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PCGZine

Issue 5 | May 2007

Free Magazine For PC Gamers. *Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates…*

PRECIOUS! FIRST REVIEW INSIDE!

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

At last! One MMO to rule them all?



HUGE REVIEW

SHIVERING ISLES

The essential expansion for Oblivion

FIRST LOOK

OVERLORD

Delightfully evil God gaming

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEWS

QUAKE WARS

Hands on with Enemy Territory

THE CLUB

Exclusive access!

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

WORLD IN CONFLICT



"I'm really proud of our tactical nuke – it's spectacular!"

REVIEWS



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Sparta

Ancient but addictive RTS



2

Penumbra

Re-invents the adventure



3

Silent Hunter 4

Watch out below!

PLUS

Genesis Rising
Med II: Total War Kingdoms
Gaming laptops
Readers' Q&A

Welcome to PCGZine



I'll admit it, our cover story this month is something of a surprise to me. I played the Lord of the Rings Online beta a few months ago and really wasn't that impressed. Nor was mine a lone voice screaming at the elements from the peaks of Weathertop. The web was united, LoTRO was just another Warcraft-wannabe.

Thank goodness we were all wrong. Turbine has not only captured the look and feel of Middle Earth perfectly, it's gone and created the first MMO to seriously tempt people away from WoW in over two years.

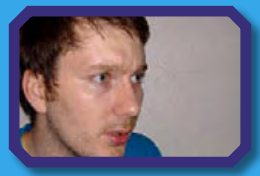
Don't let the Orc-size celebration overshadow our other big news. We've played Quake Wars: Enemy Territory - find out why it's going to be the best online shooter ever on page 8.

Adam Oxford, Editor
PCGzine@gamerzines.com

READER FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of the magazine!

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Lee Hall
Is prepared to go through EA's bins to find more gaming news.



Ian Morris
Loves submarine games, but can also walk on water.



Quintin Smith
Has left the building. To go backpacking for a few weeks.



Steve Hill
Enjoyed Sparta so much, he almost forgot to review it…

Don't miss! *This month's top highlights*



MASSIVE REVIEW

The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar

Why it's better than Warcraft! PAGE 19



Quake Wars

Hands on with the best squad shooter in the world PAGE 8



Elder Scrolls 4: Shivering Isles

As unmissable as Oblivion? PAGE 23



The Club

Join it now! PAGE 11



Sparta

Swords 'n' skirts PAGE 25



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

World in Conflict

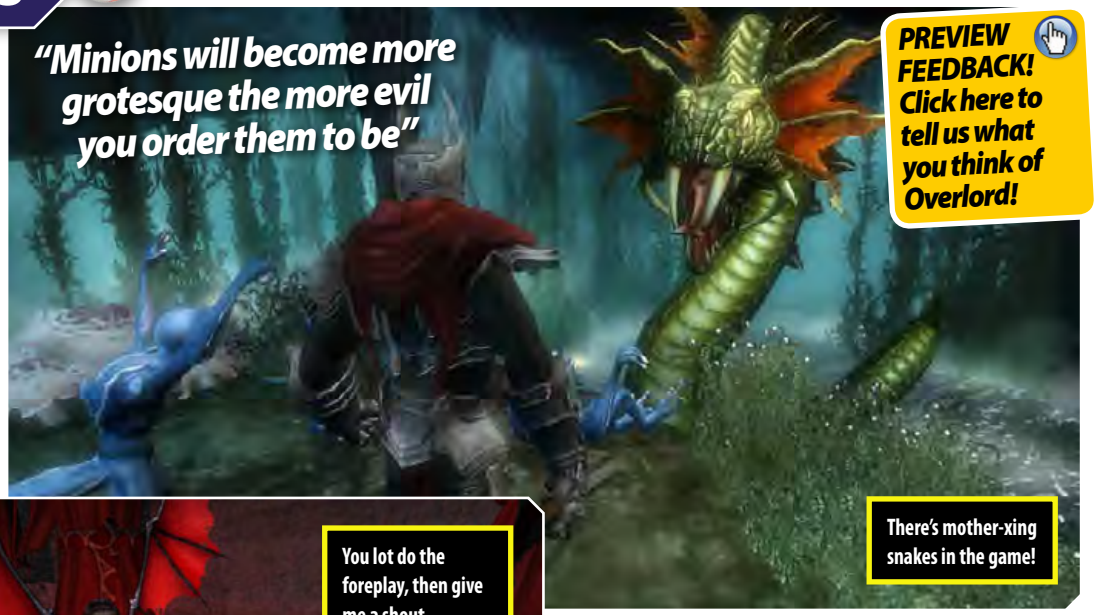
The RTS that thinks it's Counter-Strike! PAGE 14

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Overlord	The Club
Medieval 2: Kingdoms	World in Conflict
Tomb Raider: Anniversary	Lord of the Rings Online
Speedball 2	Shivering Isles
Civ 4: Beyond the Sword	Sparta
Halo 2	Genesis Rising
Lost Planet: Extreme	Penumbra: Overture
Loki	Silent Hunter 4
Football Manager Live	Readers' Technical Q&A
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Gaming Laptops





Codemasters GENIUS AT PLAY

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Triumph Studios
Heritage: Age Of Wonders series
Link: www.codemasters.com/overlord
ETA: 30th August

Overlord

LATEST NEWS

Who wants to be a minion, eh?

What's the story?

You're armed to the hilt: big, mean, capable of kicking the crap out of all-comers and bloody lazy.

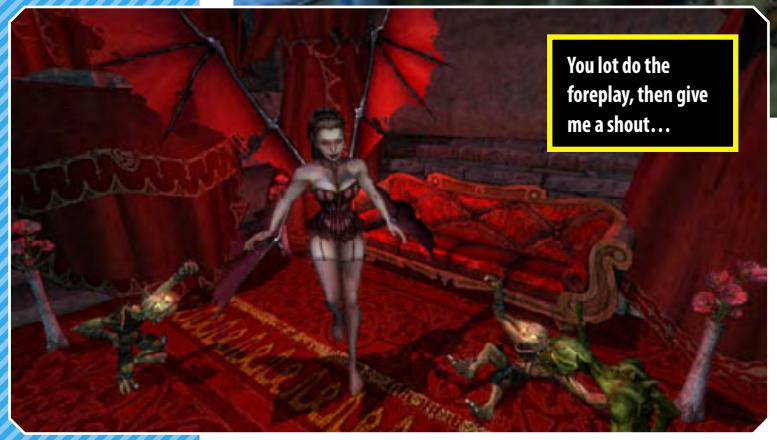
As an Overlord you've an army of minions who will do your bidding, no matter how twisted, while you sit back and collect the booty. Sounds a bit like my boss… (*You have a problem with that? – Ed*)

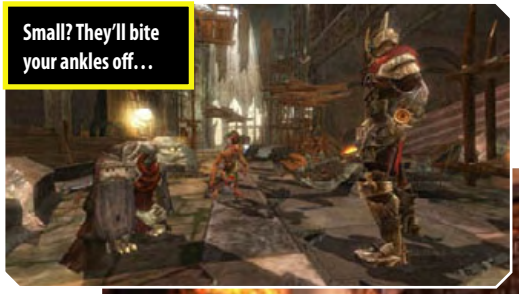
What do we know?

The minions are colour-coded to help you select which individuals or posse you want to send into the fray.

Brownies fight dirty, picking up strewn weaponry and pretty much anything you can use to batter a skull. Red minions chuck fire, but are immune to flame themselves – handy when it comes to clearing a path in inhospitable climes, and also good for retrieving sausages accidentally dropped into barbecues.

The green 'uns are stealthy, tiptoeing behind enemies and grabbing litter to turn into upgrades. And finally, the blue minions are master healers, capable of resurrecting fallen comrades.









When do we get more?

We're hoping to go hands-on very soon. Ordering minions about certainly looks like fun, but we're desperate to find out how satisfying Overlord's gameplay proves to be.

Anything else to declare?

Minions will grow more grotesque the more evil you ask them to be.

SEARCH PCGZine PRINT THIS PAGE ZOOM IN ZOOM OUT TOGGLE FULL SCREEN VIEW PREVIOUS PAGE NEXT PAGE

VANGUARD
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MEDIEVAL II TOTAL WAR

Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Creative Assembly
Heritage: Long campaign of Total War
Link: www.totalwar.com
ETA: August



Kingdoms promises more trees and shrubs. Huzzah!

How long before we see neatly tailored mini ponchos for men in H&M?







That looks like one hell of a stag do.

LATEST NEWS

Medieval II: Total War Kingdoms

Knights to see you again

What's the story?

Arch-expansionists Creative Assembly stumble into new territory with an ambitious add-on for the sumptuous Medieval II: Total War.

What do we know?

It's more a question of who we know. The game features four new single player campaigns that introduce over 150 new units and 13 new factions from around the world.

You'll scrap on the plains of South America in the reinforced codpieces of conquistadors and local folk such as Incas and Aztecs. Once back in Europe you'll battle to control 13th century Britain, Northern Europe and the Holy Land in 'magnifying glass' campaigns with more territories and story-driven goals.

And there's a whole regiment of gameplay tweaks to report… A new prestige system tracks your success in battle, unlocking extra resources and affecting your sway with factions, you can now hide in moated fortresses, and – at last – you can control reinforcement armies.

Perhaps best of all, hero units will have special abilities, such as a souped-up rallying ability, and you'll even be able to use holy relics to aid the cause.

When do we get more?

Kingdoms should be playable in a couple of months.

Anything else to declare?

There are some pretty 'out-there' units to contend with, not least some chaps blasting olde worlde flamethrowers. Realism be damned!

7UP

Some familiar faces get a modern makeover



Tomb Raider: Anniversary

Publisher: Eidos **ETA:** May

Kicking off a 7up rammed with returning legends, we're eyeing old Lara like a lecherous midget outside a Long, Tall Sally changing room. Her return is nigh in a game that reinvents the seminal original (that wasn't a pun, you filthy vermin). Expect Indiana Jones adventuring. And a T-Rex. And wolves. And a French bloke.



Speedball 2

Publisher: Frogster **ETA:** August

Get ready! One of the most addictive sporting games of all, Speedball 2 is up there with the likes of Sensible World Of Soccer for gamers of a certain (or uncertain) age. Relive the brawling future sport as you mastermind Brutal Deluxe's next assault on the Speedball championship. Will Super Nashwan still be nails?

Civilization IV: Beyond The Sword

Publisher: 2K Games **ETA:** July

A new expansion pack for a game whose moreishness we struggle to explain is on the horizon. Expect this add-on to draw extra life out of Civ IV's often hurried endgame, plus 12 new scenarios, 16 leaders, five wonders and some art of a man firing a crossbow at a tank.





Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

Publisher: Capcom **ETA:** June

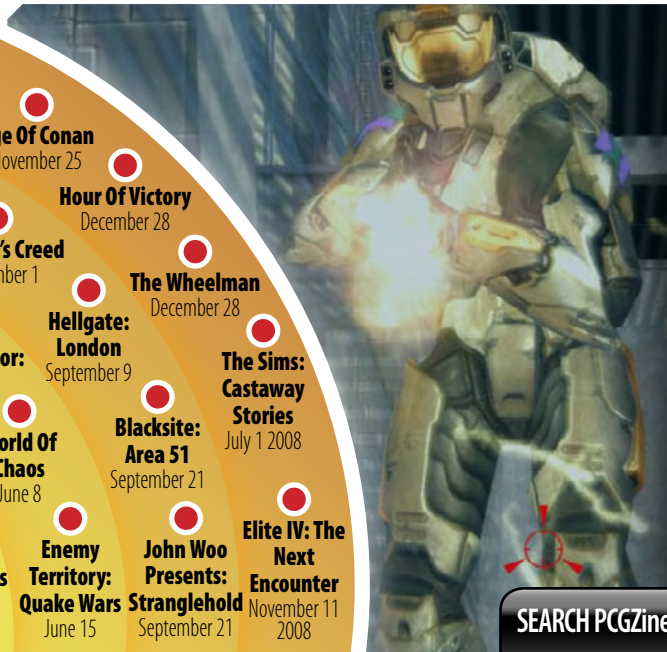
A reheated Xbox 360 game this may be, but Lost Planet is one shooter we've had our eye on. We spent a sordid few hours with the game on Bill Gates' white box and the non-stop action, instinctive gunplay and lurching, screen-filling enemies seduced us something rotten. Now it's coming to PC we can't wait to consummate our love affair with a mouse.

