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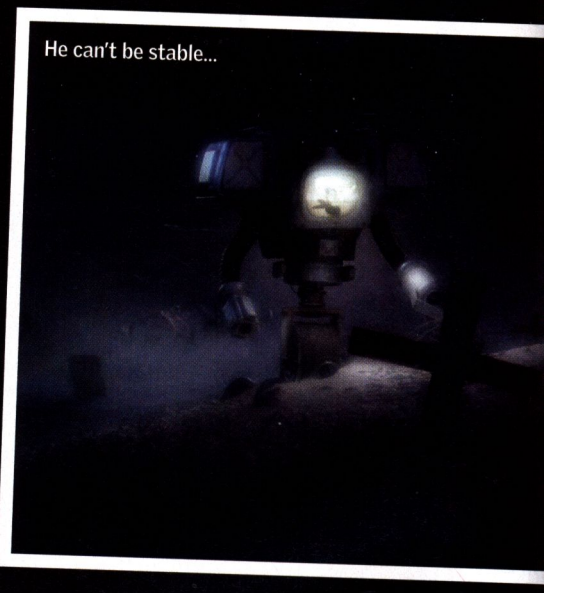
SHOOTING CRAPS...

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, pleads karmically questionable *Adam Glick*

DEVELOPER Obsidian PUBLISHER Bethesda WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com


He can't be stable...

INSTEAD OF MAKING the follow-up to *Fallout 3* themselves, Bethesda have handed the reins to a company built from the ashes of Black Isle, the series' creator: Obsidian. So, with Fallout's biological daddies back in control, will we get to see the original *Fallout 3 – Van Buren* – at last? Possibly.

Although *New Vegas* isn't a sequel to *Fallout 3* in terms of its story – it's set three years later, but there's no other links to the previous game – it's very much *Fallout 3*. It's still played from a first-person perspective, the VATS system still handles combat, and it's heavy on the talking. The big change is that the setting has been moved from the irradiated ruins of Washington D.C., to the utterly barren Mojave wasteland and the remnants of Las Vegas.

ETA **AUTUMN 2010**

GOOD WEATHER

One of the first noticeable differences are clear blue skies. Unlike D.C., which had its skies contaminated by China's nuclear bombs, Vegas dodged the brunt of the attack and as a result is more weathered than obliterated. So you can expect to be momentarily distracted while clubbing a woeful, mutated freak to death by the odd stunning sunset.

You play a courier who delivers parcels across the wasteland (a hint someone at Obsidian is a fan of bad Kevin Costner movies). Unlike previous *Fallout* games, you're not a nameless Vault Dweller, so there's no protracted character generation. Instead, you begin the game by being shot in the head and dumped in a shallow grave. You're rescued by a friendly robot named Victor and taken to the town of Good Springs. From there you begin a quest to learn who tried to kill you and what was so valuable about the package you were carrying at the time.

One of the crucial additions to the *Fallout* mechanic in *New Vegas* is a proper faction system. As you walk through the wasteland killing and maiming, you'll have the opportunity to help or hinder various, often opposing, groups. You'll still have karma's all-seeing eye watching you, but now you can really stick the boot in and get off scot-free if the faction doesn't know it was you. Your standing with all the factions is tracked in your PIP-Boy, and will no doubt affect the ending you get once you've finished the game.

The other notable addition to the mechanic is a slight tweak to the conversation system. In the previous game, the only way to unlock extra conversation options was either a high Speech skill rating or a perk. In *New Vegas*, your skills can open up hidden dialogue avenues. As an example, when you arrive at Good Springs, the town is about to come under siege from a group of escaped convicts, and you have to convince the townspeople to help you equip for the forthcoming fisticuffs.

SCARIER MUTANTS

One of the suggestions is to try getting Easy Pete, a grizzled prospector, to give you some dynamite. If you have a high enough Explosives skill, the dialogue option that would ordinarily have been a clumsy attempt to dupe him becomes a line that demonstrates you know how to handle TNT – select it and you'll be able to talk him into giving you some. Similarly, the barter system doesn't just affect prices – if you can persuade the local store owner, Chet, that an attack will be bad for business, he'll give you some armour for free.

Beyond those two tweaks, it's the new setting that's the big draw. While Bethesda are keeping downtown Vegas under wraps, we got a tour of the Mojave Wasteland. Dominating the centre of the map is Black Mountain: a heavily irradiated area populated by supermutants and ghouls. This is where that you meet Nightkin: supermutants who've used Stealth Boys so much, they've gone bonkers.

The other area we got a look at was the Helios One power station: an

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ New wasteland
- ✔ New faction system
- ✔ New weapon system
- ✔ New conversation system
- ✘ Everything else is old

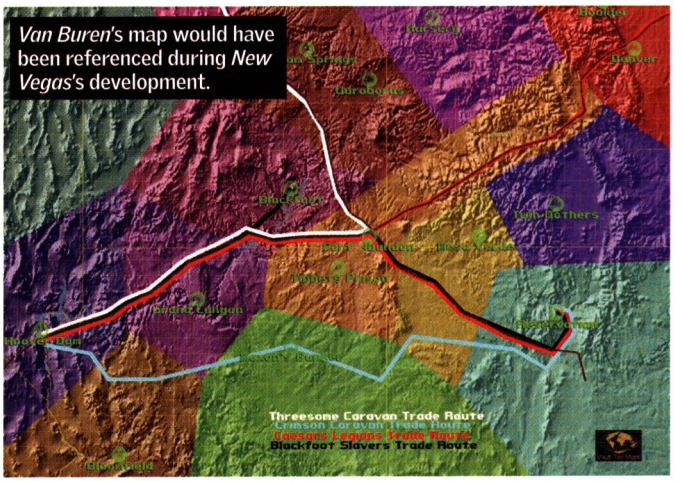
THE WAY THINGS WEREN'T...

Is *New Vegas* the game *Fallout 3* was meant to be?

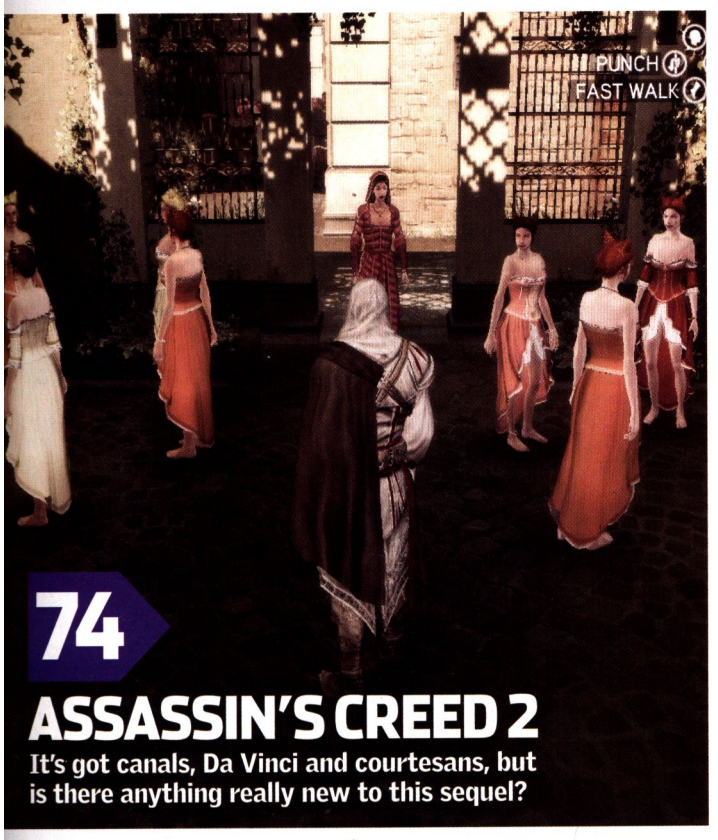
If you aren't one of those people who sets aside a portion of their brain for PC games history knowledge, you might not know that *Fallout 3* should never have existed. If things had taken a different turn *Van Buren* would have been the third *Fallout* game, and Bethesda would have released *Elder Scrolls 5* by now. The story of *Van Buren* is on page 59, but here's a rundown of what happened for the impatient.

Van Buren was being made by *Fallout*'s creators Black Isle, when Interplay closed the studio blaming a lack of money. Many Islers went on to form Obsidian, the team behind *New Vegas*.

Van Buren's plot would have revolved around a mad scientist who wanted to control a nuclear defence satellite in order to launch another atomic holocaust, that'd only leave his followers alive. Humanity, eh? What a chucklesome bunch we really are.



Van Buren's map would have been referenced during *New Vegas*'s development.



74 ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

It's got canals, Da Vinci and courtesans, but is there anything really new to this sequel?

PCZONE PRESENTS FIGHT CLUB LIVE! 25 MARCH TROCADERO, LONDON
SEE PAGE 24 FOR DETAILS

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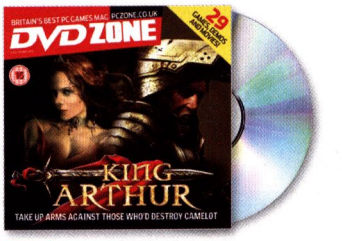
THE INTERACTIVE BIT OF PC ZONE – BLOGS, TWITTERS, AND OUR FAMOUS FIGHT CLUB!



112 FREEWARE

Chess, McCarthy, space marines, busy mages, and a very fat cat: all for you and all for free.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

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Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 48 words...

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Meet The Team

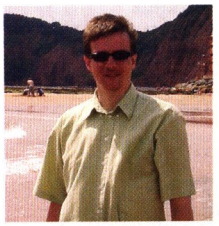
Here is this month's rogue's gallery...

WILL PORTER

Lost in Space

AGE 30
LIKES Lost
DISLIKES And Found
FEARS Antelopes
FAVOURITE GAME *Fallout*
NOW PLAYING *Van Buren*

This month, Will has been trying not to fall victim to that powerful and tempting mistress, nostalgia. Hearing so many secrets of the development process of his favourite game – *Fallout* – meant Steve had to restrain him using deadly force. Once resurrected, Will was a much calmer creature, getting on with the task of investigating why games destined for greatness were thrown to the wayside. Later he was found wandering the streets calling, "Dogmeat! Here boy!"



PHIL WAND

Console saboteur (alleged)

Wandy denies he had anything to do with Sony's recent PS3 trouble. We still suspect he may have been telling as fib, as his nose grew at an enormous rate as he spoke.

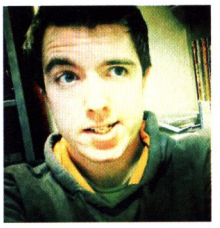
NOW PLAYING: ***Hexen II***

NICK BRAKESPEAR

Undead Lord

After days of non-stop *Dragon Age*, Nick has since become a Lich, bound to his keyboard for eternity, squawking about Arcane Warriors and Morrigan's fertile baby nest.

NOW PLAYING: ***Dragon Age***



STEVE HOGARTY

Crack Hitler

Late-night party-going does not mix well with furious deadline-meeting and so our hero found himself marooned in Theydon Bois because he fell asleep on the Tube.

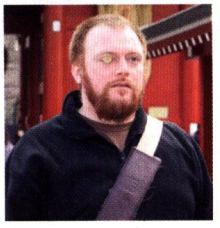
NOW PLAYING: ***Overlord***

DAVID BROWN

Word Monkey

Sometimes David thinks he's being watched. The aliens in question have issued a press release denying his allegations, saying their activities are "purely coincidental".

NOW PLAYING: ***Crane Simulator***

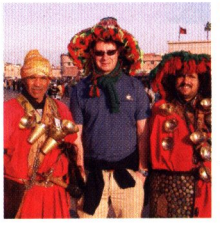


JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Media Darling

Log's, at first friendly, meeting with *Civilization* creator Sid Meier descended into an argument over the superiority of the English S over the American Z.

NOW PLAYING: ***Just Cause 2***



STEVE HILL

Back to Reality

Our man Hill finally roused himself before *Countdown* and strolled out into the open air, before having his jugular torn out and spat on the ground by an acid-dripping alien.

NOW PLAYING: ***AVP* fo' real**

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... WiFi access in the café at work, it's like being in the future! Or the present...
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Winter that's running into Spring. A Sprinter? A Wring?

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

FACE OF THE ENEMY **12min** Despite repeated requests, Steve refuses to take down a very disturbing portrait.

PLAYSTATION NETWORK FAIL **33min** PlayStations fail because they can't count? Oh the hilarity!

UBISOFT **1hour** They must be deliberately trying to irritate their customers!

IPHONE *PEGGLE* **3min** We had the idea for this first! Can we have the money please?

WINTER OLYMPICS **38min** Go Team GB! We won medals! Well, one.

LARA CROFT WAY **2min** A road in Derby is to be renamed after the *Tomb Raider* star. People are great.

FIGHTING FANTASY **50min** Reliving their childhood, the team dug out their *FF* books.

$1M BATMAN COMIC **1min** Richard considers buying issue #1 of every comic that's released, just in case.

CHICKEN JUMPERS **4min** Knitwear for bald chickens? A waste of wool surely – they'll just get frozen later anyway.

SIX MILES, 27 YEARS **5min** Royal Mail took 27 years to deliver a parcel six miles. We're not shocked.

WIN!

HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word 'STOP' at the end of your text or postal entry.

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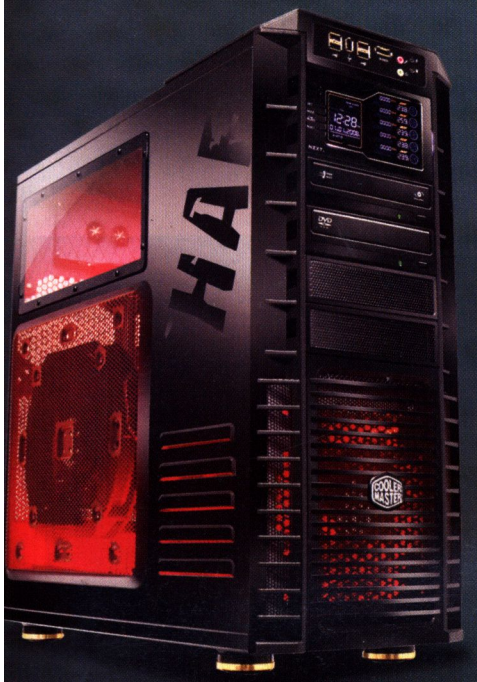

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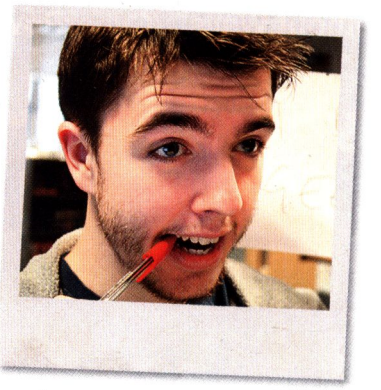
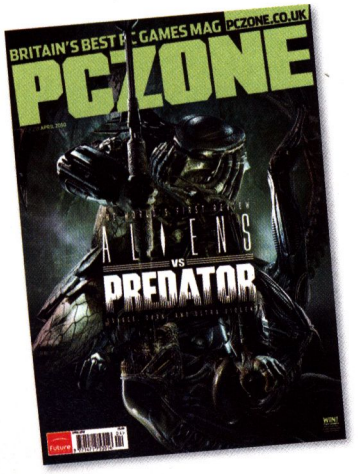
Letters

Steve Hogarty **replies to the words you sent to us by (mostly) electronic means**





WIN!

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KING OF LETTERS

KEEPING SCORE

We've all been there: an eagerly awaited release finally comes out and, terrified that the developer might have whored out their baby to the console market, we discover, to our relief, that it's not a catastrophe. Giddy with joy, we make grandiose claims like "it's the greatest game of all time!", and ignore its flaws with the dedication of someone newly in love. Then after weeks, maybe months, we float back down to earth. Realising it wasn't the revolution we thought, we try to forget the claims we made.

Unfortunately, as your articles are written during this fever pitch, your words are cemented in *ZONE* history, free for anybody to dig up and try to embarrass you with! For instance, I challenge anyone now to renew the claim that *Spore* is the sophisticated walk down evolutionary road that we all thought it was, as opposed to the loose collection of clever-looking, yet quickly boring, mini-games that it actually turned out to be.

You placed *Deus Ex* at the top of your 100 greatest games of all time – a decision I heartily agreed with – despite it achieving a comparatively modest 94% in its original review. Was it marked in harsher times?

97% for *Quake II*? It's barely even got pixels.

I saw that the seminal *Diablo II* got a shocking 72% back in issue 93, surely something's wrong here?

When people look at the *Buyer's Guide* and see the games you've given those top ratings to, shouldn't they see them with the benefit of your hindsight? Maybe you should take another look at those old reviews in a new Hall of Fame section, where you re-rate games according to the impact they had on their era, and more essentially, how they can be seen through the sober lens of time. Go on, do it for Deckard Cain and JC Denton!

Ned Birkin

Our reviews database hides some aberrations. Little known flight sim *EF2000* scored 97% in 1995, as did *Alone in the Dark 2* and *Quake II*. You've touched on what's, perhaps, the biggest problem in running a mag for over 16 years: scores are fossilised and preserved while contexts change, along with the standards by which games are judged. That's why our *Buyer's Guide* isn't ordered by score – rather it's ordered by current preferences. Our scores will always (ahem) be correct for the time they're awarded. Five years down the line though? Who knows.

This is probably a visual metaphor.

PISS OFF MW2

I waited as long as I could before getting *Modern Warfare 2*, and now wish I hadn't bothered my backside with it: what a waste of money. Not only is it overpriced in comparison to other PC titles, it also removed dedicated servers, completely destroying clan-based warfare of *Call of Duty*-style games, forcing us to either roll back to old games or just give up altogether.

Steam Cloud is also temperamental at times, and what the hell is Valve Anti-Cheat, doing? Absolutely nothing at all from what I can tell. Out of 10 hosts, at least six will have hackers on them, thus destroying the game for everyone else. It has also added paranoia to the mix, with good players getting accused of being a hacker straight away.

Seeing as Infinity Ward and Activision sold the PC out, I for one won't be buying another *Call of Duty* series game again. They've lost my business. Roll on *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* and *Medal of Honor*. Hopefully they keep up the tradition of PCs having the best online experience.

Sean Clark

True, *Modern Warfare 2*, by virtue of being the most popular thing on the

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Will there ever be a new *Hitman*? We reckon so...

"The lack of dedicated servers was a kick in the teeth to gamers the world over"

planet, was quickly mobbed by hackers on release. And yes, the lack of dedicated servers was a kick in the teeth to PC gamers the world over. But the bit in space was kind of cool, wasn't it?

QUESTION TIME

My computer broke recently and I bought a laptop, so I haven't been playing as many games as before, and I was wondering: is a new *Hitman* game on the horizon or did the film kill it off completely? How long before a game is so old you can freely pass it about? And if you had to recommend three games from the last year for their single-player mode, what'd they be?
Chris Man

As long as Io Interactive are busying themselves with *Kane & Lynch 2*, we won't see another *Hitman* game. That said, Eidos (now Square Enix) have told us that the series hasn't been put to bed just yet. We reckon we'll see more bar-coded slaphead fun at some point in the future.

As for your second question, I don't think games ever become so old that it's OK to pass them about, especially given the rise of sites like *Good Old Games*. Saying that, if you can't easily find a legitimate copy, you're left with little option other than to pluck it from the seedier parts of the internet.

Finally, the three best single-player games of 2009 were: *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Dragon Age: Origins*, and erm... *Spelunky*.

DOCTOR DOCTOR

In issue 216 you said it would be good if there was a *Doctor Who* game. There is one, it is called *Doctor Who: Destiny of the Doctors*.
Conor T Brosnan

What an oversight! We'll also have forgotten about *Dalek Attack*, and the more recent *Doctor Who Top Trumps*. It's official, the good Doctor's been really well served as far as really great computer games are concerned.

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

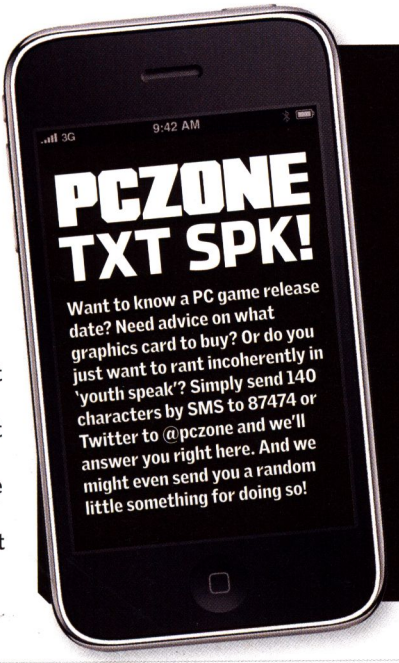
MASS EFFECT 2

Matt Rivers
PC ZONE SCORE 93%

Phwoar, going back to play *Mass Effect* in preparation for this sequel was definitely a good decision. Comparatively speaking this one is light years better. The shonky combat has been pulled out at the foundations and replaced with gunfights that are actually fun to take part in. No longer do I find myself lugging around 14 different versions of the same shotgun.

Surveying planets is still shit though. Are you seriously telling me that in the future they still haven't surveyed Pluto? It's bloody Pluto, get a grip! Honestly. Otherwise the game is brilliant.
YOUR SHOUT 99%

Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



PCZONE TXT SPK!

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Or do you just want to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply send 140 characters by SMS to 87474 or Twitter to @pczone and we'll answer you right here. And we might even send you a random little something for doing so!

Wat would win in a fight 8 rats vs 1 cat
Anon

Eight rats, every time.

Can't play *Mass Effect 2* for another month, don't print a single f**king spoiler.
Darren

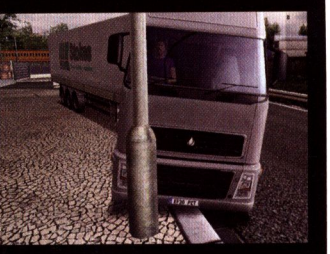
It was Joker all along.

Where's your *Extreme Trucker* review?
Tim

Oh it's coming, in the meantime, have a review of *UK Truck Simulator* (page 89)

haha. This you????
Various

Sod off, spammers.



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.

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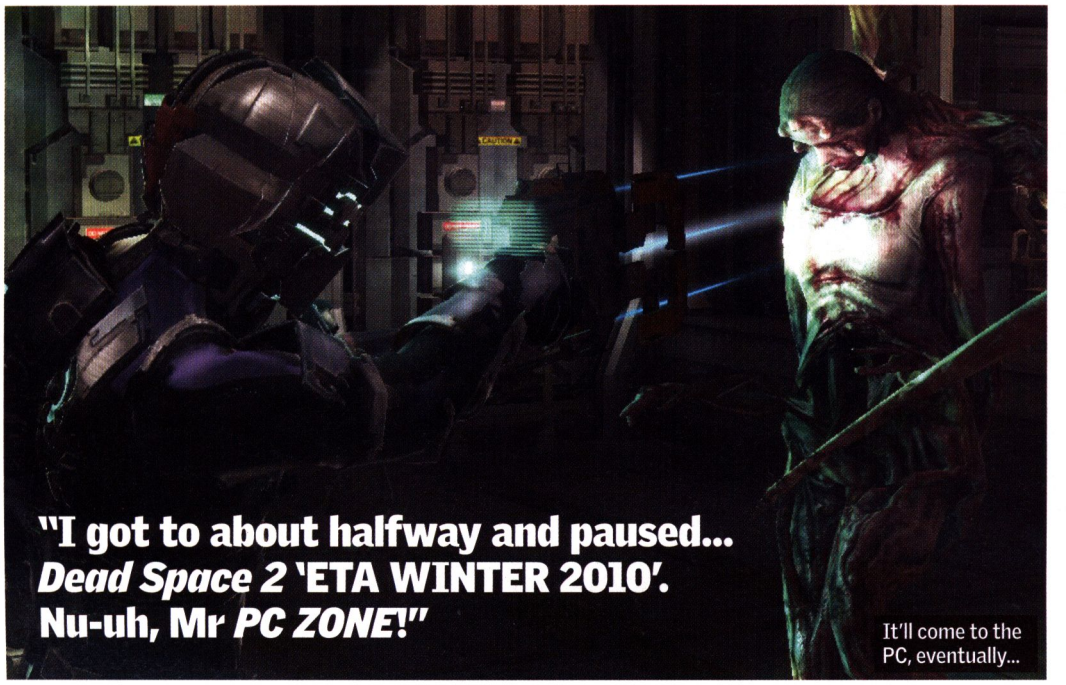


"I got to about halfway and paused... *Dead Space 2* 'ETA WINTER 2010'. Nu-uh, Mr *PC ZONE*!"

It'll come to the PC, eventually...

VERY DEAD SPACE

Just to begin, AHAHAHA, I laugh at thee. As soon as my copy of *PC Zone* 218 dropped through my letter box had I ripped of the flimsy plastic cover and began reading through it. I got to about halfway and paused... *Dead Space 2* "ETA WINTER 2010". Nu-uh, Mr *PC ZONE*! It's now been axed for the PC as quoted by an EA rep on GameSpot.

Unfortunately, it won't be on PC yet (unless of course this is just a massive conspiracy to prevent people leaking it) but I really enjoyed *Dead Space* and a future with no sequel to what was an amazing game with some great juicy horror is bleak indeed.

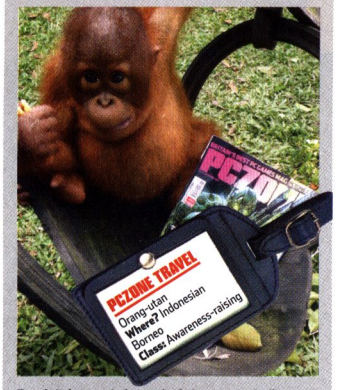
I bet you now hate your printers for printing that. You lied to me *PC ZONE*, lied.

Ben Marks

Yes, alright, we know. Look, news that *Dead Space 2* wasn't coming to PC broke after we went to print. But then, shortly after that, EA.com editor Jeff Green stated that it absolutely was coming to PC – before quickly (and mysteriously) retracting his original statement.

We reckon it'll come to PC, most likely later than the console version, but it'll be here. Honestly. Trust us. Please?

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



Paul Johnson's been helping apes in Borneo. He's graciously exploited this animal by having it hold our magazine. So the least you can do is go to savetheorangutan.co.uk. We promise this is the last time we'll ask.

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!

GAME OFF

GAME's disappointed me with what is a very limited PC stock of late, which in my opinion is both premature and out of the blue. I don't buy this rubbish that stock is limited because people don't understand the specifications on the box (a tale I have been told), this is merely an excuse to stock more console games and utilise the pre-owned/trade in scheme.

Obviously there are other ways to purchase PC games, such as online stores and over *Steam*, but this just isn't the same buzz as going into your local game shop on an afternoon, flicking through the hundreds of PC games, then picking one, going home, installing and enjoying it.

I'm not a huge fan of *Steam* for several reasons, so downloading games is not a way forward for me. I will, however, continue to buy PC games either online or from limited shop stocks – but one thing is for sure, PC gaming will never die no matter how much shops and individuals try to push PCs out and consoles in.

Adie Dewsbury

Online content delivery's the future. Well, it's the present. And it's a tiny bit of the past too. I can't remember the last time I bought a physical product from a corporeal location that wasn't milk, beer or pizza-based. Music, games, films, they all come sliding out of my digital tubes.

CORRECTIONS CORNER

WHERE YOU DARE QUESTION OUR INFALLIBILITY...

COVER CALAMITY

"In issue 218's *Letters* pages KJB sent in his games list and for *Fallout 3* you displayed an Xbox 360 game cover."

Chris Man

Yes, that's because KJB lost the original PC sleeve and replaced it with one from a console version. He explained that in the bit of the letter we cut out.

COUNTING CONUNDRUM

"In issue 218 the page numbers go 19, 22, 23, 22, 23, 28, 29, 26. What happened there?"

Jack Leonard

That's an old *PC ZONE* in-joke – the subscribers loved it. You see, this one time, Dave Woods turned up to the office in a purple... well, we doubt you would understand.

CABARET CASSEROLE

"In issue 218 on page 22, the end of the first paragraph reads "correcting that oversight with the realise of *Bad Company 2*". Huh?"

Jamie Norman

Hold on, which page 22 are you talking about?

I agree that wandering through HMV with friends, sneering and pointing at various dog-turd PC games is an experience to be cherished, but you can have just as much fun browsing Amazon.co.uk while sending links to a buddy over MSN.

The only reason people persist in meeting up in person is because, subconsciously, we think there's a chance that everybody might strip off and start doing one another in the jazz section.

PREDATOAP

As requested in the *Letters* pages of issue 218, here is a picture of a Predator shouting "noob!"

Rob Owens

Excellent. Thank you. PCZ

Tian Tian and Long Long are ChangYou.com's adopted pandas

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ChangYou.com

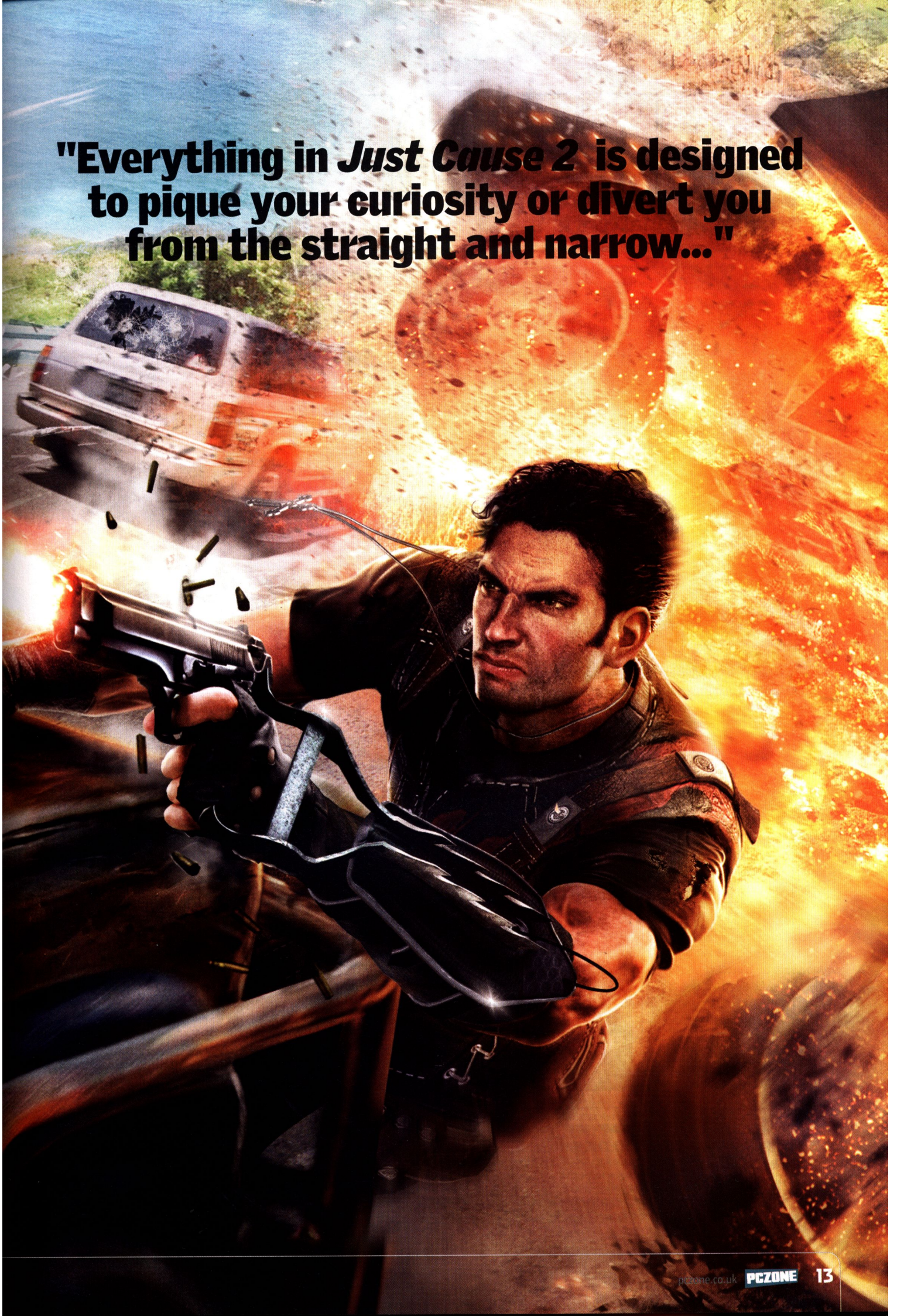
COVER STORY

JUST CAUSE 2

A tropical island, a corrupt dictatorship and a one-man army who just loves the smell of napalm in the morning...

FANCY DIVE-BOMBING a petrol station with a jumbo jet? In *Just Cause 2*, you can do this and so much more. It's a game that rides high on a wave of adrenaline, throwing thrills, spills, chills and other things rhyming with ill at you constantly until you're a broken, bloodied mess. One that's still got a smile on its face, of course. The question is whether hyper-exciting action sequences are enough – is it too console, is it a rubbish port, is there anything to do after you've mown down your 200th enemy? The answers, as you'd expect, lie nestled in our bumper review, starting conveniently on the page indicated by the big number with the word "page" before it...

PAGE 64


"Everything in *Just Cause 2* is designed to pique your curiosity or divert you from the straight and narrow..."

SUNNY BOY
Steve Hogarty

HAVE YOU EVER seen *Sunshine*? It's not a very good film, but it's about a spaceship that's on a mission to reignite the sun. On this spaceship there's a viewing deck, with a big tinted window, allowing the crew to sit and observe the sun in safety. There's only one chair though, so I'm assuming that only the captain's allowed to have a look.

The point is, one guy becomes obsessed with this ball of space-fire as it grows in size, filling the entirety of the viewing pane. He looks at it more and more, twiddling the knobs that control the opacity of the window in a way that worries the on-board computer. I think the Illusive Man in *Mass Effect 2* has the same kind of room I'm talking about.

More games should lift that narrative device. The idea of an observable inevitability, be it an interminable cruise towards an endlessly exploding pile of hydrogen, or a slowly sinking ship, a depleting oxygen supply, the departure of a plane, or the arrival of a tsunami. Some unseen peril that's playing out in real time, utterly removed from the player's control, and always about to arrive. One that you can sit and watch coming.

Nobody likes a constant and pervasive feeling of panic when playing games, of course, as it's genuinely stressful. But there are ways around this. Designers would find them if they worked at it hard enough, and in some cases they already have with the likes of *Pathologic*, and *Uplink*.

Come on you tits, try new things.

THE HUNT IS ON

The dungeon crawler goes co-operative in *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*

DEVELOPER InXile **PUBLISHER** Bethesda **WEBSITE** bethsoft.com **ETA** TBA 2010

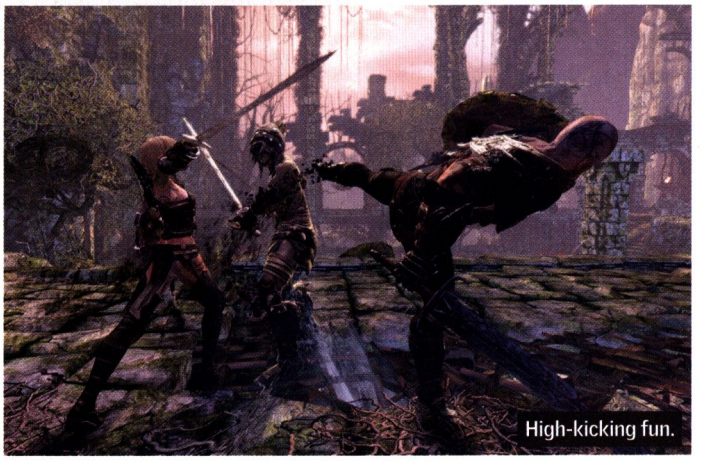
"WE'RE BRINGING BACK the dungeon crawler," claims InXile's Brian Fargo in his most affirmative voice, as his Unreal Engine-powered fantasy adventure fills the screen behind him. He lists the likes of *Baldur's Gate* and *Dungeon Master* as his touchstones. This is the game he and his team have always wanted to make, he promises, and he's finally been afforded the time and money to do it. Cheers Bethesda.

This game is called *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*, and it's best summarised as *Resident Evil 5* meets *Gears of War* meets *Dungeons & Dragons*. Two players assume the roles of Caddoc – a mass of quivering muscle, nipples and hair perched on the hilt of a giant sword – and Elara – a barely legal, barely clothed Elven archer, essentially a Legolas with tits that you're allowed to say you'd like to shag.

The developer's not ready to admit that their two main characters are as immediately engaging as plastic bags with faces drawn on – but we honestly don't think it matters. In *Hunted* the fun is found in their disparate powers.

They flit from cover to cover, with Elara's long-ranged attacks appearing more analogous to gunplay than archery. Naturally, Caddoc's far too thick to wield magic, instead preferring the basic pleasures of melee combat. Elara, like all women, is more in tune with nature, and so she can do magic spells. She can also charge her arrows with elemental abilities: ice will freeze enemies on the spot, for example, allowing Caddoc to wade in with his shattering boot.

"It's best summarised as *Resident Evil 5* meets *Gears of War* meets *Dungeons & Dragons*"



High-kicking fun.

By combining their strengths in this way, they can overcome whatever fantasy tropes are thrown at them. The most notable instance of co-operation is seen in Elara's ability to charge Caddoc with an element, fill him with flames and he'll enter a berserker rage, killing any boss characters in front of him.

Abilities are upgraded as experience is earned, and players can drop in and drop out of one another's games while holding on to the skills and abilities they've unlocked, *Borderlands*-style. The whole thing's laced with some impressive details too – most notably arrows sticking into Caddoc's increasingly pin-cushioned shield, before he then swipes his sword across its front, breaking all the arrow shafts in one go. You know, exactly like how they did it in *300*.

There's also a lot of blood. And in my notes I've written "rips out heart", because there's a bit where a monster rips out a person's still-beating heart. It's all really rather interesting. More on *Hunted* as we learn it. PCZ

STOP PRESS!

DEATH TO THE KING
Activision have put the kybosh on the fan-made sequel to *King's Quest. Silver Lining* was gearing up for a Spring release before the lawyers descended.

THULE UP
Hark at this, a free MMO just sitting right there on the internet ready to be played, all about things Norse. Give it a shot. vikingsofthule.com

AVALANCHE OF SHIT
Christofer Sundberg, CEO of Avalanche, reckons, "*Avatar* is a great example of a game that should never have come out". Hey, us too!

32 REALITY CHECK
See Steve Hill being terrified by men in costumes.

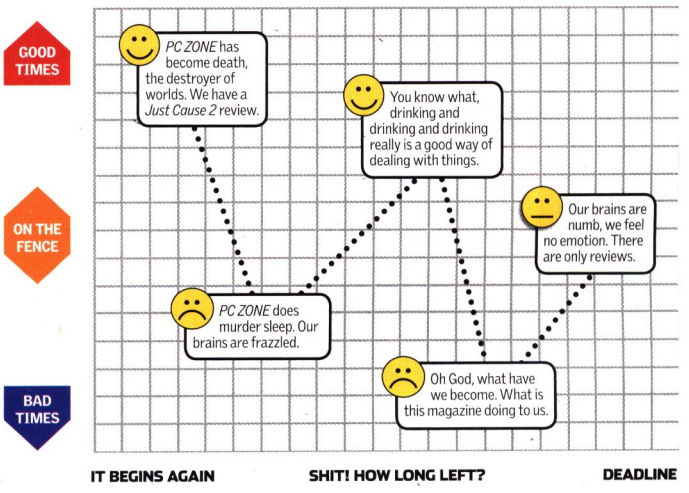
42 CRYSIS 2
See a well-armed man in a tight-fitting suit vault over a taxi.

54 LOST
See a whole bunch of games you'll never ever play.

STUFF

Jason Rohrer, creator of lo-fi arthouse piece *Passage*, is set to release another thing, *Sleep Is Death*. Why should you be care? Perhaps because he's one of the most interesting indie developers around, and *Sleep Is Death* pitches itself as a two-player storytelling game. The website (sleepisdeath.net) explains the concept well, but it essentially appears to be a point-and-click adventure in which the responses to your actions are determined, designed and written by the other player in 30 second turns. A bit like playing *Dungeons & Dragons* - but online!

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



WHEN GAMERS GIVE BACK

Pavel Barter passes the collection box for videogame fund-raising

SOME PEOPLE GO to extreme lengths for charity. You can walk across the Sahara, bathe in baked beans, or endure public humiliation on live TV, but nothing compares to the horror a Canadian comedy troupe endure every year.

Since 2007, Loading Ready Run have played marathon sessions of *Desert Bus*, possibly the most awful game ever. The goal of this mini-game, from 1995's *Penn & Teller's Smoke and Mirrors*, is to drive a bus from Arizona to Las Vegas at a maximum speed of 45mph. In real time. You have to correct the bus when it veers across the road and, well, that's about it.

As part of their last *Desert Bus* for Hope marathon in November, 2009, the Canadians spent five days and 16 hours driving this piece of virtual crap and videostreaming their progress online. There was method in their madness, though: they raised $140,000 (£89,685) for children's charities.

Microsoft and Activision have followed suit, fund raising through game sales, or through online events, and MMOs helped in Haiti. *EverQuest* and *Free Realms* players donated $25,000 (£16,016) to the relief effort by buying certain items, and *Gaia Online* promised to match donations made by their players to the tune of $10,000 (£6,413).

"With more than nine million monthly visitors, *Gaia Online* users are passionate about a broad range of topics, including current events and philanthropy," says *Gaia Online*'s Christina Simmons. "*Gaia Online* is uniquely positioned to tap into the desire that today's young people have to help those around them. Although this is the first time *Gaia Online* has supported a fund-raising effort in-world, we'll definitely consider more philanthropic opportunities in the near future."

"It's especially surprising that the first gamers to give back were sarcasm kings Gabe and Tycho"

There is a thin line, though, between heart-warming altruism and cynical marketing ploy. Every so often, the entertainment industry churns out an all-star line-up: pop stars making insincere speeches, imagery of starving infants, with Vernon Kay and his blinding teeth doing the presenting.

Charity brings out the sceptic in us all, so it's especially surprising that the first gamers to give back were sarcasm kings Gabe (Mike Krahulik) and Tycho (Jerry Holkins) – creators of web comic *Penny Arcade* (penny-arcade.com). Since establishing the charity Child's Play (childsplaycharity.org) in 2003, this duo has facilitated fund-raising to the tune of $6,704,247 (£4,294,800).

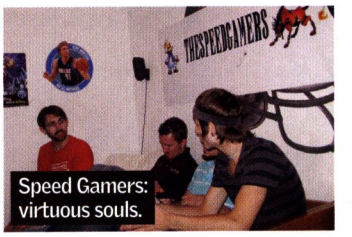
SAVE THE WORLD...

"We had the idea a long time ago," says Tycho. "I'm sure this is true of you as well: dorks end up with a lot of spare equipment. When you get a new machine, that old machine doesn't disintegrate. It's still useful equipment and can be put to a better purpose than propping open a door or being used as a boat anchor.

"It occurred to us, especially with old consoles that play games perfectly well, there's a better purpose than for them just to sit in the closet. As soon as we contacted our local hospital about donations, we found out that you can't donate used products to a hospital. By virtue of necessity, our concept shifted and that's when we made the first Child's Play wish list on Amazon."

In those teething years, Child's Play was a big two fingers to the media's

Now that's a big cheque.



Speed Gamers: virtuous souls.

Tycho and Gabe – monarchs of geeks.

"My sponsored breast enlargement was a treble-D success."

Gaia Online's players helped out Haitians.

image of gamers as drooling morons. "Very quickly, it was no longer the focus to think about those misconceptions," says Child's Play project manager Kristin Lindsay. "We quickly saw the positive impact that Child's Play donations made in the lives of sick children and their families, and it rendered any idea about proving anything irrelevant."

Child's Play also proved that gamers don't need Bono or George Clooney to tell them what to do. Loads of gamer-led charities have sprung up, many of them assisting children's hospitals or victims of natural disasters. Speed Gamers first came together to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a cancer-research facility in Memphis, although their recent donors have included hospitals in the UK.

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

OR A BIT AT LEAST

Gaming charity events can also be a laugh. Child's Play stages an annual charity dinner auction, hosted by Gabe and Tycho, where winning bidders can become guest voice actors in games or cartoon characters in *Penny Arcade*. The Speed Gamers, meanwhile, spend days in their Texan stronghold, trying to complete games as fast as possible.

"Once it gets going, it's a lot of fun," says LaRiviere. "I wouldn't say it's a party, but we're all friends and there are usually five or six people involved. We crack jokes and the webcam captures it all." Last summer, Speed Gamers undertook a week-long marathon in which they attempted to complete every *Final Fantasy* game, raising over $50,000 (£32,030) for autistic children. "We needed a break after that one," says LaRiviere. "You're pretty worked over after three days. After a week, I didn't want to play a game ever again."

But how do you know the money is going to the right place? LaRiviere says no money goes through Speed Gamers. Instead donors give directly to the charity. Some campaigns have less credibility. MMO *Atlantica Online* recently announced it would donate 5% of a "grab bag" to Child's Play. The charity asked not to be involved. Considering the small percentage offered, the publisher was arguably piggy-backing on Child's Play's success.

This was a rare event, though. For years, gaming was thought of as a mildly selfish exercise. Now gamers can give as good as the rest of 'em. "We're inspired by the fund-raising efforts and ability of the music and film industries to mobilise celebrities and consumers," says Craig Sherman, CEO of *Gaia Online*. "That said, we are thrilled by our users' response to the disaster in Haiti and feel it's a good indication that the industry can continue to make a difference."

Or, as LaRiviere puts it: "It's just nice to go against the stigma and show that gamers aren't just lazy bums. We can do good too." PCZ

WE ARE THE WORLD

PC gaming's charitable contributions

THE CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

In the popularity stakes, *The Tuttles Madcap Misadventures: Starlight Charity Challenge* (tuttlesfamilygame.com) is hardly up there with *Halo*. In fact, if a game was any more obscure it would be hiding in a cave in Borneo. Based around a family road trip, this 2008 adventure platformer features Hollywood at its B-list best: TV host Bob Saget as the dad, Jamie Lee Curtis the mum, and *High School Musical*'s Ashley Tisdale the teenage daughter. Former Captain Kirk William Shatner voices the mini-van. Proceeds went to seriously ill children. A few children, at least.

THE CHARITY CALENDAR

The MMO Calendar (mmocalendar.com) is unlikely to become the garage owner's calendar of choice, unless it starts featuring topless Paladins. But for MMO fans, this annual collection is champagne for the eyes, with original artwork from games like *EverQuest II*, *Lord of the Rings Online*, *World of Warcraft* and *Age of Conan*. Money raised goes toward a children's hospital in the US, and people who buy calendars are entered into a draw for MMO prize goodies.

THE HUMANITARIAN GROUP

For a long time, humanitarian organisation Red Cross was hardly the biggest fans of videogames. After all, games often use the group's logo to depict health packs, hospitals, ambulances, and medics. Not exactly the best PR, especially in games that let you shoot doctors in the face. Regardless, Red Cross have discovered the alluring ways of interactive entertainment, creating their own web games. These include *Traces of Hope* (tracesofhope.com), which highlights the plight of Ugandan children, *Red Cross The Game* (redcrossthegame.nl), and *Parcel Panic* (parcelpanic.com).

THE ENDURANCE TEST

Playing Penn & Teller's intentionally terrible bus driving sim requires balls of steel, but every year Loading Ready Run come out swinging. While some participants drive the bus to nowhere, others undergo humiliation for the sake of charity. As part of 2008's Desert Bus for Hope 2 – Bus Harder, one LRR member was forced to watch *Twilight* at the cinema five times in a row. Another had his legs waxed, while another wore a dress for an hour while his mum told stories about his childhood. The horror, the horror.

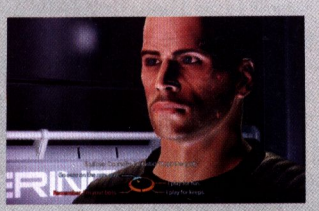
PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

1	NEW	**ALIENS VS PREDATOR**	Issue 218 – 82%
2	—	**THE SIMS 3**	Issue 208 – 92%
3	↓	**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**	Issue 214 – 88%
4	—	**THE SIMS 3:** WORLD ADVENTURES	Issue 215 – 78%
5	NEW	**BIOSHOCK 2**	Issue 218 – 96%
6	↓	**MODERN WARFARE 2**	Issue 215 – 94%
7	↓	**WORLD OF WARCRAFT:** WRATH OF LICH KING	Issue 202 – 86%
8	NEW	**MASS EFFECT 2**	Issue 218 – 93%
9	NEW	**STAR TREK ONLINE**	Issue 219 – 55%
10	↓	**DRAGON AGE:** ORIGINS	Issue 214 – 93%
11	NEW	**STALKER:** CALL OF PRIPYAT	Issue 218 – 80%
12	↓	**EMPIRE:** TOTAL WAR	Issue 206 – 78%
13	NEW	**UK TRUCK SIMULATOR**	Issue 219 – 38%
14	↓	**LEFT 4 DEAD 2**	Issue 215 – 94%
15	↓	**GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**	Issue 203 – 91%
16	—	**FALLOUT 3:** GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION	N/A
17	↓	**SPORE**	Issue 199 – 95%
18	↓	**MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X GOLD**	N/A
19	RE	**BATMAN:** ARKHAM ASYLUM	Issue 213 – 89%
20	RE	**BLOOD BOWL**	Issue 212 – 71%

1. ALIENS VS PREDATOR
(AKA: *The Unluckiest Marine.*) This hit the top spot in record time. Obviously PC gamers are fans of decapitation.

5. BIOSHOCK 2
(AKA: *Play It Again Adam.*) This game's popularity is assured, as it's basically *BioShock* with the kinks ironed out.



8. MASS EFFECT 2
(AKA: *The Dirty Dozen Do Space.*) This game's popularity is assured as it's *Mass Effect* with the kinks ironed out.

11. STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT
(AKA: *STALKER: Ditto.*) This game's popularity is assured as it's *STALKER* with... actually it's just *STALKER* again.

KINGS AND CASTLES

A new Gas Powered strategy game

WEBSITE gaspowered.com

THEY MIGHT HAVE only just finished putting the final touches on *Supreme Commander 2*, yet Gas Powered Games are announcing a new 'epic real-time strategy game', namely one *Kings and Castles*.

Chris Taylor is hailing this game as something different, understandable considering GPG haven't delved into this area of RTS gaming before. Although one could argue that *Total Annihilation: Kingdoms* fits into this category, a game Taylor worked on in his Cavedog days. Anyway, enough with the history lesson.

Before its release *Kings and Castles* is going to be a social networking experience, where potential players can get a taste of the full game. So you can expect your Facebook and Twitter feeds to be swallowed up with plenty of *Kings and Castles* minigames and news.

Also, as an aside, the very first video blog Taylor has recorded regarding the game features him feeding a carrot to a horse. He also messes about with some chickens as well. Not sure what that's got to do with epic fantasy strategy, but yeah, fair enough.

Jeff Lydell
Producer, Relic Entertainment

In Taylor's words, "Synergy will be leveraged, and paradigms will be established. More importantly, buzzwords will be utilized." Shall we analyse these words, and the horse-feeding video too, and guess that the game's going to be, shall we say, slightly tongue-in-cheek when it comes out? We wouldn't bet against that.

"We also promise to gouge evil from its shell at least once, or maybe twice," said Taylor. "But not three times. That would be weird."

Yeah, definitely tongue-in-cheek.

HAVE YOU GOT WORMS?

The 2D annelids back to the PC

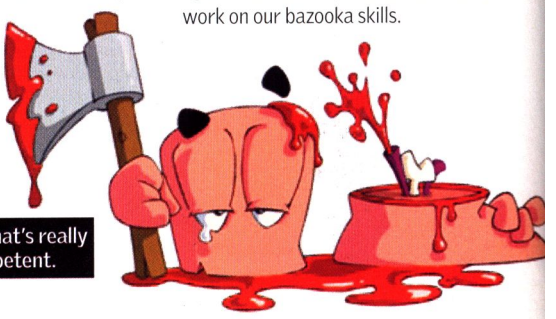
WEBSITE team17.com

TIME WAS YOU could blow up cute pink squigglies at all times of the day or night on your PC. Now, you'd be lucky if you found more than a tiny handful of annelid warriors battling on a randomly generated piece of deformable terrain. Those were great days, but now, who knows, they might be just about to return.

For we have learned that Team 17, creators of *Alien Breed: Evolution* and the immortally terrible beat-'em-up *Body Blows*, are returning to our desktops with a new iteration in the earthworm murder simulator series, *Worms*. All over the country, freshly tilled soil is being disturbed by wiggling warriors eager to fire rockets and exploding sheep at each other, while making cute little noises and spontaneously generating tombstones when they died.

