FREE!

PCGZine

Issue 30 | May 2009

Free Magazine For PC Gamers. The Massive Preview Issue

EXCLUSIVE #2

WOLFENSTEIN

Massive in depth interview inside.

EXCLUSIVE #1

PROTOTYPE

Hands On preview!

PREVIEWED!

BORDERLANDS

Too good to be true?

REVIEWED!

PLANTS VS ZOMBIES

REVIEWED!

ZENO CLASH

Fantasy Fisticuffs!

PLUS ALL THESE GAMES & MORE

PREVIEWED!

THE SIMS 3

Hands On Preview'

EXCLUSIVE #3

CITIES XL

Exclusive Video

PREVIEWED!

BIOSHOCK 2

Big Daddy's back!

Welcome to PCGZine



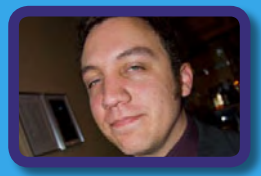
For gamers of a certain age Wolfenstein is a name that's hard to match. Whether it stirs memories of your first forray into, FPS, 3D, or years of teamwork sunk into Enemy Territory, Wolf gets your blood up. And over the walls. We've got a massive in depth interview on the latest incarnation this issue so check it out now. Also previewed this month is that peerless popular classic The Sims. We've had hands on for this third outing and it doesn't disappoint. We've also had a play with Prototype, MMO/Tycoon mashup Cities XL, side scrolling physics-'em'up Trine and taken a look at the latest on Bioshocks and Borderlands. I'm especially excited by the latter, you should be too. Go lookit!

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

James Carey, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Jim Rossignol
Now sports a beard labelled 'hoary' by experts. (not pictured)



Steve Hill
As mean as he looks, Hill steals sweets from pensioners. Fact.

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



Prototype
Hands-on preview



Trine
Yay! Physics are fun!



Wolfenstein
Massive interview!



Zeno Clash
Oddball First Person Punching!



Cities XL
Town planning the MMO way.



Plants vs Zombies
The ancient enemies...



The Sims 3
Spore who? The Sims is BACK.

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

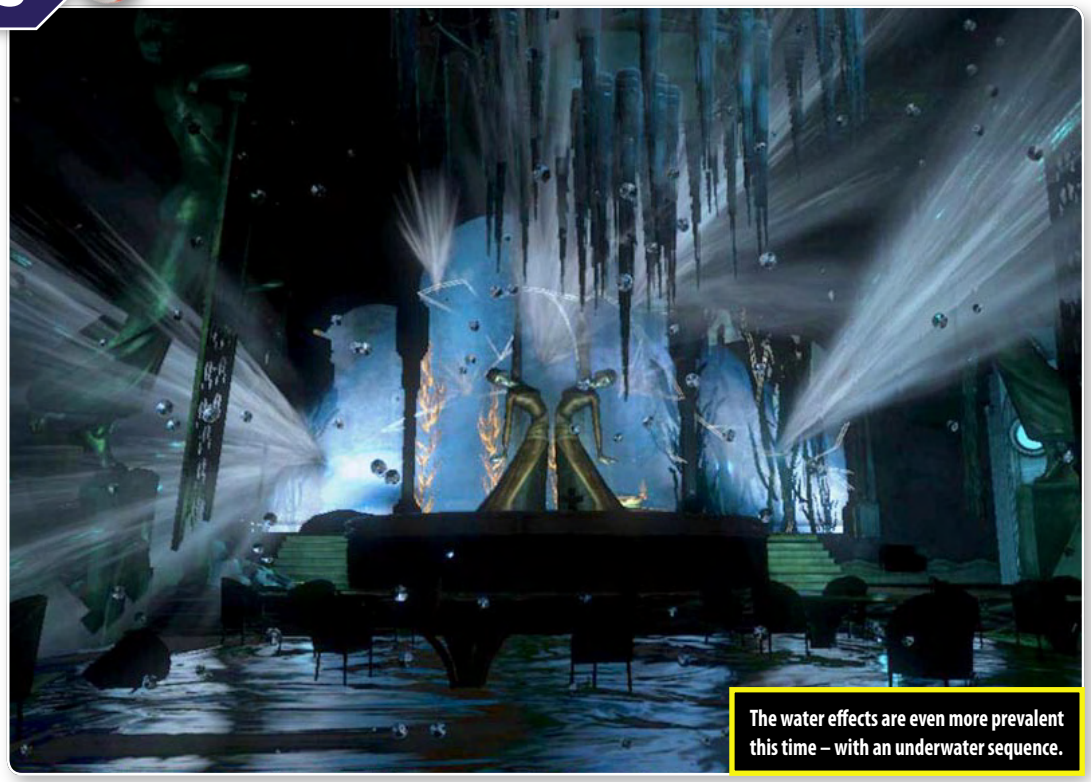
Bioshock 2	Cities XL
Borderlands	Wolfenstein
Lost Planet 2	The Sims 3
Street Fighter IV	Trine
Dead Rising 2	Zeno Clash
Prototype	Plants vs Zombies

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BIOSHOCK 2

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: 2K Marin
Heritage: Bioshock, System Shock
Link: www.somethinginthesea.com
ETA: Christmas 2009

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



The water effects are even more prevalent this time – with an underwater sequence.

Bioshock 2

FIRST LOOK

The underwater epic returns from its watery grave

What's the story?

Bringing out a sequel for the boldest game of 2007 was always going to be a challenge, but it's one that 2K Marin have taken on with gusto. We're pleased to report that there's no shortage of ideas spewing out of this return to the underwater city of Rapture.

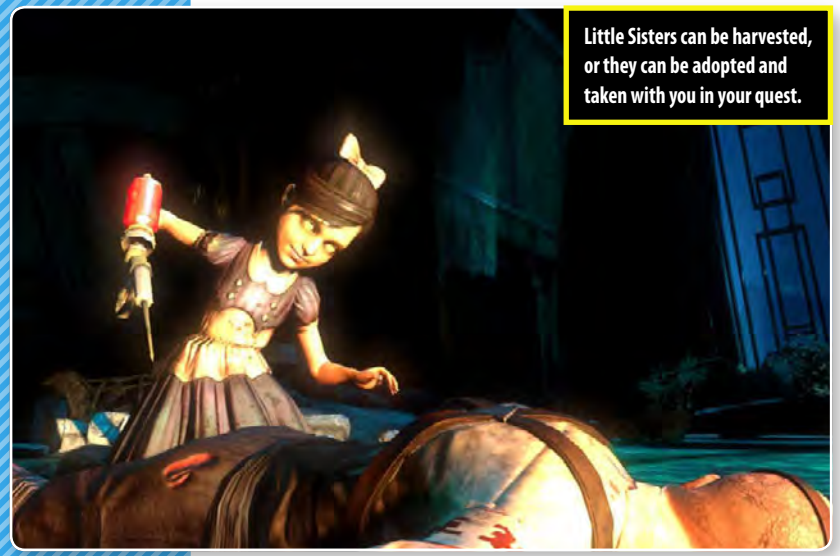
What do we know?

You're going to be a Big Daddy, one of the colossal diving-helmeted boss beasts from the original game, which should make for some interesting gameplay. You can also work with the Little Sisters too, and your enemies will once again feature the gene-spliced horrors of the utopia-gone-lunatic.

Anything else to declare?

This second game is set five years on from the events of the first, so the splicing has had even more horrible effects on the creatures that live down there, and something has produced a Big Sister – an agile, ninja version of the Daddy. All this ties into a new, mysterious plot; one that's been overseen by a rising star of game design, Jordan Thomas, who designed the best parts of the original game as well as a big chunk of the excellent Thief 3.

There's every reason to believe that this will be an increasingly rare thing in the movie and game world… a sequel that stands up to the original game, and possibly even surpasses it. We'll bring you much more very soon.



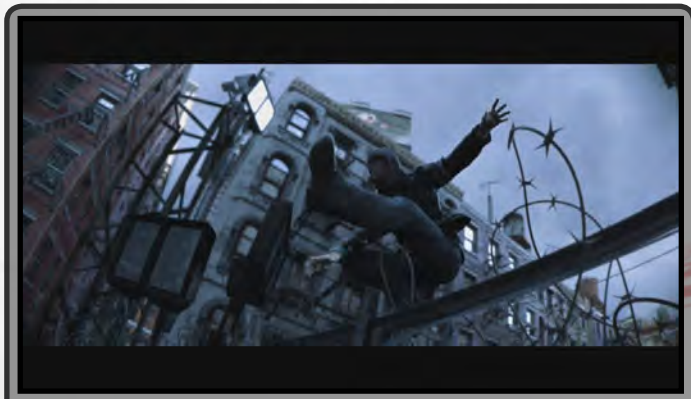
Little Sisters can be harvested, or they can be adopted and taken with you in your quest.



