THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER®



DOUBLE SCOOP!

SKYRIM SECRETS!
INSIDE 2011'S BEST RPG

TRACKMANIA 2
THE FUTURE OF RACING

INDIE GAMES OVERLOAD
15 CULT GAMES YOU HAVE TO PLAY

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

MASS EFFECT 3
REVEALED: A GALACTIC BOMBSHELL

MODDERS MAKE IT BIG!
THE MAKING OF RED ORCHESTRA

PORTAL 2: THE REVIEW
WHY IT'S A MASTERPIECE

THE BEST REVIEWS

WORLD OF TANKS
IL-2: CLIFFS OF DOVER
OPERATION FLASHPOINT RED RIVER
DARKSPORE

EXTRA LIFE

- **CROCS VS PUPS IN DWARF FORTRESS**
- OPPOSING FORCE: HALF-LIFE'S FINEST HOUR?
- **LEFT 4 DEAD 2 MODS: COLD STREAM RATED**
- SHOGUN 2 MODS TESTED

18

UK Edition › £5.99
› June 2011 › Issue 227

£6.49 OUTSIDE UK & EIRE | PRINTED IN THE UK

PCGAMER.com

JUNE 2011 £5.99

Future MEDIA WITH PASSION

9 771470 169009 06



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

"ATOMIC AWESOMENESS!"
NEWS OF THE WORLD

"INSANE GENIUS!"
OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



OUT JUNE 10TH 2011
WWW.DUKENUKEMFOREVER.COM

18

PS3 PlayStation3

XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE

PC DVD ROM

gearbox software

2K GAMES

© 1999-2011 - All rights reserved. Gearbox Software, LLC. Duke Nukem, the Duke Nukem nuclear symbol, Duke Nukem Forever, Gearbox Software and the Gearbox logo are registered trademarks of Gearbox Software, LLC in the U.S. and/or other countries and used here under license. All rights reserved. This Game is published and distributed by 2K Games, a subsidiary of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. 2K Games, Take-Two Interactive Software and their respective logos are trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies. "PlayStation" "PS" "PS3" and "PS" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved. All other marks are property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com

RAZER

BlackWidow

ELITE MECHANICAL GAMING KEYBOARD ULTIMATE



FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

- Mechanical Key Architecture
- Fully Programmable Keys
- 5 Additional Gaming Keys & Lighting Modes

Available at:

PLAY.COM ebuyer.com SCAN OVERCLOCKERS UK

© 2011 All Rights Reserved. Razer USA Ltd and affiliated companies. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Actual products may differ from pictures. Information correct at time of printing

PC GAMER®

#227 JUNE 2011

Future Publishing Ltd
30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW **Tel** 01225 442244
Fax 01225 732275 **Email** pcgamer@futurenet.com
Web www.pcgamer.com

EDITORIAL
Editor Tim Edwards
Deputy Editor Graham Smith
News Editor Craig Pearson
Section Editor Tom Francis
Art Editor Alvin Weetman
Production Editor Tony Ellis
Staff Writer Rich McCormick
Web Editor Owen Hill
Intern Tom Senior

CONTRIBUTORS
Tim Stone, Adam Oxford, Richard Cobbett, Chris Livingston, Dan Griliopoulos, Phill Cameron, John Walker, Dan Stapleton, John Callaham, Lizzie Cuevas, Andy Hartup, Mike Channell, Duncan Harris, Kim Richards, Kerry Haysom, the password is 'bosh'
Photography Future Photography Studio, www.istockphoto.com
Group Art Editor Graham Dalzell
Creative Director Robin Abbott
Editorial Director Jim Douglas

ADVERTISING
Advertisement Manager Emma Cull
London Sales Director Malcolm Stoodley
Gaming Sales Director Sean Igoe
Digital Advertising Manager Andrew Church
Account Manager Alistair Williams
Account Manager Rachel Sinclair
Account Manager Chris Brown
Senior Sales Executive Oliver Chislett

MARKETING
Brand Marketing Manager James Kick

CIRCULATION/TRADE MARKETING
Trade Marketing Manager Stuart Agnew

PRINT & PRODUCTION
Production Coordinator Craig Broadbridge

LICENSING
Head of International Licensing Tim Hudson

FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED
Head of Edge International and PC Gaming James Binns

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Phone our UK hotline on 0844 848 2852
Phone our International hotline on +44 (0) 1604 251045
Subscribe online at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
To view your account details/status and to change your address, please go to
www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/youraccount

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE... **MAY 11**

Printed in the UK by Southern Print, Poole, Dorset on behalf of Future. Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 0207 429 4000

Want to work for Future?
Visit www.futurenet.com/jobs

A member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations
25,019
January-December 2009

Future Publishing Ltd is part of Future plc. Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines, websites and events for people who share a passion. We publish more than 170 magazines and websites and 100 international editions of our titles are published across the world. Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com
Non-executive Chairman Roger Parry
Chief Executive Steve Spring
Group Finance Director John Bowman
Tel +44 (0) 1225 442244

PC GAMER is Future Publishing Limited's registered trademark. All rights reserved. © Future Publishing Ltd. 2011. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Beaufort Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. All information contained in this magazine is for informational purposes only and is, to the best of our knowledge, correct at the time of going to press. Future Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies that occur. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers direct with regard to pricing. All submissions to PC Gamer are made on the basis of a licence to publish the submission in PC Gamer magazine, its associated websites and all world-wide licensed editions of the same. Any material submitted is sent at the owner's risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future Publishing Limited nor its agents shall be liable for loss or damage.

We encourage you to recycle this magazine, either through your usual household recyclable waste collection service or at a recycling site.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

Galactic

Why are you staring at my ugly mug? *Mass Effect 3* is on page 42. We'll meet back here when you're done.

SQUEEEEE! I find myself excited about *Mass Effect* for an unusual reason. Usually I'm excited about a sequel because there's an interesting new dynamic, or a new piece of tech, or a new design that's just pure fun. With *Mass Effect*, it's purely down to the story. We know that *Mass Effect 3* will be the end of the saga. That finality drives expectation and anticipation.



I remember the first interactive movies. I've still got copies of the *7th Guest*, *Rebel Assault* and the *X-Files* game. They were rubbish, of course, but they were rubbish in an interesting way: they pointed towards a future where games could mix compelling action, deep storylines and film-standard pacing and dialogue. I think the *Mass Effect* series is that future: a superb intersection between BioWare's RPG roots, Hollywood, and space-guns.

A couple of issues ago, we trialed a far larger hardware section in the magazine, just to see what you thought. From your emails, it's clear you thought: "yay!" So we're going to make the fatter hardware section permanent. As ever, do let me know what you think.

Enjoy the rest of the issue. There's some great stuff in here.

Tim Edwards

TIM EDWARDS, EDITOR
tim.edwards@futurenet.com
@hanknova

Talk to PC Gamer
Have your say! Join our forum at *www.pcgamer.com/forum*

SUBSCRIBE TO PC GAMER
And get a free wireless controller! See p54.

BRINGING YOU THE SCOOPS THIS MONTH...



Tom Francis
@pentadact
Flew to the outer reaches of Canada, to discover the final chapter in the *Mass Effect* saga. Took gloves.



Graham Smith
@gonnas
"Why!?" he's heard to scream. "Why?!" Because, Graham. Just because. Because they hate you.



Craig Pearson
@evilkenevil
New girlfriend update: new girlfriend flew to Africa for three months. Craig is sadface.



Rich McCormick
@richmcc
He's doing a weird new exercise routine. Looks buffer, but don't tell him. He'll get smug about it.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com

ORDER ONLINE OR CALL US ON: 0844 371 2727

All desktop systems come with 3 year Limited Warranty

Water Cooling as standard on all Cyberpower Gaming Desktops



Infinity Hercules GT

Extreme Performance Gaming Station

Intel® Core™ i7-2600K Processor @ 4.6Ghz!

- Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition
- Asus® P67 Chipset MB
- 8GB Kinston Hyper X DDR3 Blu 1600Mhz Memory
- 1TB 7200rpm STAT III 6.0Gb/s HDD
  64GB Crucial C300 SATA III SSD
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX580 1GB Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- Coolermaster Dominator2 CM-692 Black

Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System

LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£1425
	i7-2600 3.4/3.8Ghz	£1415
i5	i5-2500K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£1329
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£1325
	i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz	£1305
	i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz	£1299

From **£1299** Incl. Del & VAT

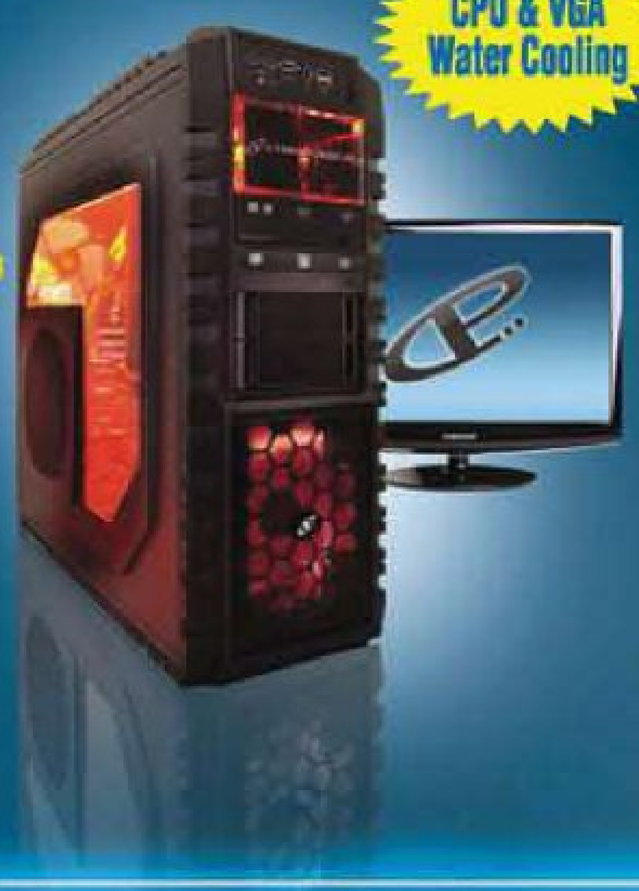
CYBERPOWER CREATE THE PC OF YOUR DREAMS

Unleash THE POWER

Liquid Black Pearl

Extreme CPU & VGA Water Cooling Gaming Monster

Intel® Core™ i7-960 Processor with Extreme Overclocking



- Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition
- ASUS® P6X58D-E DDR3 with SATA 3, USB3
- 12GB Kingston® Hyper X DDR3 Blu 1600Mhz Memory
- 1TB SATA-3, 6.0Gb/s 64MB Cache Ultra Fast HD
- Nvidia® GTX 590 3GB Water Cooled Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- CoolerMaster HAF X Gaming Tower Case w/Side-Panel Window

64GB Crucial C500 Sata 3 SSD

Cyberpower CPU & VGA Water Cooling (2x pumps, 2x 240m radiators, 2x reshoirs, CPU water cooling block, VGA water cooling blocks)

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor

i7	(8MB L3 Cache, 1066Mhz)	
	Extreme i7-990X 3.46Ghz	£2925
	i7-970 3.20Ghz	£2519
	i7-960 3.06Ghz	£2269

From **£2269** Incl. Del & VAT



Cyberpower recommends Coolermaster

NVIDIA®, nForce®, GeForce®, SLI™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation or its subsidiaries in the United States and other countries. CyberPower PCs use genuine Microsoft® Windows® • www.microsoft.com/piracy/howtotell



Infinity Hercules

High Performance All-Rounder
2nd Generation Intel® Core Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® H67 Chipset MB
- 4GB Corsair® DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 1TB Samsung® F3 High Performance HDD
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX560 1GB Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- NZXT Hush 2 Mid Tower

Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling system
24" Widescreen TFT Display (1920 X 1080)

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor		
i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 1125
	i7-2600 3.4/3.Ghz	£ 1115
i5	i5-2500K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 1035
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 1025
	i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz	£ 1009
	i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz	£ 999

From **£999** Incl. Del & VAT



Infinity Hercules SE

A Media Dream for Photo/Video Editing
Intel® 2nd Generation Core Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- Asus® H67 Chipset MB
- 4GB Corsair® DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 1TB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/S 16BM Cache HDD
- Nvidia® GeForce® GTX450 1GB Graphic Card w/ Direct X 11
- Thermaltake Element-T Mid-Tower Case

Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
24" Widescreen TFT Display (1920 X 1080)

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor		
i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 929
	i7-2600 3.4/3.Ghz	£ 915
i5	i5-2500K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 835
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 829
	i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz	£ 815
	i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz	£ 805
i3	i3-2100 3.1Ghz	£ 749

From **£749** Incl. Del & VAT



Infinity Apollo SE

Great Value for Money Home PC with Water Cooling
Intel® Core™ i3 Processor

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- ASUS® H67 chipset MB
- 4GB Corsair DDR3 1333Mhz Memory
- 500GB 7200rpm SATA II 3.0Gb/S 16BM Cache HDD
- Integrated Intel HD Graphic (HDMI)
- Thermaltake V3 Mid-Tower Case

Asetek 510LC CPU Water Cooling System
LCD monitor is not included but optional

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor		
i7	i7-2600K 3.4/3.8Ghz	£ 649
	i7-2600 3.4/3.Ghz	£ 635
i5	i5-2500K 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 559
	i5-2500 3.3/3.7Ghz	£ 555
	i5-2400 3.1/3.4Ghz	£ 535
	i5-2300 2.8/3.1Ghz	£ 529
i3	i3-2100 3.1Ghz	£ 475

From **£475** Incl. Del & VAT

TO CUSTOM BUILD YOUR IDEAL DESKTOP OR LAPTOP, VISIT :

www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk



Gamer Xplorer X6-7300

Gaming Laptop with 2nd Generation
Intel® Core™ i7-2630QM Processor

Intel® HM65 Chipset
WiFi Link 802.11 A/B/G/N

- 1x HDMI
- 1x IEEE 1394
- 3x USB 2.0
- 3 hr
- 6.83 Lbs
- Built-in Wireless

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- 8GB DDR3-1333 SODIMM Memory
- 320GB SATA II HDD
- 15.6 WSXGA Full HD Display 1920x1080
- Nvidia® Geforce® GT 540M 1GB

1 PCMCIA Type II Slot
2.0 Mega Pixels Webcam

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor		
i7	i7-2920XM Extreme	£ 1459
	i7-2820QM	£ 1019
	i7-2720QM	£ 885
	i7-2630QM	£ 755
i5	i5-2410M	£ 735
i3	i3-2310M	£ 689

From **£689** Incl. Del & VAT



Gamer Xplorer X6-9300

Gaming Laptop with 2nd Generation
Intel® Core™ i7-2920XM Processor

Intel® HM65 Chipset
WiFi Link 802.11 A/B/G/N

- 1x HDMI
- 1x IEEE 1394
- 3x USB 2.0
- 3 hr
- 5.51 Lbs
- Built-in Wireless

Genuine Microsoft™ Windows® 7 Home Premium 64-bit Edition

- 4GB DDR3-1333 SODIMM Memory
- 500GB SATA II HDD
- 15.6 WSXGA Full HD Display 1920x1080
- Built-in Nvidia® GeForce® GTX 460M 1.5GB GDDR5 Video

1 PCMCIA Type II Slot
2.0 Mega Pixels Webcam

Intel® Core™ i7 Processor		
i7	i7-2920XM Extreme	£ 1759
	i7-2820QM	£ 1319
	i7-2720QM	£ 1155
	i7-2630QM	£ 1049

From **£1049** Incl. Del & VAT



CYBERPOWER

Windows®. Life without Walls™, CyberPower recommends Windows 7

Celeron, Celeron Inside, Centrino, Centrino Inside, Centrino Logo,Core Inside, Intel, Intel Logo, Intel Core, Intel Inside, Intel Inside Logo, Intel Viiv, Intel vPro, Itanium, Itanium Inside, Pentium, Pentium Inside, Viiv inside, vPro Inside, Xeon, and Xeon inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. All prices are subject to change without notice or obligation. CyberPower is not responsible for any typographical and photographic errors. Copyright ©2008 CyberPower. All rights reserved.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

CONTENTS

#227 JUNE 2011



MONITOR

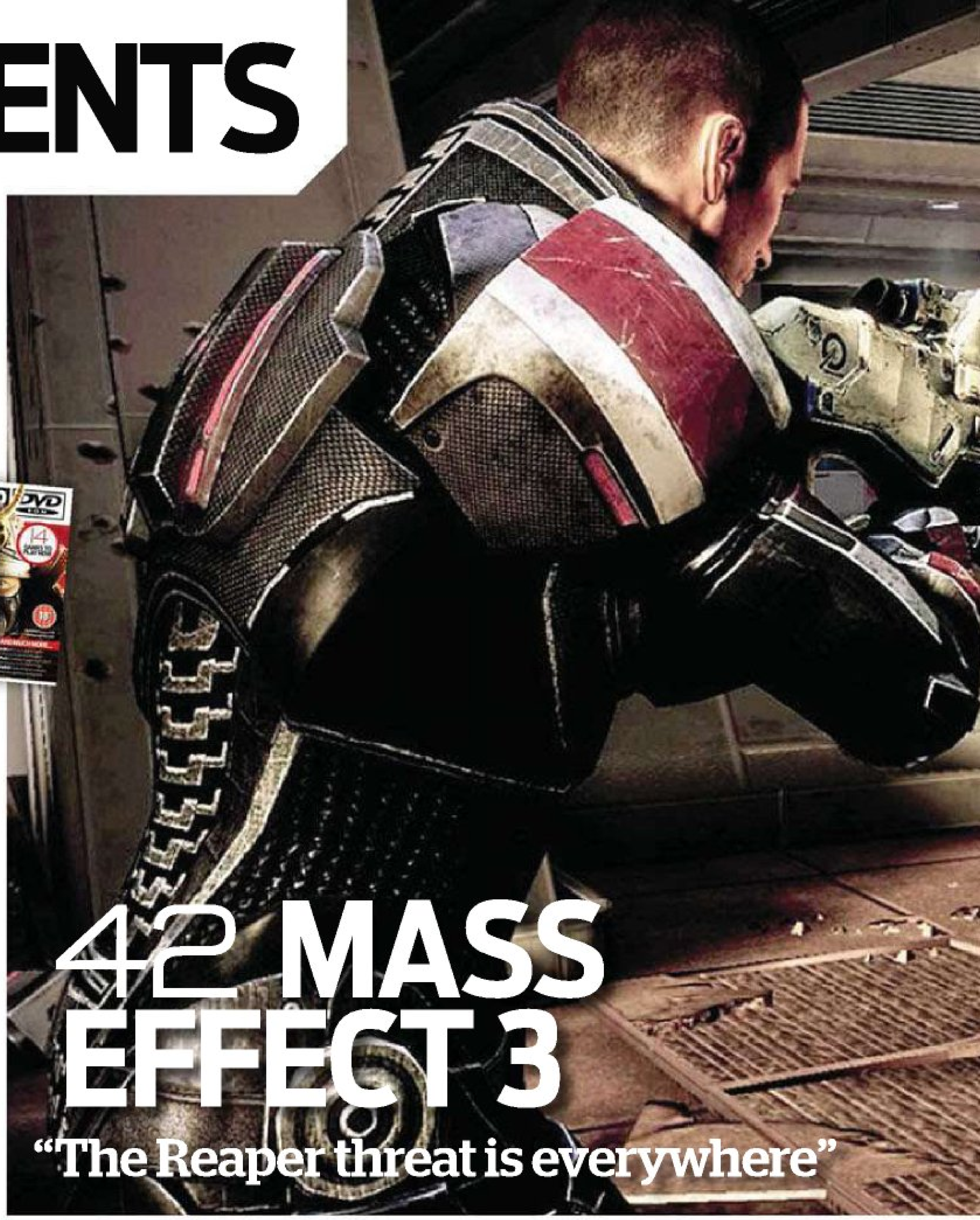
10 » **Top Story** Microsoft comes to Steam
14 » **The Spy** Might be rooting through your bins
16 » **Face Off** Should classic games get remade?
18 » **Special Report** A flyby of *EVE Online*'s Fanfest
22 » **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**
26 » **Tactical Intervention**
28 » **Prey 2**
32 » **Game of Thrones: Genesis**
34 » **Rage**
36 » **Renegade Ops**
38 » **Saints Row: The Third**
40 » **Incoming**

FEATURES

42 » **Mass Effect 3**
Earth is burning. You can save it.
50 » **TrackMania 2**
Nadeo's maniacal plans.
56 » **Indie games of 2011**
15 incredible titles on their way.
64 » **Making Red Orchestra**
It's never been quiet on the Eastern front.

PC GAMER NETWORK

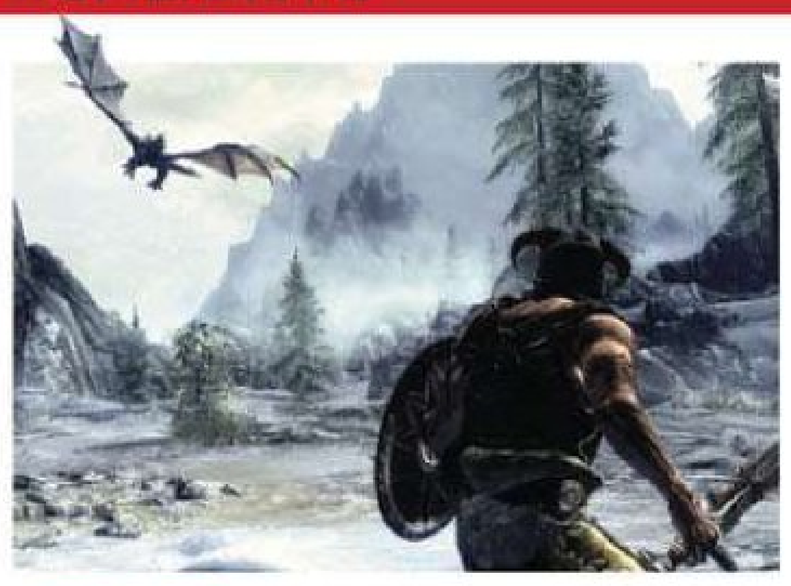
68 » **SEND** When you say things, we listen. Then print.
72 » **PLAY** Like a dating service, without the kissing. Mostly.
74 » **WIN!** £1,000 of incredible laptop to make your travels fun.



42 MASS EFFECT 3

"The Reaper threat is everywhere"

HIGHLIGHTS



22 SKYRIM

We sent Graham to the edge of the world, a place full of old magic and legendary creatures. And while he was in Utah, he saw *Skyrim* in action. Expect dungeons, dragons and death in the driving snow of the far north.



50 MAD, MAD WORLD

Developers Nadeo created the world's craziest racing game in *TrackMania*. Now they're back with a sequel, and a plan to expand: *ShootMania* aims to bring player-driven creativity to the FPS.



SUBSCRIBE TO PC GAMER
And get a **free** Speedlink wireless gamepad!
See p54



56 THE FUTURE OF INDIE

Craig investigates fifteen of the world's most promising indie games, from pixellated two-button swordfights in *Nidhogg*, to gloriously beautiful robo-deathmatches in *Hawken*.



64 MAKING RED ORCHESTRA

Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45 won the Make Something Unreal contest in 2004, letting developers Tripwire quit their jobs and make games full time. We uncover their story, and glimpse *Red Orchestra 2*.

REVIEWS

78 » Portal 2
84 » IL-2: Cliffs of Dover
86 » The Sims: Medieval
87 » Ghostbusters: Sanctum of Slime
87 » Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars
88 » Operation Flashpoint: Red River
92 » Darkspore
94 » Revenge of the Titans
95 » Tricky Trucks
95 » Back to the Future - Episode 3: Citizen Brown
96 » World of Tanks
100 » Call of Duty: Black Ops First Strike
102 » They're Back

EXTRA LIFE

122 » **NOW PLAYING**
Rich scares Craig with *Call of Pripyat*, and Owen hates horses.

126 » **TOP 10 DOWNLOADS**
The things you should be spending your gigabytes on.

130 » **UPDATE**
Time to go back underground in *Dwarf Fortress*.

132 » **HOW TO**
Lose your humanity and beat the machine in *AI War*.

134 » **REINSTALL**
Seeing things from the other side in *Half-Life: Opposing Force*.

The Hard Stuff

106 » The PC does **Kinect** better than the Xbox, we guide you toward the light in **monitor** purchases, and Adam explains **fibre broadband**.



ON THE DISC

144 » Learn how to conquer a country in our **Total War: Shogun 2** demo, clickclickclick for loot in our trial for Diablo-esque MMO **Mythos**, and vaporise the undead from space in **Atom Zombie Smasher**.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

MONITOR

THE PC GAMER VIEW OF THE WORLD



Fable 3 picks up Steam

THE BIG STORY Peter Molyneux on why Microsoft is ditching Games for Windows Live exclusives

Peter Molyneux is head of Microsoft Game Studios in Europe. So when I asked him recently whether Lionhead would consider some mad hypothetical future where their games were sold through arch competitor Steam, I was surprised by his answer.

"Yes. We're launching *Fable III* on Steam, and it'll be the first Lionhead title on there." Nor will it be the last. Full details are still emerging, but expect the floodgates to open, and other Microsoft titles to hit Valve's digital service.

Are Microsoft are abandoning Games for Windows Live? Not entirely: "*Fable* will definitely be coming out for GfWL." But no longer will GfWL have exclusivity over Microsoft's games.

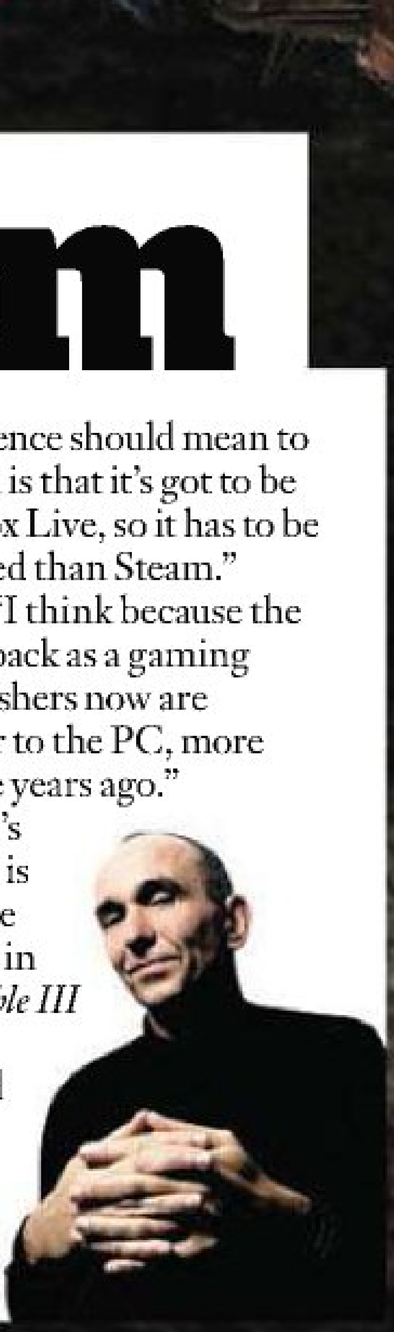
Molyneux didn't detail the deals that took *Fable III* to Steam. "Steam is such a great service – I use it all the time. They did such a great pioneering job."

Without Microsoft exclusives, it's hard to see GfWL ever becoming a serious rival. I asked Peter how he'd make the service more palatable for customers. "Honestly, I haven't really sat down and thought about its problems. I just feel that it needs a good team on it, designing what the Windows experience should mean to people. The problem is that it's got to be compatible with Xbox Live, so it has to be a bit more complicated than Steam."

Why the change? "I think because the PC is really coming back as a gaming format. A lot of publishers now are converting titles over to the PC, more than did two or three years ago."

One of PC gaming's longest serving allies is stepping back into the fold for the first time in five years. Even if *Fable III* is one of just a few Microsoft-developed games coming to Steam, that's got to be a good thing. ■

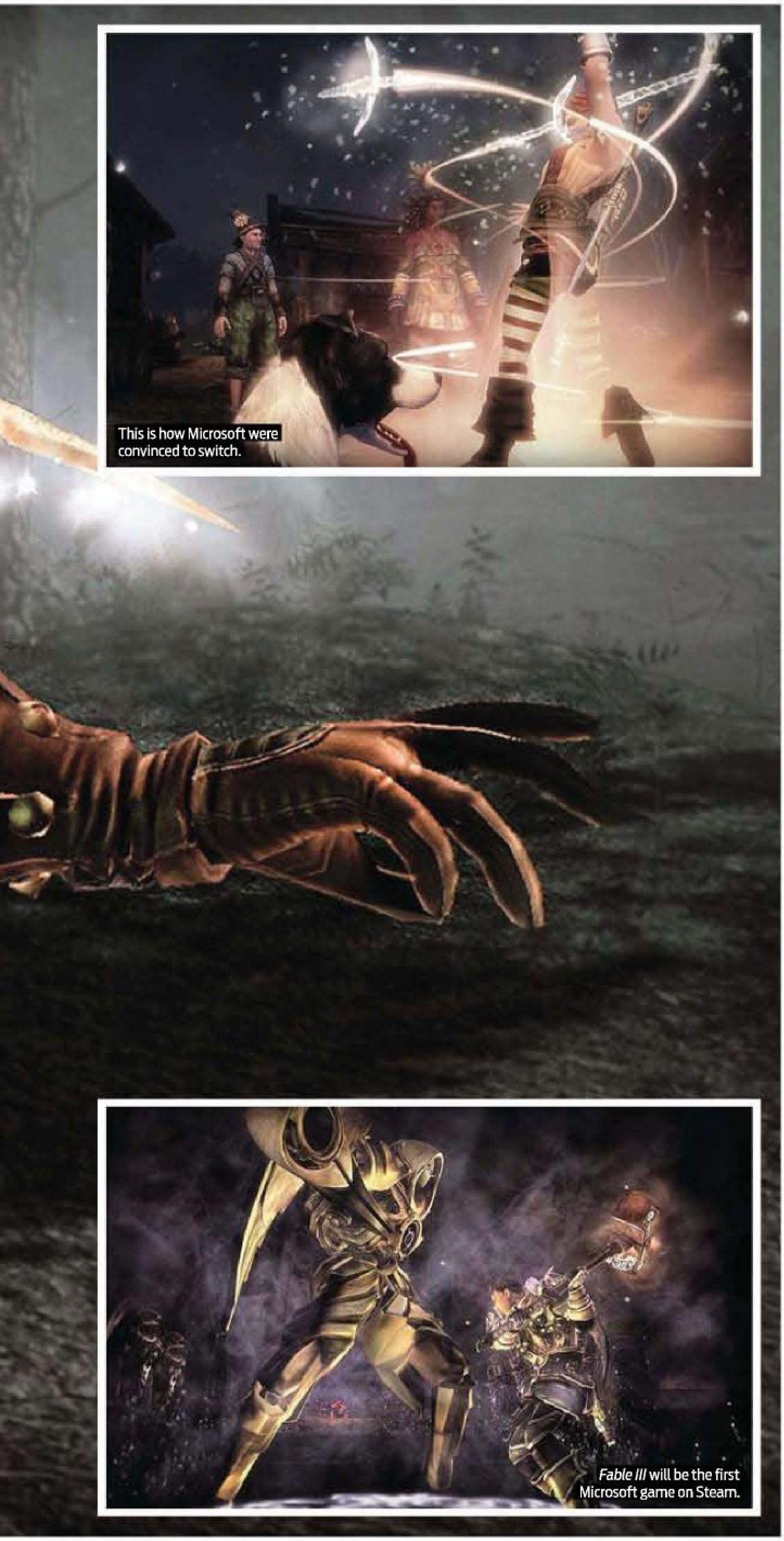
Rich McCormick



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreKeys.com



This is how Microsoft were convinced to switch.

Fable III will be the first Microsoft game on Steam.

GAMESTOP GET IMPULSIVE

CORPORATE US RETAIL GIANTS BUY DIGITAL DOWNLOAD SERVICE

Humongous American game sellers Gamestop have bought the Impulse digital distribution service. Impulse was previously a part of publisher/hybrid Stardock – now it belongs entirely to Gamestop. Under Stardock's control, it was home to a pool of excellent titles – *Sins of a Solar Empire*, *Demigod*, among others – but never rivalled competitor Steam for size of userbase. Gamestop's purchase is a statement of intent. Whatever your thoughts on the company buying a corner of the digital market wholesale, it shows that traditional retailers are fully aware of the PC's growing consumer power. Keep an eye on *impulsedriven.com* for more info. **RM**

POP IMPERFECT

PLEASANT POPCAP'S NEW STUDIO TO MAKE EXPERIMENTAL GAMES

'4th and Battery' is a new development mini-studio, formed by casual game supremos PopCap as an outlet for their madder ideas. First up is *Unpleasant Horse*: an aerial platformer starring an unpleasant horse. You know he's unpleasant because he bounces across the sky of more pleasant ponies, sending them crashing to the ground and certain death. Expect 4th and Battery's games to lack the obsessive polish of a PopCap product, but for new and experimental titles to land quicker. *Unpleasant Horse* is only confirmed for iPhone so far, but watch *4thandbattery.com* for more. **RM**

HEALTH BAR

SORTING GOOD NEWS FROM BAD

Winners

tinyBuildGAMES
Indie platformer *No Time to Explain* earned the $7,000 it needed in a day, via the Kickstarter fund.

Jake_R
Jake visited developer Two Tribes, then climbed a pole. All in the name of Valve's Portal ARG.

Björn 'Left Rook' Jónsson
The CCP developer beat his friend and opponent at a chessboxing match at *EVE*'s annual Fanfest.

Portal 2
The game's ending movies were leaked on the internet before the game launched.

Dragon Age: Origins
Origins was unavailable for a weekend when the DRM server went down. When will they learn?

Planetside Next
Was meant to be released in March. The only news from Sony Online? Job cuts. Double sadness.

Faildogs



Play Mass Effect 2 in your browser

The age of the streamable videogame is already upon us

Cloud computing sounds like magic. Today's videogames, running on a remote server, streamed to and playable on an underspecced PC. It's up there with pets in pill form and jetpack toilets. But you can try it right now.

Both OnLive (*www.onlive.com*) and Gaikai (*www.gaikai.com*) are available to use in a limited form in the UK. OnLive is a customer focused gaming platform, with community tools, subscriptions and a shiny front-end. Gaikai's remit is to provide a platform for publishers to demonstrate and sell their games through any website.

Gaikai's technology runs in your browser and doesn't require a plug-in. Such autonomy has key advantages, enabling the service to deliver games to any webpage to serve as an advert for the full game. Instead of suffering another Flash-based 2D adaptation, you could pick up and play the first half-hour of *Mass Effect 2* on Facebook.

You can play the *Mass Effect 2* demo on the Gaikai site right now, and it's astonishing: quick launching, *slightly* laggy, but sharp.

You only have one choice if you're looking for a gaming client: OnLive, which is currently only available from the USA, although you can demo their service here in the UK.

Onlive uses a client to stream game graphics to you as video. Your chosen game 'loads' instantly as you never have to download any files. Technically, you could stream *Crysis* to a smartphone.

Out of control

Both Gaikai and Onlive require some compromise of your expectations of what a PC game should do. The graphics settings can't be changed, and you can see video compression artefacts. Capping the resolution (720p) and dropping the image quality make it easier to stream.

Latency is an interesting obstacle: lag between the player's movement and what happens on screen is evident in certain games. First-person shooters, such as *Aliens vs Predator*, expose the tiny delay between what you do and when the server has responded: the crosshairs track slightly behind your movement. It doesn't make it unplayable, but there's an obvious sluggishness. Games such as *Mass Effect 2* or *Darksiders* don't require the same precision, and fare a whole lot better.

OnLive's current subscription rates include renting a game for 3 days, 5 days, for the lifetime of the service (currently $6, $9 and $20 for *Dawn of War II: Chaos Rising*), or as part of a subscription of $10 a month.

You get access to a lot of games on your subscription, 49 at the last count, but you get no ownership of them, and no opportunity to mod what you're playing.

For a technology in its infancy, it works far better than expected. The WOWZOMG factor of running hefty games directly from the internet really does impress, especially when you're playing *Just Cause 2* on a machine that struggles with PopCap games. And there's a potential for adapting console games to run in the same way, something Gaikai have already shown with the N64. The PC, via the browser, could encompass every games system on the planet. ■

Craig Pearson

Storekeeper.com



Soldier sim morphs into flight sim

Take on Helicopters to take on helicopters

If you've ever nearly screwed yourself into the ground after upending a chopper in *Arma 2*, you'll know the developers take their flight modelling seriously. So seriously, in fact, that they're spinning it off into a game of its own, set in the razzle dazzle world of commercial helicopter pilots.

Take on Helicopters is the clunky name for the first mainstream flight sim since *FSX*. You're the owner of a struggling helicopter business. To save the company and build it back up, you pick up contracts and take on competitors.

Arma 2's military fidelity is the basis for *Take on*'s sky-faring: a more complex flight model is being built for the missions and multiple choppers. The game's lead dev, Jay Crowe, told us: "All helicopters are brand new content, not seen in our previous titles. Focusing upon this range allows us to delicately adjust the feel and experience of each class of chopper. That's not to say each family flies the same – within this structure we can add more subtlety. Our goal remains to convey the experience of flying, and a big part of that is revealing – in a very tangible way – that each helicopter has its own feel and handling."

You'll be flying over accurately mapped North American and South Asian terrains: we've already seen the murky, greying skies of Seattle as one of the specified areas for the choppers to buzz around. What you need to do in the skies is being kept under wraps for the moment, but we do know there will be single, co-op and multiplayer missions. ■

Craig Pearson



GET YOUR BLIZZCON ON

GEEEEEKS TICKETS FOR BLIZZARD'S CONVENTION ON SALE NOW

The weekend of October 21, to be precise, at the Anaheim Convention Centre in Anaheim, California. Tickets to the always sold-out event will be available in two batches, with the first going on sale on May 21 and the second on May 25.

BlizzCon's a weekend of Blizzard fan love and among the many things going on are competitions, tournaments, announcements and developer Q&A sessions. If you're still not convinced then you've clearly never watched a cosplayer dance so hard on stage that they have to be stretchered off at the behest of the celebrity guest: *bit.ly/gfnQaP*.

Keep hitting F5 on *bit.ly/fBobrZ*. **CP**

DROP IN TO GLOBAL AGENDA

CHEAP JETPACK SHOOTER GOES FREE-TO-PLAY

Third-person online shooter *Global Agenda* was already somewhat free-to-play, with the game dropping its subscription fee in 2010. But now, with a player base firmly established, it's going to be supported by microtransactions, making it fully free-to-play.



Free players will be able to earn all the current weapons and armour, and get access to all the levels in the game without spending a penny, but future updates will require some spending. For a one-off £14 you'll be classed as an Elite and gain XP and loot boosts at the end of rounds.

Sign up at *www.globalagendagame.com*. **CP**

SAY WHAT?

THE MONTH IN TONGUES

"Take Two is pretty bold on this stuff... in their shoes, I don't know if I would have written a cheque for *BioShock*. 'Trust me! The kids love objectivism!'"
Ken Levine, **Irrational Games, on his bosses' willingness to make *BioShock*.**

"'MMOs are playgrounds!' it's been argued. 'There's no room for storytelling. Narrative gets in the way. The only story is the story written by players!' This is, quite clearly, complete and utter bollocks."
Ragnar Tornquist, ***The Secret World* mastermind, on MMO narratives**

"What I will say pretty clearly is the game is not a 71. You can't apply math to art."
Danny Bilson, **THQ, on *Homefront*'s Metacritic score**

THE SPY



The Spy's heart went all of a flutter.

Rule number one of The Spy Manual is never to fall in love. Number two is never to get naked. Obviously if you break the first you're on the way to breaking the second. The Spy has been led astray, readers. He's updating you using his 'neuro-uplinkificationer'. His hands and feet are bound to a chair, tied with fine silk scarves that are at least comfortable against the skin. Oh yes, The Spy is naked. He's nude, bare, declothed. Let The Spy tell you how.

The Spy was at a little bar in Stockholm, waiting for a contact who claimed *Battlefield 3* was a Peter Molyneux conspiracy, when she walked through the door. Tall, hair the colour of a Tasmanian Devil's mouth, cheekbones you could ski down. She was wearing a backless top. Usually when The Spy's 'on mission' he can't be distracted. And then there was the glittery eye-shadow...

Belle epoque

"Have huw heeerd about *Boarderlunds 2*?" she asked bluntly, using an 'Accentinator' in shop-demonstration mode to confuse The Spy. The Spy narrowed his eyes, like Leonardo DiCaprio trying to explain the concept of subconscious security to Cillian Murphy. "What? Here, in Swe-" She shook her head, dropped an envelope on the bar and slinked away. In the time it took The Spy to look from the drop to her, she was gone. Inside the package was a note: apparently *Borderlands 2* is close to announcement, probably at E3 in June. By that time developers Gearbox will have just kicked *Duke Nukem* out of the door. The success of the original *Borderlands* means another version is due. The Spy put the envelope to his nose and inhaled.

The next time that scent assaulted The Spy he was on a Tower Tour of the world's tallest Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Spy was using it to overlook Raven Software, peering into their offices with his Robo Eye while pretending to be wowed by the church's etchings. "No need," she told him. She was in a blonde wig now, and smiling cheekily. "Here." Another envelope. She waited this time while The Spy perused its contents. Yes, Raven *are* helping to put together *Modern Warfare 3*. The announcement is also expected around E3 time, but not necessarily at E3. Raven will be shouldering the multiplayer duties.

She put her fingers to her lips and beckoned. The Spy never knew her name. She called herself 'Belle'. From then on an unspoken bond was made, mostly powered by elaborate cocktails and high-technology. She was there when The Spy uncovered the new *Command & Conquer* game under development at EA. The Spy lowered Belle on a rope spun from spider's silk, she used her make-up mirror to deflect the lasers, the game design document was nearly in her grasp when a guard dog arrived, all snarl and bloody menace. But even fleeing was fun with her. She tended The Spy's bite wounds, delicately knitting together the scars across his buttocks like a pro. She'd clearly seen combat.

> **The Spy put the envelope to his nose and inhaled**

Oh, the game: despite saying that the last *C&C* was *it*, EA have set up a new strategy games studio, Victory Studio, to test out new ways of extracting Tiberium.

Language barrier

Things started to go wrong at BioWare. The Spy uncovered a note that someone was working on *Jade Empire 2*, a sequel to their martial arts RPG. After sliding though the crawlspace in their offices, The Spy and Belle discovered that, yes, the game had been in development for a while, but it had ceased. The Spy took that to mean it was on hold; Belle said it was cancelled. Hiatus, cancelled, hiatus, cancelled. The fight went on into the night.

The damage was done. She halted The Spy's investigation into EA's purported *Syndicate* FPS from Starbreeze by insisting that resources go into figuring out if *Burnout Crash*, a new downloadable driving game also from EA, was coming out on the PC. The bickering seemed to go away in a woozy, wobbly fashion.

The Spy had a dream about *Crash* being set in Crash City, where you simply cause as much damage to other drivers and buildings.

When The Spy woke he was naked and tied to a chair. Don't worry. It's just the espionage equivalent of a 'Dear John' letter. Spy out. ■

The Spy



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


Racoon City: gloomier than Hull.

Zombie strategy

Resident Evil goes top-down

In *Resident Evil: Racoon City*, you need to use your braiiiiiiinns to take down the zombies. This tactical action game makes you one of the series' bad guys, mutating into a squad-based single and multiplayer shooter along the way.

It's 1998 and you're back in the perma gloom of Raccoon City hunting down the iconic heroes of the zombie outbreak, as you silence a hit list of survivors, including *Resi 2*'s Leon Kennedy. Playing an Umbrella Corporation goon is an interesting reversal of tone for the series that's always given you reasons to remain on the side of good, fighting a shadowy corporation that's happy unleashing a virus that turns people into zombies.

While both online and offline modes can be played as singleplayer, the cooperative squad action is the interesting twist: the class-based squad has recon, medic, surveillance and heavy weapons capabilities to ward off the zombies. Online you'll be competing for objectives against another squad of players: Spec Ops out to stop the Umbrella bad guys from fulfilling their missions. The city, that classic burned up husk seen in *Resi 2* and *3*, is now more open, providing multiple routes for the teams to stalk along.

Which sounds brilliant: fighting off gun-wielding humans and hordes of zombies in an open city. If there's anything that makes team-deathmatch more thrilling, it's the inclusion of outside elements attacking both sides. ■

Craig Pearson

FUTURE ANNO

CITY CLICKERS BUILD YOURSELF A CITY OF TOMORROW IN *ANNO 2070*

That whooshing sound you can hear is Ubisoft's German city-building strategy series, *Anno*, jumping in a time machine. Previous games have landed in 1404, 1503, 1602 AD and 1701. Now 2070 is the Annus Gamicus.

It's a world of hi-tech and bad weather, where the chrome-galvanised streets are under threat from natural disasters and your own environmental impact. Will you create an ecological or industrial future? The city you create will mirror your choice in the architecture. *www.annogame.com*. **CP**



BLACK OPS MOD DROPS

MOD WANT TO MAKE A *CALL OF DUTY* MAP?

Treyarch are finally polishing off the promised *Call of Duty: Black Ops* modding tools for the PC, with the developers hoping to release them around the time this issue drops into your hands.

It's taken them six months to produce what most people would consider an important part of the package. So what was holding them back? According to a mysterious developer post on their forum (*bit.ly/gSUeDh*): "There are some purely technical issues related to engine and internal tool enhancements that do not easily fit the modtools paradigm."

We don't know what that means, but hopefully the community can come up with more impressive extras than Treyarch have provided (see review page 100). **CP**



TRENDS

GAMING MASHUPS

No game is pure anymore. It's a post-genre world, where every game is inspired by another, creating mongrel code-beasts for you to gaze in terrified wonder at. Here are some games where the inspiration is an obvious collision of ideas.



FPS vs tower defence

1 *Sanctum* (*sanctumgame.com*) drops you into a tower defence game at ground level. You place your defences, automated weapons, as a protective to defend against the mindless attack drones that flood the level and head towards your power core. You have a gun as well, so what's usually a top-down, passive strategy game becomes a fun shooting gallery.

Cars vs zombies

2 Zombies are so prevalent in games they should probably be considered a genre. *Dirt 3*'s multiplayer has a zombie mode. Up to eight players can take part, with one infected car chasing down the others, spreading the disease through crashing into them. There's probably an elaborate backstory about Jeff Car contracting a mutated strain of syphilis from his Subaru, but that's all the backstory you'd need. Zombie cars!

Strategy vs puzzle

3 *StarJeweled* is an official mod, Blizzard's cheeky take on PopCap's *Bejeweled*: a match three gems puzzle game built with *StarCraft II*'s remarkable editor. It's an amazing proof of concept piece, using the destruction of the jewels on one side of the screen to power the *StarCraft II* units. The bigger the explosion, the more power to the troops. Just like real war. It's available now from the *StarCraft II* custom games menu.

firefall.com

FACE OFF

Should developers remake their classic games?



YES If *TIE Fighter* was remade with modern technology, it would be the best thing ever.



NO Developers should expend their energy making new and interesting games.



Rich McCormick lives in a hover-house and spends his days screaming at his robot butler to be more futuristic.



Craig Pearson wants to upgrade all his school photos with more polygons and antialiasing.

CP: Here you go again. Telling developers what to do with their own resources. Sigh. There are great old games out there, and the PC is an open platform. As the technology moves onwards, why not make something that plays brilliantly, but takes advantage of the power of the machine? Why, Rich? Why?

RM: Because they should spend their time making new stuff. Developers are creative people, but we put them to work in the salt mines demanding something they made five years ago. Pick any development studio. I bet you a new hat that in that building you'll find ten good ideas for games. Those games are begging, aching, *quivering* to be made, but we sit there like stupid toads demanding a UI update to a game we've played 40 times.

CP: I'd rather play a game I'm guaranteed to enjoy than something plucked randomly from a developer's brain. And who's talking about *just* a UI update? I want phong-shaded bells, and ray-traced whistles. Right now on my PC I could be fiddling with DOSBox to get *TIE Fighter* running in all it's low-res, incompatible glory, or if LucasArts cared at all for my feelings, they could make *TIE Fighter 2011*. They did it with *Monkey Island*.

RM: Why? So you could pull on the matte black flightsuit, climb inside the cockpit, settle into the seat and sigh: "ah yes, this is exactly how I remember it." Nostalgia is like cereal – it's never as good after the first bowl. If we got an updated *TIE Fighter*, we'd spend the entire game equating it with the sorties of our younger years. *TIE Fighter* – and the other games we want remade – are already fantastic. There's nothing exciting, nothing new to be gained from flying the same Death Star trench run if you've already got a proton torpedo in the exhaust port. That's the best metaphor I've ever written.

CP: That flightsuit is worn, and the cockpit suffering from wear and tear. We have a proud legacy of PC games, but the more the technology progresses, the more games are being left behind. It's not just DOS. I can't play *Thief* on my PC anymore. And as much as I'd be happy with a hotfix, imagine a high-res, shiny, system straining *Thief* remake. We can do shadows properly, now! Man, they should remake *Thief*. And *System Shock 2*. And *Half-Life*.

The debate is over
Should we move on, or resurrect it at *www.pcgamer.com/forum*?

RM: There you go, you've won the argument for my side already. "I'd be happy with a hotfix." The community does that. It's the life-support machine that keeps old games alive. Using an entire development cycle to touch up some textures and make a game run on your ludicrous future-machine is a monumental waste of time. Hey Valve, stop making *Episode 3*! We want to go through that train-track sequence for the 16th time at 1900x1200!

CP: You happily ignored the bit where I was excited at the idea of a technology update, so take your claims back to the low-res hellhole that spawned you, pixel boy. Where we are now, with slicker, prettier, better looking games, is a good place to be. Technological advancement is important and allying it to good game design makes sense to me. It will introduce classics to a new generation of gamers, brought up on the Cry Engine 12.

RM: Good game design isn't some extinct flightless bird that lived on an island for four years in the late '90s. It still exists, and by assuming that we only knew better in the past, we're stifling our future. What kind of horrible world would we live in if all games were rehashes of past victories, refined until all the quirks and glitches that made them unique were ironed out, and we were handed the sterile final product? You want a world where the sports game model is the norm, where we fork out cash for yearly incremental upgrades and pretend it's enough.

CP: I clearly don't. That model is incremental; the *Football Manager* series of now is not the same as the *Championship Manager* of the past. I want the feeling of first setting foot on *System Shock 2*'s Rickenbacker without the hassle of hacking ini files and hoping that there's a big enough community to support getting the game to work on Windows 9. There were ambitious games made at a time when the available technology held them back. Yes, I am talking about *Trespasser*.

RM: Oh man, here we go. I'll get your slippers and your pipe, and you can tell me about the past. You've set foot on the Rickenbacker already, you can't de-foot then re-step. Let's push forward, make new Rickenbackers, not build monuments to fading glories. You can't go home again. ■

Gamers open their wallets for Japan

Gamer fundraising events mapped

The earthquake and subsequent tsunami that devastated Japan's north-eastern coast had an impact across the globe.

Japan is home to some of the world's largest gaming conglomerations, and many donated cash from their deep pockets. In addition to these donations, gamers, developers and publishers also conspired to ease the financial burden on the Japanese people. We've picked out but a few of the more memorable fundraising drives below. ■

Rich McCormick



1 Neighbourly love

COMPANY: NCsoft
LOCATION: South Korea

Seoul-based NCsoft make globally-recognised MMOs *Guild Wars* and *Aion*. They also make gigantic donations to their neighbours. NCsoft Senior Executive Sung Joon Park stated that the wad of cash - six *billion* Korean won - was equal to an entire month's of sales. Generosity ding! Level up in 'awww.'

MONEY RAISED: £3.9 million
LINK: bit.ly/fOjffQ

2 Free esports

COMPANY: GomTV
LOCATION: South Korea

GomTV show televised *StarCraft II* tournaments between the world's best players. Normally, you have to pay a fee per series but the World Championships, held between March and April, were completely free. Instead, casters Tasteless and Artosis urged viewers to donate to Japan as international pros battled.

MONEY RAISED: £19,000
LINK: bit.ly/fmkiri

3 Homegrown help

COMPANY: Square Enix
LOCATION: Japan

In addition to a healthy three-quarters of a million pound donation from top brass at Square Enix, the publisher set up a system to let players donate to Japan's Red Cross with their 'crysta' virtual currency points. They also lowered power levels in arcades, and used their web-shop to sell charity items.

MONEY RAISED: £744,000
LINK: bit.ly/hQ8zAj

4 Team Fortress 2 hats

COMPANY: Valve
LOCATION: Bellevue, Seattle, USA

Valve crafted three hats specifically for the disaster relief fund. All proceeds of this Japanese-themed headwear equippable by all classes went to the Red Cross's coffers. In two short weeks, *Team Fortress 2* players raised just short of half a million dollars - over a quarter of a million in proper currency.

MONEY RAISED: £265,000
LINK: bit.ly/fdCugN

5 League of Legends champions

COMPANY: Riot Games
LOCATION: Culver City, USA

League of Legends devs Riot Games donated all the cash earned on the sale of two champions, pseduo-ninja Akali and her nurse outfit-wearing variant. The proceeds continued to be augmented by individual donations. By the end, they'd raised a hundred grand. Who says the *LoL* community is cruel?

MONEY RAISED: £100,000
LINK: bit.ly/dIK4oz

6 EVE Online pilots give PLEX

COMPANY: CCP
LOCATION: Iceland

EVE's players can either pay real life money for game-time, or trade in-game cash for an item called PLEX that lets them play for 'free'. CCP began a donation drive to collect PLEXes from players. When the space-dust had settled, they were £27,000 richer – cash that was handed to the Red Cross.

MONEY RAISED: £27,000
LINK: bit.ly/eQf00M

GLADOS IN MEATSPACE

WHAT? VALVE PILOT THE WORLD'S MOST CONVOLUTED ARG

Valve's Potato Sack was a bundle of indie games sold cheap. But it was something else, too. Signals and strange data began to appear in the games a few weeks before *Portal 2*'s launch date. A rabid fanbase quickly decoded these, but each led to a more complex riddle. The ARG ended with the arrival of GlaDOS, a list of the Potato Sack games, and a challenge: play these games, and *Portal 2* would be launched early. But was that all? Find out how it all went down at *valvearg.com*. **RM**



CONSOLES HOLD US BACK

TRUTH DICE EXEC PRODUCER SAYS WHAT WE'VE ALL BEEN THINKING

Patrick Bach is an executive producer at EA's DICE studio, and a speaker of solid gold truth. In an interview with GeForce.com, Patrick was asked if consoles are holding the PC back from its full gaming potential. His response was surprisingly unguarded. "Yes, absolutely. That's the biggest problem we have today." DICE seem to be taking the issue seriously: *Battlefield 3*'s lead platform is the PC, and trailers shown in the wild even dare to show off mouse-based quick-time event prompts. See *bit.ly/DICEPC* for the quote. **RM**



LOL OF THE MONTH

AS ONE DOOR CLOSES

A good *Left 4 Dead* squad needs teamwork, communication and trust. A hilarious *Left 4 Dead* team needs just one dick who'll dally around the safehouse door as his friends are picked off, before closing it in their faces and laughing. Step forward Spock Blocker, of NormalGaming's YouTube channel. With your insane giggling as your friends are eaten, you illustrate both the best and worst of *Left 4 Dead*. *bit.ly/betrayall4d*



"I'll just wait here, OK?"

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Glastonbury with spaceships

Space pilots invade Iceland for EVE Fanfest

There is a push and pull between *EVE Online*'s developers and players that's unlike anything else in gaming. Icelandic developers CCP are passionate and ambitious. They've built a massively multiplayer space game about politics, economics and war set in a vast universe where every player fights and thrives on the same server.

But while CCP have established the technology and the systems, it's the players that make them meaningful. Their pursuit of power and excitement creates a world that's compelling for other players, and fascinating to watch as an outsider.

Over three days of presentations and round table discussions held in Reykjavik, Iceland, this year's EVE Online Fanfest did a good job of highlighting the ways each group has created the other and how their equal importance can put the two in conflict. The Council of Stellar Management is the perfect example. Established by CCP, the Council exists to represent the players and to provide the developers with feedback about the current game and their plans for the future.

The hope is that the two groups can work together, but the most important moment in the Council's history came last year. Although they're flown to Iceland every four months by CCP, it doesn't mean the information they provide is getting through. Feeling ignored, the

"Fanfest is about giving more players the chance to speak for themselves"

Council released an open letter criticising the company. It was a startling instance of a developer empowering players only for the players to use that power to bite the hand that feeds them.

At a Fanfest question and answer session this year, members of the Council said that communication had improved since then, but that it still wasn't perfect. "I wouldn't say it was poor, I would say that it's uneven," said the CSM's vice chair, Valentijn Geirnaert. "There are some groups [within CCP] that engage with the CSM quite a bit and others that do it on a more limited basis."



Graham says
There are stories unfolding in *EVE Online* every day that are more interesting, and more engaging to those experiencing them, than the plots of a dozen blockbuster PC games. Should we credit the game's players or the developers for that?

Resource discourse

The largest disagreements between the CSM and CCP are about how development resources should be spent. The panel of CSM members discussed how CCP have business reasons to want to bring in new players and that's why they're focusing on the Incarna expansion. This project has already introduced the ability for players to walk around their captain's quarters on space stations, which is the first time they've existed as more than just spaceships. Later updates will introduce larger environments and interaction with other players.

The CSM, meanwhile, are responsible to the current playerbase.


Chessboxing: the ultimate match of brain vs brawn.

They explained that while a couple of them were excited for Incarna, most weren't. They played the game *for* the spaceships and are more concerned with making what's already there better, not adding more stuff. Still, they feel they made some headway in explaining these concerns to CCP.

"The high point [of the Council] is the big attitude change within CCP that we helped bring about," said Geirnaert. To address their concerns, CCP established Team BFF – Best Friends Forever. It's a team of developers at CCP whose sole remit is to fix niggling issues. As put by the CSM, "We can now drop stuff in containers without opening the container first, because it makes so much fucking sense." When he said this in front of an audience, a roar erupted from the crowd.

Similar sentiments were expressed by many of the people I met at Fanfest. The convention was attended by 900 of the game's most ardent fans. They explained that they liked the look of Incarna, but when you've sunk thousands of hours into the game, it's these fixes to quality-of-life issues that mean everything.

If the CSM exists to speak for the playerbase, Fanfest is about giving more players the chance to speak for themselves and most of the sessions are low key. The roundtable discussions are led by a developer from CCP, and give attendees the opportunity to tell CCP about their experiences and specific problems. They can be extremely dry, with topics like Nullsec, PvP, and Solving lag, but Experimental Gameplay produced good anecdotes. The best was from a member of the Vard's


EVE has fostered a dedicated fanbase around the world.

School of Cryo-Cuisine corporation. They began by roleplaying as cannibals, but now they're just chefs. They invent *EVE*-themed recipes.

These smaller sessions filled time between the big events on the main stage, which tended to be less slapshot. There was, for example, chessboxing. The stage was replaced with a boxing ring, promotional videos were played, and two CCP staffers swaggered out to alternating play rounds of chess and punch the crap out of each other. It raised a million ISK for charity (ISK as in Icelandic Krona that is, not *EVE*'s in-game currency).

Looking ahead

There was also CCP Presents, the final presentation given by CCP's CEO. This was about the future of *EVE*, and everyone at the conference piled into the main hall to watch. To an outsider, most of what was shown seemed small: a new UI, new gun animations for ships, newly rendered nebula for the backgrounds of each star system. But the players *roared* their approval for a single piece of concept art for the UI and *stood up* to cheer for the new gun animations.

