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Wing Commander IV Is It Worth \$12 Million?

HOLIDAY

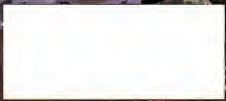
HOT

100

CGW Picks The
Hottest Games
And Goodies For
The Holidays

**Blockbuster
Games Reviewed**

Crusader
Command & Conquer
Magic Carpet 2
Steel Panthers
Heroes of Might & Magic





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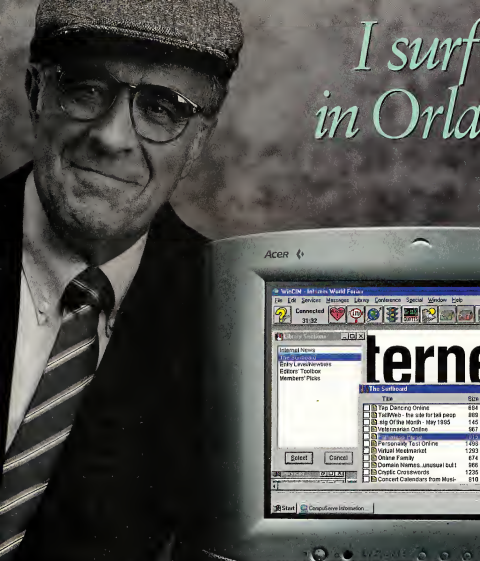
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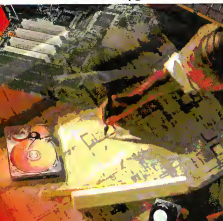
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Will your CD-ROM drive be a Christmas tree, or a computer accessory that won't come through the holidays? The hard drive is the only one that will come to them. To make sure you get the best one, we've put together a list of the top 10 hard drives of 1995. It's all in your hands.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

DECEMBER 1995

The Ultimate Gaming System:
Part One—Upgrades 204



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46 SNEAK PREVIEW! WING COMMANDER IV

With triple the budget of WING COMMANDER III, Chris Roberts and Origin set out to conquer the gaming galaxy. Mark Hamill, Malcolm MacDowell, John-Rhys Davies and Tom Wilson return to save the Confederation from a Border Worlds rebellion. Colonel Terry Coleman climbs into the cockpit to get a piece of the action.

66 THE HOLIDAY HOT 100 The biggest, best buying guide yet. CGW editors chose the top 10 products in 10 categories to help you identify the good stuff. Yeah, we checked the list twice.

204 ULTIMATE GAMING SYSTEM: PART ONE

If the old gray hardware ain't what it used to be, you need to upgrade or retire it. High Tech Priest Loyd Case confers upgrade strategies to save you money, with detailed descriptions of the products and the issues.



230 HARDWARE: VR HEADSETS A head-to-head comparison of the Virtual IO i-Glasses and Forte VFX-1 head-mounted displays.

ADVENTURE/ ROLE-PLAYING

237 SCORPIA'S STING Scorpia's search for Lovecraft melts a PRISONER OF ICE, the adventure sequel to SHADOW OF THE COMET. High seas hijinks involve Nazis, espionage, and creatures that call Cthulhu collect.

244 SCORP'S MAIL Adventure game hints for STAR TREK: A FINAL UNITY, THUNDERSCAPE, DISCWORLD, STONE PROPHECY, LANDS OF LORE and other games.

259 SNEAK PREVIEW! OUNGEDN KEEPER Bullfrog throws gamers into the dungeon and switches the usual roles of role-playing. Johnny Wilson discovers that ghouls just wanna have fun.

264 IN THE 1ST DEGREE Play the same games lawyers do in this refreshingly good whodunit by Broderbund. Charles Ardai investigates.

270 BURN CYCLE The CD-i title comes to the PC, smuggling pieces of *Blade Runner* and *JOHNNY MNEMONIC* with it.

278 ROBOT CITY Isaac Asimov's Sci-Fi city comes to life, and you've got to solve a murder where all the mechanical fingers point at you. Martin Cirulis discovers the city breeds artificial humans.

284 DUST A shotgun wedding of game design marries gritty realism with farcical humor. The wired West only seems to chap Arian Dembo's hide.

286 FADE TO BLACK Jason Kapalka finds plenty of action and scary moments in EA's sequel to *FLASHBACK*. And after you get by the controls, the game isn't bad, either.

292 KINGSPPOINT Goldtree Enterprises takes away some of the drudgery of running a role-playing game and gives players a city to roam in.

296 STRATEGY! BURIED IN TIME Charles Ardai guides you through the secrets of Presto Studios' fascinating time travel game.

ACTION

308 CRUSADER: NO REMORSE Lookin' for a fight? If you can fit all that aggression into a little red plastic suit, Origin's got some targets for you. Paul Schuytema goes postal, and he's *still* smiling about it.

312 SNEAK PREVIEW! 3-0 LEMMINGS Get a new perspective on those brainless, suicidal lilliputians when you become one of them in *Pygnosis*' latest sleep-deprivation tactic. Peter Olafson saves the day.

316 MAGIC CARPET 2 Bullfrog turbocharges the turban tourney with new spells, new environments and a greater sense of direction. Mark Clarkson builds a castle and raises hell with some beasties.

320 WITHAVEN Capstone attempts to meld the worlds of *Doom* and fantasy-adventure, but Petra Schlunk finds the result less than spellbinding.

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326 SNEAK PREVIEW! JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL The Genesis game gets a new uniform and hits the big leagues with great graphics, realistic ball carrying, and an easy-to-use passing game. George Jones takes the field.

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329 BOGEY'S BAR & GRILL Master mechanic Denny Atkin heads to the hangar to design his own aircraft with add-ons for *Microsoft FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.1*.

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340 SNEAK PREVIEW! TOWER Try your hand at controlling air traffic at Chicago O'Hare, Washington National and March Field. BAO puts you in the hot seat with this ultra-realistic sim.

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345 BROADSIDES & GRIPESHOT A quick course in designing custom battle scenarios with EMPIRE II, instructed by Commander Alan Enrich.

352 COMMAND & CONQUER Virgin/Westwood march toward glory in real-time with DUNE II-style combat. Martin Cirulis takes point in the bitter struggle for Earth's destiny.

358 STEEL PANTHERS Gary Grigsby's tactical simulation of World War II combined-arms combat blends realism and playability almost flawlessly. Patrick "Blood and Guts" Miller reconcoiters what is sure to be another wargame hit from SSI.

362 HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC Jason Kapalka leads a crew of medieval knights and wizards to glory with this addictive fantasy game from New World Computing.

368 EMPIRE II New World Computing departs from empire building with this simple yet effective game of tactical combat. Tim Carter discovers his artistic side with the robust scenario builder.

374 MARCO POLO I-Motion and Phillips Interactive Media trace the steps of the famous Venetian explorer, but Arinn Dembo finds the legend more interesting than the journey.

378 SIMISLE By combining SIMCITY-style development with goals and missions, Maxis exports good gameplay to tropical islands. Elliott Chin discovers new life in the rainforest.

382 EXPLORATION Interactive Magic, like Columbus, sets out on a long journey with a vastly oversimplified view of the world. Arinn Dembo takes the crow's nest.



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Survey Says... CGW Is #1

Survey Results Shed Light On Computer Game Buyers And Their Interests

by Johnny L. Wilson

It's one thing to say you're the best computer gaming magazine, but it's another to have independent results that prove it. Recently, a survey was conducted with an independent research firm, which mailed thousands of questionnaires to the owners of eight major computer games. There was no mention of CGW or Ziff-Davis on any of the materials participants received. Survey questions covered a broad range of topics, from hardware to game preferences to magazine preferences.

The results of the survey, taken from 1,167 completed questionnaires, offer a pretty good portrait of who computer gamers are and what they want. First of all, it comes as no surprise that most respondents are male (95%). And though they like to play a lot of games, they aren't kids: the average age is 31. (Twenty-one percent are 18-24 years old, 50% are 25-34, and 26% are 35-49). On average, the respondents said they've been playing PC games for seven years. The average annual household income is \$61,000.

We were delighted to see that computer gamers also have very good taste. Sixty-five percent of the respondents said they are regular readers of *Computer Gaming World*, compared to under 25% for the next closest competitor. In addition, we were chosen first overall as: the gaming magazine they would read first if several arrived on the same day; the gaming magazine they

would read if they could only read one; and the gaming magazine with the best reviews. That's great news!

We were curious to see how often gamers indulge in their hobby. It turns out that the respondents buy games nearly once a month on average (once ever 4.7

Gamers in this survey spent an average of 107 hours to complete games from a variety of genres.

weeks). Once they've spent the money, they set about playing those games with a fervor. On average, game buyers play their games nine times per month for an average of two hours each time.

I was also curious to learn how many game buyers actually finish the games they buy. Interestingly enough, 61% of the respondents did not play the game through to the end. Thirty-eight percent finished the game they had registered in order to be mailed this survey. That 38% got their money's worth and more, because they continued to replay the game, on average about five times. The gamers spent an average of 107 hours to complete a game.

When it comes to which gaming genre seems to be the most popular, no one category emerged as a clear favorite. Slightly more gamers are interested in simulations than anything else. But there was also a strong representation for wargames, strategy games, role-playing games and sports games. The least popular among respondents were adventure, arcade/action games, puzzle games, and the often disappointing "educational" products.

Some of the survey results surprised us. Would you have expected Packard Bell to be the #1 machine among PC gamers? With 11% of the total respondents, Packard Bell was 3% higher than the Gateway 2000, its nearest competitor. Almost three-fourths of the respondents have 486-based machines, but over one-third plan to upgrade to a Pentium within a year. We weren't surprised that only 12% of game buyers had a 386 or below and that only 3% of respondents had a Macintosh.

In terms of system information, most of the respondents have 8-16 MB of RAM on their computer (81%), Windows 95 (97%), and plan to upgrade to Windows 95 (77%). That was higher than we expected. Despite the considerable amount of attention focused on sound cards and speakers, the Labtec speakers that are included in many multimedia upgrade kits have more than twice as many adherents as the higher quality Sony and Altec Lansing speakers. Of course, we weren't surprised at all at the dominance of Creative Labs in sound cards

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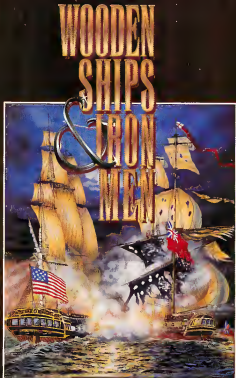
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

DECEMBER 1995, NUMBER 137

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Subscription Rates: The subscription rate is \$27.94 for a one year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add \$16.00 per postage. Annual subscription are \$78.00 per year. Canadian GST registration number is R140166720. Payment must be in U.S. dollars or mark by check or money order drawn on a U.S. bank. Visa, MasterCard, AMEX accepted.

Subscription Services: For subscription service questions, address changes or ordering information, call (303) 955-8200 or fax (303) 603-7458 within the U.S. and Canada. All other countries call (303) 604-7945 or fax (303) 603-1010 or write to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80522-7167.

Editorial Offices: 135 Main St., 14th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94106.

Back Issues: For back issues (subject to availability), \$6.00 per issue (\$8.00 outside the U.S.), send check, money order or credit card order to our Back Issues Dept., Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., P.O. Box 30131, Boulder, CO 80525-5131.

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(59%) and multimedia upgrade kits (16%), because SOUND BLASTER has been the standard for computer gamers for years. In joysticks, Advanced Gravis had a clear-cut lead, with CH Products and Thrustmaster tied for second.

We found more surprises in the area of on-line services and time spent on line. We expected CompuServe to come out on top because of its reputation for software publisher support, or perhaps GEnie because of the variety of on-line games offered. But the winner among game buyers is the same as the industry leader elsewhere—America Online by almost 2:1. Also, would you expect gamers to spend an average of eight hours per week on line?

I hope the results of this survey were as interesting to you as they were to me. There is much more data than space will allow here, but it's always enlightening to see how the community of gamers spends its time and money. With the sales of IBM-compatible PCs outpacing new TV sales, according to Intel, and with the avid interest gamers are showing in their hobby, it's no wonder that companies are directing ever more focused marketing efforts at you.

I believe that the gaming market is poised for explosive growth in the coming years. As sales of personal computers continue to increase and compatibility problems fade with programs like Windows 95, you'll find growing numbers of people who want to experience the same things you've been enjoying for years. And that's great.

But I hope that the game publishers don't lose sight of the fact that what appeals to gamers is good, challenging, replayable gameplay. I'd hate to see the creative possibilities of this technology squandered on big-budget superficiality. ☺

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.

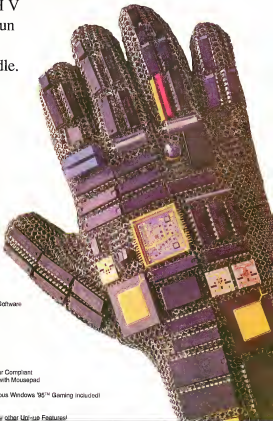
★☆☆☆☆ Abysmal: That rare game that gets it all wrong. Usually a buggy, incomplete, and/or valueless product.



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LETTERS FROM CGW READERS

A WAIL OF A TAIL

I had considered myself a student of anatomy, but the November 1995 issue of your magazine has humbled me. The review of PRIMAL RAGE obliquely refers to the powerful attack performed by the "anterior adjunct" of a T-Rex

procured. Unless, of course, the author intended to refer to a posterior appendage. Then, that's just a tail.

*Michael Seid
New York University School of
Medicine
New York, NY*

Considering our mistake, we guess Nature will have to continue abhorring the vexatious in anterior appendaged T-Rexes.

TRUTH IN CHASTISEMENT

It was good to read an honest review on Empire's CIVIL WAR. Too bad I had already purchased it. But I can't help but wonder, why would you blast a product of one of your advertisers? None of the other so-called computer magazines do.

*Richard Knopp
Hallettsville, TX*

Thanks for noticing. The editorial and sales staffs of Computer Gaming World work entirely independent of each other. We don't influence the sales department, and they don't tell us who to cover, or how to cover products. (In fact, the editorial department has no idea which companies are advertising their products in a given issue until the bound magazines arrive on our desks.) As you can imagine, our reviews and ratings do not always meet with ringing approval by advertisers. But this magazine operates on the principle of journalistic integrity. We like it better that way, and we

know it's the only way to have credibility with readers.

SUMMER DOLDRUMS

Am I the only person who looks for great games in the summertime? The industry would love more total revenue from me if their production plans covered the whole year. Of course Christmas is important, but the Summer/Fall seems to be ignored.

*Fred Kuhlman
Kokomo, IN*

Frankly, we don't know if more games are sold in the Holiday/Winter season because that's when more games come out or because gaming is such an "inside" sport so that less people play in the Spring/Summer. Since the Game Buyer study alluded to in this month's editorial shows that a significant percentage of the respondents buy almost a game per month, we're not sure if it's smart for the game industry to continue assuming that it lives by a "toy industry" cycle (Xmas or Exit, Yule It or Lose It). Who knows, maybe the shipping holiday releases will create a new first-quarter buying frenzy?

PHANTASTIC ANNOYANCE

Arinn Dembo took points off in the PHANTASMAGORIA review because the game had an

"exaggeratedly feminine protagonist?" If Arinn is going to review games based on her own personal grievances, perhaps she should keep those reviews to herself.

*Randolph Schock
Oswego, NY*

If a critic doesn't look at a product from a critical perspective, that critic is not doing her job. Adrienne, the female protagonist of PHANTASMAGORIA, is not anywhere near the equivalent of the egotistical heroine in Robert Heinlein's Friday or a match for Helen Mirren's British police inspector character in "Prime Suspect." Gamers who prefer not to play games where they di-



A RAGING SAURON The doctor is right: No evidence of an anterior appendage is visible on Sauron, even upon close inspection.

named Sauron. This is a startling discovery for biology: an appendage hanging off the front of a massive dinosaur, one that can be used for vicious slam attacks. I am admittedly unfamiliar with the anatomy of those extinct beasts, but in Homo Sapiens, the only appendage on the anterior of the body is particular to the males of the species. A species that can use such a procreative appendage as a weapon is such an exciting discovery that I hope to be able to publish an article in Nature as soon as funding is



PREEN SHOT Adrienne prings in Phantasmagoria. There is no anterior appendage visible on Adrienne, either.

rest "weak" characters around the screen need to know this. Arinn, and at least two in-house editors, were offended by Adrienne's stereotypical dependence on her husband, even though she was obviously the more successful of the two; the preening

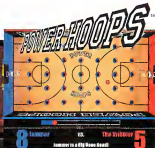
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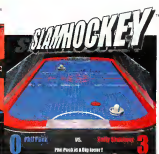
EXCEPT THIS.



Foosball: All the action of the original—spin, pass, block, and score!



Power Hoops: Block, steal or shoot, in regular or multiple ball mode!



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levels, and network and modem support for tournament and league play. In fact, 3-D Table Sports gives you everything you could ever expect in a table game...*except a place to put your quarters!*



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process every time she passed the mirror; and the use of a "hot spot" merely to try out toiletry articles. Even though PHANTAS-MAGORRA is a very good game, these are gamers who won't appreciate it. We think they deserve to know.

UNCIVILIZED LISTING

How come SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION is not among the Top 100? It deserves to be up there.

Bob Giles
Asheville, NC

We do not place games simultaneously in the Hall of Fame and the Top 100. Once a game like SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION is inducted into the Hall of Fame, it is removed from the Top 100.

RETURN TO THE PLANET VGA

You have a great map. Can you please spend one-half page looking at VGA PLANETS? This shareware game is hot on the net. I am currently hosting



LEGENDARY LOOK Legend has an eye out for gamers who are interested in the next game of the Star Control series.

a game with two Prodigy, one AOL, and three Americans, two Germans, two British, and

one Finnish players on the net. Talk about worldwide!

Darryl Bland
Rainbow City, AL

We reviewed VGA PLANETS in CGW #111 (October, 1993) and published a strategy article in CGW #119 (June, 1994). We will make these available for download on ZDNet on CompuServe, Interchange and the World Wide Web.

STAR CONSOLED

Whatever happened to STAR CONTROL 2 in the Top 100? It was in the Top 10 and then, "Poof," gone! By the way, it would be interesting to see what Legend has been doing with the latest installment in that series.

A.D.
Los Angeles, CA

After a game has been in the Top 100 for more than about 18 months, we either induct it into the Hall of Fame or remove it to make room for newer titles. One criterion for inducting a game into our Hall of Fame is that it has to have significantly added to its particular genre in terms of technological or design innovation. Though SC2 is an excellent game, we could not justify its inclusion in the HOF. As for Legend's current development of SC3, see the summary in our RPG section of this issue's buying guide.

HARDWARE HARANGUE

I am a regular reader since I got an issue of your magazine a year ago. I am tired of suggesting to you that you start a Hardware section in which we could compare different sound cards, CD dri-

What If Dr. Seuss Wrote Technical Manuals?

If a packet hits a pocket on a socket on a port,
And the bus is interrupted as a very last resort,
And the address of the memory makes your floppy disk abort,
Then the socket packet pocket has an error to report!

If your cursor finds a menu item followed by a dash,
And the double-clicking icon puts your window in the trash,
And your data is corrupted 'cause the index doesn't hash,
Then your situation's hopeless, and your system's gonna crash!

You can't say this?
What a shame sir!
We'll find you
Another game sir!

If the label on the cable on the gable at your house,
Says the network is connected to the button on your mouse,
But your packets want to tunnel on another protocol,
That's repeatedly rejected by the printer down the hall.

And your screen is all distorted by the side effects of gauss,
So your icons in the window are as wavy as a sause,
Then you may as well reboot and go out with a bang,
'Cause as sure as I'm a poet, the sucker's gonna bang!

When the copy of your floppy's getting sloppy on the disk,
And the microcode instructions cause unnecessary risc,
Then you have to flash your memory and you'll want to RAM your RIM,
Quickly turn off the computer and be sure to tell your mom!

Anonymous
via the Internet

ves, modems, video cards, joysticks, etc. Please do start such an article which could rate one or two hardware items, along with price and features.

Haoom
Galburg 2, Lahore
PAKISTAN

You won't have to be tired anymore. We will be launching a Game Technology section with regular hardware features in February. Of course, we have had at least one hardware feature per month for almost six months, but those may not have gotten to Pakistan yet.

WISH COME TRUE

My name is Mark McDon-

ald and I live in Japan. I am very interested in writing for the "Interface" section of your magazine. I am a freelance writer, interested in knowing what the requirements are for writing for your magazine. Could you be kind enough to send me a manuscript to the address below?

Mark McDonald
Tsumami-ku, Yokohama
JAPAN

Congratulations, you just wrote something for the "Interface" section of the magazine. However, since you probably want a "paying" job, we'll send you the guidelines for contributors. ☺



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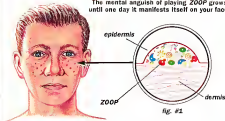
(Dream cycle of a normal and healthy teen)



(Dream cycle of a teen who plays ZOOP)

Warning! ZOOP looks and plays like an innocent game, but extensive play may cause the following symptoms: loss of friends, loss of appetite, insomnia and excessive battery consumption. Whenever possible, avoid play.

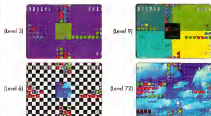
The mental anguish of playing ZOOP grows until one day it manifests itself on your face.



Research has shown the longer you play ZOOP, the more you actually start taking on the physical characteristics of ZOOP.



THE DEPTHS OF ZOOP

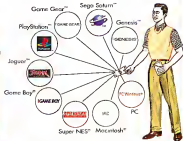


MONEY SPENDING PATTERNS.

before ZOOP:



after ZOOP:



Developed by



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THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE GAMING WORLD

Bloody Good Games In Store From Bullfrog

UK Developer Has Some Of The Most Innovative Concepts In Game Design

In the hills above Guildford, England, near a university laboratory named after the physical scientist and clergyman J.B. Priestly, there's a laboratory dedicated to a different kind of pursuit—serious fun. Here at **Bullfrog Productions**, crammed into the second floor of a university-owned office building, teams of the world's most innovative game developers are at work on fascinating new projects: **DUNGEON KEEPER** (Sneak Preview in this issue, page 259), **THE INDESTRUCTIBLES**, **THEME HOSPITAL**, **GENE WARS**, **SYNDICATE WARS** and **CREATION**.

THE INDESTRUCTIBLES is an ambitious project involving superhero combat, in the vein of Hero Software's aborted **CHAMPIONS** game. **INDESTRUCTIBLES** players will use points to modify eight attributes, create their own superhero costume with an art utility, look for a worthy super-foe, and engage in real-time comic book-style battles. All of the characters, as well as the game universe, will be true 3-D characters (based on motion capture movement), and the action will be physics-based (modified by super attributes, of course) rather than rules-based. Also, though the original game



GENE, GENE GOOD OF HOME In *Gene Wars*, gamers get to build up their civilizations a la *StarGen* as they genetically re-engineer the creatures of their home planet out of great globes of cosmic goo.

concept called for the player to become a member of a team of superheroes, **THE INDESTRUCTIBLES** is intended to be so open-ended that gamers can even be supervillains if they so desire.

The conflict in **GENE WARS** is broader and more strategic. Up to four players compete in a real-time network game turning "goo," the basic stuff of the universe, into various things in a war of survival. Players can adapt eight basic types of creatures into such units as sentinels, attackers, choppers, collectors, reflectors and electronic countermeasure specialists.

The catch is that gamers aren't *supposed* to be fighting each other. God-like Ephemerals will check their progress and punish players who aren't discreet enough in their dealings with the other players. Expect it in the first quarter of 1996.

Anyone who has played **THEME PARK** will recognize the approach to **THEME HOSPITAL**. Like its predecessor, **THEME HOSPITAL** will look cute but feature a serious economic/management model underneath the pretty graphics. The game will feature four time periods (Medieval, Victorian, Modern, and Fu-



SMOOTH OPERATOR Following on the heels of *Theme Park*, *Theme Hospital*'s silly diseases will show you to see if malpractice makes imperfect or vice-versa.



CHAMPION CHARLIE BROWN A 3-D vigilante takes a heroic stance on a Gotham-esque rooftop in *The Inconstructus*.

turistic) and different areas (rural, industrial, urban), as well as some funny diseases (none of which are realistic).

SYNDICATE WARS is a sequel to **SYNDICATE** with more realistic special effects, 3-D vehicles and fully destructible buildings. Veterans of the original will also appreciate the non-linear mission structure, as well as the variety of 30 different cities and circa 100 missions.

Finally, **CREATION** is set in a time-frame parallel to **SYNDICATE WARS** (Bullfrog seems to be moving toward a Marvel Universe-style timeline on some of their products), but the gamer is a marine game warden on another planet. As such, the warden has his/her own tasks to accomplish, but the outside resources and some of the missions within the game are affected by events within the **SYNDICATE WARS** storyline. The graphics were already impressive with light sourcing relative to depth, but the color palette for this underwater world was still being developed when we viewed the product in October.

—Johnny Wilson

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 addiction in the "Playing Lately?" blank of the CGW Top 100 ballot.

Readers' TOP 10

Results for CGW #135, OCTOBER 1995

1. **MechWarrior 2** (Activision)
2. **Panzer General** (SSI)
3. **Phantasmagoria** (Sierra On-Line)
4. **Master of Magic** (MicroProse)
5. **Jagged Alliance** (Sir-Tech)
6. **Wing Commander 3** (Origin)
7. **Command & Conquer** (Virgin/Westwood)
8. **X-COM: Terror From The Deep** (MicroProse)
9. **Descent** (Interplay)
10. **Apache** (Interactive Magic)

Notable Quotes

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

"I had totally ignored the battle-mech genre until now. **MECHWARRIOR 2** has me hooked. Die honorless Falcon Warriors!"

BJF, Denver, CO

"Broke both springs on my Thrustmaster FCS on **WING COMMANDER III**. And you ask if I'm having fun?!"

"Col. Blaw" Williams, Midland, TX

"I found a secret code which will help any gamer who just installed **DUNGEON MASTER II**. Go to the game directory and type *ERASE * *."

Robert Angelo, Bronx, NY

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MC, Greensop, KY

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Scott Carlson, Oldsvar, FL

"**PHANTASMAGORIA** is the most horrific game I have ever played. I have nightmares because of it—just thinking of playing it makes my skin crawl."

Cherh-Lin Chen, Auburn, AL

"Brilliant, ruthless, endlessly addictive; **JAGGED ALLIANCE** is the game!"

Bob Stone, Pogoosa Springs, CO

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Ray Kelly, Omaha, NE

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Magic: The Gathering Slips While MicroProse Preps Sequels

MicroProse Takes A 'Tried-And-True' Strategy With Several New Titles

MicroProse, the company responsible for such landmark games as CIVILIZATION, MASTER OF MAGIC and X-COM, seems determined to mine the popularity of those titles by producing games in a similar vein.

CIVILIZATION 2000, set for Spring release. Being shepherded through development by Jeff Bridges, of SID MEIER'S COLONIZATION fame, CIVILIZATION 2000 will feature a new isometric perspective, new lev-

such as elephants, terrorists and archers.

SimTex, the master magicians who brought us MASTER OF ORION and MASTER OF MAGIC, are currently working on MASTER OF ANTARES. Building upon the features of the former MASTER games, MOA sets itself in the dark future where players take on the role of emperors, managing space-driven colonies in war, treaties and galactic expansion. In ad-

dition to

Armedgeddon. MicroProse also announced the purchase of a significant interest in ABC Sports, which means we can look forward to a possible ULTIMATE MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL for the '96 football season. Expect to see it by fall of '96, along with a host of titles under the Wide World Of Sports banner.

So what's MicroProse doing with their most-coveted license, MAGIC: THE



BETTER CIV Civ 2000 will add better graphics, a new level of difficulty, and more features to this classic of empire-building.

The company is following up the imminent release of CIVNET with an announcement of the tentatively entitled

el of difficulty, and fully scalable 640x480 graphics. In addition, there will be seven new wonders of the world, 14 new tribes, and new unit types

MASTER THIS Master of Antares, the sequel to MOO, has improved graphics, more diplomacy features, and some better-looking alien races.



dition to battling it out with 13 different alien races, gamers will have the option of competing against up to eight human players over a LAN.

SimTex is also working on the tentatively titled

SUPER HEROES, a game with the look and feel of X-COM. Set in the bleak future, you must pit your band of mutants against the gangs, drug lords and organized crime that ordinary government forces are unable to keep in check. Lead your team through various missions until you reach the final showdown against the diabolical Dr. Demonious



EAT FIREBALLS In true X-COM fashion, you command a crack crew of super heroes in a battle against Earth's most nefarious villains.

GATHERING? Would you believe making a screensaver? Yes, while they are refitting MTG for Windows 95, they are working on a project entitled MAGIC: THE GATHERING DESKTOP ILLUSIONS. Whether ILLUSIONS can keep gamers spellbound while they wait for the actual MTG game is certainly open to speculation.

—Shane Mooney

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Circle Reader Service #166

BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG

You have to give Talonsoft credit for knowing how to push wargamers' hot buttons. Their debut, **BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES**, took on the Battle of the Bulge, and **BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG**, their



A HOUSE DIVIDED You may choose to relight Gettysburg the old-fashioned way, or view the 7th Mississippi in miniature with **BARRAGEWARE**'s *Ironma*'s flexible interface.

second game in the series, recreates the American Civil War's most famous battle in style. The game captures the best aspects of both a miniatures tabletop game and a board wargame: hexagons may be toggled off, cardboard cutout units may be changed to miniatures-style figurines, and the wonderfully-rendered terrain can be viewed as either flat period maps or as gorgeous 3-D cutaway sculpture. The toolbar makes everything, from finding a particular unit to checking which cannon have fired, simple and easy.

The AI, even at this early stage, seems to be stronger on attack than in **ARDENNES**. But part of that may be because

the **BATTLEGROUND** system is better suited to 19th-century



conflict. Although the game has a short learning curve, it hits all the important aspects of Civil War battles. Leaders are a key to organization, movement and combat, and Confederate leaders seem as aggressive as they were in the actual battle. The differences between column and line formation are handled elegantly, and the game system illustrates how melee and fire combat should be handled without over-emphasizing either.

With the voluminous amount of information available on Gettysburg, the designers are sure to be second-guessed on morale and strength levels. But the research seems sound to us. In particular, the fighting around Little Round Top has the proper desperate feel. And while I did better at Devil's Den than the Rebels did his-

torically, that's why we play these things, isn't it?

A fine, spirited rendition of the climactic battle fought in an otherwise meaningless Pennsylvania town, **BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG** will have you throwing troops down the Chambersburg Pike faster than you can say "Robert E. Lee."

—Terry Coleman

HOOVES OF THUNDER

One of the earliest uses for which personal computers were assigned was handicap-



ping horse races. Nearly every platform from the TI 99 and the "Trash-80" forward has had both serious handicapping tools and simulated

horse races. The successes of handicapping tools were debatable (until **Axisis** released its **TRACKMASTER** system), as was the appeal of simulated horse races with their colored blocks representing horses and their limited databases. **HOOVES OF THUNDER** is an extremely pretty descendant of those early efforts.

In **HOOVES OF THUNDER**, you get to choose from one of five imaginary tracks and gamble your way through a simulated season. Naturally, you start with limited funds and try to build up your personal treasury so that you can buy your own horses, hire trainers, and enter those horses in the most advantageous races to continue the buildup of your treasury. If you're successful, you may become the next Seth Hancock (the owner of Kentucky's arguably finest thoroughbred stable for many decades). Fail, and you may become the next Bruce McNall (former owner of the L.A. Kings



HOOVES OF THUNDER lets you choose from one of five imaginary tracks and gamble your way through a simulated season.

and a racing stable, all of which were highly leveraged and came apart at once).

When you move the cursor around the panoramic view of the track, its shape changes to reflect possible activities: checking the form book, reading the racing form, placing bets (and cashing tickets), starting the next race, or advancing to the next auction day (your opportunity to buy your own horses). Once you start the race, you get to view colorful, roto-scoped horses racing past SVGA scenery at up to 50+ frames per second. Also, unlike the game's closest competitor, *Good To Firm* from Scotland's Wizard Games, you are not restricted to viewing only the leader. You can scroll back to view any of the horses in the race.

HOVES OF THUNDER has the most beautiful graphics for a horse racing simulation to date. However, the beta version we saw lacks a useful *Daily Racing Form* presentation listing times and distances in the past performances. This takes away from the depth many horse racing fans are looking for. Still, the game looks great and operates much more smoothly than its immediate ancestor, *QUARTER POLE*. The horses are at the gate...

—Johnny Wilson

MARTIAN CHRONICLES

Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, his most acclaimed science fiction work, has enthralled readers for decades. Now, Byron Preiss Multimedia, the company that brought the late Isaac Asimov's robots

to the computer screen in *ROBOT CITY*, has licensed Bradbury's work to create a graphic adventure set in Bradbury's universe. **MARTIAN CHRONICLES**



CHRONICLES OF BRADBURY Lush graphics and a compelling story spice up *Martian Chronicles*, and interviews with Ray Bradbury himself give the game depth and perspective.

requires that you assume the role of a government agent whose job is to explore an ancient Martian ruin for an all-powerful "force"—something mentioned only typically in lost Martian passages. The governments of Earth believe it is some *awesome* technology or science, and hope that with the discovery of this force they will be able to avert nuclear war, something the nations of Earth are on the very brink of.

The game is entirely puzzle-driven and very reminiscent of *MYST*. You must explore the Martian ruins and solve puzzles to gain clues towards your ultimate goal. Unlike other puzzle games, however, **MARTIAN CHRONICLES** is wrapped in the lore of Bradbury's stories. For example, ghostly apparitions of Martians appear briefly as you sift through the

ancient rubble of a former Martian metropolis.

It's great that Byron Preiss is bringing legendary science fiction stories to the computer, but the results would

be better with a more fluid interface. As it is, many people, including those computer game novices who wish to explore the virtual world of a science fiction grandmaster, might be put off by the clunky interface. Hopefully, the final version of **MARTIAN CHRONICLES** will be sufficiently streamlined.

Apart from the game itself, the CD includes a video interview with Bradbury himself, where he discusses his works, his life, and the inspirations and influences on his stories. The CD also has selections from the *Martian Chronicles*, read by the narrator of the game. Fans of Bradbury will appreciate the extras built into the game, and those who liked *MYST* and *7th GUEST* might like the beautifully-rendered puzzle-driven gameplay.

—Elliott Chin

PIPELINE

ESTIMATED RELEASE DATES BASED ON THE LATEST INFORMATION FROM GAME DEVELOPERS

NAME OF GAME, COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
AGE OF RIFLES SSI	01/96
ALLIED GENERAL SSI	12/95
ALIENS Mindscape	12/95
ARK OF BAWN New World	12/95
BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG Talissoft	12/95
CIVILIZATION 2000 MicroProse	01/96
CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD Interplay	2/96
DUNGEON KEEPER Bullfrog/EA	2/96
FANTASY GENERAL SSI	3/96
INVULNERABLES Bullfrog/EA	3/96
JAGGED ALLIANCE HEAD-TO-HEAD Sir Tech	3/96
JAGGED ALLIANCE GOLD (WIN 95) Sir Tech	02/96
JOHN MAOEN FOOTBALL '96 Electronic Arts	12/95
MAGIC: THE GATHERING MicroProse	02/96
MASTER OF AMTARES MicroProse	12/95
METAL LORDS New World	3/96
NCAA FOOTBALL Mindscape	12/95
PAX IMPERIA II Blizzard	3/96
REALMS OF ARKANA 3 Sir Tech	3/96
RIPPER Take 2	12/95
SHANNARA Legend	12/95
SILENT HUNTER SSI	12/95
SPYCRAFT: THE GREAT GAME Activision	12/95
STAR CONTROL III Accolade	12/95
IFR: EP2000 Ocean	12/95
THE LAST BLITZKRIEB SSG	01/96
THE RAVEN PROJECT Mindscape	12/95
THIRD REICH Avalon PH	01/96
THIS MEANS WAR! MicroProse	12/95
TOP GUN Spectrum FolkByte	12/95
WINGHAMMER Mindscape	12/95
WING COMMANDER IV Origin	12/95
WIZARDRY GOLD Sir Tech	2/96



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The Unbearable Lightness Of Be, Inc.

Upstart start-up Be, Incorporated, is doing the unthinkable—launching a new hardware platform in 1995, one that's completely incompatible with everything else on the market. How does Be think it can succeed this late in the game? By going after the hackers.

Founded by former Apple exec Jean-Louis Gasse, Be is targeting hobbyists and multimedia application developers who are looking for a machine with top-notch performance and an operating system that's not hobbled by a need to remain compatible with 10- to 15-year-old designs.

The system they are designing should be on gamers' radars. The Be-



Box hardware looks blazing: dual PowerPC 603 processors running at 56 MHz, room for up to 256MB of RAM, built-in SCSI and IDE, integrated 16-bit sound, two PC-standard joystick ports, two MIDI ports, one parallel and

four serial I/O ports, and three infrared controller ports. PC-standard keyboard and mouse ports, as well as three PCI and five ISA slots, means inexpensive add-ons can come from what Be calls "the PC-clone organ bank."

The Be system software supports preemptive multitasking and real-time response, combined with the dual PowerPC architecture, this means games could be amazingly responsive, since one processor can handle all the I/O and graphics while another is dedicated to handling AI computations. Direct video access, similar to that in Win 95, means the

BeBox should offer blazing video performance.

Pierre Raynaud-Richard is Be's games guru, and he says the company is definitely keeping gamers in mind: Be plans a Game Software Development Kit, OpenGL support, and various 3-D graphics options. With its multi-processor architecture and sleek operating system, the BeBox could be the Amiga of the 90s—a hot machine that's only a minor player, but blows away everything else technologically. "The ultimate machine for hackers, definitely," says Raynaud-Richard, "and a very good machine for games."

—Denny Allan

The 64 Gigabyte Question?

Warren Spector may be best known to computer gamers as the evil Dr. Spector from *Morrow Dawn*, a Victorian-era space opera using the *Ultima VI* engine. Yet, Spector has a lengthy pedigree as producer and designer of both traditional and computer games. Prior to coming to Origin, Spector designed *Tomb for Steve Jackson Games* and the *Box Rosters* boardgame for TSR. At Origin, Spector has produced *Ultima V* and *VI*, *Wings of Glory*, *Cybermorax* and *Clonix*, among others, as well as designing *Morrow Dawn*. Spector is a top-notch design talent and a worthy mind to ask the 64 Gigabyte Question: if you had no limitations in budget or computing power, what kind of game would you like to design?

Over the last six and a half years, I've been involved in the creation of over a dozen games. I've produced three-quarter-overhead perspective role-playing games, interactive movies and flight sims (and I hope to make a real-time strategy game sometime soon). I've enjoyed every last one of the games I've worked on. But of all the game's I've produced, there's one kind of game I live for—first-person, real-time POV games. When I play a really good POV (point-of-view) game, I'm there in a way I can't be in any other medium—not in movies, not on tele-

vision, not in a book.

It bugs the hell out of me that we can't do a convincing real-world simulation. That's what I really want to do. Unfortunately, we're so

limited by our tools that we always end up falling back on the crutch of fantasy or science fiction. And before anyone starts screaming, let me say that I love fantasy and science fiction—I just wish we could do some-



thing else once in a while. Unfortunately, there's a little rule of the road that we just can't get around (yet). The more realistic you make your game the higher players' expectations get. Basically, we make so many fantasy and science fiction games because no

one can tell us that our orcs don't look or act like real orcs. Try to make a POV *Din Had* and watch people scream that your state-of-the-bleeding-art game doesn't do everything just right (in other words, exactly like the way things work in the real world).

Not that any of these problems are going to stop me or my colleagues here at Origin and elsewhere. I'm in this business because I know that someday I'll produce a game that is so convincing you'll have to stop and think, "is it real or is it *Memorex*?"

The game world and everything in it will look just the way you expect, and you'll interact with this world in ways that mimic the real world far more effectively. You'll decide whether to walk, drive or jump out of an airplane to get where you want to go. Confronted with a hostage situation, you'll have to decide whether to shoot that terrorist or try to talk to him (and you'll really talk to him) to get him to let his hostages go.

You'll get all the thrills and chills and emotional content (beyond the adrenaline rush everyone aspects in games today) you expect from a fast-paced action movie with none of the actual risks. And unlike an interactive movie (which, by shifting to the third-person perspective, distances you from the action), you'll be right in the thick of things. Oh, and speaking of interactive movies, there probably won't be any live-action video in my dream game. If I wanted to make movies, I'd be in Hollywood making movies. I'm after something bigger and, to my mind, cooler than that.

Tyrian



No amount of marketing hype could do this game justice. If you enjoy awesome arcade action then you owe it to yourself to download the shareware version of Tyrian and see it for yourself. Bring along a friend, because Tyrian features a two-player mode as well as network and modem support. We're sure you'll be hooked.

Here are just a few places you can find Tyrian:

Epic's web site: <http://www.epicgames.com>

Epic's official ftp site: <ftp.uml.edu> in
the <msdos/games/epic> directory
Exec-PC BBS (414) 789-4360

CompuServe: GO EPIC and
download Tyrian from the Epic Forum

AOL: keyword PCGAMES, in the software libraries
Epic's shareware games can also be found on many
BBS's and major online services around the world.



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SUPREME WARRIOR

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Circle Reader Service #90



The Riddle Of Master Lu

THE RIDDLE OF MASTER LU has the distinct flare of an Indiana Jones story, minus the whip and mayhem. The hero of this adventure is the real-life explorer and collector of oddities, Robert L. Ripley. In addition to founding the New

York Museum, the threat of a second world war overshadowed world politics. While contemplating the impending threat of the Germans and the Japanese, Ripley becomes aware of an artifact that could universally unite the Chinese. Of course, in the right hands, such an object could prove of tremendous benefit to the free world. But Ripley's discovery of a trail of corpses and desecrated artifacts make very clear that the wrong hands are just as anxious to obtain the artifact as are his own.

THE RIDDLE OF MASTER LU is tortuously challenging, filled with puzzles most of which are worthy of several nights of intense experimentation. However, each step of the way is a satisfying one, and the story-line is not only fascinating, but also lives up to the difficulty of the puzzles. IBM CD-ROM \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #1.

Saunterly Woods, San Mateo,

CA, (#15)
286-6000

Entomorph

For centuries, the people of the Kyan islands had lived an idyllic life, carved out with the help of the mammoth insectoid *jagtera*. But suddenly an evil plague of darkness called the Darkfall descended upon Kyan, turning the *jagtera* against their masters and transforming the native humans into insects themselves. Into this world steps a

young squire of the Warrick family line, looking for his sister. You play Warrick, and since you are stranded on the island, you too succumb to the transformation. The big difference is that you're smart enough to use your newfound powers to combat the Darkfall and find your sister. As human or insect, you move around in

adventure game-like fashion, looking for spells and items, and interacting with NPCs.

At first glance, ENTOMORPH looks like an adventure game with an emphasis on puzzles, although it does have a small whiff of action. An interesting story and unique characters should pique the interests of role-players and adventure gamers.



YOU BUG ME Players face enormous insects and then undergo a Kafka-esque transformation in Entomorph.



BELIEVE IT OR NOT The Riddle of Master Lu is a deviously challenging puzzle game with an Indiana Jones flavor.

York "Odditorium," Ripley was best known for drawing the popular *Believe It Or Not!* cartoons which appeared in daily newspapers. MASTER LU is an adventure that takes place during Ripley's era, a time when

Hardball 5

The baseball saying: "good defense wins ball games" could be easily adapted to computer baseball—"great gameplay wins sales." It's the formula the designers at Accolade have adhered to for years and have now honed to a razor-sharp



SWING BATTER! Curveballs look like curves and fastballs look impossible to hit thanks to Namco's 5's enlarged batter screen.

edge with HARDBALL 5. From all indications, this baseball title appears to be another surefire hit. It's got the same great graphics and the same great gameplay, with some enhancements. And a serious facelift on the statistics/General Manager side of the fence means one thing: trouble for the com-

petition. The fielding is still a little difficult, particularly with a gamepad-type controller, and the field perspective still seems a little funky, but other than that, the action's great. And the catcher's glove-full of statistics really makes a difference this time around, as does the ability to make trades and manage a roster that includes minor leaguers. IBM CD-ROM, \$69.95. Circle Reader Service #4.

Accolade, San Jose, CA (800) 243-7744

PLAYING

IBM CD-ROM, \$35. Circle Reader Service #2.

SSI Software, CA, (800) 601-7529, (408) 737-6800

Mortal Kombat 3

Just another winter?

We don't think so. Falling to the ground with the first snowflakes is the blood of the weak and the limbs of the fallen in **MORTAL KOMBAT 3**. And from our initial look at things, it's damn good.

The graphics have been buffed up considerably (although the sound doesn't seem quite as good) and so has the action (you now have all four action buttons and can run and block). What's new this time



DOUBLE YOUR PUMMELING The characters may have changed in **Mortal Kombat 3**, but the action's the same as it ever was—vicious.

old? All the things that made this game a classic: the limbering fatalities, friendship

TekWar

If you think Los Angeles has problems now, just wait until 2045, when a powerful psychoactive drug called "Tek" threatens to enslave the population. You're an ex-cop sent on a mission by William Shatner himself to rid the city of this scourge and prevent the recently unified Teklord mafias from increasing their distribution. Stopping them means finding access to a networked virtual landscape called The Matrix and uncovering the Tek strongholds.

Capstone Entertainment spices up **TEKWAR**'s familiar DOOM-like engine by allowing you to jump, crouch, duck into grates or bathroom stalls, and even use public transportation. An optional rear view monitor augments your first person perspective. And you can't be too trigger-happy this war—you risk drawing the attention and

around?

How about eight new characters, all with their own background, and a completely new cheat system, based on "kodes," which are already being wildly exchanged and traded on line and which grant access to hundreds of cheats, hidden characters and the like.

What's

moves, secret moves and so on. This time around there's also a network play option (which is a first for fighting games) that allows you to set up your own mini fighting network. The term "chestnuts roasting on an open fire" takes on a whole new meaning this winter with the release of **MORTAL KOMBAT 3**.

IBM CD-ROM, \$49.95. Circle Reader Service #3

GT Interactive, New York, NY (212) 726-6500

Ascendancy

Though the "4x" games of space conquest (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit and eXterminate) have been around since the earliest days of personal computing, it is always great to see a game move beyond these roots. In **ASCENDANCY**, players choose from one of 21 different sentient species, each with their own special advantage, and build up their home planet (SIN CITY-style) to the point where they can begin explor-



PICK YOUR PART **Ascendancy** is a good-old fashioned game of galactic conquest, boasting 3-D art and killer AI.

ing and conquering the galaxy. The game features limited diplomacy and research a la **MASTER OF ORION**, but it also offers more than one way to win the game—gamers choose whether the Tao of Knowledge, Technology or Prosperity is the path to victory. In addition, **ASCENDANCY** offers great graphics, from the 3-D representation of the galaxy to the alien races which are bizarre enough to bring out the xenophobe in all of us. Most importantly, however, the game sports artificial opponents who can combine technologies in such a way as to surprise and defeat the designers themselves.

IBM CD-ROM, \$69.95. Circle Reader Service #5.

Broderbund Software, Inc., Novato, CA (415) 382-7818



POLICE QUEST 2045 William Shatner teams up with Capstone to bring you a new Doom-ahke.

fire of the police and catching innocents in your cross-fire. Despite this diversified approach to the genre, the overall game-play of this **DOOM** retreat really fails to bring anything new to the table. And Capstone should have left Shatner's heavily marketed likeness on the box, as his annoying cinematic cut-scenes will send you searching for "Esc." IBM CD-ROM, \$59.95. Circle Reader Service #6.

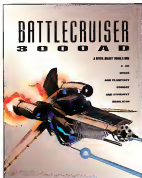
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IS THE PRICE OF FREEDOM WORTH \$12 Million?

*Col. Blair & The Boys Find Enemies Much Closer To Home
In Wing COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM*

by Terry Lee Coleman

FROM WING COMMANDER TO WING COMMANDER II TO WING COMMANDER III, WE TOOK CHANCES, BOTH IN TERMS OF TECHNOLOGY AND IN TERMS OF CONTENT. I WANTED EACH GAME TO BE THE BIGGEST AND BADDEST ON THE MARKET—TO SIMPLY BLOW EVERYTHING ELSE AWAY. WHETHER OR NOT WE SUCCEEDED IS UP TO THE GAMER TO DECIDE. LIKE MOST ARTISTS, I'M NEVER TOTALLY HAPPY WITH MY WORK. THE EXCEPTION WOULD BE THE FIRST WING COMMANDER: LOOKING BACK, I REALLY CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING SUBSTANTIAL TO CHANGE IN THAT GAME.

—CHRIS ROBERTS,

DESIGNER OF THE WING COMMANDER SERIES



A trilogy is as familiar to the modern popular artist as was a sonnet to William Shakespeare. Because of their popularity, trilogies are often criticized as too predictable, too safe, too uneven—and it's true that rarely do all the parts come together to form a cohesive, unified whole. Still, in the hands of a visionary, a trilogy is an effective art form, dramatic and accessible all at once, with the capacity to develop familiar characters through more than a single work. While it's hard to compare Chris Roberts' games to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or George Lucas' *Star Wars* trilogies, it can be argued that the *Wing Commander* series is as close as gaming has come to a sustained body of work.

When the series' detractors ask why *Wing Commander* is so popular—a year after its release, *Wing Commander II* still stands atop the CGW Top 100 Games chart—they overlook the obvious: it's incredibly fun to feel as though you're a part of an ongoing story, especially when you are calling the shots. And while Origin's other famous series, *Ultrix*, includes some wonderful games, it's also true that *Wing Commander* has been more consistent in terms of quality—while ironically taking more chances. WC is definitely a lot more than your average space shoot-'em-up affair.

Who can forget the thrill of negotiating treacherous asteroid fields to bag that first Kilrathi in *Wing Commander*, or the crushing feeling when you realized that Spirit, your trusted wingman through WC I and II, was on a suicide mission—and that there was nothing you could do to save her? It certainly wasn't *Foxbat*, but you did get attached to your wing-buddies, which only added to the feeling of satisfaction when you almost single-handedly turned the tide of war for the Confederation.

Throughout the series, Origin has utilized every trick available to draw us deeper into the action. WC I had the rudiments of a sustained plotline with its "branching tree." WC II added digitized sound for your wagnies and enemies (and was probably the main application which put *Sono Braxxon* on the map), competent voice-over acting and more coherent plotting. WC III, of course, gave us Mark Hamill, Malcolm

MacDowell, and a brilliant performance by Tom Wilson ("Maniac"), along with production values never-before seen in a computer game.

And, like most trilogies, *Wing Commander III* ended with a big bang—to the tune of \$4 million in production costs, and 700,000 copies sold. The Kilrathi were defeated once and for all, with peace sure to reign throughout the known galaxy. All very dramatic, and nicely sewn up. But as I approached Origin's new facilities in Austin, I wondered what they could possibly do for an encore, now that they were outside the safe confines of the best-selling game trilogy of all time. That, my friends, is the \$12 Million Question...

TO SEEK OUT NEW ENEMIES

When *Wing Commander IV* begins, we find that Colonel Blair (Mark Hamill) has retired to be a farmer. But his idyllic Nestle is soon interrupted when Maniac arrives to fetch the good Colonel (and thereby you) back to active duty. Did the Kil-

rathi return, somehow resurrected through time-travel, cloning, or some other sci-fi cliché? Thankfully, no. It seems, rather, that some mysterious group of humans, calling themselves the Black Lance, has begun a reign of terror from the Border Worlds, blowing up innocent civilian ships and plunging the Confederation to the brink of Civil War.

As the plot develops, you find that conspiracy theories abound, and the eyes of Big Brother Confederation are everywhere. The level of subplots and intrigue make for a story so dark at times that the shaky morale of the crew in *Wing Commander II* seems almost upset by comparison. I actually had doubts that the cast could pull it off. *Wing Commander IV* is, after all, still primarily a space-combat game, and the acting in WC II, while fine for a game, still paled at times compared to a good movie. Yet, when I played through the missions, I was rather impressed with the acting in WC IV, which is even better, based on what I saw, than in WC II.

John-Rhys Davies once again stood out. He doesn't get a lot of on-screen time, but he functions as the conscience for the interactive portions of the game, while remaining true to the Paladin we've come to know over all four games of the series. While I still have a weird feeling about seeing "myself," as the Col. Blow character, played by an actor—should any gamer really see himself portrayed

on-screen in an essentially "out of body" experience?—I must admit that Mark Hamill also does a fine job. Obviously more comfortable amongst WC IV's real sets than in front of WC III's blue-screen, he makes Blair a much more human and believable character than in the previous game.

The charismatic Tom Wilson, winner of CGW's best live acting award in 1994 for WC III, reprises his role as Maniac. This time around, the script gives him a bit more to work with—the sarcasm really flies, and we get to see our tree-spirited flyboy go down in flames several times at the hands of women who somehow don't appreciate his advances. At least Origin recognizes Maniac's marquee value—rumor has it that the wild wingman will star in his own add-on disk sometime in 1995.

The lesser-known actors range from solid to outstanding. The best minor characters return from WC II: Cobra is just as vocal in denouncing



DEATH THROES The spectacular graphics of WC IV are evident both in space combat, where this capital ship explodes in 100-frame technicolor brilliance, and back at the carrier, where the mix of real sets and state-of-the-art computer graphics gives more visual depth than was possible in WC III.

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suspected traitors as she was in condemning sons of Kibrabi to death; she's an incredibly-sustained portrait of rage. You'll still find Vagabond shuffling his deck of cards in the bar, his outward confidence not quite hiding the nervousness he feels at once again flying off to war.

choices for you in the game.

As people you've known for years are denounced as traitors and terrorists, you must decide whom to trust. Moving through the story you find that nothing is quite as it seems. Who are the Black Lance, and why are they attacking helpless Confed transports? What is the real agenda of the Black Lance leader, Seether? (With a name like that, you know he's no tent of virtue.) How do the veterans of the Tiger's Claw and the Concordia fit into all this? Is there any way to avoid interstellar war?

The mysteries and intrigue presented by the unfolding plot add new dimension to the game's usual megadose of action. I found myself enjoying the balance between the adrenaline-pumping space combat action and the sleuthing of the interactive scenes. WC III fans may not like asking questions like, "Where in the galaxy were you on the night of..." of old buddies like Tolwyn, Paladin, Captain Eisen and others, but it's appropriate, and shows how effectively the script of WC IV functions.

On a larger scale, the game continues the saga of normal people plunged into war that has always been present in the Wing Commander series, but really came into its own with WC III. To call a space combat game an anti-war interactive movie is stretching it a bit, but WC IV finds a better balance than the competition, largely because of the quality of the acting. The style here is more John Wayne heroes than *Pirates*-like realism, but it's effective and entertaining.

FAMILIAR GALAXY, COOL NEW HARDWARE

When you first enter the combat sequences of WC IV, the cynic in you will smirk, knowing that you've seen this all before. Then you notice that the explosions are richer, the death screams of your opponents more blood-curdling, and you think, well, maybe this is a little different...

The cockpits are new, the shading is better, and every ship has been re-textured to look much better than in WC III. Combat is paced differently, and I suspect most gamers will find it more brisk this

time around. The AI was still being tweaked at press time, but each computer pilot already has more maneuvers at their disposal than in previous WC games. One nice touch is that the pro-



LEARN FROM YOUR ENEMIES Flying for the Confederation has never been quite like this—notice the Kibrabi-inspired ship designs.

BOOSE SHAVE Every game, or interactive movie, can use a strong villain, so Col. Blair lands in his first meeting with Seether.

Such small brush strokes are even more effective here than in WC III, as they add a touch of humanity to the intense atmosphere of soldiers constantly living on the edge of battle.

The fall for your heroic Col. Blair is the impressive Malcolm MacDowell, whose performance as Admiral Tolwyn moves way beyond WC III (or his role in *Star Trek Generations*, for that matter). Tolwyn alternates between the stern fa-

grammers were able to code the mission sequences and wingmen AI right alongside the scripting, so that they have done an excellent job of making Maniac fly, well, like Maniac—a big improvement over the wingmen of WC III, who often seemed cut out of a generic Confed pilot database.

The cinematics have been integrated much better, and story elements now unfold in the middle of missions—with faster loading times for the video sequences (at least on high-end machines). Even when you return to the carrier, you notice a

"SINCE WE USED THE EXISTING ENGINE FROM WING COMMANDER III, THERE WAS A REAL CREATIVE CHALLENGE IN MAKING WING IV SOMETHING FRESH AND DIFFERENT. THIS WAS MADE A LOT TOUGHER BY HAVING TO INTEGRATE TWICE THE ART ELEMENTS IN LESS THAN HALF THE TIME WE HAD TO DO WING COMMANDER III."

—CHRIS DOUGLAS,

WC IV TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



SECURED & PADLOCKED The cockpit view bears subtle changes from WC III, but the best feature is that Maniac and other wingmen now are better rigtized, and also get to speak a variety of different lines during combat.

ther-figure for Blair and a Patton-like megalo-maniac, obsessed with crushing the rebellion. Tolwyn's zealous determination to eliminate enemies of the Confederation makes him think enemies are everywhere, which (without giving away any plot secrets) makes for some interesting



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huge upsurge in background activity—transports landing, other craft taking off, crew walking down hallways—all much preferable to watching Mark Hamill walk around alone in WC III's ghostly empty ship, waiting interminably for elevators.

What's nice is that the full-motion video does-



Talk to Vayboard and Marjac

CHEERS 2250 The bar has been enhanced, but it's still a good place to unwind and see old pals like Vayboard and Marjac. It's also a good place to start playing armchair detective in your search for the traitor.

n't overshadow the space combat portions of the game. One of the main reasons for this is lead programmer Frank Roen, who always knew that he wanted to be a game programmer. "Most teenage guys have posters of Michael Jordan. My posters were of guys like Bill Budge and the original programming team at EA." Roen enjoys fast-paced action games, but also likes to reward inquisitive gamers. As a result, there are a lot more easter eggs in WC IV than in WC III.

The various fighters are once again upgraded, as they have been with every Wing Commander, but WC IV also features a great variety of larger ships, such as corvettes, destroyers and capital ships. Not only are these larger ships proof that the

game engine runs smoother, the tactics used against them also make for a more fun game than the usual diet of dogfights. In certain missions, you (as the wingleader) have the option to order elements of your group to split off and check out separate navigation points. How well they complete their assigned mission affects the number of enemies you face later in your own patrol.

Another nice touch is that you have a lot

more flexibility in choosing wingmen, and you can even choose their loadout, in addition to your own. I missed having Ginger Lynn Allen lead my weapons, but you can't have everything, I suppose...

When I asked Tony Monroe, the project director, why asteroid fields (always my favorite) took a back seat after WC II, he replied by letting me play through a few of the missions in WC IV. In addition to the usual patrols and torpedo runs, WC IV brings back the infamous stealth fighters, has you engage in reconnaissance deep in enemy territory, and even throws in commando missions—almost a greatest-hits collection of other Wing Commanders, except that these missions are a lot tougher than previous WCs, especially when played on the highest difficulty setting.

The most unique twist involves a cache of experimental weapons which seem really ineffective when you first apply them in combat. When I fired my first Starburst missile, my Black Lance adversary must have thought I was practicing for the 4th of July, because the only effect was a nice fireworks display. After having a mechanic back at the carrier modify the weapon, it turned into a Coreburst, sort of a cross between a Claymore mine and a plasma gun—a remarkably effective weapon. It looks like there's enough new hardware to keep any space jockey busy for many hours.

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM THE COST OF TECHNOLOGY

From Wing Commander to Wing Commander III, the driving force was the technology, which always pushed gaming hardware to

the utmost. WC IV has no such high-tech leap. Oh, sure, you can talk about the real sets used in filming, and the moving camera; there's no doubt of the technical brilliance involved in WC IV. And when you consider how Origin saved money by using the Wing Commander III spaceflight engine,

QUOTES AND COMMENTARY ON THE \$12 MILLION QUESTION

Even at \$10-12 million, we'll still make money on Wing Commander IV. The question is, when do we make the jump, and develop a game alongside more traditional linear media: TV, feature film, whatever? Then the budget becomes much less of a concern.

—Lord British

I don't think it's necessary to spend that much money to suspend disbelief and entertain the gamer. It's all right to spend a lot of money on enhancing the game experience, but a large portion is spent instead on technology and huge salaries for big-name actors—I question whether that's really necessary.

—Aix Namestka, President, Dreamforge

(Chronoslayer, AD&D series)

I can't in my wildest dreams imagine putting \$10-12 million into a game from Atomic, but I'm sure I'll enjoy playing Wing Commander IV.

—Hein Zabalawi, President, Atomic Games

(V For Victory, World At War)



IT WASN'T LIKE THIS WITH SHATNER Chris Roberts (right) spends a quiet moment on the set with Malcolm Macdonald (left) and Mark Hamill.

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WENT A RUSH After a day's filming, Chris Roberts looks at the "rushes" to see what must be edited and/or reshot. Instead of viewing this on 35mm film, they pick out details on a large monitor.

it's a little scary to think about how much this game could have cost.

Even so, what has set the WC series apart from the competition is its ability to tell a story. WC III took some big chances with high-priced talent, and if the game doesn't go down in history as the *Jazz Singer* for interactive movies, it certainly isn't for lack of effort. WC IV shouldn't apologize for giving gamers a break from the "upgrade at all costs" philosophy, especially since it offers more gameplay and a more involved storyline. Never CD-ROM technology means extra data on each CD, so that the game, along with its five and one-half hours of video, has nearly twice the length of WC III.

What amazed me when I visited Origin was the high morale of the crew. Chris Roberts has a reputation as a martinet, but he also knows how to surround himself with talented people. When I asked Roberts why he didn't write and star in, as well as direct, WC IV, he was polite:

"My method, whether it's programming, directing or whatever, is to plunge right in. Gamers, however, aren't stupid. They know when you're out of your depth. I enjoy directing, but I know my limitations. There's no way that I'm going to try and write a screenplay when I can use a professional. Some games make for good movies, and I think WC IV is a good example of that. The secret is to ensure that the live video gives the gamer more choices, not less."

In the end, it's not so much the \$12 million spent, but the attention to detail which should make WC IV the biggest-seller for the series thus far. Ironically, more gamers should be able to appreci-

ate WC IV more than WC III, if only because of the greater number of Peacemans on the market. Regardless, I'm impressed that Origin and EA have continued to develop their franchise with the gamer's enjoyment foremost. If the WC series ends up going to a theatre in my home galaxy, that's fine (a film deal is reportedly close to being finalized). But it's comforting to know that I can still enjoy blowing Kilrathi, Black Lance, or other villains out of the stars right on my most important screen—my computer. Here's hoping that Col. Blair remains an avatar for gamers to save the Confederation for years to come. ☺

I want projects with control—and when you get that large-scale, it's hard for one person to keep creative control, and complete the project in what I would consider a reasonable time. I think Origin can get away with spending that much money, because they're building on a known winner. If you're creating a new title, though, spending that much is dangerous, because of the number of games you need to sell just to break even. Everyone wants to do the expensive products because of their high-profile and greater flash. I tend to worry more about the game: how fast can I do it and still have the quality our fans want? As many projects as we do, and as many as we'd like to do, I can't see us putting that kind of resources into one project. So far, we've been very successful with smaller investments of time and money.

—Steve Barcia, *President of SimTex*

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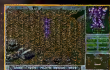
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NEW WORLD COMPUTING, INC.[®]

HOLIDAY

HOT 100



was the night before Christmas, when a
through the house
that a peripheral was stirring, not even
The hard drives were backed up on QIC
in hopes that some cool new games w
The gamers were nestled all snug in t
While visions of Fight & Duel danced i

with care,
to be there,
s,
reads.

It's that time of year again: The digital elves are hammering the final touches into games for young and old, wargamer and jet jockey. As Santa's helpers shrink-wrapped the

packages with care, our crack team scoured the Silicon Pole, checking the sleigh and the elves' beta bench for the best new games and accessories. After we defrosted our editors and dressed their elf bites, we debriefed them and distilled their findings into a list of the 100 hottest gift ideas for this very cool holiday season.

On the following pages you'll find our top ten choices for each gaming genre, as well as some other suggestions that, even though there wasn't room for them in the main list, are still so nifty that we'd love to see them under our trees. As is always the case, many developers finish their games in the St. Nick of time to catch the holiday buying season, so some of the games we looked at were still in pre-release form as this issue went to press. Every effort has been made to pick only games that will be available in time for that last-minute shopping trip, but don't be surprised if one or two end up being good Valentine's Day gifts instead.

So here's our modern-day "Wish Book," chock full of entries you can circle or highlight and subtly leave lying around for your favorite gift-giver to find. And if you're the one looking for the perfect gift for those special gamers in your life, we've also included a non-technical guide to help you make sure the games you buy will fit their computers, and their interests.





Santa's Little Software Helper

by Paul C. Schuytama

A Guide To Buying The Perfect Gift For The Gamer In Your Life

This article isn't aimed at the traditional Computer Gaming World reader. It's meant to be surreptitiously handed over to someone who might be on the business-end of a nice little holiday treat for you. After all, you were far nicer than naughty this year, weren't you?

Nothing says "ho, ho, ho" like a great computer game. But if you're not a computer gamer, a trip to a software store can be an exercise in confusion. To give that special someone a truly memorable gaming experience, you need to know a little about the intended's computer system, as well as the kinds of games he or she likes to play.

The first thing you need to know before walking into the software store is whether the recipient's system is an Apple Macintosh or a PC-compatible. A quick glance at the system should tell you. If there's a little rainbow colored Apple with a bite out of it, it's a Macintosh. Otherwise, you can probably assume it's a PC. (If the system says "Amiga" or "Atari" on it, you're probably better off giving them a nice sweater, as software for those systems is

generally available only by mail-order nowadays.)

APPLE OF YOUR EYE

If the system is a Mac, your quest is rather simple. Ask about the processor (this makes great dinner conversation: "Honey, how was your day? Oh, by the way, exactly what kind of processor do you have in your Mac again?"). The response will be something like "a 68040," "it's a 30," or "It's a PowerMac." Jot that down and then inquire as to the speed of the system, given in megahertz (MHz). Also important is the amount of RAM (Random Access Memory) that the computer possesses. This will usually be something like 4, 8, or 16 megabytes.

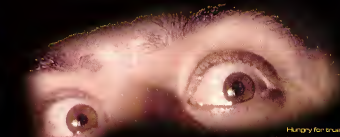
The last Mac question is whether the system has a CD-ROM drive. You can ask, or you can sleuth around the system itself, hunting for telltale signs such as empty jewel cases or CD caddies. Armed with that info, you can confidently walk into your local software merchant and pick up a piece of Macintosh software that will work on that system.