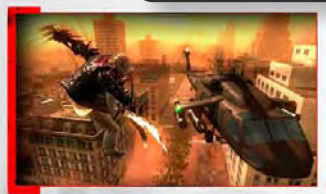
The incredible combat abilities from the first game return, and this time you have a drill too.

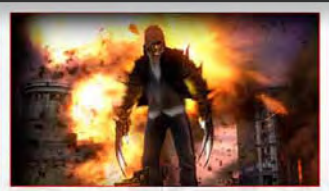
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BORDERLANDS

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Gearbox
Heritage: Diablo, Mad Max
Link: www.borderlandsthegame.com
ETA: Christmas 2009

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



The new visuals have a potent concept-art style.

Borderlands

FIRST LOOK

A whole new world

What's the story?

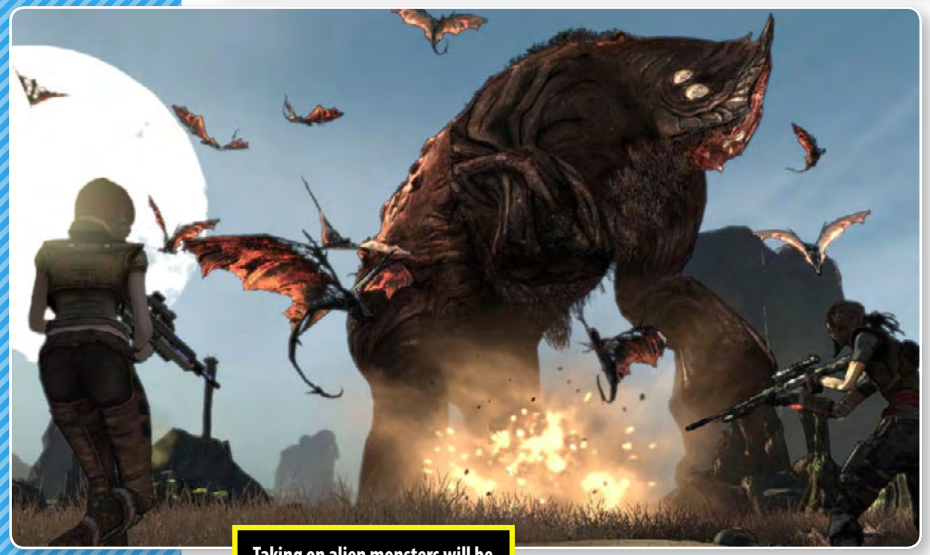
Every few years someone promises the world. A game that is an open-ended living world; has vehicles, weapon combat, exploration, randomly generated content, a story, and perhaps some other desirable features like drop-in/drop-out co-op or characters that can jump from one person's saved games to another. Yep, developers like to promise us the world, and that's exactly what Gearbox are promising with Borderlands.

What do we know?

If it lands anywhere near the dream-game that we're being told about then this could be a very special creation indeed, but even without all that, it's looking like being one of the most spectacularly beautiful games of 2009. The new art style, which you can see here, brings the game closer to the ideal of hand-drawn concept art that the team initially envisioned the game with. The inky outline certainly make the game characters look unusual, and will hopefully carry over into the overall style of the world as a whole.

Anything else to declare?

Of course, the problem with games promising as much as Gearbox are promising is that they often fall short of the hype, or mess up in some other, undetermined way. Let's just hope it doesn't happen with this one, but with a pedigree like Gearbox's, we're more optimistic about Borderlands than we ordinarily might be.



Taking on alien monsters will be just one part of the problem.



Hordes of Spiderants will make life difficult.

7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

Tropic 3



Publisher: Kalypso | **ETA:** Q2

The island management series has never really captured the general imagination, but it's always been solid and entertaining – being given chance to be the benevolent dictator of a Banana Republic is surprisingly satisfying, and this time it will look even more realistic.

Singularity

Publisher: Activision | **ETA:** Q3

Raven's new shooter has time-travel on its side. The most interesting feature of the chronologically clever combat game is that you are able to age, or de-age things in your environment, turning baddies into OAPs, or revamping ancient, crumbling scenery to act as solid cover from snipers.



Dead Rising 2



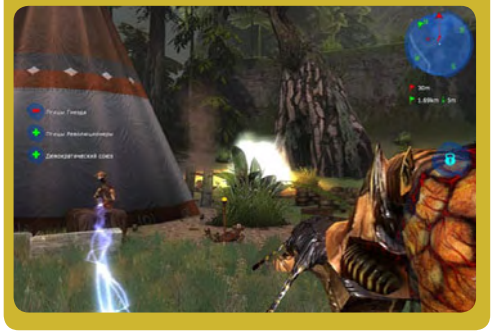
Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** Late 2009

What's better than being able to decapitate a zombie with a guitar? Well, nothing. But it's even more awesome if you have a friend there to see it happen. Fortunately, Dead Rising 2 on PC will enable that to happen, as there's a fully free drop-in co-op mode implemented for instant team-up slaying.

Precursors

Publisher: GFI | **ETA:** Q2

Eastern European developers quite often aim for lofty ambition with their games, and this bounty-hunting space Shooter is no exception. The Kiev-based team are creating multiple worlds, and a lavish cast of aliens, robots and vicious space mercenaries for you to meet, befriend, or slay.



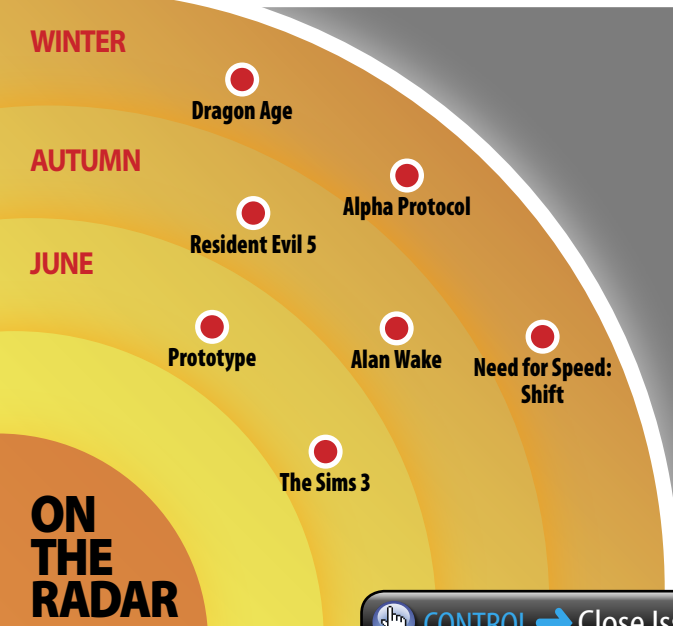
Lost Planet 2

Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** TBC

Not yet officially confirmed for PC, but a surefire certainty for later in the year. This epic boss-battling sci-fi shooter might include the best use of a grappling hook anywhere in a 3D game. The luscious new jungle environments look good enough to rival Crysis, too.



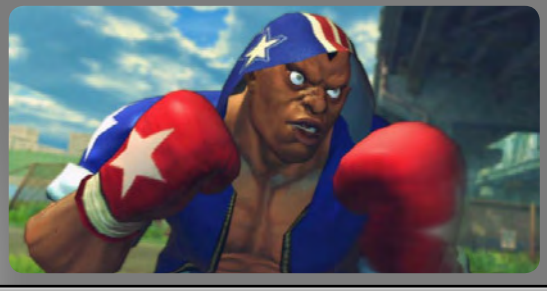
ON THE RADAR



Streetfighter IV

Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** July

The PC version of this latest iteration of the classic fighting game has a bunch of tricks up its sleeve, including a set of distinct processing modes, which allow you to take full advantage of the graphical cleverness of your 3D card. Should be stunning.





