FREE!

PCGZine

Issue 7 | July 2007

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

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW INSIDE!

BioShock

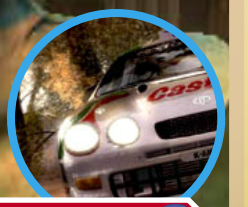
We go deep to find under-sea suspense in the sci-fi thriller



LATEST NEWS

CRYSIS

The best looking game ever is getting closer…



EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

Colin McRae: DIRT

Down and dirty with the best Colin game yet

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

TABULA RASA™

MMO master Richard Garriott wipes the slate clean for Tabula Rasa



REVIEWS



1

Shadowrun
Mega-fantasy shooter



2

Dawnspire
The brand new MMO



3

Monster Madness
It's Gauntlet vs Evil Dead!

PLUS

Defcon
The Agency
Loki & more…

Welcome to PCGZine



Everyone's heard of System Shock, Thief and the Deus Ex series – the games commonly associated with the adjective 'immersive'. These are not just first-person shooters with the added depth of RPG-like character progression: they place you in a world as physically real as possible, tell you what you have to acheive and then let you do it in your own way. Our cover game BioShock comes with a fine pedigree in the genre: it could be the best yet.

Speaking of immersion, we've also managed to bag an interview with one of the original gaming celebrities and creator of the Ultima games – Richard Garriott. Click on to find out about his latest work, Tabula Rasa.

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

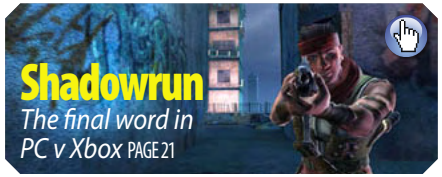
Adam Oxford, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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













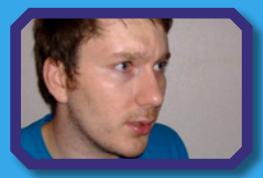




QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

SimCity: Societies	Crysis
The Agency	Tabula Rasa
Haze	Colin McRae: DIRT
Loki	Shadowrun
Need for Speed: ProStreet	Monster Madness
World in Conflict	Defon
Tom Clancy's EndWar	Dawnspire
FIFA 08	Community Pages
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	PC Technology column
BioShock	

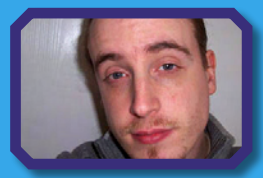
MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



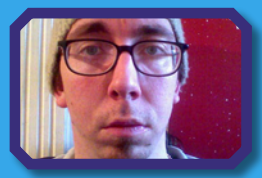
Lee Hall
Found news where others thought none was to be found.



Ian Morris
Champions the underdog & seeks the best indie games for review.



Darran Hepworth
Master of the MMO, Darran is Orc by day, but Conan by night.



Dan Muir
Knows what's happening in the wider world beyond your screen.

ALIENWARE
To experience games at their best PCGZine uses the Area 51-ALX from Alienware. Packed to the gills with cutting-edge power and technology, if a game can't perform on this it has to be a dud.





Publisher: EA
Developer: Tilted Mill Entertainment
Heritage: The actually quite good Caesar IV
Link: www.electronicarts.co.uk
ETA: Christmas



Look, tree-huggers – a disgusting eco-town...




Build a fun city, then watch it burn, burn, burn!


Presumably, this is a Michael Jackson inspired creation.

SimCity Societies

FIRST LOOK

A new chip off the old blocks

What's the story?

SimCity is back and the series is going way beyond bricks and mortar, giving you the chance to carve out an entire society in your own image. Or in the image of someone far more attractive…

What do we know?

SimCity Societies doesn't shy from the epic ambition that characterised the early games in the long-running city-building series.

Sure, you knock-up the infrastructure of your cities, but that's just the start. You also need to select a cultural identity for your conurbation. If you feel happy you can build somewhere upbeat and fun – think Las Vegas. If you feel miserable you can build somewhere to match – New Milton Keynes anyone?

Your influence on the cultural identity of your city will be profound. The roster of 350 building types will give you a flavour of the sort of whacked out locales you can craft – Ferris Wheels and Gingerbread houses take the place of the standard tenements we've been used to.

New social energies in the form of wealth, obedience, knowledge, devotion and creativity will determine the overall vibrancy of your creations and seal your fate as a city-planning genius, or figure of civic hate.

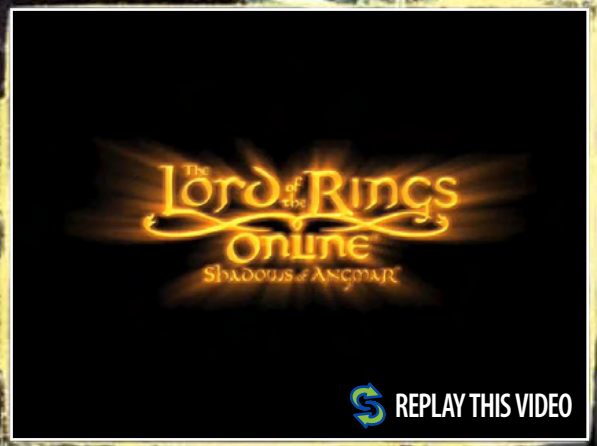
When do we get more?

Expect chirpy trailer footage in the next couple of months, and a hands-on preview after Summer.

Anything else to declare?

The SimCity series has sold over 17 million copies worldwide. That's approximately 22 copies per expansion pack.

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Adventure awaits



The Agency

FIRST LOOK

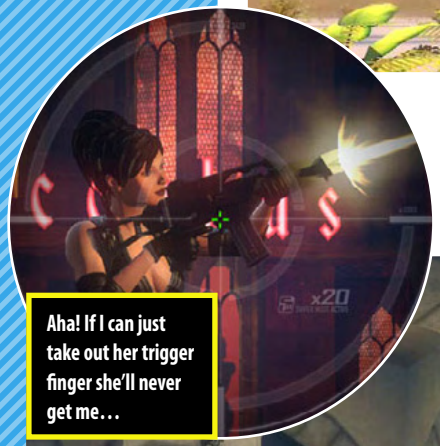
Please apply with a CV and body count…

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
Heritage: Everquest, Star Wars Galaxies
Link: theagencygameonline.com
ETA: 2008



Expect exotic locales and – oh good – booze.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Agency



Aha! If I can just take out her trigger finger she'll never get me…



"You take the bad guys, and I'll take care of the balcony."

"It's a welcome alternative to the grafting that drags down most MMOs"

What the hell is he holding? Answers by email to pcgzine@gamerzines.

What's the story?

The UNITE spy and paraGON mercenary agecnies are looking to recruit new members. Candidates must be prepared to relocate to a futuristic online world where competition for global dominance is fierce.

Your duties will include activities such as drug smuggling, assassinations, espionage and counter intelligence. Appropriate clothing is provided and opportunities for promotion are excellent…

What do we know?

The Agency sounds magnificent. A seething, persistent online world in which you form clans with fellow members, tool up and get blasting. It promises to be action-packed – a welcome alternative to the grafting that drags down many existing MMOs.

All the donkey work is done by operatives, non-playing characters whom you acquire with your advancing rank. They'll busy themselves scanning for enemies, gathering intel or even knocking together your new sports car. And they'll even email you with updates when you're offline.

While they're hard at work you can focus on offing your rivals, forming alliances and getting distracted with minigames involving card tables, shooting ranges and head-to-head combat. Not all at once, mind.

When do we get more?

Oh God, let it be soon. We're on it.

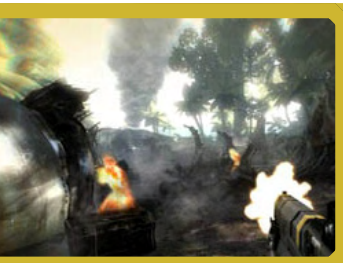
Anything else to declare?

Clothing is crucial in The Agency. There are no character classes, so the kit you pick up – from weapons to disguises – won't just change your appearance in the game, it will dramatically alter the way you play.



7 UP

Seven more of the best stories this month



Haze

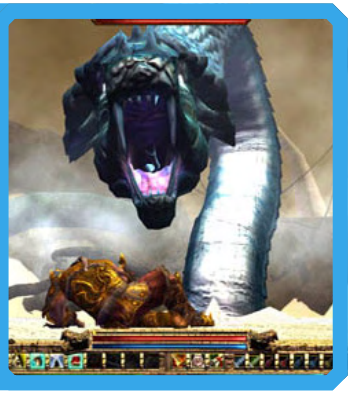
Publisher: Ubisoft **ETA:** March 2008

Oh no – major slippage… We've been waiting patiently for Haze, the forthcoming shooter from pick-up-and-blast specialists Free Radical for longer than our game-addled brains can remember. At least we can be sure it's definitely coming – and it will surely be worth the wait. Haze's clever idea is a tank of Nectar – a performance enhancing drug – lashed to your back. Nectar can aid your aiming, highlight concealed foes and even give you a sixth sense vision of dangers to come. If only Free Radical could have predicted all these delays…

Loki

Publisher: Ascaron **ETA:** August

A melting-pot of mythologies, Loki is an RPG adventure that pits you as an Aztec Shaman, Egyptian sorcerer, Greek hardass and a Norse scrapper. This promises to be an all-action affair, with breaks from slicing foes into little pieces only coming in the form of aggressive magical attacks. The cast of other-worldly foes includes minotaurs, sphinxes, dragons and mages.





Need For Speed: ProStreet

Publisher: EA **ETA:** November

The game naming god's spacebar has stuck, welding Pro and Street together like a cut-and-shut motor you'd buy for 50 quid from a geezer down the back lane. It must mean this new Need For Speed is well cool. And indeed it is – with photo-realistic graphics and Autosculpt technology, which means that as well as fannying on with the looks, you'll be able to beef your car's performance too.



World In Conflict

Publisher: Vivendi **ETA:** September

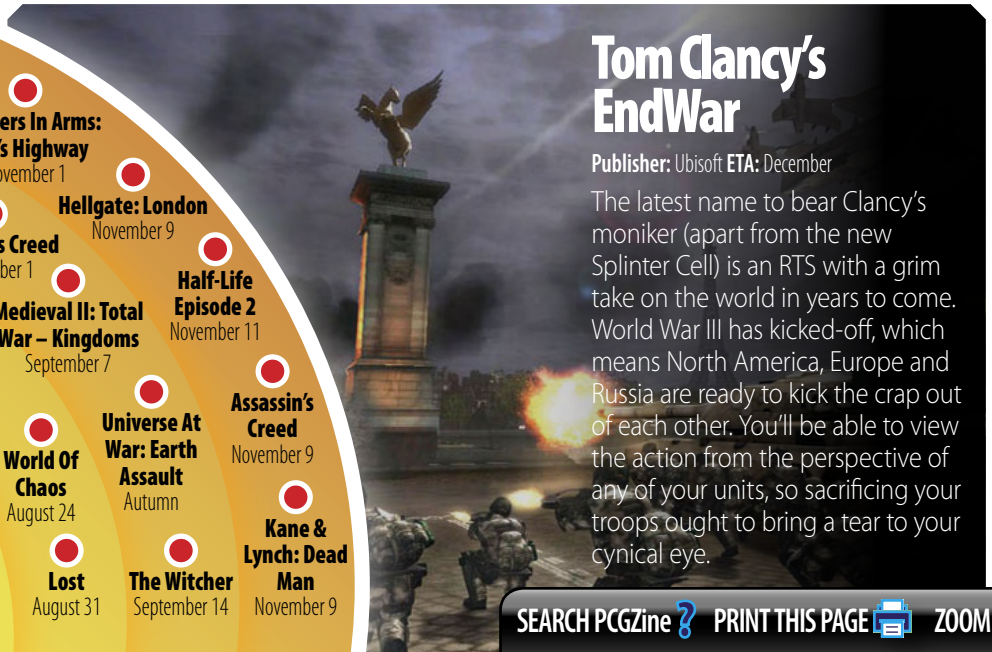
It might sound like the title of a hard-hitting Channel 4 documentary series, but WiC is way scarier than that. World In Conflict gives you control of every delicious piece of kit in the modern warmongerer's arsenal – including those naughty nuclear bombs. We've been hands on with the beta, and the 16 player team battles are possibly the loudest, most engrossing fun we've had at the PC for a while.