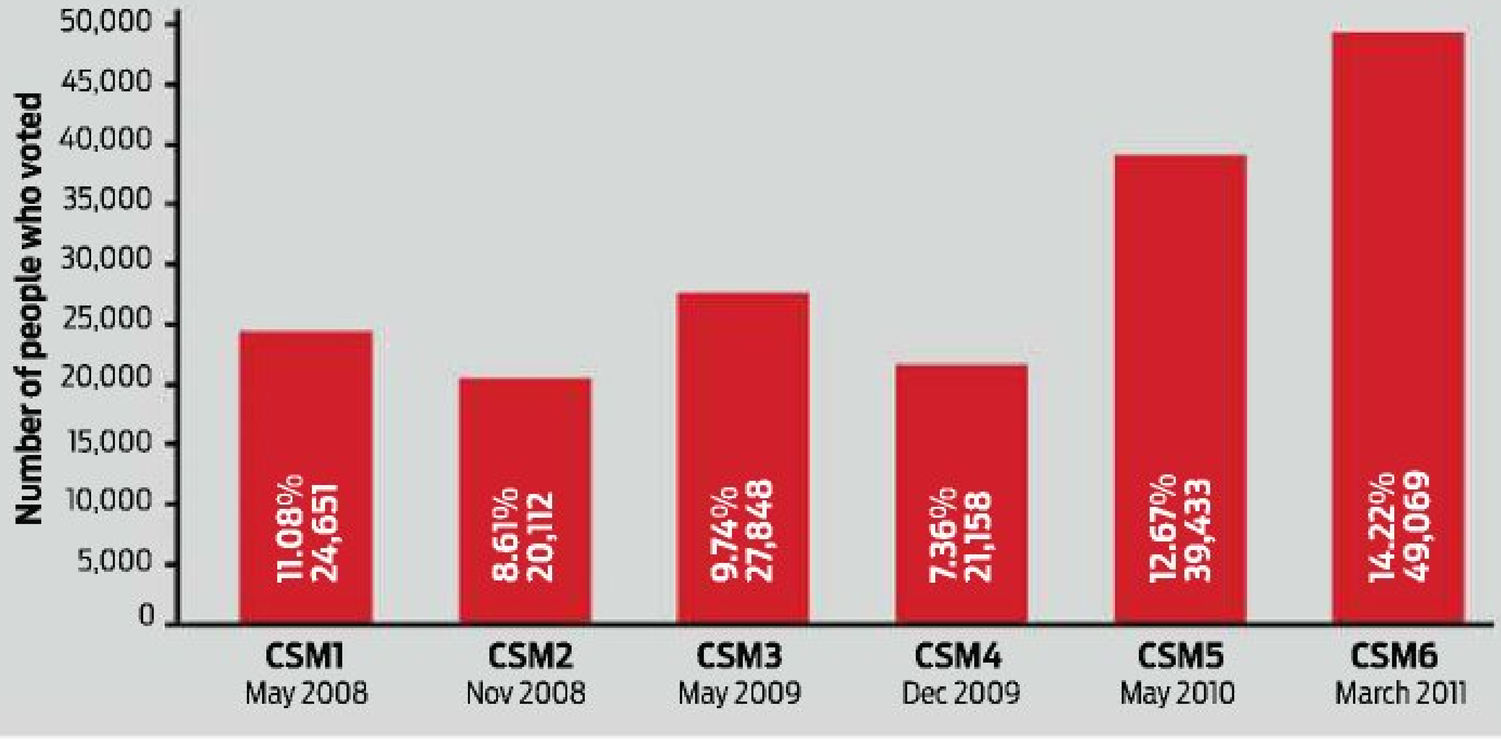
For all the talk from players about how Incarna wasn't what they wanted from *EVE Online*, the concept trailer showing how Incarna and Dust 514 would shape the future of *EVE* brought the house down. When asked to chant "Fuck yeah!" three times to see the trailer a second time, the crowd performed with gusto.

But my favourite main stage event was Design Democracy. One of CCP's ship designers sat on stage and built a ship in Photoshop based on suggestions from the audience. The result was ridiculous: it was made almost entirely of wings. Its wings had wings. But the session provided the key for why the relationship between CCP and players, for all the disagreements, has been so fruitful in creating such a wonderful game. They both really love spaceships. ■

Graham Smith

ELECTORAL SPACE MATH

How many players vote each year for the Council of Stellar Management?



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

All your favourite magazines. Anytime. Anywhere.





Available on the iPad and online.

You can now purchase a digital edition of your favourite magazine – ready to read whenever you want. Both single issues and subscriptions are available and each purchase is permanently stored in your own magazine library forever.

Search for the FREE Zinio app on the App Store or visit
myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/apps

Once the magazine has downloaded an internet connection is not required.

Powered by zinio™

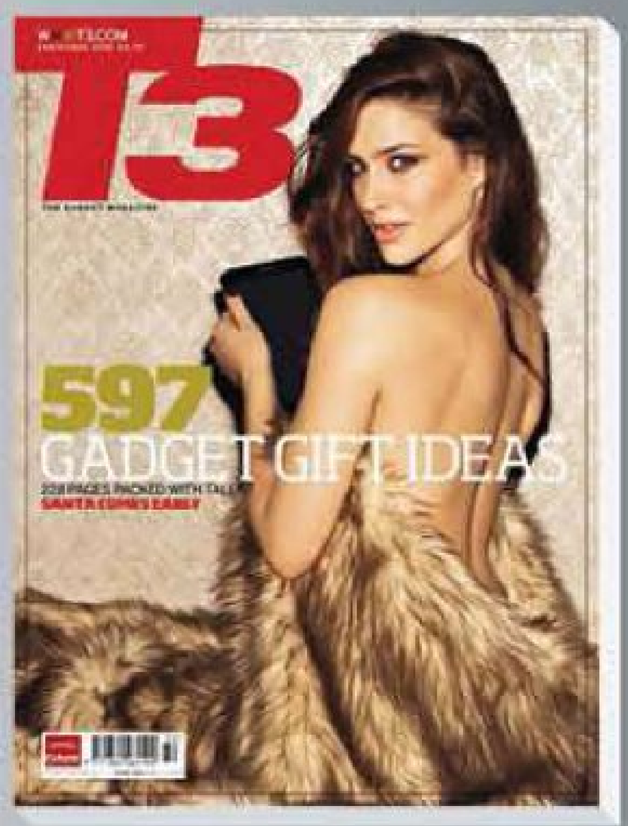
StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

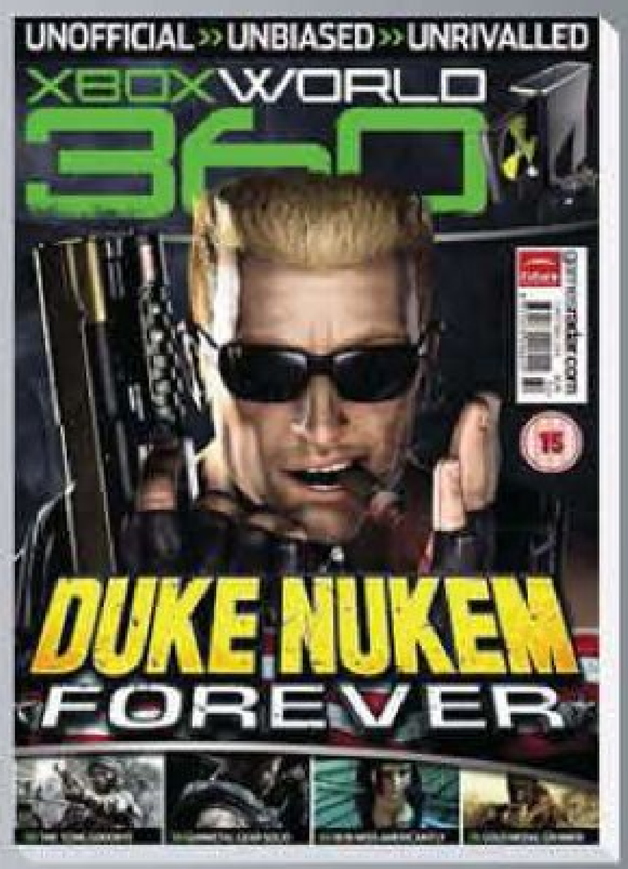


















StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Skyrim is more alive than any *Elder Scrolls* yet.

THE ELDER SCROLLS V SKYRIM

NEW INFO Bethesda's new and better fantasy world for us to live in.

There are two thrills in watching Bethesda's game director Todd Howard play and talk through an hour of *Skyrim*. The first is the long stream of confirmations that the things I loved from *Oblivion* are returning. The second is the long stream of confirmations that they're at least trying to fix the things I hated.

"We had a laundry list of things we knew we could do in the current generation," says Howard. "We re-wrote the whole renderer, the quest system, the dialogue. By the time we were done we had re-written all the gameplay and all the graphics systems in our engine."

The result doesn't look unrecognisable from its predecessor. There's plenty that's *Oblivion* about *Skyrim*, and probably less about it that's *Morrowind* than some people will like. But mostly, it looks like an exciting new world built by smart people who have listened to their audience.

READ ME
PUBLISHER In-house
DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks
LINK elderscrolls.com

Skyrim begins with you being led to your own execution, a prisoner without a backstory, as in all other *Elder Scrolls* games. By the time the introduction is over, you're off to explore the snowy, mountainous province from which the game gets its title. You're also feeling flush with the knowledge that you're the last Dragonborn, destined to save the world from invading dragons.

"Every NPC should be doing something when you find them, not just sleeping or chattering"

The demo Todd is playing starts a short time later, on a wilderness path bracketed by fir trees and skirted by a winding river. Dark mountains loom in the distance. They're steep. I'm not sure you could pull the *Oblivion* stunt of casting Paralyse on yourself at the top, sliding all the way down, and actually survive.

Sod the invading dragons: Todd runs to the side of the road and picks flowers. Flower picking is back! This, this is the only confirmation that I needed.

Bandits are back, too, and there's one on the path ahead wielding shield and sword.

Oblivion's melee tended to devolve into ridiculous bashing, with little sense that people were hitting each other with deadly weapons and not cushions. *Skyrim*'s fights seem more tactical, and both Todd and the enemy use their shield a lot. At the very least, it's more brutal than *Elder Scrolls* has ever been. When blows land there are nasty blood splatters, and an automatic finishing move sees Todd's sword impale the would-be thief in the chest. It's one of dozens of animations designed to make combat feel more dramatic, and less about numbers.

Down the path, Todd arrives in Riverwood, a logging village. At the mill, a man named Nod is loading logs onto a machine that saws them in half. The aim is that every NPC should be doing something when you find them, not just sleeping or chattering mindlessly in the street. And everything you see them do, you can do too, says Todd. If you want, you could join Nod at the mill.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com





Shirts made of belts make your back itchy.



Confirmed: Jonathan Creek cameo.



Clearly there are no mirrors in Tamriel.

A few moments later, we pass a woman named Sigrid, sweeping her porch. So can I sweep things? Is there a sweeping minigame? I never ask.

The counter to finding out how much wood a woodchuck would chuck is to destroy the town's industry. Todd explains that doing so will impact the local economy, and while they're still working out the extent of the consequences, currently no wood in Riverwood means they can't sell you arrows.

In a local shop, Todd finds Lucan Valerius arguing with his sister Camilla. It's my first chance to hear the game's conversations, and it's promising. The voices don't sound like any of the four guys who voice-acted in *Oblivion*, a testament to Bethesda's commitment not to just use the four guys who voice-acted in *Oblivion*. "At the end of the day it's time and money," says Todd, "and we're spending more time and spending more money [on voice acting]."

Lucan explains that thieves have taken the Golden Claw, a family heirloom. Todd agrees to help get it back, and Camilla volunteers to show him to the edge of town and point him in the right direction.

This is one of the situations when *Skyrim*'s new Radiant Story system could have an impact. If Lucan is killed at any point, the world course-corrects, making his sister the quest-giver. In other quests, it might adjust the location, the item, anything that could make your adventure more personal.

"If Lucan is killed at any point, the world course-corrects, making his sister the quest-giver"

Todd climbs until he comes to a view of the Throat of the World, one of the largest mountains in all Tamriel. From what we've seen so far, *Skyrim* isn't as traditional as the lush green forests of *Oblivion*, but it's far from as weird as *Morrowind* either.

"I think some people, when they go to explore the world, want to be surprised more," says Todd. "*Skyrim* has a much more unique sense of culture to it than we did in *Oblivion*. *Morrowind*, we wanted it to feel alien, like a stranger in a strange land. Whereas this we want to feel familiar, but it does have its own unique culture."

The Throat is one of the places with its own culture, and at some point the player will ascend its 7,000 steps to the Greybeards who live at its peak. They are masters of the voice, and it's with them that you learn how to use Dragonshouts, the dragon magic only the player can wield. Like a big la-de-da show-off.

Moving still higher up the mountain, it starts to snow, and the mountain rocks begin to dynamically cover in white. Todd uses Detect Life to spot two guards standing in the fog outside a stone tower, casts Fury to make one kill the other, and then ends the fight with an arrow.

At the summit, we find a ruined Nordic temple. There are fallen pillars and a few arches intact, atop which sits what looks like an enormous dragon statue. It's not. It's just a dragon.

It takes off, spews fire into the air and thumps back down to the ground.



The forests are way prettier than in *Oblivion*.



Riverwood is the first village you'll see.



Wilbur, your pet bat, joins you in fights.

Later, Todd explains that to a dragon, "when they breathe fire, that's talk. Combat is debate to dragons."

The dragon sets him on fire. Todd concedes the point and runs inside.

There are dead bodies all over the temple floor, and in the corner, some ne'er-do-wells banter. One of their co-conspirators, Arvel, has run ahead with the Golden Claw.

Crouching in the dark, Todd fires an arrow into a thief's head, killing him mid-sentence. The thief's friend draws her sword. "I know I heard something!" Sneak attack bonus x2.

She runs at the shadows, and gets her own arrow to the face.

There are a lot of familiar stone tunnels in the dungeon ahead, but many of the larger rooms have beautiful details, such as underground waterfalls and dramatic lighting. The game's 130-odd dungeons are again being built from Lego-like chunks, but there are nine level designers working on making them feel distinct.

The dungeon spirals deeper into the mountain until eventually the enemies are skeletons. These are Draugr, fallen Nord soldiers undead for centuries, and now dead angry that you're in their temple. Against groups of two, three and four, Todd uses combat magic for the first time.

Oblivion's attack spells always felt cumbersome and weak, even when they weren't. *Skyrim*'s look immediate and powerful, helped by being able to dual-

"Chanting rises from the soundtrack. It's the chanting from the trailer! Dovahkiin!"

wield them in any combination you want. What's better than a lightning spell? A lightning spell in both hands.

There's room for creativity, too. Against a group of four skeletons, Todd casts Circle of Protection in his left hand, sending them running scared so he can smack them in the back with the fireballs in his right. In other areas he casts Frost Rune on the ground to slow attacks and cuts lamps from the ceiling to spread fire.

The caves ahead are covered in cobwebs, and Todd has to hack his way through them. It's a nice visual detail, I think, and I'm idiotically surprised when a Giant Frostbite Spider bursts out. Todd kills it, and finds Arvel the Swift tied up in the webs. He can't give you the Claw until you cut him down, he says, and so Todd does. Arvel the Git runs. With the aid of a *Fallout 3*-style perk for zooming with the bow, Todd sticks an arrow in his back, loots the Golden Claw and moves on.

At the end of the dungeon is a door with a central lock and a series of rotatable rings around it, each showing an image of an animal. Only the right combination opens the door.

Todd brings up the inventory system. *Oblivion*'s was clearly designed for low res TV sets, with big, chunky text that only showed a few items on screen. *Skyrim*'s interface is slicker and you can zoom and rotate items. Doing so with the Claw reveals the correct order of animals on its palm: Owl. Hawk. Bear. Or something.

The door opens and Todd ascends to a cave. As he approaches the far wall,

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com

"Play another note and he dies."

Dragons can attack you anywhere.

The ability to buy houses will return.

chanting rises from the soundtrack. It's the chanting from the trailer. Dovahkiin!

This is a Word Wall, and the words it bears are Words of Power. One of those words glows yellow, and reading it unlocks a new Dragonshout that slows time. It's called Slow Time.

Todd activates it and everything in the cave turns a brilliant white, dust particles floating in the air. When time resumes, an angry, floating Dragon Priest appears and summons a Frost Atronach, a curved-headed, no-faced upright lobster creature with an electric blue shell. Todd smashes at both of them with fire and swords until they're done and dead.

Dragonshouts are basically just a rare and powerful kind of spell – and each type has three levels. Todd demonstrates Unrelenting Force, which staggers people at its most basic level and sends them flying at its strongest. Depending on which level of shout you use, there's a correspondingly large cooldown period.

"The nice thing with dragons in this is that we can move them around," says Todd, "so we can have the main story hit you wherever you are. And learning the shouts and doing all that really ties into the main quest. In *Oblivion* and *Fallout* there isn't really a gameplay power reason to do the main quest, but with the shouts, you're like 'Well those are fun, I'm going to become more of a badass, I'm going to do this questline.'"

Like all good dungeons, there's a much shorter exit from the main hall than going back to the entrance Todd came in through, so it's only a few moments before he's back out on the mountainside. The dragon is still here, and the ground shakes as it flies over head. Todd sends some fireballs its way, which miss, and the dragon lands in front of him and again starts setting him on fire. Todd slows time, and bashes the dragon about its dragony jowls with his mace.

"Todd slows time, and bashes the dragon about its dragony jowls with his mace"

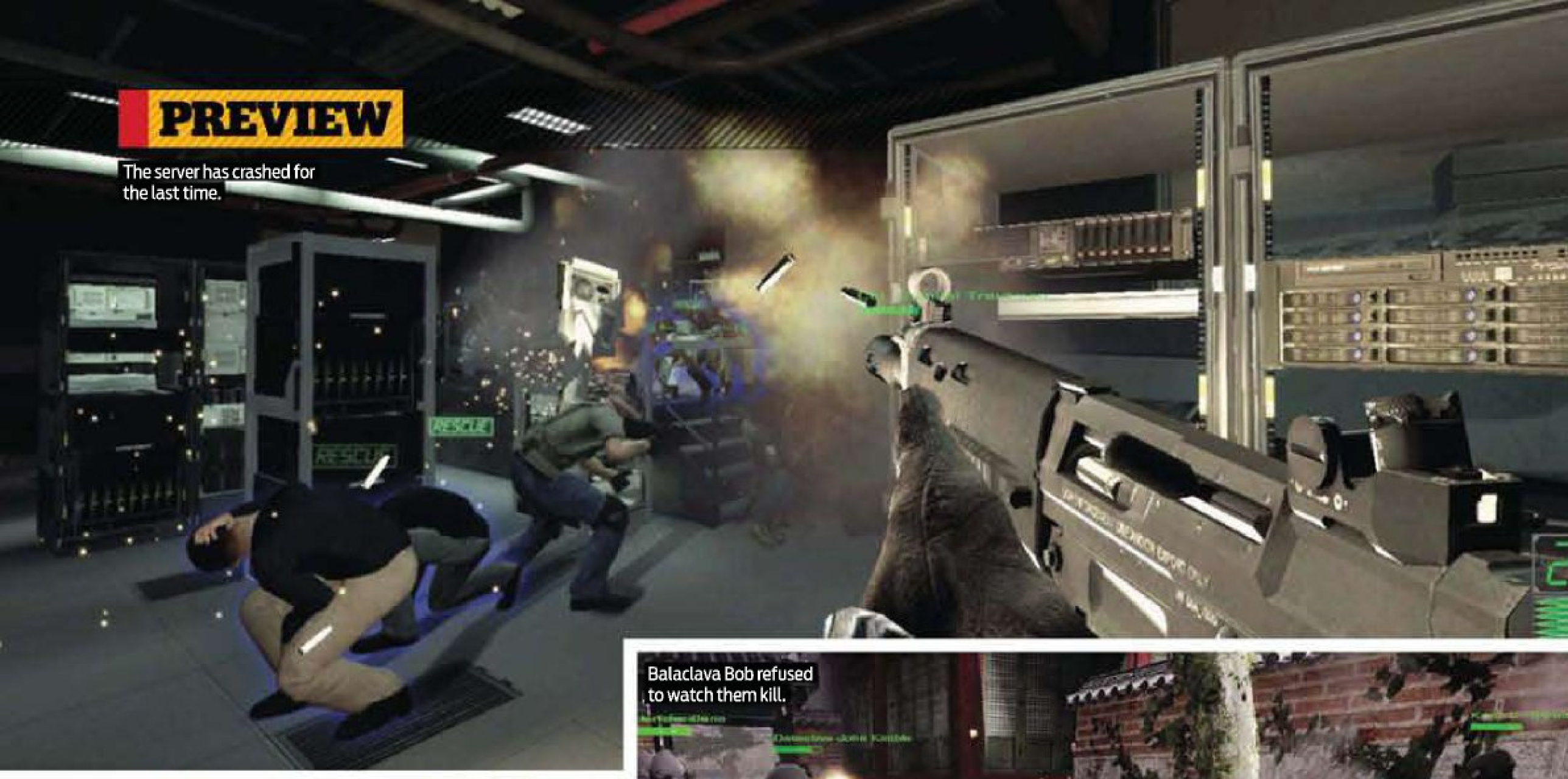
This time, the dragon loses the debate. A second after it has flopped to the ground, its body bursts into flame and Todd consumes its soul.

In the Q&A that follows, Todd confirms a dozen other interesting and exciting things about *Skyrim*: they're aiming to have the mod tools out at launch; there are dungeons set inside glaciers; Acrobatics and Athletics skills are gone, so you don't have to hop like a buffoon to build them up; there are kids but you can't kill them; horses are in there but not a definite inclusion ("If there's no horses, what will we sell armour for?" asks Bethesda's VP, Pete Hines); levitation is not included ("We found any cool level design idea can be ruined with 'Yeah, I levitate'"). And what we've seen so far is just a tiny fragment of the game: one dungeon out of over a hundred, and one small village in a world of big towns and at least five full cities.

Everything that has been said simply confirms the same thing: I can't wait to live in Skyrim. ■

Graham Smith

Release NOV 11







TACTICAL INTERVENTION

FIRST LOOK The old king of online multiplayer returns to regain his crown.

Chances are, if you've touched finger to WASD in the last decade, you've felt Minh Le's influence on PC gaming. Minh's the mastermind behind *Counter-Strike*, the *Half-Life* mod turned international man-shooting phenomenon. Since *CS*'s launch, way back in the before-times, Minh's been fairly quiet. *Tactical Intervention* marks his first step back into the world of competitive online pretend murder.

"We have about six assault rifles, five submachine guns, two shotguns, three sniper rifles and five pistols," Minh explains. So far, so *Counter-Strike*. "We also have dogs." Pardon? Dog launchers? Guns that fire dogs? Nope: attack dogs. But they're set to be more than man's worst enemy. "Dogs are pretty versatile in that they can not only be used to attack, but also to scout out rooms and sniff doors." You can order a friendly dog to smell a door. This isn't just *Counter-Strike 1.7*.

It gets madder. The game's played in one of two modes: team deathmatch, where players respawn mid-battle, and mission mode, where players get one life per round. The latter has three missions on offer - one of which involves loading your entire team into cars and barrelling down a motorway. It's called VIP escort, and asks counter-terrorists to reach their very important target, bundle him into a vehicle, and make off at white-knuckle speed. All while being chased by an equally sized team of terrorists in their own cars, brandishing rocket launchers, and imbued with a nihilistic disregard for their own safety. The other two missions are closer to *Counter-Strike*'s template, and both involve hostages. Hostage resuce charges terrorists with containing a group of people, and hostage grab leaves a gang of non-combatants in the middle of the map, free to be poached by either side.

"Cue motorway mayhem as chasing terrorists lean out of their windows to launch rockets"

As well as the vanilla guns Minh described earlier, the game has a set of special weapons. "Things like grenade launchers can't be purchased. Instead, they're given to players based on their performance during the last round. Sniping, too, isn't an open choice. "Each team is limited to between one and three snipers, depending on the size of the team," Minh says. If you want to be a sniper, you join a queue, and the class rotates each round.

Choice in regular weapons is restricted, too. *Tactical Intervention* is free to play, and everyone gets a set of basic guns that murder just fine. But if you use points acquired in-game, you'll get access to a wider pool. Spend real money, and you'll get access to these faster. The exact model isn't clear yet, but Minh promises these weapons won't be better - just different.

Don't expect another *CS*. With its dogs, car chases, and in-game economy, 'different' is what *Tactical Intervention* promises to be. ■

Rich McCormick

READ ME

PUBLISHER
Myngames.com

DEVELOPER
Fix Korea

LINK
www.tactical-intervention.com

Release SUMMER

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Alienware™ M11x

The most powerful 11-inch gaming laptop in the universe
Optional Intel® Core™ i7-640UM Processor
1GB NVIDIA® GeForce® GT 335M GPU with optional NVIDIA® Optimus™ technology
Up to 8GB of DDR3 800MHz RAM with 64bit OS
dell.co.uk/alienware

cnet BEST OF CES 2010 WINNER Gaming

HARDWARE HEAVEN PERFORMANCE AWARD



CONQUER THE DAY.

THE ALIENWARE M11X — HI-DEF GAMING AND ULTRA PORTABILITY.

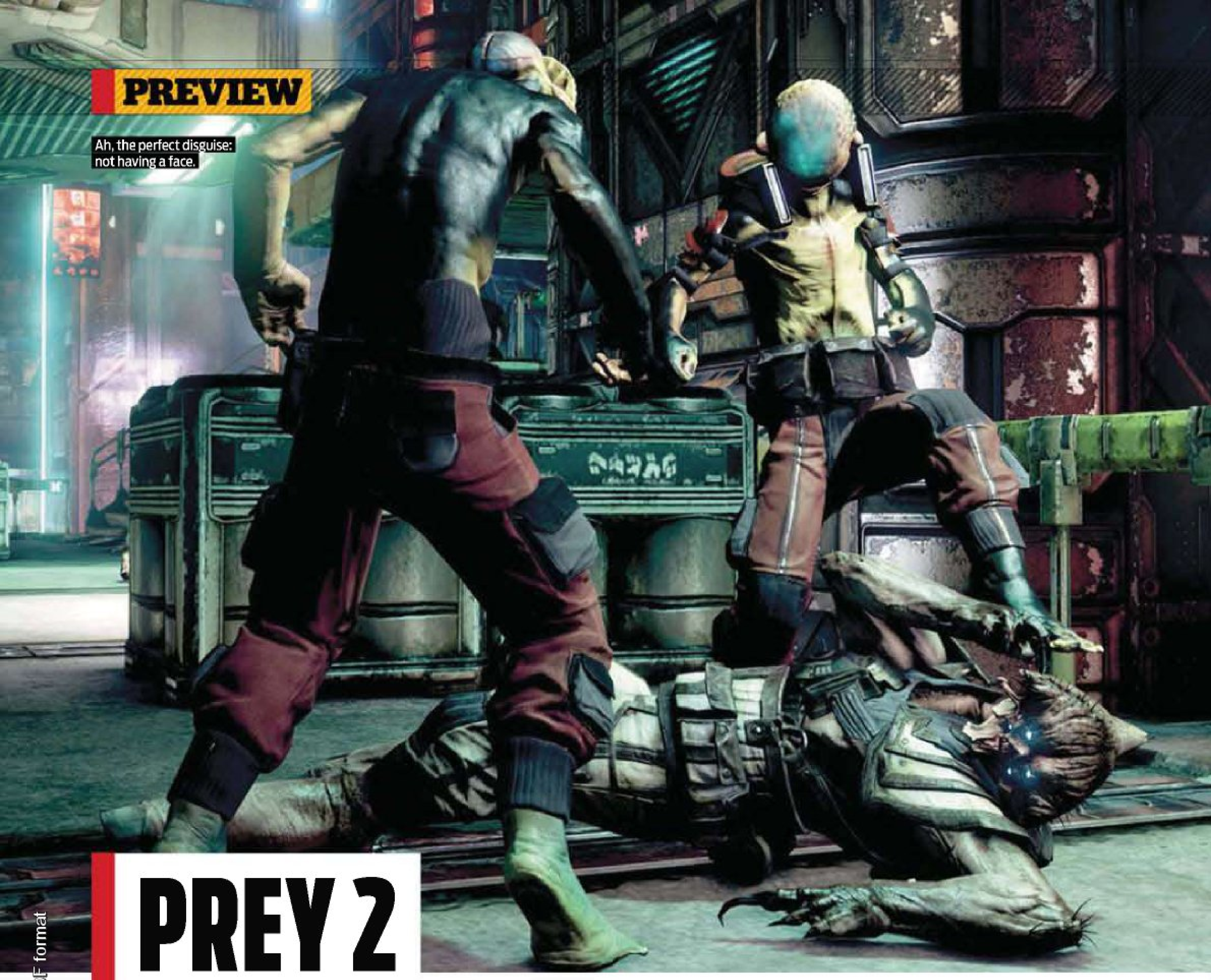
StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

ALIENWARE | ALL POWERFUL

Get proven performance with the Intel® Core™ i7 processor. Intel's original performance processor.
Intel, the Intel Logo, Intel Inside, Intel Core, and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries.

intel CORE i7 inside™ Faster. Smarter.

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Ah, the perfect disguise: not having a face.

PREY 2

NEW INFO Extraterrestrial bounty hunting in a Blade Runner-style world.

The first *Prey* was about Tommy, an American-Indian man fighting his alien abductors using portals and out-of-body experiences. It only makes sense that its sequel should be an open-world alien noir about a free-running bounty hunter who looks like the result of a night of passion between Commander Shepard and a beanie.

The bounty hunter is the terribly named Killian Samuels, a US Marshall abducted from a passenger jet mid-flight in the same incident as Tommy. While Tommy fights back, eventually destroying the sphere that swallowed him, Killian is knocked unconscious by his captors. The game then skips forward several years. In that time, Killian has become a tracker of scum and villainy on an alien planet named Exodus, but has no idea how he got there.

READ ME
PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks
DEVELOPER Human Head
LINK bethsoft.com

"We wanted to flip the predator/prey relationship, from where Tommy was preyed upon by the sphere, to where you're preying on the aliens," says art designer Jim Sumwalt. "That led to a new protagonist being a bounty hunter." Tommy will still feature in the game, but it's a mystery as to how.

Exodus is tidally locked, meaning that one half always faces the sun and the other is always in darkness. The demo I'm shown takes place in the Bowery, a multilevel city on the border of the two, with coloured lighting, black buildings and flying cars.

"It's a brief chase before the criminal is tied up in electric bolos, and Killian shoots him dead"

Killian goes looking for trouble at a local strip club. On stage, two holographic ladies dance. The first game's Keepers are there, along with a lot of new alien races. They look like the extraterrestrials in every other game, except some of them wear sweaters. This makes them 60% more adorable.

In the course of his bounty hunting work, Killian can acquire around 20 gadgets, the most basic of which is a visor that highlights alien criminals. It marks one watching the show, wanted dead or alive. In this situation, the player can either shoot him in the back, capture him or threaten him. Killian does the latter.

The perp runs. Killian takes off after him, shoving pedestrians aside. It's a brief chase before the criminal is tied up in electric bolas, and Killian shoots him dead.

This guy was an optional 'ambient bounty'. If you're not in the mood to pursue the story's core missions, you can spend your time taking jobs from locals or searching for marks on your own. Or, if you're a dick, you can mug aliens for loose change and shove people from ledges. This isn't as robust an open world as Skyrim – it's not a place you could live, but there's enough to make you want to holiday here.

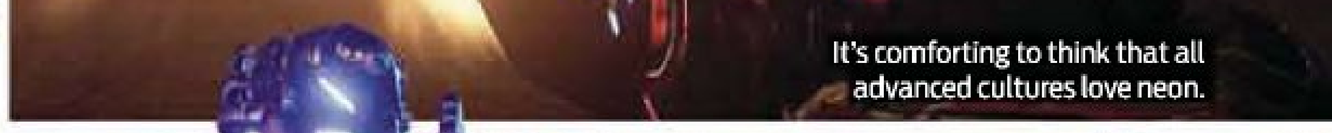
To pursue a more official mission, Killian pulls up the Bounty Wire. There are a few options, but Killian selects "Capture Dra'Gar", presumably for crimes against apostrophes. The first objective is to reach the informant on one of the city's upper levels. There are probably stairs, but you don't need them. Like all good science-

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com


There are probably some bits of the city that aren't on fire...


It's comforting to think that all advanced cultures love neon.


Something about this guy says "dangerous" to us.


As a rule, laser sights are a sign of trouble.

fiction cities, the Bowery is filled with small ledges and pipes, and Killian has the parkour skills to shimmy up them. He's soon face to face with his informant and his cute ferret-looking bodyguard.

The informant wants money for the information, but Killian pulls his pistol. A couple of bullets send the huggable ferret tumbling over the ledge, and the informant gives over the information. Dra'Gar is at the city's nightclub.

There are multiple routes inside, and Killian uses a side window, grabbing an alien from behind and taking him hostage. He doesn't provide much cover; when Dra'Gar sees you, he teleports toward the door while his bodyguards start firing. The combat is fast – even with a first-person cover system – and Killian's shotgun rips the bodyguards apart.

Back in the streets, Dra'Gar is teleporting ten feet at a time, shifting between the city's levels. Killian follows, leaping from object to object, climbing up pipes and firing the whole time.

"Other games have you run away from the combat with parkour, while we want you to run towards the combat," explains Sunwalt. The controls sit at a mid-point between *Mirror's Edge* and *Brink*. You'll be pushing buttons to perform each move, but no matter what you're holding onto, Killian can keep blowing shit up.

After blowing up more guards in a casino with a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher and using anti-gravity grenades to take down a chaingunner, Dra'Gar reaches a dead-end. Killian captures him in an electrical field and is given a choice: send him back to the client, or interrogate him. The latter might provide information, but it could kill him. Killian plays it safe and sends him to the client.

Human Head and Bethesda aren't playing it safe. There's plenty that's familiar about *Prey 2*'s art style and fiction, but it throws out everything people knew from the first game in favour of an ambitious and compelling new fantasy. I can think of no other game character I'm more looking forward to being than a free-running bounty hunter in an explorable alien city. It's a shame about the beanie, though. ■

Graham Smith


He seems harmless. We'll feel bad about killing him.

Release 2011

1&1 – DOUBLE THE RELIABILITY

1&1 DUAL H

DOUBLE SECURITY THROUGH GEO-REDUNDANCY

No one can afford downtime of their website. This is why 1&1 Dual Hosting now offers ultimate security through geo-redundancy. This means your website exists simultaneously in two of our high-tech data centres that are in two completely different locations.
If service in the first location is unexpectedly interrupted, your site will automatically continue running in the second location - without any loss of data.



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

MEMBER OF united internet

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com

OSTING

No other web host offers as much expertise, know-how and quality as 1&1:

1&1 combines many years of web hosting experience with the latest technology in our high-speed and high-performance data centres. More than 1,000 IT professionals will continue to develop our top performance web solutions for years to come.

NEW: 1&1 is now the world's first web host offering double website security with 1&1 Dual Hosting. And all this at unbeatably low prices!



Double security: Geo-redundant data centres!



Top performance: High-end servers!



Superfast: 210 GBit/s connectivity!



Environmentally friendly: Powered by green energy!



Future-proof: Over 1,000 in-house developers!

NEW!

1&1 DUAL UNLIMITED

- 3 .uk Domains Included
- UNLIMITED Web Space
- UNLIMITED Traffic
- UNLIMITED MySQL Databases (1 GB each)
- UNLIMITED IMAP/POP3 E-mail Accounts
- UNLIMITED FTP Accounts
- UNLIMITED 1&1 Click & Build Apps (choose from 65 Apps)
- NEW: 1&1 SiteAnalytics
- PHP5, PHP Dev, Zend, Ruby, SSI, Version Control Management (git)
- NetObjects Fusion® 1&1 Edition or Adobe® Dreamweaver® CS4*
- NEW: Geo-redundant Servers
- 60-Day Moneyback Guarantee

1&1 DUAL UNLIMITED from £12.99 per month*

* Visit www.1and1.co.uk for full promotional offer details. Prices exclude VAT

1&1

Call **0871 641 21 21** or visit us now

www.1and1.co.uk

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

Stardock.com

Halitosis is a potent weapon for the dragons in *Genesis*.

A GAME OF THRONES GENESIS

FIRST LOOK Get ready to sell your daughter in this hyper-sneaky RTS.

There are monsters in George R R Martin's A Game of Thrones, the first book in his superlative Song of Fire and Ice series, but they're not the orcs, kobolds and dingly-dell dwellers of traditional fantasy. They're men and women. Backstabbing is a sport on the continent of Westeros and the story arc is thick with the blood spilled by characters both innocent and evil.

It's the perfect setting for a sneaky kind of strategy game. Double-crossing and baby-murder feature as heavily as gigantic battles, so devs Cyanide have tried to work implementations of nastiness into their game. *Genesis* is set in the generations before Martin's books begin, and players won't cross the seas to other continents. But don't expect that to be a limiting factor; Westeros is 3,000 miles north to south and studded with landmarks covered by the books. Important locations such as Casterly Rock and King's Landing appear on the world map and the seven regions are split between the great houses of Westeros as they appear in the lore: the Starks up north, the Lannisters in the west and so on.

But how do you turn so many feuds and family fights into a strategy game? Designer Regis Robin explains how *Genesis* grew in development. "Our original thoughts were much more limited. We were thinking of a classic RTS, with factional clashes and a higher economic element. But that wouldn't really have done justice to the Machiavellian core of books."

"Alliances are key to success, and a skilled player will be able to win without shedding blood"

Genesis has two modes: Campaign and Versus. Regis describes the former as a training ground for the latter. To win, you'll need to earn enough prestige points to ascend to Westeros's uniting Iron Throne. In its victory conditions, *Genesis* is still an RTS, but it differs to most of its peers, as Regis explains. "There's no base-building, no development of technologies, no mass-production of fighting units. The key is alliance building."

The game is split into four distinct facets, termed 'economic', 'military', 'diplomatic' and 'underhand'. Despite Cyanide's new mechanics, genre standards haven't been totally jettisoned – you'll still need to pool gold and food, and raise armies. These armies then require upkeep, but can be hurled at a foe's kingdom. Battles are battles – get a bigger or better force and roll over your foe – but military units also have the option to siege castles and towns. "Capturing a town by siege will obviously bring it into your camp, but its lord can be as easily won over by diplomatic means," Robin says.

Alliances come in four friend-flavours: Secret Agreement, Alliance, Blood Alliance and Pact. Pacts tie houses together loosely enough that they can be broken, but do that and you'll lose prestige points. Blood Alliances are stronger – marriages forged between two families

READ ME
PUBLISHER Focus Home Interactive
DEVELOPER Cyanide
LINK bit.ly/epAnUV

Store4ags.com



Armies can siege parts of a foe's kingdom.



Global warming has yet to become a problem in Westeros.



Towns can be captured by siege or diplomacy.

that have the chance to produce an heir, but they're not bulletproof. *Genesis*'s 'underhand' tactical options allow the end of a Blood Alliance by an assassin.

Pikemen, swordsmen and their stabby chums can be hired, but the unit pool is swollen by the addition of seductive noble ladies you can send in to woo an enemy's general, and envoys to carry diplomatic messages. But Robin's favourite unit is the spy. "I love infiltrating an enemy camp and getting my spy hired as one of his envoys, assassins or commanders.

"A bride can avoid the attempt on her life if the enemy camp has been infiltrated by a spy who's turned the would-be assassin to his side. The latter's actions will then be fake, although they are reported as real to his paymaster." The bride survives in secret, the assassin's report is fabricated and the game's tactical landscape changes entirely.

What happens to that spy eventually, when he's busted? "It can't go on for ever and he'll end up in a dungeon somewhere. But it's worth the entertainment!" ■

Rich McCormick

Release AUTUMN

1&1 DUAL HOSTING

SECURE & SAVE!

1&1 DUAL BASIC
- 5 GB Web Space
- UNLIMITED Traffic
- NEW: 1 MySQL Database
- NEW: 1&1 SiteAnalytics
- 1000 IMAP/POP3 E-mail Accounts

From £1.99 per month*

1&1 DUAL PERFECT
- 1 .uk Domain Included
- 10 GB Web Space
- UNLIMITED Traffic
- NEW: 10 MySQL Databases
- NEW: 1&1 SiteAnalytics
- 3000 IMAP/POP3 E-mail Accounts

From £3.99 per month*

.co.uk
now only £2.49 first year

.biz
now only £3.99 first year

1&1 DOMAINS starting at £2.49 first year*

*Visit www.1and1.co.uk for full promotional offer details. Prices exclude VAT

1&1

Call 0871 641 21 21

www.1and1.co.uk

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



Rage is about cars and explosions, as pictured.



The Authority are the game's sci-fi big bad.



Think '*Half-Life 2*'s Combine with jetpacks'.



"Can you pose for a screenshot?" "Shuriken."

RAGE

NEW INFO Why are the creators of deathmatch leaving their baby behind?

"That's one of the questions we get," Tim Willits admits: "'Why are you not doing classic deathmatch?'"

It's a good question. id Software invented online deathmatch with *Quake* and polished it in *Quake 3*. Why wouldn't *Rage*, their next FPS, follow suit?

"We've evolved, our fanbase has evolved," says Tim, lead designer. "We wanted to do something different. We had these cool vehicles, and nobody really does multiplayer vehicle games. So wouldn't it be fun to play with your bike?"

It looks really fun to play with your bike. *Rage* is set in a Mad Max-style world of mutants, bandits, dusty wasteland and ramshackle vehicles. In singleplayer, those vehicles are a fun way to rumble around. In multiplayer, they're the sole focus of a mode called Combat Rally.

READ ME
PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks
DEVELOPER id Software
LINK www.rage.com

The map I'm shown is set in a desert similar to those we've seen from the singleplayer game, but here there are vast, spiked ruins around the outskirts, and players compete to collect randomly spawning Rally Points. Tim collects a few in a row and gains bonus points, and that deep, rumbling voice from *Quake 3* rolls out: "You have taken the lead."

Vehicle-based multiplayer is new for id, but it's unmistakably them.

Chaining Rally Points earns bonuses,

"Vehicle-based multiplayer is new for id Software, but it's unmistakably them"

but it also makes you a target for every other rocket- and machinegun-wielding competitor. The double objectives – to kill and collect – create a frantic game of cars hurling themselves around to try to reach the next point. It takes just three or four minutes to play a round. By the end, Tim is in third place.

If competitive multiplayer isn't your thing, they're also doing co-op for the first time. There are eight Legend of the Wasteland missions planned, in which you and a friend fight through the same regions as in the singleplayer game.

The part of the game I get to play is singleplayer. If you've been following the game's development these past couple of years, you'll have heard the criticisms. It looks like *Fallout 3*. It looks like *Borderlands*. It looks like *BioShock*. That's true, but what it doesn't convey is how great the game *feels*. That's a woo-waa term, but it's also incredibly technical.

"John Carmack is a master at making sure that there are milliseconds shaved off the interactions between the button and [the action]," explains Willits. "Running at 60 hertz is a big deal. He feels that the hardware manufacturers have built too much latency between hitting the button and actually seeing stuff. You know, if you get a random guy and you put him in front of a 30 hertz game and a 60 hertz game, he won't be able to tell why they're different, but he'll say, 'That one just feels better'."

Every game has a shotgun. But *Rage*'s shotgun is better than anyone else's. ■

Graham Smith

Release SEPTEMBER 16

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

JUST WHEN THEY THOUGHT THE BATTLE WAS WON...
YOU CALL IN *REINFORCEMENTS*

ARMA 2
PC GAMER
2009 Game of the Year WINNER
MOST PC

INCLUDES AUTHENTIC MAP!

ARMA II
REINFORCEMENTS

STANDALONE EXPANSION PACK FOR ARMA 2
INCLUDES ARMA 2: BRITISH ARMED FORCES & PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANY









Arma 2: Reinforcements brings two new factions to the Armaversum - Her Majesty's Armed Forces and Private Military Company. Play it separately or combine with the original **Arma 2: Combined Operations** for the ultimate military combat experience. Join the massive online multiplayer battles with up to 50 players and hundreds of AI units!

15

Bohemia Interactive

WWW.ARMA2.COM

PC DVD ROM

OUT NOW!

Store.Steampowered.com

© 2011 Bohemia Interactive. All Rights Reserved.Arma 2™, Arma 2: Reinforcements™ and Bohemia Interactive® are trademarks or registered trademarks of Bohemia Interactive a.s.

StoreMaps.com


Reminds us of *Cannon Fodder*, minus the sweet theme tune.


Note the glowing weak-spot on that tank. Oh games...


Get an aircraft carrier, if you're wealthy enough.


Looks great for a top-down shooter.


Start this stage in a jeep, end in a chopper.

RENEGADE OPS

PLAYED IT The thoroughly modern twin-stick shooter with a 16-bit heart.

"This project is something everyone is really excited about making – it isn't just a project done on the side to make a bit of extra cash. It's passion driven." I'm sitting opposite Axel Lindberg, game director at Avalanche Studios – the Swedish developers known for creating the *Just Cause* series. He's explaining why, given the studio's capacity for creating huge, beautiful open-world action games, their latest project is a relatively simple, twin-stick shooter.

Renegade Ops is being created by a splinter team within Avalanche, while the remainder of the devs beaver away on not one, but two new titles. It's a small budget, big talent isometric shooter that uses the *Just Cause 2* engine to generate its sweeping levels and handsome looks. The plot is as well-used as the genre it sits in: angry, bald terrorist called Inferno threatens the world with nuclear war, while a small, crack team of soldiers lead by the lustrous-moustached General Bryant lead the assault to stop him. Cheesy? Sure, but it fits with the game's retro feel.

The devs are keen to point out that *Renegade Ops* is all about simple action, designed to make players feel as if they're playing classics like *Jungle Strike*, *Jackal* and *Cannon Fodder*, without having to face the sad reality of how dated these classics have become. There will be a four-player co-op mode to help you recapture the joy of playing classic games with friends, but I'm not shown this during my demo.

"Despite the chaos happening around me, the first thing I do is gawp at the trees"

The first thing I notice is how great the game looks. Despite the chaos happening around me from the off, the first thing I do is gawp at the trees. Lush, colourful – they're only surpassed by the vibrant yellow mushroom clouds of the artillery fire, lighting up the world around me.

Time to get stuck in. Controlling the jeep is simple (I'm using a pad) and fire spits pleasingly out of it in all directions. There's a boost that speeds up the vehicle, and special abilities mapped to triggers.

As I hoon through the jungle roads, saving civilians by running them over (to pick them up) and blasting opposition units, the game doles out secondary objectives. Destroy this, rescue that – it's a smart way of offering alternative difficulties, and although I manage a couple of secondaries, there are plenty left to finish as I'm pushed on to the main event. With the jungle cleared of Inferno's forces, it's time to climb into a chopper and take on the man's personal aircraft carrier. The game changes subtly – it feels as if the stabilisers are off. Sweeping through the air, gunning down other helicopters and wrecking the launch-ready missiles on the boat feels great. With my last life (yes, life) I deliver the final blow to Inferno's ship with a big old grin on my face. Mission accomplished – for myself and Avalanche Studios. ■

Andy Hartup

READ ME
PUBLISHER Sega
DEVELOPER Avalanche
LINK avalanchestudios.se

Release AUTUMN

the first TEMPLAR

SPECIAL LIMITED EDITION

Version containing:

+ Thrilling bonus level 'The Arena'
+ A2 art poster
+ Official Game Soundtrack

available exclusively from GAME START HERE

16+ www.pegi.info

THE CONSPIRACY BEGINS MAY 2011.

WWW.THEFIRSTTEMPLAR-GAME.COM

XBOX LIVE HAEMIMONT GAMES kalypso

© 2011 Kalypso Media Group. All rights reserved. GameStop is a registered trademark of GameStop, Inc. "Power to the Players" is a registered trademark of Elbo Inc. Walmart is a registered trademark of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. - Windows, the Windows Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft.

Games for Windows XBOX 360

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Neon face masks make anyone look hard.

SAINTS ROW 3

PLAYED IT We built this city on cocks and molls.

Let's get something cleared up. If you object to the idea of someone being walloped with a giant comedy phallus, then *Saints Row: The Third* isn't going to be the game for you. Volition aren't making any attempt to clean their act up. Not after *Saints Row 2*'s crude novelty-crammed sandbox swooped in from nowhere and stole away *GTA* fans disillusioned with the fourth game's po-faced posturing. Equally though, the wobble-physics 'dildo bat' was the most traditionally shocking thing I saw in an extensive demo. If you can swallow the huge purple pecker – figuratively, that is – then *Saints Row: The Third* is likely to be the guilty pleasure to rule them all.

Much like the previous game, fun takes priority over all else, but this time Volition look to have the technical ability to pull it off. Whereas *Saints Row 2* committed the cardinal sin of both looking like a PS2 game and still requiring a hefty spec, this instalment is far more densely detailed and the PC version is now being handled in-house to ensure the best possible performance. The previous city of Stilwater and all its crude geometry have been binned in favour of the genuinely beautiful, meticulously crafted Steelport. It's exactly the kind of bustling, living city that used to be the sole preserve of Rockstar.

READ ME
PUBLISHER THQ
DEVELOPER Volition
LINK www.saintsrow.com

"The wobble-physics 'dildo bat' was the most traditionally shocking thing I saw"

The reason you find yourself on new turf is fresh series antagonists the Syndicate, an organisation made up of several gangs, each of whom takes care of certain aspects of running Steelport. After a bank job goes wrong in Stilwater, the Saints, who have become media darlings since the events of the previous game, end up in the slammer. They're bailed out by the Syndicate, specifically Phillipe Loren of the Morning Star gang who invites them to a meeting on his private jet. Loren offers the Saints a place in the Syndicate in exchange for two-thirds of their profits. Deeming it a terrible deal, you shoot your way out, kicking off the mission that serves as your introduction to Steelport. That introduction is skydiving out of the plane, gunning down pursuing goons and attempting to catch up with returning character Shaundi as she tumbles towards the city's unyielding asphalt.

The challenge this poses is unique to that objective and Volition are aiming to ensure that three-quarters of all the missions have some distinct activity, rather than just offering up a typical sandbox shooting gallery. Of course on the occasions you do have to ventilate some goons, *Saints Row: The Third* will cater for you with an impressive selection of armaments. While there are more standard weapons such as shotguns, pistols and assault rifles, it's not long before the game's latent lunacy rears its head. Early into the story, you'll get your hands on astonishingly destructive

Steelseries.com





Your decisions will carry a lot of weight and help shape the city.


There's an endless supply of goons to shoot.


The only person in Steelport who actually dresses well.


Saint's Row: The Third is looking very pretty.


Our weapon of choice: a giant purple dildo. It's a hard hitter.


There are still plenty of customisation options.

military hardware such as a laser designator for calling in airstrikes and a steerable missile, a la *Call of Duty*. The most amusing addition to the armoury so far, though, is a gadget that allows you to assume remote control of vehicles. Upgrade it fully and you'll be able to hijack a helicopter from the ground and turn its firepower against your enemies.

Much like the previous game, you're facing off against colourful, comic-book gangs rather than realistic career criminals. The Morning Star are described as 21st century pimps, who have turned prostitution into a lucrative business and are led by Loren and Harvard-educated vixens, the De Winter sisters. The muscle is provided by the Luchadores, inspired by masked Mexican wrestlers and led by the flamboyant Killbane, who is little more than an ego on steroids. Finally there are the British Deckers whose skills lie in cybercrime. They are led by obnoxious internet-raised upstart Matt Miller, who is mouthy over the web and phone but wilts like an unwatered pansy in person.

Increase your grip on the city and you'll actually be able to shape its skyline. Every time you flush out a gang from its hideout, you'll have the opportunity to replace it with an enormous skyscraper, permanently altering how the city looks as you cruise around it. As in *Saints Row 2*, customisation is a huge part of the appeal and altering your character, playing dress up and modifying your vehicles all return as ways to entertain yourself when you don't fancy pushing the story along.

Tackle the campaign, though, and you'll find that the story ventures into an area that few sandbox games dare to tread. The added layer of complexity created by a branching plot, with decisions that the team promise will carry plenty of emotional gravitas demonstrates that among all the ridiculousness, Volition has a quiet but resolute ambition to make a sophisticated game. Be assured, for all the dildos and fart gags, from what we've seen, this is a clever game playing dumb rather than the other way around. ■

Mike Channell

Release 2011

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Steelkage.com

INCOMING

This is your gaming calendar for the coming year

TITLE	UK ETA
FEAR 3	May 27
Red Faction Armageddon	June 3
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	June 3
Duke Nukem Forever	June 10
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	June 17
Alice: Madness Returns	June 17
Dungeon Siege 3	June 17
Might & Magic Heroes VI	June 24
From Dust	Summer
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	Summer
Red Orchestra 2	Summer
Tropico 4	Summer
Planetside Next	Summer
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	August 26
The Darkness 2	Autumn
A Game of Thrones	Autumn
Star Wars: The Old Republic	Autumn
Warhammer 40K Space Marine	Autumn
Rage	September 13
Batman: Arkham City	October 21
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	November 11
Mass Effect 3	Winter
Battlefield 3	Winter
APB Reloaded	Winter
Guild Wars 2	2012
BioShock Infinite	2012
DotA 2	2012
Diablo III	2012
X-COM	2012

BRINK
BRINKTHEGAME.COM
Games for Windows XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3 splash damage Bethesda
© 2011 ZeniMax Media Inc. Brink, Bethesda Softworks, Bethesda, ZeniMax and related logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of ZeniMax Media Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. Developed in association with Splash Damage Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Windows, the Windows Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. "PS", "PlayStation", "PS3", "PS3" and "PS" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution — August 26

2027 looks like a fun time to have no arms. Ask gravel-throated security guard Adam Jensen, star of conspiracy-thick FPS RPG: he lost his and now has super shiny powerful limbs that he can use to punch through walls.

The idea of enhancing human potential is the key to the world of *Human Revolution:* it creates a tension in society, a schism between people who support the results, and those who oppose it. Adam Jensen *has* been augmented, enabling the player to pick and choose enhancements, crafting a personal warrior moving through a complex open world. What's your choice? Stealth, brute force, hacker? A mad combination of all three?

It's the *Deus Ex* way to give you, the empty vessel, plenty of routes, as well as a modern conspiracy to untangle, and everything we've seen about this one suggests they've captured the spirt of the original.

It's all up to you. Pick an aug, pick a side, pick a route.

Publisher Square-Enix
Developer Eidos Montreal



Batman: Arkham City — October 21

The inmates are running the ghetto in this third-person Batman brawler.

An entire corner of Gotham has been given over to the inmates of Arkham Asylum: that's like batnip to the Caped Crusader, who's soon dragged into the churning, violent hellhole to rescue Cat Woman.

You know by now just how kinky their relationship gets. Add Two-Face, the Joker and Mr Freeze and you have the potential for a great open-world action game.

Publisher Square Enix
Developer Rocksteady



BioShock Infinite — 2012

A city floating in the sky, torn apart by a population terrified of foreign invasion.

This is another deeply cynical, dark exploration of the horrors people are capable of inflicting each other, but with really cool powers and shotguns.

The setting is astonishing: the city is a series of buildings on balloons, loosely tied to gether but each moving independently in the air: ideologies kept apart by nothing more than whisps of cloud and long, long drops to the ground.

Publisher 2K Games
Developer Irrational Games



Battlefield 3 — Winter

It's taken Dice nearly five years to fully return to the battlefield they left.

Their sequel to the blockbuster, *Battlefield 2*, needs to wow everyone: the game will have 64-person multiplayer, jets screaming overhead, fully destructible multi-storey buildings and a singleplayer campaign.

It's also gorgeous. It's not a surprise that the Middle-Eastern city we've seen looks good, but it is that Dice have built the tech to rip it to pieces.

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Dice





StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

RELEASE WINTER 2011

CAUSE AND EFFECT

MASS EFFECT 3 will make us pay for our choices - but in a surprisingly clever way. ***By Tom Francis***

StoreKage.com

StoreMags.com

A Cerberus elite trudges toward Shepard, semi-automatic rifle fire pinging off its full body shield. The corridor is dripping with water. Outside, fresh foliage frames a view of Sur'Kesh: curved buildings built into jungled clifftops, thundering waterfalls throwing up a storm of mist that soaks everything. More Cerberus troops flood in. Liara and Garrus take cover.

This is it: *Mass Effect 3*. The Reapers you've tried to stop in every chapter of the spectacular sci-fi RPG have arrived, and you've fled Earth to seek help in fighting them.

Even from the first game, BioWare knew they were building towards this conclusion. They aim to wrap up every major plot thread, resolve every significant conflict, feature every major character in the series, and reflect every significant decision you've made as Spectre and Alliance Commander Shepard.

So this fight is not on some backwater planet: it's on the Salarian homeworld, and you're there to resolve the decades-old conflict between the Salarians and the race they genetically crippled: the Krogan. But first you've got to deal with Cerberus – why, we'll get to in a moment.

Fight smarter

Shepard throws out an engineering drone – it floats past the elite, then blasts him violently from behind. He's sent sprawling forwards, dropping his shield, and Shepard shoots him three times in the head with a semi-automatic rifle. Another elite, only staggered by the blast, regains his composure and presses on.



New character, or Shepard variant?



Feet-guns are hard to aim.



"Ooh, my stomach hurts."



"3, 2, 1, EVERYBODY SHOOT!"

Shields are one of many devices *Mass Effect 3* uses to add a tactical dimension to combat. *Mass Effect* was never about the fighting originally, but the saga has become so vast that repetitive fights were starting to grate. *Mass Effect 2* had a team dedicated to improving the feel of the gunplay and biotic powers, and the third game doesn't aim to mess with the tactile shooting they achieved. Instead it focuses on making combat situations more interesting, so your abilities have inventive applications.

Put a shield in front of an enemy, and suddenly the ability of the Engineer class to place a combat drone behind someone and blow it up gains a new significance. Namely, knocking a guy on his face and shooting him in the head. Biotics can use their Pull ability to rip a shield out of someone's hands.

The game's combat spaces have graduated from the over-familiar open areas dotted with low walls. They're now multi-layered, encouraging you to seek high ground for a better vantage point, and some enemies can use rocket-boots to shoot up to the higher levels without taking the stairs.

Shepard commando-rolls out of the elite's way – a new move, by the way – and sneaks behind a partition running alongside the main corridor. Liara springs out of cover and pins the elite with a biotic singularity, while Garrus snipes him from cover. Neither kills the elite, but now Shepard is behind him. Rather than fire, he lashes out with his omni-tool, which emits a blade of flame that cuts through the elite's exposed back. He drops.



Combat tested

Melee moves are unique to your class, and tailored to suit it: this Shepard is an Engineer who doesn't specialise in direct fire, so that high damage fire-slash lets him end a fight quickly when someone gets too close. A purely biotic Adept, on the other hand, has a melee attack that knocks everyone near them away, stunning them long enough to ready a more powerful attack.

The next few enemies aren't shielded, so Shepard puts a shotgun to them. It's explosively vicious, killing both Cerberus troops in one shot each. Even the third, poking half out of cover, catches enough buckshot from one blast to go down.

BioWare's cryptic mantra for combat in *ME3* is 'Veteran is normal' – a reference to the challenge being raised by one whole difficulty level. The flipside of that is that your own attacks can be truly brutal without unbalancing the game.