Dark Void

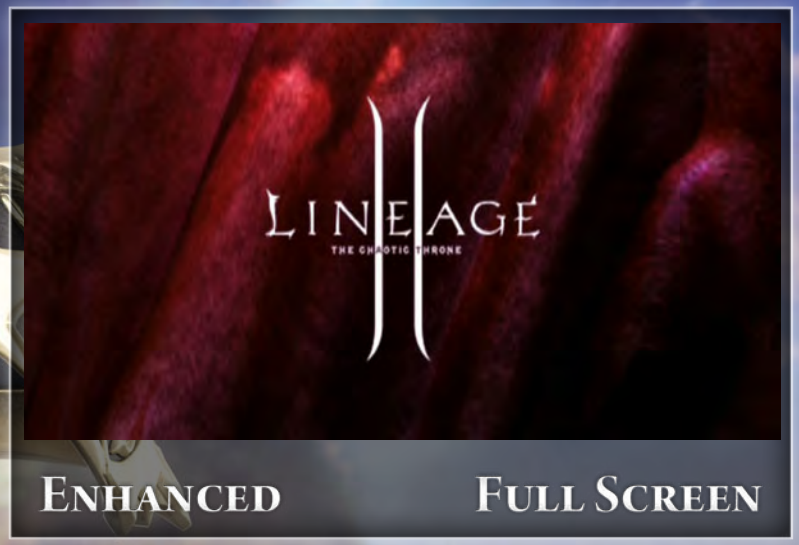
Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** TBC

This sci-fi shooter has a couple of things going for it. Firstly, the game is set in a violent dimension on the far side of the Bermuda Triangle, where Nikola Tesla lives. And the action part of the game is delivered via hoverpacks and jetpacks for aerial combat.

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NCSOFT

LINEAGE II TEAM

[PROTOTYPE]

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Radical Entertainment
Heritage: Simpsons: Hit & Run, Scarface: The World is Yours
Link: www.prototypegame.com
ETA: June

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

HANDS ON

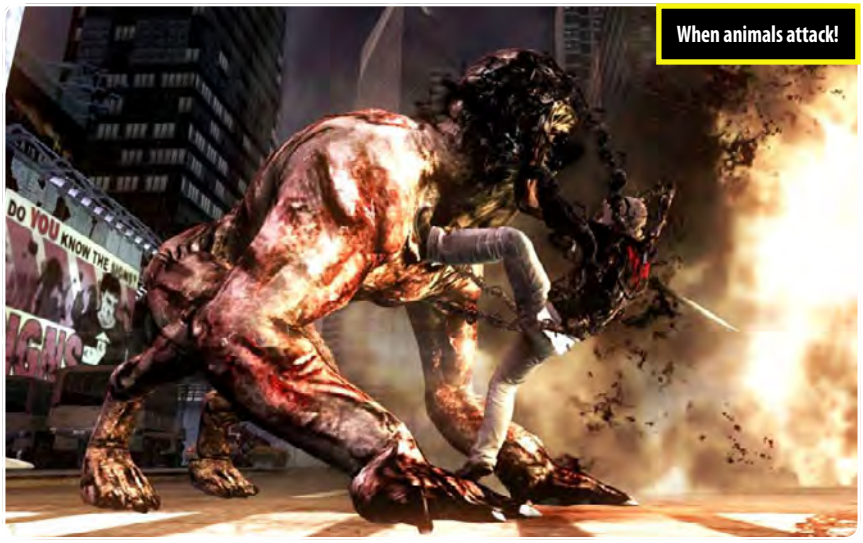
PROTOTYPE

Hug a hoodie…

Imagine waking up in the morgue about to be cut open, with no idea of who you are or how you got there. Then imagine looking in the mirror and discovering that you're wearing the kind of hooded top favoured by surly teenagers at bus stops, needlessly spitting. It's not a great day for Prototype's chief protagonist, Alex Mercer, and it gets considerably worse when he discovers that the might of the US Army has effectively declared war on him. And to add to his grief, he's also coming under attack from a group of hideously disfigured mutants know as The Infected, and is somehow wrapped up in a 40-year-old conspiracy. On the plus side, Alex has discovered that he has a wide range of superpowers, and is able to run up the side of tall buildings, jump off the top of those buildings with impunity, throw military vehicles around like confetti, and sprout razor sharp claws like Wolverine's older brother. Every cloud… >



Always check behind you first.



When animals attack!



Alex likes to fight dirty.

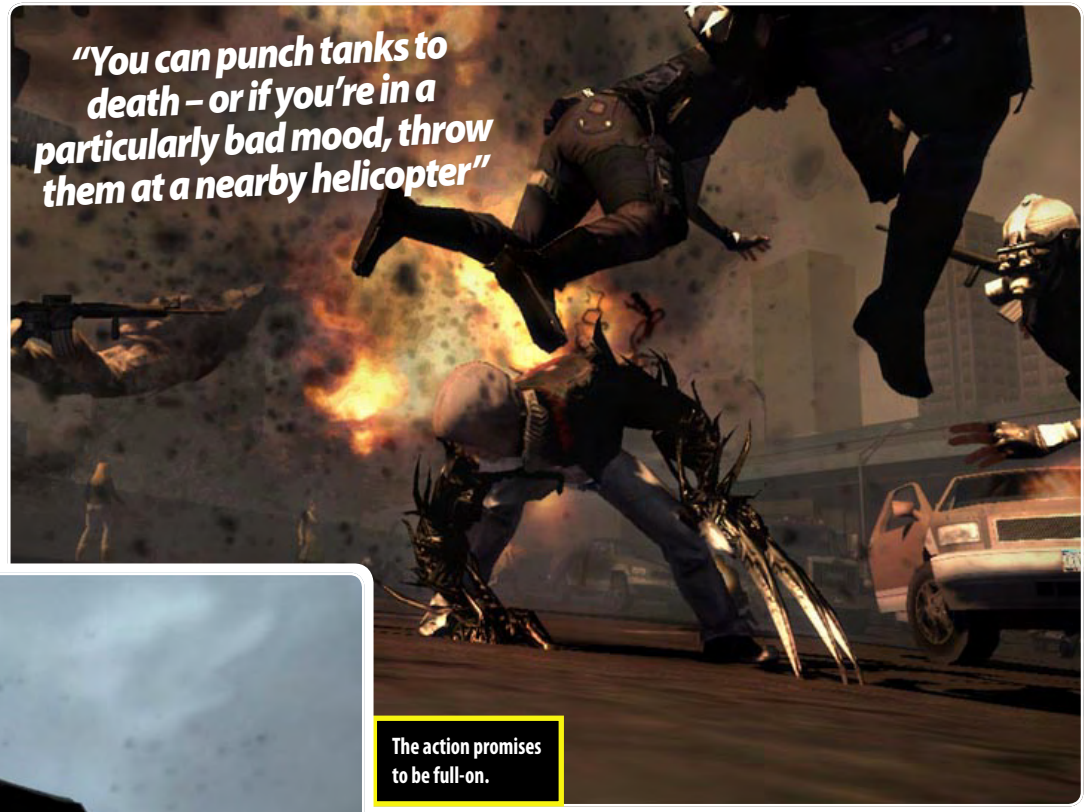
[PROTOTYPE]

