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ISSUE 221 JULY 2010
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BLACK OPS
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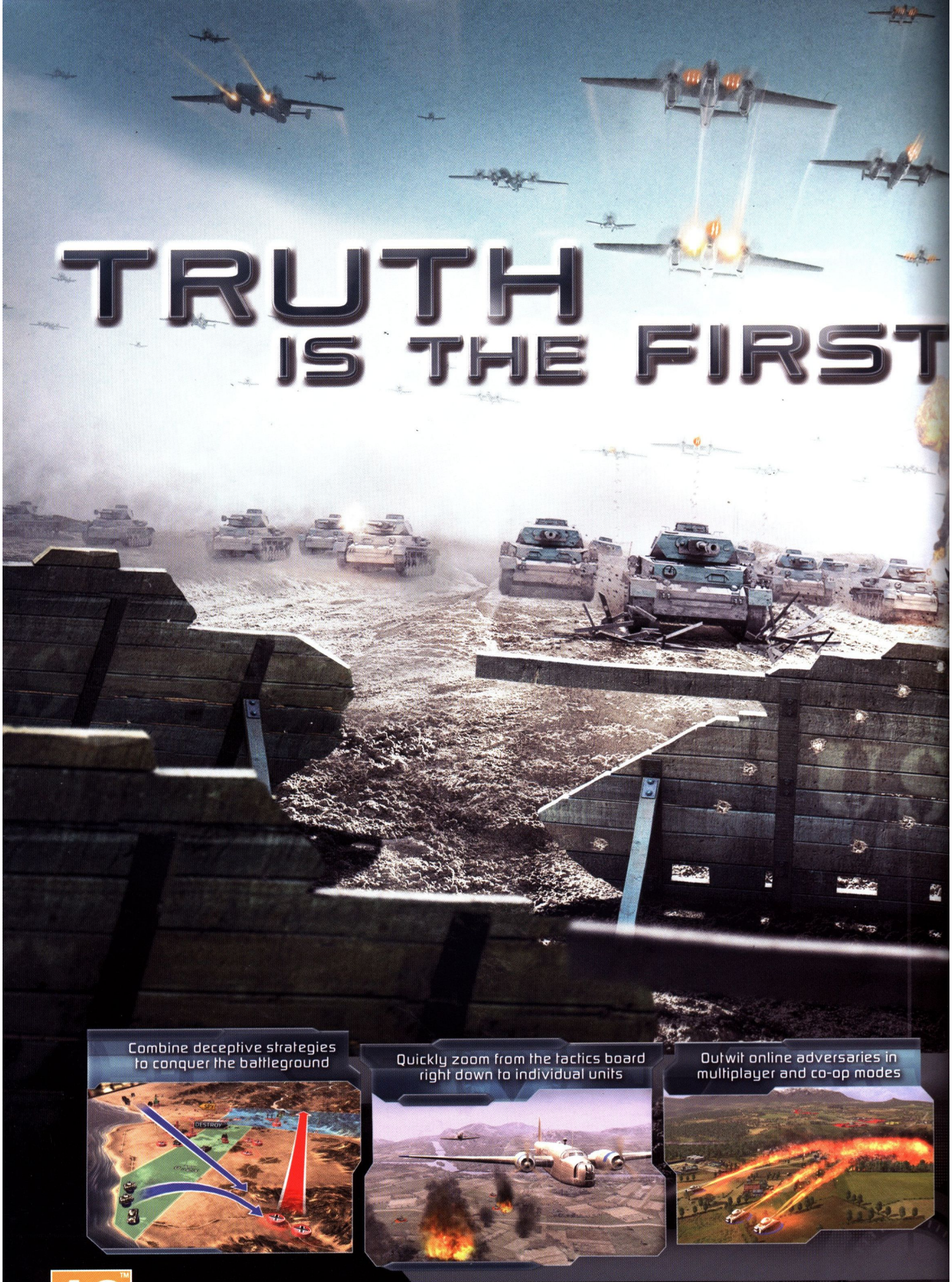
GTA: EPISODES XCOM ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD



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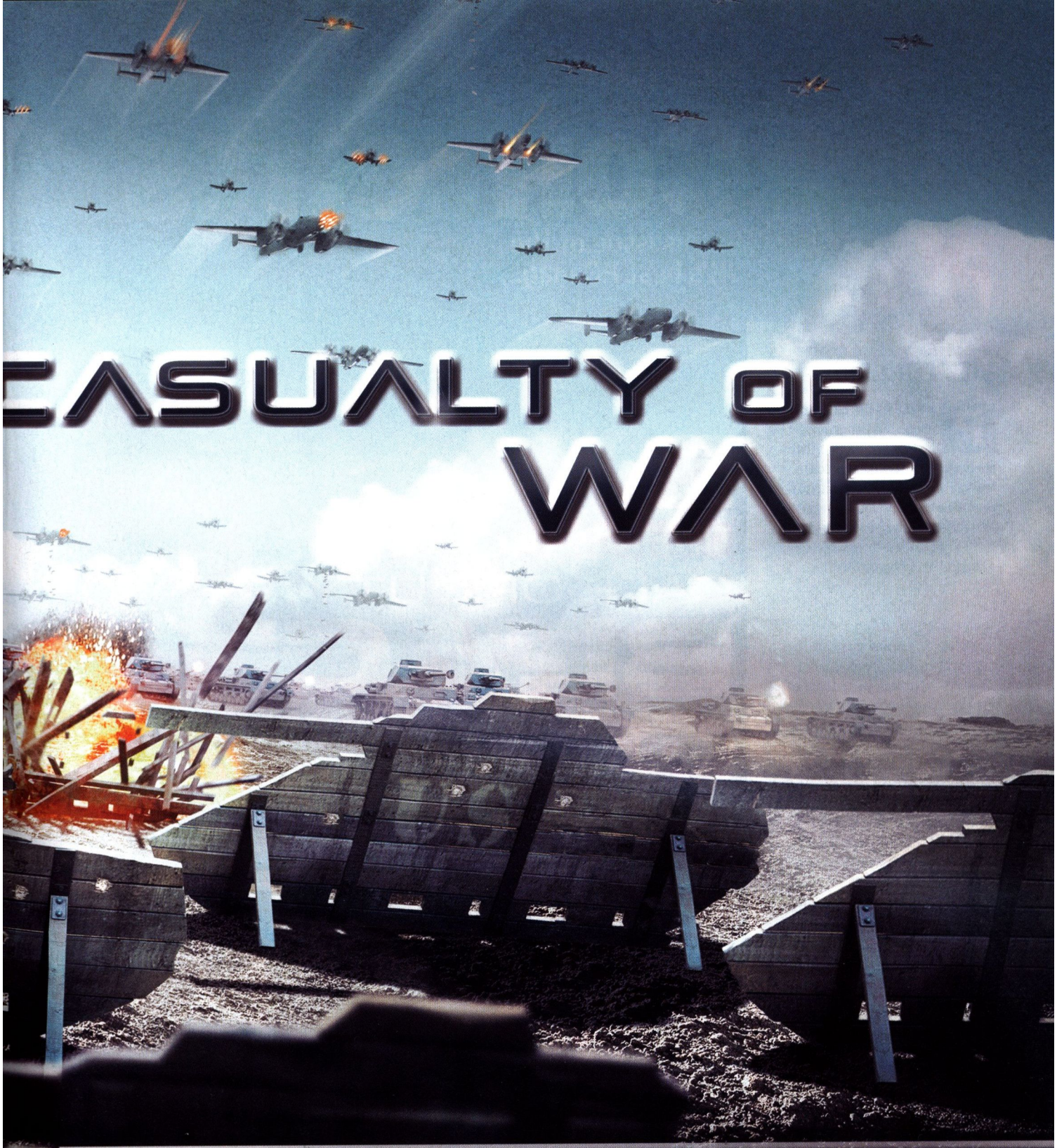

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Contents

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

VIET CONGBIES

PSYCHIC POWERS ARE dangerous things, mystic and ancient abilities that are bestowed only upon a precious few individuals. Those deigned to bear the cross of premonition must also suffer its adverse effects.

Hear this, I knew there would be a new *Call of Duty* game. And, oh... ooof... I'm getting another one... yes, here it comes. Nyuuurgh, oh god, I've just predicted *Call of Duty 8*. And what appears to be, yes, *Call of Duty 9*. They come in pairs, these premonitions.

So it's *Call of Duty: Black Ops* then, from the unfairly maligned "other" *Call of Duty* studio Treyarch. Activision leaked the name once last year, and yet again two weeks before this issue went on sale, but here it is for a third time anyway – surprise!

What you won't have seen anywhere else though, are bona-fide details. We've got locations, we've got factions, we've got multiplayer, we've got guns and screenshots and more. And coming from the studio that popularised Nazi Zombies in gaming (and somehow still carry the reputation of a second-rate developer), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* has us more than a little bit excited. Just think of all the different kinds of zombies there'll be: Viet Cong zombies, Communist zombies and every kind of zombie in between. There'll probably even be single-player too.

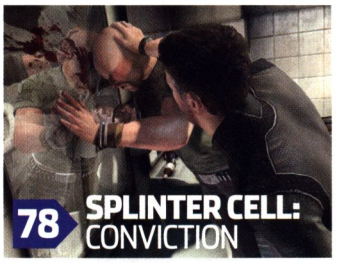
Steve Hogarty
Acting Editor
steve.hogarty@futurenet.com

64 COVER STORY
CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS
The most epic *Call of Duty* yet runs the course of the whole Cold War. Get a taste of what's to come inside...

FEATURE
30 DRM PROTECTED
Who is winning in the publishers vs pirates war, and who's losing out

44 BULLETSTORM

52 THE WITCHER 2


78 SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

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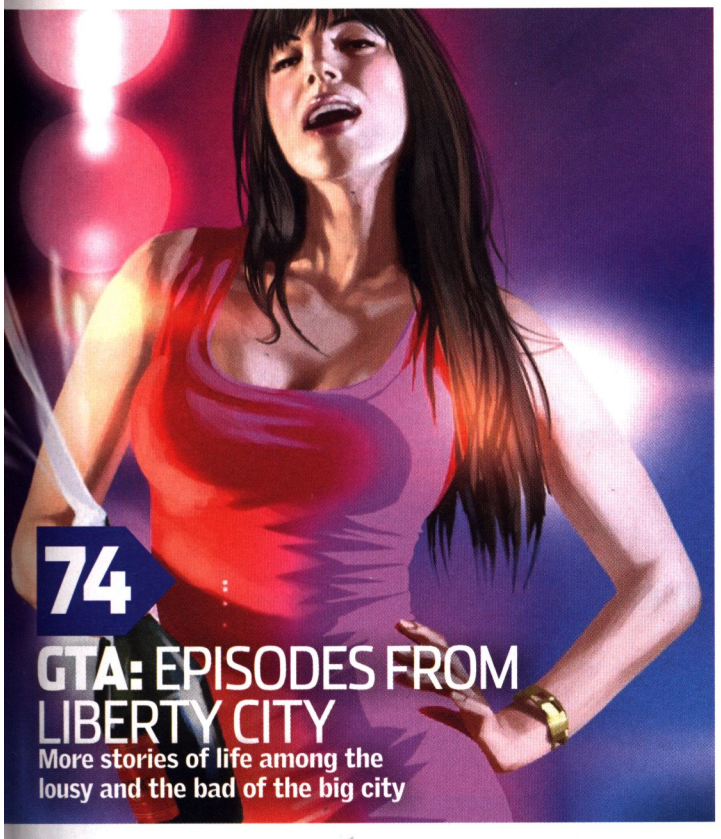


74
GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
More stories of life among the lousy and the bad of the big city

UPFRONT
14 **LEAD NEWS**
16 **SPECIAL REPORT**
18 **CHARTS**
20 **LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT**
22 **INCOMING**
24 **RUNES OF MAGIC**
26 **LOG'S COLUMN**
28 **INTERVIEW:** JOE KUCAN
30 **FEATURE:** DRM
40 **HOT SHOTS:** LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH
44 **BULLETSTORM**
48 **FROZEN SYNAPSE**
50 **ARMA II:** OPERATION ARROWHEAD
52 **THE WITCHER 2**
56 **APB**
64 **CALL OF DUTY:** BLACK OPS

REVIEWS
74 **GTA:** EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
78 **SPLINTER CELL:** CONVICTION
82 **PLAIN SIGHT**
83 **BOB CAME IN PIECES**
84 **MOUNT&BLADE:** WARBAND
85 **MASS EFFECT 2:** KASUMI – STOLEN MEMORIES
86 **SAM & MAX SEASON 3 – EPISODE 1:** THE PENAL ZONE
87 **WOODCUTTER SIMULATOR**
88 **LEAD & GOLD:** GANGS OF THE OLD WEST
90 **BEAT HAZARD**
92 **BUDGET**
94 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

HARDWARE
97 **NEWS**
98 **DEAR WANDY**
100 **REVIEWS**
102 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

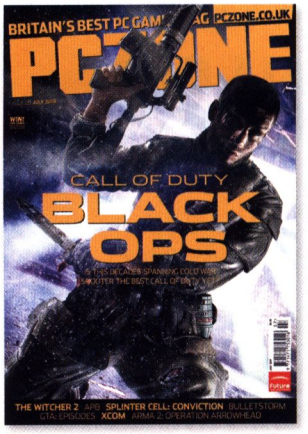
FREEPLAY
105 **NEWS**
108 **DEMOS**
110 **FREEWARE**
112 **EXTEND**
116 **ONLINE ZONE**

LOOKING BACK
118 **RETRO ZONE**
122 **ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE**
124 **DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY:** BIOSHOCK 2 – PART 1
128 **NEVERQUEST**
130 **BACK PAGE**

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

110 FREEWARE
This month slice up circles, jump around a tower, go insane in a dungeon, and play with your size.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



64 **CALL OF DUTY:** BLACK OPS
52 **THE WITCHER 2**
56 **APB**
78 **SPLINTER CELL:** CONVICTION
44 **BULLETSTORM**
74 **GTA:** EPISODES
14 **XCOM**

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 7 words...
So many cover games we've ignored one.

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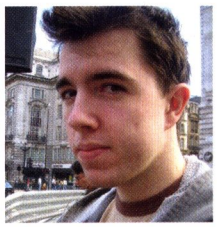
Closing date: 23 June, 2010.
Full offer details on page 62.

Meet The Team

Magazine may contain DNA traces of the following...

WILL PORTER
Prince of freelance
AGE 30
LIKES Being at home
DISLIKES Going to Whitney Houston concerts
FANCIES Beer
FAVOURITE GAME *Fallout (original)*
NOW PLAYING *BioShock 2*

Will is an intense twitterer. To give you an idea of just how intense, here's a day in his life: "I played through *The Passing* thinking about what an awesome map it'll be in Versus." "I'm fairly sure it had a cameo from Mike Skinner, The Streets bloke, at the start too. Or am I going mad?" "Feeling oddly nostalgic for the 1940s. This happens to me sometimes. They all look so happy! Back off Adolf!" You see: *The Passing*, The Streets and Hitler – what a fantastic stream of consciousness.



STEVE HOGARTY
The Man
"This issue will be great," said Steve. "It would take a volcano to mess up my plans for this issue. No, I haven't seen the news. Why?"
NOW PLAYING ***Splinter Cell: Conviction***

DAVID BROWN
The Adolescent
While Steve monologued about *Dwarf Fortress* David countered with tales of *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, and rants about the new *XCOM*.
NOW PLAYING
Left 4 Dead 2: *The Passing*

JON 'LOG' BLYTH
Archduke of freelance
One of the few men we know who has a dress and a papier maché head just lying around their flat, in case of emergencies. Face it: we live in modern times.
NOW PLAYING ***GTA:*** *Episodes*

JAMES IRELAND
Workie the first
The curious thing about Mister Ireland was his robotic left arm, which, unbeknownst to the workie, would smash desks as he passed them by. A destructive young man.
NOW PLAYING ***Dwarf Fortress***

EDWARD FENNING
Workie the second
The curious thing about Mister Fenning was, of course, the fact that he hovered about half an inch above the floor at all times. It was a subtle, but horrific effect.
NOW PLAYING ***Plain Sight***

STEVE HILL
Wizard of freelance
Look at cheeky Steve Hill, he's showing you his middle finger as if to say "look, I don't appreciate you taking this photograph of me, so why don't you just sod off."
NOW PLAYING ***SBK X***

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... an extra few days to sit around and twiddle our thumbs, sorry we're late everyone
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Icelandic volcanoes stranding games in Europe, yeah, let's blame that

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

INFINITY WARD #1 **43mins** Start counting now because...
THE ELECTION **Bloody hours** Hey, we're political.
ACTIVISION **23mins** *slow applause* Well done chaps. Very well done chaps. Very, very well done. Very, very, very well done.
DOCTOR WHO **3min** Face it – those free games will be pants.
DAILY MAIL **4min** Once you get the joke, it's really rather funny
SPOTIFY **83min** It's got 87 variations of *Baby Elephant Walk*.
THE PASSING **13min** It's free for us – take that up the arse Xboxers!
JENNIFER TOLSTOY **8min** We're card-carrying Jennifans. Check out the Back Page.
JAPANESE COSPLAY **27min** Where geekdom, OCD and tailoring meet.
INFINITY WARD #2 **43mins** ...by the time you get here, another dozen quit.

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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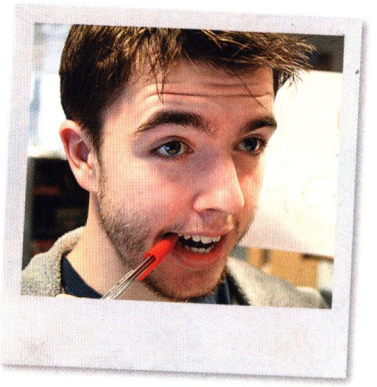
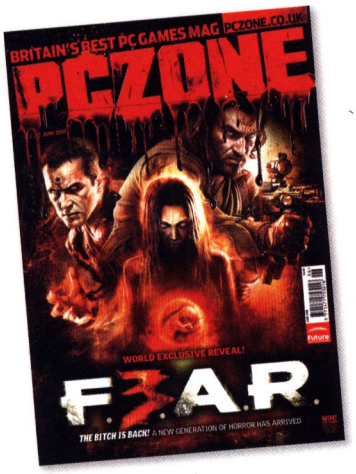
Letters

Steve Hogarty **braves a deluge of digital correspondance, and for what? This?**





WIN!

If your letter is picked out to become the King (or Queen) of these here pages, you will receive your own copy of *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* (or at least another good game we have knocking around the office).

KING OF LETTERS

DOING THE CAN-CAN

Hello! I saw in your "This month *PC ZONE* saved money by.." section that Log bought a can of Relentless.

I thought to myself, "What a perfect excuse to go out and buy lots of cans of energy drinks, drinking them and doing something with them for *PC ZONE*, so see the included photos."

The photos feature *PC ZONE* spelt out in Relentless and Monster Cans with a Monster Energy shot as a full stop, and a big energy drink tower. I also used *MS Paint* to make my own *PC ZONE* front cover. I think you should print it as a special edition of *PC ZONE*.

After reading this I think your "Trousers-off-o-meter" will be around "Knee Trembler" and then when you open the photos it will be "Right off".

Jordan

Our trousers have literally sailed across the room. Thanks Jordan.

DRM ROLL

In response to Lee Curran's DRM concerns *(Beat the DRM*, issue 220), two thoughts spring to mind:

1. *PCZ*'s argument that review scores should not reflect DRM because the DRM may have changed in six months is unconvincing. If there are features which suck the fun out of playing a game, (e.g. poor AI, uneven game balancing, being too short) then all these issues affect the games review score, yet all of them might be fixed free of charge within six months. If DRM is sucking the fun out of a game then please be consistent and factor it into the review score.

2. Log's infamous "it's not all kicks in the dick" review of *Assassins Creed 2* read like an attempt at balanced journalism, but left me thinking "Cloud saves are irrelevant. No disc play and no install limits are both artificial limitations which have been replaced by something far worse." These are not positive features. I have to agree with Lee, it feels like *PCZ* could take a stronger stance in favour of legitimate gamers.

For more on DRM, glance at page 30.

"DRM restrictions will be clearly detailed in the review, but will not factor into the review score"

I appreciate that magazine review copies of a game may not contain the DRM which will be imposed upon gamers. When that happens, the reviewer is having a different gaming experience to the paying customer and is more likely to give higher review scores than we feel the game deserves. Technically, you're reviewing a different product to the one buyers receive, presumably because you want your review to hit the newstand before your rivals. Not entirely unlike reviwing an unfinished game.

Paul Hewitt

All of Ubisoft's PC review code has carried the same DRM as the retail versions, so rest assured that we've suffered through it like everybody else. And our stance will remain consistent: DRM restrictions will be clearly detailed in the review, but will not factor into the review score. This is down to a variety of reasons that we've given considerable thought to. The chance of DRM being deactivated in future is just a part of the argument against lowering review scores. We also have to consider that limitations of an online-only requirement will affect some users more than others.

You can argue that it should affect the score, but we see DRM as a barrier to the game experience, rather than a part of it. We review the latter.

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Darth Revan, pre-unmasking.

LET'S TWIST AGAIN

I remember back in 2003 when I first played games like *Knights of the Old Republic*. The shock when I found out what really happened to Darth Revan. I was bewildered. Now in 2010 I have played my fair share of games but it seems like twists like this are dying.

Can't developers find out new ways to surprise players? In *Fallout 3* if your character's dad was dead by the time you found him it might have added a good twist to the story. Can't we get games that give us a strong sense of belief in one thing, then abruptly at the most unpredictable moment tell us a different and very real truth?

Gone are the days when I couldn't predict the story of a game. These days it's good guy looks for bad guy fighting minions on the way. Good guy meets bad guy in a fight. Good guy wins. Simple. Can't we have the bad guy turns out to be good and good guy turns out to be bad or something like that? (*Haze* had the idea and blew it.)

Let the bad guy be someone least expected. Until then I only play story-based games to know how the protagonist gets from A to B to C, with the knowledge that they will get from A to C.

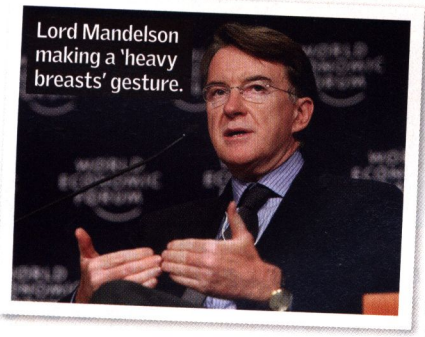
Surprise us devs. I want a good twist in modern games.

David 'Soap' Adejumo

Good twists would be a symptom of a larger want for better plots in general. The fact that *BioShock* is still the touchstone for twists in gaming storylines is depressing.

BILL POSTERS

As I am sure you are aware, the government have recently passed the Digital Economy Bill, which will to come into effect a year from now. This bill has been rushed through without proper debate, many MPs see it as a quick and easy way to crack down on illegal downloaders.



Lord Mandelson making a 'heavy breasts' gesture.

It may be quick and easy but its not fair, take a WiFi network for instance: it will be the responsibility of the owner, not the downloader, to make sure the content they download isn't illegal, and the owner is guilty until they prove it wasn't them.

"Copyright holders will also have the right to shut down websites"

This will mean the shutdown of many open WiFi networks across the UK because the insurance and potential fines will be too much. Which for us means no more online gaming in hotels and public places.

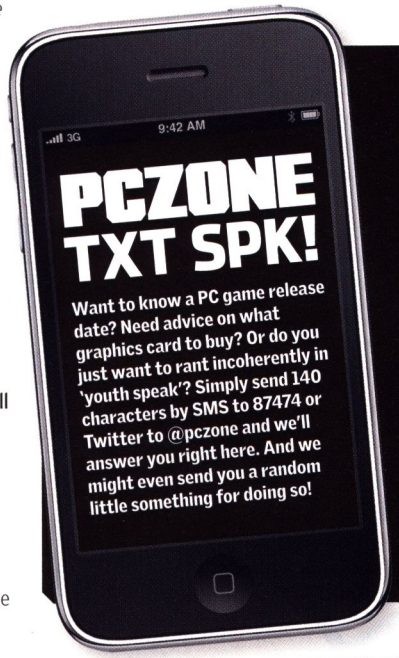
Copyright holders and ISPs will also have the right to shut down websites that contain the slightest amount of illegal content or even a link to illegal content. The bill allows them to do this without warning, so many of our favourite websites may go under.

This bill was created as a result of lobbyists from record labels and game developers pressuring an outgoing government, I think it's high time they controlled piracy some other way, rather than just trying to trap us with legislation.

But there is hope! The ISP TalkTalk have said that they will not submit to the government's demands and have maintained their pledges. Also, many people have protested against it, so maybe, just maybe, it will be revoked.

Matt Hawes

By the time you read this, the government will have changed



Can you can whack a picture of a cat in the mag somewhere?
Luke Westaway

Of course.

Is *Lost Planet 2* coming to PC?
Kevin Popular

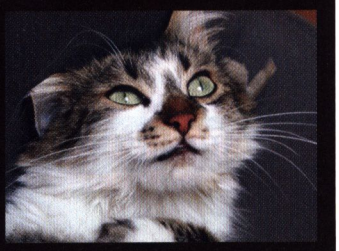
Yep, it definitely definitely is. Preview next issue.

What is *PC ZONE*'s favourite soft drink.
Ian Birch

David's is Steven Seagal's energy drink, Steve's is also Steven Seagal's drink.

How can I get a job at Infinity Ward?
Ian Birch

Just ask. They'll be desperate about now.



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YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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MASS EFFECT 2

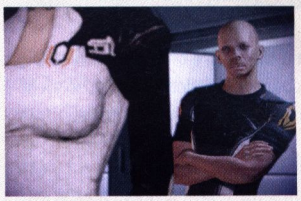
Gareth Hughes
PC ZONE SCORE 93%

Mass Effect suffered from a few flaws, most obviously the combat. Well the combat has been improved significantly. And by god you will use it. Story and loyalty missions are now little more than A-to-B run-and-gun exercises.

Elsewhere, the RPG elements have been dumbed down in ways too numerous to mention here and the side quests are scarce and pointless find and deliver missions.

The writing and characterisation are typically excellent and the game is well worth playing. Just don't go into it expecting too much more than a thinking man's *Gears of War*. The universe just got a little less epic.

YOUR SHOUT 83%



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.

Lord Peter Mandelson © World Economic Forum. Photo by Natalie Behring

Nobody does explosions like Rico.

and the future of the draconian Digital Economy Bill along with it, so we'll hold our tongues on this one.

JUST CLAUSE

Can I ask, how it is possible that you gave *Just Cause 2* 84% in issue 219? I bought this game, you might say on your recommendation, on Friday. It installed fine, but when I tried to play it, no matter which graphics settings I used it finished the loading bit on start new campaign, and then just froze. I could hear the intro video but couldn't see it.

For information I have a quad core 2.8GHz processor with 6GB of RAM and a 1GB graphics card, with over 1TB of free HDD space. When I ran the benchmarking even on lowest settings it ran for 30 seconds then froze. I could shut down using task manager so it isn't my computer, and I can run games like *Mass Effect 2* on max settings without even a small amount of lag.

I have been looking at the Eidos and *Steam* forums for the last day or so and all the comments from other gamers seem to say "we will have to wait for a patch" but there are no official comments – which as this game has been out for about three weeks just indicates that they aren't interested.

"We'll test games on your PC too, before handing out awards"

It's just the opinion of a lot of gamers, most of whom have similar gaming rigs to mine, but can't even play this game.

I mean come on what's going on here? Did Eidos even test this game on anything other than the hardware they used to build the thing?

D Jones

We tested *Just Cause 2* on three different machines before reviewing it, and it worked splendidly each time. Next time, we'll be sure to test games on your PC too, before handing out any Recommended awards.

STILL GOT IT

I decided I would put the decision to renew my subscription in your hands – or to be more precise the hands of Alec Meer – because I decided that the decision to renew would be based on your review of *Command & Conquer 4*. I love the *C&C* series and I wanted to see if you would go with a lot of other reviewers and praise the game or go with the people who actually buy it and say it was pants.

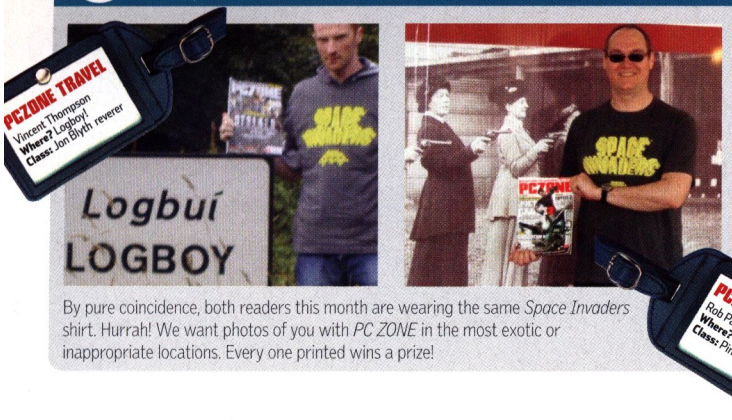
All I can say is I never should have had any doubts and my faith has been restored. I didn't even read the review – I just looked at the score and the comment "Nothing like *C&C*" and I knew that I'd be subscribing for yet another year.

Why they decided to change the game so radically on what was going to be the last ever in the series I'll never know. Personally I think they wanted to try something new but were unsure it would work, but knew if they stuck *C&C* on the box it would sell.

Thanks for restoring my faith in you, now I will just go click the renew button.

Stephen Purvis

AROUND THE WORLD



By pure coincidence, both readers this month are wearing the same *Space Invaders* shirt. Hurrah! We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Every one printed wins a prize!

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"Why can't the games companies accept that the consumer's experience is king?"

Amen. Like Gillian McKeith, we know a dodgy turd when we see one.

BT PHONE HOME

I recently experienced a two day internet outage caused by a problem in the BT exchange. Currently I play a lot of *World of Warcraft* so I thought I'd take this opportunity to open one of the shrink wrapped games that have been languishing on my desk. I looked at the stack: *Left 4 Dead 2*, obviously online play only; *Modern Warfare 2*, internet connection required even for single player game; *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Games for Windows – LIVE* required even to play single player (and certainly to save the game).

OK, I thought, I'll finish off *Osmos*, which is a great little game I got from *Steam*. I expected to be able to run *Steam* in offline mode. However that was not the case. Despite both the *Steam* client and *Osmos* being fully up to date, *Steam* refused to start. This is the second time I've tried to use *Steam* during a genuine internet outage and it will not work for me, even if I disable the network interface. The offline mode works a treat when I'm connected to the internet.

So I was left unable to play my legitimately purchased games purely because the companies involved have created anti-piracy measures that affect me the consumer, and even more annoyingly do not affect the pirates because these techniques are all cracked usually on or before the game is available in the shops.

A cosmos in *Osmos*.

This madness has to stop. Why can't the games companies accept that the consumer's experience is king? This is a lesson that the music industry was forced to learn by Apple. Prior to the *iTunes* Store music piracy was rife and spreading to more and more consumers, partly fuelled by the easier experience offered by the likes of Kazaa.

Apple launched the *iTunes* store and reversed that trend. I'm not suggesting that music piracy stopped, however I think that honest consumers who had been tempted by piracy switched back to purchasing legally because now they could get their music fully integrated into the Apple eco-system, and feel better about themselves.

So back to my games. Do I want to become a pirate? No. It's important to me to support the games developers. Do I want to play the games I buy? Yes, but I'll more than likely continue to follow the pirates to get my no-CD cracks, again for the convenience I gain, and yes I know the dangers of trojans and the like, and I take my own measures against those.

Mark Young

***Steam*'s offline mode is notoriously flaky, yet manages to escape the ire of most users until such time as their internet craps out and they're forced to attempt to use it.**

Meanwhile anti-piracy measures that vilify legitimate users are a growing concern, but one that can be appreciated from both sides of the fence – take a look at our DRM feature on page 30 for Will Porter's insight into the heavy-handed lockdown of our games.

PASSING FAD

Just been knocking about on *The Passing* for *Left 4 Dead 2* and enjoying the Realism Versus mode. I love the way it forces you to work more as a team than ever before and really shows up who's got a mic and who hasn't. Generally, the mic-less ones are getting chomped at the back or being ridden hard by jockeys.

Anyway, why are Valve taking this away? Everyone loves it, so why not just leave it in forever? Do they really need this silly cycle of mutations they seem to be insisting on having?

It's getting right on my tits knowing we'll be back to normal 'easy' Versus by the time anyone reads this.

Jamie Pursglove

We suspect Valve will keep the most popular mutations once the cycle has been completed, so you shouldn't worry too much, Jamie.

We didn't like *C&C4*, which made you like us more.

"I'll continue to follow the pirates to get my no-CD cracks, again for the convenience"

MYSTIC WILL'S SERIAL KILLER

Give me your codes, I will dispense prophecy

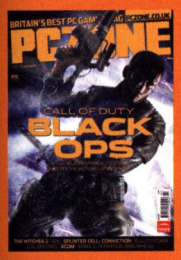
Dear Mystic Will,
I found the following series of vowels, consonants and digits stamped on to the front of a game disc. Since spotting it, I've been stung by a bee. Can you tell me why my life has taken this drastic turn for the worse?
D8BE-MCG35-JAND-UDR8-HJKS
Brian Cox

I hardly need to flex my psychic powers to divine this one, Brian! Just read it aloud! "Debbie McGee and Udder Hijinks". Have you recently encountered the magician's assistant? Perhaps on a dairy farm? Your problems can all be traced back to that fateful day, when you milked a cow with the mirthful McGee.

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it in to letters@pczone.co.uk. Readings are guaranteed 100% accurate.

COVER STORY

CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS



FROM THE POWDERY slopes of Russia's Ural Mountains to the steamy jungles and cities where the Vietnam War was fought, *Call of Duty: Blacks Ops* is going all Cold War on our proverbial arses. This promises to be the biggest *Call of Duty* game yet, spanning over four decades worth of espionage, infiltration and conflict to provide a plethora of different scenarios to explore. At least, that's Treyarch's theory. With the lawsuits and mass exodus of employees over at Infinity Ward, they've suddenly found themselves with all the responsibility of keeping the *Call of Duty* series alive. Find out if they're up to the task.

PAGE 64

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

DIGITAL LOVE

Steve Hogarty

DRM! THE SCOURGE of the high seas. The evil singularity around which all disease orbits. The leading cause of death among young adult males. Over 50? Talk to your GP about regular DRM checks. You may be at risk! Call now!

If our letterbox is any indicator of the concerns of our readers, there are two things getting right up your collective noses: your urgent need to amaze her with your god-like rod, and the dawn of the most intrusive DRM we've ever witnessed. Ubisoft's tirade of online-only releases spearheads a new generation of the legitimate consumer's vilification – but what are these bastards up to?

As hard as it might be to conceive, they're not spending all this time and money on anti-piracy methods just to wind you up. The sum total of their business acumen has led them to these decisions. Decisions which, according to their graphs, will generate slightly more money than grief. From the inside looking out, it makes perfect short-term sense in a market where, like it or not, most of us are stealing games.

That doesn't mean we have to like it: starting on page 30 we investigate the reasons behind the outrageous new restrictions imposed on gamers, how they're succeeding, how they're failing, and how some of the industry insiders reckon it's all going to pan out. If all that's a bit too serious for you, then read Log's interview with Joe 'Kane from *C&C*' Kucan on page 28, in which they discuss the use of the Kane voice during love-making, and Kane's new boy band.

SET PHASERS TO STUN

Will *XCOM* be an con or will it be going straight?

DEVELOPER 2K Marin **PUBLISHER** 2K **WEBSITE** xcom.com **ETA** 2010

FOR A SERIES as long-lived as *X-Com*, it's surprising how rubbish most of the games in it were. Only the first two – *Enemy Unknown* and *Terror From The Deep* – could be deemed classics. After that, it's been all downhill with abominations like *X-Com: Enforcer* rubbing salt into fans' open wounds.

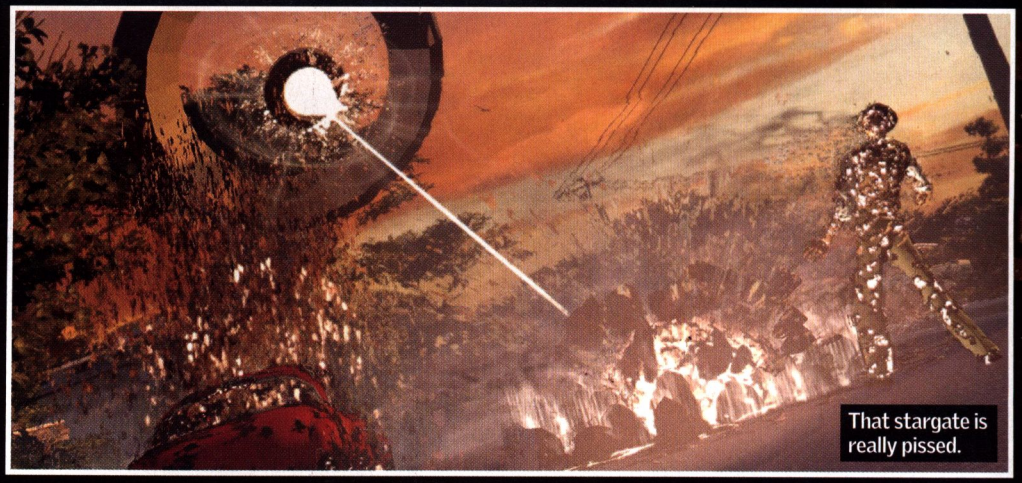
The decision by 2K to revive a franchise that hadn't seen a decent instalment since 1997's *X-Com: Apocalypse* was seen as something of a surprise, even more so when it was revealed it was being made by 2K Marin, the team behind *BioShock 2*. Then the real bombshell dropped.

XCOM will be an FPS where players take control of an FBI agent whose job it is to identify the alien threat and eliminate it. Leaving aside the curious decision to make the player an FBI agent when the whole point of the series is that the agency involved with fighting the aliens is called 'X-Com', we know a few things about what the game will be like and what's going to be in it.

What it is, as described by 2K themselves, is a "re-imagining of the classic tale of humanity's struggle against an unknown enemy". It's very easy to be (extremely) cynical about these things, but positive thoughts could potentially arise from the potential wreckage.

First of all, 2K are making attractive noises about sticking with certain themes from the original, such as researching the alien menace and building bases. Speculation about how this could work is all we have at the moment, but consider a game where you have the original Geoscape mode, mixed in with a stronger storyline and *SWAT 4* style squad-based action when you venture into the mission zone. The thought of that, if done well, is enough to defuse any knee-jerk reaction to the genre change, and the potential quality of *XCOM*.

There are a lot of ifs and buts there, sure. One thing is for certain: *XCOM* is not going to be the *X-Com* that you knew, and perhaps still love to bits. It's going to be new. If it'll be excitingly new, we don't yet know. PCZ



That stargate is really pissed.

STOP PRESS!

ACTI-BUNGIE

Bungie, of *Halo* fame, have signed a ten year publishing deal with Activision. This doesn't imply exclusivity – rather that they've got a game series coming.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Activision's Thomas Tippl has said they're "configuring the new leadership team" at Infinity Ward. As we go to press, over 25% of IW's staff have quit.

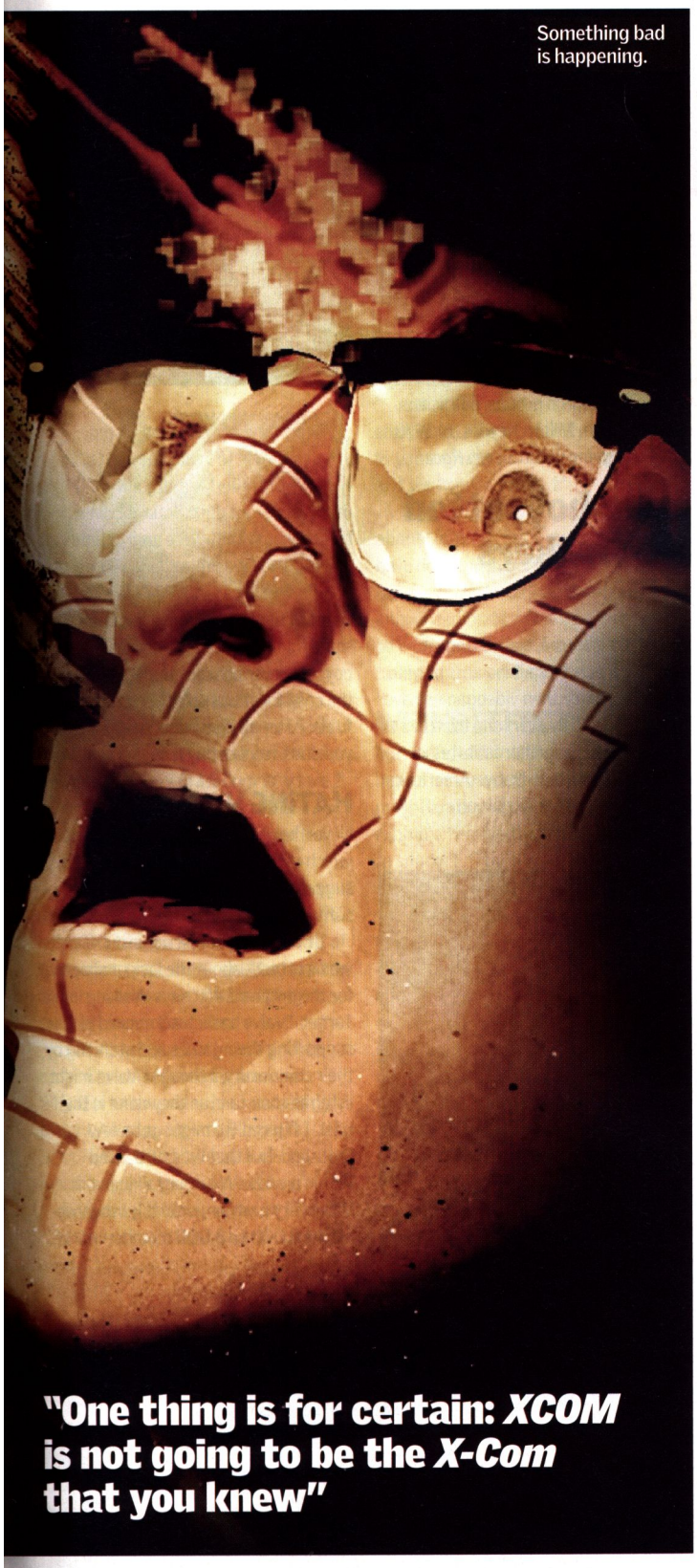
NEW ADVENTURES

Sci-fi fans might like to know the first of the *Doctor Who: The Adventure Games* will be available for download on 5 June. This one is set in a Dalek-ruined '60s London.

30 **DRM**
What the future holds for piracy and copy protection – does it really work?

52 **THE WITCHER 2**
All the details on the return of the swords-and-shagging epic.

64 **CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS**
This year's *Call of Duty* is upon us. Can it be better than *Modern Warfare 2*?



BALLOT CAPER

Last call for long list votes

WEBSITE goldenjoysticks.com

WHILE GORDON BROWN/Nick Clegg/David Cameron/Nick Griffin (delete as appropriate) is celebrating with his cronies in Number 10, you've got an even more important decision to make: what game will you vote for in the 2010 Golden Joysticks Awards? And you've not got a huge amount of time to make a decision either.

The closing date for voting on the long list for nominations is 1 June, so you might even be too late by the time you read this. Let's hope not, as the PC boys could do with your support.

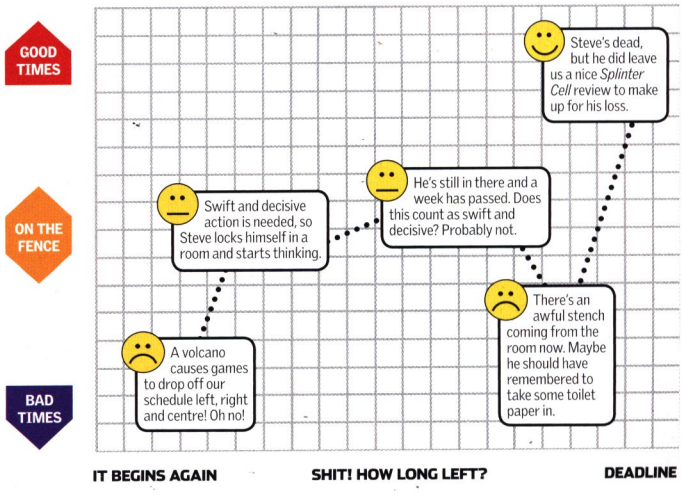
There's a lot of games over at goldenjoystick.com to choose from, so if you're a fan of *Napoleon: Total War* and you want to see it annex the Game of the Year award, be sure to vote. Or perhaps you want to see *Aion* win Online Game of the Year, who knows. The answer is to get on that website and have a quick vote.

This is the 28th year of the Golden Joysticks and they're still the only videogame industry awards you have a say in, so don't throw away your chance to be a part of the democratic process. Vote today (and vote PC).

STUFF

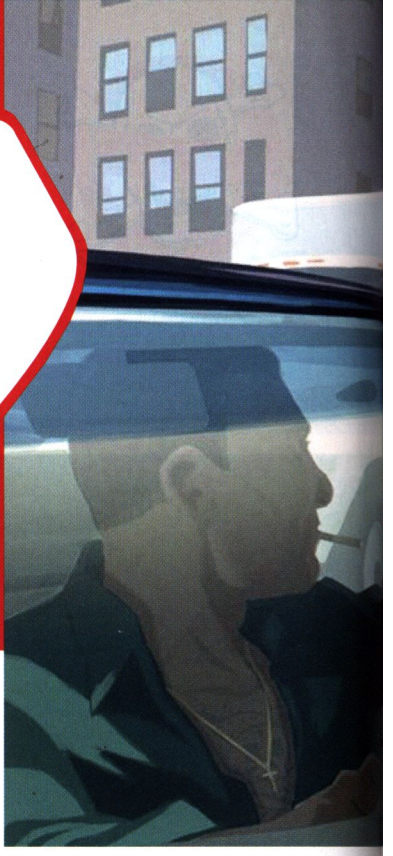
Psst, over here, guv. I've got something to show you. Here, check it in this sack. It's a little ghost horse I found on this website, wow.com. Yeah, it's called a Celestial Steed. You can use it as a mount or something in the game *World of Warcraft*. Some mug on the internet said there were 140,000 chumps queuing for it online after only three hours. Can you believe it? Yeah, anyway, so it's just a horse and it's like a ghost too, so they're charging £17 for it. $2million in the first four hours, they've made. Crook? Me?

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



FIGHT THE POWER

Boycotts are deafening, investigates *Pavel Barter*, but is anyone listening?



IN SEPTEMBER 2009 two *Left 4 Dead* fans, under the pseudonyms of Walking Target and Agent of Chaos, were taken on a guided tour of Valve's HQ and treated to an exclusive sneak peek of *Left 4 Dead 2*, by Valve's Gabe Newell.

The pair had been invited to the studio as special guests after they boycotted *L4D*'s sequel over concerns that promised DLC for the game would be dropped.

"It changed my mind about the slapdash method we had thought was used to put the sequel together," confesses Walking Target. "What we were really interested in was the support the original *L4D* would continue to receive. With another DLC now confirmed, I feel Valve is living up to what they had told us."

The fact a publisher of Valve's weight should pay attention to an online boycott shows how much power protests can have. By refusing to sell *Modern Warfare 2* on its *Impulse* service, Stardock sent a strong message to Activision for packaging the game with Valve's *Steam* client.

"This was something we could not accept," says Stardock boss Brad Wardell. "It is akin to being forced to install a web toolbar in order to use something completely unrelated."

But although publishers may take notice when the masses get hissy, the effectiveness of online boycotts is questionable. After all, the *L4D2* protest didn't stop it being released, and although other online retailers, like Direct2Drive and GamersGate, refused to stock *Modern Warfare 2* it still became one of the biggest selling videogame titles of all time.

Ineffective boycotts have been around for years, only traditionally they were led by church groups, politicians, or Angry From Milton Keynes. In 1976 an arcade game called *Death Race* caused mass furore, even though it looks like a bunch of albino ants playing hopscotch. Since then videogames have been boycotted by everyone from sex workers (the killing of prostitutes in *Grand Theft Auto*) to Native Americans (over stereotypes in Activision's Western, *Gun*).

"Videogames have been boycotted by everyone from sex workers to Native Americans"

Recently it's been gamers who are more likely to launch boycotts. Most of the time, their organisers' motivations are daft: Square Enix didn't blink because fans were angry that *Final Fantasy XIII* was released on consoles and the PC. Likewise *Diablo III* devs at Blizzard haven't lost sleep because some think it isn't dark enough. And boycotts over charges for DLC – as was the case for *Assassin's Creed II* – are futile. After all if you don't want DLC, you don't have to buy it.

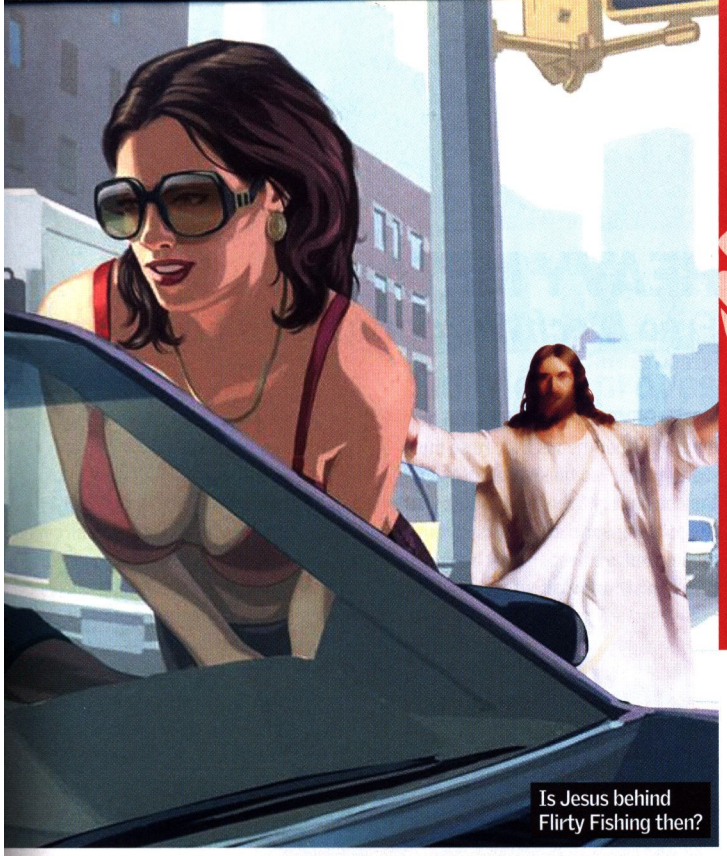
HATING HATERS

Nevertheless, last year's *L4D* boycott, which rallied over 28,000 supporters, suggests carefully co-ordinated campaigns can be heard.