In fact, you start *Mass Effect 3* with the same devastatingly powerful Shepard you finished *Mass Effect 2* with. Every weapon from the last game returns, and your character has all his abilities. From there, they evolve. Instead of just pumping points into each power you have – and gaining new ones, of course – you customise how you want them to develop through a series of branching upgrades.

We had a small taste of this at the very high levels of *Mass Effect 2*: top-level powers had two versions, usually offering a choice between higher damage or larger area of effect.

"BioWare's cryptic mantra for combat is 'Veteran is normal'"

In *Mass Effect 3* this is just the start. A Vanguard player can customise their devastating Charge move first to slam people harder, then to do more damage, then to reduce the cooldown, letting them use their other abilities almost immediately afterwards.

Powers also combine: the Soldier still has an arcing attack called Concussive Shot, but it now behaves differently depending on the ammo upgrade he's using. Cryo ammo lets you use that same trajectory to deliver a blast of ice that can freeze every enemy in the area. To deal with the last few elites, Shepard

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


Potential romance options?

freezes them solid to hold them still, then lines up sniper shots exactly through the eye-slits in their shields. This time, the only restriction on the weapons a given class can use is how many they can carry. If you want to be a pure biotic character who carries a sniper rifle, you'll be every bit as powerful with it as a dedicated Infiltrator or Soldier. It's just that you won't have as many backup weapons as a Soldier once enemies get close.

Bad dog

If you're wondering why we were fighting Cerberus, having worked closely with this shadowy organisation in *Mass Effect 2*, the answer just raises further questions. They're working with the Reapers. Since they saved your life and gave you a ship in the previous game, Cerberus have gone from behind-the-scenes players to a massive military force, with their own heavily armoured troops, specialist assassins and huge mechs.

Given their zealously pro-human agenda, they've probably fallen for the same trick Saren did in the first game: the total hopelessness of fighting the Reapers, combined with some subtle mind-control, sways people to believe they can save their species by welcoming our new robotic overlords.

What I didn't get to see in this combat demonstration was the Reapers themselves. Previously we knew them only as vast ships dangling in space. But in *Mass Effect 3* we meet their ground troops, and realise we already knew some of them. Husks, those mindless robo-zombies we fought in both the previous games, are the Reaper's early experiments in mashing up human tissue and high technology to make something that does whatever they tell it to, violently.

In *Mass Effect 3* we'll fight the Reapers other experiments, with other species. One is a hideously bloated pregnant Asari, her gums stripped away and a robot skeleton showing through her rotting flesh.

The mutations aren't purely visual: some leverage the game's new focus on locational damage to change the way you treat them in fights. The Reaper's take on the Rachni, who were already vicious insect monsters, are covered with bulging sacs of lesser creatures. Rather than hitting their weak spot for massive damage, you want to avoid it like the plague: bursting any of these sacs before the creature is dead will unleash a swarm of horrible mini-Rachni that crawl all over your body.

The Reaperised Krogan wears heavy armour plates that you can shear off with enough focused fire. Once you do, the creature changes its behaviour to ▸

FACE THE CONSEQUENCES

How your decisions affect the universe



The Rachni
(Exterminate or Release)
If you spared the crazy insects in *Mass Effect 1*, in *ME2* their queen says they'll help when "the darkness" comes.



Cerberus and the Collector base
(Destroy or Preserve)
If you gave them the Collector base at the end of *Mass Effect 2*, you've helped an enemy. Cerberus want you dead in *ME3*.



Mordin and the Genophage cure
(Erase or Save)
The disease crippling Krogan fertility could be stopped with data you found in Mordin's loyalty mission in *Mass Effect 2*.



Wrex and the Krogans
(Kill or Persuade)
If you spared Wrex on Virmire in *Mass Effect 1*, he works to unite his people in *Mass Effect 2*. He'll be a useful friend.



Legion and the Geth
(Destroy or Convert)
If you reprogrammed the rogue Geth in *Mass Effect 2*, they rejoin the collective and make the Geth stronger.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


Cerberus are back, and now they're bad.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

be more defensive, clutching its lurid blue intestines to its stomach as it lumbers towards you. Others have large calibre weapons fused to their limbs, and you can force them to come at you in melee combat by disabling those first.

One Reaper creature draws life force from anything that dies near it. The time-honoured strategy of taking out the easy enemies first ends up being counter-productive: you make the creature stronger than it would have been with its allies alive.

Now or never

The Reaper threat is everywhere, and relentless. Wrapping up the running plot threads of the series doesn't have to be arduously shoe-horned in: you *need* the Krogans to stop fighting the Salarians over the genophage that crippled their race, because you've all got bigger problems to deal with. You can't let the Quarians destroy themselves trying to take back their home world from the Geth, because you need at least one of the two factions to help you against the Reapers.

Everyone has their own problems, and it's time for you to storm in and fix them all – or at least screw them up in some lastingly useful way. So your mission takes you to the Salarian homeworld, the Quarian homeworld, the Asari homeworld, and the human homeworld – Earth. You'll even go to Mars, where mankind first discovered the Prothean technology that let them join the rest of the spacefaring races in the first place.

"If you weren't faithful, that's going to come to a head at the worst possible time"



Structurally, though, it doesn't follow *Mass Effect 2*'s collect-'em-all design. You're not just touring the galaxy picking up friends. The truth is, you don't know how to fight the Reapers. Earth is lost, and the Reapers are far too strong to fight directly. Even once you formulate a plan, your understanding of the Reapers changes and you have to restrategise.

The development of that plotline is what leads you through all the conflicts of the other races. It's still non-linear, but it's closer to *Mass Effect 1*'s long journey than the scattershot subquests of *Mass Effect 2*.

Every major character you know from the series will play a role in this plot if they're alive. Not all of them are permanent members of your team, but of those who aren't, many will join you temporarily during a certain quest. Garrus, Liara, Kaidan, Ashley and (newly confirmed) Tali are all full-time members of your team if they survived the previous games.

I asked point blank about Wrex, and got as close to a "no" as I think BioWare will come at this early stage: executive producer Casey Hudson simply re-emphasised that such characters can play a role and fight alongside you without necessarily being permanent squad members.

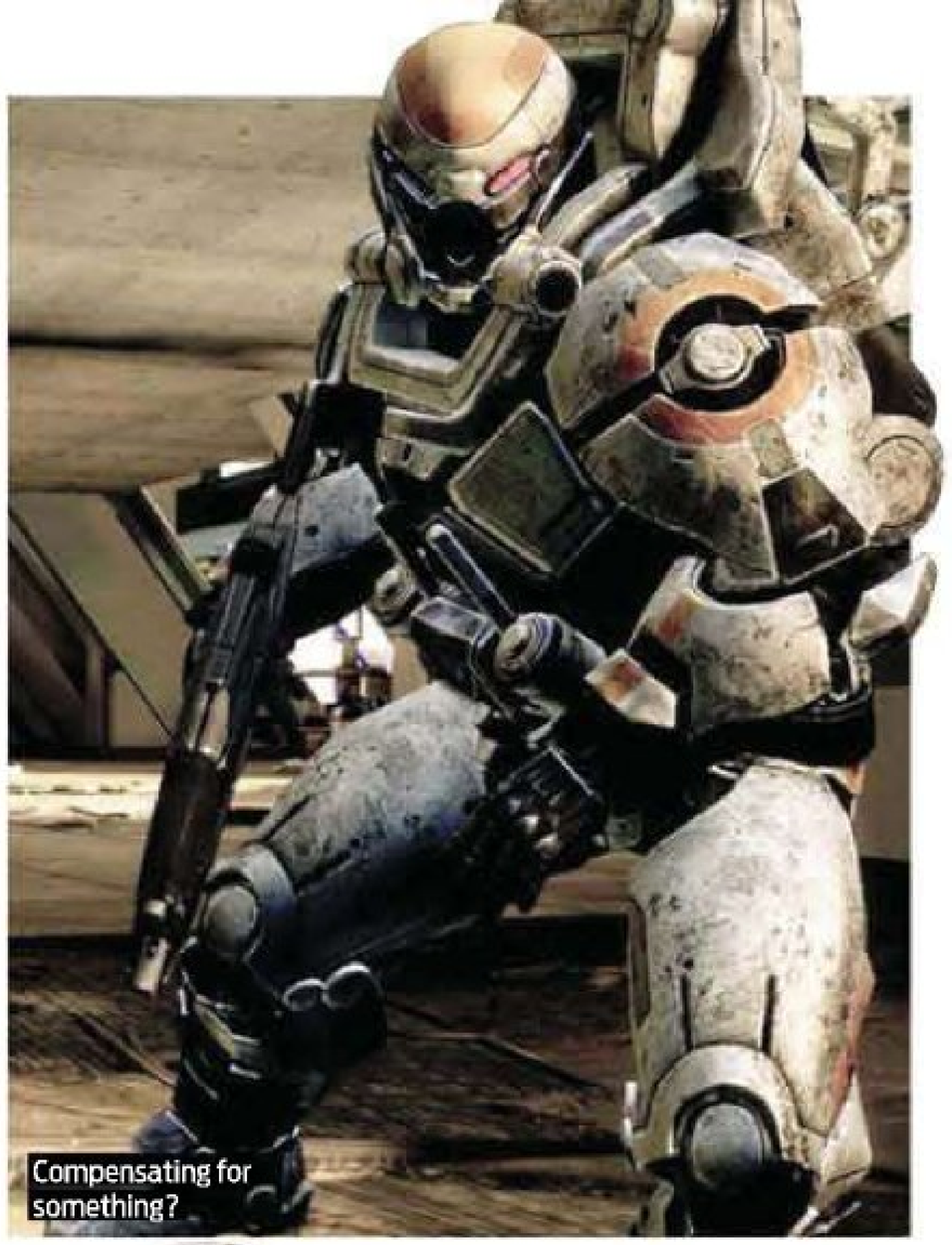
We were on a break

Your romance options get interesting: there will be no new love interests in *Mass Effect 3*, so who you can sleep with depends on your relationships with the existing characters. If you coupled up in *Mass Effect 1* and your partner is still alive, they're guaranteed to be a member of your crew. If you weren't faithful to them in *Mass Effect 2* – and 70% of players weren't – that's going to come to a head at the worst possible time: the end of the world.

Mass Effect 3 will have an equivalent of loyalty missions – the personal quests you could take on for your crew in *Mass Effect 2*, in order to gain their trust. But their significance won't be quite the same: you're not determining whether a crew member is loyal enough to you to do their job when the time comes. Instead, these quests and your decisions within them count towards the war effort.

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag







The 'war effort' is a key term BioWare use to characterise the impact in *Mass Effect 3* of your various decisions throughout the series. There are hundreds of these to track, and this is the game where they all pay off – or otherwise. But they don't want a bad call in *Mass Effect 1* to render the third game uncompletable. So the wisdom or foolishness of the choices you've made determine not the difficulty of the game, but the range of endings available to you for the finale of the series. In other words, how winnable the war is.

Casey sums up *Mass Effect* as being about victory through sacrifice, and the scale of that sacrifice has been increasing with each new chapter. But to me, the most interesting thing about *Mass Effect 3* is that what victory costs us will be unique to each player. If I was wrong to kill the Rachni back in *Mass Effect 1*, I might lose more friends than I need to in this final fight against the Reapers. But if I was right to keep Wrex alive and help him unite his people, the Krogan may be a powerful enough ally to save lives from the Reapers.

Letting you win, but showing you the price of your decisions throughout three long games, may end up being one of the most powerful reflections of player choice we've ever seen. ■

THE JOURNEY SO FAR Shepard's story, from *Mass Effect 1* to *ME 3*



©istockphoto.com

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com



MMOs are just one of the types of game that run better

GET CONNECTED
call
0800 052 0811
or visit
www.virginmedia.com/gaming

Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger.

Uninterrupted online game play with Virgin 50Mb Broadband

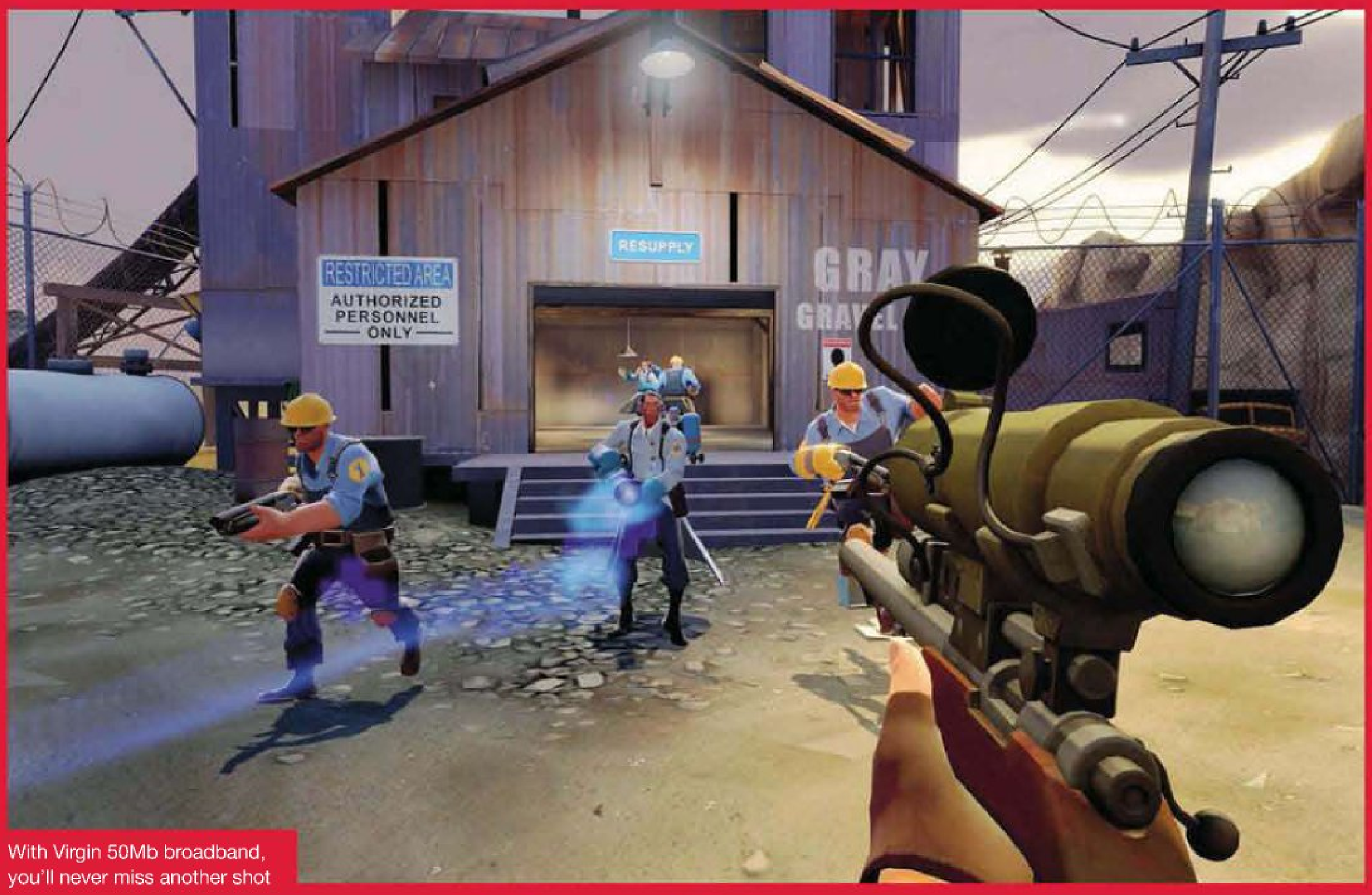
It's a familiar tale; you're trying to hook up with your friends online and it takes hours. Connections drop, someone's crappy router lags everyone else, another person has a bizarrely high ping because they're sharing the connection with their family, and no-one can get through to the support line to complain about anything. Even playing solo online is no better, because your jerky connection leaves you dead half-the-time. And let's not even talk about how long it takes to get something downloaded...

So what would it be like to have the UK's best gaming broadband? A magical connection that solved all those problems of lag, unfair deaths and connections slowed by family members using the same line? That's easy enough to answer - consider what it's like to run the Virgin 50Mb Broadband package. With fast enough download and upload speeds to maintain a faultless connection, even when shared, and 24 hour support, this ultrafast broadband connection is a pure luxury.

What's it like playing on a 50Mb connection? It's like having faster reaction times. No more dying before you've seen the opponent, as now the game reacts as fast as you do, giving you that much needed edge in shooters and keeping your guildmates happy with your performance in MMOs. Instead of having to sit there and listen to your friends tell you how great a new game, update or demo is, you get it first and can bore them to tears instead.

On top of that, whether your sister is streaming music, your flatmate is downloading movies or your mum has been on Skype to great-aunt Agatha in Australia for three hours, there's enough bandwidth to minimise any effects on your gaming. With some of the highest upload speeds in the country, Virgin Broadband 50Mb means you can dodge potential bottlenecks too, ensuring when you shoot someone in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, they stay shot. Until they respawn, that is.

It won't eat a hole in your pocket either - new customers can get it with free installation and it costs just £15 a month for the first three months (and only £25 a month after that). It comes with a new top-end wireless router (the Netgear-built



With Virgin 50Mb broadband, you'll never miss another shot



Space battles with hundreds of players at once? Can do.



It might even give you the edge in Call of Duty: Black Ops

Virgin Media Super Hub, which is secure, fully-featured and future-proofed up to 400Mb/s), free PC security, 100 free photo prints a month, unlimited online storage, email, automatic backup, unlimited downloads and... phew. Sorry, our hands are just tired from typing all that. Pop to virginmedia.com/gaming for the full list of details and benefits, and great value packages if you want a Virgin Mobile or landline too.

We don't expect you to only take our word that Virgin are the best, and you don't have to. Government communications regulator Ofcom recently put out a report (you can look at it on their website here: http://tinyurl.com/4attlov) which shows that Virgin is the only ISP that provides speeds anywhere near what's advertised; according to the report, we're "on average delivering between 90% and 96% of advertised speeds" for downloads, on- and off-peak. That's between 43.9 and 47.2Mb/s. We think we do even better than that, but meanwhile the average broadband speed for everyone else is less than 45% of what's advertised. For example, Ofcom say that BT's 'Up to' 20Mb/s broadband operates, on average, at "6.9 to 8.7Mb/s"!

That makes Virgin 50MB Broadband fastest and most trustworthy. This is luxury broadband at an economy price. It's worth noting that actual speeds depend on time of day and distance from the exchange; but we're only offering this deal in areas where we're sure we can fulfil our promises. To find out if you're eligible and get more information on the huge package, head to virginmedia.com/gaming. If you can get online, that is. Otherwise, call 0800 052 0811.

Package Details

48.7Mb is what our customers typically get with 50Mb

Unlimited downloads

Free PC security

Free super-fast wireless router

Unlimited weekend calls to UK landlines and Virgin Mobiles if you take a Virgin phone line

Top10.com Fastest Home BroadbandAward 2009 & 2010. Best Super-Fast Broadband in the Simplify Digital 2011 Customer Choice Awards

Also available without a phone line

Offer: £15 a month for 3 months then £25 a month (Plus a Virgin Phone line for £12.99/month). 18 month contract

See terms & conditions on virginmedia.com/gaming for more information.

Cabled areas only.

Virgin media

Unlimited downloads: Acceptable Use Policy applies. Traffic Management operates from 4pm to 3pm and 10am to 3pm. Weekend calls: redial before 60 mins to avoid charges. Landlines are n

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

MAD, MAD, MAD, WORLD

The PC's most creative racing game leaps off the beaten track with *TrackMania 2* and *Shootmania*. **By Duncan Harris**

RELEASE 2011

Bedroom coders' lairs aside, Nadeo must be the smallest studio you could ever hope to visit. It's so small that the guidance on how to get there counts the precise number of steps to descend before you reach the front door (it's four). You park your coat in the mezzanine, nod to the receptionist on your way into the main office, then realise that the mezzanine *is* the main office, that the 'receptionist' is actually studio founder Florent Castelnérac and that you were dangerously close to walking into a cupboard.

Unless you're Douglas Adams, this isn't what you expect the centre of a universe to look like.

Nadeo might be small, but *TrackMania*, the virtual Scalextric game they've been building since 2003, is made in a studio of almost cosmic proportions. They have millions of offices scattered around the globe, linked to the same servers, running the same code.

The players build its content: hundreds of cars and over 150,000 tracks. They do its PR: screenshots, trailers, fan sites and movies. They manage and spend its currency, building banks, casinos, tournaments and shops. They decide what modes to add and what avenues to explore. They are the players and makers of a game that knows no distinction.

Being enormously French, Castelnérac has 100 different ways of putting this. *TrackMania* is "like a piano", he declares, "which we deliver to the community so they can create blues, rock and roll and classical music. They share and they listen." It's also "a creation tool like Photoshop or Visual Studio." As well as being "the YouTube of games", "the temple of creation", and "an invitation to an adventure".

If you think he's describing anything and everything, you're starting to get the idea. Because we're not just talking about *TrackMania* anymore; that was the last adventure, says Castelnérac, for the last decade. We're not even talking about *TrackMania 2: Canyon*, the remarkably straightforward sequel that strips everything back to basics, reverting to a single race gametype and the rocky terrain set of the very first instalment. What we're talking about is something incredible: ManiaPlanet, incorporating *TM2*, *ShootMania* (a first-person shooter) and *QuestMania* (a roleplaying game).

The power of three

It's not the enormity, but the simplicity of the thing that makes your head spin. Arriving in a neat sequence – *TM2* is basically finished, *ShootMania* is currently under heavy development and *QuestMania* is still at the blue sky stage – all of these incorporate the same block-based editing suite as the previous *TrackMania* games. As well as having fun playing, you'll build your own shooters or RPGS – including the levels, guns and enemies. Furthermore, "under each title you have the same game operating system, which is running them all together", notes Castelnérac. "All the files, tools, formats and things for the community are shared."

So, when you log on to ManiaPlanet, the first thing to appear is a carousel of games, each of which loads instantly because the bulk of the loading is already done. And for the first few months of release (some time in the second half of this year), the one you're guaranteed is *TM2: Canyon*, the toy racer of the Noughties that has most definitely grown up.

"I thought we'd have the [handling] model within a day, just like the first *TrackMania*," smiles Castelnérac, "but it was a fight. It took a year for *TrackMania 2*. The space for that feeling is really wide: you've got the crazy area and the realistic area, and we have to be somewhere in the middle. But even just a month ago I was still tweaking the parameters."

What he and his 15-man studio have achieved in that time is all kinds of wonderful. That handling now sits perfectly between the heavyweight world of a triple-A racer and the flyweights of old, binding intimidating power and momentum to that four-key control scheme. There's damage – "simply because it's important that players can make *and* smash the cars" – and a sense that it's deserved. And there's a playful violence to the way that the cars interpret those inputs, a switch from accelerate (up arrow) to brake (down arrow) making

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

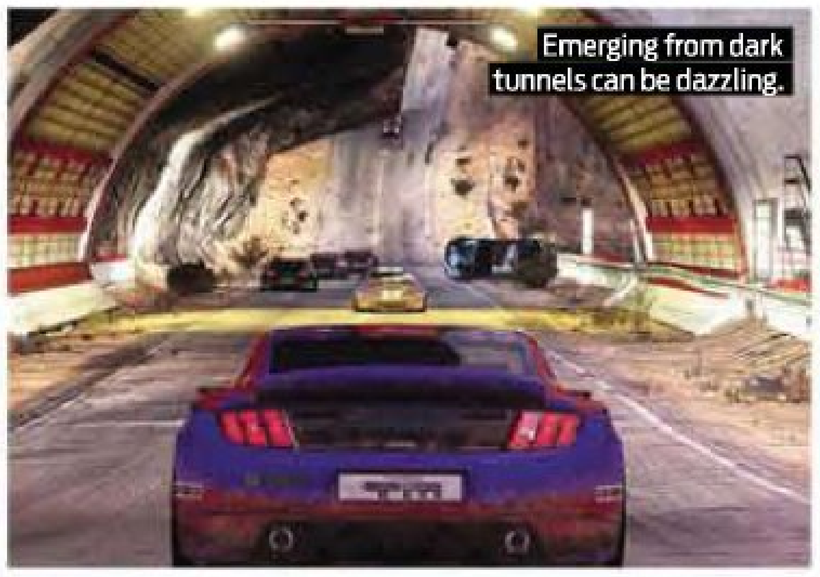
StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Simple racing on the PC, free from AI and complications.


Smashing cars up is a key part of the latest *TrackMania* game.


Emerging from dark tunnels can be dazzling.



Some maps look like a canyon vandalised.


Want a drive through a borehole? Do it in *TrackMania 2: Canyon*.

them lurch onto front axle and angrily reverse. They're still toys, impervious to all but cosmetic harm, but now they're the kind sold in hobby stores next to the gas-powered Kalashnikovs.

Then there's the lighting, which, thanks to radiosity, simply gets everything right. The maps, some made by the *TM* community's elite, actually look like vast vandalised canyons where routes have been carved and bored into mountains. Sun and shadow play on them accordingly, threatening whiteout as you exit dark tunnels. The reflections on the hurtling carbon fibre are the stuff that great screenshots are made of – and you'll be making them, with a replay editor that smooths, processes and beautifies on demand.

And that, believe it or not, is about it. Castelnérac explains: "We want to make it pure, and sometimes we have to show new features because there's nothing else. So be warned: there are no new features in this *TrackMania*, except damage. We don't care about new modes: the player can create those. As a gamer, I want to buy a racing game, a fun challenge that's as pure and good as possible. It'll be the same with *ShootMania*. In *TrackMania* there's one car, no tuning, no AI, no collision; *ShootMania* won't have experience points, 40 levels and 12 classes, etc."

Sensitive shooting

Those industrious TrackManiacs might later make him a liar, but he's right for now: in vanilla form, his FPS construction kit is almost impossibly basic, but in a good way. There's no gun model, and the bullets are just little puffs of energy flung from the camera. The character models are still being worked on, but don't expect a regular infantry.

"I want to buy a racing game, a fun challenge that's pure and good"

"We want this spectator-friendly, e-sport-friendly and competition-friendly," says Castelnérac. "Because today, *Counter-Strike* is ten years old. I won't say they have problems, but there are obvious elements to consider in games now – showing terrorism and counter-terrorism, shooting people and so forth. For sponsors and TV broadcasts, these things are damaging the good spirit of sport. So we're trying to bring out a game that's compatible with this environment."

THE MAKING OF TRACKMANIA A long and winding road

NOVEMBER 2003
TrackMania launches in the UK and France, featuring Speed, Alpine and Rally environments.

MARCH 2004
The Power-Up expansion adds Survival mode, tunnels, a better interface and mountainside building blocks.

APRIL 2005
TrackMania Sunrise features improved graphics, peer-to-peer file sharing, three new environments and two new modes.

OCTOBER 2005
TrackMania Original revisits the first game, with *Sunrise* engine visuals, 3D car imports allowed and twice as many building blocks.

NOVEMBER 2005
TrackMania Sunrise eXtreme is a free expansion that adds Stunt mode and stunt-themed building blocks.

JANUARY 2006
TrackMania Nations ESWC is built for the Electronic Sports World Cup. Free, it has a track editor for new environment, the Stadium.

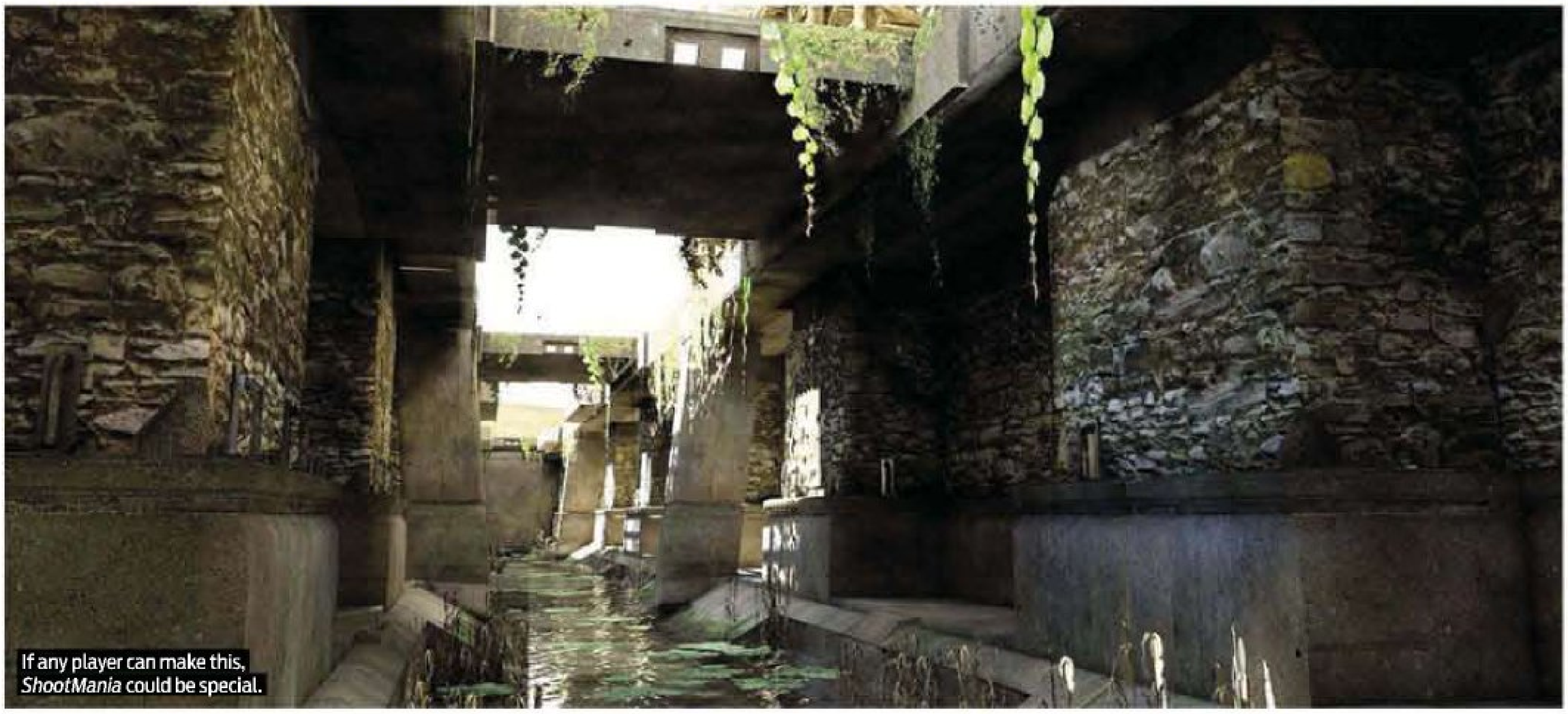
NOVEMBER 2006
TrackMania United combines all existing environments, embraces web 2.0 and works with ManiaLinks.

APRIL 2008
TrackMania Nations Forever doubles the building blocks and more. *TrackMania United Forever*, a free *United* expansion, is the current version.

Steel-Soft.com


Build your own FPS in the same editor *TrackMania* uses for tracks.


These concept mock-ups don't represent the final quality.


If any player can make this, *ShootMania* could be special.

Watching him cycle through the maps he's been toying with, you realise very quickly how much baggage the FPS has carried over the years, and what wonders can be achieved by just shrugging it all off. There's no hardware in *ShootMania*, no stupid pretexts to killing, no fan service and no gadgets. What you get instead are the building blocks (smaller than *TrackMania*'s, to suit the genre and its environments) of the FPS itself: the stuff of maps and modes.

First out of the forge, introduced with a chuckle, is The Butcher Place – a CTF map in which the teams' bases are just eight metres apart, meaning utter carnage when someone returns with the flag. Trapped Up is a kind of tower defence map in which the defenders respawn more slowly with time, ensuring an eventual win for their enemy. Another map guarantees "a massacre" as players rush along a precarious ledge towards respawn checkpoints, while under constant pulverising fire from central gun emplacements. Castelnérac builds another basic map (including flags, terrain, routes, spawn points and so on) in just a couple of minutes.

"The question is: can I express myself and make something fun?" he says, as he flicks instantly between content browser, editor and realtime play. If these maps turn out to be utter pap, or as enduring as a job at Activision, then it doesn't matter; all they have to be is fun, witty, charming, comically bad, inventive, disastrously overambitious, gleefully offensive... Whatever you'd expect of a five minute trip to YouTube. Nadeo have built more than 100 maps so far. Would anyone like to bet against there being over 100,000 before the decade's done? No, didn't think so.

Room for expansion

This really is just the tip of the iceberg. Nadeo's vision for e-sports requires there to be maps made of competition quality, and the phenomenal success of *TrackMania* in that regard suggests nothing less will do. But get this: because every ManiaPlanet title is as modular as the other, there's little to stop the most ingenious of players from building, say, AI behaviours, singleplayer components, scenery prefabs, weapon types, characters, scripts, rule sets or even interactive tutorials, and selling them all (virtually, of course) on the ManiaPlanet marketplace.

Moreover, thanks to Castelnérac's newfound obsession with the history of id Software, the whole ManiaPlanet suite now has a pack editor. So, if someone makes an FPS about woodwind instruments owning the brass section, in maps that imagine MC Escher's take on the movies of Steven Seagal, everything that entails can be safely bundled (thank God) into a single download. One click downloads and installs it as a separate title on the *ShootMania* front-end, and ensures that none of its changes affect the rest of your experience. Its leaderboards and game browser will be unique on the ManiaPlanet servers.

This isn't modding, and it's too organic to be fairly branded as user-generated content. Like *TrackMania* before it, *ShootMania* promises to be nothing short of primordial FPS soup. When you consider that what started as a game about time trials in silly cars has spawned action movies, singleplayer RPGs, casino games, TV adverts and a world of supporting websites and services, none of them created by Nadeo, the potential speaks for itself.

And *QuestMania*? Top secret for now. We know it's partly inspired by John Carmack's ideas, an adventure based on a dedicated server and connected community. It's about "events, progress and consequences", teases Castelnérac. It's not *Oblivion*, because that's "a story well told by a single author", far too simple a concept to compare. So it's more like *Dungeons & Dragons*, then: pen, paper and imagination... And maybe some Lego and techno. ■

filefactory.com

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE PC GAMES MAGAZINE

PC GAMER

Special edition covers





MORE GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE...

- You're guaranteed to get your copy!
- You'll get it before copies appear in shops.
- It's delivered direct to your door!
- And of course, you get our awesome discs too.

Subscribe to PC GAMER and get a Speedlink wireless controller!

- Strike FX wireless PC gamepad
- 2.4GHz wireless technology
- Force vibration
- Two analogue mini-sticks and buttons
- Integrated Li-ion battery
- It's not WASD, but it'll do!



SPEEDLINK

www.speedlink.com

PLUS

SAVE 28%

PAY ONLY £27.99 BY 6-MONTHLY DIRECT DEBIT

TWO SIMPLE WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE...

ONLINE

www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/pcgp1d

BY PHONE

0844 848 2852 (quote ref: PCGP1D)

Lines are open 8:00am-9:30pm weekdays
8.00am-4pm Saturdays

Offer for UK Direct Debit subscribers only. You will receive 13 issues per year. Your subscription will start with the next available issue. Minimum subscription term is 12 months. The gift is subject to availability. In the unlikely event of stocks becoming exhausted, we reserve the right to substitute items of a similar value. Please allow up to 60 days for delivery of your gift. If at any time during the first 60 days you are dissatisfied in any way please notify us in writing and we will refund you for all un-mailed issues. Offer ends: June 22nd, 2011. For overseas subscriptions please visit www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee will be provided and are available upon request.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

filerkage.com

THE FUTURE OF INDIE

Meet the PC's most exciting new ideas, built by the PC's most passionate developers. ***By Craig Pearson***

Just look at *Hawken*. If ever there was a game that undermined the notion of what an independently developed project can achieve, it's Adhesive Games' mech shooter. Every bone in my body tells me a small studio should not be able to pull off such a gorgeous, robot-stomping shooter, but there it is, megabots hanging in the air, spitting rockets at each other across maps that look like they've come out of Epic or Valve.

But I'm getting used to indie games surprising me: freedom to create without interference from the men in suits is the reason their developers go into this murky, unfunded realm, trading security for the chance to follow their own path. Every developer in this list has taken the opportunity to make exactly what they want to make, using that freedom to create some startlingly original games that simply wouldn't be made if they had a deadline to hit and had to justify every decision.

These games only exist because someone passionately wanted to bring them into the world, and it really, really shows. ■

Steelcage.com



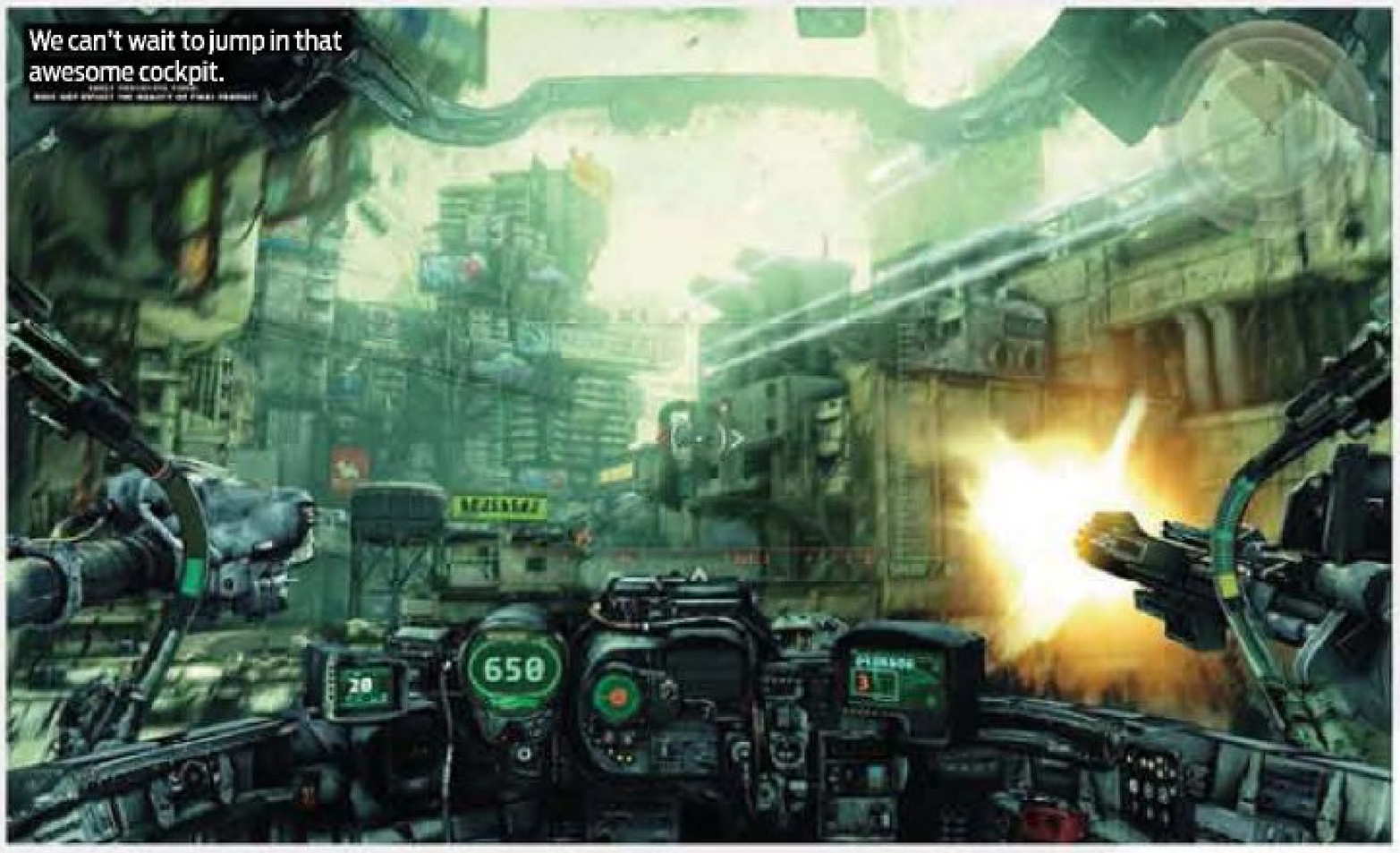
HAWKEN

www.hawkengame.com

You've seen the likes of *FPS Terminator*, so you probably know already that when garage developers think big, they no longer have to make small. Those triple-A values that cost millions to imagine, millions more to make and whatever's left to advertise do not, it turns out, cost anything like as much as you may think. All it takes, says nine-man LA outfit Adhesive Games, is a computer and the freedom to use it.

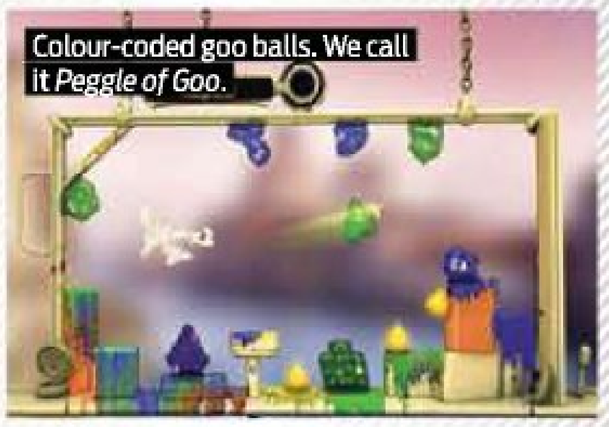
Made using Epic's Unreal Development Kit, the self-funded *Hawken* is one of those games where the concept art looks incredible until you click on it and realise it's an in-game trailer. It's that good, depicting massive robots at war in a world of supermassive structures, leaping whole city-blocks in single bounds. Moreover, as a game devoted to multiplayer rumble, it thinks it's found an escape route from the genre's lifelong niche, running straight down the middle between East (*Armored Core*, *Virtual On*) and West (the legendary *MechWarrior*).

The problem with the former is that all that uninhibited side-dashing and leaping can make the mechs look like ill-advised cosplay outfits wrapped around *Call of Duty* characters. There's no weight, no sense that breakdancing in a machine the size of Selfridges might, for one thing, use an awful lot of petrol. Then there's the *MechWarrior/Chromehounds* extreme, which Adhesive creative director Zhang Le describes as "circling each other until someone dies". It just ain't happening in *Hawken*.



Believe it or not, Adhesive see this more as something *Halo*-esque: fast, but not so much that you never see your enemy till you're dead; hefty, but not to the point when it's stuck halfway between a tank simulator and a card game, relying on choices more than reflexes. It's about every player getting at least 15 seconds of battle in every exchange, the winners being those who don't just know when to zig and zag their mechs, but know to keep enough fuel in the tank. You can boost your way across its giant cities to get straight to the action, sure, just in time to flop into your coffin.

Who, though, will get *Hawken* first? We're told that "all the major publishers" have tried to snap it up, yet Adhesive don't even know if it needs a publisher. And it's a multiplatform download title aimed at PC, PS3 and Xbox 360 – but no one knows where it's headed first, developers included. Our suggestion: drop the actual machines on each other and let the stompiest robot win. We'll bring the Cooler Master.



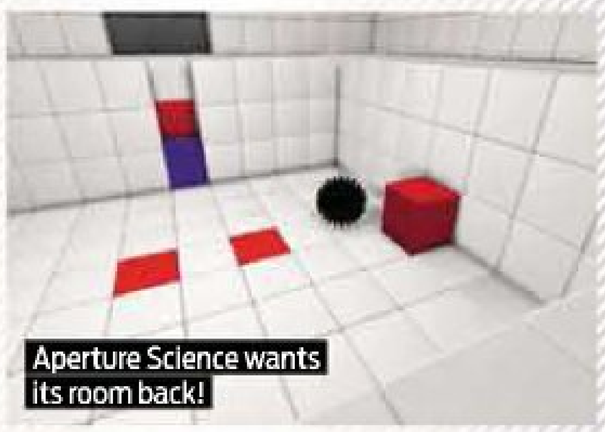
CONFETTI CARNIVAL

www.spikysnail.com

Every now and again, a physics puzzle game comes out that's charming and full of personality. So where *Peggle* and *World of Goo* bounced, *Confetti Carnival* follows.

You control blobs of smiling, happy-looking goo, flicking them across the levels to detonate colour-coded bombs. But it's more subtle than just hitting them: it's the goo ball's internal fluid that sets the explosions off, and you need them to dribble this noxious brew onto the bombs to set them off. A direct hit rather unhelpfully scatters the bombs far and wide about the level, so your aim is to burst the goo above the target to keep them in place. This is the sort of twisted condition that gives you nightmares.

Thankfully, with each completed level you'll get new abilities. As you progress through this little blinder, you'll be able to subtly guide your character through the air, burst into multiple patches of liquid to get a wider coverage, and reverse time. It's like liquid ninjitsu.



QUBE

www.qubegame.co.uk

Most first-person puzzle games can be described as '*Portal*-esque', but *QUBE* really, *really* reminds us of *Portal*. In *QUBE*, (the letters stand for Quick Understanding of Block Extrusion, would you believe) the levels are self-contained rooms consisting of moveable walls that make architectural puzzles the player must traverse.

You use the gloves like a conductor: waving hands over the colour-coded blocks, using their various effects to manipulate the environment. So, the red blocks that cunningly look like someone's sliced stairs off the wall can be dragged out to make those stairs. It gets increasingly complicated, with the player dragging out blocks that fling you across the level, bounce balls around, even manipulating the whole floor, and tilting it to move a ball around the maze-like floorspace.

It's a *smart* game for an indie dev to make: the art style looks expensive and all they need to do is come up with plenty of challenging puzzles within the framework they've created. It's looking good.



SPY PARTY

www.spyparty.com

Most multiplayer games are about shooting the other person as soon as they appear, but in *Spy Party* you have to find the human in a sea of NPCs. It's about understanding human behaviour, not guns.

There are two roles: the Sniper and the Spy. The Sniper watches as the Spy schmoozes his way around a party, attempting to conceal his activities in the group of revellers. It's classic spy stuff, like retrieving a microfilm, swapping a statue or seducing a target, all performed as the laser beam from the sniper's rifle is sweeping over the room, looking for the telltale animation.

As the Spy, the difficulty is in timing the moments of covert action to occur when the Sniper is distracted, and acting like an NPC at the other moments, trying to place your character very carefully in the correct position to make it look like you're *not* trying to place your character. Moving like a human is a dead giveaway.

All the while the Sniper watches. As the gunman, you get a single bullet to take out the espionage agent, and it's an overwhelming amount of information to parse. The NPCs mimic a lot of the Spy's moves, but without the subtle tells. Staring at all the activity, your eyes flick from person to person, trying to catch one of them out. The concentration required to keep all the accusatory and dismissive thoughts in your head, with a whole room of people acting independently, makes it difficult to take that shot. Which a good Spy will take advantage of. The asymmetry creates a terrifying atmosphere for both players, particularly when the Sniper clocks the Spy early on and lets him carry on.

Developer Chris Hecker's currently working on level layouts: a smaller, balcony level skews the game towards the Sniper's abilities, whereas an L-shaped room full of people gives the Spy a better opportunity to succeed. He's using those unbalanced spaces to explore how to balance the game: *Spy Party*'s mechanics might be easy to pick up and learn, but that's just the start of a complex game where you have to think about the humanity in what you're doing.



SUBVERSION

bit.ly/eugxuK

Robbery is the new lens flare. Introversion's *Subversion* puts you in charge of a team of skilled break-in experts, taking apart high-tech security systems to get to the loot.

Being from the developers of *Uplink*, the depth of the simulation is what makes this a fascinating prospect: guns are a fall back position for when things go wrong. Instead you'll be taking down security systems, moving your agents in concert as layer after layer of protective technology is tapped into. The modern office setting gives some familiarity to the world: security cameras are hackable to give the team a better PoV of the layout, telephone wires can be analysed, with 999 calls rerouted to hold off police intervention while the building is hacked.

The team's skills aren't limited to tweaking tech, either: agents can talk their way out of situations, using Fast-Talking augmentations, or simply sneak in, following someone with access to get through a locked door. Of course, you might need to leave via that door, which is where a gun or two could come in handy. Social engineering is all well and good, but a bullet really focuses people.

There's a clear air of the unknown about *Subversion*, not unintentionally, since Introversion are still refining the concept as they're developing it. But the heist theme, the emergent possibilities and the unusually high quality of their previous games is enough to sustain our interest.



TINY & BIG

bit.ly/eMafBy

It's almost a shame to be let loose in *Tiny & Big*'s world. It's gorgeous: a hand-drawn, sketchy backdrop full of immense character and charm. And what do you do here? Tear it all up on a quest for your inheritance: a pair of fine white underpants.

It's an environmental third-person puzzle game: everything from the tallest spires to the smallest rocks can be sliced apart by Tiny's laser. It burns through the landscape like a sausage through margarine, turning massive pillars into makeshift bridges, wrecking the carefully contoured world but enabling Tiny to cross otherwise impossible chasms on his hunt for the pants. The scale is as impressive as the technology: the cuts aren't prescribed, so you can chop a giant Redwood-sized tooth of granite neatly across the trunk, felling it like a tree, or slice it up into slivers, chipping away at it, hoping the pieces fall correctly. Or just for fun.

But it's not all left to chance: Tiny also has a grappling hook that you can drag the rubble around with, using it to angle his toppling towers. Or you can manoeuvre the collapsed levels into the desired shapes, like stairs, to chase his pant-stealing nemesis. There's also a rocket to push pieces around if you need to apply a bit more force than the grappling hook provides, or merely turn them into jagged, terrifying, self-propelled shards of angry landscape.

Mechanically, it all seems so obvious. It has the feeling of a game that should have been made a long time ago, and it took a small, student development team to realise it. Developers Black Pants (they seem obsessed with underwear this lot) are episodically releasing the game in level-sized chunks, but they've already released a demo on their site for free. Even in its raw state, it's still immensely enjoyable.







SNAPSHOT

bit.ly/hPrivb

Photography isn't just a way to show everyone how miserable your family holidays were, or how fluffy your new kitten is (and he is so, so fluffy: *bit.ly/hF2Pag*), oh no. In *Snapshot*, camera clickery can change the world around you.

It's a pretty, elegant, *Braid*-like puzzle platformer. You guide your little robot through platform puzzles. They're impossible to traverse normally, until you make use of your camera. It absorbs the world's objects into the photographs it takes and allows you to place them elsewhere in the level. Thankfully it's digital, so there's no time wasted waiting for them do develop.

At the most basic level, you'll use it almost like a gravity gun, plucking a crate from one part of the level and depositing it elsewhere, in turn placing the photograph where you need the object to be to boost your robot up, or lean on a useful switch. More complicated uses come into play, though: the photos capture object momentum, light, and even chunks of architecture. Blimey.

So, say you need to destroy the floor of a platform that's out of reach. You can photograph a falling rock, place the photograph upside down underneath the breakable barrier and the rock will fly out at the desired angle. You can use the same effect to kill an enemy, so you could push a crate off a ledge, capture it mid fall, drop the photo over the enemy and smoosh them. The power of photography!

Lightsources plucked from the backdrop can be used to help guide the bot through pitch-black levels, with the tiny suns rolling around when freed from their positions.

Even the platforms are manipulable: you can photograph a spiked landing, turning it upside down so the spikes are on the bottom and you're safe to land on it – or there are level doors that you can access by ripping them from an awkward position to an easy-to-reach spot.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


The random game world throws up some bonkers areas.

A VALLEY WITHOUT WIND

bit.ly/fcB3YP

This sounds a little bit like *Minecraft*: a procedurally generated RPG, where each world is unique to the player experiencing it. Except where *Minecraft* is about the player's impact on a mostly empty world, *AVWW* is a lot more involved.

A post-apocalyptic world where the apocalypse (an ice-age) might not have happened, the player's adventure takes him through the remnants of civilisation on a broken Earth, meeting the people left behind in office buildings and villages. Developers Arcen have some startling ambition, creating a game world without any boundaries: it'll go in any direction, generating challenges, characters and areas as the player explores. They claim it will never end, and that you'll never need to generate another world.

That openness is at the heart of the game. Everything you can see you can visit: every building will be open to the player, every settlement will have its own problems to help solve or avoid. Sounds intriguing.


The sequel, *Chilled Frontal Lobe*, is already in production.

FROZEN SYNAPSE

www.frozensynapse.com

A strategy game obviously influenced by both *X-Com* and *Counter-Strike*, thoughtful unit placement and terrifying action mix it up in quickly resolved top-down battles.

The futuristic blueprint look is appropriate: it's more about the minute planning of your team's movement than anything else, where each turn is an exercise in precognition and careful consideration. You drag markers for distance, speed, direction and preparedness out of each soldier, with the other player's team and choice hidden until you cross each other's line of sight. Then your gibs hit the fan.

Of course, this all leads to panicky skirmishes: tense little pockets of fighting where your best laid plans explode in your face. Or should that be '*like* your face'? That sniper you carefully sent to cover the corner is blasted point blank with a shotgun, while a cleverly planned pincer attack unravels when you realise the target is in another part of the map. So important is each turn that the fear of hitting the button that sets your moves in motion is scarier than any survival horror.


Quite a boring game. Ahahahahaa.

MINER WARS 2081

www.minerwars.com

Space does funny things to game developers. The minute they start to conceive of a game where freedom of movement is key, they start jettisoning any notion of controlling the player.

MMO *Miner Wars 2081* wants the players to go anywhere they want, and make an impact on their own terms. The tools it provides sets it apart from the usual *Elite* clone, though. You're the operator of an advanced mining ship, trying to carve a life out of the asteroids that lazily spin in the vacuum. Your ship is capable of burrowing through the giant rocks, with each of the vast hunks of mineral fully destructible.

It means the player is free to make a base of operations deep inside the heart of an asteroid, hollowing it out on the hunt for precious metals and setting traps on the walls to ensure your claim is well protected. Make a home there if you like: the universe around you will persist, so anyone carving a replica of their own genitals into the face of a giant rock will be giving the population of the system an eyeful, until someone takes offence and delivers a mining laser eraser to it. Right, Tim?

There's structure, of course. You can't put someone in the cockpit of a space ship and not ask them to escort weaker ships, explore and collect, steal cargo or defend bases from raiders. And the persistence applies to the ship as well, so you'll be upgrading your cockpit as you continue to burrow for precious materials to exploit and rocks to muck about with. That holy grail of *Elite* online is still hanging over every space sim that comes out, and it's been a while since a full-on live-your-life-in-space revved up to take a crack at it. This is one to watch.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



GRIM DAWN

www.grimdawn.com

Here's a lesson in recovery and openness. When old school action RPG studio Iron Lore (creators of the *Titan Quest* games) were closed, the core team took stock, took their ideas, took their engine and started on their (and their audience's) dream game, free of publisher interference, showcasing their progress in public at their forums. Airing their development so early in the production cycle is unusual, but has its advantages, and their forumites and fans are constantly suggesting improvements and additions.

Even small quality-of-life tweaks are picked over and analysed: from automatic gold pickup when out adventuring, to deeper and more complex conversations with quest givers and merchants. Even the smallest details get analysed and improved thanks to audience feedback. When an artist posted the first images of a new system to determine where the player could walk, forumites pointed out that a bridge didn't look quite right. Two hours later new screenshots appeared showing a newly tarted up bridge and path.

Super-fans also get to help fund the development. Pre-orders are already open on an escalating scale. Players can buy access into the early alpha and beta ahead of the eventual launch. Get involved in development at *www.grimdawn.com*. Just don't mention *Diablo*.


The chandelier doesn't fall, sadly.


Psychedelic backdrops don't distract once you're playing.


Only a space worm can stop you now.

NIDHOGG

www.messhof.com/nidhogg

You might not have heard of it yet, but *Nidhogg* is the funniest indie game ever.

It's not exactly a comedy setup, mind: you and a friend face each other in a swordfight that looks an awful lot like the original *Prince of Persia*. You can hold your foil high, chest-level or low down as you attempt to jam those sharp pixels into each other with a series of frantic jabs. If you win the fight, you gain the initiative and can dash to the other side of the screen. By the time you arrive in the next area though, your opponent will have re-spawned in front of you. It's now his job to kill you and regain the initiative so he can run off in the opposite direction. You're both striving to travel as far toward your opponent's side as you can.

It's a simple game learned in a few seconds, but it inspires frantic panic and glorious, dramatic comebacks in a way that will have you and your friend – who's sat next to you using the same keyboard – screaming. It's the constant feeling of not being able to quite believe what just happened.

You can't believe that your opponent just slid under your legs. They can't believe that you turned and hurled your sword at them, skewering them in the back. You can't believe that after impotently nudging your swords into each other a dozen times, your friend won by simply pressing 'up' on the keyboard to change his sword's position. He can't believe that after getting past him, you mistimed a jump and fell immediately into a hole. You can't believe that you managed to knock him back into that same hole using that same impotent nudging. Neither of you can believe the end. There is no victory but pyrrhic victory.

Creator Messhof is working at online multiplayer, as well as some singleplayer game modes. But however good those turn out to be, playing with a friend on the same PC is an experience every gamer should have. You've never laughed so hard.

filerekaga.com


Yes. That ball has a big creepy grin. Shudder.

Guide your rock, make art crumble!

ROCK OF AGES

www.atlus.com/rockofages

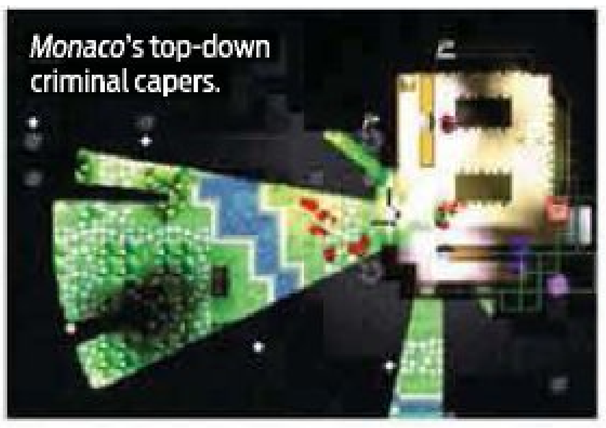
It's one of the great philosophical what-ifs of our time: what would happen if Sisyphus travelled through important periods of art history and got to meet people like Da Vinci, Aristotle and Plato?

The fact that Sisyphus was condemned to endlessly roll a boulder up a hill should probably have given you a clue. *Rock of Ages* is a strategy game where you destroy art-inspired buildings by rolling giant rocks.

The physics-based territorial battles are a mixture of bowling and base building, with the buildings and units reflecting the art style of the period.

We're not usually keen to point out the skybox of a game level, but when one has a 2D representation of the titan Cronus towering over the scenery, it bears commenting on. As does the destruction. The goal is to build the boulder at the top of the hill before the other player constructs his, and build your defences along the slope to stop the other player's boulder from reaching your castle. Those defences crumble and clog up the ball's progress, from little 2D humans on sticks to hovering, spiral-bladed helicopters inspired by Da Vinci's doodles. It's not all left to chance. When you finally release the ball on its destructive path you get to control its descent through the protective layer of buildings, scouring Rococo and Romanticism inspired blockades from the face of the world. Take that, Goya!

Physics and odd art-styles are staples of indie games, but even after years of abstract, silly and inspired adventures, *Rock of Ages* stands out as one of the most creative and whimsical games we've ever seen.


Monaco's top-down criminal capers.

