

Waiting for the internet meltdown

The world is heading for a digital doomsday as the net fast runs out of numerical addresses, warns Mark Harris

The end of the internet is nigh — and in less than three years, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Can it be true? The problem is that the world is running out of internet addresses. More than 85% of the available addresses have already been allocated and the OECD predicts we will have run out completely by early 2011.

These aren't the normal web addresses you type into your browser's window, and which were recently freed up by Icann (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the body responsible for allocating domain names, to allow thousands of new internet domains ending in, for instance, .london or .xxx.

'As addresses run dry, net speeds will drop'

Beneath these commonsense names lie numerical internet protocol (IP) addresses that denote individual devices connected to the internet. These form the foundation for all online communications, from e-mail and web pages to voice chat and streaming video.

When the current IP address scheme was introduced in 1981 there were fewer than 500 computers connected to the internet. Its founders could be forgiven for thinking that allowing for a potential 4 billion would last for ever. However, less than 30 years later we're rapidly running out.

Every day thousands of new devices ranging from massive web servers down to individual mobile phones go



BUZZ! QUIZ TV

PS3 £25. AGE 12+
★★★★★

The Buzz series of games attempts to replicate the format of a typical television quiz show on a PlayStation console. Players must answer multiple-choice questions on their television screen by pressing the right button on their joypad or on the optional dedicated controllers (£25 extra). This first Buzz version for the PS3 has seriously improved graphics, and you can now pick topics to answer questions on, or play a whole quiz based on your own chosen categories. Better still, Buzz has gone online, so you can play extra rounds on topics thought up by other players, such as Star Wars or 1980s music. **Stuart Andrews**

THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY

XBox 360, PS3 £50. AGE 16+
★★★★★

The Bourne Conspiracy is fast-moving, tense and a good conversion from film to game. When fighting, you need to build up enough adrenaline (there's an on-screen meter) to perform Bourne-style takedown manoeuvres and see off a bad guy. The graphics are detailed and the dialogue is realistic. The mechanism by which Bourne can reveal where enemies are hiding works well but feels rather supernatural. Some of the controls are fiddly and shooting is less fun than hand-to-hand grappling. Its worst sin is that the camera must be re-centred far too frequently. Despite which, this is a hard game to stop playing. **David Phelan**

GAMES

Top titles



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HOT LINKS

This week's best new clicks

Xbox may make a move on Wii

Nintendo's bestselling Wii may soon have a rival. Speculation is rife about a new motion-sensitive controller for the Microsoft Xbox 360. Like the Wii, this would enable gamers to control on-screen characters by moving their body rather than pressing buttons. More than 24m Wiis have been sold worldwide since its launch in 2006.

So popular have games such as Wii tennis and boxing become that there has been a surge in injuries caused by overexertion or by players accidentally striking bystanders. An announcement about the Xbox is expected on www.e3expo.com – the website of E3, the Los Angeles gaming trade show. You heard it here first.



NAG NAG NAG

A new web and text message service will nag you to stop eating. It's one of the fastest-growing message services in the United States — even though it does nothing but abuse its customers. It's free to sign up at www.weightnags.com, though you will be giving the company your e-mail address and risking a future diet rich in spam. Typical of the nagging messages it sends is: "Hi Tubbo, Okay, we know it's tempting to eat at the Hungry Heifer every night of the week. After all, they have everything."

"Or at least they did, before you licked every pan in that buffet clean enough to see your reflection in it. Did you bother to look at that reflection, though?"

"Obviously not — yikes! You oughta lay off the buffet. Take care of your own beefy carcass before you eat a few pounds of something else's."

THE BIG BANG

On June 30, 1908, an explosion 1,000 times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb flattened 830 square miles of Siberian pine forest, and apparently lit up the sky as far away as Britain. The details of the largest meteor impact in recent history remain unclear. New satellite-imaging techniques are narrowing down the exact impact site and even detecting remnants of the meteoroid, or comet fragment, that fell to Earth a century ago. The boffins at the University of Bologna believe they have found the smoking gun of this deep-sky object at Lake Cheko. See for yourself at tinyurl.com/5hw48w.

ROOT FINDER

A detailed map of the outer layer of the brain — the part responsible for higher-level thinking — has been created by scientists at several universities, including Indiana, Lausanne and Harvard Medical School. This map may unlock the workings of the most mysterious organ in the human body. Discover more at tinyurl.com/5tn6fk and see spectacular coloured illustrations of the millions of neural fibres in the MRI scans. Still no answer as to why

DON'T PANIC

Nigel Powell answers your tech-related queries
dontpanic@sunday-times.co.uk

Q Hackers have altered my e-mail password so that I cannot access my Hotmail account. What can I do?

