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ISSUE 211 OCTOBER 2009



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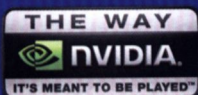
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PCZONE

Contents

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

FEARS OF FILMS

I AM ACTUALLY TERRIFIED of both *Alien's* xenomorphs and *Predator's* alien hunter. So this month's cover is pretty much my worst nightmare.

Will Rebellion be able to rise to the challenge with *Aliens vs Predator*, it being so fondly remembered by so many people? Having made the first game they certainly have the credentials and we can confirm our confidence in *AVP* is so great we've dedicated a massive eight pages to the game. Not only did we check *AVP* out, we also chatted exclusively with the dev team who are promising they're doing what they wanted to the first time around. In fact we couldn't hold series fan Richie Shoemaker back when we asked him to do the in-depth chat with three of the most important people involved in *AVP's* development. Read the full interview and more from page 48, which kicks off with Will's first look at the game.

The big question is: who will you choose: alien, marine or predator? Obviously, I'm all about the marine, it's just too scary playing as the other two, and hopefully blasting the shit out of them might go some way to curing my fears.

Finally, we will definitely be getting our hands on *StarCraft II*; at time of writing Log's getting ready for his trip to the studio in Irvine to play something very special. Read it only in *PC ZONE* on sale 2 September.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

We've waited a long time for this game. Surely, it'll be better than the films – right?



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STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Find out how BioWare's first MMO is shaping up.



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D&D Basic Set!
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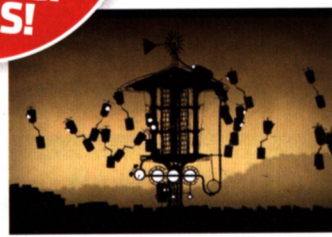
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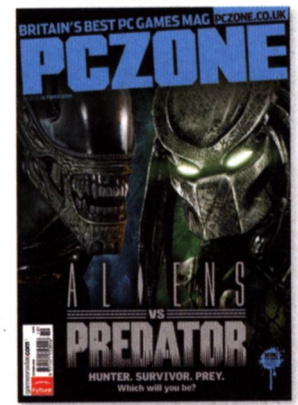
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**RED FACTION:
GUERRILLA**
The demolition crew arrives on Mars. And we're taking them on...



94 FREWARE

Build a bridge and some skyscrapers, and get a robotic city moving again with *Adam Glick*.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



48 ALIENS VS PREDATOR
Too busy? PC ZONE in 75 words...
This month we finish off our reporting from E3 with an exclusive, in-depth look at the PC version of *Aliens vs Predator* (which we're not allowed to call *Aliens vs Predator 3*, even though that's what it is). We've also peeked at *Left 4 Dead 2*, *The Old Republic*, and *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer mode. And we have reviews of *Red Faction: Guerrilla* - so get your sledgehammer ready - *Bionic Commando*, *Ghostbusters*, and a double-dose of adventuring in *Monkey Island*.



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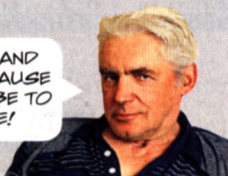
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Full offer details on page 46.

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Meet The Team

Here are the ones to thank for **PC ZONE**



DAVID BROWN

Justice enforcer
AGE 28

LIKES Sending criminals down

DISLIKES Mercy

FANCIES A curly white wig

FAVOURITE GAME *The Witcher:*

Enhanced Edition

NOW PLAYING Being Rumpole of the Bailey

This month David left us to carry out his duty as a responsible citizen: jury service. Prior to his time in court, David spent hours watching *Judge John Deed* and *Rumpole* to prepare. But on his arrival the reality quickly sank in: hours sat on hard wooden benches in cold courtrooms; being forced to listen to barristers trying to out-pose one another; no witnesses being tricked into dramatic admissions of guilt; and a distinct lack of Martin Shaw. All in all, David found duty to be a right let down.



ALI WOOD

Editor

While standing in the sea Ali looked down, saw a pair of feet and screamed. Then realised they were hers. The sharks were real though.

NOW PLAYING: *Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition*

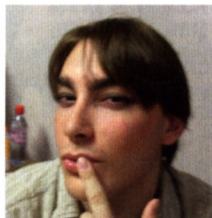


STEVE HOGARTY

Deputy editor

Forced to stay in his flat due to a possible Swine Flu infection, Steve decided to upgrade his PC. And blew it up. The man has learnt nothing from working with Wendy.

NOW PLAYING: *Overlord II*

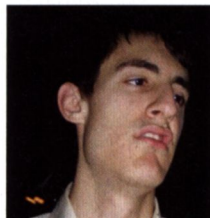


NICK BREAKSPEAR

Work experimenter #1

Oh his return from the wasteland, Nick discovered that he had grown an extra appendage. He won't tell us where, but his smirk tells us more than we wanted to know.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallout 3*



MARCO FIORI

Work experimenter #2

With his degree done and dusted, Marco tried to make himself useful by insulting Steve's indie-music taste, beating everyone at pool and writing the odd bit of copy.

NOW PLAYING: *Dead Space*



WILL PORTER

Freelancer #1

In order to relive his experiences in LA covering E3, Will took out his laptop during the heatwave, and asked a hooker to yell at him. His other half wasn't happy at this.

NOW PLAYING: *Prototype*



CHRIS CAPEL

Freelancer #2

Chris was overjoyed at the release of the new *Monkey Islands* and the old LucasArts games. He's being sedated with drip-fed Sierra titles.

NOW PLAYING: *Tales of Monkey Island*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Long holidays under the hot sun.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Delays, delays, delays...

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

THIEVING GITS! **8mins** Everyone's now bored of Richard's story about how burglars nicked his laptop while he slept.

BANANAS **45mins** They're much easier to open if you squeeze the wrong end of them, apparently.

SEND HIM DOWN! **12mins** David heads off for jury service, and refuses to tell us what the case is.

TORCHWOOD: CHILDREN OF EARTH **20mins** A bunch of kids squeal so hard that an alien pops and dies... what the hell?

HE SAID A PIG SNEEZED **20mins** The team got worried when Steve was quarantined with swine flu...

HE'S WENT AWOL **12mins** ...until we learned he was hale and hearty, and just skiving off work.

"HAIL? IT'S HAILING!?" **24mins** It hailed. In London. In July. TWICE! Can we stop arguing if the weather's screwed up now?

GIANT ESSAYS **4mins** If you read one thesis this year, make it *Don DeLillo's Postmodern America: The Representation of the Urban Space*.

SPACE SHUTTLE FACTS **73mins** "The Space Shuttle automatically plays Aerosmith's *I Don't Wanna Miss a Thing* on lift-off."

EFFERVESCENCE **1min** Fizzy things will only exacerbate trumping problems.

WIN!



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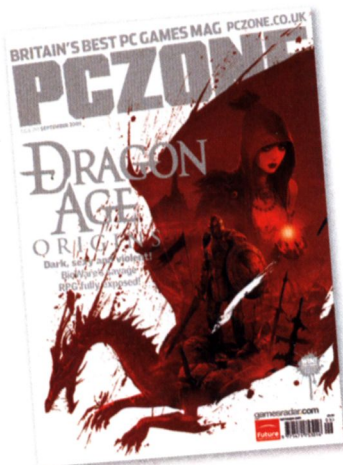
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Letters

After two weeks on holiday **Ali Wood** had to learn how to read again



KING OF LETTERS

DIGITAL DILEMMA

Great article, *Games To Go* (issue 210) on digital distribution by lesser-known suppliers, such as Metaboli, which highlights the struggle publishers have against the almighty *Steam*.

Walk into any high street games retailer and you'll notice the tiny or non-existent space dedicated to PC games. When consoles eventually catch up on digital downloads, we'll reach the end of such shops, hence the reluctance of GAME, and the like, to move to this method of distribution: they've a significant amount invested in the high street.

My fear is that the bigger players in the online space, such as Amazon, will move in (and cash in) on the flock from high street to online, dumbing down the marketplace and ensuring that poorer quality (yet higher visibility) titles still continue to make the money.

So PC gamers – don't get all downbeat on Valve for attempting to make a bit of money on a *Left 4 Dead* update – stick with these developers who have supported the PC through darker days.

Chris Green

This is undoubtedly a major concern for all those involved. However, I can



see a positive with this: when the likes of Amazon join the digital revolution, this'll mean games are available more readily for people to buy, which will plough money back into the industry.

Plus, like any entertainment medium, you have the option to avoid the "poorer quality" product. And doing this will just make the developers producing quality titles work even harder to make quality

products. As well as, if they have to, find alternative ways of distribution.

I do think that a world where everything is downloaded is a long way off though. My generation still like to buy and own product where possible. Although I am a bit of a traditionalist (read: old before my time). Besides, you'll never be able to get that free pair of night-vision goggles if you download *Modern Warfare 2* from *Steam*, will you?

WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper fingers to keyboard. The monarch will get a Corsair Flash Voyager memory stick. Corsair say these 32GB sticks were tested by being "laundered, baked, frozen, boiled, dropped, and even run over by a SUV" and still worked. So even the clumsiest PC user can't break one.



What does the future hold for PCZ's DVD?

DROP THE DVD?

I've been reading your magazine now since I was 13 (I'm 30 this year) and I've subscribed to it for the majority of that time. I remember the day of floppy disks on the front cover, and the sheer frustration that I couldn't afford – or persuade my parents – to buy me a CD-ROM drive so I could take in the glory of the newly released CD-ROM edition of *PC ZONE*.

Luckily, when DVDs took their turn to adorn your front cover I was much more the master of my own destiny and so could have the benefit of this storage medium straight away.



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Hunters start out scary, then get irritating.

"The reality is I haven't spun up a PCZ DVD for well over a year..."

But times change. The reality is I haven't spun a PCZ DVD for well over a year. Why would I? Invariably anything on there that I'm interested in will have been downloaded some time before. They just go straight in to the bin. And I'm sure I'm not the only reader who is in the same position. And so to my point – why are we still paying for this service?

I'm not saying to do away completely with the DVD, I'm sure there are readers who don't have access to decent broadband who still use it. In the past you've been able to offer two magazines, so why not now? Even if the offer was only available to subscribers that would work for me. A small drop in price to offer less coasters to the broadband generation.

While this might seem to be just about money, it isn't (entirely). I'm lucky enough to have a bit more pocket money now than when I first started buying your magazine all those years ago, but looking at the cost of your magazine today compared to other magazines (without disks) – both in the gaming area and those outside – does show a discrepancy. And I would wager that this price eats into a 13-year-old's pocket money aggressively. It sounds harsh, but people don't like paying for services they don't use.

PC ZONE has always been fantastic at embracing technology for it's covermounted media – perhaps it's time to think about letting it go.

Jon Hawkins

You make some good points Jon, and its certainly something I've looked at since joining, but the fact is the disc's still very popular and we do still get people emailing who aren't on the internet (I know, I know) and many

find it handy that all you'd like to see is in one place. I do have a few ideas for it though, so watch this space.

As for 13-year-olds buying the magazine, legally I must point out that we have an age rating depending on the content on the disc: it's usually a 15 or 18. This means stores shouldn't be selling PC Zone to kids.

LIFE-LONG LOVE

Never before have I felt such murderous rage. The injustice! The outrage!

Yep, I've just finished playing *Half-Life Episode Two* (two years after everyone else).



ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

What's best graphics card for less than £100 please.

Neil

If you can stretch to another 20 quid you can get the Sapphire HD4850. Search online and you might be able to get it a bit cheaper.

Can I play *World of Warcraft* without being online? cheers mate.

Neil (again)

Hello again Neil again. The answer to this is not legally.

How can I get work experience with you guys, my email has been negelected.

AdamTingle

Email your CV and example of your games-related writing to letters@pczone.com. And put WORK EXPERIENCE in the subject line.

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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NECROVISION

Sent in by Martin Benton
 PC ZONE SCORE 64%

It's not a WWI shooter! Ten minutes in and you're fighting the undead with dual-wield machine guns. Not authentic. And it's a melee-er. The adrenaline/fury mechanic rewards running headlong at the enemy in a way that no other FPS does. It's so different from its contemporaries that players and reviewers alike overlook it.

On the downside, there's a dodgy plot, voicing and long load times. On the plus side, slo-mo, flying and mech suits. Ignore cover, sneaking and sniping, just grab a shovel and go in kicking! Forget the modern trend for realism and have some old-fashioned fun.

YOUR SHOUT 79%



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



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate.

✎ I can't see *Episode Three* being any better. This was a tour de force, bar none. Cinema – eat your heart out! This is why PC gaming is better than anything else. It's visceral at a level that all other mediums just cannot reach. It's been over an hour since I finished it, and I still want to smash that fu*king slug thing to bits. It's THAT good!

Love the mag, and thanks for the news, reviews and laughs you've given me since '96.

Chris

And you chose to tell us just how much you loved it. Plus, I have to say what a refreshing change it is to hear a happy PC gamer. Understandably, we generally only hear when people have something to complain about!

CONFUSION REIGNS

Though yet another cracking issue, you're starting to confuse me with the difference between your magazine content and your discs. Why include the *Neverwinter Nights* mod *Labyrinth* on your discs if it's a Mod Con – an "add-on to avoid"?

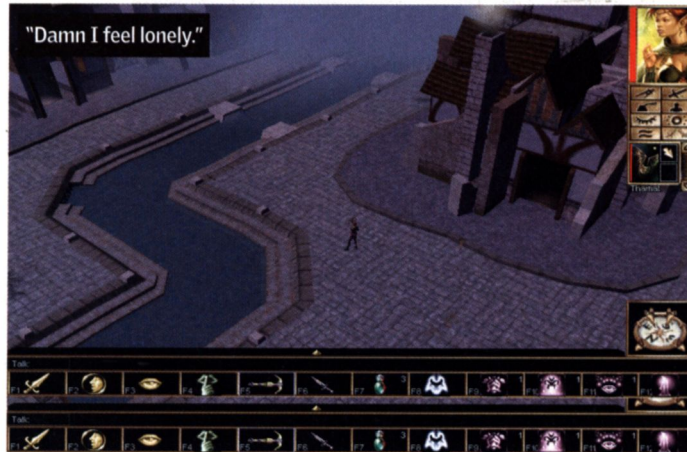
Will Hobson

It's all about choices these days and some people might've actually wanted the *Labyrinth* mod, after all it's worth a look just for a laugh. Sorry to confuse you though.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD

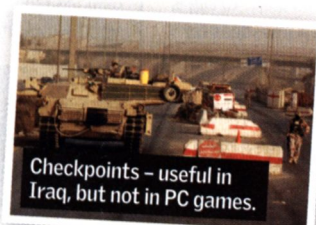


We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



CHECKPOINTS CHOICE!

I have a problem with checkpoints as I like to be treated as an adult and as such, like to make my own decisions. I object to a game company telling me how I should play a game I've spent £30 on.



It also seems a good excuse for a game developer to create a short game but make it appear to be much longer with the use of checkpoints.

Checkpoints used to be the home of

consoles which had low amounts of memory, but sadly the PC has been seduced into this poor man's domain.

I have heard the excuse that it makes a game more exciting to have checkpoints, but we must not mix up exciting with frustrating. May I remind you of *Fallout 3*, *Half-Life*, *Far Cry 2*, *Call of Juarez*, *BioShock*, *Crysis*, *Oblivion*, *Deus Ex* – all these have quick saves. Do we say these are poor games with no excitement? I certainly don't, they are challenging but allow you to progress with flexibility.

If only all games followed the model of *Soldier of Fortune* which allowed the player to choose at the beginning of each level how many saves they would like: none to unlimited. What a step forward that would be if every developer adopted this thinking!

Sadly there are no signs of any following in this direction. My idea is to have checkpoints, but allow quick save for those that wish it. Surely the technology to toggle quicksaving exists?

Ian S

Don't worry Ian: you're not alone in this. Just turn to page 106 where our man Glick comes down hard on checkpoint saving.

WOT NO AION?

As *Aion* is a major MMO release and has seen countless online previews and closed betas I am wondering why your magazine has chosen not to publish anything about it? I have not read or even seen a screenshot about *Aion* in your magazine nor a preview, neither is it listed in your upcoming games list.

This is a game which deserves your attention. For goodness sake, get into the beta and give us your thoughts so that all those who are tired of grinding in *World of Warcraft* and playing the broken *Warhammer Online* are aware of a great new game on the horizon.

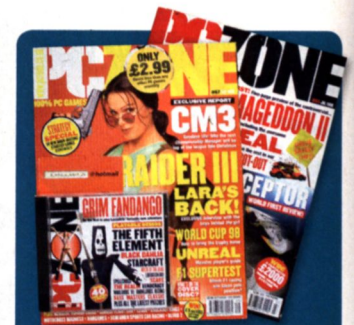
Marcus Beavon

As if by magic, a two-page *Aion* feature has appeared (page 30). NCsoft came in to the offices this month especially to show us and it really looks stunning. Even David was mildly impressed, which is high praise.

LEFT 4 FOOLS

If you compare what was promised for *Left 4 Dead* and the fantastic support *Team Fortress 2* enjoys, the sudden announcement of *L4D2* and all that this entails is something I feel the community is right to be upset at.

The survival DLC for *L4D* was good, but the additional single-player campaigns being



LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR DECADE-OLD MAILBAG, ANSWERED TODAY

REVIEWS HEAVEN

I'm sure this must have been suggested before (but I'm going to say it anyway) – why don't you include a list of all the games you've reviewed and their scores on your cover CD?

Maybe you could even copy your reviews section from your website to the cover CD? Maybe I'm just talking bollocks?

Damian



Back in October 1998 (issue 68) this suggestion went down a storm, and as a result of your letter we decided to put the scores database of next month's cover CD. As we've kept these up to date, I'm going to put them on the DVD next month!

However, the entire Reviews section from the website would be a bit too big to squeeze on the disc.

made available for multiplayer arguably should have been there from the beginning. The release of the SDK is great for modders, but equally could be Valve asking us to make any content for *L4D* because they won't any more.

So what plans do Valve actually have for *L4D*?

A Ward

Valve have said they will keep supporting *L4D*, so you'll continue to get your money's worth. But you have to wonder if *L4D2*'s early arrival is due to the financial climate. I wouldn't be shocked if other publishers began to follow Valve's suit. **PCZ**



Aion's take on hot elf chicks.

Temperatures are rising – prices have dropped!

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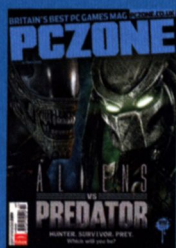
Calls cost 6p per minute from a BT landline, calls from other operators and mobiles may be higher.

1&1

COVER STORY

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

PART THREE: WHY CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?



REBELLION CAN STILL engineer the scares, in case you had any concerns. And not just the kind where things jump out at you and shout "boogaboogabooga", but real terror. Rebellion nudge your imagination in the right direction and let the primitive parts of your brain do most of the hard work for them. Severed cables that could be trailing xenomorph tails, flickering shadows from thrown flares might be wall-scuttling facehuggers – this game's *raison d'être*, as it was in the previous games, is having you unload pulse rifle's clip at a dangling bit of wire. And that's just the marine campaign, you haven't even heard what the Predator gets up to...

PAGE

48





IT'S A SMALL WORLD

I CAN'T GET away from PC ZONE. Not that I'm complaining or anything – and it's certainly testament to the popularity of the magazine – but on my recent holiday we ended up sharing a table with a chap who subscribed to the mag and had used it as a basis for a college project.

So ensued polite chitchat about PCZ, what games we're playing, what's on the next cover of the mag and how much he wanted to be a journalist, although he was studying to be a teacher. Fancy going to the other side of the world and chatting about work over your burger!

This issue while *Aliens vs Predator* clearly dominates, we've the second chunk of coverage from E3 – including *The Old Republic* and *Splinter Cell: Conviction* – as there was too much to fit into one issue.

Plus, having finally got a look at *Aion* we can confirm that it looks stunning, and we can't wait to get our hands on the review code.

Finally, a new reason why it's good to be a PC gamer: if we're to believe news reports, *Modern Warfare 2* will retail at £54.99 on consoles. This is a significant price hike, and you can bet other publishers will be following suit. However, as we go to press retailers say the PC version will hold firm at £34.99 – that's £20 cheaper! This makes me feel very smug indeed.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

WE BUILT THIS CITY



Alexandre Zambeaux
Monte Cristo spokesperson

Monte Cristo's Alexandre Zambeaux convinces us that *Cities XL* isn't another *SimCity* clone

DEVELOPER Monte Cristo PUBLISHER Monte Cristo WEBSITE citiesxl.com ETA 9 Oct 2009

WITH THE RELEASE date of the world's only city-building MMO getting closer, we thought it was time to take a closer look at the only real rival to *SimCity*'s crown.

What makes *Cities XL* such an extraordinary game?

Apart from taking a completely unique take on its subject matter? Apart from straddling two genres like the Colossus straddled the harbour of Rhodes? (Incidentally, buildable in the Planet Offer.) Apart from turning the stolid

stagnant city-builder genre, into a cutting-edge all-singing, all-dancing, MMO? Nowt. It's got a single-player component, that's as big as any *SimCity* game, then it's got the multiplayer trading/visiting element, and the integrated *Tycoon* games called GEMS (Gameplay Extension Modules). That's what makes *Cities XL* such innovation.

Sounds like this could be the first genuine city builder since *SimCity 4*. Do you see people playing this like a traditional MMO?

The MMO aspect of this game is in the trading, and the opportunities that trading unlocks. People aren't going to grind away here, because you don't have any enemies, you don't have any monsters to kill or time limits on resources, or anything like that. The only things you're contending with are the layout of the map, the strictures of the building tree, and the consequences of your previous and future decisions.

If you build a factory with a large slip road near your houses, your workers will be able to get to it quicker and more easily, but they'll also be under the massive miasma of fumes from it. That will depress them, and hence property take up in that area. If you're on one of the harder, more space-limited maps, you'll be having to make decisions like this all the time.

Tell us more about GEMS. And what are these blueprints?

Anything you can think of as a *Tycoon* game could be made into a GEM – whether that's *Theme Park*, *Hospital Tycoon*, *Hollywood Mogul* or *Evil Genius*. The price will vary, but these are expansions and so should be released every couple of months and be cheap as, 'ow-you-say, sheeps.

Blueprints on the other hand drop on your social networking home page (did I mention that every player has their own internet home page where they can

"Some people are building cities with more than 20 million citizens"



One day, all this could be yours.

STOP PRESS!

BIG SISTER
Ken Levine has teased the gaming world by saying his new game will be more ambitious than *BioShock*. But he refuses to say anything more about it.

REMEDY HOLD WAKE
Remedy, *Alan Wake*'s developers, are skirting around the issue of the PC version's future, saying it's now in the hands of their publisher, Microsoft.

BULGING BATTLEFIELD
EA are revelling in the knowledge that their free-to-play browser FPS, *Battlefield Heroes* has surpassed 1 million players. Seems *TF2*-style shooters are profitable.

30

AION

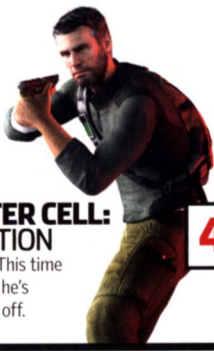
Get flighty with NCsoft's new MMO.



36

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Sam's back. This time for real. And he's really miffed off.



48

ALIENS VS PREDATOR

In-depth preview of the sequel we've all been waiting for.



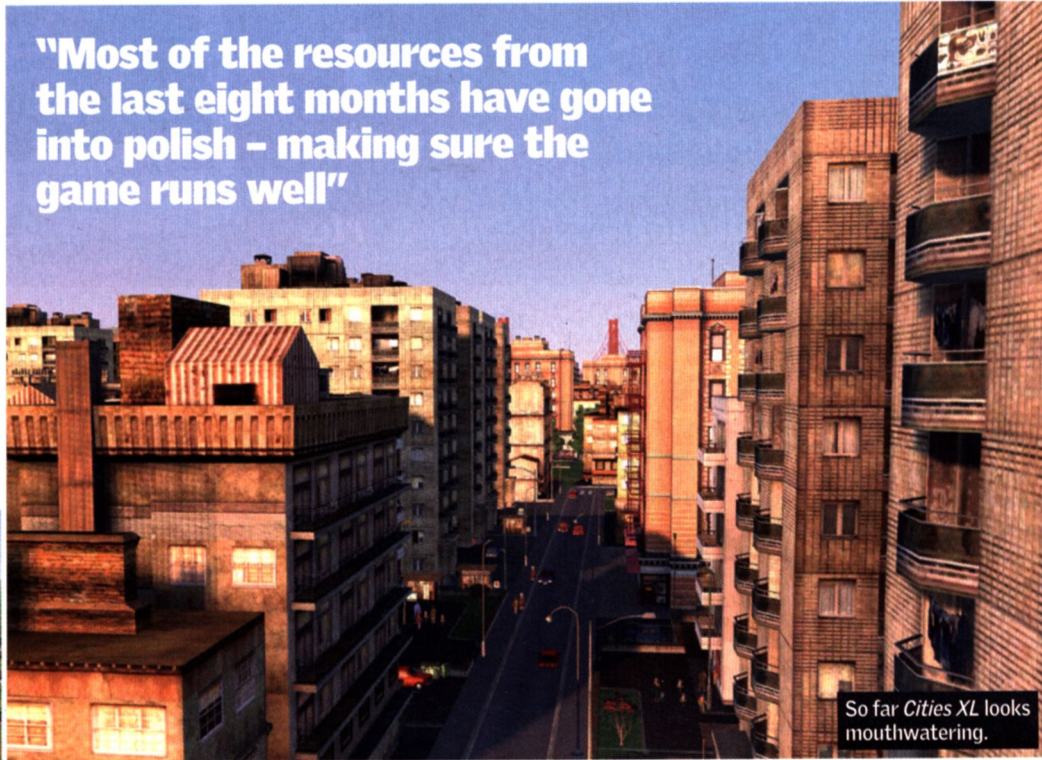
Ooh, pretty.



Ooh, swanky.



"Most of the resources from the last eight months have gone into polish - making sure the game runs well"



So far *Cities XL* looks mouthwatering.

The Golden Gate Bridge will likely need a blueprint.



trade?) and, like resources, can be traded or built. Each allows you to build a specific unique building - like the Eiffel Tower or the Empire State Building - as long as you can gather enough resources over a long building period for it.

Most cities aren't going to have the resources to build a blueprint alone - and the biggest blueprints are going to need several players working in sync to build them.

It seems like there's a crazy amount of potential here. Where's most of the work gone into?

We've got two studios, one in Paris that has built the game engine, done the design and the infrastructure, and one in the Ukraine that makes the buildings, the game assets and the security. It's a great split and it works well for us.

Most of the resources from the last eight months have gone into polishing, and making sure the game is runs well.

Have you noticed any cities trends from the beta?

People are finding getting a city up to maximum size a lot slower than we envisaged, but some people are building giant cities with more than 20 million citizens really fast! This isn't to say that the game is hard, or over-complicated, just that dealing with the layouts of a real-world map, such as Mt St Helens, means sometimes it's not so easy.

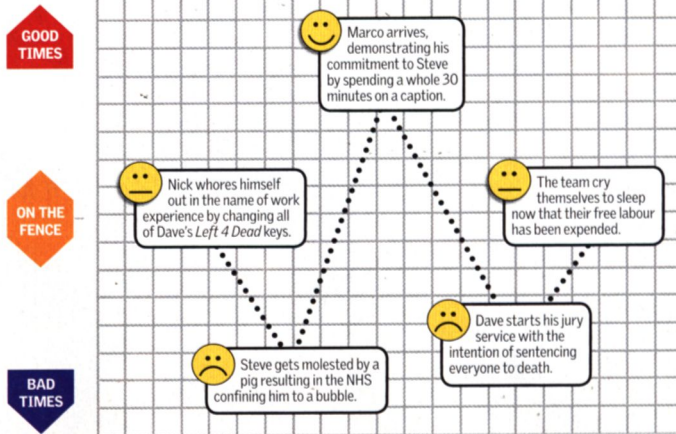
Finally, anything exciting planned for launch?

We'll have announcements about the collector's edition, the rest of the beta and the demo sometime soon, but the launch itself is very exciting for us! **PC7**

STUFF

id Software, the staunchly independent developer of some of the PC's biggest games and longest-running series have been bought by ZeniMax Media, best known for owning *Elder Scrolls* and *Fallout 3* developers Bethesda Softworks. id haven't developed a full title since *Doom 3*, instead acting as a publisher for Raven titles, so the health of their bank statements is anyone's guess. There'll be no name change, unless ZeniMax are insane, and we'll doubtless see no real change in both companies' operations for the time being. Rumours of VATS in *Doom 4* are unconfirmed.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

MILLER'S CROSSING

As *Duke Nukem Forever* bites the dust, 3D Realms founder Scott Miller looks back on a life in games with *Pavel Barter*



Scott Miller
Founder, 3D Realms

DUKE NUKEM HAD fought a few battles in his time, but even his freeze gun couldn't save him from this kerfuffle. It was May, 2009, and negotiations over the long-awaited *Duke Nukem Forever* had collapsed. Calling shenanigans on publishers Take Two for allegedly cutting funding, 3D Realms were forced to lay off their entire development team. Take Two responded with a lawsuit; 3D with a counterclaim. All very messy, but not hugely surprising for Duke fans who'd been twiddling their thumbs since the game's announcement in 1997.

For his part, 3D Realms founder, Scott Miller, expresses regret over the sequel's never-ending development.

"Obviously we should have had three more [*Duke Nukem*] games out by now," he says. "That's hugely disappointing. There are explanations, but I'm not going to get into that. We definitely dropped the ball: we should be on *Duke Nukem 6* by now."



Duke's been lost to the ages.

But what appears to be the last chapter for Duke, and an end to vapourware's most notorious saga, overshadows a career of firsts. Not only did Miller pioneer shareware, game demos and episodic PC games, but he also been integral to gaming's evolution.

Traditionally, arcade-style games gave you a number of lives, forcing you

to restart from the beginning when you died. With 1991's *Monuments of Mars*, Apogee Software, 3D's parent company, introduced the idea of save functions. The *Duke Nukem Forever* palaver has also overshadowed 3D Realms' mighty back catalogue: *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Prey*, *Max Payne*, and Duke himself.

For years, 3D Realms – alongside id Software (*Doom*), Ion Storm (*Deus Ex*), and Ritual (*SiN*) – were part of a gaming zeitgeist in Texas, far from the traditional environs of America's East and West coasts.

"We have a very independent philosophy," says Miller. "Everyone here

was very much of the idea, 'We're going to make the games we want to make on our own time schedule. We're not going to bow down to any publisher pressure'. The whole 'When it's done' philosophy was born here in Dallas."

In a sense, Miller was always an outsider. Born 1961, in Florida, his family moved to Alice Springs in the heart of the Australian outback, when he was two. Miller became obsessed with games from an early age, inheriting his programming mind set from his father, who worked for NASA. In 1975, his school bought one of the first PCs – the Wang 2200 – and Miller spent all his free time making games. Four years later, when he moved back to the US, he honed his craft on a Commodore Pet.

In the early '80s, Miller veered toward journalism, writing a weekly column for the *Dallas Spring News* and penning a book about how to beat popular arcade games. In 1986, with his *Kingdom of Kroz* titles proving popular on PC magazine discs, he began releasing games onto bulletin boards, giving a taste of a game, then selling the full product by mail order. Was there any precedent for his use of shareware?

"No. I looked around at the other games on bulletin boards and people were releasing their entire game. I would call these authors and ask, 'Are you making any money?' They weren't. There were various pundits who were saying you can't expect to make money by releasing your games into the shareware market. It occurred to me, why not release a demo, then sell the rest of the game."

Miller's instincts paid off, netting him \$100,000 in cheques in 1989 alone. Until that point he had been churning out a game a month, but decided the time was ripe to quit his job and focus full-time on Apogee. With his marketing model in place, Miller was keen to

"We dropped the ball: we should be on *Duke Nukem 6* by now"

Scott Miller, 3D Realms

Duke Nukem's old foes – in their local Job Centre.



ANOTHER DIMENSION

Duke kept us waiting for over a decade, but there are no apologies for 3D's former glories

WOLFENSTEIN 3D 1992

The first great shooter, *Wolfenstein 3D* gave us our first taste of being ushered down corridors and shooting fascists in the face. It also gave the developers the disturbing task of creating entire levels out of swastikas. *Wolfenstein* caused its share of controversy, even amongst gamers. "We got a lot of online fan flack about *Wolfenstein*, not based on the idea that you're killing Nazis, but on the idea you're killing dogs," says Miller. Which was ridiculous, since they were clearly Nazi dogs, and so deserving of being shot in the head.



BIO MENACE 1993

Despite featuring a bloke with a mullet and a soundtrack that sounds like R2-D2 wanking, this side-scroller shooter was fun. "The titles that I was interested in back then were more arcade-ish, action-oriented," says Miller. "I wanted games that you could play for short periods, save your location, then pick it up later."



DUKE NUKEM 3D 1996

Miller recalls Duke's creation in the early '90s: "We thought, let's create someone who's nothing but pure take-charge. Let's not have him wear armor – he's too badass for that. We just had a simple sketch back then: an over-the-top, ego-driven character, who relishes getting eyeball-deep into dangerous situations."

PREY 2006

Prey delivered dizzying level design and a Native American hero fighting an army of alien John Waynes. Although *Prey* got the thumbs up from gamers, Miller still regrets the fact that development was scuppered by the delay of id's *Doom 3* engine. "We couldn't pursue some of those cool ideas that later ended up in *Portal*," he says. "We had every intention of having a portal gun in *Prey*, but our development timeline was cut short a year and we couldn't pursue that stuff." Still the best use of the Blue Oyster Cult in a game, mind.

collaborate with other game designers, including many of the team who came to form id Software. By the end of 1991, Apogee was taking off, largely thanks to a certain cigar-chomping meathead.

Although the first *Duke Nukem* sold 100,000 copies, 1992's *Wolfenstein 3D* launched the company into the big league. As was the case with many Apogee/3D titles, Miller acted as producer and co-designer, but

Wolfenstein's development was handled externally: in this case, by id. With *Catacomb 3-D*, id had already set in motion a gear shift for games, birthing the first-person shooter, and Apogee subsequently rebranded into 3D Realms.

SUE ME, BABY

But while *Duke Nukem 3D* proved a big hit, the follow up took forever. Did the stop-start development on *Duke Nukem Forever* become frustrating?

"Totally," says Miller, suddenly guarded. "I'm not sure what I can say about that. Take Two are coming after us with a vengeance, and they're going to use anything I say against us in any way they can."

He can, however, talk about *Prey*, a game that initially appeared as troubled as *Duke Nukem Forever*. Work on *Prey* began in-house around 1996, before 3D Realms finally packed it. "It was a situation where we were trying to grow

internally into a multiteam studio. In hindsight that was crazy because we couldn't even get the one game, *Duke Nukem Forever*, done. After a year of trying we dropped *Prey* and had the people working on it merge with the *Duke Nukem Forever* team. We went back to being a single-project studio."

Prey was eventually revived, co-designed with Human Head Studios, and released in 2006. But as games grew in budgets, so 3D Realms reduced their external developers, focusing on specific titles like Remedy's *Max Payne*. In-house, the company poured all their efforts, and an estimated \$20 million of personal funds, into a game that never came. This has left 3D Realms beaten and bruised, but still in business.

Although 3D Realms no longer has internal development, it's overseeing 10 projects, including *Prey 2*.

There is, however, the small matter of a pending lawsuit. Miller, like the

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

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
 ✉ Special Report, PC ZONE,
 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

gum-chewing badass that started all this mess, is undaunted.

"Any time you're successful, you're going to have lawsuits coming out of the woodwork. Take Two's goal is to somehow own the *Duke Nukem* IP: they're hoping this lawsuit bleeds us to death and they end up with the IP.

"Well, we've had lawsuits throughout our whole history and we've yet to lose one. We're certainly not going to lose this to Take Two. It's a big power play on their part and it's going to fail." **PCZ**

Prey's waiting on a sequel.



PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by
GfK ChartTrack

- 1 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 2 **NEW ARMA II**
Issue 209 - 70%
- 3 **↓ FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 4 **NEW SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES**
N/A
- 5 **↑ WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 6 **NEW CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD**
Issue 210 - 80%
- 7 **NEW STREET FIGHTER IV**
Issue 210 - 87%
- 8 **↓ CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**
Issue 188 - 89%
- 9 **↓ THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 10 **↓ EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 94%
- 11 **↑ WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**
Issue 205 - 78%
- 12 **↓ FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 13 **NEW ANNO 1404**
Issue 210 - 72%
- 14 **NEW OVERLORD II**
Issue 210 - 78%
- 15 **↓ GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 16 **RE SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 17 **↓ COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 18 **↓ PROTOTYPE**
Issue 209 - 70%
- 19 **NEW RAILWORKS**
N/A
- 20 **NEW HARRY POTTER & THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE**
Issue 210 - 58%



2. ARMA II
Remarkable for being excruciatingly realistic, incredibly buggy, and having the shortest name of any sequel.



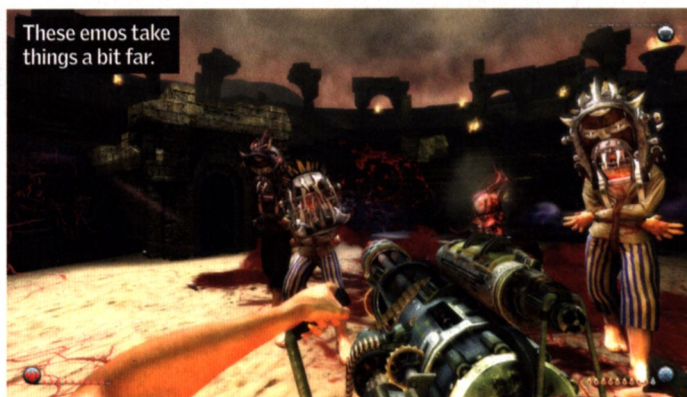
4. SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES
This hasn't graced our desks yet. But we expect to love it if it ever did.



6. CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD
Basically it's *Call of Duty: The Wild West*. And it's damn good.



7. STREET FIGHTER IV
What's this? A console-centric game involving beating people up, that's really good on the PC? Amazing.



These emos take things a bit far.

YOUR INNER ROCK CHICK

Dreamkiller wakes up in a cold sweat

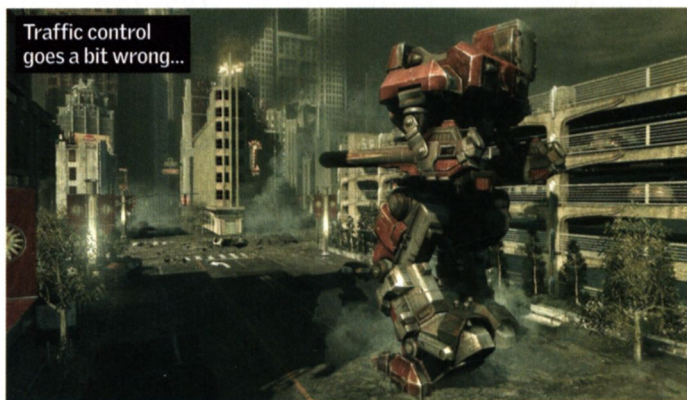
WEBSITE mindwarestudios.com

MINDWARE'S EXPANSION TO *Painkiller: Overdose* was, frankly, a load of pants. But never fear, as the developers are having another go at a back-to-basics FPS with *Dreamkiller*.

This game involves you guiding a "punk rock chick psychologist" through the nightmares of her patients. And shooting them. So it won't win any awards for realism, but when you're

dispatching the warped fiends that inhabit your patients' subconsciousness that'll hardly matter. Mindware are also promising equally outlandish weapons to mow down the legions of foulness.

Dreamkiller looks ludicrous, but this often makes a good game, especially when you throw telekinesis and "dragon tattoo powers" into the mix. Expect to see it in October.



Traffic control goes a bit wrong...

THE MECHS ARE BACK

MechWarrior's resurrection is go

WEBSITE piranha-games.com, smithandtinker.com

AFTER A SEVEN-year long wait, *MechWarrior 5* has been announced. Developers Piranha Games and Smith & Tinker are starting from scratch, so the game will be called *MechWarrior*.

Set in the year 3015, on the planet Dëshler, you take control of Adrian Khol, a party-animal turned resistance fighter who chooses to fight against his planet's invasion by the House Kurita.

The creators are promising a range of mechs that level up as you progress through the game's single-player campaign, with the option for online four-player co-op, and a competitive multiplayer mode.