"It wasn't a protest against *L4D2*: it was a protest about the lack of support for the original *L4D*," says Walking Target. "Valve has a track record of supporting their games and standing by their community, I thought Valve might listen to their fans as they done in the past. I figured we might get a few thousand, but that was surpassed within a week. We were talking with Valve very early on, probably when we hit the 5,000 to 8,000 member mark."

A lot of political comment in there.

Everyone else had joined the boycott.



Is Jesus behind Flirty Fishing then?

"And that's for dropping LAN!"

But can gamers change the ways of publishers? The *Call of Duty* fan community were fuming when Infinity Ward announced its abandonment of dedicated servers in *Modern Warfare 2*. It was as insulting as calling your granny a slut, they reckoned. Over 85,000 signed a petition, but the developers didn't dismantle IWNet or add dedicated server support to the PC game. Then, a few months later, most of the leading protestors could be found on Infinity Ward's own matchmaking service, playing the game.

Some protestors attempt a polite route. Christian Sørensen amassed 246,350 followers for his campaign to get LAN support into Blizzard's *StarCraft II* titled, "Please include LAN functionality in your future classic".

"We know this helped our petition," says Sørensen. "Keeping a sober tone is always the way forward. There's no reason to start a flame war with big companies who most likely won't listen to you anyway. So, we'd give this a try, and we know it worked."

Sørensen says he talked to Blizzard about the issue, but it doesn't seem to have done much good. Chris Sigaty, *Starcraft II*'s lead designer, recently announced that LAN will definitely not be included. Instead, fans will get their online kicks from Battle.net.

WHINE EFFECT

Due to the often whiny nature of boycotters they can be subjected to mass flaming. Walking Target, for example, received as much opposition as support: "There were a fair number of gamers that expressed negative views of the boycott," he says. "By and large, many people who could be described as vicious were not very well informed as to why we were protesting.

"We were also frequently covered by online publications who did not do their research and failed to read our reasons as to why we were protesting."

Sensing the aura of fail around boycotts, some protestors attempt different strategies. Lewie Procter, from gaming blog Savygamer.co.uk, recently tried to rally a protest against French publisher Ubisoft against their new PC DRM which requires a constant internet connection. He suggested gamers order Ubisoft games en mass, and then return them to retailers in their droves. Most respondents, however, considered this was too much effort. It could also backfire, should retailers refuse to give out refunds.

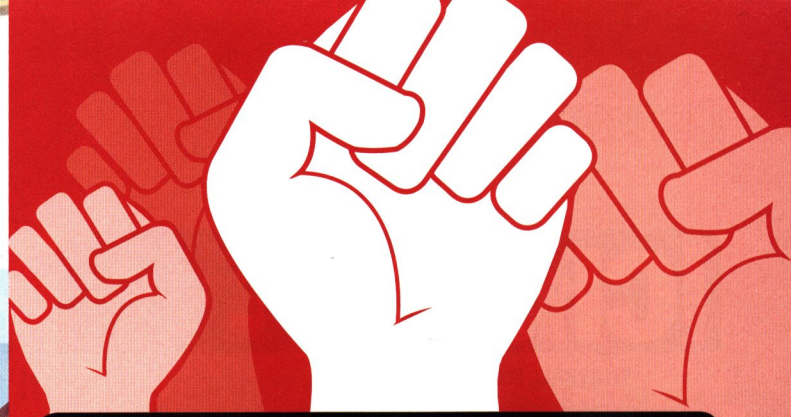
More often than not, boycotts are as ineffective as a two-legged dog. But through strategy and willpower, they can be heard. EA certainly paid attention when consumers launched a class-action lawsuit against them over the use of SecuROM in *Spore* in 2008. Likewise, Microsoft made *Games for Windows – LIVE* free after massive online boycotts.

However, boycotts by online retailers are able to change things, reckons Brad Wardell: "I think they have considerable influence on future titles. There's been a lot of demand for alternatives to Steamworks as well as pressure on Valve to not force the installation of its client and store in order to play a game."

And although boycotts may be a lot of piss and vinegar, they have helped create dialogue: "Myself and other people who were at the heart of the boycott are currently working on ways to communicate better with publishers and developers," says Walking Target. "The long-term solution is not boycotts and protests, but new ways of communicating between players and the people making games." PCZ

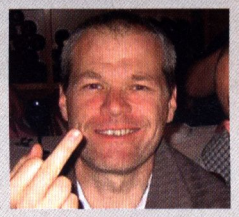
Is there anything you want *PC ZONE* to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

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



DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING

The e-petitions that went nowhere fast

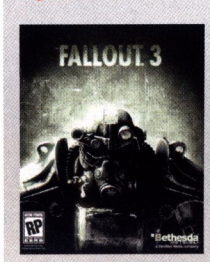


"DR UWE BOLL: MAKE MOVIES, NOT VIDEOGAME ADAPTATIONS"

petitiononline.com/bollnovg/petition.html

An honourable sentiment as Dr Boll is behind such crimes against games and cinema as *Postal*, *Far Cry* and *House of the Dead*. Also a brave one, since he's offered to take on critics in a boxing ring. "We acknowledge that directing is Dr. Boll's hobby, passion, lifetime ambition and it would not seem proper to force someone to abandon their interests," says the petitioner, pussy-footing out of harm's way.

Signatures: 19



"RENAME FALLOUT 3"

petitiononline.com/fo3ren/petition.html

A long-winded rant about how *Fallout 3* needs a different name because *Fallout Tactics* and *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel* were not *Fallout 3* and *4* in the series, and *Fallout 3* has "radical changes that set it aside from the main *Fallout* series". Yawn. "There are further reasons, but we consider them subjective and not necessarily accepted by both old and new *Fallout* fans." Good grief.

Signatures: 155

"PLEASE ADD CROUCHING TO AVP"

petitiononline.com/AVPcrouc/petition.html

One last attempt to have the marines crouching in the new *Aliens vs Predator*. Sadly, Rebellion turned a blind eye and there is no crouching to be found in the finished game. Maybe they should have said "squat".

Signatures: 5

"CLASS ACTION SUIT AGAINST ACTIVISION BLIZZARD FOR DANGEROUS AND DEFECTIVE WORLD OF WARCRAFT MICE"

petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?wowmouse

Paranoid fear mongering about Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* Mouse trying to electrocute the user and being "POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS". The petitioner also alleges that the mouse is cheaply built and "brakes" [sic] easily. Is he trying to ride it up the M1? "When this reaches 10,000 signatures," he writes, "we will engage an attorney to mount a class action suit against Activision Blizzard."

Signatures: 66

"JESUS CHRIST ON GRAND THEFT AUTO"

petitiononline.com/GTAJesus/petition.html

A polite request to feature Jesus in everyone's favourite free-roaming sin pit. "We believe that in order to crush all competition, and please the *Grand Theft Auto* audience, it would be a great idea to include a new character in the franchise – be it through downloadable content or in a possible *GTA5*. That character is Jesus Christ."

Signatures: 12

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by GfK ChartTrack

1	↑	**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**	Issue 214 – 88%
2	↑	**THE SIMS 3**	Issue 208 – 92%
3	↑	**NAPOLEON:** TOTAL WAR	Issue 220 – 89%
4	NEW	**GTA:** EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY	Issue 221 – 86%
5	↓	**BATTLEFIELD:** BAD COMPANY 2	Issue 220 – 84%
6	↑	**THE SIMS 3:** WORLD ADVENTURES	Issue 215 – 78%
7	↓	**COMMAND & CONQUER 4:** TIBERIAN TWILIGHT	Issue 220 – 60%
8	↑	**DAWN OF WAR II:** CHAOS RISING	Issue 220 – 90%
9	↑	**WORLD OF WARCRAFT:** WRATH OF LICH KING	Issue 202 – 86%
10	NEW	**THE SETTLERS 7:** PATHS TO A KINGDOM	Issue 220 – 74%
11	↓	**METRO 2033**	Issue 220 – 80%
12	↓	**DRAGON AGE:** ORIGINS – AWAKENING	Issue 220 – 79%
13	↑	**MASS EFFECT 2**	Issue 218 – 93%
14	–	**MODERN WARFARE 2**	Issue 215 – 95%
15	↓	**SUPREME COMMANDER 2**	Issue 219 – 80%
16	↓	**ASSASSIN'S CREED II**	Issue 219 – 90%
17	↑	**EMPIRE:** TOTAL WAR	Issue 206 – 78%
18	NEW	**JUST CAUSE 2**	Issue 220 – 84%
19	↓	**ALIENS VS PREDATOR**	Issue 218 – 82%
20	NEW	**MOUNT&BLADE:** WARBAND	Issue 221 – 70%

4. GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
Expansions and DLC are riding high in the chart. None higher than this.

6. THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES
This expansion adds actual gameplay to *The Sims 3*. Actually tolerable.

8. DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING
Space Marines go all chaotic. With added genestealers.

12. DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS – AWAKENING
A new campaign, new allies, new foes: it's the sequel that isn't a sequel.

HEAVY METAL

Free *MechWarrior* gets to go ahead

WEBSITE mektek.net

WHEN DEVELOPMENT TEAMS go quiet, it either means they're so busy working hard to finish their project they haven't got the time to talk with the outside world. Or they've got no money and are desperately hoping people just forget about them.

ED-209 post diet.

Fortunately, MekTek, the team behind the free *MechWarrior 4* project, have fallen into the first category. You may remember they announced their intention to release *Mech4* last year, but then nobody heard from them again.

Fearing the worst, especially when a short news item appeared on MekTek's website questioning whether they were going to be able to see the project through to the end, it was with gladdened hearts that we received the news that Microsoft's legal team had given MekTek the green light to send their remade game out to the public.

With this good news, the continued excitement about the *MechWarrior* reboot planned by Piranha Games and the various mods thrown up by the amateur community, such as *MechWarrior: Living Legends* (issue 218) it seems to be a thrilling time to be a fan of things big, robotic and stompy.

Microsoft have also shown that massive multinational corporations aren't always completely fixated on crushing the little guy under their monstrous boots.

GRAND DESIGNS

New look for *GamesMaster*

WEBSITE gamesradar.com

WAY BACK IN January 1993, back before even the mighty *PC ZONE* was born, *GamesMaster* came into existence. Since then it's been known for covering all the gaming bases and featuring, at least at first, Patrick Moore's ultra-politically reactionary cranium splattered all over the pages.

Times change and old men don't necessarily need to pick up the image rights cheques any more. Now, in 2010, *GamesMaster* is growing to 116 pages and is being licked with new paint.

Rebooted right in the cojones, 'Nu' *GamesMaster* is going to give the readers more of a say with a doubled-in-size readers' own section, which will include more contributions from the magazine's social network pages and fan art, debate, competitions and other things like that all stuffed into the hamper. A big old guide to the best games around is also being included to help you take a broader look at what games are out there and which ones you might want to buy. More coverage will also be given to free-to-play and social media gaming.

The new design is going to go live in issue #226, which goes on sale on 21 May and cost you 399 pence. If you're interested in things other than the PC (and why would you be, let's be honest) there are reviews of *Super Mario Galaxy 2, Red Dead Redemption, Alan Wake* and a game about slogging ripped males in the guts (*UFC Undisputed 2010*). There's also a big old exclusive look at "one of the biggest games in the world". Whatever could that be?

STILL THE MAN

Sid Meier proves he's the coding daddy

WEBSITE firaxis.com

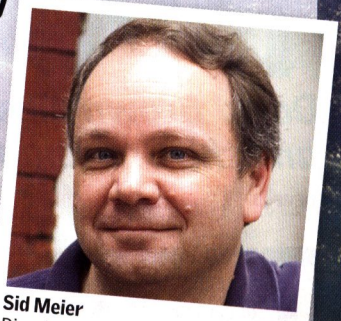
IF YOU'VE GOT 'it', you pretty much only lose it when you, well, lose it. As in, lose your mind or 'go a bit mad'. *Sid Meier*'s far from being mad, though, unless you count his attempts to make us all adore him even more as being evil, despotic and just part of an inevitable attempt to seize global power by getting everyone addicted to *Civilization V*.

You might also scoff at his place on top of the PC gaming "Christmas Tree of Developmental Excellence", but he's just shown you how utterly wrong you are, were and will forever be. You see, Meier went back to his old university a little while ago, ostensibly to help out some young would-be developers who were eager to follow in his footsteps.

There was a competition to make a game in 48 hours. Sid entered (though he also ruled himself out of being judged and, ergo, being able to win any prizes).

Naturally, Meier wiped the floor with everyone else, producing a game that stunned with its complexity, given the time period allowed to make the thing, and the fact it was in 3D. All the students had done was produce pitiful 2D efforts.

"Naturally, Meier wiped the floor with everyone else"



Sid Meier
Director of Creative Development, Firaxis Games

So, long live Sid. If you want to see a video of him talking about the contest, and other contestants being struck by his brilliance, check out snipurl.com/meier48. You can also download the 10 winning games from the contest, but not Meier's miniature masterpiece. Damnit.

GLOVES OFF

DotEmu challenges Good Old Games

WEBSITE dotemu.com

MONOPOLIES ARE NEVER a good thing, so when a website, even one as nice and cuddly as Good Old Games (gog.com) corners the market, it's important that someone else comes along before they get too big, lazy and forget how they got where they are.

Thankfully, DotEmu (dotemu.com) is attempting to thrust itself right into one of the cracks still left untouched by GOG, coming out fighting with a beta version of its service that's currently offering a relatively understated and, well, malnourished line-up of games (at the time we go to print).

DotEmu has launched with a few interesting offers. First up is the *Gobliiins Trilogy* for a piffling £4.22. (Luckily, they haven't included the monstrous fourth game.) Next into the shopping basket is a 16-game *Silmarils* collection, a whole slew of games made by a French company that you've probably never heard of, because they went bust in 2003 and never really released any good games. Even their best ones, the *Ishar* games, weren't the best flick-screen RPGs around.

This is a great time to muscle in on the old games market and the DotEmu catalogue can only increase in breadth and scope. Wish them well and maybe there will be better games to buy in a few months than *Draskula*.

Brown was in fashion at the time.

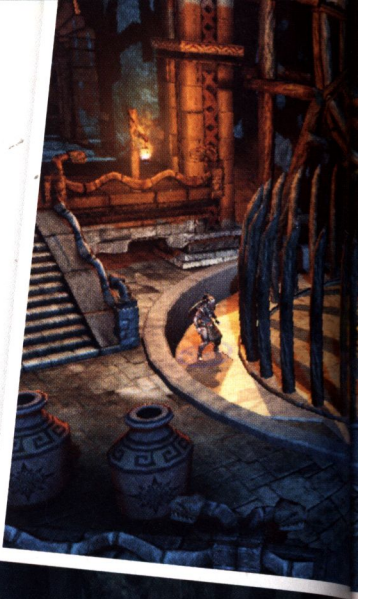
Ah, 10x10ft corridors, how we miss thee.

THE TOMB RAIDER THAT ISN'T

David Brown digs out *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light*

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics **PUBLISHER** Square Enix **WEBSITE** crystald.com

ETA **SUMMER 2010**



Giant spiders. How original.

TRY TO IMAGINE the games industry without the presence of Lara Croft. Since 1996 she's been fuelling the fantasies of men (and women) all across the world, enraging environmentalists with her wanton slaughter of endangered species, and causing numerous heart attacks in archaeological circles with her persistent desecration of ancient tombs and artifacts. She's always been the star of the *Tomb Raider* games, but she's never been on the marquee. Until now.

This is, curiously, the first *Lara Croft* branded game and it's not the only thing that's unfamiliar. Gone is the familiar third-person view and instead there's a zoomed-out isometric perspective, like *Diablo* or *Torchlight*. If this fills you with shock, you needn't fret too much, as *Guardian of Light* isn't the direction the *Tomb Raider* franchise is heading in. This ties into the title change, being marketed as a splinter from the main tree, a download-only project that'll take eight hours or so to complete.

"*Guardian of Light* is being pushed as a co-op experience"

LARA AND CO.

Guardian of Light is being pushed as a co-op experience, so this means Lara isn't alone. With her is a guy called Totec who's 2,000 years old and spoiling for a fight. He's there because another ancient bloke, an evil one this time, has also been unleashed on the world. Lara and Totec are teaming up and, as usual, they have complementary abilities that'll help them defeat the evil.

Lara has a grappling hook, while Totec has spears and a shield, which can be combined to help solve the numerous puzzles. Totec might throw a spear into a wall for Lara to jump onto then she might use the grappling hook to access a distant ledge, flip a switch to lower a bridge, thereby allowing Totec to continue. Interestingly, if played in single player, you only control one of the characters, but the levels change to take account of this.

Circus skills are a must for adventurers.

Even with the perspective change and the introduction of online and offline co-op, *Guardian of Light* has still got a strong connection to the principles of the main *Tomb Raider* series. Lara's the main character, clearly, voiced again by Keeley Hawes, but there are others.

The action is still focused in and around ancient tombs and temples, with plenty of platforms to leap on and that current industry buzzword 'verticality' coming into play. Combat, though, will be different.

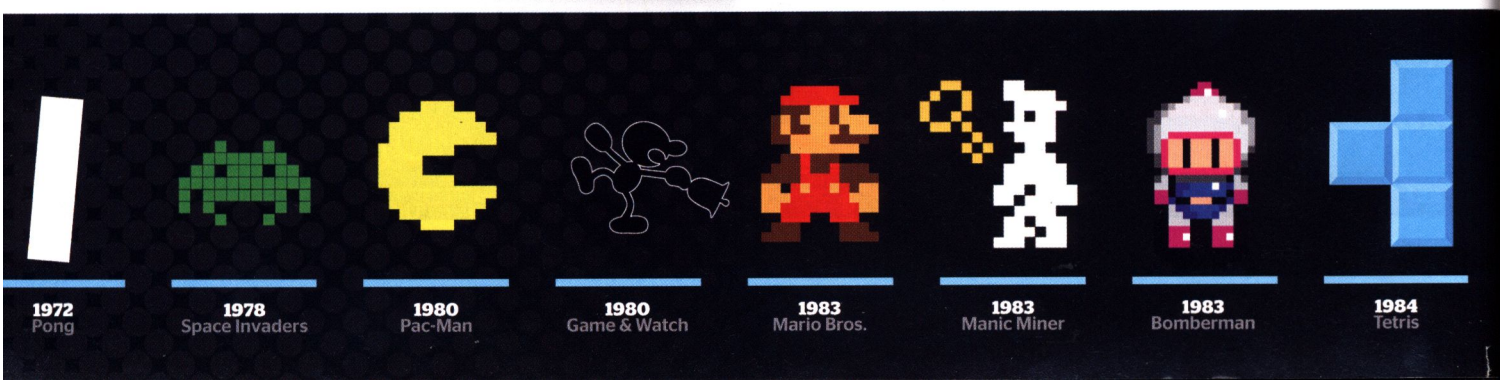
Focusing more on large numbers of enemies, Lara can wield an M16 while Totec rinses foes with magic. If one of you dies, the other one has to hold out until you respawn, so you might consider using deployable bombs and other items to help you survive in the absence of your partner.

NEW RAIDER

Guardian of Light isn't going to replace the *Tomb Raider* series, you can be sure of that. What it is going to do is provide a different context to Lara's world wanderings, while giving us co-op fiends what we crave so much.

The game is going to have puzzles galore and lots of shooting and violence, plus the idea of a game that changes itself depending on whether you are alone or are playing with a friend is very intriguing indeed.

So while there might not be many tigers or leopards to gun down, and you might not be able to gaze longingly at Lara's tight buns like you usually can, maybe you'll begin to admire her more for her abilities than her assets. PSZ



PIECES OF 8
The many faces of Lara

She's had more face lifts than Joan Rivers, with Eidos (and now Square Enix) going through official tomb raiders at a rate of knots. There have been eight official Laras over the years, starting with Nathalie Cook in 1996 and with Alison Carroll currently playing the role.

Nell McAndrew was the most notorious of all the Laras, being fired for posing for *Playboy* without Eidos' permission. (Naughty girl.)

There's also Angelina Jolie from the *Tomb Raider* movies as well, if you want to be pedantic and make it nine, but she never helped advertise any of the games, so we're not including her in our list. The films were rubbish as well, which is another reason. Also, we just don't want to.

Nathalie Cook

Rhona Mitra

Nell McAndrew

Lara Weller

Lucy Clarkson

Jill de Jong

Karima Adebibe

Alison Carroll

"Lara isn't alone. With her is a guy called Totec who's 2,000 years old"

1987 The Legend of Zelda

1990 The Secret of Monkey Island

1991 Sonic the Hedgehog

1991 Street Fighter II

1996 Crash Bandicoot

1996 Resident Evil

1996 Tomb Raider

1997 Final Fantasy V

Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

NOW THAT WE'RE moving into the summer months, some publishers are fixing down when they'll actually get their games finished and out the door. Most of the games we really want are still being TBAed.

The Secret World, the really promising conspiracy/action/horror MMO: TBA. *Diablo III*, the most eagerly awaited click-a-thon: TBA. *Batman: Arkham Asylum 2*, a sequel we'd maim clowns to play: TBA.

The only piece of good news is that *StarCraft II* will be here soon. But Mr Scuttlebutt says the instalments will cost £50 each. That's £150 for the lot, which, considering inflation, 100 years ago would've been about £13,000. Frankly ridiculous.

ALPHA PROTOCOL

This espionage RPG is promising to be everything for every gamer. Do you want to be a Bourne, breaking heads and arms as you spy your way around the world? Well, you can: just specialise in martial arts. Do you prefer to do a Bond, alternatively charming and shooting your way through the bad guys? Check – ramp up your charisma and pistol skills. And how about if you really fancy being Ghandi? Well, you can.

According to a Twitter message, a developer on *Alpha Protocol* managed to complete the entire game without killing anyone.

That the game's missions are designed to be so open you can clear the game with bloodless hands, could make this one of the most innovative RPGs we've seen.

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

After the near-perfection that was *Arkham Asylum* this MMO better be bloody spectacular if it's going to have any impact.

Sony Online Entertainment had also better learn from the mistakes Cryptic made with their two licensed MMOs – *Star Trek Online* and *Champions Online* – and not release a buggy game that's filled with dull missions, once disappointed fanboys and girls complete the tutorials.

We don't know much about *DC Universe Online*, except that it's going to focus on action and fighting, and has been designed to be playable on consoles and the PC. This makes us suspect "Dumb it down" was part of SOE Austin's design brief. But if they give us a chance to watch that pretentious moralising git Superman get his arse kicked by Bizarro, we'll forgive them.

GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY	DISNEY	21 MAY
ACHTUNG PANZER: KHARKOV 1943	PARADOX	28 MAY
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	28 MAY
BLUR	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: FORGOTTEN SANDS	UBISOFT	1 JUNE
DARKSTAR ONE: BROKEN ALLIANCE	KALYPSO	4 JUNE
STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	ACTIVISION	25 JUNE
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	29 JUNE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ARMADA OF THE DAMNED	DISNEY	30 JUNE
LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4	WARNER BROS	JUNE 2010
BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC	EA	JUNE 2010
TOY STORY 3: THE VIDEOGAME	DISNEY	30 JULY
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	27 AUGUST
CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	1 SEPT
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPT
TWO WORLDS: THE TEMPTATION	ZUXXEZ	17 SEPT
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE ENT.	24 SEPT
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	SEPT
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	SEPT
MEDAL OF HONOR	EA	12 OCT

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCT
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	1 NOV
RAGE	BETHESDA	12 NOV
APB	EA	SUMMER 2010
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE SE	LUCASARTS	SUMMER 2010
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	AUTUMN 2010
F.E.A.R. 3	WARNER	AUTUMN 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	WINTER 2010
CRYSIS 2	EA	WINTER 2010
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	WINTER 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD	EA	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDAI	WINTER 2010
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY	SOE	TBA 2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER BROS	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
DEAD ISLAND	TECHLAND	TBA 2010
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION	EIDOS	TBA 2010
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE	VALVE	TBA 2010
MAGICKA	PARADOX	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
THIEF 4	EIDOS	TBA 2010
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	EARLY 2011
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	EARLY 2011
THE WITCHER 2	NAMCO-BANDAI	SPRING 2011
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	AUTUMN 2011
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2	UBISOFT	TBA 2011
BULLETSTORM	EA	TBA 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO	THQ	TBA 2012

2006
Gears of War

2008
LittleBigPlanet

2009
Assassin's Creed II

2010
Final Fantasy XIII

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RUNES WITH A VIEW...

RUNES OF MAGIC

Third Chapter of epic free-to-play MMO *Runes of Magic* looms large

DEVELOPER Frogster PUBLISHER Frogster WEBSITE runesofmagic.com

FROGSTER ARE PUSHING ahead with their epic free-to-play MMO, continuously streaming out the new material, tweaks and changes, showing a commitment that is rare among the seemingly endless multitude of similar development studios eager to get a piece of the free-to-play pie.

First there were just some magical runes, then a demon caused problems in the first installment, *Chapter 1*. After being defeated, there was a portent involving pointy eared folk (*Chapter 2: The Elven Prophecy*) and now we have some ancient nations getting ready to see some action for the first time in *Chapter 3: The Elder Kingdoms*.

This third bumper pack of new stuff will be aimed mainly at experienced players, who'll see the level cap increased to 60.

From here there's the usual array of new dungeons and regions to explore on a new continent, plus a new skill system (which deals with the addition of further skills rather than replacing the old one) and an addition to the game's guild wars element: siege weapons.

GET THAT CASTLE

This part of the expansion will allow players to man ballistae and catapults while laying waste to the defences of your enemy's castle in PvP.

There'll also be new buildings to add to castles and new a battlefield – the Tyrefen Mountains – where you can gain PvP rankings and rewards.

"We have some ancient nations getting ready to see some action"

"It's not much, but this castle is mine!"

Elf seeks tree to hug. GSOH a must.

If you're not a fan of going up against humans then you'll be satiated by the new PvE material on offer in *Elder Kingdoms*.

The main plot thread surrounds a child-king who wants to return the glory days to the kingdom of Dalanis, which can only be achieved, naturally, by wandering bands of ragamuffin adventurers. Levels 50-55 will deal with learning more about the oncoming threat before you delve deeper into danger in order to get to 60.

TAKE THREE

As you read this, Frogster will have begun rolling out the first wave of material for *Chapter 3*, beginning with Patch 3.0.0. This added more than 100 new quests, difficulty levels for certain instances, Guild Castle mini-games, a new collectible card system and the Thunderhoof Hills area.

Free-to-play MMOs are usually treated with a certain degree of scepticism, but Frogster have earned some considerable praise for keeping *Runes of Magic* close to the traditional genre framework. With well over three million users reportedly being signed up after the second expansion and a significant number having joined up since then, it seems their philosophy is popular with players, who want to MMO without the hassle of subscribing.

If you want to see what *Runes of Magic* is about, runesofmagic.com is where you'll be wanting to head off to. PCZ

PRIZE WORTH OVER £1,000!

WIN!

Your chance to win a spanking new PC courtesy of Frogster

IF YOU'RE READING this page, droplets of saliva oozing from your gaping maw, then chances are your PC is a clunky old heap of scrap metal filled with ancient components seared by the heat of overclocking. On the other hand you might just be a greedy swine who wants another PC so you can play some multiplayer games by yourself.

Whatever your situation is, you've got the chance to win a whole PC worth over £1,000 all thanks to our extraordinarily generous, wonderful and philanthropic friends at Frogster.

With it you'll be able to impress your friends with a cacophony of amazing sound effects, the splendour of glorious PC visuals and the dextrous way you wield your mouse in online games, all without having to worry about the whole thing exploding because of the strain.

You'll even be able to play *Runes of Magic*, Frogster's very own free-to-play MMO, which we tell you all about on your left.

Instead of moaning about not being to run things on 'high', just answer the transparently easy question below and you could be saving yourself more than 100,000 pennies.

Q WHAT WAS THE NAME OF *RUNES OF MAGIC'S* FIRST CHAPTER?

A. *RISE OF THE DEMON LORD*
B. *ASCENT OF THE WIZARD-PRINCE*
C. *TOMMY COOPER'S RAGTAG ELF BASH*

SO WHAT'S INSIDE THE BOX?

Cooler Master Storm Scout Case; Cooler Master 500 Watt PSU; ASUS P6T X58 motherboard; 2.8GHz Intel Core i7 930; 6GB Corsair DDR3 RAM; Maxtor 250GB 7,200rpm; LG 22x SATA DVD-RE; XFX GTX 260 896MB graphics card; *Windows 7 Home Premium* (64-bit); two years return-to-base parts and labour warranty (hardware only),

HOW TO ENTER

TEXT YOUR ANSWER TO 87474
Start your message PCZRUNE, then space, then enter A, B or C, then a space, then your name and email address.

TO ENTER ONLINE HEAD TO
futurecomps.co.uk/pczrune and follow the prompts.

By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word STOP at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at £1 plus your standard network tariff rate. Competition ends 15 June 2010, entries received after this date will not count. Standard competition and texting rules apply (see page 129).

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

JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

MODERN WOWFACE

I have just clocked my 112th hour playing *Final Fantasy XIII*, and I'm empty. All those creative indie games etched into the ferrous grey surface of my mind (or however it is minds and/or Etch-a-Sketches work) have been shaken clean. I no longer care about piracy and DRM because I've been running around *FF13*'s one open location, Gran Pulse, working out which marginally more powerful enemy my marginally stronger characters might now be able to take down.

You don't need to have played it to understand. I've just described every grind in the world. But here's the kick in the dick: you only unlock the last stage of character development when you kill the final boss, and finish the game. After that, you're free to return to Gran Pulse, kill all the stuff that was beyond you, earning slightly crazier shit to wear, all inevitably leading back to that final boss, who you'll now be able to kill in a way that's no longer challenging or fun. Sweet deal, eh?

A virtual sense of choreographed progress is what makes pretend stuff great. And I'm not just talking video games: board games, movies, books, everything aside from the squalid and fantasy-free mulch of real life, and the misguided shit that tries to reproduce it. *Woodcutter Simulator* – aside from being a shit game, you represent an aching flaw in humanity.

THE NUMBED MIND

Fiction can be a convenient shortcut to the sort of emotions that take a lot more effort when you're dealing with real people, who keep telling you to get off or they'll call the police. In this game, I got my laptop and started making a spreadsheet of items. I once had a job in which I extracted information from a database, put it into a spreadsheet, and presented it to executives as a report. Tedious, but they paid me to do that because it was my job. Of all the thundering emotions that games like *Plain Sight* and *Just Cause 2* can synthetically feed to me, why have I settled on 112 hours of duty and research? What's wrong with me?

It was a lonely process, too. Not like *World of Warcraft*, in which you at least get to meet someone who'll check out your gear and call you a noob. Here, my only friends were the translucent-skinned writers of megabyte-long plain text FAQs, and forums in which far too many disturbingly obscure fact are assumed to be common knowledge.

With *WOW*, I got to talk with my friends in the language we'd learned together. It wasn't particularly acceptable, but surround yourself with enough people with the same problem as yourself, and you don't have to acknowledge the problem. I'm surprised AA meetings don't descend into awesome vodka parties more often, really. But the *FF* community seems weird and unfriendly – a collection of clueless idiots, angry specialists playing the import, and pube-sprouting shouters who belittle anyone having problems with a boss that only took them three minutes.

"Every game should film your face, and relay that image on the screen"

Basically, I developed what I call Wowface. Around the time of *The Burning Crusade*, when I worked full time in the *Zone* offices, I tried to get away with playing *WOW* during work hours. It didn't work. Not because anyone tried to stop me, but because I was informed that it was obvious what I was playing, from the rhythmic, repetitive tapping of my number keys, and the drawn slackness in my facial muscles. This state of mind, where you can't hear words, but only respond to tones of voice with semi-appropriate noises, is exactly where I've been. There's only one solution: every game should be forced by law to film your face, and relay that image on the screen. How is up to the developer. It could be an inset box, onto the T-shirt of the protagonist, or converted into a texture and tiled across every wall in the game. But it has to be there, constantly. It's only fair – the screen's filled with hypnotic shit: graphics, missions, story, progress bars, collectibles. All it would've taken for that spell to be broken would be to see the pallid unperson I'd become gawping back at me.

I'm going to put this compulsive form of living death behind me, and play something a little less dehumanising. Maybe I'll try out *Sleep Is Death*. That forces you to be creative and sociable. I give myself four weeks before I have a new epiphany that all people are shit. PCZ

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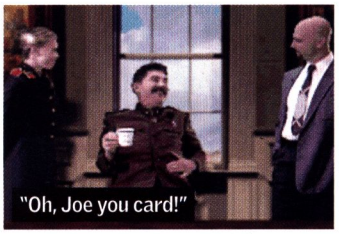
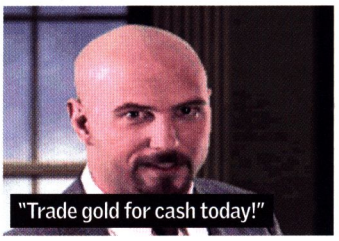
ChangYou.com

JOE KUCAN
ACTOR, GAME DEVELOPER AND IMMORTAL MEGALOMANIAC

KUCAN PLAY THAT GAME

One day *Jon 'Log' Blyth* gave a mean dictator a piggy back...


"Oh, Joe you card!"


"Trade gold for cash today!"

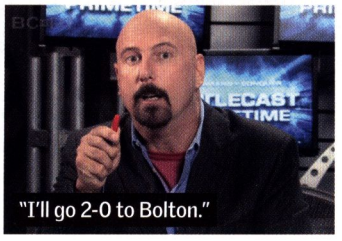
"I took two bottles into the shower, now look at me."

EA PR: Do you mind if Joe eats a muffin while he talks?
Log: Not at all. He can pour milk all over his chest if he likes.
Joe: That's alright. I'm done with this muffin. This muffin is over.
Log: So, it's good to meet you. This is honestly a real pleasure. In fact, I got the feeling, when we shook hands, that it was an inadequate gesture. I wanted to hug you. I bet you get a lot of that.
Joe: Did you play the first one? How old were you?
Log: Early 20s. Too old to legitimately be as excited as I am, if I'm being honest. But it's not just me. My former editor, Will Porter, fondly recalls demanding a hug from you in Vegas.
Joe: Will Porter? I think I remember that name. Sweaty, clammy little guy?
Log: That's how we refered to him in the office.
Joe: Yes, I do remember him. [Speaks into the recorder] I really liked our hug, Will. It changed me fundamentally. It made me a better person, and frankly a little nervous about my sexuality. Thank you, Will, you sweaty little bastard.
EA PR: Sorry Will.
Log: He'll love that. So, are you sick of being asked "what next" yet?
Joe: No, it's the very first time. Well, I'm going to answer it like it was the first time.
Log: It's a pretty insulting question. After all you're not a one-trick pony.
Joe: Well, they know me as a one-trick pony, so it's understandable. I've had some fun in theatre, features, TV, and stage, and I've had some fun as a teacher, and in videogames. Just lately I've sort of philosophically been reminding myself that my whole life is just about enjoying the moments. If someone asked me what was the highlight of my time in *Command & Conquer*, and I can honestly say right now. I didn't have to pay to come here! They actually paid for my a ticket!
EA PR: I just paid for Jon to go to North Carolina.
Joe: Isn't that cool?
Log: I'm constantly amazed. I went to New York! I mean, it was a four hour stop-over in JFK, but still – New York!

"I have a fur-lined sink. My toilet wipes my own ass. It's all automatic – my life is brilliant"

Joe: Other than that, I've had a couple of movie offers. I don't know whether it'll happen, but you know, it's always fun to think about what may be. Hey, how do I get on *Torchwood*? I would love to be in *Torchwood*.
Log: You have to snog John Barrowman.
Joe: I'll French kiss a guy. I watch all of those horrible, terrible science-fiction movies. And I want to be in every single one of them.

Damn bike accident.


"I'll go 2-0 to Bolton."

Log: So it's fair to say you won't be sitting in a room watching old cutscenes from the first *C&C* then. You do seem like an impossibly upbeat man. Are you sure there isn't a tortured soul somewhere in there?
Joe: Oh no, my life is all sugar and spice. I drive a solid gold motorcycle. I eat nothing but caviar, I drink nothing but champagne. I have a fur-lined sink, I mean my toilet wipes my own ass. It's all automatic – my life is brilliant.
Log: They have those in Japan, don't they?
Joe: That's not really a joke is it, they exist. Well my toilet makes me a sandwich, how's that?
Log: And shoves it right up.
Joe: Puts it in your colon for you!
EA PR: I'm glad I've eaten.
Log: So, what's a fun time that you've been spotted by a fan?
Joe: I was in a Canadian airport, and I realise I'm looking at my face on the back of this guy's T-shirt. I thought we were probably working for the same people, or something. But he went off towards a different plane. I met him later on in the toilets, I signed his shirt and everything.
Log: For a moment, I thought you were going to say you did Kane lines at him while he was taking a piss.
Joe: Sadly no, he recognised me. That's how I spend my time. I spend my time in airports with a pen, just looking for people. "I'll sign? Oh! Oh, no? OK."
Log: Did you have much input into the final script? You don't seem like the kind of guy who'd not want to put his stamp on something, either T-shirts in airports or acting roles.
Joe: Both of my parents are English teachers, so the structure and rhythms of language is very important to me. They were generous enough to let me make some judicious cuts, to make it more Kane-ish. Kanerific. Kanelicious. Kanelicious I think is best. Which my new live group. I've got a new boy band, I'm doing auditions, sending out the call for 13 year-old boys.
Log: Which brings me to my last question: have you ever used the Kane voice during the love act?
Joe: I'm not sure what you mean when you use the phrase "the love act".
Log: It's what you do between mortgages and families.
Joe: No, I couldn't do that to a young woman. As it is I have to keep a defibrillator by my bed, just in case I completely overwhelm them with my physical beauty. The Kane voice would be too much. PCZ

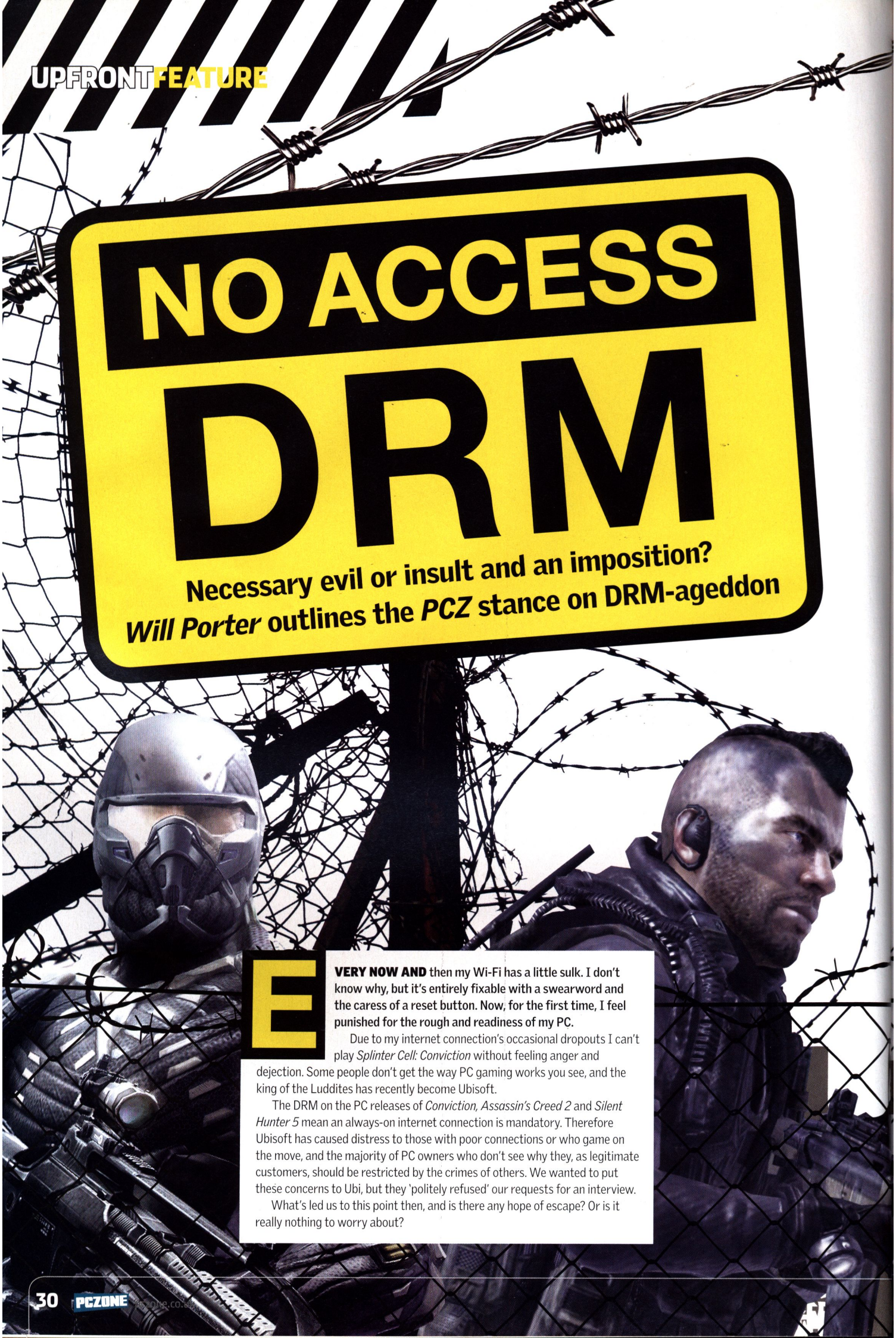
For full interview visit pczone.co.uk

Not the kind of grinding Log had in mind.

"I'm not sure what you mean when you use the phrase 'the love act'"

NO ACCESS DRM

Necessary evil or insult and an imposition? *Will Porter* outlines the *PCZ* stance on DRM-ageddon



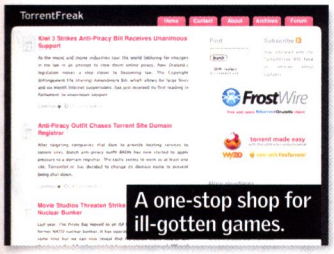
EVERY NOW AND then my Wi-Fi has a little sulk. I don't know why, but it's entirely fixable with a swearword and the caress of a reset button. Now, for the first time, I feel punished for the rough and readiness of my PC.

Due to my internet connection's occasional dropouts I can't play *Splinter Cell: Conviction* without feeling anger and dejection. Some people don't get the way PC gaming works you see, and the king of the Luddites has recently become Ubisoft.

The DRM on the PC releases of *Conviction, Assassin's Creed 2* and *Silent Hunter 5* mean an always-on internet connection is mandatory. Therefore Ubisoft has caused distress to those with poor connections or who game on the move, and the majority of PC owners who don't see why they, as legitimate customers, should be restricted by the crimes of others. We wanted to put these concerns to Ubi, but they 'politely refused' our requests for an interview.

What's led us to this point then, and is there any hope of escape? Or is it really nothing to worry about?

PIRATE SCUM



A one-stop shop for ill-gotten games.

WE CAN'T PRETEND that piracy isn't an issue for PC gaming. According to 2009's estimated total download charts from TorrentFreak (torrentfreak.com), the PC version of *Modern Warfare 2* was downloaded 4.1 million times, but a comparison to an estimate of 270,000 US sales in the same period provides some stark relief. Meanwhile TorrentFreak reckons that pirate versions of the Xbox 360 version were obtained 970,000 times, as compared to six million sales in shops over same period.

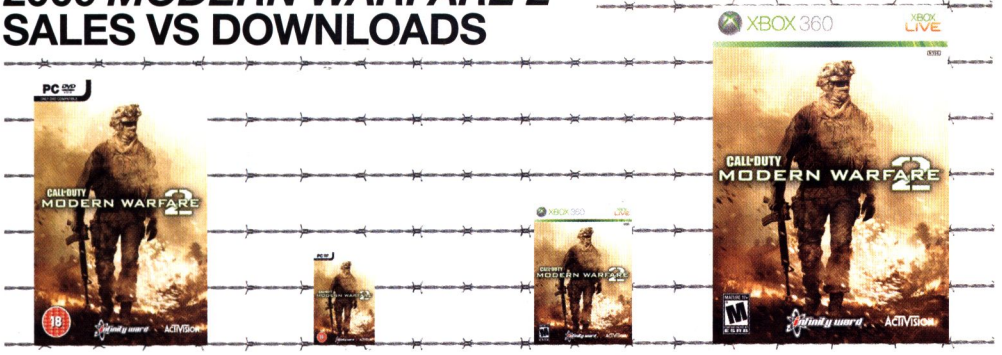
PIRATE PROBS

Sure, you can argue about figures being affected by the consolification of the game and the targeting of the marketing, but for publishers who talk in raw cash, the pattern is still writ large: a need to favour the console in cross-platform releases, and to lock PC games tight against the forces of piracy. It's debatable, but also understandable.

Of course, you can't assume that an illegally downloaded game is the same as a stolen purchase – there's no evidence that people would have bought a game in any case. The hugely pirated *Crysis* is thought to have been downloaded on a whim by a large proportion of people who wanted to try it as a benchmark rather than a game.

Then again, there can only be a negative effect on retail sales – with added factors such bugged versions distributed by pirates spreading negative vibes around the internet. Sometimes, as with the original *Assassin's Creed*, this occurs before the game is released. Ubisoft claim 'irreparable damage' was done by a pre-release copy of that game, which included a purposefully placed show-stopping bug, being released on the internet.

2009 *MODERN WARFARE 2* SALES VS DOWNLOADS



PC
4,100,000 ILLEGAL DOWNLOADS

PC
270,000 COPIES SOLD
(US retail)

XBOX 360
970,000 ILLEGAL DOWNLOADS

XBOX 360
6,000,000 COPIES SOLD
(US retail)

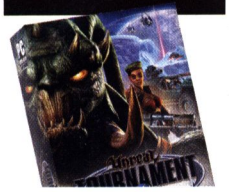
"You can't assume that an illegally downloaded game means a stolen purchase"

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

20th CENTURY
Codewheels and checking words in manuals ruled the roost. Also: grass was greener and the sun shinier.

CRACKS N' HACKS

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM



2001

Unreal Tournament 2004 heralds the new world of game activation. And the advent of SecuROM.

THE QUESTION PUBLISHERS face isn't "Will our game be cracked?" but whether it'll happen in days or weeks. Or even if the game will be leaked and appear online before the official release, as happened with *Far Cry 2, Spore, Assassin's Creed* and *Fallout 3*.

Estimates place over 50% of a game's illegal downloads as happening during its release week, when anticipation is highest and the publisher's marketing budget is being splashed around. So DRM has often become a holding measure against pirate groups such as Razor 1911 and Skid Row (both of whom refused to answer requests for interviews) whose cracks are as inevitable as sunrise.

HOLDING ACTION

BioShock may have caused controversy with its online activation, limited installs, poor messaging to consumers, and SecuROM DRM that stays in your PC after the game is removed, but it still took 13 days for it to be hacked – a minor triumph. Of course the adverse publicity harmed 2K Games' reputation with gamers, showing that moderation is required in these matters.

The other day one hazard is for servers (and customer services) to be bombarded with the needs of those who've installed pirated versions of games. Notably, Gas Powered Games approach to copy protection with *Demigod* took its servers down, as 18,000 legitimate buyers logged in alongside over 100,000 pirates.

Up until now, DRM has been about stemming the inevitable tide, rather than assuming that a game will be safe from being cracked forever.

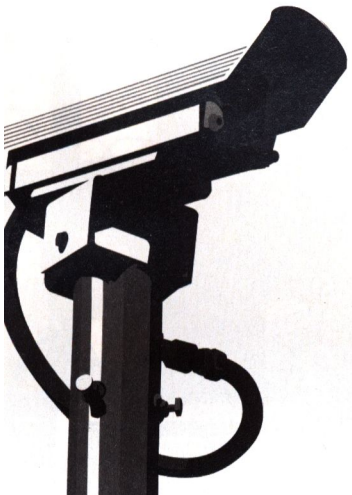
50%

estimated percentage of a game's illegal downloads occuring within the first week of its release

FAR CRY 2, SPORE, ASSASSIN'S CREED AND FALLOUT 3

all appeared online before their official release

BioShock's online activation was more Big Brother than Big Daddy.



"*BioShock* caused controversy with its online activation, limited installs, and SecuROM"

Far Cry 2: downloaded thousands of times before it hit the shelf.

Miles Jacobson, Sports Interactive

THE INDUSTRY INSIDER'S VIEW

UBISOFT AREN'T THE only ones who have suffered from an attack on their servers through DRM backlash. Sports Interactive's Miles Jacobson speaks candidly on the issue of those who push through the *Football Manager* turnstiles without paying.

Q To what extent are *FM* games pirated? How do you assess how many of these downloads are lost sales?

A I can currently only look at figures for one particular year, where we had hooks in the copy protection system we used to show who was playing legit or pirated copies. Seventy per cent of people playing the game were playing pirated copies. This hook was removed, but late in the day, so this figure is likely higher in reality.

There is no way to know how many of these are lost sales. My estimate is 20%-30% of these would purchase the game if there was no other way for them to get it, but we can never be sure of that. And, to be frank, that's not really the point as far as our anti-piracy measures are concerned. We already provide a lengthy demo for people to play to decide whether *Football Manager* is value for money or not, so don't believe those pirating the game have any reason to in the first place!

Is the copy protection attached to new *FM* releases regarded as a piracy solution, or is it a stopgap measure to prevent damage to week one sales?

We have only used DRM once, and that was with *FM2009*. We have used other copy protection systems before and since, but not DRM. The idea of it is to be a piracy solution. It's just no one has found something yet that works in that way! People and companies will continue to try, just like people have tried to create solutions to stop people breaking into cars and houses. At some point, someone may succeed, but at the moment, anti-piracy measures work only as deterrents to some.

What problems did Sports Interactive come up against in with the DRM in *FM2009*?

The only time we have used DRM, the system we used was hit by a massive denial of service attack on the day the game was released. This stopped legitimate customers from being able to authenticate their games. It was the worst 48 hours of my career to date, and it was dealt with as quickly as possible.

I still don't understand, and never will, why there are people out there so determined to ruin other people's enjoyment of the internet by doing DoS attacks – it's an alien concept to me.

What do you make of the current fashion of publishers demanding a permanent online connection? Is the outcry from the PC community justified?

Personally speaking I'm not a fan, as it would stop me being able to play PC games on my laptop whilst travelling, which is when I'm most likely to be playing games.

Would a similar online-only scheme ever work for *Football Manager*?

It works for *Football Manager Live*, because that's an online game. I'm not looking at solutions that involve this kind of system, although online-only authentication is something that is brought up regularly, and would be considered if we can get around any possibility of DoS attacks.

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

2005

On launch *Half-Life 2* required online activation and a *Steam* account. Valve immediately become the bogeyman.

THE UBISOFT DIKTAT

7hrs

the duration a denial of service attack brought down some of Ubisoft's authentication servers

THE DECISION TO lock Ubisoft games tightly to an internet connection has not come out of the blue – as a company they've experimented with copy protection more than most. For example, 2008's *Prince of Persia* came free of DRM – a move widely seen as the company testing the water for their future policies. Whatever they discovered clearly made them decide to move over to the other extreme: the tyranny of Uplay.

With save games stored externally and a constant online connection required to allow code that was missing from the game players received buying it, to be downloaded, rather than a simple online activation, Uplay has been successful at keeping the pirates at bay. But in terms of keeping them out wholesale it has failed.