> Prototype continued

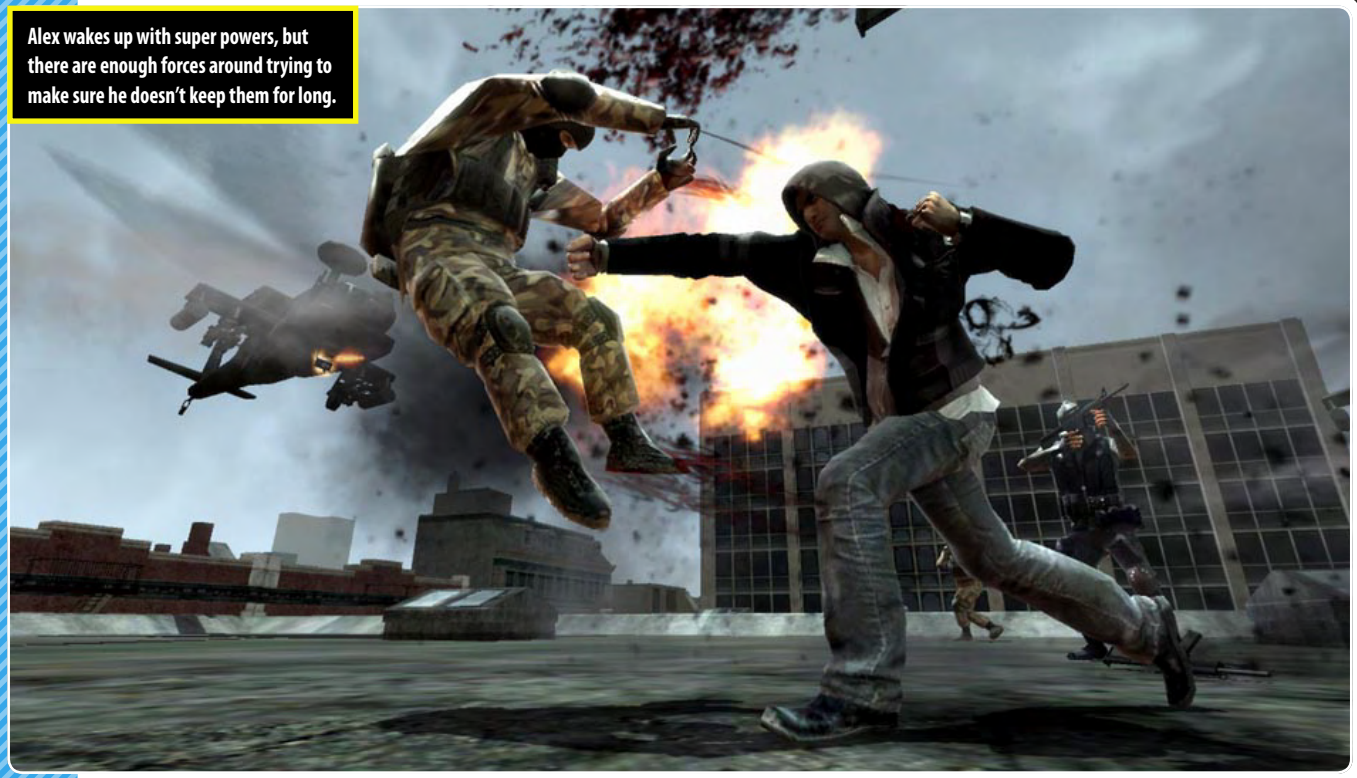
Something, clearly, is afoot, and while it may start as just another normal day in New York City, it soon escalates into wanton, ugly violence and carnage on a level not seen since, well probably since Radical Entertainment's last game, Hulk: Ultimate Destruction. Taking their cue from that game's extreme level's of demolition, the Canadian developers have upped the ante even further, and playing as Alex, you can literally punch tanks to death – or if you're in a particularly bad mood, throw them at a nearby helicopter.

For a bit of variety, you could leap into the helicopter, violently 'consume' the pilot and take over the controls. The consume mechanic involves Alex absorbing an enemy, simultaneously acquiring his victim's memories as well as his abilities – hence being able to career around the streets of New York in one of the military's finest tanks, with a rudimentary driving model comparable to that of the choppers.

While there are some quieter moments where you can acquire a >



The action promises to be full-on.

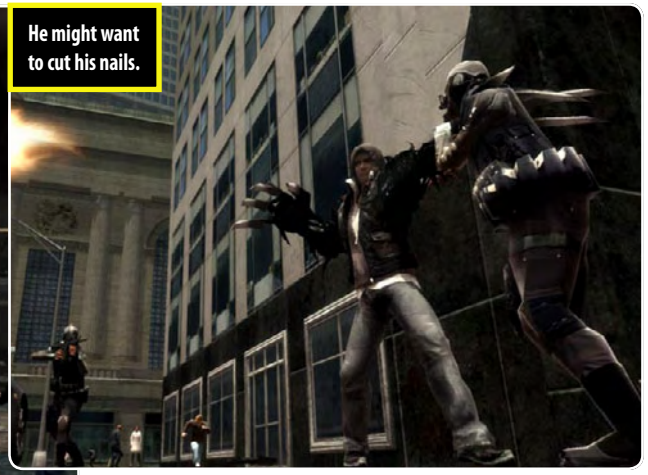


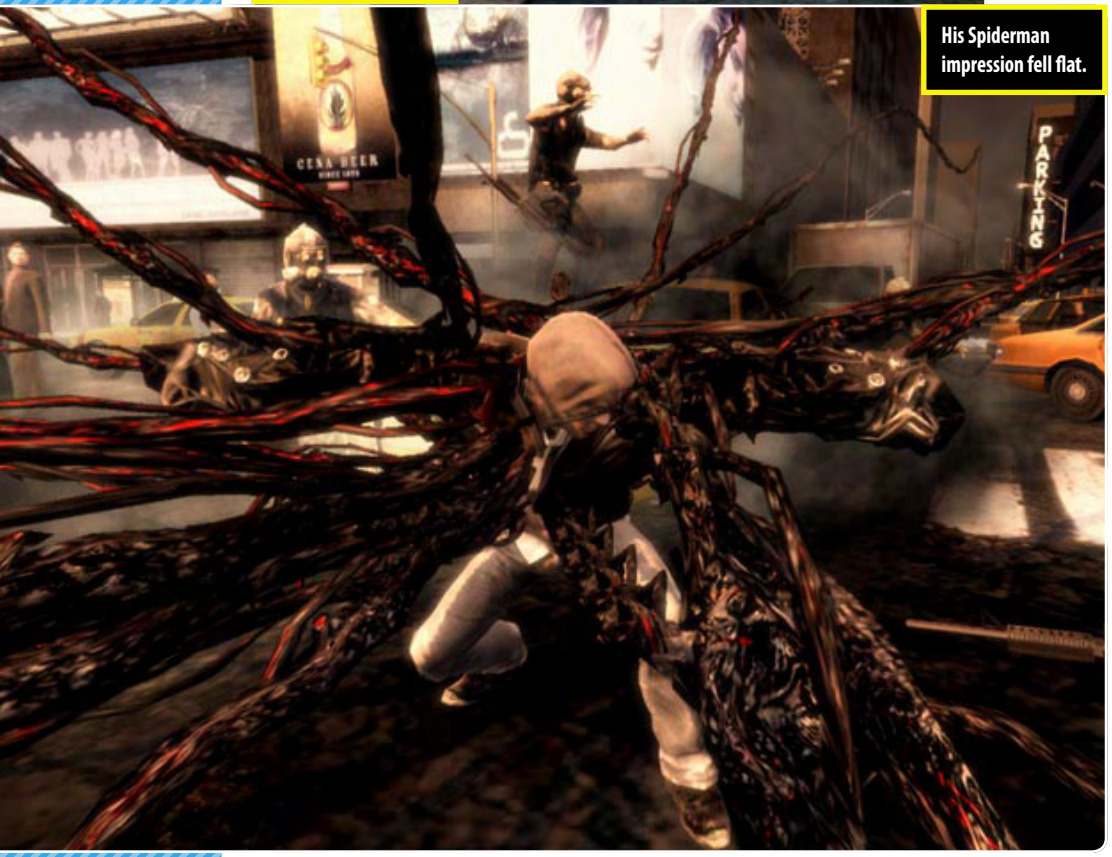
Alex wakes up with super powers, but there are enough forces around trying to make sure he doesn't keep them for long.



We think it's a little too late to slap an ASBO on this hoodie-clad bad boy.


Even the Marines are no match for our man.


He might want to cut his nails.



His Spiderman impression fell flat.

> Prototype continued

disguise and sneak into military bases, in the main, Prototype seems to be about littering the streets of New York with blood, guts, tanks, taxis and monsters, as you wage a one-man war against anything that gets in your way. By way of plot development, a couple of friends and family are on your side, but essentially Alex is an angry young man, assuming the role of an anti-hero as he strives for revenge on whoever placed him in this predicament.

We've had a dabble with the opening level, which is essentially a tutorial whereby you learn how to use Alex's various skills. It's pick up and play stuff, and within minutes you're sprinting to the top of a skyscraper, surveying the carnage below and then leaping back into the fray to crack some more skulls. In theory an open-world game, the plot will be shoved along with some linear missions, as you endeavour to find out what on earth is going on. And hopefully, you'll eventually be able to get rid of that rancid hoodie… ●

FEELING PECKISH?

It's all consuming…



Target | **Punch** | **Consume**

Target

Lead character Alex Mercer has a unique 'consume' mechanic, whereby he can absorb another human. Pick a likely target to try out your fancy move.

