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Issue 25 | Dec 2008

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THE WHEELMAN

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OVERLORD 2

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STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

This is the MMO you're looking for.

Welcome to PCGZine



BioWare has always been one of the most respected studios in the industry. Consistantly producing the world's finest RPGs is something that'll earn you a ton of the stuff among PC gamers. In this issue, we reveal not only exclusive info about their upcoming Dragon Age: Origins, but also take a look at what for my money is the hottest MMO on the radar: SWTOR. But we're not ALL about those cunning Canadians this month, not with monsters of gaming *GTA* and Tomb Raider to review, not when news of a link between Final Fantasy and Supreme Commander reaches us, not when indie delights like World of Goo need their praises sung. We've got a job to do; we can't play Dragon Age ALL day…

James Carey, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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

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















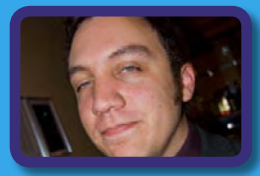
QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

Wheelman	Street Fighter 4
Overlord 2	Lord of the Rings: Conquest
Dungeon Hero	Dragon Age: Origins
Imperium Romanum 2	Star Wars: The Old Republic
Jumpgate Evolution	Alpha Protocol
EndWar	GTA IV
Supreme Commander 2	Tomb Raider: Underworld

MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Quintin Smith
Went to Canada to see BioWare. Got a cold. Sneezed for weeks.



Jim Rossignol
Now more swimsuit than man after getting too close to Lara.



Steve Hill
This month Steve stole cars for a living. Oh, and reviewed GTAIV.

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.

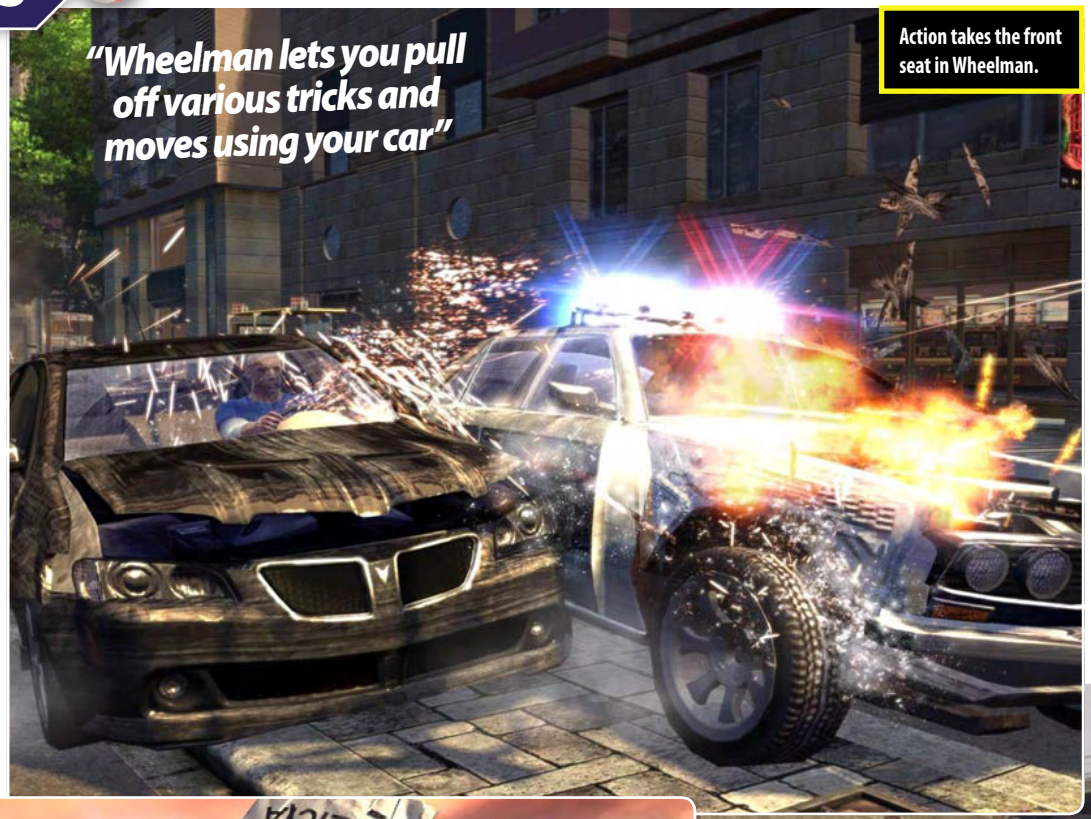


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WHEELMAN

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Fuzzyeyes Studio
Heritage: L.A. Rush
Link: www.wheelman game.com/uk
ETA: Spring 2009

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



Action takes the front seat in Wheelman.

Wheelman

FIRST LOOK

This truly is a Diesel-powered game

What's the story?

An action-packed driving game with a distinct Hollywood flavour, Wheelman's looking to bring all the glamour and adrenaline of big-screen car chases direct to your monitor – with an in-game Vin Diesel leading the way. Heh, his name's Diesel… and it's a driving game. See?

What do we know?

We were lucky enough to see a live demonstration of Wheelman at Nottingham's GameCity, and we're pleased to say that it's looking very good indeed. Instead of relying on realistic handling alone, Wheelman lets you pull off various tricks and moves using your car – from slamming into enemy vehicles using the right analogue stick (we were using a gamepad) as they attempt to pass you, to leaping onto the roof of another vehicle and swinging in through the window, taking out the driver as you go. With some slick graphics, great presentation, and an incredible 'wow' factor, Wheelman is shaping up to be a surprise hit of 2009.

When do we get more?

The game looked pretty much finished when we saw it, and with a release date pencilled in for early 2009, there should be more than enough time to give it a last-second polish before it leaves the garage.



Who *doesn't* like highspeed car chases?



Could this be a good movie tie-in?



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


We're sure the seal will be alright. Um…

Overlord 2

FIRST LOOK

The Minions are back…

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Triumph Studios
Heritage: Overlord
Link: www.codemasters.com/overlord
ETA: 2009

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Overlord 2

What's the story?

The sequel to last year's hit-or-miss comedy, Overlord 2 is looking to be a more of the same sequel, with bigger environments, characters, and the same sense of humour.

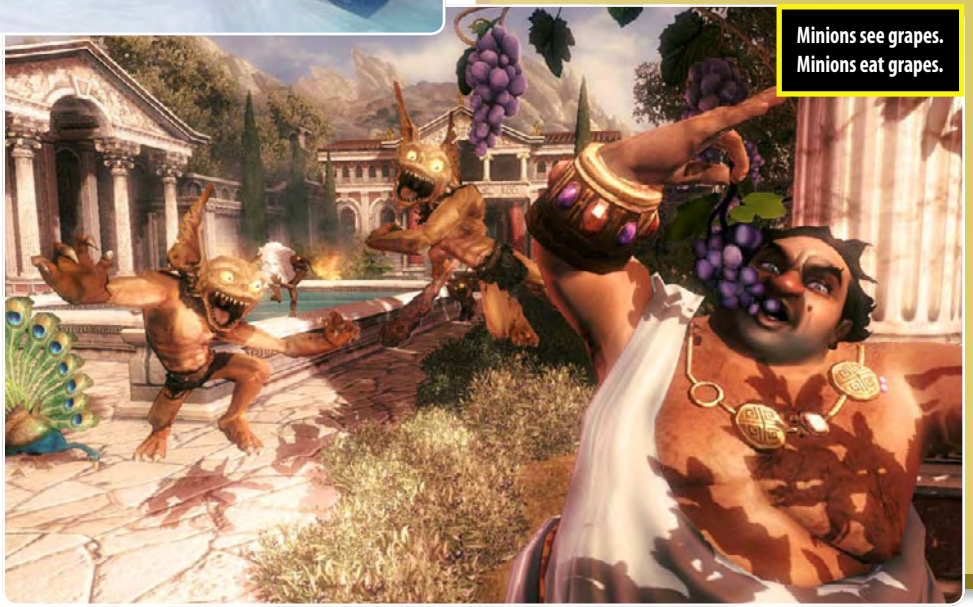
What do we know?

After setting your guy up as an all-powerful being in the first game, it'd be a bit rubbish to do it all again, so this time round there's a new Overlord in town, in a new area. With a more powerful army of minions in tow, it's up to you to clash with an entire Empire, as you attempt to establish yourself as the supreme evil honcho.

When do we get more?

Irritatingly, we can only get a release date of '2009', but the wise money is on a launch in the second half of the year.


The graphics have seen a notable improvement since the original.


Minions see grapes. Minions eat grapes.

Anything else to declare?

One of the areas Triumph Studios has decided to take a look at for Overlord 2 is the Minion's abilities. Retaining the same pack mentality as before, the little goblin-type creatures can still scavenge enemies armour and weapons, but now, they can also ride mounts too. Seeing a troop of minions atop a horse is going to be a sight to see – if they can nail the controls using a keyboard and mouse then this could definitely be one to look forward to.

7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

EndWar



Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** 2009

Another somewhat unofficially announced title, Ubisoft's EndWar has shown up in ESRB ratings listings, suggesting a PC release could be imminent. Using voice commands to control your troops, the console versions have received a muted reception, so it'll be interesting to see how this adapts to the usual mouse-centric RTS controls of the PC.

Imperium Romanum 2

Publisher: Kalypso Media | **ETA:** March

We've had our eye on this Roman city builder for some time now and with each month that passes it just looks better and better. With a stunning graphical engine and some easily accessible – yet incredibly deep – gameplay, this could do for Roman building games what Dead Space did for body dismemberment.



