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PCZONE

ISSUE 212 NOVEMBER 2009

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WINGS OF LIBERTY

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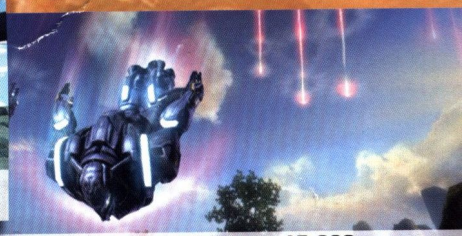

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PC ZONE Contents

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

WE ♥ STARCRAFT

I'VE BEEN WORKING with Blizzard for several months to get *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* for our cover and it's finally here. I'm really bloody chuffed we got it as a world exclusive. In fact, I was so very excited I peed my pants a little! (Too much information?)

And then things got even better. Not only were we going to be the first PC mag with the single-player campaign reveal, Blizzard were actually going to fly us over to their HQ in Irvine, California to see it! With anticipation so high for this game I couldn't wait to hear back from Log when he returned from the US, and I wasn't disappointed.

Along with the incredible Ghost cover art Blizzard sourced for us, we were also given the final *Wings of Liberty* logo to unveil for the very first time; I guarantee you won't have seen this anywhere else. Plus, Rob Pardo – the head honcho at Blizzard – dropped by to have a chat while Log was in Irvine. Turn to page 60 to find out his explanation for why we've had to wait for so long for the single-player campaign reveal.

Before I get into trouble for gushing too much, it appears I've acquired some sort of stalker judging by a series of emails from one of our readers. At first I was slightly offended, now they're just a bit funny, and I'm looking forward to the inevitable next instalment arriving in my inbox tomorrow!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

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STARCRAFT II
How can Blizzard improve on possibly the best sci-fi RTS that's ever been made?

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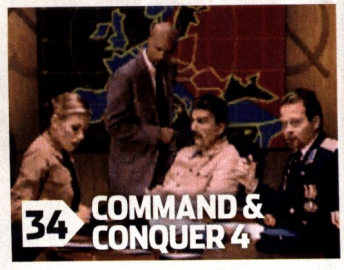
Take a trip from the *PC ZONE* office all around the world... and even through time!



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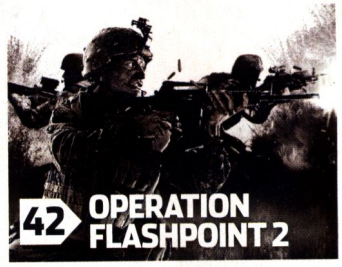

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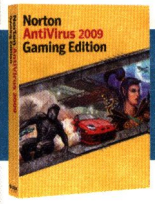

And get Norton AntiVirus Gaming Edition! See page 54

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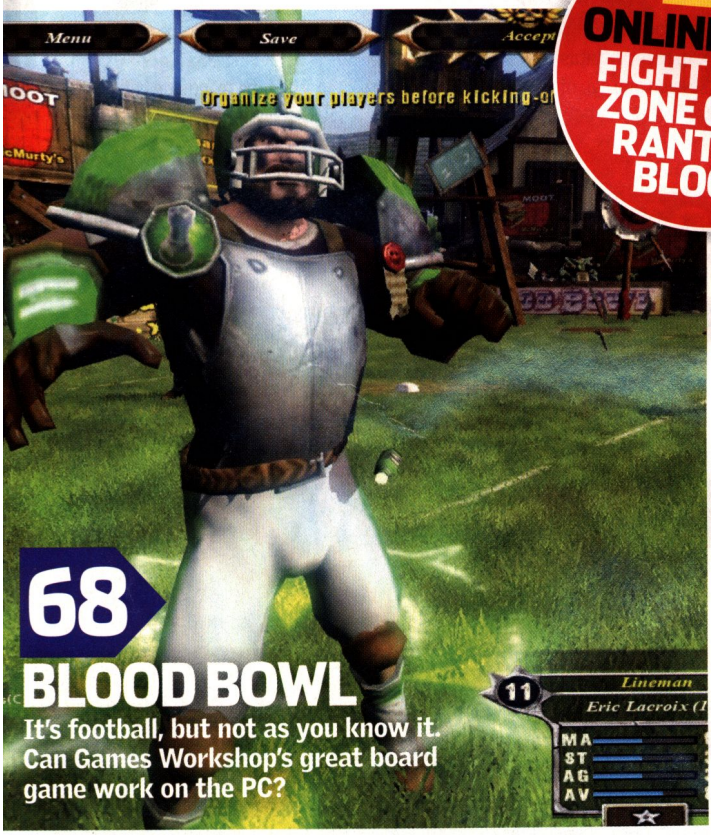
FIGHT CLUB! ZONE CHAT! RANTING! BLOGS!



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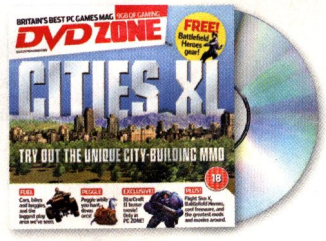
It's football, but not as you know it. Can Games Workshop's great board game work on the PC?



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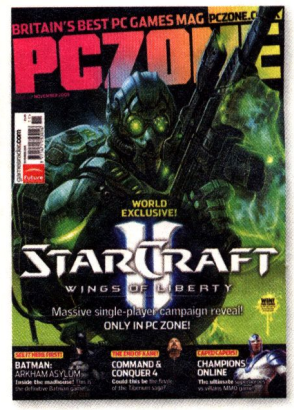
Blast everything in sight, get dancing with a funky robot, and head into an early Tamriel with *Adam Glick*.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



60 **STARCRAFT II**

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 75 words...
This month sees Log battling alien insects and their nemeses; Steve beating up Russian ex-spies turned gangsters before travelling the world from the discomfort of his office chair; David warming up to battle an evil slaphead by getting a sex change and beating up mutants with the help of an acrobatic cyborg gorilla; all while our latest work experience lad looked on and wondered out loud "They call this work? And I thought students were a bunch of slackers..."

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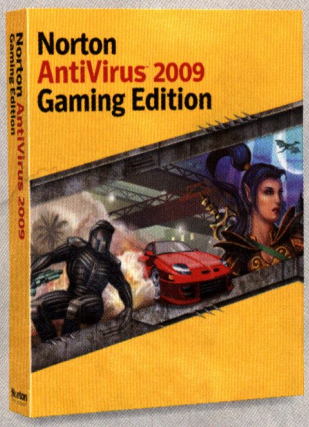

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Full offer details on page 54.

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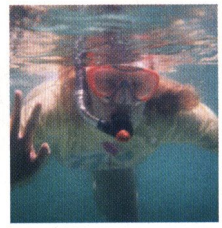
Meet The Team

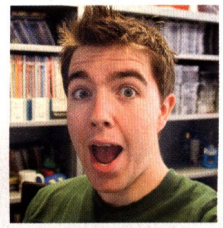
Here are the ones to thank for *PC ZONE*

ADAM GLICK
Irregular freelancer
AGE ??
LIKES Being secretive
DISLIKES Nosey parkers
FANCIES Himself as a Bourne-a-like
FAVOURITE GAME *Splinter Cell*
NOW PLAYING With our heads

Steve decided to find out who this Glick chap really is, so he staked out the PO box where we send his money. Late one night Steve spotted his target and followed the dark figure through London's streets like a shadow. Then the man we know only as "Glick" turned a corner. When Steve got to the alley, his prey had vanished. On returning home Steve found a note pinned on his pillow: "NICE TRY – G". Steve now sleeps with his lights on.

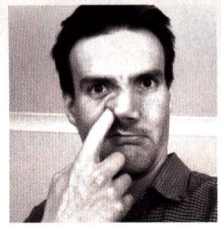


ALI WOOD
Editor
PC ZONE's boss lady is currently scouring the office for boxes, as she prepares to move out of London. Commuter belt beckons!
NOW PLAYING: ***Red Faction: Guerrilla***

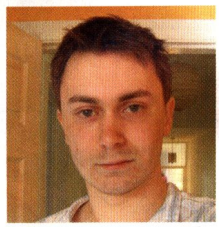


STEVE HOGARTY
Deputy Editor
Ignoring our pleas not to, Steve has re-installed *Trials 2* on his PC. The team are taking bets on how long it'll be before his smashes his mouse in frustration at the game.
NOW PLAYING: ***Trials 2***

DAVID BROWN
Staff writer
During the Ashes David kept running off to Lords, certain that England would win. No-one had the heart to correct his delusion.
NOW PLAYING:
Ashes Cricket 2009



PHIL WAND
Hardware editor
Last week Wandy gave his new baby its first mouse. Which the infant started chewing. Wandy sighed, realising the child isn't the PC wünderkind he'd hoped for.
NOW PLAYING: ***Counter-Strike***



SAM SMITH
Free labour
Sam joined our team for a week. Despite his work experience status he refused to make even one cup of tea for the real staff. He won't get far with that attitude.
NOW PLAYING: ***Trials 2***

JON BLYTH
Occasional freelancer
Log is enjoying his career as a freelance hack. It gives him the time to indulge himself in his passions – like playing with sharp weapons.
NOW PLAYING: ***Spore***

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Sunshine, barbecues, and alcohol.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... a lack of a Trans-Siberian Express simulator.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

102!?! **23mins** Matt and David mourned England's tragic Ashes failure. Everyone else shrugged.

THAT'S HARSH **3mins** Chinese therapist beat a kid to death for playing on computers. A true WTF? moment.

RIP JOHN HUGHES **30mins** Everyone over 30 on the team (and Steve) was sad at this. David said "Who?"

BOOM! **12mins** Steve's new PC blows up for a second time.

DELAYS, DELAYS, DELAYS **45mins** Will any PC game come out on time this year?

***HALO*: THE MOVIE** **2mins** Will it ever come out? Don't know. Will we care? Doubtful.

TWITTER DENIED **7mins** Russia attacks Twitter. This is cyberwarfare? Rather pathetic really.

ROTATING IN THE GRAVE **3mins** Johnny Cash's reaction to being in *Guitar Hero*.

X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER **12mins** Please, please, please do a *Monkey Island Special Edition* revamp and release it LucasArts.

SWINE FLU **9min** Is it just us, or did everyone overreact slightly?

WIN!

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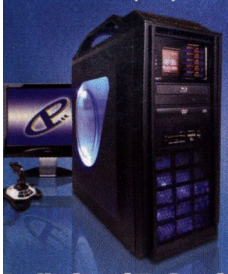

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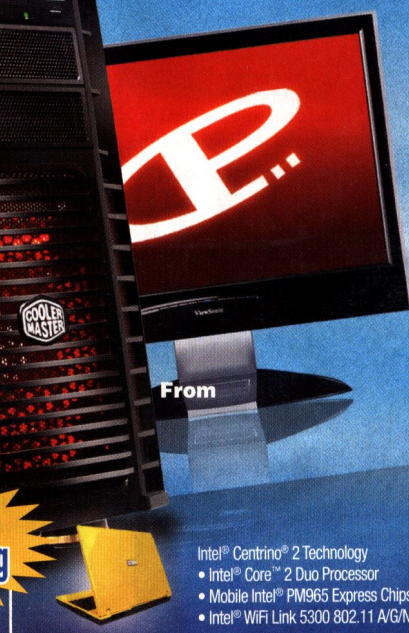

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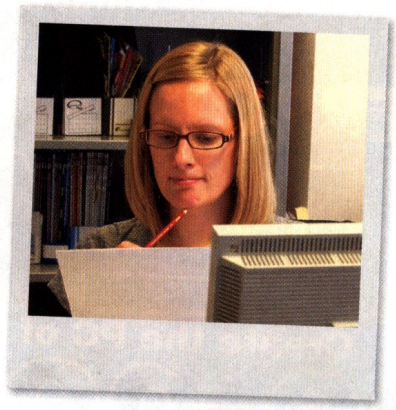
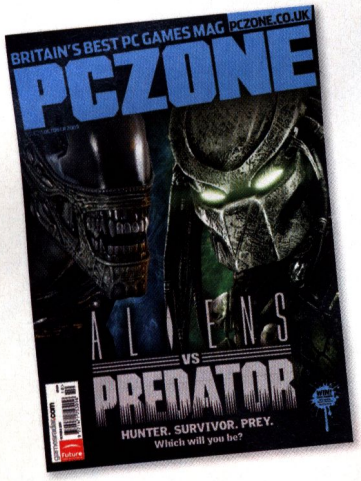
Letters

With praise and poetry readers show *Ali Wood* their love for *PC ZONE*





KING OF LETTERS

CRY NOOB

I would like to express a view to your magazine readers regarding that awful name "noob". I've tried lots of online games, including FPSs and MMOs. The main difference I find is the attitude of the other players to what a noob is. In most FPSs a noob is a derogatory title and gets a lot of abuse, insults and usually gets kicked. In MMOs a noob is helped to learn the game, given a little cash, advice or even walked through a few quests.

That is what keeps players coming back to games like *World of Warcraft* (currently on 13 million players). So I think that the noob screaming adrenaline junkies could learn something from us beardy, real ale drinking role-players. Maybe some of the players put off by the unhelpful noob bashers, will return to learn how to play and not be a noob.

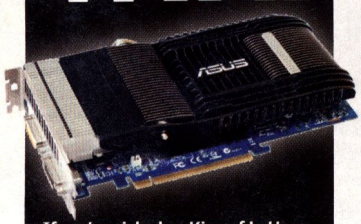
Sean

This guy doesn't like noobs. But we hug them.

I think it's about time we sorted ourselves a videogaming glossary out then. I mean, it's simply a minefield. How are we supposed to know what to call each other in our virtual worlds if there's no hard and fast rule? I know! We could never use the word 'noob' again!

And if we're banning things, let's also ban "My bad". I hate it. Pointless and American. The same goes for "Whatever". Have a prize for allowing me to invent these new rules Sean! More next week.

WIN!



If you're picked as King of Letters you will get a brand-new ASUS EN9600GT Silent graphics card, worth around £100. This variant on the NVIDIA Geforce card packs ASUS's V-cool Heatsink, which keeps the card running 10° cooler than a standard model. Less heat, means less fans, which means less noise, which means better gaming.

DARK DAYS

First of all: awesome magazine!

Second of all, I was wondering if you could cover a game that's been out since 13 July? The name of the game is called *Darkfall*, it's an MMO. At first when it came out it was called vapourware and I think a lot of gamers from England, and some of your Irish readers (like me) would be interested in it now.

Since it came out Aventurine have put out updates and set up a new server for North America, but loads of people still remain on their first server (the European one).

As for myself, I can no longer play the game, but I was hoping a qualified gaming magazine like yourselves would be able to cover it and show people how much progress the game as made.

They lost loads of people because of the glitches but a good friend of mine still plays it and said it has improved. But I would have liked to see a review of it, as I'm sure loads of people in England would.

Kenneth

Could Darkfall appear in *PC ZONE*? Maybe...

I'm familiar with *Darkfall* and if we were to review it we'd have to play it for some time to give it a fair crack.

We've loads of other games to play right now, but I've been hunting for a freelancer brave enough to take on the challenge. Watch this space!

MOVIE MAGIC

Can you please make someone re-release all of the old interactive movie games that I used to love playing on the PC as I miss them all dearly?

I know they weren't particularly popular and probably cost a few quid to make, but I really loved them. They had a unique charm, especially *Phantasmagoria*, *Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within* and the Tex Murphy games. It would be a dream if they'd start re-releasing them to work on today's operating systems.

letters@pczone.co.uk @
letters, pc zone, future publishing,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

FMV games gave work to many unemployed actors.

"Can you please make someone re-release interactive movie games?"

While you're at it, make them release some new interactive movie games too.
Edge

It seems that we have magic powers Edge, as we have indeed spoken to the god of videogames and he has listened to our plea! In fact, in last month's Budget section (211) we reviewed *Under A Killing Moon* and in this issue there's *Tex Murphy: Overseer* and *The Pandora Directive* – all of which are available for about £6 from Good Old Games (gog.com). However, the others you mention still aren't available to buy (virtually none of Sierra's games are on GOG or *Steam* yet).

BFH CODE FAIL

I am a subscriber of *PC ZONE* magazine and I have just tried to redeem my *Battlefield Heroes* code from issue 211 only to discover that the code is giving me them same items (trousers and boots) from the previous month and not the helmet and gloves for this month.

I have looked on both the *PCZ* forums and the *Battlefield Heroes* forums to see if any others have been affected and there appears to be a few. Can you tell me what you are going to do to rectify this problem? Thank you for any help you can provide with this.
John

Some of you might have had the same problem as John, if so and you want to get the National Army's gloves and helmet from issue 211, instead of doubling up parts of your pseudo-Nazis outfit, you can go to the *Battlefield Heroes* forum and find the solution by typing this link into your browser: snipurl.com/newbfcode.

I'd always take the blame if something like this was our fault, but it wasn't. So there.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Looking at the Buyer's Guide I see that all genre specific games suggested are fairly diverse. Well, as diverse as you could be with genres such as sport games, MMOs and the like. But looking at the racing section I see what could be five screenshots from one game, so I suggest to you – spice it up! Add *TrackMania United* to the list!

Has there ever been a racing game with such excellent online and customisation capabilities? Graphics that a one-eyed pirate could stare himself blind at? Most importantly, it has gameplay

YOUR SHOUT!

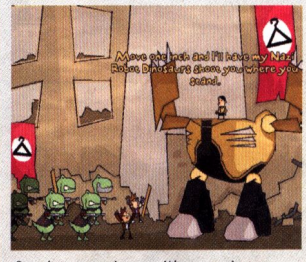
SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!

Sent in by Russell Barnes
PC ZONE SCORE 90%

Adventure games have never really been my thing, but once I took the plunge and bought *TGP* I was hooked. How could a game with Hitler in it ever be bad, especially when he's riding a Nazi Robot Dinosaur? Genuinely witty and very, very funny, I don't think I've laughed so much at a game ever.

Everyone I've recommended it to has had a right laugh playing it, so I reckon everybody should get it. It's difficult though and I'm not that clever, so I had to check some walkthroughs occasionally. Best adventure ever? It's right up there, sure.
YOUR SHOUT 95%



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.

ASK THE TXTPERTS

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

I subscribed just because of the tits! Tht old man did nothing 4 me at all.
SpamChomper

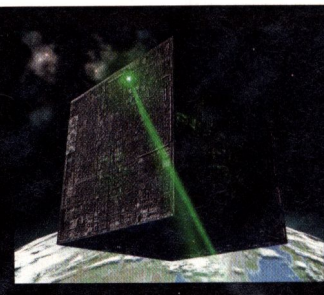
How about we compromise, and run lots of photos of old men's tits?

I think I saw Wandy walking down the street near wear I live. It wasn't him though. Sorry to waste your time liek that.
Bruce

It could never be Wandy. That'd mean he'd have to leave his Borg Cube.

Fukc Valve! Giv m3 HL Ep 3 alredy! Thse ant lions are fckin awsome!
KennyJacket

We fully agree. Except for the antlions. Valve can sod off with those.



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.

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↘ that pulls you in for that "just one more try" addiction that makes our partners scorn us.
Alex H

Unfortunately it only got 86% so doesn't qualify as a high enough scorer to push any of the other Racing games off the Buyer's Guide. And dems the rules.

A BOAT THAT ROCKS

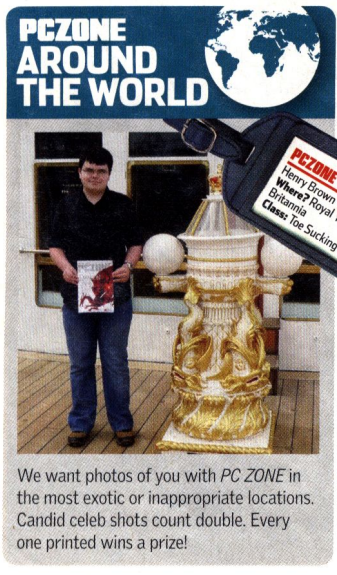
PC ZONE, thank you for opening my eyes. I have always thought of mods as botched amateur levels, with poor textures, unimaginative level design and broken AI. I believed that playing a mod would detract from my enjoyment and memory of the original game. How wrong I was!

Excited by your coverage of *Left 4 Dead 2* I became desperate for new *Left 4 Dead* content to play now. So on your recommendation in issue 211 a friend and I downloaded the *L4D* mod campaign *Death Aboard*.

It was incredible. The level design is on a par with any of Valve's official campaigns, while the finale is far better. It was easily the most enjoyable and tense two hours I have ever spent playing *L4D*.

We're going to try *Dead City* tonight and I can't wait!
Paul Newrick

David's really hot on all the new mods and there's a load more *L4D* ones on page 95 too.

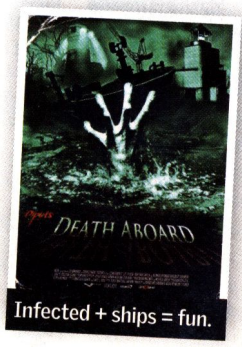


We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

We love *TrackMania*, but not enough to put it in the Buyer's Guide.

AN ODE TO PC GAMING

Writing that subject tag reminded me of something completely unrelated that you may (though probably won't) be interested to know, which is that I was once in a band called Buster Hymen & The Penetrators featuring The Rhythm Method. That was after I left Spasmodic Muscular Contractions In The Lower Abdominal Regions. Can't imagine why my musical career never took off!



Infected + ships = fun.

Haiku pour vous:
What, write a poem?
Must concentrate like frag fiend.
Brain exploding now.

Mister missed ya:
Brilliant launches a rocket
We jump pad out of range
To venture forth towards the flag
The spoils of war our numbers game
The blue reads six the red but two
For shame and ridicule await
But no, the destitute protest
Laaaaggggg!!!!!!!!
Kev

Truly amazing. Thank you Kev.

SERIAL KILLER

With the advent of digital downloads and clever copyright management wizardry, am I the only person lamenting the loss of serial keys? Not because I feel they're a better way to prevent piracy, but rather because I enjoyed dolefully tapping them in and the suspense between entering that last digit and hitting 'OK'. Is it a valid serial key? Did you mistake that 8 for a B? Was that a zero, or an O? The potential pitfalls made entering serial keys exhilarating.

That's not why I'm emailing though – I wanted to draw your attention to a particular 16-digit serial key I came across that had the word A-R-5-E in it. I was wondering if any of your readers have encountered words hidden within their serial keys, and if any of them were as rude as mine. Has anybody ever seen a C**T on the front of a CD?
Theresa Duffy

Does James Blunt count?

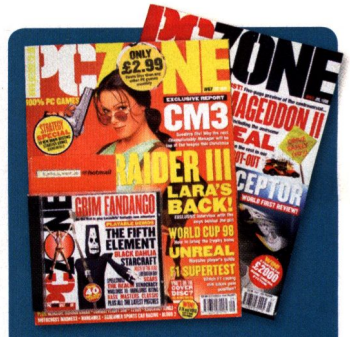
HEED THE SIGNS

In response to Theresa Duffy's letter (above), I've come across interesting serial keys in my time. I remember my *World of Warcraft* box had a doozy of a serial key, with the letters M-R-G-R printed clearly. Was this Blizzard's attempt to tell us all about the impending merger with Activision? If only I'd been more vigilant!
Simon Clegg

D'oh! Readers, if you have any interesting serial keys please send them in!

HAPPY READER

I had to put pen to paper (or rather fingers to keys) to express my enjoyment of the latest *PC ZONE* (*Aliens vs Predator* cover). I've been an avid reader for some time, and have seen a marked improvement since the magazine fell under your stewardship.

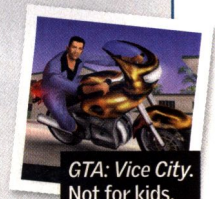


LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM OUR DECADE-OLD MAILBAG, ANSWERED TODAY

LIVE A LITTLE

I think the people who give games ratings are far too serious about their job. Games like the *Grand Theft Auto* can't be played by kids under 18. So maybe *Medal of Honor, Battlefield 1942* and many other good games are 15s, but there are some lovely games that are 18s such as *Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix*. The raters only have one good excuse for making them 18s, which is not encouraging young children to kill each other. But can you imagine a six-year-old child shooting a Nazi? Anyway if a war breaks out we're going to see it all for real, so all games do is prepare us for the truth. See my idea doesn't sound so stupid now I've given you evidence.
James Loose



GTA: Vice City. Not for kids.

When you wrote this in 2003 we were just surprised you'd called *Soldier of Fortune II* 'lovely', but I agree: there'll come a day when today's 18-rated games will seem wholesome.

I, like many, was initially circumspect about a female editor of such a male-orientated magazine. However you have maintained the high standard of editorial and, quite often, improved it. Please accept the most humble apologies for my initial caution.

It is with sincere hope that you remain at the helm for many years to come.
Addison DeWitt

Is that a pseudonym or do you really share a name with George Sanders in the movie *All About Eve*? Either way, thanks for this email, it made my day!

for not choosing the aggressive option on the way in and cracking his skull on the bar – clearly the writers want you to load up your saved game and try it out.

ADAPTIVE STORIES

The ultimate aim for Obsidian is to create a game that adapts to the choices you make, rather than reprimand you when you play the bad guy, leaving you with red-tinted superpowers but no friends. Both good and bad paths are equally valid, they both fit the character and the plot, and for the most part they deliver similar levels of reward.

"Paths" is the wrong word, as you don't carry around with you an overall morality score, instead you affect your reputation with individual characters, some of whom like being treated rough.

Obsidian are citing 120 hours of dialogue for a 30-hour game, indication that there will be replay value abound – or at the very least that important sense that the route you carve through the game is one of many potentials. Four times as many, if maths is to be trusted.

Then there's the rest of the game: the shooty bits. A *Mass Effect*-style skills system sees you invest skill points in a raft of different areas, each falling within the general spheres of tech (gadgets and explosives), arms (guns and noise) and stealth (hacking and slippers). On a basic level, piling your points into guns will make the reticules smaller, and every five or so rungs on the skill ladder will unlock new abilities. Bullet Storm will allow you to fire your SMG for a short while without having to reload, while an ability on the assault rifle ladder will have your crosshair snapping to headshots. General abilities like Awareness flag the positions and states of enemies to help you plan attacks.

The stats-based RPG underlay can leave the actual act of clicking on people to make them dead feeling floaty as long as you remain unskilled on paper, but each weapon class brings with it features available to any level.

When held in place over an enemy, pistol reticules will contract and allow for headshots. Similarly, holding fire with the shotgun will result in a critical hit, SMG's rack up damage multipliers for every enemy killed, and grenades' trajectories are mapped out for ease of use. But if you rank up enough in martial arts you can ninja your way through most fights, unlocking skills like roundhouse kicks and running jumps. As improbable as it sounds ("Ding! You've learned how to knee people in the face!") it's as rewarding a slot as any to drop your skill points into.

Hacking, lockpicking and circuit breaking are reduced to mini-games. Find numbers in a big moving wordsearch puzzle to hack, hold pins in place with the mouse to lockpick, and plot a path through a deliberately confusing maze to break a circuit.

In this area the envelope's not budging an inch, but cleverly the world continues to exist (and attempts to murder you) while you hack your way through a crossword. You won't

So, what happened next?

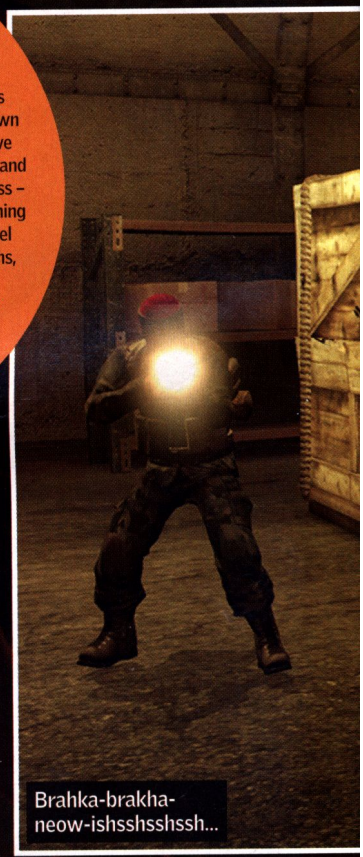
In the back, how unmanly.

DODGY DOSSIER

Alpha Protocol will hold, deep inside the trembling plastic disc unto which it has been printed, reams of ancillary, superfluous and extraneous wordage tied up in your company's database and your own personal email inbox. Every character you meet will have an extensive profile and history filed away in a database, and you can peruse this at your leisure. According to your boss – who seems to be Morgan Freeman's brother – in the opening scenes of the game, loading yourself with this extra intel can introduce new dialogue options during conversations, and lead to some side-missions.

Emails you receive can be replied to using the stance system too. Flirt with your operations handler, and you'll pen a bit of writing where you describe what you'll do to her in a closet at the Christmas party. Oh Bond – err, Thorton.

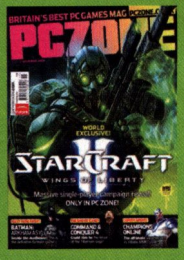
"You can definitely feel the patent leather, can't you?"


Brahka-brakha-neow-ishsshsshssh...

COVER STORY

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

The opening act of Blizzard's epic RTS trilogy is in sight...



TO THE UNINITIATED, *StarCraft II* is confusing. Just take a look at that guy on the cover: he has an ectoplasmic arm and bionic eyes – that doesn't make any kind of sense. So unless you've been paying attention to the whooping of over-excited Koreans, you could be flustered by the whole ruckus over Blizzard's epic RTS. This is a game so big that Blizzard have broken it down into three bits, the first of which is preparing to collide with our surprised faces sometime in early 2010. "Done when it's done," is as tired a concept as episodic gaming, but *Wings of Liberty* is looking to be worth the wait. Terrans, your time is up, come back in please.

PAGE 60

PCZONE UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

LONG DISTANCE STEVE

ONE OF THE best features in this issue is Steve's Around The World In Eight Simulations. He started off in London and pledged to make it around the globe using a load of different sims. And it's not as easy as you might think, particularly as there was a key mode of transport missing. Find out how Steve fared without it on page 46.

As we go to press, we're also preparing for the annual trip to Germany for the games expo out there. This year it's in Cologne (thankfully as Leipzig was a pain to get to) and by the sounds of it Steve has around the clock meetings seeing all the greatest new games, which he will report back on next month. I'm hoping he has chance to sample the strong German lager at some point too. All work and no play, etc...

Back to this issue and we have hands-ons and first looks coming out of our eyes. There's so much stuff about at the moment, we just need some of these games to actually come out so our reviews section looks more impressive!

We have hands-on with *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Championship Manager 2010*, *Alpha Protocol*, *Tropico 3* and *Champions Online*, and a first look at the hotly tipped *Command & Conquer 4*. Rocking.

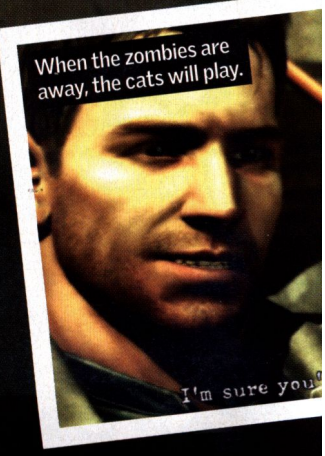
Ali Wood

Ali Wood
Editor
ali.wood@futurenet.com

THE BEAST WITHIN

From Africa via Japan comes *Resident Evil 5* and its new take on an old genre

DEVELOPER Capcom **PUBLISHER** Capcom **WEBSITE** residentevil.com **ETA** 18 September

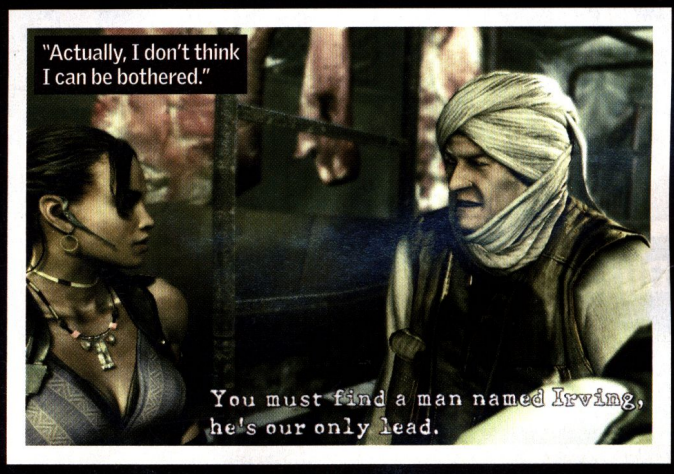


IF YOU'RE NO longer having to wear nappies, you've probably played a *Resident Evil* game at some point in your life. Ignoring the argument that young children shouldn't be playing zombie games, it's certainly one of the most recognised franchises in modern gaming history.

After the grotesque abomination of the (initial) *Resident Evil 4* PC port, Capcom are attempting to go one better and release something vaguely playable that doesn't look like a canvas plastered with low resolution cat's vomit crudely formed into the shape of digitised dead people.

As you can see from the screens littering this page, there's no evidence to suggest that'll be the case this time. In fact, it looks bloody gorgeous. Africa seems to be an increasingly popular location to set videogames and we welcome this new trend, provided it's not all we see in the next year or so. Variety is the spice of life and all that. Anyway, the great visuals means point one of the "What could go hideously wrong with *Resi 5*?" list is crossed out firmly.

"There'll certainly be a lot to do other than just blast zombies"



We have to admit that point two – the controls – is something that's causing us concern at this time. Survival horror games ported from established console franchises have a history of having dreadful controls. We're not going say that *Resi 5* will follow this traditional line, but we'd be lying if they felt smooth.

This sequel is definitely focused on action, breaking away from the traditional claustrophobic atmosphere of other genre mainstays and trying to be all modern and shooty. Whether that's what you want is up to you, but there'll certainly be a lot to do other than just blast zombies. There's a full-on co-op mode, with one of you controlling the male character (Chris Redfield from the original) and the other bioweapons expert Sheva Alomar, a new entry in the series.

The story, incidentally, is a load of cobblers about people having strange creatures shoved down their gullets. There's also a big guy with nails driven into his body hacking peoples' heads off with a vast axe. Which, we're informed, is what happens when zombie outbreaks strike. PCZ

STOP PRESS!

THE ICEMAN RE-COMETH?

EA recently renewed four trademarks, the most interesting being *Wing Commander*. Could we be seeing a new game featuring Maniac and the chaps?

SLAPPED SILLY

Some people like old things. If you're one of these people, try out *Street Fighter II* in your browser, right here: http://snipurl.com/retrosf2.

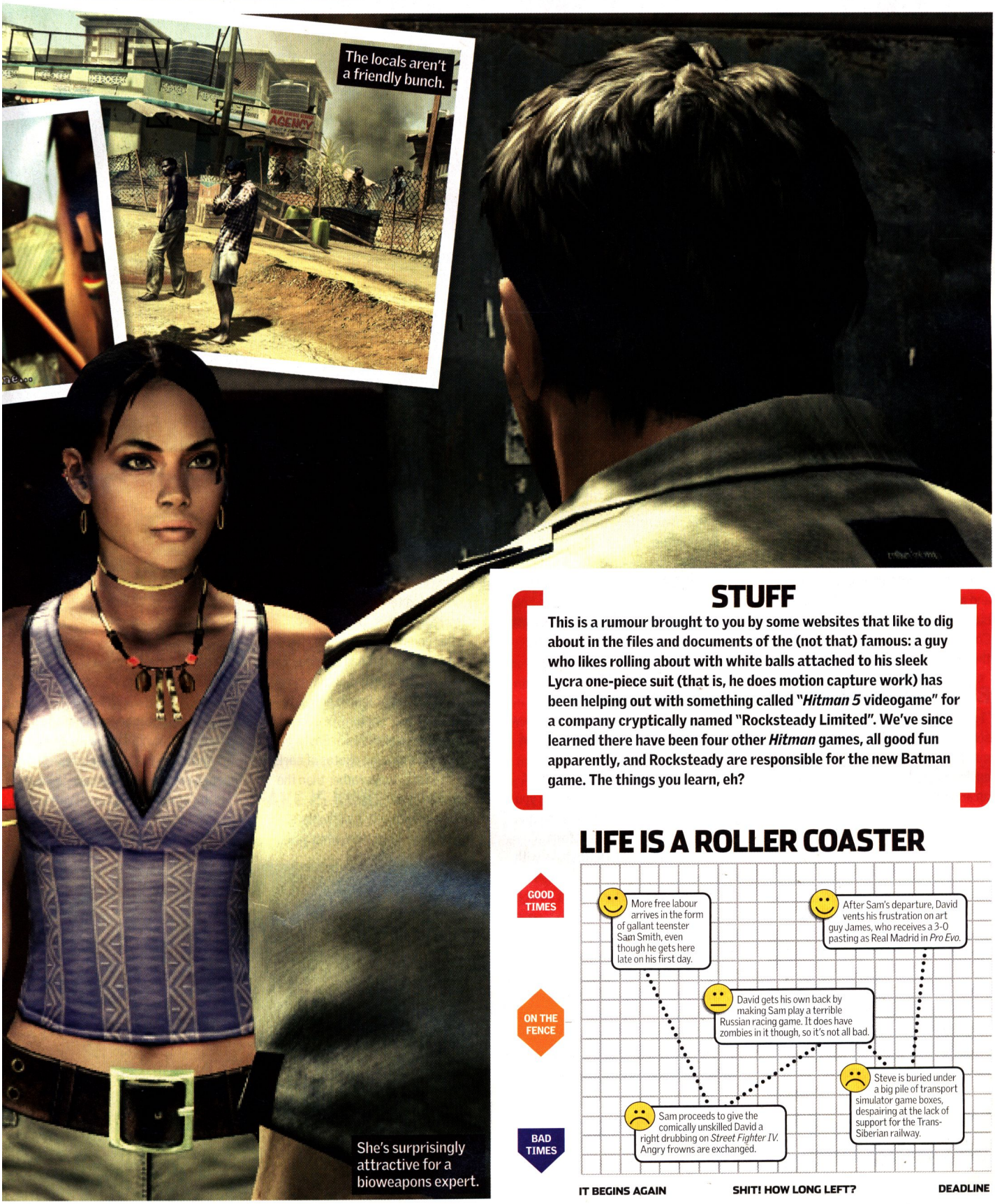
BUFF YOUR HELMET

It's easy to laugh at special edition releases, just like it's easy to laugh at the *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising*'s that comes with a full-sized army helmet.

30 ALPHA PROTOCOL
Obsidian's Bond/ Bourne-a-like is given a test run.

34 COMMAND & CONQUER 4
The world's most evil baldie's back. Boo-hiss!

60 STARCRAFT II
We delve deep into this much-desired sequel.



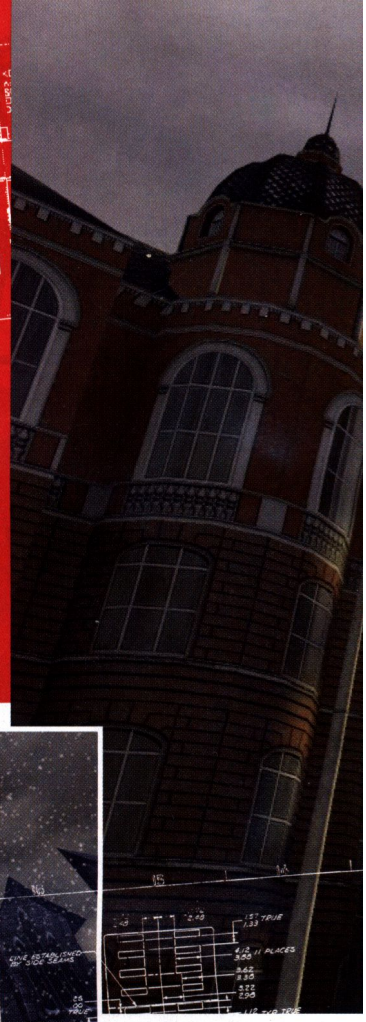
STUFF

This is a rumour brought to you by some websites that like to dig about in the files and documents of the (not that) famous: a guy who likes rolling about with white balls attached to his sleek Lycra one-piece suit (that is, he does motion capture work) has been helping out with something called "*Hitman 5* videogame" for a company cryptically named "Rocksteady Limited". We've since learned there have been four other *Hitman* games, all good fun apparently, and Rocksteady are responsible for the new Batman game. The things you learn, eh?

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

UNREAL CITIES

Real-world architects are designing your virtual slaughterhouses. *Will Porter* reports



PERHAPS IT HAPPENED to you the first time you flew into the Undercity in *World of Warcraft*. Perhaps it was passing through the station doors and taking your first steps into City 17. Perhaps it was simply walking down an alley in *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The feeling that you are in a real, solid location with its own history and identity is a rare one in videogames, where concrete corridors and metal barrels have for so long stamped their mark.

Increasingly though, the tenets of real-world architectural thought and layered city-building have entered gaming – accompanied by developers and artists themselves trained in building design. At this year's Develop Conference in Brighton, the merging of these two fields was a hot topic.

BUILDING GAMES

"I studied architecture and it was something that I really enjoyed, with the monumental spaces and the built environment," explains Rob Watkins – an architect who's worked on Lord Norman Foster's Gherkin tower and the Birmingham branch of Selfridges – who is now an artist at Lionhead working on *Fable: The Lost Chapters*. "Games are more interesting as they're freer; they love that freedom of design. With games you don't have to worry about damp-proof courses, you don't have to worry about rolled steel joists... you don't have to worry about any of that."

Viktor Antonov – the lead artist of *Half-Life 2* and a creator of City 17, who previously worked within the similarly strict discipline of automotive design – agrees wholeheartedly: "I chose videogames as there's no zoom-ins or close-ups," he explains. "Automatically you just have an 180° vista, so everything you design for videogames is an establishing shot.

Rover uses new stain-resistant Steradent.

"Whereas with film or illustration you can zoom in and pick up detail, in games your only tools of directing are architecture and light. That's why I love videogames: you have this wide vista and you paint with buildings."

With games it seems, good games at least, it's not all about painting pretty pictures – the architecture can run deeper than simply building a car park for a muscular hero to shoot aliens in. Take City 17, that place we all once knew and loved, and still the best example of urban design PC gaming has to offer: "It was an intimate urban experience," explains Antonov. "There's a feeling you get when you get off the train and enter a city you've never been to before, there's a specific feel to it. It sticks with you forever.

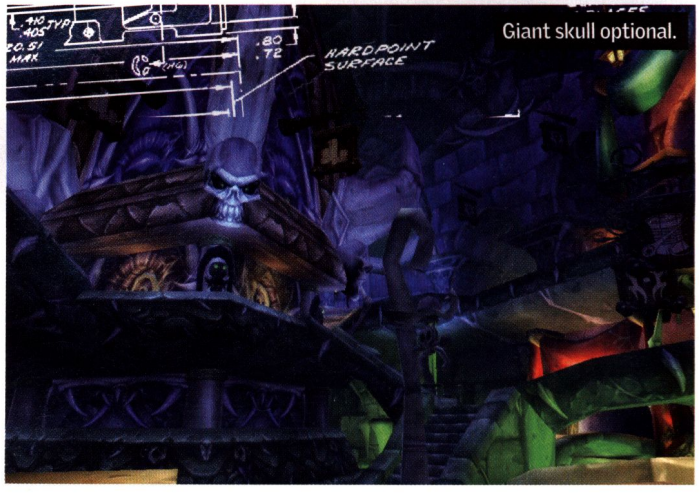
"For example, the first time I went to Los Angeles I remember the mixtures of light, the places and the smells which struck me. So with City 17 we were trying to recreate the specific feeling of a city, but also giving it the function of storytelling. To bring more richness and depth to it we went through all the stuff that had happened before that point. Going a 100 years back, 10 years back – recreating everything that had happened architecturally, so it felt like it was a real place."

To this end writers would even present tales of what had happened in the various *HL2* environs in the years before Freeman's dramatic entrance – whether two years before, or 10 – while Valve had photographers in East European cities taking photos of back-streets and alleyways rather than the boring main streets.

Designing cities isn't all flights of fancy you see – no matter what you design in a game it generally has to have its roots somewhere in day-to-day life.

2Fort is always popular.

"You can't just have textures mapped onto places, you have to have a feeling of reality," picks up Watkins. "A lot of the things I learned in architecture I can apply now in the



Giant skull optional.

"That's why I love videogames: you paint with buildings"
Viktor Antonov – lead artist, *Half-Life 2*

"When you're a game artist you're designing a living, breathing city"
Rob Watkins – artist, Lionhead Studios

A bridge too far?

City 17's streets were designed to accomodate big spidery things.

game environment. Making sure structures look credible, making sure that walls don't look like they would fall down, showing elements of rafters, joists and of the building's construction. That all adds to the game's integrity."

That said, games can clearly go further than a man who's just been told to tack an extension onto a semi-detached maisonette. Games are dream landscapes rather than utilitarian places where people live and work, and as such don't necessarily have to make any real-world sense – doors can be locked and trapdoors in kitchens can lead to long winding corridor dungeons inhabited by dog-people.