Pirates operate in moody lighting.

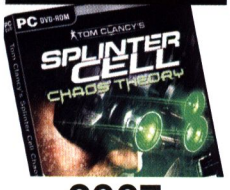
HACKED OFF

Early hack attempts provided playable, yet incomplete, versions of *Silent Hunter 5*, and now *Assassin's Creed 2* has been hacked and can be played to completion. The process to actually get it going, however, is a real faff. The Uplay system is certainly still putting off casual pirates. Ubisoft claim that their system will "evolve and improve", making this round one of a series of bouts against the pirates.

Yet the public relations storm that has surrounded the issue is something of a disaster. Denial of service (DoS) attacks brought down some of Ubi's authentication servers for seven hours, and Ubisoft's name has certainly been muddied.

Prince of Persia was DRM-free, and a telling experiment...

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM



2007

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory has Star-Force. Anti Star-Force campaign leads to a dropped lawsuit against Ubisoft.

"2008's *Prince of Persia* came free of DRM"

THE OTHER OPTIONS

NICHOLAS LOVELL, FOUNDER of Gamesbrief (gamesbrief.com), is an expert in the business of gaming. We got in touch to find out how increasingly stringent DRM demands are affecting the moneymen of gaming, and just how piracy is changing the PC gaming we're used to.

"They are trying to reduce piracy. I think that they'll succeed, but I also think that they'll reduce their sales. That's surely not the objective"

Q **What do you make of the current anti-piracy precautions that we're seeing on the PC?**

A Defeating piracy is a fine balance. Publishers need to protect their investment in intellectual property without alienating their paying consumers. Disc-based DRM has had its problems and is always cracked, but its existence is, at best, a deterrent and, at worst, a clear reminder to pirates that they are stealing. Always-on requirements have tipped that balance against legitimate customers. There is now no doubt in my mind that pirates now have a better experience than legitimate consumers.

Are current publisher measures too draconian, or are PC gamers being too sensitive?

Not only are they too draconian, they are bizarre. *Steam* has shown how you can have a balance between regular authentication checks and the ability to play the game without a permanent internet connection. It seems crazy to me that Ubisoft didn't emulate *Steam*, which by some estimates has more than half the market, and instead went for their own, draconian system.

My belief is that Ubisoft are targeting the wrong metric. They are trying to reduce piracy. I think that they'll succeed, but I also think that they'll reduce their sales. That's surely not the objective.

In Ubisoft's position, and indeed EA's, what else could they have done other than enforce an always-on internet connection on consumers to fight piracy?

Tim O'Reilly once said that the greatest issue facing any author is obscurity, not piracy. The same is true for games. Publishers spend a ton of money on promoting its games. For *Modern Warfare 2*, the marketing and distribution budget was four times the size of its development budget. So there are ways to see piracy as the start of a relationship with a future customer, not theft.

Project Ten Dollar, EA's way of rewarding people who buy the original game at retail [this is EA's marketing drive to include free DRM with store-bought games], is a good example of how to generate revenue from secondhand (and pirated) material. I think it's a great use of a new business model to reward legitimate, paying, supportive customers, and not punish them.

How else could they do it? Give the whole game away entirely for free, make it small, and charge for DLC. Investigate a virtual goods model (by most estimates, Zynga [creator of *Mafia Wars* and *Farmville*] is now more valuable than Ubisoft.) Slash the marketing budget and rely on pirated copies to spread the word about how good your game is, then charge for additional elements. In short, experiment to see how you can add value to your users, not to see what you can take it away.

In what other directions is PC gaming evolving as a reaction to the rampant piracy that plagues it?

PC gaming is in rude health, yet selling boxed products at retail is in terminal decline. We are seeing games that charge subscriptions, and games that are monetised entirely through virtual goods. Always-on DRM is not wrong per se. It's just a huge mistake to charge gamers a huge premium for their content and to limit their ability to play it in a way that pirates are not limited.

Is the change in PC gaming a good thing?

Unequivocally, yes. Publishers are obsolete. Their business model evolved when it was incredibly expensive to distribute a game. Publishers became the gatekeepers determining what got made and their focus was on reducing risk. But now we don't need gatekeepers because distribution is so close to free as to make no odds. Sure, we need the skills of a publisher: marketing, finance, etc, but we don't need their risk management any more. We're in the very early days, but in the long term, the changing business model will be fabulous for PC gaming.

It's my belief that Ubisoft is hastening this process, by making legitimate, boxed, PC games sufficiently unattractive to consumers to drive them away to other forms of PC gaming entertainment. Sometimes, even as an analyst and a former investment banker, the foolishness of big companies makes my jaw drop.

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

2008

BioShock is released. DRM only allows the game to be installed twice. The install limit was removed in 2009.

NO ACCESS DRM

THE WAY AHEAD, AND *PC ZONE*'S POSITION

PC GAMING HAS always been about autonomy, the creation of your own network of favoured programs and hardware. And the imposition of a company to demand strict adherence from customers who have committed no crime is several steps too far.

What's more, permanently online connections may be the norm in the USA, Canada and South Korea, not globally. Just as we baulked at *Steam*, we coughed up bile at Ubisoft's Uplay.

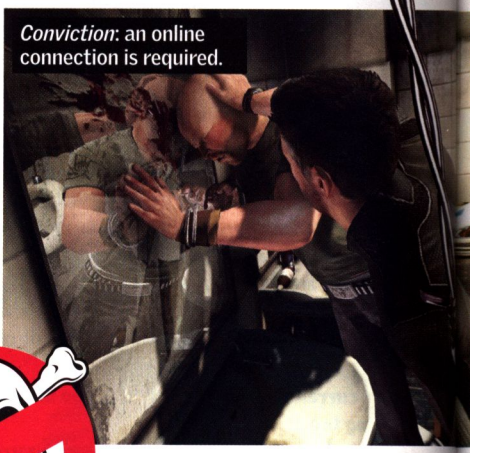
BAD MOVES

The motives behind its online-only policy are understandable. But its execution is heavy-handed in the extreme.

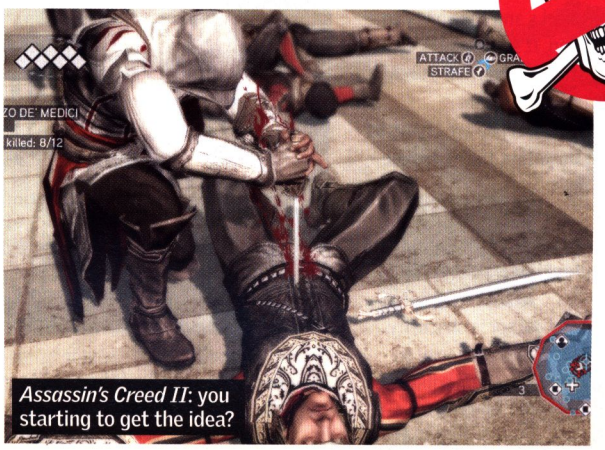
Things aren't all bad though. Piracy is taking PC gaming in new directions. Broadband brought torrents – an ease of piracy beyond having a mate with a CD burner – but it's also brought ways in which gaming can adapt and evolve. Microtransactions, free games with paid-for content, subscriptions, in-game reward systems – for we PC gamers, piracy might just be the thing that revitalises PC gaming, for both players and publishers, and makes it stand out from the console crowd.

In the immediate future, the reason that *Assassin's Creed 2* and *Splinter Cell: Conviction*'s demands have garnered a little more outcry than EA's

Settlers 7: an online connection is required.



Conviction: an online connection is required.



Assassin's Creed II: you starting to get the idea?

Even bloody submarine games are online-only.

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

2008

Spore authenticates after installation and when online, up to three installs on launch. Later increased to five.

"The public now expect information to be free, and it's going to be very difficult to reverse this expectation"

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

2009

Ubisoft release *Prince of Persia* free of DRM. EA release *The Sims 3* free of online DRM or install limits.

similar policies are because games like *C&C4* have been built with an online element that infiltrates the single-player. To this end, in the short term increasingly large PC games will find themselves filled with online hooks: centralised on publisher servers (*APB*), peppered with online achievements and potential downloads (*Dragon Age: Origins*), and attempts to separate gamers from dedicated server gaming (*Modern Warfare 2*).

The prevalence of digital distribution platforms such as *Steam* (whose front-end is relatively easy for pirates to circumvent, even if Steamworks might change this) will also come into play. The fear of a *Steam* account being tarnished through playing a pirated game online is a real, and will ultimately put off casual illegal downloaders.

Although the mainstream media has been achingly slow to realise it, we now live in a download society: people are used to getting entertainment online just for the cost of a broadband link. Whether we're talking downloaded episodes of US-shown *Lost* or free online content from newspapers and magazines, the public now expect information to be free, and it's going to be very difficult for the entertainment and information industries to reverse this expectation.

Some are clever about it, like Comedy Central showing *South Park* knowing that a random Chinese website will do the honours, but others are being dinosaurs – like Rupert Murdoch's decision to charge for news from his newspapers' websites. Right now, Ubisoft and their ilk are making themselves look like a dinosaurs through their heavy-handed approach to combating piracy. If publishers want to fight piracy, they've got to do it in partnership with the customers who want to enjoy their services and products. We are not the enemy.

Above all publishers have to show that they understand how PC gaming works and why we love it so much. PCZ

"If publishers want to fight piracy, they've got to do it in partnership with the customers"

Dragon Age's DLC warded off pirates.

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM

2010

Ubisoft launch the hated Uplay DRM that demands a constant online connection. EA follow a similar path with *C&C4*.

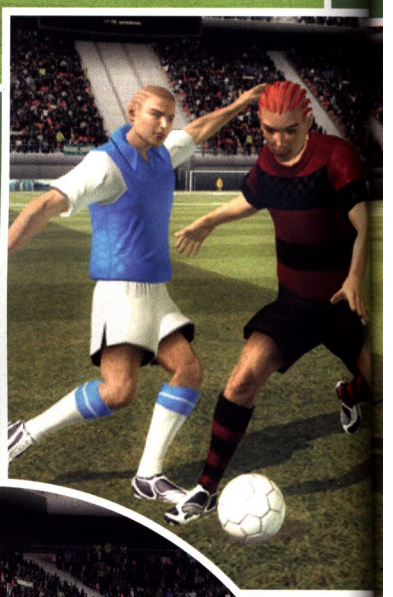
Experience the fame and glory of foot-to-ball.

ETA **OUT NOW**

FOOTBALL SUPERSTARS

The free-to-play online sports game that delivers the teamwork of football in a brand new way

DEVELOPER Monumental Games **PUBLISHER** CyberSports **WEBSITE** footballsuperstars.com



Players can be male or Katey Sagal.

GUMMY 'GUMS' BEAR takes to the field for his first match, a newcomer to football with everything to prove. He has no skills yet, but his natty faux-hawk already makes him look the part.

The opposing team kicks off and Gums darts in, stealing the ball and rushing down the left flank. With opposing players hot on his heels, he crosses the ball into the centre, where it's swiftly headed into the net by a teammate. The goal scorer gets the glory, but Gummy's efforts throughout the rest of the game earn him Man of the Match After only a single game *Football Superstars* reveals the reason it's so compelling: it nails the competition and the teamwork of football.

Where most football games put you in control of an entire team, *Football Superstars* works differently. A free-to-play massively multiplayer game, you directly control a single footballer you create yourself. That means every other player on the pitch, goalkeeper excluded, is also controlled by another human. This has two results. The first is that every

Looks like you need to go back to the gym.

Each player is human-controlled.

You can even customise your character.

successful pass feels satisfying because you're not just fighting the other team, but working cooperatively to do it. The second is that you're competing against not just your opponents, but also your own team's players; for the money and experience that unlock new skills and equipment, and the fame points that let you live the lifestyle of a footballer.

After creating your character, you enter the game in a coastal city designed like a footballer's Mecca. It's there to give you everything you need to become a footballing legend. There are training facilities, where computer-controlled coaches teach you the game's basics. Here you'll learn how to control your player via the third-person perspective and first-person style controls to shoot, tackle and pass. It's intuitive enough that you can pick it up right away, but an RPG skill system provides considerable depth with passive buffs and activated time-limited boosts. The first of these you'll gain will give you basic dribbling abilities, letting you feint in one direction while quickly speeding around players in the other.

GYM'LL FIX IT

The city contains a gym where you can trade your money and XP to level up Agility, Speed, Spatial Awareness, Strength and Stamina. Gums didn't need any skills or levelling to be immediately useful on the pitch in a Five-a-Side friendly, but both are essential if you're going to compete in larger 11-a-side matches. But *Football Superstars* aims to provide not just the on-the-pitch experience of being a footballer, but the lifestyle and celebrity as well. To do this you need to earn Fame Points, by buying fancy clothes (or penguin mascot suits) in the city's many clothes shops, by drinking at trendy restaurants, and by trading experience for interviews with newspaper, radio and TV journalists. Those earned Fame Points then dictate how much money you gain for each match, letting you go from poor Local Newcomer to wealthy Household Name and beyond.

"Fame points let you live the lifestyle of a footballer"

While the game is free-to-play forever, experienced players who want to explore further can pay £5.99 a month for a Premium account that lets them create their own Player-Controlled Teams. The equivalent of a *World of Warcraft* guild, these teams place you as the manager of a football team of real human beings. You design the logo and strip. You choose the players. You promote players to coach, team captain, or scouts. You take on the world.

Football Superstars is available to download and play now from footballsuperstars.com.

HOT SHOTS

LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

DEVELOPER Snowblind Studios **PUBLISHER** Warner Bros **WEBSITE** warinthenorth.com **ETA** Spring 2011

WHEN A SUCCESSFUL franchise gets milked too much, the teats shrivel and the tasty gaming milk curdles and turns into a fetid paste. That's what happened in *Lord of the Rings: Conquest*, but Warner believe they can reinvigorate those teats and get the juices flowing the white stuff again.

Enter *Lord of the Rings: War in the North*, an action-RPG set in the seldom-explored northern areas of Tolkien's Middle-earth. It's a crowded marketplace the game will be coming into, but with the strength of the Tolkien license behind it and, hopefully, some honest appraisals of the mistakes made by other studios with their games, Snowblind and Warner could be onto a winner.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. RING PIECES

War in the North is going to be focusing on a number of aspects of Tolkien lore, mixing in a number of concepts from the books and the films. According to Warner it's going to be a mature RPG. We imagine it won't be the kind of mature that sees Gandalf and Frodo indulging in a bit of man-on-hobbit action. (Although some kind of elf romp might not go amiss, but we digress.) It just means there will be some blood in it a bit. Maybe some heads flying off.

2. FRIENDS REUNITED

One of the major selling points is going to be online co-op play, with three people given the opportunity to knock orc heads together in Aragon's name. As a group, you'll be exploring the more mysterious lands of the north, customising your characters and levelling up, the whole RPG shebang. It's being developed by Snowblind Studios, who were responsible for *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*. They've never made a PC game before in their company's history, but that doesn't mean they won't surprise us.

3. SPELLBOUND

A contentious issue surrounding recent *Lord of the Rings* games is the representation of magic. In Tolkien's works magic is only used by Gandalf, Saruman and their three fellow Istari, yet it's always present in fantasy RPGs. As you can see in this image, the guy with the light coming out of him must be a spellcaster, so if you're a stickler for fidelity to Tolkien's lore, you might be gnashing those teeth right about now. Still, it does mean there'll be some whiz-bang special effects and spells to play with.

4. TALK TALK

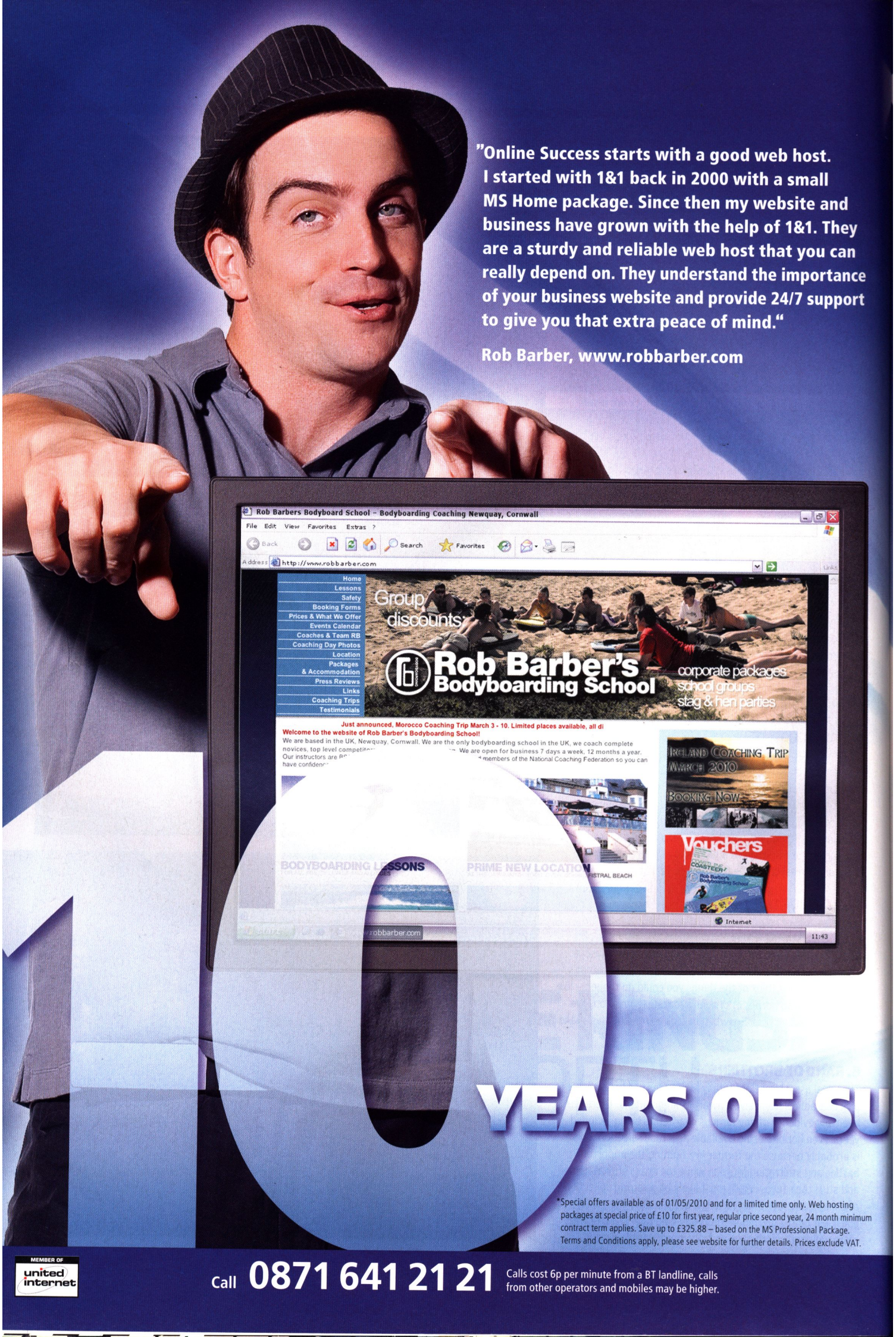
Most action-RPGs don't focus on dialogue so players can concentrate on hammering pad buttons repeatedly. *War in the North* is going to be pushing a *Mass Effect*-style conversation model. If it's transposed into the co-op sections of the game, could really be interesting indeed. News has reached us that the conversation model won't feature the ramifications of BioWare's system, which is a worrying. Is there any point if there are no real consequences to your actions?

5. CLOAK OF DOUBT

There are lots of unanswered questions about *War in the North*. For a start, is it speculation to say you might be able to ride this big bird? Chances are that you can't, because it would probably interfere with the lore or something, but it's a possibility. Just think of the things you could do though – like diving down into hordes of orcs and scatter them about the place like bowling pins. Snowblind, if you're reading this, make this happen.

6. BAND OF BROTHERS

The usual assortment of fantasy RPG races will be available to pick characters from: elves, dwarves and humans. There hasn't been any evidence of any famous characters being included yet or even hobbits being available as a race selection. This is probably because the former are fighting the important battles and infiltrating Mordor, while the latter stay at home and stuff their faces. You'll most likely be a ragtag collection of unnameables, but don't let that get you down. It's likely you'll just be the unsung heroes of an epic tale, just one with more whippets, cloth caps and incomprehensible accents.


"Online Success starts with a good web host. I started with 1&1 back in 2000 with a small MS Home package. Since then my website and business have grown with the help of 1&1. They are a sturdy and reliable web host that you can really depend on. They understand the importance of your business website and provide 24/7 support to give you that extra peace of mind."
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BITE IT...

BULLET

Jon 'Log' Blyth gets out his thesaurus, and whips up a lethal shell tempest

DEVELOPER People Can Fly **PUBLISHER** EA
WEBSITE peoplecanfly.com

THE CHOICE OF a name for a commercial product probably hasn't caused this many rolled eyes since the Nintendo Revolution changed its name to a childish word for urine. But look how that word has changed – it's impossible to laugh every time you hear it, so you just accept the name and move on. That's already happened with *Bulletstorm,* for me.

On arrival at Epic's North Carolina offices, that was all I knew about the game: the name, and the fact it was being developed by People Can Fly, the Polish wizards behind the entertaining *Painkiller*.

Painkiller was dumb and special and a great introduction to the philosophy underpinning People Can Fly's attitude. Basically, they take pride in letting the player wallow in visceral carnage. So when they introduced themselves to Epic, there was already a sense of mutual understanding respect – one that led to People Can Fly working on the PC port of *Gears of War*. The port was an unmitigated and PC-friendly success: the reason the sequel didn't come to our platform was, according to Epic's Cliff Blezinski,

Drunken space pirate? Yes. But with immaculate hair.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Creative mayhem to be wreaked
- ✓ A broken paradise to play in
- ✓ Speedy melee and gunplay
- ✗ Will die young from testosterone overload
- ✗ Enjoys genital torture a little too much

IS IT SAFE TO GO OUTSIDE?

BEAUFORT SCALE OF BULLETS

LIGHT PELLET AIR
Bullets travel at under 2mph, and probably won't puncture your skin.

2mph

AMMUNITION BREEZE
Moderate waves, reaching six to nine feet. Six to nine feet of bullets, that is.

10mph

BULLETSTORM
Use of intimate melee attacks and sexual wordplay reaches a peak.

50mph

ORDNANCE HURRICANE
Air is filled with munitions, greatly reducing visibility. Some windows may break.

120mph

STORM

"Do cool shit, get cool shit, do cooler shit"

Beheaded and melted into a skeleton: 100 points!

Boom! Throat shot!

Now that's a great shooter playground.

ETA WINTER 2011

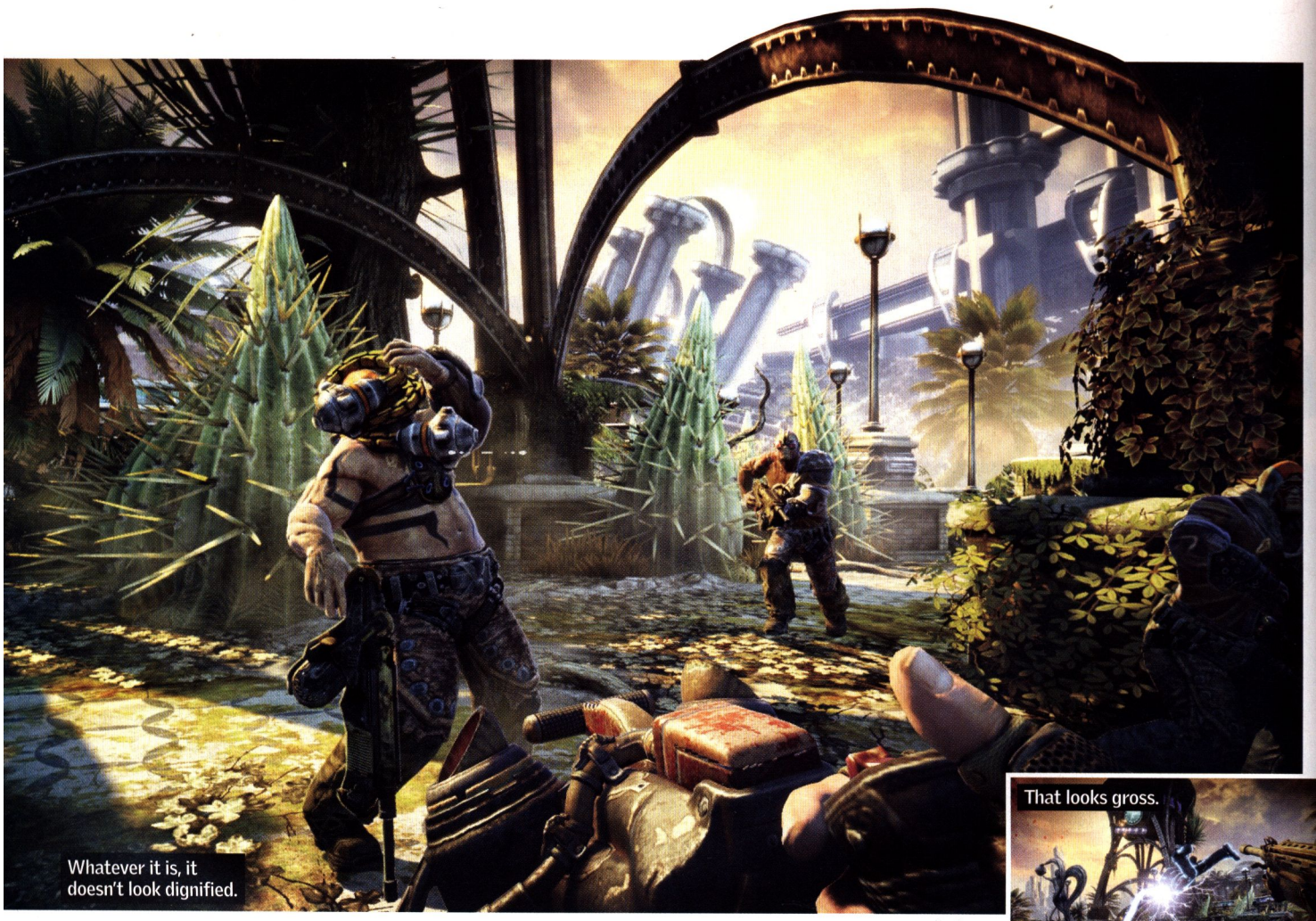
a simple reaction to the markets of the time. It just didn't seem that rewarding a prospect, and they certainly weren't short of buyers on the Xbox. Thankfully, the decision has been made to use the *Unreal Engine* for *Bulletstorm* and, all going well, the game will be released on PC at the same time as on consoles.

SO WHAT IS IT

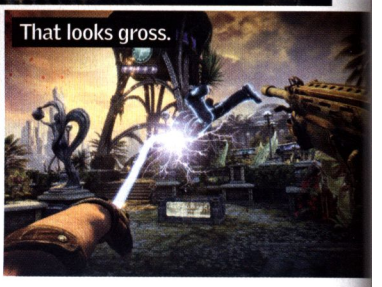
Turns out *Bulletstorm* is a slightly misleading name. The emphasis isn't on a mindless typhoon of ordnance at all. It's about making every kill a special event. You can play the game like a traditional FPS, taking cover like some terrified child, and sniping like a weak-stomached coward who doesn't want to look into his enemies' eyes as they explode. You could do that, just like you could walk through a park with your eyes closed, but you'd be spectacularly missing the point: *Bulletstorm* rewards creative kills.

Epic describe *Bulletstorm* with the Circle of Awesome, which is summarised as "Do cool shit, get cool shit, do cooler shit". People Can Fly's Adrian Chmielarz, describes it as "killing with style" adding he wants players to be disappointed with anything less than headshots.

Every kill rewards you with points, ranging from 10 for that



Whatever it is, it doesn't look dignified.



That looks gross.

disappointing and uninspired murder, to 100 for a meticulously executed multikill. To help you build that score – which is used to purchase upgrades – PCF have introduced a number of individually minor tweaks. First is the energy leash – designed to bring items to you. Second, is the slide – not your basic slide into cover, but a speed-boosting method of getting around in its own right. If you find yourself far away from a crowd of feral gang members, slide in and take them out. Third, is the kick – which has been powered up from a basic melee attack into a turbo-hoof. It sends your victim sprawling in slow motion, giving you a chance to plan what else you might want to do.

KICKS GIVE KICKS

Melee is an big part of *Bulletstorm*, but so are the over-the-top weapons. PCF are holding back on the full arsenal tucked away in their game, but let's not forget – they're the company who invented the shuriken/lightning gun. They deserve the benefit of the doubt, for now. What they are showing is a standard Peacemaker Carbine, with an upgraded alt-fire that shoots 100 bullets at once. It's equally destructive and stupid. The energy leash gets a Thumper upgrade, allowing you to whip the ground and explode everything in a wide radius directly up into the air.

Don't ask about the science. Just use the chaos to pick off your enemies. The other weapon we're introduced to is the Flame Chain, a bolas-like weapon that binds your enemies with a metal chain. The bonus being either end of the chain can be decorated with grenades. Chmielarz explains the heart of this creative sadism: "We could have made it blow the man up, and once it's around him, he's dead. But it's fun to watch him struggle." It's also useful – you can kick him into a crowd of his mates, and watch him explode with more style.

It's sadism like this that's behind longer, and more unlikely kill awards.

GROWING PAINS

Who do Epic and People Can Fly make games for?

Being People Can Fly – or their daddy company, Epic Games – isn't an easy job.

On one hand, they make games which are plainly designed to be plastered with an 18 certificate. On the other hand, even a light reading of the letters in Epic Games' lobby let you know that they actually appeal equally to troubled seven year-olds. So, we've compiled a list of ways in which the companies are batting for the grown-ups and the kids.

On the adult side, Epic's Cliff Bleszinski is currently refusing to answer to the name that made him famous, Cliffy B. He wants to be taken seriously now, and is, after all, 35 years-old. However, a simple Google Image search for his name will always include him waving a chainsaw gun in the air, like an overjoyed hairy infant. Who are you, Cliff?

Meanwhile, *Gears of War* had a strong artistic theme of "destroyed beauty". This translated mainly into grey rubble, but still – that's pretty deep, isn't it? And PCF have followed suit with their theme of "defiled paradise", which at least allows for some vivid greens. But Epic have added a romantic interest to *Gears of War 2* – that's well grown up.

So if they're so grown up, how come they're having a slide installed in their office to get to reception, and drive sports cars with the number plate "AWESOME"? Big bloody babies.

And then there's the *Unreal Engine*: a game design tool that's proved so flexible, and been so expertly marketed, that it's made everyone involved absurdly rich, and Epic Games completely recession-proof. Well, you can't really argue with that. You just have to admit that Epic and People Can Fly are companies who know how to tap into the jabbering child inside us all.

Not the look of a mature man.

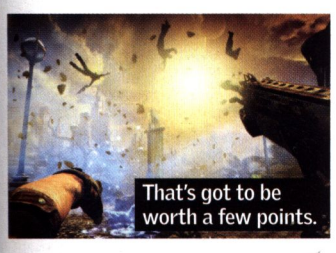
Yeah, kinda guessed it was a headshot.

This is what *Kiss From A Rose* was about.

The final stage of that plant battle.

For instance, you can shoot a gang member in the balls, then the head. That gets you the tongue-in-cheek Mercy award. Or you can whip someone into melee range, shoot them in the balls, then kick them in the head. This prolonged, individual attention earns you the sexually charged "Boy Toy" award.

There's something about this that I find unsettling – it's an unambiguously heterosexual world, designed to appeal to the fist-pumping jocks and pre-teens who enjoyed *Gears*. So this combination of sexual jokes and sadistic violence leave a slightly bitter taste in the mouth. But there's a subtle difference between the misogyny of *Bulletstorm*'s star – which gets dealt with in the story by a strong female character – and these titles, which are more like direct winks from the developer to the gamer.


That's got to be worth a few points.

Of course, I'm also open to the idea that I'm an over-sensitive gay, who's having a sense of humour failure. You're welcome to make your own mind up.

"Something about this I find unsettling"

BOOM! BALLSHOT!

So, it's pretty clear that this is a brash, pulp story that puts little stock in sophistication. But that doesn't mean they've neglected the storyline. In fact, Chmielarz is rightfully proud of roping in Rick Remender, the Marvel Comics writer who penned *Dead Space*. So you can expect something more engaging and elegantly told than *Painkiller*'s story of "man kills everything in hell".

You are Grayson Hunt, a 26th Century assassin in the Dead Echo squad, you're tasked with taking down the terrorists, rebels and ne'erdowells who threaten the Confederation. The opening level of the game, which acts as a prologue and a tutorial, tells the story of Hunt's exile. During a mission to kill a man responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, he discovers that he's fighting on the wrong side: it becomes obvious that the terrorist leader is one of the good guys, and Hunt's own work is a lot dirtier than he's happy with.

Refusing to pull the trigger, Hunt and his cyborg sidekick, Ishi Sato, are immediately condemned as traitors by the charismatic General Sarrano, and forced into a fugitive life of piracy. And so, for 10 years, that's how it goes. A bawdy life of space drink, space misogyny, and flipping space traffic wardens the intergalactic bird. All while your cyborg companion offers thoughtful and completely ignored advice.

That all changes when you're cruising the bum-end of the universe, and you stumble across Sarrano's ship, the warbird Ulysses. The temptation and resentment is too much for Hunt to bear, and Sato's objections are far too weak, and he decides to take it on. The attack is suicidal, but Hunt manages to fly into the engines of the Ulysses, incapacitating both ships. The last we see of the space prologue of *Bulletstorm* are three escape capsules pelting towards the planet Stygia, which the Ulysses was orbiting.

While *Gears of War* modelled itself on "destroyed beauty", the aesthetic catchphrase guiding *Bulletstorm*'s art direction is "defiled paradise". Stygia gives all the impressions of a once-Utopian resort, but the deserted streets, over-grown architecture and evacuation signs paints a story of catastrophe and decay.

Unusually, this is where *Bulletstorm* decides to go realistic. Instead of littering the world with unlikely audio logs, the story is told through the information panels designed for the tourists, or simply through context – like those evacuation signs. As you play, the mysteries will unfold – what was this planet? Why did it all go a bit *BioShock*? And what was Sarrano doing in orbit around the planet in the first place?

I went to Epic's offices a suspicious and sceptical man. The only upside of knowing nothing about the game was the fact that I didn't really have to do much research. But at this first look presentation, I was quickly convinced: this actually looks like it'll be a blast to play, and both developers specialise in making games that feel as satisfying as they look.

If *Bulletstorm* is even a fraction of the brash, dumb fun to play as it is to watch, then I can't wait for a hands-on. PCZ

HOT SHOT

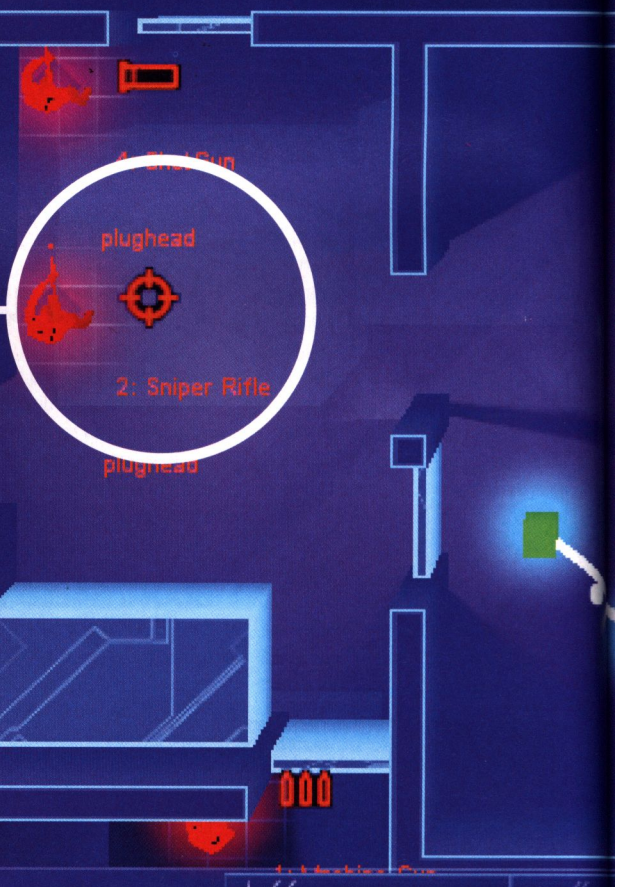
FROZEN SYNAPSE

DEVELOPER Mode 7 PUBLISHER Mode 7 WEBSITE frozensynapse.com ETA Winter 2010

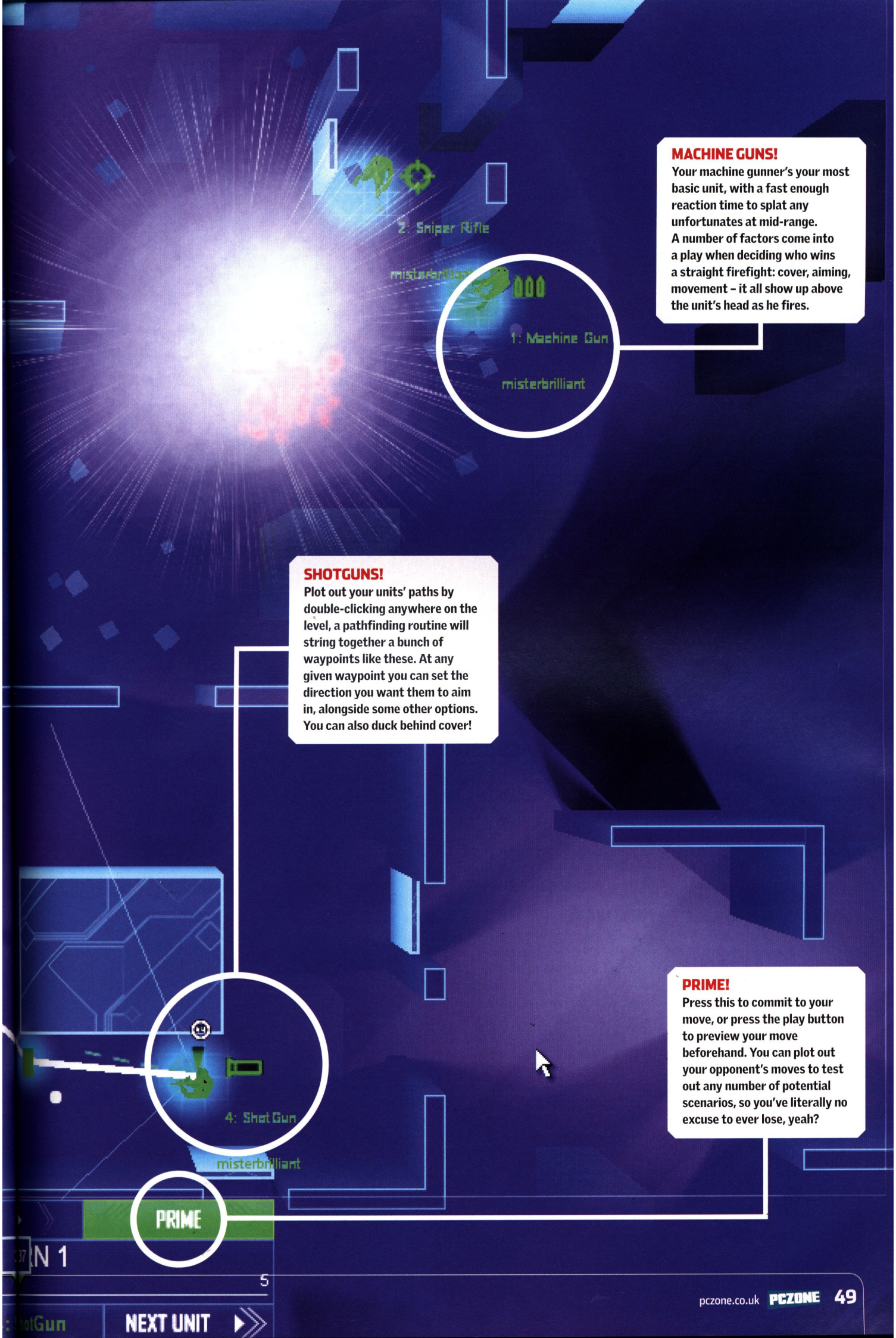
THIS BLUE WONDER'S firmly grabbed the *PCZ* office by the delicates since landing on our laps this month: a *Laser Squad Nemesis* meets old *Rainbow Six's* planning phase meets *Flotilla* strategy mash-up which, crucially, requires your attention only for attention-snapping moments at a time.

Carefully plot your turn while your opponent plots theirs, before both of your best made plans are carried out simultaneously. The challenge is in anticipating what the other player is up to, pre-empting his every step like some ghoulish supervillain. Fans of alt-tabbing between your real job and delightful distractions rejoice - it's available in beta form right now.

ROCKETS!
Your rocket units don't fire on other units, instead you order them to fire at nearby walls in the hope of creating some bloody smears in the collateral damage. They're slow to reload, and can only fire once in a five-second turn, so keep them behind cover.



SNIPER!
Snipers are powerful units, capable of firing right the way across a level. Position them at windows overlooking corridors for maximum effect. They'll never beat a shotgun or a machine gun at close or mid-range, but at a distance they're unstoppable.



MACHINE GUNS!
Your machine gunner's your most basic unit, with a fast enough reaction time to splat any unfortunates at mid-range. A number of factors come into a play when deciding who wins a straight firefight: cover, aiming, movement – it all show up above the unit's head as he fires.

SHOTGUNS!
Plot out your units' paths by double-clicking anywhere on the level, a pathfinding routine will string together a bunch of waypoints like these. At any given waypoint you can set the direction you want them to aim in, alongside some other options. You can also duck behind cover!

PRIME!
Press this to commit to your move, or press the play button to preview your move beforehand. You can plot out your opponent's moves to test out any number of potential scenarios, so you've literally no excuse to ever lose, yeah?

ArmA, now with added sand!

ONE IN THE EYE...

ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD

ETA 29 JUNE 2010

The military ultra-sim heads to the middle-east

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive **PUBLISHER** IDEA Games **WEBSITE** www.arma2.com

THOSE VIDEOS ON YouTube of people creating huge helicopter and tank-filled battles were genuinely awe-inspiring. Sadly, ***ArmA II's* best bits were merely setpieces, the quality of the underlying game checked by glitches and errors.**

Thankfully, *Operation Arrowhead*, a standalone expansion to *ArmA II*, aims to put all of the wrongs right, allowing the average gamer a chance to join the party, while keeping the commitment to depth and detail we've all come to admire.

The game will be a virtual melting pot of genres, with RPG and RTS elements melding with the core hardcore shooter experience, all adding up to what could be a unique take on the serious military FPS. We've heard ambitious things like this before from Bohemia, but this time it's looking more likely that they're going to deliver.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Still epic
- ✔ Still gorgeous
- ✔ UAVs
- ✔ Branching plotline
- ✔ Bugs not an issue...
- ✘ ...they say

NEW WAVE

First of all, there's the new campaign. Set in the fictional Middle Eastern nation of Takistan, (which, translated into Czech, means "Another-stan") this main trunk of the game will be much more plot-driven than before, with a branching story and multiple endings.

Using the same engine as *ArmA II*, there's been plenty of buffing, polishing and tweaking going on since it first appeared on our radar. You'd expect it, especially if you've had the benefit of playing a fully patched *ArmA II*, to run a lot better than it originally did. It's no longer going to grind to a halt the moment anything interesting happens.

Pushing the game more towards mainstream production values doesn't mean Bohemia have forgotten their core fans. There's still plenty for them to get excited about, including more than 300 new units, weapons and vehicles, multiple factions (USA, UN, Takistani army, and guerillas) and even the addition of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), equipped with night vision and thermal imaging systems. The desert setting also allows for Bohemia to spread their wings a little, used as they are to shooters in 'greener' locations.

Finally, there's multiplayer and the comprehensive mission and map editor. The former supports over 50 players, plus hundreds of AI units, and the latter is still surprisingly intuitive. There's also an SDK kit for modders, which should produce some interesting results.

Operation Arrowhead is Bohemia's final big push to make *ArmA II* more than just that game you were interested in but, at the same time, scared to death of. The evidence so far indicates they could finally have nailed it. The proof is naturally in the playing, but it could be that *ArmA II*'s potential has been realised after all this time. PCZ

THE STORY SO FAR... BOHEMIA

OPFLASH
A beloved and brilliant game that was riddled with bugs.

2001

ARMA
Next Bohemia made *ArmA*, which was also riddled with bugs.

2006

ARMA II
Was bigger, more comprehensive, and still riddled with bugs.

2009

OPERATION ARROWHEAD
Will Bohemia's latest be free of bugs?

2010

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ROYALS WATCH OUT...

THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS

David Brown needs a change of underwear...

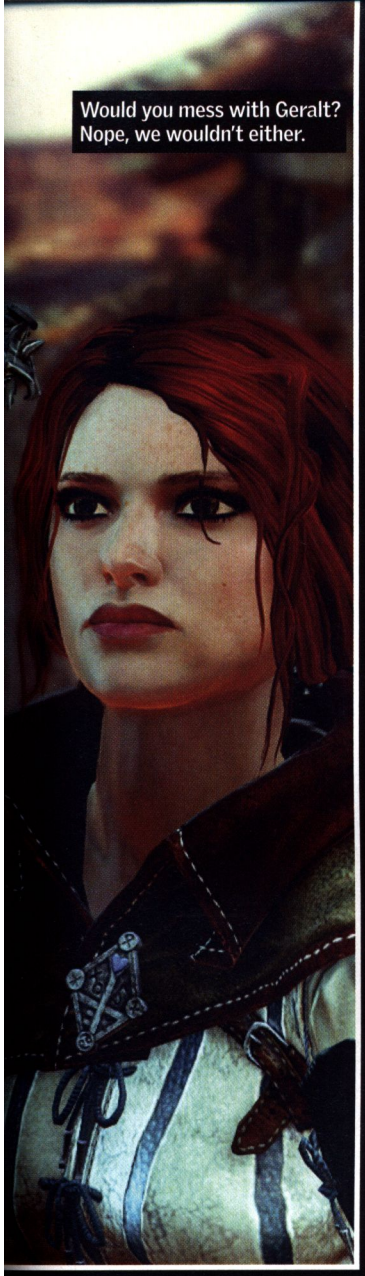
DEVELOPER CD Projekt **PUBLISHER** Namco-Bandai **WEBSITE** thewitcher.com

I THINK I just had an accident in my trousers. Sorry about that, but any mention of *The Witcher* can cause undesirable results in my nether regions. It's the sort of game that inspires devotion and love, not because it was perfect, but because it tried to go beyond the obvious.

While it didn't always succeed, the important thing was that it tried, and in today's world of ultra-generic military shooters and pointy-haired Sino-American RPGs, it's more important than ever for games to offer an original, unique experience. With playing cards of naked women.

Forget about them in the second game, though. CD Projekt are tossing them out with the old bathwater and concentrating on making a properly mature game, but don't think that that aspect of the game is completely wiped from history. Romance and sex are still very much part of all things Temeria (the land *The Witcher 2* is set in) but they'll be handled in a subtler way than a short movie and a pornographic playing card. How deep this will go is unknown, but at least accusations of schoolboy attitudes towards sex will be easily dismissed from now on. But of course, there's more to *The Witcher* than nude women.

As CD Projekt are a relatively small developer, the first game made use of a heavily modified version of BioWare's *Aurora* engine, which held its own on the visuals front. It didn't lend itself to producing the expansive areas that CD Projekt wanted, which is one of the reasons they decided to ditch that engine and create their own from scratch. This one will allow for much bigger environments to trot around in,



Would you mess with Geralt? Nope, we wouldn't either.

"Romance and sex are still very much part of things, but they'll be handled in a subtler way"

"I don't suppose you two are going be friendly, are you?"

Antlions?

with CD Projekt happily claiming that a single area from the first game would fit into one from the second many times over. Cities will now feel more like bustling metropolises, while vistas in the countryside will stretch out farther than a video card can render.

Time for a little refresher course on all things *Witcher*: in the first game, you took control of Geralt of Rivia, a master swordsman who has earned unnatural powers of agility and self-preservation through using body altering mutagens. Decried by the community at large, Geralt and his fellow Witchers, bounty hunters hired to rid the world of monsters, are few in number. At the end of the game, regardless of what path you chose to follow (either supporting the racist Order of the Flaming Rose, the rebellious elves and dwarves, or remaining neutral) you saved King Foltest from being stabbed up by a mysterious assailant.

NEW BEGINNING

That's where you would have left off in the first game and the second continues down the neutral path, with the land still wracked by factional strife. By the time the story starts, the Order have been almost defeated, while relations between the Scoia'tel (non-human rebels) and the authorities are frosty. However, the situation is more stable than it's been for a while and Geralt is on his way to La Valette castle, the home of a baroness who is still resisting King Foltest's attempts to restore order. As the story progresses, the significance of the assassin who Geralt defeated at the end of the first game becomes clear.

This becomes the main thread of the story, a tale that takes Geralt to new areas of Temeria. There'll be no revisits to locations seen in the first game, so forget about going back to Vizima to see what's going down there. As you know, the new areas will be more than double the size of the old ones, and another exciting factoid is that they won't be crippled by loading screens. They'll all be loaded in once and you can flit between all the different areas of the city at your will, which also includes building interiors.

While you might not be returning to familiar locales, you will be meeting up with some old friends. Wily witch Triss

THE LOWDOWN

- ✔ Geralt
- ✔ More game-changing choices
- ✔ More mature, in a good way
- ✔ Better combat
- ✔ New engine...
- ✘ ...more bugs?

"I know I look younger. It's the Oil of Olay."

An emo elf.

"Funny place for a picnic..."

"This time around, there'll be more decisions and the consequences will run much deeper"

TRISS MERRIGOLD
A powerful and scheming witch, Triss also likes to spend time wearing very revealing clothing and bossing our hero about.

DANDELION
A fop and famed poet, Dandelion the bard likes to fool around and has a habit for causing irate husbands and fathers to want him dead.

GERALT
The white-haired mutant is a hit with the ladies, even if he is almost emotionless and spends most of his time in cemeteries.

ZOLTAN CHIVAY
A veteran of the Second Nilfgaard war, Zoltan used to own a talking parrot, which he sold to a gnome in Novigrad.

ROGUE'S GALLERY

Some of the returning characters in *The Witcher 2*

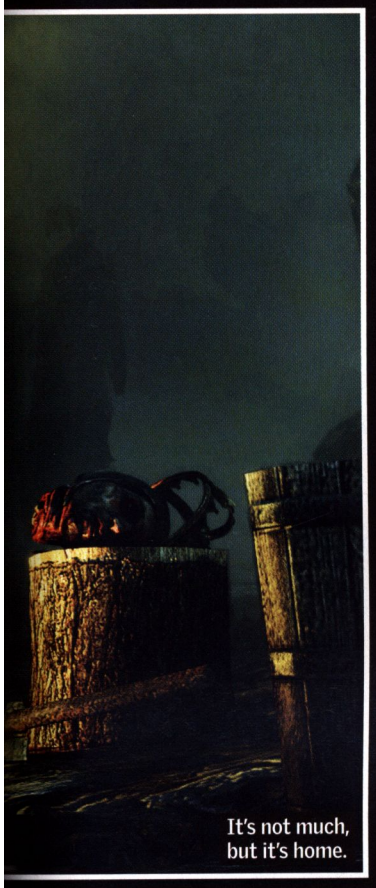
THE STORY SO FAR...
CD PROJEKT

1994 – OPENING HOURS
Marcin Iwinski and Michal Kicinski begin publishing software.

