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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

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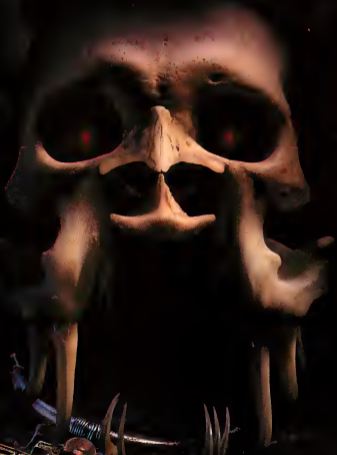
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PC



TV

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By Playing Games
On Your TV

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Victory in Europe—
A 50th Anniversary
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

APRIL 1995

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32 SNEAK PREVIEW! X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP Chris Lombardi dives into the sequel to last year's top-rated X-COM! and tries his webbed hand at intercepting Unidentified *Swimming* Objects.

36 SNEAK PREVIEW! MECHLORDS Assassination, combat, diplomacy and economics form *New World's* intrigue-rich, politically sensitive universe of mechanized warfare and neo-feudal space conquest. Alan Emrich and Johnny Wilson uncover the dark underside of the latest strategy game from SimTex.

42 SPECIAL SECTION: VICTORY IN EUROPE Fifty years after the historic Allied victory, Terry Coleman takes readers on a computer game "tour of duty" through the entire European Theater of War. If you've ever wondered which computer game covers which battles or campaigns the best, this is a "must read" article. From the opening *Blitzkrieg* through the Fall of Berlin, *CGW* gives you the right kind of intelligence to recreate these important events.

64 PLAYING ON THE BIG SCREEN Tired of that 14" monitor? John Brassil discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using NTSC converters to connect your computer to a large screen television. Join Brassil in asking, "TV or Not TV?"

80 OS/2 WARP FACTOR You've seen the television ads. Now, hear from gaming expert Jerry Golick about OS/2 Warp's potential for true 32-bit computer gaming.

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88 SCORPIA'S STING Tired of paying for 900 hint lines and hint books in order to finish a game you paid \$50 for? So is Scorpia!

92 SCORPIA'S MAIL If you need to: shed a little light on the subject of NOCTROPOLIS; stay out of the WAKE OF THE RAVAGER; pick up the right kind of lore to succeed in DRAGON LORE; or discover the right kind of hospitality for THE 7TH GUEST, you've come to the right place.

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Rants & Raves

Radio Ways



The Virtues Of "Try Before You Buy" Computer Games

by Johnny L. Wilson

Most of us do not buy compact discs by their covers. We either know the artists by reputation, have listened to the album at a friend's house, or have heard some of the album on the radio. There isn't much risk with regard to the purchasing decision. You basically know what you're getting when you plunk your plastic or cash on the counter.

With a computer game, however, you often don't know what you're getting. Playable demos, limited versions of the games, are relatively rare, so you find yourself having to filter your purchase decision through feature lists on the box, critical reviews from magazines and/or on-line services that you can trust, and word of mouth. It's tough to experience the full impact of a game without buying it, and most stores no longer have generous return policies. With the exception of shareware (and that is

limited to those who know where to find it), nothing does for computer games the equivalent of what radio does for the recording industry.

NETWORK PROGRAMMING

With the rush of networkable computer games, the problem has been exacerbated. In order to discourage gamers from installing one copy of a game throughout an entire network, most networkable games have copy protection for the communications module of their game. So, in order for me to play networked *Magic Carpet* with colleagues during our coffee break, we would all need our own copies of the game. That's not a problem in the long run. Gamers *should* purchase their own copies of games they wish to play.

However, the problem is convincing my colleagues that they *want* to play networked *Magic Carpet*. Having to ante up \$50 or \$60 to see if a networkable game is a cool experience or not can be a relatively high hurdle to surmount. Wouldn't it be wiser to include a limited network version of a game in each box? Publishers could put a couple of different unprotected levels, scenarios or race tracks into each networkable game, just to give gamers a

taste of what they could experience on a broader playing field. Somehow, I firmly believe that publishers would net more new sales than they would lose with such a "sharenet" option.

This so-called "sharenet" option could be implemented in several ways. First, publishers could opt for the razor blade approach. Every packaged version of the game would include the "sharenet" levels on the original CD. If anyone wanted to add the networkable option and additional levels, they could buy a separate disk or pay a download fee to get the network option. Second, publishers could put everything on the CD in the same way as they currently do, but only require the copy protection to come into play beyond certain levels.

Third, publishers could use a scheme like IBM's Uniloc system. The Uniloc system allows publishers to encode each CD so that certain files cannot be accessed without registering the software. Once the fee is paid, a code is given to remove the encryption. The upper levels of each networkable game could

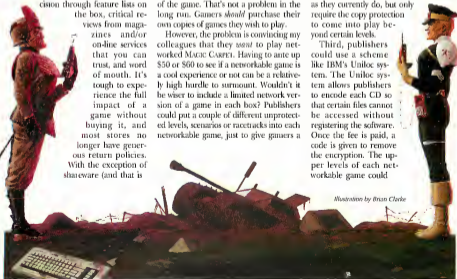


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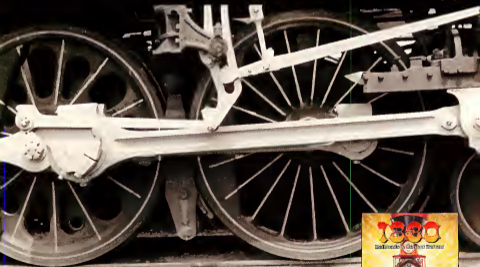


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have Unifor encryption. Then, if gamers liked the sharentet version, they could telephone in their registration and receive access to the rest of the networkable portion of the game.

Fourth, publishers could release "Multiplayer Packs" of their games which, for an additional fee (say \$20 or so?) would feature the full version of the game plus stripped-down, network-only versions of the game for two or three friends. In this way, I could have competition with my friends or colleagues and, if they liked the game, they might end up purchasing full versions in order to improve their skill and destroy me in the future.

It seems to me that this would be a win-win proposition for both gamers and publishers. Gamers would get to "try before they buy" and publishers would get to protect their investments. What could make more sense?

State of the Magazine: We can't do a lot about the "try before you buy" approach ourselves, but we can help with your buying decisions. This month, we have introduced our first *Computer Gaming World Star Card*. So many readers have asked for a comprehensive listing of the star ratings given by our editors that we have put together an alphabetical list from those games rated during the last six months. We will be publishing the list regularly and hope that you find it of real value.

Remember, the star ratings are the consensus ratings of CGW's full editorial staff. They do not always agree with the opinions of the reviewers or the consensus of a majority of our readers, but are always provided after significant deliberation (you can't believe the heated debates that occur between our editors each and every month).

To get maximum benefit from the card, just tear it out along the perforation and fold it along the scored edges. Then, you have a wallet-sized reference tool that you can carry with you on your next shopping expedition. Happy value hunting! ☺

HOW DO WE RATE?

The Guide To CGW's Review Rating System

- ★★★★★ Outstanding: That rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, interface, and, of course, the game play come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience.
- ★★★★☆ Very Good: A quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter/genre.
- ★★★☆☆ Average: A mixed bag. Can often be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in significant areas. Can also just be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.
- ★★☆☆☆ Weak: A game with serious problems. May be buggy, may not have much play value, may be ill-conceived—and you may want to think twice about buying it.
- ★☆☆☆☆ Abysmal: That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.

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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

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Interface

LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

MYSTERY RELIGION

I recently purchased MYST and absolutely love the game. But an interesting fact turned up when I played one of the movies that make up the game with another QuickTime player. The file in question is x:\qtw\channel\holocath.mov (where x is your CD-ROM drive). If you play this file backwards, an ominous phrase can be heard. RUSH LIMBAUGH UNDERSTANDS! Frankly, I almost died laughing when I heard it. I guess the people at CYAN were having some fun that day. I'd just like to end with kudos to all the makers of MYST and the people at CGW. Ditto, Rush.

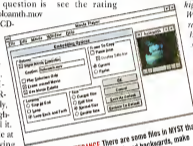
Lee Betzenberger
State College, PA

Frankly, we were skeptical at first. Your letter reminded us of the old Beatles hoax where you played a song backwards and heard, "Paul is dead!" We checked it out, though, and found out that you were right! If you use QUICKTIME 2.0's movie player and choose "Embedding Options" within the Edit menu, you can click on "Loop Back & Forth." This will play the movie file forward and backward. Not only does the holocath.mov file play the phrase, but the movie.mov acts as a delta.

HAVE A BLAST

As long as you continue the policy of providing capsule

ratings (to which I am opposed), you could make the ratings more useful by including them for games listed in your "Top 100 Games." For each game on the list that was reviewed in a "post ratings" issue of CGW, I would like to see the rating



MYST-ERIOUS UTTERANCE There are some files in MYST that sound like gibberish and, when played backwards, make even less sense: "Rush Limbaugh Understands."

and a reference to the issue number where the rating was given. I think it would be extremely useful to compare the initial reviewer's impressions, as given "in the stars," to the readers' impressions as contained in the polls.

I also have one minor quibble concerning your biography of Larry Bond in the Hall of Fame comments about HARPOON. While he is a former Naval officer, he did not serve long enough to retire from the Navy.

Janice Adams
Fairfax, VA

You are definitely not the first to ask for a list of our ratings. Many readers have requested such a list and we've come up with an interesting way of providing it. Check out the insert

joining page 112 called The Computer Gaming World Score Card that lets you create a wallet-sized buying guide. You can carry it with you to your local software store to make sure you don't pick up the wrong game on the right subject or forget the title of a highly recommended game. While we're talking about ratings, though, we would like to reiterate that the summary box is not the reviewer's impressions. It is labeled "The Editors Speak" because it reflects a consensus rating by our staff.

As for Mr. Bond, did we say "Larry Bond?" We meant "James Bond." Yeah, that's it! That's the ticket. And we weren't talking about HARPOON! It was MOONRAKER. Yeah, we just misspelled it. Okay, we know that "former" doesn't mean "retired." We just slipped a cog on that one.

REVERSE SEXISM

Why someone would buy another computer game magazine (aside from just as an add-on to CGW) is beyond me. (Blind ignorance?) Anyway, thanks for your hard work.

Now, why I gave Johnny L. Wilson's DAGGERFALL preview a C+ rather than what I usually give his reviews—an A+:

#1—I was expecting more of a review; and

#2—I was curious as to why, when speaking of characters, he mentions "her" and "she" only. Does this mean that a female is the only kind of character you can play in the game? I hope not! This may appeal to some, but I myself—even in fantasy—prefer to be a male. (I have nothing against men who like to fantasize about being a woman, but this is not a fantasy of mine.)

Mark Hocking
Oxnard, CA

Johnny Wilson responds: The purpose of the DAGGERFALL sneak preview was to offer a taste of what you can expect later this year. A review would have been impossible because the product isn't finished enough to talk about play balance, difficulty and pacing. Since it is a sequel, however, I could talk about what was different from THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA in terms of character generation, interface design and the game's projected approach to the story. We will, of course, review the game when it is released.

As for the use of feminine pronouns in the article, this did not reflect a limited



CHARACTER CORNER THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL WILL feature a wide assortment of characters to play from all genders, races and character classes.

"One Must Fall 2097 is the best fighting game available for the PC, bar none"

COMPUTER GAME REVIEW



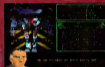
Supports dual joystick head-to-head combat in 5 unique arenas



11 robots with over 120 frames of 3D animation per robot



Win cash for repairs, upgrades training & buying new moves



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GAMEBYTES

Are you tired of PC beat-em-up games that don't live up to their hype? PC Gamer says "this is a truly excellent game" and "you won't be disappointed" with One Must Fall 2097. PC Answers calls it "outstanding", PC Home calls it "a must" and PC Gamer says it "plays brilliantly". Computer Game Review says One Must Fall

2097 is "fast, furious and fun above and beyond the call of duty". PC Gamer also calls it "the definitive" and "most awesome beat-em-up on the PC". Even people who tend to not like fighting games seem to enjoy the sheer playability and fun of One Must Fall.

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design where you would have to play a female character. Interestingly enough, however, there have been many computer role-playing games where players, whether male or female, were forced to play a male character. I wrote the article using female pronouns as both an exercise and an experiment. It was a personal exercise to remind us that we serve female gamers as well as male gamers, even though female CGW readers are a decided minority. I also thought the reverse of traditional usage might be welcomed by members of this minority as a refreshing change of pace.

It was also an experiment to see if anyone actually noticed the implied sexism in one's choice of pro-

nouns. It was not intended to offend anyone, but I hoped that their usage would have a slight jarring effect that might sensitize us all to the fact that modern English does discriminate against females. For what it's worth, I primarily play male characters. However, I recognize that it is possible to learn a lot about discrimination and patronization through digital cross-dressing in a role-playing game, especially online role-playing games. Finally, I hope I can get back in the A+ column in this issue.

RARE AS A FINE WINE

I love your magazine, but one thing from your January issue disturbed me. Although your

rating system says that a five-star game is "rare," four games (WING COMMANDER III, MAGIC CARPET, FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO '95, and NASCAR RACING) received this "rare" rating! Either games have reached their peak in quality and have no room for improvement, or you need to add a six-star possibility! I believe a little explanation is in order.

Reuben Weiser
West Orange, NJ

Considering that those reviews were written in December and that many publishers plan for their very best games to be released in December, we don't think the number of five star games is odd. For everything there is a balance, however. There are likely to be many months, like March, in which the majority of games are below the three-star median.

hour for the hard-cores) and then swap disks so the movie can continue. One does not have to continuously swap disks during gameplay. So, in fact, you only swap disks 3-4 times through the entire movie (depending on how many times you want to watch the funeral scene). This was a good question Brian asked and I know a lot of people are confused by it.

Chris Schoenfeld
New Hampshire

Not anyone. Thanks for the follow-up.



NOT A WAVE-PHILE

This is about the 5th Wave cartoon in the January, 1995 issue. The Commodore 64 was the best game machine of the 1980s and more versatile than any clone machine ever invented. I, like many others, switched reluctantly to a clone as software became less and less available for the 64.

Anyone who remembers the horrors of the clones before the 286 will agree. The days of carefree computing are gone. Now, I spend most of my time worrying about viruses, compatibility, and buying hardware at a fast enough rate to keep up with the games.

If you really want to dry your hat, just remove the fan from your 486 and start cooking.

Nick Bassett
Vienna, Austria

Or maybe an original Pentium?

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant

On March 3, 1992, Frank and Mona Tubman tried running Strike Commander through Windows on an OS/2 platform with a fragmented hard drive.



The harddisk, seeking power from whatever source, began tapping appliances throughout the household electrical system, eventually sucking time itself from the wall clocks, thrusting the couple into an irreversible time-loop!

the **Power** behind the **Power** could be you!

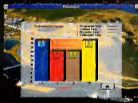
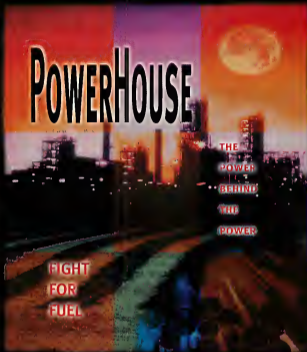
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THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

Horror Plot, Puzzles And Pyrotechnics Lead The Way On Sierra's '95 Roster



VICTORY, VICTORIA Victoria Morsel, *Phantasmagoria's* leading lady, says that acting in a computer game is a stretch for her. We see why. The authentic opera house at right will provide one of the backgrounds in *Sesun: Kuzar II: A Beast Within*. Digitized photos enhanced by traditional computer artists provide an extra lustre.

Don't ever let Roberta Williams hear you call *PHANTASMAGORIA* an "interactive movie." She will smile a half-smile, breathe out a barely audible sigh, and insist that, "It's a game. It has plot and puzzles, just like my other games. It just uses movie-style graphics." Indeed, Williams is determined not to be seduced by the film qualities of the project, having brought in veteran action director Peter Maris (Piper, *Diplomatic Immunity*) to handle the on-set direction and leave her to concentrate on the game. Such collaboration seems certain to bring outstanding results, since the use of camera angles, lighting and special effects in rough footage appear more sophisticated than we've seen in other so-called "interactive movie" products.

There is no doubt that a synergy has developed between Williams and Maris. Maris has added to the game experience by adding new camera angles to the production. This induced Sierra's 3-D modelers to go back and render different close-ups of the backgrounds of the earlier rooms. In turn, Williams recently looked at some of the film footage that has been integrated into the game and, as

a result, made a major modification. She changed the movement screen for the on-screen characters to take advantage of the cinematic fast-cut. The result, they hope, will be movie-quality production val-

lethal, the player-as-wife must solve the house's mystery and save her own life.

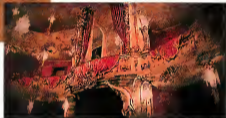
David Holm (*Street Soldiers*) plays the husband and is building up quite a portfolio as an inter-actor. He also played Sam Jenkins in *Electronic Arts' NOCTROPOLIS*. He feels that he's done some of his best work ever in *PHANTASMAGORIA*. "I get to really act 'big' in some places,

and with quality game play.

PHANTASMAGORIA is a horror story revolving around the evil house concept. A happy, loving couple move into their dream home, an eccentric mansion built by a famous stage magician. In a matter of days, with each day equal to a "chapter," the evil within the house begins its work. Amidst hallucinations, hauntings and a hideous transformation of her husband from loving to

going all the way from All-American husband to crazed maniac." Victoria Morsel (*Randow Factor*, early appearances on the Martin television series) plays the wife and feels like acting in a game is the toughest of all. "I just finished a film up in Canada, and it was much easier than this."

Since Williams has made some design changes in the game to make better use of the digitized film footage and



WOLF PARK FOR GABRIEL KNIGHT II: A BEAST WITHIN



PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games that your fellow players are blowing the most time with. Let us know which game you've been playing the most by writing the name of your current addition in the "Playing Lately?" blank of the CGW Top 100 ballot (page 145).



Results for CGW #127, February 1995

1. Wing Commander 3 (Origin)
2. Master of Magic (MicroProse)
3. X-COM: UFO Defense (MicroProse)
4. DOOM II (id Software)
5. Panzer General (SSI)
6. TIE Fighter (LucasArts)
7. US Navy Fighters (Electronic Arts)
8. NASCAR Racing (Papyrus/Virgin)
9. Front Page Sports Football Pro '95 (Sierra)
10. Magic Carpet (Electronic Arts)

"When I started playing DOOM, I had to buy a Pentium 90. Now that I have US NAVY FIGHTERS, I may be in the market for a used F-14 or F/A-18."

Notable Quotes

Wit, wisdom and caustic quips from gaming's harshest critics

Paul Whiteclock, Denver CO

"I am taking a sabbatical from Darth Vader's fleet to save humanity (and Angel) from the Kibathi. Need I say more?"

Dr. Milton Ong, Chicago, IL

"PANZER GENERAL is the wargame I've been looking for. I don't want to worry about how many rounds each grunt has in his clip. I want to have FUN!"

Kenneth Fiester, Crofton, MD

"TIE FIGHTER may be the most enthralling, spectacular, explosive game I've ever played. Here's to LucasArts for consistently producing high-quality entertainment software. If every software company operated as they do, we could finally trash our TV sets."

Tom Polseno, Sutton MA

They've made games since DOOM II!
Chris Pfaff, Eureka, CA

There was a time when Origin seemed to be losing its grip on the market. But with WING COMMANDER 3, they've come full circle. I wonder where Origin will take us next?

John Bateman, Jacksonville, FL

environment plus four different character perspectives in which to play them. So far, PQ: S.W.A.T. looks like it could be the most interesting of all the PQ series.

The latest SPACE QUEST product is also well underway. The artwork depicting the aliens invading the galaxy is wilder than ever, but janitor-hero Roger Wilco is still the

centerpiece of the wacky series. The formula for fun is still there with weird arcade games, Catch-22 situations and insane dialogue adding to the mix.

improve the game's pacing, any estimated ship date for PHANTASMAGORIA would be premature. Suffice it to say that the game is getting better every day and that it will be better in both game and movie quality as a result.

Other work occurring at Sierra includes their Fall release of GABRIEL KNIGHT II: A BEAST WITHIN. Jane Jensen has written a seven chapter screenplay in which the action and puzzle-solving shifts between Gabriel and his lovely assistant, Grace. The action takes place in a photo-realistic Germany rather than a painted world. In the story, appropriately underscored by thematic segments of Wagner's *Tannhauser*, Gabriel finds himself torn between his family inheritance of fighting evil and his desire to be seduced by it (much like the spiritual versus sensual interplay in the Wagnerian opera). An intriguing underpinning of lycanthropy adds extra spunk, just as voodoo ritual enlivened the original.

POLICE QUEST: S.W.A.T. is another sequel in the works. Tammy Dargan is continuing to work with former LAPD Chief Darryl Gates on this project. The game sports photo-realistic, high-resolution graphics, but the big news is that the game design is mission-based, not procedural. Gamers will have the feeling of moving through a career rather than focusing on one particular case, as in POLICE QUEST: OPEN SEASON. The game will feature four separate scenario environments with four different events to take place in each

Return To Krondor

Raymond E. Feist Finds A New Home For *The Riftwar Saga*

BETRAYAL OF KRONDOR was the classic "snowball" game: the longer it was out, the more popular it became. Set in the colorful world of Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar Saga* and boasting a unique and refreshing style of gameplay, BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR endeared itself to adventure and role-playing gamers alike.

The game was designed by Dynamix, with Feist acting as a very active contributor. Feist's input was a constant throughout the design, ensur-

ing that the game stayed true to his fictional universe. "I wanted to make sure that anything that had my name on it was of excellent quality," Feist stated in a recent interview.

There's no doubt in anyone's mind that the collaboration was a success. The only question on the mind of gamers since then has been: "Where's the sequel?"

Feist recently confirmed that production has begun on the next KRONDOR computer game, entitled RETURN TO



KRONDOR and scheduled to be released sometime in 1996 by 7th Level. Why 7th Level and not Dynamix? According to Feist, the initial sales of the original game were not as strong as Dynamix would have liked, and they decided that a sequel, which Feist "really wanted to do," was not worth the investment. Fortunately for all parties, unit sales did pick up thanks to word of mouth and the release on CD-ROM. At that point, Dynamix reconsidered their sequel plans, but it was too late—Feist was already looking for a new publisher.

RETURN TO KRONDOR's plot will focus on a Krondor in which evil deeds are brewing, including a gruesome murder at the beginning of the game. As players attempt to solve the mystery, they will run into a slew of other problems, including a potential Holy War in which they will play an integral role in solving. In addition to the original BETRAYAL cast of characters (including Prince Aratha, who will play a more prominent role), a new

player character will be introduced, from whose perspective the game will be played.

While the folks at 7th Level are still making design decisions—like whether or not to use full-motion video—both parties agree that the game should keep the general feel of the original. Since Dynamix owns the code for the original, and since the new game will most likely be programmed for Windows, 7th Level will have to start development from scratch.

"First we want to equal the Dynamix product," Feist stated, "and then we will improve upon it." Feist's role will remain as it was with Dynamix: he'll be consulted by the development team on a regular basis to ensure that the new game will have the proper "look and feel." While the graphics, the music, and the character images will all be improved upon, Feist's thrust is content, content, content. "We're shooting for an even better storyline than BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, with an even richer environment than before."

Intel Offers 486s Pentium Performance

Overdrive Chips Kick 486s Into High Gear

Owners of low-end 486 machines probably know the frustrations of trying to run processor-intensive games with their once robust but now under-powered machines. If you've got a need for Pentium-class speed, Intel may have the solution. Their new PENTIUM OVERDRIVE PROCESSOR will convert a 486SX-25, -DX-25, and -DX/2-50 into a Pentium for less than \$500.

If you've got an Intel OVERDRIVE-compatible 25MHz motherboard, the PENTIUM OVERDRIVE PROCESSOR will run at two and a half times the clock speed of your existing machine, or 63MHz. For

33MHz motherboard users, Intel plans to release an 83MHz version by the middle of this year.

PC Week Labs evaluated the 63MHz version (January 23rd issue) and found the most improvement when upgrading

from a slower processor. There is some improvement if you're using a faster processor like an Intel DX4, but it won't be as dramatic. A "cool" feature of the Pentium OVERDRIVE unit is its built-in cooling fan.

The 25MHz version of the PENTIUM OVERDRIVE is priced at \$449. For more information, contact Intel at (800) 585-3373.



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* Most major award cards supported

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SVGA, 640x480 or greater, 8MB RAM MS-DOS 5.0 or later, VGA, hard drive with 4MB free



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SLIPSTREAM 5000

As we revved the engine of our futuristic hovercraft racer in **Gremlin's** latest combat driving action game, goose bumps ran down our necks. Would this fi-

ed. The story we've all heard before: set in the not-so-distant future, you are placed in the role of rookie driver on the top international circuit.

The gameplay, however, departs significantly. The meat is the championship circuit, where you race in nine different in-

ternational settings from Colorado to Egypt to the Amazon. The amount of prize money you win in each race will determine how well you'll be able to fix your ship, and whether or not you can purchase the Seeker missile that your enemies have

been dying for. Each of the races takes place in an entirely different atmosphere: race in Colorado and you'll be twisting and turning along the Snake River canyon; race in the Amazon and you'll have vines slapping your windshield.

We were amazed at the texture-mapped polygon graphics and how fast they zipped around—the simulation of motion is excellent. As we were driving, we found ourselves twisting and ducking in our seats, an excellent sign for a first-person action game.

Our only real wish, a feature which the designers are planning on adding, is that there be little bonus "goodies" scattered around the tracks like weapon power-ups and turbo booster strips that would give our ships some instant acceleration. Even modem and network play will be included. There's only one potential drawback, race fans: a Pentium will be *required* to keep this warrior on the road.

JAGGED ALLIANCE

What would happen if you took **MicroProse's** X-COM, socked out the aliens, injected more "personality" and role-playing elements, and then threw the thing onto a jungle island? You'd probably get something resembling **Sir-Tech's** long-awaited game of tactical man-to-man combat, **JAGGED ALLIANCE**.

The island is Metavira, home of a rare tree whose sap is a key component of a life-saving drug. Jack and Brenda Richards, a father-daughter medical research team, have been harvesting the sap for the good of humankind. But when a fellow sci-

entist gets greedy, hires an army of thugs, takes over the island, and starts hoarding the sap, the Richards' and the ill of the world find themselves in a fix.

The fix to this fix is you, dear gamer, who must hire a team of mercenaries and wipe the island clean of this trash. You'll lead squads of eight mercenaries in a sector-by-sector, small-arms war to retake the island. As if that wasn't a big enough job, you also have to fund the operation by leading the sap gathering and processing operation. You must hire workers to tap the sap and guards to protect the workers, and then convert the healthy medicinal substance into deadly arms



HOVERING FOR THE TITLE Not only do speedracers have to worry about smashing into natural and man-made obstacles like the Pyramids and the Grand Canyon, but they also have to watch out for the rocket in the tail pipe track.

nally be the sci-fi racing combat sim we've been waiting for? Could Gremlin actually gather the ingredients of success: a fairly realistic arcade-style driving model, a true three dimensional environment, and a high-powered slug-fest? Many have tried and failed, but from what we have seen so far, it looks like **SLIPSTREAM 5000** might actually have a good shot at accomplishing what it sets out to.

The beta we tested lacked intelligent drivers and multiple weapons that worked, yet it still kept several of us rivet-



SAP, CRACKLE, POP Tree tugging takes on a whole new meaning in **Jagged Alliance**, where successful squad level tactics are needed to overcome a hostile rabble and save an island of precious life-saving sap.

for your merits.

The tactical combat system is sophisticated, improving on X-COM's combat in many ways. While the action isn't as up-close-and-personal as in X-COM, JAGGED ALLIANCE has more personality. Your mercenaries are well-developed characters with unique histories, and they will communicate with you during a battle, telling you via digitized speech when they've sighted an enemy or when they've run out of .45 ammo. The combat is phased (not "real time") with hidden enemy movement that will pause for "opportunity fire." It's very well executed, the only possible drawback being that line-of-sight is not readily apparent, so it's difficult to tell when an enemy can be hit or when your men are safely behind cover.

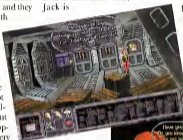
As in X-COM, your mercenaries will be able to lob grenades, crouch into the brush, and fire a huge arsenal of weaponry, but JAGGED ALLIANCE offers even more possibilities, like tossing stones to distract enemy guards, swimming across rivers, setting and diffusing explosives, using tools to repair broken machinery, picking locks, and much more.

JAGGED ALLIANCE appears to be a deep, sophisticated game that will keep tactical combat fans, and maybe even role-players, locked, cocked and ready to rock.

GUILTY

In *Divide By Zero's* adventure game *INNOCENT UNTIL*

CAUGHT, anti-hero Jack T. Ladd spent much of his time evading death and taxes. In the opening seconds of that game's sequel, Jack suddenly finds himself confronted by a large and very serious space-ship which leaves little doubt as to its intentions. Thus, Jack is



captured, and his innocence is replaced by GUILTY, the continuing adventures of an intergalactic rogue.

Claiming Jack's collar is Ysanne An-dropath, a cocky Federation Police Officer who takes no small pride in the capture. The story and the dialogue really open up, however, once Jack discovers that Ysanne is female. Sexually-charged comments fly in all directions, and the game suddenly splits into two fragments. Players may either take the role of Jack, as they did in the first game, or they may choose Ysanne's shoes. There is no switching between characters once the game begins. Each one has his or her own problems to deal with, and is often at odds with the other. While

the two participate in the same story, each is presented with an entirely different set of puzzles so that playing the adventure through twice will clearly be a worthwhile experience.

Much of the bickering between the two clearly points to a lovehate relationship, and one can only speculate as to how long it will take before the two recognize their attraction for each other.

However, while we wait for the relationship to resolve



TINTED TONGUES Sarcastic wit and sexual innuendo create a Spock-like atmosphere in *Guilty by Psychology*.

itself, Jack and Ysanne must recover lost fuel for their spaceship while investigating a mysteriously silent planet they find in the process. Jack begins by simply searching for fuel, while Ysanne takes on the job of explorer. In this way, GUILTY presents two different adventures related by a common story.

While the original game's unique interface has been largely left untouched, *Divide By Zero* has promised that GUILTY, which will be released by Psygnosis, will include voices on the CD-ROM to supplement the already-present word-balloons.

PIPELINE

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WELANDS	New World	5/95

Download From The Rich, Upload To The Poor

CGW Visits The Set Of Interplay's **CYBERHOOD**

As more and more computer game manufacturers choose to go the route of digitized video with live actors, the editors at CGW find themselves invited to more and more "Hollywood" movie shoots. At Interplay's shoot for their upcoming **CYBERHOOD** game, we were able to sit down with Martin Olson, one of the game's primary script writers. His comedic writing and producing credits have included *Roseanne*, segments on the *Tonight Show* starring *Johnny Carson*, and several cable specials. Olson

calls **CYBERHOOD** a "satirical take on the cultural phenomenon of cyberspace" because he feels that he and Michael Conti, the producer whom Olson refers to as the "David Lynch of computer gaming," were able to dream up a virtual world unlike anything yet seen on a computer screen.

CYBERHOOD's story, loosely based on the Robin Hood legend, traces a son's rebellious quest for his father, who runs a huge virtual reality environment called *The Vortex*, a place where anything and everything goes. Having seen

footage of a myriad of bikini-clad women massaging a man who appeared to be having intimate relations with a duck, we found ourselves very much inclined to believe Olson's pledge to provide something really different.

We went on to ask Olson about the differences between scripting for TV and for computer game scripts. He said that the main difficulty in scripting games was worrying about a web of plots and subplots that might hap-

pen. "In a TV show or special, there is a fluid, linear continuity of the plot from one point to the next. For **CYBERHOOD**, although there is a specific beginning and a specific ending, the middle has considerably more bulk, which means that there is a lot of simultaneous plot development in there." While Olson finds this appealing from the creative end, he went on to say that things can get a bit frustrating in that, much like a conventional storyline, there is a limit on what will fit and what won't. Olson experienced this first hand: his initial script of 500+ pages had to be condensed to around 200. "But that isn't a great departure from the norm," he stated.

While **CYBERHOOD** is similar to most "live-action" games in that it will use a cast of television performers (Brian Gaskill of *Models Inc.*, is the star) and second-tier actors and actresses, this game does appear to depart from the norm. Its *Twin Peaks* style and wit, and its rather surreal symbolism became clear when we saw a shot of a rather short man massaging a blow up doll.

CYBERHOOD is scheduled to be released in time for the '95 holidays.



COMING THE DUCK This celebrity duck is both goosed and "shot" during the filming of *Cyberhood*. Brian Gaskill (right) is used to working with a different kind of duck on TV's *Models Inc.*

The 64 Gigabyte QUESTION

If you've ever played the unlikely hero in *Eric the Unready*, you'll have an appreciation for designer Bob Bates' *Mind of legend, spoof and bad late-night TV*. Bates also designed *Sherlock Holmes: Riddle of the Crown Jewels* (1988) and *Arthas: The Quest for Excalibur* (1989) for Infocore and *Time Quest* (Legend, 1991), and he's been involved in every major Legend concoction since he founded the company. We thought we'd risk getting a straight answer out of him when we asked: if gamers had unlimited processing power and you had an unlimited budget, what kind of a game would you design?

First, encase the player in a full body suit. Hook up input devices to simulate visual, aural, gustatory, olfactory and tactile sensations. Next, induce amnesia and implant memories of a manufactured past.

Finally, immerse the player in a geography populated by other similarly equipped players. Once all this is in place, go away for a while, and then return later to see if they have invented religion.

After he had given us the type of answer we've grown to expect, he offered a more serious answer.

First of all, I don't think the





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The Inside Flap

PC PILOT Offers Ground Schooling To Rookie Flyers

No, this isn't a guide to flying without offending anybody. PC PILOT actually does live up to its name as a complete guide to flight sims on the PC, current up to about six months ago. The guide is basically for beginners, but it does contain useful information for gamers who have a couple of sims under their belts and are thinking of getting down to some serious silicon flying.

Author Steve Smith opens with a couple of useful chapters on hardware definitions and considerations for new-

comers, as well as offering some suggestions on what kind of equipment might best meet your flight sim commitment. The rest of the book covers all of the most popular flight sims available, reviewing one or two per chapter and then returning to some of the old-time classics in one overview chapter. Smith adds enough historical anecdotes on the aircraft being simmed to keep things from getting boring, and his own critiques of the sims are pretty solid.

All in all, if you are just get-

ting into flight sims or are wondering if you should begin, then this relatively inexpensive volume could make your life both easier and more enjoyable.

PC Pilot: *The Complete Guide to Computer Aviation* By Steve Smith; Published by AVON; 170 pgs. \$10.00



APPEARANCES IN THE CYBURBS

CGW Articles Have New On-Line Index;
Interview With X-COM Designer On Web

An index of articles appearing in Computer Gaming World in 1995 is now available on ZiffNet. The file contains an index of features, reviews, previews, and other articles appearing in January and February issues of CGW. The ASCII file is downloadable so that you can use your word processor's search function to find references to games. Note that there may be more than one entry per name.

The index can be found in Library 1, General Files of the CGW Forum on ZiffNet. GO GAMEWORLD, navigate to the libraries and search for the file name "CGWX95.TXT."

Here is an example of what you will see in the on-line In-

dex, with asterisks representing rating stars:

5th Fleet (Feb 95, pg. 168) ****

Armored Fist (Jan 95, pg. 194) ***

Dark Patrol (Jan 95, pg. 202) ****1/2

If you haven't seen the CGW Internet Web site, you'll find articles, reviews and vibrant screen shots waiting for you there. This month we also present a feature interview with Julian Gollop, co-designer of X-COM. Contributing writer Jeff James talks with Mr. Gollop about life, liberty and the pursuit of aliens in X-COM, X-COM: Terror From The Deep and, you heard it here first, X-COM 3. Check it out at "<http://www.ziff.com/>".

Wompin' In A Winter Hinterland

Pack A Fur-Lined Turban With
Your MAGIC CARPET Expansion Disk

Fans of Bullfrog's MAGIC CARPET (published by Electronic Arts) will have their

promise to be tougher this time around, too, so it's a good thing carpeteers will

turbans in a tangle to learn that an add-on disk with a new environment, 25 new levels, and a new spell is currently in the works. Entitled HIDDEN WORLDS, this disk will replace the arid desert landscapes of the original game with a gorgeously-rendered landscape of snow and ice. Most of the monsters will remain the same, only tougher, but the castles and buildings in the game are being redrawn in order to better fit the new arctic motif. The flying opponents



CARPETS IN THE COLD The heat of battle should warm you up to the frozen tundra in Magic Carpet: Hidden Worlds.

have a brand new spell on their side: the Homing Meteor. With a projected release date of early April, gamers won't have to wait too long to re-enter one of the more original games of the past year.

Never Lose Sight Of How Pinball Should Be Played.

A truly great pinball game is more than great graphics and spectacular sounds, more than the latest arcade features like 3D ramps and three multi-ball play, more than fast ball movement and precise flipper control, and it's more than being able to see the whole playfield at once so you can aim your shots. A great pinball game has that unique quality of playability and never-ending challenge that keeps you coming back for...just one more game and a shot at your new high score!



Washington Post—“Crystal Caliburn perfectly captures the essence of a great pinball machine.”

New York Times—“The realism is striking... [Crystal Caliburn] will be at the top of Silicon Santa's gift list this year.”

Inside Mac Games—“ARCADE GAME OF THE YEAR”

Computer Game Review—“Crystal Caliburn sets a new standard. For realistic pinball on a computer, there's nothing like this game.”

Electronic Entertainment—“Crystal Caliburn is simply the best, most realistic, most challenging pinball simulation for the Macintosh yet.” (Rating: 9 out of 10)

GAMES Magazine—“You'll forget you're playing on a two-dimensional computer screen... the realism is astonishing.”

MacUser—“Electronic pinball's Holy Grail.” (Rating: 4 1/2 out of 5)

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

MACINTOSH: 13" or larger monitor, 256 colors, and 4MB RAM.

WINDOWS: 386 or faster processor, Windows 3.1, 256 SVGA monitor, 4MB RAM. Supports SoundBlaster® and other Windows compatible sound cards.

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RENEGADE: THE BATTLE FOR JACOB'S STAR

Apparently, SSI has gone all out with their initial entry into the crowded action/adventure-in-space genre. Marvellous high-resolution, 3-D graphics and a driving techno-club soundtrack provide



Luxurious SVGA cockpit views and a booming soundtrack give *Renegade* an unearthly sheen.

some serious sizzle for this game. The storyline is basic, but the space combat is where *RENEGADE* really flexes its muscles. You're the typical demoted pilot sent to the far-away star of Jacob, which suddenly becomes the key territory in the war versus the evil empire. You face the requisite briefings with the

standard gruff admiral, but the heart of the game is in space. There, the SVGA graphics are gorgeous, and veterans will feel right at home in the cockpit, blasting away at large, incredibly detailed ships that rival those in *WING COMMANDER III*.

Sometimes, though, the combat seems almost too smooth and too clean. That is, it doesn't feel rushed and gritty like space combat (or any combat) should. Still, we loved the fact that you can pop in music CD-ROM's while in space. We found blowing away enemy fighters at 1:00 in the morning to Pink Floyd's *Comfortably Numb* to be particularly liberating. IBM CD-ROM, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC., SUNNYVALE, CA, (800) 245-4525.

STALINGRAD

With the possible exception of the Battle of Britain, no campaign was more decisive than the German drive on Stalingrad. This medium-sized factory town on the Volga River

became a vortex for the *Wehrmacht*, as Paulus' Sixth Army found itself facing a seemingly endless stream of Russian reinforcements. Most games have tried to focus either on the in-city fighting, or the strategic envelopment of the Axis forces involved in the campaign. In *STALINGRAD*, *Atomic* and *Avalon Hill* try to be all things to all wargamers, as the game operates on three different scales.

Operationally, each hexagon can represent either one or three kilometers, and gives a feel roughly equivalent to playing *OPERATION CRUSADE*. The tactical scale goes down to 400 meters/hex, which allows for more detailed firefights in the Red Barricades Factory and Mamayev Kurgan, the Little Round Top of the Eastern Front. The packaging and graphic look are typically impressive *AH/Atomic* fare, but gamers will have to decide for themselves whether the *WORLD AT WAR* system can make a suc-

cessful transition from the relatively low unit density of North Africa to the enormous



It can be a long, cold winter for the trapped German 6th Army in *Avalon Hill's Stalingrad*.

manpower expended on the Russian steps. Macintosh/IBM CD-ROM, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #2.

AVALON HILL GAME COMPANY, BALTIMORE, MD, (800) 999-3222.

BRETT HULL HOCKEY

Using the same scrolling perspective and rapid-fire action

MORTAL KOMBAT II

Sometimes it's nice to simply stop thinking and kick the spit out of something. For 16-bit gamers, this is no problem: blood, gore, and high flying drop-kicks go hand in hand with their systems. But PC gamers have been left out in the cold. Finally, with *MORTAL KOMBAT II*, it looks as if somebody's gotten it right, namely *Acclaim*. This side-fighting game has the initial

looks of a winner, combining authentic arcade style graphics and lightning fast gameplay. All 12 fighters are included, and fans of the red stuff will be happy to know that the secret, yet destructive Fatalities, Babalities, and Friendship moves all appear to be here, as do the secret characters.



Man, *Kombat II* finally does justice to arcade-style fighting games on the PC.

Make sure you have a four-button gamepad, however, or you're bound to be frustrated. *Acclaim* is particularly proud of the sound effects in *MK II*, which are at least as good as the arcade machine, if not better. Is it too late to ask for modem/network play? IBM, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT, OYSTER BAY, NY, (516) 624-8888.

PLAYING

as Electronic Art's NHLPA '95, Accolade's **BRETT HULL HOCKEY** just might be a contender for the digitized Stanley Cup. The players are big and well-rendered, and their fast, fluid motions on our 33 MHz 486 means that nearly everyone will be able to enjoy the action. Furthermore, Al Michael's play-by-play seems particularly smooth and well suited to the on-ice action. Our initial impression is that offensively-minded players will love this game, but those looking for more realistic NHL action probably won't. In our first few games, 10-8 scores were the norm, and there were usually more



Al Michael's play-by-play spices the action as you face off in **Brett Hull Hockey**.

shots on goal than even the Los Angeles Kings goalies face. We are a little concerned with the difficulty in setting up offensive plays, and the passing does seem to be a bit less precise, albeit more realistic. But all things

considered, this appears to be a worthy challenger to the reigning champ. Is **BRETT HULL HOCKEY** better than NHLPA '95? Stay tuned to next month's in-depth sports

coverage to find out. IBM PC, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #3.

