

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming

World
ZD

DECEMBER 1996

NO. 149

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Exclusive!
Descent
Undermountain

STARFLEET ACADEMY

SCOOP!

Sabre Ace —
Sim Of Your
Dreams

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Cards Tested

Killer PCs!

7 Top Systems
Face Off For The
Ultimate Game Rig



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WITH HANDGUNS.

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DUKE NUKEM 3D PLUTONIUM PAK. COME GET SOME MORE.

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- Explore 11 new levels, several based on current hit movies
- See all new enemies get their butts kicked by Duke's steel-toed boots
- Smell steaming entrails as Duke's new microwave cannon fries and explodes those alien bastards

- Hear aliens squeal as Duke aborts their entire race in one of two hilarious and controversial new cinematic scenes
- Learn more about Duke's philosophy as he cracks dozens of new one-liners (Duke Talk)
- Exciting new special effects,

- including deadly lightning and new features such as simulated multiplayer games (against up to 7 other Dukes) on a single computer
- Other Duke-approved stuff: Duke Win95 thrones, 5 Duke Screen savers, 6 Duke jigsaw puzzles and Image Carousel





THE TOP SELLING PC GAME OF 1996

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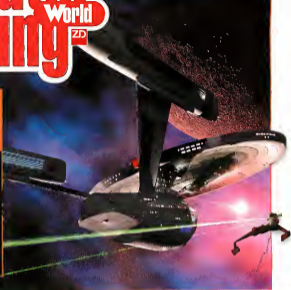


PENTIUM PRO
PROCESSOR

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Star Trek: Starfleet Academy

Is **STARFLEET ACADEMY** the best *Star Trek* game ever? Will you be the second cadet to ever beat the Kobayashi Maru scenario? And, unlike Captain Kirk, can you do it without cheating? Features Editor Denny Atkin beamed down to Interplay for the first hands-on look ever at the most anticipated space sim of the year.



HARDWARE

67 The Ultimate Gaming Machine Part 1



You're a serious gamer. You're tired of futzing around. You want the best machine to make the games you love scream. Here's the place to start. *CGW* Technical Editor and resident gear-head Dave Salvator tests seven hot new systems and gives you the low-down.

263 Smokin' 3D Graphic Cards

There's been a whole lotta shakin' goin' on about 3D, but who really delivers the goods? In this second of a two-part series, contributing propellor-head Loyd Case reviews the latest and greatest accelerators, including three based on Rendition's Verité chip.



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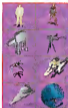
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Holiday Hot 100

Yes, Virginia, it's that time of year again. Time to go holiday shopping for friends and loved ones, and come home instead with new games for yourself. But what to buy? We've made our lists and checked 'em twice, and CGW's staff o' elves have something for the naughty and the nice.



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If you play only one real RPG this year, it will have to be...



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...Aborting Command and Conquer

...Aborting Warcraft 2

> Initiate full-scale war

...Initiating Dark Reign





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**ANDERSON,
I NEED A VOLUNTEER.**



**THAT TANK UP THE
ROAD? SOMEONE'S GOTTA
TAKE IT OUT.**

**I NEED SOMEONE I CAN
COUNT ON. SOMEONE WHO'S
MAN ENOUGH TO RUN
THROUGH MACHINE GUN FIRE
TO GET THE JOB DONE.**

**AND ANDERSON,
THERE COULD BE A MEDAL
IN IT FOR YA.**



Anderson, Chuck. Sergeant. Leads 2nd Platoon's Recon team. Probably gotta wife back home. Damn good soldier. You give him an order and he figures out the best way to get the job done. So what's he doing cowering behind that bombed-out farmhouse?

Saving his own butt.

That's what you should expect if you order him to do something crazy. In



Close Combat everything reacts like it does on the battlefield, from the ripping canvas hiss of the German MG42 machine gun to the screams of the men it hits. It all goes down right in front of you. In real time.

So there's no time to thumb through the manual. You work your mouse like a weapon. Point and click and boom, the shooting starts the second your men step off Omaha Beach and it don't let up 'til they've taken Saint-Lô. Troops, terrain, situations - if you want to get any more accurate, you'll have to shave your head.

Kick™ vs.
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Which side
you gonna take?

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To experience Close Combat visit your nearest recruiter or head straight for the battlefield at <http://www.microsoft.com/games/kickbutt/>

Microsoft

Where do you want to go today?™

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Download the trial
version and start your
hero training today.

Where should I focus my guns on the Net? What's on the CD-ROM and how do I use it? How long

after a Klingon Bird of Prey uncloaks do you have to lock on weapons and fire? What's up next month?

ON-LINE

<http://www.zdnet.com/gaming>

What's Up Online?

Check out the new look of our Web site, with expanded discussion forums, exclusive online coverage of gaming in cyberspace, behind the scenes looks at games in progress, and more. This month:

Command & Conquer: Red Alert Strategies.

Get the edge on mixing it up with the Allied armies.

Quick Start Guide to MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries March!

Can't tell an IPX from an IRQ? We'll show you how to get online with minimum hassle.



demo from T.E.N. For Quake fans, MPlayer has provided us with the Quake internet enabler.

You can also develop your own Quake levels with the CGW exclusive of World Craft. And Nucleus

Entertainment's Quake add-ons will let you throw banana peels and axes, or fly through Quake corridors with specially designed aircraft and jetsacks.

This month's playable demos include: NASCAR 2 by Papyrus, Trooper Bass 2 and Lingo of the Realm 2 from Sierra, Vicom's Bawls & Butthead! Little Thieves, Microsoft's Mowmen Truck Madness, and lots more—see page 14 for a complete list.



What's On The CD?

To seek out strange new media. To boldly go where no CD has gone before. These are the quests of the Starship CG-ROM. With special thanks to Interplay for the use of its artwork from *Star-Fleet Academy*, CGW takes over the virtual helm of the Enterprise to launch our usual plethora of playable demos.

First up, *Panzer General* has been in CGW's Top 10 Playing List for nearly two years. Now you can play it online with a



How Do I Use It?

If you have Windows 95, installation is simple: The CD is Autoplay enabled—just lock-and-load. Otherwise, from Windows 3.x, select Run from the Program Manager menu, and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. Then type D:\INSTALL to create a CGW program group on your Windows desktop. If you have installed previous versions of the CG-ROM, this disk will use the program group already on your desktop.

How Do I Play The Demos?

To view the demos, first click on Editors' Hot Picks or Product Demos. Next, click on your favorite genre: Action, Adventure, Simulations, Sports or Strategy. Then click

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A JOCK TO PLAY.

(ALTHOUGH WEARING A CUP MIGHT BE HELPFUL.)

YOU DON'T KNOW
JACKTM

SPORTS

Ouch! YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Sports, is a totally irreverent, in-your-face trivia game with over 800 all-new, all-sports questions, complete with all the style and humor of the original award-winning YOU DON'T KNOW JACK. You don't have to be a sports fanatic to play, either. You just need a CD-ROM drive and a desire to have a ball. JACK Sports is a high octane mix of pop culture and sports delivered to your desktop quicker than a searing two-hopper to the hot corner. So put on some protection and check out our free demo at www.berksys.com, because unless we missed something, rookie, you don't know Jack.

**23 AWARDS
AND WE
JUST GOT STARTED.
SO PLAY OR GET OUT
OF THE WAY.**

The Irreverent quiz show party game



CD-ROM for Windows® 95, Windows 3.1 & Macintosh®

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**BERKELEY
SYSTEMS**

**YOU DON'T KNOW
JACK**

on the title of interest. Each demo has its own instructions for installation.



How Do I Get The Patch Files?

Click on Patches under the CGW Features, and then read the text window that has instructions on

copying the files to your hard drive. You can also access the patches from a DOS prompt by typing D:\PATCHES (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copying them directly from there to your hard drive. We strongly recommend that you back up any previously saved games before installing a patch, as this may overwrite your existing program.

How Do I Get The CG-ROM?

Newstand issues come in two flavors: with and without the CD. Each type is clearly marked. If you can't find the version you want in the store you frequent, encourage your retailer to carry it (or subscribe to ensure that you get a CD every



month). To subscribe, simply call (303) 665-8930, and specify that you want the CD-ROM version.

Disclosure

As a matter of record, CGW voluntarily maintains a list of companies in which SoftBank, the parent company of Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., has an interest. It is available online at <http://www.zdnet.com/gaming/Disclaimer.html> and is updated when we become aware of such investments.

GAMES AND GOODIES ON THE CG-ROM



DEMOS AND STUFF	PLATFORM	DIRECTORY	EXECUTABLE
Admiral Sea Battles	Win 95	demos/admdemo	setup.exe
Battleground: Waterloo	Win	demos/bgw_demo	setup.exe
Beavis & Butt-head: Little Things	Win 95	demos/beavis	setup.exe
Display Doctor 5.3	Win	demos/display	ddd53.exe
Drowned God	Win 95	demos/drowned	drown.exe
Fire Fight	Win 95	demos/ffswcd	loader.exe
Game Guru: Game Enhancer	Win/DOS	demos/guru	gg.exe
Gubble	Win 95	demos/gubble	setup/setup.exe
Jonny Quest	Mac/Win	demos/jonnyq	setup.exe
Lords of the Realm 2	Win 95	demos/sierra/lords	setup.exe
Monster Truck Madness	Win 95	demos/mtruck	mtmtrial.exe
Mplayer: Quake Internet Enabler	Win 95	demos/player	setup.exe
NASCAR 2	DOS	n2demo	install.exe
NBA Full Court Press	Win 95	demos/ncpress	setup.exe
NBA Full Court Press Tutorial	Win/Win 95	via CD interface	none
NFL Quarterback Club 97	DOS	demos/acclaim	install.exe
Patches (for various games)	n/a	patches	none
PowerSlave	Win 95/DOS	demos/psdemo	ps.exe
Quake Add-ons	DOS	demos/quakestr	none
Quake Shareware	DOS	demos/quake	install.bat
Quake Textures for World Craft	Win 95	demos/qworld	none
World Craft: Quake Level Editor	Win 95	demos/wrldcft	setup.exe
Risk & Battleship	Win 3.1/Win 95	demos/hasbro	Prev31.exe & Prev95.exe
T.E.N.: Panzer General	Win 95	demos/ten	setup.exe
Trophy Bass 2	Win 95	demos/sierra/tbass	setup.exe

LAB MONKEYS

choose to stimulate their pleasure centers at the exclusion of food, water, sleep, and sex.

They're monkeys.

WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?



BUNGIE introduces *Marathon 2: Durandal*, the highly addictive game for Windows® 95 that will leave you poor, hungry, naked, and cold. Within the ruins of an ancient civilization, you'll uncover long-buried secrets of a lost clan and use sophisticated weapons to battle nasty aliens. Take pleasure in 28 game levels that will churn your brain into foamy gray froth. The SVGA 3-D graphics and active stereo imaging don't suck either. And 13 levels of intense network play may cause you to wet yourself. Not that you'll care, monkey boy. **MARATHON 2: DURANDAL. HOW WILL IT RUIN YOUR LIFE?**

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MARATHON 2
DURANDAL

Circle Reader Service #75

Coming Next Month...

STAR WARS GAMES!

THE ULTIMATE GAME MACHINE

PART

II

Next month we'll take you behind the scenes for a Jedi warrior's view of three hot new Star Wars games: *REBELLION*, a real-time strategy combat game; *JEDI KUSHI*, the incredible action sequel to *DARK FORCES*; and *X-WING vs TIE FIGHTER*.

Also in January, we'll build the ultimate gaming machine from the ground up! From the motherboard to the monitor, we'll show you how to bring together the greatest technology to build your own dream machine. Don't miss it!

Rebellion • Jedi Knight X-Wing vs TIE Fighter

HOW DO WE RATE?



Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a transcendent gaming experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.



Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.



Average: A mixed bag. Can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. Can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.



Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.



Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, ill-conceived or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place.

Hot Reviews For January

- John Madden Football 97
- Wooden Ships & Iron Men
- Full Court Press Basketball
- Monster Truck Madness
- U.S. Navy Fighters 97
- Syndicate Wars
- Shattered Steel
- Toonstruck
- War Wind
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Strategy Articles In January

- MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
- Battleground: Waterloo
- Crusader: No Regret
- Star Control 3
- Deadlock

The New World Just Got Better

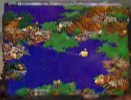
Conquest of the New World Deluxe Edition takes the award-winning strategy game and adds all the elements you asked for to create the definitive gaming experience.

"A Must for Strategists"
- Newsweek

**"Strategy fans will
be in seventh heaven"**
- Computer Gaming World

**"Conquest of the
New World is a classic"**
- PC Magazine

- ★ Expanded interactive diplomacy with the Mother Country and opponents
- ★ A custom game editor lets you preset the world with populations, armies and colonies
- ★ Extraordinary new natural wonders, resources, and gems
- ★ Advanced game software lets you start a game with pre-developed colonies
- ★ Up to 6 can play, even a network of Empires, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, or the Natives
- ★ Head-to-Head and e-mail play
- ★ Easy to use on-screen tutorial



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Giving Gifts To Gamers

Finding The Right Gift For Those With An Interactive Lifestyle

In a switch from my usual format, I'm devoting this space to tips on shopping for computer game goodies. If you're not sure how to shop for those of us who have been virtually good all year, I hope it emboldens you to action. Finding the right game is rewarding in itself, but you'll be amazed how enthusiastically the recipient wants to share his/her new toy with you.

I imagine you had a gift list full of celebrities, and you wanted to give them the right computer game. How would you go about doing it? The whole process of choosing the right computer game is essentially a game of matching needs and interests with good games.

MAC OR PC?

First, know something about the individual's computer. Bill Gates may own a Mac or two, but it's unlikely that he uses them as his game machine. Somehow, I think buying a game in the Windows environment is more likely to please him. We'll probably buy him a copy of Internet-capable *Monopoly* or *CapSword*. Ralph Nader probably only has a Mac, and probably considers the PC to be unsafe at any speed. He believes in truth in labeling, so he'd be willing to tell you whether



he has an old 68020, 68030, 68040 or Power Mac processor. You need to know that, because if you buy Tim Virtual Pool (so he can rack up balls without suffering from second-hand cigarette smoke), he'll need a Power Mac.

You'll also need to know the speed and memory of the individual's computer. Say Ronald Reagan hasn't upgraded his machine since his presidency. Even with a 386 machine and less than 2 MB of memory, he could still play an old version of *Passport Exact '88*, but you might have to find a budget package of older games like *The Definitive WarGame Collection* to meet his other gaming needs. Meanwhile, Nancy wouldn't even be able to consult the latest version of *CrashLand* with that machine.

Of course, if you're buying for a Stephen Spielberg, an individual who upgrades his machine pretty regularly, loves action games and flight sims, and plays a lot of *Quake*, you've got an easier task. Just get him *X-Wing* versus *The Fighter* or the latest first-person shooter. You may set back shooting on his next film, but you'll make him happy.

PERIPHERAL CONSIDERATIONS

You used to need to know whether the gamer had a CD-ROM or not. Now, if they're gaming at all, they undoubtedly have one. The

question is how **FAST** the CD-ROM drive is. A single-speed or 2x CD-ROM just doesn't cut it with today's games. You need 4x or faster. If, for example, you buy Hillary Clinton a copy of *The Neighborhood Chronicles* (it's not a village, but a "neverhood"), it may play on a 2x CD-ROM, but the delightful animated cut-scenes will hang for a few seconds while the drive access tries to catch up with the onscreen action. The first lady may feel like a third-world lady because of the slow disk drive.

Does the gamer have a joystick or gamepad? Some games, like 1943: *European Air War*, which we picked out for George Bush, require them. Other games, like the *NBA Full Court Press* we picked out for the often retired Magic Johnson, benefit from gamepad control.

Another significant peripheral you'll need to know about is sound card compatibility. If the individual's sound card is not Sound Blaster or Sound Blaster-compatible, you may wish to stick with Windows 95 products (assuming the gamer has Win 95). Windows handles most sound card drivers transparently and enables easier installation of games, as a result. Without this assist, there are still nightmares with such cards as the Gravis Ultrasound. Fortunately, all Sierra products take advantage of Win 95, so you can easily set up Supreme





IT SEEMS TO US

(CLICK)

SWINGING A CLUB

(CLICK)

IN MOST PC GOLF SIMS

(CLICK)

ISN'T EXACTLY
LIKE SWINGING A
REAL CLUB

(WHOOSH)



**TRUESWING™
MAKES IT A
WHOLE NEW
BALL GAME.**

In most golf CD games, they make you click three times to set your power and accuracy. But *TrueSwing™ Golf™* gives you TrueSwing, where you actually pull the mouse back for your backswing, then thrust it forward to launch your shot. **SO REAL YOU CAN ALMOST SMELL THE GRASS.**

Not only is the swing like real golf, so is the entire game: Texture-mapped graphics duplicate world-famous courses



as to within inches. So now you can play The Prince in Kauai or the Pete Dye Golf Club in Bridgeport, WV without collecting frequent flyer miles. **IT DOESN'T JUST LOOK REAL.**

IT PLAYS REAL.

Designed by Vance Cook, the genius behind Links 386, this new game gets a double eagle for authenticity: Super-accurate, physics-based ball movement.

• Fully 3-D on-screen galler mimics your swing • 12 types of play, including skins, best-ball, and scramble • Network play with up to 255 golfers. Any way you slice it (and we hope you don't) you'll be playing a game that's so real it's unreal.



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Court Justice Clarence Thomas with what's likely to become his favorite adventure game, *LEISURE SUIT LARRY 7: LOVE FOR SNL*.

Finally you'll need to know about the individual's graphic card. Is it VGA- or SVGA-compatible? The stickers on game boxes (the line print Mr. Nader reads) tell you what graphics resolution is required for each game. VGA is in decline, so you may have to resort to older games to reach gamers with older graphics cards.

VERY INTERESTING

Most importantly, of course, you need to match the game's subject

matter with the individual's interests. One can easily imagine William F. Buckley, Jr., playing *SMART GAMES 2: WORD PUZZLES* or Robin Williams playing *MOVIE PROTON'S SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GAUL*. The games fit the public personas.

The bottom line is to match interests with computer games. Just don't buy *DUKE NUKEM 3D*, *NIGHT TAMP* or *MORAL KAVAR 3* for Tipper Gore. Sometimes, it's possible to mismatch the content of a computer game to a person, as well as match the right one. Avoid any problems by using the checklist below. ☺

Gift Giver's Checklist

It's easy to buy a computer game for a friend by using the following checklist. Give it a try and let us know if it's helpful.

1. Does the gamer use a Mac or IBM PC?
Is the PC Windows 95-capable?
2. What is the processor and speed of the computer?
3. Does the computer have a CD-ROM? How fast?
4. Does the computer have a sound card?
Is it Sound Blaster-compatible?
5. What is the graphics resolution? VGA? SVGA?
6. What are the gamer's interests?
7. Match the interests to the section of our Holiday Hot 100 and our Top 100:

INTEREST

Aircraft, military aviation	Simulation
Auto racing, motorcycles	Simulation/Action Games
Brain teasers	Classics/Puzzles
Bird watching	(Close magazine, look elsewhere)
Card games, classic games	Classics/Puzzles
Children	Family Games/Stacking Stuffers
Computers	Hardware/Stacking Stuffers
Dungeons & Dragons	Adventure/Role-Playing
Economics	Strategy Games
Fantasy novels, myth, fiction	Adventure/Role-Playing
Fast-paced action, violence	Action Games
Football, baseball, golf	Sports Games
Mental stimulation	Classics/Puzzles
Military history	Wargames/Simulation
Politics	Strategy/Wargames
Science Fiction	Adventure/Role-Playing/ Space Combat/Strategy
Sports	Sports Games

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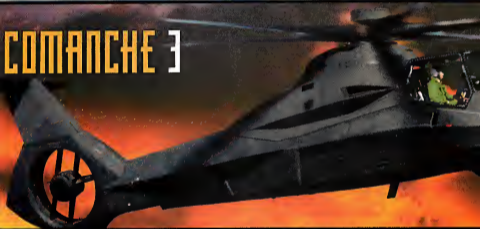
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**"The F-22 here is by far the most strikingly rendered
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- Denny Atkin

Computer Gaming World

September 1996

**"The look of the sky as you soar through it, the glare of
the sun and the shifting of your F-22 as you perform
maneuvers are simply unparalleled in the world of
flight sims...[It will] keep even the most jaded flight-sim
fan glued to the monitor..."**

- Glenn Broderick

Computer Player

September 1996

**"Easy to play and still over the top in battle situations, not
only will this version [Comanche 3] be plain fun, it'll look as
fabulous upon arrival as the original Comanche did."**

- Computer Games Strategy Plus

August 1996

**"Still pictures can't do justice to the
smoothness and beauty produced
by Voxel Space 2. Players will have
to see the game [Armored Fist 2- M1A2 Abrams]
for themselves to appreciate just how groundbreaking
NovaLogic's 3D engine really is."**

- Next Generation

August 1996

Circle Reader Service #220

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NOVALOGIC - THE ART OF WAR

LETTER OF THE MONTH

THE UNBEARABLE RIGHTNESS OF BEING CONNECTED

I just finished reading your October issue, and I had to write to say you guys hit the nail on the head with this issue. I have been playing computer games for about eight years now and I have come to the point where I will not buy a game unless it has multiplayer (modern specifically) built into it. The games I now own are NHL 96, NHL 97, MADDEN 97, FIFA SOCCER 96, WARCRAFT II, COMMAND & CONQUER, TOP GUN, DUNE NUKEM 3D, LINUS LS (excellent modern play), CIVNET, and QUAKE. The only [new] game that I have that [doesn't support] modern play is CIVILIZATION 2, which is a good game, but man would that be good with

modern and Internet play!

My point is that game publishers have to start to realize that they are throwing away a great deal of customers because they have no modern play. I am a huge fan of EA Sports games. I was so excited when I saw that NBA LIVE 96 was out! When I saw that it didn't have modern play, I didn't even bother with it. Same thing with Virgin's POWERPLAY 96, a fantastic game with two players, but boring with one player and no modern play.

Game publishers take note: Not only do gamers not buy your games without modern play, but they remember that you didn't have it before. Gamers do hold grudges!

Mike Frouse

Ottawa, Ontario, CANADA

LET'S PLAY THE BACKWARDS GAME

I just picked up the 15th anniversary issue and I must say sections devoted to the best, worst, etc., games are interesting and amusing to read. My favorite article was the 150 best games section. All my picks were there including the granddaddy of all first-person shoot-em-ups—MOCED (pg. 65). Your pulse really pounds when you see your HITLAESH at 5001 and your OMMA is down to 891 from a full load of 002!!

Later GAMES, I look forward to even chit chat on the magazine on 51 stacy to WCC.

noapneIT T

Ha ha. Ho ho. Okay, real funny. For any readers who would like to

KALI—THE DESTROYER

In your October issue you rated the best game nets. While I agree that T.E.N. sounds like a good game net, I don't think it is the best. I feel that KALI is the best, having close to a hundred servers and over 30,000 members with all network playable games supported.

How can you beat the \$20 for life membership, and no hourly fee? Your failure to even mention this game net is unacceptable. Did T.E.N. pay you not to mention Kali, or do you just not research your stories carefully? You really dropped the ball on this one.

Don Sargeon
via the Internet

We received several letters like yours criticizing our failure to include Kali in the October issue on Internet gaming. No, T.E.N. didn't pay us to omit it, and yes we researched our feature thoroughly. Our "mistake" was in covering Kali and Kali 95 a

month earlier to coincide with our network gaming feature. Since Kali enables you to play games over the Internet as though they were IPX network games, it seemed to fit there. (Kali even quotes from our article on its Web site; we hope T.E.N. doesn't find out.)

Anyways, we apologize for not including Kali in the October feature, and agree that \$20.00 is a great deal! Just to clarify, Kali has over 50,000 users worldwide, and supports a large number of multiplayer games over the Internet, including COMMAND & CONQUER, DUNGEON, DESCENT & DESCENT 2, DOOM & DOOM II, DUNE NUKEM 3D, EP2000, MECHANATOR 2, MORPH, ROMAN 3, QUAKE, TOP GUN, WARCRAFT and WARCRAFT 2.

Kali's Web site is www.zoed.com/kali. If you want to see Lloyd Case's CCW article on how to get started on Kali, visit the CCW Web site at www.zd.com/gaming.



DOOM MISTAKE Our apologies for reusing this screenshot in November. Here's how it should have looked—we couldn't make the same mistake twice.

share in *noapneIT*'s glow at pointing out our bags. It's talking about the flipped DOOM screenshot in our November issue.

Firing Line

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the guy on the right.

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"Embark on a clay adventure that breaks the mold."

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BIBLE OR BADASS?

I was sorry to see the word "badass" on the cover of your October 1996 issue, if for no other reason than the fact that I had to explain to my kids why it was all right for you to put the word on the cover, and all right for me to read the magazine, but that it was not all right for them to use the word in conversation. I am not objecting to "mature" content in your magazine. I am merely disappointed that it was featured on the cover. CCW is clearly no longer the magazine that included Bible references in the masthead, and not all of the changes over the past 10 years have been positive.

Josie Adams
via the Internet

School teachers often say that coarse language is a placebo for a limited vocabulary. They may have had a point, but some hear using coarse language like "Seven Prodigious Fighting Games," "7 Powerful Pugilistic Experiences," or "Seven Sagacious and Stimulating Pugnacious Games" just didn't fit the message. For better or worse, we thought that "badass" fit the tone of the games better than some more unappreciation adjectives could have. The cover line was intended to shock or stimulate rather than offend. As for the Bible references, believe it or not, we used to receive offended letters on those, too. And we also agree that change is a mixed bag. Of course, we believe most of the changes have been positive or we wouldn't have initiated them.

TALKING IN BASEBALL

Curling in a letter always seems a little strange, but your review of Front Page Sports Baseball '96 has pushed me over the edge. First, a big thanks for having a regular

sports section in your magazine; it has always been a game type ignored by lots of gaming magazines. The game type sections you use help keep a broad coverage of all types of games.

On to the real reason I'm writing, your review of FPS Baseball '96. Your review was right on the money and brutally honest. Something other gaming magazines and most other mainstream magazines in general won't do. Sierra obviously pushed a beta version of a game out the door with FPSB '96 and then spent forever not talking to their customers and eventually releasing a patch that, while fixing a long list of bugs, did not get the game to a fully playable

So I'm stuck with one of the biggest game lemons of all time. I hope Sierra gets a free copy of the review. Thanks for the honesty!

Mike Horro
via the Internet

Sierra did indeed see the review. We'll see in the future if it had lasting impact.

CONSUMER RESEARCH

Like many gamers, am trying to tell my computer that the sky is the limit. Yet it will not agree with me, since I don't have a top sounding wave table. So I've done some researching on the Internet and found some really valuable information, not only on the boards themselves but on MIDI, XG and other items as well, which are all such vital elements for a sound card to have.

I read everything and came to the conclusion that the market has practically been dominated by the Roland and Yamaha products. Although Roland isn't focused on the computer world anymore, they still have one off-the-top—sounding wave table daughterboard, the Roland Sound Canvas SCD-1015. Unfortunately I discovered that my Sound Blaster 16 Value Edition doesn't have a wave blaster connector. So if I don't want to buy a new SB16 with connector, I'm stuck. I thought

Luckily, I discovered the Yamaha products, Yamaha DB50NC and Yamaha SW50NC. Although the DB50NC is a daughterboard, the SW50NC is a stand-alone wave table card that produces the same quality as the DB50NC and can be plugged in next to the already present Sound Blaster 16 or Sound Blaster—compatible card.

I also came across this great site: <http://pubweb.mac.com/edw/~j5444n/dep.html>. Here, samples of different sound cards were downloadable. So you can actually hear what an one would

sound like on another soundboard. And you've got to believe me, gamers who haven't heard MIDI sounds yet are urged to have a look at that site. When I first played the FMOP1-3 sound and then let the Roland and Yamaha rock, I was swinging my butt all over the room before I could say "wow!"

Anyway, to make a long story short, I'm very keen on buying the Yamaha SW50NC now. Good choice, or? Or better buy another SB16 and stick the SCD-15 on it if you prefer another card, please tell me. Like I said, I would probably value your opinion above any other.

For those who are also interested, here are some of the sites: <http://www.mple.co.uk/mple/mad/ta/used/tdsuba.html>, <http://www.yamaha.com>, and <http://pubweb.mac.com/edw/~j5444n/dep.html>.

Well now, about how brilliant your magazine is I don't think I'll begin to praise you because I fear I won't stop. But for the record, you and your magazine are great!

Eric Smalley
Amsteborn, The Netherlands

We think you're right. The XG chip sets are the high-end choice now that Roland has completely abdicated the market.



strike. Now, rumor has it that Sierra won't release another patch for this game. Can you say, "Outpost?" They made eye candy and that's it, and it is by far the most disappointing game I've ever purchased.

In waiting for the patch, my 30-day money back guarantee ran out

Corrections

In last month's issue we attributed the *It's Vaporwave* title of all time, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, to Rechart von Wolfshied. Although Wolfshied was involved peripherally with the project, Jim Sachs was the game's designer. Also, it apparently wasn't Disney's legal department that torpedoed the game's release, but a planned tie-in with a 20,000 Leagues feature film that never came to fruition. Wolfshied said there's still hope that the game could eventually see the light of day.

Only one adventure has earned the Wizardry title..

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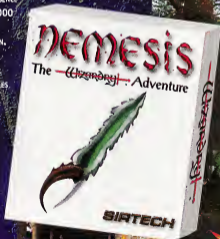
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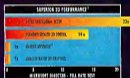
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Battlecruiser Captain Makes Last Stand

BC 3000 Designer Protests Game's Release, Citing Bugs

Seven years in development, Derek Smart's BC 3000 finally shipped in mid-October, but not without a last-minute fight from the game's embattled creator. According to sources within Take 2, designer-programmer Smart was removed from Take 2's Latrobe, PA, production facility following a heated dispute over the company's plans to release the game. Smart was subsequently banned from Take 2's offices, and the company reportedly hired a security team to guard their offices for the last week of production.

Officially, Take 2 had no comment on the incident. Privately, however, sources within the company indicated that Smart was removed by police and that he attacked a Coca-Cola machine during the incident. Smart confirmed that a blowup had occurred, though he denied any physical violence.

According to Smart, the confrontation occurred as a result of Take 2's intention to master and ship the game in spite of a number of known bugs in the final copy. "They just wanted to make their release date, and instead of waiting two weeks [for patches] they are shipping the game without a bug test," he said. "Seven years of development went into making this game and now it is going to



Derek Smart



ship with bugs. It is stupid not to take two more weeks." Smart did not refer to his online comments of last year at this time that all that was keeping the game from shipping was "the manual."

Battlecruiser has a long and interesting history in the industry, having gone through numerous revisions and changes of personnel and producers before being signed by Take 2. Smart

confirms he has acquired a reputation of being "eccentric and difficult to get along with."

A source near the development team who refused to be named said that working with Smart was like being in the movie *Apocalypse Now*. "You're on a boat ride and you can't even imagine what is lying at the end of the ride," the source quipped.

Smart, for his part, maintains that his reputation is simply the result of dedication to releasing the best game. He added that he will be working on creating and distributing patches, on his own if necessary, to ensure that the game works as originally designed and lives up to its potential of being, in his words, "the best game of the century."—John Winters

ON THE SHELF

Here are some of the hottest products on the market, as well as

the ones that frankly ain't so hot. Reviews for most are coming soon.

HIND

Even if you weren't a big fan of its predecessor, *Amoré*, you should still take *Hind* for a last flight. Building on the same basic engine, *Hind* adds a



much better flight model, individual ground troops, working multiplayer support, and a better variety of missions to the mix. The *Hind* is a simpler helicopter than the *Apache*, so combat is less electronic and more personal, but an AI weapons systems officer is available to help out during hectic battles. The addition of ground troops gives this simulation a uniquely rich environment—especially the ground troops pointing shoulder-mounted SAMs at your helicopter... —D. Aiken
Interactive Magic, (919) 461-0722
PC and Win 95 CD-ROM
Reader Service #307



THE 'FINISHED' PRODUCT: A BUGGY BATTLECRUISER

Many developers would give their left mouse-button finger for the chance to spend seven years on a game. Given that much time, many designers could tweak every aspect of a game to their liking. So what happened to *Battlecruiser 3000AD*?

After countless missed ship dates, there's every appearance that *Tekn 2* got fed up and shipped the most recent build, despite it being at least a month from completion. It was certainly never play-tested, as major portions of the game—including fighter combat—are completely unplayable.

Initial play strongly suggests it has potentially the richest universe yet seen in a SF game. You're commanding a spacegoing carrier (think *Battlestar Galactica*) loaded with interceptors, shuttles, ATVs, and jetpack-equipped marines. Along with combat and trade, you also deal with crew management and galactic diplomacy. You can fly missions assigned by *GALCOM*, or just explore the universe. Amazing possibilities abound—one player reported coming out of hyperspace in a battle between two ships, where he promptly tractor-beamed the damaged ship and sold it at the next outpost.

Also, bugs and unfinished features proliferate. The game crashes constantly, waypoint commands don't work, ground-based targets



BATTLESTAR CATASTROPHICA The graphics in *BC3000* have improved, but the game still isn't finished.

HOW DO YOU FLY THIS THING? Pitiful documentation and numerous bugs consign you to the bridge of a crippled ship.

seem invulnerable, turret targeting is hosed, and there are numerous other problems. The worst transgression is the game's manual. A pitiful 30-page pamphlet and a two-sided card packed with commands (but not all of them) in tiny print, it doesn't begin to provide players enough information.

A patch released in late October fixed many game-stopper bugs, but many problems remain. Smart promises to ship a full manual to registered users, and to release two patches a month until the game's complete. Gamers who've followed the game's seven-year saga wonder how many more will pass before it's finished. —Devry Allen

9

9 has received a lot of media attention because of its pedigree. This is the first game from actor Robert De Niro's Tribeca Interactive, and it features a bunch of Hollywood names, which makes the mainstream press think they're looking at something important. Which isn't to say that this game isn't worthy of attention. It's just that, for experienced adventure gamers, there's not much new here—other than some impressively bizarre psychedelic artwork by Mark Ryden, and voice acting by such talents as Jim Belushi and Cher.

The story is that you've inherited a rundown resort from your uncle (Christopher Reeve), that needs to be restored. Once you enter the resort, you find it has become a nightmarish,



Dr. Seuss-on-acid funhouse, full of odd gadgets and a pair of sinister, flying creatures (Aerosmith's Steve Tyler and Joe Perry) who taunt you as you explore the place. Uncovering the mystery of 9 involves solving a series of mildly challenging, Mrs.-like puzzles: fixing a steam boiler, pulling levers, figuring out a musical sequence on an organ, etc. I thought

it was so-so, unless Mr. De Niro comes looking for me, in which case I loved it. —J. Gress *GT Interactive, (712) 726-6500*

Windows 95 and Mac CD-ROM
Reader Service #302

DEADLY TIDE

Microsoft is really banking on this title's gorgeous graphics to elevate it to hit status, but they must have forgotten the key ingredient for a winning formula: gameplay. While *DEADLY TIDE* sure looks like one of the most beautiful games ever rendered, it also has some of the most limited gameplay.

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SSI's New Order Of Battle

Pacific General and Panzer 97 Lead New Gaming Assault

After the runaway success of **PANZER GENERAL**, SSI received dozens of suggestions for future games in the series. According to SSI's Bret Berry, the most requested site was the Pacific theater of WWII, which, with its emphasis on naval and amphibious operations, poses some unique problems for the classic PG system. SSI look on the challenge anyways, and the result will be called **Pacific General**. The naval rules for the upcoming game are totally different from **PANZER GENERAL**, from ranged off-shore bombardments to the ability to stack multiple naval units in a single space. You'll even have a simple, efficient method of refueling your naval aircraft and setting your combat air patrols. Last you think that the game should instead be called "Pacific Admiral," keep in mind the ferocious ground fighting on the island of Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima; the Japanese invasion of



PRETTY AS A PICTURE SSI's next **Panzer General** boasts gorgeous hand-rendered terrain and 3D tanks. Check out the detail on those **Panther Vs!**

Manchuria prior to WWII will also be included. There will be campaigns from both the Allied and Japanese sides, with plenty of hypothetical options available, such as invading Japan in 1945 (or invading the USA, for that matter). And if that isn't enough, there's even a battle editor

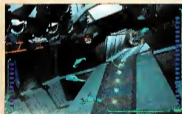
thrown into the mix to generate your own Pacific scenarios.

As nice as **Pacific General** is, it can't hold a candle to the graphic splendor of the new version of **PANZER GENERAL** (**PANZER 97**). The gorgeous hand-rendered terrain maps are a perfect backdrop for the

digitized 3D tank models, the crisp, clear rivers, and the stately European towns. The game system has also been revamped, with smoke, craters and even a little range fire. In addition, the campaigns and battles have all been redesigned, and they will be playable from the Allied side. But don't expect **Steel Panthers**-style realism; the emphasis here is still on fast, furious fun.

If your battle plans run more toward real-time, SSI's last 97 lineup tackles a lot of time periods. **Serp of the Line** looks to throw a broadside into **Talon-Soft's Ace of Spade**, but it's really more of a sim than a wargame. **Athen Quest** (working title) goes

for fantasy combat on less of a grand scale than **Warcraft II** or SSI's own **War Wind**. Finally, there's a real-time historical wargame that may actually work: an SVGA update of the classic **COMPUTER AMBUSH**. We'll keep you posted from the front. ☛



percent of the world. Unless you stop them with your experimental aquatic craft, Earth will be permanently submerged.