There's no mention of a release date, due to the lack of a publisher, but we expect it won't be long before more details leak out.

"Command & Conquer 4 will wrap up the series' storyline"

We hope John Kucan will return as Kane.

Expect shinier tanks in *C&C4*.



"So, who's got my hairpiece?"



Pre-op...



Post-op...

TIBERIUM TWEETS

C&C4 launch leaked on Twitter

WEBSITE portal.commandandconquer.com/cnc4

SOMEONE WITH A twitchy Twitter finger told the world that *Command & Conquer 4* is being developed by EA's Los Angeles studio. But by the time you read this it won't need confirming: *C&C4* is as real as your nose.

Unlike your nose, however, it won't be available until late 2010, and will be set in the tiberium universe, rather than the soviet, time-travelling wonderstuff of *Red Alert*.

Promised to be a PC-only exclusive, *C&C4* will see a hefty engine upgrade. The design team are throwing in mobile bases; and class-based gameplay, which sees your player persistently progress through the game, both online and off.

You'll be able to play two campaigns by yourself or cooperatively, and going online will grant you traditional sparring and an intriguing 'objective based' multiplayer mode.

Gameplay adjustments aside, *C&C4* will also wrap up the series' storyline which sees the GDI and Nod fighting for survival against the the Scrin and tiberium. The alien mineral is only six years away from making the Earth inhospitable, so expect plot twists and the possibility of unlikely alliances.

The details about what's will be in the game are still a bit sketchy, but expect EA to fire up the hype-machine soon enough.



Pew-pew-pew.

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- Action, adventure and deep thought await you!

TOTAL
PC Gaming

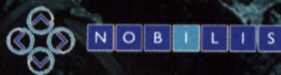
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"Absolutely gorgeous"



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Expect this.
But better.

DIRT DELAYED

DirectX 11 puts *DiRT 2* release back

WEBSITE dirt2game.com

REMEMBER HOW DIRECTX 10 was heralded as the biggest leap forward for PC gaming in years? Well, if you ignore the limited improvement to visuals we're excused from suggesting it's a bit pointless – especially when you consider the fact that developers are still struggling to get decent framerates with DirectX 10.

As a result, you can't help but feel a sickening sense of deja vu when reading Codemasters' announcement that *DiRT 2*'s release has been pushed back to the end of the year. The unexpected delay has been put down to the implementation of DirectX 11. But anyone with a keen eye will notice that

the highly anticipated racing title comes three months after the console version.

Never fear, because those itching to get their hands on it should be secure in the knowledge that as long as DirectX 11 receives the hardware support it needs, there's no reason as to why the delay won't be advantageous to the game – crisper graphics, increased detail and more impressive crashes are just some of the plus points.

The only problem is that to fully utilise Pixel Shader Model 5.0, you'll need to get saving for a new graphics card now. Just remember, if the quality of *GRID* is anything to go by, *DiRT 2* will be worth every penny.



The wet...



The dirty...



...and the dusty.



LucasArts' *Indiana Jones 5: The X-Wing of the Old Republic*.

ABOUT DAMN TIME, GEORGE!

LucasArts joins the *Steam* revolution

WEBSITE lucasarts.com, steampowered.com

LUCASARTS HAS ANNOUNCED its back catalogue is coming to *Steam*, but due to the compatibility issues of their old games being DOS-based, we'll be seeing a staggered launch.

Only a handful of games are available in the first wave. But there's plenty to be excited about: adventure titles *The Dig* and *LOOM* lead the charge. The *Star Wars* games *Battlefront II*, *Republic Commando* and *Starfighter* show the force is strong with *Steam*. And accompanying these classics is Indiana Jones who's present in classic point-and-click form with *Fate of Atlantis*.

If that fails to spark your interest, then you can be overjoyed with the knowledge that *Theme Park*-wannabe *Thrillville: Off The Rails* is also making an appearance.

If that wasn't enough, LucasArts have also launched a reboot of the *Monkey Island* series.

Tales of Monkey Island spans five episodes and is aimed at introducing a whole new generation to the classic series. For seasoned islanders, *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition* gives the original a hi-def lick of paint.

Just one of the above would be enough to make adventure fans hot under the collar, but having both results in near-cardiac arrest. (To find out how well George's lackies have handled these reboots, turn to page 68.)

Cap it all off with the fact that LucasArts have one of the richest histories in gaming and you'll understand why we're itching to see what the company resurrects next.

"Charming and excellently executed"

TOTAL
PCGaming 8/10

"Immediately likeable, hugely enjoyable"

EUROGAMER **8/10**

"This is exactly why PC gaming can be so fantastic"

PCGAMER

"Attractive, inventive, winsome and immediately fun to play"

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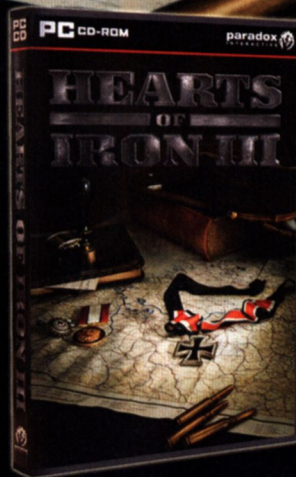
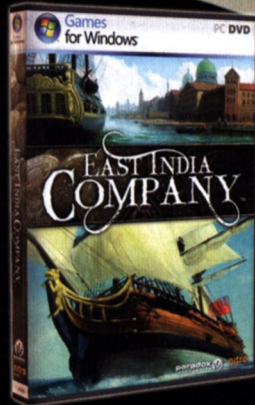
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JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

LIFE, GAMES, THE UNIVERSE & EVERYTHING



Games journalism is the most admirable and worthwhile vocation. Quite simply, it's the loftiest ambition a man can aspire to.

But be warned – the competition is so intense that any room with more than two games journalists in it will usually involve a bare-knuckle boxing match about which *StarCraft* race is best. Either that, or a detailed discussion about how hot it'd be if SHODAN and GlDOS did sex in a hovercraft.

So it's vital, if you're lazy, stupid, or just don't like games very much, to know how to bluff your way through the entire industry. These are the tips that I've picked up in my three short years dealing with people who know 10 times more about everything than I do.

1. CHOOSE YOUR FAVOURITE GAME WISELY

Every month, on the *Meet The Team* page, someone has to choose their favourite game. Never underestimate the agonising deliberation that goes into this. There's only so many times you can champion the underdog by saying *Psychonauts*, before people suspect you haven't played anything else. So vary your replies. Tell people you love *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* – it has the charm of regional accents without the success of *Fable*. Or you could just be corrupt, and say it's a game your friend wrote: like the excellent "*Time Gentleman, Please!*" available now for just £3 from zombie-cow.com.

2. 7/10 = 72%

If you're reviewing console games, everyone knows that 7/10 is the score you give to games you didn't really play or understand. But PC games are more refined than that, and require a percentage. A straight translation to 70% seems suspiciously round – so, if you're bluffing a score, and want to make it seem like you've put a serious amount of thought into it, 72% is the only acceptable equivalent for 7/10. This also creates the illusion that percentage scores are scientifically calibrated, rather than a post-rationalised gut instinct.

3. KNOW ONE THING ABOUT EVERY GAME

Most conversations about games can be easily negotiated, if you simply know one fact about the game. *BioShock*, for example, is the game that "really loses its way after that twist". (Save mentioning the *Pipe Mania* hacking mini-game or the deconstruction of *Atlas Shrugged* for essays). *Knights of the Old Republic* is the game where you can sell Wookiees into slavery, and any discussion about *OpFlash* can be completely winged with a story about how you crawled around on your stomach for 10 minutes before getting shot by someone you couldn't see. And if people start talking about *Oblivion*, you can always pull the classic "Oh, I just explored the countryside on my horse".

Only knowing one thing about a game does leave you vulnerable where arguments are concerned. So, if anyone starts to plumb you for more



"If you're lazy, stupid, or just don't like games very much, here's how to bluff your way through the entire industry"

details, escape the room using smoke pellets and a rope ladder attached to a helicopter.

DISCLAIMER

Articles containing elements of parody should not be used to gain an insight into the gaming industry. To date, I've never written a review of a game without playing it – although I might, to see if anyone notices. Aspiring games writers: if you want to get a job in the real gaming industry, it helps to know two or more facts on the major releases. If any of these tactics fail to work, I won't be held responsible for loss of revenue or dignity. But seriously, that *Oblivion* trick has worked for me no end of times. In reality, the game bored me stupid.

4. COPING WITH MISTAKES

If you make the unwise decision to not give a game 72%, then you're asking for trouble. Say, you give *Transformers* 98%, because it's the first game you've played since 1989, and you didn't realise computers could do that these days. You have two options. First, dazzle them with pretension: "Well, the distillation of the reviewing process into a vulgar arithmetic constant is always going to throw up scoring anomalies exactly like this." Alternatively, you could pull rank and say, "Well, I'm a games journalist actually, and I probably enjoyed the game on a level that scientists haven't invented yet." Be warned though, this doesn't work if you're talking to another games journalist, in which case you should go for the helicopter option. So, now you're fully armed and ready to survive in the murderous world of games journalism. Get out there, soldier, and start giving those games 72%. **PCZ**

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCKPHOTO

RUNESCAPE

Join in with this massively popular MMO

DEVELOPER Jagex PUBLISHER Jagex WEBSITE runescape.com

WITH OVER 5 million players a month, *RuneScape* is officially the most popular free-to-play MMORPG in existence. It's so official, in fact, that the men from the Guinness World Records came round and gave them a medal to say so. Everybody at Jagex was so busy playing the record-busting online adventure though, that the man with the medal had to just leave it on a desk for them to find later.

Now, whether you've experienced the fun before and want to know how things have changed, or maybe you're already a player and would like to try the game's premium content, we're giving away a free Wallie-card (stop giggling at the back) inside this issue giving you seven days of unfettered access. See? We do love you.

WHY PLAY RUNESCAPE?

● Because we've just given you seven days access to its premium content, for a start.

● It is the most popular free-to-play MMORPG around.

● Which means it boasts one of the most active communities too.

● It's browser based, so there are no downloads or patches.

● This year will see the biggest graphical and content update the game's ever had!

● There's no subscription to pay, so you can drop in and out as you please.

WHO PLAYS RUNESCAPE?

Everybody, and certainly not just the young kids. In fact, less than 4% of *RuneScape* players are under the age of 13, and the average age sits at around 16 years old.

Four out of five players play the free-to-play version of the game, as the content on offer is more than enough for even the most avid fans.

One 21-year-old player has piled an astonishing 14,599 hours into the game (probably 14,600 by the time you read this), and she's never handed over a penny, proving that the free version is anything but a demo.

WHAT'S RUNESCAPE PREMIUM LIKE THEN?

- Exclusive members-only quests
- Exclusive skills to train
- Customisable houses
- Expansive social interaction options
- Three times as much game world than in free-to-play
- Extra content and full-screen mode



HOW DO I DO THIS?

Head over to runescape.com to create an account, and soon you'll be part of the biggest free-to-play MMORPG on the planet. A 1.5GHz processor, 256MB of RAM and a 64MB graphics card is all that's needed. Once you're in, use our Wallie-card offer below for seven days of free premium access! **PCZ**

USING YOUR WALLIE-CARD

It's an "internet wallet" - if you didn't know that you're a real wally



1 Grasp your Wallie-card with both hands, and using your toes tap the address runescape.com into your browser, shrieking with delight as you do.

2 Click on "Play Now", and *RuneScape* shall unfold in front of your very eyes. Once it's done, click "Create Account" to do just that.

3 Once you're all set up, click on the "Upgrade" button, follow the prompts and be prepared to enter your Wallie-card details.

4 Enter it! Go! Once you're finished, you've got seven fun-filled days of premium access!

"We're giving away a free Wallie-card entitling you to seven days of unfettered access. See? We do love you"

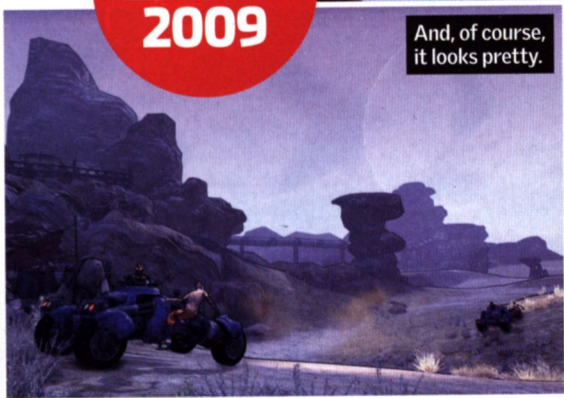


ETA
23 OCT
2009

The tech that generates the guns also customises enemies.



Your XP is constantly displayed, and some guns set things on fire.



And, of course, it looks pretty.



A work of art...



...wacky beards.

SKAG HABIT...

BORDERLANDS

Infinite guns makes Steve Hogarty happy

DEVELOPER Gearbox PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE borderlandsthegame.com PREVIOUSLY IN Issue 208

CALLING RANDY PITCHFORD over to my PC, I point at a number on the screen that was excitedly alternating between "7" and "x11".

"What's happening there?" I asked. "Oh, that's how much damage each of those shotgun pellets inflicts," he explained. "If you hit someone with all 11 pellets, that's the full 77 damage."

That's more damage than I'd ever done to anybody in *Borderlands*, I noted, before chasing after skags – the dog-like jaws with feet that prowl the game world – with my powerful new thing.

It's telling that Pitchford won't even put a number on the weapon count any more. Originally said to be "around 500,000" the number rose with every press release. Now Gearbox mutter

numbers in excess of 17 million. "The total doesn't really matter any more," admits Pitchford, "it's beyond counting. Players will only see about a 1,000 guns during their play anyway."

LOOT IS KING

They guns are procedurally generated of course; individually customisable components slotted together by an AI system to create millions of possible combinations. There's a version of that shotgun spitting out 12 pellets instead of 11, that counts as a different gun. There'll also be one with acid pellets, and one that sets people on fire.

This has caused *Borderlands* to resurrect a degree of loot-fever not seen since *Hellgate: London*. And as a skill-based shooter it holds up admirably: quests to clear out bandit camps play out like any given-FPS, so much so that the inescapable inadequacies of the early weapons will leave you feeling strangely underpowered.

Soaking up XP through missions and kills is instantly engaging, and while your weapon proficiencies increase through use, each level brings with it a skill point to be spent in one of three specialities.

Each of the four classes: Soldier (guns), Hunter (sniper), Heavy (tank) and Siren (stealth) have different skillsets, and a unique action. Soldiers chuck down temporary sentry turrets for example, while Heavies enter berserker rages, and Sirens dip in and out of invisibility. Unlockable skills augment these.

In four-way co-op it all comes together beautifully. Your characters are persistent, and the world doesn't adjust itself to maintain the challenge – so if you spend five hours levelling up in co-op and return to the starting area, you'll have the weaker skags dying in shock just at the sight of you. And that's a far better solution than coming back to find old enemies riding around on scooters and barking flames at you.

Borderlands is treading the line between shooter and RPG expertly, potentially trimming away too much of its RPG chromosome for us PC lot (skills and levelling up are a rather basic affair), but in the process ensuring that the parts in which you shoot at things to make them dead aren't scuppered by stats and dice-rolls. They're not, and *Borderlands* is fun. Commence looking forward to it... now. **PCZ**

THE STORY SO FAR... GEARBOX

FOUNDED
We are compelled to tell you when these places are founded.



1999



OPPOSING FORCE
Gearbox develop the stellar expansion for *Half-Life*.

1999

BROTHERS IN ARMS
Gearbox strike out on their lonesome.



2005



BORDERLANDS
It's become a rather nice-looking sci-fi shooter. Good job.

2009

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks fantastic now
- ✓ A solid shooter to boot
- ✓ RPG bits are engaging, and addictive
- ✓ Loot system actually brilliant
- ✗ Pitchford admits "main community won't be on PC"

EVOLVING...

LEFT 4 DEAD 2

David Brown finds the Chargers have got it in for him

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE l4d.com



ETA
**17 NOV
2009**

Rochelle: the new Zoey.



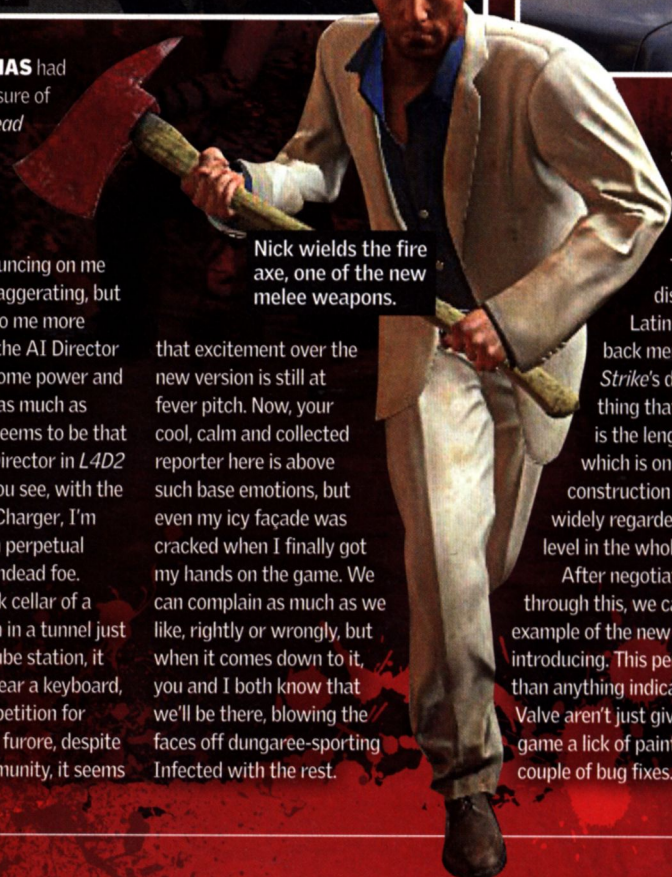
Bloody hooligans.



They look different, they die the same.

ANYONE WHO HAS had the dubious pleasure of playing *Left 4 Dead* with me over the past six or so months has noticed one thing: Hunters seem to have a particular affinity for pouncing on me and me alone. So, I'm exaggerating, but it does seem to happen to me more often than not. Perhaps the AI Director just recognises my awesome power and seeks to bring me down as much as possible. The thing is, it seems to be that the new-and-improved Director in *L4D2* is of a similar mindset. You see, with the introduction of the new Charger, I'm now destined to be given perpetual piledrivers by this new undead foe.

Stepping into the dark cellar of a London night club hidden in a tunnel just next to London Bridge Tube station, it was a fight to even get near a keyboard, so frenzied was the competition for playing time. Despite the furore, despite the crying from the community, it seems



Nick wields the fire axe, one of the new melee weapons.

that excitement over the new version is still at fever pitch. Now, your cool, calm and collected reporter here is above such base emotions, but even my icy façade was cracked when I finally got my hands on the game. We can complain as much as we like, rightly or wrongly, but when it comes down to it, you and I both know that we'll be there, blowing the faces off dungaree-sporting Infected with the rest.

The assembled scribes were given some new levels to play, starting off with one called The Parish. It has a distinctly Hispanic or Latin flavour, bringing back memories of *Counter-Strike's* de_inferno map. One thing that is also noteworthy is the length of this level, which is on a par with the construction site in *Dead Air*, widely regarded as the toughest level in the whole of the first game. After negotiating your way through this, we came upon an example of the new finales Valve are introducing. This perhaps more than anything indicates that Valve aren't just giving the game a lick of paint and a couple of bug fixes. Essentially

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's still *Left 4 Dead*
- ✓ Sunshine
- ✓ New melee weapons
- ✓ Coach
- ✗ Nothing really original

Building sites are dangerous enough, without Infected.



CHET FALISZEK, PROJECT LEAD, SHOWS US WHAT'S NEW IN L4D2

THE SPECIALS ARE COMING

one long obstacle course, the objective was to get from one side of a damaged bridge to the other.

GAUNTLET RUNNING

Sounds easy – enemies will just funnel their way towards you and you can pick them off as they do so, right? However, once you've lowered the bridge access, the Infected's assault takes the form of a continuous swarm.

If someone goes down, it's actually difficult to get them back up again, due to the continual attacks. Add to this the danger of being punched off the bridge by Tanks or being rammed by the aforementioned Chargers, and you'll soon realise that this will be a complete bastard to finish on Expert. There's no respite, hardly any chance to take a breather and devise a tactic, other than, perhaps, just legging it and hoping for the best. Which, in fact, is just what I did, leaving my hapless teammates to their gruesome fate as I danced about happily in the escape helicopter.

David 1, Other Journalists 0. **PCZ**

Do you think there will be a chance to play as the L4D characters in the L4D2 maps, or vice versa?

That would not be at launch. That would have to come later and we have talked about that as well. There would have to be additional voice work, animation and model work, but it is stuff we have talked about.

How much more difficult is Expert now that you can't just hide in the corner?

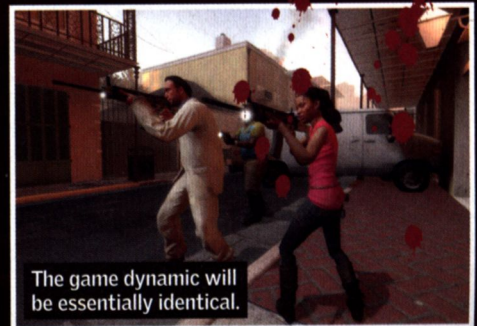
The Director still does a good job of not blowing it up and making it horribly hard. We've tried to do a lot of tuning, but yeah, Expert should be hard, right? Normal is where 80% of the players play though and we want to make sure people still have a good experience that is challenging.

We want you to be slamming shut the door with one health – that's the perfect experience. We don't want it to just do Hunter, Hunter, Boomer, Hunter, Hunter, Smoker. Giving the Director more control over that allows it to have different levels. It has these different creatures to throw at you now, too. We've been testing these and seeing what it can throw at you to do different things, like slow you down rather than just hammering the Hunter.

You have a number of new special infected and non-regular common enemies now, right?

We have uncommon and common as well as new special Infected. The idea of the uncommon common was you fight a lot of common horde. You kill a lot of zombies. Normally in *L4D* you would kill under 1,000 zombies through the whole game, now you kill over 2,000 and with that we wanted to mix it up.

There are the ones in the hazmat suits, for example, which are fireproof. When you come across them and you throw down your Molotov, they are not going to be bothered by that or the incendiary ammo. Each of the campaigns has something unique in it. They are also cool to see – they act different to mix up the game a bit.



The game dynamic will be essentially identical.

How do you think that Survival mode has gone down? It appeared to come out with a big splash but it seems people have forgotten about it.

The player numbers show it's a popular mode, but once you've got a gold medal, you're done. I don't think it has the same sense of replayability as co-op does, but we never wanted that.

One of the things about it was we wanted to make sure we had a mode that was easier for mappers. We have already seen a bunch of maps made, because it's easier.

We have some stuff coming out soon that will help rekindle some excitement about Survival mode, like being able to compare times with different groups.

Have you thought about introducing a structured Survival mode, like *Call of Duty: World at War* where you have to do certain things while still surviving?

There is a new game mode we are not talking about that does some things. When we were coming up with Survival mode originally we actually had come up with that. The original ideas started getting tested last May and we wanted to give a quicker play experience.

There are other games with 'survival-ish modes' but they seem to go on too long. We wanted things to collapse in a quicker time. One of the things with *L4D* is you have Versus maps that go on for two hours and we wanted to have the quicker gameplay experience.

Something like *Call of Duty's* structured play is something we have talked about, but we will have to see if it suits *L4D2's* play style. **PCZ**

CHAA
AAAAAAA
AAAARRRRGEE!

So yeah, this Charger thing. One of (perhaps there will be more, hidden away that we haven't seen yet) the new breed of special infected, it is a total bastard. Unless you get a quick volley off, or manage to hit it with flames, it'll rinse you up sharpish with a violent frontal attack – a charge, if you will. With you knocked down, if it's still alive, it will proceed to pound you into the pavement until you either die or your allies manage to save you. It's a toughie, so keep your eyes peeled for it.



This guy is a right bastard.

Hired goons flank every major bad guy. We promise.

ETA
**EARLY
2010**

IT'S SPYING TIME...

THE AGENCY

Ed Zitron brushes off his tuxedo and laser watch

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment WEBSITE theagency.station.sony.com

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of the flawed gem *Planetside*, *The Agency* is an espionage-themed MMO that blends the salty grit of your average shooter with the smooth concoction of your *World of Warcrafts* and *EverQuests*.

Players take on the role of a spy, customising their look, feel and faction – either ParaGON or U.N.I.T.E. These factions differ in that Paragon is the rough-and-ready paramilitary group, with little or no finesse but a pragmatic, get-the-job-done attitude (think Jason Bourne). On the other hand U.N.I.T.E. are your classic Bond or Joanna Dark spies,

specialising in high-tech espionage, gadgets, and the art of deception.

"We really wanted to bring the FPS market to MMO players. While you have to slow it down to make it a playable and fun to everybody, a headshot's still gonna be a headshot," said Matt Wilson, *The Agency's* creative director.

Unlike most MMOs, you don't pick a class. Before any given mission, you pick a particular load-out, hence the horrible SOE-coined 'you are what you wear'.

"When you create a character, you're really just choosing what side you're on, what you look like, and whether you're male or female. Once you're in the game, you can start off as any role and switch it out at your field office before the mission," added Wilson. "Inside those roles, as you gain experience, you can branch out – a support character can be a field medic who heals people, or a field tech that deals with mechanics."

The idea is that one player can be a variety of characters depending on how or when they play – if you

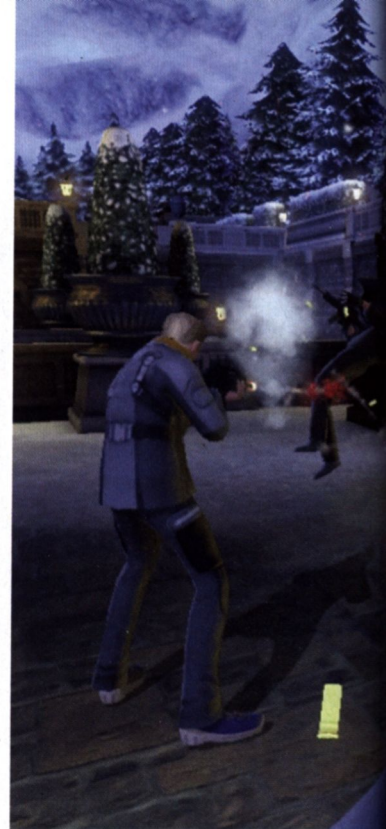
want, you can play that combat character with your friends, but your solo play is almost totally based as a stealthy stab-them-in-the-dark type. Lethalities are the games' special skills that set *The Agency* apart from your average online FPS.

"The main thing is that weapons and gadgets are critical to the game, but your own skills are too. Stealth players get a cloaking ability, and we want to drive those skills to support each other," quips Wilson.

BONDING IT UP

Much like *Battlefield Heroes*, *The Agency* will also include abilities that are useful for the entire team at once, such as a Combat Ops ability that allows the entire group see enemies through walls and spot enemies. The games' missions, from those that I played, seem hinged upon a narrative.

The mission I played centred around a mansion in a snowy mountain range, where the worlds' socialites and greatest minds had been lured under the pretence of a huge party. In reality, it was the work of Dr Kessler, an evil genius who planned to install mind-control chips in their brains and use their influence to



It's like *Pokémon Snap*, but with endangered socialites.



"Well, at least the debris is anti-aliased."



rule the world. Enter myself – a stealthy lady and my butch support-focused comrade Agent Steve Kramer, (a designer on the game) to bring some U.N.I.T.E.-style justice to the proceedings.

An agent sent us on a mission to sneak around the back and take photos inside of the mysterious devices hanging over seemingly every awning. As we did so, Kramer powered down a laser wall just long enough for me to sneak up and pop a bullet in a guard's head. However, before I could appreciate my victory, the wall powered back on, passing directly through my character's breasts and bringing (as you'd expect) a horde of desperate, sweaty NPCs into the path of my bullets.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's a spy MMO
- ✓ 1st and 3rd person shooter
- ✓ Gorgeous, semi-cartoony graphics
- ✓ Tight gunplay
- ✗ Unbalanced for new players

THE STORY SO FAR... SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT



THE FUTURE BOSS
John Smedley takes over *EverQuest*. Later he becomes president.



PLANETSIDE
One of the first MMOFPS is released, to middling success.



EVERPOPULAR
Sony releases *EverQuest II*, which is still a popular title.



HERE BE STEAM
SOE begins to sell its MMO clients on Valve's digital service.

1996

2003

2004

2009



Group combat will be akin to *COD: World at War's* co-op.



An outfit like that is hardly being covert.

ALTER EGOS

It's like a J.J. Abrams show, but good

As is the case with every fictional (and I imagine real) spy, it's necessary in *The Agency* to have an alias to use to slip into areas unawares. These roles are somewhat customisable, but SOE are currently remaining tight-lipped as to how.

"We've not got the functionality in there to change their names, but it wouldn't be a hard thing to do," nodded Wilson, if that was indeed his real name.

The aliases come into play in any non-combat situation – for example, infiltrating an evil corporation's lab, or to flirt with a particularly gullible guard.

They particularly exist as a break in the action – and still involve a group dynamic, as many situations will call for the help of either group mates or even somebody who just happens to be in the area.



Kramer threw a martini bomb – a root-style spell-like attack that freezes an enemy in place – while I mopped up the crowd of guards, gaining experience but failing the sub-objective to not set off any alarms.

At present, *The Agency* has a satisfying weight to gunplay, both in its FPS and third-person modes, and the team obviously gets what a good shooter needs, even with the slight re-balancing necessary to add MMO-style skills.

As we snuck inside the party, we slipped into aliases (see *Alter Egos*), photographing the mysterious devices. At this point, I used my shapely feminine wiles to distract a guard as Kramer grabbed the last one – for which we both received an objective credit – and we snuck upstairs to the top of the mansion to meet with our contact.

In the classic spy movie style, as he sought to tell us Dr Kessler's dark secret, the wall exploded at the behest of the villain's helicopter-borne rockets.

As we vaulted off the side of the building, the mission came to an end, and I internally applauded the demonstration. After what felt like a hundred demos involving killing the same old cockatrices in the same old fantasy environment, I was left confident that a genre-changer is on its way. We'll report in the moment we have more. **PCZ**

"I was left confident that a genre-changer is on its way"

ETA
**25 SEPT
2009**

WHERE ANGELS TREAD...

AION

David Brown got a quick peek at *Aion: The Tower of Eternity*

DEVELOPER Aion Development Team Dept. PUBLISHER NCsoft WEBSITE aiononline.com

APPARENTLY, CRYTEK WERE stunned when they saw what *Aion's* development team had done with the CryEngine 1. After having seen it for ourselves, we can confirm that *Aion* is a looker, at least in MMO terms. Of course, the question is if it'll just be another utterly generic Korean grind-'em-up that only excels in boredom.

Well, while we can't obviously guarantee that it'll not be a tedious grindfest, the visual walkthrough we were given indicates that, at the very least, a lot of time and effort has been put into trying to alleviate some of the problems most MMOs suffer from.

TALE OF TWO WORLDS

Aion's plot isn't ripping up the rulebooks in a frenzy of originality, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

There are two playable factions, with an NPC one lurking in the game. The story's core involves a world broken in two, one faction on each bit. The sun shines on the top bit, so all the people there are buffed bronzed gods. The bottom half, where the sun rarely ventures, is shrouded in twilight, cold and snow. These guys are grumpy sods who need to be tough to survive.

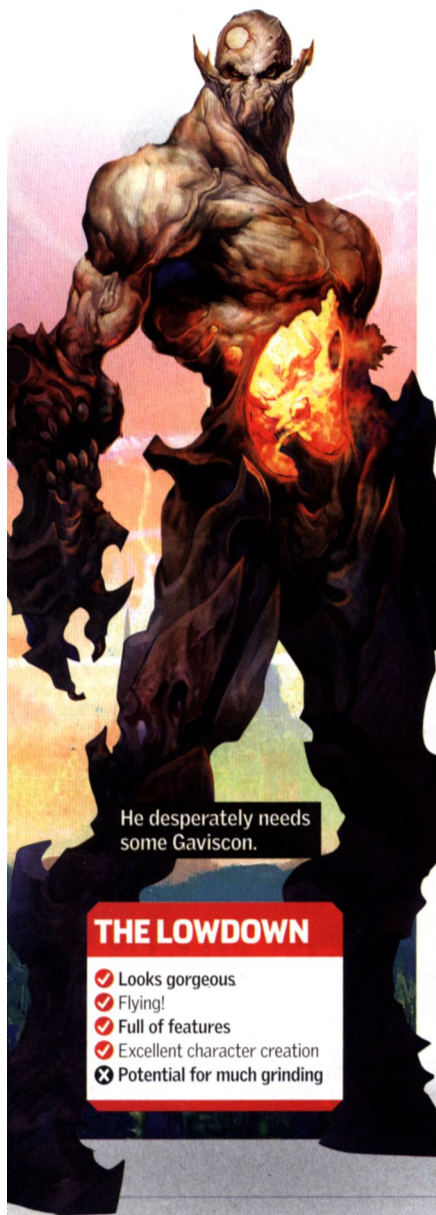
The developers stress, though, that neither faction is good or evil, they've just needed to adapt to their surroundings in different ways.



Once you've decided which faction to be, you'll get into the character creation screen, which is surely rivalling *City of Heroes* in its scope. Three hundred million different possibilities are apparently available and, such is the sheer weight of options available, you can even fashion your very own celebrity impersonation. We were told that Obama and Michael Jackson were just two of the ones the developers had come up with so far. Expect to bump into hundreds of Jackos

in pointy armour as you progress through the game, then.

After spending a silly amount of time creating your character, you'll get into the main game. The developers inform me that they've been working very hard to make sure the initial landing is smooth and lag-free. Claims of 200 people in one early instance with no lag at all will only be verifiable when the game properly hits,



He desperately needs some Gaviscon.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks gorgeous
- ✓ Flying!
- ✓ Full of features
- ✓ Excellent character creation
- ✗ Potential for much grinding

THE ABYSS

Grind, and you'll be let into the desolate lands of the Balaur



The world of *Aion* is split into two major zones, but inbetween these areas is the realm of the Balaur, the game's third faction. These aren't playable and function in the same way as the Mursaat in *Guild Wars* - hardcore bastards who'll take a hell of a lot of beating.

Their fortresses can be fought over and controlled, which is part of the PvPE system - where AI monsters can be used to protect your Legion's (*Aion's* guilds) property from invaders.

We shouldn't need to say, that The Abyss will only be for those who've reached the highest levels.

THE STORY SO FAR...
MAXIS



CITY OF HEROES
Superhero magic with a powerful character creator.

2004



GUILD WARS
Buy once, play forever. *Guild Wars*' motto saw it thrive.

2005



TABULA RASA
This MMO shooter slowly died, despite Lord British's backing.

2007

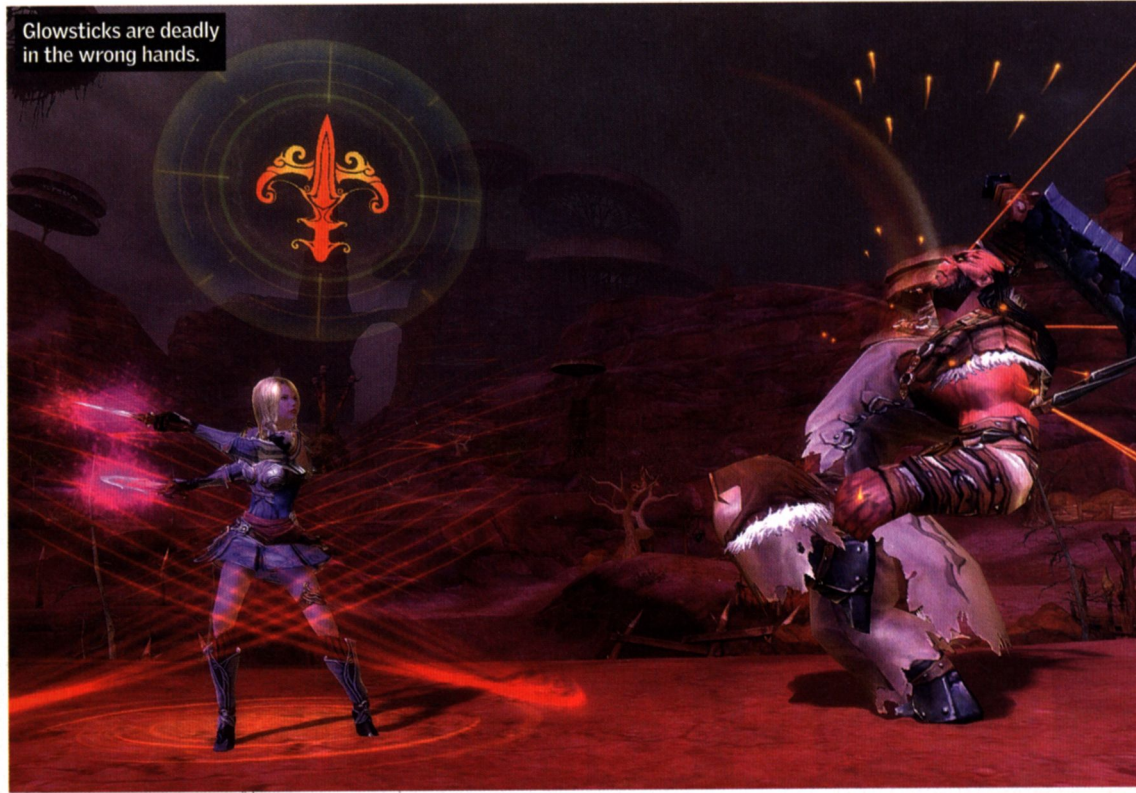


AION
NCsoft's new big hitter looks gorgeous and you can fly in it!

2009



The new Sophie Ellis-Bextor video was rather stylised.



Glowsticks are deadly in the wrong hands.



Ride the wings of change.



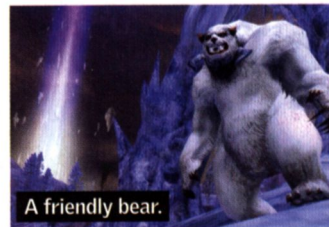
Sparkly.



A friendly lion.



A friendly, er, dog thing.



A friendly bear.

"Aion's plot isn't ripping up the rulebooks in a frenzy of originality"

but we'd like to believe they were true. Like *Guild Wars* and its ilk, new zones are created as people log in. Once one is maxed out, another is created and so on, making sure people aren't crippled with lag the second they get into the game.

Combat will be dealt with in the usual manner – lots of buttons on increasing numbers of bars across the bottom of the screen. However, one interesting difference is the concept of chaining: select a low-level skill and then more powerful ones can then be used, depending on the links on a 'chain tree' the first one has. This skill can then unlock a high level one.

If you happen to be carrying a shield, then a successful block will allow you to launch a counter-attack, and so on.

PRETTY FLY

Another thing that differentiates *Aion*'s combat from other games is the concept of flying. Not only does it allow for characters to use air-to-ground and ground-to-air attacks, you can battle other flying characters whilst in the air.

While flying isn't a new thing in MMOs – hell, even *Second Life* features it – in *Aion* it's going to be a lot more than just a way to get around the game world quickly.

All the usual favourites will be there – PvP, PvE and a new one, PvPvE – plus all the capital cities and quest hubs you could want or need.

The maximum level is 50 at the moment, with level 20 characters having access to the Stigma system, magic stones that grant non-class specific skills and abilities, like, say, healing powers for a warrior. These can't be changed on the fly, so you'll need to think about what you pick before venturing forth.

There's also a way of turning into an powerful warrior, that will be able to take on around 11 other players.

As for groups, they can be six strong, with multi-group raids of 24 people possible. As far as we can tell, none of the genre's staple features have been ignored.

We think *Aion* will be resolutely familiar territory for MMO players, but territory that will have the cracks and hollows of previous titles patched up somewhat with the degree of new ideas that have been crowbarred in. It remains to be seen how *Aion* plays, of course, but for now we're going to remain on the sunny side of things and be positive about it. **PCZ**

Free Realms specialises in overly positive farming.



ONE BIG FANGASM

Ed Zitron quests in Las Vegas to stare at the Sony Fan Faire

HEARING PEOPLE TELLING tall stories of the sheer levels of wackiness that make up your average BlizzCon, and how utterly amazing it always is, is fairly common. This is ironic, considering that it takes place in Anaheim, which isn't the most scenic of venues, nor somewhere known for its debauchery and glitz.