ACCOLADE, SAN JOSE, CA, (408) 983-1700.

DIZONE

A little more than simple shovelware and a little less than a coherent product is the best way to describe this comprehensive DOOM/DOOM II utility-packed CD-ROM. Presenting 900 new levels and a cornucopia of editing utilities for the sound effects, music, graphics and PWAD files of our favorite first-person bloodfest, this **Wizard Works** product appears to have it all, including one of the best multiplayer shells we've ever seen. **DIZONE** allows you to not only tinker with the settings of each game, but to also store modem opponents from all over the country in a single dialing directory. Power and diversity of the utilities aside, however, we did wish that



If your Doom-hat is waddering, try giving it a 900-level charge with **DIZONE**.

utility does what without actually browsing the documentation of each program; a simple interface and a solid table of contents could have solved this problem. But still, at \$29.95, the price is right, and if you're looking to add value to your DOOM experience, you'd be a demon's uncle to ignore this disc. IBM CD-ROM, \$29.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

WIZARD WORKS, MINNEAPOLIS, MN, (612) 559-5301.

the success of the invasion operation riding on your shoulders. The simulation sports SVGA graphics and a fairly decent flight model. You are sent up on quick and dirty missions in one of three aircraft: a Spitfire, Typhoon or P-51 Mustang, against such stalwart aerial foes as Me-109s and Focke-Wulf 190s. You may also be sent on search and destroy missions against



How you fly the unfriendly skies in **D-Day** makes a huge difference in the **Normandy Invasion**.

D-DAY: OPERATION OVERLORD

Sometimes, you want a long, immersive entertainment experience like *Come with the Wind*. Other times, you just want to plop in front of the tube and watch *Cilligan's Island*. **D-DAY: OPERATION OVERLORD**, in flight simulation terms, is more akin to the latter. The light flight sim action takes place during the first few hours before the troops hit the beaches of Normandy, with

patrol boats and coastal batteries. The 3-D models of aircraft are outstanding—they almost look photo-realistic. On the down side, the documentation is a bit terse, and an extremely chunky interface gets in the way of the action. IBM CD-ROM, \$39.95. Circle Reader Service #6.

VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT, INC., IRVINE, CA (800) 874-4607.

CLAWS 2!

Just When You Thought It Was Safe To Go Back In The Water, MicroProse Unleashes A New Menace in X-COM 2: TERROR FROM THE DEEP

by Chris Lombardi

TO BE FRANK, I'M A LITTLE SUSPICIOUS OF THE WILD SUCCESS OF MICROPROSE'S X-COM. AT first, I was completely taken in, as many fellow gamers were, by the game's tactical, man-to-man combat, which was made even more absorbing by the strategic over-game that tied the tactical battles together. Yes, I was hooked, addicted, found myself staring into the face of a pre-dawn clock on several occasions. But once I was able to break away and step back from it all, X-COM's success smelt a bit fishy. Consider:

X-COM seemed to come out of nowhere. Its release was not preceded by an enormous marketing campaign with an enormous amount of hype. It had no video demo playing in the front window of Babbage's, it wasn't advertised 12 months in advance on glossy foldout magazine inserts, it had no flashing point-of-purchase kiosks. It didn't come in a box designed by origamists from the school of Abstract Expressionism. It featured no full motion video starring the best TV actors of the 80s; it had no voice-overs. It offered neither Super VGA graphics, nor General MIDI support. It wasn't DOOM-like, MYSI-like, or otherwise like a hit game from the previous season; it didn't steal the best features from several other successful games. *It wasn't even on a CD-ROM!*

In short, if you plugged X-COM's variables into the "success formula" currently in use by the majority of large game companies, you'd come up with a big fat, goose egg. According to the prevailing wisdom, there's no way X-COM could survive in today's gaming marketplace. And yet it sold and sold, and gamers played on and on.

What's one to think about this anomaly? Those prone to conspiratorial paranoia might suggest that X-COM was itself an attack from outer space, a virus carefully crafted to weaken and capture human minds. That would be a cosmic bit of irony. Those of a more sober tone would be harder pressed for an explanation. Could it be that the (alleged) creators of X-COM, England's **Mythos Games** and **MicroProse UK**, have a clearer understanding of what gamers, especially gamers of the strategic bent, really want? Do they understand that what we need is not Lee Majors' voice-acting or a 15 minute 3D-Studio introduction that has little to do with actual gameplay? Do they understand that gamers would gladly exchange two minutes of full-motion video for two hours of *interactive* entertainment? Hmm. I'm afraid both theories are little outlandish.

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In
Development

I'M GOING UNDER

Whoever created X-COM, and for whatever reason, they're up to the same old tricks in the sequel, X-COM 2: TERROR FROM THE DEEP. The designers have taken the exact same game engine (core guts) and interface used in the original X-COM, and added new artwork, new weapons, and a new storyline to create a familiar game in unfamiliar surroundings. In this respect, X-COM and X-COM 2 have the same relationship as Doom did to its sequel, DOOM 2.

X-COM 2 also finds the aliens up to their same old tricks. Having been driven from our solar system through the previous efforts of the X-COM team, the aliens have decided to switch to Plan B, the motto of which, when loosely translated from the alien tongue, reads: "When the going gets tough, the tough go surfing."

The aliens have taken to the water, setting up bases of operation under the depths and reviving an ancient evil that was apparently waiting in the wings for millennia for Plan B to take effect. Several decades after their thrashing at the hands of the puny humans, the aliens are back to have another go—and boy are they nifty. They've set up ambushes along major sea lanes, they're terrorizing port cities and abducting humans, and they're gathering supplies to who-knows-what evil end. To the defense—guess who?—a



THE GAME REMAINS THE SAME From the orbital view, the X-COM interface looks exactly the same. Zoom in on the planet, though, and you'll quickly notice that the life of focus has shifted from the continents to the ocean and coastal regions.

new and improved X-COM anti-alien organization.

Those who have played X-COM will know the drill. But for those who've yet to be captured, oh fortunate ones, we'll explain.

Your job, as leader of the X-COM international anti-terrorism team, is to set up bases around the globe in order to interdict alien vessels, stop alien assaults on cities, and eventually, hunt down alien bases and blast their scaly hides off the planet. In managing bases, you must order

construction of base facilities (like alien-detection devices, research laboratories, containment rooms for captured foe, etc.), direct the research activities of your scientists, and put together a team of soldiers fit to face the alien hordes. But it's not just a desk job; it's an adventure, since you must also lead your soldiers in tactical, man vs. alien, combat missions.

WATER WORLD

For veterans, it should all sound pretty familiar so far. What are the differences? Well, since this scenario is set under the sea, so will your bases and most of your activities. At the highest level of magnification, the global view looks the same as before. But zoom in further on the continents and you'll notice that the major



WHERE'S THE WET BAR? Base placement and facility layout are still a part of your X-COM management tasks.

landlocked cities of the world have disappeared, and that the political situation has changed a bit. Where you would see France, England, Saudi Arabia, and other familiar political bodies in the previous game, you'll now find the Euro-Syndicate, the Egyptian Cartel, Neo-Japan, and the Brazilian Union. Chicago and Moscow have disappeared in favor of port cities like Fort Severn (Canada), Vladivostok, Reykjavik, Accra, and Darwin, Australia. Furthermore, a look at the oceans reveals a rough geography of the sea floor and the identification of the major islands of the world, the Azores, Falklands, Galapagos, Mauritius, Seychelles, and so on.

So when you're asked to choose the location of your first base, don't try clicking on terra firma—you'll get a rude response. No, you must plunk your base into the drink, the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans being the best places to start. Bases look and act the same (you must still design the layout of your facilities), but some names have been changed to reflect the new watery setting: radar detectors turn sonar, entryways become airlocks, and the staging area for craft become "sub pens."

Obviously, the interceptor and troop



MODDED SQUAD X-COM 2 squaddies come stock with dive suits and fins, but no armor worth mentioning. You must recover alien weaponry and research its mysteries to upgrade your equipment.

transport aircraft have been redesigned as watercraft, bearing appropriate names like "Triton" and "Hammerhead." When your subs meet an alien vessel, ship-to-ship combat is identical to that of X-COM, as you must still choose a basic combat stance (Cautious, Standard, Aggressive) and fire away, except with torpedoes and sonic beams instead of missiles and guns.

I DIVE, 9 TO 5

Once you've sent an alien craft to the ocean floor, you'll have to go after it with your team of X-COM S.E.A.L.s. Squeezed into their dive suits and totting harpoon guns and Hydro-Jet Cannons, the X-COM squaddies will pour out of their transport submarine ready to hunt for alien hides. Here, in the tactical battles, you'll see the most difference between X-COM 1 and 2, but the difference is certainly not in the control interface, which hasn't been changed a mote. All of the commands to move, turn, crouch, and fire are here, identified by the same icons. You'll give your orders to your squaddies, and then it's the aliens' turn for "Hidden Movement." It's still the best tactical combat game to date, bar none.

The difference is in the surroundings, the terrain where many of your squaddies will meet the end of their short, terror-filled lives. The terrain seems much more detailed and intricate, with lots of colorful



ACES OF THE DEEP 2000 Sub-to-sub battles between torpedo-spawning craft replace the air interceptors of the original game.

ocean plant-life, rock formations, and sand dunes that obstruct line-of-sight and provide cover for lurking horrors. In some locations there are signs of ancient civilizations (Atlantis? Lemuria? Mu?), structural foundations, crumbling columns, and statues of long-dead rulers and gods. The illusion of being underwater is enhanced by the greenish-hue of the palette and the quickly dissipating trail of bubbles traced by weapons fire—a nice touch.

Not all battles take place underwater, however. The aliens will attack cargo ships, so you'll have to fight through dark, cramped quarters where death can come through many port holes. You'll also find yourself protecting civilians in port towns and on South Sea isles with small bungalows and multi-level colonial mansions. In general, the combat landscapes are larger, or at least seem so because the landscape is

couldn't decide whose brains to suck out first. Let's hope that the intelligence of these creatures had not yet been finished.

What does a soldier have to fight back with? The usual assortment of weapons that progress in strength as you research more advanced technology. Just as in X-

com 1, tanks armed with your choice of mounted cannon will all have a home in your arsenal. The only trick to this weaponry is that some of it only works underwater, a fact that can leave your soldiers high and dry in land-based missions.

Another new addition and complication introduced in X-COM 2 is the "linked mission." The idea is that in some missions, you may fight through a landscape only to find that there is yet another region to investigate. So, for example, you might investigate an alien crash site only to find that you've happened upon an

entrance to an alien base. Once the crash site mission is finished, you must continue into the base. Bringing extra men and extra ammo to every mission might be a good strategy to adopt.

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES

Of course, all the missions are linked in that they eventually lead to a conclusion, the ultimate showdown with the ultimate Bad Guys. Just as you had to go off-world to finish off (well, almost) the aliens in X-COM, so the successful leader in X-COM 2 may have a shot at finishing the aliens once and for all. Where the story leads, I don't know, but you don't have to push the gray matter too hard to figure out that the ruins of ancient cities and the re-awakening of an ancient evil might be connected. Could we be heading towards a conclusion that unites Atlantis, UFOs, Stonehenge, cattle-mutilation, the Psychic Friends Network, and disco music into a grand unified conspiracy theory?

A play through X-COM 2 will reveal all. All that, except the mystery of the anomaly of the game's success. Once again, with X-COM 2 MicroProse is releasing a game without the frills and "multimedia enhancements" that the common wisdom knows are necessary for success in today's game marketplace. MicroProse is releasing this game on the strength of its extended gameplay in a proven game system—and nothing more. If this sort of behavior continues, an investigation will be in order. We'll have to keep a close eye on the planned X-COM 3 when it finally rolls out of Britain.

Or is it Betelgeuse? ☹



DEATH AT 20K LEAGUES

The tactical battles take place in many different settings. Above we find an X-COM squad starting a mission aboard a hijacked ship. Elsewhere, it's open season for alien hunting on the ocean floor.



so cluttered with houses, palm trees, and hills. Combat is certainly more treacherous because of this.

THIS IS YOUR OPPONENT'S BRAIN

As if the landscape doesn't make a squaddie's life difficult enough, the aliens have also become a little smarter, or so the MicroProse programmers promise. In the preview version of the software, I was unable to tell just how smart they had become. While one breed of alien (the "aquatoid," cousin of the "sectoid") seemed more wily—continually firing at my squaddies and then retreating into the brush, forcing me to expose my men in order to chase it—other aliens stood around or did the "X-COM Shuffle," pacing back and forth as if they



COM, here you start with the equivalent of pea-shooters—the harpoon gun—and no armor at all. You'll have to suffer through several missions, and lose several good soldiers, before you uncover the alien secrets of underwater armor and develop a sturdy standard-issue weapon. Once the technological ball gets rolling, however, the blessings of warfare science will rain from heaven. Gauss weaponry, enhanced grenades, torpedo launchers, and "Coela-

QUAD SQUAD.

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Spies, Damn Spies, and Sadistics

Combat And Conspiracy In A Feudal Future: New World's MECHLORDS

by Alan Emrich and Johnny L. Wilson

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In
Development



MARCUS WAS NOT AT ALL DISPLEASED WITH THE ASSASSIN'S PERFORMANCE. FROM HER INITIAL SINUOUS, SEDUCTIVE MOTION TO the wild, unexpected chaos, she had shown herself worthy of her street name—Spider Queen. The articulated blade had risen from its sheath under her fingernails, the point of coratid penetration coming even as Luca's breaths had grown shorter, the dual envoy's uncontrolled exclamations were nonsensical. Luca must have thought that first second of pain sweetly spice to his satisfaction, though the ejaculate of blood which ensued proved the anticlimax of his life.

No, it was Marcus' own performance in ordering the assassination with which he was displeased. He had hired the Spider Queen to kill Luca because the dual envoy had been an inconvenient rival, prey to far too much of the duke's business. Marcus had intended to remove a rival, but through miscalculation, all had backfired. Luca's brother Cesare had managed to transform his late sibling into an imperial martyr by positioning the assassination as the work of terrorists from a rival house. As a result, Cesare's star was rising and Marcus' star descending.

Marcus knew that Cesare was far too clever not to realize that Marcus had set the assassination plans in motion and, as a result, he knew that it wouldn't be long before Cesare sought revenge. His ascendancy made things far too hot within the dual court for Marcus and, consequently, made that out-system assignment look far more attractive than ever before. So, Marcus Faber, one of the most famous of House Drakho's inner court, assumed the mask of planetary administration.

No, Marcus wasn't at all pleased with the aftermath of his plot. He could only hope that his new planetary assignment might somehow pave the way for a glorious return. If not, he might never wear that coveted dual ring or wield the power to which he believed himself born.

You must never forget who you are in MECHLORDS, the new strategic epic from New World Computing and SimTex Software. Your goal is to have your player character become the duke of a neo-feudal realm or "house." To do so, you will have to master logistics for both civilian and military purposes, tactics for battles on planetary surfaces, and court intrigue—both

overt diplomacy and covert spying and espionage. If you get carried away with one facet of the game to the exclusion of the others, you could find yourself, like the character in our fiction, on another noble's hit list.

Fortunately, you have plenty of options at your disposal. Would you expect anything less from the ambitious developer who led you to struggle for galactic domination in *MASTER OF ORBON*, lord over fantasy empires in *MASTER OF MAGIC* (both from *MicroProse*), and put railroad robber barons on track with a computerized rendition of *Avalon Hill's 1830?*

This time around the myth-making block, *SimTex* has managed to coalesce a *BATTLETECH*-like universe of Great Houses, giant mechanized robots piloted by heroic individuals, political intrigue, and alien bad guys into a game that is both similar to and different than their previous games. It may seem like they've plagiarized from *BATTLETECH* and their previous works, but it is more like they have taken a kitchen-tested strategy gaming recipe and added their own motivational spice in order to arouse the jaded gaming palette. *MechLords* is less about the knightly jousts between dueling 'mechs in *BATTLETECH's* universe of lost technology, and more about planning, building, plotting and fighting in a balka-



COURT FABERITE Marcus Faber is one of three nobles that you could choose as your player character from House Grakka.

nized, imperialistic civilization within that universe with improving technology. In *BATTLETECH*, you improve your standing by improving your battle prowess. In *MechLords*, you enhance your standing in a variety of ways which include commanding small unit battles, building up planetary economies, sabotaging buildings, selling contraband drugs and slaves, and framing, blackmailing or assassinating rivals. Although both games are mission-driven, the campaign and role-playing elements of *MechLords* ensure that you can't be satisfied with merely beating the scenarios. The scenarios are meant to be a more complex end.

has oriental cultures and militaristic societies, but the computer games based on that universe have failed to offer any real reason for being loyal to one house or another, much less any reason for enlisting in the service of one house over another. In *MechLords*, *SimTex* has utilized their concept of offering different strengths and abilities for each house, much as *MOO* gave different abilities to different alien races and *MOM* gave different advantages to different forms of magic. Yet, *MechLords* goes its ancestors one better. You cannot simply figure out which house has the best advantages and go with that house. You must consider that you are competing against computer players with in your own house, so you must simulta-



MISSION INSIDIOUS Each mission is quickly described and its potential for failure or success rated as a difficulty level.

neously use the house advantages against other houses, and use your own strategy and intrigue against those who have the same advantages as you. Plus, there is an intricate alliance structure in which each house has natural alliances and declared enemies. This must also be thrown into the mix.

The houses or cultures of *MechLords* are easily described. It has the obligatory samurai society, House Talos (roughly equivalent to House Draconis in *BATTLETECH* and receiving a 10% bonus when dealing with merchants, reflecting the tradition of *zaibatsu* or oriental business alliances). It also features the mandatory royal court, House Ordeus (roughly equivalent to House Davion in *BATTLETECH* and consequently, has a training advantage for tank and 'mech pilots, just as Davion had the best warriors in the previous universe). But, *MechLords* offers more. House Arilon is the epitome of free enterprise and receives a 25% bonus in scientific research. House Athena is



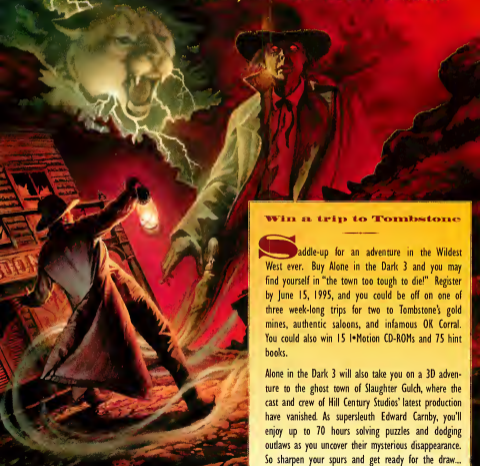
REQUISITION FORM Each mission begins with your selection of the building complexes and vehicles needed to accomplish it.

HOUSES DIVIDED

MechLords has taken the idea of a balkanized futuristic society with its entropic reduction to neo-feudalism and given it an additional twist, both beyond *BATTLETECH's* near-equivalent cultures and the game systems of *MASTER OF ORBON* and *MASTER OF MAGIC*. The *BATTLETECH* universe

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governed by female telepaths, so all Athenian pilots receive a 10% offensive/defensive bonus to reflect their ability to anticipate the moves of their enemies. House Drakka is a gangster empire trading in slaves, contraband and drugs. As a result of their strength on frontier worlds, they get a 20% bonus in mine and refinery production. House Krakus is a non-human society consisting of six races. Its members are stronger and have a 30% construction bonus when building houses and vehicles.

Looming over the empire of Houses is the external threat of an evil alien race. The aliens are like a force of nature, attacking Houses without prejudice and bringing opportunity for both gain and loss. Although your assistance in dealing with alien incursions is good for the empire (as well as your reputation), there might be times when you would stay your helping hand—like when the aliens attack a sector of space dominated by a powerful rival house.

YOU CHARACTER, YOU!

At the beginning of the game, each noble will have the House advantage specific to its culture, as well as a single special ability of your own choosing. These special characteristics include Wealthy (starting with more money and receiving 1 free MegaCredit per turn automatically), Ambassador (diplomatic expertise plus 10 extra votes in the court), and Security Advisor (ability to carry out internal investigations and external spy operations), among others.

Initially, your character does not directly control his House's scientific research, diplomacy, or military strategy. Instead, these are controlled by computer-controlled personalities until you have achieved enough influence to dominate these policy-making activities. In other words, at the outset, the game plays *you*. After achieving some prestige and influence, you play the game.

MECH WITH A MISSION

To build up your prestige you must successfully complete missions. At any given time, you have eight star systems on your map and eight potential missions for which to volunteer. Some missions involve building up a planet economically or establishing a base, and some are strictly strike missions where you destroy another house's complexes.



UTOPIA Building construction is handled similarly to that in *San Crr*, with foundation tiles placed according to taste.



GO CARS Vehicle movement is handled via point and click, using "GoTo" commands.

All are rated for difficulty such that easier missions reflect less severe interference from other houses and more emphasis on building a planet's economy than on combat. More difficult missions reflect stiffer opposition and more emphasis on combat.

Each mission begins with the requisition of equipment. You can choose prefab buildings and complexes, as well as vehicles, or equip each vehicle with existing technology. Each mission has limited funds, but it may be to your advantage to kick in some personal

funds in order to grease the pathway to mission success by purchasing extra equipment. You can also examine the pilots assigned to each vehicle.

Next, you select the landing zone by placing crosshairs on a strategic map of the planetary surface and clicking. The strategic map allows you to know roughly the location of structures, mineral and chemical concentration, and enemy forces prior to landing. After that, it is phased movement combat that will remind you of the tactical combat in *MASTER OF MAGIC*.

FAMILIAR PHASES

The combat is not the only thing that will remind you of an earlier *SimTex* game. Veterans of the *MASTER* games may be amused at these common threads. For instance, even though it "Don't drink, don't smoke" (What do it do?), Adamantium is back as the metal of choice when prospecting the galaxy, just as *Cryx* is the jewel among gems. Likewise, many of the technologies in *MASTER OF ORION*, including the Gauss Cannon and Mass Driver, have been sprinkled among the myriad of interesting new technologies

such as a Corona Generator and Magna Launcher. We're keeping our eyes open for some mention of Klackons, but have yet to see hide or scale of the lizardmen.

All of these small similarities between *MECHLORDS* and the previous *SimTex* games mean nothing unless *MECHLORDS* is similar in the most important respects:

addictiveness and replayability. From what we've seen, there will be little difference between the late nights spent with *MECHLORDS* and those with *MASTER OF ORION*. It has the richness of options and flexibility to keep you coming back to try this idea or that strategy. And it has the strong empire-building appeal that portends a long life on game's hard drives. If *SimTex* and *New World* take the time to carefully balance and tune the game, their House will emerge as a very powerful player in the strategy game universe. ☺

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"Descent is an incredible game.

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— *Electronic Entertainment*

"Descent is superb."

— *Apogee*

"The sensation of speed is amazing, and the 3D texture mapped graphics make this game a genuine joy to behold."

— *PC Gamer*

"It's Doom with a twist, a turn, and a gravity free flip."

— *Computer Gaming World*

"Played it ... and I have one thing to say. Wow!"

— *Sir Ryck AMERICA ONLINE*

"If you still have Doom loaded on your HD you're just wasting space."

— *Big Joe d. AMERICA ONLINE*

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— *Jon Yurkay, Computerwe 70583,2311*

"The weapons are zwo-some, the game play is awesome, the motion sickness is awesome."

— *Eric Hess, Computerwe 71221,2660*

"Cool game, just need to find my Bramamine to play it."

— *Mike Hulen, Computerwe 74022,3004*

"Holy Bat farts, Batman!... I have never experienced an enemy intelligence anywhere NEAR the way these robots act.

They peek, they fire, they chase you, they take cover, they wait!"

— *Marty Peralta, Computerwe 7614233*



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BATTLEFRONT
BATTLE OF BRITAIN 2
PANZER GENERAL
TANKS!
THEIR FINEST HOUR
WW2 AIR FORCE
COMMANDER

D-DAY AND BEYOND

BATTLEFRONT
BATTLES IN NORMANDY
CLASH OF STEEL
D-DAY: THE BEGINNING OF THE END
GOLD-JUNI-SWORD
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UTAH BEACH
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THE BIG PICTURE

CLASH OF STEEL
HIGH COMMAND
STORM ACROSS EUROPE
THE BIG THREE
THIRD REICH

NORTH AFRICA

DECISION IN THE DESERT
KNIGHTS OF THE DESERT
OPERATION CRUSADER
PANZER GENERAL
ROMMEL AT GAZALA
ROMMEL AT TORON

50 Years Later

A Retrospective Tour Of Duty For Computer Wargamers

by Terry Lee Coleman

EASTERN FRONT

BATTLEFRONT
FIRE BRIGADE
KAMPFGRUPPE
PANZER STRIKE
SECOND FRONT
STALINGRAD
TANKS!
TIGERS ON THE PROWL
VELHOYE LORI
WAR IN RUSSIA

In early 1942, the chance that the Allies would defeat the Axis seemed optimistic, perhaps even naive. US battleships lay at the bottom of Pearl Harbor. The British were driven out of Singapore, the island fortress which had seemed all but invincible mere months before. As Douglas MacArthur left the fallen Philippines, his vow to return seemed almost hollow to the thousands of Americans who would suffer in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps for years to come.

In Europe, German forces had conquered Poland, France, the Low Countries, the Balkans and Norway. After surviving the Russian winter, the German Sixth Army became embroiled in a long and bitter struggle for Stalingrad, and the tide began to turn...

World War II is an endlessly fascinating subject for wargamers. When the war began, bi-planes were still employed in many of the world's air forces. Tanks resembled inflated armored cars, and sported more machine guns than cannon—which was somewhat less detrimental than it could have been, since they often faced cavalry during the early days of the *Blitzkrieg*. Weapons technology developed, as the war went on, to include radar, sonar, portable rocket launchers, jet aircraft, guided missiles, and even atomic bombs. And the mighty battleship was superseded as queen of the waves by the far-reaching strike capability of the aircraft carrier.

Even more than the equipment, however, wargamers find the personalities of WWII to be compelling—quite simply some of the greatest commanders in history. Who wouldn't thrill to give the order, as Eisenhower, to "Go in" at D-Day, or to race through Western Europe like Patton, chasing the enemy before you, until all that stops your progress is lack of fuel?

In the broadest sense, WWII, despite its incredible carnage, appeals to us on a very basic level. Unlike the confused and muddled "police actions" of today, WWII offers a clear-cut conflict of good versus evil where, ironically enough, even the hated enemy is to be grudgingly respected for his professionalism and military prowess. Despite a lot of criticism, wargames have often treated the touchy subject of playing from the Axis side very tastefully, a good case in point being the recent *PANZER GENERAL* (SSI).

With this in mind, it seems only fitting that CGW pay tribute to the 50th Anniversary of the Allies' Victory in Europe. Within this guide, each theater of war is discussed according to its unique strategic considerations and interest as a wargame. Then, we have listed major battles within each theater along with our recommendations, listed in parentheses, for the best games in which to recreate those battles. Finally, we offer a critical evaluation of major games based on the particular theater. Now, join us as we reflect upon those games which chronicle the greatest and most terrible conflict in world history.



From Blitzkrieg To The Battle Of Britain

September 1, 1939: The Polish government, unwilling to cede land which would reunite Germany with East Prussia, deploys its armed forces in defiance of Hitler's demands. But the Polish Army, which had blunted Soviet expansion only a decade earlier, would be swept from the field in a mere fortnight. It was the beginning of the *blitzkrieg*, and it changed forever the way we view mobile warfare.

In most wargames, the Fall of Poland is but a puzzle to be solved on the way to more notable conquests, as in the beginning turns of *CLASH OF STEEL (SSI)* or *HIGH COMMAND (360 Pacific)*. *PANZER GENERAL (SSI)* actually devotes two scenarios to the Polish campaign. Even though the deck is stacked in favor of the Germans, the strict timetable and annoying Polish cavalry and air units make this a good start for a campaign.

CLASH OF STEEL gives a good look at the "phony war" between the fall of Poland and the conquest of the Low Countries. Whether you opt for an early conquest of France, or simply secure your northern flank in historical fashion, the improved AI of version 1.1 keeps the tension up, as France may try for an early sortie into Germany.

The best operational treatment of the complex Norway invasion is found in *PANZER GENERAL*. An intact Royal Navy, plenty of British reinforcements, and the difficulties of an amphibious assault into rough terrain make this a difficult, nail-biting experience—one of the best single battle scenarios of any WWII game. All of the battle scenarios are enjoyable and include such rarities as the Axis conquest of the Balkans, but *PANZER GENERAL*'s campaigns capture the flavor of the early war years like nothing before, allowing you to view the conflict from the uncertain perspective of the war years, rather than with the comfortable hindsight of history. The enjoyable tension of the game is largely due to the sense of urgency placed

upon you, as the next Rommel or Guderian, to pull off one military miracle after another. Through a clever system of prestige points, you earn more important assignments, and may even have the opportunity to knock England, Russia or even the US out of the



Major Battles/Campaigns: Warsaw, The Balkans (*PANZER GENERAL*); Low Countries, Operation Seafox (*THE PART WARGAME, PANZER GENERAL*); Fall of France (*PANZER GENERAL, TANKS!*); Norway (*PANZER GENERAL, CLASH OF STEEL*); Descent on Crete (*PURE WARGAME, BATTLEFRONT*); Battle of Britain (*THEIR FINEST HOUR*)

war. As you move from battle to battle in a campaign, each of your core units gains experience, adding an element of role-playing to this fast and exciting game.

A REPLAY OF WWI IT WASN'T

The most intriguing campaign of the *WWII* years has to be the Fall of France. The French in 1940 were overconfident, assuming that the Maginot Line of fortifications would present an insurmountable obstacle to the Germans. The Germans outflanked the French through the Ardennes forest, but were woefully short of fuel and supplies at the time the French surrendered. This offers a tremendous opportunity for making your own "what-if" scenarios, something for which *WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET II: TANKS!* is eminently suited.

When first released, *TANKS!* had gorgeous artwork, an easy-to-learn system, and a number of famous battles. But it was not a serious tactical study, and, even considered as a pure strategy game, contained several flaws which seriously affected gameplay. Losses at the far reaches of the battlefield, for instance, influenced the morale of units many miles away. Artillery support was clumsy, and the interplay between the various arms just wasn't in sync. The new version of *TANKS!* available from David Landrey's *Novastar Games* contains necessary fixes which make the France '40 scenario a much more enjoyable contest, as *Panzer* thrust toward Paris much more realistically.

The Fall of France campaign is a showcase for the best parts of *PANZER GENERAL*'s design. Despite the abstractions, the game does a great job of showing that the Allied tanks of 1940 were individually superior to German armor. Poor

historical tactics, such as trying to bludgeon through the Maginot line, are punished, and air superiority is very much in question. The Allies take chances and often make unexpected counter-thrusts, making this a good solitaire, as well as two-player, game.

An even more accessible game can be found in the *GREATEST BATTLES OF THE 20TH CENTURY* scenario set for *THE PERFECT GENERAL*. Based on a tabletop game by Bruce Williams Zaccagnino, this enduring *QQP* design is an abstract, but very good, introduction to the hobby. The WWII battles included are well-balanced for two human generals, but the AI of this sequel seems as lacking as in the original. You need only contrast the Guderian Forward scenario from this game with France 1940 from *PANZER GENERAL* to see how far computer game design has come in the past couple of years.

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SSG's **BATTLEFRONT** series, though similarly dated, is still worth a look. The design focuses on command control of an odd sort. As commander, you select orders for each formation, then watch as the AI carries out your commands. But the AI of this Roger Keating/Ian Trout collaboration doesn't come close to the standards of their later games like **WARLORDS II**, and often leaves gamers feeling like marionettes dancing on a puppeteer's string. This game has a very entertaining Crete scenario, because the game's confusing system helps capture the spirit of the frantic paratroop landings. The original set plus add-on disks can be had at bargain prices through mail order houses, but control freaks should shy away.

A better choice for ripcord fans would be **THE PURE WARGAME** from QQP, a much less abstract game than its title implies. The development of paratroop actions is traced throughout WWII with a surprisingly detailed order of battle. The combat system stresses morale and mobility, leading to tense, fluid situations in many scenarios. Along with the inevitable battle of Crete, the game allows you to assault the supposedly impregnable Belgian fortress of Eben Emael, a treat rarely available in wargames, board or computer-based. **Folkstone**, based on German plans to invade England, is the most "his-

torical" of the alternate-history scenarios on the market.

Operation Seafire is a common "what-if" battle, appearing in nearly all of the games listed above. That the German's plan to invade England remained hypothetical had less to do with the English Channel than the brave men of the Royal Air Force. The battle over Britain was the first, and the most decisive, air campaign in history. Odd, then, that it should occupy such a small place on our gaming shelves.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN 2 is one of the few titles covering this conflict. Rather than a typical **Deadly Games'** light first-person simulator, this is an operational view of the airwar from the perspective of the Marshal of Her Majesty's Royal Air Force. The research is thorough, and the losses of pilots and aircraft ring true. The system is based loosely on John Butterfield's award-winning solitaire board game **RAF**, but this computer descendant features even less activity for the player. In **RAF**, the decisions were spaced out so that each card flipped over only added to the tension, like a good game of stud poker. **BOB 2** makes things so seamless that the tension is replaced by sterility. Those looking for a quick Windows game might enjoy it, but the board game is more exciting.

A different campaign feel is evoked by **Impressions'** **WW2 AIR FORCE COMMANDER**, a playable game marred by huge reality gaps. In this version of WWII, we find that even Poland had radar in 1939. All-weather aircraft must have been years ahead of their time, since sorties occur around the clock—even in the dead of night. The struggle between the quanti-

OVER THE REICH

Charlie Moylan's **FLIGHT COMMANDER 2** was a most rare bird—a strategy wargame of aerial combat. **Big Time Software's** next campaign finds them **OVER THE REICH**, which brings to bear J.D. Webster's experience as a former military aviator and board wargame designer. Even hardcore wargamers find themselves daunted by the bookkeeping involved in Webster's detailed and very realistic designs, so Moylan plans to hide the tedious elements underneath the slick interface used in **FC2**. The game covers the air war over Germany from 1943-45, including everything from bombing missions with B-17s to early interception flights by Me-163 *Komet*s. Each mission begins operationally with squadron movement, then allows you to resolve tactical combat in **FC2** style, with extended campaigns and mission generator planned for inclusion as well.

why does the design render this dynamic useless, by representing all squadrons—whatever their size—by one plane? Worst of all, the crucial effects of weather are not even included. Prospective pilots should route to another landing strip, regardless of the low price and minimal hardware requirements.

A much more rewarding flight may be had with **THEIR FINEST HOUR**, still available from **LucasArts** in a CD package of flight sims. Though its luster has somewhat faded, in its day, the bit-mapped graphics freed gamers from the starkness of simple polygons. Its near limitless play options are what keep this from being a museum piece. Flying from either the British or German side, you accumulate kills and medals throughout a campaign, as the fate of Britain hangs in the balance. You can fly as either a pilot or crew member, which, along with the mission builder, adds greatly to replayability. **THEIR FINEST HOUR** is a great game which still has enough historical value to satisfy all but the most ardent simulationists. If you ever wonder why Me-109s should never fly close escort, simply use the "combat film" VCR-type feature (which this game was among the first to use) to tape your aerial experiments. Or, you could just read the manual—a marvelous blend of historical background, game documentation and sound tactical advice worthy of any aspiring Sea Lion.



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Desert Fox Hunt

Generals Auchinleck, Montgomery, and Patton all won campaigns in the North African desert, yet none have the almost mystical appeal of Erwin Rommel, The Desert Fox. Daring, charismatic and inspiring, he paved the way for a new kind of mobile warfare which would hardly be surpassed until the Israeli Army (and later Schwartzkopf) elevated it to a deadly art form. Gamers trying to capture the essence of the Desert Fox's campaigns, however, often find themselves lost in a sandstorm of poor design and documentation.

Tobruk: The very name conjures images of strength, of struggles in a faraway land. Several games have tried to capture the spirit of the many battles fought around this strategically located port, but few have succeeded.

Even the British engineers, those fortifying maniacs, couldn't have saved GDW's epic ROMMEL: BATTLES FOR TOBRUK. It tried to succeed on both tactical and operational levels, failing miserably on both counts. Incredibly, the game was so overlaid with detail that it dwarfed even high-end board wargames in complexity, with-

out

BLOOD & SAND Auchinleck and Rommel duel from exotic Bir el Gubi to Tobruk in *Operation Crusader*, the best desert WWII game to date.



adding to play value. While the occasional copy can be found in bargain bins, this is not a title to start your WWII desert collection with.

Two older games that have aged a little better are ROMMEL AT GAZALA and ROMMEL AT EL ALAMEIN. Simulations Canada's notorious lack of graphics works well here, like old black-and-white silent films. As a campaign study, the combat is akin to a naval action, with the ebb and flow dependant on realistic command control and fog-of-war restrictions. For a different take, you might also try SSC's BATTLES FOR NORTH AFRICA, another in the *Battlefront* system.

Novastar Games has re-released KNIGHTS OF THE DESERT, but despite the game's many awards, it hasn't aged well. CGW found the interface awkward when released, and time has made the static and ponderous pace of play even more apparent. Pass this one by for some Krocgel/Landrey Civil War fare instead.

When riding a tank down memory lane, it's hard to ignore Sid Meier's old DECISION IN THE DESERT. Ed Bever's research provides a solid base upon which Meier can work his usual game-play magic. The importance of supply, mechanized overruns and other aspects of desert warfare are blended well enough to give a broad but accurate view of the campaign, while also being vastly entertaining. Fans of SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION will hardly be surprised that this design has held up so well, despite its dated look.

If you can't take the big graphic step backwards, you have two choices: Con-



Major Battles/Campaigns: **Tobruk** (PANZER GENERAL); **Gazala** (ROMMEL AT GAZALA, OPERATION CRUSADER); **El Alamein** (ROMMEL AT EL ALAMEIN, PANZER GENERAL); **Operation Torch** (PANZER GENERAL); **The "big picture"** is *CASTLE OF STEEL* also shows the limited resources available to both sides without bogging down in minutiae.

tempt yourself with the eminently entertaining PANZER GENERAL, or for more robust historical flavor, pick up a copy of OPER-

ATION CRUSADER. This marriage of Atomic and Avalon Hill results in one of the finest views of desert warfare ever conceived, and is remarkably well-focused and stimulating. Designers Young and Zabalaoni (V FOR VICTORY) are released from their European shackles, and their system proves much more suited to the free-wheeling conflicts of the African sands. Supply, reconnaissance, and weather rules are appropriately intricate, but the elegant interface makes them less obtrusive—combat and air missions are a breeze. Even the sequence of play has a streamlined feel, supported by excellent documentation and sumptuous SVGA graphics—all of which give the appearance of a lean and mean Panther ready to roll down the coast to Alexandria. A good AI (much better than V FOR V), plus one of the best systems for e-mail play, make this a must for any aspiring Desert Fox.

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War At Sea

Naval actions in the European theater of WWII lack the grand sweep of those in the Pacific. After WWI, the Versailles treaty reduced the German fleet to a mere shell, so there would be no *Jutland*-like showdown in the Atlantic. Mediterranean conflict centered on escorts for transports and supplies sent from Italy to North Africa; but even then, Italian vessels were more inclined to stay in port than in battle formation.

For surface combat in the Western Hemisphere during WWII, there is really only one place to turn: The **GREAT NAVAL BATTLES** series from **SSI**. **GNB1** looks a bit dated now but is still quite good. Although it may occasionally bog down in excessive detail, **GNB1** still offers enough solid entertainment to balance the frustration. The numerous expansion disks, **SUPER SHIPS OF THE ATLANTIC**, **AMERICA IN THE ATLANTIC**, and **SCENARIO BUILDER**, add both historical and hypothetical ships, several new missions, and better, sorely needed, campaign AI. **GNB2** strictly covered the Pacific Theater and was a huge disappointment. The overhauled AI still had huge strategic deficiencies, and the minutiae swelled to the point where gameplay basically capsized and sank. Through the upcoming **GNB3** is also Pacific-oriented, it will offer an improved interface, scenario editor, and ship editor. Also, its

SVG-A graphics, complete with pyrotechnic explosions and gun flashes, are better than ever.

Otherwise, fleet admirals are reduced to the text-based naval simulations of **Simulations Canada**.

KRIEGSMARINE: TACTICAL NAVAL COMBAT IN THE ATLANTIC: 1939-1945 features a variety of scenarios which are largely played by sending and receiving radio messages after establishing rules of engagement and plotting movement on a map. **KRIEGSMARINE** doesn't have any bells and whistles, but it is very enlightening as a command simulator.

While surface ship commanders may find scarce waves on which to set sail, sub captains will find several silicon opponents to fill their periscope sights. **Deadly Games' U-BOAT** is a simple, light simulator which is actually more realistic than it at first appears. Audio feedback drives the game, as you listen for the propeller noises of enemy ships, the launching of torpedoes, the reports of your crew, or the dreaded explosion of a nearby depth charge. Even the sparse graphics add to the authentic feel of Rene Vidmer's successful game design.

Novalogic's WOLFPACK has received a facelift, and it is now available on Mac CD. **WOLFPACK** was somewhat unique when released (allowing you to command either subs or escorts), but the graphic and gameplay enhancements still leave this game way behind the current state



Major Battles/Campaigns: **Barents Sea, Hunt For The Bismarck, Norvik Coast (all Great Naval Battles), U-boat Actions (ACES OF THE DEEP, U-BOAT)**

of the art. It's hard to tell for whom this product is intended: It can't chal-

lenge the best games in terms of realism, and it certainly lacks the sheer fun of **SILENT SERVICE II**, the Pacific Theater submarine simulation from **MicroProse**. I'd hate to think that Mac gamers have to settle for a rebashed 4-year old product just to get their submarine fix.

The quintessential undersea simulation is certainly **ACES OF THE DEEP**, which so authentically creates the dark and cramped environs of a WWII German sub that you suspect **Dynamix** of conspiring with claustrophobic architects in the design. The AI of the enemy escorts is incredible, the torpedoes are modeled accurately, and the campaign mode is as close to the life of a U-boat captain as anyone could wish. The CD version has interviews with Otto Kretschmer and other U-boat commanders, one of the best example of "multimedia enhancement" we've seen yet.

