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PCGZine

Issue 23 | Nov 2008

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

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OFFICIAL FABLE 2 SUPPLEMENT

EXCLUSIVE #1 HANDS-ON PREVIEW & INTERVIEW

DIABLO

EXCLUSIVE #3

STARCRAFT 2

Hands-on preview & new screens inside

EXCLUSIVE #2



WRATH OF THE LICH KING

New screens & preview

10 never-before-seen screens inside...

PLUS ALL THESE GAMES & MORE

PREVIEWED!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

PREVIEWED!



CALL OF DUTY WORLD AT WAR

REVIEWED!



DEAD SPACE

REVIEWED!



FAR CRY 2

Welcome to PCGZine



We have a rather special issue lined up for you this month. Fresh on the back of BlizzCon we have exclusive hands-on previews of Diablo III (complete with no less than 10 brand new screens we nabbed just for us), Wrath of the Lich King and Starcraft 2. Get stuck in Blizzard fans.

Elsewhere we've also been hands-on with Call of Duty: World at War along with Football Manager 2009 - and in the case of the latter we've grabbed you some new screens so you can see the new 3D loveliness for yourself.

When it comes to splashing your cash in the here-and-now we have in-depth reviews of Far Cry 2, Dead Space and Project Aftermath. Enjoy the issue...

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

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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





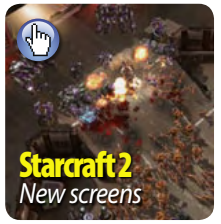
QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	Call of Duty: World at War
Imperium Romanum II	Football Manager 2009
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
Silent Hill Homecoming	Diablo III
Shaun White Snowboarding	Starcraft 2
Tom Clancy's Endwar	Far Cry 2
Dead Mountaineer's Hotel	Dead Space
Damnation	Project Aftermath
Lord of the Rings: Conquest	











MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Ian Morris
Deep in Dead Space & on safari in Far Cry 2



Chris Schilling
Looking forward to Red Alert 3



Keri Allan
Still buzzing from BlizzCon

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



MORE FREE MAGAZINES! LATEST ISSUES!

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA LA
Heritage: Medal of Honor Frontline, Boom Blox
Link: www.ea.com/redalert
ETA: 31st October

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Red Alert 3



Arachnid death-machines and tanks that are also robots? It's a Red Alert game all right.





Production values are through the roof – and over an hour of hi-def cutscene footage just proves that.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

FIRST LOOK

From Russia with guns

What's the story?

It's been seven years since the last Red Alert game, but the strategy game that it's okay to admit you like in public returns to PC, with all the accessibility of the previous games, and a new co-operative mode, among other additions. The story is suitably bizarre – a time-travelling experiment intended to restore Russia to its former glory goes badly wrong, creating an alternate time-line where seemingly every strange experiment in the interim has been successful. Which means intelligent killer dolphins, armoured bears and transforming tanks, of course.

What do we know?

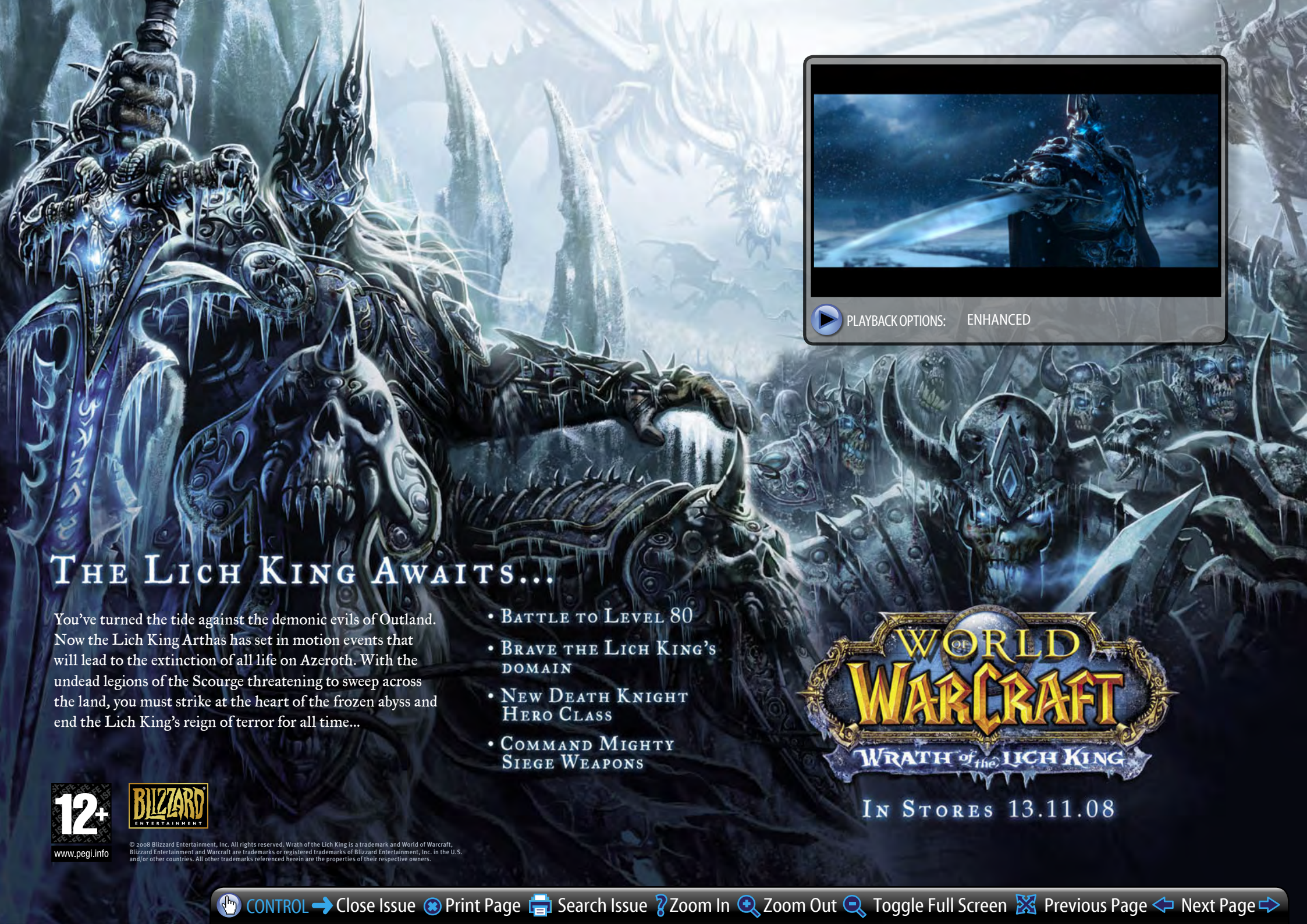
Expect plenty of explosive gameplay with tongue-in-cheek humour and FMV cutscenes – the cast includes Tim Curry, Jonathan Pryce, Andrew Divoff, Peter Stormare and JK Simmons. Obviously there's plenty of female eye candy too – why else would Gemma Atkinson and Jenny McCarthy be involved? Besides the cutscenes, the gameplay's had a few tweaks – the entire campaign mode can be played co-operatively, while naval units now play a key part in battle.

When do we get more?

It's out right at the end of this month. We're hoping to get our hands on the finished game very soon.

Anything else to declare?

The game features three campaigns to play through, while a Premier Edition will offer exclusive multiplayer maps.


PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED
THE LICH KING AWAITS...
You've turned the tide against the demonic evils of Outland. Now the Lich King Arthas has set in motion events that will lead to the extinction of all life on Azeroth. With the undead legions of the Scourge threatening to sweep across the land, you must strike at the heart of the frozen abyss and end the Lich King's reign of terror for all time...
• BATTLE TO LEVEL 80
• BRAVE THE LICH KING'S DOMAIN
• NEW DEATH KNIGHT HERO CLASS
• COMMAND MIGHTY SIEGE WEAPONS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
WRATH of the LICH KING
IN STORES 13.11.08
12+
www.pegi.info
BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
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Imperium Romanum II

FIRST LOOK

Rome wasn't built in a day

Publisher: Kalypso Media
Developer: Haemimont
Heritage: Imperium Romanum, Rising Kingdoms
Link: N/A
ETA: March 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Imperium Romanum II



This territory represents the Barbarians. It's one of 20 maps available.

"This sequel is set to be even more historically accurate than the first"





The new graphics engine allows the settlements to be more vibrant and full of the minutiae of daily life.

What's the story?

The original Imperium Romanum was an underrated little city-building sim that was very entertaining without perhaps offering enough depth for strategy veterans. That said, its streamlined approach won it fans, who'll no doubt be delighted that a sequel is coming. You play as a patrician – a nobleman whose goal is to become Rome's governor. This is done by completing quests and gaining favour with historical figures like Julius Caesar.

What do we know?

The sequel is set to be even more historically accurate than the first – no mean feat, as that was one of the original's key strengths. The slightly disappointing combat has been beefed up significantly – it now features better control of squads, with a fairly standard RTS control set-up – while the already decent graphics have had a lick of paint, so Rome should look better than ever. With over 60 buildings and 50 units to select from, there's plenty of depth to keep the hardcore happy, and the game retains its accessibility.

When do we get more?

The game is set to be released in March of next year, and we'll hopefully spend some more time with it fairly soon.

Anything else to declare?

The player's character is persistent through all modes – in other words, any character benefits gained in the campaign can be utilised in the free-play and multiplayer games, too.



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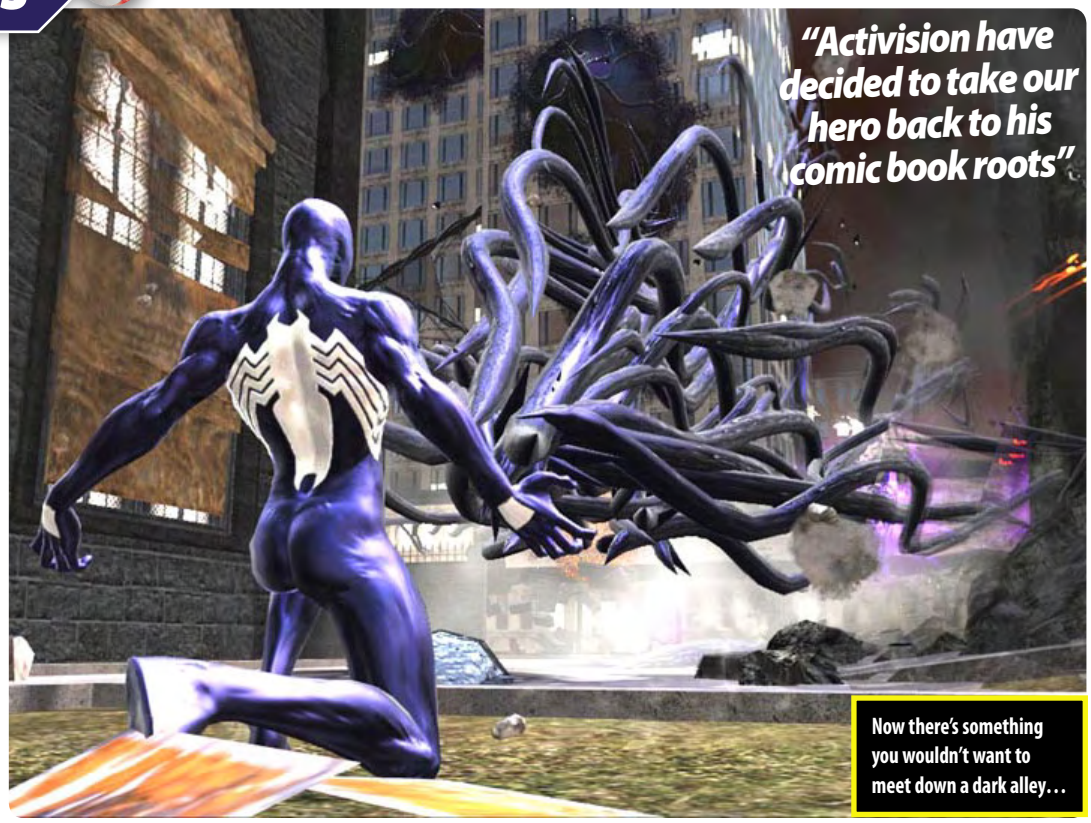
Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

SPIDER-MAN WEB OF SHADOWS

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Heritage: Ultimate Spider-Man, Spider-Man 3
Link: www.seizecontrol.com
ETA: Late October

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Spider-Man: Web of Shadows



Now there's something you wouldn't want to meet down a dark alley…

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

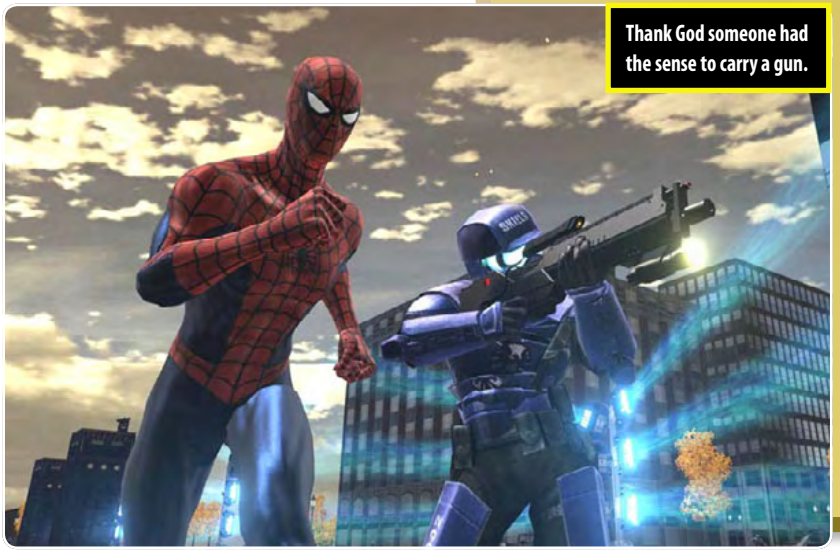
HANDS ON

Your friendly neighbourhood videogame

What's the story?
He's back. With the embarrassment that was Spider-Man 3 still lying heavy on people's memories, Activision have decided to take our hero back to his comic book roots. Spider-Man: Web of Shadows is a new one-player game with an original storyline involving Venom taking over New York City with his army of symbiotes.

What do we know?
With the freedom to explore the 3D cityscape as you see fit, you can choose who to hinder or help along the way, with the game's outcome depending upon which path you take. During play you can switch between the traditional red and blue costume or change into the infamous black alien symbiote uniform, each with their own special abilities. As you complete missions you gain experience points, which you can spend on upgrades and abilities in true RPG fashion. There are a host of familiar names to encounter along the way, including Wolverine, Luke Cage, the Black Cat and Moon Knight; the Marvel license is used to full effect.




Thank God someone had the sense to carry a gun.

When do we get more?
With a release date set for the end of October, keep an eye out for the full review as soon as we get our hands on a copy of the game.

Anything else to declare?
So far it all looks good, but will this be a Marvel tie-in worth buying? Watch this space, true believers!

7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

Silent Hill Homecoming



Publisher: Konami | **ETA:** February 2009

Konami's survival horror chiller will avoid the silly season rush and is now (quite sensibly) set for a February release. While it's a shame it misses Hallowe'en, at least we'll now be able to give this latest in the seminal series the attention it so rightly deserves. Advance word is pretty positive too.

Shaun White Snowboarding



Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** 28th November

Like, totally gnarly, dude. The frightwigged Olympic champ's downhill 'boarding sim is set to hit the slopes next month, and is looking pretty tasty on the graphical front. Whether it has the tricks to rival SSX, the racing quality of 1080 or the wacky humour of Amped remains to be seen, but we're moderately optimistic that it can combine the best of all three.

Tom Clancy's Endwar



Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** Q1 2009

PC owners will have to wait for Ubi's RTS, which could be as revolutionary to the genre as Half-Life was to the FPS. Using voice commands to control your army, this streamlines traditional genre mechanics in the best possible way – accessibility increased without the loss of strategic complexity. One to watch.

Empire: Total War

Publisher: Sega | **ETA:** 6th February

Total War games have always been hugely popular (and coincidentally very good). This one is set between the early 18th Century through to the beginning of the 19th, and features a raft of improvements, from more detailed tutorials through to improved military AI. Roll on February.



Lord of the Rings: Conquest

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** 2009

Think Battlefront in Middle Earth and you're not far off what Pandemic's latest is all about. With input from the movie trilogy's effects wizards, and a delay to allow for polishing and fine-tuning of this exciting concept, this could well be the best LotR videogame yet.