"The reason rooms can be arranged in that way is because they have a psychological meaning," agrees Rory Olcayto, features editor at *The Architect's Journal,* and previously a game designer at a company called Inner Workings.

Olcayto then goes on to compare the experience of playing games to the experience of visiting specifically created zones of not-quite-reality in the real world – places like Disney World, Las Vegas or Dubai.

"One of the trends in global culture now is the 'experience economy' where people are trying to sell experiences to us rather than physical objects," he explains. "So you get places like Dubai, which is a perfect example: it has the palm island, it has the world's tallest building. It's all about bombast and experiencing luxury. But it's bad and poor quality when you get there. In my opinion, in videogames, you can experience this sort of thing much better than in the real world."

FAKE IS KING

So what's better (as Morpheus would say in the *Matrix* film that wasn't shit) the real or the unreal? Well, designing fake cities seems to win hands down among our panel.

"When you're a game artist you're designing a living, breathing city – when you're designing in architecture your designing almost utopian buildings: very sterile, very clean," explains Watkins. "When it's visualised it's got the odd person in the lobby, but in reality architecture isn't like that – it evolves, it gets grimy and starts to decay. Games show that."

Olcayto picks up with the fact that his old job used to be replacing windows in rough Lanarkshire council estates: "Part of the relief from that was playing *Doom II* on a network with the council technicians," he smiles, "and I realised that we were spending more time in level three of *Doom II* than anything else. I preferred it there than in the real world of architecture, which is onerous and doesn't actually involve as much design as you may imagine."

This is perhaps why it's becoming more and more common for schools of architectural design are studying the virtual landscape more and more – whether deriding the urban sprawl of *Second Life*, or taking heed from the tightly designed narrative and gameplay functions of the Fort in *Team Fortress 2*. Games are a pleasant and interesting place to be, and the real world can frankly be rather dull. PCZ

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

WHO NEEDS NORMAN FOSTER?

This year The Architect's Journal picked out its favourite building designs from the videogame hordes. You can read the full list of games at architectsjournal.co.uk.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

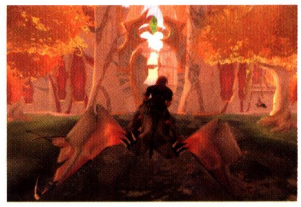
Looking solely at the Scumm Bar where Guybrush meets the pirate chiefs, the journal praised the 360° sea views afforded by the "floating timber deck system".

HALO

The Architect's Journal praised *Halo*'s use of materials. "The prevalent use of local sandstone and homogeneous approach to design make for an environment that is comparable to the spa towns of Harrogate or Bath."

SIM CITY

Will Wright's classic is accused of too often becoming an urban sprawl, or in *Architect's Journal* writer Riya Patel's eyes: "a high class favela". Yet praise for its buildings, such as thee pagoda rooftops, is unreserved.



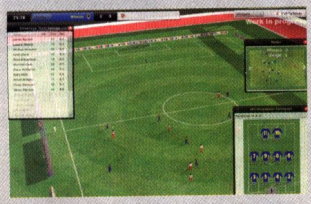
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Silvermoon – the blood elf capital – gains the highest praise, with the *Journal* citing its "organic influences. Similar to Gaudi's Parc Guell, nature is expressed in stylised form – the very essence of Art Nouveau".

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

1	—	**THE SIMS 3**	Issue 208 – 92%
2	↑	**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**	Issue 202 – 90%
3	↑	**WORLD OF WARCRAFT:** WRATH OF LICH KING	Issue 202 – 86%
4	↑	**WARHAMMER 40,000:** DAWN OF WAR II	Issue 205 – 78%
5	↑	**EMPIRE:** TOTAL WAR	Issue 206 – 94%
6	NEW	**INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 09:** ASHES	N/A
7	↓	**ARMA II**	Issue 209 – 70%
8	—	**CALL OF DUTY 4:** MODERN WARFARE	Issue 188 – 89%
9	↓	**SPORE:** GALACTIC ADVENTURES	N/A
10	↑	**GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**	Issue 203 – 91%
11	↑	**FALLOUT 3**	Issue 201 – 91%
12	↑	**SPORE**	Issue 199 – 95%
13	↑	**COMMAND AND CONQUER:** RED ALERT 3	Issue 201 – 86%
14	↓	**THE SIMS 2:** DOUBLE DELUXE	N/A
15	↓	**ANNO 1404**	Issue 210 – 91%
16	↓	**CALL OF JUAREZ:** BOUND IN BLOOD	Issue 210 – 80%
17	RE	**CRYSIS:** MAXIMUM EDITION	N/A
18	RE	**LEFT 4 DEAD**	Issue 202 – 93%
19	NEW	**BIOSHOCK & OBLIVION**	N/A
20	RE	**CALL OF DUTY:** WORLD AT WAR	Issue 202 – 84%

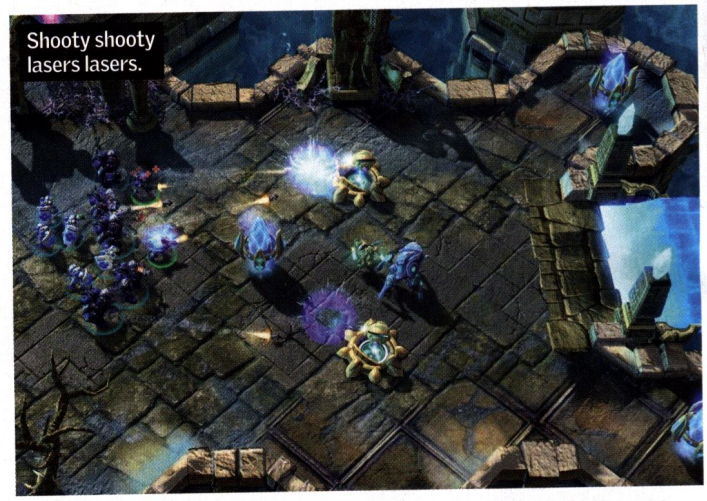


2. FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
Realistic football management simulator or animated spreadsheet? Either way it's bloody popular.

3. WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING
This guy desperately needs anger management training.

4. WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II
No chance of a diplomatic solution being reached here.

5. EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR
One for the fans of *Sharpe*, *Hornblower* and any other improbably named heroic character from historical fiction.



Shooty shooty lasers lasers.

Should have got a better netbook.

CRITICAL DELAY FOR STARCRAFT

First instalment slips to 2010

WEBSITE starcraft2.com

THE START OF the *StarCraft II* trilogy is forecast to sell 4 million in the first few months, but you're going to have to wait a bit longer to get your hands on it as – like *BioShock 2*, *Alan Wake* and *Mafia II* – the game has been delayed until 2010.

Chief industry forecaster and analyst Michael Pachter has also said he expects *StarCraft II* to be on sale just three months after beta testing kicks off, given the quick approval of *Warcraft*: "They did a phenomenal job with the *World of Warcraft* beta. As I recall, it was around four months – and they'll have no issues at all in attracting 30,000 supremely knowledgeable beta testers, so my bias is that the beta will take less time than most expect," he said.

StarCraft II has been put back to allow its release to coincide with the launch of Blizzard's new Battle.net game service.

"Battle.net will become the foundation for connecting the tens of millions of members of the Blizzard community in a social gaming network across all Blizzard's future games," said ActiBlizz CEO Bobby Kotick.

"There is no better opportunity to launch this than through the launch of *StarCraft II*. This is likely to be the most anticipated groundbreaking RTS game of all time and the Battle.net platform is an investment in the future of gaming."

So it looks like Activision Blizzard will be putting all its eggs into the *Modern Warfare 2* basket this Christmas which, with a £54.99 price tag for the console versions and just £34.99 on the PC, won't be such a bad thing for the publisher.

Win! SIX BIONICLE FIGURES, FOUR ACTION VEHICLES, AND A NEW ACTION MOVIE DVD UP FOR GRABS!

PRIZES WORTH OVER £200!

FOR THE FIRST time ever, BIONICLE fans can own a model of their hero Mata Nui! Team him up with the powerful five Glatorian Legends warriors to help him fight off the evil Skrall and discover a long lost secret.

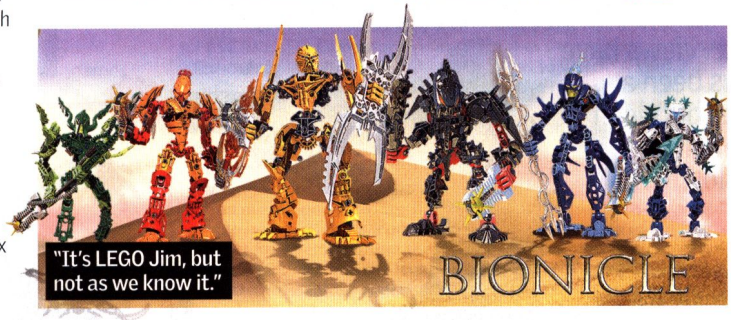
Alongside the Legends, the almighty Thornatus V9 combines high speed with devastating power and heavy armour. Boasting four Midak Skyblasters and a spiky Thornax Launcher, it unfolds for an extra burst of speed. Pulled into battle by the huge two-headed Spikit, the Baranus V7 is a powerful chariot piloted by the evil Sahmed, who's equipped with a chain, whip and Thorax Launcher. Built to race across the sand into battle, the Cendox V1 piloted by Crotesius has rear tracks, front blades and boosters to tackle the dunes. All these could be yours.

The winner will also receive a DVD of *BIONICLE: The Legend Reborn* – the latest chapter in the futuristic saga – as will two runners-up.

For more info visit bionicle.co.uk.

Q WHAT'S THE NAME OF THE NEW BIONICLE WORLD WHERE THE BATTLE TAKES PLACE?

A. MARA SCAMGA
B. BARA MAGNA
C. SCARA MANGA



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www.futurecomps.co.uk/pczlego and follow the prompts.

By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word STOP at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at £1 plus your standard network tariff rate. Competition ends 30 October 2009, entries received after this date will not count. Standard competition and texting rules apply (see below).

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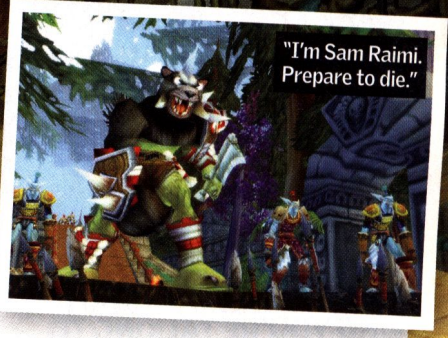
SPIDER-MAN DIRECTOR SIGNS UP TO WOW

Worldwide geekgasm inevitable

WEBSITE wow-europe.com



FILMS OF VIDEOGAMES are generally a pile of shit, but when news reached us that Sam Raimi had signed up to direct a live-action movie based on *Warcraft*, we got a bit excited.

"At its core, *Warcraft* is a fantastic, action-packed story," enthused filmmaker Raimi. "I'm thrilled to work with such a dynamite production team to bring this project to the big screen."

Raimi, who's made the *Spider-Man* trilogy and all-time classic *The Evil Dead*, will join forces with Charles Roven's Atlus production team, which has also worked on *The Dark Knight*, *Batman Begins* and *12 Monkeys*.

Blizzard is working together with Legendary Pictures for the film, and said Raimi is "the perfect choice" to bring *WOW* to life on the big screen. "Sam knows how to satisfy the enthusiasts and the mainstream audience that might be experiencing Azeroth for the first time."

Details on cast and release date will be announced as development progresses. Maybe Ozzy Osbourne and Mr T will get starring roles. We can only hope.

JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS & INTERVIEW PEOPLE

If you want to enter a written debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

Job interviews have always been a barrier between myself and the world of employment.

The fear of being predictable, or somehow boring, has always overridden the fear of seeming unemployably erratic. Ask me what I'll bring to your company and I'll perform an erotic fan dance rather than say "I work well on my own and in a team".

Until I stumbled into games writing, I never realised that this life-hindering disability would also apply if I was the one asking the questions. So, as the world's most awkward and reluctant interviewer, here are the tips I've picked up.

1. ALL THAT MATTERS IS WHETHER THEY LIKE YOU

Remember: It's not what the developer says to you that matters – it's how many times they look gently surprised and say "That's a good question". If they say that magical phrase, don't wait for an answer – just say thanks, and ask your next question.

Try to sound clever: don't ask "Are there any new weapons?" say "This franchise is built on an innovative approach to combat, which I personally enjoyed on several levels. Here is a drawing I've done of a new gun, do you think it's a good gun?"

Remember: Your readers aren't stupid, and can guess most of the information about a game. So focus on asking that one question that will make your interviewee offer you his job, leaving him to return to your office with an hour of recorded conversation to transcribe.

"Save precious hours of preparation and research by simply not knowing what game you're talking about"

2. DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO

An alternative approach is to seem professional. Professionalism implies emotional detachment. So to be the consummate professional, it follows that you should be utterly detached from the interview. Save precious hours of preparation and research by simply not knowing what game you're talking about. Just turn up, and say one of the following things:

a) "So, it's all very exciting, tell me what this game is bringing to the paddock."

b) "Our readers won't be familiar with this game, so let's pretend I'm not either. What's it called?"

c) "What kind of score do you think it'll get?" (If they say above 80, look impressed.)

FURTHER SOLOMONS

Another question Jason Solomons asked was: "Your films certainly seem to strike a chord with your fans. And speaking of chords, the score of your films is very important. Do you compose that first, before making the film?" The answer was to the effect of: "No, that'd be weird, as we'd have to play the music while filming and get the cast to act along to it." But this question is a perfect example of everything you'll have learned here. Show off, by all means – but never be anything other than a complete dick.

3. NEVER TRANSCRIBE ANYTHING

Transcribing a conversation you've just had is one of the most metaphysically disconcerting experiences you can have. It's like going into a pub, only to stumble across yourself making a series of clumsy, unsuccessful passes at your childhood sweetheart. You end up standing there, looking at yourself sweating, stammering, unprepared and unable to process rejection. So don't bother! Just write down a few things that sound cool. Here's some things every developer says which you can safely copy out in every article you write:

a) "We've really improved the AI, there were times when it surprised even us."

b) "There was so much cool stuff we couldn't fit into the first game, but it's all in this time."

c) "I think people are going to like this game."

4. YOU ARE NOT THE WORST

Every profession has its stellar talent. But we can console ourselves that the world doesn't necessarily reward that talent. Take the film critic, Jason Solomons. I witnessed him asking Charlie Kaufman – the spectacularly talented writer and director – where he got his ideas from.

Seriously: a grown man, asking another grown man where he gets his ideas from. He might as well have added, "Do you think them up, all on your own? What's it like seeing through your eyes? Are there more colours?" That's a crucial thing to remember: shit doesn't sink. PCZ

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCKPHOTO

UNIVERSITY OF ABERTAY DUNDEE
Institute of Arts, Media and Computer Games

The UK computer games industry's first academic centre of excellence.

Abertay University in Dundee has been pioneering degree courses in computer games technology for more than ten years since launching its first postgraduate degree in software engineering and computer games technology back in 1997. Since then, Abertay has expanded its portfolio to include undergraduate and masters degrees in computer games technology, computer arts, game animation, sound production and more. The computer games technology and computer arts degrees hold two out of only six accreditations so far awarded by Skillset, the sector skills council for the creative industries.

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Now Abertay is consolidating these highly acclaimed and recognized courses alongside a constantly expanding range of related subjects into a brand new Institute for Arts, Media and Computer Games with around 800 students on courses including Computer Games Technology, Computer Arts, Creative Sound Design and Computer Game Applications Development, plus many more.

Just last year Abertay attained Skillset Media Academy status and was awarded an investment of £3 million by the Scottish Government to create the UK's first national centre of excellence for computer games education. And thanks to that, the centre of excellence is opening as Abertay's new Institute of Arts, Media and Computer Games this autumn with a brand new flagship degree, Master of Professional Practice in Games Development. So, for the best there is to offer in computer games-related degree courses to set you on your way to a career in videogame production, visit www.abertay.ac.uk now.

INSIDE VIEW: CHRIS ISAACS

GRADUATED WITH BSC (HONS) IN COMPUTER GAMES TECHNOLOGY

Chris Isaacs is a software engineer at game giant Realtime Worlds in Dundee. He graduated from the University of Abertay Dundee with a BSC (Hons) in Computer Games Technology in 2007.

Chris said "After the third year of my degree, I took a year out and worked at Realtime Worlds for 16 months before returning to complete my honours degree. The learning environment at Abertay stood me in good stead for finding employment. There is a great respect for Abertay within the gaming industry, and the lecturers are keen to use their own knowledge and contacts to help you find work placements during and after university.

"I was also very fortunate to be involved in Dare to be Digital at Abertay. I was the sole Scottish member of my team, working with four students from Beijing University, and our game prototype won the Innovation and Creativity Award and was one of three games short-listed for the BAFTA 'Ones to Watch' Award.

"We have since set up our own company 'Phoenix Seed' working (between Beijing and Dundee) on a number of small projects in our free time. We were honoured to receive a Digital Animation Excellence Award during the 2008 Olympics for one of our games which featured in the official Olympics Art Exhibition in Beijing last year, beating thousands of other entries.

"I was able to return to Abertay this year as a Programming Mentor for this year's Dare to be Digital, as part of Realtime World's sponsorship of the competition."

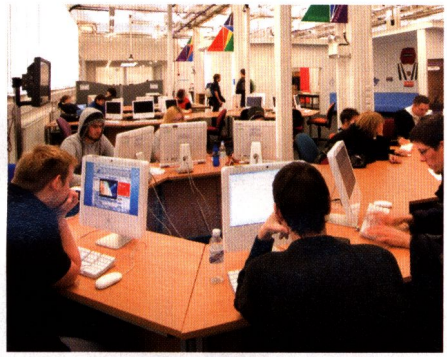
"Creating great games is my absolute passion and working at Realtime Worlds is a dream come true for me. I work alongside some extremely talented individuals and have been lucky to work on a number of exciting products such as Crackdown for the Xbox 360.

"I'd thoroughly recommend Abertay to any future developers. The facilities are second to none and the lecturers are committed to getting the best out of you."

INDUSTRY RECOGNITION

Abertay's key partners from across interactive and digital media sectors include:

Electronic Arts	Sony Europe
Realtime Worlds	Microsoft
Codemasters	Buena Vista Games
Blitz	BBC
Rare	Sky



Dare to be Digital

Daring you to be the best

Dare to be Digital is Abertay's world premier computer games design competition designed solely for students. This year, would-be developers from the UK, Ireland, Norway, Canada, China and India are competing for a prestigious Dare winner's trophy and a nomination for the coveted BAFTA Ones to Watch Award. Think you've got what it takes to win? Dare to be Digital.

FOR A PROSPECTUS PLEASE CONTACT US ON

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Contact: 01382 308080
Email: sro@abertay.ac.uk
Web: www.abertay.ac.uk

HOT SHOTS

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com **ETA** 20 November 2009

WE TOOK THE time to play a bit of the original *Assassin's Creed* this month, to prepare ourselves for its second coming, and in doing so we quickly and inadvertently struck up a list of things which we reckon absolutely must not be repeated in *Assassin's Creed II*.

Foremost is the fact that the first half hour of the game is effectively a lengthy cutscene interjected by patronising and unskippable tutorials.

There's also the guards in the countryside, for whom the sight of a galloping horse elicits a sort of debilitating and yet murderous outrage.

Oh, and the giant black borders on the top and bottom of the screen, that was particularly annoying until you could train your eyes to ignore it.

So Ubisoft, if you could fix all those things and add lots of good stuff, that'd be really great and your game will get a billion percent.

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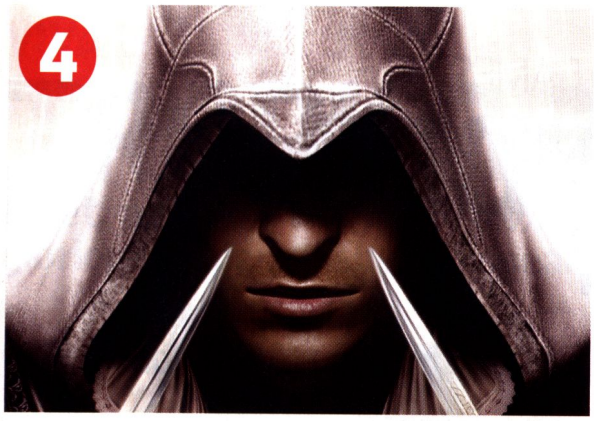
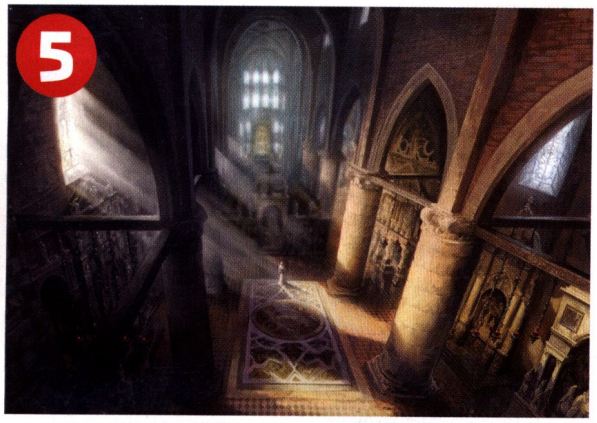




THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

A day-and-night cycle will free *Assassin's Creed II* from the eternal mid-afternoon sun of the Middle East, and deliver it to the range of lighting conditions of 15th century Italy. It's just like today's range of lighting conditions, but more olive oily.

2. VISUAL FIDELITALY

That's 'fidelity' and 'Italy' worked into a single word, and the only succinct way of describing how beautiful *AC2* will be. It'll have the "internal vegetation" tech from *Far Cry 2*, and a swishy new cloth system for extra whooshiness.

3. CHASE ME CHASE ME

When crossing the Italian countryside Ezio isn't restricted to hoofing it in his Sicilian clogs, instead he'll be able to control a horse and carriage. Guards' suspicion metres will go berserk at this sight, and they'll attempt to scramble aboard.

4. SHOOT THAT POISON ARROW

Ezio can also upgrade his iconic wrist-blade with the help of Renaissance polymath Leonardo da Vinci. With the upgrade attached, he can prick foes with a poisoned needle, which sends them into a berserker rage after a matter of moments.

5. SECRETS AND LIES

Ubisoft are calling them "secret locations", and they're specially designed interiors of famous landmarks. Here you'll find acrobatic challenges and puzzles. "Hours of additional gameplay," shouts Patrice Desilets. Twenty minutes, we reckon.

6. MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Ezio is a greedy bastard, and will be able to use any illgotten gains to upgrade his armour and buy new weapons, tools and employ "faction services".

CHRIS TAYLOR
FOUNDER, GAS POWERED GAMES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

GPG's founder unveils *Supreme Commander 2* exclusively to *Ali Wood*

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games **PUBLISHER** Square Enix **WEBSITE** na.square-enix.com/sc2 **ETA** TBC

WHEN THE FIRST *Supreme Commander* appeared the sci-fi RTS crowd took its stonkingly big robots to their hearts, and *Forged Alliance* ensured *SupCom* stayed there. Gas Powered Games have now teamed up with Square Enix to make *SupCom 2*, and Chris Taylor spoke exclusively to us about it:

The design of Heathrow's Terminal 6 was controversial.

"It's not just about creating interesting units, we also need to give these visuals a strong game utility"

Q Did you learn anything from making *Demigod* that helped in developing *SupCom 2*?

A Most of all, we refined our production process which allowed us to raise the bar visually. Our maps and characters are better than ever, and the technology is more refined and efficient.

What led to you working with Square Enix?

Square Enix were checking out western developers, and we started a dialogue as they were chatting with many different companies. Over the months we talked about doing something together. As we got to know each other, we decided this would be an exciting first project together... and so far, well, it's been an awesome relationship.

What will be the first noticeable difference for returning players?

The visuals are incredible, the maps are unique and interesting, and the game has been updated in almost every way. Experienced players will notice our in-game economy has undergone vast improvements making it much more manageable, putting the emphasis on the combat, and not on the economy.

So running the money side won't be as much hard work?

No, not at all, it'll be much easier. But honestly, it's what someone might have expected in the first place. A unit has a cost, and when they have those resources, they can have that unit built. The player no longer has to worry about storing Mass and Energy (which had the bad side effect of spilling over and being lost) and can instead just focus on the strategy and tactics of the game.

So has anything got more complex?

While the economy has become more understandable and approachable, the game itself will have many depths for the player to explore. We certainly wanted to create a game that allowed new players to enjoy it, but it was key that experienced players felt there was a continuing sense of depth in this game.

Are you expanding the original's tech trees?

Our goal was to make every unit in the game important, instead of simply pushing ahead to the highest tech levels. We did this through the tech tree system, where the player earns points they can spend to unlock different upgrades, boosts and units. It's great because the game plays differently depending on what makes sense strategically, and it provides many more hours of fun experimenting with the different approaches a player might have to these tech trees.

What new mega-huge units will we see? What's the coolest one?

Ha! We've so many crazy new units it's hard to pick a favourite, but I think many will say that the Cybranasaurus Rex is the most exciting (it used to be called the Cybranzilla, but this new name is more suitable). I also like the King Kriptor and the Universal Colossus, both incredibly powerful units, and completely over-the-top visually!

Some *SupCom* players were plagued by major performance issues. Has this been sorted in *SupCom 2*?

Well, we wanted the game to run on a lot more systems than the original, so this has been a top concern of ours from the beginning. If you consider the game runs great on a three-year-old PC, we're feeling good about the performance.

Will the playable factions stay the same or are there new ones?

We've taken the existing factions and evolved them, giving them fresh new looks. However, as the story evolved, the original Aeon Illuminate became the Illuminate, and have retained much of the culture and overall beliefs of the original faction. They've been given the greatest visual overhaul, and we're excited about the new look, and feel that the faction now has a much more robust visual design.

For us, it's not just about creating interesting units, we also need to give these visuals a strong game utility, so the player knows what the unit is by looking at it. It's an interesting balance between originality and usability. PCZ

ETA 16 OCT 2009

VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN!

TROPICO 3

Quiet, peasants! *David Brown*, your glorious leader, wishes to speak

DEVELOPER Haemimont Games **PUBLISHER** Kalypso Media **WEBSITE** tropico3.com

It's not much, but it's home.

The fire means they're protesting.

I PUT IT to you, dear readers, that a lot of people remember the first *Tropico* game fondly. I also put it to you that of those people, only a minority actually gave it any significant degree of time. Let's forget about the second game – where the setting was changed from a fictional Caribbean socialist paradise to a community of bloodthirsty, grog-swilling pirates – and concentrate on the first one, because this is where *Tropico 3* is picking up the baton. No buccaneers here, just honest citizens and corrupt leaders of revolutions.

The premise is much the same: the fictional Caribbean island of *Tropico* is yours to command, by fair means or foul. You can choose to be a tyrant, ruling your land with an iron first in an iron glove with iron bits sticking out from the knuckles. Equally, you can be tender and caring to your people, perhaps even posing for publicity photographs cradling an injured lamb in your arms, nursing it to health after a nasty capitalist ran it over in his gas-guzzling decadence machine.

CUBA LIBRA

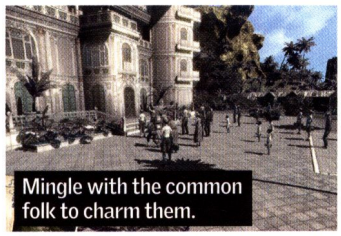
From our time with it, we can tell that *Tropico 3* is a huge improvement over the first one, as you'd hope it would be. Political, social and economic options are plentiful, including the ability to issue edicts (enact legislative changes) that alter the way your downtrodden society functions. You can ban drinking and contraception, or be a liberal leader and allow same-sex marriages and set up a range of sensitivity training courses for your people.

More underhand strategies are still needed though, regardless of whether you're a benevolent or tyrannical leader. Faction leaders can be bribed or arrested in an attempt to prevent criticism of your regime and there's the small matter of siphoning off public funds into a Swiss bank account, something which is used to calculate your final rating once you've finished the game (ie been thrown out of power in a counter-revolution).

Unlike a lot of other god games, you have a physical presence in your game world. As El Presidente, you can make speeches on your palace balcony like a cigar-smoking Pope, or step down from your ivory tower and mingle with the common folk, (or your comrades, depending on your dedication to socialism), by making personal appearances at schools and such or speeding up construction of important buildings. Whether having an avatar in the game means you can be assassinated or not, we've yet to discover. You can certainly have traitors or rebels shot down if you so wish, so perhaps they can retaliate.

There's also the small matter of your relations with the two superpowers in the world: namely the United States and the USSR. Again, you can choose to move towards either Cold War faction if you so wish, so there's no reason your communist paradise couldn't be allied with the capitalist pigs in Washington.

Aesthetically, *Tropico 3*'s looking good and the music is salsa-riffic, complementing the tropical visuals nicely. Interesting god games are thin on the ground and, certainly, ones with a focus on something other than historical trade are even more sparse, so it's good to see something breaking from the pack and trying something new . Yes we know it's a sequel, so it can't, by definition, be 'new' new, you know? You know what I mean. PCZ

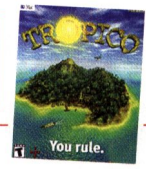

Mingle with the common folk to charm them.

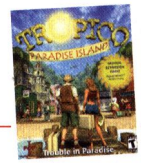
THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Trying something different
- ✔ More comprehensive
- ✔ Spot-on visuals
- ✔ Be a good or bad leader
- ✘ Will people buy it?

THE STORY SO FAR... TROPICO

TROPICO
A taste of what life as a dictator in a banana republic would be like.
2001





TROPICO: PARADISE ISLAND
Adds natural disasters and tourist attractions.
2002

TROPICO 2: PIRATE COVE
Less Castro, more Blackbeard.
2003

TROPICO 3
Even more cigars, shootings and bribes are promised.
2009

A NEW CHALLENGER EMERGES...

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010

David Brown is wondering where *2009* went to

DEVELOPER Beautiful Game Studios **PUBLISHER** Square Enix Europe
WEBSITE championshipmanager.co.uk **PREVIOUSLY IN** 207

HANG ON A minute? Weren't we talking about *Championship Manager 2009* back in issue 207? Hmm, let's see... aha, yes! We were. Don't worry, though, it doesn't mean Beautiful Game Studios have thrown away the promising code they'd previously unveiled to the world, it's just that, with a release date now scheduled for sometime in September, the game runs into 2009/2010 season time so BSG have changed *2009* to *2010*. Silly, but understandable.

As you'd expect, you're not going to be able to tell what's changed in *CM2010* by looking at screenshots. It's all about what happens behind the scenes, as it were, and in this specific case, what's happening in the game's match engine.

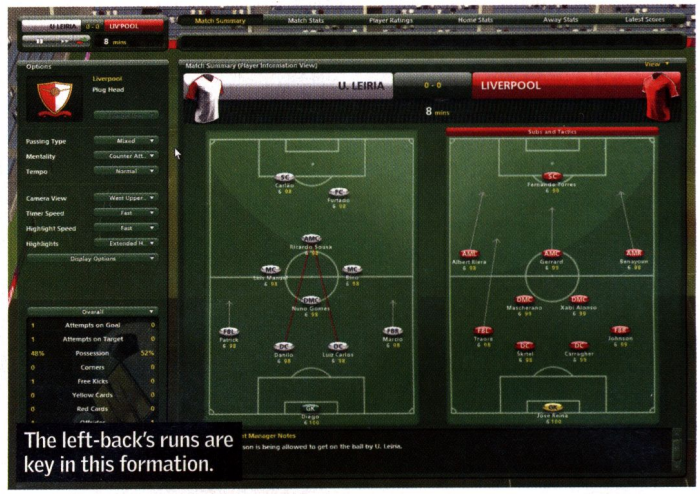
Before you get to the matches though, you've got tactics, squad selection, training, scouting and all the usual gubbins to go through before you can begin watching people kick a ball around a park.

ETA 11 SEPT 2009

Everything is done up in a swishy blue Sky Sports style, with tickers, information panels and such offering a more pleasing aesthetic than *Football Manager*. Some people will prefer the starker nature of *FM*, but *CM2010* provides an adequate middle ground between that and the low-brow styling of EA's *FIFA Manager*.

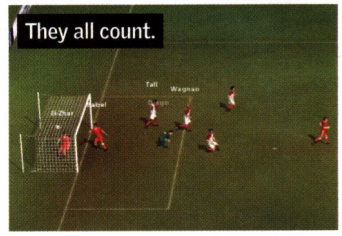
Elsewhere, there are hundreds of little things to talk about with regards to the workings of the game, far too many to adequately address here, so I'll just restrict myself to the more pleasing additions.

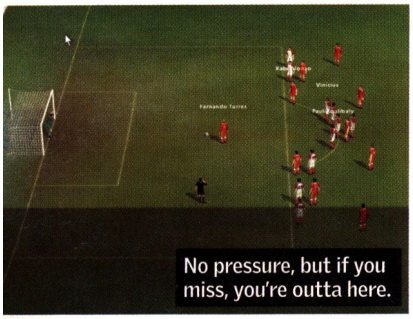
One of the first things is the player comparison tool, which is much easier to interpret at a glance than its counterpart in *Football Manager*, with attributes broken down into Physical, Attacking, Mental etc. and a little summary at the bottom of each column telling you which player in a pair has better overall stats in this section.



The left-back's runs are key in this formation.

Status lozenges (ie the bits next to a player's name on the squad screen) are also better done than in *FM*, cycling through each one rather than placing one thing above another and potentially keeping critical information from the player. A quick pointer hover also lists all the lozenges at once, which is welcome.


They all count.


No pressure, but if you miss, you're outta here.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Visually impressive engine
- ✓ Set-piece creator
- ✓ Scouting network
- ✓ Lots of ideas...
- ✗ ...that might not work

IT'S ALIVE!

How BGS are trying to keep things up-to-date after release

Psh. I wouldn't have paid 80p for him!

One thing that has always plagued football management games is the fact that, once a game is released, that's it. How many times have you loaded up the latest *Football Manager* and gone "Oh, but that guy's moved to Real Madrid"?

BGS are trying to change that with *CM Season Live*. Six monthly updates will provide database changes and, interestingly, the chance to start the first season at a point in time identical to that of real life.

If the team you support in reality has had a shit-hot start, well, you can just pick up in-game where they've left off.

Certainly it's a novel way to approach patches and content updates, but keeping *Champ Man* up with real life won't be free, if that makes a difference.

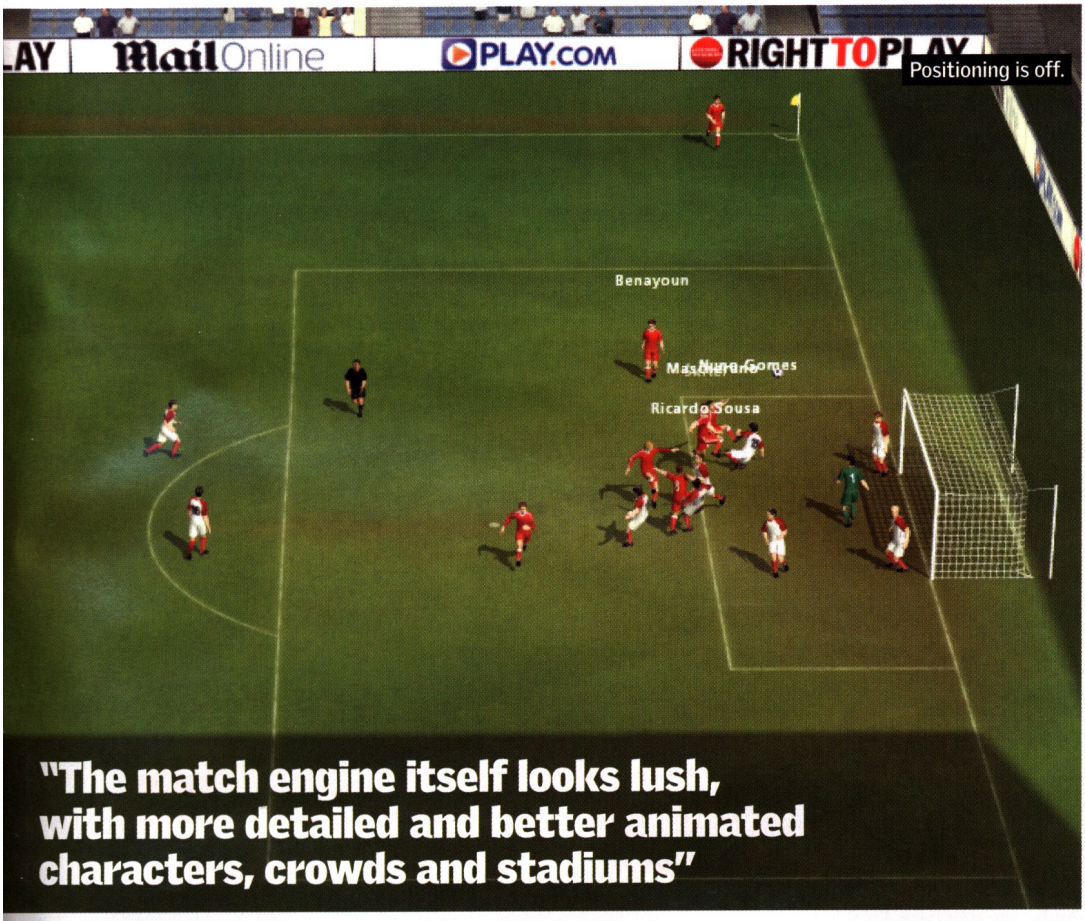
THE STORY SO FAR...
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER

TEXT ADDICT
The very first match engine. Some say it's still the best.
1993

ON THE BLOB
Graphics appear in the engine, with a few teething troubles.
2003

FOOTIE SPRITES
Rudimentary 3D was finally added, though it didn't work well.
2006

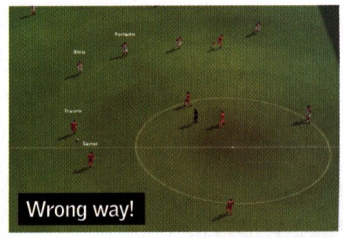
FULLY REALISED
Now with animated players, *Champ Man* has come a long way.
2009

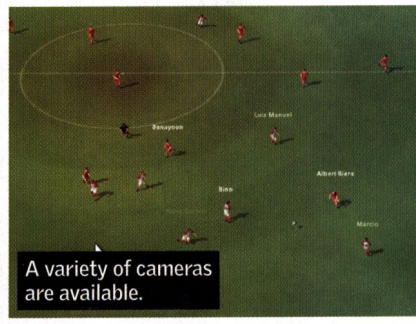


Positioning is off.

"The match engine itself looks lush, with more detailed and better animated characters, crowds and stadiums"

Red is back.


Wrong way!


A variety of cameras are available.

Give each footballer his own instructions.

The set-piece creator is great fun.

The scouting system is well presented too, but one thing that did annoy slightly was that new reports were produced every game day, with player positions not highlighted in the said list, meaning you had to click through each player to find out how useful they'd be to you.

START YOUR ENGINES

And so to the matches themselves. After you've wasted hours fiddling about in the amazingly fun set-piece editor, you'll move onto the team talk screen. This is more comprehensive than *FM*'s equivalent, with different tones and individual criticism or praise to dish out. For example, you can tell a defender he's doing well when the opposition is failing to score, or you can tell him he's doing badly because the opposition is getting too many free headers and/or shots in, even if you haven't conceded any.

The match engine itself looks lush, with more detailed and better animated characters, crowds and stadiums all adding to the experience. In my first friendly in control of Liverpool, Ryan Babel did a neat little step over to bamboozle a Portuguese full-back; Andriy Voronin got done for pushing the keeper while a goalmouth scramble was taking place; and Fernando Torres obeyed my instructions and got booked for 'going to ground' too easily in the box. These little touches are all, of course, present in *FM*, but you can actually see them getting played out now and go "Ah, yeah, that idiot Voronin just shoved the keeper over," rather than watch a load of stickmen have a bit of a jostle and then a free kick be given.

A couple of words of caution before you start whipping yourselves into a creamy froth of excitement – the engine isn't without its problems (at the time of writing). The way players move and/or interact with the ball looks a bit strange at times and, especially when trying out moves on the training ground, they do some really daft things. Things definitely improve when you go into a proper match, with players reacting to the ball's movement and, generally, producing slick games to watch.

The question of whether the engine itself is as robust as *FM*'s is still unanswered, but certainly the signs are there that Sports Interactive might have a genuine contender to their top dog football management status. PCZ

PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

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SPY VS SPY...

ALPHA PROTOCOL

He's no spy, but *Steve Hogarty*'s a fan of peep-holes...

DEVELOPER Obsidian **PUBLISHER** SEGA **WEBSITE** alphaprotocol.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 197

ONE OF THE more annoying extensions of the effect games have on our brains – specifically the one that has our brain going "phwee, I'm in a war" – is the one that causes our morality lobe to misfire and think that, when we hover over the "tell the friendly robot he's rubbish and then kick him in the face" option, we're about to inflict misery on a real thing. It's worth pointing out that real robots wouldn't experience misery or pain, never mind ones in BioWare games – so even when two steps removed from a negative act we (well, I) still can't stand punching my robotic friends.

So you opt for the "pat him on the head and tell him he's lovely" dialogue choice instead, and you spend the rest of the game doggedly trying to please everybody by worming your way through the most positive sounding sentences, like a patient trying to escape a mental hospital using personality quizes from *Hello!* magazine.

Alpha Protocol fixes this surgical approach to socialising by giving you four stances to assume once words have been spoken to you. And waiting around to have a think won't work either, NPCs will just shout at you for looking disinterested and aloof. It's *Mass Effect*'s "vague response" system dulled even further, but where that game could muddy your intent, *Alpha Protocol* gets it right more often than not. More importantly, being a tit in this game feels guilt-free, and not because the characters aren't worth caring about, but simply because the writing on the evil side of the fence is both clever and very funny. *Alpha Protocol* is a sarcasm simulator, and not having your character's response or actions laid out before you makes every line a surprise.

ETA **OCTOBER 2009**

We meet our informant Grigori in a bar. A little worse for wear, he appears to have been here for some time before our arrival. Before a word is spoken the HUD demands to know your stance – flipping to "aggressive", Grigori's face is slammed into the bar as you scream your demands into his bloodied face. You smash his vodka glass and wave the shards about threateningly, swearing, mocking his accent and acting silly. The upside is, he's rightfully terrified and hands over the location of the guy you're attempting to track down.

The downside is that you've missed out on a potential side-quest Grigori would've divulged had you been a bit more pleasant, and that further down the line – hours more into the game – your target will have been informed of your arrival by Grigori and so beefed up his security.

"These flames won't keep you from me, my love!"

THE LOWDOWN

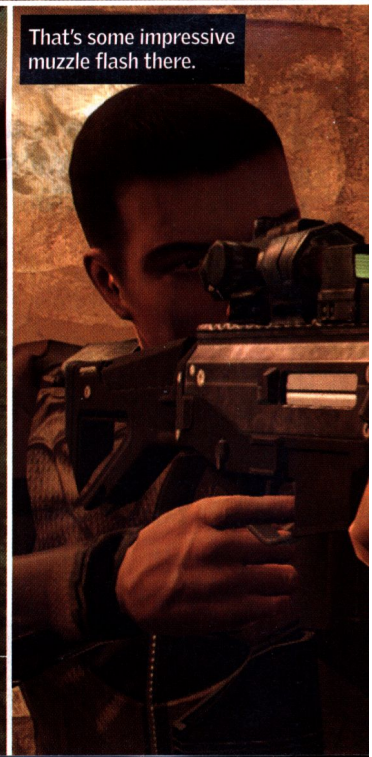
- ✓ Sharp, clever dialogue
- ✓ Being an arsehole works
- ✓ 30 hours of play
- ✓ 120 hours of dialogue
- ✗ Levels could be tiresome

JOYS OF CHARM

Time is rolled back, and we're shown what would've happened in an alternative universe where the player isn't such a gratuitous bell end.

"I'm looking for a man," comes the opening from our character. A pause. "But not in that way..." he adds. The exchange is then courteous and light-hearted, the location of the very same target is handed over, as well as the details of another optional mission. We also get access to Grigori's private arms dealer at a better price than we would've had otherwise.

As the conversation ends, Grigori effectively thanks you



That's some impressive muzzle flash there.

