much fun we simply peel out of our skins and fly away. Enjoy!

JUMPER THREE

Would you like to borrow my jumper, Bowie?

DEVELOPER Matt Thorson
WEBSITE snipurl.com/jumper3



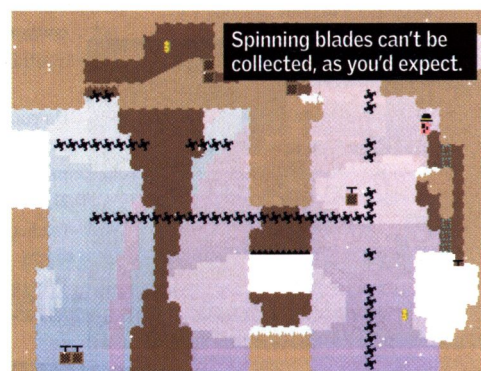
OGMO MUST CO-OPERATE with his alternate forms to overcome staggering odds. Red Ogmo's charming ability is to leap great distances, Green's gruesome ability is to stick himself to surfaces, Pink's wondrous ability is to hover for a moment, and Blue's terrifying ability is to poop out icy floating platforms. They're all Ogmo on the inside, a pixelated, mute and loveable creature in search of his homeworld, but their disparate abilities allow them to reach places the others cannot.

Jumper Three spans 40 stages, each exactly a screen wide. Your immediate concern is with getting from the left side of the screen to the right, a feat made challenging through your typical array of pitfalls, spikes and spinning blades. Once unlocked, you choose the variant most suited to the level – wide chasms are often suited to the classic Red Ogmo, while trickier falling sections come under



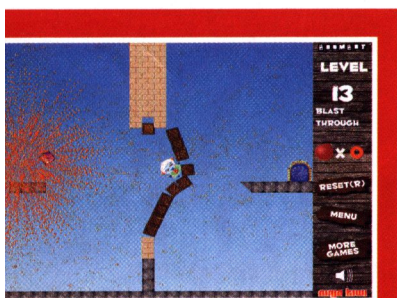
Pink's remit. Coins dotted about the stages hint at *Jumper Three*'s most interesting feature: that replaying the levels as other Ogmos allows you to gather coins that were previously out of reach. This is good as the coins you collect can be spent on hats.

Much like in real life, hats don't bestow special abilities, rather they signify achievements. Top hats, bowler hats... *Jumper Three* even extends the definition to include wigs, masks and even sunglasses. Hat shops spring into existence upon completing some stages, and the hats you purchase can be



swapped about between Ogmos at the beginning of each new stage.

Stages rapidly increase in difficulty, across ancient ruins and snowy wastelands, and even once you've unlocked all of the stages the lingering challenges of coin gathering and time trials give you reason to come back. That, and the game is enveloped in such a charming and twee graphical style that it makes it hard to quit.



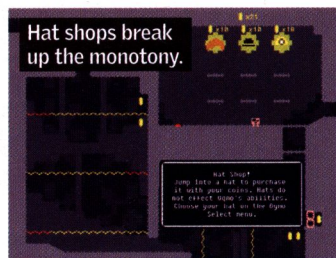
BOOMBOT

DEVELOPER Ninja Kiwi
WEBSITE snipurl.com/boombot

OH TO BE lazy. For us here at *PC ZONE*, Britain's longest running PC games magazine (with the highest tog value of any shelf publication), laziness is an alien concept. Our nuclear powerbrains are a constant maelstrom of stringy thought, and our legs are explosive flailing pistons forced into constant locomotion by impossible energy reserves. We just can't sit still.

Boombot, on the other hand, won't move. Despite needing to reach a gate situated somewhere on the screen, Boombot simply won't lift a finger. Instead you've got to blast him across the screen with bombs, launching him over obstacles, into conveniently placed and highly volatile explosives, and hopefully towards his eventual goal.

Bouncy surfaces and delicate TNT crates come into play in the later levels of this web epic, though some puzzles can be solved with brute force. Boombot does a cool face when he's in an explosion too, filling the game to the brim with lazy charm.



"The game's charming, twee graphical style makes it hard to quit"



KAROSHI FACTORY

Working for the weekend

DEVELOPER Jesse Venbrux WEBSITE snipurl.com/karoshifactory

JESSE VENBRUX'S CUNNING

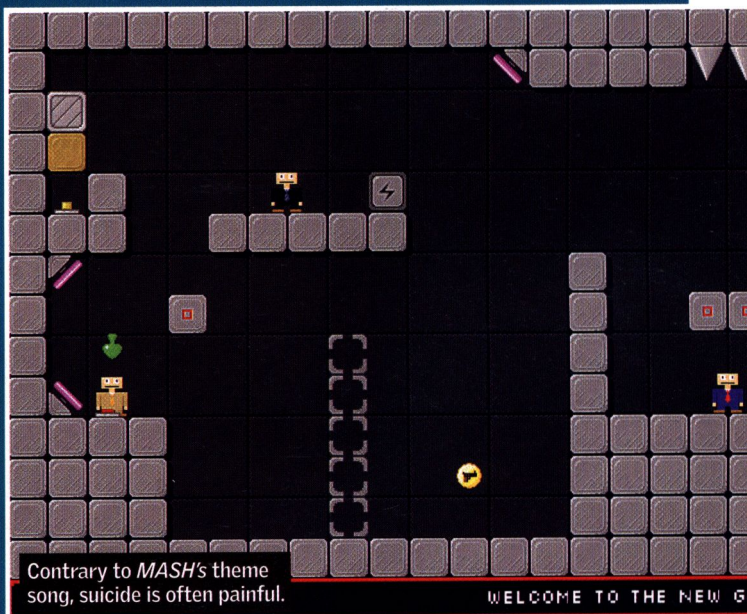
puzzle games *Karoshi* and *Karoshi 2.0* had you completing a series of slowly-but-surely more brow-furrowing and painful puzzles that usually worked in a counterintuitive way – mostly because you were actively trying to die. *Karoshi Factory* turns the dynamic a little further on its head by leaving you in control of two, and then three different depressed workers who must shuffle off their mortal coils.