The pre-rendered game graphics certainly are good, but that also means gameplay is restricted to shooting on rails. Occasionally you will be given the freedom to rotate a full 360 degrees, but you can't move forward or

backward until the computer does so for you.

Ultimately the best feature of the game is the rendered introduction and story, which look so good that you'll painfully brave the rail gameplay just to advance the story line to see what happens next. —E. Chen
Microsoft, (800) 344-2127
Win 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #303

LIGHT HOUSE

Yet another puzzle world presents itself, this one courtesy of Sierra On-Line. It's name, as well as its entranceway, is **Light House**, and while the contents of the house are certainly puzzling enough, they also

come together to relate a cohesive mystery not often found in challenge collections of this type. You've stumbled across the work of the mysterious Dr. Kolick, who, along with his infant daughter, has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. To follow the doctor's pathway into an enigmatic portal you'll need to solve the puzzles that block your way.

What makes the game several cuts above your standard Mrs.-affie is its engaging story, which connects its puzzles and gives them a



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Top Game Companies March To The Real-Time Beat

With the phenomenal success this past year of *WarCraft II* and *Command & Conquer*, gamers are crying for more real-time warfare, and gaming companies are obliging. This holiday season, and a few months beyond, over half a dozen good real-time titles are arriving to attract fans to this expanding new genre.

StarCraft is probably the most eagerly anticipated of all the real-time games, but fans will have to wait another half year for that title. Blizzard now says the game will ship in June of 1997. Look to the March issue for a full-blown sneak preview of *StarCraft* as we'll have an exclusive on the *StarCraft* code. *Red Alert* is on track to hit its

December 19 ship date, so you could be seeing it on the shelves as you

REBELLION LucasArts is working on its first real-time strategy game, *Rebellion*, which will be set in the *Star Wars* universe.

read this. Turn to our Hands On section this month for a hands-on preview of this amazing real-time heir to *Command & Conquer*.

Aside from the two juggernauts of real-time wargaming, several other notable game companies are joining the fray. LucasArts has announced a title that everyone has been clamoring for: a real-time *Star Wars* strategy game. Called *Rebellion*, this real-

Continued on page 43

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games readers are actually blowing the most time with, as opposed to the readers' overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.

There's little change in the top ten list this month. *Civilization II*, *Duke Nukem 3D* and *WarCraft II* monopolize the Top 3 positions for the fifth consecutive month. *Steel Panthers* sneaks into the sixth place (knocking *Doom II* back down to seventh).

You'll no longer find the C&W Poll Card bound into the magazine, but check your mail box: We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly chosen subscribers each month, and we use the results to calculate the Top 100 and Playing Lately each month.

READERS'

TOP 10

	Last Month	Months On Chart
1. Civilization II (MicroProse)	1	7
2. Duke Nukem 3D (3D Realms)	2	8
3. WarCraft II (Blizzard)	3	10
4. Command and Conquer (Virgin/Westwood)	4	13
5. MechWarrior 2 (Activision)	5	12
6. Steel Panthers (SSI)	7	12
7. Doom II (id Software)	6	9
8. Heroes of Might and Magic (New World Computing)	8	12
9. Panzer General (SSI)	9	21
10. Wing Commander IV (Origin)	10	11

ON THE SHELF

purpose for being solved. The puzzles themselves are fairly difficult, but not unreasonable. The addition of adventure to puzzle makes for a healthy mix and leaves *Lehr House* a solid structure indeed.—A. Greenberg

Stern On-Line

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PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #304

SHATTERED STEEL

If you're looking for a giant robot game with more emphasis on action than simulation, *Shattered Steel* might appeal to your more "mech" instincts. But once you get past the admittedly beautiful graphics and the shallow learning curve, you find a game that appeals mostly to the novice robot pilot. There are plenty of missions, all of which take place

on dynamic terrain that can be pyrotechnically modified with your shots. For instance, you can trap an enemy attacker by punching a hole in the ground with a mortar.

Then again, *Shattered Steel*'s missions are

occasionally frustrating, and it's a very simplistic game compared to *MechWarrior 2*. The glitches that plagued the initial version are mostly taken care of by the patch that developer

Blower released within days of the game's release—which makes you wonder why they (like so many other companies) didn't just test the game for another week before shipping. In any case, a mission builder is promised as an add-on, leaving gamers to decide if the potential of the game is worth the wait.—T. Nguyen

Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #305



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Circle Reader Service #379

Continued from page 49



BATTLETECH: MECHCOMMANDER In this real-time title, you'll battle the Jade Falcon Clan for possession of your homeworld and manage a lance of Battlemechs as they increase in skill and power.

time title lets you play as either the Rebellion or the Empire in a campaign of real-time battles to either free the galaxy or impose martial law. Next month, we'll visit LucasArts and play actual game code to bring you an exclusive first sneak preview of this battle for the Star Wars universe.

MicroProse andSSI, two names associated with turn-based excellence, are also making real-time games. MPS is working on a science-fiction real-time game based on FASA's BattleTech universe that was previously titled BattleTech: Haxon Bound, but has since been changed to BattleTech: MechCommander. X-Com: Apocalypse will give you the option to play in real time or the traditional turn-based mode. Both MPS titles are slated for spring '97 release dates.

SSI has just published their first real-time game, War Wind, which mimics the look of Warcraft II but offers great gameplay of its own. With four unique races

and campaigns, heroes, and the ability to carry units across scenarios, War Wind brings a lot to the party. Look for a full review next issue.

Activision is also breaking strategy ground with their new real-time game, Dark Reign, due in late February. Once titled Ironhawk, it has now been officially renamed. It has a C&C look but contains an incredible wealth of depth, with terrain effects, line of sight, much more advanced and varied units and the most robust scenario editor of any real-time game to date. Watch for our exclusive Sneak Preview of Dark Reign next month.

Another real-time title coming soon is Interplay's M.A.X., which also shares the same techno-look of C&C. The hook with this game, though, is that

it is a mix of real-time and turn-based gameplay. You'll first have a turn of issuing orders and surveying the battlefield, and then a short "turn" of real-time fighting afterwards. Interplay is also behind Blood & Magic, a real-time game based in the AD&D role-playing universe. It should be in stores by December, and was previewed in the Hands On section of our June issue.

These aren't all the real-time games coming up by any means. Wacom and 7th Level are also working on futuristic, real-time strategy titles, and even further in the future are Command & Conquer 2: Tiberian Sun and Warcraft III, both of which probably won't be seen until late next year or early 1998. In the meantime, however, real-time fans can rest assured that there will be plenty of great real-time strategy games in the near future, and CGW will be here to update you on every one.—ENJOY OWN



DARK REIGN This game improves upon C&C-style games with better AI, pathfinding, terrain effects, and sheer options of gameplay.

ON THE SHELF

MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS

Microsoft's new racing sim plops you behind the wheel of a big, thumping monster truck on an assortment of tracks from drag strips to cross-country rallies. An interactive environment lets you can snap off cars and road signs, crash through fences, and shove Winnebagos and



covered wagons around.

Microsoft supports Direct3D and can take advantage of hardware 3D acceleration to provide dense, full-color textures. At its graphical best, tires leave tracks in the mud and grass, and send clouds of dust and dirt into the air.

Although this multiplayer game favors simplicity over detail, the real fun is flying through the air and churning up the mud.—M. Clarkson
Microsoft, (800) 344-2121
Win 95 CD-ROM
Reader Service #306

BAKU BAKU

Calling all Tetris fans looking for a new challenge: Your goal is to match up falling



animal blocks with their favorite food. Once matched, animal animals chomp their food, thus clearing them from the board. If the blocks pile up to the top of your playfield, you'll be eaten.

Unfortunately, the PC version doesn't live up to its original Sega Saturn port: loss of speed and grainy graphics hinder the game. Still, it's an amusing and addictive game that will appeal to puzzle fans of all ages.—C. Pavlath
Sega (888) SEGA SALES
Win 95 CD-ROM
Reader Service #307



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SOMETIMES, HAVING A



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TOMB RAIDER

FIRST LOOK

Here's your first look at games in development. These games aren't even playable yet, but we thought you'd want to see how they're coming along.

Jurassic Park: Lost World

This is not your father's movie license. DreamWorks' JURASSIC PARK: LOST WORLD is as far from the previous Jurassic Park games as the modern age is from the prehistoric. This time the technology underlying the game is as advanced as that in the film. Steuart Blackley, the man who brought us the revolutionary FLIGHT UNLIMITED, is leading the project for DreamWorks, and he is bringing the same freshness to it that he

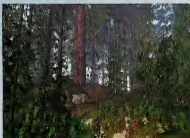


RAPTOR WRAPPER The dinos are all 3D models, with graphic "skins" stretched over their skeletons and muscles. This prototype moves realistically at a fast frame rate.

brought to FLIGHT UNLIMITED.

First, everything in the game is part of a realistic, physics-based world. So solving a problem is not merely a matter of out-guessing the creator; it's a matter of

using the tools at hand. For example, if you can uproot a tree, you can swing it as a club. If you can swing it as a club, you can use it to fight a dinosaur. If you're clever, you'll look for ways to build a trap, but Blackley's design gives you the option to go toe-to-toe with the beast, if you dare.



MICROSOFT MIKE SIMULATOR? Even with landscapes this detailed, you'll experience first-person point-of-view action at a nice frame rate.

Second, the dinosaurs themselves are polygon-based creatures built from the skeleton up. Animation takes into consideration the joint structure and the graphic representations of the dinosaurs, which are literally computer-sized skins stretched over the skeletons and musculatures. The movement is incredibly effective.

Third, Blackley didn't like the way his algorithms for FLIGHT UNLIMITED caused the landscape to "pop" as you would get closer to recognizable landmarks. So the design team has applied new mathematical formulae to handle relationships between landmarks. In this way, you should never notice the "pop" when you near a mountain or large object. In spite of his obvious pride in creating realistic physical worlds, Blackley insists that he knows the value of game-

play. In fact, he jokes, "If we don't get the pacing right in JURASSIC PARK: LOST WORLD, everyone's gonna call this Microsoft Hideo SAWAJIRO." With the game design we've seen, we don't think he'll have to worry.—J. Wilson

PIPELINE

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STONEKEEP

MECH WARRIOR 2

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HANDS ON

These are the products in development we've actually spent some time with. They represent some of the most interesting

titles in the Pipeline, and they are complete enough to actually tell how they're going to play. Most should be released soon.

►Command & Conquer: Red Alert

Red Alert landed with a bang in our offices, and if a couple hours of addictive gameplay are any indication, it will definitely surpass the expectations of waiting C&C fans.

The game has dramatically improved since we last covered it (March, '95). The graphics are SVGA, which not only makes everything much clearer but also means you can see four times more of the map. Of course, accompanying the expansion in the SVGA view-screen is a shrinkage in the size of each unit. Still, the overall look is exceptional, as the graphics are incredibly detailed.

The animated out-scenes and introduction, of exceptional quality in *Command & Conquer*, are still excellent, and the story line promises to be fleshed out even more for those C&C fans itching to discover the origins of the GDI-NOD conflict.

Something C&C fans will appreciate is the increased number of units. This time, air units are much better integrated into the game, but only on

and even a vehicle that can create its own impenetrable fog for hiding a group of units.

Westwood also researched some of the wild, science-fiction-like devices that were supposedly being researched during WW II. There are Tesla Coils that hurl bolts of lightning, a special structure that temporarily teleports units across the map, and the not-so-fictional high-powered V2 rockets.

The greatest enhancement in Red Alert, though, is in its multiplayer options. The game will now support up to eight players over a local network (C&C supported four, and previous reports underestimated the increase at six). There is also a special Skirmish mode, perfect for honing your multiplayer skills, which allows you to play a multiplayer game with up to seven computer opponents, whose AI is much improved. In multiplayer, you also have the option of choosing from among several nations, such as the Soviet Union and Germany, each of which have a unique ability. If you choose to play as the Germans, for example, you'll have higher troop production. In addition to these enhancements, Red Alert also supports Internet play. All you need to do is log onto Westwood chat and from there host a head-to-head game. The fog-of-war has been tweaked so that it covers up after a short period of time, not unlike *WarCraft II*.

In the solo campaign, though, maps are only twice as large, and the shroud remains the same as in C&C. The only difference in the shroud in solo play is the addition of specific units that can re-spawn or create their



RED RAIN Here is a familiar Red Alert shot, showing off the game's SVGA graphics, larger viewing field and the Soviets' air power.

own shroud to hide troop movement.

One important issue that needed addressing in C&C was troop control. Now, you can group troops together and save your formations with a simple keypress. You can also specify waypoints for your troops, giving you the ability to set up much more efficient attacks, ambushes and assaults.

With a much improved SVGA engine, a host of new units and buildings, drastically improved multiplayer and the enhancements to control, Red Alert definitely looks like a hot game. The game is scheduled for a late December release, so watch for our full review in February.—E. Chiv Westwood Studios, (702) 228-4040

PC CD-ROM



LIGHTNING GUN One of the game's brilliant animations depicts a Tesla Coil trying to zap approaching Allied choppers.

the Soviet side. The Allies, though, have a number of novel units at their disposal, including massive warships with impressive bombardment ranges. There are also a number of specialized units available for training. You can train medics who can heal other troops, spies who can discover your enemy's current production project and cash reserves, thieves who can steal credits, and a lethal commando named Tanya who packs a mean, dual-pistol punch. Then there are guard dogs who can sniff out those spies and engineers,



WHAT A BLAST Cut-scenes in Red Alert set the mood of the mission and clue you into particular vehicles or items you'll encounter in the game, such as these explosive oil drums.

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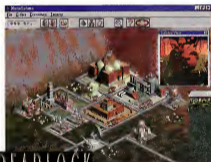
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Starship Commander

Interplay's Latest Trek Molds Strategy And Fast Action

by Denny Atkin

Cadet's Log, Stardate 8123.2. It's the date all Starfleet cadets look forward to—and dread. Starship training. This is where I prove I'm ready for command training, or if I'll be stuck as a security redshirt for the rest of my career.

These are your voyages in *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy*. You're a Starfleet Academy cadet about to embark on your first command—of a simulated starship, at least. On top of the pressure of excelling at

starship command, you're responsible for the morale and performance of your fellow cadets, who are also vying for coveted positions on starship bridges.

Interplay's newest "classic Trek" game is essentially a starship simulator sprinkled with a bit of adventure game. Between periodic "tests" (missions on a simulated starship bridge), interacting with your fellow cadets, and trying to please your instructors, you'll find the pressure's on. All that's missing from the real Starfleet Academy experience is the homework.

FAMOUS FACILITY

Cadet's Log, Stardate 8123.25. It turns out that my instructors include not only Hikaru Sulu, easily the best pilot in Starfleet, but also his former commander from his Enterprise days. That's right, my starship command prowess is going to be tested by Admiral James T. Kirk himself. I might as well skip straight to the Kobayashi Maru, pack my bags, and head back to Alpha Centauri.

I do have one possible ace in the hole, though. Lt. Commander Chekov, who I met during my starship computer systems training, served as navigator during the Enterprise's five-year mission. Maybe he can give me some advice on how to please living legends.

STARFLEET ACADEMY is centered around the game's namesake, the futuristic San Francisco-based training facility. Although the meat of the game is in the starship simulator, what you do on land can dra-



matically affect your mission performance. You'll interact with your fellow cadets, who'll be manning the various stations in the bridge simulator, and whose morale and trust you'll have to cultivate to make it through the program.

Like any academy student, you'll also get lessons from—and have run-ins with—the academy faculty. Interplay has signed three principal members of the original *Star Trek* crew to facilitate your learning experience. William Shatner, George Takei, and Walter Koenig reprise their roles as (in case you've been living outside the solar system since 1966 and you actually don't know who these people are) Admiral James T. Kirk, Commander Hikaru Sulu, and Commander Pavel Chekov.

Character interaction will be of the *Vivid Conversation TV* flavor, where dialog trees can affect what occurs later in the game. You'll be able to move to various locations at the academy—the student lounge, your quarters, the science lab—and talk to fellow cadets and faculty members. Between missions a series of dialog branches (five to ten, not the one to three of similar games) will affect your standing and your crew's morale. Because the academy has a set curriculum,



FALLING PREY A Klingon Bird of Prey encroaks just in time to fall victim to a pair of photon torpedoes.

your decisions won't alter the primary game flow, but they will affect your crew's performance and ultimately decide which of the game's three possible endings you'll reach.

THE CREW CUT

Cadet's Log, Supplemental: I met the crew I'll be working with this afternoon. A talented, top-notch lot. If I can motivate these people, we should make it through. But with over 35

missions, it's going to take a lot of work on our part.

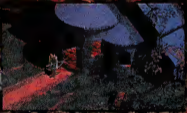
I won't be going through this alone, though. Cadet Jepsen, who I didn't even think liked me, just gave me a wonderful little gift. It's a little punning baseball called a "tribble." I think I'll go feed it now.

The core of the game takes place in the Starship Bridge Simulator. This is modeled after the simulator in the opening scene of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. (The one Saavik demolished attempting to beat the Kobayashi Maru scenario.)

Once you're sealed in the simulator room, all mention of simulation stops and you have all the responsibilities of an active starship captain. You're not alone in there, though. Your crew includes Jana Alkhan at the helm; she's half-human, half-Druik; headstrong, and a



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S I E R R A

WARNING: This game contains nudity, sexual content, mature themes and adult situations but in such a goofy, non-explicit, cartoonish way that anyone looking for the really dirty stuff will be offended.

helix pilot. Robin Brady, your chief engineer, isn't from Scotland, but rather Colorado. Geoffrey Corin is your Alpha Centaurian navigator, and Vanda M'Gila is your Andonian communications officer. Of course, what's a starship—real or simulated—without a Vulcan on the bridge?



BATTLE DAMAGE A Klingon D7 cruiser moves to attack the USS Excelsior, streaming particles from the spot where its right warp nacelle was formerly attached.

Sturek, your science officer, is reputed to be utterly brilliant. It's up to you to shape these distinctive personalities into a team that can keep your bridge in top form.

Of course, in a pinch you can always man the stations yourself. In front of your command chair, you'll find the helm and navigation stations. Around the periphery of the bridge are library computer, science, communications, and engineering stations. Each of these will prove useful during missions. You may need to man the engineering station to speed damage control, or check the library computer's vast repository of Federation information (over 700 entries, including images and 3D ships).

FIVE-SEMESTER MISSION

Captain's Log, Stardate 6123.3 Today we embark on our first mission. This one seems relatively easy. All we have to do is clear a system of mines. We even get our choice of ship on this one. Should we just take the Excelsior and get it over with quickly, or go for the real challenge and try an Oberth-class ship?

On a happier note, it appears I shouldn't have named my tribble "Bill." Because Bill just had little tribbles!

STARFLEET ACADEMY's training program will feature more than 35 missions. If you play your cards right, you'll be able to take a real

ship out on the final mission. The first missions are familiarization runs, and will give you an opportunity to choose your ship. You won't be able to take the big guns on every mission, though. Various missions will put you in the command chair of an Oberth-class scout ship, a Miranda-class cruiser (like the USS *Reliant* from *Star Trek II*), a Constellation-class heavy



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TIME TO CLOAK Four Constellation-class starships versus a single Bird of Prey—as Kahless said, there's a fine line between glory and foolishness.

cruiser (such as the *Enterprise*), or the high tech *USS Exoskior* (the ship commanded by Sulu in *Star Trek VI*).

After the initial "milk run" mine-clearing mission, things get progressively more complicated. In keeping with the theme of *Star Trek*, only a small percentage of the missions will focus on space combat. Instead, you'll be faced with various puzzles and diplomacy challenges. On one *Nord* Generation-ish mission, you'll need to lure an endangered "stellar plasma snake" away from a star about to go nova. However, the plan to capture it in a huge cage goes awry, and your ship's tractor beam is deadly to the creature. You'll need to find another way to lure the energy-based creature away before it's too late.

Some of the training missions tie together. One series deals with an interstellar war between the Hecate and the Madusa. Your first contact with the Hecate occurs when you go in search of a missing ship, the *Osprey*. Your diplomatic skills will be given the tough test here, as the state of war has put the Hecate into a "shoot first and ask questions later"

mood. Though as a skilled captain you can likely destroy the Hecate ship, that won't help you find the *Osprey*—and gunboat diplomacy isn't the Starfleet way of doing things. Note that all the interaction with characters planetside and on other ships will take place over the viewscreen. There



TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENT From the view out the window it appears they moved Sulu's office off the academy grounds and over to Morn county.

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are no landing party missions here, since all the action takes place on the bridge simulator.

A later mission will take you back into Medean territory, when the Hecate are accused of using a bioengineered plague as an illegal weapon of war. You'll be tasked to investigate this, finding the truth without getting so involved that you violate the Prime Directive of noninterference.

Don't worry, though—you'll get plenty of chances to exercise your ship's phasers and photon torpedoes. When word comes in of a new Klingon Super Cruiser-class starship, for instance, your instruc-

tors program it into the simulator and let you test your skills against it.

During the course of these missions, the folks controlling your simulator are likely to spring some surprises on you. You'll need to watch out, for instance, for spatial anomalies that might drop you into the center of very deadly territory.

While on your missions, you'll be expected to follow Starfleet protocol. If you enjoyed popping off a couple of shots at the *Tiger's Claw* in the *Wing Commander* series (just to make sure your guns were working, of course), think again here. Fire a phaser—or even launch a probe—at a Starbase and prepare to be reprimanded. Even going to red alert without proper reason will get you busted.

BATTLE STATIONS

Cadet's Log, Stardate 8123.7: We had our first taste of combat today. The folks who designed the simulator certainly did their homework. We got rocked back and forth, panels blew up left and right (it's the 23rd century—why haven't they perfected circuit breakers for these control panels yet?), and we barely eked out a victory. Starship combat was nothing like I'd expected.

Meanwhile, my roommate is threatening to use me for phaser practice if I don't do something about the tribbles. B'N and his officers have multiplied, and we now have 248 of the little things around the room. Anything over 10 is no longer cute.

One of the main attractions of *STARFLEET ACADEMY* is the ability to truly



QUARTERS SWEET QUARTERS Your dorm room, where you'll spend time between missions.


23rd Century Fox

The live video sequences in *STARFLEET ACADEMY*—where you'll interact with Kirk, Spock, Chekov, other cadets, and various aliens—will use computer-generated backgrounds, but they won't have the static feel typically associated with this technique. Intersplay has come up with a new technique that will allow the camera to cinematically pan around an actor, and then render the computer-generated background to exactly match the camera's movement. For the first time, actors will truly appear to move around inside a computer-generated environment, rather than just in front of it.

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SHIELDS UP The Excelsior's shields glow as another torpedo prepares to strike, still screen shots can't properly capture the dazzling shield shimmer effect.

pilot a starship. While the game's fast-action combat sequences will likely have the *Wing Commander* crowd jumping for joy, they're likely to disappoint *Trek* purists.

Much of the early hype about *STARFLEET ACADEMY* centered around the game being a starship simulator; instead of an arcade game that had you flying the *Enterprise* around with a joystick. Alas, that's not how the combat design worked. Although there's more strategy to the combat sequences than the typical *Wing Commander*-style arcade action, the action is nothing like what you actually see in the *Trek* series or films.

Designer Rusty Buchert says the team had originally considered a setup more faithful to the series, where you'd issue combat orders to your crew members. However, the developers determined that the pacing of the game would be slower than the typical submarine sim if they'd gone for that design. Although many of us—*Trek* fans, sim players, and strategy gamers alike—would have preferred such a design even with a slower pace, Interplay apparently was concerned about mass appeal. It's a shame they didn't offer both a strategy and arcade combat as an option.

That's not to say combat in this game isn't fun. Although battle sequences are essentially 3D arcade-style combat with a sprinkle of tactical flavor, joystick response is crisp, and the wide variety of potential opponents will force you to develop varying attack strategies. Attacking an unshielded ship armed with fast-firing torpedoes is significantly different than trying to destroy a cloaked cruiser that reappears only to take potshots at you.

Combat isn't just point-and-shoot, despite its action orientation. You can use your sensors to target specific systems on enemy ships. You might aim at sensor banks if you just want to blind an opponent to get them to stop shooting and negotiate. Conversely, targeting the "neck" of a tenacious Klingon D7 is the quickest way to destroy it. Around 20 different systems can be targeted.

Locking on a particular subsystem isn't a guarantee that that's what you'll hit, though. If you're going for precision, you'll want to slick with phasers, as photon torpedoes aren't pinpoint weapons.

Throughout the course of the game you'll encounter around 30 different ship types. The development team did stick close to *Trek* lore when setting specifications for these ships. For instance, in the original series, the Gorn were able to sneak up on a Federation outpost and wipe it out. Thus, look for Gorn ships to be both powerful and stealthy. Similarly, in the episode "Balance of Terror," the *Enterprise* was unable to outrun the Romulan plasma torpedoes by backing away from them. If the torpedoes were "dumb" weapons, all the ship would have had to do would be to move to the side. Thus, *Academy's* designers figured the torpedoes had to have some tracking abilities.

Look for all the other expected capabilities in the classic ships. Romulan and Klingon Birds of Prey can cloak, but they have to come out of hiding to fire. The *Reliant* has the fast-action "cham-gun phasers" seen in action in *Star Trek II*.

ENGINEERING LEVEL

Cadet's Log, Stardate 81241.1. Graduation is approaching. Throughout this training course, I've had to master diplomacy, strategy, and scientific investigation. Starship combat is a bit more fast-paced than I expected, but it's exhilarating once you get used to it. All in all, I think I'll look back on this experience with pleasure.

Which is more than I can say about the table thing. I took Bill to the vet to get him fixed and the Doc filled me in on the species. Stop feeding them, and they stop breeding. Unfortunately, I had 2,495 of them by the time she told me. There was no way I was going to take LL. Finney's suggestion of selling them to the Argelian restaurant, but I'm not sure their final fate was much better. But I'd give a million credits to be there when a certain cadet finds out that 2,494 bottles were beamed into the Klingon embassy with a card reading "Best Regards, Cadet Jansen."

STARFLEET ACADEMY will ship with both DOS and Windows 95 executables. The latter version supports Direct 3D, but even with a 2D display card the graphics on the pre-alpha version were smooth on a Pentium 100. The texture-mapped ships show spectacular detail, and the spinning photon torpedoes and glowing shield effects are breathtaking. As you attack ships, components such as warp nacelles may be blown off, and damaged ships will trail strings of ion particles.

While the combat sequences may not be faithful to the pace of the original series, the missions you'll be sent on definitely are. If the story lines and puzzles of the entire mission series are as good as the six missions I examined in the preliminary version, *Trek* fans are in for a treat, as these missions really capture the flavor of the original *Star Trek* episodes. *STARFLEET ACADEMY* is currently set to beam into software stores in the March/April, 1997 timeframe. ☾

Dilithium Deathmatch

Spaceship *Academy* will feature a multiplayer mode for head-to-head, unshielded starship combat. A simple deathmatch mode is available, as well as a more sophisticated strategic mode. The latter is a planetary conquest game, where the number of planets you control will affect the number of ships you have (the number of times you can regenerate after being destroyed in combat). Alliances will be encouraged by the presence of a "starbase from hell" in each home system—you'll need to cooperate with other players if you want to take someone out.

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Designed for



S3d is compatible with
Windows™ 95, Windows 3.1,
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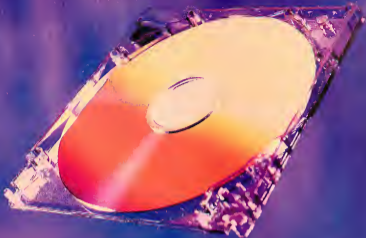
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The Fastest Gaming PCs

7 Major Computer Makers Vie For The Ultimate Game Machine Title

BY DAVE SALVATOR

PC makers have finally come to a realization: There's gold in them thar gamers. While a handful of small vendors have made game-optimized systems for several years, the big manufacturers haven't really played in our backyard—until now, that is. With the likes of Micron and Compaq jumping into the fray, it would seem the industry's larger players have taken a sudden interest in supplying your next gaming system. The good news is that all these new entrants make for a more competitive market, driving the price of a new killer gaming rig down.

With memory prices bottoming out at unprecedented low levels and Intel continuing to aggressively price faster Pentium chips, this year's entrants all pack at least 200 MHz CPUs, 32 MB of EDD DRAM, and a minimum of 256 KB of Level 2 cache. The other notable addition to gaming rigs this year is 3D graphics, with three vendors using Diamond's Monster 3D based on 3Dfx's venerable Voodoo chip set, and one opting for the NEC/VideoLogic PowerVR chip. Some entrants opted for S3's V85E, while one puntured on 3D hardware altogether.

This year, we take a look at seven hot new systems, and also give you the lowdown on the optimal laptop gaming rig. We used an array of tests in both DOS and Windows 95, and present the results to you graphically to better tell the story. There are a lot of performance numbers to consider before deciding on a system, but more importantly, who packs the biggest wallop without emptying your wallet? Let's get down to it and see.

COMPAQ PRESARIO 8712

The Presario 8712 is Compaq's first gaming system, a turbocharged version of their high-end multimedia machine. Notable features on this

lower system include audio CD transport controls—Play, Stop, Next Track, and so on—located at the top-front of the system unit. There are also controls to enable/disable Presario's telephony functionality, yes, it's not just a game machine, it's an answering machine, too. Rounding out these controls are the curious D button, which invokes Compaq's extensive help engine to answer questions you may have about the system, and a button to enable/disable the 8712's sleep mode. Other nice ergonomic touches include a volume knob on the monitor that controls the master volume level in Windows 95.

Compaq tapped speaker veteran JBL to design the 8712's speaker system. The two powered satellites and one woofer sound terrific for music and gaming audio as well. Compaq includes iThrustMaster's new gamepad with this system, though first drivers weren't available at press time. Another interesting component is the NEC/VideoLogic PowerVR 3D graphics chip, a 3D-only chip that shows promise, though little firm performance data is available yet.

Installation and assembly were painless, since Compaq color codes of all their wiring and includes a large, illustrated installation guide. Compaq writes



COMPAQ PRESARIO 8712

★ PROS: Good audio, easy assembly, respectable overall performance.
 ★ CONS: Slow CPU performance, overengineered in places.
 Price: \$3,199
www.compaq.com
 (800) OK COMPAQ

their own BIOS, and implements a graphical interface for looking at installed system components and changing settings. They don't, however, make the BIOS easy to invoke, nor are there many low-level system adjustments. Another minor annoyance: the volume knob, which works fine under Windows 95, doesn't work under DDS, and even a game's lowest mixer settings still made for pretty loud sound. We couldn't find a DDS mixer applet, though one would certainly be welcome.

In the performance department, Compaq turned in a decidedly mid-pack performance. In DOS tests, the 8712 fared pretty well overall, most notably in Duke Nukem 3D. Windows 95 performance was more of a mixed bag, with so-so scores for both disk and CD-ROM performance, as well as the slowest CPU scores of the bunch. Though we were able to gather basic data about the Presario's 3D performance, we couldn't run HELLBENDER or MONSTER TRUCK MADNESS because both of these Microsoft titles apparently violate Microsoft's own Direct3D API. Microsoft had to untangle the code on both titles and work out the bug, and an updated build wasn't available at press time. The initial data we gathered from Microsoft's Direct3D test—admittedly a myopic benchmark—are encouraging, though because of the trouble with our two current Direct3D games-as-test-tasks, the jury is still pretty much out as to real gaming performance.

Compaq's first entry in the gaming market shows a good deal of promise, and while its performance was less than stellar in places, the 8712 would be a great rig for a gamer whose family also needs some computing time (parish the thought). Its speaker system was one of the best we've heard, and its 3D graphics performance will most likely be up to snuff.



FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V

Falcon Northwest took top honors in CGW's Ultimate Game Machine review last year, and rightfully so. Of all the companies involved in this year's comparison, Falcon Northwest has the most mileage making fast, game-optimized rigs.

Their new Mach V is no exception. Featuring Diamond's Monster 3D board, which is based on 3Dix's Voodoo chip set (a Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 using 33's VRGE chip ably handles 2D graphics chores), and a PCI Ultra-SCSI controller that keeps the SCSI hard drive and CD-ROM humming along, this rig is built to burn. Other amenities include CH Products' F-16 combat stick with a two-port CH joystick card, two CH gamepads handy for console-type games, and Altec Lansing's ACS55 "gaming audio" speakers featuring Dolby Surround technology. These units sound fairly solid overall, though they start clip a little early at louder volume levels.

Every Mach V ships with thorough documentation, including a "paper registry," which is a table listing IRQ, DMA and base I/O address assignments of all I/O cards in the unit. This is a very handy thing to have when adding a new piece of hardware, and that "user-friendly" new Plug-and-Play device you've purchased just won't behave. The Mach V uses an Asus motherboard and an Award BIOS, both very able performers. The only danger

FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V

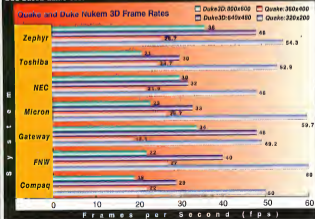
PROS: Top performer in many areas, killer 3D graphics hardware

CONS: Priority for a system lacking convergence technologies (TV, radio, etc.).

Price: \$4,795

www.falcon-nw.com (855) FALCON-1

DOS-Based Game Test



P-200

The Fastest Gaming PCs

P-200-2

IT THINKS.



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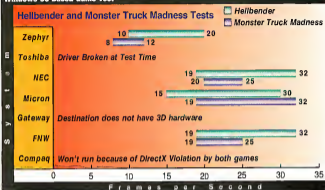


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Windows 95-Based Game Test



here is that the Award BIOS makes many low-level system settings user-adjustable, which is both a powerful tool in the right hands and a potential disaster in the wrong ones. But for a hardware-savvy gamer, this low-level system adjustability is welcome. Installation is documented and straightforward, and the case is easily opened, with all I/O cards easily accessed.

Turning to the numbers, this year's Mach V again walks away with quite a few top finishes. In DOS, its *Duak* performance was tops, though its *Duke Nukem 3D* score was curiously one of the lowest, an odd behavior considering the rest of Mach V's solid scores. Windows performance was rock-solid across the board, with wins in just about every category, including 3D graphics. Frame rates in both *Hellbender* and *Monster Truck Madness* were among the highest of rigs reviewed.

Overall, the Mach V is once again about the fastest rig of the bunch this year. While the boys at Falcon certainly know how to put together a gaming rig that takes no prisoners, Mach Vs don't come cheap. At about \$4,800 as tested, this rig will bring you the gaming world on a platter, but be prepared to pony up. Opting for EIDE storage components—which doesn't entail too severe a performance hit—knocks the Mach V's price down to about \$4,000, putting Mach V more in line with other systems reviewed here.

GATEWAY DESTINATION

Gateway was thinking big. How big? Try a 31-inch VGA monitor, and a Harmon-Kardon six-speaker Dolby ProLogic audio system. Interested? Thought you might be. Gateway's entry in this year's Ultimate Gaming Machine review is the second release of *Destination*, with improvements including a new sound card (an Ensoniq SoundScape), an updated wireless keyboard and remote control, and a new monitor. Gateway was the first vendor to ship

one of these "convergence" PCs, which integrates a TV tuner, telephony software, and wireless controls with a traditional PC. As Gateway sees it, *Destination* is a PC that lives in your living room, and is ideal for the La-Z-Boy-inclined.

The first version, while it had potential, had rough edges and was still something of a work in progress. The second coming sees some of those early glitches being

addressed, though not all those that affect gamers. *Destination* features a radio frequency wireless keyboard, as well as a "field mouse," a combination trackball and TV remote control. The first version of this unit was twitchy, and at times not responsive enough to make action gaming enjoyable. Also lacking were rechargeable batteries.

The second version has improved somewhat on the twitch problem, and with a mouse (not included) plugged into the PS/2 port found on the side of the keyboard, response was good enough to make a *Duak* session move along smoothly. Rechargeable batteries are unfortunately still lacking. Another improvement is Ensoniq's SoundScape, a great-sounding card with an excellent General MIDI wavetable synthesizer. Perhaps the second-generation *Destination*'s biggest shortcoming is still the glaring lack of 3D graphics hardware, which will be crucial in the coming year as 3D titles hit the streets on mass. With a free PCI slot, per-

GATEWAY DESTINATION

PROS: Big, big picture. Great audio. Fastest CPU performance.

CONS: Slow graphics performance, new version of wireless keyboard/field mouse still somewhat twitchy for gaming.

Price: \$3,599 (speakers not included)

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The Fastest Gaming PCs

P-200



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THE HIDEOUS S...
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SKULL. THE REVOLTING SLICE OF SWORD THROUGH FLESH.

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The Compaq Presario 8000 Series isn't for everyone. It's for that certain breed of multimedia enthusiast who likes a computer that, well, goes to 11. After all, the Presario 8000 Series is the most advanced multimedia home computer line ever made.

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Another cool feature is a Talk & Send 33.6Kbps modem. Not only does it give you the fastest Internet access, it lets you play games and talk with your opponent at the same time. But perhaps most impressive of all, the Presario has PowerVR 3D Graphics and 6MB of

graphics memory that bring true 3D arcade-quality images home for the first time ever. Translation: frightening realism and incredibly smooth animation.

