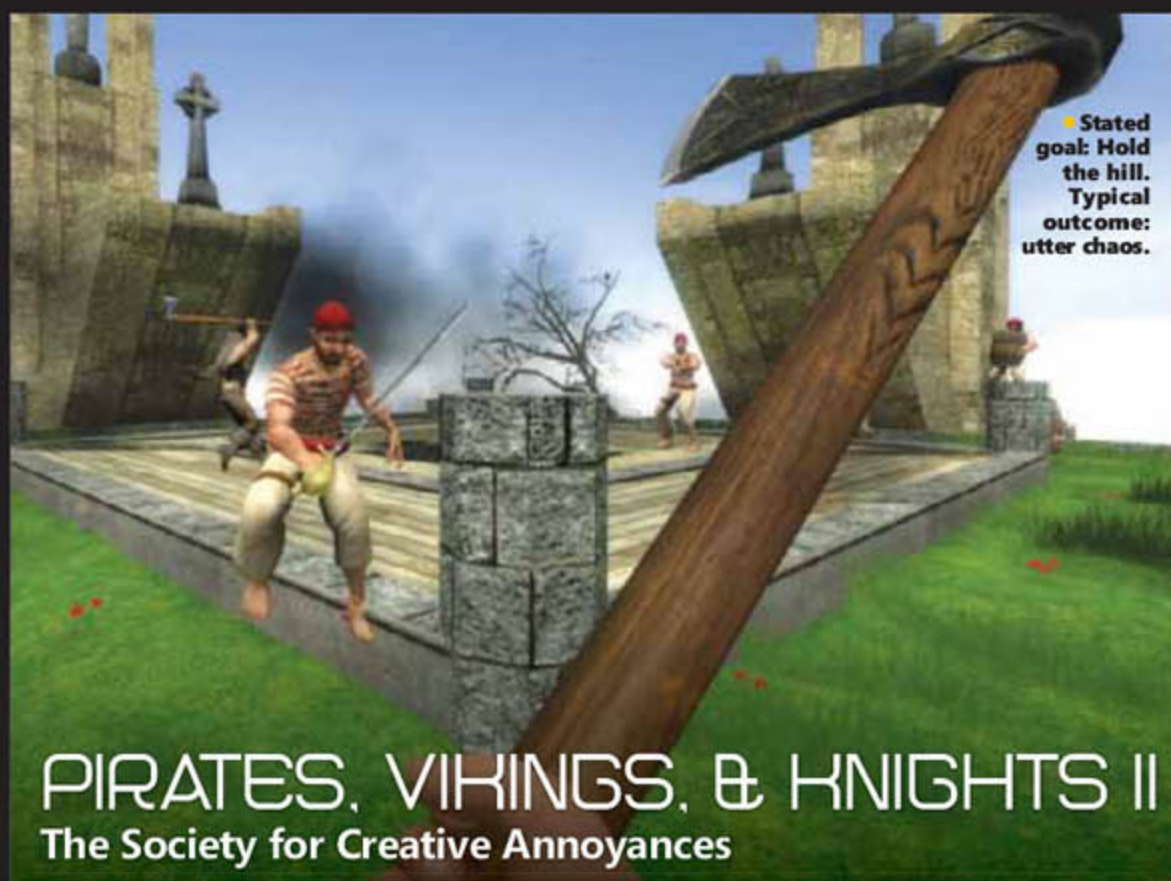


# UPDATES

Our two cents on the latest mods and patches



• Stated goal: Hold the hill. Typical outcome: utter chaos.

## PIRATES, VIKINGS, & KNIGHTS II The Society for Creative Annoyances

DEVELOPER: PVKII Team GENRE: Multiplayer Deathmatch AVAILABILITY: Free Download ([www.pvkii.com](http://www.pvkii.com))  
ESRB RATING: Not Rated MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.2GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, Half-Life 2  
MULTIPLAYER: 2-64 players VERSION REVIEWED: Beta 1.0

### MOD REVIEW

**+** *Half-Life 2* mods are, by and large, humorless treks through earth-toned, postapocalyptic wastelands, their creators seemingly desperate to race to the bottom of the dystopian barrel. Conspicuously absent from the ranks of *HL2*'s player-released content: the lighthearted mods typical of *Half-Life 1* that kept many of us occupied between rounds of *Counter-Strike* and *Natural Selection*. *Pirates, Vikings, & Knights II* mercifully bucks the trend, ushering players into a world as colorful and bright as it is hectic and funny—no surprise, then, that it's the sequel to a *HL1* mod.

Attitude isn't the only thing *PVK2* shares with its predecessor. The maps, modes, and player classes in *PVK2* Beta 1.0 mimic the *HL1* original, as does its unapologetically standard concept: The three titular clans vie for control of loot and territory, slinging blades, bombs, bullets, and stereotypical verbal barbs at one another. Standard is fine when it works...and, for the most part, it does here; unfortunately, some parts of *PVK2* weather the transition to the Source engine less gracefully than others.

### BEGGING FOR BOUNDARIES

*PVK2*'s armor snags on its biggest selling point: Melee combat has all the visceral intensity of a pillow fight. It's not a problem of hit detection (though that *is* an issue), but hit reflection. Whiffs animate the same as whacks, meaning the only indication of damage dealt comes in the form of a grunt from your victim, and occasionally a perplexing backward-hop animation that better illustrates a physics hiccup than a blade to the gut. The questionable hit recognition incentivizes flailing-for-effect...and why not? Precision strikes are seldom recommended and never required.

Blocking adds further insult to the combat system's injury. A weapon positioned to parry becomes a veritable force field, protecting the wielder against most any melee attack within his line of sight. Weapon heft has no bearing on the ability to block: A Pirate's cutlass turns aside a Viking's heavy ax as easily as it does a Knight's short sword, leaving the attacker momentarily stunned and frustratingly vulnerable. And with no downside in sight, the blocking dynamic's both overused and overpowered, serving only to stunt the action. Rather than encouraging skill-reliant hack-n-slash, duels hinge on players' ability to tolerate staring contests from behind their blades.



• This may look like a powerful swing, but if *PVK2*'s blocking system is to be believed, a small child lurks in that armor.



• Vikings valiantly face down a doomed Knight.



• Pirates make a push for the Knights' booty.

### BURIED TREASURE

In its current state, *Pirates, Knights, & Vikings II* is a mod you'll load with a grin and exit with a grimace, with unpredictable combat topping the list of disappointing reasons to uninstall. This issue proves especially upsetting due to *PVK2*'s otherwise solid—though not exactly groundbreaking—foundation and talented development team. Bear in mind that *PVK2* is in its infancy as a mod (public beta 1.0 as of this writing); it's hopefully only a few vocal downloaders away from having its most egregious kinks hammered out. •Rory Manion

### VERDICT

**+** Fun maps; goofy premise; tons of potential.

**-** Floaty combat; decidedly average play modes.

5/10

AVERAGE

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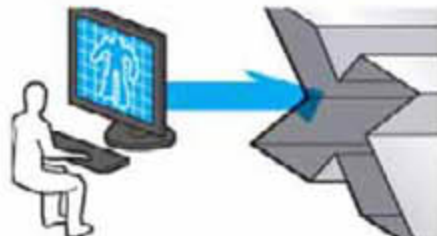
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