The puzzles are this time more centred around finding a way to kill all of your men either at once or in quick succession, and this (sadly) removes part of the fun of *Karoshi* – the fact that it had some puzzles that

were totally illogical, yet charming in said illogic.

Karoshi Factory is more of a conventional puzzler that has you spending a lot more time planning out your moves rather than laughing, and (annoyingly) a few situations require you to act far quicker than the quirky controls are designed for. This leads to you being frustrated that your character is left alive and awkwardly shuffling from foot to foot, but luckily you can reset levels if you completely bollocks it up.

Karoshi Factory is fun, but it lacks the charming silliness that made *Karoshi* and *Karoshi 2.0* so beautiful. As a puzzler it's functional, addictive, but somewhat more soulless.



Contrary to MASH's theme song, suicide is often painful.

WELCOME TO THE NEW GU

GINORMO SWORD

Get to the chopper

DEVELOPER Babarageo WEBSITE babarageo.com/flash/ginormo

WORLD OF WARCRAFT can shove it. There's a new RPG bad boy in town in the form of newly translated and bizarre *Futon Naga 2*, renamed in English to *Ginormo Sword*.

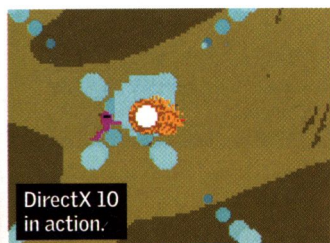
You play through the retro-styled worlds of the game using the mouse to lead your pixelated protagonist across the land and swinging your sword by clicking the mouse button in an endless litany of plastic meeting plastic. You kill things that you find strewn over the

map, gaining gold as you go, and eventually take on and bash the big bad monster at the end.

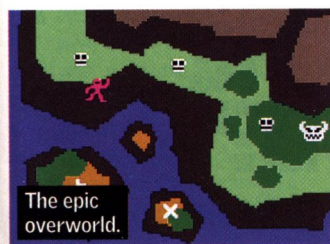
As you get more gold, you can also upgrade both your character and your sword. The latter, as it improves, both elongates and widens in girth (shut up, I know what you're thinking, you Frankie Howard wannabe), to eventually cover a large chunk of the screen with every swipe, hitting multiple enemies and doing more damage, too.

Ginormo Sword is silly and addictive, and the eventual results of the hours (yes, hours) of grinding you can put into it are beautiful – there's a great sense of reward in having a huge, thundering, glowing red sword that you can parade around and shove people with.

If you can get past the fact that this is, essentially, a 2D *Two Worlds*, you'll have more fun than you ever could do if you actually had a big, throbbing red object attached to your body.



DirectX 10 in action.

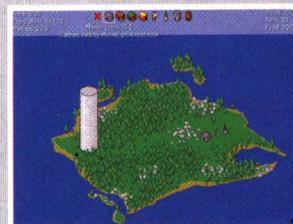


The epic overworld.



You fight alongside the stupid Indigo Pete.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

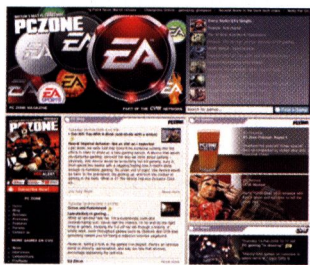


BREAKING THE TOWER

DEVELOPER Markus Persson WEBSITE snipurl.com/breaktower

WHILE IT'S OBSCENE to conceive of a web page demanding more than 20 seconds of attention, you'll find yourself willingly shovelling your precious time into *Breaking the Tower*.

This game sees you controlling a community who share an island with a demon-spewing tower. Build woodcutters to gather wood and carve your way through the thick forest, build masons to gather rock (and eventually chip away at the tower), build barracks to train warriors to fight the demons, and build guard posts and planters to rally troops and plant trees. Resources are collected in real time, so it takes an age to earn enough to build anything, but you'll find yourself entranced. It looks pretty too.



Spore's been on everybody's internet-lips this month, so much of what you'll see on this page is grade-A spleen venting. On The Blog queries the whereabouts of the Tiny Compo, while Fight Club contains the bloodiest *Team Fortress 2* screenshots we've ever seen, thanks to a renegade Engineer who refused to hold fire for the group screenshot. Send us a bloodier screenshot (any game will do) and we'll feature it here!

PCZONE 2008 ON THE BLOG

CONTINUING THE THEME of broken promises, last month we wrote that we'd make good on our promise to include more blogs, and write about certain topics. Well, thank you very much, we have very important jobs and we haven't quite made it around to doing, well, many blogs at all since last month.

We were storing energy for the spectacular website redesign, which will have been whirling away for over a month once you read this. But blog we must! And blog we have! We blogged about our missing Tiny Compo, and where it could have possibly gotten to. We even gave a prize to the best suggestion as to where to look for Tiny Compo!

To join in our blog fun and win some prizes, hop to pczone.co.uk where you'll find our blogs and the best community you could hope for.



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, podcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Spore? S'Poor!

Spore... 95%? 95%? 95%? Yes, I said that three times, as though my fingers couldn't actually believe that they were typing it. I have spent the last few days playing *Spore* and can tell you unequivocally that it is not in the remotest sense, no matter which way you look at it, a 95% game.

Each stage of evolution is simplified to the point where you almost feel patronised. The only stage with replay value is the Creature stage, as it's quite charming, yet it can suffer from repetitiveness in a few days, once you've pumped a few creatures out.

What is apparent from the entire game is that any semblance of depth or strategy has been cast aside in favour of... I'm not actually too sure.

RichDog

Maybe your opinion is the definitive one, or maybe it might just be possible that the things that Log found so magical don't interest you.