ON THE RADAR

Q2 AND BEYOND

- Champions Online — April

Q1 2009

- Red Faction: Guerrilla — January
- Dungeon Hero — Spring
- Edge of Twilight — 2009
- F.E.A.R. 2 Project Origin — 13th February
- Still Life 2 — 2009
- Sims 3 — 20th February
- Mines of Moria — November 18th

DEC 2008

- Prince of Persia — December 5th
- Orchard — Christmas

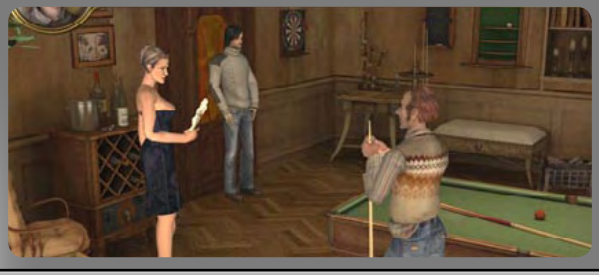
NOV 2008

- SilkWood Spring — 26th December
- Cryostasis — November 7th

Dead Mountaineer's Hotel

Publisher: Lighthouse | **ETA:** Q1 2009

A strong early contender for Best Named Game of 2009, this is a 3D point-and-click adventure based on a story by the Strugatsky Brothers, Russia's apparently famous sci-fi writer siblings (no, us neither). Still, this whodunit is looking very intriguing, and any return to this oft-overlooked genre is cause for minor celebration at least.





Damnation

Publisher: Codemasters | **ETA:** 5th December

The more we see of Blue Omega's inventive shooter the more ready we are to set our saliva glands to 'drool'. It's a violent, acrobatic blaster with a tactical feel, and its open world mechanics see more verticality in the environments than many of its genre rivals.



CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

HANDS ON

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Heritage: Call of Duty 3
Link: www.callofduty.com
ETA: November 14th

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Call of Duty: World at War

You're heading back to World War 2. And bringing friends



They actually created scale-models of the interiors of the Black-Cat plane for its motion capture.

It's a situation where, as PC Gamers, we're a little to one side from the talking heads. After the genuine phenomenon that was Call of Duty 4, there was some dissatisfied mumbling over the fact that the makers of Call of Duty 3 would be making its sequel. Because, basically, Call of Duty 3 was well beneath the quality of the rest, but since we never actually *had* CoD3, it's like rumours of trouble in a distant country. We sort of ignored it.

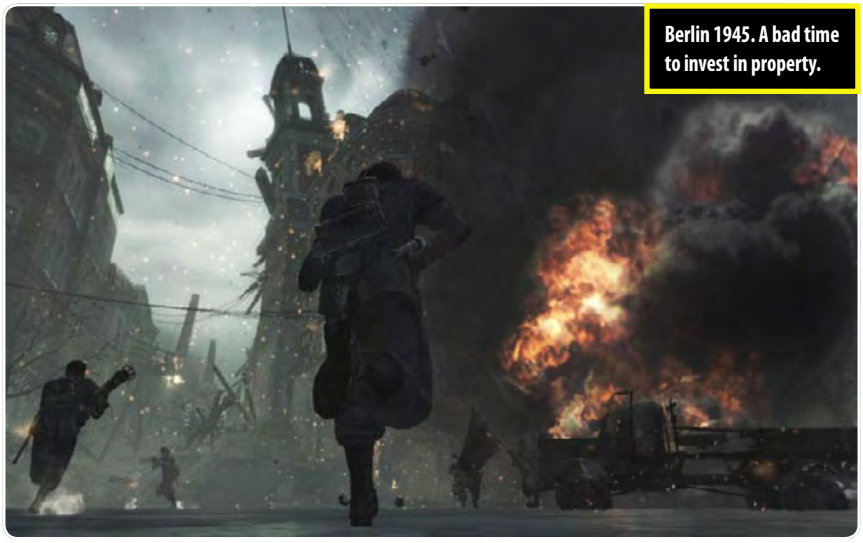
Producer Noah Heller and Treyarch as a whole was aware of it. They had to do something new. "We decided very early on that we had to show our own vision – the game was a lot more realistic than we'd ever done before,"

"The game was a lot more realistic than we'd ever done before" – Noah Heller, Treyarch

he says. "We threw out the King & Country, Trumpets and all the patriotic themes. We were a lot more about the brutality of the war. This is war like you haven't experienced it before." To that >



The rail-shooter mission takes place aboard a plane, sinking ships.



Berlin 1945. A bad time to invest in property.



Storm the Reichstag! If we win, we won't have to be in WW2 games any more.



The flamethrower, even above its practical use, actually has an amusing psychological response. Run!



The Russian soldier has a little revenge thing on his mind in the campaign.



From the opening moment, the brutality of Call of Duty is never in question.

> Call of Duty continued

end, the war focuses on the final Russian March into Berlin and the Pacific theatre where Marines faced the Japanese. Neither are areas which are as over-explored as, say, the D-Day landings, especially in the genuinely visceral way the game's approached. Bodies and blood are ever present.

"Very early on we struggled with the idea of whether we'd do limb removal and blow legs off when you're hit by a grenade," says Noah, "And we said that we're not going to do that to be gratuitous. We're going to do that because that's the way it actually happens. By doing a realistic war rather than an over-the-top Rah-Rah! Take-the-hill war, I think we've shown a different kind of WW2."

When you're ordered to shoot surrendered prisoners in Japan, or a mob of Japanese soldiers explode from the undergrowth to try and run you through, it seems to have upped the stakes. When Noah talks about the inspiration for the Pacific campaign, he talks about how they were thinking of Apocalypse Now in terms of mood, with those missions a forerunner of Vietnam. As you progress, the Japanese change from suicidally brave chargers to increasing guerrilla methods. The levels we played have a completely different atmosphere to anything else.

But it's also interesting to see how the atmosphere can be changed. And there we're talking multiplayer. Yes, Call of Duty 4's incredibly successful multiplayer has been expanded upon. There's new additions like new perks and particularly brutal – there's that word again – tanks (which, rather than the usual method of random bazooka-bombardment, are best disabled by blowing off one of 17 parts of detachable armour, then attaching a sticky bomb to that exact spot). However, the key change is co-op.

Working together

You're able to play with a group of four friends through any of the missions, bar a couple which aren't really appropriate for sharing (a linear shooter, one with you manning gun turrets and a hyper-slow Sniper mission). There's a wider scope to the levels, with multiple pathways in key sections, but it's still a traditional Call of Duty experience… just with friends. However, if you want to change it entirely, you can play >



Missions move from small tense confrontations to tank-filled mass-melees.



For those who think war isn't dangerous enough, you can always volunteer to carry a big barrel of napalm around on your back.

> Call of Duty continued

competitive co-op. In a similar points-scoring system to Bizarre Creation's The Club, you get rewards not just for individual hits, but for chaining multiples together. With up to four people trying to do this, things get hectic, with active competition when trying to clear a pathway as quickly as possible. And this changes it from the atmospheric approach of trad Call of Duty to something more frenetic, and challenges different gamer skills

"Multiplayer rewards twitch gaming. It rewards fastest reflexes," says Noah, "and competitive co-op rewards memories. You have to know the moment you walk around that tree that six enemies are going to pop out. So if I have my grenade ready, I'll throw it before any of my friends can throw it… and if I blow up that speaker over there, I'll get a whopping 500 bonus points and continue my streak." Even playing with initially undeveloped skills, going with a friend while competing with them presses agreeable buttons – so who rushes ahead and gets that flamethrower then? And since if anyone dies, you all have to restart the level, there's an agreeable tension between getting to them and reviving them as quickly as possible.

All in all, Call of Duty: World at War actually looks as if Treyarch have pulled it off, and made not just a worthy successor to one of the most successful games of recent times, but also managed the equally tricky task of making World War 2 interesting again. Well, at least for one last time, anyway. We'll be finding out whether these initial impressions are correct soon enough with our review next month.

Roll over screen for annotations



DUTY CALLS

War isn't always hell you know…



Burning passion | **Dog's life** | **Turning Japanese**

Burning passion

Among the new weapons, flamethrowers are unarguably the best. Yes, it's not entirely practical at all times – that short range is a killer – but the ability to sear all the grass from a level to discover if there *are* any Japanese hidden there is highly attractive. Best of all, it doesn't have any ammunition limit, just overheating problems.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

A fine swansong to Call of Duty's liaison with WW2



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"PLAYSTATION" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sports Interactive
Heritage: Championship Manager, Football Manager
Link: www.sigames.com
ETA: 14th November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Football Manager 2009

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS!

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

Check out the 3D engine in our exclusive screens...

It's fair to say that there's more than the usual frisson of excitement surrounding this year's iteration of the greatest football management game of all time. The reasons are scattered liberally around these words in the shape of exclusive screenshots of the all-new 3D match engine, which was a gameplay development that took even the most devout of virtual managers totally by surprise.

Those managers can sometimes be bluff old traditionalists, and there are many who will view the advent of actual graphics as an event akin to the end of times. They needn't be concerned, though. In the same way that the 2D engine ingratiated itself to the point where it became indispensable, from our extensive play-test, the 3D evolution looks like doing the same. After all, football is played by



A seat in the main stand for the TV mode gives you the full sensory experience.



Entertain yourself by adding inane additional comments at a press conference.

"The 3D match engine was a gameplay development that took virtual managers totally by surprise"

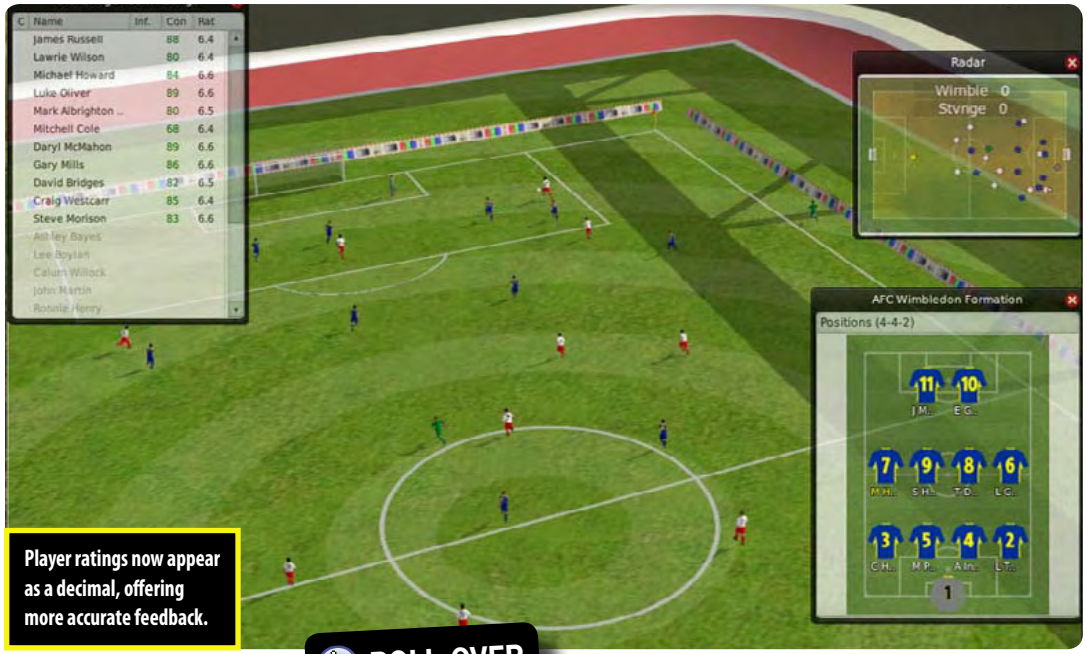
footballers, not coloured discs, although those who prefer the latter will still be catered for with the inclusion of the normal 2D mode, as well as a classic version.

Given the time-consuming nature of Football Manager, a lot of people play it on the move, on a laptop, which has raised some concerns regarding the compatibility of the all-singing, all-dancing match engine. Developer Sports Interactive claims that FM09 will run on a four-year-old laptop, something we attempted to verify by putting it to the test. And while it jerked like a bad robotic dancer, it was still possible to make out a vague semblance of association football. Apparently, should your PC not be up to the task, the graphics will revert to disc-based action, although with our lappy being on the cusp of respectability, we had the bizarre situation of a team of discs complemented by the occasional human, something we assume will be rectified in time for release.

It would be tempting to assume that with all the kafuffle regarding the mind-bending new 3D graphics, the rest of the game would have been >



The Assistant Manager is always ready with a bit of advice.



Player ratings now appear as a decimal, offering more accurate feedback.

> Football Manager cont.

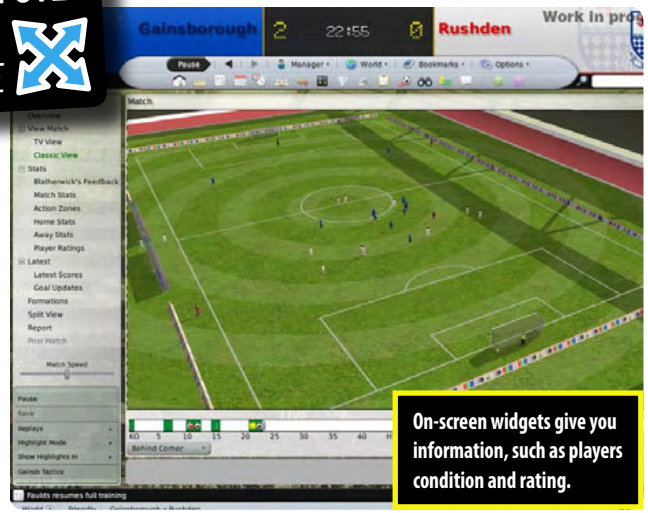
ignored. This simply isn't the case, and Football Manager 09 comes with the perennial list of additions and modifications. For starters, media intrusion has been ramped up, and before you've even slipped on your tracksuit you're subjected to a press conference with a barrage of probing questions – cleverly, the answers to which will apparently have some bearing in the future.

Elsewhere, the Assistant Manager has been elevated from anonymous dogsbody to hands-on dynamo, preparing reports, advising on tactics during a match and generally sticking his oar in, albeit in an extremely helpful fashion. Furthermore, Board Confidence has been tweaked, with the suits upstairs generously offering feedback concerning your squad harmony and the club's stature in the football world.

Finances have allegedly been made more realistic, and the transfer system has also been completely re-written to bring it into line with real life wheeling and dealing, including the ubiquitous rumour mill. And once you've bought those players, you can teach them preferred moves in training, with wingers performing step-overs, for instance. One final new feature? For the first time, you can now play as a female manager. Heaven forbid…



ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE



On-screen widgets give you information, such as players condition and rating.

> *"Football Manager 09 comes with the perennial list of additions and modifications"*

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 85%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

Can they kick it? Yes, they can



Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

NEW SHOTS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Diablo, Starcraft
Link: www.worldofwarcraft.com/wrath
ETA: 13th November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King

Upping the ante with in-flight combat and much, much more…

"Those lucky enough to go to Blizzcon were given a tour of upcoming dungeons"

The release of Wrath of the Lich King is almost upon us, and with it comes a ton of new features. For those new to the game, the first 60 levels have now become easier to attain, but there's also the new level cap of 80 for those already hooked.

Easy to play, but difficult to master, the new expansion uses the same accessible interface, allowing you to learn as you play, however new additions across the board add to the gameplay experience.

Graphically the game hasn't changed, however exploring fresh areas offers lush new experiences. From icy caverns to fields with blooming trees, exploring Northrend is a joy – just watch out for the monsters…

As for the new locations, those lucky enough to go to Blizzcon were given a tour of upcoming dungeons, such as the Halls of Lightning in Storm Peaks and the Old Kingdom of Ahn'kahet. Designers have put all their heart and soul into creating some places of pure >





The 'pick your own pumpkin' farm was a hit at Hallowe'en.



Imagine the PvP fun you'll have with the hardcore weapons you'll be working towards as you climb to level 80.



This one looks pretty tough – not sure about the purple cape, though.



With new and improved armour, will the weight make characters walk around a bit slower?

> World of Warcraft cont.

beauty. Many are based on Titan lore, so when you walk through the halls you get a real feel for the size of them. Dwarfed in gargantuan hallways, the team have also focused on trying to bring in that 'outdoor' feeling with you. As you turn corners you may find yourself on ledges overlooking huge chasms of ice or see distant bridges, making you feel small in what is in reality, an enormous world.

Also, work has been put into creating a large number of custom boss models. Added to their individual look are bespoke combat actions, for example the Blood Prince actually attacks and feeds on players, and the boss fight with Maligos is an epic multi-phase encounter to look forward to.

In terms of raid gameplay, all dungeons can be traversed in groups of both 10 and 25, with higher difficulties leading to improved raid currencies for loot. This is a great incentive for gamers to move onto the harder content, with four award tiers consisting of rewards such as the Emblem of Heroism and Emblem of Valour.