Martyn Brown, a studio director over at Team 17, tweeted that "we are pleased to announce a new edition of 2D *Worms* for PC! '*Worms Reloaded*' is coming soon via *Steam*. Details and features to follow...". It's not a direct quote, as he actually used an ampersand between the words 'details' and 'features', but you get the general idea.

Are you excited by the chance to infest your gaming colon with *Worms* again? We certainly are, so we're off to work on our bazooka skills.



New that's really incompetent.

Home-made dentistry produces stunning results.

FORGED IN FIRE

Battleforge expansion in the works

WEBSITE battleforge.com

ANYONE OUT THERE remember that virtual collectable card game/RTS *Battleforge*? We do, mainly because we got criticised for not giving it a high score. We thought it was an average RTS, but that hasn't stopped a reasonably major expansion being put into the works and prepped for release into the wide world of the gaming community. And so we have the *Lost Souls* expansion.

The addition of two new factions is the major bit of news, which therefore means a grand total of 120 new cards to be slotted into your bulging deck. This equates to 28 new units, 16 new buildings and 16 spells for each new faction.

If you want to buy one of the *Lost Souls* packs and claim your new faction, it'll cost you $2.50, which isn't very much at all. Consider that the full game is free as well (well, "free" in the sense of "free, but you'll never, ever win unless you spend money on a load of the proper cards") and you've got yourself a much better deal than you would originally have had at launch.

It's good that EA didn't just bin the game when people didn't immediately buy into the concept, giving it a chance to flourish by changing its focus. Regardless of what we thought about the game ourselves, it's always nice to see a company stick by their titles, even after a bit of initial heavy weather. So well done EA... for a change.

STEAM'S SHINY NEW LOOK

Steam gets a makeover

WEBSITE steampowered.com

YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN the new *Steam* look by now, which was in beta (and may well still be) when we wrote these words. It's certainly sleeker and more visually arresting than it was before, reminding Overlord Hogarty (as he is known to us now) of that bastion of contemporary design: the Channel 4 website.

The good news is this new *Steam* hasn't deviated too far from the original design, so you don't have to relearn how to do everything.

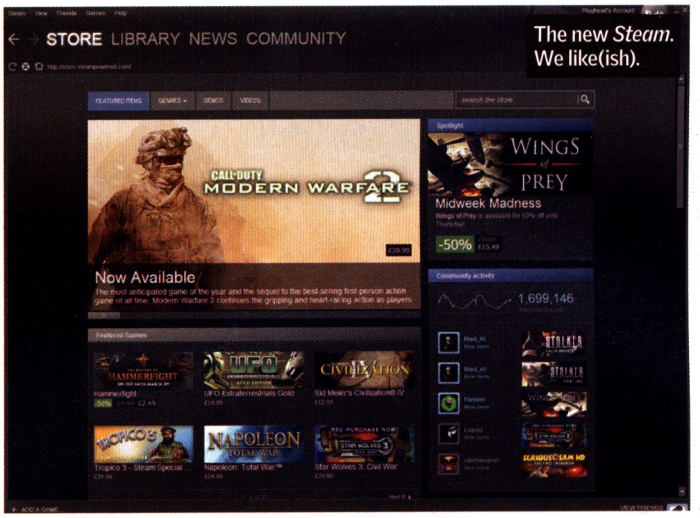
The bit that's be tweaked the most is the Games list. Here you can wow your friends by clicking on the name of a game and bam, a lovely little picture appears in the background, sparking many an ooh and an ah from passers-by.

More useful is the list of people in your Friends list who've ever played the game, achievements and recent news specific to that very game, all on the same page. It's certainly a lot better than the original, where information was hidden away in separate sections, so much so that you might not even know it was there.

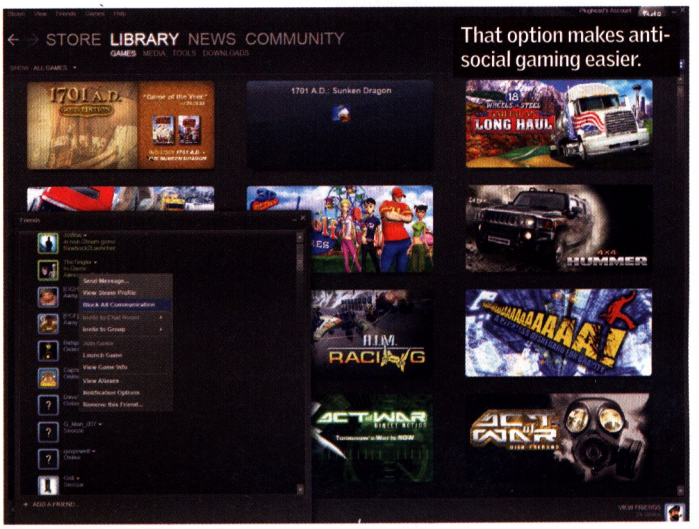
All in all, we like the new-look Steam and we're sure the beta feedback will make it even better. Do you like it? Do you have it? Let us know right now, by emailing letters@pczone.co.uk

"You can wow your friends by clicking on the name of a game"

Most excitingly for the nerd writing this, there are far more statistics and information easily available to the user, such as the 'Community Activity' bit on the main page. Here it tells us how many people are currently online using the service worldwide (1,438,382 at 12:20 on the 25 February) and it also keeps you up-to-date with who has bought what recently, in visual form rather than the old text list way. Lush. Special deals are also much more easily flagged up and noticeable.



The new *Steam*. We like(ish).



That option makes anti-social gaming easier.

18

Games for Windows LIVE

XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE

PS3 PlayStation-3

PlayStation-Network

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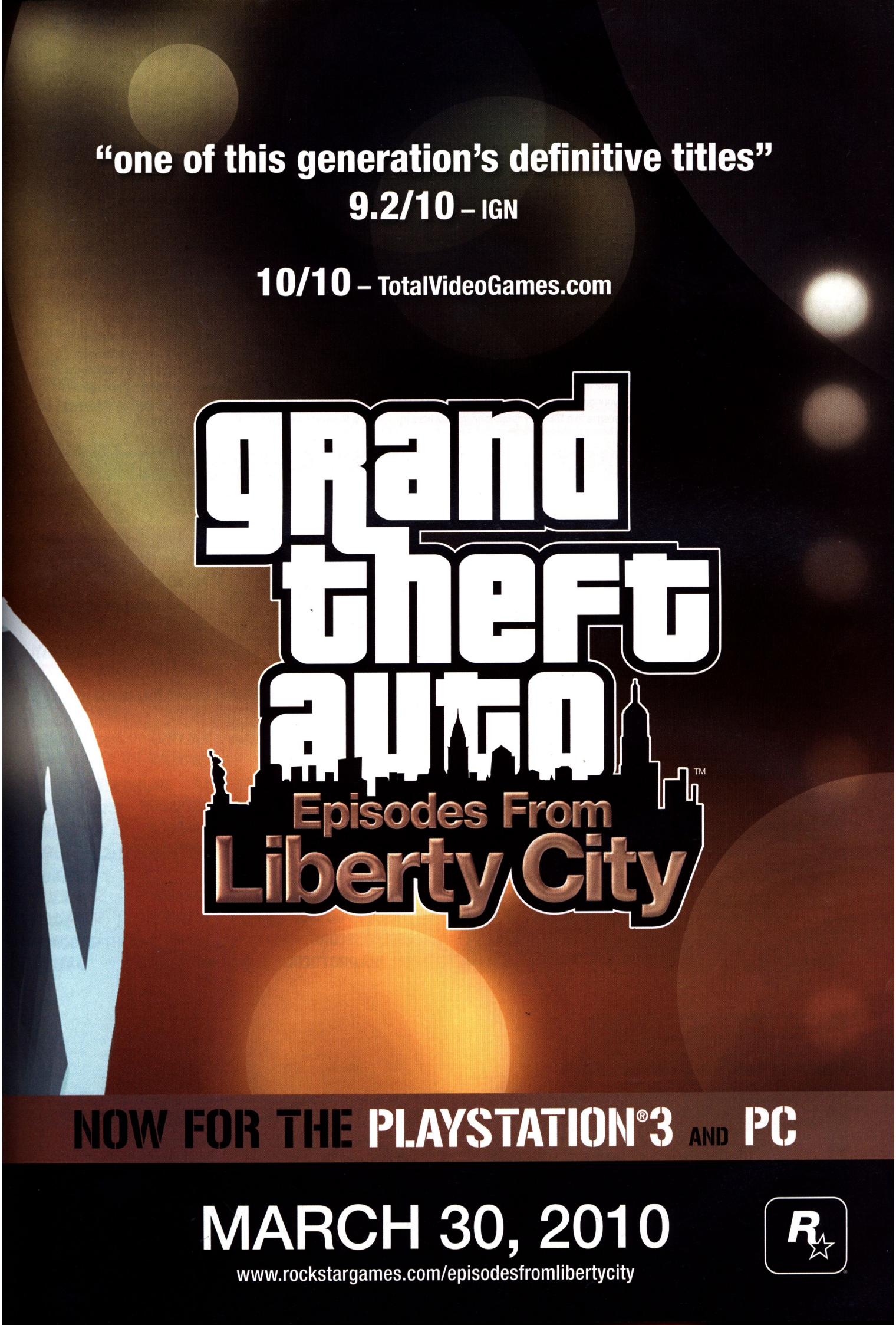

"one of this generation's definitive titles"
9.2/10 – IGN
10/10 – TotalVideoGames.com
grand theft auto
Episodes From
Liberty City
NOW FOR THE PLAYSTATION®3 AND PC
MARCH 30, 2010
www.rockstargames.com/episodesfromlibertycity

Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

THE GLUT OF good gaming has nearly come to an end. By the time you read this, a lot of this year's heavy hitters will have delivered their payloads and settled back for a game of dominoes in a digital retirement home, while their younger sequels are being carefully put together behind the scenes in a top-secret location somewhere in Canada. This means the Incoming list has a few more of the lesser lights; games that you just won't see anywhere else but on the PC. So give thanks for *Rise of Prussia*, bow down for *Mount&Blade* and salute *Achtung Panzer*! Those dirty consoles won't be able to handle the devastating realism of a Russian tank game, but your PC can. Hurrah!

METRO 2033

We've just started reading the English-translated novelisation of Dmitry Glukhovsky's underground epic and it's pretty darned good. You get a definite feeling of desolation and utter darkness, about just how horrible living underground in post-nuclear war Moscow must be.

The game looks to be getting that atmosphere just right, so much so that Glukhovsky hasn't distanced himself from this project. In fact, he's right on board with 4A Games and THQ, travelling with them to big up their game up for the whole world to see.

We're getting very excited about this title, so you should too.

SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES

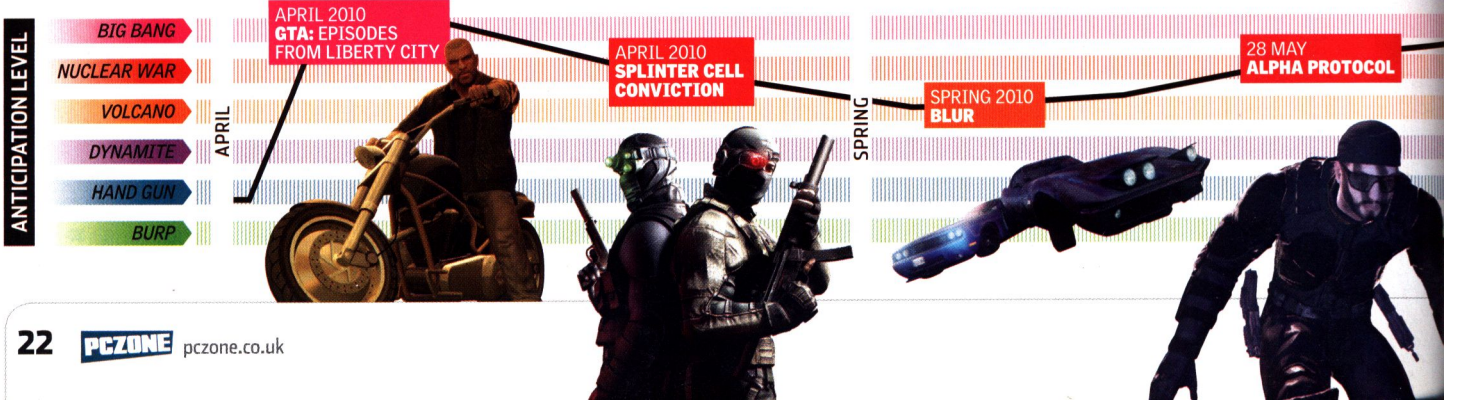
You don't get to ride about on a boat owned by Greenpeace very often. Nor do you get to prevent whale hunters from doing their dirty business. In *Ship Simulator Extremes*, these two things will be among the vast multitude of surprisingly interesting activities you can get involved with.

Plus there will be a very extensive mission editor suite to sink your teeth into. Fancy creating tsunami-size waves to navigate in your tiny dinghy? The (sea) world's your oyster with this one, an example of what can happen when a development team takes a genuine interest in making their otherwise-serious title fun.

GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT	EA	19 MARCH
METRO 2033	THQ	19 MARCH
JUST CAUSE 2	SQUARE ENIX	26 MARCH
GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY	ROCKSTAR	30 MARCH
MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND	PARADOX	30 MARCH
THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM	UBISOFT	26 MARCH
SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION	UBISOFT	15 APRIL
SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES	PARADOX	16 APRIL
POLE POSITION 2010	KALYPSO	APRIL
ACHTUNG PANZER	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC	EA	SPRING 2010
BLUR	ACTIVISION	SPRING 2010
LEAD AND GOLD	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
NECROVISION: LOST COMPANY	1C COMPANY	SPRING 2010
MAJESTY 2: KINGMAKER	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
RISE OF PRUSSIA	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
SPLIT/SECOND	DISNEY	21 MAY
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	28 MAY

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.



LEGO HARRY POTTER	WARNER BROS	MAY
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	MAY
TOY STORY 3: THE VIDEO GAME	DISNEY	15 JUNE
DARK STAR ONE	KALYPSO	16 JUNE
THE WHISPERED WORLD	DEEP SILVER	25 JUNE
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	JUNE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ARMADA OF THE DAMNED	DISNEY	31 AUGUST
APB	EA	AUTUMN 2010
CRYSIS 2	EA	AUTUMN 2010
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	AUTUMN 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	WINTER 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOID	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY	SOE	TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS	PARADOX	TBA 2010
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SOE	TBA 2010
DEAD ISLAND	TECHLAND	TBA 2010
DEUS EX 3	EIDOS	TBA 2010
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE	VALVE	TBA 2010
MAGICKA	PARADOX	TBA 2010
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	TBA 2010
RAGE	EA	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
THIEF 4	EIDOS	TBA 2010

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2

So it's not really going to be set in the Asylum, at least not very much. We're going to guess and says the name's going to change too. That handy little bit of punctuation between the words 'Batman' and 'Arkham Asylum' gives Rocksteady the ability to drop any Dark Knight-related name in there.

Sadly, there's not going to be any dancing mini-games in the new bestest-ever Batman game, that much we can say with authority. But people need to realise that the campy '60s version was the best Batman. The best, we tellsya! Sorry, where were we? Oh, yes, it's just appearing on the edge of our excitement zone, so stay tuned.

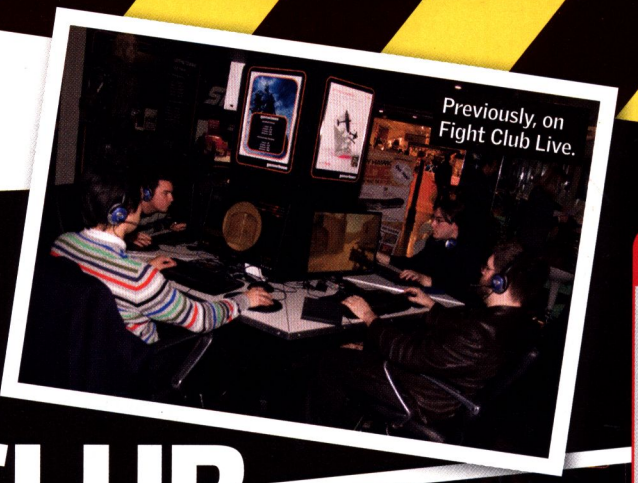
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO

The first screens have hit us and they look like you'd expect – big supermen in massive armour shooting at green creatures with spiked massive armour.

OK, the pictures we've seen don't show Orks, but we know those massive Greenskins are going to be in there somewhere – after all, it wouldn't be Warhammer without them.

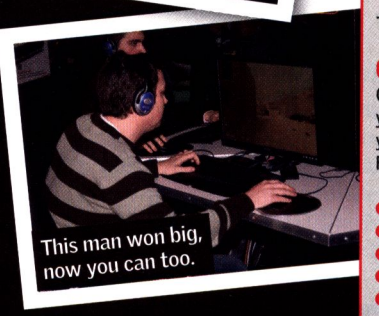
The most striking image is of a blue marine sitting on a clearly-too-big throne. Maybe he's just keeping it warm for his giant father, who's just gone down to the shops to fetch a some bread, milk and a copy of *Tyrannid Tramps Monthly*? All will be revealed once this game gets beyond the "Oh, it exists?" stage.

VICTORIA 2	PARADOX	TBA 2010
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	EARLY 2011
SWORD OF THE STARS 2	PARADOX	EARLY 2011
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	SPRING 2011
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	AUTUMN 2011
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2011
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2	UBISOFT	TBA 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO	THQ	TBA 2012


Previously, on Fight Club Live.

FIGHT CLUB LIVE!

PC ZONE's online deathmatch gets physical...


This man won big, now you can too.

WE'RE HAVING A party, and (assuming it doesn't sell out in the time between me typing these words and you reading them) you're invited. It's a local area network, or LAN party, and you can stop rolling your eyes right now, because you won't have to lug your expensive and delicate PC anywhere.

We're hosting it at Gamerbase inside the HMV just off Piccadilly Circus, in London Town, where they've got a whole fleet of gaming PCs pre-loaded with bum-loads of multiplayer games. The idea is this: we all go there and play a bunch of games together.

It won't cost you a penny to come along (if you walk or hitchhike), and there'll be prizes for winners, and raffles for those who do better in randomly allocated, non-skill based competition. It gets even better, as Ubisoft will be there with *Splinter Cell Conviction*!

If you're nice to them, they promise to let you play a whole co-op level. Keep in mind that the game won't be out for another month, which will make you one of the first in the world to play it. How very exciting is that? PCZ

"It gets even better, as Ubisoft will be there with *Splinter Cell Conviction*!"

THE DEETS

LOCATION
Gamerbase,
HMV, Trocadero, 7-14 Coventry Street,
London, W1D 7DH
Nearest Tube station: Piccadilly Circus.

TIME
Thursday, 25 March: 6:30pm

GAMES
Gamerbase has tonnes of games, which you can go ahead and play whenever you like. But the schedule for Official Fight Club Live Games is as follows:

- Counter-Strike: Source
- Team Fortress 2
- TrackMania Sunrise
- Left 4 Dead 2
- Splinter Cell Conviction (available throughout the evening)

WHAT YOU NEED
Nothing. Gamerbase will provide all the kit you need, and as long as you've registered we'll have your name at the door. You can bring your own keyboard and mouse if you want to scare people. You can also bring a guest, though we can't guarantee that they'll have a PC to use – you'll have to share. Honestly, if we see your mate using somebody else's PC, Log will kick off and start tipping over desks.

HOW DO I DO IT THEN?
First, please be sure that you're available. Tickets are limited, and if you grab one and don't show up we'll stand at Piccadilly Circus all evening tapping our watches and muttering "He said he'd be here. He really should be here by now".

So, are you sure you can come? Good. Go here to register: **futurecompetitions.com/pczonefightclub**

You can see we've reverse-engineered the competition form to work as a registration site, but it's not a competition – it's Fight Club Live!

GREAT, I'VE DONE IT
Cool. We look forward to seeing you there! If you've any questions, please send them to *PC ZONE*'s editor, Steve Hogarty, at steve.hogarty@futurenet.com. He'll look at them, shake his head in utter disdain and sigh while he deletes it.

More information can be found at **pczone.co.uk.**

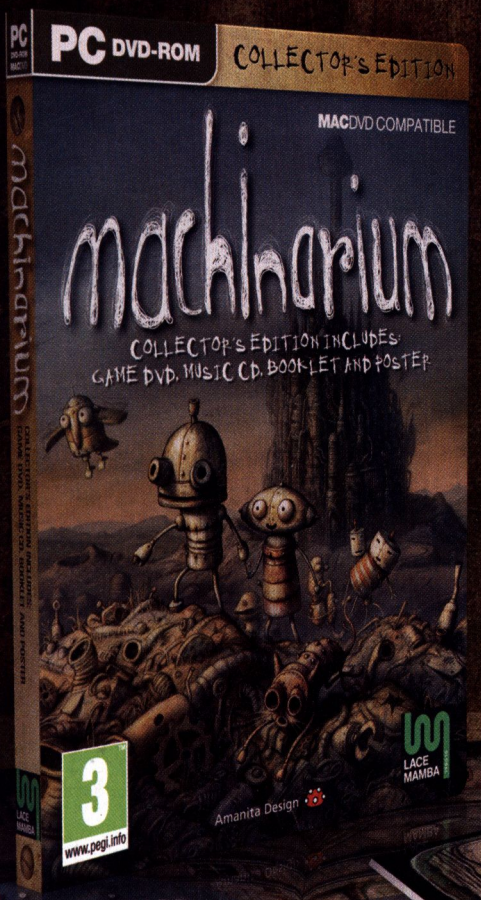
PCZONE PRESENTS FIGHT CLUB LIVE!
6:30PM THURS 25 MARCH
TROCADERO, LONDON
GO HERE TO REGISTER: WWW.FUTURECOMPETITIONS.COM/PCZONEFIGHTCLUB

Amanita Design

LACE MAMBA GLOBAL

machinarium

COLLECTOR'S EDITION INCLUDES:
GAME DVD, MUSIC CD, BOOKLET AND A2 POSTER



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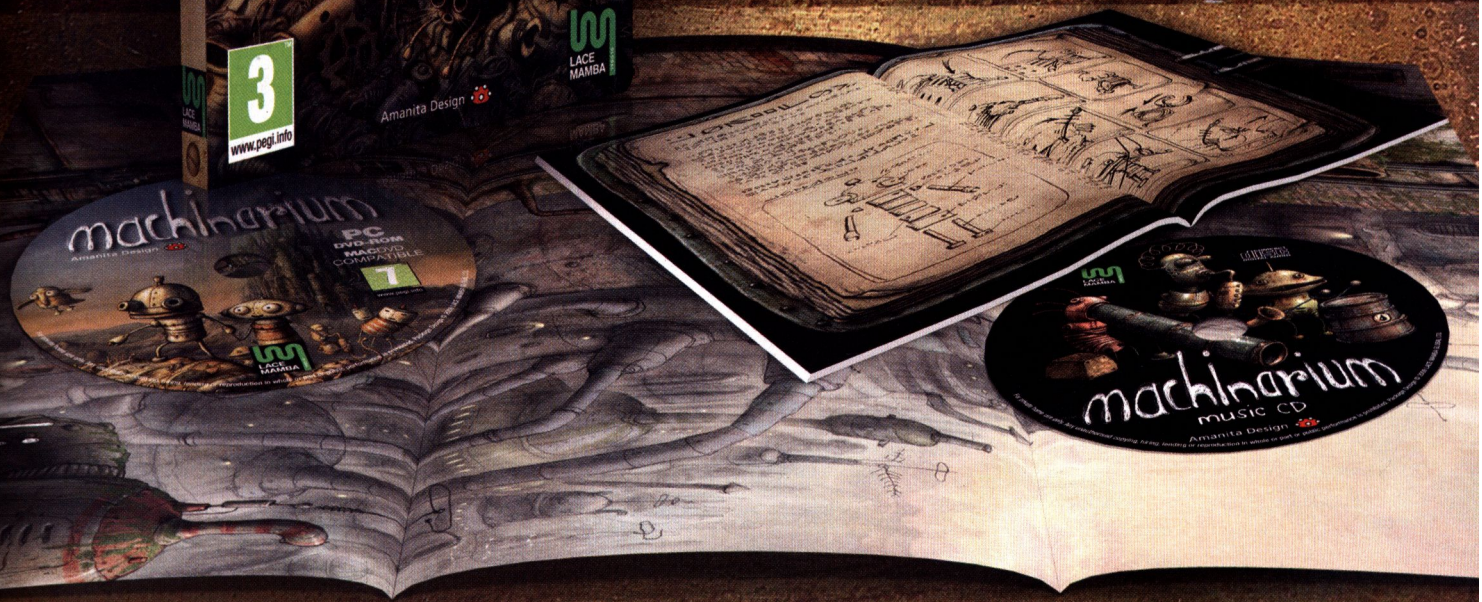

3 www.pegi.info

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JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

Two Worlds Collide

If you want to enter into a 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

The relationship between movies and games has always been tense. Well, not always. There was a time when pixels didn't aspire to look exactly like Bruce Willis, and films didn't include race scenes that would make great levels.

However, gamers share their primary interests (robots, zombies, ghosts, mutants, pirates, and shit like that) with seven year-old children, so we shouldn't be too surprised when a lot of games have that level of sophistication. And let's face it, we're all massive infants. You can ponder the nature of community in *BioShock* as much as you like, but that doesn't change the fact we came to shit up the mutants.

Games like *Arkham Asylum* and *Aliens vs Predator* prove that when they're not tied to a movie release schedule, movie-related games can be good. So, to avoid those common pitfalls, the only solution is to remake some old movies. No time pressures, no marketing schedules, and if we choose shit films, no fans to worry about upsetting.

THE PIANO

Now I haven't seen *The Piano*. As far as I can tell, it's about a woman who goes to a beach to play a piano, but that could be *The Beach* too, if there's a piano in that.

Anyway, it looked like an emotional film, so it'd be a great way to pull in the bored *Bejewelled*-housewife crowd. So, you play the role of a piano, and you have to communicate using the seven letters of the musical stave.

"Where is my wife?" asks Harvey Keitel. "D.E.A.D." you reply. "Oh my God, what happened?" he begs. "F.E.D. A. B.A.D. C.A.B.B.A.G.E" you reply. Then he breaks down into tears while you play *Chopsticks*. That's Level 1.

BOXING HELENA

This 1994 movie in which Julian Sands removes the legs and arms of the woman he thinks he loves, is just the kind of tear-jerking drama that'd be a great game.

My first thought was to make it co-op multiplayer, with one player as Helena, screaming emasculating insults into a microphone while the guy playing Julian Sands taps the space bar to hack her off at the elbows.

But then I thought why not do a "three years later" game, in which Helena has been fitted with rocket boots and telescopic arms? She'd be a genuinely empowering role model for quadriplegic amputees (as long as those quadriplegic amputees have casual access to rocket boots and telescopic arms, otherwise it'd possibly be rubbing their faces in it).

SUPER MARIO BROS

This movie has some of the elements required for a good game, but would need to be heavily re-imagined to gain any kind of longevity. The melancholy and moral ambiguity of a game like *Shadow of the Colossus* would work well: you take on the role of an inch-high Dennis Hopper, who must clamber along a Hoskin's hairy torso, as he lumbers through his morning routine. Hold onto his shin hair as he does his star jumps, knot yourself up in his forearm rug as he cleans his teeth (this is a stealth section – don't let him see you in the mirror) and meet a challenging series of quick-time events to swing from bollock to bollock during a noisy wank.

"However, gamers share their primary interests with seven year-old children... let's face it, we're all massive infants"

REQIUEM FOR A DREAM

BioShock let us know that gamers have few qualms about stabbing their forearms full with whatever's in the first syringe they see. That's why Darren Aronofsky's harrowing tale of where drug addiction ends up couldn't be more timely.

I see it as a 2D platformer, in which you run around collecting keys, avoiding the syringes, tobacco, and diet pills that fly around the room – just like they do in any modern playground. When you get hit (and you will get hit, as the levels have no end) the screen just goes black and it says "I HOPE YOU HAD FUN TAKING DRUGS BECAUSE YOU'RE DEAD NOW".

As far as I'm concerned, I've healed the rift between the movie and game industries. If you've got any more problems with it, it's not my fault. PCZ

PHOTO: FOTOLIA

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TWO WORLDS II

DEVELOPER Reality Pump **PUBLISHER** TopWare Interactive **WEBSITE** twoworlds2.com **ETA** April 2010

IF YOU EVER got to play *Two Worlds*, you'll probably never forget the experience. If you mention it to someone, their eyes light up and they go "Oh yeah, *Two Worlds*, that was awesome..." or something along those lines. They mean it in an affectionate way not because it was brilliant, but because it was laughable in many ways.

The game had that curious mainland Europe feel to it, which we English speakers just can't seem to get our heads round. The sort of thinking that gives you the opportunity to jump into a full bath with your armour on for no reason whatsoever (*Risen*) or spend hours sawing at wooden logs, again for no reason (*Gothic*).

Two Worlds II is aiming to be more accessible and less weird than its genre buddies, ditching the Olde Englishe script and comic acting. Will this mean it's a better game that people won't actually remember as much? Time will tell...

THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. BORN IN THE USA

The first *Two Worlds* was very much a product of mainland Europe, a quirky, flawed yet strangely lovable RPG with comically bad voice acting. This time around a script full of 'forsooths' won't be an issue, as development duties have switched over to the New World: the USA to be exact. In a nod to the old days, however, there will be one area of the game where people still speak in the 'olde tongue'.

2. MAIN MAN

You, the hero, are the same guy you were in the first game, except you've been brutally tortured for seven years in a dungeon. As you'd expect, this means you've lost all your skills, abilities and talents, forcing you to relearn everything as you get back up to speed. Killing zombies is as good a place to start as any if you're trying to bone up on fighting skills.

3. GREEN GIANT

This is an orc, who isn't actually the generic bad guy you'd expect him to be. He's actually wise and will help you out right at the start of the game. You've just hobbled out of your own personal torture chamber and the last thing you want to do is fight a guy in big pointy armour. This orc helps you not die, which makes him OK in our book.

4. BOOT TO THE HEAD

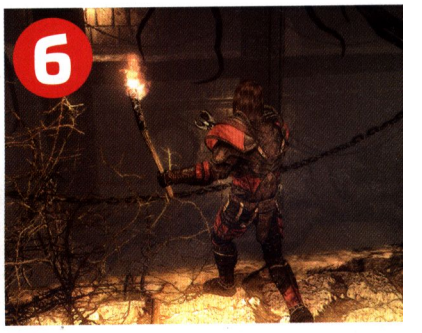
Despite what it looks like here, you won't be able to get stuck in with the kicks and punches. How cool would it have been to start going Bruce Lee on a zombie all of a sudden? There are five minigames here, including a *Guitar Hero*-style affair, curiously, but we'd have wanted a martial arts one instead.

5. WOLF MOTHER

While the move to an American studio will mean *Two Worlds II* won't be as quaint and quirky as it was, that doesn't mean they've stripped out the fantasy cliché gubbins we all know and love. The Wolfiend is a wolf crossed with a diabolical fiend. Your melee arsenal includes *Mortal Kombat*-esque finishing moves, so this Wolfiend will probably end up frozen in ice then shattered with an uppercut.

6. GLOOMY SUNDAY

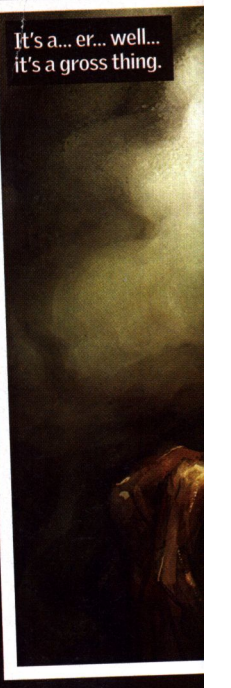
Two Worlds II will have a more sinister take on the general fantasy world you'd expect. It's not a unique slant, but *Two Worlds II* will be the first to include online multiplayer set in this world, with even a seven-level co-op campaign following on from events in the first game. There'll also be something called Village mode, which features a splash of *Sim City*-style gameplay. Bizarrely.



THOMAS GRIP
CO-FOUNDER, FRICTIONAL GAMES

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

How *Amnesia* is revolutionising the first-person scare...


It's a... er... well... it's a gross thing.

THERE AREN'T MANY games that are set in Greenland. Frictional Games thought that should be corrected, so they placed the hero of their horrifying *Penumbra* series in that bitterly cold climate.

The *Penumbra* series was praised for its use of subtle terror tactics and a lack of combat mechanics that forced players to use their wits to get past obstacles and enemies. Now Frictional are back with *Amnesia*, which is kicking off where *Penumbra* left us, drooling and gibbering in the dark.

Frictional's Thomas Grip emerged from the shadows, delivered answers to our unasked questions and phased out of existence before our very eyes. Here's what he had to say.

Q **What's *Amnesia* all about, and where is it set?**

A *Amnesia* starts out with the protagonist waking up in a castle without any memories, except a feeling of being hunted. The player must then explore the protagonist's past, find out what has happened and try to stop the events that are about to unfold.

On a deeper level, *Amnesia* is about exploring evil in humans and our goal is that the players should feel connected with the protagonist in such a way that the hero's background should feel like their own forgotten memories. This is our basis for building a hopefully emotional and disturbing narrative.

As with our previous games, we aim to create a truly frightening experience, and with *Amnesia* we aim to step up from what we did in *Penumbra* and make something truly nightmarish. If players lose sleep after playing then we have succeeded in our goals!

Will *Amnesia* feature physics-based interaction with the environment as in *Penumbra*?

Yes! And hopefully it'll be a lot smoother this time. We've spent countless hours streamlining the interaction, which could get be cumbersome in *Penumbra*, to make the best possible experience. We hope that the current system will be easy to pick up, yet give the player a very immersive and powerful system to interact with their surroundings.

Will the game be more combat-focused this time?

There'll be no combat at all, and the enemy encounters will have the player either hiding or running. Sometimes, using your wits and the environment is needed in order to proceed. We did try out including some combat at first, but it just did not create the kind of atmosphere we were after, so we removed it completely in the end.

To be honest, although I like to play combat-focused games from time-to-time, there's just too much killing at the core of most games. This is something that has cursed games ever since *Galaga* and such, having players commit a kind of genocide as they progress through the game. I think it is really sad that around 80% or so of today's top titles have this sort of mechanic at their core. If it continues, games will probably end up in the comic book ghetto, which makes me sad.

"I like to play combat-focused games, but there's just too much killing at the core of most games"

Essentially, real-time first person games with combat are flooding the market and if we can disrupt that trend, it feels like we are doing some good. This has also been a major motivation behind ditching combat.

Will the sanity of the main character be relevant?

Madness will be integral part of how *Amnesia* will play. The protagonist is afraid of the dark and remaining in gloomy environments will slowly drain your sanity, resulting in a range of diverse and not-so-pleasant effects. Encountering enemies and other frightening events will also reduce your mental health, so attempting to remain sane is a major part of the experience.

It's also important to note that sanity isn't just some gimmick, it doesn't just affect some stats behind the scenes, but it's about giving the player certain emotions and making madness intrinsically unsettling. At least, that's what the tests we've carried out so far are promising will happen.

Has *Penumbra*'s philosophy of 'understated horror' guided *Amnesia*'s development?

Using the player's imagination instead of just showing things "in bright light" is something of a rule for us. One can never create graphics that will compare to what a player's imagination can conjure up.

Playing sounds instead of using visuals and hinting at horrors instead of experiencing them directly are examples of the tricks we use. It isn't always easy to do, but when it works it has an extremely powerful effect.

Are your games still being published by Paradox?

No. We are 100% independent now! All money that has gone into the project, apart from a grant we received, has been from our own pockets!

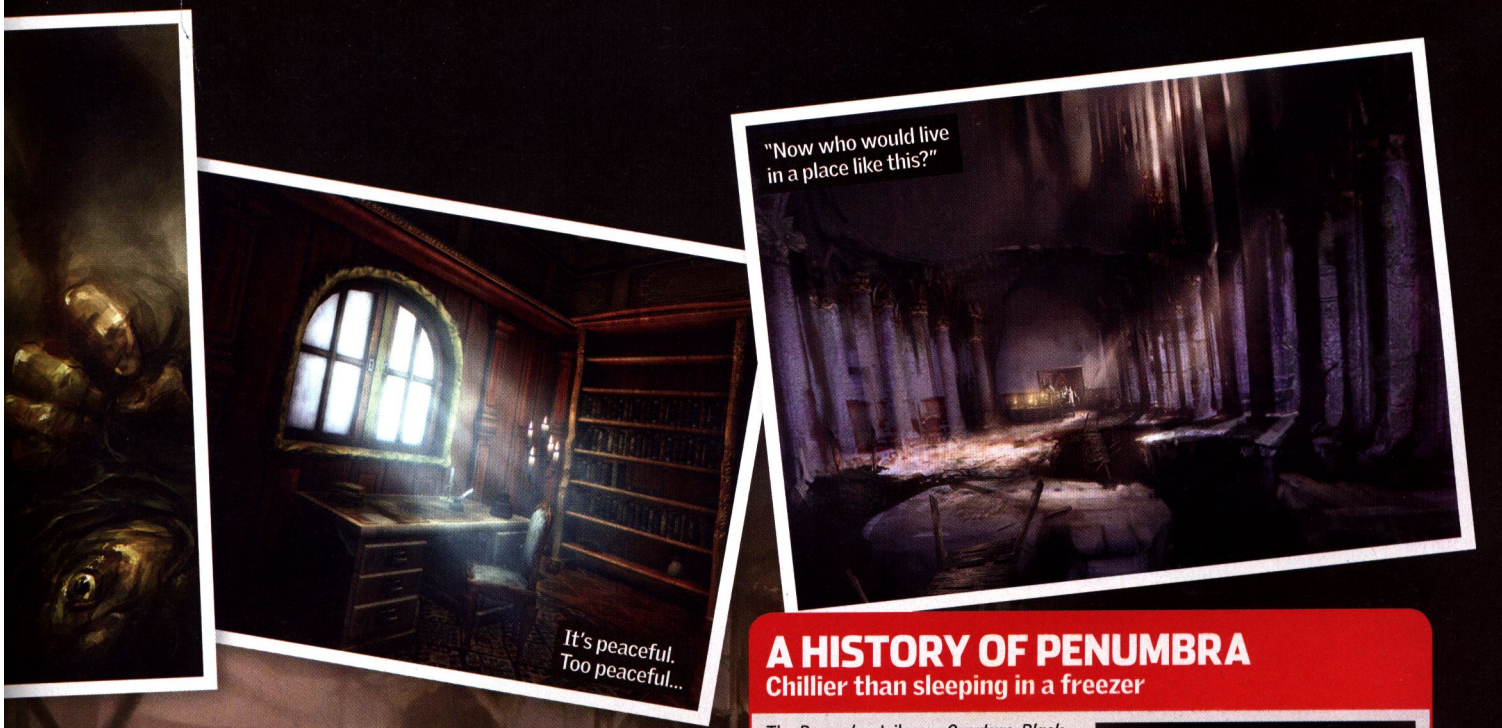
Will there be any references to *Penumbra* in *Amnesia*, or is it an entirely different world?

There will be no crossovers in terms of storylines other than extremely minor stuff that fans of *Penumbra* might catch. Players that have never played *Penumbra* will lose nothing in terms of story when playing *Amnesia*.

After experimenting in *Penumbra: Requiem*, are you going back to basics with this game?

We definitely learned a lot from *Requiem* [an expansion for *Penumbra:*

Oh, that has got to be evil.



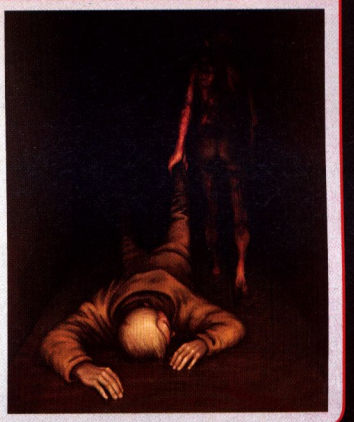
A HISTORY OF PENUMBRA

Chillier than sleeping in a freezer

The *Penumbra* trilogy – *Overture*, *Black Plague* and *Requiem* – scared the bejesus out of all who came into contact with it. Focusing primarily on avoiding conflict, it was all about solving physics puzzles while strange things screwed with your mind and dog-monsters tried to chew off your face.

Indie games at heart, they showed more horror savvy than most of today's multimillion dollar projects have ever done, demonstrating that there really is scope for engaging the player in a horror context without resorting to simplistic shock tactics and creatures with dripping flesh and weird appendages.

If you haven't played them, you really, really should. Right now.



Black Plague focused almost exclusively on puzzle-solving], mainly that you should never change the way a game is played and still give it the same name.

We don't think we made a bad game with *Requiem*, but we made something that was almost the opposite of what players thought it would be, and hence they were extremely disappointed. Also, we used our technology in ways for which it was not originally intended, resulting in poor performance on some systems. We promise never to repeat these mistakes!

Penumbra featured electronics. Will _Amnesia_ will have a different focus?

We've changed computers to cog wheels, steam machines and that kind of apparatus. It's been challenging to come up with good puzzles that fit the story when there are no computers available. Keypads make great puzzle elements. That said, it also forces you to think in different ways and has hopefully made us come up with more interesting ideas, rather than simply reusing things seen in previous games.

Will there be more dog-monsters?

One never knows what might lurk behind a dark corner... PCZ

"Oh well this is just ruined, lovely..."

REALITY CHECK

ALIENS

Just how realistic are the *Aliens* games? *Steve Hill* soils himself in the name of science...

"Blowing your own head off solves nothing!"

Dentist appointment gone terribly wrong.

Nothing is more real than a bald man.

YOUNGER AND SENILE readers may be asking, "What the hell is Reality Check?" According to a bloke on the internet, it's a feature introduced by me in 2001, "the idea of which was to compare top games with the real-life experiences they were supposed to replicate.

"The comparison took a back seat to Hill's description of the day itself, which usually drew attention to his inability to get to grips with the task while having a hangover. Increasingly the columns began to build a disturbing picture of the life of a freelance games journalist, and though they were entertaining, Hill was clearly in it for the money."

He was doing well until the last line, as being a games journalist for the money is like being a coalminer for the sunshine. Furthermore, in a buck with tradition, this outing sees me hangover-free, fresh as a daisy having not had a beer since New Year's Day (and no, it isn't 2 January). Sobriety can still be a scary beast however, as I learn when I am greeted by a life-sized Xenomorph.

As any *Aliens* bore will tell you, they mostly come at night, so this one is incongruously wandering around a packed bar at midday, scaring the bejesus out of anyone who takes their eye off the ball. The omnipresent creature is a novelty addition to an otherwise bog-standard press day, and the actor inside throws himself into the role, with an impressive stealth hiss causing one girl to literally launch her drink into the air in cartoon fashion. *PC ZONE* editor Hogarty falls for it: headphones on, engrossed in the game, he bucks wildly as the Alien looms in his face, before picking up the pad and pretending it never happened.

GENITALIEN

I manage to keep the bastard at arm's length, although am forced to face my fears for the obligatory photoshoot.

Despite being some tit in a suit, up close it's genuinely disturbing. Whatever Swiss designer HR Giger was getting at (fear of cocks or birth or something) it evidently works.

Extensive research carried out this second reveals that the alien's "design deliberately evokes many sexual images, both male and female, to illustrate its

blurring of human sexual dichotomy". Same thing.

In short, it's a big scary bastard that worms its way into your fragile psyche and gives you the heebeejeebees. While it might have led Ripley – and a generation of gamers – a merry dance, I discovered an Achille's heel when I inadvertently tread on its foot, resulting in a muffled cry from deep in the suit.

While hamming it up for the photos, I appear to have missed the briefing of the Laser Tag session that makes up the supposed fun part of the day. As such, I'm thrust into The Hangar armed only with a toy gun, a hairnet and a helmet.

Part of a crack squad of marines, it's essentially a real-life team deathmatch, with no Aliens (he's on a tea break) and no Predators, unless they're invisible.

There is also no tangible strategy, and after hiding in a wooden box this sorry quartet makes its way into the wider world only to be mown down in a crossfire of lasers.

GAME OVER MAN!

A hit to the gun or chest plate results in your weapon repeatedly barking the word "De-fence!" during which time you can't fire back.

This is all a frustrating business, and I seem to be getting the worse of it, to the extent that one of the helpers checks my gun, eventually replacing it with one that actually works. While this is a marginal improvement, confusion still reigns supreme.

One games journalist looks much the same as another – bearded, emaciated, haunted – and friendly fire becomes an issue, with mumbled apologies commonplace after unloading into a squadmate's chest. With headshots proving harmless, more cunning opponents simply pop up from cover like meerkats, survey the surroundings, and ruthlessly gun me down. It soon wears thin, and it is with some relief that we trudge to the debriefing to receive printouts of our scores.

Amidst the humiliation, mine curtly advises: "Shooting lessons may help." Thanks. Now about that bar... PCZ

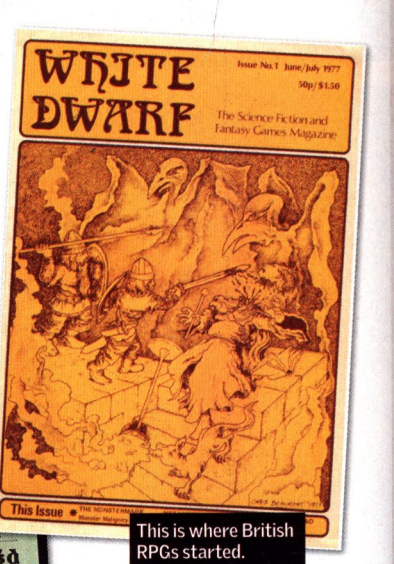
HOW REAL IS... ALIENS VS PREDATOR?

In fairness, neither the 1999 original (£2.99 on *Steam*) nor this year's re-imagining were intended to replicate running round an underground car park with pretend guns. All the same, Aliens are scary, either in a game or when sneaking up on you in a bar. As for Laser Tag, it's firmly stuck in the '90s, and is a great advert for computer games.

IAN LIVINGSTONE,
CO-FOUNDER, GAMES WORKSHOP

THE MIND BEHIND LARA CROFT

***Adam Hartley* catches up with an RPG god**



This is where British RPGs started.

Ian with two pretty Laras and Jordan.

IAN LIVINGSTONE, OBE, is one of the UK's founding fathers of interactive games. This is the man behind *Fighting Fantasy*, Games Workshop, Eidos, and Lara Croft.

Q Games developers of a certain age go dewy-eyed at the mention of *Fighting Fantasy*.

A Yes, for sure, there is a lot of nostalgia for *Fighting Fantasy*. A lot of people I meet these days tell me that *Fighting Fantasy* books had a big influence on them in their youth and they went into the games industry because it got them into gaming. That's very gratifying to hear. I'm even thinking about writing a new book for the 30th anniversary of the series in 2012.

Pretty much everyone cheated with the books, didn't they?

Of course they cheated and they were happy to admit it! I remember seeing someone reading *City of Thieves* on the Tube, their fingers stuck in 10 different pages. If people didn't like the outcome of a decision they would simply go back and choose a different route. Or if they weren't happy with their dice roll, they would just roll again. But who cares if they were having fun?

How did you go from *Fighting Fantasy* to video games?

Being on the creative side rather than the technical side, it wasn't a difficult leap for me to make. I'd designed board games and role-playing adventures so it was just a matter of finding a chance to translate my skills to a new medium. I'd designed *Eureka!* – Domark's first game – way back in 1984. This game offered a £25,000 prize for the first person to solve the main puzzle. That was a great experience because the game was programmed in Budapest for security reasons and going there in the '80s was interesting to say the least.

After selling out of Games Workshop in 1991, I invested in Domark in 1992 and went onto the board of directors. Domark merged with Eidos in 1995 and I became Executive Chairman of Eidos Interactive. Just over a year later we published *Tomb Raider* and Eidos took off. They were crazy days.

When did the PC become a viable machine for publishers?

I fondly remember the adventure games in the '80s, especially the *Zork* series. It was at the same time that *Fighting Fantasy* books were flying off the shelves and so I liked everything with orcs in it. But as a commercially viable platform for games, this didn't happen until the '90s when graphics made a significant change to the gaming experience. There were so many classics in the early '90s; *Doom*, *Myst*, *Command & Conquer*, *Civilization*, *SimCity*, *X-Com* and the rest.

This sums up the pre-PC childhood of the *PC ZONE* team.

And then there was *Tomb Raider*...

Yes indeed. The launch in 1996 was incredible. We expected it to sell well, but never expected it to sell anywhere near as well as it did. It had everything: great technology, great graphics, great gameplay and, of course, Lara Croft.

Is PC gaming in decline?

I'd say PC gaming is going through a resurgence right now. However, the types of games being played on a PC have changed, benefiting from the functionality of the mouse and large-scale access to the internet. Sales of boxed product at retail may be in decline but there's been a boom in online gaming. Online casual games, MMOs, online multiplayer shooters, games played on social networks are all huge growth areas.

What have been some of your most memorable moments in games?

My most gratifying moment was being awarded an OBE at Buckingham Palace by the Queen. My most happy moment was at the ECTS trade show in 1996 when we were launching *Tomb Raider*. I had a young Katie Price dressed as Lara Croft sitting on my knee...

Do you think games are more socially acceptable today than 10 years ago?

Games have moved from a niche hobby into mainstream entertainment. Social games have certainly accelerated this process. Now 70% of the population now plays games of some sort and that can only be a good thing. Having the BAFTA games awards has certainly added credibility and recognition of games as an art form and their positive impact on culture and society.

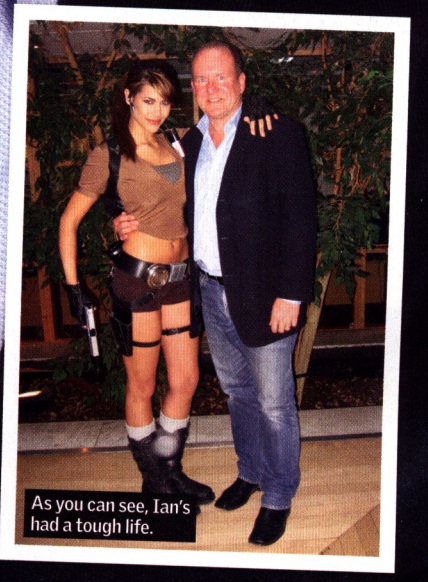
There's some interesting tech on the horizon in 2010.

Technology drives innovation in the making and playing of games. The future of gaming tech appears incredible, but and it's a big BUT, when it comes to gaming then it's all about the game and gaming experience itself. That remains the most important thing for me.

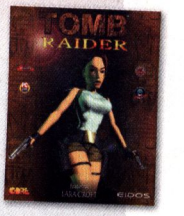
At the end of the day, it's still gameplay, gameplay, gameplay. New technology may facilitate new gaming experiences, but that experience still needs to be engaging and rewarding. Natal, for example, needs to facilitate an entertainment experience that can't be had elsewhere. That's the challenge. PCZ

Ah, Mr Livingstone OBE I presume?

Ian Livingstone (right) and Steve Jackson (left) way back in '70s.

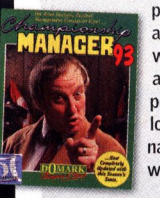

As you can see, Ian's had a tough life.

THE GOOD FIGHT
Battling gaming prejudice

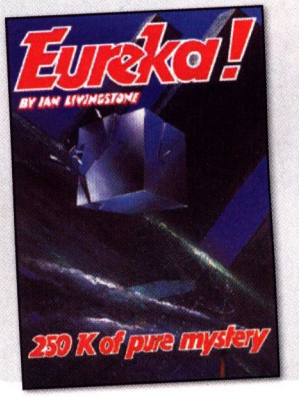


"I believe the negative perception about computer and video games is eroding," says Livingstone. "Today there are games that appeal not just to the hardcore gamer but also to young and old, males and females. Games are becoming an accepted social experience. The games industry is now the largest entertainment industry in the world.

"Those who criticise games are becoming marginalised. There are lots of positives to say about games. Interactive entertainment is far more engaging than passive entertainment. In games players solve puzzles and problems, learn intuitively, and so on. We are doing all we can to help to accelerate the positive perception about games by lobbying government and national media to work with the games industry.



"The trade bodies ELPSA and TIGA representing publishers and UK developers are heavily involved in promoting the industry in a positive light and demonstrating how seriously the industry takes its responsibilities. And BAFTA sees games as a credible art form equal to film and TV. I believe games have finally come of age."



"Of course they cheated, and they were happy to admit it! But who cares if they were having fun?"