Which is why I was particularly happy to be sent to Sony Online Entertainment's Fan Faire – formerly the *EverQuest* Fan Faire – in Bally's Casino, Vegas.

At the heart of The Strip, Bally's lacks a theme. Unlike Bill's (Western-style saloon), Planet Hollywood (strip club), and Venetian (Venice), the only theme I could garner from Bally's was depression, with lines of the walking near-dead middle-aged loading their savings into the maws of doom.

Then entered the Fan Faire crowd – thousands of them. Some dressed in

wolf T-shirts, others dressed like elves, some even dressed like wizards.

Drop these people into any other situations and they may be considered pariahs – a bunch of ne're-do-wells dressed like fantasy creatures. But in Bally's – seemingly a veritable halfway house for the damned at the best of times – this pack of cosplayers were a flourish of colour and happiness when all else was lost.

"What's going on?" she said, pointing at a man who was tightening a bow made of foam.

I shrugged: "It's a convention based on a load of computer games. Ever heard of *EverQuest*?"

She looked at me, mystified and silent. "You, er, meet up with people on the internet and kill things."

She pondered this for a second. "Alright. Bye."

She turned and walked away, and a man dressed as a knight bumped into me. "Sorry, man," he muttered.

The Fan Faire itself was less grandiose than the spectacle that is Blizzard's invitational or previous BlizzCons. Bright halogen lights shone down on the hordes

PROUD NUTTERS

As I stood at the line to get in – yes, people were so enthusiastic, there was a line – a normal casino dweller walked up to me, a Wisconsin Badgers shirt on her back.

EVERCRACKED

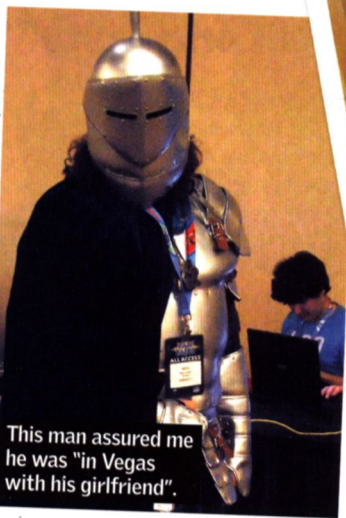
A movie now chronicles 10 years of *EverQuest* gaming

Jace Hall is the man behind *EverCracked: The EverQuest Phenomenon*, a feature film that premiered at the Fan Faire.

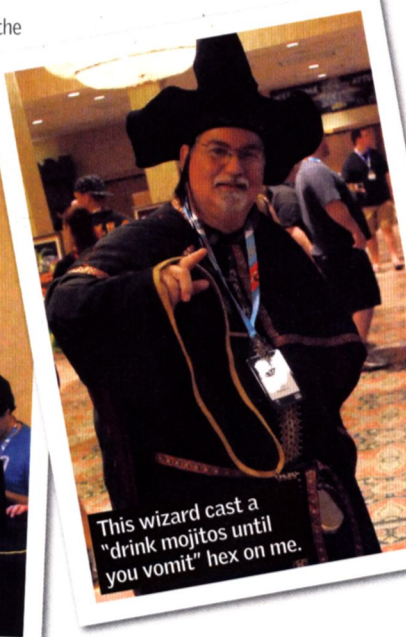
EverCracked describes from the very beginning the creation of the game, and how much blood, sweat and mead it took to put it together. It interviews industry figures, developers and even some players to get their perspective of the game over the years. It's a necessary watch for anyone who wants an insight into the

MMO gaming industry – even those who don't care about *EverQuest* – as it gets down to the nitty gritty of development without becoming overly verbose or deeply nerdy.

Sadly, there is a bit of *EverQuest*-style humour that may make you cringe, but it's not as bad as someone sitting behind you quoting *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Which, by the way, somebody did while I was eating breakfast.



This man assured me he was "in Vegas with his girlfriend".



This wizard cast a "drink mojitos until you vomit" hex on me.



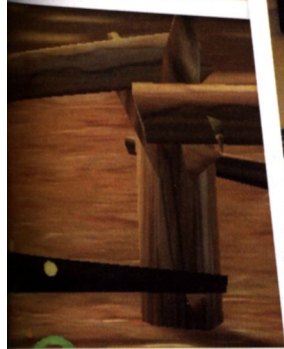
"Being level 80 gets you all the ass you want. Trust me."



Famous fantasy artist Donato Giancola appeared to sign books.



This is what the Best of the Best of EverQuest look like.



of people storming around, discussing and playing games that, to much of the gaming world, may have seemed to have fallen into obscurity.

A giant screen in the back displayed a huge free-for-all in the *EverQuest* arena – the fabled Best of the Best tournament going on before my very eyes. It may have seemed like your normal *EverQuest* battle, but people were very serious about it, screaming orders (or insults?) to each other as the battle progressed. As a winner was chosen, a crowd cheered.



Pox Nora would have looked rather wank 10 years ago.

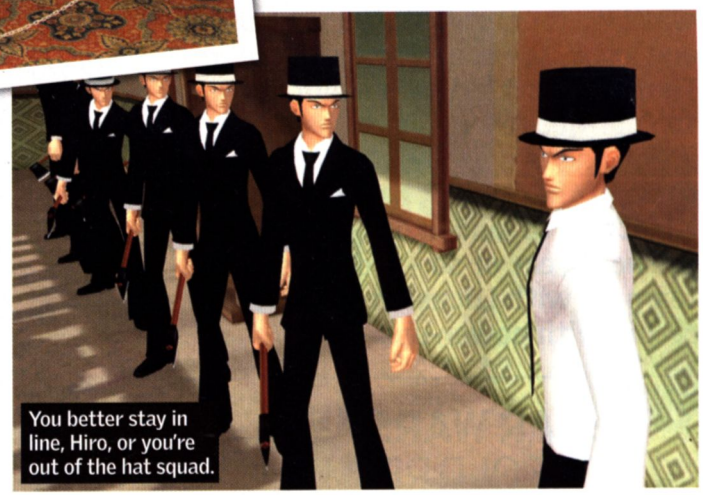
PRO POPULUS

Panels littered the Bally's convention centre, about everything from *Free Realms*' artwork to Item Database Allakazham. They were full, too, and some turned into good discussions.

Sony actually did a great job of giving people access to developers, and even your average Joe Bloggs could storm on up to the developers of *EverQuest*, *EverQuest II*, *The Agency* and *Free Realms*. It's rare that this kind of access

was possible without a large PR presence, but the developers and fans played nice, joking about the state of their games and waxing lyrical about their experiences.

The most notable part of the whole event was how many actual players were present, and how much they still enjoyed the game. As I stood in a line to get a coffee, behind me four guildmates – relatively normal-looking people – laughing about drinking the night before with 40 other players from the same server. When I questioned how long they'd been playing together, one casually said "oh, around five years".



You better stay in line, Hiro, or you're out of the hat squad.

"I listened as these players told me how they'd spent the night before drinking with Sony's developers"

Surprised, I listened as these players told me how they'd spent the night before drinking with Sony's developers, and how everyone still voraciously played the original *EverQuest*, *EverQuest II*, and even *Star Wars Galaxies*.

As they walked off, laughing and patting each other on the back, I couldn't help but think: while there were a few weird people in costume who smelled like cheese, there was a stronger sense of community at this event than I'd ever seen in anything game-related. Many had travelled hundreds – some thousands – of miles to be there, to literally spend time with their guildmates and the people who make their game possible.

Sony themselves provided both the infrastructure for the event, and the ability to really sit down and liaise with those who made it, with no ego as to who the developers would talk to.

For all your Blizzards and Warcrafts, the Fan Faire, if anything, stands as a celebration of a tight-knit community of players of several games. Laugh if you will at them for dressing up as medieval people – I did – but they enjoy it. Sony have successfully created events that bring together true enthusiasts, and for all our social norms, it's impossible to deny that they made this event for the players. And ultimately, that's what they're all about. **PCZ**

PCZONE
E3 SPECIAL
PART 2**EIGHT
MASSIVE
GAMES!**

Welcome to the second part of our E3 special. As this year's gaming festival was so huge, there was just too much stuff to cram into one issue, so here's the overflow. That's doesn't mean we kept back the not-good stuff. Over the next dozen pages we'll be looking at some of the hottest games we're expecting to land in our PCs over the next year or so - from BioWare's team-up with LucasArts to street racing with power-ups.

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THE OLD REPUBLIC**
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ETA
TBA

JEDI! THOUSANDS OF 'EM...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Jon Blyth contemplates the fate of his fellow man

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER LucasArts WEBSITE swtor.com

AT E3, BIOWARE pulled off a canny bit of advertising. After showcasing the new Smuggler class, a small section of a Smuggler's storyline was shown to give a taste of the game's graphics and the moral decisions its stories involve.

The stylised reality of the game's design is stunning. Sitting between cel-shaded cartoon and realism, the Smuggler's homeworld looks great, and the characters have an unexpectedly playful style that still maintains the capacity to carry off the script.

Every class gets their own unique storyline tailored to their lore, with every mission offered uniquely to a single class. How this will lead to groups of different classes teaming up isn't clear (missions might be shareable, or have overlap with those of other classes, making teaming up worthwhile) because it seems odd to be encouraging groups of seven Smugglers to team up.

In terms of MMO gameplay, the Smuggler is an odd fish; he plays tactically and employs stealth – but not in the way you'd expect a rogue to play. No invisibility, or backstabbing – it's more *Gears of War*, transferred to the

MMO template – take the cover locations offered on the map, have a good old-fashioned blaster battle, and if they get too close, take them out with a dirty melee attack. Kick in the nuts, and a blaster shot to the temple. Those smugglers, they know how to get the job done.

Now BioWare have made the bold claim that *TOR* will be the first fully voiced MMO, the scale of the project they've created for themselves being slightly nauseating in its immensity. MMOs like *World of Warcraft* include Instant Text options in the settings menu, for people too itchy to read a short bit of writing. So why is BioWare intent on making all of this extra work for themselves?

It's because they take their stories seriously. BioWare stand almost alone in trusting the gamer to have the patience, emotional engagement and literacy to enjoy a complicated storyline. And this is in an industry where even a highly respected writer like Susan O'Connor (*BioShock* and *Far Cry 2*) has said that short games are better suited to storytelling. It's not that BioWare stand against the bite-sized narratives of the likes of *Portal*, it's just that they're pulling hard in the other direction.

PICKING A SIDE

Back to that cheap marketing trick – the one moral decision we were given in the demo was as a Sith Bounty Hunter. We had to decide whether to kill the captain of a Republic spaceship.

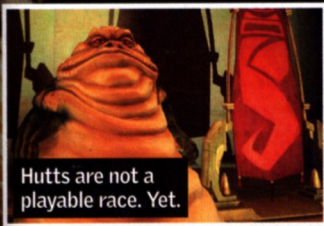
Killing the officer would be in character, but he offered his expertise to help us. Would we take that help and risk the ire of our higher-ups? After the Captain argued his case, in convincing tones, the choice was offered to the room of hacks. Based on the decision we made, we were each given a badge that read "I Killed The Captain" or... well, I don't know what the other badge said,



These Stormtrooper and Han Solo lookalikes are on the same side.



Sith just love dramatic kills.



Hutts are not a playable race. Yet.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Presentation looks superb
- ✓ New classes add new gameplay to the MMO
- ✓ Ambitious voice acting
- ✓ It's BioWare at their best...
- ✗ Enough with the info drip-feed

THE STORY SO FAR... BIOWARE

BALDUR'S GATE
BioWare's fantasy roots, which will be revisited in *Dragon Age*.



1998



KOTOR
Their first *Star Wars* adventure verged on being a masterpiece.

2003

JADE EMPIRE
It came on the Xbox in 2005. But PCs got this kung-fu yarn in 2006.



2005



MASS EFFECT
An original sci-fi adventure that made everyone very excited.

2008

as I didn't see one. Whether that was down to mob mentality, not empathising with the characters, or the fact that games journalists are dicks, who can say? But it's an example of how intent BioWare are on giving *TOR* the depth *Knights of the Old Republic* had.

No decision in BioWare's games is as simple as picking between good or evil. Even choices as blatantly sociopathic as blowing up a planet of Wookiees could be justified in *KOTOR*. But forcing players to consider the effect of their actions in this way is unheard of in the MMO genre.

BioWare will only find out whether MMO fans will enjoy, or even endure, such detailed storytelling when *The Old Republic* goes live. **PCZ**

A NEW DAWN...

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Will Porter feels more powerful in The Shadows, and understands what it must have been like for Sir Cliff

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE splintercell.us.ubi.com

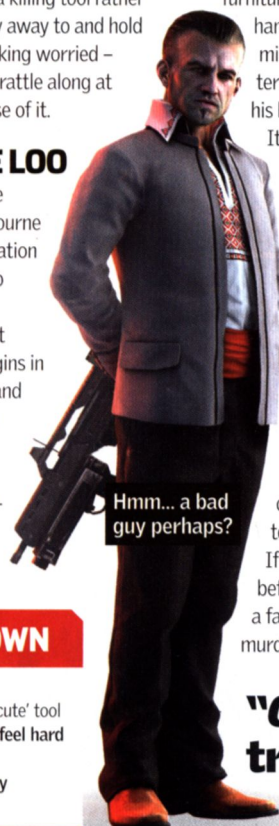
AFTER A BIT of a false start that involved Sam Fisher wearing a hoodie and stacking boxes in front of doors like a surly supermarket employee, *Splinter Cell: Conviction* is back on track. The mentality is still the same – the footprints of Bourne and nu-Bond can be seen throughout – but *Conviction* has now returned Mr Fisher to his rightful place in the shadows.

The stealth on offer isn't the softly, softly approach we're used to though; the sort where a triggered alarm would set off an inevitable barrage of pain and mission failure. Sam has been turned into something of a predator who can toy with the delicate AI of the enemies he faces or tug them off balconies when they're least expecting it; much, in fact, like the way that Batman operates.

The shadows are a killing tool rather than a place to scurry away to and hold your breath while looking worried – and the game should rattle along at a fair old pace because of it.

SKIP TO THE LOO

If you want to see the marks of the Bond/Bourne double-team of inspiration then you don't have to look that far into the game. Like all the best stories *Conviction* begins in a gents public toilet, and the parallels between this scene and the opening of *Casino Royale* are pretty self-evident. In an almost *True Lies*-esque way



Hmm... a bad guy perhaps?



"Mmm, you have such lovely soft hands, Mr Fisher."

you control Sam as he throws a hoodlum into various pieces of public convenience furniture – slamming his head into hand driers, throwing him into mirrors and essentially terrifying a bloke who's doing his business in a nearby cubicle.

It's remarkably animated, gritty as sin and as stylish as they come: a factor doubled as the guy spills his guts and his story is broadcast in FMVs on the walls.

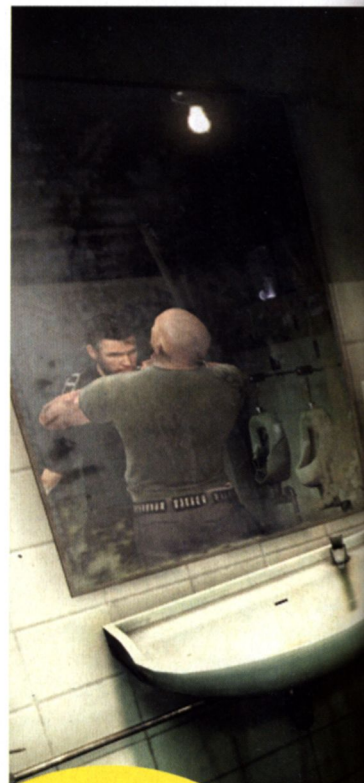
Fisher, you see, is after the nasty men who killed his daughter – and a tip-off from the toilet man goes as far as buying a one-way plane ticket to Malta with the sole intention of pointing a gun at the temple of the man whodunnit. If indeed he did dunnit. But before he gets to do that there's a fair amount of pacey guard-murder to get through.

Successful kills at close range build up a stockpile of opportunities for what Ubisoft are calling 'mark and execute' moments – in which a hidden Sam can paint two separate guards (or perhaps one guard and a piece of the environment like a rickety-looking chandelier) before leaping out and taking these accurate shots in quick succession.

This may take the action out of your hands, but it delivers limited bursts of super-spy action alongside a degree of room-clearance forward planning and as such is liable to prove rather fun.

Of course, the old stealth chestnut of everything going wrong and you being forced to think on your feet isn't going anywhere – it's just that there are systems within the game (such as the Last Known Position – see above) to make the game more dynamic and give you an added edge of predatorial power in the darkness rather than a primal fear of swivelling security cameras.

"Conviction looks to be a triumph of style laid upon a thick wodge of substance"



"I KNOW HE WAS HERE"

With frequently uttered buzz-words like 'dynamic stealth' and 'mark and execute' Ubisoft are trying to get the message across that they want to empower the player, rather than punishing his transgressions. This can be seen most clearly in a situation that most stealth operatives see as failure: running away. Now, this is a good thing, since the second the guard chasing you or the camera tracking you loses sight then a flickery image of Sam will appear in the place they saw you last – the 'last known position'. As the guards poke around this area, all manner of flanking, surprise tugs off balconies and espionage tricks can be pulled. It's a bit magical.

Conviction also looks to be a triumph of style delicately laid upon a thick wedge of substance – there's a variety of clevernesses going on here. As mentioned before story and flashback FMVs are broadcast on walls, but on top of this location names and mission objectives will appear in stark capital letters as you pass by pieces of the environment. To keep the package sleek and punchy, meanwhile, loading times are absent – instead covering up each load-bar moment with a flying camera overview of a level and its notable guard positions.

At the close of the assault on the rather posh Maltese residence, Sam is herded back to Washington DC by chaps who each wear a faintly familiar 'three light' motif on their foreheads – beckoning in *Conviction's* promised cat-and-mouse pursuit of Fisher around US capital landmarks.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Stealth, but new
- ✓ Neat 'mark and execute' tool
- ✓ Aiming makes you feel hard
- ✓ Grr: You're a tiger
- ✗ Better not be buggy this time



"Again, I must comment about how soft your hands are, Mr Fisher."

THE STORY SO FAR... SPLINTER CELL

CLANCY BOY
Sam Fisher dons green glowy-goggles for the first time.



1998



BOOKISH TYPE
The first *Splinter Cell* novel appears. It's actually alright.

2004

CO-OP CHAOS
A never-to-return co-op mode appears in *Chaos Theory*.



2007



LACK OF CONVICTION
The former *Conviction* was depressing.

2008



Conviction promises fun with crowds.

By updating the Fisher we know and love rather than completely uprooting the way his game works, as was the policy before, *Conviction* is suddenly back on the map – perhaps even a game with an outside chance of being one of the best of the year. If they provide us with a decent PC version this time. **PCZ**



Cover up that shoulder holster at least, Fisher.

When Welders Attack.

ETA
EARLY
2010

WHO'S THE DADDY?...

BIOSHOCK 2

Steve Hill is on a submarine mission as multiplayer death matching comes to Rapture

DEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE 2kgames.com/bioshock2

WHILE 2007'S *BIOSHOCK* was showered with near-universal praise – picking up no less than 50 Game of the Year awards – a small minority of miseries half-heartedly grumbled about there being no multiplayer mode.

Those churlish gripes should be quashed later this year when *BioShock 2* rocks up featuring not only a fully-fledged single-player sequel, but a brand new multiplayer mode. In fact, rather than do it themselves, 2K have gone to the professionals, roping in genre specialists Digital Extremes, who have honed the multiplayer experience over the past decade, primarily with the *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* series.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's *BioShock!*
- ✓ Bespoke multiplayer mode
- ✓ From Digital Extremes
- ✓ Who did *Unreal*
- ✗ Nothing original

That multiplayer mode was unveiled at E3 in a booth decked out to look like the innards of Rapture, and those involved were – in common with every single American in the games industry – “really excited”. Arguably even more excited than the default “really” mode was 2K Marin senior producer, Melissa Miller, who beamed, “We’ve only been talking about half the game. We’ve only been talking about single-player. Today is exciting for us because we’re showing the entire *BioShock 2* experience.”

As for the thinking behind drafting in another developer to do the multiplayer, Miller explained, “We knew it was a perception that adding multiplayer somehow diluted the focus to the detriment of single-player. So we knew we had to find a dedicated team to make sure that the multiplayer was the best and most *BioShock-y* it could be. At that point we had already started incorporating with Digital Extremes on *BioShock* PS3. Their familiarity as well as their tremendous multiplayer experience made them the perfect fit.”

Digital Extremes clearly know what they’re doing when it comes to the online shooty thing. Nevertheless, being given someone else’s game and told to make a multiplayer version must be fairly daunting, particularly given *BioShock*’s strong narrative bent. That said, the multiplayer element of *BioShock 2* even comes replete with its own story.

Whereas the single-player part of *BioShock 2* takes place 10 years after the events of the first game, the multiplayer takes place 10 years before, during the so-called fall of Rapture.

Telling the story of Jacob, a welder-cum-plasmid tester at the dubious Sinclair Solutions. The crux of the combat involves taking aesthetic tools

YOU'RE THE DADDY NOW!
Single-player soundbite...

If you missed our extensive single-player preview a few issues ago, here's senior producer Melissa Miller: “We are back in Rapture of course, but it's 10 years after the events of the first game.

“In *BioShock 2* we wanted to give you a new perspective on Rapture, we didn't want you to see it from the outsider's eyes like Jack, we wanted you to be someone integral to the history of Rapture, someone who's such a key figure you could not imagine Rapture without them. And that's the Big Daddy.

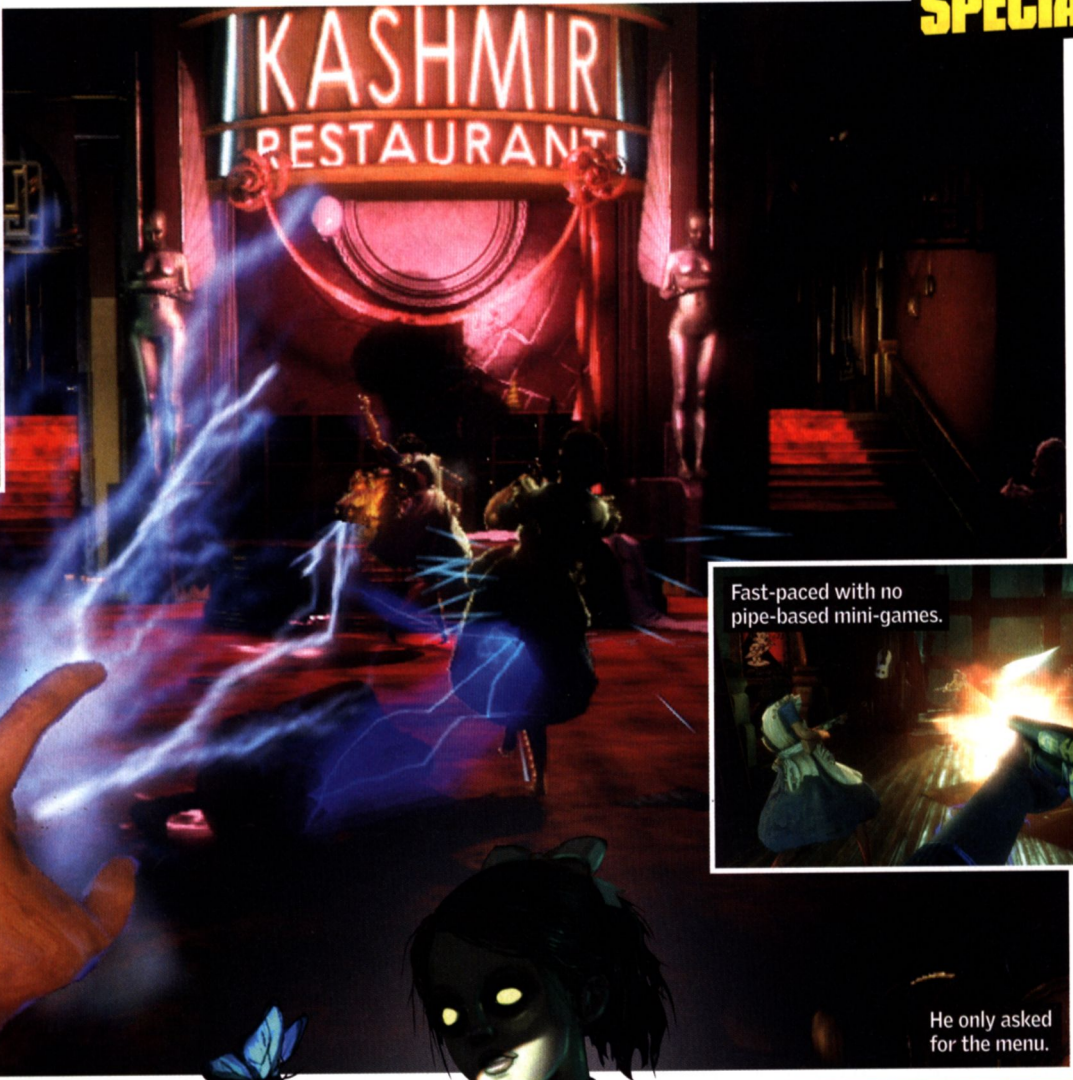
“You're not any Big Daddy, you're actually the very first the prototype and you've somehow manage to regain your free will.”

Never give your gran a machinegun.





Find the pick-up and you can be The Big Daddy.



Fast-paced with no pipe-based mini-games.

He only asked for the menu.

and turning them into combat plasmids, thus using all of the elements of the game's toolset.

This all sounds a very highbrow way of justifying up to 10 players running around Rapture butchering each other, and that is exactly what we get to see, with some iconic locations rebuilt from the ground up, including the Kashmir Restaurant and the Mercury Suites.

SIX PACK

With players joining the match, we were witness to a six-player free-for-all, with combatants electing to either buy preset weapon packs or design their own.

A variety of combat methods were on display, including pistol, shotgun and electrobolt, with the plasmids having both a quickfire mode as well as slower charge mode. The environment is also key to success (eg. you're able to set a firetrap in order to burn your enemies).

As we revealed a few issues ago, in the single-player mode you step into the sizeable boots of a Big Daddy (the first Big Daddy in fact). This revelation is

reflected in the multiplayer to an extent, with each match featuring a randomly spawned pick-up. The first person to find it gets to play the Big Daddy, along with the health and armour you'd expect.

According to Digital Extremes, "You couldn't do *BioShock* multiplayer without The Big Daddy," but there are clearly some balancing issues to be addressed. As such, the game will count how many times you take down the Big Daddy, with the stats being incorporated into a wider system that tracks kills and offers progression based on performance, with players moving up the ranks and gaining access to new weapons and upgrades over the course of 20 levels. From our brief glimpse, the *BioShock 2* multiplayer is shaping up to be a fully-fledged part of the game as opposed to a tacked-on afterthought. But you'll have to wait and see the game before you start to complain. **PCZ**



No word on Little Sisters being present in the multiplayer yet.

THE STORY SO FAR... DIGITAL EXTREMES

BLAME CANADA
Founded in Ontario by 'industry visionary' James Schmalz.



1993



UNREAL
This FPS genre, was a challenger to *Quake II*. Spawned spin-offs.

1998

UNREAL TOURNAMENT
The multiplayer *Unreal* is a gibbing classic.



1998



PARIAH
A very good FPS that's now been overlooked by history.

2005

THE ONE AND ONLY...

SINGULARITY

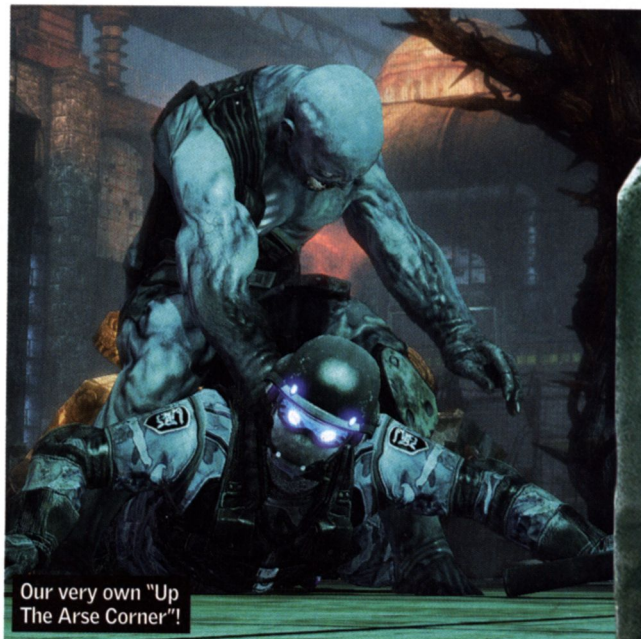
Steve Hill tries to avoid making jokes about Cher...

DEVELOPER Raven Software PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE singularity-thegame.com

MAKING A FIRST-PERSON shooter that stands out from the crowd must be tough these days. Particularly if it's being published by Activision who, with *Modern Warfare 2*, are set to unleash the sequel to one of the most successful examples of all time. Consider that they are also publishing the remake of *Wolfenstein*, the game that pioneered the genre, and you have to feel for Raven Software, gamely attempting to gatecrash the party with what marketing skunks glibly refer to as a "new IP."

That so-called intellectual property is *Singularity*, which Google would have you believe is "a recognised leader in implementing agile business process management software". Wikipedia is scarcely more helpful, hinting at a "theoretical future point which takes place during a period of accelerating change sometime after the creation of a superintelligence".

As for the story of the game, it's arguably even more complicated, but we'll take a stab at the basics. You're an American fighter pilot on a recon mission



Our very own "Up The Arse Corner"!

less an historical figure than Stalin was experimenting with as a power source. Or at least one of his scientists was, before it all went tits up with a catastrophic event that was on a par with Chernobyl.

doing that, the direction was more 'What if you could actually see what a physical item looked like 50 years forward, 50 years back, and play with that notion?'

At its most basic level, imagine there's a large tree blocking your path. Zap it back 50 years with the TMD and it becomes a mere sapling that you can easily step over. In other contrived scenarios, you can replace staircases to get upstairs, revert crates to their former

"Once the mutating thing was under way, I got the red LED eyes fitted."

"Throw in mutated flora and fauna, and parasitic foes, and it's clear you're going to be up against it"

when something goes awry and you crash on a remote island. The good news is you survive. The bad news is the island is subject to the kind of strange goings on that make an episode of *Lost* look as mundane as a weekend in Magaluf.

Since a Cold War experiment in 1950, the island - Katorga-12 - has been quarantined, largely due to the presence of the mysterious Element 99, which no

However, rather than giving radiation poisoning to Welsh sheep, the upshot of this particular blunder was a rip in the space-time fabric resulting in some time travelling shenanigans. Luckily you're equipped with a handy Time Manipulation Device (TMD), which enables you to tamper with the properties of time on a localised basis.

TIME BANDITS

A number of games have attempted the old time travel shtick, but according to producer Kekoa Lee-Creel, *Singularity* takes a different approach.

"We've seen other time games and they've had almost like a VCR function, rewind, fast forward, record, that sort of thing," Lee-Creel explains. "So instead of



Shooting his mouth off.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Time Manipulation Device
- ✓ Intense combat
- ✓ Elaborate story
- ✗ A bit gimmicky
- ✗ Potential for generic FPS play



Mutants, while horrific, are undeniably polite.



Beats anti-ageing cream.



That translates, roughly, to "pub".

COLD WAR KIDS ...and fails in his mission

As anyone who grew up in the '80s will confirm, the Cold War wasn't so much a theoretical geo-political military concept, as a genuine daily terror that involved regularly checking the skies for the seemingly inevitable nuclear missiles.

Brian and Steve Raffen were two brothers who lived through this, and went on to found Raven Software. According to the bloke who showed us the game, *Singularity* was inspired by their youthful experience of last century's nuclear stand-off, as well as their penchant for exploring abandoned areas – something that's reflected in the game's ramshackle architecture.

As for the time-shifting element, 1989 saw the release of ageing warbler Cher's seminal paean to the space-time continuum, *If I Could Turn Back Time*. Coincidence?



If only Cher could turn back time.

glory in order to snaffle their ammo (which luckily works in your 2010 weapons) and remove brick walls in order to progress through buildings.

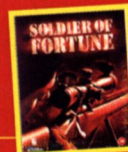
The Time Manipulation Device can also be used on human enemies, which in theory should reduce them to children or pensioners and thus make them easier to kill. For reasons of good taste, Raven have settled on your enemies devolving and evolving into some kind of gelatinous mass, which then runs around attacking all and sundry.

Enemies in *Singularity* take many forms, from the modern-day guards, to

THE STORY SO FAR... RAVEN SOFTWARE

HEXEN
Witchcraft and spells come to the FPS in agreeable fashion.

1995



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE
Look! You can shoot his arms and legs off!

2000

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
Raven picked up the word-heavy *Star Wars* FPS franchise baton.



2002



QUAKE 4
The seminal series limped into the realms of a quartet.

2005

'50s soldiers who appear when you slip into a so-called Event Echo. Throw in mutated flora and fauna, and parasitic foes, and it's clear you're going to be up against it, albeit equipped with some contemporary weapons – pistols, shotguns, and machine guns – including one that has the ability to chuck rockets back whence they came.

As the game progresses, upgrades become available, and the story also unfolds, with narrative elements scattered about in a *BioShock* fashion for those prepared to search for them.

TIME FOR FUN

As for the multiplayer, Lee-Creel could only confirm, "It is time-based and you do have some of the time stuff integrated in there, some cool stuff that we're doing right now. I've played it; it's a lot of fun."

How much fun *Singularity* will be to play remains to be seen, and we'll have to fast forward to later in the year to find out. Do you see what we did there? **PCT**

JUST ONE CORNETTO...

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Will Porter runs around Venice, hunting for ice cream

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE assassinscreed.com



He'll look silly if he messes this up...

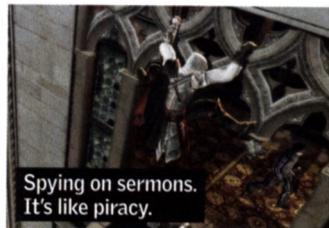
(historically accurate, in terms of design) gliding machine – it's as if 700 years of European culture had been building up to the point at which it could be included in a videogame.

"When I was younger I went to Venice, and I can remember thinking 'Man, *Splinter Cell* would be cool here,'" explained developer Chris Geiler. "But now we're working with it on *Assassin's Creed* and it's even better.

"We sent some people down to Venice, and to Florence, to take photos and check out the architecture – just to get a feel of how it is at street level. We even had guys go up on the roofs to see what it looks like from up there."

In terms of engine tweaks from former Holy Land adventures, to aid in the beautification of Venice *Assassin's Creed II* uses the lighting system from *Far Cry 2* (strategically timed sunsets were some of this game's highlights) while the chases across Venice's rooftops will be made a little more dynamic by guards who now not only understand the concept of free-running, but are parkour adepts themselves.

Venice culture will be tapped into, meanwhile, with missions that begin with Ezio masquerading as a



Spying on sermons. It's like piracy.

gondolier, in search of a kill rather than a Cornetto, and fancy carnival masks will certainly be prevalent.

"We really wanted to make it as historically accurate as possible," picks up Geiler as he neatly kicks a guard from the Rialto bridge after a deft swoop of his flying machine. "And the fortunate thing about Venice is that it hasn't really changed in a very long time so all the things you can see in the code today are what it would be like 500 years ago."

And don't you know it, but he's really rather right – although stricter historians than I might question the probability of such strategic placement of hay carts next to tall buildings in times of antiquity.

Still, if Tuscany and Florence are half as fun to roam around as Venice is, then

Assassin's Creed II could end up delivering something a little more than the cynics are expecting from it. **PCZ**

ETA
20 NOV
2009

QUICK TIP FOR the best way to ensure enjoyment of *Assassin's Creed II*: book a trip to Venice.

The roof-running escapades of Ezio take place in a remarkable recreation of the famed water-logged city, and former visitors will find their minds summarily boggled at the level of detail. From leaping over into the Doge's palace to deal with its (not over-historically accurate) occupant, to climbing up the Campanile to hook up with Da Vinci and go for a ride in his

Nick guards' weapons to really humiliate them.



THE STORY SO FAR... JUMPING IN GAMES

DONKEY KONG
Jumpman introduced. Leads to increase in jump-related injuries.



1981



COUNTER-STRIKE
The concept of bunny-hopping is born. Hops peak in popularity.

1999

SPLINTER CELL
A turning point: Sam Fisher can jump and then do the splits.



2002



ASSASSIN'S CREED II
Jumping off buildings is now automated.

2009

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Venice looks a riot to run around -
- ✓ Push bad men off buildings
- ✓ More to do than last time...
- ✗ But has it changed enough?
- ✗ No sign of Cornettos so far

ETA
EARLY
2010

ES
SPECIAL

"*DiRT 2* is already something worth taking your trousers off for"



Standing water makes a real difference on the tracks.



Ken Block features. This isn't him obviously.

New tracks include the Baja Off-Road challenge.



DIRTEH... COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

Prepare to ignore the Highway Code with *Steve Hogarty*

DEVELOPER Codemasters PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE codemasters.com/dirt2

GETTING EXCITED ABOUT racing games isn't something I do often, and I was no massive fan of the original *Colin McRae: DiRT* and its fancy-pants, off-the-wall capitalisation, but *DiRT 2* is already seeming like something worth taking your trousers off for. It's not just incredible to play, but to look at too: the cars are 50% more

detailed, the dirt is 1,000% dirtier, and the engine can manage an astounding 100,000 track side spectators. After 10 races you'll have zipped past 1 million people. You know how tall they'd be if they stood on one another's shoulders? That's right: 1,000 miles.

The previous game's front end, a stylised mess of gloss and panache, has been stripped away and replaced with a motorhome. All of the game's various options and race modes are accessed from within this caravan, which travels from festival to festival in search of races and victory. As you win events and move around the world you'll get souvenirs to display on the dashboard. So race the sandy Baja track in Mexico and you'll come away with a face mask, we assume.

All of this is a preamble of course to the races themselves – we're first shown a multi-car rally circuit around London's Battersea Power Station. The detail here is spectacular, from the spectators to the South West trains scooting in and out of Victoria station above, there's a lot going on. The car handling has been hugely improved upon since the original *DiRT*, giving cars a satisfyingly weighty feel as they take corners.

Depending on the surface, you'll be forced to prepare for corners before entering them sideways or, in the case of the 850bhp trophy trucks, you can pretty much plough through corners with little consequence. Standing water's found its way into the game too, affecting handling in the way driving your car through a big puddle tends to: lots of drag and reduced cornering. On *DiRT*'s urban Shibuya track, the road surface shifts between dirt, tarmac and metal to create an unpredictable racing environ.

When *DiRT 2* finally arrives on the PC, we expect our trousers will be blown off by the excitement of it all. **PCZ**

THE STORY SO FAR... REMEDY

COLIN MCRAE RALLY
The first McRae skiddy sid game.



1998



V-RALLY
The best rally game ever created, thank you very much.

1999

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
A reinvention for the flagging rally series.



2007



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2
McRae's passed away, but his legacy lives on.

2009

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks beautiful
- ✓ Handling hugely improved
- ✓ Interesting motorhome interface mechanic
- ✓ Standing water
- ✗ Not strictly authentic rally

WOO-HOO!

BLUR

Steve Hill goes all Mario Kart

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE blurgame.com

I RECENTLY FAILED my driving test. Perhaps if it'd involved hitting the Nitro button and then pressing Barge to force other cars out of the way, things would've been different. Unfortunately, reality is rarely as much fun as games, which is where *Blur* steps in.

Historically, the Merseyside-based developer has churned out semi-serious racing games, that while dressed in simulation clothes, often tipped their hat to the arcade. The team's propensity towards quick thrills was also demonstrated with the old-school *Geometry Wars*, and the points-based

shooter, *The Club*. The forthcoming *Blur* takes an unashamedly arcade approach, risking the ire of driving purists everywhere with the inclusion of power-ups, a decision that has already sent forum dwellers into meltdown.

Bizarre Creations are adamant that you won't be throwing shells at other cars and dropping bananas in front of them, although communications bloke Ben Ward defied PR advice by telling us that "it's like an adult

Mario Kart". So *Blur* is a step away from the trend for inaccessible racers that require you to hit the precise apex of every bend to stay in contention.