The experience is further intensified by a range of cutting-edge power and performance features. There's even an innovative gamepad that puts everything in the palms of your hands. The same ones that are probably getting a little sweaty right now. For more information, visit us at www.compaq.com or call 1-800-345-1518.



The Compaq Presario 8000 Series. Not for the faint of heart.

COMPAQ

Has It Changed Your Life Yet?

haps a 3D-only board could be added to round out the system, but at additional cost, and possibly conflicting with Destination's 2D graphics/TV tuner subsystem.

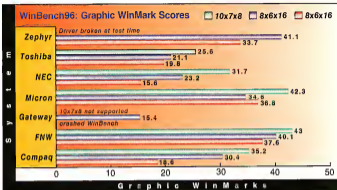
Installation is smooth, with color-coded cables and a poster-sized, illustrated instruction guide on pulling the pieces/parts together. One note: the monitor should be re-christened "The Hermitator," so be sure to round up several burly buds before attempting to move it. The system's Phoenix BIOS is easily launched on startup, and it provides basic, though not extensive, access to adjust system settings. The CPU box itself is a garden-variety desktop unit, and all plumbing inside is easily accessed.

Despite some cool convergence features, the Destination's gaming performance isn't the greatest. DOS tests place Destination at or near the bottom of the pack, except for Duke Nukem 3D at 800x600, where it came in second. Windows performance wasn't much different, though again, Destination posted the best CPU scores in WinBench tests of all rigs tested.

If you want a system that covers a lot of bases, Destination does a good job on several fronts, and is still competitively priced. But for hard-core gamers, there are some key omissions that make this rig sub-optimal. The big picture and brassy audio are great, but they don't mask less-than-stellar graphics performance and a lack of 3D graphics hardware.

MICRON HOME MPC

Micron has made solid overall PCs that doubled as good gaming boxes for several years now. But their 200 MHz Home MPC is the first system they've really designed to rock gamers' worlds. To their credit, they've put together an impressive rig that delivers on just about all fronts, and does it at a relatively affordable price. Rather than try and integrate AV components, Micron has instead loaded the Home MPC with Diamond's Monster 3D graphics board, based on 3Dfx's Voodoo chip set, and a



Microsoft Sidewinder 3D joystick and gamepad.

The Home MPC ships with a poster-sized, illustrated installation guide that helps you get up and running. The case can be opened sans tools, and system components can be readily accessed. The Phoenix BIOS provides good basic access for tweaking low-level system settings.

Despite its somewhat unremarkable appearance, Micron's box shines in the "function-over-form" department, turning solid performance across the board. Its DOS graphics scores were on par with Falcon's venerable Mach V, as were its Windows 2D graphics numbers. Its hard-disk and CD-ROM numbers were also respectable, and its CPU scores just about equaled those of the swift Falcon.

Looking at Direct3D performance, Micron was a top finisher in both polygon throughput and pixel fill rate, and frame rate numbers in Hellboxer were in the 15-30 fps range, whereas in Monster Truck Madness we saw frame rates ranging from 19 to 32 fps.

Micron pretty much takes top honors in the "bang for the buck" department, assembling an impressive system that just about matches the performance of all other entrants but, unlike those other top finishers, comes in at around \$3,400. The Microsoft joystick's feel may not be pleasing to some gamers, but it can be swapped out, and the price drops accordingly. If you're looking for a top shelf performer and don't want to be bothered with a second mortgage, you'd do well to consider Micron's latest offering.

MICRON HOME MPC

- ★ **PROS:** Solid performance across categories, competitive price
- ★ **CONS:** General MIDI patch set is so-so, no VESA 2.0 support in firmware

Price: \$3,415
www.micron.com
 (800) 205-9688



P-200

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P-202

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Minimum Requirements: OS - DOS 5.0, Ram - 4MB, Video - VGA, CD-ROM - 2x, Hard Disk - 5MB, Sound - Sound Blaster & MDA, Input - Mouse



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-PC Gamer

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-Computer Gaming World

"Sasmmokin! The MACH V just might be the only computer hardware you'll need. This system is that good."

-Best - 92% rating

"Best Hardware of the Year" [1995]

-Computer Game Review

"It's top-notch performance is key, but you'll also appreciate the MACH V's little extras."

-PC Games - Rating: A

"The MACH V may cost a bit more than other systems, but hard-core gamers will find it worth the investment."

-PC Magazine - 4/4 stars

"This system's performance was nothing short of excellent, chewing through every benchmarking program thrown at it, scoring an overall average of 20% better performance than a similarly equipped Gateway 2000"

-Next Generation

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NEC POWERPLAYER 2020

PROS: Excellent 3D graphics performance, terrific bundled controllers.

CONS: Moderate performance in most other categories, some 8-bit sound only in DOS.

Price: \$3,800
www.nec.com
(800) 632-4636

FCS Mark II joystick and Advanced Gravis' GRIP gamepad controller system with two gamepads, and NEC's 4x4 CO-ROM drive, which can hold four CO-ROM disks at a time.

Putting the rig together is fairly straightforward, with plugs on the back panel clearly marked. The case is designed for tool-less entry and

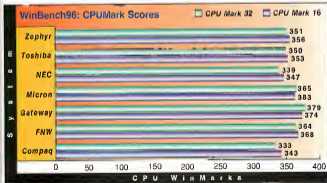
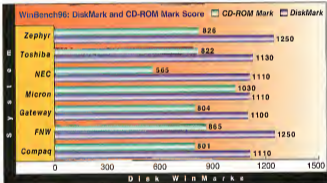
like Compaq, NEC has implemented a mezzanine bus for both PCI and ISA I/O slots. But unlike the Compaq, these slots are readily accessed once the case cover has been removed. The Phoenix BIOS provides cursory, though adequate, access to system-level settings, and it is easily launched at boot-up.

The audio subsystem consists of a motherboard-based Yamaha OPL-SA chip set (the SA stands for Sound Blaster Architecture), and Advent's AV370 speaker system. The OPL-SA seems to provide very good Sound Blaster compatibility, as well as an adequate, though unre-

NEC POWERPLAYER 2020

NEC participated in last year's Ultimate Gaming Machine round-up, entering their PowerPlayer system. That system, though not without its good points, was dogged by performance woes and some glitchy

behavior on several tests. NEC has addressed those shortcomings in the PowerPlayer 2020. Notable features include an infrared remote control with audio CD transport controls, mouse functionality, as well as telephony controls to drive NEC's RingCentral software. Other goodies include Diamond's Monster 3D board based on 3Dfx's Voodoo chip set, a ThrustMaster



markable, General MIDI wavetable patch set. This chip set also has SRS stereo enhancement, which widens the perceived stereo field, this can be enabled/disabled in Windows 95. The effect is audible and pleasing, except that hiss becomes evident when SRS is enabled. The Advent speaker system does a good job pumping game audio, and music sounds clean as well.

P-200

The Fastest Gaming PCs

P-202-A

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On the performance side, NEC lared better than last year, but aside from its impressive 3D graphics performance, its scores put it squarely in the middle of the bunch. PowerPlayer's motherboard-based ATI Rage chip, which handles

2D graphics chores, was unremarkable in DOS tests, with favorable bumps coming in CBench SVGA and Duke Nukem 3D 800x600 tests. Windows performance was more of the same, with the notable exceptions being Direct3D test performance and frame rates in Hellasvoeder and Monster Truck Madness.

All told, NEC has made some very solid improvements over last year's offering, but the PowerPlayer 2020 doesn't come out on top this year. Aside from a killer 3D graphics subsystem, this rig's per-

TOSHIBA INFINIA 7200

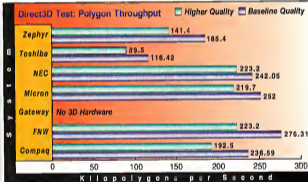
- ★ **Price:** elegant integration of television, radio, and telephony functionality. Desert overall
- ★ **DOS performance**
- ★ **3DMS:** Slowest 3D graphics performance, speaker system lacks serious oomph
- ★ **Price:** \$3,548
- ★ **computers.toshiba.com (800) 334-3445**



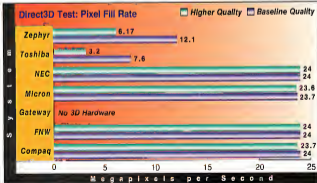
TOSHIBA INFINIA 7200

Getting Toshiba's Infinia 7200 in house for this review was no small task. Because of Toshiba's extensive presence in the home audio/video world, the fact that they're getting into the PC game is big news. The result: everybody, not just computer magazines, wants to

get their hands on one. Our venerable Editor-in-Chief was ready to buy one of these things, and couldn't find the 200 MHz model in stock anywhere. So what's all the fuss about? Well, to some degree, what Gateway started with Destination, Toshiba has relined with its Infinia line of PCs. Admittedly, there's no 31-inch monitor or six-speaker booming audio system—though given Toshiba's experience in the home AV market, such a configuration wouldn't be sur-



formance is for the most part unremarkable. Admittedly, there are some solid components—3Dix's Voodoo chip set and Gravis' GRIP system to name a few—but the package doesn't really come together to deliver compelling all-around performance. As a tricked-out gaming box, it's not tops, and as a convergence rig, there are other entrants who do a more thorough job in that arena as well.



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**ZEPHYR COMPUTING
ONYX SPEED DEMON**

PROS: Good bang for the buck, solid scores almost across the board
CONS: Unimpressive 3D graphics performance.
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(800) 448-8606

**ZEPHYR COMPUTING
ONYX SPEED DEMON**

We took a look at Zephyr's Onyx earlier this year, and after some initial glitches, wound up reviewing a pretty impressive system that was competitively priced. The successor to that system, the

Onyx Speed Demon, follows the same path, delivering solid performance (except in one key area, 3D graphics) and hitting a price point of about \$3,800.

Setup went off without much difficulty, with some labels on the

prising somewhere up the road. What Toshiba has done is smoothly integrate an FM receiver, cable-ready TV tuner, speakerphone, and telephony system into a PC.

The first thing you notice sitting in front of the Infrinia is the control panel on the front of the monitor; a Universal Serial Bus (USB) device that includes controls for the above-mentioned AV devices as well as a volume knob to control the master volume level in Windows 95. The volume knob doesn't work under DOS, though. Using these controls, you can drive the AV applications while hardly touching the keyboard or mouse. Also included is an infrared remote control which also has these functions, in addition to mouse functionality.

Installation is painless, with good documentation, and color-coded cabling helps get Infrinia up and running in minutes. The AMI BIOS offers minimal but sufficient access to system-level adjustments. Infrinia's case opens sans tools, and its motherboard layout is such that all components are readily accessible. I know what you're thinking: "Hey Shakespeare, shut yer pie-hole and tell it: Is this a good gaming rig, or what?" So let's move on.

For gamers, the first thing that's missing is a game controller of any kind. Second, the audio system—ported for better bass response and integrated into the monitor—sounds pretty good, but lacks any serious strength at the low end and goes into distortion somewhat early.

Turning to the performance numbers, Toshiba fared pretty well in DOS tests, placing anywhere from second best to mid-pack. Its Windows 95 performance, however, didn't really follow suit. Though its disk and CD-ROM scores were respectable, its CPU scores were smack in the middle, and its 3D graphics performance was the slowest of the lot.

Toshiba has come up with an intriguing rig for early adapters hell-bent on blazing the convergence trail. But does this a killer gaming rig make? Not really; its numbers are respectable, most notably in DOS, and its ease-of-use with the embedded AV devices is commendable. But certain key performance areas are lacking—specifically, 3D graphics performance—and its performance otherwise in Windows 95 is unremarkable.

Let's Do The Numbers

The benchmarks in this article concern several key performance areas, and give a good indication of what you can expect out of these systems. In addition to the graphs on these pages, we have posted some additional performance data on our web site. Some of the numbers are pretty straightforward, like frame rates from DOS and Win 95 games, but others are a bit more esoteric.

In Winbench 95, the Graphics WinMark score is derived from performing graphical tasks similar to those performed by real-world business applications, ranging from word processors to graphics design programs. Speedy execution of business application tasks may not be directly relevant to gaming performance, but this kind of performance can be important too; oh least call it the Spouse Rationalization Factor.

In testing Direct3D performance, we used Microsoft's Direct3D Test application that ships with their DirectX SDK. This tool is far from perfect, and in some ways isn't very "game-like," but it does give an indication of a system's Direct3D performance. We look at two types of performance from Direct3D Test: pixel throughput and polygon throughput. Polygon throughput is the number of rendered polygons the card is able to generate. More kilopolys per second means greater scene complexity. Pixel fill rate is a measure of how fast a graphics card can write pixels to its local memory. Higher pixel fill rate numbers will also probably yield better overall gaming performance.

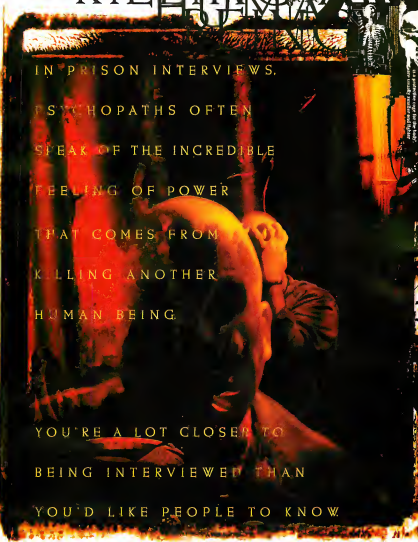
All of the numbers here combine to tell the story; if a machine does well across the board, you can bet it'll move things along snarly on your favorite power-hungry game.

P-200

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P-202

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Ultimate Game Machine

Features & Pricing

	Compaq Presario 8712	Falcon Mach V	Gateway Destination	Micron Home MPC	NEC PowerPlayer 2020	Toshiba Infinita 7200	Zephyr Oxy
	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CPU	Intel P200	Intel P200	Intel P200	Intel P200	Intel P200	Intel P200	Intel P200
L2 Cache	312 K	312 K	256 K	512 K	256 K	256 K	256 K
Memory Type	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM	EDO DRAM
Memory Amount	32 MB	32 MB	32 MB	32 MB	32 MB	32 MB	34 MB
BIOS	Comp 1	Award	Phoenix	Phoenix	Phoenix	AW	Award
Available USB Port	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	USB ready
HD/CDD	EIDE	UW SCS	IDE	IDE	EIDE	EIDE	EIDE
Controller Type							
HD Model	Compaq OEM	Quantum Atlas	Western Digital AC 3200H	Western Digital	IBM D4DD	Western Digital Civic	Quantum Fireball
HD Size	3.2 GB	2 GB	3.2 GB	2.1 GB	3.2 GB	3 GB	1.2 GB
CD-ROM	Compaq OEM, BX	Phitek SPX	Toshiba GX	Highway 154 12X	NEC GX	Toshiba BX	Real GX
2D Graphics Board	On Motherboard	Diamond Stealth 3D 2000	STB	Diamond Stealth 3D 2000	On Motherboard	Toshiba OEM	Diamond Stealth 3D 2000
2D Graphics Chip	S3 VRGE	S3 VIRT	Brook	S3 VIRT	ATI Rage 2	S3 VIRT	S3 VIRT
Graphics RAM	2 MB EDO DRAM	2 MB EDO DRAM	2 MB VRAM	1 MB EDO DRAM	2 MB EDO DRAM	2 MB EDO DRAM	4 MB EDO DRAM
3D Graphics Board	Compaq OEM	Diamond Monster 3D	N/A	Diamond Monster 3D	Myriady 3D	Toshiba OEM	Diamond Stealth 3D 2000
3D Graphics Chip	NEC/VideoLogic PowerVR	3DFx Voodoo	N/A	3DFx Voodoo	3DFx Voodoo	S3 VIRT	S3 VIRT
3D Graphics RAM	4 MB SDRAM	4 MB EDO DRAM	N/A	4 MB EDO DRAM	4 MB EDO DRAM	2 MB EDO DRAM	4 MB EDO DRAM
Monitor	ColorPlus 17"	Phitron 17"	Gateway 31"	Mercer 17"	NEC 17"	Joshida 17"	Nike 17"
Sound Card	STD InterWave	Sound Blaster 16	Essence VMD 96	Sound Blaster 32	onboard Yamaha OPL-SA	onboard Yamaha OPL-SA	Sound Blaster 16
MDI	None	Yamaha DB50XG	None	None	None	None	Roland SCO-10
Keyboard							
Speakers	Custom JBL Pro Platinum	Altec-Lansing ACS 55	Harman-Kardon	Altec A370	Altec A370	Integrated w/ monitor	Altec-Lansing ACS 55
Notes type	Compaq 300 DSW	USA 80.6	Telpath 33.6	Sigma Zephyr 33.6	Boce 39.6	Sigma 38.6	USA 30.8
Bundled Controller(s)	ThirdMaster Mouse Pad	CH F-16 Combat Stick & 2 Gun Pads	None	M8 Sidewinder 3D Joystick and Gatepad	ThirdMaster FCS, Gravis Grip	None	CH F-16 Combat Stick
SRP	\$3,199	\$4,795	\$3,500 (includes not included)	\$3,415	\$3,899	\$3,349	\$3,800

back panel to help get the party started. The Speed Demon uses an Asus motherboard and an Award BIOS, which gives detailed, low-level control of system settings, most notably on memory timings. The mini-tower case makes all components easily accessible, though it appears that Falcon and Zephyr have happened upon the same case supplier. In fact, given the number of similarities, the Speed Demon almost appears to be a Falcon Mach V clone. These similarities extend to the audio subsystem: both rigs ship with standard Sound Blaster 16s and have the Altec-Lansing ACS55 speakers. The only difference here is that Falcon uses Yamaha's DB50XG daughterboard, whereas Zephyr opted for Roland's SCO-10 board. Both sound terrific, by the way.

The Speed Demon was a solid performer in just about every area except one: 3D graphics, where it performed poorly. But its DOS performance was nipping at the heels of Falcon's, and its WinBench scores continued this pattern, actually nudging past Falcon on the 800x600 Graphics WinMark test. Using Diamond's Stealth 2000 3D, which is based on S3's VIRT chip, Zephyr posted very good 2D performance, but its 3D performance wasn't nearly as impressive. These scores were second-to-last across the board, beating out only Toshiba. The addition of a solid 3D on board would quickly remedy this problem, but the lack of one here leaves Zephyr's 3D performance wanting.

Zephyr has put together a good package of hardware components, all of which conspire to deliver very good performance in most departments. If the one glaring shortcoming can be addressed, Zephyr could have a winner on its hands. ☺

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www.playstation.com

Gaming On The Run

A Guide To Finding The Right Laptop For Portable Gaming

by Denny Atkin

With Pentium 100 laptops now the entry-level, most of today's portables make at least serviceable game machines. Multimedia units with sound and CD have dropped into the \$2500 range. That's still \$1000 more than a similarly equipped desktop unit, but it beats the \$5000 prices for similar units only a year ago.

Here's our rundown of the various specifications you should check out before dropping a few grand on a high-performance gaming laptop.

Processor: 100- to 133-MHz Mobile Pentium. Although 150-MHz units are now available, they run at a slower bus speed (60 MHz vs. 66 MHz for the 133) and provide little or no performance improvement. Also, the 150-MHz chip uses slightly more power than the 133. Avoid units that use desktop Pentium chips—these use much more power and run hotter.

Cache: 256K synchronous burst L2 cache. Cache memory is vital to game performance, especially with 120-MHz and faster Pentiums.

RAM: 16MB is minimum for Win 95 gaming.

CD-ROM: A must. Some systems still ship with 4x drives, but 10x and faster drives should be available by Christmas.

Screen: If you primarily play turn-based games, RPGs, or adventures, a DSTN passive-matrix screen will do. If you play simulation, action, sports, or real-time strategy games, you'll want a TFT active-matrix screen. DSTN screens have a slow update rate and leave ghostly trails in fast-action games. Note also that most newer TFT screens support 16-bit color, while DSTN displays are limited to only 256 colors.

One feature to avoid is "screen stretching." Some notebooks stretch 640x480 screens so they fill an entire 800x600 display. Although this avoids the squashed, letterbox effect of displays without this feature, it also results in a jagged, "messy" display.

Sound: 16-bit Sound Blaster compatibility. Creative Labs and ESS chip sets provide the fewest compatibility woes.

Joystick Port: Built-in. If you get a unit that has a standard joystick port, or one on a docking station, you'll save yourself many headaches. There's only one fully Win 95 and DDS game-compatible joystick port card available (JC Designs Game Card II, a PCMCIA card available from Flight Sim Central at 800-477-SIMS). And some machines, such as the Micron Transport, won't work with this or any other joystick game card due to the way they allocate motherboard resources.

Batteries: Lithium-ion (Li), Dider-technology Nickel-Metal Hydride (NiMH) batteries have a shorter life and suffer from memory effects that can reduce charge capacity over time.

Other Considerations: Many portables support NTSC and S-

Video output, great if you want to play your favorite PC games on the family big-screen TV. Also, we recommend a system with a pointing stick or trackball. GlidePoint-style touchpads don't provide the precise control necessary for gaming. Consider a PS/2 port splitter that will allow you to plug in an external keyboard and mouse simultaneously, for those games that make heavy use of the numeric keypad.

The Ultimate Portable Game Machine

We've tested some of the hottest notebooks on the market in an effort to find a unit with all the features a gamer looks for. Our runners-up were all good machines in many respects, but all suffered at least one fatal flaw. Micron's Transport is incompatible with joystick cards, and its screen-stretching feature causes 640x480 games to look terrible. Toshiba's Satellite Pro units are good entry-level laptops, but without L2 cache they can't provide the necessary performance for action games and sims; and HP's Omnibook 5500CT fails only in having a very short battery life and a very high street price. Toshiba's Tora 510 and 730 series units are top-notch aesthetically, but chronic shortages make them nearly impossible to find in stock.

And the winner is...Compaq's Armada 4130T. This modular unit does nearly everything right for the gamer. A fast 133-MHz Mobile Pentium is backed up with 256K of L2 cache and 16 MB of RAM. The 11.8-inch TFT screen is sharp and displays 65,000 colors in 800x600 resolution with no screen stretching. The floppy drive and CD-ROM can be used simultaneously (a rare feature in portables), the touchpad can be replaced with a stick (like trackball), up to three batteries can be installed to provide over eight hours of on-the-road gaming, and an NTSC output lets you play games using your television.

The Armada's gaming strength comes from its Mobile CD Unit (MCDU), a two-pound add-on that fastens to the bottom of the five-pound base unit. This not only contains a CD-ROM (an anemic 4x drive—the system's only weak point, which will hopefully be upgraded soon) but also a joystick port, room for an extra battery, and two crisp-sounding speakers. The MCDU also adds support for wavetable MIDI sound, a feature found on none

of the other notebooks we tested.

Prices range from \$2499 (100-MHz DSTN Armada 4110) to \$4499 (133-MHz TFT Armada 4130T); the MCDU is \$429.



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PINK TUTUS EXCITE YOU?
ARE SADISTIC CLOWNS YOUR
IDEA OF A GOOD TIME?**

?

**DO YOU THINK SHEEP ARE
KINDA SEXY? ESPECIALLY WHEN
THEY'RE DOLLED UP IN HEELS
AND FORM-FITTING LATEX?**

Toonstruck is a new twist on twisted. No computer gamer will want to be deprived of this depravity. Not when they can watch Spike the Clown torture balloon animals. See Seedy, the tu-tu clad bartender, do a little butt bowling. And



prevent an all-out war between the cartoon forces of good and evil.

Toonstruck blends live action (starring Christopher Lloyd) with wild animation for some of the most bizarre puzzle-



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TOONSTRUCK

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an adventure game unlike any we've seen. The all-over-the-board humor is delicious," says **COMPUTER GAMING WORLD**. "The twisted realms of this adult cartoon adventure (has)...all the elements of a great game: beautiful graphics, challenging puzzles, outrageous humor and good ol' star power," says **PC GAMES**. Finally, "A must see" from **COMPUTER GAME REVIEW**. We are sure you'll agree.

Weirdo.





Santa's
Little Helper

100 Hot Gift Ideas For Your Favorite Gamer

I all started so innocently. "Hey Mr Kringle, you gotta try this!" Elliott the Real-Time Elf shouted excitedly. "It's called RED ALERT, and we have it set up on the new network!" Santa had certainly been bringing more computer games to good kids and adults alike in recent years, and red was his favorite color, so he decided to join in the game. Some 16 hours later, Mrs. Claus showed up with cookies and warm milk and insisted he get some sleep.

"Ho, that was certainly fun," Santa said, dozens of campaigns and three weeks later, "but a bit stressful on the old ticker! I'd better stick to Chutes and Ladders!" Terry the Turn Based Elf dropped a laptop on Santa's desk and suggested he give Master of Orion 2 a shot. "It's a thinking elf's game," the mustachioed elf snickered, giving a superior sideways glance at the group of elves enthralled in Quake (ostensibly to test the discs before loading them on the sleigh.) "Ho, well, plenty of time till Christmas, eh? Why shouldn't I try out the sci-fi game all those kids have requested for Christmas?"

A month later, after hearing Santa shout that he was now supreme ruler of the universe, Mrs. Claus sat him down for a talk. "Kris, don't you think you've been spending a bit too much time playing these computer games? I haven't seen you this involved in anything since the guys came up with the Kung Fu Grip version of GI Joe."

"Sorry, Mrs. C," Santa said, "you're right. But I have to test these things if we're going to give them to all the good little boys and girls. A few more days and I'll stop, I promise." He hugged Mrs. Claus, thanked her, and sat down for just one more session of DROGON.

"He's sure been sittin' at that computer for a long time," said Jeff the Adventurous Elf. "I think his ass is going to get stuck in that chair." Denny the Flighty Elf looked at Santa worriedly. "Yeah, I'm worried, too. You know he asked me to build him a ThrustMaster F-16 cockpit when I gave him that copy of JetFighter II?"

"Ho, this is cool!" Santa shouted. "I wonder

if I could mount Sidewinder missiles on Rudolph's antlers?"

"It's definitely TF!" said Dave the Techie Elf. "TF?" asked Charlotte, the Elf High Commander. "Time For an Intervention," Dave said. "Kale, distract him with some cookies, that always works. Jill, you grab his CD-ROM. Doc, cut off his power strip. It's time for some serious action."

Three hours, 36 Chips Ahoy and six glasses of milk later, Santa sat soberly looking at a long scroll. "Ho dear, it's almost Christmas and I barely have enough time left to make my list and check it twice of who's been naughty and nice! There's no way I'm going to have time to pick gifts for all these millions

of kids! Why, we haven't even gathered the coal and sticks for the bad kids yet!"

"I've got it, Santa!" said Ken the Organizational Elf. "We'll give the bad kids Alan's and Hootie CDs instead. And as for the good kids, perhaps it's time to contact your cousin, Johnny L. Claus. I'll bet his guys can help out."

"So that's the story, Johnny," Santa said, admiring the 15th-floor view of San Francisco. "Well, leave it to Ken to come up with a magic solution during a crisis," Johnny chuckled. "Sure, we'd be glad to help. I've got just the list for you, too."

"It's our editors' top choices for holiday gifts in each genre, 100 hot gift ideas in total," Johnny explained. "These are the games that they'd most like to see under their trees this Christmas, along with some of the hottest hardware and even the top choices for younger kids."

"My guys have spent hundreds of hours testing these games to pick only the best," Johnny warned, "but some of these are still in pre-release form. Although the developers have promised they'll all be available by Christmas, don't be too surprised if a few of them end up being delivered by the Easter Bunny instead."

Santa thanked Johnny, took the list, and reentered back to the North Pole at top speed.

"Let's see, Moxonov for little Billy in Redmond," Mrs. Claus said as she dropped the last packages in the sleigh, "and Leisure Suit Larry 7 for big Billy in D.C. Have a great flight!"

And Christmas was saved once again, in the St. Nick of time.





ACTION

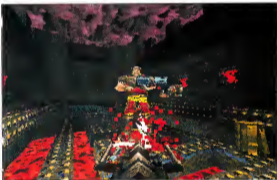
by Elliott "The Action Figure Elf" Chin

This holiday season, action games are breaking new ground, both in technology and gameplay, and while you'll still play *Quake*, it definitely won't be the last action game that seduces you. There are first-person shooters that will take you into the sinister underground of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, 3D shooters that will strap you into a muscle car and transport you back to the '70s, and games with technology that showcases true 3D, real-time environments, ghostly transparency, dynamic lighting and texture-mapped polygonal graphics. This winter also marks a renaissance of the non-Doom games. With these games, you'll wreak havoc in isometric hallways without regret, hunt for ancient artifacts in breathtaking third-person view, and decapitate rival skaters in gorgeous third-person 3D in a brutal take on futuristic sports. So if you hunger for visceral gameplay and fast action, then any of these 10 games would make the perfect gift for you or the action-starved.

#1: *Quake*

Quake is easily the number one action game of the year, even though it isn't the most innovative or original effort of the past year. What it does have are the best multiplayer options, true 3D environments, dark atmosphere and truly fun gameplay. Some would argue that *Quake* doesn't advance the first-person shooter genre like *Duke Nukem 3D* does, but of the CGW offices, *Quake* is king. Gameplay is similar to *Doom*: you run around levels, killing monsters and finding the key to open the door that leads to the next level of monster thrashing.

Technologically, though, *Quake* is amazing. All the environments and monsters are composed of true 3D, texture-mapped polygons. That means you can run around the level or creatures with complete freedom, since everything is rendered using 3D polygons in real space in real time.



Level design also takes advantage of the 3D engine, with levels composed of catwalks above floors on top of sewers on top of graveyards. Many times, you'll swim through underwater levels, fire rockets at enemies perched on balconies above you or drop down on unsuspecting death-marchers below. The dark colors and textures and scary ambient sounds also elevate *Quake* from a simple game to a truly frightening experience. If you play this game at night, with the lights turned off and the speakers cranked up high, be prepared to jump out of your seat when a ferocious fiend plummets down on you from above with a guttural roar. The 3D graphics, sounds and dark textures all combine to create the most realistic and convincing environment of any first-person perspective game. It's a realism unmatched by *Duke* or any other first-person shooter.

Finally, what makes *Quake* a truly standout game are its multiplayer features. You can play it over null modem, modem, IPX local area network or the Internet, without the aid of a gaming service. Any owner of *Quake* is free to start his own server, to which any other *Quake* gamers can log on. *Quake* also supports dynamic entry so that gamers can join deathmatches in progress. And once you join a deathmatch you might never come out, because the gameplay here is so addictive and absorbing. Play *Quake* deathmatch and you will be caught in the ultimate "just one more frag" spell. If you're expecting more from *Quake* you might be disappointed, but for what it sets out to do, *Quake* is the number one action game and should be on the top of any action gamer's must-have list.

\$50.00, Id Software, (800) idgames, www.idsoftware.com

NO

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NO 'INTERACTIVE CHARACTERS' THAT YOU CAN'T INTERACT WITH.

NO 'AMAZING ANIMATIONS' THAT BORE YOU TO TEARS AFTER 3 REPLAYS.

NO TIRED OLD ACTORS WHO CAN'T GET REAL JOBS.

NO WEAK AND WORTHLESS GAMEPLAY.

NO PAINFULLY REPETITIVE SOUNDTRACK.

NO WAY TO LEAVE WHEN YOUR 'SIGNIFICANT OTHER'

CALLS YOU DOWN TO DINNER.

NO WAY TO STOP PLAYING THIS GAME.



Warning: This product is under investigation by the FDA and ATF for its addictive nature. You just can't say no.



#2: Duke Nukem 3D

Many would consider Duke Nukem 3D the true heir to Doom's throne, and it would be hard to argue with them. Duke isn't a clone, but an advancement for the 3D first-person shooter genre. Duke gives you interactive environments, so you can blast holes in a wall with your shotgun, and an open world, so you can revisit that past level to find your shotgun blasts still burned into the wall. For those gamers tired of games that take themselves too seriously, Duke also offers a hilarious, cartoonish style and irreverence, with snide remarks and rude curses spewing from Duke's mouth at the most appropriate times. Duke also has good multiplayer features, though it doesn't offer true Internet play or dynamic entry for entering a deathmatch in progress. Also, its engine isn't a true 3D engine like Quake's, but is a deceptively good "two-and-a-half-D" engine. Still, with its innovative, interactive gameplay and



multitude of cool and interesting weapons, Duke should satisfy the Doom urge in any action fan.

\$39.95, FormGen/Apogee, (800) APOGEE1, www.formgen.com

#3: Crusader: No Regret



Consider No Regret won CBW's Premier Award for Best Action Game of 1995 with its beautiful SVGA graphics, fresh isometric look and engrossing gameplay. Crusader: No Regret, the follow-up to No Remorse, is just as good, and many Crusader fans agree that it's an even better challenge. Though it is much harder than the first Crusader—beginners should play No Remorse first—No Regret will not disappoint any action fan who loves big explosions, gory death sequences and challenging level design and traps. In No Regret, you'll guide your armor-suited agent on screen through 10 levels of deadly traps and tough robots and soldiers as you attempt to destroy an evil conglomerate. Anything and everything in No Regret blows up, in incredible and explosive detail. So if you have a penchant for excessive destruction, a need for a break from the Doom crowd, and a mind for navigating sinister levels, then you'll definitely want to prow the halls of No Regret.

\$39.00, EA/Origin, (800) 245-4525, www.ea.com/origin.html



#4: Tomb Raider



Ladies: *Tomb Raider* is breaking new ground this winter with a different kind of character and a different look. In this game, you aren't a masochistic, gun-toting brute, but a gun-toting, tough woman of adventure. As Lara Croft, you'll pack pistol, Uzi, grenades and shotguns through the ruins of Egypt, Greece, South America and sunken Atlantis. And to better see the new and unique lead character, *Tomb Raider* also sports a third-person-perspective look, unlike *Quake* or *Duke*. This is great news for gamers, because it offers a beautiful view of the lush graphics and 3D muscle of the *Tomb Raider* engine. Even without a 3D accelerator card, *Tomb Raider* delivers incredibly detailed textures and effects, such as murky, wavy water and convincing lighting and shadows. The backgrounds and creatures look exquisite, as does Lara. She has thousands of frames of animation for everything from back flips to swimming to hauling herself onto ledges. Unfortunately, *Tomb Raider* only has solo play, but the gorgeous environments and the beautifully animated star make this a solo mission worth having.

**\$49.99, Eidos, (415) 513-8929,
www.eidos.com**

#5: Descent to Undermountain

Parallax Software's *Descent to Undermountain* is the real heir to *Descent*, but this new game descends even deeper—to the dungeons. Using a fully polygonal, 3D engine like *Quake*'s, Parallax has created a world of inter-laced cavernous dungeons in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* world of *Waterdeep*. Unlike previous *Descent* games, you aren't flying through these caves in a spaceship. Instead, you are an adventurer who must venture into the dark dungeons of *Undermountain* to battle evil beasts and creatures on your quest to slay the Dark Elf goddess, Lloth. Combat is visceral and in your face, as you clash with enemies in mace, wicked ax, sword and bow and arrow. There's also a touch of role-playing in *Undermountain*, as your character grows in strength and you travel with freedom throughout the world, securing different quests and acquiring spells. At its heart, though,



Undermountain is a true hack-and-slash action game. Any fan of *Descent* or AD&D will enjoy this game, as will action gamers who enjoy combat in realistic environments.

\$42.00, Interplay, (800) 468-3775, www.interplay.com

Fig. 1: Electric chair



Fig. 2: Gallows



Fig. 3: CellBlock



Where's the sport in that?

CRIME IS RAMPANT. JAILS ARE OVERPOPULATED. THE COMMITTEE OF RECREATIONAL TERMINATION (C.O.R.T.) IS HELL-BENT ON PUTTING THE SPORT BACK INTO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT. YOU'VE BEEN SENTENCED: DEATH OR DEATHDROME.™ YOUR ONE CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL AND YOUR ONLY HOPE FOR FREEDOM. THE RULES ARE SIMPLE: PLAY OR DIE.

ENTER THE ARENA, THE DEATHDROME, IN A FUTURISTIC DRIVING MACHINE IN THE ULTIMATE BATTLE TO SAVE YOUR LIFE. EMBARK ON A LETHAL COMBINATION OF OPEN-THROTTLE DRIVING AND HIGH-TECH WEAPONRY. SHOOT AND KILL YOUR FELLOW CONS FIGHTING FOR THE SAME PRIZE TO ADVANCE TO THE NEXT ARENA. REACH YOUR "KILL QUOTA" AND YOU TASTE FREEDOM. IF YOU DON'T, YOU DIE.



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#6: HyperBlade

If you remember *SPEEDBALL 2: BRUAL DELUXE*, then you'll recall a game of futuristic sports that was fast, fun and incredibly violent. Fans of this type of ultra-bloodily, ultra-entertaining action gaming will be pleased to know that a worthy successor to this venerable game has arrived in Activision's *HYPERBLADE*. *HYPERBLADE* takes you into the next century, where roller hockey has become a deadly and popular sport. Each comprising three members—two strikers and a goalie—the teams of this violent sport compete in vast, curved arenas, rushing through power-up points and bodies to slam pucks (or severed heads) into enemy goals. The production values are as smooth as some of EA Sports' best NHL Hockey products, with extensive stat tracking, player info and

great interface graphics. The game itself is not only fast and fun but beautiful and brutal. Graphics are all texture mapped polygons and, with 3D acceleration, are smooth and gorgeous. The violence, though, is amazing, with bone-crunching body checks and

even decapitations. If you want to play something different, and fun, strap on a helmet (and watch your head) and dive into a game of *HYPERBLADE*.