HOT SHOTS

SPLIT/SECOND

DEVELOPER Black Rock Studio **PUBLISHER** Disney **WEBSITE** disney.go.com/disneyinteractivestudios/splitsecond **ETA** May 2010

PEOPLE FROM DISNEY coming over to Zone Towers to show us stuff is a rare occurrence. After all, being a grizzled team of cynics we're not known for our kindly attitude to cute cartoon characters. However, it's unkind to peg Disney's games division as being all about Mickey Mouse. It's also about racing a bit too. After all, they released Pure to a relatively mixed reception, but it was OK. Loading times were rubbish, but the game was reasonable enough.

This time, with *Split/Second*, Disney and Black Rock Studios are going in for the kill, attempting to skewer us on a gaming kebab that features exciting action, televisual presentation and trains falling onto cars. Plus explosions. Many explosions. There's even going to be online stuff, including the game itself, which will only be available on the PC by digital distribution.

The right way to go or a step in the wrong direction? You be the judge of that.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. SECOND LIFE

Those of who aren't fans of aggressive AI drivers in their racing games might want to turn away now. These guys are going to learn your style and react to how you race. If you like smashing up opponents and running their bumpers, maybe they'll counter your tactics. A lot of developers have claimed their racer has this feature before, so it'll be interesting to see if Black Rock can nail it.

2. BANANA SPLIT

The major thing about *Split/Second* is the power play, a user-activated event that can screw up an opponent or even change the layout of the track. For example, fill up the power bar until the end goes red and, at certain locations, you can cause a train to derail obliterating opponents (and even yourself, if you're not careful), and forcing a change in the route you need to take to complete the race.

3. CHAOS RISING

Although there's a blend of settings and art styles in the game, the main one we picked up on was how much the setting looked like LA. Black Rock say it's going to be very much influenced by the movies and iconic representations of certain locations, but we'd like to see a race in San Francisco's hills. The opportunities for chaos in such a location would be substantial, we'd say.

4. URBAN LEGENDS

Power plays are enabled by doing exciting things in the race, like slipstreaming behind opponents, power-sliding around long bends and causing havoc. You can then either use small events to derail your opponents or go for the full-on course changing event. Black Rock say racing in the game will be a strategic experience, but that won't compromise its arcade sensibilities.

5. FIGHT FOR LIFE

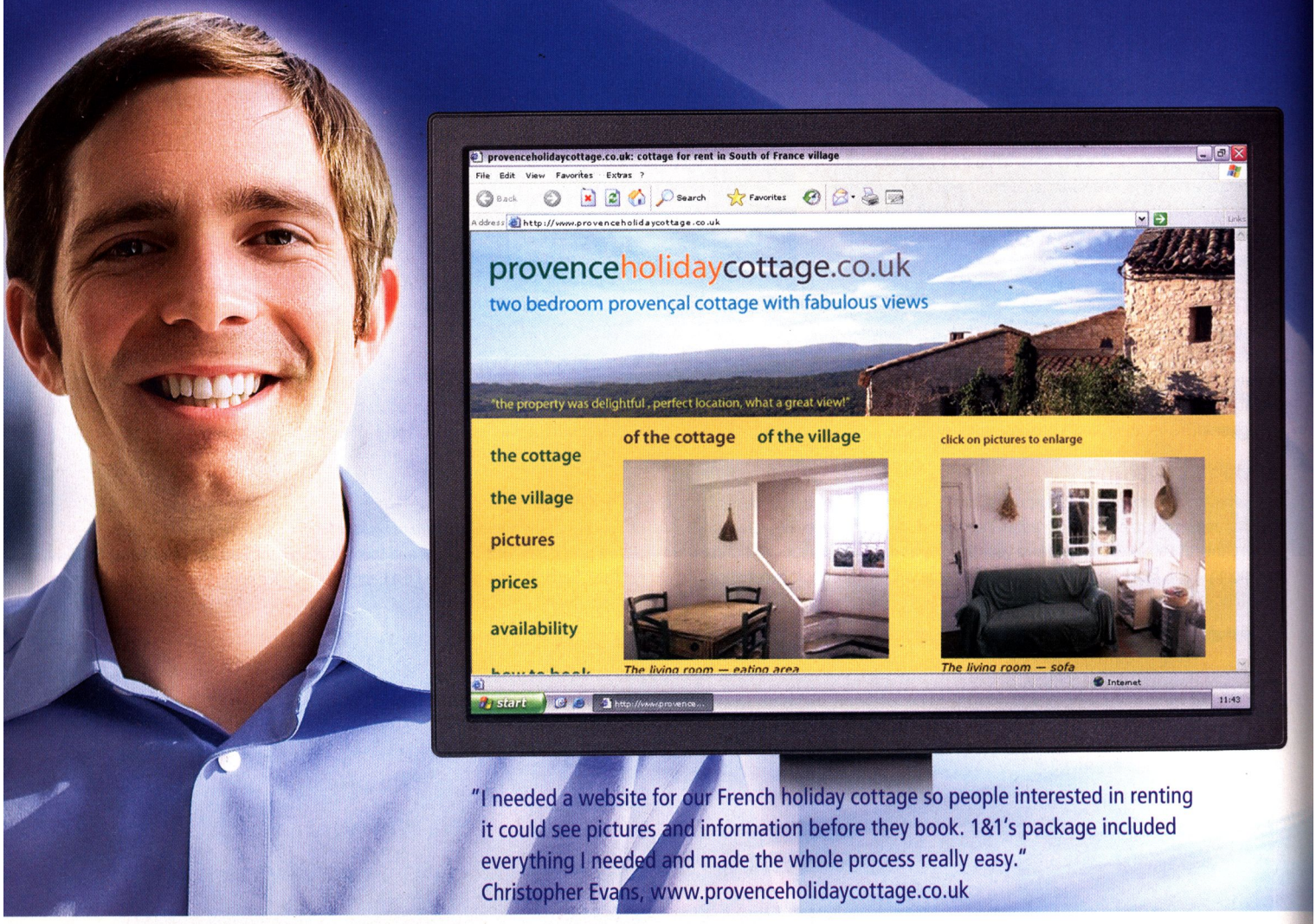
There are a few modes that haven't yet been revealed to us, mainly the multiplayer racing. There's going to be the basic championship, which will be the meat of the game, but there's also a Survival mode where you end up, as an example, behind a big truck with explosive barrels flying off the back. Your task in this situation would be to make sure you didn't get whacked in the windshield.

6. TV TIMES

The concept of the game is *The Running Man* meets that old game *MegaRace*. You're a participant in a TV show and there's even a commentator building up the next race. Sadly, it's not going to be a Lance Boyle-a-like doing the presenting, which is something we'd like to see. Just not as annoying as he was, of course.

Don't take a chance. Choose 1&1

QUALITY



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Christopher Evans, www.provenceholidaycottage.co.uk

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THE STORY SO FAR...
OBSIDIAN

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC 2
Obsidian's worthy (but buggy) follow-up.

2005

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
Another decent, but buggy, BioWare sequel.

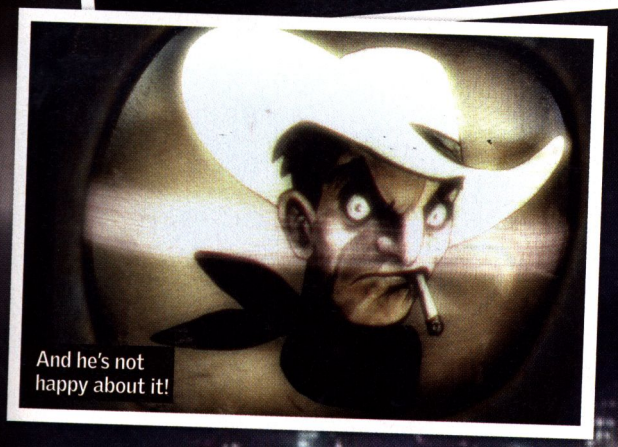
2006

ALPHA PROTOCOL
Obsidian's first original game has been marred with repeated delays.

TBC

ALIENS RPG
Mass Effect meets *Aliens*? If only: SEGA canned the game.

NEVER



SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

New Vegas' Hardcore Mode is independent from its difficulty setting, and can be switched on or off at any point during the game. The biggest change it introduces is dehydration: the Mojave Wasteland is less temperate than D.C., so you'll need to keep consuming water (preferably the purified stuff) to avoid turning into a withered corpse.

In addition, in Hardcore mode healing and radiation removal won't be instant shots, instead you'll have to take cover and wait for the drugs to take effect.

Finally, ammo is given weight. Prepared to swap that snazzy power armour for bullets? That might be the call you'll have to make.

City lights: a *Fallout* first.

enormous solar array controlled by the New Californian Republic. It transpires they've let a moron called Fantastic take charge of the station and, as yet, he's been unable to get the plant back up and running.

If you've got the relevant talents, you can jemmy everything back online and divert the power to whichever corner of the Wasteland you see fit, giving you the chance to aid the crooks who run Vegas' Strip or poorer folk in Fremont. The Helios One's solar beam can also be used as a weapon. Naturally having an enormous beam from space turning their guards into blackened scorch marks winds up the NCR.

So far there's little in *New Vegas* that feels completely new. But when all most people want is more *Fallout 3*, it's hardly surprising that Obsidian are making something that feels comfortably familiar – like an old armchair. But while they might not be making a classic *Fallout* title, we don't doubt it'll be faithful to the universe and stuffed with knowing references for hardcore fans.

By Vegas standards, Bethesda may be taking a safe bet, but it's also a safe bet that we'll love it. PCZ

"So far there's little in *New Vegas* that feels completely new"

Downtown, no finer place for sure.

TIME FOR ANOTHER UPGRADE...

CRYSIS 2

***David Brown* asks whether forests are better than cities**

DEVELOPER Crytek **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** ea.com/games/crysis-2

AT THE END of *Crysis: Warhead* there's a sprawling, heavily guarded airfield sitting between you and your objective. I'm proud of the fact I managed to get all the way over to it, avoiding all enemies without being spotted. It's one of those moments where everything about a game clicks and you get into a zone. I got spotted about five seconds after getting to the objective, of course, but the act of getting there was perfect.

THE LOWDOWN

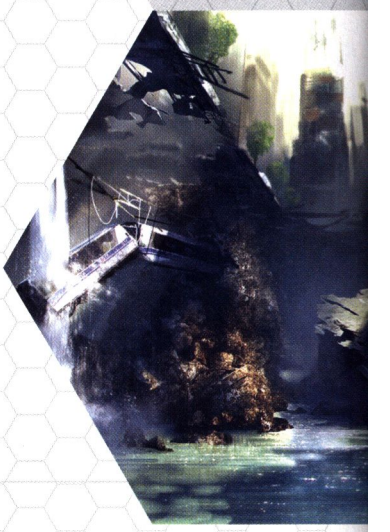
- ✓ Improved Nanosuit
- ✓ It's got lean
- ✓ Aliens to be better
- ✓ Urban environment
- ✗ Cross-platform issues?
- ✗ Cover system

Unlike Crytek's previous games *Crysis 2* isn't set on a lush tropical island though, it's going to be all about the high-rise towers and urban landscapes of New York. It's a risky jump for Crytek to make, going from their comfort zone in the jungles to the area where so many have already laid their claim to dominance: the urban combat zone.

Before we go into why it might or might not work, let's talk about what Crytek are best known for – producing butt-spankingly gorgeous games that make most people weep with joy. And then rage as they realise their computers haven't got a hope in hell of running them. This time out, it's not going to be an issue, Crytek say. We'll believe that when we see it, but 'big' people like Nathan Camarillo, exec producer on *Crysis 2*, are assuring us that it'll run well. We've seen it running on a 360, which bodes well for the engine's performance.

CONSOLATION

Of course, the notion of a *Crysis* sequel being developed across platforms brings to mind expressions like "compromised" and "dumbed down". And behold, that other phrase so despised by people who don't use pads to play shooters: "cover system". Admittedly, it's worrying to think of our beloved PC exclusive joining the rank of *Gears of War* and *Killzone* in the much maligned "cover shooter" console stakes.



THE STORY SO FAR...
CRYTEK

FAR CRY
Had lots of trees and mutants, and one very nasty shirt.

2004

CRYSIS
Features more trees, aliens, North Koreans, and macho men.

2007

CRYSIS: WARHEAD
Had trees, Koreans, aliens, and a Cockney.

2008

CRYSIS 2
Has no Koreans, few plants, some aliens and lots of concrete.

2010

"It's going to be about the urban landscapes of New York"

Is that Nomad in there? Argh, the suspense!

See, there will be some trees.

A unique take on New York's final hours.

PAINT A PICTURE

It's shaping up to look like something very special indeed...

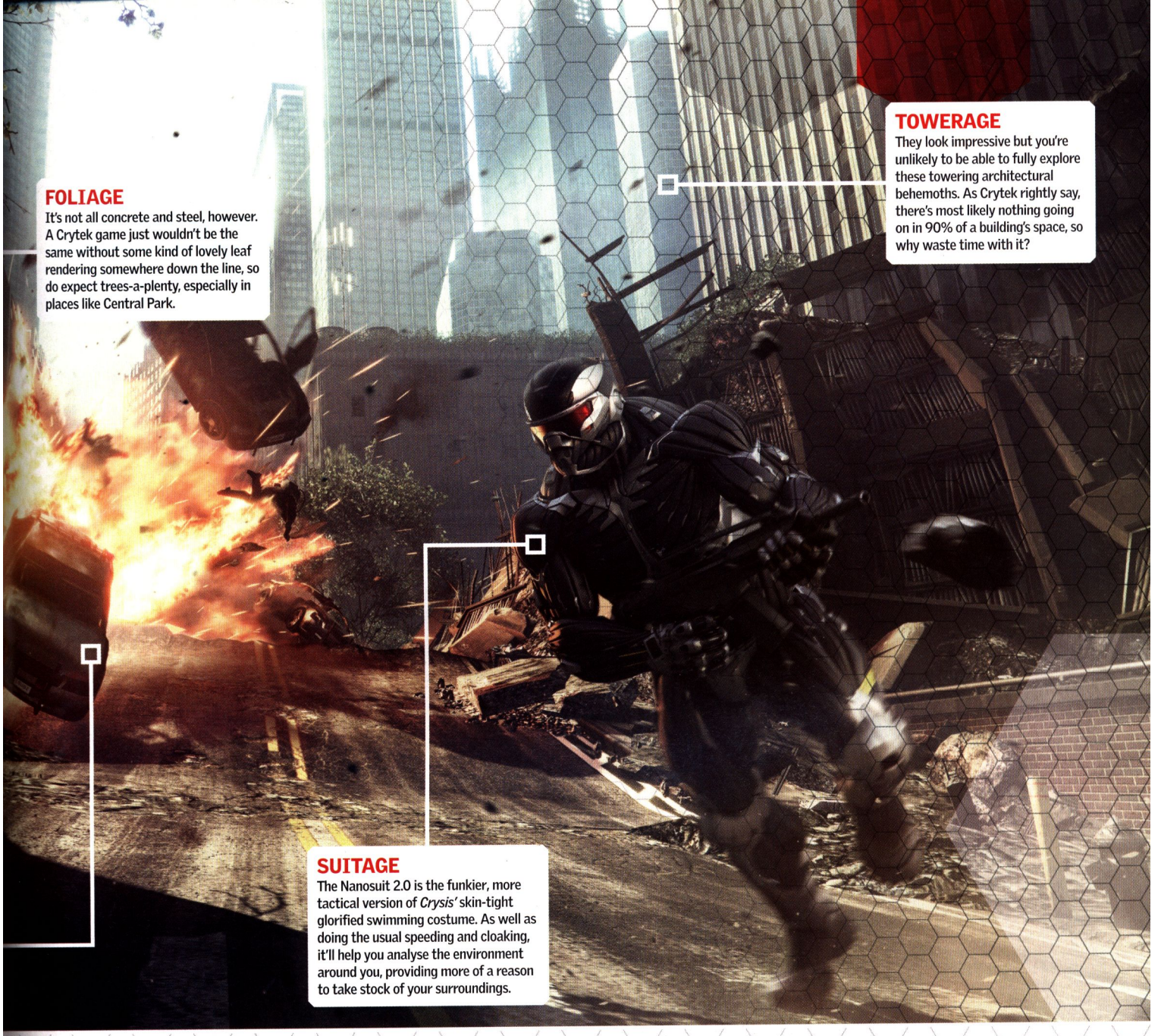
We're prepared to eat our substantial collection of hats if *Crysis 2* looks this good when running, but with Crytek and their ambitious plans and powerful engine who knows? What it will have is this level of action, because of the way Crytek write their games. They use 'bubbles' of action, each about 10 minutes long, to create intense sequences of combat or stealth without appearing to compromise the game's free-roaming nature. It's kind of like how *Left 4 Dead*'s Director gives you some breathing time followed by a swarm.

The worrying thing about *Crysis 2* is that figures of eight hours of gameplay have been bandied about, though not necessarily deliberately. It's shaping up to be one of the 'streamlined' experiences that everyone raves about now (something that often goes along with cross-platform development. Coincidence?) and maybe those eight hours will be the best you've ever had. We'll have to see. If it looks this good, though, maybe we won't care.

WRECKAGE

As it's an urban setting, you can expect lots of vehicles to either drive or blow up. The likelihood of it being a *GTA*-style romp where you can get in any car, though, are remote, so don't even think about it.

Shooty shooty shooty gun gun blam blam death.



But perhaps we're being too harsh. Perhaps we're jumping the gun and should give the benefit of the doubt. After all, the cover system (something Crytek won't reveal) won't even be in the PC version. And there's a very real upside to *Crysis 2* being developed for PC, 360 and PS3 simultaneously.

BETTER BUGS

Namely, that the challenge of squeezing every ounce of power out of the limited hardware on offer from Microsoft and Sony means we'll end up with a far more efficient, better looking and, most importantly, faster running piece of software. CryEngine will no longer be shorthand for outrageous system requirements. That's a good thing.

What of the actual game, then? As you can imagine, details are still relatively scarce, but we do know a reasonable amount. First of all, the aliens are still around, but Crytek are working hard to make them more exciting to fight than last time. There'll be Stalkers, Grunts, Shadows, Screamers, Spotters, Changelings and Heavy Ticks, apparently. You'll have to use your imagination as to what form they'll all take, but we think clues are provided by the names.

Humans will also be around to provide a good chunk of the beings you slaughter, but this time they're not Korean. They're American, members of the Crynet Systems' infantry, the company behind the Nanosuit itself. Why are you blowing them up? Partly it's because of the scavenger hunt for resources and tech dropped by the aliens, but partly it's, well, a secret.

Anyway, we also know Prophet, your squad leader from the first game, is name-checked at least once in the brief hands-off preview we were given. Whether you play Nomad, Psycho or another Nanosuit-wearer is still up in the air, but there's continuity here, at least. The same goes for the Nanosuit, one of the most distinctive (and award-winning, fact fans) elements of the original's success. Back come the traditional modes – speed, strength, cloak and armour – and they're accompanied by something new: tactical. This vision mode is kind of like using the binoculars in the original. It'll provide a more detailed, information-filled view of the game world, with notifications about discarded weapons, patrolling enemies, information on corpses and so on.

Turning on each mode changes the way you interact with the world in an aural sense. Stealth mode heightens your reception of sound, so you'll be able to hear enemies much more distinctly as they walk about, while shoving the speed mode on is likely to make the music more adrenaline-fuelled, causing your pins to work overtime in propelling you through a ruined New York City. Check those screens - his feet are a literal blur of activity.

BALANCED FOR LEAN?

One thing that came out of the *Modern Warfare 2* kerfuffle was that some developers don't think games that desperately need the ability to peek out from around corners are "balanced for lean". That makes no sense whatsoever, of course, with even pad users complaining about the lack of a lean function in *MW2*.

Thankfully, *Crysis 2* does indeed have the feature included, meaning you can see what's around the corner without having to step out into full view of the waiting enemies, getting shot through the face by some git just lying there waiting for you to do so.

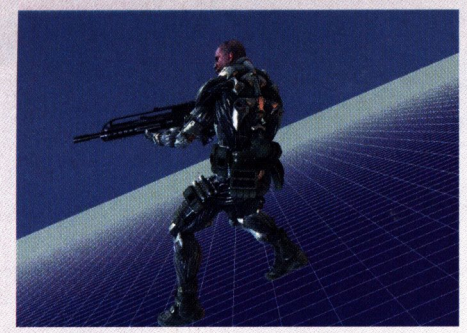
The question of whether it'll be part of a silly lock-on cover system or whether you'll be able to just assign two keys to the task remains to be seen, but let's just thank heavens for small mercies.

"Wish I'd worn shoes now."

"All of Crytek's claims about *Crysis 2* are impressive"

PHYSICS 'N SHIT

Just how powerful are Crytek's engines?



Whatever else you might be able to say about *Crysis 2*, it's certain that slopes aren't going to be something you rage about. Just look at how this guy is actually standing on this huge slanted grid! It's just one part of Crytek's plan to make clipping illegal in their games. We're all for it in a big way.

Also, the versatility of the CryEngine 3 (mycryengine.com), the new powerhouse behind the game, is such that it can generate the same map – at the push of a button – on the three target systems – Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC – at the same time. This is incredibly efficient, and of course the PC graphics are the best. These are in test(ish) conditions, so we'll have to see how it works on your crumbling old desktop, of course.

No different to today's New York really.

JUSTIFIED BOASTS

Questions on whether the amount of time you could spend in the stealth mode had been increased went unanswered - one of the grievances people had with the Nanosuit's powers in the first game. Remember that your role as super soldier isn't just all about the suit. You can modify your weaponry as well, gluing flashlights and laser sights on to your guns with wanton abandon. This time out, there's going to be a few more things to play about with in terms of abilities, like directional bullet trails, x-ray vision and bullet deflection (handy).

All of this is taking place in what Crytek are calling a "huge open world in which the level of interaction is limited". That does sound a little worrying, but maybe that just means it'll be a more focused experience, preferring to restrict how far you can explore back alleys and buildings in favour of a clear narrative structure.

Surprisingly, *Left 4 Dead* is one of the names thrown out by Crytek as to what has inspired them recently, namely the way the storyline goes on in the background and is taken on board at the user's discretion. Yet this influence only goes so far – *Crysis 2* is definitely going down the direct narrative path, but the new tactical suit mode might fill in some gaps for the inquisitive, giving you details about things scattered about the game's world. Examine a dead body in this mode, for example, and the corpse's biography will fill the HUD - clues as to his demise and his backstory are yours for the reading. Alternatively, you can ignore it. We're looking at audio logs version two, here.

Quickly back to the tech before we leave each other. Crytek say CryEngine 3 will be able to handle "hundreds of lights" without any performance hit, as a 'deferred lighting system' lies at the core of the technology behind them. We're not experts when it comes to this sort of thing, but it sounds an impressive claim when it comes to luminosity.

In fact, all of Crytek's claims about *Crysis 2* are deeply impressive, from the new urban direction to the pruned and less wasteful engine tech. It'll take time to see whether the experience on PC has been distorted by the cross-platform interests, but maybe it will be for the best in the long run.

As long as they don't mess about with what makes FPS games so natural on the PC, and what made *Crysis* and *Warhead* so exciting to play, we'll perhaps take a little bit of compromise this time. Not too much, though. PCZ

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Hexagonal boundaries look gloopier and therefore nicer.

ETA WINTER 2010

RULE THE WORLD, AGAIN...

CIVILIZATION V

Jon 'Log' Blyth can't decide which way he'll turn

DEVELOPER Firaxis **PUBLISHER** 2K Games **WEBSITE** civilization5.com

LEAFING THROUGH AN old issue of *PC ZONE* recently (issue 121, page 150 if you want to join in) I fingered across an old feature: *Games That Changed The World*. In there was a article about a then 11 year-old game. A game that "arrived from nowhere, and changed strategy games forever".

Civilization was born of Sid Meier's love of history, and his ability to spend long isolated hours turning the elements of that love into a workable gaming prototype. *Civ* obviously isn't history – it's a game that retells history in the millions of ways it could have happened, if our world's most famous leaders had been immortal and played videogames.

Civ 5 has a number of radical changes going on, but it's a testament to that original prototype, how much of that original game is still intact. Some things are sacrosanct: you start with a bunch of Settlers, build cities, and spend millennia progressing along a tech tree, aiming for a victory based on military might or peaceful scientific or cultural evolution.

That's what *Civilization* is: a turn-based alternate history of mankind. But everything else about its gameplay is up for grabs, and by putting former modder and enthusiastic young blood Jon Schaffer in the lead development role, Firaxis have come up with something that feels genuinely fresh.

Civilization IV refined the game's formula to be a balanced and full experience, but it was hard to pinpoint exactly what made it so shockingly new. The fifth game... well, you can probably already see.

SEXY SIXY

Hexagons, eh? Phwoar. Look at those gorgeous honeycomb bastards. One of *Civ*'s most stubborn and archaic features, the square grid, dies this year on the PC. Whether it continues to live on in the new, free-to-play *Facebook* incarnation, *CivNet*, has yet to be seen. Firaxis seemingly comfortable with the idea that the main franchise, the simpler console

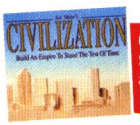
THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Hexagons!
- ✓ Proper strategy game warfare
- ✓ World leaders have legs
- ✓ Much improved opponent AI
- ✗ Bloody complicated

"You there, have you been fucking with my globe?"

THE STORY SO FAR...
SID MEIER

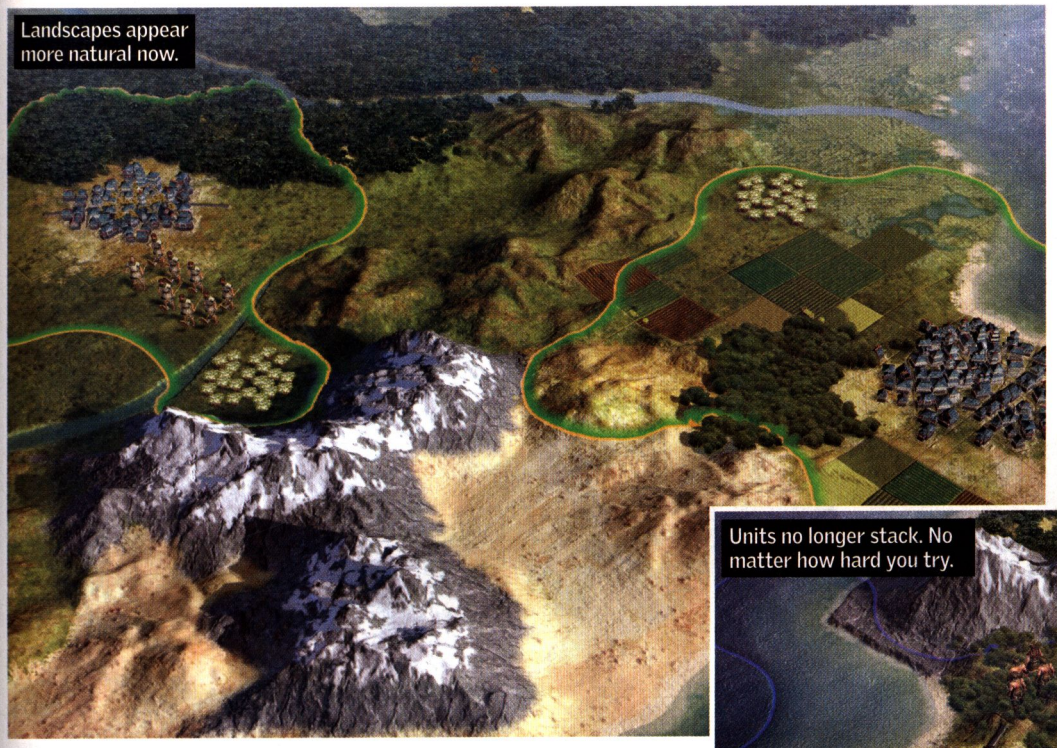
BORN
Right away Sid began reading up on Pascal and machine code.
24 FEB 1954

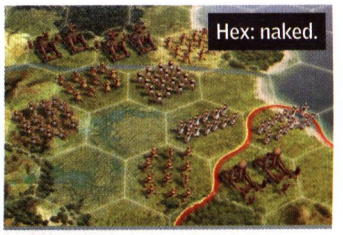


CIVILIZATION
Sid's famous game and the only *Civ* he designed. Scandalous!
1991

HALL OF FAMED
Sid joins the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' Hall of Fame.
2008

BIRTHDAY TREAT
Sid gets a Lifetime Achievement Award at GDC 2008.
FEB 2008



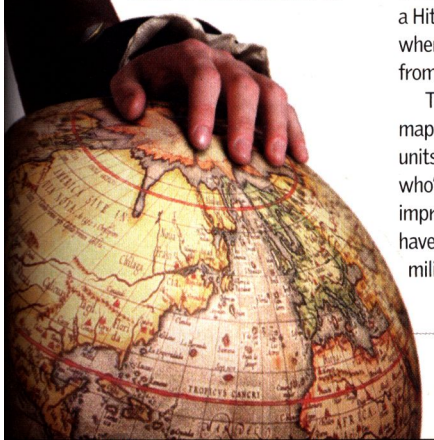


"Hexagons? Phwoar. Look at those gorgeous honeycomb bastards"

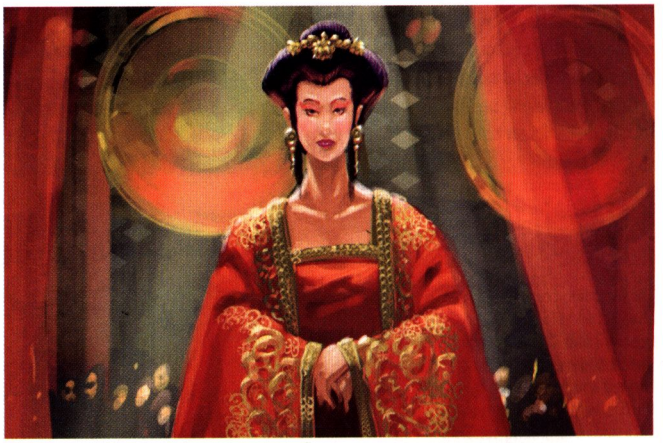
and handheld versions, and the free-to-multiplay Facebook version, *CivNet*, can co-exist, each adding in their own way to the *Civ* brand.

The benefits of six-sided geometry are immediate, in terms of aesthetics: narrow channels of water meander more convincingly through the terrain, and the two extra corners give coastlines a plump, kissable roundness. *Civ* has always felt like a kind of board game people would play, if they could be trusted not to lose all the pieces or draw a Hitler 'tache on the Gandhi counter, so when hexagons are unveiled, I quickly go from "Ooh!" to "Took your bloody time!"

There's another rule that makes the map a less bewildering place: military units cannot share a space. For anyone who's not a *Civ* fan, you're probably not impressed by that. But you haven't lived with stacks of military units as long as we



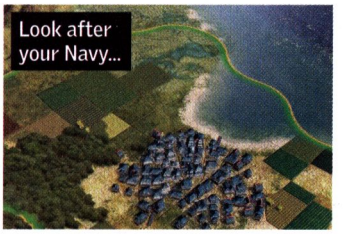
GET YOUR PINS OUT LOVE!
A world leader is no long half a person

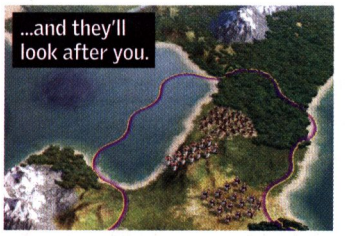


The work being put into the new leaders is pretty impressive. Until now, the idea that the world's leaders had legs remained unconfirmed speculation – but we can now confirm that Gandhi teeters around on a pair of elegant brown pins.

The leaders all talk in their own languages, and their gestures have all been researched to be culturally accurate. In the case of the Japanese leader, this involved the lead animator taking the videos home to his Japanese girlfriend.

The 3D leader models and environments used in the leader screens give me the hope that one day, someone will made a mod that involved Gandhi and Washington living together. They're the original odd couple!


Look after your Navy...


...and they'll look after you.

Bismarck took ages to do up all those buttons.

Expand your empire one hex at a time.

have. No more teetering stacks of hard-researched muscle, terrorising the map with its military might and precarious swaying. Now, tactical deployment is paramount to military success: a hex that has crap warriors in is a hex that can't have cavalry. There's some flexibility: jet planes can fly overhead, and special units such as Spies and Great People will be able to squeeze through the ranks on their way to wherever. You can also swap units over, meaning a long battle front is still flexible: if your cavalry meet up with some pikemen, you can fire on them from a distance with your archers, and tell your infantry to swap places with your horses. At this point, the room was full of palms being flexed, as people wanted to play it.

Civ 5's battle system is closer, Firaxis claim, to true tactical combat. Schaffer is a huge fan of 1994 classic *Panzer General*, and these are the ideas he's brought with him. Combat is being taken out of the borders of cities and onto the map, making *Civ 5* much more of a spectator sport.

"This growth is when a nearby City State might become a problem"

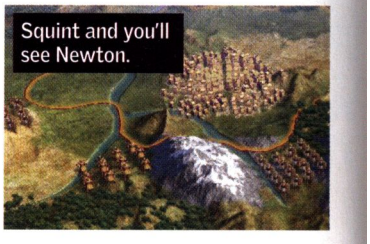
CULTURESWELL

Your civilisation also grows in a new way. No more concentric rings of influence, automatically earned as your culture is boosted by all those obelisks you've been building. Culture still plays the same role in boosting your terrain – and you can buy new areas too, as gold is being given a more central role – but your empire grows one hexagon at a time. Every hex you earn is personally chosen, and becomes a permanent part of your empire's production machine.

Empires grow at roughly the same rate, so it's a lot of manual baby-steps instead of an automatic one, but the way your empire grows is such an elemental part of your strategy, that this doesn't feel like unwelcome micromanagement.

This growth is when a nearby City State might become a problem. City States are new to *Civ 5* – they're like what'd happen if barbarians decided to do a town. Never aspiring to full civhood, their role is different – they can offer bonuses to those allied to them. Or, if they're in the way of your glorious and fruitful expansion, destroy them for a one-off bonus. Naturally enough, this will give you a reputation as a warmonger, and might disincline other, more important civilizations, from having peaceful dealings with you.

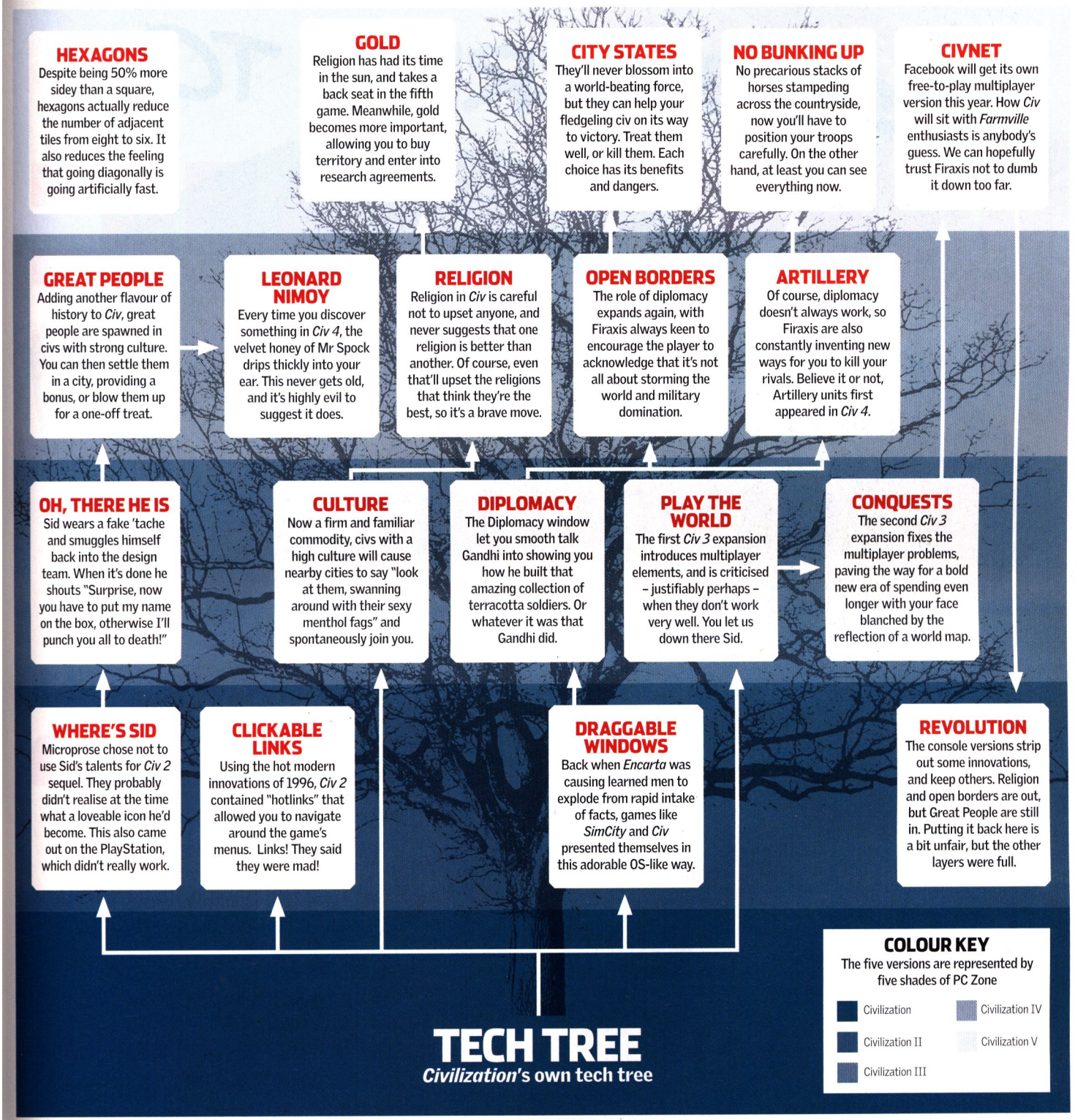
The individual personality of the leaders are now set using a variety of flavours. (I'll spell *Civilization* with a z, because it's the title of the bloody game – but I draw the line at "flavor".) The grid I'm staring at, while Ed Beach (who worked on the Hubble space telescope) talks to us about Queen Victoria, contains references to these flavours, grouped in different colours. Red has wide strategies such as offence, defence, and military training. Another colour groups military preferences into ranged, mobile, naval, and air. Recon and Naval recon bag a colour of their own, as do naval growth, expansion, and growth. It's interesting only for the terminally curious, so I won't bore you with the rest. (Actually, I will: another colour contains development preferences like culture, infrastructure, happiness, Great People and Wonders.)


Squint and you'll see Newton.

MOD ROCKER
Making life easier for modders

The modding community have always been close to Firaxis' bosom – and *Civ 5* will include an in-build mod browser. Hosted and distributed by Firaxis, with opportunities to rate and recommend content, they're also quick to reassure us that this won't end up with undue moderation.

You can still install your mods in the old way – this service will run alongside the current method. It's Firaxis's way of making sure excellent total mods like *Fall From Heaven* (which has managed over half a million downloads even with the current method) get a chance to be played by less savvy players.

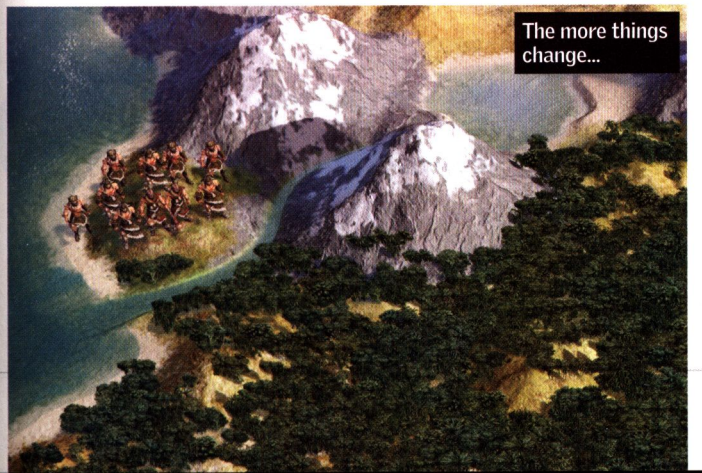


But each leader has base scores in these numbers, spiced up with a random element, and changing through the game to adapt to the needs of the current situation. It's a system that makes you want to stop talking and play the damn game.

Mind, *Civ*'s AI has never really been about powerfully outwitting you. The difficulty has traditionally come from cheats and enemy bonuses, but they're really trying to pinpoint what makes a good *Civ* player. Firaxis decided it's someone who can think on many levels, so the new system has four levels of decision making. One eye is on the overall game strategy (would it make more sense to switch your win strategy to a culture win?), and one eye on the dirtier tasks of engagement. Then, two more eyes, one on economic and military development, and the other on moving units around, making sure not to miss terrain bonuses and suchlike.

Writing about *Civ* is hard because of the audience: a crowd of demanding enthusiasts who are primed to love or be outraged by everything you say, and a larger crowd whose indifference towers above that passion. Is my job to whip up the enthusiasts, or to convince the indifferent that they're missing out? Twenty years on, hasn't everyone already made their mind up about *Civ*?

Firaxis don't think so. 2008 was a two-pronged assault on the casual and hardcore market, with *Civilization Revolution* and *Colonization* taking on both teams. This year we've got *Civilization 5* for the hungry, and *CivNet* for the unconvinced. Right now it looks like *Civ 5* is the most accessible, good-looking, and reassuringly deep, of the hardcore side of the franchise yet. PCZ


The more things change...

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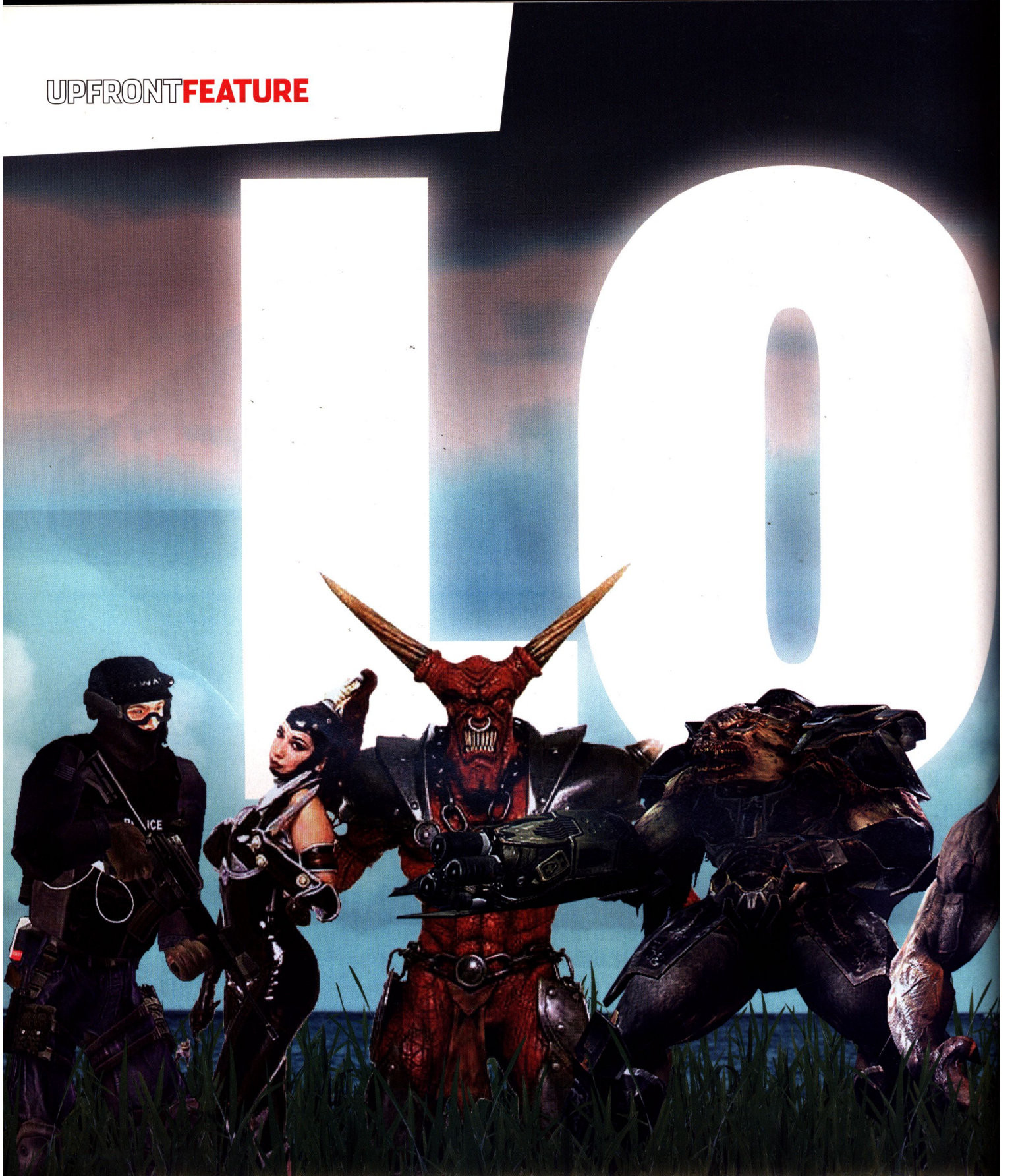


WILL PORTER SEARCHES FOR THE STORIES

SOME GAMES KICK the bucket, others shuffle off their mortal coil and run down the curtain, even more join the bleedin' choir invisible. It's like they're cursed never to see the light of day.

Hives of industrious development-types might busy themselves with painting pictures of exciting new worlds, only for a businessman (in his suit and tie) to turn up one day with a stack of P45s, a megaphone and an unrehearsed speech about a general lack of wonga.

In a world where your average big-name game costs can hit $40million dollars in production, manufacturing and marketing costs it's hardly surprising that occasionally the money to finance making them can dry up.

Other demised games are, more simply, FUBARs of epic proportions. Development nightmares in which the bosses are clueless, the engine unwieldy and year after year of laboured coding slowly becomes a road to nowhere. Still more games just didn't hit the right fun quota and were consigned to the development dustbin, others again were lost in seemingly dull publisher deals and takeovers.

BEHIND THE GAMES WE'LL NEVER SEE

Meanwhile others were aborted because of questionable choices by their developer causing the public to get a bit crank (to put it mildly). Last year saw *Rendition: Guantanamo* was killed off after Yanks claimed T-Enterprise, its developer, was supporting Osama Bin Laden's lot, while Atomic's *Six Days in Fallujah* – a planned shooter, set during one of the most controversial military actions of the second Gulf War – caused the developer to fade into nonexistence after Konami backed out of publishing it.

In our life-times, these games are gone – or in perpetual hiatus. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. In some parallel universe where it all went right though – some lucky bugger version of you got to play them all. He's playing the *Planescape Trilogy*, *Carmageddon* 8, *Populous 9* and *Duke Nukem Forever* in between grinding his way through the *Command & Conquer* MMO *Continuum* – the utter alterno-universe bastard.

So here (nattily dressed up like that *Lost* TV show people like to torrent) is the rundown on the biggest PC games that we've all missed out on, from the mouths of the creators – the ones who miss them the most...

DUNGEON KEEPER 3

IN DEVELOPMENT NOV 1999 – MARCH 2000
DEVELOPER BULLFROG
PUBLISHER EA

BACK IN THE second half of 1999, after EA purchased Bullfrog and Peter Molyneux left for Lionhead, everyone's favourite gaming mega-corporation began to play around with two names beloved by PC gamers: *Populous* and *Dungeon Keeper*.

Work on a game to follow *Populous: The Beginning – Genesis: Hand of God* – was rolling, but the shutters were pulled down when marketing types got the jitters about similarities to *Black & White*, which was also published by EA.

"The upshot was that *Genesis* got cancelled," explains Ernest W. Adams, *Genesis'* lead developer. "They looked around for something else to do with me, and decided on *Dungeon Keeper 3*." Adams, alongside a producer and another designer, was tasked with dreaming up new adventures for Horny. However, because *DK2* hadn't sold the required bucketfulls, things would've changed in *DK3*.

GOING UP

For a start, *Dungeon Keeper 3* was proposed as a straightforward top-side RTS: the portals, chickens and individual and characterful monsters would have remained, yet would have been a part of a three-faction battle for supremacy. Meanwhile, rather than build dungeons downwards, you'd be building castles upwards. For the new faction a group of wild, untamed and vegetation-focussed chaps called The Elders would join the fray, alongside the goodly ordered Heroes and noxious taint of the nasty Dungeon Dwellers.

"I realise that the move in the direction of a more conventional RTS would've been controversial. The die-hard *Dungeon Keeper* purists were bound to hate it," said Adams. "But the truth is that there weren't enough die-hard *Dungeon Keeper* purists. There weren't enough people who bought *Dungeon Keeper* at all. But marketing had seen the huge success of RTS games like *StarCraft*, and they wanted us to move in that direction. Hence the new marching orders.

There are no screens for *DK3*, so look at this and imagine it different, with castles.

"We definitely wouldn't have turned *DK3* into a clone of *StarCraft*," he continues. "We wanted to keep the semi-autonomous creatures for example, and we definitely wanted a castle that you could construct in parts and move around in, not just buildings that pop into existence.

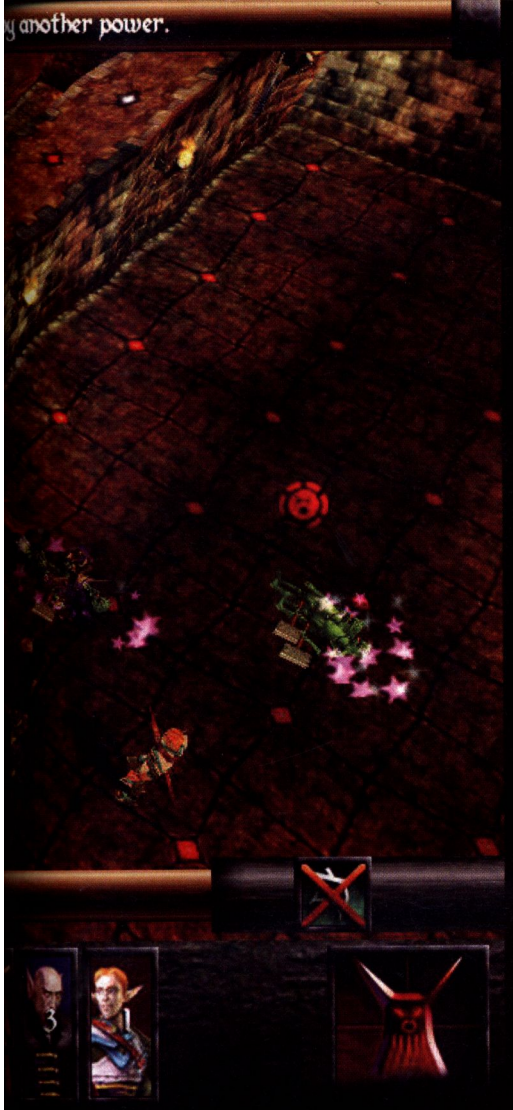
"The major impetus for the move outdoors also came from the need for better multiplayer play. The fact is that while the single-player side of *Dungeon Keeper* was brilliant, its multiplayer was distinctly poor. You spent a long time without ever having enemy contact, building up your dungeon and armies.

"When you finally did encounter them, the game was so symmetric (you always fought other Keepers, not heroes) that it became a long, grinding war of attrition. There was very little room for strategy, tactical feints, and so on."

The late '90s were the glory days of the RTS, so it was hardly surprising that had *Dungeon Keeper* come around

DK died before "Horny Ho Horny tonight" gags could used in the gaming press.

"*DK3* was proposed as a straightforward top-side RTS"

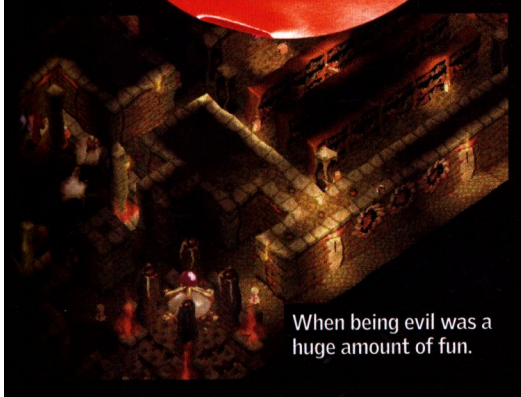


for a third self-flagellatory Mistress-slap it would have been in a different form. It probably would have irked us at the time, but better that than be trapped in this horrid world where *Dungeon Keeper* no longer exists.

THE END

EA, concerned about a potential pre-PS2 dip in the games market, cut back on its riskier titles – of which *DK3* was one. On top of this, the fact that *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* games were in the offing meant that the fantasy money train was in motion and Horny wouldn't get a look-in. Bullfrog went on to have their name stuck on *Theme Aquarium* and *Theme Park Inc*, before being dissolved in 2004. A crime which has still gone unpunished.

Status: Horny's passed on



When being evil was a huge amount of fun.

DIVISION 9

IN DEVELOPMENT 2004-2005
DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL GAMES

Everything is good with zombies. *SWAT* especially.

