

## t's a Gas

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The internet/World Wide Web has always been full of promises of interactivity and entertainment with freedom of expression and freedom of commerce. If we forget about the seamier (and very popular) side, there is very little on offer. Disney Blast is great for pre-teens, and their parents (at a price). David Bowie offers something for those a little older, complete with a really funky interface (again at a price). But a site that has something for, and is freely accessible to, everyone is a rarity - until now.

Although they call it an Internet magazine, Helium 3's site <http://www.hq3.net> has gone far beyond that to create a genre of its own. Having gained nomination for BAFTA's first Interactive Entertainment Awards it has grown into one of the most exciting web-sites around. It has taken the best aspects of traditional press, television and radio, mixed it with the full potential of the internet and wrapped it up in one of the most exciting, interesting and usable interfaces to create this whole new information driven experience.

he site is basically divided into three sections; Information, Entertainment and Reviews, which are accessed from a scrolling page, which comes alive under the mouse's movement. The scope of material that is covered is highly eclectic. There is everything

from children's pages featuring the studio cats, Mac and PC (they are real cats) to a streaming audio 'juke box' with new and experimental music (available to purchase online). There are also plans for streaming video of a quality not yet seen on the web. There are links to local, national and international newspapers and news services. There is information on everything from local schools to local transport. There are reviews of everything from the latest technology to the latest stand up comedy. There is art and fashion with pictures from the latest shows arriving by e-mail as soon as the models leave the catwalks. There is already a French version with other languages in the pipeline. There is really something for everyone and, best of all, it is all free.

his project has arrived at this highly developed state through a combination of boundless enthusiasm, great ideas, great designers and programmers and the power of our favourite computer. Not only is it created on Macs and run on a Mac server, but it is fully supported by Apple, who are helping with hardware and access to their latest multimedia software developments. Most of it is created with Macromedia products, Flash, Director and FreeHand and of course Adobe Photoshop is there. The whole site actually runs on Shockwave rather than HTML, hence the greatly improved interface and performance. It is worth noting that it is much more comfortable with Netscape (version 3 and above) than Internet Explorer.

I spent a couple of entertaining hours with Helium 3's two directors, Lorraine Barclay and Barry Chattington, as they elucidated their plans and showed me the site running on an iMac. It is such a perfect combination - designer computer and designer website. The site will be fully online in February, but will be in a state of constant evolution, responding to the feedback of its visitors. When it starts to fully realise its potential there will be almost no reason to visit any other site. Just plug in your iMac, have it open up Netscape going directly to <http://www.hq3.net> and find everything you need to know and to entertain you (you will even find your way to 1984 Online). All I can say is experience it for yourself. You won't be disappointed.

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