PC BEHAVIOR

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Computer Gaming World, August 1995

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HOLIDAY HOT 100

system, you'll need a number of specifications. First, you need to know what kind of processor is in the system. For a game system, this will be either a 386, 486 or Pentium. If it's a 386 or 486, ask whether it's an SX or a DX. (By now, that special someone will be getting suspicious, so it's best to pursue your question when they're distracted, perhaps in the midst of a killer game, just after a morning jog, frantically trying to get the dog to do its thing before heading off to work, etc.)

Next, you need to know the speed of the system. If it's a 40 MHz 386, that's pretty much the low end of today's computing totem pole, and you'll have to do some hunting in the software store to find a program that doesn't require a minimum of a 486. On the other hand, if they have a 133 MHz Pentium, then you probably don't need to ask any more questions, you can just pick any game out there and be confident that it will run "like buttah."

As with a Mac, you need to know how much memory the system has installed, and whether it has a CD-ROM drive. You'll also want to know the speed of the CD-ROM; a double-speed drive is the

minimum acceptable for most of today's games.

You'll also want to want to inquire, surreptitiously of course, about the existence of any joysticks or the like (such as gamepads, throttle controls, rudder pedals, etc.). If that special someone doesn't have any controllers, a joystick might make a great stocking stuffer. Without a joystick, you should shy away from such joystick-intensive games as flight simulations or space-action games.

Be sure to find out what type of sound card (if any) is on the system. Try to find out the brand, and, more importantly, if the card is a Sound Blaster or Sound Blaster-compatible card. If it is, then you'll be covered for virtually any game out there. Once you have all these specifications, you'll be able to check the information boxes in the corners of game packages to see if they will work on the computer in question.

GIVE 'EM WHAT THEY WANT

Of course, all this questioning is bound to arouse suspicion. I've found that a little white lie like, "Oh, my boss/relative is interested in getting a computer for his kids, and I just wanted to find out what kind of system you have," works very well to cover your tracks.

Finally, you might want to do some sleuthing through your special someone's game collection, or get them to talk about what games they like to play and why. A hard-core jet simulation enthusiast will probably be less than thrilled when tearing open a chess game or a bridge game. On the other hand, a wargamer might not be totally thrilled with a driving simulation.

Look through the pages of the "Holiday Hot 100" to see what's hot. We've done a whole lot of game playing and evaluation for you. If you can get the answers to the hardware questions above, and can find some interesting titles in the buying guide, then you'll be able to stroll into software stores with confidence, and you'll be able to give a truly wonderful gift that says: "I care—now check six and go smoke some bogies!"

WRAPPING UP

Use some imagination before wrapping up a game and putting it under the tree. We gamers can death out a CD-ROM very effectively just by weight and "shaking characteristics." Wrap it up in a larger box with a carton of nails, a few heavy rocks, or six or seven pairs of raw socks. That should keep the guessing game ripe until Christmas morning. ☺

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#

HOLIDAY
100

by Terry Coleman & Elliott Chin

This year, it appears that Santa's elves have forsaken the old wooden workbenches, loaded up on Twinkies and Jolt, and glued themselves in front of their computers to design a hot mix of adventure titles. Science fiction and horror are the twin themes of an adventuring year that has embraced the exploration of strange, exotic and fantastic worlds. As you might expect, you can explore the dark depths of a haunted mansion or stalk the werewolves of Germany. But if your sights are set on the future, you can command a starship, travel through time, or be the unwitting captives of a strange alien race. Whatever your fancy, this year's crop of adventure games has such a good mix of quality graphics, sound, and plot that they pull you in to a fantasy world more real than you'd expect.

ADVENTURE

GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN

Everyone knows that werewolves are mere legends, right? Try telling that to the residents of a small Bavarian town, who live in lycanthrope-induced terror. As Gabriel Knight, the

Designer Jane Jensen, unsatisfied with filming actors in front of a blue screen, actually went to Germany to research local history and scout authentic locations for the game.



schwarzegeist—hunter of the supernatural—you are the town's only salvation against the dark forces that lurk in the shadows of Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within.

This sequel to *Game Wagon: Sins of the Fathers* builds on that game's rich graphics, dark story, and impressive voice acting. As before, author Jane Jensen has opted to blend psychological crisis and supernatural terror into a seamless blend that satisfies in story and interaction alike. This time, instead of investigating *Voodoo Murders*, the New Orleans murder mystery of the original and source for Gabriel's best-selling novel within the background story, Gabriel Knight and his colleague, Grace, must separate myth and superstition from reality amidst the moonlit forests of central Germany. They are helped in their quest by a cleaner interface, fine acting, an original score composed to sound like a lost opera by Wagner, and a powerful story which goes beyond the achievements of even the best *Game Wagon*.

The more than 1,000 photos used for the game's background are augmented by computer graphics to provide a lush, photo-realistic look which adds to the eerie feel of *Game Wagon 2*.

While the interface is even simpler in some respects than Sierra's other honor game, *Pawnee Moon*, even veteran adventurers should find plenty of challenges. Moreover, any gamer will appreciate the live acting, as Grace and Gabriel change and grow, coming to grips with their own frailties as they learn more about the mysterious werewolves. Even the supporting cast deliver performances far beyond the norm of any multimedia production. Since the first GK won CGW's best adventure game last year—and this game is even better—it looks to be a can't-miss for even the most casual horror fan.

\$54.95, Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707.

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#2
HOLIDAY 100

CYBERMAGE: DARKLIGHT AWAKENING

CYBERMAGE: DARKLIGHT AWAKENING is a blend of fast-paced, first-person action; the nonlinear, character building world of an RPG; and the plot of a comic-book adventure. The story, usually the basis of any great game, is spell-binding. In a world where genetically engineered humanoids have replaced humans in pre-eminence, you must fight against the tyranny of a sorcerer named Necrom. Government as we know it has collapsed, and corporations now rule the world. You have been transformed into a mysterious superhero, who can drain the "Darklight" from the dead. As you do so, your powers grow greater, and your strength increases.

But character building is not the gist of the game; solving the mystery of your powers, finding Necrom, exploring the nuances of Darklight, and discovering the root of the war and the all-powerful corporations are

your true tasks. Each level in this game is like a separate issue of some great comic book epic, and you are the star superhero. This game should appeal to all gamers, whether they like action, appreciate great stories, or love adventure games and RPGs.

\$54.95, Origin/EA, (800) 245-4525.



CYBERMAGE

#3
HOLIDAY 100

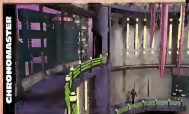
CHRONOMASTER

The late Roger Zelazny authored the original story for this game and worked closely with the game's designers to maintain a believable, engaging science fiction world. You portray a retired time-traveler who must investigate a series of mysterious disappearances. It seems that pocket dimensions have been winking out of existence, and the cause is unknown.

Unless the source of this catastrophe can be discovered, our universe could be threatened with extinction as well. You explore rich, graphical worlds, meet vibrant and varied NPCs, and find that these temporal disappearances are only the harbinger of a greater doom. The graphics are wonderful, and Zelazny's co-author, Jane Lindskold, has continued his work to craft

myriad engaging characters and universes. This adventure is a game apart, with its imaginative story and atypical gameplay (there are multiple solutions to the game's puzzles). Gamers and fans of Zelazny will want to play this game, to experience the wonderfully crafted worlds and to find out how the story ends.

\$78A, Intracorp, (800) 468-7226, (305) 373-3770.



CHRONOMASTER

#4
HOLIDAY 100

PHANTASMAGORIA

This is a game so powerful that it will leave an awful, terrified feeling in your stomach even after you have finished it. This is definitely not a game for the squeamish or the young. However, despite its emotional and supernatural horror, or actually because of it, *Phantasmagoria* is an incredible work of art. It has achieved a height of realism that has so far been missing in computer games. The seven CDs offer an excellent story, amazing graphics, eye-catching video sequences and good acting. Like any good horror film, the game has pacing and mood, starting out leisurely and then rushing to its frightening, blood-pounding crescendo.

You take the role of a female protagonist who has moved into a haunted house with her husband. As you explore your new home and plumb the depths of its hidden terrors, you must confront unknown evils that are so realistically ren-

PHANTASMAGORIA



dered and perfectly paced that any gamer will feel skin-crawling fright and disgust throughout the game. *Phantasmagoria* is non-stop horror, and whether you enjoy horror films or appreciate good adventures, you will love this game.

\$69.95, Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707.

#5
1995
100

Set between the *Sword of Shannara* and *Elftones of Shannara* novels, this adventure game from Legend is an original story au-

SHANNARA

thored by Terry Brooks himself. *Shannara* is a bridge between Brooks' two novels, and this time you must guide another descendant of Shannara, Jak Obriestford, to stop the evil doings of the shade of Brona. This game boasts lush graphics, and is being designed by the same husband-and-wife team that created the Quest for Glory series from Sierra. You must move Jak through the world of Shannara, meeting familiar characters such as Alannor the Druid and King Merion of Leah. One very interesting innovation in this game is that you get to play from the perspective of the various characters, adding depth to the storytelling and the personality of each character. Those who loved the novels will be pleased to know that Terry Brooks is proud of the game and believes it is faithful to his vision. With a great story line, an involving world, and an innovative take on role-playing, this game should win the hearts of any adventure gamer.

\$74.95, Legend, (800) 658-6891.

#6
1995
100

STAR TREK: A FINAL UNITY

You take on the roles of Captain Picard and the other officers of the famed *Enterprise-D*, and explore a universe that is pure Star Trek in this space adventure. The main thrust of this game is solving the galaxy-threatening riddle of the long gone Chodak. But there is also a civil war that needs soothing, a spoon station in need of salvation, an archaeological mission of dire importance, and a xenobiologist whose rescue is of great concern to the Federation. To top this all off, your missions are dangerously close to the "neutral zone," and the Romulans do not take kindly to unannounced interlopers. In short, this game is like any other Star Trek episode, except that this time around you get to command the *Enterprise*. The original cast from *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* has returned to provide the voices for all the characters, adding another stroke of authenticity to an already incredible adventure. The only failing of this game, apart from a



staid tactical portion, is that it will leave gamers and Trekkies alike clamoring for more.

\$79.95, Spectrum HoloByte, (800) 983-4821, (510) 522-1164.

#1
7
HOT

IN THE 1ST DEGREE

In the city of San Francisco, a man stands accused of murdering his friend (a fellow

artist and his business partner). But did he really murder his partner, or was it self-defense as he contends? The game is split into two modes, a la TV's *Law & Order*: In the first phase, you must question witnesses, look over documents, and search the evidence. Your investigation had better be thorough, though, because once you go to trial there is no turning back. The second phase, set in the courtroom, is where the game really shines. It emulates almost perfectly the experience of the courtroom. You can be outmaneuvered by the clever defense, the guilt of the defendant is never out-and-dried, and even if he is guilty, he can walk free if your case is poorly prepared. As the prosecutor of *In The 1st Degree*, you'll once again realize that the outcome of a case can hinge not on the guilt or innocence of the accused, but rather on the prosecution's skill in presenting evidence to the jury.

\$79.95, Broderbund, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4700.



IN THE 1ST DEGREE

WITNESSES TAPES DOCUMENTS TRIAL

▶ First reactions

Her location

Crime scene

The meeting

Background

Relationships

Art theft

LAP ALL

#1
8
HOT

TORIN'S PASSAGE

Al Lowe (of Leisure Suit Larry fame) has moved beyond the land of the lounge lizards to create a game he could play with his young daughter. Gone are the sleazy pleasure centers of the world, in favor of a world within a world within a world within a world, a planet reminiscent of a Russian doll. Unlike the famous dolls, however, these worlds-within-worlds are not simply miniatures of one another; each has its own distinctive terrain and puzzles. Also gone is Al's risqué humor, replaced with spirited animation representing both the juvenile protagonist and his hilarious shape-shifting sidekick. What isn't gone is the adventure-game challenge—*Torin's Passage* features some very tough puzzles. Fortunately, this means that the clever animation is likely to capture the youngest fancies, while the puzzles should interest the most jaded gamer. In fact, this may be the first "family game" that will really sell in this market.

\$54.95, Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707.



TORIN'S PASSAGE



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#9
HOLIDAY
100

In this time-travel epic, you reprise the role of Time Travel Agent #5, but this time, you must race into the past to uncover clues as to why your future self has been arrested and charged with an attempt to change history. Veering through the Mayan Empire, King Richard's medieval castle, the workshop of Leonardo da Vinci, and other time-locales, you must collect the



BURIED IN TIME

necessary evidence to free your future self and nab the real villain. This game, like all the others mentioned in this genre, has breathtaking graphics, as well as a good story. *Buried in Time* offers two modes of gameplay: Walkthrough or Adventure. If you want to just guide your character through a movie, choose Walkthrough, which allows you to play the game with a minimum of effort. If you want to get down and dirty with every last puzzle and problem, choose Adventure. Though the interface is a bit clunky, it is forgivable, and the exciting story, stunning graphics, and choice of gameplay will make any adventure gamer happy to dive into this time-travel adventure.

\$69.96, Sanctuary Woods, (800) 943-3664, (415) 286-6000

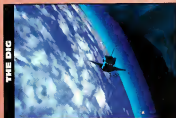
#10
HOLIDAY
100

Once again, director Steven Spielberg has teamed with sci-fi guru George Lucas to bring you a saga of interstellar proportions. *The Dig* is based on an original story idea that Spielberg initially wanted to present as a TV show. Now, though, PC technology has advanced far enough that Spielberg was happy to bring his idea over to LucasArts for conversion to a sci-

THE DIG

ence fiction adventure game. You follow a team of astronauts cast into the depths of space by an alien artifact. Marooned on a distant planet, you must guide the astronauts across this mysterious landscape, exploring the world, interacting with aliens, and trying to meet the requirements of the native species, who will return you to Earth if you give them what they want. Industrial Light & Magic actually put their awesome efforts into *The Dig* to create some of the spectacular animation and special effects. For the most part, though, the graphics seem standard fare, the real strength of this game is its story and the potential magic you get when you team these two entertainment giants.

\$TBA, LucasArts, (800) STAR-WAR.



LOOKING FOR MORE ADVENTURE?

The trend toward big-name actors continues, with Tim Curry bringing his manic presence to Interplay's *Fallen*; *Through the Eyes of the Monster*, which features several twists on the old Mary Shelley gothic horror tale. For sheer star quality, it's hard to surpass *River Run Take 2*, whose impressive cast includes Burgess Meredith, Karen Allen and Christopher Walken. Even with such talent and a near \$3 million budget, there's no guarantee that *River* will be able to successfully update the Jack the Ripper tale to the 1990s, much less avoid the full-motion video jinx.

Likewise, don't hold your breath for EA's *Protonic Dreams*. The game does offer slick video production, and at times is reminiscent of a good sci-fi whodunit from the fifties—but will there be enough gameplay for veteran adventurers? A better attempt would seem to be Activision's *Spycraft: The Great Game*. Here, the photo-realistic backgrounds offer a more familiar adventure game backdrop for you to live out your counterespionage fantasies. The participation of ex-CIA operative William Colby adds a needed air of authenticity to the project.

Of course, one of the most-anticipated games for the holidays is Trilobyte's *The 11th Hour* (distributed by Virgin). If you liked *The 7th Guest*, you'll appreciate that the sequel has more coherent plotting, and thus a better sense of suspense, than its storied predecessor. And while the video is improved as well, the look of the competition has substantially raised the ante. It will be interesting indeed to see how well *11th Hour* does in the marketplace.

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#

HOLIDAY 100



by Johnny Wilson, Elliott Chin & Terry Coleman

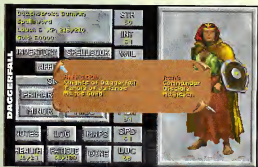
Welcome to the endangered species of computer gaming. Once a staple category, the venerable genre is in need of a mega-hit in order to keep from becoming the Western of the '80s. We consider computer role-playing games (CRPGs) as a subset of adventure games (since they are basically narrative-driven with interactive gates called puzzles which must be opened to allow the story to progress). But the emphasis for CRPGs is on character development and interaction. Purist adventure gamers would also point out that the subset also emphasizes combat, sometimes to an extreme. Traditionally, this genre has been dominated by fantasy themes, and this year's crop is no exception. So, come cast a spell or swing a sword as we enter the Kingdom of CRPGs.

ROLE-PLAYING

DAGGERFALL

THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL offers a faster version of the first-person role-playing experience encountered in its predecessor, THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARISE. At CGW, we felt THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARISE offered one of the best experiences ever for players wanting to wield medieval-style weapons in a CRPG, and we loved

Now, characters can possess items like clothes, weapons, armor and houses that will show themselves within the actual game. Membership in a guild or order will now actually mean something in terms of game play since certain quests and conversational clues will only be revealed to members of various



the dilemma-solving character generation. Capstone's WINDSOR and id's upcoming *Quake* more than match that first-person combat experience for action-gamers, but in *Daggerfall*, Bethesda Softworks has not only greatly improved their game engine with regard to combat action, but they've added dozens of new touches, as well.

Daggerfall's character generation requires some trade-offs between advantages and disadvantages, as well as insightful answers to the existential dilemmas presented in multiple-choice format. The game transparently performs thousands of calculations based on each character's basic attributes (as modified by the aforementioned advantages/disadvantages), health, fatigue, magical resistance, skill, knowledge, phobias, guild affiliation, race, vampirism, lycanthropy and more. Such detail ensures that encounters won't be the same from character-to-character, that character generation and game decisions will have consequences throughout the game.

guilds. Conversations are richer than those in *Arise*, and *Daggerfall* promises to offer considerably more plot flexibility.

Within the game engine, the 3-D environs of the towns and dungeons are better than ever. Full 3-D battlements allow characters to hide on rooftops or behind walls. Also, characters who can use a spell to levitate between floors, platforms and catwalks will find that they have to be careful not to bump their heads on the realistic 3-D structures. What really impressed us, however, was the addition of underwater combat. When we played, our character had to both defeat the monsters and get rid of some heavy armor before he drowned—a very nice touch. Strategic movement has been simplified with a fast-travel map, and the AI for monsters has been significantly enhanced. Chances are that gamers who liked *The Elder Scrolls: Arise* will like *The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall* even more.

\$69.95, Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-0700.

#2

An epic story, solid role-playing elements, full-screen videotaped/rotoscoped characters, ambitious 3-D Studio-crafted monsters, fast-moving, step-by-step, first-person action and extremely satisfying combat sequences make **STONEKEEP** a game worth the wait. Originally conceived as a mere 3-D dungeon romp with a great combat interface, **STONEKEEP**'s perilous quest to reach the market has involved some of the best paper game designers in the business. It has, as a result, become a game with an intriguing intricacy of plot to match its easy interface for play. The magic system is rich and satisfying with its alchemical feel. Just as satisfying are the video snippets where gamers encounter proud, garrulous monsters a la Tolkien or the hubris-laden ultimate bad guy who underestimates the protagonist and mucks the player with annoying regularity (although not with

STONEKEEP

7th Guest-style frequency). Add to these features a tremendous soundtrack which features musical themes appropriate to each situation/culture and **STONEKEEP** may well offer the deepest pure CRPG experience scheduled for holiday release. \$59.95, Interplay, 800-INTERPLAY.



#3

Star Control III promises to be that rare sequel which offers considerably more than the original. Gamers will explore the stars in order to find suitable systems for colonization. As a result, resource and colony management play a more intricate role than they did in **Star Control** and **Star Control II**. Alien dialogues are much more sophisticated, plus the aliens are now depicted on-screen by elaborate puppets filmed in digitized video. Add into the mix a plot where the player strives to defeat an evil, spacelaring race and things get

STAR CONTROL III

pretty interesting. The new HyperMelee still uses many of the basic algorithms of the earlier games, with only a few adjustments to reflect the characteristics and weapons of the 12 new ships that appear here. As in the original game, each ship has a basic weapon: The Daktakblakpek Vivisector has arms which grab an enemy ship and start drilling into the side; the Hanka/Yom Ravager has a bola missile, where two missiles are connected by a tether—if the tether connects with anything, both missiles converge on the object encountered. And of course there're the special weapons: The Vivisector launches a capsule that automatically launches missiles whenever an enemy approaches its range; and the Ravager, a very slow ship, can get a turbo boost by eating members of its crew. \$TBA, Accolade, 1-800-245-7744.



#4

DRUID: DAEMONS OF THE MIND

Druid: Daemons of the Mind takes place in a 3-D-rendered environment on the planet of Navan, a world where Druidic values concerning the elements and balance of nature are still cherished. Your character is summoned into this world of debauched 3-D characters and monsters in order to both rescue a missing Druid named

Lawson and discover both the higher purpose of the Druids (and yourself). Most of the game is viewed from the traditional, oblique, overhead perspective, but the 3-D rendering of characters and setting allows for some intriguing first-person encounters. Further, the interface is completely mouse-driven, with all movement, investigation, combat and magic interaction handled via a two-button mouse. The three different endgames should encourage CRPG players to do something they rarely have a chance to do—replay the game.

\$69.95, Sir-Tech Software, (800) 447-1230 (operator 43).



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#5

ENTOMORPH

For an RPG with a very interesting twist, gamers should stop by the nation of Kyan, located in SSI's new *World of Aden*. In *Entomorph*, the nation of Kyan is under the evil cloud of a pestilent insect plague. This country, so

dependent upon the capability to use insects for domestic chores, is now seeing a new breed of malicious insects arise. A pervasive evil, born of the same foul menace that has invaded the rest of Aden.

As Cedric, a wandering squire, you must battle the invading monster-insects, find your lost sister, and deal with your own metamorphosis. The latter is not a Kafka-esque play on words, as the character literally finds himself being transformed into an insect as the game progresses. As in other CRPGs, you acquire experience, grow in skill, find weapons and items, and learn spells. After all, you'll need all the power you can get to fight your way through this gauntlet of over-sized, monstrous insects. The graphics may be a bit cartoonish, but the action and unique story will provide gamers with an interesting, and different, CRPG to play.

\$35, SSI, (800) 601-7529, (408) 737-6800.



#6

LION

Remember the fresh perspective of playing a lupine predator in last year's *Wor*? *Sanctuary Woods'* role-playing experience with reference material wrapping allowed gamers to try their paws at survival and hunting in order to become the alpha-prime leader of the pack. As we noted, it was simply too interesting to be called by the almost medicinal term, "edutainment." This year, gamers may experience the pride of being one of 20 different big cats in *Lion*, the sequel to the unique product. Multimedia reference material forms a nest around the actual game, but gamers are likely to learn more about the survival of the big cats by participating in the various scenarios provided. Those who played last year's *Wor* will appreciate *Lion's* better graphics, improved interface, 11 varieties of prey, and

increased chance for survival in the scenario where you are hunted.

\$49.95, Sanctuary Woods, (800) 943-3664.

LION SELECTION SCREEN

LION	ENDURANCE		KILL RATING
	HUNGER		
	STRENGTH		
	DETAILED STATISTICS	UMAR	

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#7
100

THUNDERSCAPE

For years, SSI's CRPGs were set in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* universe. Now they have created the World of Aden, independent of

AD&D, where an evil force called the Darkfall has invaded this world of magic and steam technology. In *THUNDERSCAPE*, gamers must guide a party of adventurers to restore the banner that protects Aden from the Darkfall. Then, it's clobberin' time as the party hacks and slashes its way to victory against evil hordes throughout the realms. This game is unusually long for an RPG. Though there are some minor problems with the game (including repetitious dungeons), it is flexible in character generation (allowing you to disperse bonus points among different attributes in order to customize your character) and skill development (by allowing you to choose secondary skills, and increase your proficiency in each one with every new experience level). For a new role-playing universe, gamers could do worse than visit the emerging world of *THUNDERSCAPE*.

\$69.95, SSI, (800) 601-7529, (408) 737-6800.

#8
100

AD&D MASTERPIECE COLLECTION

Cramped into this collection are six role-playing games from TSR, based in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* universe. Even those who don't play the AD&D paper game have heard of some of these CRPGs: the *Ravenloft* sagas, *Sword's Possession* and *Stone Prophet*; the *Dark Sun* games, *Shattered Lands* and *Wise of the Ruined*; and two other titles, *Meloonbarrow* and *Gene's Curse*. While not all of these games have been great hits, some, like *Stone Prophet* and *Meloonbarrow*, have been CGW Top Ten role-playing picks for some time. All the games, except for *Gene's Curse*, require that you guide a band of adventurer's through fantastic lands, gaining experience and amassing power and magic in order to defeat some great evil (*Gene's Curse* is more a puzzle adventure/RPG in which you guide a single character). The engine might be the same in each game, but the lands you explore are varied. Packed with six different role-playing games set in various dungeons, deserts, and Gothic demi-planes, this title should have something for every computer role player.

\$30, SSI, (800) 601-7529, (408) 737-6800.

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#9

ALBION

ALBION is a near-future (ca. A.D. 2050) role-playing game where you take on the persona of Tom Driscoll, pilot of a

spaceship that has crash-landed on a planet with very primitive life forms. There's a considerable variety of gameplay here. An exploration segment uses a 2-D world map viewed from an oblique overhead perspective. This part of the game looks a lot like Interplay's *Law of the Rand* and, at times, appears to use the same "follow the leader" AI. More interesting, however, is the 2-D combat planning screen which allows you to select magic and combat options on a chessboard reminiscent of *BattleChess*. Then, you get the pay-back of watching 3-D results of that combat with lots of special effects. If that isn't enough, you also get some 3-D first person point-of-view sequences that look like *SAMURAI* meets something Dr. Timothy Leary might have seen in the '60s.

Import, so price varies; Blue Byte Software; 44 (0) 1604-232200.



ALBION

#10

JORUNE: ALIEN LOGIC

Based on a paper role-playing game, this game almost defies description. Part RPG, part adventure, it nevertheless is a fun—and different—type of role-playing game. Nearly 4,000 years ago, humans colonized the world of Jorune, only to be turned back in a long war. Those humans who were left on Jorune quickly drove the native population into hiding. Now, one of those ancient

aces has come back to haunt the humans of Jorune. Armed with spells, called *dysmas*, you must locate the alien stronghold, free your captured friends, and put an end to the alien menace.

We really like the handling of the magic system in this game. The acquisition of spells requires the harvesting of crystals. Then, the combat is purely spell-based, without any melee fighting. Although the character has few stats, your character does improve as the game progresses. The game gets a little drab-out at times, and is actually a bit sparse in places, but the world of Jorune is populated with enough interesting races and role-playing variations to be a welcome break from the usual hack-and-slash dungeon fare.

\$30.00, SSI, (800) 601-7529.

A SCRY IN THE WILDERNESS

Alas, there aren't many CRPGs being conjured up right now. *Bullfrog's The Incredible Machine*, a superb puzzle adventure slated for mid-summer, and *Dungeons & Dragons: The Role-Playing Game*, the role-reversal role-playing game described in this issue's sneak preview, should keep CRPGers happy during the early part of 1996. Also, watch for Sir-Tech's *Sword of the Avatar*, the next game in the successful *Realms of Aranna* series, to satisfy those dungeon cravings.



JORUNE: ALIEN LOGIC

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HOLIDAY 100



by George Jones

Picture the grizzled old gamer sitting back in his rocker ... "Why, back in the old days, computer gamers liked their fare as rough as three-day-old hard tack. Action games? There was no such thing back then. You'd be better off trying to sell used chewing tobacco than convincin' the boys that quality action games could be made for their computers. Them 386s and 486s just weren't up to snuff.

"But times are a-changin'," the old guy says, exchanging his corn-cob pipe for a gamepad. "Why, jest look at all the action games that came floodin' through this past year, particularly this winter. And look at whet's happenin' to 'em—high-res graphics, gameplay deeper than old man Wuther's waterin' well. There's more good-looking games this winter than I got teeth left in my head. ..."

A C T I O N

MECHWARRIOR 2

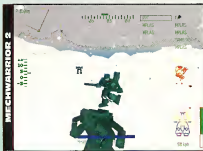
Although it's been out for almost half a year now, this is one action game that shows no signs of dying out. Combining gorgeous graphics (which are stunning in low-res and breathtaking at 1024x768) with true Mech-anized combat (that means fast action and some actual thinking involved), this game permanently raised the bar on Mech combat games, completely outdistancing the competition. It has

to the next Nav point and do the same.

And this is the first Mech game we've seen where you can actually utilize your brain instead of your trigger finger. During one mission, you're able to sit on the top of a mountain range, zoom in on your targets and pluck them off one by one—at least, until the enemy figures out where you are. Another mission makes you sprint through a mountain pass and destroy an

enemy Mech before he completely destroys some friendly structures. It's nice, for once, to avoid the "sight the enemy, run right into him, all guns blazing" syndrome.

But that doesn't mean all is stealth in this war. There will be plenty of mech-to-mech (and most of the time more than one mech) battles. Thank-



tens of missions, loads of death and even allows you to play on either of two sides of the war, for the Wolf or Falcon clan. MechWarrior 2 took a long time to hit the shelves (almost two-and-a-half years), but it was worth the wait.

It's hard to describe one single thing that makes MechWarrior 2 such a great game—this is the rare title that does most everything right, and more importantly, integrates it all in just the right way. Beginners will appreciate the ease with which they'll be able to jump into the game. There are six different tutorials, put forth in the form of tests, that allow you to get quickly acclimated. Once you're used to things, it's time to choose your alliance—Falcon or Wolf. After that, the going gets tough.

The missions vary in their scope and scale. Occasionally you'll be asked to zip into a sector and destroy a power plant. Other times you'll be sent on pure recon missions—ones where detection can be fatal. The scope is such that you'll never feel trapped into The Methodology. You know the one: you kill a few monsters, move

fully, your unit can be completely armed to the teeth with all manner of lasers, blasters, machine guns and missiles. And you can completely custom configure your weapon load.

But enough gushing. Whether you're a novice PC gamer or die-hard, battle-scarred Battletech player, this is the action game of the year right here. You'd be wise not to miss it (or let other special gamers in your heart miss out).

Activision is busy at work putting the finishing touches on a MechWarrior mission add-on and the much anticipated networking module. The mission disk will involve the intriguing clan of the Ghost Bear, and will include snow-filled missions and underwater missions as well as several new Mech classes. NetMech should also be available for the holiday seasons. Available through the Activision web site, this IPX-compatible network game allows up to eight players at a time to engage. A Windows 95 version is also in the works, and should be available for the holiday season.

\$59.99, Activision, (310) 473-9200.

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#2

CRUSADER

What's black and blue and red all over? The enemy forces, after the crimson-colored Crusader's dero with 'em. If you're good enough, that is. Origin's *Crusader* is a rare action-gaming gem. There's nothing all that original about it, but it is just amazingly good. It all starts with the super-detailed, mouth-watering SVGA graphics, and then carries over to the fast-paced, yet cerebral action and the surprising depth-adding full-motion video scenes.

The premise is this: You're a good-guy turned bad, or a bad-guy turned good (it all depends on how you look it). Anyway, the forces you now represent want you to single-handedly infiltrate various levels of the government's fortresses and perform certain terrorist duties. Along the way, you'll engage in the closest digital re-creation of guer-



CRUSADER

rilla warfare you'll likely ever see. You'll vaporize security mechs with hideous energy weapons, turn guards into human matches, slaughter innocents for their money and turn entire rooms into fireplaces. All in the name of democracy—what could be better?

Although the control scheme can be a little bit confusing, this is one of the best action games of the year, hands down.

\$59.95, Origin, (800) 245-4525.

#3

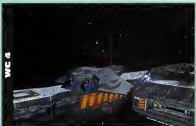
WING COMMANDER 4

We have to admit it. After all the hype and hoople over the next Chris Roberts *Wing Commander* game and its use of real sets, 35-mm film, and a whopping \$10 million budget, we're still pretty darned excited to play the game. No series to date has managed to capture such a Hollywood feel and successfully combine it with such quality action. From moment one, *Wing Commander 3* wowed us (and tons of other gamers) with its cinematic style. We expect *Wing Commander 4* to do the same.

Although the use of 35-mm film will not make much difference in what we see on PC screens, the real sets definitely will. In-

stead of flat angle shots, all sorts of moving camera angles and dolly shots are possible, all of which will make this game even more like our favorite Hollywood space trilogy. We're also excited by the enhanced game engine, which will allow you more freedom in the heat of battle and give your wingmen more responsibility.

\$99.95, Origin, (800) 245-4525.



WC 4

#4

TERRA NOVA: STRIKE FORCE CENTAUR

Take X-COM, put it in a three-dimensional environment and make it real-time and you've got *Terra Nova*, the Looking Glass Technologies foray into the ever-expanding strategic action genre. If this title makes its anticipated ship date (early December), look out, because *Terra Nova* has about as much potential as anything we've seen in quite a while.

The crux of the game is a gorgeous engine that creates a convincing 3-D world complete with canyons, craters, rivers and trees. And it's not always a sunny world—weather will play a role in the various missions.

The action will be similar to that of *MicroWarrior*. You'll be in command of a mechanized unit with an arsenal that would make Rambo proud, and you'll have multiple wingmen to whom you can give all sorts of orders. The action, while not quite high-resolution, is extremely easy on the eyes, and the game environment's look and feel is constantly changing. The missions vary—occasionally you'll have to sneak up on an enemy installation and destroy stationary targets. Other times you'll lead frontal assaults on hordes of troops.

Better still, the battle can be fought on multiple



TERRA NOVA

fronts. While you're picking off targets from the hill, your cohorts can be on the other side of the map doing their own thing. *Terra Nova* allows you to order your troops around through a simple point-and-click interface. If you want your wingmen to head over to the river and stand on watch, you can diagram that maneuver. If you want them to attack a camp, just draw a line to the camp and hit attack. Sounds like fun to us.

\$69.99, Virgin, (800) VRG-1007.

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#5
FROM 100

MORTAL KOMBAT III

Mortal Kombat III, the latest installment, takes the genre to a new level. Although very few of the "old guard" kombaters are present, there are 12 new creatures—or, characters—that you can wage war

with, each loaded with their own cache of secret moves. The graphics are pure arcade quality; no compromises whatsoever appear to have been made to move the game to the PC, and the game runs decently on a 486-66.

The bloody gameplay, likewise, is stellar. Get hit with an especially stiff uppercut and you'll crash through the roof and up to another level, where the fight continues. The blood still looks fake (of course), but it is in even more abundance than before. And needless to say, all of the Fatalities, friendship moves and hidden Easter eggs are there. And if that isn't enough, **GT Interactive** is really raising the ante by providing multiplayer network play to the mix. This allows upwards of 20 players to challenge each other to fight-to-the-death duels. With the exception of *One Must Fall: 2090*, this is the only fighting game out there to provide multiplayer support. Gamepad owners will appreciate the game's use of all four buttons—Low and High punch, Low and High kick—in single-player mode. You can also run and block this time around.

\$59.99, GT Interactive, (212) 726-6500.

#6
FROM 100

HEXEN: HERETIC 2

We know that everyone's been Doomed to death by now (jeez ... has it been two years already?), but **Raven Software** isn't going to let the original *Doom* engine fade into Quire without a bang—and a big one at that. *Hexen* carries on the time-accelerating, visceral-response gaming experience that we've come to expect. New in this game, and the genre in general, is the ability to select from three different heroes (fighter, cleric and mage), each of which has unique weapons and abilities. But what really excited us is the incredible level of atmosphere Raven has been able to inject into the game. From the fog-filled expanses of land to the leaves wandering across the screen, *Hexen* really goes a long way in convincing you that you're in a world, as opposed to in a level of some game. Also aiding in that suspension of disbelief are the integrated level schematics and the presence of some fairly involving puzzles that go beyond the simple "push this button in and run to the door" variety. (This is a new, and welcome, addition to the *Doom*

HEXEN: HERETIC 2



engine.) Hats off to Raven Software for pushing the genre even further than we thought possible. *Hexen* should be inspiring man-ic mania by the time you're reading this.

\$79A, Raven Software, (603) 833-5791.

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Circle Reader Service #182

#7
HOLIDAY
100

Normally, racing games that are fun, yet still retain challenging elements (road: that don't allow you to keep your foot on the accelerator throughout an entire race) are the domain of the gearheads over in the simulation area, but that's changed with Electronic Arts' release of *Need 4 Speed*. This may be arcade excitement, but it's the first taste we've gotten that actually stuck us to the monitor for more



NEED 4 SPEED

than one race at a time.

What makes this racer one of our "should-buys" for the gift-giving season? A combination of things. For starters, in high-resolution mode, this game's graphics are rivaled by no other racing game out there, save the gems from Polybus (*NASCAR*, *IronCar*, *Riviera II*). And the action will surprise even the die-hard simulation driver. Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche, Toyota Supra—there are three different classes of cars here with enough high-performance vehicles to please everyone—and their father. Better yet, the cars actually perform differently on the road. The Lamborghini's got a low center-of-gravity and steady handling, the Ferrari has lightning-fast acceleration.

You'll hit the road on several different courses, from the city to the country to the mountains to Las Vegas. And you can either race against one car, or a pack of vehicles. There's even a circuit of races.

A slick multimedia car encyclopedia detailing the statistics, capabilities and history of each car round out a package that should be capable of pleasing both the die-hard race driver and the Sunday spinner.

\$59.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.

#8
HOLIDAY
100

Racing fans who find themselves playing race games all too often just to create dramatic crash after crash will finally have a chance to step over to the dark, crushed-metal side of the fence. With *Pygnosis' Destruction Derby*, fans of "big-crash racing" can have their cake and eat it too. Racing takes four different forms: Time Trials, Stock Car Racing, "Wreckin' Racing" and the Derby itself. Stock car races are flat-out races to the finish—no points are awarded for damaging cars, although it's still possible. "Wreckin' Racing" is also a race to finish a certain number of laps, with the exception that you also can accumulate points by knocking the tar out of each other. The Destruction Derby is simple: take 20 cars and put them in an oval arena where you get points for spinning each other and knocking opponents out of the "race."

The graphics are similar to *NASCAR*'s low-resolution mode—that is, nothing breathtaking, but solid. But it's the action that is the key draw here, and it's stellar. Adding further depth to the game, there are several variations of Destruction Derby you can play by yourself, the tag and one-on-duels. Cars don't go through dramatic end-over-ends like in *Need 4 Speed*, but they do take real

DESTRUCTION DERBY

damage, to the point where your car will gradually come close to resembling a can of SPAM. And we haven't even talked about network play...

\$18A, Pygnosis, (617) 497-5457.



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— PC Gamer

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Circle Reader Service #38

HOT
100
9

3D PINBALL

Up until the last year or so, Pinball has been relegated to the back alleys of computer gaming. Digital tables like *Crystal Castle* by Starplay have permanently changed that. Sierra's offering, *3-D Pinball*, looks like a winner for the winter, boasting three unique tables and a completely new take on the game.

Set in space, each table—Space Mine, Command Post and Colony—is more than one pinball table in itself. In the Space Mine, for example, you'll occasionally need to defend your mine from invaders, and if you open up certain passageways you'll be able to put

your ball into play in a completely different sector of the game. You can even warp between the three different tables of the game. This might be the best pinball game of the year.

\$49.99, Sierra, (800) 757-7707.

HOT
100
10

MAGIC CARPET 2

With *Magic Carpet 2*, the best just got better. Using their revolutionary first-person engine (which is running faster than ever), and adding several tweaks, Bullfrog once again appears ready to devour large chunks of gamers' time.

The theme is pretty much the same as before. You must stop the advance of *Yissulath The Dark One* over the course of 25 different levels, each of which presents more advanced challenges

than before. At your magic carpet's disposal are a powered-up selection of 75 different spells, like gravity wells and whirlwinds. There are tons of new monsters to deal with this time around.

The designers obviously listened to the thousands of die-hard *Magic Carpet* players out there, and have made several gameplay adjustments that really enhance *MC2*'s play value. One such addition is the presence of mission objectives for each level, which gives the game considerably more structure than before.

Not a whole lot has changed here in the basic gameplay, but then again, not a whole lot needed to be changed. If you're a fan of the first *Magic Carpet*, or are looking for a fast-paced shoot 'em up the likes of which you've never seen before, this game will make a solid addition to your stable.

\$59.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.



MORE WINTER ACTION

In addition to *DESTRUCTION DODGE*, there are several other racers out there that intrigue us. Virgin's *Zone Racers* is one such title, with some seriously slick graphics and some structure to the game besides "blow up everything in sight." Gametek is readying the release of *RoadWarrior*, their sequel to *Quarantine*, which they promise will contain plenty of "mindless violence and killing, implied sex, and A/C cars going very fast..." Another Virgin racing game that looks mighty fine is *SCREAMER*, which assembles *Pou Pouton*'s fast-paced action.

3-D Labyrinths is another title we're anxious to get our hands on, with its completely new look at the action puzzler (for more information, see our *Sneak Preview* on page 312). On the fighting scene, we're anxious to get our hands on *47-Tek's Go-Mix Tom 47*, a 3-D giant monster fighting game that will pit you against a host of badies; alas, it's been pushed off to the January/February timeframe. Speaking of monsters, we also can't wait to see Magnet Interactive's *Master Isamu*, which will (hopefully) allow us to live our Godzilla fantasies.

There are also some platform games which should ship either right at the end of the year, or sometime next year. *Heaven Or Dizziness* is one game that seems to have caught everyone's fancy, but it remains to be seen whether it will ship anytime soon. One game that should make it in time for the holidays is Activision's *Earnsome Jim*. This game-turned cartoon character is being feverishly ported to Windows 95.

Of course the game everyone wants to get their hands on is id Software's *Quake*, which has been canceled, just kidding, just kidding! The designers are feverishly working on it in Texas, and while they were originally shooting for December, it appears that date has slipped a bit into the first quarter of next year. "It'll be done when it's done" is the company's official word. In other words, when they tear themselves away from playing *Heaven*...

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mistakes can prove to be quite ugly. See for yourself. (And get 'Dangerous Games,

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disgusting things to their victims. It's not an easy mission. And your



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a second look too. (It might even keep some of them out of trouble.)

Digital Pictures



#

HOLIDAY HOT 100



by George Jones

That smelt is in the air—you know, the one that says fall is coming to an end and snow is on the way. Baseball has finally crowned its champion. Football's playoff hunt is just heating up. Hockey is right at the point where you think the season will simply go on forever, and basketball is fresh and new enough that you watch as much of it as you can.

What also happens at this rare time of year—when most professional sports are on our minds—is that a massive avalanche of sports titles comes our way faster than hot sleds down an Olympic run. In the past, many of these titles have been mediocre at best. This year, though, things are different. Picking 10 hot games that we would like to play proved no problem at all. It seems like sports-game designers are finally putting together a winning game plan!

S P O R T S

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '96

With SVGA graphics and tons of tweaks and updates, *Front Page Sports Football Pro '96* (FPSF Pro) by Sierra easily takes the trophy as top sports pick for this holiday season. The third time around is the charm for this updated pigskin romp, expected to be the last version of the game using the current engine. (Pat Cook, the original designer

or replay the action from virtually any angle desirable.

Another significant—and still unrivaled—feature is FPSF's season and career play. During the course of a season, which may be set up in a number of different ways, coaches can choose to handle GM duties or simply call the action. Those who want to run



of the game, is digging his teeth into a complete redesign for next year's version.)

Of course, everything we loved about the original FPSF Pro is still here. All the real players, all the real teams, the most robust statistical model to grace the computer screen, full league and career play. There really aren't many good reasons not to buy this game.

For the rookie user, FPSF Pro revolutionizes pigskin play on the PC. It combines a tremendous game model with great graphics, different angles from which to view the action, and more plays than Mike Ditka could draw up into one package.

The on-field action is breathtaking, especially so in this edition. With real motion-captures and high-resolution graphics, this promises to be the most attractive *Front Page Sports Football Pro* game ever. Of course, players still straight-arm, spin and get tipped like pancakes. And the CAMS (Camera Angle Management System) is still around, which means you'll be able to view

the front office make personnel transactions—placing injured players on the Injured Reserve list, choosing draft picks, signing free agents and making trades. The computer handles things for the rest of the league, and the design team is promising that the General Manager AI will be much stronger this time around.

The presence of career leagues is something that really distances *Front Page Sports Football Pro '96* from the competition. This allows players to coach their favorite team through the years, losing players to retirement and injury, and gaining new players through drafts and trades. They essentially take part in their own version of NFL history. Few things feel better than taking a really onmy team and developing it into a powerhouse over three years' time. Emotional attachments are usually reserved for adventure games, but this is one sports game where you'll take personal pride in your team.

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#2

NHL HOCKEY '96

Since most of the sports genre consists of sequels and sequels to sequels, it's a good thing that each iteration seems to be a genuine improvement. EA Sports NHL HOCKEY '96 is no exception, graphics, gameplay and appearance have all been radically changed this time around, all for the better.

First off, the perspective has changed from the standard vertically-oriented view to which we've grown accustomed to a slightly closer-to-the-ice angle that's changeable on the fly. Although things may be a little disorienting at first for the veteran NHL fan, this new graphical approach makes a big difference during the on-ice action. The players seem bigger and skate more realistically, making more sense in the actual flow of the game. One other bonus in the graphic redesign is that veteran NHL players will have to re-conquer a learning curve. Favorite moves no longer work like they used to (many can't even be attempted the same way),

and scoring in this version of the game is tough. Also, in a move the real NHL wishes they could make, the puck in NHL '96 has been super-enlarged. You'll never have a problem following it in this game.

Sure, there are still some problems with the opponent AI—there always have been, due to hockey's intricate game flow—but this is the best hockey game on the market, made better for 1996. \$59.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.



#3

HARDBALL 5

Accolade's HAZARD is probably the longest running sports game on the PC Market. Ever since its initial version way back in 1985, when it pitted the Red team versus the Blue team with talented sluggers like H. Cortez and left-handed pitchers like T. Frisbie, this game has been the action baseball game. Some of the other games out there have action modules built in, but this is the only title that is created *privately* with that in mind.

This year, the action is even better. Last year's version boasted some major league graphics improvements. HAZARD 5 takes the same graphical engine and improves upon it. The perspective of the batting screen has been modified so that the batter fills almost the entire screen, which means that strike zone is nice and big, picking up pitches is even closer to the real thing. Also different is the speed with which pitches cross the plate, it's much more realistic, and will require quicker reflexes than before.

Accolade has taken a new approach with this classic game. In the past, they felt that the action itself would stand on its own, and it did to a certain extent.

But with HAZARD 5, they've figured out that even as twitch gamers want lots of depth and simulation. To that end, they've included minor leagues, free agents and injured lists. They've also added tons of statistics for number geeks, 40 different stadiums, all the real players and 12 classic teams and stadiums.

\$69.95, Accolade, (800) 245-7744.



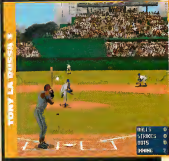
#4

TONY LA RUSSA 3 BASEBALL

Tony La Russa may have jumped ship from the American League to the National League, and he may have a lot to learn about pinch-hitting for pitchers and double-switches, but the baseball game bearing his name will remain one of the better PC sports experiences on the market for the holiday season.

Developed by Stormfront Studios, Tony La Russa Baseball 3 has already carried the famous computer baseball series to higher levels than before, with a great look and a superb statistical model. As much as HAZARD 5 is for the cerebral fan—the guy who'd rather coach his way to the title. It does have its play action elements, but they're not the strong point of the game. What is the strong suit? The chess-like nature of the game itself, which Tony La Russa 3 captures magnificently.

Tony La Russa 3's statistical merits hold rank with those of the "hardcore" baseball sims: PUSHER THE PLOW and SHOW-O-WAY, both of which recreate authentic numbers with great accuracy. Plenty of managerial



decisions are at your disposal (fans of Tony La Russa 2 will be happy to know that the double-switch finally works), and the game's interface is nice and simple. \$69.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.

INTERACTIVE MAGIC PRESENTS

CAPITALISM

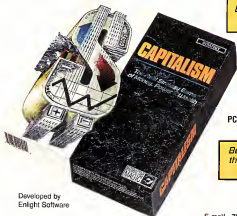
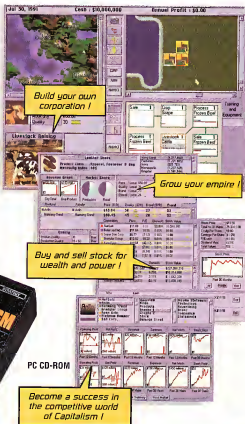
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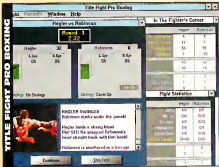
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#5

Ali jinks with the left, shuffles, and connects with a jab. Marciano isn't fazed, and bulls his way inside, ignoring Ali's punches. Look at the punishment Rocky is taking! Oh, my! Where did that haymaker



TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING

come from? Ali crumples to the mat, and the ref begins the count: one ... two ... three ... If you've ever wondered if the "Thriller from Manila" might have turned out differently, or if Iron Mike Tyson could stand up to a really class boxer like Muhammad Ali, this is your game. *True Fear* is hardly state-of-the-art—graphics and sound are spartan at best—but it's simply the best boxing simulation available, with so many famous champions you'll hardly know where to begin your dream matchups. Each fighter is rated for accuracy of punches, stamina, footwork, tendency to foul, punching power, killer instinct and ability to control a fight. You have a choice of referees, venue (with home town advantage), and colorful commenters from the respected Angelo Dundee to inimitable cutmen like Eddy "The Clot" Alvarez. While the AI is tough, bums like Ted McNally are included, so that you may pad your fighter's record, just like promoters do in real life. Action-oriented gamers may want to avoid this, but anyone interested in the more strategic elements of "the sweet science" is advised to strap on their virtual gloves.

\$49.95, Comp-U-Sports, (412) 845-7843.

#6

PC basketball was—at least from the action side of things—like the tenth man on an NBA roster until the release of *NBA Live '95* this spring. Thankfully, Electronic Arts (who else?) changed that. Never a group to rest on their laurels, they're looking to improve upon an already very good thing with the next incarnation of digital hoops, *NBA Live '96*. The release is coming down to the end of the holiday game clock, but it will be worth the wait.



This is a game that comes closer to simulating the real thing than anything we've seen. The controls are smooth and intuitive, allowing you to dribble behind

NBA LIVE '96

your back, throw alley-oop passes and actually rely on your outside game. And the graphics are stellar. There's a certain pleasure in playing with Shaquille O'Neal and actually being able to make low-post moves, and basketball fans will appreciate actually being able to properly execute a pick and roll. Even more amazing is the fact that statistically, this title is mighty solid.

What's new this time around? From what we've seen, the designers are focusing on graphics and AI. *Live '95*'s high resolution graphics looked nice, but the perspective wasn't close enough to the action to follow. That's being changed to look more like NHL *Hockey*'s high-res mode, complete with selectable camera angles in fact, even the low-resolution view will apparently use the NHL model.

Of course, the majority of NBA rookies, from Joe Smith to Yinka Dore, will all be "in the game," as will the ability to call plays and offenses. When this title lets the shelves—hopefully soon—double dribble your way to the store and pick it up. You'll probably get your money's worth in the first week alone.

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#7
HOLIDAY
100

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL

There are plenty of gaming options for the cerebral football fan—with such excellent games as *Front Page Sports* and the *Microsports* football games, pigskin coaches are in 7th heaven. Unfortunately, when it comes to football action, there isn't even a playing field. Enter *EA Sports* (who else, it seems, nowadays?) with its high-profile PC version of *John Madden Football*.



A 16-bit mainstay ever since 1990, every version of *John Madden* has boasted addictive, fun, yet seemingly realistic, action as well as quality graphics. And these two underlying principles will be improved upon twenty-fold for the PC version, which will boast hires (540x480) graphics and tons of full-motion video to spice things up, including the FOX sports commentators John Madden (of course), Pat Summerall, James Brown and Leslie Visser.

The action, of course, will be top-notch and extremely good looking. The engine is still pretty much the same basic game engine from the old days, with plays selectable from play boxes and unrivaled ground and passing games. Veterans will appreciate the ability to customize their playbooks, although you still can't create your own plays.

Graphically, *JMF* is gorgeous. Using the latest in motion capture technology, each players' movements appear so realistic that you'll be shaking your head in disbelief; this is not 16-bit football. (See the sneak preview elsewhere in this issue for more details.)

For the action gamer, *John Madden* is a no-brainer. If it ships by the holidays:

\$59.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.

#8
HOLIDAY
100

PGA GOLF '96

"But sir, if we kill all the gophers ...?" Okay, so *Crossback Golf* hasn't been released yet. But that doesn't stop us from dreaming. In the meantime, computer duffers can make do with what looks to be the best golfing simulation around for the holidays, *Electronic Arts PGA Golf '96*.

This golf title sports lush graphics that will probably raise again the ante for future golf games and has the usual wealth of sparkle and detail that is the mark of EA Sports titles. New to this version is a wobble feature that helps you determine how well you'll hit the ball, and a "Play of the Day" feature that will save your best shots for posterity's sake.

The basic interface of the game has remained the same, with the red and blue arc being your main focus. One big improvement over *PGA Golf 486* (last year's version of the game) is that the amount of time the program spends loading and re-drawing holes has been reduced considerably.

This year, 14 PGA tour pros are featured, with full multimedia treatments, including full-motion video footage and interviews. On the tour itself, you'll compete against 56 tour pros, each of which



play as they would in real life.

And speaking of gameplay, there are five different ways to compete: Practice, Shoot-Outs, Skins game, Stroke play and full fledged 18-, 36- and 72-hole tournaments.

\$59.99, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.

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{ Talk }



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Circle Reader Service #88

#100
9

IMAGINATION NETWORK: FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO

We've already gushed about Sierra's magnificent award-winning football game, so you already know about this title's exceptional graphics and authentic gameplay. Now imagine playing this game on line with hundreds of other Football Pro enthusiasts and you'll understand why we're recommending this as a gift to yourself or some other fan of the ovaloid leather for the holidays.

Currently located in The ImagiNation Network's (version 2.4) Arena setting, this game uses the Front Page Sports Football Pro engine, which, although two generations old, is still one of the better football games around, rivaled only by the two later FPSF titles. New roles



INN FOOTBALL

have been added, and player rosters have been updated.

Here's the get-up: you sign on the network (prices begin around \$9.95 a month, with ex-

tra services costing a bit more) and start playing by going into the arena and finding an opponent to play. That's it. During the course of a game you can change camera angles, change play options (although, to prevent unfairness, your opponent has to approve them) and make full substitutions. The graphics appear just as they do in the commercial version of the game—great.

And to further extend the appeal of the game, INN's web site (<http://www.imn.com>) will be heavily involved in promoting ladder tournaments and the like.

So, if your computer opponent just isn't posing enough challenge, is posing too much of a challenge, or just isn't that fun, check out INN football. Being able to play against completely random folks adds an indescribable value to the game.

\$9.95 a month basic, plus premium charges. The Imagination Network, (415) 548-2500.

HOLIDAY HOMERS

In addition to these "sure shots," there are plenty of other titles out there—released in time for the holidays or shortly thereafter—that we're curious about.

Starting off with football, several companies have committed to football titles. One of the more intriguing is Digital Pictures' *Quarterback* (from *Nike Drill*). A full-motion game that puts you in the role of QB, allowing you to read defenses, select your receivers and even scramble when no one's open. *Accelade's* also got a pigskin title in the works. Unnecessary *Roughness '96* looks like it will be a huge improvement over its predecessor, with improved high-resolution graphics, much-improved gameplay and better game action.

Although several hoops projects are rumored to be in the works, there is only one title that will make the holidays. That's *Acclaim's NBA Joe Tournament Edition*, the two-on-two arcade classic that is more arcade than simulation, but, if it's able to accurately recreate the coin-op classic, should be tons of fun.

Microsoft is banking on Stormfront Studios (designers of *Tom Lax Russia 3*) to come through with a perennial winner for them, although making early next year might be a stretch. And Interplay's *VR Soccer* title has people buzzing. The final verdict will have to wait, but their graphical approach to the sport has us curious.

Soccer is also in the works, both by Electronic Arts in the form of the popular *FIFA Soccer* title, which will include high-resolution gameplay. Interplay's *VR Soccer* also looks like a goal-hitter, sporting an interesting television-centric view of the game.

#100
10

TROPHY BASS

Normally, we equate fishing with a six-pack (okay, a twelve-pack) of sudsy water and a day out in the sun—not exactly computer game fare, if you know what we mean. But *Amiga's* release of *Game Gear's* showed us that this is one sport that could actually be made fun. Some in our office have even argued that it's more fun than computer golf. Whatever the case, Sierra's *Trophy Bass* fishing title caught our eye in June, and the anglers in us all have been anxiously awaiting it ever since.

Putting you in a boat on one of nine high-resolution virtual lakes and giving you a host of play options, from a simple day out to full-fledged professional tournaments, *Trophy Bass* is for the beginner to



TROPHY BASS

THE STRIKE

Discover exciting new fishing techniques from the pros. The pros will show you how to fish like a pro. They'll show you how to catch the biggest bass. They'll show you how to catch the most bass. They'll show you how to catch the most trophy bass. They'll show you how to catch the most trophy bass. They'll show you how to catch the most trophy bass. They'll show you how to catch the most trophy bass.

PRO BASS BEST BASS

HUNT HUNT HUNT

beginner to tournament pro as indicative of that. Along the way, you'll learn plenty about alternative fishing techniques from the pros, and there's a complete multimedia "how to" treatment.

Fishin' in the winter? Who would have thought?

\$59.95, Sierra, (800) 757-7707.

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#

HOLIDAY HOT 100



by Denny Atkin

It's been a banner year for simulations. With Pentium-75 systems now the entry-level PC, sim designers have the power to combine realistic AI and physics with high-resolution graphics. Most of the programs can be tuned down to work on 486 systems, but even Pentium-133 drivers will find that sims like *Flight Unlimited* will push their systems to the limit. Designers have realized that even the best AI can't match the challenge of a good human opponent, so you'll find multiplayer capabilities built into many of this year's top games. If you unwrap any of these programs on Christmas morning, prepare for an immersive experience. After all, "reality" is a concept for those who can't handle simulation.

SIMULATION

EF 2000

We blast through the valley, dodging a hail of AAA and waiting for the SAM radar to lock on to us. Bingo—there's the spike. Lock and fire! I check the target on the multi-function display. Three, two, one... BCDN! A clean hit. Now the A-10s following us should be able to get a clean shot at the nuclear plant below.

lock, external, and the best virtual cockpit yet seen in a PC sim.

The flight model has a good feel. The Eurofighter 2000 has advanced digital fly-by-wire controls, and popping to an external view shows the canards, rudder, and wing control surfaces in constant motion, just as you'd ex-



Suddenly my wingman breaks in, "Contact! One-ainer-five degrees! Fifteen nautical miles! Angels four!" I call back, "Engage" and jerk the stick back. Checking the MFD display, I can see from the data link that the AWACS has the bogies painted. Looks like the excitement's not over yet.

Just a typical day in the life of the Eurofighter 2000 pilot defending Scandinavia in Ocean's EF2000. Developer **Digital Image Design** gained the cooperation of British Aerospace while designing the sim, and it shows. The Eurofighter 2000 aircraft is modeled with precision detail, down to the innovative radar section on the HUD and the adjustable multi-function displays (MFDs). An innovative control scheme finally makes the instrument panel useful even in a combat situation. The panel view is divided into nine sections, each of which is accessible by pressing a key on the numeric keypad. For a quick look at the bottom-center MFD, just press the "Z" key. All the other expected views are there, including pad-

deck with a fundamentally unstable aircraft with computer-assisted control. Missions are divided into Quick Action, a series of start-in-the-air missions attacking both ground and air targets; Simulator, where you'll find free flight, training, and full takeoff-to-landing strike missions; and a Campaign mode. You're not up there alone, either. Up to eight players can engage in network combat.

Where EF2000 truly shines, though, is with the best graphics this side of *Flight Unlimited*. The effect as an island cliff begins to gain detail as you approach it through the fog is breathtaking. You're attempting to prevent Russian forces from invading Norway and Sweden, so look forward to combat over some very scenic glaciers, mountains, and fjords. With a target-rich environment, a fluid campaign, and amazing sound and graphics, this looks to be the benchmark flight sim for some time to come.

\$69.95, Ocean, (408) 289-1200.

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#2

SILENT HUNTER

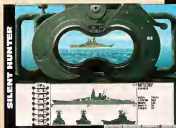
Underwater action is your game, but you're tired of playing the U-boat-driving bad guy. SSI dives to the rescue with *Silent Hunter*, an SVGA submarine simulation that puts you at the helm of a submarine fighting to help win WWII for the good old U.S. of A. You'll start your tour with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, hurding for warships and merchants in the South Pacific. The goal is simple: send as many tons of enemy hardware to a watery grave as possible.

The game uses the now-standard control room interface used by classics such as *Submarine* and *Aces of the Deep*. Detail abounds, including a fully-functional fire-control system. (However, since real subs often used tracking parties of up to eight crewmen to handle fire-control systems in combat, SSI wisely gives you the option of letting the computer set up your targeting solutions.)

Silent Hunter offers both single missions

and a campaign mode. In the campaign mode, hardware improves as the war progresses, giving you the opportunity to captain Gato-, Balao-, Tambour-, and Salmon-class boats. To train you for action, SSI includes multimedia presentations of technical and historical natures by William "Bud" Gruner, who skippered the U.S.S. Skate for three war patrols in World War II.

\$55, SSI, (800) 603-PLAX.



SILENT HUNTER

#3

INDYCAR RACING II

Chalk one up for the theory of evolution. From the EGA-based *IndyCar 500* through the VGA *IndyCar Racing* to the SVGA *NASCAR Racing*, the *Papyrus* racing sims have grown more intelligent—and better looking to boot. Now *IndyCar Racing II* takes the series a step higher, tuning up and turbo-charging the game's engine in an attempt to push to the head of the racing-sim pack.

The most dramatic enhancement comes in the form of SVGA graphics. Beautifully texture-mapped tracks, cars, and scenery, along with much-improved sound effects, really pull you into the experience. The game is available in DOS, Windows 95, and Mac versions, and the Win 95 version really shows the promise of the new operating system. *Papyrus* says that Win 95 *IndyCar II* drivers can expect graphics speeds up to four times those of *NASCAR Racing*, thanks to Win 95's

support of accelerated graphics cards.

Other improvements include enhanced AI for the computer-controlled drivers, better car handling, and updated data from the 1995 *IndyCar* season. And those of you who like to drive the wrong way on the oval will be happy to know that new crash sequences feature dented cars and parts flying in every direction.

\$55.00, *Papyrus*, (800) 836-1802 or (617) 868-5440.



INDYCAR RACING II

#4

FIGHTER DUEL

Foxes Due is like a sleek sports-car. It's not loaded down with fancy options and accessories, and it's not that easy for learners to drive. But, boy, is it fast! And the handling—sweet! This isn't one of those ultra-ambitious sims that asks you and your P-51 to win the war single-handedly. Instead, *Fighter Duel* concentrates on a single aspect of the air war: pure, unadulterated air-to-air combat.

This complete rewrite of Jaeger's Amiga classic sports runs in SVGA, but is still playable on a 486-33. Not inappropriate for a sim that concentrates only on air combat, the ground graphics are sparse—a carrier and a few islands. But the aircraft are extremely sharp and detailed, and the instrument panel is unbelievably realistic.

You can fly *Fighter Duel* against computer opponents, or head-to-head over a phone line or null-modem link. The computer pilots sport eight levels of AI, and you can take on up to eight opponents at a time, of any mix of *Fighter*



FIGHTER DUEL

Due's 13 planes. The real fun, though, comes when you take on a friend. Single-session and tournament play are supported. The game sports a full-force flight model, but it can be toned down if you're taking on a novice opponent. If fighter-to-fighter, gun-only combat is your thing, look no further.

\$49.95, Philips New Media, (301) 444-6626.

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#5
HOT
100

COMMAND: ACES OF THE DEEP

If there's one way to prove there's no such thing as a perfect game, it's by taking a five-star game and making it even better. **Command: Aces of the Deep**

Deep takes the classic **ADD** U-boat simulation, along with the Mediterranean scenario disk, ports it to Windows 95, and wraps it all up in a new high-res graphics package.

The "Command" in the name comes from the sim's newfound ability to recognize voice commands as well as keyboard and mouse input. **Command: ADD** talks back as well. Digitized voices have been added, and crewmembers now respond to your commands. They'll acknowledge in English, or for a really authentic experience, auf Deutsch (in German). You can also set the mood with the ship's record player, enjoying tunes such as *The Road to Zipperangvia* your westerbale sound card.

The high-res graphics are now fully texture-mapped, so Allied ships look all that much better as you send them down to Davy Jones' locker. Game play is essentially unchanged from the original, except for the addition of optional manual control for the deck gun. The upgraded game requires a lot of hardware oomph, but if you have the requisite 12 MB of RAM needed for voice recognition, you'll enjoy plunging into this improved sim.

\$55.95, Sierra, (800) 757-7707.

#6
HOT
100

FLIGHT UNLIMITED

Unlimited. It's a class of aerobatic competition, and it's the feeling you get when you're flying **Fuzer Unlimited**. It's just you, the sky, and a plane that does just about anything you ask it to. With no guns, bombs, enemy aircraft, or navigational instruments, this is definitely a non-traditional simulation. Instead of flying combat or learning navigational skills, you'll spend your time choreographing aerial ballets, pulling off death-defying aerobatic stunts, or enjoying the sound of the wind rushing by your glider as you seek out that perfect thermal.

Fuzer Unlimited dispenses with traditional flight modeling and instead uses computational fluid dynamics, modeling the rush of air across a plane's surface. While this method isn't perfect, it does allow you to pull off maneuvers previously impossible in flight simulations—everything from hammerhead stalls to reverse Cuban Eights.


The sim includes an interactive tutorial section with 33 lessons, so beginners and aces alike should learn a few things. The computerized instructor takes you through a maneuver, then hands you the stick and gives you a go at it.



And while you're learning, you'll enjoy some beautiful sights. While the world you fly in is extremely small (12 square miles of scenery, repeated to infinity), it's absolutely the most realistic, dazzling terrain yet seen in a computer game.

\$59.95, Looking Glass Technologies, (800) 874-4607.

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ZONE RAIDERS



How's my driving?
Dial 1-800-Ear Lead.



One just Ferrari.
5 parts Sherwin tank.



Apparently, nuclear bombs
cause malfunctions in cars, too.



#7
FROM

It's been a good year for the "bad guys." Games like *Tie Fighter*, *Pinetop General*, and *Aces of the Deep* have put you on the dark side of combat. Now sim pilots can join in the fun with *Su-27 Flanker*,

SU-27 FLANKER

which puts you in the cockpit of one of Russia's hot fighters and finally gives you a chance to down some American F-16 Falcons.

If you're a novice PC pilot, skip the rest of this entry and check out *Top Gun* below: *Su-27 Flanker* is a simulation for the experienced simulation buff! Between the top-notch flight model (you can even pull off the famed Cobra maneuver) and the deadly-accurate instrument panel (down to the Cyrillic writing on the gauges), this game should prove itself to be the spiritual heir to *Foxon 3.0's* throne.

You can fly combat at training, single-mission, and campaign (both squadron and theater-level) modes. A full range of air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons are included, although the Su-27 is primarily an interceptor.