"We knew we had to do something different. Hence *Zombie SWAT*"

BEFORE IRRATIONAL GAMES became 2K Boston (and went back again) and made *BioShock* they came across the idea of gunning down zombie hordes long before it was fashionable. Originating as a supernatural *SWAT* game, *Division 9* adapted into a fight for survival in an undead apocalypse. Irrational studio head Ken Levine has this to say on the matter:

Q **Why were zombies a logical place to go with *SWAT 4*'s style of gameplay?**

A Well, the real problem is we didn't know where to go with *SWAT*. We were huge fans of *SWAT 3* and weren't really looking to rewrite the rules. That said, we knew we had to do something different. Hence *Zombie SWAT*! *SWAT 4* was great at providing environments that told a story, which we took further in *BioShock*.

How would this have played out in *Division 9*?

We've always believed this was gaming's unique way of telling stories (along with the custom story the user creates in their playthrough). The world of a zombie apocalypse isn't that different from Rapture or the Von Braun... it's a world about what used to be.

Who, or what, was the *Division 9*?

That's a name I pulled out of my butt because I thought it sounded cool. It's kind of weird that so many "9" games and movies have hit since. Of course, that's the way the world goes, but I'll say the new adaptation of the 1982 musical "Nine" definitely stole the entire thing from us. Bastards!

Now publishers have seen the success of *Left 4 Dead* are they kicking themselves?

Well, we actually ended up finding a buyer for it, but that happened at the same time we got an offer to sell the company. So we went with selling the company, primarily because I look really good in Take-Two mankinis.

"Pepper spray direct to the brain!"

THE END

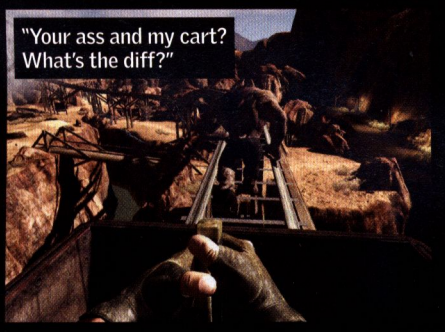
Ken's Take-Two mankini saw the end of *Division 9*, having it join Irrational's other never-released game *The Lost* in a Boston dumpster behind their studio. If you're interested in the way they worked back then, check out Irrational's new website and podcast at irrationalgames.com by the way. (They asked us to say that. But it is pretty brill.)

Status: Shotgun to the head

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

IN DEVELOPMENT 1997-2009
DEVELOPER 3D REALMS
PUBLISHER 2K GAMES/TAKE-TWO INTERACTIVE

THERE'S A FRISSON of legal tension between 3D Realms and 2K Games currently, so the true fate of Mr Duke Nukem cannot be told. But the cold hard fact is that as of right now the wheels have fallen off the *Duke Nukem Forever* project good and proper. So, with the aid of developer leaks in the wake of the lay-offs at 3D Realms, here's what we could have been playing. Remember though: nobody steals our Duke and lives.


"Your ass and my cart? What's the diff?"

1 The game was to open in Duke's Las Vegas casino – the Lady Killer. Here he was to have sex with twins while playing his own game, before being part of a talk show that would be interrupted by a vast Alien Mothership hovering over the Vegas skyline. Someone then had to pay for knocking Duke off his stride.

2 A boss battle would have taken place against an Alien Queen in a boxing ring within a vast arena known as the Duke Dome.

3 At different points in the game Duke would be able to shrink himself – capering through giant kitchens in a fast food joint and taking out the giant (normal-sized) foes that stood in his way.

4 You weren't only going to get to play as Duke. You could also play as a sexy lady called Bombshell, who at one point saves Duke from certain peril through the medium of lapdancing. One can only guess at the amount of research money developers spent in getting this scene right.

5 Bombshell would be able to shrink herself too, and would spend several missions bombing around in a remote-controlled car.

6 Familiar creatures to shoot would have included Pig Cops on flying machines, bullet-fodder Enforcers, Octobrains and topless women trapped in alien goo. Stamping on stuff would be a frequent occurrence.

The game was to begin in Duke's casino: The Lady Killer.

7 One boss was to face a humiliation move that would have involved a pipebomb being stuck up its bum. Duke's potential witticisms for the occasion included: "This is about to impact your colon", "Montezuma's revenge", and "Colon-ize this motherfucker".

8 As the Duke slaughtered babe-stealing alien bastards, he'd earn Ego Points. In post-*DN3D* games Ego had been the Duke-speak term for health, so Duke's self-regard was generally both high and easily dented by bullets.

9 Chucked pipe bombs had a really cool red smoke trail effect as they flew through the air.

10 The whole thing was going to be a bit sexist.

Pig cops were to grow, and get less shotgunny.

Don't fancy yours much.

THE END

Duke finally ran out of time – and in May 2009 its development team was mightily down-sized. The fate of the man himself is in the hands of lawyers, while the voice of Duke, John St. John, has suggested that the saga isn't over. So perhaps we haven't heard the last of Mr Nukem yet.

Status: This sucks!

VAN BUREN (AKA FALLOUT 3)

IN DEVELOPMENT 2003-2005 **DEVELOPER** BLACK ISLE **PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY

Isometric is the best metric there has ever been.

Eat your heart out Bethesda menu screen.

Going to need more than a battery to fix that one.

FORGED IN THE irradiated offices of Black Isle before parent-publisher Interplay wielded the axe on its most precious possession, *Van Buren* was the name of *Fallout 3* before the license was sold to Bethesda.

Fascinatingly, a fair amount of concepts and content from *Van Buren* are now being integrated into Obsidian's *Fallout: New Vegas* – where many of the original Black Isle developers are now shacked up.

Caesar's Legion slavers, who in *New Vegas* are making a mess of the Strip, were first a part of *Van Buren* – while locations such as the Hoover Dam (in *Van Buren* an area where you could start a town and populate it with NPCs from elsewhere in the game world) are central in both games.

A NEW START

Van Buren had you awake as a prisoner undergoing analysis by a mysterious AI known as Odysseus, at least a generation after the unconnected events of *Fallout 2*, and rescued by New California Republic troops who are embroiled in a war with the religious tech warriors of the Brotherhood of Steel.

"*Van Buren* was built on the same technology we were going to use for *Baldur's Gate 3*," explains *Van Buren's* story designer Sean K Reynolds. "You'd have multiple controllable NPCs that you could recruit into your party including a tribal, a Mr Handy in need of repair, a ghoul, and a smart dog. All off them had scripts that would change their behaviour based on what you said to them, what you did, and what other characters joined the group. There was even a way to put a companion NPC's brain into a robot's chassis and have it continue to be in your party – though you'd have to mindwipe it or it would kill you the first chance it got."

"*Van Buren* was the name of *Fallout 3* before it was sold to Bethesda"

The game (a tech demo of which can be downloaded from nma-fallout.com) was familiar *Fallout* in appearance – yet allowed the camera to spin through a full circle to fully admire the popping of heads, and allowing for better designed combat areas than previous *Fallouts*. Ask for the developers' favourite moments from the dead game though, and you're in for a barrage of cruel nostalgia.

"It's hard to choose!" sighs Reynolds. "Finding the ghouls' attempts to birth more of their kind the old-fashioned way. Realising why everyone in the game is getting sick. Your mindwiped, brainbotted buddy who keeps whispering murderous things. Using a StealthBoy and watching it erode the player's sanity until the game started playing tricks on what they saw, from distorted areas on the map to creatures that weren't really there. Fixing up the motorcycle, or the cop car, or the truck, or the 18-wheeler, and how the various NPCs would pile in or onto it when you'd start driving – your Super Mutant teammate would cram himself into the motorcycle's side car, for example. And, of course, the very end scene, where the player has won a Pyrrhic victory and isn't sure of his own survival when the game ends."

So what of the new breed of *Fallout*? What did one of the men behind the original wasteland sequel make of Vault Boy's capitol adventure?

"I haven't played it," states Reynolds. "No knocks to Bethesda, everyone I know who's played says it's a great game, but thinking about playing their *Fallout 3* just makes me think of the unfinished *Van Buren* and the stupidity and greed of Interplay's upper management that killed it."

THE END

History gave us *Fallout 3*, and then a benevolent God conspired to cook up *Fallout: New Vegas*. Proof positive that the falling of the production axe doesn't automatically mean an unhappy ending. For most of us, anyway.

Status: Reincarnated, though to what extent is as yet unclear.

THE CROSSING

IN DEVELOPMENT 2006-2009 (ON HOLD) **DEVELOPER** ARKANE STUDIOS

A FEW YEARS ago Arkane Studios, creators of *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*, dazzled the PC gaming press with visions of blue skies, leaping Templars and a remarkable blend of modern Parisian and ancient gothic architecture.

Even more intriguing was the promise of CrossPlay: placing human players as enemies within the single-player campaign. Letting deathmatch bouts run riot around you as you move through story missions would have shattered the very fabric of multiplayer as we know it. But then, at the start of 2009, the news came that *The Crossing* had been put on hold. Arkane CEO and Studio Director Raphael Colantonio explains why.

These exclusive shots show off much awesomeness.

Q *The Crossing* was hotly anticipated. Why did Arkane have to put it on hold?

A Being an independent developer has great advantages as you can do the games you want, but it has a constraint too: money!

We self-funded enough of the game that we could demo it to potential publishers. However, of the proposals we had, we never managed to reach an agreement that we felt was fair. Having been burnt in the past under similar situations, we decided to not do the game until all the conditions for doing it right were met. This happened at the same time as another publisher invited us to work on a very sexy game with good financial terms, so the choice became obvious.

How far into development did you get with the game? Did you have a playable build?

We had a playable demo that showcased the fun and the structure of the game. We had one mission worth about 20 minutes of play. You could play single-player or against one to four real players dropping in or out. Is it fun? Yes. Very fun. Every time we play it, we feel a little pinch inside, because it reminds us how much fun this game will be if it ever gets made. At some point we thought "What if we just released the demo to the public as it is?" then we realized there would be tons of support and legal issues stuff, so we never bothered.

Since *The Crossing* was announced have you seen anything like CrossPlay in other games?

There have been a number of games that I can think of that shipped and have touched on similar premises of CrossPlay, but with different takes on it: *Left 4 Dead* is one for sure (asymmetrical co-op team play in a single-player type map layout with sequential objectives). *Brink* is another one and I bet there will be more.

Some of the concept is still untouched though: the way we handled narratives, the progression of the single-player hero in a structure that would make abstraction of multiplayer or single-player considerations, and more.

"CrossPlay: placing human players as enemies within the single-player campaign"

The Crossing was announced at the end of 2006, and much has changed in gaming since then. If it were put back into development how do you think your plans would change?

Well, graphic assets would have to be redone at this point, since as you say, it's been a while. However, the hardest part is done with the demo, not that every hurdle is out of the way, but proving the fun is usually the hardest part.

As far as changing plans: yes, of course, since game design is something that evolves according to current trends and fashions, but we're mostly talking about details in the big picture.

What with Arkane busying themselves with other projects, how likely do you think it is that *The Crossing* will return?

It's a possiblity. We're really happy with how things turned out for us since then: our collaboration on *BioShock 2* along with some other stuff. I'm also co-directing the game of my dreams with Harvey Smith [lead designer on seminal classic *Deus Ex*] now, so who knows?

Templars: don't mess.

CrossPlay could have been awesome.

THE END

Maybe not. The heart of *The Crossing* beats on, even if we'll have to wait a long time to see if it ever reawakens from its slumbers.

Status: Not quite dead.

NECESSARY FORCE

IN DEVELOPMENT 2009-2010
DEVELOPER MIDWAY STUDIOS
PUBLISHER MIDWAY GAMES

Dark streets. Rain-soaked skies. Abundant crime.

IN DEVELOPMENT AT Midway Studios – Newcastle last year, *Necessary Force* was an open-world cop thriller that made you do detective work: tapping up informants and roughing up drug dealers for information until you get enough evidence on someone to being them in for questioning. Alternatively you could go Dirty Harry and use extreme violence to keep the streets safe, but incur the displeasure of your bosses and society.

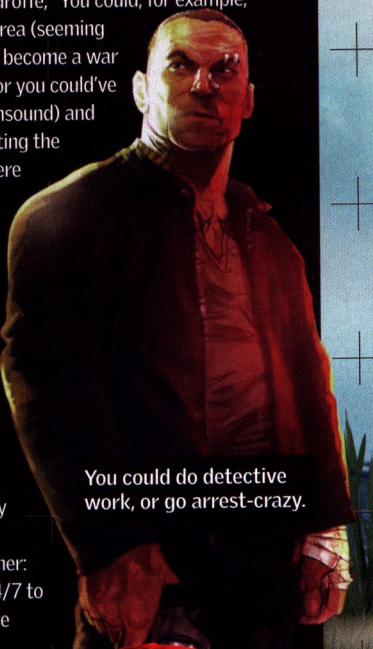
Crime busting in *Necessary Force* wasn't a sequence of missions, but conjured up by a dynamic world and the extent of what your investigations had uncovered. Lose a suspect and you wouldn't restart a mission, but carry on policing.

"Crime busting wasn't a sequence of missions, but conjured by a dynamic world"

The world would have reflected the ways you had conducted your enquiries: "The moral choices you made weren't to influence a good/bad karma meter, but had a meaningful impact on the game," said Creative Director Simon Woodroffe, "You could, for example, bust a major drug supplier in one area (seeming morally sound) causing the area to become a war zone as gangs battle for control – or you could've tortured him (seemingly morally unsound) and got the information without upsetting the power balance. Of course, there were consequences to morally dubious actions as well – nobody can become a psychotic killer without paying the price."

"There a bunch of brilliant TV shows with characters who were inspirations for the kind of character we wanted the player to be," explains producer Joe Neate. "Vic Mackey [*The Shield*], Jimmy McNulty [*The Wire*]... We wanted to get a character, story and most importantly dialogue that stood up to the best we had seen."

The game's unnamed city wasn't run of the mill either: rising water levels mean giant pumps have to work 24/7 to keep the city damp-free. This meant the city's exclusive areas were on high ground, while slums on lower levels would be sodden and neglected.



You could do detective work, or go arrest-crazy.

Max Payne just got buff.

THE END

Midway Newcastle ran out of time to find a buyer for *Necessary Force* after parent company Midway went supremely wobbly financially. Seemingly very few publishers were in a position to invest in a new brand when the globe had been placed in the jaws of a world-wide recession. Given a chance, it could have been rather special.

Status: Taken down. Down to Chinatown.

THOSE LEFT BEHIND...

Other notable games cherished in realities other than our own...

It's a fish, and a dragon? A Fishon?

DRAGON EMPIRES

The Codemasters MMO that, reports would have it, became somewhat of a money-gargling black hole would have been rather special if its back-end had been strong enough and its aspirations had been fulfilled. Remarkable graphics, a complex (yet apparently engaging) clan and trade system, cities to battle over, and big old dragons.

LOTR: THE WHITE COUNCIL

A modern open-world single-player RPG set in Middle-Earth must be the only game that the touch of Tolkien hasn't yet reached – though it nearly got there with *The White Council*. With the machinations of AI elves and beasts adapted from *The Sims* technology, and many and varied quests for your hero it could have been an utter marvel. Sadly it was killed during its gestation in 2007.

ENEMY IN SIGHT

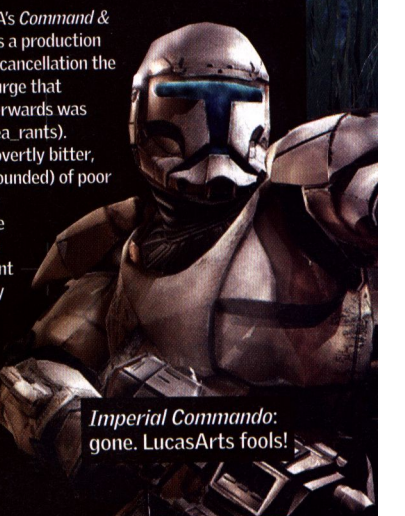
An authentic military sim in the works at Illusion Softworks before the studio was taken over by 2K, and reportedly canned because of the standing publishing deal with Atari. Although largely a tech demo when showed to the press it could have proved to be a worthy follow-up to the *Hidden & Dangerous* games. Its developers were also excited about the prospect of working TVs in people's houses, providing the enduring quote, "Maybe it could be porno? Who knows?".

IMPERIAL COMMANDO

The sequel to the largely underrated *Star Wars: Republic Commando* was once mooted, but sadly never got further than a game concept and early design paintings. It would have told the tale of Scorch, Sev and co. after the Emperor sent out the magic order code that made the clones go mental and kill their Jedi leaders. Almost certainly the 'good *Star Wars* game' that got away.

TIBERIUM

Behind the scenes EA's *Command & Conquer* shooter was a production nightmare. After its cancellation the angry developer splurge that appeared online afterwards was fierce (snipurl.com/ea_rants). Accusations (some overtly bitter, others probably unfounded) of poor management, unfair dismissals, milestone slippage, $40million spent on development and one or two fairly personal attacks tumbled out onto the internet. Proof positive, at least, that the big boys can get it wrong too. PCZ



Imperial Commando: gone. LucasArts fools!

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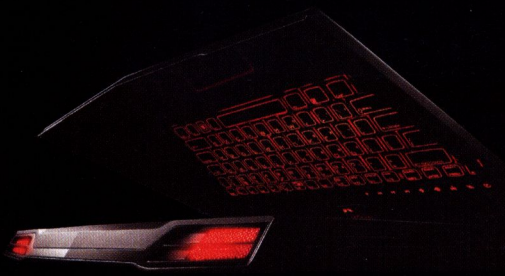

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Have Ubisoft delivered some substance and style this time?

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MAX & THE MAGIC MARKER

88 **THEATRE OF WAR 2: AFRICA 1943**

XIII CENTURY: BLOOD OF EUROPE

89 **SUPERSTAR V8 NEXT CHALLENGE**

UK TRUCK SIMULATOR

90 **GHOST PIRATES OF VOOJU ISLAND**

VANCOUVER 2010

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92 **KING ARTHUR: THE ROLE-PLAYING WARGAME**

GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES

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The PCZONE 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-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.

That guy has enormous soles!

"This is a game that constantly distracts from your ultimate goal"

AT A GLANCE...

An all-out action sequel that eschews stealth and focuses completely on ridiculously high-octane gunplay and parachuting.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz Athlon 64 X2 4200 or Pentium D, 2GB RAM, a 256MB graphics card, and Windows *Vista*/7 with DirectX 10.

HOW IT STACKS

GTA IV	91%
JUST CAUSE 2	84%
MERCENARIES 2	73%

Just wait for that gun to get tangled up in his chute.

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

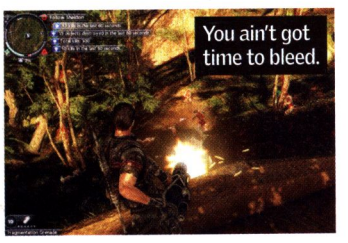
DEVELOPER Avalanche Studios
PUBLISHER Square Enix Europe
WEBSITE justcause.com
ETA 26 March
PRICE £34.99

JUST CAUSE 2

David Brown straps himself to a rocket and jets off to the islands of Panau

THERE ARE UPS and downs to creating a game world as vast as *Just Cause 2's*. The danger is you'll make a map so big it'll dazzle all sorts of record keepers, but you might also forget that size doesn't matter when you can't do anything with it (so I'm told). It's all well and good having a game world that's 40 or 50km across, but if all you can do is drive from one side to the other with little to do in-between, what's the point?

FUEL (66%, issue 201) made this mistake, but *Just Cause 2* doesn't.



In fact, there might even be too much to do, given you're always finding something different and interesting. But this is a game that constantly distracts from your ultimate goal by dumping a tonne of cool things to do right in your lap all the time.

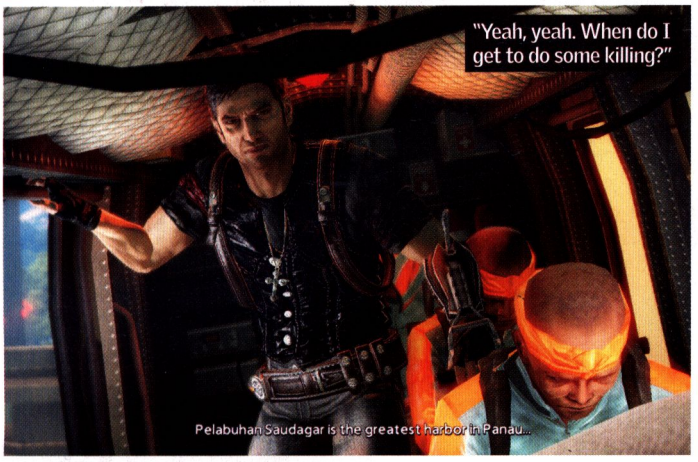
ADHD ACTION

Example: you're driving along, heading for a mission marker waypointed on your map. You see a statue of the crazed despot Baby Panay in a small village off the beaten track. Driving over, you fire your grappling hook into its head and then connect it to the back of your vehicle. A squeal of tyres and boom, the statue comes tumbling down, creating chaos and pushing you a little bit further along the road to ultimate success.

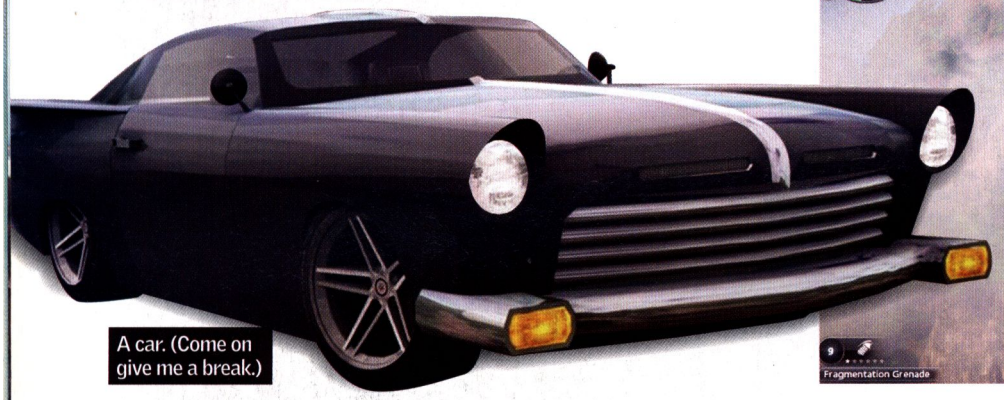
You've then got to avoid and/or gun down the local cops, perhaps causing more chaos in the process. Finally, after everything's settled down, it's 20 minutes later and you're no nearer your initial destination than you were before.

Just Cause 2 has a plot, involving rogue agents, rebel factions and various twists and turns. You reprise your role as Rico Rodriguez, over-the-top super agent from the first *Just Cause*. Given the task of tracking down his mentor on the fictional tropical island of Panau, Rico does this the only way he knows how – killing comical numbers of pissant soldiers and levelling half the buildings on the island in the process. His methods are old-fashioned gunplay and the use of a grappling hook, which is probably the best thing in the game.

This is at the heart of everything that's most exhilarating about *Just Cause 2*, coupled with the unlimited use parachute Rico also packs. The grappler's primary use is this: fire the hook into an object and get pulled quickly towards it. Before you hit



There's even a star for time spent flying low.


A car. (Come on give me a break.)

Parachuting about is a great laugh.

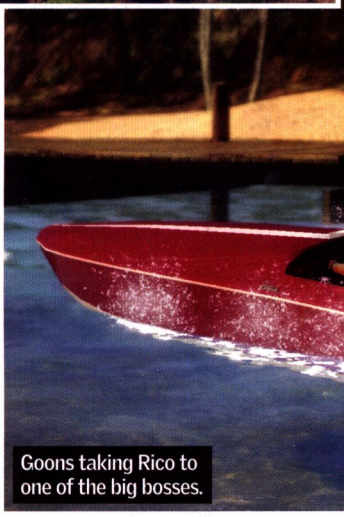
said object, press the parachute key and you'll take off into the air. There are too many ways to use this feature to describe here, without getting bogged down in a boring list. Suffice it to say it's an exciting and dynamic way of moving about the map and taking out enemies in funny ways.

Using the hook in combat doesn't always feel as fluid as it should, but that might have just been my incompetence at work. Even with a noted lack of skill, stringing two enemies together and flinging them towards one another in a head-clonking slapstick routine, is remarkably simple and satisfying. It's also useful for taking out placed gunners and snipers, grabbing them from their perches and tossing them forcefully onto the ground below. And, for good measure, it can be used for some outrageous semi-scripted stunts involving vehicles.

HI JACK!

If you want to hijack a particular vehicle, just grapple onto it and chuck out the driver, or you could swoop in from the sky, land on the roof and then chuck out the driver. You don't even have to use the hook sometimes. If a police motorbike is chasing you down, just press the highlighted key and you'll jump straight from your car onto his bike, sending the offending officer tumbling onto the asphalt. This also works for planes, helicopters, boats and everything else, so you can basically surf on a plane if you want to. A stylish way to travel, really.

All this illustrates that *Just Cause 2* is about that most important thing: fun. Everything in it is designed to pique your curiosity or divert you from the straight and narrow. It seems as if you're always discovering something new to see or do, until the map is littered with icons. And stats! Wow, don't get me started on the things: there are hundreds of them, ranging from how many metres you've parachute-climbed to how many water towers you've destroyed. If you can do


Goons taking Rico to one of the big bosses.

BLOWIN' SHIT UP

More explosions than a Michael Bay movie

RADIO SONG

Some things can be shot to bits with your light weapons, like this radio antenna. Apparently, it weakens the enemy's communications network too.

BIG CHOPPERS

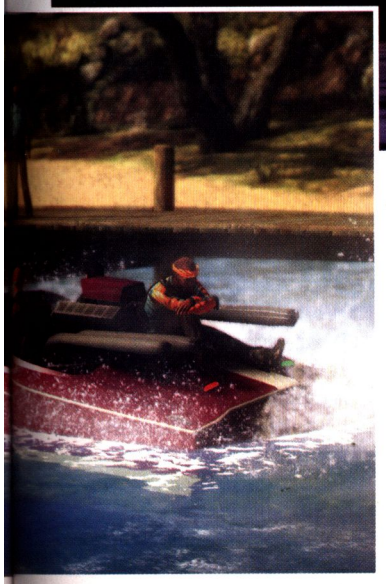
Vehicles also make for a nice explosion, especially if, like this helicopter, you first ram it into a flammable barrel and, preferably, a load of enemy soldiers.

GAS ME UP

Petrol stations are one of the most fun things to blow up. A favourite trick of ours is to drive headfirst into them, leaping out the last second. Ka, as they say, boom.

RAINING LEAD

For more robust targets, use heavy weapons like the mini-guns mounted on this helicopter. Or just rip one off a stationary platform and do it manually, your call.



Extreme pickpocketing.

something, there's a great chance a relevant statistic is being updated in the background. Maybe not if you just stand still, but you never know. "Time spent idling" or something, perhaps.

It's important to stress the sandbox nature of *Just Cause 2*, more so than the main storyline, because to push the story along requires you to actively engage in the sandbox elements. There are two currencies in the game, the first being money. You use this to buy things from the Black Market guy. This chap flies in with a chopper and air drops you vehicles, equipment and even provides you with a fast-travel option to a select number of places. Useful if you're stuck out in the middle of nowhere and can't be bothered to hike all the way back across the map. You can also use cash to upgrade the items found in the Black Market shop, for which you need the money and parts, which can be found scattered liberally about the place. There are weapon, armour and vehicle parts, with each level of upgrade requiring five more than the one before.

FIGHT THE MAN

The second currency is chaos, which is earned by blowing shit up. Government shit, to be precise. Four bars gradually fill up, unlocking new Black Market items and missions from the various factions or the Agency, Rico's main employers. Causing chaos raises each bar, as can completing faction side missions.

Essentially, you're actively encouraged to piss about and find new things to blow up. And, while you're doing this, you'll find all sorts of other things to do, like discovering all the locations on the map, finding hundreds of drug shipments, ancestral skulls and other things like that. There are hundreds of each type of collectible, so completists will have their work cut out finding them all. God knows how long that would take, to be honest.

Watch out while you're rushing about the island though, as it's easier to die in this than the first game, which was notorious for its unwillingness to inflict death (or even damage) on Rico, even when he was getting blasted from all angles. It's still tough to actually die on normal difficulty, but you at least feel like you might get taken out sometimes. Avalanche have definitely struck a good balance between providing a challenge to players and making it stupidly easy to die. Given the number of explosions and enemies, they've made the right choice, and if you do want a bit more realism in this sense, you can just play it on the two harder difficulty levels.

Things aren't all wine and roses, though. If it was, the score you see at the end of the review,

SNAPPING NECKS

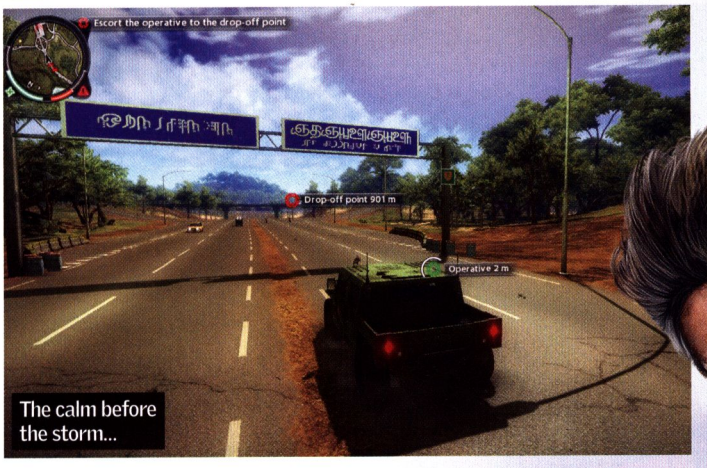
How close is *Just Cause 2* to *Above the Law*

An amusing aspect of *Just Cause 2* is how much it reminds us of Steven Seagal's epic film debut, *Above the Law*.

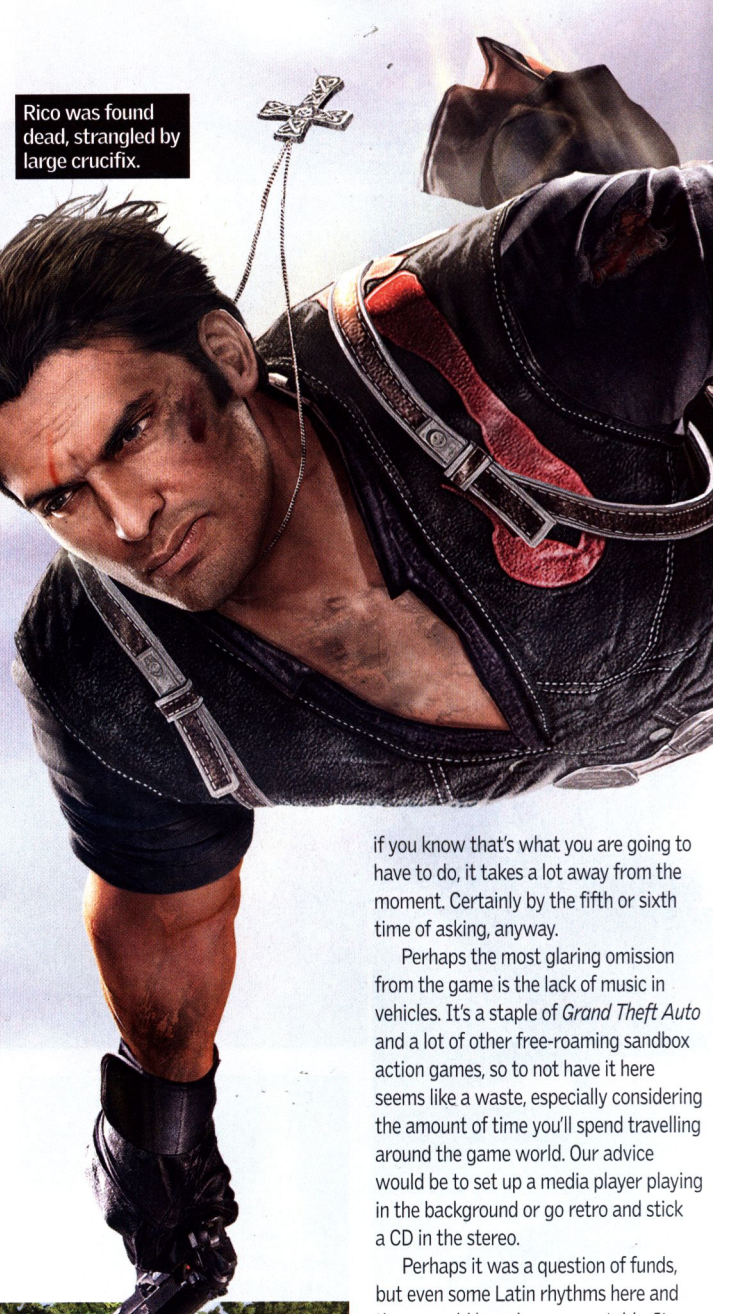
As a "cop with an attitude", pretty much just like Rico, Seagal is involved in shady dealings with the sinister government forces that utilise drug running, assassination and a fair amount of brutal torture. The Agency Rico works for is clearly the CIA as well.

Sadly, Rico doesn't have a comedy ponytail and instead of snapping limbs and crushing windpipes, he decides to just whip his grappling hook at people from close range. Avalanche have missed a trick here – the introduction of close-up kills, especially ones that involve breaking necks, could have really improved the combat.

The acting is pretty much the same sort of standard as *Above the Law*'s too.



The calm before the storm...


Rico was found dead, strangled by large crucifix.

which you've already glanced at, would be higher. First of all, the voice acting is weak on the whole. As perhaps befits a game which focuses primarily on the action, the plot and the characters contained within it aren't up to scratch really. The cast is definitely meant to be a collection of caricatures, and as such shouldn't be taken too seriously, but unlike those in *GTA4*, these ones aren't funny and are poorly acted. Which makes the cutscenes difficult to watch, and so they provide nothing more than a break in the action.

Combat too doesn't always flow as well as one would like. When it works, it's fantastic, with you flying about all over the place, hooking enemies in the face and generally causing chaos wherever you go. When it doesn't work, like if you happen to quickly grapple to the wrong bit of a building, it feels disjointed and awkward. Thankfully, these moments are rare and you'll generally have a whale of a time – which is lucky, as you'll be spending most of your time fighting. If they'd screwed this bit of the game up, there wouldn't be much point in the whole venture. But it's pretty much fine, so mop those sweating brows.

MO MUSIC!

Proper missions also vary between inspired and lazy, with the excitement of finding a 'ghost island' (that throws out references to a load of sci-fi shows) tempered by the faction Stronghold missions, which are all pretty much exactly the same, just involving escorting a technician through increasingly heavy waves of resistance.

Doing this once is fine, but consistently repeating the same mission with different scenery is not. More effort should've been put into making each one unique, as while detaching a placed minigun and walking around mowing down dozens of enemies is never not fun, if you know that's what you are going to have to do, it takes a lot away from the moment. Certainly by the fifth or sixth time of asking, anyway.

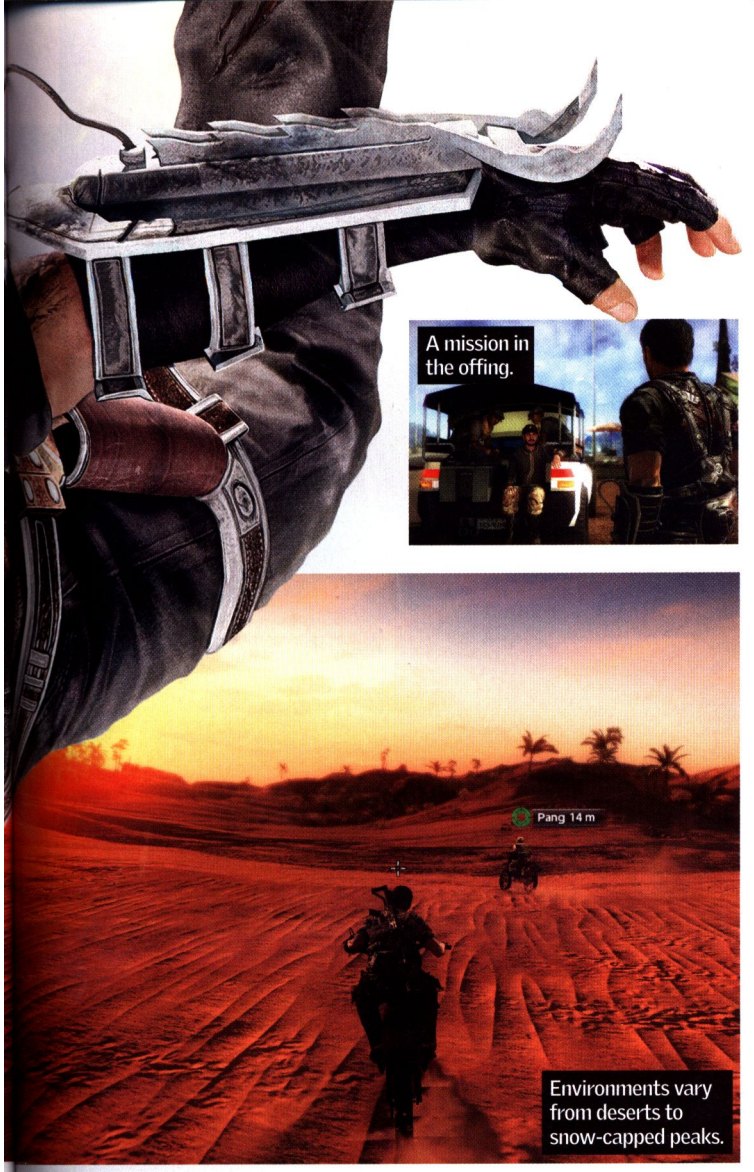
Perhaps the most glaring omission from the game is the lack of music in vehicles. It's a staple of *Grand Theft Auto* and a lot of other free-roaming sandbox action games, so to not have it here seems like a waste, especially considering the amount of time you'll spend travelling around the game world. Our advice would be to set up a media player playing in the background or go retro and stick a CD in the stereo.

Perhaps it was a question of funds, but even some Latin rhythms here and there would have been acceptable. It would have just been an extra incentive to drive about and explore, but you'll just have to enjoy protracted travel sections in silence now, or just fast travel around the island.

Finally, the game is all a little bit console. The fear before we got playing the game was that it would be far worse than this, that it would be very consolified, with terrible-to-no support for non-pad control methods, badly defined visuals and in-game key advice trying to get you to press the Right Bumper when you didn't even have

All in a day's work for Rico.

"I wonder if that newsagent has a *PC ZONE*?"



a control pad plugged in. Thankfully, none of these things have come to pass.

MAJOR FUN

The visuals are very good, especially when you get up to the mountainous areas of the island (a haven for people who like gaining stunt points by hurling their vehicles off cliffs, incidentally). Avalanche have worked hard on making the PC version look significantly sharper and more detailed than its console rivals, but even after all this effort, there's still a sense that this is one game you should be playing while slumped like a sloth on the couch.

There is an issue with the weapon system, where you can carry two light weapons and one heavy one. Tap E and you pick up one gun, hold E and you pick up another and press E to pick up a heavy weapon. The game is bit sluggish to recognise your key presses and you sometimes end up with guns you didn't realise you'd picked up. It's a minor niggle, but you don't want to be attempting to pick up new weapons in a fire fight, shall we say.

Just Cause 2 is what happens when you do a third-person action game right: an often ridiculous amount of balls-out action, with massive explosions, high-flying grappling hook stunts, and all the rest. While it clearly feels like a console-led title most of the time, the PC version hasn't been adversely affected. It looks a lot better than its lounge-based counterparts and it handles well with the mouse and keys (you might need to tweak the sensitivity though). It's got issues, specifically with the voice acting and some of the interface elements, plus the lack of music on the radio.

At the end of the day though, this game is just pure fun. It's not pretending to be a deeply intellectual spy thriller, it's just trying to give you loads of exciting ways to blow stuff up, which is surely all you want in a game like this. To criticise it for being unintelligent or stupid is to miss the point.

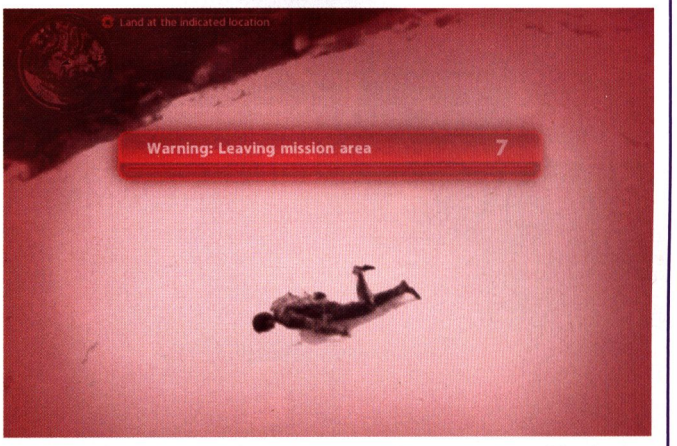
What you should be doing is speeding your motorbike off the side of a cliff, spearing your grappling hook into a tree on the other side and parachute-climbing over the top. Maybe even while shooting some bad guys in the face while you're doing it.

Just Cause 2 joyfully delivers some of the best fun we've had playing games, and it's definitely up there with some of the best. If the acting and presentation of the story had been better, it would have been edging much closer to getting our coveted Classic award. As it is, it's just going to have to settle for a big old Recommended instead. PCZ

"At the end of the day though, this game is just pure fun"

BLEEDING OUT

Ways to avoid death on Panau



You get a generous amount of health to start with and it regenerates too, although only up to a point. If you take a lot of damage, then the maximum amount you can have at any time is halved, or reduced substantially. You can push it back up to normal by finding a medical station, but if you can't find one, you have to be much more careful about how much danger you put yourself in.

However much health you have, it's much more exciting than in *Just Cause*, which often felt like you needed to stand still for a few minutes in order for the vast armies assaulting you to finally knock your health down to zero.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lush vistas
SOUND No music and terrible voice acting
MULTIPLAYER Nada, muchachos

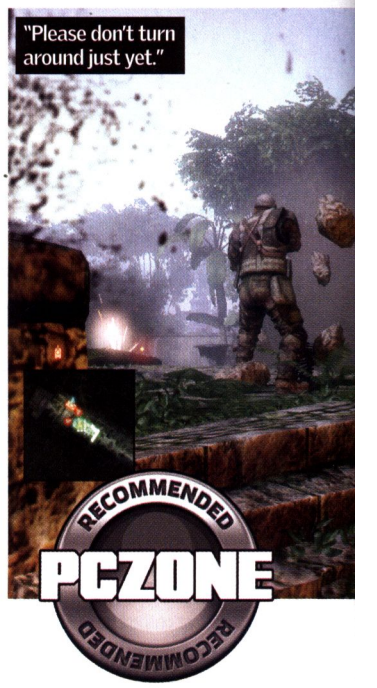
- Massive game world
- Loads to do
- Exciting action
- Mindblowing vertical scale
- No in-vehicle music radio
- Terrible acting

84

Just brilliant

Fluorescent arm bands are great camouflage.

Minigun vs rocket launcher. Who'll win?


"Please don't turn around just yet."

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Jon 'Log' Blyth loves to banter as his wall is blown away

DEVELOPER EA / DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE badcompany.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

IN THE OLD days, if *Blackadder Goes Forth* and the one history podcast I listen to are to be believed, a soldier's life was 99% tedium. But at least there was that exciting 1%, where you were running hopelessly through a storm of bullets, or getting piked in the guts.

It's difficult to imagine the kind of banter that went on in the trenches, or whether soldiers inside a Roman tortoise shell trumped and giggled. They probably talked about women, unburdened by modern political correctness. Perhaps they fantasised about a future in which unmanned mechanical drones would patrol the skies, bomb the enemy, and flash disabling strobes at tourists taking photos. Personally, I'm willing to bet they sang, "We hope it's chips, it's chips".

The single-player element of *Bad Company 2* has a couple of outstanding features, but my personal favourite is this banter. Hang around, and a conversation might start up about what superpower everyone would choose: flying or breathing underwater? It might not sound like a groundbreaking comedy moment, but it's cleverly and warmly written, in a way that makes every character seem likeable.

FRIENDLY CHAT

Even the gruff sergeant, who starts off telling you to pipe down, eventually comes around, reassuring people that their pun, which went ignored, was actually funny. These guys might not be the most decorated soldiers around, but they're better company than the barking professionals of *Modern Warfare*, or the standard butch grunts we're used to.

This is a tightrope of dialogue that's expertly walked. Never falling into the trap of easy, wearying macho bullshit, *Bad Company 2* credits the player with a good level of intelligence. Wisely, it also never topples into stoner whimsy, although you do get the feeling that the scriptwriters have seen more than one episode of *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*. The script and acting makes the whole war experience rather pleasurable.

Bad Company 2's other outstanding element is a remnant from *Bad Company*, but it's worth mentioning because no other game does it to this

AT A GLANCE...

The underperforming soldiers who still get the job done are back – and they're chattier than ever.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo or better, 2GB RAM, and a 256MB GeForce 7800 GT or ATI X1900 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MODERN WARFARE 2	94%
BATTLEFIELD 2	94%
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2	84%

Hope they've got earplugs.

Hang on – who has the space-based laser?

degree: virtually everything can be destroyed. We've been taught, by the likes of *Mass Effect 2* and *Gears of War*, that cover is sacrosanct. Pillars might get chipped, but only a boss creature can destroy them. Oh, and don't hide behind anything flagged as a "Fragile Crate". But the rule remains: in cover, you're safe, so you just wait until they're reloading to pop your head out and return fire.

NO SECURITY

Bad Company 2 doesn't have a cover mode, relying on crouching and old-fashioned line of sight – but even more terrifyingly, anything you hide behind can get blown up. Not just wooden fences and other classic soft cover: stone walls and mounds of sandbags get ripped up by RPGs, houses have their supporting walls blown away by shells from a tank. In the level when you're manning a helicopter's minigun, you spend half the time demolishing the buildings with bullets, just because you've learned that you can.

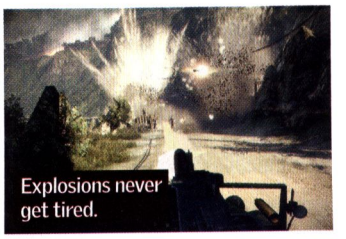
As far as realism is concerned, it's great: watching a house get reduced to a brick skeleton is satisfying or terrifying, depending on whether you're using it as cover or not. But, combined with the particle effects and uncompromising first-person perspective, it can also be disorientating. It doesn't take much to kill you, and many of those deaths will be suffered while lurching for new cover through a fog of rubble.

On the other hand, it doesn't take much to kill the enemies either. The feel of the assault rifle is a surprisingly pleasing balance between mild inaccuracy and real power.

Don't worry. He's just in mid-aria.

"Terrifyingly, anything you hide behind can get blown up"

Bad Company 2's single-player game will be compared to *Modern Warfare 2*. It's lazy, but DICE's fault for including green world maps as the introduction to levels. To their credit, you sometimes get the feeling they're taking a swipe themselves, such as when your sergeant says, "I'm just a grunt, not some spec ops shitbird." And to this writer, *Bad Company 2* is better than *MW2*. It lacks the self-conscious highs of that controversial and noisy blockbuster, but it lacks the punishing lows of terrible levels like Wolverines!. You always feel like you're doing something for a reason, and not running around from one Burger King to another just because that's what someone's shouting in your ear. In short, *Bad Company 2* is always good. Some of the action scenes (like the car chase through snow to reach a crashed satellite) get the blood pumping as much as they get your head tilting.



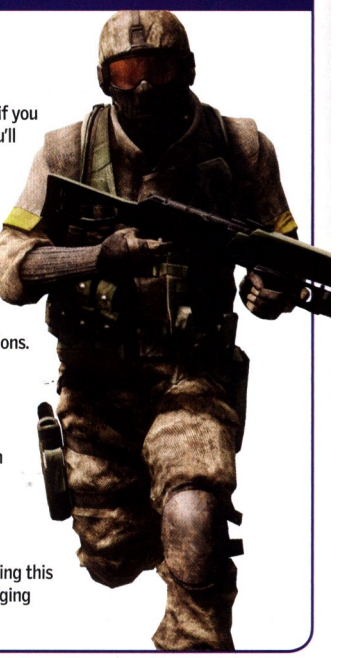
Explosions never get tired.

The steady action is marred only by the ease with which you can die, coupled by frequently ungenerous checkpoints. Once your cover has been blown, the negotiation through the particle effects to find new cover usually means that you'll die before you get there. The system may have been designed to make you constantly move from one area to the next to prevent you replaying long scenes, however it simply encourages you to seek out a bit of robust cover and pop out to snipe. It takes discipline and a measure of willing self-punishment to play *Bad Company 2* as it was intended.

An inch of snow and no-one's about. Must be England.

THE PARAPHRASED MILITARY BANTER COLLECTION

Fond and partially recalled moments of army dialogue



BAD COMPANY 2

"Maybe someday, we'll visit somewhere like this and not shoot the natives."

Just one of the many conversations that pop up if you hang around. Don't rush through the game or you'll miss some of the best moments.

MODERN WARFARE 2

"Are you still gay? Just kidding. Don't ask, don't tell."

In a thrilling opening level Easter Egg, this not-really-homophobic reflection of US military policy reflects how anything in an obscenely popular game can generate overreactions.

GEARS OF WAR

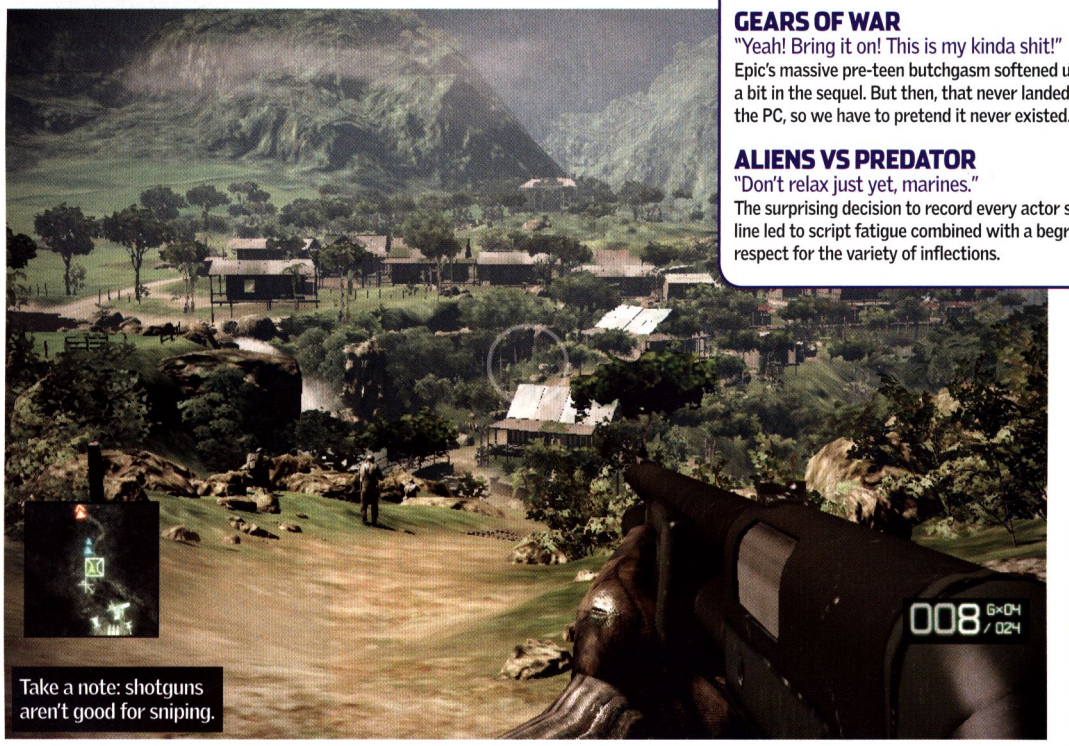
"Yeah! Bring it on! This is my kinda shit!"

Epic's massive pre-teen butchgasm softened up a bit in the sequel. But then, that never landed on the PC, so we have to pretend it never existed.

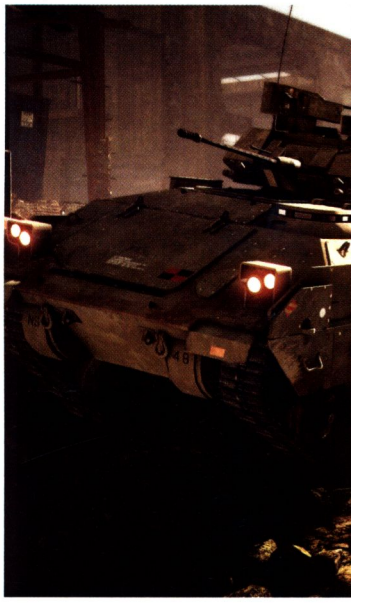
ALIENS VS PREDATOR

"Don't relax just yet, marines."