THE STORY SO FAR...
OBSIDIAN

BLACK ISLE
Black Isle closes shop in 2003, seven years after being founded.
2003

TROIKA
Troika, formed by ex-Islers, closes after just seven years.
2005

OBSIDIAN
Obsidian is formed by more ex-Islers. Will it make it to eight years?
2003

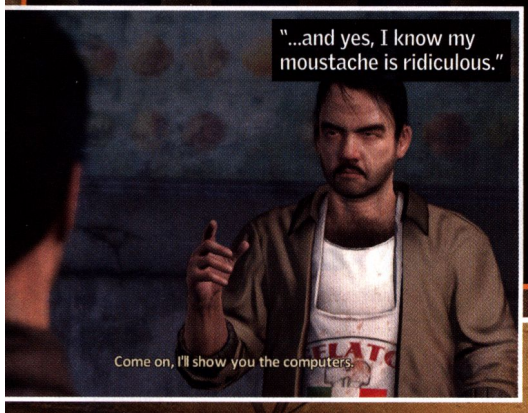
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS
Obsidian start work on a sequel to *Fallout 3*.
2009

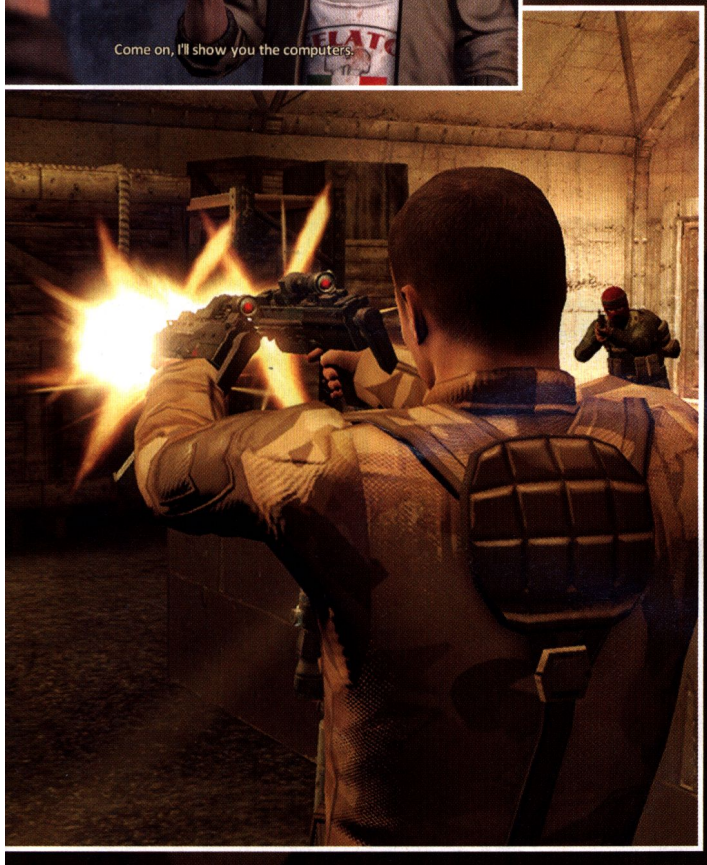
When plastic surgery goes wrong.

"The writing on the evil side of the fence is both clever and very funny"

The guy with the laser always wins.

That first guy could be Lamahl from Kajagoogoo.





"*Alpha Protocol* could feel more linear than most RPGs"

find solace by sprinting up to a door and jabbing your lockpick in it.

Besides trite mini-games, there's some worry that the half of *Alpha Protocol* in which you're not spouting rejected pages from a Bond script may be dulled by some apparently tired level design (the generic Middle Eastern town we played through was a maze of brown alleys, wooden doors and empty rooms), and the visuals are oddly low-fi.

Compromises are being made, and in leaning so heavily on a solid skill-based system *Alpha Protocol* naturally gives up some of its shooter qualities. That said, it's hard to find any RPG/shooter in which the combat is endearing from the game's start. Without creating and honing a character ourselves, to the point where we know exactly how and when to use given skills, it's going to be difficult to draw conclusions.

The structure of the game is unlike those of *Mass Effect* and *Knights of the Old Republic*. There are no hubs to speak of, no floating quest markers above NPC heads, and dialogue occurs only once, so you can't talk to somebody for a second time to try out another line of questions. You'll move from location to location, returning to safe houses from where you'll launch missions before leaving it behind and progressing to another tier of missions. The order in which you accept them is up to you, but *Alpha Protocol* could feel more linear than most RPGs.

Even if that's the case, there's a promise from Obsidian that the game will be flavoured more by your choices than any other game in the genre. And we guarantee that you'll be able to punt a quest-essential orphan into a bonfire without feeling any remorse. PCZ

ETA SPRING 2010

KANE'S BACK...

COMMAND & CONQUER 4

David Brown is a bald man with a grand plan

DEVELOPER EA Los Angeles **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** commandandconquer.com

SEE, WE ALWAYS knew that bald guy known only as Kane was a decent fellow. He was just misunderstood, only wanting a better world for you, me and the entire human race. Granted, he may be responsible for the deaths of thousands and his insane quest for personal deification and radioactive tiberium crystals is the reason the world has turned into a bleak, green, irradiated wasteland. But forgive and forget? Everyone makes mistakes, after all.

Now Kane's trying to make amends, which is why he's approaching the GDI (Global Defence Initiative – *C&C*'s goodies) with a plan, one that might just save the putrid galactic scab one might call Earth. His plan is simple – an alliance. The GDI and Kane's Brotherhood of Nod (the baddies) working together to push back the tiberium menace and help get the planet back on its feet.

KANE THE SAVIOUR

Introduced in one of those gloriously campy (and now superbly hi-res) movies that the *Command & Conquer* series is renowned for, Kane holds some strange orb in his hand while he makes the proposition. The GDI guys look a bit nervous, but we know they decide to agree, perhaps after some tough negotiation or maybe just after a curry and a night out on the tiberium cocktails.

While we don't know yet who will actually make an appearance (we know for sure Ric Flair won't be in it, sadly) the cast are sure to bring life to the story, as they've always done.

This meeting takes place 10 years after the events of the previous game. Fast forward another 15 and you've got the present day in *C&C4* terms. The plan is coming to fruition, the Tiberium Control Network is almost complete and the two factions have been skipping merrily together in tiberium-free fields for a decade and a half. A new golden age for humanity is said to be dawning. So, of course, as is the way of things in game land, things go terribly, terribly wrong. We don't know how they go wrong, nor would we tell you if we did, because it would spoil the story. But it does and the GDI and Nod are back at each others' throats once again, the fate of mankind in the balance once more.

One of the things Jim Vessella, producer on the *C&C4* project, was eager to stress was the notion of appealing to both hardcore and new users. A common enough refrain, of course, and one that is hardly easy to attain. To be fair to him, it does seem like the game could be significantly different to its predecessors, although not in a "shit, they've ruined it!" kind of way. There's definitely more of a "hmm, that sounds interesting" vibe to the project at the moment. How much you agree with that statement depends on the following passages, so let's get cracking.

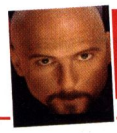
Essentially *C&C4* is the same game as all the others. You build a base with a mobile MCV (called a Crawler in this one – well, ish... we'll get back to this

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Persistent XP
- ✔ Hotkeys not so important
- ✔ Lots of new units
- ✔ New ideas
- ✘ No Ric Flair

THE STORY SO FAR...

KANE'S MANY INCARNATIONS



NOD SCENE
The first *C&C* brings us Kane, the evil slaphead warlord.

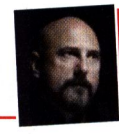
1995

SECRET ADVISOR
Kane also turned up as Stalin's mysterious advisor in *Red Alert*.

1996

ASCENSION
Kane brought the alien Scrin to Earth to help him become a diety.

1999



END TIMES
We assume that Kane has secret evil planned for the world.

2010

KEEP YOU FRIENDS CLOSE

What *C&C4*'s multiplayer means to you and your closest

Multiplayer is almost certainly where *Command & Conquer 4*'s longevity will lie, an opinion supported by Vessella himself. You'll be able to play it online in a number of ways, either co-operatively against the AI or competitively against people. We can say now, for certain, that co-op will be great.

The competitive side will allow for one-on-one skirmishes all the way up to gruelling five-on-five team battles. If you decide to form a team with friends, you'll also be able to go from battle to battle as a unit, with no annoying regrouping in lobbies. Just bounce from one glorious win to another without dropping out.

Whether you'll be able to do this while in control of the Scrin is unknown at the time of writing, but we got the impression that this might be announced somewhere down the line. Watch this space for that one.

Some mechs killing each other again.

He looks a bit like the Undertaker.

There are probably medium-sized units, but we haven't seen them.

a little later) and set about churning out a big army of tanks, infantry, engineers and other instruments of mechanised destruction. You can do this as either the GDI or the Brotherhood of Nod, each with their own distinct units.

The first place *C&C4* differs from its ancestors is that you have to choose a class, which basically means choosing between Offence, Defence and Support unit load-outs. Each one has its own specific roster with unique roles to play. For example, using Defence gives you heavy turrets to deploy, but very little in the way of quick, incisive attack troops with which to gain ground; offence does the opposite; and Support gives you the option to properly utilise aircraft, artillery and transports. You must pick one of these before starting a game, so it'll be important to think about what you plan to do or what your preferred style is.

"The game could be significantly different to its predecessors"

This is absolutely essential to what EA Los Angeles are planning for *C&C4*, specifically when you consider that you can't actually be defeated. This doesn't mean that your units are invincible – far from it – but if your Crawler (or the equivalent depending on which class you've chosen – the Crawler is used for the GDI's Offence class) is destroyed, it isn't the end of the world. You'll then get the chance to respawn as either the same class or a different one. How well this idea will work can only be divined from a proper play test, of course, but it has the potential

JIM VESSELLA
PRODUCER, EA LA

INSIDE THE MIND OF KANE

I'll scream in a minute...

You're making some distinct changes to *Command & Conquer 4*'s gameplay. Will the hardcore approve?
We think the hardcore players will like the progression system. In terms of being a completionist, I'm kind of that way in games and I like to get everything and unlock everything, we're going to have certain challenges in there that are really tough that hardcore players can really go after.

In terms of strategic depth, we're not removing it – we're opening it up. The Crawler you can kind of go anywhere with, whereas in the old *C&C* it was all about your build order, which is fun for a lot of people who find the perfect order and just execute that time and time again – see how fast you can get, how fast you can build those power plants up – but it does become predictable, so I think with *C&C4* it's going to be a more evolving experience. People are going to find great strategies, but the Crawler can really vary it up, pulling a fast one on the enemy.

We're hoping the hardcore player can find a home in *C&C4* and be able to really enjoy some of the new things we're trying, but it is a different game, for sure.

How about the modding community? Are they being catered for?
We're not disclosing too much about *C&C4*'s mod support. We're glad that people have actively been taking the *Red Alert 3* mod kit and trying some cool things with that. Right now we're trying to get the launch nailed down and focus on that, but it's always a really tough trade-off trying to support the mods, SDK and toolkits while doing the launch as well. Often, as you've seen in the past, we'll sometimes release the tools a little bit after we've launched the game and we've polished them up so they can be used by our fans.

We don't have an exact plan, so I don't have any specific details on when modding is available or how it's going to work, especially in *C&C4* as everything ties into the player progression. We're going to have to do a little bit of research on that and also kind of ask the community how they think it should work.

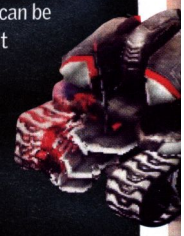
> **"In terms of strategic depth, we're not removing it – we're opening it up"**

The *C&C* series is famous for having big-name celebrities in its cut-scenes. So will Ric Flair be appearing anywhere?
I can categorically say that Ric Flair won't be back! We're not unveiling the cast just yet, but we're obviously delighted to have Joe Kucan back as Kane.

He's been with the franchise longer than anyone, right from the game's beginning, so it's great having him here for what's going to be the finale of the Tiberium Saga.

Will the Scrin be playable?
We're going to start out with Nod and GDI and see how the fans react.

How about the Forgotten – humans who've been mutated by exposure to tiberium?
They were prominent in *Tiberian Sun* and we're going to have a few units in there that can be recruited to your cause. We can go a bit crazy with them as they've been affected by tiberium, plus they've got a kind of cool little fiction as they've been cast away in society, so they've got their own agenda and background that we can use in little side stories.



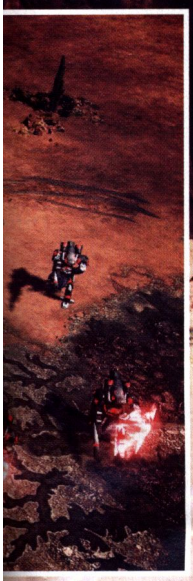
So yeah, we're going to have more units in terms of the Forgotten than we've had in our previous games, which can be recruited by both the GDI and Nod.

Will there be any exploit-ish tactics, like piling Engineers into an APC and unloading them in the middle of the enemy base and capturing everything instantly?
The structures that we currently have can't be captured by engineers as they're like fire bases. You can resurrect the husks (vast mega-units that lie dormant on the battlefield) capture tech structures and so on.

That being said though, we do have some really powerful units – like the commandos – who can do devastating damage to structures, so you could load commandos into an APC and some of our high-end infantry units and drive that into an enemy base.

Actually, the Nod APC burrows, harking back to *Tiberian Sun*. We'll see how the fans react to that one, as they can sneak into an enemy base, pop out and spew out all their guys, causing this big firework show inside the base.

Are there any units that can detect burrowing or stealthed vehicles?
The engineers can do that. As long as you have those guys scattered about in your army, you can detect stealth. We also have a few structures that do it too, so there's a definite counterbalance to the burrowing. But if you get caught off guard, Nod can really take advantage of you. PCZ



I MEAN IT!

Last warning!

Phew, just in time: this is a GDI mothership.

to make irritating build-and-rush tactics less of a pain in the backside.

While we're still sure that quick-fingered and quick-rushing gameplay will be essential to mastering the game, Vessella stresses the effort the development team are putting in to shift the balance of power towards a middle ground, where people who don't even know what a hotkey is could have a chance of putting up a good fight.

ETERNAL LIFE

The respawns, which could be unlimited or regulated by the chosen difficulty level, will also go some way to helping players alleviate the frustration of sudden rush deaths. Vessella believes that *C&C4* will be more layered strategically than previous games in the series, with longer missions than in *Red Alert 3* and more changing up of tactics because of the extra mobility provided by the Offence and Support classes.

Finally, we come to probably the biggest change to the *C&C* formula – persistent XP. Killing units, destroying structures and completing objectives all earn you experience, which allows you to unlock new units to use later on in the campaign. However, this can also be earned in the skirmish and multiplayer modes. We think this could be rife for abuse, players perhaps setting up easy win games in the skirmish mode and just grinding experience. Vessella recognises this, but doesn't believe it'll be a problem. In fact, it will be a definite bonus for inexperienced players who can "buff" themselves with practice in the other modes, bringing better units to the difficult campaign mission they previously failed to crack.

One thing we're aware of that has a sour taste is that *C&C4* needs a constant internet connection. EA say it's down to players' progress needing to be tracked at all times. So it's not DRM... sort of.

It seems to us that *C&C4* could be the game that brings back players bored of the same old mechanic used since, effectively, 1995. While not reinventing the wheel, EA Los Angeles have definitely gone beyond the minute token changes we so often associate with big name releases from established franchises. Whether these alterations work or not is a matter for you yourself, depending on your love/loathing of the base-building RTS mechanic, but what we're certain of is that, for the first time since the late '90s, the guy writing this piece is looking forward to playing *Command & Conquer*. That's definitely saying something. PCZ

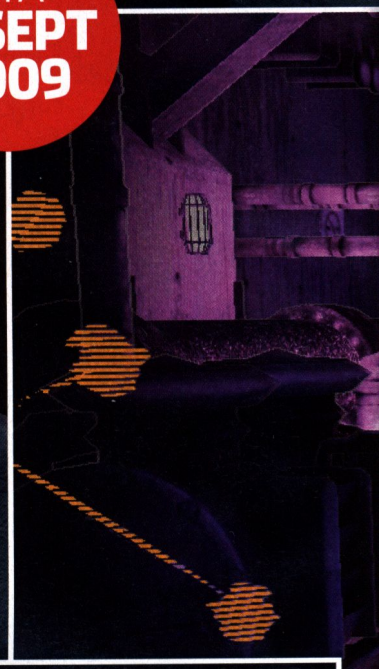
ETA 21 SEPT 2009

HOLY HANDS-ON, BATMAN!

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Becowled, David Brown prepares to sneak up on a clown

DEVELOPER Rocksteady **PUBLISHER** Square Enix Europe **WEBSITE** batmanarkhamasylum.com **PREVIOUSLY IN** 208



CREATING AN IMMERSIVE atmosphere is key to the success of any classic game, but never more so than when you have to capture the essence of a beloved character like Batman. So *Batman: Arkham Asylum* could easily become the gaming equivalent of Bob Hoskins in *Super Mario Bros* or Mark Wahlberg in *Max Payne*. It had to be a concern when this new Batman game was first announced and, until you've actually had a chance to get your hands on it, it'll probably remain one.

NO BORKMAN HERE

Thankfully, any question of Rocksteady borking Batman in a Joel Schumacher style can be dismissed – there's no question that *Arkham Asylum* will be nothing but pleasingly great.

While I'm no expert on all things Batman, it definitely seems to sit perfectly in the universe the Caped Crusader inhabits. In fact if there's one thing that strikes you about *Arkham Asylum* it's the atmosphere, which feels perfectly dark and disturbing. Part of this is down to the rendering of the characters in cutscenes, but mostly it is because of the superb voice acting.

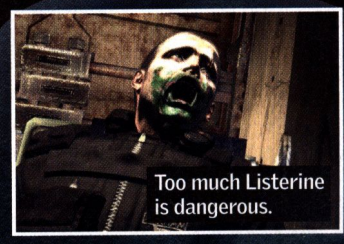
The glowy attack does the most damage.

The supporting cast does an excellent job of making the world come alive, much like in the *Chronicles of Riddick* games, which Batman definitely pays tribute to in the extensive opening sequence where Bats escorts the Joker deep into the Asylum's complex. Mark Hamill is particularly great as Joker, providing an excellent foil to Batman's straight man routine. You'll never tire of being interrupted or pestered by the madcap psychopath – Hamill's performance really is brilliant.

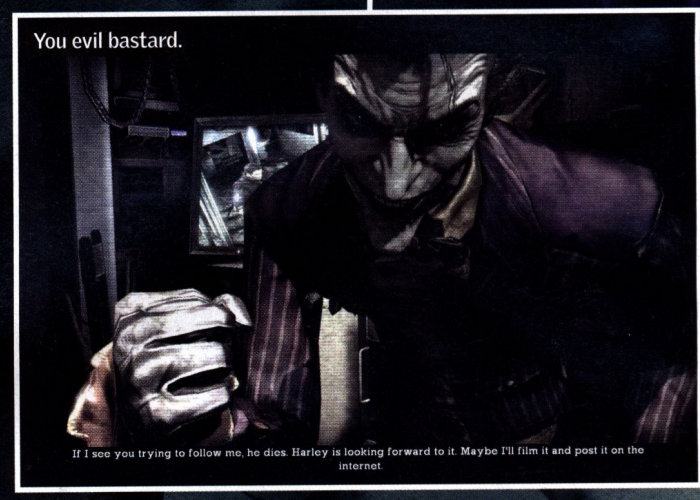
Hamill is joined by Kevin Conroy, who has voiced Batman's appearances in cartoons since 1992, starting with the classic *Batman: The Animated Series*. Reuniting Hamill and Conroy certainly adds to the atmosphere of authenticity Rocksteady are trying to create, although Conroy's performance means you may be a little bit bored with Batman's role, dulled as it is by his stoic attitude in every situation. Still, we're confident it won't make too much difference, the interplay between kooky villains and a stoic iron-jawed hero being something tried and tested through the ages in various different types of media.

There's also absolutely loads of stuff to do. The main storyline is good enough to keep you forging forward, but the sheer amount of optional items to search for is mind-boggling. Riddler tokens, strange Spirit of Arkham symbols, and interview tapes are just a few of the things you'll be scouring the undergrowth to find. Intricate level design has been a major part of the development process, with many of the more expansive areas (such as the the Asylum's grounds) containing a large array of nooks and crannies to explore. Keep finding these objects and you'll unlock a whole host of extra goodies that you can ogle from the main menu.

If you've played *The Witcher*, you'll have a good idea of how *Arkham Asylum*'s combat system works. Clown-masked thugs approach you from various angles – often in large groups – and you left-click to thump them. If one decides he wants to try doing the same to you, shiny blue indicators appear above his head that tell you he's about to come a-clobbering. A swift right-click will put paid to his nefarious ideas, delivering a quick counter-attack to send the assailant flying.



Too much Listerine is dangerous.



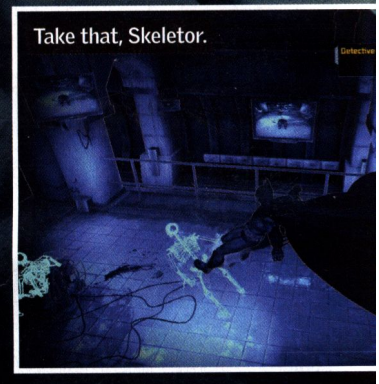
You evil bastard.

If I see you trying to follow me, he dies. Harley is looking forward to it. Maybe I'll film it and post it on the internet.

BIFF BASH KAPOW!

Stand-up melee combat is tempered by the use of stealth, which looks to be infinitely more satisfying. Perch on a conveniently placed, and shadowed, gargoyle and wait for an enemy to wander from the pack. Then you pick them off one by one. That is the best way to approach combat in this game.

Most places where bad guys gather seem to have multiple places to strike from. Once during this playtest I hid Bats under a grating in the floor, letting him pop up behind a thug to deliver a silent takedown, before zipping up to a gargoyle. From this vantage point I watched as fearful confusion spread among Joker's goons, before swooping down onto them.



Take that, Skeletor.

In terms of plot, environment, atmosphere and all that sort of gubbins, we're certain *Arkham Asylum* will satisfy all but the most nitpicking of fanboys. But hold back from soiling your official Batman duvet in fevered anticipation just yet, and wait until next month's review when you'll see our final verdict on Rocksteady's effort. PCZ

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Looks great
- ✔ Runs great
- ✔ Loads of stuff to do
- ✔ Great atmosphere
- ✘ Combat too simplistic?

THE STORY SO FAR...
BATMAN

BATMAN
David will only watch the '60s series, not the new films.

1966

BATMAN: THE MOTION PICTURE
A good film that made a decent game.

1989

BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES
Had Mark Hamill as a brilliant Joker.

1992

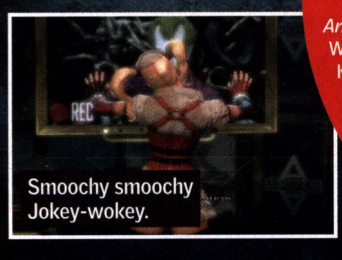
THE DARK KNIGHT
"Christian Bale isn't as good as Adam West. Period," says David.

2008

Batman just loves jumping on people's bones.

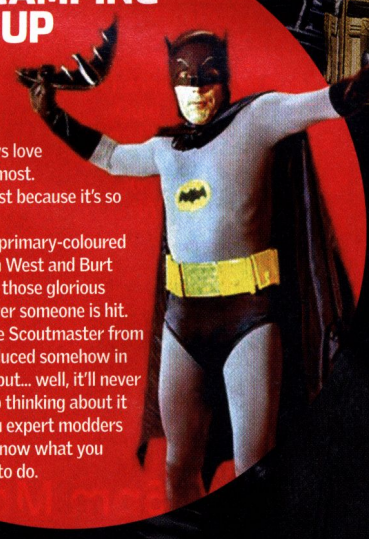
"We're certain *Batman: Arkham Asylum* will satisfy all but the most nitpicking of fanboys"

He likes it really, you can tell.



Smoochy smoochy Jokey-wokey.

CAMPING IT UP



No matter how much more cool, romanticised and sophisticated Christian Bale's Batman is, I'll always love the original '60s show the most. I don't know why: maybe just because it's so utterly ridiculous.

What I'd love to see is a primary-coloured *Arkham Asylum*, with Adam West and Burt Ward providing voices, and those glorious KAPOW! splashes whenever someone is hit.

I'd also love to see the Scoutmaster from *The Simpsons* be introduced somehow in a weird re-spoofing, but... well, it'll never happen, so I'll stop thinking about it now. But all you expert modders out there know what you have to do.

My eco-friendly armour is made of fossilised guano.

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ETA 9 OCT 2009

BACK TO THE FRONT...

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

***David Brown* enjoys getting killed by distant enemies**

DEVELOPER Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** codemasters.com/flashpoint **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 210

YOU KNOW HOW it is. You're walking around jauntily, safe in the knowledge that you're the hero, that you're the one that's going to save the world from the evil communist/alien/terrorist menace, then a bullet, with all the proper physics and trajectories implemented properly, tears out your windpipe and you choke to death on a mixture of your own blood and the mud you just collapsed into. Then you realise you're a hardcore military simulation.

That's just how things go in the world of ultra-realistic military games, such as *Operation Flashpoint* and its rival *ArmA*. Death can come from anywhere, at any time and with extreme prejudice, as they say in the US.

From what we've played of *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising*, it isn't just a jollied-up action-fest tainted by the foul stench of console corruption. While you can see nods to the machines our half-brothers insist on using, like the radial menus used to give commands to your squad, that doesn't mean this sequel is a watered-down arcade game. In fact, while we wouldn't say it's as brutally realistic as *ArmA II*, only the insane will scoff at *Dragon Rising* for not being realistic enough.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Huge map
- ✓ Improved AI
- ✓ Not dumbed down
- ✓ Massive draw distance
- ✗ Very easy to die
- ✗ No chickens or sheep

BE VEWY QUIET

The preview build we got our hands on contained two missions, but both of these were large enough in scope to indicate that there's going to be plenty to get stuck into when the full game arrives.

The first was your standard infiltration mission: you lead a four-man team on a quest to disable a Chinese early-warning system, enabling your fleet to get into position without alerting the main enemy force to their presence.

After completing this – it has to be done within a certain time frame or the fleet has to abort the mission – you then move on to securing a coastal village and a landing zone, or perhaps even driving around looking for secondary objectives to complete. Interestingly, fulfilling one of these opened up another one, so pursuing these seem to be worth it.

THE STORY SO FAR...
OPERATION FLASHPOINT

OPFLASH
The first game was buggy and hard, yet was still pretty great.
2001

RED HAMMER
The first expansion cast you as a Russian soldier in the conflict.
2001

RESISTANCE
This saw you take control of a civilian fighting the Russians.
2002

DRAGON RISING
The Codies-developed sequel is coming. Will it be as well-received?
2009

Send the grunts in first then take the glory once a mission has been completed. Easy.

Early builds of the game made us slightly wary of how the AI – both enemy and friendly – was going to pan out. The usual assurances were bandied about by Codies – claims that everything would be OK in the end, glitches would be fixed before release and so on. Usually this sort of thing is treated with an "Of course," and a resolute "...but we both know it won't be," spoken quietly inside your head. However, we've been corrected on this one, as the AI is definitely much, much better than it was before.

While we're not going to go on record and say it's 100% perfect – a game of this scope will never be bug-free, especially with its AI routines – but from our experiences, there aren't any soldiers refusing point blank to get into jeeps or dead Chinese soldiers riding around in a ghost car.

The second mission involved a beach assault. This is a realistic game, remember, so we're not dealing with scripted excitement here. Thanks to your death-defying antics in the previous mission, you've been able to get onto the beach unmolested by enemy artillery. There are still enemies scattered about the place who'll happily pump lead through your brain given half the chance though, but you can use the squad commands to just send your buddies in first and then pick up the pieces once they get taken out/killed the enemies.

You see people on TV or in films complaining about the perils of command, but it seems pretty swish to us.

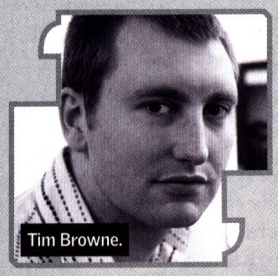
GOOD LOOKING

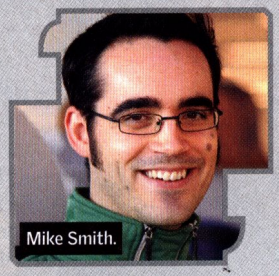
You've probably taken a good look at all the pretty pictures dotted around these pages already. You may even have chuckled at some of the mildly amusing captions too. Let's concentrate on the pictures though, for now.

Dragon Rising is using a bucket-load of the same code as *GRID* and the upcoming *DiRT 2*, so the engine is robust and shouldn't fall over very often. What it also has is a draw distance of approximately 32km, so you can stand on top of the dead volcano situated on the eastern side of the island and, provided the dynamic weather conditions

"Only the insane will scoff at *Dragon Rising* for not being realistic"

What's that thing on his helmet?


Tim Browne.


Mike Smith.

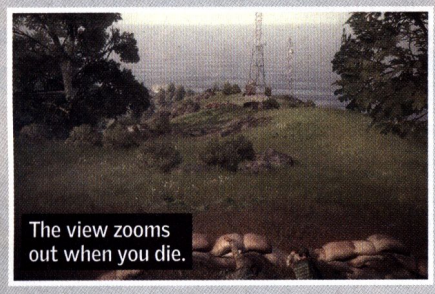
MIKE SMITH ART DIRECTOR AND TIM BROWNE SENIOR GAME DESIGNER

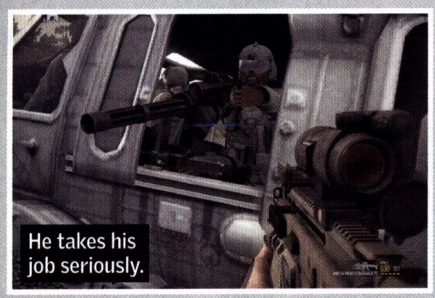
BRINGING WAR INTO YOUR HOME

Will the editor be easy to use or techy gibberish?
Tim Browne: You can set the date, time of day, weather, that sort of thing. So, it's very easy to do the basics, but of course it can get very complicated. Literally, for a person totally new to it, it's as simple as point and place. We've got all these different fire teams to put down, all these individual soldiers to choose from and we have squads to choose from. Same for the People's Liberation Army and vehicles. Once you've done that, you just click play and it'll export it to the game engine and you can play it.

Can you put every unit in the editor on the map?
TB: A very powerful PC could probably handle that, but I wouldn't try it on a Netbook or anything.
Mike Smith: We can't wait to see what people do with the editor, to be honest.
TB: Yeah, it's definitely something we're really excited about from the PC perspective. As soon as the game's out, we're expecting, within a week, to see all sorts of missions out. We have a team of 10 mission designers, but when you open it out to thousands of people it changes things so much.

Did you put in that secret ninja base we asked for when we last spoke to you?
TB: Sadly there's no hidden base in the extinct volcano. We know you wanted it, but as senior designer I had to say "No, stop right there." Who knows, maybe it'll appear in the DLC or an update? I'd rather focus on the core game, so there aren't any Easter Eggs, but you don't know what the coders or mission designers might have put in. As far as I'm aware, there aren't any.
MS: It's such a huge island that only certain areas are focused on for the campaign.
TB: Like the quarry. That's one of my favourite areas but it's not used in any of the missions yet. We've got a lot of AOIs (areas of interest) in the game.
MS: That's a dev's term. I mean we've got this huge island based on satellite reference points, but we really go into detail in AOIs – settlements, fuel stations, ports, airports, that sort of stuff.


The view zooms out when you die.


He takes his job seriously.

> **"We wanted to get the core things really great, which is infantry combat"**

If you fall off down a slope, do you break your legs or just die?
TB: Falling, yeah, you'll have falling damage, but you have to get to a place where there's a sheer drop. Most of the time you'll just slide down a slope. There's no jump button because you're carrying this 80lb pack, which makes it tricky to leap about.
MS: It also wouldn't fit if you had loads of players jumping all over the place in multiplayer.
TB: There's various different injuries, you can see where you're bleeding from. What you do is get the field dressing out, which is the equivalent of using bandages and tourniquets. What it doesn't do is heal the wounds, it just stops the bleed metre. If your legs get damaged, you can't sprint any more and your aim is worse if your arms get injured.

What you can do is call the medic over, who'll give you a shot from a syringe. That'll remove your ailments, something we felt was necessary for things like multiplayer, so the medic has more of a purpose.

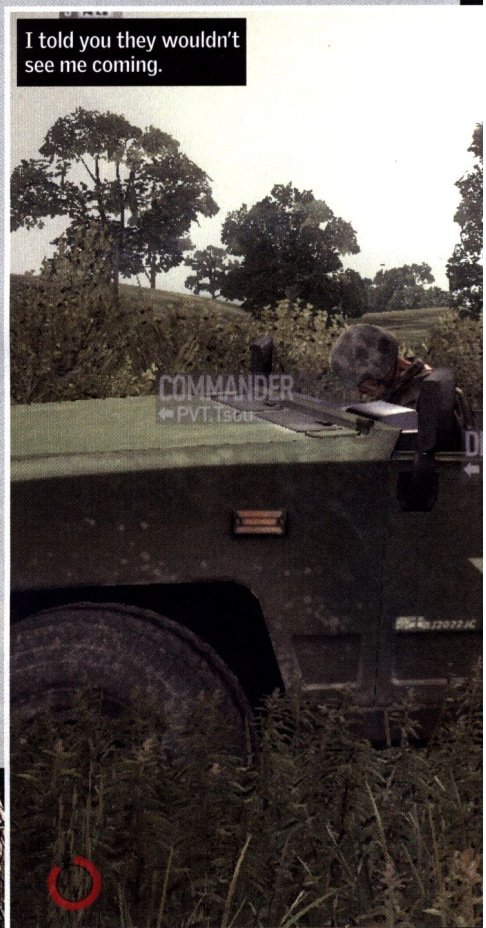
Can you use the magic syringe in the hardcore mode too?
TB: Yes, but you don't get your blood back.

Tell us more about the competitive multiplayer modes.
TB: We've got Annihilation mode, which is your basic deathmatch-type game. We find chokepoints on the island and get players to gun it out.

The other cool mode we've created is Infiltration, which is purposefully unbalanced. Ten members of the US special ops go up against 22 regulars from the Chinese PLA. On the PC, all of the soldiers can be controlled, unlike on the Xbox.

We noticed a combat knife. How easy is it to get in close and stab someone up?
MS: No, it's very, very hard. You can do it though – in the dead of night, just crawl up to people.

Can you be sheep and cows?
TB: No, we also don't have civilians in the game. We wanted to spend more time focusing on the character models, as we've had unprecedented access to the US Marine Corps, who gave us all sorts of information. The last thing they'd want us to do is to put civilians in that you can shoot and be basically as war criminals. We also didn't want to put the PLA in a nasty light, like they deliberately kill civilians. You will come across the occasional body – oil refinery workers – and other things, but we wanted to focus on getting it looking great.
MS: That's the key thing, we wanted to get the core things really great, which is the infantry combat. We're going to expand on that with DLC later, but the core experience is what we feel people really want.



I told you they wouldn't see me coming.

"The entire campaign can be played in a four-player co-op mode"

are aligned correctly, see all the way to the other side. (The volcano still doesn't have a secret ninja training base. But we're working on it.)

SUPER SIZE

The scale of the island is important to the gameplay too. Missions last a substantial period of time, so you've got time to take in the scenery and devise devious tactical approaches using the in-game map (from which you can issue orders). While you won't be going from jungle to snow to swamp back to desert – there's enough to keep amateur botanists interested. There are a few of areas of interest – such as some salt flats, the volcano and rocky beaches – to keep the island from being soulless. We'd like a mountain with a snowy peak, but you can't have everything.

You don't necessarily want to hang about admiring the foliage though, especially if you're playing on hardcore mode. This is the closest-to-real setting that takes away all the HUD apart from the list of voice commands you've issued. There aren't any checkpoints either, other than one at the start of the mission, so if you decide you want to play it like that, good luck. (Yes, *Dragon Rising* uses a checkpoint system – no other saves are allowed.) The good news is that you don't have to go it alone – the entire campaign can be played in a four-player co-op mode, so you and some hopelessly inept teammates can try to finish the game. All games that have the capacity to should have co-op modes, and we're delighted that *Dragon Rising* has one.

There are two other multiplayer options. The first, Annihilation, is a straight deathmatch, but the other mode is definitely the most intriguing.

Infiltration involves one team of up to 10 special forces troops attempting to accomplish an objective guarded by 22 defenders. We're positively salivating at the prospect of getting involved with a large game of this online. A potential Fight Club, anyone? And that's a suitably positive note to end on. PCZ

EDITORIAL DISCRETION

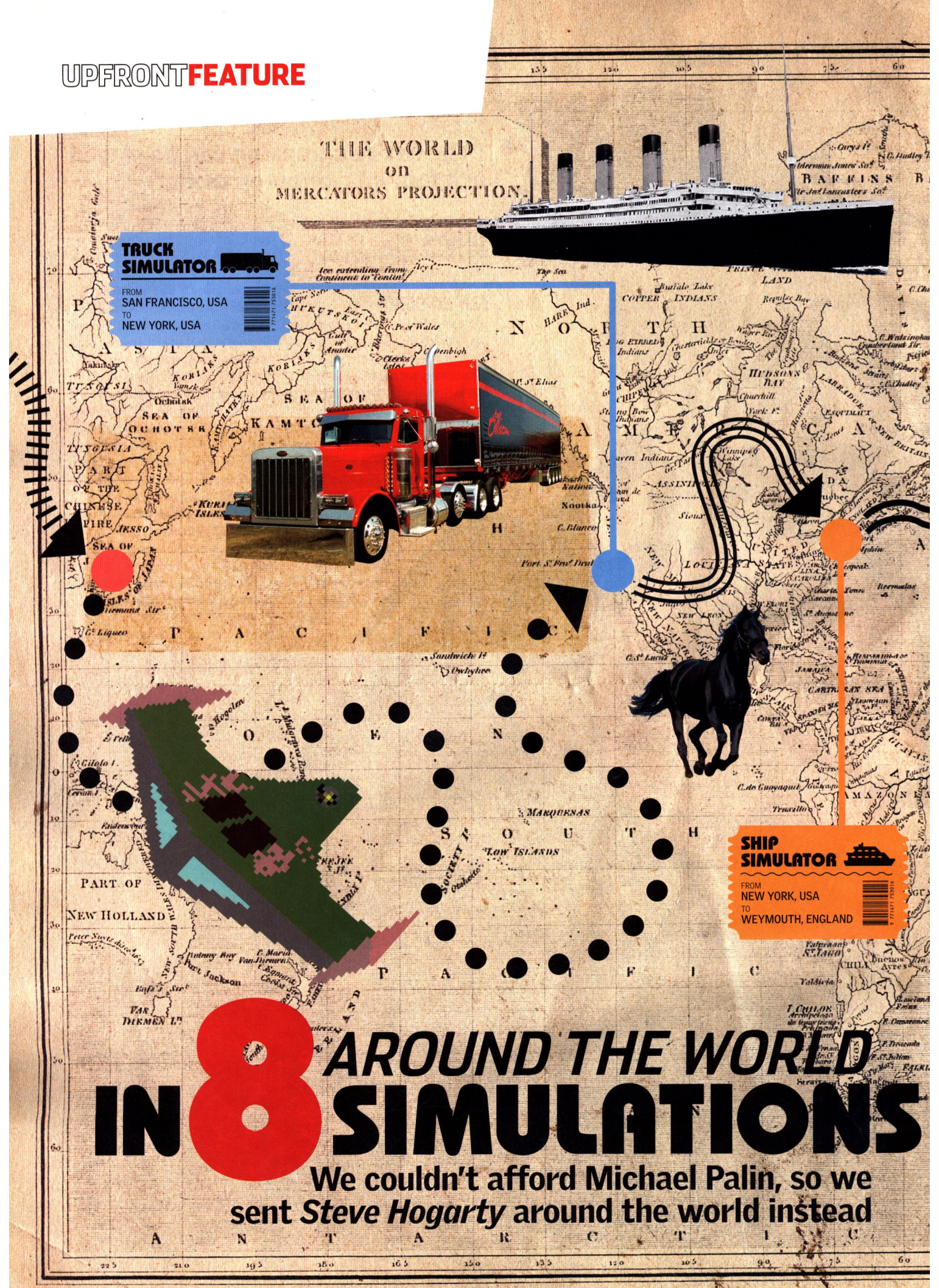
Most mission, map or level editors are hellish things for us laymen. We're happy to look wide-eyed at them before refusing to ever touch one again in fear. Let those clever mod people handle that sort of thing. But Codies say Dragon Rising's is all about ease of use. It might be presented in the usual way, but – unless you get involved with the LUA scripting language – it's just a case of simply dragging and dropping all the units you want onto the map.

Obviously things get more complicated when you delve into the designer's inner workings, but if you just want to test a basic scenario, or see what would happen if you had overloaded the map with units, it's a cinch.

Sadly, there aren't any of *ArmA II*'s animal units, so you can't watch the battles unfold while running about as a sheep.

I'm still not sure what it is you know.

"Er, little help here?"



AROUND THE WORLD IN 8 SIMULATIONS

We couldn't afford Michael Palin, so we sent *Steve Hogarty* around the world instead

Is it possible to travel right around the world using simulators? Yes, in fact it's very easy – *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* lets you do it without any fuss, it just isn't very interesting. But is it possible to go right around the planet using a bunch of different simulators? Again, yes, that's equally possible, but considerably harder to figure out how to do.

Starting in London, we set some ground rules: every simulator must pick up where the last left off; every simulator must represent real-world geography; and time travel is allowed (a maximum 1,500 years in either direction). With all that in mind, let the journey commence!

EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR

FROM
LONDON, ENGLAND
TO
WARSAW, POLAND
DISTANCE
1,329 MILES

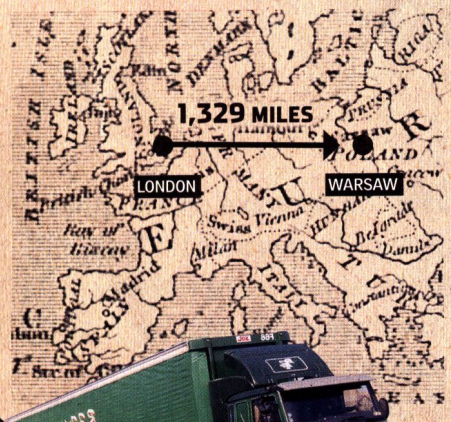
UNBRIDLED, SCREAMING OPTIMISM powers our Scania truck along the first leg of our epic journey – from the *PC ZONE* offices in London, down the M20 (itself a part of the European route E15, road fans) to Dover. Reaching speeds of 55mph, this isn't the fastest section of our trip but it's easily the most relaxing. The drastically scaled-down, leafy scenery rolls by, and the gentle rocking of the cab has a lulling effect. In our Sussex-induced stupour we miss at least one turn-off and career headlong into oncoming traffic for a good 40 miles. Frantically flashing our headlights and swerving from lane to lane sees us through safely.

Catching the ferry to Calais brings us to the Continent, and from there we plot a route through Frankfurt in Germany before trudging onwards to Warsaw in Poland. It should be noted that, for the authentic trucking experience, we acquire some cargo in the form of a container of ice cream.

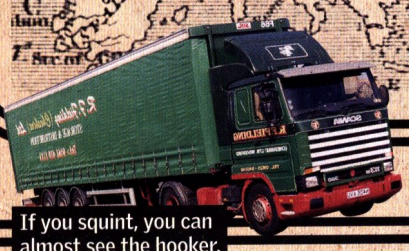
LONDON – As long as nobody sees you pull off the road and smash through a small wooded area near Haywards Heath after missing your turning, it didn't legally happen. Apparently.

DOVER – The ferry to Calais sets us back a pricey €315. If we hadn't been paid to smuggle 14 Russian migrants in on the way over, we'd have been broke.

FRANKFURT – Having drifted off twice on the autobahn, we kip in a lay-by. Without a dead prostitute in the cab, we sleep restlessly in an unfamiliar land.

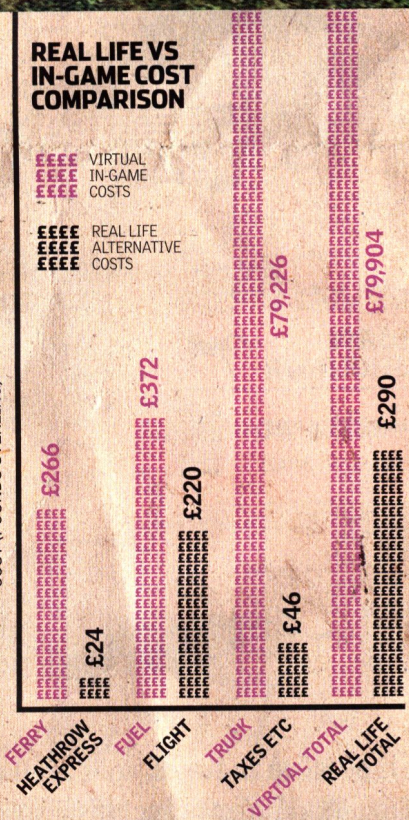


WARSAW – The Polish capital is just as spectacular as the fairytales promised, and we pull into Frederic Chopin International airport to catch our plane.



If you squint, you can almost see the hooker.