Jumpgate Evolution



Publisher: COG | **ETA:** TBC 2009

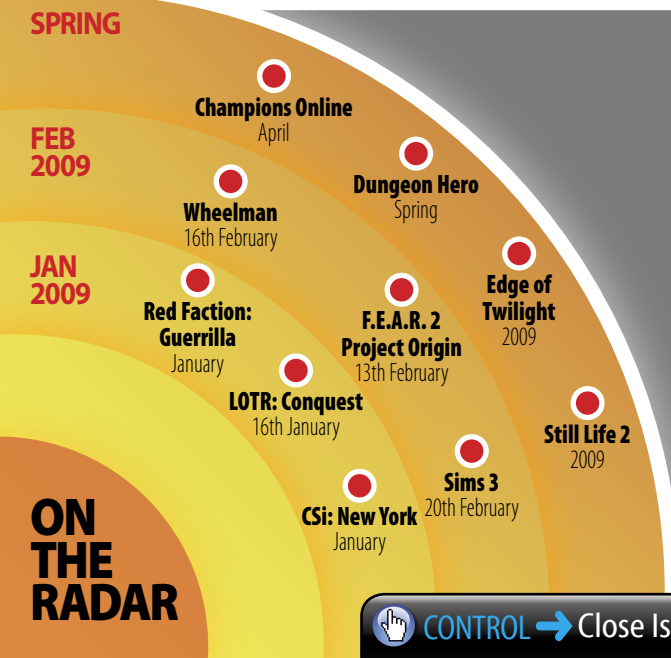
With Jumpgate Evolution, that glittering 'Elite but with more MMO' game we've all been waiting for could finally have arrived. Over 150,000 beta testers have signed up to scour the universe for space bugs, and we should be getting some hands-on in the new year. Until then, keep watching the skies…

Dungeon Hero

Publisher: Gamecock | **ETA:** Spring 2009

Dungeon Hero's name is somewhat misleading, seeing as how the game neither takes place in a dungeon, nor do you play as a hero, but despite that, we're happy to say that the game itself is shaping up into quite a nice little RPG. It's released this spring, so we'll have more info very shortly.

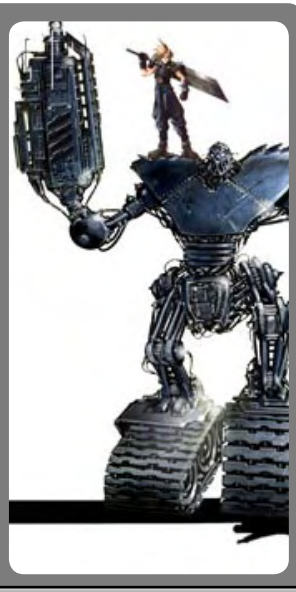




Supreme Commander 2

Publisher: Square-Enix | **ETA:** TBC

Final Fantasy fellas Square-Enix have announced they'll be publishing a sequel to THQ's Supreme Commander, though they've given no indication of when. It's a odd coupling but apparently Square-Enix are broadening their horizons to the Western market, and that means games developed by and for Westerners.





Street Fighter 4

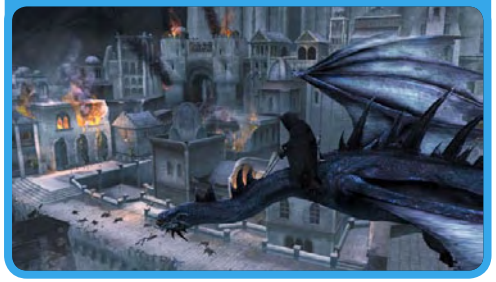
Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** 2009

It may look great in the arcades, but soon you'll be Hadouken-ing across your PC, thanks to the news that Street Fighter 4 is coming to a computer near you soon. And with Capcom's new love for the PC, we can expect to see many more.

Lord of the Rings: Conquest

Publisher: EA | **ETA:** January

Originally set for release before Christmas, we're sorry to say this Lord of the Rings-branded epic has been pushed back to January. Hopefully, the extra time should give the developers time to apply the extra layer of sheen this really needs to stand out.





Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Could this be the darkest RPG yet? Read on to find out…

For the last 15 minutes, the two Elves we're watching on the screen have been engaging in some proper old-school dungeoneering. Since entering the underground ruins they've been ambushed by the walking dead, various vicious traps, spiders the size of bears (not to mention an *actual* bear covered in spikes known as a 'Bereskarn'), and these Elves dispatched them all through careful use of skills, tactics and items. But then something strange happens. Approaching an ancient statue triggers a conversation within the party, and as the camera zooms in we get our first horrific look at the characters up close. They're absolutely >

> Dragon Age continued

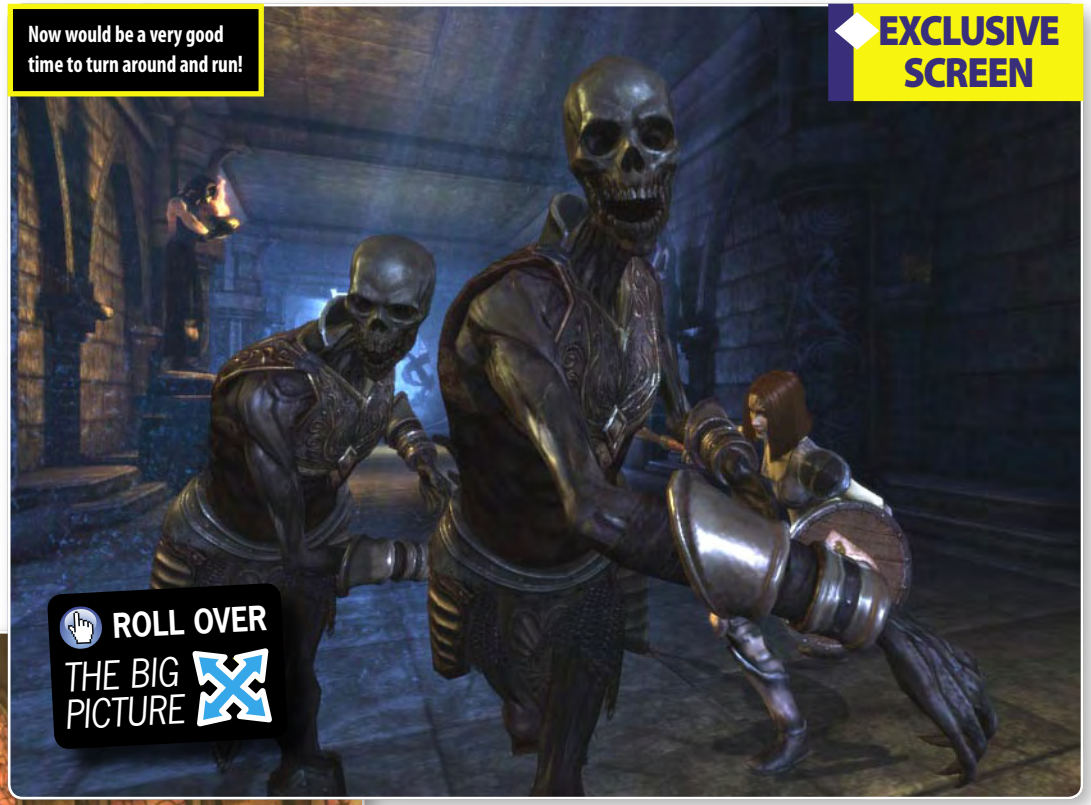
Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare
Heritage: Mass Effect, KoTOR, Baldur's Gate
Link: http://dragonage.bioware.com
ETA: March 2009

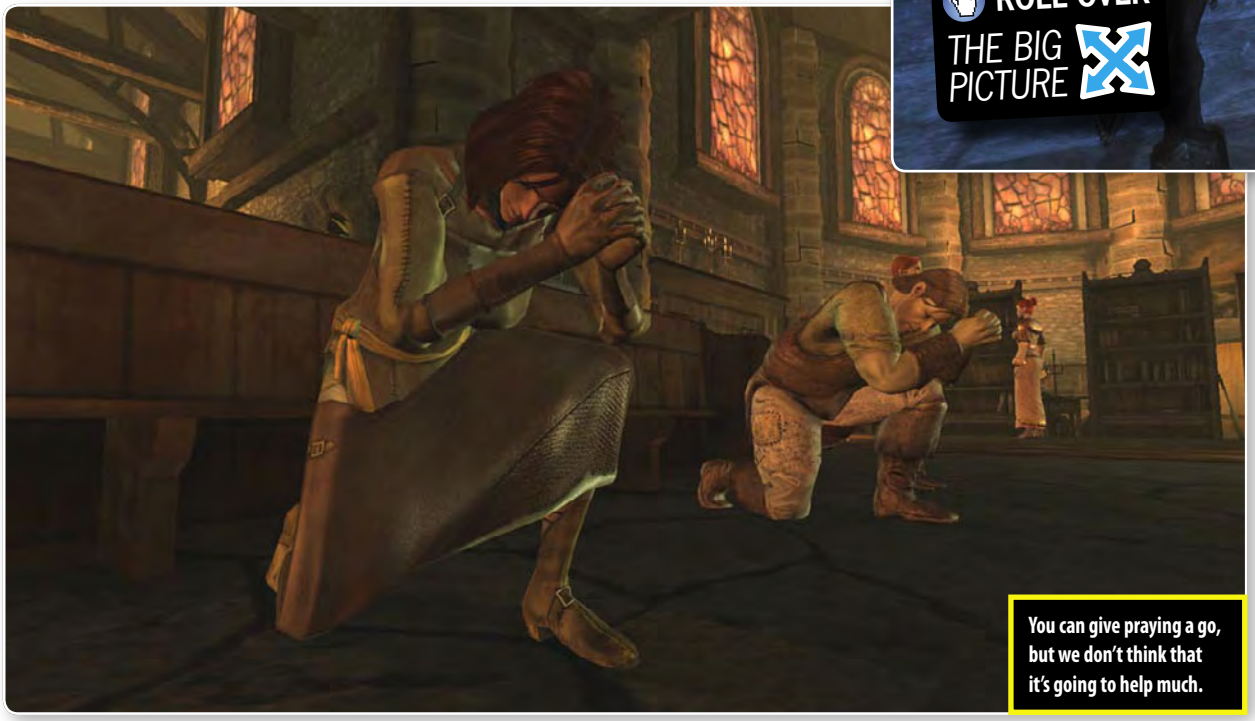
PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Dragon Age: Origins

slathered in blood. Their weapons, hands, armour, even their pale faces have become total Jackson Pollock canvases. In short, they actually look like two people who've spent the last 15 minutes murdering everything in sight. It's a revelation.