The surprising decision to record every actor saying this line led to script fatigue combined with a begrudging respect for the variety of inflections.



Take a note: shotguns aren't good for sniping.

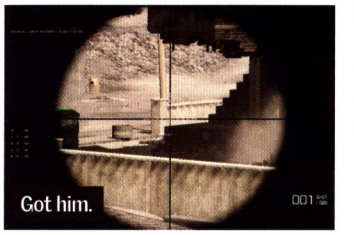


Other than that, there are all the basic elements we're used to and expect: a forest level, a snow level, a sniping level, a level where you get told to pick up an RPG and take down a helicopter, and the empowering levels where you man the gun on a truck, a boat, and a helicopter. And of course, there's a scene where you have to shoot a man without hitting his hostage – a scene in which, mysteriously, your sniper rifle disappears.

This game is far from innovative. But it's held together with warm glue that makes the familiarity a happy one, rather than the tired kind.

Battlefield's heart has always been its multiplayer game, and that's where *Bad Company 2* becomes workmanlike. The choices open to the first-time player are the rifle-shooting and grenade-launching Assault soldier, the RPG-wielding and tank-fixing Engineer, the Medic who spits out first aid and machine gun bullets, and that sniping Recon bastard.

DICE are veterans of multiplayer games, and their maps have the accomplished feel you'd expect. Plenty of room for snipers, and strongholds leaving defensive teams stretched just enough to allow an organised team in.


Got him.

Squad Deathmatch divides classic Deathmatch rules into more personal four-man teams. Conquest is the usual matter of point capture and defences, and Defender sees the attacking team trying to plant explosives in the two marked buildings. It's all classic, old-school entertainment that valiantly attempts Nelsonian ignorance with regards to the innovations made in multiplayer shooters elsewhere.

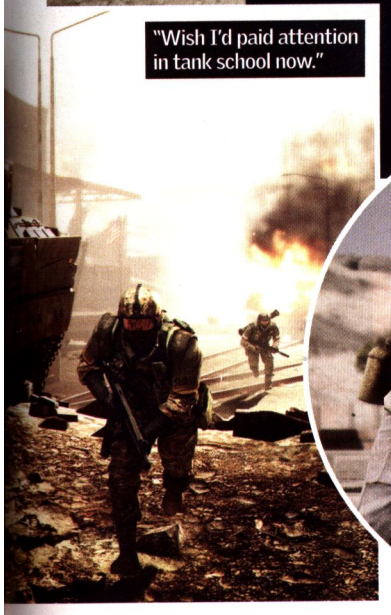
We only had a few hours on the server that was set up for this review, so we didn't get to see much in the way of levelling up. Experience is earned for performing your class's role (healing, repairing), and for straight kills – with bonuses for headshots and defending a base.

This means even poor players will eventually climb the ladder, which spares

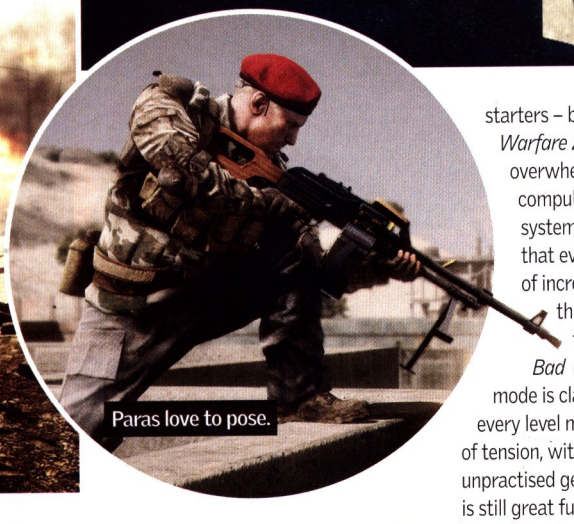
"*Battlefield*'s heart has always been its multiplayer game"

"Bad Company 2's multiplayer mode is classic in its approach"

No, this isn't *Far Cry 2*.



"Wish I'd paid attention in tank school now."



Paras love to pose.

them the frustration having to fight with fewer weapons than the people who've been levelling up from their own deaths.

The unlock systems of *Battlefield 2* and *2142* have come to *Bad Company 2*, fleshing out the options available to you, and allowing you to smudge the initially bold lines between the classes by creating your own gear loadout. Three empty slots for special equipment are filled as you're promoted. However, this feature wasn't open to us so we can't say what a difference it makes.

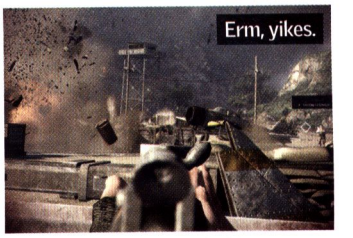
Again, the multiplayer is everything you'd expect, and you'll wonder whether DICE are cannibalising their own online players with another strong *Battlefield* experience. Human opponents aren't as physically fragile as their single-player AI counterparts, and the huge wafts of physics-powered particles are more pointedly irritating when you're trying to run in zig-zags.

UP YOURS EA

While I'm not suggesting that every game should copy *Modern Warfare 2* – DICE's promise of dedicated server support is a very welcome departure from Infinity Ward's approach, for starters – but the reason *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer is such an overwhelming success is the compulsion of the overall levelling system, coupled with the fact that every game is a microcosm of increasing reward – even throwing a consolation bone to the losers.

Bad Company 2's multiplayer mode is classic in its approach, with every level maintaining a similar level of tension, with the ungifted and unpractised getting left behind. While it is still great fun, with all of the classic moments of multiplayer panic and action completely intact, I found myself missing the banter of the single-player game. Perhaps I could get some real soldiers to let me join their squad.

Should you buy *Bad Company 2*? If you're asking the question, then you should. The single-player missions might not be headline-grabbing or audacious, but they're solid, entertaining and occasionally frustrating. The multiplayer is also strong – not innovative, but it re-uses the good stuff from DICE's other games, but goes no further. This game certainly deserves a look. PCZ



Erm, yikes.

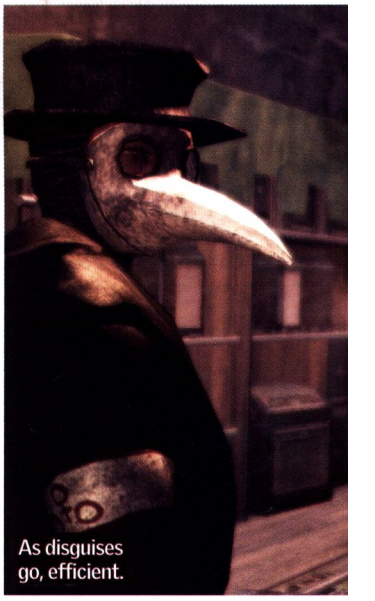
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lush and dusty
SOUND Bullets and banter
MULTIPLAYER Old-school goodness

- **Genuinely likeable script**
- Outstanding destructible environments
- **Accomplished multiplayer**
- Dedicated servers
- **Pretty template action**

84

Warfare excellence



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

ONLINE ONLY

CLASSIC • CLASSIC PCZONE CLASSIC • CLASSIC

Even *Jon 'Log' Blyth* can't make a pun out of 'parkour' and 'murderer'

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE assassinscreed.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

You're a bloke in the future who's getting trained to kill by reliving the memories of his ancestors and doing loads of acrobatics. Right? Right.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.6GHz dual core, 1.5GB RAM (2GB *Vista/7*), and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3. Constant internet connection required for DRM.

HOW IT STACKS

ASSASSIN'S CREED 2	90%
PRINCE OF PERSIA	75%
ASSASSIN'S CREED	72%

NORMALLY, I'D SPEND these opening sentences making jokes, the general hope being that you'd be fooled into thinking that the entire review was well-written and entertaining. But this time, there's something important that we need to get out of the way.

You probably already know that *Assassin's Creed 2* is the first Ubisoft game to feature their new DRM. So, don't buy *Assassin's Creed* if you don't want to register at ubi.com. Your activation key has to be tied to one of those accounts. And don't buy it if you lack a reliable broadband internet connection – the Ubisoft Launcher (which will launch all their future games) needs a constant connection to their servers.

DAMN DRM

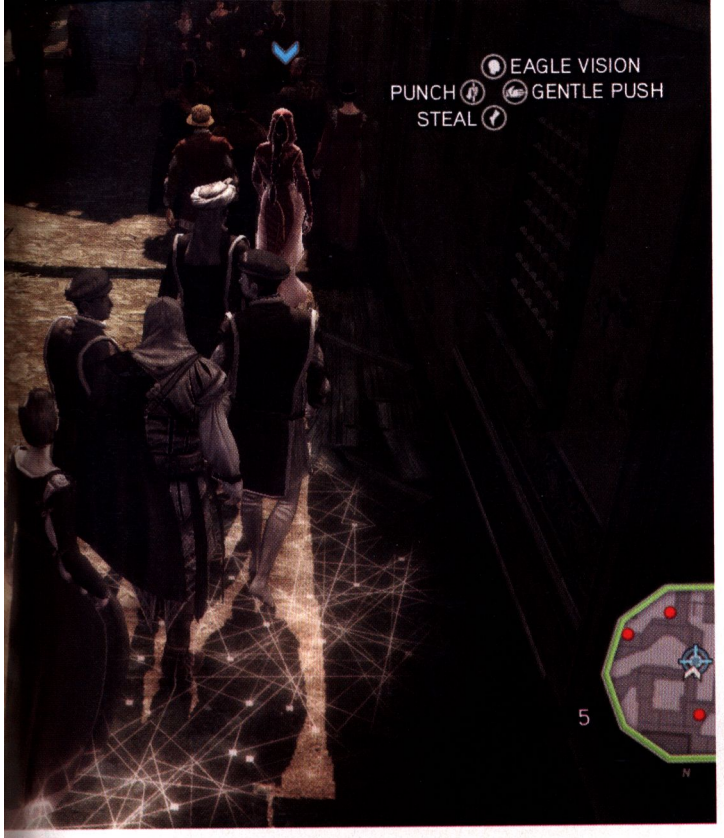
My experiments with deliberately unplugging my router gave me around 20 seconds play before I was kicked impolitely out of the game. My progress returned to the last checkpoint when I reconnected to mother brain. So, if your router or ISP occasionally drops out, be prepared for staggered gameplay.

While you might not trust Ubisoft's commitment to keeping their validation servers open indefinitely, or their half-promise of a patch in the event they do close their authentication servers, just recite those benefits to yourself, over and over: cloud save games, no disc play, and no install limits. See? It's not all kicks in the dick. Ubisoft love you, really.

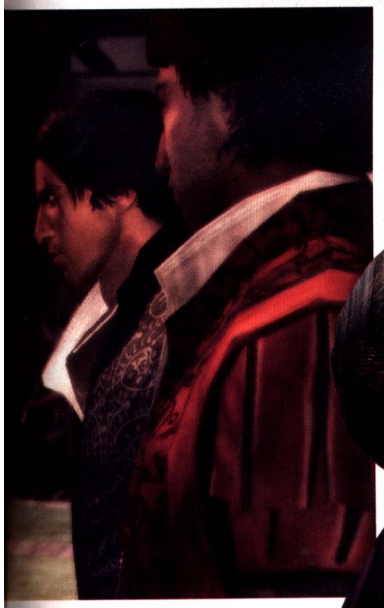
"See? It's not all kicks in the dick. Ubisoft love you, really"

Of course, *Assassin's Creed 2* isn't just a staggering new system of copy protection, it's the sequel to 2008's hit time-travelling hit mindbender. It was the game that took the familiar leaps of *Prince of Persia*, and applied to a stylish semi-sandbox world. It was so beautiful that you could forgive the shallowness, and the conspiracy-fuelled war between the Templars and the Assassins was such an audacious plot, you couldn't help but doff something at them. Relics of unimaginable power that have shaped human history. It's the game Dan Brown would have made, if he wasn't shit.

In the opening of *AC2*, protagonist Desmond Miles has been rescued from the evil Templar-run Abstergo Industries lab, escorted to his new home, introduced to a new memory-regurgitating machine, and given a new life to relive: his ancestor, Ezio Auditore. Living a set of 12 key memory sequences from your ancestor's life will train you in real life –



Giving hoodies a worse name.

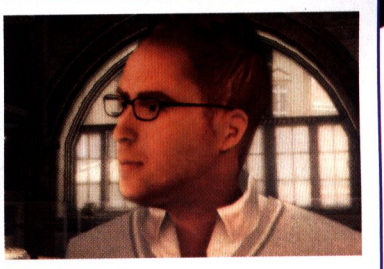


but as you begin to find out, the walls between the worlds aren't as solid as a sane person might like.

Italy – by day, dusk and night – is a beautiful location, and the cities are bustling. The overheard dialogue is never annoying, and often entertaining. What's more, the basic premise of the story makes sense of all the limitations that games place on us. Sorry, you can't go there yet: data isn't ready. Stop killing innocents, you're desynchronising with known history. And, of

WALLACE AND VOMIT

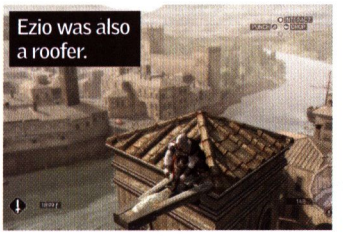
When celebrity cameos are perfectly judged



I remember first being told that Danny Wallace was doing a voice for *Assassin's Creed 2*. "Brilliant," I thought. "I hope they've written the part to be as massive and sweltering an arsehole as I (admittedly without evidence) believe Wallace to be."

I needn't have worried. Wallace's character is as charmless, smug, needless, and obnoxious as any of the wretched "I bet my mate" books he's ever written. It's almost like someone at Ubisoft thought, "This Shaun Hasting guy's a massive entertainment-free douche, let's make him a bit more unpleasant and get Danny Wallace to do the voice".

This almost makes up for the DRM.



course. you've lost your powers since the last game, as you're a completely different person.

Naturally, the basics of the game are similar. A core thread of missions carry you through the storyline, with side-missions giving you a sense of value. But now, the collectables and side-missions fill the world to saturation point. Collect 100 feathers for your grieving, mute mother. Find the codex pieces for Leonardo Da Vinci to decode, giving you new powers and weapons and forming a huge jigsaw. Plunder the six huge crypts (or raid the tombs, if you must) to unlock Altair's outfit. Collect paintings, pay for the renovation of your uncle Mario's town, and collect the four sets of armour and the weapons to nudge yourself ever closer to 100%.

There're also 20 glyphs placed in the world by the previous brain-hopper, which trigger slightly annoying puzzles that unlock a mysterious movie. The maps are also packed with side missions involving assassinations, beat-downs, courier jobs, and races, all of which earn you cash for medicine and smoke bombs.

The scope for development is fantastic. Ezio is an athletic scoundrel who – until the brutal execution of his family – used his clambering skills to climb into the bedroom windows of Italy's more delightful ladies. This puts him in a great position to relearn combat skills – the core of which is very similar to the first game. Tap attack as your opponent does, and you'll deliver a killing counter-attack. That is, until you encounter more advanced guards. Then, you're taught new moves – the ability to fight barehanded and disarm your opponent allows you to deliver one-hit kills to the halberd-wielding guards.

"*Assassin's Creed 2* is everything the first game should have been"

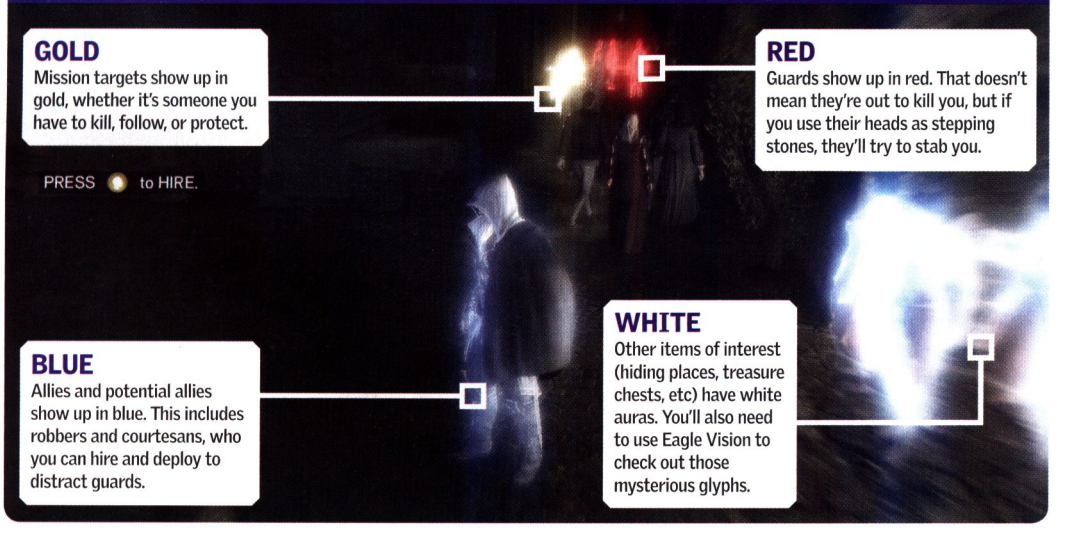
PLAYING HOUSE

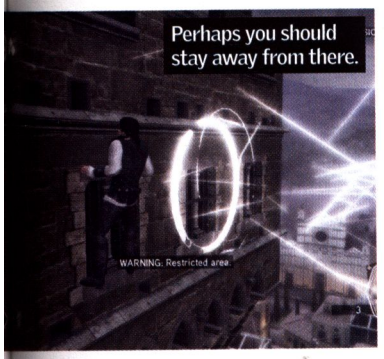
No single element of the game is so deep as to be confusing, but there's such a range of things going on that the shallowness of the first game has completely disappeared. The easiest way to describe *AC2* is it's everything the first game should have been.

Meanwhile, your mother and sister have moved to the countryside estate, which offers you a cute mini-game of renovation. Again, nothing too deep – but the renovations have a real impact, boosting the town's income, which you get to keep, and earning you discounts in the shops across Italy.

EAGLE VISION

Because *The Chuckle Brothers* hadn't been invented yet





One thing *AC* got right first time was its approach to acrobatics. Invisible hands gently guide you onto working paths, and with just the right mouse button, space bar, and W pressed, you can still bolt from one side of a town, across pillars, poles and windowsills, just by guiding yourself with the mouse. The game's more designed for a thumbstick though, so a mouse can be over-sensitive, but kudos to Ubisoft for leaving that in the hands of the player, rather than dampening the controls.

It gets harder, too – Venice is a much easier town to fall in, and the leap grab move learned in that town introduces an element of timing that can cause you to fall if you're not paying attention. Things haven't been made too difficult though – it's just tough enough to keep you in. Some decisions garner less kudos, though. The Xbox version maps the four buttons logically to feet, head, and two hands. On the PC, these are once again spread amongst the E, Space bar and Left Shift, and left mouse button. It's something that you will get used to, but the decision to keep the 360's colour coded icons in the game is confusing. I had to go into the menu system, copy the symbols down and cross-reference for the first hours of the game. And even when I'd committed moves to my memory, I rarely hit the quick-time events.

To the game's credit, these are always optional, and never determine whether you live or die, but it was heartbreaking to see Leonardo Da Vinci's face drop when I didn't return his offer of a manly thank-you hug.

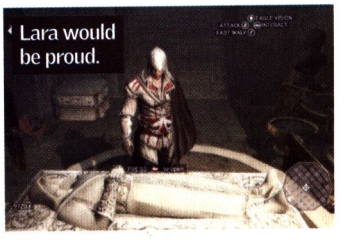
"I want to hug you, Leo," I said to his little sad face. "I just can't remember what the red fist means."

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The same thing happened when I accidentally grabbed a member of the group of Courtesans I was blending in with. You can now blend with any crowd, even if you are a bloke in a cowl standing in the middle of some ladies with their Michael Bublés out. But you're only ever one click away from an accidental assassination, or an aggressive grab.

"Oh hun, I'm sorry," I said out loud, unable to let go of her. "How do I let go?" I added, aware that if anyone came up to me on the street, grabbed me and said these two sentences, I'd prepare for death. There wasn't a non-violent way out of it, so I headbutted her and pretended it was a kiss.

"Still got it, Ezio," I said to myself, before throwing myself into a haystack.



Assassin's Creed 2 is a thoroughbred joy to play on a gamepad, and fist-twisting pleasure on a mouse and keyboard. In deciding this score – like it's a science – I've ignored the DRM. That's the kind of thing that's best addressed with slightly bitchy words. Beyond that, the bold fact remains that this sequel takes the elegant skeleton of the first game and wraps it up in slabs of loveable meat. Then it sticks its leg out the door and lets everyone take a deep bite. It's that good. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Stunning, occasional pop-in
SOUND Moody toots
MULTIPLAYER Assassins don't play together

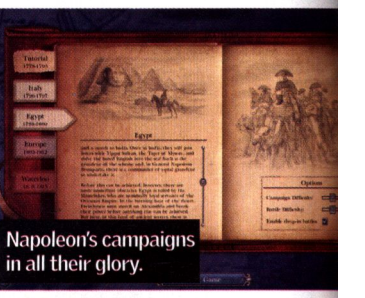
- **Beautiful, full world**
- Improved combat
- **Immense amounts to do**
- Someone says ,"It's-a me, Mario"!
- **Icons don't help mouse and keyboard users**
- No internet, no play

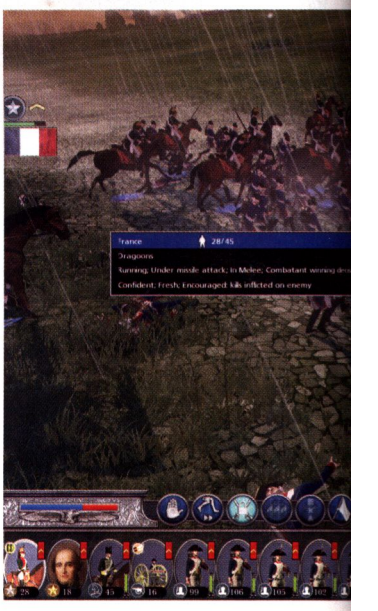
90

What sequels should be

The sea, lovely as ever.

Level two is even more colourful.


Napoleon's campaigns in all their glory.



NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

David Brown marshals his tired troops for one last battle against Europe

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE totalwar.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

The new *Total War* game focuses on smaller-scale campaigns and a French man who was actually around average height for the time.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.3GHz CPU, 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista/7*), and a 256MB graphics card. *Steam* installation required.

HOW IT STACKS

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR	94%
NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR	89%
IMPERIAL GLORY	85%

CONTROVERSY HAS DOGGED *Empire* more than any other game in the *Total War* series, as bugs, crashes and AI issues plagued many users, while other players were left unaffected.

Certainly, the situation is better now, even though some still complain, and this is where *Napoleon* comes in, using the version of *Empire*'s engine that allows the AI to invade by the sea and just do things in a more intelligent manner on the whole.

First of all, it's not like all the other *Total War* expansions that have come along before. Because *Empire* got a bit of a kicking from some sections of the community, Creative Assembly have released *Napoleon* as a stand-alone expansion, so it doesn't require the original *Empire* game to play.

In terms of content, there are the campaigns based on the Emperor's life, taking in Italy, Egypt and mainland Europe up from 1805-1812, plus the events surrounding his attempted comeback at Waterloo. After you've polished all these off you've got the Campaigns of the Coalition, where you change sides and attempt to prevent the French upstart dominating Europe.

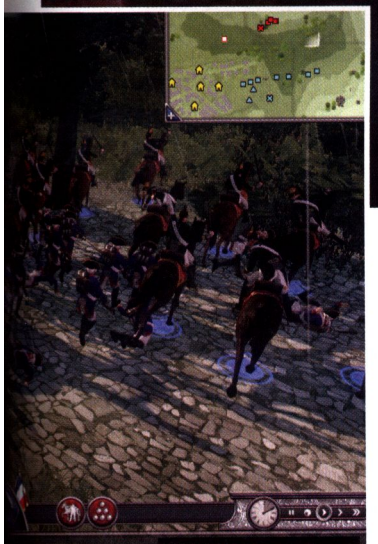
There are more historical battles included than ever before, providing a series of brilliantly executed versions of real-life conflicts such as Ligny, Dresden, Austerlitz, and Trafalgar. There are reams of stats and achievements provided by *Steam* as well, just in case you ever wondered how far your armies had marched during your play time.

Why do you all hate me?

THE NEW STUFF

There's also the seamless introduction of two new features to the series: campaign multiplayer and drop-in battles. The latter will be used by those looking for a challenge AI can't provide – a genuine, if temporary, human presence on the other

That's just sick.

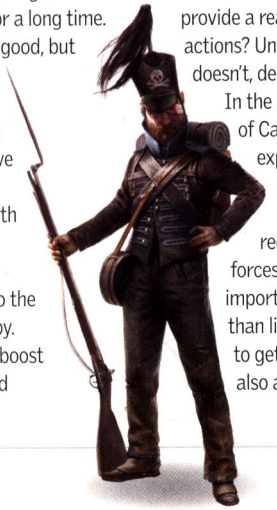


"OK lads, he went this-a-way! CHARGE!"

side of the map. Most players probably won't use this, as it'll just make things harder for them, but it should placate those who mutter about the AI being too easy to beat.

The former is perhaps the most exciting thing to come into the series (it's also in the process of being worked into *Empire* as well) for a long time. Naval battles were all good, but a full multiplayer campaign? Nice.

If you do play with a friend, you won't have to wait for them to finish faffing about with extraneous units in *Napoleon*. These have been whittled down to the Gentleman and the Spy. The former is used to boost research speed, spread dissent in enemy cities, duel with opposing characters and quell unrest a bit in your own settlements. The latter can assassinate enemy characters and provide valuable information about your opponent's movements and units. Leave him in a city for a certain amount of time and he'll create a network of informants, revealing everything going on in the territory he's in.



BETTER BRAINS

As mentioned before, of course, most people will be playing against the game's AI, which has been improved since *Empire*. At least, it has in the battles. As for the campaign side of things, we're not so sure. It's too easy to say, "Well, when I played it, the Ottomans didn't put enough troops in Acre, so I just strolled in and captured it," but there's a bigger issue here: does the game's campaign AI provide a realistic response to player actions? Unhelpfully, at times it does and doesn't, depending on the situation.

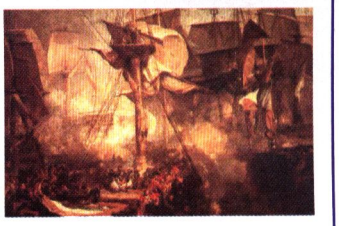
In the Egypt campaign the capture of Cairo and an overly ambitious expansion down the Nile was met with substantial armed resistance and, once, the recapture of Cairo by Mamluk forces. When you nick something important from the AI, it's more than likely it'll do it's best to get it back, which might also account for it leaving

TIME COMMANDER

Four famous battles you get to fight in

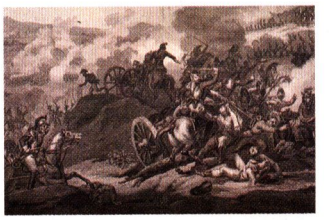
AUSTERLITZ

This is where it all went tits up for the Third Coalition, a gruelling nine hours of fighting leading to Austria signing a separate peace treaty with the French.



TRAFALGAR

The most decisive British naval victory of the Third Coalition War. 27 British ships beat 33 French ones. In your face, Boney. You average-for-the-time sized twat.



DRESDEN

Yet another Coalition (the sixth) saw themselves defeated by Napoleon's armies, although follow-up skirmishes went the other way.

WATERLOO

An unlikely victory was pulled out of the bag by Wellington and Blücher, leading to ultimate defeat for Bonaparte and that song by Abba.

"Most people will be playing against the game's AI, which has been improved since *Empire*"

other things relatively undefended as it diverts troops to the front line, which it doesn't do as much as some people have argued anyway.

So far, so good, as far as we're concerned. The Russian invasion in the third of Napoleon's campaigns doesn't quite work as well as it should, but of course, it would be unfair if the game brutally ravaged all your units the instant they stepped out of range of your supply lines – games are meant to be fun, after all. Attrition isn't the ruthless killer of men it was billed as, but whether this is a problem is down to the player. If you want it more realistic and more deadly, stick the difficulty up. If you don't, keep it down. Simple.

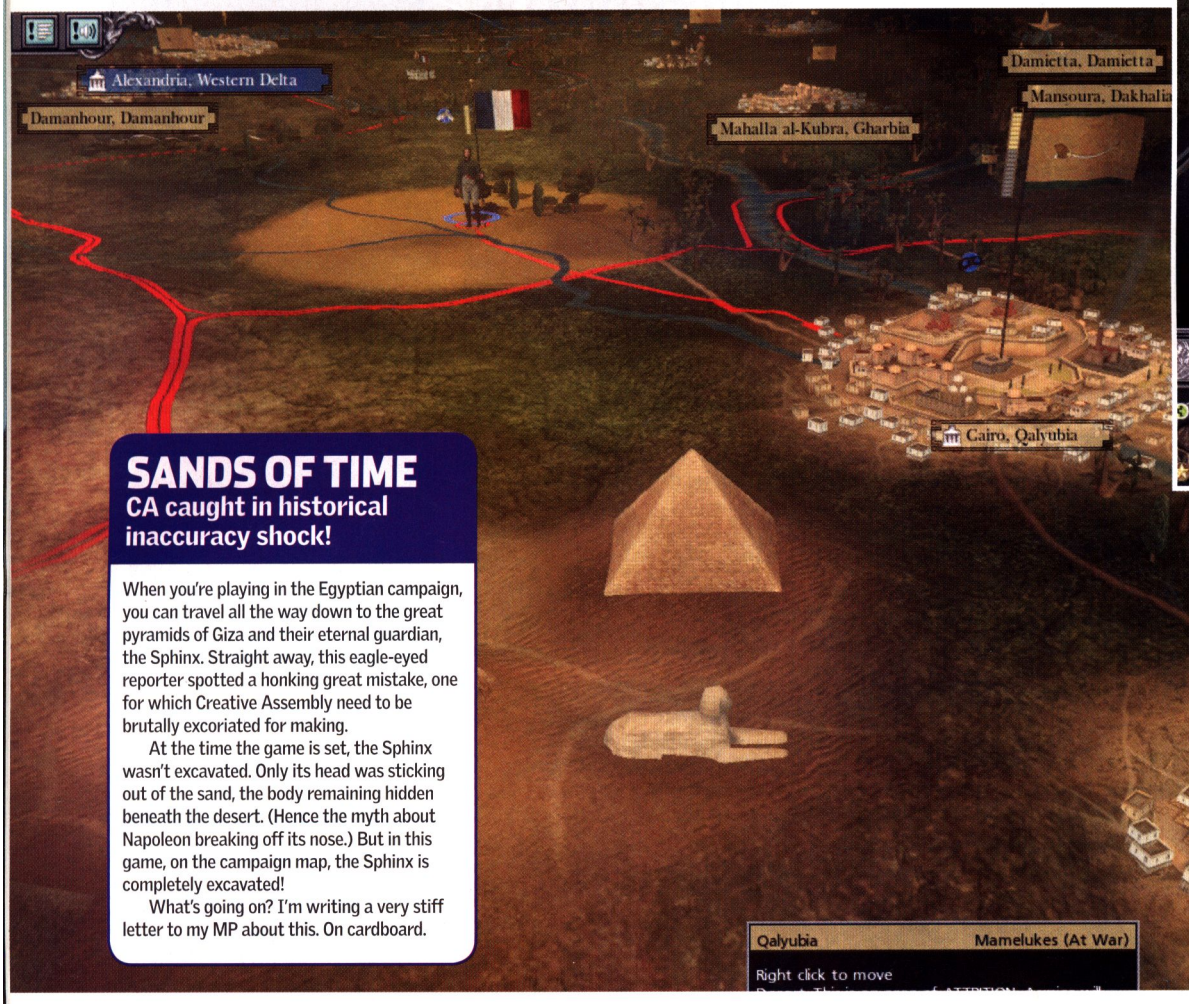
Of more concern is the return of certain strange AI decisions on a grander scale. Aggression seems to be the biggest problem, as in what nations choose to expand and which ones don't. It seems that smaller nations with very limited resources are disproportionately aggressive, with France being unusually timid when pushing back their borders. It's a deep issue, and one inextricably tied up within bundles of arcane attributes, but if we could focus on fixing anything in *Napoleon*, this would be it, as, fortunately, the battles themselves are tremendous.

Two legs up means he choked to death on a pea.

BIG ON THE ACTION

Just as in *Empire*, *Napoleon*'s battles are glorious, especially now *Empire*'s engine has been given a big makeover. They're everything that make the *Total War* series stand head and shoulders above all others in the strategy genre: beautiful to behold and great fun to play, allowing for genuine tactical and strategic thought. A lot of what's been added is cosmetic, sure, but there's been a great deal of screw-tightening behind the scenes to make things run smoother.

Aesthetically, things have never been this good. Cannonballs now scour the landscape when they hit, leaving marks where they skid along the turf. Park your hovering eye next to the impact and the screen shudders with each crashing thud into the ground. Smoke fills the air even



SANDS OF TIME

CA caught in historical inaccuracy shock!

When you're playing in the Egyptian campaign, you can travel all the way down to the great pyramids of Giza and their eternal guardian, the Sphinx. Straight away, this eagle-eyed reporter spotted a honking great mistake, one for which Creative Assembly need to be brutally excoriated for making.

At the time the game is set, the Sphinx wasn't excavated. Only its head was sticking out of the sand, the body remaining hidden beneath the desert. (Hence the myth about Napoleon breaking off its nose.) But in this game, on the campaign map, the Sphinx is completely excavated!

What's going on? I'm writing a very stiff letter to my MP about this. On cardboard.

more than before as volleys of musket fire erupt from your battle line. It's the most cinematic battle experience you'll find in any strategy game, and it's very easy to forget how exciting taking part in them is when looking back. It would be a lie to say we didn't come across tiny little bugs in our numerous skirmishes, but they were few and far between.

One unit of skirmishing cavalry collided with the big red line signifying the edge of the map and for some reason half of them died instantly, while on another occasion, when defending a settlement with a rubbish army, the AI refused to come forward to engage my puny force. However, your CPU-powered competitor is also much better at some things it used to be rubbish at, like protecting its flanks, leaving units with its cannons to stop them being destroyed easily, and that sort of thing. If you've got a small battle line, it'll spread itself wide to envelop you, and it'll even hide units in trees to launch surprise attacks.

The only major flaw we can point to is the way AI generals are still too keen to get themselves killed in stupid ways, which has been a problem since the days of *Shogun*. At one point, an enemy general charged straight into a line of defensive stakes, wiping out his entire unit while the rest of his army were marching slowly towards us. Apart from that, errors in the battles are few and far between, especially when you're up against a human player.

There'll always be little niggles that bother some people but not others, and in a game this complex, with so many small things to think about, little glitches are inevitable. As it stands however, lessons have clearly been learned from *Empire* as far as game-spoiling glitches are concerned - *Napoleon*'s a far more stable experience.

On the whole, the battles are still a triumph, although those who prefer the pre-*Empire Total War* games for their focus on melee combat won't find anything to change their minds.

FINELY TUNED

Napoleon is all about evolution, not revolution. It was never going to be a leap forward over *Empire* in terms of technology, AI or anything like that, but it is a great stand-alone expansion that gives you a whole lot of material to plough through, along with better battles, and a slightly improved campaign map.

The advent of multiplayer campaigns in the *Total War* series sees that issue become less significant, although Creative Assembly need to remember that most people tend to play RTS games by themselves.

Essentially, if you loved or even just liked *Empire: Total War*, you'd be crazy not to invest in this release. It's got more of what you liked, less of what you didn't, and more human contact to boot. What's not to love about that?

Unless you feel your head starting to explode when you find out the uniforms in the game have one less button on them than they should, this will keep you occupied for months. PCZ

WHAT WE WANT
Give us unlimited choice in our multiplayer maps

If you think about it, it makes little sense to just hand gamers a handful of maps to fight on in standard multiplayer. Even after only a short period of time, people have worked out how to exploit them and they've all been played on, making repetition a very real issue. However, if Creative Assembly were to give us the main campaign's map and allow players to pick a place to fight, that would surely solve the issue and provide a virtually unlimited selection of battle zones to choose from. If it can be done in the single player, surely it isn't too much of a stretch to implement it for the online component too?

Bars above units indicate current moral and strength.

The Red Wall of Death.

Austrians: excellent at line dancing.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Lovely new touches
SOUND Same as *Empire*
MULTIPLAYER Multiplayer campaigns

- ✔ **Tightened engine**
- ✔ Builds on *Empire's* gameplay
- ✔ **Loads of historical battles**
- ✔ Better multiplayer options
- ✘ **Attrition not that deadly**
- ✘ AI's smarts variable

89

Et voila! A fantastic game!

Now if he was holding a copy of a *PC ZONE* it'd be a great *Around the World* shot.

STAR TREK ONLINE

Paul Presley launches his quantum torpedoes at Cryptic

DEVELOPER Cryptic Studios
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE startrekonline.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99 (+ £8.99 monthly subscription)

AT A GLANCE...

Big-name brand given low-ambition MMO treatment. Looks lovely enough, but unfortunately ticks the wrong boxes.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 7950 or ATI Radeon X1800 graphics card. Internet connection required.

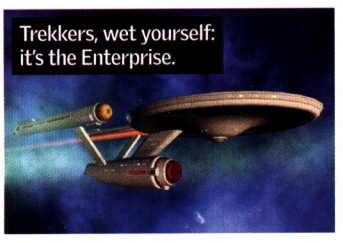
HOW IT STACKS

X3: TERRAN CONFLICT	88%
CHAMPIONS ONLINE	64%
STAR TREK ONLINE	55%

WE'VE ALL WANTED a *Star Trek*-based online world for many, many years now. We've dreamed about it, plotted it out, made our plans for what we'd do, gotten excited over potential, and then steadied ourselves in moist anticipation once it was finally announced that the dream would be turned into reality all those press releases ago. And they've given us... well, a travesty.

Star Trek Online is almost comically bad in execution, an obvious sufferer of rushed production schedules, inept design and very, very poor execution.

At its base level, *Star Trek Online* puts every player in command of their own starship, complete with an automated crew, throws a mix of spaceship and ground combat at you, and coats it all in every *Trek* reference you could think of. Which sounds OK, until you play it and realise that none of it gels and everything has been horribly crowbarred into Cryptic's existing MMO format. A setup that, as anyone who's played *Champions Online* will tell you, was never that great to begin with.



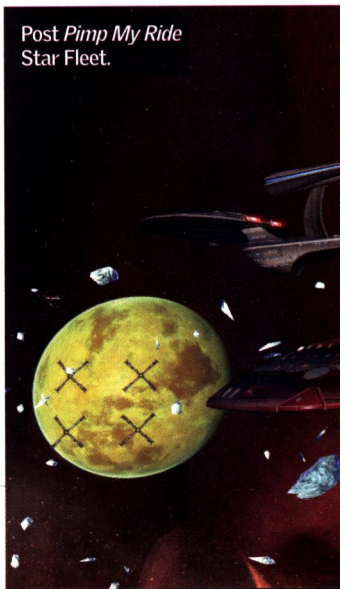
Trekkers, wet yourself: it's the Enterprise.

MARRED TREK

Not all the blame can be thrust in Cryptic's direction, mind you. When you look at *Star Trek* in the cold, hard light of day, you quickly start to realise how awkward the universe's structure is for an MMO interpretation. Just to cite two examples: the Federation doesn't use any form of currency, and 90% of any classic *Trek* episode is actors talking to each other: hardly the stuff of low-attention span gaming greatness.

But what really saddens the game-loving heart is how clear it is that, even with the challenges in front of it, Cryptic haven't even tried to make the most rudimentary attempts to translate the true spirit of *Star Trek* – that force of nature that can survive multiple awful films, several turgid spin-off shows and a host of God-awful cash-in novels and merchandise.

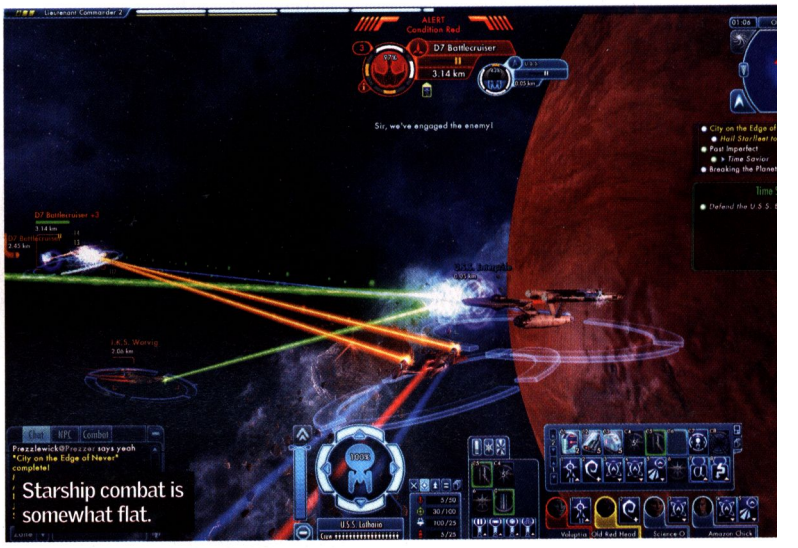
You can almost see the developers at Cryptic looking at the huge whiteboard of All Things *Trek* in the initial stages of design, realising the amount of creative effort that would be required to pull



Post *Pimp My Ride* Star Fleet.

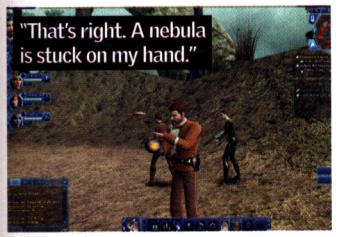
Borg: even Kirk wouldn't shag one.

"Damn. Missed my seat. Blame the blood wine."

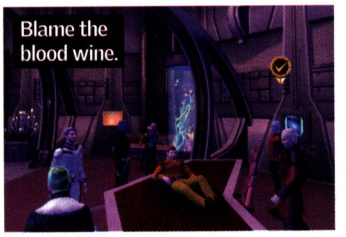


Starship combat is somewhat flat.

"*Star Trek Online* is almost comically bad in execution"



"That's right. A nebula is stuck on my hand."



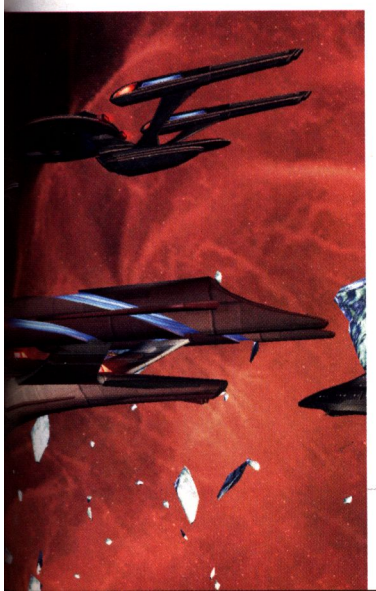
Blame the blood wine.

anything decent off, and just saying "Ah sod it, let's re-skin the *Champions* engine and make a basic combat game instead."

It's not like there isn't precedent to try this stuff. BioWare is busy creating a solid-looking story-based MMO with *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. *EVE Online* has shown that a space-based MMO doesn't have to be all about fighting. And just about every MMO under the sun includes guild structure tools that let multiple players team up and follow orders, provide unique roles in situations and contribute to a greater end result in different and meaningful ways. Are you honestly telling me that we couldn't have had ships made up of multiple bridge positions, with the guild leader sitting in the Captain's role and not have had a meaningful *Star Trek* experience?

That's what comes across most when you play *STO*: the sheer level of laziness in the development. Of course it looks lovely, yes all the words are correct, the nods to content from the rich *Trek* history is all there – from pet tribbles to the Guardian of Time, from raktajino to the Crystalline Entity – you literally can't move for fanboy-sating references. But none of it feels as though it's being used in any sort of meaningful way. It's all just being thrown at you as if to say "See! See! It's *Star Trek*! Lap it up!" regardless of whether any of it makes narrative or logical sense.

So that's why this really doesn't cut the mustard in terms of being a decent *Star Trek* property. What of its actual gaming credentials? Does it at least have the saving grace of being fun to play, regardless of narrative accuracy? No, it most assuredly does not.



STAR TRUDGE

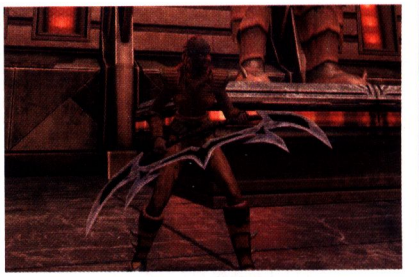
Using the term 'game' to describe *Star Trek Online* is really pushing the definition of that word to its outer limits. Most games have some sense of challenge to them, some potential for failure in order to keep things interesting. Even MMOs, with their lax attitude towards character death, usually at least try to make the content engaging, varied and difficult enough to disguise the grind at work behind the scenes.

STO has none of that. For all the pretty colours and fancy ship models on display, there is no challenge on offer. The much-vaunted tactical ship combat very quickly becomes a basic case of flying in circles pressing 'fire all' when the countdown timers run down, and since there's no death penalty worth a damn, there's simply no reason to worry if you get blown up as you'll just re-spawn 10 seconds later and jump back into the fray at full strength again.

This is attrition gaming at its worst. You never fail to progress, it might just take a few re-spawns to get there (although even that miniscule threat is practically

LET THEM DIE...

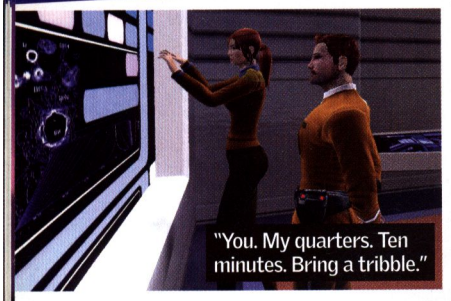
Everybody was K'ung Foo Fightin'



The Klingon gameplay isn't in the main review, mainly as there's precious little in the game to warrant attention.

Klingons are the PvP side of the game, which could be great if any real thought had been assigned to it at all. Unfortunately, this side of *Star Trek Online* has been even less well thought out than the main side. Consequently, it comes across as a mess, with little action beyond telling you to go out there and shoot Feds in the (broken) PvP zones.

There's promise to flesh them out further in future updates/expansions, but in truth it just shows how rushed the whole game has been.

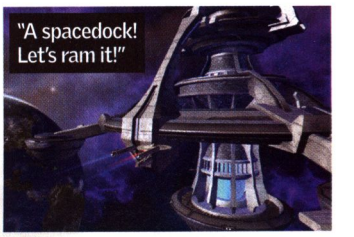

"You. My quarters. Ten minutes. Bring a tribble."

Something's leaking.

Heidi was pissed.

"A sun! Let's ram it!"

"Ladies, ladies, please. One at a time. OK, two."


"A spacedock! Let's ram it!"

↘ eliminated when you're in a team), but any progression you make isn't going to come about through any displays of gaming skill or tactical nous, you just hang on long enough, pushing the same two buttons when they light up and eventually you'll be an Admiral.

It's not even as if the enemies offer any threat. When they're not getting themselves stuck inside scenery (a very common bug), they just go through their one party trick (throwing out mines, cloaking for 10 seconds, whatever) while turning around in circles around you, waiting to explode.

MR SPOOK

On the ground it's no better. In fact, it's far, far worse. For all its flaws, ship combat at least somehow manages to offer a smidge of interest with the four-sided shield system (although don't be fooled into thinking this is a 3-D game – that's yet another illusion. Like Khan, *STO* displays very two-dimensional thinking).

When you're planetside, *STO* manages to capture all of the worst aspects of MMO gaming from the last five years – tiny zones, limited variety, the same three or four character models being used over and over again, little in the way of effective communication tools, overly confusing on-screen cues, no strategic gameplay and again, nothing in the way of meaningful challenge.

Ground missions do make some attempt to capture the flavour of the various TV shows, but again, only by referencing *Star Trek* touchstones. The gameplay boils down to either shooting your way past loads of enemies in order to press the action key on a particular mission goal, or just running around empty landscapes, pressing 'scan' five times when you're told to. No challenge, no thought, pure grind.

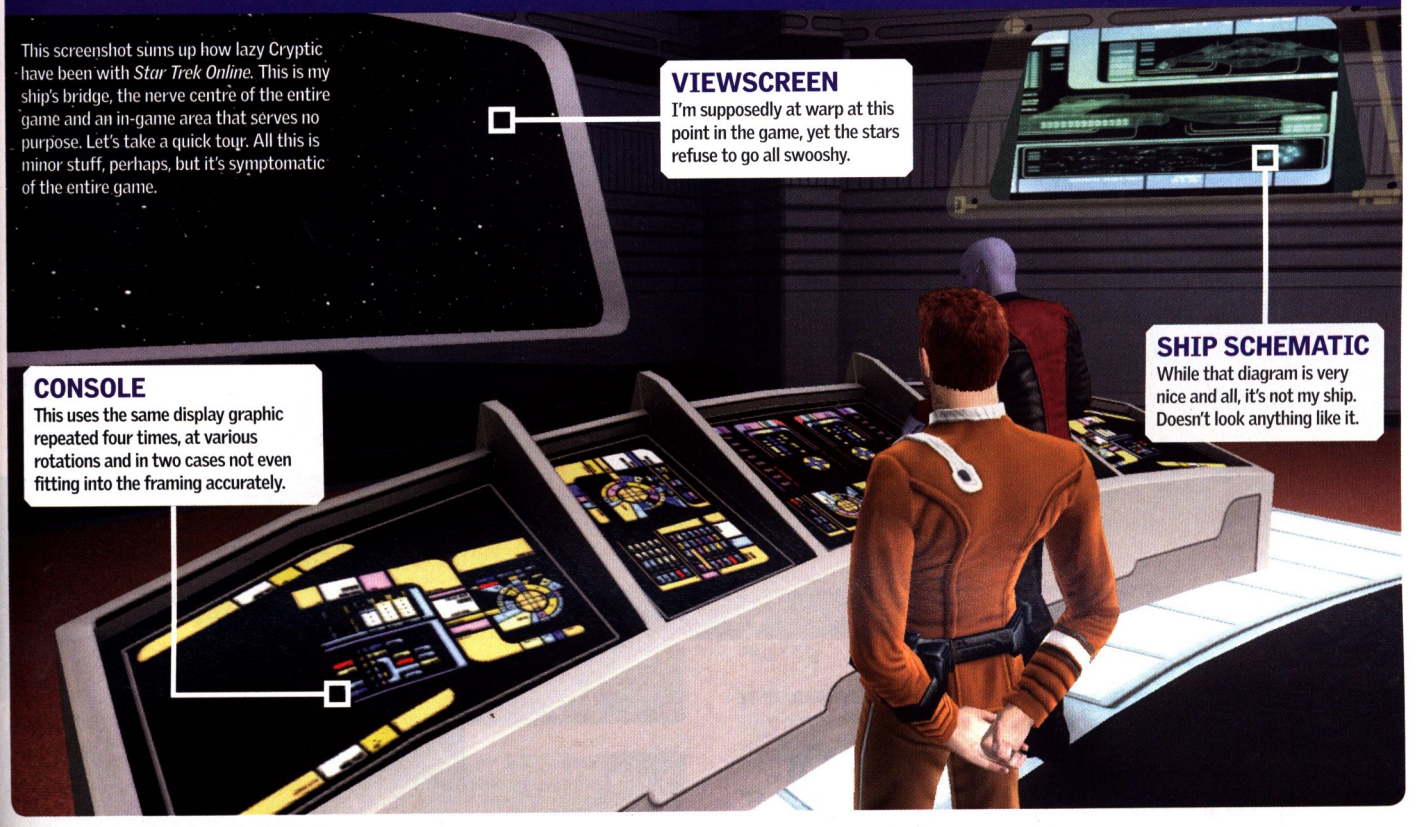
I can't say this enough, with sufficient stress or in any more

Space combat does look good.

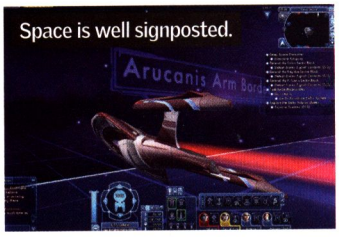
Star Fleet: peaceful explorers, my arse.

A TOUR OF THE BRIDGE

The little touches make a difference. In these cases, a bad difference...



"Wait around, while I scan this floating HUD."



effective a font: *Star Trek Online* is not a game. Not by any measurable yardstick.

Neither is it an effective online social space (the other vital component for any decent MMO title), as it offers little in the way of communication tools, player meeting spaces or guild functionality.