REAL LIFE VS IN-GAME COST COMPARISON



FLIGHT SIMULATOR

FROM
WARSAW, POLAND
TO
DAMASCUS, ISRAEL

FLIGHT SIMULATOR

FROM JERUSALEM, ISRAEL
TO TOKYO, JAPAN

ASSASSIN'S CREED

FROM
DAMASCUS, ISRAEL
TO
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL
DISTANCE
134 MILES

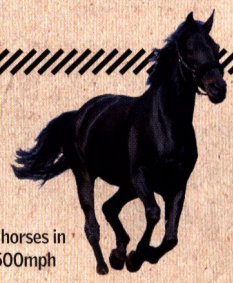
A SHORT STOP off in Israel, but a very important one. Though *Assassin's Creed* is a game about a man with a sword and a burning hatred of Christians (or something), it also simulates the land connecting Damascus and Jerusalem. The distances are relatively tiny: where the real world cities sit 134 miles apart, the virtual renditions are a short horse ride from one another. Nevertheless, the journey must be made, and make it we shall do.

We whip a brown horse hard out of Damascus. Doing this in *Assassin's Creed* is highly illegal, and we attract the attention of some guards who'd clearly rather chase a man on a horse than guard the thing they're supposed to be guarding.

A few gruesome tramplings later, and with more than a couple of dramatic leaps over fallen palm trees, we arrive at Jerusalem. We find the spot where we reckon they'd build an airport in about 822 years, and wait.

DAMASCUS – Gallop, gallop, gallop. Horses were the fastest form of transport back in whenever *Assassin's Creed* is set, and also the most offensive to guards.

HORSE FACTS...
CONSIDERING THE ACTUAL DISTANCE BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM IS 134 MILES...



Suggested speed of horses in *Assassin's Creed*: 1,500mph

Muzzle velocity of an M16 rifle: 2,192mph

Maximum speed of a Concorde airliner: 1,447mph

COUNTRYSIDE – If a real horse were to cover the real distance in the time it takes to do so here, that horse would have to travel faster than the speed of sound.

JERUSALEM – And so our supersonic horse trots gallantly into Jerusalem – looking justifiably pleased with itself. Now we wait for airports to be re-invented.

WARSAW – *Flight Simulator X* prides itself on its extensive simulation of actual air traffic control sequences. But you can't say rude things, sadly.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

FROM
WARSAW, POLAND
TO
DAMASCUS, ISRAEL
DISTANCE
1,503 MILES

PUTTING OUR TRUCK to the side, we taxi through Frederic Chopin International in our Boing 747 and request a bit of clearance from air traffic control. An American air traffic control man answers, and barks a swarthy "clear for lift-off" at us. Oddly, there are no Polish air traffic controllers, or indeed controllers of any other nationality working at any airport on the planet.

Not only does *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* fail to represent the hard-working multi-national air traffic controllers of the world, it ignores current airspace restrictions. We swoop in over the West Bank without a care in the world, and land at Damascus International Airport where we're accosted by a time wizard's untoward magical advances. We suddenly find ourselves tumbling through a tunnel of grandfather clocks to arrive in Crusader times!

TURKISH AIRSPACE – Bored, we – oh no! Bombers on board! An exciting shootout takes place, whereupon we kick a terrorist in the neck... in our imaginations.

DAMASCUS – What a lovely airport you've got. Straight bit of asphalt is it? Yeah, it's been done before but I think you guys brought your own flavour here.

X-PLANE

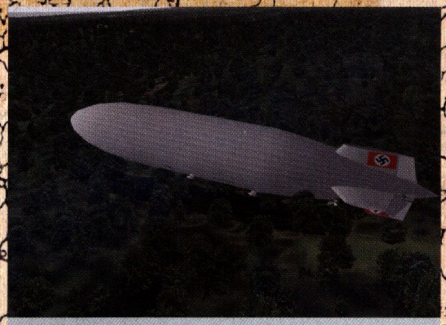
FROM
JERUSALUM, ISRAEL
TO
TOKYO, JAPAN
DISTANCE
5,700 MILES

A TAROT AIRPORT HAS been built, and planes have been invented shortly thereafter, and so the stage has been set for the second leg of our airborne adventure. Rather than slip back into the comfort of Microsoft's shiny flight simulator, we're going to indulge in a bit of the rough stuff with *X-Plane*. Where Bill Gates prefers to imbue entire aircraft with their researched properties such as lift and drag, *X-Plane* computes all of this science on the fly for individual wing segments, meaning (in theory at least) that it's a far more accurate simulation of flight and one that can be adapted to easily include a wider variety of aircraft. We could've chosen anything for this leg, from the space shuttle to the Concorde, or an inoffensive bi-plane.

So we fly out of Israel in the Hindenburg, a giant symbol of Nazi oppression. This involves installing three DVDs' worth of global scenery and suspending your disbelief that such a journey is even possible, given the slowness of a Zeppelin and the likelihood of being justifiably shot down.

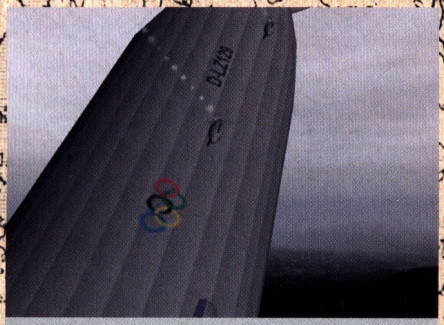
JERUSALEM – A giant swastika rises from Jerusalem's military run airport. The symbolism is far too complex for us to decipher.

"We fly out of Israel in the Hindenburg, a giant symbol of Nazi oppression"

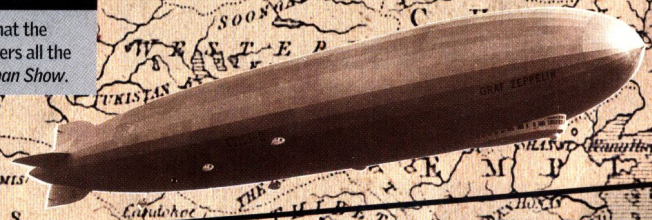


NOT MUCH FARTHER – Some sort of disaster has befallen the Zeppelin! They'll call this "The Zeppelin Tragedy". But a new plane rises from the ashes...

HIMALAYAS – Our new F4 Phantom we make the journey to Tokyo in the blink of an eye, especially with the time acceleration whacked up.



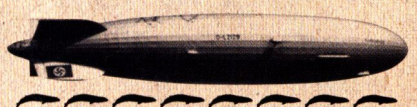
JUST OUTSIDE JERUSALEM – Annoyed that the Hindenburg is so slow, we put the storm sliders all the way up, just like the bad guy did in *The Truman Show*.



JERUSALUM — 5,700 MILES — TOKYO

We gave up on blimps and took a fighter jet instead.

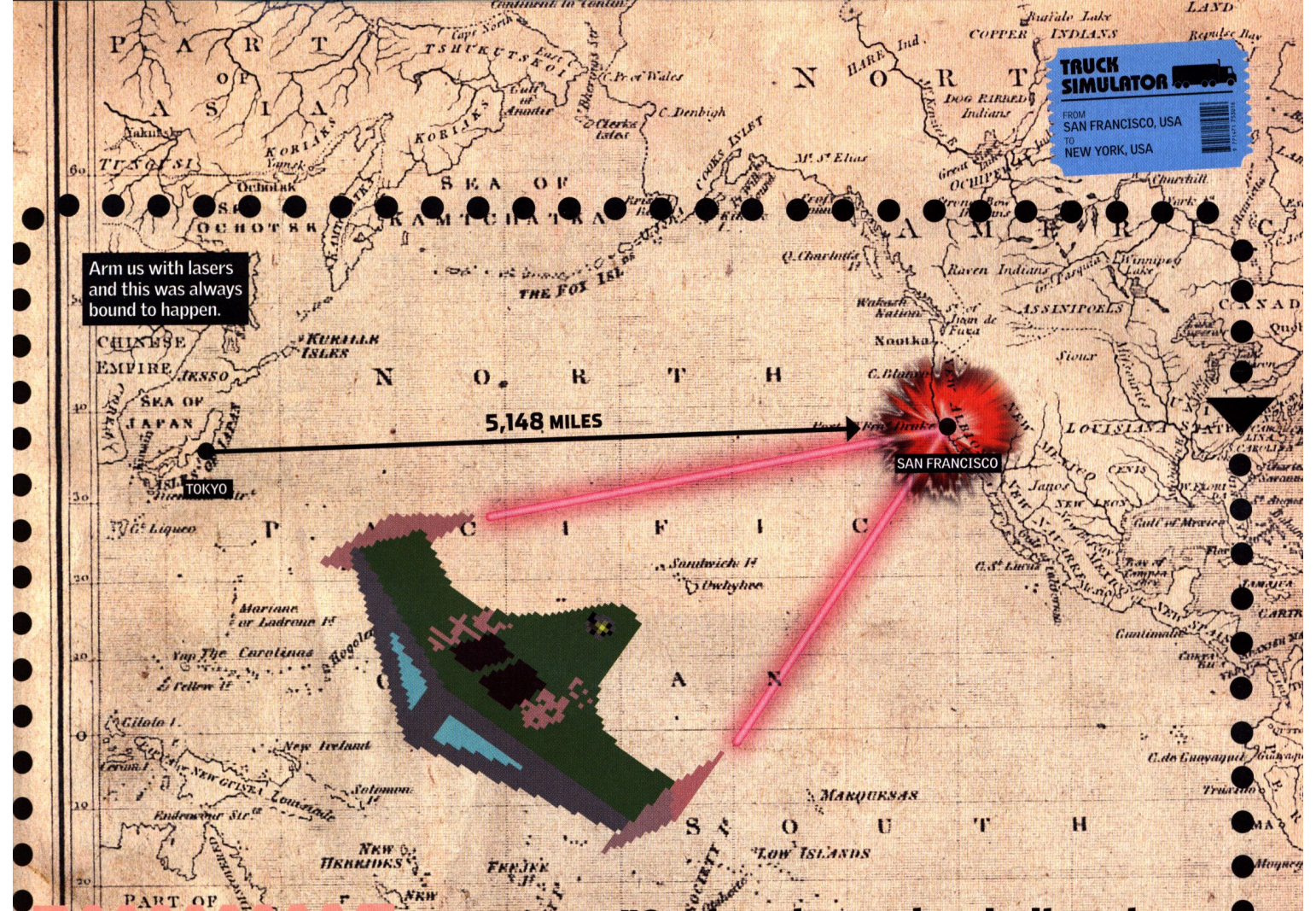
WHALES OF THE SKY VS WHALES OF THE SEA



The Hindenburg was as long as eight blue whales placed snout to tail...

...but if minced hundreds of them could be fitted inside, and you could make an excellent "Hindenburger" gag.

SPACE SIMULATOR
FROM
TOKYO, JAPAN
TO
SAN FRANCISCO, USA



FRONTIER: ELITE II

FROM
TOKYO, JAPAN
TO
SAN FRANCISCO, USA
DISTANCE
5,148 MILES

THE YEAR IS 3200, and though our brief foray into the distant future might smack of desperation, it's really the only way across the Pacific we could think of without resorting to using *Ship Simulator 2008* twice. It's also the fastest bit of the trip, with a cruising speed of a heady 10,000km/h (that's 2.77 kilometres a second, yeah?). We'd be there in no time.

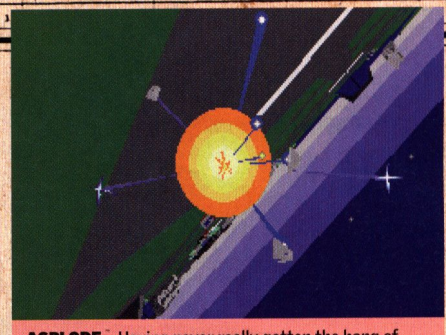
On our landing approach our boredom and curiosity gets the better of us and we lay waste to random portions of New San Francisco using our 1MW laser. The authorities mobilise their Viper attack crafts, but there's no stopping us as we collide with the spaceport at Mach 8.17, causing untold destruction on a massive scale. Six tonnes of hydrogen fuel erupt in a towering, air-splitting tornado of flaming hell. Everybody dies. The West Coast is a crater. The tumult of mass-energy conversion causes some strange and undetectable effects to occur: four of them to be precise, occurring within one third of a nanosecond. One of these effects, curiously enough, was us being sent back in time 1,200 years. And into the cab of another truck.

"Our boredom and curiosity gets the better of us and we lay waste to portions of New San Francisco"

TOKYO – Japan's capital in the year 3200 looks much as it does today, a large 32-colour expanse, dotted with angular buildings and realistic textured polygons.

PACIFIC – Philias Fogg never had access to spaceships, but if he had he definitely would've made good use of them in his round the world trip.

NEW SAN FRANCISCO – Ahh, New San Francisco. Old San Francisco has presumably been washed into the sea, just as Bill Hicks foretold.



ASPLODE – Having never really gotten the hang of landing on planets, we instead plough into the city, conveniently slinging ourselves back through time.

18 WHEELS OF STEEL: AMERICAN LONG HAUL

FROM
SAN FRANCISCO, USA
TO
NEW YORK, USA
DISTANCE
2,578 MILES

WE'RE IN SAN FRANCISCO, still shaken from our time-based escapades, but with a resolve so stiff you could iron your stinking, salty undergarments on it. Not that we have any intention of laundering our jocks, because it's time to get back into trucker mode, and as we all know, truckers are filthy bastards who do shits in the back of their cab.

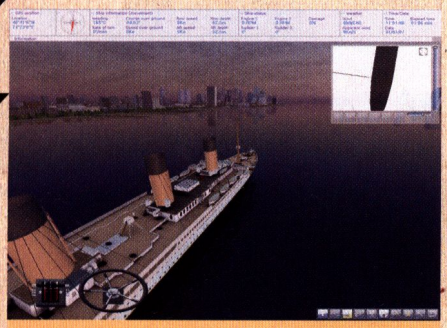
Starting out in sunny San Francisco, we set a course for Interstate 80, a road almost 3,000 miles long. That's long enough to completely encircle the United Kingdom and its wise-cracking sidekick, Ireland, and would create a perfect platform to ride menacingly around the islands on a BMX shouting taunts at them through a megaphone.

Our limited funds mean we must avoid breaking laws and incurring fines while here. Of course breaching the law for us is completely inevitable.

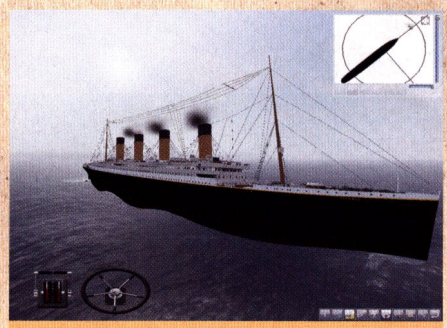
SAN FRANCISCO – *18 Wheels* features an accurate depiction of the Golden Gate and its local area. And that's probably what this trip is about: sightseeing!

ST. LOUIS – That said, there are few sights here. We arrive at night, the streets are empty, and we only stop to eat some Generic American Food Product.

FLORIDA – We're here! Our analysis of the USA: the only bits worth seeing are the coasts, which are separated by 3,000 miles of filler.



NEW YORK – It's the Titanic, look! The bloody Titanic! In New York too! The things these simulators can achieve these days. What a sight.



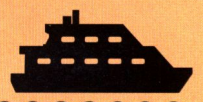
ATLANTIC OCEAN – The weather turns on us. We press the button to make Kate Winslet put her clothes back on and return to her cabin.

STILL NEW YORK – Christ, this thing is slow, but the Titanic's surprisingly tight turning circle (for a giant ship at least) makes navigating the Hudson a doddle.

WEYMOUTH – As Weymouth's docks aren't present in *Ship Simulator 2008*, we're forced to smash the Titanic into where we reckon they'd be.

SHIP SIMULATOR 2008

FROM
NEW YORK, USA
TO
WEYMOUTH, UK
DISTANCE
3,390 MILES



WOW, THOUGH OUR boredom thresholds are not those of mere mortals, *Ship Simulator*'s torturously slow journey across the Atlantic has us chewing at our limbs in frustration. The Titanic can only manage a mere 25 knots in good weather (that's 28mph), it takes 25 minutes just to get out of New York.

Once we're out in the open seas however, the vessel doesn't need much attention paying to it. We minimise the window and totter off while the mammoth boat crawls across the ocean. After all, what ill could come of leaving the Titanic unattended? None. Especially as *Ship Simulator 2008* simulates neither icebergs nor kraken.

Thankfully, although the voyage should take five and a half days, the game drastically reduces the size of the ocean to the point where it took mere hours.

OPEN BVE

FROM
WEYMOUTH, ENGLAND
TO
LONDON, ENGLAND
DISTANCE
119 MILES

THUNDERING PAST THE platform in Poole and leaving a host of filthy commuters shaking their fists at our speeding train was easily the most thrilling segment of our epic journey. And as the end was in sight we wasted no time in our race to the finish, bypassing stations and rocketing towards Waterloo at speeds which would throw the National Rail regulatory committee into a paralytic rage.

Odd noises pinged around the train's cab. An alarming chime which became more urgent as we struck 100mph seemed to congratulate us on our incredible speed, a metallic screech as we rounded corners was surely the wheels performing at their optimal grip levels, and the imagined screams of the passengers as we hurtled through Dorset was their way of saying, "Well, this is all rather fun isn't it?"

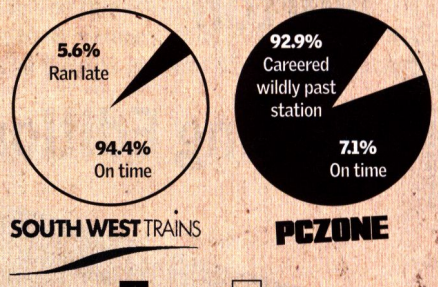
By the time our destination sprung into view it was too late. Frantically hammering keys in search of the emergency brakes proved fruitless, and we sailed off the tracks and through the buildings, ghostlike. And here our journey came to end. We were home.

WEYMOUTH – Yup, this is definitely Weymouth. Look, there's a Dorset Birch, a species unique to this area and used by locals as a potent aphrodisiac. The buggers.

TUNNELS – You know how your ears pop when you enter a tunnel? We're going so fast that we came out looking like the inside-out monkey from *The Fly*.

WATERLOO – The approach to the big city was foreshadowed by an portentous grey fog. Our journey was over, but perhaps this story is just beginning...

SOUTH WEST TRAINS PERFORMANCE
(JULY 08 – JULY 09)
VS
THE PC ZONE TRAIN JOURNEY



LORRY SIMULATOR
FROM
LONDON, ENGLAND
TO
WARSAW, POLAND

FLIGHT SIMULATOR
FROM
WARSAW, POLAND
TO
DAMASCUS, ISRAEL

HORSE SIMULATOR
FROM
DAMASCUS, ISRAEL
TO
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

FLIGHT SIMULATOR
FROM
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL
TO
TOKYO, JAPAN

SPACE SIMULATOR
FROM
TOKYO, JAPAN
TO
SAN FRANCISCO, USA

TRUCK SIMULATOR
FROM
SAN FRANCISCO, USA
TO
NEW YORK, USA

SHIP SIMULATOR
FROM
NEW YORK, USA
TO
WEYMOUTH, ENGLAND

TRAIN SIMULATOR
FROM
WEYMOUTH, ENGLAND
TO
LONDON, ENGLAND

IN CONCLUSION...

THOUGH OUR TRANS-GLOBAL escapade was a success, it also highlighted some concerns with the current state of the simulation genre. Why were ACES shut down before they could finish *Train Simulator 2*? There are parts of the planet that have been meticulously recreated, and parts that in simulation terms are black holes. Getting through Europe isn't a problem, but once you hit anything with even a whiff of communism about it you run up against a simulator dead-end. You can't ride a train through Siberia or truck your way across China.

Train Simulator 2 would've solved this by being the first train simulator to offer a global network of procedurally generated railway lines based on real, existing tracks. This would've also meant that, for the first time ever the Trans-Siberian railway would've been included in a train sim. Do you even understand what an advancement that would've been? We do, having been stuck playing these bloody simulators for well over a week, and starting this feature with the assumption that somebody could've been arsed to create that famous 9,000km long train route. Sigh. PCZ

Has the simulation genre gone off the rails?

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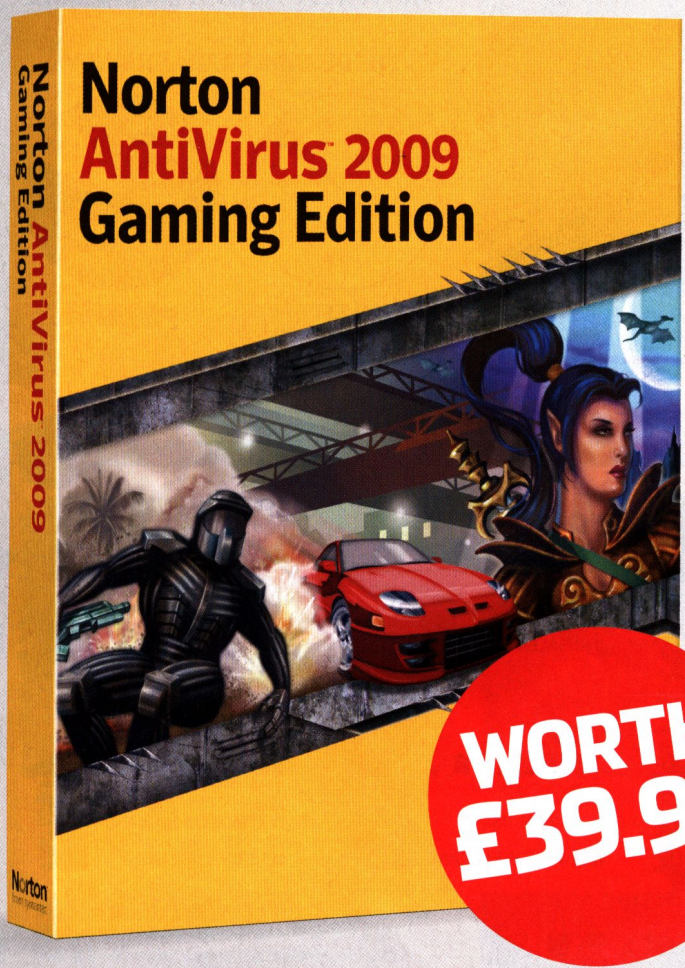

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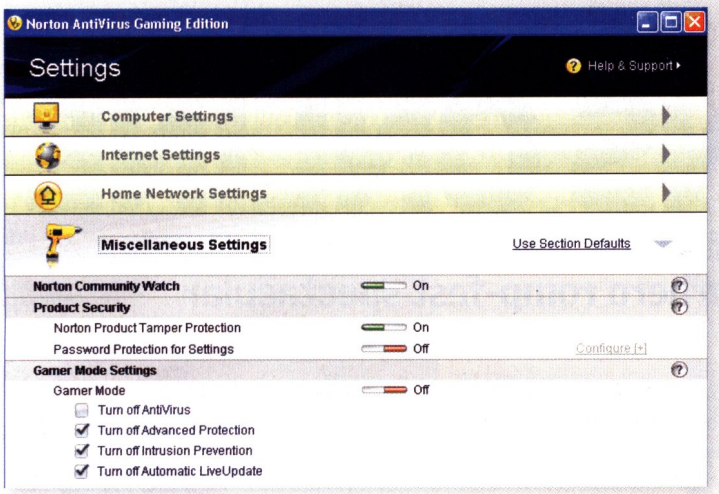

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- ✔ Smart scheduling holds resource intensive actions such as system scans for when the computer is idle.
- ✔ **Industry-leading protection from viruses, spyware, worms, Trojans, keyloggers, bots and infected websites.**
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- Optional settings to temporarily suspend updates, behavioural scanning and intrusion prevention.
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- Activate manually with a quick click on the Norton system tray icon.

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- Installs in less than a minute.
- **Adds less than one second to boot time.**

LIGHT AS A FEATHER

- **Uses less than 6MB memory even without the Gamer Mode performance boost.**
- Runs only two processes at a time.
- **Performance graphs display CPU and memory usage and how little Norton is using.**

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- **Smart Scheduler holds resource intensive actions for when you are not using your PC.**
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THE CAPE AND COWL BRIGADE...

CHAMPIONS ONLINE

One MMO, three heroes, thousands of beetle things, and one cross-section of Cryptic Studios' superhero romp-fest spectacular

DEVELOPER Cryptic **PUBLISHER** Namco Bandai (Atari) **WEBSITE** championsonline.com

PROPERLY GAUGING THE the worth of an MMO in the time we'd typically spend plugging away at a more straightforward single-player game is virtually impossible. Where we'd review the majority of releases by scanning the back of the box, expanding on the bullet points and occasionally mentioning the graphics, this time we took the time and effort to launch a three-pronged attack on this world of superheroes, henchmen and cackling nemeses.

And so, three heroes are born. Steve slips awkwardly into the robotic guise of The Prospector, David assumes the role of buxom ice-queen Plugheadia, and Richard becomes some sort of monkey thing. Together they're an unstoppable force, carving their way through *Champions Online* and laying the foundation for the definitive review that'll appear in the next issue.

For now though, here are their stories...

ETA 4 SEPT

THE PROSPECTOR

Who shall we turn to now that Millennium City is in danger? Why, *Steve Hogarty* of course...

1. ARRIVAL

When giant beetles rain from the sky in attack pods, who do the people call? Why The Prospector of course! The gentleman robot with a penchant for swordplay. But there's no time to celebrate my arrival into *Champions Online*'s tutorial zone – the mayor has work for me to do!

2. RESCUE

The Prospector's aural-nodal listening receptacles detect the shrieks of a lady in distress, leading me to my first quest and a break from endlessly slashing at beetle-faced aliens with my swords. Sadly escorting this girl to safety requires slashing at beetle-faced aliens with my swords.

3. FIGHT

Now the police chief has me killing ever larger beetles, ones with special moves which, if left unblocked, will knock me off my feet. Thinking back to the time I spent learning to press the block button (Shift) with the mayor leaves me well equipped to deal with this new threat.

4. BATTLE

Having reached the heady heights of level five, I team up with the ice temptress Plugheadia to rid the city of the beetles once and for all. Except it's a repeating, group quest for new players. Collect the crates and fire the giant cannon, again and again from now until forever. Hmm, depressing.

6. ROBO-SCRAP

Champions Online's first few hours are a hammer-fest. The Prospector had picked up two new moves: "slash harder" and "slash a bit harder but paralyse too". Taking down this robotic henchman was a matter of tapping all three keys over and over while numbers spilled from his face. Hardly an engaging start, if we're being critical. Which we are.

7. CELEBRATIONS

With the beetle battalions returning to space, the city hosts a celebration of mine and Plugheadia's victory. But with the quest to enter the Champions HQ having disappeared from my quest log, people are only cheering for the frosty-nipped cow. The Prospector is thoroughly ignored, even though I did most of the slashing.

8. ROCKETS

Right before you move out into the greater world, you get your first travel ability – your way for zipping about at speed. As a prospector, The Prospector was sorely tempted by the tunnelling ability, but as a robot from cowboy times he was naturally attracted to rocket boots.

DR LIVINGSTONE

When Canada is invaded by frozen undead they turn to a big ape – *Richard Cosgrove* to be precise

1. ARRIVAL

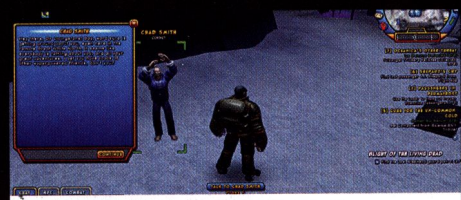
After single-handedly saving Millennium City from being invaded by alien invaders (just like the hundreds of others of superheroes before him, given the city is locked in a hellish time loop) Moreauvian man/gorilla cyborg Dr Livingstone arrives alone in the icy Canada wilderness. At first he thinks he is the only superhero determined to rid this land of this plague, but then he spies another. But this one refuses to budge from his spot. How utterly unheroic of him.

2. ALONE IN THE SNOW

So our hero (one of those people with superpowers that actually get things done) finds himself alone in the glacial and demon-infested lands, agreeing to pull a bunch of Canucks out of frigid waters. While this sounds an easy task for our vivisected chum – who did stop an alien invasion by himself – accepting this mission turns out to be a very, very bad idea.

5. CHAMPION

Having ended the invasion (for what could be the thousandth time) we visit the Champions HQ. Here we find that the beetles are here because Doctor Destroyer provoked them into attacking! Using the Shift key to pick up objects (a first for MMOs of this kind) The Prospector throws furniture about the room in impotent rage.

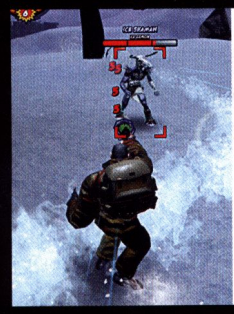


3. XENOPHOBES

What's with "Great White North"? Is Canada where BNP MPs retire, once they tire of Lancashire? If so, I'm not sure I want to be helping this load of racist scum out.

4. PRIVATE COWARD

But our hero is from Africa, so it's deliciously ironic that he should rescue White Supremacists. So I quest on, rescuing whimpering soldiers from the undead. Judging by this cowering figure, Cryptic hold Canada's military in high regard.



5. MOOSE

Come on – is this guy really meant to be scary? He has a moose's head! They're one of the least threatening creatures in the world. They're so non-scary they got a squishy dessert named after them. So what if it's a skeletal head, it's still not frightening. So this guy won't be any probs.

6. YOU FOOL APE

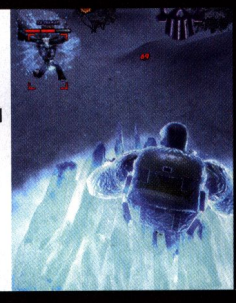
After one brief fight – more like an execution – Livingstone respawns, and learns a lesson: if he sees anything with a skull for a head that's still alive, he should run away.

9. DESERT

The irradiated deserts of New Mexico host one of two of the first big adventures you'll undertake. Racing ahead of my cohorts, I sort out the mess in double-time and revert the place to its non-irradiated and healthy state. But only for me, as I'm now unable to return to the time when the desert needed saving to help out my fellow heroes.

7. YOU AGAIN?!

This Ice Shaman has trapped our hero in a block of ice, from which he must escape. As the game doesn't tell you how to do this, there's little else to do but wait for the ray blast that'll kill Doc Ape once more.



8. NOWHERE IS SAFE

After respawning (again) staying inside the compound sounds good. But in here zombies are disguising themselves as soldiers! A gadget will sort the people from the corpses.

9. TO THE DESERT

"Sod this for a lark," thinks Dr Livingstone. "It's freezing cold. My boots are full of slush. My robotic leg's rusting up. There are zombies everyfreakingwhere. And I'm a frigging gorilla – what the hell am I doing here? Let's go somewhere warmer. I hear Arizona's pleasant this time of year...

WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO

We need about three, actually...

THE PROSPECTOR

In 1888, the impossible came to pass. A meteor from a far-flung solar system entered Earth's atmosphere, blazed through our skies and collided with the workshop of one James Watt. In the midst of the debris an alien device whirred as it surveyed the scattered components of an unfinished steam engine. As Watt cleared the wreckage, he'd notice clockwork devices spring to life and scuttle away, and as he lifted the final improbably large metal cog he discovered a living metal man.

"You must be some sort of sentient difference engine from the meteor," Watt surmised, "and you've assembled yourself into a humanoid-esque lifeform using components of a steam engine because you saw me."

"Yeah," replied The Prospector. "Are there are any crooks about?"

DR LIVINGSTONE

Kidnapped from his home at the gorilla enclosure in London Zoo 'Doc Ape' was take to the island and experimented on by a man calling himself Dr Moreau.

Moreau's insane experiments in vivisection and cybernetics were too successful, and Dr Livingstone went from being a large peaceful ape, to a large, angry and hyper-intelligent cyborg ape.

After reading every book in his creator's library and taking the name of the famous explorer, Dr Livingstone escaped from Moreau's lab complex, vowing to take revenge. But Moreau has vanished, and Doc Ape doesn't know where his nemesis is, despite searching the world for him.

PLUGHEADIA

Plugheadia's story is a sad one, her life plagued by calamity and disaster.

A freak plastic surgery accident left her permanently disfigured in the frontal area. To make matters worse, a wild night out on the beers left her falling drunkenly into a freezer unit at her local Iceland.

Amazingly, a magic box of Findus Crispy Pancakes imbued her with the ability to shoot ice from her hands. Blasting her way out of the freezer, she vowed to don the tightest spandex outfit imaginable, adorning her belt with the skulls of her victims, and to fight crime and campaign for better security and locks on refrigerators in cut-price supermarkets all over the world.

She also managed to find a great 2-for-1 deal on beef burgers and fish fingers too, which can't be bad.

PLUGHEADIA

Arizona is in trouble and needs a heroine (due to sexual equality laws), so they call on *David Brown*

1. ARRIVAL

When insectoid aliens menace the populace of a fictional futuristic city, there's only one person to call on: a 7ft tall Amazon with red highlights and two beachballs shoved in her spandex top. No enemy could possibly cope with the hypnotic sight of Plugheadia's (yes, I have no imagination) frolicking funbags distracting them, certainly not long enough to avoid the chilling blasts of her super ice powers. She wears flame red clothes, but she shoots ice. Oh, the irony...

4. WITCHCRAFT

While The Prospector decided to beat mutants around the head with his mighty weapons, Plugheadia's job was altogether more domestic. Cries of "Why do I have to do the housework just because I'm a woman?" fell on dear ears. Disgruntled, Plugheadia attempted to divine the secrets of the mystical arts, a perplexing array of ingredients, menus and scroll things lined up for her on the mixing table. After half-an-hour, a couple of low-powered amulets were all she had to show for her efforts.

5. BACK IN THE GAME

Sick of waving her arms around to improve her Mysticism ability, Plugheadia ventured back into the irradiated wastes, leaving the pillowy bosom of the Project Greenskin safe zone to make some progress in her quest, which was to eliminate some mutants, then some tougher mutants and, finally, some very tough mutants who were led by a big red guy. Who was also very, very tough.

7. GORILLA SHOOT-OUT

With the acrobatic man-monkey Dr Livingstone using his sonic pistol to aid myself and The Prospector, the forces of evil were quickly pushed back. And the new-found ability to create an ice storm helped Plugheadia to rid the world of Grond's grotesque lieutenant forever, and the heroes recuperated for one final assault on the green bastard's underground lair. The world would never be safe until they succeeded in their mission.

2. SPIT ROASTED

The Prospector was an able ally, slashing bugs to bits with casual abandon. It obviously helped that most of them had been frozen solid by the cooling rays of Plugheadia's ice hands, but they all end up dead anyway. Needing a challenge that doesn't involve pincers, she followed The Prospector to the Arizonan desert, where irradiated misfits and strange red and blue goliaths waited to feel her frozen wrath.

3. ICE CAPADES

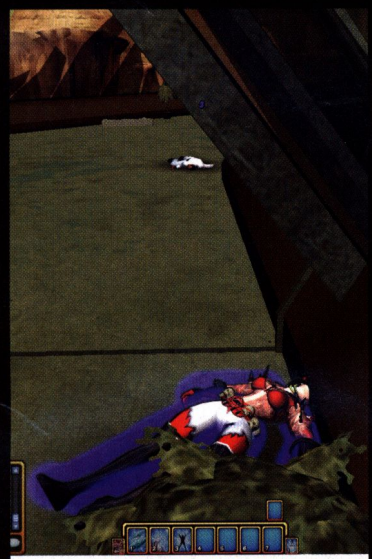
While The Prospector decided to go with pansy rocket boots, Plugheadia knew there was only one way to get about – sliding around on a big sheet of ice. The heat of the desert could not melt its frozen glory, although she was fond of falling over a bit and injuring her back. Maybe her breasts were just so large it affected her balance, who knows. The irradiated scum still feared her bosomy assault regardless.

6. THE APEMAN COMETH

Meeting up with The Prospector, Plugheadia went through the motions of killing some mutants and getting experience from mission givers. It was all leading up to a colossal battle between our two heroes and the evil Grond, a mutant of incredible strength and power. His lieutenants were first, though. For some reason, the enemies had decided to fight back a bit and even the might of Plugheadia and The Prospector couldn't defeat them. Then a big hairy ape turned up out of nowhere (OK, a spawn point) to help.

8. TEA BREAK

Well, it seemed that time wasn't pressing enough for our heroes to bother getting around to killing Grond. There were other things to worry about, like how far a character could fall without killing themselves and some "Ooh, look at this cracked ground effect when you land from a great height," cooing. Grond would have to wait, it was time to explore the skies and attempt to do gorilla back-flips.

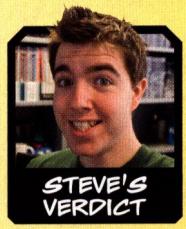


9. DESERTED

The Prospector had enough and went off by himself, unbeknownst to Plugheadia and her fellow superhero Dr Livingstone. Amazingly, the sword-wielding robot managed to defeat Grond entirely on his own, laughing at the notion of teamwork being needed. Because of his success, he was thrown into an alternative dimension (OK, a new instance), and left Plugheadia and Dr Livingstone to cope on their own. What a git.

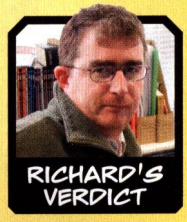
CONCLUSIONS

What the team thought...



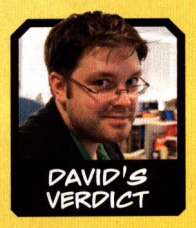
THE PROSPECTOR

"A few hours in, and *Champions Online* has me properly hooked. Having only ever spent any real MMO-time in *EVE Online* and *World of Warcraft* it's jarring to approach a game in which, rather than constantly upgrading your armoury with increasingly unique weapons, you're instead augmenting your character with trinkets. It's much the same thing in practice, but at this early stage the upgrades lack the physicality of a rare sword or shiny spaceship. Naturally, your character is meant to be your weapon, and superpowers are doled out in a gratifying way – but the simplicity of an awesome new fiery axe is lost here. Also, it's hard to show off a necklace that gives you +9 dexterity. Maybe I'm missing the point."



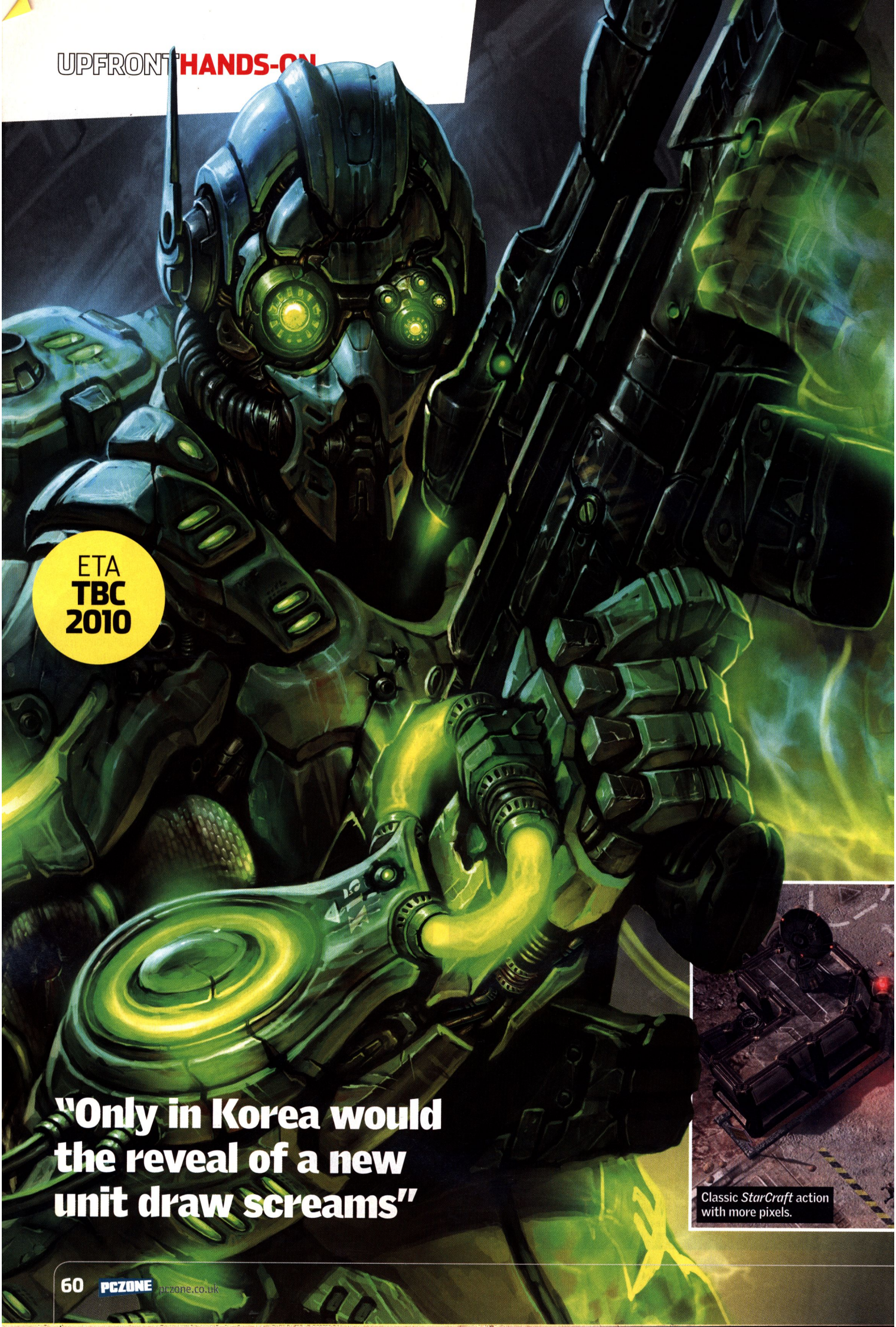
DR LIVINGSTONE

"Despite the dearth of players during its beta testing, *Champions Online* is doing the right things. Which isn't a shock as it's heavily modelled on the enjoyable *City of Heroes*: superheroes team up, kill baddies, collect bonuses, climb levels to pick up new powers, and repeat. But whether *Champions* will be able to beat competition from *City of Heroes*, and the upcoming DC comics MMO, will come down to whether it'll have anything unique. As DC's MMO will have Batman, Wonder Woman and Superman and the rest of the DC Universe, and *City of Heroes* offers continually upgraded gameplay, the Architect mission designer, and the opportunity to be a supervillain and become another player's real-life nemesis, right now it's hard to see what more *Champions Online* can deliver."



PLUGHEADIA

"Like all MMOs, *Champions Online* is definitely more fun when played with other people. Certainly the best times here were had when all three characters were together. The interface could do with being cleared up a bit and a lot of the core concepts could really do with being explained better, plus you're essentially playing *City of Heroes* over again. However, that's no bad thing. And it makes a change from clobbering goblins. One more mention of the character creator too, as it is surely the best one ever included in any MMO. In some ways, starting the game proper is a slight disappointment after using it." PCZ



ETA
TBC
2010

"Only in Korea would the reveal of a new unit draw screams"

Classic *StarCraft* action with more pixels.

THE STORY SO FAR...
STARCRAFT

STARCRAFT
This is where the interstellar three-way war began.
1998

BROOD WAR
This expansion told how the Zerg lost its Overmind to Kerrigan.
1999

STARCRAFT 64
One of Blizzard's rare affairs with a console. It wasn't not a hit.
2000

STARCRAFT: GHOST
The stealth/shooter that never was.
2002

HERE COME THE BUGS...

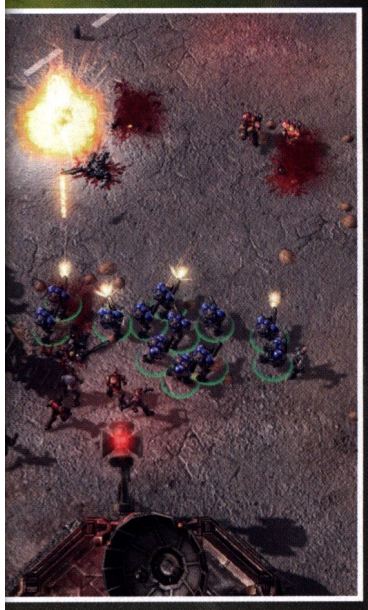
StarCraft II
WINGS OF LIBERTY

***Jon Blyth* gets infested by the Terran instalment of *StarCraft II*'s single-player campaign**

DEVELOPER Blizzard **PUBLISHER** Blizzard **WEBSITE** starcraft2.com **ETA** TBC 2010

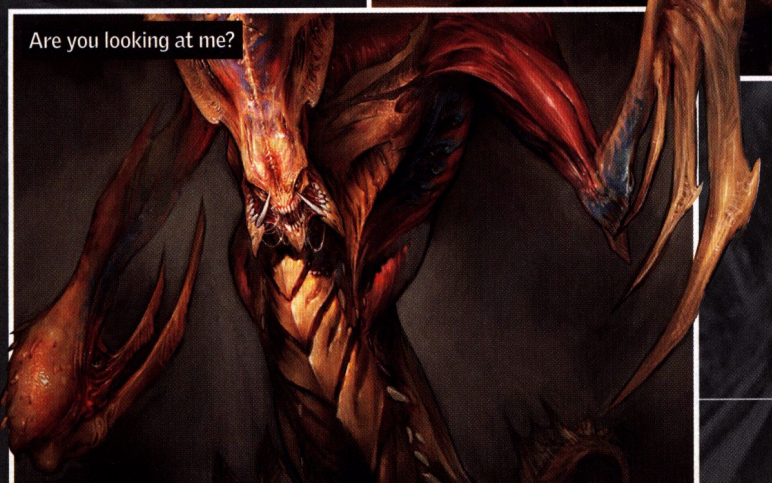
THE LAST TIME I saw *StarCraft II*, in a vaguely professional capacity, was at the 2007 Blizzard Invitational event in South Korea. Surrounded by Tauren cosplay and young girls who were more interested in mouse-clicks per second than ponies, it was a jubilant atmosphere. Sure, people kept badgering Blizzard for a fourth race to extend the classic battle between the Terran colonists, the spiritual Protoss, and the hiveminded Zerg. And beyond the move to full 3D, there was nothing which you could point at, and shout "there's the big new feature, arrr" to your crew of rag-tag pirates. It was just *StarCraft II* – and only in Korea, where the nuances of *StarCraft* strategy are televised 24/7, would the reveal of a new unit draw screams from a crowd of teenagers.