Elizabeth Maberly, London

A Unfortunately there's little you can do. This reinforces the need to take care of your passwords and to use ones that are distinct and complex for important sites. Hotmail may restore your account if you contact it, but don't count on it. My advice is to set up a new account and notify friends of your new e-mail address.

TERRY GROVES

Nussbaumen, Switzerland

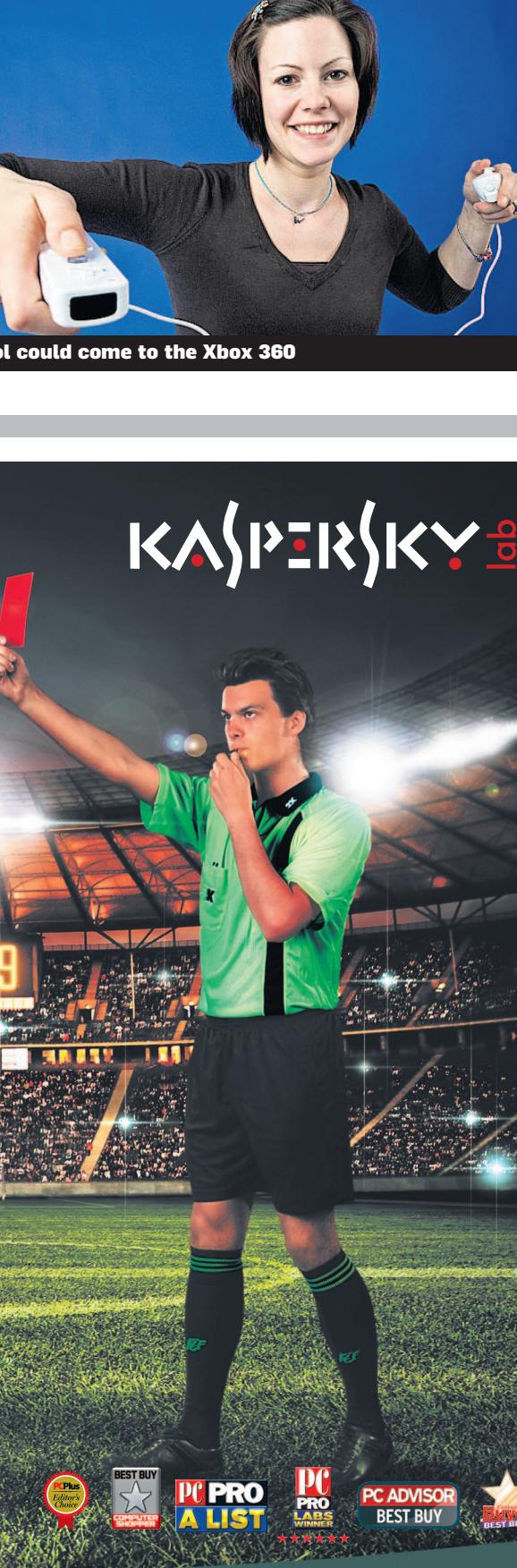
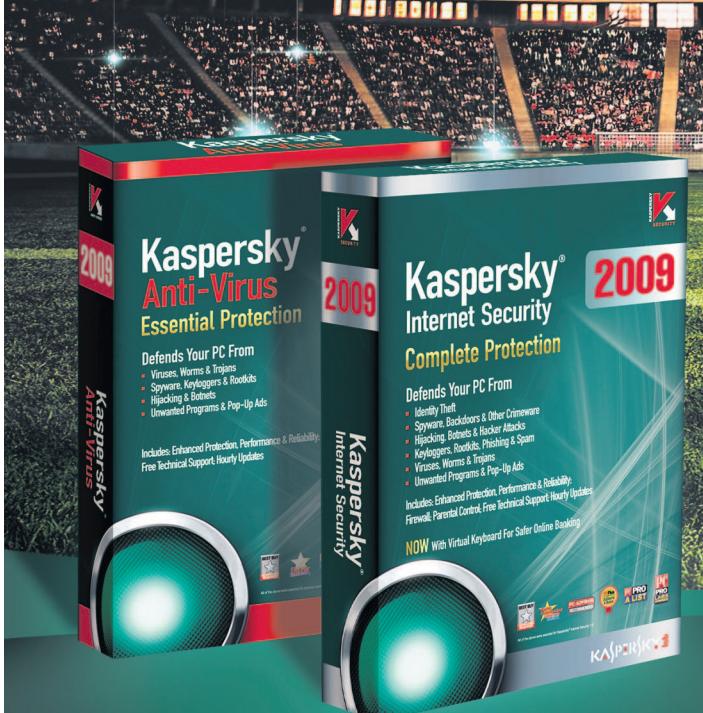
A Good software-makers will help you maintain compatibility with new hardware by updating programs, so check with the creator of your software to see if it has a USB-dongle based version. If not, it's probably time to get new software.

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Computer Shopper, Issue 241, May 2008

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