The SVGA graphics exhibit an interesting dichotomy: they're primitive compared to sims such as *EF2000* and *Foxon Unlimited*, with planes and terrain being built from non-texture-mapped polygons. However, these polygon objects are amazingly detailed, and the stiffbarian yet crisp graphics actually seem appropriate for a Russian fighter sim. \$55, SSI, (800) 601-PLAY.



#8
FROM

The first in a bumper crop of AH-64 helicopter simulations, *Interactive Magic's Apache* is born of a fine heritage, having been developed by *Digital Integration*, creator of the respected *Torpedo*. You'll fly the Army's premier attack chopper at the Ft. Hood training grounds, and then move on to combat in the deserts of Yemen, the hills of Korea, and the island of Cyprus.

In single-player engagements, you can fly both pilot and gunner positions. Multiplayer modes support two players over a serial connection, and up to 16 via a local area network. Players can fly separate helicopters or work together as pilot/gunner teams.

Apache's control suite is fairly complete, with realistic flight controls, complete cockpit instrumentation, and the helmet-mounted Integrated Helmet and Display Sight System with its "shoot where I'm looking" link to the Apache's chain gun.

Apache's graphics are high-res, non-texture-mapped polygons that look good but aren't terribly immersive. The game's sound support, however, is top-notch. Not only do you get the requisite engine and explosion sounds (which vary in volume

APACHE

depending on the range to the detonation), but there's also tons of radio chatter, foreground and background.

\$69.95, Interactive Magic, (919) 461-0722.



#9
HOLIDAY
100

TOP GUN

Just like the real Top Gun school at Miramar Naval Air Station, Spectrum HaloByte's *Top Gun: Fin & Wil* is designed to build the skills of novice fighter pilots. This is the sim to check out if you're looking for a program to give a beginning sim pilot, or if you find yourself getting bored by bogies all the time in more advanced sims.



Top Gun retains the slightly reckless, seat-of-the-pants flavor of the Tom Cruise film, yet combines it with a fairly detailed F-14 Tomcat simulation. This time around, you're Maverick, and actor James Tolkan reprises his role of Honda, the tough-talking, cigar-chewing commanding officer.

The game has a high level of cinematic content between individual missions, where you'll interact with over 20 actors and watch CNN-style news briefs as your carrier attempts to cool down conflicts in Cuba, Korea and Libya. There are also a number of training missions for learning carrier landing skills and dogfighting techniques.

Aircraft control is geared toward beginners, with simplified instruments, but happily the game doesn't less the laws of physics out the window. It just doesn't bombard the beginner with ultra-complicated radar systems and such.

The SVGA graphics are top-notch, and you'll fly to a rocking soundtrack that includes tunes such as a re-recording of the Heavy Loggins hit title song. Once you feel confident of your piloting skills, you can take on up to 15 opponents via network play.

Price unavailable at press time, Spectrum HaloByte, (510) 522-1164.

#10
HOLIDAY
100

MARINE FIGHTERS

U.S. Navy Fighters brought the expectations of flight sim fans up a notch last year, with SVGA graphics, digitized stereo sound, decent flight models for a wide range of aircraft, and a variety of interesting and challenging missions. The much-lauded sim, however, had its share of quirks. Electronic Arts has addressed those quirks and beefed up the sim engine with the *Marine Fighters* add-on disc, as well as adding an

assortment of new missions and aircraft to fly. The emphasis of *MARINE FIGHTERS* is vertical/short take-off and landing (V/STOL) aircraft. You'll fly the Marine Corps' AV-8B Harrier II, the Royal Navy's Sea Harrier, and the Russian Yak-141. There's also an AC-130 Hercules gunship tossed in, mostly for novelty value. Along with the new planes comes a much more detailed combat arena, with some four times the graphics detail of *USNF*.

Other improvements from *USNF* include better controller support, turbulence, improved flight models and better AI for enemies and wingmen, and support for the Forte VFX-1 virtual reality helmet. The fine-tuning of the original program and the uniqueness of V/STOL combat make the *USNF/Marine Fighters* combo a worthy addition to any gamer's arsenal.

\$29.95, Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171.



ALSO IN THE PATTERN

Nav-Lee's *WORLD OF COCKPIT 2.0* is the perfect gift for friend or enemy. It ships with two complete combat chopper sims on two CDs, giving you everything you need to go head-to-head in one package. Spectrum HaloByte is releasing the sequel to *World Circuit Racing*, called *Game Plan II*, under its new World Circuit Racing brand (confused yet?), the classic racing sim has been updated with texture-mapped, SVGA graphics. If you're just tired of realism, try *Windscape's Air Power: Battle in the Skies*, which transports you to an alternate 1930s Earth where air battles take place using dirigible-launched fighters. If you have a 300 owner in the family, pick up a copy of *Doman's Funs N' Games*, readable as the most sophisticated flight sim yet to hit the console market. The Microsoft *Fuzion Simulator* fan in the family will appreciate *Fuzion Simulator Fuzion* '96, which among other things lets you design your own aircraft, and *Tones*, a surprisingly addictive air traffic control simulation. *Mission Studies' JetFighter III* won't hit stores until just after the new year, but the updated classic promises an exciting South American campaign built around accurate texture-mapped terrain created from government data.

If you can find a more realistic
dogfight simulator, fly it.

"WWII air combat at its very best."

— Denny Atkin
Computer Gaming World

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Spitfires, Mustangs, Corsairs and Zeros. There's even a rookie mode for beginners.

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ESP1



HOLIDAY 100



by Terry Coleman & Elliot Chin

Strategy games have always been among the favorites of *CGW* readers because of their depth and replay value. This year's Christmas strategy treats break ground in challenging our desire to expand, explore, and exploit, from the comfy confines of Old Earth to the far-flung reaches of yet-uncharted galaxies. Fantasy games make a strong bid for playing time, allowing us to bash orcs (or humans, or trolls), make peace with elves, uncover insidious plots, and have fun fighting enemies with unpronounceable names. Even some of our boardgame favorites are faithfully translated to the silicon screen. Real-time and turn-based, tactical to grand strategic, it's all here for the taking!

STRATEGY

CIVNET

For one-third of your final grade, solve this equation: If Gamer A spends three sleepless nights a week playing *So Much's Civilization*, and Gamer B calls in sick to complete his

Settlers are now smarter, and will automatically mine, irrigate and build roads unless you specify differently. Similarly, cities may be designated for peaceful or military



Alpha Centauri expedition with the Aztecs, what effect will a multiplayer version of Civilization have on national productivity? Be sure to list specific examples supporting your thesis.

For those of us who are lifetime members of *Civilization Anonymous*, the impending release of CivNet has caused us to reschedule appointments, load up on non-perishable food stores, and find reasons to take vacation time which we could never otherwise justify. Are we simply living in the past, bound by loyalty to a four-year-old game design? Hardly.

Consider: in an industry where the average shelf life of a design—even a good one—is three to six months, Civ is still selling reasonably well (now past the 850,000 unit mark), despite its dated graphics and sound. The new version offers SVGA graphics, MIDI sound support, and a much better interface, much of what we expected the Windows version to be is here, and more.

Expansion. Research is simplified, as the science advisor is actually helpful this time around, allowing you to see up to two advances ahead of current technology. The AI is even tougher than before, making for a much better game on levels other than Emperor.

The other tweaks include: auto-saves after each turn, and auto-backup after five turns; detailed city reports, multiple world maps; and better alert functions when you are attacked. Still, it's the multiplayer aspect that drives the game. You may form alliances with other human players, and even eavesdrop on chat conversations of your enemies with diplomatic spies. The game flows surprisingly well in either classic turn-based or parallel play, and will support network, modem and, perhaps, even internet play. If any game is a sure winner for Christmas, this is it.

MicroProse, (410) 771-0440, \$59.95.

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FASA
ENTERTAINMENT



#2
100

COMMAND AND CONQUER

Well, it wasn't enough that *Dune II* redefined real-time strategy gaming. Now, *Command & Conquer*, the "unofficial" follow-up from Westwood Studios, has upped the ante once again, while still retaining some similarities to the popular computer game set in Frank Herbert's world. You still command various troops and build structures to increase your productivity and power, and you also must harvest certain elements to maintain production; in this case, it's the celestial element, Tiberium, instead of Spice. The game is set in the near-future, so the warfare takes place in various locales on Earth. The technology is also a mix between modern weaponry and slightly futuristic war machines like battle suits. *Command & Conquer* has over 30 various scenarios to battle out, and like *Wing Commander*, there are various possible branches toward victory; the game is re-

freshly non-linear in that respect. Wrapped around the incredible real-time game engine are breathtaking 3-D graphics that complement the storyline. *Command & Conquer* has a much upgraded AI over *Dune II*, but the best opponents will be human: the game is multiplay-capable over both modem and network.

\$59.95, Virgin/Westwood Studios, (800) 874-4607.

COMMAND & CONQUER



#4
100

CAESAR II

Appease the emperor, conquer new lands, build up your Roman provinces, and manage the cities within your sphere of influence in *Caesar II*. There are three levels to the game: Empire, Province and City.

In the Empire level, you must deal with the emperor, appease his demands, and curry his favor; this level is sufficiently more diplomatic and more complex than in the first *Caesar* game. In the Province level, you'll

not only defend the Imperial provinces, but develop them as well. You must build structures to increase the industry and population growth, and accumulate resources for the Emperor.

Unlike the original *Caesar*, the combat system here is fully integrated with the strategic game, and is great fun in and of itself. The near-effortless interface gives you command over lines of heavy infantry, cavalry, phalanxes, and even massive war elephants, so that you may prevail against the barbarians of the periphery. Still, it's the City level that is the true center of the game. Here, you must govern the city, maintain the standard of living, appease the citizens, and build the City to its

#3
100

WARHAMMER

This is a real-time wargame based on the hugely popular, table-top battle system of the same name. *Warhammer* is not a disingenuous lift of the original, but a very strong product, an intense wargame—in the same mold as *Panzer General*—but set in the fantastic world of *Warhammer*.

You command a motley crew indeed, from goblins and demons to mounted knights and even

werewolves. The world you inhabit is a whirlpool of demonic forces and magical creatures. As the game evolves from a loose storyline, you are left relatively free to decide your own course of action. In addition to contesting whatever scenarios you want in any order, you have the choice of fighting against or collaborating with the Ultimate Evil. Since everything is real-time, the fighting is intense and hectic, as is the magic system, which rivals *Mystic* or *Magic* for visual effects and complexity. This game will hook any strategy gamer, with its dazzling visual effects, a stunning and exciting combat engine, and a combination of the *Warhammer* world's best fantasy elements and Mindscape's innovative magic system.

\$79.95, Mindscape, (415) 897-9300.



WARHAMMER



CAESAR II

finest potential. It looks like Caesar's empire will rise to new heights again.

\$54.95, Sierra, (800) 757-7707.

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#5
TOP 100

MASTER OF ANTARES

MicroProse's *Master of Antares*, the eagerly anticipated sequel to *Master of Orion (MOO)*, should be out in time to make every strategy gamer's Christmas wishlist. This game is everything *MOO* was and more. It will feature more alien races and will even offer customizable aliens; you can select from a plethora of racial strengths and weaknesses and weave them into a new species. MicroProse is also bringing "Legendary Commanders," into *Master of Antares*, army leaders in the *Master of Magic* mold. Unlike *MOO*, there will be (finally!) modems, hotseat, and network play, so you and your friends can all vie for control of the universe. Ship-to-ship combat won't be dominated by massive, hundred-strong fleets any more (the limit should be 50), but on the plus side, players will now be able to board enemy vessels, capture ships, and salvage them for parts and resources. And casting a dark shadow across the entire game will be the mysterious aliens of Antares. Overthrown eons ago by the Orions, they now seek revenge on the entire universe, and stand between you and the conquest of a galaxy. It looks like another hit for the folks at Sinter, who always remember to put the gameplay first.

\$47.99, MicroProse, (800) 879-PLAY, (410) 771-0440.



*Darlok
Spy*

MASTER OF ANTARES

#6
TOP 100

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

This wonderful game from New World Computing is a great wargaming/strategy hybrid with elements of role-playing as well. In *Heroes of Might and Magic*, you begin with control of one castle and a hero. As you gain

wealth, you can upgrade your castle, raise greater armies, recruit spell-casting wizards and warlike fighters, and wage war on your three rivals.

As you send your heroes out to explore the world, they find mines and towns to add to your kingdom's production, discover artifacts, and gain experience by fighting monsters and rival heroes. The goal, though, is to conquer the world and vanquish the three other warlords in the realm. This game supports multiple players by hotseat, modem, or network play—which is good, since this game isn't nearly as fun when played alone. You can choose to play either a long campaign or single scenarios. The graphics are beautiful, and the worlds you explore are all extensive and blacked-out, waiting for discovery. This is that rare hybrid game that will appeal to first-time gamers and veterans alike.

\$69.95, New World Computing, (800) 325-8698, (818) 889-5600.



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

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7

ADVANCED CIVILIZATION

A conversion of the best-selling Avalon Hill board game, *Advanced Civilization* makes you the ruler of one of seven Mediterranean

nations, including Egypt, Assyria, and even Crete. You build your civilization, using little more than stone knives and bear skins, to reach the Iron Age. Even though the encompassing time frame is reduced (to reflect the actual evolution of those ancient civilizations), there are still hours of enjoyable game-play packed into this title. You expand in population, explore the Mediterranean world, collect and trade commodities (symbolized by cards), and try to corner the salt, gold or other markets. In addition to the usual diplomatic aspects of a multiplayer game, each nation must deal with calamities—civil war, heresy, volcanoes, etc.—and can deal in secret to their opponents. After trades, you buy "civilization cards" representing pottery, engineering, and other technologies that will improve your civilization; the selection is varied enough to allow for many different styles of play—and

offers plenty of replay value.

\$69.95, Avalon Hill, (800) 599-3222, (410) 254-9200.



8

CHESSMASTER 5000

As the latest installment in the ChessMaster lineup, ChessMaster 5000 is the best Chess pro-

gram to date, offering 64 Grandmaster styles and an expansive multimedia chess tour. The volume of great tournaments and matches included in the program are numerous, but the greatest improvement of CM 5000 is in the tutorials. They are strong enough to be able to teach even the intermediate-to-advanced player a few moves.

Finally, the ChessMaster series has a reliable way to rate a human player's progress, linking it to specific exercises on backward pawns, Queenside majority attacks, or whatever else you choose to work on. ChessMaster 5000 also makes full use of the Windows 95 capabilities. With the true 32-bit multitasking system, you can play up to five different games at once, with any combination of those being playable via modem. The program even supports three different kinds of chess clocks, including the revolutionary clock that Fischer unveiled for his 1992 rematch with Spassky. A rich, wonderful program that will challenge any player below master level.

\$64.95, Mindscape, (415) 897-9300.



#9
HOT 100

WARCRAFT II

Once again, orcs and humans will engage in endless warfare in Blizzard's *Warcraft II*. This time around, the venue has changed. There are large-scale naval battles, with sub marines, frigates, and carriers. To create an even more fantas-

tic feel, new monster troops have been added, such as trolls. Like the original *Warcraft*, you can choose either the orc or human side and battle it out with your opponent over a semi-linked campaign. There is the requisite multiplayer option, with support for up to seven players. You will still have to harvest lumber, gold, and ore to maintain your war production, but now you'll also have to find oil to keep those massive fleets going. Those seeking a challenging opponent shouldn't be too displeased: the AI has been given a major upgrade, and will not be so foolish or rigid this time around. *Warcraft II* is a much bigger and more extensive improvement over the original, and should provide players with great fun bashing orcs (or humans).

\$39.95, Blizzard, (800) 953-SNOW.



WARCRAFT II

#10
HOT 100

ASCENDANCY

Ascendancy is similar to other space strategies like *Masters of Orion*, but it has more going for it than just its tried-and-true concept. It delivers great SVGA graphics, a very *Star Trek*-like soundtrack, and an incredibly extensive universe. You start out on a single planet, building structures that increase your production, research, or industry. As your re-

search increases, you will gain the technology to colonize other star systems and meet the other alien races in the universe. The diplomacy in this game is not as extensive as in *Masters of Orion*, but the aliens all have unique personalities, to say the least. It does look like the Logic Factory put a great deal of effort into creating realistic, scientifically viable aliens with unique qualities and perspectives on life. They are amazingly successful, and manage to create a very engrossing universe. One setback is the less-than-intuitive interface. Also, when researching new technologies, the computer doesn't tell you beforehand what the benefits of each technology are. In general, though, the breadth of strategic options outweigh the faults of this game.

\$49.95, Logic Factory/Broderbund, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4700.



ASCENDANCY

STRATEGIES GALORE

It seems that the galaxies of gaming are teeming with all sorts of intelligent life. The grandest of scales belongs to the long-awaited strategic empire-builder *Px* from *Star Trek II: Resurrected* by Blizzard, this game has graphics and an interface that could leave *Masters of Orion* in the galactic dust, but now it looks as if *Masters of Orion* will be out first. Still, if the ship-building in *MOO* was too simple for you, try out this complex affair—playable either real-time or turn-based with network support.

A more fun alien romp may be had with *Green Teams From Outer Space*. Tom Wham's comic masterpiece for Steve Jackson Games comes to a computer nebula near you courtesy of QQP. As aliens—more funny than scary—profferate on your already-crowded spaceship, you turn to everything from zap guns to fire extinguishers in an attempt to stay the otherworldly menace. Given QQP's tendency to produce balanced, enjoyable games, it seems that the *Znutar* will bring a lot of enjoyment to earth-bound gamers—wherever QQP manages to finish the campaign game.

It also seems that the litigation between FASA and New World Computing has died down a bit. As a result, *New Worlds* (formerly *MechWarrior*) may finally get published. A rich blend of politics and corruption, hot combat and maneuver on a grand scale, this game could be to strategic mech combat what *Warhammer II* was to tactical. Then again, *Sinifer* has to finish *Masters of Orion* first.

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HOLIDAY 100

W A R G A M E S

ALLIED GENERAL



A cigarette flicks in the darkness, the ash stretching as if to defy gravity. Removing it from its hiding place (a three-day growth of beard), the duty Sergeant absently flicks the butt into the cold, damp ground. Looking over his list, he checks off each item: VGA graphics, Windows 95 interface (he mutts a bit over that one), new Allied weapons and unit loadout, new campaigns, even tougher AI. "What'll they think of next?" he muses, as he signs the list—everything was ready for the invasion, which had been given the code name of **ALLIED GENERAL**.

men and materiel—although the relative inexperience of the GIs makes for a pretty balanced contest versus the seasoned Wehrmacht. The greatest challenge, however, comes from playing the Soviets. Here, you must survive the whirlwind onslaught of the Germans and stop them before they reach the gates of Moscow. And even though you have wave upon wave of troops and wonderful artillery to aid your patriotic cause, there is still a sense of urgency as each battle unfolds.

From set-piece assaults and amphibious invasions to wild attacks and desperate defenses,



AsSSI approaches their own D-Day with the imminent release of **Axis General**, the obvious question is whether any game can successfully follow both the critical and commercial success of **Panzer General**. The thrill of locally playing the Good Guys is enhanced by three distinct campaign styles. As a British general, you are the next Monty, sending the Afrika Korps reeking across the desert sands. Should you emerge triumphant, you may either retire a war hero, or continue fighting the Germans after D-Day for even more glory.

For sheer blood-and-guts, Patton-esque-play, it's hard to resist the American superiority in

es, it's all here, with the AI—already among the best of any wargame—improved from **Panzer General**. Other welcome additions make it harder to cheat during e-mail play and add more slots for saved games (for those generals with multiple human adversaries). The Win 95 engine runs smooth as silk and saves time by letting you keep several windows open at once. While it may not be the genre-buster that **PG** was, **Axis General** is proof that sequels, when done right, are often the best that the industry has to offer. It's hard to imagine a better gift for a wargamer this Christmas.

by Terry Coleman

In 1995, sumptuous graphics burst into wargames like a Russian artillery barrage at the Battle of Kursk. But the wargames available for this holiday season offer much more than pretty situation maps and finely-detailed tanks. They bring smoother interfaces, stronger computer opponents, and a greater sense of realism than ever before. And, while WWII is still a fertile field, designers are letting us explore other theaters of warfare, from knights clashing in medieval castles to proud frigates letting cannonades fly on the high seas. There is even—finally—a good Civil War game. So, strap those bayonets on your knucklers, and get ready for the best "historical" holiday we've seen in quite a while!

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A much-maligned ship, The Rage is the choice of craft for those who care to sacrifice speed for sheer fire power. Fully loaded, The Rage can take on superior numbers and still survive intact. Of course, retreat in The Rage is never an option.

DEMON SPEED

Many Merry Pilots swear by the Demon Speed. Its speed and maneuverability are almost unmatched by any manmade craft in Known Space. While its payload is limited, a little strategy in weapons and shield selection can make the Demon Speed a ship to be reckoned with.

ROMERO INFILTRATOR

The Romero Infiltrator strikes a good balance between speed and payload. For this reason, however, many pilots tend to ignore this workhorse of the Guild - Merry Pilots seem to like extremes. Nevertheless, don't overlook the Infiltrator as an option. While it cannot outrun a Demon Speed, it can sure as hell beat the stuffy out of it.

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#2

STEEL PANTHERS

Cynics would have you believe that the wargaming in the post-*Panzer General* era is thin, but lacking in substance. **STEEL PANTHERS** shows that, quite to the contrary, you can have accessibility right alongside a hefty dose of realism. The newfound **SSI** love for elegant interfaces is readily apparent, but it can't disguise the Gary Gygisby touch: every small-arms weapon and armor type is painstakingly researched; the use of combined arms tactics is rewarded; and the game faithfully recreates the smoke-filled chaos of the WWII battlefield. The graphics are so stunning that it's hard to believe this is a wargame, and the sounds capture both the screaming velocity of mortar shells and the "clink" of near-misses more than adequately. The game plays briskly, even in two-player mode, and the cam-

paigns are varied and challenging. While one could wish for a better computer opponent, and there are a few bugs (seemingly inevitable these days), it's obvious that **STEEL PANTHERS** bridges the gap between realism and playability better than any computer wargame has for a very long time. \$64.95, **SSI**, (800) 601-7529.



#4

WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN

One of the most valuable lessons that Stanley Associates learned from designing *5th Fleet* for Avalon Hill was that they had remained perhaps too faithful to the board game. However, all traces of board game awkwardness are notably absent from this computer version of **WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN (WS&IM)**. The cardboard counters and hexagons have been replaced with an eight-point movement system and 3-D Studio-rendered ships-of-the-line. The details that made the board game great, however, are still here. Would-be sea captains must select from solid, double and chain shot; form boarding parties; put out fires; blast away enemy rigging; and juggle between battle, full and mid-sail. Noted designer Joe Balkesi has worked with the design team to include options not even included in the paper version, making **WS&IM** the most accurate high seas simulation yet seen on the computer, without the tedious of charts and excessive die-rolling.

#3

EMPIRE II

If you expect this game to be a facelift of the popular **EMPIRE DECLINE**, think again. Eschewing the strategic scope of its predecessor, **EMPIRE II** attempts to portray battles from prehistory to the modern age and beyond, using a grand-tactical scale. Whereas most games covering multiple historical eras fail, **EMPIRE II** somehow manages to inject enough period flavor into the battles that Gettysburg, for example, has a different feel than the Battle of Waterloo. In addition to the 30-plus battles included, the easy-to-use editor makes it a breeze to whip up battles as famous or obscure as your campaigning tastes require. Morale, supply and logistical factors are handled simply but cleanly, and the

game lets you get right to the heart of the fighting without having to worry about "all that boring stuff." A package greater than the sum of its parts, this is both a fine introduction to wargaming and a guffy pleasure for any veteran gamer, with the latter likely to get the most out of the "design your own" features. \$49.95, **New World**, (800) 325-8838.



WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN



Whether you sail proud French corvettes against the haughty British and Lord Nelson, or take command of the *Constitution* in a War of 1812 campaign, one thing's for sure—there has never been a game which captured the flavor of crossing the "T" and unleashing a fiery broadside quite so well as this. Here's to a nautical holiday! \$59.95, **Avalon Hill**, (800) 999-3222

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#5

BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG

It doesn't seem that long ago that CGW (and our readers) was complaining loudly about the

lack of good American Civil War games. It seems that our prayers have finally been answered with this second in Talensoft's *Battlezone* series, a rousing rendition of the greatest battle in The War Between The States. The game system does a nice job of differentiating between melee and fire combat, and emphasizes morale, always a must for a good Civil War game. The maps, created by former Avalon Hill artist Charlie Kibler, give Rand McNally a run for the money, and they are functional. Even at the early beta stage when we saw the game, the computer opponent seems to have improved upon that of *Battlezone: Americas*; the question will be how well it carries out a sustained plan in the campaign scenario, where you fight through all three days of Gettysburg. From the miniatures-style formations of soldiers to the more subtle modeling of line and column, artillery and rifled muskets, this game has something for the General Lee in all of us.

\$49.95, Talensoft, (410) 821-7282



BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG

#6

PERFECT GENERAL II

Q&P, like most companies, has had its share of disappointments, but when the folks from Jersey are on target, it's hard to find games that are more enjoyable. Such is the case with *Perfect General II*, a game that offers a fun, if only passingly historical, view of 20th-century warfare. Any game trying to replay both Stalingrad and Desert Storm with the same system is bound to elicit howls from realism-minded gamers, but PG II blithely rolls along, confident that its tried-and-true, turn-based system will see it through. Artillery is king of the battlefield, and air power is pretty limited, but the game does reward combined arms, and also encourages flank, rather than frontal attacks. A riot for two-player contests, this is not up to the sustained brilliance of *Perfect General*, but it is a nice, light war game.

\$69.95, Q&P, (908) 738-2799.



PERFECT GENERAL II



(figure 1)

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(figure 2)

THE EASY WAY.



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#7
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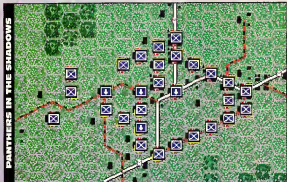
PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS

The answer is: It figures shell velocity, allowing for angle of deflection, type of ammunition, thickness of target armor and differences

in pockets of air pressure between the firing unit and its target." Well, Alex, the question must be, "What is the new game from HPS Simulations?" Yes, the last bastion of realistic-to-the-extreme

wargames scores another hit, with even more number-crunching data with which to wow the tread-heads. The good news for normal wargamers is that *PANTHERS* shows a lot of improvements over its sibling, *TREASONS ON THE PLOW*. First, the graphics, while no threat to *STEEL PATHWAYS*, are certainly cleaner and less of an eyesore. Plus, the already competent AI is better this time around, especially when counter-punching—and HPS AIs never cheat. Not for the faint of heart, but if you want a powerful game engine that will challenge both your knowledge of history and your abilities as an armchair general, look no further.

\$69.95, HPS Simulations, (408) 554-8381.



PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS

#8
100

CONQUEROR: 1086 AD

Some 20 years after the Norman victory at Hastings, you become the next in a line of con-

querors. Our first question upon seeing this game was: why? After all, *LOANS ON THE PLOW* had already managed to make medieval husbandry fun. But what *Software Sorcery* has done is to focus less on the realistic aspects of Dark Ages England, and more on the enjoyable aspects of being a knightly lord. *Conqueror* is an Errol Flynn romp, filled with valiant defenses, jousting for the honor of fair maidens, and sword fights everywhere you turn. The most disappointing aspect of the combat is that the sieges are fairly realistic, so that you can't use those catapults in *Derivative* or the *Clayton*-style fashion to shatter your enemy's ramparts. Regardless, this is an enjoyable game on a neglected period of history.

\$54.95, Software Sorcery, (619) 452-9901.



CONQUEROR: 1086 AD

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BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES

9

It's rare that a new wargame company makes much of a splash in terms of units sold, but Talonsoft is off to a solid

start with this title. The scale is more than tactical, less than operational, but it seems to work reasonably well in recreating the Battle of the Bulge. The less-experienced U.S. units still have good morale, and tend to hold out in places like St. Vith and Bastogne, as they did historically. The Germans have all the wonderful hardware, but rarely do they get enough fuel for their needs. The road network is a maze in the winter—as well it should be—yet the game system keeps the flow of play moving well enough to avoid tedium. This game pioneers a "cutaway stacked hexagon" side-view, which gives the old hex grid a new lease on life, familiar and fresh simultaneously. **BATTLEGROUND: ARDENNES** might not satisfy the purist, but it's a good challenge for those who prefer more traditional wargaming fare.

\$49.95, Talonsoft, (410) 821-7282.



10

BATTLES IN TIME

It seems that in the far future, the human race has eliminated poverty, sickness and war. All well and good, until a militaristic alien race shows up to crash the party. Your mission—and you have no choice but to accept it—is to travel back through time, re-learning the lessons of war, so that you may return and defeat the menace from the stars. On the *Hokya Scale*, this

premise definitely ranks up near the summit, but once begun, the game has more than a little of that *QOP* play-balance and charm. The graphics build on the SVGA palette of *The Pacific Generals II*, and the interface is better than a lot of *QOP* titles (I'm still holding out on the manual, however). Since the game covers all of history, the potential variety is incredible. Our main complaint with the beta version we saw was that the units of each era had not yet been tweaked so that they had distinct flavors. If this "vanilla" problem is rendered moot through additional spice, the game should appeal to a wide audience. For a "move, fight and be dented" wargame with few frills but many hours of gameplay, this game should deliver. \$59.95, *QOP*, (908) 788-2799.



COMING DOWN THE WARPATH

It probably won't make Christmas, but *The Last Battles* looks to be a winner for *SSG* regardless of when it ships. Roger Westing and Ian Trout always develop some of the best AIs in the business, and this game should build on the lessons learned from the already tough computer opponents of *Warzone II*. What our friends from Australia are striving for is a game with the playability of *Warzones* and even more realism than their old *Barnes* system.

Of course, there are WWII games designed on the home front as well. By the time you read this, *D-Day*, evidently the last of the *Wound At War* series Atomic Games is doing for *Avaton III*, should be released. This is not a computer version of the AH boardgame, but sort of an update and expansion of the old *Line Bases* title, with obviously better AI and the newer Atomic interface.

Speaking of Atomic, they have officially signed with Microsoft, with whom they plan to publish a WWII tactical real-time game, formerly known as *Between Some Leaves*, with a different name.

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#

HOLIDAY
100

○○○○○○



by Mike Weksler & Loyd Case

When Santa comes down your chimney this year, forget the milk and cookies—just leave him a computer toolkit and a note asking him to install your new computer hardware! This holiday season should prove to be a bonanza for anyone looking to improve their system, with the emphasis on speed, innovation, and more attention to superior audio. Hard disks are faster, hold more data, and are cheaper than ever. Additionally, low-priced, high-speed modems are the norm and CD-ROM technology is booming. The level of innovation in game-related peripherals is equally astonishing, with programmable throttles and joysticks as the hot items. Finally, the latest crop of sound cards (some of which rival professional MIDI keyboard in sound quality) and high-end multimedia speakers are increasingly affordable.

H A R D W A R E

SOUND CANVAS

How do you spell disappointment? Try loading up a hot new game on your advanced desktop PC and hearing music that sounds like it's coming from a kid's toy. While digital audio (i.e. sound effects and voices) has become standard on many new multimedia systems, the equipment you need for quality music playback—wavetable synthesis—is just now coming into age. Old-style FM synthe-

sis, this is the one. This mighty daughter card (a device which snaps onto sound cards with the Wave Blaster feature connector, like Creative Labs' AWE32) is all you need to really get the rich music out of your games—music that's just waiting for you to let it out of the bottle. Several of the developers we talk to actually compose game music on the Sound Canvas, so when you use one of these cards, you



hear the music as the artists did when they composed it. Instruments don't drown each other out—it's unlikely that you'll hear a baseline overpowering the melody of a

sis—the common denominator for music playback on soundcards—is proving to be the Achilles heel for game music composers. Storing music data in a MIDI file (like a player piano scroll) takes up very little space on a game's CD or on your hard disk, but there's no guarantee that you'll hear the music as intended by the composer unless you have a good wavetable sound card. (Music can also be digitally recorded so that it plays back like an audio CD, but that takes up considerable storage space.) Wavetable sound cards actually record samples of real instruments, so a piano sounds like a piano instead of some weird electronic device.

Most wavetable sound cards are General MIDI compatible; this is a standard that allows wavetable synthesizers to be compatible so that a file created on one General MIDI synthesizer will play back on another company's synthesizer.

This year, we highlight the Roland Sound Canvas—if any sound product is king of the

given song. There are two models of the Sound Canvas: the SCD-10 and the SCD-15. The difference between the two is that the latter has the entire 354-sound GS patch set (an extended version of General MIDI, which has only 128 sounds). If GS ever takes off, it may behoove you to be compatible.

Additionally, the Roland Sound Canvas is available as a standalone ISA card, the SCC-1, which is great for those of you who don't have a sound card with the necessary feature connector. Also, standalone external modules that plug into your sound card's MIDI port, as well as a PC Card (the new name for PCMCIA) variant, are available.

The Sound Canvas was Computer Gaming World's Editor's Choice for daughtercard and stand-alone General MIDI sound card for gamers from our October Sound Card Roundup.

Daughtercards: SCD-10 \$259, SCD-15 \$329, ISA Card: SCC-1 \$399, Roland; (213) 685-5141.



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Circle Reader Service #120

#2

FIREBALL 1080

If there's any certainty in the computer biz, it's that over time software will need more of everything—more CPU, more memory and more disk space. One of the best Christmas presents a game player can get is a big hard disk—the bigger the better. Last Christmas, a one-gigabyte hard disk was an expensive luxury, but drive prices have been dropping at a feverish rate.

But size isn't everything; performance counts as well. One of the faster hard disks on the market is the Quantum Fireball 1080. At a street price of \$220 for the EIDE version and \$300 for the SCSI drive, it's also a good choice for the cost-conscious. The one-gigabyte FIREBALL gets its fast speed from its 12-millisecond access time, 5400-RPM rotational speed and magneto-resistive (MR) heads (there's a word for your next cocktail party.) Don't expect a

stick package at this price, but if you're interested in a big, fast drive at a great price, don't overlook the Fireball.

\$220 (street price), Quantum, (800) 624-5545.

FIREBALL 1080



#4

6-PLEX

The Plexor drive was the first six-speed drive to hit the market, and is still one of the fastest, sporting an average access time of 145 milliseconds. Although a number of other six-speed (and one eight-speed) drives have hit the market, the Plexor is still a quick, reliable performer. The 6-Plex is a SCSI drive, so you'll need a SCSI interface, and the drive uses caddies for the CDs. (However, this allows the drive to be mounted sideways if necessary.)

We used the 6-Plex for several months, and it rapidly became one of our favorites. Plexor's parent company manufactures industrial CD drives (you know, music for dentist's offices...), so we anticipate long service from this drive. The 6-Plex is a little on the pricey side, but in this case,

you definitely got what you pay for: \$509 (internal), \$549 (with 16-bit SCSI host adapter), Plexor, (800) 896-3935.

#3

PENTIUM OVERDRIVE

You're ready to upgrade, but you don't want to sink \$2,000 into a new system.

Enter Intel's 83-MHz Pentium OverDrive processor upgrade. This chip features the same core technology as the Pentium processor, including

superscalar architecture, branch prediction, and a faster math co-processor. With a suggested list price of \$299, the Pentium OverDrive becomes a viable upgrade alternative to the 100-MHz 0X4 chip (which it outperforms by 15 to 40

percent, and even more when running Pentium-optimized code). It will bring your older 486 system into the same processor performance class as a 60-MHz Pentium. Your 486 system will need a 237- or 238-pin OverDrive socket (look for an extra set of holes

PENTIUM OVERDRIVE



6-PLEX



surrounding your current processor chip) to use this chip; if it has an older 486-only socket you should check out the 0X4 OverDrive chips \$299, Intel, (800) 548-4725.

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Circle Powder Service 104



#5
100

SPORTSTER 28.8 DATA/FAX V.34

If we could give any advice to all the gamers out there, it's three words (read in your best Denis Leary voice): GET A MODEM! Find multiplayer opponents, get technical support, hang out with game developers, and even browse the web. But, if you want to cruise the info highway, you need a modem. The Sportster V.34 (U.S. Robotics, not Harley-Davidson) is a 28.8 K.34 data/fax modem that's fast, easy to use, and ships with software that will get you on line without much fuss.

While it's hard to get too excited about a modem, the Sportster V.34 really has some features to peak your interest. At 28,800 bits per second, World Wide Web pages actually load at a bearable speed. The external version (and external modems in general) has LEDs on the unit so you can keep an eye on the status of your connection. Another really useful feature is the volume knob on the side of the external unit—at last, you can listen in on your session without your non-computer-using neighbors thinking you're firing phasers in your living room. Finally, all the settings you need to make are right on the back of the modem via a few DIP switches (the settings info is printed right on the bottom of the modem). Perhaps the most pleasing feature of the Sportster V.34 is that Windows 95 re-

cognizes and automatically configures it. Whether you need a new modem or your old modem is running out of gas, the Sportster V.34 is worth a close look.

\$279 (external), \$249 (internal), U.S. Robotics, (800) 342-5877, (708) 676-7010.

#6
100

STINGRAY 64 VIDEO

Over the past couple of years, Hercules garnered the reputation of having the fastest DOS video card around

in the Hercules Onwave Pro. This year, the Onwave has been eclipsed by another, even hotter DOS performer from Hercules: the Stingray 64 Video, which posted the fastest DOS benchmarks we'd ever seen. Windows performance is respectable as well. Hercules has had some teething problems with its digital video support, but they seem to be in the past now.

The Stingray 64 Video, available in PCI only, is based on the ARK 2000PV graphics controller, and comes with either one or two megabytes of memory. Windows 95 is supported with the ARK 2000PV drivers, but by the time you read this, Hercules will probably have shipped its native Windows 95 drivers and tools.

\$259, Hercules, (800) 532-0600, (510) 623-6030.





WE'VE CREATED SOMETHING FOR WINDOWS 95 THAT'LL MAKE YOU WORK LESS EFFICIENTLY.

Your "In Box" is piled so high it's been declared a fire hazard. Who cares? With Shockwave Assault, the first ground-level action shooter native for



Windows 95, you're busy saving the earth. Las Vegas. Hollywood. London. Egypt. And other real-world locations are at risk of being swallowed by hostile alien forces.

Luckily, Shockwave Assault is fully auto play. So you just load the CD and go. Blast away with arcade-style graphics and action. It's your job to save the world. Which beats the hell out of whatever you do now.



SHOCKWAVE ASSAULT

Check out the action at <http://www.3d.com/entertainment.html>



Shockwave Assault is the Electronic Arts Studio 3D game on the Windows 95 platform. Electronic Arts is a registered trademark of Electronic Arts. Shockwave Assault is a registered trademark of Electronic Arts.



#7
HOLIDAY 100

ACS 500

Altec Lansing Multimedia's ACS-500 speakers not only feature crisp sound and a booming subwoofer, but also genuine Dolby Pro-Logic surround sound. Imagine sound that seems to not only come from behind your ears, but also from a center channel speaker that really isn't there, while bass thunders forth from the 6.5-inch, 40-watt subwoofer. The huge, 18-inch tall ACS-500 satellites offer superior stereo separation, and the system can be expanded to use near-surround speakers and a center channel speaker.

The only drawback we could find is that the power switch is awkwardly located in the rear of one of the satellite speakers. Additionally, there is no tone control; however, there are controls for both centering and surround levels, as well as separate volume controls for the subwoofer and the satellites.

While there are no games that we know of that are encoded for Dolby Pro-Logic, if you play your audio CDs on your computer's CD-ROM drive and you are looking for good sound with rich bass response, then this system is definitely worth considering. Altec Lansing claims the system's frequency response is 32Hz—20 kHz. \$450 (ACS-250 Subwoofer, \$150), Altec Lansing, (800) 648-

6663, (717) 296-2818.



ACS 500

#8
HOLIDAY 100

CH THROTTLE

We all know how frustrating it is to try enjoying complex simulation and action games when

you only have one free hand with which to type myriad key commands. Following Thrustmaster's lead in the programmable throttle genre, CH Products has started shipping the CH Throttle.

Setting it up is a snap. Plug your joystick into the CH Throttle, attach a small adapter between your keyboard plug and and computer, and plug the throttle into your PC's joystick port.

The CH Throttle features a programmable four-way "hat" switch, a programmable two-way switch, and six programmable push buttons—enough to keep your hands off the keyboard in mission-critical situations.

This analog device can program buttons to execute a single keystroke or a complete macro (like a message for network play). Additionally, the CH Throttle, like most products from CH, is sturdy and suited for more general purpose use (like space and action games) than offerings from the competition.

For those who need even more programmable functions, CH Products will be shipping the Pro Throttle early next year. The Pro Throttle will have 20 programmable functions, both analog and digital throttle modes, and is expected to allow you to reprogram the buttons of any joystick that you plug into it.

\$99.95, CH Products, (619) 598-2518.



CH THROTTLE

A Curse.

A Mad King.

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A Mystery That Spans Centuries Is About To Unfold.

Gabriel Knight must find the killer.

Before it finds him.

GABRIEL KNIGHT MYSTERY
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Jane Jensen, creator of the Gabriel Knight™ Mystery: Sins of The Fathers has a new work of masterpiece of suspense and intrigue. Gabriel Knight is commissioned to Munich to investigate a series of multiple murders thought to be the work of werewolves. The story unfolds over multiple C.E.s, more than a 1000, hyper-realistic backgrounds and several centuries. It features two separate story lines, a hauntingly beautiful score and a terrifying supernatural twist. For more information, call 1-800-757-7777 or see your local software dealer. Rest well before you call. It may be the last good night sleep you get.



SIERRA®

#9
100

ZIP DRIVE

The first thing you'll probably mutter to yourself when you open the package and see the compact purple plastic case is "cute." The Zip Drive is essentially a 100-megabyte floppy, using a modified version of **Imaging's** patented Bernoulli technol-

ogy. It's actually much faster than a floppy, running at about half the speed of modern hard disks. The disks even look like 3-inch floppies on steroids.

This is an amazingly simple device to use. Available in either SCSI or parallel port versions, it uses the same drivers and utilities for both versions. The SCSI version can also be used with a Macintosh. There is no power switch; simply plug it in, run the Guest driver program, insert the disk, and off you go. Having 100 megabytes of portable storage is amazingly liberating. The parallel version of the Zip drive, in particular, can easily attach to any PC; just carry along a floppy with the driver software. Now you can carry those big shareware games or other demos with you when you go to a friend's house.

\$199, Imaging,
(800) 697-8833.



ZIP DRIVE

#10
100

CD-FM

Okay, if your disk is like ours, there's an incredible clutter of

wires, cables, connectors and power cords lying in a tangled heap under it. Wouldn't it be great if you could remove even one set of wires?

H4S Technology's CD-FM is a twinkie-shaped, \$40 device that attaches to your sound card's output jack and transmits the sound on an FM frequency; it can also be used with portable CD-RDM drives and cassette players. Since it only

has about a 50-foot range, it won't interfere with your neighbors' radio reception. You can set the CD-FM to transmit on any legitimate frequency between 87.9 and 90.1 MHz. You then tune a nearby stereo receiver to the same frequency, and voila—sound card audio from your stereo speakers. This is worth checking out if you have a stereo near your computer, but not a lot of space for speakers or cabling. Citinoss are the audio fidelity from your home stereo speakers will blow away the cheesebox multimedia speakers that came with your sound card. But be sure not to set the same frequency as your significant other's favorite station, or you might treat them to *Citinos's* agonizing screams over the clock radio.

\$39.95, H4S Technology,
(415) 961-9114.



CD-FM

A LOOK INTO THE 72-HZ CRYSTAL BALL

Here's a brief sampling of some other game-related hardware products that will hit the shelves by or soon after this holiday season.

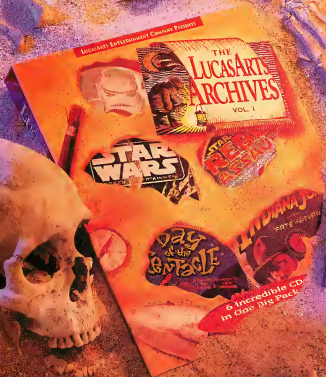
Keep your eyes out for the first wave of 3-D graphics adapters with offerings from **Diamond** (Evo!), **Creative Labs** (3-D Blaster), **Paradise** (Toshiba 3D), and **Matrox** (Millennium).

You'll want to listen for the new wavelable sound cards; coming from **Creative Labs** are **Plug 'n Play** versions of its popular sound cards such as the **AWE32**; **Dreid** has the **NiSonic PnP** plug and play wavelable sound card (with **Spatializer 3-D** audio); **MediaStar** will ship the **AudioMax Pro** wavelable sound card with **SRS 3-D** audio; and **Advanced Gravis** has a new **Windows 95** plug 'n play version of the **Ultimate**.

With game demos weighing in at up to 60 MB, you should look for the following storage solutions for stashing your holiday game booty: **Imaging's** **Jazz** drive, a removable hard disk with 1-gigabyte cartridges, and **ComByte's** **DoublePlay** tape drive with double-speed floppy drive—great for installing any games that still ship on 3.5-inch floppies. For these CD-RDM games, you might want to check out **Plexor's** low-cost, high-performance quad-speed CD-RDM, the **4Plus Plus**.

Finally, if you're out of control, reach for **CHI Products** new **F-16** line of programmable joysticks; **Trustmaster's** **Limbo Eoman F-16** FLCS joystick; **F2 Drive's** **Sistem**; and **Wizoo's** **Pinball Controller**; the **Advanced Gravis** **GRIP** joystick controller (enables more than two joysticks on one system); or **Infrared's** **Fuoco Force** joystick line.

DIRT CHEAP.



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VINCE MAGNOTTA

A veteran police detective operating on the fringes of the law, Detective Vince Magnotta leads the Ripper investigation and spars with Quinlan, the player's character. With a deadly temper and a secretive past, Magnotta becomes a suspect in the Ripper killings.



Starring
Christopher Walken
Karen Allen
Burgess Meredith
John Rhys-Davies

RIPPER

You're next.



HOLIDAY 100



FAMILY SOFTWARE

FREDDI FISH

Don't be surprised if this cartoonish game keeps you up long after the kids have gone to bed. In *Freddi Fish and the Case of the Missing Kelp Seeds*, someone has stolen Grandma Grouper's stash of kelp seeds, and the neighborhood food supply is running low. Freddi and her friend Luther swim around collecting objects to trade for clues that will bring them closer to finding the missing seeds. Along the way they meet several colorful characters who either aid or hinder their progress, including the Squidfather, who looks suspiciously like Marlon Brando, and a stingray who's willing to make deals in ex-

track of the porpoise of the quest.)

Freddi's underwater environment is colorfully portrayed in high-quality graphics that look better than most animated TV programs, and the low-key jazzy soundtrack is actually pleasant to listen to. Once the mystery is solved, kids may choose to play again with the clues randomly scattered in different places. The game allows for up to 12 saved game slots, which is great when multiple family members want to try their hands at the game. When you save, the game saves a thumbnail-size screen shot of where you are, in addition to letting you type in a name

by Kate Hedstrom

It seems that everyone is jumping on the entertainment bandwagon. As in the home video market a few years ago, this holiday season is sure to see store shelves jammed with all sorts of titles for the family computer. There are some great titles out there, but caution is in order. Too many software developers have the idea that games have to be labeled "educational" for parents to even consider pulling out their checkbooks. The result is every strange combination of perfectly good games with some kind of inappropriate and barely educational activity slapped on, or decent titles that stimulate the brain, but get mired down by a boring blast-'em-up game masquerading as entertainment. And there isn't much out there for older kids other than action games. We looked for games that won't insult anyone's intelligence, and that multiple family members can have some fun with.



change for clocks. A few people just need a helping hand—or fin, rather—which Freddi and Luther are more than willing to lend.

Every scene provides numerous clickable hot spots, and the number of places to visit encourages children to practice their map-drawing skills, in order to keep track of where they've been. There's a lot to do and see, and if you spend too much time wandering around clicking on things, you'll be gently reminded of the task at hand. (You wouldn't want kids to lose

or keyword, so even pre-readers should be able to figure out which game to restore.

If *Freddi Fish* has a weakness, it's the two unrelated games tucked within the main adventure. One is an exceedingly simple arcade game in which players must toss jellyfish into the mouths of advancing zombie-like turtles and fish, and the other is an uninspired and repetitious counting game. Ages 3-8.

\$39.95, Humongous Entertainment, 800-499-8386 or 205-486-1212.

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#2
100

SIMISLE: MISSIONS IN THE RAINFOREST

The most recent entry in the Sim-lineup puts players in charge of a scenic little tropical paradise with grand possibilities. Backed by a crack staff of scientists and specialists, you must preserve endangered species and develop tourism, all the while keeping the natives content and world opinion benign. Players may choose to fulfill a specific mission selected at the beginning of the game, or they can play in the classic "build 'til it gets boring" mode. The political nature of many of the missions—including scenarios that deal with the United Nations and drug lords—will make the game appealing to gamers tired of the pollution/population dilemmas. One scenario even has you hunting for UFOs.

The secret to success in any of the Sim games is learning to use the interface to get the latest news on how your little world is coming along, and Simisle provides an in-

depth tutorial to help you get used to the various charts, views, and game controls. The manual is detailed and well-written, with lots of useful reference information. The limited scope of an island scenario provides a distilled arena to explore the problems of balancing commerce and politics with environmental concerns, minus the endless variables of SimEarth.

\$39.95, Maxis, (800) 526-2947, (510) 933-5630.



SIMISLE

#3
100

ALIEN TALES

This title from Broderbund beams you to outer space to participate in an interstellar game show complete with smarmy host and big prizes. Your alien opponents each claim to have authored a classic children's novel, and it's your job to read excerpts from the chosen book and then answer enough questions about the book and its real author to prove your opponent wrong. An impressive selection of children's literature is represented in the program, ranging from old standards like *Treasure Island* to more recent works such as *Katch*. The program requires that players learn something about each book's author as well, and provides short biographical passages that are detailed and interesting. Children may either read the passages themselves, or the program will read aloud to them, highlighting each sentence as it is spoken.

Reading snippets of books on the computer

screen is no substitute for turning real pages, however, so it's advisable for children to pick up the actual book before playing the corresponding section of Alien Tales. Even if the child has only read the excerpts included in the program, this game is a good way for them to sample stories they may not have thought sounded interesting before. Ages 9-13.

\$45, Broderbund, (800) 521-6263, (415) 382-4700.



ALIEN TALES

#4
100

PUTT PUTT SAVES THE ZOO

The third installment of the popular Putt Putt series finds the little purple car anxious to locate six missing baby animals in time for the Cartown Zoo's grand opening. The animals are not difficult to locate, but each is stuck in some precarious situation that prevents him or her from returning to his or her distraught parents. Putt Putt must figure out how to help them using various objects collected in his travels around the zoo. As players wander around they can click on dozens of hot spots that reveal amusing animated sequences. Putt Putt can pick up a camera from the souvenir stand and take pictures around the zoo, which can be printed out (though Putt Putt's sense of the "Kodak Moment" is a little bizarre). Speakers located throughout the park impart facts about animals, but these are not necessary for solving the puzzles.

Regardless of whether children actually learn anything from Putt Putt, the game is great fun. It presents a decent challenge for younger chil-



PUTT PUTT

dren, as they must figure out which of the objects Putt Putt has collected will be useful in saving each baby animal. The graphics and sound are much-improved over previous Putt Putt adventures, and the program provides enough quirky humor to keep adults interested, too. Ages 3-8.

\$39.95, Humongous Entertainment, (800) 499-8386, (206) 485-1212.

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This "fifth generation" fielding simulation has additional play animations, baseball plays, and graphics realism, resulting in true-life baseball gameplay.

#5
HOT 100

BOBBY FISCHER TEACHES CHESS

One of the best things about a computer is that it never gets bored or tired of doing the same thing over and over. What more could

someone ask for in a chess teacher than infinite patience, coupled with a vast store of information on the game?

For anyone just learning chess, or for more experienced players who want to study a pro's moves, this title suits a wide range of playing levels. The documentation is concise and thorough, and includes a glossary of chess terms. Step-by-step lessons and 500 of Bobby Fischer's games for reference allow players to customize instruction to fit their own needs. The program also includes a flexible bookmark ability—invaluable for jumping from lessons to gameplay.

After finishing a lesson, fire up the Chess Engine to start the action. The Engine allows you to play a game from the beginning against the computer, or to set up the pieces in any legal situation to play out. In Demonstration mode, you can just set up the pieces and let the computer work it out by playing against itself. While other chess programs may have slicker graphics or a sharper AI, there simply isn't a better program for teaching the basics. A multimedia history of chess rounds out the program by providing some background and context.

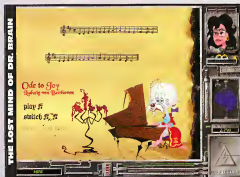
\$49.95, Mission Studios, (708) 991-0598.

#6
HOT 100

THE LOST MIND OF DR. BRAIN

Anyone who thinks they'd prefer to walk over hot coals rather than subject themselves to the deadly tedium of logic and intelligence puzzles hasn't met up with Dr. Brain. It seems that in his latest ill-advised experiment, the good doctor has drained his own smarts into the gray matter of his lab rat, Ralpheane. With the assistance of the lovely Dr. Elaine, you must solve all puzzles in ten separate areas to restore Dr. Brain to his former faculties.

Presented in a humorous and creative way, the puzzles range from programming a figure to move through a maze and pick up objects, to unscrambling stiffs of music to match a familiar melody, to the final puzzle where you must guide a marble safely home (harder than it sounds). Players may jump around from puzzle to puzzle, saving their progress as they go, and Dr. Elaine provides hints if asked. The puzzles are simple to learn, and three difficulty levels keep the challenges fresh. The digitized voices provide an endless supply of corny jokes, and if you pause too long, Dr. Brain will yell at you. Even the manual is an interesting read, providing background on



the Multiple Intelligences Theory around which the game is organized. Ages 12-adult.

\$49.95, Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707, (206) 649-9800.

COULD ZILLIONS OF DROOLING PYTHON ZEALOTS BE WRONG? ABSOLUTELY. SO, LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS INSTEAD.

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#7
HOT
100

MADLINE AND THE MAGNIFICENT PUPPET SHOW

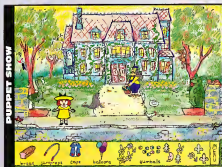
Many adults loved the Madeline books as children, and even now they don't need much of an excuse to watch the animated series on television. The bubbly little orphan now turns up in an adventure

game, one that also teaches a few words of French and Spanish.

Madeline and her friends want to stage a puppet show to save neighbor Messur Benet and his animals, but first she must find all the things she needs to put on the show. Gameplay is very similar to the Fozzie Fox and Purr Purr adventures, where hot spots set off quirky animations or reveal objects needed to get on with the game. When all the pieces are gathered, you participate in staging the show by assembling the puppets, painting the backdrop, and designing the invitations. Players direct the show by choosing a course of action for the puppets to follow at key decision points, thereby creating a different show each time the game is played.

Adventurers may also stop by the classroom, where Miss Clavel teaches French or Spanish through a series of concentration-type matching games. The program is gorgeous to look at, with graphics faithful to Ludwig Bemelmans' books, but the background music is tiny and annoying, even plinking away right over the music that accompanies animated sequences. Thankfully, it can be turned off. The cast from the television show supplies voices, with Christopher Plummer providing flawless narration.

\$39.95, Creative Wonders, (800) 543-9778, (415) 513-7555.

#8
HOT
100

ELROY GOES BUGZERK

The first entry in a new series of adventure games from **Headbane Interactive**, *Elroy Goes Bugzerk* introduces our hero and his hound dog Blue. They must capture a rare bug, the elusive Technioptera, in order to keep the nefarious Gordon Strugs from winning this year's Insectathlon.

Elroy's problems are compounded when his parents send him to stay with an uncle who lives on a farm, and chaos ensues when Blue eats a birthday cake meant for Elroy's aunt. Players must help Elroy and Blue bake a new cake and capture the bug in time for the contest. Along the way they'll pick up interesting facts about bugs, which must be used later to solve puzzles. These aren't just a dry collection of textbook jawners; either Elroy enlightens us, for instance, as to how a swarm of locusts once covered a 75-square-mile area in an inch of dung in a matter of hours.

The game suffers from a lack of interaction—players must watch several long animated sequences without manipulating the action at all—and some may be frustrated by the way a wrong decision will suddenly land them back at the beginning of the game. (Save often to avoid losing your hair out.) De-

spite these flaws, Elroy and Blue are likable characters that won't insult children or parents, and the story is excellent, with a sly, rapid-fire style reminiscent of Bullwinkle cartoons. Remarkable, too, is the sophisticated graphic style, which places retro-60s animation over sepia-toned photographic backgrounds. Ages 7-12.

\$49.95, Headbane Interactive, (800) 267-4709.





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#9
1995

HOW MANY BUGS IN A BOX?

David A. Carter's popular pop-up counting book comes to life on the computer, and as soon as those tiny fingers can press a mouse button, younger children will enjoy counting all those

big colorful friendly bugs. Players have the option of reading an animated version of the book, playing eight games that strengthen basic skills such as counting, reading and color-recognition, or hanging out in the Juice Bar.

Each section has a difficulty setting that can be raised as children master each level. The host bugs give lots of guidance and cheerful encouragement, and a clean, simple interface makes navigation very easy. Lots of perky songs and animations keep things jumping. Be warned, though, that the Juice Box in the Juice Bar plays songs over and over and over... Ages 3-6.

\$49.95, Simon & Schuster, (800) 223-2336, (201) 767-5000.

HOW MANY BUGS IN A BOX?

#10
1995

OZZIE'S WORLD

Remember those big, chunky activity books you had as a kid that kept you busy for hours when you were stuck in the house? *Ozzie's World* is a kind of animated activity book for your computer, providing a smorgasbord of activities for kids to explore ecological and environmental themes. Most of these are hands-on experiments that children need to carry out away from the computer. These range from very simple tasks, such as an

experiment where a rubber band stretched over the hand simulates a seal's flipper, to more involved activities, like throwing a party or building a tropical rainforest terrarium. Each of the experiments is detailed in the user's manual, so parents need not frantically take notes or run through the sequences again and again.

Games and activities are organized by theme in each of the areas of Ozzie's neighborhood: beach, garden, veterinarian's office, forest and bedroom. The games include jigsaw puzzles, pair-matching games, hidden picture puzzles, and relational scoring games. Though the interface is a bit cluttered, it encourages kids to explore by clicking around. Absolutely jam-packed with things to do, *Ozzie's World* should keep kids busy for quite a while. Ages 3-8.

\$39.95, Digital Pictures, (800) 775-4232, (918) 742-2022.

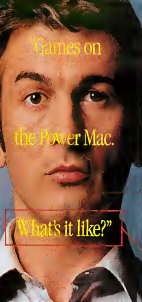


OZZIE'S WORLD

NEW FOR THE KIDS

There are a couple of other good picks coming out of Santa's workshop this winter. As any bookstore owner will tell you, teenagers love a good scare, so Sierra Online is releasing *SWIMS*, an adventure set in an abandoned museum, for the *Fear Street* crowd. Like the much-hyped *Pennsacowee*, emphasis is on the spooky story rather than puzzle-solving, but unlike that adult game, *SWIMS* allows for replayability by changing the puzzles once they are solved, and the first-person perspective adds to the chill factor by putting the player right in the story. Creepy visuals and haunting music complete the package for what looks to be good shivery fun.

If the idea of Junior toddling up to your beautiful new Pentium and putting his znieback-coated fingers all over that shiny mouse makes you cringe, Maxis is working on a new title that will let you breathe easier. *MOOM AND THE TROUBLE WITH GRASS* is a voice-controlled children's title that allows players to interact through a microphone. More storybook than game, the version we looked at did not truly allow players to make decisions for Marty; what a player says has little effect on Marty's course of action. Freed from the necessity to push a mouse button, or to recognize letters on a keyboard, toddlers will get a kick out of finally being able to use a computer like the big kids, even if only in a very limited way.



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*When comparing a Power Macintosh 9500/120 to a 100 MHz 486 PC, as was done in Computerworld (Jan 19, 1995). © 1995 Apple Computer, Inc. All rights reserved. Apple, the Apple logo, Macintosh and Power Macintosh are registered trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc. Mac, Pro and Mac mini are trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc. All other product names are trademarks of their respective companies. All featured computers are designed to be compatible with individual user hardware. In Canada, call 1-800-555-7777. In the U.S., call 1-800-555-7777.



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HOLIDAY 100



STOCKING STUFFERS

MICROSOFT WINDOWS 95

An operating system as a stocking-stuffer? Certainly, especially when it will avoid that sad, Christmas-morning realization of "batteries not included" when one of the gifts under the tree is a hot new game that requires Windows 95 to run.

If you're running a 486 with 8 MB or more, you'll find Win 95 useful right out of the box. It's packed with features that will help you when you're using your PC for the "serious" stuff—it's got Internet connectivity, a better user interface,

ing system—it's much more solid than Win 3.1. It's not as crash-proof as Windows NT, but try running DOOM II under NT. (It's like watching a silent movie—in slow motion.) Win 95 is the bridge that will take gamers and home users into the realm of 32-bit computing without forcing them to sacrifice performance or compatibility.

Of course, like many things you'll find under your tree this year, Win 95 has an element of



by Keith Hunter

There's more to life than computer games. At least, that's what someone told us once; we're still not sure about that. But in case you do spend some of your time hacking around with your computer, optimizing its performance, or gazing at full-motion video, we decided to take a look at some of the better products out there that aren't games. (Although if you tried to install Windows 95 over your old Win 3.1 setup, you might have gotten that "You're in a maze of twisty little passages, all alike" feeling that made you think you were in an adventure game all over again.)

and a set of utility applets that are much more useful than their Win 3.1 predecessors. More important than what's in the box, though, is the potential that it gives your PC. Win 95 games support AutoPlay, so installing a CD and running it is a simple matter of sliding it into the drive. The DirectX drivers in Microsoft's Game SDK promise games with amazingly fast graphics—faster than their DOS predecessors even—as well as improved digital sound, easy controller setup, and powerful networking capabilities. And perhaps the biggest paragon is the Win 95 memory architecture. Once you're running primarily Win 95 games, you'll no longer have to deal with multiple configurations and stacks of boot disks.

Although you may hesitate to upgrade until the first set of bug-fix patches ships, it turns out that Win 95 is a remarkably stable operat-

"some assembly required." It will run almost all your old Win 3.1 applications and Windows games with no problem, but running your DOS games is going to require you to set up properties dialog boxes for each game, or to configure your system so you can boot back into MS-DOS mode for playing games. This initial hassle should pass quickly, though, as more games are designed specifically for Win 95, or at least tested for compatibility with the new operating system.

If you plan to surf the Internet or if you're cramped for hard drive space, you might also check out the Plus! add-on, which adds DoubleSpace 3 disk compression, better TCP/IP Internet support, and loads of graphics, sounds, and pointers for your desktop.

\$209 (stand-alone), \$109 (upgrade), Microsoft, (206) 882-8080.

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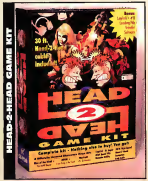
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#2
100

HEAD-2-HEAD GAME KIT

The guy in the next dorm room has been getting on your nerves, and you're all fired up for a DOOM showdown. Right at the moment of truth—when you are about to link up for your battle-royale, you realize that your cable's too short to reach through the communal bathroom to his machine. Check out FormGen's Head-2-Head Game Kit and you'll never be caught short again. The centerpiece of this Swiss army knife of multiplayer PC gaming is a 30-foot-long serial cable, which has both 25-pin and 9-pin connectors on each end for sure-fire adaptability. Head-2-Head also comes with a CD-ROM containing shareware versions of multiplayer favorites DOOM, Heretic, and The Ties, and Warcraft, as well as LurLin XL, a DOS and Windows-compatible high-speed file transfer utility. Whether you want to blow away the guy in the next cubicle in a DOOM death-

match or link your laptop to your PC for a game of Flexion Dual, this kit should get you connected. \$39.95, FormGen, (800) 263-2390, (602) 443-4109.



#3
100

CLEAN SWEEP 95

If your hard disk is packed to the gills with leftover remnants of long-deleted applications and you're running out of room, or if you just want to get that spreadsheet out of the way to play a few rounds of X-Com while the boss is out, then CleanSweep 95 is a must. CleanSweep 95 is a 32-bit uninstaller and system clean-up utility designed specifically for Windows 95. CleanSweep 95 enhances the Windows 95 Add/Remove function by allowing you to archive and back-up unneeded programs; you can later reactivate them with all custom settings intact. The program also lets you safely remove unused system files, fonts and programs, clearing up disk space and increasing performance.

If you upgraded your Win 3.1 system to Win 95 by installing over the old version, chances are you'll have lots of unnecessary files in your Windows directory hogging space; once you start replacing your 16-bit apps with 32-bit versions, this situation will get even worse. CleanSweep 95 will track down system files that are no longer being used, and it'll also hunt down duplicate files. You can remove these files on an individual basis, or compress them in an archive directory in case it turns out you need 'em later. One particularly neat feature is the ability to take an application and all its associated files and archive them in a form where they can be restored with all settings intact, either on the original machine or a new one; this feature could turn out useful, for instance, in moving games that install from a CD to your laptop.

\$29.95, Quarterdeck, (800) 683-6696



#4
100

TRICKS OF THE DOOM GURUS

Look on any game-related FTP site and you'll likely come across hundreds of levels for id Software's DOOM, DOOM II, and Raven Software's Heretic. id Software was gracious enough to allow and users to modify the level data (stored in a "wad" file) and distribute their own levels (called "Pwad," or Patch Wad files) for other gamers to enjoy.

While there are several CD-ROMs on the market that offer, in some cases, up to a thousand Pwad files for your devilish endeavors, Sams Publishing's The Doom Companion offers a CD-ROM full of Pwads, editors and utilities. Most importantly, it includes a huge 900-page *Tricks Of The DOOM Programming GURUS* book written by some of the programmers who actually created many of the most popular DOOM hacking utilities. Under their expert guidance, and with many sound and graphic resources that accompany this sacred tome of DOOM hacking, you'll be making your own custom levels from scratch in no time. At the very least you'll be able to expertly modify existing levels into variations on a theme. This book will save you the hours of downloading and obligatory poring over of README.TXT files and let you concentrate on the fun stuff.



Of all the utilities that ship on the The Doom Companion CD-ROM, we think you'll be especially amazed with the DOOM Construction Kit, a complete editing suite for DOOM, DOOM II, and Heretic. This is the perfect gift for anyone who likes to play DOOM.

\$39.95. For ordering information, call (800) 910-0999 and specify part number 0672308274.

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hands the carpal bones from the weight of your hand, and keeps your wrist in a neutral position to relieve pressure on the median nerve. The pad's durable nongelhyde material slides smoothly over desk and keyboard terrain. **Keyboards** make for a fool-proof gift idea and perfect desk accessory for frequent computer users: they're compatible with keyboard, trackball, mouse and tablet use, they augment the



KEYBOARDERS

hands more comfortable, at least one *COMed-ior* is never at his keyboard without the **Keyboards** on his wrists.