Executive Producer Dan Tudge laughs awkwardly at the reveal. "Yeah," he says. "We're looking into toning the blood down." But it's a moment that shows exactly what BioWare are trying to do with Dragon Age. As much as it might be the 'spiritual sequel to Baldur's Gate' that the team says it is, they're clearly using the break from the AD&D license to create a fantasy world that's not only theirs, but one that's more adult and morally gray. Don't expect any bumbling villains or Miniature Space Hamsters here. Expect… well, let's get back to those two Elves.

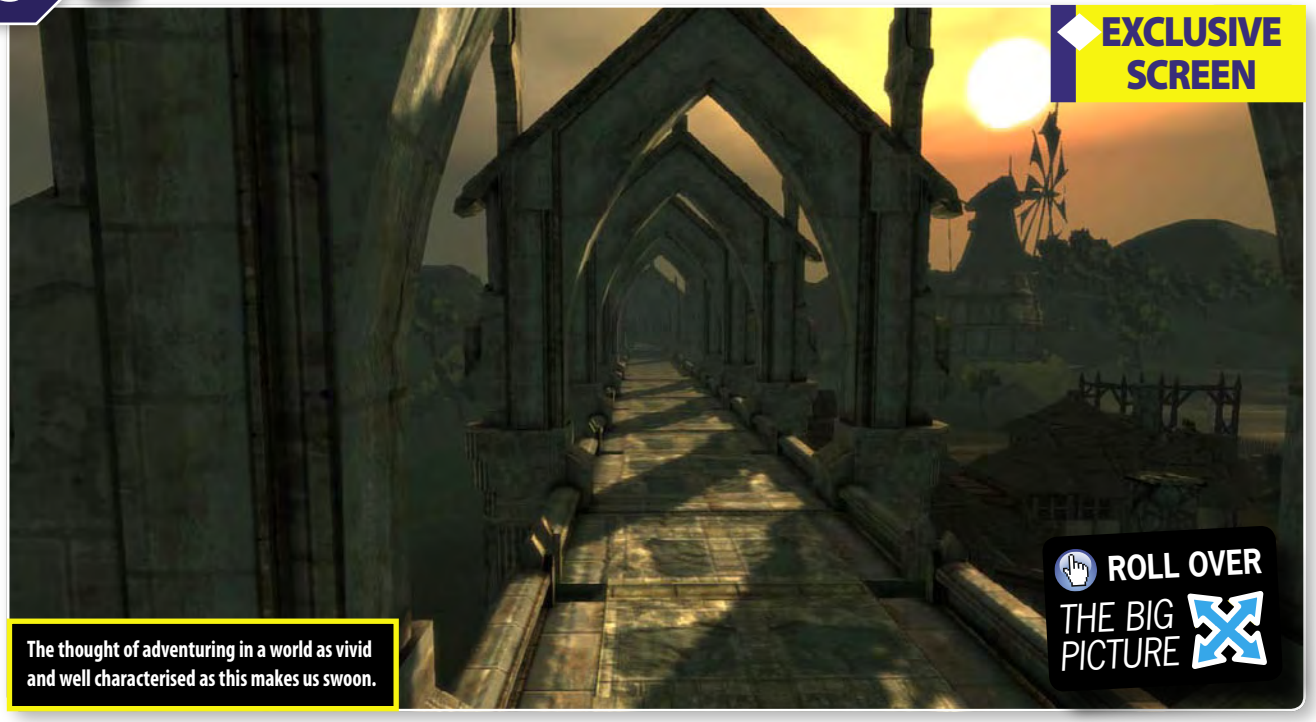
Those ruins they're exploring are actually old Elven ruins. More screwed up still, when one of them starts reading the Elvish writing off the statue, a conversation option lets you express confusion as to how your friend can even read. See, in Dragon Age the Elvish >









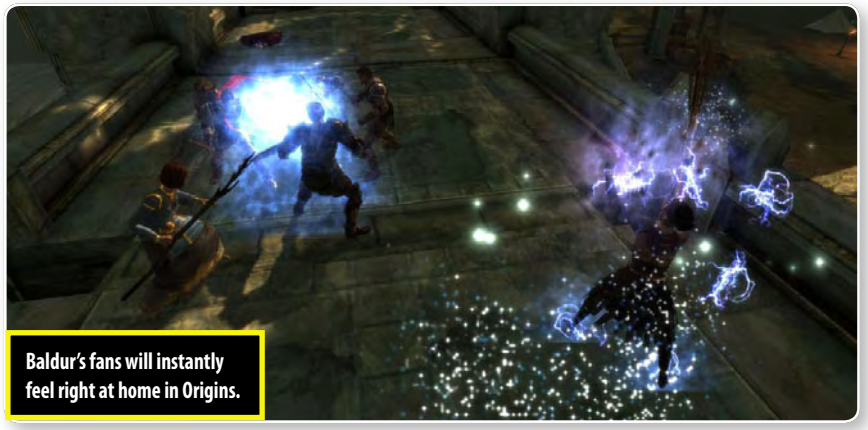


The thought of adventuring in a world as vivid and well characterised as this makes us swoon.

> Dragon Age continued

civilisation suffered a little setback. It's probably a little impolite to even call it a setback. Basically the humans of the world, being big bastards fond of raising big dogs, managed to enslave the entire Elven race and only recently upgraded their place in society to scrawny servants. The few Elves who've fought back and lived to tell the tale (which is to say, have run for their lives) have taken refuge in an enormous forest and it's playing as one of those rebels that makes up one of the game's six Origins.

Character creation in Dragon Age is as much about you choosing your Origin as your race, class and gender. In a nutshell, it's an expanded version of the three backstories you could pick from in Mass Effect. For example, one of the Origins starts you off as a noble who's obsessively training against their cosy upbringing to become a great warrior. Or if you choose to be a Mage you have to pick a >



Baldur's fans will instantly feel right at home in Origins.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE

Combat that errs on the side of traditional

Far from following the more radical, action-oriented direction their recent games have taken, BioWare have chosen a more sedate pace for Dragon Age.

It'll be familiar to anyone who's played Baldur's Gate, Planescape or even WoW. Enemies are scattered around the map and get aggroed as you approach them, and then it's a matter of either swapping between your characters and activating the skills on their hotbars or pressing Space to pause everything while you check on cooldown meters, plot the best course of action and assign everyone their orders.

But it's not all stats and experience points. Dragon Age attempts to shine things up a bit with some truly awesome fatalities that do every bit as much to attach you to your characters as the reams of inter-party banter. When everyone but your warrior has been beaten unconscious by an ogre and you watch that lone survivor wrestle the monster to the ground and slice him open from ear to ear… ah, it warms your heart. Just how many monsters are being gifted with special fatality animations is unknown, but it's definitely something the developers can't afford to be stingy with. Lackluster animations combined with traditional combat could leave Dragon Age's action looking a little dated.



A scenic break from all that nasty dungeoneering.

> Dragon Age continued

special Origin that has you battling through the tyrannical schooling that all magic users in the world are forced to undergo. Before Mages can wander the world like free citizens they have to display control over their abilities, with those who can't (and, horribly, those who are just too gifted) undergoing a kind of magical sterilisation that leaves them slow, emotionless and unable to do anything but enchant things.

The general idea is that as well as providing a unique opening to everyone's game, your chosen Origin keeps popping up, even after the six plots have converged. Your race, upbringing, class, history… all of it changes how people react to you in this prejudiced world. Although it's true that in the examples we saw, it was often possible to win a hatin' NPC over to your side with a few well-chosen words, there will be some bullets that just can't be dodged.

You see, Dragon Age is kind of a milestone. BioWare have six smash-hit RPGs behind them, but this is the first one without some kind of morality categorisation. Maybe it's a sign of either BioWare or its fans

> ***"BioWare has six RPGs behind them, but this is the first one without any morality categorisation"***

PCGZine EXCLUSIVE VIDEO

WORLD EXCLUSIVE! *Watch the first in-game footage of the Elven Origin.*



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

IT'S ALL BLIGHT NOW

Because Orcs are so last century…

The plot of Dragon Age has your hero joining up with the Gray Wardens, an order of similarly heroic badasses dedicated to defeating an enemy known as the Blight. We'd imagine this'd ordinarily be a fairly sweet gig, since the Blight only makes an appearance once every few hundred years, but no such luck for you. The Blight show up at about the same time you do. Your character's reason for joining the Wardens varies wildly depending on your origin, but it's once you're part of the order that the six Origins finally converge.

From what we've seen so far, the Blight seem a fairly two-dimensional lot. Supposedly they used to be Mages who once sought to take Heaven as their own, but ever since that went pear-shaped they've become an undead army armed to the teeth with surprisingly well-maintained weapons, sharp teeth, rippling muscles, pointy skin and poisonous blood – which if it doesn't transform you into a part of the Blight will render you mad over the following years. Evil given humanoid form, basically, which is a shame for a world made of moral grays, but never mind.

It's in the info about the Blight that we've caught our first reference to the titular dragons. From the game's official website: "They plague the underground caverns and tunnels once inhabited by the Dwarven kingdoms. When they discover one of the Old Gods, ancient dragons slumbering in the depths of the earth, it rises as an Arch-Demon to lead the Darkspawn as they spread like locusts across the surface lands, destroying all in their path."



Bioware have really nailed the sense of place in DA, just look at it!