\$49.95, Activision, (800) 477-3650, www.activision.com



#8: Interstate '76

Though *MECHWARREN 2: MEGADRAMAS* will be the last *MECHWARREN* game from Activision, it won't be the last time you see the game's incredible engine in action. The same team that brought you that clan battle royale is bringing you *INTERSTATE '76* this winter. This 3D, polygonal shooter employs the next-generation *MECHWARREN 2* engine, but is set in 1976 Earth, in an alternate past where law and order have degenerated so far that mercenaries have outfitted their own cars with weapons to protect, or rob, the countryside. You'll drive in old '70s muscle cars, ride with people who wear Aftas and fire off rockets and machine guns at will, mustachioed masterminds in lounge lizard suits. The game definitely has personality, and it also has a spectacular 3D engine, with dynamic lighting and a real physics model governing the motion of the cars and gunfire. If you dig excellent graphics and action, then you can groove to this gaming gig.

\$49.95, Activision, (800) 477-3650,

www.activision.com



#7: Virtua Squad

A smash hit in the arcades, where it was called *VIRTUA COP*, *VIRTUA SQUAD* puts you behind a badge against some of the most realistically simulated criminals in computer gaming.

It's a basic rail shooter, like *CRYSIS*, but *Virtua Squad* has touches that make it incredibly fun. Everything here is rendered in real-time 3D with plenty of polygon details, which makes for incredibly realistic gunfights. If you blast away at a criminal's hand, his gun will fly out of his grasp and he'll stop and gaze in surprise at his wrist. Shoot his knee and his leg will buckle, then he'll tumble over. This level of detail makes it seem like you are in a shootout with real gang members



rather than enemies with scripted movement and death scenes. Although the movement is on rails, the action changes its pacing so frequently and brilliantly, between furious gunfights and deliberate stalking around corners, that the business of rails never really

bothers you. *VIRTUA SQUAD* won't replace *QUAKE*, but its graphics, pacing and detail guarantee that it won't disappoint.

\$44.95, Sega Entertainment, (888) SEGASALES, www.sega.com

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Zork Nemesis

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#9: Virtua Fighter PC

Although this fighting game is a part of a two-year-old arcade fighter, it is undeniably the best fighting game for the PC this holiday season. It takes wonderful advantage of the PC's hardware, with quick, 3D, texture-mapped polygons and otherwise excellent graphics. The gameplay in this game is outstanding, with eight players to choose from and a raft of special moves and strategies to be discovered by any who devote even a few hours to the game. However, it does have a high system overhead—you'll need at least a



fighting fan yet, this game's looks and playability might just hook you. **\$49.95, Sega Entertainment, (888) SEGASALES, www.sega.com**

Pentium 60 to run the game. Aside from that, though, VFPC's 3D graphics require no special hardware to run. If you like fighting games, this title definitely belongs in your library. If you aren't a

3D Stacking Stuffers

Here are a few other good games that didn't quite make the top ten list. SkyNet, the sequel to Bethesda's *Teknoman: Future Shock*, is a 3D first-person-perspective shooter that is completely polygonal like *Quake*, and offers good graphics with plenty to blow up. Unlike its predecessor, it offers multiplayer gaming and SVGA graphics.

Eradicator is another 3D Doom clone, but it offers enough twists in gameplay and look to stand out from the crowd. This game has three selectable characters with different abilities, over a dozen unique weapons, a Doom-like interactive environment, and a third-person or first person look. NeoDove has a similar design and also gives you an interactive environment. You can ride in a vehicle and obliterate enemies or get out and blast them on foot.

Outlaws, from LucasArts, uses a modified *Duke Forces* engine to deliver Wild West gunfighting in the old Spaghetti Western tradition. The game's animated cut scenes tell a good story and the gameplay is a little different, with smart enemies, the need to reload weapons, and a simpler health system.

#10: Syndicate Wars

Syndicate Wars, the sequel to one of Bullfrog's most beloved games, has finally arrived after a four-year wait. The original *Syndicate* was an isometric action game that put you in charge of four vicious cyborgs on a killing rampage through futuristic Earth. *Syndicate Wars* still has the same isometric look, but this time the characters are larger (in the old version, you had to practically squint to see your tiny commandos). The plot is a little different as well, as you are now in charge of the Syndicate and not gunning after it. *Syndicate Wars* also adds multiplayer gaming to the mix, and has even more explosive and violent weapons, including a mini nuclear detonator that brings huge skyscrapers tumbling down in a shower of

rocks and metal. The original *Syndicate* was the game that spawned *Crusader* and its many clones, and *Syndicate Wars* looks ready to give the game that started it all the recognition it deserves.

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ADVENTURE

by Jeffrey "The Adventurous Elf" Green

The biggest mystery in adventure games this year was, unfortunately, wondering where they all went. Thankfully, Santa, after sitting on his duff all year eating pork rinds with Mrs. Claus, now appears to be working overtime, as a slew of adventures are poised to hit the shelves in time for the holidays. It also seems as though Santa is going to be handing out pink slips to many of the B-movie actors who have been starting (or ending) their careers in interactive movies, as the new crop of games shows that animation is making a big—and welcome—comeback. This isn't to say that we don't appreciate full-motion video—our top two picks, in fact, revel in it—but many of the newer games on the list are animated adventures positively brimming with creative energy. And this is just the kind of spark needed to breathe life into the genre and get us all excited again.

#1: The Pandora Directive

Whenever someone utters the phrase "interactive movie" around the Computer Gaming World office, it's usually accompanied by a face like the one you'd make if someone handed you a week-old sandwich with something smelly and dead in the middle. We want to like them—really—but for the most part, once you get past the marketing hype, they almost always turn out to be 90 percent Hollywood chrome and 10 percent actual gaming. Last year's *Under a Killing Moon* was a very popular, high-profile game, but epitomized—to us, at least—this problem of glitz over gaming. That's why we're surprised as anyone that we've chosen *The Pandora Directive*—the sequel to *Under a Killing Moon*—as our number one adventure pick for this holiday season. Access has surpassed our wildest expectations for this game, providing an experience that is better than the original in every way.

This time around, the year is 2043, and Tex Murphy is hired to find a missing person, which leads him onto the trail of a serial killer and eventually envelops him in one of the great paranoid

mysteries of the 20th century—the alleged UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. Can Tex find the killer and outwit the evil government agents trying to stop him in his tracks? Will he solve the Mayan calendar riddle without Scorpio's help? Part detective story, part campy sci-fi movie, part X-Files ripoff, *Pandora* is a big (six CD), entertaining and challenging title with puzzles that should appeal to adventure gamers of all types.

Access did a particularly nice job of increasing the playability (and replayability) of this game by offering two play modes. Newbies can play in Entertainment mode, which offers a detailed hint system so you never have to be stuck too long, while more experienced gamers can play in the harder Game Player mode, which lets you earn extra points by solving additional, more complex puzzles. More impressive are the game's multiple paths: depending on the choices you make, and the way you interact with others, you'll follow three different paths, leading to seven different endings. In this way, conversations with others are more than just information dumps—they're moral fibrous tests that challenge you to consider the consequences of your words and deeds.

Finally, there's that Hollywood chrome. The acting throughout, including appearances by Kevin McCarthy and Barry Corbin, is first-rate—with the notable exception of Chris Jones, who plays Tex again, and who is fast becoming the Pauley Shore of computer games.

So, what the heck. Maybe interactive movies aren't all bad. If they must exist, let them at least be like *The Pandora Directive*.

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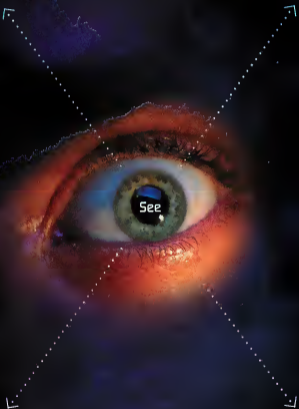
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#2: Spycraft: The Great Game

The Great Game[®] is an appropriate subtitle to this spy story from Activision, because that is exactly what it is. Like *The Pandora Directive*, *SPYCRRAFT* took us by surprise; what appears to be a light-weight, newbie game is actually one of the most original adventures of the year, with a rich, compelling plot, clever gameplay, and outstanding use of full-motion video.

You assume the role of a rookie CIA agent assigned to investigate the twin assassinations of a Russian politician and your CIA instructor—and to prevent the possible assassination of the president of the United States. The game begins slowly but, like all good thrillers, gets tenser, better and scarier as it goes on, with enough double-crossing intrigue to please even discerning *La Carré* fans.

Perhaps best of all—and this is a real rarity for an adventure game—is that every single puzzle is integrated into the plot and



atmosphere of the story. As you hunt for the bad guys, you'll analyze voice prints, break codes, doctor photographs, and—in one memorably creepy scene—torture a suspect (if you choose). Real-life spying may not be as fun as *Spycraft*, but then again, neither are most adventure games.

\$49.95, Activision, (800) 477-3650, www.activision.com

#3: Star Control 3



Daktakpak! Warning! Daktakpak! *Star Control* fans, alert! All your favorite aliens, from the spineless Spathi to the ugly Vux, are back in the third installment of Accolade's epic, comic sci-fi adventure, *Star Control 3*, developed by Legend Entertainment, takes place in 2178, about 20 years after the close of *Star Control II*. This time, you play the senior commander of the League of Sentient Races, who must command a star fleet to explore and colonize the Kassari Quadrant as you attempt to restore a breakdown in hyperspace travel and prevent the destruction of all sentient life.

The *Star Control* games have always defied categorization, and this one is no exception, with adventure gaming mixed in with equal parts resource management, strategy and combat sequences. Traditional adventure gamers might find more here than they bargained for, but those up to the challenge will find themselves engrossed in a universe of amazing depth, while hilarious dialogue and voice work keep it all from getting too ponderous. Also a blast is the HyperMeele combat mode, probably the funniest *Astronox* knockoff you'll ever play. See our review in the Adventure section this month for more.

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#4: The Neverhood

The first computer game to be released by DreamWorks Interactive, a joint venture between Microsoft and DreamWorks SKG (that's Spielberg, Katzenberg and Geffen), wins—hands-down—as the coolest-looking adventure game on the list. *The Neverhood* is a clay-animated fantasy adventure designed by Doug TenNapel, creator of *Expendable Jim*, and it's the kind of game that's so incredible looking you can't wait to show it to your friends.

The story finds you in the role of Klaymen, a flexible clay hero who must save the land of the Neverhood from being overrun by the evil Klogg. The game is relatively short and easy for experienced gamers (maybe 20 hours), and some of the more *Myst*-like button-and-lever puzzles may try your patience, but ultimately *The Neverhood* is a winner because it has so much fresh, imaginative charm. In fact, not solving a puzzle is almost as much fun as solving it, because the animation, no matter what you do, is always a pleasure to watch. Add a funky, bluesy musical score to the mix, and you



wind up with a sure-fire entertaining package for the whole family. See the *Adventure* section in this issue for a full review.

\$54.95, DreamWorks Interactive, (310) 234-7000

#5: Toonstruck



Virgin's *Toonstruck*, which seems to have been in development forever, is an edgy comic adventure in the grandest tradition of LucasArts games like *Sam and Max Hit the Road* and *Day of the Tentacle*. Those are lofty comparisons, to be sure, and if

Toonstruck isn't quite in that class, it is in fact a memorably goofy experience, loaded with genuine out-loud laughs and fine state-of-the-art animation.

Christopher Lloyd (a human cartoon if there ever was one) stars as Drew Blanc, animator of the scieringly sweet Saturday morning cartoon series "The Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun Show," who finds himself transported to a cartoon world in desperate need of his help. Along with Christopher Lloyd, *Toonstruck* boasts an all-star lineup of comic voice talent, including Dan Castellaneta (the voice of Homer Simpson), Tim Curry, David Ogden Stiers and Dom DeLuise. Though it may sound and look at times like a kid's game, it most definitely is not—something you'll figure out when you see the sheep dressed in dominatrix leather.

\$59.95, Virgin Interactive Entertainment, (714) 833-8710, www.vic.com

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#6: Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love for Sail

When we first learned that the title of this game had been changed from "Yank Hers Away" to "Love for Sail," we were concerned that maybe Al Lowe had decided to tone down the now 10-year old Larry franchise after all these years, so as not to offend. Hey, it could happen. People mellow. But no, not to worry. Larry Larfar is back in all his lascivious splendor, guaranteed to offend all the usual parties in his endless, pathetic quest for female companionship.



This year's model finds Larry on a luxury cruise, hoping to, uh, set sail with

the beautiful Captain Thygh. Others on-board for Larry to pine over include such characters as the mom-and-daughter country-western duo The Juggs, first names Wytoricha and Nalini. Obviously, this is not a game for everyone, but if you like your adventure games seasoned with bawdy humor, LLL is the classiest lustiest act around, with a proven track record, and the puzzles in these games are always just as challenging as they are amusing. Just keep it away from children and Those Who Are Not Easily Amused.

\$49.95, Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-5862, www.sierra.com

#7: Titanic: Adventure Out of Time

The most famous luxury liner in history is going down again, and this time you're going with it. *Titanic*, developed by Cyberflix, boasts one of the best plots on this list. You are a British secret agent aboard the doomed ship, and you've been assigned to retrieve a priceless book that's been stolen by a German spy, and that is to be exchanged for British naval secrets. The game plays like a standard adventure game at first, as you explore the ship and talk to passengers. Once the ship hits the iceberg, however, *Titanic* really picks up steam, as it shifts into a real-time mode in which you have exactly 2 1/2 hours—the time it took the real ship to sink—to finish your mission.

GTE has been hyping the accurate 3D rendering of the ship, and it is indeed quite beautiful. Many gamers will probably be content to wander around the ship and gaze at the spectacular recreations. But those who just want a good game should be quite satisfied, too.

STBA, GTE Entertainment, (619) 431-8891, www.im.gte.com



#8: Circle of Blood

This animated adventure game from Virgin Interactive Entertainment doesn't break any new ground, but it's a solid, traditional adventure game à la *Sanctuary Woods*. *The Blood of Master Lu* that should provide many hours of entertainment for adventure game fans. The story takes you to Paris in the role of American George Stobart, who witnesses a bomb blast at a cafe and finds himself plunged into a mystery involving a medieval manuscript created by the Knights of Templar, a notorious military and religious order founded in Jerusalem during the Crusades. As George investigates the mystery of the Knights of Templar, he begins to uncover a plot to take over the world by a sinister group of mages.

Circle of Blood's plot is quite good, and the puzzles are, if not



wholly original, at least cleverly constructed and fun, but when the game really stands out is in the animation. COB was designed by artists formerly with Don Bluth

Studios, and their talent is evident in every beautifully detailed scene. Thankfully, the game also maintains a nice sense of humor, including ample cheap puns of the French. *C'est bien, ça.*

\$49.95 Virgin Interactive Entertainment (714) 833-8710, www.vie.com

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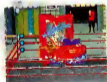


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Virtual Pool from MacPlay lets all the angles and shots of the real game—and then some. Features 4 great pool games, full-on-arcade library, realistic physics and geometry, easy multiplayer modes, mobile 3-D perspective and graphics plus a virtual jobber.



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You Don't Know Jack: Volume 2, is the hilarious sequel to the original award-winning game. This Jack costs complete with 600+ all-new questions, new question types, celebrity guest appearances, new features and more from Berkeley Systems.



In Zork Nemesis, you're beckoned to the Forbidden Lands, a cursed world occupied only by the tortured spirits trapped there. Travel through 5 mind-bending worlds to discover the ancient secret of alchemy that will free the trapped souls from evil's grip. From Activision.



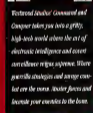
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MacPlay's Terminal Velocity offers fast 3-D intense-rugged graphics, fast 360-degree flight movement and 7 weapons of extraordinary destruction as you fight your way through 5 unique planets with an awesome array of air-to-air and air-to-ground combat action.



The best CD-ROM game of 1994 is—Monty Python and the Quest for the Holy Grail from 7th Level, Inc. It will take you on a romp through King Arthur's England, answering clues, solving puzzles and playing wacky-some games like "Dare the Witch" and "Spank the Virgin."



Task Commander by Eidos Interactive slices you into the cockpit of an M1 Abrams tank as you test your split-second decision skills against enemy tanks in over 25 fully featured missions. Destroy T-72, Leopard and Challenger tanks with over 7 weapons.



With its incredibly realistic flight models, 3-D photo-realistic landscapes and the use of real-world physics, Flight Unlimited re-creates the most accurate simulation of aerobically flying ever experienced on the Macintosh. For best results, play before lunch.



Orbit Systems' Wing Commander IV is one of the latest space combat games for the Mac. Take on the role of Colonel Blake played by Mark Rolston in breathtaking space battles and heart-pounding drama, as you fight your way through the most spectacular Wing Commander yet.



Get ready for the biggest adrenaline rush of the holiday season. We're talking new games for the Mac. We're also talking sweaty palms. Heart-pounding exhilaration. Stomach-in-the-throat thrills—the works. And here's the best part with thousands of titles to choose from, you may never come down from that gaming high. Piqued your interest? Good.

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So now you're probably wondering how to get your twitching fingers on these games. Just visit stores like CompUSA, Staples, Micro Center and Fry's Electronics. Or flip through any Mac mail-order catalogs. Or hop on the Net. But no matter where you go to find them, remember to look for the smiling Mac OS logo. (All great software wears this face.) If you're ready to take your adrenal glands on the ultimate ride, visit www.macsoftware.apple.com. And learn more about games for your Macintosh® and how to find them. Of course, if you want to, you can always use a phone: call 800-500-4862.

#9: Lighthouse

This game shipped on the day we submitted this article, and the online debate was raging already: Is it or isn't it a Myst clone? Our definitive, professional answer (because that's what we're here for) is this: Well, in way, yeah, sort of. One thing it has over Myst, right from the start, is a discernible story line to set you in the right direction. You are a writer renting a beachfront property on the Oregon coast, and are suddenly summoned by the physicist who lives in the lighthouse nearby to babysit his baby daughter while he attends to an emergency. When you arrive, the man is gone, and you see the baby being taken from her crib by some kind of alien creature. You need to follow this creature through a portal to another world and try to save the day.



It's when you get to the other world that things get rather Myst-like, as you must deal with a plethora of gadget-heavy puzzles that, depending on your take on these things, will either delight you in their ingenuity or drive you freakin' bananas. Those waiting for Myst II will be right at home in Lighthouse:

\$49.95, Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-9800, www.sierra.com

More Holiday Adventures

We're still psyched for CALLAHAN'S CROSSBOW SALOON, based on the great Spider Robinson's short stories, but the last word we received from Legend Entertainment was that it looked like it was being bumped to an early '97 release. Another game that adventurers will be thrilled to see is LucasArts' Curse of Monkey Island, third in the series of their classic comic adventures. Speaking of comedy, Psychosis is set to release Discworld 2, a follow-up to Terry Pratchett's goofy fantasy adventure, once again featuring the voice work of Eric Idle. Philips Media has a spectacular-looking 3D animated adventure on the way called Down in the Dukers, which relates the misadventures of a group of beleaguered, miniature aliens who have crash-landed on Earth in a rubbish-filled dump.

On the more serious side of things, Sierra is set to release its latest Nightfall, Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle of Flesh, which is not a sequel to the first title, but instead relates an entirely new story. Finally, Cyberdreams is following I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream, CGW's adventure game of the year last year, with a black-and-white (I) defective story called Now. Can a black-and-white game survive amidst all this flashy competition? Stay tuned.

#10: RAMA



For science-fiction fans, the best bet for this holiday season is Sierra's RAMA, based on the classic sci-fi series of books written by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee. The game takes its main story from RAMA II, in which a group of astronauts 200 years in the future is sent to rendezvous with and explore a large alien spaceship. When the mission leader dies mysteriously you are sent in as a replacement, and you soon find yourself absorbed in the mysteries of the ship.

Fans of the series should be heartened to know that Gentry Lee had active, direct input into the game, all the way down to the design of the puzzles, so there's no reason to fear that this will be another mangling of a popular science-fiction title, à la last year's The Martian Chronicles. Arthur C. Clarke himself appears in the game's prologue and finale and whenever you die, and he's also the subject of interviews in a separate CD-ROM.

\$59.95, Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-9800, www.sierra.com

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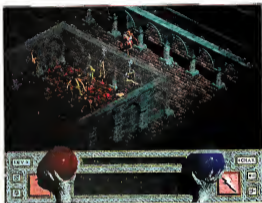


ROLE-PLAYING

by Johnny L. "Clus" Wilson

Role-playing, like the old man in the Monty Python film, is not quite dead. It's feeling much better, thank you. Still, there is quite a distance to go before role-playing becomes a healthy genre again. Apparently, computer role-playing games simply became too large, too repetitious and too detailed for many computer gamers. So, they moved on to other kinds of games. Fortunately, the next wave of role-playing games may serve to bring some of those prodigal gamers back to their first love. With new 3D looks to pull you in, incredible soundtracks to set the mood, and improved interfaces and designs to keep you in the digital dungeon, things are definitely looking up for role-players during this holiday season.

#1: Diablo



With *Diablo*, Blizzard has brought together all the elements of an epic. Set in a dark, gothic world, *Diablo* lets you play the role of a Warrior, Rogue or Sorcerer. There are no fancy hybrid character classes and no exotic backgrounds. You play a traveling hero or heroine who returns to his/her hometown to discover that some Dark Riders, apparently led by an archvillain named "The Butcher," have slaughtered many of the townsfolk, destroyed some of the houses and buildings, and desecrated the church on the outskirts of town. You piece together the remnants of the story by listening to the tavern owner and a dying townsman via audio clips. The voice acting isn't superb, but it is better than the acting in many full-motion video games. However, the music (sometimes an ominous chant, other times evocative of forest and town) and sound effects (screaches, bones crunching, sword clashes and shield parries), are absolutely superb for setting the mood.

Diablo's graphics are outstanding. Whether you're looking at the smoothly animated 3D characters, the flickering light sources and shadowing when your hero is in the dungeon, or the details in the building interiors, the look is fantastic. In fact, for a while we thought *Diablo* was just a pretty remake of *Rogue* or *NetHack*. Trust us when we say it isn't. As in the best role-playing games, dungeon items are restricted by weight, magic skill or character class; magical artifacts are classified mundane, magic or unique; and there are more than 30 different spells for heroes to use in the course of play.

Better yet, *Diablo* is replayable. The game is never the same, even for software players, but the addition of one other human player (modem-to-modem) or three additional players (LAN or Internet) will add a large number of permutations. Further, with Blizzard's provision of free access to opponents on the Internet via their Battlenet server, there is sure to be a critical mass of fresh opponents in cyberspace whenever you're ready to pick up a new game.

Diablo may not have enough complexity for some hard-core role-players, but it is certainly going to have a large following among those who enjoy a lot of hack and slash as part of their healthy gaming diet.

\$50.00, Blizzard Entertainment, (800) 953-SNOW, www.blizzard.com.

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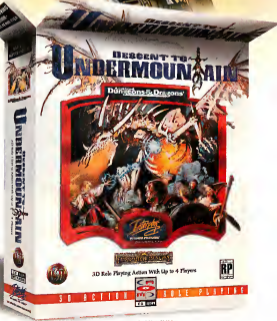
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#2: The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall



No, this isn't a scrap from last year's Holiday Buying Guide: **THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL** is finally in the stores. All of you who like really big role-playing games should enjoy this one. There's a long, challenging central quest and dozens upon dozens of miniquests randomly generated on the fly. The first-person 3D graphics really add to the sense of being in a strange world, particularly when you're climbing up staircases and leaping from one balcony to another. Combat is first-person, and it requires a bit of mouse analog movement to determine when weapon thrusts, lunges and slashes take place. The special effects for casting spells add to combat satisfaction, as well. Particularly impressive are the ability to join guilds and perform quests to benefit your new brotherhood or sisterhood, the ability to be tutored (with some randomness) in your skills, and the fact that it touches on some adult themes without being offensive. Also nice is the way skills and attributes are factored into the gameplay. But don't take our word for it. See what Scorpio has to say about it in this month's Role-Playing section.

\$79.99, Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-8700, www.bethsoft.com.

#3: Shadows Over Riva

Set in the universe of the successful German role-playing hit *The Black Eye*, the **REALMS OF ARKANA** series of computer role-playing games features a first-person 3D view window with interface controls in a panel below this view, turn-based combat decisions as in X-COM, and a detailed RPG system of skills, spells, and artifacts taken from the pen-and-paper game. The game series also features a fascinating cultural background that you can sample in the two previous games, *REALMS OF ARKANA* and *SAR TARKI*, or in two current paperbacks (*Realms of Arkana: The Charlatan* and *Realms of Arkana: The Lioness*, both currently published by Prima Publishing's Proteus series at \$5.99 each). Non-combat encounters are handled via close-up character profiles and conversation lists where you can choose from a range of general conversational gambits or specific lines of inquiry. Combat encounters are plentiful and challenging. 3D animations set up the story and advance the quest at various points. Ideal for traditional, hardcore role-players, **SHADOWS OVER RIVA** is the third installment in the series, and it looks richer and better than ever.



\$59.95, Sirtech Software, (800) 447-1230, www.sir-tech.com

#4: Betrayal at Antara



The second in Sierra's **BETRAYAL** series (the first was **BETRAYAL AT KAZDOR**, based on the works of Raymond E. Feist), **ANTARA** attempts to recapture some of the magic of the first game with its first-person look, emphasis on character perspectives, skill-based development, and 3D environment. Here, though, the action takes place in an entirely different universe. **ANTARA**'s designers have created new creatures, cultures and environments to encounter that are unlike

the Tolkienesque creatures in most fantasy games. Plus, the plot advances via a series of Machiavellian webs of political intrigue and hidden agendas.

The game offers a full-screen view window. The character/inventory interface is normally hidden, rising up from the bottom of the screen when you move your cursor to there and invoke it. The movement interface simply uses compass angles for precision. As a result, you never feel like the interface is too obtrusive in this game.

Those worried that **BETRAYAL AT ANTARA** will be a cheap rip-off of its predecessor needn't be concerned. **ANTARA** should stand on its own as a fresh approach to fantasy role-playing—a game where exploration, surprise and discovery are just as exhilarating as combat.

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

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CLASSICS & PUZZLES

by Jerry The Puzzle, BF Colman

Ever since Tetris lowered global productivity in ways games like Quake can only dream of, hundreds of competitors have lined up like lemmings to repeat that success. Similarly, Monopoly showed the industry that even dusty parlor games, when brought to the computer in style, could sell a lot of units. Other classic games such as chess and mahjongg hit the market with their best versions ever, complete with '90s graphic glitz and cozy multimedia to draw newcomers and jaded veterans alike. A far cry from the tepid conversions of yesteryear, this holiday season brings internet play, better AI help, tougher computer opponents and a welcome sense of irreverence to both old and new classics. —25 favorites.

CLASSICS & PUZZLES

#1: Risk!

As a test of skill, Risk can't boast the rich history and depth of chess, the elegant fluidity of rummy and hearts, or the exquisite tension of poker. On the other hand, it's easily learned, boasts as many home-brewed variations as Monopoly, and plays more briskly than many other classic games.

Now Hasbro Interactive has outfitted the old warhorse in shiny new armor, similar to the grand treatment that Monopoly received last year. Digitized sounds bring the beat of horses' hooves and the roar of cannon fire. The lame pestle terraines have been transformed into geographic vistas unrecognizable to any Risk addict: the gorgeous 3D terrain includes mountain ranges, capital cities, rivers, jagged coastlines, even fortifications. Cavalry charges over rolling hills, while infantry shoots from the cover of forests. Ships must fight for control of the seas, so that they may carry invasion forces across vast oceans.

But while the new animation sequences and graphics liven up combat, they don't significantly



change the game. Classic Risk! is essentially the board game favorite, with the rules and feel intact—right down to the dice rolling on your screen. Ultimate Risk (included on the same CD) offers a new map based on the era of Napoleon, tougher computer opponents, and elements integrated from Casual Risk! to give a little more strategic depth. The AI is improved over previous computer versions, but don't kid yourself with the marketing claims of "realistic battle action." The idea here is to keep it simple and addictive.

Both Classic and Ultimate Risk! feature Internet-capable play for up to six world conquerors. Although the game will require the CD-ROM to play, at press time Hasbro planned to put two CDs in each copy of the game—a nice touch to aid multiplayer gaming.

Anyone who has fond memories of whiffing the night away shoving armies into Madagascar, ferociously defending Kamchatka, or tossing opponents out of some unpronounceable region of the world should find their nights once again rendered sleepless by this spiced conversion of the classic board game.

\$39.99, Hasbro Interactive, (508) 921-3700, www.hasbro.com.

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#2: You Don't Know Jack Volume 2 You Don't Know Jack Sports



When baking sequeks, start with high quality, interesting trivia questions. Add salt of criticism, as much as you can handle, dearie. Fold in spicy commentary—remember, timing is important—until ribald chuckles bubble to the surface. Next, you'll want a very nice multimedial glaze—lots of slick interface and play screens—but make sure that you don't lose the bite or the character of the

dish. Be careful, too, around the edges of the wicked humor—oh, dear, I've cut myself! I suppose it's time to relax and watch one of these delightfully silly Num Nums commercials. Perhaps for my next party I'll prepare the You Don't Know Jack Sports dish. An exquisite compilation to either squab or a fine merlot at CGW get-togethers, it makes a nice balm for turf toe as well—my Berkeley mother's old remedy, you know. **\$29.99 each, Berkeley Systems, (510) 540-5535, www.berksys.com**



#3: Chessmaster 5000

Those looking for a great chess challenge can find it here, versus one of the strongest computer opponents around. But what sets CM5000 apart is the number and variety of computer opponents, many based on Grandmasters from Paul Morphy in the 1800s to today's Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov. When you add in the excellent chess database of openings, tournament settings, chess problems and puzzles, time controls, and even Internet play, CM5000 is truly the best mainstream chess program yet created. **\$39.95, Mind Garden, (408) 233-0888, www.mindgarden.com**

#4: Smart Games Challenge #1

Most puzzle games are rehashes of limpid brain teasers and Tetris clones. *Smart Games* breaks out of this mold with some of the freshest puzzles we've seen in years. Even old standbys like cryptograms and sliding-tile puzzles get more challenging the farther you go into the mix, with the welcome option of toggling the difficulty level. To conquer this one, you'll need visual acuity, a nimble vocabulary, and some fast reflexes from time to time. A real winner.

\$39.95, Smart Games, (888) 427-2400, www.smartgames.com



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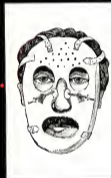
Lives are hanging in the balance, so rush to your local software dealer. Code Blue. Or visit www.pc.ibm.com/multimedia.



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#5: Battleship

From the old pen-and-paper game, to the molded gray plastic submarines of the '60s, to travel and talking Battleship sets, there's hardly a kid that hasn't been exposed to this search-and-destroy game. But this new version gives "Electronic Battleship" a whole new meaning. First off, it's in real-time, which ups the excitement level about a hundred-fold. As you move your fleet from grid to grid, you actually have to plan your radar/sonar searches while avoiding cruise missiles from the enemy. Loud, boisterous and a lot more exciting than you ever thought the old favorite could be, it could be this year's sleeper for quick and dirty Internet play.

\$39.99, Hasbro Interactive, (508) 921-3700, www.hasbro.com



Also Making Their Move

Every year brings a new crop of chess games, and the slickest casting move this season seems to be Power Chess from Sierra. The designer seems to know his Kasparov from his Karpov, and the tutorial's are based on some of the greatest games in chess history. The opponent uses neural networking and other methods to learn from your play. While it seems to improve as you do, it remains to be seen if this lighter touch will win new chess converts. Extreme Chess from Davidson has less kitz but a mecher AI—reputedly the toughest in Europe. Hasbro's ambitious schedule should also bring Quix, Xorax and Sokrates to market by Christmas, and possibly Terra, a usurp as well. Finally, if you missed our CG Choice pick for last month, here's King Mah-Jongg for Windows: improves what was already the most authentic and challenging tile-based game on the market.

We continued from page 140

#5: Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Core Rules Set

Although not a "game" in itself, this product greatly facilitates gaming of the original role-playing ilk. If you're skeptical, you're not alone. This project has been tried before in modular DM assistant programs (both licensed and unauthorized) that have only had limited success. In the past, the assistant programs didn't take into sufficient account the variety of ways in which gamers approach the system. From the start, the Core Rules Set takes this into consideration. In generating a character, you don't simply let the computer roll the dice, you have a selection of seven different ways to get the best character. When selecting character class, you don't have to cross-reference all the restrictions, you're given a list of choices. In chasing info through the monster manual, you don't have to use their "Help" menu, but you can perform a simple "Find" search and get exactly the data you want (instead of the traditional "Guess the Topic" of most Windows programs). There is also a map maker, treasure generator (using Table 84), encounter generator and NPC generator to make your DMing life easier.

\$60.00, TSR, (414) 248-3825, <http://mgn.com/Gaming/ADND/CD-ROM-demo>.



On A Role

Other possible choices for an RPGer's holiday stocking include Meridian 59, a first-person fantasy role-playing game where the other characters you meet are played by real people. Conversation or combat, guild status or loner or legend? It's your choice. \$40.00, 3DO, (800) 336-3566, www.3DO.com. Also worth consideration is Wearow Gold, an update of Crusaders of the Dark Summit with all of the latest graphic and interface bells and whistles thrown in. \$59.95, Sirtech Software, (800) 447-1230, www.sirtech.com.



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SIMULATIONS

by Denny "The Flighty Elf" Atkin and Gordon "The Rubber-burning Elf" Goble

Each year's holiday crop of simulations is that much closer to reality than the year past. For the most part, today's flight sims fly more like the real thing, look more like the real thing, and send you on more realistic missions. Racing sims have added more realism in both handling and graphics, but at the same time design improvements have made them more accessible to beginning drivers. Overall, it appears designers are beginning to remove the intimidation factor from simulations without dumbing them down.

The biggest advance in many of this year's flight sims is the dynamic campaign environments. Instead of launching you on a series of scripted missions, these games drop you into the middle of an entire simulated war, with dozens of flights all doing their own thing.

What's missing from this holiday gift list? Propellers! Developers have all but ignored WWI and Korea recently. With one notable exception, all the flight sims have concentrated on modern jets and helicopters. The future for historical sims looks bright, though, and hopefully next year Santa's elves will have plenty of goodies for those who prefer their combat without the high-tech gadgetry.



#1: Flying Corps

Empire has executed a marvelous sneak attack on gamers with *Flying Corps*. Simmers familiar with earlier Rowan efforts will be pleased to find the arcade-like flight models, confusing view systems, and quirky video and sound drivers of the developer's previous products are nowhere to be found here. The designers of *Flying Corps* have exhaustively researched the handling qualities and combat environments of World War I aircraft, poring over hundreds of books and historical documents and interviewing pilots who've flown restored aircraft from the Great War.

The result is a simulation that soars in both graphics and flight modeling. Torque, gyroscopic effects from rotary engines, stalls, spins, and even wind effects are all there. Enemy artificial intelligence specs are also impressive—computer pilots fly specific planes in the manner their real-life counterparts did. For instance, pilots of the slow Pfalz will generally try to avoid the fight unless they have an altitude advantage and can make a dive-and-run attack. Newbie sim pilots can tone down the AI and turn off various aspects of the flight model realism, making *Flying Corps* a good gift idea for trainees and aces alike.

Along with the typical instant-action modes for those days you just want to take off and start shooting, the game also features four campaigns. Set near the end of the war, in 1917-18, these campaigns put you in the

cockpits of famous aces, or in the aircraft of those who faced them. You'll fly as Lothar von Richthofen, attempting to break the kill record set by your brother Manfred (better known as the Red Baron) while he's on leave from his squadron. Can you face the onslaught of Albert Ball and the 56th Royal Flying Corps and become Germany's top ace? Another campaign lets you fly as Eddie Rickenbacker, America's top ace. Most intriguing is the dynamic campaign set at the Battle of Cambrai, where you'll fly over history's first major tank offensive.

This simulation is a big technological leap for the Empire/Rowan team. The new graphics engine sports beautifully texture-mapped aircraft (whose color schemes can be customized when you reach sufficient rank) complete with scrollable virtual cockpits. The terrain is built from actual WW I aerial photography and is so detailed that you'll be able to use period maps to navigate to your target by following the proper rivers and roads.

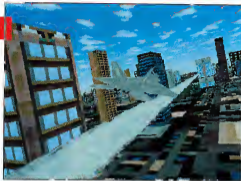
The graphics engine is completely new, and it takes full advantage of the power of this year's computers—and next year's as well. Empire says the standard 640x480 display can be bumped all the way up to 1600x1200 pixels if your display card, monitor and processor can handle it. Both Van Van 95 and DCS versions are included on the CD, making this the perfect gift for any sim fan.