There are occasional flashes of inspiration – I genuinely like the auto teaming aspect when you enter a mission area for instance; this addresses a typical MMO bugbear of pick-up grouping – but there aren't enough of these touches to warrant setting up a monthly drain on your bank account.

So, with all that having been said, there is left one niggling question – why, for all the many, many, many faults on display here, do I keep wanting to return to the thing?

Star Trek Online does one thing well – just one thing, but I've found that for many people, that one thing is enough: it provides enough fanboy service to help the diehard *Star Trek* fans look past the fact that the game is beyond terrible.

The basic fact is that if this was the exact same game but without any of the *Trek* trappings, no one would give it the time of day. As it is, *Trek* fans have been wanting an online universe to lose themselves in for years now and as flawed as this is, it's all they've got and by God, they're going to take it.

Annoyingly, this means that the online game that *Trek* really deserves isn't likely to ever get made any time soon. Still, *Star Wars* has survived the mess that was *Galaxies* and looks like being given decent service by *The Old Republic*. So there's still hope something similar will happen to *Trek*.

Right now, *Star Trek Online* is a mess of a title with little to recommend beyond the novelty of flying around in a replica of the Enterprise. As soon as that novelty wears off (ideally within the 30-day trial period), this will be one universe badly in need of a reboot. PCZ

"The online game that *Star Trek* deserves isn't likely to ever get made"

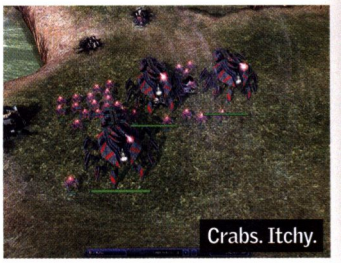
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Good ship models, so-so ground stuff
SOUND All of *Trek*'s beeps
MULTIPLAYER Of course

- ✓ **Graphically very pleasing**
- ✓ Fanboy service
- ✗ **Offers no challenges**
- ✗ Fails to capture the true *Trek*
- ✗ **Piss-poor MMO experience**
- ✗ Feels lazily designed

55

Worse than *Star Trek V*



SUPREME COMMANDER 2

Alec Meer stands in awe of big stompy robots

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER Square Enix
WEBSITE supreme commander2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

THERE AREN'T MANY strategy games which star a man who looks like a furniture salesman, but has somehow ended up piloting a giant robot instead.

Supreme Commander 2 should be congratulated for eschewing the hero stereotype, but it's tough to empathise with someone who looks like Steve Guttenberg crossed with a potato. Still, it's comforting to discover that *SupCom 2* hasn't abandoned its predecessors' fondness for really terrible storytelling.

Keep away from the single-player campaign. Between the charmless cutscenes and the decision to harshly limit which toys you can play with, it's about as much fun as licking a weasel. Instead, go straight to the skirmish or multiplayer games, where it happily gives you all its sharpest objects right away. This is an excellent multiplayer strategy game, a psychotic festival of giant robots, nukes and cyborg dinosaurs.

Despite fan concern that a lowered unit count meant Gas Powered Games had ripped *SupCom*'s brains out, this sequel is as complicated an RTS as you could hope to find. The UI has been streamlined, the performance ironed out and the tech tree has edged away from generic into iconic.

ARMS RACES

Despite the Plain Jane aesthetics, there's more pep to this than *SupCom*. It's not dumbed down, though. If anything, it's even more convoluted, thanks to a shift from static tech trees to a per-match unlock system.

You spend your points on buffs, new units and new structures – the result being that every player is fielding a bespoke force, devising their own strategy rather than climbing the same tree. The concern that there's little reason for this game to co-exist with the ageless *SupCom* erodes quickly.

One guy might be researching nukes, while another send phalanxes of spiderbots across the land, while blokey #3 is busily making a hypno-ray to addle the minds of any units that come close.

Definitely not a robot in disguise.

This cheerfully chaotic diversity will inevitably be stamped down into mathematically-calculated build orders by bespectacled men who use the word "imba" 83 times a day, but don't let them spoil your fun. Build things! Kill other things! These are the age-old rudiments of real-time strategy games, and *Supreme Commander 2* realises them spectacularly. OMG nukes are really imba, though. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

Determinedly PC-based robot-squishing strategy, in the vein of *Total Annihilation*.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz single core CPU, 1GB RAM (1.5GB *Vista/7*), and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3. *Steam* installation required.

HOW IT STACKS

SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE	86%
SUPREME COMMANDER 2	80%
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II	78%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Perfunctorily pretty
SOUND Good explosions
MULTIPLAYER Makes the game

- ✓ Unquestionably *SupCom*
- ✓ Far more variety
- ✓ Slightly more accessible...
- ✗ Still incredibly inaccessible
- ✗ Terrible cutscenes

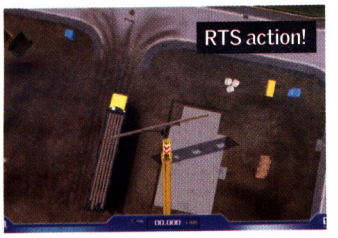
80
Brilliantly beefy strategy

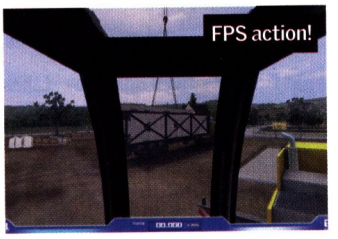
CRANE SIMULATOR 2009

Kelsey Grammar is absent

DEVELOPER Astragon
PUBLISHER Excalibur Publishing
WEBSITE excalibur-publishing.com/crane.htm
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.





FIRST OF ALL, an apology for the lateness of this review. It's 2010 now and this is *Crane Simulator 2009*. We know you've been waiting for this review for a long time, but at least it's here now. So, should you forsake *Just Cause 2* and *Napoleon: Total War* to invest in a game about constructing a prefab house or moving cargo around a harbour? Ah, but don't forget the night shift. Things really get crazy when the lights go out. After all, where are you going to place your load if your view is partially darkened?

Crane Simulator gives you three worlds to play through, each with a different-looking crane to control and a few levels to crane it up on. The object of each level is to pick up a load, move it into position and lower it, all against the clock. The quicker you do it, the more points you get and the closer you are to dominating the leader board.

One of the slight niggles we have that you might have picked up on is that *Crane Simulator 2009* is utterly, devastatingly boring. You pick up a load, move it about a bit and then put it down. That's it. While we're not saying there's much potential to the game, at least the developers could have given us some relatively flashy locations or challenges, or something fantastical. Instead, all you do for the first two and half hours is very slowly build a crap house. And at first, we couldn't even see where the load was we were supposed to pick up.

The game's all made well enough, in that everything works as it should, but, to be honest, you'd have to be fucking mad to play this.

David Brown

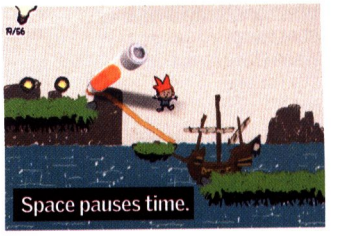
PCZONE 29 More Niles than Frasier

MAX & THE MAGIC MARKER

For once, graffiti is a positive thing

DEVELOPER Press Play
PUBLISHER Press Play
WEBSITE maxandthemagicmarker.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £13

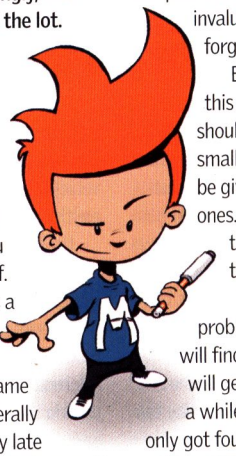
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor or better, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.



YOU'D THINK MORE people did art in school judging by the popularity of physics-based drawing games, a genre to which *Max & the Magic Marker* is the latest entrant. Surprisingly, this one is probably the best of the lot.

While it doesn't necessarily bring anything new to the table, other than combining physics and drawing with a cute platform game, it's presented and put forward in such a charming way, you can't help but enjoy yourself.

The game's plot involves a boy, his magic pen and some other stuff. The reason you're playing the game is the puzzles and they generally work well. Not until the very late stages of the game will you find yourself thinking "What the hell do I do here?" which is a pretty good going for a title like this.



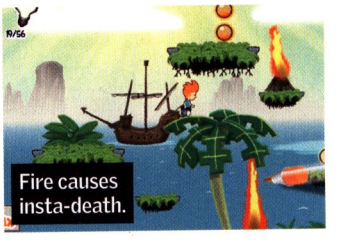
Left-clicking and holding draws lines and shapes, which physically manifest themselves in the level, helping to bridge gaps and solve said puzzles. You can also pause time to draw, which is an invaluable tool you shouldn't forget you have.

But don't get carried away: this is a throwaway game, that should be taken lightly and in small doses, but the doses you'd be giving yourself will be fun ones. Playing too long will lead to boredom, as the action is the same throughout.

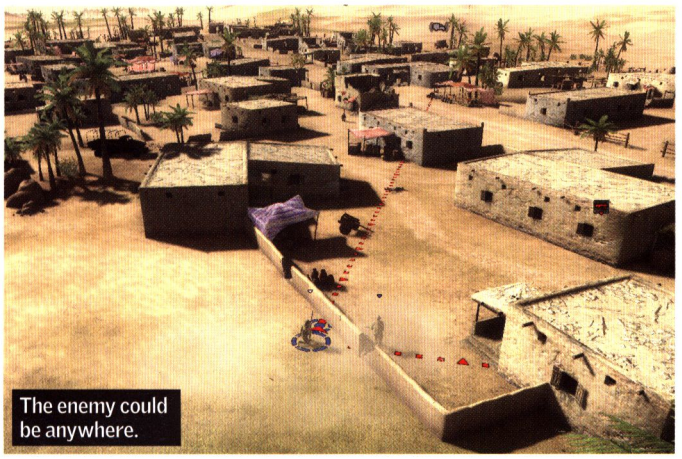
That said the only real problem with this game is kids will find it too hard, while adults will get a little fed up of it after a while. But not for long, as it's only got four hours of gameplay.

All in all, this is a good game, but it won't hit *Peggle*-esque heights of fame.

Adam Glick



PCZONE 73 Art Attack

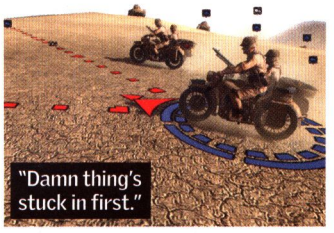

The enemy could be anywhere.

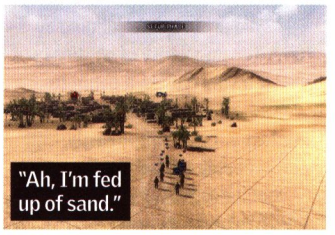
THEATRE OF WAR 2: AFRICA 1943

Get out of that one, Rommel

DEVELOPER Battlefront.com
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE battlefront.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor (2GHz *Vista/7*), 1GB RAM (2GB *Vista/7*), and a 256MB graphics card (512MB *Vista/7*).


"Damn thing's stuck in first."


"Ah, I'm fed up of sand."

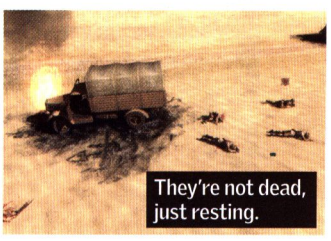
THIS IS THE second 1C Company-published game this month and this one also has a box cover that has the wrong name emblazoned on it. Unlike *Blood of Europe* to the right, this one is just missing the number '2' after *Theatre of War*. Oh, and the cover has the game names in the wrong order too. Apart from that, it's a success.

This game is a hardcore World War II RTS that plays like a cross between *Men of War* (issue 205, 76%) and *Combat Mission* (issue 93, 75%). It's more intimidating and harder to get your head around than the former, but it's more forgiving than the latter.

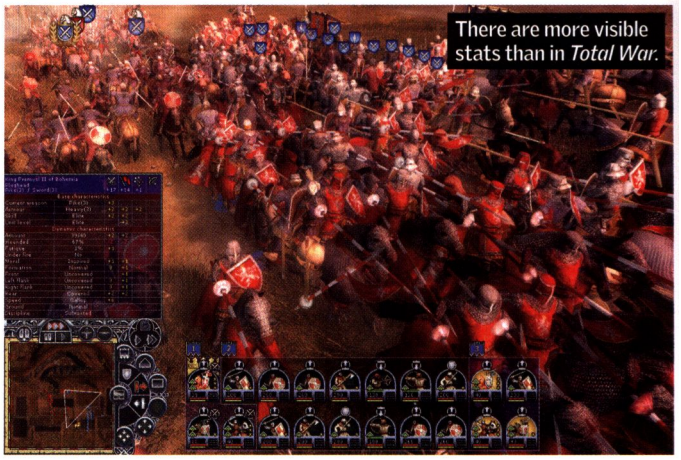
There are three campaigns here: one for the Wehrmacht, one for the US, and one for the British. They all play the same except with different accents when you receive orders and when you click on your units. Despite it being more intuitive than the *Combat Mission* games, *Africa 1943* is no picnic. One tutorial told me to find a bazooka in a box near a burning vehicle. I found the vehicle, but I couldn't interact with anything around it.

Having said that, the game's got a substantial amount of strategic depth, something Battlefront are renowned for. There's a battle creator, online modes and an exhaustive encyclopaedia referencing all the vehicles and stuff used in the battles. Sadly, it's just not easy for people who aren't already well versed in how this game series works to get into it.

David Brown


They're not dead, just resting.

PCZONE 47
African nightmare


There are more visible stats than in *Total War*.

XIII CENTURY: BLOOD OF EUROPE

Total War on a budget

DEVELOPER Unicorn Games Studios
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE 1cpublishing.eu
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce MX400 or Radeon 8500 graphics card.

Chaos often reigns.

IF YOU PICKED up a copy of this in a shop, you'd be forgiven for failing to realise this is a sequel to the semi-famous RTS *XIII Century: Death or Glory*.

If you then purchased, installed and then ran the thing, you'd be forgiven for failing to realise, if your first trip was to the tutorial, that this wasn't that exact same game, being as the introductory text to the tutorial, and its voiceover, say, "Welcome to the tutorial for *XIII Century: Death or Glory*". D'oh.

Following this, choosing 'Online Game' from the main menu, prompts you to provide a CD key in order to register a profile. No such key can be found anywhere in or on the box, the manual or the disc. Double d'oh.

Anyway, the game itself is a low-budget *Total War* clone and as such is able to command a certain degree of respect. It's clearly nowhere near as good as its illustrious brethren, but it still gives you a solid game of knights and spears. Except when the AI falls over and troops fail to move for no reason. Triple d'oh. That said, my spearmen in a circle formation looked nice and shiny though.

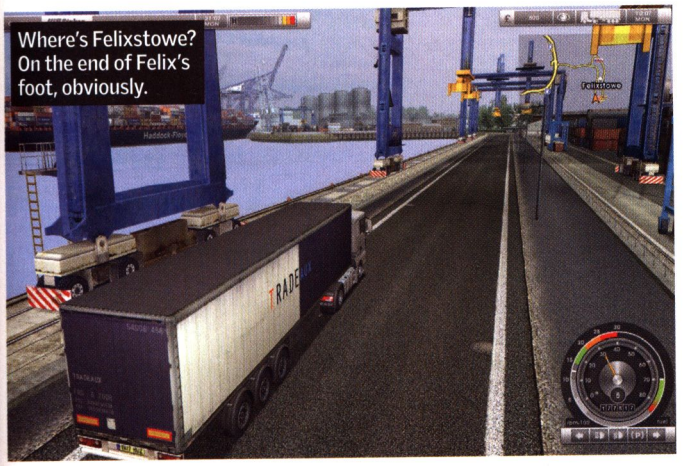
As for the bulk of the content, other than the multiplayer mode (for which you need the absent CD key to play), this is essentially a progressive campaign of set-up battles, although you can create your own if you like.

There's not much else to *Blood of Europe*, really, other than the online modes, if you manage to get into them. This is a bargain-bin version of *Total War* that's really not worth picking up, now that *Medieval II* and its excellent expansion *Kingdoms* are so cheap to get on places like Play.com and *Steam* nowadays. This really is game for completists only.

David Brown

A horse's worst nightmare.

PCZONE 38
Anaemic


Where's Felixstowe? On the end of Felix's foot, obviously.

UK TRUCK SIMULATOR

Not hauling arse, just arse

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

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.2GHz processor, 1GB of RAM (2GB for *Vista/7*), and a 256MB graphics card.

There should be a tailgating mini game.

IT'S UNLIKELY THAT 'lorry driver' features very highly on most people's list of ideal jobs. As a dream vocation it's been, rightly, shuffled behind astronaut, Formula One driver, fighter pilot and being Tiger Woods.

While there's naturally a certain life-on-the-edge thrill to ingesting medically perilous amounts of Red Bull, subsisting entirely on a diet of palate-searingly molten Ginsters pastry products, and gradually becoming psychologically unhinged by the endless solitude broken only by the occasional hitchhiker who you pick up hoping the line "So, a ride for a ride?" works, it's not exactly a desirable existence. In spite of this, SCS Software continues to create games that attempt to capture the glamour of long-distance haulage.

Bizarrely though, the company's ambition seems to have contracted with each new release. SCS used to make romanticised odes to American trucking that encompassed the USA and bits of Canada and Mexico. With *Euro Truck Simulator* it was a smaller area, and with less variety. Now with *UK Truck Simulator*, all we have is Britain's green and pleasant land. And boy is it green.

There's barely any variety across the game world, which means that if you were in danger of slipping out of consciousness and jackknifing your truck into a bus full of orphans during the previous games, you're in serious trouble now. When you get to the cities themselves, they tend to be Identikit industrial parks with the odd landmark visible in the distance – even the bright lights of London lie tantalisingly beyond your reach. It seems the curse of the lorry driver is that you only ever see the most tedious corners of cities you visit.

If you have a desperate yearning to experience the life of a UK truck driver, then why not become one? At the very least you'll be getting paid real, honest-to-goodness cash money while the monotony of the road causes the last flickers of electrical activity disappear from your withered, atrophied synapses.

Adam Glick

Barry decides to finally end it all.

PCZONE 38
Dull like spreadsheets

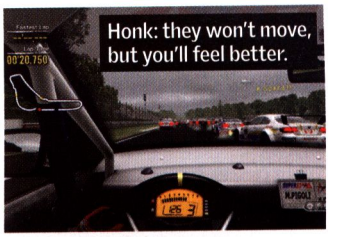
Kerosene fuel was later outlawed by the stewards.

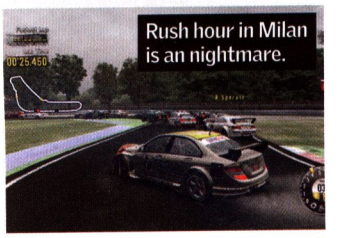
SUPERSTARS V8 NEXT CHALLENGE

The challenge is 'spot the difference'

DEVELOPER Milestone
PUBLISHER Black Bean
WEBSITE superstarsv8racing.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz processor, 1GB of RAM, and a 512MB Pixel Shader 3 graphics card.


Honk: they won't move, but you'll feel better.


Rush hour in Milan is an nightmare.

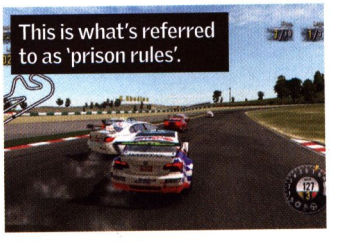
THAT THE FIRST game existed was baffling enough, but a year on there's inexplicably a sequel to *Superstars V8*. This championship is an obscure touring car series based out of Italy that sees V8-powered saloons duking it out over a series of primarily European circuits. It's not televised in the UK and as a result it might as well be the Yemeni Banger Racing Championship for all most players care.

The game itself is a tired looking racer – while there's a sharpness to the car models and textures, the race circuits are so lacking in atmosphere they might as well be on the moon. Similarly simplistic is the handling, which is as subtle as a shovel to the face. It's essentially straightforward tail-happy arcade fare. With the caveat that if you get punted into a slide by a brain-dead opponent it becomes a challenge akin to guiding a catatonically trollied spouse to the bathroom so they can noisily chuck their guts.

Between races there's nothing interesting. The Championship mode is just a frill-free series of practice and race sessions and the challenge portion is a limp offering as well.

In the face of bombastic, exciting fare like *DiRT 2* it all seems as dry as cream crackers and, worse still, it's almost identical to last year's edition. Throw in a license that no-one has heard of, and we can't think of any reason to pick this up when the PC has a selection of the finest racing games around, whether simulations or arcades.

Adam Glick


This is what's referred to as 'prison rules'.

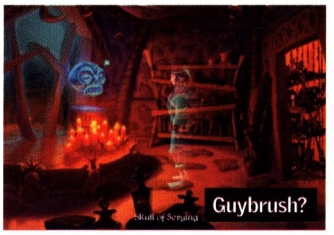
PCZONE 49
Deeply average

GHOST PIRATES OF VOOJU ISLAND

LeChuck doesn't have any worries

DEVELOPER Autumn Moon Entertainment
PUBLISHER Mamba Games
WEBSITE ghost-pirates.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.



SOME PEOPLE DON'T like the key that highlights usable objects in adventure games. They say it goes against everything they believe in. Without it, though, *Ghost Pirates* is hellish to play.

Certain objects appear to be usable but aren't, and others are seamless with the background and are vital to progress. It's an utter nightmare, so if you're sensible you'll be hammering that reveal hotspots button in every location you enter. Without it, frustration sets in almost immediately, due to the annoying puzzles, downright unfunny script and grating voice-acting.

In a nod to *Day of the Tentacle*, you get to control three different characters, switching between them to solve puzzles in different locations. The first is Papa Doc, a voodoo (sorry, Vooju) priest who is betrayed by someone close to him, leading him to team up with a fat pirate chef and a sassy lady swashbuckler. Together, they combine objects to save the world from evil people.

The puzzles are the main problem. If you ignore the hotspots issue mentioned before, it's still too much of a chore to play through. Time and again you face the age-old problem of simple things being made stupidly obtuse and long-winded. At one point, there are some bodies on the floor and you need to move them. Your character could just push them, as he seemed capable of shoving over a large wooden pole, but no, he won't do it, so you've got to go through a frustrating rigmarole to get the job done. Rinse and repeat for too many other parts of the game.

As mentioned, if the script was funny and the characters had any charm, it'd be fine – one of the strengths of games like *The Secrets of Monkey Island* is that even when you're stuck, you're still content within the world. This never happens in *Ghost Pirates*. Just get hold of the remade *Monkey Island*, or hold out for the possible remake of *Monkey Island 2*.

David Brown

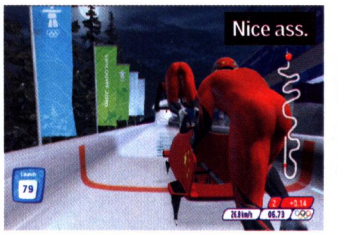
PCZONE 48
Pooju

VANCOUVER 2010

Pert buttocks and snow

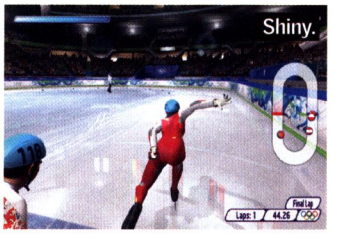
DEVELOPER Eurocom
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE olympicvideogames.com/vancouver2010
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 7600GT or Radeon 2900, with Pixel Shader 3.



ATHLETICS GAMES GENERALLY have two types of event in them: ones that involve hammering two buttons for a while and ones that replace the mashing with lots of relatively complex timed button presses. *Vancouver 2010* is generally in the latter camp, with most of the events requiring more digital dexterity than finger endurance.

There are 14 sports here in all, although the main problem is that most of these events are pretty much identical. For example, the luge, skeleton bob, and two-man bobsleigh events are all, essentially, copies of one another. Same course (mind you, in real life each of these are run on the same track as well), same mechanics (barring the luge using the trigger buttons instead of the analogue sticks for control), same everything. During the skeleton bob the slider lies on their front rather than their back, but otherwise it's a guy sliding down a tube of ice.



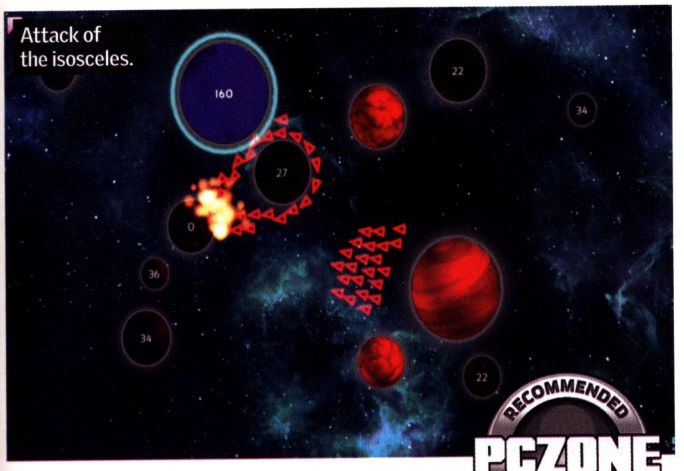
Of course, there's only so much you can do with the events at hand, other than going with things like figure skating, curling or the biathlon, but it's going to get very repetitive, very quickly. Usually you'd get a few people round, get the beers in and have a bit of a laugh, but there aren't enough events that cater for split-screen play, so the best you've got to look forward to are "beat my time, sucker" challenges.

You can see Eurocom have tried hard to inject some longevity into the game – the AI players are tough to beat, there are substantial number of challenges and achievements, and they've added multiplayer – if you can find anyone playing – but their task is akin to painting a lovely winter scene and finding out you've run out of white paint.

We're not sure it's possible to create a great sports game when half of it involves skiing, even if you adore skiing. *Vancouver 2010* isn't a bad game, just very limited by its subject matter.

David Brown

PCZONE 64
Bit of a luger

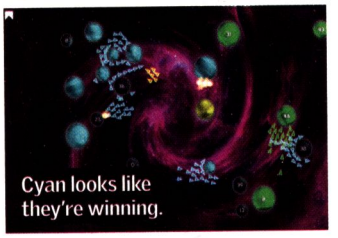


GALCON FUSION

Hands off my planet!

DEVELOPER Phil Hassey
PUBLISHER Hassey Enterprises
WEBSITE galcon.com/fusion
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, and any video card made this century.



FIRST THERE WAS *Galcon*. Then there was *Galcon* for iPhone, and soon after a very large cheque. Now there's *Galcon Fusion*, a result of the developer having given up his day job to concentrate on making games.

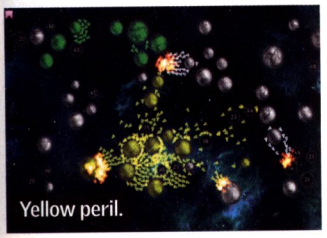
Galcon has always been simple. To win, players must conquer planets by launching ships at them: once the number attacking exceeds the number defending, the planet falls. Big planets generate ships faster than smaller ones, and that's all there is to it. Hello real-time strategy for impatient thickos.

Fusion's 2D world has stark, *Space War*-like polygons bumping against lush new 3D planets. It's an intriguing combination, but one which fits the backwardly modern feel and which also allows thousand-strong battles to be rendered free of any stutter. There are two game types, single or multiplayer, and two sound effects, "doop" and "bosh", both of which carry over unchanged from prior versions.

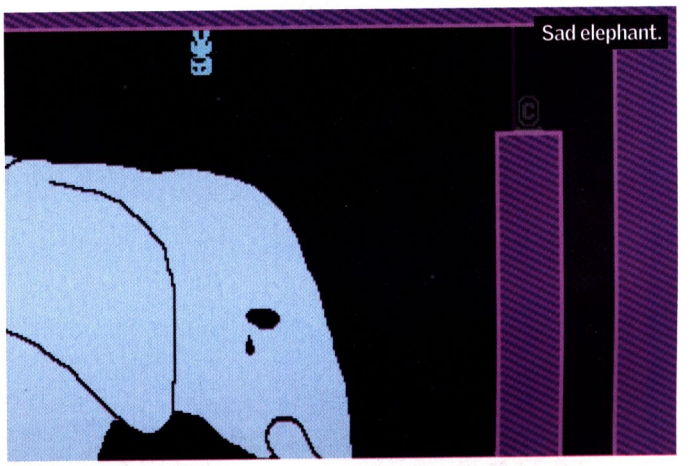
The controls still require little in the way of oarsmanship, in that left click (select), mouse wheel (how many) and right click (launch) cater for every occasion. It's no more complicated than picking your nose, and as such offers addictive fun to small boys of all ages.

This latest rewrite works through *Steam*. While Valve's whale adds an enormous drag factor to launch times, what it does do is open up *Galcon* to a massive audience. With improved AI, extra gameplay styles, bonkers retro ASCII-only mode and server lobby, the multiplayer side is where it pushes the score into Recommended territory. But the single player mode won't hold your attention for more than a few rounds.

Phil Wand



PCZONE 83
Doop doop doop bosh

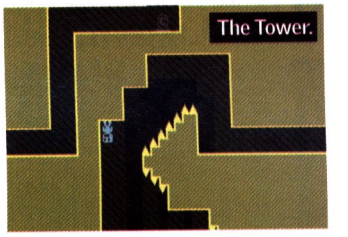


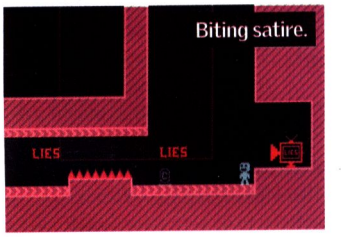
VVVVVV

A trip down 48K lane

DEVELOPER Terry Cavanagh
PUBLISHER Distractionware
WEBSITE thelettervsixtim.es
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.28

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, basically a PC capable of running Flash...





IT'S SHORT, SHARP, and over glorified, but *VVVVVV* has a hard job living up to its hype. While its lack of ornamentation is seen as a step forward to the past, every rave review seems more an echo of the dissatisfaction with today's big studio mainstream output than a serious analysis of what you're getting for your money.

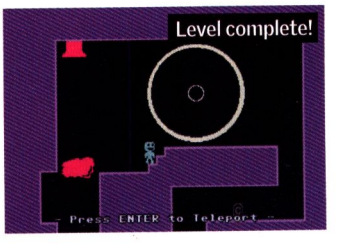
In big studio terms, *VVVVVV* is "of limited appeal". Its charm lies not in plot or DirectX 11 hoodoo, but in the skill ramp you must climb to master its controls: left, right, and space to reverse gravity. You'll find it hard work at first, as your brain will keep stalling at pressing a jump button that doesn't do what you expect, though it fast becomes second nature.

Nostalgia for 8-bit graphics aside, the flip-flopping from floor to ceiling has become *VVVVVV*'s main attraction. Together with challenges that exploit the fact you can move around upside down, and a stellar backing track, it very nearly manages to escape being Yet Another Flash Game.

But hot seat with a friend and it takes barely three hours to finish. Too often it taxes your patience more than your dexterity, the majority of puzzles heavily reliant on trial and error. Many of the game's 400 screens are pure filler, their presence merely inflating the time it takes to get around. And the controls are imprecise.

While the mock '80s chic is pixel perfect, nothing *VVVVVV* does is actually new or different. It's essentially a reproduction antique, and if you're a retro fetishist looking to bathe in the analogue glow of yesteryear, go grab any emulator and a copy of *Oxygene*.

Phil Wand



PCZONE 68
Is that you, Monty Mole?

KING ARTHUR: THE ROLE-PLAYING WARGAME

The red vs blue war continues

DEVELOPER NeoCoreGames
PUBLISHER NeoCoreGames
WEBSITE store.steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99 (£36.49 with DLC)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.4GHz Processor, 1GB RAM (1.5GB *Vista*), and a 256MB graphics card.

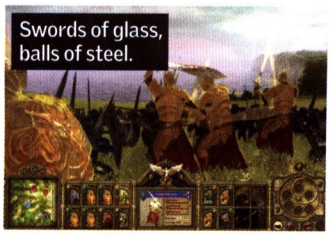
IF CLIVE OWEN has taught me anything, it's that King Arthur was nothing like Clive Owen. Thankfully, this *King Arthur* has nothing to do with Clive Owen's rendition, so Clive Owen need never be mentioned.

Depositing the player in Arthur's boots, this *King Arthur* is a real-time strategy set in a fantasy Britain full of magic and conflict. Using the *Total War* template, it has the usual combination of turn-based campaign maps and large-scale tactical warfare, but throws a few RPG elements into the mix. Recruiting lesser kings and knights into your army gives you upgradeable hero units, whose special abilities range from military to magical in nature, and whose status can be improved with the acquisition of loot, fiefs and wives.

Meanwhile your Arthur persona is shaped by your actions and choices, with morality and religion unlocking special powers. Such choices may come in the form of killing one king instead of another during your campaign, or by completing text-based quests that pop up every known and then. This is the strongest part of the game: a plethora of genre-bending components that add up to an original strategy experience.

The production values are high, with wonderfully detailed visuals and some of the lushest foliage in an RTS, but the game does suffer from a few strategy hiccups. Namely, battles often devolve into a confusing mass of red and blue flags, units have a tendency to ignore orders, and attacking archers results in *Benny Hill* chases across the landscape.

If you can forgive these occasional frustrations however, *King Arthur* will serve as a pleasant change from *Total War*, and a distraction from Clive Owen.
Nick Brakespear



PCZONE 79
King of battles

GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES

Excessive? Not in the slightest

DEVELOPER Positech Games
PUBLISHER Positech Games
WEBSITE store.steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

THE SIMPLEST PREMISES can often provide the deepest of experiences. Such is the diverting simplicity of *Gratuitous Space Battles*, whose title sums up the game and yet fails to do it justice. There is no sci-fi epic story here; no great quest to save the universe, merely the profound observation that we like to watch big spaceships blow the shit out of each other.

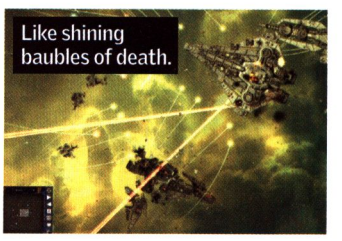
As such, the player's experience is reduced to a series of skirmishes in which the enemy's deployed forces are presented, and the player must deploy theirs, press the button, and watch the two fleets face off. As the player is unable to interfere with the battle once it begins, this becomes a destructive *Game of Life*, with deployment patterns replacing black dots.

But tucked away beneath this explosive display is an insidious layer of complexity that'll eat away at your time, as players can customise their fleet to a considerable degree. Selecting a basic hull, and then strapping a wide variety of weapons and components to it, the player is free to descend into a state of obsessive compulsion, their addiction fed by unlockable ships, races and equipment, and the adjusting of ships' standing orders.

With the ability to post your perfect fleet online as a challenge to others, many hours can be wasted tweaking formations and loadouts even when the singleplayer missions have been completely exhausted.

Though the game is entirely 2D, the visuals are smooth and detailed. Tiny escape pods flee burning wreckage, blackened smoke billows from damaged ships, and missiles and lasers fly across the screen from turrets that visibly arc and pivot.

Like *Defcon* or *Plants vs Zombies*, here lies a deeply satisfying game, beneath a humble facade.
Nick Brakespear



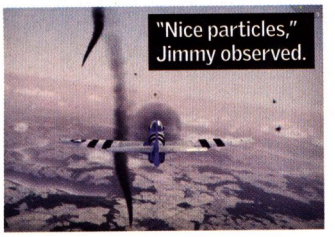
PCZONE 84
Just right

Dover harbour takes some collateral damage.

WINGS OF PREY
Roger tango curly wurly

DEVELOPER Gaijin Entertainment
PUBLISHER Gaijin Entertainment
WEBSITE store.steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £30.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.


"Nice particles," Jimmy observed.

IN A PECULIAR reversal of the natural order, *Wings of Prey* was released on console with "*IL2 Sturmovik*" emblazoned upon its chest, a name far more familiar to the PC community. You'll be relieved to hear however, that this desertion of PC heritage is limited to the name, as the game itself is uncompromised by cross-platform taint.

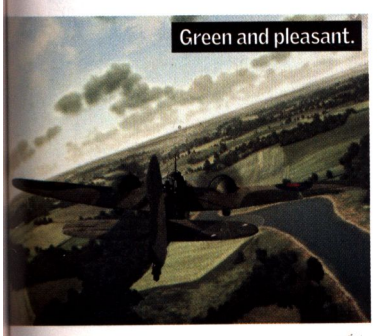
For those who have yet to venture into the world of *IL2*, this is a series of World War II combat flight simulators, focusing on the Soviet air forces, which emphasise historical detail and realistic physics. But don't let the thought of hardcore simulations put you off, as this game features three different realism settings. Arcade mode is a bare-bones combat experience, with forgiving flight physics and a simple lock-and-shoot approach to dogfighting; Realistic offers the dangers of red outs, blackouts, stalling, and a more complex damage model; while Simulation serves as a step up from Realistic, allowing the player to ineptly fiddle with trim and flaps and other such bits and pieces.

Some fans of the franchise might disapprove of the fact that you cannot tweak such realism settings as much as you could in previous incarnations, but the settings offered are balanced enough that they feel like alternative gaming preferences, rather than increasing levels of difficulty.

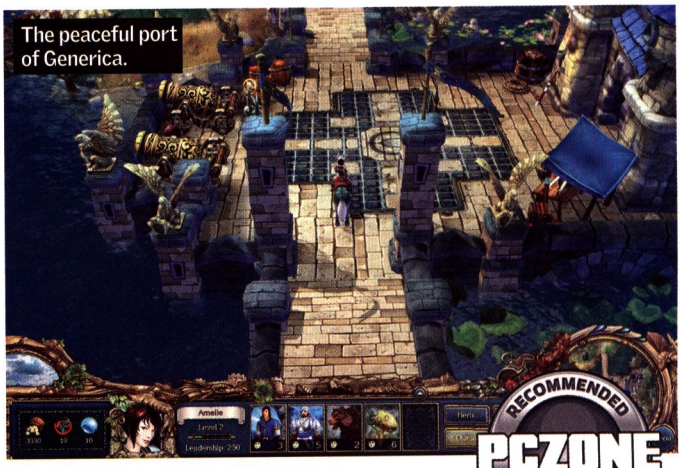
Once you're up in the air, the flight physics satisfy, while the controls (once you've fiddled with the default settings) are intuitive to novice pilots. The graphics are impressive, boasting incredibly detailed landscapes and immersive window-obscuring water vapour and oil effects.

The only negatives in fact, are that the combat is a tad easier than previous *IL2* releases and the campaign/scenario content a little shorter, but these are minor complaints for a game so polished and otherwise enjoyable.

Nick Brakespear


Green and pleasant.

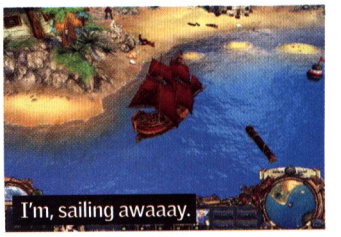
PCZONE 81
Trim your flaps


The peaceful port of Generica.

KING'S BOUNTY: ARMORED PRINCESS
Not a euphemism

DEVELOPER Katauri Interactive
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE store.steampowered.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.


I'm, sailing awaaay.

THE IMMORTAL NATURE of turn-based gaming seems strange. Presented with a turn-based sequel to a turn-based game with a 20 year-old history, one has to wonder if turn-based gaming isn't here to stay. Perhaps the concept of a board game is simply one that, with such thick roots embedded in history, can never be forgotten.

So yes, *Armored Princess* features turn-based combat. None of the sort-of-but-not-really turn-based *Baldur's Gate*-style nonsense: we're in hexagonal country here, complete with board game-esque battle areas. If this fills you with dread, turn away now. If you're willing to keep an open mind however, you may find that *Armored Princess* isn't so impenetrable after all.

Featuring wonderfully vibrant stylised graphics reminiscent of *WarCraft III*, interfaces that are attractive and clear, and animations that are fluid and polished, the game is a visual treat. In terms of gameplay, the player is tasked with riding around this colourful world in real-time, picking up quests from towns and NPCs, exploring a large array of islands on land and by sea, and generally indulging in the adventuring lifestyle.

Recruiting the turn-based representation of an army from a diverse list of mercenaries, knights, wizards, walking trees and inexplicable land-fish monsters, the player is largely free to explore and battle their way across the world as they see fit. This does add a pleasing level of freedom to the game, but may cause frustration early on, as the player will often be outgunned by their foes. Added to this is the frustration of a quest system that offers the vaguest of directions, and there is some inertia to break here.

That being said, once momentum is established there's a lot of enjoyment to be had, in both quality and quantity.

Nick Brakespear

Inexplicable land-fish vs army of plants.

PCZONE 77
No pea in sight

Budget

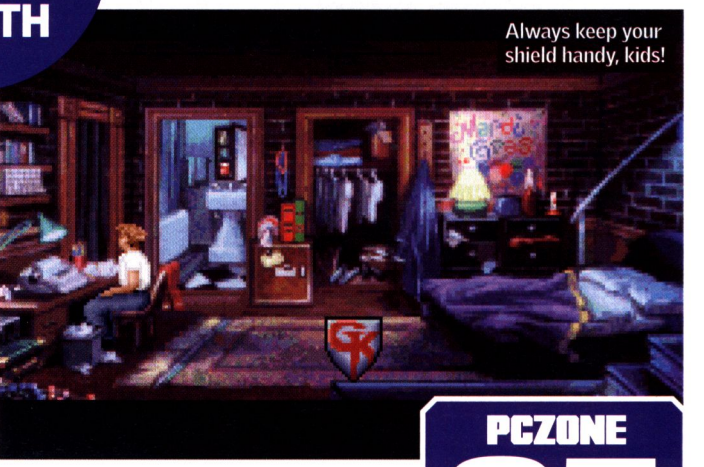
Into the world of the cheap, yet utterly not depressed, games

Don't try this at home kids.

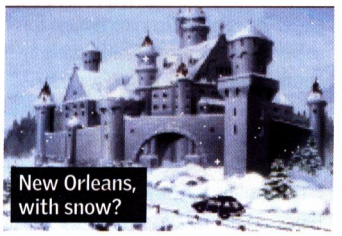
BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£3.75)


Always keep your shield handy, kids!

IF YOU TRIED to play this point-and-click without buying it from Good Old Games, you might have a tricky time. Unless you happened to be a whizz with *DOSBox*, problems with the game's speed and voices not working plagued the less-than-legal versions of this game.


New Orleans, with snow?

Thankfully, GOG are just such experts and they've fixed all the problems and returned this classic adventure to the state it deserves to be in: pristine and with wonderful voices attached. The vocals do make so much difference, imbuing the well-rounded characters with life and creating one of the most atmospheric adventure titles of all time.

The only pity about *Sins* is that it's so damn difficult. Walkthroughs will be needed by most players. Nevertheless, it's a title that needs to be played if you're an aficionado of adventure gaming. There's humour, romance and some gruesome murders to enjoy.

Jane Jensen's upcoming game *Gray Matter* will have to go some to top this classic. ***DB***

PCZONE 85
A good Knight in

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

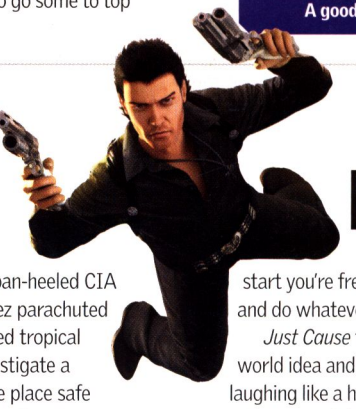
Richard resisted the urge to buy *Mass Effect 2*. **SAVING** £40

Steve stopped eating Dominos pizzas. **SAVING** £500/year (estimated)

David remembered a birthday. **SAVING** His girlfriend's wrath.

JUST CAUSE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** sold-out.co.uk **PRICE** £4.99


Shades of *Desperado*.

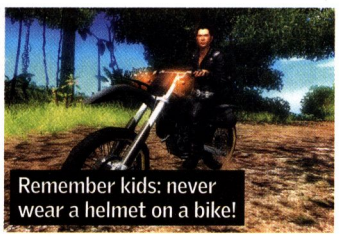
WITH THE RELEASE of *Just Cause 2*, Mastertronic are sneaking out the original at a sodding low price, in hopes of having the words 'Just' and 'Cause' sprawled across as much of everything as possible, and having people like us open budget reviews in precisely this way, mentioning the sequel over and over again.

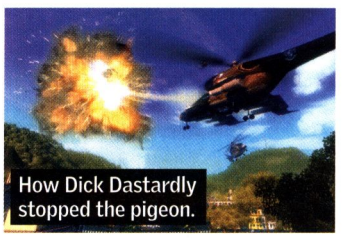
Just Cause sees Cuban-heeled CIA operative Rico Rodriguez parachuted into a civil strife-wrecked tropical island, with orders to instigate a revolution and make the place safe for democracy. (Meaning American business and tourists.)

How Rico does this is up to you. After meeting your contacts at the game's start you're free to go wherever and do whatever you want.

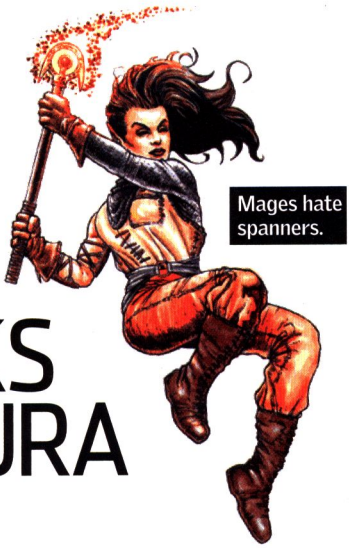
Just Cause takes the open world idea and runs with it, laughing like a hyena sniffing nitrous oxide. You're left free to sky dive, parasail, and BASE jump on an 1,025km² island. But it's not all extreme sports, as you also get to shoot many people and blow up many vehicles and buildings.

Just Cause is just entertaining. How can you not admire a game that lets you blow up a police station, ride a motorbike off a cliff, then jump off the bike, and skydive back to Earth? ***RC***


Remember kids: never wear a helmet on a bike!


How Dick Dastardly stopped the pigeon.

PCZONE 71


Mages hate spanners.

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£3.75)

THE REASON WHY *Arcanum* wasn't a massive hit is that it was released at the same time as *Baldur's Gate II*. If it hadn't been overshadowed by Black Isle's goliath, *Arcanum* would have been widely seen as a classic RPG.

Never leave home without your purple energy circles kids!

Set in a world where Steampunk tech and magic coexist uncomfortably, *Arcanum* allows you to develop a character as a spellcaster (fireballs enemies to death) or as a gadgeteer (shotguns enemies to death). This choice doesn't just affect your combat tactics – it resonates throughout the world.

Magic users and tech types don't like each other. This prejudice is felt in every location you visit, and nearly every conversation you have, to varying degrees, so mastering one path (which is vital to completing the game) means alienating half of *Arcanum*'s population. Even today, faction systems that affect the gameplay this deeply are rare.

In all other ways the game plays like *BG2*: you explore cities, find followers, and complete quests given by stationary NPCs. And like *BG2*, *Arcanum*'s epic story is deep, and is very well told.

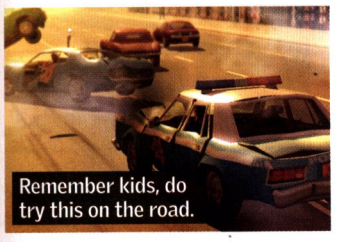
The only flaws are *Arcanum*'s graphics (meh, even for its time) and that it's hard on novices. If you keep finding yourself digging out worn-out *BG2* CDs this RPG is definitely worth getting. **RC**

PCZONE 76

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

PUBLISHER Ubisoft **WEBSITE** store.steampowered.com **PRICE** £5.99

WAY BACK IN time there was an Hollywood car chase simulator called *Driver*. Then came *Driver 2*, adding the ability to clamber out of your car and run around the city as a stickman.


Remember kids, do try this on the road.

Driv3r was atrocious. Its least offense was persevering with the hideously implemented *GTA3*-style on-foot gunfights which hadn't worked in the previous game. Two years later, *Parallel Lines* tried to make amends.

This is essentially *GTA3 Lite*. While it casts you as a criminal rising to power, a decent plot set in 1978 and 2004, car chases, and gunfights, it lacked *GTA*'s open world.

That said, it packs a decent driving model for an arcade racer, and has over 80 vehicles that can be customised – you can pick paint jobs, tune suspension, or tweak engines. But just about every mission can be completed with a freshly stolen car, making customisation totally unnecessary.

While *Parallel Lines* was overpriced on release, *Steam*'s price is reasonable. Yet, it's the same price as *GTA3*, *Vice City*, and *TOCA Race Driver 3*. If you want to go on a crime spree, or go for a race, you're better off with one of those. **RC**

PCZONE 65

AND THE REST...
The other cheap releases out now

TITAN QUEST
£9.99, *Steam*
A decent RPG from *STALKER* publisher THQ, very loosely based on Greek myths.
77

TOKI TORI
£3.49, *Steam*
This isn't the greatest platform/puzzler around, but 80 levels mean there's plenty of it.
75

ALIENS VS PREDATOR CLASSIC 2000
£2.99, *Steam*
The Marine campaign will still scare the excrement out of you.
62

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
£10, White Label
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the excellent mods.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION GOTY
£14.99, *Steam*
The sequel to *Morrowind* features the massive open-world gameplay expected from *Elder Scrolls* games.

COMPANY OF HEROES
£9.99, *Steam*
A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after the D-Day offensive.

PSYCHONAUTS
£10, *Steam*
You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.

MASS EFFECT
£12.99, *Steam*
The definitive space opera RPG/shooter. A must-play, especially before you start *Mass Effect 2*.

Reviews by David Brown and Richard Cosgrove.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 USES FOR AN iPAD

1. **VERY TIRED DOM JOLY IMPERSONATIONS**
"I'M ON MY iPHONE!"
2. **SHOWING OFF**
"Look! I have a pricey and useless gadget!"
3. **MAKING STEPHEN FRY CRY**
"I want, I want, I want, I want!"
4. **ER... A DRINKS MAT?**
OK, we're struggling now...
5. **HIGHLY INEFFECTIVE FRISBEE**
It's the wrong shape.

PCZ TOP 5 BADLY SPELLED GAMES

1. **CRYSIS**
Please note: replacing a 'i' with a 'y' doesn't make something cool...
2. **BRATZ:** SUPER BABYZ
And using 'z' instead of 's' isn't youthful – it's idiotic.
3. **DRIV3R**
Numbers instead of letters never look good.
4. **SiN**
Make up your mind: upper or lower case?
5. **KRUSH KILL 'N DESTROY XTREME**
We give up.

PCZ TOP 5 UNCOMSUMATED ROMANCES

1. **GEORGE STOBBART AND NICO COLLARD**
(*Broken Sword* series)
2. **GABRIEL KNIGHT AND GRACE NAKIMURA**
(*Gabriel Knight* games of course)
3. **GORDON FREEMAN AND ALYX VANCE**
(*Half-Life 2*)
4. **THE HEAVY AND THE MEDIC**
(*Team Fortress 2*)
5. **SAM AND MAX**
(*Sam and Max*)

FPS

HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

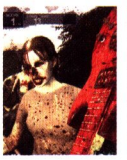
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still 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.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 94%

Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machettes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.

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.

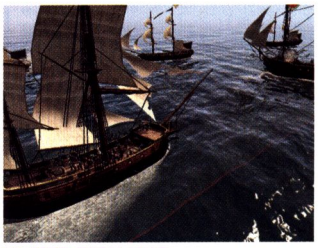
CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2
PCZ Issue: 215 – 94%

Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.

BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

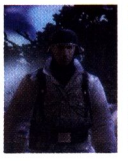
Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

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.

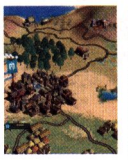


COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

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.

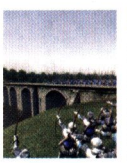


CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

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*.

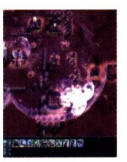
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue 193 – 91%

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%

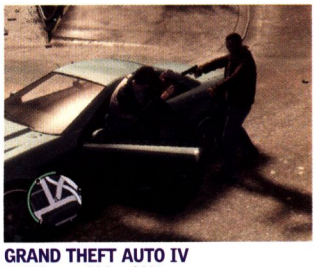
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



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.

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
PCZ Issue 213 : 89%

Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, *Arkham Asylum*'s mix of action, RPG and stealth-'em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

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?

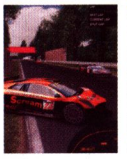
IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!

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.

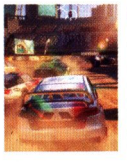
MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *ArmA II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

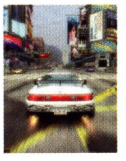
DRIVING/RACING



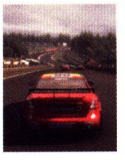
GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



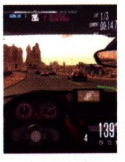
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



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.