PCGZine [PROTOTYPE]

HOW COMPLETE? 95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

Street crime looks set to get a lot worse…

HANDS ON

CITIES XL

Could this great urban experiment be the city-builder to unite the world?

Publisher: Monte Cristo Multimedia
Developer: Monte Cristo Multimedia
Heritage: SimCity
Link: www.citiesxl.com
ETA: June

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

The allure of building a city from scratch has never gone away. From the moment we laid down that first SimCity road in 1989, we were hooked on the idea of creating vast urban sprawls and modifying them to our mayoral whims.

Cities XL is one of the most ambitious city-building projects ever, allowing you to create gigantic conurbations with towering downtown skyscrapers and heaving suburban orbits. Not since SimCity 2000 have we seen a game that captures the notion of what it is to conjure up a city from nothing quite so succinctly, and the sheer visual depth and detail of Cities XL means that it's unlikely that we'll see anything with >



Ready to carve a glittering city into that fresh green countryside?



Infrastructure comes in all shapes and sizes, tunnels and bridge-spans.

PCGZine EXCLUSIVE VIDEO

It's not often a developer gives you this amount of access to a game in raw form, so feast your eyes on this taster for how Cities XL is shaping up. As it's alpha, the're no audio.

ENHANCED VIEW





Realistic social dynamics will populate the city according to real-world behaviours.



Zooming around the virtual streets is like playing tourist in something you built yourself.

> Cities XL continued

quite as much breadth any time soon. It takes one backwards zoom of the camera for you to realise just how vast the maps are – Cities XL will make real-world cities look unambitious.

But what is most intriguing about Cities XL is that it isn't simply trying to create an excellent building experience, as behind all of the graphical finery and smart camera angles, it also has a wider, online game. There is the possibility to build not just cities, but *planets*. Going online with friends, you can embed your city within an online world, and start trading within a player-driven economy. Specialise your city for the production of particular resources, and you can begin to compete and co-operate with other players in a race to make the largest, grandest city on the planet. All this sits beneath a social networking platform, which allows you to chat with the other city builders and visit their creations, and a content-enhancement system which will deliver new options to the game over time – such as expanded tourism or enhanced industries. It's visionary stuff.

We could scarcely be more excited about a city-building game, as from we've seen so far, CitiesXL promises to do everything right. Hang on to your zoning laws people, we've got an entire planet to build…

"There is the possibility to build not just cities, but planets"



Images like this give you some idea of the scale of the cities you can expect to build.

ON THE STREET

I wanna wake up in a city that never sleeps…



Bodge the builder | **Resource management** | **Down on the streets**

Bodge the builder

Building your city into the landscape requires some care. Without proper road infrastructure your citizens cannot go about their business.

PCGZine CitiesXL

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

The SimCity sequel that Maxis never made? It could be

Wolfenstein

Publisher: Activision
Developer: id, Raven
Link: www.wolfenstein.com
ETA: Summer

Five years in the making, the original first-person shooter is about to get a very modern upgrade…



Eric Biessman, Creative Director for Wolfenstein, Raven Software

We're pretty excited about this, and after talking to Raven Software, then we suspect you might be too…

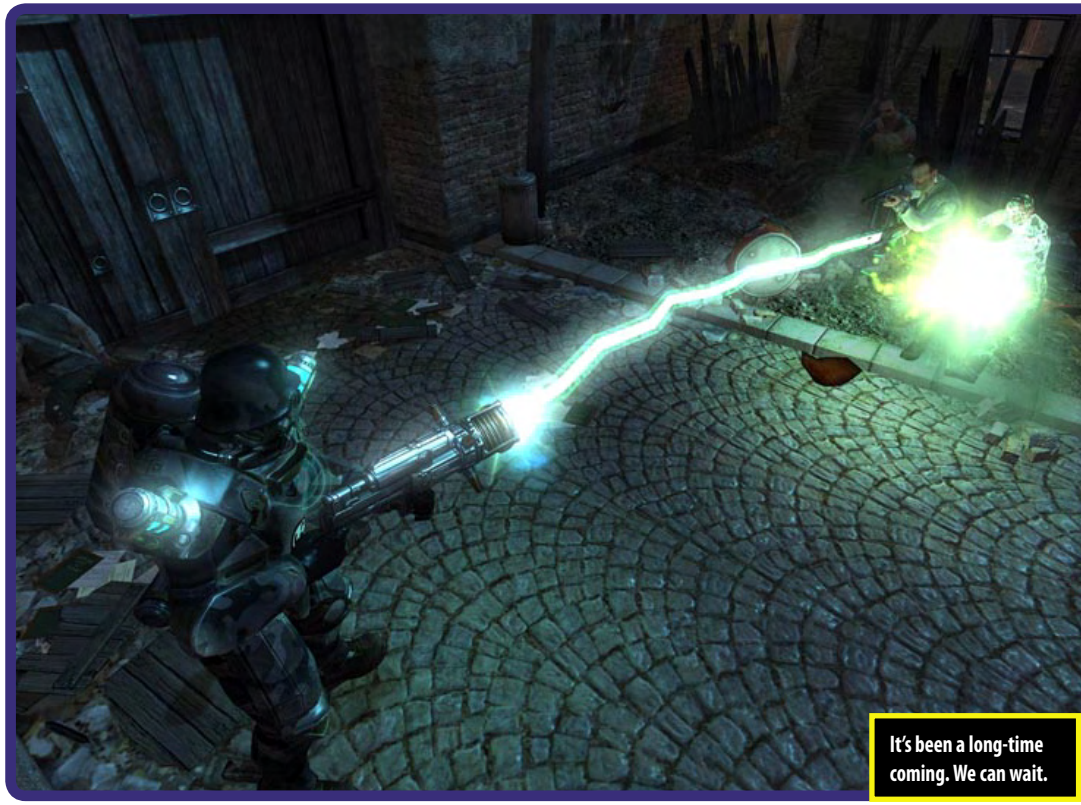
What caused the decision to now give 'B.J.' Blazkowicz a voice and personality?
B.J. began life as a face in the bottom of the screen on Wolfenstein 3D. His personality essentially revolved around how happy he was to find a new gun and how much punishment he could take, giving the player valuable feedback. B.J.'s next appearance was in Return to Castle Wolfenstein, where we see him become more of a character and get a slightly better understanding of what he does and the kind of missions he takes. There is also a lot of imagery for B.J. in the packaging and ads for the previous games. So we felt that since we wanted to create a driving story and a cinematic feel – as well as tie players to B.J. as a character – it would be great to give him a voice and more personality.