ON THE RADAR

WINTER 2007
- Football Manager 2008 – October 19
- Transformers: The Game – July 7
- Two Worlds – July 20
- Civ IV: Beyond The Sword – July 27

AUTUMN 2007
- Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway – November 1
- Tabula Rasa – September 1
- Hellgate: London – November 9
- Assassin's Creed – September 1
- Premier Manager 08 – August 10
- Medieval II: Total War – Kingdoms – September 7
- BioShock – August 24
- Half-Life Episode 2 – November 11
- Assassin's Creed – November 9
- World Of Chaos – August 24
- Universe At War: Earth Assault – Autumn
- Kane & Lynch: Dead Man – November 9
- Overlord – July 27
- Lost – August 31
- The Witcher – September 14

SUMMER 2007



Tom Clancy's EndWar

Publisher: Ubisoft **ETA:** December

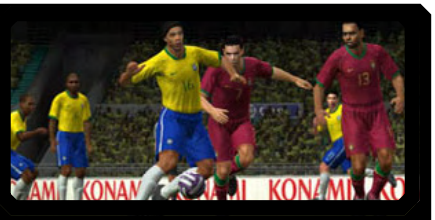
The latest name to bear Clancy's moniker (apart from the new Splinter Cell) is an RTS with a grim take on the world in years to come. World War III has kicked-off, which means North America, Europe and Russia are ready to kick the crap out of each other. You'll be able to view the action from the perspective of any of your units, so sacrificing your troops ought to bring a tear to your cynical eye.

FIFA 08

Publisher: EA **ETA:** September

Brazilian ace Ronaldinho is the official cover star of FIFA 08, a game which is championing the new 'Be A Pro' mode as it's title-winning asset. In it you take up the role of a single player out of 15,000 licensed pros, battling for possession and making sure you shine when the ball finally lands on your feet.





Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

Publisher: Konami **ETA:** October

The headline feature here is the Teamvision AI system, which empowers non-human opponents to adapt to your playing style. They'll even learn to exploit defensive frailties you betray early in a game…

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DEVELOPED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE PC







Individual order system, strategic planning phase, extended supports, specific maps, various environments.



Battle with up to 32 players in one of the 7 coop and adversarial multiplayer modes including the brand new "Recon vs Assault" mode.

Tom Clancy's
GHOST RECON
ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

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PC version developed by Grin. *subject to change.

UBISOFT

HANDS ON

BIOSHOCK

There's something moving in the depths. And it's deep.

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Irrational
Heritage: System Shock 2, Freedom Force, SWAT 4, Tribes Vengence
Link: www.2kgames.com/bioshock
ETA: August

Bioshock carries the weight of expectations on its shoulders, more than any other first-person game this year. STALKER aimed for the skies, but everyone suspected a disaster… meaning its final success was a pleasant surprise. Crysis is a technological marvel with some clever ideas, but that's it. Bioshock… well, people aren't just expecting Bioshock to be the most exciting RPG/shooter conceivable with a palpable aura of constant terror about it. They're expecting it to be – whisper it – art.

Irrational's history in developing System Shock 2 gives them pedigree, but it's only by getting hands on with it can we really judge what their chances are.

Guess what we've been up to?

Bioshock starts with you floating in an ocean laced with flame, the remains of your plane sinking. The only thing to do is to swim to a nearby lighthouse, enter a bathosphere and then descend to see if you can find someone to help you. Within minutes, you're in 'Rapture', a city constructed decades ago by a genius tired of the parasitism of lesser men – governments, churches, communists – who wished to live in a place where the truly great were able to create a perfect society. Inevitably, by the time you arrive, it's all gone wrong. The majority of its inhabitants have transformed themselves by twisting their genetics turning into 'Splicers'. The atmosphere is much like the Titanic was isolated, and then infected with radioactive chemicals and Neiztcherean philosophies of self-invention. While the mix of art-deco retro tech, decay, satire and horror may bring Fallout to mind, it's worth nothing that this isn't just an original setting for a videogame. It's an original setting, full stop.

Bioshock's story, as brilliant as it appears, is only half the appears. Where the game excels is simply in the >



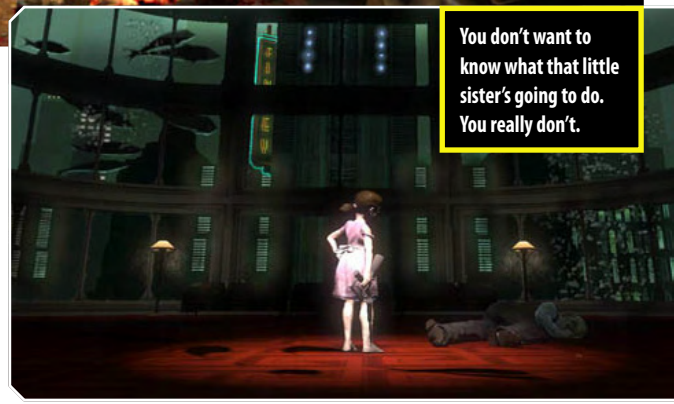
Flame effects are very flamey.



Using that security station to disable 'em would be a good idea.

"The game excels simply with the number of options that are open to you as a player"

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Bioshock!


You don't want to know what that little sister's going to do. You really don't.


Big Daddy are big. Their parental status is unconfirmed.


Oh- yeah! What a feeling. I'm... oh, I'll go now.

> Bioshock continued

amount of options that are available. The key is the 'Adam' chemical which has driven the place insane: gathering it allows you to remould your body to feature special abilities. The powers on offer are the most obvious ones: freezing your opponents solid, setting them alight or electrocuting them and so on. But – tellingly – their uses are often far from straightforward.

Opponents standing in a pool of water can all be electrocuted by shooting at the water, for example, or ice-build-ups can be dislodged by the thermal abilities, allowing further exploration. Your opponents have similar licence, happily running off to healing machines; which you can hack so they'll detonate, hurting them more. Serves them right.


Plasmids are the in-game power-ups, adding new abilities to your repertoire.

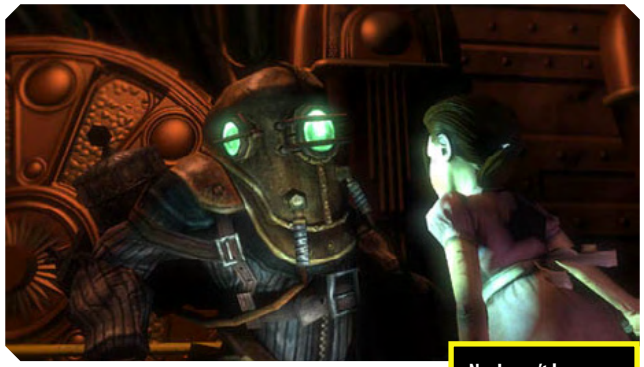
"The only thing to do is swim to a lighthouse and enter a bathosphere..."

After playing the first couple of hours, Bioshock's quality is evident. Unless something goes drastically wrong suddenly, it's a good game. The question is, how good can it get? In the first two hours, the game is still opening up, with the three sections we moved through offering increasing freedom and numbers of routes available. If this levels out quickly, we've got a superior action/RPG. If it manages to continue expanding… well, whichever we've get, it's something we want to get.


Yeah, I used your milk. So what?

Dentists, eh?


Warping your own genetic structure to render you a monstrosity has never been more fun.


No, I won't be your girlfriend. I'm 6 and you have a metal head.

PCGZine BIOSHOCK
HOW COMPLETE? 85%
FIRST IMPRESSIONS 93%
It's increasingly looking as if we'll all be in Rapture.

CATCH UP

CRYSIS

Say 'Hasta la Vista' to your old operating system...

Publisher: EA
Developer: Crytek
Heritage: Far Cry
Link: www.crysis-game.com
ETA: Winter

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Crysis!

Consider the evolution of the videogame tree. It's been a fairly slow one…

At first they were a clutch of pixels. In the 90s they became almost three dimensional. By the millennium they were 3D and scarred by bullets. Eventually they started to sway and the leaves looked more natural, even up close up.

But it's only with Crysis that trees are finally becoming, well, trees. And, believe us, that's important in this entrancing alien-bashing blaster…

Almost all of Crytek's newest shooter takes place outside in their customary jungle locations where you're surrounded by darned trees – trees that live, die, protect and even kill

The sumptuous swaying foilage and trunks here are phenomenally realistic, with each individual plant responding to changing currents of air and bending gently as you brush through them in your hi-tech nano suit.

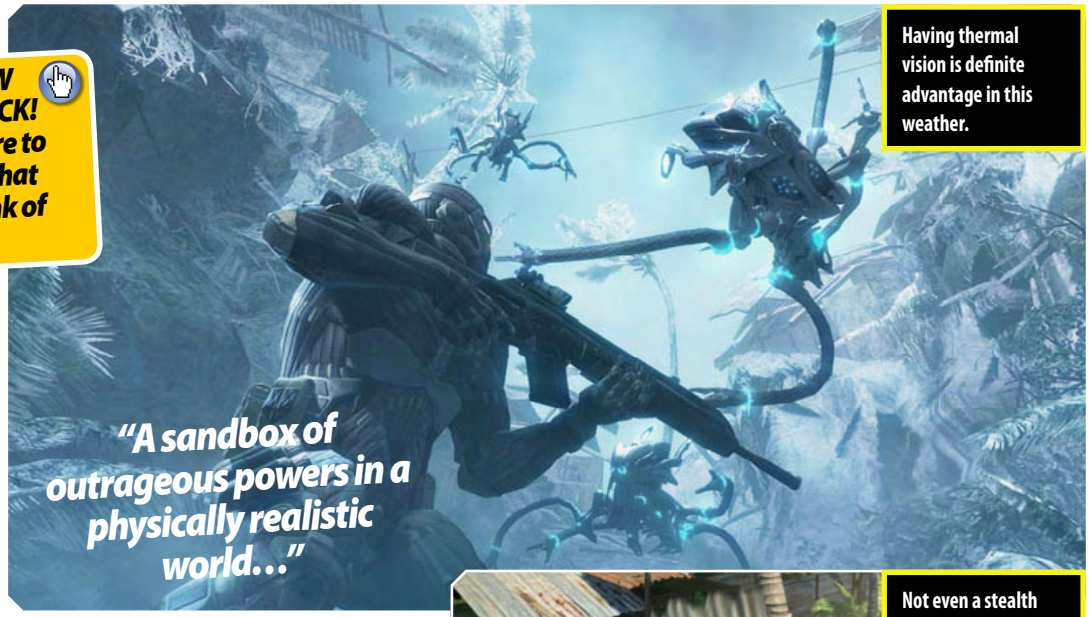
In Crysis you glide toward a crashed alien ship – trying to anonymously bump off Korean military operatives so you can have a chat with our towering, menacing visitors without sparking World War III in the process. You'll use trees like never before.