2007 – WIEDZMIN
They make an original game, *The Witcher*, which was a belter.

2008 – WAITING FOR GOG
Good Old Games began: a store of classics that work on modern PCs.

2011 – THE WITCHER 2
Geralt returns to defend his order's roles. And kill things.


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

Merrigold will be about, as will the bumbling bard Dandelion and Zoltan the dwarf. The rest of Temeria's populace will be much more reactive to how you carry out your Witcher duties, but it's not going to be a binary thing, it's more about the general attitude you display in conversations. Obviously, the bigger decisions will have more of an effect on things and CD Projekt will be certain to make a big deal out of these game-changing events.

That you could make decisions at an early point in the game that changed the way things happened much later, but not always in an obvious way, was one of the major selling points of the original. This time around, there'll be more decisions and the consequences will run much deeper. Some places will be dramatically different depending on the choices you make earlier on.

Those choices will also be made more interesting for us Anglophiles by the mere fact our language is being used as the primary language in the game. While it might rightly annoy Polish speakers to see a game from their country made in English, the consolation for us is that we won't be getting the substandard translation the original *Witcher* suffered from on release (and was corrected in the *Enhanced Edition*).

CHOP CHOP

The Witcher was also famous for its combat, in both good and bad ways. A pause-able real-time affair, you could build up combos using timed mouse clicks, while set into three different stances depending on the type of enemy you were facing.

When it worked, it was a wonderful system, allowing for smooth, graceful combat moves to be pulled off and some incredible finishers to be implemented, such as jumping on the shoulders of an enemy and driving a sword deep into the top of its skull. However, when it didn't work, combos kept breaking down too easily and it could get a little repetitive. This is an area CD Projekt are scrutinising with a big old microscope, making sure they get it right this time.

One thing that is definitely remaining is the distinctive stances – fast, group and heavy. In *The Witcher 2*, they won't be as separate as before. CD Projekt are aiming to allow for players to mix them together to produce a better flow to the combat.

Potion creation will be made less fiddly this time – more a matter of just making sure you have the right ingredients without having to go through the whole meditation and bubbling cauldron thing. In fact, the whole issue of character inventory and progression has been addressed. While not a major issue last time, your inventory could get cluttered up easily, so there are moves afoot to make sure this doesn't happen so much.

As for levelling up, it'll be interesting to see how CD Projekt deal with the beginning of the game. They can't go for the easy amnesiac route used in the first game, so will new players start out as a hardcore killer or a guy who doesn't know which end of the sword to hold? Ignoring that for the time being, what there definitely will be are fewer different categories to level up in.

Scowling = evil.

SKILLED DOWN

In the first game, there were a host of different magic powers, plus others related to combat, physique, mental strength and things like that. This time, the skills tree has been squished down into only a few branches, but these have been extended substantially to allow for more options than before.

There's one final point left to deal with and that's the fact a console version of the game is being produced. Usually, the very mention of a cross-platform release is enough to chill the hearts of all but the hardiest souls, but this time, it might not be so bad. In fact, CD Projekt have been quoted as saying "We've not spent a lot of time on the design interface for the console," which surely gladdens the hearts and minds of all right-thinking PC owners.

A lot more information will come flooding out of eastern Europe over the coming months as the PR campaign begins in earnest, but for now we know a few encouraging things to keep us going. The combat is going to be more fluid, the inventory system will be streamlined, as will character levelling. And the choices the player makes will have more of a significant difference to the world, which in itself, promises to be substantially larger.

Most importantly, you'll still be able to get your end away with plenty of women in a much more mature fashion. Whatever will Julie Peasgood think of that? PCZ

GREEN, GREEN GRASS
How much difference does a new engine make?

Instead of just re-licensing the old Aurora engine, CD Projekt have gone down the difficult route of building one of their own from scratch. As you can see, the difference between old and new *Witchers* is remarkable. Beautiful lighting, detailed foliage and all without any load times between areas. It used to be said that the original game looked pretty snazzy, but how wrong we were. The new one blows it out of the swamp in this case.

CAUGHT BY THE FUZZ...

APB

ALL POINTS BULLETIN

Will Porter fought the law and, somewhat unsurprisingly, the law won

DEVELOPER Realtime Worlds **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** apb.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 210

THIS MMO IS a lot of things, but right now it's a remake of *Heat*, as performed by The Muppets. It all began five minutes ago as I casually hung around outside a multi-storey car park as my colleagues stole a van up on the third floor. When they drove off a conveniently placed ramp and tilted delightfully downwards into the midriff of a passing pedestrian, an APB was called out on us.

I sprinted over the prostrate, spread-eagled body of the deceased innocent and leapt into the back of the van, then hung out of its sliding door as the A-Team were once wont to do. Within 30 seconds I was spraying machine gun fire at the four pursuers that the match-making system had judged were foes of equal ability to my own quadlet of lawbreaking scum.

We tumbled off the highway and smashed into the side of a skyscraper, and then fought a running battle through a street of exploding cars while giggling like maniacs.

In short, when it hits its own sweet spot of insanity, *APB* is the game I've been dreaming of since 1997: the first day my two little feet hit the top-down sidewalk of Liberty City and I gunned my very first civilian in what I imagined to be his face.

CRIME IS FUN

The first decision you'll make in *APB* is a binary one: will you play as a Criminal or as an Enforcer? Crims can get up to hijinks within the sandbox districts of San Paro, while Enforcers are out to stop them. Both factions run amok on servers containing up to 100 players, whether amidst the high-rises of the Financial District or gunning their vehicles over the rooftops of the Waterfront. Criminals mug people, steal cars and drive them to dodgy dealers, ram-raid stores and run away with pilfered items, or simply murder members of the AI population, and as they do so their notoriety will climb through five levels of wanted-ness.

Depending on civilian reports and the heat associated with a crim's name, the game's mainframe will call out an Enforcer player judged to be of a similar skill level (or perhaps

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Remarkable dynamic action
- ✓ Gobsmacking character customisation
- ✓ Hang out of car windows
- ✓ A ton of fun
- ✗ May not be a keeper
- ✗ Simplistic action

APB lets you be a lady who dresses like Lemmy.

THE STORY SO FAR...
DAVE JONES

OH NO!
Dave Jones creates *Lemmings*. World celebrates.

1991

GOURANGA!
Dave Jones creates *Grand Theft Auto*. Celebrations restart.

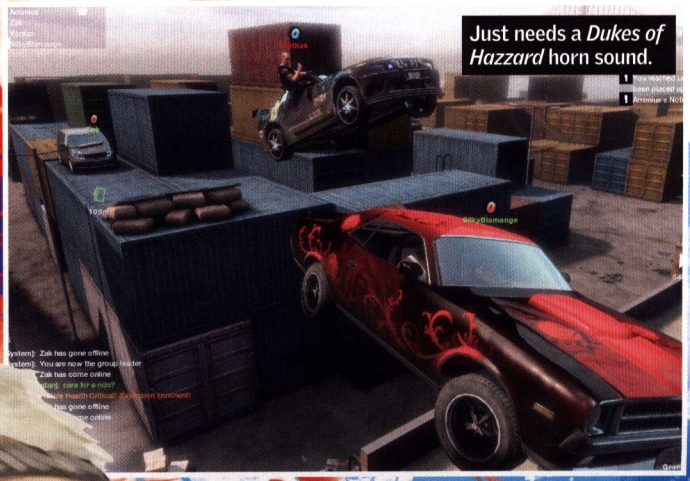
1997

360 GAME!
Dave Jones creates *Crackdown*. Causes minor celebrations.

2007

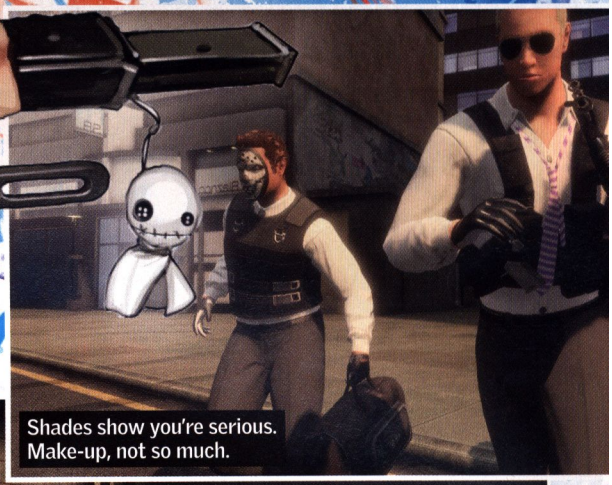
COPS N' ROBBERS!
APB waits in wings. Preparation for celebration palpable.

2010



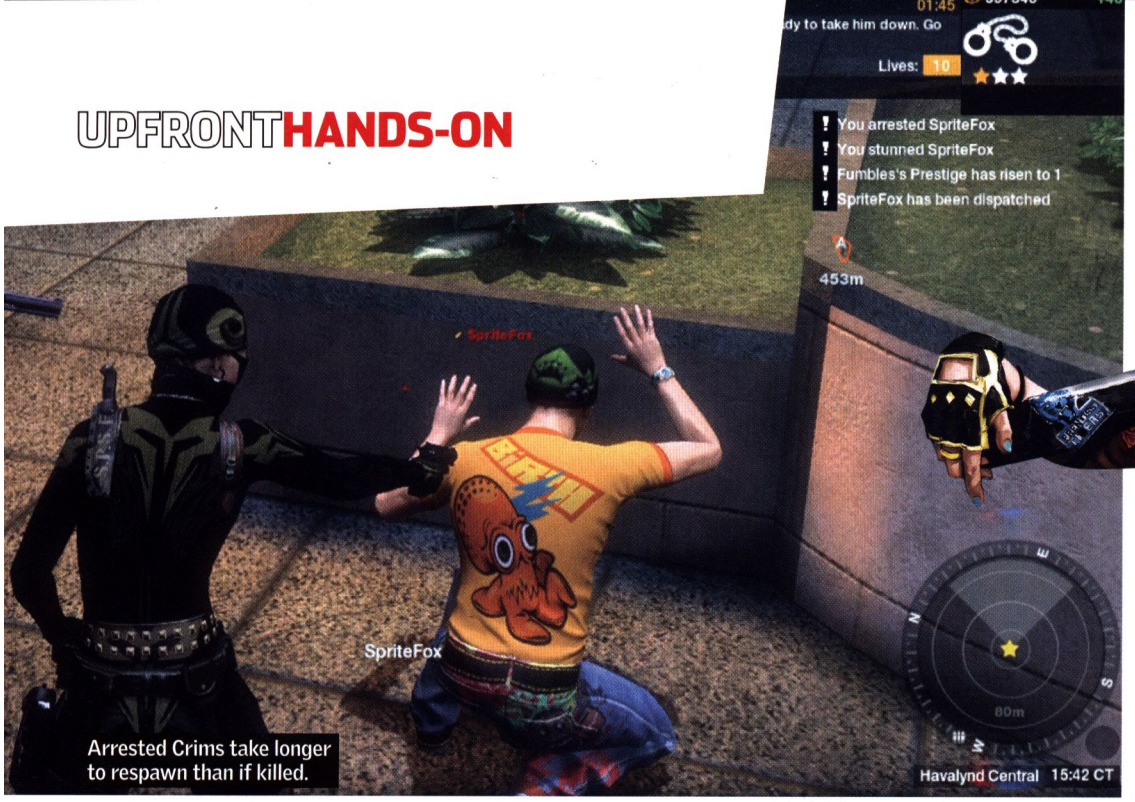
Just needs a *Dukes of Hazzard* horn sound.

ETA SUMMER 2010

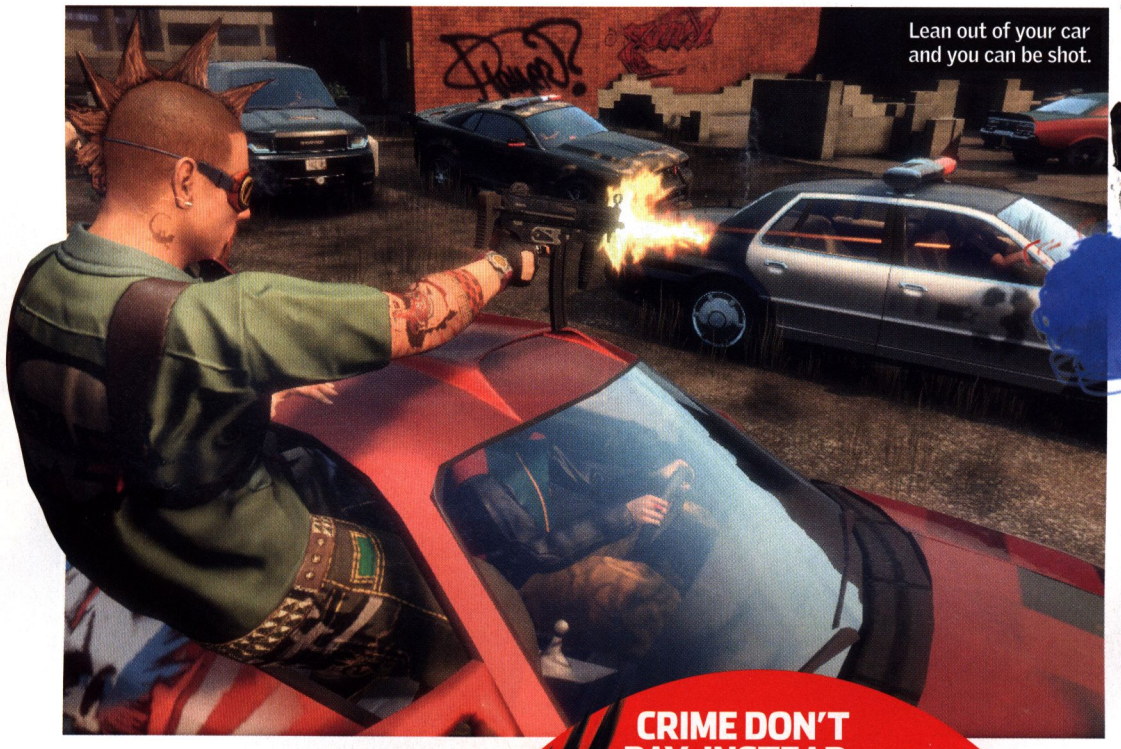


Shades show you're serious. Make-up, not so much.

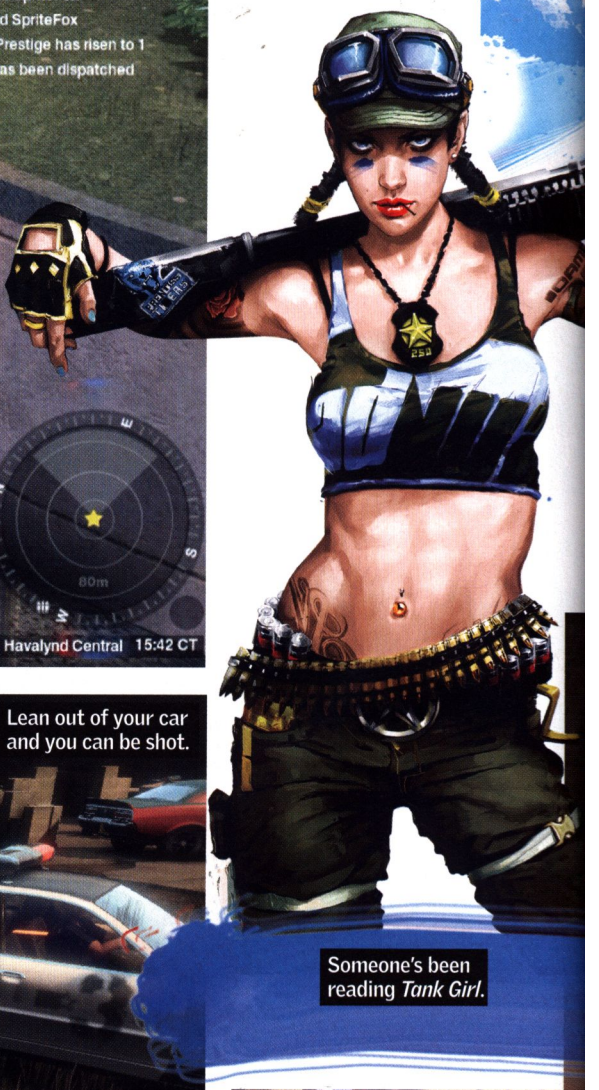
Max out Prestige or Notoriety, and a bounty is placed on your head.



Arrested Crims take longer to respawn than if killed.



Lean out of your car and you can be shot.



Someone's been reading *Tank Girl*.

An AK-47: the must-have accessory for punky chicks.

two or three who each account for a fraction of the greatness of the villain's whole) and the chase shall begin. What's more, to ensure the highest level of funness is suckled from *APB*'s almighty teats, both factions will be roaming in groups, each hollering at a bound gang of chums over VOIP – the Enforcers out to inflict their own brand of justice, and the Criminals watching the filth gradually amass in their wing mirrors.

Let's not run away with ourselves though, as once the character creation Enforcer/Criminal divide has been crossed there's still a way to go. Simply put, *APB* has the most powerful tools yet seen in an MMO to sculpt the persona you want to carry through your travails within San Paro. Fiddling with your appearance is a slider bar orgy of muscles, visible veins, age, chest hair and ear orientation – after which you'll appear in nothing but a pair of boxers in *APB*'s social district.

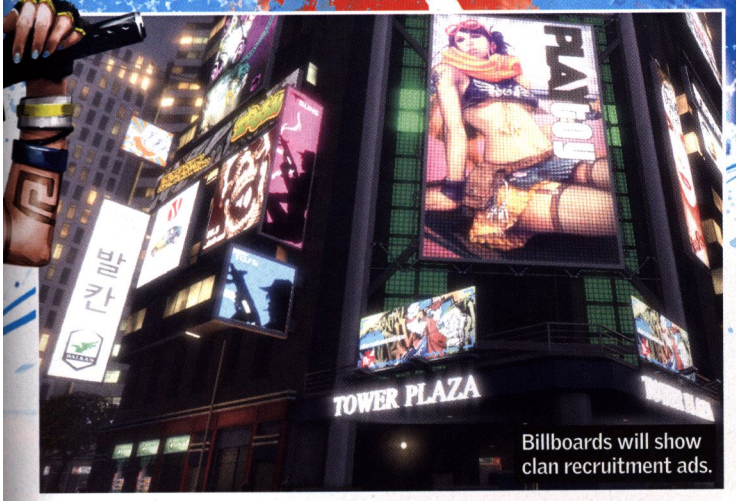
GETTING DRESSED

This is the one area in which Enforcers and Criminals can hang out together, trying to maintain conversation while nearly-naked faction members with wonky half-done faces are continually born into thin air over by the customisation terminals. At these terminals *APB*'s wondrous self-improvement systems go far beyond simple pointing and clicking at garments:

CRIME DON'T PAY. INSTEAD, YOU PAY CRIME

Do you ever get tired of something you love constantly demanding that you subscribe to it? We do. High quality monthly products are always at it. "Subscribe to this and get a free gift!", "Look a picture of a woman. Subscribe!" – what if we don't want to make a saving of 25% per issue? Well, Realtime Worlds share our hate – a *World of Warcraft*-style monthly rate is not on the cards. Nor, it seems, is the online vogue of microtransactions and an in-game economy somewhat fuelled by your own bank balance.

At the time of writing the exact method of continued payment for *APB* hasn't been announced, but this correspondent can't help feel that it'll follow the *Guild Wars* pattern, with new districts and attributed game modes being released in paid-for bundles at regular intervals after the main game's release. Consider it speculation, but it's hard to imagine any other way it could work. Unless you'll be buying bullets in the same way you do when you go paintballing.



Billboards will show clan recruitment ads.

Currently, sniped headshots don't inflict more damage.

they allow you to design your own symbols and fonts to use as graffiti, tattoos or car decals in-game, to buy and customise vehicles in which anything can be fiddled with from the noise the siren makes to the symbols on the bonnet, and finally to create your own audio in *APB*'s very own sound suite.

All this is explored in more detail in the Augmenting Realities boxout, but the message needs to pepper this preview like a spent Uzi rounds: *APB*'s avatar customisation tools are mindblowing. It boggle the mind that so much information can fit down a crap BT Broadband connection.

Not everyone is good with colours though, and design might not be your thing, in which case the in-game economy spreads to auction houses where designs, clothing, weaponry and triumphant sound files for your victims to endure upon the moment of their death can be purchased. It's easy to forget sometimes, but this is an MMO – mailboxes abound, and elsewhere in the Social District you'll find nightclubs where you and your brethren can /dance the night away. In keeping with *APB*'s desire to create a feeling of in-game celebrity, statues of successful players who have won daily, weekly and monthly leagues will take centre stage. You'll no doubt be gazing at their plinths wistfully as you corral your troops, or prepare to leap into the fray with a buddy who's already out in the districts ridding the streets of crime, or doing their best to riddle them with it.

"You can run people over just dandy, because it's hilarious"

ORGANISED CRIME

As you enter a 100-player server there'll predictably be a fair degree of activity on the streets: hoodlums tossing pedestrian bodies in their wake, Enforcers leaping off ramps with their red and blue lights ablaze, and all that jazz. An important thing to note is that until a crimefighter has been match-made against you (or until you've had an *APB* call if you're the filth) then you won't be able to kill any human players with weaponry. You can run people over just dandy, mainly because it's hilarious, but a bullet free-for-all would rob the game of that vital commit crime-chasey chase dynamic.

As an Enforcer it's down to you to wander over to a terminal that will conjure up your personal car and patrol the streets or react to match-making call-outs from the *APB* mainframe. For the opposing side petty crime might be the order of the day, or perhaps a sequence of tasks from an NPC contact – mission givers that instantly bring the contact system of *City of Heroes* to mind. Each contact represents a different organisation, and the further you level through each underworld outfit the better cars and weapons that are made available to you.

The controls of the game will be familiar to anyone who's ever fired a gun in simulated anger: left-click to fire, WASD to move, right-click to bring the camera down over

DAVE JONES
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, REALTIME WORLDS

LAW AND CHAOS

We rootle through Dave Jones' locker, and upon discovery make up some questions to placate him

Will *APB* tell a story?
"There's a big story behind the city of San Paro to do with the mayor and the characters in it. We focus a lot on the characters, the contacts and the organisations, and all of them have interesting backstories as well.

"I think there's about 45 different contacts, and every one of them has a bit of storyline behind them. There's also something with the whole Criminal/Enforcer thing: the reason we called them Enforcers and not Cops is because the Criminals aren't necessary criminals. It's more that they're not liking what the city has become, and the fact that they feel that the enforcement side is actually pretty corrupt.

"So there's a story there, and it's something we plan to unveil and change as time goes on."

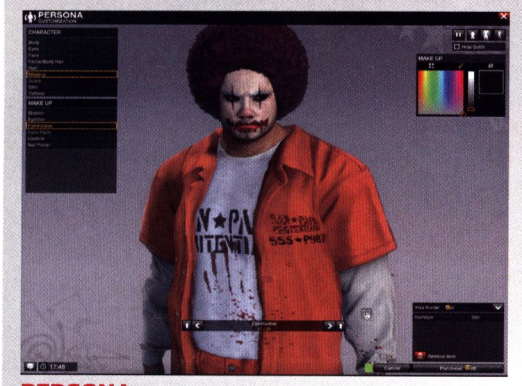
Are some areas of the map more dangerous than others?
"We've been playing internally with what we call the Chaos District, which is one in which you can shoot anyone at any time. As you can imagine, that's a different game. Completing a mission where anyone can shoot you is pretty damn hard. You could accidentally run over someone and they could start shooting at you. Within five minutes it could turn into war. It's for more experienced players, and you ought to go in there pretty well armed. We want to roll the Chaos Districts out soon after launch."

How will the game change after it's launched?
"Well as players say 'Hey I think with these particular tweaks this would be a more interesting game' we will absolutely have districts with different rule sets. So Chaos is one rule set, but there'll be different styles of the game that we make available to try out.

"Because of the way our system works, as more people go to those districts – if they're popular then we can start to make more with those kinds of rule sets. If we launched tomorrow, in three months we may find that people prefer another rule set from the one at launch – and the game would just dynamically have more of those districts. I'm hopeful that six months after launch we'll have many different kinds of games within *APB*, and that people will migrate to the one that they love."

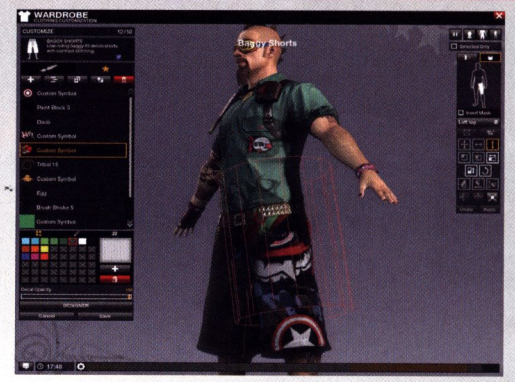
AUGMENTING REALITIES

APB's self-improvement tools go under the knife



PERSONA

The basic physical attributes of your character can be tweaked in every conceivable direction: from the colour of your nail polish, to the visibility of the veins running beneath your skin via the number of wrinkles, scars, moles and pockmarks that are scattered over your face. Big hair is also available.

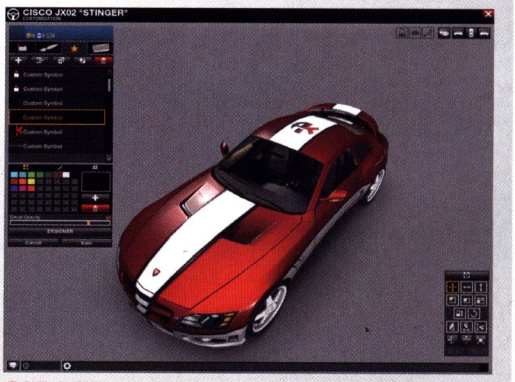


WARDROBE

You can either purchase clothes with ready designed symbols and colouration, or if you're something of a fashionista you can do the design work yourself. Everything – from gloves and goggles to trousers and tops – can be tweaked or imprinted, and the catalogue of clothing rivals even Freemans'.

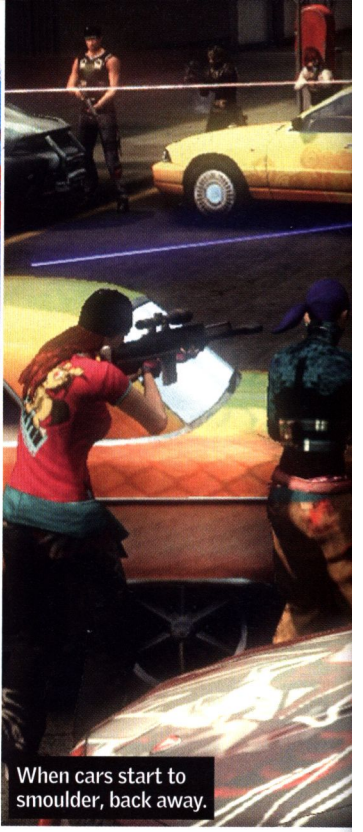
DESIGNER

Designs made in *APB* can either be used to decorate yourself and your car, or shared with your clan so you can all hit the streets in the same nattily designed threads, or indeed, the same graffiti spray. This is where *APB*'s design tools start getting a bit more complex, so it's likely good designers will make a killing at the auction house.

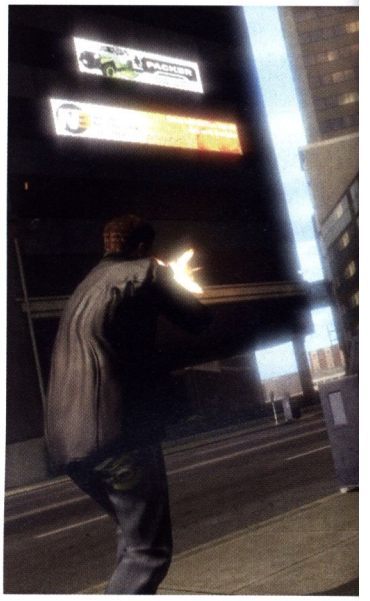


GARAGE

Here you'll be able to deck your car out in the chosen colours of your particular crib, as well as fiddle with the fender and, if you're an Enforcer, attach whatever brand of flashing lights you might fancy. How Realtime Worlds are going to stop players branding their bonnets with goatses is as yet unknown, though they probably won't be pleased when someone does.



When cars start to smoulder, back away.



the gun, C to crouch... it's simplicity in itself. For the criminals a typical string of tasks would begin with clear crimes – burning a certain number of doorways for example, stealing a collection of scattered items or half-inching a car and taking it to a local dealer. You're armed with your main weapon, a handgun and however many grenades you've brought into the fray – although the power of a car crushing a rival player in a side-on skid off a rooftop can never be underestimated.

In terms of providing targets to use these on though, it all depends on your gang's kill/death ratios, how far up the game's unlock ladders you've all gone and the notoriety you've all built up over the past few minutes in the game. This will then matchmake Enforcers that are the closest fit (balancing both numbers and skill levels) and send them after you.

Despite the veneer of Cops and Robbers, most of the challenges are instantly familiar: assaults on specific areas, king of the hill, protect the VIP, team deathmatch – essentially short bursts of those same modes that've made online gaming simultaneously great and samey over the past decade.

Here, however, each burst is intermingled with hectic chases from location to location – and if one faction arrives before another then they can do their best to set up shop for the battle ahead barricading areas with stolen cars, and taking up the best sniper positions. After this burning vehicles unexpectedly plough through tunnels full of cops with hilarious results, Enforcers dazzle their prey with stun grenades and arrest them (forcing them out of the game for longer than the usual respawn time) and bullets fill the air.

Once the mission chain is over, due to a faction victory or the time limit being hit, plaudits and cash are doled out to the worthy and battle ceases. Everyone stands, once more unable to shoot each other, and share a happily awkward post-action breather before going their separate ways. Some choose to /dance.

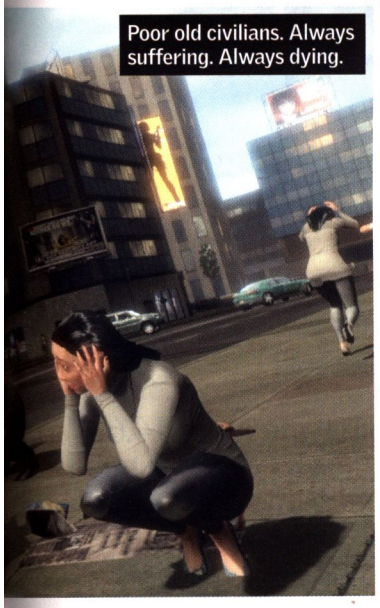
"*GTA* mechanics you expect aren't present or aren't as honed"

My personal highlight during my playtest as a criminal came when I tormented a defeated Enforcer with an exploratory /wave amidst the burning wreckage of our previous dealings. There was a pause of a few seconds as my foe worked out how to return a friendly salutation, as I watched a friend steal a sports car 50 metres behind him and accelerate towards his back.

I estimate the Enforcer got through around four frames of his happy waving animation before his broken ragdoll somersaulted skywards. I could honestly have died laughing.

It's these moments of unscripted hilarity that *APB* frequently delights with. Your first hours within its districts will be happy ones indeed, but as to whether the game will retain you for the

The *PCZ* team will be Crims. Catch us if you can.



Poor old civilians. Always suffering. Always dying.

hundreds of hours that a successful MMO expects of its players is still an unknown quantity. An opening problem is an unfair, yet important, consideration: *APB* is not *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

GHOST OF NICO

This is pernickety, but almost everyone who goes into *APB* will have experienced Niko Bellic's adventures – and when you first play the game there's a mental barrier in that the *Grand Theft Auto* mechanics you expect either aren't present or aren't (in *APB*'s beta at least) as honed. It seems strange that you can't shoot a driver through a windscreen, it niggles that the car-exit animations are laborious in comparison to Rockstar's, the lack of motorbikes is evident, and the grungy character of Liberty City is absent in the wipe-clean exteriors of San Paro.

Most of these issues could be cleared up as the game develops over the months and years post-release, of course, but I can't sit here and pretend that I didn't feel sad when *APB*'s burning cars didn't blow up in the fashion to which I am accustomed. Crimes such as ramraiding and mugging too seem somewhat mechanical and, I dare say, MMO-ey. Shallow and unthinking criticisms I know, but I can't deny what my brain told me it was thinking.

A larger issue is simply whether *APB*'s combat is too simplistic, and whether over time familiarity will dim the pleasures of the relatively basic multiplayer conceits that adorn the top layer of a frankly remarkable player-matching system. The back-end of *APB* is so clever, so complex and so ingenious that the actual top-end gameplay does seem a little facile in comparison – it doesn't feel that there's much room for hugely tactical play, for example, and you frequently find yourself standing stock-still as you hose an enemy with bullets rather than frantically dashing around the place to seek cover.

Then again, as with all MMOs, the release of *APB* is widely seen as the beginning of its ongoing development rather than Dave Jones whipping his scarf over his shoulder and saying "And that's the end of that chapter!" There's a three-year plan in place, and the game will evolve according to player demand: new areas will be made available, new game modes will emerge and existing mechanics will be tweaked.

As you wander around Real Time Worlds' studios it's clear that there are plans to somehow incorporate what are potentially more scripted engagements from enigmatic scribbles on whiteboards – events like bank jobs, heists and raids on supermarkets. You genuinely begin to feel that the Financial and Waterfront districts are something of the tip of the iceberg, and that a mass of potential content is waiting beneath the waterline.

FUN WITH GUNS

Right now, as the game enters its final beta stages, *APB* is a remarkable framework for unscripted frivolity. The dream is that upon release, with the expert guidance of us the in-game gun-toting madmen, Realtime Worlds can build ever higher on the remarkable back-end they've constructed. I can safely vouch that upon release *APB* will be good, but a year later I'm fairly confident it will be remarkable. Or at least, that's the dream.

We are entering a world bereft of nightly police-based entertainment what with those bastards at ITV thoughtlessly cancelling *The Bill* after 27 years of high-quality programming. *APB* genuinely looks like it could fill the gaping void that's due to open up at 9pm on a Thursday – and on other days in-between. It's even got a character customisation suite that will let us recreate DCI Frank Burnside, DS Jim Carver, PC Reg Hollis, and perhaps even the one with the moustache that had all those drink problems. For this, most of all, we should be grateful. PCZ

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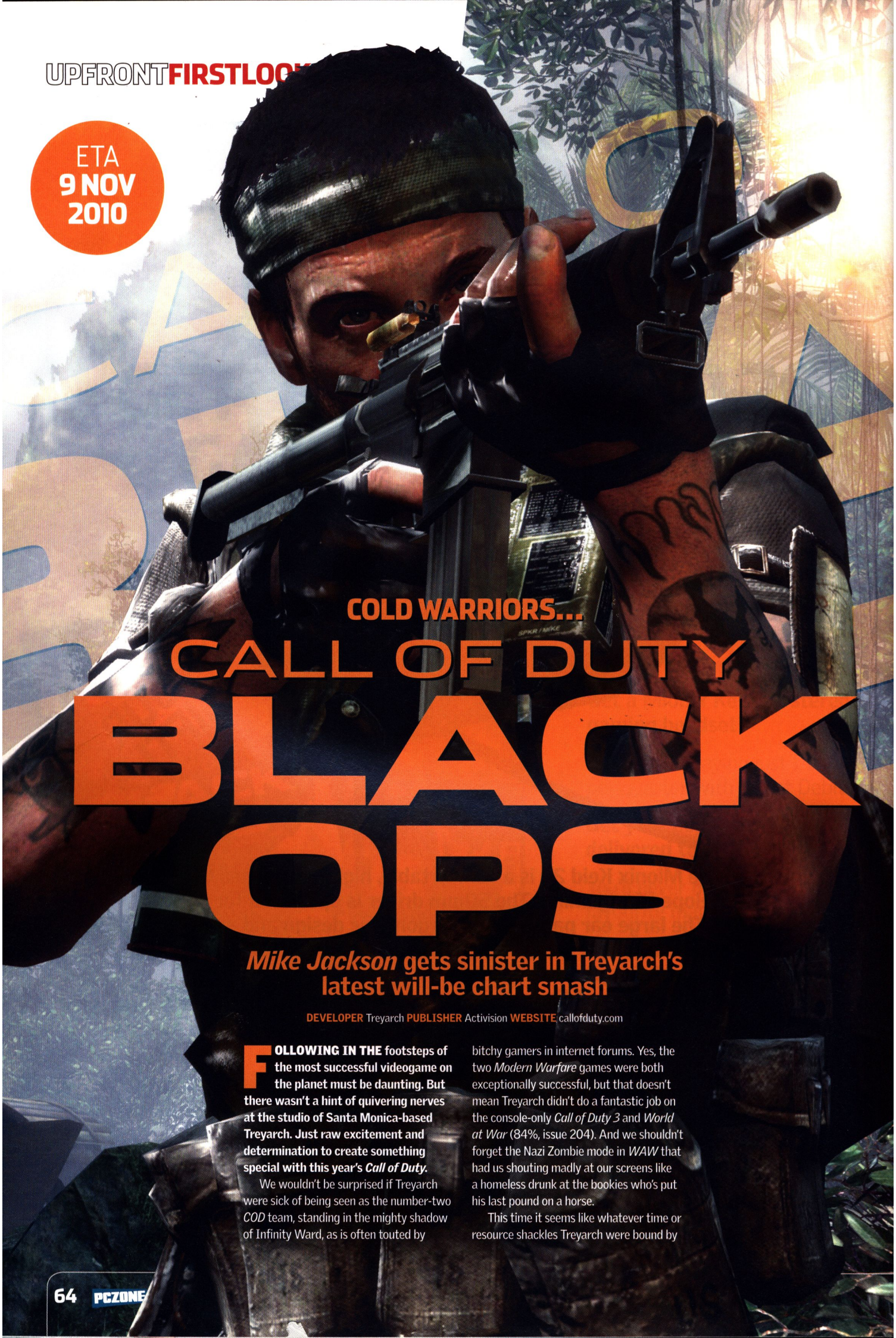


COLD WARRIORS...

CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS

***Mike Jackson* gets sinister in Treyarch's latest will-be chart smash**

DEVELOPER Treyarch **PUBLISHER** Activision **WEBSITE** callofduty.com

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of the most successful videogame on the planet must be daunting. But there wasn't a hint of quivering nerves at the studio of Santa Monica-based Treyarch. Just raw excitement and determination to create something special with this year's *Call of Duty*.

We wouldn't be surprised if Treyarch were sick of being seen as the number-two *COD* team, standing in the mighty shadow of Infinity Ward, as is often touted by bitchy gamers in internet forums. Yes, the two *Modern Warfare* games were both exceptionally successful, but that doesn't mean Treyarch didn't do a fantastic job on the console-only *Call of Duty 3* and *World at War* (84%, issue 204). And we shouldn't forget the Nazi Zombie mode in *WAW* that had us shouting madly at our screens like a homeless drunk at the bookies who's put his last pound on a horse.

This time it seems like whatever time or resource shackles Treyarch were bound by

"This *Call of Duty* is based on the exploits of covert special forces units – the titular black ops"

Firing on unarmed soldiers is pretty disgraceful.

Helicopters are plenty destructive.

Looks a bit like Sam Fisher.

have been removed. The developer has freedom, time and people – around 250 more of them. And so they've chosen to base their latest effort on a scenario that has more creative freedom than almost any other conflict in modern history: the Cold War.

This *COD* is based on the exploits of covert special forces units – the titular black ops brigades. These chaps are elite soldiers sent in to carry out classified missions, often undercover – SAS, SEALs, Pathfinders, Delta Force and the like – although Treyarch kept hush on more in-depth plot details.

BEST OF THE BEST

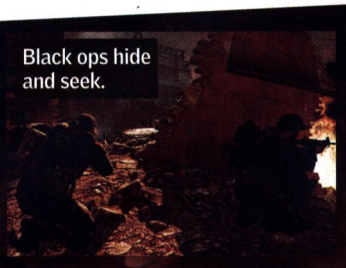
This is *Mission Impossible*-style stuff – should spec ops be caught or killed their government deny all knowledge of their existence – only instead of being assigned missions at ballroom parties and wielding slick hair, explosive chewing gum and glass-breaking wedding rings, these chaps go into battle with incendiary shotguns and crossbows that shoot explosive-tipped bolts. Oh yes.

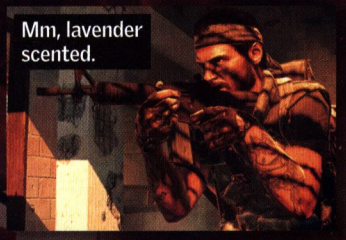
Apparently they were allowed to approach missions any way they wanted and with any load-out they wished. This gave Treyarch the freedom to create a game that can be constantly varied and kept as fresh as possible. The developer showed this with four snippets of gameplay.

A snowy mission, set in the Urals mountain range in west Russia, saw the player guide a squad from the safety of a recon plane flying at the edge of the Earth's atmosphere. The dark and grainy camera view was reminiscent of the bombing

THE LOWDOWN

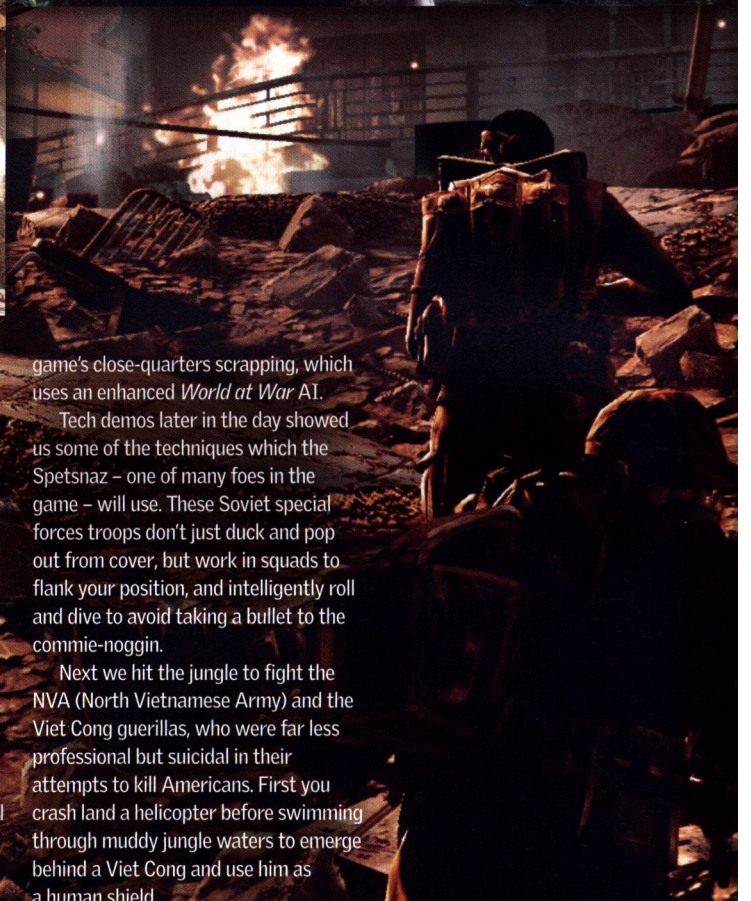
- ✓ Not set in WWII
- ✓ New weapons
- ✓ Four-player co-op
- ✓ Huge multiplayer
- ✗ Zombie mode still TBC


Black ops hide and seek.


Mm, lavender scented.

You could hide behind dense foliage. Or not...

Get to the chopper!



missions in the *Modern Warfare* titles. Within a minute your control switches to a soldier on the ground who's tasked with sneaking through the snowy mountainous environment into an enemy base.

This was our taste of *Black Op*'s stealth gameplay, as our lad had to avoid enemy patrols rather than nail them with the meaty looking crossbow in his hand.

Later sees you abseiling down a cliff face. It looks incredible – despite the blizzard-like conditions you can see the detailed scenery stretching into the distance, with your objective clearly visible before you're anywhere near it.

As you approach the base, you're told to keep things quiet and use your normal bolts, but should you draw attention to yourself you have the explosive-tipped types at hand. These stick in your enemy before detonating, sending other nearby goons flying.

Leaving the base sees you creeping along the side of a snow-covered mountain when some buffoon shoots an RPG your way. An avalanche is triggered and things go mental as you sprint along the cliff and leap down.

HUE'S THERE?

This mission showed the expansive environments you'll encounter in the game, of which Treyarch promise there will be a great number. They didn't go into detail about what you'll see, but they did show us another mission with a vastly different setting.

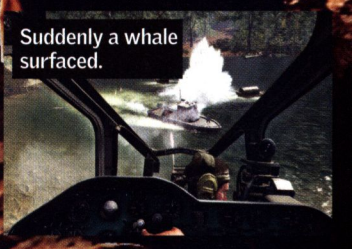
The closed-in streets of Hue City, Vietnam, was the scene of our next thrill ride, the highlight of which was the player's ability to call in a helicopter to shoot up an area of their liking. The chopper flies in and fills nearby enemies with holes before taking off to await your next command from a safe distance. It also gave us a taste of the game's close-quarters scrapping, which uses an enhanced *World at War* AI.

Tech demos later in the day showed us some of the techniques which the Spetsnaz – one of many foes in the game – will use. These Soviet special forces troops don't just duck and pop out from cover, but work in squads to flank your position, and intelligently roll and dive to avoid taking a bullet to the commie-noggin.

Next we hit the jungle to fight the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the Viet Cong guerillas, who were far less professional but suicidal in their attempts to kill Americans. First you crash land a helicopter before swimming through muddy jungle waters to emerge behind a Viet Cong and use him as a human shield.

Aiming over your hostage's shoulder, you take out his pals before dispensing of him, and moving on to blow the snot out of the jungle with machine guns, rockets and all sorts of sweet hardware. Holding this demonstration in a small room with a huge projector screen and some bassy speakers showed just how

"Hue City, Vietnam, was the scene of our next thrill ride"


Suddenly a whale surfaced.

THE STORY SO FAR...
TREYARCH

SWORD PLAY
Treyarch develop its first game: *Die by the Sword*.

1998

SOLD!
Treyarch is acquired by publishing giant Activision.

2001

A RED 'UN
Makes *Big Red One* – a spin-off of *Call of Duty 2*.

2005

A GOOD 'UN
COD: World at War appears. So do Nazi zombies. Hurrah.

2008

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Motion capture improves but characters still need a poo...

During our visit we witnessed some the newest motion capture technology being used in games today. In a studio comparable to those used for films like *Avatar*, Treyarch told us how it's only fairly recently become possible for developers to capture not just the bodily movements, but facial expressions and voices of actors simultaneously. Previously, each of these would have been captured separately, sometimes with different actors, and artificially pasted together in editing. The result of this new tech means a more fluid cinematic experience with dialogue that fits naturally with the action on screen and facial expressions that tie it all together nicely.

Shame they still haven't managed to figure out how to make a game character not look like he's in need of the loo as he runs though. Look, he's visibly clenching it.

The mocap really does make a difference.

beefy some of the weapons – and the sounds they make – really are. Even before we're allowed to take the controls we know *Black Ops* will be a mightily visceral experience to anyone with a proper setup.

The VC don't care for taking cover and all that malarkey: they run at you screaming like possessed maniacs, keeping you on edge when it's quiet and forcing you to be quick on the trigger. This is especially the case when you take to the dark and claustrophobic underground tunnels the VC dug to hide from American forces.

Being a temporary tunnel rat is a heart-pumping ordeal as you and your allies take turns to lead a slow, cautious advance through dark tunnels. And you're unnerved even further when a VC springs from the darkness and plunges a knife into your ally's chest before you can do anything about it. It's like *Resident Evil* without the zombies: you don't know what's going to jump out at you.

In this level alone you get a sense of the variety Treyarch is talking about – one minute you're blasting wooden structures to smithereens with a bazooka like a Rambo wannabe, and the next you're creeping nervously through a dingy tunnel hoping you're not about to take a blade to the face.

BAD GUY COCKTAIL

Already we'd seen a variety of enemies and there are more to be fought in the full game, Treyarch tells us, continuing the day's emphasis on variety. Differing enemies, they say, will be one of the pillars of change in the game, along with the environments and an extensive list of weapons, promises the developer.

The last level shown was a proper finale: you set upon an outpost with an eye to commandeering a meaty Hind gunship. After a brief shoot out you saddle up and take to the skies, controlling the craft freely as you blast everything in sight with chain guns and rockets.

Helicopters tend to be tough to control in games but this one won't be, promises Treyarch. The demo was being played

MARK LAMIA
STUDIO HEAD, TREYARCH

TREYARCH OF THE COVENANT

PC ZONE asks Mark Lamia what divine promises Treyarch are making for our grey boxes...

Q Have you made the game to work with NVIDIA 3D Vision?

A Yes. We actually made *World at War* to work with NVIDIA's stereo 3D and we'll be continuing that with this game. Everyone who sees it says 'wow' – it looks amazing.

How long will the campaign be for during the average playthrough?

We're aiming for a similar amount of campaign gameplay as *Call of Duty* games tend to have [that's typically between 5-7 hours], but we want to pack in a whole lot more around that. Overall I believe it'll be one of the best value products available this holiday. We're more concerned with quality over quantity.

How commited are you to the PC version, and is piracy a concern?

We're not thinking of dropping the PC. I don't know what's around the corner, but that was never a consideration. We have a dedicated PC team.

Any creative team is concerned when its work is pirated, so I'm not going to tell you not releasing a game on PC is not something we'd consider, but I think we have to solve that problem, not ditch the platform.

I know as a developer of many PC games, and a PC gamer, that the PC isn't going anywhere.

How should developers go about addressing the issue of piracy on PC?

I think it has the same digital issues as a lot of other products, whether books, movies, music: we all have to figure out how to solve the issue, and I think the way to do that is to make buying a superior experience. That's how we're trying to solve it.

Hopefully people value their time more than they value pirating, and so we provide users with such a superior experience when they're not on a cracked version of the game, and continue to support them in ways that you can't be with a pirate copy.

If you're a PC gamer, you're going to buy it. If you're a pirate then you're probably not going to buy the game anyway and you're not my market.

Do you feel competitive with Infinity Ward after the success of *Modern Warfare 2*?

I think the market is inherently competitive. Consumer expectations are high, our expectations are high. We put pressure on ourselves to deliver the best quality of work that we can. As game developers we evaluate as we play and we play all sorts of games. Whether it's from within our franchise or outside I think there's something to be learned from all of them.

Expectations couldn't be higher for *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and that's fine – neither could ours.