ON THE RADAR

WINTER 2007/08
- Brothers In Arms: Hell's highway — November 1
- Age Of Conan — November 25

AUTUMN 2007
- Tabula Rasa — September 1
- Hour Of Victory — December 28
- Assassin's Creed — September 1
- The Wheelman — December 28

SUMMER 2007
- Lost — June 1
- Hellgate: London — September 9
- Medal Of Honor: Airborne — June 2
- The Sims: Castaway Stories — July 1 2008
- Circus Empire — May 25
- Blacksite: Area 51 — September 21
- Driver: Parallel Lines — May 30
- World Of Chaos — June 8
- Elite IV: The Next Encounter — November 11 2008
- Great Battles Of Rome — May 31
- Enemy Territory: Quake Wars — June 15
- John Woo Presents: Stranglehold — September 21



Halo 2

Publisher: Microsoft **ETA:** May

Yes, that is a 2, not a 3. While the folks in Xboxland are gleefully rubbing their hands in anticipation of a trilogy-completing third Master Chief adventure, we can finally enjoy the second game without buying a console that sounds like a landing aircraft. It's looking old and a tad creaky, but at least it will show off Windows' new Live! playing arena.



Loki

Publisher: Ascaron **ETA:** August

Loki is an RPG with all the usual beardy waypoints, only it tramples over four mythologies by combining Norse, Aztec, Egyptian and Greek belief systems to conjure a bonkers world of incredible creatures and towering heroes. It's long overdue, and almost certainly completely bonkers. Lovely.

Football Manager Live

Publisher: SEGA **ETA:** Spring 2008

Ov Collyer has been wandering the globe with a laptop tucked under his arm, dreaming up a multiplayer version of the world's most in-depth and addictive game. Football Manager Live enables players to create a team from scratch and compete against human opponents in real-time matches. Still no 3D engine, but with SMS text alerts and the chance to spy on your rival managers, this looks set to be the most life-consuming management game yet.

Sound BLASTER® X-Fi™ XTREME FIDELITY

Poor sound quality in Windows Vista?

Most of your favourite games won't sound great in Vista because there's no hardware acceleration of DirectSound. The result is that your add-in sound card or motherboard audio device will not deliver the EAX effects and surround sound that you are used to in the majority of games.

Creative ALchemy is a free, downloadable application compatible with Sound Blaster X-Fi sound cards* that restores game audio in Vista to its former glory including hardware accelerated surround sound and EAX environmental effects.

If you don't have a Sound Blaster X-Fi and ALchemy most games in Vista will sound like the "without X-Fi / ALchemy" video. Play both videos to experience the difference Sound Blaster X-Fi and Creative ALchemy makes. These videos are best experienced on standard stereo headphones

Without X-Fi / ALchemy



REPLAY THIS VIDEO

With X-Fi / ALchemy



REPLAY THIS VIDEO

* Excludes X-Fi XtremeAudio

Xtreme Fidelity

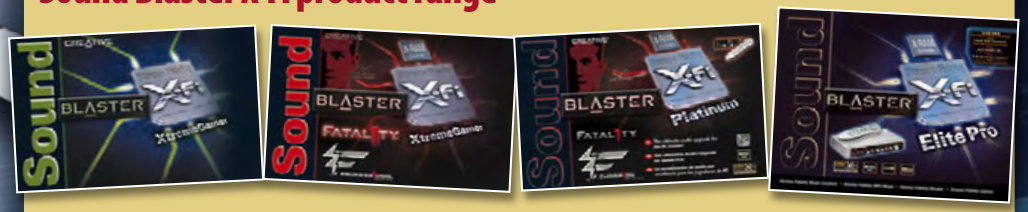
If you're a gamer there is simply no other choice. Sound Blaster X-Fi delivers a previously unimaginable gaming audio experience!

Sound Blaster X-Fi delivers the fastest gaming performance ever seen!
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The ultimate X-Fi with external I/O module for unrivalled connectivity.

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For more information or to download ALchemy, visit:
http://preview.creativelabs.com/alchemy/default.aspx
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HANDS ON

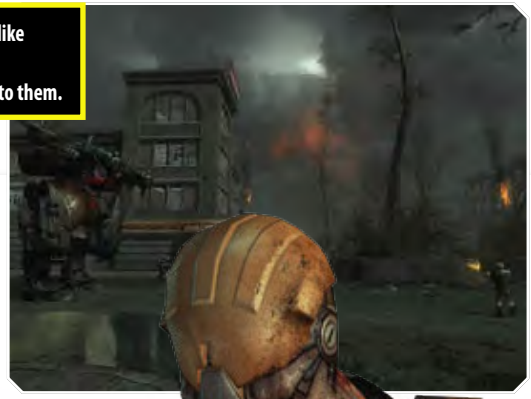
EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW!

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Splash Damage
Heritage: Quake III: Fortress, Doom III multiplayer, Wolfenstein Enemy Territory
Link: www.enemyterritory.com
ETA: 5th June

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

Because Friendly Territory would have been rubbish.

The Walkers are big. And unlike BF:2142, they don't have a weakspot. Best to be polite to them.





Oops. I've made a terrible error. My bold sprint for a piece of cover right next to the Strogg shield generator we need to hack coincided with the rest of my team hunkering down behind me to avoid a massive orbital laser called down by one of the Strogg team. Through all the noise and pyrotechnics, I suddenly feel very alone. I can hear the light clunking of mechanical legs as Strogg soldiers race in my direction to dig in around the generator. Then I see a Hornet, the insectoid Strogg anti-infantry aircraft, humming around far above me. But its not until I realise that the mammoth, orange orbital laser is scything along the landscape in my direction that I realise quite how screwed I am.

"Strogg technicians can create spawn points from the bodies of dead GDF soldiers..."

And that's just about the coolest thing we found out about Quake Wars during our playtest – it's fun to die. Splash Damage has put together a game with so much variety in its combat that every second of play you're fretting over a new potential hazard. Every player has so many options available to them it's entertaining to see what finally does you in, and when you do bite the dust your mind explodes into motion as to how you're going to avoid it next time.

Case in point, the vehicles. As well as having everything from quad bikes to huge bipedal gun platforms, Quake Wars has a sophisticated vehicles physics system that provides just that bit more depth. Paul Wedgwood, >

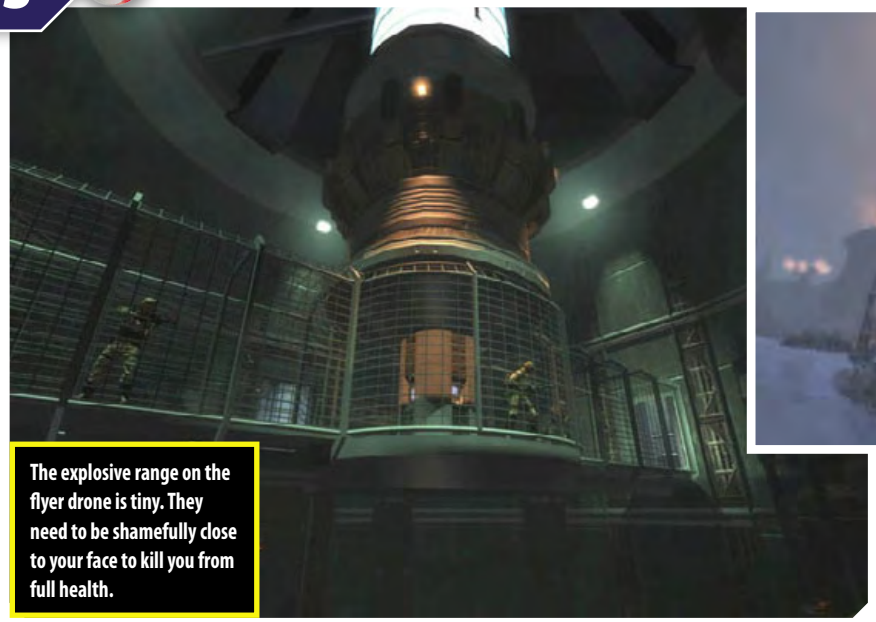
Quake Wars levels set in exotic locales. Like Bagshot.



You got stung by a hornet HOW big?

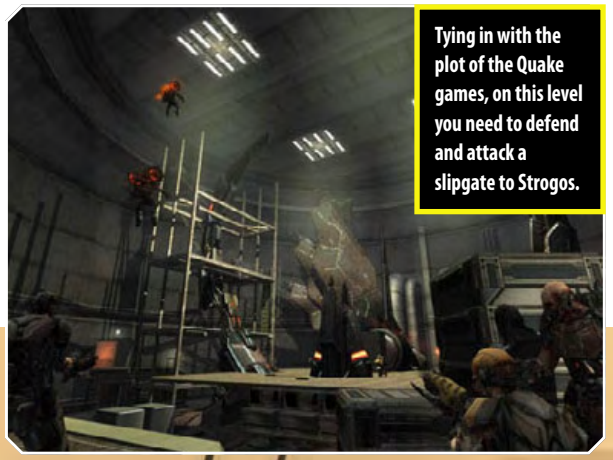
ENEMY TERRITORY QUAKE WARS

ET:QW PHONE HOME! Click here to tell us what you reckon of ET: QW so far!



The explosive range on the flyer drone is tiny. They need to be shamefully close to your face to kill you from full health.





Tying in with the plot of the Quake games, on this level you need to defend and attack a slipgate to Strogos.



Ain't nothing cooler than fighting on the ground with players dogfighting above you. Unless one of them crash lands on your enemy. That's cooler.

"Through all the noise and pyrotechnics I suddenly feel very alone..."

> Quake Wars continued

creative director and owner of Splash Damage, says it nice and succinctly. "It allows us to use geometry in the map to hinder some vehicles but not others that have better off road ability, he explains. "It also means because we do an approximate representation of articulated suspension you can do things like shoot the back wheels off a six wheeled Trojan and it can still drag its back along the ground, and if it can find water (because its amphibious) it can even the odds by taking out a front wheel or two.

To give some grounding to all the chaotic experiences you're going to have, Splash Damage is using the maps. "It's been a goal from the very >

PCGZine

WANT MORE ET:QW? Issue 2 of PCGZine ran an exclusive interview with Paul Wedgwood.



BREAK IT DOWN

We explain the play of Sewer, one of the new maps we got our hands on



Unfamiliar with the level, the first step was to bring up the map and hatch a plot.



Picking the Field Ops class we called in some artillery fire. You know. Just in case.



Progressing straight to our objectives led to a massacre. A new plan was needed.

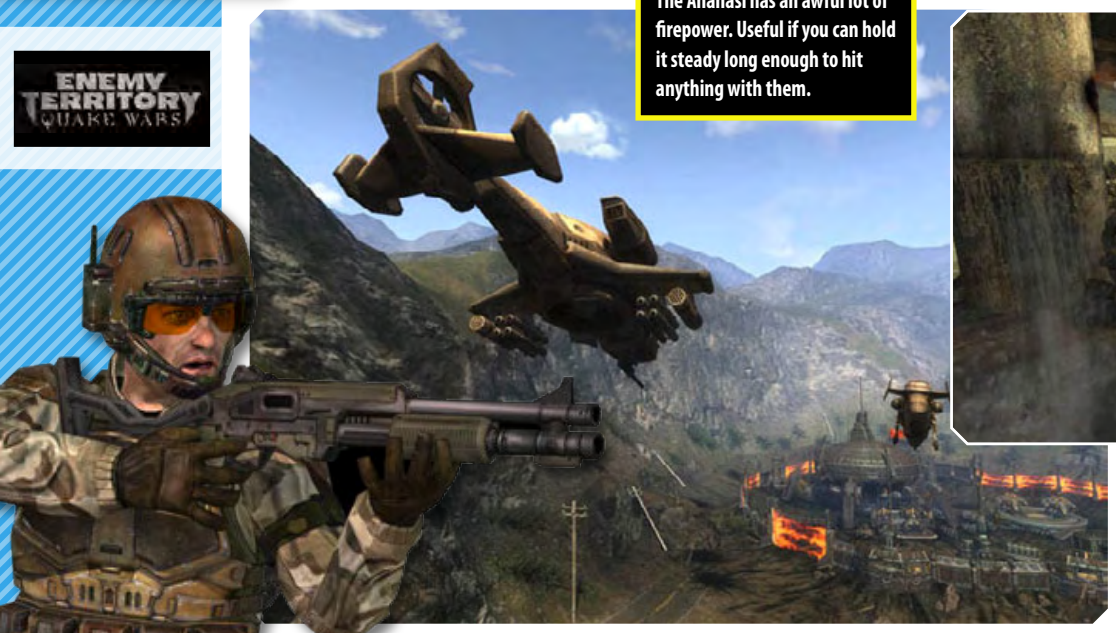


The side road across a river was less defended but left us in the open. Only one choice left.