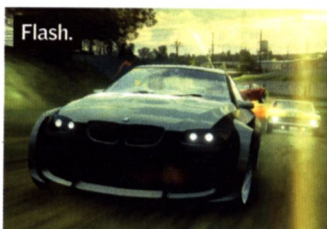
ETA
AUTUMN
2009

CAR PARK LIFE

Ward also talks about the concept of "player frustration," an example of which involves spinning off at the first corner and then spending the next 10 laps hopelessly trying to make inroads on the leaders. Instead, *Blur* promises intense wheel-to-wheel action, as you trade paint with opponents who are rarely less than a couple of feet away from you in ferocious 20-car races.



"I'm glad I got my rear-view mirror extended now."



Featuring a slew of varied licensed cars (and a made-up one), which can all take damage and even burst into flames, the trademark authenticity is in evidence. However, this doesn't extend to tracks, which are based in such diverse locales as California, Barcelona and Hackney.

As Ward explains, "We haven't really gone for absolute realism this time, we've tried to make it like Hollywood-real. Now we can be a bit more creative with it. So with Hackney, we've taken the best bits of Hackney, the more interesting bits to race round."

Interestingly, the single-player element of *Blur* will feature a story, told through cutscenes (from the same people who did those in *Gears of War*) and, fashionably, by using an in-game social network.

The social network element will also apply to the all-important multiplayer, with groups set up to compete in certain types of races. And yes, the purists will be able to turn the power-ups off if they so choose.

Blur was playable at E3, and a quick multiplayer play revealed its accessibility, with arranging power-ups into the available slots and using them at the appropriate time proving a key strategy. Through largely dirty tactics I managed a couple of mid-table positions, and, unlike my driving test, I didn't mount the kerb while attempting to reverse round a corner. If only they could come up with a power-up for that. **PCZ**

THE STORY SO FAR... BIZARRE CREATIONS

FORMULA 1
Europe's best seller of the year set Bizarre's wheels rolling.



1996



METROPOLIS STREET RACER
The Dreamcast classic established their rep.

2000

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING
The first of four PGR titles for the Xbox.



2001



ACTIVISION
Bizarre signs with Activision, paving the way for *Blur*.

2007

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Power-ups
- ✓ Four-player split-screen
- ✓ Licensed vehicles
- ✓ Social network
- ✗ Another *Mario Kart*?

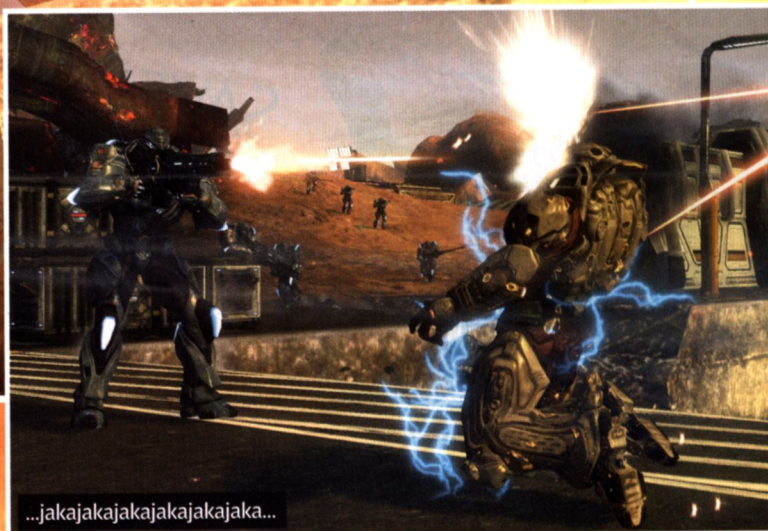


A magical power-up in full effect.

ETA
SEPT
2009



Ratatatatatatata...



...jakajakajakajakajakaka...

PAY ATTENTION BALDRICK...

SECTION 8

Now bring me two pencils and a pair of underpants...

DEVELOPER TimeGate PUBLISHER SouthPeak WEBSITE southpeakgames.eu

ANGRY LOOKING ARMY men from the future wearing Halo clothes and firing big guns about the place – Section 8 isn't about to win any awards for originality, unless they're comically oversized and handed out in a very sarcastic way. But while the multiplayer shooter is undeniably a mash of ideas respectably lifted from some of our genre favourites, the end result thankfully falls closer to the sum of its parts, rather than a disjointed and repulsive mess on the floor.

Battlefield 2142 is the most obvious touch-point here, and TimeGate's version of DICE's (and before that Robert Heinlein's) drop-pods, which they call "burning in", presents some of the game's unique features. Areas of the map marked in red are defended by anti-aircraft guns, and dropping into these areas will ensure a swift, fiery death. But barrage that defended area with fistfuls of players and a lucky few will make it.

Achieve a certain number of kills and you'll trigger an event, such as escorting a heavily armoured commando into an enemy base, or attacking a high-profile target – very much a *Quake Wars* influence, though expanded beyond that title's simple build-stuff/repair-stuff slant.

There's even a hint of *Tribes* in *Section 8*'s jetpacks, but you won't be skating around the terrain and jumping off

mountain peaks, rather you'll be jumping extra high at the push of a button. It leads into the ability to build defensive turrets around key objectives (*Quake Wars* again) to swat jetpackers out of the sky. Amass enough points and you'll be purchasing structures – which drop out of orbit – such as automatic rocket launchers, vehicles and power suits. After our brief time with it, *Section 8*'s quilt of ideas does seem to hang together coherently. It's a fast-paced, high-end multiplayer shooter, and hosts enough interesting features to make it worthy of your attention. Whether TimeGate have done enough to make the game stand out under its own merits is another matter entirely. **PCZ**



...dakajakaboom!

THE STORY SO FAR... REMEDY

FOUNDED
TimeGate is founded in Sugar Land, Texas. Yes, Sugar Land.

1998



KOHAN
A great RTS game about some immortal folk.

2001

EXTRACTION POINT
TimeGate do an awful expansion for *F.E.A.R.*

2006



PERSEUS MANDATE
And their second one turned out even worse.

2007

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Burning in is fun
- ✓ Solid, satisfying shooter
- ✓ It's like *Battlefield 2142*
- ✗ Hardly original
- ✗ Ughhhh space marines

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THEY'RE BACK...

ALIENS™

VS

PREDATOR

Richie Shoemaker comes out of an unusually long hypersleep

DEVELOPER Rebellion PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE sega.co.uk/games/aliens-vs-predator

WHEN YOU THINK about it first-person shooters are pretty darn amazing: all-pervasive, all-conquering, and almost always excellent. There are some duffers, but most are far beyond average compared to when the first *Aliens vs Predator* game appeared... back when Atari and SEGA made consoles and *Doom* set the benchmark for FPS fun.

And it's in this arena of game design excellence that we await the arrival of a new *Aliens vs Predator*, a full 10 years since Rebellion last had a go at the best movie mash-up since *Godzilla* went Technicolor on a guy in a gorilla outfit.

Overlooked for the 2001 *Aliens versus Predator 2* in favour of Monolith

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Avoids prequel nonsense
- ✔ Fuses survival horror with action
- ✔ Trophy kills for added giggles
- ✔ Hints of multiplayer awesomeness
- ✗ You might shit yourself

the Oxford-based team have every right to consider the franchise as theirs. This is in spite of Hollywood going *Phantom Menace* on what was a serviceable premise in the time since Rebellion last pitted US Colonial Marines against the galaxy's most persistent stalkers.

THE PRODIGAL GAME

"It feels like the franchise is coming home in many ways," says Tim Jones, *AvP*'s project leader, who like many on the team was around, albeit in a more junior capacity, when the original PC game was being crafted.

"I joined Rebellion just as *AvP* was being finished up," adds lead designer Alex Moore.

"I played the title at university," chips in producer Paul Mackman, keen to establish his veteran credentials at the expense of arousing the suspicion that, being a student, it wasn't a legit copy he was addicted to. "I'm coming to it as much of a fan as a developer."

"I think that's true for all of us," interrupts Jones, pointing out that Rebellion have changed a lot since 1999. "Our passion for the *AvP* franchise has

never diminished. One way or another we've been working towards making this game for a very long time."

The three senior developers fail utterly at revealing any inner turmoil that might exist over how the *AvP* backstory has been developed in the time that it's been outside Rebellion's influence. However, there's the sense that the team are pleased to be going back to the source material that directly fed the Dark Horse comics, and Rebellion's own early game translations.

"I don't think it's fair to say that we're ignoring the *AvP* films," says Paul Mackman. "There's good stuff in there..." (true, the credits were particularly pleasing) "...but to be fair our primary

reference point, film-wise, is James Cameron's *Aliens*, Ridley Scott's *Alien* and also the original *Predator* movie. But we take inspiration from anywhere that's appropriate really."

Of all the movies, the underrated *Alien³* probably provides the better entry point for those keen to immerse themselves in the new game's timeline. This latest *AvP* is set roughly 200 years from now; 30 years on from the events on Fiorina 'Fury' 161 shown in *Alien³*; 20 before *AvP2* (movie) and 170 before the comical happenings in *Alien Resurrection*. Basically, you can be fairly certain that Ellen Ripley won't be making an appearance.

This time the setting is Freya's Prospect – a colony not unlike *Aliens'* Hadley's Hope,

ETA
EARLY
2010

"It feels like the franchise is coming home"

Tim Jones, *Aliens vs Predator* project leader

THE STORY SO FAR...
**ALIENS VS
PREDATOR**



JAGUAR? WHAT?
A rich kid at school got an Atari Jaguar and said *AvP* was good.

1995



PC VERSION
The proper version arrives. There is much celebrating.

1999



TAKEN ELSEWHERE
Monolith build on *AvP* with their own sequel.

2002



GOT THEIR GROOVE BACK
AvP returns to its spiritual home.

2009

Check out those dreadlock physics!



Aliens come from all directions, especially "directly above".



ALIENS THE RPG: RIP

What happened to the other *Aliens* games that were smudged and bleeps on the motion tracker of PC gaming? Well, the *Aliens* RPG has bitten the dust and melted through five separate floors at developer Obsidian's digs; while Gearbox's *Alien: Colonial Marines* has gone AWOL, presumably bumped into late 2010 or beyond by the more imminent release of *AvP*. With the added development time the latter will hopefully become a co-op barnstormer, but it's sad to see the *Aliens* RPG go. Beyond BioWare's *Mass Effect* there aren't many sci-fi RPGs – even if the concept art dug up from the game's grave does raise eyebrows: were they making an *Aliens* game, or a new *Gears of War*?



Not quite rock, paper, scissors. Unless rocks bleed acid and paper tears out spines.

which is on a planet bearing a slight resemblance to *Predator's* Guatemalan jungle setting. The doomed colonists have stumbled across a cache of alien eggs, each one a home to one of those oh-so insistent and creepy facehuggers.

The difference between the site of the eggs in the *Aliens* movie and this game, is that they are found in the apparent ruins of another alien civilisation – that of the Predators'. Obviously the colonists are soon host to the acid-blooded uglies, while the silenced airwaves attract the intervention of US Colonial Marines.

"The Company is still up to its

movies it was in establishing the early years of the Company and why it might have become so driven to 'build better worlds'. No doubt this *AvP* game will develop the theme that greed and profit have always been a bigger threat to humanity than any creature.

JUST ADD STORY

"Our brief for the original game was never narrative focused," says Jones, "but with this one it was absolutely one of our key goals for the game: to deliver a really rewarding and cinematic story that would make the most of the three perspectives that the game's campaigns

trouble.

The point is that we all know what each race is capable of, as well as their methods and technology, so where can we expect surprises to come from?

"I think it's fair to say that in a world where first-person military shooters are commonplace, this is really an opportunity for us to deliver fresh gameplay that most gamers won't have experienced," says Jones. In particular he's proud of the ability of the Predator to use his vision modes and leap around the environment in order to stalk prey and remain stealthy.

"The leap mechanic is unique to our version of *AvP* and that's really enabling for the player," says lead designer Alex Moore. "It's not something I've seen in very many first-person shooters at all."

Having seen this leap mechanic in action it appears to work by you seeking a green go-here area with the crosshair and pressing a button that will zip you across to that spot. That may not sound all that impressive, but since players playing the Predator will be able to launch onto vertical surfaces as well as the obvious horizontal



As a xenomorph your tail whip will be a lethal technique.

"We all know what each race is capable of so where can we expect surprises?"

nefarious ends," says Mackman, referring to Weyland-Yutani, the all-pervasive corporation that finances extra-solar expansion and is hell-bent on capturing specimens of alien life, regardless of the long-term risk to humanity, or short-term risk to its staff.

"They're still pursuing their weapons programme, which was established by Ash in the first film and Carter Burke in *Aliens*."

If there was good stuff in the *AvP*

will provide."

Regardless of what people recall from previous games in the series, most will be familiar with how the game's cast operates: the aliens have acid for blood, attack with tooth, tail and claw and are utterly relentless in their pursuit of flesh to press their drooling quartz teeth into; Predators skulk in the shadows and rattle their mandibles; while the Marines spit out pulse rounds and quotable lines at the first sign of



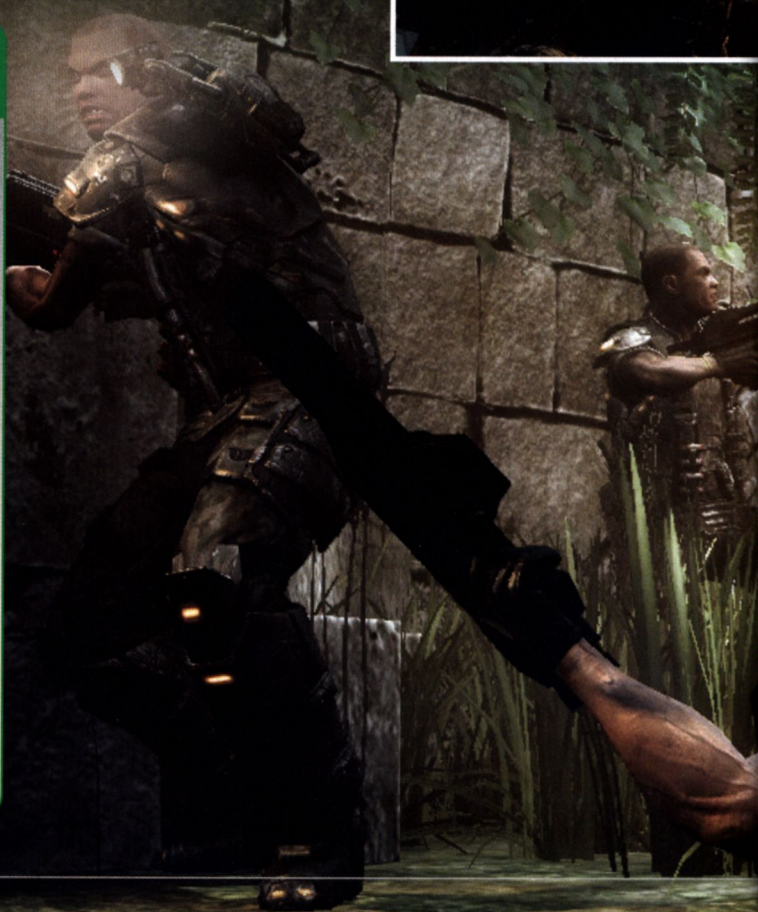
PLANET HOLLYWOOD

Predator does *Aliens* – Ripley might re-emerge



It seems even Hollywood has realised that the *Aliens vs Predator* movies were complete shit. News reaches us that Robert Rodriguez will be directing *Predators*, which appears to want to do for the original Arnie movie what *Aliens* did for *Alien*, only 20 years after the fact. Earth forces going after an extraterrestrial and invisible nuclear superpower is an interesting idea.

In related movie news, Sigourney Weaver, nearing 60, has expressed an interest in playing Ellen Ripley again. Given that the new *Alien* film is reputed to be a prequel, Ellen's mum might be the best she can hope for.



HUNTERS AND HUNTED

Who's packing what in *AvP*

MARINES

Your average United States Colonial Marine comes heavily armed. Besides their ballistic armor, they pack an M41A pulse rifle with an under-slung grenade launcher; the M56 – a massive machine gun that automatically tracks targets; and an M240 flamethrower able to kill aliens without the hassle of acidic blood spraying everywhere. Despite this, Marines rarely live to claim their dinner, let alone a pension.

PREDATORS

Creatures of tradition, the Predators tend to use remarkably low-tech weapons: wristblades, telescopic spears, spear guns, daggers, and net guns. The only high-tech gear they seem to carry are the shoulder-mounted plasma cannon (which is just cool), the smart disc (fantastic against aliens), and that nuclear bomb wristwatch.

ALIENS

The aliens don't use weapons of any kind. But then when you have skin that is really armor plating, blood that is molecular acid, hands that end in claws that punch through plate steel, and a tail that slices people in two, you don't need a gun.



The Predator's got a range of ultra-violent kill moves. What happens next?

Marines need to be separated before they can be taken out...



...which makes them a bit more deadly than mere alien fodder.



A TRIUMVIRATE OF DEATH

Will Porter reports on *AvP*'s E3 appearance

IN MANY WAYS you already know the score with the new *Aliens vs Predator* – it's essentially taking the much-loved PC model of years gone by and sprucing it up for the teenagers who weren't around at its beginning. This in itself is no bad thing, and the fact that it's being developed by Rebellion – the chaps who did the original Jaguar

version and subsequent PC follow-up (you know, the one that people actually played) – gives this game much respectability.

It's hard not to feel a pang of longing when you first see the Predator's gameplay – leaping cloaked from tree to tree, listening in on red/orange Colonial Marine blobs on the infrared HUD as they talk amongst themselves, and then warming up the old shoulder-mounted triangle-o-death plasma gun.

THE JUNGLIST

Playing as the ugly dreadlocked one is all about vertical gameplay – keeping your balance, and scanning the environment below you for enemy movement. The tree-top gymnastics are aided by a marker that you place on viable spots that then triggers your Predator to leap there.

Another enticing feature though is the ability to record the voices of people you listen in on – then later drawing soldiers out into ambushes by replaying the voices of their dead associates. It's a ploy that certainly worked on Arnie's gang.

As for the Colonial Marines, well you know what to expect: a misty,



As a marine, set up and maintain turrets to fend off alien attacks.

"There's little doubt *AvP* will be an absolute blinder"

metal-encased base with grids for floors and ceilings and all the pulse rifles, beeping motion trackers and screaming soldiers that Weyland-Yutani can provide. Oh, and the automated turrets from the director's cut of *Aliens* – the one people judge you over, should you not have seen it.

There's no doubt here, as you move between wounded Marines soldering doors and shoring up defences against an imminent onslaught that Rebellion

have nailed the feeling of tension – although whether it'll be ratcheted up to the levels seen in Monolith's *AvP2* is still unknown.

What's definite, however, is that when the aliens do put in an appearance their AI isn't lacking – they're always in different and unexpected spots and they're always noticeably hunting you down. You can pretty much guarantee that most of your Marine chums won't be making it through the night.

This said, if we're being over-cautious in extolling *AvP*'s virtues then there's a good reason – the last notable PC game Rebellion developed was *Shellshock 2: Blood Trails* (issue 206) which was truly an abomination: an indelible black mark in the history books of gaming.

With this in mind, if there's something to be feared other than acid-riddled xenomorphs then it's that mission objectives will seem a smidge bog-standard. Having to knock out a bunch of generators to gain access to a Marine base while playing as a Predator, for example, isn't a crime – but we've knocked out similar generators plentiful times before.

So while there's little doubt that the new *Aliens vs Predator* will be an absolute blinder, with the game's release so far away we're not going to tempt fate with rampant pre-ordering just yet... **PCZ**



Aliens are still as phallic as Geiger intended.



The myth that Predators cannot look up: busted.

ones, they'll also have to take into account their profile in relation to their prey, since even when cloaked a Predator isn't truly invisible.

"The Predator is about being in trees and monitoring the people below him, making sure that he picks the right moment to attack rather than just blundering in there like a tank," says Mackman. "It opens up all sorts of gameplay possibilities. We're taking those kinds of steps forward with the alien player as well."

MARINE SNACKS

As Jones is quick to add, regardless of what people will expect, and what their experiences are with other games in the series – "crawling on the walls and ceilings and hiding in the dark to pounce on your prey and then kill them in gruesome ways" – isn't an experience you're going to get from *Call of Duty*.

As for the Marine player, it's not about shooting guys behind cover. "You have to enter the darkness and find your foe as much as it finds you," says Mackman, hinting that the AI isn't simply concerned with overwhelming the player with numbers.

The xenomorphs may be relentless killing machines, but there are situations

where they'll know when to hold back. Likewise the Predator will likely use surprise and fall back into the shadows if overwhelmed. So although *AvP* is being designed as an FPS, survival horror and stealth is as much a focus of design as all-out action.

The Marine is clearly there to fulfil the action side of things, with his pulse rifle and under-slung grenade launcher, moving up to the smart gun and a trademark shotgun (handy for close encounters, obviously). It's those pesky shadows and his bleeping motion tracker that will help ladle on the tension.

For the aliens, the trick is to make use of all the surfaces, use the shadows, get in close and strike hard and fast.

"It's important for us to make sure that a single alien is a deadly threat to the player, because they are one of the scariest monsters in the universe," says Jones, highlighting a problem that has blighted many an *Aliens*-themed game in the past. "Even when you're up against two or three of them you're really in trouble, so the times when we really ramp it up and throw significant numbers of them at you, you're really going to have to be very tool-ed-up with weaponry to even stand a glimmer of a chance.

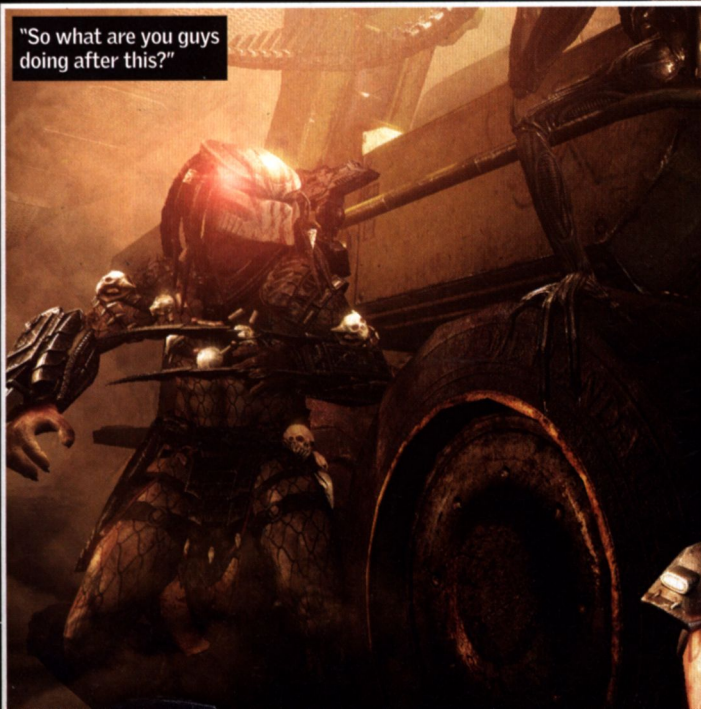
"I don't think players are going to be in any way disappointed with the number of enemies that they face at any one time. It's going to keep people on their



Aliens can turn off lights, the clever things.



"So what are you guys doing after this?"



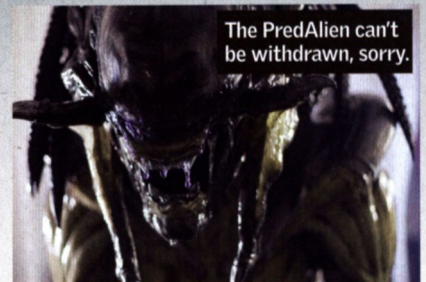
BROKEBACK HORIZON

You know you want to

There'll be no contradiction to any of the movies in *AvP*. In fact there appears to be an aim to create entry points for players, whether people are coming to the game directly from the original PC titles, from the recent movie abominations or any movie in general for that matter, whether it's *Event Horizon* or *Brokeback Mountain*.

"However you come to this title it will make sense to you and you should enjoy it," assures Mackman. "There should be something for everyone here. And that's our intention: to make something that meets a much wider audience."

The PredAlien can't be withdrawn, sorry.



Get too close to an exploding alien, and you'll catch a face full of acid blood.

"Hello, have you considered letting Jesus into your life?"

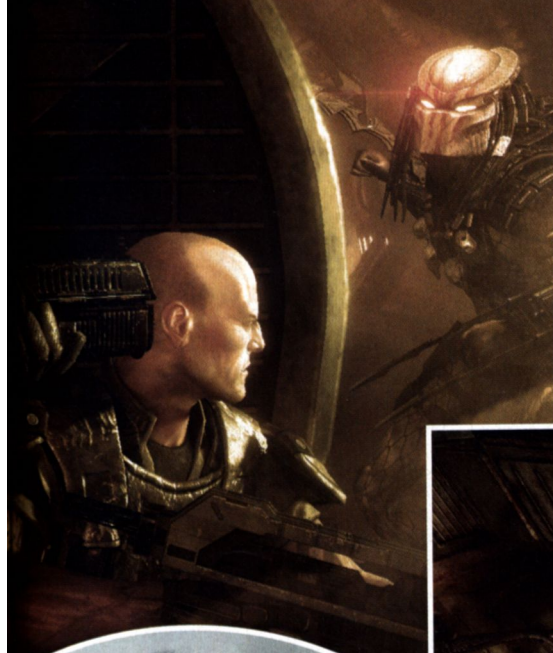
THREE'S CAMPAIGNY

All-new *Aliens vs Predator*, like its predecessors, will ship with three campaigns and three stories that will, we're told, make sense in their own right. "They interlock," says Paul Mackman, *AvP*'s producer, "so you as one species will be reacting to the actions of another species, in the same environment potentially. There are crossover moments, small and large, but you can enjoy each campaign and each story in an independent fashion, so while you could play one campaign and understand one story, playing all three will give you a full understanding of the narrative."




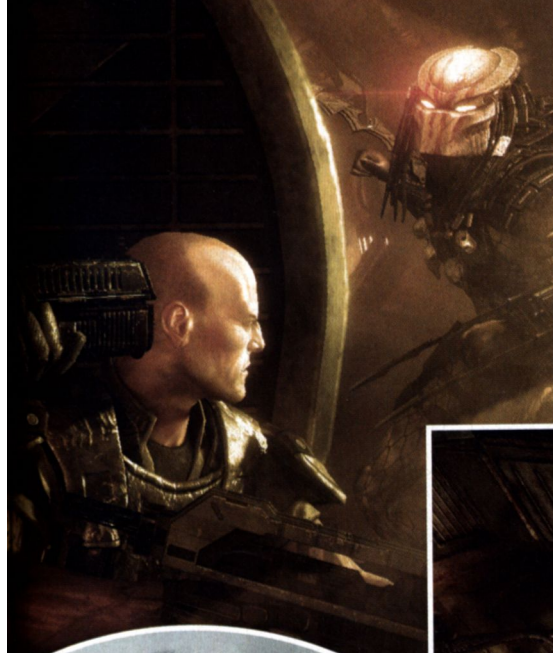
Monolith's *AvP2* offered a similar framework upon which the three main protagonists intertwined and affected the missions of the other. But for *Rebellion* this is new ground, and as they like to point out, it's been more than eight years since *AvP2*. The vast majority of gamers who'll be playing the new game will have minimal experience of those that preceded it. If *AvP2* was so well constructed, why not build on its foundation?

AvP2 is worth seeking out if you haven't played it.





"Safety in numbers has been the lesson we should all take away from the movies"



Predators can tear out aliens' inner jaws, which doesn't go down too well.

toes and make them terrified."

There will be times in the game when teamwork is an essential part of strategy.

Safety in numbers has been the lesson we should all take away from the movies (that, and, don't open the damn airlock), and while *AvP* isn't a squad-level game other characters you meet and fight alongside – regardless of which species you're playing as – will be there to offer respite from the sense of vulnerability that will play out.

"One of the key things we're trying to achieve with the game is that it feels very physical – that everything you do is fully connected with the world," explains Jones. "That helps us with making you feel vulnerable because you're not a disembodied game entity in the world. That ties into when you connect very physically with the characters right in front of you."

Such physicality is demonstrated by visceral nature of melee combat in the game. Previous games required only blind pummelling of the attack key when up close, whether you were swiping alien claws or a Predator's wrist blades. The new *AvP* will open up trophy kills if you put a decent sequence of blows together, or are about to make

a surprise attack. For the alien it might be the old pierce-and-lift tail manoeuvre, or a diagonal slice that carves a person in two parts. For the Predator it's the swift removal of the spinal column (although having seen it repeated four times in one brief play session, it's already becoming passé).

"The gore kill moments are really a pay-off that you have for successfully completing a series of melee attacks," says Paul Mackman. "We're offering a relatively simple but hopefully deep melee combat system, such that your success can be gauged on the kind of kill moves you can pull off."

LEAVE HIM, HE'S DEAD

The three-way battles that will identify the single-player side of *AvP* will be mirrored in the multiplayer. Of course Rebellion are in no mood to reveal anything specific about what gameplay modes to expect, only that, according to Jones, there will be a variety, "from the traditional, to ones that really make the most of the different species and the way they interact."

A full co-operative multiplayer campaign is on our wish list, but even just the traditional would do us fine, since it was Rebellion that did much to nail co-operative survival years before

Left 4 Dead was even thought of. Suggestions that Valve's zombie shooter might have stolen *AvP*'s thunder prompts a response that could be telling: "*L4D* takes the approach of a parody," says Mackman, "it's not a scary game as such. It's tense, but it's not the same kind of game as *AvP*. Yes it's co-operative, yes it's got a run-through area if you're comparing it to the original *AvP* but compared to what we're doing with multiplayer..." A-ha! "Well, we're not talking about that at this point. We're only saying that fans won't be disappointed."

Regardless of whether *L4D* is influencing the design of the multiplayer side of *AvP*, Rebellion are aware that although an endless parade of games have borrowed from *AvP* over the years, there are games that are paying back that influence in return. However, it's not any one title that is inspiring Rebellion to get this one game just right.

More than the template of the classic games in the *AvP* lineage, Rebellion are holding up the increasing levels of polish and accessibility that modern action games offer. Like us, Rebellion are of the opinion that today's FPS games are pretty amazing, and, like us, they want *Aliens vs Predator* to be counted among the very best. **PCZ**

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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

BANG!

TURNS OUT I have a rubbish superpower: the ability to, at will, make motherboards explode. It's just like that scene in *Bruce Almighty* where he walks down the street pointing at things, only much more specific and limited to a very particular kind of PC hardware.

It was something to do with screws and a basic property of electricity which everybody else implicitly understands, but I'm not aware of. It goes through metal now? Metal's not wires, electricity, you can't just be conducted through whatever you want. Some sort of chip self-immolation occurred in protest at all the electricity flying about, so I cheerfully asked Scan if I could have a replacement mobo.

They said yes, as I'd wisely opted for their "stupid twat" insurance, which covers damage in the event of people like me. Thanks Scan.

Steve Hogarty
Deputy 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...



Fallout 3 Left 4 Dead Empire: Total War



58 RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Get set for the inevitable *Hammer Time* jokes as we check out this open-world smash-it-up

THE PC ZONE BADGES



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.



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.



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



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

THE PC ZONE GAMING MACHINE

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



ALSO REVIEWED

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The arcade classic gets revamped. Will the effort be worth it?
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Starring Ramis, Aykroyd, Murray, and that black guy no-one remembers.
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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

Wrecking Crew provides offline, turn-based multiplayer destruction.



RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

"I want to be your sledgehammer," sings *Steve Hogarty*

DEVELOPER Volition
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE redfaction.com
ETA 11 September
PRICE £34.99

BREAKING THINGS IS fantastic fun. There's a place you can go (in America, would you believe) where they let you write words like "wife", "mortgage" and "lifetime of guilt" on crockery before flinging it at a wall. It exists because destruction on any scale is cathartic, spectacular and satisfying. That's why we have vandalism, and that's also why a man threw a brick at your window last Tuesday. He no doubt found it thrilling, and the fact you couldn't just enjoy the

sound of smashing glass waking you at 3am says more about your joyless personality than it does about the fun-loving, masonry-tossing man.

Up until now, games have struggled to properly emulate large-scale building destruction in a believable way, and then go on to marry that sort of technology with a proper game. *Red Faction: Guerrilla* can claim to have done that. And though the free-roaming, mission-based side of things has its downsides, the technology Volition have managed to

cram into their engine is honestly groundbreaking. Although, ironically this is the first game in the *Red Faction* series in which the ground itself isn't breakable. Instead, everything else is.

Mars has been terraformed, and despite the harsh weather and wild variations in atmospheric conditions (dusty bits, grassy bits, snowy bits, all conveniently demarcating the game world's zones), everything the colonists have put up appears to be built of sponge cake and Styrofoam.

If it's not part of the terrain, you can take your sledgehammer to it and reduce it to rubble. Right clicks carry out vertical swings, left clicks handle the horizontal swipes, together they allow for an almost surgical level of control when destroying the Martian scenery.

Remove lower walls and the upper levels will come thundering down to the dusty red dirt, or carefully dismantle one end of a bridge and the weakened

AT A GLANCE...

The *Red Faction* series turns its attention away from holes in the floor and to levelling buildings. An incredible spectacle.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo or AMD Athlon X2 CPU, 1GB RAM and an GeForce 7600 or Radeon X1300 graphics card (Shader Model 3.0 required).

HOW IT STACKS

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA **73%**

RED FACTION **73%**

RED FACTION 2 **56%**



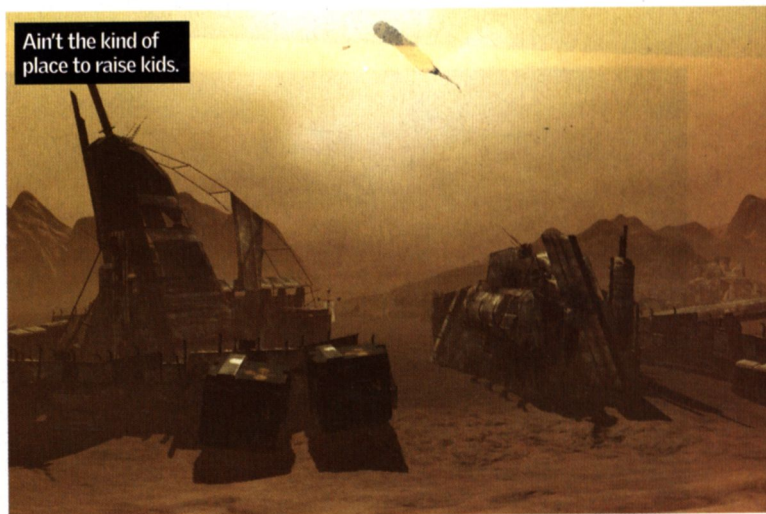
Regular guns feature too, but you won't want to use them.



"Act cool, pretend you don't care..."



Red and pink are strong themes in this game.



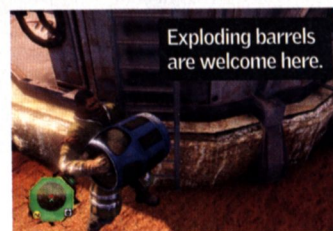
Ain't the kind of place to raise kids.

"Everything appears to be built of sponge cake and Styrofoam"

The vehicle bits can get a bit insane.



"I hate buildings."



Exploding barrels are welcome here.



Mars is pretty red.

structure will no longer take the weight of a vehicle attempting to cross it.

DEMOLITION MAN

The physics engine is constantly toiling away in an effort to determine exactly when a building should stop being upright, and in cases where it needs a second or two to figure out all the weights and masses and torques involved, it covers for its delay by having the screen shake and the entire structure emit a pained, clunking groan.

And when buildings do decide to topple, they look and feel just as they should. They might come apart like Ritz Crackers beneath your hammer, but they come down like the tonnes of concrete they are, the deafening sounds and billowing smoke nailing the feeling

that, yes, you have just wrecked something good and proper.

And that's terribly impressive. Much of the game is built around this clever technology, with many of *Red Faction's* weapons purposefully designed to wreck things – such as the sticky bombs which can be detonated simultaneously for a controlled demolition, or the as-unimpressive-as-it-sounds magic gun that simply melts away parts of the scenery in a yellow fizz.

Rocket launchers deliver a means of completing many missions from afar, while the more staid portion of your armoury – the pistols, rifles and shotguns – are reserved for seeing off the Earth Defense Force troops who will doggedly pester you throughout your time on Mars.



The EDF are the antagonists, the heavy-handed off-worlders who've driven the miners of Mars to rebellion. Your antics as part of the Red Faction affect their control over the game's six areas, as well as the morale of the Martian population. Ostensibly, EDF killing sprees and the destruction of their propaganda increases morale. This

in turn increases the chances of rebels joining you in fights against the EDF, while accidentally running over civilians rolls back the mileage on your morale-o-meter.

Destroying EDF buildings and carrying out missions for the rebels decreases EDF influence in that area. Once they've lost



Hostage missions require you don't demolish buildings.



The cover system works around holes you create.



"If you're caught without a vehicle for sanctuary you're dead"



"Who made this mess? Was it you there, the man with the giant hammer?"

control, a final rebel mission punts the storyline into the next area of Mars, and the process continues unabated.

The open-world slant means you'll be hijacking improbable looking sci-fi motors to get to your objectives, the routes to which are highlighted by a pleasing trail of yellow arrows along the road. The reduced gravity of the setting (38% that of Earth, space fans) coupled with the binary input of your keyboard's A and D keys will conspire to ruin the driving experience time and time again. Even on a pad the vehicles feel punishingly flimsy, with some criminally unavoidable driving sections serving only to infuriate.

And that's just the tip of a pile of problems *Red Faction: Guerrilla* has hidden behind its technological destructo-tricks. Separately these

problems are niggling, but on many occasion a mission will draw all of *Red Faction: Guerrilla's* foibles into one hideous celebration of wrongness.

The enemy AI is at times atrocious, and once the alert system (itself a baffling work of nonsense) decides you've aggrieved the EDF sufficiently it will send endless numbers of soldiers after you, spawning them from wherever it pleases. From behind rocks, underneath cars, hatching out of eggs and popping up out of books – if you're caught without a vehicle for sanctuary you're as good as dead.

DUMB COPS

Even worse, enemies in vehicles will do their utmost to bring about your death swiftly. Where other open-world games force the enemy to stop their cars, get out and fire at you from a distance, *Red Faction: Guerrilla's* bunch will more often than not attempt to park on your face. By the time multiple cars begin to literally pile on top of you, the lunacy of the AI will have you gritting your teeth in frustration.

Gun combat generally feels unsubstantial too, especially in contrast to the building-ruining hammers and bridge-leveling explosives.

With the driving and the shooting feeling as wonky as they do, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* might appear to be not much more than an impressive physics engine plastered around a hollow game, but redeeming factors come at you thick and fast.

The smaller, optional missions dotted about the game world are often incredibly inventive, in particular the ones which ask you to destroy a certain structure within a time limit, given limited ammunition. Some of these are puzzles in themselves, giving you, for example, one explosive barrel and two pistol rounds and tasking you with

Place satchel charges if you want to get technical.



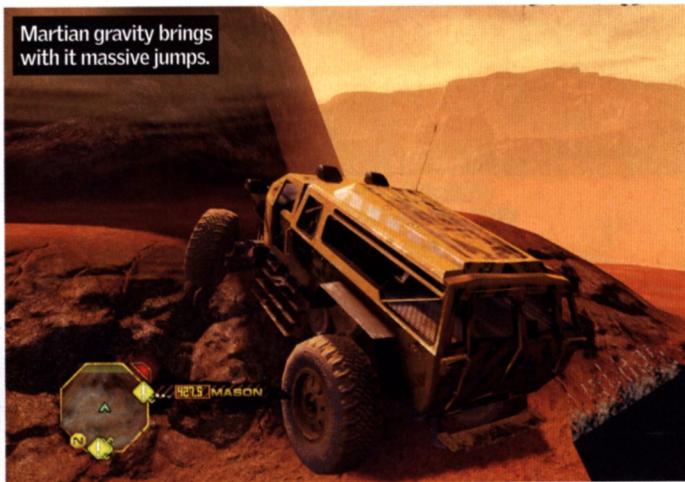
MECHS APPEAL

Many stompy robots make light work

As with any futuristic sci-fi, heavy lifting isn't carried out by the far more functional, but marginally less awesome forklifts, but instead everybody gets a mech-suit capable of turning them into a one man army. *Red Faction: Guerrilla's* no exception – its various walking tanks can not only launch missiles and swipe at enemy vehicles, they can walk through entire buildings unhindered, leaving a comedy mech shape in the walls they pass through. It's a wonder anybody could actually get any work done from inside one of these things.