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longevity of your irreplaceable wrists, and they are the latest in hip office couture. Also, they will actually fit in a stocking. **Keyboards** come in five sizes (X-small to X-large) and a variety of solid colors and patterns.

\$19.95, MouseMitt International, (800) 489-6488, (408) 335-9599.

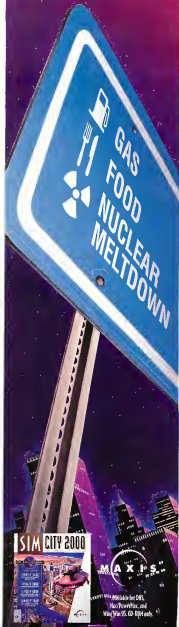
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STAR TREK OMNIPEDIA

The **OMNIPEDIA**, as the title suggests, is the quintessential *Star Trek* new-media reference tool. Hardcore Trekkies may sit glued to their screens for weeks, as this CO-ROM, based on Okuda and Sternbach's best-selling *Star Trek* encyclopedia and chronology books, boasts tons of info on everything from *Gems to Tibbles*, from Harry Medd to Q.

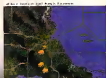
The **OMNIPEDIA's** database includes 6,000 in-

dexed, cross-referenced entries, 2,000 color photos and illustrations, and over 100 Quicktime movies. Voice-recognition lets you access the **OMNIPEDIA** database through 600 spoken-word commands. The **OMNIPEDIA** covers the original series in its entirety, as well as current information on *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine* and six of the Paramount feature films. (An update is planned that will feature *Generations* and *Nogger*.) You can browse the **OMNIPEDIA** through dif-





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ferent database search engine modes to find information sorted under Topic, Chronology, Resource, and Episode and Encyclopedia sections. Individual entries also feature hypertext-linking

for immediate cross-reference.

Mejel Barrett, the official voice for all Federation computer systems, is the featured Overton voice, and Mark Lenard (who played Sarek,

Spock's father) narrates five historical multimedia overview sections. Simon & Schuster plans on releasing periodic updates to keep the OMEDIA's information current.

\$69.95, Simon & Schuster Interactive, (800) 910-0099, (212) 698-7000.



#7 THE IMPROV PRESENTS WINDOWS 95 FOR THE TECHNICALLY CHALLENGED

The perfect choice for computer novices who would rather keep Windows 95 in the box than, as they say, RTFM. The clever Parsons interactive CD-ROM tutorial breaks down Win 95 basics into 17 easy lessons taught by 16 different improv comic characters. The "Warm-Up" section teaches basic computer skills such

and property streets. Lesson titles such as "How to Achieve the Perfect State of Windows with Guru Ron Gos" and "Using Windows Help...as a Flotation Device" are typical of The Improv's appealing, if corny, style of presentation. The non-intimidating interface includes an easy-to-use glossary, index, and bookmark system that make browsing through different lessons and locating a subject convenient and quick. Other perks include bundled AOL starter software, 95 tips for Win 95 from the author of *Voodoo Windows*, and on-line links that wind users can use to get additional information.

Like the comedy traffic school's popular in California, The Improv recognizes that learning can sometimes be a painful and tedious experience, and that comedy is an effective medium for making



as cut and paste and back-up methods, while the "Visual Road" section provides Windows 95 features like the Explorer, Network Neighborhood,

and all more available.

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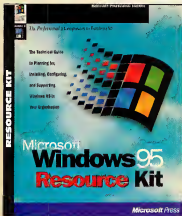
MICROSOFT WINDOWS 95 RESOURCE KIT

The Win 95 Bible, bar-none. If you are an infomaniac who needs to know the ins and outs of your new operating system, this dictionary-size tome is the most preeminent source of information for all

resourcés for support pros. Although Microsoft bills this as the resource guide for professional use, gamers and home users will find it indispensable for trouble-shooting and tweaking the home system for maximum performance. If you're the local guru that all your friends come to when they have a computer problem, or if you just want to learn more about the workings of Win 95 than is included in the skimpy booklet that ships with the disk, you'll find this tome invaluable.

The Resource Kit also comes with three floppy utility disks containing an online version of The Resource Kit in Help file format and some of the utilities and network tools included on the CD-ROM version of Win 95. No matter what your Win 95 question is, you'll be able to find the answer in here.

\$49.95, Microsoft Press, 800-MSPRESS.



that is Win 95. Microsoft Press collaborated with the Win 95 development team to design The Microsoft Windows 95 Resource Kit as a technical

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THE BEERHUNTER

Does that row of 30 looming taps get you flustered when you step up to order a cold one? Now there's a CD-ROM reference tool to assist you in your quest to figure out the difference between a dark wheat and a pilsner. The Beerhunter will help you bone-up on your brew knowledge so that you're better prepared to handle the American beer renaissance. The Beerhunter shares the knowledge of celebrated brau-meister Michael Jackson (no, not that Michael Jackson)

to help guide you in the search for the perfect brew. You can learn what Jackson thinks of your favorite beer, as well as his list of the top 24 beers and ales in America.

The Beerhunter will help you make sense of the recent rise of the now-ubiquitous micro-brewery, detailing brews by history, region, style, fermentation, color and taste. You can also learn the art of home brewing, with tips on ingredients, equipment and procedures. The Resource section lists up-to-date information



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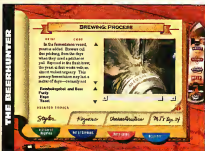
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The definitive guide to computer gaming with the accuracy of a laser and the punch of a million-pound pile-driver. A hefty digest written and edited by game players who prefer writing for an intelligent, discriminating reader. The only magazine that reviews and rates games when they are finished, not while still in development, and that evaluates games based on gameplay, not just graphics.

In addition to Sneak Previews and Reviews, *Computer Gaming World* offers strategy articles or how to win, technical advice and information for getting the most from your PC; feature articles on sound cards, video cards, joysticks and other neat things; game news; game cheats, the Top 100 poll of the best plays in gaming (rated by readers); insight; analysis; and a bewildering cascade of advertisements.

The magazine does take some time to read and digest. And there is the annoyance of all those cards that fall around your feet at the magazine rack. But if you are a serious gamer who needs a trustworthy resource for gaming information, a novice looking for reliable information to help you save money, or if you're just shopping for a gift for the gamer player in your life, this is it.

Oh, and of course there's always the shameless self-promotion that we indulge in once a year in the Holiday Buyer's Guide.

\$4.95 each, 12 for \$27.94, Ziff-Davis, (300) 665-8930.



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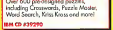
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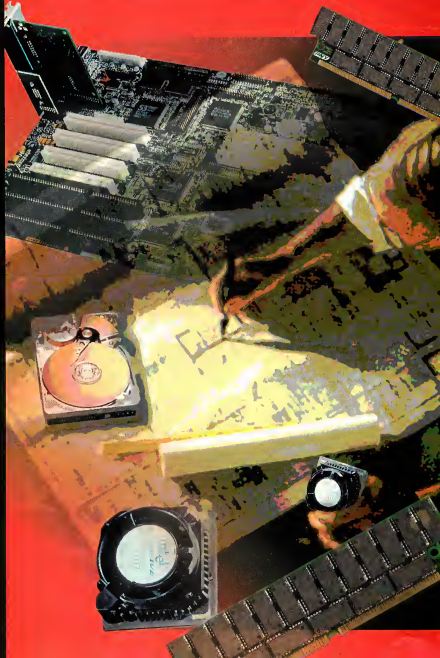
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The Upgrade Strategy That's Right For You

Whether you have an old war-horse PC or a hot showroom-stock Pentium, you can squeeze more performance out of it with some key upgrades. Loyd Case explains the issues related to each major component, to help give you the Big Picture before you start buying the parts.

by Loyd Case

When Falcon 3.0 arrived on the scene, most game players were shocked to discover that the game wouldn't perform well unless they had a 33-megahertz 386.

One of Falcon's modes even used a floating point co-processor. Falcon 3.0 also consumed a then-massive 10+ megabytes of disk space. That was in 1991. Since then, the average system requirement for computer games has been ratcheting

up steadily. Until recently, the rate of change has been somewhat predictable, but in the last few months, large numbers of games have shipped that have seemingly staggering system requirements. There are some games today that require 16 megabytes of RAM to run at high resolution, and others that will gladly eat up all the CPU cycles a 133-MHz Pentium can throw at it and then grab you by the throat and demand more.

This has left many gamers with the dilemma of upgrading. Do I go out and buy a new system? Will more memory be enough? Just how much can I get for my money? Some gamers no doubt

believe that a PC is a black hole on your desk into which you throw money.

Nonetheless, there are strategies you can pursue to upgrade your system. Your strategy for upgrading depends a lot on what equipment you have. If your PC is an old 386, your best bet is to throw it out and buy a new system. On the other hand, you may have a fairly new Pentium that doesn't offer quite the performance you expected. First, we'll look at three "typical" systems, and suggest upgrade strategies for each. Then we'll look closer at the components and discuss performance issues in more detail.

THE MODEL Y

Okay, so you have a 386 or old 486 system. If you're lucky, you've got a VESA local bus graphics card. Your 486 probably runs at 33 MHz, maybe 66. It's likely you've got an IDE hard disk and 4 to 8 megabytes of RAM in 30-pin SIMMs.

The best thing to do is buy a new system. You can keep the old system for multi-player games, for your kids, or sell it off (although don't expect much in the way of resale value.) If you're budget constrained, we'd suggest a short-term strategy of upgrading to a faster CPU, if your system can handle it. If there's an overdrive socket, you can add a faster 486, such as a 100 MHz DX4. If you have a P24T (Pentium Overdrive) socket (look for an empty row of holes encircling your 486 chip), then you can add a Pentium overdrive. The faster CPU will run most current games adequately, although you might need to turn the detail level down. In other words, if you have a 386 or slow 486 with slow parts, stop and save your money until you can get a whole new system.

THE FAMILY CAR

Let's say you have a fast 100 MHz 486 or a midrange Pentium, say a 75 MHz system. The trick here is to take an inventory of the capabilities of the different components of the system. Do you have a slow graphics card? What kind of hard disk does it have? How much memory?

The best short-term trick is to add more memory, particularly if you have 8 megabytes or less. Adding RAM to get to 16 megabytes is about the best performance kicker you can get in the short term. Next, look at your graphics card—#1 if it's a slow performer, move up to a faster card. Third comes mass storage—a fast hard disk, then a quad-speed CD-ROM drive or better.

One print about the newer Pentium systems is that the motherboard is very likely capable of handling multiple clock rates. If you're running a 75 MHz Pentium and you feel comfortable popping open the hood, or know somebody who can,

then you can buy a faster processor. Most 75 MHz-capable systems can handle at least 100 MHz chips, and many can handle 120 or 133 MHz Pentiums.

If you have one of the newer, high-speed 486 systems, then there's still hope. It's highly likely that a newer 486, say a 100 MHz DX4 system, has some pretty good components, 72-pin SIMM memory and PCI graphics. In that case, you can go to your local clone shop and have them swap the motherboard for a fast Pentium board. If you want to do this, don't get anything less than a 90 MHz Pentium, or you might not see much in the way of performance improvement. If you're inclined, you can do the swap



INTEL PENTIUM OVERDRIVE PROCESSOR

yourself (see this month's "Under the Hood" on page 422).

THE SHOWROOM STOCK

Okay, so you've dropped three or four grand on the hottest retail rig you can find from Dell, HP, Micron or any of a host of vendors. What's next?

Most of the high-end systems have some minor flaws. It might be the graphics card, it could be the amount of memory, or the monitor. Often, the sound card is problematic. If you're shopping for a system like this, most of the usual order

houses will let you change the configuration a bit, but only if they carry an item in stock. If you buy a pre-built system at a retail store like Circuit City, you're out of luck—you'll just have to upgrade later.

Don't underrate the local clone vendor—they can usually build you a system to your specifications, but it will be more expensive than an off-the-shelf system.

SUM OF ITS PARTS

So you're ready to upgrade. Where do you start, and what's the highest-priority replacement? Let's take a look at the various pieces to the puzzle, discuss what they each do, and give you some tips on what you should look for in performance upgrades.

THE PROCESSOR

The microprocessor in that box on the desk is the brains of the system. The best set of peripherals in the world won't make up for a lack of CPU horsepower. As recently as 15 months ago, the choices were fairly simple: do you get a 486 or a Pentium? Pentium systems were pretty pricey, and games hadn't gotten to the point where they would overwhelm a 486, so a lot of people opted for a fast 486, usually running at 66 megahertz.

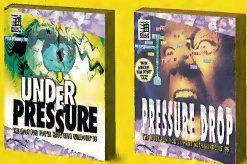
Now Pentium prices are dropping faster than the stock market in 1929, and the number of different Pentium variants is staggering. You can now buy Pentium systems that run at six different speeds: 60, 75, 90, 100 and 133 megahertz. Soon, Intel will be shipping 150 and 166 megahertz variants, but they'll likely be dropping the 60 and 90 megahertz chips.

On top of that, there are a variety of 486s out there. There's still the venerable 486-66, now the bottom of the barrel in performance. A lot of today's games specify the 486-66 as a minimum requirement to run the game. In addition, there's the DX4 75 megahertz (although you almost never see these in desktop systems—they appear mostly in portables) and DX4 100 megahertz 486s. Now add into the mix the Overdrive chips, which include DX/4s and Pentium Overdrives. These are chips that plug into a special

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socket in your computer and effectively replace the existing CPU.

There are also Intel alternatives. Cyrix makes a line of 486 compatible chips, but they lack a floating point co-processor (see below), although you can add one externally. Additionally, their performance hasn't been as good as the equivalent Intel chip. Some software developers have reported minor incompatibilities.

AMD makes a line of 486 chips as well—these are much closer to the Intel 486 in performance and compatibility. AMD ships 66 and 80 megahertz DX/2 variants, as well as 100 and 120 megahertz DX/4. (The "DX/2" and "DX/4" refers to the internal speed of the processor. A DX/2 always runs at twice the speed of the external clock; for example, a 66 MHz will talk to the outside world at 33 MHz. The DX/4 nomenclature is more confusing; suffice it to say, it runs faster than the DX/2.)

Then there are the Pentium clones. The only one actually on the market is the NexGen Nx586. There have been reported compatibility problems with some games, and the Nx586 doesn't have the juice of the equivalent Pentium—and it doesn't have floating point.

This brings up an interesting question: what good is floating point hardware? The floating point co-processor is the part of the micro-processor that deals with fractional numbers, such as 3.142. A CPU without floating point acceleration can do floating point, but very slowly. Still, does it matter with games?

To date, only a few games use floating point. However, Intel has stated flatly that all future versions of the Pentium and beyond will have floating point hardware, so it's possible that future games might use the floating point hardware, particularly games like flight simulations.

THE MOTHERBOARD

The main system board in your PC is usually

called the motherboard, but you'll also see references to "mainboard" occasionally. This board contains all the support circuitry necessary to have a working system. Some motherboards even have graphics and sound hardware right on them.

Unless you're technically inclined, you'll only see a motherboard when you pop the case open to install a memory, a graphics card or maybe a hard disk. Still, it behooves you to know a bit about what's out there, only because the ads for systems are designed to confuse people (or so it seems.)

One issue to be particularly wary of these days is cache memory. Cache memory is a small amount of very fast memory, ranging from 64 KB to 512 KB, that sits between the CPU and normal RAM. The RAM in your computer runs at a much slower speed than your microprocessor; cache RAM can keep up with the processor, so

data sitting in

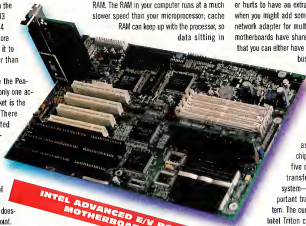
presence of a local bus. Most systems today have some form of local bus. There are two main types, VESA local bus (usually abbreviated VLB) and the Intel-designed PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) bus. The safe bet today, even in 486s, is the PCI bus. There are a few systems that have both PCI and VLB slots; avoid these if possible. Because of the compromises inherent in trying to support two different local bus architectures, performance suffers.

Also, be sure that there are at least three ISA (Industry Standard Architecture) slots on the bus, which is also called the PC-AT bus by old-timers. Why at least three? You need one slot for a sound card, one slot for a speed-compensated joystick card and one for an internal modem. While you might have an external modem, it never hurts to have an extra slot; you never know when you might add something else, such as a network adapter for multi-player games. Some motherboards have shared slots, which means that you can either have an ISA board or a local bus board in a given location, but not both.

The next piece of the motherboard is the core logic chipset, usually just referred to as the chipset. The chipset consists of two to five chips that handle the transfer of data within the system—these are the all important traffic cops of your system. The current hot chipset is the Intel Triton chipset; another good choice is the SIS chipset used on some Pentium motherboards.

Most of the newer motherboards have built-in I/O (input/output), usually including at least one floppy connector, two serial ports and one parallel port. These often have a pair of IDE connectors, at least one of which is a PCI enhanced IDE port (EIDE) for hard disks, with the other available for IDE CD-ROM and tape drives. This feature is a real slot-saver, but if the experience of actually connecting the cables can be nerve-wracking if you've never done it before.

Finally, we'd recommend avoiding on-board graphics and sound. These technologies are still changing rapidly, and almost anything that shows up on a motherboard is obsolete by the



that the cache can be accessed much more quickly. The presence of cache has a tremendous effect on system performance. Lack of cache memory could severely affect the frame rate of most action games and sims, and even have a noticeable effect on other types of games. The problem is that there's a shortage of cache memory, so many vendors are leaving out the cache on the less expensive systems. Always specify cache memory in any system you buy.

Another important piece of the puzzle is the interface type. In every system there is a series of slots to plug in various cards, such as graphics adapters. One of the keys to a fast system is the

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time it ships. Although they can usually be disabled if you want to add newer cards, why incur the expense?

To learn more about the components and inner workings of a motherboard, see this month's "Fix, Bugs 'n' Rock & Roll" on page 392.

MEMORY

Memory used to be simple: just add more, please. Unfortunately, while the price of every other PC peripheral or component has been falling fast, memory prices have actually increased a bit. There is currently a worldwide shortage of memory that will probably last well into 1995.

In addition to the expense, there are now two kinds of memory: regular DRAM (Dynamic Random Access Memory) and EDO (Extended Data Out) RAM. EDO memory is slightly faster, but also slightly more expensive. In addition, the system must specifically be able to support EDO memory, and only the latest systems do so. Also important is the memory speed. At a minimum, specify 70-nanosecond memory, which is the minimum requirement for most systems these days.

Then there's the issue of the type of SIMM (Single In-Line Memory Module). The SIMM is a tiny printed circuit board which holds the RAM chips. There are currently two types of SIMMs in common usage: 30-pin SIMMs, usually found in 486 systems, and 72-pin SIMMs, found in newer 486 and all Pentium systems. You typically need four identical 30-pin SIMMs before you can install them in a 486, or a single 72-pin SIMM. Since the data bus is twice as wide in a Pentium system, you need to buy a pair of 72-pin SIMMs at a time.

The different SIMM types create a real problem if you're moving from an older 486 to a Pentium system. Suddenly, your old memory is useless. Luckily, market forces have been at work, and there are now a number of companies that will take older memory as a trade-in on newer memory. You lose some money in the process, but if you're careful, it's really a minimal loss.

Looming on the horizon is the DIMM (Dual In-

line Memory Module), commonly used in workstations and the newer Power Macintosh systems. There aren't any PCs that use DIMMs currently, but that will likely change because of the convenience factor: you'll be able to add a single DIMM to a Pentium sys-

tem to upgrade memory, instead of a pair of modules.

There's one last issue:

If you are contemplating a motherboard that uses Intel's Triton chipset, consider buying 32-bit, non-parity SIMMs. Traditionally, PCs have used 36-bit SIMMs, which access memory in 9-bit wide chunks. The ninth bit was used for parity checking, which is a method of detecting a memory error. The Triton chipset doesn't support parity checking, so you can save yourself a few bucks by buying 32-bit SIMMs instead. If the clerk at your local computer store or catalog outlet is confused, tell them you want 72-pin SIMMs for the Macintosh.

In a nutshell, memory can be somewhat confusing, but the rule of thumb is to buy as much as you can afford. If you're running Windows 95, get at least 16 megabytes (your wallet will scream in pain, but your computer will thank you).

MASS STORAGE

Mass storage encompasses a variety of ways of what's euphemistically termed "persistent storage." Here, we'll focus on the two areas that have the most impact on game performance: hard disks and CD-ROM drives. First, there's the question of the drive interface. Check out the accompanying sidebar to see whether IDE or SCSI is the interface for you.

HARD DISKS

The design and manufacture of hard disks is an arcane physical art, even more so than chip design. Hard disk designers live in a world of magnetic domains, flying heads and rotation speeds. One key performance spec out of which means the entire hard disk performance suffers.

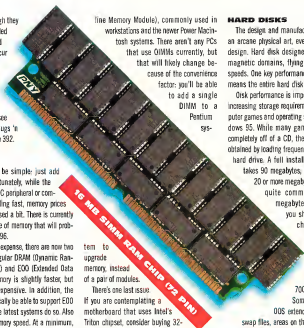
Disk performance is important because of the increasing storage requirements of modern computer games and operating systems such as Windows 95. While many games allow you to run completely off of a CD, the best performance is obtained by loading frequently-used files onto the hard drive. A full install of *Across the River* takes 90 megabytes; games which require 20 or more megabytes of disk space are quite common. With cost per megabyte at an all-time low, you should expect to purchase a 1.6 gigabyte hard disk such as the Western Digital Caviar AC31600 or the Maxtor Durango 7000 for under \$500.

Some games which use DOS extender technology create swap files, areas on the hard disk the game uses to store temporary data. The difference in perception of game speed in these games can vary radically between systems which are identical except for hard disk performance.

What are some of the key performance parameters to look for? The list can be pretty long, but there are a few key ones: access time, rotational speed, data density, cache size and interface type.

Access time (also referred to as average access time or occasionally, average seek time) is simply the time it takes the drive head to move from one part of the disk to another. Since hard disk heads are mechanical devices, there's always a delay as the head is moved to a different part of the disk. Access time is usually quoted in milliseconds. A few years ago, this performance spec was abused by some drive makers, but these days it's become fairly standardized. Look for access times faster than 12 milliseconds for good performance. High-performance drives have access times lower than nine milliseconds.

Rotational speed is simply how fast the disk spins, in revolutions per minute (RPM). This actually varies all over the map, ranging from 3600 RPM to 7200 RPM. You'll see drives with interme-



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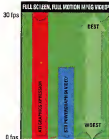


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drive speeds: 4500 and 5400 RPM are typical. You might think the faster the rotational velocity, the faster data can be streamed off the disk. To a degree, that's true, but

another performance spec is related to rotation speed: data density. This is usually stated as track density, in tracks per inch or recording density (bits per inch). This is a pretty arcane parameter, but a good rule of thumb is the fewer the platters, the higher the data density.

Data density is important because the more densely packed the bits, the faster the disk can be read at a given speed. Thus, if all other parameters are equal, a disk with fewer platters will move data off the disk faster. (The current champion in this category, by the way, is IBM's Ultrastar series, which packs two gigabytes of data into two platters; expect to pay a serious price premium, however.)

Cache size, also referred to as buffer size, is another important parameter. Within limits, the larger the cache, the better, although for most desktop PC systems, the point of diminishing returns occurs at around one megabyte; very few PC drives have buffers greater than 512 KB. Some disk drives load up their onboard control programs into part of the buffer, effectively reducing the real size of the cache. (This onboard cache is different from an operating system disk cache, such as Microsoft's Smartdrive. For one thing, it operates at the speed of the hard disk; there's no computer between the disk and the cache. For another, it's always there, even when Smartdrive is off.) The faster drives have cache sizes of at least 128 KB.

Finally, you should consider what interface type (SCSI v. EIDE) to get (see sidebar).

CD-ROM DRIVES

What about CD-ROM performance? This is a little tricky, because CD-ROM drives behave a little differently than hard disks. For example, data density is fixed. There are other important

parameters, such as CPU utilization, that are almost never quoted.



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Until recently, access time wasn't considered to be too significant. Since the MPC level 2 specification called for an average seek time of less than 400 milliseconds, most CD drives would simply quote "meets MPC level 2." Average access time in CD drives is an underrated parameter. Look for access times under 250 milliseconds. Some fast SCSI CD-ROM drives have access times under 150 milliseconds.

There's a lot of hype about fast rotation speeds, i.e., "quad speed," "six speed," and most recently "eight speed" drives have hit the market.

NEC MULTISPIN 6X CD-ROM



The problem is that this doesn't always have the impact you might expect. For example, a lot of the digital video embedded in some computer games are tuned to stream off the disk at 300 kilobytes per second. This means your quad speed drive is behaving like a double speed drive. Still, more games are taking fast CD drives into account, and it's always great to see

how quickly a big install can go on a fast CD drive like the Plextor 6 Plus or the NEC Multispin 6x.

A more useful parameter is CPU utilization. Take quad-speed drives, for example. Quad speed drives, at 100% CPU utilization, will all pretty much behave the same—they'll transfer data at their maximum speed of around 600 kilobytes per second. However, if the CPU is only 40% used for CD transfers, the data rate varies quite a bit from drive to drive, and is always less than the maximum 600 KB per second. This means that if your game streams data off the CD while you're playing, the CPU utilization will have an impact on how fast the data is loaded.

GRAPHICS ADAPTERS

The final puzzle piece in our performance conundrum is graphics performance. DOS games are still king, so you want to have the fastest DOS performance you can get. It's smart, though, to plan for the Windows 95 future, so good Windows performance is important. These days, you can have both, so the picture looks pretty good here.

(For the latest information on graphics controller performance, check out CGW's October issue, or see the results on the Computer Gaming World web page,

<http://www.cd.com/~gaming/>.)

What about graphics memory? There's a lot of conflict-

ing information thrown around about VRAM vs. DRAM (and now, WRAM). VRAM is dual ported, meaning it can read in graphics data and send it out simultaneously. This actually has a minimal impact in DOS performance. WRAM (Window RAM) is similar to VRAM but cheaper. VRAM does have an impact on programs with special drivers—such as Windows

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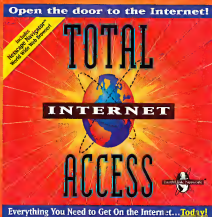
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MATROX MILLENNIUM PCI GRAPHIC ADAPTER

or DS/2.

Our advice: get one of the fast DOS performers, but also look for good Windows performance. If you can afford it, get two megabytes of graphics memory; it's not really used for games currently, but this will change soon.

What about 3-D? There's been a lot of hype about 3-D accelerators lately. Accelerated 3-D graphics is the holy grail of graphics performance, and is a very fast moving target. Companies shipping 3-D accelerators include Diamond, Matrox and Creative Labs. However, there are very few games which support 3-D acceleration currently, and the state of the art is shifting so quickly that we'd suggest waiting, unless the card in question fills the bill in other ways (such as fast DOS and Windows performance.)

Finally, make sure your monitor and graphics card combo can handle a high refresh rate—70 Hz is the absolute minimum. Your eyes will be grateful. We'd also recommend getting a monitor no smaller than 15 inches (as measured diagonally); 17-inch monitors are starting to be available for less

than \$700 with a small dot pitch. Dot pitch refers to the size of the phosphor dot as painted by the electron gun inside the picture tube. There are a lot of arcane monitor specifications, but dot pitch and refresh rates are the two key ones. You should avoid buying any monitor you haven't seen.

SOUND AND COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

Most game players already have sound cards, but if you've got an older card, such as the Sound Blaster Pro, you might look at the newer wavetable-capable sound cards. Some, such as the Turtle Beach Tropez and

wavetable built-in. Others, such as the Sound Blaster 16 Value Edition have a connector for a wavetable daughterboard. Moving up to a sound card capable of 16-bit digital audio is a good idea at any rate, because more games are supporting 16-bit stereo sound.

If you're interested in multi-player gaming, a good modem is important. Look for 28.8 KModem, V.34 modems—they're under \$200 on the street and getting cheaper. The next new thing is DSVD (Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data) modems, which allow you to talk to your gaming partner while connected via modem. (This is not to be confused with VoiceView modems, which allow you to alternate between voice and data.)

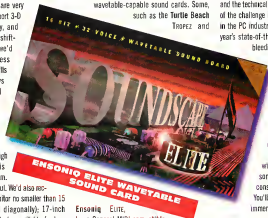
If you have an external modem, or connect two computers via a head-to-head serial cable, make sure your system has a 16550 UART. This arcane term refers to a type of serial controller chip that has a small buffer and can transfer data more efficiently than older serial ports.

Finally, for the ultimate in multi-player games, add in a network adapter. There are many of these, and most are at least adequate for gaming. If you and your buddies get together for network games, just make sure you all have the same type of network card. Ethernet combo cards, capable of handling both twisted pair and coax cables, can be found for as little as \$75.

THE WHOLE PICTURE

Upgrading a PC can be a real challenge. Part of the challenge is technical—learning the lingo and the technical issues will take some time. Part of the challenge is the incredible rate of change in the PC industry and the game business. Last year's state-of-the-art PC chokes on this year's bleeding-edge game. It's worthwhile subscribing to one or two general purpose-computer magazines to begin the learning process. There are a lot of good books, too. And don't forget your local expert—usually they love to share their knowledge and opinions.

But it is possible to keep up with the pace, and within a reasonable budget, if you develop a consistent strategy for upgrades. You'll be rewarded by richer and more immersive gaming experiences. ☺



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Interface Wars: IDE VS SCSI

Other than a few rare portable devices that attach to the parallel port, most storage devices use either an IDE or SCSI interface. Which is best for your application?

IDE is the easiest to set up and configure. Until recently, IDE drives have been limited to 528 megabytes, and you could only have two total drives on a system. The newer Enhanced IDE (EIDE) spec has pushed the limit up to four drives of up to 8.4 gigabytes each; conversely, you can attach CD-ROM drives and tape drives to EIDE interfaces. The interface is much faster than the old IDE as well, supporting transfer rates in excess of 16 megabytes per second. Finally, EIDE is inexpensive; most newer systems have PCI bus EIDE controllers built into the motherboard, and EIDE drives are less expensive than their SCSI counterparts.

One important parameter when considering EIDE drives is the data transfer mode. Most newer drives support mode 3 PIO (programmed IO) or mode 4 PD transfers. Mode 3 has an upper limit of around 13 megabytes per second, while mode 4 allows transfers of greater than 16 megabytes per second.

Still, SCSI is the performance leader. SCSI, which stands for Small Computer Systems In-

terface, allows for the connection of up to seven devices for standard SCSI 2 interfaces, including scanners,

tape drives,

disk drives and even the oddball printer or two. It's also much easier to connect external devices to a SCSI chain, which is quite useful if you're limited by the number of drive bays in your computer case.

Although SCSI has come a long way, it's still harder to configure. With EIDE drives, you only have to worry about which drive is the master and which one the slave. With SCSI, you have up to seven IDs to set, as well as having to worry about terminating the SCSI chain. (Termination identifies the ends of the SCSI chain of peripherals.)

You can add multiple SCSI controllers to a system, as long as you have free slots and IRQs.

What about performance? SCSI 2 can handle 10 megabytes per second, while the more expensive wide SCSI variant can move data at 20 megabytes per second. SCSI is a better solution for multi-tasking, making it a more efficient solution for Windows 95. The newly emerging ultra SCSI standard can handle 40 megabytes per second.

Note, though, that SCSI performance does come at a price premium. You usually need to add a SCSI host adapter to your system, and SCSI drives cost more than the same drive with an EIDE interface. Finally, the fastest SCSI hard disks and CD drives are typically faster than the fastest EIDE drives. —Lloyd Case



tape drives, disk drives and even the oddball printer or two. It's also much easier to connect external devices to a SCSI chain, which is quite useful if you're limited by the number of drive

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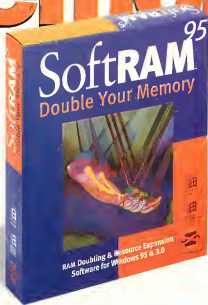
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Head Games

A Head-To-Head Comparison Of The Virtual IO i-Glasses vs. Forte's VFX-1

by Loyd Case

You stick your head around the corner, then jerk it back as a tracer passes within inches of your face. You drop to a crouch and click the safety of the smartgun off. After a moment, you pop around the corner in a crouch, firing measured, three-round bursts into the packed hove of mutants. The crosshair in your targeting monacle snaps from target to target. You sense, rather than feel, hits from a couple of slugs. But your kevlar vest soaks up the impact. After several frantic moments, the last of the enemies goes down. You breathe a sigh of relief, safe the smartgun and reach up to remove your helmet.

After blinking for a moment, reality sets in and you find yourself staring at the monitor.

Sound too good to be true? Well, it is, but an experience such as the one described here is getting closer. Only a scant three years ago, a virtual reality (VR) helmet with very limited color depth and resolution cost thousands of dollars—and that didn't include the **Silicon Graphics** workstation. Now there are two competitors shipping VR gear for just under a thousand dollars that work on a home PC. That's still quite a pocketful of loose change, though. Are they worth it? This month, we'll take a look at the VFX-1 helmet from **Forte Technologies** and the i-Glasses from **Virtual IO (VIO)**.

THE VIO I-GLASSES

At first blush, the i-Glasses appear to be industrial strength welding goggles. A closer look reveals some interesting details. The i-Glasses don't stay on like normal glasses, despite the hefty-looking earpieces. Instead, you need a strap around the back of your head to support the set of color, backlit, liquid-crystal displays. There are roughly 180,000 pixels in each eyepiece. This is slightly more than half the number of pixels used in the 640x480 display of Super VGA games, but more than twice the 320x200 resolutions of most VGA games. However, the number is a bit deceptive, be-



cause the display is interlaced. Ultimately, the display appears to be a pixelated 320x200.

Why is the display interlaced? This is because the i-Glasses were specifically designed to work with television displays. Television is interlaced, meaning that every other line of the display is painted during each refresh cycle—first the even ones, then the odd-numbered lines. This gives the product a somewhat broader appeal than something that's strictly designed to work with a PC. For example, you could play a console game attached to your TV with the i-Glasses. However, because of the interlaced nature of the display, normal on-screen text is impossible to read. One interesting feature is the implementation of 3-D technology, enabling you to watch 3-D enhanced movies (remember those flimsy red/blue glasses?) A few games, such as *Descent* and *Magic Carpet*, use this form of 3-D as well.

OCTOPUS TIME

Setup is somewhat complicated. Since the i-Glasses require an NTSC television signal, a scan converter needs to be plugged in between your monitor and the VGA graphics card. Virtual IO supplies all the cables and connectors needed, and the documentation is clear. It comes with two small power bricks: one to power the unit when the scan converter is used, the other for those occasions when you might watch television, and hence don't require the scan converter or the head tracker.

In addition to the VGA cable and the power cord, the unit needs an

audio cable, so sound can be fed to the headphones from your sound card, and an optional microphone cable. Finally, there's a nine-pin serial cable used to feed data from the head tracker to the computer, which necessitates an available COM port on your computer.

A HEADY EXPERIENCE

The head tracker is the key to any VR device. It's the head tracker that detects the motion of your head and feeds signals to the game to translate your





VIRTUALLY WEIGHTLESS While big on display, Virtual ID's i-Glasses are light and large enough to wear over prescriptive glasses. They're even designed after eyeglasses—the display visor attaches to the head-tracking unit via a comfortable elastic strap.

head's motion into game motion. Not every game is set up to implement a head tracker correctly. Virtual ID supplies a driver for *Hexic*, as well as a copy of the shareware version. The i-Glasses also come with the shareware version of Descari and a mildly interesting 3-D game called *Accret* (not to be confused with Descari...). *Magic Carpet* and Descari both have head-tracking drivers built into the games. There is also a driver for *Dew Focus* from LucasArts.

In *Hexic*, when you turn your head, the game display turns. When you look up or down, the game viewpoint looks up and down. Unfortunately, it's not quite like turning your entire body. The result is somewhat frustrating in combat. *Dew Focus*, on the other hand, gave me the ability to

get tangled up in the heat of combat. Descari worked the best with the i-Glasses. Not only did we have full freedom of motion, but the 3-D effect was quite startling. The experience of watching an enemy fighter seem to literally float in the air gives new meaning to the phrase "immersive experience."

The i-Glasses are relatively comfortable to wear and fairly light. However, we found the forehead pad to be a bit wearing after a short while. The unit adjusts for a wide variety of head sizes with a simple turn of a knob attached to the head-tracking unit.

The i-Glasses still have some teething problems. The connectors from the video inputs are not well aligned with the pins inside the i-Glasses, and it was very easy to bend the pins, even when we were careful. *CGW* tried out five sets, of which several needed to be replaced. A lot of care needs to be taken to keep the i-Glasses functional.

The displays themselves are semi-transparent, meaning you can see through the video image. This is useful for watching TV, but annoying when trying to immerse yourself in a virtual world, so the i-Glasses ship with an opaque shield that snaps over the outside of the lenses. There is no adjustment for interpupillary distance (the gap between the pupils of your eyes). Normally, this can cause some people to have problems focus-

ing, but the i-Glasses have a fairly narrow field of view, which compensates for the lack of this adjustment. The i-Glasses also fit reasonably comfortably over corrective lenses.

Overall, the i-Glasses are designed with versatility in mind. While the wide variety of uses will broaden the market for the i-Glasses, the inevitable compromises make the i-Glasses a less-than-perfect solution for an immersive gaming experience.

Virtual ID offers technical support by telephone (not toll-free) and a World Wide Web page; the URL is <http://www.vio.com>.

THE FORTE VFX-1

Given that Forte designed the *Gravis* Ultrasono audio card, we approached the VFX-1 headset with some trepidation. The Ultrasono's quirky behavior has frustrated more than a few game players. However, the Forte headset proved to be well-designed, although still suffering from a few flaws that are simply the result of pushing the technology envelope.

The VFX-1 is a one-piece, injection-molded, black plastic helmet with a flip up visor. It somehow manages to look incredibly cool and quite geeky at the same time. Unlike the i-Glasses, the VFX-1 attaches to the computer with a single cable. The tradeoff is that it requires a free ISA slot for a custom interface card. Another compromise is the use of the VGA feature connector for driving the display, rather than a VGA pass-through like the i-Glasses. The feature connector is two rows of pins on a graphics card used to pass VGA information on to another device. Using the feature connector can be problematic, as various display cards implement the feature connector differently. Some cards even have the two rows of pins, but no circuitry to drive them! Needless to say, if the VFX-1 appeals to you, you should give Forte a call and check to make sure your card is supported. Our *Matrox Millennium* seemed to work without any problems, but we did lose head tracking occasionally.

HOPPING THE BUS

The VFX-1 interface card is an ACCESS.BUS card, meaning you can connect (daisy chain) multiple peripherals that support this emerging standard. In addition to the helmet, Forte supplies the *Plex*, a device resembling a hockey puck with three buttons. The puck plugs into an ACCESS.BUS connector on the helmet itself, and acts as a kind of 3-D mouse. The cable seems to be fairly long, but it's not long enough to stand up and spin around, and like the i-Glasses, it's easy to get tan-



REARHEAD BEAR The Forte VFX-1 helmet covers most of your face, while the full earphones help immerse you in a total gaming experience.

turn my head independently of my character's body, instilling a deeper sense of immersion.

The ideal solution would be to stand up and actually turn your body, but the number and relatively short length of the cables makes it too easy



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gled up if you do try standing.

The VFX-1 ships with the usual complement of shareware games, as well as drivers for some commercial games. U.S. Navy Fighters works with the VFX-1, although only in the low-res mode. There's nothing quite like being able to turn your head to follow an enemy plane while in a tussle.

One of the more interesting games supported is *MicroWarrior 2*. It was a very stirring experience to be thundering along in a battlemech, turn my head, look at the enemy and pull the trigger. The head tracker on the Forte also handles torso movement in *MicroWarrior 2*, but it needs to run at low resolution to work. We found the puck to be nearly useless in most games.

The display on the VFX-1 has roughly the same resolution as the i-Glasses, but the images viewed seemed sharper and brighter. This was partly because the display is not interlaced and partly because the helmet completely shuts out the outside world when the visor is down. The lenses focus independently, which is a good thing, because unless you like the feeling that the bridge of your nose is going to be pushed into your skull, glasses are a no-no. Also, the fit isn't as adjustable as the i-Glasses, but it seemed to fit a large head fairly well, albeit snugly. Also, the interruptory dis-

tance is adjustable by reaching inside and pushing or pulling the lenses apart.

The eyepieces also support bicolor 3-D modes like the i-Glasses. There seems to be a slightly wider range of games supported, but there are still only a handful of supported games. The headphones in the VFX-1 are awesome, pumping out high-quality audio with good depth. They reminded us of the old Koss headphones that completely sealed over your ears.

Surprisingly, although the VFX-1 is heavier than the i-Glasses, we found we could use them for extended periods (up to a half hour) without noticing the weight. Forte recommends taking the helmet off every 15 minutes or so to rest your eyes.

Overall, we thought the VFX-1 was a better immersive gaming experience, but buyers need to be aware of the potential compatibility issues with their graphics boards. Also, the VFX-1 lacks the versatility of the i-Glasses—you can't use it with your television or console games.

CONCLUSIONS

Virtual reality is still in its infancy, but the availability of decent VR gear for the PC signals an emerging trend. There are still problems with both the displays we tested, so we can't give an

unqualified recommendation. If you want to watch television and play console games in a VR mode, then the i-Glasses are an interesting choice. The Forte VFX-1 is more immersive, but requires an ISA slot, which means popping open the case and installing a card. Overall, as game players, we'd give a nod to the VFX-1.

But are they worth the cost? At \$799 for the i-Glasses and \$995 for the Forte set, the price is steep. You'll have to determine if having a head-tracking headset that works at pretty low resolution works for you.

Both companies are feverishly working on higher-res models, but it's going to be a few months before the display technology catches up. Perhaps by then, there will be wider support in games as well. ☺

How They Rate

	Virtual ID i-Glasses	Forte VFX-1
Setup	2	3
Image Quality	2	2 1/2
Comfort	3 1/2	3 1/2
Value	2 1/2	3
Audio Quality	2	4

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Minimum Requirements: OS - DOS 5.0, 6.0, 7.0, 95, Vista, VGA, CD ROM - 2x Hard Disk - 3MB, Sound - Sound Blaster & 16MB, Input - Mouse

Cthulhu's Frozen Tomb



PRISONER OF ICE IS THE SEQUEL (SORT OF) TO SHADOW OF THE COMET. IN COMET, Professor John Parker grappled with a cult of Cthulhu worshippers infesting the small town of

Ullsmouth, back around 1910. Now, almost 30 years later—in 1937, to be exact—U.S. Navy Lieutenant Ryan faces a similar challenge. This time around, however, the Cthulhu followers turn out to be everyone's favorite villain, the Nazis.

Actually, there is one particular Nazi, Obersturmführer Dietrich, who is just itching to bring the Great Old Ones back to Earth. This is not something any sane person would want to do, since it would mean the destruction of the human race. Then again, people with their eye on absolute power are apt to overlook these minor details, especially when their sanity is already close to the edge.

SCRY SIGHT

Legend Entertainment's Callahan's Crosstime Saloon project is coming along at a fairly fast pace. All of the action takes place on Panday Night (Callahan fans know, the rest of you will have to find out), and the game will feature something which the famous anthologies of short stories do not—action outside of the bar. The game will feature nine modular games, built to reflect the stories, and all will start in the bar. Designer Josh Mando's intent is to both keep the mature slant of the Spider Robinson books and up the ante on animation and artwork from previous Legend efforts.

Sno City will be a visually lush 1980 offering from Merit Studios. After suffering through the ones and zeroes of outrageous fortune with domestic game developers (late ships on *Harvester* and *Crossroads*), Merit seems to have found a new look with their European subsidiary. *Sno City*, a 3-D rendered urban future, puts gamers in the role of a cyberpunk detective, and allows the futuristic city to be explored by point and click navigation. Although the game will have an action component, the mystery is puzzle-driven in the true tradition of adventure games.

The game begins with Ryan, temporarily attached to the British Navy, on board the submarine *HMS Victoria*. The *Victoria* has just completed a covert mission, infiltrating a secret Nazi base at the South Pole and making off with two mysterious crates, as well as archeologist Bjorn Hamsun, who was a prisoner of the Nazis.

DEFROSTED MYSTERY MEAT

It isn't long before all hell breaks loose on the sub. A pursuing German ship drops some depth charges on the *Victoria*—not enough to cause serious damage, but enough to start some fires in the hold. Because of the flames, the contents of the crates begin to defrost. As you might expect, there's Something Alive in those crates, and one of them gets out.

Before any time has passed, the captain is dead, Hamsun has vanished, and the sub is taking on water. It's up to Ryan to save the day, and see to it that the submarine makes it to the British base in the Falkland Islands.

Life is no easier at Edwards Base, where more strange things happen, including a message from Washington that tells Ryan to look out for a traitor among the base personnel. After cleaning all that up (the traitor is uncovered but gets away), it's off to Buenos Aires, on the trail of Prof. Parker (yes, the same Parker from *Shadow of the Comet*; events here are connected in strange ways to what went before).

Eventually, Ryan ends up back at Schlossadler Base, that secret installation at the South Pole, in the hands of the Nazis. Matters took a bit grim, but our hero escapes and, by magical means, pays a brief visit to the future, be-

by Scorpius

SCORPIA'S SEARCH

FOR LOVECRAFT

EXPOSES A PRISONER OF ICE



SHIP OF GHOULS Big trouble awaits the crew of a British WWII submarine when strange things start slithering out of secret Nazi crates.



CRAZY AS A RUNE Professor Hansun, like all those who encounter the Great Old Ones, has been driven insane. But his ranting could hold clues about Cthulhu.

fore heading off to the finale at Illsmouth, where Dietrich is about to open the gate for the Great Old Ones.

Like many adventure games these days, PRISONER's interface is a simple one. Ryan is maneuvered around the screen by point and click. Holding an inventory item over another object and left-clicking causes Ryan to take the appropriate action, if there is one; otherwise, nothing happens. Right-clicking on an item with the cursor puts it into the inventory; there is no way to drop anything, unless it's meant to be dropped in a particular location. The game has no auto-map, but the number of locations in each section is small. You really can't become lost, so there's no need to drag out the graph paper.

Conversation is handled very simply: left-clicking on a person brings up a box with one or more topics in it. Clicking on the topic starts the actual exchange. New topics may appear as the conversation progresses, or if you talk to someone again after certain events have occurred. Sometimes, conversations happen spont-

taneously, based on events in the game.

You can save and restore at almost any time. There seems to be no limit, aside from hard drive space, to how many saves you can make. Each one is accompanied by a small "snapshot" of Ryan's position, which is quite handy for determining exactly where the save was made.

In addition, the game makes an automatic save any time Ryan is about to head into a potentially deadly situation. This special save comes under the heading of "Trouble-joker." If Ryan bites the dust, you can go right back to that moment and try again. However, there's only one Trouble-joker; each new autosave overwrites the previous one, so you should be

making your own saves as you go along anyway, just in case.

NO GOING BACK

As you've probably figured out, PRISONER is a linear game: once you're done with a section, there is no going back. This isn't a problem, as you can't progress to the next sequence until everything is done in the current one. Therefore, you don't have the problem of overlooking some important item early on that you need later in the game. Besides which, most of the time the necessary objects will be found in the current section of play.

Events are usually triggered by Ryan's actions; until he has done certain things, others won't happen. So, usually, it doesn't matter how long it takes to figure out a particular puzzle, as time isn't really passing in the game.

The one exception is when the autosave kicks in. This is often the herald of a real-time sequence coming up, where Ryan has only a short while to figure out what he has to do. These moments are

not action/arcade stuff. Rather, they depend mainly on using the right object in the right place to overcome the problem. Fast thinking, not fast reflexes, are what's needed at these times.

PRISONER can be installed to hard disk or played directly from the CD. Because my drive space was limited, I ran the game off the CD. For the most part, it ran well, although there were perceptible pauses in some of the cut scenes, where the action was very much stop-and-go. In the game proper, however, everything went smoothly.

Happily, the game has subtitles in addition to sound. If your sound card is not supported, or you're playing late at night, or you have hearing difficulties, or you just prefer to read, you can turn on the text and not miss anything. Text and voice can be on together, too.

PRISONER does support the Gravis ULTRASOUND, but you have to run the GRAVIS.BAT file before running the game, so the Midi patches will be loaded in. Otherwise, you will have sound but no music. This, unfortunately, is not noted in either the documentation or the Read.me file. If you have a Gravis, keep this in mind. I had some aggravating moments until I checked the CD directory and found GRAVIS.BAT.

DOS BOOT

This is a DOS-based game (5.0 or higher), while you can run it from Windows under the Program Manager (it doesn't install to Windows), you are probably better off running it straight from DOS, as

Prisoner of Ice

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System

Requirements: PC compatible 486-33 or better (486-66 recommended), 4 MB RAM (8 MB for SVGA graphics), VGA/SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards

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the manual recommendations.

You can also have problems with memory managers. I first ran under my usual settings with QEMM active. That worked until a particular scene on the sub, when the game crashed. After that, I switched to a boot disk with EMM instead, and everything ran fine from that time on. There were no other crashes or bizarre occurrences, so the game itself is a clean product.

Generally, PRISONER OF ICE is not a par-

ticularly hard game. Most of the puzzles have fairly obvious solutions, once you've found the right item or items. However, finding an item can, on occasion, be a problem. For instance, early on in the sub, I looked at a desk drawer and was told it was locked. I spent a lot of fruitless time looking for a key or other means to open it, which wasn't necessary: the drawer wasn't locked at all, and just left-clicking opened it.

There are a couple of other times where finding an object isn't easy, but fortunately, these annoyances are few. It is always a wise idea to run the cursor slowly over the screen to make sure you don't miss any "hot spots" (especially in the doctor's office, after the critter is on the

loose in the Infirmary).

WHERE HAS THE LOVECRAFT GONE?

What disappointed me most was the lack of atmosphere. SHADOW OF THE COMET had a good, Lovecraftian feel to it, a sense of growing eeriness and terror, where PRISONER just seems to be rather matter-of-fact. Despite references to Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones, old books and mysterious chants, the game simply doesn't have the authentic Lovecraft aura. Perhaps there were too many monsters running around, or possibly all the time-travel business struck a wrong note. Whatever, as an addition to the Cthulhu myths, this one isn't up to par.

Overall, PRISONER OF ICE is an easy-to-moderate adventure game, with a few annoying moments. Veteran gamers will likely whip through this in a short time. Those looking for something less demanding than, say, DISCWORLD, or who want a couple afternoons' diversion, could have a good time with it. ☺

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WELL, HERE WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF CHRISTMAS, WITH NOT ALL THAT MUCH TO LOOK forward to. There hasn't been all that much in the past, either. The mail room, which used to be piled high with sacks, has some empty space these days. It seems that either players are skipping a lot of new product that have come out, or they're finding most of the newer games easy enough to get through without help...when there are new games to play, that is.

Just take a look at the Top 100 Games in the October *CGW*. *MENZOBERRANZEN* is #10 on the top 10 CRPG list, yet its score is too low to make the Top 100. *VEIL OF DARKNESS*, also on the top ten role-playing list, is several years old now, and not even a CRPG (I'm still wondering how it got in that section). Out of 100 games, only eight are CRPGs, and adventure games aren't in much better shape either. Ouch!

So it's not surprising that the mail re-

fects this situation, especially as the ratings come from the gamers themselves. Sigh. Anyway, let's get on to the letters.

Star Trek: A Final Unity: In my review of this game, I mentioned the problems I (and others) had with the sound, which was causing game crashes and hang-ups. If you have a **Gravis ULTRASOUND MAX** (and only the MAX, not the regular GUS), you can get around that by using **MaxBos**. MaxBos is a special **SOUND BLASTER** emulation, only for the MAX. I tried it, and the game ran fine with both music and voice. If you don't have MaxBos, you should be able to find it on many online services, or you can write or call Gravis for it. And kudos to **Spectrum HoloByte** for sticking with this one and coming up with the solution!

Meanwhile, a few adventurers are experience another kind of problem—not being able to get off Allanon. That mention of a shuttle dock on the way in has them looking for non-existent exits. Nope, that's not it. The only way out from the computer room is the same way

you came in. The party has to go all the way back to the entry room and transport to the Enterprise from there.

Thunderscape: There are a couple of undocumented commands that may make your life easier when jumping or walking

around dangerous areas. You can look up or down by using the

Page Up and Page Down keys. Not the ones on the keypad; the Page Up and Down that are in a separate group on the keyboard. Many jumps require you to be right on the edge, and it's almost impossible to judge where you're standing when you have only the forward view, even crouched down. By using these keys, you will have a better idea of your position, and some of those jumps, at least, may not require too many tries to complete.

Diseworld: By far, this seems to be the game of choice lately; many questions are coming in about it (not surprising, as it is tough). One spot that a lot of people find tricky is picking the barber's pocket. Well, every good pickpocket knows that, before slipping one's hand in, it's a good idea to make sure there is something in that pocket to scarf in the first place. So you may want to have a little chat with the customer before proceeding with any larcenous acts.

If Rincewind is having a hard time getting the monk's robe into his hot little hands, don't be too surprised. This puzzle is somewhat on the obscure side. The solution requires using the butterfly (you did get the butterfly from the park, yes?) in the right place on the right side, so Rincewind can pick up the robe back in the present (future?). Don't let yourself feel cornered here.

Bureau 13: Some gamers are having a little trouble with the end game section, especially in regard to the computer.



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CG512

Keep in mind that the EMP device must be fully charged in order to be useful. If you charged up and didn't get the "fully charged" message, the EMP won't do a lot for you, and you do need to use this thing twice during the end game (yes, that means a second trip to the lab after you've activated the EMP once, sorry about that).

Stone Prophet: Adventuring in the desert has its drawbacks, especially when you don't know where to go at the start. A number of sunburned gamers took off in the wrong direction, going hither and yon, and wondering how they're supposed to enter the Obelisk. You can't do that until you've talked to Mm Deir, the blind woman about due east of where you begin the game. She's easy to miss if you decide to go north or south, and that's a big desert out there. Since the Obelisk holds an important item, you don't want to skip it. By the way, remember that the autopap works on line of sight, so every once in awhile, stop and look around, then check the map, to make sure you don't miss something.

Once you've finished with the Shrine of Nefertini and the Obelisk, the best place to go next is the Harvest Temple. This is a key location, and completing it (the underground chambers, that is) will go a long way towards helping with the other dungeons. You really want to leave Pharaoh's Rest alone for awhile. This is part of the endgame, and it will be some time before you're ready for that.

Return to Zork: Yep, folks are still playing this one, too. One of the things

that is giving some of them gray hairs is how to get to the Bel Nair temple. First, you need to hitch a ride on Scavenger Airways back to the lighthouse (if you don't have the means to do this, you're not ready for the temple yet). Then you need to (ahem) hitch a ride on something else, as it were. This is one of those times when being roped in is not a bad thing.

Lands of Lore: Another oldie with staying power. Of the many places to become stuck in this one, the pit room sans map is a favorite (heh). This is one time where having some graph paper and drawing your own map is necessary. While the area is actually quite small, the spinners can drive you crazy. Just take it very slow, wait for the compass to settle down (it will, eventually), and go carefully. The game map will return when you make it to the second level. And when you do finally make it past the pits, keep an eye out, because there's a statuette lurking around somewhere nearby.

Another question that pops up a lot in this game is how to get past Scotia's Gate. This comes later, after you're done with the Urbish Minks. Only Paulsen (who is hiding there) has the item you need to destroy the gate. So the sooner you go through the mines and find him, the sooner you'll be on your way to Yvel City.

Pagan: Yeah, some stalwart gamers are still suffering through this one. It's amazing what people can put up with when they're desperate (heh). The Sorcerers Test, for in-



LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP Use the Page Up and Page Down buttons in **Ultima Underworld 2** to look up and down before you make these treacherous leaps.

stance, which is certainly an aggravation in itself. It can be even more so for players who finally do all the enchantments, only in the wrong place. Regardless of whom you chose as your mentor, all the enchantments have to be done in that person's presence, or you've wasted your time. Remember, your teacher has to see you do the spells yourself (after all, you might be tempted to cheat otherwise!).

Ultima Underworld 2: One of the most difficult parts for many is the Void, in particular the pyramid. There is no way around it; you have to follow the colored paths (one at a time, of course) to the pyramid, then hop all over it until the whole thing is the same color as the path that brought you there, making sure you end up at the top so you can jump through the moongate. This is, alas, a dreary exercise, but you have to go through with it to reach the Shrine of Spirituality.

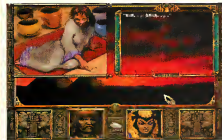
And that's about it for this look into the mailing. In the meanwhile, if you have a question about an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

On Delphi—Visit the GamesIG (under the Groups & Clubs menu).

On GEnie—Stop by the Games Round-Table (type: Scorpio) to reach the Games RT).

By US Mail (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you live in the United States): Scorpio, PO Box 338, Grace Station, New York, NY 10028.

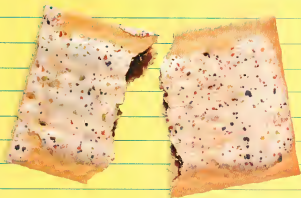
Until next time, happy adventuring! ☺



LET HER FINGERS DO THE WALKING The blind woman at Stone Prophet will show you how to enter the Obelisk by drawing a map in the sand.

Confessions

OF A GAME ADDICT:



Day 1: I was driving down the freeway eating a chili dog, shifting into fifth, balancing a copy of WIRED® on my lap, when the cellular rang. It was Bob from Sierra. He wanted to know if I could write reviews for a bunch of new CD games they had coming out.

I had 40 days, 25 games, and a closet full of sunflower seeds, instant coffee and Pop Tarts®.

HOW COULD I SAY NO?

Day 5: I'm not sure Chapter 6 of Phantasmagoria

GABRIEL KNIGHT: THE BEAST WITHIN™



The top two computer gaming magazines both named the first *Gabriel Knight* mystery the best adventure game of the year in 1994. Creator Jane Jensen might want to start dusting off her awards shelf again, as *The Beast Within* mixes a strange, new brew of mutilation murders, a centuries-old curse, and criminal misdeeds on multiple CDs.

Gabriel Knight, a detective of the supernatural, is summoned to Munich to investigate a series of murders blamed on werewolves. The edge-of-your-seat tale unfolds to implicate the mad King Ludwig II, a lost Wagner opera, and Gabriel's own dark past.

Shrewd thinking and paying attention to details are rewarded as players unravel clues while taking on the role of Gabriel and his partner, Grace Nakimura. Shot on location in Germany and the U.S. with more than 40 surprisingly talented actors, *The Beast Within* is possibly the most visually stunning, realistic adventure game to come out on CD this year. Even the photo on the box is enough to induce a minor heart palpitation.



INTERACTIVE CINEMA The rich, realistic movie-like look of *The Beast Within* came from shooting more than 1,000 backgrounds here and in Germany.



PHANTAS HORROR



Unless you've spent the last couple of years spelunking in Zanzibar, you've already heard of *Phantasmagoria*. Now it's finally here with all the

elements of a big hit: a master story teller in the person of Kings Quest® creator Roberta Williams, feature-film quality footage, and a story so rich and elaborate it took a record-setting seven CDs to contain it all.

The tale of Don and Adrienne's bizarre discoveries about their newly-acquired mansion is told in realistic live video. No, you don't watch a movie and then click on a plot option. You run this show.

But the thrill of *Phantasmagoria* isn't simply the technology, it's also the story. As Adrienne explores her new home, its dusty secrets begin to reveal themselves. The original owner, an illusionist, died in the house after the suspicious disappearances of his



INTERACTIVE NIGHTMARE The most film footage ever shot for a CD game lends *Phantasmagoria* the master qualities of a great horror feature film.



SIERRA® BUY TWO SIERRA GAMES AND GET A THIRD FREE.

what's more frightening:
or my face.



SMAGORIA™ ON 7 CDS

many wives. An evil force still inhabits the maze of rooms, and its effect on Don is disturbing, terrifying, and deadly.

With perseverance and wit, you can discover the clues that save Adrienne from Don, and Don from himself. This is truly the kind of game you'll find yourself staying up all night to play. And, with its decidedly macabre storyline, the middle of the night may be *Phantasmagoria's* finest hour.



HORROR ON 7 CDS Players control every movement of Adrienne... and this game doesn't "blow" you anything. You have to find it!

WIN 95 WIN DOS MAC



DARYL F. GATES POLICE QUEST®: SWAT™



When he headed the L.A.P.D., Chief Daryl F. Gates founded SWAT, the first Special Weapons And Tactics team. Now these highly trained forces are the elite of law enforcement, while Gates' *Police Quest: SWAT* stands as the elite in tactical simulation games.

In this, the fifth installment of the successful *PQ* series, you join a SWAT team, take intensive training, and learn to handle advanced class 3 weaponry, like an MP5, Benelli tactical shotgun, M16 and LASH radio. After a few hours on the shooting range comes the "fun" part. That is, if you consider getting nearly blown away in a real-life crisis fun. Work with your team, make the right split-second decisions, fire accurately and you could advance through the ranks to become an Element Leader. Mess up, and it could cost you your on-screen life.

The video action was shot using actual SWAT officers at their training facilities and in the streets of L.A. to lend an unmistakable air of realism. At least some of the country's major police departments think so—they now use *Police Quest* CDs to train their officers.



DEAD-ON AUTHENTICITY *Police Quest: SWAT* doesn't let you avoid. More a decision, full to commitment or not, the life you're weapons and you're here!

WIN 95 WIN DOS MAC



ENTER TO WIN AN IBM APTIVA. Call 1-800-959-7707, surf <http://www.ibm.com>, or log on at AOL or CompuServe.

Day 24: My family keeps bugging

I told them, "can't

TORIN'S PASSAGE™



Leave it to Al Lowe—creator of some of the most entertaining and enduring computer games—to unleash *Torin's Passage* on the world.

In coming up with this remarkable new game, he has delivered to our CD drives an adventure game with as much intrigue and brain-twisting challenge as any hard-core gamer has ever tackled AND a funny, musically-rich, visual treat that takes gaming to a new level.

Torin's Passage is the story of a young man's encounters in the nested worlds beneath the surface of the planet, Strata. These bizarre lands, replete with flowing hot lava, unworldly creatures, and a host of other cunning obstacles, must be traversed if Torin is to reach his goal.

Making matters worse (for Torin, more exciting for you) is a formidable line-up of

brain-tensing puzzles at the end of each chapter—all of them, double black diamond challenges.

There is one word to describe the artistry in *Torin's*: "whoa!" Multi-plane scrolling, spectacular backgrounds, and hand-drawn cel animation add a depth and realism you've never seen in a game before. The sheer talent and imagination of the artists is, by itself, worth the price of admission.

But your eyes aren't the only things that get to dip into the candy box. *Torin's* also features an original digital music score composed by three-time Oscar™ winner, Michel Legrand.

There's a pop-up TelePrompTer™ that lets you replay dialogue to listen for crucial clues, plus a 3-D interface with on-line hints for the less-experienced players. There was, however, one hint missing: How do you avoid work, eating, chores and sleep so you can play *Torin's Passage* endlessly?



THE WONDER DOWN UNDER The subterranean worlds of *Torin's Passage* provide the setting for a challenging quest with brain-teasing puzzles and humor.

WIN '95 WIN DOS MAC



SIERRA® BUY TWO SIERRA GAMES AND GET A THIRD FREE.

me to let them play Torin's Passage.

you see

orking?"

SHIVERS™



It's amazing to think that the same computer used to balance the family checkbook can produce an even bigger scare. What's required is the addition of a terror-filled, nail-biting, spine-tling CD like *Shivers*.

In this new game aimed at teens and adults, players must rely on their wits and raw nerve to survive a nightmarish trip through a surreal, abandoned museum. The goal is to vanquish the ghosts and phantoms that haunt the museum before they steal your life's essence.

Along the way, a series of beads-of-sweat-producing puzzles await, along with chilling moments of live-action video that delivers twists and turns in the plot.

Shivers sets a haunting stage through an eerie original music score and "as seen through your own eyes" graphics. The first-person views are handsomely rendered, you might even say "mystical." But the real draw remains the story.

It tantalizes, draws you in, and—fittingly—gives you the shivers. This is definitely one game that will keep you glued to your seat. Or, at least, the very edge of it.



NOT HOME, NOT ALONE Players have to spend the night on guard in search of the evil spirits that haunt a sinister, dark estate.

WIN 95 WIN 3

HOYLE® CLASSIC GAMES



"According to Hoyle™" means "by the rules; done the right way."

This remarkably sophisticated collection of 10 favorite games lives up to its name, giving families great variety, totally accurate play action, and an interesting twist on the old idea of playing against the computer.

Sit down at the *Hoyle® Classic Games* poker table, for instance, and you play against a rogue's gallery of computerized competitors. Take on a crusty, old prospector, an over-the-hill movie star, or a number of other players, each sporting an accent and an attitude.

The more you play, the more sides you'll see to their weird, witty personalities. Add in their different card-playing styles, and you end up with a much more fun (and realistic) way to challenge the microchips to a game.

Along with five card draw, you can also play bridge, solitaire, old maid, hearts, crazy 8's, gin rummy, checkers, backgammon, and hearts. With its cast of characters and jam-packed variety, you'll definitely want to ante up for this card game.



TEN GAMES IN ONE Hoyle® Classic Games give you ten card and board games and 10 assorted competitors to defeat. The Hoyle™ trademark is used under license from Hoyle & Hoyle, Inc.

WIN 95 WIN 3

ENTER TO WIN AN IBM APTIVA. Call 1-800-768-7707, surf <http://www.ibm.com>, or log on at AOL or CompuServe.

Day 29: Today I defeated a horde of commanded a U-boat and

TROPHY BASS™



Surely you've seen them. Those guys on cable TV, sitting in a boat, reeling in a big one, saying stuff to each other like, "Oh, he's got a lot of fight in him there, Jim."

At last count, there were 50 million people in this country like Jim who love to feel the tug on a rod. And now they've got their own

computer game: *Trophy Bass*.

There are three sides to *Trophy Bass*. You can choose tackle, pick your bait, read the water, set the weather conditions, and then finesse your casting technique on one of five virtual lakes. Option two is to play in Tournament Mode and try your luck against conditions and competitors dished out by the computer.

Or you can get even more serious and watch the full motion video "how-to" section and pick up more than 100 nuggets of solid advice from America's top tournament bass fishermen.

Now, obviously, the Jims of the world are going to love this game, because playing can bring you more success out on the water. But, surprisingly, you don't have to know what a lunker bucketmouth is to get a charge out of *Trophy Bass*. As Jim would say, "It's a keeper."