As well as providing cover, they ooze life, forming part of a fully destructible environment, snapping with glancing shots, splintering with sustained fire, creaking and breaking with well-placed blasts to their base…

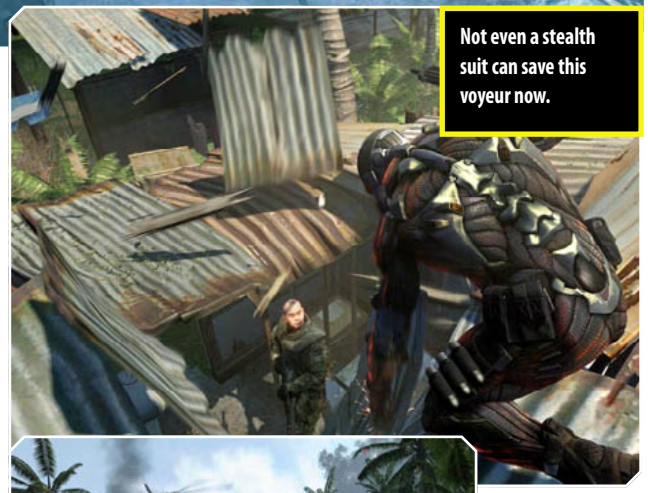
It's at this point you start to feel a bit sorry for the Korean folk who don't take too kindly to futuristically-clad US black ops troops skulking through the fallen undergrowth.

You see, your nano suit isn't simply for show (come on Crytek – admit it is just a bit or show…). It gives you super-human strength, strength enough to pick up a mighty log and squash the eyes out of an enemy's skull, for instance. Bloody dangerous things, those trees…

This strength boost, which also allows you to pick up any other massive objects strewn about the rapidly charring battlefield, gives you the power to halt vehicles in their tracks >



Having thermal vision is definite advantage in this weather.


Not even a stealth suit can save this voyeur now.


It's not just pretty – the AI has had a lot of refinement since Far Cry too.

JUST AN X MACHINE
See how darned good Crysis looks on Direct X 10.



> Crysis continued

with an outstretch fist, and even chuck Korean soldiers at their stunned mates.

It's also terrifically resilient when the lead starts to fly, protecting your soft bits from a hail of bullets, before recharging when you take a breather so you can continue your seemingly unstoppable march through legions of helpless foes.

It'll boost your speed too – enabling you to sprint faster than a Korean officer with a tree rammed up his backside. It can also act as a cloaking device, meaning you can melt, chameleon-like into the background and become nigh-on invisible.

In other words, your nano suit is quite an advantage when it comes to battling the legions of terrestrial foes you'll face on your way to the alien ship. Once the aliens start slumbering and floating toward you, however, it does just about enough to even the odds.



Crysis is the best showcase for DirectX 10, with lots of fancy effects.

Your tentacled, merciless extra-terrestrial foes use heat patterns to track their quarry, you see. And luckily the temperature regulation capabilities of your suit mean you can cool your frame so you don't stick out like a straight man at a Village People reunion gig.

"Your suit gives you strength enough to crush the an enemy's skull"

Given the aliens blast out shards of ice, it's a relief to know your thermostat can dial-up the opposite way. With a shake of your mouse you're able to de-ice yourself if you do get frozen, which is more than can be said for the Korean folk, who pretty soon start looking like extras from the Chronicles Of Narnia.

While Crysis itself is no fairytale, it's far from po-faced. The game is a sandbox of outrageous physical powers in a physically realistic world, of towering alien foes and dashing military heroics. It's beautiful, it's exciting and – get this – it looks set to be enormous fun.



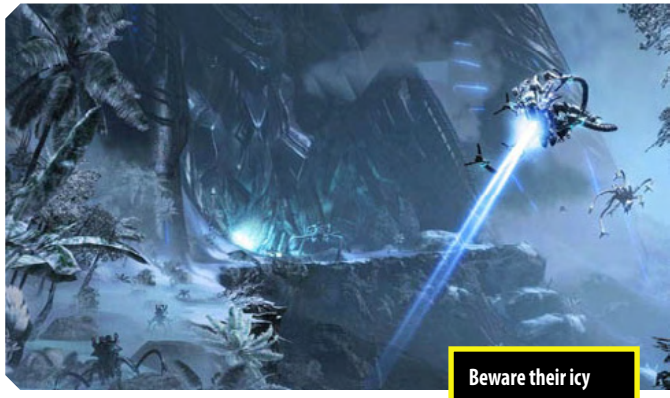
At last. A scene as good as the Matrix part three should have been.



Almost a perfect holiday, ruined only by the tentacled killer alien fiends.



You can punch through much of the scenery thanks to the suit.



Beware their icy gaze.

PCGZine CRYSIS

HOW COMPLETE? 87%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 92%

Time to buy RAM, Vista and a new graphics card.

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Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: Destination Games
Players: MMO
Features: Proper fighting, moral dilemmas and an attempt to break the MMO mould
ETA: 1st September

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

Best of British

Visionary developer Richard Garriott explains why he's wiping the slate clean with his latest MMO, Tabula Rasa


An AFS soldier fires as a boss level Bane prepares to attack.

He created the MMO genre with Ultima Online, now he's decided it's time he reinvented it. Richard Garriott, aka 'Lord British', has been cast as an oddball – his wicked sense of humour, dreams of space travel and outspoken creativity would be the stuff of tabloid front pages in a world where games were cool. Thankfully they're not, and this British-born gaming demigod is free to make engaging, rewarding and brilliant videogames…


Richard Garriot. MMO master and real-life artefact collector.


A Bane (left) and a Brann (right) square off in battle.

That's enough of the ass-kissing. What's Tabula Rasa all about?

It's a near-future, sci-fi MMO RPG (a NFSFMMORPG, then?). A big part of the team are the same members who built the first ever MMO, Ultima Online. Our team is uniquely experienced in pushing the threshold of gaming. We wanted to embark on a journey away from the derivative, fictionally and in terms of gameplay.

The name is Latin for 'blank slate' – it was chosen as it reflects our design philosophy. We wanted to move away from medieval fantasy, and felt space had had become quite stagnant. Every MMO since Ultima and Everquest is the same, only with better art. Tabula Rasa sets out to shake that up.

So what makes Tabula Rasa so different?

The combat system – it's very fast-paced and tactical. It's unlike most MMOs, where you almost ignore opponents in 3D space and simply try to do most damage.

In the last ten years the end-all has become character management, MMOs have essentially evolved into equipment management games.

In Tabula Rasa all the creatures are tactically aware of a variety of conditions on the battlefield. When you shoot, obstructions matter and each enemy we've made has an AI which forces you to adjust your tactics.

"Most MMOs are about the level grind and nothing else. We want you to feel like you've acomplished things"


A soldier's Epic Armor gleams.

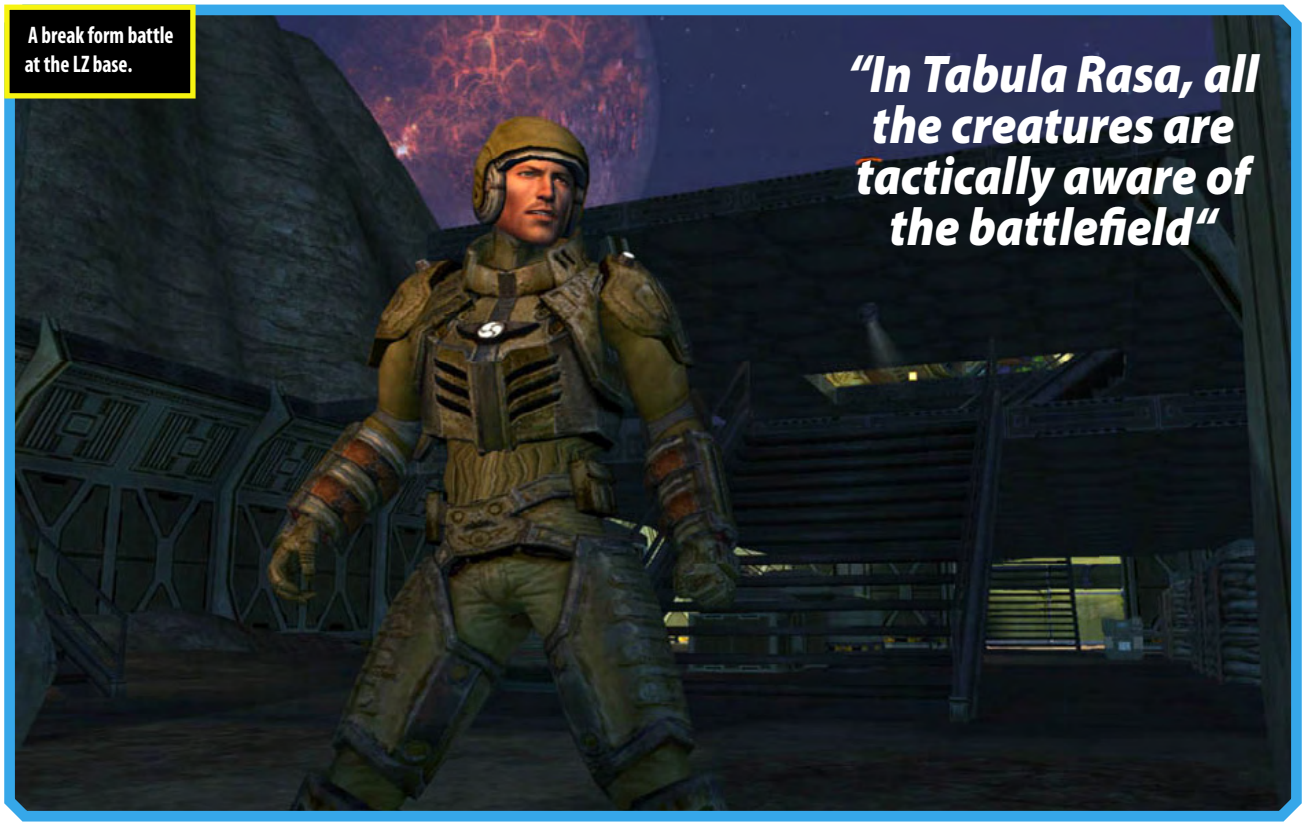
The shield drone which protects enemy units, for instance, requires you to sacrifice players to weaken it.

Most MMOs are essentially turn-based too, but our combat is actually core to the game's appeal.

There's talk of dynamic battlefields in the game – what exactly does that mean here?

In most MMOs you get farming grounds where level one monsters respawn, you get a little treasure and some experience points. You do this repeatedly until you get to level two farming grounds…

It's like a game of 'Whack-a-mole' – in these spawning grounds you kill a >


A break form battle at the LZ base.

"In Tabula Rasa, all the creatures are tactically aware of the battlefield"


Crouching behind Bane control panels, a small group of AFS battle for control.

> Interview continued

creature, then walk back and see the same creature reappear.

Nothing you do changes the battlefield or gameplay – everything just returns.

We want to make sure there's a constant ebb and flow, and that players have a significant effect.

In Tabula Rasa the NPC good guys and the enemies, called Bane, spawn in with clear strategic objectives – they'll want to move from their main bases through the player environment and try to accomplish objectives.