Martian gravity brings with it massive jumps.



demolishing an entire tower. (The trick, if you're interested, is to chuck the barrel skywards and shoot it in the air, taking out the tower's weaker mid-section. Clever stuff.)

Elsewhere, the multiplayer segment plays to the game's destructive strengths. In typical team deathmatches, classes are defined by wearable backpacks you pick up on the map, giving you specific abilities – such as the one that allows you to sprint through buildings, Juggernaut style. Various other game modes see teams attempting to prevent opponents from destroying key buildings, or capture

the flag in drastically changing, destructible maps. Removed from the AI and vehicle issues of the single-player game, and focusing on exactly what makes the game interesting, *Red Faction: Guerrilla's* multiplayer facet is perhaps the most enjoyable and unique online experiences we've had in months.

Back in single-player town, while *Red Faction: Guerrilla* regularly frustrates you'll find yourself inexorably drawn back to it. Wrecking things is not only satisfying, but addictive too, and the erosion of EDF control through the destruction of their property provides an



EDF cars have turrets, handily.



PCZONE

GRAPHICS Best Mars since *Doom 3*

SOUND Audible architecture

MULTIPLAYER Brilliant stuff, lots of modes

- ✓ Smashy smashy
- ✓ Incredible physics engine
- ✓ Explosive, relentless fun
- ✓ Clever morale/control system
- ✗ AI will frustrate
- ✗ Some definite one-trick-ponyitis

73

Manilla Guerrilla

ample sense of progress throughout the game, allowing you some freedom from the rigidity of the plot's missions.

The best moments you'll have in *Red Faction: Guerrilla* are those the developers haven't engineered for you, and the physics engine, even after hours of play, never ceases to impress. While the underlying game is lacking in some regards – in particular, I haven't come across any *Total Recall* references – the joy of breaking things apart with giant hammers really is enough to prop up any amount of dull shooting. A lack of triple-breasted ladies be damned. **PCZ**

BIONIC COMMANDO

Chris Pickering heads out swinging. Er...

DEVELOPER GRIN
 PUBLISHER CapCom
 WEBSITE bioniccommando.com
 ETA Out now
 PRICE £29.99

THE ORIGINAL *BIONIC Commando* was, and remains, bloody brilliant. It's a piece of 2D platforming magnificence, with a chap packing an extendable appendage (his arm) that may have been as tough as old boots that've been swimming in crude oil for the last year and a half, but there's no denying it was a cruelly overlooked gem. One that glowed brightly too.

ARMED ASSAULT

This long-awaited sequel dispenses with, well, very little that made the original so fantabbydosey. Remaining is a chap who has the ridiculous ability to attach a long grappling hook arm thing to far-in-the-distance objects. As is the rock bloody hard difficult level.

In the modern gaming world of tightly packed shop shelves, and obsessions with immediate excitement, *Bionic Commando* flies in the face of the trend by offering up one of the drabest looking and ridiculously tedious opening sections witnessed anywhere since I fell asleep attempting to watch an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

This isn't necessarily a horrifically bad start to proceedings. It's just so boring in comparison to the rest of the game. You're sadly not packing the extendable limb, which leaves you slowly meandering through identikit



"Come quietly, and you won't be 'armed.'"

corridors, blasting away idiotic enemies with what sounds like a pea shooter. Thankfully the game comes to life once you're out in the game world.

Once you're a fully fledged swinger, after a brief piece of tediously dull storytelling involving the government being arses, things start to get good. Flinging yourself around the landscape is a breeze with a handy little icon displaying exactly where your arm will attach. And it's all coloured according to whether your appendage can reach its desired target or not.



"Don't mind him. He's 'armless.'"

AT A GLANCE...

A wild swing-a-thon, that remains rock hard, niggly, and tough as a day old steak.

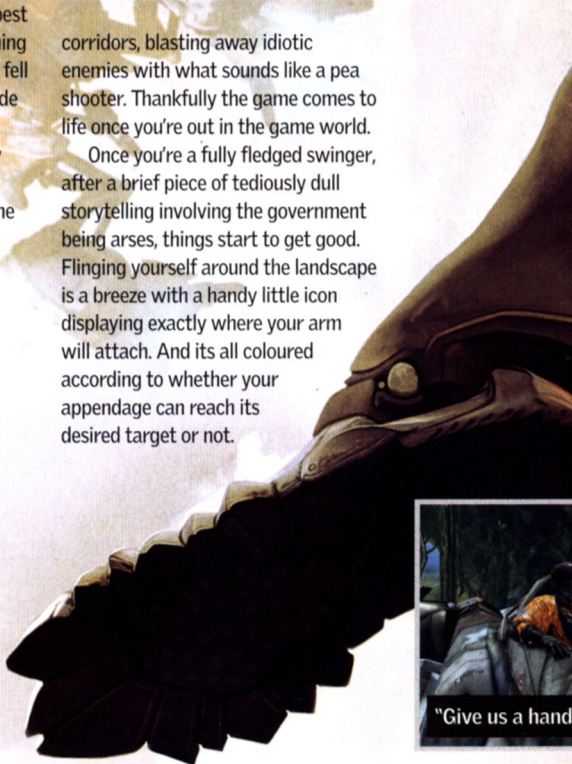
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), and a GeForce 6600GTI.

HOW IT STACKS

ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA **87%**

MIRROR'S EDGE **71%**

BIONIC COMMANDO **68%**



"Give us a hand."



"High-five!"

REARMED

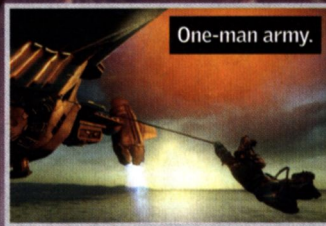
Released last year, *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* was another of those remakes of an arcade classic that splits the gaming community. While it stuck true to the original's credentials and style, and attained all kinds of brilliantly high review scores and sales figures, those not particularly au fait with the series criticised the lack of difficulty curve – the game was rock solid right from the get go – and that the game that wasn't up to the modern standards. Still, it's great fun and well worth the bargain price it sells for.

The King of the Swingers.

Arm-ageddon.



One-man army.



"The sound of one-hand clapping."



Attach and you've two choices: you can go Spider-Man and use your momentum to toss your body from point to point, hopefully getting enough inertia to reach the next platform. This is all fine until you realise that since the coloured icon doesn't change until you're already drifting towards your chosen target that your total deaths will spiral upwards.

So you'll find that attaching and zipping yourself up to the attached

ledge is the way to go. Which leaves progression slower and less exciting, but thankfully lacking in 1,000 deaths. Especially as a fall into water is almost guaranteed death. Unless your fingers are swifter than a pickpocket during

"Bionic Commando offers up one of the drabest looking and tedious opening sections witnessed anywhere"

the Christmas shopping crush in the London Underground.

That said regular deaths will still be a regular occurrence for even the most hardened of platforming fan. The game's hefty difficulty setting, when coming up against the variety of enemies on offer, means that any force consisting of more than a pair of human opponents will always be a tricky prospect. Particularly as your initial weapon – the one that sounds like a pea shooter – doesn't even pack the ability to injure that toy offers. And head shots are nearly impossible to make. It's possible the crapness of the firearm is to force you to throw enemies around with your bionic arm. (Which is immense fun incidentally.)

The mediocrity continues with the technical achievements. Or lack of. Loading screens crop up too often, and they linger just those few seconds longer than you can truly cope with. Which could sort of be understandable if this was a *GTA*-esque style huge game world that we're getting to explore.

But the truth is that this is just as rigidly structured as most story-centric gaming offerings. Though appearances seem to hint towards a good chunk of exploration, none is allowed here. GRIN have done an excellent job at using the story to restrict your movement down a continuously narrow path which can't help but feel like a massively missed opportunity.

And that's what *Bionic Commando* is: instead of a series brought bang up-to-date with brand new features combined with good old fashioned '80s gaming brilliance, we have a decent enough title packing enough flaws to leave a pretty hollow feeling in the end. A bit like swinging. **PCZ**

PCZONE

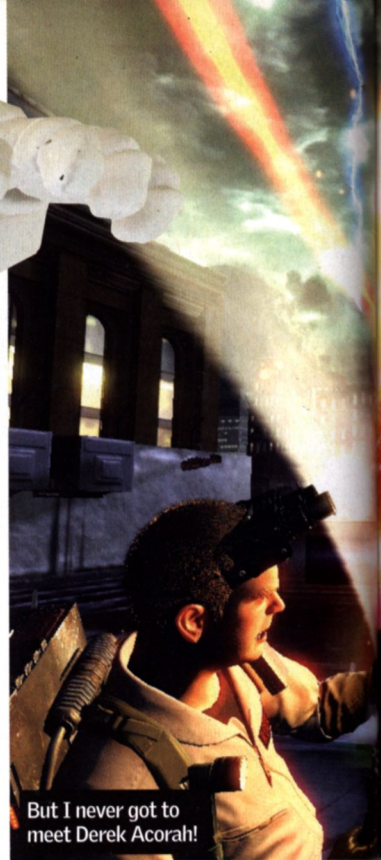
GRAPHICS Swings between stunning and minging
SOUND Lacks any real meat
MULTIPLAYER Same old stuff

- ✓ Grappling hook
- ✓ Real classic stuff
- ✓ Swinging mechanic works...
- ✗ ...sometimes
- ✗ Still frustratingly hard
- ✗ Dull weapons

68

Go commando

Ohhhhh shit.



But I never got to meet Derek Acorah!

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEOGAME

Who you gonna call? Not *Chris Capel*, that's for sure

DEVELOPER Terminal Reality
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE ghostbustersgame.com
ETA 30 November
PRICE £24.99



Disgusting blob...

GHOSTBUSTERS MEANS A lot to me. I loved the first film. The second is the first film I remember seeing at a cinema. I collected the toys and watched the cartoon all the time. So when Terminal Reality said they were making a game with the original cast, with a script by Dan Ackroyd and Harold Ramis – who wrote both films – that was basically *Ghostbusters 3*, my Geek Containment Unit exploded.

Then it was delayed. Twice. While our US cousins have every version of the game, here it's still only out on PlayStation. But that can't stop us intrepid PC owners from getting it! We'll never be suppressed, so long as we have online stores! However, is this game worth paying import tax for?

For fans like me, yes it is. If you really dislike the *Ghostbusters* films then this game won't sway you. This is unashamed fan service all the way. The first thing you do is slide down the fire pole and hunt Slimer (that's not a euphemism). For Gozer's sake, you hunt the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man on the second level!

Who's you? In a disappointing move, we don't get to play any of the original

Ghostbusters. No, not even Louis Tully. Instead you're a nameless, voiceless "experimental dangerous equipment technician". This basically means that the main crew banter while you walk along and listen to them, which is fine by me.

MUTE WITNESS

Venkman explains the rookie's lack of a name by saying, "We shouldn't get attached to this one, not after what happened to the last guy."

The best thing about *Ghostbusters* is undeniably its script. It's just as funny as the films, with a genuinely interesting plot and wonderful banter between the team members.

The voice acting is pretty good – as it damn well should be: the four *Ghostbusters*, jaded receptionist Janine, and asshole Walter Peck are all played by the original actors and they slip back into their roles fine. Dan Ackroyd bubbles with enthusiasm as Ray, although Harold

AT A GLANCE...

Ghostbusters 3 in over-the-shoulder shooter form. A big treat for fans, but the gameplay is repetitious and lacks online play.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Intel Core 2 Duo E4300 or AMD Athlon X2 +3800, 2GB RAM, and an Radeon X1800 or GeForce 8400 512MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

GEARS OF WAR **90%**

DEAD SPACE **81%**

GHOSTBUSTERS **70%**



GET HER!



GHOSTBUSTED

We ain't afraid of no multiplayer

For some baffling reason, the PC version contains no online component. This is even more unacceptable as a different company (Threewave) was responsible for making it, so they weren't exactly over-stretched.

Threewave have claimed that they "couldn't" do all versions with multiplayer simultaneously with the resources that we

had available - there was simply too much to do." But the game was basically finished last October.

If you couldn't port a simple online component in eight months to the system that invented the idea in the first place, then what were the hell were you doing Threewave? Pretending to be 3D Realms?



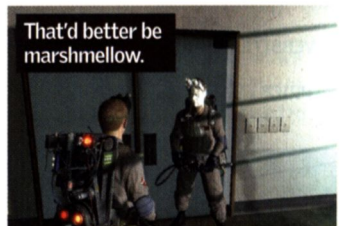
Want to play as these guys? Tough.



Any else feel hungry?



Listen! Can you smell something?



That'd better be marshmallow.

Ramis (Egon) and Bill Murray (you know full well) do sound tired. Their characters were bored in the film anyway, so it's not really that noticeable.

The game itself, however, is sadly more hit-and-miss. It's an over-the-shoulder third-person shooter with a heads-down sprinting method ripped off from *Gears of War*, although there's no automated cover system (hooray).

There are four "weapons" - settings on the proton pack - each with a radically different alt-fire mode, and all of the ghosts you face have a weakness to a particular mode. These can be found out by scanning them with the PKE Meter in first-person, learning their

amusing histories and also hunting down hidden haunted items along the way.

The attention to detail is great. Cool little animations on the proton pack, Venkman swaggering as he walks, not to mention the atmosphere. The movies were comedies but still had creepy moments, and the game gets this right. There are plenty of occasions that remind you that Terminal Reality made *Nocturne*.

Unfortunately, while snaring ghosts and steering them into traps remains great fun, too much of the game is spent simply shooting animated objects, like statues, books and marshmallows. While the early battle against Stay Puft is superb (climbing a tall building while he

batters the side, then rappelling down from the roof to blast him) you never do anything as imaginative ever again.

DEFLATED

Terminal Reality does a good job of disguising the repetition with variations in locations and ghosts, and fans will be blinded by *Ghostbusters-y*-ness of the game, but *Ghostbusters: The Videogame* lacks variety. Still, it would have got an award if the multiplayer was present (see *Ghostbusted*). If it wasn't for this, the PC edition would be the best, as the mouse and keyboard controls are perfect.

The lack of variety and blatantly missing extras should cause some consternation when hovering your mouse over your chosen import website's checkout button though - exactly how good does bustin' make you feel? **PCZ**

"In a disappointing move, we don't get to play any of the Ghostbusters"

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Nicely done
SOUND The original cast
MULTIPLAYER None, for pathetic reasons

- ✓ **Ghostbusters!** With the original cast!
- ✓ Great attention to detail
- ✓ **Good fun catching ghosts, but...**
- ✗ ...it's very repetitive
- ✗ **Little replay value**
- ✗ No online component for PC





Assaults by Victoria Beckham clones are no laughing matter.

Picked up energy vial
Picked up Experience

TRINE

David Brown must trine harder to think of good puns

DEVELOPER Frozenbyte
PUBLISHER Nobilis
WEBSITE trine-thegame.com/site
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99 (£19.99 on Steam)



"Easy... easy..."

AT A GLANCE...

Three heroes with varying abilities negotiate a perilous platforming obstacle course of a fantasy land in search of their salvation.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB Vista), and a Radeon X800 or GeForce 6800 or better.

HOW IT STACKS

LOST VIKINGS 80%

PRINCE OF PERSIA 75%

TRINE 72%

A WIZARD THAT looks like Gandalf, an athletic lady thief that doesn't look at all like Gandalf, and a metal-clad warrior with a big sword and a shield who looks more like Gimli than Aragorn. These are the three characters you get to control as you hop, skip and jump through level after level of 2D fantasy platformers. Or, rather, you'll actually only control one character at a time, being as the three mentioned above have been magically glued together by a strange, mystical object – the titular Trine.

The plot is a bit throwaway, so we won't dwell on it too much. Ancient objects, dungeons, undead roaming the land etc. That's it all covered. The core, crux and distended belly of the game is the jumping and, on the whole, Frozenbyte have done really well indeed in producing a solid puzzle/platformer.

Each character has special abilities, with more collected from conveniently placed chests as you progress. The warrior can lift heavy things and smash things with a sword, while the thief can fire her bow to kill distant skeletons and use a grappling hook-type thing to swing between wooden surfaces. Lastly, the wizard has the ability to conjure cubes, planks and other debris

to aid progress.

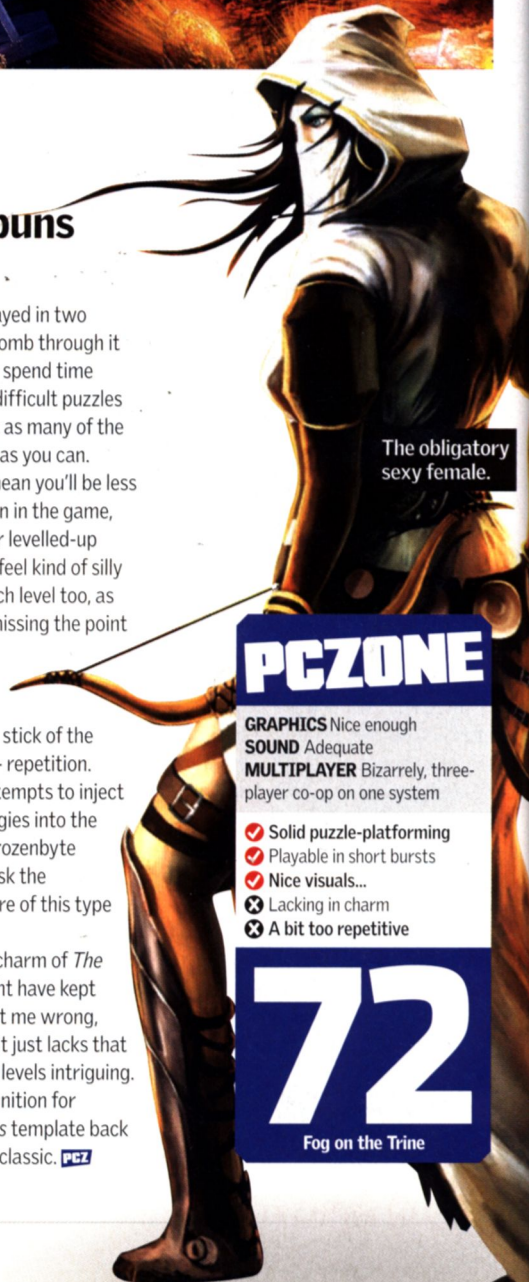
Each level can be played in two distinct ways – either bomb through it just to get to the end or spend time appreciating the more difficult puzzles on offer, so as to collect as many of the green 'experience vials' as you can.

This will obviously mean you'll be less likely to struggle later on in the game, what with your superior levelled-up abilities and all. It does feel kind of silly just rushing through each level too, as you feel you're kind of missing the point of the game.

However, taking your time will lead you fully into the sharpened stick of the game's major problem – repetition. Despite the laudable attempts to inject new abilities and strategies into the game and its puzzles, Frozenbyte haven't managed to mask the inherent repetitive nature of this type of puzzle game.

Also *Trine* lacks the charm of *The Lost Vikings*, which might have kept you interested. Don't get me wrong, it's a really good game, it just lacks that little something to keep levels intriguing.

Trine deserves recognition for bringing the *Lost Vikings* template back to our PCs, but it isn't a classic. **PCZ**



The obligatory sexy female.

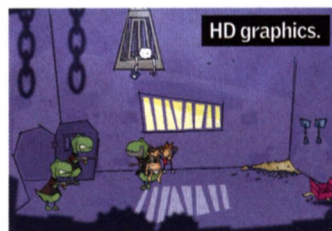
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Nice enough
SOUND Adequate
MULTIPLAYER Bizarrely, three-player co-op on one system

- ✓ Solid puzzle-platforming
- ✓ Playable in short bursts
- ✓ Nice visuals...
- ✗ Lacking in charm
- ✗ A bit too repetitive

72

Fog on the Trine



TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!

Marco Fiori confronts Hitler over a coat hanger

DEVELOPER Zombie Cow Studios
PUBLISHER Zombie Cow Studios
WEBSITE zombie-cow.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £2.99



AT A GLANCE...

No-one's safe in this time-warping adventure romp through the absolutely ridiculous.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Anything post-abacus.

HOW IT STACKS

| | |
|--|-----|
| SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION | 91% |
| TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE! | 90% |
| THE HARRY BOYS: THE HIDDEN THEFT | 22% |

HAVE YOU EVER wondered what the shape of AIDS is? No? Well you needn't worry as *Time Gentlemen, Please!* provides you with the answer anyway. If you think that's a peculiar situation to find yourself in, then this game isn't for you. In fact, if you're the kind of person who lives in a steel-plated vault to avoid the evils of the world, *TGP!* is probably akin to playing through the *Satanic Bible*.

We don't mean that in a *Manhunt!* *Daily Mail*-abhorrence kind of way, but more in a *Mock The Week* way. The lack of principles is something the developers are fully aware of, and they continually drag up the dregs of decency in the name of humour, until all that's left are the shredded remains of your morality. And then they take a dump on them. It's one of the most outrageous games I've ever played and for that alone I love it.

Where else could you have a game that revolves around a pair of time-travelling idiots who come up against Hitler and his Nazi Robot Dinosaur army. Instead of red and black swastikas, there are coat hangers adorning '40s Europe, as National Socialism is thrown out the window. It seems Adolf's quest for genocide was nothing compared to the search for a golden coat hanger.

The game is absolutely barking mad, but eventually there reaches a point where crazy becomes unquestionable genius. Being an indie title, it means there isn't any publisher censorship. It's allowed the guys to let their imagination run wild. You can expect toilet humour aplenty as jokes concerning erections, poo and racial stereotypes – there's even a racism meter that can be adjusted in the options – are driven home on a minute-by-minute basis.

Low-brow hilarity is the only thing present – popular culture is taken advantage of as *Star Wars*, *Back to the Future* and British TV find themselves exploited for your benefit. Combine that with self-referential quips and you'll find it difficult to keep a straight face. Oh, and if that wasn't enough, it's got old men being shot in the cock.

Terminator-style complexities aside, *TGP!*'s gameplay is generally on the ball, even if its narrative is jumping through time on a drug-fuelled trip. It's your archetypal adventuring affair; you combine a variety of items to get past whatever is standing in your way. As with any logic-based game, the problem solving favours those with a keen eye for detail. Occasionally the game's puzzles could have benefited from more signposting, but on the whole, as long as

you're not nursing a hangover, you'll be able to work out what goes where.

It's all brought together with a minimalist design – the hand-drawn looks bringing the humour to life. At only £2.99, you'd be hard-pressed to ask for more. From a friendly robot professor called PAL to a clown who makes obscene sex balloons, if you connect with the game's humour, you'll be in adventuring heaven. If not, return to your prudish life, heathen! **PCZ**



GRAPHICS Intentionally crude
SOUND Subtle
MULTIPLAYER No

- ✓ As cheap as a pint
- ✓ Popular culture overload
- ✓ Cock jokes
- ✗ Enjoying it, go to Hell
- ✗ Pretty difficult



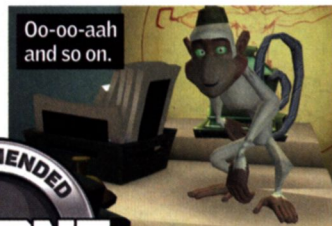


Guybrush: the master of awkward social situations.



The Voodoo Lady returns once again.

him in the Jerkbit Islands. Take this locker to him, and tell him I vouched for your character.



Oo-oo-aaah and so on.



Embarrassing.

TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND - LAUNCH OF THE SCREAMING NARWHAL

David Brown nervously readies his clicking finger

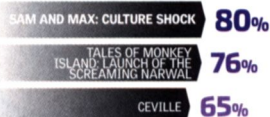
DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/monkeyisland
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99 (episodes can't be bought individually)

AT A GLANCE...

After a long wait we're finally setting sail again for the Caribbean in the company of Guybrush, LeChuck and friends.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS



ONE OF THE most difficult things in the whole game development industry to revisit a game so revered and beloved by fans and try to make a new version that not only meets expectations, but forges its own path as well. That is what Telltale have attempted (again – they have, of course, experience from dealing with the *Sam & Max* games) with this new and eagerly anticipated visit to *Monkey Island*. While nobody expects anything to match the sheer glory of the first two games, hopes were still very, very high. And, of course, they haven't been met.

Certainly my first impression was "Uh-oh..." when I first got into the game. I really didn't like the look of Guybrush or LeChuck, neither was I fond of the new interface or the fact the camera was far too close in for effective surveying of the scenery. Plus, you start out onboard a ship, which is rocking up and down on the choppy seas. Nothing wrong with that, except that it means your mouse pointer is constantly moving about. It doesn't make things difficult, but a misplaced click is very easily attained. Consider this is meant to be

the tutorial, where you learn about the interface, the decision to make the screen shake about is a curious one.

Neither did things get any better when you find yourself on Flotsam Island, the location for this first episode. There are only two locations you can enter and some of the characters are uninspired, with the decision to re-use more than one of the character models a number of times being particularly ill-advised. I didn't connect with any of the other characters really, and the whole Porcelain Pirate bit was embarrassing.

However, Dominic Armato is back as Guybrush and this makes so much difference. While you might skip some dialogue from the supporting cast, you'll never be doing that with Guybrush. Even his character model grew on me as I progressed. The introduction of an old favourite about halfway through helped things too.

Puzzles-wise, things are pleasingly *Monkey*. If you fail to spot an item, it can become a grating experience, like any adventure game, but 90% of the time you'll be sure about what you have to do. There's also a clever twist on the familiar map puzzle routine as well.

While it's no classic, every *Monkey Island* fan should be playing this. It feels more like an introduction to what we hope will be the full feast in later episodes, and as this one got better after a less-than-encouraging start, we can't wait to see what comes next. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Some locations too sparse
SOUND Excellent to average
MULTIPLAYER Does not compute

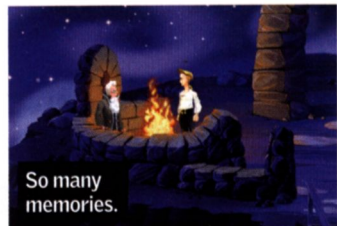
- ✓ Guybrush is back!
- ✓ Gets better as it goes on
- ✓ Nearly all puzzles are good
- ✓ Sets up the next episodes
- ✗ Initially worrying
- ✗ Some visually boring locations

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A prelude to greatness?



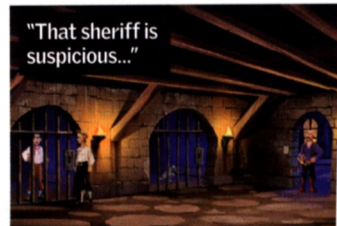
The word "unfair" springs to mind.



So many memories.



"Ah, skeleton, we meet again."



"That sheriff is suspicious..."



"Plunder bunny!"

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION

David Brown desperately needs more superlatives

DEVELOPER LucasArts
PUBLISHER LucasArts
WEBSITE lucasarts.com/games/monkeyisland
ETA Out now
PRICE TBC



AT A GLANCE...

One of the best games ever released on the PC just got a lovely facial (in the graphics sense, you dirty people).

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Pentium 4 3GHz or AMD Athlon 64 3000+, 256 MB RAM (512 MB for Vista), and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

| | |
|--|-----|
| THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND | 92% |
| THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND: SPECIAL EDITION | 91% |
| ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND | 82% |

SERIOUSLY, HOW CAN I review this game without descending into a fanboy gush-fest of embarrassing proportions? I'll give it a go, but bear with me if I get a bit carried away at certain points.

The *Monkey Island* series was where it all began for me on the PC. *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* was the first PC game I ever played and, when you consider how many amazing, genre-redefining games have been released over the years, it's something that it still remains, without doubt, my favourite game of all time (OK, maybe *Doom* edges it out, but it's damn close). The first game was equally as superb – if not better – but whatever your own particular persuasion, the fact is that they are both at the very peak of the game development summit.

So now we've got the remake – the same *Monkey Island* we all know and love in a new suit, tarted up and given funky water effects on the first screen. Everything else is identical, barring miniscule tweaks that only the absolutely dedicated will notice (for example, the chef in the SCUMM Bar doesn't interrupt your sneaking when

you enter his kitchen surreptitiously). The interface is different as well, which is perhaps the only real stumbling block in this digital refurbishing. Maybe the voices too, but that's down to how you imagined each character speaking.

The wit and humour, the devilish puzzles and the extraordinary characters are all still there, fleshed out both visually and sonically.

The *Special Edition* is as close to perfect as I could have imagined. However, as I said earlier, the fly in the ointment is the new control system. It doesn't always work and you sometimes end up using the keyboard shortcuts to make sure you use the right action. The hiding of the SCUMM interface also takes away a little bit of the silly action/object combination, so you have to be deliberate with your "Open LeChuck" or "Push Herman Toothrot" commands if you want to hear some of the hidden gags. Press V though and the list does come up in some form. You can also morph from the new version back to the original if you so wish, which is cool.

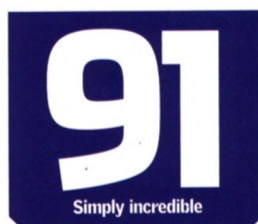
If you've never played *Secret of Monkey Island*, this is the perfect opportunity to try out one of the best

games of all time. If you're a veteran, this is the perfect opportunity to remind yourself of why you fell in love with games in the first place. Get it right now and maybe we'll be seeing *Monkey Island 2* spruced up this time next year. We can only hope. **PCZ**



GRAPHICS Guybrush's hair is odd, but otherwise great
SOUND Great voices
MULTIPLAYER Sadly, no insult sword fighting

- ✓ One of the best games ever
- ✓ New graphics and sound
- ✓ Sublime gameplay
- ✓ Extraordinary writing
- ✗ Controls a little finicky





BLUEBERRY GARDEN

Flying so high, but why, oh why?

DEVELOPER Erik Svedäng
PUBLISHER Erik Svedäng
WEBSITE eriksvedang.wordpress.com/
 blueberrygarden
ETA Out now
PRICE £3.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
 1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and
 a 128MB graphics card.

THERE'S A GROWING body within the gaming community that consider doing nothing artistic and intriguing.

I'm not talking about being bone idle or poopsocking your way through a night's worth of *World of Warcraft*. No, I'm talking 'art' nothing: doing something where there is no tangible reward or reason for doing it. This is where *Blueberry Garden* is coming from and the market it is aiming for. Ish.

While the majority of the game is just about exploring a basic-yet-lovely cartoon world with your duck-faced creature thing, there is kind of a point – stand near the large objects in the game, be they top hats, dice, tomatoes or whatever – and you and said object get teleported back to the start.

The teleported item is then placed on the platform above the start point, balancing on other objects you've put there, with each subsequent object added creating a taller structure.



Objects appear all over the place.

The reason for doing this is that water gradually fills the world and, if you can't build a tower up far enough (or go for the other ending, as there's another way around the problem) you end up drowning. Really though, the game is just about exploring the world and finding new places. You can walk around normally or glide through the sky to reach far-off ledges. And that's pretty much your lot. Oh, and you can eat various types of fruit and nuts that give you certain abilities, not all of which are immediately fathomable. One just turns you blue, as far as I'm aware.

The positives are that *Blueberry Garden* is very cheap, very friendly, and is charming as an experience, but it's just that: an experience, not a game. As I said at the beginning, this game is not suited for those who need structure in their gameplay. Everyone else will adore it, for about an hour at least.

Adam Glick

PCZONE
68
 Charmingly pointless



OFFICERS War is beige

DEVELOPER 3A Games
PUBLISHER Kalypso Media
WEBSITE kalypsomedia.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
 2.6GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and
 a 128MB graphics card.

WORLD WAR II strategy games are a bit like pigeons: when the end of the world comes, they'll still be trotting around, necks all puffed up, cooing in an attempt to get a leg-over.

That's not to imply that *Officers* is some sort of *Carry On...* spoof of World War II, or that it'll mate with *Company of Heroes* and lay eggs, it just suffers from its own nature and position in a market saturated by similar games.

Like most modern strategy games, old *Command & Conquer* base-building mechanics are shunned in favour of territory-capturing and reinforcements, though the artificial speed with which such units become available does somewhat shit on notions of realism.

There are a few details that bring the game back towards reality, such as resources being physically transported by vulnerable convoys, and armies consuming fuel and food and suffering should such supplies run out.

The sheer scale of the maps is impressive too – they're far from *Company of Heroes'* confined



battlegrounds – with combat taking a considerable length of time to win, and numerous units on screen at once.

Unfortunately, all of this size comes at the cost of gameplay. As a battle's momentum starts to pick up and the ranks start to swell, you'll find yourself forgetting about tactics and simply selecting vast blobs of green icons, before hurling the green blobs at a red blob and hoping that the green blobs are enough to wipe out the red blob.

All in all, it's hard to recommend *Officers* with the likes of *Company of Heroes* and *Men of War* available, both of which offer superior gameplay, tactics and strategy.

Nick Brakespear



PCZONE
60
 Officially generic

What a big wand you have Harry.



HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF BLOOD PRINCE

Wave your wands in the air

DEVELOPER EA Bright Light
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE harrypotter.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.84GHz Pentium 4, 256MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.



DANIEL RADCLIFF HAS once again been digitised to squeeze the money out of eager *Harry Potter* fans. This game ticks EA's family-friendly boxes – slick, inoffensive and, at times, mildly entertaining. The developers have done a decent job capturing the general feel of the books and the look of the film, but when you realise the tutorials are all the game has to offer, it turns sour. It's an aftertaste that lingers, with the game struggling to provide anything like a fresh experience. It has become all too apparent that you can't teach an old wizard new tricks.

Like the five *Potter* games before it, "the dark forces are threatening to penetrate" and it is up to Harry and his motley crew to save the world once again. As a result, it's confusing to find the complete lack of urgency residing within Potter's assembled allies. Instead of fighting evil, you're stuck with playing

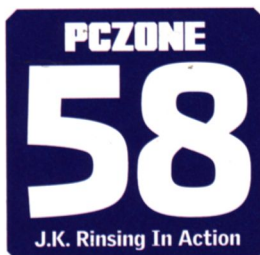
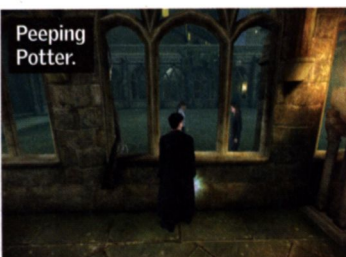
Quidditch, a linear on-rails navigation of checkpoints, and the 'copy-the-colours' potion club.

When Potter does eventually grow some balls, the mouse-wagging duels are severely anti-climactic. Mix in some collecting mechanics with the ghostly GPS of Nearly Headless Nick, and you have a simplistic trudge through a characterless castle of despair. Crude visuals round off the unimpressive package, with only the soundtrack saving it from total failure.

Sadly you cannot enact your revenge by throwing Potter off a ledge (trust us, we've tried) so we're stuck with him for at least another two years. Make sure you thank the one who must not be named – Lord Cash Cow. Oh dear, we did name him after all. May EA blight us with more *Harry Potter* games than our PCs' hard drives can possibly tolerate. Which we're sure they'll continue to do anyway.

Marco Fiori

Peeping Potter.



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CHRONICLES OF MYSTERY: THE SCORPIO RITUAL

City Interactive's latest cracker

DEVELOPER City Interactive
PUBLISHER City Interactive
WEBSITE city-interactive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

IT'S BEEN TOO long since our PC screens were graced by City Interactive games, but our prayers have been answered at last. *Chronicles of Mystery: The Scorpio Ritual* is a by-the-numbers point-and-click adventure game that is about as generic and average as you could possibly imagine. There's no panache, flair or creativity on show here, just your bog-standard adventure where every action you take is extended through cliched game mechanics.

You play a young lady named Sylvie Leroux, a budding archaeologist who has interesting theories on Sodom and Gomorrah. This is apparently related to her uncle's own archaeological career, which involves digging things up on the island of Gozo. He disappears, you have to find him and there are bad people trying to stop you, all mixed up with a standard story of ancient prophecies

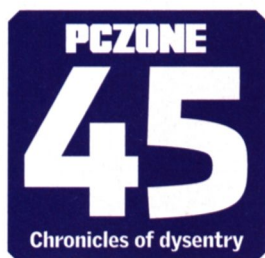


and knightly orders (the Hospitallers instead of the Templars this time out). There's also a bit where you have to fish a rotting mackerel out of the sea in order to bribe a parrot. In fact, this is the second game this month that involves using a parrot to solve a puzzle.

If you've played the rather woeful *FBI Confidential* games from the same developer, you'll probably notice that this is almost exactly the same in terms of execution and visuals. Given that the main character from those games actually turns up as a 'female tourist' in this, the similarities have at least been recognised.

If you enjoy below average games or like adventures where the voices cut out halfway through every single sentence, then this one is for you. As is a sharp blow to the head with a cricket bat.

David Brown



THE HARDY BOYS: THE HIDDEN THEFT

The end isn't nigh enough

DEVELOPER The Adventure Company
PUBLISHER Xpec
WEBSITE hardyboysgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.4 GHz pentium 3, 256MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card



THERE WERE ONCE two brothers, Red Arms Boy and Shit Hair Boy, and they loved each other in a vaguely incestuous *Top Gun* wingman sort of way. One day, Red Arms Boy and Shit Hair Boy were "chilling" in their "crib" beneath posters of semi-naked men and boybands, when a fake policeman accused them of something they didn't do, so that he could give them a disc full of porn. Or something.

I don't really know what that was about, but Shit Hair Boy ended up leaping out of a window, and then he glued a mobile phone to a parrot and threw it up to Red Arms Boy, who subsequently used the parrot-phone to call his dad and tell him that he loved him. And his dad had a moustache and looked a bit like a blonde Tom Selleck.

Then they went to a mansion. Being telepathic, Red Arms Boy knew when people weren't in the mood to talk, and refused to engage in conversation. Shit Hair Boy was well annoyed about that and vandalised a car with a shard of glass he found at a crime scene.

Seeing that the violated vehicle was leaking some sort of fluid, they decided to gather it for future recreational purposes. For the harvesting, Shit Hair Boy offered up a glass beaker that he had stolen from school, but Red Arms Boy was adamant that they would use



an old hubcap he had found earlier. And so they gathered the fluid in a hubcap and carried it through the town as carefully as if it were freshly ejaculated nectar of the gods.

Having been forced to witness this bizarre yet disappointingly dull display of adventure-gaming madness, God fed from an all-consuming despair that blackened the skies and darkened the universe. And the Earth turned into a barren land where the last humans farmed children for meat and punched themselves in the nuts for fun. The End.

Nick Brakespear



Would you trust this man?



WALLACE & GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES: MUZZLED!

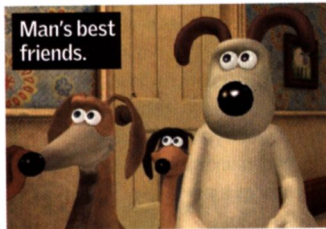
Plasticine canines tomfoolery

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/wallaceandgromit

ETA Out now
PRICE \$8.99 (£5.50), or \$34.95 (£21.50) for four episodes

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

2GHz processor, 512GB RAM, and a 64MB (DirectX 8.1 compliant) graphics card.

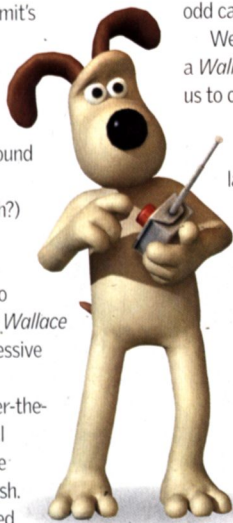


Man's best friends.

AND SO WE return to the ever-so-slightly deranged world of *Wallace & Gromit*. Yet again, our heroes have landed themselves in another surreal situation. This time a gentleman has offered his charity to the town's homeless dogs.

The one thing I've learnt from silent films is that you can't trust anyone with a moustache, so unsurprisingly it quickly becomes apparent that this gentleman is a two-faced fraud. With his dastardly plan threatening Gromit's fellows, he – with Wallace's bumbling help – sets off to foil Mr Muzzle.

Cue the eternal sound of the tuba (is there anything more British?) with the mandatory cheese and crackers, as Telltale continue to capture the world of *Wallace & Gromit* to an impressive degree. The crazy contraptions and over-the-top characters are all present and the voice acting is typically flush. That said, the recycled



areas show that *Muzzled!* is all about its narrative. The developers have laid the groundwork in previous games, so you're showing your naivety if you're expecting a whole new experience. This is episodic gaming after all.

Muzzled! isn't as laugh-out-loud funny as the previous episodes. Rather it's drug-trip wacky and with its gentle mix of adventure-lite gaming is calmly entertaining. Think of it being akin to the game gently lulling you into dream-state that happens to be inhabited by odd caricatures of English life.