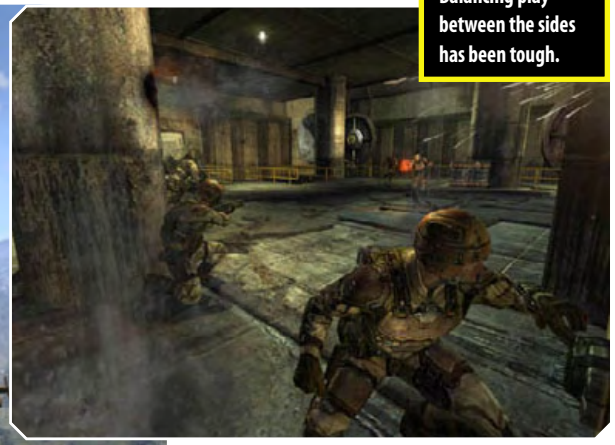


We took to the skies! Smoothly hotdropping behind the enemy, they never saw us coming.

ENEMY TERRITORY QUAKE WARS



The Ananasi has an awful lot of firepower. Useful if you can hold it steady long enough to hit anything with them.



Balancing play between the sides has been tough.



The variety of locations requires tight team play.

> Quake Wars continued

start to have each map be a unique experience," Paul tells us. "There's a North American, African, European and Pacific campaign, and within those we have different times of day and weather. The moment one loads players will remember all the cool stuff that happened there last time they played, they'll remember tactics, mistakes and anecdotes."

For the record, it wasn't the troops or the Hornet or the orbital laser that took me out in the end. It was an explosive camera drone launched to make sure the area was clear. I could have shot it out of the air if I hadn't been so busy gawping at the laser beams.

Fun as they are, the point of the massed options available to you through five classes, two sides, vehicles, deployables, equipment, upgrades and objectives is to give the game long term appeal and make it tempting for clans, competitions and the hardcore. "I think the most important thing about competitive online gaming is that there needs to be an element of strategy that teams can employ that isn't considered an exploit but allows them to demonstrate their skill and allows them to overcome the enemy," says Paul.

The only problem with all this is the nightmare of balancing Splash Damage have created for themselves. The Strogg and the Global Defence Force are such radically different sides that its never a simple case of tweaking numbers. The GDF Medic can resuscitate the dead, for example, and the Strogg Technician can create spawn points from dead GDF troops. How do you balance that? With an awful lot of playtesting. Getting hapless saps in to play your game and… hang on. I've just realised I've has been used. Oh, they're smart over at Splash Damage.

"Shoot the back wheels off of a six-wheeled Trojan and it can drag its back along the ground"

COMMON PEOPLE

Three reasons why the humble, grunt-like soldier shouldn't be overlooked.



Armed forces | **Big bang** | **More than six shooter**

Armed forces

With all the fancy new classes about, the straight-laced Soldier choice mustn't be forgotten. Soldiers who earn enough points during a match get a dashing flak jacket that does an excellent job of keeping you nice and alive. But that's not all.

PCGZine

ENEMY TERRITORY QUAKE WARS

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 90%

The squad shooter we've all been waiting for.

THE CLUB

Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Heritage: Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved, Metropolis Street Racer, Project Gotham series
Link: www.bizarrecreations.com
ETA: Christmas

HANDS ON

THE CLUB

Sorry son, come back when you start shaving…

Shooters have gone soft. These days your average blast seems to be all about homoerotically muscular men with big guns ducking behind cover or working as a team to outfox their foes. Pansies! It's time for the real hard cases to battle back, as Bizarre Creations takes a pitstop from developing Project Gotham Racing 4 to deliver a balls-out shooter in which you're always on the front foot.

Not that Bizarre has much recent pedigree in terms of shooters. But it's turning its expertise in racing games that dates back to an earlier collaboration with SEGA on Metropolis Street Racer, to its advantage with workingly titled The Club.

For starters, the game features a combo system that will exponentially grow your score when you're on a roll – just like the kudos points mechanism that makes PGR such a compelling racer. You'll earn multipliers for pulling off a string of kills within a few seconds, upping your score with headshots, for instance. The better your combo, the quicker your multiplier will fade, so it's only the most kill-hungry players that will reap the richest rewards.

Which leads us nicely to the other great cross-over from Bizarre's racing principles – speed. Levels kick-off with a countdown from three and you feel very much as if you're under starters' orders as you twitch to get stuck into a deathmatch. Once the action begins, you're in a race for survival, behaving like a gladiatorial warrior, only instead of swords and maces you're packing shotguns and missiles…

It should be noted that The Club is being developed simultaneously for >



Fighters chose their own outfits, or get their mums to dress them.



Mission Impossible-style infiltrations will be met with scorn, and heavy gunfire.



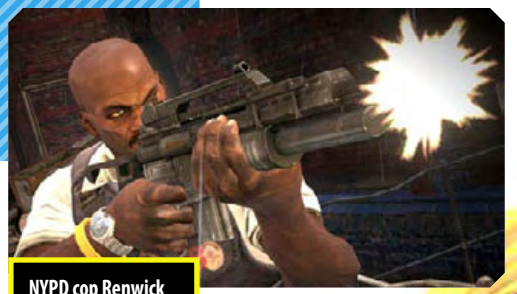


"This is a shooter that doesn't rely on mindless violence for its kicks…"

THE CLUB



Please say it's extra points if you shoot his hat off before you cap him…



NYPD cop Renwick takes no crap, but wears a friendship bracelet.

>The Club continued

PC and those trendy new consoles what all the kids seem have in their lounges. And we say this with a hint of justifiable snobbery, and more than a smidgen of delight…

The game casts you in the third-person, taking on well-armed foes in spartan environments good only for some hot lead action, and it guns for the kind of accessibility synonymous with console blasters. We only hope, though, that Bizarre doesn't shy away from the kind of precise and intuitive controls that make the PC so great for gunplay, and clumsy joypads so damned frustrating…

From what we've seen so far – there's very little to worry about. This is a shooter that doesn't rely on grotesque deaths or mindless violence for kicks. Like PGR it rewards style (shoot a guy the split second he pops out from behind cover to earn more points) as you hunts down high scores as much as teeth-clenched blasting.

With a limited number of environments (eight in total), the game is clearly gunning for those who will eventually tire of improving their own performances and will seek a multiplayer challenge.

So far details of online play are a bit like Paris Hilton's thongs – fairly scanty. We do know 16 players will be supported, and that as well as deathmatch and team deathmatch modes there'll be skill games based on your prowess with a projectile. At this stage, any more than that would be a shot in the dark… ●

JOIN THE CLUB

What's it all about then, this cosy little group?

You only need two things to become a member of The Club – shedloads of money and at least one screw loose. It's a society of gunmen who play out their masochistic fantasies in derelict manor houses, disused factories and other bleak locales for the hell of it. I guess if you've got so much money you can pay a butler to take a crap for you, you've got to get your kicks somehow…





"Like Project Gotham, style is rewarded in the form of points"



My god, you've shots his arms half off and still he shoots…

PCGZine THE CLUB

HOW COMPLETE? 75%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 80%

Pretty and brainy – it's everything we're not…



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Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Massive Entertainment
Players: Up to 16
Certificate: TBC
Features: Alternative history plot, real-time strategy action with a frightening arsenal, and huge multiplayer struggles
ETA: 29th June

WORLD IN MOTION
Click to see the conflict play out



Nuke kids on the block

We engaged Martin Walfisz, president of Massive Entertainment, in a war of words…



Bending the rules of engagement to breaking point, the dev team behind World in Conflict are daring to serve-up an RTS that's, well… in a world of its own. Players can take on several roles in co-operative battles that pit the USSR against the US on an Earth where the Berlin Wall wavered, but never fell…

Set our pulses racing by telling us about a 'wow' moment in development…
When we first had the idea of mixing Counter-Strike-type game play with the strategy genre – it was an epiphany!

Then when we finished the initial prototype of the game, and we played it for the first time ourselves - we had a lot of fun because the matches were truly compelling…

Why? Because of the spectacular weaponry? Tell us your favourite…
There are some really interesting and entertaining weapons, both in the USA faction and the USSR faction. Some of my favourites include the USSR artillery unit and the US Apache helicopters.

Executing a perfect hit with the USSR artillery is really satisfying, and blasting away with a group of Apaches is really an eye treat in itself.

But apart from these units I'm really proud of our tactical nuke – it's spectacular!

It sounds like the scenery takes a battering. Tell us about the kind of screen-shaking scenes of devastation we can expect to see…
World in Conflict is very rewarding in the way it uses destructibility – everything on the maps is destructible: forests, bridges, buildings and so on. One of the greatest things in WIC is when you see your enemy within a small, urban area and you deploy the really heavy guns on him.

Seeing your artillery, or air strikes, completely destroying the whole place in a cascade of explosions, smoke and debris is really cool, especially in contrast to the quietness of the aftermath, when everything is just burned and collapsed, and there's no trace of life left.



Uncle Seth and his pooch don't stand a chance…

Because of the twisted plot, these scenes of devastation aren't the

> World in Conflict continued

familiar bombed-out cities in the Middle East, are they?
No. A lot of the fighting takes place in the USA, both in major cities like Seattle, but also on the countryside and in smaller cities and towns. WIC also covers some Soviet locations and a few European ones.

We really wanted to offer the player a vast variety of locations that were fun to play, and I think that we've managed to do that. The maps are very different from one another, and one of the things that really makes them enjoyable to play is the tactical depth that the surroundings offer.

Playing on the open farmland fields in the American Midwest is completely different from playing in an urban area.

Another contrast is seeing the effects of war on the surroundings: when you start playing a map, the scenery is often very pretty, but after some artillery and air strikes, the map looks more like someone covered the entire landscape with ash and dirt. The maps almost have a life of their own.

And nothing brings maps to life better than living, breathing human opponents. Why is it worth getting excited about?
I think that players will enjoy WIC because of the intense matches, and because of the fact that you can enter an already running game at any time.

One of our game modes is Domination, in which two teams fight over map domination by controlling a number of Command Points that are spread out across the map.

In Assault teams play two rounds, one as an attacker and one as a defender. The attackers must take control of a specific Command Point, while the defenders try to stop them. If they succeed in taking it, they get another Command Point to capture, pushing closer towards the main target as they continue.

When the first round is over, the roles are reversed. Now, to win, the other team has to capture the same Command Points faster.

So is WIC a multiplayer-only game?
Not at all. The single player experience is also interesting because of how it lets the player feel like a part of a bigger operation, with AI armies assisting and a commander who gives orders.

We feel that the super-power weapons of the '80s and '90s are pretty unexploited in previous games, so there's a multitude of new discoveries for most gamers.

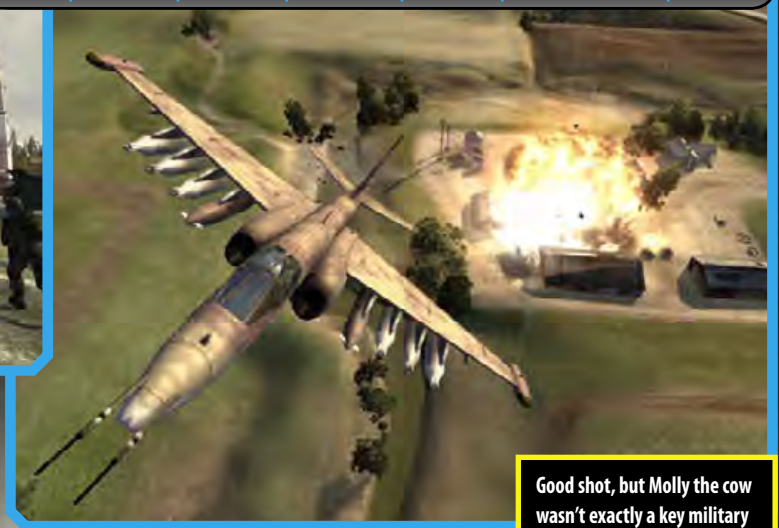
One immediate discovery is the fact you can take different roles in the game…
There are four different roles in the game: infantry, air, armour and support. You select your own individual role when you enter the game, to deploy units by spending re-retrievable points.