CAST OF THOUSANDS The super-graphics revolution and detailed live-action footage on award-winning *Trophy Bass* the endorsement of *BASS*, America's top sport fishing magazine.

WIN 95 WIN 98

CAESAR II™



A city simulation? Hmm, haven't I seen something like this before? Yes and no. Yes, you've seen amazingly-detailed 3D renderings before. And, yes, you've played sims that put you in the municipal driver's seat.

But, no, you've never played anything quite like *Caesar II*. For starters, if you do a good job quelling riots, dousing fires, recruiting soldiers and building great cities, you earn approval ratings that grant you the right to take on another province.

Then it really heats up. Along with wearing your city planner hat, you get to don the general's helmet and fight off hordes of barbarians in battle sequences (check out the Carthaginians on armored elephants). With each additional province you control, the closer you get to the best hat of all: the emperor's snappy laurel wreath.

By combining great graphics, intricate strategizing and battle action, *Caesar II* isn't merely simulation. It's simulation for those who hanker for action and power.



BUILT IN A DAY! The historical accuracy and detail in *Caesar II*'s graphics are amazing, while battle sequences are a treat for war game-addicted players. It's a challenge and fun.

WIN 95 DOS



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fished for bass,
barbarians, won the playoffs,
ate six Cup Noodles.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS®: FOOTBALL PRO '96™



When *Football Pro '95* was hailed as "the best football game on the planet," you'd think Sierra would send in the third string and retire to the locker room for a tall, frosty one. But, no. They put the pads back on, threw out the old playbook, and came back with *Football Pro '96*.

It keeps all the things that earned its forefathers the Best Sports Simulation award three years running: Slayish attention to real NFL player and team stats, a play book with over 10,000 combinations of X's and O's, and league play over CompuServe.

Ah, but that's the old stuff. For 1996, you can suit up as a player for an arcade game or appoint yourself coach for the football sim. What's more, 3D animations were created using films of actual players shot from dozens of angles simultaneously, so tailbacks juke, wide receivers sprint, and linemen grunt just like their real-life counterparts. The awesome realism of this new version is sure to earn some accolades. "Best football game in the solar system?" Could be.



THIS IS NOT TV™ The "motion capture" based 3D animation will have you think you've tuned in to the NFL game of the week. But that is better. No commercials.

WIN'95 DOS



COMMAND: ACES OF THE DEEP®



Now hear this. All personnel who want to see how the Simulation Game of the Year has been improved, report to your software dealer. *COMMAND: Aces of the Deep*, with its incredible realism and historical accuracy, has taken a giant leap forward with the addition of phenomenal texture-mapped graphics and voice activation.

With Windows® 95 and IBM VoiceType®, you bark commands at your U-boat crew and watch them respond to your orders to dive, surface, fire torpedoes, and more. While you don't need the voice command option to play the game, it adds yet another dimension to the realism.

Your strategic skills get a sweat-producing workout in the cat-and-mouse pursuit sequences, while a new two-mode deck gun lets you play a more arcade-style game. Here, you get to do other ships what *COMMAND* has done to other simulation games: Blow them out of the water.



DIVE! DIVE! Obey the orders, and your crew rests on the double in the first voice-activated CD-ROM simulation game ever. IBM VoiceType is registered trademark of IBM Corporation.

WIN'95 NATIVE



Day 27: It took 3
but I finally reached Level
Not every

3-D ULTRA PINBALL™



The pinball wizards at Sierra have just come up with a better idea on how to stick five vertical feet of pinball machine onto seven inches of computer screen. While most other pinball games show you the table as if it were shot pointing straight up, Sierra's *3-D Ultra Pinball* slants the table so you can see the whole thing easily without scrolling. This bit of cleverness was then totally exploited with the most amazing spacecape graphics to appear this side of Alpha Centauri.

Another innovation: *3-D Ultra Pinball* uses advanced physics formulas to give you an uncannily accurate feel of a real table. Thanks to genius programming from some people who weren't sleeping during Physics class, flipper responsiveness, table bumping, ball rolling and ricochets look and react just like an authentic tavern machine. It even tilts like classic pinball. Damn!

The game's three tables can be interconnected so you can keep going until the sun comes up. And action on all versions is super fast; an amazing feat especially for a Windows® game. If there's one downside to this addictive game, it may be that the garbage isn't going to get taken out for a while, and the dog may have to start walking himself.



FAST AND FURIOUS The full dimensional graphics of *3-D Ultra Pinball* haven't slowed things down. Action is fast, frenetic, and richly assorted.



THE



Now that the Windows® 95 frenzy is going full tilt, you may wonder, "is there a game specifically designed for this amazingly cool new operating system that takes full advantage of its multi-threading capabilities?" Or perhaps you'd like to know, "is there a game so incredibly wicked that it will actually increase my supply of testosterone?"



The answer to both questions: Yes. And you're looking at it.

Thexder flies, runs, jumps, morphs into a tank or plane, and blazes his way through five worlds, each with ten different levels of increasing hair-pulling difficulty.

Your job in all this is to help *Thexder* work his way through mind-numbing mazes while steering clear of energy fields, sheer drop offs, and other assorted game-enders. Then, in addition to robots, aliens, cyborgs and other



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solid days,
10 of Thexder.
member of the family jumped for joy.



X D E R

enemies, *Thexder* also has to contend with burning lava, crushing ceilings, and unpredictable explosives.

Thanks to your droid-fast reflexes, and *Thexder's* ability to morph, you can struggle your way to the 50th level to face Primus Tech, the numero uno enemy. Actually, there are other enemies you can take on: the bad dudes you play against on your network or your modem.

All this battling is supercharged courtesy of Windows® 95. Along with the main horizontally-scrolling action window, there are five additional screens to keep you filled in on your position, available equipment, enemies and weapons. Due to that multi-threading business,



every screen is constantly updated without slowing down the main action one hair.

Thexder—sure to be one of the season's best sellers—has arrived, pumped on Windows® 95 steroids, and ready to do some serious damage.



LIKE A MALL MOVIE THEATRE The five screens of *Thexder* clock out hours of life and action simultaneously. It's all made possible by the only game to take advantage of the multi-threading abilities of Windows® 95



LAST DYNASTY™



Last Dynasty isn't the best new game to come along in a while. It's more like two of the best.

Start by parking yourself in its first-person, full-view, real-time combat simulator. The completely customizable cockpit, with continuous on-line help, locks on and destroys typical space fight games. The information overload as you

plan an attack, while your radar and windshield fills with enemy ships, is truly stomach-churning. Then comes an even cooler part: You can grab a momentary breath during all this chaos by switching into strategy mode, where you can map out and execute your next attack from a mega-choice of battle strategies.

Carrying the action game forward are spectacular interactive cinema clips, haunting original music, and enough mind-bucking tension to have you sweating an arsenal worth of bullets.

While the action side of this equation beats most pure space arcade CDs at their own game, *Last Dynasty* shines again in the fully-rendered, high res scenes in the adventure portion of the game. This mind-puzzler takes place aboard a multi-level space station. From a first-person angle you explore, look for clues, remove a few ruthless strangers, and keep your nerve endings on alert-mode in wait for a surprise attack.

Consider *Last Dynasty* as an excellent, addictive, warp speed, mysterious, challenging, over-stim'd value.



DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE If you can't make up your mind between the action overload of a space fight, or the brain-tease of an adventure game, *Last Dynasty* gives you both





Day 39: Help! My reviews
are due tomorrow and I'm stuck
in Mary, Mary Quite Contrary's garden.
Where's my 4-year old?

THE LOST MIND OF DR. BRAIN™



You have to love something that makes your kids smarter, keeps them happily occupied for hours, and isn't TV. In this case, that something is *The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain*.

This third installment in the immensely popular *Dr. Brain* series gives kids 10 different wildly entertaining puzzles to solve—each challenging the 10 learning centers in real live kid brains.

Some involve mazes, others memory games, and there's plenty of fun with words and music. Since you can set the degree of difficulty, both ten-year olds and teens can have their brains put to the test.

But here's the real truth. These puzzles are also a blast for those of us who, ahem, haven't doodled on a Pee Chee for many moons. (My favorite: sending the right colored balls down the railroad track maze to the station.)

So don't get the idea this is some stuffy, bookish "learning aid." The puzzles are pure fun, surprisingly funny, and always a challenge. If you've got kids, buying *The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain* is clearly a no brainer.



BRAIN CENTRAL There's an object to this game. Help restore Dr. Brain's brain which he accidentally transferred to his robot assistant, Ralfoose.

WIN'95 WIN'98 MAC



MIXED-UP MOTHER GOOSE™ DELUXE



The list of the awards *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* has won from magazines, parents' groups and the software industry could fill up the rest of this page. And no wonder. Here is a game that has introduced more than 500,000 little ones to the computer, while helping build their problem-solving and learning skills.

Sounds like a textbook? It's not. In the new deluxe version of *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* kids search through Mother Goose Land to find missing objects from classic rhymes. A successful recovery is rewarded with a song—but not like you've ever heard before. Imagine "Little Jack Homer" done in reggae and you'll get the idea.

The game can be played in English or Spanish, and there's a free bonus audio CD of the 18 songs in the game so kids can sing along after you've commandeered the computer so you can play your games.



TAKE A GANDER *Mother Goose Land* is not only beautiful, hand-painted graphics, with dozens of places for kids to explore.

WIN'95 WIN'98 MAC



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SIERRA®

BUY TWO SIERRA GAMES AND GET A THIRD FREE.

Day 42: Fried my computer. Entered Sierra Sweepstakes to win IBM® Aptiva "Ultimate Gamer."

We're giving away five IBM Aptiva "Ultimate Gamer" systems with Pentium® 133 Mhz processor, 16 MB RAM, 3.4 GB HF, Six Speed CD-ROM, 16-Bit Wavetable sound, 3-D graphics card, 2 stereo speakers with sub-woofer, and a 17" SVGA monitor (15.7" viewable image size). You want? Option A: Score all 10 pages of the Sierra ad, answer the questions below, send the card back to us by February 14, 1996 and pray mightily to the game gods. Option B: Buy your own by calling IBM PC Direct at 1-800-IBM-2-YOU.



Which Sierra game comes with 7 CD-ROMs? _____

Which Sierra game takes place in an abandoned museum? _____

Which Sierra game visits subterranean worlds? _____

Which Sierra game features voice activation? _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

No purchase necessary. Offer good in USA only. Sweepstakes is open to residents of the US over 18 years of age. You may use this card or enter on a plain 3x5-inch card. All federal, state and local laws apply. Taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the prize winners. Decisions of the judges are final and binding. Offer void where prohibited by law. Employees and family members of Sierra On-Line or IBM Corporation are not eligible. Odds of winning depend upon number of entries received. Only one winner per

question, one entry per household. Entries will be randomly selected and winners notified by certificate to identify and select winners. Winners will be selected February 15, 1996. Grand Prizes will be shipped to winners at address shown on entry form. Total approximate value of Grand Prize is \$5,000 each. Winner cannot transfer prize. Prize is not redeemable for cash. Each winner will be required to sign a release allowing Sierra to use his or her name and likeness on advertising.

Winners will be assigned an Sierra Systems on-line card in Spring issue of InterAction. For a list of winners, available 90 days after Sweepstakes drawing, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Winners List c/o Sierra On-Line, PO Box 53216, Bellevue, WA 98005-3216.

IBM Aptiva

IBM is a registered trademark of International Business Machines Corporation. Aptiva is a trademark of IBM. Pentium is a registered trademark of Intel Corporation.

Day 48: Bought two Sierra games, got a third free*. Free game was actually not junk.

Hard to believe, but there are even more Sierra games than we could squeeze into this ad. So check them all out by going to the place where you like to buy games or call 1-800-757-7707 and order directly from Sierra. Then, when you buy any two games from the list below between November 1, 1995 and January 31, 1996, you can select one more from the other side of this card and we'll send it to you for free.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adi's Comprehensive Learning System | <input type="checkbox"/> Last Dynasty | <input type="checkbox"/> Shivers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caesar II | <input type="checkbox"/> Lode Runner On-Line | <input type="checkbox"/> Space Quest 6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COMMAND: Aces of the Deep | <input type="checkbox"/> Lost Mind of Dr. Brain | <input type="checkbox"/> Thexder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Front Page Sports: Football Pro '96 | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed-Up Mother Goose Deluxe | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-D Ultra Pinball |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within | <input type="checkbox"/> Outpost 1.5 | <input type="checkbox"/> The Incredible Machine 3.0 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hoyle® Classic Games | <input type="checkbox"/> Phantasmagoria | <input type="checkbox"/> Torin's Passage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kings Quest VII, 2.0 | <input type="checkbox"/> Police Quest: SWAT | <input type="checkbox"/> Trophy Bass |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Print Artist 3.0 | |

* Well, OK, free plus \$5.95 for postage and handling.

Sierra Sweepstakes
 P.O. Box 485
 Coarsegold, CA 93614

PLACE
 STAMP
 HERE

Full-duplex dot-matrix



Please refer to your retailer

CSA009

Buy two Sierra games, get a third game free.*

Check the box in front of your free game from the list below and mail this card with your check or money order made out to Sierra On-Line for \$5.95 for postage and handling, dated receipts and proofs of purchase from both games (the UPC bar code from the cartons) to:

Sierra Buy 2 Get 1 Free Offer
 P.O. Box 3404
 Salinas, CA 93912

You can also take advantage of this offer by ordering directly from Sierra at 1-800-757-7707 24 hours a day.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Berlitz Spanish | <input type="checkbox"/> LandDesigner | <input type="checkbox"/> Space Quest Collection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Casino Deluxe | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure Suit Larry 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking Tutor: Alphabet Blocks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Castle of Dr. Brain | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure Suit Larry Collection | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking Tutor: Beginning Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Front Page Sports: Baseball '94 | <input type="checkbox"/> Lode Runner: The Legend Returns | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking Tutor: Early Math |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers | <input type="checkbox"/> MetalTech: EarthSiege | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking Tutor: Kid's Typing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hoyle's® Classic Card Games | <input type="checkbox"/> Powerhouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking Tutor: Spelling Blizzard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Incredible Toon Machine | <input type="checkbox"/> Red Baron w/ Mission Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodruff and the Schnibble |

SHIP MY FREE GAME TO:

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery. Offer valid in the U.S. and Canada only. Not valid with any other offer. Response must be postmarked by February 15, 1996. This offer may be discontinued without notice. Sierra reserves the right to limit quantities. No dealers, please.

CSA009

You Little Monster, You!

Bullfrog Reverses The Roles Of Role-Playing To Let YOU Be The Monster
In **DUNGEON KEEPER**

by Johnny L. Wilson

TRY TO SEE THINGS FROM MY PERSPECTIVE. I MAY LIVE UNDERGROUND, BUT IT COSTS ME A LOT TO REACH THIS pinnacle of success. When I think of all those years spent studying arcane spells, my self-imposed exile from the world of men, trial and error lessons in waster management, and gallons of blood spilled in the accumulation of gold—it must mean something. After all, I provide a certain amount of stability for society. I'm a threat that helps get children to go to bed, a warning to adolescents as to what greed can do, and a necessary economic check and balance upon money supply. Face it: I'm a visual symbol of evil for local townspeople to rally against rather than fight each other. So, I take it very badly when these foolhardy *élan-do-wells*, those pathetic paladins and wispy wizards, bring their magical swords and ensorcelments into my home, murder my faithful retainers; pick up anything that isn't nailed down; and deplete me of the things I value most: money, mana, gold and power.

Does the above sound a little strange? Well, it's all the norm in the world created by Bullfrog Productions in their upcoming **DUNGEON KEEPER**, a game that breaks all of the traditional role-playing rules. The usual computer RPG has you create a character or characters by assigning numbers to attributes. Then, you direct the characters through a series of ruins/caverns where your party faces enough lesser monsters and villains to get "pumped up" enough to both find some Ultimate Monster and defeat it in a climactic battle. In **DUNGEON KEEPER**, the

rules change. Instead of finding the monster, we get to be the monster. Instead of directing characters through caverns and catacombs, we get to build custom dungeons, set traps, direct monster defenses, and even "possess" our evil minions in such a way that we can face knights, paladins and wizards head-on in full 3-D combat from the monster's-eye view

ARCHITECT OF INFERNAL DESIGN

DUNGEON KEEPER (DK) begins with a sort of "SimDungeon" feel. That is, the dungeon keeper begins with limited resources and builds his or her reputation by building a dungeon, corridor by corridor and room by room. If DK turns out according to Bullfrog's ideal, individual dungeon keepers will be able to create themed dungeons. One may have a horror theme that specializes in monsters and another might be done in early Spanish Inquisition. The version we got to play had strictly a horror theme.

Each room has a different cost attached to it, and, like buildings/complexes in **SIMCITY**, **ASCENDANCY**, **MASTER OF MAGIC** or **CAESAR II**, serve different functions. For example, torture chambers provide...well...staff motivation (can't be too careful when conjuring demons and hiring minions, can we?), libraries en-

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development



MARCHING MINIONS Trolls, golems and even more exotic creatures are at your beck and call to defend your abode and (dis)honor.

able spell research to occur, treasure rooms naturally store the gold, and armories provide for weapons training.

Of course, the most important addition to the well-designed dungeon is the generator room. With such a room, the monsters appear in a burst of magical fire rather than having to enter the dungeon by the "front door" like the heroes. Naturally, having monsters or hired sorcerers enter through the "front door" means that they will have to face the same traps and defenses that invading parties of heroes would normally face—in a word, wasteful.

Bullfrog is even lavishing the dungeon environment with incredible detail. Consider the dungeon floor, for example. If no characters/monsters traverse the floors of a room or corridor for a given amount of time, dust will begin to appear on the floor. My favorite touch, however, is the very detailed light-sourcing. Even though many products use some form of light-sourcing, few products perform it to the degree which DK does. In DK, multi-

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San Francisco Law

The People Find Broderbund Guilty Of Good Gameplay IN THE 1ST DEGREE

by Charles Arday

COURTROOM GAMES HAVE NEVER BEEN BIG. THE LAST ONE I REMEMBER IS PERRY MASON: THE CASE OF THE MANDARIN MURDER FROM Telarium, and that came out way back in 1985. It's been quite the dry spell since. But fear not, *Mistak* fans. As I pen this review, the defense has just rested in the O.J. Simpson double murder case, and even if that trial is finally over by the time you read this, I suspect that its impact will remain with us for a long time. It will remain in the form of the TV shows it inspired, the movies, the novels, and, yes, the computer games—like Broderbund's IN THE 1ST DEGREE.

Could it be a coincidence that the defendant in IN THE 1ST DEGREE has an "O" and a "J" in his name? IN THE 1ST DEGREE is about a California celebrity (from San Francisco, not Brentwood, but who's keeping track), accused of murdering his business partner in either a hot blooded, jealous rage—though married himself, we quickly learn, the partner was *staying* the accused's girlfriend—or a cold-blooded attempt to cover up his part in an insurance scam. Or, if you ignore the thermodynamic impossibility, the motive could be some combination of the two.

The accused, part-time painter and gallery owner, James Tobin, doesn't deny having pulled the trigger, but he says it was in self-defense. His freshly deceased partner, Zack Barnes, was behind the insurance scheme—at least that is what Tobin insists happened. When Tobin threatened to reveal all to the police, Barnes went ballistic, snatching up a gun

from his desk drawer—or so Tobin alleges. They wrestled for the gun; a table smashed; a shot rang out, then another; and by the time the smoke cleared, Zack Barnes lay dead with one hole in his throat and another in the back of his head. This last part, at least, is a matter of fact, not allegation.

It only accounts for one of the bullets, though. The other one found its way into Tobin's leg, and how it did that is one of the first mysteries the game poses.

But first things first. Who are you? Your name, right out of a soap opera, is Sterling Granger, crack prosecuting attorney, assigned to represent the people in *The People of California vs. J. Tobin*. Budget cuts seem to have decimated your staff, so you have to double as your own investigator, traipsing around the city to conduct interviews with all the relevant

parties. You get some help from a world-weary, wisecracking police inspector, but otherwise, you are pretty much on your own in the lion's den.

And what a den it is! Not only are you going up against the renowned Cynthia Charleston, a defense attorney who'd make Marcia Clark weak in the knees, but because of the accused's fame, you're in the public eye as never before. Every day, a pack of journalistic Siskels and legal Ebers on the Channel 2 news (promoting themselves as "Your trial headquarters!") rate your performance with the sort of unsparing viciousness previously known only to theater critics (and maybe computer game reviewers). Topping it all off is a judge who is just itching to throw you out of court at the first hint of misconduct and contempt.

What's a poor litigator to do? Think quickly, remember all those lessons from law school, and save your game often.

TRIAL AND ERROR

Although at first glance there appears to be no *whodunit* for you to solve—Tobin shot Barnes, and that's that—appearances can be deceiving. The entire first CD of this two-CD game is devoted to your investigation of the crime, and you quickly discover that there is plenty of "who" for you to piece together.

Whose gun was it, and how did it end up in Tobin's hand? Who brought it to the gallery, and who told Tobin it was there? Who shot first: Tobin or Barnes? Then there's the charge of larceny to consider. Who stole Tobin's paintings from the gallery, and who masterminded



In The 1st Degree

Price: \$79.95

System

Requirements: PC compatible 486-25 or better, 4 MB of RAM (8 MB for Windows 95), SVGA graphics, 4 MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1 or Win 95, 2x CD-ROM; supports Windows compatible sound cards

Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in drive)

Designers: Peter Adair, Honey Armstrong, Dexter Chow
Publishers: Broderbund
Novato, CA
(415) 382-4745



the theft? Which partner planned to collect the insurance money, and which had the attack of conscience that precipitated the homicide?

And there's the sexual jealousy angle. Who was sleeping with whom, and when? Who found out about it, when, and how? Who is this mysterious, tattooed grungester, Simon Lee, with his sulky attitude, his filthy mouth, and his name ripped right out of Wordsworth?

There is certainly no shortage of questions to ask and answer. Thankfully, there are answers to all of these questions, and if you probe cannily in your own interviews and dig carefully through recorded police interrogations, you can find them. But one of the things that makes *IN THE 1st DEGREE* a great game, rather than merely a good one, is that somewhere around your third interview, you realize that it doesn't matter.

You're not Perry Mason, in the business of finding answers or unearthing the truth. Your job is to put James Tobin in jail, and you only have to concern yourself with the truth insofar as it is likely to help or hinder you in accomplishing this goal.

This focus on getting a job done—on legal gamesmanship that goes on irrespective of the questions of justice—continues in the trial section of the game. Here, instead of collecting evidence, your job is to marshal the evidence you've got, in front of a sleepy-eyed jury that would rather be anywhere else than on jury duty and doing anything besides listening to you.

The information you pick up in the first half of the game directs your behavior in the second. You've got to call your witnesses and then question them, remaining true to the lawyer's axiom that you should never ask a question to which you do not already know the answer. You'll hopefully lead the witness with your questions, thereby giving the jury the information you already know, but which they need to get, in order for them to return with a guilty verdict.

The game gives you plenty of chances to hang yourself: hostile witnesses; too-friendly witnesses who offer to change their story to suit your needs; questions that will alienate witnesses, causing them

to clam up; questions with largely helpful answers that also, incidentally, can open up a line of questioning that the resourceful Ms. Charleston can leverage into reasonable doubt in the minds of the jury; and so on. There is also retroactive self-hanging available to you: certain lines of questioning will only succeed if you played your cards right in the investigation portion of the game. If not, it's time to restore an early game and replay, replay, replay.

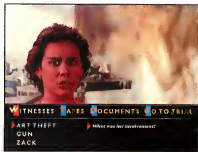
This occasional need to start the whole shooting match over is one of the game's few weak points—an option to retract your missteps with an Undo button would have been nice. Another weakness



ORDER IN THE COURT The judge in this case is no pushover; he'll boot you out of court if he thinks you're wasting his time with a frivolous case.

is an odd design feature which makes it hard for anyone who hasn't read the documentation (and what real gamer reads documentation?) to figure out how to actually ask questions of witnesses; otherwise you'll just have Sterling recite the questions out loud to himself. The game's generally strong writing also slips occasionally, going for easy gags and silly wordplay.

For the most part, though, the quality of the game is remarkable. It's put together entirely from well-acted, well-scripted, and well-filmed, live-action



THE CASE OF THE SCHEMING ARTIST You'd better gather solid evidence before you take this case to court. Interviews, interviews...

scenes that are cleverly stitched together; this helps to blend the miniature Quick-Time windows segments seamlessly into the static photo backgrounds. During the trial, for instance, you'll have a full-screen shot of a courtroom, with just the witness box animated; then you'll cut to a shot of the jury, where only two of six jurors are animated; then a shot of the judge's bench, with just the judge's face animated; and so on.

Adding to the quality of the illusion is dead-on casting (not all the actors are great, but they all look deliciously idiosyncratic, like real people you might actually see on the nightly news), and an apparently endless supply of apt visual "asides."

The designers' eye for detail is shockingly sharp: from some just-right misspellings on a police report ("tehy" for "they"), to the decoration of a greasy spoon diner; and the wonderful shot of a child playing with its mother's brooch in the public gallery at the trial. With these details and the bull's-eye faking of newscasts and other television lare ("Tonight at eleven: parking meter rates are on the rise...more rain is on the way...and the Mexican government was deposed in a violent coup"). *IN THE 1ST DEGREE* is packed with a density and

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EVENING REPORTCARD After each day of testimony, the Channel 2 news team delivers their commentary on your case; it's a good way to see if your case is up to snuff or a wasted effort.

precision of satirical detail more typical of a Nabokov novel than a computer game.

MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT

I don't want to leave you with the impression that *In The 1st Degree* is highbrow or literary, or that it is amoral in pursuing victory over justice.

The game is lots of fun, and can be enjoyed simply as an excellent and tense courtroom adventure. But the beauty of *In The 1st Degree* is that, on top of the ordinary joys of its gameplay and its "let justice prevail" climax, it has a cynical sensibility it isn't afraid to display.

While it seems obvious that Tobin is guilty, the chilling realization sets in during play that Sterling Granger would do all the same things even if Tobin turns out to be innocent. Should you lose to Cynthia Charleston, it has less to do with Tobin's guilt or innocence than the fact you were simply outmaneuvered by a better lawyer—and you realize that this game really *does* reflect real life.

Computer games generally don't induce much reflection; *In The 1st Degree* compels it. Without sacrificing the elements of play and strategy, which are crucial to a successful game, *In The 1st Degree* makes you think about our legal system, our narcissistic media, and our idolatry toward celebrities, among other timely topics. It's a fine line the designers have chosen to walk, since a single false step would send the game spinning into the abyss of self-righteous didacticism. But *In The 1st Degree* walks it like Philippe Petit wire-walking across Niagara Falls: there are no false steps, not one. And like Petit's famous stunt, the result is not just a success. It's a marvel. **A**

THE EDITORS SPEAK

IN THE 1ST DEGREE

RATING ★★★★★☆

PROS Razor-sharp satire of justice in the age of O.J., combined with a solid strategy challenge.

CONS A mistake early on can mean you have to replay the entire game when you go to trial. Having only one case to solve is a big limitation.

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Burn There, Done That

Philips' BURN:CYCLE Reprises The Role Of A Data Courier, With A Package Much Smaller Than JOHNNY MNEMONIC'S

by Peter Dlatson

THE TECHNOLOGY IS FIVE YEARS OLD. THE GAMES—THE FEW THAT THERE ARE—HAVE SLOWED TO A TRICKLE. And yet CD-i will sometimes surprise you. VOYFUR, CHAOS CONTROL, and KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES all were released initially on Philips' long-lived 16-bit console system. A superior version of LIFE: DIVIL came out in tandem with the IBM version. And MPEG games like THE 7TH GUEST, the DON Bluth portfolio and MAD DOG MCCREI looked as good as or better than their PC equivalents. And then there's BURN:CYCLE. Released in September 1994, this cyberpunk full-motion video (FMV) action/adventure gave the machine instant credibility. It was as close as CD-i had ever come to a computer game.

Now it has been transferred accurately to Windows and Macintosh. For all intents and purposes, BURN: CYCLE PC is BURN: CYCLE CD-i. And that's precisely the problem, because a great CD-i game does not necessarily make a great computer game. On the PC, BURN: CYCLE is an entertaining trifle, a "germ of a game," to adopt the language of viruses. But, as a small fish in a huge new ocean, it is hopelessly out-matched.

IT'S ALL IN HIS HEAD

To the uninitiated, it may seem like a new spin on JOHNNY MNEMONIC. Wiry data thief Sol Cutter invades megacorp Softech on a routine job to download a few files into his neural implant. He leaves under fire, minus his girlfriend, and with a logic-bomb virus, the Burn: Cycle, planted in his brain. He has just two hours to get it out, or die trying.

What follows is a largely effective intermingling of filmed characters within a burnished polygonal environment.



RUDE BUDDHA Your patience will be overdrawn trying to complete this time-consuming and unenlightening transaction at the Bank of Karmic Consciousness.

Cutter raises cash, enlists the odd ally, plays with interesting gadgets, fights it out with menacing dark-suited folks, and puts together the equipment necessary to enter the computer network known as the Televise. The latter is an oddly New Age-ish affair in

which he must reintegrate his fear and rage into his body. (I kept waiting for a naked Indian to show up.) Then it's on to a bizarre, delightful and intensely movie-like ending.

The jewel-box sized manual is hardly necessary. You point an on-screen arrow and click to move (more on this later), and use a hand-shaped pointer to drag objects to and from the pop-up inventory at screen-bottom. It's a well-integrated design, and very much of a piece. FMV games tend to be ruled by their video, but here the sequences are tightly interwoven with gameplay, and don't really take over until the inevitable Explanations Scene at the end. The writing—apart for a glaring error or two in the *Blade Runner*-like voice-overs—contains few bumps, and the acting (with Aaron Swartz as Cutter) is better than the "Dinner Theater 101" level that's usually the rule in computer

Burn: Cycle

Price: \$59.98

System

Requirements:

PC compatible

486-33 or better,

8 MB of RAM,

256 VGA, 2x CD-

ROM drive.

Windows 3.1,

mouse; supports

most major sound cards

Number of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Tripp Media

Publisher: Philips Media

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games.

The puzzles are nicely handled, too. Most of the time they're not simply sub-games for sub-game's sake, but integral

However, only one of them has a practical use, and that reduces this sequence to little more than a fancy shell game. The lifter's autopilot displays a large city map, but only two locations, the city center and the "ex-urbis," can be selected.

The game has an unhappy tendency to reward wrong turns or curiosity, not with greater challenges, but with death: cold, immediate, unvarying death. (Speaking of death, I should note that while most of the casualties are quite tame, the game is framed by two partic-

found was the lack of a documented quick quit back to the Windows sill (I also couldn't persuade the Mac version to run in full-screen on a 16 MB Quadra 650 with a Power Mac card—evidently it requires a higher-spec video card—and the game locked up on me twice).

The pre-rendered movies used for movement in *BURN:CYCLE* will play as well on the computer as they did on the original. In this mode, the backdrops lose their polish and fine lines, and drop into a more ragged video mode until Cutter reaches his destination, as though they'd been suddenly reduced to their component polygons.

FISH IN A BARRELL

Then there's the matter of the controller. At the time *BURN:CYCLE* appeared, most CD-i owners were stuck with the bundled one, a narrow-beam remote with two action buttons and a stubby central joystick. If you didn't keep it pointed directly at the console unit you might as well have been on the far side of the moon as far as your game was concerned. But for the CD-i version, the chunky controls had a pleasant side effect:

It made *BURN:CYCLE*'s action sequences much harder to complete, and its general awkwardness of use gave the game's ticking clock some meaning.

Consider the rigorous sequence in which our fashionably unshaven hero tries to escape Sofitech in a lifter. It's a great scene: The lifter's autopilot leaves Cutter free to gaze at a detailed polygon world as it whizzes by, and out of the welter of colors and shapes come a series of 10 meteor-like missiles. First you have to spot them, and then you have to lead them with your fire. One hit and you're a goner.

On CD-i, I was usually a goner. Using the remote, it took me hours to



WACHO MANNEDUINS Most of the crowd in this nightclub doesn't make much in the way of conversation, you might think you entered a max museum by mistake.

to the game. For instance, to get into the bunker where Cutter is uploaded into the Televerse, you have to run a lockpicker and play a simple variation on *Mastermind*. But that didn't occur to me until long after I'd cracked the code. I didn't see a mini-*Mastermind*, I saw tumblers falling into place.

BRAIN DEAD

The shame of it all is that the game is an underachiever. *BURN:CYCLE* has all the essentials of a good game. But it was always small, and the computer version is even shorter than it needs to be. This is very much a one-CD game (a second, limited-edition CD contains the soundtrack), and, more to the point, it's a *finer* one-CD game, whose initial impression of depth gives way to one of shallowness once you reach its limited boundaries.

How linear, you ask? The Sum = Zero Bar is packed with people, but you can talk to only one of them, not counting the Russian barmaid who awards prizes. The upside to the bar, since it's not the people, is that you can watch some amusing TV news broadcasts and insipid Brit commercials.

In an adjoining room, you can play *Psychic Roulette*, a game emphasizing quick recognition of symbols and their placement, and win up to five prizes.



PSYCHIC ROULETTE In this puzzle you have to pick the right shape from a barrage of spinning symbols before they melt down your brain.

ularly brutal murders—one in which the camera lingers over some spurting blood and guts—and also contains some PG-rated profanity.)

All this means is that you get steered towards victory far too easily. Admittedly, I'd played this game a year ago on CD-i, and remembered much of the winning path. But I blew through this version twice in just a few hours, and that included some repetition of certain segments and thorough exploration of *BURN:CYCLE*'s few unrewarding side roads.

Technically, *BURN:CYCLE* is passable. The Windows version is a clone of the CD-i original, and the only failing I



DEJA CRUISE The talking Japanese billboards, perennial night-time urban environment, and aircar transportation in *Burn: Cycle* show more than a slight resemblance to *Blade Runner*.

complete. This action sequence is identical in both the original and the port, but the PC version was too easy because *BURN: CYCLE* PC uses the mouse. This makes most of the action sequences ludicrously easy and potentially speeds progress through the game to the point that time never becomes a gnawing issue; you never feel

times—once you divine the pattern of extending and retracting passages. The control issue wouldn't have taken much to fix: Adding difficulty levels, forcing keyboard control or making the mouse control in these segments a little tougher would have extended gameplay.

But Philips hasn't really done anything to *BURN: CYCLE*. It was converted

in six months, and that lack of enterprise is its fatal flaw. If the publisher was determined to release the game on computer, it should have re-invented it, perhaps as a fleshed-out "director's cut" version, to make it competitive in this much larger and more sophisticated market. Sadly, that's not something this industry tends to do. Typically, conversions are to games as videotape is to movies: a way to make money, not spend it.

Unfortunately, on the computer, *Cutter* just doesn't, well, cut it. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

BURN: CYCLE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Strong basic design, with good integration of action, puzzle and video.

CONS You'll never get the chance to burn out on *BURN: CYCLE*. The game is too short and too easy.

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Infotek

Playing By Robot Rules

*An Amnesiac Is Accused Of Murder In ROBOT CITY,
A Game That Itself Suffers Design Amnesia*

by Martin E. Cirulis

WHILE ALL THE NEW INTEREST IN COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT, IT SEEMS THAT A DAY DOESN'T GO by without another company throwing their hat, as well as wads of start-up money, into the ring. More often than not, the first thing offered by these companies is an adventure game title, because of the handy way the sub-genre brings out all the bells and whistles of multimedia. I'm always a big fan of new blood, but a lot of the first offerings get high points for enthusiasm then lose ground and time re-inventing the wheel. Design and management teams new to the field seem so eager to show us how dumb our old games are that they fail to learn any lessons from the 15-odd years of successful and failed games that have gone before. Unfortunately, **ROBOT CITY**, **Byron Preiss Multimedia's** initial game release, while impressive in some aspects, suffers from just these kinds of birthing pains.

GHOST WRITERS IN THE MACHINE

Byron Preiss, if nothing else, has shown how to get the maximum mileage from a license. First, they get the rights to publish various lesser-known writers under the banner of *Isaac Asimov's Robot City*. (Homage or looting? You make the call.) Then they used the Old Master's name to sell their CD-ROM reference work, **THE ULTIMATE ROBOT**. Now, in an attempt to enter the computer game market, they have gone back to the Robot City and used it as a backdrop for their SF adventure game. Although the documentation alludes to a whole new realm of computer gaming, most gamers

will be hard-pressed to find much innovation in the story itself.

The game begins with one of the oldest clichés in not only adventure gaming, but in mystery writing itself: you are an amnesiac charged with murder! Not much originality here, but at least the particulars are interesting. You awaken in a crashed escape pod with no knowledge of your identity, location or even point of origin. A quick scan of your surroundings reveals that you have landed in the middle of a city street, but wouldn't you know it, the moment you think about opening the hatch for a quick look around, you pass out. When you finally awake, things are looking up again as you find yourself in a plush hi-tech apartment with a partially assembled robot in the corner. Your bad luck quickly resurfaces,



I, FORGOT You begin the game as an amnesiac in a crashed life pod, and are soon accused of murder. To clear your name, you'll have to explore Robot City to find the real killer.

though, when you try to leave and a very polite robot informs you that he cannot let you leave, but would be happy to record your murder confession!

After some hectic questioning of your steel custodian, you discover that you have crashed in a city on an obscure alien world, inhabited almost completely by robots. The city runs on Asimov's classic *Laws of Robotics*, but the Law most relevant to your situation is the one that states: "No robot may harm a human being or through inaction, allow a human being to be harmed." As it happens, there are only three humans in **ROBOT CITY**: one of them has been murdered, the other has an alibi and you are the third, so the fact that no robot can possibly kill a human means you are in a heap of trouble. While your robotic captors are extremely polite, they are also very secure in the logic that you must be the murderer and think the crime bears no further investigation, so it's up to you to find the real murderer in order to clear your name and leave. (Oddly enough, re-

Robot City

Price \$49.95
System Requirements:
 486-25 or better processor, 8 MB RAM, 256 VGA graphics, 4 MB hard drive, 2x CD-ROM, Windows 3.1; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Jeremy Ross
Publisher: Byron Preiss Multimedia
 New York, NY
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covering your own memory is entirely irrelevant for much of the game.) Of course, you are not totally alone in your quest; there is still one other human in the city somewhere, and players with any adventuring experience will think of something to do with the half-done robot sitting in the corner.

As you can see, while the backdrop is interesting, an amnesiac accused of murder and trying to prove his innocence isn't exactly new ground for an adventure game. To its credit, though, *ROBOT CITY* (RC) presents many challenges, and players who can stick things out will discover that their mission may include not only saving themselves but the entire city.

NUTS AND BOLTS

The first thing that strikes you when you boot up RC is the high production values—a game steeped in the glory of VGA. From the very cool "Robo-Noir" opening credits, to the New Age soundtrack, this game definitely deserves a place on the shelf beside *Myst*. Unfortunately, once past the beautiful wallpaper, you realize that this game could have used a little more experience at the design helm, and sometimes you find yourself playing a very pretty version of *ALIFN VIRUS*.

Perspective is from the first-person view, but you seem to have lost your neck along with your memory, and so must turn your whole body to look around. Your world is laid out in the good old grid pattern, and you maneuver by clicking the mouse on the edge of the screen.

For some reason, though, you find yourself back in the old days of adventure gaming, before anybody invented the sidestep—so moving over is a tedious affair instead of a simple arrow press. Also, an object must be in your "square" in order to be manipulated, so if you can see a button off to the side of your view, you can't actually press it until you maneuver directly in front of it. Again, that kind of tedium was eliminated in the genre a couple of years ago.

RC is also mistaken about what kinds of features it thinks gamers will enjoy. The worst is the idea that since the City is based on an amorphous technology, streets are always changing, so players won't be able to retrace their steps even after moving only a few blocks. Not being able to roughly map locations in an adventure game isn't innovative, it's bloody annoying. Gamers like to achieve things in a game, not spend their time trying not to get lost going from the subway to an office tower. Adding to the frustration factor is the program design, which splits the game over two CDs, based not on plot-position, but instead using one CD for the opening and city streets and the other for most indoor locations, forcing you to switch CDs far too often.

PROCESSING ERROR

In the end, *ROBOT CITY* is a decent adventure game marred by a design that hasn't learned much from other games of its kind. New companies should give us new ideas, not re-invent the wheel. Had this game been part of the evolution of the genre, it would have been less frustrating to play and probably more entertaining.

If you are hungry for an adventure game with a different backdrop or are a big fan of die *ROBOT CITY* stuff being knocked off under the de-



ROBOTICS INSTRUCTOR After you've re-activated Alpha, he'll be your trusty companion, following you around with advice and suggestions.

parted Asimov's masthead, then this game should do the trick for you, despite its design flaws. Otherwise, if you just want to experience a land where everybody is polite to you even when accusing you incessantly of a crime you didn't commit, try saving your money for a vacation up here in Canada. The beer is better. ☺

ROBOT READINGS

Readers new to SF, but having their curiosity piqued by all this talk of Laws and Robots, should consider reading some of Isaac Asimov's classic works on the subject. I encourage ye readers to find his older works, because the last couple of Robot Books require a bit of Asimov-knowledge to really enjoy. And I tend to avoid the *Robot City* books like the plague because, as a writer myself, I have a philosophical problem with publishers farming out an Old Master's universe to other, less creative lights.

To see why Asimov's ideas on artificial humans have endured for so long, try finding a copy of *The Caves of Steel* (a really good sci-fi mystery), the wonderfully varied *I, Robot*, or my personal favorite, *The Bicentennial Man*. All are still in print, and more than worth the price.

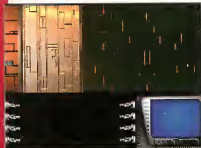
THE EDITORS SPEAK

ROBOT CITY

RATING ★★★★★

PROS A world of Asimov's robots, interesting backdrop to game, and good graphics supplement a tried but true mystery.

CONS This game has a stiff, dated interface, a clichéd plot, and the unwelcome need to switch CDs at inopportune times.



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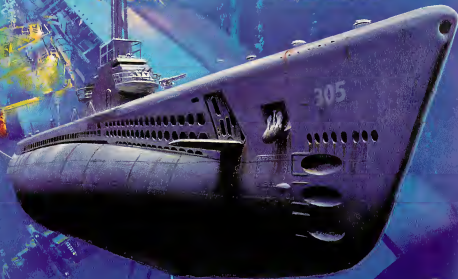
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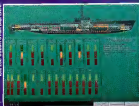


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Busted Flat In Diamondback

Cyberflix's *DUST* Is A Tired Tale Of The Farcical West

by Arinn Dembo

SOMETIMES, WHEN YOU TAKE TWO GOOD THINGS AND PUT THEM TOGETHER, YOU COME UP WITH something even better. The electric guitar, for instance—or chocolate in a hard candy shell. And then other times, you can take two weak ideas, put them together, and have something completely ridiculous. *DUST*, the latest offering from Cyberflix, belongs in the latter category.

At times, this "Tale of the Wired West" is a hard-core western, with adult language, sexual frankness and casual violence. At other times, it slides into over-the-top satire, campy dialog and burlesque-theater jokes performed by a cast of absurd caricatures. The product of this shotgun wedding is an adventure game which weaves drunkenly between themes, with a formula that's one part gritty realism and four parts flatulent humor.

DUST

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:
IBM 486 or better,
8 MB RAM,
SVGA graphics,
less than 1 MB
hard drive space,
2x CD-ROM,
Windows 3.1 or
Win 95; supports Windows-compatible
sound cards

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Bill Appleton and Andrew Nelson

Publisher: Cyberflix
Knoxville, TN
(423) 546-1157



WHERE AM I?

The contradictions are apparent within the first 20 minutes of play. The slow graphic beauty of its opening scene builds a few moments of tension: a match explodes in a shower of golden sparks, touching the end of a cigarette and then dying in the darkness; a plume of smoke rises from a man's lips as he asks the classic question—"You going to see that bet?"—while a guitar plays minor chords in the background. It's a serious scene, an archetypal moment. This is the last 15 seconds of a poker game between two rough characters, the Stranger and the Kid; the Stranger has clearly been losing all night—his gun is already on the table, and as we watch he draws his "fancy knife" and bets that as well. No go. The Kid has won again. He extends his arms to rake in the chips...and an ace drops out of his sleeve.

Pandemonium! Even as a woman's voice annoyingly states the obvious—"Guess the Kid has been cheatin' all along!"—the Stranger snatches up his stiletto and uses it to nail the Kid's left hand to the table. The Kid already has his right hand on his gun, drawing, but the Stranger surges to his feet, flipping the table up into the Kid's lap, and as the gun discharges overhead the Stranger turns and bolts—out of the saloon and out of town, running in darkness to put as many miles between him and the Kid as he can. As the opening credits roll by,



SLIM PICKENS Welcome to Diamondback, New Mexico, pardner, where the livin' is tough as a buffalo hide and the actin' is clear over-the-top.

we see him walking through a hot, picturesque Southwestern desert the following day, while the narrator explains to us his predicament—just four dollars left in his pocket, no knife, no gun and no bullets if he had one, and boots full of holes. In the end he comes over a rise at nightfall and sees a little town nestled in the dust below: Diamondback, New Mexico. Drama, graphic violence and life-and-death struggles: all very nice for a serious game. Problem is, *DUST* can't take itself seriously long enough to sustain interest.

As you stand at the outskirts of Diamondback, the town drunk approaches for a little conversation, mostly to model the interface for you: how to select dialog from a list of possible lines, what the problems of the town (and thus the game) are, how you say hello and goodbye, and so on. When he walks away, he leaves a jug of moonshine for you to pick up, the first item for your inventory. All pretty straightforward, and since town drunks always exist for comic relief, you

might not be too distressed by the way this old man rolls his eyes and wheezes out a string of colorful western metaphors. He's no great crime, dramatically speaking, especially while the audience is learning how to play the game.

Unfortunately, the old drunk at the edge of town isn't as bad as the goofy writing and atrocious voice-acting. Some of the female characters, in particular, are so badly written and hideously over-acted that they're actually offensive, simpering at the screen and giggling like the girls from an old strip-poker program. The majority of the people in Diamondback, even if taken alone, would be too broad and annoying to serve as comic relief in an ordinary game; when you put them all together, each trying to out-ham the others, the corn index is just too much.

Now, my ten-year-old nephew sat beside me during the first hour I spent playing *DUST*, and he was enjoying the campy humor and over-acting immensely. If the game was consistently juvenile, it would be far more successful. But every once in a while, the designers used a moment of completely inappropriate, completely undeserved drama or maturity, which no kid is ready to deal with—like the call girl who opens the door to her room, upstairs in the saloon, and proceeds to stick four or five inches of hanging cleavage into the camera.

But even given that a gloves-off approach to prostitution probably doesn't belong in a game this silly, there are other elements that throw sand into the gears. A scared, desperate woman scrapping in a hog's trough at night, looking for

a scrap that might still be edible—not for herself, but for her three sons, whom she has to feed somehow, now that her husband has been murdered. Or the big, crude slob who calls you “scrammy ass” and comes in swinging. This and other incongruous departures from the general sophomoric tone made me uncomfortable; instead of comic relief from drama, this game has dramatic relief from comedy, which didn't work for me and probably won't work for the majority of gamers.

FISTFUL OF ERRORS

Speaking of things that don't work well, we should probably discuss the physical attributes of the game as well. The only thing that *DUST* has going for it is that it's one of the fist few titles designed almost exclusively to run with the Windows 95 operating system. It's easy to load and cue up from the desktop, and it has a convenient Uninstall feature, which I'll be putting to good use very soon.

The graphics while walking around the town of Diamondback are nicely drawn, although they suffer because the movement engine for your first-person viewpoint isn't very smooth. The animations during character encounters are not good—jerky, stop-motion puppeteering based on photographic stills. The sound and music are acceptable, although the voice-acting, as I've mentioned already, is truly awful.

Considering that the graphics and animation are so unimpressive, however, *DUST* makes considerable demands on the system. Its opening scenes run slow on a 486-66 with a double-speed CD-ROM, and the game locked up several times during play, especially during the poker and checkers sequences; it even crashed while I was trying to save it, which was immensely annoying.

ASHES TO ASHES, OUST TO OUST

The confusion in the design of this game brings up a general



ANOTHER ROUND The bar is a good hangout after you get a little spendin' money, and the clientele is generally a bit more interestin' than the bartender.

point, which is this: if you want to use dramatic elements in any narrative, you have to earn them. That means taking your subject seriously, even if it is “just a computer game.” Someone has to go to the trouble of fashioning characters deeper than your average mud puddle (and that includes giving them names that aren't farcical), and writing dialog for them that sounds like something a real person might say.

If, on the other hand, your intention is to satirize the form, and make fun of its tropes and limitations, you lay your cards on the table from the start; you don't try to tap into drama that you don't deserve. It's either *Blazing Saddles* or *The Unforgiven*—you can't mix the two. Computer game writers need to learn that comedy is not a fall-back position, something you do when you don't believe you're competent to sustain a drama. Satire and farce can be done well, and I'm not against them, but I'm against using them as a screen for poor story-telling. ☹

THE CRITICS SPEAK

DUST

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Well, there aren't many Westerns for your PC. This one runs in Windows 95 and may appeal to the (ahem) young at heart.

CONS Overall, *DUST* has little to recommend it to any experienced gamer. Neither fish nor fowl, it has nowhere to go but Boot Hill.



"HI THERE, HANGSONE I know my lines are intended for young-uns, but I hope you're old enuf—I'd hate to get in trouble with the Sheriff."

Blood, Sweat And Fears

FADE TO BLACK Delivers More Action Than You Can Handle

by Jason Kapalka

FADE TO BLACK, DELPHINE SOFTWARE'S SEQUEL TO THEIR POPULAR FLASHBACK, IS ONE STRANGE DUCK. At first you'll applaud the game's daring and experimental interface—at least until you've been wrestled into submission by its confusing, blind, insensate fury. Likewise, you'll initially appreciate the presence of a robust storyline—at least until it tails off into insignificance. One thing does remain consistent, however: the gameplay, which straddles the line between action and adventure with enough puzzles to drop bloodthirsty arcade-fans in their tracks and enough twitch-reflex combat to stymie more cerebral gamers. I remember thinking initially: "Is this a lousy game with some really nice parts, or a great game with a few giant flaws?" Twenty hours later, I still can't make up my mind.

THE PLOT THICKENS

The plot, which picks up at the end of FLASHBACK, has secret agent Conrad Hart returning to Earth in cryogenic sleep,

having successfully smashed the plans of the evil, shape-shifting Morphs. Alas, Conrad's heroes have been for naught—during his long slumber, the Morphs have conquered and enslaved the human race. Intercepting his shuttle, they promptly chuck Conrad into a prison complex on the dark side of the moon. But Conrad, a never-say-die kind of bloke, manages to hook up in no time at all with Earth resistance leaders Sarah and John O' Connor (seems like Delphine's English translators were *Terminator* fans having a yuck at their employees' expense) and is running and shooting his way through Morph-infested halls on various alien worlds.

Like the rest of the game, the storyline is a mixed bag. The beautiful, cinematic cutscenes that advance the plot contain some of the best-looking "artificial actors" I've ever seen. Unfortunately, the plot becomes looser and more surreal the further you get into it. Eventually you'll give up following the story and just go with the flow—kill some more Morphs, solve some more puzzles, get to the next level, whatever.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE DIFFICULT

But the cutscenes and plot are at least familiar elements. When you get down to the actual gameplay, *FADE TO BLACK* is frankly unlike anything I've seen before. And quite frankly, I'm not sure what to make of it. The closest comparison would



SPIEDER BABY OF DOOM Conrad takes aim at a clanking mechanical spider that looks like a hatching from *Doom II*.

be to *ALONE IN THE DARK*, only with a free-scrolling over-the-shoulder "camera." Conrad, a nicely-animated polygon figure, walks, runs, jumps and fights much like *Carmy* in the *ALONE* series, but instead of static, painted backgrounds, *FADE TO BLACK* has a fully realized 3-D environment, with the viewpoint fixed behind and slightly above your electronic surrogate. Swivel to the left and the "camera" marches right to keep Conrad's polygon butt squarely in frame; gallop down a hallway and it slowly keeps pace; draw your pistol and the view settles gently between Con's shoulder blades as he takes aim.

It's tough to describe, and it's even tougher to play. Mouse and joystick controls are available, but over the long run, you're going to have to learn to play using the keyboard. And where *ALONE IN THE DARK* had a simple movement scheme—arrow keys, space bar, enter—*FADE TO BLACK* has a monstrously complicated and (worse yet) non-configurable layout that uses more keys than a night watchman, with a few shift-key combinations thrown in. In theory, this gives you nearly unlimited control over Conrad's movements. In practice...well, let's just say "practice" is the key word.

Fade to Black

System Requirements: 485 DX2-66 or faster; 8 MB RAM; VGA or SVGA graphics; 2x CD-ROM drive; supports mouse & joystick control, most sound cards

Protection: None
Designer: Delphine Software International
Publisher: Electronic Arts
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DID YOU SEE SOMETHING MOVE? These golems may be slow, but they're indestructible and pack a mean wallop.



SCANNERS Although the interface is a bit clunky, the game's 3-D environment does provide plenty of visual cues through nicely rendered graphics and a trusty scanner.

Take, for example, this typical sequence of actions. Coming to an intersection, Conrad peers around the corner and spots a Morph. Loading his pistol with high-explosive bullets, he sidesteps out into the hall and pumps half a dozen rounds into his foe, ducking as the Morph's return fire passes overhead. A noise comes from behind, and Conrad spins, reloading on the fly.... The key sequence would go something like this: 7, 4, 4, 4, Left Arrow, Alt, Shift-Right Arrow, Ctrl, Ctrl, Ctrl, Down Arrow, Shift-Down Arrow, Enter.

Frightened yet? It's one of the most anti-intuitive control schemes I've ever seen, and the dizzying spin of the camera doesn't make it any easier to learn. The odd inventory system, featuring "families" of objects, is actively user-hostile. Even the options screen initially feels like a Chinese box puzzle.

HORRIFICALLY IMMERSIVE

None of this bodes well, but there is hope: once you've mastered the controls

and get over your swirling-camera motion sickness, the game becomes enjoyable, even absorbing. There are no flat, cartoony sprites or bitmaps in *FADE TO BLACK* (FTB)—every object, beast and protrusion is modeled in fully texture-mapped, gouraud-shaded 3-D polygons, resulting in a "you-are-there" factor unrivaled even by first-person shoot-'em-ups like *DOOM*.

Though it's not billed as horror, FTB has some of the scariest moments found in a computer game since the glory days of the original *ALONE IN THE DARK*. Watching an acidic, flesh-eating blob ooze steadily as you navigate a maze of glass walls is cause for cold sweat; the first appearance of Conrad's nemesis, Super Morph, should inspire terror in even the most hardened guts-&-gore gamer. Brief but excellent "death animations"

accompany each of Conrad's many possible demises...my, er, favorites were "Killed by decompression" and "Killed by golem." Ker-runch.

"PUZZLES THAT DEFY REASON"

As far as the adventure game elements go, the hyperbolic back-cover blurb promises "puzzles that defy reason." Thankfully, this isn't the case. All the puzzles are fairly logical, and none are terribly difficult. There are perhaps a few too many areas where a single misstep or moment of hesitation spells doom, and there is one nightmarish jumping sequence midway through the game. But on the whole the balance between reflex and thought is solid. Some unexpected spaceship-piloting levels help spice things up, though the finale, which has Conrad's escape shuttle dodging obstacles as it rockets down a shaft, goes on too long and is far, far too difficult. It's a tedious rather than thrilling climax, as you die, restore, die, restore, die again, restore again...

If the puzzles in general aren't too demanding, the combat certainly can be. Even on the "Easy" setting, getting ganned down by Morphs will be a common occurrence, especially if you're still flailing away at the wrong keys. On the bright side, Conrad has a variety of nasty ordnance available to him, ranging from plasma and heat-seeking bullets to these super-nifty bouncing fistbees of death. Some Morphs attack with rifles, necessitating plenty of ducking and use of cover, while others simply charge in for the kill. Either way, you'll need a steady hand, steel nerves and lots of high-caliber bullets.

The action sequences aren't quite as thrilling as those in a pure shoot-'em-up, and the puzzles aren't really up to snuff when compared to thoroughbred adventure games. But the hybrid somehow works. Thanks to the disintegrating storyline, you may not have a very clear idea why Conrad is running around on, say, the Morphs' home planet, but you'll certainly get a very vivid, visceral impression of that subterranean crypt-world. You'll need a hefty processor to get the full experience, though—the high-detail SVGA setting will make even your Pentium sweat.

HALF-FULL

FADE TO BLACK is one of the more innovative games to hit the market in a long time, and merits a long, hard look if only for that reason. It takes a lot of gambles with its design, and many of them pay off. However, it's a shame Delphine couldn't come up with a more friendly interface or at least allow the player to reconfigure keys. Alas, as it stands, I suspect many gamers will find figuring out the controls to be the toughest puzzle in *FADE TO BLACK*. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

FADE TO BLACK

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Daring and experimental interface, a good mix of action and puzzles, some very scary moments.

CONS Non-intuitive controls cannot be reconfigured, and constantly swooping views can be disorienting. Too many "Instant Death" traps make you fade to black too often.

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Hold Onto Your Dice

KINGSPPOINT Replaces The RPG Paper Chase With New Complications

by David Horrar

YOU STAND, ANKLE-DEEP, IN THE REFUSE OF THE SEWERS WITH DRIPPING WATER RINGING IN YOUR ears. You decide to enter the dark, cavernous entrance; the orc who stole your purse can't have gotten very far. Motioing to your companions to do the same, you draw your long sword, testing its weight, swinging it a few times while envisioning the orc's body impaled on your blade. Suddenly, a gurgling cry explodes from the wall beside you, as the orkish thief launches himself from the shadows where he had been lying in wait. Brandishing your weapon, you leap toward the monster, hacking him across the face, sending a..."Wait, I need to find the orc's hit points. Don't roll yet because I'm not ready." You groan and sit back in your chair, impatiently waiting for the game master to get his massive house of papers in order.

This scenario is an all too familiar one for players of fantasy role-playing games. While the computerized versions have moved beyond text-only puzzle games, the pen and paper variety has remained relatively unchanged. Rolling dice has been a mainstay of role-playing, but the only real problem with this type of gaming is the vast amount of data that must be accessed, organized, retrieved, or updated whenever something of note happens. As anyone who plays these games knows, this can slow the game down considerably.

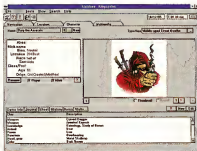
Enter **KINGSPPOINT** from **Goldtree Enterprises**. Rather than writing yet another adventure game, the folks at Goldtree created a combination game master's utility and campaign setting that automates some of the routine drudgery of running a game while giving you and your players plenty of room to roam.

THE CAMPAIGN

Kingspoint, the city, as opposed to **KINGSPPOINT** the game master's tool, is designed to be non-game-system specific. The down side of this is that the game master is going to have to spend a long time customizing things if he hopes to have more than sketchy information available when play begins.

The city itself is a pretty nice piece of work. Ruled by Khefren, Archmage of the Demon Tower (there's a classic name), the 27 districts of the city run the gamut from nice to nasty. If your group likes to play good and noble characters, they won't have to look hard to find some wrongs that need righting. The intrigue and festering evil here will also make any less-than-good adventuring party feel right at home. They'll just have to remember to watch their backs.

There are many pre-assigned addresses within the city, but most of the build-



CHARACTER ASSIGNMENT The character folder allows players and game masters to create new characters, store old ones, and keep a complete database for all the weird denizens of **Kingspoint**.

ings in the city are available for you to fit into your campaign as needed. The streets are relatively straight, so getting around within the city is not a major chore for the party.

Naturally, there are both good and evil folk in **Kingspoint** for the players to interact with. Like the buildings, many of the city's inhabitants need some fleshing out by the game master. But, if you want to just chuck these home-made non-player characters (NPCs) and bring in your own supporting cast, **KINGSPPOINT** provides you with the tools to create new characters at will.

THE TOOL

As a game master's tool, **KINGSPPOINT** breaks its functionality down into four tabbed folders of interrelated information: location, navigation, character and multimedia. There are also a few special-purpose items like the dice roller and current game time display. (Of course, nothing beats shaking up the dice, rolling it on the table, and waiting with bated breath for a natural "20" to appear.)

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Kingspoint

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to read the documentation, don't hold your breath. An ad, a registration card and a CD in a paper carrier are all that you get. Nor will you see an ever-familiar READ.ME file after you finish installation. Although there is an extensive help system, I couldn't find anything resembling a "getting started" or "how to create a character" type instruction. You just have to dive into the program and learn by trial and error.

Once you jump that hurdle, you will start out in the location folder. Here, you will find a wealth of information on any particular home or business, as well as a list of which players are present, any loose items lying around, and the current time and weather. You can even place pictures and sounds at this location (through the Multimedia folder) to add realism to the environment.

The best thing about this screen is the area at the bottom that shows who is coming and going. As time passes, this information changes, and suddenly the idea hits you that this city is alive! As a game master, for once, I felt like a load

quickly gave way to disappointment. Clicking on one of the random NPCs labeled "Middle-Aged Female Citizen" revealed that the lady in question was a 25-year-old male. That's odd. Maybe I'm in San Francisco. Trying again with an "Old Male Citizen" showed a 26-year-old female. Either something doesn't work right or this city is stranger than advertised.

Moving on to the Navigation folder gets you a map of the city's districts. A double click brings you to a scrolling neighborhood map complete with street names and addresses. Moving the pointer over an address and clicking the right mouse button (not the left, as the screen instructions tell you) will display more information on that location.

The Character folder is where you go to create a new character, edit an existing one, or review and change journal or history information. Again, there is an area for displaying assigned graphics and sounds. When creating a new character, some information about that character will be assigned randomly by the program; other information you enter yourself. One big complaint I have is that the engine, without telling you how, requires that you enter rigid input for certain fixed fields. I spent 30 minutes trying to create a "Half-Elf" character, only to finally figure out that it should be "1/2 Elf." Other than that little annoyance, character development is fairly smooth.

Open the Multimedia folder to assign pictures and sounds to an event, location or character. Although the supplied clip art and sound files are pretty sparse, the ability to read in additional files helps. All sound files added must be in the WAV format, but art can be in any of the standard graphic formats, including .GIF and .JPG.

KINGSPPOINT is a good starting point, and, hopefully, we will see more competent game enhancing tools in the future. For now, though, while KINGSPPOINT does provide some much-needed help for game masters, the bugs and lack of documentation are too annoying to forgive. Besides, I kind of like rolling all my own dice. ☺

THE DARKER SIDE OF ROLE-PLAYING

Goldtree's Hudson City For Dark Champions

If your idea of a superhero resonates more with Dark Knight, Judge Dredd, Sludge and The Prophet than with the Flash, the Phantom and the Fantastic Four, you probably play *Dark Champions*. Here *Games*' vigilante superhero supplement for their *Champions* role-playing game. If you also happen to be a game master (GM) who likes to play face-to-face *Dark Champions*, but doesn't have a lot of time to create a viable game world, you'll be glad to know that Steven Long's *Hudson City* module has come to the computer in the form of a colorful, relatively easy-to-use database.

Goldtree Enterprises' *Hudson City Sector 1* (\$44.95—DOS only) offers a considerable amount of information at the GM's fingertips. It reconciles the scheduled activities of non-player characters (NPCs) and player characters (PCs) alike within the fictional locale of Hudson City. So, you never have to roll a die in order to determine how many NPCs are in a bar or which NPC is working the counter at the local army surplus store. It's all available within a few keystrokes. As a GM who was constantly having to stop the flow of action in an evening's scenario to find that misplaced chart or character sheet, I really like having it all available on the computer.

And scenario management is really this title's strength. We use *Hudson City Sector 1* for handling the environment for both *Champions* (our heroes always function in the gray, with or without the sourcebook) and *Mesmerics*, *Spies and Power*, *Eyes* (the decaying urban environment is perfect for *Nov* role-style adventures). But we prefer to roll our own dice and move miniatures around to handle encounters. —Johnny Wilson



PICTURE IMPERFECT The multimedia folder lets you assign sounds and pictures to events and people, if you can get around the cumbersome interface.

had been taken off my chest. I didn't have to think for these NPCs, figure out where they were going or why. Instead of micromanaging a city of—lets face it—insignificant extras, I could let the computer handle the mundane goings-on of the cityfolk, and devote my attention to more important aspects of the game.

TRANSVESTITE NPCs

However, the euphoria of the moment

THE EDITORS SPEAK

KINGSPPOINT

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Saves the game master from tedious paper-pushing and dice-rolling, and offers a ready-made environment for gaming.

CONS With rigid character generation, strange bugs, and a lack of documentation, game masters will want to wait before they give up the paper and dice.

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A Brief Walk Through Time

Unravel The Secrets Of Time Travel In This Guide To BURIED IN TIME

by Charles Ardiai

Transmission Begins

I'VE NEVER MUCH CARED FOR LOOKING AT MYSELF IN A MIRROR. BUT IF I'M GOING TO LOOK AT MYSELF AT ALL, that's the way I prefer to do it. Much better than the alternative, which is what I'm facing now.

I am standing in my living room, facing...myself. An older, frightened-looking version of me. His—my?—face is flushed with panic. My—has?—hands are trembling. He's wearing my jumpsuit. There are fewer than a dozen like them in the world: self-contained envirosuits equipped as mobile time travel devices. Mine is the only one with a big number 5 on the faceplate. And he's wearing it.

He's talking to me. Look at it another way: I'm talking to myself. "Quick, take the suit," I say to me. "No time to explain."

No time. That's funny. I've traveled back nine years to meet my younger self, but somehow I haven't left myself enough time to explain. Why didn't I—damn it, he—just come back and meet me yesterday?

"Cloak yourself. Fast." Something in his voice tells me I'll regret it if I don't, so I get into the suit and poke a virtual finger at the virtual switch marked "Cloak." I hear the buzz that tells me I've just been rendered transparent. Then another buzz, this one followed by a sound like cloth tearing and the stink of ozone, something I smell even through my filtered mouthpiece. A rip appears in mid-air. Another jumpsuit steps through it. Agent 8, his faceplate says. I watch I



keep my mouth shut Agent 8 sees me—the other me—and arrests me (Can't be. We're on the same side! We saved the world together once!). Then they're both gone, into the rift.

And, a second later, so am I.

2320: HOME SWEET HOME-TO-BE

Someone has set me up. That much I gather from the TV news (once I find the TV) and from the messages on my answering machine, and from the fact that my front door won't open. Yes, it's my apartment, no question about that. I live nicely nine years hence, but they've locked me in. The newscasters are saying that I'm responsible for ripples in time, that I traveled back in time and tried to change history. Did I? I have to believe I wouldn't. But how can I prove it? The suit's been used recently; four settings inside show the last four times and places I've visited. Maybe if I were to go back to each location, I might find something to prove I'm not the one who's been tam-

pering with the timestream...assuming that I'm not. Stop that. I've got to focus. I should pack before traveling.