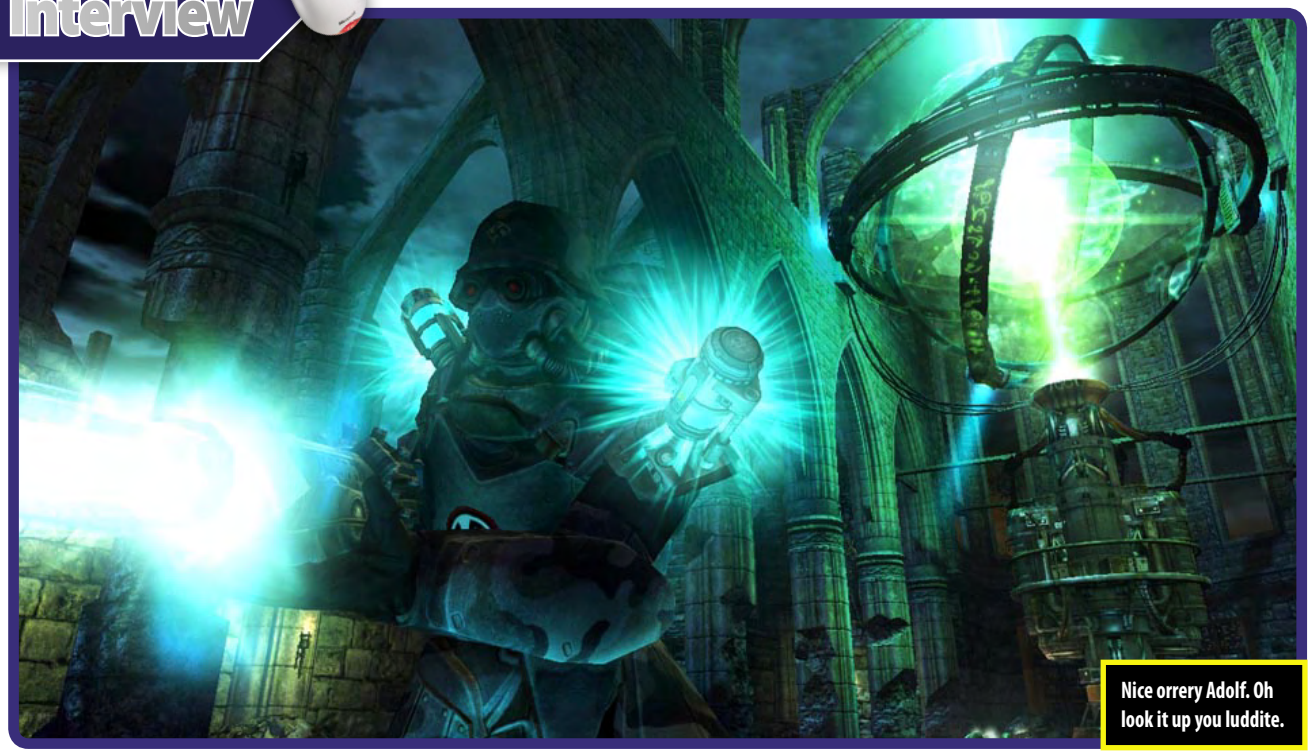

Lady Gaga might be able to get away with sholderpads mate, but you 'aint no lady.

You first revealed Wolfenstein way back in 2004. Five years is a worrying amount of time for any game to spend in development, so was there any particular reason for the delay?
From the beginning of development we had some ideas that we wanted to try out to see how they would shake out in the Wolfenstein universe. We wanted to make sure that we created an enjoyable, exciting game that fit within the confines of the established universe. That said, we spent a good deal of time trying out ideas, prototyping, building and honing >

"We wanted to make an exciting game that fit within the confines of the established universe"


Good old normal, evil Nazi officers. You know where you are with them.


It's been a long-time coming. We can wait.



Nice orrery Adolf. Oh look it up you luddite.



Looks like WWII all right; rubble check, fire check, big green laser...

> Interview continued

until we came up with a formula that we felt did justice to the license as well as created the next logical step in the Wolfenstein universe.

This is shaping up to be quite the modern shooter. Are there any elements to it that hark back to Wolfenstein's roots, like the secret areas that you can find in Return to Castle Wolfenstein?

Wolfenstein 3D and Return to Castle Wolfenstein are games that have a lot of meaning to me, as a developer and especially as a player. In fact, Wolf 3D holds a special place that is near and dear to my heart – it changed me as a gamer, moving me from the action/adventure and RPG games of the time to an adrenaline junkie. So going into the development of Wolfenstein, we took special care to pay attention to what people loved from the previous games and use them as a starting point for the game.

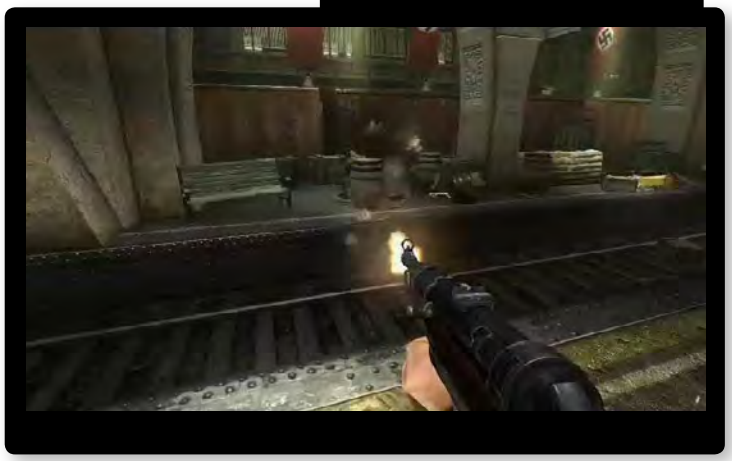
"As the player collects the treasures he can take the money and go to the black market"

Beyond some of the characters, enemies and weapons that you've come to know and love from the Wolfenstein universe, we also made sure that we followed the key gameplay from the previous titles. First and foremost, Wolfenstein is a fast action combat game. It focuses on frenetic gunplay that uses super-powered weaponry, strange occult themes and conventional weapons.

We've taken something that many people know and love from the previous games: treasure. In Wolf 3D and Return to Castle Wolfenstein, the player was able to find and collect treasures and Nazi gold in secret areas and scattered throughout the levels. This time, we've taken the idea of collecting gold and treasure and added one more layer. As the player collects the treasures he can take the money and go to the Black Market. Once he is there he can buy upgrades for every weapon and Veil power that he has. It's really cool to mix and match your upgrades to hone your weapons and powers how you like them.

Wolfenstein was never a series that was weighed down with options, but for this game you're adding friendly soldiers, set-pieces, side missions, branching paths, shops, special abilities and even an alternate reality you can enter at any point. Does it strike you as dangerous to be adding so much depth to a series that rarely tried to be anything more than a simple, highly polished shooter in a camp setting where you could boot a guy when you fancied it? >

ENHANCED VIEW



> Interview continued

Wolfenstein is focused around fast action, big guns and visceral combat, and it's got everything that you've come to know and love from the franchise. So, even though we've offered the player some choices in the game, our goal was always to focus on adrenaline, fast action and combat. All of those things that you've listed in your question come together to set the scene, the emotion and the speed of the gameplay.

Where did the idea for the Veil come from?
The Veil came from simple gameplay mechanics. We wanted to allow the player to have access to some of the weird occult things that the Nazis were creating in the story, so we started by rapidly prototyping out the idea of the various powers. In the beginning, the powers functioned like the upgrades you've found in games like Quake – they were strange runes that floated in the air and when you touched them they gave you a power for a limited set of time. From there, we experimented with ways to make the powers feel more special and more controlled – which led to the creation of the Veil. We added this place that the player could enter and activate a power. Once this was in place we expanded on it with creatures, weapons and abilities, as well as allowing the player to turn it on and off as they wanted. The next thing you know, the Veil was in and working!

Was it a difficult decision to replace numerical health and veil energy with the regenerating health and energy now found in almost all big shooters?
As a fan of the previous games, this was actually a very hard decision. There is a certain amount of coolness to being down to five points of health and lapping up pools of blood and eating dog food to get health back. We even had turkey dinners spread throughout the game at one point. What it all came down to was our focus on making sure that the game continued to play as a fast action combat game. Instead of moving from combat situation to combat situation, we found players taking breaks to search for food. It ended up playing against our main goal for the game and instead became an inventory hunting game and it wasn't as exciting. So, in the end, regenerating health was really a great way to focus the game better.

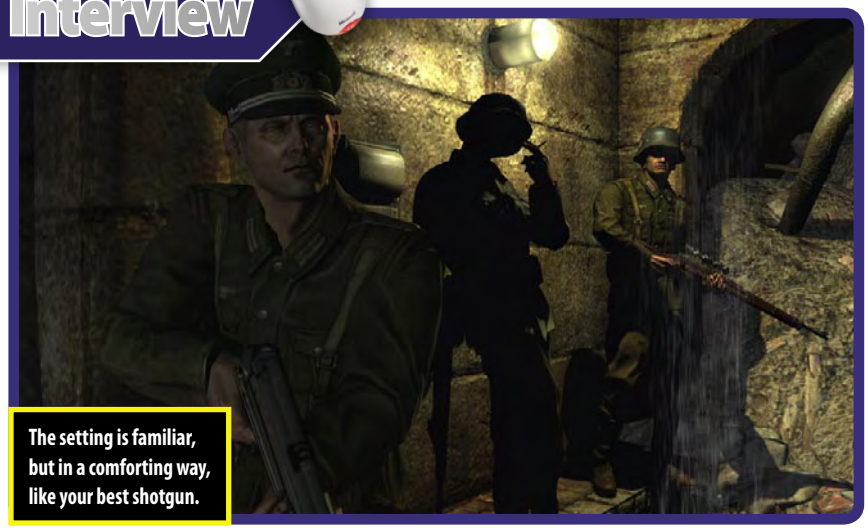

Health packs out, regeneration in. It's Wolf, but with a twist.