Because all roles have strengths and weaknesses, one of the key features of World in Conflict is co-operation. In order to be successful, and to defeat your enemy, you have to give backup to your different types of units. Therefore, if you're playing an infantry-based side, it might be a good idea for another player to bring some anti-air with your group of tanks, just in case some hostile helicopters turn up to ruin your day.

A lot of people will probably find a favourite role, and in time, many will also find the tactical depth there is within each role, which is very satisfying in the long run.



Trials of the new flamin' freakin' hot burger



Good shot, but Molly the cow wasn't exactly a key military the target, was she?

"A lot of the fighting takes place in the USA, some in major cities like Seattle…"

Finally, sell the game to us. Why should our readers care about World In Conflict?
I'd have to say that one of the greatest appeals of WIC is when a match is so well-balanced and tightly played that the Domination bar keeps moving in both directions.

A lot of times the game will end with one team just barely winning, the Domination bar just a couple of pixels over the middle.

These matches can really raise your adrenaline levels, and you get a rush even if you're on the losing end. Another great appeal of WIC is when you're playing with some solid players, either over VOIP or at a LAN, and you really collaborate with each other in team play and tactics.

And no matter how many times I've done it, I always get a smile on my face when I deploy a tactical nuke. It's really something special!

360Zine Issue 5 Out Now

★★★
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Written by the best in the biz
★★★

> *"I was impressed with the quality of the writing, content and layout of this publication."*
> **MajorNelson.com**



INSIDE ISSUE 5

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
Rock Star Games finally lifts the lid on the next gen's most anticipated game.
Read the latest info and watch the video!

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WHY THANKS

WHAT ABOUT THE ODD DEMO? Apart from giving us playable downloads, PCGZine has everything well covered. Have enjoyed all the articles. It is a much better magazine than even (Snip – Ed.). The best thing is that it's absolutely free. Nice previews, reviews, features. All in all, a true gamer's magazine.

> Peter

Don't miss Issue 6
Out May 24th
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How will history view C&C3?

ON C&C3

MY THOUGHTS? WELL, I SAY Supreme Commander walks all over C&C3 due to one thing only. Innovation.

C&C has relied on it's brand name one too many times. Going 'back' to the cheesy cutscenes with Kane and relying on the C&C brand name as a game feature is not where gamers heads are at any more.

Supreme Commander, on the other hand, has taken Total Annihilation by the scruff of the neck and given it a truly humungous shaking! The maps are just enormous, and that alone brings a whole new batch of strategies and tactics! The zoom way out and back in, and the split screen options are genius and the number of units in battles and the clever use of maps makes for enormously clever battles and a whole different RTS gaming experience! Giving us campaigns for all the races is just the icing on the cake! I just can't see C&C3 being as replayable as Supreme Commander in any way, shape or form!

There's a light at the end of the tunnel with regards the perfect RTS, CoH and Supreme Commander have shown the way, C&C3 has decided to try the road less travelled – but has found a dead-end...

> UK_John

> PCGZine says: You're being a little harsh, John. What about the glorious environments, the madness of multiplayer?

MORE ON STALKER

I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR this game for years, and if it wasn't for the high system specs to run the game at high settings I would say it's OK. The problem is I was able to run HL2, Far Cry, Doom 3 all at high settings and these games have been out years and look just as good as Stalker. Anyway, bar, that it's an interesting game that needs optimizing and several patches.

>Andy

> PCGZine says: Ah yes, but none of those games had the high AI requirements of STALKER. It's a huge world, constantly in motion. Bet you couldn't run Oblivion at high settings, could you?

PLAY THE XBOXERS

WHAT DO YOU GUYS make of Microsoft's Live gaming? It launches next month and lets you play Xbox gamers from your PC. Sounds ace.

> Fragger

> PCGZine says: It certainly sounds great, but there's an annual charge of £50 to play against console gamers. That's a bit steep, since PC players should win every time, thanks to faster systems and better controls.

STALKING THE STALKER

The pros and cons according to Mike

WELL, I'VE BEEN PLAYING THE GAME pretty extensively since it hit the shelves. Wow. Talk about immersive. Reminds me of a cross between Boiling Point and Codename: Outbreak. More mainstream comparisons could be Far Cry meets Ghost Recon.

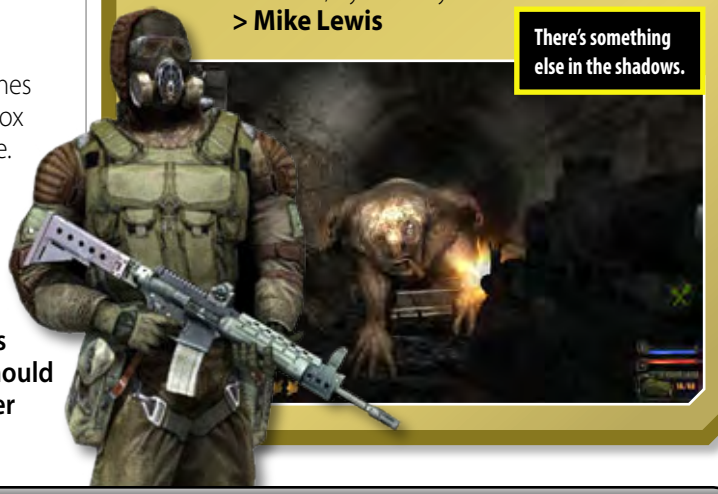
The structure and pacing of the levels is truly amazing. I figure it'll revolutionize the way we play first-person shooters these days. Areas, while not free-roaming, are spacious enough to satisfy any explorer, while other zones are simply beyond your reach, not because of scripted events, but simply because you don't have the fire-power to enter the areas with any hope of survival.

Now the bad, the localization is utterly horrible! Like almost every great Russian game I have played out there, gems such as Silent Storm, Codename: Outbreak, and Space Rangers 2, the English translation seems like it's been processed through Babelfish…

Mainly beyond the localization bugs (lots of background conversation is in Russian), the tactical side of things will find you running and gunning in a quasi-online-like FPS. This game is great and will be much better with a few patches, and a released SDK. Can't wait. Well, now time to go back into the shadows…

Great ezine, by the way.

> Mike Lewis



There's something else in the shadows.

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The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Turbine
Heritage: Asheron's Call and Asheron's Call 2, Dungeons and Dragons Online
Link: www.lotro-europe.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card
(But these truly ARE minimum settings)

Massively Multiplayer Middle Earth

PCGZine GOLD

"Quest design is excellent, thanks to the excellent writing team"

For the past two years World of Warcraft has proven to be something of a phenomenon in PC gaming. With over eight million subscribers worldwide, and widespread critical acclaim it is without doubt the King of the MMORPG.

So, Turbine, developers of The Lord of the Rings Online were left with somewhat of a dilemma. How best to dethrone a King?

JRR Tolkien's epic tale of Middle Earth and a certain ring, is as good a place to start as any, but when you're dealing with the world's best loved fantasy world, you'd better get it right. Fortunately a hell of a lot of work has gone into creating an authentic Middle Earth, and boy does it show.

Bookworms

With the license covering only Tolkien's books, incorporating the movie trilogy's art direction wasn't an option. Unfortunately, the movies will have been many people's first taste of The Lord of the Rings, so Turbine have had to accept that straying too far away from the theatrical visuals of Jackson's vision could potentially alienate subscribers. So while it's not a direct lift, it feels very familiar. Grand forests, snow topped mountains and rolling hills are >


Ermmm... behind you.

FREEZE FRAME

Places you just may recognise


Bag End. Home to Bilbo and Frodo Baggins .

The Home of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry the River-Maiden.

The Prancing Pony. The most infamous and popular of Bree's Inns.

Weathertop. Where Frodo gets stabbed by the Ringwraith Witch King.

Beautiful Rivendell, the birthplace of the Fellowship of the Ring.

>LOTRO continued

all dealt with using a fairly restrained but charming earthy palette, while the Orcs especially are very close to the film realisation. Like EQ2 and Vanguard, The Lord of the Rings Online takes a step away from World of Warcraft's cartoonish design and heads in a more gritty direction, which suits this game down to the ground.

Lacks character

While the game's different environments are gorgeous, and sometimes breathtaking, character models unfortunately aren't quite as impressive, but this seems to be a recurring theme in many MMORPGs. Also it has to be noted that character animations aren't entirely without fault. Elves and humans especially, move rather woodenly, and while it's not a game-destroying problem it's a little confusing since so much work has gone into capturing the right look for Middle Earth.

Define 'Sore Loser'.



What troll?



Those of you familiar with World of Warcraft will find few surprises with the U.I. Health may be replaced by Morale, and Power takes the place of Mana/Rage, but there's no denying that Turbine have borrowed heavily from WoW's interface. In fact, let's be straight about this, Turbine have downright looted Blizzard's MMO monster in numerous areas, but this isn't such a bad thing. After all, World of Warcraft isn't one of PC gaming's biggest ever successes for no reason.

As a result, rather than reinvent the wheel, Turbine have given it a lick of paint and added a few tassels.

The primary difference here is the importance of story. Quest design is excellent, largely down to the high standard of writing which rather than simply dishing out goals pushes you to embrace the story behind them. Throughout your journey you'll be interacting with Tolkien's major (and minor) characters, but this never feels contrived and is always rooted in some way to the continuation of the central underlying plot.

Storyline aside, the Deed system provides some none-quest related goals. Rewarding anything from >

May the force be with you. Oh, wait, wrong trilogy.





>LOTRO continued

exploration to mass genocide, Deeds set the player certain targets which upon completion can grant you either Traits or Titles (or both). Titles offer little more than boasting rights, but why wander Middle Earth as 'Bob' when you could strut your stuff as 'Bob the Undefeated'? Traits, on the other hand, provide you with a more practical addition to your character in the form of either pluses to stats, or entirely new skills.

A time for change

An element unexplored to any degree in most MMORPGs to date is that of timeline progression. While your character may gain a few dozen levels, and grow in skill and strength, you'll usually find yourself playing in somewhat of a vacuum.

The Lord of the Rings Online has addressed this, and through various quests and events you'll find the world around you evolving. The most extreme example of this is presented to Dwarf characters, where the beginning of their adventure takes place decades before The Fellowship of the Ring. This helps to lay foundations for your character's involvement in the epic tale and furthers Turbine's dedication to wrapping you from head to toe in Tolkien-lore, and creating an authentic Middle Earth experience.

OK, no more beating about the bush. Is The Lord of the Rings Online a World of Warcraft killer? Or does the score below just signify that we're all in need of a change? In all honesty, it depends on what you want from your MMORPG. If you're a hardcore PvPer, or a gear-whore, Middle Earth isn't the place to be. Also, it goes without saying that none-Tolkien fans (if there are any) will find less to be excited about, as a large part of The Lord of the Rings Online's enjoyment is interacting with characters, monsters and locations that are already loved by fans of the books and movies.

If however the storyline is more important than "uber loot", and immersion into the greatest fantasy world ever created takes priority over XP-grind and level progression, you'd better find yourself a hobbit-hole.