If you take and hold key areas, that we call control points, it changes the game. Depending on which NPCs control these points, rapid travel goes on and off, hospitals come online, automated defences such as turrets or forcefields go on- and offline.

When I come back into the game entire sections may be easy to traverse when under human control, or difficult when under Bane control. If the enemy has ownership of a control point, I can get a group of players together in a quest and claim it.

So, these control points are just like standard spawn points?

They aren't just arbitrary spots – they are strategically important. They are mystical spots on laylines, junction points of special power where factions gain benefits. They're tagged with Logos, a language of symbols that unlock telekinetic powers.

In the game's story they were developed by the Eloh to communicate with other sentient races as a pictographic language that's intended to be as easy to understand as possible.

Through them you can learn the power, for instance, to knock someone down. To do this you have to learn the Logos phrase that would add up to the meaning of pushing someone off their feet. Then use it.

It pays to learn the Logos language, then?

Yes, you can learn the language literally, to earn magical or deified powers. It's like the Biblical phrase 'let there be light…' in that spoken word and mental power manipulate reality.

The game is full of shrines, symbols, and puzzles like the 'Speak friend and enter' door puzzle in The Fellowship of the Ring where you have to learn Logos information to continue.

There must be a palpable sense of achievement once you've learnt it?

Well, unlike most MMOs which are about the level grind and pretty much nothing else we want you to feel you've accomplished a sense of greatness generally.

Look at private instances, for example, which in most MMOs give you a chance to fight the boss monster – a good reason to have an instance, so you don't have to wait turn. But this radically undersells the potential of private spaces which can be used for very detailed story-telling.

We use private spaces to culminate stories. As opposed to the boss just dying and a cataclysmic explosion destroying the city, we make you feel you've reached a pinnacle. The goal is to make something that feels like a single-player game – that makes you feel unique and as if you've actually accomplished somthing.

In other MMOs, life feels average because you are average. Not so in Tabula Rasa.

It's beginning to sounds lik you're on something of a mission to 'fix' the entire genre?

>

> Interview continued

Look at the history of MMOs… When we created Ultima Online no-one believed it would work. We had a hard time getting support for the prototype. When the prototype was finished 10,000 people signed up for the beta and after it came out it sold more than all the Ultimas combined. They said: 'This one works, but you can't do Wing Commander'.

That partly led to my exit from Origin (then owned by EA) and I retired for a year.

I was floored to see how few jumped in to dominate this fantastic new opportunity in MMOs – the only exception being Sony Online Entertainment with Everquest. I'm a fan of World Of Warcraft, but from a critical standpoint it's extremely derivative.

How can you really break away from the development conventions you pretty much invented and which have been mimicked so relentlessly?

By using ethical parables. I've always enjoyed including features that challenge play habits in my games, and – from Ultima IV – features that challenge personal beliefs in a way that I find makes the game more meaningful in your life. Very few people have chosen to do that.



The world is black, white, and some grey too.

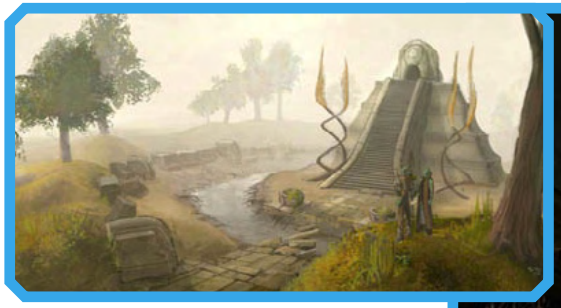
Yet ethical choice is one of the only things that takes games away from the slot machine game mechanics. I want mission arcs that are purposefully unclear, where the outcome of an action is not clear.

In Tabula Rasa, someone might say "Take this piece of person to person 'a'". And along the way you might bump into someone who says, "no, take it to person 'b'". Each person will happily take the paper, and as they do so they'll set in motion a chain of events that will have ramifications that you have to live with and observe.

But there's no moral there – you might as well give people the option to fork either left or right on a road…

Ok. I'll give you an example from earlier in the game… You walk into a new base and meet the base commander for the first time.

Since you're new to his base, he knows you've not been influenced by people in his staff, so he asks you to help him out.





A corridor inside a Bane base reveals the biomechanical nature of their architecture.

"MMOs have become equipment management… with whack-a-mole fighting"

He tells you there are some drugs being stolen from the infirmary – stimulants. He invites you to let him know if you find out any information about who might be responsible. Shortly after, at the infirmary, a character asks if you want to make a quick buck by dealing in these stolen drugs, offering you more money than you could make by any other means in the game.

It's funny to watch how people react – most turn the dealer in. But instead of rushing to a conclusion, instead of making a decision based on a situation that appears to be simple on the surface, it might pay to slow down…

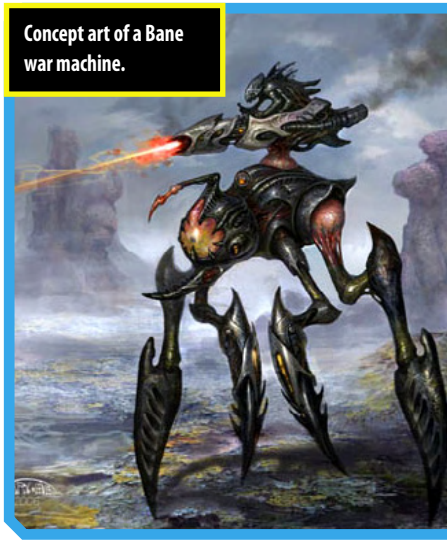
It turns out the base commander isn't hunky dory – he has own agenda, he's not above board, and, besides, this drug is not being used recreationally. It's deployed in the middle of battle when fighters who can't keep awake face catastrophe.

So how does this moral tale end?

The outcome of your decision, right and wrong, is that you learn not to pass judgment immediately – this makes things interesting. What you decide *will* change the way the NPCs think of you, too, which means that once again you're having a measurable impact on the world.

So what else will sell Tabula Rasa to us?

It's the first and only MMO in which you can load, save and clone characters. You don't have to start over to experience the game with another character class – a fact we saw as an opportunity for people to exit other massively multiplayer games.



Concept art of a Bane war machine.

We've created a class tree structure that allows you to develop, say, from a recruit to a specialist soldier, commando or ranger, then specialise further so if you're a ranger, for instance, you can become a spy or sniper.

You'll want to experience different specialties, so all your clones are part of the same family with the same inventories, which once again makes Tabula Rasa akin to a solo gaming experience.

Tell us something no-one else knows about Tabula Rasa...

I think the world is full of none black and white issues. Even the best of us have regrets, shame or weaknesses. It's part of the human condition, and Tabula Rasa is one of the few games that reflects that.

>Inbox

Type sweet nothings into our ears. Mail the 'zine at pcgzine@gamerzines.com.

READER FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of PC games or PCGZine!

YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT STARCRAFT 2

THE GAME LOOKS AMAZING! Keeping what people loved from the first StarCraft, but adding content to make it worthy of the name "StarCraft 2". StarCraft has never looked so beautiful, I could cry. This is how a sequel should look like, and it's not even completed yet. I can't wait.

> VL

Don't miss Issue 8
Out 26th July
Sign up now!



StarCraft 2. We've waited a decade for this.

I THINK ALL BLIZZARD CARES ABOUT is the Korean players and this is who they are really making the game for.

> Tyler Smith

> PCGZine says: Well, we're inclined to agree with the former opinion. StarCraft 2 looks absolutely awesome, and certainly full of international appeal. The idea that Blizzard is just making it for Korea is absurd.

AND ON CALL OF DUTY 4…

THE IS GAME CAN NOT ARRIVE SOON enough. This will be one of the next gen premire games like Crysis and teh superb Halo 3.

I believe that you were the first to preview this game. Great Job.

> Doug

NO! WW2 ALWAYS… If I want modern weapons, I can get a mod for cod2 if im really hard-up, or I could switch to Battlefield 2142… But WW2 shooters are the best, and it's a shame that Call of Duty is going all modern.

Maybe I'm just hooked on WW2: I'm an older gamer, almost 50, and WW2 is kind of a hobby. The new game mimics the current world too much, I play to get away from that stuff!

www.theoldergamers.com FTW.

> Porky

> PCGZine says: There's plenty of shooters old and new to satisfy anyone's proclivities. CoD 4 isn't just about setting though – it's bringing a lot of genuinely new stuff to the table, and we can't wait.

PATCHWORK QUILTS

Make games better after release.



Boiling Point –even better now it has patches.

THERE WAS A GAME CALLED BOILING POINT, a game lambasted and given low scores in many quarters for being bugged, and yet with the 2.0 patch added a marvellous open ended RPG/FPS/Adventure game in it's own right now exists – and yet nobody will know, as the 1.0 version reviews will never be edited and republished!

I would suggest that PCGZine takes a different route and re-reviews games like Boiling Point with the 2.0 patch included, as well as re-reviews of other games released in the year or two before you started publishing! Especially from the smaller publishers that just do not get the media attention, like Star Rangers 2, Darwinia, etc.

In general it would be good if you re-looked at any game that you reviewed as 'could be great with the fixes suggested' or some such quote, a few months later with the patches (assume they were written!) added to see if the game now stood up for itself and indeed given a score upgrade (or downgrade if the patches didn't fix the problems.) PC gaming is not the movie business. Reviewing the 1.0 version of some games and never re-visiting it can be a total shame. Games that are only on the radar slightly would also benefit from these re-reviews. Was the game as good as first thought on a second look?

Was the game supported, got the bugs fixed and became a totally brilliant game, like Boiling Point? You can count on one hand the number of truly open-ended RPG's that have been released in the last five years.

They are hard to write, cost huge amounts of time/money to make and can give 100's of hours of great entertainment! Given that, Boiling Point has been really hard done by, and even STALKER will not get the attention it deserves totally. We need a different way - maybe PCGZine can be in the vanguard of that change? Why do we have exclusively 1.0 reviews in PC gaming media?