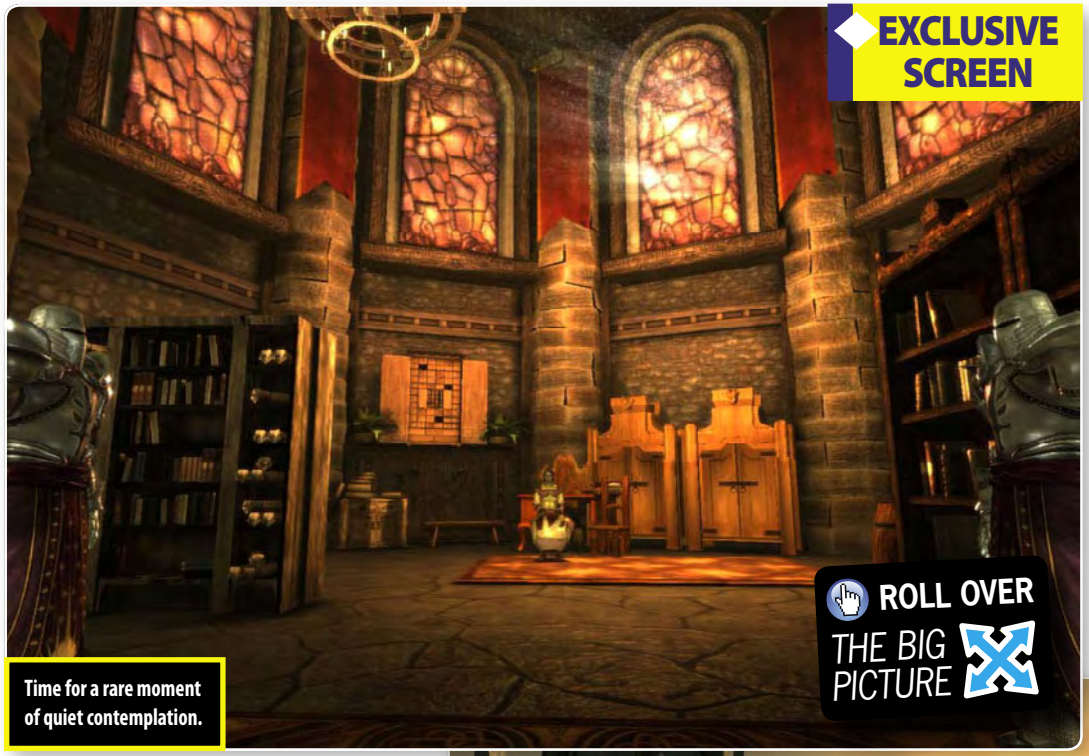
Well, it wouldn't be an RPG without a pub, right?



We. Hate. Spiders.



We bet whoever lives up there is really friendly, not at all evil, no.



Time for a rare moment of quiet contemplation.

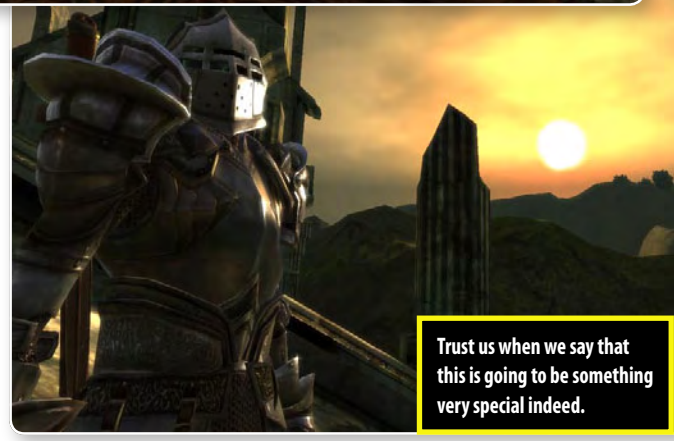
> Dragon Age continued

growing up, but nothing in Dragon Age is good or evil, nothing is right or wrong, nothing is even labelled as the choice of a paragon of virtue or a renegade. This time around, the only consequences of your choices are the physical and emotional consequences in the world and in your chosen party. Fans of numbers shouldn't despair, though. Every party member gets a percentile bar in their stats that shows their current opinion of you – a bar you can give a boost by giving away special 'gift' items to them.

Returning to the Elf origin one more time, it's one of these choices that kicks everything off once you first pick the origin. On an otherwise calm and safe day, you and your old friend pounce on three humans trespassing through 'your' patch of forest. The humans claim they've lost their way, but now they've found where you live, if they return home the secret could spread. So your options are to let them go, kill one to scare them or slaughter them all. I ended up killing one of them right there in cold blood, and I *always* play lovely men in RPGs. But letting them go just felt too foolish. Like I'd be betraying my race over squeamishness. So up came the arrow and down went the man, his friends screaming in terror.

It definitely feels slightly off calling Dragon Age the spiritual sequel to Baldur's Gate. It's just too brooding, too subtle, too mean. Until further notice, we're referring to this game as Baldur's Gate's Older, Cooler Brother. We'll find out if that's any fairer when Dragon Age hits the shelves this March.

"Until further notice, we're referring to this game as Baldur's Gate's Older, Cooler Brother"


Trust us when we say that this is going to be something very special indeed.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 80%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 90%

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The MMO games magazine

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* European servers only

Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare
Players: Many
ETA: March 2009

A New Age

We interview a room bursting with BioWare's best and brightest to talk about Dragon Age: Origins

"We knew we wanted to make a mature game so we'd be able to tell all the stories we wanted to tell"

Creating your own IP for a game like this seems like such a huge task…
Ross Gardner, Lead Programmer: Yeah, they'd been writing and designing for years before we showed any demos or anything like that. We have this small army of writers now and they were off writing different stories, these different legends, histories and political groups.

But where do you begin?
Dean Anderson, Art Director: First of all you have a few core concepts or colours. Like we knew we wanted to make a mature game so we'd be able to tell all the stories we wanted to tell. And we wanted to make a fantasy game because one of our goals was to go back and please our old PC fans.


Not sure who's going to win this battle, but it's definitely going to be messy.

Since Knights of the Old Republic you guys do seem to be drifting towards more adult stuff.
Benoit Houle, Project Director: Well, the gamers who enjoyed Baldur's Gate and Neverwinter Nights are growing up! We're talking around 25-35 now, so they'll enjoy a more mature game.

We were thinking the world seemed quite Middle Earth-ian…
Mike Laidlaw, Lead Designer: But Lord of the Rings is very *good* and *evil*, and you occasionally have a guy who flips sides like Saruman but it's still a rarity. Whereas Dragon Age is about dealing with the reality of the situation. Often there is no easy choice or even a 'good' choice. You just have to choose A or B and they both kinda suck. And this is a society that's had these kind of choices placed before them.

Dan Tudge, Project Director: That's where the political thing comes in, too. There are people that are politically motivated who are >


You can change the angle to get the perfect view of the action…


…and then zoom in to see it all happen up close.



Character detail is outstanding.



If it makes it out of the flames in one piece, then you can shoot it!



Don't know what that is, but it looks dangerous.

> Interview continued

doing things that are bad for the country for their own motivations.

ML: Yeah. You go 'Oh I get why he did that. He's still a dick, but I get why he did that.'

So after all this time, what do you guys think the appeal of fantasy is? Why is it something that fiction returns to time and time again?
ML: Well, it's a license to be fantastic, right? After all, that's where the word comes from.

But, specifically, it mostly seems to centre around the medieval era. Why do you think that is?
RG: I think it's that our lives have changed so much over the last 100 years with all this technology, and in some ways that situation's very fragile. I think there's something inside of everyone that longs for the simple days where you could do whatever you wanted, bash someone on the head with a sword or something!

DA: I think the imagination aspect of it is important. This is something that did exist, so we wonder how it was.

ML: It opens up a world where the men were men, the women were women, and there were no cubicles or paperwork, or a lot of the things we associate with drudgery and tedium. These things are simply not there, so it's that much easier to escape them.

So, finally, how long is it that you guys have been working on Dragon Age now?
DT: We announced the game way back in 2004, but then we went dark for a long time so it really does feel like a long time. But we've resurfaced very close to the end.

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FIRST LOOK

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Publisher: LucasArts/EA
Developer: BioWare
Heritage: Practically all of the best RPGs from the past 10 years
Link: www.swtor.com
ETA: TBA

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Star Wars: The Old Republic

"The Old Republic is going to have more narrative than every game BioWare has ever made put together"



The world's finest roleplay designers. The world's greatest franchise. We've got a good feeling about this…

When Obi Wan spoke of a more civilized age, where the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice, we now know that he wasn't discussing the days of his youth. If that were the case he'd presumably be banging on about trading alliance ship blockades, and the fact that wherever he went there'd be humorous CG characters with odd-looking wobbly flesh dropping spanners. No, he was talking about the times of the old Old Republic – the multi-Jedied and multi-Sithed network of primary colours, meatbag-obsessed companion droids, remarkable plot twists and, now, crafting and mob-killing. Because, yes, BioWare are taking the KOTOR license and letting you play it with friends and strangers as an MMO.

Hooked on the story

Sort of. Because the hook to any BioWare game is the storyline – and on release, The Old Republic is going to have more narrative than every game BioWare has ever made put together. What they're aiming for is the full single-player KOTOR experience – with companions, NPCs, multiple planets, side quests, the intricate balance between light and dark et al – placed in a universe where other players are on the very same, or very different, adventures as you. What's more, the choices you make will still effect the >



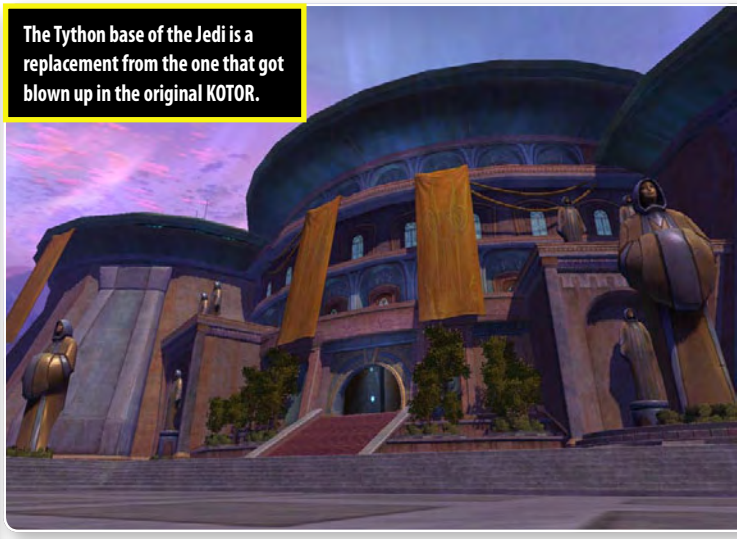
The eternal battle of red and blue reignites. While purple looks forlornly on.