Upcoming products include the add-on missions disk from **ACES OF THE DEEP**, which will allow you to sink Allied tonnage in the Mediterranean and command the advanced Type XXI U-boat. Also, **SSI's** upcoming **SILENT HUNTER**, with its light-sourced graphics (modeled from detailed photos of the interior of a U-boat), looks like it will be a Pacific counterpart to **ACES OF THE DEEP**. In addition to the extensive torpedo and dive models, the game even includes detailed views of each harbor you sail into. In any case, naval enthusiasts will have plenty of WWII sub sims to fuel their combative fix for the upcoming year.



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All Violent On The Eastern Front

Given that *Operation Barbarossa* was the largest land campaign ever undertaken, both in terms of men, materiel and sheer geography, it is hardly surprising that there are more games available on this subject than any other WWII exercise.

The stereotypical image of *Operation Barbarossa* is that of a lean, mean, professional German Army running rampant over a lumbering, bumbling Soviet behemoth. The best gaming example of this was Chris Crawford's *EASTERN FRONT*, where—believe it or not—the AI for the Russian side was restricted to 8K of memory. During testing, it was found that the Russian units were retreating toward the German lines. Since this made the AI a tougher opponent—if hardly nice—competent—Crawford wisely left it in. Recent Eastfront games claim to have left the *EASTERN FRONT* days behind; but to challenge the nosily hardcore gamers who retrace the treadmarks of von Manstein or Zhukov, the AI still has a way to go.

Oddly enough, one AI that has held up reasonably well is Gary Grigsby's venerable *KOMMUNISTE*. Although respected on the Apple and IBM, the game reached its pinnacle on the Amiga, with stereo explosions adding a lot to the enjoyment. The variety of units—*Wespe* self-propelled artillery, T34/85 tanks, *Hetzer* tank destroyers, and even flame-throwers—all helped to make this the first WWII tactical computer game that could be taken seriously. If you can ignore the graphics, it's still fun to go for *Kiev* one more time.

Other re-releases from the SSI "Grigsby Files" are more of a mixed bag. *SECOND FRONT*'s division-level scale serves up the huge expanse of Russia in manageable form, but has single units taking out well-en-

trenched, more numerous defenders. Worse, the strategic AI has severe problems, which often come into play just as the action is heating up. *WAR IN RUSSIA*, the follow up, removed some of the more unrealistic aspects of *SECOND FRONT*, but tried to do so much

One data-intensive design that works well as both a simulation and a game is **HPS Simulations'** *TIGERS ON THE PROWL*. Since its original release, designer Scott Hamilton has improved the interface sufficiently to make this worth the steep learning curve. The treatment of training, morale and other "soft" factors add a lot to the WWII feel, particularly in scenarios set late in the war, where the outnumbered *Wehrmacht* must coordinate difficult delaying actions and counter-thrusts. The detailed rules include: flames which spread according to prevailing winds (giving "firefights" a whole new meaning); penetration, angle of impact, and deflection of shell hits; suppression fire; night engagements; and the difficulties of acquiring targets on smoke-filled battlefields before the advent of high-tech sensing devices. For these reasons and because of its strong computer opponent, *TIGERS* is a finalist for CGP's Premier award for Best Wargame of 1994.

Before the advent of *TIGERS ON THE PROWL*, the owner of the ultra-realistic Eastfront throne was *FIRE BRIGADE*. **Panther Games** started out

as a boardgame producer, but the rules to their wargames eventually became so complicated

that even hardcore gamers were intimidated. So, Dave O'Connor adapted his GLIMACS movement, combat and command control system from *Trial of Strength* to the computer. The IBM views of Kiev and the surrounding area look dated, but the Mac and Amiga graphics are still pretty good (considering the game came out in 1987). Operationally, *FIRE BRIGADE* plays a lot like a



Wargame titles including *Warfare* (Quint of Sord), *Panzer Grenier*, *Kiev* (Kampeon), *FE, FIRE BRIGADE*, *Budapest*, *Crucifixes*, *Moscow*, *Kursk*, *Sovietopol* (Il Panna Games), *Drive On St. Inrad* (Quint of Sord), *Stalinopol*. Also, *TIGERS ON THE PROWL* does an excellent job of recreating just about any major Eastfront battle.

that it lost the elegance that had been Grigsby's strength. Hardware information dominates over command and control considerations, or even reliability. For instance, the T34/85 is inferior on both attack and defense to the *Tiger* tank, even though the latter had badly sloped armor and suffered chronic mechanical breakdowns. For a great strategic-level Grigsby game, try his wondrous *opus Pacific War* instead.

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complex SSG game—not surprisingly, since SSG's Keating and Trout gave freely of their time and advice. A lot of the information which gamers take for granted in later designs, such as in *V FOR V*, was present in early form here, with lots of reports and various intelligence available from the front. The fighting around Kiev in 1943 is portrayed through a number of scenarios, playable from either the German or Russian side. The research is very good, and the AI—with the help of a few tricks—provides a good enough opponent to capture the essence of the campaign. What's really amazing is that a game this old supports modern play. It predates *PANZER GENERAL* by seven years in having role-playing elements, as you receive *commissariés*, medals and sometimes even demissions, from Stalin or Hitler. So why wasn't *FIRE BRIGADE* a tremendous hit? It was simply too far ahead of its time, especially for the limited IBM of yesteryear. With a fresher interface, better graphics and a hotter topic than Kiev, this system might still have some potential.

Of course, the best-known operational system to date has been *Atomic Games' V FOR VICTORY*, soon to be re-released by Avalon Hill. *VELIKIY LUKI* is a fine example of why this series raises ambivalent feel-

ings in wargamers. The gorgeous SVGA graphics form a backdrop for the quintessentially boring Russian campaign. Although the basic system is sound, the unit scale is inappropriate here. The pace of the game is sluggish, with one of the most inept computer opponents for any major release. Unless you absolutely have to own every Atomic design, pass this one by.

STALINGRAD is another matter entirely, as it features three different scales in the same game: One and three kilometers for operations, while the tactical view is 400 meters per hexagon. Multiple scales in wargames are often like split-level houses: they look cool when you put your money down, but, once sold, the designer doesn't have to worry about the waste of space...or tripping over ill-placed stairs (or rules systems) while you acclimate to your new environment. Whereas *CRUSADER* kept the unit density low and thereby gave the AI a fighting chance, *STALINGRAD* is so huge that the computer opponent simply can't mount a coherent defense. I'm sure that there will be gamers who will rhapsodize over *STALINGRAD*, seduced by the familiar game system, the sexy graphics and the chance to refight one of the great battles of history. But while I applaud the design

STEEL PANTHERS

If you've ever played a tactical wargame, chances are, you're familiar with *Panzerblitz* and the host of imitators it spawned. Avalon Hill never got around to publishing a computer version, but SSI did a good job of capturing that same spirit with *PANZER STRIKE*, which included an editor to create your own small-unit WWII engagements. Over seven years later, *STEEL PANTHERS* brings Gary Grigsby's design up to current standards, while maintaining the fun of the original. In fact, the game feels a lot like a squad-level *PANZER GENERAL*, with leaders gaining promotions and experience as they move through a campaign. Line-of-sight is handled cleanly, and there are a wide variety of unit types, including engineers, *Panzerfaust* squads, and of course, tons of tanks. The scenarios range from France '40 and Berlin '45 to Stalingrad and even the Pacific, but the feel is Eastfront through and through—which means a lot of potential enjoyment for *Panzer* freaks everywhere.

team for trying to be innovative, I can't help but feel that this system has seen better days.

Although many strategic-level games sputter when attempting to recreate campaigns, *CLASH OF STEEL* is a notable exception. The latest version improves the Russian defense so well

but pretty accurate, view of the danger Paulus' 6th Army was in when it allowed itself to be tied down in building-to-building fights against a very determined Russian opponent—an excellent two-player contest.

The most accessible game for any gamer interested in the Eastern Front is *PANZER GENERAL*. Surprisingly, the simple learning curve doesn't compromise the AI, which is more competent than in many games of much greater complexity. The intent is obviously to emphasize playability over realism, and it doesn't always work perfectly. *Koenig* is a wild armored melee, closer to the German ideal of the battle, instead of the minefield-rich horror that the *Wehrmacht* had little chance of winning. But at its best, *PANZER GENERAL* offers a widely eclectic array of battles for the Eastfront connoisseur. *Sevastopol* introduces the Black Sea fleet, *Caucasus* is a classic slugfest, and *Budapest* shows both German defensive brilliance and the monolithic sweep of the Russian offensive. *Moscow* has a bit of everything: aerial struggles, desperate tank duels, fortifications galore, and the infamous Russian rocket artillery, all of which combine to make this a fine stand-alone battle, or the fitting climax to any Russian campaign.



STALINGRAD X 3 Gamers may relive the drive to the Volga (clockwise from above) operationally in *Clash of Steel*, try grand tactics in Atomic's 400 meters/hex *Stalingrad*, or get down-and-dirty at squad level with Gary Grigsby's *Steel Panthers*.

that *Burbovoss* is no longer a cakewalk for the Germans. The Drive on Stalingrad offers a very broad,



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D-Day And Beyond

By mid-1944, the Axis had been driven out of North Africa, the Russians were reclaiming hundreds of miles of lost territory, and the Italians were well on their way to being out of the war. Yet Germany still controlled France, The Low Countries, the Balkans, Denmark and Norway. Having learned from their capture of Sicily, the Allies planned an even bigger operation to break the back of the Third Reich: D-Day, the most ambitious amphibious assault in history.

Every strategic-level WWII game must have a D-Day of sorts, but to get the feel of the Normandy invasions, an operational approach is best. **Impressions** takes this almost to extremes with **D-DAY: THE BEGINNING OF THE END**. The system is pretty much **BLUE & THE GRAY** meets Eisenhower, with all the micro-managing that entails. Now, there is a certain visceral thrill to pushing tank units forward to meet the enemy, but moving them all individually—especially after large numbers are ashore—quickly becomes tedious. If you have the patience, **D-DAY** has a much better AI than other Grabowski designs, and the shorter scenarios are fun in two-player mode (hot-seat only, no modem).

A more traditional approach comes from **Atomic Games**, where **GOLD-JUNO-SWORD** and **UTAH BEACH** look amazingly like board wargames—only better. **GJS** was the last of the **V FOR VICTORY** series, but was released too soon by **360 Pacific** to be the jewel it could have been. The computer opponent is poor, and even with two human generals, the German forces are so outclassed that the game simply isn't enjoyable, despite the obvious technical achievements of the design.

With **UTAH BEACH**, however, the concept was still fresh, and the designers' enthusiasm for their subject translated into a wonderful game. The AI, while not great, put up a decent fight, and it was actually

possible to drive the Allies off the beaches with a little luck, or for the Allies to break out of the beachhead early and race toward Paris. Both sides have several opportunities to attack and defend, making for an excellent two-



Major Battles/Campaigns: D-Day Landings (UTAH BEACH); Breakout & Pursuit (BATTLES IN MOVEMENT); Operation Market-Garden (MARKET-GARDEN); Battle of the Bulge (BATTLEFRONT, PRINCE OF GEORGE); Fall of Berlin (PRINCE OF GEORGE, TAKE2)

player contest. The packaging is excellent, particularly the documentation, which is thorough and remarkably candid about the strengths and weaknesses of the game system. If you've ever wondered where **OPERATION CRUSADER** and **STALINGRAD** had their origins, **UTAH BEACH** is a worthwhile, enjoyable romp through gaming history.

If you are among those who can never get their fill of tanks, give **Deadly Games'** M-4 simulation a try. The first-person graphics are weak, but the audio includes enough authentic-sounding radio chatter to give you more than enough images of approaching enemy armor. The scenarios are OK, but the campaign gives a fun mini-tour through 1944 France and Belgium, including small actions unavailable in any other game. The copious feedback includes medals, promotions and replacements, enough to keep any gunner's 75mm warm, happy and ready for instant Windows action.

Although the **V FOR V** series does cover the post-D-Day fighting, to really get the essence of fighting in the *booge*, you're better off with **SSG's** **ANCIENT BATTLES IN**

NORMANDY. The same *convits* apply here as in the parent **BATTLEFRONT** system, but there are several battles here not found in any other notable game, in particular the savage fighting on Omaha beach.

If the **SSG** system doesn't simulate confusion on the battlefield well enough to suit your tastes, try **MARKET GARDEN**, another good game in the **V FOR VICTORY** series. Regardless of whether you play from the British or German viewpoint, chaos reigns throughout, with pockets of desperate firefights scattered about the battlefield. That the game is actually interesting and fun to play despite all this is a tribute to the design, which includes several enhancements over **UTAH BEACH**. Because of the nature of the battle and the complexities involved in simulating it, this is not a game for novices, but it remains the best way to appreciate this controversial campaign. Although **MARKET GARDEN** was somewhat buggy when released, this should be taken care of in the upcoming re-release by **Avalon Hill**. Those who are on-line could try a different approach to **OPERATION MARKET GARDEN**, the **Multi-Player Games Network** conversion of **GDW's** boardgame. The double-blind aspects, tedious in the boardgame, are superbly suited to the on-line format versus another human general.



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Regardless of the outcome of Operation Market-Garden, the Allied push to the Rhine was inevitable. Part of the breakout from the beachheads is covered in the scenarios found in Gary Grigsby's WESTERN FRONT (SS1), but the same reservations apply as in SECOND FRONT. There are no comprehensive studies of, say, Patton and the Third Army as yet, but the sequel to PANZER GENERAL may take care of this wargaming dilemma (see page 62). Until then, we must be content with scenarios of the Battle of the Bulge, one of the most-simulated subjects in all of wargaming. (Noted boardgame designer Danny Parker has forged a career from virtually nothing but Bulge games.) Whether the Germans, in retrospect, could have won seems largely irrelevant. Even though the British, Canadians and other Allied forces were involved, the Bulge is remembered largely as an American battle. This viewpoint is reflected by most games on the subject, which center on the fighting around Bastogne.

Once again we find that older is often better, as BATTLEFRONT does a good job of showing the stubborn US resistance to the

German advance at Bastogne. This scenario does artificially restrict the action, but is one of those rare duels-to-the-death actually worth the trouble. The victory conditions are simple but reasonable: Hold the town of Bastogne, and destroy as much enemy armor as possible. For quick and dirty action, this has been little surpassed in the past seven years. The upcoming THE LAST BLITZKRIEG promises to be the BATTLEFRONT of the '90s, but in the meantime, *Bastogne* will serve as a good appetizer.

Chris Crawford's PATTON STRIKES BACK (*Broderbund*) was a noble experiment, attempting to provide an entertaining game with a teaching tool on the Battle of the Bulge. Problem is, the "coffee-table book on a computer" approach used here doesn't give enough insight into the Bulge—if you want a good WWII educational CD, try NORMANDY: THE GREAT CRUSADE by *The Discovery Channel* instead. The elusive "rest of us" that Crawford was reportedly trying to reach ended up confused by the clunky combat and movement systems, with novices and grognards alike quickly coming to the conclusion that as a game, PATTON strikes out.

Although it doesn't contain the overt multimedia elements of PATTON, the *Bulge* of PANZER GENERAL is both eerie and strangely compelling, especially when played as part of a campaign. Because of the ambitious timetable imposed by the German General Staff, it's easy to feel the sense of desperation which gripped the



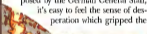
The Last Blitzkrieg

The major complaint I have about WWII computer games is that they don't handle breakthroughs by mechanized forces as well as their cardgame counterparts. SSG is trying to change all that with their upcoming title THE LAST BLITZKRIEG. Roger Keating and Ian Trout designs always seem to have a strong computer opponent, which should be augmented by the new operational AI developed specifically for this game. Six scenarios and a campaign cover the Battle of the Bulge in carefully rendered SVGA detail. The Operations Point system gives a fluid feel as each battle commences, while penalties from combat, terrain, etc., allow for the infamous traffic jams so important to slowing the German advance. The aim of the designers is to make this both realistic and accessible, and they're certainly off to a great start.

secretly assembled forces launched at the Allied lines in the last German offensive. Like a punch-drunk prizefighter past its prime, the *Wehrmacht* tries to land one last haymaker. But the US Army had matured into one of the great fighting forces of the modern era, and generally proves more than a match for its opponent. The best winning strategy is not readily obvious, making this a battle worth visiting again and again.

The *Fall of Berlin*, as seen in PANZER GENERAL, is more backs-to-the-wall action; but this time, the inevitability of the Allied victory makes for a sobering scenario. It should be played as such from both the German, and, if you can convince someone to let you pound on them, from the Allied perspective in a two-player game. If you must play solitary, PANZER GENERAL has an incredible number of exotic weapons, such as the Me-262, which can sustain interest even while your forces are being justly pummeled by the victorious Allies.

The TANKS! version of a crumbling Berlin offers a viable alternative. The fighting around the city seems to have a grittier feel, which is actually helped by the lack of graphic sheen when compared to PANZER GENERAL. Moving Sherman tanks through the streets of Berlin, having just vanquished the last of the German resistance, is an important close to any wargamer's tour of Europe.



SUMMER VACATION The Vera Vickers tour begins in June on the beaches of Normandy, moves to scenic wartime Paris, and ends with stormy Holland in September, courtesy of UTAH BEACH, GOLD-JEWEL-SWEEP and MARKET-GARDEN.



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The Big Picture

Fighting through the rubble of Stalingrad or silently descending, chutes unfurled, to drop down on Crete, is a wonderful challenge.

Completing a campaign in *PANZER GENERAL* is undeniably satisfying. Yet as any wargamer knows, there is an irresistible allure to fighting "The Whole War." Several games have tried to harness that siren call, but their success has been as varied as that of the WWII participants themselves.

For a good introduction to WWII, you could do a lot worse than *THE BIG THREE*. *Big Time Software's* brainchild has been revamped by *Alliance*, and now has an AI to go along with the improved graphics. The Windows format offers more than just bug-free gameplay, as the simple but effective interface also keeps the learning curve to a bare minimum. The style of play is a combination of *Axis & Allies*, *Third Reich* and just enough *World in Flames* to add spice, as gamers deal with diplomacy, strategic combat, supply and the problems

of mobilization. The scenarios aren't quite up to *CLASH OF STEEL* standards, but there is always a place for a good beginner's game, and *THE BIG THREE* will have just about anyone campaigning across Europe in record time. Let's hope that this modest success inspires Steven Jones to be more ambitious with his next design.

Of course, too much ambition can get you in trouble, which is exactly what happened to SSI's *STORM ACROSS EUROPE*. For instance, each of the warring countries are rated for "Stalin Sanity" or some other label, which measures their insulation from politics. The German political advantage is ridiculous—simply because they are the bad guys, I suppose—as they can invade nominal allies like Spain or Sweden with impunity. There's nothing wrong with "what-if" options, especially in a strategic-level game, but *STORM ACROSS EUROPE* often doesn't make you pay for the consequences of your actions. A weird mix of abstractions (tactical air points) and unneeded complexity (lots of naval rules, with little resulting action) makes for a poor simulation of WWII, and a worse game.

360 Pacific increased the simulation ante with *HIGH COMMAND*, by taking the old *Colorado Computer Creations* product and fleshing it out with SVGA graphics and a toolbar interface. Such niceties could not, however, lessen the impact of one of the most needlessly complex

games ever released for the computer. The sequence of play makes that of *PACIFIC WAR* look accessible by comparison. The economic sub-system is a game unto itself, and the diplomatic AI seems to rely more on obfuscation than devious backstabbing. Worst of all, after struggling through the overbearing documentation, you find that the heart of the game, the combat system, simply doesn't work well enough to justify the level of detail. While two players can struggle along, it's doubtful anyone will have the patience to fight through an entire war, and the AI is sadly inept.

Another complex game with AI woes is hoping to finally emerge, wraith-like, from the mists which have shrouded its troubled transition to IBM shores. It's easy to pick on *THIRD REICH*, because the AI for the Atari ST and Amiga versions was even worse than that of *HIGH COMMAND*. The pleasant surprise is that the IBM version may actually do justice to this boardgame classic from *Avalon Hill*. As it currently stands, the computer has separate AI for strategic plans, tactically relevant objectives, and the destruction of enemy troops. Unlike former conversions, the IBM game will include virtually all of the board game's rules, in the hopes that some of their mind-numbing complications will be tempered by the computer format. Even so, this is not going to be an easy game to learn. You just won't have to worry about losing a game



CARDBOARD CUTOUTS
Units in *The Big Three* (above) sport icons, while the IBM version of *Third Reich* (right) uses familiar military symbols. Both games will seem like family to any board wargamer.





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because your opponent points out how you violated Rule 37.5.3B, just as you were about to capture Berlin. The old graphics (mostly white) are included for grognards, with a new colored map for novices (as though an inexperienced player would even attempt this game). If noted ASL guru Bob McNamara can pull this off, he should receive the

Royal Cluster of Avalon; he'll already have the gratitude of every diehard WWII gamer.

With all due respect to the other games listed above, there is no doubt that if you want to fight the entire war, from the stormy Atlantic, to the scorching North African desert, to the frozen steppes of Russia, *CLASH OF STEEL* is still the best overall. Some games are more realistic, and others have more dazzling graphics, but few games in any genre deliver more of what they promise. In a fairly simple package, *CLASH OF STEEL* shows why Malta is so important to the outcome of the North African campaign. The Italians are hard to use properly in the Mediterranean, as they should be. The naval and strategic bombing rules are abstract, but integrate seamlessly with the rest of the design. Similarly, the Russian winter rules may be criticized as inelegant, yet it's difficult to argue with how well they work. The entire game is designed for effect, which can result in some inaccuracies, but these are far from the egregious excesses of other strategic WWII games. At least with *CLASH OF STEEL*, it's obvious how and why events unfold; the feedback is good for both veteran and novice alike, and brings them back for more. If it weren't for *CLASH OF STEEL*, it's doubtful that there would be a *PANZER GENERAL*; or at least *PANZER GENERAL* wouldn't be as good as it is.

To all those gamers who struggle on IBM, Mac and Windows beaches, fight in polygon-generated planes, shoot from silicon tanks, and cajole tired and often-pinealed infantry to capture each objective in their path, we can only hope that your next gaming tour of duty will be as exhilarating as ours was. See you at the 75th Anniversary of the Allied Victory in Europe... ☉



ALLIED GENERAL

SSI's designers may not be wargaming deities, but they have risen to at least patron saints after the release of *PANZER GENERAL*. The forthcoming sequel, *ALLIED GENERAL*, mates the core of the best-received wargame in nearly a decade with a unique multiple perspective. You may fight as either a Russian, British or American general, where you will have to develop flexible tactics to maximize the effectiveness of the variety of different troops and equipment for each army. This approach goes beyond even *PANZER GENERAL* in giving an overall view of WWII in Europe, and also offers even more opportunity for role-playing. After running the Germans out of North Africa, for instance, you could either retire as a war hero, or like Montgomery, go after more glory at D-Day. While there will be little change in the main game engine, more feedback will be provided through individual unit histories, complete with battle performance ratings for each formation. Better multimedia enhancements promises new life for those pint-sized archival WWII films, and Allied invasion plans call for voice-overs rivaling those of their German counterpart. Over 30 new scenarios and several campaigns are planned for inclusion, with the game's release scheduled in time for Christmas '95, so save those Liberty dimes!

A Wargaming Tour Of WWII In Europe

Game	Year	Theatre/Period	Graphics	Realism	Solo	2-Player	Replay Value	Overall
ACES OF THE DEEP	1994	War At Sea	A-	A	A	N/A	A	A
BATTLES FOR NORTH AFRICA	1967	North Africa	D	B-	B-	B-	B	B-
BATTLEFRONT	1986	Blitz, East, D-Day	D	B	B	B	B	B-
BATTLES IN NORMANDY	1987	D-Day	D+	B+	B	B	B+	B
BATTLE OF BRITAIN 2	1994	Blitz	C-	B	C+	N/A	C-	C-
CLASH OF STEEL	1993	The Big Picture	B-	B	B+	A	A	A-
D-DAY: BEGINNING OF END	1994	D-Day	B	C+	C	B	C+	C+
DECISION IN THE DESERT	1985	North Africa	C-	B+	B+	A	B+	B+
FIRE BRIGADE	1987	East	B-	A-	B	B+	B	B
GOLD-JUNO-SWORD	1993	D-Day	A-	B	C-	C	C	C
GREAT NAVAL BATTLES	1992	War At Sea	B+	B-	B-	B	B-	B-
GND SODAKING DISKS	1993	War At Sea	B+	B	B	B+	B	B
GREAT NAVAL BATTLES II	1994	War At Sea	A-	C-	C-	B-	C-	C-
HIGH COMMAND	1993	The Big Picture	A	C+	D+	C+	C	C-
KAMPFRUFYTC	1985	East	D	B+	B	B+	B	B
KNIGHTS OF THE DESERT	1985	North Africa	D-	D+	D	D	D-	D-
KREISSMARINE	1989	War At Sea	N/A	B+	B	B+	B+	B+
M-4	1993	D-Day	C	C+	B-	N/A	B	B-
MARKET-GARDEN	1992	D-Day	B+	B+	B	B+	B+	B+
MARKET-GARDEN ONLINE	1994	D-Day	B	B+	N/A	A-	B+	B+
OPERATION CRUSADER	1994	North Africa	A-	A-	B+	A	A-	A-
PANZER GENERAL	1994	All	B	A+	A	A+	A+	A+
PANZER STRIKE	1987	East	D+	B-	B+	B+	B	B-
PATTON STRIKES BACK	1990	D-Day	B-	C+	C	C	D	C-
ROMMEL AT EL ALAMEIN	1986	North Africa	N/A	B	B-	B	B-	B-
ROMMEL AT GAZALA	1987	North Africa	N/A	B	B-	B+	B	B
ROMMEL AT TOSKNAK	1985	North Africa	F	D+	F	D-	F	F
SECOND FRONT	1992	East	B-	C+	B	B+	B	B+
STALINGRAD	1995	East	A	B-	C+	B+	B	B-
STEEL ACROSS EUROPE	1989	The Big Picture	C-	C-	C+	C	C	C
TANKS!	1994	Blitz, D-Day, East	A-	B	B	B+	B	B
THE BIG THREE	1995	The Big Picture	B+	B-	B	B+	B-	B-
THEIR FINEST HOUR	1989	Blitz	B	A-	A-	N/A	A-	A-
TIGERS ON THE PROWL	1994	East	C-	A	B+	A	A-	A-
U-BOAT	1993	War At Sea	B-	B+	B+	N/A	B+	B+
UTAH BEACH	1992	D-Day	B+	A-	B+	A	B+	A-
YELLOW LUNG	1992	East	B+	B-	C-	C	D	C-
WAR IN RUSSIA	1993	East	B	C+	B-	B-	C	C+
WESTERN FRONT	1992	D-Day	B-	B	B	B+	B	B
WOLFPACK	1990	War At Sea	B-	D+	D	N/A	D	D
WW2 AIR FORCE CADRE	1993	Blitz	B-	D+	C-	C	D	C-

Silverload

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TV

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by John Brassil with Mike Owen

TV OR NOT TV? THAT IS THE QUESTION, ONE WHICH WE WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER IN OUR REVIEW OF SOME hardware that transforms the VGA (Video Graphics Array) output from your PC to the National Television Standards Committee (NTSC) format used by televisions in North America. These hardware devices, generally known as "NTSC converters," are either external devices that sit outside your computer like an external modem, or "bus cards" that you insert into your bus slots exactly as you would a sound or video card. With a simple installation, you could be getting the Big Picture.

But would you want to? As you'll see in

our reviews, NTSC converters work fairly well for gaming, delivering a decent picture on a quality TV set. But there are other issues than visual quality to consider. A big one is logistics. To play games on your TV will require that you bring your TV to the computer or your computer to the TV. If you've got a spare TV in the house that you can tote into your den, you're set. If you've got an enormous TV in the living room that can't be moved, then you've got to truck your computer and all its peripherals, which can be a hassle. Laptop computers work best in this case.

Another issue is the type of games you want to play. Graphically intense games like DOOM or NASCAR RACING work very well on the TV, but text-intensive adven-

ture games might not. With a quality TV set, reading text on-screen is fine, but with a lower quality screen, text can get washed out and grainy, and can strain the eyes.

BEHIND THE SCREENS

How does the NTSC conversion technology work? One of the reasons the PC to NTSC process works at all is that PC monitors and TV sets have the same 4:3 aspect ratio of width to height, as opposed to a movie theater screen, which is 16:9. The difference between the film format and the TV format is the reason for the black bars seen on "letterboxed" movies and the slightly distorted pictures of movies released on tape. In the PC to TV conversion, there is very little picture distortion

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due to this similarity in aspect ratios.

A TV using the NTSC system has 525 lines of resolution and displays 60 frames per second, with two frames per field. This means the TV display is interlaced, drawing every other line on the screen 60 times a second. As anyone who has ever used an interlaced monitor knows, this causes the screen to flicker, which is fine for the constantly moving images that TV normally delivers, but can be very apparent on a static screen display from a computer. It is also worthwhile to note that 525 lines of TV resolution translates to about 466 pixels of screen height and 620 of width, so adjustments must be made to the NTSC signal in order to fit all of the PC's 640x480 screen. Most of these NTSC converters support true color VGA (16.7 million colors); there are a few that only support 256-colors, but that really isn't much of a drawback for gamers, since there are very few products currently on the market that use more colors than that anyway.

Input to a TV set is mainly designed to be through RCA composite or S-Video (also known as Super VHS or S-VHS) jacks. The RCA jacks are single-pin connectors like those found in stereo systems, and combine chrominance (color) and luminance (brightness) information in the same signal. A four-pin approach allows the S-video signal to separate the chrominance and luminance components, resulting in improved picture quality. If your TV is an older model that doesn't have input jacks, you will need to use a Radio Frequency (RF) converter to change the signal so it can be fed through the antenna leads, but be aware that this will result in further degradation of picture quality.

For our tests we used a 26" Mitsubishi CS-2610R model television with RCA composite and S-VHS inputs. Our test computer was an IBM PC clone with a Diamond STEALTH 24 VLB video card with 1MB of video memory. The STEALTH 24 uses the S3 89C805 chipset, which worked with all the units except one. Just for grins we also booked up a Toshiba 4600C laptop through its external VGA connector, and it produced essentially the same results as our desktop system.

direct mail. Besides being the smallest (palm-sized) unit we looked at, it's also the least expensive, selling for about \$70 less than the next cheapest unit. There's also a ZAPPER bundle available which includes three games (PRINCE OF PERSIA,



JETFIGHTER II and SPECTRE CHALLENGER) for about the same price.

Installation of this external unit was a breeze, as it was for all the external units we tested. There were pictures of all the included components to accompany the text in the manual, including diagrams of all the required connections. The cable from the VGA connector that would normally go to the monitor is replaced by a Y-cable that has connections for both the converter and a PC monitor. The converter has output connections for composite and S-video TV input. All the units we tested supported both of these output types.

The first setup we tried was the RCA (Composite Video Signal) connection, which provided virtually unreadable text in DOS. Unfortunately, with the Diamond Stealth card, this muddled text mode was all we could get out of the GAME ZAPPER.

Installing the software was quick (about 90 seconds) and easy. Included was a README file which explained the video problems we were having. The GAME ZAPPER is incompatible with Diamond STEALTH CARD, Orchid FAHRENHEIT, and cards using Tseng ET4000c and ET4000w chipsets. Three software drivers were provided, none of which corrected the incompatibility problem. The memory resident (TSR) programs used hot-key

combinations to control TV or monitor output, left/right and up/down picture adjustment, and horizontal overscanning, which is used to make the displayed image take up the entire screen instead of leaving borders on the left and right edges of the picture. However, several of the games we tried took control of the keyboard, rendering the hot-keys inoperative. This problem was common to all the units we tested, so we found it to be a good idea to adjust the screen positioning before using a game.

We were able to get Apogee's MONSTER BASH (an EGA game) working, but it only displayed on the left half of the screen. As it turned out, the only converter which used the full screen for EGA games was the TV CONVERTER (below).

We were finally able to view graphics by connecting a Toshiba laptop to the GAME ZAPPER. When connected to the Toshiba laptop through its external VGA connector, text mode was not enabled, but MASTER OF ORION looked great! Finally, some output from a game! It only worked with the laptop's display turned off, however.

For more information, contact ADS at (800) 888-5244.

ADVANCED DIGITAL SYSTEMS

TV ELITE

Our next product was another ADS product, the TV ELITE, which has a street price of about \$139 for the internal version and \$219 for the external. Hardware setup was fast and easy, and the documentation was very similar to that provided with the GAME ZAPPER. The converter unit is larger—about the size of a portable CD player—and includes outputs for both the monitor and TV directly from the adapter. A small plastic tool is provided for adjusting the output brightness of the unit. Darker pictures on the TV make the scan lines less noticeable, improving appearance on the TV screen. The TV display was noticeably lighter on all the converters we tested using the factory default brightness settings, so having this kind of feature available is a definite plus, although the TV's brightness control can serve the same purpose.

ADVANCED DIGITAL SYSTEMS

GAME ZAPPER

The first product we reviewed was the GAME ZAPPER from Advanced Digital Systems, which sells for about \$78 through

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Technologies
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Again, we tried the RCA connection first. Software installation for this product requires Windows (it is possible to just copy the DOS driver from the install disk if you don't need or want the Windows version) and offers hardware summary information in addition to the install program. The FLICFREE DOS driver mentioned in the manual has been replaced by the file ELITEVDO, as described in the README file. A Windows-based driver called VGA2TV is also provided. Note that while the GAMZAPLER required a TSR program to work properly, it's not necessary to load one for the TV ELITE. However, screen adjustments and flicker reduction aren't possible without it.

The games we tried looked pretty good on the TV. There was a bit less color saturation than others, but the difference in size more than made up for it. DOOM, for instance, was a much more "in your face" experience. RAPTOR, the shareware shooter from Apogee, also looked very nice on the big screen. One thing that might be helpful is to find an extension for the keyboard to allow a little separation from the TV. This would have the dual benefit of making the scan lines less noticeable and reducing radiation exposure from the cathode ray tube. When we tried the Asteroids game from Microsoft's ARCADE FOR WINDOWS, we got some noticeable shadowing, but switching to S-video input fixed that problem.

For more information, contact ADS at (800) 888-5244.

AITeCH

MULTIPRO CTV

Our next stop on the converter trail was a look at the AITeCH MULTIPRO CTV, with a street tag of about \$239, next-to-

highest of the group. This one initially appeared to be the cream of the crop, with the same approximate physical dimensions as the TV Elite and TGF, and also features vertical adjustment and under/overscan controls built into the unit. A "freeze" button also keeps the current image on the TV while the monitor display changes, a feature handy for the business presentation market at which the CTV is aimed. An RF converter is also built into the unit, making this the only converter to directly support RF



conversion. Also included in the package are cables and adapters for Macintosh computers and a cable TV input switcher.

Although not absolutely required, Windows and DOS drivers that allow horizontal and vertical display adjustment are included. However, these are the only functions performed through the software drivers, so options like TV output toggling and flicker reduction are not available. The instructions in the manual are a bit thin in spots, but do an adequate job of addressing installation and troubleshooting.

Unfortunately, the hardware-intensive approach of the CTV has some significant drawbacks. The overscan mode filled up the screen all right, but at a noticeable loss in picture quality, and undescanning cuts off a significant portion of the display area. The vertical adjustment button doesn't allow scrolling up or down, just a 40-line jump in either direction. The picture quality just wasn't as good as some of the other units we tested.

For more information, contact AITeCH at (800) 882-8184.

AITeCH

GAMEPLAYER TV

We also looked at another AITeCH product, the GAMEPLAYER TV, one of two internal units in the review. The street price for this unit is about \$189. Besides the NTSC conversion, the card also has a Yamaha OPL2 chip, enabling it to act as a 12-bit monophonic sound card providing Sound Blaster 2.0 and AdLib emulation. In fact, most of the manual is devoted to describing the installation and use of the

Windows Sound System utilities which come with the GAMEPLAYER TV. The video software provided was none other than the DOS and Windows versions of our old friend FLICFREE. Seeing this, we checked the FCC ID for the card, and sure enough, "JRS-FCN-1025" is about as close as you can get to the ID of the TV ELITE and TV GAMER PLUS.

The testing we did on the video features of the card produced essentially identical results to the TV ELITE and the TV GAMER PLUS, which is what we had expected. Although it was a bit out of scope, we disabled the sound card already in the PC and hooked the GAMEPLAYER TV's audio output directly into the television's sound system. We had no problems using the default settings, and the sound quality was actually not too bad from the TV's built-in speakers. We didn't load or use the Windows sound driver and Audio Accessories, since programs like the Audio Recorder and Talking Calculator are a bit off-topic for this review. But they're there for those who are interested.

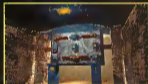
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Actual screen images from the game.

TV CODER

The other internal unit we looked at was the TV CODER from Creative Labs. It sells for about \$139. The TV CODER is the only converter we tested that supports both NTSC and PAL (the European TV format). In fact, the software provided allows for selection of three types of NTSC and three types of PAL, although there's no description in the manual of what the different types are. In general, though, the manual was the best of the bunch, with a well-organized, professional layout.

The picture quality from the TV CODER was as good or better than any of the units we tested. What really set the TV CODER apart from the other converters, however, was the installation and utility software that came with it. Besides a slight glitch deciding which floppy drive to use, the installation program ran smoothly, automatically updating the boot files and inserting an automatic installation script in the WIN.INI file for the Windows utilities.

We were quite surprised to initially see the TV display in black and white, and although we finally did get color output, it took a bit of experimenting with the "Color-Run Frequency" slider and the "Signal Type" buttons (NTSC-M is what eventually gave us color). Playing with the "Horizontal Alignment" slider got us into big trouble, though, since it garbled and then blanked the Windows display, a problem which we were only able to correct by deleting and reinstalling the TV CODER software. There are also check boxes for color output and toggling the TV display on and off.

The other neat Windows utility was the Color Lookup Table (CLUT), which allows mapping of input RGB values to output. This process is hard to describe, but it uses an X(input)-Y(output) graph to create a color line for the Red, Green and Blue components of the signal. Besides the default CLUT provided, there's also a Reverse, which looks essentially like a

photo negative of the original image, and Gamma corrections which adjust the apparent brightness, as well as the ability to create user-defined configurations. These changes are made to the VGA output stream, so the results can be seen on both the TV and the computer monitor, if one is connected.

All these adjustments can also be made in DOS, either from the command line with the TVSET utility, or the TSR pop-



up TVADJUST, although it's hard to conceive of using the CLUT functions without the Windows interface.

For more information, contact Creative Labs, Inc. at (800) 998-1000.

ADDA TECHNOLOGIES

AVERKEY 3

Finally, we looked at another hardware-only solution, the AVERKEY 3 from ADDA Technologies, which goes for \$269 through direct mail, making it the most expensive of the products we tested. This unit also comes with some Windows-based presentation software, but it isn't required for the unit to function properly. The neat thing about the AVERKEY 3 was that all the controls are built into an infrared remote, so it's possible to adjust the picture from across the room. In fact, you have to use the remote, since there are no controls on the unit itself. There are buttons for power on/off, panning, width control, screen position, brightness, overscan, freeze frame, three sharpness levels, saving the current settings or resetting to factory defaults, and a unique "zoom" feature that magnifies a portion of the screen to twice its normal size.

Like the MULTI-PRO CTV, this unit worked fine with all the games we tried, but like the other hardware-only solution, the picture quality just wasn't as crisp as some of the other units. The other benefit of the AVERKEY 3 is that it will support 800x600 on NTSC units, although the NTSC display conversion results in a large chunk of the screen not being displayed.

For more information, contact ADDA Technologies at (510) 770-9899.

SCREEN WRAP

Each of the units we looked at has its own strengths and weaknesses. The GAME ZAPPER has a low price, but doesn't support several popular video cards. The TV-ELITE and TV GAMER PLUS both do an adequate job, but don't have much in the way of extra features. The plus and minus on the MULTI-PRO CTV is a hardware-intensive solution that also features Macintosh support, but with little flexibility and so-so picture quality. The GAMEPLAYER TV is a one-stop solution to audio and video upgrade for a basic PC, but the mono FM synthesis sound-card feature might not be that big of a deal in a world that's increasingly stereo- and wavetable-oriented. The TV CODER has some nice software utilities and PAL support, but lacks the convenience of the external units we tested. The AVERKEY 3 doesn't use any of your precious memory, has a neat infrared remote, but falls short in picture clarity and has the highest price tag as well, although there is a \$149 model available that doesn't include the remote.

Which unit you choose depends on your particular needs and preferences. The TV ELITE and TV CODER both seem to cover the essentials quite well, and at about \$140, provide a big-screen thrill you just can't get from a PC monitor. For those fortunate souls out there with a high-end TV, being able to use the Picture in Picture (PIP) feature to swap between output from the computer and the TV tuner means you can squeeze in a few rounds of X-COM during commercials. It will also save some bucks on an external monitor for a laptop if you can pry the rest of the family away from the Simpsons.

TV or not TV? Well, it depends on the quality of your TV and just how large you can handle DOOM demons. As for me, to paraphrase a popular tune (Fade in Sting's voice) "I want my...I want my...I want my big TV." ☺

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A Gamer's View Of

OS/2

WARP

*IBM's New 32-bit Operating System Is A Real Workhorse,
But Does It Have Time To Play?*

by Jerry Golick

I HAVE BEEN A USER OF IBM'S OS/2 OPERATING SYSTEM FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS NOW, USING IT MOSTLY FOR MY WORK. I really like the capabilities of this operating system when it comes to things like communication and integration. But when it comes to games I've been a die-hard DOS veteran. I've never found a reason to run games under OS/2 (or any other non-DOS operating system), since it seems that if a game has been written to run under DOS there's no reason to add the additional headaches of an extra operating system. Besides, DOS seems to be the fastest operating system around for high-speed action games and simulations when using IBM-compatible machines. As a result, my hard drive is set up with OS/2 for business and DOS for pleasure, and rarely do the twain meet. But all that may be changing. You see, I've been Warpel.

WHY WARP?

But before I tell you about IBM's new OS/2 Warp, an enhanced version of OS/2, let me tell you about my problems using DOS for games. If you're like me you probably have a stack of "boot disks" beside your machine. Games can be very picky about the memory configuration that they want to run in, and while reboot-

ing the machine to load a new configuration is not the worst thing in the world, it is certainly an inconvenience I could do without.

Even more irritating is having to interrupt a game of DOOM for work! Not only do I have to stop playing, but I then have to reboot the machine so that I can get to my work environment. When I'm on the phone with someone, the delay becomes frustrating.

Let's face it. The DOS interface is not the world's most attractive. While typing commands might be considered fun by some, it's something else that I could do without. One of the reasons for the popularity of graphical environments like Microsoft's Windows or IBM's OS/2 is the fact that you can do so much without having to type commands.