Since then, we've learned a little more: it's to be delivered in three distinct packages, with *Wings Of Liberty* focusing on Jim Raynor's battle against the treacherous Mengsk, whose Dominion is establishing a classic propaganda-spewing dictatorship. It doesn't feel like episodic gaming, though (which was so 2007) – it feels that Blizzard are just using their expansions more openly and sensibly. Certainly, the pricing will reflect that – lead designer Dustin Browder has all-but confirmed the second and third games will be priced as expansions. And from a storytelling point of view, it makes sense: covering all three sides of the story in one package limits what you can do with each one. Nine missions each, you've barely finished the tutorials before



Debaser.

Meet Tychus – the outlaw with a love thing for relics.

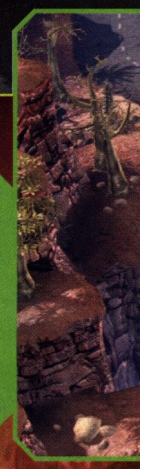

Are you looking at me?

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Elegant storytelling
- ✓ Varied single-player levels
- ✓ Newly found sense of fun
- ✓ It's still *StarCraft*
- ✗ Is it different enough to grab lapels?

THE MISSIONS

The best way to talk about how *StarCraft II*'s single-player campaign plays is to describe the missions – each one adds a different twist to the gameplay. Browder refers to it as mini-games – and although it's odd to think of the *StarCraft* single-player campaign in terms of something like *Plants vs Zombies*, it's pretty apt. They've built a flexible war engine – so why not test it out?



MISSION 1 – TUTORIAL: TROOP MOVEMENT

Raynor's Raiders trek through a short, resourceless set of battles: destroying propaganda-spewing holograms of treacherous Dominion leader Mengsk, and eventually, with the help of the newly motivated grenade-throwing locals, obliterates the Dominion base. If you fail this mission, something's very wrong – but at least the tutorial aspect is hidden away on the optional F12 screen. If you've played any RTS game before, you'll be thrilled not to have to move the camera in all four directions to trigger a gruff, sarcastic response from a Sergeant.

MISSION 5 – ESCORT SERVICE

Meanwhile, Dr Swann wants you to evacuate 50 survivors. It's an escort mission, re-introducing the Firebat unit, and takes place over an area that's slowly succumbing to Zerg infestation. Man and build bunkers on the route, keep an SCV out in the field to harvest the Zerg chrysalises as they appear, and make sure the evacuation truck is surrounded by whatever units you've got available. The five escort runs you'll have to complete get progressively harder, and the Zerg become more powerful and aggressive throughout. One of the achievements is to take the battle to the Zerg, and wipe out their bases – worth it if you fancy a challenge.

MISSION 4 – THE GREAT PROTOSS-OFF

Tychus is all about Protoss relics. If he were a cartoon dog, he'd be sniffing around the cupboards, woofing "Relics?" There are five relics here, but you're up against two well-developed armies. It's a good job they're preoccupied fighting each other. Grab the relics before the Zerg gain an impossible-to-shake foothold. An entertaining introduction to the three-way conflict of *StarCraft*, and the powerful, slow Marauder units and their uniquely sexual grunts, this battle ends with a great climax, that involves you overpowering a Protoss Colossus.

MISSION 6 – RISE AND BURN

Tychus wants you to collect some minerals. The only problem is the minerals are in a chamber that's regularly flooded with lava, and there's an ambush-loving Zerg Hydralisk tucked away in one of the corners. However, you're given another new unit – the canyon-jumping Reaper. His movement comes at the cost of firepower so he's easily overwhelmed. But why fight, when you can lure the Zerg into lava? This is the one mission that felt like a chore: every unit you build delays you reaching your target, and the slow spread across the environment is subject to setbacks that feel insurmountable. It's the one mission you don't immediately want to play again, to see if you can do it better.

things are over. This way, you can spend 30 missions on the story of incorruptible lawman Jim Raynor, his personal redemption from his failure to protect lover Kerrigan from the Zerg, and the battle with the evil monster that she's become.

SEALED FATE

Speaking of which, if you're wondering about the impact you can have on the storyline, the answer is none – at least in the long-term. There'll be a couple of moments when you have to decide one path or another, but they won't affect the final outcome of the campaign, and won't be referred to in later expansions. Blizzard are telling the story, not you, so drop that *Fallout 3* attitude right now.

It's a different crowd who turn up at Blizzard's Irvine HQ in 2009 than in Korea. A Frenchman wearing a "i pwn noobs" T-shirt. The German devotee who runs starcraft.de. A Russian guy who starts a question with "We all know PC gaming is dying," and an indeterminate voice who seems to have taken the removal of LAN support as a personal attack on his mother. If just one screaming Korean teenage girl had run through the room, it would have been a relief.

Eloquent motor mouth Browder spent 20 minutes guiding us around the game's interface. If you've watched the Battle Reports on the *StarCraft* website, you'll be familiar with his voice – upbeat, irresistible and gently exhausting. Rob Pardo is on his way, but as Blizzard's vice-president he's in charge of three huge in-development franchises, and another big secret project. We can probably forgive him being 10 minutes late.

When Pardo arrives, he has a chance to explain Blizzard's position on casual and hardcore gaming: "It depends on your definition of casual player. We can use it to refer to ourselves, as the everygamer, or we can use it for people who play PopCap games. If you're asking, are we going after moms who play *Bejewelled*, then no – that's not the people who play *StarCraft*."

Pardo defends his position as developing a game for the hardcore

MISSION 2 – TUTORIAL: BASE BUILDING

Jim's given control of a ready-made command centre and barracks, and given the chance to place his first *StarCraft II* Vespene Refinery, and upgrade his first barracks with a Tech Lab, allowing him to train medics. In the right proportion, these medics can help you win the "Flawless Throwdown" achievement for not losing a unit.

Tychus Findlay is introduced, a new character but an old friend from their outlaw days. There's a bit of manly squaring off, as you'd expect, but Tychus soon becomes a clickable character in the point-and-click world of *StarCraft*'s between-level storytelling.

MISSION 3 – MEET THE ZERG

As the Zerg spores contaminate the planet, preparing it for infestation, Jim has to hold out during a simple survival mission – hold your base for the 20 minutes it'll take for the evacuation to be completed. Build and man ground reinforcements like Bunkers and Turrets, and stage three rescue missions taking you into the infected wilderness. Tense, dramatically timed, and introducing you to several Zerg enemies, this mission takes you from the self-pity of hard liquor in a Mar Sara saloon, and into the sparsely-staffed Hyperion. There's a bar there, too.

MISSION 7 – PITCH BLACK

With Kerrigan (Raynor's Zerg-infected ex-girlfriend) appearing more and more in the cutscenes and addressing *Wing of Liberty*'s protagonist personally, it's time to deal with the infection that claimed her. This homage to *Pitch Black* is set on a day-night cycle, with the Zerg infected unable to tolerate the sun. By day, you'll roam the map, torching the infected's hideouts. By night, you'll retreat to your base, and suffer increasingly savage attacks. To speed things up, you get your first vehicle, the Hellion. This is also a gruelling slog, but in a good way – a generous and sensible auto-save checkpoint system means you can rewind to a point before you made that suicidally idiotic mistake.

first, then making it accessible as simply good game-making. The idea isn't to dumb the game down, but to let the player in. It's not two discrete and immiscible pools: the casual becomes hardcore. Fair enough as the dead eyes of the *Bejewelled* mom are startlingly similar to those in the cocked, drooling head of a child who's waiting for his 16th Satyr Horn to drop in Ashenvale.

He also has a chance to explain the late development of the single-player campaign – the *StarCraft II* team only started dealing with it halfway through the overall development cycle: "From an organisational point of view, it'd be great if we could start single and multiplayer development at the same time, but the reality is we have to figure out the units.

"The idea isn't to dumb the game down, but to let the player in: the casual becomes hardcore"

"We want to get the multiplayer up and running – then we start figuring out the units, what's fun. How can you start designing a single-player campaign before you know what the units are? Start too early, and we'll end up throwing out more missions than we already do."

Other choice snippets include the defence of their decision not to support LAN – "LAN will be a great footnote in the history of PC gaming, just like *DOS*"; the rejection of *Steam* and *Games For Windows – LIVE!* in favour of Battle.net – "Why would we use those, when we've always had the best system in the world?"; and Blizzard's reaction to the age-old PC piracy problem – "Our strategy has been to create a place where the players want to go. Of course you can pirate *World of Warcraft* – it's just not much fun."

THE BATTLE BEGINS

After this lecture we we're escorted to the third floor, in lifts painted like the ante-chambers of hell, then sat at a monitor and allowed to explore *Wings of Liberty*'s opening missions.

There are no hero units in *StarCraft* – you don't pilot Raynor around, dealing

overpowered death. That's *Warcraft* deal. *StarCraft* is about expensive, expansive, and expendable armies. As Browder explains, you can have the lead characters on the map, but that means you have to design the mission around them – their death would be game over, and it wouldn't be in the spirit of *StarCraft* to have 15ft tall units. You might as well give them bobbleheads.

With quick and non-patronising tutorials (no tutorial element is forced on you), you're soon on board the Hyperion, where – once you've finished the first five missions – you gain access to the four main rooms and the game's main characters. You can visit the Cantina to watch TV – usually a report on your last mission, or the developing storyline – or buy mercenaries, which

"There are no hero units... *StarCraft* is about expensive, expansive, and expendable armies"

The 3D is almost resentful – you can rotate the camera a bit, but it'll snap back into place immediately. The implication is Blizzard are saying, "We made these maps to be viewed this way. We don't want you rotating the camera. But if we prove that you can, will you just shut up about it?" This also makes sense from a pro-sports angle – it would confuse the spectator if the terrains were constantly rotating.

are the game's equivalent to hero units. Mercs are powerful sets of elite units, but there's no incentive to keep these guys alive: you don't keep them, they don't level up, and there's plenty more where they came from.

You might prefer to spend that money with Flynn in the Armory. This is where you'll find less dramatic, but longer-term upgrades to your units. More efficient SCVs (Space Construction

Holograms of Mengsk spit Dominion propanda – shoot them with guns.

ROLL CALL

Friends and enemies of *Wings of Liberty*

TEMPLATE NERD GUY
Blizzard's commitment to embracing the inner geek means there's always a place for acne and technobabble. The initial instinct is to flinch, but this guy is surprisingly likeable.

KERRIGAN
By consuming Kerrigan to absorb her psionic powers, the Zerg created a poignant foe for Raynor. This means *Wings of Liberty* is a love story, but no more disturbing than any of Richard Curtis'.

JIM RAYNOR
Raynor has developed a love of liquor since Kerrigan fell to the Zerg. He's not a cliché drunk, but he's seen with a bottle enough to let you know that he's taken betrayal and failure badly.

GABRIEL TOSH
Arms dealer and "pseudo-Rastafarian" Tosh has been around for a while, and knows a lot more than he lets on. He's no good guy, and his missions have always led Raynor down a darker path.

RORY SWANN
Flynn is the snippy portal to the Armory. This is where you'll spend your earnings to upgrade units. Flynn stands for the working class, the let's-get-this-done spirit mixed with a need for revenge.

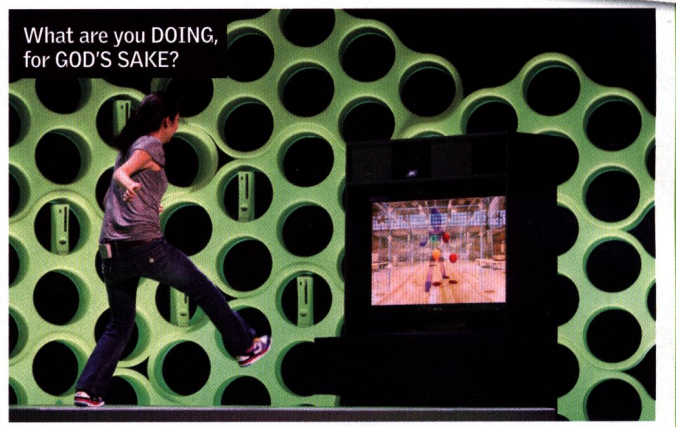
TYCHUS FINDLAY
Raynor's friend from his shady past Findlay will suggest missions in which you're searching for Protoss relics. He smokes cigars as well, which could mean he's a bit of a baddie.

POST-NATAL IMPRESSION

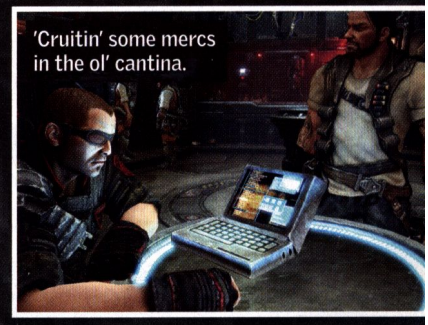
The worst named peripheral ever?

Blizzard vice-president Rob Pardo also comes out with something that everyone watching Microsoft's E3 conference must have thought. Project Natal is simply too inaccurate as a controller for a real-time strategy game. Pardo concedes it might be the first step towards a *Minority Report*-style world of gaming/mime, but Blizzard aren't making strategy gimmicks like the voice-control of *EndWar*. They're making a game where Koreans need to make many mouse clicks a second to maintain their edge – if you introduced something as ambiguous and vague as a Wii Remote, you'd be pushing a country to self-mutilation and riot.

Rob Pardo
Vice-president, Blizzard



Using the smooth-talking Marauders to polish off some Protoss.



'Cruitin' some mercs in the ol' cantina.

Even in the future, good TV is a rarity.

Vehicles) or the option to grant them the ability to repair vehicles. Browder's keen to point out that these benefits are only available in the single-player campaign – it'd be impossibly unbalancing in a multiplayer game. But when you're playing against AIs, that's less important. During skirmishes on the ultra-hard level, the AI is open about cheating, as it accrues resources quicker than yourself, so it's only fair you get a few perks.

The lab, meanwhile, is where you can trade the optional items you accrue from missions for upgrades. Zerg chrysalises can be harvested with SCVs in some missions, and smaller Protoss relics can be found on others. Browder looks at the screen with a comical contempt: "This will change – we'll think of more interesting benefits than a +1 attack."

CAMPAIGN VARIETY

The most interesting thing about this approach is that it forces the next two games to be completely different in presentation – the strong Terran cowboy aesthetic wouldn't make much sense in Protoss or Zerg campaigns. Browder wouldn't expand on rumours that the Zerg campaign would have a role-playing, levelling-up feel, but it's one of the things they're considering.

It must be stifling to create a new game from one that's considered a masterpiece of balance. To take 10 years of refinement, patches, and perfecting and throw new units into it. But if you've watched those Battle Reports, you'll see that *Wings* is still *StarCraft*. The back and forth of battle is intact; the individual victories in a losing war are just as hopeful; and the raw visual, uncluttered appeal that makes it such a bizarrely watchable sport is completely intact.

I've never really considered myself a sports fan. I've always been silently outraged that people can be idolised because they can enter a thoughtless state of instinctive physical brilliance. But watching those Battle Reports I can see why Koreans watch this stuff. PCZ

"It sure as hell is addictive"
STRATEGY INFORMER

EAST INDIA COMPANY

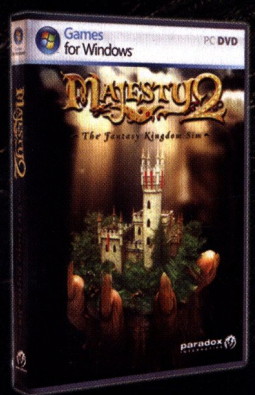
BUILD THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL EMPIRE

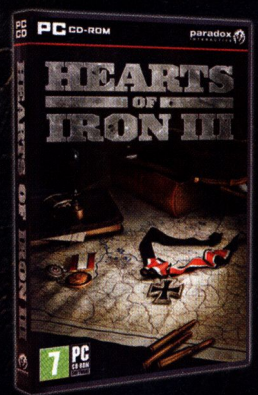
"Thoroughly riveting"
RESOLUTION-MAGAZINE.CO.UK

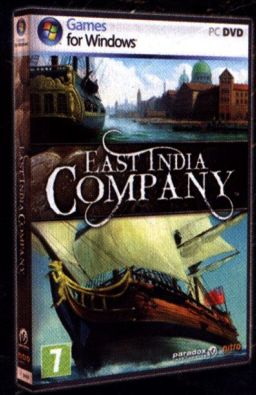
"A solid strategy title"
REALGAMER.NET

"Challenging and enjoyabl
IGN

NEW GAMES FROM paradox INTERACTIVE







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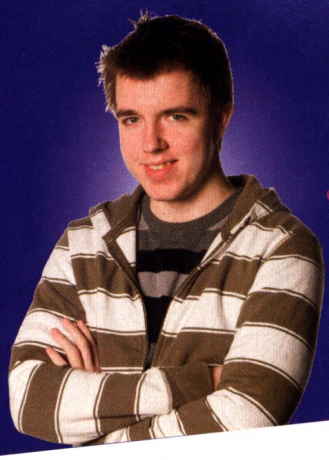
Games for Windo



PC ZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

HATS OFF!

PERHAPS THE ONLY rubbish thing about the real world is that people who can spend lots of money can have better things. Formula One's a good example: teams like Force India can't afford good bits of cars and have to use mixing bowls for helmets.

MMOs used to be a comforting socialist retreat though. Everybody begins at level one with equal potential for growth and infinite scope for the decay of real-world relationships. *Champions Online* on the other hand will feature premium items, bought on top of your normal subscription that'll give you an in-game advantage – as long as you're ready to hand over real cash for them.

It's not nearly the first MMO to do this, but it's probably the most recently disappointing case of cash-grabbing at the expense of the player's experience.

Or something. I'm just angry that I might not have the coolest top hat in the game any more.

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

68 **BLOOD BOWL**
Greenskins with pigskins – the most violent sports game ever!

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.

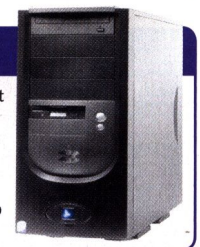
ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time with this game.

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

72 **MOTHERSHIP ZETA**
The Wanderer gets beamed aboard a UFO. Have Bethesda cracked making good *Fallout 3* DLC this time?

73 **BROKEN STEEL**
It'll change the ending and let you wander for longer, but will *Fallout 3* be any better for it?

73 **POINT LOOKOUT**
Break out the banjos and head into the swampland. Altogether now "Piggy piggy SOOO-EEEEEE!"

74 **ASHES CRICKET 2009**
We all know what happened in real life, so can Codie's new release rescue England's cricketing pride?

75 **EAST INDIA TRADING COMPANY**
Not just *Empire: Total War Lite.*

VIRTUA TENNIS 2009
Will it be a Federer or a Henman?

76 **HEARTS OF IRON III**

WALLACE & GROMITT:
THE BOGEY MAN

77 **CHAINS**

CLUTCH

78 **BUDGET**

80 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

PC ZONE 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

BLOOD BOWL

Adam Glick sees a red bowl and he tries to paint it black

DEVELOPER Cyanide Studios
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE bloodbowl-game.com
ETA Out now (online), 18 Sept (in stores)
PRICE £39.99 (online)

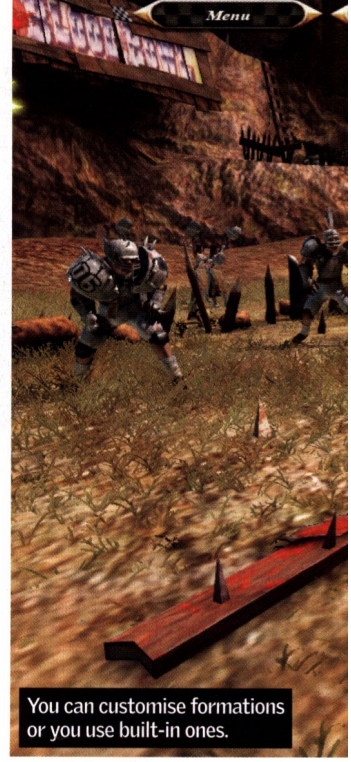
TO PUT IT in laymen's terms, *Blood Bowl* is American Football meets a bar brawl – players have to get the ball into their end zone (their end of the field) while avoiding getting blocked, injured or killed.

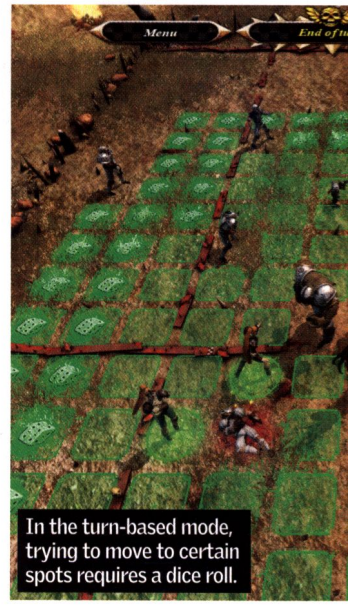
But playing *Blood Bowl* isn't as fluid and intuitive as that. While it may have the same goal as classical sports games (get the ball in the right place) it runs like *Risk* or *Baldur's Gate*, depending on your play style. Despite how this sounds, *Blood Bowl* can be a lot of fun. It's just sometimes it requires you to excavate a deep mine to find it.

The rules are simple. Each team is made up of 16 players, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The initial kickoff has the ball landing in someone else's half, and any player can pick up the ball and throw it. However, the success of every action – dodging, picking up and throwing – is based on the result of dice rolls, and so you have to be careful how you allocate players. You'll want to use your beefier players to block the other team (as in start a fight with them) and clear a path for the player with the ball to run into their end zone, or pass it in.

If you're on the defensive, the same applies – except you're trying to hit the player and take the ball from him, or get a player in the line of his throw so you can intercept. It gets even more confusing when you consider players can get knocked over, injured and killed; be sent off for hitting a man when he's down; and even cast spells.

"Despite how this sounds, *Blood Bowl* can be a lot of fun"





FOOTBALL IS WAR

Depending on the mode you choose, these rules are either invisible or painfully obvious. The real-time mode – much like *Dawn of War II* – allows you to control one player at a time, with the AI helping you across the field. You can pause too – like in *Baldur's Gate* – and issue a series of commands, such as sending three linemen forward to create a hole that your player with the ball can run through.

If you think this seems a bit intimidating, you're correct. But the game is immensely satisfying when you get things right. Depending on the team you pick – for example, the Chaos are very physical and run a lot, while the Wood Elves like to weave, throw and catch – the whole game can be different. I preferred the Orcs'

AT A GLANCE...

A faithful real-time or turn-based strategy game version of the violent table-top sports board game from Games Workshop.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

DAWN OF WAR II	78%
FIFA 09	74%
BLOOD BOWL	71%

Read the manual, even if it is a *War and Peace*-length PDF.

The future of rugby?

ETHICS AND THE INTERNET
The hell we went through to review this game

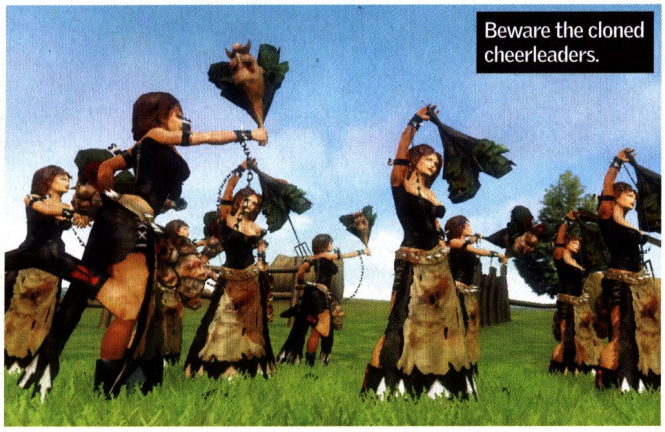
Blood Bowl is one of the hardest games that we've ever had to source.

In order to get a copy of the game in time for this issue, we had to buy one online. However, a couple of minutes after giving our credit card details to the *Blood Bowl*'s online store, our bank called to say there'd been suspicious activity on the card's account.

In the end it took us three different credit cards – and three calls from banks, checking the payments were legit – before we were taken to a page that said the payment was being taken by a Dutch company called Triple Deal, but we weren't given an order number. Half an hour later, the game's activation code appeared in our inbox, and we breathed a sigh of relief.

Then we found out installing the game involves downloading four files and putting them in the same folder.

Why couldn't they have used *Steam*?


Beware the cloned cheerleaders.

game – lots of careful blocking and creating holes, knowing that my team was better at creating a hole than finding one through the air.

However, this becomes rather more difficult in the turn-based game. It takes a radical re-imagining of what you think the game will play like to even wrap your head around it – such are the slings and arrows of being faithful to the source.

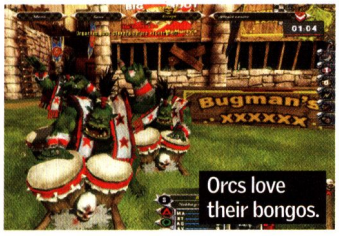
an endless Franchise campaign where you create your own team, level it and lead it to stardom.

Players all individually level and can be built in your own image – to the point that I'd advise not touching it until you're comfortable with your play style. Each player levels depending on what they do in a match – such as passing, blocking or scoring – forcing you to keep an eye on

"For all the positives there are deep-seated problems with *Blood Bowl*"

Turnovers are frequent, and a seemingly innocuous move can completely ruin your game plan. *Blood Bowl* isn't illogical, stupid, or unfair – it's just bloody hard to get to grips with. Even when you do, little mistakes will punish you painfully, especially when you play online veterans.

Strangely enough, there is some real depth when you delve into the game's campaign setting. Usually the last thought in a sports game, the single-player mode in *Blood Bowl* is engrossing:



what everybody's doing. Each time they level, they can pick a skill, such as Sure Hands that gives them an extra dice roll if they fail to pick up the ball.

Even the campaign itself is interesting: tournaments can be gambled on, players can be bribed to be less effective, and your own players can be trained and injured in the process. You can organise sponsors for your team, promising particular goals (such as a certain percentage of victories) in return for fat bonuses. The depth is something to be appreciated – though it could have done with a lot more explaining, and preferably by someone who's fluent in English.

For all the positives, however, there are a few deep-seated problems that limit *Blood Bowl*. The first is the distinct budget feel of the game. Sounds are repetitive – especially the unfunny and monotonous commentary – and the menus are written with all the flair of a bad *Half-Life 2* mod. Worse still are the little things: loading screens, tutorials, tool-tips etc are riddled with grammatical errors and confusing language.

A TOUGH GAME

The basic animations lack the complexity expected from a *Warhammer* game. There are only a few stadiums, which becomes painfully apparent a few hours into the campaign. There aren't really that many player models. And if you score more than two touchdowns in a match, you've seen all the animations for your team. While the core of the game is sound, the overall package lacks the finesse that one demands from such an awesome license.

The final, and more personal problem, is that the real-time mode is not what the game needed. If it required another year or two to develop it, so be it – but a truly real-time *Blood Bowl* would be akin to the console game *Blitz: The League*.

That said, *Blood Bowl* isn't awful – in fact, there's a lot to like if you're willing to dedicate your time to learning its complexities. If you're a fan of the board game, you'll like this adaptation – but if you're not, it's not going to sit well with any logical imagining that you've ever had for a *Blood Bowl* game. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Great art, repetitive animations
SOUND Worst commentaries ever
MULTIPLAYER Online Leagues, Tournaments

- ✔ Fun once you 'get it'
- ✔ Tactically deep
- ✘ Budget presentation
- ✘ Not really real-time
- ✘ Hard to learn

71
Hardly bowls us over

CHECK OUT OUR NEW LOOK SITE!

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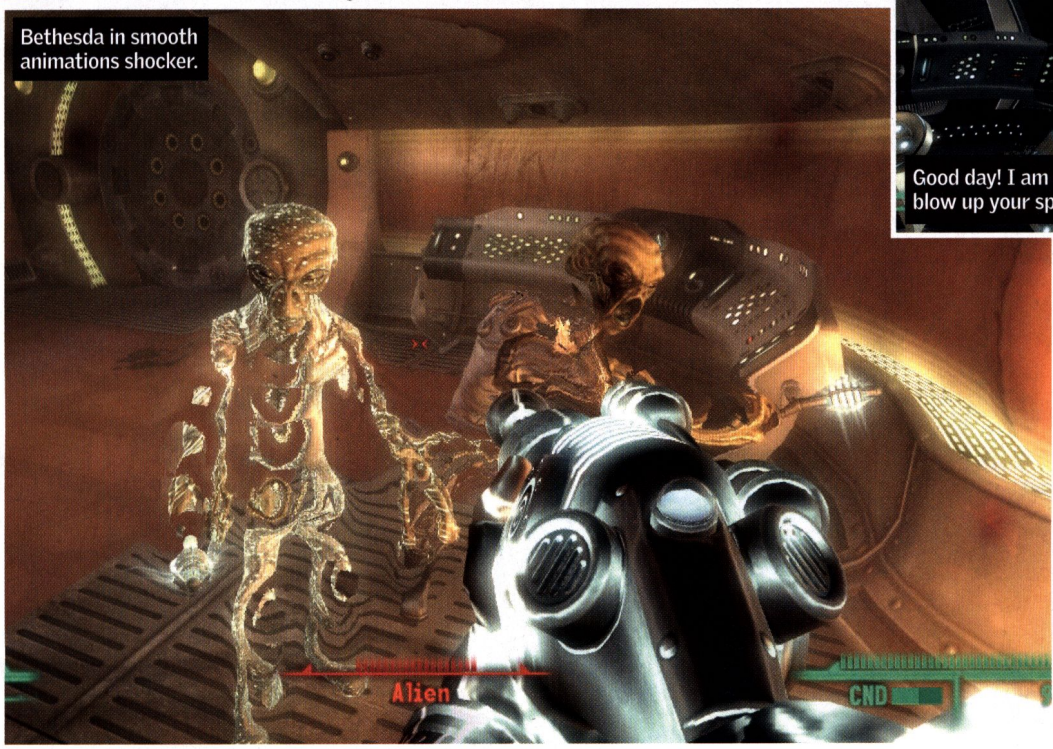
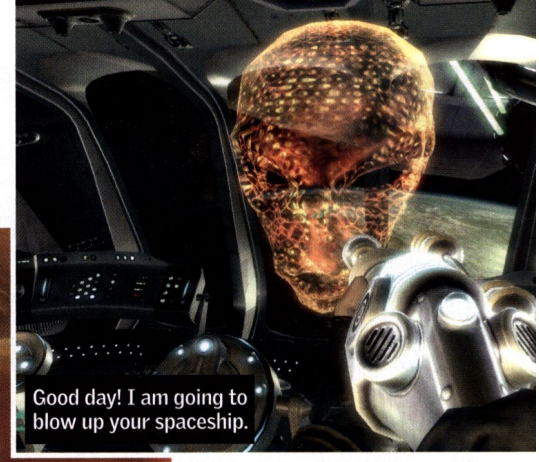
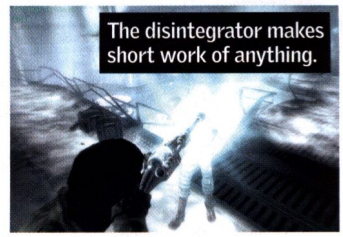
sexy funny weird highbrow gaming culture

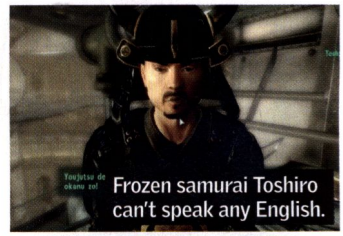
(and news, previews, reviews, features, videos, screens etc)



Bethesda in smooth animations shocker.


Good day! I am going to blow up your spaceship.


The disintegrator makes short work of anything.


Frozen samurai Toshiro can't speak any English.

Fallout... in SPACE!

FALLOUT 3: MOTHERSHIP ZETA

Adam Glick tenderly caresses his probe...

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER Games For Windows – LIVE!
WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE 800 Microsoft Points (about £6.80)

EXPANSION PACK

AT A GLANCE...

An expansion that sends the Wasteland wanderer into the cosmos to fight aliens and shoot spaceships with a death ray.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

MOTHERSHIP ZETA	83%
THE PITT	70%
OPERATION ANCHORAGE	40%

WHILE AT FIRST glance it's a bizarre concept, an alien mothership beaming up *Fallout 3*'s Wanderer actually sits well into the sequel's, and its predecessors', stories (remember the crashed flying saucer in *Fallout*? How about the TARDIS? Or the crashed *Star Trek* shuttle in *Fallout 2*?). Little green – well, green-ish – men running around in flying saucers wielding rayguns fit in well, juxtaposed with the wasteland's nuclear Cadillacs, day-glow cafés and grinning Pip-Boy caricatures.

That's the strongest feeling you'll find from *Mothership Zeta* – constant, pleasant surprises from what could have been a dull-as-ditchwater mess. When you find a crashed spaceship in the middle of the wastes, you're taken into the mothership via a spooky, wavy teleporter, and find yourself on a table being probed by bald-headed extraterrestrials.

It's not long before you trick the jabbering midget creatures into releasing you from your cell and, with the help of a little girl called Sally and your new-found friend Somah, make your escape. It's a really bizarre tale that takes an interesting stab into the history of *Fallout* – let's just say the aliens were around long before the Great War. The combat is claustrophobic, somewhere between *Lost In Space* and *Dead Space*, and the new weapons are remarkable both for their power and '50s B-movie sound effects.

The icing on the cake is the constant introduction of recordings by the aliens of their former captives. These can be played (much like other notes/radio signals) as you do other things, and help round out the history of some of the captives you discover. You even get a chance to walk out into space – and the conclusion, for the first time in a *Fallout 3* expansion, is truly satisfying.

GET PROBED

That said, it's probably somewhere in the middle as far as length goes, lacking the depth of *Point Lookout* (though it's a damn sight more interesting) and a real connection to the world of *Fallout 3*. While this can be explained by saying that Bethesda didn't want to damage the mise en scène, it would be good to see the aliens having a reason to return. It also errs on the side, as has been the case for most of the expansions, of pure combat.

Overall, though, *Mothership Zeta* is dramatic, entertaining and charming in the way that every *Fallout* expansion should be from now on. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS A rounder, kitschier Fallout
SOUND A '50s alien movie
MULTIPLAYER None

- ✓ Genuinely entertaining
- ✓ Excellent audio diaries
- ✓ New weapons are hilarious fun
- ✗ Slightly short
- ✗ A little too linear

73
Out of this world

The Tesla Canon sounds like a futuristic washing machine.

FALLOUT 3: BROKEN STEEL

Death from above 2277

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER Games For Windows – LIVE!
WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE 800 Microsoft Points (about £6.80)

EXPANSION PACK

Use Mountain Dew as a toxic weapon.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB video card.

ONE MIGHT SAY that the ending of *Fallout 3* was a bit of a non-ending. It didn't make too much sense and – without spoiling anything – had one gigantic, lumbering, nucleated plot hole. This is why it's welcome that *Broken Steel* demands that you've reached the point just before that said ending, so that it can conveniently re-write it at the last second and provide a slightly more sensible one.

Broken Steel is probably the most substantial *Fallout 3* DLC yet, feeling like a cohesive part of both the *Fallout* lore and the main plotline of the game rather than an afterthought. The Wanderer can continue to explore Washington State, reach Level 30, and can gain several new, if not mind-bendingly awesome, perks. The advancement of the storyline is substantial and a great big step in the right direction.

Broken Steel's storyline, as is the case with all of the DLC so far, is a bit damp. While literally explosive at first, it comes to a somewhat abrupt end, and the world itself remains unchanged. After what is apparently a significant act – which we won't spoil – you're left with a remarkably untouched wasteland. Considering the magnitude of what happens at the end of *Fallout 3*, during the weeks before *Broken Steel* takes place and its eventual conclusion, you're left with a big gun and nothing much else.

Ultimately, *Broken Steel* is satisfying. It's consistently engrossing, explosive and impressive to the eye, and while its conclusion bares a remarkable similarity to the events in Raven Rock, we can forgive Bethesda. It's no *Shivering Isles*, and it still lacks the depth that we want from *Fallout* DLC, but it's very much worth your time and money.

Adam Glick

We demand robots and lasers in all our futures.

PCZONE **80** A better end

Yer pretty. C'mere.

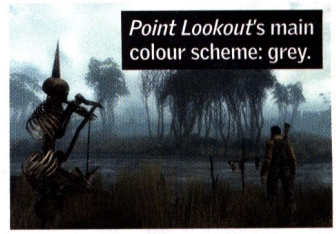
FALLOUT 3: POINT LOOKOUT

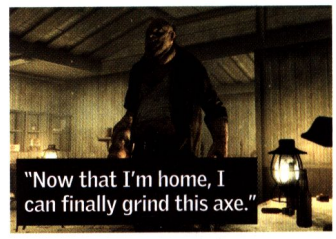
Banjos at the ready people

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER Games For Windows – LIVE!
WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE 800 Microsoft Points (about £6.80)

EXPANSION PACK


Point Lookout's main colour scheme: grey.


"Now that I'm home, I can finally grind this axe."

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 256MB video card.

THERE'S SO MUCH to play with in the *Fallout* canon that one can't help but despair when Bethesda chooses such a weird locale as *Point Lookout*, Maryland to house its DLC in. After taking a tugboat to an area apparently not affected as badly by the nukes as the rest of the world, you're greeted with a drab theme park, a large field, and a mansion containing a ghoul that has a supposedly British accent.

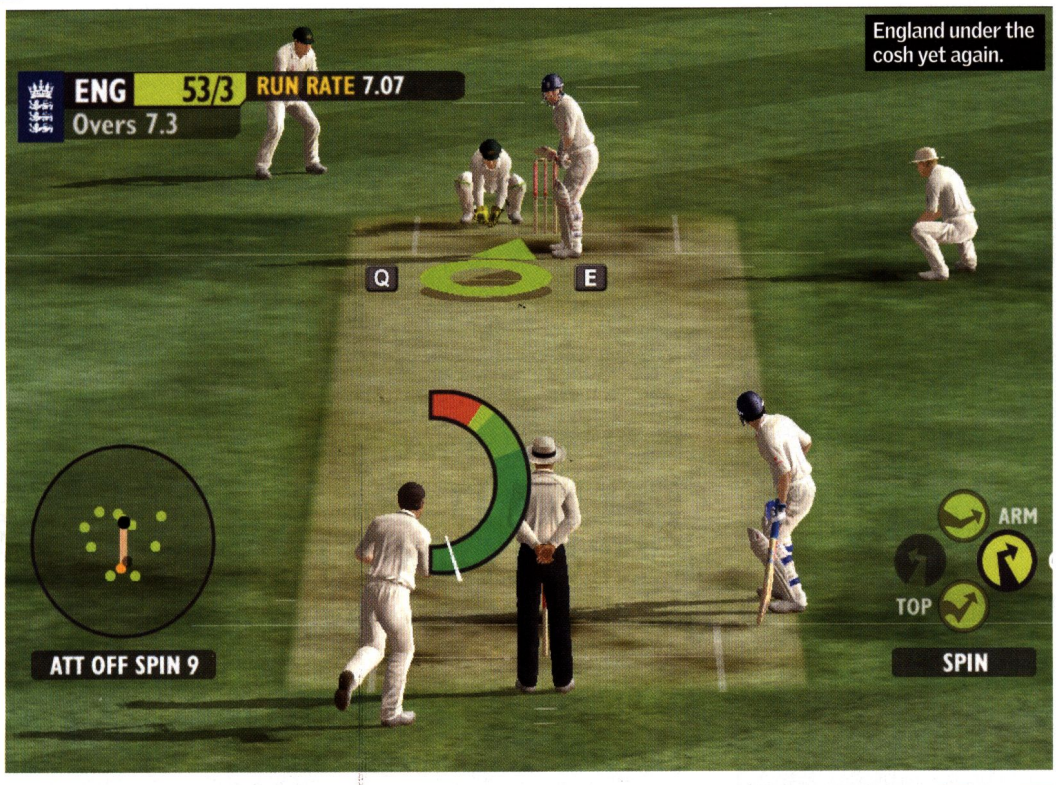
This is very much *Point Lookout* – an incongruous addition to *Fallout 3* that has little or no bearing on the wider world itself. You'll fight with tribesmen who have suffered trepanation, get involved in a war between scientists, go on a vision quest, and ultimately end up with yet another totally unsatisfying conclusion – probably the worst yet from *Fallout 3*'s DLC. The ending is so bizarre and unsatisfying that you may – much like we did – walk around for 10 minutes before realising that it's over.

That's not to say that *Point Lookout* is bad – the main storyline is quirky and very *Fallout*, splicing together the stories of Old World America with the remains of the human race. The side quests are remarkably vast, too, and the bizarre irradiated denizens – three-tooth nuclear hicks – and the area rewards those who invest their time in working through the five additional side quests. However, the main quest feels lifeless and forces players (no matter what their choices are) into the same ending in some irksomely contrived ways.

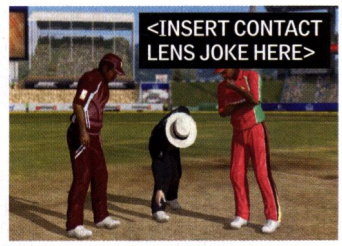
Whether you love or hate *Point Lookout* is dependant on your play style. If you want to be the explorer and experience the finesses of the world, then this is for you. However, if you're looking for a detailed, dramatic storyline to follow, you're not going to be pleased.

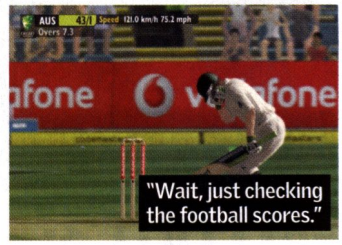
Adam Glick

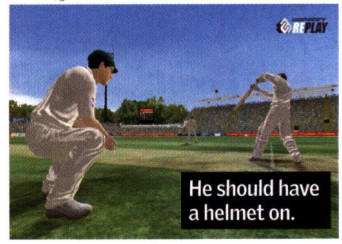
PCZONE **76** Swampy



England under the cosh yet again.



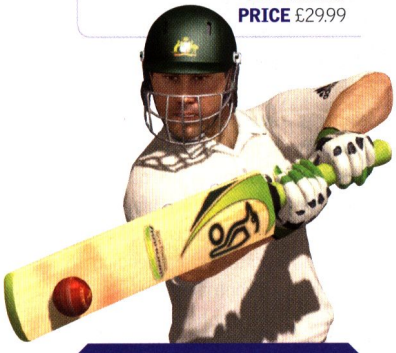




ASHES CRICKET 2009

David Brown steps in for Freddie Flintoff. With predictable results

DEVELOPER Transmission Games
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE playashes.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Officially licensed cricket fun cashing in on/celebrating the recent Ashes tour with commentators galore.

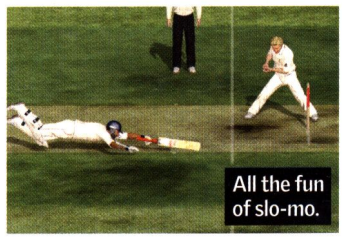
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

ASHES CRICKET 2009	74%
CRICKET 07	68%
BRIAN LARA INT. CRICKET 2007	63%

THE ASHES WILL have concluded by the time you read these words, so I'll guess you're either swilling down the champagne in various toasts to England's improbable victory in the fifth Test, or you're drowning your sorrows as Australia once again provoked a stunning middle order collapse from England's batsmen, and carried off the tiny urn back to the Antipodes for a few more years. If you just don't care about cricket, why are you even reading this? Go on, piss off out of it.

Now that's taken care of, the remaining lovers of willow and leather can ruminate on the following words. The next game in the much-loved Brian Lara series, *Ashes Cricket 2009* is both an attempt to revive a forgotten brand and also a shameless effort to cash in on the hype surrounding the famous series.