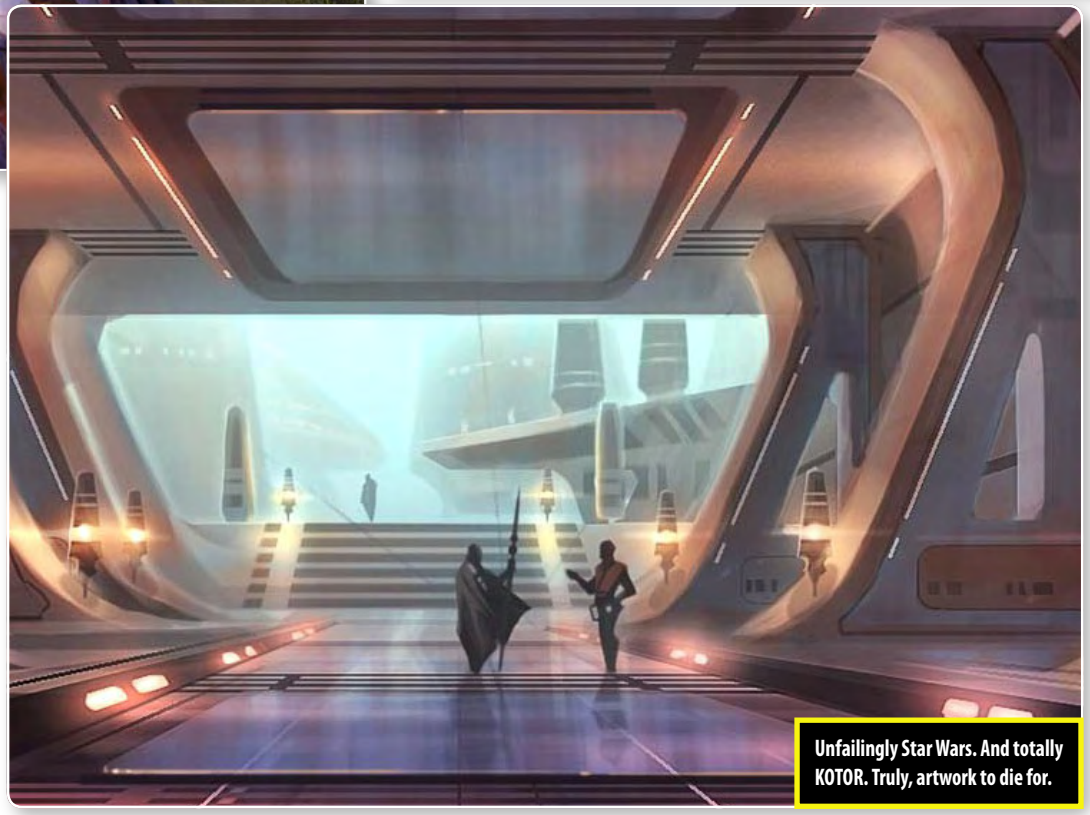
Behold! Korriban! You may well remember this from earlier times.



Mining droids on Tython, only one letter away from being Minging droids on Tython.



The Tython base of the Jedi is a replacement from the one that got blown up in the original KOTOR.



Unfailingly Star Wars. And totally KOTOR. Truly, artwork to die for.

> Star Wars continued

story and the world you find yourself in – if this game were Warcraft then you'd finally find out what would happen if you actually took issue with the concept of going off to kill 10 Worgs for a hunter that wants to collect their legs.

Time frame

It's due to take place 300 years after the (slightly duff) close of Obsidian's KOTOR 2 – and as such you'll learn what happened to Bastila, Revan and all the other characters, as well as probably bump into cast members to whom the ravages of time do not apply. The way it'll work is that you'll choose a class, and each class will have their own multi-stranded quest through the galaxy. As such, the Sith class will start from the already familiar Sith academy on Korriban, while Jedi players will start a parallel (perhaps criss-crossing?) adventure starting on Tython – the planet where the Sith and Jedi first went their separate ways. No other classes have been announced, but BioWare are promising that the 'heroic' roles from the first and second trilogies will be covered. So if there aren't handsome smugglers going on the Kessel Run out of Corellia or masked Bounty Hunters setting out from locations unknown, then I'm an Ewok's uncle. What's more, within character creation you'll undoubtedly be >



A Sith, finding someone's lack of faith disturbing.



Another scrap in the Sith Academy playground. Back of the head with a paper cup for both of 'em.

> Star Wars continued

allowed to play as different races within each class – even if sexy Twi'lek lady Jedis will probably outnumber grumpy, slimy male ones about 20 to one. What's more, as you progress through the game and progress along the sliding scale of light and dark (or, more likely, the cumulative pillars of good and bad seen in Mass Effect) your avatar will change to reflect your standing – brightness and smiles for the good, hunched backs and talons for the wicked.

Quite how BioWare's increasingly clever companion system will work within SWTOR hasn't been firmly underlined, but it's promised that they'll operate in much the same way as they always have in previous single player offerings – and not as some sort of glorified World of Warcraft pet. Quite how, when every player will be running about with a couple of NPCs tailing after them, BioWare are planning on making sure that everyone doesn't have the self-same characters alongside them is still a mystery, but one they claim to have overcome.

Actual content

As for actual MMO content, well again they're not going into specifics – they promise only that MMO fans won't be disappointed. Combat is one thing that will be changing however, what with the stop-start action-queuing nature of traditional KOTOR fights not being readily transferrable to MMOs and their PvP demands. It's promised that lightsabers will connect and have weight to them, even if when viewed in screenshots their handles appear to be about five times too big. Another noticeable change made for the MMO are the visuals, which are suddenly far more stylised than previous BioWare and Star Wars games – in all probability it's an attempt to mimic World of Warcraft's fearsome achievements in accessible system demands, and its reliance on art design rather than demanding graphical effects to ensure long-term good looks.

Because, let's face it, the scalp that the triple-pronged assault being made by EA, LucasArts and BioWare will very much be on Azeroth. Even after the abject failure of Star Wars: Galaxies, what other franchise could truly challenge the iron grip of Warcraft? The rebel forces are beginning to amass…

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 35%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 95%

Begun, these MMO wars have

FIRST LOOK

ALPHA PROTOCOL

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Obsidian
Heritage: Knights of the Old Republic 2, NeverWinter Nights 2
Link: www.alphaprotocol.com
ETA: 2009

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

Spying it up in Obsidian's new RPG

The spy genre really should be doing big business in the gaming world. After all, who doesn't see the appeal of travelling to exotic locales, using the latest gadgets, driving the hottest cars and flirting with beautiful women? The very principles of being a spy lend themselves perfectly to games, yet for some reason this has remained untapped. Yes, we've had Splinter Cells and rubbish James Bond cash-ins, but nothing's managed to get the spy experience just right. And this is where Obsidian come in.

Remembered best for the slightly rushed Knights of the Old Republic 2 and NeverWinter Nights 2, Obsidian have a great heritage developing RPG games, so it should come as no surprise that that's what Alpha Protocol is.

Played from a first-person view, the game puts you into the squeaky clean shoes of Michael Thornton, an agent with the CIA who begins the game having been betrayed by his superiors and placed on a hit list by the US Government. In a bit of a pickle, Michael sees fit to initiate the Alpha Protocol, and goes undercover in an attempt to single out his betrayers.

Of course, one of the main elements of being a spy is the ability to talk yourself out of danger, and dialogue is handled in a way that brings back memories of Mass Effect. Taking place in real-time, you'll have to quickly choose the direction you want to take the conversation in, and will be able to reply suavely, aggressively or professionally. With a limited amount of time this puts pressure on you to respond correctly, and helps create an atmosphere of tension.

Choose your path

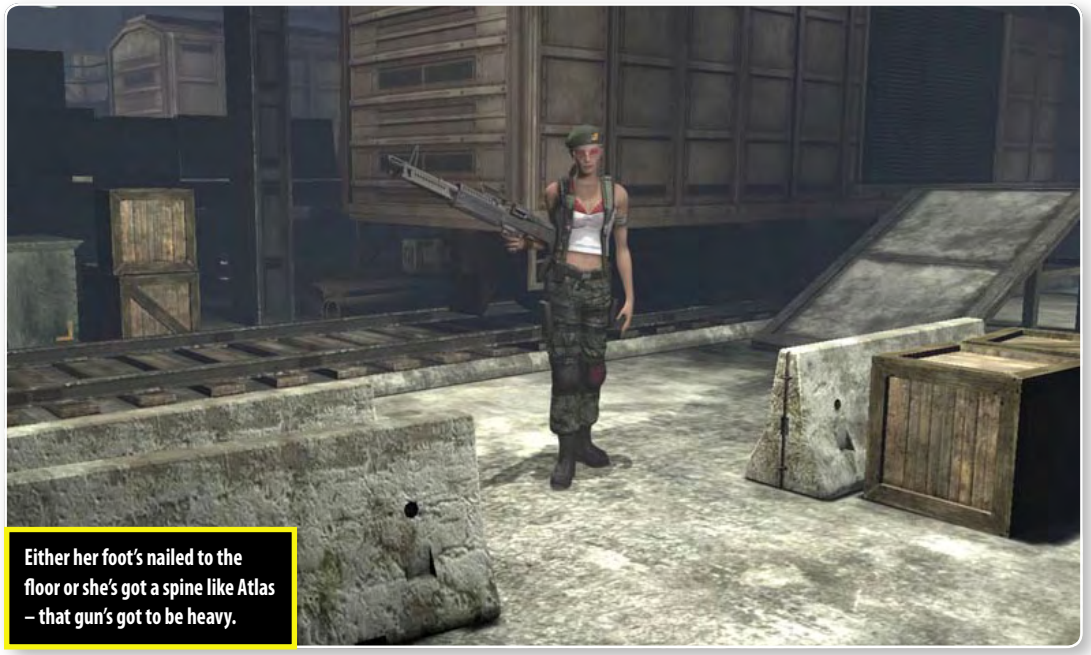
This emphasis on choice also extends into how you approach the missions. Do you shoot your way in, sneak around the back or try and talk your way past the security? In an interesting twist, Obsidian have also announced that each of the missions you play through will directly affect the story, >



We hope for that guy's sake that Ammistratore means 'Bulletproof Man's Office'.


Dodgy evil eye. Beard… Best shoot him now to save time.


Unarmed combat will be important to master.