I do agree that Log's review was perhaps a touch too positive and didn't give enough time to the apparent fact that most of the stages up to the space-age stage have little depth.



Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
PC Zone Magazine Forum			
Forum rules, news and announcements	0	0	No Posts
PC Zone Magazine	0	0	No Posts
Spore	195	1943	18 May 07 7:32 am
Gameplay	20	200	14 May 07 3:12 pm
Reviews	0	0	No Posts
News	0	0	No Posts
The Fight Club Arena	0	0	No Posts

However, what he does clearly state is his love of the way it all fits together and how playing each subsequent stage shines more light on the ones going before it.

Beats12

A reviewer can only give their honest opinion on a game. If Log happened to love it, then he's given as true a review as he could give.

I didn't agree with Hogarty when he gave *Assassin's Creed* a low 70s score. I would have given it above 80. But I didn't chew up the entire magazine just because of a few pages I disagreed with.

I read *ZONE* because it's honest. Unfortunately, being honest doesn't mean keeping everyone happy, as we clearly are seeing.

JoWoo

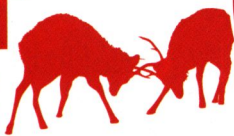
Spore's split folk down the midriff. Like *PC gaming's* Marmite. We adore it at *ZONE*, but some miscreants disagree! Let us know your thoughts at pczone.co.uk



PODCAST SUPERTEST WHO IS THE BEST GOD?

We talk about the best God games...

FIGHT CLUB



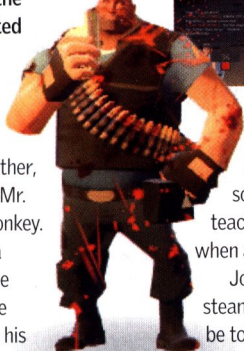
COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

"STOP SHOOTING!"

A LAST-MINUTE scream tore through the internet the day before Fight Club, announcing to all and sundry that the monthly scrap would take place at the unorthodox time of 1pm. As such the fight was made up of the unemployed, uneducated dregs of society.

The rowdy lot would hardly stay still for the traditional end of game group photo either, much to the chagrin of Mr. "Better Than Jesus" Monkey.

The man swore up a storm each time a rogue Engineer massacred the posed group, slamming his



fists on the keyboard and demanding ceasefire like some sort of mad politician. Well, that'll teach us for scheduling it at a time when all the sane people are at work.

Join our Steam Community at steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz to be told of future Fight Clubs.



ZONE CHAT



Good day, we are talking to you

AH, YES, ZONE Chat.

It goes by the names Mother's Little Helper, the Dark Corner of the Web, and Babbage's Sorrow, and we are not the ones that summoned it this month.

You see, you, the readers, demanded that the Chat take place and, as you'd expect, it did. And it was a furious argument about *Spore*, about the merits of *Spore*, about how *Spore* had not lived up to the varied expectations of the angry, verbose denizens of the fibre-optic cables that hold us together. Many people say that *Spore* isn't up to par, that it's a kid's game, that it's terrible, and many of these people logged onto the Community Zone Chat.

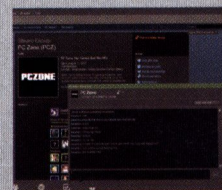
We also had an argument about *Mercenaries 2* not being anything like *Grand Theft Auto*, but that was mostly between Useful Dave and Ed, which is essentially the equivalent of two people pissing in the wind to keep cool.



Mercenaries 2, where helicopters roam.

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 learning a groovy new dance – 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

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... really

7 BATTLEFIELD 2142
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567

8 TEAM FORTRESS 2
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135

FOR A START, *Spore* is the current talking point. Thus we were talking about how great *Spore* was, as a game, as a God game and just in general. Almost 10 minutes were chewed up by Will Wright's ability to capture the hearts and minds of a generation, and also infuriate a colony of internet delinquents.

Will couldn't let a mention of the word God go past without mentioning that he loves *Populous*, how that console game *Fracture* ripped off the raising and lowering of terrain, and how Knights let you cause genocide. He said this all while the rest of the team looked on, bemused.

Continuing, we've all agreed we're very excited for *Empire: Total War*, and

Steve excitedly declared how wonderful the land battles were, as they're resplendent with hundreds of animations for each individual on the battlefield.

Ed also decided to say his very brief goodbyes, which nobody noticed until he burst into tears at our lack of attention to his pain. OK, he didn't do that, but he probably did inside.



We're smitten with God.

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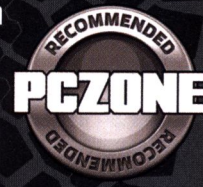
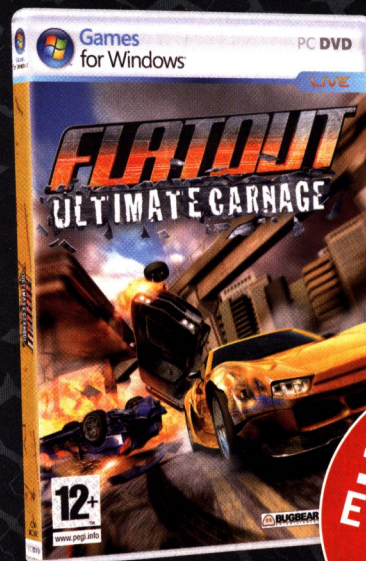
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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill gets the band together in *EverQuest* for one last grind...

AS IT WAS in the beginning, so it shall be in the end. Over the course of the long-running *NeverQuest* series, numerous magical worlds have been visited, countless goblins smited, hundreds of spells cast, potions mixed, clubs wielded, dungeons explored, and (in the case of *Second Life*) unspeakable acts of human depravity engaged in. Following an enforced respite, *NeverQuest* has now come full circle, and I'm back where it began, trudging round a cave in Norrath as a big fat troll, apparently a "hideous and deplorable race that carries a sickening smell and is generally unpleasant to everyone." Correct.