All the fun of slo-mo.

I can safely say that *Ashes 2009* is the best cricket game money can buy, but I could equally say that there are a number of issues that still remain from the previous game (*Brian Lara International Cricket 2007*).

GOOGLIES GALORE

Some things have definitely been tidied up and it's now a more accessible game than before. Tutorials are provided by Sir Ian Botham and Shane Warne through the Legends training mode, where you go through a series of challenges from basic batting and bowling to advanced techniques and strategies. By the time you get about halfway through these, you'll be itching to just get on with a proper game.

When its time to get started you'll find the usual raft of limited overs matches and full-on five-day Tests are available, as well as the Ashes itself. Graphics and presentation veer between good and drab, with the crowd looking rather sloppy, which is a shame.

The gameplay is an improvement, with a more realistic feel to the batting, bowling and fielding. However, the AI still has a tendency to run itself out stupidly far too often and the continued lack of proper edges behind the wicket mean having a large number of slips is often completely pointless. We can appreciate it would be difficult to get thin edges simulated accurately, but without them, well, the game just isn't cricket. Nevertheless, *Ashes Cricket 2009* is a decent game of cricket, marred by some classic issues. If you'd sorted out the persistent problem with the edges and runouts, you'd have got a much higher score, Codies. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Variable quality
SOUND Commentary can be a repetitive
MULTIPLAYER Basic

- ✓ Better than the last game
- ✓ Feels more like cricket
- ✓ Ashes licence
- ✗ No proper edges to slips
- ✗ AI is suspect with run-outs

74
More Tufnell than Warne

EAST INDIA COMPANY

Sea, ships and sweaty men

DEVELOPER Nitro Games
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE eic-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8GHz Pentium or AMD CPU, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), and a 128MB graphics card.

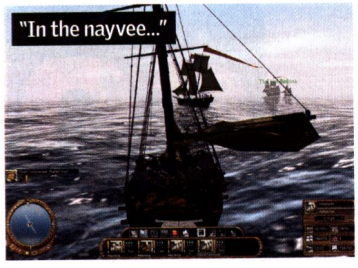
DOUBTERS BEWARE! *EAST India Company* is not *Empire: Total War*, but a 150 year-long economic epic beginning in 1600. The agenda of colonisation was to bleed India and Africa dry, and, being the 17th century, the only way to do this was by sea. Success requires grasping simple economics – fill your ships to the brim and sail between the East and West, trading as you go.

That's not to say it's a walk in the park. The game dynamically alters the prices of imports and exports, so keeping a careful eye on the world's first globalised economy is vital. Anyone can make money, so it's about maximising your profits. Automatic trade routes, upgradeable ships and a shrewd business sense will help you fill your coffers to near-bursting.

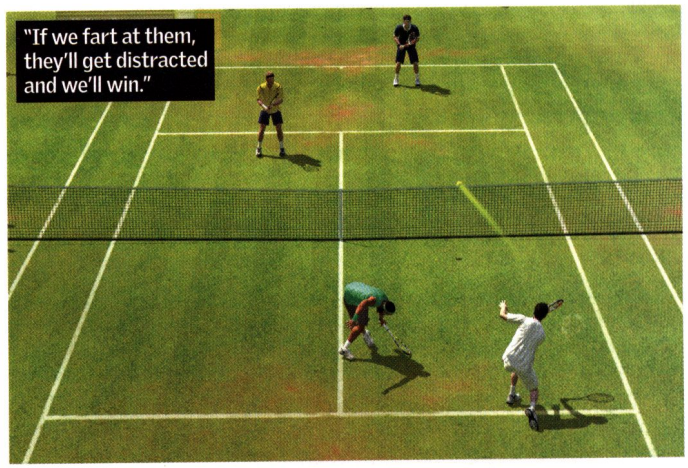
Alas, historical accuracy denotes your transnational company is not alone. Occasionally rival nations will get greedy and decide to throw some cannon balls your way, propelling you into the game's naval warfare. Playing out like every other ocean-combat game, you can target the hull, sails or crew or opt in for a more personal approach by boarding the enemy's ships. The game's engine lovingly recreates the time period as the ships blow each other to smithereens. The only downside is the ship-on-port combat that's limited to a text screen and number crunching.

East India Company manages to whisk you on a sedate journey through teatime. As your ships chug away and your balance gets fatter and fatter, I can't help but feel the urge to walk into Tesco and demand to pay for some coffee with some bits of wool.

Marco Fiori



PCZONE 70
Perfectly good cuppa

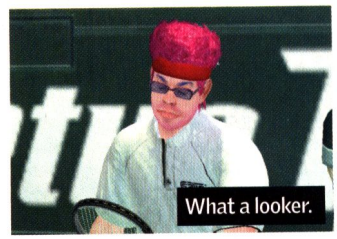


VIRTUA TENNIS 2009

Furry balls all over the damn place

DEVELOPER Sumo Digital
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE virtuatennis2009.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 6600 NVIDIA graphics card, or an ATI equivalent with Pixel Shader 3 support.



OTHER THAN A few new mini-games involving hitting wooden pirate ships with tennis balls or potting pool balls with, well, tennis balls again, I can't honestly say that much has changed since I played the very first *Virtua Tennis* game many years ago. Despite claims of 'revamped' World Tour modes and various things like that, *Virtua Tennis 2009*'s game model hasn't changed since then – it's still the epitome of arcade action and lacks any depth.

It's still almost impossible to hit the ball out in open play, meaning matches with two players of decent ability could go on for hours, with rallies only ending when one guy falls asleep and fails to press fire. So that's oversimplifying things somewhat, but doubles matches certainly feel like this. When you've only really got three shots – top spin, slice and lob – the lack of variety does create carbon-copy rallies that occurr over and over again.

The World Tour mode is excruciatingly dull too, with each tournament inching your ranking up by a couple of measly points. Yes, this means that if you get all the way to number one in the rankings, you've certainly earned it, in terms of time invested, but only the most determined or hardened fans will make it this far. Boredom is sure to set in far too quickly.

The AI is also either unbelievably rubbish (not moving to hit the ball until it's gone past) or stubbornly perfect (making every rally last an extremely long time). On the harder difficulty settings, the lack of variety in the way you can approach the game really shows, removing the ability to win points with a touch of magic.

All in all, *Virtua Tennis 2009* is a disappointing and flat experience that's only really any fun when played with a friend, who may make an occasional error.

Adam Glick

PCZONE 59
Bit of a Henman

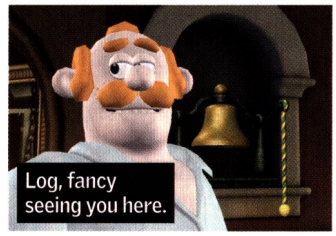
This cannot end well.

WALLACE AND GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES: THE BOGEY MAN

Bogeyman was a great supervillian

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/wallaceandgromit
ETA Out now
PRICE $8.99 (£5.50), or $34.95 (£21.50) for all four episodes

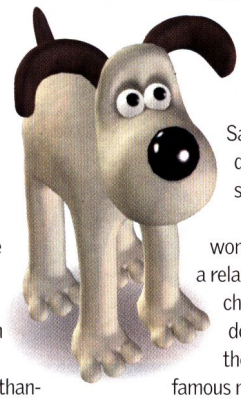
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2Ghz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB Direct 8.1 video card.


Log, fancy seeing you here.

THE RISE OF episodic gaming has really benefited the adventure genre, with new *Sam & Max* and *Monkey Island* games using the format, as well as everyone's favourite wrestler, Strong Bad. But for everyone craving something more British (or covered in cheese), Wallace and Gromit are here.

After defeating the moustachioed Mr Monty Muzzle in the last episode, our intrepid duo find themselves dealing with Wallace's accidental engagement to his less-than-desirable next-door neighbour. After a stealthy Gromit finds out Wallace's future bride has an aversion to esteemed country club Prickly Thicket, a plan is set in motion. Unsurprisingly, Wallace soon finds himself a new member of said club, and is soon set with the task of saving it from destruction.

The game, as is par for the course (fnar fnar), is funny, but in a brief chuckle-and-smile kind of way, rather than the laugh-out-loud way of *Monkey Island*. That said, the song about golf that plays during Wallace's initiation to the club is simply priceless. The puzzles all fall under the banner of medium difficulty, not signposted by any means, but nothing to tax point-and-click vets. The voice acting is pretty good, although the lack of Peter Sallis as Wallace is a shame. The dude is getting on a bit though, so I won't begrudge him a rest.



This is a sedate game that won't appeal to everyone, but for a relaxing afternoon, whip out some cheese and crackers, settle down, and enjoy some time in the company of the most famous modelling clay in the world.

Sam Smith

PCZONE 70
A bit crackers

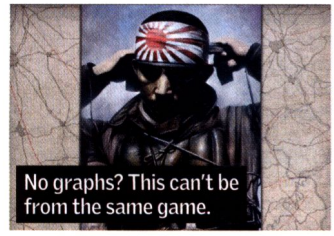
It seems the British Army is a tad short-staffed.

HEARTS OF IRON III

Only for the hardest of the hardcore

DEVELOPER Paradox Interactive
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
Intel Pentium 4 2.4GHz or AMD 3500+ Quad Core, 2GB RAM, and a GeForce 8800 or Radeon X1900.


No graphs? This can't be from the same game.

A tad more complex than *Call of Duty*.

THIS IS A fantastic example of a game meant for fans of the genre. *Hearts of Iron III* is a grand strategy war game, a real-time strategy of epic scale and scope. The game takes place between the years of 1936 and 1948, letting you pick any country that existed at the time, and guiding it through the years of the war.

Players control all aspects of running their country, from developing their military power to politics, diplomacy, espionage, scientific research, and trading. Should the player come to arms with another country – which is likely given the time period – they also control their armed forces on a large scale, choosing which provinces to attack or defend, and with what forces.

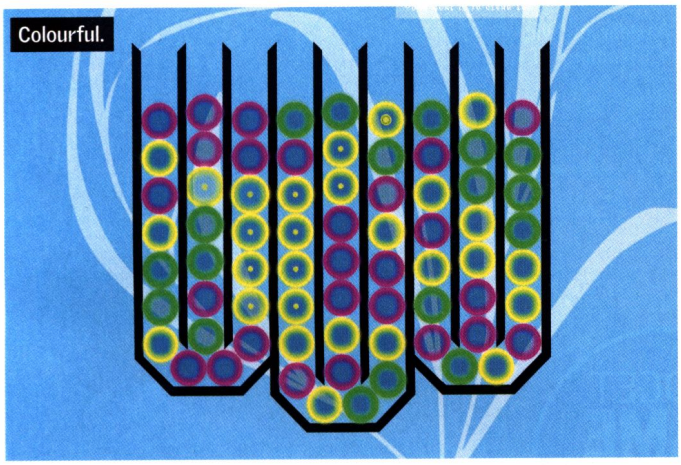
The problem with this game is that it's simply too complicated for all but the most die-hard strategy fan. Tutorials are present, but strangely only cover about half of the game, with some important things, such as combat, apparently omitted altogether. Even when they do explain things, the tutorials consist of walls of text that can be a lot to take in. Players can, however, set the AI to control certain aspects of the game, freeing themselves up to focus on other parts. This can help a new player to gradually learn the game, but a first-timer will find this overload of detailed information staggering.

Hardcore strategy fans and history buffs will love *Hearts of Iron III*. For everyone else the game is nearly inaccessible, with a learning curve that brings new meaning to the word steep. That said, it's not a bad game, and if you're one of the aforementioned strategy fans, you will likely enjoy it.

Sam Smith

From this point on things get serious.

PCZONE 60
A cartographer's dream

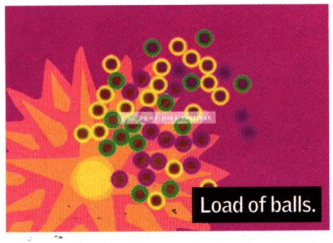

Colourful.

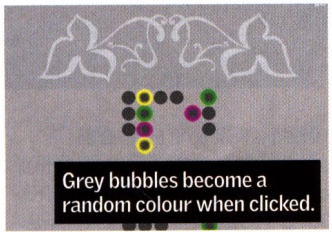
CHAINS

Why work when you can puzzle?

DEVELOPER 2DEngine
PUBLISHER Meridian4
WEBSITE 2dengine.com/chains
ETA Out now
PRICE £3.49

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.


Load of balls.


Grey bubbles become a random colour when clicked.

THERE IS NO shortage of puzzle games in the world, and it takes something special for a title to stand out amongst its peers. Unfortunately, 'special' is not a word that describes *Chains*.

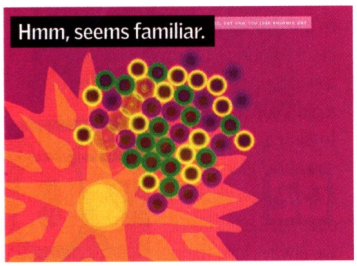
The game revolves around making chains of at least three bubbles, which must be of the same colour in order to link up. Also, the bubbles aren't static, bumping and rolling off one another as they fill up the screen.

Rather than following the traditional puzzle game convention of having one mode that gets harder, *Chains* has 20 levels, each a different scenario using its core mechanic. For instance, one stage may have you making chains to remove bubbles before they pile too high and hit spikes at the top of the screen, whereas another has you creating a 40-bubble chain.

The problem is most of these levels are over too quickly and a skilled player could finish the game in little over an hour. The game is also bland to look at, with none of the visual flare present in genre stalwarts such as *Lumines*. The soundtrack is serviceable, but entirely forgettable, with nothing to distinguish it from many other games.

Compared to superior time-wasters like *Peggle* or *Puzzle Quest*, this game has little to recommend it. At £3.49, it's hardly bank-breaking and if you have an hour or two to kill, there are worse ways. Still, *Chains* is never anything more than average at best, and feels destined to be forgotten.

Sam Smith


Hmm, seems familiar.

PCZONE 62 Balls

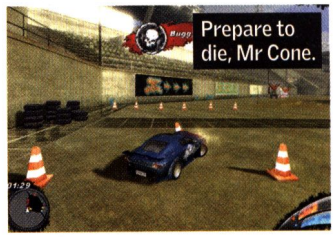
Zombies were harmed in the making of this game.

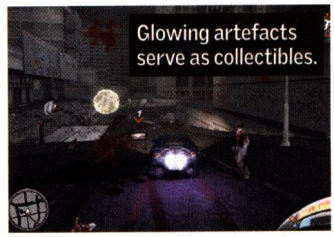
CLUTCH

Racing in a city of the dead (bored)

DEVELOPER Targem Games
PUBLISHER Game Factory Interactive
WEBSITE snipurl.com/gfi_clutch
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.


Prepare to die, Mr Cone.


Glowing artefacts serve as collectibles.

THIS IS A game with an interesting concept. Think of a cross between *Mad Max* and a George Romero film, and you have something far better than *Clutch*.

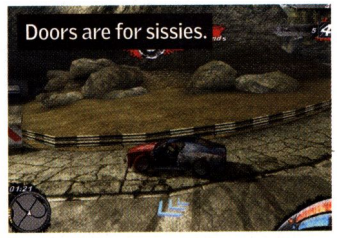
Essentially it's an open-world street-racing title, with one relatively unique selling point: zombies. Apparently, the best way to deal with a ruined city full of the walking dead is to deck out a car with spikes and blades and then drive fast. There is some kind of story, but it is unlikely you will care, or be able to understand it if you do. Developed in Russia, *Clutch* has some of the most hilariously bad translation yet seen in games and as the story is told entirely through text at the start and end of missions, following it is difficult.

Players are treated to a number of different modes, including racing, item collecting, helping someone else collect items, and more racing. Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for the game to get boring as the driving is very basic, with nothing to set it apart from other racing games. The graphics are awful and the city the game is set in is tiny. The killing stroke is that the soundtrack consists of five terrible songs, played over and over – it's not uncommon to have the same track play a few times in a row.

Side missions can also be played to amass funds with which you can upgrade your car. This is not only extremely dull but also pointless, as the upgrades you buy are barely noticeable when it comes to performance.

Yet this game does have one redeeming feature. Zombies are everywhere, and mowing them down in a variety of gruesome ways is nearly always amusing. But that gets old, and for £20 *Clutch* isn't worth the money.

Sam Smith


Doors are for sissies.

PCZONE 30 Dead last

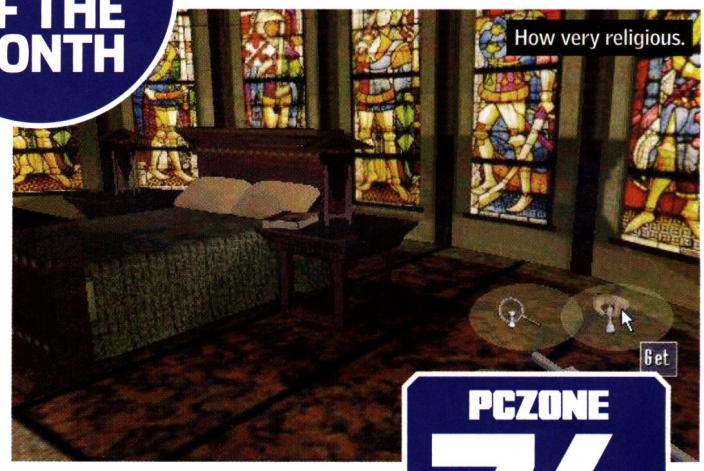
Budget

***David Brown* thinks penny sweets are grossly overpriced**

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

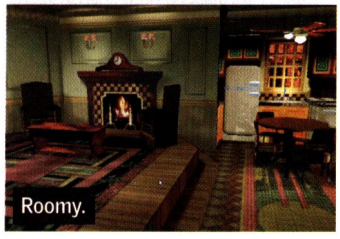
TEX MURPHY: OVERSEER

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $9.99 (£6)



WE SPOKE ABOUT *Under a Killing Moon* in our last issue (issue 211) and about how Good Old Games had only released the first three Tex Murphy games. Well, now they've let the final two loose as well.

Currently the final Tex Murphy adventure (though rumours persist about one final fling) *Overseer* was a remake of *Mean Streets*, the first game in the series. It was, however, certainly the best looking of all the games, with a new "built for *Windows 98*" engine showing off Tex and his troubled buddies in all their glory. The transition wasn't to go entirely smooth, with a control method that wasn't adored by all. Nevertheless, it didn't stop the series' humour, wit and intelligence coming through.


Roomy.

That games based on detectives or crime solving (the *CSI* franchise not withstanding) aren't popular these days is a shame. I suppose if they were to come out, they'd have to be shooters or arse platform games just to make the dollar signs light up in the eyes of marketing men. Well, you can spit in their faces and go buy all of the Tex games on GOG right now. I heartily endorse these games and/or products.

PCZONE 74 Heavenly FMV

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

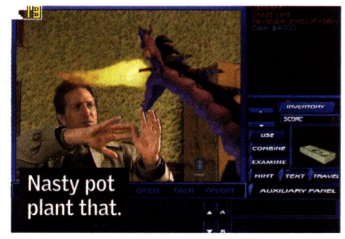
David got two new mice from nice PR people, making his nightly *Left 4 Dead* sessions more of a pleasure.
SAVING £114.94

Matt attended a wedding and was plied with alcohol until his liver rebelled and fled for its life.
SAVING £67

Steve was sent five copies of *ArmA II*, all of which went missing. He just pestered the PRs for more regardless.
SAVING £150

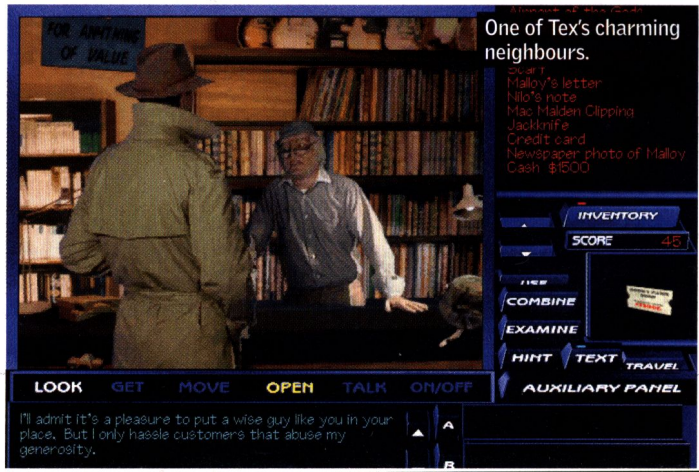
THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $9.99 (£6)



THE SEQUEL TO *Under a Killing Moon*, *Pandora Directive* feels pretty much exactly the same to its predecessor. And that's a good thing.

While this instalment doesn't have the same star factor in terms of actor, the acting is never less than acceptable. It also showed a reasonable amount of forward thinking, with three different morality paths to take, leading to a total of seven different possible endings.



Like other adventure games of its time, wit, humour and quality writing that's missing from most modern adventures is present, making listening to the dialogue a treat. It even has a little in-joke during the intro clip, where a sinister psycho/burglar rifles through a girl's cupboard, tossing aside a boxed copy of *Under a Killing Moon* as he does so. Easter Eggs, we always love them.

PCZONE 70

LEGO INDIANA JONES: THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

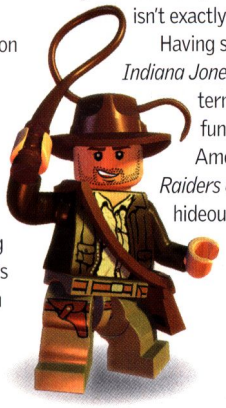
PUBLISHER Steam **WEBSITE** store.steampowered.com **PRICE** £12.99

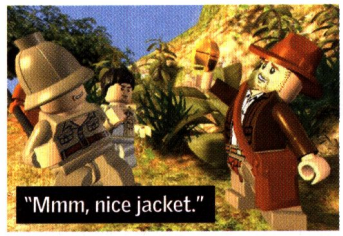
IN MY OPINION George Lucas' films are a load of old shit (yes, that includes *Star Wars*) but I do find the Indiana Jones films to be rather good. This means that I didn't immediately spit on the screen when I started to load up *LEGO Indy*. Knowing that it was an excellent block-'em-up helped hugely.

The stylised nature of the graphics means that, despite more than a year or so having passed since it first landed among us, nothing has really changed. So the gameplay is the only thing you can really look at in drawing budgetary conclusions.

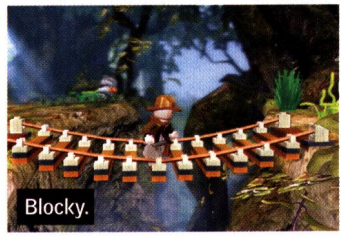
On our initial play *LEGO Indy* did throw up some frustrating issues, so to then go back and see them again – especially some of those bastard camera angles that make progress overly hard – isn't exactly pleasant.

Having said that, *LEGO Indiana Jones* is excellent in terms of platforming fun, even if the South American temple from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is hideously re-imagined.





"Mmm, nice jacket."



Blocky.

PCZONE 75

SUPREME RULER 2020

PUBLISHER Steam **WEBSITE** store.steampowered.com **PRICE** £7.49

WHEN IT FIRST came out, *Supreme Ruler 2020* was a total bastard of a game. It was ruthlessly in-depth and could be described using the following words and phrases: complex, unforgiving, intimidating, and at times unhelpful.

Yet there was a kernel there, a chunky nougat centre of strategy goodness that defied the tough-as-diamond exterior, coupled of course with the unnervingly possible near-future political scenario that it put forward.

Painstaking and painful in equal measures, *Supreme Ruler 2020* could really have done with allowing you (like in the more recent *Hearts of Iron III*, page 76) to dole out some responsibility to AI advisors, just to take some weight off your shoulders at the beginning.

Tougher to crack than a fossilised Terry's Chocolate Orange, this game is for those with patience beyond our means and a willingness to engage in all but the smallest of details.

As exciting...

...as it gets.

PCZONE 65

AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now

KING'S QUEST COLLECTION
PRICE £9.99, Steam
Seven adventure games, all twee and bastard difficult.
50

SPACE QUEST COLLECTION
PRICE £9.99, Steam
Six adventures, harder than *King's Quest*, but much better.
70

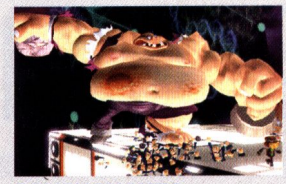
TROPICO RELOADED
PRICE £9.99, Steam
Some Caribbean Communism to keep you occupied until you get *Tropico 3* (page 25).
69

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

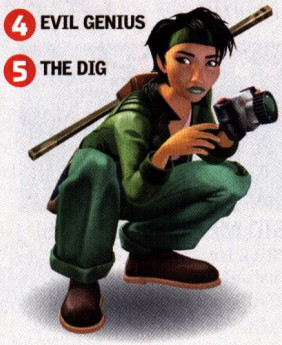
PCZ TOP 5 ROBOTS

1. **DØG** *Half-Life 2*
2. **TURRETS** *Portal*
3. **HK-47** *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*
4. **JOEY** *Beneath a Steel Sky*
5. **CLAPTRAP** *Borderlands* (he'll be big – trust us)

PCZ TOP 5 PC GAMING GRIPES

1. **BAD VOICE ACTING**
2. **CONSOLE-ONLY RELEASES**
3. **COPY PROTECTION**
4. **INCREDIBLY BUGGY NEW RELEASES**
5. **LACK OF QUICKSAVE OPTIONS**

PCZ TOP 5 RE-RELEASED RETRO GAMES



1. **DUKE NUKEM 3D: ATOMIC EDITION**
2. **FREESPACE 2**
3. **BEYOND GOOD & EVIL**
4. **EVIL GENIUS**
5. **THE DIG**

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%

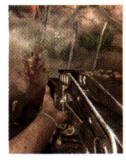
The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.

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 psion 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%

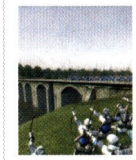
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.

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*.

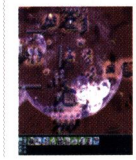
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue 193 – 91%

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%

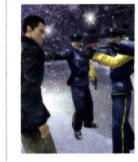
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, 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: 188 – 90%

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*.

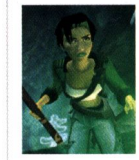


FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

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.

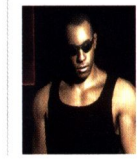
PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

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?

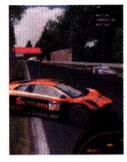
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!

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.

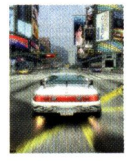
MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

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.

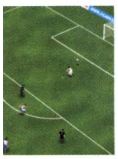
WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.

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.

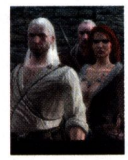
FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 – 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.

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	
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM	EIDOS
BATTLEFIELD 1943	EA
BATTLEFIELD HEROES	EA
BLOOD BOWL	THQ
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010	EIDOS
CHAMPIONS ONLINE	ATARI
NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT	EA
ORDER OF WAR	SQUARE ENIX
RED FACTION: GUERRILLA	THQ

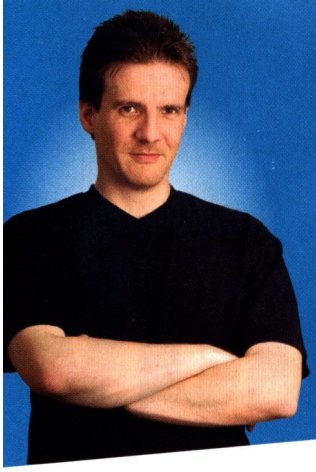
OCTOBER	
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA
BORDERLANDS	2K GAMES
CITIES XL	ATARI
FIFA 10	EA
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010	SEGA
GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME	NAMCO BANDAI
PES 2010	KONAMI
OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING	CODEMASTERS
TROPICO 3	KALYPSO

NOVEMBER	
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2	THQ
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS	EA
LEFT 4 DEAD 2	VALVE
MODERN WARFARE 2	ACTIVISION

WINTER	
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR
THE SABOTEUR	EA
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION	UBISOFT

CONGRATULATIONS!

You've just unlocked CHEAT!



PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

WIRED WI-FI

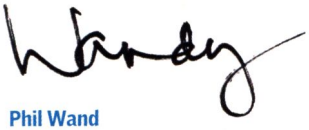
BACK IN THE '80s, when I used to work in London, wear pointy shoes and carrying a mobile the size of your left speaker, the buildings I worked in used microwave links to form their networks. The problem with this tech is that it needs line-of-sight to maintain a connection, often over many miles, meaning everything from rain to pigeons can cut the link.

It's the same at home today with my Wi-Fi router. If my wife does the ironing in front of it, or the dog flops down and starts sniffing its arse near it, my network vanishes. Wi-Fi's radio signals don't need line-of-sight to work, but the only time mine works is when I've put everything in the same room.

In addition, I have to contend with four other Wi-Fi networks in the immediate vicinity. My FRITZ!Box router gives a graphical display of which channels are affected, and to cut a long story short, it's all of them. It was then I realised that I wasn't going to win.

Since I switched to HomePlug AV adapters and used a power cable network I've had no glitches or dropouts, and the throughput is higher – enough to stream movies.

So I can heartily recommend you ditching your erratic wireless network too and replacing it with Billion BiPAC devices. You will live a lot longer, and your pets will be able to snuffle themselves in peace.



Phil Wand
Hardware editor

HIGH FIVE

Prepare to give the Core i5 some silicon skin

The P7P55D centres around Intel's new P55 Express chipset and upcoming Core i5.

DISMAYED THAT YOUR fantasy Core i7 system has always been £200 more than you're prepared to pay? Your dreams could come true over the next few weeks as Intel introduce cheaper family members.

Core i5 is the minified, mainstream brother of Core i7 with a smaller feature set, so Intel are sticking it in a smaller socket and charging a smaller price. This means an i5 needs an LGA1156 motherboard, a new socket shared with the entry-level Core i3 range, as well as pared down Core i7 derivatives due early next year.

The X58 chipset found on today's LGA1366 i7 boards is Intel's flagship platform and, as many have found, remains elusively more expensive than any other on the market. The new P55 chipset that Core i5 CPUs need will be much cheaper to produce, and it won't be long before we begin seeing i5 boards available in good numbers for £99 or less.

ASUS are first to market with the P7P55D, a P55-based product likely to be bowled right down the middle of the cheapest and most expensive i7 designs, so expect a price tag of around £140.

The P7P55D sports an LGA1156 socket and, because i5 is a dual rather than triple-channel design, it has four rather than six slots for DDR3 RAM.

As well as all the expected mod cons, including eSATA, dual Gigabit LAN, 8-channel audio with DTS Surround, the new ASUS motherboard will also includes a curious return to legacy keyboard and mouse ports.

uk.asus.com

EXTREMELY SOLID

Corsair launches new SSDs

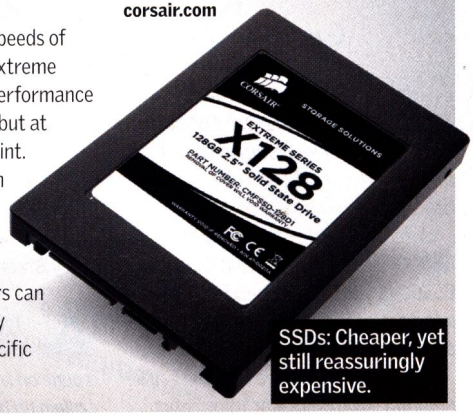
CORSAIR HAVE ANNOUNCED a range of 32GB, 64GB and 128GB high performance solid-state hard drives retailing at £125, £180 and £300 respectively.

With maximum read speeds of 240MB per second, the Extreme Series units are a broad performance match for high-end rivals but at a more appealing price point.

Corsair claim that each drive has an expected life span of 100 years, together with upgradable firmware that means users can keep their investment fully compatible with SSD-specific *Windows 7* features.

Be careful though. Until prices drop significantly, two smaller units striped together as your C: drive continues to makes the most sense.

corsair.com



SSDs: Cheaper, yet still reassuringly expensive.

NEWS ROUND-UP

INTEL IS HOLDING back shipments of some SSDs after discovering a problem with the units BIOS passwords. If a user sets a password, the SSD stops working. Intel will have a firmware update soon and in the meantime have asked customers not to enable or modify their SSD's passwords.
intel.com

US RESEARCHERS JON Peddie claim computer games and simulations of activities "too expensive or too dangerous to test in reality" will soon take advantage of advanced real-time capabilities of computer graphics. That the growth trend of the CG industry – 16.5% for 28 years straight – means that real-time could be here in no time.
jonpeddie.com

MICROSOFT HAVE RELEASED a release candidate of *Windows 7*'s *Windows XP Mode*. Once we've tested it, we'll give your our verdict.
www.windows7.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

POWER CABLE NETWORKING: Organised events where electricity wires get drunk in bars and charge the bill to expenses, claiming they're meeting new business contacts. **SAIPH:** A shout particularly upper-class baseball referees let out when a player slides home. **FRITZ!BOX:** A cuboid storage device, branded after a very excited German. **CORE I3:** Replacement for the standard integer "3". Youngest, and very much non-sexy, sibling to "Core i5" and "Core i7". **CORE I5:** The cool replacement for the standard integer "5". Younger and less sexy sibling to the established "Core i7", yet is slightly more sexy that the "Core i3."

Dear Wandy

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

PROBLEMS?
Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *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 infomation about your problem as you can and system specs where applicable.

Q COMPATIBILITY CRISIS

I'm planning to get a second PC, and I'm wondering if you'd recommend waiting for *Windows 7* before I buy the new machine, missing out *Vista* altogether?

The only fly in the ointment, I'm assuming, is that I won't be able to run current games (eg *Crysis*) on the new OS. Or am I wrong and Microsoft are going to be terribly clever and kind and include backward compatibility features which will let me play them?

Mike Diesch

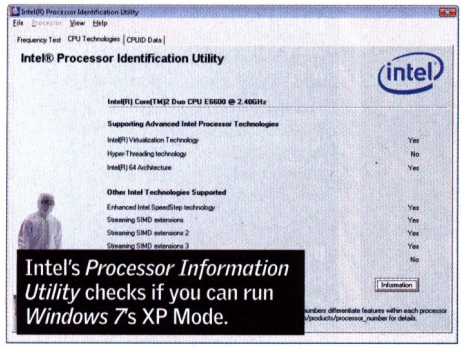
A *Over the last few months, the* Windows 7 *backwards compatibility issue has become a baked spud in Microsoft's lap, but most games and applications will work OK. The* Windows *development team would have to be seven kinds of crazy to create a new version that didn't run the stuff you use now. However, it's come to light that* XP Mode – *the "*Windows *inside* Windows*" feature Microsoft hope will ease the migration of users with mission critical programs – requires a processor with virtualisation technology.*

Almost all AMD chips have this, but it's absent from a random number of Intel CPUs. For example, the Core 2 Duo E6600 in my workstation has VT but the Core 2 Quad Q8300 in my benchmark rig does not.

Intel have said they'll add VT to the Q8300, E7500, E7400, E5400 and E5300 by the time you read this, but a large number of current Core 2 owners will find XP Mode *out of reach.*

Thankfully Intel have released a little program – the Processor Information Utility *– which can tell you if your CPU is capable of running* Window 7*'s* XP Mode. *You can download the program at snipurl.com/intelpiu.*

Some Intel chips can't run *Windows 7*'s virtualisation tech.



Intel's *Processor Information Utility* checks if you can run *Windows 7*'s XP Mode.

Q PATH TO SEVEN

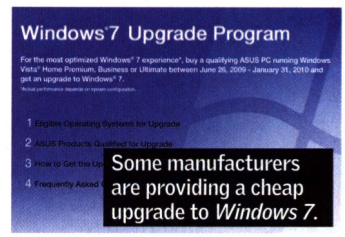
I've seen a number of companies advertising an 'upgrade path' to *Windows 7* for people who buy PCs before the new OS has been released.

Is this a legitimate offer that Microsoft will honour? What does it cost and how does it actually work in terms of installing the upgrade?

Andy Strong

A *Take a look at snipurl.com/7upgrade. This leads to a page on Microsoft's UK website explaining how, if you buy your new rig from participating vendors between now and 31 January 2010, you can get Windows 7 for around £13, including shipping and handling fees.*

The list of vendors involved in this promotion currently includes Acer, Gateway, Packard Bell, ASUS, Dell, HP, Samsung, Sony, Toshiba and Fujitsu, though as with any offer you'll need to read the small print: "The Windows 7 *Upgrade Option Program in your region requires a clean installation of the* Windows 7 *upgrade media. A clean installation will result in your computer's hard drive being wiped clean of any software and data previously stored on the hard drive prior to the installation of the upgrade media."*



Some manufacturers are providing a cheap upgrade to *Windows 7*.

"If you buy your new rig between now and 31 January 2010, you can get *Windows 7* for around £13"

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.7	22 July 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 190.38	21 July 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

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dear wandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw ✉

"Do you want a high-end netbook or low-end laptop? My advice is forget fashion and go with the latter"

If you really must buy a new machine today, it's good to know you can upgrade to 7 for next to nothing. However, the fact you'll need to install everything twice puts the mockers on it for me.

Q TEENY GAMING

I'm looking for a small laptop with a long battery life and bright screen to use for basic computing and playing old games. However, I've been warned that mini notebooks are no good for that, and since I'm not looking to spend more than a few hundred pounds I may be out of luck.

Will a mini notebook run the original *Red Alert*, *Dungeon Keeper* or *Unreal Tournament*? Titles such as *The Sims* or *The Movies*? At what point do you need to go from netbook to proper laptop?

Any general advice, or a nod in the direction of a good guide, would be enormously appreciated.

Paul Brunger

A *The games you've listed show that you understand your prospective netbook (subnotebook, mini notebook, call it what you want) isn't going to deliver the performance necessary to run a recent blockbuster.*

As a rule of thumb, if the game in question was released on or before 2000, you should be able to play it on a Windows*-based netbook smoothly. I've every confidence that your wish list will perform more than acceptably – though I'm not so sure about* The Movies*, a title barely three years old. No harm in trying though!*

My last snippet of advice would be to make sure you choose a netbook with Intel GMA onboard graphics (Dells, Samsungs, Toshibas, most ASUS products), as you can then download GMA Booster from gmabooster.com – though as with overclocking this will have a detrimental effect on your battery life. Read on to discover my favourite.

Q MINI SUB

I'm in the market for a netbook, and the overwhelming amount of new models and confusing names is getting to me. If you can point me in the right direction I'd be really grateful.

What I need is a netbook under £400 that packs some kind of punch in terms of processing ability. I've been trying to weigh up the Eee PC 1000HE and the Samsung N110. The 1008HA looks lovely too.

I'm going to need this for school in September. It needs to have a fairly decent battery life – 6+ hours – and in terms of power I'd like to be able to use basic applications like *Word* but also an IDE such as Dev-Pascal.

Maybe I'm being too unrealistic here. Should I wait until the NVIDIA ION-based netbooks are released? I don't care about screen size, screen type, amount of extras like Wi-Fi and USB ports or even thickness or weight, or even the hard drive.

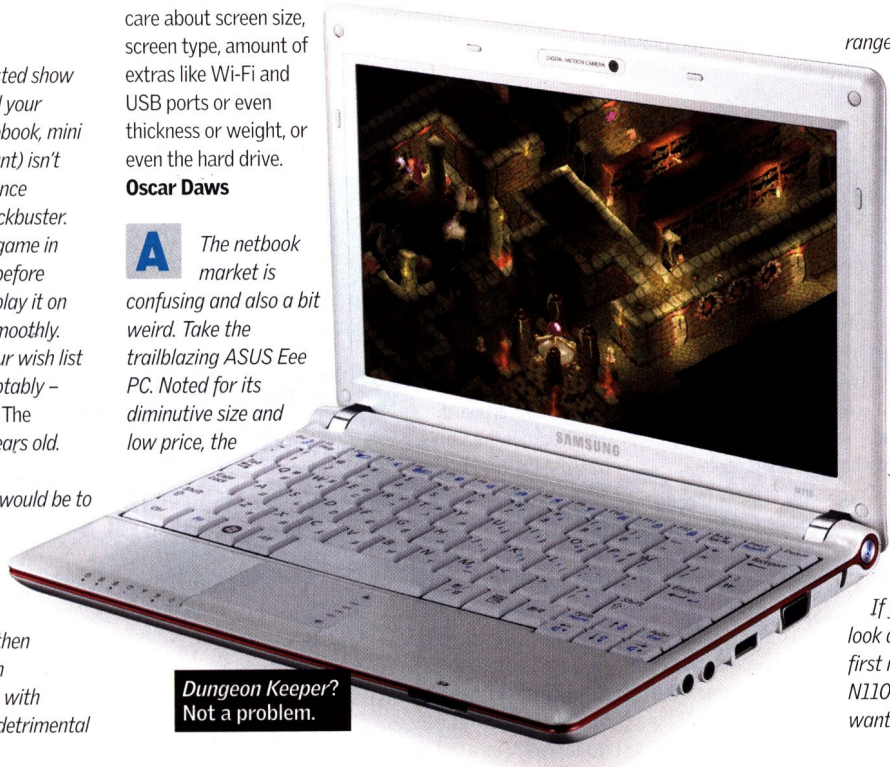
Oscar Daws

A *The netbook market is confusing and also a bit weird. Take the trailblazing ASUS Eee PC. Noted for its diminutive size and low price, the range has been expanded to include a 9in screen, 10in screen, and most recently an 11in screen on the 1101HA that has a price tag larger than Toshiba's Satellite Pro L300D-21U with 160GB HDD, 2GB RAM, 15.4in screen, DVD rewriter, Radeon 3100 and* Vista Home Premium.

So do you want a high-end netbook or low-end laptop? My advice for you is to forget fashion and go with the latter.

There's also every chance you'll end up installing one of the free versions of Visual Studio*, which is an horrific bloated whale of an application that'll surely bring any netbook to its knees – ION-based or otherwise.*

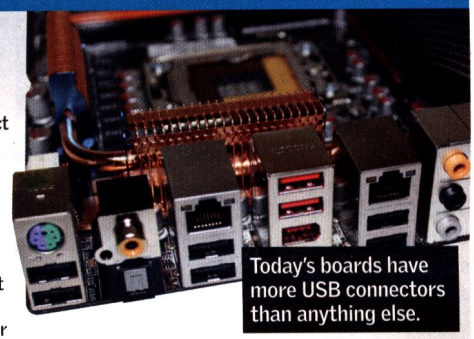
If you feel you must get a netbook, look at a Samsung. The NC10 was the first netbook to make sense, and the N110 gives you the battery life you want in your budget. PCZ



Dungeon Keeper? Not a problem.

ALL ABOUT...

19 USB



Today's boards have more USB connectors than anything else.

Not long ago you needed different cables to connect your scanner, printer, mobile phone or PDA, camera, keyboard and mouse to your PC. Today connections are made over USB. All you do is push in the cable and wait for the 'be-dink' sound.

When you push in your connector, the host controller on your PC takes over so there's no chance of a rogue USB device talking without your machine initiating the conversation. The device is asked to identify itself, and after a little chat is supplied with a unique address.

One of the great things about USB is that as well as being a truly universal means of bringing stuff together, it provides power to the device you're connecting. There's enough – roughly 2W – to drive external storage devices such as hard drives and optical drives without the need for an external 240V adapter.

USB 2.0 can send data in packet form at a rate of up to 480 megabits/sec. However USB 3.0 – due for release over the next few months – works at an astonishing 5.0 gigabits/sec.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(AdZ) I'm sure I saw somewhere that you can copy some files from the *Windows* folder and then use these in another *Windows* folder to carry over activation data? Is this possible? (Wandy) You need to run Safe Mode and copy over wpa.dbl and wpa.bak from Windows\System32. However, this won't work if the PC to which you copy these files has a different graphics card, SCSI card, motherboard, MAC address (ie another NIC), RAM, CPU, HDD or optical drive. It's actually more complicated than that, but in essence if you have the same motherboard, processor and RAM you should be OK. Otherwise you'll need to phone Microsoft. Having done this a dozen times I've yet to be refused.

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.

MESH SLAYER ELEMENTAL

PRICE £1,099 **MANUFACTURER** Mesh **WEBSITE** meshcomputers.com

THE MAIN INTEREST point of the Slayer Elemental is that it uses a solid-state hard drive (SSD) as a boot drive, and a regular HDD for general storage.

While the SSD cuts down boot times – *Vista* was usable within 25 seconds of hitting the power switch – 30GB means there isn't much room for anything other than OS files, plus a couple of apps and games regularly in use.

Other than the SSD, the Slayer is a standard, top-end AMD-based gaming PC. It's got the latest Phenom II x4 beating away under the now-ubiquitous CoolIT Domino liquid cooler, 4GB DDR3 RAM and a HD 4890. But there's little difference in performance between this machine and the AT-FX Dragon (reviewed issue 210), which costs under £650.

That said, the AM3 CPU and DDR3 RAM give a better upgrade path and that 750GB HDD provides storage that'll last.

It's also worth mentioning that Mesh is offering free upgrades to *Windows 7* on its machines.