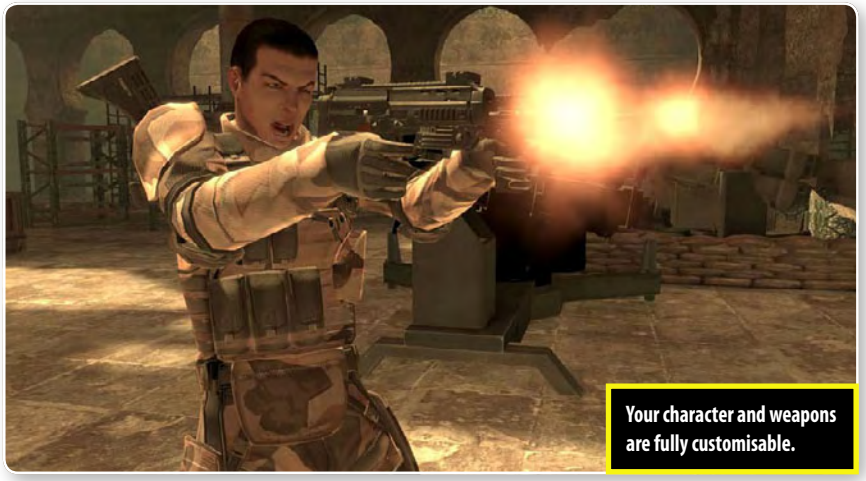

Either her foot's nailed to the floor or she's got a spine like Atlas – that gun's got to be heavy.

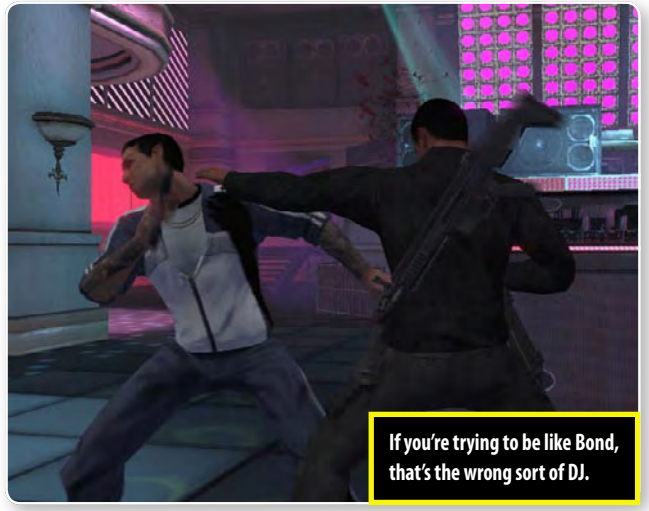
> Alpha Protocol continued

and even tiny things, like the way you speak to a certain character, could effect you later in the story arc.

Alpha Protocol's combat is played from a third-person perspective, handled in real time, with a variety of gadgets and weapons at your disposal. Although little's been announced about the gadgets yet, we do know that the weapons you'll acquire are fully upgradable, with silencers, different sights, and ammunition. As you level up, you'll also be able to specialise in certain weapons or abilities, again in a manner that's not too dissimilar to Mass Effect.

Letting you take in exotic locations around the world, schmooze with the beautiful people, use all the latest gadgets, all wrapped up in a great storyline, Alpha Protocol should be one to watch next year. Spy games have needed a champion for some time – hopefully in Alpha Protocol, they may have found it.


Your character and weapons are fully customisable.


If you're trying to be like Bond, that's the wrong sort of DJ.

PCGZine ALPHA PROTOCOL
HOW COMPLETE? 60%
FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 70%
Perhaps finally a quantum of solace for spy fans?

WIN! SACRED II: FALLEN ANGEL

Boxsets, games and exclusive online pets up for grabs...

We've teamed up with Koch Media to bring six readers exclusive Collectors Editions of the free-roaming fantasy epic Sacred II: Fallen Angel. 10 runners-up will also receive a standard edition of the game. The Collectors Edition includes a double-sided map of Ancaria, an official Sacred 2 artbook and soundtrack, Sacred 2 tattoos, a DVD containing the elite GFX graphics upgrade and an exclusive online pet 'The Carrier Imp' to make your pals green with envy in Sacred's exceptional cooperative and PvP modes.

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel is an Action-RPG with a rich story that takes place in a giant, open-ended and seamless world. This world contains hundreds of dungeons, treacherous opponents and a variety of challenging quests. Intelligent enemies, steadily adapting in number and difficulty based on player progress, challenge players in heroic single- and multiplayer battles. Drop-in styled cooperative multiplayer gameplay further ensures players will enjoy the game alone or seamlessly with friends.

Competition closes 29th Januray 2009. See website for full T&Cs.

To be in with a chance of winning one of these prizes, simply answer the question opposite...









Grand Theft Auto 4

PCGZine GOLD

There's not much PC in Liberty City

Publisher: Rockstar Games
Developer: Rockstar Toronto
Heritage: GTA series
Link: www.rockstargames.com
OUT NOW

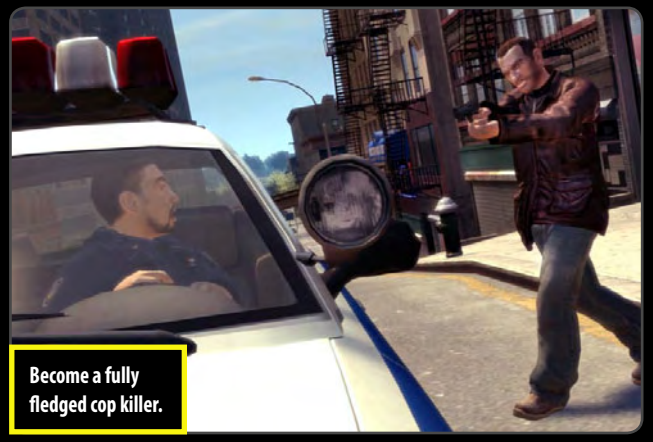
Unless you've been hiding under a big pile of writing cliches for the best part of a year, you may be aware that this came out on the consoles back in April. It's been a long wait for PC loyalists, but finally GTA IV has come home, replete with a suite of format-specific features. The city itself is superbly realised, with the PC playing host to the definitive version – graphically at least – with a significant hike in resolution.


Stunt jumps are dotted around the city.


Think once, think twice, think bike!

"Hitting F2 at any time during the game records 30 seconds of footage, which can then be edited"

Functionally, probably the biggest improvement has been to the multiplayer, which at 32 players now boasts double the number of its console brethren, as well as new tracks for the lively race modes. There's also a brand new feature in the shape of a movie editor. Hitting F2 at any time during the game records 30 seconds of footage, which can then be edited, with music and text added. Furthermore, the controls have been optimised for mouse and keyboard, making the shooting sections a far more skill-based affair. As for the driving, unless you're a seasoned keyboard dabber, it might be worth investing in a 360 pad. This can be used in conjunction with mouse and keyboard, as you simply switch whenever you get in and out of a car. >


Become a fully fledged cop killer.

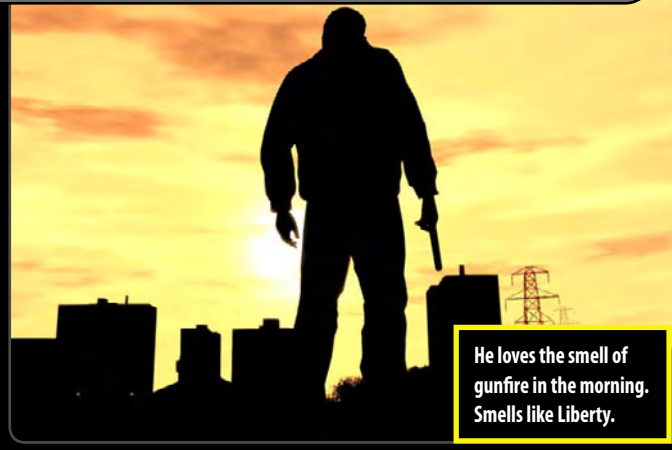

Cousins in crime dispose of the evidence.



That's why they introduced the smoking ban.



Say Hello to Playboy X. Real name Brian.



He loves the smell of gunfire in the morning. Smells like Liberty.

> GTA IV continued

This is of course something you'll be doing thousands of times during the course of the game. If you really don't know what's going on, you play embittered Russian ex-soldier Niko Bellic, fresh off the boat to Liberty City, which is of course a thinly veiled replication of New York. Promised unimaginable riches by his cabbie cousin Roman, Niko soon discovers that the American dream is a nightmare and gets sucked into the underworld, eking out a living as a freelance criminal, and progressing through the city's gangster hierarchy through a brutal combination of robbing and killing.

So far, so GTA, but the modern-day setting gives the game a number of crucial elements, namely a mobile phone, satellite navigation technology and the Internet. Your phone is essentially your office, holding contacts, messages, appointments and offers of work. As for the GPS, it works seamlessly, with or without voice, and as in the real world you'll wonder how you managed without either of them. The Internet – accessed via web cafes – is something of a gimmick, but can be used to get work, as well as arrange meetings on dating sites – one example of the game's wilful approach to time wasting. There's no real need to take a girl to a show (and then back to hers) >



Negotiations are easier with a weapon.

LAND, SEA & AIR

Rack up the miles…



Hit the road | **The high seas** | **Take to the skies**

Hit the road

Get yourself a set of decent wheels by stealing one of Liberty City's numerous cars. Or, if you have a strange desire to take the moral highground, then you can simply take a cab.


One of the Irish mob causing trouble.



Improbably, scoffing junk food boosts your health.

>GTA IV continued

or go bowling with your cousin, or enjoy a strip show, and if you want to simply plough through the core missions you can, but that would be missing much of GTA IV's charm. Those who dismiss the game's recreational elements as pointless are surely completely missing the point of gaming.

While the main missions are often breathtaking set pieces, it's the bits in-between that define the experience. There aren't many games where you can sit in your apartment and watch an advert for Ricky Gervais, and then go and see his live show, replete with industrial language. As you'd expect, the black humour of the game is as acutely observed as ever, with the sublime radio stations taking a pop at such mainstays as politics, religion, poker, obesity, celebutards, spiritualists, the Fox Network, CNN and even CSI. As a satire of Americana, it's arguably unsurpassed in any medium.

"Grand Theft Auto IV is not so much a game you play, as a place that you live"

Those radio stations also blast out an improbable array of tunes, and are often responsible for some of the game's more reflective moments. With blood on your hands having committed a triple murder, driving through the rain-glistened streets at 3am and too wired to sleep, your conscience can briefly be eased by the soothing rhythms of Jean Michel Jarre's seminal electro-cheese classic, Oxygène, Pt 4. There really is something for everyone, or alternately you can sling some MP3s in a folder and set up your own Independence FM.