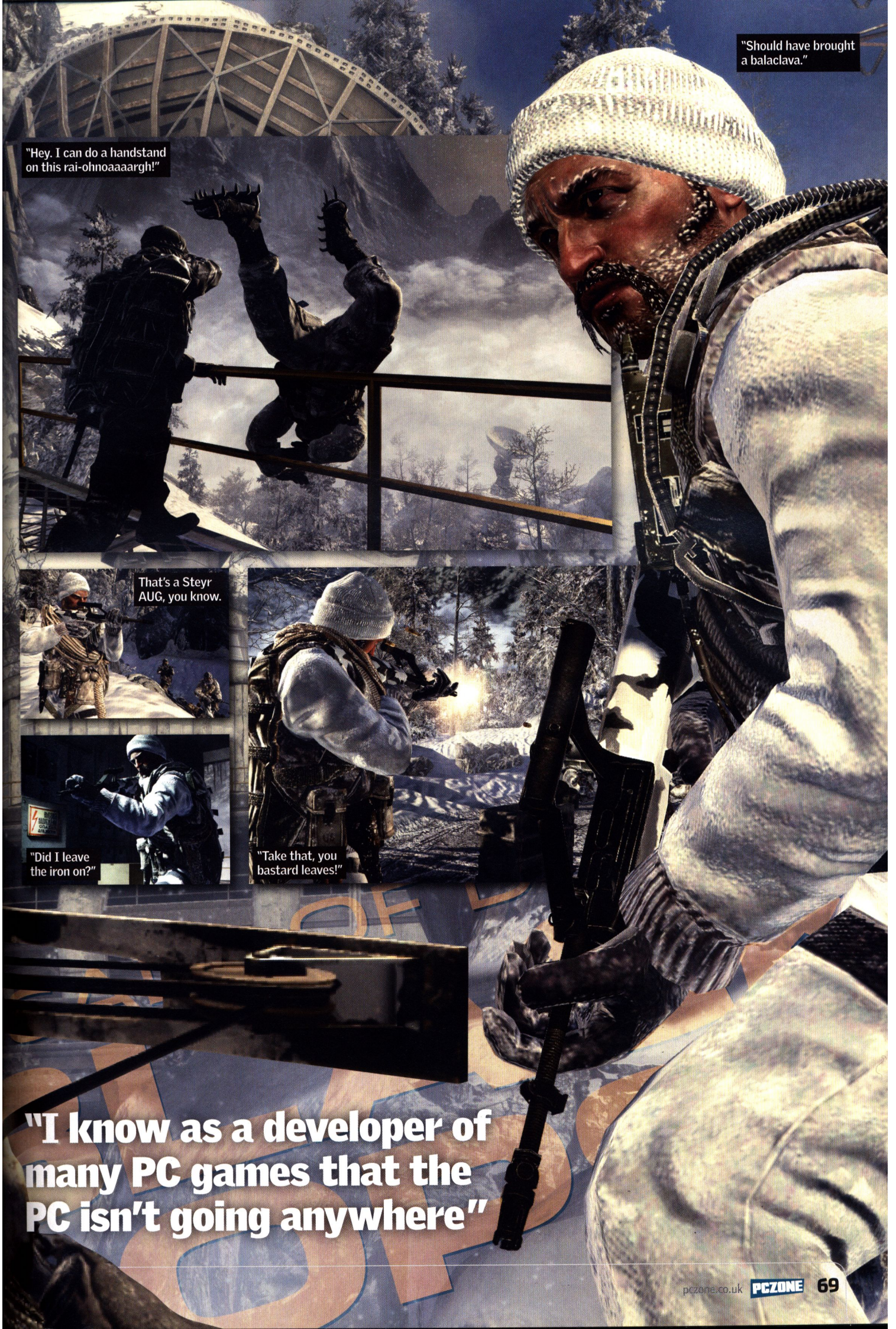
The question that's on everyone's lips, will there be dedicated servers?

I think dedicated servers are excellent. I don't see any reason not to see them unless... well, I just don't see any reason not to. It seems like people like them and we're excited about what we're doing right now.

We very much support competitive play and clans, we want to make sure they have a great experience and we have a lot of people who like to run their own dedicated servers, a lot of people in our community who find that very important. We do work very hard to reconcile the desire to manipulate and modify those dedicated servers with offering them the persistent experience and benefits that the console system provides.

We're working very hard to marry those two things, so people can run dedicated servers and also participate in the more communal experience the console players get to have, given they're all on first-party servers.

One boom-boom bolt coming up.



"I know as a developer of many PC games that the PC isn't going anywhere"

POINT AND KILL

A dissection of one of *Black Ops'* more chaotic levels...

DEMOLITION MEN
The occasional destructible building will make firing off hefty RPGs all the more satisfying, although don't expect to flatten entire levels. a la *Bad Company 2*.

REAL TO THE LAST
Treyarch researched and hired the actual gear worn by soldiers during the Cold War, and dressed models to scan with laser scanners for supreme realism.

"Treyarch say they don't want to mess too much with the tried and tested *Call of Duty* formula"

OFFENSIVE STUFF
This mission starts as the Tet Offensive got under way on 31 January, 1968. The National Liberation Front (NLF aka the Viet Cong) and People's Army of Vietnam (NVA) got stuck into the Americans, striking military and civilian centres throughout the south of the country.

with an Xbox 360 controller, but the helicopter was controlled much like a character in a normal FPS way.

On the PC we assume the controls will be kept just as basic: you'll steer/aim with the mouse while using WASD to control speed and strafe, while the aircraft's altitude control is completely ignored. This means flying should be easy for anyone who's capable of playing an FPS. As Treyarch said: "This is not a flight sim."

That intense level concluded Treyarch's single-player showing off. But it's the multiplayer game that'll have most hooked in the first week of *Black Ops'* release. Treyarch said they'd be keeping its multiplayer game under wraps for now, but they shared more than a few hints of what to expect.

Black Ops' multiplayer gameplay is being taken incredibly seriously by Treyarch, who've put in twice as much time, resources and staff into making it than *World at War's*. That's allowing for more time to be spent refining the experience. It's even leading the single-player campaign in some respects, says Treyarch. Some of the maps in the single-player game are based on multiplayer maps. Equally, the crossbow we described earlier was, among other things, made for the multiplayer game and brought across to the single-player.

The huge multiplayer team spent a lot of time thinking about the basics of multiplayer gaming and how to develop a better game. The three areas of focus were boiled down to the social, competitive and players' experiences.

MULTIPLAYER TEASE

On the player experience side Treyarch want to expand how a player customises the game to their own play style. That said, the team tells us they've done a significant amount of work on the create-a-class options to

CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The Battle of Hue marked the first time either side targeted areas of historical or cultural importance. The fighting carried on for a month, with the Viet Cong killing thousands of civilians during the conflict.

FIRE FROM THE SKY

Vehicle play will be a more significant part of *Black Ops*. Here, you periodically call in support from a beefy helicopter to take out troublesome enemy squads.

BEST OF MATES

For the first time in the series your character will speak to NPCs as you play, offering a greater sense of story and personality as the men fight together.

allow a player to personalise their battle strategy. It's different enough for the developer to promise it'll be a "new experience" that leverages the freedom that real black ops soldiers have with choosing their gear.

Treyarch say they don't want to mess too much with the tried and tested *COD* formula on the competitive side of things, but rather just tweak it where possible. They promise more equipment players can take to the battlefield and things that they can do to enhance their abilities against other players online, taking into consideration criticisms of previous *COD* games.

As for the social experience, Treyarch says they've had half of its development team focused on this, expanding the game with features that allow people to interact with others in and outside of the game. Maybe something like a stat-tracking website with forums and the like, we speculate.

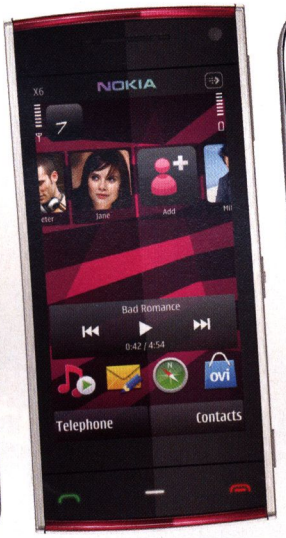
This is all very vague but it paints the picture of a multiplayer mode that aims to be every bit as epic as thoseof the *Modern Warfare* games.

That's before we even get a hint as to what's in store for the four-player co-op mode, which was confirmed at the event but again kept completely shrouded in secrecy.

Call of Duty: Black Ops hopes to top this year's list of shooters – and it has every opportunity. Not only have the previous two *Modern Warfare* games firmly established the *Call of Duty* franchise as the king of shooters, but with *Modern Warfare 3* now on an indefinite hold thanks to Infinity Ward being in turmoil as its staff quit in droves (30 have left, at the time of printing) and sue Activision (to the frankly astounding tune of 'up to $500,000,000'), this could be the time for Treyarch to step up and snatch Infinity Ward's crown. PCZ

WHICH SMARTPHONE?

Choose the best phone at the best price



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PCZONE Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

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✔ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?

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

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

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

ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one.

EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.

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

74 GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
Has the PC's return to Liberty City outdone the consoles' DLC?

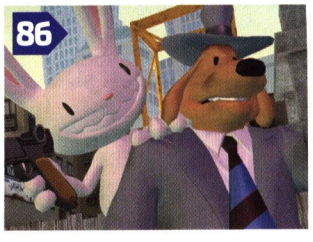
78 SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION
Once he was a cat-suited 40-something. Now he's a Chino-dressed 50-something. Does this mean Sam Fisher is less sneaky than creaky?

82 PLAIN SIGHT
While it's not deep or clever, this is a brilliant example of a co-op shoot 'em up.

83 BOB IN PIECES
Another indie title bringing a physics spin on a classic genre: this time it's the turn of lander games.

84 MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND
Take *Mount&Blade*, add royalty, North Africa and Islam, and you get this stand-alone expansion.

85 MASS EFFECT 2: KASUMI – STOLEN MEMORIES
Another mission for the brilliant *Mass Effect 2*, adds a new spin on the standard Shepard job.



86 SAM & MAX SEASON 3 EPISODE 1: THE PENAL ZONE
The dog and psychotic rabbit-thing are back for another round of psychotic adventures. This time with added shine.

87 WOODCUTTER SIMULATOR
Probably the best lumberjack simulator ever made.

88 LEAD & GOLD: GANGS OF THE OLD WEST
Team Fortress 2 goes cowboy.

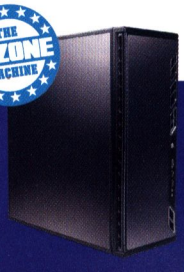
90 BEAT HAZARD

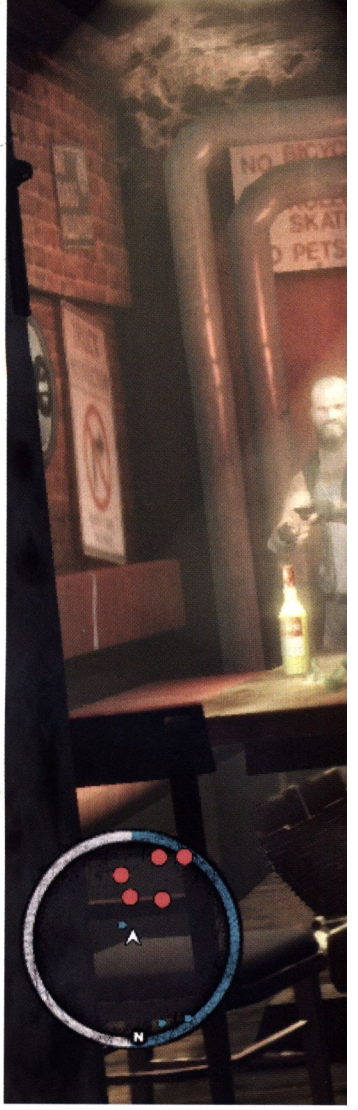
92 BUDGET

94 BUYERS GUIDE

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.





GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY

Jon 'Log' Blyth indulges his leather biker loving side

DEVELOPER Rockstar
PUBLISHER Rockstar
WEBSITE rockstargames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

Adds new colour and grit to Niko's Liberty City, but doesn't push the *GTA* envelope – it just stuffs more things into it.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz Core 2 Duo processor, 1.5GB RAM and a 256MB NVIDIA 7900 or ATI X1900 graphics card or better. Internet connection required for product activation.

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV	91%
FAR CRY 2	90%
EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY	86%

INSIDE 2008'S RE-DRAWN and re-imagined Liberty City, Rockstar declined to change the shape, structure and content of the game, or even the average mission.

Niko Bellic's freedom to roam around the city was comfortably stifled by constant prompts telling him what to do next, whether it was getting in a car, following the mini-map, losing the cops, or shooting a man with an arrow floating above his head. *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s sandbox element was mainly punching women's shopping out of their hands.

BAD SHOOTING

Gunplay was never the game's strongest card and *GTA4*'s new cover mechanics did little to enhance it. Now, you just slog along the odd corridor with your back to the wall, instead of facing it.

Let's not be too down: it's important to remember what *GTA* does with majestic, and rarely equalled, excellence: tell stories in a way that makes you feel. Take *GTA4*: Brucie was a charming mentalist, and the futility of his missions was a superbly deflating payoff. The constant pestering of your phone might have been frustrating, but it created bonds with certain characters that gave their eventual betrayal a genuine sting. The much-vaunted openness of Liberty City – and the dry and meaningless cliche that it was "living and breathing" – paled next to the lives of its mission-dispensing stars. They might not be sympathetic characters, but they're never boring, and they're dripping with satire that the tabloids never acknowledged.

With Rockstar's skilled writers providing redundant reams of character dialogue and satirical radio chat, *Episodes From Liberty City* develops the game's

Despite appearances, this isn't the gay one.

MULTIPLAYER
We hunt in packs

The joyful stupidity of *Grand Theft Auto 4*'s multiplayer is extended and embellished by the *Episodes*.

Lost and the Damned resurrects *San Andreas*' Gang Wars in Own The City, and introduces daft unbalanced racing combat in Chopper vs Chopper – in which a helicopter takes on a pushbike. There's Road Rash-esque Race, which combines speed with baseball bats to opponents' heads.

Gay Tony doesn't bring so much new stuff to the party, but welcomes BASE jumping back from *San Andreas*.

GTA4 will always be a primarily single-player experience for most people, as the combat has never been the most compelling part of the game. But you should definitely poke your nose into the multiplayer side, because it's dumb, irresponsible fun.

The poignant moment a soul leaves a ragdoll.

Nonchalant like a fox.

strongest assets admirably – and even fixes one of the more tedious problems of *GTA4* with mid-mission checkpoints. The release as two chapters that are playable independently of one other and *GTA4*, even makes sense of the game's bipolar attitude to gritty realism and OTT dick-waving. If you want real, get on your bike. If you want to jump out of a golden helicopter, go gay.

The Lost and the Damned drops you into the leathers of Johnny Klebitz, the second-in-command of The Lost, one of Liberty City's motorcycle gangs. He's been acting up while the proper boss, Billy, went through rehab. During this time, he negotiated a ceasefire with the rival gang and got the business side of the gang (selling drugs, naturally) sorted. Basically, he's greatly improved the standard and expected life expectancy of the average gang member's life.

"*Episodes* develops the game's strongest assets"

But this isn't a situation that pleases Billy when he returns. He doesn't own a Biker to Pussy translating dictionary, so he's not sure what "ceasefire" means. And he isn't prone to respecting the boundaries of his enemy's territory. So that's the journey you take on in *The Lost*: the role of the reasonable man forced to watch his hard work being undone by a stubborn old-timer with mental health issues. This tense relationship is so expertly written, and with such self-control, that you'll wince at the constant anticipation of Lost-on-Lost violence that's being saved for the finale.

In terms of what you do in the world, few things change. You ride as part of a pack now, and riding over the icon that appears in the centre of the pack triggers bonus dialogue that you'd normally get from being in a car.

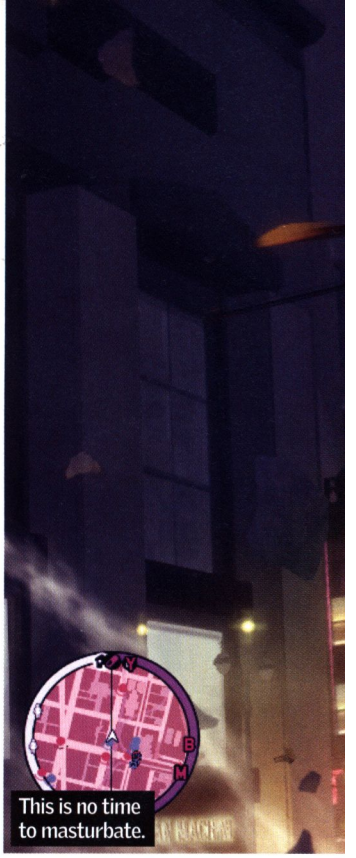
The pack mentality extends to your members – they're not a lot of nameless, faceless people. If someone dies, they stay dead. If they're replaced, it'll be with less helpful rookies. Group AI and health is always something of an opaque art in *GTA4* – it's difficult to tell what help your friends are actually offering, or what damage they're taking. You often suspect they're simply there to add to the spectacle, rather than the battle.

Beyond that (and the excellent handling on the bikes that undermines beefs about the *GTA4* cars) this is classic DLC. More of the same, but with new characters that wouldn't fit into the main story. Rockstar aren't selling you the last level they didn't finish by deadline.

SIR CAMPALOT

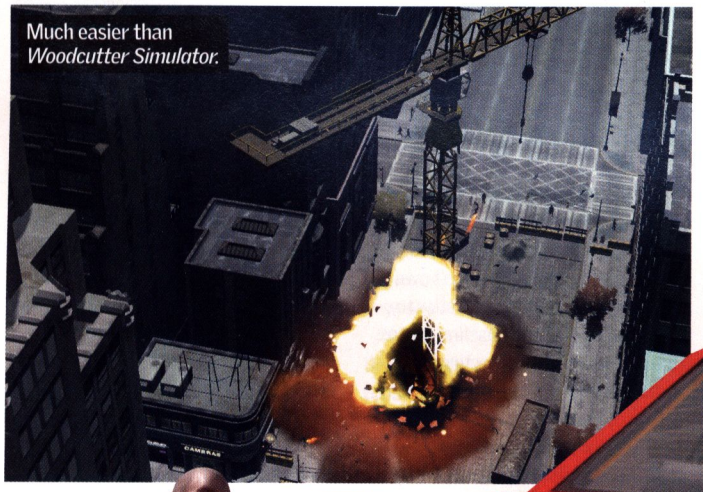
The Ballad Of Gay Tony is a very different beast. When I say that, I don't mean it's a different game: you'll still be driving to waypoints, and you'll still have 25 side missions called Gang Wars. But the tone is bolder, the pace is faster, the music is camper, and

Ah, the glamour that is gayness.


This is no time to masturbate.

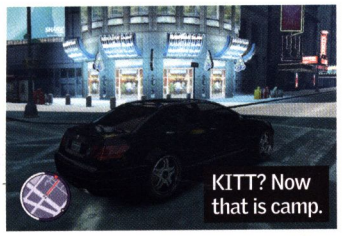
"The same issues that were annoying in *GTA4* remain in the *Episodes*"

Least gay car ever made.


Much easier than *Woodcutter Simulator*.

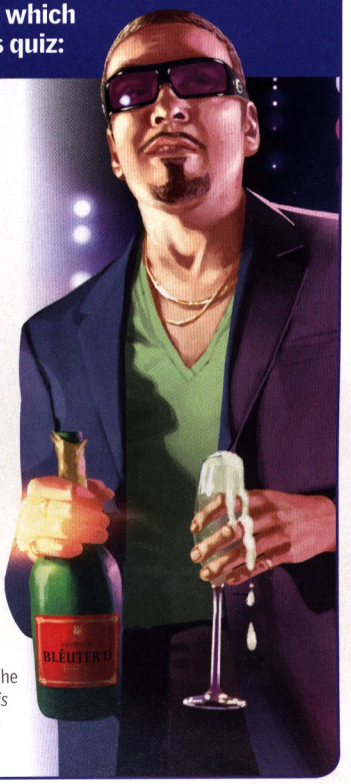
Mate, your line-of-sight's all off.

No, it's your dirty mind.


KITT? Now that is camp.

WHICH EPISODE ARE YOU?

Some things are common to both episodes, but each have unique points. Find out which you must play first with this quiz:



When I'm not doing missions I like to:
A Armwrestle.
B Sex ladies in public toilets.
C Walk into people and make them drop their shopping.

My favourite way to get around is a:
A Road-hugging hog with a low centre of gravity.
B Golden helicopter.
C Any car that spins 720° if you so much as glance at the handbrake.

What really gets my goat is when:
A Territorial infringements and disrespect damage your public perception.
B Bloggers are bitchy about you.
C Someone selling drugs on your turf, in a series of 25 bonus missions.

My favourite band is:
A Motörhead.
B Alcazar.
C Gaye Bikers On Acid.

If you answered mostly (a) go for Lost And The Damned. *Mostly (b)* The Ballad Of Gay Tony *is for you. If you answered mainly (c) then toss a coin – both games have got you covered.*

↘ the characters are bigger. Gay Tony isn't even the star of the show, which shows considerable restraint: it'd be all to easy for Rockstar to pander to their target audience and turn him into a comedy flamer, so kudos for filling out his character. Admittedly, he's pill and coke-addled, a lousy businessman and no role model, but if you come to *GTA* for your role models, you need taking out of society right now.

Like its titular hero, *The Ballad of Gay Tony* is a tackier, unsubtle and more fun affair. You'll take down a helicopter with a rocket launcher in an introductory mission, and the parachutes are a flat rejection of *The Lost*'s grenade-launching grittiness, in favour of a colourful *Just Cause*-style attitude to reality.

In a lovely touch, the relationship between player character Luis and Tony is one of genuine warmth. Luis' story is a new take on the *GTA* classic theme of a doomed new start – Tony sponsored Luis' release from jail and offered him a job. Of course, Luis is dragged back into his old ways – with a mother in debt to a loan shark, hopeless friends trying to carve themselves a drug empire, and a boss whose business methods involve selling his clubs simultaneously to two different (and equally violent) gangs. There's comedy here – for example, the escape from a golfing range in a caddy, but it rarely comes from Tony or Luis. They're just friends in a world that tends to crazy levels of bat-shit.

SAME, BUT NEW

Gay Tony has a loveable, hypermanic comedy figure from the Brucie's school of self-regard – Yusuf Amir, voiced by Omid Djalili. He's the kind of guy that wants a subway train to boost his social standing, and Tony's the kind of guy who dangles bloggers from helicopters.

Between them, Luis is the classic bemused observer, helping out because he doesn't have a choice. And again, his is a story you'll care about, and it's pleasing to see that the openly homophobic characters are also the least intelligent.

The same issues that were annoying in *GTA4* remain present in the *Episodes*. The double sign-in to the Rockstar Social Club and *Games for Windows – LIVE* still feels needless, and despite some optimization since the first PC release, this is still a punishingly demanding game that'll swallow 17GB of hard disk and dip to ruinously stuttering frame rates if you're not on a relatively new PC.

Taking a corner is still frustrating on a keyboard – it's like trying to control a suitcase full of kangaroos with a bit of dowel rod. Combined with cover-and-shoot segments of the game – clearly designed for consoles too – you might prefer to play this on a gamepad.

Episodes From Liberty City adds mature and expertly written stories and entertainingly unacceptable characters to the rapidly ageing Liberty City. They're punchier stories, and the imagination poured into *GTA*'s restrictive framework manages, on many occasions, to break the monotony that set in towards the last third of Niko Bellic's journey. PCZ

The guy on the left? He's a dick.

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Great, if your PC can handle it
SOUND New radio music and chat
MULTIPLAYER More overblown *GTA4* fun

- ✔ Enriches Liberty City
- ✔ Good hours per pound ratio
- ✔ Mid-mission checkpoints
- ✘ Missions still templated
- ✘ *GTA* play glitches remain

86
DLC masterclass

Human shields delay enemies for just a few seconds.

SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Steve Hogarty's last known location: Tesco Metro, Hackney

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE splintercell.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99

ONLINE ONLY

AT A GLANCE...

Fisher, but with a Bourne twist. Find your kid, foil a terrorist plot, take cover and shoot multiple baddies at once in a really awesome way.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 1.8GHz Core Duo 2 processor, 1.5GB RAM (2GB *Vista/7*), 256MB NVIDIA 7800/ATI X1800 graphics card or better. Constant internet connection required for DRM.

HOW IT STACKS

SPLINTER CELL	94%
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	91%
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION	84%

HERE COMES THE usual, laborious, intro-spoiling caveat: **if you don't have a perfectly reliable internet connection and an utterly dependable router (and you don't reside in a fictional world in which Ubisoft's authentication servers aren't under constant attack), there will be times when you won't be allowed to play *Splinter Cell: Conviction* using either its single-player or multiplayer modes.**

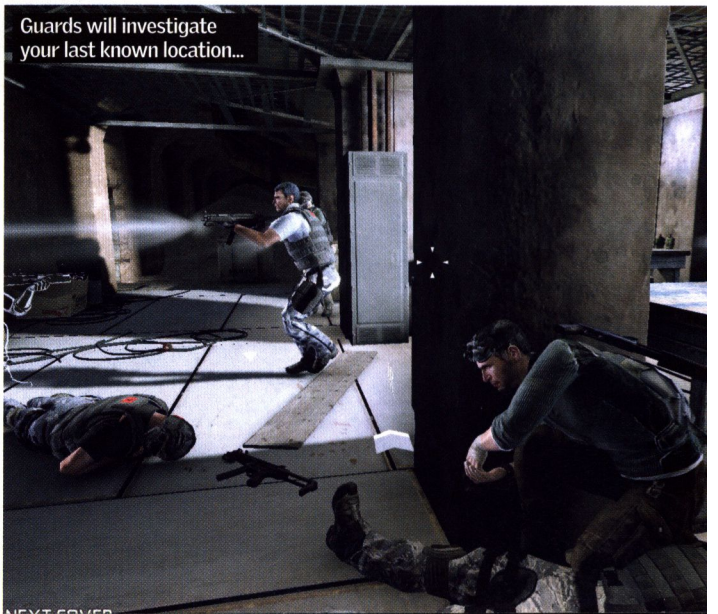
Ubisoft's astounding anti-piracy measures will unfairly pull you back to the menu screen if there's even a whiff of your connection being lost. Mid-fight, mid-sneak, in the instant before Sam Fisher snaps a neck, the system will jerk you out of the action regardless – if only for a fraction of a second – to check that you haven't become the death of the industry incarnate since it last looked.

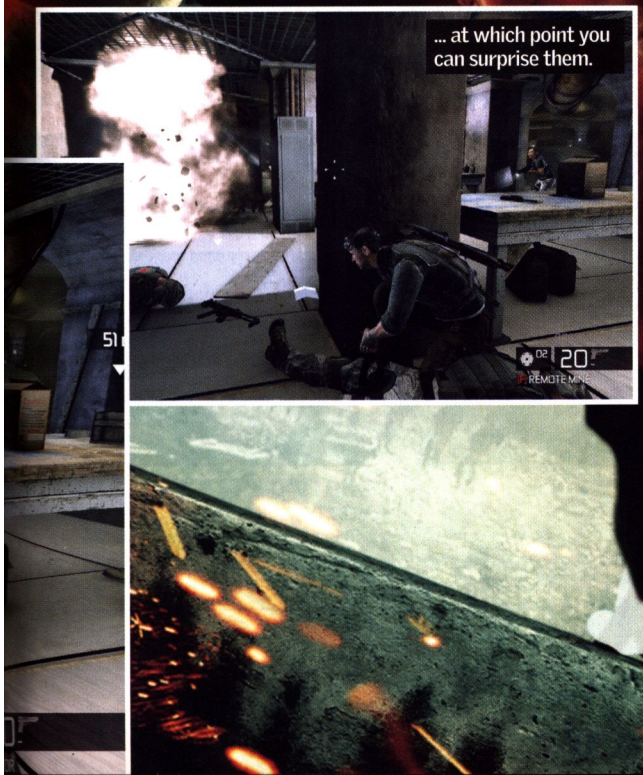
Not only do these interruptions stomp on the throat of immersion, the frequency of these split-second flits back to the menu screen increases if there's any other traffic on your network. Downloading the new *Doctor Who* from the BBC iPlayer? Streaming a live puppy webcam? That'll impact how often you're rudely interrupted by a game-freezing "Attempting to re-establish connection" message. This player-punishing DRM is the latest in an embarrassing series of own goals for Ubisoft, which we've looked at in detail on page 30, but here in review-town you won't find it affecting *Conviction*'s final score.

In fact, it'll hardly be mentioned again. Just imagine somebody flicking your ear after each page, then balance the inconvenience of these infrequent interruptions against the number we've stamped at the end of these pages. It's a big one. It'll be a hard decision, so give it some thought.

OLD GUY

This isn't your father's *Splinter Cell*. Fisher's all grown up (the fiction glosses over it, but he should be in his mid-50s by this point), and the cruel passage of time has stolen from him his ability to zip up


Guards will investigate your last known location...



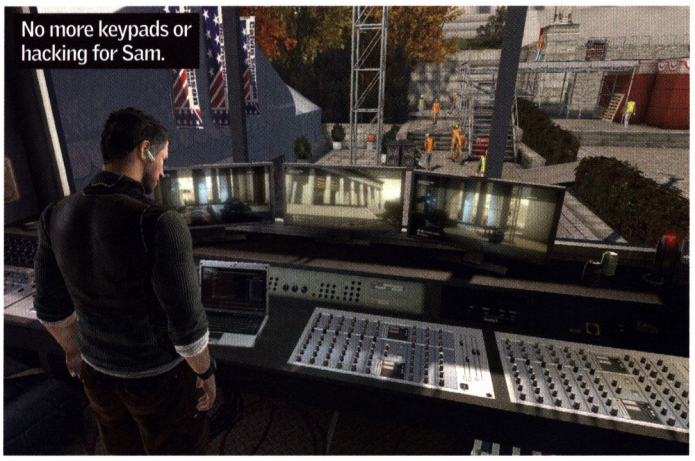
"The beating heart of *Splinter Cell* is very much in attendance"

his skin-tight catsuits and do the splits in the dark. Instead we've got a contemporary spy for the noughties, a strategy minded, khaki-wearing sharpshooter exuding the effortless cool of Bauer, Bourne and new-Bond combined. Gadgets are out the window, goggles likewise, and replacing much of the shadow-skulking of the original is the new mark-and-execute system, a fully automatic murder-button that, when available, dispatches multiple enemies in the blink of an eye.

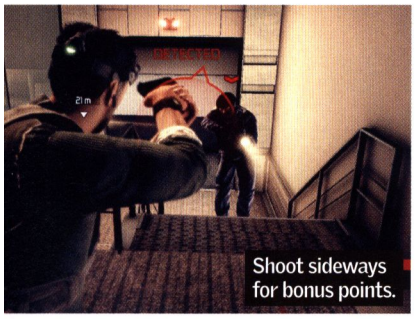
Conviction falls between the short-tempered resourcefulness of *24* and the stalker-ish charm of *Arkham Asylum*. New Fisher is one seriously stylish bastard, and while the goggles make a partial comeback later in the game (sticky cameras too, though the tech-wizardry peaks there) *Conviction* is less about memorising patrol routes, flicking between vision modes and timing your movements between pitch-black alcoves. Instead, you're observing rooms from behind cover, marking enemies with the Q key, looking for that crucial melee kill to unlock a one-use execution move, and triggering said move to drop the remaining guards. *Conviction* rewards preparation and celebrates efficiency. Fisher even comments on how well you do with pithy and sarcastic post-slaughter remarks to himself.

This is fast-paced stealth, and while the beating heart of *Splinter Cell* is very much in attendance, it feels entirely unlike any other game in the series. Darkness is still your ally, and light metres are eschewed in favour of desaturating the screen when you're shrouded in the inky black. Lights can be shot out and portable EMP devices can stun guards and create pockets of temporary darkness.

Once unseen, it's a matter of moving from cover to cover (adjacent destinations are highlighted, and Fisher automatically slides to his next hiding spot with a slap of the spacebar) while identifying and avoiding the gaze of baddies.


No more keypads or hacking for Sam.

This is how we end all our interviews too.



Shoot sideways for bonus points.

The AI is pleasingly unpredictable, with some guards more willing than others to chase you around blind corners. They vocalise every thought too, an angry deluge of anti-Fisher sentiment tumbling from the mouths of any buggers who know you're skulking around. You are, after all, infamous.

Present yourself to guards and they'll engage you, but duck back into the darkness or behind cover and you trigger *Conviction*'s second party trick. Your last-known location is marked by a ghostly silhouette to which enemies will pay most of their attention, affording you an opportunity to circle around into a more advantageous position. Here, the guards' AI works almost perfectly, striking a crucial balance: dumb enough to stride purposefully towards where they think you are, but clever enough to consider where you might've gone. If you were last seen diving into a drain, they'll fire wildly into the darkness below rather than potter mindlessly about its edge.

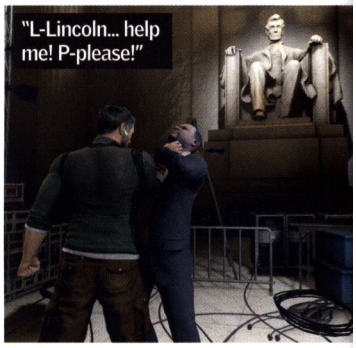
From your new vantage point you can either carry out a random, gruesome melee attack on an enemy – Fisher can do this move where he seems to stab people with bullets, using his pistol like a deadly and impractical staple gun – or take a distracted guard hostage (which also allows you to use your execute ability). Or you can pop heads the old fashioned way. Unlike the previous games' deliberately wonky guns, your basic weapons are mostly accurate in *Conviction*, though it's this needless expenditure of energy that Fisher tuts at after an encounter. He, along with the level designers, clearly want you tagging and bagging the ne'er-do-wells.

"*Conviction* simply isn't geared towards pure stealth"

SHOOTY STEALTHY

There's little sense of accomplishment in merely sneaking past every guard undetected, *Conviction* simply isn't geared towards pure stealth. Neither is the plot: an off-the-grid Fisher's got word that his daughter, who he believed had been killed in a hit-and-run (back in *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*) is alive and well, leading him to charge angrily through a conspiracy plot in search of the truth. Only on one occasion are you limited by a mission-resetting "don't set off an alarm" order, otherwise you're free to be as loud as you like.

Shotguns, submachine guns, grenades and assault rifles are all options available to you. Every gun can be used in an execution too – with shotgun executions being a particularly destructive way to neutralise a room of opposition. Fisher's grumpy new demeanour doesn't lend itself to the witty guard encounters of old *Splinter Cell*s either, a massive shame as it makes the whole of the single-player campaign come across more than a bit po-faced – a waste of good Ironside. What his temperament provides instead are wonderfully violent interrogations, vaguely quick-time event-style expositions during which you can smash your victim's head against "contextual bash points" (see Interrogatored).


"L-Lincoln... help me! P-please!"

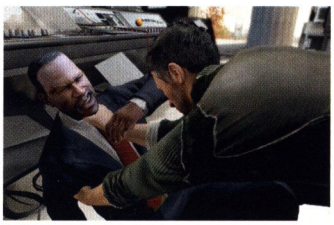
Conviction's single-player game is very short too – roughly five hours long depending on how you play – but it's backed by the incredible co-op mode. This is a lengthy and entirely original

INTERROGATORED

The many, many terrible things Sam Fisher does to people who don't answer his questions...

WINDOWED
EST. DAMAGES: £315
This man has his head punched through a window early on, when he failed to name the capital of Argentina.

PIANOED
EST. DAMAGES: £6,000
This man couldn't tell Sam Fisher the name of the song he was humming, and had his face smashed into an expensive grand piano.



MIXING DESKED
EST. DAMAGES: £700
The man could only name 41 presidents of the United States. Was body slammed into a mixing desk, to his eternal shame.

HDTV'D
EST. DAMAGES: £1,200
This man wasn't sure what he wanted for dinner, and soon found himself shoved rudely into a large, wall-mounted HDTV.

campaign built from the ground up and starring two fresh characters. Kestrel, the distrusting Russian, and Archer the wise-cracking American.

The co-op side of *Conviction* is a game in itself, with a plot that sets up the events of the main campaign. Mark and execute works for both players, with each spy's marks appearing on the other's HUD. In this way, up to eight enemies can be marked, and with the right co-ordination kills can be carried out simultaneously.

DUAL FISHERS

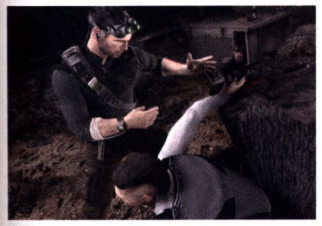
The effect of the co-op campaign being designed purely from the perspective of two players is apparent, if only in the frequent ability of one spy to worm around inside a ceiling crawlspace while the other moves along the corridor underneath, taking advantage of the marks being given to him from above. You can be grabbed by an enemy too, at which point your buddy has to take a risky shot or flank the grabby guard to take him out from behind – an act that pushes all sorts of lovely co-op empathy buttons.

Supplementing the co-op love-in, Deniable Ops is a series of stand-alone missions which ostensibly replace the old Mercs vs Spy competitive multiplayer element. These see the two spies luring guards towards one another by making rude noises behind crates. Other Deniable Ops missions see the pair co-operating to fight against waves of increasingly harder enemies.

All of this carrying on feeds into the game's economy system. In-game achievements dole out upgrade points, which you can then spend on weapons mid-campaign, increasing their accuracy, damage, and the number of enemies they can mark at any one time. It's a slightly underused feature, given that you'll fall back on one silenced, infinite-ammo pistol in particular, almost entirely avoiding the big noisemakers in the second drawer, but the drip-feed of progression is always a welcome one, as is any incentive to experiment with patrolling guards.

Conviction's a bold re-invention for the series then, just as it had always promised to be. The powerful Bauer's-own brand of action-stealth means it's unfair on most levels to compare it to the likes of *Chaos Theory*, and though delayed by almost three years it still feels stylistically relevant – who could've guessed that looking undaunted and firing a gun sideways would still be cool in 2010? The projected objectives are incredibly flashy too, a remnant of a brief infatuation certain quarters of the internet had with videos of hi-def projectors, one that never went viral but remains in tune with *Conviction*'s austere and polished tech-politic mix-bag.

Keeping it from a higher score is that stumpy campaign length, and the rapidly degenerating level design as the game draws to a close, which sees large, multiple-pathed and accessible rooms whittled down to enemy-funnelling corridors, drawing to the fore the few negative aspects of *Conviction*'s combat (here, niggles like the alternating run/walk mode bound to the Shift key begin to irritate). And redressing those concerns is the astonishingly fun multiplayer component, and the thrill of efficient murder within the highly refined and endlessly enjoyable mark and execute system. Sam might not be sticking to the shadows as much as he once dide, but *Splinter Cell*'s never been this classy. PCZ



STABBED INTO A TREE
EST. DAMAGES: COVERED BY NHS
This man failed to explain to Sam's satisfaction Fermat's Theorum and was subsequently stabbed right into a tree.

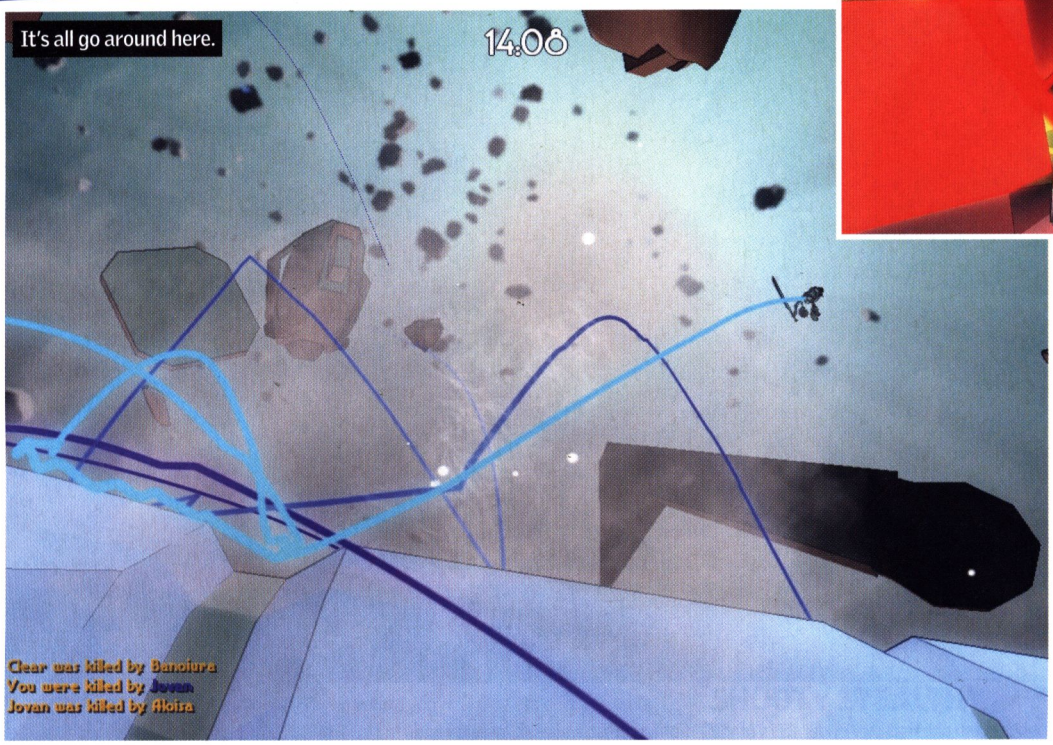
Kestrel: one half of the co-op team.

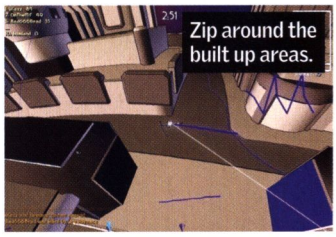
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Bit too grey at times
SOUND Lots of sweary guards
MULTIPLAYER Fabbo co-op

- Executions satisfying
- Stylish and polished
- Needlessly brilliant co-op
- Single-player a bit short
- Loses pace near the end

84
Has the courage





PLAIN SIGHT

Jon 'Log' Blyth had his eyes on the prize, but it moved

DEVELOPER Beatnik Games
PUBLISHER Steam, D2D, Gamers Gate
WEBSITE plainsightgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $10

AT A GLANCE...

An eye-warping robot-boosting melee deathmatch in which you bank your points by committing suicide.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2Ghz processor, 1Gb RAM, and a DirectX 9 graphics card with Shader Model 2 support. You'll need a sound card for sounds, too. Fancy.

HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2	93%
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3	90%
PLAIN SIGHT	90%

FOR REASONS BEST known to themselves the sword-waving robots of whatever world *Plain Sight* is set in are locked in a perpetual deathmatch.

It seems they kill each other, because killing each other gives them energy and makes them bigger. As you grow bigger, the energy reward for killing you is greater. So, it's a matter of storing as much energy, and as big a multiplier, as you can before you bottle it. When you're a big enough target that everyone's after your energy, it's time to commit explosive suicide.

Suicide cashes in your energy points, along with any multiplier you've picked up from chain kills, and another multiplier for any enemies who got destroyed by your nuclear seppuku. Banking your points lets you upgrade your tin fella – adding shields, speed, a warning indicator that tells you when someone's locked on, and various other bonuses, such as reducing the time taken to detonate (during which you're completely prone).

SUICIDE IS HILARIOUS

So far, so conkers. But *Plain Sight* is set over a number of retro 3D maps which work like *Mario Galaxy* spheres. You attack another player by locking on, constantly running, jumping, and swirling your mouse, and holding down the left button to lock on and build up a charge. Once the orange reticules align and turn red, you're in with a chance – release the mouse button to launch yourself into a lethal boost. Assuming they haven't disappeared halfway around the planet by the time you let go.

A helpful touch is the trails players leave. Colour-coded by the energy level of their owner, they give you a sense of direction and purpose in a world that would be blank and baffling otherwise.

Five modes mix up the gameplay – from classic deathmatch, to causing the biggest explosion, to Ninja! Ninja! Ninja! Robozilla!, in which you take it in turns to wreak as much carnage as possible before the other players whittle your health away.

Practice mode is good for teaching yourself the basics, against some competent but unchallenging AI. It's online where you'll get your skills flexed, your wrists tested, and your inner ears screwed with. It's frantic, non-stop action that leaves you with the perfect combination of exhilaration, satisfaction and a nugget of injustice that makes you want to play again.

Plain Sight is a simple little game that's polished and varied enough to compete with the big boys in terms of pure, joyful fun. PCZ

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Simple, effective
SOUND Charming music and then booms
MULTIPLAYER Five modes

- Simple, pure fun
- Satisfying suicide mechanic
- Frustrating in a good way
- Clean, accessible chaos
- Everyone is better than me

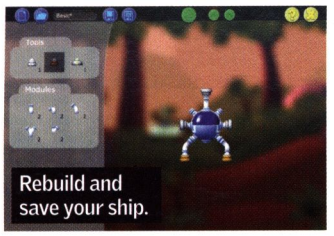
90
Cheap and gold

BOB CAME IN PIECES

Shoot to Phil? No?

DEVELOPER Ludosity Interactive
PUBLISHER Ludosity Interactive
WEBSITE ludosity.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.49

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.



THERE'S SOMETHING CHARMING about Bob. His quest to get back to his job in an intergalactic call centre is an unexpected mix of *Moon Lander* and *Spore Creature Creator*, held together with the unpredictable glue of physics.

When you start, it's a basic matter of boosting yourself around a corridor. And you needn't worry about the delicate tip-tapping of traditional lander games, as your ship is indestructible. It can get trapped in clumsy situations, but you're free to reset to checkpoints at any time.

Where *Bob Came...* develops into something distinctive and worthwhile, is in the ship parts you find around the maps. They can be snapped onto your ship at the many screwdriver icons, along with boosters and pushy-pully gadgets that you find along the way. You'll be regularly rebuilding your ship to suit the needs of a level – poking a pipe through a gap in the wall, putting a booster on top to burn away some weeds. It's doubly satisfying, because there are clumsy and elegant ways to complete a level. A poorly optimised load-out might work, but you'll make your life a lot easier if you balance your ship. Asymmetrical crafts are a bastard to control, especially when you're carrying some cargo.

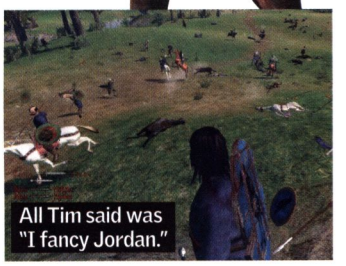
The music and sound effects become slightly abrasive after a while, but there's no essential noises you need to hear, so just turn them off and sing your favourite songs. You'll get a few hours of intriguing and fresh puzzling for your six quid and singing's fun too.

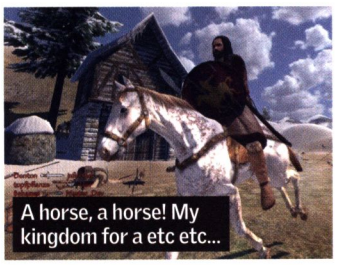
Jon 'Log' Blyth

PCZONE 82
Simply good

YOUR WEAPON..

WWW.ALPHAPROTOCOL.COM





MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND

Nick Brakespear gets confused and mounts his blade

DEVELOPER TaleWorlds
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE taleworlds.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

IF MY CHILDHOOD experiences of medieval re-enactment are anything to go by, then medieval warfare smelled rather strongly of blood, sweat and WD-40, Strongbow was the favoured drink in those ancient times, and banquets usually involved curry and chips.

For all its fancy new additions to *Mount&Blade*, this standalone expansion spectacularly fails to grasp the historical significance of the Indian takeaway. Given its accuracy in other areas however, we'll forgive this error.

For those of you new to the scene, *Mount&Blade* loiters between *Sacrifice* and *Medieval: Total War* in terms of gameplay. Set in the fictional 13th century war-torn land of Calradia, the franchise offers a blend of open-ended RPG, RTS and mounted combat, with real-time battles and realistic physics.

Veterans of the original release who saw TaleWorld's claims that this is a sequel will be dismayed to hear that *Warband* has the same setting, the same kingdoms and much of the same content as *Mount&Blade*. Considering this is a standalone release with a standalone price this may put you off, but *Warband* does introduce some improvements and additional features to *Mount&Blade*.

MANY MOUNTS

Top of this list is the new multiplayer side to the game. Offering seven game modes, randomly generated map options and bots to fill ranks in smaller matches, there's little to find fault here. The RPG elements of the single-player version are cast aside in favour of a class system, neatly avoiding issues of character balance, and equipment is purchased with money rewarded for kills. Sadly, there's no campaign or co-op mode, but with so many conventional multiplayer options and an active modding community, it's hard to bear a grudge.

On the single-player front, players can now find a spouse and engage in a lengthy courting process in the name of love or power. This can lead to control of a faction, becoming a king, and special party members being promoted by you to become vassals lords and given land. Meanwhile a new faction and a desert region based on medieval Islamic society has appeared, offering new armour and clothing designs, and a more topical locale for waging war.

And of course, there's the kick button to play with. You'll be having *Duke Nukem* flashbacks and shouting "I've got balls of steel" in no time. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

Historical action RPG with RTS elements and lots of horses.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.1GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

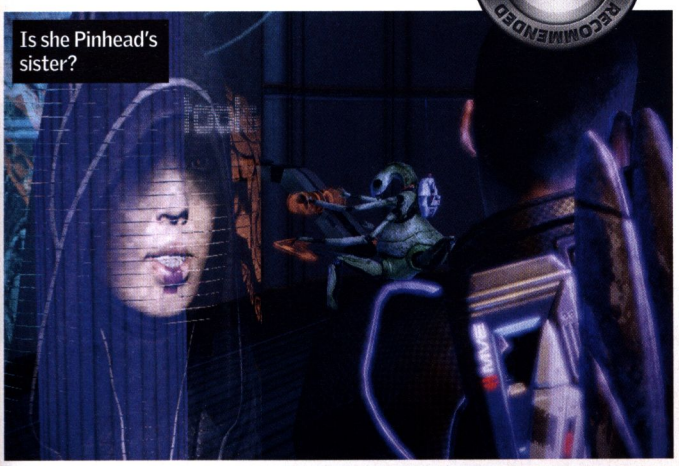
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR	91%
MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND	70%
MOUNT&BLADE	62%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Moments of beauty
SOUND Thundering hooves
MULTIPLAYER Fully functional

- ✔ **Multiplayer with horses**
- ✔ More power
- ✔ **The kick button**
- ✘ No new campaign
- ✘ **No co-op multiplayer**
- ✘ The price

70
My lovely horse


Is she Pinhead's sister?

MASS EFFECT 2: KASUMI – STOLEN MEMORIES

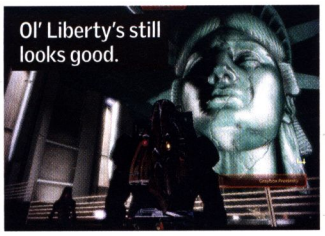
She took my... thingy

ONLINE ONLY

EXPANSION PACK+

DEVELOPER BioWare
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE masseffect.com
ETA Out now
PRICE 560 BioWare points (approx £4.33)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for *Vista/7*) and a 256 MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support. *Mass Effect 2* required. Constant internet connection required to play *ME2* DLC.