The Slayer is very well put together too. The Elemental S chassis is stylish and the insides have been neatly tidied away.

The tough thing here though is the market. This month will see the arrival of Intel's P55-based motherboards and Core i5 CPUs, which could cut deep into the market for £1,000+ AMD systems. So, while this is a good machine now, you're best off waiting a few months before picking one up. ***DJ***

SPECIFICATION

CPU	3.3.2GHz Phenom II X4 955
GRAPHICS	ATI Radeon HD4890 1GB
RAM	4GB OCZ DDR3
STORAGE	30GB SSD, 750GB HDD
OS	Vista Home Premium

PCZONE 79
Too little, too late

CRYO NANO

PRICE £1,295 **MANUFACTURER** Cryo **WEBSITE** meshcomputers.com

INSIDE THE NANO'S compact cube case is a GeForce GTX275 graphics card, 6GB of RAM and 1TB of Raided storage. Cryo have done a decent job of getting some quality components into a relatively small case, and they've also made a stab at overclocking them a tad.

But overclocking's pointless without a decent cooler strapped to your CPU, and given Cryo's smaller form factor, this is especially crucial. Cryo have used a decent cooler to prevent the CPU's temperature getting to the point where the system throttles the processor. But the machine is more likely to have a shorter lifespan as a result.

Cryo's case is likely to divide as much as it conquers. It's sleek, but in spite of being half the height of a normal case, it's twice as wide. And, weirdly, the DVD drive is located on the right side of the case, so you'll have to allow room for disc entry.

But Cryo deserve some kudos for making use of MSI's compact X58M motherboard. This board is the same Micro-ATX form factor as ASUS' Rampage II Gene, which is too small to be useful. But this MSI board is a perfectly capable model and is eminently upgradeable.

Overclocking issues aside, Cryo have made a good job of stuffing a lot of quality into an unconventional case. The size may be an issue, but the Nano suits sitting in front of a TV as a slightly large media centre. ***HW***

"Cryo have made a good job of stuffing a lot of quality in an unconventional case"

SPECIFICATION

CPU	Intel Core i7 920
GRAPHICS	GeForce GTX275
RAM	OCZ 6GB DDR3
STORAGE	2x 500GB HDDs
OS	Windows Vista Premium (64bit)

PCZONE 84
Power cubed

ROCCAT APURI

PRICE £36.99 **MANUFACTURER** Roccat **WEBSITE** roccat.org

WHEN WE FIRST heard about the Apuri, we were puzzled as to how it achieved anything more than just using Sellotape or Blu-tac to fasten your mouse's cable to the desk. But when we took it out of its box and looked at it properly, we realised that it doubled as a four-port USB hub. This is the only real reason to buy the Apuri, as the lead holder is just a gimmick.

Only of use if you need more USB ports or you don't want tape down your mouse's lead. ***DB***

PCZONE 71

ROCCAT KONE

PRICE £60.99 **MANUFACTURER** Roccat **WEBSITE** roccat.org

OF THE TWO mice reviewed this month, the Kone has the most features and the most comprehensive set of options to fiddle about with.

Customisable buttons and macros are plentiful and different profiles can be assigned for specific games, while you can even change the lights if you so wish. A choice of weights can be added or subtracted, although getting the lighter ones to stay in properly is problematic. Most importantly, it just doesn't feel as good to use as the Saiph 3200. It's still a great mouse though. ***DB***

PCZONE 80

ROCCAT KAVE

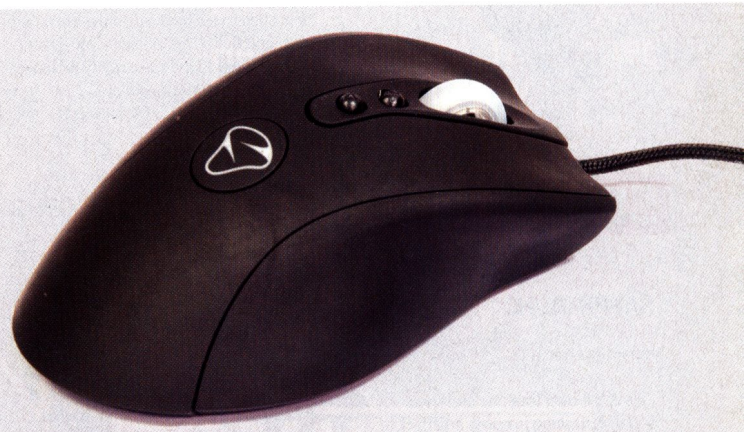
PRICE £79.99 **MANUFACTURER** Roccat **WEBSITE** roccat.org

ONE THING THAT can be said about the Kave is it's comfortable enough that it doesn't make your head hurt, so gains some definite plus points there.

When it comes to sound quality there could a bit more power to the bass, but, overall, it's good.

A handy volume control makes it easy to adjust things in-game and there's even a movie/game toggle to give you precise control over what type of sound is being blasted at your ears. ***DB***

PCZONE 85



MIONIX SAIPH 3200

PRICE £54.99 **MANUFACTURER** Mionix **WEBSITE** mionix.net

FOR GAMING MICE, precision and handling are key, perhaps with a few configurable buttons for obscenely complex macro combinations tacked on.

With a 3200dpi sensor and buttons for altering its sensitivity in-game, the Saiph covers the first of the two core needs of a gaming mouse. As for handling, other mice feel unwieldy in comparison to the Saiph. As for other bells and whistles, all the usual fancy gubbins (eg. weights and a gold USB plug) are present. This really is a top-notch device. ***DB***

PCZONE 87

Reviews by David Brown, Dave James and Henry Winchester

REMEMBER: VACUUM CLEANERS SHOULDN'T BE USED TO CLEAN PCs

Unless your PC is kept in an airtight clean room in which you enter through an airlock, wearing a full biohazard suit, dust will build up in it. If this happens do clear the crud out using a can of compressed air. Do not stick your Hoover into the machine's innards. That's just daft.

Hardware Buyer

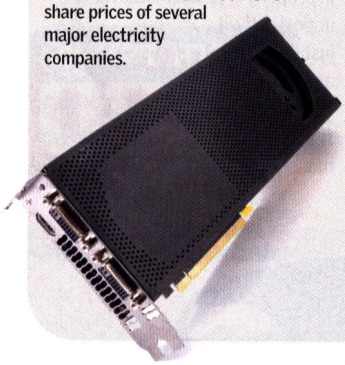
This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

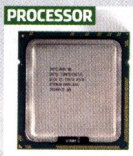
GRAPHICS

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

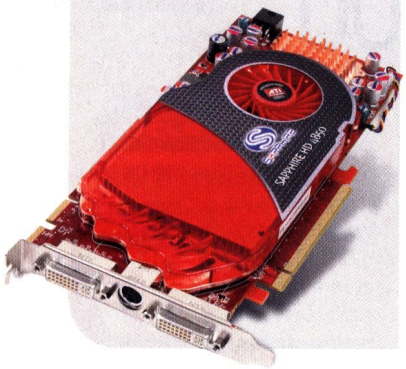
The price has dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

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 suprising 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.

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

39 PAGES OF REVIEWS AND PREVIEWS!

BIG NEW GAMES

Dragon Age: Origins, **Rage**, Mafia II, **Operation Flashpoint 2**, Aion, **Alpha Protocol,** more...

BEST REVIEWS

Wolfenstein, **Blood Bowl,** Battlefield Heroes, **Hearts of Iron III,** The Hunter, **East India Company,** Darkest of Days, **more...**

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Re-creating classic games

On sale 1st Sep

PCZONE Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

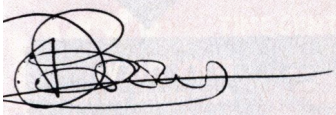
LIFE SENTENCE

I WAS ON jury service a little while ago and I was told by people from various sides of the fence that it would be both boring and interesting. I would say, after having gone through it, that it is more erring on the side of interesting, but then that might be because I didn't get a case involving goat molestation or equities fraud.

It did get me thinking though – why are there not more games based on legal proceedings or just police investigation in general. If you look at how other media sources have approached these subjects, it's interesting to then note how reprehensible the gaming industry has been in doing so.

From the top of my head you've got *Police Quest*, that console lawyer one with the strange hair (*Phoenix Wright*, I believe – Ed) and some crappy *Law & Order* hidden object-y games. There's stuff like *SWAT* and such too, but they aren't really what I'm talking about. Yes, it involves police work, but not on the theoretical side. What also got me thinking was how few gumshoe detective games there, specifically after I had a look at the Tex Murphy games in this month's Budget reviews (page 78). *Discworld Noir* was likewise great, but we fans of police procedure just get stiffed otherwise.

Maybe the continuing rebirth of the adventure genre will help to propel these genres into the spotlight, but I suspect not. It does seem strange (and yes, I realise I haven't said anything about free games yet) that such a large part of our media culture is ignored by game makers.



David Brown
Staff writer

SKINNED ALIVE

Get *Photoshop* ready, it's *Street Fighter* skinning time

WEBSITE streetfighter.com

IN SOME WAYS it's utterly unsurprising that this has happened. Among the deluge of quality skins for *Street Fighter IV* now created by the modding crowd came the obligatory "Let's see what Chun-Li's privates would look like" nude skins.

Today there are a number of forums dedicated to the digital disrobing of all our favourite female game characters. If God existed/cared/was watching over us all (delete as religiously applicable) he would surely be weeping salty tears down his ethereal visage, perhaps those same tears falling to Earth and drowning the wicked with their briny bounty. But, the fact of the matter is, there are nudey skins out there and far be it from us to comment on your foul, sick, depraved and despicable lust for these cartoon images.

Peace be damned, it's fireballing time.

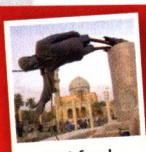
At least he had a nice view when he lost.

Hulkamania!

Anyway, like the bastions of virtue that we are, we'll focus on the skins that don't show improbably-thighed females in the nip. There are some real crackers out there, ladies and gentlemen, it has to be said. Somebody came up with the excellent idea of turning stretchy limb man Dhalsim into Gandhi, while another thought Blanka made a good Lion-O from *Thundercats*. Elsewhere, we have Zangief doing his best Hollywood Hogan impression and El Fuerte being less annoying than before in a colourful *Spider-Man* costume. The possibilities are nigh-on limitless, given the variety of character models available to tweak. I might be overselling it a little, but there's no reason even more inventive ones couldn't continue to pour forth. Some characters, like E Honda, have barely been explored yet, given the natural inclination to go for the attractive females instead of the obese sumo guy.

The only real problem is how to get access to them. Installing skins isn't difficult. The trouble lies in viewing the skins in-game, because you'll need to have unlocked/be able to see more than just the default two colour schemes available for the specific character, unless the custom skin happens to be numbered 1 or 2. It's a shame, but I guess it'll keep you playing long enough to unlock Cammy's costumes. Don't tell me that's not what you were thinking, I know you better than that. After all, it's what I'm doing... oops, said too much.

PCZONE FREE-O-METER

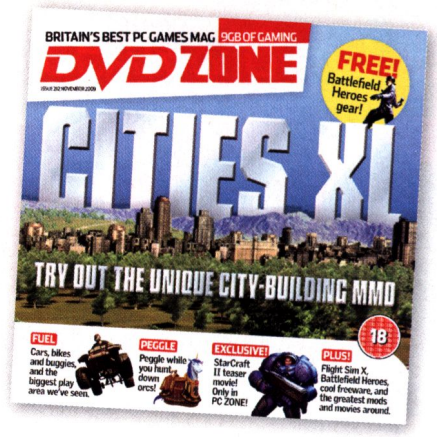

Not free!

0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

Free!

441 HOURS*



Demos

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Take a tour this issue's DVD with *Adam Glick*

FUEL

You take the high road, I'll take the dirt track

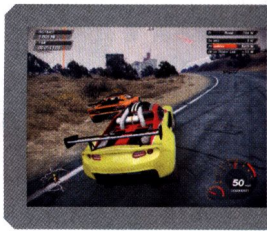
WEBSITE fuel-game.com

THE BIG SELLING point of *FUEL* is that it had a map the size of Wales (almost). The problem was that there just wasn't much to do in most of it, apart from marvel at the lovely scenery (it really is very lovely).

There was also a question of the AI being virtually unbeatable once your opponents left your field of vision, because the game wouldn't let them crash, just putting them on a steady speed with no mistakes possible. Which isn't much fun if you happen to make an error yourself and see them speeding off into the distance.

But our DVD's Demos section is all about allowing you, the reader, to prove or disprove our wisdom-filled words by trying the game out for yourself. Perhaps you'll think the world is thriving, filled with life and interesting things to do, or perhaps you'll not find the slightly wonky physics and suspect AI a problem. Only installing this demo will prove us right or wrong, one way or the other.

DROP IN
At the beginning of a race, you'll get dropped onto the starting line by a friendly helicopter, which also allows you to fast-travel all over the place.



REV UP
After that, you just get racing. Simple as that. Make sure the AI doesn't get too far away or you'll never be able to catch them, unless you find a devious shortcut.

FLICK THE Vs
Alternatively, you could ditch four wheels and get on a motorbike or even a quad bike for some Ozzy Osbourne action. This allows you to gesture rudely as well.

BIG BERTHA
Or you could stick with four wheels. Big mother wheels, like on this monster truck. Slow but able to crush its foes with ease. Reminds us of our mothers, actually.

FUEL IS BURNING ENGINES

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 *PC ZONE* 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.

TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND – EPISODE 1

What exactly is a narwhal?

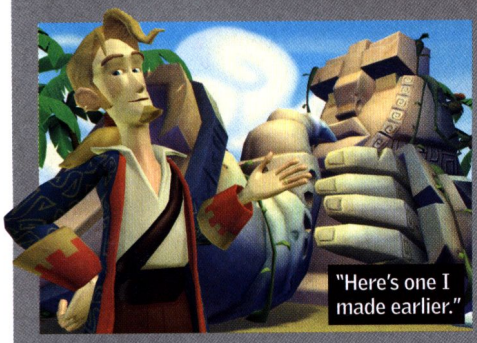
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/monkeyisland

GUYBRUSH IS BACK with us once again in *Launch of the Screaming Narwhal*, ready to cause calamities and foul the dastardly plans of various cutthroats and voodoo-soaked vermin.

After a magic root beer-related disaster, he finds himself washed up on the island of Flotsam, a place where no ship can ever escape from, due to inward-blowing winds. His task is simply to get off the island.

As he does perhaps he'll come across new friends, enemies and maybe even an old acquaintance who seems to pop up in every single game at some point.

More of a prelude to the rest of the series than anything else, but definitely worth playing.



A BIT OF JETSAM

DEEP GUT
A whistleblower who keeps the island's press tapped into breaking pirate-based news.

MARQUIS DE SINGE
A deranged French doctor banished from the King's court, who has a secret.

CITIES XL

Making the world a better place

WEBSITE citiesxl.com

POTENTIALLY THE MOST exciting development in the city building genre since *Sim City 2000*, *Cities XL* will offer you anything your build-'em-up game-obsessed brain could imagine.

Build your city on a world populated by hundreds of other ventures, share resources with other players to create famous buildings, and get game extension modules (GEMS) to expand your city.

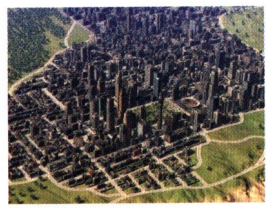
Only 10% of the final game is represented here, but you can still make a 20,000 citizen city. So long as you do it before the end of September (darn these time-limited demos).

1. MAINLAND
The central hub of your city, where you'll be building most of your stuff.

2. ISLAND
Perfect for building the more obscure or gigantic buildings that might clutter up your main block.

3. BEACH
In the full game, GEMS can build holiday resorts on polluted yet pebbly beaches.

CITY SLICKERS



THE BRICKS
There'll be loads more options in the full game, but that doesn't mean you can't create a wonderland of urban greatness.

THE STICKS
It's not all concrete jungles. Your people need food and what better way to get it than building farms.

HOT DOWNLOADS

PCZONE

TIME GENTLEMEN, PLEASE! DEMO

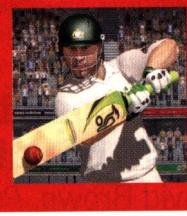
snipurl.com/tgpdemo

We loved it immensely, so you should love it too, but if you haven't loved it, perhaps you can get to love it with this lovable demo that we though was extremely lovely.

ASHES CRICKET 2009 DEMO

snipurl.com/ashes09demo

Get that bat in your hand and give those Aussie balls a good walloping. That's your task in this demo of Codemasters' new leather-and-willow simulator that doesn't have Brian Lara on the cover.



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...

PEGGLE WORLD OF WARCRAFT
popcap.com/promos/pegglewow
PopCap and Blizzard join forces to bring you some tasty Peggle maps with *World of Warcraft* themes.

BATTLEFIELD HEROES
battlefieldheroes.com
Fancy playing this free online shooter but can't be bothered to waste your download limit on it? Fret ye no more!

FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
microsoft.com/games/pc/flightsimulatorx
X is the last *Flight Simulator*, but that doesn't mean it should be consigned to the dustbin of history. Use this demo to enjoy some flying goodness.

NEOTOKYO
neotokyohq.com
Taking the *Half-Life 2* mod shooter template and moving it into the world of futuristic Japanese fighting, *Neotokyo* could become the next *Counter-Strike*.

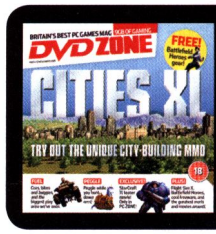
DRESS TO KILL

Pants and boots aren't the only new things in *Battlefield Heroes* Thor's Turbojet outfit – eight **EXCLUSIVE** and **PERMANENT** items

ISN'T IT LOVELY when something comes together, be it a good plan or even, pulling something from the top of our heads here, a Thor's Turbojet outfit available only in *PC ZONE* magazine? Yes, we think it's lovely, so if you don't, tough.

This month we've got the third segment of our *Battlefield Heroes* giveaway available, in key form, on the cover disc we really hope you didn't sling in the bin the second you tore open the packaging with your teeth.

This time out there's the jacket and holster to attach to your semi-naked bloke putting him pretty close to the finished article, barring a sado-masochistic gimp mask and a phallic, red-tipped rocket pack.



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

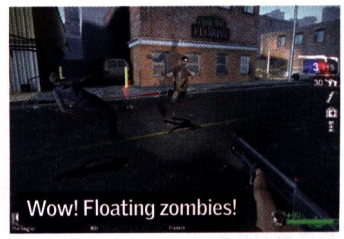
BUT WHAT IF I MISS AN ISSUE?

Just go online visit myfavouritemagazines.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.

To be honest, if you aren't already hurtling out your front door in a frenzy in order to put yourself first in the rapidly forming queue at your local magazine emporium, well, I'm ashamed for you. You could just subscribe, of course, saving you the potential legal problems arising from beating old ladies round the face with a rusted piece of pipe to secure your place in the newsagent's line.

"The good things to be found here could be said to be plentiful"
David Brown, *PC ZONE* 208

A typical night out in South London.


Wow! Floating zombies!

Not Japan's best side.

LEFT 4 DEAD GETS MAPPED

Let *David Brown* find the infected wheat from the chaff

WEBSITE l4dmaps.com, l4dmods.com

WHAT'S STRUCK ME after playing user-made *Left 4 Dead* maps is that creating a really bad one requires sod all effort. Especially the cheap Survival ones.

It isn't that the majority of maps are bad, it just takes more than rearranging the original textures a bit to impress us now. This is why Dead City (issue 211, snipurl.com/deadcity) isn't one of the greatest as, while it's huge and well-designed, it doesn't go far from the original *L4D*.

Death Aboard (issue 211, snipurl.com/deathaboard) does that and is rightly hailed as being the best *L4D* map the community has to offer. Long maps, interesting new environments and an excellent finale all combine perfectly together. You can play a nigh-on flawless game of Versus too, with a surprising number of servers ready to accommodate you. There is, however, a new challenger to Death Aboard's title.

SURVIVE THIS

Heaven Can Wait (snipurl.com/heavencanwait) is being described as the hardest thing to have been thrown at veteran players since *L4D*'s release. Made by a renowned mapper called Romka it's rock hard, full of imaginative locations and horde events – like when the vehicles drive past the motel and the Infected rush you because of the noise – and offers up massive levels that'll test any player running the game on Expert.

This campaign doesn't have enough in the way of genuinely new locations though, so it might not have the edge on the excellent Death Aboard. But that's really down to the player's tastes.

"Death Aboard is hailed as being the best the community has to offer"

Then there are the Survival maps, which, because of the ease with which they can be created, form the bulk of the user content released so far. The quality does dip substantially, because there's far less effort required to make a tiny map with a small hut in it than there is to sculpt a five-act campaign, but there are still some gems.

Helm's Deep (snipurl.com/helmsdeep) is based on Tolkien's Helm's Deep, and is perhaps the greatest Survival map of them all. This is despite it having an exploit that makes it almost impossible to lose. This map is being tweaked continually, so this flaw might be fixed once you read this.

Elsewhere we've got Central Dark (snipurl.com/centraldark), which is vast in Survival map terms: it offers an *L4D*-ised version of New York's famous park, just with less dead bodies.

For the fan of simpler map design, there's Tower (snipurl.com/ld4tower), which is just a wooden ziggurat with Infected at the bottom and you at the top. Simple yet effective, just like Who's Laughing Now? (snipurl.com/whoslaughingnow). Essentially, this is the cabin from *Evil Dead* into a Survival map. Excellent and fun, but absolutely bullock hard.

COMING SOON

As for the future, there are definitely a few custom maps that are standing out from the shuffling undead crowd.

Some are just unfinished campaigns showing great promise, some are Survival maps in a beta form. So, honourable shout-outs go to the likes of Wolfenstein (snipurl.com/ld4wolfenstein), Detour Ahead (snipurl.com/detourahead), Resident Evil: Last Escape (snipurl.com/lastescape) and, last but not least, Yama (snipurl.com/l4dyama), which takes *Left 4 Dead* to Japan, into daytime, and places we've never been before. Keep an eye on it, it could be big. PCZ

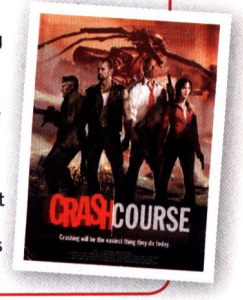
GOING DOWN...

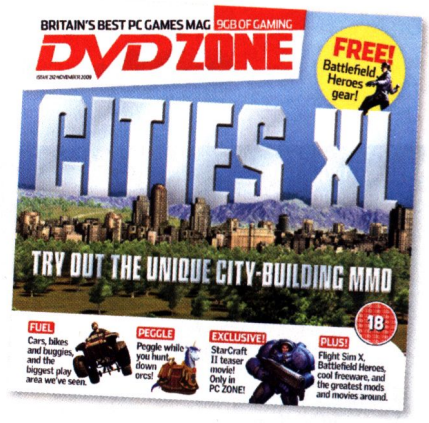
Valve takes a crash

Finally there's going to be a new (mini) campaign for *Left 4 Dead* from Valve.

Crash Course is going to attempt to bridge the gap between the end of No Mercy, where you're whisked off the top of Mercy Hospital in a chopper, and the beginning of Death Toll, where you're distinctly chopperless. It's only going to be two maps long and Valve say it's going to focus on streamlining the Versus experience.

We somewhat underwhelmed by this offering, thanks to the great stuff we've seen coming from *LD4*'s community.





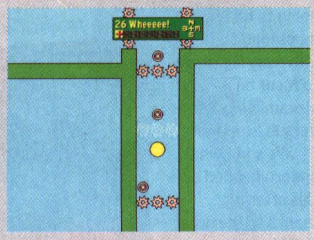
Freeware

Marco Fiori begs for free games in the street

PCZONE ON THE DVD

This month we go retro with a free re-release of one of the finest RPGs ever made; help a blob stop cutting itself on razors; get funky in a disco-themed shooter; blast the scenery to pieces with a big laser; and see the love child of Mario and one of the founders of the FPS genre.

GLICK'S PICK



INNOQUOUS 3

DEVELOPER Andrew McCluskey
WEBSITE innoquous3.orgfree.com

I'VE MANAGED TO pop a vein. Don't blame me, blame *Innoquous 3*. Having never played the first two, and desperately trawling the web to find some sort of enjoyable freeware experience, I came across this gem. It may frustrate you to the point of nervous breakdown, but getting through this title's 30 levels provides a sense of satisfaction not experienced since I completed a vile Chinese Mario knock-off (search for it on Google if you dare).

You guide a yellow blob around levels that are continually playing with your sense of what's up and what's down. Avoid the razors (which cause instant death) and make your way to the end. It starts off simple, but McCluskey quickly ramps up the difficulty. I can see him, cackling away in his programming dungeon, as I fail a level for the 15th time. You'll need to jump with millimetre precision otherwise it's a restart.

Available as a download, or playable online as a Flash game, *Innoquous 3* comes fully recommended. Unless you have a heart condition. Or perhaps an aversion to frustration of the most buttock-slappingly annoying kind.

THE ELDER SCROLLS II: DAGGERFALL

Head back to where it (almost) all began

DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks **WEBSITE** elderscrolls.com

HAPPY 15TH BIRTHDAY ***Elder Scrolls*! Before Bethesda were making post-apocalyptic RPGs, they were prancing about as elves with phallic greatswords. It seems they're keen not to forget their roots, which, to the delight of recession-clad gamers everywhere, has resulted in the release of the second *Elder Scrolls* game – *Daggerfall* – for free.**

Comparing *Daggerfall* to the other indie games this month is a bit cheeky, because this was a game developed by a huge studio (well, they're huge now) and you can't avoid the fact that it's previously had a price tag. But it's free now. Let's repeat that over and over until it hits home.

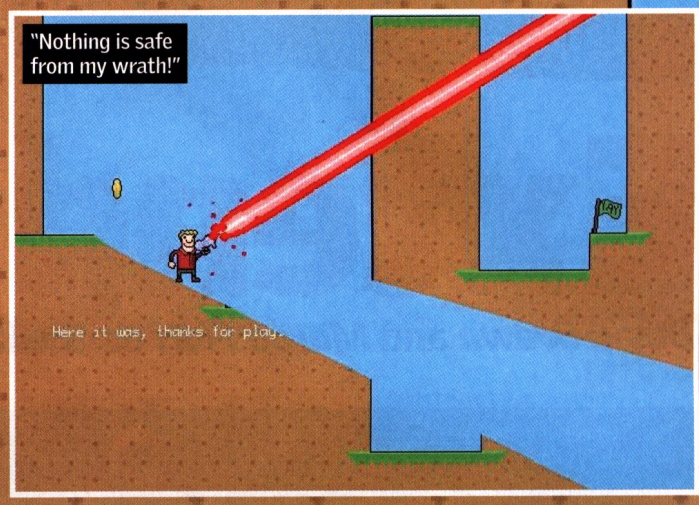
There are plenty of options available to the 'classics' for reaching new audiences, like *Steam*, Good Old Games, Impulse, etc. but Bethesda have rewarded us with one of the best RPGs out there. For free.

The *Elder Scrolls* formula hasn't changed over 13 years – you still create a character, pick their class and set off in search of treasure. It's difficult to present *Daggerfall* as anything unique, as it plays out like a history lesson rather than an actual game. Then again, did we happen to mention that it's free? Oh, we did, right, sorry.

Everything is instantly familiar, from the MIDI soundtrack to the old-school blocky graphics. You'll quickly forget about the high-definition era. Massive, open ended, engaging, engrossing – take your pick. Multiple endings, a life-stealing amount of gameplay and enough NPCs to run a country, *Daggerfall*'s scope is unfathomable – it really is a gigantic game. It's as engaging as it was on release and it's lovely to be able to revisit a classic.

You'll notice the issues that plague the game (unfinishable quests, texture issues, game breaking bugs) but overlook all that and you'll be compensated with one of the best RPGs of all time. It's not asking to be compared to today's greats, so if you refrain from doing so, you'll be well on your way to enjoying it.

If you've never had the chance to play it then you've got no excuse now. And anyone who's visited *Daggerfall* before will instantaneously remember what made it so good in the first place. And it's free. And on this month's DVD.

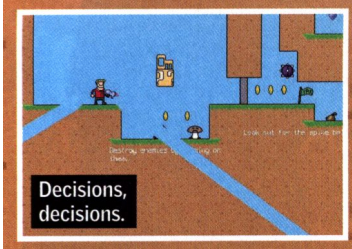


G*E*N*E*R*I*C

Careful where you point that thing

DEVELOPER Arvi Teikari **WEBSITE** hempuli.com/gener

IF YOU HATE tutorial messages, this game is for you. In fact, if there's anything in *G*E*N*E*R*I*C* that you loathe, you can shoot it with your pistol. Saying that, calling your gun a "pistol" is an understatement, as it's akin to holding the Death Star's primary weapon.



Your task is to pick up as much treasure as possible and reach the flag at the end of the level. That's not to say *G*E*N*E*R*I*C*'s a clone of a famous Italian plumber – Mario never had this boomstick.

Ingeniously programmed in Flash (but not playable online) this isn't one for the trigger-happy. Shooting off a round will yield a destructive energy beam that wipes out anything in its path. Getting to the treasure often requires you to destroy your surroundings, as the goodies lie beneath the earth or just out of your jump range. It's not just a case of mindlessly clearing a path: your beam isn't adjustable so *G*E*N*E*R*I*C* is less about platforming and more about planning out a safe route.

You see, if you catch the treasure with your beam, it becomes worthless. It's easily done and results in your quota being unfulfilled, preventing you from finishing the level. The same applies if you nick the finish flag – it becomes static, taunting you with its unobtainable presence. But never fear, your frustration is easily released by wiping the whole of the level clean with your beam of delight, including the scoreboard. Certainly, it's an interesting idea, but is it really just a waste of time? Perhaps, but it's a good waste of time while it lasts.

FROBOT

Get up, get on up!

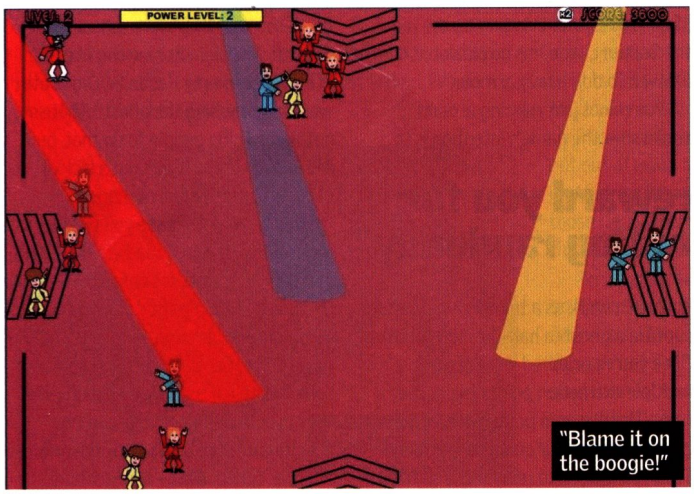
DEVELOPER Kyle Gray **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/frobot

IF JAMES BROWN was a robot, this would be his game. You control the afro-toting Frobot who's spreading his funky message in a mobster-infested disco. In gameplay terms, that translates to killing stereotypical burly men in period suits who either want to hug you to death or pepper you with bullets.

Thankfully, following their demise, they promptly become an extra from *Saturday Night Fever*, frozen in their respective dance pose. Clear the level of enemies – while simultaneously avoiding shooting your funky companions – and you'll be treated to a miniature celebratory dance: lights, music and even cutesy animations. Simultaneously, the game's quaint charm (yes, funky discos are officially "quaint") makes it increasingly difficult for you to avoid the urge to join in with the dancing.

With your inner Travolta grooving away, you work your way through an infinite amount of levels. The enemy density quickly increases and it's not long before you're back at level one.

Despite *Frobot*'s lack of any real content, it's a welcome hark back to the golden age of gaming. It's what indie games are all about. Be sure to head on over to experimentalgameplay.com where Kyle Gray, *Frobot*'s creator, has teamed up with *World of Goo* man, Kyle Gabler to showcase their new creations (hopefully one will be *Planet of Slimy Funksters)*. Anyway, strut your stuff *Frobot* – I demand entertainment!



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

FLASH DOOM 2D

DEVELOPER Codinsoft
WEBSITE silvergames.com/game/flash-doom-2d

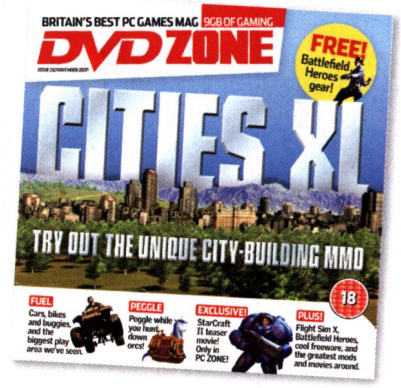
NOT TO BE mistaken with the equally impressive *Flash Doom* (the original ported to your browser), *Flash Doom 2D* is the perfect webgame for a lunch break. It takes everything cool about *Doom* – the guns, demons and textures – and squeeze it all into a platformer.

The only changes are that you play slightly differently, (eg avoiding an imp's fireballs by jumping over them rather than strafing).

Trivialities aside, this is the same game that catapulted the FPS genre into controversy and fame.

Extend

PCZONE ON THE DVD



***David Brown* and *Marco Fiori* on the latest mods**

NEOTOKYO

Sadly, nothing to do with *Akira*

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 **WEBSITE** neotokyohq.com

NOW I REMEMBER why I stopped playing *Counter-Strike*: it was causing me to suffer from severe, crippling fits of rage. It's easy to see similarities in *NeoTokyo* as one minute you'll be happily navigating a level and then, suddenly, you'll be dead.

There's no warning – your health just drops to zero. A few moments later, the reason behind your demise is made clear: your opponent de-cloaks and runs off down the corridor. A silent kill, followed by a hasty retreat. This mod doesn't reward you for running around, shooting randomly at anything moving.

Think tactically in *NeoToyko*, and you will, slowly and surely, begin to rack up some kills. Promotions come swiftly, and it's not long before you're creeping up on new players, and assassinating them. Quick, decisive combat is what drives *NeoTokyo*.

Don't let the comparison put you off, though – *NeoTokyo* isn't just *Counter-Strike* with some invisibility. Set 40 years in the future, Toyko looks much the same as now. (One level takes place in a Japanese garden with traditional pagodas alongside near-future tech.)

You get three classes to choose from: the Recon has light weapons, a long-lasting cloak and the ability to zip around the map; the Assault is the jack-of-all-trades; and bringing up the rear is the Support, who has no cloak but is allowed to don heavy armour.

You're not just running around aimlessly – the game's intention is to make you work as a team in an effort to capture a ghost (a half-finished robot). Once you've grabbed it there are multiple extraction points to choose from. The player in possession of the ghost can see their enemies' positions. They really need to relay these to their teammates, as the opposing team can see you – and they will come for you.

"This mod doesn't reward you for running around, shooting randomly"

Much like in *Ghost in the Shell* – *NeoToyko*'s main influence – in this future the Japan National Security Forces' Group Six (the result of crossbreeding hi-tech SAS-types and the police) are in a constant battle against terrorists (the Jinrai).

As usual, expect to be in the midst of lots of try-hards, spouting ultra-serious nonsense as if they were actually in a combat situation. Something like: "There's an enemy Recon 800m south-west approaching the ghost." There's nothing forcing people to do that, but the quality of the mod (and a lack of other interests in life, perhaps?)

NeoToyko does make you work together with your squad, admittedly, and choose your shots carefully, as you'll be punished for wasting your cloak or going off on your own.

With proper patching to resolve some technical issues we encountered, there's no reason why this can't be a legitimate substitution for the original *Counter-Strike*. ***MF***

These guys are no longer easy to kill.

FULL COMBAT REBALANCE

David's *Witcher* mod of the month

MOD FOR The Witcher **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/combatrebalance

THIS CLAIMS TO be the biggest mod released for *The Witcher* so far and, even after just a quick glance at the custom install options, you couldn't really argue. Various smaller mods have been included – included Flash's *The Witcher Mod* (issue 209). Other additions include a werewolf fur quest, visible wounds, a poker mod, item stacking and some cosmetic additions. It also gives you the option of disabling the intro and logo movies.

Of course, the bulk of the package is devoted to rebalancing the combat and attempting to make it more difficult and/or tactical. Like many similar mods, how successful this is comes almost completely down to how you feel about the additions. Personally, we were accepting of the original combat system, but that doesn't mean we wouldn't have taken something a bit more tactical in its stead.

Don't forget to back up your copy of *The Witcher* before installing this, as if you don't like the new combat, you'll find yourself with a buggered version of a great game. ***DB***

COTTAGE OF DOOM

The Bungalow of Horrors

MAP FOR Left 4 Dead **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/cottage-of-doom

SURVIVAL MAPS FOR *Left 4 Dead* are coming out at a rate of knots, it seems, but the thing that makes *Cottage of Doom* stand out from the crowd is that it tries to do something different.

Yes, you've got the traditional *Evil Dead*-style hut-in-the-middle-of-nowhere settings, plus a comical spawn bug where you all end up starting the level stuck in a door, but you've also got a *World at War*-esque defence mechanic, where you nail wood over windows, push furniture in front of other windows and rebuild doors as they break.

All you need to do is break wooden objects to maintain your wood supply and avoid the thousands of Infected running at you and you're onto a winner. ***DB***

Our house, is a very, very infected house.

COMMANDERS OF WAR II

You can never have too much authenticity

CAMPAIGN FOR Men of War **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/commanders-of-war-ii

AS IF *MEN* *of War* wasn't in-depth or hardcore enough, people have (as usual) seen fit to pilot it much further down realism road.

All sorts of new gun, vehicle and uniform models and skins have been included, so surely even the most ardent World War II fetishist should be satisfied.

"You two go first. We'll follow, honest."

The main focus is on said unit additions, but that doesn't mean that no gameplay changes have been made. More control over resource and command point allocations has been granted, though the mod makers urge players not to fight battles with over 2,500 points for frame rate and playability reasons.

Players who don't like the use of rockets in the game can opt out of using them, plus players who prefer light infantry combat can also choose to focus solely on that, with none of those nasty, mean metal buckets trundling along and ruining the man-on-man action.

As far as exhaustively comprehensive unit add-on packs go, *Commanders of War II* is up there with the most ridiculous. If you can tell the difference between a Jagdpanzer IV/70 (A) and a Jagdpanzer IV/70 (V) then this one is almost certainly right up your proverbial alley. We expect this mod to be improved upon in the future too, with more gameplay and fundamental design changes probably in the pipeline. ***DB***

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid

HUNT OSAMA

MOD FOR Morrowind
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/hunt-osama-mod

Oh ho ho, how we did chuckle! You see, Osama bin Laden, right, he's been 'seen' in the game *Morrowind*, yeah? And, get this, you can try to kill him! He's even holding, like, a big gun. Those witty modders, eh? Always right on the cutting edge with their political satire.

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

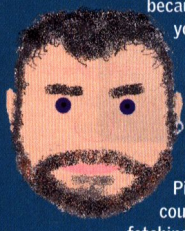
COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

A change of pace this month, with our regular *Team Fortress 2* slugfest being replaced by a *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* slugfest. It was less cartoony but no less fun, and much fun was had by all. Except for the person accused of cheating. Elsewhere, the *PC ZONE* Twitter feed – @pczone – was unusually active, with John McEnroe being the surprise guest star. And yes, we are definitely being serious.

tw@tter

Tennis inspired tweets

THE MAIN TOPIC of conversation (if that's what you can call Twitter interaction) was a comp to win the less-than-awesome *Virtua Tennis 2009*. A number of you bothered to enter, the challenge being to draw an *MS Paint* version of everyone's favourite headband-sporting wooden racket maniac John McEnroe. Some of the entries were interesting, some were disturbing, and some were extremely tedious. But we loved each and every one, because they came from you, our lovely readers.

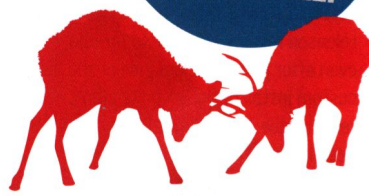


The winner was one @rclarke, whose effort (top) was clearly inspired by the works of the cubist greats like Picasso and Braque, coupled with a rather fetching turn of internet phrase which mangled McEnroe's famous "You cannot be serious" rant into "Am not be serias!" Very witty, I'm sure you'll agree.

An honourable mention goes to @Halrick (above). FYI @Halrick, McEnroe doesn't look like a cross between a white Mr T and Will Riker out of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

FIGHT CLUB

Heeding the call of duty isn't easy



FORGIVE US, OH *ZONE* gamers all, for not knowing how to properly configure a *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* server for your needs. Specifically, this meant putting it on team deathmatch and setting a round timer that allowed for more than two minutes of play. It took a little while and more than a few restarts, but we got there in the end. With pretty excellent results, we have to say.

While erstwhile deputy editor Steve Hogarty was there in spirit, he was actually represented by *COD4* veteran Sam Smith, our work experience man of the month. While rusty, he definitely boosted *PCZ*'s usual performance.

After a quick practice bout on Backlot, the real action began on the much-maligned Bloc, which produced the most intense and exciting fighting of the entire evening. To say things went to the wire would be an understatement, as one kill literally became the difference between winning and losing.

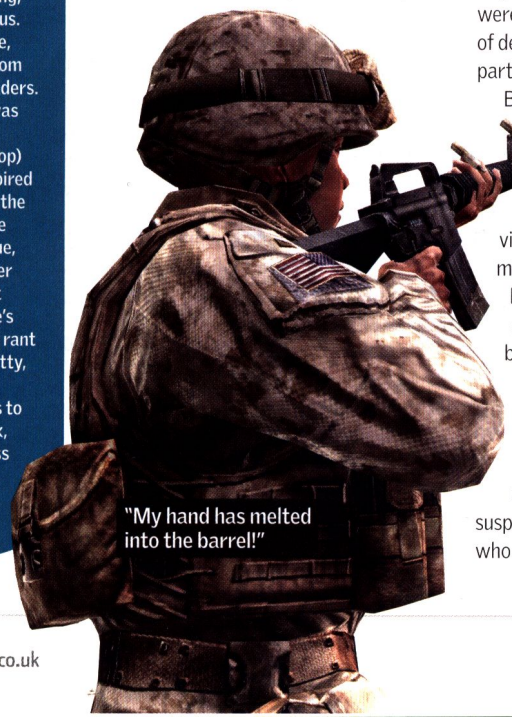
Effectively a draw, the round ended when David's fortuitous run of straight kills allowed him to spawn a helicopter (for the first and last time in the game) which brought the solitary kill required to grant victory to his side. Huzzahs were uttered, but it was mostly a case of declaring the 'awesomeness' of that particular round.

"One kill became the difference between winning and losing"

Bog was next and it was a bitty affair. The Steve/Sam hybrid did superbly in a losing effort, with the OpFor team rightly picking up the victory with some inspired (some might say) usage of aerial bombardment and bastard-shooting-through-walls-ery. After a bit of swampy action, the action switched to the more sedate street fighting of Chinatown (officially called mp_carentan, confusingly). This bout requires mention only because of the suspiciously good play of one player, who shall remain nameless (mainly because we've forgotten what his name was). Other than that, it was a confusing mess of a round that we'll gloss over.

The players regrouped for one last attempt to break each other on Wet Work (mp_cargoship) which was a very one-sided, but surprisingly enjoyable, romp over rain-slickened metal flooring and the type of grenade spam reserved for Demomen in *Team Fortress 2* fight clubs. Nevertheless, this match was a fitting ending to a night of wonder, gruesome disfigurement and severe internal haemorrhaging.

Perhaps the only real blemish on the evening – other than the suspected cheating – was the fact we forgot to take a group photo this month. After the last few attempts though, perhaps it was a blessing in disguise, as it would, undoubtedly, have been nightmarish to organise. Ah well, until next month, dear reader.


"My hand has melted into the barrel!"

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Is John Carmack a big old traitor for saying *Rage* is made for consoles?

BRAX: Seriously, what the hell has Carmack been taking? As has recently been demonstrated, any notion of PC gaming dying is bollocks, given the massive rise in digital distribution sales. Leaving aside this fact, he's a PC developer. He has a long history of PC games, and a massive PC following; that means even if the game is crud, he'd still get a load of sales from crazed fans who would buy his still-warm crap if they could.

Why do such once-respected developers come out with such bollocks? I mean, it's bad enough that everyone is going cross-platform and pissing in the gaming gene-pool.

DR DARK: Yeah, it's getting worse. I don't like the way things are going.

JOWOO: All these turncoat developers moan about lack of sales on PC exclusive games, but have any of them released a PC exclusive recently?

Crysis, despite only being playable on PCs that would melt your carpet, sold a million copies worldwide. *The Witcher*, despite being an unknown franchise by an unknown developer, sold a million copies worldwide.

ALBERTHAMMOND: Given id have just been bought out it just sounds like Carmack's having to suck on his new bosses todger.