It's all going down in Chinatown.

On the downside, having to replay missions is irksome, and constantly buying body armour becomes a drag. And if you want to be really cynical, you are simply running predetermined errands in what is a very awkward way of watching a very long gangster film. While there will always be a touch of the Emperor's New Clothes about GTA, number IV provides an astonishing outfit. This is not so much a game that you play, as a place that you live.

Steve Hill

PCGZine Verdict

A morally bankrupt adult playground. And all the better for it

- Revamped multiplayer
- Movie editor
- Console port

92%



Tomb Raider Underworld

Lara Croft goes to hell and back

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Heritage: Tomb Raider Legend, Tomb Raider Anniversary
Link: www.tombraider.com
OUT NOW



The fire sure is fancy lookin'.

Underworld might just be the best Tomb Raider so far. The series has, over many years, suffered terribly from inconsistent design decisions, and from its achievements being diminished as every other action adventure in the past decade ripped off the things that made Lara interesting in the first place. None of that matters now, because Crystal Dynamics have now made the finest Tomb Raider title since that first memorable outing. This is a game that is faithful to its roots, and nevertheless ambitious and entertaining. It seems classical (rather than dated) and satisfying, rather than repetitious of a tested formula. Baddies are gunned down and ancient ruins are bested. It's sumptuous stuff and it's full of the stuff that made the original Tomb Raider such a thrilling game to play.

Why so satisfying? Well partly it's down to the sheer solidity of the design. As ever, Lara's challenge is to negotiate large physical challenges – she has to climb, leap, scramble, crawl, swing and fight her way through hostile environments, and the ease with which Lara scrambles up a climb surface, or grabs hold of a ledge, or shimmies up a pole, or works grapple magic for that Tarzan moment, well, it's rewardingly predictable. You never feel like the game is tricking you or messing around with your expectations. You learn how Lara works within the first half an hour of gameplay, and then it rapidly comes down to a pure test of your skill as to whether you can get through the things that lie ahead. It never seems to lie to you. If you think Lara can pull something off then the chances are that she can.

"Underworld is full of the stuff that made the original Tomb Raider such a thrilling game to play"

GOTTA KEEP MOVIN'

Taking control of the world's favourite tomb raider



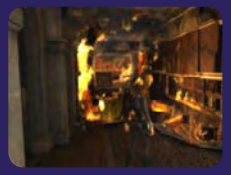
Smoothly does it | In at the deep end | The big grapple

Smoothly does it

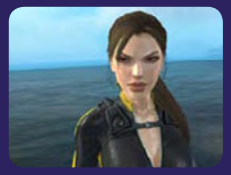
Lara's abilities meld seamlessly into each other, so you can go from sprinting to diving and then to climbing in a few fluid seconds.

FREEZE FRAME

Guiding you through the game, one step at a time…



PROLOGUE
Lara's mansion is destroyed in a huge explosion, and you have to escape from the burning wreckage.



LEVEL 1 – 30 MINS
Time then rewinds to back before the explosion, with you out on a boat in the Mediterranean.



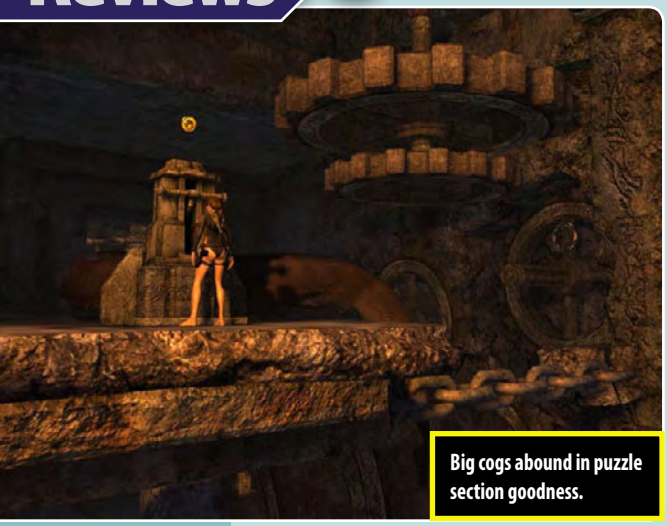
LEVEL 1 – 1 HOUR
The first big challenge is a kraken, which is basically an octopus the size of a house!



LEVEL 2 –2 HOURS
Lara's enemies arrive on the scene and you have to fight your way aboard their ship.



LEVEL 3 – 3 HOURS
A clue leads Lara into Thailand and the game starts proper. Just watch out for the fauna…



Big cogs abound in puzzle section goodness.

> Tomb Raider continued

Again, the combat is a little uninspired, and it's almost always better to kick someone than shoot them with twin nine-millimetre pistols, but then the game never really was about the shooting action. It's about an acrobatic lady raiding tombs, and using gymnastic verve to escape a grisly fate. Occasionally fighting does come in handy – such as killing off sharks in the underwater sections, or getting aboard the enemy ship – but the core of the game remains faithful to the puzzles which have always made it interesting.

Large, surprising, multi-stage environmental puzzles dominate the problems you'll face in the game world, and finding the solution for each one delivers on the most minor annoyances or trial-and-error frustrations. The autosave is so systematic that if you do crack Croft's headcase open on some rocks, you won't have to repeat a great deal of the game to get back to where you where before. This is good design.

Better still, Crystal Dynamics have listened to the criticism of their previous work on the series. There are, thankfully, no extended boss battles in this game, and instead you're faced with intricate puzzle situations that always have some spectacular denouement. You kill a vast, glistening kraken in the first couple of hours of the game, and things just get more interesting from there on in.

For those folks who have been following the story in the previous games – which currently hangs on the search for Lara's mother, who may or may not be in a mythical underworld – this latest instalment continues with pacey surprises and some interesting developments within the now regular cast. For anyone just dropping in to see how the old girl is doing, this is another high-quality action adventure, and it would be remiss to ignore just how competently constructed this particular instance of Tomb Raider is. Case in point: look at how few PC games >



Thor is involved, as well as his magic hammer, Mjolnir.



Natla, the evil angel thing from previous games, returns with some advice.

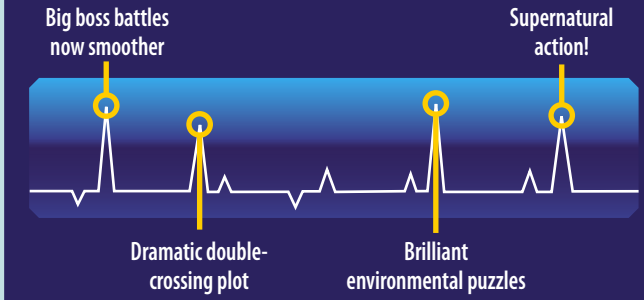
Roll over screen for annotations







PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"If you've ever had even the slightest fondness for Lara's antics, then now is a great time to return"


Climbing inside a sinking ship is one of the more exciting bits.

> Tomb Raider continued

actually bother to support not just an Xbox controller, but automatic installation of just about any USB gamepad out there. Of course, Underworld is perfectly playable and comprehensible on mouse and keyboard, but the fact that Crystal Dynamics have bothered to make a PC game so solid and approachable that it automatically configures whatever controller you might decide to plug into your computer is a testament to their commitment to the game. This level of quality is seen throughout.

So it's tough to criticise Underworld. If there was a major gripe it would be that it is a little slow and meandering in sections, and that it really doesn't deviate far from a game we've become overly familiar with. It doesn't give quite as much direction and focus as we've come to expect from other rival games, but we nevertheless believe that no one is even attempting to make action adventures work in quite this way in 2008. If you've ever had even the slightest fondness for Lara's antics, then now is a great time to return. If you've never played a Tomb Raider game, then you owe it to yourself to find out what all the fuss is about.

Jim Rossignol


Some dude gets shot in the face. What a shame.

PCGZine Verdict

Perfectly formed raiding, with a hint of drama, too

- Brilliant control system
- Beautiful environments
- Some fiddly arena puzzles

85%



World of Goo

Publisher: 2D Boy
Developer: 2D Boy
Price: $20 (£13.50)

PCGZine GOLD

Special puzzle games are a rare thing. Joining the likes of Lemmings, Peggle and Zoo Keeper is World of Goo. Small blobs of goo can be connected together by holding them near to one another, forming bonds, and therefore structures. Using these towers, bridges or whatever peculiar shape of your own devising, other Goos can travel, and eventually reach the level's pipe.

The concept is utterly wonderful, but it's the imagination at work in the design that elevates this to greatness. Hilarious, beautiful and oddly moving, 2D Boy's creation is one of the best games of the year. Buy it at www.2dboy.com.

- Brand new concept
- Heart warming
- Hilarious

Goo(d) enough to eat **94%**



Peggle Nights

Publisher: PopCap
Developer: PopCap
Price: £15

Peggle was mentioned only a moment ago to your left, listed as one of those all-time classics of puzzle gaming. So how exciting that there's a sequel. What new ideas will they have added to the original game of bouncing a ball around to try and hit orange pegs? What new characters? What new special powers? Er, one. At the end. Far beyond where patience dictates.

This is a peculiarly lazy offering. It feels like a bonus pack of leftover levels from the original, not a full-price sequel. So while it's still the same Peggly fun, it's, well, the *same* Peggly fun. We already paid for it once and see no reason why we should do it again.

- It's still Peggle
- One new power, but only one
- Seen it all before

Why no new stuff? **60%**



Zahada

Publisher: Andy McGov
Developer: Andy McGov
Price: Free!

Here's your peculiar, almost entirely text-based website puzzle game. You were looking for one, right? Every now and then it's important to take a break from Gears Of Tomb Cry 3 and spend a bit of time making your brain hurt.

This is a puzzle game involving some remarkably tough – and yet in hindsight maddeningly simple – challenges, that require some hefty lateral thinking. It is minimalist, presented with no panache, and yet it'll have you distracted from proper work for hours. Or thumping your head against the desk in crazed confusion. Oh, and don't forget it's a website – lots of extra clues if you think that way.