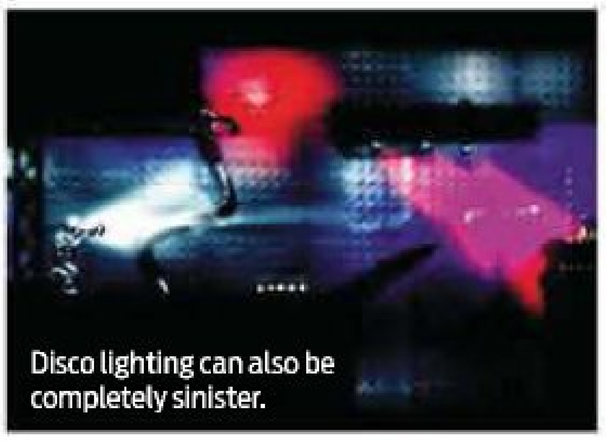
MONACO

www.monacoismine.com

The big Hollywood pitch for this is *Gauntlet* meets *Ocean's 11*. *Monaco* is a top-down heist game, where a team of four plan and execute a robbery. A caper simulator, is what it is. The team are made up of criminal classes working together in quickly paced assaults on technological fortresses such as mansions and corporations. We've discovered one of the missions is labelled "steal the porn".

Character classes are built around specific thiefy needs. The Locksmith powers through the level's locked doors, the Cleaner is able to generate health and knock out guards, the Hacker takes down security systems and the Prowler can speedily rush through levels, plus another four that we don't know about yet. They're being kept under wraps, and The Spy refuses to investigate for reasons of professional courtesy.

It sets up a co-operative, speedy jaunt through stylised 8-bit levels, characters overlapping, unlocking doors ahead of each other, peeking around corners. The player's have a limited field of vision, so it really pays to work as a team to get a clear overview of the trouble they're facing. You know, as they're trying to steal porn.


Disco lighting can also be completely sinister.

THE SWAPPER

www.facepalmgames.com

First they fired bullets and rockets, then they fired furniture and portals, and now they spawn clones and fire consciousness. This side-scrolling puzzle platformer takes the next step in the evolution in guns.

Set in space aboard a vast, desolate spaceship, you use these abilities to navigate corridors and trigger switches. The left mouse button lets you place a clone anywhere within a twenty feet radius, while the right hurls your consciousness between them. It doesn't matter if a clone dies, unless your brain happens to be inside it at the time.

Pretty soon you're trying to synchronise the movements of four clones at once, and working around different coloured light that stops you from either swapping or cloning.

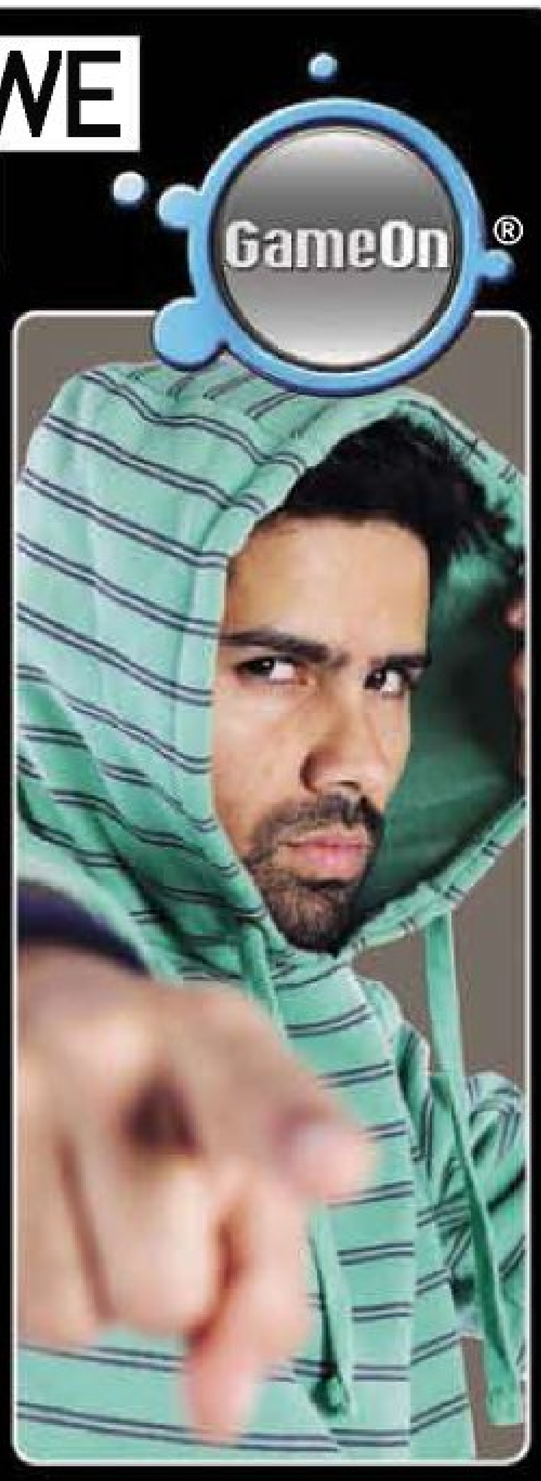
Upon solving each level you unlock a new piece of po-faced backstory about the ship and your own origins, but for every piece of purple prose, there's the silly fun of sending infinite clones to their death. Spawn one 20 feet in the air and watch it plummet. Create five of them in a row and jump around to form yourself a bonkers dance troupe.

filefactory.com

PC GAMER GAMING ESSENTIALS

CONTACT To advertise on these pages email **gamingessentials@futurenet.com**

GAMERS! WE NEED YOU



Are you a Gamer with ideas? GameOn® wants yours! Now's your chance to show the world what you've got! Here at GameOn® we make technical and clever accessories for all consoles and sell them worldwide. We are constantly looking for new inventions. If you think you've got the next big idea then contact us today and we'll make it a reality.

CONTACT:

ideas@impactint.co.uk

TEL: + 44 (0) 845 600 1676

About GameOn® - Founded in 2000 with offices and sales in Europe, Hong Kong and the US. GameOn® is now one of the fastest growing gaming accessory brands in the world and our gamer mad guys are desperate to get stuck into a new project.

INSERT COIN CLOTHING

If you're looking for for awesome videogame-inspired t-shirts and hoodies then check out **Insert Coin** and level up your wardrobe. With designs that take in some of the most memorable brands and places from across the gaming world, there's a subtle style to help every gamer get their geek on!





INSERT COIN

WWW.INSERTCOINCLOTHING.COM

THE
MOST FUN
YOU CAN
HAVE WITH
YOUR HANDS
WITHOUT
G O I N G
B L I N D

games radar.

MORE KICKS PER CLICK

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

"We got cocky. We saw ourselves as a juggernaut that was going to destroy all comers"

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

MODDED WARFARE

How the development team behind **RED ORCHESTRA** took on the gaming industry – and won. ***By Dan Griliopoulos***



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

It's 1941 and Nazi Germany has just invaded the USSR, its erstwhile ally. SS counter-intelligence soon detects a range of radio signals from communist and socialist sympathisers, embedded at all levels of European society. Since the SS call transmitters 'piano' and supervisors 'conductors', they name this nascent resistance network the Rote Kapelle – the Red Orchestra. Despite early successes, it is soon crushed.

Jump forward 60 years. It's now 2001 and indie development is dying. The big publishers are forcing more independent studios to sell up, small developers struggle to get their games on the shelves, and the new chain games stores are squeezing the PC out. The modding community has reached its high point with *Quake* and *Half-Life*, but even this growth is decelerating as indie teams struggle to convert their online popularity into full-time contracts. It's a bad ▸



Red Orchestra 2 is the game the team always wanted to make.



Alan Wilson: vice-president, responsible citizen.



For a long time, Tripwire didn't have an office to call their own.

time for PC gaming all over.

It's in this harsh environment that *Red Orchestra* is born.

In 2001, the people who would one day found Tripwire were just a handful of keen modders, scattered around the world. Alan Wilson was in London, Dave Hensley in New York, Ingmar Spit in Holland, the rest mainly in America. Who actually started the mod isn't clear, longest-serving team member William 'Bill' T Munk II, who joined in 2002, is as lost as the rest of them. "Oh, it's prehistory, man."

Initially, the plan was for the mod to be a stealth game, hence the *Red Orchestra* title. Mods in those days tended to coalesce on modding forums, so the early *RO* hopped between designs and engines like a gadfly with an itch.

John Gibson, lead programmer, recalls why they made it. "No one was making the game we wanted. A lot of the 'realistic' shooters played like *Quake* with WWII weapons. We introduced a whole bunch of revolutionary things that are common now: 3D ironsights, proper ballistics, realistic player movement, player damage... " Gradually though, after trying the *Medal of Honour* and *Soldier of Fortune II* engines, the team settled on *Unreal Tournament* and an emphasis on realism.

This choice allowed them to enter the Make Something Unreal competition, with its much-trumpeted $1,000,000 prize, and changed their lives forever.

At the time there were perhaps 60 people working on the project, a huge talent base for a mod. "We had great animators, researchers, programmers, designers," John recalls. "But then every team has guys who only show up in the IRC channel... there were probably 20 full-time producers, 20 who would do something cool occasionally, and 10 or 15 who were worthless."

"And one or two who were worse than worthless," puts in Alan, the lead historical researcher and now vice-president at Tripwire.

"There are at least two or three I would physically harm if I saw them," John continues. "When we started winning, we were winning computers. One unproductive level designer claimed it was because his computer was slow, so we sent him a precious new computer. Of course, he then ran off into the sunset with his shiny new PC."

All that said, 85% of the core people still work or contract for Tripwire Interactive.

Clone wars

Oddly, the team sat out of the first round of Make Something Unreal. But having seen the competition, they realised that they were way ahead of it. "The road to modding superstardom is littered with corpses of *Counter-Strike* clones," says John. "All the other mods at the time, working on newer engines, were six months behind us... Our game, graphically, was the *Crysis* of its day."

The 1.0 version of the mod was

"In those days, a lot of the 'realistic' shooters played like Quake with WWII weapons"

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

released in 2003-4 and well received by the community. Meanwhile, the team were winning every phase of the Make Something Unreal contest, and the success quickly went to their heads. "We got cocky," says John. "We saw ourselves as the juggernaut that was going to destroy all comers." As they got complacent, the other mods started to catch up. "I thought we were going to lose; so I got a group list of the top ten things that another mod will have that will beat us. I then took this and said 'We're going to be this mod; we're going to make these ten things and put them in our game. And we did."

To finish these elements, several of the core team quit their jobs, and worked 16-hour days for the final six months, while family and friends were telling them they were insane.

They won. "It was the Willy Wonka Golden Ticket," says Bill, "indescribable exhilaration, vindication." John was equally excited but he remembers getting hate mail "...after we won the infamous 'million dollars'." It turned out the prize wasn't anything near a million dollars; most of that had been spent on the competition and prizes, or was tied up in the licences they'd won. So the team founded their new studio, Tripwire, on just $30,000.

The new cell

They started it in Atlanta. Three of them moved on site, others worked remotely. They expected the money to last three months – long enough, as there would be "Publishers beating down our doors to throw millions of dollars of cash in," in Alan's words. "We spent the first two weeks playing videogames and going 'what do we do now?' So naïve. Now we know that even a consensual deal might take three-six months to get the contracts through."

A few publishers *did* beat down their doors, but not with offers the team found attractive. The money ran out. They still didn't have a deal. Then they saw Steam, which back then Valve were just using to sell their own games. John contacted Doug Lombardi (Valve's marketing director) and it turned out that he knew about *Red Orchestra* and wanted to talk about giving them a *very* good deal. That was the turning point.

Now they just had to finish the game, turning it from a mod into the standalone *Red Orchestra: Ostfront 41-45*. With a route to the gamer at last, the team scraped together as much money as they could. Alan mortgaged his house, others maxed out credit cards or borrowed money. "We put together a small but terrifying amount of money," says Alan. It took another six months to finish the game. They offered the external contractors a deal where they would pay them a 50% bonus if they took their money after the game shipped – another big gamble. Meanwhile, the art team all lived in one apartment, sleeping on mattresses in the living room. "It was a crazy time, huge amounts of fun, even if I had to live off my savings," says artist David Hensley.



Bill Munk, demonstrating what realism looks like.

Mission successful

In March 2006, five years after work on the mod started, *Ostfront* was finally released, in the shops and as the third game on Steam, selling over 400,000 copies. What kept it selling in the months that followed was the amount of free features the team developed. "We doubled the content after shipping," says David.



The original mod was low on polygons, high on quality.

"A lot of people think of digital distribution like a Walmart shelf," Alan explains, "but you've got the opportunity to keep upgrading things. The sales the updates generated gave us the cash to keep going."

This, and the money they made from publishing the hugely successful *Killing Floor*, allowed Tripwire to start the project they always wanted to make: a full, properly-funded version of *Red Orchestra. RO 2: Heroes of Stalingrad* is going into beta very soon, and Tripwire, always conscious of their community, have already seeded the dev tools with various modding teams, so they'll have time to generate the high polygon models necessary for modern games. "We'd like to see the first big mods out a few months after the game, not two years later," says Alan. "At the current rate, we'll have *Rising Storm* (Japanese vs Americans in the Pacific), a Vietnam conflict game, plus there are a bunch of others as diverse as World War I and the Warhammer universe."

It still might not have anything to do with spies, subterfuge or radios, but Tripwire's *Red Orchestra* series has blazed a trail for both modders and the modern indie Steam developers. Along with Valve, they ferreted out the secrets of self-publishing from under the noses of the big publishers and made the world a better place for everyone who loves PC games. They've already shown that quality and enthusiasm count; we're intrigued to see where they go next. ■

SEND

EMAIL pcgamer@futurenet.com
TWITTER @PC_Gamer
TEXT 87474 'PCG' as the first word
FORUM www.pcgamer.com/forum
WRITE PC Gamer, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW UK

Texts cost 25p plus your standard network charge

Adventures! Consoles! Ultimate power!

SPK UR MND

■ *Super Laser Racer.* Little indie-game you gave a half-decent score to? Your only gripe was it had no multiplayer. Well, out of the blue they just added it.
Joe Bartram
Then we'll have to make up some new gripes. Does it have a cup holder? Does it come in puce? If not: rubbish! If yes: gah! Bloated piece of crap!

■ I'm trying to submit something for the letters page of the UK magazine, but I can't find the address anywhere.
Jon
Then this is spooky indeed.

■ I just thought I'd write to say that I went out and bought my first PCG magazine in around six months today.
Jonathan Allcock
Splitter! If you want to make it up to us, at least send cake. Nice cake.

■ IDEA! *SPORE* combined with *POKEMON*!!!
Shaun Rattue
"Penis-chu, I choose you!" Yeah. There's a flaw in this plan. It's called 'The Other People On The Internet'. (Also us.)

■ I would love to chat with you about Lamonica Garrett.
Bradley Frank
OK, but you'll have to dial our new premium-rate number: 0891-WHOTHEHELL. Wear something sexy. We'll be asking.

■ *Dragon Age II.* Walk along a path and randomly tap a button, walk along

Suit Richard

Maybe it didn't suit Richard Cobbett to refer to the two good and brave attempts to redefine PC adventure games, as it would rather have undermined the premise of his article ('How To Save Adventure Gaming'). But to mention *Hitman*, *Deus Ex and Heavy Rain* yet ignore Quantic Dreams' previous PC efforts in the excellent *Omikron/The Nomad Soul* and *Fahrenheit* is a clear dereliction of duty. He could at least acknowledge their efforts even if he disagrees with their 'adventure' status.

Please seek some explanation for this omission.
Colin Cooper



Was *Fahrenheit* really 'good *and* brave'?

We asked Richard, but after the fifth hour of ranting about "David bloody Cage, leaving Carla in the car while Lucas fights a guy who can control his body and make him kill!" and "Stealth! That horrible stealth!" we decided it was probably best he'd stuck with games he liked. Good point though. They're depressingly misogynistic games, but definitely interesting ones.
PCG

Shot chilled me

I haven't played *Homefront* yet, just watched the intro on



"All I wanted to do was leap into the game and commit unspeakable acts"

YouTube, but even that made me feel something I've never, ever felt towards a videogame before: hate. It's that moment when the camera pans from the inside of a bus to the pavement and we witness the execution of a mother and father in front of their child. I had no idea what was coming and the anguished wail of the child as his parents were shot chilled me to the bone. At that very moment, I hated the two soldiers who'd pulled the trigger. All I wanted to do was leap into the game and commit unspeakable acts of torture and brutality on them. Hours later, whilst playing football with friends, that child's screams and sobbing were still rattling round my head.

I believe it is testament to the skill (and bravery!) of the developers and the quality of the writing and voice-acting that it made me feel this way. In that one moment, I immediately engaged with the story. I felt part of it. I wanted revenge for that child. And that emotional impact and engagement is something that every writer and movie director would be proud to have achieved.
Matt Williams

And if that doesn't make you angry, reaching the end of the campaign in four hours certainly will. We agree though, it's good to see developers pushing the boundaries of

THE HOT MAIL

Article in the shower

You recently wrote about how Take Two Interactive CEO Strauss Zelnick believes that review scores affect game sales. I was thinking about that article in the shower this morning.

Imagine a system whereby review scores not only influence sales but directly affect prices. Every kind of game would have its own price band, like 'DLC' and 'Special Edition', but the price you actually paid would be its review score percentage of the fixed price. For example, in issue 225 you scored *Dawn of War 2: Retribution* 88% and *The Precursors* 47%. Both would be classified as full games, but *Retribution* would retail for £26.40, while *The Precursors* would cost £14.10.

If you think about it, this is a system where absolutely everyone is a winner. It even benefits the more mediocre developers and the 70% to 80% scoring games they produce. Lower prices might increase their volume of sales, as more gamers take extra chances with their cash.
Paul Newrick

We're in favour of anything that gives us more power... but would we not give games like* Psychonauts *1% at the end of a glorious review, so that everyone might sup from its creative teat? Would the allure of finally being able to make publishers dance for their suppers not inevitably lead to ever crueller, more capricious whims? What would be the point if not? It'll never happen, but thanks for the fantasy. Enjoy your very real giant USB stick as a reward.
PCG

The best missive we receive every issue will win its sender a shock-proof 32GB USB drive worth £70, courtesy of our lovely friends at Corsair. Find out about these gadgets at www.corsair.com. See above for how to get in touch with PC Gamer!



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

FloodGate.com

narrative, even if it's a shame that the standard is so low that anything that tries to do something new is head and shoulders above its peers.
PCG

Notch a beer

I was reading on your GDC blog that Tim had bought *Minecraft*'s Notch a beer. Other than this being a nice gesture, I thought that this was probably a very unique occurrence in this type of industry. Nowhere else would you find the critic hanging out with the people they analyse. It might just be me but I cannot imagine that film critics are on good terms with directors, or that food critics are great friends with chefs. I think it's fantastic that there is this air of community surrounding the games industry. So I think that it's fair to say that this industry is the best around. Thanks for being lovely,
Tom Bennett

Depends on the developer. One minute everything's happy and cheery, the next they realise you're the one who compared their life's work to a steel pipe-cleaner up the rectum, and then... oh, so much blood. It's why any First Contact situation requires the official PCG suit of armour, just to be on the safe side. Can't review games with a fork through your face. Except for* Sims 3 *expansion packs. Then it's compulsory.
PCG

Free jet-ski

On the PC Gamer website, you offered "Win a free ticket to Polynesia DLC in *Civ V*! Only for US Citizens." Then there was "Win a free copy of *Shogun 2: Total War*! US Only!" After that: "Have yourself a free jet-ski. No, seriously – we love you, and want you each to have a jet-ski. So just click here, and we'll ship one directly to you for free. Non-colonials need not apply."

OK, so I made the last one up. But it does seem that, on the now unified international PCG website, the American readers get all the love. I don't think I've seen a single competition or event labelled "UK Only" or even "Europe Only" – in fact, I'm pretty sure that all your competitions have been restricted to the other side of the Pacific. I realise that logistically, having international competitions probably doesn't work, but surely there's no reason we can't have our own?
Alex Marsh

Have a heart – the Yanks need something to fill the void in their souls left by not being British. Besides, we have had a few UK-only compos, including a chance to win an SSD hard drive, an awesome graphics card, gaming headphones, a massive haul of Plants vs Zombies swag, and the chance for one lucky reader to spend a weekend tidying our kit-cupboard. (Oddly, that one didn't get many entrants. None, in fact. Maybe we shouldn't have charged an entry fee.)



"No, seriously – we love you, and want you each to have a jet-ski"

Keep your eyes peeled for more. Not literally though, that would be disgusting.
PCG

Borked on release

I was musing the other day over the consolification of PC games and the abject buggy mess that *Fallout: New Vegas* was when another more troubling thought struck me: Have we become a gaming-generation of make-doers? Had the games of today been released in the heyday of PC gaming, when quality, originality and sound design were paramount, would they be getting the same scores? I sincerely doubt it. More likely they'd all be getting 70-85% at most, and berated for their shocking state upon release! Perhaps this is just the gaming equivalent of thinking all old music is the best and that the current generation is just rubbish... but I don't think it is.

I think we need to re-evaluate how we look at games. I think PCG, specifically, needs to re-look at how it reviews games. It is no longer acceptable (in my humble opinion) to give a high score to a game that is borked on release. While I understand that games change over time and

TOP DRAW



Swimming Pool Massacre 9000?

A very royal congratulations to Mark Blant for correctly deducing that PCG 225's fine piece of MS Paint scribblage was indeed *King's Bounty: The Legend*. He also promised to draw us one, so we'll be looking forward to seeing that. This month though, your challenge comes from Mr Edward Helmsley, who walks away with £50 worth of Play.com vouchers for this delightful scene of bloody horror. What game is it? Send your guesses and your own digital masterpieces to pcgamer@futurenet.com.

Send your daubings to pcgamer@futurenet.com – the one we like the best wins the voucher. No prizes for guessing the game, but the first to guess correctly gets their name in print.

£50 voucher from PLAY.COM
WIN!

SPK UR MND

a bit more and tap it again. Come across a chest I can't get in to. Drop an Ogre by right-clicking a lot. Decide I can't stand Sean Bean and while I'm at it realise that all the other voice actors are crap; and that all the dialogue is cliché-ridden. Uninstall.
John Cotterpin
But apart from that, it was OK?

■ *Insert Game Title here* *Insert witty remark about game* *Insert arbitrary score here*
JTJdude
awesome reply

■ I wish the FPS genre would go away for a bit so we have some time for creativity to come into the genre.
CKrawl
Agreed. We need evolution to provide us some new body parts to shoot off.

■ I wasn't sure where to send this.
Mark
You should have asked Jon. Or maybe you did.

■ I have been reading your mag since I was 14. I am now 26.
Chris Emptage
Really? There's probably a new issue out by now.

■ I'm in love. I've been bewitched by a red-headed rogue from Orlais. I've spent weeks, nay months, exploring every nook and cranny of *Dragon Age*, with Leliana by my side, her lilting French voice whispering sweet nothings in my ear. But still, in the end, she only wanted to be friends. It was like being back at school again.
Ed Symons
Now we almost feel guilty about doing the wild thing with her and Isabela. Sorry. Not our fault. Girls dig mages.

■ If you could quicksave and load in real life, would you?
Dusty Gerkin
You mean you can't? Wait. (reloads) You mean you can't?

SEND

TXT UR REVIEW

Text your review of around 20 words to 87474, using 'PCG' as the first word. Include your name, the game's name and a score.



Texts cost 25p plus your standard network charge

Magicka
I can now type FQASA quicker than my name. Amazing if played with friends.
89%
Simonheartscake

Homefront
The love child of *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* that was dropped as a baby. He's short, ugly and no one likes him.
45%
Krazilvan

Crusader Kings
Flawed. Unique. Brilliant. Where the fuck did my Sunday go?
80%
Sinformer_Joe

Dragon Age II
Badly done console port with a story nobody cares about and okay-ish combat.
73%
Clummings

that content is constantly updated/repaired/replaced, it is the 'out of the box' state that is important. Therefore I think a new structure for scoring should be adopted; 20 percent of the score should be assigned to the technical side, ie, even if the game is one of the best ever made, if it's littered with crashes, graphical/gameplay bugs and other issues then the most it can get in a review is 80 percent.
Jon Armer

If a game is littered with crashes, serious bugs and other issues, it's not going to get 80% anyway. To give one recent example, our* Test Drive Unlimited 2 *review took great pains to slam the game for its buggy online mode at launch. Unfortunately though, we can only report on our own experiences. Most of the time problems only become obvious when there are thousands of people playing on multiple configurations, and even then, it's usually only a vocal minority screaming and shouting. Happy players are too busy playing their new game.
PCG



"I'm a huge fan, and reinstall the original *Deus Ex* at least twice a year"

Ex fan

First and foremost, thank you for all your recent coverage of the new *Deus Ex*. It's been great! I've been a huge *Deus Ex* fan for years now and even though I'm moving on to bigger and better games, I reinstall the original at least twice a year, even if it's just to play mods or do a bit of mapping. Speaking of mods, there is one I think you should check out; *Deus Ex Multiplayer: Human Revolution*.

I've been following this mod since it started and it looks fantastic! They have recreated various locations from the *DX3* Trailers (Hive Bar, Shanghai Docks etc.) into *Deus Ex Multiplayer* maps. They've also got new weapons, textures and music to go along with it. Above all, they have been in regular contact with the guys at Eidos and many of them are fans of the project. Hopefully, over the next few months, we will see the release of more mods for this gem of a game. I'm excited, and after the success of *The Nameless Mod*, who can blame me?
Ben Howgill

Recreating a hot new game in an old engine? In our day, we just stared wistfully at screenshots in magazines, sometimes jiggling them around in front of our faces and pretending they were moving. Cool project though. Readers, check out* bit.ly/e5vPXl *to see the mod, including a fun parody of the* DX:HR *trailer.
PCG

YOU'RE PLAYING



Si Naylor
Currently playing:
Blood Bowl: Legendary Edition



GRAARGH! GRRAAAAR- Oh, wait, it's your turn.

This is a re-release of the 2008 boardgame conversion. It adds 12 more races (making 20 total), revamps the multiplayer front end, and adds a few new singleplayer modes. The basic game is still the same – fantasy races battle it out in a simplified but far more violent version of American Football, in either real-time or turn-based modes. It relies on dice rolling, but as in any form of gambling, the key is weighing up the risk versus reward. When understood and played well, it is deeply, satisfyingly tactical.

Players of the original conversion may have been put off by the lack of any real explanation of the rules, and little has been done to improve that in this version. The addition of an objective-based story mode is useful for learning play styles, though, with objectives such as completing a certain number of passes or dodges leading the player in the right direction. The multiplayer browser may be improved, but it's still awful and only testament to how astonishingly bad the original was.

Despite its failings though, this is the game that should have been released in the first place. The basic game of Blood Bowl has been a winning formula since 1987, and it is faithfully represented here. If you can pick up the rules and understand the concept you'll be well rewarded for your effort. It's a shame that this re-release has been done at full price, as many fans will have already bought the inferior original, but it can be found for around £10 in a few places and is certainly worth a look for that money.

Awesome stuff, Si. Have some RAM.
PCG

crucial

Tell us about the game you love, and why, in 300 words. Write to the usual place, and include your name and a photo. The best piece each month wins 2GB of Crucial Ballistix RAM carefully chosen for their PC by Crucial's experts – see *www.crucial.com/uk*.



WIN!

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMaster.com

Wired2Fire.co.uk
Gaming PCs

For Free Delivery Call 0845 388 9051 and quote: june11*



Hellspawn Xtreme

Intel Core i7 950 Processor (up to 4GHz)
Corsair H70 Liquid CPU Cooler
AMD HD 6950 2GB GDDR5 Graphics
6GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz 9-9-9-24
Asus P6X58D-E (USB3 + SATA III)
Corsair Force 120GB Solid State
Samsung 1TB 32MB Cache SATA II HDD
Wired2Fire Overclocking & Tuning (FREE)
Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium

From £1285 inc VAT

Overclocked



Hellspawn Ultima

Intel Core i3 540 Processor (up to 4GHz)
Titan Radial CPU Cooler
ATI 5770 1GB GDDR5 Graphics
4GB Corsair DDR3 1333MHz 9-9-9-24
Asus P7H55/USB3 (USB3 + SATA III)
Samsung 500GB 16MB Cache SATA II HDD
Wired2Fire Overclocking & Tuning (FREE)
Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium

From £605 inc VAT

Overclocked

Sandybridge Now Available!



Diablo GTX

Intel Core i5 2500K Processor (up to 4.8GHz)
Xigmatek Scorpion CPU Cooler
nVidia GeForce GTX 460 1GB GDDR5 Graphics
4GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz 9-9-9-24
Asus P8P67 SANDYBRIDGE (USB3 + SATA III)
Samsung 1TB 32MB Cache SATA II HDD
Wired2Fire Overclocking & Tuning (FREE)
Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium

From £720 inc VAT

Overclocked



Fury VX-5

Intel Core i3 540 Processor (up to 4GHz)
Titan Radial CPU Cooler
ATI 5750 1GB GDDR5 Graphics
4GB Corsair DDR3 1333MHz 9-9-9-24
Asus P7H55-M/USB3 (USB3 + SATA III)
Samsung 500GB 16MB Cache SATA II HDD
Wired2Fire Overclocking & Tuning (FREE)
Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium

From £505 inc VAT

Overclocked

* Must be quoted at time of purchase. Please add code to the order comments section if placing your order on the website.

CORSAIR

Building award winning PCs since 2004.

PC GAMER NETWORK

PLAY

JOIN OUR WORLD OF FRIENDLY FIRE



We have more Steam community members than Lichtenstein has citizens. You'd better join now, before we annex your house.

THE PC GAMER STEAM COMMUNITY POPULATION 37,090

If you laid all the members of the PCG Steam group and everyone who 'likes' our Facebook page (*facebook.com/pcgamermagazine*) end to end, they'd stretch 140 miles. Google '140 miles' and there's a heartwarming story about a missing cat. So, by a process of elimination, being part of the PC Gamer community is heartwarming.

If that isn't enough to make you get involved at *pcgamer.com/forum*, our super-active guilds and servers will. They run the gamut of gaming, from a server for *Team Fortress 2*'s hectic shootery to a village for *Wurm*'s sedate life-building. We've got homes for everyone, stuffed with fantastic people. And Craig's around, too.

HOSTED BY MULTIPLAY



TEAM FORTRESS 2

IP: 85.236.100.18 **Port:** 27115
Our *TF2* server is permanently packed with nice people. And bullets. And sticky-bombs. And death.



KILLING FLOOR

IP: 85.236.100.18 **Port:** 7957
There's no better place for a spot of slow-motion murder with five other friends.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

IP: 85.236.100.18 **Port:** 27615
We all need to practise for the inevitable zombie apocalypse. Get on our server to work out your manoeuvres.



ALIEN SWARM

IP: 85.236.100.18 **Port:** 64100
We booted up Valve's free shooter to spend a lunchtime panicking and screaming together. Your turn!

HOW TO JOIN THE STEAM COMMUNITY

STEP 1
If you don't already have a Steam account, head to *www.steampowered.com*, download the client, run it and sign up.

STEP 2
Install your games from the Steam client. If you're having technical problems, hit the forums at the Steam site.

STEP 3
In the community tab of the Steam client, search for PC Gamer and join our group. Then chat, play and troll to your heart's content.

GAMER DIARY

MAY

11 **Join the Republican party**
Our *Old Republic* guild is huge! Sign up at PCGamer.com.

20 **FEAR 3 released**
Get online and find a friend to talk to while you play – it's scary.

27 **Dungeon Siege 3 released**
Grab a raiding party from our forum and go underground.

30 **Play among yourselves**
Spend your bank holiday on our *TF2* server. It's the law.

JUN

8 **PCG 228 on sale**
A new issue in time for summer's height. Use it to fan your hot face. And for reading.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Across the divide

PC Gamer's *Rift* guild is up and running

More news from the end of the world this month, as our brave PCG guild members report back from *Rift*. Even with the planet of Telara at the intersection of several planes of reality and under siege from all manner of horrible gribblies, the guild – under leadership by Talizorah (Thunderchild82 on the forums) – found time to gather for a group photo. Then found time to chase away a gang of 'bothersome invaders' that attempted to scupper said photo, regroup, and dance around in jubilation. While mildly on fire.

AT WORLD'S END

Our *Rift* guild is almost 200 strong now, with a fair few alts thrown in. We welcome new players (as long as they stick to the simple rules found at *bit.ly/hKmtby*), and there's no level cap for entry. Our top tier have rocketed up the ranks to level 50, but are sticking around on the forum to give battling advice and loadout tips to other members. Step into a floaty portal and emerge at *bit.ly/ew3abP* – that's our *Rift* forum, where you'll need to register your name and up to three alts. We play as Defiant, on Steampike EU server. ■






PLAYER OF THE MONTH

Who? waawaamp
Where? *Minecraft* server
Why? For running a secondary *Minecraft* server while ours went insane and tried to kill us.

NOW PLAYING

Minecraft
Server: 83.222.240.186
Port: 28765

■ A new server means a fresh start. Though at the speed you lot build your wonders, that means as you read this, the entire server will likely have been paved over. Still, *Minecraft*'s unlimited scale means you can just head into the wilderness and carve out your own niche. With blackjack. And strippers. As long as they're both made out of stone blocks, anyway. We've got the mod Bukkit installed, and a friendly group of players who'll help n00bs find their feet.

EVE Online
Guild Name: PCG-E
Message: See bit.ly/gFWC5T

■ Our *EVE* guild is still growing, taking up a pocket of space and staking it out with the red and black of PC Gamer. Led by a contingent of super-elite players, we've got close relations with other active groups – as well as a bustling forum jammed with ideas for ship fitting and career options. With *EVE*'s amazing new character creator and incentives for returning pilots, now's the perfect time to jet off into space. Head over to our forum at *bit.ly/cXyBz3* to introduce yourself.

World of Warcraft
Server: Steamwheedle Cartel – EU
Guild Name: PCG
Contact: Jecca or Careth
Faction: Horde

■ The Cataclysm has come and we're stronger than ever. We've got some mad number of members now (676, at the time of writing), utterly spanking all the other guilds on Steamwheedle Cartel. Our elite raiding crews run like clockwork, our members chat on our Ventrilo server for ease of communication (ip 85.236.100.69:4164, password 'beard'). As usual, we welcome all comers at our forum: *bit.ly/bpF7AK*.

THE OLD REPUBLIC

[Cue Imperial march]. Puny reader! Yes, you. We're here to invade your PC, just like *The Old Republic* threatens to invade your brain when it finally comes out later this year. BioWare have already enabled guild signups, and we're not the kind of chumps to wait for a game to come out before irrevocably dedicating all our free time to it.

The European PCG guild is called 'PC Gamer Mint Imperials', and as you can most likely guess, we're playing on the side of the Sith Empire. That way, we can flush people out of airlocks and snap their necks without worrying about concepts like 'morality' or the namby pamby Jedi code. It also means we get to play the Sith Warrior and Inquisitor, the Imperial Agent, and – best of all – the Bounty Hunter. There's no Darth Vader giving the orders here: we say 'yes' to disintegrations.

Plot an internet course to *bit.ly/mintimperials*, where you'll find a big flashing 'apply here' button. Press it. Immediately, our dark lord Rich will weigh up your midichlorians, encase you in carbonite, and sell you to the highest bidder (or just accept your application). We've also set up a special forum for the guild to discuss which inferior galactic species they fancy subjugating next, to be found at *bit.ly/pcgmiforum*. We're guessing Gungans will be high up the list. ■





WIN!

The winner of PC Gamer 224's 'Extremely puzzling' competition

Our chins are sore from stroking. We asked you to send us some fiendishly tricky puzzles of your own creation, to celebrate the release of the adventure game *Gray Matter*.

Some of you didn't think it through, and made puzzles without solution. Others sent us sneaky wordplay and mental tricks that made us feel stupid, but which we'll happily nick for the next time we're in the pub. One of you even sent a three-foot-high monstrosity made of plastic rods, hamster-balls and superglue that turned up in a box marked 'ornamental fireplace' and confused the hell out of the office.

But it was Albert Megroff who had us scratching our heads the longest. His neat puzzle had a PC theme – asking us to connect three paper 'graphics cards' to a cardboard 'motherboard' without ever crossing wires. Even though he used drawing pins in the puzzle which then got tipped all over the floor to form a foot-threatening hazard around Rich's desk, for his devious brain, he wins a mega PC.



WHAT ALBERT WON...

- Infinity Game Cube PC
  www.cyberpower.com
- Silverstone SG-07B Black mini-ATX case
- Intel Core i5 760 OC to 3.6GHz CPU
- 8X Slim DVDRW
- MS Windows 7 Premium 64 bit
- 4GB PC10666 RAM
- Gigabyte GA-H55N USB3 motherboard
- 600W PSU
- 1TB SATA II HDD
- Nvidia GeForce 460 1GB graphics card

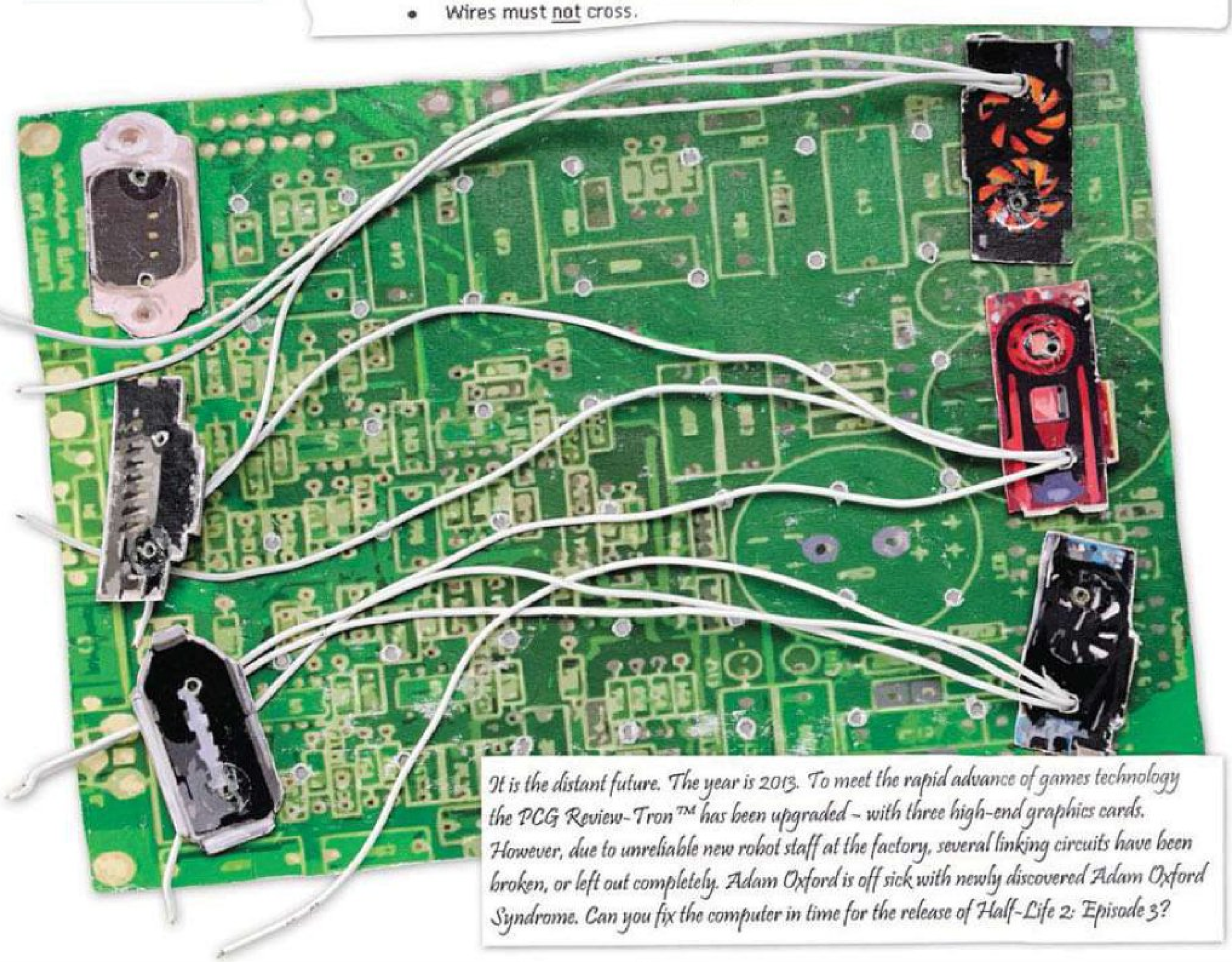
www.graymatter-game.com

The winning entry...

'CIRCUIT TRAINING'

by Albert Megroff

- All 3 graphics cards must be connected to all 3 input ports on the motherboard.
- Wires must remain in contact with the board at all times. The wire clips provided may be used to hold them down.
- Ports and cards may be fitted anywhere on the board.
- Wires must not cross.



It is the distant future. The year is 2013. To meet the rapid advance of games technology the PCG Review-Tron™ has been upgraded – with three high-end graphics cards. However, due to unreliable new robot staff at the factory, several linking circuits have been broken, or left out completely. Adam Oxford is off sick with newly discovered Adam Oxford Syndrome. Can you fix the computer in time for the release of Half-Life 2: Episode 3?



Now win this...

A £1,000 laptop

Laptops of the past looked up at their bigger desktop brothers, sitting there on top of their desks, and asked "Why can't we run triple-A games at maximum settings? Why are we lumbered with terrible onboard graphics chips? Why were we programmed to feel pain?"

It's *exactly* like *Darkspore*. EA's RPG lets you customise the creatures you send into battle. You could make some crippled fail-monster with one leg and a piddly weapon. Or, you could hone the best bits on offer and make an absolute beast.

In laptop terms, the Alienware M11x is that beast. It's really a PC, squished up all tiny and squeezed into a laptop case the size of a particularly chunky book. It's got an 11-inch screen and enough oomph to run everything on the market today on super-settings, meaning you won't have to settle for shoddy Facebook games to convince yourself you're having fun. And all you need to do to win it is create a beast of your own.



THE PRIZE

- Alienware M11x laptop
- Intel Core i5 520UM processor
- 4GB RAM
- 500GB hard drive
- Nvidia GeForce GT335M 1GB

www.alienware.co.uk

HOW TO WIN

Make us a monster

We want you to send us a monster. Something truly heinous (without any real body parts please, Rich is a vegetarian), created from your sick imagination – and maybe Plasticine – along the lines of *Darkspore*'s battling beasties. The best monster wins the laptop. No, wait. The *creator* of the best monster wins.

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Phone Number

Send your competition entry and this form to: **The 'It's alive! It's alive!' competition, PC Gamer, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW.** The closing date for this competition is June 8, 2011.

Your contact details from this entry form will only be used for contacting you if you are a winner. For terms and conditions applying to PC Gamer competitions, point your eyes at the small print leftwards.

COMPETITION RULES By taking part in a Competition you agree to be bound by these Competition Rules and decisions which are final. Any Competition Entries which in the opinion of the Competition Promoter (Promoter) are illegible, incomplete, damaged or altered, or which are received after the closing date will be disqualified. Proof of posting (Proof) or sending (Receipt) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by the entrant personally unless otherwise stated. Competitions are open to residents of the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) aged 18 and over except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the Competition, their households or anyone else connected with the Competition. By entering a Competition you give permission for your name, likeness and personal information to be used in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company and will not be returned. You warrant that any Competition Entry is your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, acceptance of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

PRIZE DRAW RULES By taking part in a Prize Draw you agree to be bound by the Prize Draw Rules, which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.future.com/privacy.html/2007/sale or in the relevant publication. Proof of posting (where relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by the entrant personally via a valid agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The winner(s) will be selected at random from all the eligible entries received by the closing date. The winner(s) will be notified by email or telephone within 28 days of the closing date. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with a cash or alternative prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Prize Draw is open to all UK residents (16 years and over) except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition, their households. By entering a Prize Draw you give permission for your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Prize Draw and for promotional purposes. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, acceptance of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Prize Draw Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Scan'd at EGF.com

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

EDGE®

NINTENDO | SONY | MICROSOFT | PC | HANDHELD | COIN-OP | ONLINE

DRIVER SAN FRANCISCO
The head-spinning return of the original wheelman

PREVIEWED
Street Fighter X Tekken
Dead Rising 2: Off The Record
Dragon's Dogma
Child Of Eden
Uncharted 3
Rage

Tomb Raider

The story behind the rip-roaring rebirth of an icon

Plus: Lionhead's secret game labs TrackMania 2: Canyon Advance Wars Portal 2

ISSUE 228 ON SALE NOW

Storekeys.com

PC GAMER

REVIEWS

How we review

Wherever possible, we finish every game before finalising the review. We review each game on its own merits, and try to match it to a reviewer who's a passionate expert in the field. The main aim of the reviews section is to help you make buying decisions. As such, we'll review paid-for content of all types in addition to the latest big-name releases.

Our scoring system explained

0-30% Intolerable
A crime against gaming. Whether it's bugs or bad design, this should be shot on sight.

31-45% Weak
Serious flaws ruin any chance this game has of offering sustained fun.

46-60% Mediocre
A very ordinary game, quickly forgotten. Think twice even if you find it cheap.

61-75% Fair
A decent effort that, but for a little more polish, coulda been a contender.

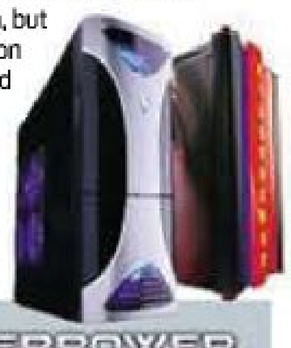
76-89% Good
Enjoyable, well-made and entertaining – just falling short of true greatness.

90%+ Editor's Choice
Oozing class, this is the work of experts at the top of their game. Bravo, sirs!

PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★
A game scoring 90% or more is the proud recipient of a PC Gamer Editor's Choice award. The Editor's personal seal of approval means we think the recipient is a truly great example of its genre.

THE PC GAMER MACHINES

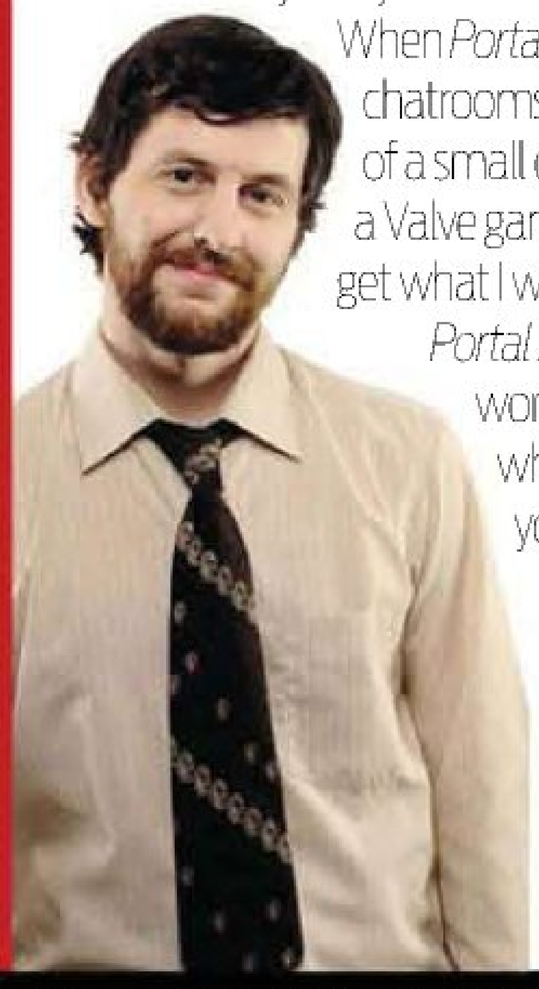
We aim to review games at their best, and this means playing them on our two Cyberpower PCs. The Gamer Infinity I7 Pro boasts a Core I7 920 CPU, 3Gb DDR3 RAM and a GTS250 graphics card. Coming from the AMD angle, our watercooled Gamer Ultra Perseus machine has a Phenom II CPU, 4Gb DDR3 RAM and an HD 4870 card. Powerful machines, both, but we also test new games on lower-spec machines, and we'll tell you if a game will make unreasonable demands. Go to *www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk* for more info on our top-spec machines.



CYBERPOWER

Activate portals

Here's why I like Steam: it turns a game launch into a huge, worldwide event, which absolutely everyone can take part in.



When *Portal 2* went live, millions of people were waiting. The forums, chatrooms and websites of the world were all focused on the activities of a small development studio in Seattle. The wait for Steam to unlock a Valve game feels like the wait for Father Christmas, except this time I get what I want.

Portal 2 is an amazing achievement. Another polished, innovative, wonderful game from Valve. It's been worth the wait to find out what the slumbering GLaDOS has been cooking up for us, and you and your co-op buddy have plenty to look forward to, too.



CRAIG PEARSON
NEWS EDITOR
craig.pearson@futurenet.com

Let us know what you think
Get in touch via our 'Send' section on page 68 or via our forum at *www.pcgamer.com/forum*.

THIS MONTH'S GAMES



Portal 2 78
IL-2 Sturmovik: Cliffs of Dover 84
The Sims Medieval 86
Ghostbusters: Sanctum of Slime 87
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars 87
Operation Flashpoint: Red River 88
Darkspore 92
Revenge of the Titans 94
Tricky Trucks 95
Back to the Future: Ep 3 95
World of Tanks 96
Call of Duty: Black Ops - First Strike 100

THEY'RE BACK

Alien vs Predator 102
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game 103
Gothic Complete Pack 103
UFO Trilogy 103
Kane & Lynch 2 : Dog Days 103

Steelkage.com

PC GAMER
EDITOR'S CHOICE
★★★★★

Need to know

What is it?
A first-person puzzle game.

Influenced by
BioShock, hallucinogenics

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT/ Radeon HD 4870

Alternatively
The Ball, 81%, *Portal: Prelude* (mod)

Copy protection
Steam

"Valve's platform puzzler sequel makes you feel like the dumbest genius ever"

filerkeys.com



A TRIUMPH

Welcome back to Aperture Science. **PORTAL 2**'s brutal, brain-bending puzzles await you. ***By Dan Stapleton***

It's so simple, I can't believe I didn't see it until now: use the orange Propulsion Gel to reach the energy bridge, then catapult across the chasm and shift my blue portal to the inclined surface (in mid-air) to launch myself up to the ledge, grab the Refraction Cube and redirect the laser beam to wipe out the turrets and activate the switch! One half of *Portal 2*'s brilliance is its ability to make me kick myself for not thinking of the impossible. The other is the way it makes me feel immensely satisfied when the solution finally clicks.

Valve's platform puzzler sequel makes you feel like the dumbest genius ever: some of the test chambers in the last third of its eight to ten hours had me convinced that they were completely unsolvable, and that some bug or sadist game designer had placed the exit just out of reach. I'd let out exasperated sighs as every attempt met with a dead end. I'd grimace in disapproval as I plummeted to my death for the tenth time. I'd consider surrender, until the solution dropped onto my head like a tossed Companion Cube.

What's remarkable is that all this is made possible using only one weapon: the Portal Gun. Unchanged from the first game (except for portals that can be seen through walls, *Left 4 Dead*-style) it creates one orange portal and one blue portal on certain surfaces, enabling you to instantaneously pass through one to the other. It's the ultimate non-weapon weapon, a sort of physics-based Judo-bazooka that redirects energy and objects the way you want them to go. Wielding it makes me feel more powerful – and smarter – than nearly any other gun in gaming.

Along with the new concepts,

"It's the ultimate non-weapon weapon, a sort of physics-based Judo-bazooka"

Portal 2's gentle learning curve reintroduces us to a broken Aperture Science facility: since the end of the original game, the place has fallen into disrepair. Many of its once-spotless test chambers are now rusted, grimy and overgrown.

The first hour or so follows the classic *Portal* practice of drip-feeding you basic portal functionality, after which the game starts introducing new inventions to use with portals, a process that continues until you reach a point around three quarters of the way through.

That's when the chambers become complex jungles of hazardous obstacles, where you need to direct lasers emitting from the walls using the moveable Refractor Cubes to create the closest thing *Portal 2* has to an offensive weapon: an aimable laser. Most often, your goal is to direct this beam through portals onto detectors, where it serves the function of the bouncing energy balls of the first game – but it can also turn the tables on those sweetly baffled turrets. Then there are the infinitely useful Excursion Funnels (levitation beams) and Light Bridges. More than just here-to-there movers, they can be applied to block or push away turrets, halt a catapulting jump before it throws you into oblivion, or help you climb a sheer wall.

Doesn't gel

I'm a little less wowed by the three flavours of viscous gel, which flow with a hypnotic globular effect from spouts to coat the environment. Orange adds a speed boost to surfaces, blue a bouncy coating, and white allows portals to be cast on materials that normally block it. Unlike most of *Portal 2*'s devices, these have only a couple of uses at most, and can be difficult to control as you use portals to direct their flow. It's a hassle, when you're trying to paint an orange runway up to a blue bouncing patch that launches you through a portal cast on a white patch, to have an errant blob of blue splash over everything. When your work of physics-defying Impressionist art comes together, however, it feels great.

The Aperture Science facility is far bigger than I had imagined. Your quest to escape leads you through its industrial bowels, a cavernous ▸

Stuck? Try these handy tips

✔ **Do**

- Look for a new perspective: try getting higher.
- Is there goo? If so, cover every surface with it.
- Stop playing for a bit. Come back with fresh eyes.
- Try everything, even if you don't think it'll work.

✘ **Don't**

- Spam your Portal Gun – that never works.
- Get fixated on tools. You can use portals as well.
- Assume your co-op buddy is not just being a dick
- Get fixated on one approach. Try accomplishing tasks in a different order.

One puzzle, two perspectives

How to cooperatively push a button



1 Evan casts one portal beneath a Propulsion Gel dispenser and another on a wall, then hits the dispenser button to squirt out some gel, which paints a nearby ramp orange. Presto: instant robot runway!



2 Dan launches off the ramp first, landing on a platform near the locked exit. A pressure plate will unlock the door. A button causes a box to drop, but the boxes fall into a disintegration field.



3 Timing it carefully, Dan hits the button at the same moment that Evan begins running toward the ramp. In mid-air, Evan snags the box and carries it with him safely to the other side.



4 With the box secured and both bots near the puzzle's exit, Evan drops it on the pressure plate to open the door and continue on to the next area. High-five emote time!

"If you like a challenge, it's impossible to put this game aside"

underground sewer-like area, and a long-forgotten retro 1960s version of Aperture Science, among others. Some areas are so dramatically different that even the basic button triggers and doors have unique looks. Fine-brush touches extend to the sound, too, such as the wind whooshing in your ears during long drops, or tingly electric chimes that introduce themselves to the background music when you're speeding on Propulsion Gel. Levels shatter before your eyes as Aperture Science collapses in on itself, while GLaDOS's hundreds of robot arms gradually repair and rearrange the chambers piece by piece. All of this scripted activity animates what would otherwise be still and samey-looking rooms, given *Portal*'s lack of foes other than stationary turrets.

Between puzzles, *Portal 2* is full of thrilling showcase moments, such as a mad-dash escape from an angry intelligence that controls the very walls, followed by a surprising take on the boss battle that, without a shot fired, made me feel dangerously out-classed by my adversary. Right around that time is when the test chambers become increasingly elaborate and intimidatingly huge – to a fault in some cases. These jumbo puzzles are so immense that, even using the handy camera zoom function, spotting the exit can take several minutes of exploration. Setting out to solve a puzzle when you don't know what objective you're working toward is the wrong kind of challenge, and some players will find it frustrating. Later levels have multiple contiguous puzzles that can seem like they might never end, and made me miss the pace of the early game where I'd get a refreshing break between challenges.

I always solved them in the end, though. Even though a couple stumped me badly for up to half an hour, I couldn't give up until I made it to the other side. If you like a challenge, it's impossible to put this game aside until you've burned through all of it.

Chatter boxes

The chambers are cohabited by well-written and wonderfully acted characters who exude personality, despite none of them technically being alive. Three major characters rattle off absurd dark humour and petty insults at every turn. Evil AI GLaDOS is in top politely murderous form from the moment she appears on screen (spoiler alert: she's still alive), but *Portal*'s show-stealing monotone antagonist is challenged for the spotlight by Wheatley, the bumbling, chattering robot who helps you escape. Fantastically voiced by Stephen Merchant (pretty much playing the same mind-bogglingly stupid character from Extras), Wheatley is a doofus AI who makes you turn around while he hacks doors (he can't do it while you're watching). Also present is JK Simmons (J Jonah Jameson in the Spider-Man films), who lends his fittingly cantankerous voice to the founder of Aperture Science, Cave Johnson. His comically sociopathic approach to science is second only to GLaDOS's.

Sure, I saw the plot twists coming, but I still looked forward to witnessing exactly how the characters would react to them. Through death, resurrection, revenge and reversal of fortune, their charm makes what would otherwise be an empty world feel boisterous and alive – and more than makes up for the player character being a faceless mute.

Portal 2 does all this and more while recycling very few of the first game's greatest comedy hits – there's nary a nod to dishonest cake, and the beloved Weighted Companion Cube makes only a cameo appearance. And the finale? Not challenging in the least, but a spectacular and extremely clever finish to the story, with extra points for those who've paid close attention to Mr Johnson. And when it's over, it's not finished.

Companion cubes

A lot of people played *Portal* cooperatively. They always had a backseat driver, a roommate or significant other hovering over their chair, feeding them advice as to where to place their portals. In *Portal 2*, Valve have officially supported that dynamic, enabling us to share the burden of crunching spatial options with another human brain in a co-op campaign. With the right sidekick, *Portal 2* co-op is some of the most social gaming you can have. The occasional headaches that you would get when stuck on your own are alleviated by communication and dimensional horseplay.

You and your partner play as P-body and Atlas, a Pixar-esque Laurel and Hardy droid duo running the testing gauntlet at GLaDOS's whim in a separate, sillier story. They're not big talkers, only managing a few expressive squeaks and squeals of triumph and defeat, but their animations are lively and a joy to watch, and they've got some amusing celebratory emotes.

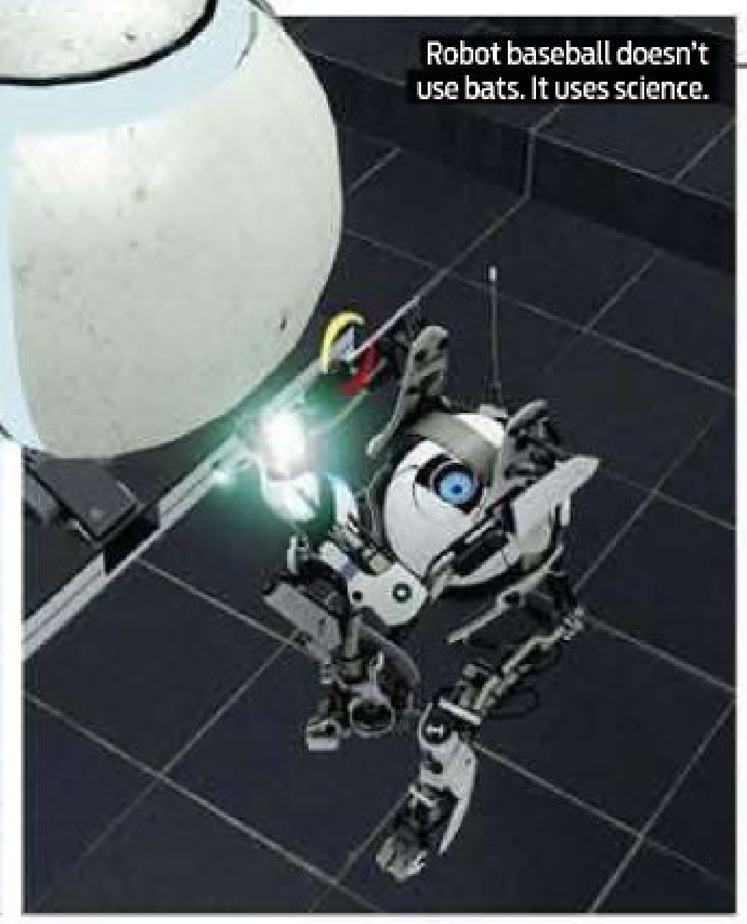
Five different testing zones are accessible via a massive hub room, making a total of more than 40 chambers (many of which are multi-part puzzles). Next to the singleplayer tests these puzzles are doubly complex, but co-op wastes no time babying you with tutorials. The very second challenge I tackled in co-op had us scratching our heads for several minutes trying to wrap our brains around the idea of linking our two sets of portals to achieve ▸

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Excursion Funnels are the hot new way to travel.