Ol' Liberty's still looks good.

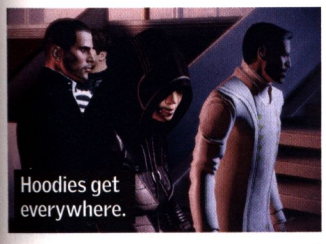
BUY, DOWNLOAD, AND install *Kasumi*, **and you'd be forgiven for thinking it didn't work. The only evidence of your purchase is an email on your terminal and a waypoint on your galaxy map, reading "Recruit The Master Thief".**

So you return to Citadel and Kasumi tracks you down quickly – in a stupidly conspicuous, but forgivably fun, way that sets the tone of the mission. And it's a strange old task. BioWare have squeezed a heist into the *Mass Effect* game style with considerable skill, but it's still a difficult to buy into completely. You're at a party of the world's most decadent and criminal billionaires, running around saying "let me into the boss' bedroom please".

Kasumi is a good character – a cocky but heartbroken thief who can't let go of her past. She could have been a great character in the main game, but you only get one mission with her for your money (OK, points). She's immediately loyal, so there's no revealing second mission to make it worth buttering her up. Indeed, if you've already completed the game, you're missing out on the pleasure of having her skills with you throughout the story.

So, what do you get for your quids? A new character (briefly) with unique stalking backstab attacks and flashbang grenades; a 60-minute mission (tops); and a submachine gun. *Stolen Memories* is definitely not big on value, but if you're a *Mass Effect* fan you'll find it hard to resist. Which is, obviously, what EA are counting on.

Jon 'Log' Blyth


Hoodies get everywhere.

PCZONE 78
Short and sweet

IS CHOICE...

WWW.ALPHAPROTOCOL.COM

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

SAM & MAX SEASON 3 EPISODE 1: THE PENAL ZONE

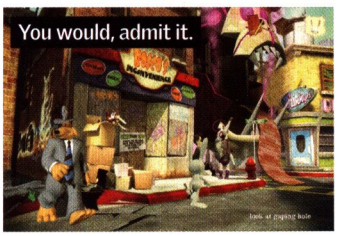
David Brown wishes he harassed pigeons for a living

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/samandmax
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99 (five-episode season)

AND SO ANOTHER season swoops down from Telltale Castle and begins to suckle on your adventure gaming teat, this time returning to the corners of Straight and Narrow for another battle with the forces of bizarre evil.

Sam and Max are back after a substantial time away and it seems they mean business this time. Telltale have kept up a consistent level of quality with their games, always scoring around the 70 to 80% marks. You've pretty much always known what you were going to get, but this time things are just that little bit different. For a start, it's safe to say this is the best they've ever made.

The writing is always witty and much more amusing than in any of their previous titles, with some genuinely laugh-out-loud moments in there. The voice acting is a cut above, especially compared to the embarrassing incidental pirates in *Tales of Monkey Island*. There isn't a single character that you don't want to fully listen to and at no point does the dialogue have you reaching for the skip button.



RETURN TO FORM

With the humour nailed on, including self-referential comments about how the series' comedy can be baffling to non-converts, the puzzles are next under the magnifying glass.

Adventure veterans will bemoan the lack of mind-bending puzzles and that's a problem. The introduction of Max's psychic powers, especially the one which lets him predict the future, is often akin to Telltale telling you how to solve the puzzle. It's not as simple as that and it does help to push you along at a steady pace, but it definitely doesn't make this a challenge. That's a good thing though, if you just want to relax and play through a madcap story about alien gorillas, brains in jars and toys that grant very specific powers to the user.

Aside then from a questionable difficulty level, and therefore a relatively short lifespan, there's not much at all wrong with *Penal Zone*. It's funny, clever and thoroughly enjoyable to play, and you can't ask for much more than that can you? PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

The zany freelance police return for their third set of twisted adventures, mixing intergalactic monkeys in with curious psychic powers.

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

HOW IT STACKS

SAM & MAX 3.01	88%
WALLACE & GROMIT 1.01	79%
TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND 1.01	76%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Telltale's best yet
SOUND Voices are a joy
MULTIPLAYER One-player co-op

- ✔ **Telltale's best to date**
- ✔ Superb dialogue
- ✔ **Excellent voice acting**
- ✔ Good new characters...
- ✔ **...and plenty of old references**
- ✘ Puzzles a bit too easy

88
So close to greatness

WOODCUTTER SIMULATOR

Lumberjack Squat

DEVELOPER It's a mystery
PUBLISHER Layernet
WEBSITE Oh, if only
ETA Out now
PRICE £17.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

YOU'RE EXPECTING A comedy review, right? Well, I'm not taking the easy road. I'm going to sit here and play this game until I've at least finished the first mission, the Melleroy Job. There's no manual, but I've watched a couple of episodes of *Ax Men*, so I'm as qualified as anyone to do this.

Having pressed every button on the keyboard, I've discovered pressing 'H' brings up a little fact sheet. A fact sheet that tells me precisely what I'd figured out and no more. So the question still remains: How. Do. I. Cut. Down. A. Fucking. Tree?

Basically, this is a game which tells you you're "not in the right position". I have spent two hours circling this tree, trying to make sense of that blip on the radar, watching YouTube videos of a Polish guy jabber on in what are probably perfectly good sentences where he comes from, and I still can't get this machine to work.

There's something deeply wrong when a simulator doesn't let you make a mistake. What flight simulator doesn't let you crash into the sea? What *Lipstick Tycoon* game doesn't let you price yourself out of the lipstick market? A huge part of *Woodcutter Simulator* should be bad judgments and carnage. People don't watch *Ax Men* and its ilk because they like to watch large trees fall to the ground: they want to see arms get ripped off.

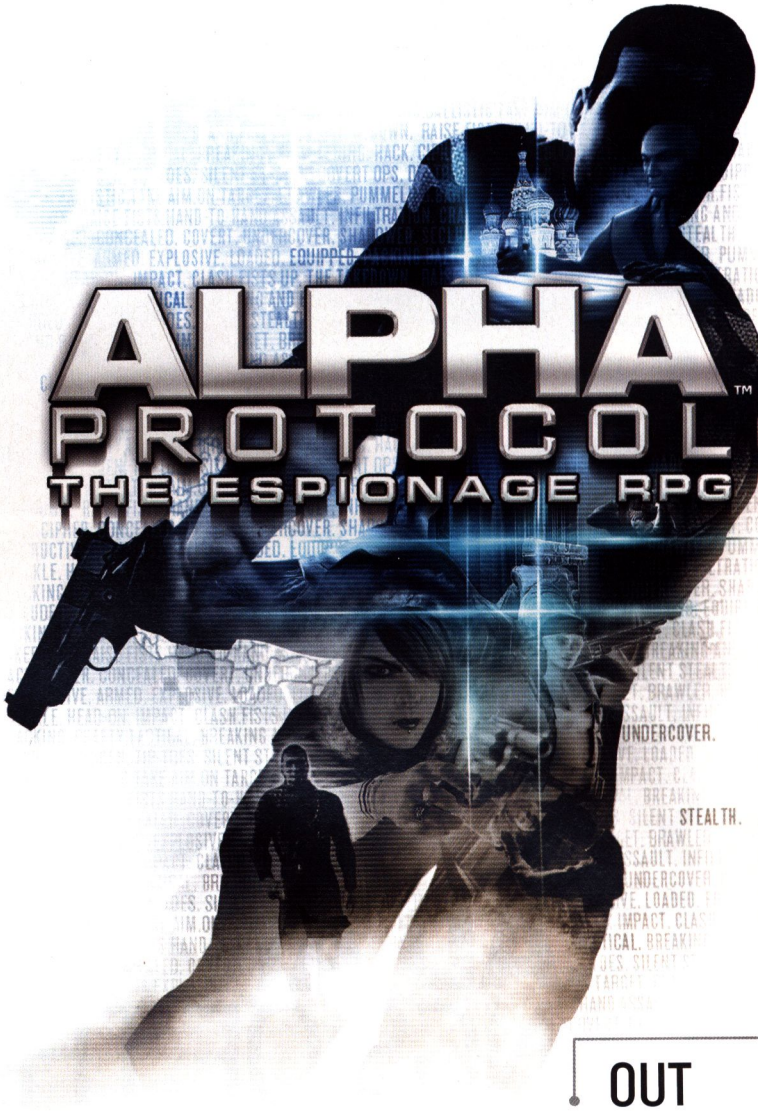
With games that live in a pointless niche as this, it's always good to hear from people why they like it, so here is Andrew Bryant's (@optimaximal) explanation of why he pretends to be a woodcutter: "I play and/or like it because nothing captures the high-octane lifestyle of a holzfäller like it. I also like the twig cursor."

See? Even your fan can't justify you, you stupid gamebollock.

Jon 'Log' Blyth

PCZONE 40 Axe to the head

YOUR WEAPON IS CHOICE...



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LEAD AND GOLD: GANGS OF THE WILD WEST

ONLINE ONLY

David Brown saddles up and heads out into review country

DEVELOPER Fatshark
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE fatshark.se
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

AT A GLANCE...

Small-scale multiplayer shoot outs in a cartoon version of the Wild West, with added gunpowder kegs.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.4GHz processor (2GHz *Vista*), 1.5GB RAM (2GB *Vista*), 512MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 compatibility. Steam required.

HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2	93%
LEAD AND GOLD	71%
STARGATE: RESISTANCE	19%

HAVING THE ABILITY to shoot hats off in a game is a great thing, especially when this act is accompanied by that distinctive shrieking sound guns made in the Wild West. Each of the four classes in *Lead and Gold* has headwear you can blast off, exposing their craniums to the world. Do this to a Gunslinger and you even notice he's comically bald, reducing the fear factor of meeting one up close and personal in a dark alley.

LAG (an appropriate acronym) is a *Team Fortress 2*-inspired multiplayer shooter. As either a Blue or a Red gang member, you'll take the battlefield in a number of different game modes. Some involve blowing up objectives and taking items like sacks of gold back to your base, while others just require you to kill more enemies than the opposition or capture five different zones of control.

The four classes are Gunslinger, Trapper, Blaster and Deputy, with the former being probably the easiest to get to grips with. Each character has a special ability, with the Gunslinger able to fire off six shots very quickly to take out opponents from close range. The Blaster can lob sticks of dynamite and wields a double-barrelled shotgun, while the Trapper can place bear traps to ensnare unwitting enemies. Lastly, the Deputy's special ability allows him to tag an opponent, so his whole team can observe their movements.

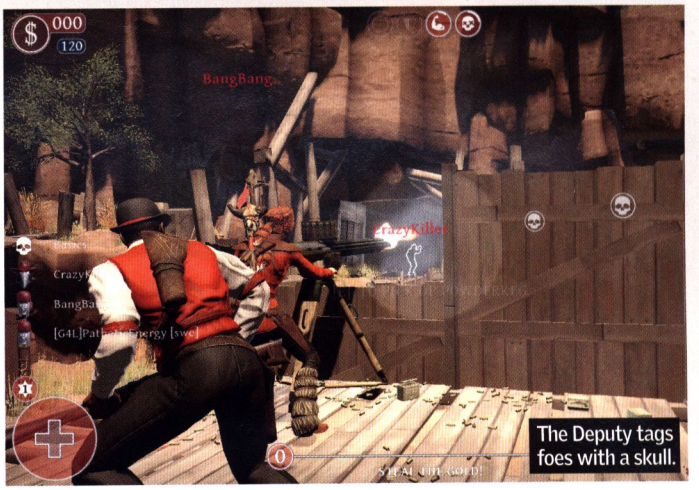
A TRUE TEAM

In terms of balance, each character trades off well against the others. At no point do you feel useless, even when playing as a long-range class (Deputy or Trapper) on a particularly boxed-in level like Devil's Pit. Clearly certain classes will have advantages at times, but on the whole developers Fatshark have done a superb job keeping play interesting for all players at all times.

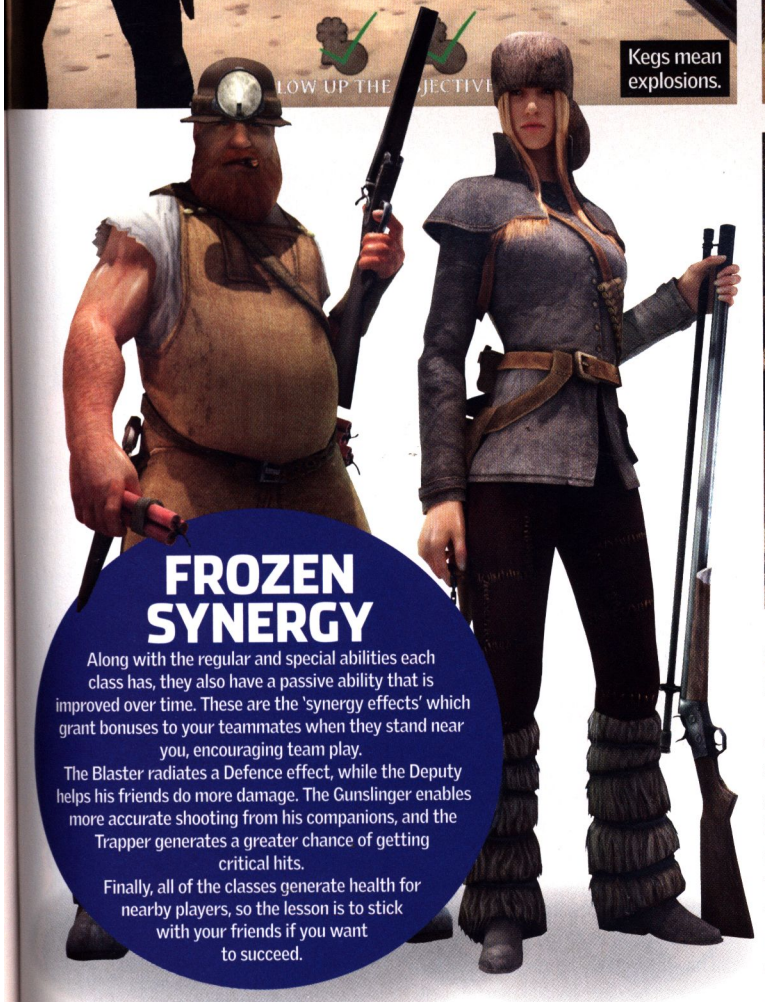
The only real problem with the characters is that there's a distinct lack of personality, as none of them have any vocalisations or taunts. This means you don't get attached to them in the way

Kegs mean explosions.

Tag! You're it!



The Deputy tags foes with a skull.



FROZEN SYNERGY

Along with the regular and special abilities each class has, they also have a passive ability that is improved over time. These are the 'synergy effects' which grant bonuses to your teammates when they stand near you, encouraging team play.

The Blaster radiates a Defence effect, while the Deputy helps his friends do more damage. The Gunslinger enables more accurate shooting from his companions, and the Trapper generates a greater chance of getting critical hits.

Finally, all of the classes generate health for nearby players, so the lesson is to stick with your friends if you want to succeed.

you would to a sandvich-chomping Heavy in *TF2*.

LAG's also a game that doesn't take itself too seriously and therefore isn't one that's likely to get on your wick as much as serious multiplayer shooters like *Bad Company 2* or *Counter-Strike*. Because the game is only five-a-side, you always feel like you have something to contribute to the team, be it with supporting actions, like tagging opponents or just laying traps around the gold to stop the bastards stealing it.

Playing this game isn't all wine and roses, though. Player numbers are limited and the lack of dedicated servers is a real problem. In fact, it's the biggest problem affecting the game, by far with serious lag issues in pretty much every game you join. This seems down to the servers being based in the US, which leads to pings of around the 400ms mark being possible. It's a problem that must be sorted out by Fatshark if they want *LAG* to survive and hopefully, when you will have read this, they'll have taken action.

Another flaw is that the game ends if the host disconnects, as there's no facility to see the match transferred to a new host, such as with *Modern Warfare 2*.

Some more effective team balancing wouldn't go amiss either, with games sometimes descending into farce when a few players from a team decide to leave mid-game. As an example, it's not unheard of to discover you and your teammates don't have any opponents to fight until the end of the round, when one player might get switched to the opposing team. One of the perils of limiting your numbers to five-a-side is that when players drop out, the effect is far more noticeable.

PATCH QUICKLY

All these issues are with the framework rather than the action and, with a bit of work, could be sorted out in subsequent patches. But in terms of what's on offer now, even at the very good price of £9.99, it's not possible to glowingly recommend *Lead and Gold*.

"While its substance is wholesome and good, the server situation at the moment simply won't do"

While its substance is wholesome and good, even with a slight lack of long-term appeal, the server situation at the moment simply won't do. If this isn't a relevant criticism any more, by all means cut out the score with a pair of scissors and sew in a new one with at least five more points added on.

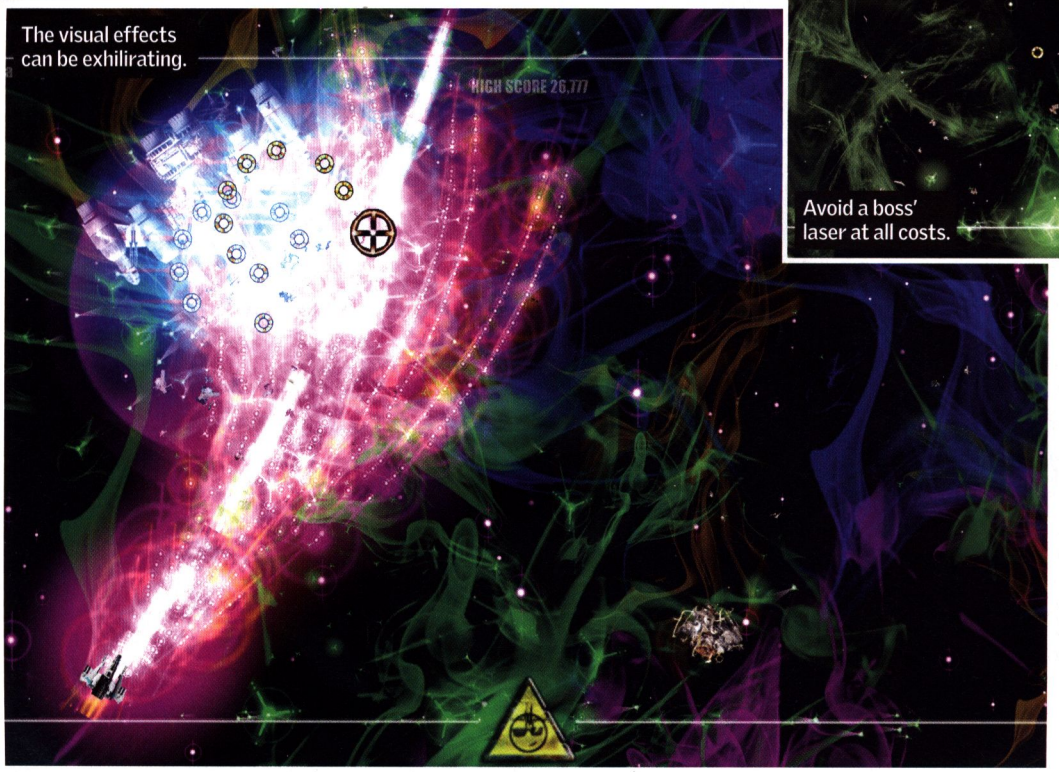
Horses would've been good too. PCZ

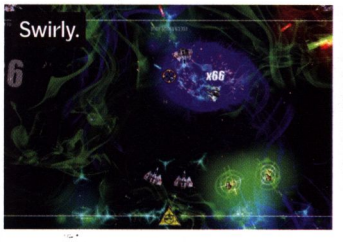
PCZONE

GRAPHICS Cartoon *TF2*-style
SOUND Sad, mute characters
MULTIPLAYER Only way to play

- ✔ Cheap
- ✔ Well-balanced classes
- ✔ **Everyone contributes**
- ✔ Lots of potential
- ✘ **Lag and server issues**
- ✘ Slight lack of long-term depth

71
Gold rush





BEAT HAZARD

David Brown is a hazard to himself and everyone around him

DEVELOPER Cold Beam Games
PUBLISHER Cold Beam Games
WEBSITE coldbeamgames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £6.99

THE FIRST QUESTION you want to ask yourself before starting up *Beat Hazard* is "Do I suffer from epilepsy?" If so, it might even be dangerous to look at the grabs on this page, such are the level of strobes and visual embellishments.

Rising to extraordinary levels on the higher difficulty settings, it's almost impossible to tell where your ship is, such is the carnage. That's also when the game is at its best, throwing tons of enemies, asteroids, power-ups and big boss ships at you as your song reaches its crescendo.

Like *Audiosurf* (87%, issue 193) *Beat Hazard* takes a track from your digital music collection – thought not M4A files, so be warned – and produces a game level from it. Unlike *Audiosurf*, though, there's no real difference between them, other than maybe some more aggressive flashing lights for faster songs and fewer during softer ballads and Brian Eno soundscapes.

The difficulty level is also altered depending on the brutality of your chosen song. Pick a Deicide song and the ruthless drumming will make your game incredibly intense, but stick a Bob Dylan strum-a-long on and you'll be able to breeze it, even on harder settings.

The premise of the gameplay is basic *Asteroids* fare, which, even after all these years, is still simple yet fiendishly addictive, so the idea to combine that with your own music is inspired. Using the keys to move your ship about while aiming a separate reticule with your mouse, it feels fluid and easy to play with a deal of sophistication.

The graphics are superbly colourful and exciting too, with explosions, debris and lasers constantly lighting up the screen, sometimes to the point where you have absolutely no idea where your ship is or if he's (or she's) in mortal peril, especially when playing a speed metal track. However, the love-in ends there, because there's just not enough to it.

ROCK OUT IN SPACE

There are two modes: Play, where you pick a track and attempt to survive until it ends, and Survival, where you do play through one song and the entire album it comes off. Sadly, that's all there is to *Beat Hazard*, apart from earning *Steam* achievements, levelling up to earn bonuses when you play, and getting on the online leaderboards.

The lack of gameplay options is a shame and the hope is the developers will continue to support it with new material. With new modes and more variety to the core experience, there's no reason this couldn't attain the level of adoration enjoyed by *Audiosurf*. *Beat Hazard* is cheap, but for now there's not enough reason to come back after the initial wow factor from the visuals wears off. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

Asteroids clone that uses your music collection to generate visually lush levels full of enemies and carnage.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

AUDIOSURF	78%
BEAT HAZARD	69%
USING AN MP3 PLAYER	60%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Vivid, colourful
SOUND Your own music
MULTIPLAYER Online leaderboards is your lot

- ✔ Creates levels based on your music
- ✔ Luscious visuals
- ✔ Fast music = intense levels
- ✘ Not enough game modes
- ✘ Initial impact factor wears off quickly
- ✘ Can't use your M4A files

69
Pretty beat up

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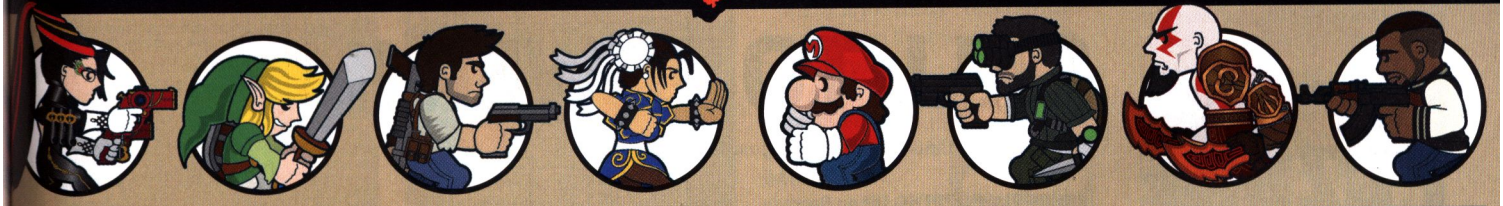
LITTLE SISTER

EZIO

FIGHT!

BIOSHOCK 2 VS ASSASSIN'S CREED II



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Budget

Old, battered and weather-beaten, *David Brown* is perfect for this job

OUTCAST

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $9.99 (£6.50)

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH

THERE ARE CERTAIN older games out there that have been lost in the mists of time due to the constant advance of technology making them impossible to play. *Outcast* was one of those, denied to a generation of new users because certain bits ran too quickly, making them impossible to complete.

Cutter Slade in action.

Now, thanks to Good Old Games, the 1999 "stranded on a parallel alien world, stop evil, be messiah" classic is available for us all to devour anew. The graphics engine is looking a bit ropey now, as you'd expect, but a lot of the bugs and issues that were prevalent way back when are no longer relevant, meaning the slew of interesting ideas, like the saved game system that can alert nearby enemies to your presence, shine through.

The combat is a let down, lacking the substance necessary to match up to the depth of the rest of the game, so it's advisable to err on the side of diplomacy and tact when talking with the natives youmeet. Their AI is still remarkable, even to this day, putting to shame a lot of modern efforts.

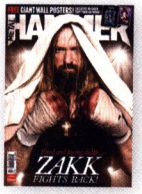
Is that a Stargate?

This is a game you probably never played, so now is the perfect time to pick up a cheap copy from GOG. It's not as impressive as it once used to be, but that doesn't stop it being a fine romp through a fascinating alien world.

PCZONE 79 Overdue hit

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Steve refused to leave the office for days. **SAVING** £50 on tube fares



David lifted CDs from *Metal Hammer*'s desks. **SAVING** £200 on ear-bleeding music

Log became a fan of grey squirrel: roasted and in pies. **SAVING** £100 in proper meat.

CALL TO POWER II

PUBLISHER Good Old Games **WEBSITE** gog.com **PRICE** $5.99 (£3.90)

RECENTLY POPPING UP on Good Old Games (gog.com), this classic of the epic turn-based strategy genre was released by Activision as a sequel to the *Civilization: Call to Power*.

The confusion lies in copyrights, haggling over names and other such shenanigans. It's best not to worry about it. This one differed from *CTP* in that its interface and numerous balancing issues regarding economies and combat were improved.

While the vanilla version of *CTP2* from GOG is a reasonable *Civ*-style game, if you purchase it you should go to Apolyton (apolyton.net/ctp2) and download their *CTP2* expansion mod *Apolyton Edition*. This site is home to a fanatically dedicated crew who've spent seven years improving, tweaking and creating additions to all of the *Civ* and *Call to Power* games.

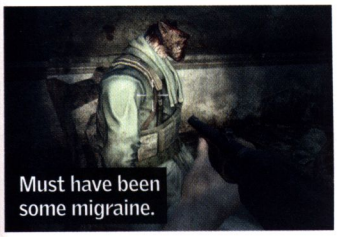
Their *CTP2* mod is based on the game's original source code that was released to the general public by Activision in 2003. *Apolyton Edition* massively expands on what you were originally able to do and is a must-get download for owners of the game.

PCZONE 71

SHELLSHOCK 2: BLOOD TRAILS

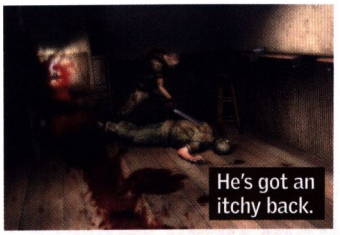
PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** sold-out.co.uk **PRICE** £9.99

THEY SAY THAT shite always rises to the top, but fortunately this particular pile of that particular substance managed to stay plastered to the bottom of the gaming barrel.


Must have been some migraine.

Produced by a now defunct arm of Rebellion, *Shellshock 2* was an FPS with nothing to recommend it. The graphics are beyond awful, the sound was uninspiring and the combat was tremendously unexciting, with huge iron sights that obscured the screen and a selection of weapons that were anything but accurate.

Moreover, the attempts to introduce a potentially traumatic story about soldiers being used as subjects for psychological experimentations were haphazard and clumsy.


He's got an itchy back.

In fairness, *Shellshock 2* hasn't really got any worse with age, but that's because it's was atrocious to start with. In fact, there is one particular thing that raises it up very slightly in the grand scheme of things. Consider that the next game the studio produced was *Rogue Warrior* (issue 217, 14%). So *Shellshock 2* has the honour of being better than *Rogue Warrior*. Let that be a warning to you, should you think of buying this game.

PCZONE 33

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008

PUBLISHER Mastertronic **WEBSITE** sold-out.co.uk **PRICE** £9.99

PEOPLE QUESTION THE need for football management games at the best of times, so the decision to re-release old ones has always been puzzling, especially when it's the rubbish *Champ Man 2008*.

The latest – and perhaps the last – *Champ Man* saw Beautiful Game Studios clawing back a substantial degree of respectability after years of producing garbage products, so there's absolutely no reason to buy this one.

Dated...

...and pointless.

The database is old and pretty much everything about the package – match engine, transfer market, tactics system et al – has been massively improved upon in *CM2010* and every *Football Manager* game from the past few years.

As football enthusiasts will already have a copy of a *Football Manager* – any recent vintage of which shame this game – and those who are into *FIFA Manager* or the *Championship Manager* series will either already have an old one, or won't be interested this release because it's out of date. And non-football management fans won't want it for the obvious reasons.

As such, this can't be recommended to anyone, even those who are stuck in a time warp and can't accept that Manchester City are now a good team. Interesting as a museum piece only.

PCZONE 28

AND THE REST...

Three dirt-cheap golden nuggets you should definitely own

SNIPER ELITE: BERLIN 1945
$9.99 (£6.50), Good Old Games
An interesting idea let down by sloppy execution.
52

PHANTASMAGORIA 2
$5.99 (£3.60), Good Old Games
An example of a sequel can make a vilified and laughed-at original much, much worse.
8

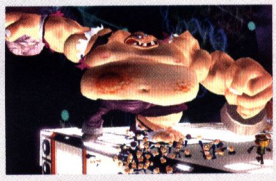
BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR
$5.99 (£3.60), Good Old Games
This ancient RPG hasn't aged much. A lot of material to get stuck into here.
64

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 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 D-Day.



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*.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 PAIN-IN-THE-REAR DRM

1. **UBISOFT UPLAY**
   No internet, no play. French gits.
2. **SECUROM**
   Hides in your PC forever and ever.
3. **PROTECTION TECHNOLOGY'S STARFORCE**
   Knackers your PC. Allegedly.
4. **TAGÈS SA'S TAGÈS**
   Really easy to crack.
5. **PHOTOCOPY-PROOF CODE SHEETS**
   Famously uncrackable.

PCZ TOP 5 BUMS IN GAME NAMES

1. **'ASS' 'ASS' IN'S CREED II**
   Issue 219, 90%
2. **COMMANDOS: 'BEHIND' ENEMY LINES**
   Issue 66, 87%
3. **TOP 'TRUMPS': DOCTOR WHO**
   Issue 196, 40%
4. **BIONIC COMMANDO 'REAR'MED**
   Issue 199, 80%
5. **BEASTS & 'BUM'PKINS**
   Issue 66, 59%

PCZ TOP 5 GAMES WITH THE SHORTEST NAMES

1. **Z**
   Issue 42, 95%
2. **KO**
   Issue 83, 53%
3. **ER**
   Issue 159, 53%
4. **GUN**
   Issue 163, 72%
5. **SAW**
   Issue 218, 38%

FPS

HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

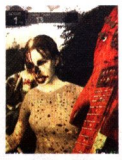
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still 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%

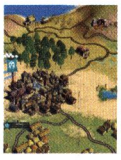
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel 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.

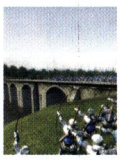


CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

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.

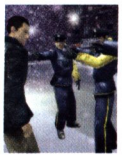
MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

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.

NEW ENTRY!

ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
PCZ Issue: 220 – 90%

Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



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.

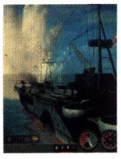
SIMULATION

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!

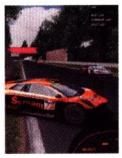
THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.

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.

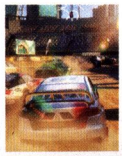


OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *ArmA II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

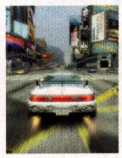
DRIVING/RACING



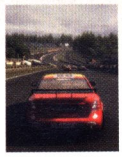
GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



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 serious. 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.

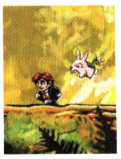
ODDBALL

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*.

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.

LOG'S PICK

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
PCZ Issue 213 – 89%
I'm saying *Arkham Asylum* because I didn't want to say *World of Goo*. I love *World of Goo*, and I want 2D Boy to become ultra-billionaires riding around on diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should acknowledge that it's 2010 now, and withdraw my Goo-gushing until they make a new game.

So, *Arkham Asylum*: the game I first played about 18 months ago, when a surprisingly complete preview copy fell into my hands. The game I played completely through, unable to write about half of it, because of the NDA that came with it. Still, it was a privileged feeling – it's not often you finish a game for a preview – and it actually felt slightly naughty, like I was getting more than I deserved.

But it was well-judged for Rocksteady. By the time I got to do my interviews and write the preview, I was already 100% sold on their treatment of the caped bastard, and was desperate to write the actual review.

Well, that never happened – I never ended up reviewing *Arkham Asylum* for anyone. So those hours spent in the house, desperately telling an uninterested housemate that I was Batman, and he had to come and look, because I was being Batman on the telly, can remain a pure memory for me. Batman... I never had to give you a score. This love transcends percentages. Give us a cuddle.

STEVE'S PICK

GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue 179 – 88%
If you want to play *Garry's Mod* on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goon Gune servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of *Source*-engine models shipped with *Garry's Mod*) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects.

You'll also be downloading maps. One of which turns *Garry's Mod* into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protects you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit.

Guides (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at ggg.bottlabs.org – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.

INCOMING! Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to **page 22** for the full run-down.

MAMA FESTIVALS & CLASSIC ROCK PRESENT

HIGH VOLTAGE

FESTIVAL

SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

MAIN STAGE

ZZ TOP

heaven & hell

RONNIE JAMES DIO · TONY IOMMI · GEEZER BUTLER · VINNY APPICE

FOREIGNER

GARY MOORE

THE ANSWER

THE UNION

SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010

MAIN STAGE

ELP

PLUS SPECIAL GUEST TBC

JOE BONAMASSA

BACHMAN & TURNER

UFO

THE QUIREBOYS

KERRANG! HAMMER STAGE

Black Label Society

SAXON

CATHEDRAL • HAMMERFALL

ORANGE GOBLIN

BLACK SPIDERS • NEW DEVICE

down

Voivod

CLUTCH

HIGH ON FIRE

AUDREY HORNE

LETHARGY

PROG STAGE

TRANSATLANTIC

Opeth

ASIA

DWEEZIL ZAPPA

MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH
(PERFORMING ARGUS)

TOUCHSTONE • PENDRAGON

marillion

ARGENT

URIAH HEEP
(PERFORMING DEMONS & WIZARDS)

MAGNUM

STEVE HACKETT

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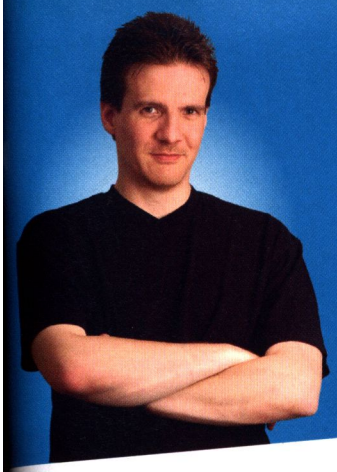


PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

LOW-TECH HOLS

I'VE COME BACK from a week away in Devon at a place which made the absence of the internet and phone signals part of its sales pitch.

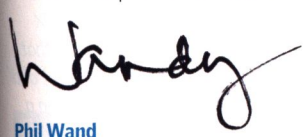
The thinking behind this is that once you retreat to an isolated place in the hills, without a regular flow of emails or the ability to post holiday snaps to Facebook and alert would-be burglars to your absence, you'll begin to unwind and enjoy a peaceful time free of all distractions.

Let me describe what a holiday without the internet means: to begin with, there are always a few stray messages that turn up just before the signal goes. You decide to read them, and discover one requires your attention: it's an email so the sender is expecting a prompt response.

So you stand outside, device held aloft like Benjamin Franklin with his kite. Nothing. The upstairs balcony? Still nothing. Outside on the fire escape – yes! A single bar, so the rickety stairs become a makeshift office. People inside ask muffled questions about coffee and then dinner so I retreat inside, freezing, and to a barrage of complaints about working on holiday.

On a trip out the next day, we pass a Little Chef promising free wifi, so I perform a *Blues Brothers*-style handbrake turn into the car park so the messages I composed yesterday are sent. Further complaints are voiced, culminating in thinly veiled death threats.

There's no peace without internet.



Phil Wand
Hardware editor

FERMI INFRIGIDATION

Board makers turn to water-cooling for NVIDIA chip

GRAPHICS CARD MAKERS Inno3D and EVGA have announced water-cooled variants of their flagship GTX 480 and GTX 470 products.

You may have already read that the most recent GeForce hardware has become something of a laughing stock, known for blistering heat levels as well as benchmark results. And this is despite NVIDIA reassuring potential buyers that the Fermi chip is designed to run at abnormally high temperatures.

Despite this, EVGA announced its water-cooled GTX 480 and 470 Hydro Copper FTW variants with Swiftech manufactured water blocks, and factory-set speed tweaks even before they were announced. And now Inno3D have tagged along with two Black Freezer models complimenting its existing high-end GTX line-up.

GTX 400-series now much cooler than previously.

Inno3D is remaining tight lipped on availability, pricing and the actual specifications of their new card, but if their previous GTX 295 iChiLL Black Series is anything to go by, then the waterblock and fittings will be coming from Bitspower.

Assuming the build quality, attention to detail and capabilities remain similar to that of the Bitspower-cooled Radeon 5870 Black Freezer, we might see flagship NVIDIA cards turning out benchmark scores significantly higher than any rival. Which is what we expected in the first place.

inno3d.com

INSTANT SIX PACK

Turn your quad into a hex

LAST MONTH WE reported that Core Unlocker, the ASUS motherboard feature that makes quad chips out of dual or triple core AMD CPUs.

Now, a new Phenom II X4 'Zosma' chip is being invited to the upcoming Phenom II X6 launch party, suggesting that the quad core newcomer is actually a 'Thuban' hexa-core processor in disguise, and that Core Unlocker might enable its two disabled parts.

New Phenom II X4 chips are X6 chips underneath.

The two imminent Zosma models – the X4 960T and X4 940T – are likely to be priced close to £100, making their potential unlocking all the more appealing. As always, just don't expect it to work on every chip.

uk.asus.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

SAMSUNG WARNS PURCHASERS of its new TVs: "Viewing in 3D mode may cause disorientation. DO NOT place your television near open stairwells, cables, balconies or other objects that may cause you to injure yourself. We do not recommend watching 3D if you need sleep or have been drinking alcohol." I've already ordered mine.

samsung.com

FIGURES FROM THE US have shown PC shipments climbing by 25% or more in the first quarter compared with a year earlier, a figure much better than expected. Hewlett-Packard lead the way, with Lenovo, Dell and Acer chasing along behind, all posting very healthy sales increases. Most encouragingly, AMD returned to the black, with its revenue increasing by more than a third to $1.57bn.

amd.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

3D TV: According to Samsung, the most dangerous home entertainment device yet created. Do not buy one – even Samsung say they're lethal. **PSU:** Internet abbreviation. Highly insulting sexual accusation involving a skunk and a pineapple. **ROP:** Style of music involving rhythmically speaking lyrics over a heavy bass beat. Appeal limited to ex-public school types who like to tell everyone they know they're 'extremely street', yet run away from anyone wearing a hoodie. **WATERBLOCK:** Embarrassing and uncomfortable medical condition, often suffered by gamers of a certain age. Symptoms include repeated early morning trips to the loo accompanied by sensation of fail.

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 all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

The HD 5570 lacks a VGA connector.

Q POWERED UP

I have a desktop PC comprising a quad core Athlon II X4 630, ASRock N68C-S motherboard, 2GB RAM, 250GB HDD, an optical drive and a 450W PSU.

I'd like to upgrade my graphics card to a Radeon HD 5670. I chose this card because from what I've seen it doesn't require a huge amount of power. But I was wondering if this card will be fine with my PSU. If not, what card would you recommend? And if you think I should upgrade my PSU, I'll choose a much better GPU to go with it.

Any advice will be a great help to me as I don't have a clue when it comes to PCs or components!

Paul G

A *The Radeon HD 5670 needs a 400W power supply unit (PSU), but with at least 26A over 12V. This means that while your PSU meets the minimum wattage, you'll need to check how it delivers its power. There's a chance what you have has enough oomph to support a faster card such as the HD 5770, so it's worth doing.*

To get your power unit's output specification, you'll need to read the sticker on its casing. The problem is that most of the time this will be obscured by the motherboard and processor cooling apparatus, not to mention cable spaghetti, so a safer bet is enter the model number into Google and check the manufacturer's site, then do the same for the GPU to ensure it all tallies up.

"A HD 5670 is unlikely to need more than 230W"

What you're looking for is a chart detailing the DC ratings for the various voltages needed inside your PC: that's 3.3V, 5V and 12V. Taking Corsair's 400W unit, a Seasonic-made £45 favourite of mine, as an example it offers 30A on a single 12V rail, and a maximum combined wattage of 360W. This makes it an ideal partner for lower-mainstream cards, given that it offers plenty of amps, and that a HD 5670 is unlikely to need more than 230W.

If it turns out your supply doesn't make the grade, replacing it isn't as difficult as it may seem. It's modular, the same as any other component in your PC, and as such can be easily removed with a screwdriver and common sense.

My advice would be to look for a 600W or higher, known-brand replacement costing between £75-£100. Cheap suppliers use cheap components, and while they offer headline-grabbing wattage figures they rarely provide amps in the right places.

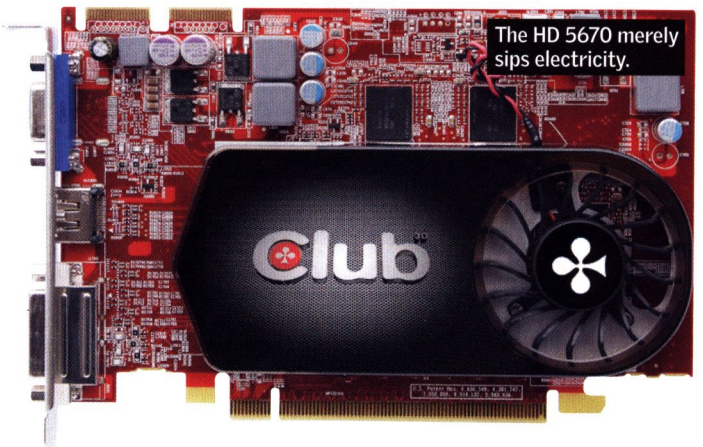
DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.3	24 Mar 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 197.13	25 Mar 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



The HD 5670 merely sips electricity.

Q MORE MONKEY BUSINESS

As per the recommendation printed in issue 220, I bought the Radeon card and got it fitted. However, when I flicked the switch several beeps sounded from the motherboard and it progressed no further. Although I could hear the new card's fan spinning, it lacked the power to boot up. This isn't much of a problem as I can return the card and get the money back, but I felt obliged to let you know.

Paul "Monkey Bloke" Johnson

A *You may recall that Paul here has a Fujistu-Siemens E3510 small form-factor PC with integrated GMA 3100 graphics and weedy CFX power supply. The saving grace is that the machine has a PCI-Express slot and my suggestion was to spend £70 on a new Radeon HD 5570. This is a low-format graphics card, which has enough punch to run today's games.*

Interested to know precisely why my suggestion didn't work I double-checked the PCIe x16slot on the E3510, to make sure that there wasn't anything that would be inherently incompatible between old and new

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"In this mad consumerist world we live in, products are often priced at a level people are willing to pay"

hardware. There isn't and there shouldn't be.

I am certain the problem is that the HD 5570 is simply asking for a level of amps that the factory fit Fujitsu power supply simply can't provide. I can think of no other reason why this PC would fail to even boot with that replacement card.

It must be said that the HD 5570 doesn't use much power. Manufacturer requirements vary slightly, but the minimum supported PSU it requires is 350W with 24A on the 12V rail.

Paul might want to try dropping to a Radeon HD 4650, but my fear would be that the evidence already gathered shows his existing PSU has been engineered down to a price, and its a system that really isn't designed for modern games.

Sometimes theory doesn't work in practice.

Q WHISTLES AND BELL

I'm going to be building a new PC soon and I've decided to go the i7 920 route as it seems to be the best bang for your buck. However, the number of X58 motherboards out there and the wild differences in prices is pretty baffling: boards that are up to £100 different in price seem to have identical specifications, so what do you get for your extra cash?

Basically what I am after is the best value in terms of features, reliability and some gentle overclocking!

Greg Stinson

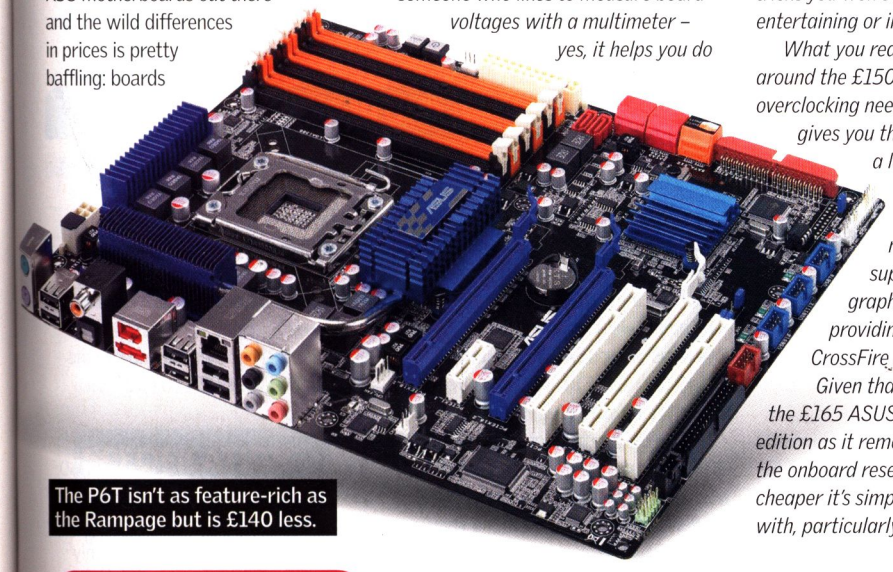
A *Like almost everything in this mad consumerist world we live in, products are often priced at a level people are willing to pay.*

In the case of the £299 Rampage II Extreme, it would be churlish of me to suggest that it's that price simply because it fits with ASUS' marketing. For starters, the Rampage comes bundled with a discrete SupremeFX X-Fi audio card, 12 USB ports, an external LCD screen for on-the-fly BIOS changes, plus small but handy features like an easily accessible 'Clear CMOS' switch for when you screw those settings up. The moment you move down the price ladder you'll see expansion slots, ports and features dropping like flies.

That said, the ASUS Rampage is a product aimed at less than one in every 10 buyers, and unless you're someone who likes to measure board voltages with a multimeter – yes, it helps you do that too – then you're wasting your money on something that performs tricks you won't find the least bit entertaining or interesting.

What you really want is a board around the £150 mark that suits your overclocking needs and, in addition, gives you the room to add both a larger CPU cooler (look for space around the socket on the motherboard) and supports multiple graphics cards through providing support for CrossFire and SLI.

Given that, my choice would be the £165 ASUS P6T. Avoid the SE edition as it removes SLI support and the onboard reset button. At just £15 cheaper it's simply not worth bothering with, particularly given the overall cost of switching to an i7-based system in the first place.



The P6T isn't as feature-rich as the Rampage but is £140 less.

ALL ABOUT...

27 APPLE IPAD

iPad buyers heading for their nearest Apple Store.

If you've ever wondered how your laptop might look if someone sawed the keyboard off, halved the storage capacity, blocked up the USB ports and removed one of the speakers, wonder no more.

With a 4:3 screen resolution rivalling monitors found in landfill sites, the 1024x768 iPad appeals to myopic iPhone owners who don't want to make telephone calls while simultaneously increasing their chances of being mugged.

The iPad is operated by touching its surface with an extended finger. Dubbed 'greasy screen', the technology has existed on railway station ticket machines since before anyone can remember.

And like ticket machines, the virtual keyboard you use is a stab-and-pray affair that can often lead to shouting, particularly when you realise Apple don't allow you to play Flash files and thus the device is of limited use as an aid to beating off.

Like the mono speakers, wireless support is just as innovative. Apple have detuned the iPad's wifi range so you must connect to the internet without moving more than six feet from your router, allowing people with very small houses to enjoy everything the device has to offer.

Pricing for the UK isn't known, but expect the iPad to cost a lot more than seems right, particularly as it doesn't even come with a mains adapter.

Q WATERBUG

The water in *Far Cry* doesn't look right when set above medium detail. I don't think it's my graphics card as I've only started with this problem after upgrading from 512MB to 1GB. My graphics card is a GeForce 7600 GS.

Matthew Lea

A *In a release note that came with the 1.3 patch, Ubisoft stated that certain NVIDIA cards display a "water reflection bug" when the detail is set to high. There's no mention of this bug in later patches, suggesting it's still present. Sadly,* Far Cry *was last updated five years ago, so I'd not hold out any hope that the problem will ever be fixed.* PCZ

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(Grinterloper) Hi everyone. Just put together my PC. Everything seems normal, the motherboard is intact and I assume working. The problem is it won't start up. When I power it up the fans start spinning, the internal and external power LEDs light up but then it beeps and shuts down. After a couple of seconds it attempts to boot up again but does the same thing. (Tetras) You are sure all the power connectors are firmly connected? Tried with only one stick of RAM? The CPU cooler fan is connected to the CPU cooler fan header and not a general fan header? (Grinterloper) Problem solved. I'm a nub who didn't hook the power up as well as he thought.

GRAPHICS CARD JARGON

GPU: The Graphics Processor Unit runs the graphics card.
VERTEX SHADERS: These create the outlines of objects in 3D scenes, by calculating the position of their vertices. They also generate textures, colour and lighting, and convert 3D scenes into 2D. This data is given to the... **PIXEL PIPELINES:** These process the data that forms pixels before sending it to a card's... **ROPs:** Raster Operators combine the data from pipelines into pixels to make the final 2D image you see on screen. As with pixel pipelines and shaders, the more ROPs the better.

These cards are OK, but they're not great.

PCZONE 77 HD 5770 VAPOR-X

PCZONE 79 HD 5670 1GB

SAPPHIRE HD 5670 1GB & HD 5770 VAPOR-X

PRICE £95/£145 **MANUFACTURER** Sapphire **WEBSITE** sapphiretech.com

WE'RE GETTING TO the point where you can pick any number between 10 and 600 and be sure of finding a graphics card for that exact price. Making that point are Sapphire's ever-so-slightly enhanced 5770 Vapor-X and the all-new 5670.

The HD 5670 is yet another sub-£100 card in an already crowded marketplace. This Sapphire version is the 1GB edition, doubling the memory allocated to the stock version and adding another £20 onto the price. It's essentially an even more stripped-down version of the HD 5770 than the already rather helpless HD 5750.