\$54.95. Empire, (800) 216-9706, www.empire-us.com

#2: Jetfighter III

Originally a candidate for last year's gift list, this F-22 simulator should finally hit shelves in plenty of time for Santa's last shopping run. You'll fly in fictional campaigns set in future Cuba and Chile, where you'll fly carrier-based F-22s (hey, it's fiction) and F/A-18 Hornets in support of American interests. The jagged terrain of Chile, accurately recreated using satellite data and warp-free texture maps, should make for spectacular missions. The campaign is scripted, but it features a wide variety of possible branches, depending on mission outcomes. This promises more interesting missions than are possible with random generators.

Since our last look at the game, a number of new features have been added to the already impressive graphics engine, including software-based MIP mapping to eliminate aliasing, as well as real-time, light-sourced terrain shadowing (a feature not found in competing F-22 sims). Mission sources say they have addressed early concerns about flight modeling and weapons loads, and the company aims to



accurately model the F-22 and its systems.

With over five million miles of accurate terrain to fly around, Jetfighter III promises plenty of action. (For the full scoop, check out preview coverage in the December, 1995, and September, 1996, issues.)

STBA, Mission Studios (distributed by Interplay), (800) INTERPLAY, www.missionstudios.com

#3: Grand Prix II

Grand Prix II is the strongest PC racing title to date. You'll find 16 Formula 1 tracks that'll take you from the storied straights of Hockenheim to the maze-like confines of Monaco, from gear-crazy Interlagos to a Japanese dou-

ble. Each track is an exacting replica of its real-life counterpart.

Cars are adorned with logos and detailed color schemes. They spark when they ground out, expel unburned fuel as bursts of flame, and kick up tire smoke when the wheels spin. GP

II's cockpit lets you quickly glance at suggested gears for upcoming turns, driver's aids enabled, your current position and lap, car damage and more.

Driving a GP II car is fun, exciting, and easy to learn. With enough opponent strength variance, driving aids, and car set-up options to keep everyone from rookie to sim veteran happy, the program manages to provide accessibility to the drivers still working on their learner's permit.

They say good things come to those who wait. Grand Prix II is a fitting sequel to the impressive World Circuit, one that was definitely worth the wait.

**\$55, MicroProse,
(510) 522-1164,
www.microprose.com**



#4: Hind

The sequel to last year's *Apache*, *Hind* isn't the same old sim with a different helicopter. Although the look is similar—it uses an improved version of *Apache*'s graphics engine—gameplay is different enough to give this sim an identity of its own.

The Russian *Hind* helicopter is a generation older than the *Apache*, and its lack of advanced systems makes gameplay far more challenging. It doesn't possess all the high-tech targeting systems found in the *Apache*, and in the air it handles more like a tank than the *Apache*'s sportscar-like nimbleness. The "Silicon WSO," a computer-controlled weapons systems officer, can make up for some of this by targeting enemies for you; those seeking the ultimate challenge can turn him off.

Hind adds an unprecedented human element to sim combat. Not only will you drop off or rescue troop formations, but you'll also encounter large groups of enemies on the ground. It's one thing to blow away a faceless tank, quite another to take aim at a group of sol-



diers running for their lives.

With three campaigns (Korea, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan), arcade and sim modes, and support for up to 16 players in multiplayer mode, *Hind* should be near the top of any helicopter fan's holiday gift list. **\$49.95, Interactive Magic, (800) 789-1534, www.imagicgames.com**

#5: AH-64D Longbow



Another top choice for helicopter fans, *AH-64D Longbow* comes from the team led by Andy Hoffis, creator of such classics as *F-19 Stealth Fighter* and *F-15 Strike Eagle II and III*. This simulation of the U.S. Army's premier attack helicopter is one of the rare sims (that's accessible to beginners [thanks to a top-notch interactive tutorial], yet accurate enough to please the most hard-core sim experts.

Campaign missions are set in the Baltics, with historical missions from Operation Just Cause (Panama) and Operation Desert Storm included as well. The hilly terrain looks terrific, and the accurate instrumentation will help you stay alive as you fly nap-of-the-earth attacks against enemy ground units.

If you already own *Longbow*, you'll want to add the *Flash Point Korea* expansion disc, which adds over 140 new missions, updated avionics, and new terrain. It also lets you fly from the copilot/gunner position, a feature missing in the original game. Also in the works is a version for Windows 95, as well as multiplayer support.

\$54.95, Jane's Origin, (800) 245-4535, www.ea.com/janes





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#6: NASCAR Racing 2

NASCAR Racing 2, from Sierra's Papyrus division, takes an already superb racing game and makes it even better. This game has the potential to run the non-tobacco economy of North Carolina, as NASCAR fans might just sit glued to their computers all weekend instead of heading to the raceway.

The sim sports a number of improvements designed to make it more accessible, including a single-screen car setup routine. The graphics engine has also been souped up. Although the original NASCAR supported hi-res graphics, this tuned-up version has a more sophisticated appearance that sports clouds, more realistic pavement, and smoother updates. NASCAR 2 looks great in SVGA and is stunning in its 3D graphics board versions.

Car handling has improved, which will be good news to casual racers intimidated by the quirky sensitivity of its prequel. There's less wobble, and curbing (the bit of the car when cornering) should help keep your tires glued to the pavement. Beginners can use steering assistance or an arcade mode if they want to dive in and start

racing and still have a chance to place. Helpful voiceovers from your crew chief help keep you apprised of what's going on around you.

\$54.95, Sierra, (206) 649-9806, www.sierra.com



#8: Back To Baghdad

BACK TO BAGHDAD is the sim of choice for the jaded, experienced PC fighter pilot. While it doesn't have many of the gameplay-related bells and whistles of many of its competitors, it is by far the most complete, authentic simulation of the environs of a fighter jet cockpit yet produced.

Its flight model is state of the art, matching realistic performance envelopes under a variety of weight and drag config-



#7: US Navy Fighters '97

It's the series that just wouldn't go away. After the original US Navy Fighters, Marine Fighters, USNF Gold, Aviatec Tactical Fighters, and NATO Fighters, Jane's and EA are closing out the series with USNF '97. This Windows 95 game includes all the aircraft and missions from the original USNF and Marine Fighters, plus a new 25-mission campaign set in Vietnam.

New flyable planes added for the Vietnam era include the F-4B and F-4J Phantom IIs, the F-8J Crusader, the A-7A model of the Corsair II, and the MIG-17 and MIG-21. The USNF missions feature many of the improvements added to later games in the series, including better terrain and aircraft graphics, handling tweaks and interface improvements. You'll also find much more intense Iak and SAM action.

Also retrofitted is the multiplayer capability introduced in ATF, supporting network, modem, and full-modem connections. Finally, the reference section has been fleshed out with data from Jane's All the World's Aircraft, as well as a new series of aircraft videos.

\$54.95, Jane's/Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4535, www.ea.com/james



urations. The sim boasts a highly detailed simulation of the F-16's avionics systems: there are ten HUD modes and nine air-to-air and air-to-ground radar modes to challenge even experienced simmers.

The game features a variety of individual missions set in a fictional (at least at press time) second Persian Gulf war. The topology is generated from reams of geographical data for a large region around Baghdad, so the lay of the land is totally accurate. The detail looks great at low altitude—if you have a very fast computer (P133+) with loads (32MB) of memory. This is a great gift for the very experienced sim pilot, but be warned that you'll want to wrap it with a detailed book on operating a real F-16, as the included documentation is rather skimpy.

\$99.95, Military Simulations, (360) 254-2000, www.military-sim.com

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Circle Reader Service #285

#9: Super EF2000

EF2000, our number one sim recommendation last Christmas, is back on the list this year in its latest incarnation, Super EF2000. This updated release is designed for Windows 95 and sports dozens of improvements over the original. The dynamic campaign in this version is fully fleshed out, and it now includes a mission editor that lets you plan your own stories.

Also new is a quick mission creator that lets you set up quick scrambles against any of the aircraft modeled in the game. In addition to network play, Super EF2000 now offers modem support. Finally, there's full online help for the sim a keypress away.



If you're a DOS diehard, the TacCow add-on package for EF2000 adds the same improvements to the original game, with the sole exception of online help.

If you a 3D video card with the 3dfx Voodoo chipset, keep your eyes peeled for the special Voodoo version of the game—with filtered terrain that shows no blockiness or prettiness, it looks spectacular.

\$54.95, @Ocean/010, (408) 289-1200, www.did.com

Also On Approach

The pattern of sims getting ready to land on store shelves for the holidays is awfully crowded. NovaLogic will be releasing *COMANCHE 3* and *Aerobore F18 2*, promising to add more sim elements to these action-based chopper and tank games. The new Voxal Space 2 graphics engine shared by these sims, looks sensational.

If you're looking for a more serious tank sim, Interactive Magic's *M1A2 Abrams* should fit the bill. The company should also have *An Warfare II*, a stand-alone version of the popular online *WW II* air combat sim, on shelves by the time you read this.

Finally, look for a couple of popular Mac sims to appear in Win 95 versions soon. Graphic Simulations' *F1A-18 Hornet* should be on shelves now, and the Win 95 version of Parsoff's *A-10 Cuda!* will be available soon from Activision.



#10: F-22 Lightning II

NovaLogic's first shot in the fixed-wing sim melee is targeted squarely at the action sim fan. But don't dismiss it, even if your tastes tend towards hard-core simulations. *F-22 Lightning II* is unmatched in the graphics and sound departments, and it's a great multiplayer sim when you're getting

non-flying friends involved in a melee.

If you're looking for a good introductory sim to hook your friends on air combat, this is the gift to give. Although *F-22* includes a functional set of instruments, all targeting, navigation, and weapons info can be accessed from the simplified heads-up display. Combined with a relatively simple set of command keys, this makes *F-22* far less intimidating to new pilots than, say, *BACK TO BACHAO*.

What *F-22* lacks in complexity it makes up for in flash and dazzle. The terrain and aircraft graphics are unrivaled by any sim that doesn't require a 3D card, and are further enhanced by Dolby stereo sound. The game is written entirely in Assembly language, so frame rates are good even on the slowest Pentiums.

Along with single missions, four campaigns, and a custom mission builder, *F-22* features both cooperative and combative network and modem play.

\$44.95, NovaLogic, (800) 856-1322, www.novalogic.com

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SPACE SIMS

by Thierry "The Spacey Elf" Nguyen

The past year hasn't been a stellar one for space sims, but it looks like the Christmas season will bring some new stars. The themes this holiday season are multiplayer and money, with mercenary-style capitalism and the ability to battle live human opponents via modern or networked features *du jour*.

Add to that the fact that most of these space sims place us in familiar territory (in the cockpit of a giant robot, or zooming about the *Star Wars* or *Wing Commander* universes), sport beautiful graphics, and offer a broad range of complexity to satisfy novices and experts alike, and you've got a great lineup for those cold-as-space winter days. There's not much new thematically here—it's you vs. evil empires in space scooters or big tanks with arms and legs—but the top games here are the classic formulas nearly perfected.

#1: X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

The mission: prepare for an imminent attack on Endor. We'll soften up the Imperial presence in the region by hitting their delivery convoy. Yellow squadron will engage the freighters and transports, Red will escort them. Blue squadron will clear the area of any TIE Fighters. Good luck, and may the Force be with you.

That's the kind of scenario you can relive in LucasArt's *X-Wing* vs. *TIE Fighter*. What separates

them like they were lifted out of the movies? The ships are absolutely gorgeous, showing off fine details such as blast doors and the pipelined body of an Imperial Star Destroyer. But if you admire the pretty graphics too long, the fast-paced combat will literally fly by you, and your opponent will be chalking up another kill.

Single-player missions serve as training for the multiplayer action, and the backdrop for all of these missions will most likely be the famed



ates this mission from the many others just like it in the previous two games? Every flight group in that mission can, and probably will, be human.

LucasArts has made a brilliant move by making the next *Star Wars* space sim a multiplayer experience. Ever since the *Star Wars* films came out 19 years ago, countless fans have dreamed of flying those great ships from the trench and Death Star II scenes. Those dreams came true in the form of *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*. But, as always, people are competitive, and when the AI in both games has been beaten countless times over, LucasArts ups the ante by finally bringing us the multiplayer experience we need.

And if multiplayer isn't enough, how about texture mapping the graphics so that the ships

Battle of Endor.

The actual missions will not only have duels to the death, but also numerous team missions where one side (Empire or Rebellion) attacks the other side. Since there will be massive battles, players who get blasted in the line of duty can kick a computer pilot out of his ship and take over to reenter the fray. These missions will emphasize teamwork and tactical strategy, just like a real battle.

Play options abound in this DOS game, with modem, direct connection, and eight-player LAN support included.

In the end, the graphics, the multi-user play, and, most of all, the myths, will make this game number one on every space-simmer's wish list.

\$54.95, LucasArts, (800) 98-LUCAS, www.lucasarts.com

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closest thing yet to a
fantasy role-player's
dream.

—PC Games A List Award
Game of the Month



THE ELDER SCROLLS



#2: Privateer 2: The Darkening

Take the gritty, futuristic atmosphere of *Blade Runner*, present it in a dark, disturbing and macabre-humorous English style in the vein of *A Clockwork Orange*, throw in a dash of freiform exploration and capitalism from *Star Wars: Privateer*—all while wrapping it in space combat à la the *Wing Commander* series—and you have *PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING*. This game takes you into the seedy, corrupt underbelly of the *Wing Commander* universe.

Will you be a legitimate trader, or a risk-taking smuggler? How about semi-honest mercenary, or outright bloodthirsty pirate? Your choice. Will you work for the CIS secret police or the Kindred, the largest crime syndicate in the galaxy? Perhaps you will work within the thin line that separates both, keeping straight in the middle.

Featuring an engine far more graphically spectacular than that of *Wing Commander IV* (with more detailed ships and impressive light-sourcing), a large expanse of space to explore, and a complex story, *THE DARKENING* looks like a fantastic game. It retains the absolute freedom of the original *PRIVATEER*, and adds a rich plot that is vastly improved over the original. And of course you'll find the ubiquitous full-motion video sequences, rendered with typical Origin aplomb.

\$78A, Origin Systems, (800) 245-4525, www.ora.com



#3: MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

Reviewed in this issue's Simulation section, *MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES* is set to end Activision's reign of BattleTech games with style. The prequel to *MECHWARRIOR 2*, *MERCENARIES* is packed with new enhancements and changes that could make it surpass its predecessor (or successor, depending on how you look at it).

The most visible changes are the texture maps that adorn the many Mechs in *Mercenaries*, as well as the landscapes. More subtle improvements include a particle system, an improved physics model and a better night vision system.

Gameplay-related changes include a non-linear campaign, random mission generator, and the heavy use of resource management. With mercenary capitalism being the theme here, expect everything, from repairs to weapons to customization, to cost money.

Perhaps the best feature in *Mercenaries* is MechNet. The new multiplayer engine, MechNet Improves on NetMech by allowing you to use all Mechs from *Mech2*, *Ghost Bear's Legacy* and *Mercenaries*. It supports the traditional modem and LAN connections, but even more exciting is the built-in support for free play over the Internet. That alone is reason enough to want *Mercenaries*.

MECHWARRIOR 2 was the best Space Sim of the past year (and perhaps best ground-based SF sim of all time), and *Mercenaries* is a fitting sequel that will be remembered as a classic in its own right.

\$45.00, Activision, (310) 473-9200, www.activision.com



#4: Shattered Steel

SHATTERED STEEL, the first effort from developer Bizarre, is a mechanized warfare sim with a style of its own. Players assume the role of a mercenary (sound familiar?) who is sent out in the cockpit of a very large robot (called a Planet Runner, but it's a Mech or Hero to be sure) to check out a routine disturbance, only to stumble onto a deadly alien race bent on conquest.

The main stars of *SHATTERED STEEL* are the graphics and the interface. The aliens have biomechanical constructs, and the beautiful texture maps laid on top of insect-like models convey this combination of flesh and metal. The interface is also quite simple, thus mak-

ing the game accessible to novices.

The fast-paced combat combined with the simple keyboard interface will make *SHATTERED STEEL* a game for players of all skill levels. Also, multiplayer support is built in, so you can blast your friend's Planet Runner when the AI bores you. *SHATTERED STEEL* distinguishes itself from the rest of the giant robot games out there primarily with its fantastic rolling wavelandscapes, which adds a unique "take cover" factor to gameplay.

\$49.95, Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY, www.interplay.com



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#5: Wing Commander IV

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With a retooled engine that allows for better textures and faster load times



during space flight, Origin addressed some of the technical complaints about *WC III*. But the real star of the show isn't the new game engine, it's the plot.

The plot is darker than its predecessor, and it's filled with betrayals and moral dilemmas. A better sense of direction and cinematography in the filming makes *Wing Commander IV* one of the most cinematic games yet.

And what great action! With better graphics, good AI, cleaner sound and impressive special effects, the combat will surely satisfy any space sim fan.

\$49.95, Origin Systems, (800) 245-4525, www.ca.com



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Other Shining Stars

BATTLECRUISER 3000:AD finally shipped at press time. Given the game's storied history and repeated delays, the program will be one of the most unexpected gifts in your favorite space sim fan's stocking. (But beware of space bugs—see this month's story in "READ.ME"). Other noteworthy space sims on the scanners include *Wing Commander: Kilrathi Saga*, which includes episodes I through III of the series retooled for Win95—the biggest enhancement being the ability to actually play *WC I* and II on a Pentium. There is also *The 10th Planet*, a joint effort by Bethesda and Centropolis Entertainment (special effects whizzes for *Independence Day* and *Starquake*), which Bethesda is pushing as their epic space sim. Unfortunately, that won't be out until early next year.

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SPORTS

by Jeff "The Sporty Elf" Green

Ah, winter! For sports fans, this is the greatest time of the year, not necessarily because of the sports themselves, but because of the cruddy weather outside, which gives us the best imaginable excuse to park the ol' kiester on the sofa, grab a truckload of chips and flip on a game or three while feeling no guilt whatsoever over neglected responsibilities.

It's also a good time to fire up the PC and give your favorite sports games a go (since actual physical activity would be out of the question in this weather). The great news is that we're right in the midst of a real renaissance in sports games, with better-looking and better-playing games than ever before. Whether it's football, baseball, basketball, hockey or golf you love, there's a game out there to feed your jones. But enough of our yakkng. Let's take a look at this holiday's all-star team.

#1: NHL Hockey 97

Welcome to the next generation of PC sports games. EA Sports has long ruled the roost of PC action sports games, and NHL Hockey 97 represents a new pinnacle of achievement, upping the ante not just for hockey games but for all action sports games in general. Even if you think you don't like hockey, you'll want to check this one out, just to see how it looks. Because once you see the motion-captured 30 polygonal players skating around on the ice in this game, you'll never want to go back to a 2D game again.

As with the previous version, NHL 97 offers exhibition, season and playoff games in three levels of difficulty. All 26 NHL teams are included, with up-to-date player rosters and ratings, along with five international teams (Canada, Europe, Russia, Scandinavia and USA). This version can run within DOS or Windows 95, and also supports modem or LAN play for two computers. If you have a Gravis Grip for each computer, up to eight players can play on the two machines. (Unfortunately, NHL 97 does not support more than two machines, and both computers must have the CD-ROM--this is the game's biggest bummer.)

EA has always made their games easy to get into and play, and NHL 97 is no exception. The new setup screens are models of intuitive design, and the two-button controls are easy to master and offer a much greater

variety of moves than you might expect. And watching those moves has never been better, with eight camera angles and an outstanding instant replay feature, which lets you focus the camera on any player, line of, either net, or the puck. Among the great touches you'll notice in this game, if you watch closely, are the reactions of certain players, who will smack their sticks on the ice and even grumble out loud after making a poorly played move or being sent to the penalty box. That's the kind of small but realistic touch that really makes this game so enjoyable.

EA's NHL franchise has always suffered criticisms for its unrealistic AI, and this version is not likely to change the minds of those who could never deal with it. But what EA has always done best is make games that are extremely playable while maintaining the basic feel of the sport. NHL Hockey 97, with its fast-paced action and slumming cutting-edge graphic beauty, might be their best effort to date. See our full review in this issue.

\$59.95, EA Sports, (800) 245-4525, www.ea.com



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#2: Links LS

A If you need to play golf," says Happy Gilmore, "it's goofy pants and a lat ass." The great thing about computer golf is that you don't even need the goofy pants. Thanks to Happy, Nike wunderkind Tiger Woods, and Tin Cup tobe Rene Russo, golf is hip again—well, sort of—so if you want to be in with the in-crowd, babe, you just might want to take up computer golf. There are a lot of good golf games on the market now, but Access' Links franchise has been the game to beat for years. This year's model, Links LS, is no exception.

If nothing else, Links LS is a beauty to behold. Access has really beefed up the graphics, offering resolutions up to 1280x1024 in 16 million colors or 1600x1200 in 65,000 colors. With such graphic power, the three new courses—Kapalua Plantation, the Village Courses on Maui, and Arnold Palmer's Latrobe Country Club—are simply breathtaking (the only downside: very slow screen redraws). The biggest news is that you can finally compete in Stroke Play, Match Play, Best Ball or Skins games against computer



opponents—including Arnold Palmer himself. And speaking of Aimee, a separate CD lets golf voyeurs take a virtual tour of the legend's office and library—a nice extra perk.

\$79.95, Access Software, (800) 800-4880, www.access-software.com

#3: Front Page Sports: Football Pro 97



In the NFL, the Oilers and the Cowboys are the current reigning dynasties. In the computer sports world, that honor belongs to Sierra's Front Page Sports: Football line. The latest version of the three-peel CGW Sports Game of the Year award ('93-'95) makes the list because of its heritage, but ranks further down this time because, frankly, we haven't seen it yet. Still, we're talking FPS Football, here, the best football series of all time, and until a contender proves otherwise, this is still the game to beat.

For the '97 version, Sierra is adding modem and LAN play, adding Windows 95 support, redesigning the play editor, improving the General Manager AI and redesigning its Camera Angle Management System. Because we haven't seen it yet (!) should be out by the time you read this), we can't let you whether these changes will be successful and compelling enough reasons for longtime fans to upgrade, but for new users at least this should be a no-brainer. All the features that have made this game great will be back, including its stupendous career mode, unparalleled statistical model and outstanding on-field action. Will the dynasty continue, or is its time passing? Stay tuned.

\$59.95, Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-5862, www.sierra.com

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#4: NCAA Championship Basketball

Talk about your hoop dreams. While EA's NBA LIVE franchise has done a good job in the last couple of years of bringing NBA action to the computer screen, the hapless college basketball fan has had no decent game to play (and don't talk to us about COLLEGE SLAM—we said decent). That's why we're psyched about the arrival of GTE Entertainment's NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL, a game that makes a serious effort at recapturing March Madness in all its glory on the PC.

Sixty-four real-life Division 1 teams are included (with accurate real home courts, colors and logos), which you can play in exhibi-



tion, regular season, and NCAA tournament mode.

What we've been enjoying most are the game's career features. You can compete with other schools to recruit top (fictional) prep stars and then watch them flourish or flounder under your program as you work towards the Sweet 16. On the court, the game's graphics don't match the crispness of Microsoft's new FULL COURT PRESS, but they're not bad, check out the reflection on the parquet, for example, or the fluidity of

moves such as behind-the-back passes and alley-oops.

\$59.00, GTE Entertainment, (619) 431-8801, www.im.gte.com

#5: ABC's Monday Night Football



Kordell Stewart

Quarterback

Height: 6' 3" Weight: 210 Years: 0

Age: 0 Jersey: 10

College: N/A

Pass Acc: 0 Read Cvr: 75 Arm Str: 0 Pass Ret: 0
Scramble: 80 Roll Right: 70 Roll Left: 70 Fumble: 78

Available Players

K. O'Donnell	QB	M
H. Terzic	QB	M
K. Stewart	QB	M
A. Miller	QB	M



Yes, as a matter of fact, we are ready for some football. Sierra's Front Page Sports: Football line is still the game to beat, but this is the year when some serious competition is finally beginning to muscle in. Leading the blitz (now that Accolade's LEGENDS 97 FOOTBALL has been delayed) is ABC's Monday Night Football from OT Sports. With all of the Disney/ABC money backing this thing up, OT Sports has created a football game awash in multimedia chrome, successfully recreating the glitzy atmosphere of the TV show, right down to commentary by Al Michaels, Dan Dierdorf and Frank Gifford. If that's all this game had to offer, though, we'd respond with a resounding "big deal," because we all know how long that matters. But MNF has the gameplay to back it up. While definitely leaning towards the action side of the spectrum (which will keep it accessible to a wide audience), MNF abounds in nice, surprising touches, including an editable playbook, an easy system for calling audibles, editable stats and a variety of trick plays you can call. Add to that a two player modern option and internet play over Dwanigo, and you have the most exciting rookie player to join this year's computer football lineup. See our full review in this month's Sports section.

\$45.00-55.00, OT Sports, (410) 771-8550, www.otsports.com



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SEEN THEM BEFORE!



NETWORKABLE FOR UP
TO 4 PLAYERS!

#6: Tony La Russa Baseball 3: 1996 Edition

On the day this was written, Tony La Russa—after just one season—had taken the St. Louis Cardinals to their first NL East championship since 1987. The man is a winner, and so is the computer baseball game that bears his name. Though the computer baseball scene has been getting mighty crowded of late, in our minds no game has done a better job of simulating the real thing over the last couple of years than the Tony La Russa series, and this latest version continues that tradition.

Tony La Russa Baseball 3 '96 is pretty much just an update to the previous version, but what it adds greatly improves certain aspects of the game. Along with cleaning up some of the controls in the action mode (still the weakest part of this game), Stormfront improved the game's already outstanding statistical model with new head-to-head pitcher/batter stats and situational batting stats. Those who live and breathe baseball numbers will be in heaven here, especially given the program's easy interface for comparing and juggling player stats. The graphics in this game are beginning to show their age and will really need an upgrade next time, but for now, for those looking for a nice compromise between action and simulation, this is the perfect choice.

\$39.95, Stormfront Studios, (415) 479-2800, www.stormfront.com



#8: Full Court Press

Well, this isn't the NBA Live killer that some people were expecting, but it's a pretty darn good basketball game nonetheless—from Microsoft of all people—that should at least keep hoop fans happy until the arrival of NBA Live 97 next year. Full Court Press actually does one-up EA's game in a few respects. The game's graphics, while maintaining a similar 2D, cartoony look, are in fact much crisper than in NBA Live, making the action much easier to follow. The sound, too, is quite good, with effective play-by-play commentary from Kevin Delabar (announcer for the Seattle SuperSonics). A 100-deep playbook is included, with each play diagrammed out, so newbies can visually grasp what a pick-and-roll is—and then test their skills in a noncompetitive practice mode.

Because team performance is based entirely on individual's ratings, the game has suffered some criticism (from us included) that it unrealistically makes champs

out of teams like the Washington Bullets, whose players look great on paper but can't get it together as a team. But since the game's release,

Microsoft has done a good job of letting people know online how to tweak player stats for better realism. For the Evil Empire, this is a job well done.

\$44.95, Microsoft, (206) 882-8980, www.microsoft.com



#7: NHL Powerplay '96

Released earlier this year, Virgin's NHL Powerplay '96 offers an inexpensive, credible alternative to EA's NHL Hockey for PC hockey fans. Of particular note is the game's AI—which has always been NHL Hockey's weak point. While still essentially an action game (purists should probably just stay away from both games), Powerplay impresses with an AI that makes players seem as though they actually know what they should be doing out there, rather than just flying around in a chaotic, pixelated frenzy. The game also includes outstanding GRIP support, offering a level of control as solid as you'll find in console games.

And speaking of consoles, you should be forewarned that while the PlayStation and Sega Saturn versions of Powerplay offer outstanding 3D

graphics, the PC version is unfortunately 2D only and it lacks SVGA support as well, making the game look considerably behind the times. Nevertheless, it's half the price of NHL

Hockey, and some hockey fans actually find it to be the more satisfying game. As Claude Lacombe might say, before bodychecking you to the ground and slamming his stick into your gut, *chacun son goût*.

\$29.95, Virgin Interactive Entertainment, (714) 833-8710, www.vie.com



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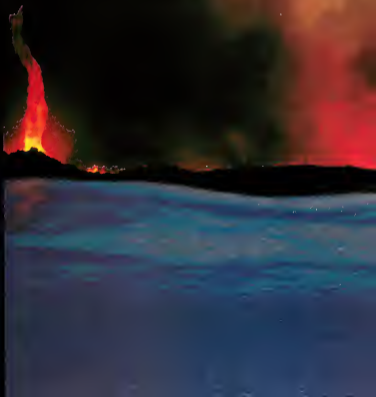
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#9: Triple Play 97

We've already recommended Tony La Russa '96 for the baseball numbers geek, but what about the guy or gal who just wants to get onto the field and whack some balls around? For you, slugger, we heartily recommend EA Sports' Triple Play '97, which upon its release instantly claimed the crown of best PC arcade baseball game on the market. Excellent sound and graphics (with the full MLB license), GIP support for up to six players, and simple controls make this a phenomenally easy and accessible game to play for baseball fans of all levels.



Though certain aspects of the game, like the strike zone, are unrealistic to the point of being ludicrous, consider this: Back in September, we had a chance to watch real-life Padres Tony Gwynn and Wally Joyner play this game head-to-head on a PlayStation, and Gwynn actually had to stop playing, because the realistic feel on the plate was breaking him out to the point that he thought it might affect his timing when playing the real thing. How's that for a recommendation? **\$59.95, EA Sports, (800) 245-4525, www.ea.com**

#10: Total Control Football

Are you the kind of person who spends more time at work futzng over your fantasy football team than doing what you're getting paid for? Do you find yourself muttering to yourself on the street or the commuter train about the latest boneheaded move made by Al Davis or Art Modell? If so, then you're the kind of sports fan who should get a kick out of Philips Media Games' Total Control Football, a game that can best be described as a managerial role-playing game in which you run every aspect of an NFL franchise from the top down.

Developed by BlueSky Software, TCF lets you hire and fire your coaching staffs, scouts, trainers and administrators; woo draft picks and free agents; manage the team's income and expenses; edit your playbooks and game plans; even study X rays of injured players. (The game's one glaringly bad omission: no computer-initiated trades.) You can play football, too, in an arcade mode, but this is not the game's strong point, nor is it the reason to buy the game. TCF is shipping as a single-player game, but it will be available next year on the Engage online gaming service, where up to 30 teams will be able to compete in either managerial or arcade modes.

\$49.95, Philips Media Games, (800) 883-3767, www.philipsmedia.com



In The Bullpen

Accolade's NFL License '97 was the number one entry on this list up until the day this article was due—and then we found it slipping to January, or possibly even to the beginning of the '97 football season, because Accolade decided the new engine needed further refining. Another sure bet for this list, EA Sports' Madden NFL 97, is actually out, and we even have a copy, but some major compatibility problems are keeping us from rendering judgment—so we're docking it for now.

On to brighter topics. Three very strong golf titles that are making their way to the stores should all pose a formidable challenge to Lewis LS. Accolade is readying the latest version of its Jack Nicklaus golf line, Jack Nicklaus Four, which features an all-new course architect so users can design their own 18-hole courses. Sierra is expanding its FPS line with FPS: Golf, due by the time you read this. The game is being designed by Lewis 3B6 lead designer Vance Cook (a good sign) and will apparently introduce a new golf swing technique using the mouse. Hmmmm. Interplay's VR Golf is due around January; the early PlayStation version we tested recently was stunning to look at and a blast to play.

Sierra is also set to release *Thunder Bass II*, the follow-up to its surprisingly popular fishing simulation of last year, now with competitive play over modem, LANs or the Internet. Other major releases to keep your eyes peeled for in early '97 include ABC Sports' College Football from OT Sports, Empire's Snow Ice Hockey (rumored to have an outstanding AI), Accolade's *Hazzard II*, EA's *NBA Live 97*, and NFL Quarterback Club and *Striker 95* from Acclaim.

Finally, the Macintosh sports scene has always been a barren wasteland, so we're happy to mention that one game at least has finally made it to that platform: Interplay's *Virtual Pool*. Okay, so it's "just pool," but it also happens to be the best damn pool game on the planet, and should make a great gift for the hapless Mac sports gamer in your life.



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STRATEGY

by Elliott "The Real-Time Elf" Cht

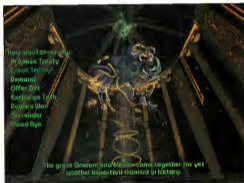
This holiday's lineup of strategy games is among the strongest of recent years. Strategy gamers can expect to play more, and better, sequels, as we see follow-ups to *HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC*,

COMMAND & CONQUER, *FANTASY GENERAL*, and more venerable games like *MASTER OF ORION* and *LORES OF THE REALM*.

Another theme creeping into the strategy genre is real-time combat. *WARCRAFT II* and *COMMAND & CONQUER* proved that real-time gaming can succeed, and the popularity of these two games, combined with their earnings, have compelled many publishers to go the real-time route. Yet, though you can expect more real-time games to continue the fine tradition of Blizzard's and Westwood's brood, you will still find excellent turn-based games to excite those of you who like to ponder over your moves and muse on how to slowly take over the universe. Any of these games, real-time or turn-based, would make the perfect gift for you or your neighborhood strategy gamer.

#1: Master Of Orion 2

This is the ultimate game of galactic conquest, and is the only game that can truly claim to be "Civilization in space." As the eagerly anticipated sequel to *Master of Orion*, *Master of Orion 2: Battle at Antares* has a lot to live up to, but it wouldn't be the number one game on this list if it didn't have the features and the gameplay to succeed. In this grand game, you guide one budding space civilization from ignorance on its home planet to conquest of nearby star systems and eventual colonization of the entire galaxy. Along the way, you will research new technologies and weapons, manage your



colonies, battle and parlay with new civilizations and boldly explore where you enemies hopefully haven't explored before. *Master of Orion 2* also offers a powerful external threat: the ancient and powerful Antaran race, who lurk in the periphery of outer space, waiting to attack you and all the other races. Master them and you will gain new technologies. But beware: They harbor a deep hatred for the residents of your galaxy, and defeating them will be a much harder goal to accomplish than mere conquest of your neighbors.

MOO2 also has a raft of new features, the least of which is an SVGA facelift. Now, you can manage individual colonies in similar fashion to *Master of Magic* or *Civilization*. In another nod to their other great creation, *Master of Magic*, SimTex also has added heroes to *MOO2*, though they add bonus points and abilities to your existing armies rather than supplanting them with near-game-unbalancing power. Combat is also fleshed out, with ship boarding and more involved planetary invasions. New races have also been added, such as the telepathic and aquatic Titans, the omniscient warrior women called the Eldarans and the greedy and diminutive Gnomans. *MOO2* also lets you customize your race with a large set of advantages and disadvantages.

Lastly, perhaps the most important addition of all is multiplayer capability. *Master of Orion 2* supports hot seat, null modem, modem, local area network and soon even Internet play through TEN. You simply cannot go wrong with *MOO2*. As a single player game, this is the ultimate in expansive god games, and with added multiplayer gaming, it becomes a truly addictive gaming experience that will steal your every waking moment just as surely as *Civilization II* has

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#2: Heroes Of Might and Magic II

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC WON CGW's

Premier Award for Best Strategy Game of the Year because of its

simple, intuitive interface, expansive scope and surprisingly addictive gameplay. The sequel, *Heroes of Might and Magic II*, has all these features, but it also adds to this foundation to deliver an even better gaming experience. This time around, the campaign is much better integrated, with players having the option of playing for (and later betraying) either the good or evil side. Your success or failure in each scenario will affect what happens in



the rest of the campaign. For example, if you successfully save the dwarf-ven king-

doms, you will be rewarded with double dwarf-ven recruitment for the rest of the game. Cut scenes are also being added to the game to enrich the plot of the campaign. The game is further enhanced with a larger battlefield, a new point system for magic casting, two new classes and dozens of new monsters and artifacts. We've played *Heroes II*, and we can safely say, any strategy gaming fan will be happily addicted to this incredible sequel.

\$78.99, New World Computing, (818) 889-5600, www.nwcomputing.com

#3: Red Alert

COMMAND & CONQUER was a good real-time strategy game, and co-winner of our Strategy Game of the Year award. It's sequel, *Red Alert*, though, blows C&C away. *Red Alert* is actually a prequel, and chronicles an alternate history where World War II was waged, not between the Allies and Hitler, but between the Allies and Stalin. As the Allies, you'll have greater naval firepower, but as the Soviets, you'll have air superiority. *Red Alert* offers dozens of new units, including sea and air units for more diverse and complete battlefield engagements. Gamers who bemoaned the AI and pathfinding in

C&C will be pleased to know that *Red Alert* offers drastic improvements in both areas. The computer is much tougher in *Red Alert*, and you can save formations and issue waypoint movement for better control of your armies. Multiplay is also enhanced in *Red Alert*, with six-player IPX LAN play as well as Internet play for head-to-head matches. The graphics are also improved for *Red Alert*, with all gameplay rendered in gorgeous SVGA. The strong production values and intriguing cut scenes of *C&C* return in *Red Alert*, and you'll learn more about the formation of the NOD and GDI in *Red Alert*'s storyline.