Robot baseball doesn't use bats. It uses science.



Portals really help to mix up a foam party.



Ah, the one weakness of lasers. Physics.



I'm going for a walk. I may be some time.



This is the Borealis. Ha! You wish.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com


The Borg finally got Mike from Monsters, Inc.


Repulsion gel and turrets mix beautifully.


The floating gel is strangely hypnotic.


This is Atlas' counterpart, P-body.


This is high on the list of Things That Bode Ill.


Ceilings aren't the barriers they used to be.


The full scale of Aperture's operation is on show.


This looks simple. What are you waiting for?


You'll have to get creative with moving the gels around.


We like Refraction Cube, but it's just a rebound thing.

Aperture inventions

How do the latest toys rate?

	What it is	What it does	Used	Score
	**Propulsion gel**	Makes you run faster	Often	2
	**Moon gel**	Lets you put portals where you couldn't put them before	Rarely	2
	**Repulsion gel**	Bounces you off surfaces, increases jump height	Sometimes	3
	**Excursion Funnel**	Moves players and objects horizontally or vertically	Often	4
	**Aerial Faith Plate**	Flings you through the air, like a jump-pad	Sometimes	1
	**Lasers + Refraction Cubes**	Death beam retargeter	Rarely	4
	**Light Bridge**	Walkways, anti-turret shields, flying-object stopper	Often	5

even-more-impossible feats that couldn't be navigated alone.

A handful of puzzles are wonderfully distinct from what you do in singleplayer. In one, I was guided through a rat maze of spiked walls that resembled GLaDOS' grisly version of a Pachinko machine. My partner had to carefully hop on and off a pressure pad to reverse the direction of an Excursion Funnel, to juggle me back and forth to avoid death by giant stompy pile-driver, while he cast new portals to change the path of the beam. On other occasions, I created a ceiling-and-floor loop that my partner would fall through infinitely, until I re-cast one portal to launch him toward an objective at terminal velocity. Other rooms prompt careful timing: after many minutes pondering one, it finally dawned on me that we had to fling ourselves from opposite-facing portals and collide our bots in mid-air in order to safely land on a platform below. Robot chest-bumps: *Portal 2* has them.

In sync

For the timing puzzles there's an awesomely simple, non-verbal tool for syncing with your partner: holding the F key initiates a three-second countdown timer visible to both players. Two other tools tremendously supplement your (totally necessary) voice communication. There's marking, which lets you tag any spot or gizmo in the environment with a temporary pointer that's highlighted on your teammate's screen, and a seamless picture-in-picture toggle that shows you exactly what your buddy sees in the corner of your screen. Both are effortless to use, and between the two there's never any confusion as to which acid pool your partner wants you to help him leap over.

I love how trust is made part of the game, and that the instant, painless respawning leaves room for antics. Every few stages, my partner would grief me a little by trapping me in a levitation beam, moving a portal to remove the Light Bridge from under my feet, or overwriting my portal with his at the last moment.

These intangibles arise from the complex fun of moving and solving with another person, the most gratifying of which is having a gaming context where you can demonstrate your spark of awareness, creativity, or problem-solving knack. There's a wonderful reflex when this is about to happen - your eyes widen, a corner of your mouth rises. You're the only one in the class who knows the answer, and you are about to enlighten your teammate. It almost always starts with "I have an idea."

There's also a fair amount of making fools of yourselves. In one of our prouder moments as a team, we spent ten minutes trying to outsmart an Excursion Funnel/Faith Plate combo. We were so busy activating switches and scouting the room for new options that it was some time before I realised that we'd forgotten the most basic part of *Portal* science: you can walk through the portals, not just send things through them.

From beginning to end, the co-op puzzles are excellent but brief. We zipped through all 40 in around four hours, which means you'll be able to finish both the singleplayer and co-op modes in a long weekend – partly because you won't want to stop playing. It's a minor shame that Valve didn't use co-op as an opportunity for a handful of optional, brutal obstacle courses like *Portal*'s challenge chambers – some of those take a weekend to work out.

"I love how trust is made a part of the game"

One shot

Portal 2's biggest flaw is that, having played through once, I can never look at these puzzles – in either singleplayer or co-op – with those same bewildered eyes again (barring, as Aperture Science would call it, "a very minor case of serious brain damage"). The included developer commentary, and of course an encore performance from the cast, would be the only things that might make me start playing again after Jonathan Coulton's new song rolls with the credits. (It's a good song, incidentally, but 'Still Alive' is a tough act to follow.)

For that reason, my strongest words of caution are to choose your co-op partner carefully. You only get one shot at these puzzles – don't waste them with someone who's already been through, as that would spoil the many surprises and the victory of discovering them for yourself. I'll definitely remember all of *Portal 2* fondly, though, and as one of the best-written and finely polished gaming experiences in recent memory. ■

VERDICT

A challenging, hilarious, and mind-expanding puzzle experience for one or two. Treasure your first time through.

PC GAMER **94**

◆ **Expect to pay** £40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Valve Software ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** 2-player co-op ◆ **Link** www.thinkwithportals.com

SCRAMBLED

Why **IL-2 STURMOVIK: CLIFFS OF DOVER** isn't 1C's finest hour. ***By Tim Stone***

Need to know

What is it?
A WWII flight sim with uniquely realistic planes and lots of bugs.

Influenced by
Mechanical realism, British pluck

Play it on
Quad core CPU, 4GB RAM, DX10 1GB video card

Alternatively
Battle of Britain II: Wings of Victory + BDG patches, 68%, *Wings of Prey*, 78%

Copy protection
Steam + Solidshield

When Joseph 'Mutt' Summers landed after test-flying the prototype Spitfire for the first time, he was so impressed he told Supermarine's engineers "Don't touch anything." After test-flying this long-awaited follow-up to flight sim legend *IL-2*, my message to 1C's engineers would be a little lengthier:

"Don't touch anything except the painfully primitive campaign, the embarrassingly inept training mode, the clumsy GUI design, the dodgy comms, the bugged AI, the inadequate documentation, and the ill-optimised graphics engine."

The most distracting of *CloD*'s many shortcomings (and hopefully, the most easily rectified) is the feeble framerate. However much money you've thrown at your rig recently, it's going to gulp when confronted with busy dogfights over land. Until 1C deliver promised refinements, fluid furballs over London are about as likely as bluebirds over Dover.

Harder to fix will be the achingly unambitious campaign. In sims like *Battle of Britain II*, the 1940 air war is a breathtaking thing, a swirling sea of unscripted savagery you throw yourself into for day after memorable day. In *CloD* we don't get anything half as involving. The immutable sequence of small-scale sorties has been carefully pre-prepared in Moscow. A page of memoir-style preamble before take-off, then another when you land, is as far as mood-setting goes. Often these texts don't even reflect the action. More than once I've bagged multiple bandits, only to be accused of cowardice on returning home.

The training mode is as crude as the campaign. Ten minutes into my first trip in the beautifully crafted two-seat Tiger Moth, the instructor informed me he was taking the stick for the landing. Seconds later we were plummeting into a cornfield. SNAFUs like this, in combination with a plethora of unassigned controls, and an idiosyncratic interface, make *CloD* impossible to recommend to fledgling fliers.

The more you see of this obviously unfinished creation, the clearer the target audience is. For the last six years 1C haven't been striving to satisfy the casual simmer, the gamer who yearns for the days when sims enveloped rather than confused; they've been building a sim for 'full-real' fanatics.

If you're the sort that always flew *IL-2* with the complex engine management tickbox ticked and the cockpit graphics on, you'll adore *CloD* even in its current state. To max-out the realism settings and clamber into any of the 16 stunning flyables, is to participate in a revolution. No developer, with the exception of *FSX* artisans A2A, has ever treated WWII warbirds with more respect. The flight behaviours, the cockpit functionality, the damage models, the engine alchemy... it's all recreated with astounding subtlety. Suddenly the job of the '40s combat pilot is right there in front of you, in all its stark, sumptuous complexity.

Fail to master the murky interrelationships between prop pitch, radiator settings, fuel mixture, and throttle, and you'll be gliding to the ground long before you encounter the enemy.

If the likes of the Spitfire, Stuka, Fiat G.50 and He 111 were *FSX* add-ons they'd cost £20 a piece. Treat *CloD* as an interactive museum, a tool for setting up small photogenic skirmishes, and it's marvellous. As a game, it's much less successful. I advise waiting a year for the makers and modders to work their magic. ■



"I've bagged multiple bandits, only to be accused of cowardice"

◆ **Expect to pay** £30 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Ubisoft ◆ **Developer** 1C: Maddox Games ◆ **Multiplayer** 128 players (in theory) ◆ **Link** bit.ly/ebisrf

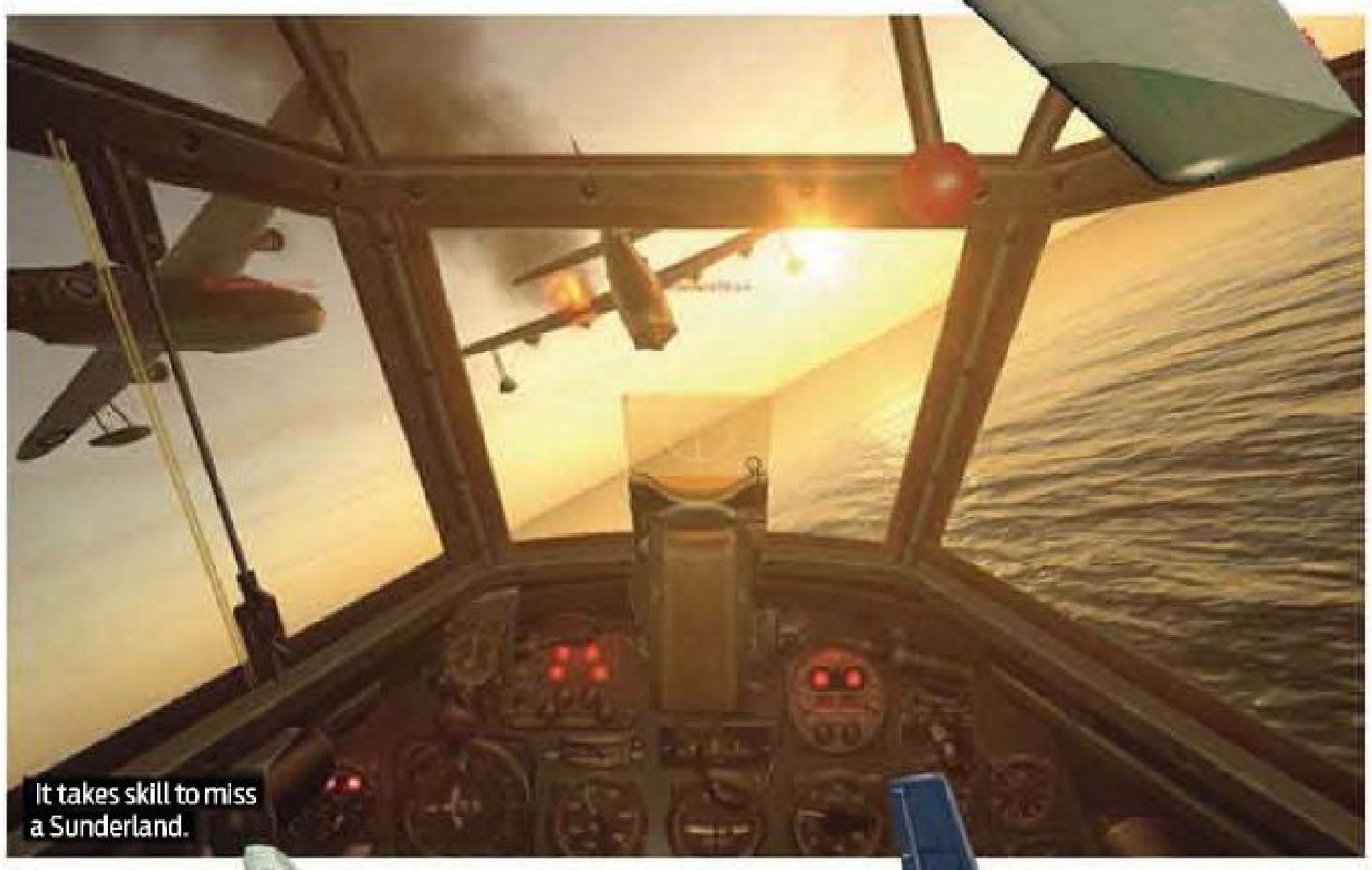
VERDICT

Flashes of brilliance and masses of bugs. *Cliffs of Dover* needed at least another six months in the hangar.

PC GAMER 72

StoreKeys.com


Only 1C know why this pic isn't anti-aliased.


It takes skill to miss a Sunderland.


Key RAF bases like Manston are missing.


No 'Thames Pilot' achievement? Bah.


Even fish in barrels pity Stuka gunners.



If you don't know what's dangerous about it, don't press it.


Turn flying boats into boats with hot lead.













SIMPLER TIMES

It's a good yarn, but **THE SIMS MEDIEVAL** loses some of that open-world magic. ***By Dan Stapleton***

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Need to know

What is it?
A choose-your-own-adventure game with virtual people in a fantasy realm.

Influenced by
The Sims 3, King Arthur

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT/ Radeon HD 3850

Alternatively
The Sims 3, 92%

Copy protection
Disc check

The Sims Medieval is set in a picturesque fantasy kingdom of kings, knights and wizards. It tells many a charmingly off-the-wall, humorous tale of its people and their lives. It's just that there's not much game to it.

It's both a strength and a failing that it isn't a lazy re-skinning of *The Sims 3*. Instead, it's driven by one of the most basic and least challenging parts of that game: quests, which usher your chosen 'hero' Sims – including a spy, a blacksmith, a priest, and seven others – through a series of brain-dead simple objectives. It has a beginning and an end. It brings out the storytelling, but omits the more interesting sandbox play that generates those wonderfully emergent *Sims* stories.

Medieval's quests are a chain of tasks, like 'Challenge Sim X to a duel.' To solve this, you click the icon that appears over the target Sim's head and select 'Challenge to duel' from the menu. They duel, and it gives you another task: 'Tell the Monarch you won,' which you solve in exactly the same way. A trained monkey could play 90% of this, and it only gets slightly trickier with two Sims to manage at once.

Bad medicine

It didn't take me long to figure out how to easily max out my performance meter – the metric for how well Sims are doing in their job – nearly every time. All I had to do to get my Sim 'focused' was a couple of compulsory profession-related tasks per day. In the case of my doctor, it was treating a couple of Sims for illness by collecting and applying leeches in a minigame, and crafting medicine from gathered herbs. Then I satisfied his most basic needs by buying him a comfy bed and strolling into the off-map village market to buy pigeon meat for soup.

A few tasks are jarringly more complex, such as when your Monarch Sim has to pass an edict. You propose an edict, then see which Sims are voting which way, and then you try to bribe them to support one edict or another. Or else just guess which way they're going to vote, which appears to be completely random. They even seemed to change between each time I checked.

It ends up more of an interactive choose-your-own-adventure story than a game, and that's where the treasure of *Medieval* lies. The stories are at times light and goofy, typical E-rated Sims fare; at others, they're full of delightfully dark humour, with executions, dire chinchillas, assassinations and organ theft.

Once I got some momentum built up, *Medieval* had me happily clicking to see what would happen next, and the stories branch enough that I'm curious to see what the wizard would've done had I chosen him to solve the 'Talking Frog' quest rather than the doctor. There are tons of achievements to earn. But without the freedom to build and live as you please, *Medieval* doesn't have the lasting appeal of its parent game. ■

VERDICT

More an interactive fairytale story than a game, this *Sims* spinoff tells a good yarn but feels limited.

PC GAMER **70**

◆ **Expect to pay** £40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ◆ **Developer** EA Sims ◆ **Multiplayer** No ◆ **Link** www.ea.com/the-sims-medieval

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

BUSTED

GHOSTBUSTERS: SANCTUM OF SLIME is a repetitive mess. *By John Callaham*

Where are Bill Murray, Dan Ackryod, Ernie Hudson and Harold Ramis? They might not have managed to elevate this cheap feeling, top-down co-op action shooter, but it would have at least been authentically crap.

The unnarrated comic book opening cutscene was a bad start, but I pushed manfully on. My reward: unfunny, repetitive fights where my three AI-run rookie Ghostbusters and I trudged through five hours' worth of bland sewers, an ugly hotel, and a forgettable cemetery, to purge these places of ectoplasmic vermin with our proton packs.

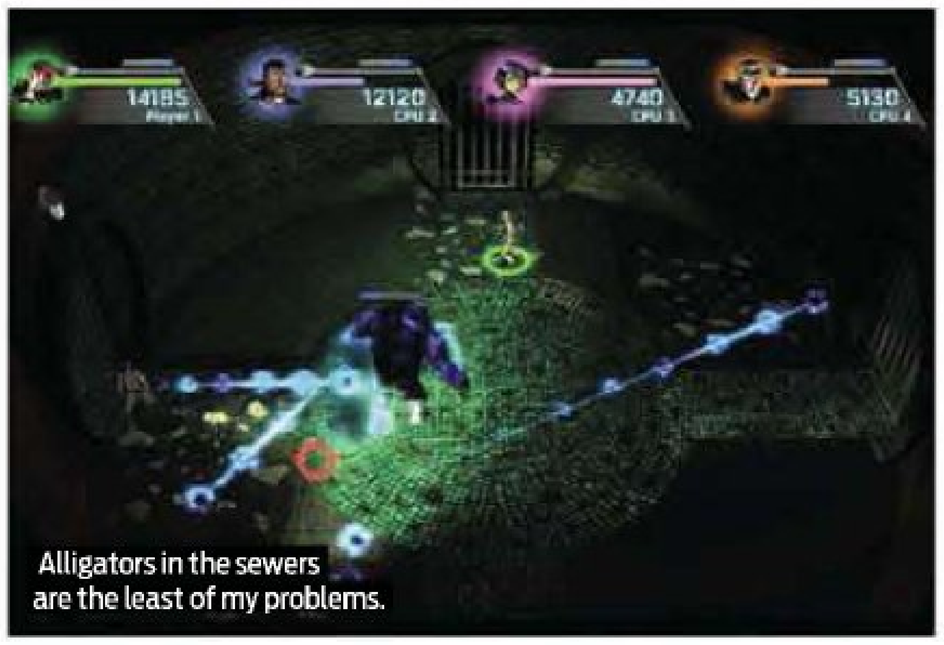
The pack is the only weapon: you just switch between its three coloured attacks to dispatch colour-coded enemies, like in a toddler's matching game. Targeting enemies is easy with the red streaming mode and the yellow widespread mode, but hitting the ghosts with the blue burst mode is frustratingly tricky. Bosses, such as a ghost chef, a subway car come to life and a giant spider, aren't any more exciting, only requiring some running around and firing before you ensnare them in the ghost trap with a simple button-mashing minigame. Occasionally the movies' most famous ghost, Slimer, shows up, but rather than providing memorable moments, all he does is drop power-ups when fried.

Excluding a few instances where the game threw insurmountable numbers of spooks at me at once, ghostbusting isn't a challenge.

Sanctum could've been partially resurrected with co-op, but since it's ridiculously limited to local-only (no online or even LAN), few will ever bother. But it's not like you're missing out on anything special. ■

PC GAMER 35





◆ **Expect to pay** £7 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Atari
◆ **Developer** Behaviour Interactive ◆ **Link** www.atari.com/gbsanctumofslime

SQUARE

LEGO STAR WARS III: THE CLONE WARS is a few bricks short. *By Lizzie Cuevas*

This follows the rule that everything not based on the original trilogy is tainted by the dark side. It transmogrifies the cast of the Clone Wars animated series into cute Lego brick-people, and puts them into an average platforming adventure parody.

You start with Obi-Wan, Anakin, and Padme, switching between them to use their unique abilities – such as Obi's lightsaber moves or Padme's chain whip (kinky!) – to escape Count Dooku's Geonosian Arena. You unlock characters by completing missions, and after a short while I'd amassed a large selection with a wide array of skills: Lightsaber Throw for Jedi characters or stunning enemies with an electrical shock as a droid.

The controls can be cumbersome, even using the gamepad the game is obviously built for. While hacking and slashing battle droids to bits is as easy as smashing your little brother's Lego creations, switching characters is a chore, as you have to chase them down and hit a button to swap bodies with the AI piloting them.

When it goes well, you'll be solving fun puzzles by using the Force to arrange Lego pieces together, or fighting cool boss villains like General Grievous. A few missions suffer from a lack of direction: in 'Duel of the Droids', I got stuck because I needed a specific character I hadn't unlocked yet to activate a switch. I had to quit the mission and pick a new one.

After the main game, Free Mode lets you play any level with any character, while in new competitive Arcade Mode you and a friend race to collect Lego studs or destroy the most buildings. It's all simple, brainless, limited fun. ■

PC GAMER 65





◆ **Expect to pay** £20 ◆ **Release** March 22 ◆ **Publisher** LucasArts
◆ **Developer** Traveller's Tales ◆ **Multiplayer** 2 players, co-op and versus (local only)

BUGGING OUT

Does **OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER** still want to be a military sim? ***By Rich McCormick***

Need to know

What is it?
A linear shooter dressed in the skin of a dead military shooter.

Influenced by
Call of Duty: Black Ops

Play it on
Quad core CPU, 4GB RAM, Radeon 4870

Alternatively
ArmA II, Battlefield: Bad Company 2

Copy protection
Games for Windows Live

"We've seen some PTSD-inducing shit together"

Operation Flashpoint: Red River tells me that I'm a slick sonofabitch, commanding three other slick sonofabitch marines. It tells me loudly, repeatedly, and gratingly – via the mouth of staff sergeant Shouty McRacist – that I'm a Spartan and a devil dog, and all those other ultra-macho things that make me feel terribly uncomfortable because I haven't seen combat.

My squad and I, we're told we're the best. We were the best at killing nebulous insurgents upset with America on first insertion in the dusty Central Asian country of Tajikistan; when the Chinese army arrived, the gruff man narrating the story told us we were the best at killing them too. But if we're the best – the last bulwark against virulent, encroaching communism – then it'd be a good idea to start practising your Mandarin. Because we're fucking terrible.

Red River's squad AI is infuriating. Playing as a blank faced squad leader, you have access to a radial menu that lets you deliver a set of commands. They range in scope from the order to lay down a blanket of suppressing fire, to a 'move' command. Every single one is broken.

Simple minds

"Hold that position!" I'd shout, aiming the helpful white circle at a square of sandbags. "Okay!" my men would parrot back, before giving each other the secret gesture that meant "Haha! Let's fuck with his head." Let's zoom out from the desert to illustrate my point. I'm going to talk directly to *you*. For a moment, I'm going to pretend you're my soldier. We've seen some PTSD-inducing shit together, OK, and I love you like a brother. Even if you're a lady. Imagine we're in Tajikistan, being pressed by Chinese troops. I'm going to tell you to hold position at those sandbags.

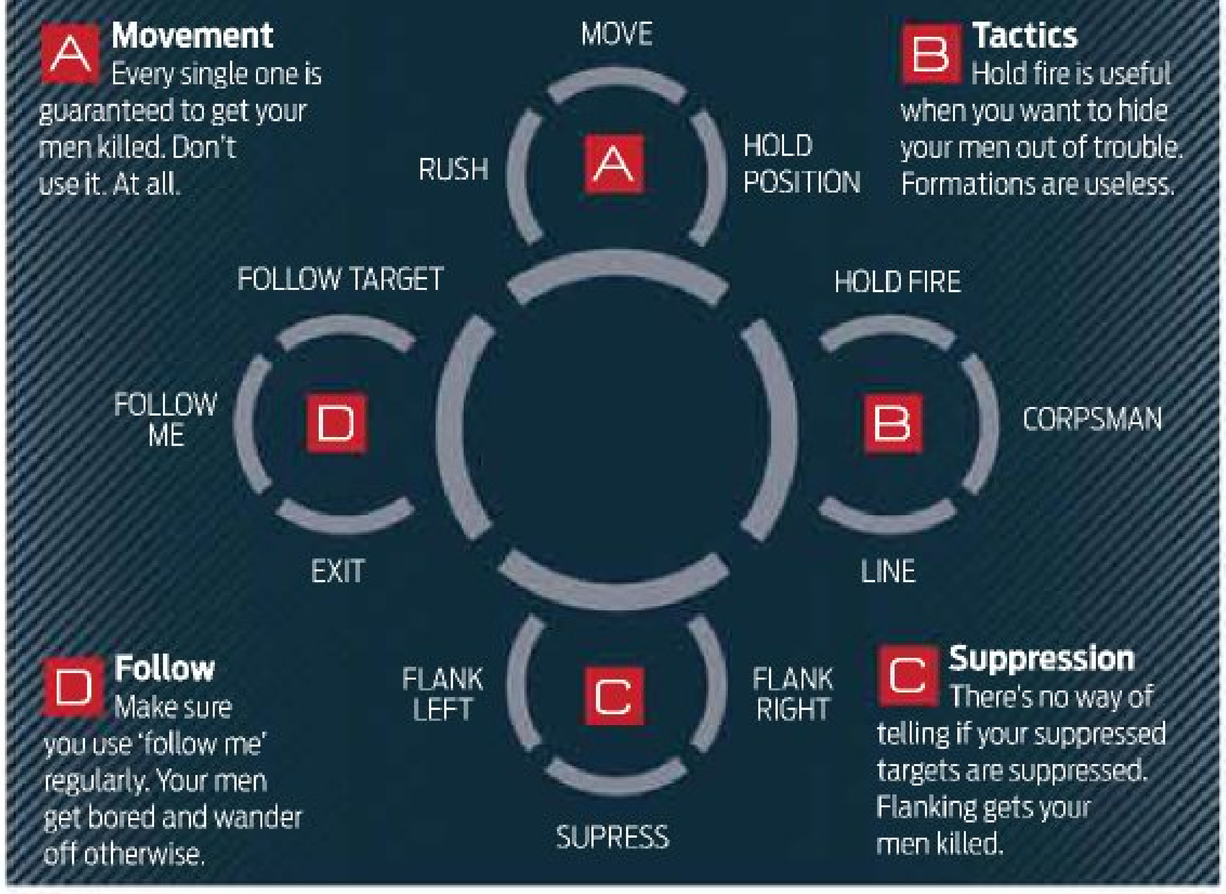
What do you do? If your answer was any permutation of "Umm, I guess I'd probably crouch so the sandbags are between my soft skin and hurty bullets?" I want you transferred to my squad in place of *Red River*'s artificial men, double-time. Their answer – presumably delivered between bouts of dribbling and bumbling into furniture – was always: "Let's stand in *front* of the sandbags! It'll be fun! And if it isn't, we'll just wander around a bit until our circulatory systems churn more metal than blood!"

Occasionally – very occasionally – they'll get it right. I had the most success with the 'defend building' command. During a staggered retreat from the Chinese Army's first spearhead, the game asked me to protect a series of two-tiered structures. When I specifically pointed my sniper to an upper window and left the other two men behind reassuringly chunky masonry, I was left with a semblance of a defensive force. That was, until I also asked them to provide covering fire. The advanced multi-tasking necessary to process the twin orders of 'stand still' and 'point your gun at this' caused all three squadmates to run out the front door in a blind panic, lest the complexity of my orders force their brains from their ears. Don't worry, they were all shot before that could happen.

It's for the best, anyway. By the end of the game, I hated my squad for both their propensity for dying in the most inconvenient ways, and their general character. They're meant to be straight-talking alpha-males lifted directly from cultural sources like HBO's Generation Kill – but where those soldiers are presented as morally questionable and damaged by war, the marines of *Red River* are deliberate heroes. There's no discussion on the nature of conflict to sweeten the nasty taste left by the game's incidental

Can I see the menu?

Your voice messages, and what they mean.



A Movement
Every single one is guaranteed to get your men killed. Don't use it. At all.

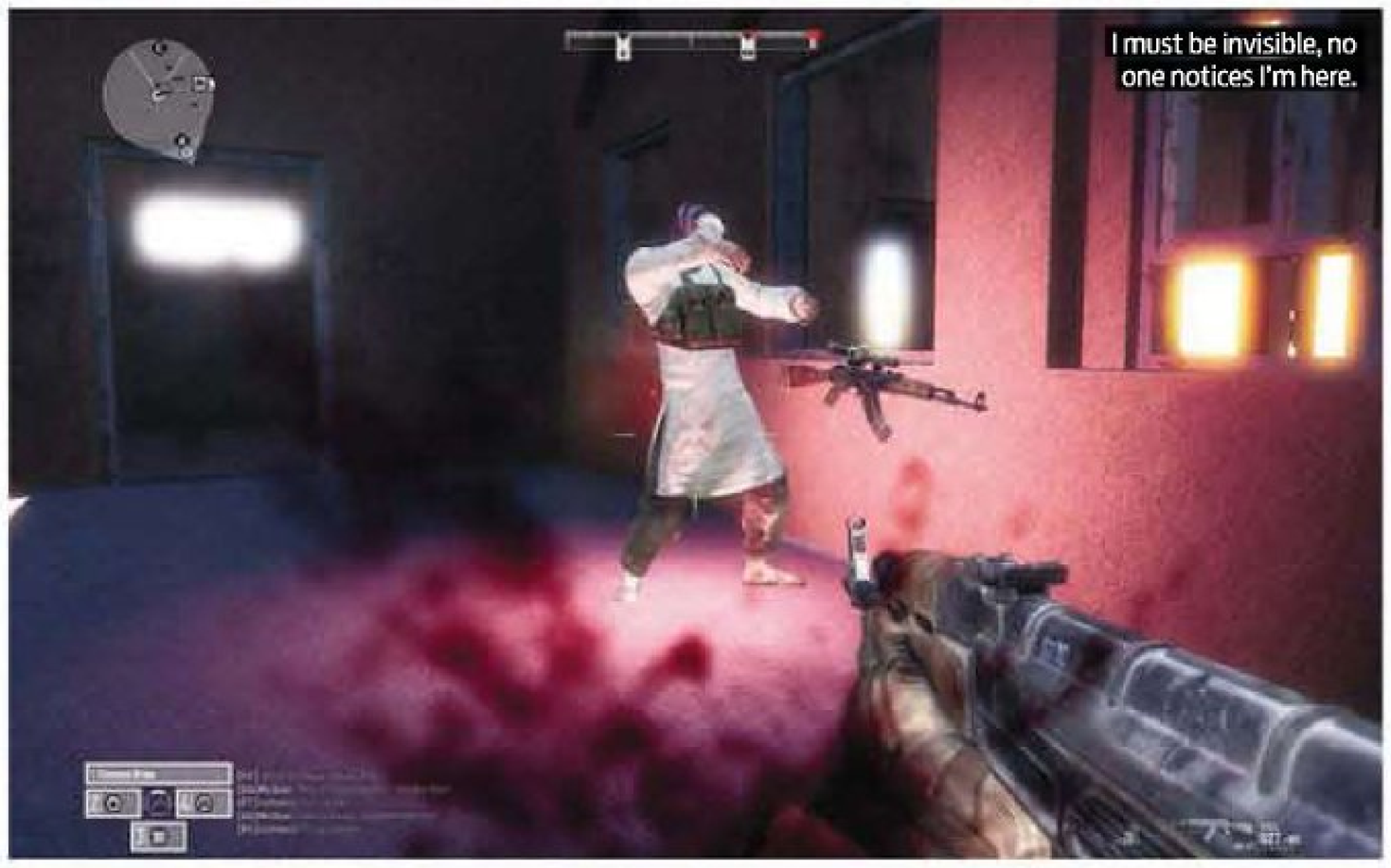
B Tactics
Hold fire is useful when you want to hide your men out of trouble. Formations are useless.

C Suppression
There's no way of telling if your suppressed targets are suppressed. Flanking gets your men killed.

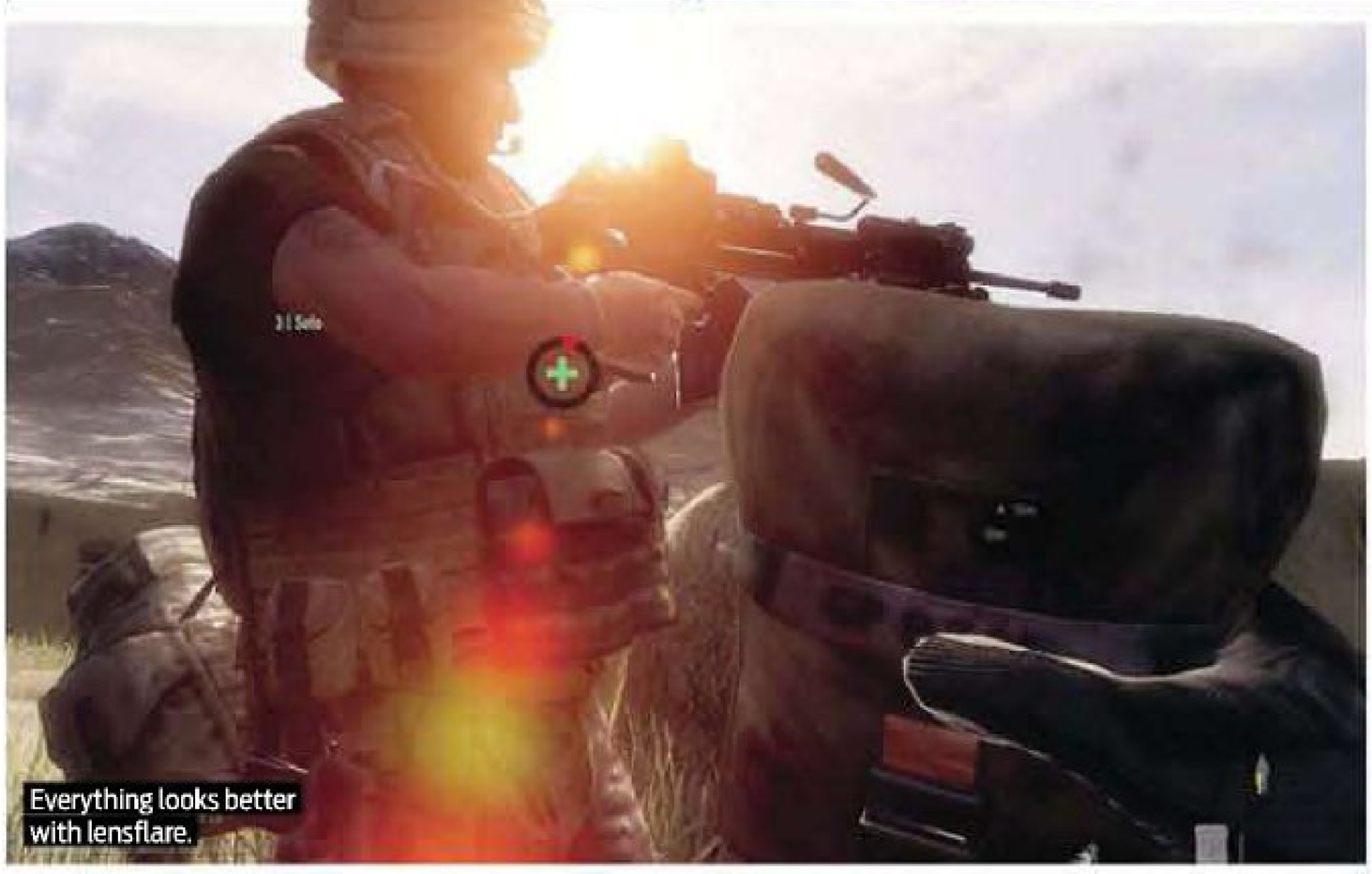
D Follow
Make sure you use 'follow me' regularly. Your men get bored and wander off otherwise.











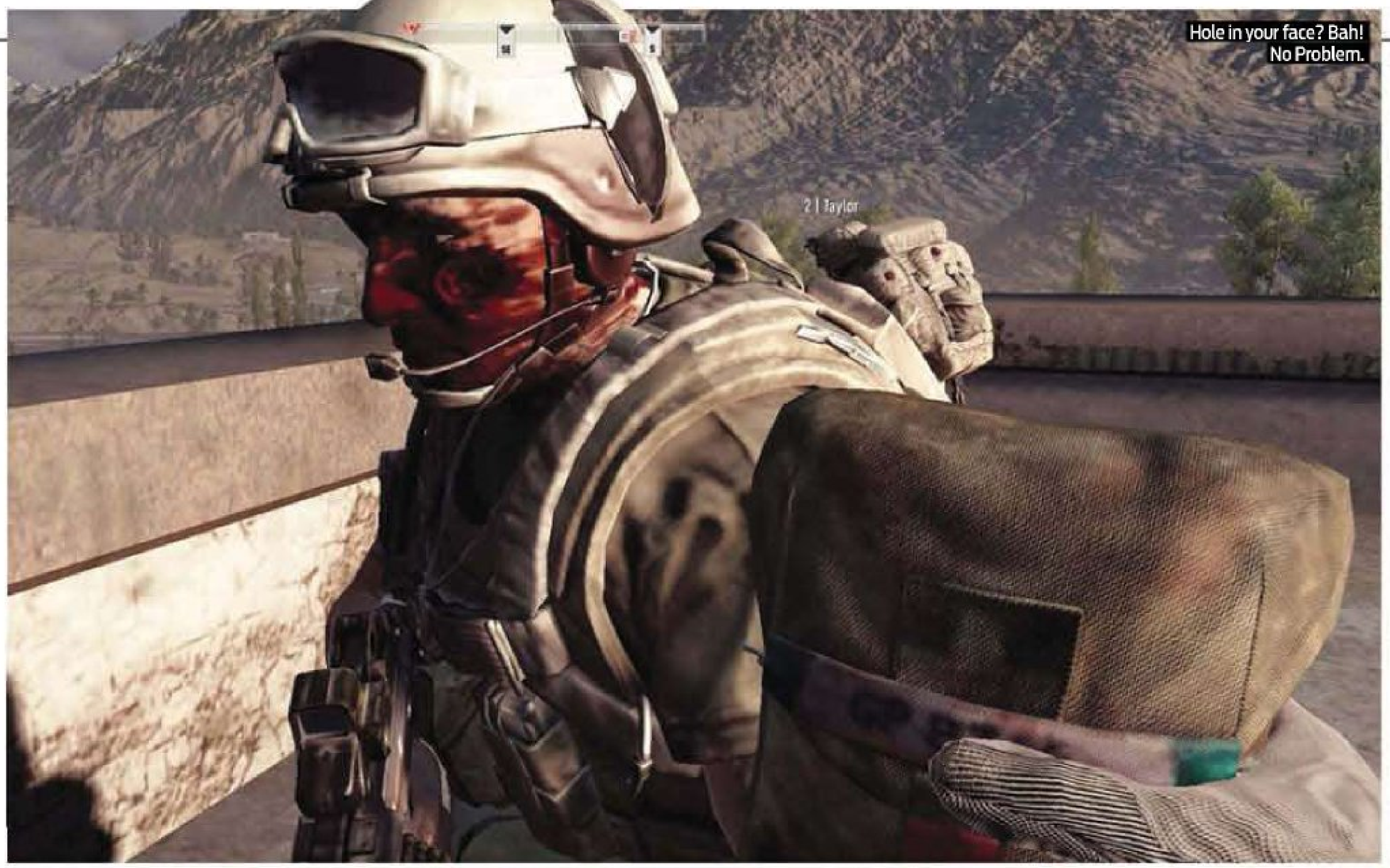




StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

filefactory.com















conversations; we just get Staff Sergeant Knox launching into another five minute, racism-tinged diatribe about the eating habits of the invading Chinese forces. These rants are meant to sound big and clever, but go on far too long and sound indelibly self-satisfied.

The enemy AI is as wonky as its friendly counterpart. Early on in the game, I flanked an infested compound as three squads opened fire on the front gate. Peeking through windows like a terrorism-pervert, I murdered a handful of oblivious insurgents. This first part is *Red River*'s best bit: I'd snuck behind a set of enemies as their attention was drawn away. But when I'd entered the compound, I found their equally dull-witted chums glued to their assigned windows.

The first one I spotted made me panic: despite the shift from military sim to linear shooter, *Red River* still runs with the tang of *Operation Flashpoint*'s blood, making one or two shots deadly. I popped a few bullets into his back as he stood unmoving. When I met the second one, he didn't turn. I pulled out my pistol and fired over his shoulder, breaking the window in front of him. No reaction. Finally, I let loose a few shots at the dirt around his feet, trying to make him dance. Slowly, in three distinct movements, he turned to face me. I killed him before he raised his rifle, a full 50 seconds *after* I'd clomped into the room.

Dumb AI means traditional infantry battles are trivial shooting galleries: enemies distrust cover more than your own squad, and kneel in open fields, praying for death's sweet relief. This is the same enemy force that, when presented with the freshly exploded carcass of an APC on a wide track road, can't drive its convoy *around* it. The sight of an armoured vehicle gently humping its dead brother, in case you were wondering, is both hilarious and touching.

Applying vehicles to any of *Red River*'s situation seems to be a recipe for incalculable disaster. In one of the later missions, an empty Chinese transport helicopter landed on the rooftop I was standing on. Both pilots sat in the cockpit, facing directly ahead, making no motion to continue their flight and giving no reason for landing their multi-million pound charge less than spitting distance from their enemy.

Worst mates

Meet your squad. They're idiots.

Taylor

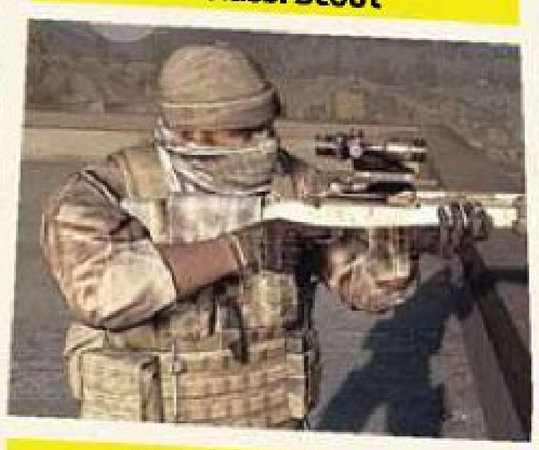
Class: Grenadier



Usefulness: **Doesn't use grenades**
Gun: **M4A1**
Annoyance: **Nrrrggh.**
Cliche factor: **Offensive**
Likelihood of dying: **Bleeding out already**

Soto

Class: Scout



Usefulness: **Infinitesimal**
Gun: **M14 DMR**
Annoyance: **Rage-inducing**
Cliche factor: **Low**
Likelihood of dying: **Certain**

Balletto

Class: Auto-rifleman



Usefulness: **Medium**
Gun: **M249 SAW**
Annoyance: **Very**
Cliche factor: **Medium-well**
Likelihood of dying: **Incredibly likely**

Best buds

Any chance to mitigate the use of the game's AI is a blessed oasis of competence in a sea of fuckuppery. Real humans are the best tonic. To its credit, *Red River* is thick with co-op potential, allowing up to three friends to join the main campaign mode, as well as four game modes built for groups. Last Stand sees you simply defending against waves of attackers, but the others are more nuanced. 'CSAR' has you inserting, finding and extracting a prisoner, and 'Rolling Thunder' gives you a humvee and full charge of a convoy, forcing you to clear a route before pressing on. Attempt these with a team of four and you're guaranteed repeat fizzles of enjoyment.

The campaign, too, regains some lustre in co-op, where less time spent screaming for the death of your AI squadmates means more time devising sneaky battle plans. Problem is, in order to play you're going to need friends willing to jump through the hoops of Games for Windows Live.

Multiplayer sessions seemed to smoke out *Red River*'s bugs faster than singleplayer. Much of this is likely thanks to mankind's innate curiosity when put in a room with someone else. Pootling around the countryside with a friend in a humvee, we managed to drive directly through several three-foot high walls, only for our ride to permanently sink a few feet into the Earth's surface. With the spirit of exploration in our hearts and a seemingly magic car at our grasp, we abandoned our convoy and pushed for the horizon.

We didn't get far. Don't let the extensive environments mislead: go off the beaten track and you're punished: your screen goes wibbly, and you're ordered back into the combat area. It's the diametric opposite of the freedom of the first *Operation Flashpoint*.

Red River takes all the things the *Flashpoint* name is associated with – creative, emergent destruction and go-anywhere realism – and lets them wash away. It tries to be a bombastic shooter, but dodgy AI, a warren of bugs and an unpleasant tone mean the few gulps of fun you could draw from its waters are to be taken in multiplayer only. ■

"To its credit, *Red River* is thick with co-op potential"

◆ **Expect to pay** £26 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Codemasters ◆ **Developer** In-house
◆ **Multiplayer** 4 player co-op ◆ **Link** www.flashpointgame.com

VERDICT

Too restrictive to appeal to *ArmA* fans, too ragged for *CoD* people, *Red River* is a needless addition to a crowded sector.

PC GAMER **45**

MUTANT

Self-defeating **DARKSPORE** hacks and slashes away its own potential. ***By Dan Stapleton***

Need to know

What is it?
A sci-fi action-RPG with customizable heroes.

Influenced by
Spore, Diablo

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8800 GT/ Radeon HD 3850

Alternatively
Torchlight, 89%

Copy protection
EA.com account

Why won't Maxis let me play with their best toy? I refer, of course, to the awesome, Play Doh-like Creature Creator that powered the creation of the wacky player-made monsters of *Spore*.

In *Darkspore*, the loosely affiliated hack-and-slash action-RPG spin-off of Will Wright's evolution game, it serves as the loot-equipping screen. But this version is a shadow of its former self, limited to GI Joe-like functionality that only allows manipulation of accessories on 25 playable 'hero' monsters that someone else already had the fun of creating. Being locked out of its creative power baffles me.

Let's pretend that we don't know what we're missing, and appreciate *Darkspore*'s lively and colourful hack-and-slash violence for what it is: mildly entertaining with a lot of good ideas, most of which go tragically awry.

Darkspore's big idea is the best one: instead of controlling a single hero, you can instantly swap between each member of a team of three cartoony-looking monster-heroes. Each creature has its own set of powers and distinct health and energy pools, and each creature contributes one power that any team member can use.

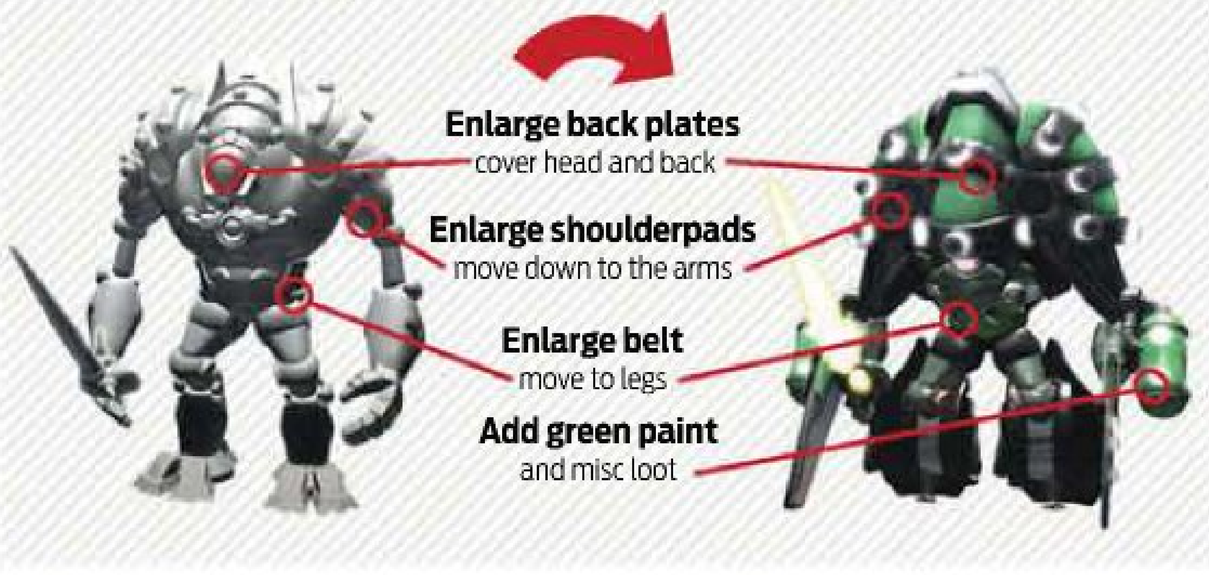
I quickly assembled a team of heroes with powers I liked, led by Arborus, the self-healing plant-based tank who could grow to several times his normal size as long as I maintained a steady stream of kills with his club. I even customised his accessories as best I could to make him my own.

Darkspore then goes out of its way to sabotage this by treating Arborus like a piece of walking loot, encouraging me to swap him out by unlocking new heroes as I levelled up. I wasn't forced to, but it's the only way to get new powers. Having disposable heroes makes customisation feel futile, and I soon stopped bothering to learn heroes' names – they were just Plant Guy or Plasma Dog-Thing to me.

"Having disposable heroes makes customisation feel futile"

Beat the system

How I made Goliath into a Big Daddy with *Darkspore*'s crippled creature editor



Rescue me

Four-player co-op is definitely the best way to play – you're constantly wading waist-deep through swarms of great enemies with interesting abilities, and there's always someone there to come to your rescue.

There's a very clever system for 'chaining' levels together, enabling you to risk the loot you've earned in a mission for the chance to win much better loot by taking on increasingly difficult levels without dying. It's only practical to attempt in co-op, so it's a strong incentive to be social. Plus, it gives you a reason to replay maps that would otherwise get old due to their unrandomised layouts. The lobby system and friends list make it easy to team up, too, but I'm annoyed there's no offline mode for solo play here, mostly because waiting for servers to respond makes jumping in and out of the character editor a tedious exercise.

Player versus player is in there too, but its rudimentary 1v1 or 2v2 matches are just slug-fests in a small arena. The triple-hero system gives it an extra dimension, but unless you save your best hero for last you're unlikely to come back from losing a hero first.

Darkspore just leaves me asking questions. Why are heroes vulnerable to extra damage from enemies of the same type (for example, robots) but robot enemies aren't vulnerable to robot heroes? Why does this Maxis game take itself so seriously, telling a downer story about an ancient race that was wiped out by its own creations? Can they fix the glitches? Why can't I build my own hero? And what were they thinking? ■

VERDICT

A strange animal, *Darkspore* doesn't seem to want you to like its characters. A poor use of *Spore*'s technology.

PC GAMER **60**

◆ **Expect to pay** £40 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ◆ **Developer** Maxis
◆ **Multiplayer** 4 players, co-op and versus ◆ **Link** www.darkspore.com

Fileplanet.com

StoreKage.com


A telescopic penis. Because I can.


Aborus: self-healing plant-based hero.


Combat is colourful and lively.



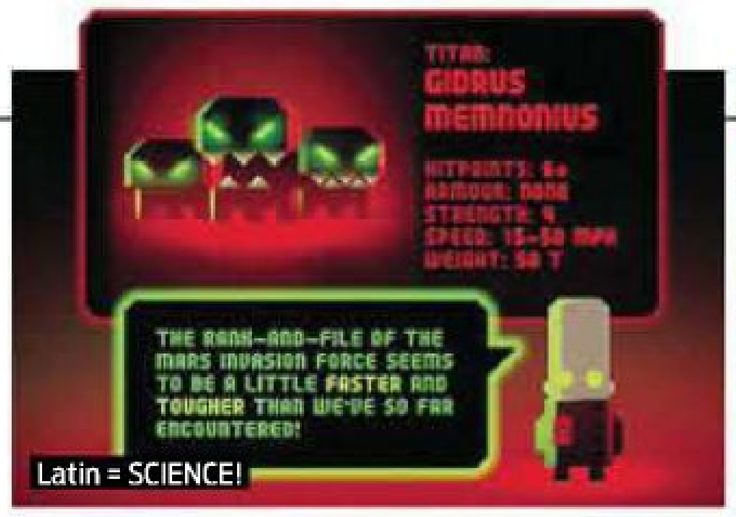
Somewhere under all this is Will Wright's *Spore*.


Player vs Player is simple arena stuff.


Four-player co-op works best.



You create your squad, but the fun stuff is done for you.



Latin = SCIENCE!



You try and get any research done without any coffee.



This is what happens when you only defend one front.


Droids become essential before long.


He laughs over the ruins of humanity.


It's not a tumour!

TOWER COMPLEX

Choices, choices. **REVENGE OF THE TITANS** gives tower defence some free will. ***By Phill Cameron***

Need to know

What is it?
A planet-hopping *Tower Defence* game with RTS frills.

Influenced by
Defence Grid, Desktop Tower Defence

Play it on
2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card

Alternatively
Plants vs Zombies

Copy protection
Online Authentication

Whatever it is that you did, the Titans want revenge for it. And that means you must defend against them, with towers. Towers that whittle down their numbers as they swarm over the map, towards that final point of your homebase.

Each new *Tower Defence* game tends to have some sort of twist to set it apart from the others. However, *Revenge of the Titans* has focused on getting the basics right, forgoing the usual bells and whistles that serve to distract you from the fact that, really, you're just putting down some towers and waiting for bad guys to walk within range.

What *does* set it apart is the freedom you're allowed with how you set up your defences. Before you get to the fights themselves, there's an extensive research tree presented to you, allowing you to focus on where exactly you want to go, be it building better turrets, or passive bonuses like straight damage buffs.

Which then translates onto the battlefield, affording you a growing repertoire of toys to scatter across the map, using them in concert so blockades can force the Titans to bunch up before they break through and walk straight into a mine, wiping out five or six instead of the usual one. Or batteries and cooling towers, which boost your turret's magazine and firing rate, respectively, boosting damage output.

Add to all that various different Titan types, some armoured, some fast, some huge, some small, and you're going to have to mix things up regularly to keep them from breaching all the way to your command centre. One of your primary worries is researching yourself into a corner and being left with a useless loadout when facing the bigger boss Titans. Or, if you do focus entirely on the super powerful heavy turrets, you can't deal with swarms. The game favours a balanced approach, but this doesn't become readily apparent until you're already in trouble.

This is partly because the first five or six levels are easy to botch. You can build turrets in the Titan's path without much worry, have inefficient resource gathering and blow all your specials (which carry over from level to level), leaving you with poor tactics and poor equipment when you go up against something challenging. But, once you *do* overcome that obstacle, you'll be all the better to deal with the rest.

There are a pair of supplementary modes: Endless and Survival, two spins on surviving against increasingly large numbers of enemies. It's a nice distraction from the campaign, but by taking away the customisation of the research tree, they remain somewhat hollow.

While it has a tendency to lead you into a misstep with its choices, *Revenge of the Titans* is a game that rewards repeated playthroughs, so fine-tuning your research path and building placements are rewarding in and of themselves. ■

◆ Expect to pay £9 **◆ Release** Out now **◆ Publisher** Shaven Puppy Ltd **◆ Developer** In-house
◆ Multiplayer None **◆ Link** bit.ly/aJJgWG

VERDICT

It's simple, well executed and, so long as you're not bothered by a little trial and error with your research, good fun.

PC GAMER 77

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

filehippo.com

TRAILER TRASHING

Discover the joy of jackknifing with **TRICKY TRUCKS**. *By Tim Stone*

Sky-high diesel prices, shrinking Yorkie bars, stereotypical confectionery references... lorry drivers have many reasons to grumble. This fantastic physics puzzler is proof they should actually count their lucky stars.

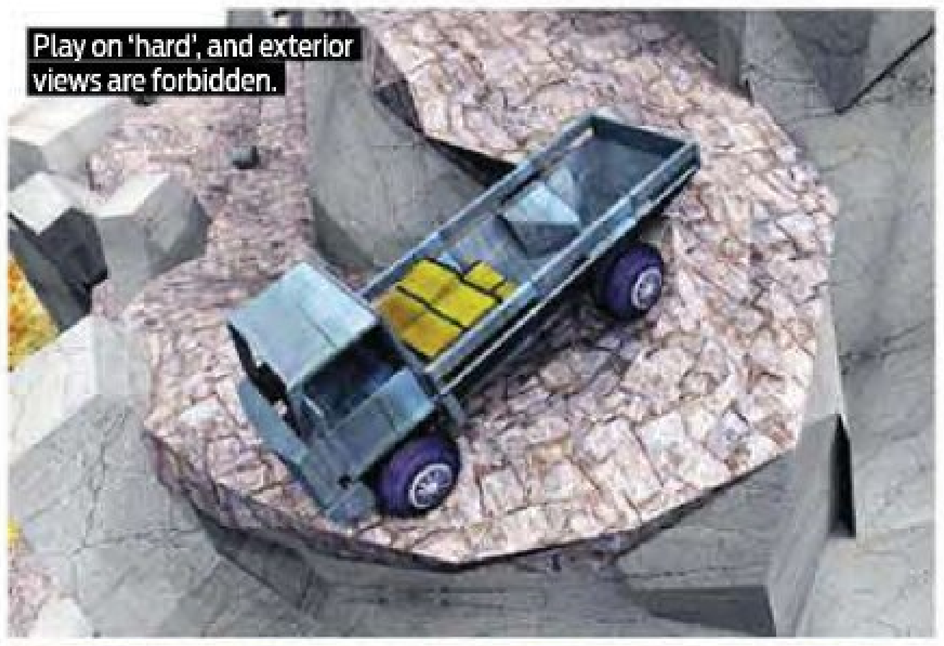
Mr Truck Pilot, just be grateful your gaffer never asks you to haul cargo across a collapsing bridge, down a 300% slope, or along a mountain road that makes the Bolivian Death Highway look like the North Circular. Be glad you don't have to load-up by knocking crates off pillars, navigate mazes walled with fragile circuit boards, or avoid giant pendulums while reversing out of your depot. Thanks to clever physics, these activities are all (a) stupidly entertaining, (b) highly replayable, and (c) as hard as a constipated trucker's lavatory logs.

Any time you shed one too many cargo cubes, or smash your ride to smithereens, a dabbed Backspace key slams time into reverse. Not only are these cheaty rewinds free, they don't even impact the puzzle completion times that are automatically posted to online leaderboards.

While it's nice to be 17th best-in-the-world at 'Death Slope' (Go IphigeniaPCG!) *TT* is as much about creativity as competition. The game comes with 16 official challenges, but has another 720 user-made odysseys, many as surreal as they are devious. Even the most jaded gamer will grin while grinding the lip of a gargantuan half-pipe in a hurtling 18-wheeler, or smile while speeding through a colossal, rolling barrel-o'-boulders in a bouncing jeep.

Pay the very reasonable £8, and discover the best physics-'em-up since *Armadillo Run*. ■

PC GAMER **85**



Play on 'hard', and exterior views are forbidden.



Stego's 'Mina de RioTinto' is a work of awesome evil.

◆ **Expect to pay** £8 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** www.gravitysensation.com
◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.gravitysensation.com

BLAND NEW WORLD

Absolute power bores absolutely in **BACK TO THE FUTURE: EP 3**. *By Richard Cobbett*

In this episode of the ongoing *Back to the Future* adventure game, Marty crashes into a world ruled by a Big Brother version of Doc Brown. It's sterile, it's empty, and has no sense of fun. So is Hill Valley under Doc. Sigh. What went wrong this time, Telltale?