> John Ingram

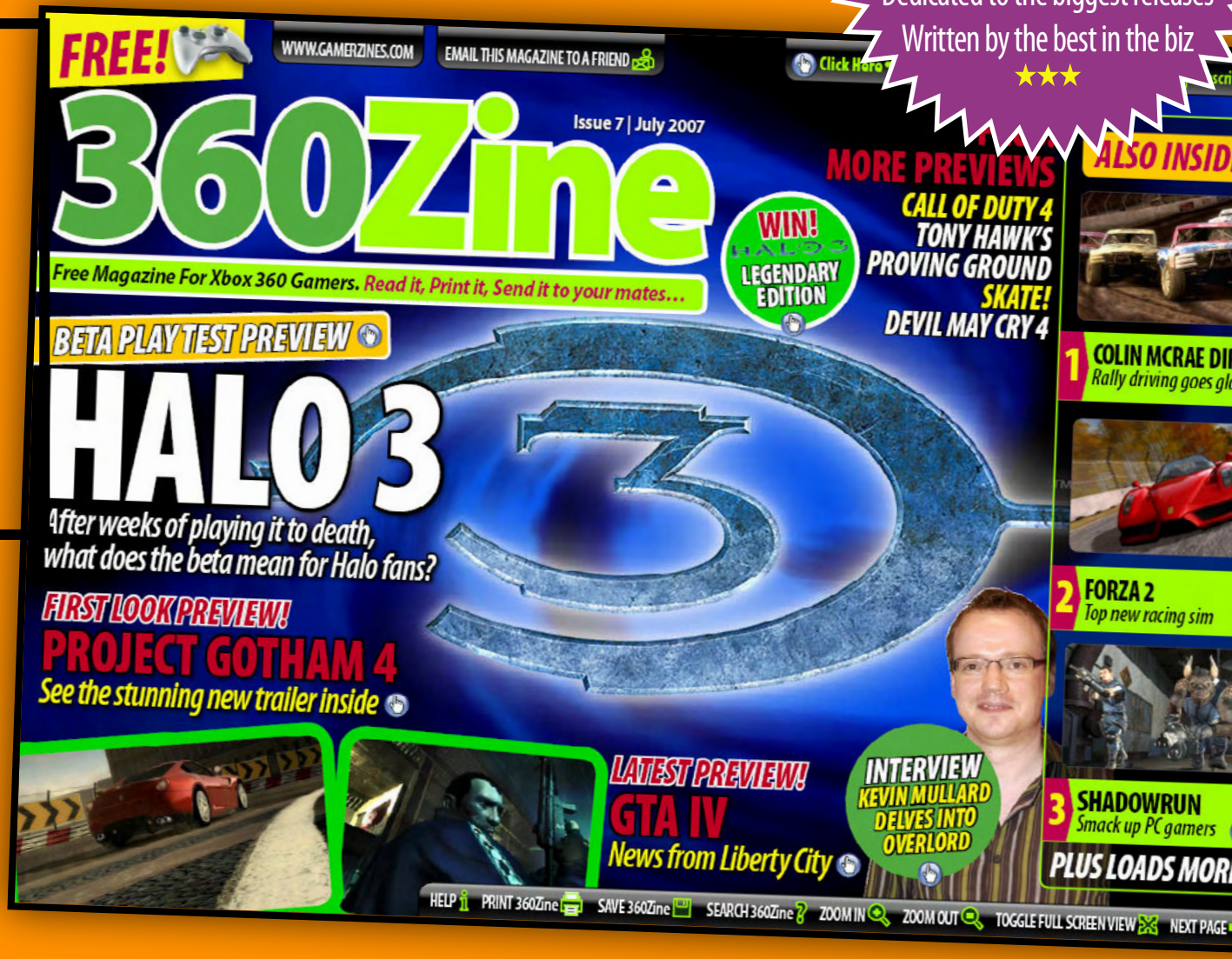


Call of Duty 4 has ruffled a few die hard vets feathers.

360Zine Issue 7 Out Now

★★★
360Zine
Completely free of charge
Passionate about Xbox 360
Dedicated to the biggest releases
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 7

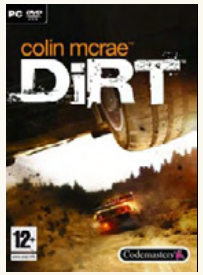
INSIDE HALO 3
The biggest game of the year uncovered
What did the beta tell us and your chance to win a copy of Halo 3 Legendary Edition

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DEVIL MAY CRY 4 **CALL OF DUTY 4**

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Colin McRae: Dirt

He's not Lewis Hamilton, though, is he?

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Heritage: Colin McRae series, TOCA Race Driver
Link: www.codemasters.com/dirt
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.0GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, GeForce 6800

It seems these days that we're only happy if we're shooting someone in the face with a rocket launcher. War sells, and we love it, be it be dropping bombs on battalions of Nazis or filling aliens with plasma holes, we just can't get enough. In fact, nowadays, gaming is a tough affair for the squeamish. Sometimes, just sometimes, it's nice to cut down on casual genocide for a while and invest a few hours in gaming's less violent offerings, and what better way than to get behind the wheel of an 800bhp mechanical monster and innocently tear up the local countryside?

"You'll need a fairly beefy PC to play this, but it does make the most of it"

While dishing out copious amounts of rural pollution continues to be the standard fare, Codemasters' latest collaboration with a certain Mr McRae takes the series in a new direction and expands on the previously Rally-centric titles. No longer are you limited to battling against the clock in your Subaru Impreza, with the welcome inclusion of head-to-head racing in the likes of Super Buggies or Big Rigs, theres more to Dirt than basic rallying.


The local binmen won awards for speedy service.


Hence, the game's title.

Along with the new direction comes an entirely new engine which has Codemasters execs and PRs bouncing around like toddlers at a Toys R Us sale. The 'Neon Engine' has been in the making for the best part of two years, and to be honest, it shows. Dirt's visuals can be downright stunning. Sunlight, shadows, flora, they're up there with the best we've seen to date. As you'd expect, you need a fairly beefy PC to handle all of this loveliness, but it really does make the most of the hardware.

Crash of the titans

One of the Neon engine's most impressive elements is how it deals with your vehicle's damage. There's none of this power-sliding into a 12 tonne boulder and accelerating away with some chipped paint and a cracked wing mirror. The Neon engine truly makes you feel the pain. When a

>



That's why they stagger the start of rallies usually.

NEON, THE ENGINE THAT SHINES

Beneath the bonnet of Dirt's beauty



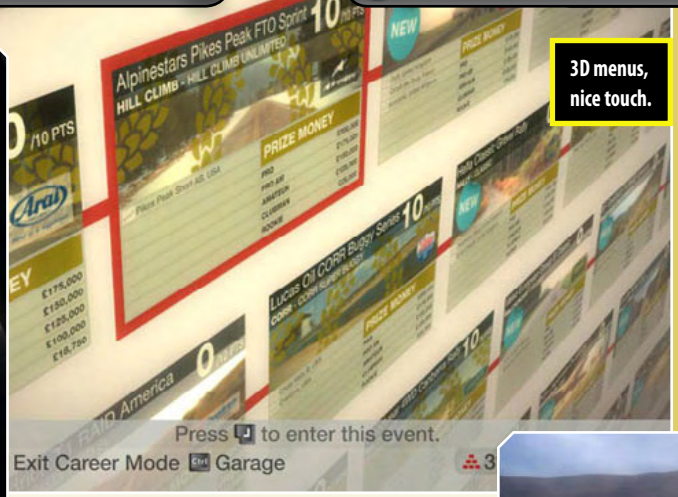
Damage **Cars** **Tracks**

Damage

Deform your car in any way possible. When collisions look so damn good, it's tough not to partake in a touch of intentional destruction. Peel off the spoiler, smash the windows, lose the bonnet and smash up your gearbox. Glorious!



While doing his physics degree, Carl had a weekend job.



3D menus, nice touch.

> Colin McRae continued

simple driver's error results in any sort of collision, no matter how negligible, you're going to have to deal with the consequences. Vehicle damage is far more than just an aesthetic worry, too. Crash head first into a barrier, and you may damage or destroy your radiator, leaving a good chance that your engine is going to overheat. Rocket into a tree, and you may very well write your car off altogether.

Physics and handling are also satisfying. While Dirt is a little more arcadey than it would have you believe, you can feel the difference between not only different types of vehicles, but individual cars within each category. It feels great when you pull off a perfect powerslide, or take a corner too aggressively with a top heavy truck, leading to nail-biting two-wheel moment. There are plenty of control options ready to tweak, just make sure that you have a decent wheel at hand. Using the arrow keys to play Dirt is like buying a Rolls Royce just to tow your caravan to Devon.

Dirt's only handling problem rears it's ugly head when you hit the brakes. Rallying relies heavily upon precision braking. Brake too early and your competitors take the lead, brake too late or too lightly and you'll find that theres no life-saving barrier between you and a short flight over the side >



My other car is a Micra…

MORE TO MCRAE…
…than standard Rallying



HILL CLIMB Push your car to the limit in an unflat-out race to the top



CROSSOVER Head-to-head against a single opponent on a 2-lane track



RALLYCROSS European circuit races, both on and off-road



CORR Champion Off-Road Racing, complete with super buggies and trucks



RALLY RAID Head-to-head American off-road racing

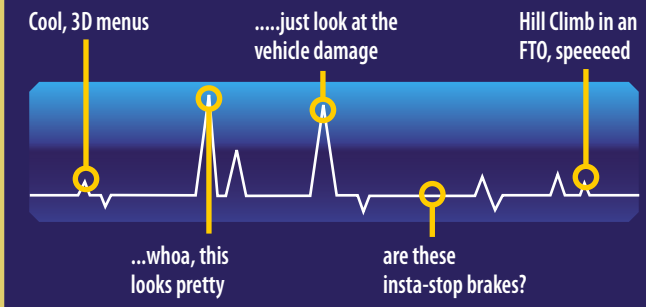


You do know you can fail your MOT on emissions?



This really is the most beautiful racing game we've ever seen.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*

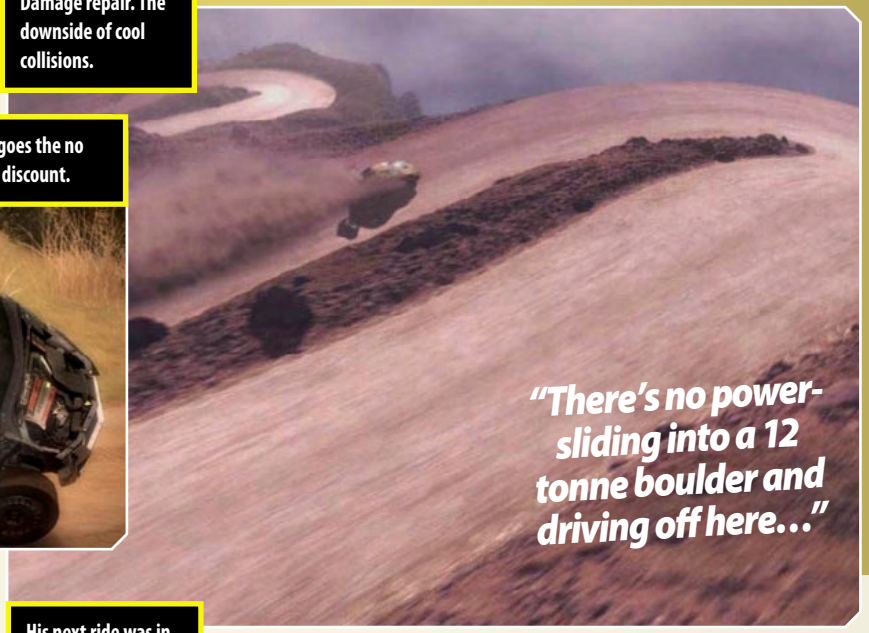




Damage repair. The downside of cool collisions.



There goes the no claims discount.



His next ride was in the back of a hearse.

> Colin McRae continued

of a sheer cliff. So, it's more than a little frustrating that Dirt's braking system is so unrealistic and counter-intuitive. Hurtling 100 mph towards a right angle turn should result in you wrapping your car around the nearest oak. In Dirt however, just slam your foot on the brake peddle and you're guaranteed to come to a perfect stop in the blink of an eye. It feels great, but true sim-heads will balk at its flagrant disregard for the laws of nature.

This certainly isn't a game breaking problem (no pun intended), and you'll soon get used to it, but it reduces the danger factor of approaching obstacles at speed and seems to encourage reckless peddle-to-the-metal driving as opposed to cautious-but-courageous wheelmanship.

No room for passengers

Dirt's other downfall is it's "mulitplayer" option. Those of you itching to jump inside a Super Buggy and battle it out amongst your friends online will be sorely disappointed. Codemasters' promise of "online races with up to 100 people at the same time" is verging on a breach of trade description. What you're really getting for your money is the chance to race solo, and compare your time with 100 other players.