Darran Hepworth

PREPARING YOURSELF FOR MIDDLE EARTH

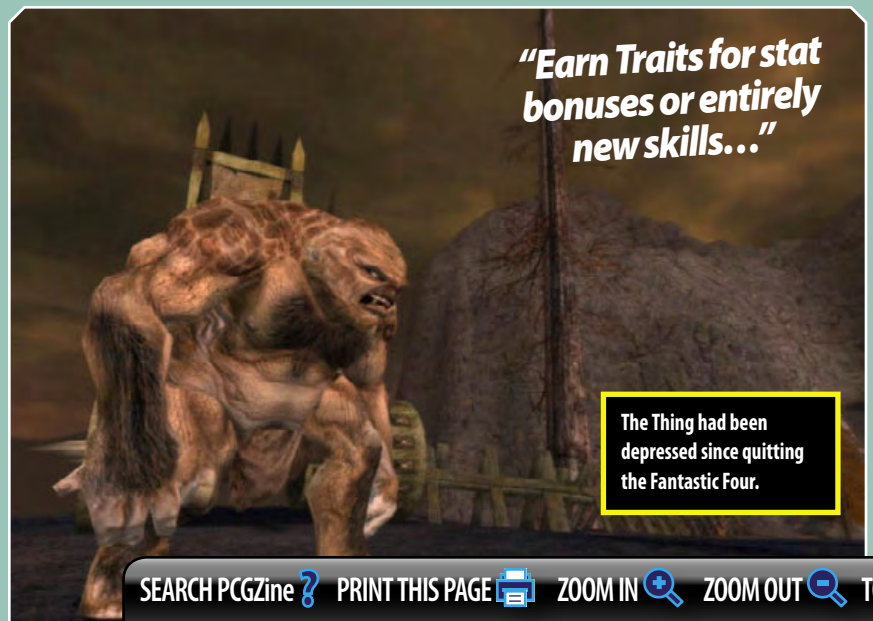
So...who are you going to be, and what will you add to your fellowship?



Choose your Race | **Choose your Class** | **Choose your Evil Side**

Choose your Race

With only 4 races available, The Lord of the Rings Online is fairly restrictive when it comes to your choice of race, but what we have here is quality over quantity. Within minutes of setting foot in the Shire with your Hobbit you'll find yourself face to face with a Ringwraith. Enter Middle Earth as a Dwarf however and you'll be helping Gandalf prepare on his quest to rid the Lonely Mountain of a certain Dragon.



The Thing had been depressed since quitting the Fantastic Four.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*





Ringwraiths. Not big believers in individuality.

PCGZine Verdict

Tolkien's epic gives birth to a truly epic MMO

- Great quest design
- Extremely immersive
- Character animations a little dated

90%

READER REVIEWS! Click here to tell us what you think of LOTRO!

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Written by the best in the biz
★★★



Elder Scrolls IV Shivering Isles

Oblivion gets even bigger. But is it any better?

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Bethesda
Heritage: Oblivion, Morrowind
Link: www.elderscrolls.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, DX9 3D card, Oblivion

You may well have finished every quest in Bethesda's magnificent RPG Oblivion, but here's a trial that'll fox even the most seasoned of adventurers in the land of Cyrodiil. Who can name me one award that Oblivion didn't win last year? Best RPG, best PC game, best game on any format, best newcomer in the R&B category…

So I made the last one up, but to be fair, it even won some accolades based on the rousing score that accompanied your wanderings around the Great Forest. So it isn't that much of a stretch. Still, the point is made, Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion was very, very good, and if you haven't played it yet then you really should. One of the things that made it very good was the sheer scale and depth of realisation to the world, so what on Earth has Bethesda included in this add-on pack to improve up on it?

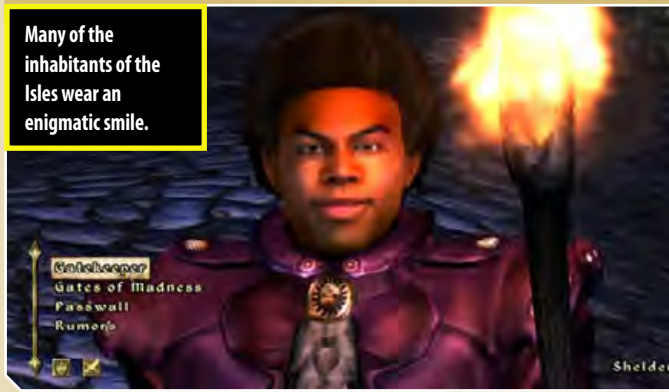
"The best advice would be to start a new, morally ambiguous character"



A year on, and nothing rival's Oblivion's outdoor scenes. Still.



Stepping into the strange portal, you're greeted by a strange man, with a metronome for effect.



Many of the inhabitants of the Isles wear an enigmatic smile.

The right thing

The answer, as is so often the case with Oblivion, is that Bethesda has done almost the right thing. Colour, for a start. And no more bloody Elven ruins.

The action in Shivering Isles begins when a strange door appears in the middle of a lake. News of this door naturally reaches your ear, and upon investigation it turns out that it's a gateway to a strange land where men in black sit beside metronomes talking cryptically while the walls around them dissolve into butterflies. It's a door of perception indeed…

This is a portal to the Shivering Isles, ruled by the Daedric Prince of Madness, Sheogorath. Created in the image of its master, it's a world more that's more than slightly twisted. It is split into two halves – the psychedelic Mania and the oppressive Dementia – and while it's rendered with all the panache that tells you you're clearly still playing Oblivion, there are some subtle differences that make it a refreshingly new experience.

For a start, there's no property to own on the Isles, you're a visitor to this >



One Gatekeeper. Just need to find the Keymaster now.

360Zine
WANT MORE OBLIVION? 360Zine issue 5 includes a review of Shivering Isles.
P3Zine
Issue 2 of P3Zine reviews Oblivion.

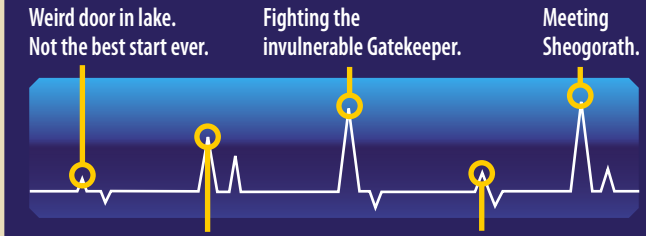


New monsters aren't much of a challenge for a seasoned sword.


A cage of gems. A thousand keys. Going to take a while.

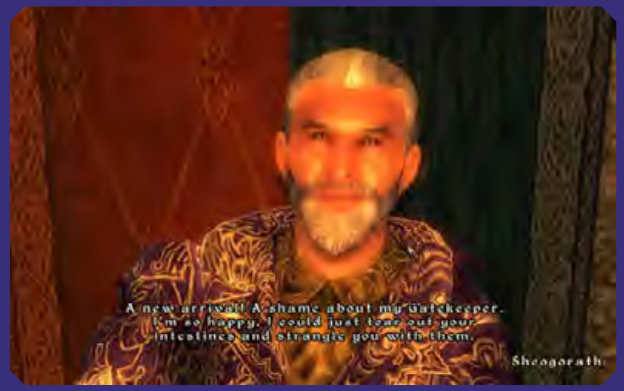
"There's no compulsion to settle down and make the Isles your home"

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



INHABITANTS OF THE ISLES

Or, you don't have to be mad to live here, but it helps.



Sheogorath | **Thadon** | **Tove**

Sheogorath

This neatly bearded Prince of Madness picked his accent up halfway between Arran and Belfast. He may be Scottish, he may be Irish, who knows? He certainly has a way with words. Beware the not-so-veiled threats though.

> Shivering Isles continued

land and therefore there's no compulsion to settle down and make it your home, you're a little more constantly on the move and unsettled.. A dearth of horses, by which I mean there are none, puts you back on shank's pony to get around, so you also feel in more immediate touch with the weirdness of your surroundings again. Enemies are more likely to have special abilities – like reflecting spells back at you – and NPC conversation is often tinged with lunacy or gibberish so it's important to pay attention.

All of which means that Shivering Isles feels new for even those who've logged hundreds of hours in Oblivion. Bethesda's been wearing the Trousers of Clever Games Design again.

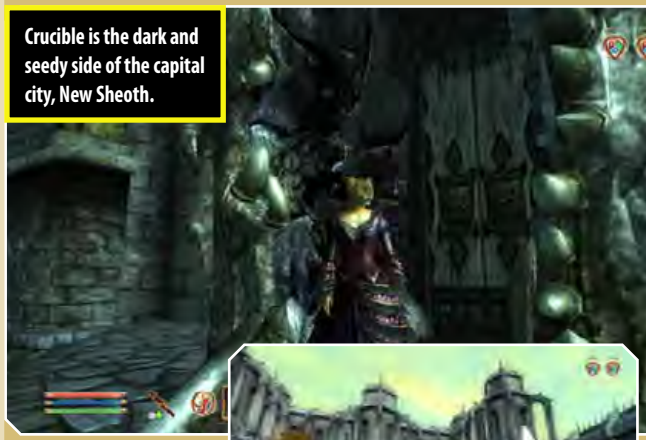
Choices, choices

There's an interesting paradox in the way Shivering Isles plays out, though. While the choices you make in the game have far more reaching effects than in Oblivion, the main quest – to fight off the threat of Order – feels restrictive. There's no 'good' option, for example. An early piece of trickery involves you choosing the fate of three (relatively) innocent adventurers. You can kill them or drive them insane, but you can't just let them go. Personally it seemed a bit grating that the noble Champion of Cyrodiil should so easily be overcome by this disregard for the value of life – especially as I'd even avoided the assassin quests while closing Oblivion gates.

Perhaps the best advice for those choosing to visit The Shivering Isles, though, would be to start a new, morally ambiguous, character anyway. A sufficiently well tooled Champion of Cyrodiil is a little over powering here, even accounting for the dynamic difficulty level.

This is symptomatic of the whole game. Oblivion was a very hard act to follow, and while Shivering Isles will scratch that Elder Scrolls itch, it just isn't as good, and you'll power through it quickly. Different and diverting, yes, full of weird and wonderful things, but outside of the main quest there's just not quite enough to do or discover to keep you coming back for more.

Adam Oxford


Crucible is the dark and seedy side of the capital city, New Sheoth.


A strangely tasteful palace for a prince who's mad as a hatter.

PCGZine Verdict

Lots of new content for Oblivion, almost as compelling as the original

- Still the best graphics around
- Strong main questline
- Just one island. Not Isles at all

83%



Ancient Wars Sparta

History was never this much fun…

Publisher: Playlogic
Developer: World Forge
Heritage: The Settlers
Link: www.world-forge.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, DirectX 9 3D card

Do you even need to read this review? The name of the game and the screenshots should be enough to tell you that it's a bog-standard real-time strategy game with a cod-historical slant. Initially, at least, it is little more than a case of genre-specific box ticking. Spurious historical setting relayed via functional graphics? Check. Portentous voiceovers from dismal drama students? Present. Arcane interface? Correct. Chaotic battles with little actual strategy involved? Naturally.

How about that RTS classic, the hapless farmer continuing to plant seeds while he's actually on fire? Oh yes.

Not your bag? Think again. While it's true that there is little here that could reasonably be described as revolutionary, the old school approach is still enough to suck you in and keep you there, the hours drifting by in a blur of frantic clicking and pseudo-strategic trial and error gameplay. It's hard to pinpoint just when or how the game gets you in its vice-like grip, but it's some combination of well balanced missions, head-shaking moments of frustration, and an enormous sense of well being when you finally crack it at the 20th attempt. This is of course swiftly followed by self-loathing when you realise that it's dawn and you're playing a glorified game of toy soldiers.



Defend the lighthouse until your boat comes in.

Club Med

Those soldiers are allegedly drawn from the period between 500 and 450 BC, and the crux of the game involves a three-way battle for supremacy in the Mediterranean. It's a very different place from the Club 18-30 destination of today, with the Spartans, Egyptians and Persians all slaughtering each other by any means necessary. Horses, elephants and camels are all thrown into the fray, and a lot of the battles degenerate into a blur of swords, spears and hooves.

There are a variety of missions though, such as escorting a small troop of soldiers through trap-ridden enemy territory, or defending a settlement from an onslaught of siege weapons. Furthermore, the game features an array of heroes, who must often be kept alive in order to make progress.



Ignore the fire and keep sowing seeds.

The boats are almost unmanageably large.

And given that the German bloke behind ancient RTS, The Settlers, led the development team, there is plenty of building and resource harvesting to contend with, often while a war elephant is decimating your village.

Seasoned RTS fans will have seen it all before, but it's still a formula that works, requiring swift thinking and an >

THREE TRIBES

Chose from a triumvirate of intertwining campaigns.



Spartans | **Persians** | **Egyptians**

Spartans

The fiery red-clad Spartans are experts in making weapons, building walls, and playing the flute.