Does Warp solve all of these DOS problems? No, not all of them. But it solves enough of them to make it worth a look. Depending on what you are trying to do, Warp can be a great help.

Let's start with the problem of multiple boot disks. OS/2 eliminates this problem

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by allowing you to define different DOS environments that are specific to the needs of a program. You can give one game EMS memory and another XMS. You can choose the type of graphics environment you want. In fact, you can have a separate AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS for each game. There's no need to play around with memory managers because Warp manages the memory for you.

To simplify things a bit, Warp comes with a number of preset configurations



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Art by Sam Hall (P.15)

for many popular games. After selecting the "Add Programs" icon, WARP will scan your hard drive looking for any DOS, Windows, or OS/2 programs that are in the database. If found, WARP automatically sets up the correct icons/settings for each one.

Of course in some cases you may want to go back to DOS. WARP offers two ways of doing this. Without getting into a long explanation, the end result is that if you want "vanilla" DOS, you can have it.

Most DOS games perform best in a full screen environment, which is accomplished easily enough, and when you are running under WARP a simple keystroke combination (either <CNT>-<ESCAPE> or <ALT>-<ESCAPE>) will

Windows users will have to spend some time learning another graphical interface, and might even find it easier to use. I strongly suggest that new users take the provided tutorial and that you don't forget about the right mouse button. Almost every operation that you want to perform can be done via the mouse.

WARP also offers some neat ways to customize the interface for your own needs. For instance, you can create your own desktop icons and custom menus for those icons.

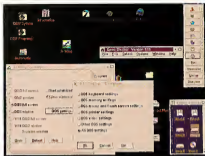
You can even have multiple desktop configurations—one for games and one for work.

WARP AND THE SERIOUS GAMER

What about games and WARP? If you play a lot of flight simulators and high-speed action games, and you don't have a very high-end processor, you may find yourself going back to vanilla DOS pretty often. Most of these processor-intensive games work faster without OS/2, and some won't work at all since OS/2 has some

problems with games that use Protected Mode. On the other hand, if you mostly play strategy games, WARP is great. Put another way, WARP is fine if you don't need high-speed graphics.

To avoid these speed and compatibility issues, games must be programmed specifically for OS/2, and such "native" games are finally beginning to appear. GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS from Stardock Systems is an OS/2-only game. It's something like a combination of MASTER OF ORION and SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION. The

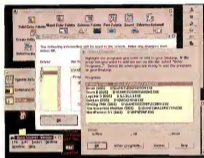


SET UP FOR THE KILL OS/2 Warp offers an enormous number of options when setting up the environment for a specific program. For every program, you can determine memory, video display, and control settings, among others.

on-line buzz over this game has become quite a roar lately, due to its deep, addicting gameplay. In addition, a native version of SIMCITY is available, SIM CITY 2000 is in the works, and there has even been some talk of a popular game that rhymes with "room." There are also many native shareware games currently in circulation.

GAMING AIN'T EVERYTHING

Are there other reasons to give WARP a try, even if you still go back to DOS for your games? You bet. WARP comes with something called the Bonus Pack. It's basically a value-added set of programs intended to show what WARP can do. One of the programs is the Internet Access Kit (IAK). It provides single click



PRE-CONFIGURATION OS/2 Warp comes packaged with a number of preset configurations for games. When you add a program to your desktop, Warp will scan your hard drive looking for programs that match its database. If a match is found, the program will be automatically configured for optimum OS/2 performance.

take you back to the OS/2 interface. Depending on how you have arranged things, your game will either be suspended or active until you get back to it. One interesting side effect of this feature is that you can have multiple games running at the same time. This means you can quickly switch between games as the mood strikes you. So, while you're waiting for your opponent at the other end of the telephone line to take his turn in EMPIRE DELUXE, you can shoot a couple of holes of golf. This also means that my *gambus interruptus* problem is solved. When my work duties call on short notice, I just "hot-key" back to OS/2, do my work, and flip back into the game where I left off. Very handy!

What can I say about the interface? You will either like it or you won't. I like it.



ON THE WINDOW After a simple configuration, LucasArts' X-Wing runs in its own Warp window. However, as with most high-speed DOS games, X-Wing will run much faster in a full DOS screen than in a desktop window.

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access to the Internet. You get all your favorite Internet programs like Gopher, Telnet, FTP, NewsReader and others. A multimedia mail package called Ultimail is also included. But my favorite is the Web Explorer, a graphical interface to the World Wide Web (WWW). The WWW is a multimedia, hypertext-based chunk of the Internet that contains more information than you could ever dream of. It grows bigger everyday. Web Explorer allows users to explore the Web from within OS/2, is extremely easy to use, and a lot of fun. Many game companies maintain WWW links so you can get the latest info about your favorite games. But beware! You can spend a great deal of time, and consequently money, exploring the Web. Once you start exploring you never know where you may end up.

Access to the Internet is provided by IBM's Advantix network, and it can get expensive. However, the same program can be used to link up to your own Internet access provider if you already have one. (For those who are more technically minded, the interface currently supports SLIP, with PPP to be available by the time you read this.)

WARP also comes with a graphical front-end to CompuServe, similar to the WinCin interface for Windows. The two primary support areas for OS/2 on CompuServe are OS2USER and OS2SUPPORT. In OS2USER you can find a section called "Fun and Games," which is a good place to ask your game-related questions when it comes to making them work (or not work) under WARP.

Occasionally, WARP allows you to do things that are simply impossible using DOS or Windows, like running X-WING in a window on the WARP desktop. Unfortunately, not all games can be run in this fashion. By the way, I don't suggest trying to play X-WING in a window unless you have a very fast processor.

So, is WARP for you? As I said, that depends on what you are trying to do. I have always felt that OS/2 was a great operating system in terms of integration. Since you can run DOS, Windows, and OS/2 applications at the same time, this means that you can build an interface that works the way you want. If you're a high-speed action or simulation player, however, you may want to stick to DOS.

In terms of system requirements, WARP wants a lot of disk space (about 50 megabytes), and while it can run with

four megabytes of RAM, I would suggest eight as a minimum. The installation program is simple and flexible, with both a quick installation option and an advanced option that allows you to set up a boot manager and partitioned drives. And the price is nice—you can get a copy for less than \$100.

From the numbers, it's likely that most of you own Windows, and some of

you are eagerly awaiting the release of WINDOWS '95. Well, while you wait (and wait) for the Microsoft release, know that there are other operating system options, and that OS/2 Warp may be the best among them. With it, you can play many of your DOS/Windows games, explore the Internet, and even get some work done. In other words, you can get Warped. ☺

Conquest Of The "Natives"

There are a couple of native OS/2 games, but one in particular has made quite a stir. GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS from Stardock Systems (distributed by Advanced Idea Machines, 801-572-4018) is a conquest game in the style of MASTER OF ORION and SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION. Like most games of this type, you start with a single colony ship and a megalomaniacal desire to control the galaxy. You can select the galaxy size that you want to play in and the number of opponents you want to play against (from one to five). The computer-controlled players can also be assigned "personality" profiles which range from evil to friendly. Each star system will have between 0 and 12 planets, some of which may be suitable for colonization.

Once you establish a colony you must decide how to develop its resources. Beyond building ships and researching new technologies, you can also improve the planet with a wide variety of projects such as soil enrichment, nano-technology, schools, and even an entertainment network to keep the population happy.

Of course, the computer opponents have their own empire building dreams. Even the "friendly" opponents expand quite rapidly. As in CIVILIZATION, you can form trade and political alliances. These are important, especially in the early stages of the game, as they will help you avoid conflicts that you do not have the resources to pursue.

Also as in CIVILIZATION, technology is built upon technology, and it can be difficult to determine what you need to research in order to get to the advanced "good stuff."

The game was originally released in Europe, and the European version does not contain a rule book; instead, the entire manual has been made available as on-line help that is loaded with the game. Since GALACTIC CIVILIZATION can be played in a WARP window, you can easily flip back and forth. The North American



WARP GETS CIVILIZED Stardock Systems' GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS has made a lot of noise in the OS/2 gaming world. Its addictive strategic play has been compared to MicroProse's MASTER OF ORION and CIVILIZATION.

version will include a manual, however.

Quite a number of discussion groups are going on at various on-line services including CompuServe, Internet, and others where you can pick up a variety of tips. While I have not heard of an "Official Strategy Guide" for GALACTIC CIVILIZATION, I am sure that one will be coming, because this game is big enough, smart enough, and, gosh darn it, people like it!



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A Hint In Time



THESE ARE NOT HAPPY TIMES FOR GAMERS. OVER THE last year and a half or so, game releases have tended to be few and far between, and when something

does come along, it is likely to be pretty but mediocre at best. Right now, we are in the midst of another drought; nothing new in the way of adventure or role-playing games, as I write this, is on the horizon. The barrel is not only empty, it doesn't even have a bottom to scrape.

So I am stuck with doing a Dreaded Editorial, and the subject of this one is hint books. Going

by the letters I receive, and comments I have read on-line, gamers are divided into two main camps: those that think a hint book should be included with every adventure and role-playing game, and those who think that they should be able to finish a game without needing a hint book in the first place.

Hint books, and their partners, the outrageously overpriced hint lines, are big business now, but it wasn't always so. Back in the good old days, when everyone had an Apple, Atari, or Commodore computer, hint books didn't exist. If you were stumped by a puzzle, you worked it out on your own, or called the game company (where a real, live person answered your questions), or put the game on the shelf, unfinished. Many times, players opted for that last option: a lot of games just never got completed.

It wasn't that gamers were dumb; all of us, at one time or another, come across a puzzle that gives us long pause for thought. A game may not be hard overall, but most adventures and even role-playing games may have a section that is tough (and tough can vary for each player). However, since getting help wasn't easy back then, and being stuck is a frustrating experience, people put the game aside and bought another one, hoping to do better next time.

Also, the game market in the early days was small; hint books wouldn't have

SHOULD HINT BOOKS
BE REQUIRED
DOCUMENTATION FOR
ADVENTURE GAMES?

SCRY SIGHT

- Science fiction has been a hot topic lately in the realms of the crystal ball. For example, *Robot City* from Byron Preiss is based on an Isaac Asimov universe and the late writer's Laws of Robotics. The forthcoming game will be a 3-D MYST-alike with more interaction. Unlike MYST, this new world of adventure will be heavily populated, mostly with robots. The player's character is framed for a murder, wakes up with amnesia, and has to prove his innocence. In finding the murderer, of course, he also finds a more dangerous plot afoot.

- Just after Hero Software alumni held a wake for the *Champions* computer role-playing game, other software companies began to express interest in licensing the system for their own games.

- After the long delay on LucasArts' *The Dig*, the graphic adventure co-written by Steven Spielberg, we were happy to discover that all the parts are almost complete and that it may be playable soon, even though much of the game is still in rough form.

by Scorpiia

been very profitable to produce. Over time, that changed; as the number of computer gamers increased, hint books began appearing on the scene. Today, a well-stocked computer store is likely to have shelves full of hint books and strategy guides available.

From the game company's point of view, hint books and hint lines make a lot of sense: these things help people to finish a game, and therefore they are more likely to continue buying games in the future. If you buy games and don't complete most of them, sooner or later, you stop buying games.

Does that mean game companies deliberately publish hard games so they can squeeze some extra cash from desperate gamers? I've seen that accusation made more than once, but I don't think there's any truth to it. Games today aren't harder than they were ten years ago; it would take some thought on my part to come up with any recent title that was on a par with some of the old Infocom text adventures in difficulty. However, it's pretty obvious that people want hint books, and the companies are just putting out what people want.

So, should game companies include hint books with the games? Not really. For one thing, it would certainly raise the price of the game, and games aren't cheap to begin with. For another, not everyone wants (or needs) a hint book. For a third, hint books take time to do, which would delay game releases even more (*Nobody wants that!*). And the books and have their own disadvantages.

The first is temptation. Once you have that book open, it takes a lot of willpower not to keep turning the pages. Just one little peek, and one more, and before long, you've read the whole thing almost without realizing it. This can be demoralizing,

especially if you hadn't really meant to do that when you first opened the book to find a particular hint.

More insidious, however, is the "why struggle?" syndrome. This strikes people who do have the self-discipline to not read the whole book at once. They come to a roadblock in the game. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour passes. They've made no progress, and their eyes stray to the handy clue book. Why suffer? Why struggle? Why spend another hour agonizing, when a

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fast peek into the book will get things moving again?

Before long, the time between being stuck and consulting the book tends to shorten. It's so much easier to look up the answer than to sit tearing your hair out. You become less inclined to really think about the puzzle, and more inclined to use the book to get past it, thus encouraging mental laziness, and even more frequent recourse to the handy hints. This is also a common problem with those games that include "on-line hints" that you can reference while playing.

In this respect, the 900 numbers aren't quite so bad. The meter is always ticking, and at 75-95 cents for the first minute, 50-75 cents each additional minute, few people want to be on the phone any longer than is absolutely necessary. The dial-ups can be good if you're really desperate and want to get by that one sticky point to finish the game. Otherwise, at those rates, you're better off buying a hint book (if available), since three or four calls can easily add up to the book price (if not more!).

On-line gamers probably have the

best of it. They can log in to the service, post a question to other players, log off, then come back again a couple of hours later to look for an answer, which is much cheaper than a hint line or book. The drawback is, you aren't guaranteed to get an answer, especially if a game is just out and you happen to be ahead of the pack, or everyone is stuck in the same place you are.

What all this means is that by and large, gamers are an impatient lot. I've been playing computer games since 1981, and the people I've known are by no means stupid; in fact, they're brighter than average. They just seem to have a low tolerance for frustration, coupled with a powerful drive to Get The Puzzle Solved, preferably Right Now. This combination doesn't help if you're trying to resist hint books and 900 numbers.

At the same time, we have a contradiction here: while gamers complain they "need" hint books to complete Game X, they also complain that games are becoming too easy. "I bought Game X on Monday and finished it in two days," they grumble.

The trick is that Game X isn't the same

for everyone. For instance, you might whip through MALCOLM'S REVENGE in a couple of days, while your friend climbs the walls while trying to figure out how to get off the island. She, on the other hand, breezes past *DLAUN GATE* and you're still wondering what to do about the glowing Elves. Which is the harder game? Which the easier?

There is no perfect game for everyone, no game that provides the same level of challenge to all players. Eventually, on Game X, or Game Y, or Game Z, you're going to be stuck, and stuck hard. So the various resources, the hint books, the 900 numbers, the on-line community, and, yes, letters to Scorpio, too, are actually a Good Thing. Like all Good Things, they should be used in moderation. Give yourself a chance first to solve the problem before taking the easy way out. Thinking is hard work, but nothing beats the satisfaction of finishing a game without a hint book or telephone in hand. And if, in the end, your mind just blanks out, don't feel guilty about needing a nudge. We do all, now and then; let's be happy there are many ways to get one. ☺

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Game Hints For Nothing

And Your Tips For Free

EACH DAY I HEAD TO THE MAIL ROOM, AND EACH DAY I'M reminded how few games have been released lately. Nothing much has come along since Christmas, and many of the letters in my box are mostly about older games.



But before we get to the hints, I've got to answer a question that keeps popping up in your letters. I do my best to personally answer every letter (with an SASE!) I receive asking for hints. Many of you have asked why I don't charge money for this service. Well, the way I see it, the predicament of the stumped gamer is bad enough as it is. Most games aren't cheap to begin with, and if you don't want to spend \$10 and up (mostly up) for a hint book or call the overpriced 900 numbers, how are you going to get help?

The main point of all my articles, be they mail columns, reviews, or walk-throughs, is to help out other gamers, and answering individual questions is simply an extension of that. I've thrown my share of money away on dogs, and been stuck plenty of times myself. If I can help you get around those obstacles, that gives me more satisfaction than any amount of dollars. Okay? So now let's get to the good stuff!

Malcolm's Revenge: So you're standing at those big cat statues and wondering which gem goes where. With six gems and six statues, that makes for a lot of trial and error experiments (a whole lot!), so I don't recommend that method for solving the puzzle. It's much easier if you know beforehand what goes where. For

that, you have to visit the Hieroglyphics Room (with your little mouse) under the Dog Fort. If you're finding it a bit too dark down there, perhaps some forest clearance in the right direction will brighten things up for

you; in fact, it can help a *lot* lot.

Ultima 8—Pagan: Paying a visit to the Sorcerers is not easy. You can't just go there on your own; you have to be sent by Devon or you'll never reach them. The only way is to unleash havoc on the world by freeing Hydros from her prison down in the caverns (and no, she won't keep her word to teach you Tempest spells, so don't expect any gratitude from her). Then you can chat with Devon again and be on your way to the fire images.

Noctropolis: Here you are on the trail of Top Hat under the opera house and you've come to a dead end in the boiler room; actually, it's not so much a dead end as an obstacle in the form of a locked door. Forget about finding a key or breaking down the door. What you need is right there in the room, it's just very difficult to see. I suggest examining that boiler very carefully.

Menzoberranzan: Some folks are having a hard time finding the "right-hand hammer head" on level two of the Dwarf temple. Well, if you're looking for an actual hammer, you're gonna be looking forever. What you want is more symbolic in nature. Possibly a closer look at the map for level two will make that clearer, providing you've been all around the area.

Lands of Lore: Up on level three of Scotia's lair, there are some poor souls

wandering around searching for that fourth statuette so they can free King Richard from his shroud. Hey, it's not really that hard. It's easy! In fact, as easy as $1 + 1 = 2$. Once you see that, things should open up and you'll soon be on your way to saving the king.

Wake of The Ravagers: Here is a handy tip for dealing with the air drakes when you're on the quest for the Lyre of The Winds. Put a mage as the party leader and cast either Globe or Minor Globe of Invulnerability so you can waltz up the path without damage from the traps. Walk slowly as you near the end and stop when you hear a click. Now chuck an arrow at the nearest drake. For some reason, this sets them off to fighting against each other. Just wait for the dust to settle, and do it again. Eventually, only one drake will be left and he's easy to take out. Unfortunately, this trick won't work with the second group of drakes down by the nest, but your party will be in good shape for that combat if you let the first group kill themselves off.

Dragon Lore: Having a little (maybe not a little) difficulty getting that cog house door open? Perhaps you haven't found a nearby secret entrance yet that leads to a small set of passageways. It isn't easy to see unless you look closely at the wall, and even then, you need a certain spell to open the way. If you haven't obtained a new spell recently, a visit to the mushroom city is in order. Picking the right flower will go a *short* way to helping you with that.

Ultima VII—Serpent Isle: Passing the Knight's Test is an important part of the game, and some players are finding themselves a bit stuck there. The clue is easy enough to get, but the ashes confuse them. If that's the case, it's likely you missed a secret wall somewhere. Somewhere, say, in the vicinity of a certain assassination attempt. Check out that area, and you should soon be on your way to joining the Knights.

And that's about it for this look into the mail bag. In the meantime, if you need help with an adventure or role-playing game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On Delphi: Stop by the GameSIC.

On GEMe: Type "Scorpio" to reach the Games RoundTable.

By US mail (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you live in the U. S.): Scorpio, PO Box 338, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028. ☛

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Blood in the Saddle Again

An Old Hero Returns In Mindscape's *COMMANDER BLOOD*

by Peter Olafson

HY, A PROMOTION IS A PROMOTION. CAPTAIN BLOOD EVIDENTLY HAS GOTTEN SOME RESPECT FROM HIS BETTERS AND BEEN KICKED UPSTAIRS. The fake plants, the ceramic mug with "I (heart) beagles" written on the side, the little Toblerone-shaped desk sign, the pictures of his clones—all stuffed into a cardboard box for the big move. Now it's *Commander Blood* to you, son.

However, this is one of those dubious promotions that find you doing more or less the same job in more amiable surroundings. The *Commander's* not riding a desk. For *Mindscape's* new CD-ROM game, French developers *Microfolie's* ((CQ)) and *Cryo* have resurrected the hero of the 7-year-old *CAPTAIN BLOOD* adventure game for a charming, breezy exploration of the cosmos.

Back in 1988, *CAPTAIN BLOOD* was a decidedly ground-

breaking game. Oh, sure, this quest to capture Blood's five clones was written off by some as one of those *Weird French Adventures* that seemed to descend on the US market en masse in the late '80s and early '90s. But its esoteric depth made room for it in a corner of my heart, and it put its claws into me like a nestling cat and hung on. I couldn't have shaken it loose if I wanted to.

The developers haven't bothered to draw any conspicuous links between the two games. In *COMMANDER*

BLOOD, you simply find yourself the caretaker of galactic magnate Bob Morlock. He peers from his icy cabinet (a Cayobox) through misty eyes—after all, he's 300,000-and-some-odd years old—like an old guard dog of uncertain disposition.

But excuse me one sec here. Bob Morlock? This does not sound like a futuristic, sci-fi, *Zardoz* sort of character. This does not sound like a *Rock of Ages*. This sounds like someone who, were names permitted to assign destinies, should by rights own a one-third share of an

auto-parts store in Bangor.

That should be a clue. Unlike *CAPTAIN BLOOD*, which was a straight adventure with an undercurrent of humor, the sequel is essentially a light-hearted romp. The enemies may threaten to blow you out of the heavens in 10 seconds and counting, but they can't count. Your computer's name is Honk, and if you ask him to recount recent events, he needles you to report his help back to Bob.

COMMANDER BLOOD

Price: \$69.95

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 10 MB hard drive space available, 2x CD-ROM and mouse; supports SoundBlaster and compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Developers: Microfolie's and Cryo

Publisher: Mindscape Inc.

Novato, CA
(415) 883-3000



(Jeez. What a geek.)

And what are you doing when the game starts? You're watching TV. So much for seriousness.

Actually, Bob is mostly serious. He may be an elemental creature-cum-corporate titan, but he's old and he has regrets. He has it all; he just wants to understand it, and he's too weak to do it alone. Specifically, he wants to see the Big Bang, and you, as *Commander Blood*, are going to get him there.

However, as in *Maine*, so in hostile *Scrub*-occupied territory: Can't get there from here. Driving Mr. Bob across time and space to that primal explosion—in theory, the beginning of the universe—proves to be rather involved. Black holes will open the path. You don't know where those holes are, and thereby hangs the tale.

And here the game system most echoes that of *CAPTAIN BLOOD*—bouncing around Bob's universe in a space-

The Scroll

Some Things Are Better Left Dead And Buried.

It's said that the ancient Egyptians found a prince of Ancient Egypt to spread the cult of the dark god, Hylakhoes, and ensured that the blood of the common people ran through the veins of all his descendants. Sanderio would have, and it would be buried at the end of a long, dark tunnel in a temple beneath the unsuspecting city of Alexandria. But in 1920, one Yusuf Al Hossain begins to dig a hiding place for his ill-begotten money and uncovers the 2,000 year old sagging scroll which sets in motion an event which begins with death and could finish with the end of the world.



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GIVE 'EM THE FINGER An imaginative interface allows you to navigate through the game and through space by using your virtual hand. Here in the Nav Room you can find out about distant planets and warp there almost instantly.

craft called the Ark (which looks rather like a dragster engine as designed by H.R. Giger), gradually learning the location of new planets and new aliens with special needs. A Scrut (a Cylon-like helmet head) wants a password. A contrary droid needs a battery. The rat with an elephant's trunk would like something to eat, and that bubble-headed salesman wants to see cash before he'll talk merchandise.

You run the show from the hub of a super receptionist's desk—a circular console with stations for communications, interstellar travel, planetary stopovers and a six-channel television. (At the start, there's not much on except commercials.) It's very neatly handled. You simply move the mouse right and left to whirl in a circle, and use a big blue hand (another holdover from *CAPTAIN BLOOD*) to click on the orange balls that activate the machinery.

Helping you out is that personable, if neurotic, computer (for specific advice and general information), and you can summon Bob himself from his sleep in emergencies. (He's said to know all—and more than he lets on—but only lets it out in dribs and drabs before he requires another visit with the frozen veggies.)

Most of the con-

you in orbit over your target. To answer a hail on the radio, just jab a finger at the orange nerf ball, which bounces, titters at you and calls up a video screen.

Friendly, eh? You can also get Honk to bring you up to date on game events if you've lost track of what you've given to whom. And if you didn't save before quitting, or were rudely interrupted in your game, invoking "Last" in the "Save" menu will bring you back to where you were when the computer went off.

And to visit a planet, well, click on the



HACKER MEETS HAWKER This cartoonish salesman can deliver the goods, but you'd better have credits when you go to Venusia, because they don't take American Express.

control functions are quite simple, and you'll find you can play the game happily without instruction. Navigation is simply a matter of picking the planet you want on a 2D map and then pulling a lever. Travel itself—blazes of beautiful screen-saver-like light that sometimes recall the climaxes of *2001* and *Bratstvo*—is automatic, and lands

planet, and an Orxx—a sort of porpoise-as-torpedo-as-ambassador—is dispatched to the surface and makes for the settlement in cruise-missile fashion. It's so easy, I feel like a fool for even mentioning it. (Initially, you'll want to activate the Orxx directly to watch it surge down its tube in 3D.)

It's here, on approach to a planet, that Mindscape's *DRAGON LORE* technology kicks in on a global scale and to wonderful effect. The surface ripens gradually, details come to the focus and the whole routine has an easy sweep that makes the eventual appear natural. It's beautiful—like *DRAGON LORE*, *COMMANDER BLOOD* is rarely less than beautiful. But cinematic doesn't quite say it. (It doesn't mean anything these days any-



HONK IF YOU'RE IN A HURRY Listen to Honk, your trusty computer, to keep from getting bogged down with characters like Bronks before they can help you.

way.) It *moved* me somehow. There was a sense of arrival, and a sense that arrival meant something.

If only fleetingly. I have to note that said movement is basically a movie—tightly scripted, with no exploration allowed. In *CAPTAIN BLOOD*, you could explore the planet's surface. Yes, it was barren and rendered only in wire-frame until you actually landed. And, yes, you were told via directional arrows where you'd find the resident alien. But you got there largely on your own hook, and it gave the game a sense of process. *COMMANDER BLOOD*, on the other hand, has a sense of someone else doing the work.

The same can be said for *COMMANDER BLOOD*'s conversation options. You barely have to do a thing—just more pointing at and clicking on what you want to say. And it's here the game really runs afoul of the spirit of *CAPTAIN BLOOD*. It's not about art of communication any more.

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JOKESING FOR BIONUM In one of the stranger game elements we've seen, gamers harvest energy chunks in this virtual stream in order to accumulate credits.

Oh, you can talk up a storm, and the translation will come back in a kind of primitive English with the odd word missing and "me" used for "I." But that's just window dressing. There is no struggle to make yourself understood, or to understand what you're told. Between the Orxx and a universal translator (named OLGA), you're covered. Where's the art in this?

been. You didn't so much play CAPTAIN BLOOD the game as become immersed in it, and that's the only way to play.

COMMANDER BLOOD doesn't make that kind of claim on my heart. It could have, I'm certain, and I'm mystified as to why the language elements were dropped rather than enhanced. (It's almost ironic that, in an industry rushing to include more and more speech in

games, the games have less and less to do with the art of communication.) The details of talk—or dungeon mapping, for that matter—should not be seen as a burden on the player, but as a way of drawing them into the process of play. It's the difference between playing a game—being inside it, and taking its logic and rules into yourself—and simply playing with it from the exterior.

In most of COMMANDER BLOOD, you're on the outside. And it's a beautiful outside, too. But it's cold out there in space. And the Commander, after all these years of service, deserves a little heat. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

COMMANDER BLOOD

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A pretty, easy to play graphic adventure with a unique interface.

CONS Resurrects the myths of a previous game but then fails to draw from its history and develop its best features. As a result, the game's not all it could have been.

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The CyClones Of Doom

*It Takes A Cyborg To Kill A Cyborg
In The DOOM-like CYCLONES*

by Mark Clarkson

THIS MONTH'S "HONESTY IN ADVERTISING" AWARD GOES TO RAVEN SOFTWARE AND SSI. THEIR MOST RECENT RELEASE, A FIRST PERSON SHOOTER, IS CALLED CYCLONES, AND IT IS INDEED A CLONE—ONE OF THE MANY SIRS OF THE reigning action game king, DOOM.

The set up to CYCLONES has a familiar ring: Evil aliens have been studying our planet for decades. Six months ago, they attacked without warning. Entire cities were devastated, and people were killed by the hundreds of thousands. Conventional weapons had little effect upon the alien armies of cybernetically-enhanced clones (CyClones). The governments of Earth proved unable to cope with the alien menace.

Luckily, the scientists of the lunatic fringe, working in a secret laboratory in Wisconsin (I just report 'em, I don't make 'em up) have developed a special weapon to be used in the event of just such an alien invasion. That weapon is you: the HAVOC unit. Half-man, half-machine, designed to go places and face foes that would crush platoons of mere mortals, you are humanity's last hope. Your mission: kill, kill, kill.

AIM AND FIRE

The first thing you notice about CYCLONES is the targeting reticle. Weapon targeting

is not a slave to your movement, a *la* DOOM. Rather, you must use your mouse to aim and fire your weapons with one hand, while you use the numeric keypad to move, run, jump and set off explosive charges with the other. It's not as hard as it sounds, and quickly becomes natural.

Nor will you pick up items such as ammo by simply running over them; you've got to click on them with the mouse to add them to your inventory. To use items from your inventory—to boost your armor or activate a communications console, for example—you must select them again with the mouse.

CYCLONES' mouse movement interface is one of the better I've seen in the first-person action arena. Even so, some movements—jumping and running at the same time, for example—are impossible or nearly so using the mouse alone. Then again, there are some combinations that are nearly impossible even using the keyboard. The <Shift> key lets you run, but I defy you to simultaneously hold down the <Shift> key and the <9> key on your numeric keypad with your

left hand while aiming and firing at a moving target with your right.

There's the usual assortment of weapons with which to perform radical appendectomies: spiked fist, photon chain-gun, grenade launcher, etc., all selected with the number keys. But CYCLONES adds a few actions to your standard shooter repertoire. In addition to moving forward and back and turning left and right, you can look up and down, and you can jump over, onto and off of things.

As half-man, half-machine, you're equipped with a nifty Heads Up Display which gives you your current heading, altitude, weapons, damage and health status. I found the heading information especially helpful in getting around large levels.

INSERT MODULE A IN CONSOLE B

Whereas DOOM's own creators characterize the essence of DOOM's gameplay as a slick *WIAKA-A-MOLE*, CYCLONE's designers have tried to imbue it with a little more in the way of mental challenge. In addition to needing keys to unlock doors, you'll need power packs, communications modules and other electronic goodies, which you then use with various control panels throughout the game. On one level, you must restore an alien spaceship to functionality. To get into the control room, you'll first have to restore power to the engines. Before you can do that, you'll have to locate secret areas where you'll find the keys to the storerooms. In the storerooms are power modules for the ship's engines. By "plugging in" the power modules, you power up the ship's en-



CYCLONES

Price: \$59.95
Floppy & CD-ROM

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 485-33MHz or better (66MHz recommended), 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 6 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM; supports most major sound cards.

Protection: None

Developers: Raven Software

Publisher: SSI
Sunnyvale, CA
(408) 737-6800



"THIS is cool"

—Computer Gaming World

5/5 Rating

Computer Gaming World—February 1995

94% Rating, Golden Triad Award Winner

Computer Game Review—February 1995

Winner—1994 Best Breakthrough Game

Electronic Entertainment—March 1995

Best Software Developer: Bullfrog

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"The graphics are stunning, the sounds are amazing, the play is fast and furious."

PC Gamer—February 1995

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Circle Reader Service #334

gines, which in turn allows you to open the door to the control room, and so on. And of course all the time you are being attacked by robots, laser towers and alien soldiers. This ain't KING'S QUEST, after all.

CYCLONES provides some new twists in movement as well. There are catwalks and raised platforms that you can walk on or under. And how about holowalls? These holographic projections look like regular walls but they aren't really there; they're illusions and you can walk right through them.

CADDY MAP

CYCLONES' three-dimensional autopmap looks like the output of a cheesy CAD/CAM program with floors, walls, ceilings, and doors displayed in garish colors. You can turn each of these objects on and off; in fact, you have to in order to see inside rooms and corridors. With the walls displayed you often can't see into the rooms in which you're standing; with the walls turned off, you can't tell where one room ends and another begins. You can zoom in and out and rotate the map around its vertical axis, but you can't turn it so that you are looking down on the level. Ultimately, I would have preferred a plain old 2D, top-down map.

One neat feature of CYCLONES' autopmap is the tactical display, a little monochrome monitor in one corner of the screen. By moving the mouse around the map, you can place your viewpoint inside any area you've visited and see what the character would see if he was standing in that spot. If you forget what that big room at the top of the map is, simply click there and look at the monitor. ("Oh yeah, that's the cafeteria.") In the "is that a bug or a feature?" department: the map shows all the doors on a level, even the "secret" ones.

The monsters in CYCLONES range from the ferocious four-legged "pit bulls" to the eponymous CyClones and ultimately to the evil alien overlord himself. For the most part, these guys look like rejects

from the Justice League of America: over-muscled dudes clad in bright red, blue and green uniforms, hurling balls of green fire. All that's missing is a snazzy logo on their chests.

The monsters are sometimes crafty, sometimes amazingly stupid. They'll



POINT AND SHOOT Blasting away the critters is a little easier in CyClones than in other first-person action games since you can aim your weapon all around the screen.



SLUG THAT THUG As in Doom, when you're down to fighting with your hands, you're in deep trouble. To the left is your inventory and map buttons. Armor level, health and amount of ammo in your weapon are at right.

fire at you without realizing that they're hitting the corner of the wall, and will in fact sometimes shoot at you when you're in a completely different room; you can hear their cries and the sounds of the fireballs smacking into the other side of the wall.

In what's becoming a popular trend, CYCLONES includes a digitally recorded soundtrack on the CD-ROM. This certainly provides a higher quality of music than the FM synthesizer on board your average SOUND BLASTER clone, but those without a direct CD-ROM/sound card hookup won't hear it. That is, if you can't play music CDs through your sound card, you won't hear the soundtrack unless you

plug some speakers into your CD's headphone jack.

THE DOWNCYED

CYCLONES is not without its annoying shortcomings. There is no head-to-head mode, fast becoming *de rigueur* in today's computer games—especially first-person shooters. And those who prefer joystick control to the mouse are out of luck.

On the CD-ROM version, each mission is preceded by a live video briefing which contains some of the worst acting and production quality this side of a skin flick; I'm convinced at least one of the actors was soused

at the time. I would have greatly preferred a simple text screen. Then each briefing ends by teasing you with a nice 2D, top-down floor plan of the level you're about to attack. I would have loved a copy of this map to actually use during the game.

So where does CYCLONES stand in the field of DOOM-clone competitors? Squarely in the middle. It makes a few nice additions to the genre in the targeting mode, more challenging "puzzles," and interesting graphics, but it also fails to deliver the elements that we've come to expect from these games—multiplayer games, a convincingly threatening environment, and a map mode that you can actually use. For the quest to save this world, only those most dedicated to the cause of first-person action need apply.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CYCLONES

RATING



PROS Independent weapon targeting is a fresh twist, and the world is a tad more interesting than most DOOM clones.

CONS The creatures aren't half as terrifying as DOOM's, there's no multiplayer game, and the map mode is an experiment that fails miserably.



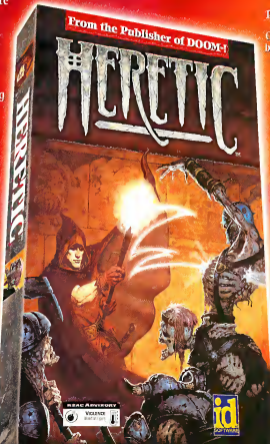
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Circle Reader Service #71

Commander, Jr.

Gremlin Interactive Takes A Shot
At Space Combat With *RETRIBUTION*

by Martin E. Cirulli

WHEN I FIRST SAW THE ADVERTISEMENT FOR GREMLIN INTERACTIVE'S *RETRIBUTION*, what I first noticed (other than noting how much pride the designers seem to have in their ability to define common English words) was the reference to killer aliens called Krellans. At first I thought these were our old friends from the mostly defunct STARFLEET/STAR LEGIONS line of games and a franchise resurrection was at hand. My disappointment was keen when I finally opened the colorful box to discover these particular evil aliens were neither green nor particularly amusing. What I did find was a British import in the tradition of the *WING COMMANDER* series, but with none of the style or technical skill that North Americans have come to expect from their space combat sims.

"NEXT STOP, DERIVATIVE CITY!"

In a plot that roughly comes down to *WING COMMANDER* meets the Twilight Zone's "To Serve Man," you find yourself aboard a human space station with a terrible secret. It seems that when humanity was just at the brink of self-destruction through warfare and eco-stupidity (Oh, you remember the bad ol' 1990s!), a group of insect-like aliens calling themselves Krellans popped in to borrow some sugar and incidentally solve all of our problems and bring us into a new golden age. With their help we raced into space,

colonizing and terra-forming everywhere we could put a spaceship down.

Of course, we should have known there was going to be a price some time, and when we finally discover the truth, through a fluke mishap in the Alien-Spy-Delivery-System, that price turns out to be higher than your VISA bill after a weekend of playing *AIR WARRIOR*. The real skinny on the alien beneficence is that they are

planning to use us as self-tending cattle for their voracious appetites, and they have spread us out across the galaxy to make us both more plentiful and more vulnerable....not to mention closer to Krellan fast food outlets.

Since devious alien jamming techniques keep your station isolated, it falls to you and your short supply of fighting craft to both pummel the Krellans into submission and run interference while other ships evacuate the human colonists, before they find themselves starring in an Unhappy Meal. Oh yes, and if you have a moment, you might want to break through the jamming and warn the rest of humanity.

Good thing the Krellans were nice enough to let us develop weapons that could blow the heck out of them.

COMBAT CAKEWALK

RETRIBUTION is technically a space combat sim built around a very slight plotline in the tradition of the *COMMANDER* series. I use the word "technically" because, while

story and action are indeed aspects of the game, they both exist in quantities just sufficient to force one to mention them.

You basically wander through three rooms of a space-station talking to your prissy flight controller, who boos down what the Commander is going on and on about; then you see your dropship engineer, who sometimes gives you useful tactical advice in between testosterone-inspired put-downs. Once you suffer through this, you hop into your ship, go kick some butt, and then either go back to the dropship for some quick talking heads over the vid-com or, if you successfully complete a "campaign" (the equivalent of cleaning out a Star System in *WING COMMANDER*), you return to the space-station for more of the same up-close and personal.

There is no character-driven storyline here; all conversations are basically war updates and mission assignments, nothing that couldn't be taken care of with memos. And it is not exactly PBS level dialogue either—your Commander can give you the "I hate sending you on a mission no man could survive..." speech on your way out the hatch, but if you return unsuccessful, he will still basically call you the biggest loser to ever dot a spacesuit. Saving humanity is a tough gig without much affirmation these days.

The actual missions show the same kind of limited imagination. For the most part, campaigns will involve several missions against a single installation, and you must never exceed your mandate—the space corps seems to hate over-achievers. Instead of one mission to destroy the guard units, defenses, incoming transports and the base itself, the job has been divided for some kind of paperwork reasons into separate tasks. First you take out the guard units and return, then you go out again and destroy the defenses, then back for a new mission to destroy the transports...and so on, and so



RETRIBUTION

Price: \$39.99,
CD-ROM

System
Requirements:

IBM
compatible
386DX-40MHz
or better (486-
33MHz
recommended),
4 MB RAM (8
MB recommended), VGA graphics, CD-
ROM; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound
Blaster and General MIDI compatible
sound cards.

Protection: None
Developers: Gremlin/Astro Productions
Publisher: US Gold
San Francisco, CA
(415) 693-0297





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work as stand-alone games, you can give them out to friends—and watch their heads spin.

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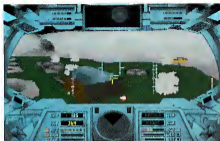
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 "gambpub" & select **Maxis**.
 On AOL: enter keyword
 "Maxis".



The Revolutionary Instant Game Creator.



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DESTRUCTION AT 10 FEET In your many missions, you'll have to destroy ground targets as well as enemy air ships. Alas, you can't fly very high, and complicated maneuvers are out of the question.



TANKS FOR NOTHING The view from the tank differs little from the fighter cockpit view. Likewise, the differences between the two are minimal, and they even carry the same weapons.

on, until you finish what you could have done all at once. But woe betide any pilot foolish enough to pick his own target! Killing out of order is as bad as failure in the eyes of your retentive Commander.

Of course, all this might be forgivable if the combat was really all-out, laser-spitting, shield-burning action. Guess what? It isn't. Now we get to the part where I explain why this game is only "technically" a space-sim, because other than the fact that you get into a vehicle and fight from a cockpit

perspective, this game has more in common with Zaxxon than X-Wing. Combat deep in darkest space is not to be your fate in RETRIBUTION; instead, your fighter missions are completely in the realm of ground attack, so much so that you cannot do anything other than rising and falling. Your maneuvers are completely two-dimensional; no loops or split-S's in this universe. Enemy fighters function under the same restriction, so dogfights resemble something out of *Out Wars* instead of an

aerial duel to the death.

The game tries to cut a little new ground by introducing the need to fight some missions in a tank instead of a fighter, but all this really does is bring out the weakness of the game as you think, "Gee, flying is just like driving a tank except the ride is smoother."

A PRIMER FOR REAL SIMS

I realize that a lot of European software comes from that strange alternate dimension where *BALMAIN RETURNS* can be the best selling computer game, and our usual standards do not apply...but RETRIBUTION is still a pretty rough pill to swallow. The graphics are from two or three years back, and the gameplay is just a step above video game status.

This game might be suitable for a young gamer, someone you might want to introduce to goal-oriented games instead of the usual kill-everything-that-moves kind, but anybody above 12 or so will probably be calling you after a couple of hours to see if you still have the receipt. As much as I'd like to say otherwise, it seems that the only real "retribution" here will be against anyone foolish enough to purchase a game on the strength of nice box art. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

RETRIBUTION

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS Simple arcade action may appeal to the rookie star pilot in the house.

CONS Not even close to the game it tries to be.

Virtual Reality



Virtual Vanessa is computer generated.

Real Reality



Girlfriend Maria™ is the real thing.

Virtual Dialog

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- Do you come here often?
- Don't I know you?
- Aren't you a famous model?

Real Dialog

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- H: Hello Maria! How are you?
 M: Great, Dave! How are you today?
 D: I'm really depressed.
 M: I'm sorry to hear that. Why?
 D: Harold is such a jerk.
 M: I'm sorry your boss is a jerk. What can I do to make you feel better?
 D: You could kiss me.
 M: I just love kissing. Mmmm!
 D: I feel better already! Now, let's...