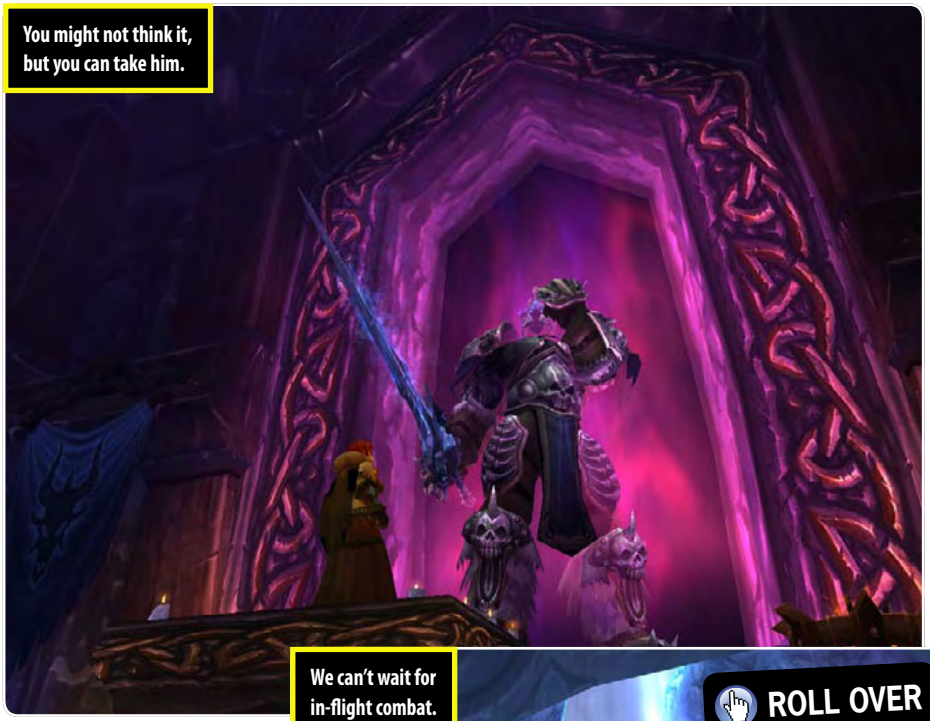
But there's so much more. Since the Burning Crusade expansion released back in January 2007, the Blizzard team has been developing some interesting, new technologies. One of which is pilotable vehicles. These Siege vehicles are for use in PvP to bring down destructible buildings. Currently >



A troll hunter aims for the kill.



Beware the opposition, as it's never fun for Horde and Alliance to meet outside PvP battlegrounds.



You might not think it, but you can take him.



We can't wait for in-flight combat.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

> World of Warcraft cont.

limited to the new zones of Lake Wintergrasp and the Northrend Battleground, there will be different vehicles for different races, each with their own game mechanics.

Designer Cory Stockton also told us of another way gamers will get to experience this technology – through combat on flight. "We're using flying in some of the dungeon and raid fights now. Flying was a big new feature for Burning Crusade, but we've never allowed you to have combat with it. But now we have the tech to create vehicles for combat, so we can basically turn a dragon that you would fly into a 'vehicle', with its own new abilities," he reveals. "So in certain fights, you can hop on the back of a dragon and a new interface bar comes up with abilities that you can fight with."

Good knight?

Arguably, the biggest addition to the WoW universe is the introduction of the first hero class, the Death Knight. The multi-purpose character can function as both a damage deliverer and party punchbag. Appearing as a level 55 character, you're given starting quests that allow you to learn the new techniques at hand which even includes magic. Well rounded, you can solo quest with ease, as we found for ourselves when playing the game, but with some tough as nails armour, the class is also perfect for tanking, meaning you'll never find yourself short of a raid member again.

Throw in new customisation options to boot and you've got enough new content and features to keep you occupied for months. A must-experience game, Wrath of the Lich King looks set to raise the number of global players much higher than its current 11 million mark, and definitely has the ability to 'wow' gamers from all walks of life.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 95%

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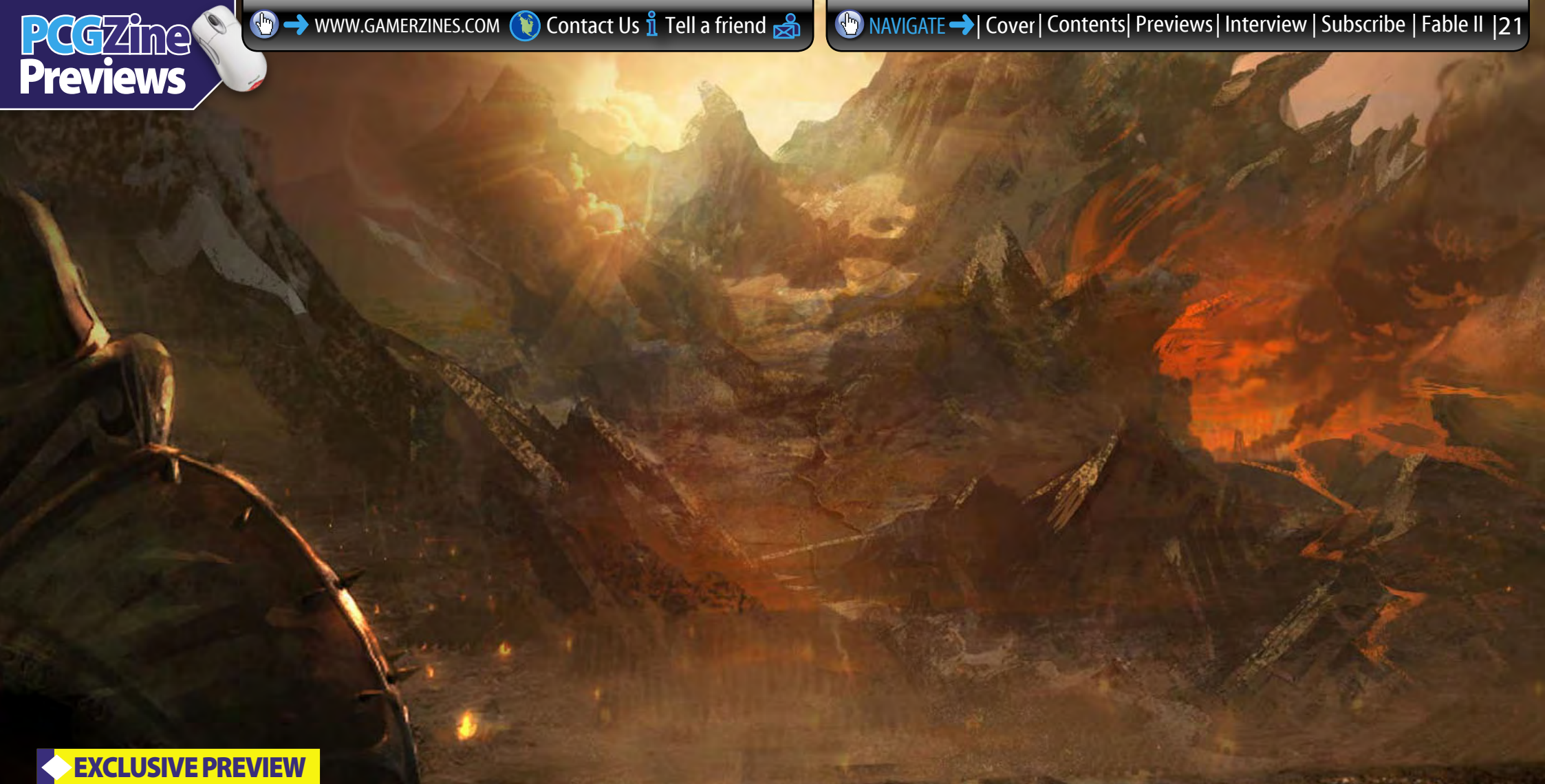
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EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

Diablo III

From the belly of the beast, Blizzcon 08, comes our exclusive feature that's packed with exclusive images, video, interviews and playtests on the hugely anticipated Diablo III

Sitting among the 15,000 Blizzcon attendees at the Anahiem Convention Centre, California, there's no underestimating the power Blizzard Entertainment holds over the PC gaming community. With three massive IPs – all playable under the same roof for the first time in Blizzcon history – the anticipation is palpable.

Those who've travelled from over 25 different countries to attend are rewarded in many ways, including a playable dungeon and the very latest character announcement: The Wizard.

Taking time out from the Blizzcon madness of tournaments and panels, we headed over to the huge, dimly lit gameplay area for some hands-on time with the upcoming game. >

Publisher: Activision Blizzard
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Diablo I and II
Link: www.blizzard.com/diablo3
ETA: Spring 2010

> Diablo III continued

After an eight-year gap since Diablo II, developer focus is all about offering the gamer more. More action, more excitement, as Kanye West may well have put it, this game is 'harder, better, stronger, faster'.

Back to basics

The basics are this: you can pick a hero from five distinct gameplay-styled classes, dependent on whether you're a fan of melee or 'blaster' class combat. Characters announced so far are the Barbarian, Witch Doctor and Wizard. The focus is on multiplayer, co-op action, however players can solo it if they wish, and although kept quite quiet, there will also be PvP play.

Its simplistic all-out action from the word go, with plentiful drops to keep you happy, and the ability – when not being attacked by hordes of undead – to upgrade your skills and gear quickly and painlessly. Use picked up runes to boost your attack – for example, socket a multistrike rune to your Skull of Flame skill and watch that baby bounce all over the screen, burning anything that gets in its way. These are also no longer locked in, meaning you can experiment with your attacks and runes until you have a combination that suits your gameplay or the situation.

The cornerstone of the franchise, randomly generated monster >

PCGZine EXCLUSIVE VIDEO

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



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!

"After an eight-year gap since Diablo II, developer focus is all about offering the gamer more"

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



Male or female, the barbarian really kicks some ass.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



The witch doctor has some really fun abilities, like that of summoning a plague of toads!

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



Detail abounds, even when it comes to dungeon exits…

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

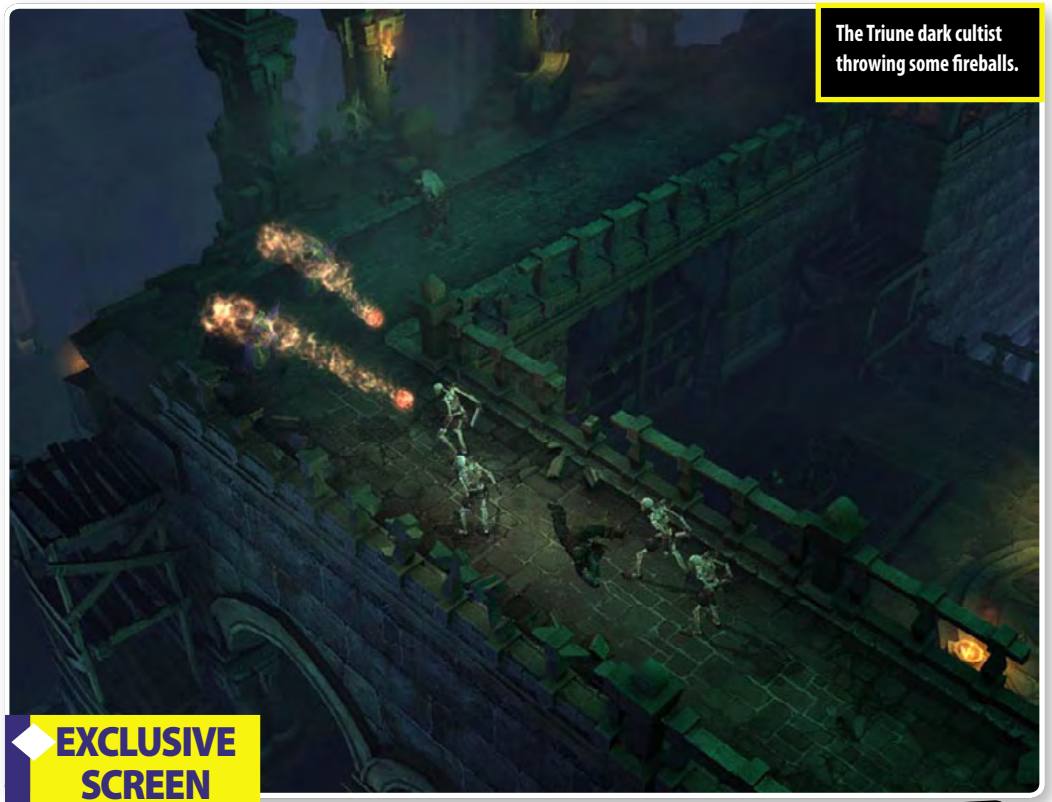
> Diablo III continued

spawns and maps are key to the gameplay, and you never know if you'll turn a corner and face one skeleton or 50 zombies, which really adds to the excitement. Having played through the Skeleton King's Dungeon level multiple times, we were treated to a variety of rooms and different scripted events with each outing. These random adventures take things to the next level, offering a wide variety of new experiences each time you run a dungeon, from anything like complex enemy encounters through to interaction with NPCs leading to new, additional quests.

Philosophically speaking

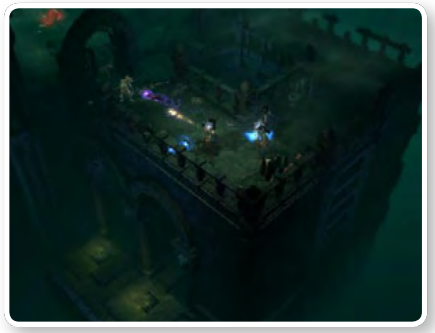
"Blizzard philosophy is one-third old, one-third improved, one-third new," Jay Wilson, lead designer tells us. A lot of our 'new' is still cooking, so we haven't really talked too much about it, but our old and improved is really focused on the core tenets of Diablo, and making a game that lives up to those and of course, replayability."

> *"Random adventures offer a wide variety of new experiences"*



The Triune dark cultist throwing some fireballs.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN







The barbarian's electric axe really frazzles the enemy.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN

THE WIZARD

For fans of the 'blaster' class

Described as an iteration of Diablo II's sorceress, Blizzard's developers have noted that her speciality lies in channelling the powers of the universe to wreck destruction from afar. Rooted in pen-and-paper-style wizards and drawing power from the universe rather than good or evil or following the elemental or summoning roots, her role is to simply kick ass.

Technical game designer Wyatt Cheng described her brilliantly when he said: "She's super ambitious, smart and powerful. She's the kind of person that would have dropped out of school to start a dot.com."

☒ Four main spells were shown off at Blizzcon, with the first being the time-honoured magic missile. With functionality comparable to Diablo II's firebolt, the early introduction of a raw-power attack to gamers is to set the tone of what's to follow: universal power. Electrocute will look very familiar to WoW players, as it's an elemental spell reminiscent of chain lightning. As the introduction of rune socketing became clear you could also see how this attack will grow more powerful.

☒ Slow time got the audience cheering, as the first component of the reality control kit was shown off. A tough concept to work with and design, the developer's answer was to create the spell as a bubble around the caster. Anything that enters the bubble – aside from the wizard, is slowed down, allowing the player to dodge attacks and get some quick ones of her own in.

☒ Another cheer-inducing sight was the introduction of the 'face-melter', disintegrate. A failed experiment with the barbarian class, it's found its place with the wizard, where you hold down to fire and move the mouse to sweep the killing ray across the battlefield. The longer the attack touches a target, the greater the damage. Definitely a must to socket-up with some hardcore runes.

> Diablo III continued

"We put in random bosses with cool abilities and items are generated randomly. We added in a lot of adventures, too; we cut chunks out of the terrain and plop down a self-contained scripted event, and they can appear all over the place," he mentions.

Destruction of the environments is another new feature which adds to the game, but they're not just pointlessly there. Time your attack right and take down chunks of the bad guys' health as a bookcase shatters down onto them. Nice.

The third dimension

Clearly with the move to a 3D top-down camera perspective, the game's graphics are much improved, but it's the visceral gameplay that adds to its look. Although some may disagree (both Jay Wilson and Rob Prado wore bespoke Diablo III T-shirts, complete with rainbows, fluffy clouds and smiley unicorns designed specifically in response to those who complained the new game looked too 'colourful'), the game still has its dark, foreboding feel. However, characters' attacks bring bursts of colour, with the Wizard's light show of Disintegrate and Electrocute, and the Witch Doctor's Burst of Acid really upping the ante. In addition, Blizzard were eager to highlight the 'special, crazy' death animations they've brought into play, simply citing that 'explosions are cool'.

When it comes to game controls, Diablo III is definitely an 'anyone can play' experience. Its simplistic interface of mouse control and basic key commands return. If anything, some of the old complexity has been removed, but the combat still has depth. The interface is now made up of six buttons, with an on-screen indicator – something that was clearly lacking before.



The barbarian in action, using the hammer of ancients ability.

THE STORY

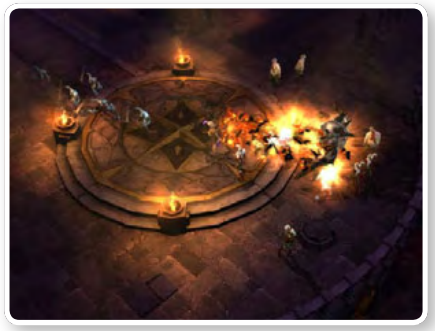
So, what has happened since Diablo II?