I'm not the only one to come out of retirement, as erstwhile *ZONE* veteran and professional goblin-fancier Prezzer is dutifully awaiting my arrival. Rocking the ginger ponytail with matching ching-glove look, he appears to have come as his former self, and proffers the traditional greeting, "Ow do."

Having already been felled by a diseased rat, I'm pleased to see him, and indeed to feel the benefit of his healing hands. No sooner have we said hello than I'm lit up like a Christmas tree, feeling a rush of courage as he magically nurtures me back to full health.

GOOD ELF

The power trio is completed by *ZONE*'s sometime editor Will, who turns up as a

perennial female wood elf, albeit one that appears to be on the verge of soiling herself.

"I'm crouched and I don't know how to get up," says the hapless Will, by way of explanation.

"Guess you'll have to stay supplicant?", says Prezzer, who has obviously learned some big words since he left *ZONE*.

Will finally manages to free his avatar from her predicament, and we officially form a party, all the better for slaughtering small animals. Will and I are to lead from the front, with Prezzer bringing up the rear and administering aid as needed, or as he puts it, "I'll stand back and try to keep you both alive."

Charged with the task of "Clearing the Vermin Nests," we are literally – virtually – killing rats in what is almost a pastiche of the fantasy MMO genre (if you will). While me and Will are mindlessly hacking away at small rodents, Prezzer appears to be on some kind of tea break, tucking into some bread cakes and washing them down with a skin of milk.

"THIS IS DISMAL," shouts Will from a bleak corner of the cave, and it's hard to argue as we attempt to eradicate the rodents. Indeed Prezzer appears to have lapsed into a soporific state. On inspection, he seems to be still with us, and confirms, "Nah, just sitting. I'm old and tire easy."



"NeverQuest has come full circle, I'm back where it began, trudging round a cave in Norrath as a big fat troll"

Well if you hadn't gorged yourself on milk and biscuits...

KILLER QUEEN

"Is there anywhere that isn't dull near here?", asks Will.

"Don't be daft, this is *EverQuest*," points out the sage-like Prezzer.

Despite their lack of enthusiasm, I'm intent on completing the quest and earning the promised pair of leggings. As the final rat is killed I sprint to pick up my reward, slipping into them only for Will to pipe up, "Steve, your arse is hanging out of the back of your ripped leather shorts."

They're actually Stitched Burlap Pants, and besides these tiny trousers are a good look for me. Anyway, I don't think a short-arsed cross-dressing Santa helper has got a leg to stand on

when it comes to matters of gentlemen's sartorial elegance.

"I think I want to die," announces Prezzer, somewhat melodramatically. He almost has his wish when we set about killing gloom spiders, and run into the frankly terrifying Queen Gloomfang.

"What the fuck?" yells Prezzer, as the giant spider spits poison and, in a break from arachnid convention, begins to cast a spell.

NEW ROSE

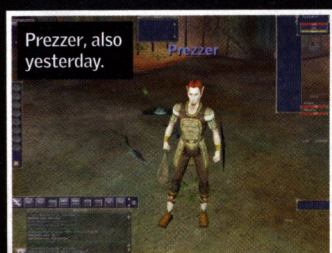
We appear to have met our match, and run like hell, scarping through the network of caves like the pitiful cowards we are. As giant spiders go, Queen Gloomfang is a persistent beast, and is all over us like a soup sandwich, swiping violently at our rears, seemingly unperturbed by the fact that my arse is still hanging out of my Stitched Burlap Pants. It's a frantic chase, but we finally make good our escape, whooping with joy at the thrill of the near miss.

Charged with adrenaline and blood lust, we brutally beat an unfortunate Spider Tamer to death, with a passing Frogman helpfully weighing in with the final fatal blows.

"How do you tame a spider anyway?" muses Will, seemingly oblivious to the fact that a man has died. Improbably, this act of callous murder is rewarded with a solitary rose, which Will claims on the basis that, "I'm the most girlish."

He seems happy enough with the spoils, beaming, "Steve, you know it isn't going to get any better than this, don't you? We are living the dream."

Alas, the dream is over... **PCZ**



Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback of the Month

But when?

April 1993 was a truly great month in the history of the world. As far back as you can zoom out, one thing stays the same size, and dominates space and time as a white-hot singularity – the birth of *PC ZONE*. Other things happened – the Zambian football team were wiped out in a plane crash, sure. Tomsk 7 squirted out a little nuclear accident, we'll grant you that, too. Oh, and the World Wide Web was born. But that can quite rightly be considered a small part of what we now call "Online Zone".

Perhaps the only event that can be truly compared to *PC ZONE*'s incredible life is the stabbing in the back of Monica Seles by someone who had a senseless feeling of ownership over her rival, Steffi Graf. If you've got a 1993-based experience to help us revel in our 200th celebrations then feel free to email us at letters@pczone.co.uk. Not the formation of the EU though. That's dull.

Giving ourselves a reacharound...

PC ZONE

ONCE EVERY 100 months, there comes a brief window when it's perfectly acceptable for a magazine to disappear up its own inky anus. Indulge us on our birthday, and we'll try our best not to come off on your fingers.

It's the first part of 1993, and PC gaming has just been born. Pretty much everyone's gathered around the cot – The Soup Dragons, Princess Diana, the drummer from Suede – and it's two hours before someone runs in with the hand-held Mega Duck and declares PC gaming dead. Despite this handicap, the DOS environment goes on to be lively and popular – like the film *Weekend at Bernie's*. And *PC ZONE* is there, recklessly encouraging the technological early adopters with impossible promises of CD-compatible SoundBlaster cards and double-speed CD-ROMs.

It had 2.88MB of double-sided, high density future-retro gaming gummed to the cover – which thankfully wasn't enough to give *Simon the Sorcerer* a voice when his demo appeared on issue six. This probably explains why people have fond memories of him – they imagined a voice that wasn't nauseating. But voices were coming –



Interplay were preparing the world for an enhanced CD-ROM of *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* that only required a £600 CD player to hear Shatner guffing off some shit about tribbles or the like.