Sure it's online, and technically it involves multiple players, but "online mutliplayer" it isn't. It's little more than a live leaderboard. Multiplayer aside, though, Dirt is a great game. Sure it has the odd handling problem, and its limited Car Setup options do little to hide the fact that it's more arcade wheel-spinner than hardcore racing sim, but Dirt is just downright fun to play. Add the fact that you've got difficulty levels to suit casual and experienced racers alike, and a number of different game modes which provide much needed variety to the genre, and you end up with one of the best racers around.

Darren Hepworth

PCGZine Verdict

Diiiiirty, but in a very, very good way

- Gorgeous visuals
- Nice variety of modes
- Handling isn't perfect

88%



Shadowrun

Microsoft's crusade for a unified platform begins here.

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: FASA Studio
Heritage: Crimson Skies, MechWarrior
Link: www.shadowrun.com
OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
3.2GHz CPU (dual-core recommended), GeForce 6800, 2GB RAM

For many years now, there's been an increasingly vicious war of words brewing between console and PC gamers over which is the superior platform. PC gamers, with their mouse and keyboard combo flaunt their precision accuracy in the face of the console collective, while console gamers reject this, claiming that it's the skill of the player, not the control scheme, that will decide which is the mightiest platform. As the first game to allow for 360 v PC cross-platform multiplayer, Shadowrun gives you a way to finally settle the score.

Don't I know you from somewhere?

And, we're pleased to say, the cross-platform setup actually works incredibly well. After creating your gamercard (a term that anyone who's used the 360 will be familiar with), and signing up for a Live account, finding and joining a cross-platform multiplayer game is effortlessly easy. Although the PC's accuracy has been compromised slightly to try and make the game a bit fairer (your reticule is huge), Shadowrun is actually a better game for it, as it makes each and every contest that much more hard fought.

With no single player mode to back it up, Shadowrun is relying on its multiplayer mode to stand on its own, so it's somewhat surprising that the selection of modes on offer is rather limited. There are only three types of game to choose from, two of which are simple capture the flag style contests. Surely someone somewhere could have spend a bit more time thinking up ways to play?

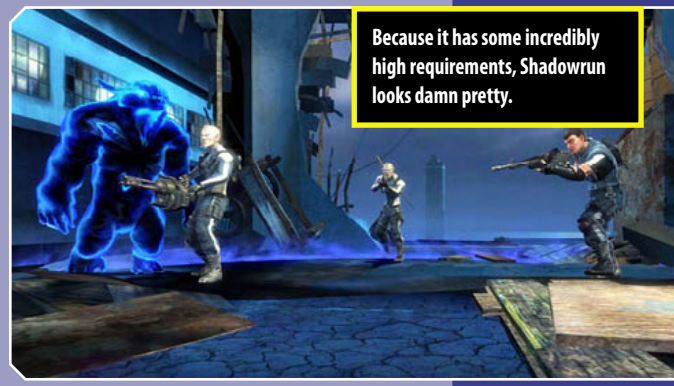
However, while the selection of modes may be disappointing, the ingenious gameplay on offer in Shadowrun certainly isn't. Letting you play as a variety of different character classes (Human, Elf, Dwarf or Troll), each with their own set of well thought out strengths, weaknesses and special abilities, Shadowrun has been masterfully balanced, and aimed squarely at the team player.

Even cooler than the way each character class meticulously meshes with the others is the range of magical and technological abilities you have on hand. From the tree of life (which, exactly as it sounds, is a tree that gives life to your team mates by healing them), to the ability to teleport through solid objects, such as walls, roofs, ceilings, and other detritus that's scattered around the levels, the special abilites make Shadowrun really stand out over the usual Counter-Strike clone and call to mind the superlative Jedi Knight 2. Thanks to the obviously high amount of play-testing time that's gone into this game, they're all fun to use. >



Elves can heal themselves when in cover.


He's on fire.


Because it has some incredibly high requirements, Shadowrun looks damn pretty.


Onward, to glory!

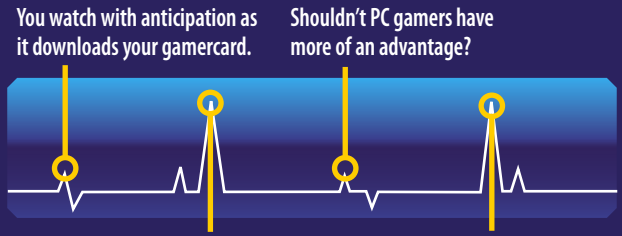

Lets stand next to the explosive barrels. Yes, that's a good idea.

>Shadowrun continued

While it may not have the same amount of depth as a game such as Battlefield 2, the multi-faceted gameplay, and the ability to play cross-platform with your 360 owning mates make Shadowrun an appealing prospect. Unfortunately, the lack of modes, and few levels stop this from being a must-buy, but with the right group of people playing, Shadowrun can be a lot of fun. Whether we agree with Microsoft's restriction of online play or not, the fact remains that, if you have the PC to run it (and Shadowrun is one of the most demanding games we've played), Shadowrun is well worth a try. ● *Ian Morris*



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



METHODICAL MADMEN
How the bits of Live come together



GfwL? WTF? BBQ? | **You've got a friend** | **Achievement Unlocked**

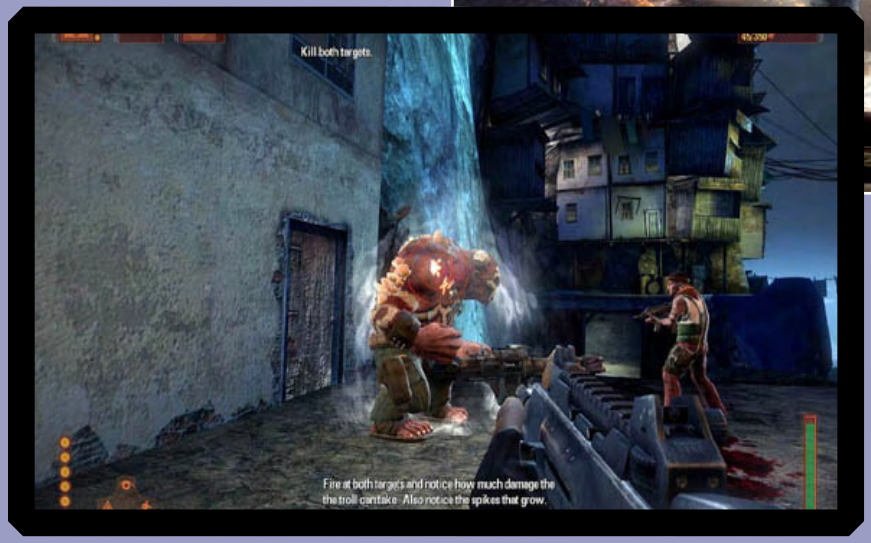
GfwL? WTF? BBQ?

GfwL, or Games for Windows Live is Microsoft's vision for online gaming on Vista. As part of the 'vision', if you're looking to play cross-platform against 360 owners, you'll have to take out a £40 a year subscription to the service. As there's only one game at the moment that currently supports GfwL, we doubt many of you will be rushing out to buy it – the good news is you can still play PC v PC for free, and if you have an Xbox Live Gold Membership for 360, it can be carried over.

360Zine

SHADOWRUN TOO! 360Zine reviews the game from the other side of the fence.







PCGZine Verdict

The most fun you can have with a Troll outside of WoW

- Multi-tiered gameplay
- Cross-platform's well integrated
- No single-player

78%



Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

They may have done the Monster Mash, but this isn't quite the Graveyard Smash.

Publisher: Southpeak
Developer: Artificial Studios
Heritage: None
Link: www.monster-madness.com
ETA: 22nd June

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.5GHz CPU, 512 MB RAM, 128MB 3D card

You can almost count the number of PC games that have allowed for same-machine multiplayer on one hand. Off the top of our head, we can think of Worms, Lego Racers, and Lego Star Wars, but then the list begins to dry up. On consoles, this concept is pretty much par for the course, but for some reason, developers have been shying away from allowing same-machine multiplayer on PC for years. Letting you and up to three friends battle undead hordes together from the same machine, dropping in and out at any time, Monster Madness : Battle for Suburbia is the exception that proves the rule.

"Boss characters and vehicle based levels add some variety"


Electric zombies. Yum.

Camembert

A top-down/third person shooter in the vein of Smash TV, Monster Madness is as cheesy as they come. Taking references from popular (read: American) nerd culture, Monster Madness is littered with subtle, and not so subtle links to everything from Zombies ate my Neighbours to Star Trek. There are four separate characters to choose from, each of which has been heavily stereotyped (Goth girl, Barbie, skater boy and nerd), and comes complete with annoying voice.

The gameplay mechanics in Monster Madness are simple – find an object in the game world, pick it up, and impale it in the head of whatever undead creature is shuffling towards you. If scavenging isn't your thing, you can also buy weapons from the game's "shop", which allows you access to the game's more impressive weapons, including a nail-gun, and a CD launcher, that fires CDs as buzz saws. Boss characters and vehicle based levels help add some variety to proceedings, but ultimately, they still fail to disguise that this is a really basic hack and slash.

If you have three friends willing to play with you, Monster Madness can be a real riot – just don't buy it to play on your own.

Ian Morris




Did you know - Monster Madness uses the Unreal 3 Engine? Hard to believe, isn't it


Certain Versus modes are also playable offline on the same machine.

YOU RANG?

Anyone feeling left out?

While the offline multiplayer complement of Monster Madness is impressive enough, the game also provides a robust online mode to help keep all players happy. Allowing for up to 16 players in numerous game types, including CTF and Deathmatch, the online mode is possibly even more frantic than offline. With a strong emphasis on teamplay, a lot of the maps even include multi-person vehicles, which allow you to turn a standard hovercraft into a veritable gunship!

PCGZine Verdict

Simple, but a fun slash 'em up nonetheless.

- Cheesy, but not stinky
- Four-player same machine co-op
- Rubbish in single-player

74%



Usually when someone loses millions, it's on the stock market.



Publisher: Pinnacle
Developer: Introversion
Heritage: Uplink, Darwinia
Link: www.defconvideogame.com
ETA: 15th June

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
P3-600, GeForce 2, 128MB RAM

Defcon

And when the bomb drops, I'll be the first to know.

This little homage to the famous 80s movie Wargames, was released last year on Valve's Steam download service. Thanks to its success there, though, it's been picked up by Pinnacle for a retail release and is about to hit store shelves in an attractive box. If you haven't had the pleasure of playing it yet, now's as good a time as any to get involved.

The premise is deceptively simple – as is the look of the game. A vector graphic world is illuminated only by the outlines of a map, with cities across the five continents picked out as square blobs. As the game begins, so does a countdown timer – which ticks away the seconds until the next level of global alert is reached. This is a strictly prescribed limit – you can't slow it down or stop the inevitable approach of all out nuclear war.

Keeping radar stations alive is vital to victory.



Mutually assured

Before that happens, you must rush to place your limited supply of aircraft, submarines, navy, radar defences and, of course, ICBM silos into the best strategy positions and manoeuvre past enemy defences to rain nuclear death on their citizens. Everything seems so easy – until you actually play a game.

Tactically, Defcon is more about managing your loses than destroying your enemy. Air defences are so effective that sacrificing fighters and cruise missiles to distract them is vital. Navies are easily picked off if you're not paying attention and switching an airfield between bomber strike and scrambling the fighters for defence takes precious minutes.

To top it off, when your silos open for firing, they leave a hole in your missile shield just wide enough for a well timed counter-attack to decimate your population.