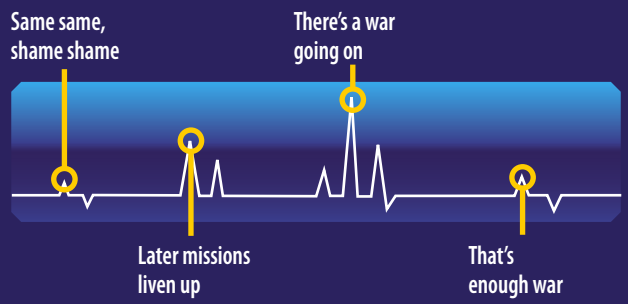


>Sparta continued

agile mouse finger. As ever, the perennial plate-spinning analogy applies, and it's a question of keeping on top of things at all times. Which becomes increasingly difficult the more buildings you have.

The cumbersome naval battles apart, it's not all plain sailing, with a number of moderately annoying bugs cropping up, such as a chariot getting stuck in the scenery and forcing you to restart a mission. And the AI can be more than a tad moronic; for instance when building defences your slaves will regularly wall themselves in. It's mainly forgivable though, and there's enough here to while away a few virtual decades at least. ● ***Steve Hill***

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*











PCGZine Verdict

Flawed but entertaining

- Varied missions
- Intermittently addictive
- Buggy

80%



Genesis Rising

In space everyone can hear you scream

Publisher: DreamCatcher Interactive
Developer: Metamorf Studios
Heritage: None
Link: www.genesisrisinggame.com
ETA: 27th April

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card

When you're dealing with a game in which blood is used as a galactic currency and spaceships explode in clouds of gore, you begin to get an inkling that creating an aura of sophistication wasn't particularly high on the developer's agenda.

The number one priority it seems was establishing a new angle on the old space-based RTS genre, and Metamorf Studios has done this simply with the introduction of organic space vessels. Your fleet is made up of fleshy living ships, which require blood to operate (and to heal), and have the ability to steal the genes (basically special weapons or defences) from destroyed enemy craft. Kill the enemy, steal its genes, suck on its blood to heal up; it's not rocket science but it's nowhere near as easy as it should be.



A face only a mother could love.

"Your fleet is made up of fleshy, living ships which need blood as fuel"

Number two?

While the AI can just about deal with auto-attacking enemy vessels, there's no delegating when it comes to making the most of your fleet's more interesting abilities and special attacks. You're forced to manually select each special attack for each individual ship every time you wish to use it. In the midst of battle this is more than a little annoying as the interface excels at producing miss-clicks, and in turn, loses you valuable time and units. To top things off, you are also expected to manually dodge incoming missiles for each of your units. When you add to this the fact that you aren't able to pause the game to issue orders, and there is no mid-mission save feature, it's a micromanagement nightmare.

For the navigation of your fleet, patience again is a required virtue. While combat is a frantic affair, moving a ship from one place to another is an exercise in frustration. As if the AI's insistence on randomly ignoring your commands wasn't enough, the time it takes to get your fleet from A to B can be infuriating. Mankind may have developed beautifully constructed living ships, but when they move like a Nissan Micra towing a Big Rig, it may be time to get back to good old liquid oxygen rocket fuel.

Okay, so the gene-stealing side of things may add a unique twist to this RTS, but it's little more than a new take on a traditional space-salvage system, and simply isn't enough to make up for the erratic pacing, poor interface and the numerous frustrations that each new situation presents.

Darran Hepworth

GENE THERAPY

DNA splicing antics ahead

In order to advance the capabilities of your organic battleship, you must make the most of your ship's gene-stealing capabilities. When you destroy an enemy unit, it's carcass is left behind for you to 'harvest'. Not only can you steal it's remaining blood supplies, but you ingest special genes which are then made available in your gene laboratory. From here you can either store these genes for later use, or insert them into your units for immediate system upgrades.





He's behind you!



This ship had just stolen some 'Cheesy Grin' genes.

PCGZine Verdict

Bloodsucking spaceships meet patience-draining warfare

- Nice visuals
- Ridiculous pacing
- Frustrating interface

50%



Penumbra: Overture

The clue's in the title: this is just the beginning.

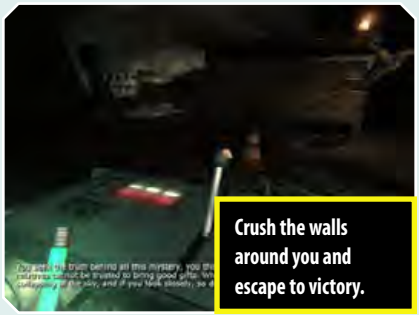
Publisher: Lexicon Entertainment
Developer: Frictional Games
Heritage: Energetic, Fiend
Link: www.penumbra-overture.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, DirectX 8 3D card

We're told that Penumbra Overture is the first in a series of three titles. And while this first person survival horror isn't quite perfect, there's enough to like about it that we're already looking forward to the rest of the trilogy.

The gaming physics, for example, are rather more clever than the norm for an adventure game, with mouse movements being directly translated into in-game object movement in accordance with Newtonian physics. You'll crouch in a terrified puddle of humanity repeatedly swinging your hammer back and forth until you smash the face of a killer dog. You'll enjoy the fact that the way in which you pick up a slab of wood in the game has exactly the same effect as it would in real life – hold it in the middle and it will sway and wobble ponderously but pick it up near the end and you have a fabulous weapon. We've seen elements of this before, in Oblivion, for instance. But there's never been anything quite so challenging – there's no click to swing option for the easily bored.


Everything kills you down here. Even the water is deadly.


Crush the walls around you and escape to victory.

Real world

In some instances the clumsiness of the mouse and combat will have you reeling in frustration, while at other times you may find yourself happily opening and closing a door just because its fun.

The unassuming nature of Penumbra's hero adds to the charm. Your inability to snap a dog's neck or to jump huge distances emphasises the fact that, despite his bizarre desire to meander unarmed into the frozen wastes of an abandoned mine in

>


Every random pile of junk is a physics puzzle to be solved.


No prizes for guessing what this is a pastiche of…

GOING UNDERGROUND

How to create atmosphere using everyday household items and pets

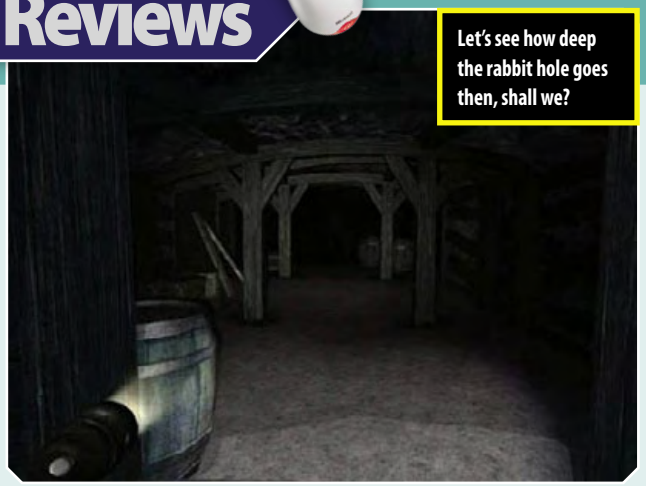


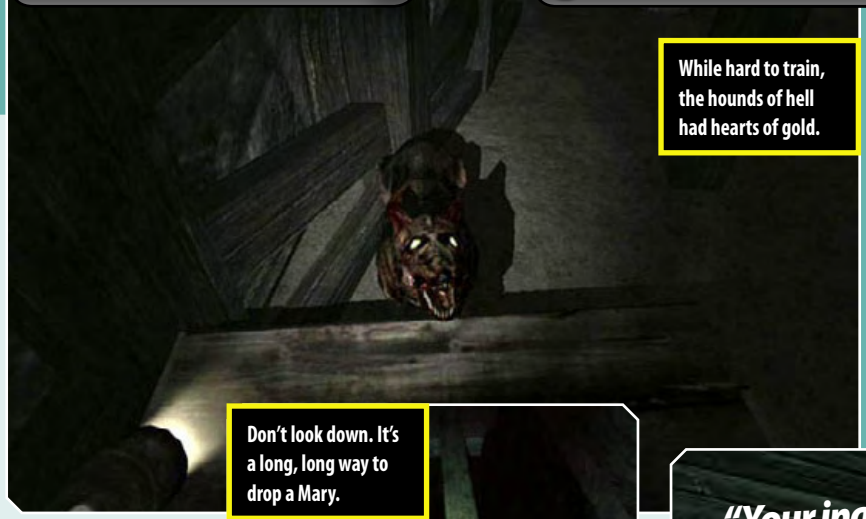
Bad dog | Hide away | Last words

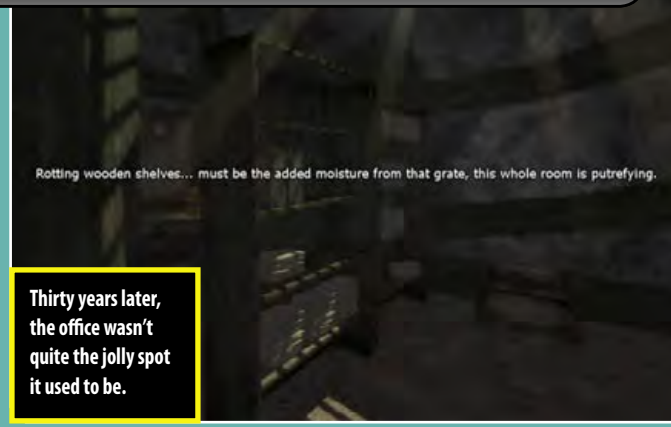
Bad dog

The crazed dogs roaming about the various hallways of the mine are actually quite terrifying. You can hide behind the crates, barrels and boxes that litter the hallways and wait for them to pass but beware of catching their eyes for your character will panic and stand up so the dogs see him and attack. Death happens one out of every two times when you play with these puppies so make sure that you avoid them.

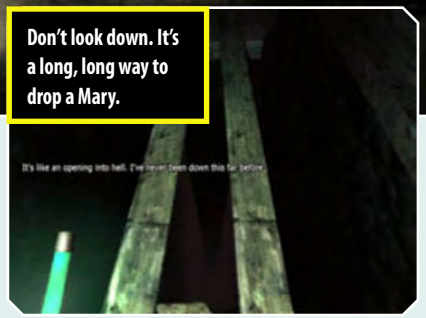

Moving around and interacting with your it's all about


Let's see how deep the rabbit hole goes then, shall we?


While hard to train, the hounds of hell had hearts of gold.



Thirty years later, the office wasn't quite the jolly spot it used to be.


Don't look down. It's a long, long way to drop a Mary.

> Penumbra continued

Greenland, your unnamed avatar is just a normal guy. He can't even catch a glimpse of a googly-eyed monster without going out of his mind with fear – at which point he'll panic, stand up and have to run away. Add to this the perpetual darkness, the intermittent torchlight, the eerie noises that seep out of the very rocks and you have a game that's absolutely packed with atmosphere. In crouch mode you gain a night vision that disappears the moment you move. It makes hiding behind a crate while a dog snuffles and snarls its way past you an incredibly intense experience.

Ultimately, though, Penumbra tends to a schizophrenic waltz between its FPS and puzzle-solving adventure selves and never quite marries the two. Some scenes positively capture the magic of either genre while in others it falls dramatically flat. The plot also suffers from a lack of credibility; you can't quite understand why you're there and how come miners are leaving long waffly notes of their doom lying about. Some of the puzzles are insultingly obvious with clues literally spelt in capitals too.

Penumbra brings together a collection of impressive ideas which don't quite gel as well as they should and the confused plot brings the score down considerably. But this is still an engaging game with some unusual ideas, and with two episodes still to come, things may yet get better.

Tamsin Mackay

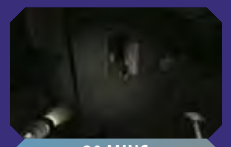


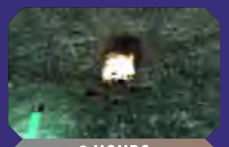
A deft mouse flick and objects can be sent flying to their doom. Die, crate.