\$54.99, Virgin/Westwood, (800) 874-4607, www.westwood.com



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#4. Star General

STAR GENERAL is the fourth game in SSI's GENERAL series, and looks like the best in the series so far. Based on *The Fleet* anthology, edited by David Drake, the game is an epic space struggle as you guide a race of humans against alien forces in a campaign of space naval engagements. The combat system is an improved version of the *FRONTIER GENERAL* one. One of the most noticeable improvements is the split-screen menu, which lets you view both the tactical screen in half-screen and your menus and unit stats on the other half-screen. Some other changes include the appearance of production structures, which must be built in order to support specific types of troops. Terrain, such as craters, and space bodies, like black holes, also affect gameplay, reducing or restricting movement. There are two forms of combat—land and space—as you must conquer each planet after you clear its surrounding space. In this way, you'll go planet-hopping from system to system in the robust campaign. With a



great depth of gameplay and many more new features, *STAR GENERAL* should keep both the GENERAL fans and new strategists well-occupied for weeks to come.

\$45.00, Mindscape/SSI, (800) 245-4525, www.ssionline.com

#5: Dungeon Keeper



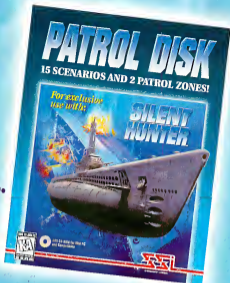
Last year, everyone was hoping *Dungeon Keeper* would be the role-playing game to revive that spattering genre. This year, though, as the game nears completion, its entire focus has changed from role-playing to strategy and action. You still play from the other side, as a villain, the *Dungeon Keeper*, who must guard his lair from the greedy invasions of paladins and just warriors. It is now a strategy game, though, because you basically dig and modify your dungeon, hunt for gold, build structures as in *Command & Conquer* and recruit appropriate monsters, such as dragons or goblins, to defend your lair. You gain extra power for every good soul that you destroy, but also lose power for every one of your minions who is destroyed. You can either click and command them, as in real-time strategy games, or enter the very mind of one of your minions and fight in first-person mode against the oncoming hoards of goodie-two-shoes. Once you've managed to fend off the looting masses

in one level, you move on to the next. *Dungeon Keeper* will have multiplayer options for death-matches, and should still captivate gamers with its unique premise and excellent gameplay.

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#7: Lords II

LORDS OF THE REALM II, by Sierra, is the follow up to Impression's old and honored strategy title, Lords of the Realm. Lords II deposits you in beautiful, old S/PGA England, as the lord of a British Duchy. Your task is to manage your fief, build an army, appease your serfs and increase your wealth and production. Of course, your ultimate goal is the coveted Crown of England, and to that end, all your management and expansion is

directed towards destroying your neighbors in warfare and seizing their holdings. Combat in Lords II is real time, with an interface much like Civilization & Conquest's. There are separate battles for field engagements and castle sieges, where you must scale walls as boiling oil is poured upon your advancing troops. Best of all, Lords of the Realm II has multiplayer gaming built-in, with support for up to 4 players over LAN. With an extensive, yet easy to learn, menu of options for developing your counties, economy and armies, Lords II has much to offer those who would be King.

\$64.95, Sierra, (800) 757-7707, www.sierra.com

Those who like real time combat are sure to enjoy SSI's first real time wargame, War Wind. It has a fantasy feel similar to that of Warcraft II, and yet it's different enough to more than hold the attention of the curious. War Wind offers not two, but four races to choose from, and each race is different, with varying strengths and weaknesses. You can play as the reptilian Tha'Roan, who are fighting to maintain their rule over the other races, as the warrior Obblinox or plant-like Eaggra, who are both try-

#6: War Wind



ing to break free from their Tha'Roan masters, or as the contemplative Shama'Li, who fight to join all races into one. The campaigns for each race are different, and the continuity of the campaign is much lighter than in other real-time games since you can carry upgraded troops and heroes with you from scenario to scenario. Like Warcraft and C&C, you must harvest resources and build structures and then train units. However, there are enough fresh differences in both the gameplay and the unique races to captivate real-time warriors looking for a new battlefield.

\$45, Mindscape/SSI, (800) 245-4525, www.ssionline.com

#8: Deadly Games

JAGGED ALLIANCE was a wonderful tactical strategy game that didn't quite get the attention it deserved, largely because X-Com stole its thunder. Yet, those who played it recognized an excellent strategy game, with a squad level combat engine for commanding teams of mercenaries and quite a few roleplaying elements that spiced up the gameplay. Each mercenary in the game had a distinct personality and skill level. DEADLY GAMES isn't exactly a sequel, since it has the same VGA graphics and interface, but offers enough to make it an outstanding product worthy of any strategy gamer's hard drive. Sir-Tech's Deader Games has a new campaign for Jagged Alliance veterans, a dozen new mercenaries and also provides a scenario editor so you can create your own missions. Best of all, though, the game has multiplayer capability, which lets you play over modem or local area network. A nice bonus is that the game also comes with an extra multiplayer CD so you can play two player games immediately with a friend.

\$65.95, Sir-Tech, (315) 393-6633, www.sir-tech.com



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With kind regards, Edu Oskara, Technical Support Specialist, (Gravis Europe/Belgium)

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(Gold Award, PC Format 9/96)

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(Best Buy, C&A 10/96)

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(9/95)

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(PowerPlay 9/95)

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(PC-Player 7/96)

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(PC-Spiel 6/96)

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(PC-Aktion 8/96)

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(PC-Games 9/96)



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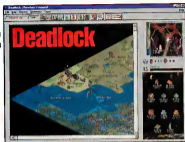
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See us at COMDEX/Fall



#9: Deadlock



Accolade's *Deadlock* is a new franchise, but a familiar refrain: You play one of seven races who must vie for control of a single planet's resources. The stakes are high, though, for whoever controls the planet will have free reign to conquer the universe. The aliens have rich backgrounds and unique personalities, and the diplomacy model is impressive, with options for taunts, boasts, trading and espionage.

Like any good sci-fi strategy game, *Deadlock* offers a well-detailed technology tree for research-

ing ghastly new weapons and beneficial new developments, territory management and city building, combat and exploration. Though the gameplay tends to wear thin over time in a single player match, *Deadlock* is incredibly fun when played multiplayer, over modem, local area network or the Internet.

\$59.99, Accolade, (800) 245-7744, www.accolade.com



Other Gift-Giving Strategies

Two more strategy titles also deserve mention for this holiday season. *Gene Wars*, by the folks at Bullfrog, is a humorous and strange take on real-time wargaming. A mix of *Command & Conquer* and *Lost in Space*, you must lead a group of aliens as they build structures, tag and research alien lifeforms and re-engineer their genets to create new armies of workers and troops. While researching these animals and plotting to conquer the other races in the galaxy, you also have to put on a peaceful show for a mysterious race of aliens who patrol space in classic 1950's style flying saucers. Another interesting real-time strategy game, called *Dink Reign*, comes by way of Activision. With much smarter AI, bench effects, intelligent pathfinding and the ability to set waypoints and formations, *Dink Reign* looks poised to captivate the real-time crowd.

#10: WarCraft BattleChest



For those few deprived souls who have yet to play the best-selling, real-time strategy game, *WARCRAFT II*, Blizzard is releasing a special holiday bundle called *The WarCraft BattleChest*. The perfect gift for *WARCRAFT* fans and newcomers alike, *BattleChest* offers the original *WARCRAFT* discs vs *Humans*, the sequel *WARCRAFT II: Tides of Darkness*, and the *BattleChest II Expansion Set*, all on a single CD. The CD is a hybrid Windows 95 and Mac disc, and will be the only

opportunity for Mac gamers to get their hands on the *Expansion Set*. For the few gamers who haven't played *WARCRAFT*, or for strategy newcomers, *BattleChest* is the perfect gift. Those who already own *WARCRAFT II* might want to forgo this game, but then again, if you've played *WARCRAFT II* and not *WARCRAFT*, this would be a good bundle to buy.

\$70.00, Blizzard, (800) 953-SNOW, www.blizzard.com

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Steel-Nerved, this richly woven tapestry of psychological horror puns no punches. The scenes are often all too graphic, the fear you'll feel will be all too real. Fortunately, the designers have thoughtfully provided a password-protected way to set the level of intensity, should this game be a little too much for some members of your family. Or, perhaps, even you.

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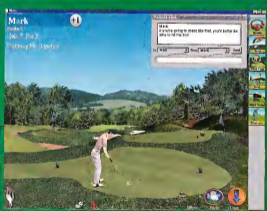


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FRONT PAGE SPORTS®: GOLF

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LORDS II The original *Lords of the Realm*™ was named "Best Historical Simulation" by PC GAMER. Now they say this all new sequel, "combines the best of two worlds," referring to the real time battles and the turn-based strategy game that is *Lords II*. In other words, you can lay siege to your opponents with catapults, flaming arrows, pikes, maces, and the ever popular boiling oil.



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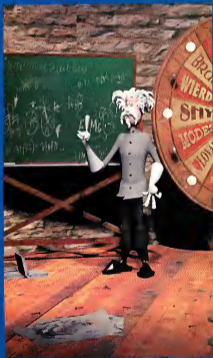
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WARGAMES

by Terry "The Turn-Based Elf" Coleman

Just a few years ago, finding quality wargames for the computer was as difficult as posting significant territorial gains in WWI trench warfare. SSI's *PANZER GENERAL* rekindled the wargame enthusiasm of many with its fast-paced play and challenging campaigns, but left a bad aftertaste in more historically sensitive palates. Times have changed for the better, however, and this year's crop is a veritable wargamer's smorgasbord, bursting with historical flavors from every era of warfare. From the famous battles of Waterloo and Antietam to the most obscure engagements of the 19th and 20th centuries, the mix of multimedia, excellent graphics and interfaces, strong AI and well-designed scenarios make any of these games fine gifts for the would-be Napoleon Battalion on your holiday shopping list.

#1: Age Of Rifles

There are few books, much less games, that can encompass a half century of history in detail, without either sounding pompous on the one hand, or leaving out vital information on the other. Nonetheless, *AGE OF RIFLES* somehow manages to illuminate a period often shrouded in myth and mystery with a remarkable blend of energy and elegance. You can relive the emergence of the United States as a hemispheric power through a campaign on the Mexican-American war, then follow that experience by walking in the boots of Grant, Lee, Sherman and other famous (and infamous) Civil War generals, in battles that are lively, challenging, and conscientiously true to their real-life counterparts.

Similarly, if you think the sun set prematurely on the British empire, you may defend the honor of Her Majesty "The Soldier Queen," in the most unique campaign of any wargame you'll see this year. You must put down rebellions in far-flung India, outnumbered more than



two to one. Should you survive, you travel to Africa, where the ferocious Zulus pit their incredibly high melee strengths against your small formations of disciplined troops. Increasing tensions with old allies may find you in traditional European-style warfare versus the Russians in the Crimea. Through all of the battles—many separated by years of uneasy peace—the technology continues to develop, meaning that you must learn new tactics constantly, or be left behind on the battlefield.

In addition to the famous campaigns, there are many obscure conflicts, such as the bloody set-piece struggles of the Russo-Japanese War, to keep any student of history captivated for untold evenings. *Age of Rifles* also features a robust scenario editor that allows you to create every detail from orders of battle to what type of leather to place in the helmets of your dashing Lancers. The finest game yet on the tumultuous 19th century, and one of the best games of the year in any genre.

\$54.95, SSI, (800) 681-PLAY, www.ssionline.com



#2: Antietam

Talonssoft doesn't get the credit it deserves for making the Civil War fashionable again. Every game in their *BattleGround* series has improved, and this rendition of the bloodiest single day of the American Civil War should be no exception. The regimental scale allows for maneuver and finesse that larger scale games lack, and it also showcases the wide assortment of weapons—carbines, smooth-bore muskets, Kentucky long rifles, even shot-guns—that made this a quartermaster's nightmare.

Antietam is defined by terrain even more than *Shiloh*, the last *BattleGround* release. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia is nestled perhaps too snugly in a cul-de-sac near the small town of Sharpsburg, as the Rebel soldiers fight desperately to hold the vastly superior Union forces off in the famous Corn Field and Burnside's Bridge. The toughest thing to achieve in any game on this battle is balance, so Talonssoft



intends to limit the command control for the Union player to simulate McClellan's indecisiveness. The designers also plan to include a "Union fantasy" scenario, where all restrictions are lifted, allowing you to roll over the Confederates and end the Civil War in 1862. Regardless of which scenario you prefer, this one is another can't-miss for any Civil War aficionado.

\$54.95, Talonssoft, (800) 211-6504, www.talonssoft.com



#3: Steel Panthers II

The original *Steel Panthers* was simply the best tactical game ever done on WWII. Armed with the typical Gary Grigsby and Keith Brors level of historical detail, the design benefited greatly from SSI's newfound love of clean interfaces and sumptuous graphics. But even considering the critical acclaim and strong sales, *Steel Panthers* could have been even better. As a

result, the sequel does more than move the system to the modern era. From what we've seen so far, it also improves the computer opponent, making it more aggressive and less predictable. Mortars and artillery seem to have a better feel than before, and "scatter" much more realistically.

The graphic look—already excellent—has changed for the better, with even the sand-filled battles of *Desert Storm* improved over their WWII brethren. SSI is hinting at a wider

range of battlefield sounds as well. In general, the interface is a bit cleaner (although still being tweaked at press time) and probably more accessible to novices than the original. And while play is still turn-based, it seems even more brisk than before, no doubt due to the increased lethality of modern weaponry. With better armor, more air resources, and bigger guns all-around, it seems there's little to keep this off any would-be Schwartzkopf's hard drive—even if (like me) you're still campaigning with the original.

\$78, SSI, (800) 601-PLAY, www.ssionline.com

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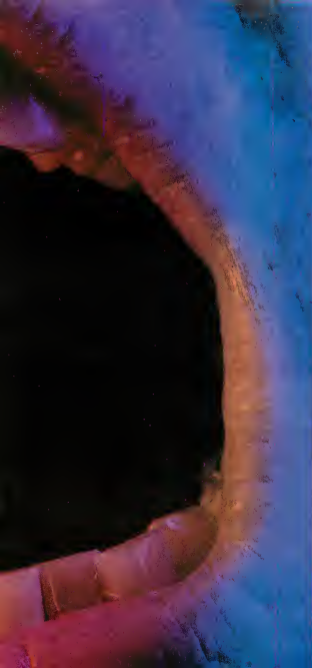


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Scorchers



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#4: Over The Reich

Charlie Moylan is a bit of an anomaly, even as game designers go. Although fascinated by aircraft, he doesn't do traditional flight simulators—for which we can all be grateful. Following the well-received *Fuoco Comanche 2*, he again teams with Avalon Hill to produce another turn based, yet very realistic, tactical/operational combat simulation. The air war over Germany from 1943 to 1945 pitted the remnants of the Luftwaffe veterans against the resurgent Royal Air Force and the vast numbers of the USAAF, in a campaign every bit as important as that of D-Day and Over The Reich lets you fly squadrons in any of these three air forces, in both campaign and single dogfight mode.

Early jet planes can easily out-accelerate their propeller-bound brethren, but can't turn as well as the nimble Spitfires and P-51 Mustangs. B-17 bombers take on incredible amounts of damage and still limp home to receive another payload. Being a stick joystick jockey won't get you out of a lullapin here; you have to know the strengths and weaknesses of both your aircraft and that of your opponent's.



Whether you want to see how the experimental Meteor would have fared against the legendary Me 262, or you just crave escorting Mosquitos and Lancasters over Rumanian factories against endless waves of Focke Wulfs, then strap on your goggles—and your thinking cap—because this is your game.

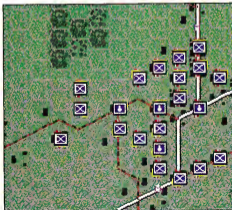
ST&A, The Avalon Hill Game Company, (800) 999-3222

#5: Tigers On The Prowl 2.0

The behemoth turns, sensing its prey. Waiting for the right moment, it lumbers from its hiding place, spewing forth a barrage of formulae complex enough to send mathematics majors scattering in object terror.

Yes, the wait at times has seemed longer than MacArthur's return to the Philippines, but the most intimidating and realistic of WWII simulations has finally upgraded. One of the toughest AIs in the business—it doesn't cheat, by the way—now sports improved targeting algorithms courtesy of HPS Partners in the Snows. You'll find that winning maneuvers that once worked against the computer are, more often than not, bloodily repulsed now.

Graphics are improved to Partners standards as well, but let's be honest; no one plays HPS games for eye candy. If you're easily turned off by depth and realism, look elsewhere. If you can handle



the steep learning curve, however, this version of Tigers will have you up for many a sleepless night on the Russian steppes. Tank destroyers, flame-throwers, the subtleties of minefield laying—it's all here, in a package that threatens to overwhelm you with weapons performance data. And unlike say, *TroDes*, Tigers successfully blends morale and training into the mix, for the most comprehensive view of WWII on the market.

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#6: History Of The World

Even all the years that Avalon Hill has seemed ruled by *Squad Leader* and its children, it came as a big surprise when this simple multi-player game knocked

Advanced Squad Leader from its perch as the top-rated AH boardgame in the bi-monthly poll in *The General* magazine. History or the West might do much the same in the computer market, simply because it is the most addictive game to come out of AH in years. And unlike the troubled development of *Advanced Civilization*, *History* is moving along smoothly.

Basically, you draw and trade "cards" that give you control of an empire in a given epoch of history. Strong empires like the Mongols and Romans get 20-25 representatives per turn, while near-forgotten "dynasties" like the Khmers and Chols receive only 4-8 per turn, according to their significance on world history. With the leaders always drawing cards last, most of the fun comes from trading cards and forcing your opponent to keep the Aztecs instead of the Spanish or French. When you throw revolt, fortification, plague and treachery cards into the mix, what you have is a clean, fast game perfect for hotseat or e-mail diplomacy and world conquest.

STBA, The Avalon Hill Game Company
(800) 999-3222



#7: Battleground: Waterloo

While *BattleSaurus* gets us ready for the good game, it didn't prepare us for this. The patented Talonsoft cut-away hex view combines with the lead miniatures-style soldiers (that you don't have to spend several weekends painting!) to create a sumptuous graphical landscape that just perfectly captures the flavor of the era of Napoleon. Walled chateaux are tough to crack, so Hougomont becomes the anchor for the Allies under Wellington that it should be. Casualty charges and square formations for infantry defense may not please all the purists, but they work well within the game's



context, and dump a ton of tactical decisions in your lap.

The tension of the fighting around the left and center of Wellington's line is captured in exciting fashion, complete with artillery barrages and confused melees. You can even commit the Old Guard at that crucial moment in the battle, as the Allied reinforcements led by Blucher appear ominously on Napoleon's right flank. Great fun solo or two-player, this is the game that will let you finally move beyond the venerable *Battles of Napoleon*. **\$54.95, Talonsoft, (800) 211-6504, www.talonsoft.com**

#8: Robert E. Lee: Civil War General

OK, so they "borrowed" his title from *POWER GENERAL*. That shouldn't keep you from riding with Old Pele Longstreet and Stonewall Jackson, performing miracles against Yankee forces twice your size. Morale is never a problem—so long as you're winning—but you may have to turn on that "Marse Robert" charm and spend army prestige to charge a well entrenched foe. There's plenty of decision-making here: keeping your army fed and clothed is tough; procuring ammo for the motley assortment of weapons your soldiers favor is even more difficult. Bold maneuvers and a steady nerve are required to win the tough campaigns, which unfortunately don't include the

Seven Days' Battles, where Lee first came to prominence. Still, what the system lacks in historical perspective and tactical detail (all small-arms fire occurs at a one hex distance), it tends to make up for in sheer fun. Better than average computer opponent, too.

\$59.95, Sierra, (800) 757-7767, www.sierra.com



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#9: ZuluWar!

If you want only to re-fight Rorke's Drift or Isandlwana, you'll have to settle for the battles in *Age of Rifles*. *ZuluWar* is a fast playing, yet more than passingly historical view of the entire Zulu campaign. Without getting enmeshed in minutiae, it shows the contrast between the swift, sudden attacks of the Zulu, and the methodical sweeps of the British. Clash of spears meets Maxim machine guns, if you will.

The quick and dirty victory conditions force the British to burn Zulu kraals and hunt down Chelwago against a difficult timetable, much like that of *Prince General*. Zulus have the option of fighting a guerrilla war, bringing neutral tribes into the war, taking the fight to the British camps, along with a host of other clever "what-if" options. While *ZuluWar* lacks the tactical feel of Jeff Lapkoff's earlier *ALAMO* and *CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND*, it still cap-



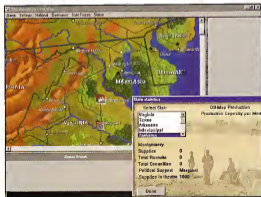
tures the feel of an obscure campaign, complete with "Hollywood" scenarios for anyone needing their *Zulu Dawn* movie fix.

\$39.95 (+ \$&H), Incredible Simulations, (408) 554-6381

#10: American Civil War

I combined arms is more your cup of tea, *American Civil War* gives you all the land, sea and stage you can handle. It's a bit clunky, and it doesn't really use the Windows interface to any great advantage, but the scale is right. You get a real sense of conducting campaigns in the Civil War, where hell the battle is knowing exactly where and with what troops your enemy is moving.

The leader modeling is first-rate: McClellan is organizationally sound but timid on the battlefield; Bragg is aggressive, even impetuous; Stonewall Jackson moves and fights with deadly smooth efficiency. Logistic considerations can be a pain at times, but never take over the game. And the naval aspects, so often ignored in Civil War games, are authentic, up to and including the power—and the difficulties—surrounding ironclad warships. All in all, this is still the only strategic Civil War game worth buying.



Other Battles

Naval warfare, 19th century-style, seems to be making a comeback. *Age of Sail*, from Talonsoft, lets you control formations in real-time. *Wooden Ships & Iron*

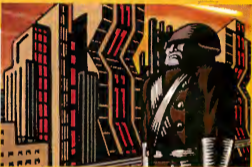
Men may finally step its turn-based combat system in time for Christmas. Given the ambitious schedules of both these companies, we suggest prospective Admiral Nelsons keep a lookout from the coming tower. Finally, we'd be remiss if we didn't mention *Seize*, Talonsoft's five-star Civil War battle game, which brilliantly captures the tense struggles around the Bloody Pond and the Sunken Road. Regardless of your tastes, there are plenty of computer-generated battlefields to keep any master strategist planning maneuvers during those long winter nights.



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Circle Reader Service #222



HARDWARE

by Dave "The Techie Elf" Salvator,
Lloyd "The Hardware Hacking Elf" Case,
and Denny "The Early Adopting Elf" Alkin

Maybe now they get it. Despite the fact that gamers have driven the PC hardware industry for more than 10 years, the gaming enthusiast market hasn't received its due. Well, 1996 may well be remembered as the year many big players suddenly figured it out. We've seen the beginning of the 3D graphics revolution, a crop of new, fast CPUs, and plummeting memory and storage prices, all conspiring to make a killer gaming rig less cost-prohibitive. What's more, just about every major system vendor is now bringing out a tricked-out gaming rig (see this month's Ultimate Gaming Machine feature). In addition, we've seen some interesting controllers hit the market, and here we take a look at ten items that would make anyone's holiday a lot merrier.

#1: Righteous 3D

Shelves this holiday season will be brimming with 3D graphics accelerators, but most are mere pretenders to the title. A few—a scant few—can be called capable performers in the 3D world. Even the better ones make some compromises, but not the Righteous 3D. Using the sophisticated 3dx Voodoo chip-set, and loaded with 4 MB of EDO DRAM, the Righteous 3D is a 3D-only accelerator. The board needs its own PCI slot, and attaches to your normal 2D card via a pass-through cable. 2D/3D boards had to make design compromises so as to support VGA for DOS, and run Windows programs, but not Orchid. Righteous 3D's game is blistering 3D acceleration, and it makes no pretensions to anything else.

The feature set is certainly robust. There's separate memory for textures and frame buffer (2 MB each), and it supports perspective corrected texture mapping, bilinear and trilinear filtering, and mip-mapping.

These features make the texture-mapping prevalent in today's 3D games look pleasing and realistic. The card even supports layering of multiple textures, a feature absent on some high-end professional 3D accelerators.

Righteous 3D

High Performance 3D Accelerator

Features

- Spectacular 3D Texturing
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- Full Motion Frame Rate Performance
- Sophisticated 3D Acceleration
- Windows™ 95 Direct3D™ Support
- Includes Advanced 3D Software Titles

3D So Real It Must Be Righteous™

Light sources, alpha blending (for transparency) and fog effects round out the feature set, enabling the creation of wonderful atmospheric effects. Its maximum resolution is effectively 800x600, but the image quality is superb. Even the Microsoft Direct3D game, *Hellblazer*, with its strange mishmash of textures, looks good with this card.

The performance is there, too—the Orchid card is the current performance champion of the game-oriented 3D accelerators. Not only do the current crude benchmarks bear this out, but *Hellblazer*'s frame rate at 640x480x65,530 colors with all the features turned on never dropped below a rock-solid 28 frames per second.

The card installs easily, and its Windows 95 setup is straightforward. Bending the thick, shielded pass-through cable is a bit of a chore, but the extra shielding is good to have. There's a handy utility for setting Righteous 3D's refresh rate, and the software bundle is decent: with demo or limited versions of *Descent 2*, *Hellblazer*, *Scorched Planet* and *VR Soccer*, plus the full version of *Whiplash*. With Direct3D support, future 3D titles developed for Windows 95 will really hum on the card. A number of game companies are poring existing DDS titles as well.

There is a downside (other than requiring a PCI slot): it ain't cheap. Shelling out \$299 for a card that still has limited uses—given the relative dearth of shipping 3D-accelerated titles—can give one pause. But if you're looking for stellar 3D acceleration that will more than keep up with new titles as they ship, then check out the Righteous 3D.

\$299, Orchid Technologies, (800) 545-5733, www.orchid.com

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 "Comanche 3? Must be only the latest addition to the highly acclaimed, award-winning Comanche series... you'll want to get into and bring home the right one for many of Comanche's reasons." **\$49**



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#2: Force F/X

If your holiday gift target is a fan of flight simulations, a gift of a CH Products Force F/X joystick is probably the best inexpensive alternative to buying them a ride in the real thing. The handle of the Force F/X is nearly identical to the one on CH's F-16 Combat Stick, but that's where the resemblance ends. In the heavy base of the Force F/X are motors and gears that allow the stick to provide programmable resistance to your efforts to move it, similar to what you'd feel when using a joystick in a real aircraft.

When using the Force F/X with *FIGHTER DUEL*, for instance, you not only feel resistance when you attempt to turn the plane at high speeds, but you also feel the constant vibration of the plane's motor. Fire the guns and the stick jerks with recoil. Similarly, the driving game *VICTOR FOX SPEED SE* lets you feel the textures of the ground you're driving over—a slight hump on the highway, and a constant bumpiness on off-road tracks. At a price similar to that of a high-end flight stick,



the added realism afforded by the Force F/X is a bargain. **\$150, CH Products, (619) 598-2518, www.chproducts.com**

#3: SupraSonic 336V +



The SupraSonic 336V+ is Diamond's high-end modem, and since fast-paced games tend to mercilessly pummel modems with data, this unit will move your online adventures along nicely and is worth the extra bucks. The SupraSonic 336V+ is an external Plug-and-Play modem, and Windows 95 detects it sans hiccup and installs the appropriate driver. The unit also

works swimmingly under DOS, and helped keep head-to-head play pretty smooth in a variety of DOS titles.

With its 33.6-Kbps maximum data rate, the SupraSonic will negotiate down to 28.8 Kbps when connecting to those modems. But as more 33.6 Kbps modems hit the streets, you'll be ready and waiting. Mediocre phone line conditions may sometimes force connection speed down to 28.8 Kbps or lower, but as more 33.6 Kbps units ship, connection speeds will hopefully head north.

SupraSonic's ROM can easily be flash-updated when new firmware revisions are released. Another cool feature: an LCD display, which displays what the unit's doing—dialing,

negotiating—and the type of connection that's been established. Given its ease of installation, LCD display unit, and good performance running DOS titles, the SupraSonic makes a great gift for the pathological online gamer in your life. **\$289, Diamond Multimedia, (800) 727-8772, www.supra.com**



#4: Jaz Drive

No matter how much hard drive space you add to your system, programs will expand to fill it. Even with today's games shipping on CD-ROM, some still require as much as 75 MB of your precious hard drive space. Add a couple of these monsters to your gaming regimen and you'll be seriously squeezed for space. Iomega's Jaz Drive cures this problem by offering you practically infinite storage.

The Jaz Drive is a one-gigabyte cartridge-based hard drive. This SCSI device looks just like the 100-megabyte Zip Drive (itself a great bit value at \$150 or less), but the resemblance ends there. Where the Zip offers expandable storage in small increments, with a small speed penalty, the Jaz Drive is as fast as a standard internal hard drive. One-gigabyte Jaz cartridges sell for under \$100, allowing easy expandability in large increments. You can install games on a Jaz cartridge, or even copy an entire CD to a Jaz disk if you want to speed loading or smooth animation playback.

If your PC isn't equipped with SCSI, you'll also want to pick up Iomega's PCI Jaz Jet SCSI card. Although hard drive prices have plummeted, even a big, inexpensive drive adds only a fixed capacity. If you never want to run out of space again, it's time to play with Jaz.

\$399 (internal), \$499 (external),
Iomega, (800) MY-STUFF,
www.iomega.com



#5: Dynamite 128/Video

Face it, DDS games still outnumber Windows 95 titles by a considerable—though shrinking—margin. Most current Windows 95 games only support Microsoft's 2D DirectDraw API or the older WinG library, so it makes a certain amount of sense to get a very fast DDS card that is also a capable Windows performer. Enter the Hercules Dynamite 128/V.

There is no faster DDS card on the market. The Tseng ET6000 chipset uses MDRAM (Multibank DRAM), speeding memory transfers along to the tune of 600+ MB/sec on the card. Windows performance is less spectacular, but we expect Hercules will deliver better-tuned drivers over time as they've done in the past.

Installation is straightforward: plug the card into a free PCI slot, boot to Windows and run the supplied installation utility—the CD-ROM even has an AutoPlay script. In a departure from the standard "let's add two tabs to the Display Properties control panel" approach, Hercules gives you a single page, all-in-one Windows utility for configuring the card.

The copper: the card is fairly inexpensive, \$159 for 2 MB. Pairing this card up with the Righteous 3D would be a difficult combo to beat.

\$159, Hercules Corporation, 1-800-532-0600,
www.hercules.com





#6: GrIP

Gravis' GrIP technology is changing the face of action-based gaming for the PC. Similar to Sega's Saturn devices, GrIP controllers sport six main buttons and two top buttons. Designed with adult hands in mind, the controllers' buttons and directional thumb pad are responsive, and feel great.

The stealth-bomber shaped Multiport consists of four 9-pin GrIP sockets and two "pass-through" 15-pin ports for garden-variety joysticks, though you can't use both types of controllers at the same time. The GrIP Sports Pack ships with a Multiport, two GrIP controllers, and Electronic Arts'



NHL Hockey '96. An additional benefit: no more controller acts trying to get at your sound card's game controller port whenever you want to switch joysticks.

Installation is a snap. After connecting the PiP Multiport into your joystick port, run the Win 95 and OOS installation programs, and the GrIP is good to go. Also included are utilities to reprogram the GrIP for OOS games.

There are a growing number of OOS titles shipping that directly support GrIP, and a Disinput driver makes newer Win 95 titles playable with GrIP as well.

\$120, Advanced Gravis, (804) 431-5020, www.gravis.com



#7: Toshiba 12X CD-ROM

In the faster-than-a-speeding-bullet department, we have three new 12X CD-ROM offerings from Toshiba. To put things in perspective, these drives' 1.8 MB/sec data rate is on par with good EIDE hard drives, a far cry from the faint trickle of 150 KB/sec the first CD-ROM drives could barely muster.

Two of these new drives are internal units that install into a 5-inch drive bay, the only difference being the XM-5701 is a SCSI-2 device, whereas the XM-5702 is an EIDE drive. The third model, the TXM-5701, is an external SCSI-2 drive.

What do these drives bring to the party for gamers? Gone will be lengthy installations that leave you with enough time to finish the last half of War and Peace. Also, new scene load times when starting a new level will be greatly reduced. What's even more impressive about the Toshiba drives is their price: \$195 for the SCSI-2 XM-5701, \$185 for the internal EIDE XM-5702. With their aggressive pricing, these new units will greatly reduce CD-ROM file transfer times, and increase your quality time with friends and family and...well, maybe not. But check 'em out.

\$185 (IDE), \$195 (SCSI), Toshiba, (714) 457-8777, www.toshiba.com



#8: Multimedia Series 140

There haven't been a lot of advances in audio card design in the last several years, but there has been some progress in improving current technologies. The Crystalake 140 is a perfect example of such incremental improvements. At a street price of about \$230, you get some of the cleanest digital audio around, true full-circuit input/output and a very solid General MIDI synthesizer with 4 MB of waverable ROM.

The Achilles' heel of the Crystalake is installation. Because it's a Plug-and-Play (PnP) card, it has some problems with systems running an early Award PnP BIOS, which had a bug. An updated BIOS or disabling PnP fixes the problem.

Once running, though, this card sounds beautiful. The digital audio is free of hiss and noise, and the General MIDI patch set is on par with dedicated Roland or Yamaha wave table daughterboards. The Crystal chip set supports Sound Blaster Pro emulation



in hardware, but games which support the card directly will run in full 16-bit stereo.

Currently, the only way to order the card is through mail order, either from Chips and Bits, 4CDS (<http://www.4cds.com>) or Computer Express at (800) 228-7449.

\$229, Crystalake Multimedia, 1-503-222-2603, www.crystalake.com

Unlock the legend of the Knights Templar.

And discover a secret
too frightening to unveil.

CIRCLE OF BLOOD

"With its lush, detailed animation, *Circle Of Blood* resembles the classic arcade game *Dragon's Lair*. But it seems this time the game will play as good as it looks."

— CD-ROM TODAY

- ◆ High resolution animations hand drawn with painstaking detail by Don Bluth Studios alumni (*All Dogs Go To Heaven* and *An American Tail*)
- ◆ Features a cinematic musical score from the talents of soundtrack producer Barrington Pheloung (*Truly, Madly, Deeply* and *Nostradamus*)
- ◆ Available for Windows® 95/DOS CD-ROM and MAC CD-ROM



American George Stobbart happens into a Parisian cafe one afternoon because he wants a cup of coffee. But after a clown delivers a plastic explosive that blows the place to smithereens, all George Stobbart wants are some answers.



Buried deep beneath the bodies and the rubble of that explosion lies a fourteenth century medieval order called The Knights Templar. Only you can unlock the secret of this intriguing historical adventure and stop the vicious conspiracy that threatens to reshape the world.



#9: SpaceOrb 360

In the days of Windows 3D, the keyboard was the controller of choice. But for new titles like *Quake*, *Descent II* and *Duke Nukem 3D*, the keyboard/mouse combination rules. SpaceTec has a different idea with their SpaceOrb 360: a controller that provides that same functionality, and becomes the sole device for playing 3D action titles.

SpaceOrb 360 features a "power-sensor" orb that can be pushed, pulled, and twisted around, and also has six programmable buttons.

Sound weird? We thought so too, until we played with it. There is a learning curve to climb, but its Trainer utility will help you get acclimated, and once you get going, you may never go back. After some initial fumbling around, we were able to circle strafing with extreme ease in *Duke Nukem 3D*, and could easily outmaneuver robots in *Descent II*.

One downside: SpaceOrb 360 needs a free COM port, which becomes tricky if you've already got both ports in use with a mouse and modem.

With a little patience, SpaceOrb 360 can be a terrific controller for 3D titles, and Windows 95 support means you can drive newer titles as well.

\$99, SpaceTec IMC, (508) 970-0330, www.spacetec.com.



#10: MindDrive



that makes music based on your thoughts. Unfortunately, MindDrive can't drive more conventional game titles yet, though that may be in the offing. It's a technology which, if refined, has tremendous potential to change how we interact with our machines.

\$149.95 with two titles, The Other 90%, 1-800-706-0456, www.other90.com.

Another entry in the unorthodox controller arena is perhaps the most intriguing controller we've ever seen. With MindDrive, you can actually drive simple games with your thoughts. It does take some getting used to, but it's a little unnerving to have MindDrive's games actually respond to movement commands you're thinking without a keyboard or mouse. Admittedly, the current technology is somewhat limited, and it can't yet be used to drive more complex titles. But the upside there is that MindDrive can't upload your naughty musings to the FBI either.

How does it work? There's a sensor that attaches to your index finger, and from that MindDrive reads in bio electric patterns, and is able to interpret these patterns as you think certain thoughts. So MindDrive isn't "reading your mind" per se, but rather has a pretty good idea what's going on. But, attention all preventionists: one of MindDrive's applications, Fix, is an excellent lie detector.

There are currently ten MindDrive titles shipping, ranging from a skiing action game to an application

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KIDS' STUFF

by Charlotte "The Elf High Commander" Panther

As the entertainment software industry continues to grow, you'll find stores devoting more and more shelf space to "edutainment" titles, each one promising to teach your kids, reading, writing and arithmetic in ways you've never seen before. But beware: We've discovered, all too often, that when developers concentrate on emphasizing the educational element, gameplay is frequently sacrificed in the process. The results: achingly dull, repetitive activities labeled as games. This year we've tracked down a terrific selection of original and challenging games that parents can feel good about. With strong story lines, high-quality graphics and fascinating characters, these products promise to entertain your children, time after time. And while most of these programs focus strongly on gameplay, your kids will definitely learn some things along the way.