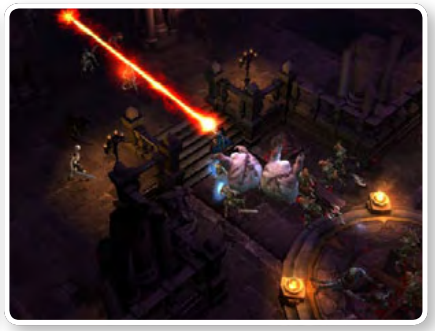
Diablo III actually picks up the series 20 years after the events of Diablo II, with a fiery omen from the sky heralding the return of dark forces to the mortal realm.

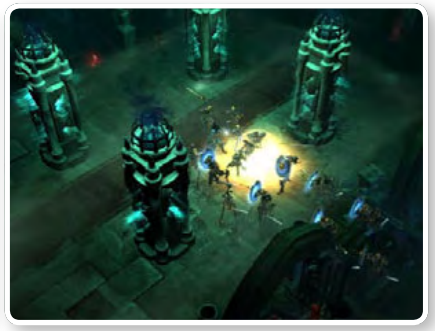
Set back in the world of Sanctuary, sadly it seems that the warriors that survived last time round went mad from the experience (understandable, really) and so it's down to the next generation of heroes to save the world.

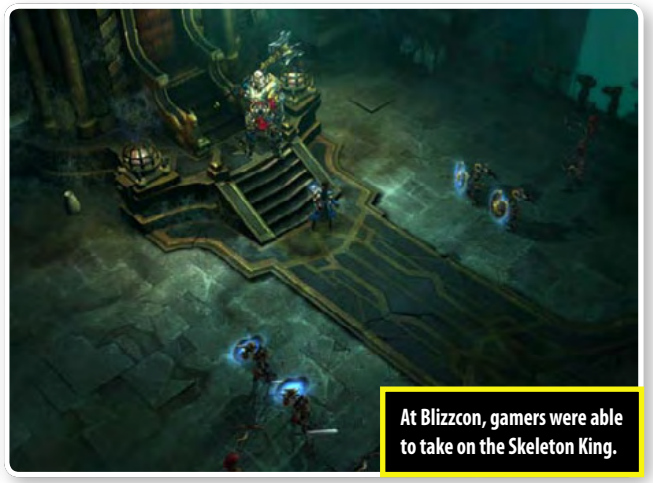
A mix of new and old, gamers will recognise some areas – like that of Tristram – which they'll now be able to explore in more detail than ever before. Also, some NPCs will be returning, including Deckard Cain, who's luckily survived the horrors of both the previous games.

The world has also grown in size, allowing gamers to really get immersed in Sanctuary. Numerous indoor and outdoor areas detail regions of the world, and although the dungeons are going to be hugely randomised, the up-top world looks set to be static. Designer Rob Pardo has been cited as saying that Blizzard wanted to make more static geography so gamers can learn where towns and villages are, because they wanted to 'start building a world'.








At Blizzcon, gamers were able to take on the Skeleton King.

> Diablo III continued

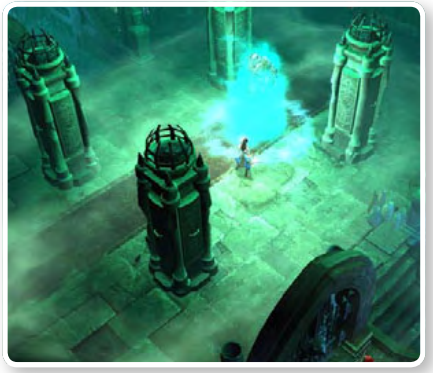
Now players can switch-in items and skills in a way that suits them, and after trying it out, it's a very user-friendly experience that allows you to focus on the game.

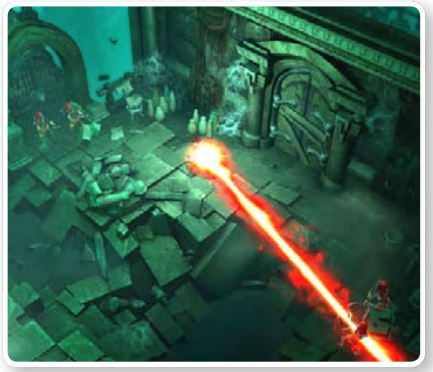
All in all, Diablo III looks set to be the onion of action RPGs, with layers galore. Both new and improved features let gamers get sucked into the world of Sanctuary, and the developers' enthusiasm is contagious. Highly immersive from the word go, its ease of use, action and replayability make the title hugely addictive, even when you just have one dungeon to play through. With improvements across the board, Blizzard is giving this its all, and look set to wow us yet again. Blizzcon attendees all second that, simply by being willing to queue for hours to try the demo out time and time again. We can only imagine how many hours we'll lose to the fantasyland when the entire game is in our hands…



The graphical detail of both the characters and backgrounds are amazing. It's like playing in a dark, foreboding watercolour painting…







CHECK OUT MY WICKED SKILLZ!

Creating the best possible skill system

During a Diablo III panel at Blizzcon, developers discussed the processes taken to arrive at their chosen skill system. They took time out to analyse what worked with the previous Diablo games, as well as World of Warcraft. Highlighting the pro's and cons of past decisions, they looked at the use of skills gained from book drops and then also skill trees. Big down points they noted included a lack of re-spec option in Diablo II, and although WoW's tree learnt from Diablo's mistakes, it didn't offer the immediate character improvements the team wanted for its fast-paced Diablo III game.

This time round they wanted a simpler system, compelling whatever difficulty mode you were facing, and something that allowed a large variety of character build options. Lead Designer Jay Wilson explained that they went to 'crazy town' with their ideas, considering skill rings, cards, wheels and even cubes, but as he explained: "Different but worse isn't better, better is better." Erm, well put, sir…

The system is far from final, but the team have managed to hone down the list to two ideas they like, which are randomly dropped skills and modifying skills through item drops, like those of the socketing runes. Although still in the works, the system they are leaning towards incorporates active and passive skills, runes, synergies and of course, the option to re-spec. Taking a look at the current system in the demo, adding runes was simplistic and fun to try out, and although things may well change, as it stands the simplicity of the system will definitely add accessibility to newcomers to the series. Watch this space.

PCGZine

DIABLO III

HOW COMPLETE? 50%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

This action-fuelled RPG looks dead set for success



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The Devil Inside

Publisher: Activision Blizzard
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Players: Many!
ETA: 2010

We talk to Jay Wilson, lead designer of Diablo III

FULL AUDIO INTERVIEW Click here to listen to the whole unedited interview.

It's been eight years since Diablo III, so has development been a huge technological leap for you?
Yes, we've now been able to create and use a 3D engine, and do a lot more stuff with the characters. 3D models are a lot more malleable than the 2D sprites which the previous game used, and we can affect them in a lot of different ways. We've planned that into how the creatures die, how they're affected by damage, etc.

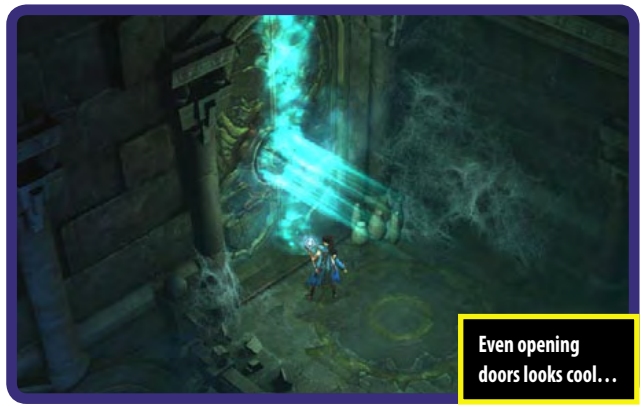
A lot of the technology focuses on the player feeling more powerful, and just one example of how they feel this is by all the different ways they can kill monsters. One of the things that turning to 3D really helped us do is make the most of assets that can be manipulated because they're full 3D image objects.


The wizard has many cool abilities too, including arcane orb.

Did going to 3D mean more work and a longer development cycle?
I don't think the tech has been the biggest problem with extending our development. I actually think that it's been designer art. That said, 3D makes a lot of the things that you want to do with Diablo more difficult. Randomness is a big part of Diablo and we were able to randomise the environments with the original Diablo and Diablo II just by using a 2D tile system. But tiling is very difficult when you're dealing with in-placed organic environments. Tiling's not really that appropriate for the kind of environments we're building, so we had to look around for other methods to be able to get the same kind of randomness in the gameplay.

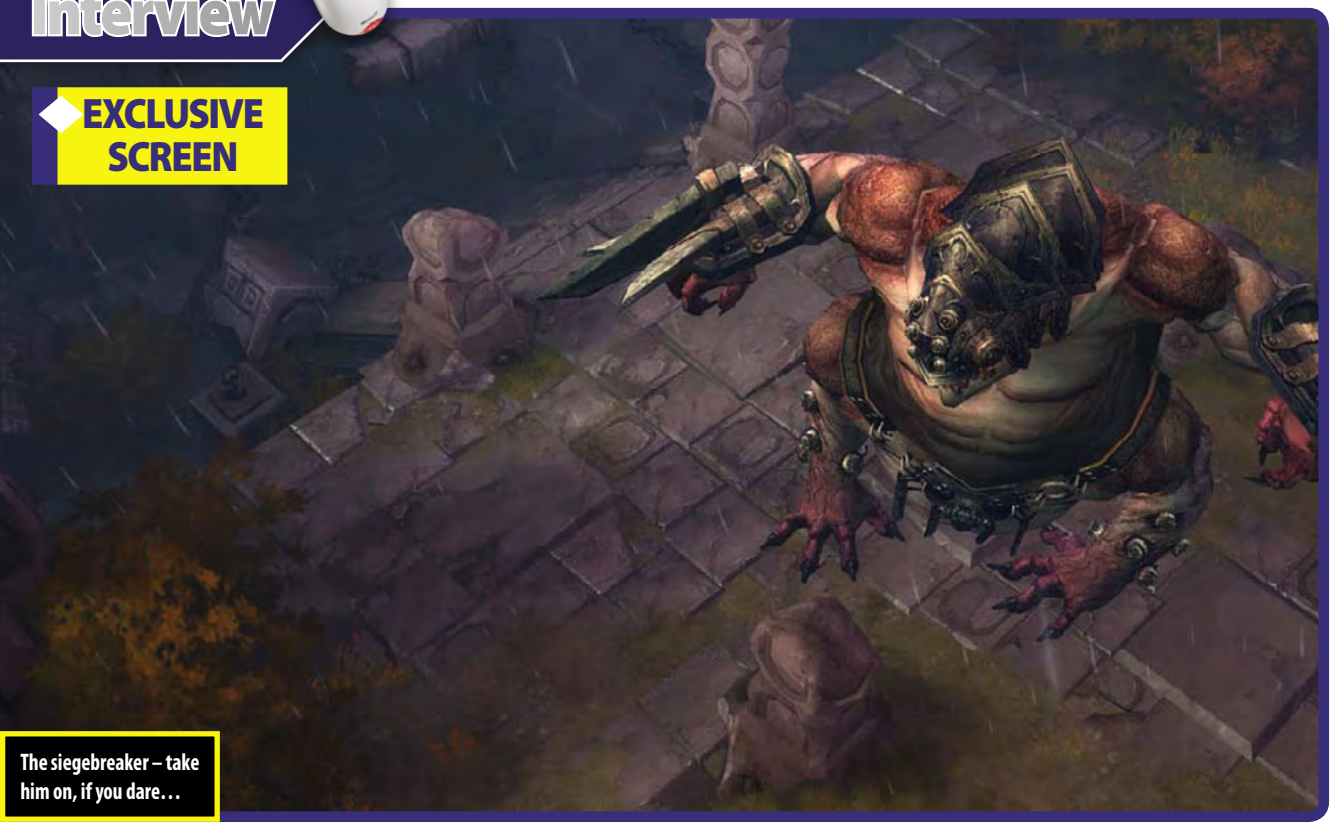
We've gone to almost a Lego building block system in some places where we stick rooms together with common points where they meet. We're getting better at it as we do it, but yes, it is a challenge.

There seems to be such a huge Diablo following, so what is it that you think the gamers love about it so much that makes them want to keep coming back time and time again? >


Even opening doors looks cool…


As the witch doctor, setting fire to your hellhounds is well, really cool!

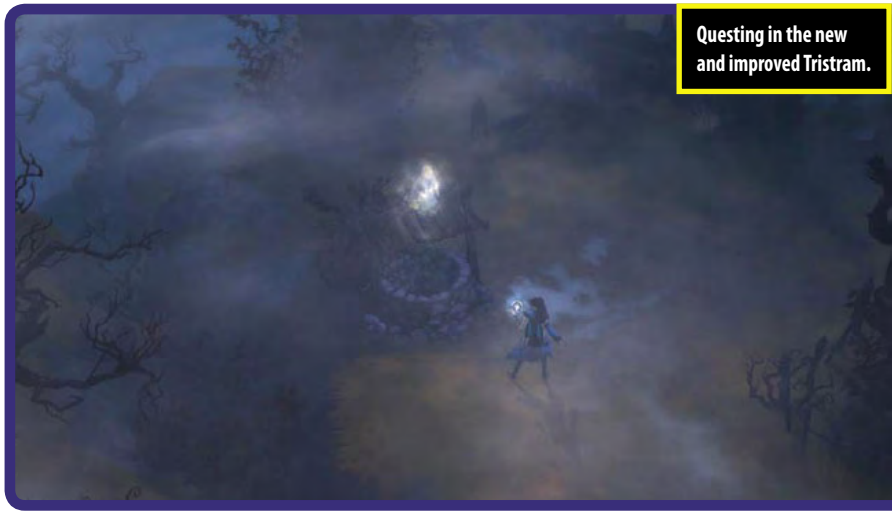
EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



The siegebreaker – take him on, if you dare…



An example of the interior architecture found in Diablo III.



Questing in the new and improved Tristram.



So many skills, so little time. Here we see the wizard using frost nova.

> Interview continued

There are a lot of things that keep people coming back. For starters, I think it's a really compelling universe. It's a fantasy universe, which is pretty common in gaming, but I can't think of another fantasy universe that looks like Diablo. It's fantasy, it's filled with monsters and magic, and yet it feels medieval and real.

It was really dark in a time when games weren't. Now dark is hugely popular, but at the time it wasn't as much, so it was an exceptionally dark game where the player got to be undeniably powerful and heroic. You're the one person facing all the hordes of hell. It's such an iconic enemy, such an iconic conflict. You get to be that hero and it feels great. That's one of many reasons, but that's the reason that excites me the most.

I could probably say that the items are randomised, so people kept killing monsters until they got the right item – and there's a slot machine aspect to that. You know how fun slot machines can be, and you can just pump quarters into them forever. So it's got that too, but I really think that the universe is one of the things that really excites people the most.

Do you find that it's hard to try and get new players in, or do you think that it simply has the necessary accessibility?

I don't think Diablo has any problems with accessibility because it's so easy to play. My wife played it for the very first time today and she doesn't play games at all, but she can click a mouse, so she can play. Within five minutes, she had her left hand on the one-to-four keys, her right hand on the mouse, and she was owning some monsters. That kind of approachability is what draws players in and makes it a really great game.

FREE! EXCLUSIVE DIABLO III WALLPAPERS & SCREENSAVER

Download them here! Free Diablo III wallpapers and screensaver for your desktop



There's big news in the gaming world, as after an eight-year absence, Diablo is coming back – and it's going to be in 3D, too. You've read the preview feature and interview in this issue, and as if that wasn't enough , we've also got these exclusive wallpaper images and a screensaver from the game for you to download for your PC.

YOU'VE GOT 6 FANTASTIC WORLDS TO EXPLORE, BUT AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF WAYS TO ENJOY THE RIDE.



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The dynamic duo are back in their most constructive adventure yet. Battling against the evil witch Gruntilda across 6 fantastic worlds, Banjo and Kazooie need you to help them build an amazing array of vehicles in order to overcome more than 150 challenges and secure the future of their homeland. It's going to be quite a ride.

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Microsoft game studios
RARE

Jump in.

XBOX 360

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NEW SHOTS

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Diablo, Warcraft
Link: www.starcraft2.com
ETA: 2009-2011

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

"The Terran campaign map consists of 23 planets"

STARCRAFT II

Trilogy sees Starcraft world expand dramatically

The anticipation for Starcraft II has grown immensely this month, with the news that the upcoming single-player campaign is going to be split into three separate products.

"The original game was three campaigns with one story, and we tried to make them as in-depth as possible," says Samwise Didier, Blizzard's art director. "With this one we're trying to push it even more. We started by doing three campaigns, but the farther along we got, the more we saw ourselves trying to chop back on some things in the Terran campaign to make sure we had time to work on those for the Zerg and Protoss. We had a team vote and decided to do it right instead of cramming it all into one game and losing lots of cool ideas."

Just to give you an idea of the scale, the Terran campaign map consists of 23 planets, and although the exact number is unknown, each will have >



Terran infantry and vikings try to stop a group of Protoss colossi from crossing a river.