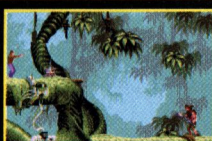
With minimum system requirements generally in the 286 processor range, there was a thick, soupy innocence in the air. It's no coincidence that in the

PC ZONE over the years: we've aged well.

early '90s, knife crime was unheard of – indeed, knives hadn't even been invented – women wore gorgeous pinafores, and weightlifters wore stripy bathing suits and rode Penny-farthings around the starched brim of a top hat.

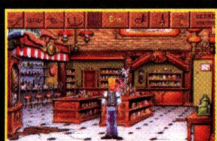
Best of the six

It's September 1993, and issue six just came out. What are you excited about?



FLASHBACK

"It's *Prince Of Persia* in the future." Everyone's been comparing games to *Pop* since God-knows-when...



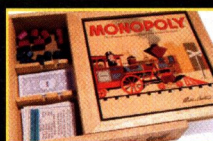
FREDDY PHARKAS

A guide on how to complete *Freddy Pharkas* – tips and walkthroughs died when the internet landed...



TORNADO

The decision to "not waste time with an overly long and unfunny intro" is one we still haven't grasped today.



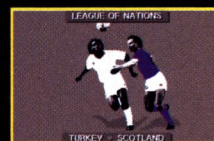
MONOPOLY

Our issue six has seen a few meetings. *Monopoly's* score of 75 is circled, with "Too High?" written in black pen.



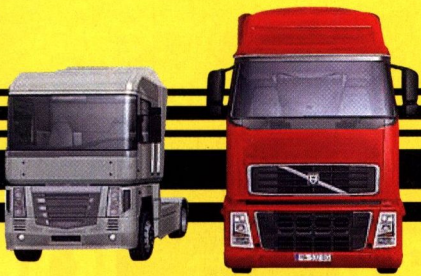
RETURN OF THE PHANTOM

An interactive movie, also the first sign that graphics might kill games.



SENSIBLE SOCCER

If it's such a classic, how come it only scored 70? Sensi wouldn't even get a Recommended badge today.



Now & Then

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR vs PENN & TELLER'S SMOKE AND MIRRORS



The height of realism.

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR isn't the first recreation of a long-distance journey in an oversized vehicle. Penn & Teller's video game never made it to the PC, but copies began circulating on emulator sites a good while ago. A collection of scam minigames, the most well-known is the desert bus simulator. It takes eight hours to drive from Arizona to Nevada, and completing the journey scores one point. And if you were thinking about pausing to take a piss, or leaving a book resting on the accelerate button, forget it. There's no pause button and the bus' steering has a slight bias.

Euro Truck Simulator may be the foremost title in the HGV recreation genre, but the concessions to "gameplay" are frankly lazy, and compromise the purity of the simulation. *ETS's* "options" and "menus" ruin what could have been a perfectly linear eight hour sit-down.



Exactly. The. Same.

Play it!

Can you remember which one does the talking?

At last – a process complicated enough to warrant the four-step plan we've set aside for it! Although it could have been done in three.

1 *Smoke and Mirrors* was meant for the Sega Genesis CD system. A PC version was meant to follow, but the game never made it to release.

2 But copies of the game have leaked out, and torrents are available. If you don't have the console, go to gens.consumemul.com for the emulator.

3 There's a torrent up at torrentfreak.com/desert-bus-the-torrent, but if that's low on seeds, you can find it using torrent search engines.

4 Use the emulator and the CD image you have just downloaded to play the game. Go on, it's what Penn & Teller would want you to do.

Mameframe GALAGA '88

THE ORIGINAL GALAGA was a basic wave-after-wave shoot-'em-up with one basic twist: the rabbit-eared spaceships that sat on the top row had a tractor beam. Get sucked up, and use your next ship to rescue the first, and both ships then fight side-by-side. Until you get killed. Which generally wasn't long, because your new ship was twice the width – and when the swooping aliens decided to come back up from the bottom of

the screen, there was close to boggle all you could do about it.

Galaga '88 – coming seven years after the original – kept that basic theme, and even allowed you to start off in double formation. It introduced a new range of enemies – some of which took three shots to kill instead of two, if you can imagine that, and introduced the flabbergasting dimensional rifts.

During your battles, you would have to collect canisters, which would be

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.

automatically deployed at the appropriate time to tear open reality itself. Anticipating an overwhelming influx of chaotic sensation, players were instead cast into six slightly more difficult waves of creatures that looked pretty much the same. Some of them took four shots to kill, though. If you can imagine that.

Back in the day



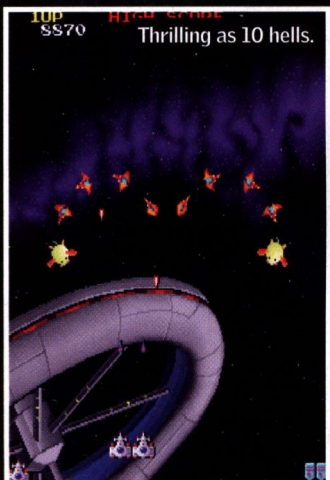
Odd.

Abe's Oddysee

By Steve Hogarty

Abe's Oddysee forever crippled my ability to spell the actual word 'odyssey'. I know it's not spelt with two Ds – those were added as reference to the world of *Oddworld*, where the game takes place. But dropping an S and changing the final Y to E was needless and confusing. The only explanation is that they wanted to make sure people didn't think they'd simply mis-spelt 'odyssey', but in doing so they forced the correct spelling out of my brain.