We just wish Telltale would create a *Wallace & Gromit* MMO that allows us to create an over-the-top female character who goes round brandishing a rolling pin with laser-guided targeting. Just like in real life.

Marco Fiori



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State of Play

We look at the changes made to games after their release...

THIS MONTH...

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

PUBLISHER THQ Developer Relic WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com

WHAT'S THIS? IT has to be a pricing error, there's no such thing as free downloadable content in the year 2009. There has to be a sneaky text contained in the EULA for *There Is Only War* to allow THQ to legally pilfer your bank accounts.

Now I've gotten the customary sarcasm out of the way, I can get on with lavishing some praise on Relic. You see, they're a dying breed. They believe in their community and put faith in its ability to help make their games better.

Relic aren't content with shipping *Dawn of War II* and watching their bank balance fatten. They've been busy since day one: listening to your forum rants,

reading your online blogs, and doing the unthinkable – acting human and actually talking to those that play *DOW2*'s multiplayer. Like a pseudo-educational process, if you invest in your children, then you'll reap the rewards.

TACTICAL TRAINING

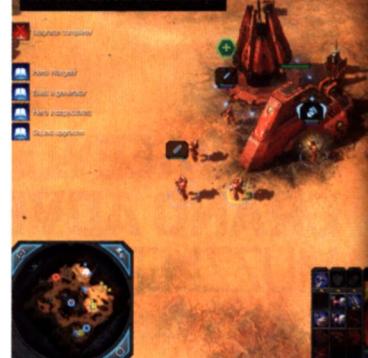
The result of all this is Relic's largest update to date. The *There Is Only War* patch has an unmatched scope and possibly, the biggest change log I've ever seen. It's balancing is rivalling MMO standards and puts the majority of other developers to shame.

Version 1.4.2 sees every faction painstakingly pampered. Virtually every unit has been meticulously tweaked in

an attempt to strengthen the game. Whether its tier one units or end-game vehicle combat, you'll find the game a sharper, more enjoyable experience. The playing ground has been levelled, resulting in a strategic rethink. You no longer have the right to moan about unbalanced units: if you lose a battle, it's firmly down to your lack of skill.

To get around such a problem, Relic have included the Observer feature. It allows you to watch matches, letting you learn from the best. *Company of Heroes* had a similar feature,

London after swine flu ravished mankind.

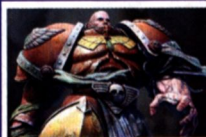


and like the WWII RTS, this slowly but surely improves your game. You pick up the ability to micromanage, putting your units to better use. Add in the ability to stream matches with the option to bring in a third-party referee who can maintain order,





THE STORY SO FAR...
PATCHES OF WAR



FEBRUARY, 2009

The big, burly Space Marines return as *Dawn of War II* ships worldwide.



MARCH, 2009

Games For Windows - LIVE! gets patched allowing for actual working multiplayer games.



APRIL, 2009

Patch 1.1.3 provides one whole map for free! Take that paid-for DLC.



MAY, 2009

Gamers rejoice as ranked two-on-two play becomes available.



JULY, 2009

The aptly named *There Is Only War* update enters beta, as Relic go into tweaking overdrive.



JULY, 2009

Everyone's too busy playing patch 1.4.2's release to notice the global recession.

and you can see how Relic are aiming to make *DOW2* a legitimate candidate for e-sport competitions.

Those who'd rather learn-by-doing will enjoy the eight new maps. More interestingly, the inclusion of four one-on-one arenas implies that Relic are leaning towards the idea of quick multiplayer encounters – something they previously outlined in a video showcase.

You only have to pluck a random statistic from the change log – Scouts now have 40% armour against mele classes for example – and you can see the direction in which they're heading. This isn't a design choice that Relic have taken blindly. Instead it's down to a careful consideration of what the *DOW2* community wants and has asked for.

"Relic have made an admirable stab at redefining the single-player action-RTS experience"

78% – David Brown, *PC ZONE* #205

And if that wasn't more than enough *DOW2*'s *World Builder* is being bundled with the 1.4.2 update. This will mean we'll no longer have to wait for Relic's over-generous updates, but instead enjoy what the internet's mappers have to offer. The developers have gone the distance, putting the game's future firmly its fan's hands. In-game RSS keeps you up to date with all of *DOW2*'s happenings while an updated *Army Painter* increases customisation options.

This patch contains an astonishing amount of content. New war gear for the single-player, engine improvements, changeable victory conditions, and a tweaked UI – the list goes on and on. It's the perfect time to start playing

online even if, like me, your arse is consistently handed to you.

There Is Only War makes *DOW2* plays like an entirely different game. It's more fluid than it used to be and the update has removed any sense one-sidedness. You're no longer punished for preferring a race that's inherently weaker. If you fail, it'll be down to your lack of tactical skill or more than likely, you've simply come up against someone who's better than you. Even when you're losing, it feels as though you can turn the tide of battle with a few thought-out manoeuvres. Your choice of tactics never feel undervalued, just mistaken.

This is war redefined. Let's toast to another 40,000 years of conflict.



VERDICT

With a patch log reaching to the moon, it's no wonder the update's breathed a breath of fresh air into *Dawn of War II*.

Marco Fiori

Budget

Nick Breakspear saves cash by scavenging clothes and games

PENUMBRA COLLECTOR PACK

PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive WEBSITE steampowered.com PRICE £1799

VERY FEW GAMES scare me. This isn't so much to do with my masculinity, but rather down to having a jaded, desensitised soul and shrivelled gaming heart. But *Penumbra* reminded me that I was still alive enough to shit myself over virtual horror.

Born of a tiny team, the *Penumbra* series demonstrated that you don't need a big budget to terrify players, as well as innovate in gaming. A first-person survival horror with physics-based puzzles, impressive visuals, ominous audio, and a plot that features enough twists and turns to keep even the most avid *Lost* follower engrossed; this is indie development at its best.

The *Collector Pack* features *Penumbra: Overture* and *Penumbra: Black Plague* – the first and second episodes respectively. It also includes *Penumbra: Requiem*. This release has more in common with *Portal* than the series' earlier survival horror games. (It



BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH



It's terrifying in the depths of *Penumbra*.

even stars a computer, possessed of a dark wit, that guides you through each of the levels.)

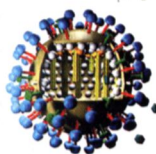
If you're looking for scares, or simply an original take on tired genres, look no further than *Penumbra*. And then look away, lest the dog-monster spot you.

PCZONE
85
Its time has passed

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

David found a coupon for an Indian takeaway that was already completed, giving him money off his madras. **SAVING** £5

James went to Wells instead of Wales, saving money on the Severn bridge toll booth. **SAVING** £5.40



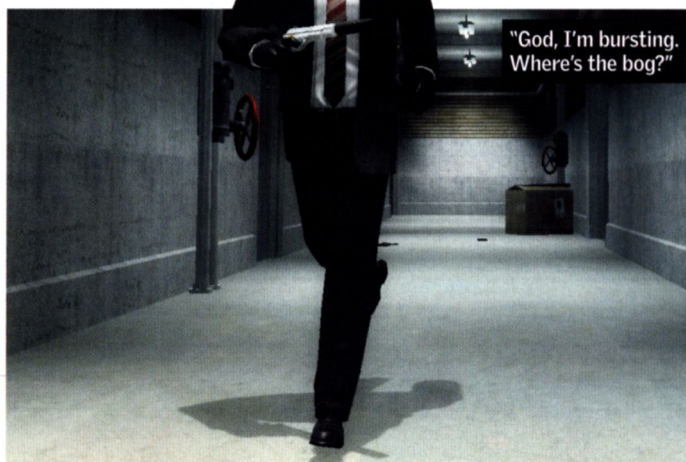
Steve pinched the pennies by remaining motionless in his house because of the ravages of swine flu. **SAVING** £639

HITMAN: ULTIMATE CONTRACT

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £14.99

WE LOVE 47, that wonderfully emotionless bald-headed Mr Ben wannabe. He's so cool, he can wear oriental clothes

and people just assume that he's Chinese. Garrett may be the master of shadows, Altair may be the ultimate free-runner, but Mr 47



"God, I'm bursting. Where's the bog?"

is the undisputed king of stylishly-nonchalant exits and imaginative hits.

This pack, featuring all four *Hitman* games, is definitely one to pick up if you've never before delved into *Hitman*'s world of cloned costume-changing assassins, and at this price you're getting a hell of a lot of killing for your money.

While the first two games are looking their age, their blend of extreme violence and puzzles continues to please and challenge. *Hitman: Contracts* is weak, *Blood Money* makes up for its appearance.

PCZONE
80

UNDER A KILLING MOON

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$999 (£6.25)

THE ADVENT OF the FMV-fuelled adventure brought with it a lot of utter dross, usually with Ned Beatty and/or Tim Curry tucked away in the cast list somewhere. *Under a Killing Moon* was one of the rare exceptions, a gem of an adventure starring a surprisingly large number of stars, like Margot Kidder.

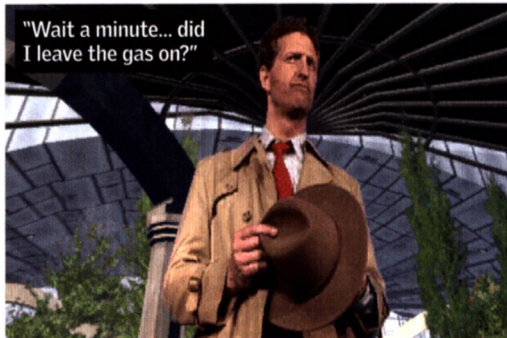
Intriguingly, the guy who played Tex Murphy, the hard-nosed and rather unfortunate gumshoe who's the game's protagonist, was his creator, proving that yes, sometimes bringing in amateur actors from within the development team does work. The FMV looks a bit ropery now, but the actual gameplay is

still solid. You can also buy the two games previous to this (*Martian Memorandum* and *Mean Streets*) on GOG, with its sequels coming out soon on the same site. Great retro stuff.

PCZONE
70



"I'm selling these fine leather jackets."



"Wait a minute... did I leave the gas on?"

DESCENT 1 & 2

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$599 (£3.50)

CLASSICS THEY MIGHT be, but the world has moved on since spiralling about in mineshafts was all the rage.

Having said that, there aren't that many games that embrace the 360° movement style with as much gusto. There also aren't so many games that make people regularly suffer from acute motion sickness.

The object of the games is to take your flimsy spacecraft/flying machine into a series of mines and suchlike, destroying rebellious and/or evil robots and machines.

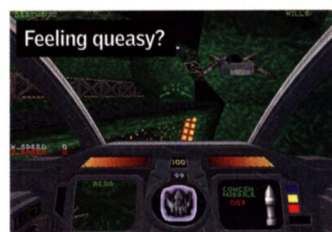
The *Descent 1* and *2* are still decent games and will mostly be adored by, well, pretty much the same people who adored them all those years ago.

One for the nostalgia trippers or those curious to see whether the motion sickness thing affects them or not.

However, it does seem strange for GOG to have left the third game out of the package. We'll just assume there were legal issues and leave it at that.



It's also rock hard.



Feeling queasy?

PCZONE
62

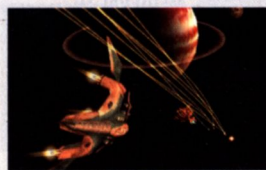
AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



THE HEROES PACK
PRICE £29.99, Steam
Dark Messiah, *Heroes of Might & Magic V* and two expansions make this pack a worthy buy.

80



TACHYON: THE FRINGE
PRICE £6.99, Steam
Average space combat blaster that's brought to life by the presence of the Bruce Campbell.

63



FREEDOM FORCE: FREEDOM PACK
PRICE £4.99, Steam
A fiver for both of the Freedom Force games? Yes please!

79

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PRICE £10, White Label
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic
If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological shooter until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!
PRICE £5, Sold Out
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 GAMES FOR LONELY MEN

- 1 THE WITCHER**
Rude playing cards.
- 2 DIVA X: ARIANA**
Make your own lo-res porno.
- 3 FOOTBALL STRIP**
The *Daily Sport's* soccer quiz.
- 4 SECOND LIFE**
A wankers' paradise.
- 5 THE VELVET EXPRESS**
A 3D sex simulator.



PCZ TOP 5 GUNS, GUNS, GUNS

- 1 SHOTGUN**
In every FPS ever made.
- 2 ARMACHAM PENETRATOR**
F.E.A.R.
- 3 ELECTRODRIVER**
Painkiller
- 4 NAILGUN**
Quake
- 5 BFG9000**
Doom



PCZ TOP 5 ANIMAL SIMULATORS WE WANT TO BE MADE

- 1 HUNGRY HUMPBACK**
Eat krill while hiding from bloodthirsty Japanese sushi chefs.
- 2 HOOKWORM WARS**
Fight to rule the small intestine.
- 3 DUNG BEETLE RALLY**
Race balls of shit over the Gobi.
- 4 IT'S A CAT'S LIFE**
Eat. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Eat. Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Die.
- 5 BOTHERSOME BOAS**
How many neighbourhood pets and toddlers can you eat?



FPS



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.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



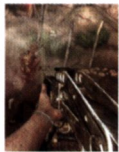
TEAM FORTRESS 2

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



CRYSIS WARHEAD

PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%
This standalone expansion only takes a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains fantastic action storytelling, and a much improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



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.



BIOSHOCK

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

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



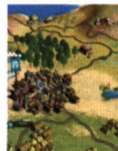
COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, 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 in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come 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.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and 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.



ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

PCZ Issue 207 : 87%
The new story in the *Chronicles of Riddick* is a mix of brutal knife fights and stealth, which means you need fast fingers and brains. And it comes with a revamped *Escape from Butcher Bay*.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS 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...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips Warhammer into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



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 for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SIMULATION



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



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!



THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 - 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



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

DRIVING/RACING



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. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 - 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



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



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. Time to get down and dirty with a 4x4.



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. (Well, fish-tailing '60s).

ODDBALL



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.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



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.



BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 - 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 - 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. New additions to this addictive football sim are a 3D match engine and options to deal with PRs and the media.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009
PCZ Issue: 201 - 85%
PES lacks official support from the football business fraternity, but that doesn't detract from the game. This year's *PES* provides fun and realistic football, on and offline.



NBA 2K9
PCZ Issue: 203 - 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 - 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



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.

ROLE-PLAYING



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 and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 - 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
BioWare's best game since *Knights of the Old Republic*, with a real-time combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and sex with aliens - 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 an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs - if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

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

SEPTEMBER

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| AION | NCSOFT |
| BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM | EIDOS |
| BATTLEFIELD HEROES | EA |
| CHAMPIONS ONLINE | ATARI |
| CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010 | EIDOS |
| NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT | EA |
| RED FACTION: GUERRILLA | THQ |
| SECTION 8 | SOUTHPEAK |

OCTOBER

| | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| ALPHA PROTOCOL | SEGA |
| BORDERLANDS | 2K GAMES |
| DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS | EA |
| RISEN | DEEP SILVER |
| TROPICO 3 | KALYPSO MEDIA |

AUTUMN/WINTER

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| ASSASSIN'S CREED 2 | THQ |
| BATTLEFIELD 1943 | EA |
| BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS | 2K GAMES |
| COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 | CODEMASTERS |
| FIFA 10 | EA |
| FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009 | SEGA |
| LEFT 4 DEAD 2 | VALVE |
| MAFIA II | 2K GAMES |
| MAX PAYNE 3 | ROCKSTAR |
| MODERN WARFARE 2 | ACTIVISION |
| OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING | CODEMASTERS |
| SINGULARITY | ACTIVISION |
| SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION | UBISOFT |
| STARCRRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY | BLIZZARD |



27th ANNUAL
**GOLDEN
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goldenjoystick.com
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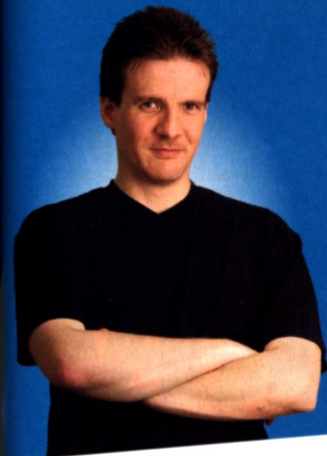
**Stop. Vote.
Carry on.**

Thousands of your fellow gamers have cast their vote to decide gaming history, have you cast yours?

The Golden Joystick Awards are known globally as **'The People's Gaming Awards'** and they're the industry's most prestigious. Why? Because they're voted for by you and this is your opportunity to make sure your favourite game claims the ultimate gaming accolade, a Golden Joystick Award. This years long list saw a record breaking 272,680 votes – and now we're down to the business end of deciding who wins. And if you need an extra incentive, we'll be giving away some brilliant prizes in our 'landmark' voting system. So you might just win an LCD TV, PS3 or Xbox just for exercising your democratic right!



Register your vote, make history and reaffirm your democratic voting right at **www.goldenjoystick.com** now!



PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

ANCIENT WARS

IT'S FAIR TO say the game that has given me the most laughs online is *Battlefield 1942*. Launched about a century ago, today there are still 17,000 active players running, cursing, driving, flying and running the aircraft carrier aground on islands in over 500 servers. Despite being the oldest title in the series, it remains one of the most popular.

Like a lot of players, I've been anxious to play *Battlefield 1942* – the latest instalment that is coming seven years after the original. What made things even more exciting was news that its maps – Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Wake Island – are favourites of the existing community.

Playing the game on my brother's Xbox, I found myself really stoked about the forthcoming PC version. Not because of the vibrant Pacific environments, deformable terrain, first-class map design, nor the sense of fun that prevails, but because I came away understanding how awful the Xbox version was. It was crippled by the most appalling lag, the frame rate was a joke, and because the servers are all EA hosted, they were too few in number and full. Having to use a gamepad wasn't too bad because everyone else had the same handicap.

Once it appears for *Windows* (the environment console developers use anyway) you'll be able to adjust the game's settings to suit your setup, host your own server and then use a keyboard and mouse. Amen.

Wandy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

YOUR PC: GOOGLEFIED

Can another open-source OS make it big?

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN living under a rock this past month, you'll know that Google have announced a free, lightweight alternative to *Windows* – the *Chrome Operating System*.

Chrome OS has been the subject of rumour for years, but it's only this past month that Google have revealed their hand. In essence, it's the company's Chrome browser running inside a windowing system based on Linux – a cut-down, no-cost, 'instant-on' computing platform.

What it means is that *Chrome OS* will be an open-source project designed to run webapps such as Gmail or BBC iPlayer. Even though it's not challenging Microsoft directly, the fact it's being developed by one of the world's largest technology companies and backed by Intel makes it the one to watch.

But, it's not for gaming. It'll run software stored on the web, rather than on the machine, and without support for specialist hardware or DirectX, *Chrome*



Chrome OS games will be strictly casual.

won't replace *Windows* nor run *Half-Life* any time soon.

What Google are hoping is that today's gradual shift towards web applications will accelerate, and that some day soon the humble browser will

become central to everything. How long that will take, and how long it is before Microsoft retaliates with a stripped-down version of *Windows* aimed at 'netheads nobody knows. chrome.blogspot.com

TOUCH GAMING

Rub your fingers with glee

MICROSOFT HAVE ANNOUNCED the *Touch Pack* for *Windows 7*, a collection of six apps optimised to be controlled using a touch screen.

The pack contains *Virtual Earth 3D*, an interactive screen saver, a digital photo collage tool, and three games: *Blackboard* is a *Crayon Physics*-style puzzler, where you draw machines on a virtual board. *Rebound* is a rework of air hockey, and *Garden Pond* puts you in charge of some pond life.

None of these titles will set the world ablaze, but they show you don't need an iPhone to game with fingers. windowsteamblog.com



Turn *Windows* into an iPhone.

NEWS ROUND-UP

CALVIN KLEIN HAVE released a pair of USB sunglasses. A 4GB flash drive is integrated into the \$199 specs' right arm. To access your data you need to pull the thing apart at the hinge. I don't recall the last time I was sat at a PC wearing sunglasses, and feel a USB baked bean-encrusted plate or USB coffee mug would make more sense. calvinklein.com

THE \$150 Ocz Sabre is a gaming keyboard featuring nine programmable LED display keys that can convert and display any digital image you upload, or text into key labels. Software allows you to map tiers of commands to each key, giving you a near limitless supply of shortcuts. ocz.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS
BY RICHARD COSGROVE

OCZ SABRE: A keyboard that can store thousands of shortcuts, but probably won't encourage developers to include quicksave on console ports. **SOFT-START:** A method to gently coax elderly PCs to start without crashing. Involves wrapping the machine in a duvet, and giving it a mug of tea and a pile of hot buttered toast, while whispering "Time to wake up". **CHROME OS:** Google's free and open-source operating system. Designed to give users quick access to internet applications, and to give Google complete access to all of your private information. **BAKED BEANS:** Canned haricot beans cooked in a tomato sauce. The staple diet of the English, not eaten anywhere else in the world.



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* 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 your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.



GT44 - busted.
On the PC at least.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|--------|-------------------|-----------|
| ATI | CATALYST 96 | 15 Jun 09 |
| NVIDIA | Force Ware 186.18 | 18 Jun 09 |

SOUND

| MANU | DESC | RELEASED |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Creative | X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004 | 30 Jul 08 |
| Creative | Creative Alchemy 1.20.04 | 01 Aug 08 |
| Creative | Audigy Beta 2.18.0001 | 17 Jul 08 |

Dear Wandy

If it ain't working, don't panic - Wandy's here...

Q LIVE AND LET LIVE

After registering for a Microsoft Passport that was linked to a Hotmail address I've had since 1998, my location was set as the USA. When I created my *Games For Windows - LIVE!* account, it took this to be my billing location and now it won't let me change it. This means that I can't purchase points, seemingly the only way to get downloadable content for *Fallout 3*.

I tried contacting Microsoft's support but they just tell me that I chose the wrong country when I signed up to *Games For Windows* and that I'd need to create a new account.

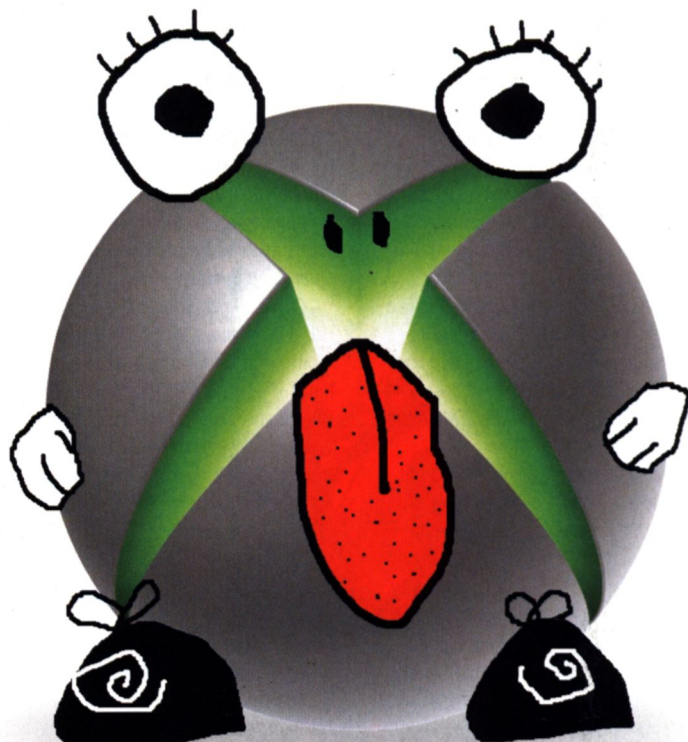
I have concerns about doing that, one being that I already have my version of *Fallout* linked to my old credentials. If I were to have a second account I'm fairly certain that's going to cause a problem, and even if I could delete and start a new one for the UK, I'm sure I'd lose my achievements and saved games. The only alternative seems to be using prepaid cards, but I've heard people say that a UK card must be redeemed on a UK account. With my account being registered in the US, I'd need to find some way of buying US pre-paid cards.

From being online I know that these issues seem to be affecting both Xbox and PC gamers alike and Microsoft seem to be unwilling to do anything about it. Is there any way to sort out these issues?

Olly Hill

A I fought the same absurdness when I signed up for my first GFWL account some time back. I put the problem down to my antique Hotmail address whose region I'd never bothered to change - well, there was never a need. From what you've said I think this deduction was spot on.

In my case, I canned the stillborn



Keep the Xbox monster away from Windows users!

LIVE! account and re-registered using a real email address - one that didn't have a location associated with it. In your case, things aren't so easy for one of the reasons you mention.

Sadly, the GFWL support team have corroborated your findings, which is to say that you can't change country. Why you can modify every other account detail is a mystery, but then this is Microsoft we're talking about here.

A new account will mean losing your progress, though I don't see you running into problems reconfiguring your GFWL games to work with another account. I'd certainly not fanny about with US prepay cards - life's too short for that.

I must say, the entire GFWL platform on the PC needs an overhaul. It claims to "Simplify your sign in!" but the reality is that it often makes it worse. In titles such

as Grand Theft Auto IV (see elsewhere on this page), it adds an element of confusion to the proceedings. What makes things worse is that when logging in, PC users are prompted to "Sign in to Xbox" and when buying points they do so on live.xbox.com site. It's like an alien land.

No point raging at Microsoft though. Their drive towards needless complication will come back to haunt them some day, and particularly as many competitors are successfully making things simpler.

Q FECU, SECURUM

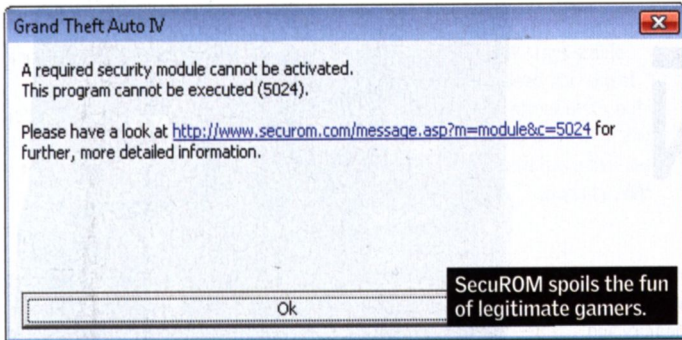
I bought *Grand Theft Auto IV* and after months of trouble free gaming I've now run into trouble. To start with, it needs patching. Having bought the game over Steam I presumed that it would keep things updated automatically for me, but nothing has happened.

Looking round the Rockstar site, I was told that *Games For Windows - LIVE!* would do the job for me. Is that true? And in which case, is mine broken and in need of a complete reinstall?

Second, I can't actually play the game

"The Games For Windows program is supposed to guarantee a fuss-free ride for every user. Yeah, right."

"A Core i7 CPU is expensive - not least because upgrading a setup will need a new motherboard and memory"



any more. I'm sure that once everything is updated all will be well again, but I'm concerned - the error I'm seeing is related to GTA4's anti-piracy measures and I'm wondering if I need to update the SecuROM system as well? It's all hopelessly confusing and I'm hoping you can help!

Keith Waring

A GTA4 on the PC is a dog's dinner. Aside from well-documented and heatedly discussed issues with the game itself, if you bought the title over Steam you'll find three multiplayer platforms vying for your attention: Rockstar's Social Club, Microsoft's GFWL, and of course Steam.

My advice is to do it all the old fashioned way. Grab the most recent v1.04.0 patch from your favourite download site - GamersHell.com is a good bet - and give up waiting for things to happen by magic.

Regarding the SecuROM problem, you'd have found the answer simply by clicking on the link you should have seen displayed in the error box. You're running Process Explorer and SecuROM is pissy about that. Ensure Process Explorer isn't set to start with Windows, then reboot your PC and try again.

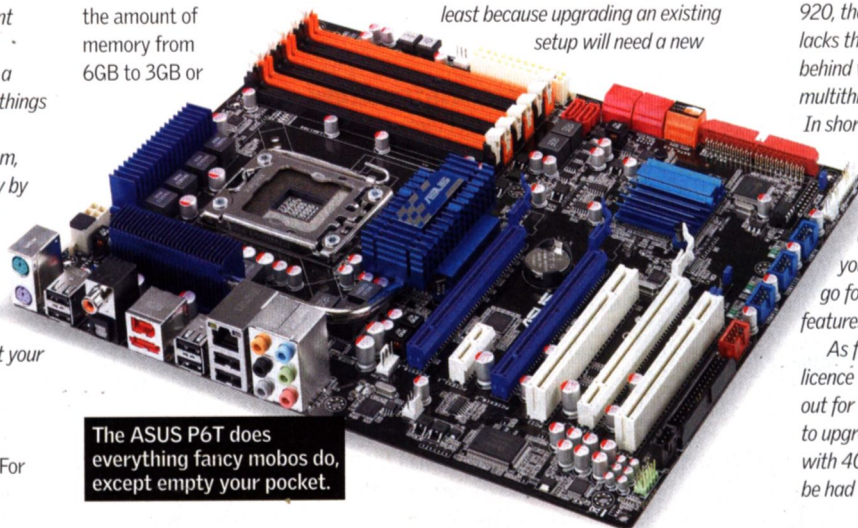
The irony here is that Process Explorer has recently become a Microsoft product, and the Games For Windows program is supposed to

guarantee a fuss-free ride for every PC user. Yeah, right.

Q BUILD ADVICE

It's been two years since I built my current PC and things are starting to creak slightly. I want a machine that's quite a beast when it comes to tackling modern games. The setup I have in mind is based around an ASUS Rampage II GENE X58 with Core i7 920, Noctua NH-U12P cooler, XFX GeForce GTX 285, 6GB DDR3 RAM, 1.5TB HDD, Antec P193 case with 850W PSU and an Iiyama 24in screen.

It'll have Windows XP on it to begin with as I think Vista is shit. I'll hold out until Windows 7 is here and well established. Could I cut the amount of memory from 6GB to 3GB or



The ASUS P6T does everything fancy mobos do, except empty your pocket.

ALL ABOUT...

17 CORE I7

This line of CPUs gets an awfully bad press and you don't know anyone whose bought one yet, but behind the grand prices Core i7 is still the more recent, better designed successor to Core 2.

To begin with, i7's quad-core layout isn't formed from two dual core dies but has all four sitting on the same piece of silicon. It's a larger design and hence requires the larger LGA1366 socket - your existing LGA775 Core motherboard simply won't do.

Intel's new QuickPath Interconnect on the i7 replaces the old front side bus and permits data to travel at twice the rate of even the fastest FSB. The memory controller works exclusively with DDR3 memory sticks in groups of three. That's why many i7 boards have either three or six slots.

The company has also resurrected its Hyper-Threading technology that effectively doubles the number of processors the operating system sees, and Turbo Boost ups or downs clock speeds depending on workload.

The entry level 920 chip is an ideal choice for most gamers looking to upgrade an early Core 2 or late Pentium board. At £200 it's good value and particularly when used for overclocking - a stable 3.5GHz is easily attainable.



Bigger and faster. Faster and better.

4GB? Would it be worth investing in one of the new i7 chips or do you think a good Core 2 Quad would be best?

Stu

A While it's true that getting a Core i7 CPU is expensive - not least because upgrading an existing setup will need a new

LGA1366 motherboard and DDR3 memory - the fact remains that it's more powerful and more software is taking proper advantage of the way it works.

To get a Core 2 equivalent to the Core i7 on your shopping list, you'd really need to buy the Q9650. Like the entry level 920, the Q9650 costs around £200 but lacks the i7's superior design and will fall behind when the i7's simultaneous multithreading is being used to full effect. In short, stick with i7.

I wouldn't stick with your board. The £145 ASUS P6T is just as real world capable as the £175 Rampage and unless you know what you're buying I'd go for price and stability over features every time.

As for the OS, stick with your existing licence of XP. There is no point shelling out for Vista if you don't like it and intend to upgrade to Windows 7. Don't bother with 4GB RAM unless there's a deal to be had buying 6GB. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
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(JACKIEBAUER) I want to update/overhaul the sound setup in my room. Main requirements: Good music sound quality on PC. I listen to music a lot every day at home mainly in my room. Good stereo and surround sound/Dolby Digital on PC for movies and TV shows. **(SuPerNoVi)** The Logitech Z-5500s are clear, crisp, punchy and more than powerful enough. If that's what you after get them. **(Rich)** If you don't care about the sound enough, will you really care about any differences from the Logitech X-540s? **(Wandy)** The £185 Klipsch iFiS are the best speakers I've put next to my PC. They're 2.1 but since I do more listening to music than anything else I've not missed 5.1.

HOW WE TESTED

SPEED: We use benchmarking software on all desktop systems, to see how fast they'll perform in real-world situations. **COST:** A PC that performs as well as a model that costs twice as much is going to score highly. **INSIDES:** We check that wires and cables have been tucked away neatly, and everything is plugged in correctly.

ADVANCETEC AT-FX DRAGON

PRICE £650 **MANUFACTURER** AdvanceTec **WEBSITE** advancetec.co.uk

THE COMBINATION OF an overclocked CPU and a quality GPU means the AT-FX Dragon's performance is close to machines twice the price. Granted, it runs a few frames slower than some £1,000+ rigs, but it can still hit 30fps on full settings at 1920x1080.

SPECIFICATION

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| CPU | 3.5GHz Phenom II X4 940 |
| MOTHERBOARD | Sapphire 790GX |
| GPU | Sapphire HD4870 1GB |
| RAM | 2GB OCZ DDR2 Reaper |
| STORAGE | 320GB HDD |
| OS | None supplied |

There are compromises though – notably the lack of OS. Having one installed costs extra, but you could use *Windows 7 RC1* which is remarkably stable and free. You'll have to upgrade to *Windows 7* proper at some point, but using *RC1* will give you time to save up.

The 2GB of DDR2 is stingy, especially as the bottom has dropped out of that end of the memory market. Still, adding more memory later, or upgrading to DDR3, won't be prohibitively expensive.

Thankfully, AMD's fantastic Phenom II X4 is a great chip and, with the CoolIT all-in-one Domino water-cooling block, it holds at 40°C even with a 500MHz overclock. We managed a stable 3.8GHz, and could possibly see it

pushing further with the right memory and voltage tweaking. But at 3.5GHz, the quad-core CPU will cope with almost anything you throw at it.

The 4870 in its 1GB GDDR5 guise a capable GPU, delivering playable frame rates even at 2560x1600. This is down to the launch of the 4890 pushing the 4870's price down.

The Dragon proves that you can build a performance gaming rig for well under a grand. It's the perfect fit for a 22in panel and will keep you gaming at the high-end for a while yet. **DJ**



PCZONE
90
Tough to slay

CYBERPOWER INFINITY 17 HEAVEN

PRICE £1,400 **MANUFACTURER** CyberPower **WEBSITE** www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk



WHEN SYSTEM INTEGRATORS go head-to-head, margins get cut and extras get thrown in. That's what's happened between CyberPower and PC Specialist, with the former putting together this PC to rival the latter's Core i7 Vortex i950 (£1,750).

The Vortex packs an Intel i7-950 CPU and an NVIDIA GTX295 graphics card. The Heaven uses the same CPU, but it has two NVIDIA GTS 250 cards and comes in £350 less. This is a neat compromise, as these Sparkle cards can deliver a performance that's close to the GTX295's, but slashes the PC's price.

CyberPower have opted for CoolIT's FreeZone Elite thermo-electric cooling system. In theory this TEC unit should keep this PC cool enough to reach 4GHz. But the cooler in the test rig we were supplied was too flaky to allow serious overclocking.

While the Vortex had 12GB of DDR3, the Heaven only has 6GB. That said having this much RAM is more about getting bragging rights than a performance benefit. But then the same can be said of this rig's Blu-ray player: it's a read-only drive, so the PC has a separate DVD rewriter.

The i7 Heaven isn't the Vortex's equal, but it'll save you cash. There's also an i7-920 version on the cards for £1,200, which given that chip's insane overclocking prowess could be well worth another percent – or two. **DJ**

SPECIFICATION

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| CPU | Core i7-950 |
| MOTHERBOARD | Gigabyte EX58-UD3R |
| GPU | 2x Sparkle GTS 250 |
| RAM | OCZ 6GB DDR3 |
| STORAGE | 1TB HDD |
| OS | Vista Home Premium 64-bit |

PCZONE
88
A gamer's angel

COOLERMASTER UCP 900W

PRICE £138 MANUFACTURER CoolerMaster WEBSITE coolermaster.com

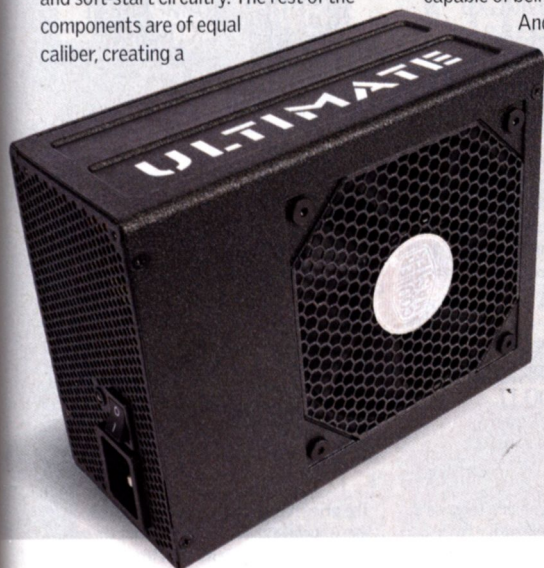
THE UCP 900W looks like a cube of granite, but provides a stable power source for single and dual-GPU systems.

CoolerMaster uses high-quality power cables, built-in circuit protection, and soft-start circuitry. The rest of the components are of equal caliber, creating a

PSU that punches well above its weight.

The UCP 900W stays stable under a standard load, running at 85% efficiency in all our tests, but is capable of being pushed further.

And it has a five-year warranty. **HW**



PCZONE
91

SAPPHIRE HD4890 TOXIC

PRICE £187 MANUFACTURER Sapphire WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com

THANKS TO THEIR Vapor-X system keeping the GPU cool, Sapphire's HD 4890 Toxic cores are jacked up a little higher than a standard HD 4890's, resulting in slightly better benchmarks all round.

In all the games framerates were slightly higher a standard 4890. It even beat the NVIDIA GTX275 in some tests. The card's efficient cooling system allowed us to push the core to 1,000MHz while staying. Undoubtedly it can be

pushed further. But, in spite of this the HD4890 chipset can't compete with NVIDIA's, which are a better propositions in the long run.

For those who dislike NVIDIA and want to overclock, the Toxic is great. For everyone else, the NVIDIA GTX275 is still the best choice. **HW**



PCZONE
88



NATURALPOINT TRACKIR 5

PRICE £105 MANUFACTURER NaturalPoint WEBSITE naturalpoint.com

THE TRACKIR TRANSLATES your head movements into supported games, moving your avatar's eyeline to match. It works astoundingly well, making it essential for flight sim enthusiasts, petrolheads and FPS fans.

The system amplifies your actions, so a slight turn of your head results in your avatar looking over their shoulder.

With a little tweaking and practice,

using the TrackIR becomes so natural you feel lost when playing a game that doesn't support it. The range of games it supports continues to grow, including *DCS Black Shark* and *ArmA II*.

The TrackIR 5 is an amazing piece of kit, which you should pick up without delay. **JC**

PCZONE
88



SAMSUNG PB22-J 256GB

PRICE £550 MANUFACTURER Samsung WEBSITE samsungssd.com

SAMSUNG'S LATEST SOLID state hard drive is expensive, giving 256GB for £550, but it delivers near-identical read and write speeds: 220MBps and 200MBps, respectively.

These speeds are down to the SSD using Samsung's own controller chip and a 128MB cache of DDR-SDRAM. These, along with Samsung's latest MLC flash memory chips, make the PB22-J one of the quickest SSDs around.

Despite all the love we through at this drive, we've yet to establish whether it stands up to sustained use without failing.

With that in mind, we'll be running the PB22-J virtually non-stop over the next few months. If it fails, we'll let you know. **JL**

PCZONE
80

REMEMBER:
IN PCs, DRIVERS
ARE NOT USED
TO PLAY GOLF

If you are having trouble getting your new graphics or sound card to work, and a PC technician tells you to "Stick in a new driver", do not buy a set of golf clubs and forcibly insert them through the air vent. Do download new drivers from the card makers' website.