"We even had turkey dinners spread through the game at one point"

Can you tell us anything at all about the multiplayer? Seems strange to have radio silence on >


Look at that poor Nazi fella disintergrating! Aww, shame.


Yeah take that you goose-stepping... er... window...



The setting is familiar, but in a comforting way, like your best shotgun.

> Interview continued

the matter after Enemy Territory – the last project to use the Wolfenstein license – became one of the single most popular multiplayer games on the planet. More information on multiplayer will be coming soon… What I can say, is that fans of Return to Castle Wolfenstein will find the same great game experience, and this time we've added the powers and the Veil to play with as well.

The art department seem to be having a lot of fun with the Nazi imagery in the game, producing something more colourful and darker than Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Is this the case?

We decided at an early date that we really wanted to showcase the power and presence of the Nazis in the city and the levels. We went through tons and tons of reference materials and found that the Nazis were very much involved in their symbolism and the propaganda that it brought. We really wanted the city to feel like it is in the grip of the Nazis, draped with flags, statues, paintings and propaganda posters at every turn. It shows the player how ingrained the Nazis are to the city and continually reminds the player of their involvement.

As for colour and darkness, we have many varied looks in the level that play on different emotions. Some areas are bright daylight areas and some are dark, drippy and dreadful. Each area was created to evoke a different mood and feeling, and we definitely wanted to push a realistic looking setting as much as we could – even if we do have eight-feet-tall suits of power armour harassing the city streets.

What are you particularly proud of in the visual design of the game?
There are a lot of things that I am really proud of in the visual design of the game, from the high poly models to the lighting, to the characters. But the one thing that most stands out to me is the variety of locations that the game has. Each one is highly detailed, enjoyable to travel through and interesting visually. I think that this is the best part because it ties everything together – the great models, the enhanced technology, the next-gen features, the wonderful textures!

"We really wanted the city to feel like it is in the grip of the Nazis"



Whatt will MP bring? We'll have to see...



You'd be angry if your initials were B.J too...

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HANDS ON

THE SIMS 3

Publisher: EA
Developer: Maxis
Heritage: The Sims series
Link: http://thesims3.ea.com
ETA: June

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of The Sims 3

"You'll probably spend a good deal of time in your first few games just zooming around the local landscapes"

The third Sims game will be interactive soap opera at its very best


My cross-dressing redneck puts his sofa in the front yard, like any good citizen.

It's a common complaint that games are only good for action, gunplay, and violence. But just a few minutes with any of The Sims games shows that not to be true. Having spent several hours with the most recent game in the series (The Sims 3) we started to realise that the pleasures of social drama, situation comedy, and domestic meandering are all well within the reach of the modern videogame.

Superficially, this seems like less of a leap than the step up to 3D that was made by the Sims 2, but this is nevertheless an expansive new game, with some pretty significant tricks up its fully customisable sleeve. Once again we're creating artificial people from scratch – be it a teenage goth with a love for computers, or a middle-aged mullet-wearing fisherman who fancies himself as a world champion Chess player. We found that the creation process is also slicker and simpler than the previous game. It takes moments to create the physical appearance of your little computer person, and then just five traits and a lifetime aspiration set them on the course of their personal life.

Once again they're living in a neighbourhood of other Sims, but this time the scope and scale of the place is rather more impressive. You'll probably spend a good deal of time in your first few games just zooming around the local landscapes, checking out the other houses and the places your Sims can visit and work: bistros, the beach, a science park, a mall, a military base. All the usual locales your Sims might want to live and work.

The approach this time, however, is to make The Sims 3 about shared >


Choosing the bet locale for your Sims can make their life much easier in the long run.


You can define the relationships between your Sims to create any kind of household.


The more a Sim performs a skill, the better it becomes at it.


Buying a big villa down by the beach will take some serious career work.

> The Sims 3 continued

creativity. There's a new editing suite called the 'Mashup Tool', which allows you to produce soundtracked mini-movies of your Sims in action – which is ideal for machinima dabblings. And, of course, practically everything in the game world can be customised, including dragging around the walls of a house to customise your dwellings, and even combining the genes of two adult Sims to see what their offspring would look like. All these things can then be shared online with your friends, via The Sims 3 portal.

"You can combine the genes of two adult Sims to see what their offspring would look like"

What makes us most optimistic about this new game, however, is that the game has lost none of Maxis' strange, silly sense of humour. The game excels in making you chortle as the Sims spout their 'Simlish' language and interact with each other in all kinds of ways. Trust us, it really won't be long before they're having affairs and making enemies. The full potential of a Sims' life is larger than that, however, and you can expect a well-played Sims family to produce everything from world leaders to great sportsmen and even criminal masterminds. The scope and solidity of this game promise that this will give greater life to a series that already bestrides the world. We can see no reason why this shouldn't be the best of the series so far.

Roll over screen for annotations



BUILDING YOUR SIM

A brief guide to creating life…



Back to basics | **Bad taste** | **Hair apparent**

Back to basics

The game automatically generates a basic Sim that you can use right away, or alter to suit your whims – the choice is up to you.

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

We can see no reason why Maxis' form should falter

HANDS ON

TRINE

Publisher: Nobilis/Ascaron
Developer: Frozenbyte
Heritage: Shadowgrounds
Link: http://trine-thegame.com
ETA: July

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

"It works much like Blizzard's ancient Lost Vikings game"

A thief, a wizard and a knight go into a magic dungeon with hilarious consequences…

It begins like a high budget kids TV show, with a wholesomely voiced narrator detailing the background of our three heroes as you manoeuvre them towards a mysterious money-pile in a nearby dungeon. "By my trousers! I must escape!" one heavily intones, giving voice to a wizard that we're told has been asleep for two weeks after a fireballing session meant to impress the ladies went disastrously wrong. What it goes on to become, as well as a game of astounding beauty, is an exercise in exemplary side-scrolling physics.

It works much like Blizzard's ancient Lost Vikings game – you have three characters with different powers, here all blended into one crowded body, and you swap between them to navigate levels of whirring gears, spinning death traps, unbalanced see-saws and giant weighing scales. The wizard can levitate objects, including ones he's standing on, and distribute >



Put a duck on the other side and we'll find out if he should be burned.



The art-style is half fantasy and half slightly wonky golden steampunk.



Pontius the Knight dashes around gallantly, excited about bashing things.

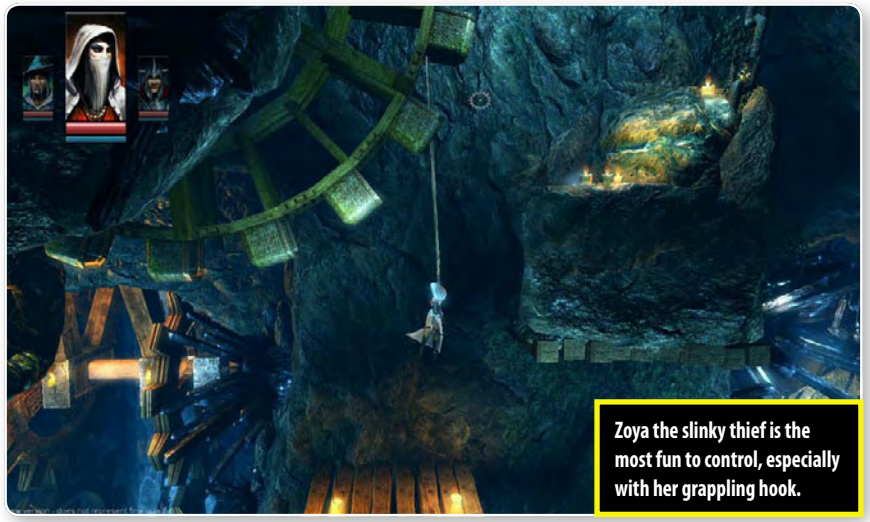


Skeletons occasionally get in the way of our bound threesome, but they're soon crushed with mighty blows.

> Trine continued

their weight on relevant parts of the screen, but if there's nothing useful around can also draw a square on the screen in the manner of Crayon Physics to create his own magical clockwork cube. The knight, meanwhile, is best for bashing the skeletons that come your way – as well as making holes in the scenery and protecting himself from the environment with a handy shield you can move around. Finally the slinky and rather lithe thief – easily the most fun character to control – has a grappling hook hidden behind one mouse button, letting her swing like a woman possessed – coupled with a bow and arrow attached to the other to damage enemies and relevant bits of level furniture.