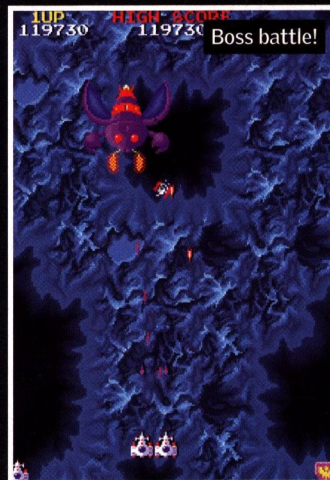
Oddworld was comprehensively original, humorously dark and a demented place full of amazing creatures. Scrabs, with their huge crab claw heads, human torsos and shrimp-like legs. Paramites, with their fingery spider faces and fearful nature. Interacting with these things in this place with Abe, a farting, talking hero, paved the way for some excellent platform puzzles. And now it's on Steam, for about a fiver, filed somewhere under games beginning with O. Hello! Follow me!



Thrilling as 10 hells.



Your transdimensional progress bar.

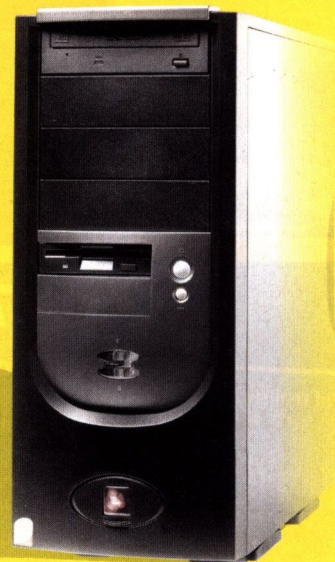


Boss battle!

CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



SPORE

Brief historian of blogonia: **John Davison**

THE BLOGONIAN RACE is a bitter, angry, cynical society ever willing to thumb its nose at convention, and contradict those it encounters almost on principal. Having dragged itself from the primordial ooze a vicious, carnivorous, bipedal bundle of angriness, it set about establishing its relationship with the world by thrusting its giant proboscis into the chest of anything it stumbled upon, and sucking its heart out.

Over time, it evolved into a humanoid race able to control its relentless anger and willingness to eviscerate all that stood in its way. Its dual proboscises withdrew as a tooth-filled mouth developed, and its intelligence emerged in such a fashion that it learned to be reasonably pleasant to those around it. A brief charm offensive endeared it to those it shared its environs with, but it

soon returned to its old ways. By befriending neighbouring creatures before chewing their arms and legs off, the Blogonians found that they didn't need to work as hard.

After years of evolution, the Blogonians developed a dangling, shaft-like, venom-spitting appendage from its groin area, and they found that they could spew bile from great distances by thrusting their hips towards anything that irritated them.

When doing so in large numbers, they annihilated the objects of their disdain without having to face them directly. They would gang up on hapless neighbours, disgorging their poisonous ejaculate until all that opposed them was extinct. Then they returned to their quickly growing community and gloated about the inadequacies of their prey.

UNIVERSAL RULERS

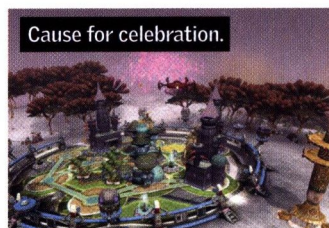
As Blogonian society expanded, its cruelty slowly spread across the globe, and its finest minds fashioned weapons and tools for the exclusive purpose of more efficiently destroying those around it. In time, the species no longer needed its venomous appendage, and instead it beat its enemies with an escalating arsenal of more complex weapons: spears, hammers, axes, tanks, battleships and tactical nukes.

After destroying everything it had ever come across, the Blogonians escaped the confines of their home world, and have moved to the stars, spreading their uncompromising brand of cold, dark hatred around the universe.

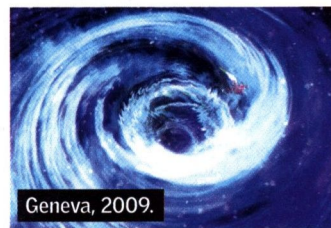
VERDICT Creationist fun



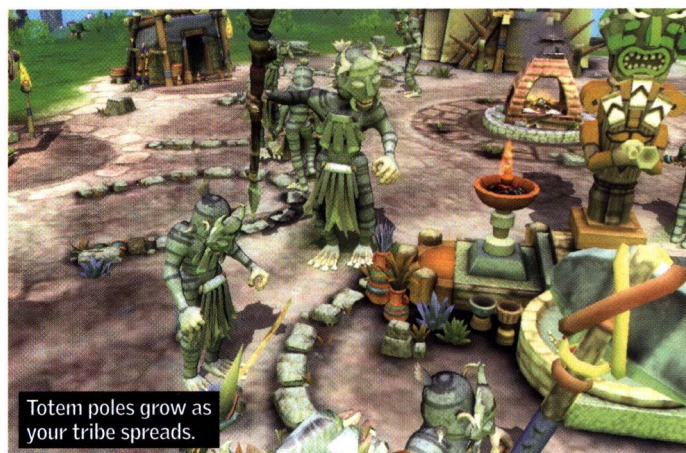
Time for a lovely bit of probing.



Cause for celebration.



Geneva, 2009.



Totem poles grow as your tribe spreads.

"They could spew bile from great distances by thrusting their hips towards anything that irritated them"



MOUNT & BLADE

Horse blinder and naked jockey: **Richie Shoemaker**

AH, THE WONDERFUL spectrum of opinion 'tis a marvellous thing. We all scan along its merry axis, arguing why and where such-and-such should sit, endlessly re-arranging anew when something else arrives to take a seat on the continuum of life.

There are many such spectra: one for shooty-up games, one for the playing of roles, and according to last month's reviewer, Jamie Sefton, *Mount & Blade* exists somewhere in the crowded middle of the latter, neither bad nor unbad. Not like other games in the RPG genre, like *Oblivion* and *World of Warcraft*, which are officially very unbad indeed.