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— *Electronic Entertainment*

"Raptor's voracious gameplay eats other shooters for lunch."

— *Computer Gaming World*

"... blows away most commercial games...! The graphics will amaze you and the sound will astound you... a super star!"

— *Interactive Entertainment*

"Did you like Wolfenstein 3-D"? If you did, you'll love Blake Stone."

— *PCN Magazine*

"The first-person viewpoint and smooth movement will have you peering sideways into the monitor to see if there's another monster around the corner."

— *PC Magazine*

"Mystic Towers has the kind of gameplay that will devour entire evenings."

— *Computer Gaming World*

"Looking for something silly yet highly entertaining? Hocus Pocus will do just fine... Give your brain a break, and enjoy 40 levels of sheer mindless mayhem."

— *Home Computing & Entertainment*

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Out Of Reach

Interplay's STAR REACH Follows In The Path of Space Combat Tradition

by Jeff James

GALACTIC CONQUEST—AH, YES, THAT HOARY OLD CHESTNUT OF COMPUTER GAMING. IT WAS THERE AT THE beginning, when the original hackers (may they code forever!) played "Space War" on PDP computers in the '60s, and it will probably be there when computer gaming succumbs to entropy and reaches heat death.

Into the rich heritage of galactic conquest games comes the latest release from developer **Techtonics** and publisher **Interplay**, the action-strategy game **STAR REACH**. In keeping religiously with tradition, the setting of the game is drawn from Galactic Conquest Script #1: Centuries of internecine warfare and heated squabbling among humans have given way to peace and prosperity, with humanity finally "getting it together" and beginning the exploration of the universe. After years of uneventful exploration, first contact is made with

a hostile alien race. Instead of trading goods and good-will, the alien invaders decide to swap weapons fire and armed soldiers with their new neighbors.

Calling this setup "hackneyed" is probably to be hackneyed oneself. But of course, being hackneyed is no sin in the universe of space games. Games like **REACH FOR THE STARS**, **STAR CONTROL I &**

II, and **MASTER OF ORION** have all demonstrated that it is not the setting of a space game that counts, but, as the great space-farer Eric Clapton put it, "it's in the way that you use it."

RACES FOR SPACES

When the game opens, you can choose from 22 different scenarios of varying difficulty levels. A few single-player tutorials will help you learn the ropes, while larger scenarios pit up to four players (with one or two human players) in a race to conquer dozens of planets. Once

you've decided on a scenario, you can choose which alien race you'll use to conquer the universe. A total of seven sentient races are available, including the insectoid Nanbari, the combative Cynoid Legion, the robotic Braquelians and the fish-like Kathodians. The infer-

nally curious humans are also present, as are the Z'nul, a mysterious race of gaseous beings. Gameplay is primarily one player versus the computer, although two players can play at the same computer in a unique split-screen mode. Unfortunately, serial, modem and network support aren't available.

Once into a scenario, you find your-

self viewing the gameworld from a familiar viewpoint, looking down on a field of planets which serve as the objectives and locations for starbases and mining operations. Your alter-ego is represented in one of two ways. In "ship" mode, you control a single starship. In order to issue direct orders to a planet, you must fly your ship—in a style strongly reminiscent of **Accolade's STAR CONTROL I & II**—to that planet and slip into orbit. In this way you must shuttle between planets, issuing orders for the construction of your nascent stellar empire. Your ship can be employed in combat as well, making you a vital part of any combat action. In "phantom" mode, your vessel is replaced by a red crosshair that can be moved to select the planet you wish to give orders to.

Each scenario has a different goal, so you'll have to adjust your strategy accordingly. In the first scenario, your goal is a straightforward one: simply establish a base on a neutral planet. After completing the easier scenarios, you can move on to more difficult and taxing battles. In smaller scenarios, giving orders to two or three planets and planning minor offensives isn't too taxing, but in larger scenarios you'll find yourself suffering from an extreme case of information overload. Although you can create supply lines (which ferry minerals, food or colonists between planets), you can't automate any ship production processes. If you want to build a massive fleet of warships, you must go to each planet, issue the correct construction orders, then wait for the craft to be built. After the vehicle has

STAR REACH

Price: No SRP, Floppy
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-40MHz or better, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 7 MB hard drive space; supports most major sound cards.

Protection: None
of Players: 1-2 (same computer)

Developer: Techtonics
Publisher: Interplay
Irvine, CA
(714) 553-6678



You can hear your breath,
your boots pounding on metal stairs.
There's only one way out.
20 more feet...15...10.

You're almost there when suddenly
from out of nowhere
an 8-foot-tall green alien drops down
and lunges at you with a spear, leaving you
approximately .08 seconds to act.

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mention the superior processing speed
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Circle Reader Service #27



KATHOO RAZE In "ship mode" you can personally lead attacks on enemy planets. The quick-switch action strongly resembles that of Acclaim's *Star Control* series.

been constructed, you must repeat the process all over again, frantically dashing from planet to planet while your computer opponents marshal their forces.

BUILDER OF WORLDS

At each planet you can build a variety of structures, including your headquarters, biospheres (for colonists), hydroponics (food), strip mines (minerals), ground defenses, a starbase and a factory. Any planet with a factory can produce a variety of vessels based on the amount of money and minerals you have. Satellites serve as orbiting defense platforms, while troop ships ferry your soldiers into enemy territory. Light fighters and destroyers handle most of the ship-to-ship combat duties, while scouts and repair ships fulfill less combat-related roles. If you've built a starbase, you can shuttle your ships off to the storage bay, a convenient holding place for vessels until they are needed.

Once you've created your starfleet, you can send them off to invade the planets of your enemy and destroy his forces. In ship mode, you can lend a helping hand to your computer-controlled forces, rocketing into the area at a tactically critical moment and turning the tide of the battle. As mentioned, the only ship that you can directly control is your own; during a pitched firefight between dozens of ships, attempting to issue individual orders to your computer-controlled henchmen—in real time—is a nightmare. Factor in the small game window (which precludes you from seeing your foes until you're practically on top of them) and the propensity of the player's craft to get blasted into space debris, and the arcade

sequences become more of a chore than an engaging game experience. The only possible saving grace is the excellent implementation of convoys. If you send a group of fighters and troop transports to attack a planet, the fighters will protectively encircle the transports, shielding them from attack.

The music that accompanies the game is a hard-driving score that will bring out the warrior attitude required of any successful planet-busting, ship-blasting space general. Sound effects are used

to good effect throughout the game, with the digitized voice of your subordinates making occasional updates and announcements especially well done. The same can't be said for the graphics, which are functional, but rather dingy and colorless.



DROP-IN INSPECTION In order to administer your empire in "ship mode," you've got to drop into orbit around one of your developing planets. In "phantom mode," a planet is just a mouse-click away.

to good effect throughout the game, with the digitized voice of your subordinates making occasional updates and announcements especially well done. The same can't be said for the graphics, which are functional, but rather dingy and colorless.

A GALAXY OF GLITCHES

Unfortunately, *STAR REACH* suffers from a number of shortcomings. Although all the included races are purported to have different combat and production philosophies, the fact that all aliens share the same vessel types is a bit disappointing. Whereas *STAR CONTROL II* and *MASTER OF ORION* feature craft unique to certain races, all the vessels and planetary improvements in *STAR REACH* are the same

for all players. It's not a major drawback, but the opportunity to face off against aliens using different weaponry and tactics would have been an invaluable addition to gameplay. As is, combat simply devolves into a lackluster war of attrition, with the player boasting the largest fleet usually coming out on top.

STAR REACH does support the use of a keyboard, joystick or mouse, but certain control methods are restricted to certain aspects of the game. For example, mouse support is only offered during game setup and configuration; once the game begins, you're forced to direct your legions by way of joystick or keyboard. Hit the escape key during play, and a disk options menu will appear. On this menu, only keyboard controls work. This sort of interface schizophrenia seems totally unnecessary.

But the biggest problem is that *STAR REACH* adds very, very little to the Galactic Conquest genre.

It seems the designers tried to mesh the best features of *STAR CONTROL II* and *MASTER OF ORION* into one product, but in doing so they watered it all down. What's more, they failed to imbue the game with anything that might give it a unique spin and its own identity. While being derivative in setup and approach is not a sin in these types of games, being derivative and dull in gameplay is. In a genre as crowded as Galactic Conquest, the sin can be a deadly one. ☹

THE ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

STAR REACH

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Split-screen two-player mode and a fast-paced soundtrack are highlights....

CONS ...while the klutzy interface, weak arcade action and mediocre graphics leave *STAR REACH* in the outer reaches of space conquest games.

There you are, flying through the air
with the greatest of ease when
the air-to-air missile locks on you
and starts homing in. Let it close to 4 miles.
Roll 90 degrees into it and start laying chaff
and flares like crazy. It's still coming.
Keep turning. G forces. Everything's going black.
Turn harder or you're dog meat.
You're dog meat.

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Apple 

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Circle Reader Service #28

Digging For Gold In Lemmings Lode

*DIGGERS Puts You In Charge Of The Dearest
and Dimmest Characters Since LEMMINGS*

by Jason Kapalka

BILLED AS "THE GAME OF DISCOVERY, STRATEGY, AND ADVENTURE ON THE PLANET ZARG," Millennium Media's **DIGGERS** could be more simply and accurately marketed, if not for copyright law, as "Subterranean Lemmings" or "Lemmings IV: The Strip Miners." Fans of *Psychosis*' survival-challenged mammals will feel right at home with **DIGGERS**' tiny spelunkers. On the other hand, gamers who felt the best part of *LEMMINGS* was the "Nuke" button, which detonated the painfully cute horde in a spray of technicolor pixels, will instantly wish (in vain) that **DIGGERS** had a similar "Cave-In" option.

The game's setup finds the player arriving at the Planet Zarg to pry the mineral riches from its virgin soil. Alas, for the budding capitalist, Zargian labor laws demand that entrepreneurs employ one of the four native races for this task. The Habbish are cloaked thieves possessing mysterious powers of teleportation. The demonic-looking F'Targs are actually quick-healing, steady workers, while the dwarvish Grablins, cowards in combat, are the fastest diggers of all. The green Quarriors, bearing a strong resemblance to Bruce Banner's alter-ego, right down to the par-

ple flood pants, are lazy, shiftless bullies, well-suited to settling labor disputes.

Once all this union nonsense is done with and you have your team of five miners assembled, you pick a patch of rock from the 34 territories of Zarg and send out your five underpaid and uninsured employees to start digging for gold, diamonds, rubies, and the rare but treasured purple Jennite.

In an attempt to prevent monopolies, the Zargian government has legislated that a second group of miners, controlled by the computer, will also be deposited in the zone to compete with you. The level is terminated when you or your opponent acquire a sufficient amount of money, or, more simply, when all of one side's diggers are themselves terminated, either through their own clumsiness, the hazards of Zargian flora and fauna, or the rigors of healthy free-market capitalism, e.g. sabotage, assault, and murder by dynamite.

Getting down to game play, the main screen presents you with a side view of the terrain and your minuscule miners, much like (surprise!) *LEMMINGS*. The screen scrolls to follow your workers as they run,

jump, and dig (mostly dig) through the vast play area. The documentation claims each zone takes up the equivalent of several hundred screens, and though I didn't verify this, it certainly seemed like it: you can dig, and dig, and dig some more, for a very long time before reaching the limits of any zone. Switching between miners is as simple as clicking on one of their icons; individual miners can walk, run, jump, rest, dig, or use any mining tools they happen to be carrying.

Your objective is to unearth the various valuable minerals hidden underground, then return with them to the Zargian bank and buster them for "Groads" with which you can buy mining devices to help you excavate farther, and so on until you accumulate the sum of Groads necessary to complete the level.

Quickly you realize that this is more complicated than the cutesy graphics would suggest. The mines teem with dangers, chief among them gravity. Headlong plunges down hundred-foot shafts are rather rough on the hired hands, despite any advantages in speed and efficiency. Similarly vexing are the problems of going up...for all their skill at digging downwards, your miners are quite incompetent at climbing. Thankfully, a miner can teleport back to his home base at any time, but then you have to face the challenge of going back *down* again.

Occasionally, deposits of Jennite or other minerals can be seen just lying about, seemingly ripe for the plucking. But most of the Planet Zarg's wealth is hidden from the naked eye, and can only be uncovered by moving mountains of



DIGGERS

Price: \$39.95
Floppy, \$49.95
CD-ROM

System

Requirements:
IBM-compatible
386DX-25 or better, VGA
graphics, 7 MB
hard drive
space (floppy),
2K hard drive space (CD-ROM), mouse;
supports Sound Blaster and Gravis
UltraSound sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Toby Simpson

Publisher: Millennium Media Group, Inc.

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GAMES

dirt. Yes, as it eventually turns out, *DIGGERS* is primarily a game of strip-mining. Much time will be spent watching your spehankers digging, digging, slowly, slowly, in long horizontal paths. Ker-chunk. Ker-chunk. Ker-chunk.

CARNAGE IN A COAL MINE

DIGGERS, like military service, is not all tedious; but what isn't tedious is usually abrupt, frightening and lethal. Faithful if not terribly bright, your diggers will drown themselves in underground lakes, fry in lava, leap to their doom, be devoured by an assortment of carnivorous plants, animals, ghosts, and unidentifiable squidgy things, or even be impregnated by face-hugger eggs straight out of *Alien*. And then there are the competing miners to worry about. Combat on Zarg is a simple, almost innocent affair—diggers simply waddle up to one another and punch away—but still potentially deadly.

An assortment of tools is available at the company shop to help the player with all of these hazards. Bridges and boats can cross lakes and underground reservoirs. Lifts, rail cars, and teleporters can be built to ease the pain of subterranean transit. There are drilling machines that plow through the earth at a tremendous rate, and explosives that can be used to clear obstacles or foes. Unfortunately, all these gadgets cost Groads, forcing the player to choose between buying helpful tools and reducing his progress towards completing the level, or slogging through with a minimum of extra devices.

Fortunately for the player, given the lethality and general difficulty of the game, the computer opponent is abysmally stupid. Computer-controlled diggers will often fall into holes and just sit there, literally for hours if you have the patience to watch, instead of teleporting home. Not once did I lose a game because the computer acquired the necessary Groads before me, which means that if the human player can avoid killing himself, he will always win—after long, long stretches of strip-mining.

Sadly, the greatest danger to the player is the massive stupidity of his own men. Miners standing idle for more than a

minute or two will become bored; bored miners take it on themselves to start digging or walking randomly without regard



DIG IT, BABY! Competing for precious resources against your opponent may put you in direct contact with the enemy. The slugfest match that ensues is cute, but deadly.

to safety. The novelty of seeing the digger you left topside go hurtling down a three mile shaft wears thin fairly quickly. Once your five miners have been whittled down



DELVING EYES The rectangular tool bar gives you complete control over your hard-working diggers. You've got to keep them on a tight leash, though, or they'll saunter off to their death.

to one or two it's easier to keep track of them, but then you have fewer hands with which to strip-mine.

LEMMINGS BURIES DIGGERS

Just as the vast majority of *DOOM*-like games fall short of their model, *DIGGERS* fails to achieve the same level of fun as *LEMMINGS*, for several reasons. The graphics are uninspired and the sound actively boring, consisting of the odd blips, honks and tinkly music. The control scheme, which pretty much requires simultaneous manipulation of the mouse and keyboard, could be described, if one was in a generous mood, as "novel." After many hours of strip-mining, I was not in a generous mood, and you won't be either. For all its attention to physics, there

are strange anomalies: lifts will not support mining machines, occasionally bridges will fail to support diggers, rocks will not fall when the dirt under them is removed. The game world is set up on an invisible grid of squares, and diggers can only change direction when they are smack in the center of a square, meaning that to change a digger's orders you must click on him repeatedly until he is in the "sweet spot." Very curiously, for a game whose premise is competition between teams of miners, there is no multiplayer support at all. Given the monumental idiocy of the computer opponent, this is a serious omission. A multiplayer option would have at least partially alleviated this flaw, and anyone who wouldn't want to try a lemming deathmatch?

After a time, all the Zargian terrain begins to look the same. Yes, there are a host of different geographies—desert, grassland, mountains, icescapes, islands—but when the majority of game time is spent underground, the difference between palm trees and cacti becomes moot. And underground, well, dirt looks pretty much the same no matter where you are.

And so one is left, eventually, working out the logistics of an efficient strip-mining operation. Perhaps there is a successful game to be made of this premise—*SM CITY* made civic planning fun, after all—but *DIGGERS* is not it. The cute graphics and concept make this look like a game for the younger set, but I think it's safe to say the average 10-year-old will find little joy calculating the optimum sweep pattern for clearing a block of dirt, while the sim-buffs who might enjoy such a task will be turned off by the goofy graphics and lapses in realism. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

DIGGERS

RATING ★★☆☆☆

PROS An interesting concept with huge play areas and some nifty chrome.

CONS Awkward controls, tedious game play, and boring graphics steal the sparkle from this gem.



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ACTIVISION



To The Empire's Defense

An Addendum to the Imperial Pilot's Secret Handbook

by Jason Kapalka



(A partial copy of the following document was found during inspection of pilots' quarters aboard the Star Destroyer Invincible. Once again the Imperial Information Bureau, on behalf of Lord Vader, seizes anyone with knowledge of the author or authors' identity to step forward. A reward has been offered.)

...necessitated the release of this, the updated edition of the Secret Handbook. For example, pilots in search of unofficial R&R should certainly peruse the latest version of Commander Moonbarker's "Budget Guide to Pleasure Palaces of Imperial Space," as inter-species "consortium" laws have changed drastically in certain sectors of the Outer Rim.

In addition, veteran pilots now engaged in the campaign code-named DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE have requested more unofficial tactical advice, which we are only too happy to provide. Rookies beware! If you've never seen the interior of a TIE Advanced, let alone a Defender, if your superiors haven't let you in on the recent defection of a certain highly-placed Admiral, if you don't know about the plot to kidnap Emperor Palpatine himself, it would be most unwise to read the following info.

ADVANCED TACTICS

Flyers in the DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE campaign will spend most of their time in the new TIE Defender, which, while certainly the most advanced starfighter to date, is not invulnerable, particularly in the one-against-many missions you're required to fly in it. Hence, a few new stratagems are offered here to help even the odds.

Missile Defense: Even a Defender with full shields cannot survive more than one hit from an advanced missile—a brand commonly used by Zaarin's traitorous forces. Thus it becomes necessary to avoid those missiles.

The easiest way to do this is to prevent the enemy from getting a lock on you in the first place. Ninety-degree turns at high speed are the best way to foil targeting; bobbing and weaving, effective against close-range laser fire, are next to useless against a ship targeting you from further out.

But sooner or later every pilot will hear the dreaded missile alert klaxon. When this happens, hit the spacerbar to lock onto the incoming missile. You then have two options: you can accelerate to high

speed and turn circles until the missile self-destructs, or you can shoot the missile. Simply dodging the missile is easier, but takes up a precious 20 to 30 seconds. Shooting it down is far more difficult, but can save critical moments. Switch to single lasers and keep the missile on the outer edges of your radar screen until it passes you. Then turn and spray it with fire.

Missile Attack: It can be difficult to hit enemies with missiles if they're already attacking you. When closing to missile range, press <Z> to check your target's mission. If it's attacking you, firing missiles as you close will often result in the enemy blasting them with laser fire directed at your ship.

A handy thing to remember is that your missiles will retain their lock for a second or so after you move the targeting reticle away from the enemy. Swing sharply away from the target ship right after you attain a lock; fire missiles a second later, and they will usually avoid the enemy's lasers.

Tractor Beam Tricks: The new, improved tractor beam is, of course, useful for slowing enemy starfighters while you



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fire lasers, but it has other uses that your commanding officers, with typical Imperial efficiency, will not inform you of until very late in the campaign.

When defending a large ship or installation, watch for ships making attack runs on it. If you catch them in the tractor beam as they make their approach, they will be unable to turn in time to avoid crashing headlong into the Star Destroyer, platform, or what have you. This will damage the craft you are defending slightly, but much less than a volley of torpedoes or a sustained laser-rafting run, and it's quite pleasurable to imagine your foes' reactions as they yank in vain at their joysticks....

A second useful trick will allow you to destroy ships quickly without attaining a full missile lock. Activate the beam and target an enemy with missiles. Fire after only a second or two of "yellow" blips, but maintain the tractor lock on the ship, which will be unable to change course in time to avoid the minimally-guided missiles.

Energy Management: Veterans will be familiar with the controls for changing the recharge rate of shields, lasers, and engines. Remember, though, if your craft's equipped with a tractor beam, you can use its energy as well, redirecting it to the engines by hitting F8.

And even many seasoned pilots ignore the fact that you can transfer power back and forth from your lasers and shields by hitting the <= > and < > keys. By setting both your laser and shield recharge settings to maximum at the beginning of a mission, and then transferring all power from lasers to the shields, you can achieve full double-shield strength in less than a minute.

MISSION STRATEGIES

Even for veterans, the DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE campaign offers some tough challenges. More than one hotshot ace has ended up asking for reinforcements and "Easy" task assignments. Following, then, are a few tips for each of the new missions.

And as an aside: rumor has it that the Secret Order has inaugurated a new top rank, one beyond "The Emperor's Hand." But this is not a safe topic for public discussion...

BATTLE 8

Mission 1: Here, as in many of the missions you'll be called to fly as a Defender pilot, there is less danger to you than to the ships under your protection. If time is an issue—and it certainly is here—force all missile-armed attackers to break off their torpedo runs so you can pick them off later at your leisure. Approach the flights of TIE Bombers in this mission with your lasers on single-fire, and spray each ship with one or two shots. They'll peel away, giving you time to deal with other threats.

Mission 2: Remember that resupply shuttles almost always appear as soon as



TIE FLY-BY Two TIE Defenders on a fly-by of the starfighter manufacturing plant that dominates Battle 8.



FLY-BY SHOOTING The Defender packs heavy firepower in the form of quadrilinked lasers, but in certain circumstances you're better off with a single rapid-fire cannon.

you've exhausted your missile load. Try to use missiles on all the Corvettes, and press <Z> to check which of the target ships is closest to entering hyperspace. When making laser runs against large, armed ships, switching to single-fire will give you a higher rate of fire and make it easier to dodge during your approach.

Mission 3: Forget your commander's suggestion to send your wingmen after the Corvettes; your flightmates are apparently high-scoring graduates of the Imperial Flight Academy, i.e. quite useless when at-

tacking capital ships. Send them after the Gunboats, dump all power to your engines, and take out the Corvettes with two heavy rockets apiece. Fire the rest of your rockets at the Carrack Cruiser when it appears and a resupply shuttle will hyperspace in. Take out the enemy transports before reloading, ordering your wingmen to cover you when necessary. Launch rockets at the Cruiser from very close range until its shields are down, then strafe it with lasers. Keep your shield levels high so you can take one or two missile hits from the Gunboats.

Mission 4: Don't be afraid to use your missiles here. Use them a lot. Whenever there's a break in the action, reload. This mission takes quite a while, and you may have several minutes of dull waiting before each new Rebel attack wave. Don't get bored or distracted; stick near the Cargo Ferries and if you use time compression, be ready to turn it off at a moment's notice.

Mission 5: Target the platform's missile launcher first. Once it's disabled, power up shields and lasers and dogfight with the various X- and T-Wings. The Rebels' new T-Wings are not exactly state-of-the-art: they have only two lasers and a very weak shield. They're slightly faster than an X-Wing, but as you will learn, certainly not as hard to hit as an A-Wing. Lock Transports Omega 1 & 2 in memory and don't stray too far from them. Save your missiles for craft targeting the transports.

Mission 6: The main thing to worry about here is missing with more than one of your mag pulse warheads. You need to disable, first, the nearby Corvette, second, the Interdictor, and third, the Strike Cruiser that hyperspaces in a bit later.

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Charge your shields up, then redirect all power to the engines. The best angles from which to release the mag pulse torpedoes are either from directly behind the target ship, or while flying very close in a parallel course.

BATTLE 9

Mission 1: There's a lot to do here, but for once your wingmen and the other Imperial pilots will help out. They'll disable Escort Carrier Jitte with minimal assistance, for example. Unfortunately, the Assault Transport that's supposed to take out the Cargo Shuttles will not—at least not in time. If you rush, and use four missiles, you can catch the Shuttle that's heading into hyperspace, but it may not be worth it. Destroy the remaining Shuttles as quickly as possible, then use missiles to take out the platform's launcher. Turn on the tractor beam and engage the remaining TIE Bombers. After you're done with them, the platform's shields will probably be down. Disable it and



THE LAST VIEW OF A DOOMED PILOT The TIE Defender manufacturing plant in Battle 8 is a pretty sight. But this pilot's going to be getting more of an eyeful than he bargained for thanks to a dead steering mechanism.

then it's just a matter of eluding the hordes of TIE Fighters until the capture operation is over.

Mission 2: The best way to intercept missiles aimed at someone else—the Star Destroyer Adarga in this case—is to get

crash into the Adarga.

Mission 3: A straightforward but tough fight. Lock the Mharsup and G'Nagnib into memory and take out their attackers—the transports first—and remember to re-acquire the G'Nagnib after

in between the target and the attacker and spray single-laser fire. As soon as the mission starts, turn to face the Assault Transports and dump all power to the engines. Use missiles on the enemy TIE Defenders. Even in a Defender, close attacks on Assault Transports are dangerous; use your tractor beam to make them

Bonus Mission Goals

For the TIE pilot who just can't please his superior officers enough, here are the bonus objectives for each of the new missions.

BATTLE 8

Mission 1: Destroy Nebulon B-2 Frigate Raptor

Mission 2: 100% of Assault Transport group Tiger completes mission

Escort Shuttle Sigma 1-3 and Omega completes mission

Inspect Modular Conveyor Z-Cod 1 & 2

Capture Transport Z-Epi

Inspect Corellian Transport Coril

Inspect 100% of Modified Corvette group Z-Oz

Mission 3: None

Mission 4: 100% of Cargo Ferry group Terry completes mission

Container Transport Cortel completes mission

Modular Conveyor Vendor completes mission

100% of Modular Conveyor group Dromi complete mission

Mission 5: Assault Transport Leopard completes mission

Transports Omega 1 & 2 complete mission

Escort Shuttle Sigma completes mission

Disable Transport Blue

Inspect 100% of Modular Conveyor group Rampart

Mission 6: None

BATTLE 9

Mission 1: 100% of all TIE Defenders completes mission

AND 100% of Assault Transports completes mission

50% of TIE Defender group Delta complete mission

Capture Escort Carrier Jitte

Capture Shuttles Upsilon 1 & 2, Lambda 1 & 2, Sigma 1

Destroy A-Wing Red 5

Destroy 100% of B-Wing Blue

Destroy 100% of X-Wing Gold

Destroy 100% of A-Wing Red

Mission 2: Imperial Star Destroyer Adarga completes mission

Utility Tug 311 completes mission

Tugs 819, 719, 619 and 519 complete mission

Destroy Corellian Corvettes Uhu 1 & 2

Destroy 100% of probe groups Keyhole 1 & 2

Mission 3: Destroy 100% of all Transports

Destroy 100% of Assault Gunboat group Z-Mu

Destroy 100% of Tug group 20116

Destroy at least one of TIE Advanced groups Z-Alpha, Theta, Gamma

Destroy at least one of TIE Bomber groups Z-Beta, Z-Eta

Destroy at least one of TIE Defender group Z-Zeta

Mission 4: Destroy 100% of Rebel craft

Freighter Mharsup completes mission

Destroy Nebulon B Frigate Hunu

Mission 5: Destroy 100% of all R-41 Starchasers

Destroy Strike Cruiser Intombe

Mission 6: Destroy 100% of all Rebel craft

AND at least one Nami craft

BATTLE 10

Mission 1: Destroy 100% of Y-Wing group Boegs

Destroy 100% of T-Wing group Oio

Capture Corellian Transport Dhooes

Mission 2: Utility Tug Rover survives

Destroy 100% of TIE Defender groups Z-Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta

Destroy Nebulon B-2 Frigate Z-Kopsh

Destroy 100% of TIE Advanced groups Z-Eta, Theta, Zeta

Mission 3: None

Mission 4: Destroy Carrack Cruiser Prism

Destroy Probe Yey

Mission 5: Inspect Escort Shuttle Black Box

Mission 6: Destroy 100% of all X-Wings AND 100% of all A-Wings

Destroy Calaman Cruiser Independence

Destroy Strike Cruisers Lonsiger 1 & 2

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it finishes docking. Watch out for the advanced missiles used by Zaurin's forces; your shields will have to be at near double strength to withstand a hit.

Mission 4: Sure, you were never crazy about your wingmen, but at least they served one useful purpose: drawing fire. Pretty well all the Rebel scum in this mission will be gunning for you and only you. Quickly eliminate as many of the A-Wings as you can or you'll be constantly harassed. Charge, then activate tractor beams as you close to missile range; fire one missile after a moment or two of "yellow," then a volley of linked lasers. The Mharsup will almost certainly be disabled, but make sure you eliminate the enemy Transports before they start docking, or you're likely to blast the freighter by accident.

Mission 5: The pirates, with their out-



APPROACH WITH CAUTION It's always risky approaching a Rebel platform from the topside, where defensive fire is heaviest. But the underside is impossible to target, since the defensive missile launcher is located there.

moded R-41 Starchasers, are about as threatening as a sick taun-taun. The real danger here is sensory overload: it can be extremely difficult to pick out targets amidst the mines. Don't bother locking the Corvettes into memory; just hit <I> until you've found the Transports, then kill them all sniftly with missiles. Mop up the R-41s and mines only after all six transports are eliminated. You can get some big bonus points for blasting the Strike Cruiser, but it hyperspaces out fairly quickly,

which means you'll have to use your missiles on it instead of the Transports.

Mission 6: Try to take out the A-Wings before you head for the B-Wings attacking the convoy, or they'll make life very difficult. Make speed your priority here. If you dump all power to the drive, you can probably intercept the B-Wings before they launch torpedoes. Kill them with lasers if you can, since you'll want your missiles later on. Eliminate the X-Wings at your leisure, then dogfight with the Defenders—again, you want to conserve missiles. You'll have to do some fancy energy management to have a chance against the Defenders; you need to be able to both match their speed and maintain your tractor beam. Stick close to Missan 2 and 3. Quite late in the mission, a flight of TIE Defenders will hyperspace in nearby and target them. Now, of course, is when those missiles will come in handy.

BATTLE 10

Mission 1: Back in an Assault Gunboat, but look on the bright side—it could have been a TIE Fighter. First, lock the shuttle into memory and charge your shields. Park directly behind the Transport, and as soon as it disengages hit it with one missile, then immediately switch to ions and disable it.

JFK WOUNDED



(Dallas, Texas) Shots rang out and the heart of a nation stopped yesterday afternoon in Dallas as an undetermined number of snipers shot at President Kennedy as his motorcade proceeded along Main Street.

One of the bullets found it's way to President Kennedy's right arm, wounding him at Parkland Hospital. Kennedy was treated for a non-fatal wound, listed the following day as stable, yet gunned down. The wound is still being treated. President Kennedy's relatives are still in Dallas.

yesterday afternoon in an undetermined number of snipers shot at President Kennedy as his motorcade proceeded along Main Street.

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Now target the shuttle and destroy any R-4s going after it. Remember, you only have two lasers now, and are better off transferring laser power to the engines. Use missiles and tractor beam trick #2 to scrub the pirate filth from the cosmos.

Mission 2: Whatever you do, DO NOT try to dogfight the TIE Defenders in your Gunboat. You've seen what that leads to from the other end of the gun. Kill them safely from a distance. Make sure you've destroyed the ones attacking you (using tractor beam trick #2) before trying to reload. Note that you can start accelerating while the missile tug is still reloading you. Also note that any missiles fired during this time will be automatically resupplied. Later, stick near Chemeti 2 and watch for ships attacking it.



SPECIAL DELIVERY, DON'T SHOOT! Nag pulse warheads will temporarily disable a capital ship's systems. You have to get in good and close, though, to make sure the warhead isn't shot down by the ship's guns.

Mission 3: The most crucial moment in this mission is right at the beginning, when the T-Wings will launch rockets at the Ulzepli. Immediately redirect all shield power to the engines, head for the Ulzepli, target her, hit <A> to see who's attacking her, and swing away towards the pirate at the last moment. Spray lasers towards the rockets; if you miss any, turn back towards the Ulzepli and try to intercept them as they home in. Later on,

watch out for T-Wings targeting you with missiles and dispose of them first. Do not engage the enemy Defenders unless you have missiles left over, or a strong subconscious desire for an honors funeral.

Mission 4: Thrawn's newest starfighter is at long last unveiled: the Missile Boat. Some old-timer pilots have expressed dissatisfaction with the new ship, claiming this superweapon makes destroying the enemy...too easy?!? From where we stand, it can never be too easy; moreover, the Empire's "superweapons" tend to have embarrassing Achilles' heels. We would make reference to a certain giant battle station here, but the Imperial Information Bureau has forbade the conjunction of the words "Death" and "Star" in casual conversation. In any case, the Missile Boat is no exception to this rule, with its single laser making it practically useless in a dogfight. You must destroy the enemy at long range. Note that with the improved radar system you only need half as long to attain a missile lock. If starfighters close to laser range, hit <N> to engage your SLAM drives and get some distance. In this mission, keep a close eye on the Assault Gunboats. If they're destroyed, you will be unable to disable the Strike Cruiser, and hence unable

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to complete the mission.

Mission 5: The main problem you'll encounter here is running out of ammunition. You'll need more than 40 missiles, and definitely more than 10 heavy space bombs. Lock Transport Omega into memory and keep it safe. Ask for a reload before you've exhausted your missiles, and keep firing while Omega resupplies you. With the tractor beam installed, your dogfighting capabilities are enhanced: an enemy caught in the beam will not be able to dodge a missile, even if you fired it without a full lock. When engaging the Carrack Cruisers, try to approach from the rear, and launch bombs only when very close.

Mission 6: Your first priority is to deal with the Defenders. Set lasers to recharging, channel everything else to the en-



TOP-OF-THE-LINE The new Cygnus Missile Boat is a modified Assault Gunboat equipped with a SLAM overdrive for temporary bursts of speed, four missile launchers, and up to 80(!) advanced concussion missiles.

gines, and engage SLAM overdrive. Once in range, recharge your shield and start blasting the Defenders with missiles. If some become functional, turn on the tractor beam and kill them at short range. Next take out the platform's launcher. When targeting individual parts of a platform or capital ship, realize that your missiles are not smart enough to steer around the vessel if their target is on the other side of it. The TIE Fighters

and Interceptors will take out Y-Wing group Gold Devil, leaving you free to concentrate on annihilating the platform and the mines. The mines are annoying; try to line up five or six in close proximity, fire one missile at each, then turn and engage the SLAM boosters to avoid the volley of return fire.

That concludes our latest installment of tactical advice. Pilots hoping for a dramatic ending to the DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE campaign should be warned that it turns out as something of a cliffhanger. Ramor has it that the Imperial High Command is already drawing up plans for another campaign. The Secret Handbook staff would like to suggest "Missiles, Missiles, Yet More Missiles" as a possible codename.

Returning now to the ever-interesting topic of inter-species "consortium," we are pleased to include in this edition Captain Scar's illuminating new treatise on the subject, "Wookie Nookie and Droik Dalliance: One Man's Opinion"...

(Further serious of the trustorous document are of no general interest. Once again the Information Bureau urges anyone with knowledge concerning the above text to do their duty and report to a ranking officer. There will be, we emphasize, no reprints.) ☛

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Double Play

Turn Two With Reviews of *HARDBALL IV*
and *ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT*

by Jim Gordin

THERE WAS A LOT OF GOOD BASEBALL THIS PAST SEASON. BROKEN RECORDS, THRILLING DIVISION RACES, and a World Series more exciting than many in recent memory. Of course, this didn't take place in the real stadiums, which were empty except for the players pacing the dugouts in search of bigger paychecks; it all happened in my stadium-built-for-one, my PC, where the ball players' digitized and animated counterparts played their hearts out—played several seasons in fact—without a thought of compensation.

Yes, with the release of several solid baseball packages, it was a good season for computer baseball. Now, as we turn the corner of the New Year and head into what we all hope will be Spring Training, two new baseball games have made their debuts, each adding some variety to the growing market of PC baseball simulations.

ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT

Price: \$59.95

Floppy, \$69.95

CD-ROM

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

386-33MHz or

better (486-

25MHz

recommended),

4 MB RAM (8

MB recommended), 5 MB hard drive

space, SVGA graphics, mouse, CD-ROM,

supports AdLib, PAS, and Sound Blaster-

compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Players: 1-2 (same computer)

Developer: Stormfront Studios

Publisher: Sony Imagesoft

Santa Monica, CA

(800) 922-SONY



HARDBALL IV is the latest entry in Accolade's series of action-oriented baseball games, featuring the most stunning single-screen graphics I've seen in a sports game. All 28 major league ballparks are included, which is groundbreaking in itself, and each is intricately detailed. The artists put together more than 50 frames of animation for the pitching motion alone; eight frames of art detail the batter's swing. But whereas most graphical games scroll and twist their way into recreating a sport, *HARDBALL IV* has no scrolling action. As a result, the few views of the action that are available look stunning in their SVGA detail, but the designers have made some trade-offs.

The concessions? Well, *HARDBALL IV* isn't really a baseball simulation—it's more of an action game. After your hitter makes contact with the ball, the game will shift to one of three possible views of the ballpark, each centering on one of the outfield positions. The play will take place in that screen. As a result, the outfield is about the same size as the infield, so you'll see force-outs at second base on line drives to the outfield. If the ball isn't hit over the fence, it's likely a single with only one base advancement possible.

Sony Imagesoft's *ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT* opens with a digitized video sequence that will be familiar to viewers of *ESPN's* in-season nightly baseball show. You might see the Twins turn the triple play, or former Cincinnati manager Lou Pinella throw a tantrum. Announcer Chris Berman mans the studio while Dan Patrick calls play-by-play.

Graphically, *ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT* is much weaker than *HARDBALL IV*. Player movement is awkward, and the ball disappears a full frame before the bat is in



© Accolade, Inc.

view. The game tries to scroll into different views of the outfield, but the motion is all done at once, providing an uneasy, jerky view of plays in the outfield. However, if it weren't for *HARDBALL IV's* standard-setting graphics, *ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT* would be among the best. Large player sprites and realistic-looking play outcomes highlight this simulation.

FIELDING ERRORS

Ask any action-oriented ballplayer what he or she finds lacking in a favorite game, and you'll likely hear the word "fielding" mumbled amongst other words I can't print here. Well, there's no relief here, because these two action games provide typically weak fielding models. When the ball is hit, the game highlights one of your defenders and places a circle on the field where the ball will drop. *ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT* provides more options and the fielders are easier to control, but low-

HARDBALL IV

Price: \$59.95

Floppy and CD-

ROM

System

Requirements:

IBM

compatible

386-33MHz or

better, 4 MB

RAM, 18 MB hard drive space, SVGA

graphics; supports Sound Blaster-

compatible sound cards; floppy version

requires purchase of extra disk for

MLBPA players and stats.

Protection: None

Players: 1-2 (same computer and modem)

Developer: MindSpan

Publisher: Accolade

San Jose, CA

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HEY BATT! BATT! While ESPN Baseball's graphics (right) are par for the course, *Hardball IV* (above) goes the extra mile with gorgeous SVGA pitcher-batter screens.

er-quality graphics and poor scrolling effects detract from play. You can decide whether you want to control your fielders' movements and/or throwing, permitting a gradual learning process.

HARDBALL IV also gives you control of pitcher movement and throwing, control of throwing alone, or no arcade control at all. Infield play is seemingly arbitrary: after the ball is hit, the game decides whether an infielder has a chance to make the play. Sometimes a play looks like an easy ground out, but you are not allowed to use your shortstop. So while your initial reaction is to move your shortstop right a couple of steps, you end up moving your center fielder out of position to hold the play to a single.

Outfield play is very difficult. After the ball is hit, the view shifts from behind the pitcher to the selected view of the outfield, and this new view requires a second or more for you to evaluate it. This often costs you a chance to move your outfielder into position. Outfielder movement is momentum-based, and because of the unusual dimensions of the outfield, lateral movement is much easier than forward or backward movement. The result: you often miss what should be easy catches. Mastering the idiosyncrasies of outfield play is certainly the key to success in *HARDBALL IV*.

an enormous amount of work into the pitching model. Fastballs look like fastballs and curveballs bend just like they should. Most pitchers are allowed to throw four of the eight different pitches available in the game. Some pitchers,

always best to have someone warming up in the bullpen.

ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT handles pitching in a far worse manner. Pitch selection is limited to positioning your hand on the mound and then selecting a speed of slow, medium or fast. Once the pitch is thrown, you can cut it right, left or both, sort of like throwing a whiffleball in a wind tunnel.



HITTING AWAY

ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT allows players to position themselves laterally in the batter's box and swing high, low or in the middle of the strike zone. The ball disappears too early, and contact is best made when you start your swing at the precise moment that it appears to be too

late to hit the ball. When contact is made, the game runs through an algorithm that determines the result based on the matchup between the pitcher and the hitter. This keeps results more on a par with real baseball, but lowers the action value of the program.

HARDBALL IV, however, does try to evaluate the quality of the pitch and the timing of the swing. This means that once you get your timing down, lots and lots of hits result. After just a couple of full games, I was averaging about 30 hits per game for my team alone. Dedicated joystick sluggers will fare even better. As a pitcher, you had better throw every ball into the bottom third of the strike zone or you will give up a lot of home runs.

like knuckleball specialist Charlie Hough, can only throw two or three. You select a pitch, then the batter steps up to the plate. A button press starts the windup, and then you move the joystick to pinpoint a location within a box just before the pitcher finishes his windup. Each pitcher is given a control rating that determines the accuracy of his original aim. Pitchers gradually get tired during the game, and, if hit hard enough, will suddenly lose control all together. This fatigue system is rather poorly designed, and the problem is exacerbated because it takes about one full inning for a relief pitcher to warm up. It's

Rank	Player	OPS	AVG	R	HR	SLG	OBP	BB	SO
1	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
2	George Sisler	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
3	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
4	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
5	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
6	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
7	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
8	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
9	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50
10	Sam Rice	1.00	.371	208	208	.991	.42	50	50

FLAT STATS Sternfront's games usually have lots of stats, but *ESPN Baseball Tonight* (right) is surprisingly deficient. *Hardball IV* (above) has more stats than in previous games, but their accuracy is suspect.