Is there anything useful in the apartment? Nothing good that's not nailed down, though I find some information while poking around the shelf full of action figures. In the kitchen there's a remote shopping terminal. During the news on TV, as I recall, there were some commercials; each had an ID code at the end instead of an 800 number, and here we seem to have a numeric keypad...

Some food would be good to carry on a long journey, even if it's just high-tech Cheez Whiz. Some music, too—and that translator chip looked like it might come in handy. What the hell, the terminal seems to be stocked with plenty of cash: I buy 'em all. Then I batten down the hatches and flick the switch for outer space.

2247: FARN' WIDE

It's just not my day. Somehow I've ended up 300 feet outside the Farnstein



Space Lab instead of inside where I belong. A look at my tanks tells me that my oxygen is quickly depleting. And inertia is keeping me where I am, no matter how much I try to thrash around. What I need is propulsion. Once more, the TV commercials give me my clue. I'll never say those things are worthless again. Now that I'm inside, what I need is oxygen. That and a good map. Half the station has been sheared off, and the other half is a jumble of corridors with no up or down to orient myself by.

Meanwhile, something in here is making spooky noises and trying to scare me into leaving. Could Farnstein still be alive in here? Or could the noise belong to one of the artificial intelligences he was rumored to be building? One of the doors requires an access code I don't have, but the other way is wide open. I yank out a bit of debris that's keeping the

bulkhead from sealing, then pressurize the area. Suddenly, I can breathe again.

Down one corridor is the station's docking bay. It's hard to get around here, since the room's gravity panels are malfunctioning; instead of walking straight across the room, I have to ease left and right like I was negotiating a maze. But my tanks are full now, and time's the one thing I've got in abundance—it'll be 72 years before I'm arrested. So I try all the paths and eventually make it through.

This lands me in front of a pulsing panel, and the voice that's been talking to me through hidden speakers is suddenly right there, in my face. It's an AI, all right, an intelligent piece of software roaming the systems of a derelict station.

Someone came here before me, Art says (it calls itself Art). Someone dressed like me (I knew it!), who was intent on tampering with the kinetic sculpture Farnstein left behind when he died.

Can Art help me find the sculpture? Yes, on the condition that I take him with me. Fortunately, he'll fit neatly on one of my biochips, so I say yes. Besides, I can use the company.

I jump back to my apartment to restock on propellant, then back to the space station. Art helps me pass

the locked door I couldn't pass earlier, and together we roam through a captured asteroid that's attached to the end of the station. The asteroid's crammed with ice—a chance to make some more oxygen, since my tanks are running low again, and get some water while we're at it. Then, it's on to Farnstein's sculpture room.

Which piece has been tampered with? It's got to be the one which, when I fiddle with it, morphs into the top secret, stolen plans for a time machine.

Yes, one of my fellow agents has definitely been here before me.

1204: I SEE ENGLAND, I SEE FRANCE...

What could I possibly have been doing in France during the Crusades? I jumped out of the space station and seem to have landed on top of a castle smack in the middle of an invasion. Before I can take two steps, a knight sees me—but fortunately he's felled by an arrow in the back before he can call for help.

("Fortunately?" When did I become so callous? I observe a moment of silence. Then I take the arrow.)

Huge boulders, catapulted at the tower, rock the heavy stone walls. Getting down from here has got to be my top priority (Art, still chattering away, agrees). I find a staircase leading down into the tower, then gingerly cross the parapet at the first landing. Along the way, I find a grappling hook sticking out of one of the privy holes by the wall—so this is how the invaders got inside, through the sewer system! I take the hook and, at a conve-



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nient gap in the wall, jump down onto the roof of a lower building, then from there to the ground. The only thing I find, though, is an empty forge and a dozen knights in the middle of battle. From a distance, my jumpsuit might look like armor—that's the only reason I can think of that they don't notice me. But if I let any of them get close enough, they will, so I turn back to the castle.

There's a moat, but my suit's waterproof; I cross it, first noting a footprint in the mud. I'd know that imprint anywhere—my nemesis has been here before me! The grappling hook gets me up the tower wall, though I have to dodge rocks thrown by the castle's defenders, who think I'm part of the invasion force. Quickly donning myself once I'm in the King's bedchamber enables me to elude the guards who come looking for me.

The room's empty, as is the one beneath it and the one be-



THE WHIMS OF GODS In a burial pyramid in the Mayan empire, an inscription there says you must placate the nine gods before you can enter the underworld, where a time machine piece is hidden.

neath that. All I find is a curious tapestry, and a hiding place for a key—but not the key itself, which is a pity, since in one of the other rooms I find references to hidden treasure, accessible through one of the castle's locked chests. I need that key. Maybe I could forge a new one, but for that I'd need some soft metal. Time to look elsewhere.

1050: OH, MAYA

Further back, I emerge from the timestream atop a Mayan pyramid, the burial place of a high priest. The natives are at the bottom, so I can't climb down. I go inside, reading all the inscriptions along the way.

It seems there are nine gods I have to placate if I want to travel through the underworld. Do I want to? Well, I must have come here for a reason, and I won't find out what it is walking in circles on top of a pyramid. In the main chamber I find a pair of disks mounted on the wall (a calendar of some sort, apparently), and a bowl. Outside is a statue with its hands outstretched. I spin the calendar disks to a setting shown in one of the inscriptions, put the bowl in the statue's hands...and a hole opens under me! Thank the nine gods for my suit's clamping system: a fall like this would leave a normal person smashed to jelly.

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IBM SYSTEMS DISPLAYS



I've looted in a subterranean chamber, all rough hewn rock walls, stalactites, and dank condensation. There are some skeletons scattered around, probably those of the poor souls who took that long fall from four stories up unprotected. One of the skeletons has a skull that's in pretty good shape; the other has a copper bracelet. Hm. Poking around, I find four archways, three of them with platforms for offerings. The translation chip helps me out here: I can tell which arch belongs to the rain god, which to the war god, and so forth.

At the rain god's arch, I offer the water bottle I filled on the



RENAISSANCE MAN While da Vinci's studio is a treasure-trove of information, don't get so wrapped up in the Codex Atlanticus that you forget to pick up the human heart.

space station. Sure enough, the archway opens, and through it I can see a chasm with a crashing waterfall beneath it. There are hanging platforms I can use to cross the chasm, and I use them, only to find a treasure chamber at the far end with nothing but an odd-shaped brick in it. To make matters worse, the only way back is across the platforms, and my earlier passage has set them swinging. All I can do is time my jumps carefully. And pray. Maybe, with all the gods around, it's the prayers that do it: I make it back in one piece.

Gingerly, I approach the second altar, belonging to the god

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Circle Number Service #183



SERPENTS OF THE UNDERWORLD The subterranean Mayan treasure you seek lies beyond four temples—the serpent altar pictured here is the second of those four, and belongs to the god of war. Offer a weapon to placate this militant deity.

of war. I lay out on the altar the only instrument of war I've got with me. (At least the knight on the tower didn't die in vain.) The door opens, and foolishly I walk through. Three hundred years before I was born, they made movies about guys who liked to poke around in ancient temples—right now, I wish it was one of them, not me, who had to deal with the skeletons, snakes, and spikes I'm looking at. At least the snakes here are statues, not real, and the skeletons are resting in peace (not to mention in pieces). By keeping my head, and using one or two of theirs, I make it through without getting skewered. The prize at the end?

Another stone block. No idea what I am supposed to do with it, and nothing I put on the third altar gets me any further. So I'm stuck. But I do have an idea what I might do with that bracelet I found. A quick jump timewise takes me back to the Crusades, where I pick my way down to the forge again. There's a pan over the fire, and once the metal's melted there's a mold I can pour it into. It cools quickly; by the time I carry it back into the castle, my new key is ready to unlock the chest in the storage room.

On my way down, I find the tapestry again and follow the instructions I read earlier to activate its hidden machinery. Now, when I get to the storage room, I not only can unlock the chest but climb through its false bottom to the treasure room underneath. I find gold coins in a pile—a good enough haul by itself. But I also find the king's sword, and that's what I'm really after, since close inspection tells me the diamond in its hilt is what's been tampered with in this era. The original is gone, and in its place is a focusing element for a time machine!

1488: ART MEETS ART

Before heading back to the temple, I go to the fourth site my suit has stored: the workshop of Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci. I arrive in the middle of the night, when Leonardo is asleep. This gives me a chance to poke around his workshop and look at his plans for a variety of wondrous devices. While I am at it, I find another futuristic footprint—and this one carries a serial number, so now I know who my enemy is. But

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there's no time to get angry. There's a da Vinciian elevator contraption I have to figure out how to use to get down from the tower, then another one that carries me on a rope to the tower across the way. It also carries me closer to the rogue agent I'm pursuing, who just manages to escape.

The agent drops something on the way out. I pick it up, and when I get into Leonardo's study, it helps me read his famous encrypted Codex Atlanticus. Only there's more encryption there now than there used to be: once again, the other agent has tampered with an artifact, apparently in the hope of hiding the secret of time travel in the nooks and crannies of history.

I record the evidence, grab a few interesting tidbits from cold storage (Leonardo the anatomist and the ancient Mayans had at least one interest in common), and head back to Mexico...

I take the fall from the top of the temple again, this time prepared for it. I head straight for the third altar. This one belongs to the god of wealth—gold coins are just the thing to appease him. Once the archway opens, I find my way into a secret chamber by supplementing a rope bridge with the extra rope I found at da Vinci's.

What do I find in this chamber? Yet another brick. The fourth archway gives me the final clue I need: a picture of a pyramid, with several bricks missing. I fill in the missing pieces. The door opens and suddenly my heart is beating faster. There is an altar inside with a bowl of blood on it. The Mayans were prone to

human sacrifice—the only thing that will satisfy their god of death is a human heart. Fortunately, I picked one up in Italy. I drop it into the blood, and hold my breath as something rises out of the altar, some sort of puzzle box with four rotors, each rotor inscribed with eight words. Of all the temple's deathtraps, this is sure to be the deadliest. I need to come up with the right combination of words, but what is it? The inscriptions at the top of the temple hold the key—it's not my breath I need to be holding. I realize. I set the dials and press the catch...and inside the box I see my fellow agent's final act of desecration. Whatever used to be in the box is gone, and in its place is a holotape.

When I jump back to my apartment to play it, I find out it's a holotape of the traitor herself, recording a message for the people she's selling our time travel secrets to. Apparently, she's explaining to them how to use the pieces she's scattered throughout time to make a working time machine. The only thing left for me to do is to confront her directly and bring her to justice. But where will I find her? She's managed to elude me so far. But now I have something she needs. Now she's going to come looking for me. I hear the sound of cloth ripping—and I freeze. I look up. I can see her in the mirror: she's behind me, holding a gun trained on my back.

Not now, I think, not so close to the end. "I'm sorry," she says. The last thought I have before she pulls the trigger is, "how will I get out of this one?"

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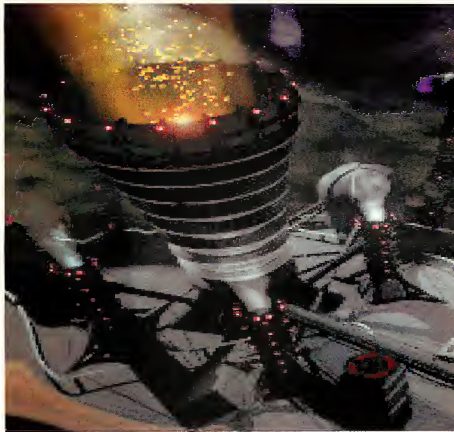
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Vengeance, Violence, And No Remorse

Origin's Stunning CRUSADER Unleashes The Ultimate In Bad Attitudes

by Paul C. Schuytema

THEY SAY THAT ONE'S WORST ENEMY IS A SILENT ENEMY. DANGER CREEPING UP FROM BEHIND IS FAR MORE NEFARIOUS THAN THAT WHICH WE SEE IN THE CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY. In Origin's latest offering, *CRUSADER: NO REMORSE*, you get to find out if that's true.

HAPPY NEW WORLD?

The year is 2194, and the civilized world is ruled by the WEC—the World Economic Consortium. A “for the people” kind of government, the WEC is an amalgamation of all of our “big brotherly” nightmares. It's the kind of rulership that requires government approval for a couple of beers after work.

The world of the WEC is populated by mega-corporations, called cartels, and

promises its citizenry a world free of poverty, disease and hunger. It is even hinted in the documentation that this fictional world is an earlier manifestation of the world of *SYSTEM SHOCK*, the excellent first-person game released last year. A news report points to the impending development of a true artificial intelligence computer, SHODAN, which is the AI baddie in *SYSTEM SHOCK*.

While the WEC may seem polished and peachy on the surface, there are some cracks in its facade, and those cracks are being infiltrated regularly by the revolutionary Resistance forces. The Resistance is a good “meat and potatoes” movement preaching representative government and true freedom. Through a double-edged campaign of information dissemination and precise guerrilla terrorism, the Resistance is seeking to take the “big” out of big brother.

THE PATH OF GREATEST RESISTANCE

You are a nameless captain in the MilOps Cartel's elite “Silencer” corps. Donning a suit of red plastic armor, you have been trained in the most precise counter-terrorism techniques. Yet you are beginning to feel that something is wrong, that the WEC isn't coming all that clean about the nature of the Resistance. On one mission, your suspicion grows as



GOT A LIGHT? *CRUSADER* may well be the most violent game yet on the PC, as this about-to-be ashen enemy can attest.

you wonder what it is you have just been asked to do. Suddenly, you and your two other squad-mates are ambushed by a WEC security mech. You duck for cover at the last instant, taking the mech out with a grenade and a Dirty-Harry-esque shot to its CPU. In your heart, you know that the WEC is wrong. So you defect.

While others in the Resistance initially see you as a potential spy, General Maxis thinks he has you figured out, so he gives you a shot: go and toast a WEC refinery. Simply put, the game's afoot.

BITTY PIXELS AND BIG GUNS

CRUSADER: NO REMORSE is an all-out action game utilizing a heavily modified *ULTIMA VIII* graphics engine. The view is a skewed 3-D perspective which scrolls as you move. The graphics are all SVGA (yes, that's right, in this game there isn't even an option for low-res), and they sure are gorgeous. Origin has created the

Crusader: No Remorse

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:
IBM compatible
486-66 MHz, 8
MB RAM, 256
Color VESA-com-
patible SVGA,
640x480 color
monitor, 2x CD-
ROM (Recommended: Pentium 50 MHz
or better, 12+ MB RAM, 55 MB hard
drive space, 4x or better CD-ROM drive);
Sound Blaster-compatible sound card
Number of Players: 1
Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in
drive)

Designers: Tony Zurovec and Mark Vitbek
Publisher: Origin
Austin, TX
(800) 245-4525



most graphically stunning game world I've seen, and they have even gone one step further by creating grimy graphics, as opposed to the clean-cut and polished environments of previous SVGA games.

MISSION-BASED MAYHEM

CRUSADER is a mission-based game offering up 16 different "opportunities" to stick it to the WEC. While 16 missions may not seem like much, they are huge, often consuming hours upon hours of play time. The general flow is that you get your mission briefing from commander Ely, teleport into the site, do your dirty work, and then the "Wizard," the Resistance techno-junkie, will beam you the coordinates for your "dist off" point.

What happens in the middle is the meat of the game. The mission environments are massive, yet they are constructed in such a way that you'll rarely get confused. That this can be done without it seeming like you're being led by the hand is quite a feat. Once in the mission, CRUSADER is a relatively simple game. Which is not to say it's easy. It's simple in that you can grasp the mechanics and nuances of the gameplay rather quickly, and they remain consistent throughout the play experience.

At the bottom of your screen is a graphical information bar showing your weapon, ammo load, inventory, health and energy levels. That small bar is all the interface that you'll ever need, since the rest of the screen is all game world.

You control your alter ego by either the keyboard or the mouse (no joystick control here). Both controls work well most of the time, yet each have some idiosyncrasies. I found that one hand on the mouse for general movement and firing, and one hand on the numeric keypad for other maneuvers, such as sidesteps or rolls, worked very well and became intuitive after only a few hours of play.

The missions are well balanced to offer up rapid-fire action along with the need for tactical decision making. Essentially, everybody and everything is your enemy (with the exception of an occasional contact, but it'll be pretty clear who they are). Some enemies are obvious, like guards and troops. Some are merely WEC work-

ers who don't necessarily need to be targets, unless they decide to pull the alarm, or if you're in need of some credits.

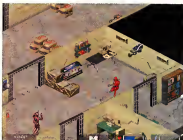
Then you have inanimate targets. These come in all forms, from an assortment of mechs to surveillance cameras, wall-mounted machine guns and energy weapons.

The environment in Crusader is as real as can be. The size of rooms looks right, and what's in the rooms makes sense. Lots of machinery, desks, terminals, and so on, all add to the sense that these are very real installations you're infiltrating.

The tactical considerations in the heat of battle make this game something special. We're not talking grand strategy here, but a much more visceral "duck and creep" approach. There's something very satisfying about darting into a room surreptitiously enough that you can take out a surveillance camera before it gets a lock on you—or gunning down a

A MILLION WAYS TO GO BOOM

Perhaps my favorite aspect of the game is that your hero gets to play with so many goodies. From automatic pistols to heinously powerful energy beam weapons, we have a full gamut of armament to choose from. Most weaponry is picked up from "Weasel," the black-market guru who, for the moment at least, is hanging out with the Resistance. To buy goodies from this enigmatic and slightly



WELL DONE The experimental UV-9 "Pulsar" Ultraviolet rifle has the disturbing trait of literally burning the flesh off of the bones. Red cross hairs help you aim your weapon.



GIMME SOME RED-EYE The bar in the Resistance base is your home away from home.

guard just as he reaches for the alarm.

Origin has thrown us tons of challenge in CRUSADER. There's the combat aspect of the game, as well as the familiar "hunt for the access keys" spin. You'll also have to contend with hidden "bouncing betty"-type mines, force fields, small (and I do mean small) motion detectors, as well as myriad floor-based grid puzzles which require an even hand and some experimentation to work through.

creepy guy, you need some credits. To get those, you need to do some pilfering "on site" in a mission.

As for traditional weaponry, I can't help but like the SG-AI "Conformer" shotgun. Perhaps it's my old DOOM nostalgia, but that weapon seems to pack the best punch for the bucks, though it does require two trigger clicks to use (one to load and one to fire).

My true favorites in the Sentinel's arsenal are the demolition packets. These charges

come in three flavors: a standard detpac, a limpet mine and a spider bomb. The detpac is a basic charge which you place and then explode by remote control; placing a sprinkling of these in a hallway as a bevy of guards comes sprinting after you is a very effective means of saying "huck off, buddy!" The limpet mine is motion sensitive and you can stick it to nearly any surface. After three seconds (giving you time to scoot), it arms itself.

Anything unlucky enough to pass near the mine is history. The spider bomb is a nasty number with legs. You let this little beast loose and then control it as it scuttles toward the target. When it runs into something, like a mech or someone's boot, it goes BOOM.

IF YOU CAN'T KILL IT, TAKE IT

Three goals will become immediately part of your tactical procedures: check out all trunks and accessible containers (here you might find ammo, demolition charges, credits, and so on); sweep the room for surveillance equipment, basting cameras as soon as possible; access each and every terminal you find.

Computer terminals will provide lots of useful information. Sometimes you'll discover a key sequence to enter on a security keypad. Other times, you can disable any alarms. Or you might discover a terminal that will provide you with a black and white image from a security camera in another region of your level, allowing you to check out what's waiting for you around the next bend.



MECH NUGGETS A few well-placed rounds will turn a multi-million-dollar security mech into a Cajun-style pile of debris.

The best discoveries are terminals that allow you to take charge of some piece of equipment, either a mech or a remote gun. Once activated, use your controls to operate the remote device, clearing the area of any unwanted enemies before you venture in for yourself. I especially like controlling the massively powerful thesaur cannon, a turret-mounted energy weapon that can turn even the most

sophisticated and heavily guarded lab into a pile of smoldering wires and ooze.

You also have the opportunity to explore a lot of environmental weapons, such as highly explosive barrels of god-knows-what, as well as jets of super-heated steam or burning fuel.

After completing your mission goals and making it to your escape point, you'll find yourself in the Resistance base, which is an old subway station. You can explore the base, trade with Weasel, watch the news reports on the TV monitor, stow your gear or talk to the others at the base (who are cold to you at first, but as your successes pile up, that relationship changes). All interaction with the other characters comes in the form of video snippets. These are very well acted, and I was equally impressed with the way in which the video backgrounds matched the backgrounds of the characters.

One thing that CRUSADER does very well (it's almost becoming an Origin trademark) is its "end mission" paybacks. Too many times, I have seen long and involved games blow right past that payback we want after a mission. CRUSADER delivers plenty of treats, from watching the results in a nice cut-scene animation, to the news reports, to being able to rap with other members of the Resistance. There's plenty of kudos and plenty of information to think about, making you all the more pumped for the next mission.

MISFIRES

While there is a lot to like in CRUSADER, there are still a few problems. The most notable is the idiosyncratic controls. Neither the key-

board nor the mouse is the perfect control device (a six-button gamepad, which I don't think exists yet for the PC, would be the ideal controller). The mouse is great when moving in the "alert" stance (gun drawn and combat ready), but simply walking is difficult and controlling a run with a mouse is next to impossible. Also, you can't roll, sidestep or crouch from the mouse. The keyboard works

well in all areas except shooting, when the mouse is far superior.

With all of the interactivity of the environment, and the fluidity of your Silencer's movement, you will soon be frustrated by what you can't do. There is no hand-to-hand combat. You can't climb on any of the neat objects in the game, and you can't move while crouched. However, you can perform some neat moves with a little practice. My favorite "Schwarzenegger-esque" move is to leap off a catwalk and land with a side roll, coming up with gun a'blazing.

Perhaps the design issue that I most disagree with is the fact that your Silencer fights with full efficacy right up to the moment of death. There is no degradation of performance as his armor becomes riddled with bullets or scorched from jets of burning fuel. I would have liked at least some correlation between damage sustained and performance.

NO REGRETS

While I did have some problems with CRUSADER, you can see that they are, for the most part, rather nit-picky. This is one solid game, and one which has taken stock of the past and improved it in nearly every way imaginable.

John Gardner, the great writer and writing teacher, said that the best fiction should create a "vivid and continuous dream" for the reader. CRUSADER does just that—it excites, frightens and challenges us with a wholly involving game experience. This is not a game for those who like their experiences overtly complex, nor is this a game for the recreational gamer—this is a game for those of us who like to play, for hours and hours and hours.... ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

CRUSADER: NO REMORSE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS CRUSADER is a wonderfully balanced game offering an exceptional play experience. Sumptuous SVGA graphics and great video actors culven the game world.

CONS The movement controls can be awkward, especially at crucial moments when every second counts.

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Circle Reader Service #158

Lemmings Dive Into 3-D

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

Our Favorite Suicidal Lilliputians Face Fresh Hazards In 3-D *LEMMINGS*

by Peter Dlafson

IF YOU VALUE YOUR SANTITY—OR YOUR SLEEP—YOU'D BETTER CALL THE CRISIS PREVENTION HOTLINE, BECAUSE the Lemmings are back. Yes, once again *Psygnosis' de facto* mascots live up to their monikers by attempting collective, brainless suicide, as they have done previously in three full-length games, several seasonal data disks, and spin-offs of varying quality. Along the way, they've evolved into tribal, festive, larger and more versatile creatures, while always retaining their innate drive towards self-destruction. Now, **Clockwork Games** tacks on an extra dimension to the original game to bring you 3-D *LEMMINGS*. You must still beat the relentlessly ticking clock to finish each level and keep the dull-witted Lems from marching ceaselessly to their deaths. But while the core of the game remains the same, the 3-D incarnation of the lovable lilliputians is a new, strange blend of classic *LEMMINGS*, *STUNT ISLAND* and *DOOM*.

The 3-D perspective of 3-D *LEMMINGS* allows you to explore each small, three-dimensional world in the hundred levels of 3-D *LEMMINGS* with four moveable cameras and a battery of CAD-for-kids controls. Not that you are likely to take to it straight away; 3-D *LEMMINGS* requires you to face obstacles such as springs, angled and one-way blocks, muddy and slippery surfaces and splitters that (infuriatingly) divide the neat Lemming phalanx into divergent streams. As the 101st lemming, you're in the trenches with them as they stroll through tunnels, up ramps, and over bridges. You're there watching as they make leaps of faith, fall



LEMMINGS ON THE LAM Although the basic premise of the game is the same, 3-D *Lemmings* creates a brand new approach to the genre.

into deep water, and make little gurgly sounds as they drown. Scenery that blocks their progress also blocks you. Just getting into position to issue urgent commands to the ranks can be half the challenge for a novice.

CAN'T SEE THE TREES FOR THE LEMMINGS

3-D *LEMMINGS* brings back a number of lemming talent from the first two *LEMMINGS* games. Blockers send other Lemmings bouncing back the way they came; builders create little staircases; diggers burrow straight down; miners dig at an angle; floaters open umbrellas that permit a soft landing; and climbers scout the vertical terrain. In addition, you have access to a "turner"—a little Lemming traf-

fic cop who redirects his approaching brothers at a 90-degree angle determined by the player. In addition, the Virtual Lemming feature allows you to enter the role of a given lemming, complete with a wobbly 180-degree 3-D view and the Highlight Lemming option allows you to pick a single lemming out of the thicket for the purpose of better issuing commands.

In the original games, you could always see a big chunk of the level at any given time, or scroll to it with ease. In 3-D *LEMMINGS*, the big picture is available only on the overhead map or by pulling back your view to a distance. You must thoroughly research a level before thinking of solving it, adding a new dimension of strategy to the classic *LEMMINGS* game. Of

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course, you still find yourself wondering how it can possibly be 5 A.M. as you deal with finding flight paths and search for the exit.

THE LEMMING GUIDE TO LIFE IN 100 EASY LESSONS

LEMMINGS may have driven you crazy, but it was still a game, not a way of life. You could always put it away, scribble down a semi-legible password and come out from under your rock for a quick dinner. But you don't just play 3-D LEMMINGS, you inhabit it, and your reactions become more visceral as you progress through the game. For instance, in an *Aliens*-like level you must free imprisoned Lemmings from cells and protect them from the horrors that lurk in the black pits. You will find the enclosed environment suffocating and downright claustrophobic. Any game that induces such a physical reaction (short of epilepsy) is doing something right. Late in the game, you will encounter a nightmare of multiple ramps and teleports in the hanging garden. I stayed there for one long night, and I want it out of my life.

Fortunately, the lemmings possess a



LEMMINGS OF LEISURE Would you book a cruise with a group of 3-D Lemmings? These 3-D adventures take place on land, air and sea.

gets yours.)

Fortunately, 3-D LEMMINGS treats you better than it treats your Lemming brethren. Clockwork Games thoughtfully includes 20 mini-levels, equipped with a sprightly *"Peony Lane"*-era theme, to illustrate each of the features and allow you to get used to the new controls. Moreover, you don't have to play a level all the way through each time you blow it. Rest assured, you will blow even the easy ones a few times while you learn the ropes. You can even opt to have the level play-back the previous run on autopilot, and intervene at the point when things went awry.

The 3-D transition only really becomes problematic once a scene gets crowded. When Lemmings march between two opposing walls and walk through one another, it's next to impossible to separate who's coming from who's going. If other rules of 3-D physics apply, how about the rule forbidding objects from occupying the same space? The Highlight Lemming and Virtual Lemming features become useful when this happens. However, supplying one feature to repair a defect in another is not a hallmark of good game design.

3-D LEMMINGS also features blatant in-game advertising at the start of the game

and at least two product-oriented levels within. Advertising in a LEMMINGS game? Granted, it's for gourmet jelly beans—an innocuous enough product. What is a lemming, after all, if not a big blue jelly bean with a Cabbage Patch head and a death wish? This product placement might go unnoticed in the *Psygnosis*' UK base, where product placement and computer games have gone hand-in-hand for years. But the phantom consumer presence got under my skin, like hearing a Beatles song in the background of a TV commercial. 3-D LEMMINGS remains a strong title despite this product pandering, but it's a dangerous trend that I wouldn't like to see continue.

Still, all these are relatively minor quibbles. To be honest, I had thought that with the last few LEMMINGS games looking all too much like tired variations on a theme, that the franchise was nearing its end. 3-D LEMMINGS, however, is much more than another rehash for marketing dollars. It adds enough new technology to make our peregrinating friends seem new again, and the 3-D levels create fresh challenges even for LEMMINGS veterans. And after far too many hours of play, I must confess that this was, for me, as addictive a game as any in the LEMMINGS series. Now, if you'll excuse me, the sun's coming through the window, and it's time for a nap. Then again, maybe there's time for just one more level... ☺



DOORLINES A first-person perspective is one of the new looks that allows you to get closer than ever to these curious creatures.

simple charm that will balance out the more maddening aspects of the game and bring a smile to your face. The game's not beyond a little non-essential graphic trickery either; keep an eye on the monitor screen in the level built around a computer. It always displays your point of view. (Get it? You're getting a Lemming's point of view, and the game

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Circle Reader Service #58

Carpet Diem

Bullfrog's MAGIC CARPET 2 Takes You For The Ride Of Your Life...Again

by Mark Clarkson

DAMN, IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN. BULLFROG HAS RELEASED MAGIC CARPET 2, THE SEQUEL TO THEIR great first-person shooter MAGIC CARPET, and I've gone without sleep for the last week while I've pursued demons, devils, dragons and all sorts of other assorted mythical beasts throughout the Netherworlds.

It's been almost a year since I hung up my old MAGIC CARPET, which by that time was frayed and stained from overuse (kind of gives a whole new meaning to the term rug burn). At that point, Order had been restored to the shattered lands and the people were happy once again.

But peace never lasts for long—there's always some major force of Evil waiting in the wings. This time around it's Vissakuth The Dark One, who has been lurking in the Netherworlds for an eternity or so, growing stronger and stronger as he snacked on the souls of the damned. Now The Dark One is strong enough to thrust open the gap between the Netherworlds and

our world—a place which you worked mighty hard to put back together last year. And once again, the only thing standing in his way is you and your refurbished, 1995-'96 model rug.

LET THE GAME BEGIN

MAGIC CARPET 2, while sporting some refinements here and additions there, is eminently recognizable. But that doesn't mean this is just another glorified add-on mission disk. This is a much better rendition of MAGIC CARPET, even if the scale of improvements is comparable to the DOOM to DOOM 2 revision.

The original MAGIC CARPET took place in a sunny (okay, foggy) out-of-doors environment, where lapping waves licked palm-dotted beaches. In contrast, MAGIC CARPET 2 is all about darkness: dark caves, dark tunnels, and cloudy nighttime landscapes (since DESCENT, everybody's been seeking the cool darkness of tunnels).

The environment is still as detailed and convincing as ever. Trees burn, fireballs scorch landscape and castle walls alike, and your spells rip the land asunder or raise enormous erupting volcanoes right before your eyes. Shoot a fireball into the darkness and it's reflected in the dark waters below.

The engine, of course, is substantially more stable and considerably faster than the first MAGIC CARPET. There are still some clipping problems (intertangling of graphics), though, when you get too close to other objects.

THE NOT-SO-FRIENDLY SKIES

With the exception of optional in-flight assistance which can help keep you fly the



DON'T EAT THE WORM! *Magic Carpet 2's* monsters may be bigger and better, but they're still no match for a well-aimed fireball.

straight and level, the main flight engine of the game is essentially unchanged. Flying your carpet is still a little like flying some odd helicopter. I still found myself using nap of the earth (NOE) techniques more in MAGIC CARPET 2 than in any helicopter sim I've ever played—dodging behind buildings, circling around hillsides and so forth.

For the uninitiated, there are two sets of primary flight controls—your cursor keys control speed and direction, while the mouse controls your orientation. Push the up arrow and you begin to move forward. Move the mouse to the right and you bank right. Pull the mouse back to climb and push forward to dive. You can't climb all that high, though; you're always a fixed distance from whatever you're passing over. And magic carpets being, well, magical, you can't crash into things. Fly into objects—castle walls, hillsides and so forth—and you'll zoom right over them.

Magic Carpet 2

Price: \$69.99

System

Requirements:

486-66 or faster,
8 MB RAM, 8 MB
hard drive space,
2x CD-ROM,

Microsoft compatible
mouse; 16 MB
RAM and VESA

compatible SVGA video required for high-res
mode; supports Sound Blaster compatible
sound cards

Number of Players: 1 (2-8 player networks
available with NETBIOS network extensions)

Protection: None

Designer: Bullfrog

Publisher: Electronic Arts

San Mateo, CA

(415) 571-7171



You can even barrel roll.

The controls work extremely well in making your flying carpet an exquisitely maneuverable craft. By moving left while "leaning" right, for example, you can execute a clockwise circle around a castle tower, keeping it between you and that wyvern you'd rather not face directly. One drawback new users might experience is that the controls are a little on the sensitive side. But we veterans have long since gotten used to that.

By the way, *Magic Carpet 2* supports the Virtual IO and Forte VFX headsets, if you really want to live in the Netherworlds.

GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

During your quest you'll fight your way through 25 levels infested with magic, monsters and demons, all toward the ultimate confrontation with the ultimate bad guy, Visulath. One big improvement over the original is how Bullfrog has enhanced the overall play experience of the game by treating each level in a different manner. Rather than just banging about, trying to collect enough mana to finish the level (which I have to admit did get a tad bit tedious in the original version), you must now accomplish a sequence of objectives, such as fight past the spiders, grab the spell, and find the hidden cavern. A flashing arrow on your All-Seeing Eye points the way to your next objective, so you'll always know what you're supposed to do next.

Another difference is that this time you're not alone. No you don't have car-



CARPET CLEANER You'll keep your head if you keep your head against bosses who think their carpets are better than yours.



pet "wingsmen" (carpetmen?). But you do have a mentor, Kafka, who accompanies you throughout the game as a disembodied Obi-Wan-esque voice, directing you from objective to objective, helping you locate new spells, or urging you to fight.

OF LEVIATHANS AND BEES

Your favorite monsters from *Magic Carpet*—brown worms, green dragons and purple wyverns—are all here. Of course, under this new reign of evil, things look a little different. The dragons have received a facelift, as have the worms, which now resemble that thing Kahn dropped in Chekov's ear in *Star Trek 2*. There are plenty of new gruesome ghoulies as well: fireflies with poison stings; demons; devils; lightning-spitting Moon Dwellers and giant, gaping-mouthed, dagger-teethed Leviathans that rise up from the ocean to chomp at you. The Hydra, which regenerates its fire-breathing heads about as fast as you can knock them off, is a serious problem. The killer bees—

you know, those pesky insects that get behind you and sting you in the back—are back, although this time there is a new contender for "most annoying monster": the semi-transparent zombie. Fly too close and they'll steal a spell right out of your hands. Sweep back to pick it up and you lose another spell, and another. Making matters worse, zombies love to trap you in a narrow corner of a cave somewhere, where you must fly over them to escape.

If you're in the mood for defenseless prey, or in desperate need of mana, there are herds of defenseless goats. You'll feel bad about killing them...once. Hey, sometimes you need all the mana you can muster.

SPELL ME

Your weapons are magical spells—fireballs, whirlwinds, flaming meteors and earthquakes—which you find scattered throughout the levels. To power these spells, you'll need mana—which takes the form of shiny pearl-like spheres. The more mana you accumulate (which is occasionally just lying around for the taking, but more often than not must be attained by killing monsters or defenseless goats), the more spells you can cast and the faster you can cast them. You "pick up" mana by blasting it with a spell, whereupon a hot air balloon will drift over to pick it up and add it to your hoard back at the castle (you did remember to build a castle, didn't you?).

The big fun in the original *Magic Carpet* was destroying stuff, and thankfully the chaps at Bullfrog know that. All your favorite hammers are here: erupting volcanoes, ground-rending earthquakes, lightning storms, and flaming meteors. Here also are: magic mines, gravity wells that can suck your enemies into oblivion, and "Fool's Mana," which looks like the real thing but spits fire and lightning at anyone trying to possess it. You can conjure bone-breaking whirlwinds or morph into a mighty, flying wyvern and let your enemies eat fire.

As you gain experience with a particular spell, you'll be able to cast it at a higher power level. Each of the 25 basic spells has



CARPETS EYE VIEW The overhead map view allows you to simultaneously scout out the level and see your immediate surroundings.

three power levels, which basically means there are 75 different spells at your fingertips. Fireball and rapid fireball, two separate spells in the original, are now simply two different power levels of the same spell.

SPELL MANAGEMENT

The original *MAGIC CARPET* didn't have a very elegant means of handling spells—switching spells meant interrupting the action. And 75 spells is one hell of a big inventory to manage while simultaneously flying backwards and fighting off hordes of mutants. Thankfully, in this new version the inventory interface is much improved. Hold down the Control key and the spell menu pops up. Click on a spell icon with either mouse button and that spell is assigned to that button. One nifty feature is the ability to "pre-load" spells onto each mouse button by shift-clicking, then cycle through them by holding down the Shift or Alt keys. It's

still not all that easy, and at times you'll find yourself wishing for a third hand (or at least a few extra fingers) while you struggle to Shift-Control click on icons mid-flight. But it's still better than the original version.

A word to the wary: set your spells up before heading into battle. There's no time to sift through your collection when you're surrounded by a swarm of winged Cymerians.



ARCHERS AT THE GATE *Magic Carpet 2's* detailed graphics really make your treacherous world come alive.

YOU ARE HERE

Guiding you in your endeavors is a magical, stone-age HUD containing your All-Seeing Eye, which acts as a radar, and the Stones of Knowledge, which display your health and your castle's health and mana, as well as your currently selected spells. Also available at the click of a button is a map of the entire level.

As much information as the All-Seeing Eye and map provide, they represent one of my biggest gripes with *MAGIC CARPET 2*. There's just far too much information presented to interpret it all quickly. Almost everything is represented by small, colored dots: flashing white dots, static white dots, moving white dots with flashing red rims, static cyan dots and so forth. There are so many dots that it is fiendishly difficult to distinguish what is what, especially when things are packed tight. A zoom function would be very useful here.

TALK TO ME

Although Bullfrog's ads for *MAGIC CARPET 2* promoted modern play, a feature I sorely missed in *MAGIC CARPET 1*, I was very disappointed and more than a little agitated to find modern play absent from the actual game. It's still network or single-player, and while the network play is stellar, there are tons of people out there who don't have access to such a luxury.

Other than that, you'll find improvements everywhere, including new hot keys that allow everything from full stops to razing your castle. And the new "save level" feature is a welcome sight when plunging into a dark tunnel full of devils. On the whole, this game just builds upon the original to create an even more compelling and exciting game. ☺

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THE EDITORS SPEAK

MAGIC CARPET 2

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Beautiful graphics, fast action, more spells and more direction have been added to last year's runner-up for Game of the Year.

CONS This is more a revision of a great game than a complete overhaul. And it does not deliver on advertised modern support.



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Twitch And Hex

WITCHAVEN: Bewitching Action Game Or Cursed Adventure?

by Petra "Lady Macbeth" Schlunk

WHEN ID SOFTWARE RELEASED DOOM, THEY ESTABLISHED THE YARDSTICK BY WHICH WE INVARIABLY JUDGE ALL ACTION GAMES. So, game designers, knowing a good thing when they see it, engaged in a real-life version of LEMMINGS to capitalize on DOOM's runaway success by developing similar games using different (and sometimes, not-so-different) graphics. Some companies even tried to add storylines and adventure elements to the genre. As usual, some of these "me-too" Doom-clones have worked better than others. DARK FORCES, for example, didn't really innovate, but it added a rich, albeit "pre-fab," world to the first-person action mix. HERETIC, while built off the DOOM engine, managed to up the ante with special effects that made the new foray worth the effort.

WITCHAVEN is Capstone's attempt to meld the worlds of DOOM and fantasy-adventure in a more complete way than, say, HERETIC—an ambitious attempt, to be sure. So, it's a bad sign when first off, the liner notes accompanying the game present the premise of the game in an awk-

ward, convoluted fashion. And although WITCHAVEN does do some things fairly well, it never quite gets it right.

WHERE'S THE WATER?

In summary, the ignorant mistakes of wayward priests allowed Illwhyrin, an evil witch from another realm, and her regiment of ogres, goblins, and witches to find their way into your world.

You must rectify the problem, eliminating Illwhyrin before the rest of her army passes into your world.

You begin WITCHAVEN without any armor, potions, or scrolls—the role-playing equivalent of being back-naked. All you have is a dagger and 100 hit points to take you through the first part of the game and, immediately, a band of goblins lies in wait for you up ahead. As you approach the goblins, a careful look around reveals some rough stones that form a stairway to one side. If you take this makeshift stairway, you can bypass the goblins completely, and learn a very important lesson. In this game, there is often *worse than one solution* to the problems and obstacles you face. This is a much appreciated component of the game, one which many a first-person game still needs to learn.

THE SLOW ROAD TO SUCCESS

You travel through WITCHAVEN in the now-standard first-person perspective. The 3-D world bounces up and down in cadence with your every step. Likewise, you can simultaneously use both mouse and keyboard to move around the dimly lit dungeon. Special moves include jump-



LOSING YOUR HEAD Even with some eye-popping gore and a few cosmetic RPG elements, *Witchaven* comes across as just another staid Doom clone.

ing, crouching, and flying. One big downer is that although you are supposedly able to run, the difference between running and walking is virtually imperceptible in practice, an irritating realization whenever you have a timed spell or potion affecting your character. Those used to rushing around dungeons will be frustrated, to say the least.

I quickly found out that one life prolonger is the automap, which astute gamers will keep on-screen *throughout* the action. I found myself taking advantage of this feature at all times, for one big reason. Although you can look up and down, it's pretty hard to move unless you're looking straight ahead. Yet, looking straight ahead prevents you from seeing WITCHAVEN's many spike-laden pits, ledges and secret doors above, below and all around. Leaving the automap on allows you to view such obstacles and opportunities well in advance. It isn't the most realistic, but hey, it works...

The automap's polygon line drawings show elevation changes, as well as ledges, pits, pools of lava or water, and floor plates. Doors are marked in red and solid walls in white. While it can be confusing to

Witchaven

Price: \$59.99

System

Requirements:

486-33 or better

(Pentium recommended for SVGA

mode), 8 MB

RAM or higher,

40 MB hard drive

space, MS-DOS

5.0 or higher, CD-ROM, VGA and SVGA

graphics supported; all major sound

cards supported

Protection: none

Designer: Capstone

Publisher: IntraCorp Inc

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have this HUD (heads-up display) laid over the action, it does save a lot of reloading and re-exploring time. Of course, one disadvantage to the automap is that it shows every little altitude change when only significant changes (such as pits or pools of lava) are really necessary. The resulting profusion of lines, especially in places where the elevation constantly changes, can sometimes render the automap useless.

DUNGEON TRAVELER

As you travel through the dungeon you'll find weapons, armor, potions, scrolls, and special items to assist you. Like *Doom*, you automatically scoop up items by moving over them, provided you have room to carry them. One nice touch is that weapons and armor wear out and must be replaced periodically.

One-use items such as potions and scrolls are critical to successful play. Health potions, for instance, are the only means of healing your character. One of the potions gives your character immunity to fire damage for 30 seconds, which is vital for getting past many of the fireball traps, fireball-casting monsters, and lava pools. Since there never seem to be enough of these potions around, you should make every effort to hang onto your inventory for as long as possible and use them sparingly.

You'll also need lots of scrolls, since you can only cast spells by using scrolls. There are eight different spells, including "fireball" and "open-door" spells. Unfortunately, your character can only carry up to 10 scrolls of each type, with each scroll providing only one use. So, like potions, scrolls are critical to success.

PRACTICE MAKES MORE PERFECT

As your character defeats monsters, finds treasure and travels farther into the dungeon, he or she will gain experience points and, consequently, levels. In

addition to increasing your hit points with attendant level increases, your character will also learn to wield combinations of weapons and cast higher-level spells. This also makes it even more important that you save regularly. If you die without doing so, you'll have to go back to square one without any of the personal upgrades you've so laboriously earned.

Combat works just like it does in *Doom* and isn't too difficult. The biggest prob-



NOCK IT OUT One of nine different weapons, the bow and arrow is a great long-range weapon but too slow to pull in close melees.

lem is avoiding damage, particularly from ranged attacks, which can quickly toast your bread. Fortunately for the fast-reflex impaired, careful planning, intelligent use of potions and scrolls, and fancy footwork can replace swordsmanship. Nonetheless, it helps to crank up some ranged weapons of your own, like the bow or pike axe, and use them judiciously to take down difficult foes from a distance. When all else fails, you can notch down the difficulty level of the game a bit, which makes key monsters easier to kill by giving them fewer hit points.

Besides combat, exploration and plenty of traps (generally pits with huge, deadly spikes), *WITCHAVEN* also contains several puzzles. These

usually entail searching a level and finding ways around obstacles, be they monsters, traps, or simple barriers. Sometimes you will need a potion or two to make it just a particularly difficult section. At other times, you will need a spell. Unless you utilize *WITCHAVEN*'s cheat codes, however, be prepared to die more than a few times before you figure out how to get past a problem area. Should you solve these puzzles, your major goal in each level is to find the teleporter to the next level and the pentagram key that activates it. It is possible to move on only after you've found both of these items.

MIDDLE EARTH

For a game billed as an action adventure with RPG elements, *WITCHAVEN* is very disappointing. There are minimal RPG elements, and even disregarding that, the *Doom*-like engine just doesn't have the oomph to get the old blood pumping. *WITCHAVEN* simply lacks the suspense of a good action game, being unable to create tension through evocative sound effects, eye-catching graphics, and most importantly, the suspense of never knowing what to expect around each corner. Despite a few interesting areas to explore, the monsters, weapons, and other treasures in this game are not sufficiently interesting or varied enough to warrant the kind of immersive adventuring experience I'm looking for. The phrase, "It may not be a loser, but it's a snoozer" comes very close to nailing *WITCHAVEN* on the head. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

WITCHAVEN

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Fairly lengthy action game with a useful automap and reasonable puzzles on every level; possibilities for head-to-head modem and network play for up to 16 players.

CONS Irritatingly slow movement, especially when using the "run" option; lacks the vitality necessary to make it an addictive game.

Be-Witched

If witch-hunting ever gets too tough, try these three cheats. To invoke them, press Backspace, type the code you want and then hit Enter.

NOMMY	Gives you nine of each potion.
SCOOTER	Gives you all weapons.
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Redskins' ball; after 5 yd. penalty from spot of recovery

TD Redskins

49ers' ball; at spot of recovery

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Circle Reader Service #81

That's Gotta Hurt!

John Madden Football Delivers Hard-Hitting Action On The PC

by George Jones

RECENTLY HAD REASON TO RECALL A CONVERSATION/ARGUMENT I HAD WITH MY YOUNGER BROTHER REGARDING THE VIRTUES, OR LACK THEREOF OF HIS SEGA GENESIS VERSUS MY NES (remember those?). The crux of that infamous heated winter discussion was something along the lines of: "Why the hell did you get one of those fancy-dancy 16-bit systems when there aren't any good games for it? The NES has more games and always will. Do you realize how many Nintendo games you could have bought for the price of that system?"

That was in 1989, and I rode my brother mercilessly for the next year, never letting him forget the error of his ways. I had *TECMO BOWL* and *RBI BASEBALL*. He had, well not much. Because of Sega's funky licensing schemes, there just weren't too many quality titles. And when it came to sports, it was either *TOMMY LASORDA BASEBALL* or nothing. "Little brothers!" I thought contemptuously.

1990 came and went and still no

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

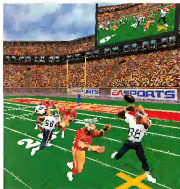
games. Then, my superiority became the complete opposite. In the 15 seconds it took for my brother to insert *Electronic Arts'* revolutionary *JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL* into the Sega Genesis and turn it on, my Nintendo castle came crashing down about



FIELD WITH A VIEW *John Madden Football's* multiple camera angles allow you to view almost 50 yards of luscious green at a time—handy for the action gamer.

me. My jaw dropped to the floor, while my brother laughed and laughed and laughed.

The reason I recalled this conversation? I just had a chance to sit down and play the next generation of *JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL* and it's almost *deja vu*. This version looks like it's going to blow away anything that's gone before it.



LIKE A MACK TRUCK

The Genesis version of *JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL* completely changed the way computer football is played. Graphically, it gave players large characters and a vertically-oriented field. On the field, it gave players the ability to pass intuitively and easily (through the passing boxes) and allowed ball carriers to spin and burst with speed. It even had some rudimentary statistics.

The same revolution appears to be looming for PC pigskin play, a genre which has traditionally relegated action to the back seat and let the more cerebral components of the game drive the experience. Graphically, *JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL '96* for the PC will go for paydirt. In terms of gameplay, this game will own the end zone—it's built for football fans who, like the players Madden himself favors, like to get muddy and dirty during a game.

This isn't to ding the excellent football titles which are already out there, particularly the absolutely fantastic *FRONT FOOTBALL* series from *Sierra/Dynamix*. But, have you ever tried to throw a pass in *FPSF*?

ALL AIRPORT TEAM

In the realm of strategy games, graphics can be compromised every now and then, assuming the gameplay is extremely good (and even this is becoming less true). This simply isn't the case with sports action. If you can't tell what's hap-



PASS ATTACK Passing the ball is easier in JMF than most other football games on the market.

pening on the field, court or ice, it isn't a good game. In football, that's an especially auspicious challenge that requires graphically illustrating the motions of 22 players simultaneously.

So, graphics presentation was one of the obstacles Electronic Arts diligently worked to conquer during the development of **MADDEN FOOTBALL**. From our preliminary glimpse of things, it appears that they've come up with a winning way. Slick introduction and interface (which is

consistent with the state of the art they introduced in **NHL HOCKEY** and **NBA LIVE**) aside, this title's football players look more like football players than most other games on the market. What they've basically done is taken the old beefy 10-bit player models and made them look a lot more lifelike through the use of real motion capture and higher resolution graphics. The end result is stunning.

The rest of the game has a shiny new uniform, as well. The whole of the interface has been

dressed up and accurately reflects game selections (e.g. choose to play in the snow and the field reflects that; choose a different team and the helmets change as well). The field looks good and the stadiums look great (in fact, complete virtual stadium models were constructed for the Playstation version of the game). In short, **JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL** is one attractive game

KERRUNCH

The on-field action should be, of course, excellent. If there is one thing the folks at Electronic Arts know, it's how to make the action portions of their games work. The fact that they've had 4 years to tweak and adjust JMF's gameplay should show through in this PC version of the game.

Indeed, though the graphics are completely different, the gameplay is essentially the same, with few differences. The ground game, revolutionary for the PC platform simply because there is one, allows you to actually find holes at the line of scrimmage and pop through them. The passing game remains one of the easiest-to-use and most enjoyable in the game. Drop back, hit a button to go into pass mode, select your receiver and drop the ball in. Of course, you've got to worry about 300 pound linemen and the like getting up in your face, but hey—that's all part of the game. One difference old-school Madden users will notice is the absence of the "passing windows" that camera-isolated each receiver at the top of the screen.

Now, helping you see all the action are five different camera angles, from the standard vertical flyfield to the "Tecmo Bowl" view to various zooming vantage points. But while these viewpoints will be huge for replaying great plays, I have a feeling most people will stick to the standard JMF camera angle.

GENUINE PIGSKIN

So, is this real football? Or even a "real football" simulator? No, and the designers at Electronic Arts would be the first to confess to that. "Real football is boring," asserts one member of the design team, "If we simulated the real thing, people would very quickly grow frustrated with the game; it would be so difficult as to be unplayable. For example, for Steve Young to be successful, he's got to get rid of the ball in under 3.0 seconds. There is no way the majority of players out there is so do that, even in a computer game." He's right! **JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL** isn't real football. It's arcade football—fun, fast, arcade football.

I can't wait to show this to you-know-who. ☺



PROFESSOR MADDEN SPEAKETH One multimedia bonus you'll enjoy is Madden University, where you'll be able to ask questions about the game, as well as watch video clips of Madden and several NFL rookies.



The Red Baron
From 1916 to 1918 he scored
80 victories.



Maj. Richard Bong
Top U.S. ace of all American wars with
40 victories.



Maj. Gregory "Poppy" Boyington
Top WWII Marine Corps ace with
28 victories.



Jay "Vossman" Thompson
publisher/entrepreneur with
10 victories LAST NIGHT!

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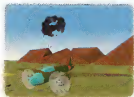
You won't find courageous flying aces only in the history books. You'll meet them online, live and in real time, playing the best online air combat game in the world — multi-player Air Warrior.

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Circle Reader Service #110

Flight Sim Hop Shops



"OH, HOW EXCITING—VIRTUAL SIGHTSEEING."

That's the reaction lots of serious combat sim fliers have to

programs like Microsoft's FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5.1 (FS 5.1). If you ever plan to unstrap from your THUNDERSLAT, put away the FLIGHTSTICK, and try your luck in the cockpit of a real plane, though, you'll find FS 5.1 is an invaluable tool for learning the skills you really need to know as a pilot. No, I don't mean snap rolls and Immelmans, I mean VOR navigation, instrument landings, and airport approach patterns.

Real military pilots get their initial training in small planes and gliders, so there's no need to feel like you're less than a real man (or woman) for flying a virtual Cessna. Hey, did you learn to drive in a Ferrari Testarossa? So if you're serious about becoming a proficient sim pilot, plan on getting in some single-engine hours. Not only will it make you a better sim flier, but the experience will transfer well if you ever decide to take the stick in a real plane—whether it's a weekend at Sky Warriors or lessons at the local flying club.

WINGING IT

Although FLIGHT SIMULATOR has come a long way since its earliest Apple, CG4, and CGA PC incarnations, it still has a number of quirks and limitations. Foremost of these is the small selection of aircraft that you can fly—a single-engine Cessna, dual-jet Lear, Schweizer glider, and a questionable Sopwith Camel. Also, tower communication is handled through a scrolling text window, which is more than a bit distracting when you're on final approach in a thunderstorm.

BAO, the company that develops FLIGHT SIMULATOR for Microsoft, is beefing the program up with its FLIGHT SIMULATOR FLIGHT SHOP (FSFS) add-on for FS 5.0 and 5.1. The feature that will have the widest appeal is the aircraft design module, but there are a number of other enhancements to the program that will be especially appealing to real pilots, and pilot wannabes. FSFS includes three main modules: AIRCRAFT FACTORY, ATC WORKSHOP, and a patch for FLIGHT SIMULATOR that adds a variety of capabilities including digitized voices and a flight-model editor.

AIRCRAFT FACTORY isn't for the faint of heart. Don't expect to sit down in front of your PC and churn out a detailed B-24 in a single sitting. It's

a long, meticulous procedure that combines elements from CAD and spreadsheet programs, as well as a few of the skills you picked up building model planes as a kid. It's a complicated process, but a series of tutorials takes you through modifying existing planes and creating your own plane (the world's largest balsa glider). If you dive in with no preparation you'll be confused, but if you work through the tutorials you'll find the process unfolds logically. You'll build dozens of individual components, fit

DESIGN YOUR OWN

AIRCRAFT WITH

ADD-ONS FOR

MICROSOFT FLIGHT

SIMULATOR 5.1

ON THE RADAR

Origin's AH-64D Apache combat helicopter simulation is still a good way from getting out of the company's Austin, Texas doors, but that hasn't stopped designer Andy Hollis from planning ahead for the future. Sources at Origin indicate that Hollis has been building his sim team in preparation for development of the next titles in Origin/EA's Combat Simulations series. No word yet on exactly which vehicles follow Origin's much-anticipated Apache simulation, but sources at the company tell us that current plans are for a fighter jet sim (possibly the F-22 Lightning II), as well as a tank simulation.

Origin is already considering an expansion pack for World of Warcraft, as well. The new world include not only a series of new missions, but also a module that would add multiplayer capabilities.



by Denny Atkin

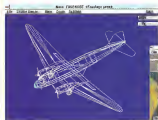


FLY THE CGW SKIES Flight Shop makes it easy to change a plane's paint scheme, illustrated by this modification of FSFS's DC-3.

them together, and assign them colors. Once the plane is together, you can map textures and logos on it.

PLANE, NOT SIMPLE

YOU CAN USE AIRCRAFT FACTORY to build literally any kind of fixed-wing plane, excepting VTOL craft such as the Harrier or Osprey. Actually, while the design tools are geared towards aircraft construction, your model can be as unconventional as you want—with a little patience, you can actually use this program to make pigs fly! This is possible because the program doesn't actually use the physical design of your plane to model its flight performance. Instead, you assign one of the included flight models to the plane, and then tweak it in the flight-model editor in FLIGHT SIMULATOR. This is kind of disappointing—it would be great if you could, say, take an F4U and see how clipping the wings and adding an aerodynamic, liquid-cooled engine would affect its performance, just by modifying the visual model. You can do this, but it involves changing a series of numbers rather than altering the airframe. Apparently we still don't have the



WHAT A CAB Creating 3-D models in FSFS isn't easy, but the results can be worth bragging about.

computing power to do it the other way.

Even if you don't have the time—or patience—to create your own designs, FSFS is worth a look. The package includes six new aircraft, and you'll need FSFS if you want to fly any of the new designs bound to pop up all over online networks after the program's released. Plus you can have some fun just modifying the performance of the included planes. Imagine a DC-3 sporting a pair of engines ripped from an SR-71 Blackbird. You can model it here. (By the way, it turns out that the DC-71 has a takeoff roll of, oh, about 20 feet.)

ON THE PATH

If you're really serious about the flying experience, check out the ATC WORKSHOP module. This utility lets you create authentic flight plans (or "adventures," as BAO calls them, although a cross-country in a simulated Cessna doesn't seem all that adventurous). With a database that contains all the NAVADS and airports in the U.S., it's great for previewing real flight plans, although you're realistically limited to the scenery included with FS 5.1. FSFS not only prints an FAA-style flight plan to use on your flight, it also sets up Air Traffic Control (ATC) to guide you on your flight.

FSFS adds an ATC voice to FS 5 that really enhances the flying effect. Controller voices give you clearances, weather reports, radar checks, and so on. The voice is digitized, not synthesized, so it sounds pretty authentic—except when a series of numbers is being read off, when it sounds more like the automated telephone operator. The audio weather report will come in handy, since FSFS adds changing weather conditions to FS 5.



Flight Shop Squadron

Flight Simulator Flight Shop adds six new planes to the FS 5 stable:

Beech C55 Baron: A twin-engine, six-seat general-aviation plane with a maximum speed of 210 knots.

Blue Angel: A beautifully modeled F/A-18 Hornet jet painted in the colors of the Navy's zero-attack team.

Douglas DC-3: A garishly painted but amazingly detailed model of the renowned twin-engine airliner.

FSFS Ultralight Model Z: A tiny ultralight plane powered by a single 30 hp engine. Great for slow sightseeing.

North American T-60 Texan: The venerable radial-engine WW II trainer. For a good starter project, try your hand at Hollywood-style aircraft construction and modify it to look like a Mitsubishi Zero.

Northwest Airlines 747-400: The world's largest airliner. Don't try a flaps-up takeoff in this behemoth.

ONLINE AIRLINES

A number of FS 5 fans didn't wait for FSFS to start creating their own planes. They reverse-engineered the aircraft file formats and did it the hard way. You'll find a variety of new planes online that don't require FSFS. They're of varying quality, but many are worth a look. On AOL you'll find them in the Flight Simulation Resource Center (keyword FLIGHT), while CompuServe users should GO FSFORUM.

The best plane I've seen is Simula's DC-9, worth checking out if you want to see how a large jet handles. Simula even attempted to model Bell's JetRanger helicopter. Look for JETRANGR.ZIP; it's not perfect, with a minimum speed of 20 knots, but it's pretty amazing that they even got it close.

Cooler utilities include FSCLOUDS, which adds seven new cloud types and 10 weather-related flight challenges; AVIEW, which prints maps using FS 5 scenery data; AIRPORT and SCAM, scenery-design utilities; and ATCCOM, which uses the Creative Labs TEXTASSIST program to add synthesized ATC radio communications. You'll also find scenery for the world over, whether you're looking for your neighborhood airport or updated Colorado scenery that includes the new Denver airport. ☺

mission: DEADLY SKIES™

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NOT
INCLUDED**

Vertical loops...quick turns...speed bursts...air brakes. Flying by the seat of your pants in a one-on-one dogfight to the death can make a pilot kind of queasy. It doesn't matter that you're armed to the teeth with gun cannons, heat seeking missiles and guided missiles. You still have to keep the other guy in your sights using whatever moves you've got. Did you remember to save that dog tag from lunch?



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PC CD-ROM



SEGA SATURN

Circle Reader Service #109



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Thinking I Could surf on
Red clouds all day, then
a worm hole ripped and
twisted my thoughts
into toxic waste.

How I



Dispersion cannon missiles
came toward me
like a school of Angelfish,
metallic, all gleaming.
Hey, they almost
looked edible.



HallucinAtions begaN to
happen aLL aroUnd me.
Then I realiZed thOse
Rockets weRe Real and
they thouGht my flyiNg
suckEd. Big tiMe.

died.



A thouSand plasMa rockEts
taPPed on mY winDshield.
I didn't hEar them knOcking
so they taPPed harDer.



SPiNNing my heAd around
in a biLLion directiOns.
Bad moVe. As I wAs
seriOusly violated in a
cross fire from a cloud
that looked as innocent
as a kid holding candy.



Doing a LiTTle tunnel spying,
picked the wRong tuNNel
obviOusly as the DOM rocketS
heAding my way decided to do
some explOring theM selves.
I'll leave their intENDED
destinatiOn to your intogination.



DOing IOOp the IOOp
like a moNkey on a trEE,
then shraPnel, buildiNgs,
and funky stuFF all hit
Me on my nOse like a
wEt thiCk moUnd of sPit.

You plummet from the sky. You hit your cockpit with bulging eyes.

This is no demo, it is you flying that warship. Eight planets await your twitching trigger finger, a spot on your satellite map and the brush of your metallic wings: Terran, L24-D, Ares, New Kroy, Sebek, Vestra, Tiamat, and the ultimate eye twitcher, Fury. Look around your cockpit using your virtual head and fly the impossible with six degrees of freedom. Your joy erupts into a wry smile. A servo laser is your best friend, a customized cockpit and an energy shield the only barrier between you and a sharp jolt back to reality. The reality being, Fury³ is one of the first games optimized for Windows[®] 95. Kill stuff, fry stuff, fry, fry some more until it's as natural as breathing. Fight Fury³ to the death on multiple missions. In the clouds, on the ground, and in netherworld tunnels.

Death comes like grains of salt out of a shaker in Fury³. Enjoy them or at least die trying.

Fly the "Total version" of Microsoft Fury³ at <http://www.microsoft.com>.



Thinking nothing bLEEDs on
this pyraMId-infested
plANet, then 30 or so bOmbs
explAINED to me why.
There's no time to bLEEd.

Microsoft

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?™

Third Time's A Charm

JETFIGHTER III Enters The Pattern Dressed To Kill

by Denny Atkin

MORE THAN FOUR YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE RELEASE OF *JETFIGHTER II*. CAN THE VENERABLE SIM BE SOUPED UP ENOUGH TO COMPETE WITH TODAY'S flight sims? Developer **Mission Studios'** goal isn't just to bring *JETFIGHTER III* up to date, but to push it ahead of the pack.

This sim marks the return of designer Bob Dinnerman, creator of the first two *JETFIGHTER* games as well as the Amiga classic *F/A-18 INTERLEUTER*. Mission's goal isn't ultra-realism, but to provide an interesting campaign structure, an immersive gaming experience, and some exciting flying. *JF III* won't be a simplified beginner's sim like *TOP GUN*, but it doesn't look likely to challenge *SU-27 FLANKER* in the flight physics department, either.

That doesn't mean *JF III* won't push the envelope in many respects. It looks set to surpass even **Ocean's** *EF2000* in terrain detail and accuracy, and it sports some very impressive graphic effects, such as curving missile trails. The campaign looks particularly promising: unlike *U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS*, how you perform during a particular mission affects what you'll be faced with next; but the missions are scripted, so there's more interesting background info on each mission than you'll get in sims like *EF2000*.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

JF III is set in an unlikely future, using an unlikely combination of equipment. You'll be working for the United Nations Rapid Deployment Force, aboard the *Nimitz*-class carrier *U.N.S. Peacekeeper*. You're flying a navalized version of the Air Force's *F-22 Lightning II*. Missions progress in an adventure-style tree, where the outcome of one mission decides which

you'll fly next. There's lots of variety—at any point in the campaign you could be flying one of five possible missions.

After training around San Francisco, you'll sail to Cuba. The Cuban military has been hiring its services to Colombian drug cartels, using ex-Soviet hardware to safeguard drug shipments to the United States. Once you've put a stop to this nefarious alliance, you'll be deployed to Chile, where you're charged with putting a stop to an Argentinian invasion. Ranging from relatively flat land to the towering Andes mountains to the icy Antarctic Peninsula, the Chilean terrain gives many opportunities for Mission to show off its new scenery engine.

This scenery engine is *JF III*'s most impressive feature. Over 2,000,000 square miles are represented. Defense Mapping Agency charts were used not only to ensure the accuracy of terrain elevations and coastlines, but also of what's

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development

on that terrain. The maps used mark off land areas as farmland, urban, rural, swamp, roads, snow-caps, desert, and so on. Scenery programmer Mike Woodley (who spent eight years as head of scenery at *SubLogic*) and his team use this data to map any of the dozens of possible land textures on to the ground. You'll see a realistic variety of land features, rather than large expanses of generic green. Ground objects abound;



CLEAR THE DECK! *JetFighter III* carrier landings feature not only a rocking and rolling ship, but also a deck that's realistically packed with planes.



BOOM & ZOOM Unlike its iron-bombs-only predecessor, *JetFighter III* should pack a full arsenal of air-to-ground weaponry.

Lightning Strikes Again

A few years ago, the F-16 Falcon was the darling of sim designers. Now it's the Lockheed F-22 Lightning II, which beat out the McDonnell YF-23 (simulated in JetFusion II) to win the Air Force's Advanced Tactical Fighter competition. This \$71 million jet is the Air Force's first true stealth fighter (the F-117 Nighthawk has no air-to-air capability). So far only the YF-22 test model has flown; the first production F-22 (a flight-test model) is scheduled for Air Force delivery in 1997, with active squadron service beginning around the turn of the century.

To maintain a steady profile, the F-22 carries its weapons internally on retractable launchers and features "two-dimensional"



Lockheed F-22 Lightning II

exhaust nozzles. The Lightning II is designed to be highly agile and can supercruise at Mach 1.5 without afterburners; it's also set to carry one of the most sophisticated offensive and defensive avionics suites ever fitted to a fighter.