This verdict sits ill with me, dear reader. I've been tinkering with *Mount & Blade* for months now and I think it's a game of considerable beauty and boundless depth. A world without orcs is, to me, as refreshing as a summer breeze. And the combat, OMG (I believe



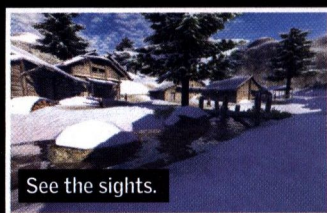
the phrase is)... rests within a control mechanic forged by tireless hands eager to perfect. A mouse hasn't sat so comfortably under my palm since *Quake III Arena*.

Mount & Blade isn't an empty shell of a world. It's a world to be explored. It's a trading game, a game of dense

tactical combat and raw action. And is probably the best game of its type since *Oblivion*. For me it's the best since *Morrowind* and I might even go one better and start comparing it to *Lord of the Rings*, but perhaps I need to play it some more... yes, I should do that.

VERDICT Ignore the lack of hype

"A world without orcs is, to me, as refreshing as a summer breeze"



PORTAL

Doing what he must because he can: **Paul Mallinson**

PORTAL IS THE first Steam-powered game to grace my system in four years. Until very recently Steam had been completely banished from my computer – cast out as annoying, intrusive and a liability.

A couple of weeks ago, when I purchased *Portal* (for the princely sum of \$10), I knew I had to bite the bullet and re-install Steam to get the thing working. I needn't have worried. As I discovered: Steam has come on a long way since I

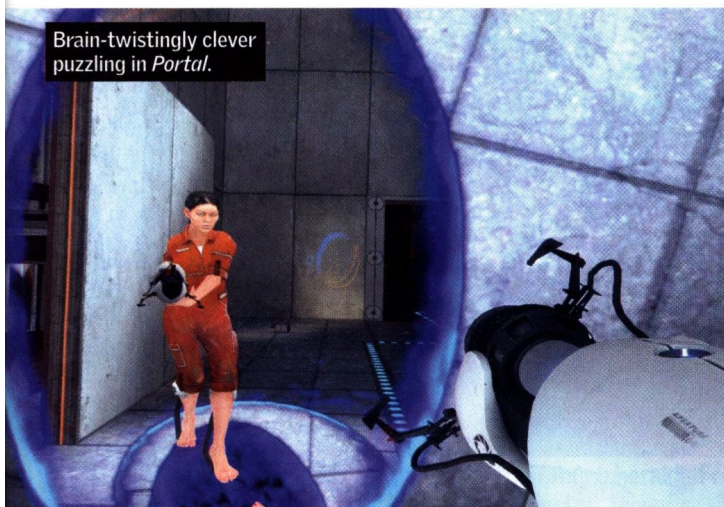
last used it. And *Portal* turned out to be one of those games that re-affirmed my love of gaming: a beautifully simple idea, given absolute credence with a great script and an interesting backstory.

I took no more than half a day to complete the game, but the ending alone made me want to play the game through immediately once again. I'm humming *Still Alive* in my head right now. It won't go away. It's so infectious.

I've been permanently permeated by *Portal*, but I'm happy. I'm now in on the cake jokes, and know what all the fuss is about. Steve was right. It gets in your head. *Portal* sticks like shit to a blanket. And I love it for that reason.

VERDICT Irreconcilably good

"Portal is one of those games that re-affirmed my love of gaming"



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

MOBY_MATT ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE

I've been playing the demo from Steam and had forgotten just how good it is. The sadist in me loves to possess the Slig guards and help them bring on the next stage of their life-cycle through self termination. He-he-he.

PEACHFUZZ F.E.A.R.

In anticipation of *Project Origin*, I'm currently running through far too many corridors. Still love bolting enemy heads to the wall and watching their legs flail.

JOWOO TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

It's been a while since I've screamed "You stupid bitch!" at the monitor as I sent Lara tumbling to another horrible death. This time around though, the joys of physics means Lara bounces.

WORLD-FIRST REVIEW THE SHOOTER OF THE YEAR

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This month *PC ZONE* have been, and always shall be: Macca, Mallo, Jeremy Wells, Rhi, Suze, Hill, Will, Korgon the Magnificent, Mr Cursor (aka Duncan McDonald), Prez, Clare Lydon, Andy Robinson, Log, Ed Z, Woods, Setton, Richard Cosgrove, Steve-O, Paul Lakin, John Davison, Tim Panton, Keith Pullin, the odd Irish one, Wandy, Mark Hill and that man Brooker.

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NEXT MONTH!
RED ALERT 3
REVIEWED
Comrades! The big red war machine has returned!

ALSO REVIEWED



FAR CRY 2

Will the African safari adventure be everything we've dreamt of?

PLUS! MULTIWINIA

Indie development maestros Introversion make their much heralded return. But how far have the Darwinians evolved?



ZOMBIE-GEDDON BEGINS

We play the whole of *Left 4 Dead*! Every corridor strafed, every zombie killed, every detail you need to know... only in *PC ZONE*.



MR CURSOR

(He's afraid of computer games)

IF YOU'RE NOT a die-hard PC ZONE aficionado you won't know who I am, so this for you: I wrote the Back Page column from issue one to issue 54, then I severed all ties with everything, left the country and moved to Pitcairn Island, thinking it would be a paradise. It wasn't. I escaped from Pitcairn and to Sierra Leone. That was even worse. Now, many years later, I'm back in Blighty and living in Hastings – which is the worst of the lot. A complete shitehole. And scary with it.

The odds are about 50/50 that you'll be stabbed in the eye on any given day. So I tend to stay inside, wishing my computer was powerful enough to play something other than *Pirates! Gold*, the only game I own. (My trek around the globe has left me penniless, you see.) So that's my world: month after month in a damp flat playing *Pirates! Gold*, slightly annoyed because I haven't got the original *Pirates!* (which was better).

While I'm playing *Pirates! Gold*, moreover, I often find myself pretending I'm playing a modern game on a modern computer using whatever modern peripherals are currently available... the kind of kit you doubtless own. I can only imagine what this stuff might be like, of course, but being 2008 it's probably along the following lines...