Protoss carriers assault Terran thors and missile turrets.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE



Protoss colossi, immortals, and stalkers descend upon a Terran encampment.



Terran air units attack a Protoss base defended by archons and carriers.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE



Zerg roaches, lurkers, mutalisks, and corruptors attack a Terran-held bridge.



Zerglings and hydralisks flood into a Terran base defended by siege tanks, marines, marauders and thors.

> Starcraft II continued

multiple missions. With two more full campaigns to come over the following two years we're looking at over 60 planets to explore.

This time round the developers are focusing on the single-player experience, making it more in-depth and involved. "It's not only a linear campaign where you just go down a straight line," Didier notes. "You can choose your path of adventure, and we have a whole cast of characters for you to check out; some new, some old."

Decisions were wisely made to keep some classic units intact, like the space marine and siege tank for example, however the medic was cut out, among others in order to make room for the new additions.

"People don't want to buy Starcraft II and have it be the exact same game. It's 10 years in the future here, and we were very keen to make something new," Didier says.

Thanks to the new 3D engine, characters have a much wider breadth of animations, and you can zoom in, out and round the levels. In addition, a big leap forward has been the introduction of in-game cinematics. Also adding to the immersion, you'll find yourself becoming more attached to the characters and also get to interact with their world in new ways.

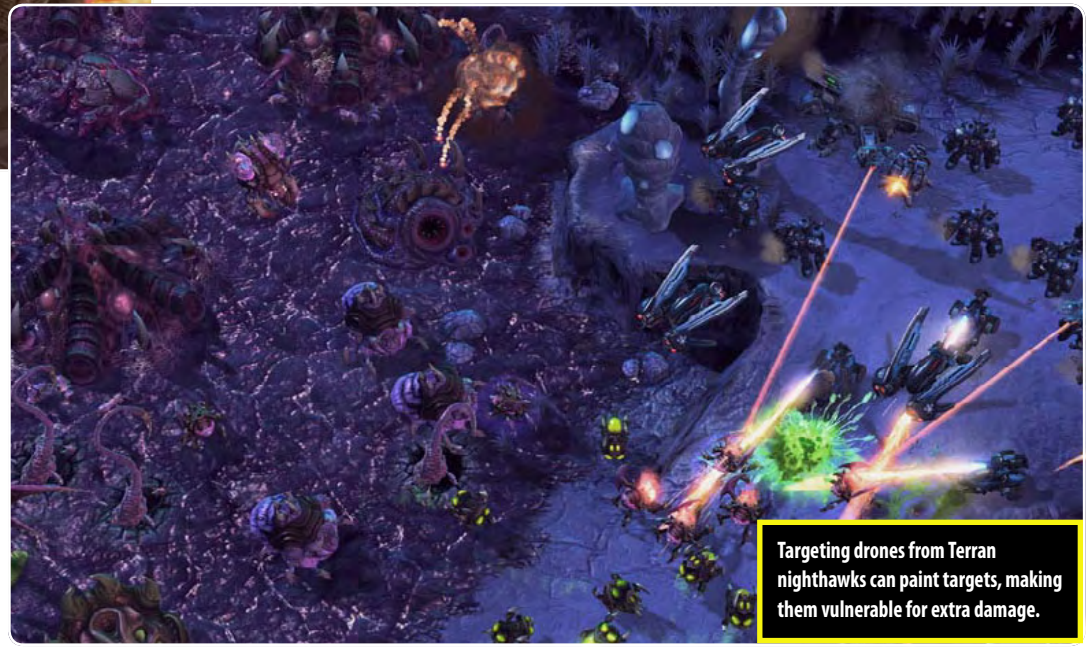
But don't despair, although single-player is getting a fairly hefty workout, >



The area effect flame attack from hellions can make short work of zerglings.



Starcraft gets a huge overhaul in the single-player mode, with the introduction of some great cut-scene cinematics.



Targeting drones from Terran nighthawks can paint targets, making them vulnerable for extra damage.

> Starcraft II continued

the team hasn't totally forgone the multiplayer experience altogether.

"We're really trying to keep what made Starcraft cool – great multiplayer, great story (which is evolving to be a little bit more in-depth) and a more immersive experience," Didier enthuses.

Still a challenging RTS, the game isn't kind on its players, yet its accessibility means everyone can give it a go. Controls are simplistic, in that you just need to use a mouse, and once you get to grips with the tech tree and gameplay tactics, it's a matter of diving in and surviving! Sure, if you want to be a master you'll need to spend a lot of time playing and mastering techniques, however Blizzard's got the balance right as those new to the game can jump straight in.

The release may be way off yet, but the excitement for this game is already ramping up. With gamers queuing for hours to experience the game at Blizzcon, the reception has been great.

Asking Didier how he felt the game was coming along, he said: "Multiplayer is really solid but we're not in our beta yet, that's coming soon. What we're focusing on now is single-player and getting it as cool as we want it to be. It's coming along nicely. We had some demos here, and everyone seemed to really be into it. It's definitely a different direction for an RTS, to have an adventure game within it," he concludes.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 75%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

A hardcore game on a much bigger scale

TRADE FIGHT BUILD THINK

X3

TERRAN CONFLICT







PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

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Far Cry 2

Realism rules in Ubisoft's jungle

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Heritage: Far Cry Instincts
Link: www.farcry2.com
ETA: 24th October

"Set in over 50 square kilometres of African desert, there's no denying that Far Cry 2's an amazing technical masterpiece"


This thing's entirely wood. That means it'll burn, killing everyone inside it.

When Crytek and Ubisoft had their infamous falling out, many wondered what would become of their Far Cry series. Ubisoft retained the rights to the Far Cry brand, and gave it a development team, but frankly, all we got were two awful console shooters. But just when we presumed that Far Cry was a thing of the past, Ubisoft shook the world with the announcement of a new game. A game that looked stunning. And that game was Far Cry 2.

Set in over 50 square kilometres of African desert, there's no denying that Far Cry 2's an amazing technical masterpiece. The sheer size of the environment you're presented with is awe inspiring, and for the first few hours of play, you'll likely to just be exploring the delights of the Sahara, discovering enemy camps, coming across new cities, and wondering why everything's so quiet.

One of our fears when we heard Far Cry was going to be set over 50 km2 of land was that things may get a bit empty from time to time, and sadly, this is actually the case. Even worse is when this happens and you're miles away from a vehicle, with no easy way of knowing where the nearest transport is. It's as if the game's set over 50 km2 of land just for the sake of it, or even for the 'realism'. And as Far Cry 2 shows us, sometimes realism and gameplay are an incompatible brew.

But if we could go back for a second, it's probably worth explaining why you're in the jungle in the first place. >


Most of the townships have plenty of buildings, but seem worryingly void of people.

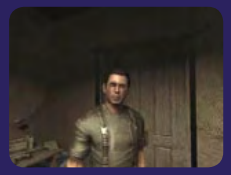
FREEZE FRAME

Welcome to the jungle…


OFF FOR A DRIVE
This is you, driving across the Serengeti with your lovely driver.


FEELING FAINT
Nothing to see here. Even less when you pass out in the back of your car…


THE JACKAL?
You wake up, and you're confronted by the Jackal. Or, at least, we guess he is.

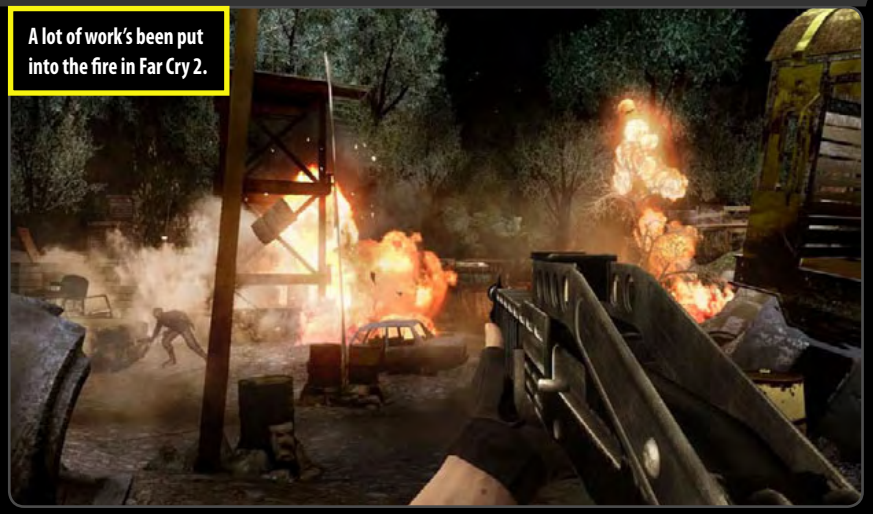

THE MEXICAN
Then you're suddenly speaking to a Mexican for no logical reason.


HISTORY REPEATING
Choose a side, fight a war, blow things up. And kill the same enemy. Twice.


The animals are one of the highlights of the wilderness.



There's no denying Far Cry 2 looks gorgeous.



A lot of work's been put into the fire in Far Cry 2.



The hang-glider returns in Far Cry 2, only this time you've got 50 square kilometres to explore.

> Far Cry 2 continued

Africa's fallen into a civil war, with the two warring factions, the UFLL and the APR dissolving into an ever-more bloody conflict. The one common theme in this conflict is their weapons supplier, and the guy who's firing up this whole conflict, known only as the Jackal. As you may have guessed, you've been sent in to stop him – but how you do that is entirely up to you.

Much like the original Far Cry, once you've got past the tutorial section, Far Cry 2 offers you complete and utter freedom, and this is one of its most impressive points. You're free to take up missions for whichever side you want to, from whichever agent you want to speak to, slowly gathering information, and drawing in on your target.

The missions can be approached in a variety of ways too, and as you may imagine, with 50 km2 of ground to play with, there are countless strategies for approaching an enemy base. AI and the expansive wilderness combine to create a real adrenaline rush, as you're forced to rely on your survival instincts alone. There are no fancy radars here – you've just got a map and a gun. If you want to survive, you have to learn how to use them both well.

But while the freedom's certainly great, the problem we have with Far Cry 2 is that it seems eternally juxtaposed between its desire to be a hyper-realistic survival simulator, and its need to be easily accessible as a game.

"There are no fancy radars here – you've just got a map and a gun"

For example, there are far too many times when Far Cry seems to be trying desperately to be realistic, even if it's at the expense of its gameplay. Your weapons degenerate over time, and you're also suffering with malaria, and so have to keep popping pills if you're to stay a functioning human being. If you're out of pills, well, it's a 20 mile trek back to the one guy in the game who'll give you them. And in a game based largely around time, why does it not tell you how to check your watch, or choose to pass a certain amount of >





IN THE JUNGLE, THE MIGHTY JUNGLE

I'm a celebrity, get me out of here…



Realism rules | **Gore** | **Artificial intelligence**

Realism rules

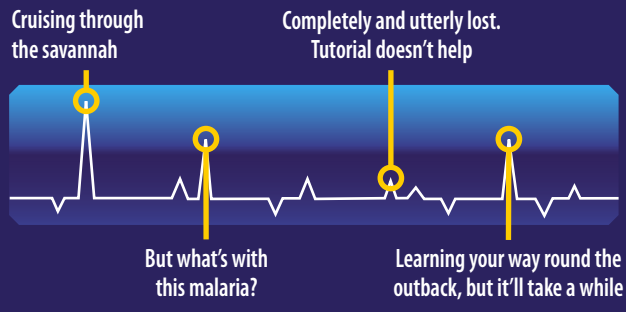
Far Cry 2 makes no bones about being realistic. The GPS system you'll find present in every car makes realistically navigating the land possible, while the lack of a radar in-game forces you to rely on your survival instincts.



Indestructible tin sheds.



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



>Far Cry 2 continued

time without driving to the nearest safe house – wherever that may be?

And although there's no denying Far Cry's technical merits, it's impossible to not draw unflattering comparisons with Crysis. Crysis put you in a living, breathing environment. And while Far Cry makes your jaw drop with its realistic use of fire (throw a Molotov into some tall grass and watch your enemies burn), it's always being contrasted by indestructible chairs, and, worst of all, respawning enemies, who have an irritating habit of magically reappearing at the checkpoints, even though you killed them all the first time.

Far Cry 2 is full of brilliant, innovative design decisions (see the boxout for three of the best), but to use an old cliché, for every great decision, there's usually another terrible one. With an overly large gameplay area that often feels empty, missions that often specifically try and take you back on route full of respawning enemies, and a plot that's so confusing, you'll have to read the manual before playing, Far Cry 2 is its own worst enemy. A technical masterpiece that sadly never reaches its potential as a game.

"Far Cry 2 is full of brilliant, innovative design decisions"

Ian Morris

PCGZine Verdict

Impressive and depressive, all at the same time.

- Freedom
- About half the realism points
- Confusing plot, confusing gameplay

85%



Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Redwood Shores
Heritage: Sims, Medal of Honor
Link: www.deadspacegame.com
ETA: 24th October

System Requirements: Pentium 4 @ 2.8 GHz or equivalent, 1 GB RAM, 7 GB hard drive space, 256MB (nVidia GeForce 6800/ATI Radeon X1600 Pro (Shader 3.0 support) graphics card

PCGZine GOLD

Dead Space

Lost in space, but it's nothing like the film

"The characters have been incredibly well written, and the result is a game that feels natural"

To get an important point off the bat straight away, Dead Space is not a terrifying game. There's little in that'll make you jump out of your skin – instead, the game concentrates on creating an atmosphere of pure dread and horror. A feeling that something's waiting for you around the next corner and getting ready to dine on your flesh.

A lot of the way this atmosphere's created is by putting you in an environment that feels so alien. Playing as engineer Isaac Clarke, you're part of a search party sent to the deep space mining ship, the Ishimura. As you may expect, contact was lost with the ship several days ago, and when you get on board, things are not all as they seem…

But the way Dead Space introduces you to its characters and environments is an important part of what makes it so gripping. The characters have been incredibly well written, and the result is a game that feels natural. The characters sound scared, and as their tension increases, so too does yours.



The maggots falling out of this guy's dead body creep us out.

Aboard the Ishimura, things aren't much better. Your eyes are constantly darting around the environment, examining the flickering shadows and any other signs of movement. You hear noises – rattling, or someone knocking something over. In the distance you hear something that could be a person crying. Or whimpering in fear.

This fear is further enforced by the viewpoint, which, although it takes some getting used to, certainly draws you into the action. Even better is the game's lack of interface, which, thankfully, isn't at the expense of the gameplay, but rather it enhances it. Everything you could need to know is easily accessible at the twitch of an eye. Your health's represented in the blue bar running up the back of your spine. If you want to check how many bullets you've got left, just hold up your gun and press R. It's simple, it's easily accessible and it leaves you feeling in control, rather than trying to work out how the hell you do something.

To keep the immersion going, your helmet actually acts like a projector. >



MAN OF MANY POWERS

Upgrading your RIG



What is it R2? | **Stasis** | **Kinesis**

What is it R2?

One of the most important things in Dead Space is your RIG – otherwise known as the funky mining suit you wear. As you progress through the game, you'll gain new implants for this suit, giving you special powers, and you can also upgrade its armour rating and design.



He's lost his head, but that won't stop him.

> Dead Space continued

If you access your map or your inventory, it'll shine out of your helmet without pausing the game. You have to stop and think about this to realise what incredibly clever design it is – keeping you in world, removing the relative security of a pause screen, while providing an alternative that fits with the sci-fi world. This hologram tool is also used to deliver video messages from characters as your progress through the Ishimura – enhancing the already impressive backstory, without breaking the game's pace.

The combat is equally clever. As you're aboard a mining ship, you can't expect to go finding machine guns lying around. You'll be using mining tools, and they certainly pack a punch.

The enemies in the game are the Necromorphs, a strange, bug-like race of aliens, which you'll find in several different varieties. The key here is that just shooting them in the chest won't work. Nor, surprisingly, will decapitation. If you take off an enemies head, it'll just keep coming at you, swinging wildly because it can't see. Dismembering your enemies is the only way to stay alive. To make matters even worse, certain enemies become even more dangerous without their limbs.

But what of Dead Space's flaws? Well, the viewpoint is a bit awkward, as it makes you effectively blind to your left-hand side. Our other complaint is that there isn't enough of it to go round. We wish it'd last for longer.


Dismembering enemies is an art. At least, that's the excuse.

Dead Space is one of those rare games where all the separate elements – story, sound, and gameplay – come together to make an incredible package. The plot's rich in drama and entertaining, the characters well-rounded, the sound serves to enhance the atmosphere, and the gameplay's off the charts. It's rather good-looking too, in case you hadn't noticed. The PC's been drained of survival horrors for almost as long as EA's been drained of high quality original IP. It looks like both droughts have just come to an end.

Ian Morris

Roll over screen for annotations




Keeping an eye on your health at all times is key to your survival.