On no account is the game as two-dimensional as its styling would have you believe – and the online game browser means you don't have to fight AIs all the time either. It's an excellent showcase for independent game design – getting more things right than many high profile commercial releases. But ultimately, it's not quite as perfect as its simplicity suggests. For a start, the single map is highly unbalanced. Compact Europe, for example, is much easier to defend than the giant expanse of Africa. Once battle begins it's often impossible to turn the tide of a game when it starts to go wrong – if all the other players gang up on you, there's little you can do to hold on. And it's more expensive than the download version. ● ***Adam Oxford***

THE OTHERS

No, it's not Lost. You might have though.



The best way to play through Defcon's slowly unfolding action is, of course, with other players. The online game browser is excellent and you can ally then, ultimately, betray your fellow players as the ebb and fall of your fortune demands. Because you *will* have to stab your friends in the back, it adds a cunning and Machiavellian streak to the game.

The wider community, too, is worth taking note of. Although Defcon only comes with one map, there are many mods available for adding game modes and environments. From an abstract space war, to three brains fighting to a more realistic look for the Earth map, it's well worth checking out the link from the game's homepage.

PCGZine Verdict

A game with no winners, only those who lose least.

- Simple
- Yet tough
- Unbalanced map

84%



Dawnspire

So you've never heard of Dawnspire, right? Don't worry, you're certainly not alone.

Publisher: Silent Grove Studios
Developer: Silent Grove Studios
Heritage: Hyperium
Link: www.dawnspire.com
ETA: Out Now

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card

Silent Grove's "team-based online action" point-and-click RPG seems to have been largely ignored by any sort of hype machine at all. More than a little worrying for an online-only title which ultimately relies upon the presence of a strong and active community.

At first, things seem perfectly normal. You create your account, choose your class from the usual mage/warrior/healer/rogue types, pick your skills and spells, and finally name your character. However, things begin to get more than a little broken when you join a server for your first game, and realise that the vast majority of your team mates (and the opposition for that matter) are in fact AI controlled bots. As a result, Dawnspire becomes less of a Player Vs Player affair and more of a tedious online bot-match. If you're looking for some great multiplayer battles, you're going to have to convince your friends to pick up a copy of the game.

"Less of a player-versus-player affair, more of an online botmatch"

Progression is 9/10s of the law

In an effort to create an easily accessible pick-up-and-play experience, the developers have opted for an all-are-equal stance in terms of character advancement. There's no levelling up, no experience points, no grind.

Which is revolutionary. But what you're left with is a very basic, Diablo inspired, point-and-click affair, with traditional character advancement and solo play sacrificed and replaced with frantic Capture-the-Flags. Combat is incredibly fast paced. You're usually either dead or victorious within a matter of seconds. Mastery of Dawnspire is as much about quick reflexes as quick thinking.

All in all, Dawnspire isn't a totally lost cause. The frantic pace of battle combined with the simplistic pick-up and play nature of the game are bound to attract a small but loyal following. Unfortunately, this following is currently far too small to provide any sort of fulfilling online gaming experience, and with the total abandonment of any real character progression, longevity doesn't appear to be one of its strengths. ● ***Darren Hepworth***


Capture the Wotsit.


Dwarves, always good for starting campfires.


As if running with scissors wasn't bad enough.


Reavers, great at handstands, poor at subtlety

IN THE COMPANY OF FRIENDS

With friends like these...

Your AI team mates are of little use to you at all. Your bot-friends treat you like the school kid who got his trainers from the market. They seem to have a mission in life, and it in no way involves you. Regardless of the odds you're fighting, or the assistance you need in securing a relic (Dawnspire's interpretation of flags), your bot allies will courageously run on by, leaving you to die in horrible ways.



PCGZine Verdict

Basic but broken bot-fest.

- Instantly playable
- Bots, bots, bots
- No progression

60%



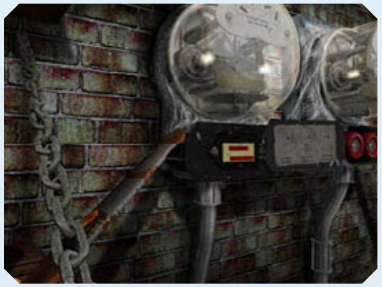
Flyboys

Publisher: G-Stars
Developer: iEntertainment
Price: £19.99

Based on the film of the same name (no, we haven't heard of it either), Flyboys is a WW1 flight sim like the PC used to be brimming with back in the "good old days". With thirteen missions to play through, and a vague attempt at a storyline tying them all together, the game can be a lot of fun, for the short time it lasts. With an accurate flight model powering the simulation, mannable turrets and gunner positions, and a full MMO flight sim experience (it's made by the same people as Warbirds), if you're willing to pay the monthly fee, Flyboys gives you reason to dig out the goggles and bomber jacket again. Tally ho!

- Realistic flight model
- Varied missions
- Online costs extra

We miss flight sims like this **78%**



Bad Mojo

Publisher : XIDER
Developer : Pulse Entertainment
Price : £9.99

Originally released in 1995, Bad Mojo is, quite literally, an old-school adventure game. Placing you in the shoes (or should that be shell) of a man who's been transformed into a cockroach, it's up to you to delve around the gritty scenery, and ultimately turn yourself back into a human being. As you're playing as a cockroach, the game has a dark appeal, and you'll come across many things in the underbelly of the city that'll make your stomach turn. Sadly, the graphics have barely been touched, but that doesn't spoil the game's unique appeal.

- Decent puzzles
- Original concept
- Awful graphics

Good Mojo **76%**



Pacific Storm: Allies

Publisher: Excalibur
Developer: Lesta Studio
Price: £29.99

Letting you take control of ships, boats and aeroplanes in numerous Pacific conflicts, the premise of Pacific Storm: Allies isn't too different to that of Battlestations: Midway. However, where Battlestations drew the line, Pacific Storm lets you do so much more – rather than just taking part in arcade battles, you can also control the strategy in-between the missions via a map of Europe, in an ambitious blend of RTS, grand strategy and simulation. The game is let down by a lack of polish, but if you can work through the unfriendly interface, you'll be pleasantly rewarded by this.

- Cockpit views on aircraft!
- Dynamic campaign
- Not as polished as Midway

Bali Ho! **80%**



Aura 2

Publisher : DreamCatcher
Developer : Streko-Graphics
Price : £19.99

The cunningly named sequel to 2004's Aura, Aura 2 is a generic point-and-click game with a fantasy setting. The plot revolves around a set of magical rings, and, strangely, tetrahedrons, that you happen to have in your possession, which grant the user "unlimited power and immortality". Coming with all of the fancy pre-rendered graphics, obscure puzzles, and hackneyed plots you could hope for, sadly, Aura 2 never does anything to elevate itself above mediocre. When combined with the game's love for ridiculously complex, and often incomprehensible puzzles, you have a game that's average at best.

- Luscious graphics
- Rubbish plot
- Obscure puzzles

One puzzle to confuse them all **61%**



Woody Ball

Publisher : sunXvogy Studio
Developer : HiHiSoft
Price : £7.50 (online download)

Woody Ball has one of the most original concepts we've seen in a long time – it's a puzzle game, where you have to re-arrange balls. OK, so when we said "original", we actually meant "overused", but still, Woody Ball does have a few unique ideas. Instead of moving pieces directly, when you click on a ball, each ball surrounding it will shuffle around either clockwise, or anti-clockwise, and this can take a bit of getting used to. Sadly, the price seems a bit excessive, but Woody Ball remains strangely addictive – useful for winding down after a stressful game of Counter Strike.

- Strangely addictive
- Good for winding down
- Nothing really original

Spin me round **69%**

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★★★

Welcome

Another month, another MMO announced as completely free to play.

There's another new MMO coming from NCSoft, and the Korean outfit has surprised us all with an unusual price structure. The new game, Dungeon Runners, will be free to download and free to play, so players can access large chunks of the game's content or pay $4.99 a month for a "membership level" which opens up a whole new world. This is a system that the ever popular RuneScape has been using for quite some time now, is it a wise move for NCSoft?

Is this the future structuring of MMO gaming?

Dan Muir, Community Editor



CLAN INTERVIEW

They are Exiled

They shoot, they steal, but they're not pirates. Oh no.



This man will shoot you and steal your stuff. Sometimes.

Exiled. is one of the most successful Eve Online corporations (the term that Eve uses for Guild or clan) to date. Consisting of players from all over the world, their strict no bullshit attitude and love of PvP (player versus player) action, they're certainly a force to be reckoned with. Oh, and they're not pirates... apparently.

Can you give me some more information on yourself and other members of your coporation?

Haha, of course I can. My name is Detleff Mellies and I'm an 18-year old scholar from the beautiful lands of the Netherlands. In EVE Online I am nicknamed Aero089. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Exiled., one of the few corporations that focus on shooting other players and reaping the rewards of whatever they were carrying. We're not pirates. Most of the time, hahaharrr (Shouldn't that be "yaaaar?" – Ed).

For someone who is totally new to the Eve Online world, how does your in-game character progress and advance?

EVE is different in a way that you do not have to kill monsters all day to gain 'experience'. In EVE you need to learn skills in order to use weaponry and ships or to maximize profits in trade and industry. These skills train over time, even when you're not currently logged in and playing. Because the game doesn't need you to stay at your computer 24/7 to progress, EVE has many adult players with lives and jobs and so on.

Spending more time in-game does mean that you can potentially earn more ISK (the in-game currency) though, allowing you to fly more expensive equipment or to rig your body with implants that improve your speed, damage et cetera... If your ship is blown up however, you will need to buy a new one including its weaponry and other fittings. Flying the top-technology stuff costs quite a bit of money, thereby rewarding those with more time to spend or those with a sharp sense of business and opportunity.

What's your corporation's main goal and how do you fit in within the game's political system?

Politics in EVE are very volatile. Obviously it's a game and people know they can't die. However, with territorial conquest where you can lose billions of ISK in investments and assets in less than a week's time, you'll think twice about taunting that enemy of yours with his 150-man battleship fleet and a handful of dreadnoughts.

Exiled. is snake-like. We want to have fun, and we want to be free of ties and outside rules in order to have that little bit of fun. Whereas some people of the EVE community would frown upon a heavily armed ship blasting away a defenceless transport ship, we just don't care. We want our members to enjoy themselves.

Obviously such an unstable corporate vision can be very messy in the political climate as other parties want to know what they will be dealing with. That is where I come in. I broker deals, create opportunities and constantly plan ahead to keep our activities versatile. Take a mercenary contract up north for a week or two, organize a logistics operation to move assets down south to wreak havoc on an old enemy, then raid alliance-controlled territory and try to catch a lonely pilot drifting around in their expensive battleship.

Does Eve Online attract many women?

It is funny that you ask, because EVE is the first game I have seen in which women are not afraid to reveal themselves. In fact, so far I have had the pleasure of working with at least five women already. During the Easter weekend this year I even got to meet one of them, she was the head of logistics operations of our alliance back in the day. A mind-boggling job if you consider that there are 1,200 members each with their own needs and desires.

There is also a "Women Gamers of EVE" community in which women can freely talk about girl stuff, free from the prying eyes and testosterone-loaded comments of men.

"Such an unstable corporate vision can be very messy in the political climate of Eve..."

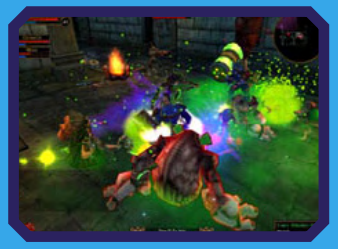
What's the future for MMOs?