- Really challenging
- Pleasingly distracted
- Poorly presented

Simple yet smart **74%**



A Cry for Help: Edmund McMillen Collection

Publisher: Edmund McMillen
Developer: Edmund McMillen
Price: $10 (£6.80)

Edmund McMillen has been sharing ideas for a long time. Developing games for the last seven, and the three before that spent drawing comics. With a slightly morbid air, he has gathered together everything he's created and put it all on one disc.

McMillen is widely regarded in the PC indie scene as one of the most influential developers, and A Cry For Help is a very cheap way of getting his output all at once.

- Classics like Meatboy
- Comprehensive collection
- Doesn't contain full-priced games

Freaky but fun **83%**



Ben There Dan That

Publisher: Zombie Cow
Developer: Zombie Cow
Price: Free

Ben and Dan are two indie game developers who rather narcissistically made a game about themselves. Fortunately, they made it a completely hilarious one. It's a point-and-click adventure, inspired by the classic LucasArts adventures and jokes about poo. Two of the funniest things there are, really.

It's not a tribute to the past, but rather a fresh and imaginative original. And best of all, it's free. Although you can drop some pennies in Zombie Cow's tips jar when you get it. And it's certainly worth it. A truly funny adventure game with some fantastic puzzles.

- Brilliantly funny
- Appropriately rude
- Free

Point-and-slick **85%**

>Inbox

Let your opinion be heard. Mail the zine at pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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

We asked for all of your opinions on two threequels: Red Alert and Diablo. On reflection, perhaps we shouldn't have…

SOMEWHERE IN CANADA…

I discovered you while I was searching for updates on Blizzard's Diablo III, so thanks for the new shots! It's nearly a full-time job sifting through all the speculation regarding anything connected with Blizzard, and Diablo III.

Don't miss Issue 26
Out Jan 29th
Sign up now!



Apparently, a lot of people are getting rather excited about Diablo III.

I'm not holding my breath as far as a release date goes, but in the meantime I'll be sure to be checking in with you.

> David Janzen, Canada

A *NOD* TO UCL

Looking forward to seeing what this has to offer as I liked Red Alert 2 a lot and it has been a seriously long time since a Red Alert title has graced us with its presence.

> Julian Beckles, UCL, London

PRACTICALLY PERFECT

I like everything that's going on in Diablo III, except for three things:
1) The drop system should be similar to the cutthroat free-for-all loot system from Diablo II LoD. That made the game unique, infinitely more random and appealing than what the currently planned loot system is. I just really don't want to see WoW's bland "Hey everybody gets easy, great items!" type of loot system.
2) Skills and Talents. Again, please don't use WoW as an example for skills. Use a skill system similar to DII's – they made your character extremely powerful, and it should be that way in Diablo III.
3) Re-specing should be an option. Unless levelling will be comparable in speed with Diablo II, the player should be able to re-spec.

> Mares Mihai, via email

I'M VERY EXCITED!!!!!!!

DIABLO 3!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Your magazine is the best. Wonderful to see videos of Diablo III in the magazine. Good job!

> Mike McDonald, N Potomac, MD

Well that's nice, but some are clearly fishing for a freebie…

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

Your magazines are awesome, I don't buy game magazines any more because you guys always have the most up-to-date information. Not to mention all the prizes, freebies and exclusive content. Just thought I'd drop a line to say 'keep up the good work'.

> Jon, via email

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Another age-old argument raises its ugly head

How can you give 85% to Far Cry 2 when, in effect, you describe it as a broken game? Given you couldn't even give 80% to a £10 Indie game while praising it, I have no idea how you can give 85% to a game where you condemn it in all the important areas of gameplay, replayability and immersion!

Then we have Dead Space: 92% for a 10-hour game. Is it really acceptable to see shorter and shorter games for the same retail price? If Dead Space had 30 hours of gameplay but cost £100 you would've marked it down as 'overpriced', so why not when games are released with so little content and replayability?

You marked Project Aftermath down for only having 10 levels, while admitting it had some replayability, even when it had been priced accordingly! Why penalise an Indie game for being short, and then not penalise a commercial game for the same thing when its price has been lowered not one jot?

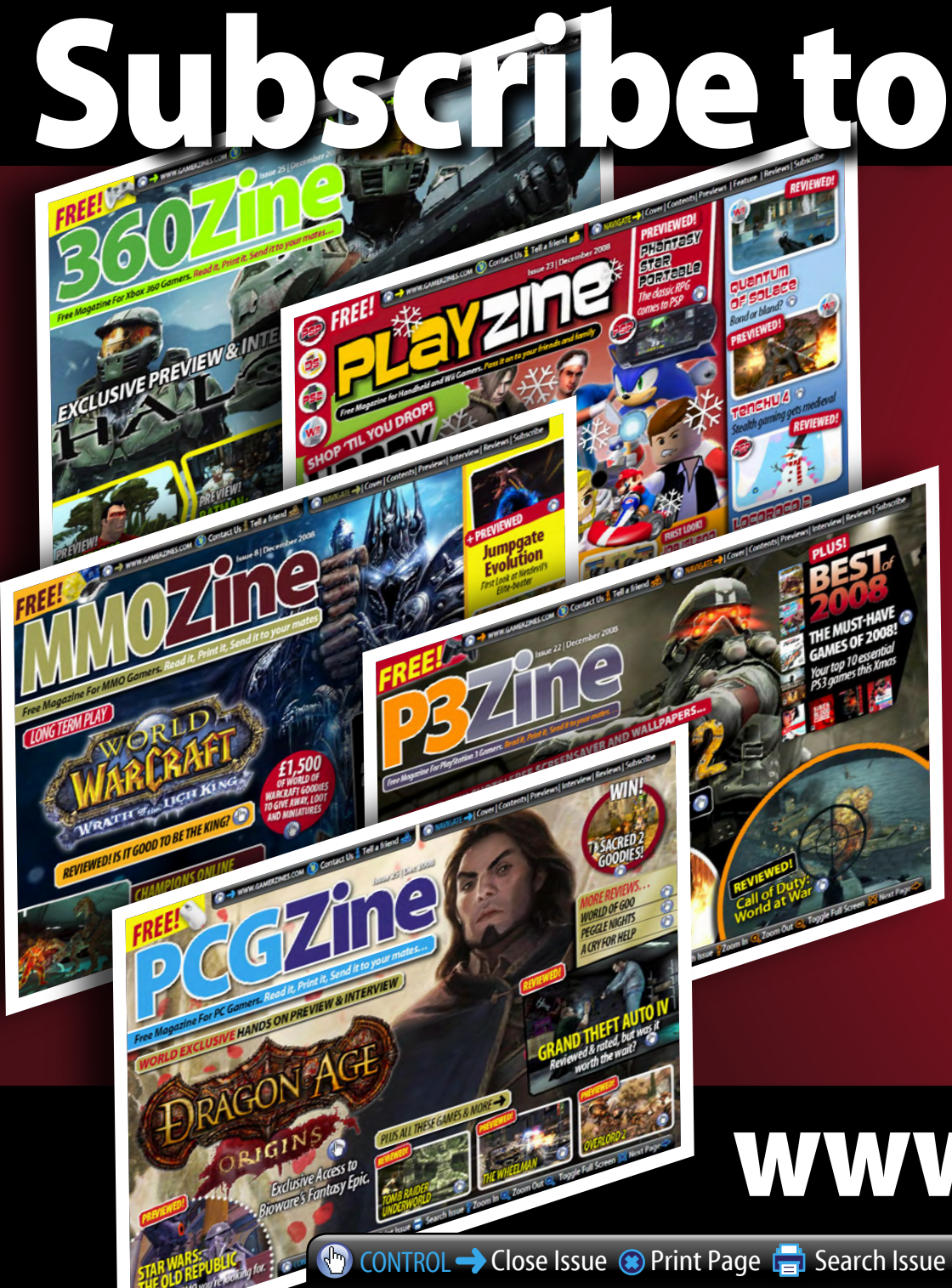
> John Ingram, London

> PCGZ says… And so John went on at some length. Some interesting points there, but remember all reviews are based on the subjective opinions of a writer's experience. Scores tend to reflect an overall level of approval for a game, rather than a mathematical breakdown of its value in hours-per-pound. What do the rest of you think?



Yes, it really is that old 'you gave xxxx the wrong score' argument. Again.

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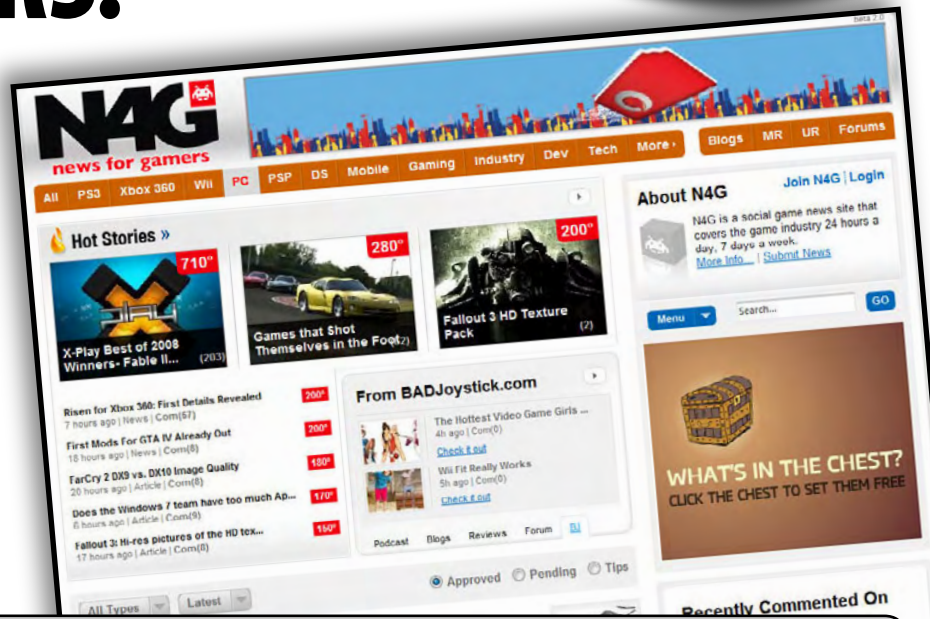
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