PCGZine Verdict

A gaming masterpiece that's packed with plenty of atmosphere

- Great gameplay
- Incredible atmosphere
- Just a bit too short

92%

Project Aftermath

Publisher: Games Faction
Developer: Games Faction
Heritage: None
Link: www.gamesfaction.com/project-aftermath
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
2 GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 400MB disc space, GeForce 6 series, RADEON 9600, Intel GMA 950 video card or above, 1280x768 resolution or better

Strategy with a difference

For some reason, there's often an air of a prejudice around indie games that most gamers hold without even noticing. It happens to the best of us. We've lost count of the times we've come across a new indie title, and thought to ourselves 'it looks okay for an indie game', but without even noticing it. Just by thinking that thought, we've almost instantly condemned it to a 'below par' category, as if indie games can't be expected to be the same phenomenal, mind-blowing experiences as a major release. Thankfully, this opinion is changing, and with games like Project Aftermath coming out of our indie studios, it's not very hard to see why.

Roll over screen for annotations



"One of Project Aftermath's unique touches is the way it handles resource gathering"



Thanks to its modest graphics engine, the game runs perfectly on most hardware.

Project Aftermath is an independent game, self-published by UK outfit Games Faction via Steam and digital download. Blending the lack of resource management from Company of Heroes with the visual style of Dawn of War, it's an impressive enough RTS, with little of the lack of production values that can plague indie games.

One of Project Aftermath's more unique touches is the way it handles resource gathering (or doesn't, in the traditional sense), by giving you a limited number of squads and a substance called GOOP. GOOP is the lifeblood of Project Aftermath's strategy, as this is the only way to revive your incredibly limited number of soldiers. Every time you complete an objective, kill an enemy or collect one of the canisters that have been randomly dotted around the map, you'll be awarded with GOOP, and as you'll want to maximise your GOOP reserves, this can really affect the way you approach a situation. >



Obvious references to other sci-fi properties litter the landscapes.



Keep pushing the enemies back, and with a little strategic thinking you'll soon have the advantage.

> Project Aftermath cont.

But while the collection of GOOP adds an instant feeling of reward to accomplishing objectives, there's another little twist that's been added to lend another layer to the proceedings. Both your soldiers, and your enemies can be equipped with different 'elements' of armour and weapons. This works in a similar way to the Pokémon-style 'water beats fire' type of gameplay, with the difference here being that you can change your soldiers' type. And because in most missions you'll find yourself grossly outnumbered by hordes of enemies, switching weapons with almost every encounter ends up being essential to your survival, as it's a sure-fire way to give you an edge over your opponents. Changing the formation of your squads – sending in soldiers with resistant armour first, while the weaker ones hide behind them – is also a necessary strategy if you're going to complete the game's 10 levels.

And although it only has few problems, this is the one issue that gets us down about Project Aftermath – the relative lack of longevity. With only 10 levels, the lack of an epic campaign does hold this back, but there's still a fair amount of replay value in what remains.


It's a space marine with different armour.

Though it may pull you out of its world on a few occasions – with a badly acted line, or a groan-worthy reference – Project Aftermath more than holds its own against most RTS games on the market, and actually betters a fair portion of them. Give the demo a try, and you may be impressed – at just a tenner, this is great value.

Ian Morris


Each of the troops has a coloured circle beneath them to let you know their element.


The refined interface makes it easy to keep track of your unit's health.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Why you'll love this homegrown hit



Britsoft | **Dad's Army** | **Muted**

Britsoft

The one thing you'll always notice about UK-developed indie titles is the way that British culture is often represented with pride. That much is true for Project Aftermath, which thankfully features a number of accents other than 'Cockney' in its voiceover library.

PCGZine Verdict

Indie-licious!

- Inventive gameplay
- Plenty of strategic elements
- Too short

79%

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FABLE II

FREE E-MAGAZINE! READ IT, PRINT IT, SEND IT TO YOUR MATES...

OFFICIAL HANDS-ON FABLE II

Read the definitive guide inside...

7 EXCLUSIVE NEW SCREENS!

GOOD OR EVIL?



How will you play through Fable II?



PUB GAMES

Win items and earn extra money!

INTERVIEW PETER MOLYNEUX



Why Lionhead's main man loves Fable II

FABLE II

Welcome

From the throbbing hive of activity that is Bowerstone marketplace to the dark, frightening pirate port of Bloodstone, the universe of Albion is a rich, intoxicating world to explore – a world full of secrets, of choices, of wonder. There's more than just a main quest and some side quests to enjoy. There's a rich simulation game to get involved in – can you buy all of the houses in the world? There's a social aspect – can you find a partner and successfully raise a family?

Can you do the right thing? Do you want to even? Can you even tell what the right thing to do is? See our Good vs Evil feature to see what we mean about choices.

This is the beauty of Fable II – your game experience will be so different to someone else's. It's a role-playing game and a life simulation; it's an economy simulator and a social experience – both in single-player and the Jump-in, Jump-out multiplayer. It's a game with real wit and thought put into every aspect – and one glance at the ingenious Achievement list proves that – and the time we've spent exploring Albion just makes us even more excited to sink our teeth into the final game.

Roll on October 24th, and the arrival of what's likely to be one of the most uniquely brilliant experiences you'll have on your 360 this year.

Enjoy the issue,

Chris Schilling

"Fable II is going to be so many different things to a great many people"

EXCLUSIVE SCREENSAVER

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Good vs Evil 03
Find out why the choices you make will change your entire Fable II experience...

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Essential tips, tricks & tactics to help you win big!

FABLE II

FEATURE

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Why morality is more than just Black & White

One of the most significant changes to Fable II is the whole morality system. No longer will your decisions be clear-cut choices between noble heroism or demonic nastiness – here you'll have to think about the consequences of your actions, and how they'll impact on your progress.

Take the early example of the star-crossed lovers – a prologue quest which sees a young couple declaring their love for each other, in true Romeo and Juliet style. The girl's interfering mother, concerned that her daughter is about to elope with this man she considers unworthy, interrupts the tryst – at which point, the young man asks you to pass a letter onto his beloved. Yet ring the doorbell, and it's the mother who answers. If you hand the letter to her, are you helping a mother protect her daughter from trouble, or simply preventing the path of true love from running smoothly? Another scene might see you unlock a caged prisoner from his cell. You could either be freeing an unjustly enslaved peasant or releasing a thug on to the world of Albion – the fact that his captor drew a sword on you may have swayed your decision, but does that mean

FABLE II

Fable II continued

he deserved to be let loose?

It's fascinating to see how this has developed from Fable's more simplistic approach – and there are other measures of your behaviour besides good and bad. There's also a meter for purity and corruption, and another which ranges from vicious cruelty to absolute kindness

Players who adopted a virtuous role in the first game may be tempted to inject a wicked streak into their play without it impacting too greatly on their hero status, while others will switch their brand of evil from malevolent to benevolent. Sure, you might have just killed someone's family, but you can always apologise afterwards.

The path you choose will still impact upon your character's appearance. The more evil you become, the less human you'll look – sprouting horns and facial disfigurements – while those who fight for all that is good and right may just see a halo sprout above their avatar. And that's not all.

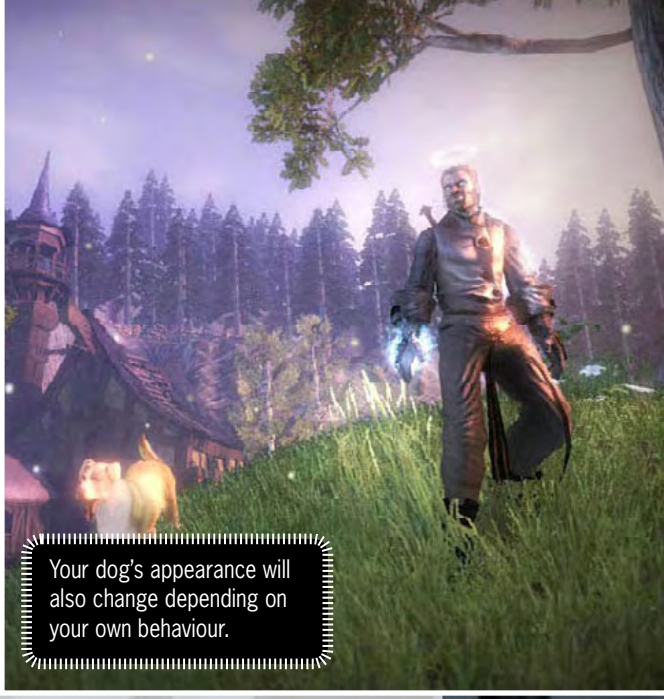
Depending on your actions, shopkeepers may refuse to serve you or adjust their prices accordingly. If you're the embodiment of evil, villagers will boo and hiss at you – or alternatively run away screaming – whereas a heroic avatar will frequently find himself surrounded by his adoring public. And you'll likely be more attractive to the local womenfolk as well.

Your behaviour won't directly influence many of the game's story quests, but you'll find that certain side quests and other tasks only become available once you reach a certain level of goodness (or indeed, should you find yourself on the rocky road to the dark side).

Given that it's possible to kill anyone except the plot's key characters, you may find yourself missing out on a boatload of content if you're a little too trigger – or sword-happy – although then again, your evil behaviour won't have gone unnoticed either, so certain nefarious individuals will be more likely to offer you work if you're behaving very badly indeed. It's actually possible that you'll be treated completely differently in two separate areas of Albion.

In Bowerstone you might be a bit of a legend, but in Bloodstone you may well be considered an easy target – a paragon of virtue on one side of the map, and a thieving, womanising drunk on the other. It's all up to you.

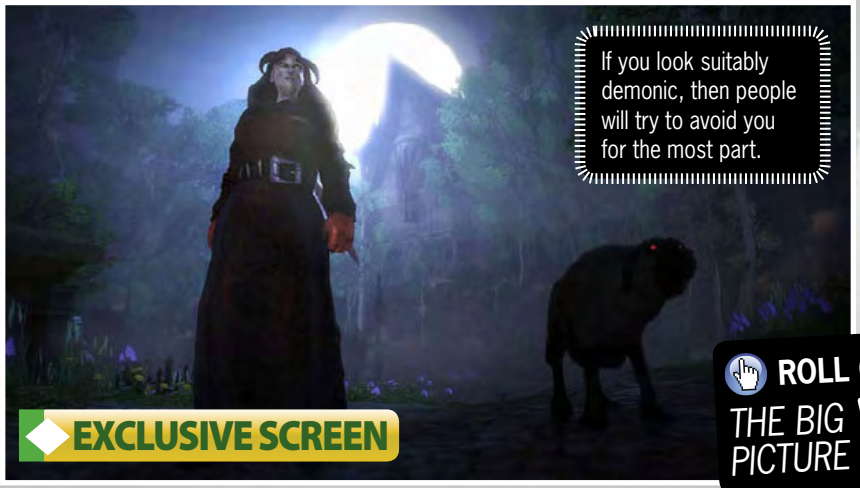
Yet despite all the extreme behavioural possibilities it's the subtle inbetweens that define Fable II's approach to role-playing – where you're not merely shunting your character from one path to the other, but guiding them in a totally non-linear manner according to your own whims. In other words, your characters behave exactly how you want them to behave. And of Fable II's many innovations, perhaps that's the most revolutionary of the lot.



Your dog's appearance will also change depending on your own behaviour.



Your ugliness rating will soar if you're consistently evil.



If you look suitably demonic, then people will try to avoid you for the most part.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

FABLE II

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



The snowy prologue doubles up as a tutorial, introducing players to the controls and themes of the game while weaving a compelling narrative.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

Fable II

Spend some time down in Albion

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Lionhead
Heritage: Black & White, Fable, The Movies
Link: www.lionhead.com
ETA: 24th October

Fable II is set some five hundred years after the original, with the world of Albion having evolved significantly in the intervening years. It's a neat metaphor for the game itself, which has improved an already superb original almost beyond recognition. If the first game suffered from technology limitations stymying Peter Molyneux's ambitious vision, then this current-gen sequel finally sees the developer's imagination given free rein. It's telling that Lionhead is having trouble squeezing it onto a single DVD-9.

You begin the game as a child – either male or female this time – trudging through the snow-covered backstreets of Bowerstone with your sibling, desperately trying to scrape together enough gold to buy a mysterious and powerful item >



"It's improved an already superb original beyond recognition"



EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

As an adult, you'll start out in this small settlement.

FABLE II

Ideas Man

How Peter Molyneux's innovations set Fable II apart from other RPGs



Combat | Development | Story

Combat

Enter into battle, and you certainly won't be standing in line, taking turns trading blows with your enemies. Nor will you be wildly hacking away by stabbing at a single button (though the choice is there to do that if you want it). And you definitely won't be seeing numbers spouting from the top of your opponents' heads. Fable II offers a revolution in RPG combat that could well wind up influencing future titles, with its economy of button commands belying a surprisingly complex system which allows you to adjust from wielding axes to casting spells without any messing around. Indeed, the fluidity of the combat is such that you can do both simultaneously.

> Fable II continued

from a market stall, which leads to a tragic twist, before you fast-forward to adulthood and set out on a hero's quest relating to this incident. We can't say any more for fear of spoiling events, but suffice to say that Fable II, while offering plenty of whimsy throughout, can get really dark at times.

That's hardly surprising, really – Fable II offers light and shade in so many respects, from its myriad choices leading you on the path to either good or evil, while there's also a purity and corruption mechanic that tracks your behaviour in more subtle ways. In other words, you can play as the Albion equivalent of Han Solo – an undoubtedly heroic figure that still has a bit of a shady side.

And choosing to be a loveable rogue is just one of a great many approaches you can take. In essence, Fable II is your game – a very personal experience you can tailor to your own preferences, which means that no two games will play out identically.



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!



Feel free to deck your hero out in the most outrageous get-ups you can find – but don't be surprised when you get funny looks from non-player characters.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN

"Fable II is your game – it's a very personal experience"

MORAL MAJORITY

Your actions directly affect everything within Fable II, which means that no decision can be taken lightly – and Lionhead has thrown in a fair few moral quandaries to test your mettle when it comes down to the crunch. Do you free those prisoners, or leave them caged? Do you disobey orders to choose what you think is a more virtuous option? Morality doesn't just change your avatar's character, it changes their appearance, too. Stroll down the murky path to malevolence and your face and body will change

FABLE II

> Fable II continued

accordingly, becoming less attractive and more fearsome to look at. And a puritanical hero will positively glow with the radiance that such noble deeds bring. You'll also change the world around you with your actions. Once you start raking in the cash, you'll be able to buy property, eventually amassing enough to pick out entire villages for purchase – whereupon you'll have the option to lease out your holdings, potentially for extortionate prices to line your wallet, and that will change the game's economic balance accordingly.

BEEN CAUGHT STEALING

If you'd rather be even more devious in your moneymaking, you can steal from people. First you have to ensure that your character isn't being watched, and then attempt to grab the item in question by holding down the A button while a green bar encircles a small onscreen eyeball (representing whether or not you can be seen). Should the eyeball start to turn towards the front, you can immediately retract your hand and should hopefully get away with it. And if the circle manages to join up at the top, then you've pilfered the item successfully. Get spotted however, and you can expect your standing within the community to change – every single action affects how you're viewed by other people in the gameworld. You're instantly seen as a bit of a hero by the Bowerstone Gypsy Camp you start out in, as until you set out on your quest, no-one has ever left the camp before

Elsewhere you might be viewed as a bit of a ladies' man if you spend your time wooing that area's busty maidens, and it pays to check your menus before you wander into a town you've not visited for a while, in case they remember the episode where you farted in the face of a small child and you suddenly remember that you're persona non grata. That's something you'll almost always be in misty pirate port Bloodstone – a dark, imposing hamlet with residents who are more proficient at communicating with swords than with words. That said, the same place also offers dubious pleasures – like an overweight, scantily-clad male prostitute whose proposition may well be the least attractive offer you've ever had.

STAT ATTACK

There are reams and reams of stats to look at, many of which are hugely amusing, but all of which are relevant to the behaviour of non-player characters towards you. You might lose a bet which

> "Every single action affects how you're viewed by other people in the gameworld"


Venture into the wilds at night, and you're asking for trouble.

Role playful

The game's Achievements are hugely inventive, and offer genuine replay value, as you won't be able to get them all on a single playthrough. The reason for this is that some will be quite tricky to achieve first time round if you've decided to follow a certain path. If you're determined to be good, then you might not get the Chicken Kicker Achievement, while those playing as an evil character may struggle to convince enough women to join them for the Swinger Achievement. Meanwhile, you'll earn small rewards for killing rabbits, getting villagers drunk and committing acts of public indecency. More sensible players will be pleased that the story quests generally offer more Gamerpoints, however. But if you want the full 1000 adding to your Gamerscore, you'll almost certainly have to play it two or three times.

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN


One man and his dog – though it's helpful to have a partner to help you out during trickier parts.