A stock HD 5670 has got the same number of ROPs, memory interface, and the same GDDR5 as a HD 5770, but half the shader count, slower clockspeeds and half the RAM. The effect of this is that despite this edition having 1GB of memory, it only delivers a performance boost of 3fps.

The real selling point of the HD 5670 is the fact that it doesn't need a PCI-E power cable as it gets its power from the PCI-E umbilical bus. Realistically, this card is for media centre PCs with low-powered PSUs that need a boost.

The 5670 only offers DirectX 11 support as an incentive if you need a cheap, bus-powered card opt for an NVIDIA GT 240.

SPECIFICATION

	HD 5670	HD 5770 VAPOR-X
GPU CLOCK	775MHz	860MHz
SHADERS	400	800
MEMORY	1GB GDDR5	1GB GDDR5
MEMORY BUS	128-bit	128-bit

On the other hand, the HD 5770 Vapor-X wouldn't look out of place in a mid-range gaming setup. Thanks to updated drivers, both the stock and this slightly overclocked version can deliver over 40fps in *Far Cry 2* at 1680x1050. The bad news is that while the price has dropped on the standard model (only to £110, mind), the Vapor-X edition sells for £145.

This £35 premium gives you an extra 10MHz extra clock speed, and nothing else spec-wise. The thing that really makes it different to an off-the-shelf card is its Vapor-X cooler. The presence of this is aimed at overclockers, but there's little point in tweaking this card's settings.

The standard card tops 30fps in our 1680x1050 benchmarks. Overclocking the card can't add more than a few frames per second to that, due yo the limitation of the HD 5770's 128-bit memory bus.

Really, you're better off saving up for another month and getting a HD 5850 for £50 more. That's a great card at pretty much any resolution.

Ultimately, the HD 5670 1GB only gives 3fps more at 2560 x 1600, and nothing at lower resolutions, making the extra £20 for the extra RAM irrelevant. In contrast, the Vapor-X HD 5770 is pricier still and gives you no performance boost at all. **DJ**

GPU PERFORMANCE

FPS @ 1680x1050	HD 5670	HD 5770 VAPOR-X
FAR CRY 2*	26fps	42fps
WORLD IN CONFLICT*	23fps	36fps
COLIN MCRAE'S DIRT 2*	23fps	36fps

* *DirectX 10 test* * *DirectX 11 test*

AMD RADEON HD 5830

PRICE £200 **MANUFACTURER** AMD **WEBSITE** www.amd.com/uk

This card is a complete waste of a time.

AMD ALREADY DOMINATES the low, mid and high-end of the DirectX 11 graphics sector, while NVIDIA has yet to log in yet. But AMD aren't resting; they're bringing out more cards in every conceivable price bracket.

The HD 5830 is supposed to cover the gap between the HD 5770 and the HD 5850 – a gap few were aware existed. To do this AMD has made a card that's only slightly better than a HD 5770, and far worse than a HD 5850, and yet sits in the middle of the two in terms of price.

Luckily, the decision about whether to buy with this card is easy to make: don't bother. This is a half-baked, halfway house of a card.

The HD 5830 uses the same 40nm Cypress chip as the HD 5870 and HD 5850 cards, but has half the memory bus and ROPs count of ATI's top-end cards.

That hobbles it to the extent it can only just hold up against the Juniper-based HD 5770 (issue 216, 82% for the stock model; see the left-hand page for Vapor-X edition).

Unless one of AMD's partners finds a way to unlock the HD 5830's 256-bit memory interface and open up the HD 5770's ROP count, you shouldn't consider getting this card. Either get a HD 5770 and save yourself a bit of cash, or pay extra and get a HD 5850. ***DJ***

SPECIFICATION

CORE SPEED	800MHz
MEMORY	1GB GDDR5
MEMORY SPEED	1GHz
MEMORY INTERFACE	128-bit

BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 1680x1050	
FAR CRY 2*	45fps
WORLD IN CONFLICT*	38fps
COLIN MCRAE'S DIRT 2*	38fps

* *DirectX 10 test* * *DirectX 11 test*

"The decision about whether to buy with this card is easy to make: don't bother"

PCZONE 37

KINGSTON SSDNOW V+

PRICE £290 **MANUFACTURER** Kingston **WEBSITE** kingston.com

If it had 'Intel Inside' it'd be better.

BECAUSE THE DEVELOPMENT and making of solid state drives' flash memory and controller chipsets is complicated, these key components of SSDs are only made by a few of companies. This means most SSDs are actually similar on the inside, so companies like Kingston are at the mercy of their suppliers.

The Kingston SSDNow V 40GB drive was based on Intel's second-generation SSD technology. It was a great drive at a brilliant price, but Intel killed it off when they withheld a crucial firmware update from Kingston. Kingston says that all is forgiven now, but this revised SSDNow V+ doesn't use Intel tech.

The drive's controller is a new chip from Toshiba that Kingston says enables 230/180MBps sequential read/write speeds. Our benchmark tests were in line with Kingston's claims, but things got complicated during the 4K and 64-thread tests. Here, the new V+ Series did worse than the old Intel-based 40GB V Series, but closely enough to rival 128GB drives.

Apart from speed the SSDNow V+ offers a satisfyingly robust metal chassis and SATA II support. That's a welcome feature as SSDs are becoming too fast for SATA I interfaces to cope with.

Subjectively during testing this SSD gave a fast, responsive, stutter-free performance. But, as with all solid state drives, there are still some questions regarding its long-term performance and reliability. ***JL***

SPECIFICATION

CAPACITY	128GB
INTERFACE	SATA II
TYPE MLC	Flash Memory
SIZE	2.5in
CACHE	128MB DDR2
CONTROLLER	Toshiba T6UG1XBG

BENCHMARKS

MEGABYTES PER SECOND (faster is better)	
MAX SEQUENTIAL WRITE	170
MAX SEQUENTIAL READ	234
4K RANDOM WRITES	6
64-THREAD RANDOM WRITES	9

"During testing this SSD gave a fast, responsive, stutter-free performance"

PCZONE 80

Reviews by Dave James and Jeremy Laird

REMEMBER:
CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, GRIND = A SICK HARD DRIVE

Should you hear the following noises from your PC as it starts up: CLUNKCLUNKCLICKCLICKCLICK GRUUUND it means your hard drive is about to fall apart and you should get a new one. This doesn't happen with silent solid state drives, instead they just stop dead. The gits.

Hardware Buyer

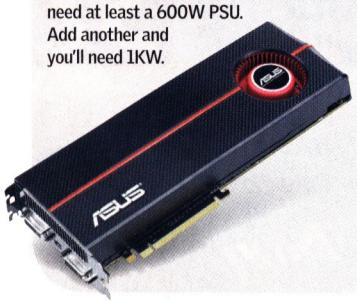
This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

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 this slot. Under that plastic shroud are two AMD RV870 GPUs, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the car park. 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

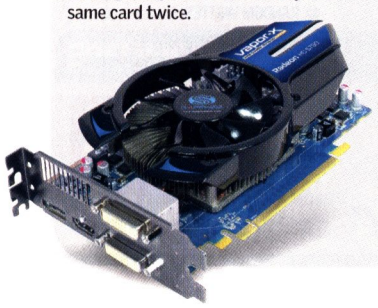
We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

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

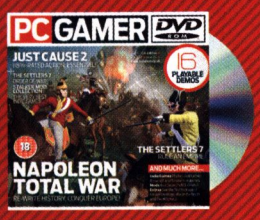
If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

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.

"THE MOST ADVANCED GAME ON THE PLANET"



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PCZONE Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

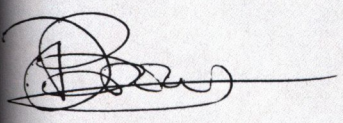
MISANTHROPY

AM I THE only person in the world who doesn't get on very well with competitive online gaming? I used to play *Counter-Strike* a lot, but now I won't go anywhere near it. Likewise with new games like *Bad Company 2*. I've been trying to force myself to play it, to endure for the sake of potentially finding that reason for playing, but I'm finding it very difficult to stay with it. Perhaps the biggest culprit is you, the player. Not you specifically, but the more general you, the man on the forum, the person who spends every waking moment making my online life hell.

In fact, I'd hazard a guess that you yourself aren't one of the people that annoy me. I'm talking the ones who are level 40+ on *BC2* or in the 70s or whatever in *Modern Warfare 2*. The people who I automatically assign negative, hateful characteristics to for having killed me. It may be irrational, but I can't help aiming mental daggers at players called 3l33T-^Ki114h^ who have just downed me yet again with their unlocked gun that I'll have to play another month to get.

I'll stick to co-op for now, or at least attempt to get people I know onto small-scale competitive games. That avoids the shroud of anonymity colouring my reaction to every single death and I can begin to enjoy the game for once.

Random people are the curse, bane, blight and pus-filled oozing boil on the bottom of the multiplayer gaming scene for me and I'm not sure there's anything that can be done, other than my seeing a psychiatrist. Back to *Left 4 Dead* for me then.



David Brown
Staff writer

Lots of action, not enough fisting?

FISTS AND FUN

Edward Fenning takes the *Action Fist!*

WEBSITE teknopants.com/games/actionfist

THIS IS ONE of those games whose title tells you exactly what you're getting: *Action Fist!*. You know there's going to be action, some fists will fly and the plot will be silly (thanks to the well-placed exclamation mark).

Anyone who played on a SEGA Genesis might remember a game called *Gunstar Heroes*, which acts as a major inspiration for this title. If you weren't gaming in 1993, *Action Fist!* is a side-scrolling shoot 'em up that allows two people to fight their way through a variety of levels and bosses by playing on the same keyboard. This is truly old-school co-op play.

Fist-'em-up?

For a free game, this is phenomenally polished, having specially composed music and the original artwork and animations. And, like games of yore, it's not afraid to rake you over the coals either. Although the amount of continues you have is infinite, each time you die you're thrown back to a checkpoint and lose all of your hard-earned weapon upgrades. This never makes the game too hard to carry on, but can be annoying at times.

Even when put on normal difficulty *Action Fist!* proves to be a sufficient and ultimately satisfying trial to beat. Though sometimes brushing the edge of frustration, it never crosses over into the realms of a ragequit.

Though the whole game can be beaten in a couple of hours, the pure joy and challenge of it can keep you coming back for spurts or longer sessions, especially with the option to close the game down and pick it up again where you left off.

Action Fist! feels like a successful and brilliant homage to all the side-scrolling platformers and shoot 'em ups of the past three decades, whilst still existing as a distinct title all by itself.

PCZONE FREE-O-METER

Not free!

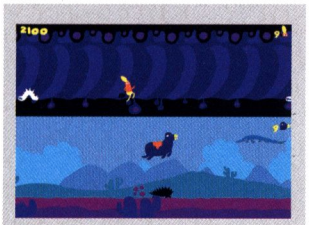
0 HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

Free!

419 HOURS*

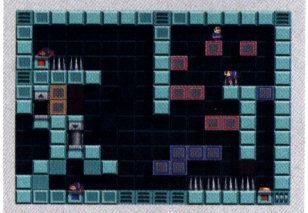
SNIPPETS



HONEYSLUGGISH

potoandcabenga.com

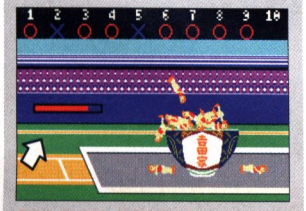
A Gamma IV indie showcase winner at this year's GDC, *Poto & Cabenga* is a game where pressing Space controls a humanoid with a yellow quiff and a curious purple cow/bird thing at the same time. Confused? Try playing it.



EVERLASTING LIFE

killme.chown.dk

It's an unwritten rule of games that your character should want to stay alive, but that's exactly what you're not trying to do in *Kill Me*, a platformer with a character that cannot die.



STACKED ACTORS

snipurl.com/hypermorinpic

Here's an idea for a new Olympic sport: *Hyper Morinpic*, a game where you stack (seemingly rather slippery) athletes on a big Japanese noodle bowl. Yes, that'll do nicely.

Not at all complicated...

TRAIN HARDER

Open source *Transport Tycoon* thrills and excites

WEBSITE openttd.org/en

THERE ARE FEW games that inspire inexplicable devotion like transport management games. Certainly, *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* stands out from the herd as an iconic title given special praise and worship, so much so that a team of enthusiasts have spent six years fashioning their own open-source version of Chris Sawyer's classic connect-'em-up game.

A belter it is, as well. Let's dazzle each other with facts and figures for a moment. First of all, let it be known that the game maps, while huge enough in the original, are now a staggering 64 times bigger than previously.

If that wasn't enough, you could be one of 255 players in a multiplayer game, split between 15 companies or just spectating. Delving deeper into the features list, eyes begin to water when you read about pre-signals, semaphores, path-based signalling and having multiple trees on one tile.

We could argue that any attempts by commercial companies to shove another management game into the marketplace will be blown out of the water by this release, which is mind-boggling and comprehensive in scope. However, a word of caution if you're considering shoving the cover disc into your CD drives and giving it a bit of a go: *OpenTTD* is very, very complex and it even drove one of our work experience lads to despair.

So be prepared for an experience so complex, your mind may well melt as you attempt to understand it.

CRYENGINE FREE

Modders and indie devs could soon Cry(sis) in joy

WEBSITE crytek.com

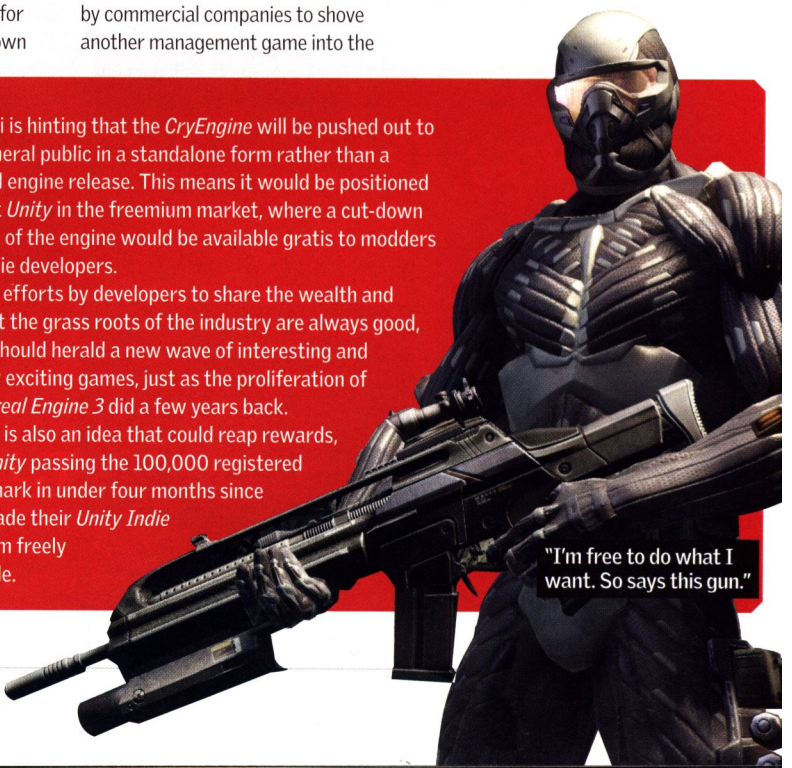
THE RELEASE OF the *CryEngine 2* made it a meaningful competitor to the *Unreal Engine* and *Source*. Now Crytek's Cevat Yerli has come out in support of those using his engine, and it seems that Crytek might release a free version of the *CryEngine 3* in the near future.

One of the stumbling blocks behind amateur teams deciding to create their own games or mods is the massive up-front costs of licensing engines. With the release of the *Unity* engine and Epic's *Unreal SDK* for free, a slew of new titles soon appeared on reputable mod and indie websites.

Yerli is hinting that the *CryEngine* will be pushed out to the general public in a standalone form rather than a general engine release. This means it would be positioned against *Unity* in the freemium market, where a cut-down version of the engine would be available gratis to modders and indie developers.

Any efforts by developers to share the wealth and support the grass roots of the industry are always good, and it should herald a new wave of interesting and visually exciting games, just as the proliferation of the *Unreal Engine 3* did a few years back.

This is also an idea that could reap rewards, with *Unity* passing the 100,000 registered users mark in under four months since they made their *Unity Indie* platform freely available.



"I'm free to do what I want. So says this gun."

TUMBLE IN THE ROUGH

Tiger does what he does best (golf, by the way)

WEBSITE tigerwoodsonline.ea.com

DESPITE THE MANY lurid tabloid headlines about the guy, Tiger Woods is still the figurehead of golf. After all, despite Mickelson's win in the Masters at Augusta, you don't see his face plastered on golf games.

But enough of that red top mush, on to *Tiger Woods PGA Tour Online*. Since EA have decided to not release any sports games on the PC, primarily because people pirate them too much (though who can necessarily blame them, as each game that appears is basically the same as the one before. See the *NHL* games, for example) the PC has been starved of corporate-heavy sports games.

EA's new idea is to mix it up online, going down the micro-transactions and free-to-play route. *Tiger Online* is one of these strange beasts and yes, can be played for nothing for as long as you want. Not all the courses are available unless you stump up some cash though. You can also buy some branded clubs which give you a little boost to your stats, although the generic EA clubs are reasonable alternatives should you not wish to spunk out some money. As a free player, you're limited to just the two courses (at the time of writing) with green fees attached to them, which basically means you spend points to play.

It's not necessarily going to be the new shining light in PC sports games, but it's a decent first step along the road to long-term rehabilitation for the genre. With *FIFA Online 2* coming along as well, there might be some life left in the old dog, but it might need a more expansive portfolio for the free gamer to attract players.

As for the actual whacking and putting itself, it's just like playing that pirated version of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08* that you're pretending you never downloaded.

"Can be played for nothing for as long as you want"

SNIPPETS

BOTTLE O' RUM

snipurl.com/treasureisland

Treasure Island Online is a grid-based multiplayer game where you have to find a chest of doubloons hidden on a small island, with every player trying to beat each other to the gold.

BETTER EFFORT

moddb.com/mods/operation-stargate-oblivion

Last month we saw the utterly awful *Stargate: Resistance*. This month, we found this upcoming mod for *Oblivion* which should be miles better.

Bug Fix of the Month

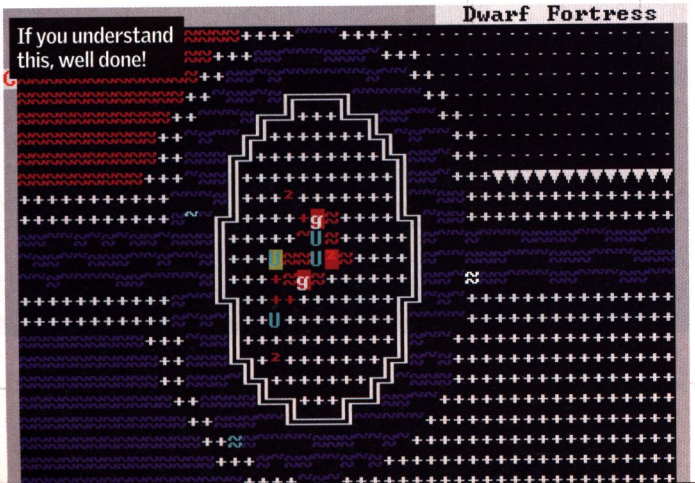
THIS MONTH MOUNT & BLADE: WARBAND 1.105

"Companions no longer duplicated when rescued from a prison."

MORE DWARVES, PLEASE

Dwarf Fortress gets updated, new material system excites all

WEBSITE bay12games.com/dwarves



OUR CURRENT OVERLORD, Mr Hogarty, loves ASCII dwarves, reaffirming his bond with *Dwarf Fortress*' bewildering realms every so often. So you can imagine his delight when it was discovered that it'd received one hell of an update.

One of the more exciting new tweaks is the material system, which allows water to freeze on people or liquid gold collecting on a tile to cool into a glob of solid gold. This release's mightily comprehensive change list can be seen in full at snipurl.com/dwarffortupdate.

If you've been away from your ASCII dwarves for a while, this might be enough to bring you back to it. It's certainly worked on our editor, who is currently busy seeing how much fun he can have diverting rivers and experimenting with fluid levels, as you do.

As comprehensive updates go, not much beats *Dwarf Fortress*.

Demos

***James Ireland* takes a spin on the DVD**

ON THE DVD PCZONE

JUST CAUSE 2

Grappling with yourself is good clean fun

WEBSITE justcause.com

HAVE YOU EVER wondered what happens when you tie a helicopter to a boat? Or an ATV to a jeep? Now you can find out and not go to jail! Even better, for free!

Don't let the fact the plot and dialogue leave something to be desired. If anything, a plot would get in the way of all the fun you can have – completely ignoring it is the best course of action.

The grappling hook is by far the best part of the game. Folk may shoot at you as you slingshot yourself around the island, but you'll never entirely be sure why. Maybe it's because they've been deprived of your grappley attentions. You should grapple them to something – that will make them happier.

There are beautiful vistas aplenty, and even when underwater you can see that a lot of care has been taken in building a world you can completely lose yourself in. It's almost a shame that you then decide to utterly destroy it. Almost. Remember that this demo needs *Vista* or *Windows 7* to work.

He's driving using his little toe.

PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

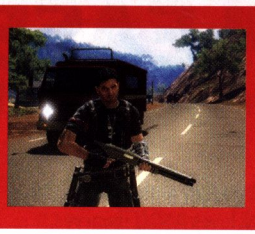
1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).

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.



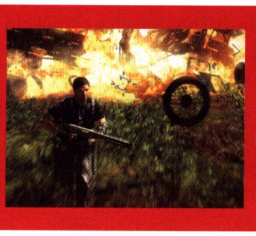
DOUBLE BARRELLED

First, take your shotgun and stare menacingly into the camera. This not only makes you look cool, but also.... no, it just makes you look cool.

BABY BOOMER

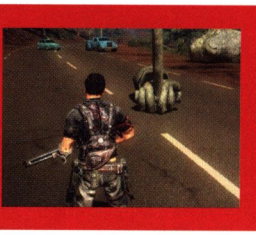
A good way to get a big juicy chaos rating is to pull down a statue of 'Baby' Panay. Explosives are a tried and tested favourite, but you may wish to improvise.

"AN APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION..."



FOUGHT THE LAW

At this point the filth will be coming, so you best pop off sharpish. But not before throwing a few grenades toward the accumulated wreckage and running away swiftly.



FALLING DOWN

After finding a suitable method (do not see above), you may rejoice! The deed is done, take that you dictating... well now Mr Panay, there's no need to be so uncouth.

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

France v East Germany in Euro 1815

WEBSITE totalwar.com

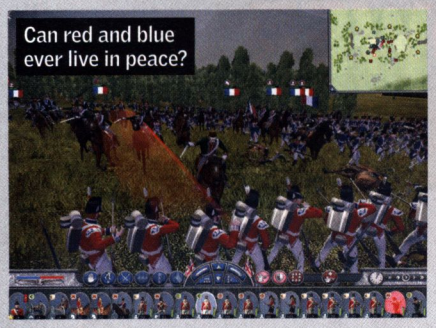
TIME FOR THE triumphant return of *Total War*. This time round it's Napoleon's turn to conquer.

Just in case you've been living under a rock in an intra-dimensional pocket of n-space for the last gazillion years, the demo includes a land tutorial – Siege of Toulon, which gives you the opportunity to give the British Army a thrashing. Yay! Destroy the British! Actually, don't. Please leave us alone.

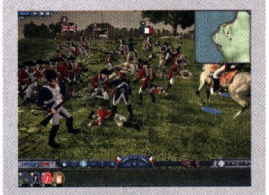
Also included in the demo is the historical Battle of Ligny, an epic collision of Prussian and French forces. You may play as either side, and attempt to turn the other lot into a warm, runny paste that resembles raspberry jam.

This will give you a taste of what the full, remarkably in-depth strategy game offers.

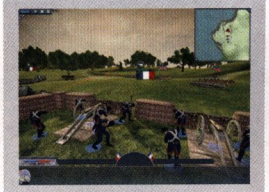
The demo, not the jam.



CROTCH ATTACK



PAINFUL
Zooming in close let's you see people being stabbed in the gonads. Always worthwhile.



DIY FORTS
Makeshift fortifications will keep your men safe while they blast away at the enemy.

MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND

Spearing farmer's wives

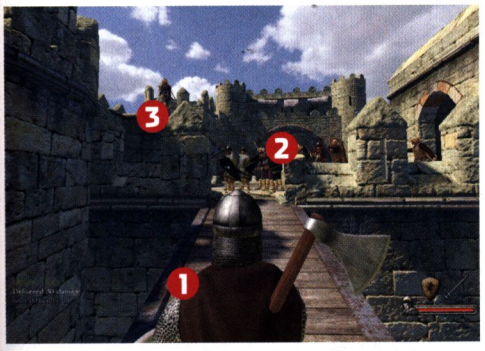
WEBSITE mountandbladewarband.com

GET BACK TO the fray with *Mount&Blade: Warband*. Assemble your troops, grab a mean looking axe, and go looking for innocent villagers to plunder. Or villages.

Plowing your trusty steed right into the heart of an enemy formation, before lashing out wildly with a sod-off axe feels amazing. There are dozens of castles to siege, villages to plunder, and kings to kill.

Warband includes a 64-person multiplayer, a new faction, the ability to marry, make vassals and, if you're really good, become the King.

Install it now, we beseech thee.

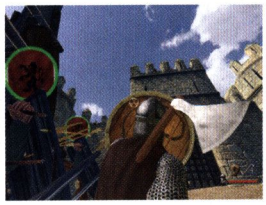


1. DIRECT
You could just charge right at the enemy, but that will earn you insta-death.

2. DEE FENCE
Clumping all your men in one place is bad. No castle has just one entrance.

3. RUN AWAY!
Sometimes the enemy will break through your line, so retreating to these walls can be advisable. Fleeing isn't always cowardly.

WAR IS HELL



WELL ARMED
This fellow shows the correct shield technique. You hold it in front of you, facing the guys trying to kill you with arrows.

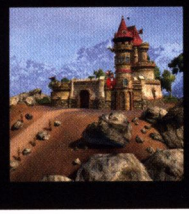
SNAPPED ARM
And here's a moron. This kind of shield technique will get you poked full of holes.

HOT DOWNLOADS PCZONE

SETTLERS 7 DEMO

snipurl.com/settlers7demo

At 2.5GB this is a hefty demo, considering it only has one map and a tutorial video. But let that slide and you'll find a fun little nugget that'll give you a good taste of what the full version involves.



NETKAR PRO DEMO

netkar-pro.com

In this realistic racing game demo you have access to only one car and one track. This is more than enough to get a feel for the full thing though, and you'll quickly find out whether it's to your taste or not.

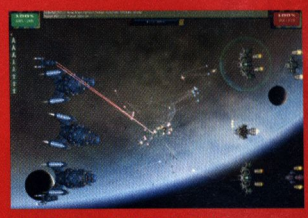
BEST OF THE REST

A bunch of other stuff you'll find on your disc, if you click hard and fast enough, that is...

DWARF FORTRESS

bay12games.com/dwarves/

The ultimate ASCII game. Good fun, but with an extraordinary learning curve. Come and have a go if you think you're hardcore enough.



GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES

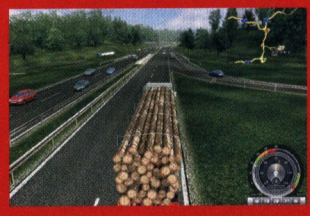
positech.co.uk/gratuitousspacebattles

A fun and slightly madcap indie game that's perfect for lunch breaks, hungover mornings, or both.

RISE OF PRUSSIA

paradoxplaza.com/games/rise-of-prussia

This demo lets you invade Saxony, and gives you a chance to play the opening of the grand campaign.



GERMAN TRUCK SIMULATOR

germantrucksimulator.com

You do have to keep to the speed limit and stop for lights, but hitching your trailer manually is extremely exciting.

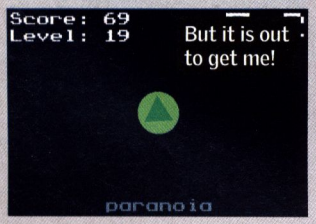
Freeware

James Ireland **seeks a good time, but can't pay**

ON THE DVD PCZONE

So dedicated are we to revealing the best free games around that to deliver less would induce us to commit seppuku so as to regain our honour. This month, descend into ASCII dungeons, shrink to the size of a pea, and impale your nads on a spiky ball, before riding a pink unicorn off into the sunset.

GLICK'S PICK



REDIVIDER

DEVELOPER Nathan McCoy
WEBSITE snipurl.com/redivider

THIS IS A simple yet fiendishly difficult game. Using your mouse to drag a line over the screen, you must cut the green circles, separate the blues, and avoid the greys. And just like that you lose an hour of your life.

The first few levels are easy enough: cut a couple of greens, separate some blues, then everything starts to move. Then they throw in the greys. This makes things exponentially more difficult, as greys swirl among the pretty greens and blues. Whoever designed level 16 is deserving of respect. It's utterly frustrating, yet completely amazing.

The later levels are harrowing, and the red flash of the game over screen quickly becomes a familiar sight, but when you do manage to solve a level, by God it's satisfying.

The only qualm is that most of the puzzles can be solved by random clicking. So do this for a few minutes and you'll eventually find the way to get that last green circle you spent the last 20 minutes weeping over, caressing the screen, and offering your soul to The Great Unclean One, if only he'll let you splice the bloody thing.

TELEPORTOWER

Note to self: little blue hats are not spike proof

DEVELOPER Kaho **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/teleportower

IF THIS GAME was food, it'd be spag bol: a classic, but if you don't have the technique down, it makes you look like a moron.

Teleportower's premise is simple: there are two sides to each level, and you must use your teleporting ability to get to the pretty yellow gem.

As the levels progress you encounter sharp spikey things that kill you should you jump on them, trampolines that boost your paltry two square jump to four whole squares, and a teleport door which allows you to teleport to the other door on the level.

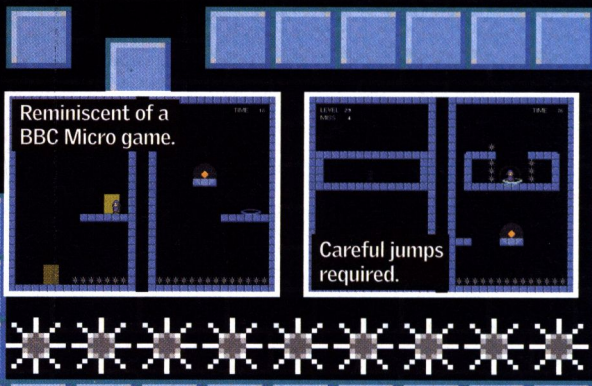
BEAMING AROUND

Once you get the hang of using the tools given to you (including hanging), the game becomes relatively easy, and it's rare that you pause for more than a couple of seconds before completing a level.

You can get to the fourth tower pretty quickly, and then it gets a little more taxing. At this point you may find yourself staring dumbfounded at the screen, with dead eyes and a blank expression, waiting for inspiration to strike. You can't just jump around until you find the right sequence of moves either as these are clever puzzles, so you must carefully work out your strategy before pressing anything. When your eureka moment does strike, you find yourself reassessing your intelligence, feeling rather stupid indeed.

Teleportower's last few levels are a real challenge, and the final last tower is an unrelenting and vicious gauntlet: your timing must be perfect, and your movements precise. It's difficult, but in a great way. You always feel the gem is just beyond your reach, just a couple more tries and you can get it.

That said, it does feel as though the first tower is far too easy, and that could well be off-putting. Bear with *Teleportower*, and it will test your button mashing skills to their limits.

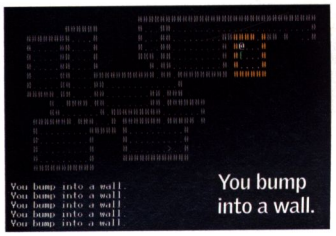


MADNESS

You are likely to be eaten by a grue

DEVELOPER hmp **WEBSITE** tinyurl.com/madnessgame

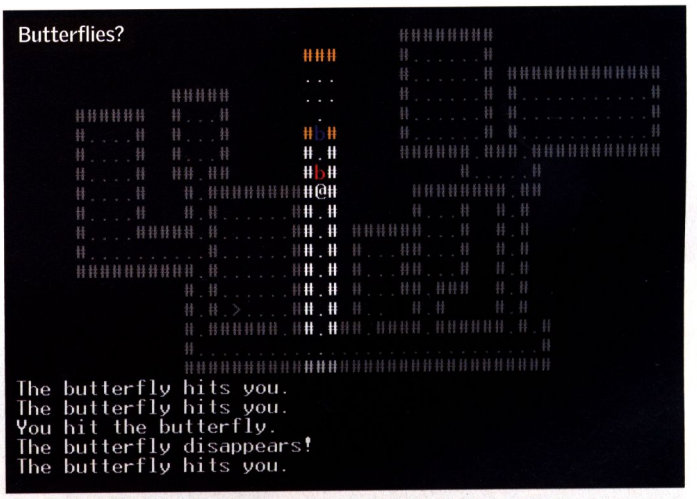
MADE FOR THE Seven Day Roguelike Challenge, *Madness* is an exploration of dungeons, darkness and sanity. You play an adventurer who must traverse the 10 floors of the dungeon and defeat the dungeon master, while protecting yourself from baddies and staving off insanity (presumably caused by ASCIII characters assaulting you).



At first the enemies are easy and singular; a little rat to stomp beneath your +1 Leather Boots. Later you encounter more powerful enemies: goblins, orcs, and of course, ogres. These tougher enemies take more than a couple of kicks to fell, but they aren't the only threat facing your adventurer.

You have a sanity counter, and when it starts dropping, you better watch out. If it falls too low, ghost bats appear in swarms, dogging your every move, and robot unicorns attack in droves. You must restore your sanity by using potions, but care is needed as levels are never the same, so you don't know where your next potion will come from.

Darkness adds to your unsure situation and a torch is always handy.



Who knows, without one, you may be eaten by a grue, or perhaps killed by an imaginary butterfly.

This is certainly an impressive endeavour for only 168 hours work, and a great introduction to the roguelike genre, especially if you're new to these back-to-basics games. A fresh driving concept doesn't hurt either, the effects of madness are amusing and add yet another challenge to the game.

Here's hoping there are more good games out of the Roguelike Challenge this year.

GEM CRAFT

Yes, it's another tower defence game

DEVELOPER Armor Games **WEBSITE** freewaregames.net/gemcraft.asp

IN THIS COOL little tower defence web game, you play a wizard holed up in his tower who must create magic gems and place them atop pillars to destroy waves of incoming enemy insects. (At least we think they're insects.) As you advance through the game, the number of waves increase, but so does your power.

It's easy to pick up and play, and within a couple of rounds you'll be building defences Sun Tzu would be proud of. One of the keys to building a good defence is combining the gems. This costs mana, but is well worth it. You can mix two of the same gem to create a pure version which will boost their original stats, or you can blend different gems to get different effects.

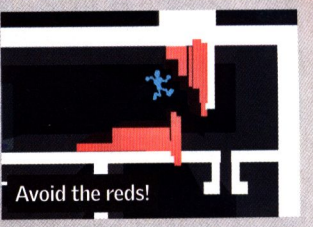
Positioning of towers is also paramount, as you need them to lay down an unrelenting barrage, rather than occasionally hit something.

There are other weapons available to our wily mage. He has access to traps which are activated by placing gems in them. These act in a similar manner to towers, other than they don't actually shoot things.

You can also activate charge towers. which are pre-placed on the map, by sacrificing a gem to them. The tower then lashes out with electricity, killing pretty much everything around it. These towers have limited charges however, so must be used wisely.

This is a fun web game and well worth a half-hour of your time. Perfect for a lunch break.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



SPECTER SPELUNKER SHRINKS

DEVELOPER Ken Grafals
WEBSITE snipurl.com/specterspelunker

IN THIS UNITY-BASED platformer the player must find a way to traverse a level and overcome obstacles by changing size. Doing this warps the entire level into something new as unreachable ledges become steps and tiny holes become vast caverns.

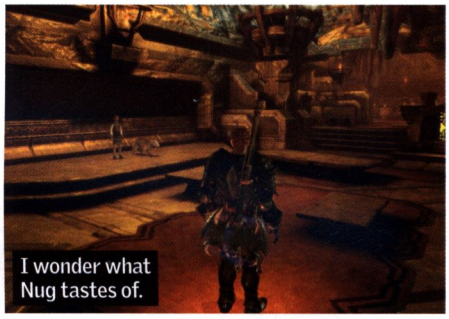
When the character shrinks, time slows. Red blocks that would otherwise hurtle into you now float along slowly. It would have been good to have some extra functions to the growth/shrink mechanic, but *Spelunker* remains a great idea, and it'll be interesting to see if Grafals will build on this concept.

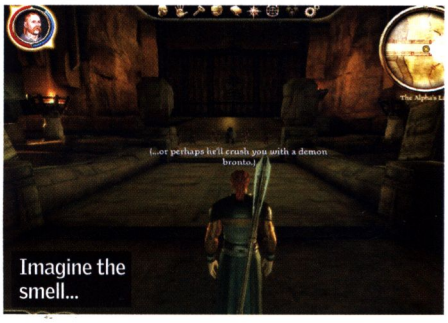
Extend

ON THE DVD PCZONE

James Ireland **delivers some choice mods and maps**

Karate is a new addition to the Circle's curriculum.


I wonder what Nug tastes of.



Imagine the smell...

FRAGMENTS OF FERELDEN

The Ginger Strikes Back

MOD FOR *Dragon Age: Origins* **WEBSITE** social.bioware.com/project/1504

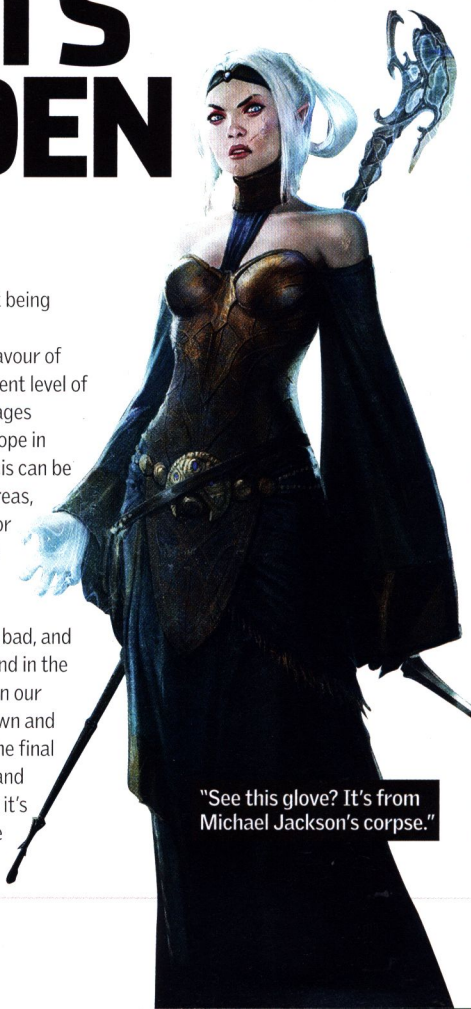
THIS CAMPAIGN FOR ***Dragon Age*** **sees you, a knight-errant, called upon to search out and destroy an Alpha Hurlock residing in a mysterious labyrinth.**

Fragments of Ferelden was only released a couple of months after the *Dragon Age Toolset* became available. Given the time in which it was produced, this is a very impressive little mod. Clocking in at around three hours of game time, it's a reasonable length, sending you from level one to nine.

The combat is somewhat reliant on potion spamming, as you are alone for the entirety of the mod. Fortunately you start out with the ability to make potions, though this can become something of a chore. It may be a quick and dirty way of balancing the game, but it does do the job without being a complete game-breaker.

The balance is shifted in favour of area effect attacks and a decent level of protection, so Rogues and Mages without AoE spells may not cope in some of the larger battles. This can be solved by exploiting pulling areas, taking on foes one at a time, or by standing at a distance and twanging away with your trusty bow.

The battles aren't entirely bad, and there's a lot of good to be found in the latter stages of the mod, when our brave Templar must track down and kill the Alpha. The run up to the final battle involves killer brontos and hordes of minions. As always, it's extremely satisfying to freeze a dozen enemies, and then hack their friends to pieces.


"See this glove? It's from Michael Jackson's corpse."

The story is somewhat confused, and it's never made clear how the different parts of Ferelden came to be within this labyrinth. This is further complicated by the modder's choice of plot delivery. Most of the information about the plot and quest appears in text on the screen while you're exploring, which is a rather sloppy way of handling things. While the original game depended on Codex entries to flesh out the quests' stories, this option has been ignored here. It's disappointing to see a decent plot spoiled by poor handling of delivery.

It's also possible to bypass a lot of the labyrinth and go straight to the final battle, as there isn't a driving reason to go to the elven and dwarven districts (such as collecting items needed to defeat the Alpha), and the available side-quests aren't as compelling as defeating the monster in the maze.

Given the resources available and the time it was produced in though, *Fragments of Ferelden* is a decent accomplishment. It's not the pinnacle of *Dragon Age* mods, but it gives an enjoyable few hours, and promises a lot from the next instalment.

STAR WARS: CONQUEST

Speeder&Vibroblade

MOD FOR *Mount&Blade* **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/swconquest

Blasters at the ready!

A VAST MODDING community has emerged since *Mount&Blade* was released in 2008, and now they've turned the game upside down in efforts to make it even better.

This full conversion includes speeder bikes, lightsabers, blaster rifles and plenty of Wookies. You can become a Sullustan soldier or a Jawa Jedi, a Rebel or Imperial – it's up to you.

The futuristic weapons have been well translated to the *Mount&Blade* engine, and though the blaster shots drop like arrows, it's as good a representation of *Star Wars* combat as can be made in this engine.

There's a healthy dose of force powers included, but these seem to be slightly off. It's much more satisfying to run in lightsaber flailing than it is to sit at the back flinging lightning around.

Securing a decent crew will be your first instinct, and you'd do well to trust it, as there's nothing as embarrassing as squaring up to a mob of pirates with a couple of puny recruits by your side.

Early battles involve skirmishes with Jawas, but sink a bit of time into this game and you're going to end up seeing two dozen Jedi slam into 200 droids.

The campaign mode is more than enough to keep you interested, but there's also a custom battles mode included. You can play through pre-made scenarios, like the boarding a ship, or create your own vast skirmishes.

You may not lead cavalry into battle here, but this mod is worth a go.

CLEAR SKY COMPLETE 2010

Head back into a prettier Zone

MOD FOR *STALKER: Clear Sky* **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/clear-sky-complete

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of *STALKER Complete* (snipurl.com/stalkercomplete) for *Shadow of Chernobyl, Clear Sky Complete 2010* gives *STALKER: Clear Sky* a makeover, adding to its graphical punch.

This is a hefty update and you're going to need a high-end PC to get the most out of it. If you're having frame rate issues, you may have to turn down sun quality, SSAO (Screen Space Ambient Occlusion for the Wandies out there) and anti-aliasing. This allows you to run the game at a significantly smoother speed, while maintaining the intended graphical boost.

The biggest change you'll notice is a new set of distant scenery textures. These give the sense of being in a huge open world, which is a necessity in a game where your environment is everything. You'll also find prettier lighting, and a heap of other new textures.

This project includes not only graphical boosts, but also nearly 100 new songs, that were recorded for the mod.

While *Complete 2010* retains the original's gameplay, it includes some fixes of minor faults. The biggest of these is reducing the amount of grenades NPCs have to stop them bombarding you, and slight changes to bandages and medkits, to deal with the original's excessive bleeding.

Pretty nuclear wasteland.

Clear Sky Complete is perfect if you loved the original game, but the dreary visuals got you down. Alongside the beautified landscape, the gameplay tweaks certainly make this a worthwhile download.

BADWATER BASIN PAYLOAD

Blow those zombies to hell

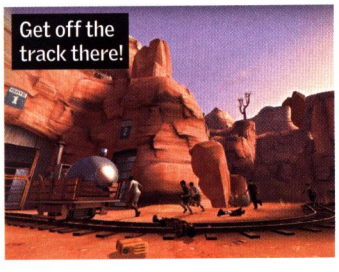
MOD FOR *Left 4 Dead 2* **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/bbpayload

DESIGNED AS AN example campaign for developers and to test out ideas, *Badwater Basin Payload* fuses two game modes from *Team Fortress 2* and *Left 4 Dead 2*: you must scavenge fuel to a cart, while beating back *L4D2's* zombie hordes.

As it stands, the campaign is more of an exploration of what's possible within the *L4D2* engine than a romp around *TF2's Badwater* map, and there are certain things that could be improved to make the experience more fluid. The earlier stages of the fight are difficult in comparison to the last stage, and towards the end there is a noticeable lack of Specials. The pacing needs improving, possibly by addressing the rise and fall tension with some scripted events, perhaps by having specials guard certain areas. The core game mechanic has a lot of potential, and it's easy to see a more streamlined version of this becoming a real game mode. A Versus mode could well be interesting, with two teams battling to push (rather than fuel) the cart into each other's bases. It would be great to see this within the realm of the *L4D2*. Perhaps the Survivors could push a clapped out police car instead of fueling a cart.

With variations on the way the cart is propelled this could be made into a full campaign rather than just one map. It'll certainly be interesting to see how this develops. Who knows? Next we might see *Counter-Strike* with portals.

To the portaloo!


Get off the track there!

MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid

He gargles with bleach.

WHITE TEETH

MOD FOR *Dragon Age: Origins*
WEBSITE snipurl.com/dawhiteteeth

Are you a dental hygienist? Do off-white teeth give you bad dreams? Does staring into Alistair's mouth horrify you? The modding community righted this universal and terrible wrong. Morrigan's gnashers will now be a lovely Vanilla Mist instead of bloody beige.

MULTI THEFT AUTO

Edward Fenning jetpacks into action

MOD FOR *GTA: San Andreas* **WEBSITE** mtavc.com

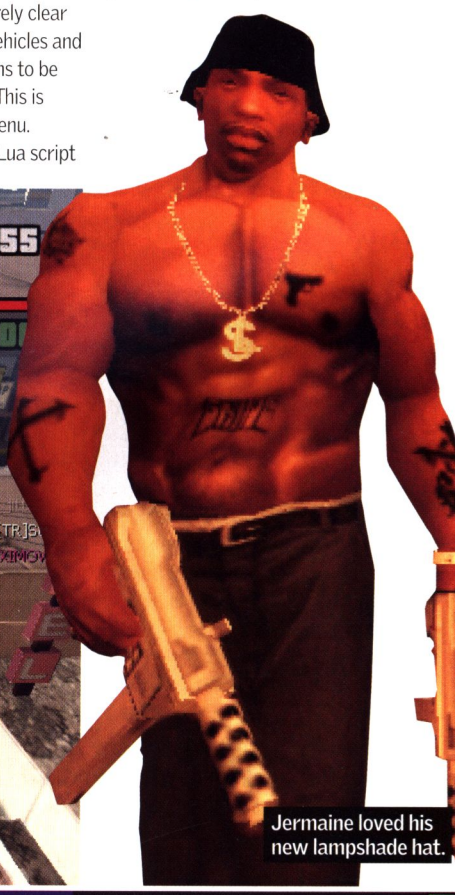
THERE HAVE BEEN mods to *San Andreas* before that have introduced multiplayer modes, an option that Rockstar bizarrely failed to include in their original release of the game on the PC.

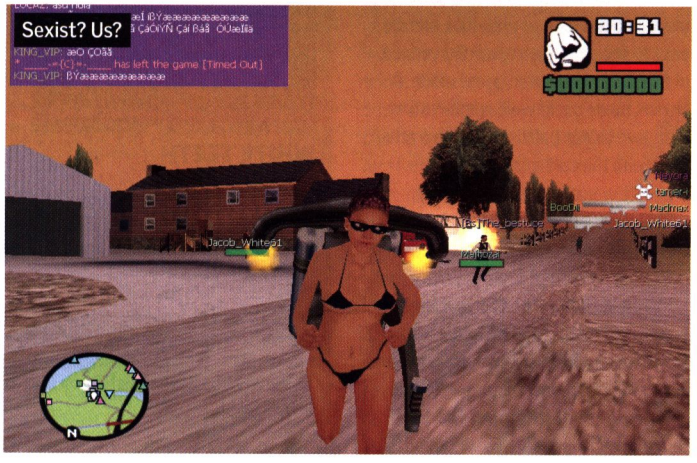
Multi-Theft Auto goes beyond being a simple tweak to let people play together, instead serving as an entire online experience in its own right that's got seven years of development behind it. Think of it as the *Garry's Mod* for *Grand Theft Auto*, allowing unlimited vehicle and weapon spawning at a whim for utter craziness on the sandbox servers. A 132-person jetpack battle really is something to behold, as is 32-a-side golf cart chicken. More often than not though there will just be a mad bunch of people in a variety of vehicles, either killing each other or doing stunts. Outside of this basic mode are a variety of sub-genres, from standard ideas like Race to wackier things like Role Play and Zombie Survival.

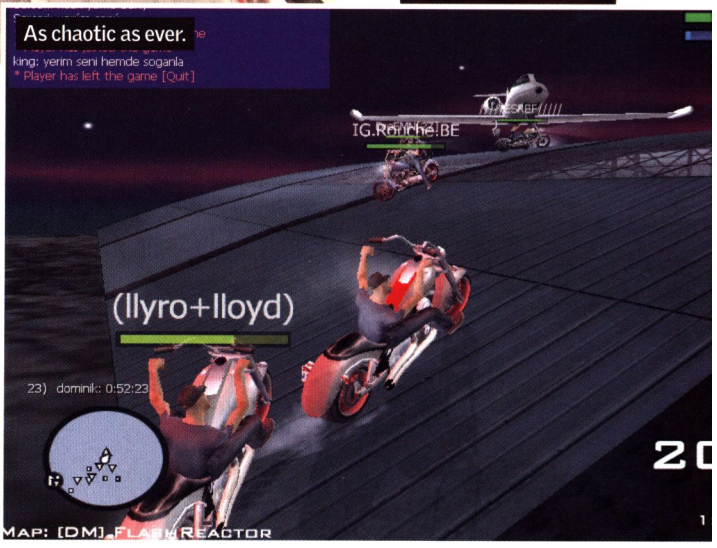
If you own a retail copy of *San Andreas* installation is a breeze, but if you have the *Steam* version then some tinkering is required to get this mod running. Once it's ready, joining a game is relatively easy and streamlined, with a surprisingly large player base and many servers on the dedicated browser to choose from.

Once in a game it's not entirely clear how you should summon the vehicles and weapons as everyone else seems to be doing with consummate ease. This is down to not having a spawn menu. Instead, you have to know the Lua script name of what you want and use the in-game console to spawn it manually.

Master the console commands and you've got a brilliant playground at your disposal to enjoy with others, that alone makes *San Andreas* worth purchasing if you haven't already.


Jermaine loved his new lampshade hat.





EASTERN FRONT

Stalin-g the German Advance

MOD FOR *Company of Heroes* **WEBSITE** easternfront.org

WHENEVER THERE'S A World War II game that leaves out the Russians, somebody will make damn sure to put them in. When a game leaves out the French though, nobody seems to give a shit.

Eastern Front is an extensive mod that finally brings the Soviet Army to *Company of Heroes*, polished to such a standard you could mistake them for a THQ created faction.