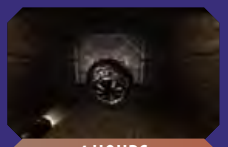
FREEZE FRAME

In Penumbra's case, the freezing is quite, quite literal…


10 MINS
You find yourself dying of hyperthermia in a frozen wasteland. Cool.


20 MINS
Don't fancy your chances of house training that little puppy dog.


2 HOURS
Who likes spiders? Really? They are terrifying down here…


4 HOURS
Step aside Dr Livingston, THAT is what you call an earthworm…

PCGZine Verdict

Chilling enough to keep you cool as we enter the heat of summer

- Genuinely scary moments
- Clever physics
- Impenetrable plot

78%



Silent Hunter IV: Wolves of the Pacific

Yo ho, Yo ho, a submariner's life for me

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Romania
Heritage: Silent Hunter III, Blazing Angels
Link: silenthunter4.uk.ubi.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card

Simulation games used to be the big thing on the PC. Each month, something new would be released to get propeller heads frothing at the mouth. Cars were simulated. Planes were simulated. Even Richard Branson's beard was simulated (well, his yacht with beard aboard anyway). But then, something happened. Almost overnight, the sims stalled, and the genre passed quietly on.

As the last of the old-school simulation games, Silent Hunter IV is one of few survivors.

Graphically, the game looks gorgeous. SH4 uses all sorts of fancy environmental techniques, shading and lighting to make the Pacific skies look the most glorious of blue, and the underwater depths as murky as a sailor's sock drawer. The water too, a key element of any sub game, looks fantastic, whether you're above or below the surface.

Dive, dive, dive

In the same way as its predecessors, the main part of Silent Hunter IV is the campaign mode, which lets you captain a submarine through four years of Pacific war. This provides an incredibly in-depth experience, and as the Captain, you're in charge of everything – you can plot courses, control your submarine's depth, up the periscope, fire torpedoes and even man the AA guns yourself, all in a submarine that's so detailed you can smell the grease and sweat.



The interiors of the submarines are intricately detailed.



Another one bites the dust. Or sinks to rust.



It can get quite hectic in the middle of a battle, especially with planes overhead.

"You're in charge of it all. Fire torpedos and man the AA gun yourself"

But sadly, the game has one huge problem – it's completely unfinished. You can barely complete a mission without it crashing. Even the patch released mere days after launch hasn't helped – simply pressing "A" when your submarine's surfaced is enough to sink to desktop. And this puts a downer on what is otherwise a fantastic sim, and we'd advise waiting for the next patch before you give it a chance.

Ian Morris

PAINSTAKING DETAIL

Begone, arcade-style fun

When it comes to commanding your ship, this is no Battlestations: Midway. Everything here has been recreated to be as accurate as possible. In the navigation screen, you can plot your course using a virtual compass and ruler, you can man the radar stations yourself, and you can even stand on deck with your crew members to see what's going on first hand. We're slightly disappointed you can't run around inside the submarines themselves though.



PCGZine Verdict

It's a solid sim, but a few too many holes in the bow threaten to sink it

- Detailed submarine interiors
- A great, old-school simulation
- Just too unfinished!

73%



Frontline Fields of Thunder

Developer: Nival Interactive
Publisher: Paradox Interactive
Price: £29.99

While it may bear a resemblance to Sudden Strike, thanks to its accurately modelled WW2 vehicles and perspective, this RTS offers an experience that's nowhere near as enjoyable. Frontline never really affirms itself as the hardcore RTS it's meant to be, instead choosing to flit between realistic and arcade-y types of gameplay. There are numerous flaws – not least the dodgy AI and pathfinding of friendly vehicles, which often sees your tanks getting to point blank range with an enemy tank before deciding to fire.

- Many units to play around with
- "Friendly" AI spoils the game
- Disappointing graphics

MIA **51%**



Sam & Max Episode 5 Reality 2.0

Developer : Telltale Games
Publisher : Telltale Games
Price : $8.95 (~£4.53)

Hapless cops Sam & Max have a new case to investigate this month, and it's as enjoyable as ever. There's a new game in town, called Reality 2.0, and it's destroying the internet as we know it, hypnotising players into never wanting to leave. Sam & Max have to venture into the 'new' reality to solve the mystery, and save the planet from a life in cyberspace. As funny as ever, this episode is helped further by the numerous nerdy references, and some incredibly fiendish puzzles to get you thinking.

- Great geeky references
- Fantastically realised Reality 2.0
- Same great sense of humour

Virtually a classic **87%**



Ankh Heart of Osiris

Developer : Deck 13
Publisher : Xider
Price : £19.99

Whilst adventure games may have been experiencing a bit of a lull lately, it seems they're making a comeback. This is the third game this month. The sequel to 2005's Ankh, Heart of Osiris picks up directly after the first game left off, as Assil finds himself unconscious in a street, without his precious Ankh. Although the puzzles are suitably challenging, and the humour is up to scratch, the game is let down by some sloppy errors, such as lines of dialogue that are missed out completely, leaving you to try and decipher a placeholder, and this really ruins the experience.

- Decent puzzles
- Not as polished as it should be
- Awful voice acting

Good game, bad QA **74%**



Devil May Cry 3 Special Edition

Developer : Capcom
Publisher : Mastertronic
Price : £9.99

Yes, it may have a name that sounds like a bad Emo band, but Devil May Cry 3 set the PS2 gaming world alight. Set before the original game, the plot revolves around Dante, the devilishly handsome demon, and follows the events leading up to the battle against his brother. This is Capcom's hack-and-slash at its finest, and even though it was intended for a gamepad, this still works relatively well using just a standard keyboard. One of the better ports around, and a damn good game to boot.

- Fun, if simple hack 'n' slash
- Interesting variety of moves
- All the extras from the PS2

Devilishly good fun **84%**



Prince of Persia The Twin Thrones

Developer : Ubisoft
Publisher : Mastertronic
Price : £9.99

The third and final installment in the Prince of Persia trilogy, the Twin Thrones combines gameplay elements from the previous two titles. A natural evolution of platforming gameplay, the acrobatic Prince can run up walls, swing from poles like a monkey, and traverse almost any surface. The Prince's actions have all been beautifully animated, and the gameplay just seems to flow from platform to platform. A little too smoothly at time, as the Prince seems to know what to do without being told…

- Good port – solid controls
- Refined platforming action.
- Let down by the odd glitch

Glitchy, but still great **78%**

Tech Support

We've received so many emails asking for advice, we thought we'd better open up a dedicated help desk. Send your questions to help.pcgzine@gamerzines.com



Russell Barnes is a freelance computer and technology journalist. He has spent 10 years specialising in PC gaming and troubleshooting hardware and software problems on the PC.

POWER OUTAGE

Over the past couple of weeks my computer has started misbehaving when I'm playing games. Sometimes it freezes on a screen until I reboot, other times it reboots all by itself. What's most worrying, though, is when it makes a screaming sound for a few seconds and then goes to a blue screen. After that I have to turn it off at the mains for a while before it will even fire up again.

Although I'm normally pretty good at sorting out computer problems this has got me stumped because no-one's touched my system (besides to install games) in about four months. Before that the last thing done was an upgrade at the computer shop for more memory and to swap my old graphics card for an ATI X1950XT to get Splinter Cell Double Agent running smoothly.

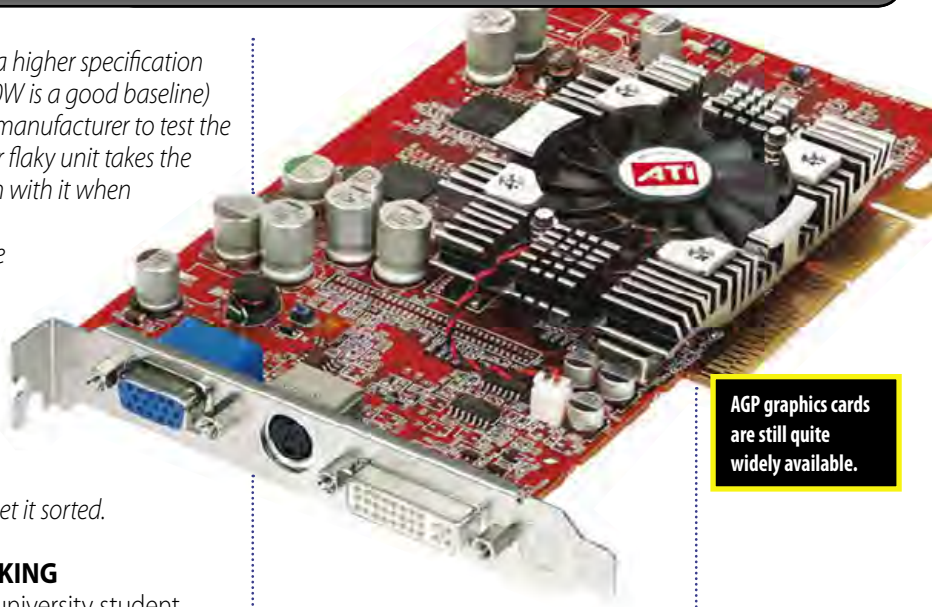
My other specs include 3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB of memory and Windows XP.

> John

> *One component you didn't include in the full specifications list you sent in was the sort of power supply unit (PSU) you're using. If the PSU originally supplied with your computer from was only designed to contend with your old system hardware this is most likely what's causing you problems now – it likely needs upgrading to compensate for your more power hungry graphics card. Why only now? The PSU will have broken its back keeping your system running and is only now caving under the pressure. If I were you I would test your system with a higher specification power supply (500W is a good baseline) from a reputable manufacturer to test the theory before your flaky unit takes the rest of your system with it when it finally blows. Manufacturers like Antec, OCZ, Tagan, Seasonic and Enermax are all well respected in this field – I'd keep off the games until you get it sorted.*



Hardly the sexiest computer component, but one of the most important nonetheless.



AGP graphics cards are still quite widely available.

ALIVE AND KICKING

Since I'm a skint university student there's little hope of my getting a new computer this decade. I want to know if there's anything I can do with my current machine to keep me gaming for a bit longer yet.

Asus K8U-X motherboard, Athlon 64 3000+, 256MB DDR333 RAM and a Nvidia 6200 graphics card.

> Simon Belson

> *The first thing you'll want to do is sort out some more memory. Thankfully, RAM of the specification you're looking at is a cheap as chips and you'll be able to pick up another 512MB for a shade over £20 if you shop online. You could also swap out your processor for the fastest available which is the 3700+ for your system type. You'll be able to pick one up from auction relatively easily for around £50, but make sure it's Socket 754 version you shop for, not the newer Socket 939 model. That said, since you'll see bigger performance benefits from a new graphics card, you'll probably be better off investing that £50 here instead. Despite only supporting AGP, NVIDIA and ATI/AMD haven't given up on the old graphics standard just yet (and show no signs of stopping entirely) – there's a surprisingly healthy range available from £30 right up past £200. The Nvidia 7600 is a particularly good buy at £60-£100 for the GS and GT models respectively. You should be pretty satisfied at the transformation from a total budget of £100-£150 or so, just make sure your power supply is up to snuff, but 400W would be ample here.*

VISTA PERFORMANCE BOOST

I notice from the last couple of Tech Support columns that Vista can be

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"Microsoft's poor gaming performance in Vista hasn't gone unnoticed..."

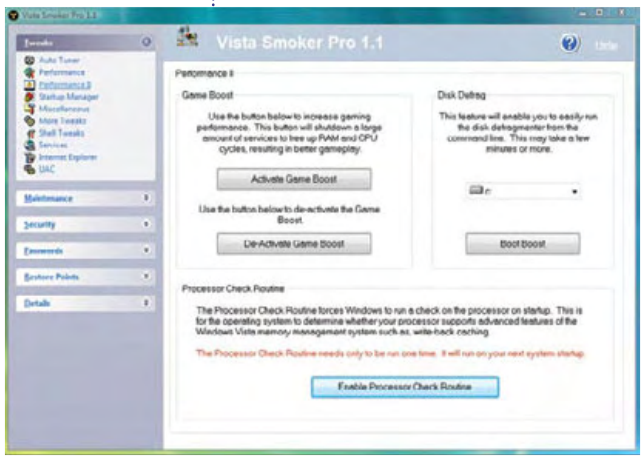
Tech Support

> quite damaging to gaming performance. Are there any software tweaks I can do to help relieve the pressure?

> Adam Carver

There is no shortage of utilities designed to speed up Vista, but none can compare to an honest hardware upgrade.