If you look at it as it is now, Single Player is starting to die out. Human nature is competitive, we want to excel, be better than our fellow humans. Beating a computer-controlled entity is no fun, but imagining the face of your nemesis is. Online gaming is here to stay and will undoubtedly become the main focus of all gaming industry sooner or later as every household becomes connected to the internet.

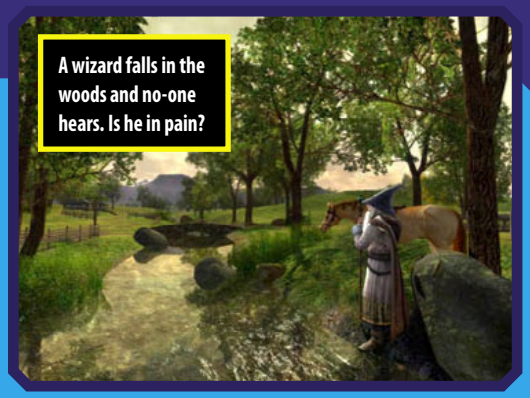
A big thanks to Detleff for taking the time to answer our questions. If you'd like to pop along and join the Exiled corporation, point your browser www.eve-exiled.com.

What's hot in the MMO gaming world?

Dungeon Runners



NCSoft's latest release sees a free to download and free to play structure in place. Players can pay $4.99pm for premium content, items and features. Featuring a variety of character archetypes, this is a focus on action with limited penalties for death. Endless gold, weapons, armor and magic items available to claim after defeating hordes of monsters is promised, is it enough to keep your interest?
www.dungeonrunners.com



Lord of the Rings Online

The first free expansion for LOTRO is available now. Featuring over 100 new quests and a totally new area (Evendim) full of great loot. There's also updates to the music system and even new collectable armour sets, so this expansion is sure to get all you hobbits excited. Also, check out the recent midsummer festival celebrations…

World of Warcraft

Kicking off on June 12th (co-inciding with a small patch) is the second season of the Arena. Team ratings have all been reset to 1500, so if you only got going towards the end of the last season, there's chance to start afresh. Blood will be spilt and rewards can be yours. Are you ready to fight?
www.wow-europe.com



Gods of War

IGG recently unveiled this ancient world MMORPG, which promises the player fascinating plots, esthetical scenes, customized character development and an exciting combat mode. The preview website was launched on the 20th of May to tempt visitors into the Hellenistic civilisation.
gw.igg.com



What's not?



Dirty Dancing

Codemaster's recently announced a game based on the film Dirty Dancing. Quite how this game will be implemented and how it'll play online is yet to be announced. Will you be having the time of your life?

Updates & Patches



Star Wars Galaxies Chapter 6: Masters of the Wild

A new update for all you budding Jedi knights for SWG allows players to create, raise, train and trade more than 150 creatures in game, the Beast Master System. It basically will allow the player to hatch, train and sell their creations but is it a case of too little too late for the much maligned MMO?
station.sony.com

Eve Online

The massively successful multiplayer space opera that is Eve has just been updated with part two of the free expansion pack, Revelations. It's the seventh major update to the game that players have been given for free by the developers, CCP.

There's a whole host of changes introduced, including a completely new Rookie areas for those new to Eve, which provides a safe zone for pilots to train at their own pace before being shunted out into the wilder regions of deep space.

For established players, Sovereignty scope has been completely overhauled, with four new tiers – Territory, Protectorate, PRovince and Constellation Capital – to change the dynamics of ownership and diplomacy, with a range of new intermediate goals on the way to greatness.

As well as some basic engine optimisation stuff for real-world performance increases, there are also changes to the management side, allowing you to overclock your hardware in game too. *www.eve-online.com*



World of Warcraft

The latest client (2.1.0) update adds the Black Temple instance, which is steeped in history and demonically corrupted orcs. Promising massive loot drops, raid parties that take hours to complete and more, there's a lot to keep the WoW addict for many more hours to come. Beware of Magtheridon…

The update also adds the Ruins of Lordaeron Arena, which for gladiatorial tournaments and contests. Think you and your fellow WoW players are tough? Then get on down to the arena… I'm waiting!

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

Computex 2007

Our roving reporter has returned from Taipei with news…

For the gaming hardcore among us, Computex opened with a day of cooling and power supplies. I'll assume we're all aware the benefits a well managed system brings over one prone to the occassional overheating, I'll skip the cooling and power management pep-talk in favour of some detail on the coolers themselves.

Perhaps the most impressive (both in terms of cooling ability and sheer mass) was Arctic Cooling's Freezer Xtreme. You'll be forgiven if you think the name rings a bell, the unit was already displayed at CeBIT 2007, but has only now hit the market.

The Freezer Xtreme is a brute of a unit, boasting eight heat pipes and a staggering 226 fins. The fan sits between two separate fin bodies, and the device will fit onto AMD's AM2 and Intel's Socket LGA775. The real bonus is that it's set to sell at €50, with no dollar price yet announced.



It's reminiscent of a lawnmower engine... glorious.

Hybrid ahoy

For the performance obsessed, the announcement of high capacity Solid State Drives (SSDs) from Sandisk, PNY and practically anyone else with an interest in flash memory means we can look forward to tremendously fast read/write speeds from upcoming SSDs up to 256GB (PNY). Thanks to the complete lack of moving parts, SSDs also offer a lower fail-rate and power consumption. In fact, Sandisk's 64GB offering is rated at two million hours mean time between failures; which might encourage us to backup a little less often. The only question left is why we're still using the term "disk" in descriptions of them…

"The question is, why do we still call them hard 'disks' at all any more?"

Apacer's SRFD goes so far as to house two CompactFlash cards in a single 2.5" RAID array. The upshot of which is top speeds of a around 60 MB/s and the added ease of upgrading whenever you choose to buy higher capacity CF cards. The SRFD also supports both RAID 0 and RAID 1 through mini DIP switches.

AMD's announcement of two low power consumption Athlon X2 processors has drawn attention from >



It accesses files in an average of 0.11 milliseconds; too short to even think about



Those accessible CF cards should mean some of the easiest upgrades imagineable.

>Computex continued

all corners. The lower power usage is gained by running at a lower speed, achieving 65 watts at up to 2.6 Ghz. The new BE-2300 and BE-2350 check in at 1.9 Ghz and 2.1 Ghz, based on the socket AM2 Brisbane core.

With this announcement, AMD has introduced a new numbering system for its products; there's been no clear details yet, but AMD has said that the first letter in product names (B) identifies the class, while the second gives an indication of power consumption (E). The four digit number is split into two parts, the first (2) indicates the product family to which it belongs (Athlon X2), while the next three digits (300 or 350) indicate performance relative to products in the same family.

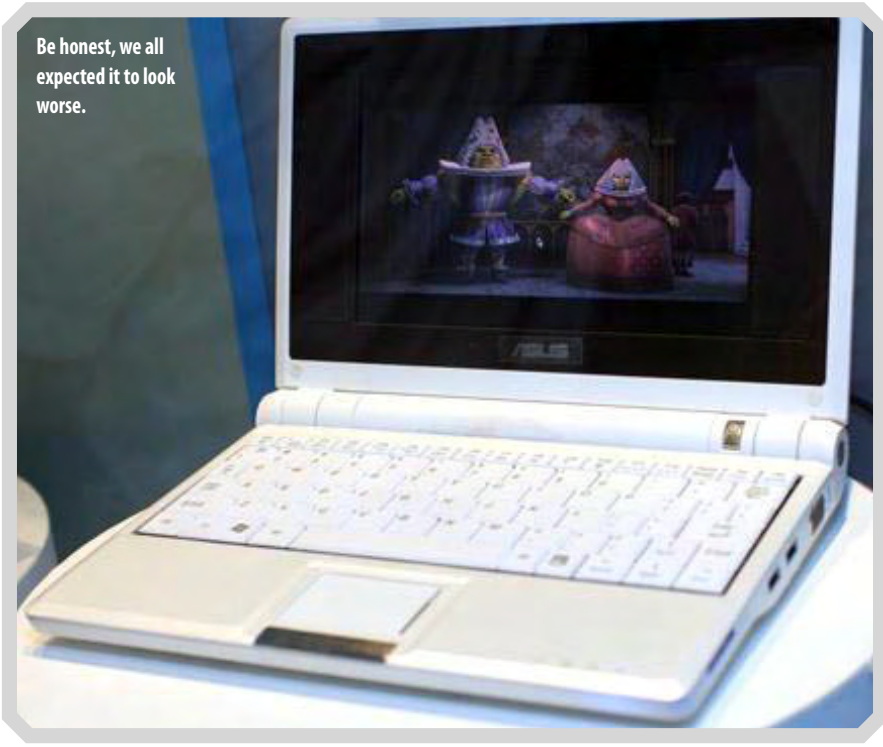
"ECS has upped the back-up stakes with storage built into the motherboard"

It's always nice to see a company resorting products to offer a little consumer friendliness for the less tech-aware of us out there.

Elitegroup Computer Systems (ECS) has upped the backup stakes by building a system recovery feature into its 945GCT-M motherboard; Intel's System Recovery Tool is built directly into the BIOS. It's fairly simple, for those of us with a regular need to format and reinstall an OS, a stable image can be created of the machine and restored without the need to boot up. It's the small things that should get us all excited. Think of the hours this could save in "family tech-support".



AMD's new numbering system means easy-to-follow product trees for all.



Be honest, we all expected it to look worse.

Cheap laptops

We were also treated to a closer look at Asus' sub $200 dollar computer. Alright, $199 (£100) is only just sub $200, but let's not split hairs. Asus chairman Jonney Shih introduced the flash powered PC, boasting a 15 second boot time. It's been named the Eee (or 3e) which hopes to communicate that it's Easy to Learn, Easy to Play and Easy to Work. The machine will be available in either 7" or 10" and runs a customised Linux distribution. So far there's been no word on when the Eee will be available but it was demoed using Firefox across a wireless connection, meaning we'll at least wring that much functionality from it. No word yet on whether or not it'll feature Bluetooth though.

And there you have it, the articles of hardware for which we're most likely to remember Computex 2007. All else aside, I have dreams (honestly, dreams) of combining a motherboard with built in disk recovery and a large scale SSD. It gives me chills.

NEW ADVENTURES IN OLD TAIPEI

Computex is one of the largest trade shows, but it is also one of the most unique…

Computex is one of the big technology tradeshows, ranking up there alongside and perhaps even beyond shows like the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas and CeBit in Germany. The scale of the show is massive, set across a number of hanger-sized halls to and from which journalists must proceed in the stifling humidity and frequent rain showers which Taiwan sports at this time of the year.

What sets Computex aside from the other shows is its character: It is very much a components, bits-and-bobs show. Taiwan and Asia in general are where most of your computing kit will come from, and Computex is the show at which many products which will never actually see the inside of your machine are touted – some ideas will float, and some will not.

The show is also notable for its Booth Babes. We have to mention them… Where shows like CES go for a more "upmarket" theme, at Computex you will regularly get companies attempting to attract attention with scantily clad young Asian girls, and perhaps even an hourly song and dance from them. And, of course, these cheap tricks work spectacularly well. What a week…



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REVIEWS

Overlord

Civ 4: Beyond the Sword
Lost Planet | GRAW 2

PREVIEWS

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Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising
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Hellgate: London
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