JONNY_P66: What is this nonsense? John Carmack can do no wrong for he is the sexual beast of computer games. All his words are golden and the light it shineth out of his bum. Peace be to him and all those who walk with him. Amen.

LICKYBOOMBOOM: Blimey, Jonny's a fundamentalist.

Is id founder John Carmack evil now?

Your typical console user.

ZONE CHAT

Sailboats, cocks, and tech talk

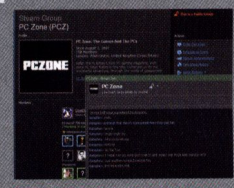
Mmm, 64 slices of American cheese.

THIS MONTH'S ZONE

Chat saw Steve meekly popping his head into the bouncy castle of laughs, that cosy cocoon of altruism and love, that paragon of democracy and philosophy, that metropolis of considered and polite exchange of thoughts and ideas that is our Steam group's shared internet talk-space. In the time it took him to inhale the lung-full of air he uses to bellow an announcement his arrival, Steve was cut off by a man talking about his cock in capital letters. The discussion quickly moved on to PCs, PC specs, PC components and PC building. As if the two subjects were somehow implicitly intertwined.

Desperate for attention, Steve wackily announced that he would like to ride his empty PC case as a sort of boat or dinghy. This did the trick, and soon all talk was centred around the possibility of doing such a thing. Some form of inner lining would be required, many noted, but even the largest of PC cases couldn't support the weight of an adult male. Ideally, one would use one or two outriggers, in the form of those teensy shuttle PCs you can get, for stability and ballast.

His obligation to contribute to the magazine's monthly chat-off met, Steve once more rescinded his presence, returning cruciform to the shadows and howling in despair. He then ate slices of cheese under his duvet while sobbing quietly.



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 gone pearl-diving in the briny deep of the Caribbean – then feel free to join other *PC ZONE* readers on the following public servers.

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

Retro zone

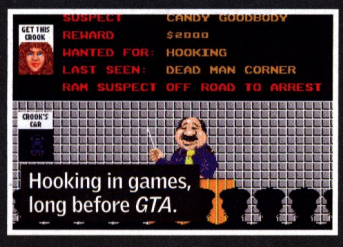
Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

APB

THIS HAS NOTHING to do with the new APB MMO, which is a game about putting tattoos on people until they commit a crime. Instead, the old APB (whose graphics were developed by Walking Circles, who would go on to make the amazing *Skull & Crossbones* on the C64) is a simulation of a cop's average, corruption-filled day.

Starting at the police station, you control a squad car primed to explode at the merest suggestion of contact with another vehicle or stationary object or particularly hard bit of air. Arrest petty criminals – primarily litterbugs, who drive the pink cars – by firing your sirens at them, and if they refuse to comply, ram them off the road to their arrests and presumed deaths.

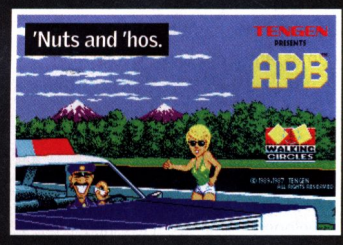


You have an incredibly short amount of time in which to do all of this, but you can increase this time by driving over donuts. I used to know how to do this, but now I can't. The donut shops leave giant donuts outside their doors, but they pull them in quickly when they see you coming. Crashing into the donut shop doesn't work either – that gets you a demerit. After 10 demerits you're fired, and these demerits accumulate throughout the game. That's 10 mistakes you're allowed to make before you're forced to start again. Like with the donut thing, there's a way to remove demerits that I don't know about.

Every now and then you'll get an APB for a particularly hard criminal.

Once you've brought him into the station, you have to shake him left and right (by the traditional hammering of the left and right keys) to elicit a confession before the chief comes down the stairs. This is probably the part of *APB* everybody remembers, and it's really the only bit of this game that hasn't aged horrendously.

I had a horrible time playing this, despite it being one of my most fondly remembered Atari ST games. And if anybody knows how to get the donuts, please write in.



But how? Beating up criminals

The Atari ST has been thoroughly and brilliantly emulated by *STEem*, to the point where you can insert blank floppies into virtual disk drives and pretend to copy made-up things to it.

The *STEem* website has also catalogued every bootleg automation disk ever made, and *APB* appears on the 136th automation disk (the intro screen is a static image of a clown – not their best work, but it does have the *Xenon* music). You can get it there. We'll even give you an effing link.

steem.atari.st

How did they get the ST at the end? By pretending they're based in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, of course.

Law & Odour Encounters of the judicial kind in *APB*

1 LITTERBUGS Your main crook in *APB* is the litterbug. They drive pink cars dropping tins out of the window.

2 HONKERS Taxi drivers who honk their horns must also be arrested, but they're faster than litterbugs.

3 DOPERS Dopers are really hippies, and drive distinctive green camper vans. If you see a camper van, arrest it.

4 HITCHERS Hitchers are women stranded on the roadside. Officer Bob drives over them to help them move on.

5 DRUNKS Drunks helpfully only ever drive orange cars, and weave down the road in a drunken sort of way.

6 INTERROGATION Arrest an APB and you'll have to shake the perp until you get a digitised yelp of "I confess!" Fantastic.

Now & Then

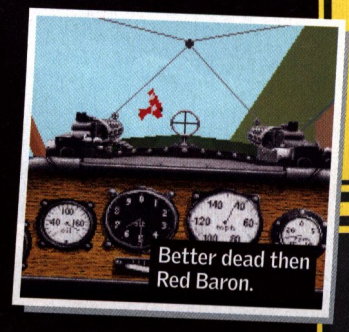
RED BARON vs IL-2 STURMOVIK

Il-2 good to be true.

SO WHAT IF one is only marginally more retro than the other. *Red Baron* came out in 1990, while *IL-2* peeped into existence in 2001, which is (God help us all) eight bloody years ago. If we're going to be pedantic we should call this section "Then & Thenner", but ignore the incongruity and just wallow in the lovely comparison.

Red Baron saw you flying World War I planes through fully 3D air, and featured a whole host of legendary pilots from the eponymous crimson nobleman to other ones you won't have heard of. *IL-2* is almost exactly the same, except absolutely brilliant and incredibly detailed, with bits flying off your plane and everything.

So rigidly realistic is *IL-2* that the moment in which you finally line up an enemy plane in your sights and tear a wing off is one of the most satisfying things you'll do at your PC.



Better dead then Red Baron.

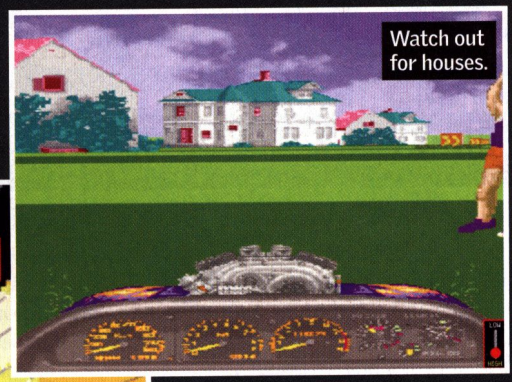
Play it! Take to the skies, murder people and be called a hero

1. Home of the Underdogs is back! Albeit in a new, neutered guise. You can find *Red Baron* flitting about in the archive at homeoftheunderdogs.net. Just search for it using your brain.
2. You should have no trouble discovering a full download link. By now you might be questioning whether the *IL-2* comparison works, as *Red Baron* is a World War I game.
3. We ran *Red Baron* through *DOSbox* by force of habit. It probably works just fine outside of the *MS-DOS* emulator. In fact we'll check now. Oh wow! It doesn't!
4. Alternatively, if you're one of the 14 who own a PlayStation 3, *Red Baron* can be had from the PlayStation Network. Though why you'd want to spend money on it is beyond us.

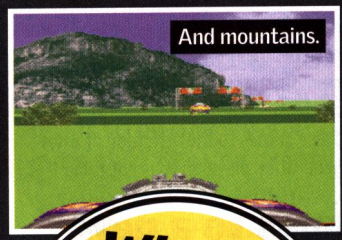
MAMEframe

OVERDRIVE

BAM! Dead!



Watch out for houses.



And mountains.

INDULGE ME THIS once reader, as I present to you an absolutely awful emulation of a half-decent game.

Overdrive, in its state as a half-working MAME ROM, is terrifying. It resembles some maddening descent into insanity. It's a vaguely playable racer, one of the *Outrun* class of arcade machines with a gear stick and parallax-powered 3D-esque visuals, but as the intro rightly warns: the video emulation isn't 100% accurate.

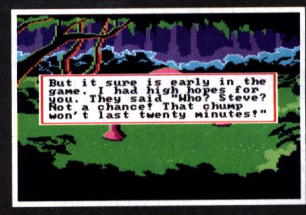
Instead any roadside detail is flashed in front of your visor before being rendered on screen. The randomness and flickering makes *Overdrive* feel like *Mario Kart* crossed with the flight into the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and once you eventually succumb to the hypnotic effects of cows and goats accosting your retinas and crash into the glitched scenery, you get a wonderful image of a man with his head smashed through a windscreen.

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.

The fact that the only real legible image in *Overdrive* is that of a man plunging his head through a pane of glass is haunting and powerful. Brilliant.

Back in the day



SPACE QUEST 2

By Steve Hogarty

THAT WEIRD FEELING you get in the pit of your stomach when you revisit the street you grew up on, the sense that everything's too small and a bit shit, that's the same feeling you get when you play adventure games you haven't seen since you were six.

I cried when, having rented *Space Quest 2* on the Atari ST, it wouldn't copy to a floppy disk. Somebody must've broken the copy protection tab or something, and *FoxCopy* bombed halfway through.

Replaying it now, it's apparent that I wasn't being deprived of all that much. Sierra's old adventure games were bloody hard work, and delighted in killing you at every turn. LucasArts were the opposite: lovely, warm and caring. Once you get eaten by a giant mushroom in *Space Quest*, you'll see why the Lucas lot won.

"OK, anyone got a spare bulb?"

BY GEORGE, LOOK WHO'S COME BACK

David Brown **takes a look at how a tarnished reputation can be buffed to a shine with just one generous move**

LUCASARTS' FIRST GAMES were called *Ballblazer* and *Rescue on Fractalus* and were released for the Atari 5200 back in 1984. Now in 2009 – after a decade of churning out consolified *Star Wars* titles of varying degrees of quality – LucasArts have set about reinventing themselves as a player in the PC gaming scene. And they're doing this by re-releasing the titles that every veteran PC gamer loves from their childhood. As well as *Thrillville*.

Gaming on the PC was a distant memory, a system that couldn't necessarily be plundered for cheap franchise dollars. And yet, suddenly, LucasArts have turned the tables (a little) with their first re-releases on Valve's *Steam*. While some might point to the fact that virtually all of the games have been put on sale in different boxes many, many times before, the general consensus seems to be that bringing these games to the attention of a new generation players is a great thing.

"Bringing these games to a new generation players is a great thing"

LucasArts can be split into two halves: on the one side, you've got the classic games, like the *Monkey Island* series, *Day of the Tentacle*, the original *X-Wing*, *Grim Fandango* and the like. In fact, it's more of a two-thirds than a half, given how many quality titles the company produced in the late '80s and early '90s. However, in recent times the company has become a vehicle for creating substandard *Star Wars* games aimed at the console market.

One of the best things about this is that the versions released are, where possible, the talking ones, some of which were very difficult to get hold of in the past. Certainly, this writer had never managed to get hold of the spoken word version of *Fate of Atlantis* before. Add to this the fact people actually seem to be genuinely excited by the releases, something that kind of flies in the face of the industry consensus that nobody buys adventures anymore and that only games with face-melting graphics can possibly sell.

LucasArts' back catalogue isn't all adventures, of course, or even games that are that ancient. *LEGO Indy* is only a year or so old, plus there's *Armed and Dangerous* (the action game with the gun that fires sharks) and a trio of *Star Wars* games (of varying quality). Ironically, it seems to be *Republic Commando* that's attracting the most attention, merely because the others are so well known that users are also taking the chance to take a gander at a game that passed them by in 2005.

However, there's no getting away from the fact that, on the PC, adventure games are what made LucasArts so beloved (and so hated when they ditched them) as a developer. It's the likes of *Day of the Tentacle*, *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, and *Full Throttle* that are most eagerly awaited, although there are plenty shouting for the return of the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games as well.

The future is decidedly more rosy for LucasArts now than it was a few months ago, simply because they remembered what they were good at.

STEAMY WINDOWS

LucasArts on Steam

So you've got this Steam thing and you've noticed that, maybe due to the words on this page, that there are some old LucasArts games floating about. At the time of writing, there are 11 LucasArts games on Steam, if you include the recently-released *Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition*.

You've got *Battlefront II*, *Republic Commando* and *Starfighter* representing the *Star Wars* side of the company; and you've got the aforementioned *Secret of Monkey Island*, *The Dig*, *LOOM*, *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* and *The Last Crusade* in the point-and-click adventure corner.

Bringing up the rear are *LEGO Indiana Jones* and the underrated *Armed and Dangerous*. There's also *Thrillville: Off the Rails*, but nobody cares about that because it's knob.

WHAT THE FANS SAY...

***PC ZONE* readers on their love (and hate) for LucasArts' classics**

CAFF:
***Indy and the Last Crusade* was great. I played it before watching the film and again after. The puzzles are complementary to the story and it evokes the swashbuckling feel of being Indy (before he got grey hair and survived nuclear explosions by hiding in fridges).**

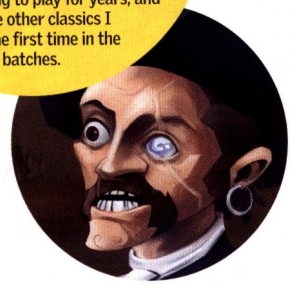
GAVPOWELL: *Fate of Atlantis* is that rare thing – a franchise used to good effect. The multiple routes through the game are a great touch (not least being able to engage in giving baddies a biff in the face), the plot hangs together nicely, dialogue is pretty believable and the puzzles are just about the right side of fiendish without being mind-breakingly impenetrable. Despite the fact I don't like the films, I never could resist an archaeology/history-themed adventure, and it was a pleasure to replay after 10 years away. This is a game for the ages, says I. If you decide to use this in the magazine, please credit me as Frank J Ichecuchi.

GAVPOWELL:
The Dig piqued my interest all those years ago and always disappointed. The graphics are dated even compared to other games of that era, the plot is a generic sci-fi romp that was done better in *Star Trek: Final Unity*, and the script is absolutely dreadful, with wooden dialogue and shallow characters. *As for Star Wars Republic Commando*, it's an example of the 'New LucasArts' – take a generic game and re-skin it with *Star Wars*.

MAD_AL:
For me, the best of the bunch is *Armed and Dangerous*, just for its twisted sense of humour. The game is vintage goodness – it still looks graphically good, and the shark gun must be one of the strangest and most effective weapons I've seen in a game. There's a small feeling of glee every time you use it. I defy anyone who loved *Monkey Island* not to love this and occasionally smile at the warped sense of humour. The torture scene is top notch Python-esque comedy. Avoid it at your peril.

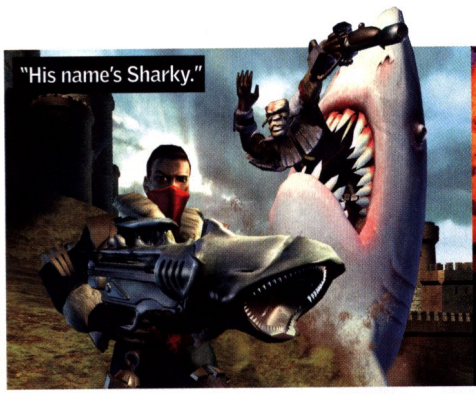
G_MAN_007:
You can't fault a LucasArts game's build quality. *Republic Commando* is a solid fun shooter, though not a mold-breaker, and the team controls are simple and work, which some modern games can't manage. I'll be waiting for a deal before buying any LucasArts game on Steam though, but I'll get any deal pack for the Indy games I've been hoping to play for years, and I hope to see other classics I missed the first time in the next batches.

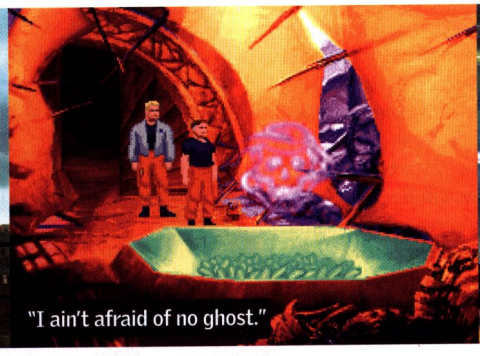
JOHNNYWARMONGER:
Hey, just imagine if George Lucas was in control of these re-releases. I wonder what great ideas he would bring to *Fate of Atlantis*? Maybe he'd improve the graphics, giving it a modern edge, without tarnishing the memory of the original. Or, maybe he could introduce a new reptilian character to give some wise-cracking and hilarious remarks. Finally, he could maybe introduce some sort of alien race at the end. Wow, that is such a great idea! Just imagine it, *Indy vs Aliens* – surely it couldn't fail.

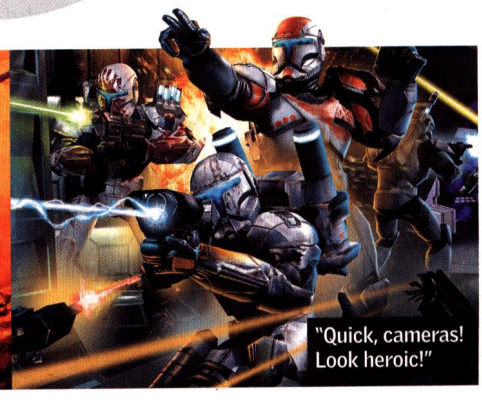


JOWOO:
***Armed and Dangerous* was poor. It had great ideas but the gameplay was shallow. That said, it nevertheless holds a place in my heart just because it had a gun that fired sharks. There ought to be more games with guns that fire sea creatures. Porpoise cannon, anyone?**

THE TINGLER:
Battlefront II, as far as I'm aware, is the most successful *Star Wars* game, so that's one reason why that one's on there. *Republic Commando*'s brilliant and I'm very glad it's on there, as I've been meaning to pick it up on PC for a while. Don't knock it as "just reskinning *Star Wars* on to another game," it's a great game in it's own right and I don't know another game like it.

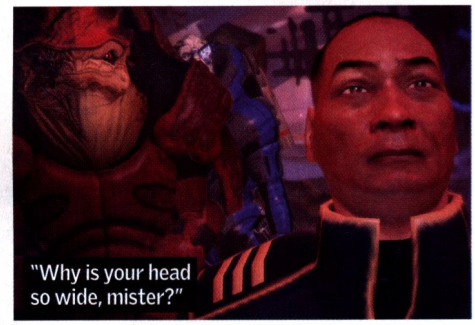


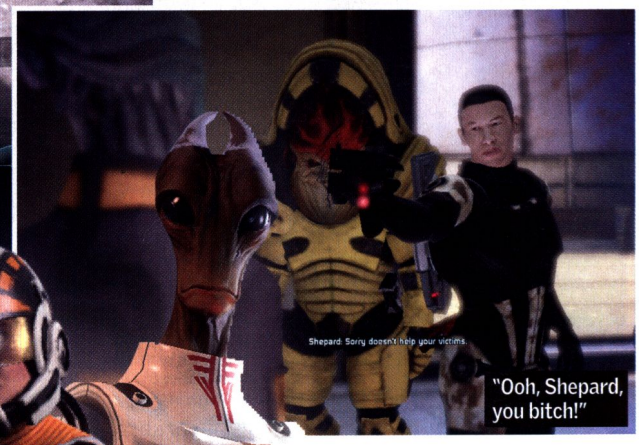




On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them





MASS EFFECT

Mooning: ***Steve Hogarty***

I SAW *MOON* at the weekend. The weekend before that I watched *Armageddon* on ITV and have had Aerosmith in my head ever since. It got me thinking about really good space games, specifically those that feature the moon. It also got me thinking that "the moon" is a fairly unassuming name for something so distinctly spectacular. Why not Ultor, Endor or Mordor?

While we're at it, "Sun" is a bit bollocks, considering we've got Arcturus and Tau Ceti bobbing about a couple of light years off. We're doing our celestial bodies a disservice, and with this in mind I approached *Mass Effect* – a game set 176 years in the future, where the regularity with which people talk about space is such that we've started calling our planet's satellite and star Luna and Sol as a matter of clarity. Thank Christ.

There's something I find fascinating about how Earth is represented in space games – specifically ones that don't start out on Earth. It's a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar galaxy, a unifying reference point which, when sighted, makes the fiction of a game infinitely more personal.

Frontier: Elite II started you off in the Ross 154 system, 9.53 light years from humanity's origin. Reaching the Sol system (that's our solar system to non-future astronauts) in *Elite*'s universe doesn't disappoint: by the turn of the 33rd century it's become a hive of stellar activity. Earth hosts three giant orbital cities, Mars has been terraformed and is now watched over by Mars High, a floating metropolis.

Mass Effect tantalises by offering the Sol System as a destination, but only allows you to land on the moon and gaze at our planet from afar. Though disappointingly distant, it's a starkly beautiful vision, and the Codex entry referencing the irreparably damaged environment and the vast slums of the 'Texan Megapolis' is almost enough to have you voting Green. Almost.

VERDICT: **Moonatopia**

RACE DRIVER: GRID

Smashed-up bodywork: ***David Brown***

I PLAY RACING games with the keys, which is viewed as being some kind of mad thing to do. Well it is, but I just can't be doing with pads unless I have to put myself in someone else's shoes for purposes of review. For myself, pads can get stuffed, I'll soldier on with my trusty arrows.

Having said that, sometimes I do consider using analogue sticks for car games, for the obvious reason of being able to make graded turns, rather than binary ones. That doesn't stop me enjoying racing games as good as *GRID* though.

The fundamentals are just right, pretty much (and that's coming from someone who likes cars as much as he does genital fungus). Yes, it's more arcadey than some nutcases might like, but it is just damn fun! Personally, I couldn't care less if the courses didn't have accurate advertising or pixel-perfect GPS modelling or whatever. I just want to go vroom vroom and crash into barriers a lot. *GRID* definitely has the right blend of solid driving and arcade fun, with a surprisingly smooth multiplayer element too.

Oh, I also love the fact the female voiceover calls me by my name when I load the game up. If the world suddenly decided to shun me, I'd still have my *GRID* girl to welcome me with unrestrained good cheer.

VERDICT: Smashtastic

Fighting through the pack is great fun.

That's not a real car!

TRIALS 2: SECOND EDITION

Reheating turkeys: ***Steve Hogarty***

THE LAST TIME I played *Trials 2* brought about a raft of delightful joshing about having to be surgically removed from the keyboard, or being found in a crab-like position over my desk in the morning, howling in pain. In truth it turned me into an utter bastard, a shrieking, swearing bucket of seething profanity.

If you dared chuckle and suggest that I was "addicted", or that I needed to go to "*Trials 2* Anonymous" or something similarly awful, I would hate you intensely for many hours. I wouldn't attack you, that's unrealistic, but I would think how you were a shit human.

Bone-crunching tumble imminent.

The game's now flirting with the Xbox 360 lot, with a reworked, mini-game laden re-release, so what better time (actually, what worse time) to go back and play the original. Riding a bike in *Trials 2* is like riding a motorbike – you never forget how. While I struggled with the fiddly long jumps at first, the compulsive nature of the game, with its evil rapid-restart system, soon re-established its hold.

My scores still exist somewhere on *Trials 2*'s global leaderboard, though with the game now on *Steam*, and tied to your *Steam* profile, I'm being forced to reclaim my best times.

If you want to try me on, I'm escaped_monkey on *Steam*. But please, try not to interrupt me.

VERDICT: Gaming crack

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

CRYOSTASIS

It's Russian, it's full of linear gameplay, it's a bit like *Condemned* only with slightly less melee fun and fairly average guns, but it'll keep you hooked because it's absolutely barking mad. I'd still buy the first *Condemned* over this. Once you've played it, you won't ever want to touch it again.

caff

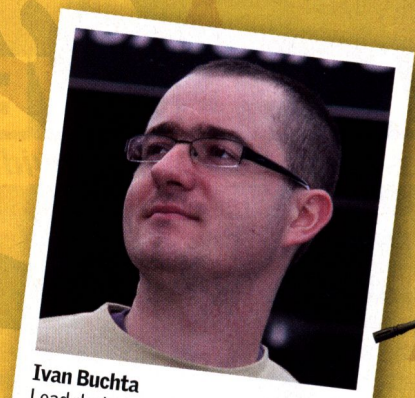
DAIKATANA

Got *Daikatana* on Gametap. I remember it being bad, but wasn't sure if I'd got caught up in the hate campaign at the time and not given it a real chance. Whoops! It's bad. Clearly extensive traumatic amnesia had taken place that hid the depths of badness I suffered the first time around.

f0rg3

ARMA II

This Q&A cost *Steve Hogarty* an *ArmA* and a leg



Ivan Buchta
Lead designer, Bohemia

THE UNOFFICIAL SEQUEL to *Operation Flashpoint* is many things to many people, a consummate PC title and exactly the sort of thing that wouldn't fly on console. Complex, complicated, daunting and with a few too many quirky glitches for most, it's the most dynamic and unpredictable battlefield simulator you can find.

In a less adjective-y sense, playing *ArmA II* is bloody hard work. Like owning an old Volvo and being the only person who knows how to stop it from stalling and catching fire when turning right. Oh, we hate you and love you in equal measures, *ArmA II* – it's a shame the number "70" doesn't convey the depth of our emotional turmoil, but that's one of the many fallacies of our scoring system. Another big one is that everything's "subjective", and that there are people in the world with more patience for cracked gems like *ArmA II* than most. Weeeeird people.

Anyway, we found Ivan Buchta on the end of a phone and asked him all about the game he did.

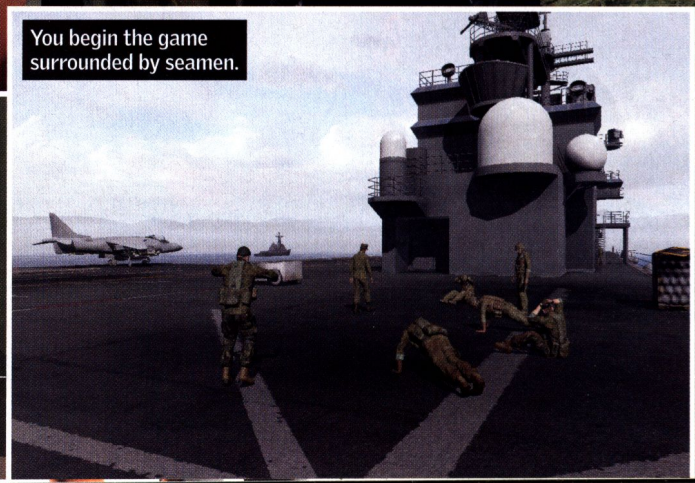
Get in the choppa!

01 ARMY EXPERIENCE

"As we're young at Bohemia, and the compulsory military service was abandoned more than a decade ago, there are only a few guys here who've served in the military. I haven't served myself because of my university studies, but the founders have. That was just compulsory service.

"Of course, we're using the knowledge base of our fans, or our military advisers who have served in some of the world's military. For example, in *ArmA II* we have guys who've been in the US Marine Corps, so we had a chance to ask several questions to ex-Force Recon guys, which was very valuable. But plenty of us are interested in some military-like activities, like airsoft, paintball, long-range hiking, or climbing mountains, so we're pretty aware about many aspects of a soldier's life.

"Whenever we found some tricky stuff, like we weren't sure about some USMC unit organisation, or about military symbolism, or about radio conventions, we asked particular questions. We are basically in constant touch."



You begin the game surrounded by seamen.

02 PLAY SOLDIER

"We're really interested in airsoft, as it gives you deeper insight into the non-combat routines of the soldier in the field. However it's just recreation, we do it for fun, so we don't really push it to the limits that soldiers are used to, but it changes your perspective. You don't think anymore that you are some invincible hero, you really appreciate that teamwork is the key to success, and that while you're only very small you are also a very important part of the bigger picture.

"Airsoft is a good experience which has helped us, but we don't give too much attention to any sport like this in regards to design, as it's just a game, so we also try to consult some people with real military experience, field manuals, and books written by soldiers."

Eastern Europe's hottest new boy band.

"It was a gas leak, honest."

03 IS IT LIVE?

"We don't call what we're aiming for 'realism', we prefer 'authenticity', because during our research we've found that the many realistic procedures are really complicated, and would be very boring for the player.

"So the mission architecture for several military features are designed in a way to please the player, not to bore him. For example, with artillery, in real life, there's a very complex way of ordering an air strike, whereas in the game you have a point-and-click interface with some additional authentic-sounding radio, and that's it. So we're definitely more inclined to find a fun solution over a realistic solution."

Quick, run him over in the truck. Make it look like an accident.

04 HARDWARE HANDS-ON

"Do we ever fire real weapons? Well, I had a chance to fire some hunting weapons and I even fired some blind rounds from some assault rifles, from the Czech assault rifle and light machine gun, and I think lots of other guys also had the opportunity, but we're not experienced shooters, I think nobody in the development team actually owns his own weapon.

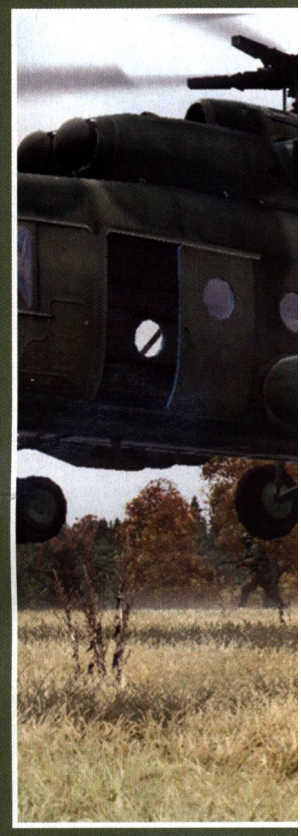
"People always think that we're military fans and that we're crazy about it, and when they actually read or hear our opinions regarding this it's sometimes pretty confusing for them as we're all basically anti-war. But from my point of view, the army is an organisation which has its role, its purpose, it's very useful and sometimes you just have to apply that power. So I'm definitely not a pacifist, but of course I can't speak for the rest of the team."

"We don't call what we're aiming for 'realism', we prefer 'authenticity'"

05 MOTION CAPTURE

"When we did the cinematic scenes, those were acted by the guys from the design team, including myself. We also had to re-record many common movements, like running with weapons and sprinting, which was particularly interesting, as we realised the environment was really huge, and if we let the player move at the realistic speed, which in full gear can be something like 15km/h, it would be too slow. Our sprint was something like 21km/h, a really fast movement which you can't endure for long in real life, but we did this for the gameplay.

"This meant our actor had to sprint really fast during motion-capture, and we were able to record just four of his steps in the area that was scanned by the camera, so there was some fine tuning involved. But we recorded all sorts of moves, from forced entries to animations like healing wounded or being wounded, which was great, and plenty of generic stuff you'll see all the time."



"We didn't want to deny people the possibility to play as a dog"

06 RESEARCH AND DESTROY

"We do a lot of research, and we also use our community as a good source of information. Some people who fly military aircraft also play our games, and fortunately we sometimes have a chance to find a person who can share some experience. But we're mostly using the internet and other publicly available resources, and it's usually enough to make a decent representation of vehicles in the game. Of course, the accuracy isn't always 100%, but I think we're able to get a reasonable depiction of any particular aircraft or vehicle in the game.

"The internet is a great source of information when you know where to look. In some cases we have to buy some books, we even use some modelling books, for people who are making plastic kits. As these guys are usually mad about details it's a very useful resource from which you can get everything, from the accurate size of the vehicle to the camouflage or markings. That's usually where we will go for information when we're out of available research or cannot find anything else."

"Hey! Where are you going! You weren't supposed to leave me!"

"That Recon guy's annoying me now."

07 SOUNDS GREAT

"We have a small team of programmers and sound teams here who design things together, and we did some research on what really happens on the battlefield. You mentioned the supersonic crack, which is a distinct feature that, once you got into a real shoot-out, you'd hear frequently. It's a sound generated by the bullets passing at the speed of sound. There are plenty of things like that, like the fact that weapons sound different when you hear them from a distance than when you hear them from close range, and depending on whether you are behind the muzzle or in front of it.

"These sounds are all caused by physics – basically all the sounds are pressure waves travelling through environments. Of course we're not simulating the pressure waves, but we can define some events the player meets, and simulate or fake them. This way for example, if you hear an explosion in the distance, you hear the bass sounds, which travel further than the pitched sounds. These things are all there, and even though at the start you can't really tell what it's about, after some time playing you are able to read a battle based on the sound. So the audio is as close to real-life as we could get."

08 ANIMAL CHALLENGES

"The challenges in the armoury being extended to animals was a side effect of our game being too big to be fully controllable by our team. Normally we'd limit the use of animals somehow. Maybe there'll be a time where we add some animal-specific challenges, but I can't see it happening right now. We didn't want to deny people the possibility to play as a dog or something. It's just a small thing, it's not breaking the game, it's just some extra fun you can have, but we're definitely not focusing on that aspect, it's just a minor thing.

"It was left there, forgotten maybe, and someone obviously forgot to limit the use of animals in the armoury challenges. It's all about time, maybe one day we will see something more to do with animals. But for the moment, there are other things such as defensive fields or AI strategic behaviour, which are far more interesting to both us and the players."

"I'm so good, I can shoot without looking."

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FIRST LOOK!

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

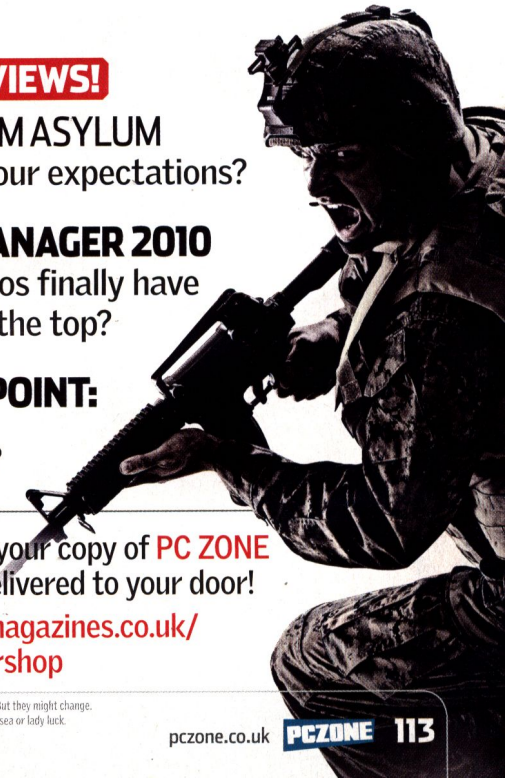
We check out the brand-new Total War game from Creative Assembly!

MASSIVE REVIEWS!

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
Can this game live up to our expectations?

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010
Do Beautiful Game Studios finally have a true contender for the top?

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
Can it beat ArmA II?



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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.

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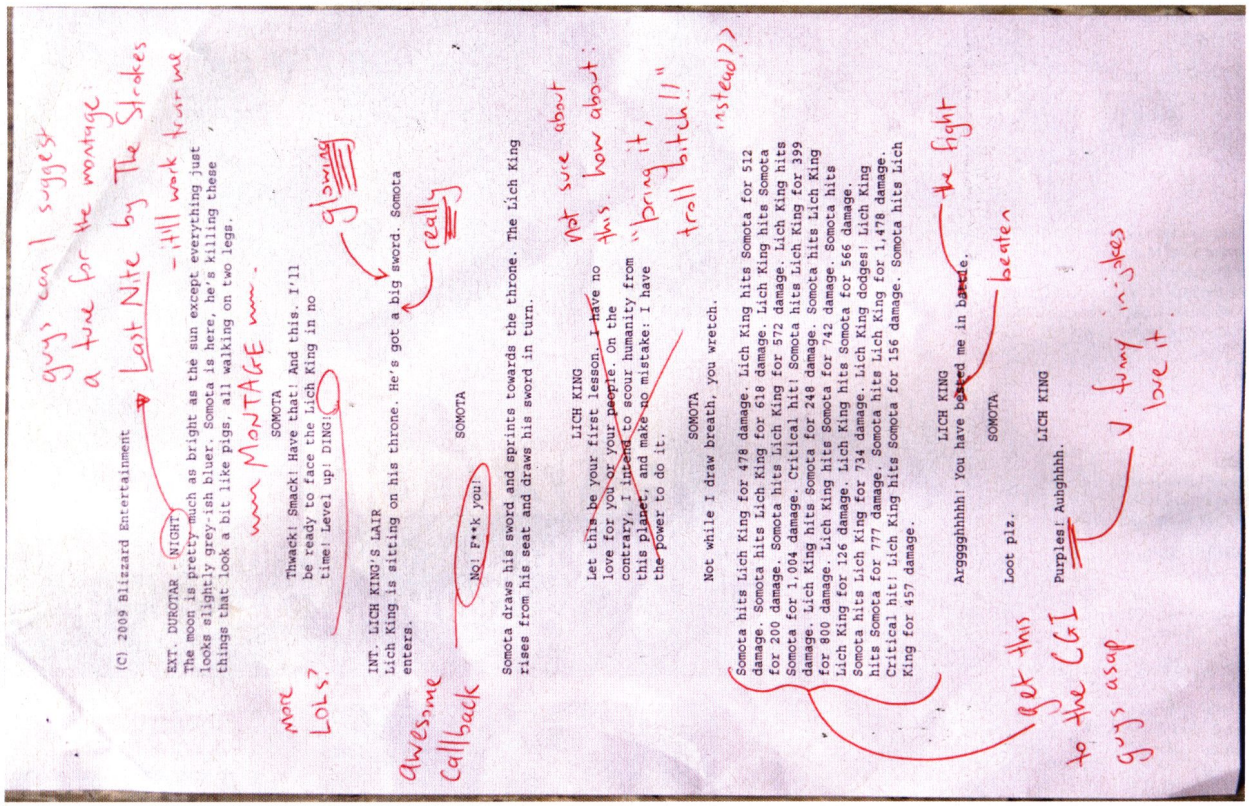
backpage text

Junk Move Projects

From: Randy Lipschitz <rlipschitz@smarmybros.org>
Date: Tuesday, August 11, 2009 10:48
To: Sam Raimi <sam.raimi@gnail.com>
Subject: World of Warcraft: A Movie

GUYS,
Love the script. Love it. I'm faxing through some suggestions. Could you check them through and get me a revised version on my desk by tomorrow morning? I'm off to do handstands and pour frappacinos down my anus.

guys can I suggest a tune for the montage: Last Nite by The Strokes - it'll work truer me



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EXT. DUROTAR - NIGHT
The moon is pretty much as bright as the sun except everything just looks slightly grey-ish bluer. Somota is here, he's killing these things that look a bit like pigs, all walking on two legs.

mm MONTAGE mm.

SOMOTA
Thwack! Smack! Have that! And this. I'll be ready to face the Lich King in no time! Level up! DING!

more LOLs?

glowing

really

INT. LICH KING'S LAIR
Lich King is sitting on his throne. He's got a big sword. Somota enters.

awesome callback

SOMOTA
No! F**k you!

Somota draws his sword and sprints towards the throne. The Lich King rises from his seat and draws his sword in turn.

LICH KING
Let this be your first lesson. I have no love for you or your people. On the contrary, I intend to scour humanity from this planet, and make no mistake: I have the power to do it.

not sure about this. how about: "bring it, troll bitch!!" instead??

SOMOTA
Not while I draw breath, you wretch.

Somota hits Lich King for 478 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 512 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 618 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 200 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 572 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 1,004 damage. Critical hit! Somota hits Lich King for 399 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 248 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 800 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 742 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 126 damage. Lich King hits Somota for 566 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 734 damage. Lich King dodges! Lich King hits Somota for 777 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 1,478 damage. Critical hit! Lich King hits Somota for 156 damage. Somota hits Lich King for 457 damage.

get this to the CGI guys asap

LICH KING
Arggggghhhhh! You have beated me in battle.

the fight

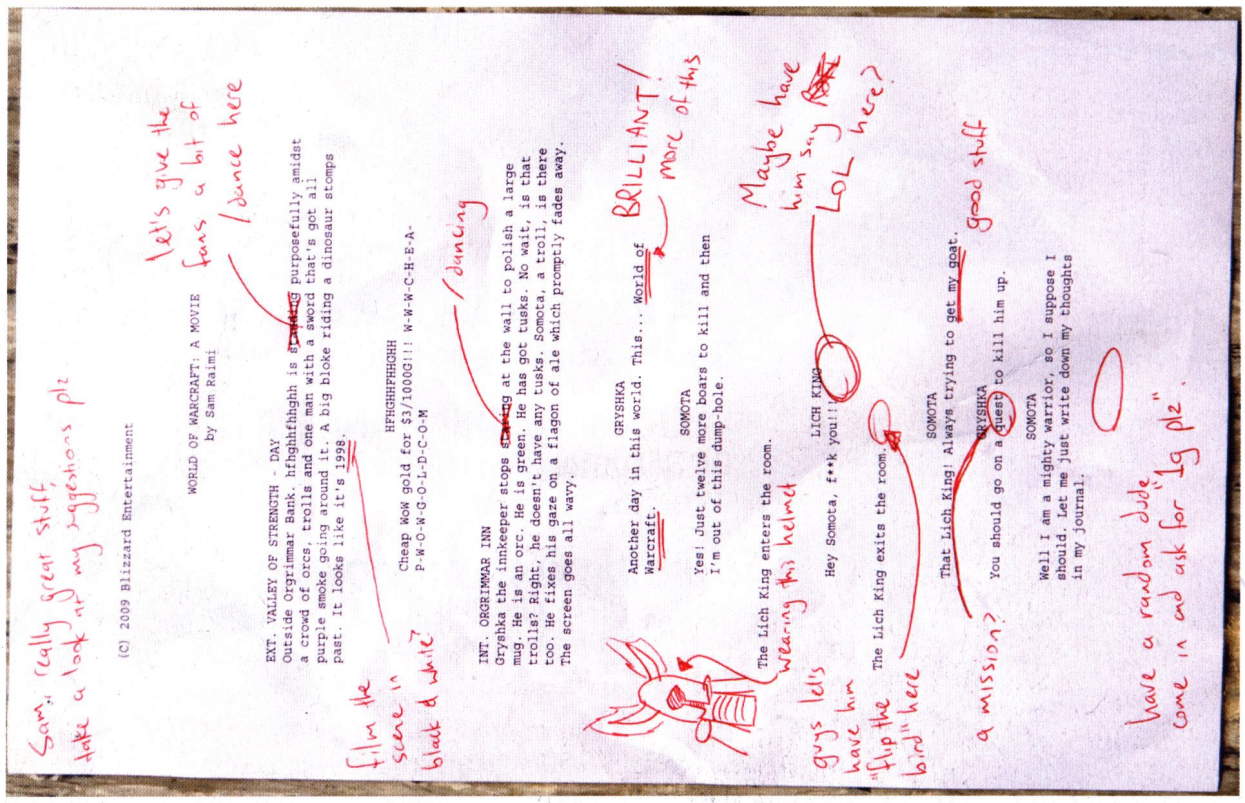
beaten

SOMOTA
Loot plz.

LICH KING
Purples! Auhghhhh.

v. funny in-jokes love it.

Sam, really great stuff, take a look at my suggestions plz



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WORLD OF WARCRAFT: A MOVIE
by Sam Raimi

let's give the fans a bit of /dance here

EXT. VALLEY OF STRENGTH - DAY
Outside Orgrimmar Bank. hfhghhfhhghh is standing purposefully amidst a crowd of orcs, trolls and one man with a sword that's got all purple smoke going around it. A big bloke riding a dinosaur stomps past. It looks like it's 1998.

film the scene in black & white?

HFHGHHFHHGHH
Cheap WoW gold for $3/1000G!!! W-W-W-C-H-E-A-P-W-O-W-G-O-L-D-C-O-M

/dancing

INT. ORGRIMMAR INN
Gryshka the innkeeper stops staring at the wall to polish a large mug. He is an orc. He is green. He has got tusks. No wait, is that trolls? Right, he doesn't have any tusks. Somota, a troll, is there too. He fixes his gaze on a flagon of ale which promptly fades away. The screen goes all wavy.

GRYSHKA
Another day in this world. This... World of Warcraft.

BRILLIANT! more of this

SOMOTA
Yes! Just twelve more boars to kill and then I'm out of this dump-hole.

The Lich King enters the room.

wearing this helmet

LICH KING
Hey Somota, f**k you!!!

Maybe have him say LOL here?

The Lich King exits the room.

guys let's have him "flip the bird" here

SOMOTA
That Lich King! Always trying to get my goat.

good stuff

GRYSHKA
You should go on a quest to kill him up.

a mission?

SOMOTA
Well I am a mighty warrior, so I suppose I should. Let me just write down my thoughts in my journal.

have a random dude come in and ask for "1g plz".

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