Eastern Front acts as an expansion rather than a mod, providing Soviet forces with their own unique models, skins, sounds, buildings, tech trees, maps and three doctrines.

Their play style is a breath of fresh air too, having units like the conscripts who cost no population, but have to share rifles and are prone to carrying out undisciplined rushing attacks.

Though lacking any solo missions they're compatible with multiplayer and single-player skirmishes, but the team has plans to introduce their own campaign in the future.

"Lenin us a hand here, comrade!"

TRIBAL WARS

Don't cry over missing *Tribes* any longer

MOD FOR *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* **WEBSITE** twars.org

GOOD GAMES NEVER truly die. They just get faithfully recreated as mods to more modern titles. *Tribal Wars* is an attempted recreation of the old *Starsiege: Tribes* game pitting light, medium and heavy classes against one another in a revival of the original game's speedy floating combat.

There are two maps recreated from the original using a capture-the-flag mode. All the old *Tribes* tactics are still valid, so those who mastered skiing first time around will find it useful again.

The mod is in its early stages, yet there are no noticeable game-breaking bugs, and more maps are promised. The only hurdle is that there are few players, and more often than not none at all. If you're wanting a game of this it's best to organise it with some mates beforehand, that or try and wrangle some players from our own *PC ZONE* forums.

2 EVIL EYES

And one morally ambiguous mouth

MOD FOR *Left 4 Dead 2* **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/2evileyes

TRAINS, TANKS AND nauticalmobiles all make an appearance in this swampy campaign for *Left 4 Dead 2*. Most of the map has you going through a bog populated with sinister buildings, treetop walkways and downed planes that manages to maintain a variety of locations and be challenging for new and experienced players alike.

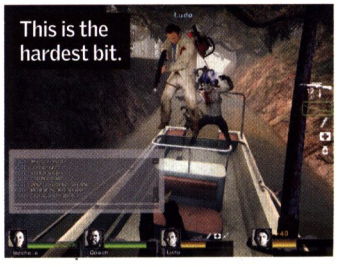
Mostly the map is bug free, apart from a few instances of Infected spawning in the sides of containers. It's mostly intuitive where to go, though there were occasions of confused backtracking over paths that could lead you in a circular route.

For those of you without human companions it's AI friendly, the only snafu happening at the mid-point where there's a boat to the safe room for you to ride. Once you perch on top of it and set it going, AI allies will run along behind in the ankle deep waters. If you really want to at this point you could sing Lonely Island's ditty about how you're on a boat and doing a mermaid, before crying over how hollow and lonely you feel inside.

Weirdly, the most challenging moment happens in the penultimate part: crossing a misty bridge that splurges foes all over you and is narrower to navigate than the one in Parish.

The finale itself instead feels anticlimactic after this, as you're pretty much unthreatened due to the fact the Infected spawn a great distance away and have to cross open terrain to reach you, which leaves them pretty easy to gun down.

Don't let these things put you off though, as it's a solid campaign well worthy of a play.



Online Zone

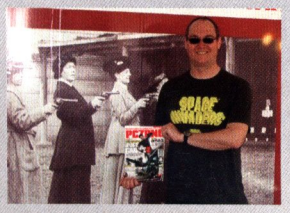
What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

A foray into *Bad Company 2* brought much rejoicing and some gnashing of teeth. Elsewhere, Zone Chat was a wild change from the norm, with people actually taking part, and our other online appendages were oiled and ready enough to take on all comers. See what was said, what was thought and how we responded right here.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



HOPE YOU'VE BEEN enjoying your *StarCraft II* beta keys. If not, you weren't following us on Twitter (or looking at our malnourished blog). If you had been, you might well have been able to snaffle one of the complex strings of letters and numbers that would enable you to access the game's pre-release build. It's all over now, so you've missed your chance.

It wasn't just free stuff, of course, unless you count the glorious words we spew out all the time. Actually, it pretty much was just *StarCraft II*. That and plugging the last issue. We did manage to scrape together a few seconds in order to viciously satirise the Digital Economy Act, comparing it to unscrupulous illegal loggers.

Finally, we have to mention regular reader Darth_Careful, who lamented the fact he wasn't getting mentioned in the magazine. We're nice people here (apart from the one guy who isn't) so we thought, hey, let's give him what he wants. He also sent in a picture of himself, so if you want to point and laugh, or even fantasise about him covered in honey and doing an erotic dance, be our guests.

If you want to get mentioned and/or ridiculed, why not send us an imploring tweet to us @pczone. Nudity optional.

FIGHT CLUB

PC ZONE are incredibly bad company

NOT ONLY DID this month's Fight Club mark the debut of *Bad Company 2* in our monthly scrap-off, but it was also the turns of editor Hogarty and staffer Brown to dip their toes into EA's building-ruining online FPS extravaganza for their very first time.

Bless their tootsies, they were only level zero going in, and halfway towards level one coming out. They never even got off the ground floor of this towering inferno of experience points and unlocks, despite pouring a whole evening into the game.

So, armed with their default weapons and heads swimming with confusion and spectacle, Hogarty and Brown (adopting their rap names of Boss Hogg and D-Bro) charged headfirst into the fray, supported and opposed in equal measures by *PC ZONE* readers who – as is Fight Club tradition – massively outclassed them.

Readers king_clueless and yourevilclone took immense pleasure in popping open the skulls of the *ZONE* team and feasting on the delicious treasures within, while *PCZ*'s very own work experience exploitee (and *BC2* veteran) EGTF dragged the magazine's average to a halfway respectable place on the board. This despite Hogarty and Brown's insistence on quad biking themselves off rooftops and under tank treads. Skraty, meanwhile, proudly claimed his 100th dog tag, a grotesque memento of a century of successful knife kills.

Why indoor barbecues just don't work.

The day after our online kerfuffle, in the sobering light of day, we approached Fight Club regular [Quite] Rob demanding to know how he'd felt to be part of such a rare and unique monthly event: "Got raped hard by 40 mills and better players," he intoned, turning to face the middle-distance, a glimmer of regret in his eye that he'd said 'raped' and ruined the chance to show his gran his username printed in a mag. "I did manage to shotgun a sniper the other side of the map though lulz."

Lulz indeed – the length and breadth of these lulz were almost beyond words. Medic Hogarty took up residence on rooftops, and finding himself without even the most basic tools (these level zero yokels can't be trusted with defribbles and medipacks) instead opted to rain gunfire on the streets below, racking up a surprising number of kills before rampaging about the map in a tank and shouting about how brilliant games are.

Next month we'll be playing *Bad Company 2* again – check out our *Steam* group for more information. In the meantime, search the server browser for "*PC ZONE*" to find our little corner of the internet. Who knows, you might even spot us there. Glimmering, incompetent demigods that we are.

"Hogarty and Brown charged headfirst into the fray"

No time for group photos this month.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Do you think the new *XCOM* game will be a disaster or excitingly new?

THETINGLER: The rumour was Irrational being the developer, but it's actually 2K Marin, developers of *BioShock 2*. It's an FPS and it's on PC and Xbox 360, but is described as "exclusively on 360" when it's not. The website strongly suggests that it will be simply titled "*XCOM*".

MUSICALGIBBON: Seems like a fairly pointless attempt to take a unique series (albeit one that only really saw two decent releases) and turn it into the same thing as everything else.

ANDY_MONAHAN: Do not want.

SUNSCRAMBLE: Ohhhh, that *X-Com* franchise, the *X-Com: Enforcer* thing. I thought for a moment you meant the *Enemy Unknown/Terror From The Deep X-Com*. Son... I am disappointed.

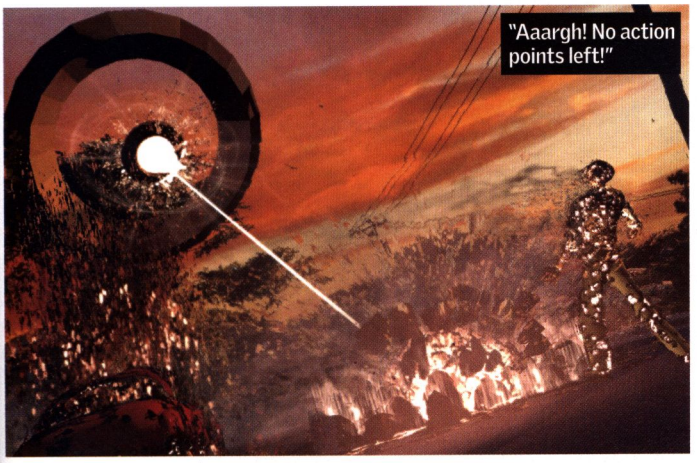
LIQUID_METAL: A developer of a poor sequel to its predecessor plans to update a separate beloved isometric PC franchise in the form of an FPS to please console players who have never heard of said game in the first place. This has never happened before.

CSDAVEUK: You never know. It might be as good as *Deus Ex: Invisible War*.

JONNY_P66: Put some cheese on it, maybe wrap it in bacon, it'll be OK. I think the word 'sacrilege' is fairly appropriate for this turn of events. Or has this been tried before? What was *X-Com: Enforcer*?

SUNSCRAMBLE: Kotaku contributor and [horrendous expletives deleted] Luke Plunkett has done it once more, posting about why 2K did the right thing when they made *X-COM* into a FPS. Every single point he makes is either flat-out wrong, or plain stupid. As of time of posting, pretty much every single one of the many, many comments on his post are an ode to why the man is an idiot, and 2K are just plain wrong. My faith in gamers and humanity as a whole has just crept back up a tiny notch.

JOWOO: Laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaame.



"Aaargh! No action points left!"

ZONE CHAT

The great debate

A turning point for the interactive media industry.

IGNORING THE TINTIN references that came up for the second month in a row, this Zone Chat was a much more successful venture than last month's. For a start, people actually showed up, which generally improves the situation somewhat.

However, with numbers often comes silliness and that's just what Bigboy0007 brought to the proverbial table. Lots of mentions of penises and excrement, although he did manage to also mention an aversion to eating prawns.

A question was raised about *Little Britain: The Game*, whether it was worse than being molested by an old man. The general consensus seemed to be that being fondled by an octogenarian would be preferable to having to play that pile. Then, amazingly, somebody had the gall to suggest that *PC Gamer* was actually worth reading.

The tone of the evening changed substantially, jars of textual vitriol thrown in the direction of one Dave Lemon. Attempting to transcend the violence, the perplexingly named ^1EZ_^2Bug^3z lamented his folly for spending all his money on clothes in *Battlefield Heroes*.

The equally bizarrely named [118]DHFTWOMFGBBQZOMLOL thought that was a good time to complain about *Bad Company 2*'s rubbish server browser, and with that people dispersed into Fight Club, apart from Bigboy0007 who sat there on his own typing 'Poo' and 'Wee' a lot. Maybe it was a dirty protest. Against what is a mystery.

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 become lodged inside a cannon while attempting a death-defying stunt – then feel free to join other readers on the following public servers.

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

COD 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

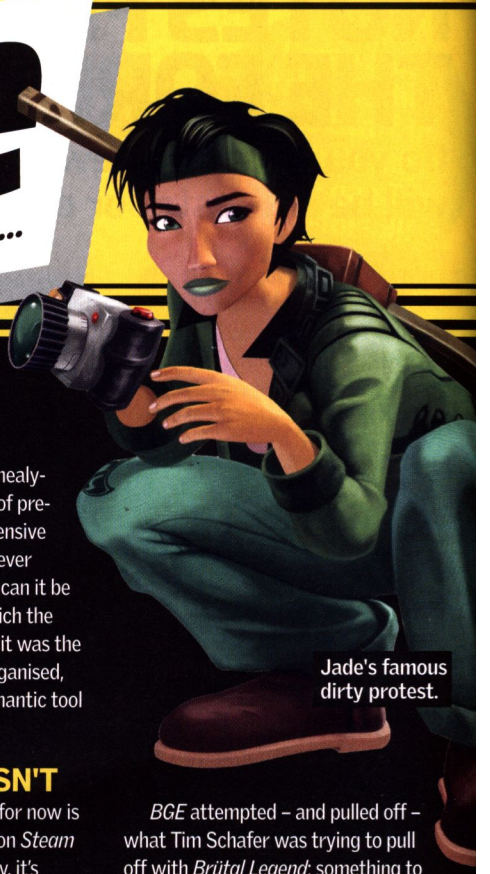
BAD COMPANY 2
Look for "*PC ZONE*" in the server browser.

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...

MULTIPLAY

Retro zone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Jade's famous dirty protest.

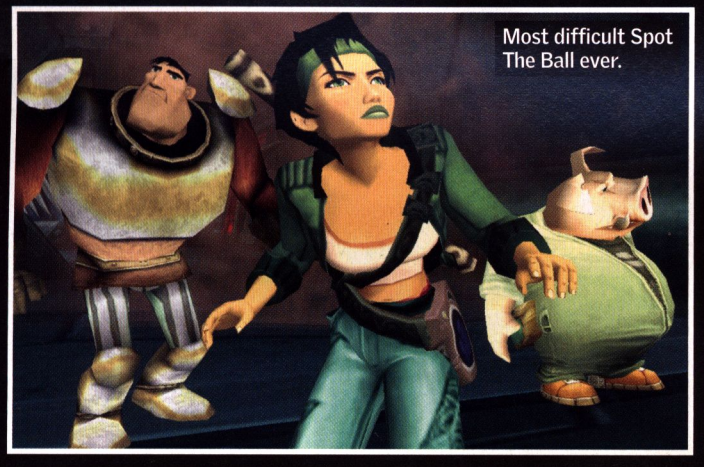
Flashback

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

ONCE A YEAR, Ubisoft hold an event called Ubidays. Like so many industry events, it's essentially a dick-waving exercise, and 2008's undulating penis show was notable for two main things. First, the misjudged use of Vernon Kaye as an MC. I'm sure he's a nice bloke but having him scream "I'm so addicted to GAMES," and genuinely expecting a cheer, was mortifying for everyone involved.

The other thing that sticks out was the ripple of excited cheers that shot through the audience when people realised that the teaser trailer at the end of the show, was actually the *Beyond Good and Evil* sequel. Making a big deal about something that was a far bigger critical than commercial success seemed brave, and uncommonly worthy.

Since then, there's been mealy-mouthed backtracking chat of pre-production, on-hold, and defensive bluster that the game was never officially announced, so how can it be technically cancelled? To which the correct response is "Sod off, it was the big reveal at an event you organised, remember? Stop being a semantic tool about it".



Most difficult Spot The Ball ever.

A HIT THAT WASN'T

So, it looks like all we've got for now is the original game (available on *Steam* and Good Old Games). Luckily, it's charming enough to reward first-timers and historical snufflers alike. The pretentious title sounds like something Peter Molyneux would cook up, but there's none of that in the game – we start off with a battle against a plant, relax with a bit of nature photography, before getting embroiled in a speedboat race and some platform puzzling.

BGE attempted – and pulled off – what Tim Schafer was trying to pull off with *Brütal Legend*: something to all people. Another similarity is the tepid reception: while *Beyond* was loved by journalists, there's something about a game that does more than one thing that's hard to passionately explain. These days people buy soundbites and quick pitches, and *Beyond Good and Evil* defiantly resisted a quick and cheap summary.

But how? You Pey'J your money

You takes your choice: *Beyond Good and Evil* is recent enough to be commercially available. It's on *Steam* for £5 and gog.com for $10, although they both work about at about the same amount once you've added VAT to Steam's price and translated the dollars back down into real money.

There's no question of us guiding you towards pirate sites for a game that's for sale, and if you're the kind of tight-fisted bastard that won't fork out a fiver for one of 2003's loveliest experiences then you deserve to have five quids worth of food ripped out of your stomach and jammed into a starving developer's shocked mouth.

The Characters The friends and foe of a photographer

1 JADE
A green-lipped photojournalist, and the first love of several optimistic gamers.

2 PEY'J
The affable pig that brings a cheer from crowds of journalists, and makes you feel bad about bacon.

3 DOUBLE H
A manual quoting, facially deformed, ex-soldier who's a full H short of a wrestling match.

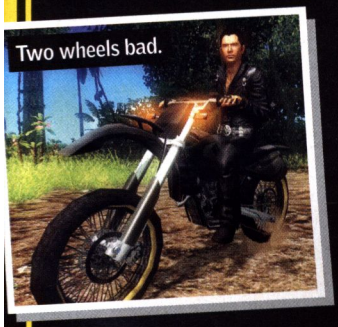
4 HIGH PRIEST DOMZ
The strangely named character who let you know it was a French game.

5 GENERAL KEHCK
The nasty guy behind *BGE*'s nasty things. General Kehck, you're pants! That's what I say to myself, anyway.

6 SECUNDO
A Spanish AI who can't pronounce his Js, and lives inside Jade's backpack. As AIs are prone to do.

Now & Then

JUST CAUSE 2 vs JUST CAUSE



ANY REVIEW OF *Just Cause 2* is subject to certain obligations. It has to start with an introduction, where we shoehorn bits of our personal life into the review, so we can make ourselves sound compelling and erotic. Then we'll tell you how good the graphics are, use the phrase "in gameplay terms" a few times, and finish off with a thrilling number.

But with *Just Cause*, the only question people wanted to know the answer to was where have they put the strippers this time? Inside a volcano took some beating, but we really think they pulled something out of the bag with having them on a floating island. Where next? Might we suggest hurtling through space in nothing but a helmet? Or how about miniaturised, inside the mouth of a pensioner? Come on, *Just Cause 3* – we need to know.

Play it! How to play a game that's over three years old!

1. *Just Cause* might not seem retro. But it's at times like these you've got to sit back and ask yourself: exactly what does 'retro' mean to me? A game that came out in 2006? Good.
2. You can get the original off *Steam* if you like. It's £8.99 there, and once you're tired of that you can move on to the sequel, also on *Steam* for... let's see... £29.99! Christ.
3. But we're not *Steam* biased! Oh no! You can also grab the original off Direct2Drive for £9.95 – which works out pretty much the same as *Steam*'s deal when you do VAT on it.
4. Where else does it? None other than Amazon.co.uk of course, and for a mere £7.90! The best deal yet! And for that you get a box and a disc and a manual and everything!

MAMEframe

WONDER BOY

THE USE OF constantly dwindling health as a method of getting you to pump more coins into the slot was first seen in *Gauntlet*, but *Wonder Boy* used the same effect to keep you panicking and prone to mistakes.

It seems *Wonder Boy* is a medical marvel, requiring upwards of six pieces of fruit a minute, simply to avoid dying of starvation.

So, this game is really a simple matter of memorise-and-dash platforming. Luckily for *MAME* users, and '80s children with bottomless pockets, *Wonder Boy* let you continue any number of times, so there's no excuse to not have completed it.

Unless you've chewed your knuckles off and no longer have control over your carpal phalanges. That's a pretty good excuse.

WHAT IS MAME?

The *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator* runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of *MameUI*, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

Time Trump

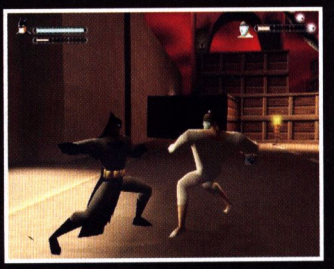
THE WORST OF... ISSUE 122 – DEC 2002

THE PROBLEM WITH nostalgia is that it's rose-tinted and one-sided. Sure, *UT2K3*, *Empire Earth*, *Arx Fatalis* and *Stronghold: Crusader* came out in late 2002, but now you can get the full 3D effect by slipping one brown lens into your time-spectacles...

BATMAN: VENGEANCE
SCORED: 42%

Pre-*Arkham* washout

"The fact that it tries to imitate *Metal Gear Solid* and fails, doesn't help. Horribly trite, unfair, and nowhere near excellent"



CASINO EMPIRE
SCORED: 39%

Template Tycoon

"In the UK, you can walk into a pub and gash £20 into a fruity. That'd be a better idea than wasting it on this."

SHADOW FLARE
SCORED: 28%

Another *Diablo* clone

"No innovation, no fun, and no point."

LEGION
SCORED: 25%

"Take *Civilization* and strip it of its depth and complexity. Then take *Age of Empires II*, and simplify the combat so you don't have to do anything. What you're left with is *Legion*."

Back In The Day

ARX FATALIS

Jon 'Log' Blyth gestures his way out of a paper bag

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios **PUBLISHER** JoWood Productions **RELEASED** 2002

THERE'S PLENTY THAT can go wrong in the first few minutes of *Arx Fatalis*. I know, I've been exhaustively inept in mastering the system.

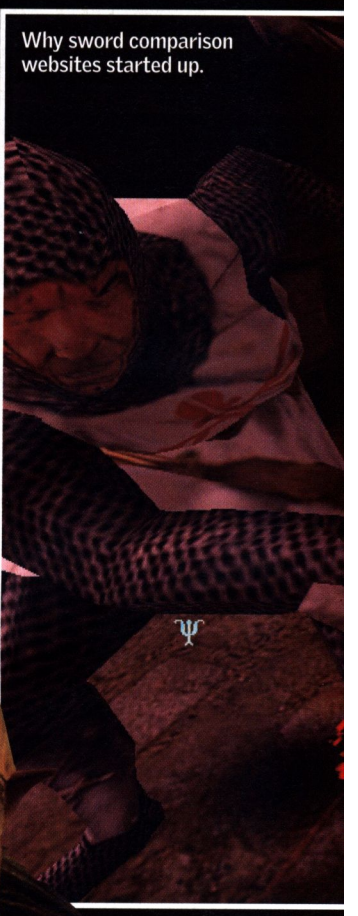
First of all, it takes a few minutes to get used to swapping between cursor mode, look mode, combat mode, and spellcasting mode. It's the kind of control system that multi-platform development has wiped out, as you just couldn't do this on a gamepad. So there's a nostalgic PC twang to *Arx Fatalis*, beyond its traditional RPG statistics and low polygon count – it's the kind of game we'll probably never see again. And while I'm glad it's still around, I'm not sure that never seeing its like again would be a bad thing.

First off, gestures. These were done just about right by *Black & White* two years earlier. But before I even got a chance to try and cast the ignite spell, the system asked me to put the runes in my magic book. Knowing how computer games work, I dragged the rune to my spellbook icon, and it disappeared. It was not in my book, not on the floor, or anywhere to be seen in the dark room. Of course, I might have been able to find it if I had some light – but that was the next part of the tutorial – use the rune to light a torch. Seethe. Restart.

RUNED GAMING

Next time, I followed the instructions, and still found myself unable to cast a spell. That's because I couldn't draw a lidless box to the satisfaction of the game's gesture recognition program. Assuming my barbarian build didn't have the spellcasting ability, I seethed to myself, and restarted. It made no difference, but I got lucky enough times to get me through the next couple of hours.

The *Elder Scrolls* series has moved the role-playing genre on so far that going back to *Arx Fatalis* was definitely a matter of undoing your expectations.

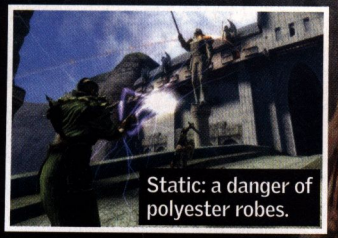


Why sword comparison websites started up.

Arkane Studios

Welcome To The Lyon's Den

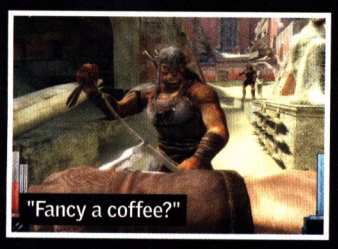
Arx Fatalis was French developer Arkane's first game, and was a faithful enough homage to *Ultima* to win them friends in the fantasy world. So, their next game saw them adopted by *Might & Magic*, with *Dark Messiah* released a full four years later. This was *M&M*'s attempt to sex itself up – it was beginning to feel a little old-school, even with *Heroes* dabbling in the RTS arena.



Static: a danger of polyester robes.

With levels that were deathtraps for the clumsy, *Dark Messiah* relied on rather unsubtle environmental weapons to despatch your enemies. It's one of the few games to feature beds of lethal spikes propped up against 50% of the world's walls.

That said, it lent an exciting edge of playful physics and hands-on visceral combat to the world of melee, ranged and spell combat. There was more than one way to play every level, even if you did kick a lot of people into a lot of spikes.



"Fancy a coffee?"

Arkane's next project was *The Crossing* – an ambitious game that fell foul of financial problems, and the adage I've just invented: If, when you try to describe a game to someone who loves games, and they reply "Eh? How's that work, then?" then you're going to have a bastard of a time selling it to businessmen.

Since then, Arkane have helped out 2K Marin with *BioShock 2*'s level design, which looks good on your CV. With any luck, they'll get a project of their own again soon.

That's no canary.

Basking in the afterglow.

What's a tiny lass like you doing outside a castle like this?

That looks like it needs stabbing.

However, once you get past the idiosyncracies of its system, it becomes a game that's very easy to warm to.

Yes, the script is translated and awful (a goblin attempting to kill you with a club asks you to "get lost"), and your role as an amnesiac prisoner couldn't be more hackneyed – but the story and the world it plays out in are genuinely interesting.

OLD CHESTNUTS

The underground would you inhabit was built by an unlikely alliance of trolls, goblins, rat people and humans unified by the death of the sun. Forced into underground warrens to use the heat of the planet to survive, the old divisions soon crept back in. Nothing's sacred – even the narrator gets killed, halfway through his introduction.

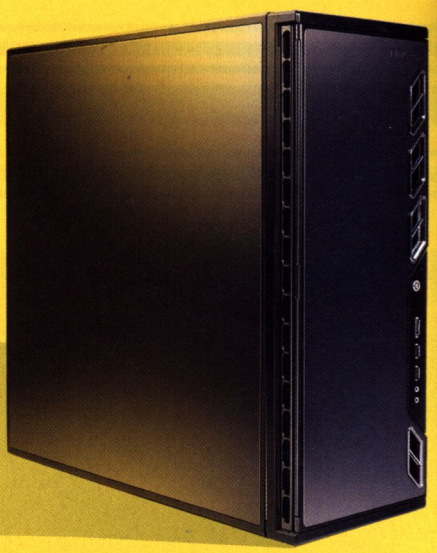
It's also refreshing to go back to character-rolling basics. Creating your character lets you choose four main stats, broadly selecting how strong, magical, precise and hardy your character is, and nine sub-stats, which effect thief-like actions such as stealth, lock-picking and trap-noticing, insights into monsters and objects, and boosts to the complexity of magic you can cast.

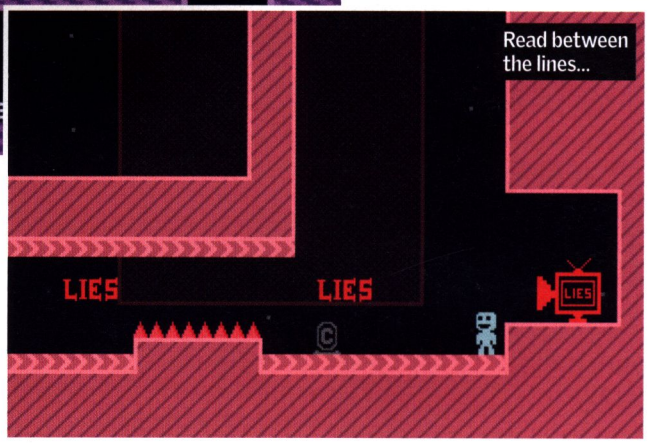
All bitches aside, once you've mastered the controls and learned the peculiarities of the game's controls, *Arx Fatalis* is a bit of a flawed, dusty gem. A gem that needs a bit of attention, maybe. And a gem that'll piss you off a bit. And certainly, it's a gem with shit dialogue. But for anyone with a history of PC gaming behind them, it's a traipse that'll take you down some half-forgotten mental corridors. PCZ

"Past the idiosyncracies of its system, it becomes a game that's very easy to warm to"

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing and why we're playing them



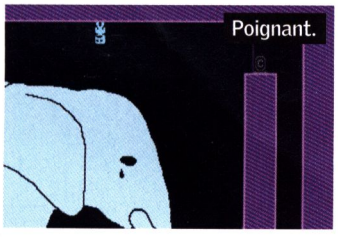


VVVVVV

Consonanted: ***Jon 'Log' Blyth***

BEFORE I PRAISE *VVVVVV*, I should explain where I'm not coming from. I'm not coming from a rear-facing world of denial, in which the last great game was *Jet Set Willy*. I've written *Retro Zone* for three years: I know that the past is a disappointing place.

So, *6V* should plug directly into that constantly disappointed bit of my brain.



It should be a distraction, a sigh of recognition, a flush of brief happiness as I briefly remember the childhood friends I don't talk to any more, before a shapeless half-deflated feeling of loss and mortality lands on my face.

But it's not like that. I've no doubt *6V* would have landed a gold medal in *Zzap!* It would have warranted a double-page pull-out map, and I'd have left the amazing music on in the background, the same way I did with *Monty On The Run*. But this isn't straight nostalgia, it's a short and highly compelling game.

With fantastic chip music, simple controls, and rooms with names that make your heart swell hot, *VVVVVV* slams its charm hard into you. It's difficult not to love the main character, who's mindlessly happy in the face of repeated death. But the deaths are so fast, and the restarts so instant, that you don't get a chance to stop playing.

And the final dose of intelligence and charm is in the flexibility wrung out of the basic three-button control system. All you can do is move and rescue your crew is move left and right and swap gravity. A stifling system that the tiny team manages to find enough variety to carry you through the two to three hours *VVVVVV* lasts.

The optional trinket missions and time trial modes are great bonuses, but even with them, I'd be forced to admit that *VVVVVV* isn't very long. And I'll happily concede that it's optimistically priced. You might paraphrase that as "too expensive". I'd shrug and tell you to dedicate your life to making a game, if you're so great.

I hope *VVVVVV* makes enough money to convince these guys to make another game, because I want to see what they make next.

VERDICT: **Flipping brilliant**

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Bad Medicine: *Edward Fenning*

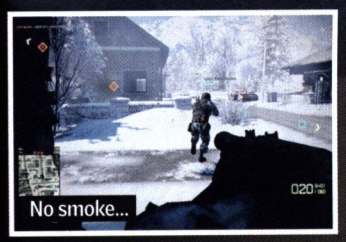
LET ME TELL you how much I've come to hate Medics. I trust my three year-old cousin to perform first aid better, compared to these guys that throw down a magic box and hope it heals people some 10 meters away. Maybe they believe positive vibes can stem bleeding.

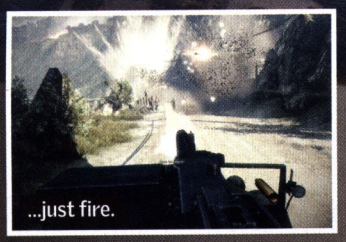
That's not even beginning to cover their misuse of defibrillators, where 1,000 volts to the heart apparently cures death by bullets to the face. But don't let such incompetence fool you, they're an extremely deadly juggernaut class. They could easily outgun me with M60s, plus if there was more than one they would keep zapping each other back to life.

To calm down I needed my Dicaprio fix, so went and watched *Gangs of New York* again. Seeing the fight scene at the end it came to me: smoke! Now I have a new tactic for Medic menaces. When I see a group of them huddling together I blanket the area with smoke grenades, before running into the gloom and stabbing them, only to vanish again afterwards.

Prescribing a knife to their backs has done wonders in curing my frustration at these gits.

VERDICT: Nurse! Suction!





WORLD BASKETBALL MANAGER 2010

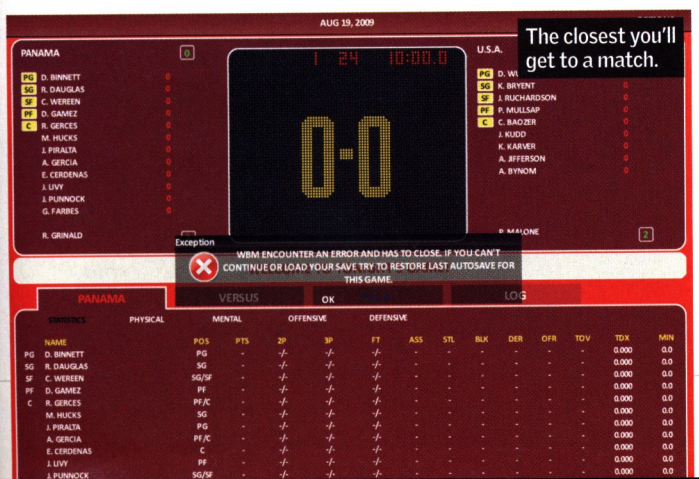
Off the Rim: *David Brown*

WHILE SPORTS MANAGEMENT games don't necessarily need wonderful graphics or exciting 3D match engines, it's good to have something pleasant to look at during the hours you invest into them. Even *Football Manager* has gone down the visuals road now, so to play *World Basketball Manager 2010* is like stepping back into the dark ages in a very, very bad way.

Judge how accurate the game is at simulating the work of a basketball coach is difficult, because every time a match was initiated, the game would display an error and stop. So this is a basketball management game that you can't even look at the text highlights in. That's not the most inspirational thing to say about a game, is it? Just running through a slow-running glorified text adventure clicking "Simulate" a lot surely isn't anyone's idea of fun.

The whole point of basketball is that you get involved with the substitutions, create a playbook and all that sort of thing, so to be denied it all (there was no play creation option to be seen) is a kick in the proverbials. The interface is utterly horrible and counter-intuitive as well – just accessing your squad is frustratingly fiddly. There's no excuse for the design flaws shown here, and it makes you appreciate fully how well made games like *Football Manager* are. So yeah, you could say this isn't the game of choice for lunch breaks.

VERDICT: Benched



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

ALIENS VS PREDATOR
It is a great game, but I've concerns about the length of the single player missions. Whilst the graphics are first rate and the weapons have obviously been well thought out, I just feel slightly cheated over how short it was.
Preay

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
This is going to be the one that swallows up a whole year like *Baldur's Gate II* did. I'll start drafting a goodbye note to my girlfriend now.
G_Hughes

METRO 2033
I thought the game was brilliant. It's one of those games that you can complete in a weekend, but can play through it again in different ways,
WonkoTheShit

BIOSHOCK 2

Will Porter puts on a dress and a creepy girly voice

Jordan Thomas
Creative Director,
2K Marin

ONE THING WE know about Will Porter is that he loves the *BioShock* games, so when we were asked to supply somebody to sit in a room with Jordan Thomas, creative director at 2K Marin, and question him about *BioShock 2*, there was only one name that could have possibly have passed our lips. So it was that the excited Mr Porter found himself pumping Thomas for information on Daddies big and Sisters little (and big).

There were so many sentences and words to listen to, the poor work experience lad who transcribed the interview broke down in tears and fled the building, his poorly constructed headphones still plastered to his sweat-matted hair.

Fortunately for us, we managed to retrieve the following spoiler-peppered words for your delectation. The rest of them will be in next month's issue if we can coax the workie out of the tree with a blueberry muffin.

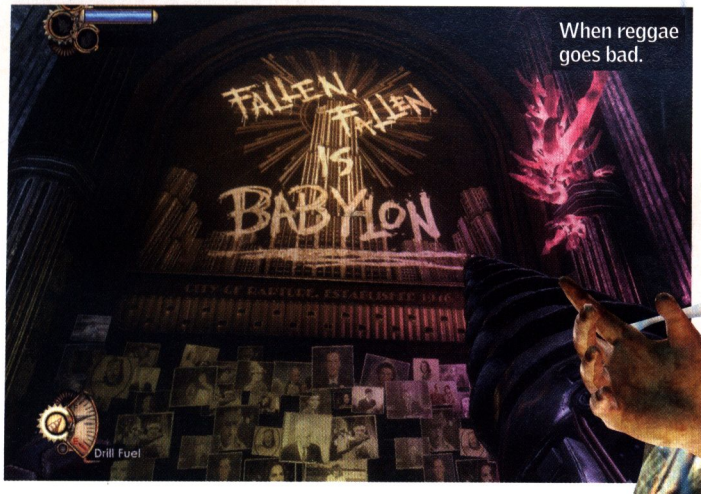
PART ONE

01 PARALLEL UNIVERSE

"Originally the game was a hybrid, there were a number of playable flashbacks, which had a prequel-like flavour, but were much more subjective, like memories that you were uncovering. But they were terrible. What Rapture was like in its heyday appeals on paper, but it meant you really couldn't play the game. Players sleepwalked through each scene, which was pretty, but not particularly convincing.

"We spent a lot of time on that because it was something that I very much wanted to do, but it just didn't make sense. It would've been such a radically different game that we couldn't really call it *BioShock* any more. Anybody who came from the original would be saying like, 'What about the gameplay?! I liked that too.'"

It could have been very different.



When reggae goes bad.

02 ONE TRICK PONY

"I knew that the people who came back expecting a giant twist, and would be disappointed with it's lack. But I also feel like repeating that formulaic kind of Shyamalan-style of one-trick storytelling would have led to people saying *BioShock 2* was a carbon copy of the first game.

"Frankly, I was much more interested in doing the opposite of 'Would you kindly...', zooming out to show your effects on the world in a way that you didn't anticipate, than to pull another 'Gotcha!'."

Those white contact lenses are freaky.

"Originally the game was a hybrid"

Freeze him, shoot him, laugh.

03 SPLICER BATTLES

"Before we got out of formal pre-production, we started speaking about multiplayer, because we were informed that the sequel would have to expand what it meant to be a '*BioShock*' game. We started thinking about what that meant, and came up with some very loose ideas. More experienced multiplayer gamers would have seen them as too complicated to drop in and play, but Digital Extremes countered with their own pitch, and we hired some internal people whose job it was to work directly with them."

Faster than you'd imagine.

04 MARIN LIFE

"A few months after *BioShock* shipped, Alyssa Finley (*BioShock*'s project leader) told me she was starting a new studio, and that Ken Levine and the guys at Irrational were moving on. Eventually it came down to about eight of us who seeded 2K Marin, and we just started talking about *BioShock 2*. Our main objective was the make sure the name was treated well. Each of us had worked on *BioShock* and were proud to have been involved, and we wanted to make sure that the very sort of baroque and spiny Rapture canon was properly protected. Eventually we kind of distilled down to a couple of core ideas: the Big Daddy/Little Sister relationship was going to be humanized, a former sister would factor in a big way, and that we would set it in Rapture."

Scenic.

He's really a big softy.

05 SPLIT PERSONALITY

"Splicers have an array of possible remarks based on their state. The only difference is that *BioShock 2* has dozens of states for them to be in. So them being frozen, covered in bees, hypnotized, running to cover, deciding to flush a player out with a grenade or just fighting a protector – a Big Daddy relative to fighting a player – all of those things have very unique writing associated with them.

"The biggest ones are the hypnotized state's unique content, which reveal a different aspect of the character. Every splicer is a duality. For example, the brute is a raging homophobe, foul-mouthed and despicable. But if you hypnotize him he hits on you, and he reveals that he got strong because he was afraid of being found out as homosexual in Rapture's unforgiving socio-political climate.

"Hypnotize is my favourite plasmid, specifically because it unlocks this other side to characters."

06 MUTTON CHOPS

"Originally, the Big Sister was an unique character who you fought as frequently as you do now, but couldn't defeat. And back then Eleanor was the Big Sister. A couple of things irritated me about that: she was too far gone, your input wouldn't lead to anything, she was too fragmented, and had already done too many terrible things for you to feel like you had done much.

"Another thing was that it felt like a bad twist in the sense that 'Ooh, the Big Sister was your Little Sister,' and that was never the intent. Dramatically it had to be that way, because it had to feel like she was the antagonist at first. So a combination of pressures led to that shift to multiple Big Sisters as enforcers and Eleanor taking up the mantle later.

"I'm definitely happier with how it turned out, but I've learned my lesson with telling too much early on. With any mystery game I work on in the future, I'm going to be super reticent with details."

She's no softy though.

Rapture still looks impressive.

07 DADDY COOL

"No amount of talking about prototypes, agility and being more of a guy in a suit from way back in the line is enough to disassociate 'Big Daddy' from 'slow' and 'completely immortal'. Frankly if we had made a game around a traditional Big Daddy, it would've been fun for an hour before you realized you're just going to be lumbering down a corridor and killing everything. There's no challenge there.

"I feel that a lesson of *BioShock 2* is that the associations people make with the character – 'Will I be slow? Will I be immortal?' – are going to be the subjective experience of anyone returning to play that character. Convincing them otherwise is a challenge which we could have dealt with elsewhere, but the story was so fundamental to that bond that it's hard to see this particular game as any other form."

08 DUAL SHOCK

"Introducing Rapture as a setting is daunting in comparison to most games. *BioShock* had a two-audience challenge: increasing the number of people that are interested in *BioShock* was a goal, and so we had to make sure this game would introduce you to Rapture, Ryan and some of the core concepts again.

"The fans coming back would be familiar with all that, and so the layering references and skewing the tutorial, giving a child's eye view of Rapture with Ryan Amusements for example, became a goal, as we wanted to keep veterans interested while getting the huge payload of concepts delivered to them."

Icky.

Doherty's looking much better these days.

09 REFERENTIAL TREATMENT

"There's a fair amount of stuff in the Big Daddy/Little Sister lore that overlapped with the first game, like references to guys like Suchong who were pivotal in their creation. But we focused on the player, like when Splicers debated what Jack did.

"Not everybody catches this because it's in the telekinesis plasmid tutorial. There's an argument going on between three splicers, one of whom says that Jack rescued a bunch of Little Sisters, went back to the surface and is a pansy. The second one one believes he's topside drinking high-balls. And then a third says, it doesn't matter where he is – he's gone.

"Those are the three things that you need to know: splicers don't know what Jack really did, they think he did different things, and that now he's out of the picture it's leaving a power gap. That sets the stage for what happens."

Needs more bees.

Ah, good news.

"Splicers don't know what Jack really did"

STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

***Steve Hill* boldly goes upstairs and plays *Star Trek Online*...**

NEVER SEEN IT. By 'it,' I mean new *Star Trek*. By 'new,' I mean anything not involving Shatner and Nimoy mincing around an unconvincing Technicolor set. It's not a particularly idle boast, but I've never sat through an episode of *Next Generation, Deep Space 9, Voyager*, or whatever other nonsense lurks out there. I regard people who deify such things with the same contempt reserved for real ale enthusiasts and men who know what 'torque' means.

I once worked with a sarcastic *Star Trek* fan who genuinely didn't believe that I couldn't reel off the Enterprise's number plate. As far I'm concerned, "Trekkie" is an insult, as once witnessed at an England match when a tattooed brute memorably yelled "Sit down you fucking Trekkie!" at the weedy bespectacled man obscuring his view.

Despite my wilful ignorance of warps, cores, and tribbles, this much I've learned through osmosis: Klingons have a piecrust embedded in their foreheads and speak Welsh, and the Borg live in a cube and assimilate people. The latter factoid holds me in good stead during my early forays into *Star Trek Online*, when I find myself defending the good guys from a Borg attack and eventually destroy their home cube.

It was some of the least fun I've ever had, the main entertainment coming from the fact that I'm sporting a vintage Paul Presley ponytail, which makes me look more like a Status Quo roadie than the captain of a star ship. All the same, I'm promoted to the bridge of the USS Zone and informed that the fate of the galaxy rests in my hands.

HILL IN SPAAAACE!

However, space travel is rarely as dramatic as it is in the movies, and one of my initial tasks involves talking to somebody called Malcolm. He's quite a guy.

"Space travel is rarely as dramatic as it is in the movies"

Finally unleashed into deep space, I team up with a fellow newbie, D Mac of the USS Corax. Between us, we destroy some Syndicate Drydocks.

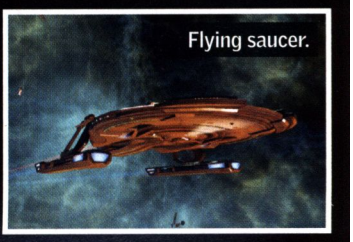
"Good job," I say.

D Mac says nothing.

Elsewhere a discussion breaks out on the merits of Michael Bolton. I also learn of a Californian earthquake, with one humanitarian – Wyatt@RunningMad – hoping that a lot of Mexicans died so "i wont have to feed em with my tax money". He's correctly dismissed as an "idiot," a "*&#%$#&)" and "the reason people hate the USA".

Meanwhile, my burgeoning relationship with the taciturn D Mac sees us head out on a two-man mission to rescue a stricken freighter and escort it to a station.

Having found the freighter, I ask my colleague if he knows where the station is. Breaking his silence, he suggests, "There may be something the other way."



Following him across great tracts of empty space, gingerly leading the freighter by the nose, there's a sense of tranquillity, just me and Daddy Mac, taking care of business.

"This is slightly dull," I say.

He says nothing.

JIM? HE'S DEAD

Breaking up the beautiful partnership, I beam down to Vulcan where all is brown. A brown stairway, flanked by brown statues, leads to a door. It doesn't open. Nothing happens. Nobody speaks. Chancing my arm elsewhere, I beam down to an ice planet where bare knuckle fighting is encouraged. I'm offered refreshments while watching the duel. The duel never starts.

Inspired by my experience of *Star Trek*, I rummage through my roomful of free stuff and unearth an untouched VHS copy of *Star Trek: Generations*, clocking in at a challenging 113 minutes. I watch it alone. Turns out Kirk's dead. Who knew? PCZ

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219: Aaron Castle
Winning Ghostbusters

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219: Ned Birkin

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GOSSIP

WITH JESSICA TOLSTOY

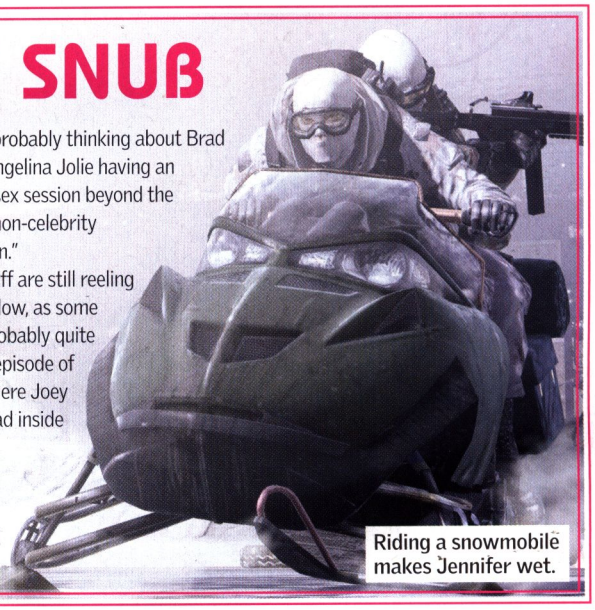
HI! I'M JESSICA TOLSTOY, Hollywood gossip duchess. I'm here to give your dowdy old games industry a triple-whammy of glamour and celebrity boomshackalack. Every entertainment industry thrives on gossip, so stop pretending you're more interested in playing ridiculous 'videogames' than hearing about what people more beautiful than you get up to. Tip back your head, and let my rumour syrup trickle into your gullet!

WARD BOYS SNUB

CRAZY DAYS OVER at Infinity Ward! After their leaders' morale-busting firing/walkout/whatever and staff haemorrhage, there've been explosive revelations that Jennifer Aniston has driven past the Infinity Ward offices in what commentators are describing as a brutal snub!

"She didn't even look in," said a close friend of the company. "She was probably thinking about Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie having an acrobatic sex session beyond the realms of non-celebrity imagination."

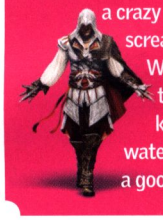
Sad staff are still reeling from the blow, as some of them probably quite liked that episode of *Friends* where Joey had his head inside a turkey.



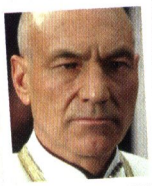
Riding a snowmobile makes Jennifer wet.

WATER DICK!

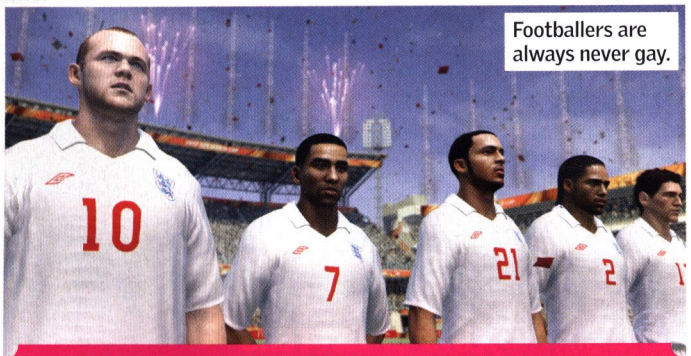
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2 could have been released half-complete on the consoles because of a shocking series of tantrums from Danny Wallace! A trusted source at the Ubisoft studios confided: "I can definitely confirm that there was a time at which Danny asked for a glass of water. Luckily, the water arrived in the nick of time. I can only imagine what'd happen if Danny had been left a single second longer. He might've spun around like Wonder Woman, knocking things off shelves, making a crazy high-pitched scream." Time-bomb Wallace confesses that he sometimes keeps a bottle of water with him. And a good thing, too!



S&M-ETHESDA ARE STAB-STABBY HAPPY!



AND THAT'S NOT all, from the shadowy umbrella of ZeniMax! Jean-Luc Picard has caused ripples in the LA party circuit by recounting tales of routine genital mutilation and unnecessary surgical procedures in the Bethesda offices. "They just ran around stabbing each other as far as I could see. There was no sense to it. I mean, I could understand it if there were territorial disputes or mating rights to be established, but they just seemed to get off on the feel of stirring another man's guts with a blade."



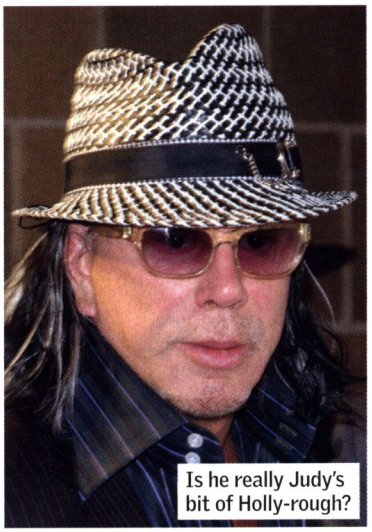
Footballers are always never gay.

IT WASN'T THE ONE ON THE LEFT!

I'M GETTING REPORTS that one of the people named in *FIFA Online*, mentioning no names, is texting gay pictures of his down-belows to beautiful female women. This highly homoerotic picture of two big balls and a penis could be used by a gay man – if he were to ever see it – to fuel a sordid montage of public masturbation, leading to a shocking indecency arrest. This is just the kind of juicy gay public masturbation phone sex scandal that EA will be hoping to avoid, in the testosterone-spattered world of games about international soccer.

IS JUDY GETTING ROURKED?

MICKEY ROURKE MAY have just finished recording the voice of murderhouse Dick Marcinko, but my insiders at the company report him making a series of juicy phone calls while he was there! "He seemed slightly grumpy during these calls, almost like he was having a covert affair with the person he was talking to. It's possible he is having a powder-keg kneetrembler with Judy Finnegan, featuring a number of degrading role-play scenarios in which Mickey is gaffer-taped to the ceiling and jabbed with broom handles."



Is he really Judy's bit of Holly-rough?

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