FABLE II

>Fable II continued

results in your face being tattooed all over, but you can reduce your ugliness by wearing a mask – which means people are less likely to comment on how repulsive you are as you skulk past. Even the clothes you wear – while obviously affecting your armour points and similar statistics - can force people to see you in a different light. There's even a Master Chief armour set in the game should you wonder what a Victorian Halo might feel like.

TEAMWORK

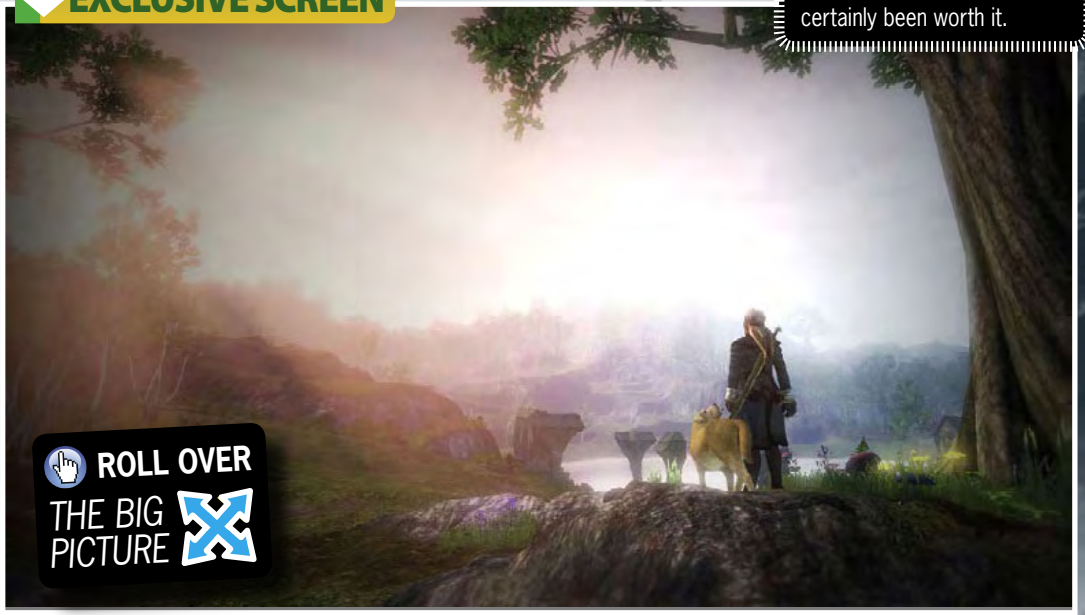
With such a variety between games, it's little wonder that Fable II's co-operative mode is one of its most celebrated new features. If you're connected to Xbox LIVE, at any time you'll be able to see glowing purple orbs floating around Albion, representing your friends in their own versions of the gameworld.

You'll be able to walk up to one and immediately invite them into your game – though first you'll need to negotiate a fee. Because once that second player is in your world, they're able to affect it just as you can. Before this partnership can begin, however, you need to negotiate – the second player effectively becomes a



Larger foes take a while to defeat using standard attacks, which is why it's best to learn the intricacies of the combat system, allowing you to pull off more powerful moves when you spot a gap in their defences.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

Molyneux admits the game's exceptional lighting effects have been tricky to pull off, but the hard work has certainly been worth it.

Roll over screen for annotations



FABLE II

> Fable II continued

henchman to your protagonist, and you can specify the percentage amount of experience and loot they gain while in your version of Albion. And once your time together is over, the second player can leap back into their own game, with more experience and money to put to good use. It's an innovative idea that works terrifically well – neither of you will be able to wander too far, with the camera zooming out but keeping both players onscreen, essentially putting a set of reins on player two to stop them misbehaving. One of the key pleasures of co-operative mode is seeing how your friend's version of Albion has developed differently from your own. The number of choices available throughout means that two disparate approaches can lead to Albions that are worlds apart, almost to the stage where it feels like two different games.

Fable II's world is huge, but it eschews the streaming approach to loading of other free-roaming games to load individual large areas separately. This enables each section of Albion to have much more detail, with non-player characters milling around market areas, and you have some way of interacting with all of them, be it talking to more significant figures, or merely gesturing towards a passer-by using the 'expression wheel' (activated simply by squeezing the right bumper). Indeed you can even express yourself during the game's cutscenes, which offer further interactivity at specific points, where a press of the left trigger focuses the camera on objects of interest.

There's so much to interact with it's unreal. Every single residence – be it a caravan, a house or a huge castle – that you're able to enter can also be purchased. You'll be able to set up small market stalls, choose the price you want to sell your wares at, and let them earn money for you in your absence. You'll even be able to profit from not playing the game thanks to the real-time gold-earning mechanic. Though you can't just wait months and gain an instant fortune – the game will reduce the amount you earn after a certain time, scaling the drop accordingly based on how long you've been away.



The combat is both accessible and flexible with much more depth than your average button-masher.

"There's so much to interact with it's unreal"

FIGHT CLUB

Of course more money means better weapons – all the better for those quests where you face off against fierce opponents in the game's vastly-improved combat sequences.

The 'carrot, not stick' approach to game design is very much in evidence here, in that casual players can get through most encounters by mashing the X button for repeated melee attacks, but those who use timed presses, holds and >



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!

FABLE II

> Fable II continued

different moves will be rewarded with more experience. You're not punished for sticking with the same approach, but it's definitely worthwhile mixing it up. Flourishes are still there, except this time you get a more cinematic camera angle to show off your best Errol Flynn impression, and you'll get more orbs for finishing floored opponents off.

Larger orbs are reserved for the best combatants, and the colours correspond to which techniques were used in battle – blue orbs for melee combat, red for magic, and yellow for ranged attacks, with green representing all-round experience. Each of these orbs can be 'spent' on new powers and techniques within the three main abilities of strength, skill and will. So you might buy 'brutal styles' to become more barbaric, or purchase 'chain attacks' if you prefer to string moves together rather than adopting the bludgeoning approach. You might opt for the sniper technique (which allows you to aim more accurately, zooming the action to a tight over-the-shoulder view) or any one of a number of spells, all of which have five different levels of power, and all of which can be focused around your character for area attacks – affecting any enemy wandering within range, or more powerful ranged attacks, which deal damage to single enemies (or more if your aim's particularly good). The skills screen shows you brief but incredibly useful video overviews of the item you're saving up for, so there's no buying blind. You'll also be able to beef up your character's more basic abilities – examples include physique (which increases your attack power) and toughness, which gives you a longer life bar. At any point if you want to undo your progress towards a specific skill, you can – while it will cost you some experience to change approach, there's nothing stopping you from switching sword-fighting abilities for spells if you find a magician's role more appealing.



Bloodstone is swarming with pirates, and it's a good idea to be prepared for a fight or three.



The Hollowmen make for nasty opponents, especially when there's a group of them. There's a neat Achievement should you slay one in a very specific manner, however...

"There's even a Master Chief armour set"

ROLL OVER THE BIG PICTURE

DOG FIGHT

You're not the only one who gets stuck in during skirmishes, either. Your character is joined by a dog – whom you rescue as a child from a Bowerstone bully – who will savage any foes foolish enough to fall over.

Your pooch acts as a constant companion throughout the game – and you'll be able to pamper

FABLE II

> Fable II continued

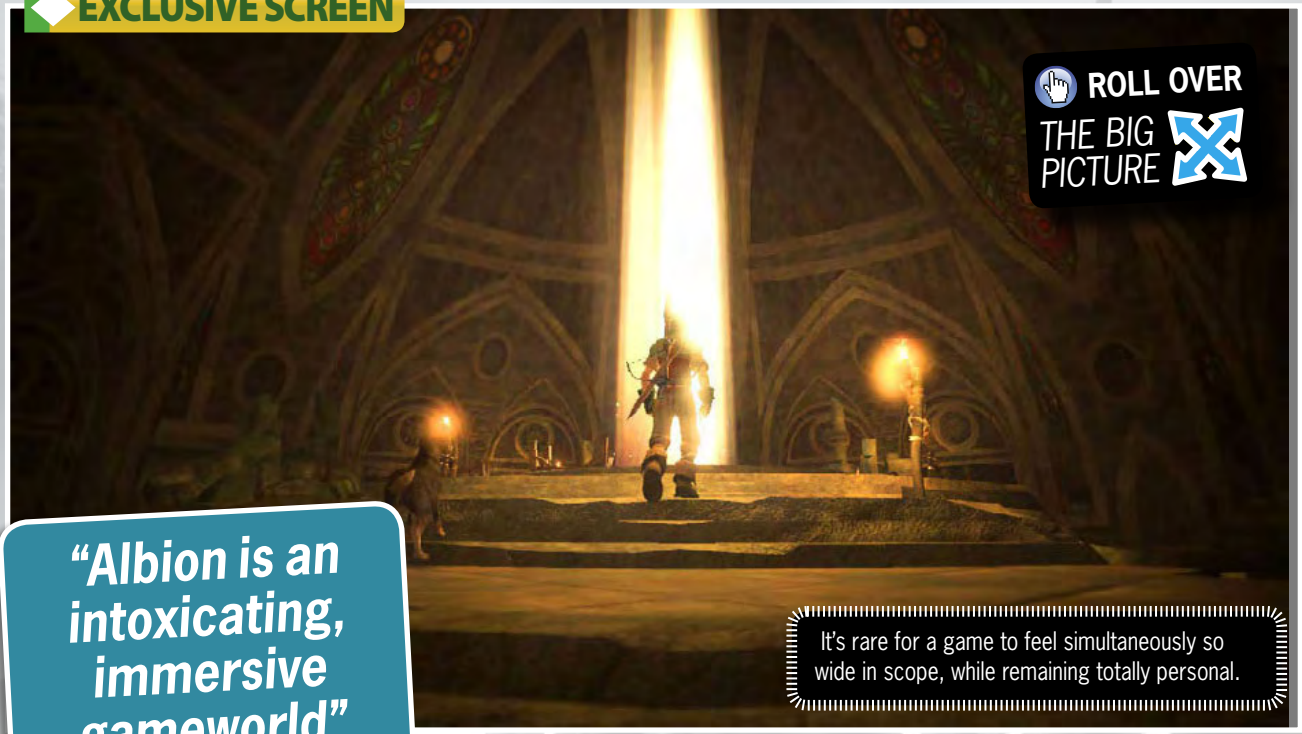


There's a refreshingly British feel to Fable, especially in its slightly bawdy sense of humour.

him to your heart's desire. Though overpraising and frequent treats will turn your canine chum into a lazy, spoilt mutt. Like your own character, your dog can be levelled up – rated from one to five stars at how useful he is in combat, or how effectively he can sniff out treasure.

You'll even be able to teach him tricks – shops will sell you items like a ball which you can throw for him to fetch, thus further building your relationship. He'll bark to alert you during certain situations – often it'll be a treasure chest that he's found, but sometimes it will be a warning that enemies are nearby. He's also responsible for guiding you away from the breadcrumb trail – the glowing path the game provides to help guide you to the next point of interest on each quest. It never gets to the point where you're led by the nose – instead the trail is there to prevent players becoming lost – and is a massive help when you've followed your dog and can't find your way back. Should you follow the path fairly religiously, it will glow much brighter than for those who prefer to wander off the beaten track. And if you prefer to be without it completely, you'll always have the option to turn if off.

EXCLUSIVE SCREEN



It's rare for a game to feel simultaneously so wide in scope, while remaining totally personal.

"Albion is an intoxicating, immersive gameworld"

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

The game's main story quest runs to around twelve hours, but most players will take much, much longer to finish the game, simply because Albion's such an intoxicating, immersive gameworld that you'll want to spend more time there. And you're actively encouraged to go down the road less travelled as your dog will bark to indicate items of interest, and some of the game's best secrets won't be found on the breadcrumb trail. Indeed, Molyneux predicts that the average player will only have reached two-thirds of the potential character development, with a host of levels remaining for more hardcore challenges, like the tricky demon doors where you'll face off against multiple strong enemies.

And if you're tired of traditional adventuring, then you can always spend time in the local inn, swilling ale until your view becomes blurry (with sound effects subtly changing in your inebriated state). Indeed, if you're more into sex than violence, then you'll be able to partake in orgies – though as with the first game, the screen will fade to black while engaging in coitus.

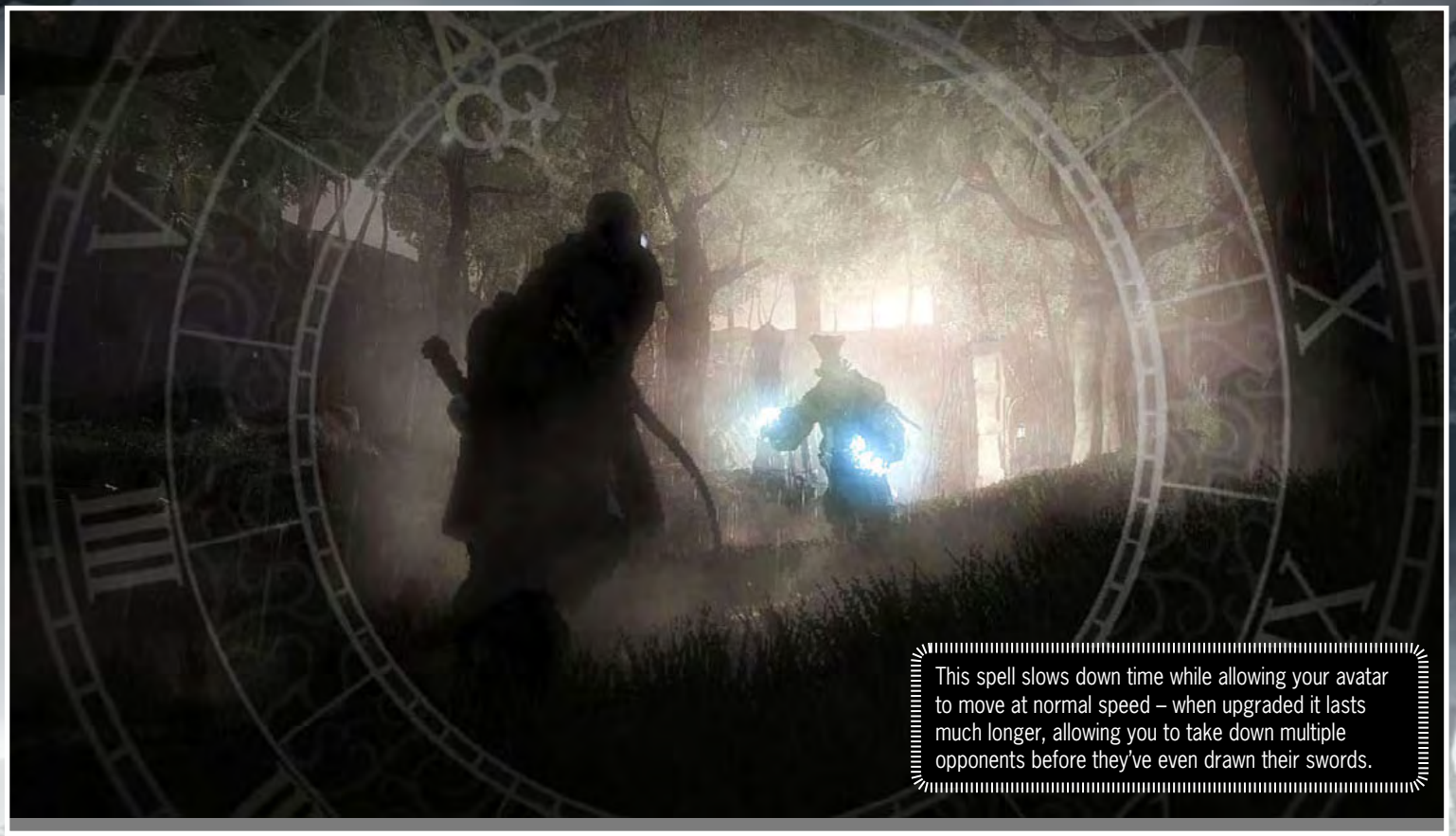
Fable II

> Fable II continued



The art style remains the same, but the many areas of Albion couldn't look more different.

"It's rare that a game makes you feel so empowered"



This spell slows down time while allowing your avatar to move at normal speed – when upgraded it lasts much longer, allowing you to take down multiple opponents before they've even drawn their swords.

Even here the choices remain – you can use a condom to prevent potentially debilitating sexually transmitted diseases, while if you wish to sow your wild oats you'll be able to get women pregnant should you go without a sheath. There's even an Achievement for 'taking part in an orgy, responsibly'.