Trine is a beautiful and hugely satisfying puzzler, whether you're swinging a giant stone fist into a delicate-looking wall or going on an unexpected journey into the rafters with your thief attached to a water wheel. We've played it for a not inconsiderable amount of time and have been utterly charmed; the full game can't come soon enough.



Zoya the slinky thief is the most fun to control, especially with her grappling hook.

WONDERFUL WIZARDRY

Harry Potter? Pah!



Boxing clever

A bit of a drag

Trolley dolly

Boxing clever

Finding that piled-up boxes are something of a pain? Simply levitate your heavy wooden problems out of the picture…

PCGZine TRINE

HOW COMPLETE? 90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

Give yourself one moment in Trine and you'll be hooked

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Zeno Clash

Publisher: Steam/ Direct 2 Drive
Developer: Ace Team
Heritage: Source Engine
Link: www.zenoclash.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: Dual Core CPU, 2GB RAM, 256MB 3D card

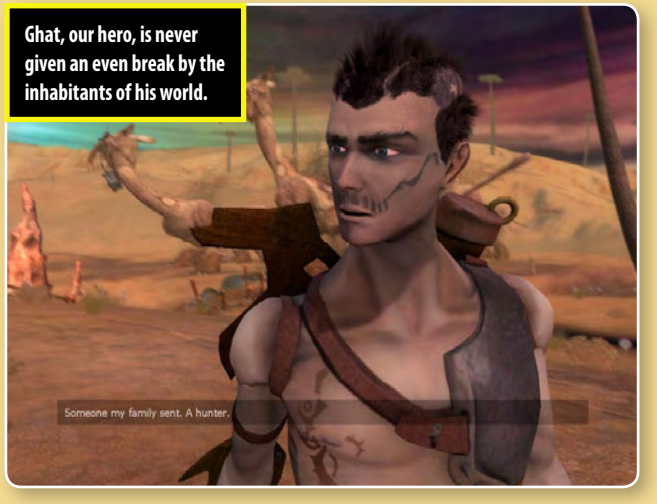
"At four hours, it's short, but it's intriguing, astoundingly violent and visually lavish"

Punch and kick your way through splendid surrealism

It never ceases to amaze us that people find new life in the linear first-person shooter. Chilean developers Ace Team have taken the ageing Source engine (responsible for Half-Life 2 and Portal) and turned it to something quite beautiful – a melee game set in a tribal fantasy world of dreamlike weirdness. It's a surprisingly visceral fighting experience, and a new direction for these kinds of episode-length games. At four hours it's short, but it's intriguing, astoundingly violent and visually lavish.

The spooky, nightmarish story is at the heart of the game – your adventures are told partly as a journey for your protagonist and his female companion, and partly as flashback for the reasons why they are fleeing his home. Ghat, the main character, has murdered 'Father-Mother', a huge, bird-like humanoid whose family he was a part of, but then abandoned to explore his strange world. Discovering why he murdered Father-mother is all part of the mystery, and it brings in a cast of insane characters and wondrous set-pieces to tell the tale. It reminds us in part of Tim Burton's cinematic imagination, but as equal parts films like MirrorMask, or games like Sacrifice and Giants. Ultimately it adds up to a world that is deeply evocative and genuinely imaginative. Oh, and you get to punch dudes in the face. Cool!

While there are a bunch of classical weapons in the game, including a sniper



Ghat, our hero, is never given an even break by the inhabitants of his world.




Zeno Clash is a visual feast – these giant tapir-giraffe things appear several times during the game.

ODDS AND SODS

The weird and wonderful world of Zeno Clash



Weird looking | **Back to school** | **Freakish fat guy**

Weird looking

The Corwids are a clan of weird-looking lunatics who are basically too insane to live. You end up fighting a bunch of them as the story progresses, although they're not all violent. One of them just lays down and dies, while another teaches you the finer points of unarmed combat throughout the game.



Occasionally you face very large monsters who must be clubbed to death.

Roll over screen for annotations



> Zeno Clash continued

rifle, a cross bow and fish-pistols, most of the hard work of putting people on the ground is done with your fists. The melee options are fairly substantial, although all the controls are kept within familiar mouse-keyboard constraints. You can do a jab, block, dodge, do a big block-breaking punch and knock away incoming blows. You can also kick your enemy when they're down, which is brutal, but ruthless and necessary.

Hand to hand

Unlike most other FPS the hand-to-hand stuff does not come second to ranged weapons. These are useful – and even vital in a couple of the boss battles – but they are generally knocked out of your hands by close-ranged enemies, and you'll usually choose to holster them rather than lose them in a brawl. What's also brilliant is how well the game copes with you having to fight multiple opponents. It does feel much harder, but it never really gets out of hand, and the NPCs generally don't get in each other's way. The escalation to fighting bigger, tougher enemies is genuinely well-handled too.

This is one of the most creative games we're going to see this year. The visual rewards alone are enough to make it worth playing, but the fact that it's a solid, unusual action game means that this is something you can hardly afford not to buy. You'll probably be able to spot the twist a mile off, but can you explain Golem? And what's with the Rubik's Cube? We'll leave you to figure that out.

Jim Rossignol


If we had to put a genre name on the style, it'd be something like 'TribalPunk'.



It's not all bad, because you have a lovely lady friend to keep you company.

PCGZine Verdict

Weird and wonderful, with a roundhouse for everyone

- Solid melee
- Weird story
- Wild visuals

85%

Plants vs Zombies

Publisher: PopCap
Developer: PopCap
Heritage: Zuma, Bejeweled
Link: www.popcap.com/games/pvz
OUT NOW

System Requirements: This will run on the most cranky and ancient of PCs. The spec is about as low as it gets.

The eternal battle commences, but can you really keep zombies off your lawn?

Plants vs Zombies is a tower defence game; a strategy game in which you have to hold off enemy attacks by building defences. Familiar stuff, only this particular defence is to save your brains from being eaten, and the 'towers' are plants which must are gifted with special powers.

Your house, lawn, backyard and roof are under attack from zombies. The horde comes in the from the right, and you have to set up your defences from the left. As the game progresses you collect a range of plants, and you must select just a handful for each defence. Some plants are single-use, and will explode, squash, burn, hypnotise or blast the zombies. Other plants are more defensive by blocking, eating or slowing the zombies. Others still are more like classic turrets, firing organic ordnance into the ranks of the undead.

You have to collect 'sun' to pay for the plants you're using, and in the daytime this falls from the sky, or pops from sunflowers. At night you'll have to rely on sunflowers or convenient mushrooms. As you play you'll unlock plants and mushrooms for all kinds of circumstances, all of which are useful because the zombies are extremely inventive. They'll float in on balloons, tunnel under defences, hop over plants with pogo-sticks, or come crashing through everything with a lawnmower. Only a planned, competent defence will keep them out. And it's also great fun.

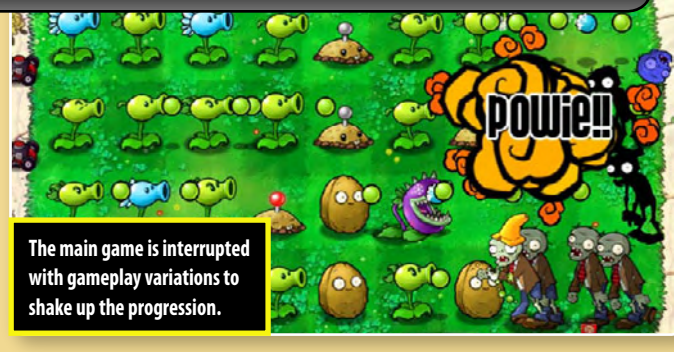
Jim Rossignol

"Your house, lawn backyard and roof are under attack from zombies"



The Thriller zombies make a boogie-licious appearance.





The main game is interrupted with gameplay variations to shake up the progression.

CRAZY DAVE

Come on down! We've got crazy prices!

It's pretty much you and your plants versus the Zombies, but one person is around to help you – your hirsute neighbour, Crazy Dave. He's got a shop of anti-undead loot in the boot of his car, and you can make purchases with coins blasted from your zombified foe.



PCGZine Verdict

Great fun overall, but also a bit too easy

- Brilliantly conceived
- Brilliantly executed
- Brilliantly balanced

88%

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