> *You weren't the only person to write in with this request this month – it certainly seems Microsoft's poor performance when it comes to Vista gaming hasn't gone unnoticed. If you know your way around Windows then there are quite a number of different system tweaks you can do, but since they're too numerous to go into here another option worth considering is a tweak utility. These are software downloads designed to do the hard work behind for you at the touch of a button. There are already numerous utilities available like Vista Manager, WinOptimizer 4 and Vista Smoker Pro to name a few. The latter is a particularly good example, not least because it offers a feature called Game Boost which turns off unneeded background services to streamline your system for when you want to play a game. Of course, none of these are free and the £20 or £30 you'll spend on them would be better put towards another 512MB or 1GB of system RAM – a considerably more effective way to get Vista smoking.*



SUPREME SYSTEM

What sort of specification do you need to play Supreme Commander at top quality and keep it smooth even when the screen is full of units?

> Mohammad

> *According to THQ the recommended system specifications include a 3GHz processor, 1GB of RAM and a DirectX 9.0c graphics card with 256MB onboard. While I'm sure it does the job, it's not going to do the game justice – if you really want to make it fly you're going to need some seriously expensive hardware. This is largely because Supreme Commander is one of the first games to offer truly native support for Dual and Quad Core processors so that's £650 for an Intel QX6700 straight off the bat. Any hardcore gamer worth their salt wouldn't try and play a new game under Vista (or even XP for that matter) without at least 2GB of high speed DDR2 RAM under the hood either. That's another £250 taken care of and money well spent where this game is concerned. Then there's the small matter of a graphics card. If you want to play at a decent resolution with lots of fancy filters you're going to want at least 512MB on board and plenty of hardware grunt, which means one of NVIDIA's new DirectX 10 cards. Something like an 8800 GTX with 768MB on board will do the trick – that will be £400. By the time you've rented a power plant to supply the juice and 1,000 square feet of vacant office space for the cooling mount you can wave goodbye to £1500 for a self-built system or close to £2500 for a custom job.*

Thankfully, though, the game scales really well and still looks great at medium settings. You can download a fully playable demo from www.supremecommander.com at take it for a test drive to see how it runs on your current or prospective system first.



Supreme Commander is as demanding as it is brilliant. Prepare to spend big money if you want the best performance.

"Your PSU likely needs upgrading to compensate for the new graphics card"

GOT A PROBLEM?

Send us your technical questions and we'll try and help you out

Click here now!

Desktop Replacements – Unwieldy Laptops or Portable Desktops?

Laptops can now best desktops on the performance field – but do they make good purchases?



Aaron McKenna is the editor of Tom's Hardware Guide UK & Ireland, a site for tech enthusiasts of all persuasions.
www.tomshardware.co.uk



Some desktop replacements are 17" monsters with SLI, like this Alienware Aurora m9700. But are they all born equal?

There aren't too many who could convincingly argue that hefty "Desktop Replacement" notebooks can't play the performance game and come out with decent results. Nowadays we can even fit a dual board SLI graphics set-up into tray-sized computers.

Never the less, desktop replacements have had a bit of a mixed reception in the gaming world. On the one hand, people bemoan the fact that they are not as portable as a laptop should be. They're heavy, they're noisy, they're hot and don't dare to ask about battery life. On the other hand many see them as being distinct from the traditional laptop – they are certainly more portable than desktop machines and they have more horsepower than smaller notebooks.

In considering a desktop replacement as your next gaming machine purchase you must weigh two things: Firstly, what type of desktop replacement are you really after? Secondly, how do you foresee yourself using this new machine now and in the future?

Choose wisely

Firstly when considering a desktop replacement it is worth dispelling the image of a big brick of a yoke that has four speakers, a subwoofer and a RAID array. Certainly, there are massive desktop replacements, but equally a bog standard Inspiron with some discreet graphics thrown in classes as a desktop replacement.



On the inside it's funny to note just how like a desktop these things can look… Only, slightly flatter, that's all.

"Desktops still have longer lifespans and staying power"



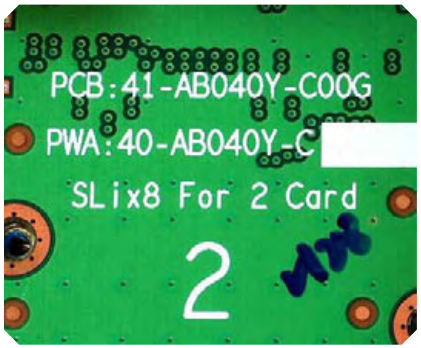
Most of us don't have a RAID array in our desktop.

> Desktops continued

For business users, notebooks have been desktop replacements ever since they could do all the office work and include some wireless connectivity. Similarly for a gamer, a notebook is a desktop replacement as soon as it starts doing what your desktop can do; and let's face it, we don't all have red hot machines with quad-core and SLI under the bonnet, no matter what the graphics companies tell us.

A chirpy mid-range notebook with an upgraded processor, a bit more RAM and a mid-range discreet graphics solution is a desktop replacement to that mid-range HP machine sitting in the family living room.

To take a familiar example, Dell offers its top-end XPS M1710 notebook with a Core 2 Duo T7200, 1GB of DDR2 RAM at 667 MHz, a 17" display, 256MB GeForce Go 7900 GS and 120 GB HDD starting at £1,179 and moving up fast. This machine can be configured to kick a ball around with the top-end desktops on the market. The less catchily named Inspiron 9400 on the other hand starts with a Core 2 Duo T5500, 1GB of DDR2 RAM at 533 MHz, 17" display, 256MB ATI Mobility X1400 and a 120GB HDD starting at £699. Move back to a 15.4" machine and you save even more money, which you can clock back up with more RAM and a better graphics card. It's not pocket sized, but it is pocket friendly.



If the two graphics cards weren't enough proof, SLI on a tray.

So, you have to decide to yourself what kind of shunting power you need and remove that misconception from your head that a desktop replacement needs be half the size and weight of a tower rig. To decide that we move on to the next question…

What do you use your computer for?

The second question you must ask will help you in deciding the answer to the first. How do you foresee yourself using your machine now and in the future? Many of us need a notebook for work or for college. We like to game, but paying for both a desktop and a laptop seems like a waste of money.

In this scenario I'll buy myself a midrange machine – perhaps something with a 15.4" display that's good enough for gaming, upgrade the RAM and the graphics card and essentially it'll give me portability and gaming in moderate amounts. Something not unlike the 15.4" 3kg Inspiron 6400.

On the other hand I'm a hardcore gamer who likes to go to LANs, or is just rich and spoiled. I don't like hauling a huge desktop with me everywhere, so I go for a big machine with lots of everything – this is more a portable desktop than a notebook. Something like the 4kg, 17" Alienware Aurora m9700.



Meet Dell's ultra-top-end XPX M1710, one of the fastest gaming notebooks in the world.

The spectrum you can move up or down is quite similar to the desktop performance one, except portability is your key factor in making the decision here. You want portability and a modicum of gaming from the lower-end machines, and you want a portable high-end desktop from the bigger and meaner desktops.

Ultimately the decision is as with desktops: based off of your requirements and budget. Not all desktop replacements are behemoths, and those Goliaths have their uses so long as you don't think of them as you would a tiny Sony Vaio. The performance is no longer really an issue with desktop replacements, so it all comes down to what you need, what you want and what you can afford. ●


Now, for the difference of at least £400, spot the difference between it's Inspiron 9400 brother.

WHY BUYING A DESKTOP IS STILL A GOOD IDEA

All this talk of desktop replacements… what of the towers themselves?

Just because desktop replacements have been able to match up to desktops themselves in the performance stakes does not mean that we should all be rushing out to buy them. True you can save a lot of time, effort and money when you buy a desktop replacement – for one, the monitor is a part of the package and not a nasty £300 add-on in the peripherals section. Setting up a desktop replacement is a matter of plugging it in, 15 seconds and you're ready to game unlike the sucker who has more wires coming out the back of his desktop than The Borg.

So, why wouldn't you buy a desktop replacement? One word: Upgrade. Upgrading a desktop replacement is a tricky process which will, half of the time, void your warranty. If your desktop is getting a bit rusty you can give it a new lease of life by slapping in a new graphics card. Not so easy with a notebook. Desktops still have the longer shelf-life and staying power.

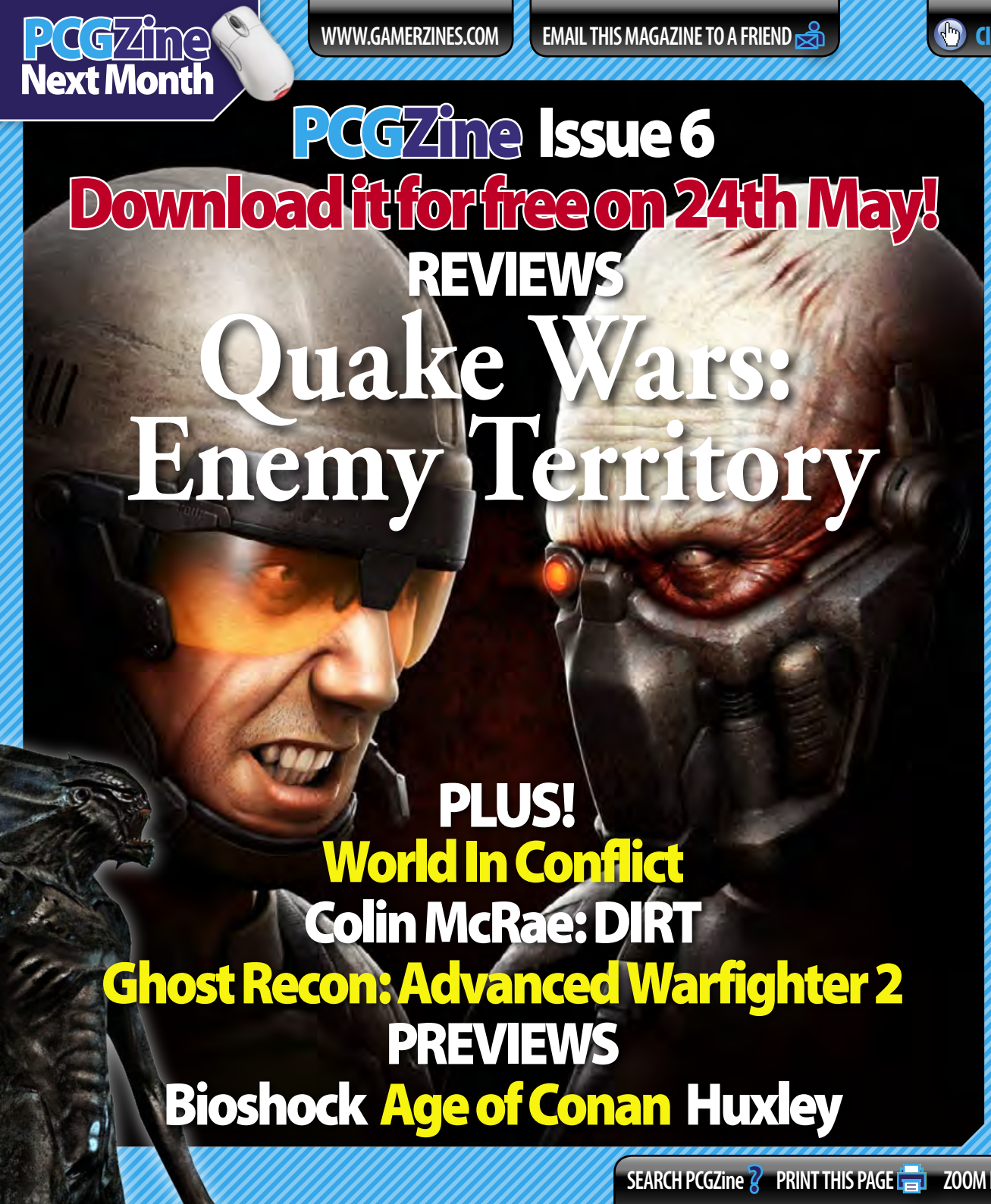

So trendy you could drag it to Starbucks… If you're a Mr World Weight Lifting Champion. For the rest of us, smaller solutions might be the way to go.

"People bemoan the fact they're not as portable as a laptop should be…"

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