THE COLOR MEN

Both games excel in the audio category. Al Michaels' voice calls the play-by-play for *HARDBALL IV*. The play-calling is sometimes choppy and occasionally lags behind

Rank	Player	AVG	R	HR	SLG	OBP	OPS
1	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
2	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
3	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
4	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
5	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
6	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
7	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
8	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
9	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00
10	Sam Rice	.371	208	208	.991	.42	1.00

INSIDE PITCH

HARDBALL IV's designers put

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REPLAYS DON'T LIE The instant replay in both games allows glory hogs to view and review their finest moments. *ESPN Baseball Tonight* (right) gets a nod for allowing you some camera positioning.

the play action, but full player names and realistic play descriptions add a lot to the simulation. *ESPN Baseball Tonight* features play-calling from Dan Patrick, which is a little out-of-sequence and poorly timed in many cases, but it sounds very realistic. Adding player names would have improved the effect.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

Realism takes a hearty beating in the *HARDBALL IV* dugout. The game offers only a handful of player stats, basing pitching almost entirely on ERA and hitting entirely on batting average and home runs. The results are usually good for comedic relief. *HARDBALL IV* also offers a quick season play feature, but you have to jump in every few minutes, move the schedule forward a week, and press the "simulate" button. The lineups never vary from game to game, except for a strict five-man pitching rotation. Backups get about 50 ABs per season and New York Yankee third baseman Wade Boggs, who played 93 of his team's 113 games in 1994, hitting .342 and winning a Gold Glove, isn't even listed as the Yankee starting third baseman. You've got to put him there yourself. Ahem.

In my first simulated season, San Diego (47-70 and the worst record in the Major Leagues in 1994), ran away with its division title and ended up defeating Toronto, 4-2, in the World Series. Five Padre regulars hit better than .300 and Tony Gwynn hit .507 with 37 home runs (.394, 12 homers in 1994 play). San Diego's pitching was typical of league play as well, with starters gaining a lot of the saves and the closer, Trevor Hoffman, pitching just six innings all year. Keep in mind that *HARDBALL IV* season disks include only 25-

man rosters and that there are no injuries. The game is probably worst in the stolen base department. Witness speedy Jeff Conine of Florida, 1-for-5 stealing bases in 1994. Even though he's rated a 2 out of 5 for speed, he managed to steal 63 bases in



the simulation. This total was among his team's leaders, but hardly surprising considering Padre Luis Lopez's 28 was the league's lowest total among starting players. Okay, enough bashing. *HARDBALL IV* was not meant for serious season replay. Again, it's an action game and should be taken as nothing but.

ESPN Baseball Tonight fares much better in the reality department, although there is one rather glaring omission. Box scores are available neither during nor after your game—an inexcusable oversight. Baseball without box scores is like apple pie without the fruit. The game doesn't compare statistically to statistics-based standouts *PURSUE THE PENNANT 5.0* or *STRAY-O-MATE! BASEBALL 5.0*, but it does provide a fairly realistic set of numbers. Batting averages are very low, as are ERAs for most pitchers. Even the pitching disasters from Detroit can manage a sub-4.00 ERA for a year. You can simulate a full season in just a few minutes on a high-end computer, and the computer manager will make a genuine attempt to assign hitters a realistic amount of playing time. Pitchers in the bullpen have specific roles, and this may be the first game to offer realistic injury durations. *ESPN Baseball Tonight* includes full rosters (up to 40 players) from all 1993 and 1994 teams. You can make trades between teams, but you can't eliminate players or edit statistics. This is rather unfortunate, because the data entry people made mistakes. Pittsburgh's

Scott Bultet in 1993 and Atlanta's Jose Oliva in 1994 feature batting averages of more than 2,000, and both hit about .970 in season replays. I haven't found any way to alleviate this problem short of trading them both to San Diego.

Neither game offers much of an opposing manager, either. Both games are prone to unusual substitution patterns and have trouble managing pitching staffs. *ESPN Baseball Tonight* occasionally even allows a pitcher to re-enter a game. Again, *HARDBALL IV* suffers from a serious lack of realism. You can watch a hitter lay down a perfect sacrifice bunt, only to see that your runner has forgotten to advance to the next base.

GAME SUMMARY

HARDBALL IV is a remarkable game graphically, but it is baseball by analogy alone. Once you learn pitching placement, outfield play and the timing of the pitch, you will be able to control game results. With all the beauty of the graphics and the play-by-play announcing, though, it's easy to suspend reality and enjoy the batting practice.

ESPN Baseball Tonight is statistically more sound than its competition, but is definitely not an action game. As a result, the flaws and bugs in the computer's AI stand out much more. This game is an upgrade away from making it to the big leagues.

And the quest for the ultimate baseball game goes on.... ☺

THE CRITICS SPEAK

ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Reasonably accurate statistics and easy play make this a good choice for the baseball novice.

CONS Veterans will find it mediocre in nearly every aspect.

HARDBALL IV

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Terrific look and feel, and a great action-game interface.

CONS The statistics are a joke. Approach this one as a fun and easy action game and nothing but.

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"Open The Bomb Bay Doors, Hal"



You never saw Dave, the cagey pilot in 2001, type commands into a keyboard to issue instructions to his craft.

Spoken words were all that was necessary for Hal to acknowledge and, subsequently, ignore commands. Simulation buffs have long yearned for the same ability in their games, but can we expect our machines to react with any greater compliance than Hal?

Obviously, the keyboard is still the favored sidekick of the joystick in computer simulations. But just because it's favored doesn't mean it's the best choice. We all know how difficult and distracting it can be to take your eyes of the screen during an intense dogfight and try to find that crucial key.

The alternative will keep your hands and your

eyes where they should be—on the joysticks and on the tailpipe of the bogey in your sights. Voice recognition isn't as expensive and futuristic as it once was. It's available now, at an affordable price.

WATSON, I'VE GOT A MISSILE LOCK!

The first product to function with any degree of accuracy is VOICE COMMANDER from *Island Imaging*. This small TSR program costs only \$22, and all it requires is a Sound Blaster-compatible sound card, a microphone, and at least a 386DX-33 computer. No expensive sound cards or high-quality microphone are necessary. Naturally, a microphone that will clip to your collar so you can concentrate on the joysticks helps, but isn't required. All you do is install the software, speak each command "phrase" in the VOICE COMMANDER library three times, and you're ready to roll. I've spent quite a bit of time using VOICE COMMANDER with MicroProse's FLEET DEFENDER, and it works amazingly well.

VOICE COMMANDER comes with a preprogrammed library of commands; it knows what keys a simulation accepts and assigns a word or phrase to each function such as "chaff," "flares," or "radar." Once you've "trained" the software to recognize your voice, no further training is required. VOICE COMMANDER recognizes most, if not all, commands accepted by the flight sims it supports. In fact, it supports more commands than would be realistic in a sim; for instance, I could use "radar" to activate the FREY DEFENSE radar, but I choose not to in order to preserve realism.

In order to have any sort of

GET HANDS-ON
WITH YOUR SIMS
USING VOICE
RECOGNITION
SOFTWARE

ON THE RADAR

Topping today's briefing is an advisory for those of you flying near Mission Studios airspace. Satellite recon indicates an unusually high level of activity as they prepare to launch the next modern combat simulation, JETFOIGHTER III. Long-range radar has identified updated models of the F-16 Falcon, F/A-18 Hornet, and the F-22 Lightning II. The latest version in the Jetfighter line boasts technology distilled from the military, including what Mission calls "true texture mapping...no more warping or fringing." Military data has also been used to create JETFOIGHTER III's terrain, which is expected to be highly detailed. The product will feature smooth shading, haze and fog, transparencies (for see-through clouds), and a texture-mapped 3D virtual cockpit (where the gauges still function while the pilot scrolls the view around). Thus, volunteering to fly in these craft will be flying in a United Nations strike team against Argentina in their invasion of Chile.

(continued on page 140)

by Tom "KC" Basham

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recognition accuracy, your speech patterns must be reasonably consistent. You must slur phrases like "engaged defensive" into one word during the training stage as you would during game play. VOICE COMMANDER does have some recognition problems, which seem to increase as the number of syllables increase. Fortunately, you can reprogram any single command later. So, if you find that "Return to base" is mistaken for "engaged defensive" you can reprogram that phrase without redoing them all.

Despite how well VOICE COMMANDER works, I imagine very few of you have seen or even heard of it. One reason is that only four simulations are currently supported by VOICE COMMANDER: FLEET DEFENDER, F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, F-117 STEALTH FIGHTER,



"DESIGNATE TARGET" A simple voice command replaces the old keyboard hunt and peck, freeing pilots to focus on the task at hand.

and 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR. Why? Because, as peripheral companies like Thrustmaster have learned, game publishers usually don't receive keyboard replacements all that well. It usually means extra programming and development to provide support for the new device. The game publishers don't know if it really works all that well, nor do they know just how many people are really using it. Hence the first problem. Most people (game publishers and non-game publishers alike) usually see voice recognition as something coming down the road but not here yet, or a great idea but prohibitively expensive. Why spend the time providing support for voice recognition software that probably doesn't work and isn't supported by gamers? Thus, we find ourselves in a chicken/egg scenario: Nobody buys VOICE COMMANDER because only four products support it, but only four products support it because nobody owns it. Another problem is that the software has limited distribution. There's only one retail firm carrying VOICE COMMANDER at the moment, a mail order house called Flight Sim Central (800-477-SIMS).

Don't expect voice recognition technology to revolutionize our hobby overnight.

VOICE COMMANDER is not perfect—it can make mistakes. But for \$22 plus a SOUND BLASTER-compatible card with a microphone jack and a microphone, it works pretty well; well enough to convince me that voice recognition isn't an expensive novelty or the stuff of science fiction stories. It's here, now. And it's something software developers should begin to consider today, not next century.

INTO THE SUNSET

Regrettably, I'm passing the torch of *Bogey's Bar & Grill*. I've thoroughly enjoyed writing this column and corresponding with many of you, but the time for change has come to move on to other things. My wife and I are exploring new careers, and I will be unable to continue handling this column. I extend my thanks to all of you who took the time to write or e-mail words of encouragement. Check six!

The editors would like to thank Tom for his hard work over the last year. We've enjoyed having him behind the bar and wish him luck in his new venture.

But the battle must go on, and the next flight assignment will go to Dewey Atkin, simulation fanatic, former editor at Compute! magazine, and current Associate Editor of Orion. Look for Dewey behind the bar next month. —Ed

RADAR (continued from page 139)

Onto other matters. We have a mole at MicroProse who reports that they are fast at work on a modern day strategic simulation, *Navy Strike*, that puts you in command of an entire task force. *Navy Strike* will place more emphasis on managing resources and mission planning, requiring you to concentrate on preparation as well as combat command of the task force. Highlights include combating chemical warfare in the Persian Gulf area and a Libyan regional scenario. Dynamic rules of engagement will shift according to the current political climate.

Now, for you race car drivers who've been flipping pencils into the ceiling, eyes forward and listen up! Papyrus tells us they're busy porting over *INOCAR RACING* and *NASCAR* to both Windows and Macintosh versions. So you'd better quit polishing your pistons and get those engines built, because your day will soon be at hand! Dismissed!

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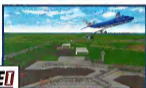
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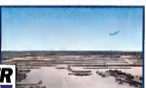
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Courage And Canvas

Relive The Youth of Air Combat
In Origin's WINGS OF GLORY

by Martin E. Cirulis



WORLD WAR I: A YEAR SO BRUTAL AND POINTLESSLY WASTEFUL OF HUMAN LIFE THAT THEY HOPED it would be the War to end all wars. Unfortunately, all it seemed to do was set the stage for the even more horrific—but far more efficient—disagreement known as WW II. Oddly enough, though, The Great War did not consist solely of the stench and death in the trenches; the conflict also created one other lasting impression. In direct contrast to that dirt and despair, there came a legend of romance and chivalry from high above: the dashing fighter aces in their canvas and wood machines. While the reality of aerial combat in WW I was sometimes more akin to a deadly Punch and Judy show than a glorious flying joust between noble knights, the romantic image of the early fighter pilots refuses to die.

Nowhere is the legend healthier than in the realm of computer flight sims. While charging about at Mach 2 dodging SAMs and teaching naughty third-worlders a stern lesson is always exciting, and pushing your Mustang to the edge of the envelope while you fight to prevent the nightmare of a Nazi-dominated world is certainly morally satisfying, nothing stirs the blood of most sim-pi-

lots more than riding through the skies on a rickety charger of canvas and wood, dueling other knights for possession of the air.

A few years ago a burst of WW I flight sims was released, and after the skies cleared, most gamers had picked their favorite and the market was pretty much locked down. Well, it seems that technology has allowed Origin to follow the golden rule: "If you can't do anything new, do the same old thing better than anybody else." Their newest flight-sim-with-a-story, WINGS OF GLORY (WG), is centered on the golden age of flight when humanity, having so recently broken the bonds of gravity, decided they just had to try killing each other with their new toys.

CANVAS COMMANDER

In WINGS OF GLORY, the player assumes the role of a young American flyer who has joined the Royal Air Force, before the actual involvement of America herself, in the hopes of

of a tight spot. Together with the rest of your squadron, you live a M.A.S.H.-esque life of hijinks and horror between flying various missions that affect the course of your little part of the war. As you proceed, a plot of military espionage unfolds, complete with spies and even a captured Fokker Tri-Plane thrown in to mix things up a bit. All-in-all, your basic Origin plot.

Those expecting a story-line and execution on the level of WING COMMANDER III, or even PRIVATEER, will be somewhat disappointed. Things here are far closer to the level of STRIKE COMMANDER. While there are the occasional "War is hell" statements and some interesting personal observations about the greater debacles of the war, this is still a pretty idealized universe and most ugly little truths are overlooked.

The character graphics are basic and the voice-acting minimal, to the point that the lovely French peasant-girl who loiters about the field firing and over-hearing mission plans sounds more Oriental than Parisian. I guess Angel from the WING COMMANDER universe was busy the weekend they taped the voices. The only other thing that may annoy some, especially those of English ancestry, is that there seems to be some confusion between the portrayal of a dashing British Ace versus an utter git.

But even the basic story and bad characterization seem to work in favor of this production, giving the game the feel of a '30s-era adventure movie starring Errol Flynn, or perhaps Douglas Fairbanks. And besides, the story does what it is supposed to do; it gives you a reason to go out again and again to fly the beautifully rendered skies of WW I.

WINGS OF GLORY

Price: \$79.95,
CD-ROM

System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
486DX-33MHz
or better
(486DX-50MHz
recommended),
8 MB RAM,
VGA graphics,
15 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM;

supports AdLib, General MIDI, and Sound
Blaster-compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Bruce Adams, David Beyer

Publisher: Origin Systems

Austin, TX
(415) 571-7171



finding adventure and glory while fighting the good fight. You find yourself assigned to a squadron stationed at a small airfield in deepest, darkest France. On your wing is your dashing and cynical true friend Charles Dearing, who is always ready to help you out

17 bureau

one agency congress doesn't #*% with.

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■ Original music score, complete with lyrics ■ AIW's solutions vary depending upon characters in your party ■ Thrilling dialog sequences with variable scenarios ■ Complex puzzles require clever thinking and imagination ■ Complete multi-media experience full of dazzling graphics ■ Based on successful pen & paper role-playing game by Richard Tucholka ■ PC-CD-ROM & PC Floppy ■

TAKE 2
ENTERTAINMENT
GAMETEK

THE BEST

OF THE WORST OF TIMES

Without a doubt, *WINGS OF GLORY* is the best-looking and sounding WW I flight sim to date. From the beautifully rendered cockpit views to the groan of your wings bending under the stress of a tight turn or climb, this game pulls out all the stops to give you the feel of how it was.

Players will fly five different fighters while in the service of the Allies: the Sopwith Pup and Camel, the S.E.5a, the SPAD SXIII and even the classic Fokker Dr.I of Red Baron fame. With all reality options turned on, each of these planes handles in a fashion distinctive enough that you have no doubts you have switched aircraft. Many will find themselves choosing a favorite fighter based not just on speed and firepower, but also handling.

The graphical rendering of the planes around you is exquisite. Details are clear and accurate down to pilot's scarves waving in the wind, and the paint jobs are so beautiful that players will find themselves somewhat bitter over the fact that this game does not allow them to paint their own aircraft. Enemy aircraft are rendered well enough to make you think you are looking through a window into a realm of diving, twisting model planes. And let's not even get into the Hindenberg-esque death throes of the Zeppelins you will eventually gun down, if you're lucky or skilled enough to survive their incredible firepower.

All this aircraft beauty does not slow the game down, but it appears that the designers had to sacrifice ground detail to achieve this. The land below is basically grass or mud, with a few well rendered trees or buildings to break up the monot-

ony. But hey, if we were worried about the ground we'd be driving a tank sim.

And speaking of tanks, the ground war is not totally forgotten, and often you will find yourself bombing or strafing enemy units in support of some major historical offensive. Though you really can't do much to prevent a bloodbath for the Al-



lies, success always allows you to think things might have been worse. And, while the terrain is simple, enemy tanks and grounded aircraft are up to the graphical quality of the air war. I was pleasantly surprised to discover the dark rectangles I was diving towards on a bombing run resolved themselves into recognizable ATV Totenkopf.

YOU ARE THERE...

As in most things, pretty pictures are great, but the proof is usually in the details. *WINGS OF GLORY* doesn't disappoint there, either. Small aspects of the early flight experience are covered in surprising ways: for example, you can actually gauge how close you are to disaster by listening to how loud the groan of your wings becomes under stress.



AIRCRAFTSMANSHIP *Wings*'s aeroplanes are stunning in all their color and detail. You've never flown, fought and died in such style.

As a sign that Origin wanted *WINGS OF GLORY* to be more of a real flight-sim than a flying action game, they also included a very basic mission builder that allows player to just fly for the heck of it, apart from the story handwired into the game. While this is not an especially powerful utility, you can still choose one of the four allied planes or the Fokker and fly a ground-attack or dogfighting mission against random targets. You also have the choice of playing in what has become the standard training program of Origin flight games, the Gauntlet mode. This lets you fly against ever increasing numbers of enemy aircraft that attack in waves of progressively better fighter craft.

Of course, this is not to say that hardcore sim-jocks will be completely happy in this world. While realism has an important place in this game, with many nice touches like aircraft center-of-gravity and fires caused by excessive engine-pulsing, there has been a definite decision made with regard to playability vs. realism. Origin chose to edit out some aspects of the real world that might make gameplay too difficult or tedious to the average gamer. While aircraft will stall, it is never fatal unless you are very low or your aircraft has



NPC-HQ The *Wings of Glory* story unfolds under this ramshackle roof. The characterization and voice-acting aren't stellar, but they work.

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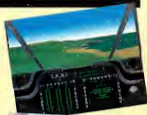


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simulation.

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Gunship 2000®
arrives,
incorporating the
hottest technologies
and graphics.

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way. Who bet-
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OH THE HUMANITY! A Zeppelin takes a lesson from the Hindenburg after being pelted by machine-gun fire and primitive air-to-air rockets.

suffered serious damage to its control surfaces. Also, planes famous for deadly spins are very well-behaved here.

The only simplification that I felt took away from the simulation was in the damage model for aircraft, especially for your own. Damage seems to be taken in "hit-point" increments; once absorbed, it has an effect, but there doesn't seem to be much of a dynamic aspect to the process.

second or two, and that's the end of it. Heck, nobody even comes out to hand you a Band-Aid after the mission.

FACING THE DAWN PATROL

These and other decisions, especially the ones pertaining to flight-models, will undoubtedly cause many purists in the flight-sim world to label *Wings of Glory* fluff and turn grumpily back to their

Damaged engines do not get worse or catch fire, and although damaged fuel lines will eventually force you to make an emergency landing, oil leaks have never really affected my flight time. Even more unrealistic is the way a pilot is wounded. The screen goes red for a

copies of *RED BARON*. And if unending realism even to the point of tedium is important to you, then perhaps you should avoid this newest offering from the Great Air War. Others may find the story-line a little clichéd, and cry "Same old, same old"—and they may be right.

But if you long for the "feel" of the planes, and images of the days when pilots were Knights and you flew with the wind blasting in your face and bullets tearing through stretched canvas all around you, then this game is definitely for you. The sounds are here, the sights are here, and so is the tension. There is enough realism to lend the world an authentic tone, but the accent is on the experience and the excitement, make no mistake about it. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

WINGS OF GLORY

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Best-looking, -sounding, and -playing game on the topic.

CONS Slight shortcuts on realism and hackneyed story may annoy some.

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*CD version only.



Uber Alles Under The Waves

How To Have A Lon, And Leibal Career In ACES OF THE DEEP

by Kevin Turner

TAKEN SCENARIO BY SCENARIO, ACES OF THE DEEP IS A GREAT U-BOAT SIMULATION. BUT WHEN YOU STRING THE U-boat scenarios into an entire career, then you truly get to experience what separates ACES OF THE DEEP from its contemporaries. An ACES career accurately depicts the rise and fall of the U-boatwaffen in WWII with an attention to historical detail that borders on the obsessive. Once you've started in the U-boat heyday, stealing candy from the naive Allied navy, and then felt the heavy hand of Allied anti-submarine tactics slowly press upon you, you cannot help but walk away with a better understanding of the war as fought on and under the Atlantic.

The career, once begun, will start the player in a small, Type IID U-boat based in Bremen in 1939. This is the first of the eight time periods depicted. As you move through these time periods, you'll see the development of the convoy system, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) tactics, and the effects of the U.S. entry into the war. It is important to monitor time periods, as it will enable you to understand what is going on in the war and, more importantly, what to expect at sea.

Once the decision to start a patrol is made, the coordinates for the patrol area are given. But before leaving that screen,

it is critically important to take the time to select the level of realism. The level of realism is basically a level of difficulty selection. If I could only impart one piece of advice, it would be to start easy. Careers are very long, and there is ample time to make the game more and more realistic. The first patrols should be considered a shakedown cruise. Learn the interface and the capabilities of the U-boat without the added pressure of high levels of difficulty and the game will be much more enjoyable. Besides, the next career can be played from start to finish at the highest level of realism, which is as close to actually being there as possible without a commission in the Kriegsmarine.

The realism options affect difficulty in two ways: making the enemy more capable and making the U-boat less automated. I would suggest that you increase the two proportionally. Having the enemy at expert level, but the boat at the absolute lowest level of realism, or vice-versa, will yield a skewed game. A balanced approach is the most effective way of enhancing the learning process and getting on the right side of the learning curve.

Spend the first patrol learning how to dive the boat and operate the interface. As confidence builds, put more and more of the realism options into play. I'd recom-

mended limited fuel, battery, and torpedoes as the first options you explore, as it's important to learn how to ration these assets early in the career. Dud torpedoes add a level of realistic frustration, as a perfect attack can be thwarted by a weapon that will not perform as advertised.

GETTING THE PICTURE

As the boat leaves the slip, it's time to start thinking about the Big Picture. The Big Picture is a term I use to describe the mental framework you must be in to succeed as a U-boat skipper. The Big Picture encompasses knowledge of the platform, the enemy, and strategy. Knowledge of the platform includes knowing the max speed, battery and fuel performance, crash dive lag time, and other characteristics of the boat. Knowledge of the enemy would include its ASW advancements and capabilities, and as much about their attack methods as possible. Strategic knowledge would include knowing the basic tenets of submarine warfare, like the tactics of convoy attacks, how to set up and use the stern tubes, and surviving a depth charge attack.

But more important to the Big Picture is knowing what is going on all the time. There is nothing more frustrating than setting up a great second attack on a

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ACHILLES' KEEL Captains without a sense of the Big Picture may end up like this one—stuck firmly in the mud at 199 meters.

large convoy, only to discover that the torpedoes from deck storage were never loaded. There is nothing more dangerous than ignoring the damage control reports during a sustained depth charge attack. Ignoring radio reports of convoy movements from other U-boats creates missed opportunities. The Big Picture means acting like, and thinking like, a U-boat captain.

A good example of the importance of the Big Picture is knowledge of the depth under keel—the distance from the U-boat's keel to the mud on the bottom of the ocean. There are times when the depth of seawater is less than 150 meters, which means that any crash dive will land the U-boat on the bottom of the sea, stuck in the mud. (There are times when sitting on the bottom of the sea is a good idea, but while diving to do so, make sure that the U-boat has no forward motion).

LAST ONE TO SPOT THE ENEMY DIES

As the boat exits the harbor, it is time to plot a course to a patrol area. Plotting a course is done by setting up waypoints. Early in the career, all the patrol areas will be centered around England. Simply plot the easiest, fastest way to the patrol area. The trick to transiting is not in plotting the course; the trick is simply to keep a close watch as the transit is taking place.

Keeping a close watch while transiting is the key to finding easy, unescorted targets, as well as the key to seeing aircraft and escorts first. In the submarine service, the saying is, "He who is found first, dies first." Remember that stealth has always been the submarine's primary advantage. Once that advantage is given away, the tables will completely turn.

The best vantage point from which to oversee a transit is not from the bridge, as some rookies assume, but the "geo plot." The geo plot is my name for the overhead screen with the red ring that denotes visibility range. Aircraft and ships will appear on the geo plot long before they are sighted by the lookouts.

Transiting is usually done in high time compression (unless you've got a lot of time to kill), and I advise that when transiting the following rules be followed. First and foremost, never leave the geo plot while in high time compression. Instead, go to 1X time compression and do what needs to be done, then return to the geo plot and crank up the compression again. Throughout the patrol, radio reports of convoy sightings will be coming in. I recommend that the patrol area and

Hitting the <Enter> key takes the boat immediately to 1X time compression. Whenever a plane or a ship is spotted on the geo plot, simply hit <Enter> and buy some time to think.

Once the patrol area is reached, there is no need to advise headquarters. Simply patrol in a pattern of your choosing within the patrol area. Should boredom set in, new orders can be requested, but are not necessary. At any time, at the captain's discretion, the patrol area can be left. Early in the war, I thoroughly recommend that the fledgling submariner take to the west coast of England, particularly the area from the southwest corner of England to the end of the channel between England and Ireland to the north. Convoys galore arrive and depart from this area, making for a bountiful tonnage harvest. After 1941, avoid this area like the plague, as the depth is confining and the ASW assets are plentiful and deadly.

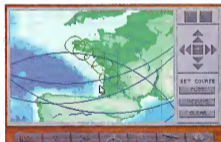
FORGET CHIVALRY, THIS IS WAR!

With any luck, the patrol area will yield some unescorted merchants, and hopefully a convoy will wander through. The patrol areas are assigned based on actual shipping lanes, and I recommend that patrol areas not be abandoned prematurely. This is especially true later in the career, when mid-Atlantic patrol areas are not uncommon.

There is one common mistake that is made when a convoy is encountered and attacked. Having spoken to a number of new ACES players, I have found that they all

want to sink the escorts. *Nein! Ze denial of shipping to ze enemy is der primary mission!* Nothing else should be considered. Keep chivalry in the closet with your other outmoded ideas and feel no shame in sinking unarmed merchants. Besides, the game awards no tonnage or extra credit for sinking escorts, and tonnage is the key to a successful career.

Should you decide to attack a convoy, and the escorts have closed and forced your U-boat into submerged evasion,



THE TRANSIT SCOPE The best viewpoint during transit is from the "geo plot." (Notice the sub ports on the coast of France that become available later in the game.)

the surrounding areas be memorized or written down. That way, there is no need to come out of the geo plot to find out if the reported convoy is in range. Another method is to use the fine chart that is supplied with the game. Simply spread the chart out, put a dime where the patrol area is, and look to see if the spotted convoy is within reach. Meanwhile, always listen to the radio reports. Whenever I am transiting, I keep an eye on the geo plot, with my fingers on the <Enter> key.



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there are some key things to remember. First of all, watch the geo plot. At the easy levels of realism, the escorts will be visible, as will their sonar pulses. Watch the red lines that spread out like wheel spokes; these denote bearing to a pinging escort. At high levels of realism, the red lines are all that appear. Now watch how the escorts attack.

Having located the U-boat with active sonar, the escort will close on the target. As the escort closes, but before the depth charges are dropped, the pinging of the radar will suddenly stop. At this time, turn 90 degrees off the base course in either direction. The deeper you are, the more time the depth charges will require before going off, and the more time to clear the area.

While playing at high levels of realism, wait until the red spokes suddenly seem to change direction 180 degrees. This means a direct pass over the sub. The end of the pinging, along with the change of direction of the red spokes signifies the time to make a fast move. An increase of speed can be used to get clear, but remember to limit the time of the burst.

Whenever possible, maintain heading pointing directly at, or away from, an escort (red spokes). Should one escort be moving more than others, it is closest to your boat. Pointing the boat at the escort limits the available cross section that the sonar ping has to return on. Should more than one escort be close aboard, simply keep moving, changing direction and depth. When enemy sonar is no longer getting a return, get away from the area. The speed available will seem dead slow, but silence is golden and stealth is the only defense. Getting brave and coming to periscope depth to fight back will result in the untimely demise of the U-boat, especially in high realism. Don't get in the habit at low realism.

DAMAGE CONTROL

There's one thing that submariners are especially good at, and that separates

them from other sailors: their damage control ability. When a submariner is awarded his dolphins, this signifies a comprehensive knowledge of the whole



A GOOD DAY TO DIVE Planes like this Sunderland are very dangerous and difficult to shoot down. Once you're spotted, it's best just to dive for cover.

boat and the systems that comprise the boat. A machoist mate is going to know the Trim and Drain system as intimately as his own genitalia, but a sonarman with dolphins will, in addition to his own special knowledge, be able to draw the Trim and Drain system from memory, and show which valves are where. Why this level of "cross training"? A submarine is a very small place, and flooding can happen in a real hurry, sending you to a wa-



SPOKE TOO SOON The "spoke" of the red circle indicates a sonar "ping" in the spoke's direction. As the escort nears, and when the pinging stops, it's time for evasive maneuvers.

tery grave even faster. Should the sonarman discover flooding, there isn't enough time to run and find a machoist mate or look up the system in a book. The sonarman must isolate the flooding and do whatever is necessary to keep himself and his companions from dying.

To the detriment of many *ACTS* careers, damage control is the most neglected and

misunderstood portion of the game. Should damage occur on the boat, it is critical that you immediately evaluate the damage and react accordingly. There is no

damage greater, or of more concern, than water in the "people tank." Any water that is not where it is supposed to be should be of more concern than any other casualty. The second most significant casualty is chlorine gas, which is caused by the seawater getting in the battery well and mixing with the lead-acid cells, but this is ultimately be-

cause water is in the people tank.

Should damage occur during a depth charge attack, the watch officer will inform you. The damage control screen will show where the damage has occurred and help you evaluate its severity. Should the damage occur to one of the non-essential systems such as the radio, count yourself lucky. Should the damage occur to the torpedo launching equipment, the patrol will be shortened, but not your career. Should the damage occur to one of the systems that keeps water out of the people tank, find out if the damage is minor, moderate, or critical, and the time needed for repairs.

The speed at which water leaks into the boat is directly proportional to the boat's depth. Whenever water is leaking, stay out of the red zone of the depth gauge. At that great of depth the bilge pumps will not work against the water pressure, and some leakage in a U-boat is inevitable. Once in the yellow range, keep a close eye on the depth. If the depth starts to decrease due to no action on your part, immediately move up to the green range. These actions will slow the leaking of water and buy some much-needed time.

The speed of the boat is another important factor in an emergency. The planes, which help maintain control, are more effective the faster the boat is traveling. Should the boat be traveling at 2 knots, the planes are going to have a minimal effect. Should that speed be increased to 7 knots, the planes will have much more effect. But the problems that result from increased speed should ren-

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der acceleration a last resort to stay alive. As speed is increased, your sonar effectiveness goes out the window, leaving the boat relatively deaf. An increase in speed also means an increase in noise, and submarine rule number two clearly states that "Noise is bad!"

Should the planes or the torpedo launching equipment (tube doors and torpedo tubes) be damaged, I advise heading for port and calling in a patrol. As much as I hate returning to port with unexpended ordnance, I hate losing a U-boat more.



SHE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE! After tussling with several escorts, this boat is in rough shape. Only the most skilled and lucky captain could nurse her back to port.

Should the damage be controlled and you survive the depth charge attack, wait until all systems are back on line before attacking the convoy again.

also gain the ability to skipper newer classes of boats. These new boats will have inexperienced crews, but they will be more capable. One big advantage in

accepting a new command is the opportunity to have a home port in France, which means that transiting the English Channel can be avoided. These French ports also make transiting to any patrol area in the Atlantic (and eventually the Caribbean) much easier, and less time- and fuel-consuming.

At some point in the career, a staff job will be offered. This means that your career has ended, and it will be placed in the record books as it stands. There is no penalty for turning down a new boat or a staff job, although I recommend that any new class boat be accepted.

The career emulation in *ACES OF THE DEEP* is fascinating, addicting, and educational. You'll find yourself jumping when an escort makes sonar contact, and cursing the Allies for putting dings in your boat. You'll find yourself elated as a convoy is successfully penetrated, and relieved that a patrol has come to an end. As your abilities increase and you take on higher levels of realism, you'll feel a profound sense of accomplishment—not because of your hand-eye dexterity, or because the secrets of the game have been found, but because now you possess the Big Picture. ☺

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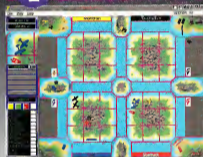
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Value-Added Gaming Options

LIKE MOST BABY BOOMERS WHO ARE SWELLING THE RANKS OF WHAT I CALL "THE GREYING Guard," I remember fondly my college days when I had less flab and more time to play games. In those days, there was time to play every game—both turkeys and triumphs—and savor the experience of each.

As family and work responsibilities have taken their toll in hours, I've been forced to be a little more selective. The shotgun approach of my college days has been replaced with a high-powered rifle with a laser site which allows me to pick off the best gaming values for the time and money invested.

This selectivity has extended to other entertainment forms as well. I rarely go to the movies



anymore, and when I do it's a matinee. Of course, it's the cost that keeps me away. Two people plus movie munchies prices the cinematic experience at a minimum of \$20, which works out to \$10 per hour. A movie has to be pretty compelling in order for me to drop that kind of dough.

Instead of renting home videos, I buy them. I'm a bargain bin shopper and won't purchase many videos that are more than \$20. On average, I drop about \$13 on each. However, because I'll watch a movie several times (at least five, unless it's something I bought on impulse and is a real stinker), the cost works out to about \$2.60 per hour of entertainment. I can live with that.

How do games stack up on the basis of dollars per hour of entertainment? Naturally, it depends on the game, but when it comes to the cream of

the crop, gaming can be a cheap form of thrills. I like to see computer games that net out at under \$1 per hour of play. In other words, when I shell out \$54 for a game, I'm looking for two to three weeks of fairly intense game play. I'm sure we've all played computer games that have reached this lofty goal. (And, fortunately for us war and strategy gamers, there is generally a lot more replay value in these games than in most adventure and role-playing games which, once "solved," become permanent shelfware.)

PASS ON THAT

My frugality aside, what inspired this reflection on gam-

THERE'S MORE
MILEAGE IN SOME
GAMES THAN JUST
ONE TRIP AROUND
THE BLOCK

G-2

◀ First, congratulations are in order to SSI. Their **PANZER GENERAL** game has reached the pinnacle of your combined opinions and reached the lofty plateau of #1 on our Top 100 list. Yes, a wargame beat out titles like **X-COM** and **WING COMMANDER III**. For the record, there hasn't been a wargame at the top of our reader's poll since SSI's **GETTYSBURG** (now retired to **CGW's** Hall of Fame) hit #1 in December of 1987.

◀ Expansions and upgrades keep on coming. Besides **Blizzard's** (800-953-SNOW) recent release of a fairly comprehensive editor for their **WARCRAFT: ORCS & HUMANS**, **Impressions** (617-225-0848) has also released the modem patch for their **D-DAY: THE BEGINNING OF THE END** game. Of course, **BATTLESIEGE 2: WESTPACK** for **HARPOON II** has been out for a while, providing 15 new scenarios, but what you might not know is that **Novastar** (916-624-7113) has released four scenario disks for **WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET II: TANKS!** When combined with the new,

(continued on page 140)

by Alan Emrich

ing values was a comment I read online. One veteran wargamer had finally sucked the marrow out of the bones of SSI's PANZER GENERAL and announced that he was putting it up on the shelf. He had mastered the game and was ready for his next wargaming challenge, whatever it may be.

What concerns me is that games with the high caliber play value of PANZER GENERAL (or SIMCITY, or CIVILIZATION, or EMPIRE DELUXE, or you-name-it) are piling up on our shelves. I feel that relegating these retired champions of gaming value to the status of shelfware is not the smartest thing we can do.

With the boom in personal computer

sales, you probably have a friend or family member who has recently acquired a new computer. Sure, you may have recommended a game or two, but they'll stick to playing the solitaire game that came with Windows unless you become a more pro-active recruiter.

What I suggest is that you give them some of these high-value games. You own them; they're yours to give. Rather than letting them collect dust awaiting your urge to reinstall them, pass them on to a new computer user who would probably never pick up a war or strategy game and could stand the great gaming experience these exceptional products offer. If the people

you give them to are anything like us, they'll become regular strategy gamers, and our modem and e-mail opponents of tomorrow.

I believe that would be a good thing, and the value of a good thing is to have done it. Having a common interest in war and strategy gaming has helped me make a lot of great friends. Ours is a satisfying, lifelong, educational hobby. The least we can do is pass along some of the toys that we're no longer playing so that others can discover the fun we're having. You never know, that buddy or cousin of yours could be the next digital Desert Fox. ☺

62 (continued from page 139)

unofficial upgrade for TANKS! that is out on the networks (see below), we're talking about a game highly worthy of a fresh look.

Speaking of that TANKS! unofficial upgrade, it was released by designer Norm Koger and dubbed version 1.25. It adds unit retreat and panic fire, hidden AT guns, variable weather during play, reduced effectiveness of air and artillery under certain circumstances, and more morale checks. The "feel" of tactical combat has been greatly improved, allowing things to occasionally get out of your control and better simulate some of the chaos on a battlefield. We salute you, Norm, for the great product support and loyalty to your fans.

Not to be outdone, the version 1.2 of HPS Simulations' TIGERS ON THE PROWL is also looking good. It includes an all-in-one unit orders menu, has increased the range for units' combat moves, added a misfire/dud rate and a training rate for each force, and tons of other stuff (such as driving tanks in reverse!). Like Norm Koger and Gary Grigsby, Scott Hamilton just loves to tinker and improve his games.

In addition to TIGERS ON THE PROWL version 1.2, HPS Simulations (408-241-6886) is working on a self-published strategy guide written by the same Greg Smith who did our TOP strategy article in the November 1994 issue. It will probably include a disk with either more scenarios or a new campaign. This should be released concurrently with their West Front ver-

sion of TIGERS, entitled PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS.

The Rose is off the bloom at Avalon Hill. Jim Rose, that is. He's been their computer game guru, assembling the line-up of quality computer games that The Hill has been releasing of late. Jim will be starting his own computer game company and hopes to release a wargame on the Battle of Kharkov at the Platoon/Company level later this year. Good luck, Jim!

Although we're still awaiting COMPUTER THIRD REICH from Avalon Hill, we've got some information on its boardgame sequel, RISING SUN. This Pacific THIRD REICH board game should be out in the summer of this year. If and when it will be converted to computer play, no one is saying.

While many are tired of hearing about the wildly successful collectable card game MAGIC: THE GATHERING, now historical gamers have something to crow about. A collectable American Civil War trading card game called DIXIE has proven to be very popular. The first set covers the battle of First Manassas, and we've been having fun with it here at the CGW offices after hours. For more information, contact Columbia Games, Inc. at (800) 636-3631 from the US or Canada.

Even as the 2.0 version of THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATOX is finding its way to wargamers' hard drives, designer Frank Hunter is working on both THE ROAD FROM MARENGO TO WATERLOO and BETWEEN WIND AND SEA: THE AGE OF SAIL. Frank is hoping to link these two Napoleonic titles into as grand a gaming experience as we

Old Guard can imagine.

Australia's SSG hasn't forgotten their classic REACH FOR THE STARS. They still plan to do "a bigger, better space game sooner or later," according to SSG's Gregor Whaley. In the meantime, SSG will release THE LAST BLITZKRIEG in the second quarter of this year.

Those awaiting U-BOAT 2 from Deadly Games will have to keep waiting. While the software is coming along, it's coming along in fits and starts. This Macintosh wargame/simulation will cover Operation Drumbeat, the German campaign against the US East Coast after American entry into WWII.

Our ace spy, The Body Bag Guy, has been going through the waste baskets at Norm Koger's office. Koger's scribbled notes suggest that his next offering may well be WARGAME CONSTRUCTION KIT III: RIFLES, a tactical Napoleonic game featuring swords and musketry instead of tanks and airplanes.

The Bag Guy has also jacked into Jim Dunningan's memory chip. Dunningan's latest multi-player on-line game on the Roman Republic is being shopped around the many on-line services. Interestingly, the new MicroSoft "Marvel" network is singing the sweetest song among them.

Finally, the Body Bag Guy took a much needed vacation to Tahiti. He uncovered the fact that the 3W boardgames TAHITI and BARBARIANS are being offered for conversion into an electronic format. The interested parties include some computer game companies that are not known for wargames.

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Circle Reader Service #349

All's Quiet On Tomorrow's Front

*Impressions' FRONT LINES Delivers Futuristic Warfare—
Not With A Bang, But A Whimper*

by Patrick C. Miller

IN THE OPENING ANIMATION OF IMPRESSIONS' FRONT LINES, A SQUAT TANK SQUARFS OFF AGAINST AN AGILE HOVER TANK on a battlefield 50 years into the future. The vehicles blaze away at each other from point-blank range using various wonder weapons of the 21st century, most of which appear to rival the World War II bazooka for effectiveness. Finally, as the scene drags to a conclusion, the hover tank fires a laser-like red beam that does to the tank what you'd expect a microwave oven set on high would do to a pumpkin after a few minutes.

Veteran gamers know that any resemblance between a game's obligatory animated sequence and its gameplay is usually coincidental, but FRONT LINES is nearly the exception. Unfortunately, no vehicle in the game sports a death ray capable of barbecuing tanks—a regrettable oversight, because this means you and your enemies are stuck with the high-tech equivalent of bazookas to fight each other's futuristic tanks. As a result, with maximum realism in effect, the action in FRONT LINES tends toward close-range

slugfests that are about as lethal and as interesting as the days when cavemen threw rocks at each other.

In fairness, the game does include a "one shot, one kill" option that makes combat considerably quicker and more deadly, or you can use the game's scenario builder to create battles more to your liking. However, while playing with more lethal weaponry provides faster paced action, it also serves to highlight the lackluster performance of FRONT LINES' artificial intelligence (AI). The computer player generally makes feeble, piecemeal attacks that can be crushed with massed firepower or easily countered with competent maneuvering.