It should have been the highlight of the series: a brilliant story concept, and the episode after the series somewhat found its feet last month. Instead, it's adventure design at its most tedious and uninspired, from the structure to the storytelling. "You'd better not [KISS IN PUBLIC], [MAKE FRIENDS WITH A DOG] and [BE CAUGHT WITH CONTRABAND]!" a policeman practically warns at the start. "Otherwise I'll have to take you straight to Citizen Brown, which is what you want! Would you like me to write that down so you don't forget?"

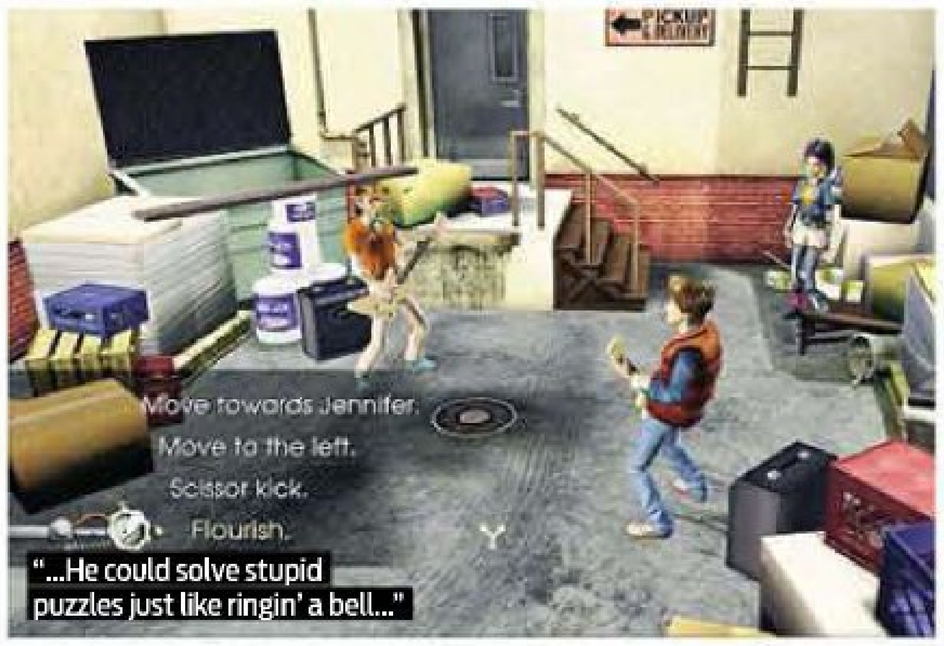
There are two moments to enjoy: a visual gag I won't spoil, and the revelation that even ultimate power isn't enough to stop Doc being... well... Doc. Everything else falls flat. Repainting Courthouse Square white does nothing to give it an oppressive vibe, while the near total lack of narrative makes for padding, padding and more padding. The worst moment is a guitar duel between Marty and alternate-Jennifer's current boyfriend Leech, which involves all kinds of pointless cheating and jumping around on scenery, but no actual music. Why? Marty can play! It's the only puzzle I've ever seen where I longed for a simple QTE instead.

Let's hope that next month, this timeline gets erased from memory in more ways than one. ■

PC GAMER **43**



Jennifer looks nothing like Claudia Wells *or* Elizabeth Shue.



"...He could solve stupid puzzles just like ringin' a bell..."

◆ **Expect to pay** £15 (whole series) ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Telltale Games
◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** www.telltalegames.com

PANZER EXTRAVAGANZA

In **WORLD OF TANKS** shelling is mandatory, shelling out is not. ***By Tim Stone***

Need to know

What is it?
A free WWII armour MMO with more AFV types than Bovington Tank Museum.

Influenced by
Panzer Elite, *World of Warcraft*

Play it on
Dual-core CPU, 4GB RAM, GeForce 8600/ Radeon 3850

Alternatively
Steel Fury, 78%, *Red Orchestra*, 83%

Copy protection
Password account

Last summer, while roaming the Downs near my home, I found a half-buried piece of a WWII tank. It was a very small piece (a track link) from a very small tank (a Bren Gun Carrier) but it was an exciting moment nonetheless. Photographs were taken, experts consulted, 'Look what I found!' messages sent to friends. I'd discovered a little chunk of tanky treasure and I wanted to tell the world about it.

Cue predictable segue! Assuming I don't stumble upon a rusting Sherman sprocket or Tiger turret this year, my AFV find of 2011 is sure to be this massively multiplayer, massively moreish, armour sim. If you have any interest in angry architecture or tactics-rich military gaming, you really need to give *World of Tanks* a whirl. And I'm not just saying that because more new recruits means more juicy targets for my trusty AT-1.

"*World of Tanks*' 16 battlefields can be brutal spaces"

Here are three very practical reasons why I've got the hots for *WoT*. It's free (though purchased gold means you grind your way up to the spiffy tanks faster, and may have a slight technological edge in combat). Its WASD controls and neat interface mean the basics of moving and shooting are as easy to grasp as an unusually sticky stick grenade. Its streamlined team deathmatch format ensures that you can rattle your way through 30 gripping scraps after work and still be in bed before midnight.

Early on, a good-few of those 30 engagements are likely to end PDQ, your tracked trundler reduced to a forlorn, flame-belching hulk. Until the novice player gets his head round the differences between tank classes, and learns to read the ebb and flow of fights, *WoT*'s 16 handsome battlefields can be brutal spaces.

Quick load

Not that quick demises matter much. Because you start with three different Tier 1 vehicles, after you're knocked out of one scrap, you can jump straight into another using one of your other steeds. Once battles are over, vehicles reappear in your garage for maintenance, ammo replenishment and upgrading.

I'll talk about the all-important upgrades in a minute. First let me explain why the skirmishing in the screenshots over there isn't quite as random or shapeless as it might first appear. All of *WoT*'s 60+ steel beasts occupy one of five classes. Using vehicles outside their class roles is possible, but often it's an invitation to get shellacked. The hardest class to play well is probably the light tank. Fast and thin-skinned, the primary function of tiddlers like the Luchs and the BT-2 is to scout and spot for their heavier brethren. The temptation to open the throttle and hare towards the enemy end of a map is strong and, if succumbed to, frequently ends in immolation.

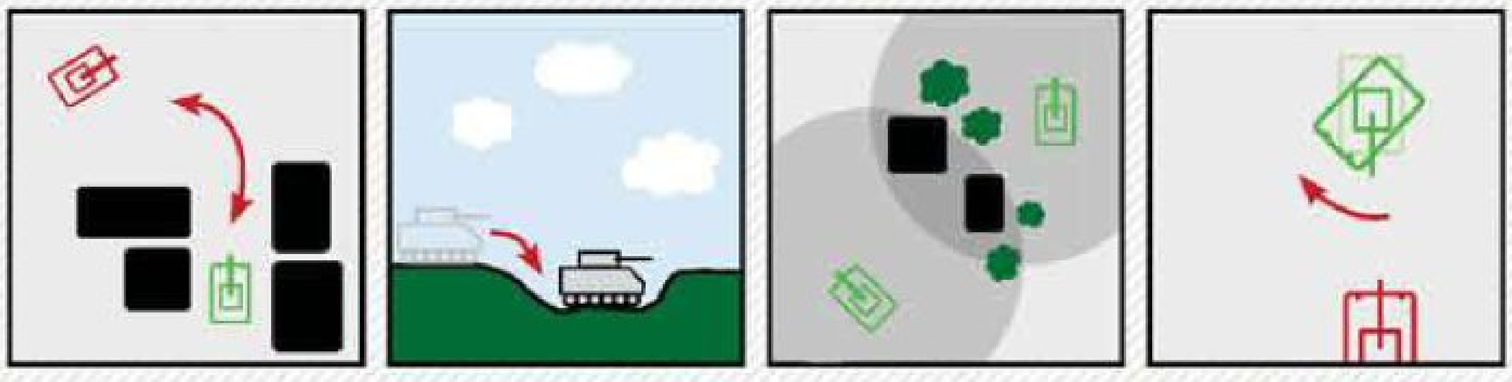
Close behind light tanks in the difficulty stakes is the self-propelled artillery. Choose to play as an ungainly Bison or Priest and it's your job to hang back lobbing fat shells at the distant targets exposed by your teammates. SPGs are the only vehicles in the game that use an overhead view for targeting. Long load and munition flight times mean scoring hits is as much art as science. Once you get the hang of it, though, hurling HE thunderbolts like some bored Olympian deity is a profoundly pleasing way of handing out hurt.

The AT-1 I'm so fond of is a member of the tank destroyer class. Often found lurking in undergrowth, these turretless snipers specialise in violent surprises. Used skillfully, they can decimate an attack or rip open a defence with a few well-aimed emissions from their high-velocity hull-holers. The only time you're likely to see them flustered is when they're being flanked. Immobilise a turreted vehicle with a track shot, and it remains a threat. Immobilise a TD and, assuming you're not in front of it, it transforms into an inanimate slab of Stupid.

Medium tanks? They're *WoT*'s grubby yeoman, just as happy to vanguard assaults as dig in and defend during base overruns (games can be won by either destroying an enemy team or occupying their base). A pack of Panzer IVs, T-34s, or Shermans working together is a truly beautiful thing to behold. ▶

The wisdom of Wittmann

Historical tactics work a treat in *WoT*



Shoot-and-scoot
Reload safely by reversing into cover after slinging a shell.

Low cunning
Use walls, craters and crests to shield your hellraiser's hull.

Warm reception
Stay in radio range of pals or risk being cut off and culled.

Glancing blow
Turn. AP is less likely to penetrate angled steel.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag




Tier 1 AFVs look like the work of Amanita Design.


Slay it, then sell its penis to Chinese herbalists.


I call my Maus Klaus. He's as big as a haus.


Neglect the mini-map at your peril.


Bow MGs are just for show.


Even tanks had to do the Hitler salute.


Three hours of battling and I can afford my first new tank.


To my comrades, I'm just a giant sandbag.


Ambush or picnic? *WoT* is all about choices.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


I didn't like the curtains.

A shot through the engine should finish him.


Post-war tanks, such as the IS-7, erode the realism.


Foe comes to admire windmill. Foe dies.


Staying close to buildings can save you from artillery.


Only artillery sees this view. Everyone sees the explosion.


Hopefully, SPGs will get smoke shells one day.



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Even the game's fifth and most impressive class – the heavy tanks – can be cowed by canny mediums, working in a careful pack.

The cowing will probably take a while, though. Monsters such as the Maus and the IS-7 are the rolling bulwarks that teeny tanks shelter behind when AP hailstorms are at their fiercest. Ferrous battering rams, heavies can shrug off most small-calibre shells and soak-up incredible amounts of damage. Just don't ask them to climb a steep hill or tiptoe through a thicket.

A clever and quick automatic matchmaking system ensures Tier 1 featherweights never encounter Tier 10 bruisers, but isn't so rigid that tanks of different levels never share arenas. What is guaranteed is balanced teams. If you glance at the always-visible enemy roster and see something scary, then your own line-up should contain something equally badass. The tier overlaps and the unpredictable class distribution mean your place in the team pecking order can change from battle to battle. One minute you're a nervy first-year, the next you're an inspirational prefect.

First look

When I first fieldtested *WoT*, there were a few elements that I didn't much care for. Between battles, Wargaming.net aren't prepared to let us scramble out of our scarred steeds and go doze in the shade. No, they want us to scrutinise tech trees and component stats, muse over what to spend our hard-earned credits and XP on. At the start, the multiple currencies and numerous upgrade options are pretty overwhelming. Even after hundreds of games I still find myself confused at times.

What I have come to recognise, however, is all this tank tweaking and crew cultivating does add a pleasing sense of progress. The moment you acquire your first German big cat, or get your first kill in a Pershing or ISU-152, feels damn special because it's the culmination of weeks – or even months – of hard battling.

Of course, all the grindy RPG stuff isn't just there to gratify. The devs are hoping we get impatient and reach for our wallets. At present, around £8.50 will get you enough gold to buy a month-long premium account. Premium account owners gain 50% more XP and credits from battles, meaning they can climb the armour ladder faster than freeloaders. Gold can also be spent on special ammo, extra garage slots, crew training, clan forming, XP exchanges between tanks, and consumables such as engine-boosting petrol and crew-buffing rations. It looks like a recipe for resentment, but in practice, the battlefield bonuses gold brings are relatively slight. If you're a half-decent tanker, you'll get kills and have fun whether you've slinging fancy APCR and HEAT shells or bog-standard AP and HE.

The payment model assumes that players will rush to reach the top tiers. Frankly, I've enjoyed myself as much in low-tier tussles as high-tier ones. Eviscerating enemies with an elephantine Elefant or a ground-shaking Jagdtiger is undeniably thrilling, but when, thanks to the matchmaking system, almost everyone else is in similarly sturdy machines, some of the potential magic is lost.

What I would happily shell out for is access to a few different game modes and extra capabilities. If I could deploy the odd Pak 40or direct a few squads of infantry RTS-fashion for £8.50 a month, I'd pay up in an instant. WW2 tank warfare without grunts and AT guns is a little like Napoleonic warfare without cannons and cavalry.

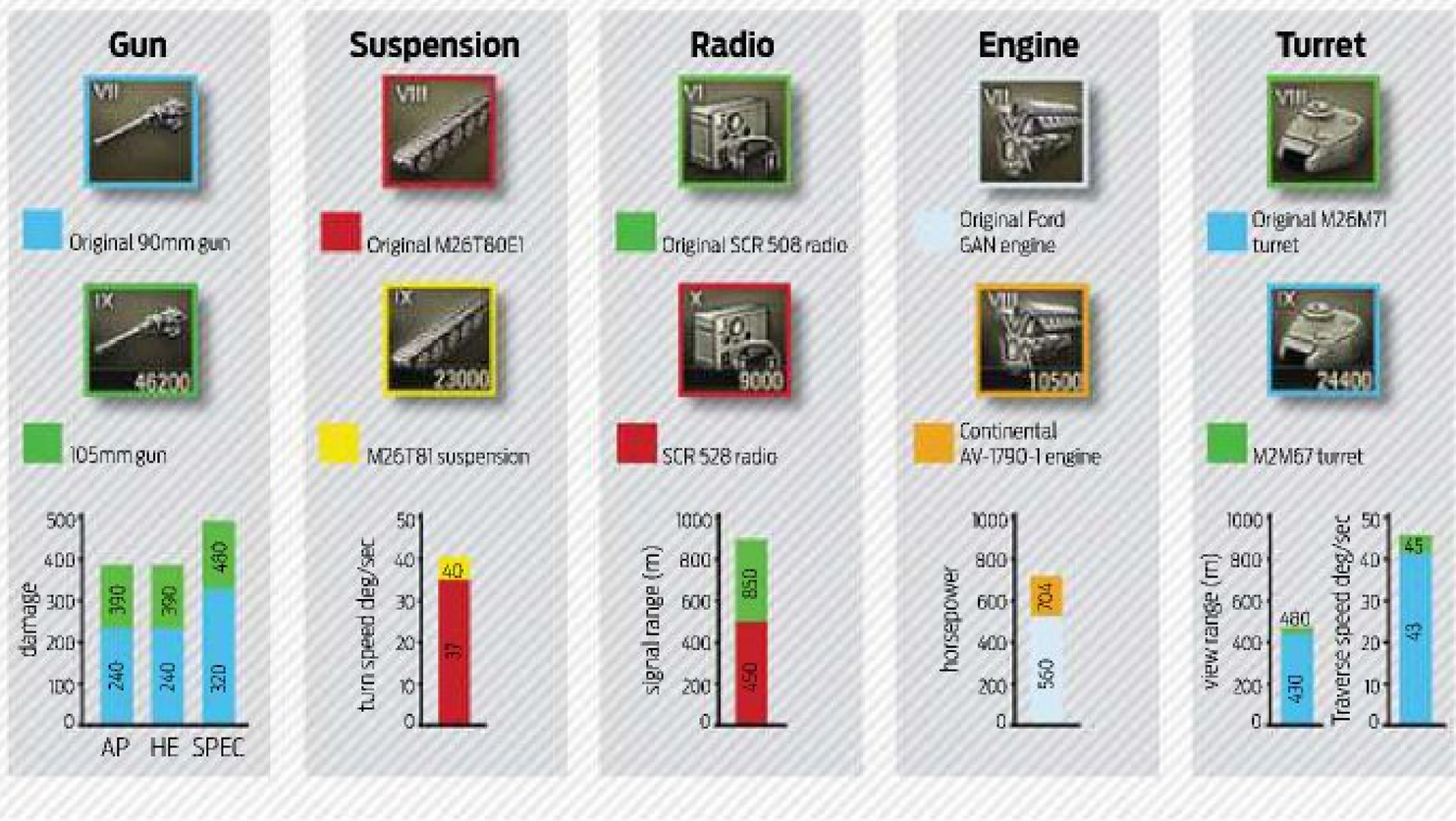
Wargaming.net are planning a persistent meta-game in which clans vie for control of a Risk-style Europe. A 'historical' battle mode in which some of *WoT*'s more fanciful elements were temporarily disabled, would be just as popular I reckon. Cut tank-slaying howitzers, Ready Brek glows, prototypes, upgrades, rapid repairs, and multi-nationality teams out of the picture, and *WoT* could be almost as resonant as *Red Orchestra*.

Even now it's a delight, a near-perfect example of a populist combat sim. It's rare a battle passes without some nailbiting duel or pulse-propelling advance. After countless scraps I still get a tingle out of sneaking a scout tank down a flank, or snuffing out a target with a tricky long-range shot. I still shiver when I round a corner and see 200 tons of Krupp steel bearing down on me. If you're not already prowling Himmelsdorf's rubble-strewn streets, camping in a copse at Komarin, or pretending to be a mirage in Sand River, then I recommend you rectify that. ■

"One minute you're a nervy first-year, the next you're an inspirational prefect"

Pimp your Pershing

Upgrades make all the difference



◆ **Expect to pay** £0 to £20 a month ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Wargaming.net ◆ **Developer** In-house ◆ **Multiplayer** 15 vs 15 ◆ **Link** www.worldoftanks.com

VERDICT

World of Tanks can come and park on our lawn any day. Except Friday (that's croquet day).

PC GAMER 85

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


The price tag came as quite a shock to this poor chap.


More grey on grey snipers to spot before dying.


Look out for sniping spots that are high up.


Don't run across any empty spaces, the snipers are waiting.


The Ascension map is the best of the bunch.

COST OF DUTY

Five maps for £11? It must be the **BLACK OPS FIRST STRIKE** pack. ***By Tom Francis***

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Need to know

What is it?
Four new multiplayer maps and one new zombie map for *Call of Duty: Black Ops*.

Influenced by
The fall of the Berlin wall and money

Play it on
Core 2 Duo E6600, 2GB RAM, GeForce 8600GT

Alternatively
Buy the highest-rated game under £11 on Steam

Copy protection
Steam

Deus Ex. Half-Life 2. Episodes One and *Two*. Hm? Oh hi, didn't see you there. I was just thinking of things that are cheaper than a *Call of Duty: Black Ops* map pack to pass the time while I camp.

Knights of the Old Republic. Rome: Total War. GTA: Vice City. I'm camping the Berlin Wall – it's cool that I can do that and it's nice to be fighting on a backdrop that means something. Not anything to do with Activision's bombastic, stupid FPS, particularly, but that's OK.

Lay of the land

Unfortunately as a map, it's pretty much just a series of windows looking out onto wide open areas, or 'noob farms' as we might as well call them. Players who like to die run around the map, players who like to kill lie in windows and gun them down before their victims have a chance to spot them.

FEAR. Fallout. Braid. Blam! I shot a guy named AssWhore! This is living. It's pretty much the same living I was doing on the stock *Black Ops* maps and because not everyone has these, I'll probably spend most of my time playing on servers running the old ones anyway. One of the reasons that not everyone has these is that they cost 11 cocking pounds. Luckily, this server is for people who will give Activision whatever they have the balls to ask for, and the new Antarctic map, Discovery, is up next.

I guess if you're going to give a map a visual gimmick, the aurora australis is a pretty good one to add. You don't exactly drop your remote control car and gawp at its majesty, but it gives the icy map an eerie feel that distinguishes it from Summit. It's full of very long sight lines – nice for snipers and a pain for everyone else.

Psychonauts. Both *Max Paynes*. *Far Cry*. The other two multiplayer maps are forgettable: Stadium sounds like a nice idea, but the Stadium itself is blocked off: it's really Awkward Streets Near a Stadium. Kowloon tries to capture the rainslick atmosphere of the Hong Kong section in the singleplayer game, but in practice it just brings the muddy grey of the scenery even closer to the muddy grey of the people you're trying to spot.

Value for money

Hitman: Blood Money. World of Goo. Darwinia. The best thing about *First Strike* is a new map for the zombie survival mode. Ascension is set inside a Soviet Cosmodrome, takes place in black-and-white, and features zombie scientists getting battered by a spinning centrifuge, a black hole grenade, and evil space monkeys. It's tense, funny and stylish.

Ultimately, though, nothing here justifies the brutal £11 price tag. It would be hard to *throw* £11 without hitting something of better value. If Activision ever stop gouging gamers for content that smaller developers make for free, their mediocre efforts might be worth buying. ■

VERDICT

There's only one good co-op map and a few middling deathmatch ones. The price is obscene for what you get.

PC GAMER **46**

◆ **Expect to pay** £11.50 ◆ **Release** Out now ◆ **Publisher** Activision ◆ **Developer** Treyarch
◆ **Multiplayer** 2-24 players online or LAN ◆ **Link** www.callofduty.com

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

ROG MAXIMUS

DESIGNED IV EXTREME

THE NEXT REVOLUTION IN PERFORMANCE

THE FUTURE

REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

REV 3.0
New B3
Revision

ASUS ROG MAXIMUS IV EXTREME MOTHERBOARD

LGA1155 socket for 2nd Generation Intel® Core™ i7/Core™ i5/Core™ i3 Processors

Intel® P67 Express Chipset / 4 x DIMM, max. 32Gb, Dual Channel DDR3 2400 (O.C.), 10 x USB 3.0 ports (2 at front)

Revolutionary ROG features provide the best overclocking experience from beginning to end.

- **Easily Update BIOS:** Quickly Flash your BIOS in 3 steps with only a USB stick even without turning on hardware with **USB BIOS Flashback!**
- **Debugging Mode:** When the system fails to boot, you can quickly check the problem with **RC Poster** from remote devices, or the number shown on **Debug LED** on board.
- **User-friendly BIOS Tuning:** Easily adjust BIOS settings with the ROG **EFI BIOS**, enjoying flexible and convenient overclocking.
- **Remote Overclocking:** With **ROG Connect**, **ROG iDirect** and **RC Bluetooth**, experience the ultimate in convenience by overclocking from external devices, iPhone & iPad and smartphones.



aria pc · dabs.com · OCL · ebuyer.com · novatech · OVERCLOCKERS UK · SCAN · VOVOTECH

ASUS
Inspiring Innovation · Persistent Perfection

The World's Best Selling and Most Award Winning Motherboards

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com











BAD FEELING

John Walker vs **ALIENS VS PREDATOR** in a battle for who has the ugliest teeth.

Need to know

What is it?
A big stupid shooter.

Influenced by
Barbie's Dreamhouse Adventures

Play it on
3.4GHz CPU, 2GB RAM, 256MB 3D

Alternatively
Left 4 Dead 2, 92%

That *Aliens vs Predator* exists as an idea is something to be richly celebrated. Never mind that the latest game to pitch the tooth-faced Predators against the boneheaded Aliens against the human shaped Marines was a stinker, and even ignoring the classic, and still fantastic, original terror-fest. Even ignoring the gloriously awful film based on the games based on the films. It's a great idea because it combines two awesome things.

You'll appreciate that Underworld was unfairly robbed of an Oscar despite the fact that it combined vampires *and* werewolves. And I'll never understand the lack of awards given to Pirates of the Caribbean for having pirates fight zombies. I want my fictions to be constantly crossing over, and I don't care how badly it's done. Until gaming offers me Gordon Freeman fighting Starship Troopers' Arachnids on Alpha Centauri, I shall not rest.

This latest *AvP* (according to Wikipedia, the 38th game based on either the Aliens or Predator licences, and the 13th with 'Aliens vs Predator' in the title) once again gives you a series of singleplayer missions to complete from three perspectives. Which is clearly where the two films went wrong: they tried to get us to care about the Marines, rather than the far more interesting extraterrestrial beasts. (Which reminds me: it's a bit of a cheek for anyone to call the Xenomorph an alien, really, isn't it? It's not like it came to Earth. Surely the humans were the aliens?)

The horror

The Marine campaigns are boring. The crappy weapons do little to let you feel any thrill when fighting the beasties. The Xenomorph and Predator sections are better, but still not that special. Dodgy controls threaten your entertainment at any moment, the alien is clunky and frustrating, the Preddy – ridiculously – only able to jump at predetermined points.

The multiplayer side rescues the score somewhat, but is still hampered by the clumsy controls, even if it does offer the fun that's missing from the campaigns. The Deathmatch sucks, but things improve with Survivor's co-op mode, which asks four humans to survive as long as they can against increasing waves of Aliens. 'Infestation' is Alien Sardines, with a single Xenomorph catching Marines and converting them into aliens to hunt down the remaining soldiers, while Predator Hunt is similar.

But in the end, these are bonus games on the side of some pretty poor main content. It's a disgrace to the good name of fictional crossovers! What would the creators of *Megashark vs Giant Octopus* think?

So, I've got a list of demands, and if they're not made by next year I'm blowing up the planet: *Serious Sam vs The Sims*, *Left 4 Dead vs Farmville*, and *Freedom Force vs The Third Reich vs Plants vs Zombies*. Get to work. ■

VERDICT

Some decent multiplayer modes don't rescue this sludgy shooter. John vs Aliens vs Predator: JOHN WINS.

PC GAMER **58**

◆ **Expect to pay** £15 ◆ **Publisher** GamersGate ◆ **Developer** Rebellion
◆ **Multiplayer** 18 PvP, 4 co-op ◆ **Link** goo.gl/Tccu ◆ **First review** PCG 212, 65%

SMURFING SMURF

Left in a blue mood by JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR: THE GAME


What fun, slaughtering defenceless local fauna.


If only the game were half as good as this screenshot makes it look.

Games of films are obviously shit, because no one ever intended for the game to exist. How can there be passion behind an idea that began as a marketing exercise? Which makes *Avatar: The Game* a strange one. Cameron was talking about the game as he was pre-publicising the film, hyping the expense and time that had gone into it. It seemed like it might be an exception.

Of course it wasn't. The Queen probably sits on a diamond-encrusted toilet in a bathroom made out of gold, wiping her royal bot with wild silk handkerchiefs, but she still plops out a poo like everyone else.

Remarkably, this is two games in one – an early decision has you go down one of two entirely separate paths, either fighting with the Na'vi against the human invaders, or if you're a deranged psychopath, siding with the clearly murderous humans to slaughter the indigenous race of the planet.

However, the reality of the game is running from checkpoint to checkpoint, with all the miserable tedium of an aimless MMO, without any of the hats to buy. Someone's mad decision to have your character one third across the screen, but your crosshair in the centre, makes the whole thing feel almost as ludicrous as the broken animation of the NPCs and enemies.

The story is horribly told, there are some shockingly offensive attempts at various 'native' accents, the controls are a mess, and the combat is tedious. But apart from that, *Avatar: The Game* is absolutely the massive hit Cameron promised. ■

PC GAMER 30

◆ **Expect to pay** £5 ◆ **Publisher** MAD ◆ **Developer** Ubisoft
◆ **Multiplayer** None ◆ **Link** avatargame.uk.ubi.com ◆ **First review** PCG 209, 42%


Come on giant insect, we're going to be late for tea.

GOTHIC COMPLETE PACK

The *Gothic* series is received in two ways. 1) Huh? And, 2) HOW DARE YOU SAY "HUH?" I AM GOING TO CHOP UP YOUR DOG. THESE ARE THE GREATEST GAMES EVER MADE AND ANYONE WHO SAYS OTHERWISE SHOULD BE BOILED IN ACID AND POURED INTO THE ORIFICES OF THERESA MAY.

They're so polarising that all I can do is tell you that they're German epic RPGs. In this pricey Steam collection you get the original *Gothic*, *Gothic II*, *Gothic 3*, the very recently released complete remake, *Gothic 3: Forsaken Gods Enhanced Edition*, and the latest, *Gothic 4*. All are middling exploratrons, the fourth not living up to the standards of the previous few. I don't own a dog. ■

PC GAMER 75

◆ **Expect to pay** £55 ◆ **Publisher** JoWooD ◆ **Developer** Various ◆ **Link** goo.gl/kYryl ◆ **First review** n/a


Imagine if they'd made really good *X-COM* follow-ups. Sniff.

UFO TRILOGY

I was a little excited when I saw the title of this one. *UFO Enemy Unknown*, *Terror from the Deep*, and *Apocalypse*? Well, no. It's the games that were inspired by those early titles: *Aftermath*, *Aftershock* and *Afterlight*.

It began with 2003's *Aftermath*, an RTS that draws its ideas from the *X-COM* games, not least because an aborted version was developed by the original developers. Finished by Altar, it wasn't a brilliant start. But then came *Aftershock* in 2005. It was buggy and still lacking the greatness of its inspirational source. Finally came *Afterlight* in 2007, which was – oh – quite similar.

They're solid RTS games, but in comparison they highlight their own flaws: a lack of brains and fluidity. But for squad-based strategy, it's a fine price. ■

PC GAMER 70

◆ **Expect to pay** £5.10 ◆ **Publisher** Focus ◆ **Developer** Altar ◆ **Link** goo.gl/1Wsn6 ◆ **First review** n/a


Just another day in Tim's back garden.

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

I hereby let out a clarion call from the mountain tops to IO Interactive: Stop, sit down, and have a think.

The splendid news is that with *Hitman 5*, they're going back to the series they finally figured out. So perhaps they're admitting defeat with the miserably cruel world of *Kane & Lynch*. It's so morbid and unpleasant that even if they could figure out how to have the shooting match the brilliant art direction, it would still be strange of you to want to play it.

Strip away the peculiar YouTube video perspectives, the visual blurs and shaky cameras, and you're left with an average shooter with a crappy cover system. There's clearly a strong creative drive behind it, but it's at the expense the core game. ■

PC GAMER 70

◆ **Expect to pay** £7.50 ◆ **Publisher** GamersGate ◆ **Developer** IO Interactive ◆ **Link** goo.gl/c5dqL ◆ **First review** PCG 218, 70%

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Windows®. Life without walls™, PC Specialist recommends Windows 7

pcspecialist.co.uk

you dream it... we'll build it



The Ideal starting point if you're new to the gaming scene, enjoy **extreme performance** for under £600!

Fusion 600 Elite PC

- **AMD® Phenom™ II X4 955 Processor**
- Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 1TB WD Caviar Green GB Serial ATA II Hard Drive
- 1GB ATI Radeon HD5770 Graphics
- 24x Dual Layer DVD-RW
- CoolerMaster Elite 310 Blue Case
- 19" Widescreen Monitor (1440 x 900)
- Logitech® Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers

from £599*



An AMD Hex-Core based PC with the all new HD6950 Graphics, let **AMD Vision** power your gaming experience

Fusion 1000 X6 PC

- **AMD® Phenom II X6 1075T Processor**
- Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium
- 4GB Samsung® DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- ASUS® M4A87TD/USB3 Motherboard
- 2GB AMD Radeon HD6950 Graphics
- 1TB WD Caviar Black HDD
- Corsair TX650 Power Supply
- 24x DVD RW + CD-RW
- 22" Widescreen Monitor (1920 x 1080)
- Logitech Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers

from £999*



An extremely powerful Core i7 ready laptop. Paired with the GeForce GTX460M, this Laptop is a great gaming machine with **desktop rivalling performance!**

Vortex i7 Gaming Laptop

- **Intel® Core™ i7 Processor i7-740QM**
- 17.3" Full HD Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black HDD
- 1.5GB nVidia GeForce GTX460M
- Intel Ultimate Wireless-N Network Card
- 8x DVD-RW + CD-RW
- Integrated Bluetooth & Firewire Port

from £1299*



The Enigma i7 is seen as an all-rounder. With **solid gaming performance** and a full HD LED backlit display, very little can compete at this price!

Enigma i7 Gaming Laptop

- **Intel® Core™ i7 Processor i7-740QM**
- 15.6" Widescreen Display (1920 x 1080)
- Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium
- 4GB Corsair® DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black HDD
- 512MB ATI Radeon® HD 5650
- Wireless N Network Card
- 8x DVD-RW + CD-RW

from £749*

For the latest technology and most powerful gaming PCs & Laptops, call or go online at

pcspecialist.co.uk

Powered by ASUS
uk.asus.com

order online or call us on: **0844 499 4000**

email:enquiries@pcspecialist.co.uk

ULTIMATE VISION AMD

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



The Vortex 3D Vision is one of a kind! This Laptop comes supplied with nVidia 3D Vision goggles to take your gaming experience to another level!

Vortex 3D Vision Laptop

- 15.6" Full HD LED Backlit Screen (1920 x 1080)
- Intel® Core™ Core i7 Processor i7-740QM
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- 1GB nVidia GeForce GTS350M
- 500GB WD Scorpio Black HDD
- Onboard Gigabit LAN & Wireless N Card
- Integrated Bluetooth & 2.0 Megapixel Webcam
- Vortex 8 Cell Lithium Ion Battery
- **nVidia GeForce 3D Vision Kit**

from £1299*



This gaming beast has an nVidia 3D Vision Kit AND a ViewSonic VX2268 Monitor. Gaming will never be the same!

3D Vision 1600 PC

- Intel® Core™ Core i7 Processor i5-2500k
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1333MHz RAM
- ASUS® P8P67 Pro Motherboard
- 1536MB nVidia GeForce GTX570
- 80GB Intel® X25-M SSD
- 1TB WD Caviar Black SATA III HDD
- CoolerMaster HAF 922 Gaming Case
- 650W Corsair TX850 PSU + CoolIT ECO A.L.C Cooler
- **GeForce 3D Vision Kit & ViewSonic VX2268wm Monitor**

from £1599*

intel inside
CORE i5
Visibly Smart
NEW

3D STARTS HERE!
NVIDIA® 3D VISION™

Extreme Overclocked Gaming PCs



The hugely powerful Intel Core i7-2500k is taken to the extreme with an **overclock up to 4.6GHz** and kept cool with the CoolIT ECO liquid cooler!

O.C Gaming Desktop

- Intel® Core™ Core i7 Processor i7-2600k **@ 4.6GHz!**
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 8GB Kingston Hyper-X 1600MHz RAM
- ASUS® P8P67 Pro Motherboard
- 80GB Intel® X25 M SSD
- 1TB WD Caviar Black SATA III HDD
- 1536MB nVidia GeForce GTX580
- CoolerMaster HAF-X Gaming Case
- 850W Corsair TX850 PSU
- CoolIT ECO A.L.C + Arctic Cooling MX-3

from £1599*



The new Intel i5-2500k CPU taken to the extreme with a huge **overclock to 4.6GHz!** Coupled with the GTX560Ti, this will blow the competition away!

Gaming Desktop PC

- Intel® Core™i5 Processor i5-2500k
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1600MHz RAM
- ASUS® P8P67 Motherboard
- 1TB WD Caviar Green SATA II HDD
- 1GB nVidia GeForce GTX560Ti
- CoolerMaster CM690 MKII Advanced Case
- 650W Corsair TX650 PSU
- CoolIT ECO A.L.C + Arctic Cooling MX-3

from £999*



Overclocking on a budget? Look no further, the **Fusion 750 OC** is ideal for you. The extra boost in performance will help out in those tricky situations!

Budget Gaming Base Unit

- AMD Phenom II X6 Processor 1090T
- **Genuine Windows 7 Home Premium**
- 4GB Samsung DDR3 1600MHz RAM
- ASUS® M4A87TD/USB3 Motherboard
- 1TB WD Caviar Green SATA II HDD
- 1GB AMD Radeon HD6950
- 22x DVD RW + CD-RW
- PCS Maelstrom Gaming Case
- 650W Corsair TX650 PSU

from £849*



Flexible Finance Available!
Have the option to settle within 12 months and pay no interest!

SAVE £15 off every order!
Enter code **PCG26**

VISIT pcspecialist.co.uk TO CUSTOM BUILD YOUR IDEAL DESKTOP, LAPTOP OR MINI PC!

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

The Hard Stuff

GET THE PC YOUR GAMES DESERVE



Kinect on PC is official

THE BIG STORY Microsoft have finally announced Kinect for Windows. It all kicks off this year.

After months of toying with us, Microsoft have finally confirmed that a software development kit (SDK) is coming that will make its Kinect controller officially compatible with Windows. The first release will be a non-commercial starter kit for "academic research and enthusiast communities" to play around with. Microsoft say they envisage robot surgeons controlled remotely by doctors using Kinect. We envisage gamers playing PC games by jerking around like loons.

The first release will be followed by a full commercial one later in the year, so that's when we'll start to see big-name developers starting on PC games designed for Kinect. As for what kind of games will arrive, that's where it gets interesting. The PC has traditionally been desk-bound, but Kinect requires an obscene amount of empty space to reliably track full body movements. We're bound to see a movement towards encouraging the home theatre-type PC as a gaming platform – swishing your hands around like you're in Minority Report is a lot more fun than faffing about with a wireless mouse and a flat surface.

But for most gamers, the most useful applications of Kinect will probably be on a smaller scale. Not all of us want to spend our PC gaming time jumping in a dinghy or spasming robotically to Poker Face. Plenty of hardcore flight sim players, racers and *ArmA 2* players currently use the infra-red TrackIR system to move the in-game camera with their head without taking their hands off the controls. Kinect could handle that even better, while being more flexible for other interface options.

Further out, imagine using Kinect's facial recognition to track your expression and react to it in-game. A Spy in *Team Fortress 2* might give his perfect disguise away by wincing when hit by friendly fire.

Of course, Microsoft is playing catch up with the PC gaming community: there's already a huge number of community developed hacks (*kinecthacks.net*) that get the beady-eyed console camera working with games (*bit.ly/dUFZRi*) and general Windows control. The official SDK will encourage more projects like these, and we'll soon reach a point when it actually makes sense for gamers to buy Kinect just for their PC. ■

Adam Oxford

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

WHO'S GOT THE FASTEST GPU?

ONLINE OBJECTION AND MORE TO THE POINT, WHO CARES?

This month on AMD's Play blog (*blogs.amd.com/play*), Senior Public Relations Manager Dave Erskine got a bit peeved with Nvidia's use of the phrase "World's fastest graphics card" for the launch of its GeForce GTX 590 series. To be fair to Dave, in most benchmarks AMD's HD6990 is a bit quicker, but at £500, I'd hope no one's buying on the strength of a marketing slogan alone.

Frankly, Dave's subsequent post is a far better read, if less incendiary: "Morphological anti-aliasing is a smooth operator." Well, quite. **AO**



NVIDIA BRING 3D TO WEB VIDEO

EYES! GET READY FOR POP-UPS THAT POP-OUT

As stereoscopic 3D slowly infects all our games like a flesh-eating bacteria, there's an obvious problem: there's no way to show the effect in trailers and screenshots. That's tiresome for gamers trying to decide what to buy, especially as each game implements 3D to varying degrees of success. Nvidia's new, free plugin lends a hand by letting developers stream stereoscopic 3D videos through people's browsers. There's already a YouTube equivalent for you to share 3D movies across, to be found at *www.studio3d.tv*. **GS**

HOT PRODUCTS

MEASURING HARDWARE FEVER





iPad 2
For once, the Apple smugness is deserved.

DDR3 1,600MHZ+
RAM prices are falling through the floor. Get your 16GB now.

New Intel chipsets
Motherboards for the latest Core processors that work. Woohoo!

Corsair H60
Compact water cooling for the masses. Works well, too.



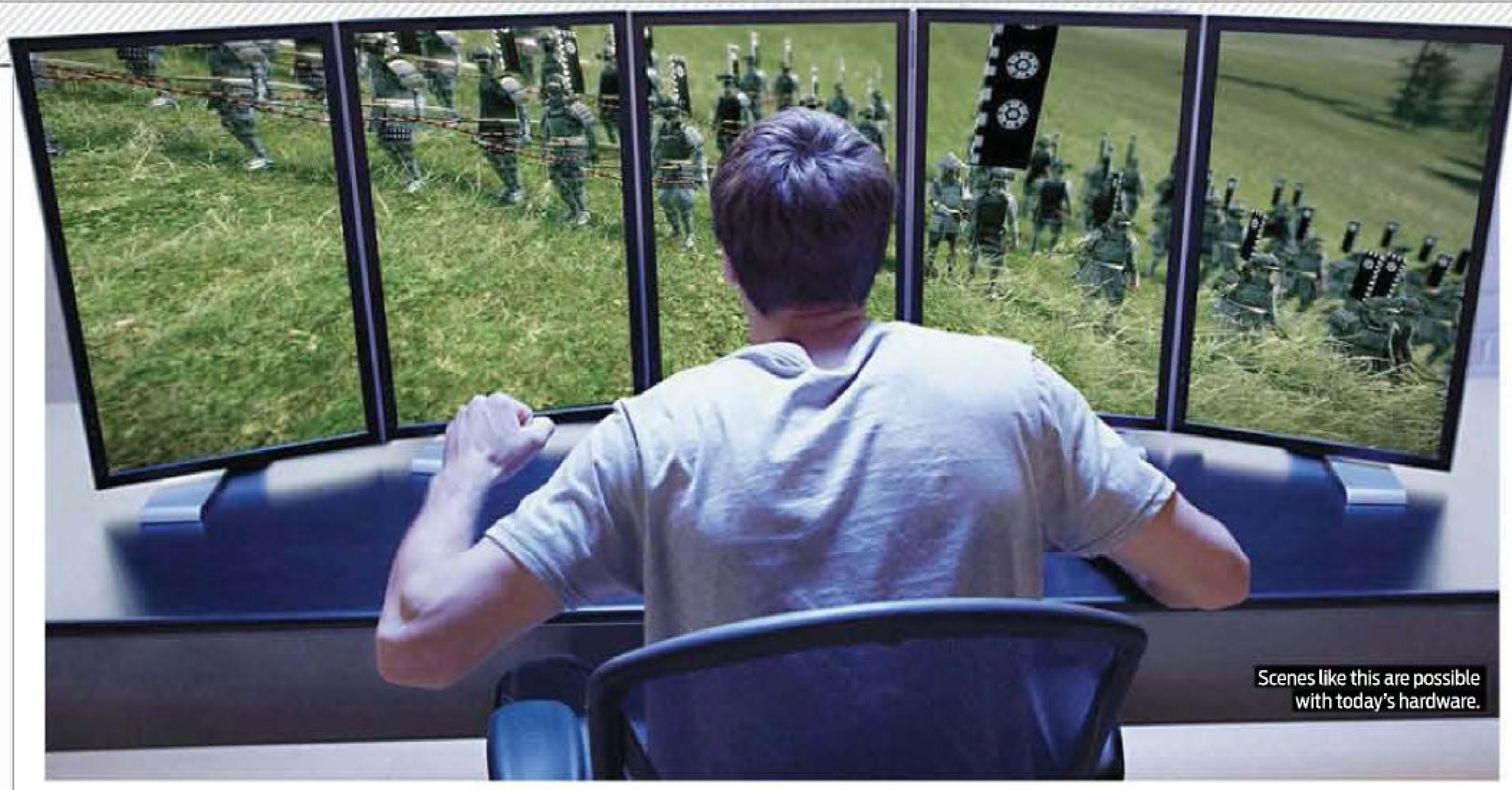
Acer Iconia 6120
A dual-screen laptop with no keyboard.

GeForce GTX 590
Another twin-chip card. Respect due, but mortals can't afford it.



4G mobile broadband
Years away.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Scenes like this are possible with today's hardware.

The rise of surround gaming

Forget 3D goggles: AMD's demo of *Shogun 2* on five screens is the visual experience to get excited about

Once upon a time, owning a 30-inch, IPS monitor was the definitive way of showing that you cared about how your games looked. Richly coloured and big enough to fill your peripheral vision, these professional grade screens made games look gorgeous and created an immersive way of playing that 3D goggles don't even come close to.

Today, single monitor setups are for the weak. AMD have just given an unofficial demo of *Total War: Shogun 2* running on five separate panels, and it looks incredible.

The ability to display games in a 5x1 arrangement is a new option in AMD's Eyefinity technology, which has been included in all Radeon graphics processors for the last couple of years. It's hard to believe, but AMD's product manager Sean Parfitt told me that the new mode was added because of demand from enthusiasts.

"Multi-monitor gaming makes economic sense now," he explained. "You get more pixels for less money if you buy three 24-inch monitors than you do in one large 30-inch one."

It's not just the price of 24-inch screens, says Parfitt, that is helping multi-monitor setups gain in popularity. Design is important too. Thinner bezels mean less obvious divisions between panels, and a more convincing look.

Monitor quality is also getting better, making it a safer bet to buy multiple screens. New IPS and VA screens, with high native contrast ratios and accurate colour quality, aren't much more expensive than faster but worse looking TN panels. So you can envelop yourself in really good looking pixels without spending huge amounts.

There are a few technical issues to bear in mind. Not all games support two or more monitors by default, which is where Eyefinity comes in. Not only does it allow you to connect up to six monitors to a single card (Nvidia GPUs can only handle two per card), but it works better than Windows' Extended Desktop feature. If you use the Windows settings, many games will only appear in the centre display unless you run them in Windowed mode.

"It makes economic sense now... You get more pixels for less money if you buy three 24-inch monitors"

Should you buy your monitors together? It's not essential that all the monitors you use are the same brand, but if the size and resolution isn't the same, you're going to get some strange stretched pixel effects. Also, pairing similar models means the stands are all the same height.

An odd number of monitors also works much better than an even number. You don't want the centre of this mega-screen – where the crosshair is in a shooter – to be broken by the plastic of a panel surround.

It's difficult to assess exactly how popular multi-monitor gaming is. Despite the fact that Eyefinity is one of AMD's three marketing 'pillars', and the company evangelises multi-monitor support to developers, they don't conduct a lot of market research to see whether the message is getting through. Neither do any of the monitor firms we contacted.

Peter George, of gaming PC retailer Wired2Fire, sells multi-monitor rigs specifically created for flight sim fans, and says "These [systems] prove to be quite popular... The largest screen we do is the 24-inch version. We get virtually no interest at all in larger screens than this. I assume because it is just too price prohibitive."

So three screens are good, five screens are better and two screens is definitely bad. There is just one final caveat to add, given that we're running into the summer months, before you rush out to upgrade. Even the newer LED-backlit panels get quite hot after they've been on for a while. Now think of tripling that, or more. Be sure your desk is big enough or your surround-gaming setup will turn into a solarium. ■

Adam Oxford

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

CORSAIR®
corsair.com

HYDRO SERIES™

INTRODUCING THE

HYDRO SERIES H60

HIGH-PERFORMANCE LIQUID CPU COOLER

Designed to take the heat.

Designed to be Cooler
The new Hydro Series H60 brings remarkable new CPU cooling technologies to an affordable price point. An all-new micro-channel copper cold plate and advanced split-flow manifold provide superior cooling for a more reliable CPU, and higher overclocks for greater performance.

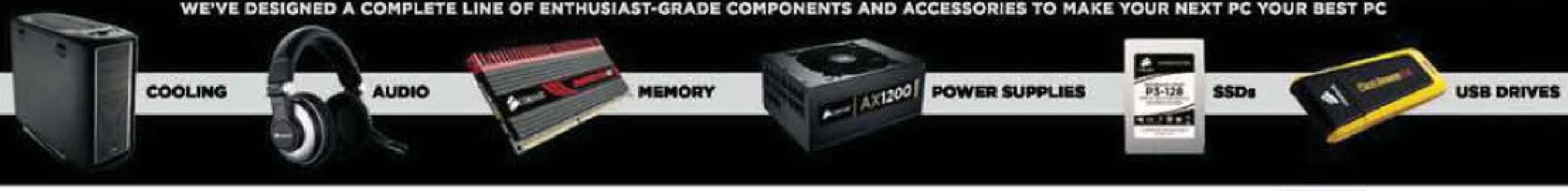
Designed to be Quiet
Heat is the enemy of Intel® and AMD processors, but cooling your CPU reliably—and therefore protecting your investment—doesn't have to be a noisy affair. The H60 combines improved cooling efficiency with a new fan design that delivers lots of cooling airflow, but at minimal noise levels.

Designed for Simplicity
The H60 has an innovative mounting system designed to make installation quick and simple. And, unlike bulky CPU air coolers, the low-profile, lightweight cooling unit places no stress on the motherboard, and reduces clutter around the CPU and memory for increased airflow through the PC case. You can install the H60 and enjoy increased cooling and lower noise in minutes.



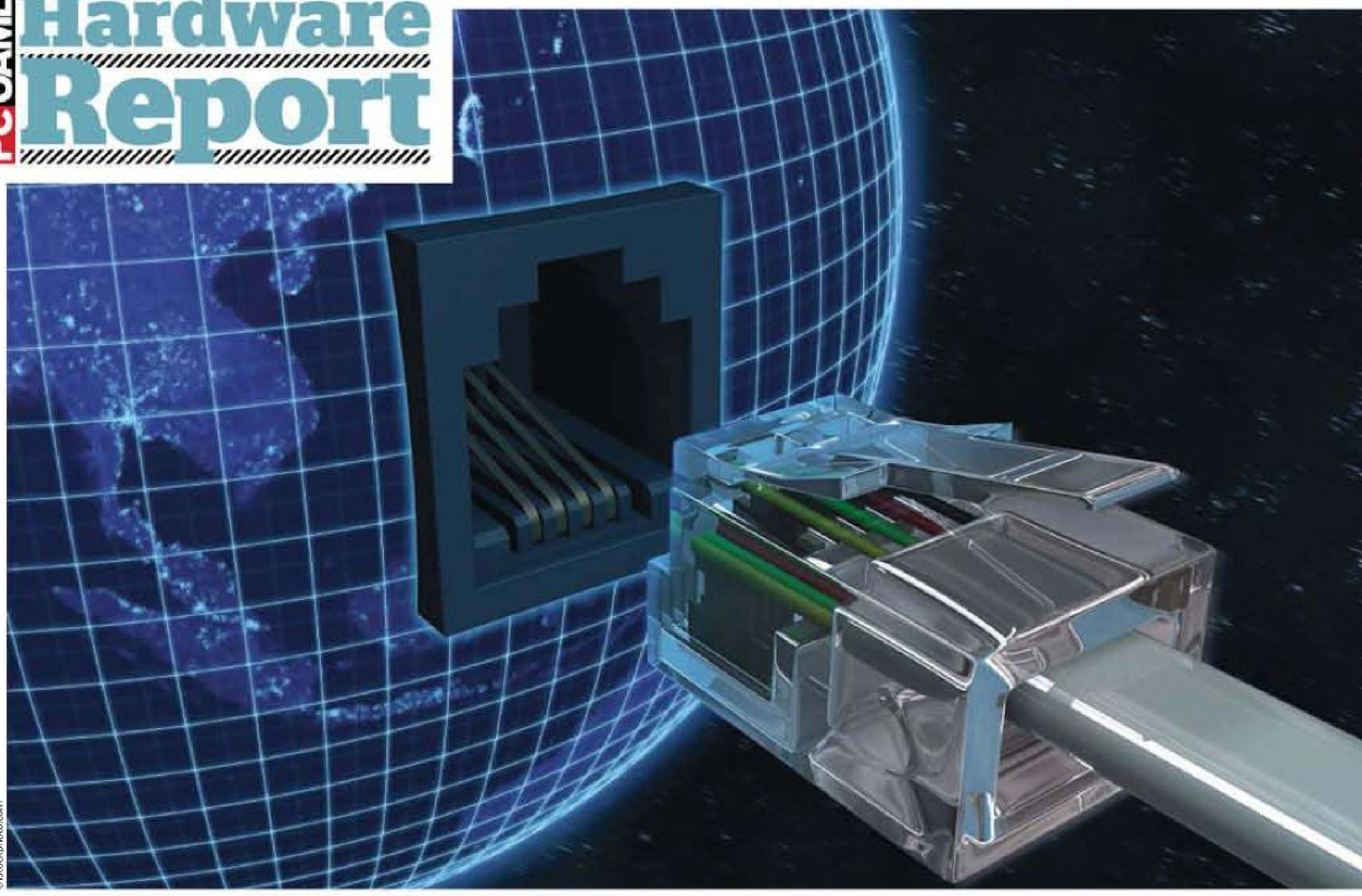
The Hydro Series H60: Designed for You. Learn lots more at corsair.com/cooling

WE'VE DESIGNED A COMPLETE LINE OF ENTHUSIAST-GRADE COMPONENTS AND ACCESSORIES TO MAKE YOUR NEXT PC YOUR BEST PC



dabs.com ebuyer.com OcUK OVERCLOCKERS UK SCAN computers

Steelseries.com



©istockphoto.com

Fibre connections: the future of gaming?

Fibre-based broadband is coming, but will it really improve PC games?

Within a few years, a 24Mbps internet connection with a mere meg or so of upload speed will seem as outdated and quaint as dial up does today. TalkTalk, the UK's third largest internet provider, have just announced that they are going to start offering homes the option of 'superfast' broadband capable of 40Mbps download and 10Mbps upload speed starting this month.

That puts them on a par with the two most popular ISPs in the UK, BT and Virgin, who already have similar or faster services. A lot of the smaller providers will soon join them: Plusnet, Sky and others have all said they have plans to provide 40Mbps.

These dramatic speed increases are due to more fibre optic connections in the local networks, a technology that frequently comes up when advertising these services. But what exactly is fibre-based broadband, how does it compare to ADSL, and is it really better for gaming?

Fibre optics, in which data packets are transmitted as pulses of light rather than electrons, can carry more data faster than copper cables. Just last month, a team of Japanese researchers set a new record for transmission speeds over fibre optics, achieving 109 terabits per second. Previously it was thought that 100Tbps was the theoretical limit.

"It would take just four thousandths of a second to download a 500MB game patch"

At that speed it would take just four thousandths of second to download a 500MB game patch. For established national networks the practical speed limits aren't in the cables, however: they're in the routers and switches that convert data signals to light. It's common to find 40-gigabyte-per-second switches on a major telecoms network, and some of the biggest providers will run two or more 40Gbps rings simultaneously.



Adam says: Fast, cheap broadband is a godsend, but give me a connection that isn't subject to peak time throttling and promises that gaming traffic will be pushed through to the front any day.

The fibre gap

Getting fast, fibre-powered networks out to people's homes and businesses will reduce the cost of high bandwidth broadband and encourage new types of services. In terms of gaming, the kinds of MMO that could be designed when bandwidth isn't a limiting factor are almost unimaginable right now.

In the present day, however, fibre

technology isn't quite as 'on your doorstep' as you'd think.

For starters, there are only two real suppliers. Other than Virgin, which operates its own fibre network at the street level, most other ISPs (like TalkTalk and Sky) will be using BT's fibre optic cables to connect you to their network backbones. There are some specialised local projects, such as Fibrecity in Bournemouth, which offer their own end-to-end fibre optic connections, but these are few and far between.

What the likes of TalkTalk and Sky will be offering is the same network access that BT uses for its 40Mbps Infinity broadband, bought from BT's wholesale arm. This is where things start to get complicated, and both BT and Virgin have been admonished by the Advertising Standards Authority in the past for the way they describe fibre services.

The various arms of BT have had several different overlapping network upgrade projects running simultaneously for years. The core project for BT Openreach, the engineering arm of BT, is 21st Century Network (21CN). This £10bn project is notoriously behind schedule, but essentially involves redesigning telephone exchanges as pure IP services where voice and data are carried as internet traffic. That in turn has meant upgrading the lines which connect exchanges to the BT backbone to fibre optic lines in order to increase capacity for all those voice calls and the internet services of BT and its customers.

Cabinet office

The next stage is doing the same upgrade to the cables between exchanges and the large green cabinets on street corners. Once this stage is completed, superfast services like Infinity can begin operating.

Somewhat imaginatively, this type of technology is called 'fibre to the cabinet' or FTTC. According to the broadband analysis site Sam Knows (*www.samknows.com*), there are 420 exchanges in the UK which are equipped with FTTC connections and therefore capable of running Infinity or a similar service from a wholesale partner. BT's most ambitious plan is to get FTTC out to 90% of the country by 2017.

With FTTC, the copper wires between the cabinets and your house remain untouched. Infinity's headline speeds of 40Mbps down and 10Mbps up are actually delivered via twisted copper cables using a technology called VDSL, or very-high-bitrate digital subscriber line.

The problem with VDSL is that, just like ADSL, signal performance degrades over distance and the quality of the wiring. Over a mile away, there's not much difference between VDSL and ADSL2+. Most people live much closer than that to their nearest cabinet, of course, but it's a different story in rural areas.

To be fair, not even Virgin Media's cable network is based on running a fibre optic cable to your front door. For most customers it's a similar design to BT Infinity albeit one that uses different and arguably more reliable technologies. The fibre part of the network only extends as far as a local node, the connection to your house is via a copper coaxial cable and is capable of around 50Mbps. Virgin are, however, already offering 100Mbps download speeds in some areas, using – as far as we know, the company isn't forthcoming on its core technology – two 50Mbps copper circuits 'bonded' together.

How important is it that when we're told companies are selling us fibre broadband that means fibre all the way to the door? After all, fibre to the premises, otherwise known as FTTP, is so rare in the UK that we don't even rank on the official scale at *www.ftthcouncil.org*, unlike Slovenia, Slovakia and Estonia.

"Not even Virgin Media's cable network is based on running a fibre optic cable to your door"

Half the story

As most of us have learnt the hard way, bandwidth is only one part of what makes a good gaming connection. All a 40Mbps download speed tells you is that you'll be able to download files really quickly when it's running at optimum speeds. It says nothing about the number of hops to a game server or how gaming traffic is prioritised, so it isn't a guarantee of better ping speeds. You can't even interpolate from the headline figures how long it would take to download a new game from Steam or a patch for *WoW*.