The F-22 was designed as an air superiority fighter with first-shot, first-kill capability, but the Air Force is also considering variants for interdiction, reconnaissance, and Wild Weasel missions. Although JetFusion III and some other sims have the F-22 operating off aircraft carriers, no naval variant of the aircraft is currently planned, and the real plane isn't carrier-capable.

buildings, roads, and even electric towers dot the landscape.

Most impressive, though, is that Mission has managed to completely eliminate terrain warping. There's none of the way

"flowing" terrain you see in programs like USNF.

The mountainous terrain will come in handy in combat situations, as terrain-masking can be used to hide from enemy radar as you come in for an attack. Although it wasn't implemented in the version I saw, Mission hopes to eventually "fractalize" the polygons used for mountain faces to boost realism even further.

are missiles followed by smoke trails that cut off when the motor burns out, but these trails curve. Seeing a SAM arcing up at you from the ground or an old-bore-sight missile curving towards a target is breathtaking.

The one feature that wasn't breathtaking in the version I saw was the graphics resolution. Although JF III has some wonderful effects here and beautiful terrain textures, as this preview went to press the game was still running only in VGA, 320x200 mode. Dinnerman was busily coding an SVGA mode into the graphics engine, though, and the company is optimistic that a hi-res mode will be in the game before the expected January ship date.



Argentina-Chile War: Day 3
Ensign Matthew "Slasher" Harmon
Ship's Library: End to hallway

BELOW DECKS In the library you'll be able to catch up with the latest news reports on your campaign; the 7th Guest-style carrier sequences are surprisingly anachronistic.



CITY'S SLICHER Urban combat's made all the more realistic by the varied landscaping, buildings, and—best of all—a complete lack of texture-warping.

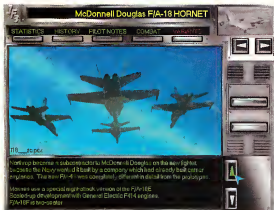
A CLOUDY FUTURE

Here's a first for flight simulations: transparent clouds. Yes, you can actually peer through thin cloud layers and fog and see the buildings and land below. This transparency is used for all smoke effects, even missile trails. Speaking of which, the missile trails do an amazing job of heightening realism. Not only

CARRIER WAVE

In rough weather, JF III's carrier deck actually pitches up and down, so you'll be able to experience the thrill of the carrier deck slanting up into you as you touch down. Also, the deck isn't unrealistically bare; you'll find planes parked all over the place, and you can even expect the occasional go-around because another jet hasn't yet moved off the wires.

Once you've landed, you'll go below decks. There mission-selection interface has been built around a 3-D rendered carrier interior that you can explore, 7th GUEST-style, moving from the operations center to your cabin to the flight deck and so on. (Thankfully, there's also an icon menu that lets you jump immediately to each location.) The carrier sequences



ENCYCLOPEDIA AERONAUTICA Taking a page from Jane's, JetFusion III includes a fairly complete online aircraft reference tool.

aren't just eye candy. You can go down to the library and research a comprehensive aircraft and weapons database (it looks as if it'll rival the one in EA/Jane's *Advanced Tactical Fighters*), and check your

progress in the conflict by reading the newspaper. Head back to your cabin and you can use your personal computer to exchange e-mail with pilots on other ships, gathering info on their battle suc-

cesses. When you're ready to fly again, a multimedia mission brief will point out your targets.

HEAD-SPINNING

Of course, it's the experience in the cockpit that matters most of all. The virtual cockpit in *JF III* is top-notch; instruments remain functional as you scroll the view. As you maneuver, your view shifts slightly, as if your head's moving from the G forces. The cockpit *looks* realistic, but how will it feel? Exactly how accurate the flight model will be remains to be seen; the alpha-test version I flew had only a preliminary model. (In fact, it wasn't even decided if any planes other than the F-22 will ship with the game, or if they'll come on the expansion disc.) From discussions with Mission, though, you can expect the flight physics to be dramatically improved from *JetFusion II*, but still simpler than what you'll find in hard-core sims like *Falcon 3.0* and *Su-27 Flanker*. Mission's shooting for accuracy, but not at the expense of fun. After all, to paraphrase The Bard, "The gameplay's the thing." ☛

[\$5,000 in prizes.]
See the **YOU DON'T KNOW JACK** ad in this issue for contest details.

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK
Question One

All the Latin I *know* I learned on **YOU DON'T KNOW JACK**! **\$1,000**

Remember the episode on which Greg's friend told him the crappy car? His dad was quick to teach Greg the concept of "caveat emptor," which in Latin means what?

1. let the buyer beware
2. let the buyer beware
3. you've grounded for two weeks
4. neither borrower nor lender be
5. buy low, sell high

Steve \$0
Rod \$0
Sig \$0

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YOUR NEW CAR?**

We Crashed It.

Right along with most of America here's why a car... to make the best buying decision. You can save the...
What? To get over a sales guy, drive over to the...
...to have and such a quick performance like...
...to get that. So no addition to his ego and all...
...and if they still that makes sense, you can...
...with me will free call, you'll have more information.

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FOR 20 YEARS

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Stomach-in-the-throat-racing.**



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Fright Simulator

The Tension Is Non-Stop When You Control Air Traffic In TOWER

by Scott A. May

AS IF CONTROLLING YOUR OWN LIFE ISN'T STRESSFUL ENOUGH, TRY TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE lives of thousands of people, every day. An air traffic controller can't afford to have a bad day at the office—they don't make enough Maalox to soothe that scenario.

BAO places you in the hot seat with TOWER, an ultra-realistic and highly enjoyable air traffic controller (ATC) simulation. Three years in development, the product is a joint effort by Wesson International and BAO. TOWER is a scaled-down, Windows 3.1 version of TOWER/Pro, a PC-based ATC tower training system used by the FAA and Canadian government.

This simulation is geared toward the hard-core aviation buff. It's extremely authentic, making only a few concessions for the sake of gameplay. The most apparent of these is your workload. Most real-life towers consist of at least three separate positions: Local Control, Flight Data and Ground Control. TOWER makes you wear all three hats simultaneously—a bone-chilling prospect for ATC trainees. The good news is that the computer-controlled pilots you'll encounter are no dummies. They're programmed with an innate sense of self-preservation and ample artificial intelligence, presumably to simplify the command process and ease your workload. For example, pilots will always opt for a missed approach rather than risk their safety based on your mis-

direction or inadequate information. There are no commands for altitude adjustments—a curious omission that decreases your burden, yet eliminates a crucial aspect of the ATC experience.

ANY AIRPORT IN A STORM

Three airports are provided with the sim: Chicago O'Hare, Washington National and Canyon Field. The first two feature beautiful bitmapped photographs of their respective airfields, rendered in a scrolling, 360-degree panoramic view. Aircraft for both airports are also

time 3-D displays, including binoculars, super binoculars, spot plane and pilot view. Though less realistic, these enhancements jazz up what might otherwise be a dry simulation.

Each airport offers three predefined scenarios, concentrating on arrivals, departures and a mixture of both. In addition, you can modify difficulty levels by adjusting the amount and frequency of aircraft traffic, time of day, and number of available runways. The airport you choose also determines your overall difficulty. Canyon Field offers a classic layout of four total runways. The far extreme is

Chicago's O'Hare: With its maddening maze of up to 12 runways, there's never a dull moment. A performance review at the end of each shift rates your progress, based on your skill level and the scenario's difficulty level, with points earned for successfully working each aircraft and points deducted for errors. Unless set to practice mode, the results of each scenario add or detract from your ongoing career standing.

LOOKING OUT THE WINDOWS

The program's multi-window display allows you to resize and reposition any screen component to your liking. Available displays include the large tower view, flight strips, communications box, compass, wind indicators, BRTE and ASDE radar. The program supports multiple resolutions, including 640x480,

SNEAK PREVIEW
Game Still In Development



PLANE STRAIN Be alert when managing takeoffs, approaches and taxis simultaneously; now's a good time to become a coffee achiever.

bitmapped, resulting in an incredibly realistic setting. Canyon Field, on the other hand, is a fictionalized airport rendered with simple solid-fill polygon graphics. The trade-off in realism, however, is well worth the price. Canyon Field is the only airport to offer an enticing array of real-

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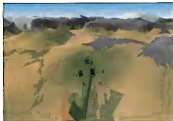
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As you'd expect, aircraft separation is your most crucial responsibility. Whether on the ground or in the air, this takes precedence over missed approaches and scheduling delays. For most incoming and outgoing aircraft under your control, you are required to have a minimum distance of three miles and 1000 feet separation. This can be extremely difficult to maintain, as the taxi lanes fill up and one or two missed approaches cause arrivals to stack up.

The sim gives you the option of printing flight strips—arrivals and departure information—on either plain paper or actual FAA strips. Try printing the flight strips and use the margins to jot down runway assignments. Printed strips also free up more screen space, allowing you to create a larger tower display.

Controlling traffic on the ground can be one of the most challenging

aspects of the sim. For departing aircraft, the trick is to stagger their take-offs by at least one minute, to assure minimum airborne separation requirements. Other considerations include crossing runways in the path of incoming or outgoing aircraft, as well as the types of aircraft in your departure line-up. Ordering a Cessna into the wake of a 747's jet blast is not a good situation.

Another crucial Tower skill—which helps in controlling aircraft separation—is understanding airport traffic patterns and what each aircraft can do within them, as well as timing of the proper commands. This is where the aerial ballet metaphor really comes into play, as you break multiple aircraft from holding patterns into downwind, base and final approach, with one eye on outgoing aircraft making their departing roll. Handling patterns can be nerve-wracking, yet extremely satisfying when it all moves like clockwork.

Traffic patterns on the ground are equally important. The key here is simple observation. With experience, you'll discover the terminal locations for military and cargo aircraft (UPS and Federal Express) to prevent overcrowding in the areas near public terminals.



PATTERNS OF FORCE Learning to manage approach patterns is a key to avoiding disasters and nervous breakdowns.

The sim's only glaring shortcomings are the limited number of airports and the keyboard-only command structure. Typical tower communications consist of keypresses for the aircraft ID, tower command, an optional parameter and sometimes another command. With practice these long, enigmatic acronyms become easier to type, but user-defined macro buttons would have been a welcome addition.

Strangely enough, as you become comfortable with Tower's command structure, navigational protocol and aircraft traffic patterns, the sim's operational routine is quite relaxing. Intellectually, it's like a chess game. Approached with clarity and the ability to think ahead, panic should never cloud your judgment. On the other hand, nothing beats the adrenaline rush of having to make multiple, simultaneous split-second decisions.

Marketing folks like to apply the "choreography" metaphor to ATC simulations

for good reason. When it all falls into place and you've melted into that pleasure zone of hyper-awareness—arrivals and departures perfectly timed and moving like clockwork—the simulation evolves into some sort of sweeping aerial ballet. Enjoy it while you can, because reality always checks back in, leading you one misstep away from a slam dance.

NO MESS TO CLEAN

On the subject of the unthinkable—air-to-air or ground collisions—the simulation records such accidents, but doesn't reward players with gruesome graphic portrayals. Aircraft simply pass through each other, leaving only a permanent black stain on your record. The documentation strongly reinforces the fact that real air traffic controllers work in a zero-tolerance environment, where no mistakes are allowed and even the smallest breach can be potentially catastrophic.

Tower's authenticity and fast pace should make most aviation aficionados happy. In many ways, however, it's a crossover product that will also appeal to real-time board game strategists, or anyone looking to hone their high-stress managerial skills. ☺

800s600, 1024x768 and 1280x1024.

Sound is limited to the crisp digital voice-overs of tower commands, pilot requests and responses. BAO plans to augment this feature with voice-activated commands, available as a future add-on. The sim also interfaces directly with FLIGHT SIMULATOR 5, either by null or remote modem connection. It's a kick watching a friend buzz you in the tower at O'Hare.



CARTOONISH CANYON The fictitious Canyon Field doesn't look as realistic as the others, but it offers a much wider variety of view options.

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Design The Perfect Battle With Empire II

WITH THE HOLIDAYS UPON US AND THE NIGHTS GETTING LONGER, THERE SHOULD BE A BIT MORE TIME FOR INDOOR recreation, especially computer gaming. Since this is also the season for giving and sharing, we all should use the holiday time to design some games as well. Do something nice for your fellow war and strategy gamers, and give them a new scenario to play with for the coming year.

Of course, it's one thing to say that we should chip in an original scenario design of our own this year and post it where others can enjoy it, and quite something else to actually do it. So, I'm venturing forth from the bunker this issue and leading by example.

You'll find my small gift to you posted on ZD-Net, various online services, and the World Wide Web (<http://mars.superlink.net/user/mok/html/e2awc.html>).

You'll find three origi-



nal scenarios I designed for **New World Computing's** **EMPIRE II: THE ART OF WAR** (BARBAROSSA, 1941; FRIEDLAND, 1807; and my magnum opus, **THE BATTLE OF NATIONS: LEIPZIG, 1813**). Who knows, by the time you read this, there may even be more (depending on the stamina of my wargaming muse and my less-than-amused wife).

EMPIRE II (reviewed in this issue) is certainly not a grognard's be-all and end-all wargame, but I've had a ton of fun with it (its e-mail and modem play support are outstanding), and the scenario design utilities are built for both comfort and speed. Each of these scenarios I completed in a day, and playtested over the next several nights. Hey, I'm just like any other "gaming buddy" out there, and if I can do this and have a great time, so can you. Let me share a few secrets that I hope will inspire your creative juices.

INSPIRATION VS. PERSPIRATION

Because I have a good number of board wargames, I looked to them first for inspiration. Sure enough, I found board games that I liked, on each of these topics, and used them as the cornerstone of my research when generating these scenarios. First, the maps had to be created, so figuring hexes (from the board games) for squares (in **EMPIRE II**) and keeping all of the distances in proportion as best I could, I made up the first draft maps for these scenarios. Afterwards, I checked them against several military books, atlases, magazine articles, and other related

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G-2

* Novastar, the people who bring old games to life, is now offering the latest edition (v1.19) of Dave Yeager's (d.yeager@genie.geis.com) editor for the timeless classic Gary Grism's **PACIFIC WAR**. It's \$15 and includes Gary's latest personal upgrade to the game, version x22. This new version puts more spunk into the AI Japanese player. For more information, call Novastar at (816) 624-7113.

* The upcoming **CinNet** should include TCP/IP support, NetBIOS support, Artisoft Lan support, and Novell Support, in addition to direct modem play and hotseating. NPS is still working on Gaming Connection protocols for play over a BBS at press time.

Charles "Fuzar Commander 2" Meylan is working with J.D. Webster, mating his **Over The Reich and Achtung! Spitfire** boardgames with the **Fuzar Commander 2** system. Scheduled for release the third quarter of 1996, these are still hex-based games with more of a 3-0 look to the altitude than **Fuzar Commander** has. Joe Amoral is doing the graphics for these two Windows projects. For

(continued on page 346)

by Alan Emrich

more information (and some new FC2 campaigns, too), check out the Big Time Software Web site at <http://www.cybercom.net/~bigtime>.

* Rumor has it that Scott Hamilton's 2.0 version of *ACE OF CAMF* will be for Win 95. It will include the Line of Sight routines from *PANZER IN THE SIMONS* and automatic "radius" measuring for revealing hidden units. There will also be added cards, step reduction, counter flipping, and the myriad of other new features previously announced.

* Also from HPS Simulations, the first Campaign Disk for *PANZER IN THE SIMONS* should be out by now. Called *INTO THE CAULDRON*, it covers several North Africa engagements in 1941 and 1942. The Italians have a starring role in many of these scenarios, and this Campaign Disk also includes the latest *PANZER* patch (adding a new "fog of war" setting, dubbed "realistic," where players will have to get in very close if they want to get a better definition than "medium tanks" when scouting for actual Panzer III's, M-13 40's, or what not). Contact HPS Simulations at (408) 554-8381 for more information or at

<http://www.chris.com/~sturner>.

* On the QQP front, *BATTLES IN TIME*, *CARD PLAYERS PARADISE*, and *THE AWFUL GREEN THINGS FROM OUTER SPACE* should all be out for Christmas this year. After that, QQP sees *VISIONS OF GLORY*.

* Avalon Hill has signed an agreement with Colorado Computing Company (the guys who did *HEX CAMPAIGN* for Three-Sixty), to do computerized versions of the board games *HEROES OF THE WINDS* (Summer '86) and *PRAXISBURG* (Early '87). Computer *THREE RINGS* has been brought in-house and will be delayed until April to get the AI "just right." Just about everything else in the game is completed. Currently, there are no plans to con-



SEE SUNNY OKINAWA While it may be "unofficial," the latest version of *Pacific War* is blessed by Gary Grigsby himself.

vert *Rising Sun* (Three Rings in the Pacific) to the computer. *BLACKBARRON* has been moved to the back burner.

* Frank Hunter's *The Road From Summer to Apocalypse II* will be upgraded to allow players to fight out their Civil War battles using Norm Koger's *The Age of Rules* from SSI. While waiting for Norm to send the needed specs, Frank continues to work on his Napoleonic epic and is seeking feedback from wargamers about whether they'd like to see a Windows 3.1 version of *RFSTA* that drops the Mexican war, changes the scale of the U.S. map from 14 miles per hex to 7 miles, and drops the tactical battles element completely. Contact Frank Hunter at 0.hunter7@geale.geis.com with your feedback.

* *Troops for Windows* is finally in beta testing, and Arsenal still hopes for a release by the end of 1995. *PANZER EAST*, its WW2 East front sequel, is still on track for a March 1996 release on both the Mac and PC platforms. It will feature at least 10 maps and 20 scenarios. Although there is no map editor in *PANZER EAST*, players can edit forces and design their own scenarios on them. For more information call (703) 742-3801.



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board games. After some fine-tuning, the maps were ready.

Next, one must define the "technology," an option that *EMPIRE II* affords the player-cum-designer. (Many other games that include scenario editors do not have this feature. For example, in *WARFORDS II* *DELUNE*, *TANKS!*, and even *EMPIRE DELUNE*, you can only manipulate the way units interact with each other on a limited basis, if at all.) In *EMPIRE II*, you can define each unit's strengths and weaknesses versus every unit and terrain type in the game, as part of a defined "technology." Since I opted for a higher playing scale than *EMPIRE II*'s standard WWII and Napoleonic technology sets, I made no use of the Transport Mode option and tried to keep the overall attrition rate of units down. Eventually, I managed to define all of the unit types for these scenarios, even personalizing the Napoleonic ones with Leader units just for fun. The amateur artist in me even invented an icon of Napoleon's hat to symbolize his presence on the battlefield.

Again, I used those board games to

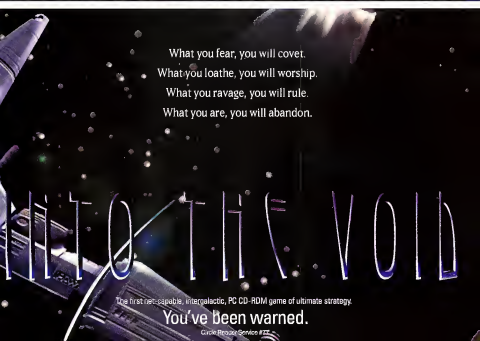
find the orders of battle and starting unit placements (the other references were used for cross-checking, verifying, and fudging). The trick was to assign units different strengths, which I did by varying the units from their full 100-point strength level (the maximum allowed in *EMPIRE II*). Instead, I created a scale between 50 and 100 and figured each unit's starting strength on that scale. Really large or strong units I simply broke down into two units of a smaller size (for example, in the case of a strong brigade, I would break it into two regiments instead—remember those unit size definitions from my column in *CGW* #135?).

Those same useful resources also provided me with a good time frame for each turn, plus a schedule for reinforcements, night, and weather events. Since I wanted more longevity from the units on the map, I opted to keep a steady stream of replacements coming in. So, with all of the initial components in place for each scenario, I went into the most rewarding of all stages of game design.

PLAYTESTING FOR BALANCE

When playtesting a home-made scenario, my theory is that balance in a human vs. computer game is all but impossible. A human player will always find the kink in the AI's armor and exploit it. So I playtest scenarios to try and achieve some semblance of balance between two opponents of roughly equal skill (be they both human or both computer players). Fortunately, one can always watch the AI play itself and see if it does any really dumb things, and can make adjustments accordingly.

For example, when the supply rules in the Napoleonic scenarios were turned on, the computer player would venture forces far afield to go control the other player's supply sources. Furthermore, casualties increased by about 66% with the supply rules on (as the computer player's units tend to maneuver themselves into untenable spots). So, with that, I switched the supply rules off, and the Napoleonic scenarios had a much better "feel." When the French were committing their reserves too hastily in the Leipzig scenario, I reset their



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starting status so that they all began the game entrenched, thus it would take a turn or two for the computer player to "mobilize" them. By that time, the situation around Leipzig had developed enough for the computer player to make a more informed decision as to where to commit those forces.

In the Barbarossa scenario, I wanted some strategic fog of war. Unfortunately, when I set ranges as low as I wanted them, I discovered a bug in the game (that will be fixed in the EMPIRE II patch, whenever it's released). Consequently, my playtesting resulted in slightly higher spotting ranges for the air units than I had originally planned.

The key to getting your new scenario "just right" is patience, and watching closely as the computer plays itself. Look for all of the weird things the AI does, and see if you can compensate here and there to give the game a bit more realism and challenge. Do the ranges and movement allowances feel right? Are the replacement rates too high or low? Most importantly, do the victory conditions seem balanced?

Watch, play, and tweak until you feel that two evenly matched players would each win about half the time.

On a final note, consider this: by being creative with the tools that a good scenario builder has, you can usually invent scenarios that the designers never dreamed of. The people who make these construction kits constantly tell me how amazed they are at some of the wild things players have come up with while noodling around with their tool sets. This year, let's make those tool kit designers proud.

Whether your game is EMPIRE II, THE PERFECT GENERAL II, FLIGHT COMMANDER II, TIGERS ON THE PROWL, STEEL PANTHERS TANKS, WARLORDS II DELUXE, or any other game with a custom scenario designer, let's all consider making each other a holiday gift of at least one new scenario this year. I'll be checking the online libraries, and mentioning any outstanding efforts I come across in the G-2 column (you can email me directly at AlanEmrich@icchange.com). Now, go ye, warriors, and create thyself a field of honor so that we might meet in battle there! ☺

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Earth In Flames

Virgin/Westwood's *COMMAND & CONQUER* Marches To Glory In Real-Time

by Martin E. Cirulis

ONE OF THE NICE THINGS ABOUT THE COMPUTER GAMING INDUSTRY IS THAT SOONER OR LATER you'll get what you ask for. A couple of years ago, I was obsessing my way through *DUNE II*, and found myself thinking it would be great if somebody would make a good networkable version of the game. Well, instead of dragging us back to the tired sands of Arrakis, Virgin and Westwood Studios decided to stay home and up the ante a bit with a bitter struggle for Earth's destiny. Of course, when the Gods of game design grant your wish, they can take you a little too literally. And so, while *COMMAND & CONQUER* reaches some great high points, it remains mainly a good, networkable version of *DUNE II*.

SEARCH AND DESTROY

Oddly enough for a strategy game, the background and developing story for this game is as interesting as the actual tactics and gunfire. As revealed through a combination of competent live-action video

and some of the most impressive computer animation sequences this side of *MechWarrior II*, *COMMAND & CONQUER* is a dark tale of the near future—Early next century, a mysterious spore—probably brought to Earth from deep space by an errant asteroid or comet chunk—begins to sprout across the globe, and it has an interesting effect on the geo-political situation. It seems that the space spores germinate into strange, crystalline flowers that concentrate various rare elements present in the soil with some unknown component of their own, and produce an incredible new power source called Tiberium. While most scientists are thrilled with using this new material to make bionic eyes for the blind and a really good easy-bake oven, there are the inevitable malcontents who are paid big money by various governments to say stuff like, "Hey, these crystals could power some great weapons!"

The world powers begin a footrace to collect and understand Tiberium, but when the smoke clears there are only two real contenders—and unfortunately, one of them makes the PLO look like discontented Cub Scouts. In the wonderful moral polarity of computer games, we find the two groups split cleanly on either side of that whole Good/Evil fence. The Do-Gooders are a UN military force known as the Global Defense Initiative,

who are out to claim Tiberium for the good of all humanity (as well as their own budget allotments). Evil's team is a worldwide terrorist group known as The Brotherhood of NOD (the sexist name lets you know they're Evil), led by a jovial



THE NOD SQUAD Video sequences portray The Brotherhood of NOD as a terrorist group bent on controlling the world by harvesting all its Tiberium.

sociopath named Kane, one of those charismatic types who continually misinterpret Nietzsche.

While most wargames would have included this only in the backstory, C&C uses the between-mission clips, and even some of the missions themselves, to evolve this simple plot. Both sides remain true to their basic philosophy of good and evil, but along the way you learn that all is not what it seems. Even the Tiberium flowers have an agenda of their own—an agenda that has dangerous implications for the groups that covets Tiberium so dearly.

MAIM AND KILL

In order to learn any of this, you must choose sides and then fight to win, and it's here that C&C shows its Arrakian roots

Command & Conquer

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements: PC compatible 486-66 or better, 8 MB RAM, MCGA graphics, 20 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Soundblaster compatible sound cards
of Players: 1-4

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Westwood Studios

Publisher: Virgin

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most strongly. After watching a great impression of channel surfing, you are invited to join either the GDI or NOD forces. The game ships on two CDs, one for each mission path. Apart from philosophical matters, the main difference between the sides in this Easter Egg hunt is in their weapon technologies and the resultant strategies these choices create.

The GDI have all the world's resources at their disposal, their equipment tends to be more durable, hits harder, and is usually expensive, forcing a GDI player to strike hard and consider attacks very carefully. The NOD, on the other hand, being terrorist types without much infrastructure, must buy most of their heavier weapons from the black market, and they tend to favor quantity over quality, ending up with larger numbers of weaker, but cheaper, units. (Hmmm, didn't they use this same plodine during the Cold War?)

Though the differences are there, both sides have analogous equipment and often share some basic weapon systems, producing things like: Mini-gunners (basic infantry), Bazooka Men, Commandos, Engineers and support vehicles like Tiberium Harvesters and transport choppers. Where the GDI gets Grenadiers, Humvees and rocket launchers, NOD produces flame-thrower troops, machine-gun-toting dune-buggies and mobile artillery.

But as the weapons become more expensive, the divergence of strategic philosophy becomes more pronounced. GDI generals will have to master entirely different tactics when employing such platforms as the Mammoth Tank, whereas their NOD counterparts must learn the subtle uses of the nigh-invisible Stealth Tanks. All in all, there are 20 different weapons systems used between the two sides—so if there is a fault to this game, tactical monotony is not one of them.

Of course, not all of this comes for free, and this is where your megaroids of DUNE II will serve you well. In simplest terms, most missions will require a player to collect Tiberium (read as "money") in order to build a base out of tiled structures, which allow you to purchase the weapon systems that will ultimately clear the map of your enemy. Yes, you could replace Tiberium with "Spice" and the

game would remain the same, but at least these crystals have been made a little more dynamic than worm poop. Observant gamers will notice fairly quickly that Tiberium actually has a life cycle, and there is an advantage in farming patches of it, instead of harvesting every chunk indiscriminately.

While these "explore/exploit/exterminate" missions form the bulk of the game, the designers have tweaked and twisted the form as far as possible. Instead of just endless missions of "Now harvest and conquer this area," the player sometimes has to save a base already under attack, or use Commandos and Engineers to capture enemy facilities and form a new base. They have even taken a page from WARCRAFT and thrown in a few "surgical strike" missions, where you can't build a base and must take only your initial forces into enemy territory and achieve the mission (usually tech/inko theft or assassination), without any hope of reinforcement. These "quests" are by far the hardest missions and can bring out all that is best and worst about this game.

In general though, the missions are fairly well-balanced, since the enemy is compensated for its less-than-human intelligence with superior numbers and usually-good positioning. The 20-odd missions, based geographically on conquering an entire continent, are also nicely organized to introduce new weapon systems gradually, so that players aren't drowned under an avalanche of choices (generally you can master some



JONESING FOR TIBERIUM Like its predecessor *Dune II*, *Command & Conquer* compels you to harvest an essential substance to gain power.



TREAD ON THEE There are over 20 different weapon types for each side, ranging from little mini-gunners to the monstrous, troop-crushing Mammoth Tank.

of the subtleties of one device before the next battle requires another).

Combat itself is usually fast and furious, being both real-time and tactically complex. The variety of weapon systems makes for a quick study in the necessity of combined arms for the success of any mission, and single-minded players will go down fast and hard in most scenarios. Luckily, the interface is almost entirely mouse-driven and intuitive. You just click on a unit (or drag a box around a group of units) and move the pointer to where you want to move or attack, and click again. Units not under direct player control at any given moment will automatically open fire on enemy units when they enter weapons range. Combat is resolved in the standard way of unit hit-points vs. weapon damage, but hits are not always automatic, and slower, heavier weapons have a good chance of missing a fast

moving target like a jeep or motorcycle.

A fairly smart movement routine takes the best route four out of five times, though players may want to keep an eye on things when giving long movement commands in complex terrain. And speaking of terrain, players have more to deal with here than dunes and escarpment. Since scenarios cover the breadth of Europe and Africa, there are plenty of rivers and forest to go along with the more traditional desert terrain.

The artificial opponent itself is no brain-surgeon, but as I've said earlier, it is well compensated by numbers and position and is no push-over. The AI sometimes makes odd decisions, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, and has a tendency to commit its forces piecemeal. (Actually, its heart is in the right place for massed attacks, but it fails to take into account the different ground speeds of various units, so that over large distances, the unstoppable Russian assault becomes a Montgomery-like cautious probe, easily picked off by base defenses.) The computer does defend well, and its precise reactions force human players to be almost pixel-precise in order to pull "the same old trick" every time. Regardless, if beating the computer becomes too easy, the sophisticated and easy-to-use Network/Modem/Serial connection ability (similar to that of WarCraft) lets you pound on up to three of your friends.

DUNE AND DUNE AGAIN

The strange things about sequels to hot games these days is that designers



SMOKESCREEN One annoying holdout from Dune II is the Fog of War; you'll die several times in each scenario just trying to unveil the terrain.

seem so afraid to tinkering with the "Formula" that they fail to correct major shortcomings in the original. Unfortunately, C&C is no exception. While this game has all the strengths of DUNE II, and some more all its own, a couple of large flaws were retained.

The biggest problem with C&C is that it feels more like a puzzle where things explode than a real, wide-open strategy game. As in DUNE II, many missions have a single "right" way to go about things, and pretty much all other strategic paths lead to destruction; this is especially apparent in the "quest" missions, where one must take four or five stabs at it just to get an idea of where everything is and what the "trick" is. Since any "mistake" will cost you units, and quests give you none to spare, most players will get very used to the "Repeat Mission?" button. While life can sometimes leave you with a narrow path to success, the joy of a good war/strategy game is finding "your" way to win, not trying to figure out what the designer wanted you to do.

Exasperating this "puzzle" feel of the game is another relic of DUNE II: the blacked-out terrain that must be explored by units in order to be revealed. To me, this is the crudest form of Fog of War, and, while it is appropriate for CIVILIZATION or WARCRAFT, it has no place in any game with a Sci-Fi premise.

I forget what silly rationale there was for not knowing the terrain on Arrakis, but this is Earth, kids. Even today, I could find a map of every square meter of the planet if I looked hard enough—and I don't even have my



own satellite navigation box. I'd rather be able to see all of the terrain in question and have enemy units appear only when they get close enough, instead of actually having to send units out in random directions just to see the lay of the land—and then being able to see everything moving on the revealed ground. This bit of nonsense only adds to the puzzle frustration, and forces you to repeat missions just to figure out where roads and rivers are, instead of applying your smarts and using the terrain like a real strategist would.

Another, smaller relic of the past is that some of the larger Base vs. Base missions can degenerate into long battles of attrition. Literally an hour after knowing victory is inevitable, you are still left assaulting the dug-in computer player, who neither surrenders before the last unit or building explodes nor pulls any last-minute surprises. While the designers must share some of the blame, this is really more endemic of the current state of pseudo-AI routines and their inability to deal well with complex situations. Once again, multi-player capability comes to the rescue for the player who wants to keep this one on his hard-drive for many months.

SMART AND SEXY

All this being said, C&C is still a beautiful and challenging game. This is easily the best-looking and sounding strategy game yet, and while most grognards still disdainfully at "chronic," to do so here would be an error. While things like the very cool install routine and the great music can be considered superfluous, the animation and video between missions really enhance the experience. The production values here are very high, and images have been chosen deliberately to be as powerful as possible, instead of be-

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LIGHT MY FIRE The Brotherhood of NOD toasts a town of innocent bystanders, racking-up some collateral damage before the good guys show up.

ing used as eye candy, like is done in the other multimedia dreck that's come about of late (parents of younger players should be warned that some of the sequences are best meant for adults, especially the scene in the NOD arc where we are witness to a close-up of a "demotion" via .45 pistol to the temple). The NOD's final victory in Africa contains the best Cyberspace se-

quence I have seen in any movie. The plot is interesting enough that I would buy C&C2 just to see where things are going to end up.

The bottom line seems to be one of origins. Virgin has upped this form to the graphic and multi-player standards of today, but failed to rework the basic engine enough to create a entirely new game. So, if you thought gathering up "money" from the surface, building bases and exploring dark territory was stupid, it still is and your dollars are probably best spent elsewhere.

On the other hand, if you even remotely enjoyed DUNE II, COMMAND AND CONQUER is the game for you. It is more than entertaining enough to make up for its shortcomings, and the two CDs con-

tain nearly a hundred hours of missions for the average gamer. If nothing else, the entertainment factor is high enough and the action fast enough to please all but the most jaded wargamers.

If real-time strategy is your thing, then take my advice; build up your mouse-skills before getting yourself a copy of COMMAND & CONQUER. There are crystals to harvest, a world to win, and victory goes to the Smart—but being Fast won't hurt either. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

COMMAND AND CONQUER

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Great graphics and production values, with multimedia that actually adds to gameplay. Fast-paced, with several challenging missions—a very good real-time strategy game.

CONS The real-time AI isn't always up to the challenge, and the game retains the lesser elements of DUNE II without improving significantly on its strengths.

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Heavy Metal

SSI's *STEEL PANTHERS* Makes Other Wargames Look Like Paper Tigers

by Patrick C. Miller

MANY WARGAMES DO A COMMENDABLE JOB OF PROVIDING PLAYERS WITH CORRECT MILITARY units and detailed maps on which to simulate combat, but too often they fail the historical accuracy test: tactics that should work don't and tactics that shouldn't work do. Fortunately for wargamers, SSI's *STEEL PANTHERS*, a tactical simulation of World War II combined-arms combat, passes this test with flying colors.

Witness my attempts to storm the beaches of Normandy. On the first try, my Americans never made it off the beach and suffered heavy casualties because I neglected to bring along enough engineers and engineering vehicles to clear mines and dragon's teeth. On my second attempt, I succeeded in breaking through the beach defenses, but failed to take any of my objectives because my engineers took too long to clear obstacles. Finally, on the third try, working under cover of a heavy smoke screen and con-

centrating the efforts of my engineers, dozers and mine-clearing tanks on a smaller area, my troops rapidly cleared a path through the beach obstacles and seized nearly all of their objectives. The mistakes I made were uncannily similar to those made by the American commanders who planned the attack on Omaha Beach, although in my case, the consequences were far less dire.

ANNE GET YOUR BAZOOKA

The designers have created a game that's wonderful to look at, enjoyable to listen to and immensely playable, without straying too far from the realism and historical accuracy that wargamers demand. Who says we can't have it all? Like an assault planned by General "Blood and Guts" Patton himself, *STEEL PANTHERS*' sensory appeal grabs you by the nose while its gameplay fires you up. This game will have you cursing at it for making you stay up too late—night after night—trying to squeeze in one more battle so you'll be another step closer to ending your campaign.

Battles in *STEEL PANTHERS* are small, highly tactical affairs that are 10 to 20 turns long, representing approximately 20 to 40 minutes of combat. Vehicles are represented on a one-to-one scale and infantry units range in size from two-man sections to 14-man squads. Platoons, comprising three to five vehicles or three to four squads, are the basic maneuver units. There are three types of scenarios: meeting engagements (both sides are attacking), advances (an attack against a



CONTROLLED CHAOS The swirling smoke, terrific-sounding explosions and realistic morale rules all contribute to the feel of being in the middle of WWII tactical combat.

hasty defense) and assaults (an attack against a prepared defense).

The game features beautifully-rendered SVGA hex maps with five levels of zoom and authentic, highly detailed unit icons that conjure up memories of miniatures games of the past. During combat, the battlefield becomes a smoky, cratered moonscape littered with smoldering hulks, burning trees and flattened buildings. As for sound, nothing gets your attention like the scream of a fighter-bomber diving for a strafing run on your artillery. The musical score is exceptional, providing the appropriate mood to underscore the serious nature of the game's subject.

WHAT! NO SOVIET DOG MINES?

There's so much depth here that once you dive into *STEEL PANTHERS*, it could very well be months before you resurface. Hundreds of armor, infantry, artillery and air units are available for battle, and you can command 15 nationalities, play

Steel Panthers

Price: \$64.95

System:

Requirements: PC compatible 486/DX33 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports most major sound cards

Number of Players: 1-2

Protection: None (CD must be in drive to play)

Design: Gary Grigsby and

Keith Brors with SSI

Special Projects Group

Publisher: SSI

Sunnyvale, CA

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DETAILS, DETAILS All you ever wanted to know about a unit's weapons, capabilities and leader status is but a right mouse-click away.

eight historical campaigns and stay occupied for hours with 60 different scenarios. In a long campaign in the European or Pacific theaters, you purchase a group of units to command throughout the war, manage replacements and upgrade to better equipment as it becomes available.

For more variety, there's a scenario generator and a scenario editor for creating your own custom battles and units.

Two people can play in either hot-seat fashion or by using the play by e-mail option. There are three difficulty level settings to help novices ease into the game. Command and control factors are included, but aren't overemphasized to the point where you have little influence over the units under your command.

STEEL PANTHERS' point-and-click interface is clean, well thought-out and intuitive. A touch of the cursor on any icon button gives a brief description of its function. Right clicking on a friendly unit provides information about its capabilities and status, as well as the abilities of the unit's leader. Left clicking on any of your units highlights the surrounding hexes in which they can move. Right clicking on an empty hex around a unit changes its facing and reveals hexes within its line of sight.

After selecting a scenario or campaign, you're allocated points with which to purchase

up to 24 units that make up the core of your command. In a single scenario, this isn't as important as in a campaign where the units you select will be the ones you fight with in all subsequent battles. You're then given points for purchasing up to 24 support units, such as artillery, air strikes, transports, mines, fortifications and specialized engineer units, as well as additional armor and infantry. After units are selected, you deploy them for battle, pre-plot artillery fire and load troops onto vehicles.

I'M OKAY, YOU'RE SUPPRESSED

The action begins in the orders phase where you move and fire your units. As you move, enemy troops can take opportunity fire, and quite often the unit doing the firing won't be spotted immediately. Enemy units sighted during the orders phase can be targeted with either direct or indirect fire. Direct fire occurs immediately, while fire from artillery and air units arrives a turn or two later. Vehicles can suffer a variety of damage from hits, including destroyed weapons, crew casu-

SLUGGEST AT SINGLING

On December 5, 1944, the famous U.S. 4th Armored Division approaching the German village of Singling ran head-on into an ambush set up by a Panzer Grenadier regiment, and an entire company of Sherman tanks was wiped out. The next morning, the Americans launched another more determined attack with a tank company supported by infantry and artillery. Under cover of a smoke screen, the Americans made it into the village, but from then on, it was a vicious melee between the opposing tanks and infantry. Eventually, the Americans were forced to withdraw after dark.



This small engagement is an ideal battle to create using the **Suez** Panzer's scenario editor. It gives you the necessary tools to reconstruct battles, duplicate the deeds of your favorite World War II combat units or even set up your own hypothetical battles.

I first designed a map of Singling and the surrounding area, purchased the correct units for both sides and then manually deployed them on the map to reflect the tactical situation the opposing commanders faced.



The Germans have two Panther platoons (eight tanks), an infantry company, two 75mm anti-tank guns, and two sections of Jagdpanzer IVs (four-tank destroyers) armed with 75mm L/48 guns. These particular German tank destroyers aren't available in the game's unit database, but by editing and renaming the Jagdpanzer IV-7D, which is included, I created the historically correct units in a few minutes.



The American tank company comprises 12 Shermans armed with 75mm guns and five armed with 76mm guns. Supporting the Shermans is a platoon of four M-18 Hellcat tank destroyers, an infantry company, three machine gun sections and two artillery batteries. The U.S. tanks made liberal use of the superior HVAP anti-tank round, so the ammo loads were edited to reflect that fact.



Although the Americans have more armored vehicles and better artillery support, playing "Sluggest at Singling" from the German side should be relatively easy. Playing the Americans is a far greater challenge. If you can fight the Wehrmacht to a draw in this battle, you're doing well. Here's a hint: The Americans can't win without capturing the three victory hexes on the upper right side of the map. Those who want to try their hand at rewriting American military history can download the Singling scenario from the CGW web site at <http://www.cdnst.com/~gaming>.



GRAPHIC GARY The newfound \$51 love for superb graphics and a simple interface makes Grigsby's design much more accessible without compromising its historicity and realism.

what happens. If your units have shots remaining and don't have too much suppression, they will attempt opportunity fire at new targets they spot or return fire at attacking units. Pay close attention here, because some of the messages go by so fast that it's almost impossible to read them. It's also confusing to figure out what's



A WORLD AT WAR A wealth of historical scenarios are available in both the Pacific and European theaters of World War II. Battles can be played from either side at three different levels of difficulty.

activities and immobilization. Units under fire and taking casualties will acquire suppression points that can force a rout or retreat. Crews will also abandon their vehicles if the situation around them goes to hell in the proverbial hand basket.

Once your order phase ends, enemy movement and firing begins. At this point, all you can do is sit back and watch

happening as the screen jumps around the battlefield to resolve combat. At first, this aspect of the game is disorienting, but in time, it becomes less bothersome and you'll develop a better sense of what's happening.

The turn sequence continues until either the preset turn limit for the scenario is reached or the computer determines

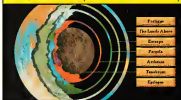
that one side has been defeated. Because every scenario ends after a predetermined number of turns, battles sometimes conclude abruptly just when the action is getting started or the fighting has reached a crucial phase. This contrived method helps you complete scenarios faster, but it also sometimes results in unsatisfying or unrealistic conclusions.



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At game's end, you're shown the scores for both sides. However, for some reason, you've given no clue as to how the point totals were achieved. When playing a campaign, a short synopsis tells you how the results of your battle affect the campaign and your next mission.

The game's artificial intelligence can be challenging, especially when the computer player is on the defensive. However, veteran wargamers will quickly pick

up on the fact that the AI generally concentrates its defenses along the most obvious routes to victory hexes and, when on the offensive, often allows light units to rush ahead of the main attack and crushed piecemeal.

A more glaring weakness is the documentation. In the past, SSI provided gamers with more information about weapons capabilities, vehicle ratings and combat algorithms than many cared to know. However, with STEEL PANTHERS, SSI has taken a 180-degree turn for the worse. Amazingly, the manual doesn't even contain a chart for terrain effects on combat. Although there is a well-done on-line encyclopedia that provides pertinent details about each unit type, there's no easy way to make a side-by-side comparison of different units. For veteran wargamers and World War II buffs, the poor manual probably won't represent a serious problem. However, for those new to wargames, learning under fire will most likely be a frustrating experience with a steep learning curve.

Despite its lack of documentation, a

few technical glitches and some minor flaws, STEEL PANTHERS is an excellent game, one that should appeal to both veteran and novice wargamers. SSI is working on a patch to enable two-player games by modem, a feature that will further enhance replayability. Now if you'll excuse me, it's getting late and my company of Easy Eight Shermans has score to settle with some Tigers near St. Vith. If I didn't have to go to work in the morning, I'd have this war won before Christmas. ☹

THROWING A TREAD

At 400+ MB, Steel Panthers is available only on CD, but offers the options of installing either 8, 20 or 30 MBs to your hard drive. Make sure to install 30 MB, or you may have problems saving changes made with the editor, and you will fall prey to a fatal crash bug in the first scenarios of the Normandy 1944 campaign. Pentium owners may experience compatibility problems with the Number Nine FX Medion 771 video card (S3 968 chipset), and should contact the card manufacturer for a patch. Surprisingly, the game runs as well in Windows 95 as DOS, even though it isn't optimized for Win 95.

THE EDITORS SPEAK

STEEL PANTHERS

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Perhaps the best sound and graphics yet seen in a wargame. Very realistic, with great depth, variety, and stimulating play.

CONS Skimpy documentation, mediocre AI and scattered technical problems mar an otherwise excellent game.

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May The Best Warlord Win

Marshall Your Armies And Face The HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

by Jason Kapalka

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT SOMETIMES WE REVIEWERS GET LAZY. INSTEAD OF EVALUATING A GAME ON ITS OWN MERITS, WE'LL TAKE THE HIGH-CONCEPT SHORTCUT AND DESCRIBE IT IN TERMS OF EARLIER TITLES: "It's like ULTIMA VII meets POPULOUS!" or "A hybrid of PANZER GENERAL, LEMMINGS, and PONG, only with 3-D bitmapped polygons!" But sometimes comparisons are necessary. With the industry suffering from endemic rip-off-itis, it'd be silly to review, say, a DOOM clone without referring to the original. And then there are certain games, not blatant knock-offs, that borrow and refine ideas from a host of older sources, in the process trying to forge something greater from the sum of their discombobulated parts.

New World Computing's HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC is such a game, so there's really no way to avoid discussing its many antecedents. The most obvious similarity is to New World's own KING'S

BOUNTY from a few years back. Like KING'S BOUNTY, HEROES is a "lite" fantasy wargame with RPG elements thrown in, where you lead a crew of medieval knights and wizards to victory in tactical and strategic encounters. The SVGA combat sequences in HEROES are much like those in New World's recent viking epic, HANDEL OF THE GODS, while parts of the interface will remind players of WARLORDS 2. And the overall gameplay sometimes feels like a streamlined version of Microprose's MASTER OF MAGIC. Strangely, the one game series HEROES *doesn't* bring to mind are the actual MIGHT & MAGIC RPGs—beyond the title, there is practically no relation. If not for copyright lawyers, HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC could as easily have been called "Heroes of Ultima," "Heroes of Wizardry," or "Heroes of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons."

MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS HEROIC PARTS

Games that borrow heavily from earlier successes often end up as bizarre, unplayable pastiches, but HEROES is a pleasant surprise, bringing its disparate elements together into a satisfying whole. It may not get many points for originality, but it's undeniably one of the most entertaining and addictive strategy games to come down the turnpike in some time.

It may also be the prettiest and most accessible. In fact, the game's bright SVGA



BESIEGED Outmaneuvering the computer opponent is more difficult than you might expect. Here, a carefully planned siege is thwarted by the AI's clever use of spells.

graphics, charming music, and simple mechanics may lead some to underestimate it. I expect plenty of gamers will take one look at the cute fairy-tale characters and crank the AI up to "genius" level, expecting a light romp, only to return an hour later to the options screen, bloody and humiliated, to select a less hefty challenge.

Though there's significant depth to it, HEROES' turn-based gameplay is intuitive even when you compare it to beer-'n'-pretzels strategy games like PANZER GENERAL and MASTER OF MAGIC: You have your CIVILIZATION-style world map, with unexplored areas blacked out, and assorted towns, mines and castles to conquer and develop. Your units are organized into armies, each of which must be led by a hero and can contain up to five different creature classes. Unlike most such games, there is never any difficulty keeping track of all your units—you're limited to an absolute maximum of eight heroes, and, therefore, eight armies, plus various castle garrisons.

Heroes of Might and Magic

Price: \$69.95

System

Requirements: IBM

PC 486-33 or better

(66+ MHz recommended), 8 MB

RAM, SVGA graphics,

25 MB hard

drive space, 2x CD-

ROM, supports most major sound cards.

Number of players: 1 to 4 (supports network play)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Jon van Caneghem

Publisher: New World Computing

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NO QUARTER

The game can be played in one of three ways: as a single scenario pitting you against up to three enemy nations on one of two dozen maps; a campaign of linked battles leading from your initial spearhead to complete world domination; or as a multiplayer game via hot seat, modem, direct connect or network. In most cases, the basic objective remains the same: eliminate all the opposing heroes and capture their towns and castles. Occasionally there will be a different victory requirement, such as finding a lost super-artifact or conquering a particular neutral city, but even then you can't expect to avoid conflict. Unlike *WARLORDS 2* and *MASTER OF MAGIC*, *HEROES* involves little diplomacy—no quarter is asked by your computer opponents, and certainly none is given if you wish to survive.

When combat occurs—as it will, frequently—the view switches to a square chess-grid battlefield with the warring armies lined up on opposite sides. Fighting is turn-based, and a snap: you click the mouse where you want to move your troops, or on the foe you want to attack. Heroes never take part in battle directly, but “lead from the rear,” casting battlefield spells and raising their troops’ attack and defense values. Heroes never die, nor do they fade away: defeated leaders go back into the general “hero pool” and can be recruited again, though not necessarily by the original controlling player.

The combat sequences are where the game's SVGA graphics really shine. There are nearly thirty different monster

types, ranging from insufferably cute sprites to grotesque trolls to clanking armor-clad paladins, all gorgeously animated as they sprint, crawl, lumber or soar into the fray.

For all its simplicity and graphic flash, the game's structure is elegant enough to leave room for tactical brilliance or blunders. Missile units like archers and elves can chew up powerful, slow creatures like trolls long before they can close to melee range, but on the other hand, are useless if pulled into hand-to-hand combat by swift-moving flyers. Many creatures have special attacks, some spectacular and obvious (like the unicorn's power to blind foes), others more subtle (such as the rogue's sneaky ability to smite an enemy without incurring a return attack). Victorious heroes gain experience points RPG-style, which gradually improve their leadership and spellcasting prowess.

Alas, as always, tactical genius is wasted if you fumble the ball strategically. The key points on the map are the castles, which provide you with troops and income. There are four different castle types, corresponding to the four hero types—knight, sorceress, barbarian and warlord—and each builds structures designed to attract a different family of creatures. Knight castles start with barracks for peasants and archers, and can eventually construct jousting grounds and cathedrals to recruit heavy-duty cavalry and paladins. Meanwhile, barbarian fortresses begin with lairs for goblins and orcs and work their way up to troll bridges and pyramids, home to the lethal cyclops.

Certain buildings may be constructed in any city, such as thieves' guilds for intelligence on opposing players, docks for building ships, and the all-important mage towers. Mage towers serve as a reloading point for spell-casting heroes—the more elaborate (and expensive) your tower, the



A WARLORD'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE Your castle is your most important asset; from here, you recruit heroes, build mage towers, construct homes for your troops, and raise armies.

more numerous and powerful the magics wielded by your captains, from simple blessings to fearful meteor storms and the invaluable Dimension Door spell, which can teleport an entire army across the map in a wink.

All these gimmicks don't come for free, of course. Buildings and troops all cost money, supplied by captured towns and gold mines, and most buildings also require the expenditure of one or more of the six game commodities: wood, ore, crystal, gems, mercury and sulfur. These items can be found scattered about the map in small caches, or in mines that produce a slow but steady flow once captured. Particularly at the beginning of a game, resource management is critical. Should you use all your gems constructing a minotaur maze, or save them for use on mage towers? Should you risk an attack on a guarded mine, or just pick up the materials you find scattered around?

MONSTERS FOR HIRE

As you maneuver your armies around the map, you'll encounter hordes of neutral monsters, who will either attack you or join your armies. You'll also come across a broad assortment of “special event” sites. There are the ubiquitous obelisks, which give you fragments of a map leading to the buried Ultimate Artifact—a device with potentially game-winning power. There are huts and cabins from which you can recruit extra low-level troops. There are fountains and statues that temporarily increase your army's



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luck or morale, shrines with secret spells, lighthouses that increase your ships' range, magic lamps that let you summon high-powered genies, graveyards and shipwrecks haunted by dangerous phantoms, and many, many magical swords, books, compasses, horseshoes, boots, and so on, typically guarded by gangs of particularly nasty monsters.

Unlike New World's earlier **HAMMER OF THE GODS**, which was downright stingy handing out cool items and creatures (you usually had to complete a major quest just to get a unit or two of skeletons), **HEROES** is so jam-packed with neat stuff it can be disorienting, particularly since none of the artifacts and special sites are described in the manual. Some may prefer it this way—the thrill of discovery, you know—but others will just wish they knew what everything on the map was, so they could get on with clobbering their opponents.

And those opponents are no pushovers; the AI actually lives up to its name for once. Even on normal settings, the computer foes generally use sound tactics in battle and display considerable

cunning on the strategic level. When set to smart or genius level, these electronic generals are impressive foes, conducting guerrilla raids when outpowered, staging *blitzkriegs* on lightly-defended towns and castles, and even conducting surprise teleport invasions via Dimension Door spells. Though they seem to be given an initial material advantage, the computer enemies generally don't rely on massive resource "cheats" to challenge the player.

If there's a fault with this otherwise excellent game, it lies in the lack of a map randomizer of editor. Though there are nearly two dozen maps included, many of these have poor replayability, being centered on a puzzle of some sort... how to cross such and such a sea to reach the enemy, where to find the big honking magic gizmo, and so forth. In multiplayer mode these are not significant issues (**New World** should be congratulated for producing a game in the **MASTER OF ORION/MASTER OF MAGIC** vein that supports multiple human players) but solo gamers may eventually run low on challenges.

HEROES has one other virtue, which in

an ideal world would be expected of every piece of software: it is practically bug-free. Not once did the game lock up on me, crash, or glitch out.

Taken as a whole, **HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC** is probably one of the best wargame-for-people-who-hate-wargames yet released. Even die-hard grognards who turn their noses at "fantasy fluff" may get a kick out of it, if they can just pull themselves away from their panzers for a while. ☼

THE EDITORS SPEAK

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Great graphics and sound, easy-to-learn interface, involving gameplay, strong computer opponents, multiplayer capability, lots of neat stuff. What more do you want?

CONS Not as endlessly replayable as **PANZER GENERAL**, and the game lacks the depth of **MASTER OF MAGIC**. Manual could be a bit more informative.

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Worlds At War

EMPIRE II Shows That Great Art Is Better Than Empire Building

by Tim Carter

EMPIRE II IS PROBABLY BEST UNDERSTOOD BY ITS SUBTITLE, THE ART OF WAR. UNLIKE THE ORIGINAL EMPIRE AND EMPIRE DELUXE, EMPIRE II is not really a game of exploration or the construction of empires. Instead, EMPIRE II (E2) is a simple yet effective game of tactical/operational battles. Within the context of a fixed-duration scenario, with specific objectives, forces and reinforcements, E2 is an incredibly versatile and flexible product.

Interestingly enough, the designers have structured the game so that it may be played in two fairly different ways. The distinction is between sequential turns (in which all movement, combat and ranged fire takes place for one side and then the other), and parallel turns (in which both sides give orders, and then all units move and fire at once).

Ranged fire in particular can be pretty problematic under parallel movement, although this is more realistic. The computer is really only competent playing in sequence, but against a human oppo-

nent, particularly via e-mail, the parallel option can add depth and enjoyment to the game. Either way, the commitment of the designers to giving the player as much choice as possible is one which should be welcomed.

The game interface is simple and very easy to learn, despite the fact that in different historical scenarios the capabilities of units tend to change dramatically (and rather unfaithfully). The manual is sparse, but anyone with a basic understanding of wargames will be up and flying in no time, and even complete beginners shouldn't find the system difficult to learn.

Each unit has movement, direct combat and ranged fire capabilities. Each also has a numerical combat strength, which may not exceed 100. Different unit types may also have preprogrammed modifiers, so that an elite unit will perform better than an inexperienced one, even though they may have the same numeric strength. Units do not always start at full strength, particularly in historical battles. Over the course of the scenario any unit may lose strength through combat or gain it through replacements.

The availability of replacements and reinforcements must be preset before the scenario begins, and it is not generally af-



EMPIRE II Unlike its predecessors, isn't about world domination. This time around, you'll command armies in different historical and fantasy scenarios.

ected by the course of events.

Land, sea and air units are available, although the handling of aircraft is problematic at best. Essentially, air units function like really long-range artillery; they can't move but have exceptionally good ranged-fire capability. They can't be intercepted, and basically function as ground support. This is fine if you want to replicate air-to-ground combat; air-to-air combat, however, is not really a part of the game system.

BATTLES GALORE

The 30-odd pre-programmed scenarios cover a range of historical eras and conflicts, demonstrating the versatility of the game engine. For instance, Napoleonic battles have a very different feel (as they should) from 20th-century conflicts. In Waterloo, one of the key decisions is whether to stand and fire at the enemy line (which usually involves taking considerable punishment yourself), or closing with the enemy for hand-to-

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TACTICS IN TIME One of the best things about *E2* is that its myriad scenarios challenge players to adapt different tactics to different scenarios. Attacks employed in the deserts of North Africa won't work at Waterloo.

hand combat. Coordinating artillery and fast-moving cavalry is also important, with victory going to the general who can wear down the opposing side, and then bring an unstoppable combination of force to bear on the enemy's weakened line.

In comparison, the Africa Korps scenario covers over a year, as opposed to a day, and thousands of miles of open desert. Would-be Rommels must use an entirely different set of tactics to prevail in the fast-moving battles around Tobruk. There is no ranged fire whatsoever, as the scale of the map does not allow anything but direct attacks, and the ebb and flow of the campaign may see players trade strategic points a number of times before the game ends.

Because replacements are available in relatively large numbers in the Africa scenario, the durability of units is much higher than in a one-day battle. A seriously damaged regiment can be rested for a turn or two and then returned to the fray. This puts a premium on decisive engagements where enemy units are destroyed once and for all, rather than the tactics of attrition that can be highly successful at Waterloo.

What this means is that each time period replicated is like a mini-game system. The combination of ranged fire, replacements, movement restrictions and the general relationship between unit types (such as infantry vs. cavalry) makes for a unique set of problems and solutions for each time period. Napoleon, the American War of Inde-



pendence, the U.S. Civil War and the Second World War are all well represented in the scenario mix.

In addition to purely historical battles, *E2* includes a number of fantasy scenarios. From dueling Norse gods to Godzilla versus the local constabulary, the fantasy element adds not only depth, but also a tutorial on the versatility of the scenario editor.

In addition to being easy, *E2* is both quick and fun. Even a large scenario should not take more than a single evening, and a good four-hour stint might see, say, the Battle of Antietam Creek fought both ways before bedtime.

A SLIGHTLY SLOTCZY CANVAS

Yet, *E2* is not without its faults. Perhaps its biggest flaw is the weakness of the artificial intelligence. While somewhat competent at the highest level of difficulty, in a balanced scenario I had little difficulty beating the computer. In particular, the computer does not handle ranged fire well, as the AI seems very reluctant to let go with its big guns under almost all circumstances.

This is really a shame, as usually computers do best on defense, since the computer is a pretty good attacker, it also raises the question of how challenging the AI could have been, if ranged fire was used properly.

I also have a problem with the map. Under certain weather conditions, especially snow, the map becomes almost impossible to read. It seems realistic to have the rivers freeze and therefore disappear; however, when villages and whole cities,



Weak AI If there is one complaint about *E2*, it's the weak AI; it is quite poor in defense and doesn't make good use of artillery. The best opponents in *E2* are still humans.

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The Power Of Creation: Scenario Building



Map Making

A random map can be generated by the computer, or players can design their own. The map can later be edited as necessary; simply select the terrain type and paint it in. Interestingly enough, it is possible to name towns and other locations in the Scenario editor, leading me to wonder why it could not be done for the scenarios that came with the game. Of course, using the editor, you can always go in and add the names yourself.



Technology

The Technology menu defines unit characteristics, capabilities, color and icons. If players do not wish to build units from scratch, they can take the characteristics of units set out in any of the major historical or fantasy periods used in the original scenarios. Simply select the period from which you want to gather units and then make adjustments or additions as necessary.



Technology 2

True aficionados can also build armies from scratch, picking their own icons and setting the basic unit types and restrictions. Once a complete range of units for both sides has been established, more complicated issues such as ranged fire capabilities, the effects of terrain on combat, movement and ranged fire, and the combat abilities of each type can be modified. Virtually anything is possible at this stage, giving designers a vast range of choices.



Making a Scenario

Once the units and map have been fully defined, the designer must set the terms of the actual battle. Starting forces, objectives, reinforcements and replacements must all be factored into scenario design. A fun scenario is a balanced scenario, but happily it is possible to tweak a design as many times as necessary to obtain an interesting battle or campaign.

(For more on designing E2 scenarios, see Alan Emrich's "Broad-sides & Gripsshot" in this issue.)

particularly victory cities, can't be found because of the puffy white stuff, it tends to detract from the enjoyment of the game.

While I'm on the subject of the map, why not put the names of the towns on it? Finding Töbruch is probably not a problem for the experienced gamer, but the Ardennes is full of tiny little villages, and knowing St. Vith from Malmedy is actually pretty important to winning the game.

THE SCENARIO EDITOR:

MATISSE OR MICHELANGELO?

As with any scenario-based game, the longevity of E2 depends on the ability of its fans to create new and exciting situations to compliment the array that come with the original package. Once again, kudos have to go to the designers (and publisher) for incorporating the scenario editor into the basic game, rather than releasing it later at an additional expense to the player.

The scenario editor for E2 allows would-be designers access to all of the options relevant to the game. From defining unit characteristics to choosing unit icons (or importing custom-painted ones), it's all at your fingertips.

For instance, when creating a force pool, players can control not only unit strength, movement abilities and ranged fire, but also combat relationships between various units. Most goggnards will have a great time tweaking the relative effectiveness of infantry vs. armor, armor vs. artillery and so on. The characteristics may be locked in to a particular side, as well, so that the superiority of German armor or Napoleon's Imperial Guard can be assured as well.

The only real criticism I have of the editor is that it has no random processes built into it. As a result, creating a good scenario can take considerable time and effort, and is more for the serious artist than the casual finger painter. Of course, just because one does not wish to dabble in design does not mean one cannot benefit from the labor of others. I suspect that, given the ease of game play and the seemingly limitless spare time of some gamers, there will be no shortage of new scenarios to download from the Internet in the future.

MASTERPIECE?

Some hard-core gamers have already

begun to criticize E2 for its lack of realism in a number of areas. This is inevitable with any historical wargame, but fundamentally misses the point of this product: having fun while savoring the flavor of the past.

While the AI is a bit weak, and a few minor glitches mar the overall picture, E2 is unquestionably a winner. While experienced gamers may find it a bit too simple to warrant constant play over hundreds of hours without stopping, E2 has definitely won a place on my hard drive, and seems likely to remain the beer and pretzels game of choice for some time to come. ☺

THE EDITOR SPEAKS

EMPIRE II

RATING



PROS A great scenario editor, diverse scenarios that challenge players to use different tactics, and just plain fun.

CONS The AI is not a strong counter-puncher, and there are some historical inaccuracies.

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Life On The Silk Road

I-Motion's MARCO POLO Adds A Rich History To A Dull Journey

by Arinn Dembo

BY THE 13TH CENTURY, EUROPE'S CRUSADES ON THE HOLY LAND HAD DEGENERATED INTO FRUITLESS, spastic twitches; from 1202 on, the only victories were won by diplomacy. The power of the Saracen caliphates was rapidly disintegrating throughout the Middle East, and the last flower of Moslem rule was cut down in 1251, with the fall of the Abbasid dynasty. A long nightmare of fanaticism and barbarity, both Christian and Mohammedan, was at an end—just in time for a new nightmare to begin. While Christendom and the Caliphates lay exhausted from a century of struggle, Temujin, later known as the Great Khan, Genghis, united the disparate Mongolian tribes in 1206, forging them into one of the greatest cavalry armies the world has ever seen. Abandoning their centuries-old history of inter-tribal struggle, the Mongol hordes swept over Asia, India and the Middle East like the wind, and by 1279, the sons

and grandsons of Genghis Khan, "the Precious Warrior Lord," had built an Empire that stretched from the Pacific shore to the Caspian Sea.

This era of conquest and empire-building forms the backdrop for MARCO POLO, where I-Motion and Philips Interactive Media attempt to trace the steps of the famous Venetian explorer. This story has everything: exploration, diplomacy, trade, war, mystery and wonder, not to mention the chance to brush shoulders with Popes and great generals. All of this is reflected in the multimedia aspects of the package—stylish, educational and entertaining. It's a very thorough examination of the explorer's life, including his family, the lands through which he traveled, the historical events which surrounded him, and his adventures in the Mongol Empire and the Middle East.

MARCO POLO draws upon at least 300 minutes of professionally shot film clips and photographic stills, complete with full period costuming, magnificent sets and an enormous cast. Could the producers possibly have spent that much on the development of a game? Well, no, most of this footage has been seen before on film, from a TV mini-series



WORLD OF WONDER The maps, locales, and people of the 13th century are portrayed accurately, but the atmosphere created by the multimedia aspects of *Marco Polo* is tainted by dull and lifeless gameplay.

on Marco Polo that aired in the late '80's. Although I had seen all the scenes before, I wasn't tired of them by any means, and I was impressed by the way the sequences and narration had been put together to advance an episodic plot.

Adding to the atmosphere are the strains of Asiatic music which accompany various actions in the game—I didn't find them annoying, although they drove the people around me to distraction (it being impossible to turn off)—and the graphics, which are consistently good and capture the feel of the 13th century. Documents viewed on-screen have a medieval flavor, with background resembling aged vellum, and the maps in the game are in an antique style.

Of course, the realistic look of the product would be meaningless without the weight of history to back it up, and MARCO POLO also benefits from some of the most meticulous research I have yet

Marco Polo

Price: \$59.95

System

Requirements:

18M 386-33 or better, 4 MB

RAM, 256 VGA

graphics, less

than 1 MB hard

drive space, CD-

ROM drive, mouse; supports Sound

Blaster compatible sound cards

Number of Players: 1-4

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Infogrames Multimedia

Publisher: I-Motion

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YES, NO, MAYBE SO Sadly, the only interaction one gets with the characters in Marco Polo is being able to answer "yes" or "no" to streams of dialogues. Don't expect any better from combat either.



TRADING POST When you enter cities, head into the town center, where you can buy goods for trading and rub shoulders with the city elite.

seen in a game of this type. The game's map of Asia features over sixty cities and all the roads which were available at the time, with distance between cities given in minimum possible traveling time—seven days from Acre to Lajras, ten days from Trebizond to Arcinghan, etc.. As your caravan rides into each new town, you will frequently get information and film clips about the surrounding countryside or the city itself, some of which are very beautiful.

In short, I would say that I've never played a historical game that so successfully captured the feel of a historical landscape or the likely encounters of an old era explorer. Accuracy isn't everything in a game, of course, but it makes MARCO POLO a much more valuable piece of software.

ply aren't enough to make the game interesting. There is no combat, no assassination, none of the things which made MERCHANT PRINCE so much fun to play. In MARCO POLO, you can be attacked, but you can't fight, as attacks on the caravan are resolved off-screen. Occasionally people will tell you how to configure your caravan in order to minimize losses—i.e., if a certain bandit clan "always attacks from the south," you would want to arrange the heaviest concentration of armed men on the southern flank of the caravan—which hardly makes for thrilling gameplay.