LET THEM EAT PRETZELS

Impressions set out to create a turn-based, "beer and pretzels," tactical-level hex wargame with a miniatures game look and

feel that would appeal to a broad audience, as well as hard-core strategists. FRONT LINES is clearly an attempt to go beyond QQP's THE PERFECT GENERAL by offering such features as 256-color SVGA graphics, animated units and combat, digitized sounds, user-selectable realism options and a scenario editor. Impressions devoted a great deal of time and effort to make FRONT LINES a game

that advances this genre to another level; in some respects it succeeds, but in others it falls behind the current standard.



The SVGA graphics are outstanding, giving the game a very crisp, clean look. Windows users should be comfortable with the mouse-driven interface's hot buttons, pull-down menus and icons. The interface is generally straightforward, easy to understand and intuitive—a good thing because the three manuals that come with the game leave out some important details. The individual armor, infantry and artillery units resemble the finely sculpted, highly detailed mini tanks used in miniatures wargaming. Some units contain animation, such as the spinning fan blades in the Ferret hover tank. The terrain is also exceptionally well done, and a hard fought battle yields a landscape littered with broken bodies, charred vehicle hulks, craters, burning trees and shelled out buildings.

How did a game that appears to offer so much sizzle manage to fizzle? Impressions based its design on a future world where warring factions use the same armored fighting vehicles and weapons. In this world, advancements in mobility, armor protection and other defensive measures have significantly degraded the effectiveness of offensive weapons. Is this vision of future armored combat wrong? Who knows. Does it make for exciting and interesting game play? Definitely not.

Further complicating this picture, Impressions' combat model contains so many variables and factors, including unit endurance, morale and quality ratings, a "combat odds" setting and randomly inflicted damage, that trying to predict whether a target can be hit or hurt sometimes provides the game's greatest challenge. This complexity certainly runs counter to the company's intent for FRONT LINES to be a "beer and pretzels" game.

FRONT LINES

Price: \$59.95,
CD or Floppy
System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
386 or better,
4 MB RAM,
SVGA graphics,
hard drive,
mouse, CD-
ROM; supports
AdLib, Gravis Ultrasound, Roland, and
Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
of Players: 1-2 (same computer; modern
with patch)

Protection: None
Designer: Chris Foster
Publisher: Impressions Software
Cambridge, MA
(800) 545-7677



MODERN OF THE OPERA

Modern play is a feature of *THE PERFECT GENERAL* responsible for its longevity on many gamers' hard drives, but, because of technical difficulties, this feature wasn't available in the initial release of *FRONT LINES*. The game was billed as being modern playable, and references to it exist on the game's box and in the manuals. Once the modern play problems are resolved, the company says a patch will be mailed on request to registered owners and that it will also be available from the Impressions BBS and other on-line services. The decision to ship the game without the modern play was an unfortunate decision, because with the game's inadequate AI, modern play is a feature it desperately needs. It can be played as a two-player "hot seat" game by those willing to forego hidden movement and tolerate an interface that doesn't lend itself to this type of play.

The CD-ROM version of *FRONT LINES* comes with 33 prebuilt scenarios (13 more than the disk version) which are ranked as easy, medium and hard. The CD also contains digitized voice and longer, more detailed animated sequences. Loading a scenario brings up a summary screen providing a brief overview of your mission, including each side's objectives and suggested strategies. You can also take a close look at the map on which the



DRUG WAR 2000 *Front Lines* offers many hypothetical scenarios like this one, where you lead a coastal invasion with fast Ferret hover tanks into an island of druglords armed to the teeth.

battle will be fought. Once you accept the scenario, you have the option of either going with the default units and their assigned deployment, or tailoring your force by using points to buy from a pool of units, which you can then deploy behind your side's lines.

Combat takes place on the tactical map screen where the hex scale is 150 meters, and each turn represents one minute of real time. Here, movement and fire commands are issued to your units, and you can call up reports providing information on unit status, terrain effects and objectives. There are several options that can be used to increase the level of realism and speed of play, giving you some flexibility in customizing the game to suit your tastes.

Game play proceeds with first one side, then the other, conducting movement. If the opportunity fire option is enabled, units can fire during the movement phase. Following movement, fire combat takes place, which can either be conducted in the traditional manner of having first one side then the other fire, or by using simultaneous combat resolution. The simulta-

He ruled the auto industry.



Henry Ford Photo: UPI/Seltman

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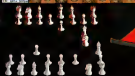
—Patrick Wolff, 1992 U.S. Chess Champion

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Circle Reader Service #204



He ruled the shipping lanes.

neous feature provides greater realism because, instead of firing units in the most advantageous sequence, both sides must designate all targets, then sit back and watch as the computer determines the results.

DON'T HOVER ON ME

The 14 units available for combat are grouped into four types: tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), infantry and artillery. The three types of traditional tracked tanks include a light tank, a heavy tank and the all-powerful Mega Tank. The Ferret is a lightly armed and armored, but very fast, hover tank. The SCAB (Surface Combat Airborne Battle tank) is another hover tank, more heavily armed and somewhat better armored than the Ferret. There are two types of APCs; an amphibious hover-type shuttle, capable of carrying infantry, artillery and tanks, and a more conventional wheeled APC that can haul infantry and artillery.

Checklist Summary Next

Checklist of the 1st Battle Mission

Check to make the 1st Battle Mission your active mission for the previous and the next level. For more information on the Battle Mission, see the Battle Mission section of the Battle Mission.

Checklist Summary in Table

1st BATTLE MISSION: OBJECTIVES

This is a mission of your position and your position. You will be given the task of the mission. If you are not given the task of the mission, you will be given the task of the mission. If you are not given the task of the mission, you will be given the task of the mission.

2nd BATTLE MISSION: OBJECTIVES

This is a mission of your position and your position. You will be given the task of the mission. If you are not given the task of the mission, you will be given the task of the mission. If you are not given the task of the mission, you will be given the task of the mission.

Objective	Progress	Time
1st	100%	1:00
2nd	100%	1:00
3rd	100%	1:00
4th	100%	1:00
5th	100%	1:00
6th	100%	1:00
7th	100%	1:00
8th	100%	1:00
9th	100%	1:00
10th	100%	1:00
11th	100%	1:00
12th	100%	1:00
13th	100%	1:00
14th	100%	1:00

BATTLE BRIEFS Before each battle, a short but effective briefing clearly indicates mission objectives as well as providing background and tactical advice.

Infantry is one area in which *FRONT LINES* has improved significantly over *THE PERFECT GENERAL*. Engineers are truly useful because they can quickly build bridges, lay mines and destroy things. Regular infantry is your basic grunt unit, good for garrisoning objective hexes and fighting other infantry. Tech infantry, described as "little walking tanks," is a real menace. It moves nearly as fast as some vehicles and maneuvers easily through woods and built-up areas. Infantry can perform close assault attacks against armored units, so tech infantry presents a real threat when it gets in among your vehicles in a wooded or built-up area.

In *FRONT LINES*, artillery in no way lives up to its vaunted "god of war" image. Unlike *THE PERFECT GENERAL*, where artillery can attack multiple hexes (providing great incentive for dispersing your units), artillery in *FRONT LINES* can only attack one hex at a time. It either hits or misses, and it seems to miss a lot, never scattering to adjacent hexes and sometimes inflicting only minor damage. There are four types of artillery units: light, heavy, the GSM missile launcher and the Blast Wagon, a wheeled self-propelled artillery vehicle. The other three units are motorized carriage-mounted weapons, capable of moving short distances on their own, though more effective when paired with an APC or shuttle.



Princess Cruise Photo: J. J. Seltman

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PC Data, May 1994

040-0087



MAN VS. MACHINE Given the relative weakness of the computer opponent, veteran wargamers will have no problem laying traps for enemy units, while avoiding AI ambushes like this one.

FRONT LINES' sighting rules can be confusing, especially when operating along the edges of cities, hills and forests. The game could use a feature that lets players see what hexes their units are capable of spotting. Opportunity fire is difficult to use and even more difficult to execute until you figure out how it's done. What the manual doesn't tell you is that after you built an enemy unit during movement, you must first right click on the unit you want to fire, left click on the unit you want to fire at, and then left click on your firing unit. Also, because you can't control what portion of the tactical map you're viewing while the computer is moving, enemy units are often out of sight or out of range before you realize they've moved.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, BUILD 'EM

The scenario builder is an excellent addition to FRONT LINES, giving players the power to lay out their own maps, edit terrain feature characteristics and change unit values to create entirely new scenarios. The scenario builder in the CD-ROM version has a fatal bug that renders the editor nearly useless. However, to their credit, within days after the game's release, Impressions developed and widely distributed a patch to fix the problem.

Impressions says that FRONT LINES is the first in a series of hypothetical and historical games that will use the game engine created for it. The company is working on an American Civil War game that it expects to release sometime next year. We can only hope that Impressions' experience with FRONT LINES, a game with much promise and potential, translates into future products that look and sound as good, that play better and suffer from fewer problems. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FRONT LINES

RATING ★★☆☆☆

PROS Superb graphics and sound, a good interface and nice terrain create the look and feel of a miniatures game. The scenario editor is an added bonus that increases replay value.

CONS Dull game play and poor AI force a retreat. Lack of modern play in the initial release is unfortunate.

He ruled motion pictures.



Left: Mayer Photo: UPI/Bettman

Road To Nowhere

Koei Leaves Asia Behind For OPERATION EUROPE

by Terry Lee Coleman

THE FOES AT KOEI HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING THE GREAT MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF THE Eastern world to wargamers in North America. BANDIT KINGS OF ANCIENT CHINA, NOBUNUGA'S AMBITION, ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS et al, were a consistent string of solid, entertaining games from a unique perspective. Just as it seemed that the magic formula was wearing off, Koei discovered VGA graphics and revamped their game engine. The result was GENGHIS KHAN II, which featured a strong computer opponent, great campaigns, and a lot of panache—enough, in fact, to earn it a slot as a CGW Premier Award Finalist for best wargame of 1994.

As you might expect, then, I was looking forward to Koei breaking out of its Asian mold with OPERATION EUROPE: PATH TO VICTORY, 1939-45. I was interested to see Koei's unique wargaming approach applied to a new milieu, especially with the enhanced graphics and game engine of GENGHIS KHAN II. No sooner had I booted the game, though, than my



FIND THE HIDDEN T34/85 This close-up look at the tactical battle board is supposedly a tank battle, but it looks more like chartered accountants fighting from their tax shelters.

hopes were soundly dashed.

Graphically, the game is a great step backwards for Koei. The majority of the map is in lime green or dingy brown, and the tactical map is so pixelated that the orange-dots-on-green-background effect makes the battlefield look as though it suffers from a severe attack of measles. Frankly, I own Commodore-64 games that look better.

Instead of the nicely-sized sprites of Mongol horsemen from GENGHIS KHAN II, you are subjected to minuscule stick figures of infantry and cardboard-cutout tanks. There are familiar faces, such as your advisors, who pop up in the corner of the screen with information on your objectives, supply, or battle situation; but unlike the rosy-cheeked and tanned characters of GENGHIS KHAN II, these leaders look pale and wan. To make the action even less inspiring, every time you give an order to re-supply, for instance, you see a static screen of soldiers loading trucks, carrying sacks of food, and so on. The problem is, they are all drawn in a bad sun-of-anime style that even the Japanese would be ashamed of

A PORT OF POOR VINTAGE

The truth of OPERATION EUROPE is that it is simply a bad conversion of a Japanese cartridge game, and computer gamers

deserve better. The game attempts to cover the entire scope of the war in Europe, but lacks the depth to do it justice. The entire European Theatre is covered by a mere half-dozen battles, and these battles aren't even the most representative of their respective periods of the war.

The Invasion of France is a good enough start, but centers around Sedan. The victory conditions are more appropriate to a WWI game than WWII, which misses the entire point. The French expected to refight WWI, and the Germans quickly showed them the error of

their ways. That this erroneous mindset is perpetuated by OPERATION EUROPE is inexcusable, especially as this is obviously positioned as a beginner's game. Why bother to introduce people to wargames if you ignore the most basic historical facts in your game design?

The Battle For North Africa centers appropriately around Tobruk, but there is no sense of fluidity, the essence of desert warfare. Part of the problem is the poor interface, another step back from recent Koei designs. Sometimes it's best to use the mouse, for other tasks you need the keyboard, and it is not obvious which is best at what time. This kind of confusion is bad news for any game, but especially a light



OPERATION EUROPE: PATH TO VICTORY

Price: \$69.95, CD and Floppy System

Requirements: IBM compatible 386 or better, 4 MB RAM, 3MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards.

Protection: None

of Players: 1-2 (same computer)

Publisher: Koei Corporation
Burlingame, CA
(415) 348-0500



game like OPERATION EUROPE, since there isn't enough depth to make you want to struggle past the interface and onward.

The *Armored Battle At Kursk* tries to be more historical than this simple system can handle. Essentially, what the designers have done is to take the ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS system and retrofit it to WWII. This uneasy marriage reduces the huge tank battles of the Eastern Front to aimless unit-pushing. There is no broad sense of armored thrusts, as in PANZER GENERAL, not even the rudimentary sense of combined arms that you get from playing WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET II: TANKS!

As the scenarios progress, the insult to history and to any gamer playing OPERATION EUROPE increases. *D-Day at Normandy* evokes no feeling of the tense landings and the ensuing desperate struggle on the beaches. As you try to capture St. Lo, Bayeux, or Caen, you might as well be fighting in Italy, or at Gettysburg for that matter, so vanilla are the lands in which you campaign. *The Battle of The Bulge* is confined to Bastogne, which is at least some attempt at focus, but the traffic jams so crucial to the battle are simulated only so much as in the amount of fighting you do with the interface, not by any intention in the design.

Finally, you get to raze Berlin to the ground in 1945. Now, I'm all for getting to shoot the bad guy at the end of the gun-fighter flick, but there should be some sense that he might be faster on the dime than the guy wearing the white hat. There is no such luck here, as the Germans will roll over and die even for a novice, and where's the fun in that? Instead of a sense of closure gained from beating a worthy opponent, the feeling here is relief, as you put the lid back on the box.

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

Which brings up the question: for whom is this game designed? There are small attempts at serious simulation tossed about here and there. The most ridiculous of these is the Army structure, which goes from field army down to battalion. No begin-



BATTLEFIELD WITH A VIEW Note the field view (above) and aerial view (below) of the action. Don't see much difference? That's because there really isn't.



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by Arinn Dembo

INTERIOR: (Steadicam walks through an intergalactic cantina, complete with Bugeye Goodman jazz combo and pastel-skinned beauties serving fizzy drinks which look something like lava lamps.)

MEDIUM SHOT: (Over the shoulder of leather-clad, longhaired captain, camera focuses on earnest young wannabe space trader's face.)

CLOSE-UP: (Female captain smiles a bewinged smile and begins to speak.)

Captain: You think it sounds great, wheeling and dealing in strange new sectors of the galaxy? You think you've got what it takes to sell lava lamps and whip cream to weird creatures that look like everything from giant insects to living topoca? Think it's easy to buy low and sell high in every port in the system, constantly dodging clouds of corrosive gas, space hurricanes and herds of gigantic star-faring whales? Ready to negotiate with pirates, smugglers, gamblers and starving artists? Think you're good enough to keep your crew happy, coax a full load of passengers aboard, and stay a half-step ahead of the tax man and the loan sharks? Yeah, loan sharks! The kind who compound your interest weekly and stand ready to re-possess everything you own. You think it's gonna be exciting, the beginning of a brand new adventure, but kid, I'll tell ya', sometimes... it's just monotony.

VOLUME, VOLUME, VOLUME!

When you load up Spectrum HoloByte's latest offering, GAZILLIONAIRE, it may appear that you've stepped into a wild, colorful galaxy full of opportunity for the energetic and resourceful space trader. Indeed, for your first several runs through the space lanes, this game of hyper-capitalism offers surprises at every turn, riches at every port, and new threats in every dark corner of the galaxy. But stick around a while, kid, and we'll see how long the shine stays on your coin.

You start the game in debt because Mr. Zinn, the richest man in the sector, has loaned you 100,000 kubars (the local currency) to help you set up your new shipping company. As the game begins, you have nothing to your name but a freighter, seven warehouses, a line of credit, and a big loan to repay, at 4% interest. If you did nothing, the game would be over in less than 20 turns, since Mr. Zinn repossesses your ship and holdings when you owe him over 200,000 kubars.

Of course, sitting there letting the interest mount up wouldn't be very sporting of you. The point of the game is to be the first entrepreneur to make 1,000,000 kubars free and clear, and the only way to

take the prize is by running your single ship around the Empire, lorrying passengers and speculating on cargo. Before the game is through, I can guarantee that paying back Mr. Zinn will be the least of your worries. I wouldn't want to spoil anything, because learning to play this game is one of the keenest pleasures it affords, so let me put it this way: you're going to want traveler's insurance.

The game system forces you to stay light on your toes, hopping from planet to planet, because until you make a journey, your turn doesn't end. To make a profit, you purchase as many tons of merchandise as you can at rock bottom prices, and you advertise for passengers and commodities at the next planet you intend to visit. When you touch down, you hit the market, unload what you can, and load up whatever is cheap. Your competitors are trying to do the same, and whoever gets to a planet first has first crack at the marketplace, which can be the difference between making a profit or taking a loss for the journey. The supply and demand of the 20 basic commodities varies from planet to planet, and taking in the full profit margin on any given load—say, 100 tons of cantaloupes—is pretty satisfying.

When you make a big score, you can do important things like giving your crew their wages, paying your taxes, or making inroads on your debt. Filling the hold of a two-hundred-ton freighter with "moonferns" or "kryptoons" is fun, and you have supply screens available to let you know which planet is likely to give you the best price on the load. The mechanical aspect of the game has the potential to be endlessly diverting, except for one thing: there are only seven planets.



GAZILLIONAIRE

Price: \$32.95,
CD-ROM
System

Requirements:
IBM 386-
33MHz or
better, 4 MB
RAM,
VGA/SVGA
graphics, 3 MB
hard drive
space, mouse; supports Sound Blaster and
compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-6 (same computer)

Protection: None

Developer: LavaMind

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte

Alameda, CA

(BDO) 695-GAME



SEVEN GOING ONCE SEVEN GOING TWICE...

Each planet has a number of gorgeous paintings and humorous cartoons associated with it, as well as a "theme" song, a few pages of planetary history, and a special task that can be performed only on that world—i.e., religious pilgrimages, ship leave, or swapping out your old star-drive for a new one—as well as access to the interplanetary news and weather reports. Exploring the planet and taking advantage of its unique opportunities is an important aspect of the game—you have to keep doing it to win—but once the novelty wears off, doing the same-old same-old at the same old planets is pretty tedious.

Seven planets aren't enough to sustain a player's interest or satisfy the appetite for variety and discovery. To be honest, I'd prefer to forego the exquisite paintings of each planet from orbit, or the funky theme music, and have more worlds instead. This game would be a lot more interesting if there were 50 worlds, randomly distributed over the map with each game, all possessing random attributes. A larger, more varied field of play would give GAZILLIONAIRE a richness and sense of adventure it sorely needs.

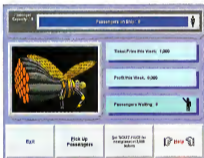
The fact that the game can support up to six human players should have made for some good, clean fun. GAZILLIONAIRE is a Windows application, but strangely enough it doesn't have network capability. So, although the action is turn-based, and despite the fact that it is much more fun to play the game socially, you have to hot-seat the play every turn, which slows things down quite a bit. By the time six people sit down, go through the necessary screens, and make all their decisions, a single turn can take an hour...which is pretty excruciating.

The game's heart is in the right place, but the replay value really should have been better. It's a shame, really, because the designers of GAZILLIONAIRE put a lot of attention and creativity into this



FLATSCREEN ECONOMICS Although the main screen is fairly static, it immediately provides a wealth of useful data within an easily learned interface.

game. It started as shareware, a simple scenario with simple mechanics, until it was picked up by Spectrum HoloByte. Unfortunately, Spectrum did very little to expand the game in scope; instead,



EIGHT PASSENGER PICK UP Ferrying gaying passengers from one destination to the next is a sure-fire way to earn some consistent dough, but don't expect it to make you rich in a hurry.

they slapped some fancy chrome on it and transferred the whole package onto a CD-ROM.

Of course, the bells and whistles, along with a humorous, light-hearted sense of fun, are more than enough to distract the player for the first few bouts. But in single-player mode, GAZILLIONAIRE is not only extremely easy to play, but also very hard to win, which means that the average player will have to play it several times in order to beat the computer. By the time you've learned the drill and gone through your first few games, those bells and whistles are no

longer enough to distract you, and plugging away at it is annoying, rather than fun. A person simply can't play this game solidly for more than a week or two, and once you win at Intermediate level, trying to win again at Expert or Master level is not an attractive prospect—unlike games which have less sophisticated graphics and much higher replay value.

Of course, when I say that GAZILLIONAIRE is difficult to win, I don't mean that you have to be outstandingly clever, or that the game is full of fiendish puzzles. The fact of the matter is that if you're doing too well, the computer will butcher you with random events over which you have little or no control. The program is designed to keep a player surfing at zero for as long as possible. If you start doing well, the computer will quickly arrange a host of financial disasters; if you're hurting, just as many sudden windfalls can come along.

CLOSING THE DEAL

All in all, this game is light, funny, flashy and easy to get the hang of. All the jokes are delightful the first time around, and learning to play is a pleasure. Also, the operation of the game is exquisitely smooth—in dozens of hours of play, there wasn't a single crash or hiccup on my machine. But like I've said, it gets old fast. If you're playing by yourself, I can't imagine keeping GAZILLIONAIRE on your drive for more than a month. Of course, at the low asking price, it might not be such a bad deal—especially if you could re-sell it for a profit to a gullible alien when you were through.

THE CRITICS SPEAK

GAZILLIONAIRE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Simple gameplay and humorous motif make for a good time for a few hours.

CONS Too simple and restrictive to keep you coming back for the long-haul.

EXPLORATION

You've left a comfortable home and a loving wife for 40 tough, smelly sailors who eat careless captains for breakfast. In a creaky wooden ship you plan to sail the uncharted, hostile waters of a world many are certain is flat.

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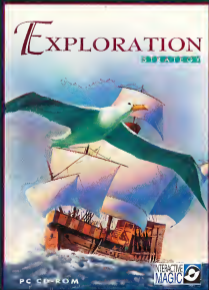
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Movin' On Up

*Shooting For The 100-Floor Megaplex
In Maxis' SIMTOWER*

by Paul C. Schuytema

LIKE MANY A GOOD INVENTION, MAXIS' SIMTOWER: THE VERTICAL EMPIRE FOUND ITS GENESIS IN discontent. Yoot Saito, a Japanese businessman with background in architecture, was frustrated by the inability of Tokyo's elevators to effectively move the massive amounts of people in the city's skyscrapers. He wondered how elevators were scheduled and if, perhaps, the scheduling could be done better. Not being one for idle curiosity, Saito set out to create a simulation that would allow him to study elevator performance and traffic patterns in a modern-era skyscraper.

Then the Sim-ulated designers at Maxis got wind of Saito's project. The people responsible for engineering system simulations (SIMCITY, SIMEARTH, SIMLIFE, sim-anything) thought the SimElevator concept was an interesting one, and that with a little more development, the concept could become a neat game. This was SIMTOWER born.

SIMTOWER is a building simulator, but it does not simulate today's typical downtown high-rise. SIMTOWER looks forward to the day when the suburbs of major urban centers become completely developed, and the demands of our exploding population force humanity to build up, rather than out. The high-rise of tomorrow, according to SIMTOWER, will not only be the place where urbanites work, but

also where they sleep, eat, exercise, and play—living out the drama of their lives several hundred feet from the ground.

SIMILARITIES

First, let's tackle some obvious comparisons. Yes, SIMTOWER is very similar to SIMCITY (more to the original than the new SIMCITY 2000). It is a management simulation based, chiefly, on cash flow, construction and traffic management. Because of what SIMTOWER simulates—a single building as opposed to entire urban areas—it is a simpler simulation to get your teeth into.

This is not to say that SIMTOWER is overly simplistic. Far from it. There is a nice balance of challenge in SIMTOWER, even more than in the original SIMCITY. Having fewer variables to content with means that you can see each

components' effects more directly, and you really feel as if you can focus on specific problem solving rather than large-scale SIMCITY bandages (such as more roads or more police) which may or may not "stop the flow of blood."

Before you can reach for the stars, you've got to have solid ground underfoot. You start with a prime plot of real estate, nothing but red, gritty dirt really, with the urban skyline in the distance. You are also provided with a cash kitty of \$2 million,

which doesn't sound like much given your lofty aspirations, but it's a start.

The mandatory foundation element in SIMTOWER is the lobby. You select your plot, select the lobby tool, click and drag your mouse, and hey, you're hiring teamsters! A lobby goes up fast, but you don't want to make it as large as the base of your envisioned "ultra-tower." You'll go broke doing that, so only create enough lobby for a mid to small sized office building.

Your \$2 million should be enough to let you build a 3-4 story office building with a single elevator, offices and one or two fast food courts. Essentially, that's all you really can build when you are a "one star" building. For those who prefer to have their workers live on the premises, you can also build condos, but you probably won't yet have enough resources to keep your residents happy.

WHITE COLLAR MECCA

After you've dragged and placed your offices, fast-food joints, stairs and elevator, you can sit back and watch your virtual white collars come and go. As the simulation is running, a clock spins through the hours of day and night and weekends. Outside, the sun sets, turning the sky a lover's purple before the rattle of morning rush hour. Wait long enough, and you're sure to experience a torrid rain storm and even Santa on Christmas night.

Like SIMCITY, you rely on income to feed your cash hungry tower-building enterprises. Restaurants, stores and hotel rooms will provide you with a steady stream of income. When rent comes due, all of your office occupants will shell out their bucks, and then you'll have the cash to pick up the jackhammer once again and build.




SIMTOWER

Price: \$44.95
Mac Floppy &
CD-ROM,
(Windows
version
available April
95)

System

Requirements:
Macintosh
68030 or
higher (68040 recommended), 4 MB RAM,
System 7 or higher, 8-bit color, 4 MB RAM
Protection: None
Designer: Yoot Saito
Publisher: Maxis
Orinda, CA
(800) 52-MAXIS



A portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli, a 15th-century Italian philosopher, writer, and diplomat. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, heavy robe with a white collar. He has dark hair and a slight beard, and is looking directly at the viewer with a serious expression.

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a fox to recognize traps, and a lion
to frighten off wolves."

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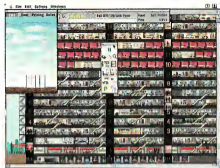
1-800-879-PLAY. For IBM®-PC & Compatibles on CD-ROM.

SHOOT FOR THE STARS

The construction options available to you are based upon your building's current star rating. You begin at the bottom (of course), with only the most basic options available to you. Hit a population of 300 and you're bumped up another star rating. At two stars, you can add single hotel rooms, maid facilities, security centers and service elevators. Climbing up from two stars (population 300) to three stars (population 1,000 and more than one security center) is the first real test in the game. You need to do some serious building to cram 1,000 people into your tower, but you still have only limited options to work with. This is where your organizational skills really come into play.

Hit three stars, and your building options become quite grand: express elevators, double- and suite-size hotel rooms, restaurants, stores, theaters, ballrooms, medical centers, escalators, underground parking and recycling centers. The climb from three to four stars is a long one indeed. You must have 5,000 building residents and meet several other requirements, the most important of which is a favorable VIP rating. A VIP will show up sometime when you reach a three star rating and rent at least one hotel suite. If your tower isn't up to snuff—if the VIP must wait for an elevator or the room isn't cleaned promptly—then you can't reach 4 stars no matter how many theaters and fast food courts you have to please "the masses."

As you climb up the star rating, you have to keep building. The population goal for a five star building is 10,000 (yes, that's right, 10,000) happy residents. After reaching that august ranking, all that's left is for you to reach the noble razing of "tower." All you need to do is place a cathedral on the top floor of your building, the catch being that you don't get the cathedral construc-

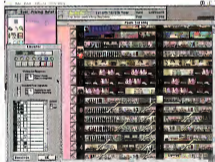


BUILDING IN THE BLACK Our mega-tower is humming along nicely during mid-day. Not too many people waiting for anything, and we've got over \$2 million in the bank. Time for a two-martini lunch!

tion option until you hit 100 floors of urban chaos.

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

So just how do you craft a killer tower in SIMTOWER? There are basically two approaches: build up or build out. Building out, that is, extending your lobby founda-



FIVE O'CLOCK CRUSH It's quittin' time, and our sims are living up to go home. Even though there are a lot of people waiting for the elevators, they don't have to wait very long, as indicated by their neutral color.

tion and building up from there, is an easier strategy in the early game, because it gives you the sense that you have a "master plan" for the building, i.e. offices on lower floors, then hotel rooms and condos on top, etc. This seems very logical, but in truth, logic must sometimes be thrown out the window. You will probably have to build a tower that is a mish-mash of facilities as you begin to expand. Also, as you can see from the cathedral

requirement, tall is not only good, it is a requirement of "winning" at this game. The best strategy, then, is to "go up young man." Set yourself a limited foundation and start climbing. You'll have to do some bulldozing of past construction along the way, but just reassure your tenants that they'll have better, spiffier facilities several floors up.

Another reason for building floors up rather than out has to do with the genesis idea of this sim. Remember, it began its life as an elevator simulator, and elevators are your keys to an efficient building. If you build wide, then you will run into either one of two problems: you will have too few elevators to move your residents effectively, or you will run into the "stupid commuter" phenomenon. If you have a large tower with five or six elevator shafts, the ones on the outside walls of the building will see the least use. Interior shafts will get clogged very quickly, and for some reason, your little virtual folk would rather stand in an elevator line and get stressed out than take a flight of stairs up to their first or second floor office. Fewer elevator shafts on a floor allow you much more control over traffic flow.

One of the best features of SIMTOWER is the ability to see the stress levels of your workers. They will cycle from dark gray to pink to "approaching aneurysm" red. When you see a beet-red line of workers waiting for an elevator, you need to do something fast. You can also "tag" a worker, assigning a name, and then you can later track that worker to evaluate stress level and location.

Since elevator management is the key to keeping tower traffic moving (and keeping resident stress low), you are given the most control over elevators in this game. Clicking with the "examine" tool over an elevator shaft will bring up the planning window for that shaft. The window provides you with a way to program elevator movements during certain times, such as telling elevators to "express to

bottom" during the 5 p.m. rush to get home (though if you have a lot of condos on the upper floor, you will need to have at least one elevator "express to top" to get those people home and into a dry martini before 5:15 p.m.).

You can also control such things as how many floors below or above an elevator may be called away from its current floor. Since *SIMTOWER* is a 2D



SIMCYNTHIA Cynthia, who seems to be working through lunch, is in unusually good spirits. The colors of the *Sim* tower let us know just how we're doing in different zones.

simulation of a 3D building, you can also do the unexpected, such as placing several elevators in the same shaft.

THE FINAL FLOOR

So how does *SimTower* stand up to its other *Sim*-brethren? As I've said, it has a much more clearly defined "goal" than

the *SimCities* and fewer variables for the player to juggle, making it a little more accessible. On the other hand, it certainly isn't a deep game, and while it might take some time to get a tower up to "tower" level, once you accomplish that lofty peak, I'm not convinced that you'd want to play the game again.

In addition, the "flat" nature of the building and the chaotic "build as you go" approach serve to throw reality out the sense that the virtual building you are creating is a "real" building. Whereas you could learn some real world lessons from every other *SimGame*, there not much hope of that here.

But if the other *SimGames* were a little too chaotic for you, then I'm sure you'd like *SIMTOWER*. If you're obsessed with elevators, then you'll love it. Hard-core *SimGame* fans should just beware that while *SIMTOWER* reaches for the sky, it doesn't run very deep. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SIMTOWER

RATING



PROS Quick to learn, fun to play, and with more concrete game goals and success levels than in the *SimCities*.

CONS Has an artificiality about it, and the elevator management aspect can be a chore. Limited replay value once you "kiss the apex."

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Welcome Back To The Machine

Sierra's *The INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2*
Will Put Your Brain Back On The Wrack

by Jason Kapalka

FOR THOSE WHO FEEL THERE CAN NEVER BE TOO MANY GADGETS, TOO MANY CONTRAPTIONS, TOO MANY WOOLY GIZMOS and hyper-complicated widgets in the world, the arrival of the latest installment in Sierra's *The INCREDIBLE MACHINE* saga is cause for jubilation. Even those who have nightmare flashbacks of high-school physics class at the mention of the word "pulley" may find themselves drawn in by *The INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2*'s gorgeous, whimsical graphics, only to find themselves puzzling over a ghastly web of ropes, rubber bands, engines and gears, toasters and cannons at four in the morning, knowing the springboard is in the right place to catapult the rubber ball into the hoop, but wondering *how* in *harnation* to get that unspeakable firecracker lit with the laser beam...

First, a quick history lesson for those coming late to the "Machine" story. In the beginning there was *The INCREDIBLE MACHINE*, an addictive puzzle game in which players were challenged to build weird, Mousetrap-style devices which accomplished their goals in monstrously circuitous fashion: a falling ball might flip the switch on an engine, which would turn gears via an elastic band, which would activate a treadmill, which would

drop a weight with a rope attached to a matchbook, which would ignite and start a rocket's fuse, which would...you get the idea. *The INCREDIBLE MACHINE* then begat *THE EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE MACHINE*, which in turn begat *SID AND AL'S INCREDIBLE TOONS*, which has since returned to the family with the new moniker of *THE INCREDIBLE TOON MACHINE*, and gone on to spawn *THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2* (*TIM2*).

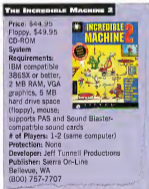
In some ways, very little has changed since the original *TIM* was published a few years ago. As Led Zeppelin said, the interface remains the same—an intuitive click-'n'-drag mouse operation. The goal in all the "Machine" games is also identical: starting with an incomplete or non-functional machine, you plunk down gadgets and devices until either the thing does what it's supposed to do (launch a missile off the screen, feed a chunk of cheese to a cartoon mouse, whatever) or your brain implodes under the weight of the logistical demands. Like its predecessors, *TIM2* includes a large number of easy puzzles to acclimate the newcomer; however, I suspect the harder of the 150 puzzles (say, the latter half) will leave more than a few collapsed cere-

bellums out there in the computer gaming world.

There are differences in *TIM2*, of course, but they are, as they say, more evolutionary than revolutionary. Certain aspects have been streamlined or even eliminated. While the original *TIM* kept a running point total based on the difficulty of puzzles solved and the time involved, *TIM2* dispenses entirely with the scoring system, and wisely too: just solving the cursed things is more than satisfying enough, and after three hours of sweaty mental struggle, who wants to be penalized for not being fast enough? Not I.

But the single biggest change is in the graphics and animation, which are now extremely tasty eye-candy rather than functional Puzzle Solving Units. Rockets bulge and hose fire as they launch, fireworks explode in multicolored sprays, blenders grind and shaver, toasters eject their cargo with an animated hiccup, zeppelins crumple into flaming wreckage when punctured. Make no mistake, you're still engaged in pure and intense cerebral work here, but it is nice to have a more attractive playfield. The addition of background graphics like clouds, stars, mountains and forests is likewise engaging, though it changes gameplay not a whit.

That gameplay, by the way, is enhanced with a parcel of new parts for the Machine, leaving the player over a hundred pieces with which to tinker: lasers and phazers, balloons and blimps, lava lamps and flashlights, nitroglycerine, dynamite, remote-control bombs, vacuums, fans, coffee pots and anti-grav pads, all are at your disposal, along with a wealth



of less glamorous gadgets like gears, ropes, cables, belts and the ever-popular pulley. Figuring out what all these widdies do could have been a nightmare, but there is extensive on-line help available, and even better, a set of simple tutorial puzzles that introduce the player gradually to all the pieces.

There is a final class of parts I've left for last, because sadly they represent, if not exactly a step backwards, a certain staidness of design. These are the living creatures available to you in the game: Mel Schlemming, a little humanoid munchkin; the repulian Edison Alligator; and Curse Cat and Newton Mouse, who are about what you'd expect. The critters are placed and used exactly like machine parts, except that they exhibit more mobility and "personality" than your average cog; Curse Cat will pursue Newton Mouse or cans of cat food, Newton Mouse scurries for cheese or his mouse hole, Edison chomps whatever comes near and belts objects with his tail. Mel generally just walks back and forth and looks stupid.

What's wrong with these guys? Nothing's wrong with them—they add humor and depth to the game—it's just that they could have been done so much better, as evidenced by SID AND AL'S INCREDIBLE TOONS/INCREDIBLE TOON MACHINE. Sid and Al, the cat-and-mouse pair in the earlier game, were beautifully animated cartoons in the best ultraviolet Warner Bros. style, who were continually exhibiting new behaviors as you subjected them to danger and opportunity. Sid chortled as a bomb blew Al to a blackened cinder, Al yowled in pain and flew straight up if he landed on a pin, and so forth. Curse and Newton in TIM2, amusing as they are, just don't have the charisma of these two; I kept hoping Sid and Al would make a surprise comeback to blow these colorless ushers off the screen.

These matters aside, TIM2 does have some new features that Sid and Al would have killed for. As in earlier "Machine" games, an easy-to-use puzzle editor is in-

cluded, but unlike earlier entries, TIM2's editor allows you to define the conditions under which a puzzle is considered

take turns trying to solve a puzzle. A time limit is set for each turn, during which the player is allowed to add one



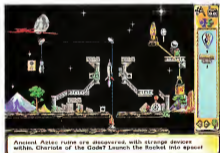
TOO PUPPED TO POP Nothing is ever easy in TIM2. The simple act of popping a balloon requires a laser, a vacuum, a cannon, a lava lamp, and several million of your over-worked neurons.

"solved"—no more "honor system." The user is thereby empowered to create puzzles every bit the equal of the ones includ-

new piece from the parts bin to the puzzle, and to move or remove one old piece. If it looks like your rival is close to figuring it out, you can move things to obstruct him, or otherwise place pieces so that (in theory) the puzzle cannot be finished until it's your turn once again. The two-player game isn't going to woo anyone from DOOM Death-match or on-line "mech battles, but it does offer another twist.

Cooperative play is also possible, in the same way it's always been available, i.e., get some pals to make suggestions over your shoulder. For the harder puzzles, you'll need all the help you can get—the things may well have been designed by Satan himself, though His Infernal Majesty is missing from the credits.

The low violence level, charming graphics, and—eep!—"educational" content of TIM2 make it a good choice for parents looking for games that don't involve homicide, xenocide, genocide or xenogenocide, but remember that later puzzles are fully capable of bringing NASA engineers weeping to their knees, never mind little Johnny. Mature gamers looking for a stern test of their intellectual prowess will also be delighted. Now if only Sid and Al had made it in...well, there's always TIM3. ☹



THE KAPALKAN CONTRAFTION Using TIM2's puzzle building tools, the author designed this scheme to send an ancient race into space.

ed with the game. If TIM2 takes off, you can expect to see lots of home-made puzzles archived on BBSes and various on-line services. The ability to add background scenery to your puzzles is another plus, although it would have been nice to import your own graphics.

Also new is an on-line hint system that gives much-needed advice for many of the puzzles, although the hardest seem to have left this option out. User-made puzzles can include hints as well.

Finally, TIM2 includes a two-player game. Sorry kids, no modem or network play—this is strictly a head-to-head one-computer match. In this mode, players

THE EDITORS SPEAK

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE 2

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Great graphics, more parts, more puzzles, a better editor, clever and absorbing gameplay.

CONS None, really, though it might not be to some folks' taste. The two player competitive mode could have been better. And where the heck are Sid and Al?

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SLASHED

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**CAPTRON
G & G**

Windows On The Shareware World

by Chuck Miller

For a variety of reasons, a large number of gamers are making the transition to Windows. At the same time, companies like Activision, Sierra On-Line and Cyberdreams are now developing most of their new games for Microsoft's operating system. Appropriately, greater numbers of shareware games are being designed for Windows, too. And, while they're not in the same weight class as games being developed by the "big boys," these low-budget alternatives are still worth downloading and playing, if only for a free test-run.

I'VE GOT DEMONS IN MY PC!

Though it doesn't feature Martin Short or Dennis Quaid, **OBSESSION: INNER SPACE** nevertheless delivers a healthy dollop of good humor and entertainment. Darkly parodying a computer-user's worst fear, the game unleashes a horde of demons who have supposedly loosed all your programs to feed on your system's resources. Your only hope of restoring order is to enter the computer yourself, capture or destroy all aberrant icons and face the final challenge awaiting you—all from the belly of the digital beast. But fear not! Although hazards, competitors and the Inner Demon await you, there are also some welcome allies at your disposal.

Perhaps best described as "Asteroids for the '90s," **INNER SPACE** has a classic look and feel. You maneuver your computer "self" (a tiny ship) around the screen applying thrust, turning right, turning left or applying breaking thrusters while firing away at enemy vessels and asteroid-like particles of floating

"ship" can be represented by a wide variety of animated icons including numerous space ships and animal shapes. Some of my favorites are the Duck, Fruit Bat and Beaver, but, unfortunately, there are no "Pigs" in **INNER SPACE**.

If you aren't happy with the available ships and their abilities, you have the option of heading to the Ship Factory. This is an editing and creation tool that can modify existing ships' appearance and behavior, or it can be used to create entirely new craft. Another nice touch: the game greets you each play session by name and day, as in "Hi, Chuck! It's Saturday afternoon...." These are just a partial indication of the extra effort that has gone into the development of this game.

INNER SPACE even furnishes an instructional tutorial in which the computer pilot explains what he's doing and why, providing an easy way to learn the game. (This enables you to avoid that most hideous of last resorts—reading the instructions.) Each time the tutorial runs, it continues from where it previously left off, providing more advanced instruction as it goes. Though gameplay is not difficult, this is still a handy feature.

Of course, there is a "vacuum" in **INNER SPACE**: the ship control is by keyboard only. While it works okay, I definitely prefer a joystick for this type of game. Also, the interface, which resem-



DUCK! In **OBSESSION: Inner Space** players can choose their own ship shape, in this case a duck, and shoot space targets Asteroids-style.

debris. What makes **INNER SPACE** unique is a gameworld that is dynamically generated from the contents of your hard drive as you play. The "zones" you must purge are primarily the contents of the directories on your hard drive, each chock full of icons and adversaries to capture and/or destroy.

INNER SPACE comes equipped with a full complement of user-friendly features and customization options. Your computer

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bles a windowed circuit board with a status panel, lacks the design sophistication that characterizes the rest of the game. Since all of the gameplay occurs within its confines, more attention should have been paid to its design.