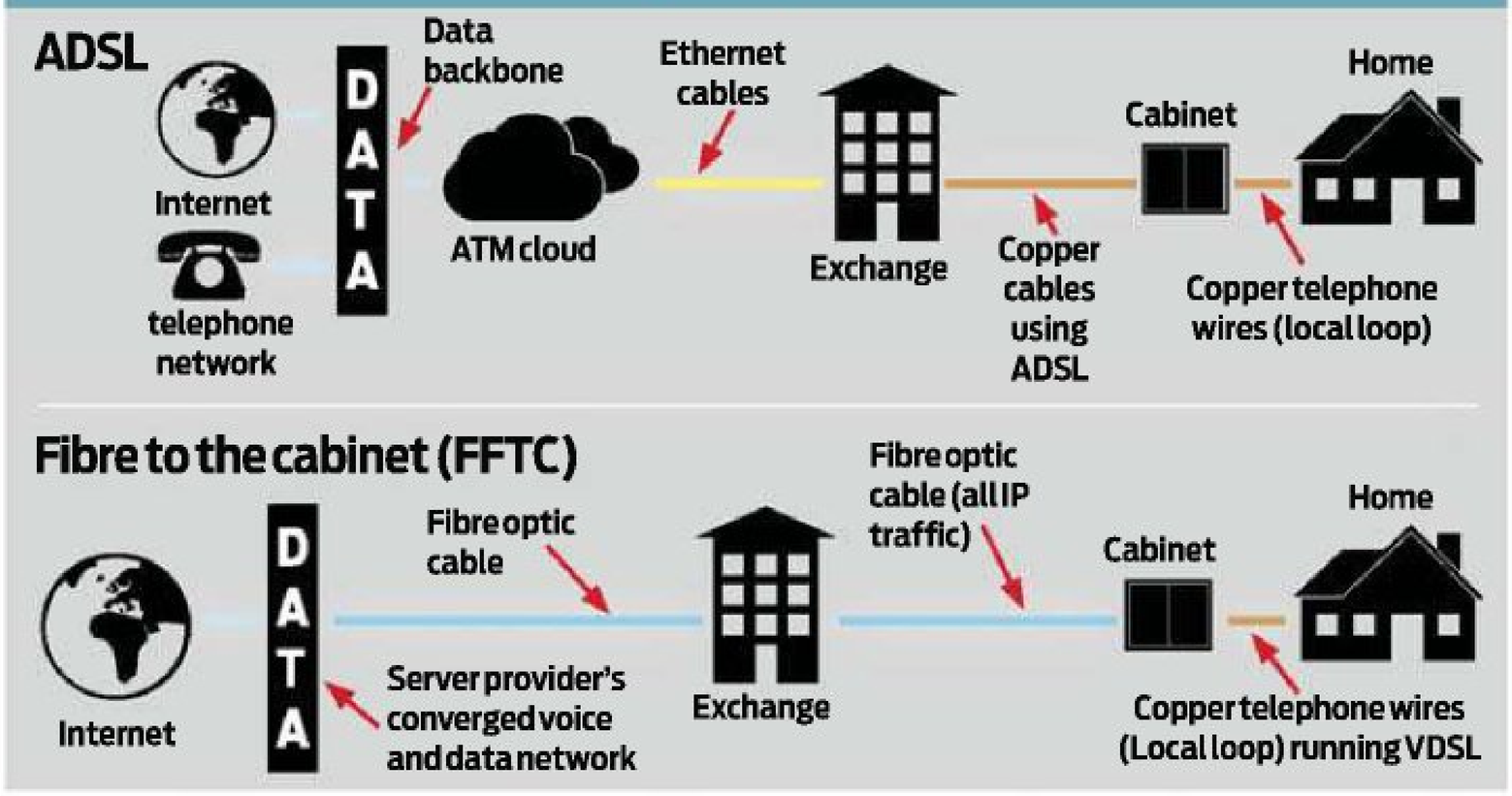
For example, you can get 24Mbps from TalkTalk for just £7 a month right now, but if you try to download a new game via a peer-to-peer service during peak hours, the traffic management policy will slow you down to a crawl. Many gamers on Virgin's network found their ping times going through the roof recently as a result of new techniques for 'shaping' traffic on the network – although these issues have been resolved now.

What the new fibre connections *should* do is increase capacity at the supply side, which means that there's less chance of hitting network congestion even at peak times. Unfortunately, as access speeds increase so does the amount of bandwidth households consume. Right now, a lot of that extra capacity is being used primarily to drive down prices rather than reduce pings, and that's no bad thing: BT's offer of £28 a month for 40Gbps is very reasonable. But for time-sensitive data transfers in competitive gaming, in which a few milliseconds can be the difference between kill or being killed, quality of connection will always outstrip quantity.

Which means that even when 40Mbps is common, the lowest latencies will still be found on premium services like Plusnet's Pro bolt-on. That costs a bit more than bargain basement broadband, but if you want the lowest latency server times, is well worth it. ■

Adam Oxford

WTF FTTC? How the internet gets to your door



ROCCAT™ KULO

SURROUND | USB

VIRTUAL 7.1 USB GAMING HEADSET



AVAILABLE IN 2 VERSIONS:
STEREO + VIRTUAL 7.1

FEATURES

- PREMIUM 7.1/STEREO SOUND FOR GAMING, MUSIC AND VOIP
- 40MM DRIVERS, GUTSY BASS AND CRYSTAL-CLEAR TREBLES
- NOISE-FILTERING MICROPHONE, INTERFERENCE-FREE COMMUNICATION
- COMFORTABLE EARCUPS FEATURING EXTERNAL NOISE SHIELDING
- PRACTICAL IN-LINE SLIM REMOTE CONTROL
- AUTOMATIC MIC-MUTE BY FOLDING UP THE MICROPHONE ARM
- SOLID, METAL-REINFORCED HEADBAND, EXTRA SOFT HEAD CUSHION
- ULTRA LIGHTWEIGHT, FLEXIBLE & SOLID DESIGN FOR EXTENDED USE
- HIGH-GRADE MATERIALS, OUTSTANDING FINISH
- EXTERNAL ROCCAT™ USB 7.1 SOUND CARD FOR STUNNING SOUND

JOIN US ON
FACEBOOK.COM/ROCCAT





WWW.ROCCAT.ORG

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

BUYER'S ADVICE

MONITORS

Expert advice on upgrading your screen. *By Adam Oxford*

DICTIONARY

TN> Twisted nematic

VA> Vertical alignment

IPS> In-plane switching

These three families of LCD technology define the way crystals move to block or allow light through from the rear bulb.

Calibration> All screens have a different visual 'fingerprint' that may change the way certain colour tones look on one compared to another. Calibration means adjusting the settings to get the best match to a pre-defined gamut as possible.

Native resolution> Games look good if the number of pixels output from your video card matches the number of pixels on screen, or the native resolution. Playing at 1650x1080 on a 1920x1080 monitor will look blocky, stretched and odd.



Whenever we survey readers about their most wanted hardware upgrade, it's always a new monitor that tops the list of covetousness. Lust for shiny screens outstrips even the oft-changed graphics card. Adding more pixels is the one thing that you can do to improve the look of any game, and if you've already got one great monitor, a second or third is an almost equally wise investment.

Monitor manufacturers know this, though, and post an enormous amount of confusion about refresh rates, response times, contrast ratios and so on in order to make their screens seem better than they are. So what should you be looking for if you're out to purchase a panel? Here's our quick sheet of cheats.

How big should my monitor be?

The common sizes around at the moment are 20-, 22-, 23- and 24-inch diagonals, all with a 1920x1080 native resolution. It makes sense to get the biggest monitor you can, but you really won't be able to see much of a difference between a 23-inch and 24-inch panel. If it's a choice between a high quality 23-inch model and a sub-par 24-inch, skimp on the space.

Which technology type is best?

There are three main families of flat-panel technology, which govern the way the LCD filters are created. TN is the most common and is generally cheaper to manufacture, yielding faster refresh rates. VA (and variants MVA or PVA) is a step up in terms of picture quality, with better colours and viewing angles but slightly lower refresh rates. IPS offers the best picture of all, but with the slowest speeds (and is the costliest to produce).

You should also take a look at the backlight type, which will be LED or CCFL. LEDs allow for thinner, lower power screens, but they aren't always the best for colour rendition.

Do I need a sub-millisecond response time?

Some people claim that lower response times – also known as refresh rates – in an LCD screen make them better for gamers. Theoretically, the fact that there's a couple of milliseconds of lag between the movement of your mouse or the click of a button and something happening on screen might affect your score, but unless you have bionic eyes or are a tournament player of FPS games, it's unlikely you'll be able to tell the difference between a 2ms TN panel and an 8ms e-IPS one. Except that games on the latter look a thousand times better.

What are these new-fangled e-IPS screens you speak of?

There several different ways of making an IPS screen, and e-IPS is a relatively recent innovation. It's proving popular because, by removing some of the complexity of the manufacturing process, e-IPS screens are absurdly cheap for the quality they offer.

If I have more than one monitor, should they all be the same size?

If you want to game across more than one screen, they probably should be. For a start, the resolution will have to be the same – which may mean one panel not running in its native resolution.

Should I calibrate my screen?

Yes, because everything will look more accurate, if not better, if you do. You can buy a USB camera that will adjust your settings for you, such as the DataColor Spyder (£70). Otherwise, head over to *www.lagom.nl/lcd-test* for some tests you can do without incurring any cost. ■

Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices.

ON TEST

MONITORS

3D or not 3D, that is just one of the questions. ***By Adam Oxford***

TESTING CRITERIA

Colour quality> Thanks to AMD's Eyefinity, we were able to hook almost all these monitors up simultaneously to compare their output. Using cameras and the test images at *lagom.nl*.

Dynamic range> Some people like to think in terms of contrast ratios, but we look for dynamic range. Complex photos are a good way to test this: can you see all the details in the shadows? Are highlights blown out?

Response times> We checked the screens for signs of ghosting in fast moving pictures, and also for 'input lag' between use of an input device and seeing the result, using a stopwatch and a high speed camera. We're happy to report none of the models here suffered from these.

Design> It's going to dominate your desk, so a monitor should look good. The thinner the better, as a rule, and tiny bezels are best for multi-screen gaming.

UltraSharp U2311H

£238 Dell



Although the 23-inch screen is among the smallest on test here, the monitor itself is very nearly the heftiest.

Not for this Dell the tiny, energy efficient LED backlights of its ultra-modern rivals. The U2311H is illuminated by an old fashioned cold cathode fluorescent lamp, which requires a large amount of room to cool off in round the back (although it's worth noting that this only requires 10W more than it's 'green' competitors). The stand weighs more on its own than any of the other monitors here fully assembled.

The best things, however, do not always come in small packages. That stand might look like it could be used to jack cars up while you steal their tyres, but it's rock solid and however you lift, drop or rotate the screen around its double hinged joint, it'll stay exactly where you left it until you decide it's time to change the viewing angle yourself.

"The panel uses E-IPS technology for brilliant native contrast ratios"

But this isn't a review about a stand. What really matters here is the incredible quality of the IPS screen that the stand raises aloft. It is, for the price, awesome.

The panel itself uses E-IPS technology for brilliant native contrast ratios even before you turn on the 'dynamic' backlight cheat, giving it a far better dynamic range in our photo tests than anything else here. Ever wondered why HDR lighting in games looks overly bright and blown out? It's because on monitors like this, it doesn't. It just looks stunning. The colours are rich without being too heavily saturated, and text is hypodermically sharp.

Like other E-IPS panels we've recently reviewed, notably the Viewsonic VP2365wb (PCG 219 90%) – which the Dell betters – the viewing angles are among the best possible and there are no dark patches towards the edges of the screen. Input lag has also been fully conquered, and the 8ms grey to grey response time sounds sluggish but to most eyes has no more ghosting than on the fastest TN screen.

Completists will note that there's no HDMI in, but that's no bad thing unless you want to hook up an Xbox. What you do get is a USB hub, and thin bezels which are perfect for multi-monitor set-ups.

The UltraSharp would be better yet if it was a full 24 inches, rather than 23, but that's an inch worth sacrificing for the quality. And while it's a bit pricier than the other screens on test here, the U2311H is most definitely worth it. ■

VERDICT

It's genuinely hard to find anything to fault. This quality at this price makes criticism seem like nitpicking.

PC GAMER **93**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 23 inches ◆ **Viewable** 23 inches ◆ **Screen tech** E-IPS ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Response time** 8ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** DVI, VGA, DisplayPort, USB (four port hub) ◆ **Power consumption** 33W ◆ **Dimensions** 549.9x184.1x356.2-456.1mm ◆ **Adjustable stand** Yes

Scorptec.com

S273HL

£330 Acer



Where the UltraSharp U231H compresses its 1920x1080 pixels into just 23 inches of screen space, Acer's S273HL spreads the same number out over a vast 27-inch diagonal. The effect is nowhere near as sharp as the Dell, but still one you should see for yourself if you can.

It's a little unsettling if you're creating Word documents, but if you don't plan on using more than one monitor for gaming, the next best thing is getting a single large one. As an overall experience the Acer is a close runner-up in this test. Game worlds envelope you in peripheral-filling enormity,

An external PSU and astonishingly low power draw of just 23W help keep the size down, but the improbable 15mm screen depth isn't the best thing about the Acer's design. The asymmetric stand isn't height adjustable, but it's more than just an eye pleaser for when the screen is turned off. It also serves as a control panel for the onscreen display, with large, well marked and easy to reach buttons for adjusting the picture quality and the volume of the built-in speakers. That said, you'll probably want to keep your existing speakers. The sound quality is not what you'll buy the Acer for.

Given that large screen IPS monitors still sell for around £1,000, you won't be too surprised to learn that this is a TN panel. The dynamic range thus isn't up to the standards of the VA and IPS monitors here, and sunlight turns to white out a little too easily in *Dirt 2*. But it is one of the better examples of its ilk. The banding test in particular was a clear pass, which is very unusual for this type of panel. The viewing angles are good enough that even though there's a bit of fall-off around the edges when you're looking at it straight on – which is inevitable in a monitor this size – it's far from distracting and, indeed, barely noticeable.

There's also no DVI input, although this doesn't have the same text blurring issues other HDMI-only monitors can suffer from.

There are plenty of technical reasons why this shouldn't be a great monitor, but when you fire up a game they all largely disappear. It shouldn't be as good as it is, but it is. ■

VERDICT

Accept its flaws and this is a cost-effective way to big screen gaming that looks almost as good off as it does switched on.

PC GAMER **84**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 27 inches ◆ **Viewable size** 27 inches ◆ **Screen tech** TN ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 2ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 23.9W ◆ **Dimensions** 312x189x90 ◆ **Adjustable stand** No

EW2420

£184 BenQ



If you can't quite stretch to an E-IPS screen like the Dell U2311H (opposite) or the Viewsonic VP2365wb (now around £220, up since we reviewed it), you might just settle for an LED backlit panel that uses the next best thing: vertical alignment LCD technology (VA). Especially if it costs less than £190, like BenQ's EW2420.

Side by side with the TN panels in this test, the rich contrast ratio and wide dynamic range of BenQ's monitor are like moving from black and white to colour. In its factory sRGB setting, with contrast levels slightly raised, you'd be hard pushed to see the difference between this and the winning Dell opposite – although I'd recommend staying away from BenQ's 'Senseye' modes for Gaming, Photos and Movies. Engage those and the look goes from near professional accuracy to something best described as 'bad trip'.

Fortunately, it doesn't take much to get the screen back the way you want it. The control panel on the side is easy to use and responsive.

If only the same could be said about the screen. It is the only monitor which exhibited very, very slight traces of ghosting. It's barely noticeable, and there's a booster mode called 'AMA' for making it even less so, but if you're sensitive to these things and play a lot of fast-paced shooters, it may not be the monitor for you.

It also, curiously, showed slight evidence of banding in the Lagom tests, which I wasn't expecting, and the viewing angles aren't quite as good as Asus's similarly VA-equipped ML249H overleaf.

Given that you're gaining an inch of space and over £50 for image quality that's almost on a par with the U2311H, it's easy to overlook these flaws. It's one of the best put together monitors BenQ have made for a long time. It's still a bit shiny around the edges, but the stand is satisfyingly supportive and wobble free. ■

VERDICT

Image purists will want to spend more on an IPS screen, but this is as close as you'll get for less than £200.

PC GAMER **85**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24 inches ◆ **Viewable size** 24 inches ◆ **Screen tech** VA ◆ **Contrast ratio** 3000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 8ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI, DVI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 25.5W ◆ **Dimensions** 581x439x18mm ◆ **Adjustable stand** No

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Designo ML249H

£200 Asus



The clue is in the name. Asus's Designo ML249H is a monitor which isn't just designed to perform well, it's meant to be a bit of a looker too. Assembling the strange, two-part stand is curious experience, but once it's together the 16mm-deep screen hovers above the desk both attractively and – more importantly – without wobble.

You can't adjust the height, which is far more important, and I did find that the bolts needed tightening after a few hours, but it's still far preferable to the rubbish supports which arrive with most nonprofessional screens.

The thin bezel also offsets the design well, but the thick speaker bar at the base is slightly less appealing – made worse by the fact the speakers aren't up to much either.

Nevertheless, you get an advanced MVA screen with a low power LED backlight, so the Designo's got to be a winner, hasn't it?

Unfortunately, not quite. While the colours are indeed rich and the contrast ratio is high even without the dynamic backlight adjustment on, I'd recommend the BenQ on the previous page over this.

Both are very similar in terms of performance, although the Asus has slightly warmer colours by default and a little less ghosting. The BenQ, meanwhile, is a more comfortable height, and easier to adjust. The touch-sensitive controls on the Asus aren't as responsive, and the menus aren't as straightforward to navigate.

What's more, the BenQ is a monitor that offers more choice in terms of inputs. The ML249H has just a single HDMI and a VGA port, and lacks even a DVI in. There's a DVI to HDMI adaptor included, but I'd prefer the more reliable DVI to DVI wherever possible.

How you'll feel about much of the difference between this and the BenQ, however, is down to personal preference. If you can find the ML249H on sale for less than the EW2420, you can rest assured it's a very safe buy. And you get to pretend you're a beret wearing designer. ■

VERDICT

An attractive design with great colours and good viewing angles, just beaten by BenQ as the VA panel of choice.

PC GAMER **81**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 24 inches ◆ **Viewable size** 24 inches ◆ **Screen tech** VA ◆ **Contrast ratio** 3000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 8ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** HDMI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 23.1W ◆ **Dimensions** 650x483x171mm ◆ **Adjustable stand** No

HS233

£250 Hanns-G



To some of us, the Hanns-G HS233 is a way to blow £250 on a decent but not astounding 23-inch TN panel. To others, it'll be a cost effective way to voyage into the third dimension.

As a 2D screen, the HS233 is a decent enough performer, best noted for its 120Hz refresh rate and 3ms response time. Viewing angles and colours aren't bad, but there's no real reason to consider it over the E-IPS and VA monitors reviewed elsewhere.

It's real calling is stereoscopic gaming and 3D Blu-rays. If you're a fan of the phenomenon of 3D and compare this to the price and quality of current 3DTVs, it's a bargain.

Even so, it has limitations. For a start, you'll need an Nvidia graphics card to use this in 3D mode. That's not Hanns-G's fault, it's the stupid lack of standards of graphics vendors, but it does mean you may need a GPU upgrade too.

Even more annoying is the fact that you'll need to buy the 3D goggles separately, that's another £80 for a pair of active shutter glasses. You also need a dual link– rather than single – DVI cable, but this is supplied.

It also has the highest power draw of all the monitors tested here.

As far as the 3D performance goes, there isn't much to distinguish between any of the currently available monitors, since the effect is largely applied by the graphics card and the drivers. If the monitor is reasonably viewable in 2D, as this one is, you can't go far wrong.

Against other 3D screens the Hanns-G isn't bad quality and value – you can get smaller ones for less than £200, but 23 inches is a comfortable size. Only you know whether you are ready to invest in the 3D phenomenon, however, or prefer your games flatter, but cheaper and better looking. ■

VERDICT

Lacks the raw 2D quality of cheaper monitors here, but if you're sure you want to go 3D, this is as good a way as any.

PC GAMER **73**

SPEC ◆ **Screen size** 23 inches ◆ **Viewable size** 23 inches ◆ **Screen tech** TN ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 3ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** VGA, DVI, HDMI ◆ **Power consumption** 50W ◆ **Dimensions** 594x492x182mm ◆ **Adjustable stand** No

Fileplanet.com

VX2453mh

£160 Viewsonic



Even though the difference between an 8ms response time and a 2ms response is barely noticeable to most human eyes, some people have a heightened sensitivity to ghosting in moving images. It's a bit like the rainbow effect in a DLP projector – for some viewers it's so apparent they feel sick. For most of us it's invisible.

If you really, really worry about response times in fast first-person shooters – perhaps you're a tournament player who practises for ten hours every day – then fine, get a TN panel rather than a lovely IPS or VA one. But if you're going to get a TN panel, be sure to get one like this. It's a bit pricey, but the VX2453mh clears most of our colour tests, is streak free and doesn't suffer from obvious colour banding either. The viewing angles are worse than the BenQ or Asus screens, however, and there's obvious backlight falloff towards the edges of the screen when you move your head around.

It's also very thin and well designed, despite not having an adjustable stand. An external PSU reduces the bulk dramatically. ■

PC GAMER 77

◆ **Screen size** 24 inches ◆ **Viewable size** 23.6 inches ◆ **Screen tech** TN ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 2ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** HDMI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 23.1W ◆ **Dimensions** 574x229x195mm

Prolite E2473HDS

£173 Iiyama



Just like the Viewsonic above, Iiyama's Prolite W2473HDS is an example of how good a TN screen can be when it tries, with punchy colours that are reasonably accurate and show no sign of colour cast or looking washed out. It's also fast, providing a 2ms response time for gamers who can tell the difference.

Surprisingly for Iiyama, who are best known for their professional-grade screens, there's no sRGB preset. The controls aren't particularly versatile at all, as it happens. Kicking into Eco Mode literally just dims the brightness a bit, for example. There's also no built-in USB hub, although that would mean adding bulk to the thin LED-backlit design.

The viewing angles aren't great either, and highlights are easily blown out in HDR games. It also has one of the least supportive stands here, and tends to wobble if you type to hard.

I've seen far worse, but this is the lowest scoring monitor tested here. If you do want a TN panel, get the Viewsonic instead. ■

PC GAMER 68

◆ **Screen size** 24" ◆ **Viewable** 23.5" ◆ **Screen tech** TN ◆ **Contrast ratio** 1000:1 ◆ **Refresh rate** 2ms ◆ **Resolution** 1920x1080 ◆ **Inputs** 2xHDMI, DVI, VGA ◆ **Power consumption** 23.5W ◆ **Dimensions** 556x418x219mm ◆ **Adjustable stand** No

BENCHMARKS

MONITORS COMPARED BY SPECIFICATION

Comparisons made are based on manufacturer-quoted figures.

Contrast ratio: native contrast, without dynamic backlighting (higher is better)

Response time: grey to grey quoted (lower is better)

Power use: peak use over 10 minutes' gaming (lower is better)

DELL U2311H £238

1000:1
8ms
33W

ACER S273HL £330

1000:1
2ms
23.9W

BENQ EW2420 £184

3000:1
8ms
25.5W

ASUS ML249H £200

3000:1
8ms
23.1W

HANNS-G HS233 £250

1000:1
3ms
50W

VIEWSONIC VX2453MH £160

1000:1
2ms
23.1W

IIYAMA PROLITE E2473HDS £173

1000:1
2ms
23.5W

ON TEST

REVIEWS

Our definitive guide to the latest gaming hardware. ***By Adam Oxford***

TESTING CRITERIA

Components and materials > A piece of kit is quite literally the sum of its parts. We look for the fastest chips, the highest core counts and the most modern materials.

Real-world performance> Each piece of kit we look at must be examined on its own merits. If it's a mouse, how does it feel? Is it too heavy or light? If it's a memory stick, an item designed for portability, how much data can it hold? Does it read and write data quickly?

Attractiveness> Some kit looks good, some looks bad. Aesthetics are often taken into account, as depending on the item, it can be a factor in your long-term satisfaction.

Value> It may be the highest-performing piece of kit in its category, but it sit within reach of most consumers? We like to see components that are not only best-in-class, but offer value for money too.

Visit www.techradar.co.uk/reviews to find the latest, best prices.

Fusion Blackbird

£1,749 Chillblast

What would the most powerful games machine in the world look like, do you think? Flashing lights? Perspex windows? It surely wouldn't look like this.

Beneath the understated gunmetal gloss of the Blackbird's Corsair Graphite 600T case there's an equally reserved interior. Even the motherboard, an Asus Sabretooth P67, is completely enclosed in a grilled shield: there's not a transistor in sight. But once you turn it on you'll be fully aware of their presence.

"What's impressive is that despite all this power the Blackbird is near silent"

Because this is an incredibly fast machine. The Core i7 2600K CPU is unlocked for overclocking and specced up to 4.6GHz by default, and is in turn partnered with a massive 16GB of RAM to keep all four of its hyperthreaded cores ticking over. The Radeon HD6990 graphics card is a giant two-chip monster, capable of outperforming everything other than gratuitous three- or four-card Crossfire or SLI rigs.

What's impressive is that despite all this power the Blackbird itself is near silent, even when running the Unigine benchmark to get the graphics fans spinning at full speed.

On top of everything else, the Blackbird is immaculately put together. In fact, the only criticism to be levelled at it is that trying to add new components is a bit tricky because the cabling is so tightly wound up out of the way.

And the price? It's better value than similarly specced machines from rivals like Cyberpower, and actually quite close to what you'd pay if you were to build it yourself. If you were to put this together, though, you could easily skimp on the amount of RAM and pass on the SSD drive to save a couple of hundred pounds and not sacrifice much in the way of performance. There is a configurator on Chillblast's site which means you could do the same thing.

Whether you need a PC of this calibre is debatable, but it's ideal for the multimonitor gaming discussed elsewhere this month. ■

VERDICT

Proof that sometimes buying pre-built is better than building, this is a high flyer that obliterates benchmarks.

PC GAMER 91



PC GAMER EDITOR'S CHOICE ★★★★★

SPEC ◆ **CPU** Core i7 2600K (3.4GHz) ◆ **RAM** 16GB 1600MHz DDR3 ◆ **Graphics** Radeon HD6990 ◆ **Hard drive** 60GB SSD, 1TB HDD ◆ **Far Cry 2 (1920x1080, Ultra high)** 179.27fps ◆ **Unigine (1920x1080, high)** 109.7fps

StoreKeys.com

Erazer X6811

£949 Medion



After a gaming laptop for less than a grand? Supermarket favourite Medion reckons it has the answer.

Certainly the specs look like a good deal. It's not the latest or the fastest GPU around, but it's better than the Radeon Mobility HD5850 more commonly seen in 15-inch gaming laptops around this price. As a result, DX11 benchmarks in Unigine's Heaven benchmark aren't great, but it performs reasonably well for a laptop running *Far Cry 2* at high detail. Dial down the image quality a bit and you can get decent framerates in most games.

There are other things to like about the Erazer. It has a decent three to four hours of battery life, for example. What's less inspiring is the all-plastic body, designed to look like brushed aluminium with none of the benefits. The keyboard is spongy too, but worse is the screen resolution of just 1366x768 pixels. That's not enough to look sharp on this size display, and it's further held back by washed out colours and a patchy backlight.

Eurocom and MSI offer similarly priced alternatives with a true quad core CPU and better screens, which are better built too. But right now it's best to wait a bit before buying a notebook. In a month or so, there'll be a lot more models based on Intel's second generation Core CPUs. Likely to be cheaper, faster and thinner, they'll only serve to highlight the drawbacks of the Erazer. ■

PC GAMER **78**

SPEC ◆ **CPU** Core i5 460M (2.53GHz) ◆ **RAM** 4GB ◆ **Graphics** Nvidia GTX 460M ◆ **Hard drive** 640GB ◆ **Screen** 15.4", 1366x768 ◆ **Weight** 3.5kg ◆ **Far Cry 2 (1366x768, ultra high)** 35fps ◆ **Unigine (1366x768, high)** 17fps

Survivor

£70 Bitfenix



It's not as big or as imposing as Bitfenix's appropriately named Colossus case, but the Survivor is clearly from the same family. Externally, it shares a similarly curved outline and is coated with a soft rubberised finish that feels like the kind of stuff stealth fighters use to avoid radar detection.

It's disappointing the soft finish doesn't extend to the side panels, but despite the relatively modest price, it feels like a luxury case.

Inside, things are just as impressive. Drive fittings are quick release, the expansion cards are held in by handy thumbscrews. There's not a huge amount of room inside, however, because this is designed for Micro ATX boards only. Bitfenix think this is a case for the kind of PC you take to LAN parties, and there's even a hidden handle that pops out of the top. It's a little cumbersome for this, though, and the handle feels more like a gimmick than a practical appendage, coiling out like an anglepoise lamp. The sliding panel that covers the front panel connectors, on the other hand, is a very classy touch.

Portability aside, this is a lovely case for the money. But I'd recommend it more for small rooms where you don't want a giant tower taking up space than as a companion for regular LAN gaming. ■

PC GAMER **85**

SPEC ◆ **Size** 230x502x510mm ◆ **Weight** 11.1kg ◆ **Drive bays** 4x5.25", 7x3.5" ◆ **Cooling** 1x200mm fan (front), 1x200mm (top), 1x120mm (rear) with throttle ◆ **PCI slots** 7 ◆ **Front panel** 2xUSB 3.0, 2xUSB 2.0, eSATA, Audio

KIT FILTER



Toshiba NB550D £320

If this first attempt is anything to go by, AMD's Fusion netbooks are a bit disappointing for gamers. It's slimline, well built, has a ten hour battery life with a good screen and excellent speakers for a netbook. But while the Radeon graphics do an admirable job of running 1080p video, the processor hits 100% load just on a *WoW* loading screen. ■

80

www.toshiba.co.uk



Asus GeForce GTX550Ti TOP £140

This is factory overclocked by 75MHz, to 975MHz. It also adds about £20 to the cost of a regular 550Ti, a chip which was designed as a £100 (ex VAT) budget-buster. The problem is, for the same price, you can pick up an older 1GB version of the GTX 460: a massive 20-30% faster at 1920x1080. ■

49

uk.asus.com



Razer Marauder Starcraft II £85

No USB ports. No dedicated macro keys. But then you don't need any of those. What you need is a solid keyboard that's not too large, with backlit buttons with a decent travel that won't shake loose at 100apm. And that's what the Marauder is, with the controversial ability to create unlimited macros on the fly. But £85 is too much for a keyboard. ■

81

www.razerzone.com

Storekeys.com





Total price £498

The perfect PC for Portal 2

Ready to gimp GLaDOS with your gaming rig? Good news: it needn't cost much.

There may never have been a team of painters working endlessly to keep the Forth Bridge fresh, but Valve's Source engine is proof that some masterpieces of architecture do exist in a state of constant improvement.

Incredibly, rather than suffering feature creep and bloat from repeated iteration, it's an efficient piece of code which doesn't require much in the way of PC power to run.

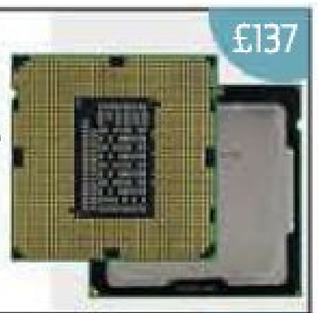
You should be able to run it flat out on a modestly specced PC, and you can build a games machine that will show Wheatley's bad side at its absolute best for less than £500. How? See below.



MOTHERBOARD £65

ASUS P8H61M

A Micro ATX board designed for Intel's Sandy Bridge processors, with some excellent tuning applications for light overclocking relief.



PROCESSOR £137

Intel Core i5 2300

The cheapest Sandy Bridge quad core available. Don't cut corners and go dual-core – Source can scale well over the extra cores.



MEMORY £44

4GB Corsair Value DDR3

With prices dropping to just over £10 a gigabyte, there's never been a better time to upgrade to a DDR3-based system.



3D CARD £130

Novatech GeForce GTS 460 GS 1024

Easily the best value card around at the moment, but you could get away with something even cheaper.



DVD-RW DRIVE £14

Samsung SH-S223C

A perfectly serviceable combo drive from Samsung that'll read and write DVD discs with the best of them. Why pay more?



HARD DRIVE £30

Samsung Spinpoint F3 500GB

Yes, you read that right. Half a terabyte of storage for less than the cost of a round in PC Gamer's local.



CASE £43

Antec 100 Ultimate

It's not big and it's not flashy, but it is solidly built and quieter than most other cases in this price range. And that's what's counts.



POWER SUPPLY £35

CoolerMaster Elite Power 500

Good value, but if you're going to break the £500 budget, this should be the first component to upgrade.

For Quality AND Performance choose

iiyama



team-dignitas™

iiyama are sponsor's of Team Dignitas

ProLite E2473HDS LED-backlit monitor

Finished in the latest glossy-black, this monitor is a full high definition 24" display that features all the benefits this technology affords. VESA mount compatibility along with one HDMI input and headphone connector on the side of the cabinet ensures great comfort of usage.



- 24" LED-backlit panel
- Full HD 1080p, 1920 x 1080 resolution (2.1 megapixel)
- Ultra fast 2ms response time
- 5,000,000:1 ACR (typical 1000:1 CR)
- DVI-D, D-Sub and 2 x HDMI connectivity

iiyama ProLite E2271HDS



One of the stunning new range of LED-backlit monitors from iiyama. Power consumption is only 21W typical usage and less than 1W in standby.

Other features include:

- 22" LED-backlit panel
- Full HD 1080p, 1920 x 1080 resolution (2.1 megapixel)
- Stunning 5ms response time
- 5,000,000:1 ACR (typical 1000:1 CR)
- DVI-D, D-Sub and HDMI connectivity

iiyama ProLite E2208HDS



We never overlook the budget conscious but this is still packed with a range of powerful features.

Features include:

- 22" LCD panel
- Full HD 1080p, 1920 x 1080 resolution (2.1 megapixel)
- Fast 2ms response time
- 10,000:1 ACR
- DVI-D and D-Sub connectivity

iiyama ProLite E2710HDS



Our largest monitor offering to date and with design, Windows 7® compatibility and Energy star rated this 27" monitor also features:

Features include:

- 27" LCD panel
- Full HD 1080p, 1920 x 1080 resolution (2.1 megapixel)
- Ultra fast 2ms response time
- 20,000:1 ACR
- DVI-D, D-Sub and USB connectivity

Extended Warranty Options available! See the complete range of iiyama displays: www.iiyama.co.uk uksales@iiyama.com Tel: 01438 745 482

iiyama monitors available from the following reseller partners:

novatech www.novatech.com · SCAN · CCL www.cclonline.com · VOVOTECH · OVERCLOCKERS UK · mesh

Awards:

COMPUTER SHOPPER BEST BUY · COMPUTER SHOPPER BUDGET BUY · PC PRO

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com

EXTRA LIFE

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMING

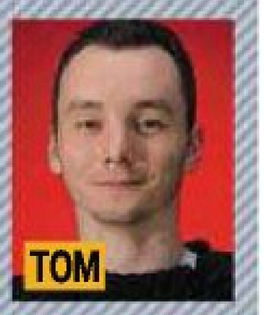
NOW PLAYING

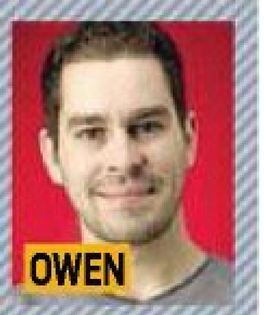


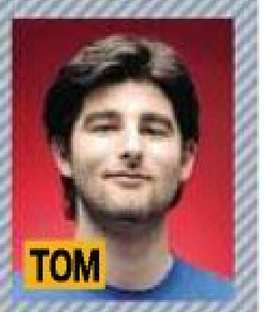
Craig went "Pfft" at this.

THE PC GAMER TEAM


RICH


TOM


OWEN


TOM


TIM

"What was down there that Craig didn't want to see?"

GETTING SCARED AGAIN IN **STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT**

Rich McCormick



Now Playing: *Stalker: Call of Pripyat*
This month: Got scared trying to make Craig scared.
Also played: *Dead Space 2, Deus Ex: Invisible War*

Craig's not scared of very much. I know this, because when I ask him "Craig, what are you scared of?" he replies, "NOTHING!" Then he calls me names, because I'm afraid of spiders.

But only a madman has no fears. I've been testing Craig, positing ooky ideas and gauging his reaction. Some days, I just shout them at the back of his head. "A BIG SCARY CLOWN WITH FOUR EYES!" I'll say. He just shrugs, and reminds me he grew up in Glasgow. Sometimes, I draw a picture. He scoffs at my ghost-with-dinosaurs-for-legs, and scrunches my paper up. To be honest, I'd almost given up the fight and declared Craig a madman.

That was, until I caught him looking over my shoulder at lunchtime. I'd gone back to *Stalker: Call of Pripyat*, buoyed by the release of the superb *Call of Pripyat: Complete* mod (to be found at *bit.ly/copcomplete*), and found myself teetering at the edge of an anomaly after an hour in the irradiated world. The anomaly – as far as anomalies go – looked innocuous. It was just a big hole in the ground with a car at the bottom.

In the boot of the car was my quarry: a locked box full of loot that another Stalker would share with me. On the way down, there were a few outcroppings of rock that ought to slow my descent enough to keep my shins unsnapped. I was about to begin dropping, when I heard a voice behind me. "Don't go down there." Turning, I found Craig eyeing my screen suspiciously.

"What?" I said. Craig turned back to his monitor. "Nothing, nothing." I hopped down to the first slab. "I just said you don't want to go down there."

Stalker is a spooky game. I know this now, I knew this when I reviewed it, knew this when I urgently had to Alt+Tab out halfway through an infiltration into a bloodsucker lair to watch a Katy Perry YouTube video.

But I'm a wimp. Craig – as he's repeatedly told me – isn't scared of anything. What was

> **"They clamber around the Zone on all fours, useless gas masks still clamped to their faces"**

down the hole that he didn't want to see?

I fished the box from the boot of the car. Craig had abandoned his PC, and was now entirely focused on my monitor. I think I heard him whimper slightly.

Box in inventory, I navigated an escape route. Behind me, Craig was muttering. "Oh man. Ohh man." I looked over to him, confused, and looked back to my monitor in time to see a pair of giant eyes hurtle toward my screen. Craig yelped. I yelped. Snorks.

Snorks are remnants of

READ ME
RELEASED February 2010
OUR REVIEW PCG 211, 87%
BUY IT Steam £13
MORE cop.stalker-game.com











men. They clamber around the Zone on all fours, useless gas masks still clamped to their faces. They leap out, unnatural claws extended, and they sprint away into the darkness.

I hurled myself into a dead end and crouched in the dark, firing occasional bursts of ammunition at any flickering shadow. The first snork limped away, trailing blood, but he had friends. And I was running out of ammo. I tried a different tactic, and shut my light off entirely. In the dark I was invisible to human eyes, but woefully vulnerable. Craig was making small whimpering sounds.

Gathering my courage, I started feeling my way out of the cave system. I'd flick my light on just long enough for one of two things to happen: I'd either get my bearings and realign myself, or see a snork bounding toward me and yelp in unison with Craig.

Eventually, I spied a sliver of daylight. Slamming my light on, I sprinted for it – just in time to receive an emission warning. Emissions are episodes of murderous freak weather: they last minutes, and kill anything stupid enough to be standing outside. I turned to look back at the cave I'd just left, and the shadows still hopping around inside it. I turned to look at Craig. He looked sad.

"Don't go back in. I'm scared."



Even lichs were appalled by Jake's skeletal third leg.

"A tear in reality appears above me and it starts raining zombies"

TRYING TO TAKE A HOLIDAY IN **RIFT**



Tom Senior

Now Playing: *Rift*
This month: Became a one-man defender of *Rift*'s countryside and electrocuted a dragon.
Also played: *Crysis 2*, *Bulletstorm*

I'm taking time off from whacking boars to explore *Rift*'s world of Telara. As MMORPG worlds go it's a vast and varied place, with excellent sunsets. I've also just got hold of my first mount, a giant two-headed tortoise I've named Bortoise. Now all I want to do is ride through Telara on shellback, taking in the ambience.

There's one small problem. Patch 1.1 has landed, kicking off a huge world event all around me. Now every zone in Telara is being assaulted by dark forces from another dimension. Portals are opening up everywhere, spilling forth liches, skeletons and demons into the mortal plane. They're running around, wrecking the place, killing civilians and ruining the lovely views. And it's all Queen Alsbeth's fault. She's using the evil powers of her tall hairdo and short skirt to unleash hell on Telara. There was nothing about this in the brochure.

After some time spent dodging the undead hordes I find the most picturesque location to explore yet, a huge broken bridge lying in the shadow of a castle. I get ready to charge into the valley and have a good look around when, suddenly, BOOM. The sky turns ominously dark. A glowing tear in reality appears above me and it starts raining zombies.

This will not stand. I let rip with every spell I have until my mana bar is bare, then start sacrificing my health to get more. Once I've slain enough undead, a grey dragon appears. It's the final rift boss. I electrocute it to death and the portal disappears with a satisfying pop. Peace is returned to my corner of Telara.

Bortoise the tortoise and I stand on the edge of the cliff, admiring the sunset. Thirty seconds later, I get bored and set off for the boar fields.

READ ME
RELEASED March
OUR REVIEW PCG 226, 86%
BUY IT bit.ly/ibsuo4 £30
MORE bit.ly/gZeaJX



Look, I'm off the clock now. How about next week?



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



"You haven't gone mass cavalry, have you, Timbo?"

PITTING MAN AGAINST BEAST IN **TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2**

Owen Hill

Now Playing: *Total War: Shogun 2*
This month: Killed a lot of horses. Revelled in the glory.
Also played: *Crysis 2, TrackMania Unlimited*



"You haven't gone mass cavalry have you Tim?"

No response. I highlight my troops, select the Flying Geese formation and begin to march. Tim loves horses but he knows I know that, so I play safe. My army might be made up of peasants, but at least it's balanced; bow, yari and loan-sword Ashigaru make for an elegant starting formation, but under my micro-less control they're almost guaranteed to get hacked. I hide my horses in the woods (it seems like the right thing to do) and click the gong.

Tim's army is revealed. It's more balanced than I anticipated and... FUCK! It's charging. Three minutes later I'm defeated. My cavalry are still standing in the woods, alone. They were *too* hidden.

Round 2. "You haven't gone mass cavalry have you, Timbo?"

This time I hear a quiet "lol." I select the Flying Geese formation (I *always* select the flying geese formation), and make a break for the high ground.

My army has an almost identical makeup to last time, but a quick inspection reveals that Tim's is more of a 'specialised' force. *Eight* cavalry units are galloping towards my front line, their wedge formation giving off a real air of menace.

By contrast, my archers and spear-wielding Yari Ashigaru look as though they're en-route to an afternoon picnic on a grassy hillside. I plough cavalry through my forces to intercept the charge and buy my skirmishing force some time. The whinnying animals collide scant metres away from my front line, delaying Tim's forces just enough for my Bow Samurai to set up and scare them off.

"Perfect(ish)," I thought.

Tim's cavalry wedges don't seem too bothered, however. His units are now standing outside of my archer's range, having a quiet lol to themselves and munching grass. The horses are munching grass. Not the riders.

Then I remember Bopo San. My general paces within range of Tim's forces and starts feathering them with arrows. Tim's melee-

"My archers and Yari Ashigaru look as though they're en-route to an afternoon picnic"

only army shifts. I compensate and launch another flurry. They reposition. My archers launch more projectiles. The thrill of a well-managed *Shogun* battle is almost overwhelming; I launch flame arrows to celebrate. Eventually Tim sees an opening and charges my front line. Archers skirmish as Yari Ashigaru lower their spears. Bopo San rallies the troops, draws his katana, and pins the horses between spears and swords. They don't like it very much.

Tonight, the peasants will eat steak.

READ ME
RELEASED March 2011
OUR REVIEW PCG 224
BUY IT steampowered.com
MORE www.totalwar.com/shogun2

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

"These guys are definitely messing around"

TURNS OUT **CRYSIS 2**'S MOST DRAMATIC MOMENTS ARE PERFECTLY SAFE


Relax, Gould, it's just another scripted sequence.

Tom Francis



Now Playing: *Crysis 2*
This month: Activated MAXIMUM GLARE at the world's worst snipers.
Also played: *Digital: A Love Story, Broken Dimensions*

I'll say this: armour mode in *Crysis 2* feels really cool. It makes a kind of liquidy sound when you flick into it, and your feet stomp like you're wearing concrete bellbottoms. In every other way I can think of, *Crysis 2* seems like a worse game than the last one.

I won't dwell on the painfully long intro, semi-intro, intro, credits intro and tutorial intro – all of which fail to explain anything you actually need to know about the game. I'll get straight to the part where you meet Gould, the obligatory scientist.

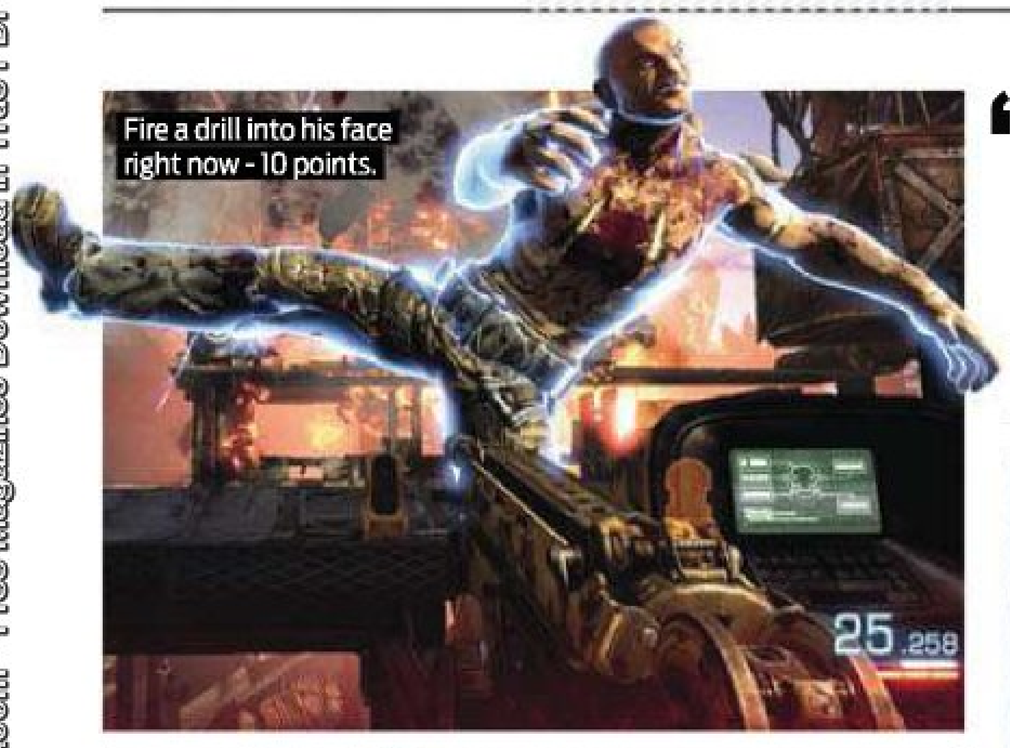
He's shouting at me for not thinking about cephalopods (which I do, actually, all the time), then sniper shots punch through the windows. He hits the deck and encourages me to do the same, which I can't since they took out the prone key. Then I get an objective to eliminate the enemies, which I can't because my gun is still in cutscene mode and won't fire. It doesn't really matter, because however long I stand there, none of the sniper shots hit me.

"Come on, Alcatraz! These guys aren't messing around!"

I walk past three more sniper shots that conspicuously miss me on the way to the window, and look at the four or five armed soldiers standing on the rooftop 20 feet from me. These guys are *definitely* messing around. They're trying to miss me, because they seem to know I'm in the middle of a shitty scripted sequence in which I can't attack anyone.

Crytek's first game, *Far Cry*, was ridiculously ambitious yet remarkably well made. I'd love to see them go back to the drawing board and show that creativity again. But I suspect they'll take *Crysis 2*'s impressive sales as a sign that the world just wants more *Call of Duty* – even from people who suck at aping it.

READ ME
RELEASED March 2011
OUR REVIEW PCG226, 70%
BUY IT Steam, £30
MORE www.mycrisis.com


Fire a drill into his face right now - 10 points.


The dreaded Fist of Rap.

"To score big you should kill continually, without pause"

TIM TRIES TO SCORE WITH **BULLETSTORM**

Tim Edwards



Now Playing: *Bulletstorm*
This month: Pondered the mechanics of chains.
Also played: *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm, Crysis 2, Total War: Shogun 2*

The thing about games is that they're software. And the thing about software is that it improves with time as developers re-code and improve. I'm amused by how much I enjoy the man-pinball in *Bulletstorm*, where the central conceit is that you can rack up points for killing baddies in amusing ways. But I'm left with one thought: *Bulletstorm 2* could be properly brilliant.

The problem is that the game isn't currently smart enough to figure out when you've done something very, very cool.

My guilty gaming secret is enjoying some seriously old school shoot-'em-ups. *Ikaruga* on the Dreamcast, *DoDonpachiR* on the iPhone. One of their tricks is using 'chains' – the more you kill without being hit, the more your points rack up. *Bulletstorm* could easily learn this lesson – that to score big you should kill continuously, without pause.

Also why on Earth do you have to spend points on ammunition? For a game that's meant to be about putting drills through a dude's eye, you spend an awful amount of time on menu screens buying ammo and upgrades. Way to ruin the effect. Arnie rarely runs out of bullets and when he does, he certainly doesn't tinker with menus.

Still, all of this could be fixed with just a few simple mods. And it means that *Bulletstorm 2* could be *fantastic*.

READ ME
RELEASED March 2011
OUR REVIEW PCG 225, 80%
BUY IT Steam £30
MORE www.bulletstorm.com

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

TOP 10 DOWNLOADS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH Virgin media

GET ■ Up to 50Mb/s unlimited downloads ■ Free internet security ■ Free super-fast wireless router



Cold Stream: a fan-made campaign, adopted by Valve.

1 Chill factor

CAMPAIGN *LEFT 4 DEAD 2*'S FAN-MADE CAMPAIGN: **COLD STREAM**

Valve are doing something odd with *Left 4 Dead 2*. They're taking one of the better community-made campaigns, *Cold Stream*, and making it official. That means taking what creator Matthew Lourdelet has made so far, testing it thoroughly, and giving it the Valve polish. But they're doing the whole thing publicly: they've released an early beta, and are taking our thoughts on board as to what needs changing. You don't even need to do anything to get it: it'll automatically be added to your game.

It's a pretty campaign: the four of you plough your way up a long, misty river valley, tall deciduous forest on either side and cold rushing water underfoot. The infected pour in from all directions at pretty much all times. In fact, that's the most unusual thing about it right now: we're used to fighting lots of infected, but they usually come in discrete waves. *Cold Stream* never lets up: there's just a constant, well, stream.

The highlight is a section that gives your group two chainsaws just before dropping you into the water: infected come thicker and faster than the rapids, and by the end of it you can hardly see through the blood.

There's a tank fight not long after, which must be the easiest in the game so far: you spot him from miles off, and have ample time to mow him down before he can do much more than throw a few easily avoidable rocks. I actually like that: the campaign has plenty of stressful moments already, it's nice to see them use a tank almost as an atmosphere piece.



There are more "Ooh, look at that!" moments than you'd expect from a community-made campaign; hopefully Valve will continue to polish those. I properly flinched when I was almost crushed by a falling boulder.

The finale already impresses visually: coming out of the water into a raging forest fire is a stark jolt of colour.

It's already a great campaign, so have a play and tell Valve how to make it better. **TF**

SIZE 530MB LINK bit.ly/ColdStream

2 TINY FUN IN 4K

IN SEARCH OF THE BEST FOUR-KILOBYTE JAVA GAME

The Java4K site runs an annual competition to make the best game you can in under four kilobytes. The finest of them are pure play.



4Kube 3D
Pick a simple idea, make fun puzzles. Here you roll a 3D cube with coloured faces, trying to get the red face to land on red tiles, and so forth. *bit.ly/4Kube3D*



Stick Shift 4K
A platformer where you Shift from a white man on a black background to a black man on previously empty space. World turns upside down. *bit.ly/StickShift*



Dungeon Defender
Place spike pits, lava traps and your own gloopy slime monsters to murder adventurers who try to plunder your dungeon. *bit.ly/DungDef*



Battle for Hoth 4K
Zoom around in 3D shooting at AT-ATs. You can't tie their legs up, alas – that would take 5K. *bit.ly/Hoth4K*

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

3 Deep sea diving

WEBGAME GO EXPLORING
BENEATH THE WAVES

Indie platformers often create beautiful and interesting worlds in which you play the exact same jump-over-these-spikes game you've played a million times before. *Beneath the Waves* is smarter. Its challenges are built around the world it gives you.

While you're just exploring, scoping out the sea floor and finding underwater caverns, the sea-life is passive. When you steal an idol from these caves, it turns on you. Shoals nibble at you as you swim through, sharks hunt you down, and it's very easy to lose all your health.

Except it's actually the idol's health: when it runs out, you drop the idol and everything leaves you alone again. When you're ready, you can grab it back from the ground and have another go.

It's the perfect blend of exploration and challenge: always giving you something to work towards, but also breaks when you need them. **TF**

SIZE Browser-based **LINK** bit.ly/beneaththewaves



4 QWOP climbing

WEB GAME GET YOUR FINGERS IN A HILARIOUS TWIST WITH **GIRP**

QWOP was an infamously hard game in which you controlled an Olympic runner by activating his leg muscles individually. Now its creator has made _GIRP_: a physics-driven take on climbing.

A HOLD TIGHT
The loops you're holding are keys you've got to keep holding down. You can let go of one at a time, but release both and you'll fall to your doom. Some moves require ridiculous combinations.

B REACH FOR THE R'S
To get higher, you must take your hand off one of the keys you're holding and press another that's in reach. You'll probably have to hit the tense muscle key to pull yourself up.

C RISING TIDE
The sea level is rising. Slowly, but often not as slow as your progress. And if you do get the hang of it, asshole seagulls occupy the higher rungs, and peck at you as your struggle. Dicks.

SIZE Browser-based **LINK** bit.ly/GiRP



5 WEBGAME
REAL TIME CHESS

CHESS WITHOUT TURNS GETS RID OF ALL THAT STRATEGY STUFF

My pawns charged out in spearhead formation, cutting through the enemy ranks. His rook burst forth and took out three of them before I could react, but one made it through, becoming a rook himself. He stormed behind the enemy lines, killing the king. This is a whole new kind of speed chess.

"My pawns charged out in spearhead formation, cutting through the ranks"

One of my enemy's pawns was at my base, doing the same thing. I smashed through the invading units to get to him, but I was too late: he became a queen. But before this new unit could get its bearings, my rook swept in and took it. The rest was just house cleaning. **TF**

SIZE Web game **LINK** bit.ly/RTChess



IN ASSOCIATION WITH Virgin media
GET Up to 50Mb/s unlimited downloads ■ Free internet security ■ Free super-fast wireless router

INDIE

6 OUTSIDE THE BOX

MOVE BLOCKS, GET BEER. *JOHN CUBE* IS MOTIVATION FOR US ALL.

All John Cube wants to do, after his shift on the spaceship Cubicum-01, is go home and booze it up. But his evil supervisor demands he work another shift moving crates around small storehouses to earn his freedom.

You need to defeat him in the only way you know how: by moving boxes onto markers to turn teleporters on, and using them to progress through a series

"Defeat him the only way you know how: by moving boxes to turn teleporters on"

of increasingly complex rooms. Soon, your impotent rage will be forgotten, replaced by tumbling confusion. Blocks can only be pushed, meaning each move has to be planned a few steps in advance. Early rooms have a set of solutions; later ones are one-shot opportunities, but each one has a palpable sense of reward on completion. Gotta get that beer. **RM**

SIZE 7MB LINK bit.ly/JohnCube





Bow vs fists. A tough call.

7 Win the West

MOD TEAM-BASED COWBOY COMBAT IN **FISTFUL OF FRAGS**

Modders love to give the Source engine their own theme – whether it's cyberpunk, space, or pirates, vikings and knights. *Fistful of Frags* takes it to the old West, and the team have just released the final version. It's a competitive team-based shooter with objectives: in one mode, you have to find chests full of money, steal it, then stay alive until a timer runs out to keep the cash.

It's a surprisingly clever game: instead of asking you to pick a class, you choose everything from the guns you sling to the whisky you drink and hats you wear from a generous loadout menu. How much you can equip is limited by your notoriety, but cleverly you can choose more than you can initially afford. The extra items won't be equipped when you spawn, but as your notoriety increases from completing objectives, they'll pop into your inventory as soon as you can afford them.



The weapons cover all the usual revolvers, rifles and shotguns, as well as dynamite, throwing knives, a bow and an axe. The bow is particularly fun: it doesn't require a long charge-up, so you can skewer people with impressive speed if you duck behind cover between shots.

Interestingly, cosmetic customisations also cost notoriety, so when you see someone with a fancy hat, you know they're arrogant enough to think they didn't need the points for better weapons. That's what a hat *should* mean. **TF**

SIZE 600MB LINK bit.ly/FistFrags

8 The world is spinning

FREEWARE ROTATE GRAVITY IN PUZZLER **BROKEN DIMENSIONS**

You're a young boy in a chicken suit. Oh these indie games, so frivolous! Then come the ghosts, the blood, the spikes, the murals of weird monsters mutilating people, the teeth and gums that block the exits, and the anger. Also you have to collect sweets.

Your only power, at first, is to levitate into the centre of the room, point at a wall, and turn the world around so that it becomes the floor. Everything is frozen while you twist and turn, but as soon as you drop back to Earth, heavy boxes, giant statues and whole chunks of the room crash to the new floor. It sometimes takes a few twists before you know which bits of the room are fixed, and the game plays on that cleverly.

Dimensions certainly isn't the first game to let you change gravity, but the way it's done – two beams suspend you in mid-air like electric stilts – makes it feel tactile and miraculous. The echoey, spookily lit chambers are unnerving to explore, and the silent menace of their horrible spikes gets you thinking very carefully about when and where you can rotate. The puzzles start simple, but soon get interesting and eventually a little scary. **TF**

SIZE 100MB LINK bit.ly/BrokenD


Chicken suit or not, an air or menace pervades.


Rise up in the air, then rotate the world around you.

9 Change history

MODS FINE-TUNE YOUR **TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2** EXPERIENCE WITH THESE THREE TWEAKS

Creating these mods for *Shogun 2* required a mad degree of technical and historical understanding. Fortunately, actually applying mods is a much simpler process. The giant brains in the *Total War* community have already burrowed into the game's code, making tweaks and changes. Some have focused on historical accuracy, turning an already ultra-detailed sim into something even more era-specific. Others work behind the scenes, balancing AI battle routines, or making unit selection easier.

These three are but a slice of the community's work. Delve deeper into the forums of *Total War* super-site *twcenter.net* and you'll find a host more. Most mods come as .pack files, and simply need placing in your *Shogun 2* 'data' folder. **RM**



DarthMod

Created by DARTH VADER (I hope he's not the real one), this is a slim download that makes a range of tweaks to *Shogun 2*. Install it via the handy exe file, and you're left with three .bat files. Two of these increase the number of men in each unit block, the third resets it to default values when you fancy switching back.

SIZE 234K LINK bit.ly/darthmod



Additional Units

Shogun 2's encyclopaedia references units such as the Wako and Ronin that are un-recruitable in the singleplayer game. Thanks to mod-general Swiss Halberdier's tiny mod, these have now been unlocked.

SIZE 3K LINK bit.ly/aumsho



Shogun 2 Realism

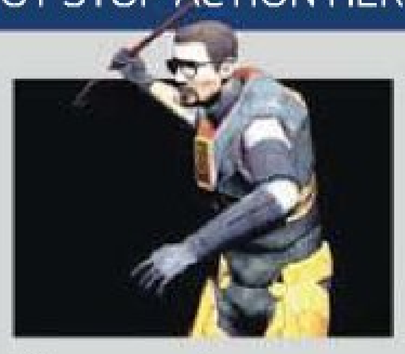
DaVinci's mod extends *Shogun 2*'s battles, making peasant units larger, fights last longer, and routs occur less frequently. Cavalry, too, have been beefed up, making a general's retainer a precision strike force, not a liability.

SIZE 60K LINK bit.ly/s2realism

10 MACHINIMA

BEING INANIMATE CANNOT STOP ACTION HERO **GNOME CHOMSKI**

If you know the gnome from *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, it's probably because you tried to carry him through the entire game. Keeping him with you till the end gave you the opportunity to put him in a rocket, send him into space, and get the Little Rocket Man achievement. But that was then. Now he's fighting dinosaurs and zombies. **TF**
bit.ly/GnomeChomp



No more heroes

1 With Duke late and Gordon missing in action, the fictional world needs a new hero. Ideally a dumb one made of ceramic materials, with an adorable little red hat.