During the course of the game, you run into a number of other characters. But even here, interaction is severely limited; you are allowed to answer with only "yes" or "no," to simple questions, making the role-playing elements as pa-

THE GAME'S THE THING

Then there's the game...

To say that MARCO POLO suffers from a very low excitement level is putting it mildly. Now, as a merchant-diplomat, traveling with a caravan of goods through unknown parts, excitement is the last thing you would want—excitement would be synonymous with death, most of the time. What you really want to do is make money, and become famous by carrying out various missions for the high and mighty.

But the 32 missions (about 2/3 trading and 1/3 quests) and a handful of random events, sim-

per-thin as the combat.

The trading interface isn't too bad. As you travel from town to town, your goal is to buy low and sell high. There are thirty-six commodities, all classic trade goods of the time—fabrics, arms, spices, gems, metals and manufactured goods like carpets and jewelry. But prices are never fixed, and everywhere you go there is room for negotiation. You can haggle to pay less and get more for all the trade goods you carry, with the trader's expressive voice exclaiming and complaining during every transaction: "You're taking all my money! Do you want my house, too?" This is fun the first few times, but for those who've already had ample experience with trading interfaces, it would have been nice to be able to skip the banter and get the trading done quickly. Also, given how many numbers you have to fiddle with, it would have been a good idea to let players enter amounts directly from the keyboard, rather than forcing them to hold down the mouse-keys.

Ultimately, MARCO POLO suffers from schizophrenia. The game is so limited that the quality of the multimedia history package only makes its shortcomings painfully obvious. While repurposed linear media has its place in the CD-ROM marketplace, this is nowhere near say, CASTLES II in giving a feel for the period it attempts to recreate. Perhaps a public library or student of history might justify picking up MARCO POLO—but they'd be better advised to get a videotape instead, for all the confusion the interactive aspects of this program will cause. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

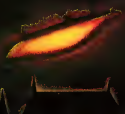
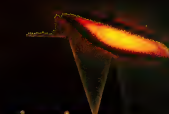
MARCO POLO

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS The multimedia skills and film clips are nice, and the historical database is pretty accurate. So is the game, for what that's worth.

CONS The game has a tendency to be slow and repetitious, and the lack of combat and solid character interaction ensures that the game is unexciting at best.

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Maxis Books A Bargain Vacation To SIMISLE

by Elliott Chin

IN THE COMPUTER GAMING INDUSTRY, THE YEAR 1987 COULD JUST AS EASILY BE REMEMBERED AS "SIMCITY Year One," as it marks the emergence of the original "software toy." Unlike the often linear strategy games of the time, SIMCITY gave you unprecedented freedom to do whatever you desired in your world. There was neither goal nor mission, just building for the sheer joy of building. After that initial success, Maxis produced other Simgames—SIMANT, SIMEARTH, SIMFARM, SIMENNUI (only kidding)—that, while commercially successful, never quite recaptured the magic of the original. SIMISLE, the latest in the series, might change all that, because it combines a lot of good old SIMCITY charm with a bit more game than is customary in the series.

Simisle

Price: \$39.95

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible

486-33 or better,

8 MB RAM,

SVGA graphics, 5

MB hard drive

space, 2x CD-

ROM drive,

mouse; supports

Sound Blaster-compat-

ible sound cards

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Matthew Stibbe

Publisher: Maxis

Orinda, CA

(800) 336-2947, (510) 933-5630



THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD You can choose the industrial route, but be prepared for the inevitable problems it will bring.

mance goals in order to win the game. By keeping the "toy" aspects of SIMCITY and injecting goals and missions into it, Maxis has created a game that is just as fun, but with considerably more replay value.

Like other Sim games, you must manage a locale, see it through disasters, and control every aspect of life in your territory. Two innovations in SIMISLE that make this game truly enjoyable are the addition of agents and the ability to explore your island. Agents are essential to the game, because you manage your island through them. Also, since you've just arrived on the island, you know little about its environment, meaning there are all sorts of animals, plants, and ruins to be discovered.

SMILES, EVERYONE, SMILES

You begin the game looking at a 2-D map over 20 islands. Clicking on one shows a close-up of the island and a brief synopsis of its mission. Those expecting firebrand preaching about rainforest preservation will be pleasantly surprised by the wide range of missions offered. There are some cases where, in order to

win, you must exploit the island, clearing it away of flora, fauna, and people to make way for commercial development. There are also a few political scenarios, including one where your goal is to win an election, and another where you must contend with a drug ring on your island. And if that's not enough to convince you of the variety of

missions, there is even a scenario involving UFOs. In fact, the only types of missions that I thought were underrepresented were those to preserve the rainforest.

Rather than throw a dozen missions at you with an overt message of preservation, Maxis decided to go with a range of missions and then let the player choose how to go about achieving those goals. If you want to exploit the natives, you can go right ahead. But if you want to take a more PC approach, you can do that, too. The point of the game is that you can be an environmentalist, an industrialist, or someone who merrily acts like both. The power of the game is in showing you what consequences result from your choices.

In the tutorial, I decided to build a few more hospitals than the manual suggested. Since I used labor and wood on the extra hospital, I ran out of wood for other projects. As a result, I had to build another sawmill, which in turn led to more wood waste and pollution. If I had not built that hospital, I would have preserved a few more trees and kept the air around my is-

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had a little cleaner. But on the other hand, if I hadn't built that hospital, my health care and population happiness would have suffered. There are a lot of tough choices to make in *SimsIsle*, and the game makes sure you see the results of your decisions, however unpleasant they may be.

Accompanying all your industrious efforts is a virtual symphony of sound. The music is full of drum-beating, tribal chanting, and wonderful rhythms which had me humming throughout the game. Sound effects help bring the island to life: birds chirp, animals howl, leaves rustle, and every object you click on or look at makes some sort of noise. The sound and music definitely create a more convincing environment.

THE ISLAND TOUR

The game's interface is completely mouse-driven. Most of the screen is taken up by a map of the island, which you can view in three different zoom levels. Clicking on any object in the map will open a window with information on the object and a list of tasks you can perform there. Clicking on a village, for instance, will open a window showing the population of the village, the people's happiness, and other information. The window also has

with certain skills. If you want to train villagers to increase their efficiency, you must send an agent versed in local ecology to that village to train them. Thankfully, the skills of agents are not static, and you can augment their skills through training at your headquarters.

Above the agent bar are four tabs: file/options, score, graph, and notebook. The score tab grades you on a percentage scale on: your population's happiness; your levels of ecology, development, and industry; and the world's opinion of your island.

The graph tab shows the various commodities and objects on your island, and lets you see how they have increased or decreased over time. Periodic checks on this tab will keep you abreast of changes in your money and industry levels.

The last tab offers perhaps *SimsIsle*'s best feature: the notebook. Clicking on this tab brings up a virtual binder with a list of topics to choose from. This book is a handy and exhaustive source of information on everything from how many cars a plant can produce to what kinds of animals thrive in what kinds of climates. If you ever have any trouble figuring out what a building does, or need to hear how poachers can be eliminated, you simply open the notebook and read. In addition to providing specific information on particulars of the game, the notebook also provides general information on pollution, ecology, animals, and a number of other subjects.

CAN'T GET BY ON JUST A SIMISLE

Of course, life in *SimsIsle* does have its drawbacks. Moving around the island in the zoom level is quite slow, since you can only inch across the screen. To get from village to village, or building to building, it would have been nice if there was some way of toggling between structures. The game could also have used a repeat button for agents. In some cases, you must click on a certain task for minutes (literally) before the desired result occurs. In these instances, if you had a repeat button, you could have left the agent to continue his work while you went to other



IF YOU BUILD IT... No *Sim* game would be complete without construction. You can build a variety of structures to exploit or preserve your island.

buildings and villages. There is a lot of macro-management here, especially with the number of agents you have to control and the various buildings and terrain you must periodically check on. Those who find this tedious will lose interest in the game. But then again, what makes *SimsIsle* addictive is the godlike feeling you get from overseeing every aspect of the island's functioning.

SimsIsle does have a lot to offer, though. There is plenty of flexibility in gameplay as you build and develop the islands to your taste. The addition of agents and the lure of islands to explore only adds more fun to the game. *SimsIsle* also does a remarkable job illustrating the consequences of your actions, showing the dangers of industrialism without preaching about environmental destruction. Those who appreciate engrossing strategy games, and those who hope to learn about the complex relationship between man and nature, would do well to pick up this game and get lost in the rainforest. ☺

THE EDITORS SPEAK

SIMISLE

RATING ★★★★★

PROS *SimsIsle* has the charm of *SimCity* and more: a variety of challenging missions to choose from, agents to control, a great atmosphere, and a wealth of information.


CONS A better interface could have helped with the inevitable micro-management, and it would have also sped up gameplay. It's a real shame that there is no campaign game.



SIMRA ISLE New animals and ancient ruins await your discovery on the isles.

various task buttons, which you can click on to train the villagers, recruit unskilled labor, and so on.

Under the map is your agent bar. You can click on the agents to view their skills and send them off to different areas to perform certain tasks. Anything that requires work can only be done by agents



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It's A Small World After All

A Traveler's Advisory For Interactive Magic's *EXPLORATION*

by Arinn Dembo

1480—NOT A BAD YEAR. IN ENGLAND, WILLIAM CAXTON WAS BUSILY AT WORK WITH THE NATION'S FIRST printing press, which he had just brought back from Cologne. In Italy, Leonardo da Vinci had just completed his apprenticeship under Andrea del Verrocchio, and was making a name for himself in the art world. And in Portugal, Diego Columbus, the son of the yet-to-be-famous explorer, was born.

In the house of his brother Bartolomeu, who worked as a cartographer in Lisbon, Christopher Columbus pored over maps of the known world, gathering

rocky beach, the man had been dead for many days—apparently of heat exposure and thirst. How long had he been at sea? And from what shore had he set forth?

Columbus had his suspicions about the dead man's origin. In fact, he believed the planet's circumference was roughly 25% less than the widely accepted (and, as we know, very accurate) Greek estimate. If, as Columbus thought, the Greeks were right about the shape of the Earth but wrong about its girth, then Asia was a lot closer to Europe than anyone supposed. And if India and China could be reached by sailing west, it would not only explain that "Indian" corpse he had seen, but would also mean that the wonders of the East were open to Europe for the price of a ship and a good tail-wind. The implications were staggering.

It's hard to pinpoint the beginning of an era; does it begin on the day a ship sets sail—or does it begin when an idea is conceived? 1480 is probably as good a date as any to mark the beginning of Europe's great Age of Discovery, and Interactive Magic chose to begin their new strategy game, *EXPLORATION*, in that year—and like Columbus, they've set out on a long journey with a vastly oversimplified view of the world.



A FLYING DUTCHMAN The ships of *EXPLORATION* are accurately rendered and painted, and are accompanied with information on their usage and history.

EXPLORATION

Price: \$44.95

System:

Requirements:
PC compatible
386SX-25 or better,
4 MB RAM,
VGA, 9 MB hard
drive space, 2x
CD-ROM drive,
mouse, supports
Soundblaster-compatible sound card

of Players: 1-4

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Ray Rutledge

Producers: Interactive Magic

Research Triangle Park, NC

(919) 461-0722



evidence in support of a new theory. During a trip to England some years before, Columbus had seen the corpse of a dark-skinned mariner, washed ashore in an odd, little one-man boat; the incident had been preying on his mind ever since. By the time the tiny bark arrived on the

WOODEN SHIPS AND GREEDY MEN

EXPLORATION is a mixed bag in a lot of ways, and the presentation is no exception. Apart from the decent splash screens of ports, most players will be disappointed with the dated graphics. The movement in the animation is also so unnatural that it's almost Monty Python-esque—little pieces of the collage moving back and forth with no relationship to the rest of the picture. Most of us expect better, even from strategy titles. On the other hand, the music is okay, and the interface is intuitive and easy to use, with the standard pull-down menus.

In the substance department, *EXPLORATION* is a bit schizophrenic. Part of the game wants to relive a by-gone age of discovery. Players begin the game as one of five famous explorers, representing the five great colonial powers of Europe: Vasco de Gama for Portugal, Columbus for Spain, Louis Antoine de Bougainville for



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—Newsweek

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France, James Cook for England, and Le Maire for Holland, with nice character portraits for each man. A tremendous amount of care and attention has gone into the modeling of the wooden ships of that era; there are 12 different vessels in the game, each one lovingly rendered as a painting in the ship-building screen. One of the features I enjoyed most was an educational briefing which can be accessed before you play. The briefing goes over each ship, its uses and distinguishing features, and also explains its place in the evolution of sea vessels, from the simple carack to the mighty Man-of-War.

On the other hand, these wooden ships and iron men have not been given a very exciting world to explore. The game's view of geography is generic to the point of being depressing, and the scale is wildly off-kilter. When the game begins, the player will find himself looking at a port icon with a small letter on it—in my case, "P" for Portugal, which marks all Portuguese units and possessions. That was the city of Lisbon, the capital port and the main headquarters of my office. I was astounded, however, when I jaunted a few squares down the

not capture a sense of excitement or discovery. The world is too limited and crudely drawn, and the terrain isn't detailed enough to be interesting. The model for travel by ship is equally simple-minded. For example, at the beginning of the game, your home port is the only place on earth where you can dock your ship, sell trade goods or buy provisions. Not only are your men incapable of foraging for food, water or timber along a coast, but your colonies don't produce needed supplies until you build them up into ports, which costs a minimum of 15,000 doubloons. Your men can, and do, starve in the hold, even when docked at your most prosperous colonies.

BUILDING SETTLEMENTS AND BUYING CHIEFS

The model for colonization is a bit better. When you venture forth onto new land, you can create settlements by spending 5,000 doubloons or by conquering or "converting" native villages.

Conversion can be achieved by guile or by force—you can either attack them or buy their chief with several tons of trinkets.

In any case, once your settlement is formed, it needs a great many improvements: plantations and mines to make money for the crown, warehouses to store the raw goods awaiting shipment back to

the home port, churches to please Rome and prevent you from being excommunicated, fortifications and troops for protection, and so on. Success in the game depends largely on the number of colonies you create, and how well you develop them.

The whole process—duping natives, destroying indigenous civilizations, rap-



GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY You can create colonies in the *New World*, but the game encourages the historical model of conquest and land rape.

ing the land for the benefit of a ruler hundreds of miles away—is all as cheerfully amoral as you would expect. Your towns and expeditions do suffer a hail of arrows occasionally, as anonymous natives express their displeasure at your presence, but that's about it. The empire-building is the most enjoyable part of the game, but I occasionally found myself shaking my head in wonder at the callousness of the model; there's no trading, communication, or positive interaction with indigenous people at all, and the manual is unapologetically brutal about it. "No, this part of the game follows history. You must fight the Incas."

There are some rudimentary political and military aspects to the game, as well. You have to maintain peace with two of the four competing colonial powers, both to please the crown and to keep up good relations with Rome. If you stay at war for too long, and let too many men starve aboard ship, you can be excommunicated. It's a fate much to be dreaded—even if you're playing the English (although why it should bother them after 1532 is beyond me).

If you can't maintain peace, you'll have to try and stay ahead in the arms race, by funding research for ship improvements and more sophisticated weapons. And if it comes down to defending your colonies and attacking your enemies, you'll have to hire mercenaries. Unfortunately, the combat system in this game is execrable. Intelligence is virtually nonexistent. There's no way to tell how many men or cannons are on board a ship, and no way to see whether there are mercenary units inside a town or village; so it's impossible



NYMPH MAP-MAKING In *Exploration*, countries that should be separated by vast tracts of land are only inches apart, while the rest of the globe is crammed into dual screens.

screen and discovered another city—not Setabal or Sines, but a city with the letter "S" on it—"S" for Spain! Each one of those little port icons represented an entire country, and the many miles between Lisbon and Barcelona were reduced to 10 centimeters of uninhabited, squiggly green coast.

Despite its name, *EXPLORATION* does

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HONOR THY FATHER You'll have to appease the Church with spoils from the New World or face excommunication, leaving you alone against the other powers of Europe.

to assess one's chances before a fight—and since losing a ship is ridiculously easy and horrifically expensive, you don't have much choice but to avoid all ship-to-ship combat like the plague.

Also, mercenary units cannot be combined except in a town or onboard a ship. Despite the fact that there are numerous different troop types, there's no way to put together an army, and even units of the same type cannot be com-

bined in the open. To attack a settlement or a ship, you have to send one unit after another into it. Battle, when it does occur, is the most anti-climactic, lackluster affair that you can imagine: just a tiny shower of stones passing between unit icons, accompanied by strange noises. That's it.

EXPLORING OTHER OPTIONS

I don't ordinarily like to critique a game by comparing it to others, but *EXPLORATION*'s mission has been handled so much better by other titles that I feel I should mention at least two. **MicroProse's MACHAVELLE: THE PRINCE**, which takes the viewpoint of the Venetian merchant-aristocracy from the time of Marco Polo to the discovery of the New World, is still on the shelves, and is unmatchable as a game of trade, exploration and intrigue in the Renaissance. And it's still possible to get a copy of **SID MEIER'S COLONIZATION**, which al-

lows the player to direct the development of a European colonial empire in the New World in a more graceful fashion than in *EXPLORATION*.

I hate to knock a game that tries to do so much, but *EXPLORATION* just won't measure up for the majority of gamers; it hasn't been given enough time or thought, and its better ideas suffer because the rest of the game is so weak. The end result is a half-baked game which can't compete with more fully realized titles in a similar vein. Gamers are advised to explore other means of parting with 40 dollars. ☹

THE EDITORS SPEAK

EXPLORATION

RATING ★★☆☆☆☆

PROS The attention lavished on the ships is impressive, and the empire-building and development aspects of the game can be fun.

CONS A crudely drawn world, simplistic travel model and a terrible combat system dash any sense of excitement or discovery.

THE MARKETPLACE

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Hey, That's Cheating!

Well, Maybe So, But CHEAT Will Help You Win Over 300 Games

by Jeff James

IF YOU'VE EVER TYPED `IDKFA` INTO YOUR KEYBOARD WHILE PLAYING *DOOM*, YOU'LL IMMEDIATELY understand the concept of the cheat code. Just about every game programmer these days

you directly edit game data. On the contrary, it's a compilation of hundreds of cheats, Easter eggs, bonus stages and other extras for more than 300 computer games. The CHEAT program itself is essentially a hypertext text reader which al-

other fairly recent releases. Even with the spotty quality of the information provided, CHEAT gives you an excellent excuse to brush the cobwebs off those game classics and relive some memories.

As I write this, Mike is working on Release 30.0, which should contain even more tricks, tips and hints for your favorite games. You can find CHEAT on most on-line services such as America On-Line or CompuServe. If your on-line service doesn't have it, you can call direct to the official home of CHEAT, the Cult of the Tentacle BBS at 914-583-6237. Although it may sound like a hang-out for fans of H.P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos*, this board is stocked with all sorts of game-related hint files, cheats and utilities and is well worth a visit.

CompuServe GAMERS forum filename: CHEAT260.ZIP

Cheat for Windows v2.0

by Mike Zier and Adam Smith

CHEAT FOR WINDOWS v2.0 is the Windows-based sibling of Mike Zier's CHEAT

that their latest creation has bonus areas, undocumented features, and other goodies that can only be accessed by typing in a magical combination of letters. Shareware games like *DOOM*, *RISE OF THE TRIAD*, *TERMINAL VELOCITY* and others have helped popularize the concept of cheat codes as of late, but the idea isn't new—cheat codes have been around since the dawn of computer gaming.

So how do you know if the games you own support cheat codes? Unless you've shelled out the clams for a strategy guide, found the right file areas on-line or have a friend with an encyclopedic knowledge of game hints, you may never be able to access all the cool extras that game developers have worked so hard to provide. Enter Mike Zier and his CHEAT program (DOS and Windows), arguably the most comprehensive collection of cheats, Easter eggs and game secrets you'll find anywhere.

CHEAT Release 26.0

by Mike Zier

Unlike many of the programs featured in *Gamer's Edge* over the past few months, CHEAT isn't a program that lets

you to read the included cheats and hints. Many of the hints are for older games like *Accolade's TEST DRIVE II* (type `AERF` for faster acceleration, braking and an extra life) and *LHX ATTACK CHOPPER* (press `CTRL-R` to rearm), and the quality of cheats provided varies wildly. Hex editing information is listed for some games, while other entries describes quirks in gameplay that players can use to their advantage. There's lots of information on newer games as well, including the latest cheat codes for *DOOM*, *DOOM II*, *HERETIC*, *TERMINAL VELOCITY*, *JAZZ JACKRABBIT*, *WARCRAFT* and



DAY OF THE CHEATER Mike Zier's CHEAT program organizes tons of cheat codes for tons of games.



THE BACKDOOR WINDOW Although it's basically the same as its DOS counterpart, the Windows version of CHEAT puts the power of cutting corners into a nifty interface.

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Panthers in the Shadows — At least you're still at home when the smoke clears...

While designed for all levels of wargamers, **Panthers in the Shadows** is not recommended for first-time gamers without some understanding of military forces and operations.

Requires VGA display, 500K free hard disk, 3MB high memory, 4MB hard disk space and a mouse. 2MB or more of high memory is suggested for optimum performance. For IBM PC and compatibles. Copyright 1995 by Santa Barbara HPS Simulations. All Rights Reserved. IBM is a registered trademark of International Business Machines, Inc.



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Cheat of the Month Club

Crusade: No Remorse Cheat Codes

To bring the most out of your vintage cherry-red Crusader, type in "ASSICA1B" at any point during gameplay. This enables Cheat Mode. Once enabled, press F10 to get the latest and greatest weapons, ammo and special items. CTRL-F10 makes you invincible. Warning: Origin does not support the use of Cheat Codes with Crusade.

Here are some additional cheats, usable from the command line. Type CRUSADER -(cheatname) to enable command-line start parameters:

- skill x sets default skill (1-4)
- warp y warps you to a mission (1-16)

Hexen Cheat Codes

Here are the correct cheat codes for Hexen, straight from the lips of designer John Romero at id Software. Beware of the cheats you might see floating around the 'Net—they've been disabled, and at least one will kill you!

- BUTCHER Kills all monsters
- VISIT Takes you to different level
- MAPSC0B Shows full outmap of level
- SATAN God mode
- CLUBMED Restores full health
- SH00WCASTER Changes class type
- MARTEX Commits suicide

program. Don't let the pug-ugly interface fool you—this program is positively packed with game-winning cheats, Easter eggs and other valuable secrets. Program authors Mike Zier and Adam Smith even state that it offers help on more games (344) than the DOS version of CHEAT, a claim that I have no reason to dispute.

There's not much difference between these two programs (other than the greater number of cheats in the Windows version), but the Windows version may be a better choice if you're a heavy Windows 95 user.

Installation is straightforward, and the program does require that you have the Visual Basic run-time file (VBRUN300.DLL) installed on your PC. It works under both Windows 3.1 and Windows 95, and occupies less than 1 MB of hard drive space once installed.

CHEAT FOR WINDOWS v3.0 is currently in development, and should be widely available by the time you read this. It promises

to cover even more games than its predecessor, and may even sport an updated interface. For more information, check out the Cult of the Tentacle BBS at 914-583-6237 (8N1).

I downloaded Mike's work in progress from the Cult of the Tentacle BBS (914-583-6237).

Jeff James, CGW columnist and Associate Editor of The Electronic Roadhouse, can be contacted on CompuServe at 74774.1635 and through the Internet at 74774.1635@compuserve.com. ☺

ZDNet

To locate these files on-line, tune in to the CGW headquarters on ZDNet. Files featured here can be downloaded from ZDNet on CompuServe. On CompuServe, go to Computer Gaming World's own forum (GO GAMEWORLD), and search in the Gamer's Edge library.

Mother, What A Board!

A Guided Tour Through The Backbone Of Your System

by Paul C. Schuytema

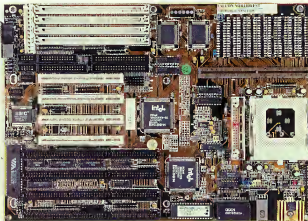
THE YULETIDE SEASON IS UPON US, AND MANY OF YOU ARE PINING FOR A NEW PENTIUM UNDER THE Christmas tree/Hanukkah bush, all wrapped in shiny bows and tinsel. Sure, we all want a 133 MHz Pentium. Who doesn't?

We all want a great sound card, a thirty-speed CD-ROM drive, a fully programmable 200 button joystick and an SVGA card capable of 100 frames per second at a color depth of 56 billion "natural hues"—essentially, the red-blooded American game system. But just what do we plug all of our stuff into?

MORE THAN JUST A DOCKING BAY

The motherboard is the true unsung hero of the Pentium revolution. Sure, the Pentium chip is the brains of the operation, but any good life form needs more than that. We need a central nervous system, a skeleton, and a system of managing and interpreting the coming and goings of data through a myriad of disparate systems. That's what a motherboard does.

At its most basic level, a motherboard is a giant silicon wafer, inscribed with super-



MOTHER, WHAT A BOARD! This Falcon Northwest motherboard showcases the latest PC technology. It is a true "clone" board, in that most I/O functions are handled by add-on cards, as opposed to being hardwired to the unit. Gamers should look for "clone" boards like these, to allow for the most flexibility when expanding a system.

highways of circuits, and serves as the place onto which we plug all of our cards and other goodies, from megabytes of RAM to the latest wavelable sound card. In the early days of personal computers, back when the operating system was CPM rather than MS-DOS (oops, I mean Windows 95, of course), the motherboard was built around the S100 bus. Essentially, the motherboard was then nothing more than a docking station for the component parts of a computer.

Now, the motherboard is an integral component of the whole system, performing many of the tasks once relegated to a separate card or cards. Our specimen for this month's tour was served up by Falcon

Northwest Computers. We have the privilege of getting up close and personal to the latest evolutionary beast, a motherboard which is capable of handling Pentium processors from 75 MHz all the way up to 200 MHz.

On this board, we not only have the slots to install all of our digital componentry, but we also have a host of processing stations in their own right, from cache memory, the Intel's new Triton chipset, to a programmable flash BIOS, to a system clock, to hard drive and floppy controllers.

ZIF ME A CHIP

First on our tour is the "docking port"

DON'T FRY YOUR CHIPS

Exercise care, when performing any operation on the internal components of your system. Static electricity that you may not be able to feel is enough to fry integrated circuits and require expensive board replacement. For tips on safe handling of your motherboard, see this month's "Under The Hood" on motherboard upgrades, page 422.

for our Pentium processor. This large square connector is a "ZIF" (not as in "Zaff-Davis" but as in "Zero Insertion Force") socket which allows us to simply drop the Pentium chip in place and latch down the lever. Because of the layout of the pin holes, this socket will only take Pentiums of 75 MHz or faster, and is set up so that we can't accidentally put the Pentium in the wrong way (whee!).

Older Pentium chips (60 and 66 MHz) used five volts of power, but that caused a lot of problems from heat build-up. Now, all of the newer processors use only 3.5 volts, so the pin holes have been modified to prevent installation of a 60 or 66 MHz "heat hog."

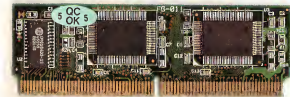
Next to the Pentium socket is a VRM (Voltage Regulation Module) socket. This isn't used for anything yet, but when Intel releases their 200 MHz Pentiums, they'll run at a scant 2.5 volts, and will need the VRM popped in this slot to drop the voltage down to the proper levels.

THANKS FOR THE CACHE

The brown slot next to the Pentium chip holds the processor cache memory card, a little wafer of silicon only slightly larger than a memory SIMM (Single Inline Memory Module). A cache is a small bank of memory which "sits" between the Pentium and your standard complement of RAM.

Often of the SRAM genus (for Static Random Access Memory), these chips are far faster than the traditional "dynamic" RAM we use for our main memory. SRAM memory often has an access time under 30 nanoseconds, but because of the wiring complexity of each "flip-flop" circuit, the chips are more expensive, larger and utilize more power than traditional RAM. Essentially, each and every bit of SRAM information is made of a petzel-like circuit with a single transistor at the center. Think of a memory transistor as a railway switch. Thrown one way, the electrons speed around one loop of the petzel representing the "0" or off value. Throw the switch, and the electrons romp through the other loop for the "1" or on value.

Cache memory serves as a "holding pool" for memory and instructions which are in frequent use by the processor. Programming code (in it's most primitive, ma-



CACHE IN THOSE BULKY CHIPS The two larger chips on this board are 128K SRAM memory chips from NEC. This 1.5 x 2.5 cm chip sports a most speedy access time of eight nanoseconds. Two of these chips, plus a parity checking chip, make up the 256K synchronous memory cache system, which is plugged in just above the Pentium processor.

chine code manifestation) is transferred from regular memory into the cache memory. That allows the Pentium chip to access, and hence execute, the instructions very quickly. Often, many motherboards rely on what's called a "level 1" cache, which is a small amount of memory built into the Pentium chip. (There are actually two 8K caches, one for code and one for data.) High-performance motherboards utilize a "level 2" cache, which is an external memory source like we have here. Generally, the larger the level 2 cache, the better, but it's hard to predict what the ab-

solute increase in speed will be, since it depends on the mix of machine level instructions encountered in the current program.

This motherboard sports 256K of speedy NEC 8-nanosecond (that's eight-millionths of a second access time, as opposed to 70 nanoseconds for your main RAM) synchronous SRAM. The cache memory is synchronous in that the 256K of cache memory runs at the same speed as the Pentium's internal caches, offering up heinous performance.

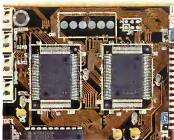
The square chips on this daughter board are 128K SRAM memory chips. The small IC to the left is a parity checking chip, which serves as a watchdog, making sure that what goes into the cache RAM comes out the same. Since this memory is so fast, and in constant use by the CPU, this parity checking is essential. Several years ago, standard RAM utilized parity checking, but it was discovered to be an act of overkill—now virtually all standard RAM doesn't mess around with parity checking.

"For gamers or anyone doing serious 3-D graphics," commented Kelt Reeves, president of Falcon Northwest, "cache speed becomes extremely important. If you can match a Pentium 133 MHz with an eight nanosecond cache, then you can run *MILITARY WARRIOR 2* at high-res just as smooth as silk."

Just above the slot for the "synchronous" cache are a number of sockets to plug in "traditional" cache memory, just in case the synchronous cache isn't available (eight nanosecond cache memory is quite hard to come by).



TRITON IS THEIR NAME These two chips make up half of Intel's four-chip Triton chipset. These babies control virtually all system I/O, from the hard drive to the data streaming to and from your video card via the PCI bus.



BABY TRITONS These smaller chips, located near the top of the motherboard, complete the four-chip suite of the Triton chipset.

GET ON THE LOCAL BUS

The four white slots are the PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) local

bus slots. Generally, the PCI data bus runs at 33 MHz, and offers up both 32-bit and 64-bit data "highways" back to the CPU.

Your video card is probably the most obvious PCI card. Using the extra bandwidth of the PCI local bus, a PCI video card can operate at a much higher frame rate than older cards which lived on the 16-bit ISA bus. Other PCI cards can be network cards or specialized I/O cards.

The four long black slots are the ISA (for Industry Standard Architecture) slots, used for plugging in such things as modems, sound cards and other standard cards which don't need the local bus speed of a PCI slot. The ISA slots provide a 16-bit data bus back to the Pentium processor (think of it as a 16 lane data highway). This format was originally introduced in the IBM AT computer, and has remained consistent since then. Over the last few years, local bus connections have evolved for higher-speed connections, but for things like modems, 16 bits provide plenty of data throughput.

Many of today's motherboards don't of-

fer up this many ISA slots, but as a gamer, you want all that you can have. Many of the newer machines, especially the ones in "trium line" cases may offer only one or two available ISA slots. Gamers need more than that, with modems, sound cards, General MIDI cards, game cards and the like. When hunting for a clone system, consider three ISA slots the minimum, with four as your target.

TRITON TRUE

Four specialized chips make up Intel's new Triton chipset. The Triton chips handle the memory and input-output operations of the PC. Until recently, while your processor might have been a Pentium, the memory and I/O functions were often handled by



FLASH MY BIOS This rather gaudy chip is the BIOS, which tells your computer how to boot up and where to find its various parts. This is a BIOS designed for a 586 (Pentium) PCI system.

more "archaic" controller chips, which put a severe bottleneck on the computer's performance. Essentially, your memory operations were plugging away at the same speed as a slower 486, even though the Pentium was capable of much more speed.

The Triton chips are Intel's attempt to match the memory and I/O operations of a computer with the speed of the Pentium processor. This might not affect "normal" operations, such as working with a large spreadsheet, but when we delve into some serious multimedia (read: games), when the amount of data being tossed back and forth in your system becomes truly enormous, boosting performance really makes a difference.

As a concrete example, one of the things the Triton chips handle is the hard

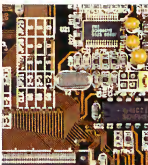
drive I/O. Without the chipset, your CPU might have been spending up to 20% of its processing time merely handling the disk operations. With the Triton chips taking over that responsibility, the load on your Pentium chip is less than one percent of processing power.

The Triton chips also manage the PCI local bus, and keep track of such things as DMA channels, IRQs and base addresses for the various PCI cards. Having a chipset manage this means that we are one step closer to true plug and play installation of new boards. Reeves described the Triton chips as your PC's "paper clerk, managing all of that annoying information that's so essential."

AND ON YOUR LEFT...

Nestled between the ISA slots and the real-time clock battery rests the BIOS (Basic Input and Output System) chip. Called a "flash" BIOS because it can be reprogrammed, this chip has all of the machine level code which tells the computer how to boot up, where to find the operating system, the hard drive, and all of that other essential information.

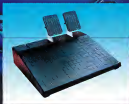
Between the SIMM (Single In-line Memory Module) slots and the PCI slots are the connectors for the serial ports, the floppy drives and the Enhanced IDE hard drives. Not too long ago, these functions were under the control of a separate card,



OLD-TIME CRYSTAL The Y2 chip, which looks like an upside-down bathtub, generates a 14 MHz oscillating cycle by electrically exciting a tuned quartz crystal inside. This chip ensures hardware compatibility with CGA graphics modes.

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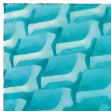
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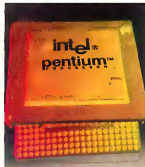
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but the technology has become sufficiently advanced to allow a few chips, the SMC chip for the serial I/O and the Triton chips for the drives, to control all of the I/O functions at blazingly fast speed. That leaves us another free slot for some other cool card.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Nestled between the two larger Intel Triton chips is something from the dark past of the PC. Looking like an overturned bathtub, the Y2 chip contains a



MAKE MINE A PENTIUM The Pentium chip is the neural center of your computer. This CPU chip sports 273 gold-plated pins to mate with the motherboard's ZIF socket. Remember, though, a Pentium needs a chip-mounted heat-sink or fan, or you'll run into serious heat trouble.

small quartz crystal which oscillates at a lousy 14 MHz. This little beast exists only to ensure backward compatibility with the old CGA standard, something hardly needed or even discussed these days, but it will allow you to load up and run UTM-X I (if you can get it transferred to 3.5" disks, that is).

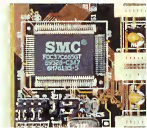
In today's motherboards, crystal oscillators have been replaced with solid state integrated circuits. The small Texas Instrument chip near the Y2 handles the clock speed of the CPU. The clock speed is set by the blue jumpers on the board. When setting up the motherboard, you first need to specify the CPU's speed. For a 133 MHz Pentium, that would mean a setup of 66 MHz (since a 133 Pentium is actually just a clock-doubled 66 MHz

chip). Then you must set up the speed of the PCI bus, which should be some division of the CPU/board speed. Falcon sets up this board to run at 44 MHz, even though Intel only recommends 33 MHz for the bus. Reeves explained that with a high quality motherboard, you can push the PCI bus all the way up to 50 MHz.

HAVE CPU, WILL TRAVEL

The brain of this operation is the Pentium chip. A Pentium is a hefty chip, surprisingly heavy, and sporting 273 gold-plated pins. With an external data bus at 64-bits wide, Pentium can chomp on data and process instructions at blazing speeds.

If you could chip open (no pun intended) the ceramic casing, you'd find over three million microscopic transistors, some as small as .8 microns in width. The newest breed of Pentiums use 3.3 volts of power (as opposed to 5 volts for the earlier 60 MHz variety). The speed of a Pentium, stated in megahertz (such as a 133 MHz Pentium), refers to the clock cycle speed. The easiest way to think of the MHz rating is to think of it as your computer's heartbeat. A 133 MHz Pentium's "heartbeat" is 133,000,000 clock cycles per second. This shouldn't be confused with the terms MIPS, or Millions of Instructions per Second, since some Pentium instructions take more than one clock cycle to perform. Also, while a 133



BUS RIDER This little chip, mounted near the PCI slots, controls the serial I/O of the system, and lives on the PCI bus itself. Before serial I/O was controlled by a dedicated chip, the I/O speed was always a question mark. Just because you had an external 14.4 modem, it didn't necessarily mean that the serial port on your 486-50 was capable of that speed.



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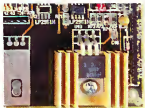
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1. What is the highest level of education that you completed? (Check one only)

- 01 Some high school or less
- 02 Selected high school
- 03 Some college or technical school
- 04 Graduated college
- 05 Post graduate school

2. Computer ownership status. (Check all that apply)

- 01 IBM compatible (not standard)
- 02 Macintosh
- 03 Any
- 04 Dedicated game machine
- 05 None

3. If bid, what level? (Check one only)

- 01 Power PC
- 02 Pentium (386)
- 03 486
- 04 386
- 05 386

4. Do you need (or plan to buy in next 6 months) a CD-ROM? (Check one only)

- 01 Yes
- 02 Plan to buy (6 months)

5. How often do you usually buy computer games? (Check one only)

- 01 Once a week
- 02 Once every two to three weeks
- 03 Once a month
- 04 Once every two to three months
- 05 Once every four to six months
- 06 Once a year

6. Where are you most likely to purchase games? (Check all that apply)

- 01 Independent computer store
- 04 Computer store chain
- 02 Consumer electronics store
- 05 Direct from vendor
- 03 Mass merchandising store
- 06 Mail order

7. What is your total others in household? (Write type of game) (Check one in each column)

	Person 1	Other 2
01 Storage		
02 War/Military		
03 Role Playing		
04 Brain Teasers		
05 Card		
06 Sport		
07 Action/Adventure		
08 Educational		
09 Adventure		

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1 What is the highest level of education that you completed? (Check one only)

- 01 Some high school or less
- 02 Graded high school
- 03 Some College or Technical school
- 04 Graduated College
- 05 Post Graduate school

2 Computer currently owned in (Check all that apply)

- 01 IBM compatible (with standard)
- 02 Macintosh
- 03 Amiga
- 04 Dedicated game machine
- 05 None

3 What level would you be? (Check one only)

- 01 Power PC
- 02 Platform (MS)
- 03 MS
- 04 386
- 05 386

4 Do you own (or plan to buy or rent if monthly) a CD ROM? (Check one only)

- 01 Yes
- 02 Plan to buy (3 months)

5 How often do you usually buy computer games? (Check one only)

- 01 Once a week
- 02 Once every two to three weeks
- 03 Once a month
- 04 Once every two to three months
- 05 Once every four to six months
- 06 Once a year

6 Where are you most likely to purchase games? (Check all that apply)

- 01 Independent computer store
- 02 Computer store chain
- 03 Consumer electronic store
- 04 Discount brand vendor
- 05 Mass merchandising store
- 06 Mail order

7 What is your total (either as household) level of type of game? (Check one in each column)

	Yourself	Other 1	Other 2
01 Strategy			
02 War/Military			
03 Role Playing			
04 Action/Adventure			
05 Sports			
06 Action/Strategy			
07 Educational			
08 Adventure			

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Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Publication Title Computer Gaming World		2. Publication Number 0 7 2 - 9 1 6		3. Issue Date 10/1/95	
4. Issue Frequency Monthly		5. Number of Issues Published Annually 12		6. Annual Circulation (Net Press Run) 837,564	

7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Street, City, County, State, and ZIP+4®) (Not for circulation data)
One Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016

8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not for circulation data)
One Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016

9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Business Manager (Not for circulation data)
Publisher: James M. Bates, 130 Chagall Rd., Ste 260, Amherst, CA 94003
Editor: James M. Bates, 130 Chagall Rd., Ste 260, Amherst, CA 94003
Business Manager: James M. Bates, 130 Chagall Rd., Ste 260, Amherst, CA 94003

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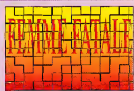


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UNCENSORED

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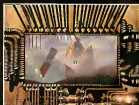
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Motherboard Upgrades



Issues To Consider If You'd Like To Hot Rod Your PC For Less Money

by Loyd Case

COST VS. PERFORMANCE, THAT'S THE NAME OF THIS GAME. IF YOU'VE GOT A 486 and you've been getting your ass chewed in *MechWarrior II* because you can't turn and burn in high-res, it's time to start thinking about solutions. If the solution to plunk down three grand on a new system doesn't sound very appealing, and if you're willing to go under the hood yourself to replace the motherboard and processor, you can have Pentium-class performance for a lot less money.

But there are many factors to take into account before you head off to Herb's Electronics and go sifting through the parts bins. The price of upgrading vs. buying a new system depends on the

kind of machine you have and the kind of performance you want. If you have a 386, stop reading now and start saving for a new system. If you have a slow 486 with no CD-ROM drive, less than 8 MB of RAM, an aging sound card and a small hard drive, you should consider buying a whole new system. By the time you bought a new motherboard, processor, video card, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, sound card and other components, you'd probably be near the price of a new Pentium 90 with a warranty.

If, however, you have a 486 with a VLB bus that meets most of your needs but just isn't fast enough, consider the upgrade route. A new motherboard, processor and video card will give you a healthy performance increase for roughly half the price of a new system. Since you'll be getting a PCI local bus board, it will also put you in a better position to take advantage of the forthcoming 3-D PCI accelerators.

Prices vary widely, but you could expect to pay \$250-400 for a new PCI motherboard, \$240-500 for a Pentium-level processor, and \$200-400 for a fast new video card. Now that you've got an idea about the price, let's discuss what you need to know to get started.

PARTS IS PARTS

The motherboard is a big circuit board that (usually) has a socket for the CPU, the memory, and all the slots for various cards. Many of the modern motherboards are heavily integrated, meaning they have features such as disk controllers, serial ports, and printer ports on

board. There are even some motherboards with onboard audio, which is usually SOUND BLASTER compatible.

The key to the performance of the motherboard is not the CPU, but the *core logic chipset* (often just called the chipset). The current darling of the hot rod crowd is the **Intel TRITON** chipset, but this changes every few months. Why is core logic important? Because these chips act as the traffic cop for data flowing throughout the computer, and there are many opportunities to create bottlenecks. Most of the newer Pentium boards can handle clock speeds in excess of 133 MHz, leaving plenty of room for growth.

HOT SLOTS

Next in importance is the type and number of I/O slots. There are a couple of boards out now with only three ISA slots. This is a problem if you have a sound card, speed-compensated joystick card, internal modem and maybe a separate I/O card. Consider four ISA slots to be the minimum. For fast graphics, nothing beats PCI these days, and if you have a penchant for soaping up your disk access with SCSI controllers, PCI is the only way to go. Look for at least three PCI slots: one for a graphics card, one for a SCSI controller, and one for a PCI Ethernet card (hey, you're into multiplayer games, right?).

Our current favorite is the P55CMS from Supremicro. The P55CMS uses the TRITON chipset and has eight full slots: four ISA and four PCI; there are no shared slots. Other worthy motherboards are the ASUS P54TP4 and the Intel ZD

SHORT CIRCUITS

Modems make loud squealing sounds, so it's a natural that sound card standard-setter Creative Labs would want to make these too. The **Mocem Blaster 28.8 External** is a V.34 modem that should hit the street at about \$190. This isn't the advanced **DSVO (Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data)** modem that Creative and others should be shipping soon, but it's an inexpensive entry into the world of high-speed telecommunications. Along with the 28,800 bps faxmodem, the package also includes a CD containing Internet access software, an Internet tutorial, and front-ends for four online services. In addition, there's a taste of online gaming, with playable demo versions of *Vortex*, *Pool*, and *Discreet* included on a second disc.



Get Ready For The Winter Games

It's that time of year again. Time to winterize your multimedia system for another long, cold season indoors with nothing to do but eat and play games. Interact accessories can't help you with the eating part, but they can sure give your gaming experience a major shot in the arm. With this kind of excitement, who cares if you don't see the sun for four months?

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(also known as the "Zappa"). The Intel board is a little problematic if you have full-size expansion cards, though. All have synchronous burst SRAM cache, which is a kind of cache memory that's a bit faster than normal cache. (Cache memory on the motherboard, also known as Level 2 or L2 cache, is what's often specified in systems that say "256K cache." System cache is very fast memory that acts as temporary storage between the CPU and main memory, because the Pentium or 486 chip can easily outrun normal DRAM.)

(For a more thorough overview of the parts and working of a motherboard, see this month's "Hex, Bags n' Rock & Roll" on page 392.—*EL*)

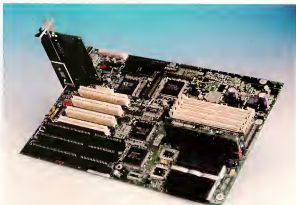
NOT-ROD TIPS

One tactic used by some hot-rodders is *overclocking*. All the newer motherboards can run at different clock rates. This means that the same board can handle a 75 MHz Pentium, a 90 MHz Pentium, or a 120 MHz Pentium, or even faster. It's very tempting to buy a 75 MHz Pentium and run it at 133 MHz, for example. Our advice: *don't*. In general, unless you really know your stuff, don't overclock your CPU. Some chips run just fine at higher clocks, others will burn up in a jiffy.

Also, make sure you have enough memory. These days, eight megabytes of RAM is de rigueur, with 16 becoming commonplace as games boasting high resolution graphics will use that 16 megabytes. There are a number of formerly exotic memory technologies showing up (such as EDO memory), but for the most part, it's the quantity, not the speed, that's critical here.

AN OUNCE OF PREPARATION

If you want to install a new motherboard yourself, be aware of a couple of things: first, you must remove any peripherals that are in the way (for example, you might have to remove a floppy drive to free the motherboard). Additionally, labeling any wires that you disconnect from your old motherboard (such as the various status LEDs and ribbon cables for your IDE hard drive may need to be removed), should make the installation of your new motherboard easier. If



MOTHER OF ALL MOTHERBOARDS The Intel Advanced/EX motherboard's features include: Windows 95 Plug and Play support via the 1MB Intel flash BIOS; built-in Creative Technologies 16-bit stereo Sound Blaster audio; and upgrade capability for forthcoming faster Pentium OverDrive processors.

this is the first time you've undertaken a project like this, I'd suggest you find a technical manual or a knowledgeable friend who can help walk you through it.

SCALPEL, SCREWDRIVER, CAT GUT...

Make sure you have the proper tools for delicate motherboard work. You don't want to be caught in mid-computer-surgery without the tools you need to get your system back together. The tools in your garage are probably a mixed bag: some are fine for this kind of work, but most are too large for working on electronics. Some may be magnetized, something you want to avoid around disk drives. Instead of scrounging around your garage workbench, invest in a PC tool kit; they're available in most computer stores from companies like Kensington. If you want to collect your own tools, there are some "must-haves."

An electric screwdriver—the long skinny kind, not the ones that look like small handheld drills—will ease the stress on your wrist. Squeeze tongs, the grimos that have a spring-loaded claw at the bottom, are also a big help. Press on

the handle and the claw emerges to grab small objects—usually screws—from tight places.

You'll also want an anti-static strap. This is usually a coiled cord with a loop on one end to wrap around your wrist and an alligator clip on the other. Use this to ground yourself. Many computer components are very sensitive to static electricity, so grounding yourself minimizes the problem. If you can't find an anti-static strap, touch the metal chassis of the computer before you start and frequently while you're working.

A long, very skinny, narrow-bladed screwdriver will help you reach into tight spots. You'll also want a pair of spring-loaded, small needle-nose pliers, or—better yet—a pair of forceps, just like the doctor uses. Finally, dig up lots of anti-static plastic bags (the kind computer interface cards are usually stored in.) These are handy for temporarily storing your interface cards.

Most of all, you need a lot of patience—don't ever rush a motherboard install; failure is expensive. Finally, like any computer hardware installation, it never hurts to have the assistance of a savvy friend the first time you try this. ☺



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SIDEWINDER RATTLES THE COMPETITION

by Loyd Case

My desk is a mess. On the right side is a Thrustmaster WCS (WEAPONS CONTROL SYSTEM). On the left side is a Thrustmaster FCS (FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM) PRO (in other words, a fancy joystick.) Under the desk is a set of rudder pedals. That's a lot of real estate taken up by game controllers. There have been a couple of attempts at all-in-one controllers, with the

Gravia FIREBIRD being the latest attempt, but they've been fairly massive. Wouldn't it be nice to have an all-in-one controller that takes up little space on the desk and works well?

The folks in Redmond who brought you the Microsoft MOUSE and the NATURAL KEYBOARD are getting into the game controller biz. The two products are the SIDEWINDER and the SIDEWINDER 3D PRO. We took a look at the PRO version, which is a lot more interesting.

As an analog joystick, the SIDEWINDER 3D PRO emulates either the Thrustmaster FCS or the CH FLIGHTSTICK PRO, with rudder pedals. Rudder pedals are simulated by a twisting motion of the joystick; it sounds a bit awkward, but we got used to it quickly. Also, Microsoft has planned for the future, because the SIDEWINDER series have the capability of acting as digital joysticks. The typical joystick and controller interface eats up 10-15% of your CPU, even when it's idling. Digital joysticks are much more efficient. Imagine getting that performance hit back in a faster frame rate.

Currently, there aren't any games that use digital controllers, but this will change as Windows 95-native games begin to ship.



A JOYSTICK WITH A TWIST In addition to emulating the buttons on both CH-Pro and Thrustmaster FCS joysticks, Microsoft's digital Sidewinder 3-D Pro joystick emulates rudder pedals with a twisting motion of its handle.

The real question is: how does it play? As a multibutton controller for action games, it's pretty good.

MECHWARRIOR II has a setup for the SIDEWINDER in CH emulation mode. The stick is smooth, even the twisting motion of the handle.

However, this is not the controller for the flight sim jockey. The feel is wrong—there's not enough draw and the tension is too light.

Price: SIDEWINDER 3-D PRO, \$59.95 (\$79.95 bundled with MechWarrior II); regular SIDEWINDER, \$29.95. Call (800) 426-9400, (206) 882-

8080 for more information.

PREVENTING A POWER FAILURE

Ever had a power failure or brownout right in the middle of a major gaming session? If so, and you find yourself compelled to finish that U.S. NAVY FIGHTER mission when the lights go out, then you probably need an Uninterruptible Power System (UPS). While at first we thought an uninterruptible power supply for gamers was a little overkill, two things changed our minds: the first was the rapidly dropping price of these rigs.

American Power Conversion (APC) offers UPSs as low as \$80. Second, the prevalence of advanced operating systems, such as Windows 95, OS/2 and Macintosh Sys-

tem 7.5 moves UPS modules from a luxury to a practical need—recovering from a power failure on a system with a bunch of open files is no fun at all.

We checked out the PLUG N PLAY BACK-UPS PRO 420 model from APC, which delivers up to 420 watts of power during a shutdown. The first thing we noticed was the heft. These babies have a lead-acid battery inside, so you get a workout when you move them around. The next thing that came to our attention was the serial port. Serial port, you ask? The 420 is an honest-to-gosh plug-and-play device. When we attached the serial port to our computer and booted Windows 95, we were prompted to load the driver for the newly detected hardware. A few minutes later, we were running APC's PowerChute application, which monitors the status of the UPS on a continuous basis.

For most gamers, this is a luxury at best; we usually don't have spare serial ports. The monitoring utility is really for use by file servers and other mission-critical systems. However, the 420 worked as advertised. After charging the battery, we yanked the power cord out of the wall, gritting our teeth to do it. The computer kept running. The UPS began beeping, so we'd know it was supplying battery juice to



DON'T SQUEEZE THE JUICE The Plug n Play Back-Ups Pro 420 from American Power Conversion will provide battery power to your computer and allow it to run in the event of a power failure.

the computer, but it was amazing to see a system with no visible means of support running on its own. Priced at under \$300, the PLUG N PLAY BACK-UPS PRO 420 is cheap insurance against losing a lot of data. Price: \$269. Call (800) 877-4080, (401) 789-0204 for more information.

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HIGHLIGHTS



ULTIMA III ORIGIN SYSTEMS, 1983

Although ALARABETH may have been Lord British's first game, it is little more than a quaint museum piece when compared to the Ultima line, certainly the best-known of all computer role-playing games. It's funny how the first three Ultimas are often referred to—and sold as—a trilogy, even by Richard Garriott himself. Both ULTIMA I and II were, for all the world-breakers they may have seemed at the time, really little more than grandiose dungeon romps. ULTIMA III, on the other hand, strived for a much more involved plot and characterizations. It largely succeeded, as its coherency and surprising subtlety set the tone for later Ultimas. It's fair to say that ULTIMA III was among the first computer RPGs that emphasized *role-playing* (as opposed to hacking and slashing your way through the story), and its influence is still being felt today.



ULTIMA IV ORIGIN SYSTEMS, 1985

Even those impressed by ULTIMA III could scarcely imagine the effect that its sequel would have on the genre. This game introduced the concept of "Avatarhood," where personal accountability was paramount: every major plot development depended on ethical choices made by your character. As word traveled from town to town of your actions, even non-player characters would react to you based on your character's reputation. What the dialogue lacked in cleverness, it made up for with an authentic, gritty feel rarely found in other games. For the first time, NPCs became true companions, rather than bundles of statistics to help in combat. Even the ending was a surprise, moving away from the "take out Foozle" climax so common in RPGs. It's hard to imagine now that such a rich, enduring world could be created with just a handful of floppy disks—this game was playable on a C-64, for goodness' sake—a reminder to companies obsessed with graphics that it is, after all, the game that counts.

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 BARON (Dynamix, 1990)

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)

THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)

ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (Origin Systems, 1992)

WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D (id Software, 1992)

INDUCTEES PRIOR TO 1989

BATTLE CHIEF (Interplay Productions, 1988)

CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)

DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)

EARL WENNER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)

Endless (various, 1987)

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)

GETTINGBY: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)

KAMMERUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MEN OF BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)

MEDIT & MAZE (New World Computing, 1986)

M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)

PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)

SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)

STARFLIGHT (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)

WIZARDRY (Interplay Productions, 1987)

WIZARDRY II (Se-Tech Software, 1981)

ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	ESRB	PRICE
1	Day of the Tentacle	ESRB	9.97
2	Full Throttle	ESRB	9.54
3	Residual & Evil	ESRB	9.51
4	Guilty Knight	ESRB	9.52
5	Sam & Max Hit The Road	ESRB	9.50
6	The Seventh Guest	ESRB	9.25
7	Robotech	ESRB	9.12
8	Electronic Arts	ESRB	9.09
9	Exotica	ESRB	9.08
10	Phantasmagoria	ESRB	9.04
	Under A Killing Moon	ESRB	9.04



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	ESRB	PRICE
1	Battletech at Renegade	ESRB	5.44
2	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xan	ESRB	5.37
3	Lords of Lore	ESRB	5.25
4	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpents Isle	ESRB	5.08
5	Might & Magic: Claws of Xan	ESRB	5.07
6	Battletech: Stone Prophet	ESRB	5.06
7	Arise: The Elder Scrolls	ESRB	5.03
8	Wall	ESRB	5.04
9	Wall of Darkness	ESRB	5.04
10	Moonbane	ESRB	5.26



TOP SIMULATION GAMES

RANK	GAME	ESRB	PRICE
1	MASCAR Racing	ESRB	10.01
2	US Navy Fighters	ESRB	9.60
3	Wings of Glory	ESRB	9.56
4	Leaving Class	ESRB	9.45
5	Indy Car Racing	ESRB	9.43
6	Acas of the Bump	ESRB	9.38
7	Final Defender	ESRB	9.25
8	Hornet	ESRB	8.84
9	Acas Over Europe	ESRB	8.68
10	MU-2B	ESRB	8.66



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	ESRB	PRICE
1	X-COM	ESRB	10.37
2	Master of Deceit	ESRB	10.20
3	Warlords II	ESRB	9.93
4	Jagged Alliance	ESRB	9.81
5	Master of Magic	ESRB	9.65
6	Warcraft	ESRB	9.66
7	Samurai	ESRB	9.51
8	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	ESRB	9.38
9	Marchant Princess	ESRB	9.08
10	Syndrants	ESRB	9.07



TOP 100 GAMES

RANK	GAME	ESRB	PRICE
1	Wing Commander 3	ESRB	10.57
2	Prince of Persia	ESRB	10.46
3	Monkey Island 2	ESRB	10.43
4	X-COM	ESRB	10.37
5	TES II: The Dagger	ESRB	10.26
6	Master of Deceit	ESRB	10.24
7	Master of Deceit	ESRB	10.20
8	MASCAR Racing	ESRB	10.01
9	Warlords II	ESRB	9.93
10	Day of the Tentacle	ESRB	9.86
11	NEB Miles '85	ESRB	9.87
12	Jagged Alliance	ESRB	9.81
13	DOOM II	ESRB	9.77
14	Dark Forces	ESRB	9.70
15	Master of Magic	ESRB	9.66
16	Front Page Sports Football '85	ESRB	9.64
17	Front Page Sports Football Pro	ESRB	9.64
18	X-Wing	ESRB	9.60
19	US Navy Fighters	ESRB	9.60
20	Virtual Pool	ESRB	9.59
21	V for Victory: Market Garden	ESRB	9.58
22	Wings of Glory	ESRB	9.58
23	Ries of the Wood	ESRB	9.56
24	Full Throttle	ESRB	9.56
25	Sam City 2000	ESRB	9.54
26	Warcraft & Schabale	ESRB	9.51
27	MU-2B	ESRB	9.51
28	Might & Magic	ESRB	9.48
29	Might & Magic	ESRB	9.48
30	Flight Unlimited	ESRB	9.43
31	Battletech at Renegade	ESRB	9.43
32	War in Russia	ESRB	9.44
33	Indy Car Racing	ESRB	9.43
34	Saberlight	ESRB	9.42
35	Shogun	ESRB	9.38
36	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	ESRB	9.38
37	Acas of the Bump	ESRB	9.38
38	Might & Magic: Darkside of Xan	ESRB	9.37
39	Operation Crusader	ESRB	9.36
40	Flight Commander 2	ESRB	9.35
41	Sam & Max Hit The Road	ESRB	9.33
42	Lords of Lore	ESRB	9.25
43	The Seventh Guest	ESRB	9.25
44	Phantasmagoria	ESRB	9.25
45	Spectator Shock	ESRB	9.19
46	Prisoner	ESRB	9.14
47	Defenders	ESRB	9.12
48	Exotica	ESRB	9.09
49	Marchant Princess	ESRB	9.08
50	Ultima VII: Part Two Serpents Isle	ESRB	9.08

PATCHES

1030 July Upgrade: Fixes a minor bug with the C & SL (only occurred on 1st turn). Also upgrades to V & G hot keys, which will now turn on and off the city Values and hex Grids. 8/1/95

Bill Jones Encyclopedia

Update: Eliminates bug that restricts you from accessing the biographies of non-players. 8/25/95

Blood Bowl Modem Patch

V1.1: Adds modem play and fixes a number of known quirks. 6/7/95

Buried in Time: Includes new 16-bit Windows executable, fixes the exploding wall problem in Chateau Galliard and the Alien Highway lockup; portions have also been enhanced for better performance. 10/11/95

Down Patrol: Includes new SVGA drivers for Trident video cards, as well as an updated flight model. 10/4/95

Descent Registered Version 1.4a Update: Fixes reported bugs. 6/23/95

Dungeon Master 2 Sound Fix: Patches both the demo and the retail version. 7/29/95

Flight Commander 2 V1.04 update for IBM PC: Updates any previous version of Flight Commander 2. 9/18/95

Flight Unlimited V2.0: Contains two physics fixes, two video fixes, fixes a couple of controller bugs, a mouse driver problem, and adds total energy compensation to the Grob's variometer. 8/30/95

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, EUnic, ZiffNet) and Computer Gaming World's Web Site (<http://www.zdnet.com/~gaming/>), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's BBSes or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase. **Red indicates new files.**

Hardball 4 Gameplay Patch:

Introduces ten levels of difficulty as well as providing other repairs and fixes. Also fixes little playability bugs and some compatibility problems. 8/22/95

Klik'N'Play V1.1y Update:

Works only with the U.S. version, fixes several reported bugs. 7/7/95

Lords of Midnight Update:

Provides multiple fixes to Domark's RPG/strategy game. 9/5/95

MechWarrior 2 Joystick

Driver Update: Fixes many of the controller problems users have experienced. 10/1/95

NASCAR V1.2 Modem Patch:

Addresses difficulties in playing NASCAR Racing via modem or null modem cable. This patch does not affect any other issues. 7/21/95

Rebel Assault V1.8 Update:

Fixes "Unexpected Interrupt" errors, joystick jumpiness, display problems, sound problems and other incompatibilities. 9/21/95

Road Iron Sumter to

ApogeeTux Update: Improves the AI and fixes some combat results in e-mail mode, primarily mak-

ing sure there is always counter artillery battery fire when artillery is available. Also, enables units on a city to retreat into the city garrison. 7/15/95

SimCity 2000 V1.2 Update

(Macintosh): This Power PC update only works with version 1.0 or the 68K V1.1. 8/29/95

SimTower for Windows V1.1:

Fixes several reported errors. 9/28/95

Sigstream 5000 Update:

Fixes some problems with modem users not being able to properly connect. 8/2/95

Stalingrad Update V1.05:

Fixes reported problems. PC and Macintosh versions available. 8/25/95

Tenk Commander V1.2

Update: Contains several fixes including removing the sharing violation error and fixing the partial install routine. 8/1/95

The Perfect General 2 Update:

Updates some scenarios and includes a resign feature, as well as fixing some other small bugs. 6/9/95

Virtual Pool Video Drivers

Update: These are the latest batch of video drivers for the full or demo version. 6/23/95

Warlords II V1.0.7: Fixes multiple problems. 8/28/95

X-COM: Terror From The

Deep V2.0 Update: Numerous tweaks and fixes to X-COM 2. 6/3/95

Zephyr V1.1 Upgrade:

Adds modem and network play as well as fixing a couple of video and headset problems. 6/20/95

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem party settings at N-8-1.

Accolade (408) 295-8800

Apogee (508) 368-7036

Bethesda (301) 990-7552

Blizzard (714) 556-4602

Broderbund (415) 883-5889

Capstone (305) 374-6872

Creative Labs (405) 742-6660

Id Software (508) 368-4137

Impressions (617) 225-2042

InterPlay (714) 252-2822

LucasArts (415) 257-3070

Maxis (510) 254-3869

MicroPress (410) 785-1841

Microsoft (206) 936-6735

NeveLogic (818) 774-8528

Origin (512) 328-8402

Papyrus (617) 576-7472

Sierra Online (206) 644-0112

Spectrum HoleByte (510) 522-8509

SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739-8623

Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3305

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What's The Deal With... Sex?

YES FOLKS, IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE OL' "S" WORD. NOW, DON'T WORRY, IF YOUR kids have made it all the way back here, then they've gotten past ads far more graphic than anything I could say without getting a stern note from my mother. No, in another attempt to deconstruct computer gaming back to its origins, I'd like to open up this Freudian barrel and hit on why, no matter how many times computer game companies say they are shifting toward the adult demographic, they continue to treat this important aspect of life like a bunch of giggling adolescents under the covers with a flashlight and an old *Playboy*. From the embarrassing "Sword-Babe" on the ARENA box, to the reviewers who comment on how "hot" the graphics are in a LEISURE SUIT LARRY episode, to the reams of adult CDs that have appeared, (and my take on this phenomena is that if you can actually rationalize buying a porn CD-ROM instead of just renting a video like normal naughty folks do, your relationship with your PC is way too close), nothing marks computer gaming as a "hate boys club" more than how it deals with human sexuality and, in a larger sense, relationships with women in general. <

I guess the first games to tread the dangerous ground of "Adulthood" were the satires like LEATHER GODDESSES or PHOBOS and LEISURE SUIT LARRY, where the player wandered through a landscape of endless sexual satire. These games were actually the most mature I've seen until very recently, and they even acknowledged the fact that women had de-



by Martin Cirulis

WING COMMANDER 3. Now here was a game that I really loved, and the storyline was great fun—right up to the point where our hero, Mark Hamill, starts looking for love in all the wrong places. With all the money being spent, maybe

they should have borrowed a writer who could portray a believably adult, experienced man—rather than force a character to act like a 15-year-old brain in a Colonel's body. The scene where you get over your beloved Angel, who was so recently gutted by a space-kitty, is pure geek wish-fulfillment. Your choices are to either duck out of the situation, leaving both women wanting you, or tongue-lather the babe of your dreams while the "loser" storms off in bitter tears. I would bet that most adult men who have actually kissed a woman (who wasn't a relative) would have preferred the game giving them some other way out of that one.

Come to think of it, improvements in graphic technology can be blamed for this trend towards the geekiest common denominator. After all, why deal with the subtleties of human interaction when you can just photograph a few cubic centimeters of silicon, lift it from a CD and plaster the image across the screen? Back when there were only polygons or less, you actually had to write something clever or insightful to get your point across. I'm sure this easy technical access to photo-realism has been the motivation for more than one "adult" game.

Even games that try to deal with human relationships without being explicit still show the genre's origins in the realm of guys who don't get out much. Look at

they should have borrowed a writer who could portray a believably adult, experienced man—rather than force a character to act like a 15-year-old brain in a Colonel's body. The scene where you get over your beloved Angel, who was so recently gutted by a space-kitty, is pure geek wish-fulfillment. Your choices are to either duck out of the situation, leaving both women wanting you, or tongue-lather the babe of your dreams while the "loser" storms off in bitter tears. I would bet that most adult men who have actually kissed a woman (who wasn't a relative) would have preferred the game giving them some other way out of that one.

Of course, all is not without hope. PLANESMAGGORA did a pretty good job of giving us adults in adult situations, and it even had the guts to portray an ugly rape, showing it as a function of evil and madness instead of treating it as something "risqué," or yanking the story into a less realistic but safer path. While the easy answer is to credit this maturity to the fact that the designer was a woman, I will try hard not to be such a cynic, and I'll keep hoping that there are also men out there plotting the next generation of mature computer games—men who don't giggle when they hear the word "Sex." ☺





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