Hardware Buyer

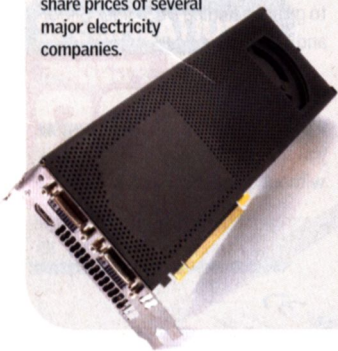
This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 295
PRICE £436
zotac.com

The current king of the hill is this giant dual-GPU board from NVIDIA. That ridiculously large heatsink covers two 280 chips running side-by-side. And it's not just faster than AMD's 4870X2 (its nearest rival), but it's also a lot more energy efficient. Good news, as the 4870X2 is currently propping up the share prices of several major electricity companies.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 965
PRICE £839
intel.com



Intel's latest processing powerhouse doesn't just have four cores with which to throw your games around, it also support hyperthreading for running even more simultaneous processes without affecting framerates. The upshot: there's not a game in the world that this will struggle with.

SCREEN

NEC 24WMGX3
PRICE £529
onec.com



If we had the money we'd fritter it on this incredible 27in screen from NEC. Picture quality is simply unrivalled, and it's got so many input options it's the subject of at least three web fetish sites. Size queens will always go for something larger, and that would be lavishly decadent too.

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME
PRICE £321
asus.com



This Core i7-friendly board sports the X58 Intel chipset and everything else you can imagine. It's the deluxe department store of motherboard design, hawking bespoke capacitor design and expertly tuned performance pathways, to the sleazy suburban joys of three-way SLI.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI PRELUDE 7.1
PRICE £144
auzentech.com



Take a top-of-the-range Creative X-Fi audio chip and surround it with components of such a high grade they're spoken of only in hushed tones by those in the know, and then add Dolby Digital Live – you'd have a pretty cool sound card, right? Actually, you'd end up with this one.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.11
PRICE £99
seagate.com



If we're talking money no object, then we'd couple this with a solid-state drive from Samsung for maximum performance and storage, but if our loaded rig was limited to one hard disk, it would be this one. A huge 1.3TB of storage and a performance unmatched by any other vanilla HDD.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500
PRICE £195
logitech.co.uk



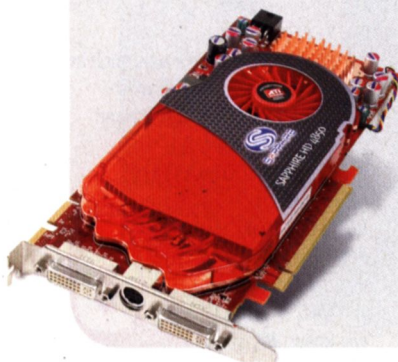
The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE HD4850
PRICE £120
sapphiretech.com

This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £120 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 and buy one.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE 2 DUO E2180
PRICE £44
intel.com



At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200 processors from Intel. It's not surprising that 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

ASROCK CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2
PRICE £60
asrock.com



Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard 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

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 1600AAJS
PRICE £30
wdc.com



A 160GB hard drive, like this SATA 2 model, 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

VIEWSONIC VA903M
PRICE £118
viewsoniceurope.com



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, although it can't handle native widescreen resolutions.

SOUNDCARD

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE
PRICE £20
uk.europe.creative.com



The cheap Audigy card 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, unless you're an audiophile, or you want your PC to act as a top-class music system.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-530
PRICE £55
logitech.co.uk



Logitech's X-530s have the edge on quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And their value can't be beat, giving sound quality above their price bracket.

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THE WORLD'S **NUMBER ONE** PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER

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18

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SPECIAL REPORT

HOW THE CENSORS
DECIDE WHAT YOU PLAY

THE SECRET OF
MONKEY ISLAND
BORDERLANDS
MASS EFFECT 2
MAX PAYNE 3
BRINK

PC GAMER DVD ROM

ARMA 2
PLAY THE MOST REALISTIC
SOLDIER SIM, EVER.

ANNO 1404
BUILD YOUR OWN
MEDIEVAL EMPIRE

OVERLORD II
HOW EVIL WILL YOU BE?

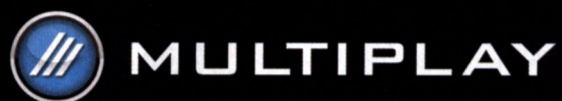
**14
PLAYABLE
DEMOS**

18

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PCZONE

Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

SOCCER CHEATS

WE ALL HATE cheats. Of course, we can never really know if someone is genuinely cheating, even if they seem to have a sixth sense where their opponents are. *Football Manager Live* is another game in which exploits and cheats could well prosper, disguising underhanded tactics using a variety of nefarious methods.

For example, at the beginning of a lot of seasons, some managers will set up DYM leagues, which stands for Double Your Money. The top five teams in the league get double their entry fee back, the others get nothing (usually). To make this fairer and to stop teams just spamming up all the competitions then letting the AI manager control all their games, Sports Interactive made sure there were penalties for doing this, forcing managers to be online and control their teams, so limiting how many competitions people would enter. Of course, people found a way around this, forcing SI to close that loophole, before others appeared later on.

There are plenty of other exploits ruining the enjoyment of pretty much every online game. My point in this column, though? Well, I decided to see how vigilant the mods in the Fowler game world were (still in *FML*, people). I logged in using a friend's account, which had been offline for months. He had £7million, so I started secretly funnelling money into my side, trying to be sneaky. Thankfully, the mods caught me and punished me severely.

So, at least there are some people out there doing their best to fight the cheaters. I can now play *FML* feeling that my opponents can't cheat. Well, maybe not as easily at least.

David Brown
Staff writer

IN THE ARMY NOW

Nick Brakespear is PC Zone's very own GI Jane, making him perfect to look at *America's Army III*

WEBSITE americasarmy.com

HARDCORE MILITARY GAMES ARE awkward things, and if they were people they'd be the most socially inept freaks you could ever dread to meet: glitching all over the place, heads quivering like someone out of *Jacob's Ladder*, frothing at the mouth over unrealistic ballistics.

And on that note, *America's Army 3* leaps forth onto our *Steam* list, vaulting over its competitors with the word "free" emblazoned upon its manly hardcore bosom, all the while muttering "join the military" under its breath like a deranged ex-recruiter tramp. Undeterred by the US Army's attempts at convincing me that God himself invented America, I embraced the hobo, shaved my head and made for the front lines.



A US soldier. Before post-traumatic stress kicks in.

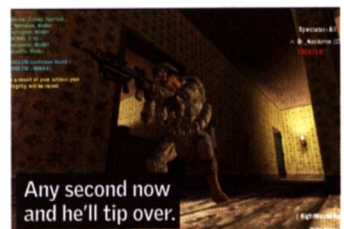
If you need telescopic sights to make that shot, you're crap.



Fans of *Operation Flashpoint* or *Arma II* might find something to like here. Weapons, ballistics, attachments and sound effects have all been engineered with realism in mind, and though I can't claim to have ever fired a gun or been shot at, the whizzing, cracking and popping of projectiles all seem frighteningly convincing.

I say frighteningly, for as with most hardcore games, if you so much as fart at the wrong time you'll get your tits blown clean off.

Once your tits are no longer attached, the game makes use of its "realistic" healing system and forces any



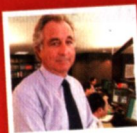
Any second now and he'll tip over.

wannabe medic to apply one of four possible treatments based on your tit-based symptoms.

Saving team-mates, killing enemies, confirming kills or capturing objectives all add to your persistently-tracked stats, leading to promotions and unlockables and the growth of your e-peen. Levels are decent enough in size and design, servers are up and running and although this older incarnation of the *Unreal Engine* is looking rather ropey, it'll no doubt attract the map and mod-making community.

Plus, it's free, which is well cheap.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0
HOURS

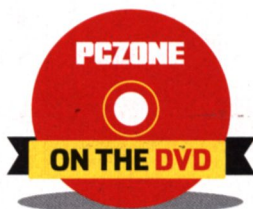
*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

348
HOURS*

Demos



Take a tour this issue's DVD with Adam Glick

ARMA II

Have a little taste of the military life

WEBSITE arma2.com

THIS MAY WELL be the most hardcore military sim around, but it's slightly crippled by bugs and AI glitches. However, there's the potential for a hugely intense warfare simulator to rise from the slightly gristly meat of the current version of *Arma II*. And why not see if you'll be willing to be there if this phoenix-like ascension takes place?

All you have to do is fail to throw your disc in the bin, insert it into your drive and install the demo. And it'll save you using up your monthly download limit, which can't be bad.

This demo will let you sample the full flavour of the *Arma II* experience, although we didn't find out whether you could play as a sheep or a cow in it. So you may have to get the full game if you're that interested in bovine computer simulations.

There are loads of non-animal units to sample as well, plus a substantial part of Chernarus' terrain. Have fun out there, soldier!



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PCZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.

DRIVE-BY
You'll get the chance to pootle about in some cars and other vehicles in the demo. Just make sure you don't call in the chopper near some trees or there'll be big trouble.

UNITED FRONT
You and your chums will be jiggling along on motorized armor, singing songs of freedom, when suddenly the dastardly Russians will attack! So keep 'em peeled, soldier.

THE MILITARY LIFE

R'N'R
When you're all done and killed the Commies, what better way to relax than to head for home and a good, old-fashioned homoerotic orgy back at base?

OUCHY
While the terrain is vast that doesn't mean you shouldn't heed basic safety procedures. Climbing over pointed fence posts like this is decidedly unwise.

TRINE

Teamwork is the key to this puzzler

WEBSITE trine-thegame.com

JUST LIKE IN *The Lost Vikings*, this platform game is about using three characters with differing abilities to solve various puzzles.

The basic premise is that your three guys have been magically glued together by a mysterious artifact that they all happened to touch at the same time.

The wizard can create objects and use magic, the soldier can hit

things, and the thief is good at leaping and using bows.

You'll have to use a combination of all three characters to progress, although most of the time each bit can be solved in a number of ways, allowing you leeway as to who you select to do the job.

The demo won't tax you too greatly, introducing you to the basic skills and actions you can perform.



Show off.



A magic mushroom.

PEOPLE POWER



ZOYA

The thief uses a bow to kill enemies and a grappling hook to swing from pillar to post.



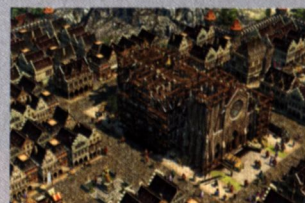
AMADEUS

He doesn't compose piano pieces, but he's a dab hand at the old box conjuring trick.

BEST OF THE REST



Here are the some of the other demos and movies that you can enjoy on this month's cover DVD. Or not, if that's your will...



ANNO 1404

anno.uk.ubi.com

Trade, trade, build, trade and then, perhaps, trade. *Anno 1404* doesn't do anything unexpected, but if medieval trading is your cup of tea, get on this.



THE PATH: PROLOGUE

tale-of-tales.com

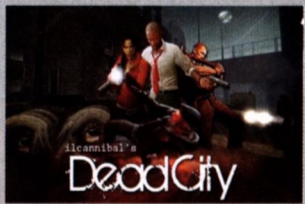
Yes, this is the one where little girls dance in a forest. In this demo, you get to try to figure out what it's all about.



DEATH ABOARD

snipurl.com/deathaboard

We think this is the best custom campaign for *L4D* we've seen. Granted, competition isn't yet fierce, but when it is finished, by God it will be fun to play.



DEAD CITY

snipurl.com/deadcity

This is the second best user-made campaign for *L4D*. Huge levels, intricate paths through twisting alleys and a big bridge before *L4D2* did it.

OVERLORD II

Better the devil you know

WEBSITE overlordgame.com

WE LIKED THIS game, so we thought we'd give you, our loyal readers, a chance to play it.

In this demo, you'll be controlling an evil fiend at the start of his nefarious career. You'll get to control a group of loyal brown fighter minions. As you progress, you'll discover yetis frozen in

ice, and get the chance to explore the Hunting Grounds, located in and around the town of Nordberg, which has no relation to anyone from *Police Squad*.

So if you've ever fancied having a chance to be evil then why not have a bit of a dabble with *Overlord II*. You never know, you might get a taste for it.



1. YOU

Yes, you've got a big sword, but most of the time you'll use others to finish tasks.

2. GOBLIINS

Your Minions scurry about the place, picking up debris they can then use.

3. THE YETI

Wake this guy up from the block of ice and you get to chase him about a bit, just to show how evil you are.

RUMBLE STRIPS



HELPERS

These little creatures are your minions - your main tool for defeating the forces of good that blight the land.



EVILDOER

That's you on the left: the soon-to-be-mighty-leader of the world, with wives obsessed with drapery, no less.

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

NANCY DREW: RANSOM OF THE SEVEN SHIPS DEMO

snipurl.com/nancydrew

If you just couldn't get enough of the Hardy Boys in their recent adventure, you might like to know that its guest star, Nancy Drew, is back in yet another game.



TRUCKER 2

snipurl.com/trucker2demo

Get your CB radios out for the lads, and start sucking on a frozen Yorkie, as its time to go on a trucking rampage in this sequel to a game I didn't know existed. Truck racing, that's all there is to it.



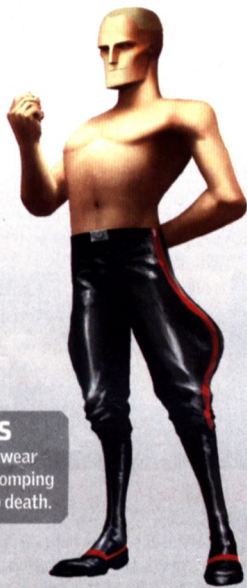


DRESS TO KILL

Pants and boots not the only new things in *Battlefield Heroes*
 Thor's Turbojet outfit – eight **EXCLUSIVE** and **PERMANENT** items

TROUSERS

We hope that bulge isn't a form of alien growth.



BOOTS

This footwear aids in stomping Royals to death.

GLOVES

Gloves, not of metal, but still of supreme power.



HELMET

Deflect pesky bullets with this metal skullcap.

JACKET

The black leather gives you a real faux-SS air.



HOLSTER

The perfect for accessory for a man in any war.

ROCKET

Perfect for the pseudo-Nazi who's on the go.



MASK

For a genuine "Man in the Iron Mask" look.

1

PCZ 210

2

THIS MONTH

3

PCZ 212

4


PCZ 213

T HIS MONTH MARKS the second part of our *Battlefield Heroes* clothing giveaway, with the two items being a lovely helmet and gloves combo. Over the next few months you'll be getting codes that will allow you to redeem other bits of

clothing from the *BF Heroes* website, so you can turn your avatar into a fetishistic, yet smart, pseudo-Nazi.

Other things have been happening in the game, so don't go thinking it's just a virtual clothes shop with a bit of shooting thrown in for good measure.

Recently, a new map has been added, Coastal Clash, which is an infantry-focused scenario with tight streets, a big windmill to snipe off and capture if you want to win.



THE CODE IS ON THE DVD SLEEVE

Don't throw your DVD away! You'll be tossing your code in the bin of you do. So, pick it up out of the trash, dust it down and notice the code printed all nicely for you.

battlefield-heroes.com

Elsewhere there's a whole lot of new features, such as leaderboards, a friends list, clans and player searches.

There'll also be the facility to buy stuff from the shop instead of renting it, plus the timely addition of *PunkBuster*.

To claim your very own Nazi *Rocketeer* uniform – exclusive to the members of *PC ZONE*'s National Army – use the unique code printed on this month's DVD case. And don't forget to get the next *PCZ* for more gear. **PCZ**

"The good things to be found here could be said to be plentiful"

David Brown, *PC ZONE* 208

BUT WHAT IF I MISS AN ISSUE?

Just go online visit my favourite magazines.co.uk/gamesradarshop. Click on the **PC ZONE** on the shelf, and you'll be able to get the issues you've missed. Unless they've sold out.

HOW TO

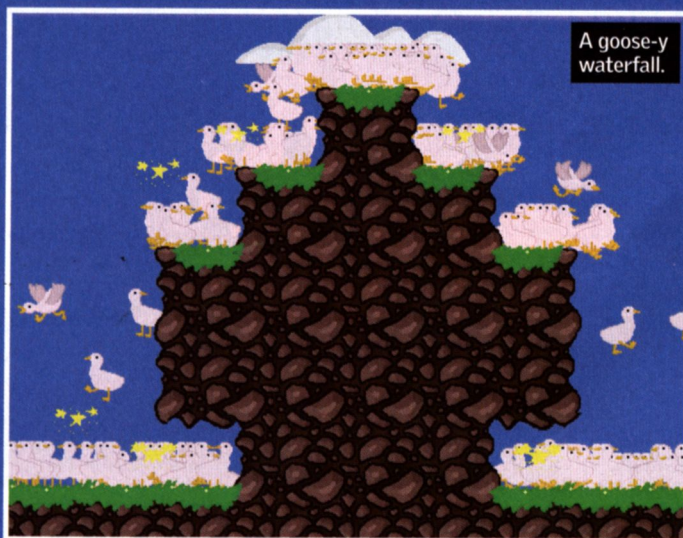
Make a game

PART 2 Steve Hogarty gets inside the minds of geese

A GOOSE STRESS test. I think that's what a real games developer would call it, putting 80 geese in a pit and checking to make sure they don't do anything weird or untoward. I don't know if you've ever seen a dozen geese gently recede into a solid rock wall, their wet, obsidian eyes glaring accusingly as they're engulfed by the stone, but it's a frustrating sight.

"Why?" you shout at the geese, "why are you getting sucked into that wall? I didn't program you to do that, you bloody fowl!"

Of course, you did program them to do that. Game code doesn't know what's right and what's wrong. Putting your geese inside walls is, to game code, exactly the same as putting them in some sensible place. Your processor doesn't even know what a goose is, all it's doing is shifting arrangements of pixels about on the screen, while your brain gives meaning to the shapes and movement. Your mind balks at the notion of one clump of pixels



"When things get a bit weird it's because my instructions are vague and occasionally contradictory"

overlapping with another, because it's decided that the first clump is a bird and the other clump is the floor, but for all the game knows you're playing some sort of pixel overlapping game and everything's OK. That's what's most frustrating: the game doesn't even realise it's acting stupid.

My geese follow my instructions to the letter, so when things inevitably get a bit weird it's because my instructions are vague and occasionally contradictory. In this case, if a goose happened to be accelerating as it approached a wall (it does this when it moves from a walking to a running gait), the collision check would fall one pixel too short.

The next step would notice the collision and turn the goose around, but by that point it was doomed and inescapably embedded in the wall. From

here, the bird's attempts to extricate itself drove it further into the rock.

The fix was simple enough: walls now "push" the geese away. Geese can hurl themselves at the walls all they want (and they do - I've made it so they bump their heads, fall on their feathery bums and see stars for a bit) but they'll no longer get stuck. And that seems to be 90% of AI programming, I've learned.

As interesting as the subject sounds, designing artificial intelligence in games is mostly about stopping things getting wedged into other things. Imbuing a robot with empathy is way down on the to do list, while priority one is making sure he doesn't get stuck in some revolving doors.



DO IT YOURSELF Follow in Steve's footsteps

WWW.YOYOGAMES.COM/GAMEMAKER

Can't be arsed learning to code an engine? Neither can I. The simple but tremendously powerful development platform *Game Maker* does most of the hard stuff for you.

INDIEGAMER.COM

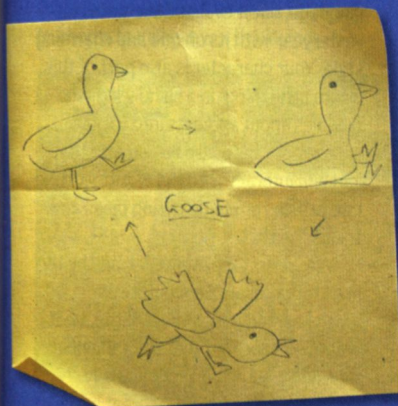
For when you need help, all the coolest indie game developer folk hang out here and exchange ideas and tips and other stuff.

TIGSOURCE.COM

Even more indie community stuff going on round this way, whether you want to get involved or just stare at the indie crowd doing their wonderful thing.

WWW.GIMP.ORG

A free, open-source image editor. This one is very difficult to use, but if you don't want to drop hundreds of pounds on *Photoshop*, it's all you got. Well, that and *MS Paint*.



A behavioural flow-chart.

NEXT MONTH

The geese start stealing hats, and Steve creates level one of *The Hat Game*.



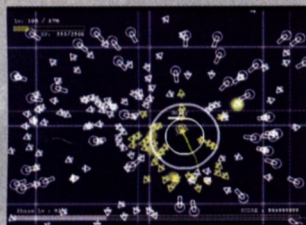
Freeware

Adam Glick refuses to pay for games



This month, jump off the top of really tall things and fall to the ground, teach a penguin to fly (well, bounce), explore a really low-resolution but technically brilliant dungeon, play an unfinished game about little people, and balance a load of cats and watermelons on top of one another...

GLICK'S PICK



VEL.SHOCK(α)

DEVELOPER Fandrey
WEBSITE snipurl.com/vel.shock

AS IS WONT TO happen in the land where freedom reigns and games fall like teardrops from the milky eyes of a spurned maiden (or something), some people have entered a competition with very little real value, other than the need to have a competition of some kind.

The theme of Game Jolt's Shocked! contest (gamejolt.com) was to make a game where lightning, and similar sort of things, was the central element to the gameplay. And there was just one week to get it done.

Vel.shock(α) is probably the best game we've seen from this battle of developers, combining an *Asteroids* dynamic with the aforementioned theme.

The object of the title is simple – move your tiny spacecraft around using the mouse, repelling attacks from turrets by left-clicking. This act produces a shock wave, sending projectiles back towards their emitters. You gain experience by surviving and destroyed turrets, while keeping an eye on your health.

Things soon get hectic, with increasing numbers of turrets spanning quickly. Fun and short, good for a quick blast. Just like all the best indie games.



LITTLE WHEEL

The vital cog in the adventure genre's arcane workings

DEVELOPER Fast Games WEBSITE fastgames.com/littlewheel.html

THIS IS AN extremely charming point-and-click adventure, where you play the only robot left online in a large mechanical city. A problem with the main generator has led to the entire metropolis grinding to a halt, with only yourself able to save the day by manipulating objects and becoming the little wheel that keeps the rest of the gears turning efficiently.

Little Wheel's gameplay unfurls very simply – usable objects and items are circled, a simple left-click performs any

and all actions. As you travel through the world, you need to get various machines and mechanisms working again in order to clear a path to the main generator. A train needs to be refuelled, a lift needs a bit of encouragement to descend all the way to the bottom of its shaft, that sort of thing. It's very simple and effective, and at no point will you ever get stuck.

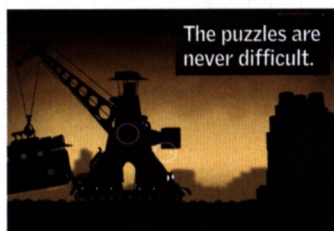
The only problem one might have with it is that it's too short, but that's only because it was such a pleasure to play that we just wanted more, more. We can only hope that more is to come from Fast Games and our robotic hero, though we won't hold our breath.

Visually, things are superb. There's so much character and invention in the graphics, simple silhouette-based artwork that's efficient and beautiful in its own way. I don't want to get carried

away with overly effusive and flowery language, but it evokes adventures of yesteryear with its unique and charming style. Your character is also part of this: a cute little thing on a spindly leg who trundles about and gets into various scrapes, our hero also has an arm that lets him interact with the world, slotting into orifices or manoeuvring pipes and things like that.

We were completely charmed by the little robot fellow's adventure and wholeheartedly recommend it to all. It won't last long, but that's not the point. Charming, cute, funny and visually splendid, *Little Wheel* is a great game to while away 10 minutes or so, a must-play for adventure fans.

We'd like to see Fast Games take the idea and art style and create a full-on adventure, so if you're reading this, Mr Fast Game's person, please do so!



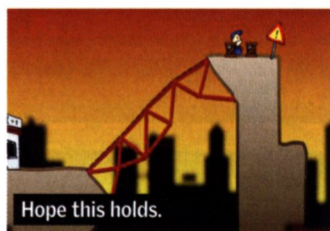
CARGO BRIDGE

No planning permission required...

DEVELOPER Limex Games WEBSITE limexgames.com/games/cargo_bridge/

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE better bridge building and physics-based puzzle games out there, *Cargo Bridge* is still interesting enough to appear here.

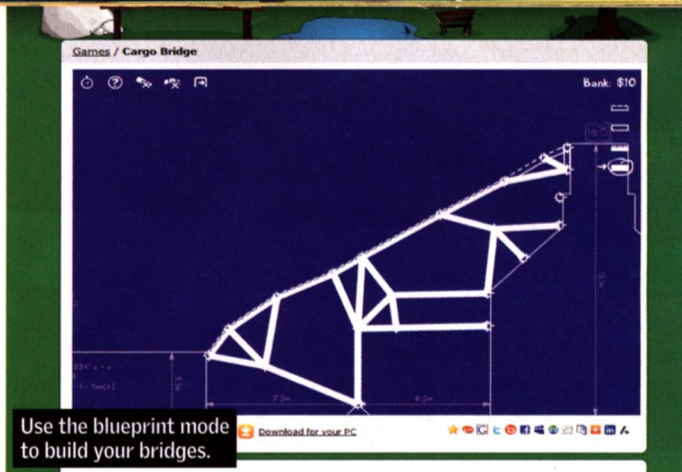
While it doesn't work as well as the more original games like *Bridge Builder*, *Elefunk* and so on, it contains a large number of levels and still has that same kind of fiendish addictive quality that all good Flash games have.



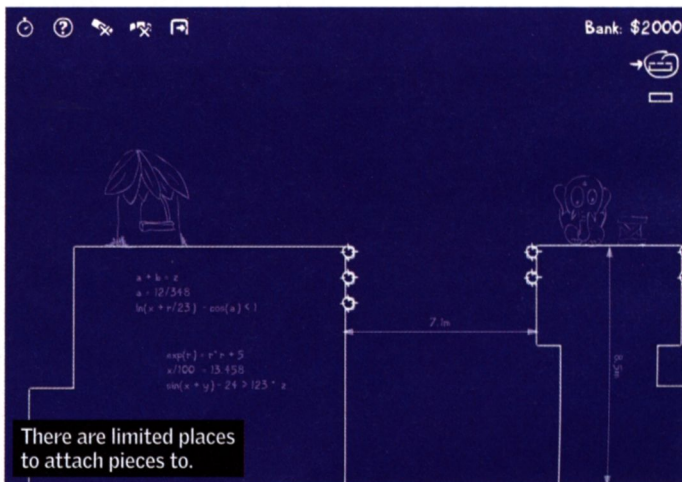
Hope this holds.

Your goal is to guide a group of labourers over various chasms to retrieve wooden boxes, steel safes and even elephants. Once they've safely managed to get to the objects, they need to push them back across the level to the collection area. To do this, you need to construct makeshift bridges.

While the puzzles are often fiendish and require a decent amount of thought to solve, sometimes the game seems to behave illogically and isn't perfect in the physics department. Considering that it is almost entirely reliant on this element, this is a major flaw. Still, once you adapt to its twisted physics, you'll be able to progress at a steady rate. My two hours of solid play indicates its success in capturing attention.



Use the blueprint mode to build your bridges.



There are limited places to attach pieces to.

CRANE WARS

There goes the neighbourhood

DEVELOPER Flashbang Studios WEBSITE blurst.com/crane-wars/play

THE LATEST GAME from the creators of *Minotaur China Shop* and *Off-Road Velociraptor Safari*, *Crane Wars* is aiming to hit the very same slightly madcap buttons that its predecessors did. However, what seems to be missing this time around is the fun element.

While the idea is sound – build a group of towers by using a crane to pile building blocks on top of one another – the execution doesn't have the required charm to make it worth playing.

Your crane follows the movement of your mouse and holding down the left button picks up building blocks. Move grey ones to the highlighted areas until a brown one appears, which caps the building and turns it into a less wobbly skyscraper. Competing against you is a gang of ruthless scabs – unlicensed builders who'll stop at nothing to bring down your skyscrapers.

They'll do this by lobbing building materials, trucks and other debris in

your direction, trying to dislodge the foundations of your towers and bring them crashing to the ground. You can do this back to them, if you fancy, so it isn't all one way traffic. Keep playing until your money runs out and that's it, really.

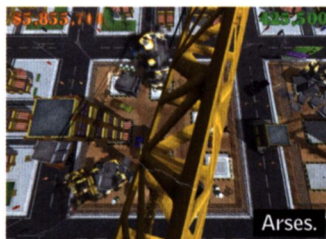
While *Crane Wars* isn't bad, it doesn't retain the same charm as Flashbang's earlier releases. And those two talking heads are annoying, repetitive and stupid. Get rid of them!



These two guys get seriously annoying.

We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight!

Look on my works ye mighty, and despair!



Arses.



Careful now.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



PILLARS

DEVELOPER The Monkey Odyssey Project WEBSITE snipurl.com/pillarsgame

APART FROM HAVING one of those annoying names that screams "look at us, we're trying to be irreverent," the Monkey Odyssey Project have put together an addictive and challenging webgame.

The object of the game is to avoid crashing into the pillars. The game is made of nine levels, each based on a planet in the solar system.

Pillars is brutally unforgiving, but you'll keep coming back to it in a masochistic way.

Extend

David Brown checks on the latest mods, maps and add-ons



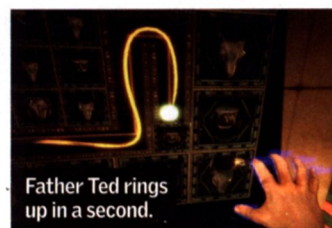
Eat my purple weapon, undead swine.



The Hand of Fate.



Ooh, glowy!



Father Ted rings up in a second.

CURSE EPISODES

The Mummy returns...

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/curse1](http://www.moddb.com/mods/curse1)

THIS IS A mod that's attracted a lot of attention since it was first tentatively announced on that bastion of creation, ModDB. Described by some over-enthusiastic users as "the reason they came to the site and stayed," this mod takes *Half-Life 2* and turns it into a *Hexen II* tribute act. That doesn't stop it being an interesting experience, although one that is slightly perplexing and empty at the same time.

Of course, ancient Egyptian necropolises aren't known for their bustling social climates, so by definition *Curse* needs to feel empty. However, perhaps the manner in which it's been made to be so isn't as effective as it

could be. Engine and time limitations probably meant that the developers haven't been able to get the exact feeling of isolation they were looking for, as you can see in certain, more lavish sections, which have a much greater atmosphere surrounding them.

As a magic using character, you have two abilities. First of all, you have a glowing hand that can be used in a gravity gun-esque style to break pottery, push buttons and so on. It doesn't go so far as to allow you to drag objects towards you, but we could guess that this is something that will come in a later episode. Your other ability is to don a mask of some sort and wield a mystical pink hammer and smite

your enemies with it. Well, I say wield, but it actually just floats in front of you and, with a flick of the mouse, you can swing it at the oncoming mummies and evil wizards. It's certainly a strange way of doing things and only partially succeeds. If you hit a mummy correctly, it might split in two, which is obviously cool, but other times you'll don't really feel any connection with the weapon and so combat is unsatisfying.

The majority of the game involves finding keys, solving puzzles and, later on, some annoying precision jumps.

There's also a good puzzle mechanism that is like moving a ball through a maze. Fail to do it quick enough and a spectral hand shoves you away, hurting you. The way you move the ball is fiddly, though, so frustration while trying to complete the later ones is inevitable. It seemed to me to work best at certain mouse sensitivity settings, so be aware.

There has to be a mention of the ending before I finish. I have to say it was unnerving and was really neat, as our American brothers might say. It's a bit of an anti-climax in some other ways, though it is pleasing for it to not just be a "kill big boss now" event.

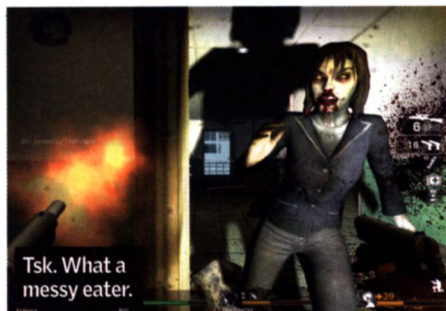
Incidentally, the ModDB entry indicates there were two boss battles to be fought, although I don't think I actually found either of them. Perplexing, as I said, but worth a go.

"This mod takes *Half-Life 2* and turns it into a *Hexen II* tribute act"

DEAD CITY

The first of many...

CAMPAIGN FOR Left 4 Dead WEBSITE l4dmods.com



SO, NOW VALVE have at last graced our copies of *Left 4 Dead* with the ability to play custom maps, we can get down to some serious infected slaughtering.

So long, Blood Harvest! Say your prayers, No Mercy! We're moving on to pastures new, starting with Dead City. The first thing you'll notice about this (and Death Aboard The Ship) is that they are absolutely excellent in terms of design.

Sure, there are the odd low-resolution textures every so often and some of the rooms haven't had as much effort put into them as they could have done, but

this is just nit-picking. The fact is that this – and The Ship – are new campaigns (almost, as at the time of writing, this campaign isn't complete), but each one is so big you'll feel as if you've played through about two normal Valve levels back-to-back.

To get it to work with your friends, start a locally hosted Campaign mode, then select the campaign you want to. It has to be locally hosted, remember, or you won't get anywhere (probably).

The most important thing about this mod is that that it's *Left 4 Dead* and it's new.

DEATH ABOARD THE SHIP

Get the dramamine ready...

CAMPAIGN FOR Left 4 Dead WEBSITE l4dmods.com

MOVING ONTO THE second of the *L4D* custom campaigns, Death Aboard The Ship is probably more ambitious than Dead City. Whereas the latter is set in similar surroundings to No Mercy's locale, DATS is very much aiming for new, interesting areas.

You start off in a prison and you'll end up on board a ship. Each level is huge and will be an epic challenge on Expert difficulty. Think the third level of Dead Air but longer, basically.

What differentiates this from Dead City is that the scenarios aren't similar to the ones in

the original *L4D* campaigns. The prison feels just like the one simulated in *The Suffering*, dark and foreboding buildings looming over you as you battle a Tank while standing on a pile of corpses.

Level design is also interesting, with lots of different ways to get to the same objective. We haven't tried yet, but it's apparently possible to also play this (and Dead City) in Versus. The size of the levels should make it challenging enough even for veteran players, the design will enthrall everybody, even if just because it is actually new, so sick is everybody of the original levels.



THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

More fun than the modern one

MOD FOR Civilization IV WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-ancient-mediterranean

VERCINGETORIX, ARMINIUS, LARS Porsena, Krisos, Decebalus, Argantonio and Viriato. Just a few of the faction leaders in this *Civilization IV* mod (based on a very popular *Civ3* one).

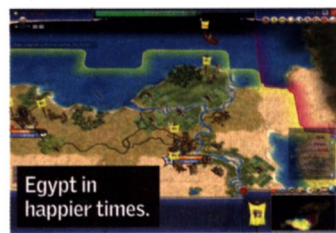
The setting is the ancient world and, instead of just the usual people, you've

got the Lydians, Iberian tribes, the Kolchis and various other factions only a select few will have heard of.

There are two versions of the mod available: one for vanilla *Civ4* and one for *Beyond the Sword*, which obviously has all the new features that brings with it. It's also the best one to get, if you can, because it's the only one that's currently being updated.



Exhaustive, authentic and, as usual, plain fun because, well, it's *Civ* and that's always fun.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



ZOEY NUDE
MOD FOR Left 4 Dead
WEBSITE l4dmods.com

Oh dear lord, what have they done to you woman? You know what'll be next, don't you? A Witch nude skin, which is too grotesque for words.

Zoey's 'new look' involves fully physics-enabled breasts, apparently. I'd say it was unbelievable, but it isn't really. It's an inevitable event for any female character in a videogame.

Online Zone

What's new in PC ZONE's forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!



It's been mega-holiday-fun time at Zone Towers this month, so the internet has been far from our minds. Nevertheless, in dogged fashion we got Fight Club under our belts early on, allowing you all to humiliate us again in numerous ways. Zone Chat was filled with peculiar individuals (not to mention the PCZ staff themselves) who gave vent to their opinions as if the others in the channel had any interest.

ON THE BLOG



FORGET THE MOUSE and keys. Toss that useless baby toy called a 'controller' in the bin and refuse point blank to wave the white stick Nintendo gleefully provided you with. It's time for the new dawn of game interaction. Yes, face control is where, they say, "it's at". Specifically, "it" is "at" here: snipurl.com/headtracking. Just look at the guy's face on the screen! He's in the future, right now. We're so envious we've actually painted each other green to illustrate this face. Yes, all the way down.

We also took a little time out to congratulate our very own walking robot man, Phil Wand, on the assembly of his latest project, a startlingly realistic humanoid baby that has, as of the time of writing, not blue screened once or needed an upgrade due to frame drops. It has, however, been heavily reliant on his motherboard for sustenance, giving our android chum the chance to talk about his other true love: porn. No, sorry, I meant to say hardware news. Big, shiny hardware news that makes us want to spend a lot of money. Or ring up PR people to blag some freebies.

Don't forget to get following us on Twitter (we're @pczone) and to pop along to pczone.co.uk and join us in the forums.

FIGHT CLUB

Dale Winton was proud this day

LIKE A HELLISH Supermarket Sweep of Death, the gibbs flew freely in this month's Fight Club as combatants pushed explosives-laden trolleys to victory in *Team Fortress 2*'s Badwater Basin and Pipeline. The battle was epic, and was made all the more so by the repeated victories of a certain team – ours – whose exceptional trolley-pushing skills garnered both the favour of the Orange God Dale Winton, and the mouth-frothing fervour of a certain Ghostchanter, who spent much of the time sharing his contemplations on his team's inadequacies from his position in the lower-half of the scoreboard.

The battle for supermarket supremacy raged on, with the likes of our very own Chris Capel (The Tingler), one of this month's slave labourers Nick Brakespear (Flatline) and forum-lurker PeachFUZZ filling the ranks of Team Awesome and pushing the trolley of victory towards the checkout of, er, win.

David served as a Tom Berenger stand-in with his piss-throwing sniper performance and stubborn refusal to die, while both Steve and Marco became quietly obsessed with people's behinds

Piss-stained warriors of the world unite!



and all their backstabbing potential. Chris, meanwhile, served as a solid Heavy, though was outshone somewhat by Bulletproof Smurf's fancy hat. Not that the hat was shining, but it was certainly the envy of all who saw it.

Amid the bloody swathe cut by Team Awesome's brilliance however, victory was not always so assured and the fight

was made all the more difficult by the notable performances of [Quite]Rob and Bulletproof Smurf, who repeatedly thwarted our trolley-based plans. We salute them. The bastards. With a glare of annoyance, it must also be said that Hyperfunk's propensity for grenade spam also proved to be a bit of a thorn in the side of Team Awesome.

Matches lost, matches won and flesh chunks thrown around liberally, the Orange God was appeased by our blood sacrifices and his fake tan glowed brighter in the sky, warming all our hearts. The Supermarket Sweep of Death was done and the time had come for all to leap onto the trolley and bounce like demented pixies in anticipation of the group photo.

After David's many frustrated cries of "STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT STOP IT", the violence finally subsided long enough for the picture to be taken, and there the day of epic trolley-based conflict was etched in pixels and carried into eternity. Or at least, into the next month.

Two heavies, one medic, and a logistical problem.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

What do you all think of *Arma II* – a goodie or a baddie?

JOWOO: I'm calling it *Armed Assault* because *Arma* is a stupid name.

SUNSCRAMBLE: I really like the idea of *Armed Assault*, but like many other developers recently they seem to have forgotten that they're making a game.

You can shove in as many killer features as you like and you can strive for all the realism in the world, but when you forget the simple, important things, such as giving the all-important act of "moving your crosshair over the enemy and squeezing the trigger" a nice solid feeling, your game isn't worth shit to me.

THE TALKING HEAD: I love realism in a game, but only in Hollywood (or game) terms. For example, we all accept that, in real life, one bullet hit on pretty much any part of your body would render you more or less



"Try your best to look casual, OK?"

useless, but we wouldn't accept that in a game, unless that was how the game was made and there was some kind of satisfaction or counter to it. This kind of thinking should be applied to all games.

JOWOO: I have a new-found respect for anyone who flies an attack helicopter. Simply turning them around 180° without plummeting into the ground like a feckin' dart takes an unbelievable amount of concentration. I have to say though that I'm enjoying it in a slightly masochistic sort of way.

LIQUID METAL: I love this game, maybe because I've always loved *Operation Flashpoint* and this is almost identical (including some of the bugs). *Arma* was a horrid mess of a game, *Arma II* is the proper sequel to *OpFlash*.