OMG there's one

2 And behold! A garden ornament with a grudge is here to hack up zombies with a chainsaw. True, he can't take his hands out of his pockets, but... shut up.

ADVERTISING FEATURE



Welcome to Virgin Broadband

Get faster download speeds with Virgin 50Mb Broadband

With the rise of digital distribution, mods and indie games, it's never been more important to have an internet connection capable of downloading large files quickly. With Virgin's 50Mb Broadband package, you get just that. If you sign up today, you'll get free installation, the first three months for the reduced price of £15 a month (and just £25 a month after that), along with free PC security, unlimited online storage, 100 free photo prints a month, automatic backup and unlimited downloads. You'll never have to wait long for a game to download again.

To find out if you're eligible and for more information, head to virginmedia.com/gaming. Or, if you can't get online, call us on 0800 052 0811.

Virgin media

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

KEEP UP

PHILL CAMERON CHARTS THE REMARKABLE PROGRESS OF **DWARF FORTRESS**

READ ME
FIRST REVIEWED
Still in beta
PUBLISHER
Bay 12
DEVELOPER
In-house
REQUIRES
1GHz CPU, 1GB RAM
LINK
www.bay12games.com/dwarves
COMMUNITY
bit.ly/foVTep

Dwarf Fortress is a fantasy management game with graphics made out of text characters (although its community has given it many different makeovers – see Tile It On, below). You have some dwarves, you need to make a fortress – and ideally, stay alive. It's convoluted, brilliant, and barely a day goes by without the game being updated.

The only way to explain *Dwarf Fortress* properly is to explain what happens in a typical game. My dwarves, for example, are in a pitiful state. Their farm is on barren land and barely works. But it is producing mushrooms, which is all they need to make booze, so they're drunk enough to not care.

The mushrooms are all the food we have. Our army is a joke, comprised of a few drunk peasants wrestling in a corner somewhere, and just yesterday my legendary miner Nils dug a hole so deep he struck... emptiness. He'd found a huge cave. A cave full of cave crocodiles. Which are like normal crocodiles, but much, much angrier.

So naturally they swarm up the stairs and start to eat the hundreds of puppies in my dining hall. Just try to imagine how my dwarves felt, drunk out of their minds and watching ancient reptiles tearing apart *puppies*. It's no wonder a dozen went insane on the spot.

The most recent updates form the start of what creator Toady is calling 'The Caravan Arc', which is intended to implement an accurate simulation of a feudal trading system. Peasants will sell surplus produce to towns in exchange for tools, and the towns will then use those supplies to expand and trade with merchants, who travel between towns and fortresses, plying their wares. It doesn't sound particularly impressive, until you realise that (a) every one of those peasants is actually tilling their land, producing their food and making *decisions* about what they need to keep and what they can sell, all *while* you're building your fortress, and (b) this is just the lead up for 'The Army Arc', where towns, fortresses and cities will be able to raise and campaign with armies.

Dwarf Fortress continues to be beyond overwhelming. The base game alone is a desperate struggle to get to grips with, a gargantuan pile of hotkeys to remember, not to mention the sheer complexity of how it all works. There is so very much you can do, but at the same time, there's a hell of a lot that requires you working the system.



"Try to imagine how my dwarves felt, drunk out of their minds and watching ancient reptiles tearing apart puppies"

Like that farm I mentioned: you have no way of getting your dwarves to just lob buckets of water on the ground to wet it up for fertilisation. Instead, you need to build a room *above* where you want your farm, then cut holes in the floor. And then mark those holes as ponds, and your dwarves will try to fill them. The water falls through and hits the ground below, and now you can farm.

And I'm stuck in a cave with an angry crocodile. How on earth am I going to deal with the world doing things like that all around me?

Over the past few months, the Adventurer mode has been given a massive overhaul and expansion. Adventurer mode is *DF*'s take on the classic RPG, letting you create a single hero and go out to do good (or not), in the incredible detailed world you've procedurally generated. The great thing about this is that it is *the* exact world that you've already made, including all the failed fortresses that you have inevitably littered it with. These are places you can visit, and hopefully plunder, with the proviso that you were a good enough fortress builder to make anything worth plundering.

The changes have come in the shape of an overworld map, which makes it infinitely easier to travel from location to location, while adding the danger of getting lost out in the wilds at night. Visibility plummets the instant the sun goes down, and sleeping in the open is often the last mistake you'll make. So you blunder about, hoping to stumble across a town before a band of outlaws stumble upon you.

Which is how both my latest Adventurer games ended. Out wandering between towns, ambushed by a group of bastards who shouted something like: "The name of The Deadly Tears will be the last thing you ever remember!" before they stabbed me in the hand and shattered the bone. *Dwarf Fortress* accurately models anatomy, to the extent that you can lop off someone's hand, then pick it up afterwards to sell for a surprisingly large amount of money. Damaged nerves can make you drop your weapon, a shattered ankle can make you fall over.

In this particular instance, the leader of The Deadly Tears decided that she'd had enough of smashing my limbs up with her mace, and bit me in the ear. *In the ear.* Then she latched on. It was at that point that I gave into the pain. And the humiliation.

And this is just what the developers have been doing. Alongside all this are numerous community projects to make the actual playing of *DF* easier. They range from tilesets to game aids such as Dwarf Therapist, which tracks the professions and skills of each of your dwarves, while allowing you to make changes on the fly, avoiding much of the frustration of using the in-game systems. This means that, when a legendary miller arrives with some migrants and you're entirely devoid of wheat or a millstone, you can turn him into a novice engraver instantly, avoiding the dangerous spiral of laziness and booze that spells the end for so many dwarves.

Trying to detail everything going on in *Dwarf Fortress* is almost as hard as playing it, but it's clear that the developers are trying to create a game that's more world than anything else. One where each tiny nuance and grand scheme is fully realised, and entirely believable. It's still not an accessible game, and perhaps never will be, but it's an extraordinary testament to what games can be.

TILE IT ON Prettify *Dwarf Fortress* with these tilesets

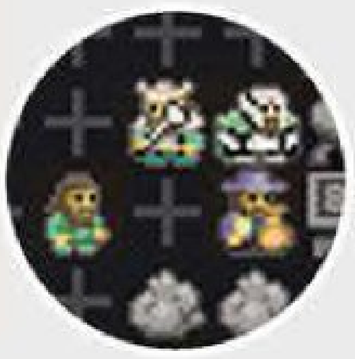
1: MAYDAY
Popular because it blends graphics with pragmatism, leaving enough simplicity in the visuals to let you know what's going on, while elaborating on the items that need it. *bit.ly/3bGjVJ*



2: IRONHAND
Adds more visual flare, taking on a styling that's a little more Nordic and in keeping with the tone of *Dwarf Fortress*. There's the danger of things becoming slightly confusing, but it's prettier. *bit.ly/9TyXu2*



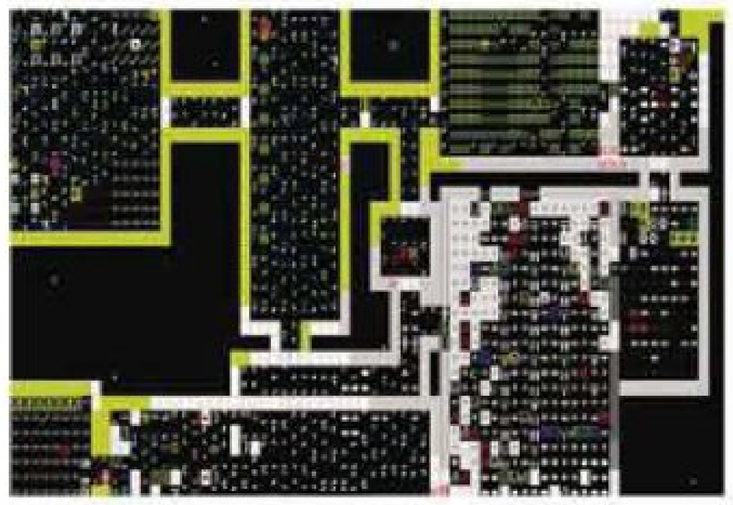
3: PHOEBUS
While it shares a lot with Ironhand, Phoebus manages to pack a great deal more unit types, avoiding the placeholder letters that are carried over from the ASCII version. *bit.ly/ak1Ouj*

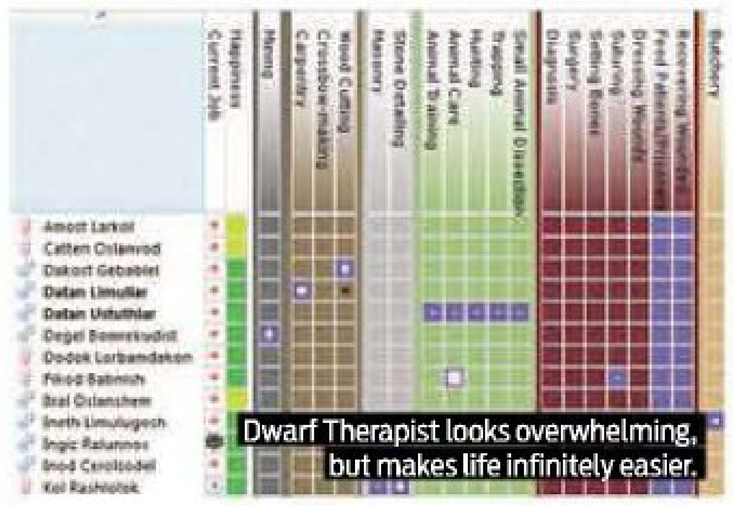


StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag


I'm storing my gems near the entrance. Safer that way.




Dwarf Therapist looks overwhelming, but makes life infinitely easier.

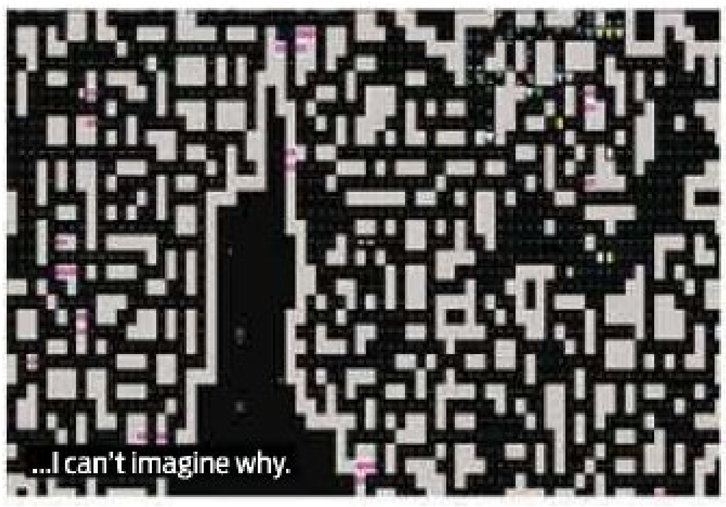

Forget rabbits. My dogs *reproduce*.


This is why they call me the terrier.


This is why they call me dead.


The overworld map in Adventurer mode makes things so much easier.


Some people think *Dwarf Fortress* is complicated...


...I can't imagine why.


Vast underground caverns were introduced in a recent update.

HOW TO...

HAVE MORE FUN WITH YOUR FAVOURITE GAMES

Bluff an artificial intelligence and conquer the galaxy

PHILL CAMERON HAS LEARNT **AI WAR**'S TELL

AI War is a space strategy game on a vast scale. Starting from your home world, you churn out hundreds of ships and send them through wormholes to conquer the galaxy. But that doesn't mean you can play it like a normal strategy game. Your AI opponent is not an equal, it's a terrifying superpower that can crush you in an instant if it considers you enough of a threat. To survive, you're going to need some pointers.

It's not an easy game, but the good news is that the more incompetent you are, the more the AI will leave you alone. And by the time you get good enough to be a threat, you'll be able to put up a spectacular fight against the onslaught it throws at you.

It's a galactic poker game, one where you need to bluff that you're weak and pathetic while trying desperately to stop being weak and pathetic. Every move needs to be evaluated to maximise your power while minimising the attention the AI pays to it. And that means knowing how some of the game's less obvious mechanics work. There are extensive in-game tutorials if you have the time and patience, but if you just want to get started, here's what you need to know. It won't be enough to win on the higher difficulties, of course, but winning isn't the point. AI War is all about the fight.

GET STARTED

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TIME 4-5 Hours

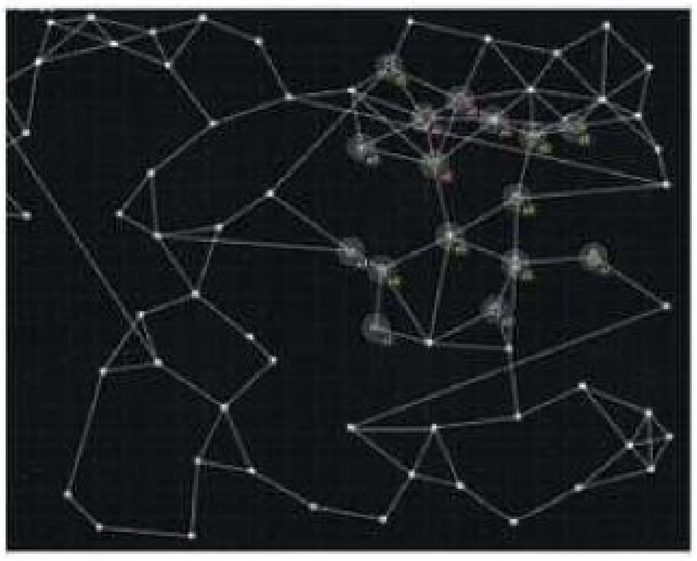
VITAL LINKS

The *AI War* Wiki: has a huge FAQ about how it all works
snipurl.com/27otli

Official website, blogging the near daily updates
snipurl.com/27otlr

The AI War Forums: get community tactics, meet players, talk with the devs
snipurl.com/27otlu

Video tutorials by the devs
snipurl.com/27otml



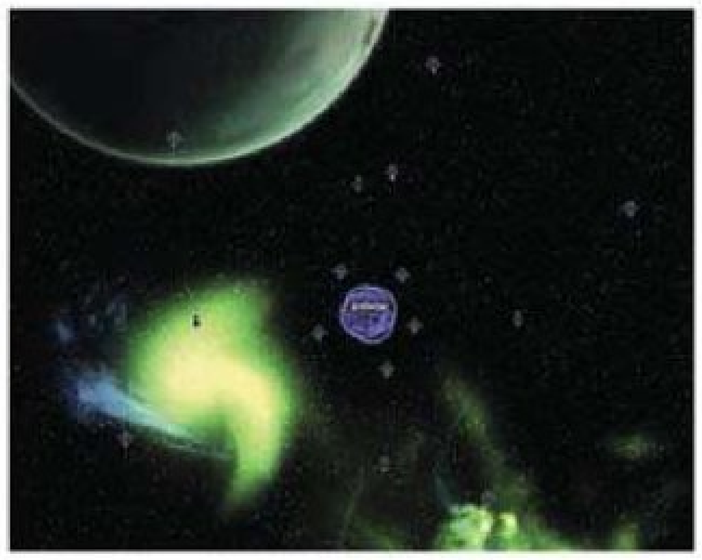
1 Choose your war

AI War randomly generates maps for you to play in, as well as allowing you to tailor the difficulty and personality of the AI you're playing against. Find the right balance: don't be afraid to challenge yourself, and don't be put off if you're getting your arse kicked. Knock the AI difficulty down a few notches, and find that sweetspot where you're challenged, but not constantly on the back foot and unable to progress.



2 Science!

Once you're in a game, the first thing you need to do is spend your starting research. A good choice is to upgrade your resource gatherers, to enable you to build faster – but getting better ships from the off will help you expand. It's up to personal preference whether you'd rather go for aggressive expansion or economic growth. There are clear benefits to both, but the important thing is to get the research underway immediately.



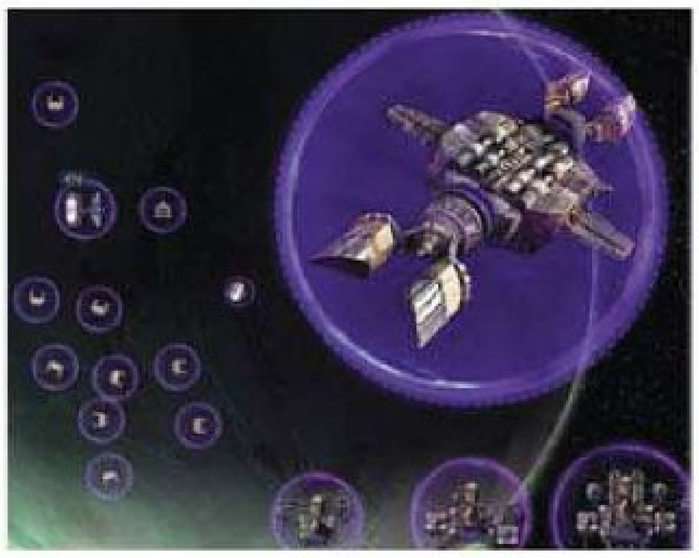
3 Defence!

Before you start that expansion, you'll need to shore up your starting planet. This is your homeworld, the place where all of humanity is hovering in the cold, comforting embrace of cryostasis. Luckily, the AI will usually attack through wormholes, so you can base your defences around that. Surround your homeworld with mines, sprinkle tractor beams liberally, then surround the whole thing with missiles. Delicious.



4 Explore!

Now that you're marginally safer, it's time to find out just how screwed you are. Send your starting scouts off through any unexplored wormholes, and hope they don't get completely decimated by whatever defences the AI has put around their holes. Having a scout spying on a hostile planet is immeasurably useful, as it provides you with early warnings of attack and unit counts. You never want to fly blind.



5 Prepare!

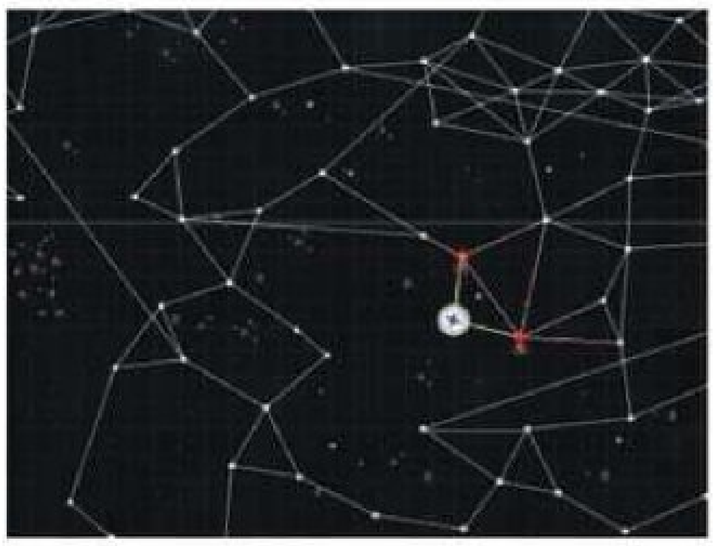
Speaking of early warnings, one of the cheaper and more useful pieces of technology to research is the Advanced Warp Sensor, which lets you know *where* an attack is coming from. It sounds somewhat redundant, as the game tells you when a wave is coming and where it's attacking regardless of what tech you have, but this marks the exact wormhole they're striking through, letting you prepare properly. With excessive mines.



6 Build!

You've got turrets. You've scouted systems. You've researched stuff. Now it's time to expand, which means you're going to need an army. There's little benefit in limiting the size of it, as there's no unit upkeep, so just set your factory to build everything on a loop. It'll replace any losses, and pump out the maximum number of each, meaning you should have about three or four hundred ships in a few minutes.

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag
StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format



7 Analyse!

This stage of the game is when things get a little bit more tricky. The worst thing you can do right now is start to aggressively expand, taking every planet you come across. Yes, it's tempting, and yes, you've got a big army, but it's the fastest way to get noticed by the AI, and while it's tempting to present a unified front, you'll just get squashed. So you need to choose your planets, based on their location on the starmap and their resources.



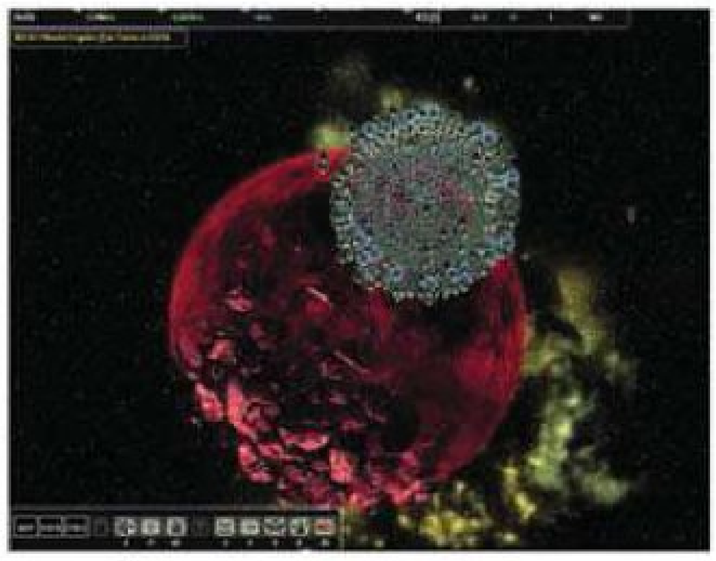
8 Fear!

There are three AI buildings that should make your bladder quiver. The first is the AI Eye, which is as omniscient as it sounds. If you send more ships to that planet than the AI has, it'll bring in reinforcements. A LOT of reinforcements. Then there's the CounterAttack Guard Post, which does the same thing when it dies. And there's the Ion Cannon, which instagibs anything smaller than a star ship. Stay away from worlds with these buildings.



9 Attack!

Once you've established that the planet you want to take is (a) useful, and (b) contains nothing to be terrified of, it's probably time to attack. Pretty much the first thing you should do is make a bee-line for the enemy warp gate, as that's how they bring in reinforcements. Take it out. And remember: even if your attack fails, you'll have essentially crippled this planet, making it easier to take. The rest should be relatively simple.



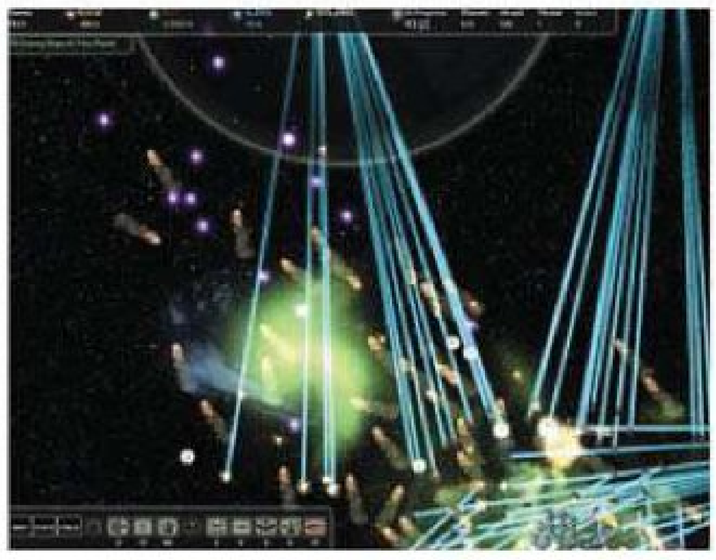
10 Respond!

Occasionally an alert is going to pop up in the top left of your screen. It'll read something like '123,092 ships headed to Zaphcr in 3:43'. This is the cue for your already weak bladder to give up the ghost. Get there and defend this world at all costs. If you fail to stop this wave, those ships will spread from the planet they're attacking into anything adjacent, and so on. You need to stop it, or you're done for. You're probably done for anyway.



11 Cooperate!

As satisfying as *AI War* is to play on your own, it's much more fun to play with people you know. You can frantically reinforce one another as attack waves hit, expand into different regions of the galaxy, capture fabricators and high-level factories to supplement each other's forces, and more importantly, they can serve as a valuable distraction for the AI to destroy. They're obstacles between it and you. Squishy, meaty obstacles.



12 Persevere!

AI War is not a quick game. It's going to take many hours to complete just one attempt at galactic conquest, although you can take some solace from the fact that you'll probably get wiped out somewhere along the way. The AI is going to beat you until you find the right AI difficulty level for you, or you improve. The fun isn't in winning, but seeing how long you can survive, and how bloody you can make the AI's mechanical nose.

SKILLS

HUMAN MINE

TAKING OUT TANKS IN *MEN OF WAR: ASSAULT SQUAD*



1 First, make sure your guy has an anti-tank grenade. Then hide him in a bush near a road a tank is likely to take. Switch his fire mode to return fire so he doesn't give himself away, and wait, like a snake in the grass. A snake with a grenade.



2 As the tank gets close, manually select the AT grenade, then switch to direct fire mode. Aim for the tank's engine, and throw that sucker. If you're very lucky, you'll set the engine on fire and startle the crew.



3 Wait a few seconds, and keep your little guy's head down until the engine fire spreads to the rest of the tank, burning its crew and hitting the fuel tanks, where everything explodes. Hope you're not in the blast radius.

BONUS TIP

GO RAMBO

A dead tank is useful. Get one of your tank crew to look inside, and get the 50.Cal machinegun out of it.





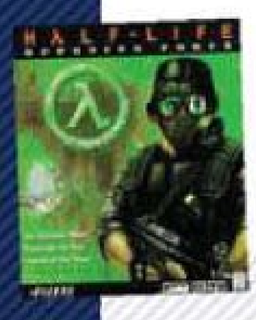
Bullets are no good against this monstrosity, soldier.

"It's like touring the set of a well-known and much-loved movie"

CHRIS LIVINGSTON GETS REACQUAINTED WITH **HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE**

In 2007, *Portal* was nearing release and gamers were buzzing about its unknown protagonist. The game was to feature a gun called the Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device. Could its acronym, ASHPD, be a clue to its hero – Adrian SHeParD?

The fact that gamers clutched at so flimsy a straw says something about their attachment to Shepard, the unspeaking soldier who starred in Gearbox's 1999 *Half-Life* expansion, *Opposing Force*. He was last seen being stuffed into an inter-dimensional linen closet by the G-Man. The decade-old mystery of his fate still nags.



READ ME

FIRST REVIEWED
PCG 78, 93%

PUBLISHER
Sierra Studios

DEVELOPER
Gearbox Software

REQUIRES
500MHz CPU, 96MB RAM, 16MB 3D card

LINK
bit.ly/husEi4

INFLUENCED BY
Half-Life

GET IT FROM
steampowered.com
£2.99

As Shepard, you're one of the grunts dispatched by the military to put down the alien invasion, and eliminate one surprisingly resilient scientist. You arrive at Black Mesa via Osprey, only to be shot down in a sequence we've seen mirrored many times since – from *Modern Warfare* to *Just Cause 2*. Surviving the crash, Shepard makes his way through the crumbling, largely subterranean facility.

Gearbox mostly stick to Valve's ingredients: screeching headcrabs, teleporting vortigaunts, milquetoast scientists and oddly cheerful security guards are all familiar, welcome sights.

For fans of *Half-Life*, playing *Opposing Force* is like touring the set of a well-known and much-loved movie. "Hey, this is the tram tunnel where Gordon Freeman rode to work! Ooh, that's the marine that gives the famous radio order to forget about Freeman! Wow, this is the chamber where Gordon Freeman jumped into the Xen portal! Hey, there's Gordon Freeman himself! Can I get an autograph?"

"Another trip to Xen, where we once again see why the aliens are so keen to colonise our dimension: we have floors"

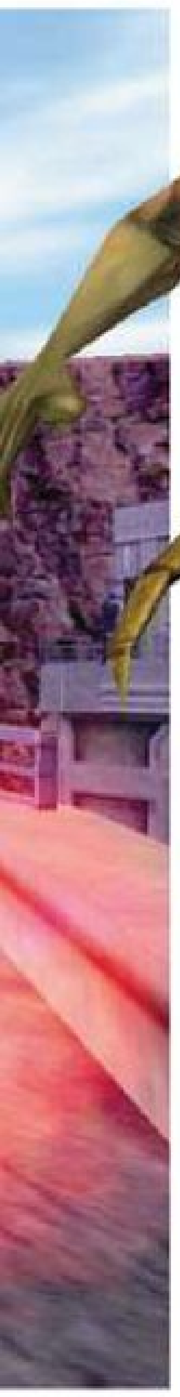
You're also intermittently joined by an assortment of marines who act as squad members, common in today's games but novel in 1999. They chat among themselves, grant you access to new locations, help you out in combat, and get stuck in doorways. It's always nice to have company and somewhat sad when they're left behind or killed, sometimes by you, by accidentally wandering into your line of fire. (Or purposely, because you're tired of them getting stuck in doorways.)

Well-armed

While the years have not been kind to the graphics, the weapons are still a highlight, and a welcome reminder of the glorious days of carrying around everything you find rather than having to pick and choose. *Opposing Force* is constantly throwing new guns at you, sometimes literally: one bio-weapon actually wriggles across the floor and leaps onto your arm, so eager is the game for you to have it.

Even the Barnacle, that irritating, stationary enemy, is made mobile and useful. Black Mesa scientists have modified it to be carried around and used as a grappling hook, enabling Shepard to swing across gaps and pits, or pull enemies helplessly toward him to be om-nom'd into chunky gibs.

The Spore Launcher is another wiggling




Somehow Gordon never comes across Race X.


Easiest. Boss fight. Ever.


All this carnage really works up the appetite.


Close cover before detonating.


Science = poking.

creature you can wreak havoc with. Feed it alien fruit and it will barf explosively on your enemies (a lovely bit of idle animation shows Shepard fondly stroking the creature like a lost puppy). Once you've stocked up on experimental and alien weapons, you'll probably never use your standard guns again.

Running Valve's *Half-Life* playbook does have occasional downsides. Environmental puzzles litter the levels, slowing down the action as you hop across radioactive hazards, slide across icy floors, fall off crates and boxes, and weave through forests of electrified cables to find the requisite power switches.

When you're not jumping, you're crouching: Black Mesa has so much ductwork it's a wonder the scientists aren't constantly pinned to the wall by the excess airflow. There is yet another trip to the Xen borderworld, where we once again see why the aliens are so keen to colonise our dimension: we have floors.

Gearbox wanted to add some new enemies, so meet Race X, more violent, squishy aliens lured to Earth by the cascade resonance. With monsters from two different alien races, slippery black ops assassins, and heavily armed marines all trying to kill one another, it makes me think the G-Man has the right idea: nuking this hot mess is clearly the best option.

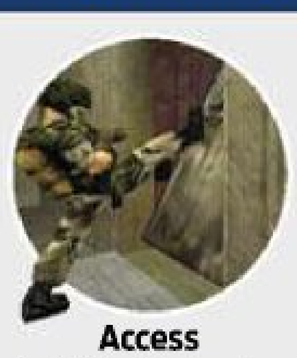
Speaking of whom, our favourite talent scout pops up from time to time, making the transition from well-dressed Peeping Tom to active participant: here he is opening a door to free Shepard from a rising flood of radioactive goo; here he is shutting another to prevent Shepard escaping the facility by helicopter. And of course, he's the one who personally re-arms the nuke Shepard fights through scores of black ops agents to deactivate.

And then there's Shepard himself. With no cutscenes, we never see him, with no dialogue, we never hear him. Yet, all these years later, gamers still want to not see him and not hear him again. As with Freeman, by the game's completion we've managed to fill that empty space with something. We've helped create a character, and we still think of him fondly.

Opposing Force ends as *Half-Life* did, with the G-Man storing Shepard in his dimensional personnel file. Good job, Shepard. We'll let you know. Don't call us, we'll call you.

We're in the same limbo as Shepard. We're still waiting.

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?



Access
Let's find the key for this... never mind.



Health
This shot will heal that shattered femur.



Support
If they're facing the right direction.



Ammo
Once you no longer need their support.

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

MUST PLAY

DON'T MISS OUT ON THE LEGENDS

The greatest games on PC



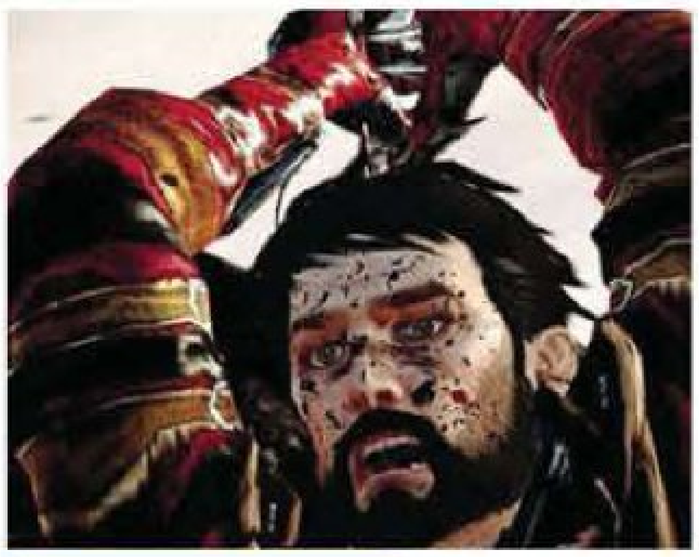
GO TO WAR...

Total War: Shogun 2

totalwar.com/shogun2

Use ninjas and samurai to conquer Japan in a more focused *Total War*, blessed with good AI, sumptuous visuals and clan-based multiplayer.

Also: *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty, Dawn of War II, Supreme Commander 2, Company of Heroes, Solium Infernum*



HAVE AN ADVENTURE...

Dragon Age II

dragonage.bioware.com

Betters the original in every way, with more interesting characters, a darker, sexier world, and super stabby combat. Essential.

Also: *KotOR, Mass Effect 2, Oblivion, Deus Ex, Fallout 3, Assassin's Creed II, Lego Harry Potter, Splinter Cell: Conviction*



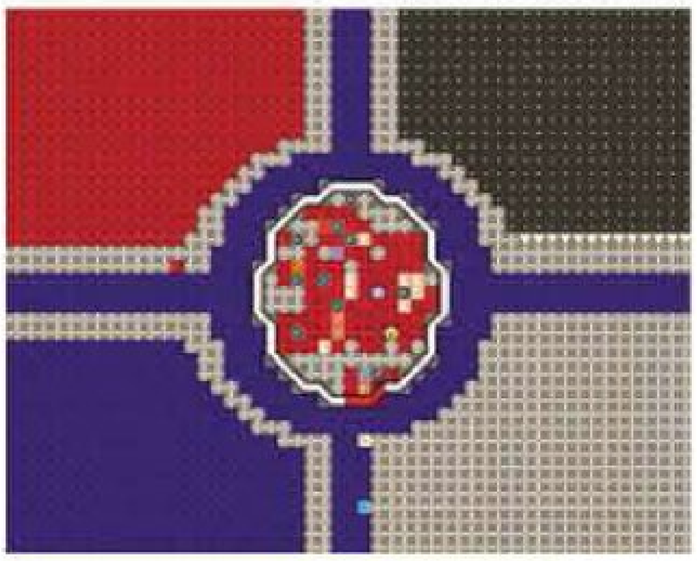
SHOOT MEN...

Bulletstorm

www.bulletstorm.com

Boot enemies into the air, wrap them in bombs, and launch bullets through their ass-door. It's not about shooting. It's about shooting in *style*.

Also: *Half-Life 2, BioShock 2, Crysis, Far Cry 2, Bad Company 2, Just Cause 2, L4D2, Modern Warfare 2, Stalker: Call of Pripyat*



GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING...

Dwarf Fortress

bay12games.com/dwarves

The eighth wonder of the world. An absurdly detailed management sim that constantly produces funny experiences. Plus, zombie slugs!

Also: *Desktop Tower Defence, N, GTA 2, Freespace 2, Tribes 2, Anchorhead, Nethack, TrackMania Nations Forever, Spelunky*



LEAD A SECOND LIFE...

World of Warcraft

www.worldofwarcraft.com

With the launch of *Cataclysm*, there's never been a better time to get into *WoW*. It's prettier, funnier, and less grindy. The best just got better.

Also: *EVE Online, Warhammer: Age of Reckoning, Lord of the Rings Online, Guild Wars, Mount & Blade: Warband*



PLAY ON YOUR NETBOOK...

Bejeweled 3

bit.ly/ckpPvs

Match gems in rows of three, and in doing so play poker, save butterflies and cause huge explosions in this inventive sequel to the classic puzzle game.

Also: *Monkey Island 2 SE, Day of the Tentacle, Peggle, Bookworm Adventures, Uplink, World of Goo, Braid*



SWEAR YOURSELF TO DEATH...

Super Meat Boy

www.supermeatboy.com

Jump, run and die in the ultimate reaction-based platformer. By turns more frustrating and more rewarding than what we're used to.

Also: *VVVVVV, Revenge of the Titans, AudioSurf, SpaceChem, Mirror's Edge, Magicka, The Misadventures of PB Winterbottom*



FLY, DRIVE AND RIDE...

F1 2010

www.formula1-game.com

It's a lightning-fast racer that strikes a balance between accessibility and detail, but Monte Carlo in the rain is all the reason you need to play it.

Also: *Flight Simulator X, TIE Fighter, Silent Hunter 4, Black Shark, Race Driver Grid, Colin McRae's Dirt 2, Burnout Paradise*



PWN SOME NOOBS...

Team Fortress 2

www.teamfortress.com

Cartoon styled it may be, but the retribution is real when your 'friend' is literally stabbing you in the back. Team shooters get no better than this.

Also: *Counter-Strike Source, Unreal Tournament III, Battlefield 2, Left 4 Dead, Battlefield Bad Company 2*

StoreMags.com

ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

E3

EXCEEDING IMAGINATION

E3 Expo is the preeminent global trade event for computer and video games. It's all about the innovation, creativity, business, and imagination of the most compelling sector of the entertainment industry.

EXPERIENCE ALL THAT E3 EXPO HAS TO OFFER BY REGISTERING TODAY AT WWW.E3EXPO.COM.

esa entertainment software association

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER

JUNE 7-9, 2011

WWW.E3EXPO.COM

E3 Expo is a trade event and only qualified industry professionals may attend.
No one under 17 will be admitted, including infants. Visit www.E3Expo.com for registration guidelines.

Produced By IDG WORLD EXPO

© 2011 ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION

ADVERTISING FEATURE

WHAT MMO?

NO MONEY DOWN

It's easy to game for free on the PC

PC gaming is a remarkably flexible hobby. It caters for every possible genre, player and budget. Case in point: free-to-play games. You might not realise just how many there are, and the breadth of games you can play. They don't only exist at the fringes of PC gaming anymore. Today, the biggest names are joining in, coming around to the fact that free is a whole world away from cheap.

Battlefield Play4Free (bit.ly/cVwEc1), *The Lord of The Rings Online* (www.lotro.com), *Battlestar Galactica* (bit.ly/cfjVm8) are massive names, all freely available to you right now, supported by advertising and microtransactions, but each with a huge player base of people who'll never pay a single penny.

They take advantage of the ridiculous raw power of modern PCs, and the near ubiquity of broadband internet connections. It's easy to grab a new game when all it takes to be part of an MMO with hundreds of quests, thousands of players and as much choice as you'd get from a boxed game, is to click on a big flashing download button. And they're getting quicker: Frogster's *Runes of Magic* (www.runesofmagic.com) will soon be streaming through your internet browser: no install needed.

Whether you're dropping people with a well-placed bullet, questing through the realms of Tolkien's forebrain, or floating through space, you only need to contribute what you like. That doesn't mean payment is a bad word in free-to-play, but that you can stick to buying only what you want: a new gun here, or a new quest line there for a few pence or pound. It's really fascinating to watch how each game finds the balance between serving paying customers while still catering for those people who just want to play without laying any money down.

So whether you do or don't, this flexibility is what makes free-to-play a welcome part of the gaming landscape. And while there are huge names vying for your attention and time, they're a tiny slice of what is out there right now. There are dozens more games waiting to be explored, and something for everyone to enjoy.



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

ADVERTISING FEATURE

WHAT MMO?





Join the battle

www.mythos-europe.com

MYTHOS

Damage dungeon dwellers in the F2P action RPG

Oil your mouse-finger: if you like your action RPGs colourful and ***Diablo***-esque, then *Mythos* is definitely a game to grasp. The enemy heavy, top-down dungeon crawler has just launched.

Or relaunched. *Mythos* was originally in development by the folks who went on to make *Torchlight*, before their parent company died and left the promising little game to wither. Now it's returned, rezzing for your free-to-play pleasure.

Every action MMO needs a world to protect and a hero to make. *Mythos* has Uld, in which you'll have access to four races: Humans, Cyclops, Satyrs and Gremlins. They're mostly cosmetic choices, although there are racial traits. You modify yourself further by the choice of three classes: Pyromancer is the typical mage, Bloodletter will fulfil all your violent, warrior needs, and the Gadgeteer is the most roguish of the classes. Within those classes, you can specialise further with skill trees.

Each class has three choices of skill tree to follow, as well as the various routes within that tree. Your Gadgeteer, for example, could select a series of Marksman skills, specialising in guns and their various uses. Allied to the skill trees, Mythos has a crafting system, where you can break down the loot you've captured into their component parts to forge more powerful items. You have specialisations for each type of weapon: Terran specialisation focuses on swords and armour; Etheral will focus on magic items and gadgets; Sylvan is where firearms are made. It's wide and deep, allowing for a player to focus on a specific trait for their character to specialise in.

Which is a way of saying it rewards players looking to make a character their own. You'll need to: allied to the MMO structure is an RPG's randomised loot and dungeons, so there's never a time you'll not have



somewhere new to explore or an item to quest after, and in world where the dungeons cannot be mapped, having a character respond to your every whim is your strongest ally against the swarming, knee-high spiders.

Of course, you could join up with others and go bash things together. You and up to four other people can form a small fellowship against the item-bagging monsters. Show off your specialisations, and click on the swarms of beasties hidden away in the deepest depths of the dungeons. The more you kill, the more you'll have to craft.



StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



VOLUME 4 : ASTRAL ODYSSEY
Officially launches in Europe on 11.5.11

Save Sarnaut's Past To Win The Future

Get started for free at : www.allods.co.uk

Get Allods Today! Download the game at www.allods.co.uk, search
"Allods EU Download" or swipe the QR code for the 650 KB Downloader

In a Guild? Check out the Guild Portal at :
http://guilds.en.allods.gPotato.eu

www.youtube.com/allods www.twitter.com/allodsonline_en www.facebook.com/allodsonlineen

gPotato WWW.GPOTATO.EU @mail.ru

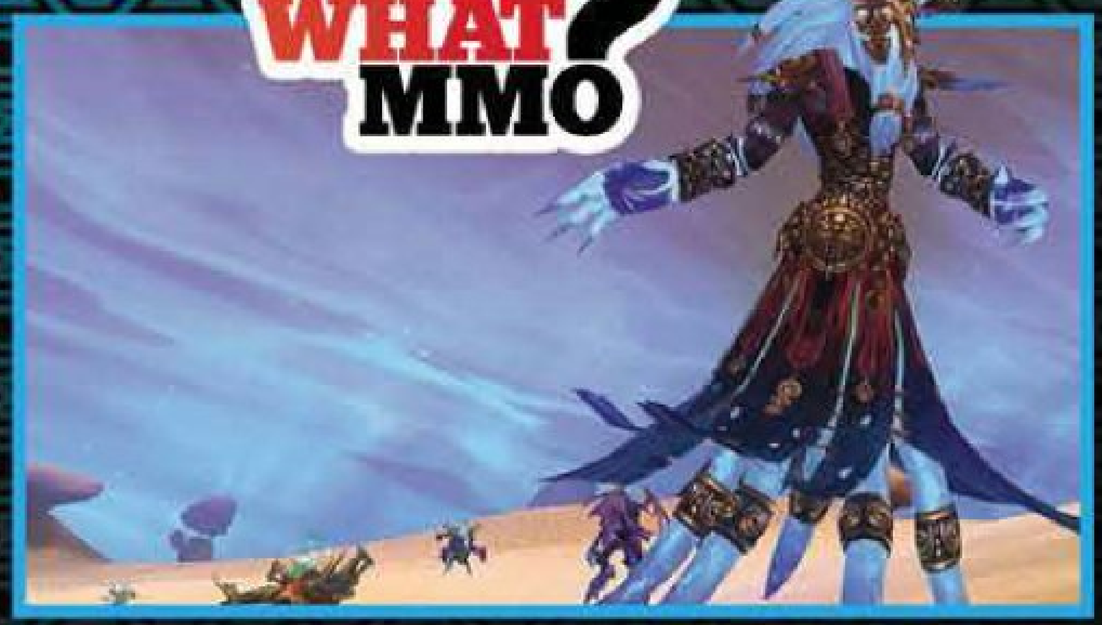
© 2011 Gala Networks Europe Ltd.
© 2011 Astrum Nival, Powered by Mail.Ru All rights reserved.

PC DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download in True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

WHAT MMO?





ALLODS ONLINE

After a year in beta, Allods Online grows up

MMOs take a while to gestate properly, so even though MMO *Allods Online* has had players troubling the servers for more than a year now, it's only just left beta. Floating islands, two warring factions and three races form the basis of the world, and it's an atypical set-up that leads to some ground-breaking gaming.

The titular Allods are floating islands in an astral plane, the remnants of a broken up world called Sarnaut. The discrete little pockets are where the developers leave the traditional MMO setting behind: on the land, where the Empire are battling it out with the League, there's a world of quests to complete and beasts to battle. Each allod has its own theme, using their dislocation as an excuse for unique places to explore. Getting to them requires solid work on your own astral ship (which takes 30 days of questing at least to build), crewed by other players, but the rewards are finely crafted worlds full of imagination.

And with the game leaving beta, they're adding a new allod for players to ship up to. Kirah, a spit of land that both the League and the Empire once fought over for it's natural resources. When both armies were battling for control, the allod tore open and demons flooded its surface, forcing both sides to flee. The content is about showing what would have happened if the two sides had instead fought together, standing against the flood of death that assaulted them.

It's a fascinating experiment: take people who've chosen different factions and force them to work together instead of merely ganking each other on the server's PvP realms. It's not just hands-across-Allods, though. While the floating islands are separate from the world, Kirah the swarming demons and The Director, a mysterious unnamed force guiding the players through the allod's history, are part of the larger mystery of how Sarnaut was destroyed and the allods were formed.

New content, and an official launch. Now's the time to get into Allods Online.

All aboard

Grab the free client and start crafting yourself an astral ship at Allods.gpotato.com

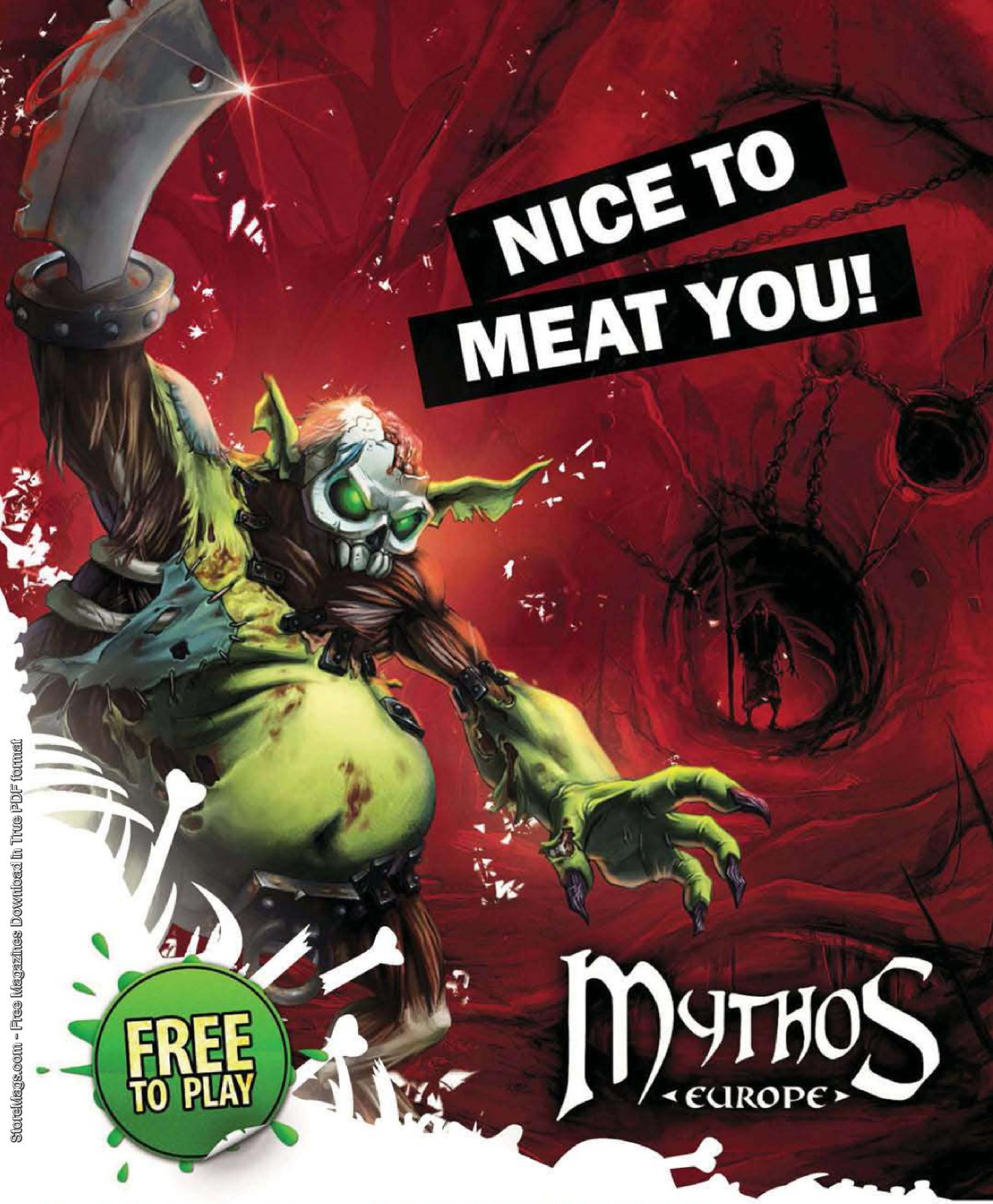






StoredMags.com

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format



No noobing in here! Get stuck in THE HACK'N'SLASH MMO on:

WWW.MYTHOS-EUROPE.COM

© 2011 HANBITSOFT INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. © „MYTHOS" PUBLISHED BY FROGSTER ONLINE GAMING GMBH. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



ON THE DISC

The PC Gamer Promise

» We deliver the best content possible. If you can't find an item you were expecting, it probably just missed our deadline. You can bet we'll have it on next issue's disc.

» If something on your disc doesn't work, don't despair. See our Troubleshooter guide below to see what help we can offer.

» If there's something you think we should have on our disc, get in touch. Email graham.smith@futurenet.com

Need help?

Is your coverdisc playing up? Help is at hand

No menu?
If the menu program does not automatically start, the autorun feature may be disabled on your PC. Go to the START/RUN command on the task-bar and type D:\PCG.EXE (where D is the drive letter).

Crashes?
For problems with an individual demo or application, refer to the Help section on the disc. Also ensure your drivers and DirectX version are up to date.

Dud disc?
If your disc is defective then return it to the address below, along with a description of the fault and an SAE: Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW.

Looked online?
If we discover issues with programs on the disc, we'll post solutions on the Disc Support forum. Check here to see if there's a quick fix: *www.pcgamer.com/forum*

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our coverdiscs. The PC Gamer discs have been thoroughly tested and certified 'virus free'. However, 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. We advise that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.

Maybe you've been leaving your wars half-baked. Maybe you're ready for war, but you're just not fully committed – not ready for *Total War*. Our *Shogun 2* demo might convince you. This month, we've got the gargantuan tutorial campaign from Creative Assembly's strategy epic in its entirety on the disc. Install it, and it's only a few steps until a medieval Japanese man will be telling you how to conduct a murderous battle.



After such grand strategy, soothe your brain with our *Mythos* beta client. It's an action-RPG that demands only some reassuring clicking.

GRAHAM SMITH
DEPUTY EDITOR
graham.smith@futurenet.com


Not one for the demophobic.

TOTAL WAR SHOGUN 2

DEMO Conquer the past before it's too late in this giant campaign.

You are the best! Your family has the best soldiers, the best little symbols and the best hats. Why won't the rest of Japan bow to your every whim? Why don't they listen to you? Why do they giggle about your funny clothes when you turn your back? Only one thing for it: let's get subjugating.

Our demo casts you as the Chosokabe clan. They're based on Japan's southerly island of Shikoku and are archer supremos vying for control of the country's Shogunate. The demo gives you enough turns to get a feel for the game's two entwined branches – the turn-based campaign map and the real-time battles. Boring technical bit: you'll need a Steam account to play and you'll need to make a folder in your Steam/steamapps/common folder called 'Total War Shogun 2 demo'. Unzip the file provided there, click 'Shogun2.exe' and then you're ready to commence conquering.


Manage land and armies in 16th century Japan.


He always had a stiff neck but couldn't work out why.

MYTHOS

DEMO Massively multiplayer *Diablo*, for free. No part of that sentence is bad.

In the past, there was *Mythos*. *Mythos* begat *Torchlight* and that captured both the attention span and souls of thousands. Now *Mythos* is back to take them all over again, like some legendary spectre of death. *Mythos* is an MMO in the *Diablo* mindset – that mindset being "clickclickclickclickLOOT!". Our client gives you access to the game's open beta, letting you go on free dungeon raids with your chums for special swords and the like. There are four races to choose from and the final game is technically free to play because it doesn't require you to pay a subscription fee– it's supported by microtransactions instead.



Missions play out across a top-down city grid.

ATOM ZOMBIE SMASHER

DEMO Kill the undead from way up in the sky. A bit like a zombie-hunting version of God.

The only way to be sure about anything is to take off and nuke it from orbit. Aliens? Take off and nuke. Not sure which sandwich to have for lunch? Take off and nuke. Zombie infestation on Earth? Definite cause for taking off and nuking. *Atom Zombie Smasher* has the right idea: you're already in space, manning an orbital weapons platform. Take careful aim from the stars and melt the undead. It's not like they'll get you up there.

FULL DVD CONTENTS

DEMOS
Total War: Shogun 2

GALLERIES
Dead Island
Dragon Saga
Dungeon Siege 3
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Hunted: The Demon's Forge
Rage
Brink

Side B
DEMOS
Atom Zombie Smasher
Hannibal: Rome and Catharge in the Second Punic War
Mythos

MOVIES
Battlefield 3
F3AR
Fallen Earth
Portal 2
Sengoku

INDIES
John Cube
Broken Dimensions
0Space Beta
The Iconoclasts
Wind and Water: Puzzle Battles
Megazey and the Demons
Games Journo Story
Spelunky
Dwarf Fortress v0.31.25

MODS
HalfLife 2 – Fistful of Frags
Total War: Shogun 2 – Darth mod
Total War: Shogun 2 – Additional Units
Total War: Shogun 2 – Realism

PATCHES
Crysis 2 1.1
ArmA 2 patch 1.09
The Sims Medieval 1.1.10 – Retail

TOOLKIT
PERFORMANCE
Radeon 11.1 – Vista/Win7 (32bit)
Radeon 11.1 – Vista/ Win7 (64bit)
Radeon 11.1 – XP (32bit)
Radeon 11.1 – XP (64bit)
GeForce 266.58 – Vista/ Win7 (32bit)
GeForce 266.58 – Vista/Win7 (64bit)
GeForce 266.58 – XP (32bit)
GeForce 266.58 – XP (64bit)

GAME APPS
DOSBox 0.74
ScummVM 1.1.1
Foxit Reader 411
FileZilla 3.3.4.1
Fraps 3.2.3

MEDIA MANAGEMENT
Irfanview 4.27
Media Player Classic 6.4.9.0
Miranda-IM 0.9.0
Mozilla Firefox 3.6.2
Mozilla Thunderbird 3.1.2
Winamp 5.581
7-Zip 4.65

TWEAKS
CCleaner 2.35
Defraggler 1.21
Sequoia View 1.3
Spybot: Search & Destroy 1.62
uTorrent
vLite 1.2

RESOURCES
The Big Phat Online Games Glossary
The Good Grabbing Guide
The PC Gamer Dictionary
The PC Gamer PC Companion
The Reviews Database
PC Gamer Podcast

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

THE MANY FACES OF COMMANDER SHEPARD



Next month!

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE WEDNESDAY MAY 11

FEATURES...

- INCREDIBLE SECRET EXCLUSIVE #1
- INCREDIBLE SECRET EXCLUSIVE #2
- DEUS EX 3: THE FIRST TEN HOURS

PLUS...

- EVERYBODY DIES IN DWARF FORTRESS
- THE PC GAMER OLYMPICS

ON THE DISC...

- BULLETSTORM
- ALLODS ONLINE
- ANOMALY: WARZONE EARTH

AND THE BEST REVIEWS » THE WITCHER 2 » BRINK » DIRT 3 » RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON » FEAR 3 » BATTLEFIELD: PLAY 4 FREE » MORE...

StoreMags.com - Free Magazines Download In True PDF format
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Storekeeper.com

www.OP3.co.uk

The Premium PC Manufacturer

0843 289 1260



OP3 2nd Generation i5 OCT

- Coolermaster CM 690 II Advanced Case
- OCZ Stealth Xstream II 600W PSU
- Corsair H50 Hydro Series Liquid Cooler
- Asus P8P67 R2 B3 Motherboard
- Logitech Wireless Desktop MK710
- Intel 2nd Generation i5 2500K OVERCLOCKED to 4.8GHz
- Western Digital 2TB SATAII Hard Drive
- KFA2 GeForce GTX 550Ti 1024MB GDDR5 + nVidia 3D Vision
- Patriot Viper Extreme 4GB DDR3 1600MHz
- 24X DVD Re-writer
- Internal Multi-Card Reader
- Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium 64 bit
- BenQ 22" LCD Monitor, LED Backlit + FULL HD

OP3 Hydro GTX White Edition

- Corsair 600T White Graphite Series Mid Tower Case
- Corsair TX 850W V2 PSU - 80plus Bronze Certified
- Asus 1155 SABERTOOTH P67 Motherboard
- Intel Core i7 2600k 3.4GHz OVERCLOCKED to 4.8GHz
- Corsair H70 Hydro Series Liquid Cooler
- Corsair Vengance 8GB DDr3 1600MHz
- Western Digital 2TB SATAII Hard Drive
- Corsair 60GB Solid-State Hard Drive
- Blu-Ray Writer
- Internal Multi-card Reader
- Asus GTX 560 DirectCU II 1GB GDDR5 + nVidia 3D Vision
- Logitech Wireless Desktop MK520
- Microsoft Windows 7 Home Premium 64 bit
- Asus 22" LCD Monitor + FULL HD





Save £15!

Enter Discount Code: PCG100

3 YEAR WARRANTY

OP3 Powered by:

ASUS

CORSAIR

StoreMags.com

DUNGEON SIEGE III

TOGETHER
WE ARE STRONGER

JUNE 17TH 2011



PRE-ORDER THE LIMITED EDITION NOW AND RECEIVE 4 EXCLUSIVE ITEMS FREE!

**THE BURNING BAND OF SCORCH,
BITE OF THE ARAKUN,
TALISMAN OF THE GRAND MAGE AND
SACRED HEART OF THE LEGION**

WWW.DUNGEONSIEGE.COM

SQUARE ENIX. XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3 PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE 16 www.pegi.info

© 2011 Square Enix, Inc. Developed by Obsidian Entertainment, Inc. DUNGEON SIEGE is a registered trademark of Square Enix, Inc. All rights reserved. '♣', 'PlayStation', 'PS3' and '●' are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. 'PS3' is a trademark of the same company. Kinect, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under licence from Microsoft.