I'm in my grotty Hastings flat, but am blissfully unaware of it – because I'm inside my huge rotating GameSphere™ playing *Pirates! Gold Plus Online Odyssey*: not just a game, but a competition

yielding the eventual winners (of 20 million subscribers) a share of \$1billion. Inside my GameSphere™ it's hot at the moment, because we're on the equator, becalmed in the doldrums (*Pirates! Gold Plus* thermatically controls the environment inside the GameSphere™).

It's smelly, too, thanks to the Aromatron 8000™ accurately simulating the result of 300 sickly crew members' bowel movements over the last four windless days... it's all floating around the ship, held to it by gravity. The

(They realise how skill I am, and know that with me at the helm a share of the prize money is guaranteed.) (*Don't forget, he's kind of in a dream – Ed*) I look up at the sun, directly overhead, aware that the Gamesphere™ is emitting loads of ultraviolet and I'm getting a tan, and then I notice – to the southwest and just above the horizon – a large greyish mass. Hoorah! A storm. Bringer of wind!

"Permission to speak, sir?"

"Go ahead, Boson Hasselhoff," I say. (He's actually the real David Hasselhoff,

Gold Plus Online Odyssey everyone needs to eat and drink – if you don't your GameSphere™ becomes harder to control and eventually seizes up.)

"Sir, forward watch reports sail sighted three points to starboard. An American frigate. She is closing fast."

"Thank you number one," I say. "Clear deck and beat to quarters. Tell the gun crews to load with grape, double shot. I intend to board her."

Suddenly I feel the need to have a piss. (Luckily the GameSphere™ contains a special tube with suction filters).

"Sir." It's the Hoff.

"What is it, Mr Hasselhoff?"

"Sir. Request to join boarding party."

"Request acknowledged, Mr Hasselhoff. Ready the nets."

As we close with the frigate I hear bellows from her. It's an unruly mob, clearly not playing the game properly.

"Prepare to suck on dick, cocksuckers," comes one typical cry.

"Number one, tell the gun crews to begin firing," I say. "Mr Hasselhoff, gather your sabre." And with that we swing onto the enemy's deck, hacking and slicing as we go. Except of course we don't. Because I'm not in *Pirates! Gold Plus Online Odyssey* at all, and the Hoff is nowhere to be seen. I've slipped out of my reverie and am sitting in a grotty flat in Hastings. I'm playing *Pirates! Gold* and for the umpteenth millionth time I'm about to have a simplistic 2D swordfight with a badly animated, blocky sprite. Bahl! **PCZ**

"The graphics are amazing, with each individual turd bobbing slightly in the undulating diarrhoea soup"

graphics are amazing – with each individual turd bobbing slightly in the undulating diarrhoea soup. And thanks to being bang in the middle of a mega hi-resolution hologram (Kawasaki VisiMaster™) I can look anywhere I like. Like, for instance, at my number one...

"Carry on, number one," I say. "Aye aye sir," he replies, carrying on standing there looking at all the poo. My crew (300, as I said) are very obedient and have accepted me as Captain, even though we all paid a £50 subscription.

speaking from within his GameSphere™, somewhere in Beverly Hills).

"The fore watch has spotted cloud to the southwest, sir," he says.

"Very well," I reply. "Man the rigging. Prepare all sail."

"Aye aye sir," says the Hoff, tugging on his forelock.

It's a few hours later, and the giant floating mass of poo is 30 nautical miles behind us. And we're out of the doldrums and heading with utmost dispatch for Rio, to re-supply the ship. (In *Pirates!*





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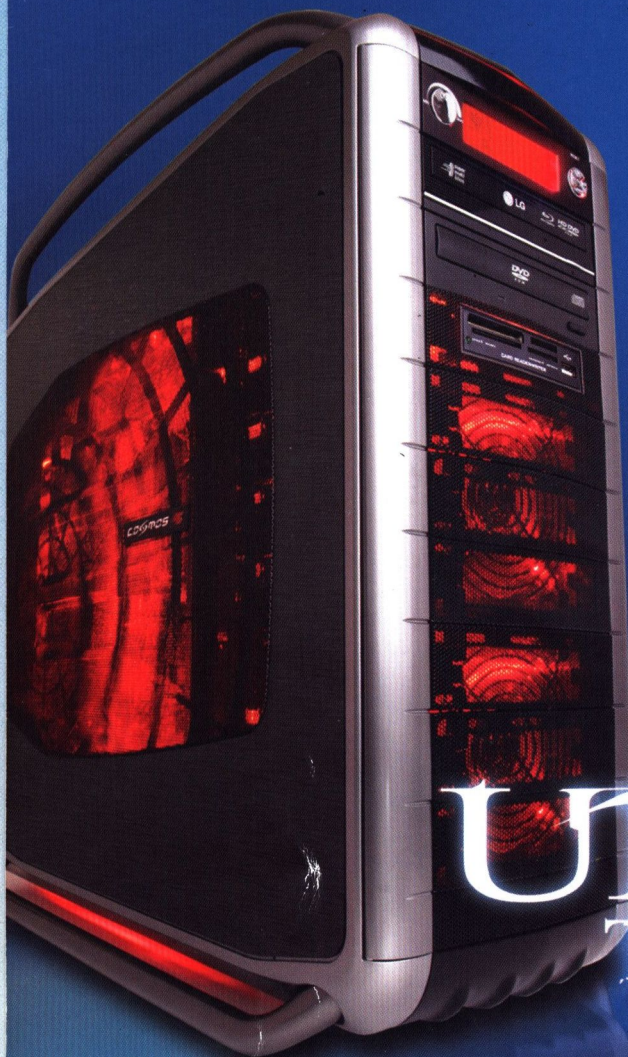
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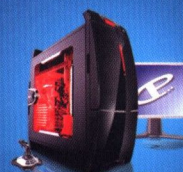
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