Another problem with INNER SPACE is its own built-in advertising. Without consulting the gamer, it automatically replaces the user's screen saver with its own. The first time the screen saver kicked in after installing the game I almost had a coronary, thinking that the game was actually a cleverly disguised virus, and that all my crucial business data had been wiped out. I'm not opposed to advertising, but a program that changes any user settings should do so only with the user's full permission and knowledge. In addition, the installation creates about a half-dozen directories scattered all over your hard drive that should have been confined within the INNER SPACE directory itself.

Still, apart from an unattractive interface and the questionable alteration of the user's default screen saver, OPERATION: INNER SPACE offers a creative and entertaining twist to a classic game idea. And the inclusion of the Ship Factory is frosting on the cake.

The shareware version of OPERATION: INNER SPACE can be yours for the download (INSPAC.ZIP). When you're ready to send for the registered version, shoot a payment of \$29.95 (US) to: Software Dynamics Inc., 84 Coach Gate Way SW, Calgary, AB Canada or call (800) 36SPACE with a credit card in hand. The registered version includes the complete working game, plus full printed documentation.

JUST ME AND MAH JONGG

When I downloaded MAH JONGG I expected the traditional tile game. To my surprise, I discovered a rendition of the classic Oriental game played as a four-handed game of cards, only with Mah Jongg tiles.

A beautifully rendered game, MAH

JONGG is played in hands, with a minimum of four hands making up a round and four rounds comprising a game. Each of the four "Winds" must have their turn as Wind of the Round, and each player must have four turns playing the East Wind. Though the minimum number of hands in a game is 16,



LOOK WHAT THEY GAVE TO MAH JONGG, MOM Mah Jongg for Windows takes the traditional tile game and shuffles it into a card game for a challenging new twist.

there may be more if the East Wind player continues to win. "Going Mah Jongg," the object of the game, is accomplished by completing a hand of 14 tiles. Scores are then calculated based upon the tiles in each player's hand before the next hand is played.

While a knowledge of traditional Mah Jongg is helpful, a careful reading of the game rules is all that's really necessary to play. Watching the computer play all four Winds also helps you in understanding the rules of the game.

During each hand, the goal is to complete tile groups, combinations of three or four tiles, called Chow, Pung and Kong (which are, oddly enough, also the daily specials at my local Chinese restaurant). A Chow is created by picking up a tile discarded by the player on your left, a Pung is fashioned by picking up a tile discarded by any player that matches two identical tiles already on your stake (kind of like the wooden tile rack in SCRABBLE), and a Kong is completed when you pick up a tile discarded by any player and combine it with three identical tiles on your stake. This forms the basis of MAH JONGG, though there are

other details that come into play such as replacement tiles and Special Hands. The game also requires a familiarity with the 144 tiles in the set.

I must admit, my first reaction to learning yet another computer card game was not all that positive. However, MAH JONGG offers such a unique twist, combining elements of cards and the ancient Chinese game, that I quickly became enthralled. There are, however, a few downsides. The shareware version has limited play options. You can't save or open any files, you can't employ any number of special features, and you aren't allowed to cheat. In addition, registration is a bit inconvenient as the developer is based in France. So, you will need to get an international money order, send it overseas, and wait for your registered copy to arrive.

Still, for a unique and enjoyable change of pace, MAH JONGG (MAHJBB.ZIP) is *très magnifique!* If you need a greater mental challenge than many Windows games can offer, MAH JONGG is worth the registration fee. Send an International Money Order for \$29.95 (US) to: Bloem, 69 Allée des Plaqueminiers, Île Verte, 06560 Valbonne, France. If your system can run Windows 3.1, you'll have no problem installing and playing MAH JONGG.

Cluck Miller, CGW columnist and editor of *InterActive Gaming*, is available on CompuServe at 74774.1476, America Online at IGAMING and through the Internet at interactive.gaming@suslabs.com.

ZiffNet

To locate these games on-line, tune in to the CGW headquarters on ZiffNet. Games featured here can be downloaded from ZiffNet both on CompuServe and on Prodigy. On CompuServe, go to *Computer Gaming World's* own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), Library 7, Shareware Sizzle. On Prodigy, jump ZiffNet and Search by Title for the games listed here. Or, Search by Category to browse the entire Games Library.

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Building Brains Bit By Bit

How Game Designers Program Computer Pilots To Eat Your Lunch

by Paul C. Schuytema

THE TERM "ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE" (OR AI) IS THROWN AROUND A LOT IN THE PAGES OF CGW. Flip through the reviews in this issue, and you'll see references to the tough AI, the weak, the challenging and the push-overs. What the reviewers are referring to is the collection of programming routines that control the computer opponents and make a game interesting to play. AI routines can control anything from the movements of huge armies and fleets in wargames, all the way down to individual pilots and drivers in simulations.

It is these artificial pilots and race drivers that have caught my attention lately. In the earliest simulations, AI wasn't a very good term to use for pilot intelligence. Basically, computer-controlled pilots "blew the script," performing certain maneuvers during certain situations. Venerable games like *Origin's WING COMMANDER* and *MicroProse's KNIGHTS OF THE SKY*, while indeed possessing AI routines, were quite limited. In certain situations, you could always count on a Klrathi breaking left, or a Fokker simply corkscrewing around your Camel, but using no rudder at all. After logging a good handful of hours, you could almost always predict the moves of your opponent and take them out every time.

In recent games, I've noticed that the AI opponents have upped the ante a bit, and in rare cases, are even downright challenging to play against. I've been amazed to find how skillfully computer drivers have nudged my car into a wall in *NASCAR RACING*. I've been surprised in *WING COMMANDER III* at the wildness of certain Klrathi pilots, who can bank tight as they let loose some slam on my similar-

ity to an ape. More than once in 1942: *PACIFIC AIR WAR* have I been startled by a milk-white Zero screaming out of the sun and turning tight on my tail, peppering my Corsair with lead.

What's behind this increase in the intelligence of these artificial pilots? And how exactly does one go about creating artificial brains? To find out, I went to the source—the programmers responsible for all of my virtual deaths and crashes in the three mentioned games.

LEARNING TO DRIVE

All of these games are in some way simulations that attempt to process their "world data" on the fly. Each second, the game is making calculations to change its world. In the package of program routines executed in each game cycle, some of the CPU energy is spent on calculating just what the computer opponents are going to do. Consider *NASCAR RACING*. At the beginning of the AI development process, Randy Cassidy of *Papyrus* was told that he would have roughly 3% of the computer processing time for driver decision making. That worked out to approximately 1,000 processor cycles per car per game tick (in *NASCAR*, a tick is 1/15 of a second).

A computer driver, then, does some calculations every tick, depending on the



situation. Each and every tick, a driver will "look around" his car to get the "lay of the track" and determine the next move—a break, a swerve, or a decision to pass a slower moving car on the outside of a turn. Once each second, the computer driver considers the tire wear on the car

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(far more often than us human drivers, that's for sure!). Then, once each lap, the driver evaluates the car's performance and makes a decision whether or not to pit (of course, just like real NASCAR drivers, the Papyrus computer analogs will tend to pit when the race leader heads in for some fresh rubber).

The driver AI in NASCAR is essentially a generic set of routines, meaning that each driver would drive exactly the same

move the plane through the maneuver; rather, the AI spits out a cache of data which represents the stick position, throttle position and the rudder position at any given instant. The computer-controlled pilots are, in a way, really flying those birds over the Pacific.

The game loop in 1942 asks the AI for feedback approximately 20 times a second, but a maneuver might certainly take longer than that to execute. So, like

"I want my AI to kick everyone's ass,"
says Frank Roan, the creator of the
Kilrathi "brains" in Wing Commander III.

given an identical car. However, there is one factor that gives drivers unique personalities—aggressiveness. Each driver is given an aggressiveness rating which controls the probability that a driver will cut another car off or dive for the inside of the curve, among other neat tricks. "It's a good thing we didn't have Dale Earnhardt in this game; we couldn't tweak the aggressiveness up that high," commented Cassidy.

TO THE AIR, THEN!

While NASCAR deals with a world that is essentially a ribbon of oily concrete, MicroProse's 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR is a simulation that lives in three dimensions, several thousand feet above sea level.

"I had to try to think like a pilot," said Ed Fletcher, producer of MicroProse's 1942 PACIFIC AIR WAR, as he described the pilot-AI he crafted for the simulation. Not being a pilot himself, Ed Fletcher spoke with real pilots to get a handle on the nuances of combat tactics. Using their input, he worked to develop a package of AI pilot routines which gave the impression that there was a real person behind the stick of each and every plane in the game.

While NASCAR's AI drivers have an "organic" flow to their actions, 1942's pilots are continually attempting to perform precision maneuvers. Basically, a pilot chooses a suitable maneuver and executes it until it is completed or the situation is no longer valid. When the AI calls for a maneuver, it does not directly

in NASCAR RACING, some queries are done once every couple of cycles. As an example, consider a plane performing a strafing run on a bomber in flight. The first maneuver the pilot will attempt will be to line up for the pass (either high, ahead or to the side). Then, the plane will execute an "attack run" maneuver to get into offensive position. These last two maneuvers take a few seconds to accomplish, so the AI will perform them without doing major checks, except for the obvious checks for enemy gunfire. Once in position, the pilot will then perform a series of line-up-and-shoot maneuvers. These are small incremental maneuvers, often just slight rudder adjustments, which line the bomber up in the plane's sights. When lined up, the plane will fire a burst. After the plane flies past the bomber, the situation has changed and the AI routine will know that the line-up maneuver is no longer valid and will move to another, longer maneuver to set up for another attack run (unless the bomber is already corkscrewing down into the Pacific).

In 1942, the pilot AI is essentially a "cookie cutter" AI, in that all American pilots in the same type of plane will fly with the same AI routines. The AI routines are different for the Japanese, who will try to turn into your plane, as opposed to the Americans who will try to extend and then get away. To add some unpredictability, some random decision making was factored in when the AI routines attempt to select an appropriate maneuver.

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While the physics of plane flight introduce a plethora of variables for computer-controlled pilots, Fletcher kept the approach straightforward by opting for the AI routines to return actual flight maneuvers. The AI pilots are charged with keeping track of their plane's performance (though they will still fly with 100% capability, even when injured). Any significant change in variables such as speed or altitude might cause the AI pilot to scoot an uncompleted maneuver in favor of another.

KITTIE BRAINS

"I want my AI to kick everyone's ass," says Origin's software engineer Frank Roan. Roan coded the "brains" of the Kiltrathi in WING COMMANDER III, and at the beginning of the project, he wanted nothing more than to have his kitties blast some playtester butt. "The fact is, that isn't fun, and you want to make things fun," says Roan. Roan had to turn down his AI several notches to get just the right balance of play.

In the case of WING COMMANDER III, there were no "real world" pilot analogs to refer to, so Frank Roan used himself as a model for the AI. A confessed WING COMMANDER addict, he came to Origin explicitly to craft the pilot intelligence for WCIII. His first step was to climb back into the cockpit of a Raptor and have a go at WING COMMANDER II. Analyzing his flying style, Roan determined that, even in his quickest maneuvers, he held them for several seconds.

Each pilot, whether Kiltrathi or human, has a "generic" AI package of maneuvers and considerations, rated in four levels of competence from "rookie" up to "bad-ass ace" (these are only seven Kiltrathi BAAs). These AI classes are further refined into "personalities" by applying pilot profiles to their decision-making process. Each pilot profile is a cluster of byte-long flags which serve as "probability filters" influencing how a pilot might react in a certain situation. Each profile contains a value for trigger happiness, courage, verbosity, loyalty, flying skill, gunnery skill, aggressiveness and panache. These values can either be set to low, normal or high levels.

Like 1942, WCIII pilots have a menu of maneuvers available to them. Unlike 1942, though, the WCIII pilots are a touch more "obsessive," continuously evaluating all of their available maneuvers. Essentially, the AI routine is given a

packet of data containing the "situational" data for a pilot—such things as location of other enemies, the angles to each other, distance, etc. Then each routine is evaluated, taking into account the pilot profile modifiers, and is assigned a value. The maneuver with the highest value is the "winner," or the best maneuver for that particular situation. Of course, points out Roan, a normal pilot may not always pick out the best maneuver at every given time, so a probability is given to the highest rated maneuvers, and one is selected.

Each maneuver has two components: a "start-action" routine and a "more-action" routine. As I talked with Roan, he pulled up the programming for the head-on attack maneuver and described it in detail. The start-action routine sets up a timer for the maneuver. Then, control switches to the more-action routine, which updates the timer, checks the current state, and branches to one of the "sub maneuvers" that is part of the head-on attack. For this maneuver, those components are "come in fast," "slow down," "fire weapons" and "peel away."

"We wanted to make it feel like you were playing against cognizant opponents," says Roan. When I asked him what steps he took to make the AI feel more "human," he said "I get a lot of stuff for free in AI programming; it's a trick, like when you draw a square, erase some of the lines and you can see a diamond. You make the obvious [in the AI's performance] stand out, and the player's mind will fill in the rest."

A CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

AI routines take a ton of computational power, especially when you are calculating the performance of many AI opponents each game cycle. The trick for these designers is to create just enough "humanity" so an opponent will seem realistic to a player, but to keep the routines as simple, and as fast, as possible.

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Installation Plan



The 12 Step Program For The Game Install-Challenged

by Mike Weksler

WHEN IT COMES TO VIDEO GAME CONSOLES, COMPUTER GAMERS OFTEN ACT LIKE an elite corps who openly disdain the junior squadrics with their ram-a-play machines. But inside I know that many of us are actually thinking, "Wouldn't that be the Kilrathi's meow if we could put a game in a machine and instantly play?"

Unlike console games, computer games must go through some form of installation before they will devour your free time. It's as if our computers are going, "Uh uh, I need a little foreplay first, you big galoot."

So we usually have some kind of INSTALL command for transferring files, and

another SETUP or CONFIG command to configure hardware. This installation procedure sometimes yields nothing but frustration, because it encompasses all of the dreaded computing snafus: memory problems, hardware configuration nightmares, storage requirements, and everyone's favorite, the sound card setup.

12 STEPS TO A FULLER, HAPPIER INSTALLATION

Because installation can be so troublesome, I've created the Mike Weksler 12 Step Installation Program to bring out a happier, healthier configuration from your machine. This is a simple checklist of things you should know and things you should do before you delve into a dungeon or take off for the skies. To put it through a real-world test, I enrolled myself in the program to get WING COMMANDER III installed on my machine. Let's see how it works, step by step.

1) General: Know thy system as thyself.

Before you install any game, I recommend you take a tip I got from the technical journal, *Duke!* "Print out your system information and keep it near your computer." In order to get my system information, I use PC-911 from Cybermedia (310) 843-0800. This utility has a great info feature which detects most of the hardware in a system. Use its handy print-out feature to print a detailed list of your Interrupts, RAM addresses, I/O addresses and DMAs that are in use.

1) CPU: Know the minimum system requirements for your game.

This is one you should figure out in the software store before you blow the coin. WING COMMANDER III needs at least a 486-50MHz computer to run acceptably. (I tried it on a 486-33 with 8MB of RAM and it ran like a chubby musk ox.)

10) CD-ROM: Make sure your CD-ROM drive is working.

The quick test is to place a CD-ROM into the drive, type the drive letter with a colon (example, D:), and type "DIR." Make sure you don't have an audio CD in the drive; I've forgotten to take mine out, leading me to believe that the drive had gone haywire when there was really nothing wrong.

9) Storage: Know how much hard drive space is required and how much you have available.

WING COMMANDER III needs at least 15-20MB of free disk space. Note that, while installing, some games require just a bit more space than is listed on the box; they copy compressed files to the drive, uncompress them, then subsequently delete the original compressed files. Also, while some installation routines will tell you how much space you have, others won't. Some will even try to install a game if you don't have enough space (the creators of such install routines should have their RAM chips pulled out with needle-nose pliers.)

8) Storage: Make sure your hard drive is unfragmented.

Your free hard drive space should be contiguous, i.e. in one complete block, rather than several small chunks. Use Microsoft's DEFRAG utility that comes with MS-DOS 6.x, or Norton's Speed Disk to "optimize" your hard drive. Games, especially CD-ROM games that copy large files to your hard drive, will run better if the files aren't broken up and scattered around the drive.

7) Memory: Know how much RAM a game requires.

To run WING COMMANDER III, you will need at least 8MB of RAM installed in your computer. Of course, having more than required is always better. With 16MB of RAM, for example, the delays between

SHORT CIRCUITS

IBM has announced PC DOS 7. According to an IBM spokesperson, this latest version of the operating system will ship with the following: built-in STACKER 4.0 data compression from **Stac Electronics**; "no-worry" memory management with **Central Point's** RAM-Boost; the REXX programming language; extensive on-line help; docking support, file synchronization; easier PCMCIA setup and configuration; an improved editor; protection from more than 2,100 viruses; an improved setup program with mouse support; and the ability to dynamically load device drivers on demand. Will there be a competing MS-DOS 7.x? According to a Microsoft spokesperson, "Microsoft is currently involved in getting Windows '95 out the door. Plans for future versions of MS-DOS are based on customer demand. Microsoft will continue to support its MS-DOS users."

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the movie portions and the game portions of WCIII are greatly reduced. Other games show similar performance increases with more RAM.

6) Memory: Know the type of memory required: Expanded (EMS) or Extended (XMS).

WING COMMANDER III is unique in that it can handle either type of memory. In other cases, you have to ascertain which is configured and change your memory configuration accordingly. A memory manager like QEMM or 386MAX is often helpful.

5) Memory: Know how much Expanded or Extended memory is required.

WING COMMANDER III needs at least 7MB. For this installation, I modified Microsoft's EMM386.EXE to configure the expanded memory on my machine to

provide 8MB of RAM as per the WING COMMANDER III install guide.

In most cases a memory management program can be helpful. It won't with WCIII because, while memory managers can optimize conventional memory, they don't optimize your expanded memory. With QEMM, I had boat-loads of conventional memory (much more than I needed), but I came up 5K short of the necessary 7MB of expanded memory (5 sticking K!).

4) Memory: Know how much conventional memory is required.

WING COMMANDER III is unique in that it only requires 360K (368,640 bytes) of conventional memory, so the conventional memory was not a concern. In most other games, it is the major concern.

3) Sound: Know your used and free

IRQs, I/O addresses and DMAs for digital audio, and IRQs and I/O addresses for your MIDI device.

WING COMMANDER III has great sound support, so it had no problem with my Ensoniq Soundscape. However, sound cards are usually the number one difficulty when installing a game. If you're having problems getting a game to run, disable the sound and music, and try running the game again. If the game runs, then you've got a sound problem. Most sound problems are related to the digital audio, so start your trouble-shooting there. Try to configure the music portion of the audio, with the digital sound turned off. If the game runs, then you've either got a buggy digital audio driver or you have a funky sound card that's not supported by the game. Once you narrow it down to the digital audio, you can call the company to see what the problem is. If it's a buggy driver, then you may be able to get a patch; if it's a lack of support for your sound card, perhaps it's time to go shopping.

2) Video: Know the graphic card requirements for the game.

If your game supports SVGA graphics, then you may have to load a VESA driver. This is becoming less of an issue since many new video cards support VESA through their hardware and don't require a driver.

WING COMMANDER III detected my Diamond Stealth 64's built-in VESA compatibility. In other cases, you may have to actually load the VESA driver manually. See the documentation for your Super VGA video card for details.

1) Video: Make sure the proper playback CODEC (video playback software) is installed.

This wasn't applicable in this case because WING COMMANDER III runs under DOS and the video playback software is built into the program itself. However, if you were installing a Windows game, you might need a CODEC (like QUICKTIME FOR WINDOWS) installed. Many games will detect whether or not a CODEC is running; if not, the program will usually ask if you want the program installed.

I hope this list comes in handy when the installation blues have got you down. Just remember, take it one step at a time, and you'll soon be taking out your frustrations on the Bad Guys.

Mike Weksler, Computer Gaming World's Technical Editor, can be reached through e-mail at: mweksler.notes@mail.cd.tiff.com, or through USMail addressed to: Under the Hood, c/o Computer Gaming World. ☛

THE PARTS DEPT.

The Turtle Beach Monterey Plays CD-Quality Digital Audio

by Loyd Case

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU MIX A LITTLE RIO WITH SOME TAHITI? YOU GET A MONTEFEY, of course. Turtle Beach, those purveyors of sound cards with exotic names (TAHITI, RIO, TROPEZ and MONTE CARLO, to name a few), have long held the high ground in the battle of the sound cards. And their new Monterey hasn't given up any of it.

Combining Turtle Beach's legendary prowess in high-end digital audio with a solid, if unassuming, general MIDI daughter card, the MONTEFEY is really a hard bundle of two existing Turtle Beach products. The first is TAHITI, a high-performance sound card that is tuned for Windows multimedia and is also WAVE BLASTER (MPU-401) compatible. The second is the Rio general MIDI daughter card that snaps onto the TAHITI's WAVE BLASTER connector. Turtle Beach combines the two cards and boxes them with appropriate software to produce the MONTEFEY.

Why is high-performance digital audio important? In the past, it wasn't. Until recently, most games had 8-bit, 11-kilohertz mono sound, and all gamers needed was a low-end 8-bit card to hear



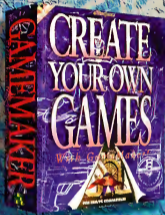
it. But now, a few games are starting to show up with 22-kilohertz, 16-bit stereo, and very soon 44.1-kilohertz (e.g., CD audio quality), 16-bit stereo will be common.

At present, the MONTEFEY is not supported by many DOS-based games, but that will change because some key developers have begun to support it. In addition, given Turtle Beach's long-standing support for Windows, the MONTEFEY will be a natural in the era of Windows '95. With that in mind, I decided to put the card through its paces to see what it could do.

Even though there aren't any games written for the MONTEFEY yet, I was able to test it by playing MIDI files and recorded digital audio. First I tested the card's MIDI capability. Because the MONTEFEY uses the Rio daughter card, I compared its sound to Turtle Beach's TROPEZ and the Aztech WAVEBLER 32, because they all use ICS Wavefront MIDI samples. How-

The Best of Both Worlds for

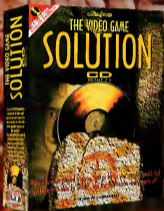
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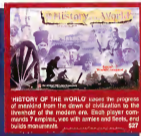
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The strategic game is suitably vast, but well organized and very playable.



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INDUCTION CEREMONY!



**ULTIMA UNDERWORLD:
THE STYGIAN ABYSS**
ORIGIN SYSTEMS, 1992

Prior to Origin's *ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS*, smooth-scrolling first-person 3-D was the province of driving, flying and space combat games. These were first-person role-playing games before *ULTIMA UNDERWORLD* and dungeons that looked like 3-D environments, but the magicians at Looking Glass Technologies (then Blue Sky Productions) were the first to give us that feeling of exploring and fighting within a real 3-D world. It was the first time that the mouse could be used to direct movement that was not frame-by-frame, but smoothly recalculated and redrawn according to the gamer's input. The texture-mapped dungeon walls were detailed and convincing enough. *ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS* also presented a very satisfying form of two-step combat wherein weapons are pulled back and released, with the power of the blow depending upon the interval between the strokes. Add powerful auto-maps upon which players could make their own notes and you have a game which broke plenty of new ground in game design, a worthy inductee to these halls.



WOLFENSTEIN 3-D
ID SOFTWARE, 1992

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D was based on the concept of an early Apple II game, *CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN*, where the gamer had to escape from an old castle guarded by Nazi jailers. *WOLFENSTEIN 3-D* transformed the game with a free-scrolling, texture-mapped environment that roughly corresponded to the simple line-and-fill graphic mazes of the earlier game. To be certain, the walls of the Nazi-controlled castle were not as detailed as those in *ULTIMA UNDERWORLD*, but the game screen was larger and the scrolling much faster. Though spartan, the graphics created a wonderful atmosphere, with Nazi banners hanging on the walls, stained glass windows starring Hitler himself, and lots of nice touches like chandeliers and coats of armor. *WOLFENSTEIN 3-D*'s use of perspective and sound also assisted gamers in suspending their disbelief. At the time of release, *WOLFENSTEIN 3-D* was the most thrilling, adrenaline-pumping game around, and since then, it has spawned (for better or worse) an entire genre of action games.

CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)

FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)

GUNSHIP (MicroProse, 1989)

HARPOON (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)

KING'S QUEST V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)

LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)

LINKS 386 PRO (Access Software, 1992)

M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)

RAILROAD TYCOON (MicroProse, 1990)

RED BARRON (Dynamix, 1990)

THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)

ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)

WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)

INDUCTEES PRIOR TO 1989

BATTLE CRESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)

CHESSEMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)

DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)

EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)

EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)

GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)

KAMMERBUFFE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MOON & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)

M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)

PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)

SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)

STARLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)

THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)

ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)

ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)

WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)

WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)

WIZARDRY (Sun-Tech Software, 1981)

ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE
1	Day of the Tentacle	LucasArts	9.87
2	Starbuck Holmes CD I	Viscra	9.85
3	Cloned Knight	Sierra	9.82
4	Star Control II	LucasArts	9.33
5	Sam & Max Hit the Road	LucasArts	9.29
6	The Seventh Guest	Virgin	9.25
7	King's Quest III	Sierra	9.12
8	Quest for Glory I/II/III	Sierra	9.05
9	Under a Killing Moon	Access	9.04
10	One the Necrosy	Legend	9.04



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE
1	Battalions at Brunner	Dynasty	9.44
2	Ultima Underworld II	Origo	9.42
3	Might & Magic: Islands of Xeen	New World Computing	9.37
4	Lands of Lore	Virgin	9.25
5	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.31
6	Ultima VII: Part Two Sacred Isle	Origo	9.08
7	Wizardry VII: Crusaders of Savant	SSI-Tech	8.97
8	Wolf	Sarcophary Worlds	8.95
9	Arms: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	8.81
10	Val of Darkness	SSI	8.74



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

RANK	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE
1	MASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.06
2	US Navy Flight	Electronic Arts	9.85
3	Acies of the Bay	Dynasty	9.53
4	Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	9.46
5	World Circuit	MicroProse	9.36
6	Commander: Modibus General	Neologic	9.27
7	First Defender	MicroProse	9.25
8	Shant Island	Dance	9.00
9	Warren	Access	8.86
10	Access over Europe	Dynasty	8.66



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE
1	X-COM	MicroProse	10.36
2	Master of Deceit	MicroProse	10.21
3	Warlords II	SSI	9.96
4	Blaze II	Virgin	9.82
5	Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.79
6	San City 2000	Mirus	9.58
7	Warcraft	Broad	9.54
8	Commander Magdars	GGP	9.33
9	March of the Titans	GGP	9.08
10	The Strategist (Dual)	GGP	9.08



TOP 100 GAMES

RANK	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE
1	Prince of Persia	SG	10.53
2	Wing Commander 3	WG	10.53
3	X-COM	MicroProse	10.46
4	TE Fighter	AC	10.33
5	ORION	AC	10.24
6	Blade of Demen	MicroProse	10.21
7	Public Enemy	AC	10.18
8	MASCAR Racing	SG	10.18
9	Warlords II	SSI	9.95
10	US Navy Fighters	SG	9.95
11	Day of the Tentacle	AD	9.87
12	BLON II	AC	9.85
13	Blade II	SG	9.82
14	Master of Magic	SG	9.73
15	Front Page Sports Football Pro	MicroProse	9.64
16	X-Wing	Dynasty	9.64
17	San City 2000	AC	9.60
18	Blade	AC	9.58
19	Three-Body Problem	MG	9.59
20	Warcraft	Viscra	9.55
21	Warcraft	SG	9.54
22	Commander Magdars	SG	9.53
23	Acies of the Bay	Dynasty	9.53
24	War in Russia	MG	9.52
25	War in Russia	SG	9.49
26	Battalions at Brunner	Electronic Arts	9.49
27	Indy Car Racing	Dynasty	9.48
28	Ultima Underworld II	SG	9.44
29	Blade II	SG	9.43
30	Might & Magic: Islands of Xeen	SG	9.42
31	World Circuit	SG	9.37
32	Commander: Modibus General	SG	9.36
33	Blade II	SG	9.35
34	Star Control II	SG	9.34
35	Sam & Max Hit the Road	AC	9.33
36	Splinter Cell	WG	9.31
37	Commander: Modibus General	AC	9.29
38	Lands of Lore	SG	9.27
39	The Seventh Guest	SG	9.25
40	Blade II	SG	9.25
41	Blade II	SG	9.25
42	Yar's Victory: Gold Jewels	MicroProse	9.18
43	Blade II	SG	9.16
44	Blade II	SG	9.12
45	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	SG	9.11
46	The Strategist (Dual)	GGP	9.08
47	Blade II	SG	9.08
48	Blade II	SG	9.08
49	Blade II	SG	9.08
50	Blade II	SG	9.08
51	Blade II	SG	9.08
52	Blade II	SG	9.08
53	Blade II	SG	9.08
54	Blade II	SG	9.08
55	Blade II	SG	9.08
56	Blade II	SG	9.08
57	Blade II	SG	9.08
58	Blade II	SG	9.08
59	Blade II	SG	9.08
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61	Blade II	SG	9.08
62	Blade II	SG	9.08
63	Blade II	SG	9.08
64	Blade II	SG	9.08
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75	Blade II	SG	9.08
76	Blade II	SG	9.08
77	Blade II	SG	9.08
78	Blade II	SG	9.08
79	Blade II	SG	9.08
80	Blade II	SG	9.08
81	Blade II	SG	9.08
82	Blade II	SG	9.08
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84	Blade II	SG	9.08
85	Blade II	SG	9.08
86	Blade II	SG	9.08
87	Blade II	SG	9.08
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91	Blade II	SG	9.08
92	Blade II	SG	9.08
93	Blade II	SG	9.08
94	Blade II	SG	9.08
95	Blade II	SG	9.08
96	Blade II	SG	9.08
97	Blade II	SG	9.08
98	Blade II	SG	9.08
99	Blade II	SG	9.08
100	Blade II	SG	9.08



TOP WARGAMES

RANK	GAME	GENRE	SCORE
1	Panzer General	SSI	10.53
2	V for Victory: Market Garden	SSI	9.98
3	V for Victory: Kofeiya Laid	SSI	9.92
4	War in Russia	SSI	9.44
5	Carriers at War: Guadalcanal 88	SSI	9.35
6	Pacific War	SSI	9.34
7	Operation Crusader	Avolon III	9.31
8	V for Victory: 5th Para Sqr	SSI	9.18
9	Tanks	SSI	9.00
10	Clash at Stief	SSI	8.96

TOP ACTION GAMES

RANK	GAME	GENRE	SCORE
1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.59
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.33
3	Blom	id Software	10.24
4	Music Carpet	Electronic Arts	10.13
5	Blom II	id Software	9.85
6	X-Wing	LucasArts	9.60
7	System Shock	Origin	9.20
8	President	Origin	9.16
9	Lemmings: Chewbacca	Propaganda	8.90
10	The Horde	Cyber Dynamics	8.59

TOP SPORTS GAMES

RANK	GAME	GENRE	SCORE
1	Front Page Sports Football Pro	Dynamix	9.64
2	NHL Hockey	Electronic Arts	9.49
3	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	9.06
4	FIFA Ice Golf 48E	Electronic Arts	8.92
5	Tony La Russa Baseball II	SSI	8.76
6	Wayne Gretzky Hockey II	Balaban	8.30
7	MicroLeague Baseball 4	Electronic Arts	8.22
8	Jordan in Flight	Electronic Arts	7.85
9	Microsoft Golf 2.0	Microsoft	7.43
10	Ultimate Football	MicroProse	7.26



You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CGW Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CGW Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

The Computer Gaming World

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

51	Quest for Glory I (WGA)	Sierra	9.80
52	Eric the Unlucky	AD	9.04
53	Under a Killing Moon	AD	9.04
54	Legends of Eyranda 3	AD	9.00
55	Shout Island	Blitz	9.00
56	Enraged of Darday	SI	9.00
57	Tanks	WG	9.00
58	WGA Projects	SI	9.00
59	Crash of Spaul	WG	8.98
60	Wizards VII: Crusaders at Sarant	RP	8.97
61	Eggers on the Prowl!	WG	8.97
62	Home	SI	8.95
63	Freddy Pharkas Frontier Pharmacist	AI	8.95
64	Alone in the Dark	I-Phox	8.95
65	Wolf	RP	8.95
66	The Incredible Machine	Electronic Arts	8.93
67	The Island of Dr. Brain	Dynamix	8.92
68	Incredible Icons	SI	8.91
69	Enchanted Icons	SI	8.89
70	PKA: The Golf Club	SI	8.82
71	Comets at War II	WG	8.82
72	Arms: The Elder Scrolls	SSI	8.81
73	Red Nebula	MicroProse	8.80
74	Sea of Cortez	SSI	8.80
75	Myst	SSI	8.80
76	Rayman II	WD	8.79
77	Toy to Hava Baseball II	SSI	8.78
78	Geogles Khan II	WG	8.74
79	Yell of Barkness	SSI	8.74
80	Gracia Unisport	AD	8.74
81	Acas over Europe	Dynaxis	8.66
82	F-15 Strike Eagle III	MicroProse	8.65
83	Mit-29	Spectrum Hobby/E	8.64
84	Samurai of Iwakami	Legend	8.61
85	Space Duet V: Mission	AD	8.60
86	Lord of the Rings	SI	8.60
87	Issue of Title	AD	8.56
88	Kempner's Knight	SI	8.54
89	Rules of Engagement 2	SI	8.52
90	Warner of the Gods	SI	8.51
91	The Nordic	Cyber Dynamics	8.50
92	Lemmings: Chewbacca	AC:SI	8.50
93	Star Trek: Judgment Rites	AD:SI	8.50
94	Princes of Persia 2	AD	8.49
95	The Lost Vikings	AC	8.49
96	Star Trek: Incredible Years	SI	8.46
97	Challenge of the Five Brains	SI	8.45
98	MicroLeague	RP	8.45
99	SSI	AC	8.43
100	Sim City Gold	SI	8.40

Games on unranked lines have scores equal to the line above. * = Top game of type. Rank Test = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, S = Simulation, SI = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports

PATCHES

1942: Pacific Air War Update: Adds digital sounds, 6 new airplanes and new flight models to the original game. 1/19/95

Armored Fist V1A14 Update: CD-ROM/Doppy updates address a number of compatibility issues, including mouse, video, memory and missing/no sound effects. 1/5/95

Computer Gaming World Version 126.02 Update: Fixes reported 5 1/2 star ratings bugs in reviews of Rise of the Robots and Battle Isle 2000. 1/15/95

Dark Sun II: Woke at the Revolver V1.1 Update: Fixes reported problems. Separate floppy and CD-ROM versions available. 1/5/95

000M V1.9: Official 1d upgrade; works only with version 1.666. 2/8/95

5th Fleet Version 1.2 update: Fixes some reported bugs. 2/2/95

Flash Traffic Installation Update: New INSTALL.EXE expands sound card support, includes drivers for MS Sound System and cards with the Ensoniq chip. 1/27/95

Flight Commander 2 V1.02: Patch fixes PBEM feature and 1 reported problems with some video drivers. Also makes the game compatible with the CD-ROM version. IBM compatibles only. 1/8/95

Front Page Sports: Baseball '94 V1.02: Upgrade fixes many reported problems, including crash bugs, General Manager AI, and roster handling bugs. 2/3/95

Front Page Sports: Football Pro 95 V1.02: Adds fans to the stands and enables the CD-ROM version of the game to access extra plays from the CD, plus many other enhancements. 1/26/95

Hareyon Classic (Mac Version) V1.57: Works with version

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major on-line networks (CompuServe, Eerie, Zfile), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's own BBSs or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. **Red** indicates new files.

1.5 or better, fixing some missile targeting bugs. 2/3/95

Hareyon Classic for Windows V1.53b: Works with version 1.5 or better, fixes several reported GPF errors. Also fully implements all version 1.32 missile changes including bearing-only attacks. 2/2/95

Hareyon Classic V1.56b: CD-ROM update corrects some bugs with setting aircraft speeds, air-to-air refueling, and some other long standing bugs, as well as using less memory. Missiles launch against bases correctly. Works with all previous versions. 12/28/94

King's Quest VII Update: Corrects all known problems, but is not compatible with V1.1. 1/11/95

Knights of Xenter V1.08a Patch: Fixes some graphics bugs as well as some hardware compatibility problems. 1/4/95

Menzobrenzen V1.01 Update: CD-ROM/floppy update fixes numerous bugs, including: NPC Vonar can scribe the Light spell, Malice will now appear in the endgame for everyone, and Jump potions will not disappear when saving the game. 1/9/95

Master of Magic V1.2: Latest upgrade to MicroProse's strategy game with numerous fixes, new features, and major AI enhancements. 12/1/94

NASCAR V1.1 Upgrade Patch: Fixes in this version include: pole bug, interrupt 10 or higher for sound card settings and some problems with SET CONTROLS function when using ThrustMaster T1 and other pedal units. 12/19/94

Panzer General V1.1 Update: Separate CD-ROM and floppy patches fix some reported problems. 1/6/95

SimTower V1.1 Update: Macintosh-only patch fixes problems with metro station, random lock ups and some graphics glitches. 1/20/95

Tanks V1.25: Unofficial patch by Norm Koger adds panic fire and retreats, hidden A1 guns, variable weather, horse-drawn artillery, reduced air and antler effectiveness, and much more. 1/25/95

Tigers on the Prowl V1.15b: Latest patch fixes problem accessing multiple units and adds some new features. 11/23/94

Transport Tycoon: Fixes sound card recognition bug during setup, among other minor problems. 1/10/95

Warcraft: Orcs and Humans Disk/CD-ROM Update: Works with both the disk and CD-ROM versions, contains unit editor and cheat codes. 1/27/95

Warlords II Power Mac V1.04: Speeds up redraw of

hidden maps on Power Macintoshes. 2/1/95

Wing Commander III Joystick Patch: Fixes reported joystick lockups when starting up WCS. 1/2/95

Wing Commander Armada Proving Grounds Add-on: Adds 6 player network support to Armada. 1/2/95

Wing Commander Armada V1.0 Patch: Fixes reported problems. 1/2/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available direct from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accelade CA (408) 296-8800

Activision CA (310) 820-1276

Apagee MA (508) 368-7036

Bethesda Software MD (301) 990-7552

Broderbund CA (415) 883-5880

Capstone FL (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs OH (405) 742-6660

Id Software TX (508) 368-4137

Impressions Software MA (617) 225-2042

InterPlay Productions CA (714) 252-2822

LucasArts CA (415) 237-3070

Maxis CA (510) 254-3869

MicroProse MD (410) 785-1841

Microsoft WA (206) 936-6735

NovLogic CA (818) 774-9528

Origin TX (512) 328-8402

Papyrus MA (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online CA (209) 683-4463

Spectrum ByteByts CA (510) 522-8909

SSI CA (408) 730-6137 or (408) 739-6625

Virgin Interactive CA (714) 833-3305

NR 13**WARNING!**
NOT RECOMMENDED FOR
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graphics, no external memory
required, Sound Blaster™ and
Pro Audio Spectrum™
compatible, CD-ROM or
dialects version available

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Megatech, P.O. Box 11333, Torrance, CA 90510.

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KNIGHTS of XENSTAR

The Rumor Bag

The Winter Of Our Disk Contents

by William Oxford Bacon



It seemed like a natural, staging a performance of Richard III at Middleham Castle with yours truly playing the lead role using a serviceable Richard Nixon impression. "I'm a king, not a crook!" Why not? The voice of an unpopular president to suggest the voice of an unpopular king offers a certain something.

In fact, it seemed as natural as Sierra's Roberta Williams deciding to design KING'S QUEST VIII as a solo act. Both KING'S QUEST VI and KING'S QUEST VII were written with co-authors, but Roberta has interesting plans for the next installment which do not require collaboration. In addition to her plans to up the ante on the animation and integrate it with multiple scrolling, she unfortunately swore me to secrecy about the intriguing idea she has for one arcade sequence in the game.

To perform the opening monologue from the highest point in the keep, I climbed the narrow, twisting stairway—practicing my Nixon voice with visions of glory and critical acclaim in my brain. VISIONS OF GLORY, of course, reminded me of QQP's expected late '95 release of a planetary conquest game with both strategic and tactical combat. The game is supposed to feature 20 different planetary terrains and accommodate up to 40 players. There are even supposed to be near 40 alien races within the game.

I didn't feel very regal, however, when a little blond boy jumped out of one of the corridor's shadowy recesses, waving a stick sword and shouting, "Die, villain!" I instinctively stepped back and into the rather comely shape of the boy's mother, causing her to drop the book she was reading and release an involuntary cry. I muttered an apology, picked up her copy of SWORD OF SHANNARA, and suddenly realized that the young lovely was a woman I'd met at Legend. Hmm, I knew that Terry Brooks, the author of the best-selling Shannara series, was published by Random House, and I also knew that Random House has a major investment in Legend. Ergo, I reasoned, Legend must be publishing a SWORD OF SHANNARA game. She confirmed my suspicion and indicated that the game would be set in the time frame between SWORD OF SHANNARA and ELFBONES OF SHANNARA with the player taking on the role of Shea Ohlmsford's son, Will's father. She also said the game was being designed by Corey and Lori Cole of QUEST FOR GLORY fame.

I was so excited by that news and my mind was racing so fast that I reached the summit huffing and puffing like an early locomotive in QQP's upcoming EMPIRE BUILDER. This conversion of the classic Mayfair boardgame of railroad building will feature the standard board game, plus a version of the game with lots of

new optional rules. It will be the first of a series of games featuring NIPPON RAILS, BRITISH RAILS, EURORAILS, and more.

I caught my breath and began the monologue, only to be interrupted by an English Heritage volunteer who sternly but politely asked me to leave—something about defacing historical monuments. As I followed the volunteer down the twisting staircase, the little boy's mother handed me a hastily scribbled note. It said that Byron Preiss was going to publish a MARIAN CHRONICLES game. The Bradbury game will take place after the short stories from which the game received its name and will be a MYST-like game where the player must stop a potential nuclear disaster.

I gave her a thank you kiss on the cheek, but suddenly felt a thwack on the side of the head. Her son was waving his stick sword like a baseball bat and was acting a lot like a big league batter in Stormfront Studio's TONY LA RUSSA BASEBALL III. The new version will feature digitized professional players and both a near-flaw statistical model (affected some by weather and physics) for baseball stat-buffs and a pure physics-based game for action gamers. "I'm gonna tell daddy," threatened the protective youngster and, knowing the father's great propensity for jealousy, found myself capering nimbly from the lady's presence to the lascivious playing of a lute. ☺

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