#1: Pajama Sam

In "No Need To Hide When It's Dark Outside"

Are you afraid of the dark? If so, you'll appreciate the enormous challenge Sam has ahead of him. For the first night ever, he must prove his valor by sleeping with the lights out. But how can poor Sam sleep, knowing that Darkness is lurking in his closet? What would his hero, Pajama Man, do in this situation? He'd capture Darkness, of course. And that's exactly what Sam decides to do. In order to succeed on his quest, Sam will need you to help him locate his Superhero tools: a mask, cape, flashlight and his Pajama Man lunch box. When Sam steps into his closet to begin his search, he discovers a fantastical world on the other side of the door. The landscape of this wonderfully eerie place certainly has a nightmarish quality to it, but don't worry about your kids being frightened: They'll be in point and click heaven when they discover all the secrets hidden in the realms of this enchanting land. Remnants long ago discarded to the back of your closet, like a baseball bat and ball, miraculously come to life and interact with each other when you click upon them; French fries sing Fiere Jacques, and you'll be amazed to see how furniture boogies, when it thinks no-one's looking. With all this entertainment, it's easy



to forget that you're on a mission, but poor old Sam will soon cry out for your help, when a clump of trees hold him up for customs. His much cherished Superhero tools are confiscated, and wind up being scattered all over the realms of Darkness. As you

venture through landmines and underground rivers on the way to Darkness' house, you'll make friends with characters like the lovable Otto, a little wooden boat, who thinks he can't float, and Carrot X, a freedom-fighter from the Vegetable Liberation Front. You may even be invited to join a game of cheese and crackers: Tic-tac-toe, with edibles.

The latest in Humongous's "Junior Adventure" series, this wonderfully executed adventure game is intended for children age 3-8 and will succeed in entertaining, right across that range. Younger kids who are not yet capable of understanding all the elements of gameplay will be fascinated by the sheer amount of activity they can control by clicking on the screen. Older kids will be challenged by this fairly sophisticated adventure game. Replayability is unlimited, since each time you start a new game the gameplay changes. Not only will you have to search for your Superhero tools in different places, you'll also encounter new characters and discover different environments. Humongous has come up with a winning combination: The captivating landscape, amiable characters, upbeat sound track and endless gameplay variations will delight every member of your family.

\$39.95, Humongous Entertainment, (800) 490-8386 or (206) 486-1212, www.humongous.com

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Windows™ 95 and
PlayStation™ CD-ROM

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- Thousands of evil orcs have landed in the big city—make sure they get a rude welcome!
- Choose a dwarf (Greg, Tacnac or Corthag) and one of their trusty weapons (baseball bat, bowling pin or shotgun).
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SEGA SATURN



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SEGA SOFT



#2: Iz and Auggie: Escape from Dimension Q

Looking for a product with a sassy heroine? Meet Iz, a teen with attitude, and fellow band member Auggie, a robot with some musical talent, but whose forte is mucking things up.

Suddenly whisked away to the mysterious Dimension Q, their mission is to rescue other secret agents, recover stolen music from silky record producer Cosmo LaRue, and figure out the code that will launch the X7-10 probe, so that they can return home. On your inter-dimensional journey, you'll help Iz and Auggie avoid Cubic Pentameter security guards, unscramble cryptic messages, and



use your musical skills to escape some sticky situations. The great thing about this game is that you don't have to complete one puzzle before moving on to the next one, so if your kid's really stuck, they can try again later if you do this too many times, however, it will affect your chances of completing the final puzzle successfully. Designed for ages ten and above, Headbone once again delivers an original plot, entertaining puzzles that advance the storyline, and a cast of intelligent, vivacious characters. **\$30.00, Headbone Interactive (800) 267-4709 or (206) 323-0073, www.headbone.com**

#3: Madeline: European Adventures

If you ever run into trouble while on vacation, shout out for Madeline. The petite red-headed orphan has a unique ability to find whatever you need to get things done. In her latest adventure, a thief has stolen a magic lantern from Madeline, and the fearless little girl is planning to chase him across Europe, in order to get back the lamp and rescue the gnomes. You must help Madeline find the items she needs for her trip: a passport and current photo, some money, a train ticket and all the pieces of the map the thief dropped. As she passes through each country, Madeline somehow manages to save the day. In Switzerland, the train makes an unscheduled stop, and Madeline undertakes a special journey to find the best chocolate in the land, so that the train chef can make his famous dessert. As you wander in and out of different countries, you'll hear snippets of different languages. Look out also for Madeline's language game, which allows you to practice your French or Spanish by matching foreign words with pictures. The exceptional illustration, shown off to its full potential in MADELINE!



EUROPEAN ADVENTURES, completes the package beautifully. **\$40.00 Creative Wonders, 800-kid-xprt or (415) 482-2300, www.cwonders.com**

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#4: **Freddi Fish 2:** The Case of the Haunted School House

Freddi Fish and her pal Luther are called upon to save the day when a mysterious spook takes up residence in their schoolhouse, terrorizing the guppies and stealing their toys. The fearless friends endeavor to capture the underwater phantom by setting a trap, but they need your kids' help. This "Junior Adventure" allows children to explore a fascinating subterranean world while searching for the objects Freddi needs for her trap. Kids will be delighted to discover that practically every inch of the screen conceals a surprise. Click on a rock, and you may make the acquaintance of a tap-dancing fish. Be sure to pick up everything you can: some items will be used for the trap, while others may be useful to bargain with. You'll meet a colorful cast of characters including Barnacle Bob, the octopus, and Mr. Triple Fin, the Janitor of the Ocean, and watch out for the notorious Squidfather. Although it's aimed towards ages 3-8 years, don't be surprised if you find your older kids playing this challenging game. As with *PLAZMA SAM*, the great thing about *Freddi Fish 2* is that each time you start a new game, the combination of items you need for the trap



is different, so kids (and parents) will enjoy playing it over and over. **\$39.95, Humongous Entertainment, (800) 499-8386 or (208) 486-1212, www.humongous.com**

#5: **The Pink Panther's Passport to Peril**



You'll learn even more about the countries, as you join Pink on his journey across the earth. The only disappointment? This was the first time I recalled hearing the Pink Panther speak, and he didn't sound quite like I'd anticipated. Oh well, guess I just like those strong, silent types.

\$49.95, Wanderlust Interactive, (212) 965-9770, www.wanderlust.com

The Pink Panther has been assigned an important undercover assignment. The mission will require extensive international travel and you'll issue with extremely influential people. Translation: You have to help Pink watch over a bunch of precocious kids at summer camp, the sons and daughters of ambassadors. The cool cat soon finds an excuse to leave the camp, though. Pretty soon, he's jetting around the world, visiting the kids' native countries, and returning with gifts to make them feel at home. Wanderlust may not be far wrong when they list their target audience as aged 8 to 108. This classic adventure game is challenging enough to maintain an adult's interest, and it provides a steady supply of humor that may well go right over kids' heads. There are plenty of attractions for children, though, including a database packed with cultural information about different countries, that can be accessed at any time during the game.

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Silmarils



#6: Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss

Living Books has truly succeeded in bringing to life Dr. Seuss's wonderful tale of Sam-I-Am, the grouch, and a most unusual dish. Children will be delighted to follow Sam as he chases the old grouch through the richly animated Seussian world, expanding the glories of green eggs and ham. The more the grouch protests, the harder Sam-I-

Am persists, until he finally persuades the grouch to taste the dish. The grouch discovers that he does indeed like green eggs and ham. This is one of the few books that adapts perfectly to multimedia. Had it just been a story, the product would have worked, but Living Books has created an



interactive adventure, hiding secret delights on every page. If your child is just learning how to point and click, the storybook will delight them. Click on a the word eggs, and a picture of eggs will be revealed. Click on Sam-I-Am's hat and you'll see another surprise. Older children will enjoy the three games incorporated into the book. The "Mouse in a House" game requires your child to match up objects of the same color. "The Fox in a Box" game helps kids to create words or sentences of the same family—e.g., pig, wig, fig—and Sam-I-Am's rhyming game asks children to match up words that rhyme. And everybody will enjoy hearing this wonderful story one more time.

\$29.95, Living Books, (800) 397-4940, www.living-books.com

#7: Eroy Hits the Pavement



If you've met Eroy before, you'll know that this plucky 10-year-old has developed a habit of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In *Eroy Hits the Pavement*, our hero goes looking for his hound-dog, Blue, and finds himself mixed up with the mob.

Your task is to find Blue and help Eroy recover his

missing science project, the Canine Revolverizer. If you want to get to the bottom of this mystery, be prepared to study; you'll have to answer questions on historical criminal activity, as part of the mobster's initiation test, and bluff your way into MUCK (the Mysterious Underground Crime Corporation). Your journey will be laced with original and entertaining puzzles: figuring out how to unlock Blue's cage, decoding his scrambled doggy messages—you'll even get a chance to put your chemistry skills to the test. *Headbone* has hit upon a winning formula: the unusual graphics make for a stunning gameplay environment, and the gutsy character actors will have both kids and adults running back for more. No wonder folks are asking, "What the heck will Eroy do next?"

\$49.95, Headbone Interactive, (800) 267-4709 or (206) 323-0073, www.headbone.com

#8: Muppets Inside

Have you noticed anything strange about your computer lately? Do you sometimes hear peculiar sounds coming out of your hard drive? Somehow a gaggle of Muppets have managed to get lost inside your system, and Kermit needs your help to rescue them. Hop aboard the Databus and put on your thinking cap, because the only way you can rescue your fabulously fuzzy friends is to solve an assortment of puzzles, games and quizzes starring your favorite Muppet characters. Answer correctly and you'll clear the debris blocking your path; sooner or later you'll discover nine missing Muppets.

This entertaining product will delight Muppet fans, old and new. Filled with hilarious puzzles like "The Swedish Chef's Kitchen of Doom," "Scoops That Song" and the Muppet's own version of *Hollywood Squares*, "Trivial ... but True," this product maintains all the appeal of the original television show. Whether you're a kid experiencing Muppet mayhem for the first time or a parent rediscovering these bawdier characters, *Muppets Inside* is sure to put a smile on your face.

\$19.95, Starwave, (800) 457-8646 or (206) 957-2900, www.starwave.com



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Computer Game Review



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Descent II: The Infinite Abyss, includes the award winning Descent II with an optional 3D accelerated version and the all new Vertigo Series. With 50 levels, 40 enemy robots, easy to use utilities like the Mission Builder, Level Converter and the Robot Texture Editor your Descent experience is infinite.



Parallax
Software



#9: Maurice Ashley Teaches Chess

While MAURICE ASHLEY TEACHES CHESS is an excellent chess guide for beginners and intermediate players of all ages, Ashley's comprehensive and entertaining approach makes this teaching tool an obvious choice for kids new to the game. Ashley manages to simplify classic chess moves by translating them into familiar analogies: don't be surprised if you hear about pawns scoring a touchdown, while football quarterbacks or soccer goalies defend their territory. The user-friendly interface will allow your kids to explore everything from learning how a piece moves to surveying the board while Ashley talks them through a master game. And with its highly competitive advanced levels, you can be fairly sure that this is one game kids will not easily outgrow.

\$49.95, Davidson & Associates/Simon & Schuster, (800) 457-8357 or (310) 793-0600, www.david.com



Other Suggestions

These are the products that didn't quite make our Top Ten list but are still worth checking out. If you're searching for something inoffensive, yet appealing to older kids, take a look at *RoboQuest* from Philips Media. Set in a Doom-like environment, players must construct their own robot to conquer ghosts, ghouls and other scary monsters and rescue the townchildren from an evil witch.

If your kid's a die-hard Muppet fan and likes adventure games, then *Muppet Treasure Island* is certainly worth a look, although I felt it needed a few more doses of the distinctive wackiness that made *The Muppet Show* such a great success.

If you don't have a problem with a rambunctious rodent teaching your kids, check out Sega's *Sonic's School House*. The blue hedgehog has had a career change and an attitude adjustment, in his new role as teacher, Sonic will encourage your kids to practice reading, spelling and math through gameplay. First one to answer correctly gets a gumball.

#10: Toy Story Animated StoryBook



The *TOY STORY ANIMATED STORYBOOK* delivers the same lively animation, charm and humor that made the film a hit. Kids will enjoy interacting with their favorite characters, while parents will find that the revised dialogue and story line provide an entertaining alternative to re-watching the video. While recommended for kids aged 3-9, certain CGW editors are known to be enchanted by this product. If you enjoyed the movie, the *TOY STORY ANIMATED STORYBOOK* will entertain you further—no matter how old you are.

\$59.95, Disney Interactive, (800) 906-9234, www.toystorybook.com



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to plant sod in a face mask. Bone-jarring match-ups that reek of Madden. This is the Ultimate Judge.™ The blitz is on PC/CD.



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QUINN
LIVE
97

And on the eighth day we took the rock out of the Stone Age. Elevated it to where the laws of gravity don't apply.



Where swish is the national anthem. And man soars to perfection. This is the Ultimate Judge.™ Throw it down on PC-CD.





FIFA
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National hero? Or infamous goat? The answer is black and white. It's also round. And only you stand in its way.

He doesn't just defend a goal. He defends a nation.



ore, hustle is currency. And points don't come cheap. This is the Ultimate Judge™ Set goals. Defend them on PC-CD.





NHL⁹⁷

Some guys have nightmares when they're awake. The lucky just get a bloodshot eyelid of severe puck abuse.

Why goalies suffer from insomnia.



the fiercest blade-to-ice contact ever hammered into 3 periods. This is the Ultimate Judge.™ Carve up the ice on PC-CD.





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hear it laughing as it goes by.



...has had for those guys who want a candy bar named after them. That's the Ultimate Judge. Bring it home on PC-CD.





PGA
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FOR WINDOWS 95

There's a place where the silence is deafening. Every nerve is frayed. And each swing is a test. What

Actions speak louder than words. Bring earplugs.

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Madden's gridiron genius is all over this thing. Hammering out strategy and interactive insight at Madden University. Dishing buckets of stats. Spewing commentary, it's authentic NFL action with brand new polygon rendered spirals. All the mud, sweat and guts that you can stomach.



100% pure NBA hoops. Staffed with new eye-glazing, 3-D graphics. Epic animation. "Cut 'em any way you want." In-depth stats. And dead-on real, poly players. A whole new level above the legendary gameplay you have come to expect from LIVE.



Proof you can get what you want by kicking and screaming. Fully rendered, realistic 3-D players collide amid retina-melting, Motion-Blending animation. Plus, full commentary with three different types of play-by-play. The entire world of pro soccer is now at your feet. Literally.



This supersonic baby is the hardest checking explosion of hockey yet. With breakthrough 3-D graphics. And stellar motion capture animation that puts you right on the ice. All the real players and teams. NHL excitement in all its freezing-hot glory.



If you've got the lumber, step up and launch one from here. You'll find every Major League* team, player and ballpark immersed in goose bump raising animation. And with multi-player, you really see who's got the diamond wrapped around their finger.



Take the hottest names on the TOUR. And go divot-for-divot with them on the nation's most spectacular links. You can also add on world-class courses like TPC at Sawgrass*, The Links at Spanish Bay* or Wentworth*. As real as it gets without the blisters.





STOCKING STUFFERS

by Charlotte "The Elf High Commander" Parfiter, Jill "The Multimediac-Talented Elf" Anderson, and Gerry "The Elf Who Didn't Write Number 3" Aksh

Sometimes, as shocking as it might seem, a game might not be the right gift. The person you're buying for has every flight sim in existence already. The young gamer in your family is so fixated on Duke NUKEM 3D that no other game will see his computer until the snow melts. Or you haven't seen the front of your wife's head since she got hold of DUNGEON KEEPER, and you don't want to make matters worse by giving her a new fix. Or (shudder) your mother-in-law has a computer but doesn't play games.

No need to despair: There are dozens of computer products on store shelves that aren't games! (Yes, we were surprised, too.) Some multimedia titles even deal with (gasp) things you can do in real life!

#1: Catz And Dogz

Here's the perfect gift for anyone who adores pets, but splutters and sneezes whenever a dog or cat approaches. PF Magic have created *Catz* and *Dogz*, lovable pets that live inside your computer. You'll be able to play with a selection of appealing pets, that are just longing for a good home. Once you've adopted your little darling, give her a name and she'll live happily in her playpen on your desktop, until you're ready to play.

Both *Catz* and *Dogz* come equipped with all the products you'll need to take care of them: food, water, treats, a ball, a squirt bottle (if they're misbehaving, a quick spray of water will remind them who's boss), and even a paintbrush to change their fur color, should you feel like giving them a makeover. *Dogz* will feel quite at home once you give them a well-chewed tennis shoe and a doggie bone. Your cat will delight in playing with her Cat Gancer toy (a pom-pom on a string), and squeaky doll.

Kitties also love to chase mice around your computer. If you want to see how your faux feline hunts, there's nothing like a slab of cheese to tempt that mouse out into the open. Watch your cat running wildly around her playpen, trying to protect you from the little critter. When you're away from your desk both *Dogz* and *Catz* can be used as a screensaver. Puppies will howl at the moon until you return, while cats happily chase mice. And if anyone tries to touch your computer while you're gone, both

animals prove to be tremendous guard-dogs!

You'll find yourself longing to pet your baby at every opportunity. (These digital pets prove to be particularly entertaining during long, dull telephone calls.) But if you must leave to do some work, why not free your pet from their playpen and let them prow around the desk top?

The program's artificial intelligence, which allows your pet to react when you throw a ball or spray them with water, is so realistic that you may even find yourself talking to your pet. And while these animals don't require as much maintenance as a regular pet, don't be surprised if you have a hard time tearing yourself away.

\$19.95 (each pet) PF Magic (800) 482-3678, www.pfmagic.com



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#2: Steven Spielberg: Director's Chair

Do you have a Smart Alec in your family? Someone who constantly criticizes movies and says, "I bet if they gave me all that money, I could make a movie like that." Well, here's your opportunity to tell Mr. Smart Alec to put his money where his mouth is. **Steven Spielberg: Director's Chair** gives you a chance to be the new kid on the block in Hollywood. As a rookie director you're under the gun: You have to write, film and edit your masterpiece, on schedule and under budget. Mr. Spielberg has made sure that you have the hottest names in Hollywood available to work with you, including Jennifer Aniston and Quentin Tarantino, as your leads. Now, it's down to you to complete the project, so don't blow it. You'll have to think fast, as production dilemmas appear out

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\$54.95, Knowledge Adventure, (800) 542-4240, www.directorschair.com

#3: CGW Book Series

BradyGAMES has a new book line, published in cooperation with Computer Gaming World, designed to help the frustrated gamer in your life.

The Computer Gaming World Graphic Adventure Companion, authored by Ron Wainio and CGW columnist Scorpius, covers 28 of the top recent Adventure games. The book features detailed walkthroughs for specific games, designed to help you find those hiding objects, manipulate those ornery characters, and defeat those dastardly puzzles. Games featured include *GAZEK*,

KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN, *SPYGLASS*, *MIST*, and *BOWS AND BUTTHEAD*. *VIRTUAL STUNIONARY*. A valuable addition to any adventure game enthusiast's collection, the book also includes generic cheats and strategies for the genre in general.

If your frustration is not from the gameplay itself, but from not being able to get the games to run in the first place, pick up a copy of *Computer Gaming World's Why Won't This \$9M\$ Game Work?*, authored by CGW editors Denny Akin and Terry Coleman. This troubleshooting guide features an easy-to-use graphical layout, step-by-step explanations, and in-depth cross-references designed to help both the neophyte and the expert. Learn how to optimize your machine's performance; how to fix those darned sound, video and hardware configuration problems; how to run DOS programs—with top performance—under Win 95, and more.

\$24.95 each, BradyGAMES, (800) 428-5331, www.mcp.com/brady



#4: Cinemania 97

It's Saturday night and there's nothing on but reruns. Online Descort II is caking your name, but if you spend one more minute on the computer, your girlfriend's going to leave you to play with your joystick alone. Renting a movie and grabbing Chinese take-out might be a healthier alternative. But the video store is picked dry of all the hot hits at this hour, and there's no way you're going to talk her into watching *Buckaroo Banzai* again. What to do?

Break out a copy of Microsoft's **CINEMANIA 97**. This handy reference CD is loads of fun for movie buffs, and a godsend for frequent tape renters. You'll find reviews of hundreds of films by Roger

Ebert, Leonard Maltin, and Pauline Kael, along with still images, sound bites, and occasional short clips from big-name movies.

It's the search engine, though, that makes the program shine. Want to find a good Jimmy Stewart western you haven't seen yet? In the mood for a Janeane Garofalo comedy? Can't remember the name of that weird 70's sci-fi flick with Bruce Dern? All this info is just a couple of clicks away along with tons of biographies and filmographies.

\$34.95, Microsoft, (800) 426-9400, cinemania.msn.com



#5: A Gaming Magazine



We really think a Christmas Gift will please if it's informative and useful. So why not get your gamer a Complete Game Watchtower, a magazine resource to help them

avoid sims with Complex Gooey Warplanes? Certainly, they can listen to the Constantly Griping Wahoos on the net to make their decisions, but why not get them a magazine they can take with them to the train or bathroom, one written by Certified Game Wags who spend their days and nights finding out which games are Completely Glorious Winners? One with tips for winning Complicated Galactic Wars? We wouldn't want to be so self-serving as to name this publication, but we humbly think it's the best resource for those seeking Critical Gaming Wisdom.

\$27.94 (12 issues), Computer Gaming World, (800) 827-4450, www.zdnet.com/gaming

Other Stuff

We had to stuff Mania Multimedia's Reo-Shift 2 in somewhere. This multimedia astronomy program takes amateur astronomers on a stunning tour of the heavens.

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Circle Reader Service #135

The 3D Shock Wave

3D Comes Of Age With Second-Generation 3D Video Cards

BY LOYD CASE

Last month we covered a number of new graphics cards, but with the exception of the boards based on the 3Dfx Voodoo chip-set, most of them weren't really killer solutions. Don't get me wrong. Most of them were pretty likable, but for the most part, they lacked that certain knock-your-socks-off factor (with the exception of Diamond's Monster 3D and Ditch'd's Righteous 3D.)

This month, though, is different. All of the boards this month differ from last month's selection in some basic way. Either they're new, eagerly anticipated technology, or they fill a market niche for professional users who happen

to also be game players. We have three boards based on Rendition's Verité 1000E chip, two VIREVIX boards (the VIREVIX being the professional VRAM-based cousin of the VIRGE) and the ATI Pro Turbo 3D PC2TV. In addition, you'll get a sneak preview of two products that may well be on store shelves as you read this: boards based on 3D Labs' Penmedia chip and the new Videologic board using the PowerVR chip from NEC.

DIAMOND STEALTH 3D 3000

Last month, we looked at several cards using the S3 VIRGE chip. This month, we have a couple of cards using the



DIAMOND STEALTH 3D 3000

Pros: Usual solid Diamond implementation. Easy to use Windows tools.

Cons: Slower than it's Stealth 3D 2000 little brother in 3D. 2 to 4 MB upgrade is pricey, no VESA 2.0 SVGA built-in.

Software Bundle: Descent II-Destruction Quarkon, Asymetrix 3dFX, Compaq's Interactive Encyclopedia MPEG edition

Price: 2 MB \$249 (upgradable to 4 MB) 4 MB \$299

Contact: Diamond Multimedia(800) 4MULTRM <http://www.diamond.com>

VIREVIX chip, including Diamond's Stealth 3D 3000. The VX is the big brother to the VIRGE chip, and includes features like a 220 MHz RAMDAC, enabling better refresh rates and high resolution support, and sup-

port for faster VRAM memory, which can read and write data simultaneously.

Interestingly, the Stealth 3D 3000 is a little slower in Direct3D than its little brother, the 3D 2000. Winbench scores are slightly higher, but DDS support is somewhat lacking. Diamond still doesn't have VESA 2.0 support in hardware, so Dualte wouldn't recognize it as a VESA 2.0 card.

Installation was smooth, and the Diamond InControl tools are simple and straightforward. As for professional features, the card will support high refresh rates even at a 1600x1200 resolution. Windows NT OpenGL drivers will also be available. Overall, it's a typically solid, but un spectacular, effort from Diamond.

STB VELOCITY 3D

The Velocity 3D is available with either 4 MB or a staggering 8 MB of memory (the first 4 MB is EDO VRAM, the second 4 MB is EDO DRAM). The additional 4 MB is used for storing textures and z-buffer information. An 8 MB card should be able to store a

lot of texture, at least for gaming applications.

Performance is stellar, top. The Velocity 3D posted some of the fastest Winbench scores we've seen, though Velocity 3D's Direct3D performance is just a bit slower than the Diamond Stealth 3D 3000, as is DDS speed. Like the Diamond card, Dualte does not recognize the Velocity 3D as a VESA 2.0 compliant SVGA card, and would not run in 640x480 mode. It offers the same high-resolution support as the Diamond card. Windows NT 4.0 and OpenGL drivers will be available.

We did note one quirk when running Hellbender. Although the Velocity 3D was recognized by all the Direct3D test programs, Hellbender couldn't detect the presence of an accelerator. STB is aware of the problem and is looking into it.

VELOCITY 3D

Pros: Expandable to 8 MB, fast Windows performance, aggressive pricing.

Cons: Relatively slow 3D performance, no VESA 2.0 SVGA built-in.

Software Bundle: Bundle information wasn't final at press time. Contact STB for more information on software bundles.

Price: 4 MB: \$249 8 MB: \$349

Contact: STB Systems (872) 234-8750 <http://www.stb.com>

3D GRAPHICS CARDS

Overall, the STB is a smooth performer, with the added advantage of fast windows performance and the ability to add a lot of memory for sophisticated 3D applications.

ATI PRO TURBO 3D PC2TV

Like the Xpression 3D PC2TV card reviewed



ATI PRO TURBO 3D PC2TV

Pros: NTSC & S-video outputs, VESA 2.0 built into hardware, expandable to 8MB.

Cons: Slow Windows and DDS performance, somewhat pricey

Software Bundle:

Multimedia files, no games.

Price: \$299 for 4 MB, \$399 for 8 MB (VRAM)

Contact: ATI Technologies
(905) 862-2600
<http://www.atitech.com.ca>

Xpression's, although Hellbender actually seemed a touch less smooth. We also connected the 3D Pro Turbo to a standard Sony 27" televi-

last month, the Pro Turbo is based on ATI's Rage2 3D accelerator chip and has connectors for NTSC and S-video

out. Unlike the Xpression, it can be expanded to 8 MB of VRAM and can handle high resolutions and refresh rates. Just for kicks, we ran Winbench 96 at 1600x1200x65,000 colors and got a very respectable 24 Winmarks. Other Winbench scores were somewhat slower than the S3-based cards, and DDS performance was sub-par.

The 3D performance was pretty much equivalent to the

sion. The image quality was decent for composite video. The TV feature also only supports certain resolutions, but there was something oddly compelling about Quake at 400x300 frame size, which is the aspect ratio for standard television.

You can also have a computer monitor attached simultaneously so you can videotape those hot game sessions. Overall, this is an innovative card, although we wish the performance was just a bit better.

WAITING FOR GOOOT...ER, RENDITION

One of the most anticipated 3D accelerator chips is the Rendition Venti 1000. As a 2D/3D solution, Venti seems to combine the right balance of features, performance and price-point for a gamer's 3D accelerator. And unlike Godot, Venti has arrived. This review sees the arrival of not one, but three Venti-based cards, including products from Intergraph and Sierra.

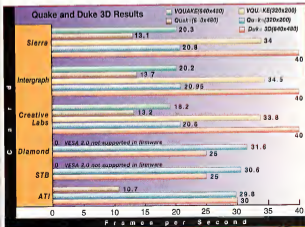
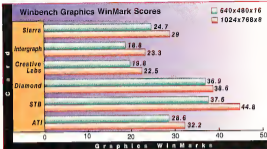
In some respects, the Venti rewrites the rules for graphics cards. For example, it's quite slow in standard DOS VGA. But before you wince, consider that it's really fast in DOS SVGA—one of the faster DOS SVGA cards we've seen. For example, Cbench SVGA scores were actually faster in SVGA than VGA!

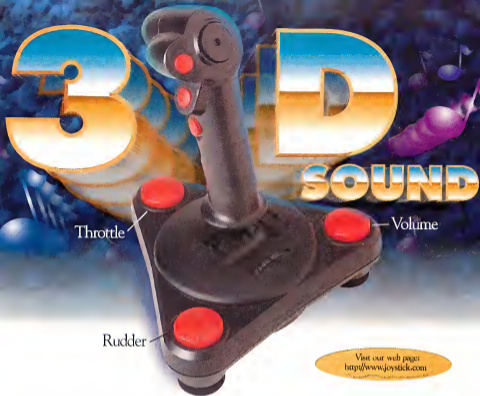
Standard Windows performance is fairly slow, too, although the dri-

vers are still being tweaked. However, DirectDraw and 3D performance is better than any existing combination 2D/3D board, especially when you start turning on some of the more sophisticated features. One wild card here is the Permedia (see page 270).

There is one caveat for all the Rendition boards: The Venti makes extensive use of DMA (Direct Memory Access) in your PC. Some older PC's, particularly those with 60 and 66 MHz Pentiums, may not handle DMA correctly. Boards using the Venti will run, but expect about a 30% performance hit.

Okay, so let's deal the cards.





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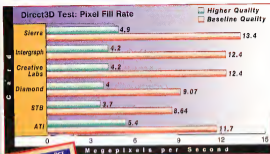
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CREATIVE LABS 3D BLASTER PCI

Pros: Very good 3D performance, superb image quality, solid VESA 2.0 SVGA performance, wide distribution

Cons: Poor DOS VGA performance, mediocre Windows performance

Software Bundle: Quake (shareware), including VQuake accelerated executable, Rebel Moon, Flight Unlimited and Battle Arena Toshinden

Price: \$199 for 4 MB (EODD DRAM)

Contact: Creative Labs (800) 998-1000 <http://www.creativelabs.com>

CREATIVE LABS 3D BLASTER PCI

The 3D Blaster is probably one of the most anticipated products we've ever seen. The DOS VGA performance is stunningly poor, but the SVGA performance is stellar. But when you run Quake using the Rendition-accelerated VQuake exe, you know you have something special here. Quake is

almost a completely different game

with the 3D Blaster. Performance was about 50% better than standard Quake on a P166—with features such as bilinear filtering and full mip mapping turned on at 640x480. The image quality was, to put it simply, superb.

The Windows benchmarks were pretty slow—you'll be able to run productivity applications with no problems, but the Venté is no star for 2D graphics applications. DirectDraw performance seemed pretty good, though—Earthshock 2 and Mechwarrior 2: Mercenaries ran smoothly.

The Direct3D benchmarks showed good performance—the Venté is a good polygon performer, probably because it has some limited geometry setup on board. Interestingly, the performance with z-buffer enabled is about half of that without—but most games these days don't use z-buffers for hidden surface removal—yet. Quake does use z-buffers in a limited way—only for character calculations. Hellbender ran at between 14 and 25 frames per second, slowing down to a just-playable 9-12 fps inside tunnels. It was pretty much the best performance for Hellbender this side of a 3dFX dedicated 3D card.

In addition to the shareware version of Quake, Creative ships accelerated versions

of Flight Unlimited, Battle Arena Toshinden and Rebel Moon (a 3D shooter). Oh, and if you have the full version of Quake, the card ships with the VQUAKE executable—just add it to your Quake directory and prepare to rock and roll.

Installation was pretty straightforward, using the 3D Blaster Setup program from Windows 95. The one quirk: 3D Blaster doesn't use the standard Windows 95 monitor setup to set its refresh rate—you have to do it manually for each resolution the first time you run it.

The 3D Blaster hits its mark squarely: this

card is for gamers. Yeah, you can run Word on it, but why?



INTERGRAPH REACTOR

Pros: Very good 3D performance, superb image quality, great SVGA performance, mediocre Windows performance

Cons: Poor DOS VGA performance, mediocre Windows performance

Software Bundle: IndyCar 2 (DOS, Rendition-ready), Quake shareware (with VQuake patch) and Microsoft demo disk.

Price: \$199 (4 MB EODD DRAM)

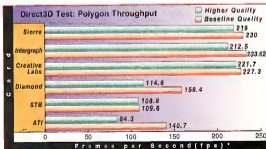
Contact: Intergraph Computer Systems (800) 692-8099 <http://www.intergraph.com>

INTERGRAPH REACTOR

Intergraph has long been known as a manufacturer of high-end workstations and CAD systems. The Reactor is their first entry into the hotly competitive consumer market, and they picked the Venté to be the core of their first product. Coming

from a company with a history of high-end 3D systems, that speaks volumes.

The Reactor's performance was nearly identical with the 3D Blaster, as is the price. The bundle is slightly different: Quake shareware, as in the 3D Blaster, but also the full version of IndyCar 2 (the DOS version,



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Without Monster 3D Acceleration



With Monster 3D Acceleration



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> 3D CARDS PART 2

accelerated for the Vertix), and a CD with demo versions of the Microsoft Direct3D files, Hellbender and Monster Truck Madness.

IndyCar 2 on this card looks well, superlatives for us. The clouds look real, the trees look real, you can read the text on all the cars and it runs at 28-30 frames per second.

Installation was a snap, and the Reactor uses the standard Windows 95 installation routines for adding new hardware. Overall, the card seems as solid as the 3D Blaster. Although Intergraph has no history of supporting consumer products, they seem committed to the long haul.

Intergraph has signed up a major distributor for the card, but in case you can't find it in the stores, the company is making an 800 number available for orders.



SIERRA SCREAMIN' 3D

Pros: Very good 3D performance, superb image quality, best Windows 2D performance of Revision-based boards, good SVGA performance.

Cons: Poor DOS VGA performance, so-so overall Windows 2D performance.

Software Bundle: IndyCar 2, Silent Thunder (A10-W), CyberGladiators, Quake shareware (with VQuake patch)

Price: Price: \$199 (4 MB EDD DRAW)

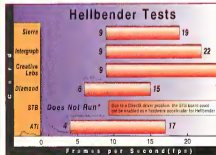
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SIERRA SCREAMIN' 3D

At first, it may puzzle some of you as to why Sierra, the game company, is selling 3D accelerators. Those of us with some historical perspective know this isn't unprecedented. A few years back, Sierra sold

sound cards, hoping to seed the market so that more computer games would be incorporate high quality audio in their games. Now it's doing the same for 3D graphics. The board was actually designed by the American arm of Canopus, a Japanese company that's the largest vendor of graphics and add-in boards in Japan.

Although standard Windows performance was similar to the other two



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3D GRAPHIC CARDS

▶ 3D CARDS PART 2

cards, we've heard that new drivers are available which should boost the Winbench scores by about 25%.

The Screamin' 3D differed a bit from the other two boards, particularly in performance. In D3D test, fill rate was a bit faster, but polygon performance was slower. This showed up in Heilbender, where the average frame rate seemed slower than the other two Venúle boards. However, the performance of the accelerated version of Quake seemed quite similar, as did IndyCar2. Like the other Rendition OEMs, Sierra will be bundling the shareware, Rendition-accelerated version of Quake, which will also let the full retail version take advantage of the Rendition chip.

Of course, being a game company, Sierra plans on bundling its own games. Sierra plans to sell and support the Screamin' 3D through its retail channels.

WORK IN PROGRESS: PERMEDIA

Several boards using the Permedia chip from 3D Labs will likely be shipping by the time you read this, including one from Creative Labs (part of their Graphics Blaster series). The folks at 3D Labs sent us a Permedia reference board with 4 MB of VRAM. The drivers were pretty solid, and we were able to thoroughly exercise the card and chip. DOS VGA and SVGA performance was below average, and Windows performance was also a bit sub-par. However, the card did quite well in our Direct3D benchmarks. Interestingly the card not only came with the Permedia chip, but also 3D Labs Delta chip, which handles a lot of the geometry setup chores, offloading the main CPU. This was reflected by better polygon numbers with Delta enabled. Oddly Heilbender did worse with the Delta enabled; according to 3D Labs, this is because many games (including Heilbender) have relatively low polygon counts, and Delta performs better when lots of polygons are thrown at it.

Permedia already has OpenGL and Windows NT 4.0 drivers, great 3D performance and passable Windows and DOS performance. When Permedia based cards ship, they might be an interesting answer for those people who have to do "real" work in addition to playing games.


Work in Progress: PowerVR

The PowerVR chip is already on cards in some Compaq home computers. Videologic will be shipping PowerVR cards onto retail shelves sometime this winter. Like the 3dFX boards, PowerVR boards are 3D only, requiring a PCI slot and another graphics card. However, the 3D feature set is much more limited. The PowerVR also has the capability of storing textures in system memory.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to thoroughly wring out the card, as it requires DirectX 3.0 from Microsoft, which is just now shipping. We did look at a PowerVR accelerated version of Mechwarrior 2. Because the PowerVR lacks texture filtering, the sky and ground textures seemed a bit pixelated, but performance was pretty good. Videologic expects their PowerVR-based Apocalypse 3D card to come in well under \$200.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Looking back on the past two months, it's clear that 3D-accelerated graphics is here to stay. We're just now starting to see cards, such as the Rendition-based cards and the 3dFX cards, that really deliver on the promise of better image quality and better performance. Now all we need are the games! ☺



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Santa's Little Tech Helper

Tips For Avoiding Technical Difficulties With Your New Toys

by Loyd "Propeller-Head Elf" Case

I was sitting at the keyboard trying to finish the graphics card article when the phone rang. The distraction was annoying. "Hello?" I said tersely.