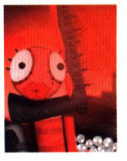
RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets series. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

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.

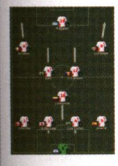
BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.

NBA 2K10
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



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.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

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.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.

NEW ENTRY!

MASS EFFECT 2
PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%
Darker in tone than the original, but featuring refined... well... everything, *Mass Effect 2* is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play *Mass Effect* first.

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.

RICHARD'S PICK

THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue 188 – 88%
Being an old-time P&P RPGer – the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person – I've always enjoyed CRPGS. But none have met my expectations since *Baldur's Gate II*. That is until *The Witcher* arrived.

This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and – most importantly – a damn good story.

The Witcher's setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an antihero is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally inhuman terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out, *The Witcher* forces you to consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world – each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you get an ally later on; choose the wrong lover, and you make an enemy.

And boy, were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, *The Witcher* is a truly great game.

DAVID'S PICK

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue 214 – 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of *Excel*. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.

Like a good book, *FM2010* goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.

Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!
Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to **page 22** for the full run-down.

MAMA FESTIVALS & ★CLASSIC★ ROCK PRESENT

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FESTIVAL

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heaven & hell

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JOE BONAMASSA

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THE ANSWER

BACHMAN & TURNER

Black Label Society

HAMMER STAGE

CLUTCH

down

PROG STAGE

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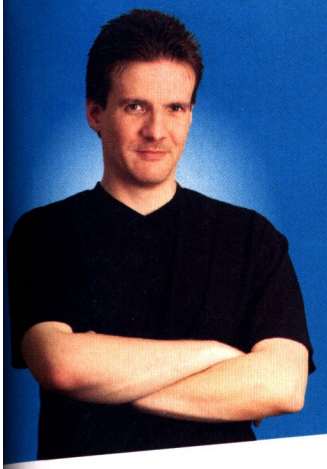


PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

SSD JOY

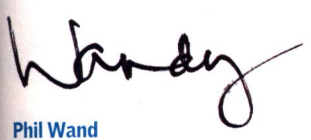
FEEL FREE TO skip this bit if you're fed up listening to me bang on about solid state drives. But if you're interested to hear that the non-spinning kind of hard drive will soon hit regular capacities, keep reading.

Though everyone associates their name with crap advertising and – to a lesser extent – processors and motherboards, Intel have become a brand to be reckoned with when it comes to storage. Had you asked me just two or three years ago whether the light blue oval would be the trademark to look for on disk drives, I'd have laughed.

But here we are, and Intel have just promised their X25-M SSDs will be available in 160GB, 300GB and 600GB capacities by the end of the year. In other words, the exact kind of sizes we're used to buying now – only in a format that no longer involves metal platters going round in circles at more than 7,000 revolutions per minute.

I appreciate that you can now buy 1TB of old-fashioned mechanical space for under £60. But be honest, wouldn't you rather have 600GB of silence? Intel haven't released their pricing plans yet, but I'd happily pay a premium to rid my house of the sound of mechanical whining.

And don't forget how fast these things are. The SSDs I have now have been so reliable and mind-bogglingly rapid, that I can't imagine that I'll get anything else.



Phil Wand
Hardware editor

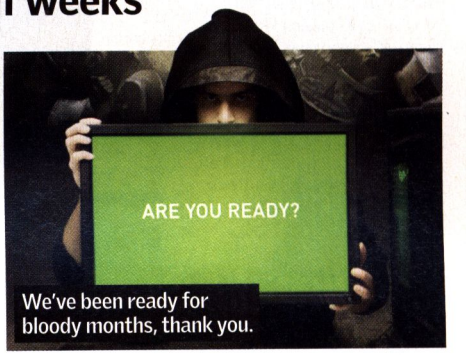
NVIDIA FINISHES FERMENTING FERMI

GeForce GTX 470 and 480 due in weeks

UNINTENTIONALLY SUMMING UP what their customers think of them, NVIDIA announced they would soon be announcing the announcement of GF100 'Fermi' graphics hardware later this month.

This means we can expect to see one of the new and highly celebrated (but at the same time not entirely real) 400-series GeForce cards on shelves some time in April, with most normal people looking to buy one in the January 2011 sales – you know, once the price has come down.

However, we still don't know what that price is. And while we know that the new chip is a majestic 3 billion transistor, 512-core GPU, we don't know what that entails for gaming. We have no idea how it stacks up against the competition, although we do know the two models available from launch will be the GeForce GTX 470 and GTX 480.



We've been ready for bloody months, thank you.

We also know is that the incredible complexity of the new processor will make it run very hot. But given the amount of time NVIDIA have taken making it ready for retail, it may well exceed expectations that it's roughly twice as fast as a GTX 285. Sadly, it could be twice as expensive as well. But like so many things in life, good things don't come cheap.

nvidia.com

TECH A TEST DRIVE

ViewSonic offers 30-day guarantee

MANY CAR MAKERS offer a no-quibble, 30-day exchange policy with their cars, so why don't tech companies make the same commitment?

This must be what a ViewSonic employee asked at a marketing meeting, and the answer – silence – is what made the American manufacturer to launch its 'Buy and Try' tag. Consumers can buy these selected products, try them for 30 days, and get their cash back if they're unhappy with it.

"We don't want our customers to feel there's pressure to make our products fit, find they do not, and think badly of ViewSonic," said James Coulson, European Marketing Manager.

viewsoniceurope.com/uk/buyandtry

Buy and Try doesn't apply to screens.

NEWS ROUND-UP

YOU MAY RECALL that 2010 is due to be the year of 3D. A recent Sony product launch for a $499 receiver unit reinforced the point of many 3D naysayers, which is that for the new technology to work with your existing gear, you'll need to throw heaps of cash at devices which understand HDMI version 1.4. Anything prior to this won't see proper 3D and won't support the stereoscopic formats. The cost of a new 3D TV alone will deter most purchasers, so my bet is on 2012 being the year this stuff actually becomes affordable.

sony.co.uk

STILL ON THE subject of 3D, American gamers can already buy 3D screens such as Acer's GD235HZ or Alienware's OptX AW2310. Both panels are getting good write-ups though you would be wise to wait for other manufacturers to get in on the act before replacing a perfectly good monitor.

acer.com, alienware.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

MOORE'S LAW: Named after astronomer Sir Patrick Moore. This states that there is a positive correlation between the popularity of a scientist amongst the general public and how eccentrically barking mad he or she appears to be when seen in public. **ISP:** The warning sound the rarely seen mobo snake makes before it strikes. If bitten your vision flashes blue and you deliriously mumble a series of hexadecimal codes before falling unconscious. **FERMI:** "Oh thanks. You shouldn't have!" The cry of a geek who has just received a long-desired present.

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? Wandy can't help with those setbacks, 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 details about your problem and system specs.

That's modern gaming for you.

Q STUTTERING CRYSIS

I'm running *Vista* and recently purchased the *Crysis* and *Crysis: Warhead* pack from *Steam*. When I came to play *Crysis* it stuttered really badly: not just the sound, but the whole game.

This exact same problem happened with *BioShock* and my solution for that was to install *XP* on another hard drive and boot to that each time I wanted to play the game. So I booted *XP* and guess what: *Crysis* works fine! I bought *Windows 7* thinking that it was just a *Vista* problem and I still get exactly the same stuttering.

I have a fairly crappy PC. A8R-MVP with Athlon 64 4000, 2.5GB RAM, Radeon X1950 and a Sound Blaster X-Fi Xtreme Audio. I thought it might be a sound issue, so I swapped out the X-Fi for my old Audigy 2 ZS, but it was exactly the same. I've also tried all the latest drivers for sound and graphics, but to no avail.

So is my PC just too old to play it in *Vista* or *7*, or can you think of any other solution to this other than booting into *XP* every time?

Stuart Ashton

A *Stuttering is without doubt the top issue people have with* Crysis. *Sometimes it's a result of underpowered hardware, but often it's something less clear cut. And to be honest, I must have seen two dozen solutions for the issue ranging from forcing the game to run in a lesser version of DirectX to using a different processor entirely.*

"There are various configuration tweaks but these are fool's errands'

In your case, the first thing I'd do is pull out the Sound Blaster card and use the ASUS board's SoundMAX chip instead, not least because there's bugger all real-world difference between them.

I would then disable or even temporarily uninstall whatever anti-virus software you have, and remove Crysis. *Hunt out all its remnants – be sure to include those in Documents and Settings – and install it again. While you're at it, you might also like to consider formatting your drive and reinstalling* Windows *too.*

There are various configuration tweaks littering web forums but these are fool's errands in that few are documented and none are guaranteed to work. You could also add a bunch more RAM (particularly now that you're using 7), but I'd save your money for a better board and processor.

So if the clean start approach fails and you simply must play Crysis, *keep loading up* XP *to do so. It's not worth spending your life trying to fix something that's acknowledged to be half-broken for a lot of people anyway.*

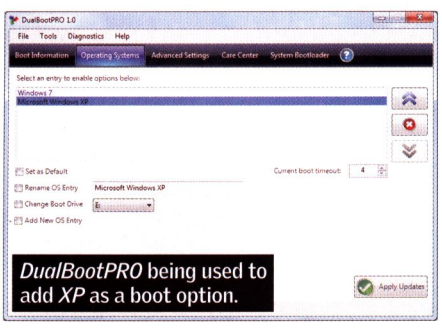
DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.1	27 Jan 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 196.21	19 Jan 10

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



DualBootPRO being used to add *XP* as a boot option.

Q *7* HILLS OF ROAM

I realise you're a big fan of *Windows 7*, but my experience of it has been less than amazing. My major beef is with the sheer number of older games that refuse to work properly on my brand new laptop.

It's not just that I'm running the 64-bit version (that fact alone being responsible for tripping up more than one installer) it's that a lot of older stuff shows up quirks and problems – an OpenGL error here, random complaints about missing files there – that when

"If you already have a 5-series Radeon, the best route to take is also the easiest: get a faster CPU"

experienced one after the other make me want to slam my head in the lid.

I decided to create a new partition on the existing hard drive and install my old copy of *XP*, which worked a treat but has sadly disabled *Windows 7*. I can still see the files on the other partition, I just can't get it to boot into the later system.

I've read guides online but hardly any of them make sense, despite describing my problem almost exactly. The main problem is that the boot managers I've downloaded can't find *7*'s boot files. Have I nuked them? Is there something I should know about mixing *XP* and *7* on a laptop?

Simon Roam

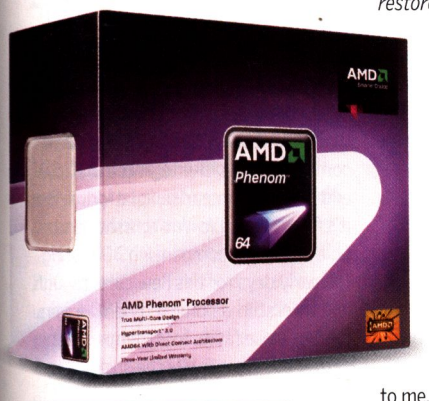
A *This is a predicament which affects everyone installing an older operating system after a later one. It occurs simply because* Windows XP *doesn't understand the workings of* Windows 7 *– for what I hope are obvious reasons. When you run the CD-ROM setup,* XP*'s boot mechanism overwrites what's already there, unwittingly slamming the door in 7's face.*

You can't even get around this gotcha by installing another disk, because XP *will still overwrite information on the primary drive (as defined in your BIOS). You could switch drives around, so that the new disk becomes first in the boot order, but then you still have the problem of not being able to run* Windows *from the original drive. And in any case, in this instance we're talking about a laptop – it's not as though you can cram in multiple drives, and certainly not without pulling something out.*

There is a way around this. Pop your Windows 7 *DVD back in the drive and boot from that. When prompted, start the setup routine and then initiate a repair. Select the top item on the menu, Startup Repair, and once that's finished restart your PC. This will reinstate the boot manager and you'll be able to load* Windows 7.

From what you've told me, it sounds as though your missing boot files are hidden on the system reserved partition on your primary drive, created when you first installed 7. To access them, locate Computer Management *on your Start menu and run it. Select the Disk Management node, right-click on the 100MB reserved partition and change its drive letter.*

The next step is to download a boot management utility like DualBootPRO *(£6.50 from dualbootpro.org) or* EasyBCD *(free from neosmart.net), restore 7's boot loader to all drives, and then add* XP *as an entry to the list of available operating systems. Save and reboot.*



We don't have enough AMD photos. So here's one.

Q PHENOM SEVEN

My trusty Core 2 Duo E6750 has served me well over the past two and a half years, but I feel the time has come to replace it with something a little quicker in readiness for the DirectX 11 era.

I have three options available to me, and I was hoping you could offer me some guidance as to which path I should take.

1. Keep my existing P5N32-E SLI Plus and 4GB DDR2 Corsair RAM, and get a faster CPU such as the Q9650. This is old tech, but it has the benefit of not having to reinstall everything and re-register *Vista*.

2. Get an AM3 board that supports DDR2 and DDR3, so I can use my RAM with a Phenom X4 965.

3. Go for a new Core i5 or i7, new motherboard and DDR3 memory.

Cost isn't really an issue, but I'd like to keep it below £400. My PC is used for gaming and surfing 95% of the time. The other 5% is time spent encoding DVDs for playing on my phone.

Nigel Butler

A *You need* Vista *or 7 and the right graphics hardware to make your system DX11-capable. If you already have a 5-series Radeon, the best route to take is also the easiest: get a faster CPU. The problem with this is your mobo. The P5N32-E SLI Plus won't support 45nm Yorkfield chips such as the Q9650. The most recent CPU you can use is an E8600 and the fastest is a QX6850, the latter with a price that's twice your budget.*

If money's an issue then, what about that switch to AMD? The system I built only last week used AMD's Phenom II X2 550 Black Edition atop an ASROCK K10N78 for a grand total of less than £120. What I would say is that while gaming performance is on a par with the E8600, the 550's transcoding performance isn't as good as any Intel equivalent.

The X4 gives transcoding times and gaming performance that rivals the QX6850. At £136 the 965 is a steal but you'll need to bin your RAM. Put it on a £70 ASUS M4A785TD-V Evo and feed it £80 of DDR3 and you're away.

Of course, you could always pull the same stunt with Intel. Spend around £155 on the Core i5 660 chip, £80 on GIGABYTE's GA-P55M-UD2 and the same again on DDR3 chips and you're in much the same position. PCZ

ALL ABOUT...

25 MOORE'S LAW

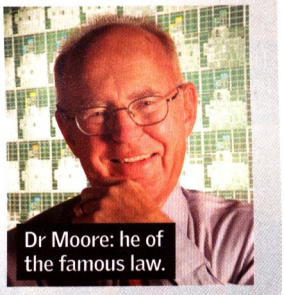
You've probably seen reviews of new technology that mention something called Moore's Law. But what rules does this law lay down, why did Moore create them, and who has adopted them?

Moore's Law isn't a set of requirements to which manufacturers must adhere when creating new products, though it's attributed to Dr Gordon E. Moore – one of Intel's co-founders. The 'law' is really a forecast made way back in 1965 which suggested that technology would double its underlying complexity every 12 months (adjusted later to 24 months).

Moore was originally referring to the number of transistors in an integrated circuit, but his statement can also be applied to memory sizes, hard drive capacities, and a surprising number of other subjects.

The global semiconductor industry has grown in accordance with Moore's prediction, though it is often said that this is probably the result of the industry treating Moore's Law as a goal for them to strive towards.

Next time you buy a digital camera that has twice as many shiny megapixels as your last one, think of Gordon.



Dr Moore: he of the famous law.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

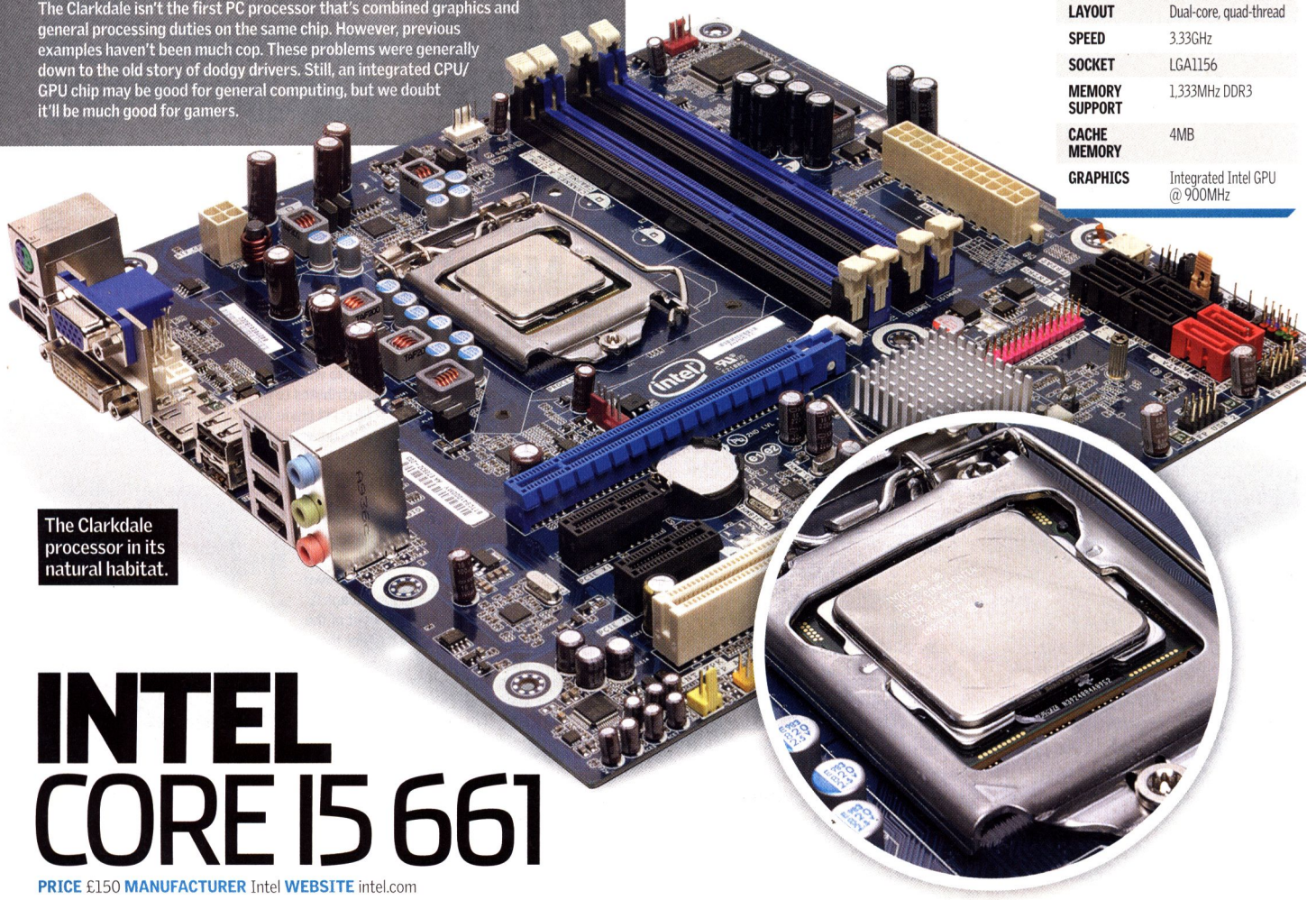
(Mad Al) I'm having issues with my ISP in that I'm exceeding my download limit. Is there a tool or sidebar gadget for *Windows 7* that I could use that will log my bandwidth usage, as I'm sure I have not used the 100GB they are stating I have. Any help will be appreciated. (Rich) *Bandwidth Monitor Extreme* from lp23.com/bmextreme. Not sure if it'll work on *7*, but you can try it. (bsoltan) *Netlimiter* from netlimiter.com might do what you need, although I haven't investigated fully. (Mad Al) I found *tbbMeter* from thinkbroadband.com seems to be OK, yet not sure how I set it up to log the usage of everyone on my router.

INTEGRATED CPU WOES

The Clarkdale isn't the first PC processor that's combined graphics and general processing duties on the same chip. However, previous examples haven't been much cop. These problems were generally down to the old story of dodgy drivers. Still, an integrated CPU/GPU chip may be good for general computing, but we doubt it'll be much good for gamers.

SPECIFICATION

LAYOUT	Dual-core, quad-thread
SPEED	3.33GHz
SOCKET	LGA1156
MEMORY SUPPORT	1,333MHz DDR3
CACHE MEMORY	4MB
GRAPHICS	Integrated Intel GPU @ 900MHz



The Clarkdale processor in its natural habitat.

INTEL CORE I5 661

PRICE £150 **MANUFACTURER** Intel **WEBSITE** intel.com

CLARKDALE IS THE first dual-core variant of Intel's 32nm Westmere processors. These debut several important new techs, the most significant being an integrated GPU.

Each Clarkdale CPU contains two separate chips. Intel has done multi-chip packages before, but previous efforts have always been quick and dirty ruses – ways of stuffing in more cores and sidestepping the engineering challenges of designing a whole new chip. With Clarkdale, multi-chip is all about Intel's drive towards making an integrated CPU. This started with the Bloomfield Core i7, which had an on-die memory controller, while the Core i5 and Core i7 Lynnfields had an integrated northbridge chip.

This chip offers a greater level of integration by virtue of bringing a graphics core into the CPU. This isn't a truly integrated chip, as the CPU section is made using a 32nm production process, and the second, which contains northbridge features and the GPU, uses a traditional 45nm process. Intel's original plan for Clarkdale was almost definitely to produce the whole thing in 32nm. But it seems they decided that attempting to make a CPU/GPU fusion chip on a new production process was asking too much. Instead, Intel played safe, so a true fusion chip from Intel won't arrive until the end of 2010.

The Clarkdale's highlights include HyperThreading, which supports up to four software threads (still of limited use in gaming), high-bandwidth DDR3 memory controller, 4MB of on-die cache, and Intel's auto overclocking Turbo feature.

Several variants of this chip (these chips, technically) will become available over the coming months, with clock speeds ranging from 2.93GHz up to 3.46GHz. Our test chip was a 3.33GHz model, that Intel claimed to be good for up to 3.6GHz in Turbo mode. The arrival of Clarkdale also brings the Core i3 brand: a Clarkdale i5 lacking a Turbo Mode.

When tested, this Clarkdale chip delighted and disappointed in equal measure. The graphics core is based on Intel's G45-era integrated GPU, with 12 shader cores, and a graphics clockspeed of up to 900MHz and hi-definition video features (like HDMI 1.3).

As for the chip's performance, it's mixed: at stock clock speeds the CPU far outpaces dual-core chips – more so than clockspeeds can account for alone – and compares well to low-end quads. Yet it's an extremely poor overclocker: 3.45GHz is the best we could manage, leaving us to wonder if combining the CPU and GPU reduced overclocking headroom.

On the subject of graphics, this Clarkdale stacked up surprisingly well compared to AMD-integrated and low-end discrete comparison platforms. But it's far from stable, with crashes and blue screens accompanying 3D testing. It's early days for this new core, though, and Intel still has time to tweak drivers to stop these faults from happening, before this Core i5 hits the shelves. **JL**

"At stock clock speeds the CPU far outpaces dual-core chips... Yet it's an extremely poor overclocker"

BENCHMARKS

	CORE i5 661	CORE i5 750	CORE 2 E7500
Multi-threaded CPU (1)	1m22s	1m1s	2m8s
Memory bandwidth (2)	12GBps	16.3GBps	5.7GBps
GPU performance (3)	17fps	29fps	14fps

1 *Cinebench R10* (quicker is better) 2 *SiSoft Sandra* (bigger is better) 3 *Call of Duty 4*

PCZONE 60
Not the future yet

ROCCAT ARVO KEYBOARD

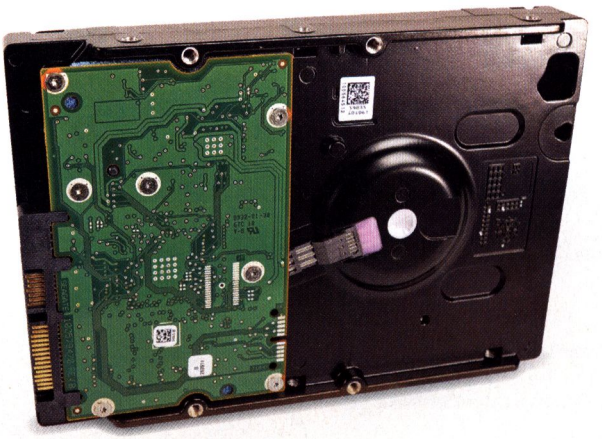
PRICE £55 **MANUFACTURER** Roccat **WEBSITE** roccat.org

HAVING VAST KEYBOARDS overflowing with macro buttons, LED displays, and even small video screens cluttering up your desk top is all well and good. But sometimes you just want a compact device streamlined to just do what it's supposed to do.

This is what the Arvo does. The direction keys (arrows, Home, End, page up and down etc) are on the numeric keypad, and everything's dinky. But there's still room for three extra buttons below the space bar, providing the keyboard equivalent of a mouse's side button, ideal for assigning to a melee attack or grenade toss in your favourite shooter.

This is not a board for those with complex MMO commands to set up, but definitely recommended for people who have too much crap filling up their desk than is healthy. ***DB***

PCZONE 81



SEAGATE BARRACUDA XT 2TB

PRICE £240 **MANUFACTURER** Seagate **WEBSITE** seagate.com

THE SATA 6GBPS standard boosts the performance of hard disk drive memory controllers. This is shown by the Barracuda XT's burst speeds being 100MBps more than the speedy Caviar Black.

SPECIFICATION

CAPACITY	2TB
SPEED	7,200rpm
INTERFACE	SATA3 6Gbps
FORM	FACTOR 3.5in

Aside from that, SATA 6Gbps does relatively little for hard drives. Under SATA2 and 3, game and OS load times decreased by a couple of seconds, but general read and write speeds were unchanged. Still, this is a bloody fast HDD. But so was the Caviar Black, and that didn't come with a £40 premium.

If it's speed you need get a solid state drive, but for capacity a SATA 3Gbps HDD is more than enough. ***DJ***

PCZONE 71

PALIT GT 240 SONIC 1GB

PRICE £78 **MANUFACTURER** Palit
WEBSITE www.palit.biz

SPECIFICATION

CPU	GT 215
CORE SPEED	585MHz
MEMORY	1GB GDDR5
MEMORY SPEED	900MHz
SHADER UNITS	96
DIRECTX	10.1

THIS OVERCLOCKED GT 240 (with 1GB GDDR5) is jumping into an incredibly packed area of the market: the cut-price graphics card arena.

The GT 240 is basically half a GTS 250, as it has half the texture mapping units, ROPs, and memory bus of the more powerful card. All this adds up to a card that isn't going to win any friends at the higher resolutions, but that still beats the 9600GT and 9800GT, despite both having a larger memory bus and higher ROPs count.

Like standard GT 240s, Palit's overclocked chip doesn't require any more power than that provided by the PCI-e bus. It's also got DVI, VGA and HDMI outputs and an incredibly quiet fan. It offers a decent gaming experience too at lower resolutions. But GTS 250 and AMD 5750-based cards are far more powerful options at this asking price, and are much better for gamers. ***DJ***

BENCHMARKS

	SONIC	9800GT
Far Cry 2	26fps	21fps
World in Conflict	24fps	23fps
Resident Evil 5	40fps	44fps

PCZONE 68

LOGITECH G27 RACING WHEEL

PRICE £330 **MANUFACTURER** Logitech **WEBSITE** logitech.com

THERE'S NO BETTER way to play a racing game than using a wheel that has force feedback and pedals. But a proper six-speed gear shift isn't necessary, unless you're an enthusiast. And this is definitely a wheel for the enthusiast.

The problem with the G27 is that the previous model (Logitech's G25) is available for about £160. And all you lose picking that one are six programmable buttons.

The G25 is still a fantastic racing wheel and at £160 it's a bargain for serious racers. By comparison, the G27 brings little to the table for its somewhat crazy price tag. ***DJ***

PCZONE 78

Reviews by David Brown, Jeremy Laird and Dave James.

REMEMBER: ALWAYS SUSPECT GENEROUS STRANGERS

If you get an email promising to contain Cheryl Cole appearing in hardcore pornography, or from a member of African nobility offering your tens of thousands of pounds in exchange for your bank details, delete them. There's an 80% chance they're not genuine.

Hardware Buyer

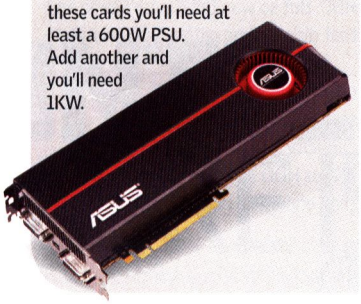
This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970
PRICE £499
uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for our top slot. Under that ugly plastic shroud are twin AMD RV870 chips, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the parking lot. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1KW.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 975
PRICE £770
intel.com

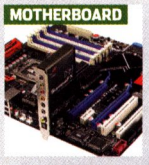
The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.

SCREEN

HP LP2475W
PRICE £450
hp.co.uk

You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

MOTHERBOARD



ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME
PRICE £259
uk.asus.com

ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.

SOUNDCARD

AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1
PRICE £119
auzentech.com

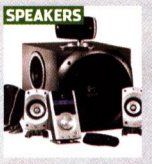
There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB
PRICE £220
westerndigital.com

Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your *Steam* folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FASS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.

SPEAKERS



LOGITECH Z-5500
PRICE £249
logitech.co.uk

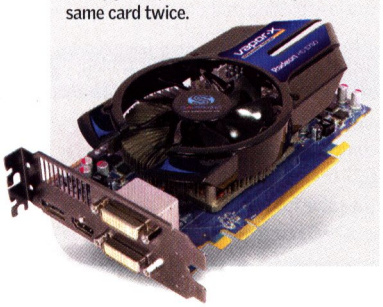
We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

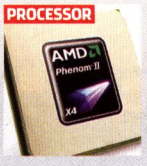
GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X
PRICE £115
sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



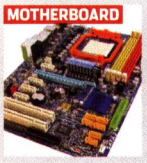
PROCESSOR



AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK
PRICE £122
amd.com

With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.

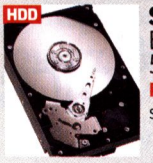
MOTHERBOARD



GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3
PRICE £49
gigabyte.com.tw

Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.

HDD



SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB
PRICE £33
seagate.com

Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

SCREEN

IIYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2
PRICE £134
iiyama.co.uk

Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.

SOUNDCARD

NONE
PRICE £0
N/A

If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

SPEAKERS

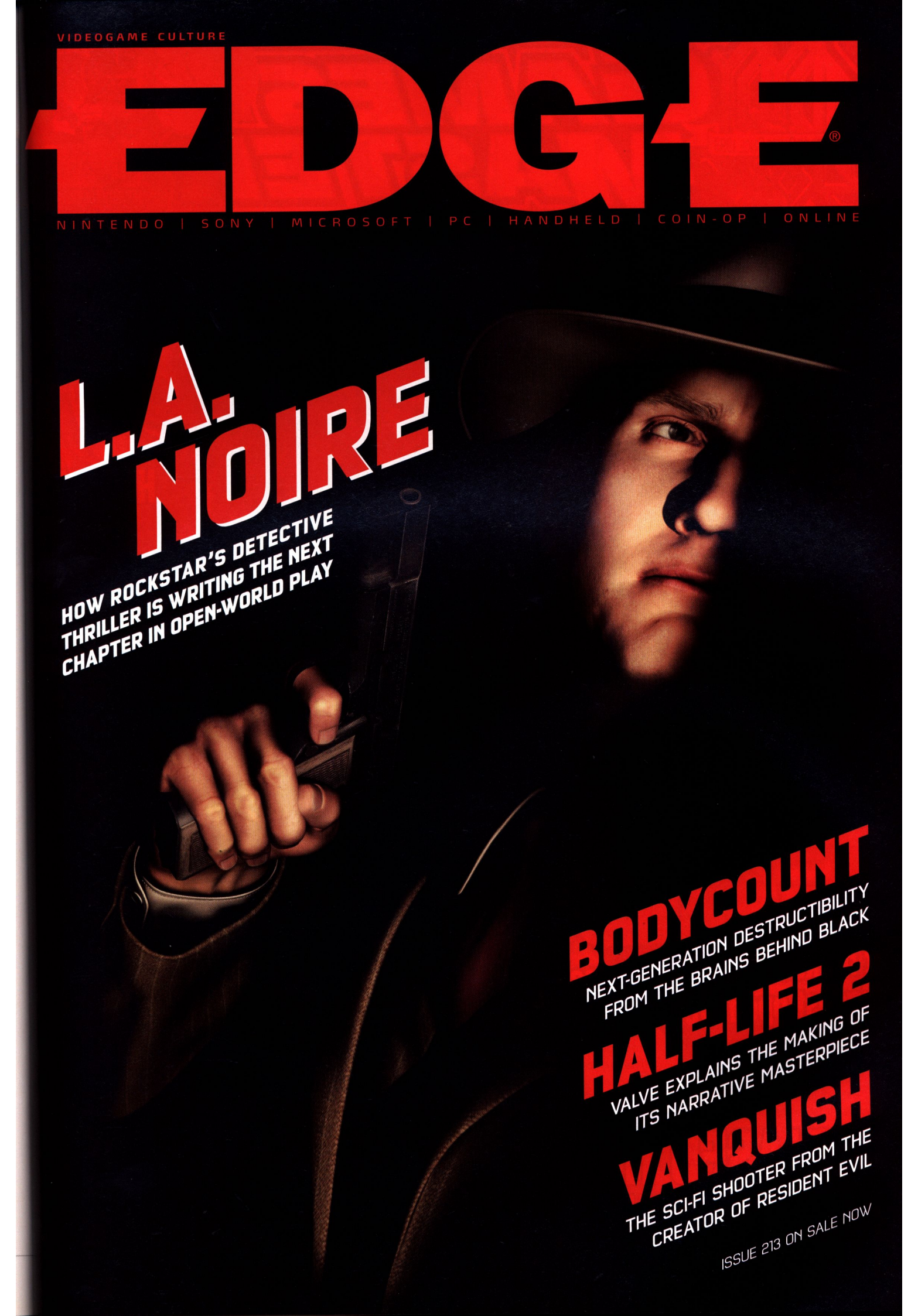
LOGITECH X-210
PRICE £25
logitech.co.uk

Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

EDGE®

NINTENDO | SONY | MICROSOFT | PC | HANDHELD | COIN-OP | ONLINE



L.A. NOIRE

HOW ROCKSTAR'S DETECTIVE THRILLER IS WRITING THE NEXT CHAPTER IN OPEN-WORLD PLAY

BODYCOUNT

NEXT-GENERATION DESTRUCTIBILITY FROM THE BRAINS BEHIND BLACK

HALF-LIFE 2

VALVE EXPLAINS THE MAKING OF ITS NARRATIVE MASTERPIECE

VANQUISH

THE SCI-FI SHOOTER FROM THE CREATOR OF RESIDENT EVIL

ISSUE 213 ON SALE NOW

THE MASTER OF GAMES SINCE 1993
GAMES MASTER
ON SALE NOW!
FIRST EVER LOOK!
HALO
REACH
We sneak into Bungie and see EVERYTHING!
EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!
JUST CAUSE 2
It makes GTA IV look small! The PS3 and 360's biggest open world game reviewed first inside!
HOT NEW GAMES
FIFA WORLD CUP 20
FALLOUT NEW VEGAS
RED DEAD REDEMPTION
SPLINTER CELL
LA NOIRE
RED STEEL
MONSTER HUNTER
VANQUISH
SONIC
UNBIASED REVIEWS!
ALIENS VS PREDATOR / BATTLEFIELD BAD COMPANY 2
FINAL FANTASY XIII / SUPER MONKEY BALL
POKÉMON HEARTGOLD & SOULSILVER + MORE!
HANDS-ON!
RED DEAD REDEMPTION
The final play of our most wanted game!

PCZONE Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

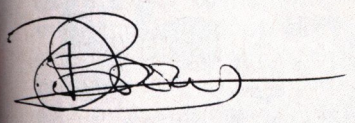
BAD IS GOOD

I WATCHED THE epic piece of cinema that is *Commando* the other day. I've only seen it, what, 23 times or so, but it never ceases to amaze and amuse.

Well, not amaze, as clearly to anybody who wants to take things seriously, it's utterly awful. But if you can treat it as a comedy, it's possibly the greatest moment in Hollywood history. Especially the amazingly realised character of Bennett and the stellar performance of Vernon Wells. So, while I was letting off some steam watching *Commando*, thoughts flickered through my head about games that are atrocious yet, in their way, absolute belters in the chuckling department.

Many times we've slated games that should have never made contact with a hard drive, but those titles often provide the moments we refer back to in pub conversations months and even years later. Remember *Boiling Point*, perhaps the buggiest game ever? It was ambitious, exciting and full of potential, and it failed to deliver on virtually all of the promises it made. But we still talk about it today because of the flying animation-locked pumas that terrorised unsuspecting players.

I then ask you, dear readers, what games you've played that have made you laugh while crying. Laughing at NPC civilians touching parked cars and then dying, while crying that you just spent £30 on the game. What's the worst bug you've ever seen? If you can think of something better than hovering big cats, then fling them our way. Use the usual email and Twitter addresses, people.



David Brown
Staff writer

WORLD WAR FUN

All is not quiet on the *WWI: Source* front

MOD FOR *Half-Life 2* **WEBSITE** ww1-source.net

THE GREAT WAR has always been much more difficult to realise in game form than its younger upstart cousin, World War II. It's not stopped developers trying to bring it to our PCs though, and the latest hopeful is comprised of three mod teams glued together.

It's not been the best time for original mods in the past year, so the question we're asking of *WWI: Source* is whether it can get over that creaky, old feeling many *Half-Life 2* mods now have.

Short answer is: no it can't, with a distinct "but..." following on afterwards. The mod feels old and clunky, like pretty much all *HL2* mods nowadays. It feels like older versions of *Battle Grounds 2* – a *HL2* mod set in the American War of Independence. Maybe it's because the generic Soldier class (there are two others, an Officer and a Machine Gunner) fires a non-repeating rifle, that you have to bolt after every expended round, and also perhaps because you rarely get any feedback at all from your bullets.

It's very hard to tell whether you hit the enemy, with a lot of kills occurring because of bleeding out, where a grave wound slowly kills your enemy rather than you clipping his face off from a distance. Certainly, this adds an element of realism – although players are complaining about it, wanting a Medic class added or, at least, the ability to bandage yourself. A trench gun and the addition of a pistol as a secondary weapon are also much yearned-for items.

Having said that, there's a feeling of *Day of Defeat* in *WWI: Source* too, a mod that went on to much bigger and more professional things. This is the first proper release and with three teams behind it, you'd imagine much quicker resolution of issues will be seen.

The playing community is very friendly as well, a number of them very willing to discuss the pros and cons of the game when they found out who we were. And, most importantly, people were actually playing the mod, a rarity in today's multiplayer modding scene.

So *WWI: Source* looks pretty good for what it is. The problems it faces are substantial: an old feel to it, the issue of using bolt-action rifles instead of fun automatics (damn historical accuracy), and how difficult it is to actually figure out if you've hit someone. But there's a kernel of something there that, if handled properly, can be built on and used to create a potentially successful mod. It's World War I, but not as we know it.

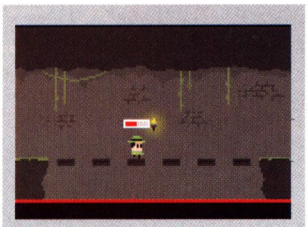
PCZONE FREE-O-METER

0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

349 HOURS*

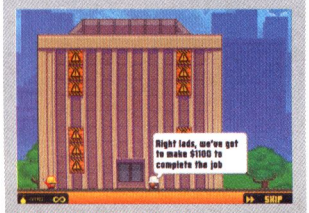
SNIPPETS



SINGULAR ADVENTURE

Meet Bob. He's the hero of this little platformer and he only likes things when they come in ones. That's why people call him One-Button Bob. It's not great, but as you only need one control key, it's easy enough.

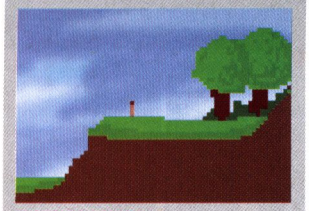
snipurl.com/singularadv



RUBBLE TROUBLE

Forget *Digger Simulator* or any of that cobblers, this is where the demolitions experts should be going for their training, a *Flash* game where you have to level buildings and not innocents.

snipurl.com/rubbletrouble



GALLIC PIXELS

Fancy some French lo-fi action? Look no further than *Darkfate*, a freeware title about a guy with amnesia who has to escape a pixellated wilderness. It's French, so naturally it's a bit kooky.

snipurl.com/gallicpixels

Not a goblin in sight.

TANK POWER

Free-to-play tin can of death MMO trundles slowly on

WEBSITE worldoftanks.com

THERE ARE SO many fantasy MMOs out there with pictures of pre-teen elves wearing virtually nothing and promising us the chance to "play now, discreetly".

After the busies rush in with the arrest warrant, there will be nothing discreet about that encounter and all you'll be left with, as a 20-stone hooligan pounds your buttocks into pâté in the local jail, is this thought: "I wish I'd just played *World of Tanks* instead."

Yes, Wargaming.net will be providing an antidote to the usual underage pixie loving in the form of an MMO based around the concept of big, hollowed-out boxes of metal with a big tube sticking out the front shooting at each other a lot.

The game will run thus: lots of fast-paced random battles featuring a glut of game modes, historic mini-campaigns, tournaments and a Clan Wars system. This will take place on a global map, where provinces can be fought over, clan diplomacy can be carried out, and economic strength achieved.

Even better, there won't be any bunny hoppers, because the whole thing is played with tanks. Nothing but. The differences between the vehicles will be that some are lightly armoured and quick, while some will be stonking goliaths and slow.

The only thing left to do now is think of ways in which the usual scum will attempt to cheat and exploit the game's foibles in order to win. You know they will, don't deny it. Five minutes in and you'll be enraged by some numpty who's managed to hide his tank in a wall, taken to the air, or is zooming around with a KITT-style turbo boost.

FREE KANE-ING, ENQUIRE WITHIN

Some classic build-and-rush action for free!

WEBSITE commandandconquer.com/classic

GEARING UP FOR the release of the end-of-storyline *Command & Conquer 4* festival that's coming soon, EA have kindly released *Tiberian Sun* and its expansion *Firestorm* onto the internet.

Amusingly, the plot involves what happened to Kane, who was supposed to be dead after the previous game. We all know, of course, that the crazy bald guy reappears about a billion times in subsequent games, but do try to suspend your disbelief for this one. *Firestorm* just adds more of the same, some cybernetic nightmares being released by Nod, forcing the two enemies to consider working together to face the danger.

While you're at the link above, you might also notice that *Tiberian Dawn* and the first *Red Alert* games are both available for nothing too. Think of the possibilities, days worth of quality RTS gaming at your fingertips for no pounds and no pence. I imagine you've already tossed this magazine and feverishly opened up a new tab in your browser to get the games.

Just remember to close that goat porn page before anyone else gets on the computer, OK?

Very sloppily designed base there...

WE CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Modders finally turn their attention to the forgotten *Stalker: Clear Sky*

WEBSITE snipurl.com/csreloaded

EVERYONE GOES ON about *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl* and, because it's flavour of the month, the third game, *Call of Pripyat*. Nobody is ever willing to give some love to *Clear Sky*, the forgotten mutant middle child of the *STALKER* family.

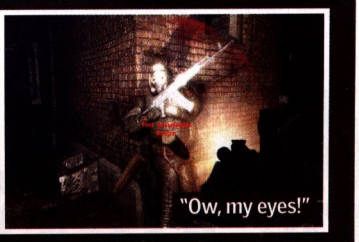
Clear Sky had its problems, but it was still good. And some guy called Clear_strelok thinks it was good enough to deserve its very own *Reloaded* mod.

The *Reloaded* treatment has been given to *Shadow of Chernobyl*, and it makes the whole *STALKER* experience so much more exciting than the original game, which, at times, could be pretty drab and uninspiring. So *Clear Sky*'s haters might just need to eat their words soon, if the same treatment *SOC* got can be transferred to *Clear Sky*.

Like *SOC*'s *Reloaded* mod, this one mainly improves graphics stuff, with some smaller gameplay tweaks thrown in for good measure.

First of all, the weather system has been overhauled and the shaders have been ramped right up, making a huge difference visually. Clear_strelok says that view distances have become "vast" and a "full re-texture" has been performed with "1,500 new high-definition textures, weapons, land, materials and NPCs", pimping out the game no end.

Nice house.

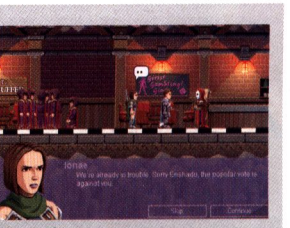


"Ow, my eyes!"

There's even been a wholesale replacement of the game's sound effects, with audio being stripped from the best *STALKER* mods the community has come up with.

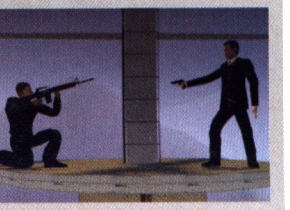
Clear Sky: Reloaded strips the vanilla game to its boxers and then forces it into a shinier suit, making it more attractive and playable. It definitely makes reinstalling and replaying *Clear Sky* a worthwhile experience.

SNIPPETS



THAT'S THE SPIRIT!

Back in 2003, an indie game called *The Spirit Engine* appeared. In 2008 its sequel followed. You had to pay for it, which you can still do if you want to reward the dev, or you can get it free. And it's damn good.
snipurl.com/spiritengine2



GOLDENEYE: SOURCE

It seems like it's been in development forever, but perhaps finally we'll see something other than a beta for *GoldenEye: Source*. Beta 4 is out now and it looks better than ever before.
moddb.com

Bug Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
OPFLASH: DRAGON RISING 1.02 PATCH

"Mines are no longer triggered by neutral (inactive) vehicles"

READY, AIM, FIRE!

Release the hounds, and let's get some deer

WEBSITE www.thehunter.com/pub

IT MIGHT SOUND like an '80s drama starring Don Johnson, but *theHunter* is, according to its website, "the most realistic hunting game you will ever play". It's also made by the same people who did our cover game, *Just Cause 2*, collaborating with a company called Emote Games.

Well, we say playing *theHunter* is free, but it's got that whole micro-transactions thing going on, as you might have expected. For all intents and purposes, though, there's a whole free hunting game for you to play if you sign up for an 'unlimited time Guest pass'. With that you get unlimited ammo and a rifle for free, and the right to track and kill Mule Deer on the fictional Whitehart Island.

If you decide you love hunting, you can become a Whitehart Island Member, which allows you to slaughter whitetail deer, Roosevelt elk, and wild turkeys.

For a free game, *theHunter* looks pretty special too and it's safe to say it's better than *Deer Hunter*. Maybe not as funny, but better, certainly.

What other animals could be hunted? Could Avalanche branch out into the exotic with *Komodo Dragon Hunter*, go domestic with *Dog Slaughter 2010*, or head for the mundane with *Fly Swatter Extreme*? Let's see in the future.

Guns used for defensive purposes only.

Demos

PCZONE ON THE DVD

***Adam Glick* is always excited by polymer circles**

KING ARTHUR: THE ROLE-PLAYING WARGAME

Show Mordred what you're made of with this special demo...

WEBSITE kingarthurthewargame.com

CAST ASIDE ALL memories and thoughts of *Monty Python's Holy Grail*, this is proper Arthurian fantasy gaming. No pseudo-socialist peasants, no taunting Frenchmen and not even a plain old cow carcass-tossing mini-game. This is *Total War* meets *Baldur's Gate(ish)*.

This demo contains a tutorial and a huge slab of the main campaign chopped out and placed on your gaming dinner plate ready for chomping.

In the full game, you get to build your own version of Camelot, which we thought was pretty good, something you can verify in our review on page 92 if you think we're lying.

There's nothing more that needs to be said, so why don't you start clacking those coconuts together, running away from three-headed knights, and snacking on roasted minstrels.

Harshly geometric armour? Must be a baddie bad.

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.

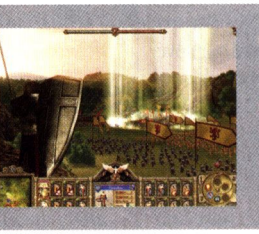
We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The *PC ZONE* discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd 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.

RULE BRITANNIA
The campaign map looks very impressive, at least on a par with the ones in the *Total War* games. Some would even argue it looked better, which is definitely something.

MAGIC BUBBLES
Realism really isn't an issue when you play *King Arthur*. Magic plays a big part, as you can see by this shot of a big shield bubble protecting units within its boundaries.

THIS CAMELOT WON'T GIVE YOU MONEY

LUMBERING OAFS
The Fomorians are big, tough and a complete sod to kill – what you'd expect from demigods – so if you see them in an enemy army, you'd better have God on your side.



GOD COMPLEX
Make sure God's happy with you and he might help you out in a tough situation by smiting your enemies with a big holy attack. It's nice to have him on your side.

THEATRE OF WAR 2: KURSK 1943

Big old tank battles from Russia

WEBSITE battlefront.com

IF YOU LIKE tanks – and what red-blooded male doesn't? – you might just be interested in this little number thrown into the ring by the chaps at battlefront.com.

The Battle of Kursk was the biggest tank conflict that's ever been fought, and signified another nail in the coffin of the Nazi's war machine.

In this demo, you get to play in two full missions, one on the side of Hitler's guys and the other controlling the Red Army's buckets of death.

Expect rumbling vehicles, destruction on a grand scale and a comprehensive military simulator that could well leave your mind boggled and scrambled.

We really didn't need grass pointing out.

TANKS A LOT

T-34
One of the goliaths used by the Soviets to steamroller their way across Europe.

FERDINAND
Named after the designer Ferdinand Porsche, this Nazi tank didn't do well at Kursk.

SOLIUM INFERNUM

Burning in the pits of Hell

WEBSITE crypticcomet.com/games

HELL AIN'T A bad place to be, as Bon Scott once sang so forthrightly on *Let There Be Rock*. It certainly isn't if you happen to be playing *Solium Infernum*, a game in which you get to control an archfiend.

Five rivals stand between you and a reign of ultimate terror and devastation. Pursuing a career in evildoing isn't easy, but you are allowed to level up in give different spheres of badness, like Wrath, Deception and Diabolism.

Solium Infernum is turn-based and it uses the dreaded hexes, but it's a nifty little underground strategy title that you can play by e-mail, if you so wish.

1. BRIDGE
Controlling bridges leading into your territory is a strategic necessity.

2. UNITS
These icons represent characters or armies, and are intriguingly drawn.

3. HEXES
Not the evil spell, but the currency of many an old-school strategy, they symbolise the six sides of geekdom.

EVIL WALKS

VILE APOSTATES
Known for their religious zeal, these mad monks are rather unnerving in appearance and fearsome in battle.

BIG BERTHA
So we don't know the name of this monster, but by crikey, she/he/it isn't pleasant to look at.

HOT DOWNLOADS

TOTAL EXTREME WRESTLING 2010

snipurl.com/wrestling2010

Now you no longer have to wonder what it would be like to manage a stable of wrestlers. Train them up and watch them die of steroid abuse, all in text and stat form!

ZOMBIE DRIVER

snipurl.com/zombiedriver

Running over zombies has never been this fun, plus you don't get the problem of insane repetition being a factor in the demo of *Zombie Driver*, as you only have a limited amount of death-dealing to, er, deal.

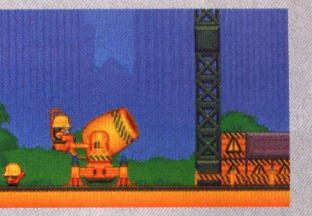
BEST OF THE REST

Nearly there. Here's the pick of the rest of the stuff that's packed on this issue's DVD...

MASS DEFECT: STARFELD

snipurl.com/massdeflect

Everybody loves a parody, especially one of the very parody-able *Mass Effect* games. A comedy classic to some people, see if you think so.



RUBBLE TROUBLE

miniclip.com/games/rubble-trouble

In this delightful indie game, smashing up the public is out. Instead fling your load about to destroy various buildings.

VVVV

snipurl.com/vvvvgame

A faithful de-make of Terry Cavanagh's game with two extra Vs (page 89), this one runs in just 4KB of memory. It's also insanely hard, just like the original.

LUCID

lucidpuzzle.com/

A block-matching puzzle game. We're sure you've never played something like this before, so here's a great example of the genre to sink your teeth into.