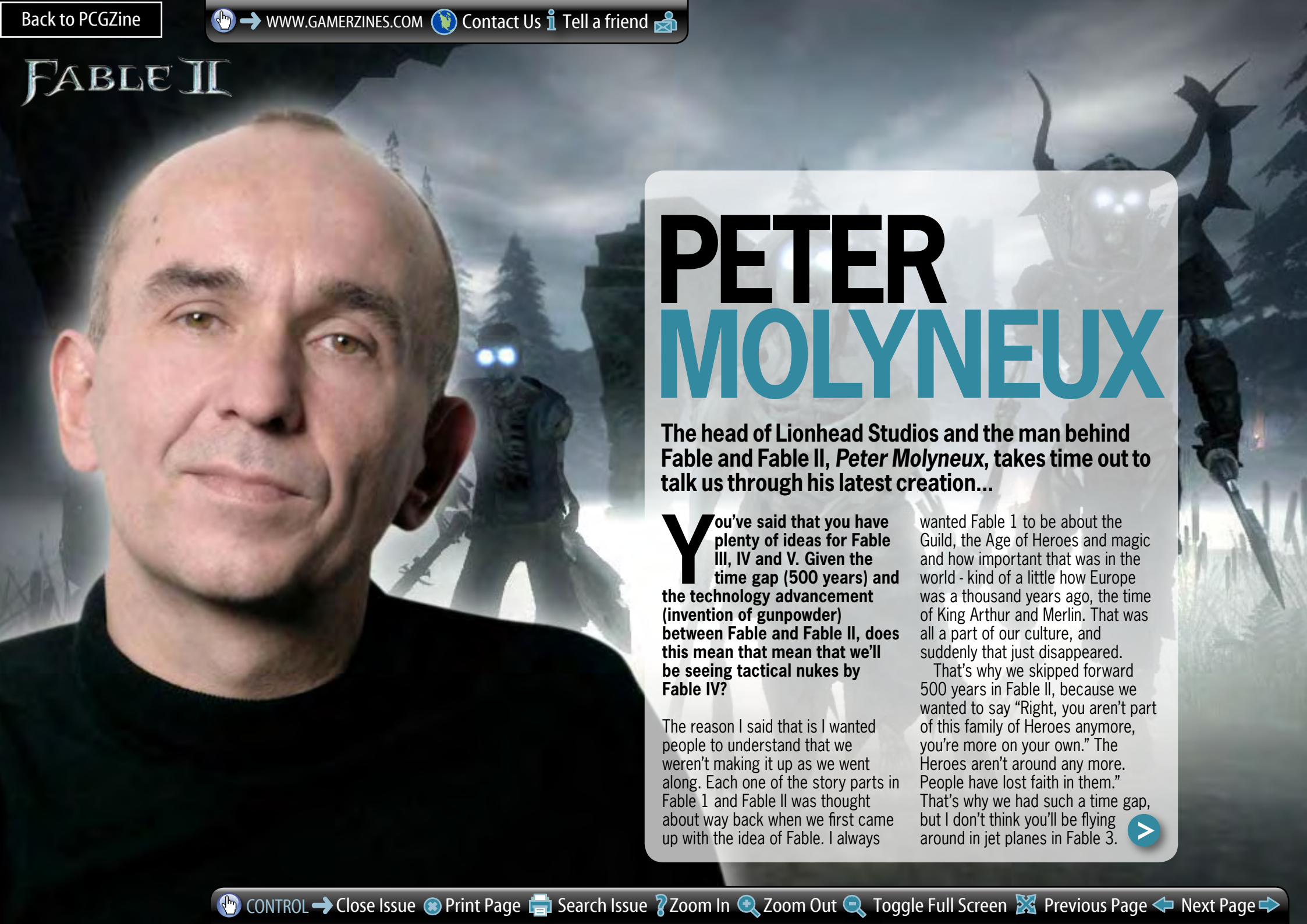
JOB'S WORTH

Talking of responsibility, you'll be able to earn money by taking on a job, such as crafting swords for the local blacksmith. This particular role takes on the form of a timing-based minigame, as you attempt to swipe the hammer at the correct time by pressing the A button as a marker reaches the green area of an arc. This gets progressively smaller and the marker moves much more quickly after a while – making for an entertaining challenge which you can return to whenever you want to make a bit more money, the honest way.

It's not the only task which requires a bit of rhythm – should you fancy yourself as a street entertainer, you'll be able to attract crowds with a bit of Cossack Dancing, which employs a similar mechanic. Once again, this changes your position within the community, and may even cause the town minstrel to write a tune about you. Indeed, you'll be able to visit this songsmith regularly throughout, whereupon he'll base his words on whichever actions you've performed during your adventure. And should you tire of this minstrel's wailings, you can always just kill him.

With so much to see and do, Fable II runs the risk of becoming seriously unfocused, but the fact that every choice of yours has some kind of consequence – however minor – means that everything in the game holds some significance. It's rare that a game makes you feel quite so important, so empowered, and it's a feeling we're sure most of you will want to share when Fable II makes its debut, exclusively to Xbox 360, on October 24th.

FABLE II



PETER MOLYNEUX

The head of Lionhead Studios and the man behind Fable and Fable II, *Peter Molyneux*, takes time out to talk us through his latest creation...

You've said that you have plenty of ideas for Fable III, IV and V. Given the time gap (500 years) and the technology advancement (invention of gunpowder) between Fable and Fable II, does this mean that mean that we'll be seeing tactical nukes by Fable IV?

The reason I said that is I wanted people to understand that we weren't making it up as we went along. Each one of the story parts in Fable 1 and Fable II was thought about way back when we first came up with the idea of Fable. I always wanted Fable 1 to be about the Guild, the Age of Heroes and magic and how important that was in the world - kind of a little how Europe was a thousand years ago, the time of King Arthur and Merlin. That was all a part of our culture, and suddenly that just disappeared.

That's why we skipped forward 500 years in Fable II, because we wanted to say "Right, you aren't part of this family of Heroes anymore, you're more on your own." The Heroes aren't around any more. People have lost faith in them." That's why we had such a time gap, but I don't think you'll be flying around in jet planes in Fable 3.

FABLE II

> Fable II continued

The inclusion of gunpowder is an interesting idea. It's not something you normally see in fantasy RPGs. What was the thinking here?

The style guide for Fable 1 was Sleepy Hollow, the Tim Burton film. The style guide of Fable II is Brotherhood of the Wolf, where it's a highwayman era, and there's a criminal element but they live alongside the rich element and it felt wrong for there to be bows and arrows there. It's not like a sub machine gun. At best you're holding a repeater, which allows you to fire six shots before reloading and it tends to be a little bit slow.

You've never been heavily into doing sequels to your games before. What made you want to return to Fable?

I've not done a lot of sequels in my time, but it did seem like when we started Fable that this was something that could go on. Also I thought that there were some things that went wrong with Fable 1 that really needed to be addressed.

Some of those were stupid things like giving you practically everything you'd need within an hour of playing.

Other things were more complex, like how awful the sneaking was. I thought the story was OK, but I didn't walk away from the story thinking "that was cool". So there was plenty to innovate around, plus the fact that we had some really interesting ideas around the dog and combat and drama. And I have to say and it's a bit of a strange thing to say, but I think I've learnt more about games design doing Fable II than any other game





Combat's much easier with a second player joining in the melee, but you'll have to share the experience and loot.

One change from Fable to Fable II is the inclusion of more "named" voice talent, Stephen Fry and others. What do you think bringing in those types of actors can add to a story driven game like Fable II?

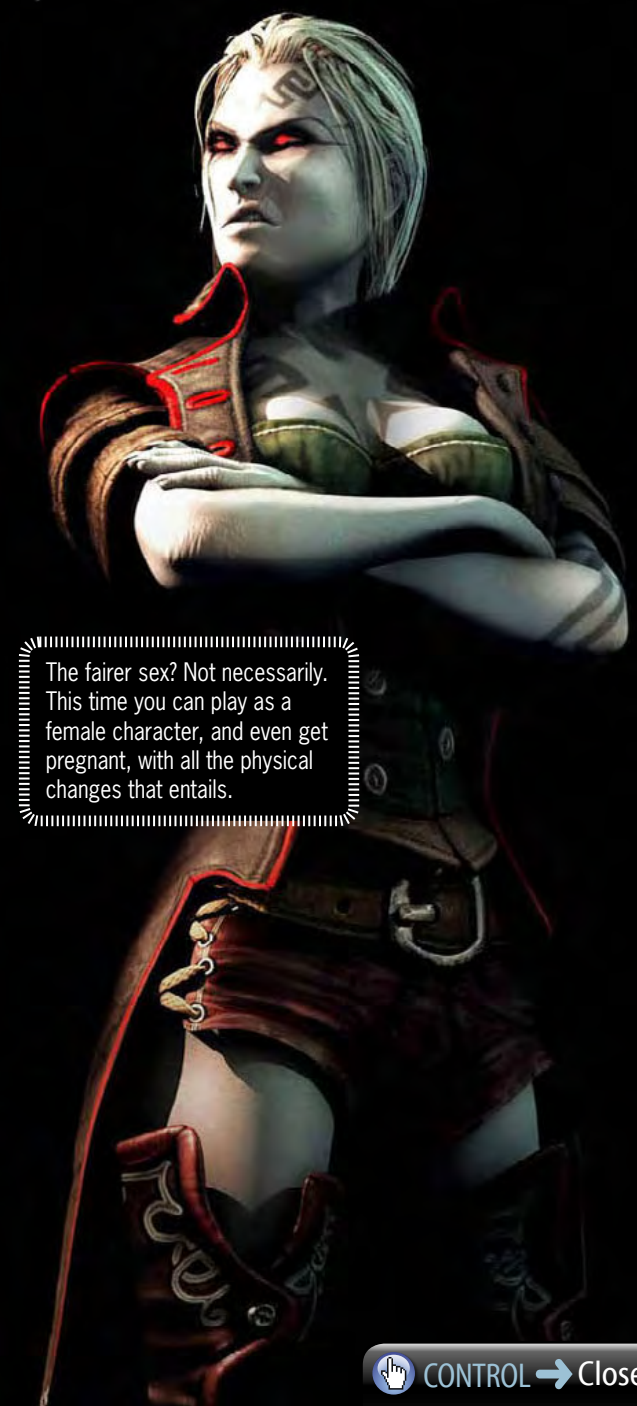
Familiarity pays dividends, because it means people trust those people more. You go "Isn't that Stephen Fry? I liked him in that programme. He's a top bloke." So I don't have to do as much work as a designer to characterise him [laughs], so that's the first thing. The next thing is the actors in Fable II are fantastic because they are professional and they know what they are doing.

I have to admit, and I think some of these voices stayed in,



"I don't want people to play Fable II twice."

FABLE II



The fairer sex? Not necessarily. This time you can play as a female character, and even get pregnant, with all the physical changes that entails.

> Fable II continued

that there were a couple of voices in Fable 1 who were checkout girls at Tesco's [laughs]. You can't compare.

Did you find fitting Fable II onto one DVD or any of the Xbox 360's hardware restricting, or was it just far more liberating than the original Xbox?

Well, I'm sure I should tell you that the Xbox was wonderfully easy and we have everything we want, but of course being a developer, it doesn't matter what you give me we will fill it up to the very maximum. Not only is Fable II this vast open ended world, there's an enormous amount of AI going on. There's the AI of the dog, the economy of the world, there's characters that travel with you, there's the ability to bring in co-op players, there's all the LIVE stuff: we are pushing every aspect of the 360.

Can you tell us a little bit about the good and evil choices?

Well, it's pretty hard to describe that. In Fable 1 it was easy. I could just say you get horns or you get a halo, but in Fable II it goes a lot deeper than that. Yes, you can look more noble and light, or darker and with horns, but that's just the visual aspect. It's not just about what you look like. It's the way the world treats you, the way people in the game treat you, the way your family treats you, the way your dog reacts... there's a list a mile long of things that changes because of your choices. It's not just about good and evil any more. It's how much are you willing to sacrifice.

Fable 1 was about kill this person, save that person. Fable II is more about making you think "well, what is the good thing to do here?" There's a tiny one in childhood, for example, where there's this girl who wants to elope... you've got to give this love letter either to her to allow her to elope or to her mother to stop her. Now which is the good one there? Is it good to give it to the parent who is worried about their child, or should love be allowed to find a course? I think there are lots of times in the game like that where you will be asking yourself what is the right thing to do, and I like that.

"We are pushing every aspect of the 360"

We also measure purity and corruption – how you approach things, whether you overcharge for items and cruelty and kindness. Now you might think being kind is being good, but no it's not. I'll give you a real life example. To my son every night I'm cruel to him because I make him go to bed, but I know that if I don't he'll get up cranky. I want people to finish Fable II and say "OK, I now know a little bit more about myself."

Are there ramifications in the world – if you're good you can only do one quest and if you're evil, there's a different one?

You're talking about branching. Yes, we do do branching. Sometimes the world branches. To give you an example from childhood. If you do a quest one way, the whole region changes. So there's not just good quests and evil quests, but entirely different regions with different people. I know Fable 1 was a game that a lot of people played twice, but because there is an element of drama missing second time around, it wasn't such a good game second time around. The funny thing is, I actually don't want people to play Fable II twice. I know that sounds very odd, but I've designed this game to be played once – in this unique way. A lot of the world works as a simulation, so people can continue to play and enjoy beyond the story.

FABLE II

FEATURE

Fable II Pub Games

Win money and items today!



Available on Xbox LIVE Arcade now for a mere 800 points, Fable II Pub Games allows you to win money and items for use in Fable II itself. So we've put together these tips and tricks which should hopefully ensure that your avatar is nicely in the black by the time October rolls around.

GENERAL TIPS

It pays to spend time unlocking the better tables, even if you end up having to borrow a fair bit in the meantime. The higher-limit tables offer a better chance of getting your money back, because wins are far bigger. Sure, if you risk a lot of money then you could well lose big too, but a few lucky hands should leave you in a healthy position. It's knowing when to quit that's the key!

Alternatively, you should try to enter the tournament – not only because you stand the chance of winning items that are unique to Pub Games – yes, some items aren't available anywhere in Albion – but also because chances are that you'll get out more than you put in. That's because money is added by the house to each game – so even if you don't win outright, there's a chance of making a tidy profit by the time you're out. Not only that, but you'll get a cash sum for finishing in the top five.

You're not forced to merge your Pub Games character with your Fable avatar – so if you end up down on your luck, then simply keep the two separate. That way you can start out with a completely clean slate.

FORTUNE'S TOWER

This is almost certainly the best game to play to win most, as it's the most strategic of the three. Make sure you choose a deck with the lowest number of Number cards (56 rather than 70), as it increases the ratio of Hero cards to Number cards and therefore your odds marginally.

"Fortune's Tower is the best game to play to win"

It's often a good idea to cash out when the Gate Card is gone, to avoid risking a loss, particularly if you've bet big. Remember the Gate card is not a Get out of Jail free card – while it does offer some security, it can still cause a burn.

Don't risk all on doubles – you'll be in profit quite early, and it's sometimes tempting to go for broke for a big win, inevitably ending up in failure. Sometimes it's better to cash out on a small profit, while letting the NPCs risk all and lose.

It's tempting during tournaments especially to try and get your money back, leading to more risky play, but to win, you don't need to have more than you started with - just make sure you have more than your competitors. Keep an eye on their totals and bet accordingly.

FABLE II

> Fable II continued

If you're way behind you'll have to try the odd risky bet, but if you're roughly even then play it safe – cash out as soon as you feel comfortable. Occasionally, the opponents will risk all for a jackpot and miss out.

If you make it to the final stage of a tournament, you're going to win something, so you can afford to take more chances. As long as you get to the final stage once in three, which is quite achievable, you'll be in profit even on ranking fifth on the top table. Finish higher and those odds increase further. When you have the money, play the high rollers' tables outside the tournament to win big.

KEYSTONE

Again, the odds are better at the higher-limit tables, and particularly in tournaments. Stick to the later tables once they're unlocked and you're more likely to profit. Remember to check the odds by pressing the left trigger, to remind yourself of the chances that each of your bets has of winning.

In the tournaments, it often pays to place low-odds, high-reward bets – as an example, put the arch bets on 3 and 18, then bet on all the individual triples, and finally the triple square. Keep doing this and you'll lose a number of rounds, but when you win, you'll scoop a huge amount. Revert to safer bets (like 10 and 11 on the arch, and 4-9 and 12-17 squares for the inner bets) and you'll likely finish on top, or at least in the first three.

Don't bet against yourself. In other words, if you bet on a single number, make sure other bets correspond, so it's the same shape, colour, number range. Betting against yourself might mean you win something back, but overall it makes no sense as some of your bets have to lose.

SPINNERBOX

Again, it pays to play for a while, even if you're losing money.



Unlocking the later games is the secret to success, as the higher-limit games offer better odds once more.

Don't go looking for any specific tactics, as there's no way to affect your results at all. There's literally no way of influencing what will happen, so just keep tapping A and hoping for the best.

From experience, the Cow and Corset spinnerbox (with the maximum bet of 250) seems to pay out slightly better than the others.



IN-GAME EFFECTS

Apart from the items you may or may not have won, your Fable II game can be affected by your performance in Pub Games, should you choose to merge your gambler with your Fable II avatar. Any debt you accrue will be outstanding with the Pub Games Masters which you can find within Albion's many public houses. Should you happen to owe too much money, you'll be considered a criminal, and will have to pay a fine or even do some community service!

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