APOPHIS_DD: *America's Army 3* is free on *Steam* now, isn't it? Anyone tried that out? I dunno if I can afford to buy *Arma II*, whether I'd like it or not, but might *America's Army 3* be worth a shot if we could get enough people to join in?

SHAKERMAKER07: I'm finding it exactly like *OpFlash*, but very buggy.

LIQUID_METAL: So exactly like *OpFlash* then?

BRAX: *Arma II* is awesome. Only played the opening mission so far, but the realism and atmosphere is incredible. And the way you can look around with your head, so you can look down at your gun while you're walking along... that's a really nice touch. And essential in vehicles.

WHO'S WHO
 Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
 David Brown [PCZ]plughead
 Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
 Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx
 Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea

BATTLEFIELD 2
 85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
 85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
 85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
 85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
 85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2
 85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT



Blue men and phantom genitals



Blue World Order was a force to be reckoned with.

THIS MONTH SAW A particularly memorable Zone Chat, I think those who were there will agree. Lots of people turned up, perhaps because we remembered to announce it with plenty of time to spare this time, and the repartee was sharp, incisive and rarely crude and overly insulting.

David tried to kick things off with a little competition about his new *Steam* picture, but it was guessed within seconds and made him look slightly silly.

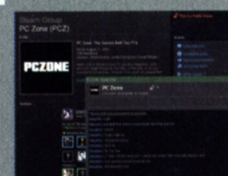
Nick Brakespear (Flatline) was more chatty than usual, delivering what could only be described as a torrent of messages at the throng.

Meanwhile Snoozer – Marco Fiori, this issue's other work experience lad – claimed he could even feel Nick's ethereal penis prodding him over the chat room. This image was swiftly erased from peoples' minds by Bluemeanie entering the fray and prompting at least one person to talk about wrestling.

Apophis_DD tried to get people interested in the new *Harry*

Potter film, but his exhortations were painfully ignored. Finally, people were diverted onto the topic of which game they were looking forward to most. *Batman: Arkham Asylum* was probably the winner, with *APB* and even that forgotten relic *Huxley* being discussed.

David had the last word, proudly declaring his yearning for *Grey's Anatomy 2: Meredith's Revenge*.



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 find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've now devoted all your time to writing crime thrillers – then feel free to join other readers and old and current *PCZ* staff on the following public servers.

PCZONE THE RETURN! JACKASS



David Brown releases his dark side in *The Sims 3*

WHILE WE HAVE mixed feelings about *The Sims* series, there's one thing the entire team agrees on: it's a wonderful way of torturing people. While you can't simulate Guantánamo Bay (yet - we expect a mod any day), you can still try to drive your virtual people to suicide by training them to be highly antisocial and so extremely lonely; wall them into alcoves in the style of the best Edgar Allen Poe stories, or just hide their loo.

With *The Sims 3* promising more lifelike Sims, we thought it the right time to bring back *Jackass*, to see if more lifelike Sims means we can deliver more lifelike tortures.



Why Barry's jumping in the pool when he doesn't like it, is beyond us.



"Do you like my hat?" started a fine romance.

A WATERY GRAVE

THE SETUP

To begin with, we set test subjects the simple task of not dying.

For this experiment we put two comically mismatched housemates in a room filling with water, and left a pack

of disturbing teddy bears to watch their every move.

THE OUTCOME

Jackass veteran Barry Test - an average, career-driven man - returned to pit himself against the newcomer Jack Lumber - a vast Shrek-a-like whose clothing is made of solid oak.

At first, they got on well, but when Barry took a fancy to Jack, their relationship started to disintegrate. In a rapid fashion.

Barry's pick-up line didn't go down well, so Jack hurled himself in the ever-expanding pool to escape. Following hot on his heels, Barry stripped off and took a quick dip too.

Seizing the opportunity, the pool expanded to cover virtually the whole room, leaving Jack and Barry to count down the time to see which one would drown first.

Amazingly, the man in the wooden suit won the impromptu 'hold breath'

competition, leaving his adversary in the company of the Grim Reaper and able to enjoy his watery prison with no further interruptions.

WE RECKON

Weight, clothing or mental stability plays no part in the scenario of two men being locked in a water-filled house.

All the odds pointed to Barry Test surviving - he was normal, fit and athletic, while Jack was a vast, blubbery green whale wearing almost an entire tree over his bulbous frame. And yet, Jack won easily. Barry, hold your head in shame.



It's just like *Titanic*: the skinny one dies.

PCZONE PCZON

GAMING HELL.

THE SETUP

We keep hearing from 'people who know' that gaming is bad for your health, but what about a Sim's health? Will a constant diet of gaming and nothing else do enough damage to destroy the sanity of our test subject?

With Barry Test so disgracefully having died on us in his gruelling face-off against Jack Lumber, his sister Bertha has kindly stepped up to the gaming plate. Will a lack of any facilities other than a TV and a controller hamper her everyday life?

THE OUTCOME

Bertha's house consists of a dark room with a \$3,500 TV in the middle. A cheap chair and a games console are her only other companions, but, unperturbed, she sets about her task with gusto, really getting into this whole gaming lark. She seems to really enjoy the American Football game. Hours pass as Bertha dwells in her eternal twilight existence, her hands blistering up from the constant gamepad usage.

Unable to fight the call of nature, she urinates all over the carpet after a solid

eight hours of play. Refusing to give in to tiredness or sanity, she gets back to the gridiron. More time passes and she starts to flag, playing in five minute bursts. Suddenly, she passes out from exhaustion, at 8.15am.

Rousing herself in one last, desperate attempt to beat the Oakland Raiders on the hardest difficulty, her body simply gives up, expelling yet more urine all over the carpet, and she collapses down into the putrid puddle, forever lost to the night. Poor Bertha.

WE RECKON

Bertha's attempt at a marathon gaming session was ended by calls of nature, falling woefully behind even the least experienced Korean *Counter-Strike* obsessive at a mere one day's worth of solid play. Perhaps a regular dosage of insanely strong coffee might have helped her continue, but, to be honest, we'd hated to have seen the state of her carpet afterwards. So long, Bertha, you gave it your best shot.



GERIATRIC RACING

THE SETUP

Take four old people (well, Sims), give them a single objective and see who can get there quickest. Starting on the far left corner of the game map, our OAPs were ready for the starter's pistol, preparing for an epic journey to the top-right of the play area. Who'd win? Who'd die of a heart attack?

THE OUTCOME

Four bicycles were provided for the contestants to use.

When one of the old ladies got her hands on the first bike and proceeded to rocket ahead of the chasing pack, all of whom remained rooted to their saddles, nary a glimpse of competitive spirit or endeavour on display.

Rose Random eclipsed

her familial friends Richard, Rita and Ronald by some distance, getting to the target bin and toppling it with aplomb.

The only vaguely unusual thing that happened was Rita and Richard choosing to occupy the exact same point in time and space, mucking up all attempts at individual screenshots and threatening the universe's very existence with their continuum-shattering antics.

WE RECKON

Well, it turned out to be a total waste of time, but we did learn one valuable lesson from our geriatric grand prix, namely that Sims have, when given an order, little chance of ever showing initiative. Maybe we asked too much of them or maybe the whole idea was just totally flawed from the outset.

Perhaps we'll just go with "they were well dumb" and not attribute any blame to our experiment selection process. Yes, that'll do.



Take your PC gaming to the next level

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



Windows Vista is the new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's

primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it.

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

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

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

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

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

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

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

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

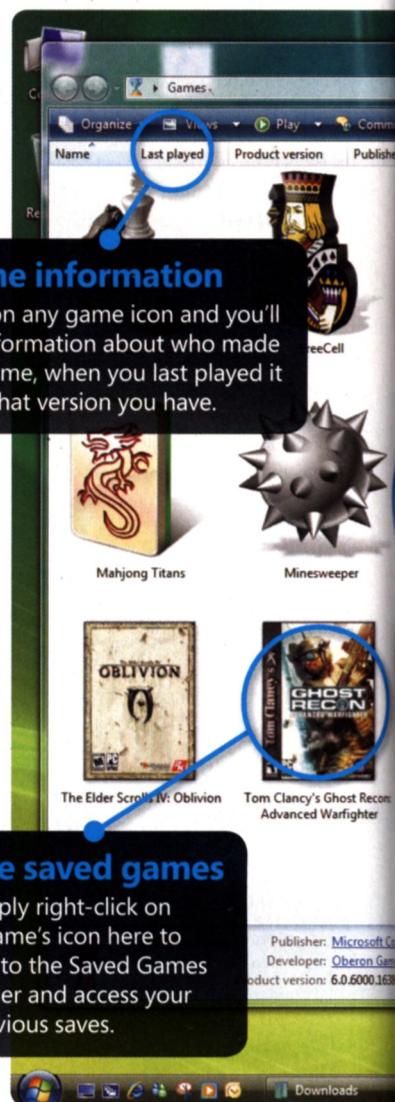
your processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating of how well your PC will run Windows Vista

Game information

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



See saved games

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

Super Media Center

Windows Media Center is at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect up your PC to an HDTV and browse your music and video collection. What's more, you can bin your set-top DVD recorder! With Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play, record and timeshift TV programmes. Get hold of Windows Media Center Extender (a device that plugs into your TV) and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, this Extender capability is already built into it.

All your games

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



Game rating

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

New built-in games

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

Get more from your PC with Windows: The Official Magazine

If you want to get the very best from your Windows Vista PC then pick up a copy of *Windows Magazine*, which tells you everything you need to know

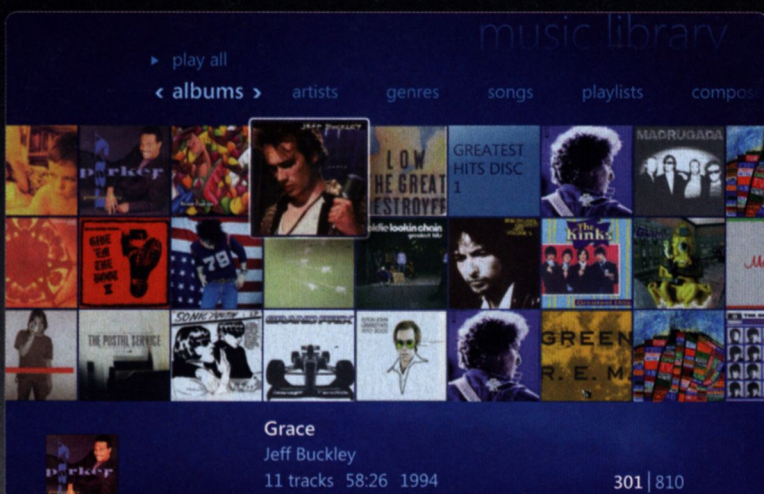
We show you...

- ➔ How to speed up your PC
- ➔ How to fix common problems
- ➔ How to boost stability
- ➔ The best new kit to buy for your PC
- ➔ Great new games and software



Issue 34 is out now

Find out more at www.officialwindowsmagazine.com



EASY LISTING Intuitive menus help you to browse your music collection

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

MYST

PRAISED BY SOME as gaming art, to the fans it was a world of exploration and desolate beauty; of books whose words shaped reality, of strange crystalline formations that sang; of Ewok-esque tree-towns and highly improbable architecture. And of course, obscure puzzles with obtuse solutions that probably contributed to the mental problems of an entire generation.

If you keep a pencil and notebook handy for the solving of puzzles, you probably played *Myst*, or should have. This was adult, intellectual gaming. Gaming that would stroke its beard and question its own existence.

To others of course, it was nothing more than a glorified and stuck-up slide-show with a distinct lack of NPCs or

a means to kill them, thus establishing the Marmite effect that the *Myst* series never really shifted.

Assuming the role of – to quote Zork – an ageless, faceless, gender-neutral, culturally-ambiguous adventure person, the player freely explored a series of magical worlds linked by a hub, solving puzzles and uncovering the tale of a world-writing chap named Atrus and his two treacherous sons.

Mute as the player was, and with cutscenes and dialogue limited to a few important moments, *Myst's* storytelling could be seen as a precursor to that of *Half-Life* and its silent ginger hero.

In fact, such is the hardness of some of *Myst's* puzzles, one has to wonder whether the famed physicist might have been better suited to *Myst Island*.

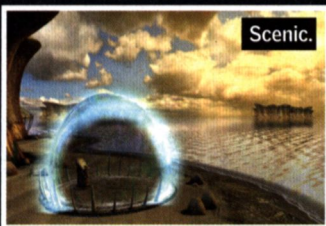


A stiff breeze and down it'll all go.

While there is no denying that *Myst* was a sedate experience that would occasionally stagger to a halt, when played casually and in the right frame of mind the game's magical scenery and um, mystical atmosphere could elicit a sense of inner calm. That's despite the

incredible amount of frustration at the puzzles that made up *Myst*.

Of course, it also helped if you were stoned at the time. Which we could never advise you to be, because drug use makes Jesus cry. And Gordon Brown, but that's not as bad.



Scenic.



Fancy, but a bastard to clean.

But how? Gorillas in the myst

Unfortunately for those of you hoping to find *Myst* on abandonware sites, the game is a little too famous and sold a few too many copies for it to have slipped into the realm of 'nobody cares'.

There are a couple of options for nostalgia-seekers or puzzle fanatics however, including the *Myst Ultimate Compilation*, featuring all five games, as

well as a port of the original to a 3D engine called *Real Myst*.

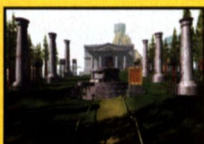
www.amazon.co.uk

There are copies floating about everywhere, including the compilation.

www.gametap.com

Real Myst is available on Gametap.

Myst Opportunities Adult puzzling through the ages



1 MYST
The first game, and best-selling on PC until *The Sims* pipped on its puzzley parade somewhat.



2 RIVEN
The sequel, featuring both CG and live-action characters, plus a big ball thing on the cover.



3 MYST 3: EXILE
Full spiny-360°-rotatovision featuring the brilliant Brad Dourif, the doctor in *Deadwood*.



4 MYST 4: REVELATION
Different developer, same puzzling, prettier visuals. Not exactly a revolution.



5 URU: AGES BEYOND MYST
Cyan Worlds' failed attempt at an adventure MMO. Was the world ready for this?



6 MYST 5: END OF AGES
The ending of the *Myst* saga, featuring *Urdu's* fully 3D engine.

Now & Then

STARCRRAFT II vs Z



Popular in Korea.

WHEN DELVING INTO the past in search of *StarCraft* comparisons, it would be easy to jump straight back to *Warcraft*. But given that Blizzard have arguably been remaking the same game throughout both franchises, and that the office consensus was that *Warcraft* isn't sci-fi, instead we'll get nostalgic over the forgotten Z.

Where *StarCraft II* has lawyer-baiting similarities to a certain Games Workshop franchise, Z has two robotic factions represented by those most sacred of colours: red and blue. There's none of this three-way warfare nonsense, no hero characters whose death may cost you the battle, no deep and epic plot. There is only war. And sarcastic robots, and destructible scenery, and a territory-based resource system that everybody seems to think was invented by *Company of Heroes*. Bitter? Perhaps, but Z wins. Always.



Get to know your grunts.

Play it! Play this game - but be prepared to be punished

- 1 Copies of Z are rare these days, and kept locked away in vaults. Or something. But if you find one, head to "Zzone" at zzone.lewe.com for tips on running it on your modern PC.
- 2 Alternatively, find yourself some red and blue paint, head out to your garden, and split it into territories ready to be captured by your army of mechanical men.
- 3 To spice things up, try recruiting friends and family. Paint them red and blue, and command them to fight to the death for supremacy of the garden!
- 4 When your friends tell you to sod off and your family disowns you, have them all executed for desertion. Then play *StarCraft II*, and weep for the past.

MAMEframe

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA

OWLBEARS ARE A bit shit. A bear with a chicken's head? That's stupid. Perhaps that's why they never made it into *Baldur's Gate*. Nevertheless, if you're prone to even mild geekgasms over the appearance of recognisable monsters from the D&D universe in

a D&D-inspired game, then rub thine thighs verily for *Shadow over Mystara*, for there be owlbears here.

While at its core the game is yet another *Golden Axe* clone, it does offer RPG-style upgradeable character equipment, a neat inventory system and,



Dunno what button that was.



What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

depending on the class, a hefty number of spells to cast. With its occasionally non-linear plot and challenging gameplay, *Shadow over Mystara* is a good way to pass the time while waiting for *Dragon Age: Origins*.



See, owlbears. Told you.

Back in the day



THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT 2: BURIED IN TIME

By Nick Brakespear

WHILE MYST WAS full of obscure puzzling, *Buried in Time* was all about shitting yourself at fairly regular intervals.

Myst was safe; the worst that could happen was a puzzle-induced headache. But *Buried in Time*? A cow could fall on you. Or you could be stabbed, or fall into a spiky pit of death, or alter the timeline and become a new Aztec deity. *Buried in Time* was an adventure game played at knife point. Or so it felt.

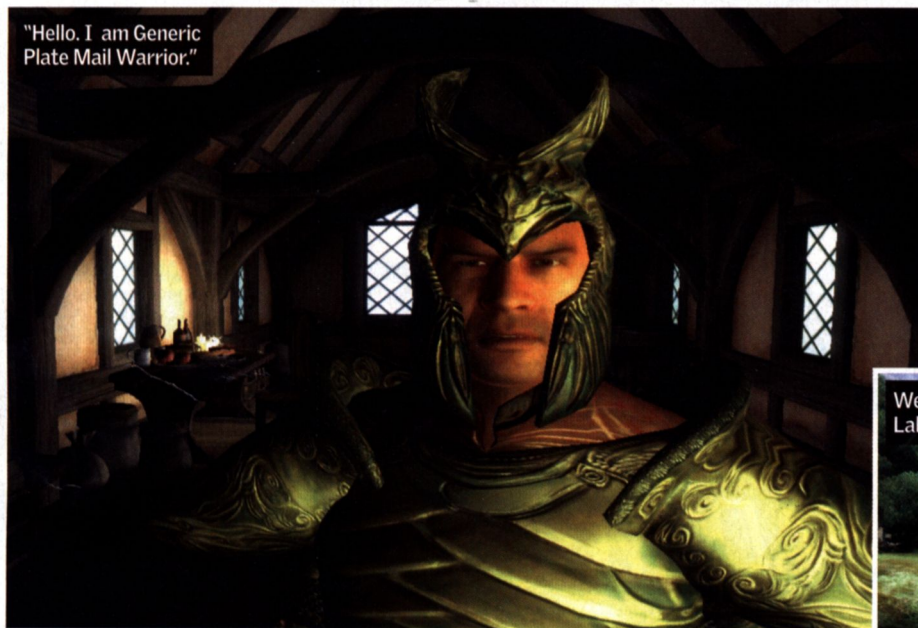
You could lose the game in any number of ways, and each time it happened you'd be presented with a death page, featuring a dramatic illustration of your final moments. This time-travelling adventure with depth, tension and the occasional *Monty Python* reference, and one of the first games I ever owned.

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



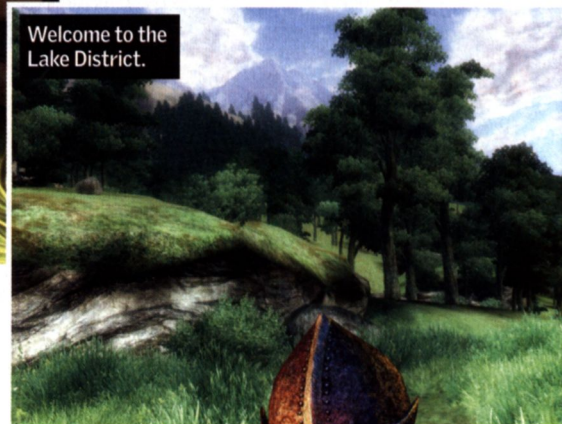
"Hello. I am Generic Plate Mail Warrior."



Oh look. A zombie. How imaginative.



Welcome to the Lake District.



OBLIVION – GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION

Slinging spells: **Richard Cosgrove**

MY LATE ARRIVAL to *Oblivion* is odd, as RPGs are my favourite gaming genre. The genre's opportunities to develop your character yourself and for deep storytelling make RPGs just damn fun. So when *Oblivion: Game of the Year* edition appeared on *Steam*, I decided to pay a visit to the lands of Cyrodiil.

Oblivion sends you off to recover a mystical gem, stolen from Patrick Stewart's corpse, to save the land from being invaded by the dimension of Oblivion (literally, Hell). Or you go where you like, killing monsters and people, and ignore your destiny driven mission.

Now that sounds just dandy. Explore a world while it slowly turns into

Gehenna, as Hell infects your homeland. But that doesn't happen. When you're not following the main quest, *Oblivion's* incursion is placed on an indefinite hold. So there's actually no threat to Cyrodiil.

Add to this that your character doesn't develop. His (or her) skills improve, but your character remains essentially unchanged (unlike in *Mass Effect*, *Planescape* and *The Witcher*).

In short *Oblivion* lacks a solid story – a major feature of the RPG genre. The greatest RPGs – like *Mass Effect*, *Baldur's Gate II* and *Planescape* – have dramatic storylines that see your hero's actions changing them, their friends and allies, and the world they live in. But in *Oblivion* you may as well not exist.

Another major failing is the lack of fantasy in this supposedly fantasy world. In *Morrowind* you could turn round a hillock and bump into a living tentacled zeppelin, or a three-storey tall beetle. In *Oblivion* there are only the generic fantasy tropes of elves, ogres and skeletons.

I admit this lack of the fantastical would change if I'd entered *The Shivering Isles*, but I couldn't bring myself to play long enough to earn entry into that realm of insanity. And that's because I found *Oblivion* wasn't any fun to play. On any level.

VERDICT: A highly polished turd

"This armor isn't rusty. It's aged."



Damien Hurst's latest installation is just gross.

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

Going slightly mad: **Adam Glick**

WHILE HP LOVECRAFT'S creations had silly names – Shub-Niggurath, Nyarlathotep, Zoth-Ommog sound like puzzles from *Countdown* – his stories are effectively creepy. And like Lovecraft's stories, *Dark Corners* was disturbing from the start – the introductory cutscene has your insane

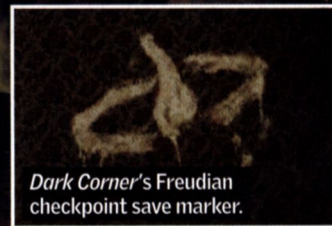
character hanging himself in his padded cell. Brilliant! Add to that good graphics and voice acting, a focus on investigating not shooting monsters, and distorting the screen to reflect your character's mental state, all made for an enjoyably frightening PC game. I immediately loved this game.

For about 10 minutes.

That was how long it took me to realise Headfirst had decided to use a checkpoint save system.

OK developers listen up: Checkpoint saves are needed on consoles because their controllers only have 12 buttons, so you can't realistically dedicate one just for saving games.

But they aren't needed on PCs, because these use keyboards that have around 102 buttons. In fact, they're pointless and unnecessarily irritating.

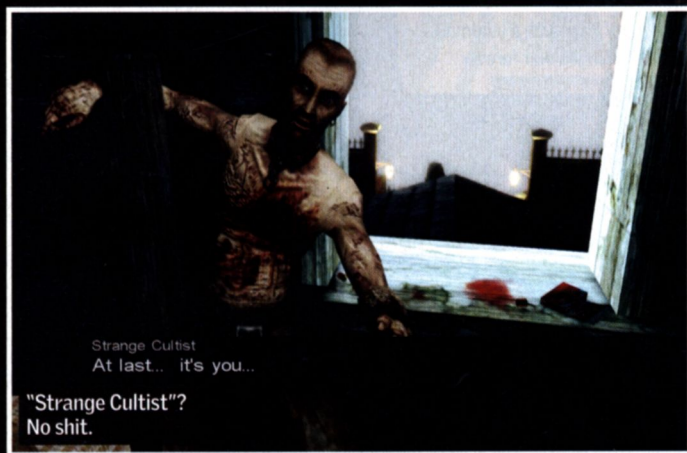


Dark Corner's Freudian checkpoint save marker.

Do you developers really think we gamers believe you can't make pressing F5 save the game when we like, when you're able to produce cinematic visuals that outclass most Hollywood films, and accurately recreate how a sniper's bullet flies through the air and through a person's body?

We're not dumb. We just want to save the game when we damn well like. So stop making excuses and let us.

VERDICT: Gimme quicksaves!



Strange Cultist
At last... it's you...

"Strange Cultist"?
No shit.

TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE

Sword and sandling: **Marco Fiori**

LOOT MAKES EVERYTHING worthwhile. Dying 17 times against a boss would usually result in my mouse going through my monitor, but it's quickly forgotten when I finally see the drop when I win. Weeks of grinding finally pay off, but there's little rest as my helm is looking starting to look shabby.

Genre enthusiasts may draw comparison with a certain game by Blizzard, but *Titan Quest* does a cracking job at mimicking its obvious inspiration. Rich in lore and teeming with items, *Titan Quest* holds your hand as it guides you lovingly through the ancient world. Greece, Egypt, China and Hades are all full of the heroes and heroines you would expect.

Iron Lore have successfully transferred the ancient world to digital

form, both narratively and visually. A particular highlight comes when you're asked to fight your way through the Pyramids of Giza – a setting that's oddly untouched by games.

Never-ending with limitless character opportunities, *Titan Quest* is the perfect fix those awaiting *Diablo III*. If that wasn't enough, the six-player

co-op makes my loot-fetish go into overdrive. The screen is filled with yellows, blues and purples: it's like a fireworks display made up of magical gear – a sensory overload.

Anyway, enough chat as I'm all out of health potions and there are mobs that need killing.

VERDICT: Loot-tastic

What happens when you eat deep-fried Mars bars.



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE? Readers on their chosen poison

BRAID

Surely the best platformer since *Yoshi's Island*. (I swear I only borrowed a SNES to play it.)

JohnnyWarmonger

THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT

Figured since I'm all grown up now this game would be both easier and less terrifying. Not a chance, but it's worth plodding through just for Garrett's dry-toned wisecracks: "So this is the Lost City... it ain't lost no more."

JoWoo

FALLOUT 3

Bowed down to *GFWL* and got the DLC. Waste of money. Still the game is awesome when loaded up with mods.

Shakermaker07



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

Steve Hogarty yelps after splicing his mainbrace

THE *TOTAL WAR* series has always been a uniquely appealing game. There are few other strategy titles with such a breadth of content, that go to such heights of authenticity, and with this level of originality. That's all three gaming dimensions pretty much nailed down

to form a sort of cuboid of military brilliance that we can't help but be in awe of.

We caught up with Creative Assembly's Kieran Brigden to find out what made *Empire: Total War* such a landmark outing for the series, and how it's changed war forever.



Bloom was ever-present in Civil War-era America.

01 PARTY LIKE IT'S 1699

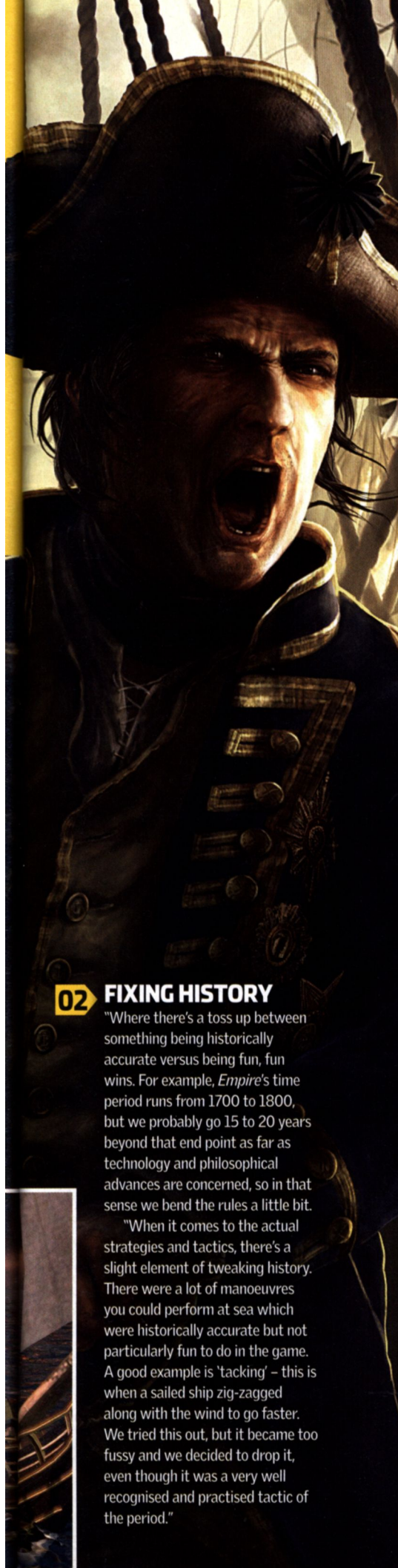
"When considering a setting for *Total War*, there are several features present in any area of history that you're thinking of using.

"There have to be a number of factions that could've come to power at any one time. Basically, you've got to have a competing set of nations, families or clans or, as in *Empire's* case, established nations that could've come and dominated at that time. There had to be a time where there was a competition element between these people.

"It also has to be a time of technological and military change. It has to be a period in which the sort of battles you're fighting at the outset aren't the sort of battles you're fighting at the end. In *Empire's* case, the way we did it with that was the technology, obviously with the use of gunpowder and artillery advancing all the way through the game, so by the time you get to the end your single-shot flintlocks and cannons have been replaced by rapid-fire mechanisms and long-range mortar bombs."

Sail-powered submarines didn't catch on.





03 ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

"People often think, 'Oh you chose the American period to open up to the American market,' and that's partly true. You tend to find that ancient European history, like the Greeks and Romans, doesn't have much traction in the United States.

"Imagine the Grand Campaign as the story of Imperialism and Colonialism. The European powers moving out into the wider world and conquering and commanding all that they saw.

"Road to Independence is almost that same story, except it's told from the opposite viewpoint. You take a smaller, less established

nation and you literally birth it, grow it and defend it in those series of episodes.

"It's also a period which is actually pretty cool. You've got huge cannons billowing smoke across the battlefield. You've got the Battle of Bunker Hill and George Washington holding the Declaration of Independence. All these things are what we associate with what we'd call the birth of modern democracy. It was a fascinating period and it sits within *Empire's* remit anyway. It was a very good first effort in doing narrative-driven campaigning."

02 FIXING HISTORY

"Where there's a toss up between something being historically accurate versus being fun, fun wins. For example, *Empire's* time period runs from 1700 to 1800, but we probably go 15 to 20 years beyond that end point as far as technology and philosophical advances are concerned, so in that sense we bend the rules a little bit.

"When it comes to the actual strategies and tactics, there's a slight element of tweaking history. There were a lot of manoeuvres you could perform at sea which were historically accurate but not particularly fun to do in the game. A good example is 'tacking' – this is when a sailed ship zig-zagged along with the wind to go faster. We tried this out, but it became too fussy and we decided to drop it, even though it was a very well recognised and practised tactic of the period."

Ah yes, the eternal conflict of Red vs Blue.



Can you spot the odd man out?



"Where there's a toss up between accuracy versus fun, fun wins"

LOOKING BACK COMMENTARY



Sadly, they forgot to load the cannonballs.

04 RESEARCHING THE AGES

"We licensed all the ship plans from the Royal Maritime Museum in Greenwich and were able to scan in the blueprints for the ships and carve in polygons exactly how they'd be carved in wood. So we know we have created accurate representations of the ships. Having access to that level of detail is really a great boon when designing.

"It's a double-edged sword as we have the most fanatical fans who will come back and contest our designs. There's a lot of competing evidence and one-off examples of certain guns. There is a wealth of information available. This was the age that Britain established itself as a worldwide superpower, so we have plenty of domestic records of battle mechanics and ship designs."

Can you spot the odd man out?



06 MATCHMAKING

"There's a system we incorporated into *Empire* called 'matched combat'. Basically we took loads of motion captures of stunt actors fighting with rifles and mapped them onto characters. So in a battle, 20-30% of your troops will pick one another and fight it out instead of doing the usual 'I attack, you fall back, you attack, I fall back' scrap. The idea behind it was to bring the battlefield to life.

"There are a couple of rare ones. For example admirals on ships may duel with each other when you board one flagship with another flagship. My favourite is where one guy chokes the another with the musket and kicks him to the floor. He goes to stab him and the guy rolls over, in proper B-movie style, avoiding the stab while stabbing his would-be killer in the gut."

05 CAMPAIGN IN THE ARSE

"Is it disheartening when players only use the campaign map? Well, a third of the team only work on the campaign and find that really heartening! When players skip battles as they don't get the complete *Total War* experience, but you have to appreciate that players play how they want to play. The good thing about not forcing players into naval and land battles is you have variety.

"There's also a percentage of players who do the bare minimum of management. They auto tax, auto govern and auto build everything and just dive in and do all the fights themselves. They want to be an Alexander, who carves an empire and isn't concerned with administration. It's interesting to see how different people approach the game in different ways.

"One thing I will say: it's always better to fight your own battles, because you may just be able to pull something off that the auto management system wouldn't have thought of doing."



Some players never leave this screen.



England – we ruled all the waves once, don't you know.



07 REPRESENTATION

"*Empire* is our first truly global game, but there are several reasons why we didn't include the entire world. One is just sheer size and practicality. If you bring it out to include all of China, Korea, Australia, etc. you end up with a massive amount of potential regions to conquer, and as far as accessibility and micromanagement are concerned it can be a headache.

"Second, and this might sound weird, but you risk diluting the premise. Take China – they were a trading nation and powerful, but they had their own regional conflicts and wars which didn't flow into the international fights that the Europeans colonies were going through. And it was much later that Australia and South Africa were discovered."

"There are reasons why we didn't include the entire world"

The Americans were never on time for a fight.



The English didn't charge, so much as amble into battle.



08 THE HISTORY BUFFS

"We've had a lot of players who've go on to become historians after playing *Total War* games. We do get the occasional letter of, 'Thanks a lot guys, I've now completed my doctorate because I played this.' It's really nice to have that level of commitment and fanaticism from your fans.

"I'll give you a great example. When we released the early screenshots for *Empire*, the light infantry troops pictured were given moustaches and we ended up with a four-page email describing how the moustache wouldn't have been accurate for the period because the wax needed to style it didn't exist.

"That gives you an example of how in-depth our fans can be. It's only because of them that we have a job and we get to do what we love though. And we never take that for granted."

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

EDGE

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THRILLER

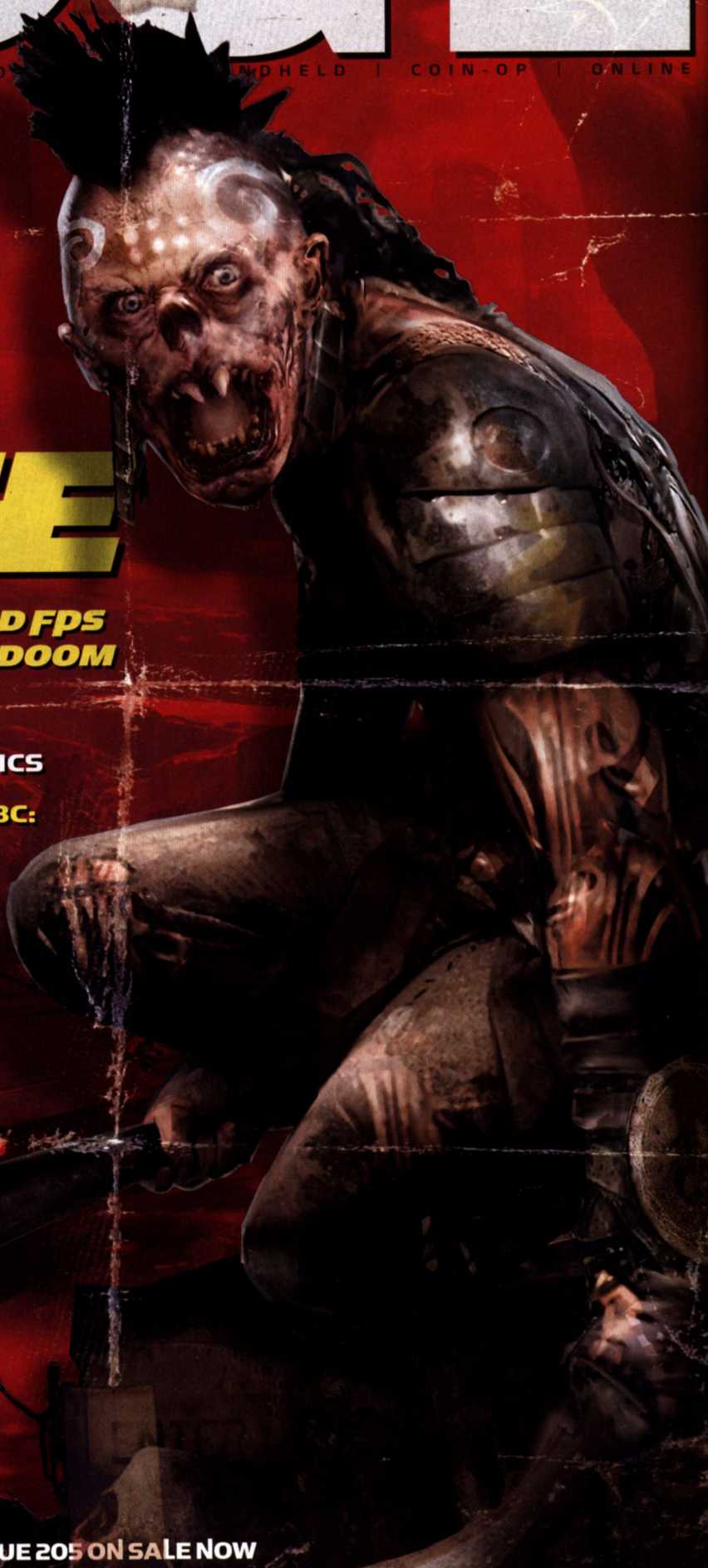
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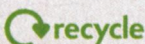
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Next Month!

ON SALE
2
SEPT

HANDS-ON!

STARCRRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

The moment we've been waiting for has finally arrived!

FOOTBALL FOCUS!

FIND OUT IF CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010 IS MATCH FIT

REVIEWED!

WOLFENSTEIN! BATTLEFIELD HEROES! NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT! AION!

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All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. PC ZONE is a fickle mistress, much like the sea or lady luck.

WANTED

The following is a message from the Swine Flu Containment and Management Centre

SFCMC

We round up swine flu sufferers into ominous, unmarked black vans and take them away never to be seen again so you don't have to.



DESCRIPTION

NAME PEY'J

WHEREABOUTS HILLYS

REPORTED SYMPTOMS

"HAD A BIT OF A HEADACHE THERE LAST THURSDAY. I MEAN, NORMALLY I WOULDN'T SAY ANYTHING, BUT THE WAY THEY'RE ALL TALKING ABOUT IT IN THE NEWS, AND THAT GUY DIED, YOU KNOW, BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY AND ALL THAT."

WANTED



NAME Mutated pig in *STALKER*

WHEREABOUTS Ukrainian irradiated hills and wastelands

REPORTED SYMPTOMS "A bloke on the Jubilee line was coughing like a plague victim, and I was like 'I knew it, I knew it, this is swine flu, I've got swine flu now' so I barricaded myself in my house and refused to go to work. It was all I could do to sunbathe and watch the tennis."

WANTED



NAME *Far Cry* warthog

WHEREABOUTS In a jungle, refusing to get into a jeep and prove that the 'pig in a jeep' Easter Egg exists

REPORTED SYMPTOMS "First, I had this trembling in my legs. Next, this weird immense pressure built up behind my eyes. Then, I became all red hot and translucent, and I shot a beam of pure energy out of my nether regions. GP said it were swine flu."

WANTED



NAME Pig Cop

WHEREABOUTS A smutty porno shop in LA

REPORTED SYMPTOMS "Man I threw up like three or four times on Saturday. Sure I'd been drinking WKD through a straw all night, but it didn't feel like that kind of sick, if you know what I mean. It was like, piggy sick. What you talking about? WKD isn't a girls' drink!"

**BE SAFE. BE SMART.
BE SUSPICIOUS OF
ANYBODY WHO LOOKS
LIKE THEY'RE
ABOUT TO SNEEZE.
BE SAFE (AGAIN).**

- If you suspect an in-game pig of having swine flu, let us know.
- If you can think of any more in-game pigs, also let us know - we could only think of four, and the last one is barely a pig.
- Yes we saw the list of 'pigs in videogames' on Wikipedia, but it's woefully incomplete.
- Give us a break, we didn't have much time to do this one.





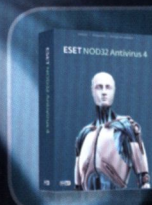
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