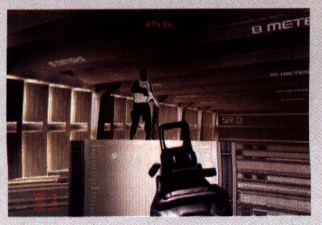
Freeware

***Adam Glick* never spends if he doesn't have to**

PCZONE ON THE DVD

This month head out on a browser-based demo of yet another space marine shooter, wave a staff around to stop a cave being stormed, help an obese moggy stuff its face, go all noir-y with a paranoid senator (maybe), and, finally, get stuck into a truly immortal strategic game.

GLICK'S PICK



BULLSEYE

DEVELOPER Zero Point Software
WEBSITE interstellarmarines.com/game/bullseye

SADLY, THIS GAME hasn't got anything to do with Jim Bowen or winning substandard motorboats, as it's to do with shooting things.

Bullseye is the training section of an upcoming full-strength FPS called *Interstellar Marines*. Because of this the demo lacks blood and you are expressly forbidden from slaughtering hostages, but it's a wonderful way to test your reflexes and FPS ability, within the comfort of your browser. This is down to Zero Point using the impressive Unity 3D game engine, yet the game behaves just like a proper FPS game you'd pay money for.

If *Interstellar Marines* plays as good as this demo, it could be a winner. We'll deal with that when we get to it, but for now, *Bullseye* is a highly addictive shooter that'll keep you occupied for ages, especially if you register and unlock all the challenges.

The only criticism is that this demo could have done with some variety in terms of environments and scenarios, but otherwise it's great, making it definitely worthy of the coveted Glick's Pick award.

DUNGEON DEFENSE

Mage vs every-bloody-thing

DEVELOPER Jeremy Stieglitz **WEBSITE** trendyent.com

IF YOU'VE OCCASIONALLY poked your head out of your home, and wondered what would happen if you were to erect some fortifications to drive off a persistent menace but never got round to it, this game will be the introduction to tower defence you need.

Made in four weeks to show off what can be done in the *Unreal Development Kit* (UDK), *Dungeon Defense* combines regular tower defence play with action-RPG elements. You play as a merry wizard type who has to keep his Crystal Cave free of enemies for a substantial amount of time. The enemies appear in waves, swarming up the steps towards the Cave in ever greater numbers. Each wave is broken up into two parts, the first being the Build phase.

This gives you about a minute to construct defence towers, lay down gas traps or erect blockades. The more you have, the better, of course, but there's limited space on the narrow staircases, so it's vital to think about where to place your defences. Cramming them all around the top gives you little room to manoeuvre if things go wrong, as we found out to our cost.

Once the Build phase is over, the Combat one begins, which is where the goblins, dark elves and other creatures start swarming up your stairs. You don't have to watch helplessly as they batter your defences, though. You can get involved with your puny (at first) staff, collecting the crystals enemies drop as they die. These are the game's currency, used to build more powerful defences, heal yourself, repair the towers and upgrade your staff so it can do more damage.

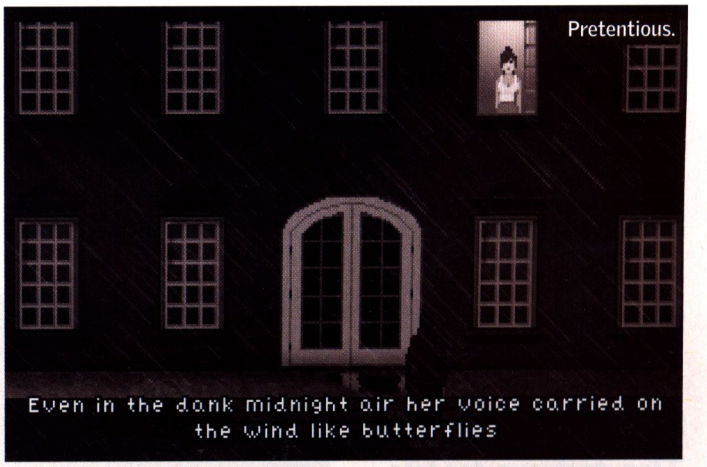
Like any tower defence game, it takes a while before you find out what *Dungeon Defense*'s optimum strategy is, and once you've found it, you'll see off waves with ease. The twist is that you never have enough crystals to feel secure, meaning it's vital you get stuck in yourself.

Don't be tempted to splurge all your crystals on cheap defences either: it's worth saving up during the early rounds so you can build better towers instead of loads of cheap ones. All this makes *Dungeon Defense's* four-week gestation all the more impressive. There'll be a bigger version coming out, so if you love this, you've got more coming your way.

THE MCCARTHY CHRONICLES

Noir adventuring goodness

DEVELOPER Steven Poulton **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/mccarthychronicles



ADVENTURE TITLES TEND to get featured heavily in these pages. We're not obsessed though – they only get in if they offer something interesting. You'd be surprised how many rubbish free games we see, but Mc*Carthy Chronicles* isn't rubbish.

The graphics are grey and drab, but they succeed in giving the impression of a world full of despair and loneliness. Colour is at a premium, with almost everything being in monochrome. The story is pretty decent: a girl is killed in the first scene and a visit to a run-down hotel prepares the player for a tale of mystery and intrigue.

Having said that, the voice acting is utterly dreadful. And while the writing isn't bad in general, it sometimes reverts to using relatively embarrassing clichés, especially when your character first meets up with the girl in the window – Sarah. These bits are definitely cringe-worthy, but you can ignore them. And these are the only real issues with the game.

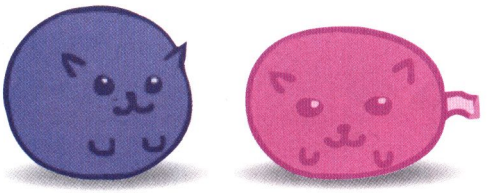
"Horror adventures don't usually work, but this one does"

Horror adventures don't usually work, but this one does, to an extent. And if the game's going to resort to clichés, I will to: it's free, so there's nothing stopping you from giving it a try. Let's hope for more episodes soon.

SUSHI CAT

Damn those fat cats...

DEVELOPER Joey Betz **WEBSITE** armorgames.com/play/5379/sushi-cat



CATS LIKE TO eat and the feline in this game is no different. The reason this circular moggy wants to chow down on Japanese food is that age-old puller of the heart strings, love.

A cat of the feminine persuasion catches our hero's eye, but this molly happens to live in a building which can only be accessed by Sumo wrestlers.

Noticing one eating sushi from a tray on the ground, our feline hero gets an idea into his head: "If I can bulk up by eating tonnes of raw fish, maybe I can enter the building and work off the excess fat bumping and grinding!"

So begins our hero's adventure, which just happens to be exactly the same as *Peggle*. Instead of dropping a ball into a load of pegs, you drop a round, blue cat into a load of sushi. Like a game of bar billiards, holes (or boxes) down the bottom of the level grant varying amounts of points when you land in them. The more difficult the landing, the more points you get.

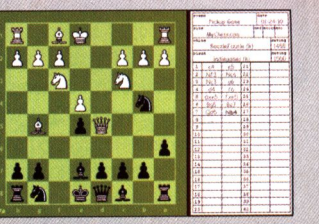
Before that, you have to make your tom eat as much of the sushi as he can before hitting the bottom. There's a target to meet for each level, plus bonuses for clearing all the sushi.

Sushi Cat is simple and, like *Peggle*, fun and addictive, but it's such a copy that you can't give it too much credit. Fair play for making an amusing cat-related storyline and also making it cute and cuddly, though.

Betz has copied a good game and it's one that's easy to play and fun as well. It could have been worse – another block-matching or gem-swapping game might have made me tear out my own lungs with frustration.

So, the lesson is – copy something I like and I won't criticise you too much.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



MYCHESS

DEVELOPER Michael Keating
WEBSITE kongregate.com/games/bloodyhorse/mychess

THIS GAME IS chess. You move pieces around and get beaten by a more capable opponent. It's the classic game and it's being hosted at Kongregate so you can enjoy it in easy multiplayer form. That's the key here: it's played in real time, with a time limit, and it's against real people.

MyChess is something that's been done hundreds of times before, but this time it's not restricted by huge time banks or registration processes. Just load up the link and play. The AI isn't a concern, like in *Chessmaster* titles, and you can have spectators.

There's nothing new here, but it's a timely reminder of how easy it is now to circumvent all the annoying crud that forms most webgames.

Extend

PCZONE ON THE DVD

David Brown **picks out the best mods and maps**

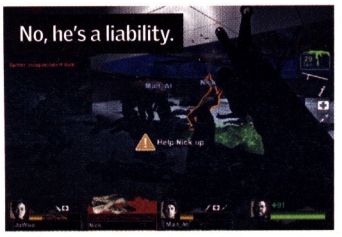
2019

The future holds yet more zombies

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2
WEBSITE snipurl.com/l4d2019

IT'S GOOD TO see *Left 4 Dead* campaigns moving out of the tried-and-tested dark urban streets setting. Of course, this reliance has been relatively enforced due to modders' assets being based on the settings used in *L4D* itself. Now *L4D2* is out and has established itself, there's a wealth of new materials to play with, and time has allowed for custom assets to be produced. *2019* gives the *L4D2* environment a big polish, turning it into a homage to *Mirror's Edge*.

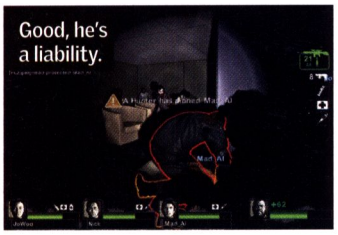
The setting is still urban, but it's classy urban: polished floors and everything. While this makes no difference to the game itself, and there are no interesting or special events to make you ooh with excitement, the levels are big and well designed. They're also challenging, extensive corridor sections providing ideal places for Chargers, Spitters and, in the more convoluted bits, Jockeys



"One for Versus enthusiasts who want to try wall-jumping"

to flourish. Luckily the latest version has introduced Versus, the three-map campaign being the ideal sort of length for a quick game.

2019's also got a bit where you have to leap a gap between buildings, making sure to play up its similarity to *Mirror's Edge*. Perhaps the best area, though, is where you traverse a walkway over a river, checking out the scenery to either side of your bridge. Unfortunately, while I was doing this, I got rumbled by a Charger, reinforcing the lesson that if you snooze, you lose.



As mentioned, there are only three levels and it ends (at the time of writing) very abruptly. They might be long levels, but then most custom maps are vast in size, so that doesn't really help set *2019* apart from the rest. You also get a feeling more could have been done to take advantage of the near-future setting, like adding more colour to the environments.

Having said all this, it's a good campaign that's challenging enough to flummox reasonably skilled players at certain points. You do sometimes feel like you're breezing through huge sections of it, and the final staged sequence doesn't always work, but there's still a decent amount of play time here: around an hour, unless you're speedrunning and don't get hung up on the many Tanks that appear.

Bots also don't get on with certain bits, at one point leaving me to die because I'd jumped across the gap at a different place to them.

2019 isn't the best *L4D2* mod (*Death Aboard* still keeps the crown) but it's one for Versus enthusiasts who want to try that wall-jumping thing with the Hunter in a *Mirror's Edge*-style setting.

Superman makes a cameo appearance.

LIVING HELL: NONAME ISLAND 2

More like a no-go island

MOD FOR Crysis **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/living-hell-noname-island-21

THIS IS AN island you don't want to visit. While *Noname Island 2* has the right ingredients, there's a problem that makes it unplayable.

Normally we wouldn't talk about buggy mods, but this one is out there and it's already received at least one patch. What it does right is provide a new *Crysis*-based story, complete with all the wonderful sneak 'n' shoot action that brings with it.

The huge issue is that you'll get stuck on the scenery hundreds of times during play. In the first 20 minutes of play, I got stuck on various invisible barriers 10 or so times. Each time the problem could only be solved by reloading a quicksave or checkpoint to correct.

So, *Noname Island 2* is a hideously bug-ridden *Crysis*. If you can grit your teeth and tap quicksave a lot, by all means try it out. Just be warned.

DINO D-DAY

Dinosaurs plus Nazis? It's a win-win

MOD FOR Half-Life 2 **WEBSITE** dinodday.com

More like *Dino Dead Day*.

THOSE DEVILISH NAZIS, eh? They'll use the occult, superweapons and anything they can possibly get their hands on and manipulate for evil in their quest for glory and world domination. This time, they've gone and done a *Jurassic Park*, to help win the war for North Africa.

While Monty might not be able to take on an army of enraged triceratops, you certainly can. If by army you mean one, because that's all you'll end up fighting. Sadly, this mod is almost comically short. It only took us a reasonable amount of time to finish it because we spent ages wandering around the first (of only two) levels trying to figure out what we were supposed to do. There was a triceratops there and we killed it. It took ages, but was pretty easy to take out.

The next level was filled with annoying leaping raptors, which can be killed with one shot, before a big T-Rex charged at us. And that was it, other than some annoying Nazis. It was good to see the humans and rogue dinosaurs attacking each other, and seeing rag-doll Nazis being tossed about by a triceratops is always amusing. But there's just not enough of it. *Dino D-Day* will be bigger when the final, actual release hits, but for now, it's just not worth the effort.

SHOTGUN SUNRISE

Not a nice way to wake up

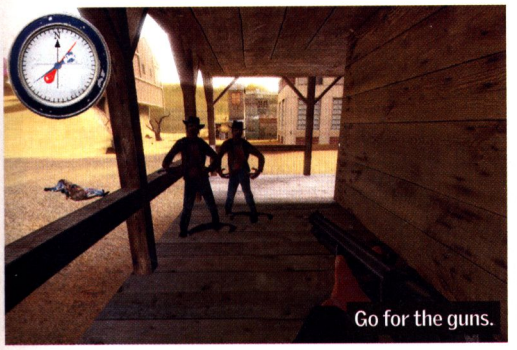
MOD FOR Half-Life 2 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/shotgun-sunrise

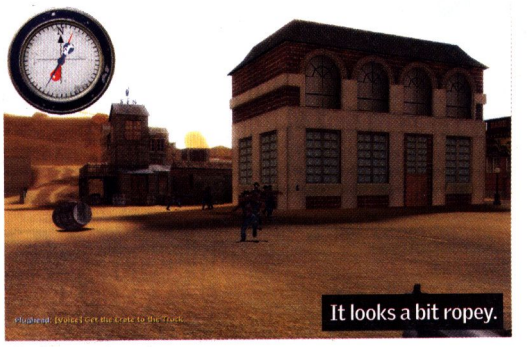
THIS CO-OP MOD set in the zombie-infested Wild West should be a right goer, but people aren't playing it.

The premise is you and some pals have to go into town, collect a crate of weapons, and then get out again. If you die, you respawn somewhere in the town with only an axe and a pistol, but also without a hat.

Take the crate to your truck, then get some booze, then jump-start the truck at the Shotgun Electrocombobulatory Power Facilitron. It sounds like it could be fun, but it gets boring pretty quickly.

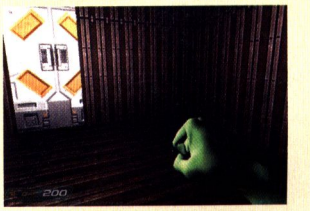
If you can find anyone playing *Shotgun Sunrise*, it might be worth a go, but the *Half-Life 2* engine is so creaky now it's a chore to play, not a delight.


Go for the guns.


It looks a bit ropey.

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



SHERK MOD

MOD FOR Doom 3
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/sherk-mod-for-doom-3

Note: changing the spelling won't confuse any lawyers into thinking you haven't used copyrighted material. Also, this mod is atrocious, simply replacing the hand of *Doom 3*'s marine with a green one. One of the worst mods we've ever seen.

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

PC ZONE was interactive years before some thought saying "Web 2.0" was a thing normal people would say. Now that interactivity has hit the heights of throwing jars of urine at our beloved readers, and those kinky urolagnians are loving us for it. Elsewhere we've been proving throwing knives at people can be fun, and that undersea cities are worth revisiting.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird

THERE ARE TWO things in life that must be done before you go to bed. The first is make sure you've subscribed to *PC ZONE*. The second is to be absolutely certain you've watched the first *Predator* film. It's what we do, so you should follow our lead. Especially as boning up on your '80s action movies will give you the strength to get through the glut of great games we've been seeing.

It'll also make you appreciate the sheer audacity and blind luck of the greatest kill in the history of multiplayer gaming. It involves a knife being thrown about 600 yards across a *Modern Warfare 2* map, bouncing off at least two surfaces and finding the head of an enemy soldier. It's here if you want to see it, which you really should do: snipurl.com/mw2knife.

Other than that, we're just gearing up for a propaganda assault that may well bring the world crashing down around our ears due to its awesomeness. There's nowhere else you should be on 25 March. Not at a wedding or a funeral, just with us in Piccadilly Circus. Head to page 24 for more!

Follow us via **@pczone** for more silly things like this. Editor Steve can be found at **@misterbrilliant** and staff writer David lives under **@Plughead_Zone**!

FIGHT CLUB

Join us, kill us, taunt us... online!

AS YOU MAY know, we're pretty lazy at Zone Towers. We've been meaning to tweak our primary *Team Fortress 2* server to allow for more of you to join us in our rabid killing sprees, but we've just never got round to it. Partly because we forgot our login details, too.

Thankfully, Wandy rescued us, having saved the email with the details on and soon we had upped the player limit from 14 to 32. Hurrah! And so, a bulkier version of our violent reader get-together was then launched.

SNIPER ALLEY

After a warm-up round on perennial favourite 2fort, the match moved onto Pipeline and the race was on to see which team could push their cart to the other end of the track, through the enemy's territory.

An epic Sniper duel between Steve and David on Pipeline was the highlight of the match, as the two ignored the Scouts and Pyros flitting about as they took careful aim at each other.

While they wasted time like this, the battle raged around them. The [Quite] members, Rob and the controversially named Jesus Died LOL, dominated all, double-jumping all over the place and causing havoc with their baseball bats. Steve's Blue team made the early running, pushing their cart within a couple of metres of the finish line.

Amazingly, they just couldn't get it over the threshold of victory, the Reds' resilience being enough to stop the Blue wave. A few cunning throws of Jarate from David helped out, eliminating whole groups of Blues around the cart on more than one occasion. Startlingly, the Reds pushed their foes backwards, until the impossible happened: they reached their cart and grabbed victory from the jaws of defeat.

The second Pipeline was less fun, the Reds pushing home their advantage to the end of that tunnel bottleneck. Slowly and inexorably, the Reds managed to push the resisting Blues back and victory was achieved, leading to a really anti-climactic final map where the Blues just ran the cart up to the top of the ramp with ease.

Next month, Fight Club will be taking place live and in person in central London. Hopefully you live there? There are hella details on page 24, come along and touch us on our bums. BUT DON'T REALLY.

Useful Dave lived up to his name here.

PCZONE PRESENTS FIGHT CLUB LIVE! 25 MARCH TROCADERO, LONDON SEE PAGE 24 FOR DETAILS

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Who wants to get wet again?

KING_CLUELESS: Sequels are lame and desired only by marketing cretins, who need a safe bet to make sure they don't get fired. However, there seems to be enough new direction with *BioShock 2* to gain my interest. What are your thoughts, are you looking forward to it?

DOGEN_D_DERRIBLE: Story-wise I'm not expecting much, but the additions to the gameplay should make for a fun ride. If nothing else, I find it hard to turn my nose up at another trip around Rapture purely because of the great setting, which was half the joy of the first game.

LIQUID_METAL: It's like they took every idea I'd have for making a *BioShock* game truly fantastic... and then did the complete opposite.

KING_CLUELESS: Just completed the game with some time off from work. It was a slow burner for me. I wasn't feeling it until about a third in. After that it kept getting better until the end, which was much better than the first.

THETINGLER: Haven't finished it yet, but I'm really getting into it. Combat is much improved from the first one, although you're never in danger of running out of anything.

ANDY_MONAHAN: Runs well, even on my sub-sub-bargain-level graphics card. Even better after the patch: now it doesn't spazz out if I change the resolution.

JNR218: [Expletive dèleted]ing *Games for* [expletive deleted] *Windows Live™*!

SUNSCRAMBLE: I'm still harbouring a stinging resentment after all of the crap I had to go through to get the first *BioShock* running. That took me about two hours.

Talking to strangers is bad.

ZONE CHAT

Insane Typist

The Mako: yay or nay?

ZONE CHAT REGULAR Flatline dominated this chat by straddling multiple conversations at once, firing off lightning quick replies to questions about *Baldur's Gate*, *World of Warcraft* and "eye-beams that mess your party up".

Elsewhere, *Mass Effect 2* was high on the agenda. The general consensus was a big love wave, but with some people lamenting the lack of airlock-exiting and Mako-led planet-scouring. Flatline got involved with this as well, saying its storyline was ripped off from *FreeSpace 2*.

Apophis_DD, another regular, then grumbled about leaving games he was enjoying unfinished for no real reason, perhaps going back in a few years to do the final level. We feel your pain, brother.

Moving on, talk switched to the irradiated husk that is Pripyat and the ability to stalk things therein. It seems to be one of those games people are intending to play, but are catching up on the original and its prequel – *Clear Sky* – first, to make sure they're right up to date with all things *STALKER*.

Finally, Flatline muscled everyone out of the conversation by shrieking about Valve removing 'vocalise' from *Left 4 Dead*. This is where people bind voice files to common actions, like making Zoey ask "Yes?" to the shove key, and so spamming it throughout a match. Good riddance, we say. In your face, Flatline.

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 been run out of town like a leper – then join other *PC ZONE* readers on these public servers. We might even join the rabble from time to time.

WHO'S WHO
Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

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

POPULOUS

DIP THE TIME flannel back in the mentholated clock juice, and slip it onto your face once again. This time, we're sailing the SS Nostalgia back to 1989. When you slide the flannel from your face, your *Now That's What I Call Music!* tape collection will number but 14, and your sense of hard-earned self-confidence will be shot to hell by the overwhelming urge to masturbate.

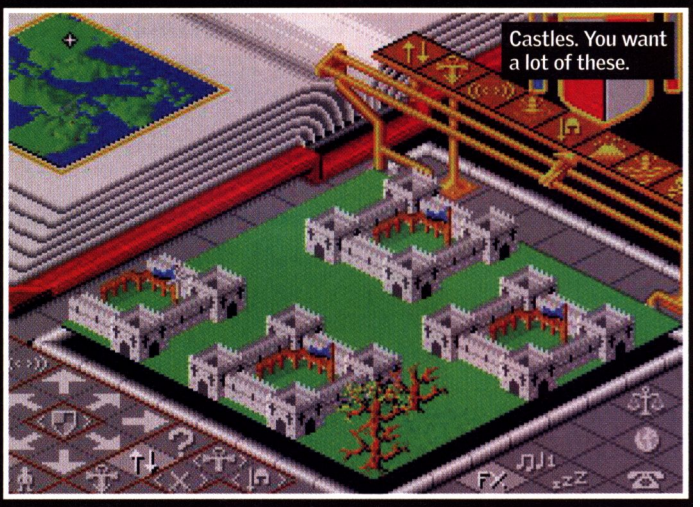
Take off the flannel! Here's *Populous*, possibly the first god game. We humans were a primitive bunch in the '80s, our gods were savage, and as humans we wanted nothing more than an area of flat land big enough to build a castle on. We'd leave the castle only walk around, build another castle, or punch some guy in a nearby hut until he disappeared, so we could build a castle where his hut once stood.

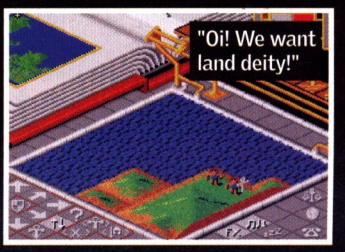
The works of our creator were all around us, back then. It was the god's primary job to provide you with flat land, and to attack the evil people with floods and volcanoes. *Populous* didn't give you a chance to go relativistic about the evilness of the other team – they worshipped a skull. As far as giveaway signs of evil are concerned, skull-worship is on a par with wearing SS uniforms.

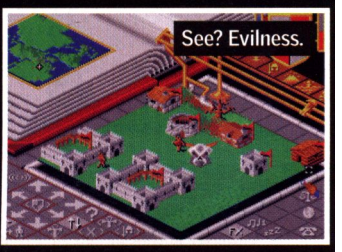
And you can forget the peaceful win conditions of modern games like *Civ* – every level is building up to one thing: Armageddon. Once you've gathered enough people, and won enough prayer power, it's time for everyone to unbuild their castles, presumably carrying the bricks to the centre of the map, where they'll use them to crush the skeletons of their minutes-old enemies.

This is the game that launched Peter Molyneux towards his ambassadorship for uncomfortable interactions with impossible children. See where the madness began!

The hand of God. Or some other diety.


Castles. You want a lot of these.


"Oi! We want land deity!"


See? Evilness.

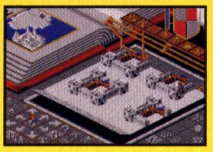
But how? Build a hate-fuelled empire!

Aspiring to godhood is only natural – we're always desperate to believe in dumb psychic shit just to give ourselves a desperate glimpse of a life beyond our meatcages – so it's only natural to want to download it. It's 288KB of pure data, freely available on the internet. Instead of telling you how, let's just dance the necessary legal dance – why not type populous abandonware into Google's box? Or that Bing thing, if you like. We've all got our perversions.

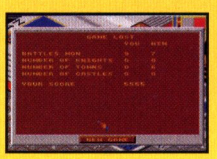
The six powers of godhood All you need is omnipotence

1 EARTHQUAKE A basic power, easily fixed attack: disrupts the enemy's land, ruining all of their lovely castles.

2 SWAMP Swamps disrupt walkers and buildings – it's a pretty fair tactic to swamp everything.



3 KNIGHT Take the crusades to your enemy's huts, and show them the true path to God by killing them.



4 FLOOD Insta-lose for anyone who tends to build their castles on low land. Like, well, me.

5 VOLCANO This one is kinda like an earthquake, but with much more upwards and with loads more rocks.

6 ARMAGEDDON End the level with the violent collapse of society and genocide, then bask in your beatific supremacy.

Now & Then

CIVILIZATION vs CIVILIZATION V

***Civilization* is in its 20th year, and as *Civ 5* rewrites the rule book again by ditching squares for hexagons, and stopping you stacking your shit up, it's worth a space-filling look back at the first game.**

The game's core has resisted progress. The details may always be in flux, but there's still the same basic game: start off with a Settler, build a city, improve the land to yield better resources, progress along a tech tree, decide whether you want to win the game through military might or technological progress. There was no culture back then, though – that was introduced in *Civ 3*, as the mechanic by which your towns spread, and other towns are coveted to your sophisticated way of life. Caravans also disappeared for more complicated trade windows, making a comeback in the heavily pruned console and handheld version.

Play it! Hexagons are for squares...

1. First, decide that you want to play it. The newer games are all on *Steam*, and when you go this far back it's almost never as good as you desperately want to remember it.
2. If you're resolute that modern life is nothing but noise and pollution, go right ahead – it's legal to download *Civ* for free, so for once we don't have to pretend we don't love breaking the law.
3. Besides, Sid Meier's so lovely he'll be pleased you want to play his old game. He'll chuckle, hold his adorable tummy and say, "Go ahead, I'm worth seven birrion dorrars."
4. Leaving you with the suspicion that Sid Meier has just been slightly xenophobic. Where does that Sid Meier get off, doing uncomfortable racist voices like that?

MAMEframe

ELEVATOR ACTION

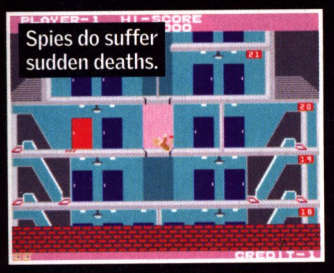
WHEN YOU'RE A spy, you've got two things on your mind – classified documents, and enemy spies. Of course, if you're a good spy, people don't know you're a spy, unless you're doing your special spy walk that lets other spies know you're in the middle of some subterfuge so please don't come over and blow your cover by asking you about secrets you know.

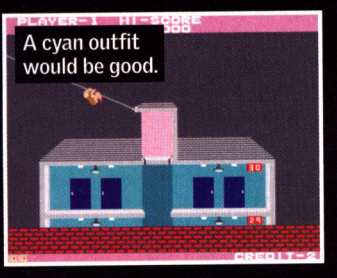
Elevator Action is from 1983, and it captures perfectly the sensation of being a spy in a block of high rise flats. But not just any high rise – a high rise populated entirely by enemy spies. They all look the same, so in retrospect a disguise might have been good – because they're very quick to shoot you. It's considered one of the better arcade games of 1983, and introduced the still-with-us concept that of every 120 doors, six will be a different colour, and they're the ones you can open and go through.

And don't let the modest game title fool you – there are escalators too!

WHAT IS MAME?

The *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator* lets you play arcade games you own ROM boards for – it's illegal otherwise. We've put the program on the DVD as you can't consider yourself virtuous for not committing a crime unless you had the means to do so.





Time Trump

MEDIOCRITY TIME

IT'S ALL VERY well knowing what games are scoring these days, but the question projected into our night skies is "What forgettable games were scoring moderately well 98 issues ago"?

This question can be conveniently answered – by happy coincidence, issue 121 is right next to me. This is how features are born: inventing a problem that can be solved without standing up or moving around.

PRISONER OF WAR
SCORE: 77%

Richie Shoemaker: "Those with a forgiving nature who are looking for an escape from the endless monotony of mass slaughter would do well to seek it out."

BEAM BREAKERS
SCORE: 57%

Steve Hill: "A slightly above average game with a theme that's rapidly becoming overused"

SYBERIA
SCORE: 42%

James Lyon: "It's pretty dull. I wouldn't get too excited."

ANOTHER WAR
SCORE: 30%

Steve O'Hagan: "We really can't see who this will appeal to, unless there are still fans of those old Pratchett point-and-clickers out there..."

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them

BIOSHOCK 2

Underwhelmed: ***Adam Glick***

THIS ISN'T HOW it's supposed to be, is it? A game Will Porter loved up so much in his review, one which has been garnering rave reviews all over. I'm supposed to like it, and yet, frankly, it's boring the arse off me.

No matter how streamlined or how much more fluid the combat is it seems the developers, all 10 million different teams or whatever, haven't succeeded at all in making the world of Rapture interesting again. There's still a certain degree of interest in exploring the new areas and finding out about the new characters, but really this is an expansion pack. The graphics are virtually identical and are really looking terribly tired. And this tiredness transfers to me, leading to a lethargic feeling throughout my time in Rapture.

I was constantly picking up ammo and equipment and firing lightning at Splicers, but wasn't getting any joy out of it. I wasn't hating it though – it just gave me a feeling of drudgery.

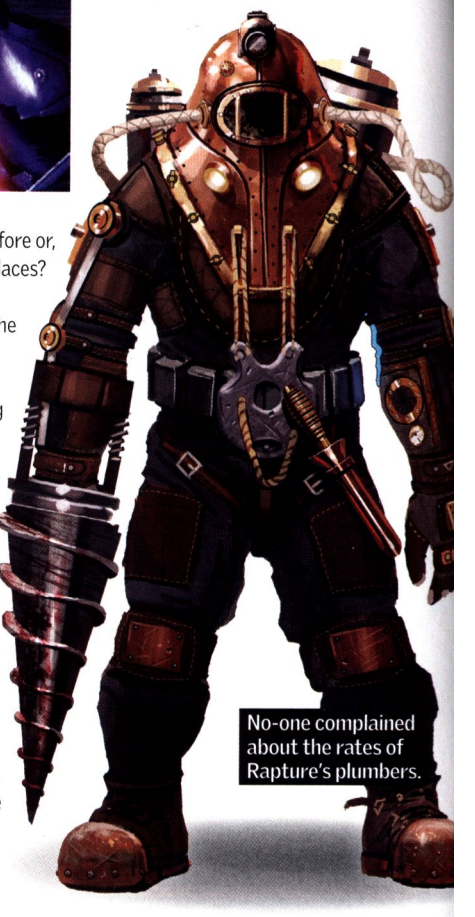
"I was firing lightning at Splicers, but wasn't getting any joy out of it"

Also annoying was the fact the storyline was so contrived: why had I not had heard of this woman before or, indeed, any of these people or places? Or is it that it's been cobbled together with little thought to the grand scheme of things? Will *BioShock 3* have a new supervillain that had been hiding in a pipe for 20 years? Urgh.

That said, I will finish the game, perhaps only out of bloody-mindedness. I've heard it gets better during the latter stages, but I doubt it's going to approach anything like the wondrous awe felt when first getting into the bathysphere in the original.

I suppose it's too much to ask for it to beat that, a classic moment in gaming that it is, but just being plonked into the game doesn't cut it. I liked the ocean floor bits though, they were OK.

VERDICT: **All at sea**



No-one complained about the rates of Rapture's plumbers.

MASS EFFECT 2

Star Trekking: *David Brown*

AS LOG SAID in his review, this game really is an example of epic storytelling. The first time I loaded up, I was hooked for an entire weekend, eschewing all social contact in favour of wallowing in space opera. However, this level of quality leads me to consider one thing: does this great storytelling, by its excellence, detract from the solid-yet-unspectacular combat sections?

Going from tense conversations and wonderful scenic vistas to hiding behind crate after crate is slightly jarring. At least the combat is easy enough (at least on PC, with its superior aiming control) that it doesn't get in the way of the storytelling for too long.

As well as this, I can't be the only one missing the large quest-hub areas we could explore in the first game. Going to the Citadel and finding it's basically now just a couple of corridors is slightly disappointing. I even miss the lifts, if you can believe that. Go on, stone me to death for my heresy, but I thought they were good. In a way.

Despite these things, the strength of the game lies in the fact that, no matter how hard I try, I can't really find many faults with it, and certainly none beyond the petty and irrelevant. Roll on *Mass Effect 3* and more dancing Asari women.

VERDICT: **No complaints**

It's your old mate, Meccano.

ETCH A SKETCH

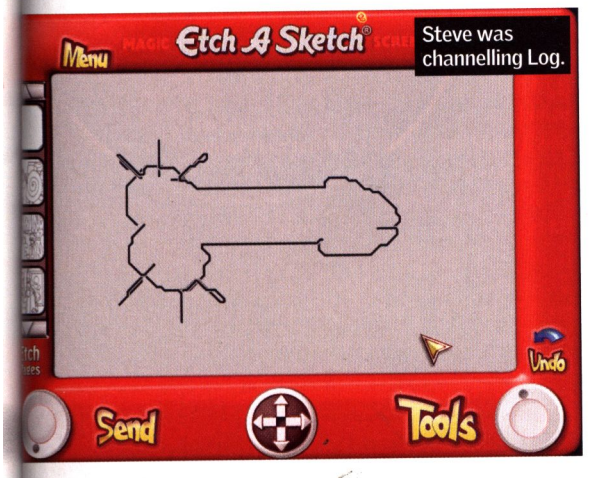
Sketchy: *Steve Hogarty*

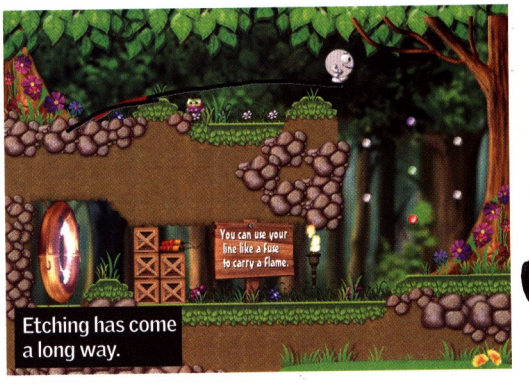
"YOU HAVE ONE friend who plays *Etch A Sketch*," *Steam* tells me. "One who you have more in common with that you'd ever have imagined," it doesn't say, "One who shares in your morbid curiosity of the worst games on *Steam*. Click here to chat with him."

I click there to chat with him, but he's away. So I return to *Etch A Sketch*, a game that valiantly conjures up two characters using the only identifiable parts of the toy: the knobs. They're called Knobby and Knobella. You can tell which of them is the girl because she's got a blonde ponytail and a pink bow, and is quickly kidnapped by a witch. To rescue her you've got to use your mouse to draw bridges and guide Knobby over pit-filled levels, a la *Crayon Physics*.

That's the Quest mode. There's also a drawing mode, which replicates using an Etch A Sketch frighteningly well, ensuring that anything you draw ends up looking awful.

VERDICT: **Why am I playing this?**





Etching has come a long way.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

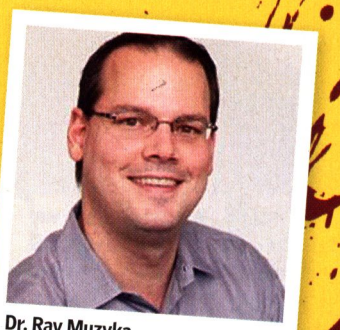
BORDERLANDS
Cartoonish wasteland
Mad Max crossed with *Brave Star*
With no robot horse
zaarin_2003

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
Baldur's Gate still wins
But you can't knock the effort
Or the great side boobs
zaarin_2003

BRAID
So I just finished *Braid*. Took me 18 days but I did it. Now I just wish it could have been a bit longer...
Tarekmallo

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

BioWare's main man talks about the origins and awakenings of *Dragon Age*...



Dr. Ray Muzyka
CEO, BioWare

HE'S GOT A name that less sensitive types could make terrible puns out of, but you won't catch us attempting such a thing when in the presence of Ray Muzyka. We strap him to a table, inject him with truth serum and get him to divulge as many of the game's mucky secrets, including why having three wizards in your party is a really good idea and why Fox News don't know they're doing when it comes to reporting on games.

The weird dream realm is almost like a mini-game.

There aren't as many dragons and you'd think.

01 AWAKENING ORIGINS

It was a pretty long project. We started as a PC lead, but we always had a hope of bringing it to consoles as well, which became a concerted effort later on. I think we talked at one point about doing a Human Commoner origin story, which wasn't in the shipped game, but it wasn't as aspirational or interesting. But you know, dwarf noble, dwarf commoner, those were exotic. The Dalish and the city elf were intriguing too, plus the mage and the human noble, which were the six we shipped with. We wanted to make sure you took on a role that was aspirational and exciting, ultimately something that players would want to get behind. If we think of anything else though, we'll put it in the next release.

Dwarven women sure are feisty.

Fight this too early and it's curtains.

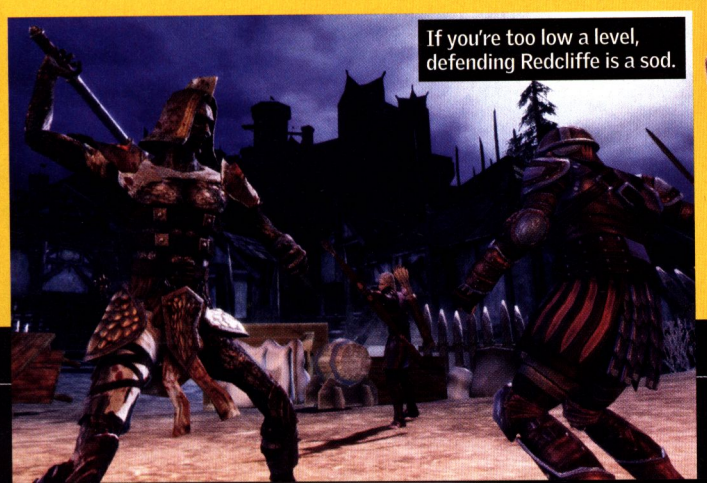
02 PARTY TIME

One time I had three mages in my party. I had Wynne, Morrigan and my main character was a mage too, with Leliana in front, a dual-wielding, back-stabbing thief who could open chests, of course. I had all three mages progressed along the spell chain to get Animate Dead, so I actually ended up with seven characters in the party, including the corpses. If Leliana was a ranger, she could have summoned a pet and I'd have had eight. Anyway, it worked really well with seven. Did you know that when you cast Animate Dead on a corpse, the thing that gets animated varies according to what they were before? So, if you had a Hurloc Emissary, you'd get a mage, or if you cast it on a ranged guy, like an archer, you'd get them in your party. So you can actually have six mages in your party, which I did a few times, which was really cool.

"You can actually have six mages in your party, which I did a few times"

03 PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

There's a lot of depth to the game if you poke around in it, a lot of interesting nooks and crannies. If you've already progressed a lot with your characters, you might be able to unlock some new abilities later on when *Awakening* raises the level cap. We wanted to have summonable characters to raise the group size above four, but as for a greater base group size, we looked at it and thought from a performance and playability benefit balance, four was the best number. We considered six and we did some prototyping around three, four and six and decided four was a nice middle ground, so we chose that. We felt there was a nice tactical depth there, so you could have a couple of fighters, a mage and a thief, or a couple of thieves, a fighter and a mage or three mages and a thief, which is what I did. It gave it enough tactical depth and diversity. I think that's really cool, as you get the water cooler moment where you go "Well, my party was composed of this," and your friends would go, "Oh, I didn't even think of that".



If you're too low a level, defending Redcliffe is a sod.

The sexual elements aren't "gratuitous", says Muzyka. Riiiiiight.

My money's on the one with wings.

04 SCALED UP

I gotta tell you, fighting a dragon is one of the coolest moments in the game, very epic. They're freaking huge and on the PC, I remember I was fighting some dragons and I was so excited, taking all these screenshots of Sten rushing up to the dragon with his flaming sword, and the dragon rearing over his head.

Wynne was at the back basically trying to heal and animate them back to life whenever they dropped. I took all these screenshots and sent them over to Frank, my boss, and John, my boss's boss, and I was like "Look at this, this is freaking awesome, I'm fighting dragons". Epic stuff, I was really excited by it.

The blood splatter effect can look silly.

"What the hell is that?"

05 FANTASY LIFE

Dungeons & Dragons and Tolkien, they're high fantasy: it's all good and evil, one or the other. There's elves and they're good, but we wanted elves that were downtrodden, a grittier, more mature take on fantasy. Not like a dark or low fantasy, but somewhere in the middle, taking the best features of high and low fantasy, which we call dark heroic fantasy. We feel it was a fresh take on things. It looks familiar on the surface, but when you dive into it you realise there are a lot of things going on that aren't necessarily obvious. I think *The Witcher* was more an example of low fantasy. It's on the other end of the spectrum to the high fantasy. It's good, there's a lot of different types of fantasy you can create. I like the middle, where there's a dark, mature world where your choices have consequences, but you can still be a hero.

06 RULES AND REGS

We wanted to build our own rule system that was designed first and foremost as a computer RPG system, not a pen-and-paper game system that had been brought to the computer, which is what we did with *D&D* successfully with *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*. We thought, let's try something new and build a videogame system that's designed as that first. We actually brought it back to pen-and-paper gaming, doing a version of *Dragon Age* in that medium, which was kinda cool. I haven't played it yet, but I looked at the rule book, which is really interesting.

Surely that sword is too big for him?

"I can only dance with one of you chaps."

07 RISQUÉ BUSINESS

We're not trying to be gratuitous with the sex scenes. We're trying to get an emotional response, for you to feel affection and believe the characters in your party are real, to feel genuine emotion for them. There wasn't as much of a reaction to the scenes in *Dragon Age*, certainly compared to *Mass Effect* where Fox aired a scene on national TV.

In most of our games we've enabled choice, so however you want to play the game, if you're a male and want a female romance interest, or if you want a male romance interest, we've enabled that. We're not saying one choice is better than the other, it's a role-playing game and, as in real life, you can make choices.

There's a little controversy when people say this is different, but we point out we've done this in every game since *Baldur's Gate*, and they realise the scenes aren't gratuitous. Other than that, there wasn't a controversy. Fox was embarrassed by their story coverage, how they ran a story about it with someone admitting they'd never played the game and was still critiquing it and... well, not good.

08 ORIGINAL AWAKENINGS

It was challenging with the origin stories and there was a decision made to sort of bring more of a first-person narrative to it. You weren't just watching a character taking on a role, you were the character taking on a role, hence the reason for the origin stories and more choice option. We felt that having a voice for that character might not be the best approach. Having said that, we like the other approach too. Clearly the third-person narrative approach in *Mass Effect* is very successful too. I'm not going to say it's impossible that we would consider doing it in future *Dragon Age* products, but I think there's a place for first-person narrative and third-person narrative. It's about how you take on the role. Either you hear your own voice in your head, or you're watching a character that you're controlling acting out a role. It was a conscious choice we made.

Urgh, spiders...

Friendly fire is a constant thorn in your side.

09 TOUGHENING UP

In a game as vast as *Dragon Age*, there are a lot of different ways to play through it. Difficult sections might just be tough because of your current party setup. We had and have a huge Q&A team with a test plan that encompasses the style, but when you put it in the hands of millions of consumers, they're going to find different ways to play it, some of which might not be compatible with the balancing. What I'd encourage them to do is try different party members. When you get stuck or blocked, it might just be a clue that maybe you're not ready to go through that passage yet, that you need to go back out into the wide world and gain a few levels, find some more equipment, buy some more potions and then try it again. If you're running through a barrier and you're dying, that might be a higher level encounter meant for a higher level party. Typically, after the origin stories, there's nothing that you have to do to advance, there's always more content, more quests or experience that you can gain somewhere.

STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill is a sexy Orc in *Warhammer Online*

I ONCE WENT on a press trip for this game that was so bad I left. Along with the appalling food, the dismal weather and the fact that it was in France, the misery was compounded by a grown man encouraging a roomful of journalists to loudly shout: "WAAAGH!"

As Goblin-fanciers everywhere will confirm, that is the battle cry of the Orcs, a race of the fearsome Greenskins who comprise the Forces of Destruction. And if it sounds like I know what I'm talking about, consider that for years I genuinely thought an Orc was a type of bird. Something appears to have sunk in though, as when faced with a choice of character I gravitate towards the Orcs, eventually settling on a rather ugly beast known as a Choppa.

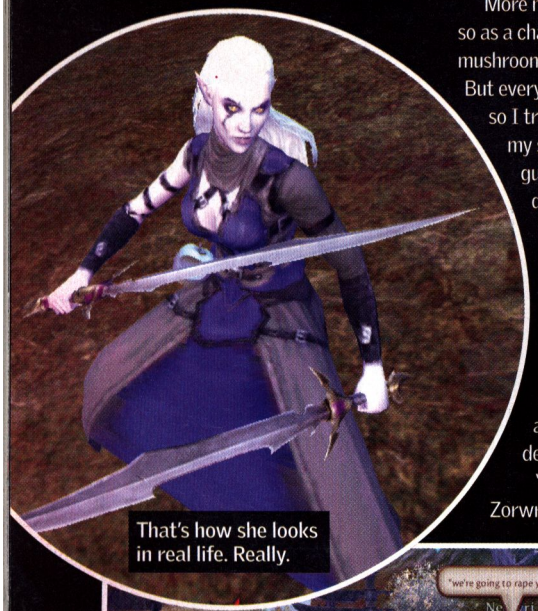
ADULTS ONLY

What I lack in looks and charm, I make up for in brute strength, and instantly prove myself by slaying three Foul Nurglings. It's a swift career path, and I soon advance to clearing out ghosts, shooting down Dwarfen Gyrocopters, and burning families of humans alive in their homes. A Thorshafn Citizen tries to protect his humble dwelling by swinging at me with a pitchfork, but he's no match for my rugged blade as the death count surges upwards.

More mundane quests are available, so as a change of pace I pick some mushrooms for Sursten The Deceiver. But everyone needs a trade, even Orcs, so I train to be a butcher, practising my skills on wildlife, ripping the guts out of wolves, vultures and deer I come across, which is marginally more appetising than the slop they served up on the *Warhammer Online* press trip.

Butchery is lonely work, and craving company I sidle up to a male Leprechaun and a female Dark Elf, who are deep in conversation.

"Ah nee tis goud," says Zorwrak the Crucial Crusher.



That's how she looks in real life. Really.

Rape jokes. How amusing.

Steve enjoyed this bit.

"She unburdens real-life concerns... that her breasts are too large"

"Klompen kuch," replies Neytyri the Strategic Hitter.

Finally noticing the massive green oaf inches away from them, the Leprechaun inquires, "You want spanking too?"

"Spank him," orders the Dark Elf.

"What's happening?" I plead.

"We're going to rape you dear," she explains.

"Are you sure?" asks Zorwrak.

"I want his big axe," confirms Neytyri.

"Please be gentle with me," I plead.

"Your kind doesn't need gentle," admonishes Neytyri.

"Gentle is not in her dictionary," laughs her accomplice.

Calling their bluff, I casually ask, "Have you started yet?"

"Obviously not," admits Zorwrak.

However, Neytyri claims, "I'm touching... something."

"Touching what?" I ask.

"Wouldn't you like to know..." taunts the coquettish Dark Elf.

"I hear moaning," pipes up the Leprechaun.

We are soon joined by a half-naked bloke called Dacul The Pawner, who announces "I am power stripper," casually farts, and blames it on Zorwrak.

The fight was far from fair.

As an introduction to *Warhammer*'s social contact, it's not a promising start. It turns out that the Leprechaun and the Dark Elf are from Belgium, and know each other in real life. Over the course of a few late nights, I grow close to the Belgian Dark Elf, who admits that she finds Orcs kind of sexy.

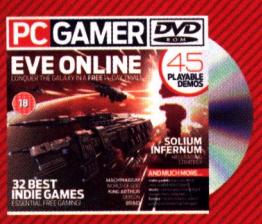
CHOPPA SHOCKA

I seem to take on the role of agony Orc, as she unburdens her real-life concerns, how she's worried about her weight, and that her breasts are too large.

At some stage she also tells me that she has real vampire fangs that were put in when she was 16. It all seems unlikely – particularly the fact that she's a girl – but everything she's said proves to be true when she sends me some photos of herself.

I'm in too deep. My subscription ends. I don't renew it. PCZ

JOIN OUR PARTY



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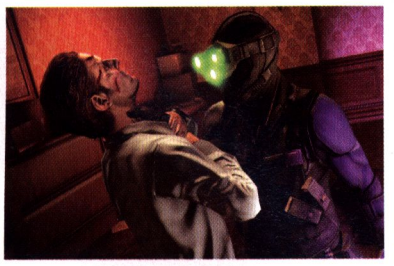

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The stealth saga reaches maturity...

ENDINGS!

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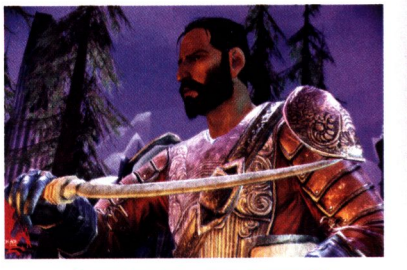
The strategy saga draws to a close...



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DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS – AWAKENING

The RPG saga thunders onwards...

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ATTENTION READER!

NEW ISSUES OF PC ZONE TO CONTAIN SATIRICAL DRM IN HALF-THOUGHT-OUT PARODY OF UBISOFT'S NEW COPY PROTECTION MEASURES

We often lie awake at night, wracked with worry. "Our readers," we mutter, "those bloody arseholes. They can't be trusted. Sure, they've bought the magazine, and we owe our continuing existence to them, but how do we know they're not showing our reviews to their non-paying friends? How do we stop them projecting our *Mass Effect 2* review on to the side of a building, or reading it aloud in the background of a news broadcast? They've got to be stopped before those bastards do real damage."

To this end, we're implementing DRM from issue 220 onwards: an elaborate locking device (based on Polly Pocket Diary technology) will require you to keep a constant internet connection in order to read *PC ZONE* magazine.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Simply connect your *PC ZONE*'s Ethernet port to an active internet connection, whereupon your copy of the magazine will be verified as genuine by the rock-solid *PC ZONE* servers and unlocked. Then read at your leisure! Should you lose connection with the server, even for a second, it will snap shut with some force. Watch those fingers!

SO WHERE CAN I READ PC ZONE?

Anywhere you can find an internet connection!

Can I read *PC ZONE*… On the toilet ☒ On the bus ☒ On a plane ☒

While driving ☒ At home, sitting on the floor a few feet from a router ☑

WHAT IF IT CLOSES WHILE I'M READING A REVIEW?

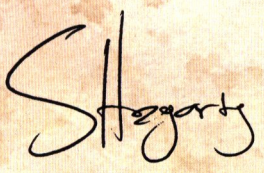
If you lose your connection while halfway through a review, you'll have to start again from the beginning, once you've re-established your internet connection, because you'll probably have forgotten where you stopped reading.

WHY SHOULDN'T I SIMPLY GET A DODGY COPY OF *PC ZONE* FROM THAT SHADY MAN IN THE ALLEY BEHIND TESCO? IT'S EXACTLY THE SAME BUT FAR MORE CONVENIENT, AND IT'S FREE, AND IRONICALLY IT DOESN'T TREAT ME LIKE SOME SORT OF CRIMINAL. I MIGHT DO THE SAME WITH *ASSASSIN'S CREED 2*, ACTUALLY, NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT.

Yeah, can't really argue with you there.

THIS WAS A REALLY CONTRIVED ANALOGY, BY THE WAY.

Shhhh.



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