"Hello. Is this Loyd Case?"

"Yes."

"This is S. Claus. Can we talk for a moment?"

I took the phone away from my ear and stared at the receiver for a moment. "Come on, who is this?"

"Santa Claus. From the North Pole. Have you got a minute?"

"Sure." Maybe, I thought, if I hurry him for a few minutes, he'll go away and leave me alone.

"You know about the letters we get before Christmas asking for presents?"

"Of course," I replied.

"When I was a kid, I sent a few myself."

"Right. Did you know

about the letters we get after Christmas?"

"Uh, no," I replied, mystified.

"These last few years, we've been delivering a lot of computer hardware and computer games. We try to keep up with the trends. But in the last couple of years, we've been getting a huge amount of mail after Christmas asking us for support, and the elves are just overwhelmed."

"Can't say I'm surprised. What do you

want from me?"

"Could you dig into your mail bag and write up some tips on what to expect? Maybe I'll get a little less mail after December 25th. The mail we get before the 25th is bad enough."

"Uh, sure Santa, anything to help."

At this, he hung up.

Well, I don't know if it was really Santa, but he has a point. This holiday season, you'll probably see that new game or piece of hardware that you'd been anticipating. So I dug into my e-mail box and found some unpleasant experiences peo-

ple had when they installed the game, he was told that his graphics driver hadn't been tested with DirectDraw, so did he want to have them replaced? When he checked NO, the installation program exited.

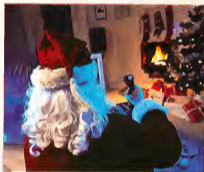
Somewhat annoyed, he ran the installer again, but answered YES this time. Therein began a nightmare of system reconfigurations, downloading new drivers and hours spent reinstalling Windows 95.

While MARATHON 2's installation is particularly egregious in its refusal to install at all if you don't want your graphics drivers

overwritten, most Windows 95 games that use DirectDraw ask you this question—even when you have the latest and greatest drivers already installed. Come on, I thought, Windows 95 was supposed to reduce the amount of tech support required to run a game.

My advice is to get the latest possible drivers. If your card vendor isn't going to support DirectDraw in your particular card—because it's ready to collect Social Security—get a new card. Newer Win 95 titles have probably been written to DirectX versus 3.0, but a recently purchased board may have shipped with DirectX 2.0 drivers, so you'll need a driver update from the vendor.

Another piece of advice: if the game refuses to install if you refuse to have it replace your driver, return the game. You



people have had—and came up with some tips for avoiding them.

THROUGH THE GLASS, DARKLY

Recently, one reader brought a copy of MARATHON 2 for Windows 95 by Bungie Software. MARATHON and MARATHON 2: DURNDIEL have gotten nice reviews in the Macintosh press, but this was Bungie's first port to Windows 95. When my crea-

“ Fewer things are more annoying than hearing loud crackling coming from your new 9,000-watt speakers. ”



should always be given an option to not have an application muck around with a fundamental part of your system.

SO WHERE'S MY THREE GIG??

Recently, Western Digital and Quantum have begun shipping 3+ GB EIDE drives. Seagate is on the verge of shipping a 4 GB EIDE drive. The prices look pretty good, but getting one of these big drives may actually cause some major

heartburn. The culprit is the ROM BIOS in your computer. Even some of the more recent BIOSes out there can't support a 3 GB drive, so you end up with apparently less space than you paid for.

The right solution is to get a new BIOS from your system vendor or dealer. If you can't obtain one, you'll have to look into a disk manager, like Ontrack, which is a device driver that lets your operating system see the full capacity of the disk.

LAB NOTES

Roland Source: The Roland SCD-15 is probably the finest-sounding MIDI wavetable daughterboard. It's a full Roland GS MIDI card that plugs into the wavetable connector on Sound Blaster 16e, AWE-32s and other sound cards with a 16-pin Waveblaster header. Unfortunately, it seems to have disappeared since Roland USA

bailed out of the consumer desktop audio market. Fear not, the SCD-15 and its General MIDI-only sibling are still available from a company called Edrol. They are selling the SCD-15, SCD-10 and a host of other Roland desktop gear. Check it out at <http://www.edrol.com> or by calling 1-800-380-2580.

NO JOY WITH JOYSTICKS

We've run this one in the past, but I keep getting e-mail on it, so let's do it again, along with a new twist for Plug-and-Play (PnP) sound cards.

Trying to get a joystick configured in Windows 95 apparently requires a degree in arcane studies—especially true if you have a PnP sound card and a dedicated game card. Not one, but two game port adapters appear in your device manager, and neither of them seems to work. Here's how you get them going.

First, bring up the device manager by right-clicking on the My Computer icon and selecting Properties, then click on the Device Manager tab. Scroll down until you see Sound, Video and Game Controllers. Delete both entries. Now reboot the system.

Since the sound card is a PnP card, Windows 95 will detect the joystick port and add it in. Now bring up the device manager again, and find the entry for the

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game port. Select Properties for that device and click on the Original Configuration box so that it is empty (i.e., there's no longer a check mark).

Now run Control Panel, select Add New Hardware, find Sound, Video and Game Controllers, and add in the driver for the game port (it's listed under Microsoft). You may have to restart the system, but now a joystick attached to the dedicated game card should work correctly.

SNAP, CRACKLE AND POP: GREAT FOR CEREAL, NOT SPEAKERS

If you've just acquired a pair of \$200 (or more) speakers, fewer things are more annoying than hearing loud hiss or crackling coming out of your killer new 9,000-watt speakers. Check the back of your sound card. You may have attached the speakers to the socket labeled Speakers.

This may seem counterintuitive, but remove the jack from the Speaker socket and plug it into the Line Out socket. Many sound cards have 2- or 4-watt


amplifiers for unpowered speakers, and this "amplified" signal has, uh, suboptimal audio fidelity. If you already have speakers with serious amplification, they'll sound better with the much clearer line-level signal from the Line Out jack.

WEIRD EXTRA DEVICES

Another problem that occurs occasionally is that of phantom devices showing up in your device manager. For example, if you have nothing but SCSI drives on a newer Pentium system, you probably disabled the built-in EIDE/PCI ports. However, these still occasionally appear in the device manager, because Windows 95 flippantly bypasses the BIOS when doing its device detection. The secret is to go to the device manager, select the tab labeled General (as in the sound card joystick port above) and then deselect the box labeled Original Configuration. The device will still appear in the device manager, but it will actually be disabled.

CHECK TCP/IP FOR PERFORMANCE

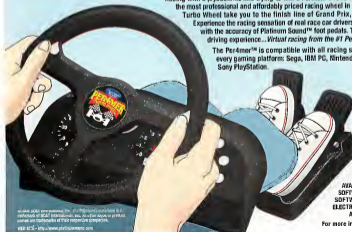
If you've played Windows 95 games, or played DOS games directly from the Windows 95 desktop, you may have noticed odd pauses and hesitations in otherwise smooth-running games. If those pauses or hesitations happen at regular intervals—three or four at a time—check your networking configuration. From Control Panel, bring up the Network control panel. If you have a network card, and TCP/IP is enabled for that card, then that may be the source of the pauses. Turn off TCP/IP while playing the game. (Note: It's okay if TCP/IP is enabled for the dial-up adapter, usually for Internet access. These pauses don't occur then, unless you're logged into your service provider.)

Well, it looks like we're out of space for this one. When you write Santa your letter, make sure you tell him I did my part. Now he needs to deliver, so fire up the reindeer... 

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Role-Playing's Cutting Edge

Here At Last, *DAGGERFALL* Is A Real, Epic RPG Of A Lifetime



Few games have been as eagerly anticipated as Bethesda Softworks' *The Elder Scrolls: DAGGERFALL*, especially given the hoard of deaths in quality CRPGs these days. Other than Blizzard's *Diablo*, this may well be the only role-playing product we have until sometime next year, which makes the interest in *DAGGERFALL* all the greater. In particular, people want to know two things: Is it better than the game's prequel, *ARSEN*? Is it as buggy as *ARSEN*? The answer to both questions is yes.

We'll come to the problems in due time; right now, let's look at the game itself. Your character is a trusted confidant of the Emperor of Tamriel. He sends you to the royal court of Daggerfall because the ghost of Daggerfall's previous king,



HAY THERE Horseback riding through the streets of Daggerfall. This is one of the game's more earthy (and earthy) ways to travel.

Lysandus, haunts the streets at night, calling for vengeance. No one knows why. Your job is to find out.

There is also a secondary mission: The Emperor sent a letter to the queen of Daggerfall that never arrived. He wants you to find out about that, too, and

retrieve the letter, if possible. You start for Daggerfall, but a storm wrecks your ship and you end up in the dungeon of Pinaker's Hold instead. This is where the game actually begins, and your first task is to escape the Hold and get to Daggerfall itself.

I GOT SKILLS

Anyone who played *ARSEN* will find much that is familiar in *DAGGERFALL*. The view is again 3D, with most combat by either mouse or cursor. People stroll the streets during the day, and clicking the cursor on someone will usually begin a conversation. Seasons and weather change; you can find yourself brudging through rain, snow, fog, or sunshine. As before, combat is in real time. Spellcasting is done by bringing up the spellbook, which temporarily freezes the action while you choose an incantation. However, though much is the same,

“**DAGGERFALL** is the closest thing to real role-playing I've seen outside of the **ULTIMAS.**”

CRYSTAL BALL

As we close the curtain, adjust our cape, and gaze into the crystal ball this month, your adventure game soothsayer is getting a vision of a famous text adventure game that begins with Z and ends in K. The middle letters are a little blurry. What we see, in any case, is a vision of hard-working people at Activision commencing development on the next game in this series, which will apparently be much more humor-oriented than the previous title. First, however,

the company is finishing up their graphic version of another classic text adventure, *PLANETFALL*, due for an early '97 release.

▶Another intriguing title coming up is *REALMS OF THE HAUNTING*, a 3D adventure/action hybrid (using the *Nonality* engine) with an epic story line of good vs. evil. The game looks and feels like an adventure game, but with combat sequences punctuating the ride. Could be the type of genre-buster that the more adventurous among us crave.



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THE WARRIOR'S WARDROBE DAGGERFALL's robust inventory display helps Scorpia meet her busy schedule. After eight, she changes into evening armor at the click of a mouse.

there are many changes, too, and perhaps the biggest one is the switch to a skill-based advancement system. It is no longer a matter of how many monsters you kill. Your character's rise in level is governed solely by the use in his or her skills. As the skills improve, your character goes up in level; the more you use them, the faster you go up. Skills are divided into four groups: primary, major, minor, and miscellaneous. All of them improve with use at the same rate (faster when the skill is low, slower when the skill is high).

Because of this change and the addition of skills that did not appear in *ARENA*, you won't be able to transfer any *ARENA* characters into *DAGGERFALL*; you must create a new one. All the old professions, from the Acrobat to the Spellweaver and Sorcerer, are available in *DAGGERFALL*. You can choose one of these "off the rack" classes, or you can create your own.

That's right—you can now make your own character class. You choose the starting skills, any advantages or disadvantages, the minimum stats, and even the minimum number of hit points per level. If you want to be a Sorcerer who can wear plate armor, or a Battlemage who's immune to paralysis, you can do it. This doesn't come free, however. Making a character too potent increases the difficulty of improvement; it can go as high as three times normal progress. So while you can be a virtual superhero or superwoman, your character will advance in

skills very slowly.

To counter this, you can assign a few disadvantages to bring progress back down to a more reasonable level, adding two or three disadvantages to a character that has no special advantages will make it easier for him or her to increase skills. Of course, surviving in the game may be harder for that person, depending on what you choose.

MEMBERS ONLY

Another new feature is the introduction of reputation. You have many reputations in *DAGGERFALL*, which reflect how well (if at all) the game's numerous groups like you. The local population, the nobility, the merchants, guilds and temples, knightly orders, the underworld—all these and more have a certain view of

your character that will shift and change throughout the game based on your actions and other events. Your character does not exist in a vacuum here.

Speaking of guilds, temples, and knightly

orders, there are quite a few you can join. This is an important aspect of *DAGGERFALL*, since rising in rank brings special benefits to members. For instance, potions now can only be purchased at a temple, and only by a temple member of high enough rank (this varies by temple, and not all temples sell potions). Joining the Mages Guild and going high enough gives you access to the Item Maker, where you can have items enchanted with a variety of different spells. You also, of course, obtain access to the ever-popular Spellmaker for those custom spells.

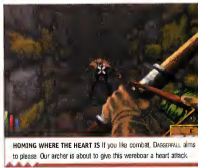
You have to work for the benefits, though. Rising in rank is a combination of doing quests for the guild and improving those skills the organization most favors. Promotions don't happen overnight; either, it takes time to work your way up the ladder.

In a departure from most traditional games, your character does not absolutely have to be good (whatever your definition of good may be). You can create an assassin and go around committing murders, or a thief who picks pockets and robs stores. I don't know if it's really possible to complete the game as a member of the Dark Brotherhood, although you should be able to manage it as a thief. Further, you can also play as a vampire or werewolf. In most games, lycanthropy or vampirism would mean the end of the character. Not here; you can go on, with the benefits of that particular monster type...and also the drawbacks (fairly severe, for vampires). Again, I don't know if you could



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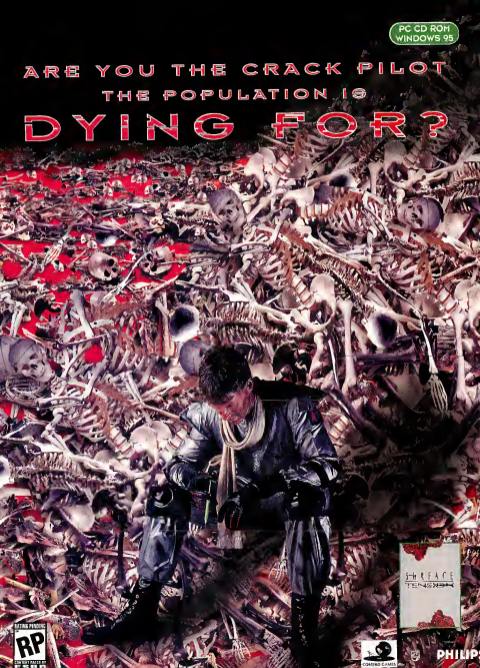
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S I E R R A



option here. You pretty much have to do a dungeon in one expedition.

Towns and cities are as large as they ever were, but the town automap is greatly improved. Now, the shops, taverns, and guilds are highlighted in different colors, making them easy to pick out. If you look at such a building while walking by, its name is written automatically on your map.

THE BAD AND THE UGLY

From all this, you may get the idea that *DAGGERBALL* is a huge game, and it certainly is. The game box says "200 hours of play," and that may well be a conservative estimate; I put in close to that just getting through it at breakneck pace (or as close to breakneck as *DAGGERBALL* allows). The game is deliberately designed to be played slowly, and for some people, it could easily be a lifetime project, there is so much to do here, not even counting the main line.

But every silver cloud has a dark lining, and the living in *DAGGERBALL* can be rather dark at times. Most annoying is a startling omission from the manual that as soon as a character achieves 100 percent in a primary or major skill, level gain stops. That means no more hit points, and no more stat points to distribute. It could also prevent you from finishing the game if it occurs too soon, and that can happen quite easily. All anyone need do is buy a cheap spell at the Mages Guild, sit in a safe place (an inn room, for instance), and

cast that spell over and over again, forcing the skill rating up. While boring and monotonous, that would eventually get the skill to 100. Now, if the character is still low-level at that time, he or she is skunked, because some parts of the main quest only kick in when the character reaches certain levels. Since the character is mased out, however, that will never happen, and the game is at a permanent standstill as far as the main line is concerned.

There are players who will do this; it's a standard (if tedious) technique that is often used in games with skill-based systems (*DUNGEON MASTER 2* and *STONEHEEP*, for instance). Even players who don't do this, but otherwise use magic heavily, may be caught in the trap. It is inexcusable that this information is not presented in the documentation as a warning that advancing too far too quickly can have disastrous consequences in the game.

Another annoyance is that you get only six save positions, which for a game of this size is totally inadequate. There should have been at least 10 of them. I could have lived without the cute snapshots if it meant more save slots.

While there are noiddles in *DAGGERBALL*, a number of dungeons have puzzles, mostly involving levers of one kind or another. Generally, there is no way to figure these out except by a lot of dull trial and error. This is especially the case in the final dungeon, which has

Look to the
spirit, for
there lies the
battleground...



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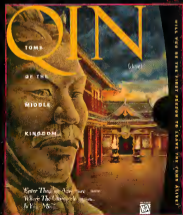
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—STEVEN GREENLEE
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quite a few of these. If we must have puzzles, they should be solvable by reasoning and inspection, and/or clues in the game, rather than a "lets pull this and see what happens" approach.

Most disappointing to me was the completion of the main line. After doing the final dungeon, what you get is a 20-second animation and some choice words about how the world is now



COME ON IN! This charring little building is actually a typical dungeon entrance

changed. Only it didn't seem that way to me. The world seemed very much the same as before. There were certain Royal Personages who should have hated my guts, but they reacted to me about the same as always. I didn't have a very great sense of accomplishment after that.

About the bugs—which were numerous—I'm not going to say as much as planned, because the patch file was released just before this article was written. It fixes 25 separate problems in the game, including a number of side and main quests that didn't work properly (including Myrissa's Letter, the dungeon with Dust of Restful Death, Lord Woodborn's Castle, and the dungeon in Castle Daggerfall). To Bethesda's credit, they moved fast on these and other bugs, the patch coming out within three weeks of the game's release. Still, there is no getting around the fact that, despite intensive testing, this game was released too soon, by at least a month. In any case, you can get the patch from any of the online services or from Bethesda's Web site (www.bethsoft.com). If you're not online, call Bethesda and they'll send you the patch. You really don't want to play without it.

ENDGAME

Yet, for all its faults, *DAGGERFALL* is still a tremendous product. There is much to like about it, from its wonderful custom character facility (one of the best I've ever seen) and skill-based advancement system to many other features there hasn't been room to discuss, such as the much-improved (and properly working) fast travel screen. A great deal of thought went

into this game, and if some of those thoughts went a bit astray, quite a few others were right on target.

Let me put it this way: despite my frustrations with *DAGGERFALL* (I played most of the game before the

patch file arrived), I am looking forward to replaying it, this time in the manner it was meant to be played, without having to skip, or skip on, many of the parts that add so much to the experience.

DAGGERFALL is the closest thing to real role-playing I've seen outside of the *ULTIMAS*, and that's saying a lot. It will definitely keep you busy and happily occupied for quite some time to come. **S**

Scorpius would like you to know that she'd rather drink paval than this rate a game. Abuse the editors if you don't agree with this rating. —Ed.

APPEAL: Traditional role-playing games thriving for the real thing.

PROS: An epic RPG, with hundreds of hours of gameplay. Great custom character creation, numerous good quests, great graphics, and more—a vast improvement over *ANIM*.

CONS: Big flaw in level-advancement system; some dungeons are too big and tedious; the initial release is too buggy; disappointing end game; and too few save game slots.



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Daggerfall Tips

How To Cheat Death, Steal, And Increase Your Skills In DAGGERFALL

This month's column would normally have been the mail, but with the release of *DAGGERFALL*, I decided to switch and offer some game tips for it instead. I suspect most readers won't mind (heh).

—Scorpia

DAGGERFALL requires patience. It was designed to be played slowly. Not a lot happens at first in the main storyline. You could easily feel at a loss after watching *Daggerfall*, where nothing "special" is happening. Don't worry about it. Much depends on both the passage of time and your character's level. Just hang out, enjoy yourself, and things will start to roll, beginning around level 3.

However, don't go too fast, too soon. The final quests won't appear until level 10, so don't max out any primary or magic skill until after that, or you'll be stuck. *Mince* and *Misce* (alchemy) skills are not a problem, since they can only rise to 90 percent.

Your character should have some ability in spellcasting. As in *ARMA*, this one is weighted toward magic-using classes. I recommend at least 175 Int in spell points, or more if you can manage it without making progress too high.

BAD REPUTATION

Whether your character is custom or pre-made, always answer the 12 background questions at the end. If you don't, the game does it for you, and you may not like the results. I didn't do it, and came in with a high reputation with the underworld, so all the non-guild quests I was offered ranged from smuggling to murder. Ugh! I ended up doing guild quests only.

Join the Mages Guild for access to the Spellmaker, and get the Teleport spell

This is the most important spell in the game. It gets you out of those huge dungeons quickly, which is particularly useful when you're on a quest. Teleport is instantaneous, so you have more time to find what you're looking for before the time limit runs out (many quests have time limits). Just remember to set the anchor before leaving town. Anchors are a one-shot deal; after you've returned to the anchor site, it's gone.

The best temple is *Atkey*; you only have to rise one rank, from Novice to Initiate, to buy magic potions. No other temple allows this at so low a rank. Make sure you always save the game before asking for a quest from anyone. While the patch file has fixed a number of side quests, it's likely that some escaped notice. You don't want to be stuck with something you can't finish.

While you can take your time getting to the main line, don't neglect any main line quest. It is vital to do all of them on time. Blowing a main line quest, or refusing one, means you can't finish, because you're only asked once (not a good thing). You'll know that something is part of the main line when a courier hands you a letter. However, on occasion, a letter will

appear in your inventory without notice. After you reach level 3, check the "Clothing & Misc" slots every now and then to see if a massive haul mysteriously appeared there.

LEARN BY DOING

Going up in any organization depends on your rep with them (increased by questing) and skills they consider important. Just doing quests alone isn't enough; relevant skills have to be improved, too. Every time you gain a new rank, at least a month must pass before you can go up another, whatever your rep or skill levels may be.

For the four main guilds, what they value should be evident. With temples, it isn't obvious what the important skills are. To find out you can (a) save the game, (b) join a temple, (c) pay for training, and see what's offered. That will tell you what they're looking at. Then, if you don't like what you see, restore the game and try a different temple.

Train when you're low in level. Training anywhere costs character level x 100, and you get the same results whether you pay 200 gold or 500. Generally, training only improves a skill by 1 percent, and some-



UPPER MANAGEMENT One of the best ways to beat some of the monsters in *Daggerfall* is to fight from the top of a staircase.

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the light cast itself upon
the dark to form highlight and
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traces you won't get an immediate increase from training, either. It works best for those skills you're really low on.

Save before you rest. That's when the game checks for both skill increases and level increase. When the level goes up, you receive hit points, plus random points (4-6) for increasing attributes. Especially if hit points are low, you may want to restore and try again for something better, you can never have enough hit points.

CRIMINAL ADVICE

If you plan to play a thief, buy a cart early in the game. Then, when you bungle a shop, grab all you can carry, put it in the cart, and continue on. You really build up cash quickly. Stealing from shops in daytime is not recommended (too easy to be caught); nighttime burglaries are safer and more profitable.

Whether you steal stuff or have items to sell from bodies or treasure piles, sell at a pawnshop. The prices will be better

there, usually, especially if you have good merchantable skill. You always get less at fancier places (note shop descriptions when you walk in), so avoid them for resales.

The best place to buy weapons is Odd Blades in Daggerfall. As you go up in level, the selection becomes better, and eventually Mithril, Ebony and Daedric (the very best) will be available for purchase. Unfortunately, there is nothing similar for armor. The occasional good piece shows up, but you'll have to depend on dungeoneering to acquire most of the better armor.

Fighting will occupy a lot of your time. The basic method is not to stand still, but move around. The two-step technique works most of the time: forward to strike,



TRAVEL ADVISORY When using the teleport spell (the most important spell in the game), remember to set the anchor before leaving town. Remember, too, that anchor sites can only be used once.

back before the target swings at you. You will often have to move back more than a step or two, depending on your opponent, so try to have rooms behind you for that. If you're at a dead end, facing something in a doorway, use the sidestep keys to "slide" down the hallway and give yourself some room.

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ACCESS
SOFTWARE

have a hard time going up a stairway (not inclined). If you're fighting something tough (that isn't a spellcaster), try to reach stairs if some are nearby, and run to the top. Then turn around. The critter is likely to be near the bottom. Rush down, swing at it, and back up. Continue until the monster is dead. With careful timing, you may come out of the fight unharmed.

DUNGEON MASTERY

Carry a space weapon in dungeons for bashing doors. Some doors are locked, and if lockpicking or an open spell doesn't work, you have to break the door open. Using an extra weapon saves wear and tear on your main hardware. The exception is the magically held lock. Any door with that

requires something special to open it, there is no other way.

Resting in dungeons is difficult, and sometimes, even when you can, you may still be interrupted. One thing to do is rest in small increments, a few hours instead of "until fully healed." Cast a healing spell before resting, stamina and spell points

usually restore faster than hit points, and that can reduce resting time, too.

Move slowly in dungeons, and listen carefully for sounds, especially of a door opening nearby. Approach any doors after that by side-stepping, so you're facing the door and don't have to turn towards it. This can be dangerous, though, if two

doors are facing each other and both open. In that case, just walk past them a short distance by backing up to see what comes out.

Well, that should be enough to get you moving along in DUNGEONM. There's, of course, more I could tell you, but you should find out at least a few things on your own (huh). Until next time, happy adventuring! **S**



SHOP TALK The best weapons shop in *DUNGEONM* is Odd Blades. The selections at the store get better, too, as you go up in level.

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Can You Say Daktaklakpak?

Accolade's Genre-Busting STARCON 3 Is The Ultimate Space Adventure

by Elliott Chin

It's games like this that stir up heated arguments at CCW and throw our usually neat genre classification systems into disarray. What exactly is *STAR CONTROL 3*? To begin with, it's the third installment of the very popular *STAR CONTROL* series, a hilarious and extremely well-scripted story of humans and aliens in perpetual warfare. *STAR CONTROL 1* was an action-strategy game, while *STAR CONTROL 2* was an adventure game with action elements. *STAR CONTROL 3*, though, is less forgiving to our CCW nomenclature. It's a plot-driven, action-adventure-strategy game that might not appeal to the classic adventurer, but should draw in the open-minded gamer who's looking for great stories, humor and gameplay.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Like *STAR CONTROL 2*, *SC3* has a wonderful science-fiction story line. After dismantling the evil Hierarchy of Battle Thralls in *SC2*, you've forged a new alliance between your old allies and enemies called the League of Sentient Races. As the League commander, you've come to the Kessan Quadrant on a search for the lost artifacts of the Precursors, a race of technologically advanced, almost mythical beings who lived eons ago. Hopefully, their technology will help you save the galaxy from interdimensional fatigue. Entire star systems are imploding, and the phenomenon signals not only the end of the galaxy but also the total elimination of intergalactic travel. Luckily, you begin with a special Precursor vessel that allows you to freely explore the galaxy and search for races and artifacts to aid you in

halting the galaxy's disintegration.

Of course, this wouldn't be *STAR CONTROL* without the inclusion of a dizzying array of subplots. Each race in your League has its own story line to follow. The Vax, for example, are xenophobic bigots who constantly push the boundaries of League rules. As their insolence grows more and more brazen, you must find a way to deal with them. The Utwig, on the other hand, are loyal and efficient members of your League until their Ultron, a piece of junk which they believe is a god-like prophet, is stolen from them. You have to find it. The other races also have their own little problems that need solving. Those that don't still bear killing, because each race holds some bit of knowledge about other races, the Precursors or genetic history that could help in your search for a cure for the galaxy's demise.

Adding to this already overflowing mix of aliens is the Hegemonic Crus, a band of aliens who have also come to the Kessan Quadrant for Precursor artifacts. They have six member races, and almost all can be swayed to your side if you can solve their story lines as well. But while you can enlist new races from the Crus, the Crus can steal League races from

you as well.

This huge and complex plot structure is *STAR CONTROL 3*'s best feature. Quite a few races' stories are intertwined, so you'll have to solve the Vax problem before you can finally put to rest the Utwig's loss. For the most part, though, *SC3* is nonlinear, so you can solve each race's story in whatever order you wish. There is, in fact, so much to explore and so much story to unravel, that *STAR CONTROL 3* plays almost like an entire season of *Star Trek* episodes.

The dialogue for each race is also on par with the excellent plotting. The writers for *SC3* did a superb job of giving each race a distinct personality that shines



Price: \$49.95
System

Requirements: 485/66 or better (Pentium 60 recommended), Windows 95 or DOS 5.0 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 5 MB hard disk space (65 MB recommended), VESA compatible SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, Sound Blaster compatible sound card

of Players: 1 (2 for Hyper Melee)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Legend Entertainment

Publisher: Accolade
San Jose, CA
(800) 245-7744

Reader Service #: 327

Nerd! Worm! Loser!

Adventure gamers new to the *Star Control* series might be surprised to discover an action element in the game, the Hyper Melee combat mode. Many longtime *Star Control* fans like this mode the best, but for those that could do without the action, you can have the computer fight for you. The only problem with this is that the computer isn't particularly effective. A melee takes several minutes if you don't take the controls yourself. So letting the computer fight for you means the Plunks are right when they call you "Nerd!, Worm!, Loser!"



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through in their unique and flavorful dialogue. The Spathi, one of the first races you find, are instantly recognizable as quivering cowards who will do and say anything to save their hides. The Ue-Quan, the former rulers of the Hierarchy, come across as proud and powerful venturers, and the Plank talk like New Age, counter-culture children. The best writing, though, is reserved for the new races of SC3. The dim-witted Drog and the insecure Klarg are especially funny; I was literally crying with laughter the first time I encountered the side-show Klarg. The voice acting for each race is, for the most part, good, though the the Human voice is too flat. Even when faced with a glibly-defying threat, he still dines on monotonously.

YOU SPILLED STRATEGY ON MY ADVENTURE GAME

STAR CONTROL 3 has equal parts adventure, action and strategy, but is entirely plot-driven. You won't fight an alien race in the action battle sequences until you piss them off when talking to them, and you won't colonize a planet for resources unless you need the fuel to visit a new race. Indeed, the majority of gameplay involves exploring the galaxy in your ship, looking for new races and then engaging in dialogue with them. You have to talk to each race to find out their history, and then they'll usually present you



GALACTIC MICROMANAGER NONPAREIL Some gamers will be put off by the colony management, which is a necessary, but fairly simple, part of the game.



LOST IN SPACE If you liked Star Control 2, you'll love Star Control 3: new races join old favorites in a game that's easily the most expensive of any in the sci-fi adventure category.

with a problem. One race needs to cure a debilitating disease, another has to find a loophole to free it from an oath of service, another race won't talk until you prove your worth by recovering an artifact, and so forth.

However, an equal amount of time will be spent on colony management, which isn't vital to the story but is still very important. You need fuel to travel between worlds, a research center to research artifacts you find, resources to build ships for defeating your enemies, and landing pods to build more colonies. All these functions can only be acquired at colonies, so the strategy element is unavoidable. Thankfully, it's not too complicated, but just a matter of adjusting slider bars at each colony to prioritize fuel production, ship building, mining and research.

Of course, for those who like resource management, you can dig a little deeper and transfer resources between planets and break with the colony development. Unfortunately, during the beginning portion of the game, when you have few colonies and need to find new races, you'll have to spend a great deal of time creating and managing new colonies so you can amass enough fuel to travel around the quadrant.

Though I generally liked the strategy element, one problem I did have was that if you colonize more than one planet in a solar system, you have to visit each one to gain their fuel. While it might be more

realistic, it was often tedious. I would have liked it more if the game had an option to pick up all fuel in a solar system once you landed on just one colonized planet in the system.

The only other problems I had with the game were the music, which was much better in Star Control 2, and the Plank, who were my favorite invertebrate race in SC2 but are just boring in

SC3. In general, aside from the Spathi and the Ooz, most of the old SC2 races aren't as funny as new Kesson and Ouz races.

STAR GAZING

To some gamers, the different elements of gameplay will be a welcome change, and those with an open mind might find themselves totally engrossed by the Star Control story, the hilarious dialogue, the great character interaction and even the fun Hyper Melee module. The strategy element tends to bog down at times, and adventure game purists will probably be too frustrated with this module to continue playing. But if you take this game for what it is, and don't restrict it to the classic definition of an adventure game, then you'll discover a truly stellar experience. **C**

APPEAL: Star Control fans and open-minded gamers who want to experience a good story, a good laugh and conversations with some very fun aliens.

PROS: Great story, funny characters and dialogues, fun Hyper Melee module and huge amounts of gameplay.

CONS: Strategy module isn't much fun, StarCen fans will be disappointed by the uninspired music, and the action and strategy elements could push away some gamers.



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Klay Time

Spielberg Molds A New Kind Of Adventure In *THE NEVERHOOD CHRONICLES*

by Kate Hedstrom

Since Gumby and Pecky first slaked into our hearts 40 years ago, the labor-intensive, painstaking process of bringing clay to life has pretty much relegated it to the realm of commercials and short subjects. Now that computer game designers are exploring new ways to take advantage of high-quality visuals, it's fitting that clay animation has found its way into gaming in the shape of *THE NEVERHOOD CHRONICLES* (TNC).

The effect is charming. Serving as a counterpoint to the hyper-realistic, fast-forward quality of computer-generated graphics, the rough, primitive clay world of TNC is a perfect setting for this simple monthly play. One of the first releases from the Steven Spielberg-led DreamWorks Interactive, and designed by Doug TenNapel (EARTHWORKS JIB), *THE NEVERHOOD CHRONICLES* is one of the freshest-looking games to come around in a long time.

ENTER KLAYMEN

You awaken in a tiny room as Klaymen, a thoughtful, shambling figure reminiscent of a Max Fleischer cartoon. As you wander around the Neverhood, you collect a series of disks, which, when dropped into one of several video players, tells the story of the Neverhood, a clay kingdom taken over by the nefarious Klugey. You must solve a series of puzzles as you work toward the endgame, where you can choose to restore order to the Neverhood, or perhaps take a less honorable route.

Gameplay is extremely simple. The (all-day) interface consists only of directional arrows that allow you to send



THAT DARING YOUNG SLAB To save the last of the Neverhood, Klaymen will need to pull a lot of strings.

Klaymen in a particular direction or pick up, examine and manipulate objects. If Klaymen encounters an item he can use, he collects it and stores it in his torso. When you reach the place where the item is needed, Klaymen automatically takes it out and uses it.

Most of the *NEVERHOOD* puzzles are in the *MIST* tradition of figuring out how to open doors or how to get big, weird contraptions to do what you want. Many solutions are based on symbols or buttons you encounter at other points in the game, so you spend a lot of time pushing buttons and putting cards for reasons that don't become apparent until later. Others are of the logic variety: sliding tiles, tone recognition and concentration, for example. The puzzles start off simply but become more complicated as the game progresses. I say more complicated, not more difficult, because they don't necessarily require more brainpower—just a lot more legwork, which can rapidly become tedious.

Speaking of legwork, a couple of tasks in TNC don't require any puzzle-solving skill at all other than sheer doggedness. In the Hall of Records, where the history of the Neverhood is written in exhaustive detail along the wall, Klaymen must slog

to the end of the hall to collect a necessary item, a matter of walking from left to right across the screen numerous times. I lost count after 28 screens. Even if you stop to read bits of the Neverhood history—which is an entertaining, if lengthy, parody of classic myths—this kind of activity doesn't

add much to the experience.

WARM AND SQUISHY

For all that, the Neverhood is a delightful world to explore, with beautiful animation, slapstick cartoon comedy and colorful personalities like a giant teddy bear-loving, martial-artist robot named Bill. Even the music—a mix of Dixieland and blues—is on target, accenting the story with homespun charm.

If you can stomach the kind of gameplay where sometimes the only thing to do is trudge from one location to another to accomplish a task, *THE NEVERHOOD CHRONICLES* provides a warm, funny and wholly original diversion. **C**

APPEAL: Adventure gamers looking for something really different; clay animation fans.

PROS: Low-tech visuals and music perfectly complement the classic mythic tale; amusing characters keep things interesting; puzzles scale in difficulty with progression of game.

CONS: Too much legwork and some flat-out time wasters almost cancel out the charm of times.



Price: \$49.95

System:

Requirements: IBM compatible Pentium 75 or better processor (Windows 95, 8 MB RAM (15 MB recommended), 10 MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics, 8-bit Windows compatible sound card, mouse.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive).

Designers: Doug TenNapel and The Neverhood

Publisher: DreamWorks

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Mummy Dearest

Interplay Goes Monster Mad In Follow-up To FRANKENSTEIN

by Petra Schlunk

The game title, *Mummy: Tomb of the Pharaoh*, calls to mind a cross between a story steeped in the mysticism of ancient Egypt and a campy Frankenstein-esque tale, and this is basically what you get in this decent successor to Interplay's *FRANKENSTEIN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE MONSTER*. Substitute a mummy for the monster, and Malcolm McDowell for Tim Curry, and you pretty much get the picture here.

The introduction to *Mummy* has you heading for Egypt as one Michael Cameron, on your way to investigate some problems that have arisen at one of the National Mining Corporation's Egyptian mines. A mysterious box covered with hieroglyphics was found in the mines, suggesting the possible presence of a nearby burial site. The local workers are superstitions, and operations at the mine are not what they should be. Also, Egyptian authorities are concerned about the encroachment of the mining operation on a potential archaeological site. Your job is to figure out what's going on and get things back on track.



TOMB RAIDERS? While investigating the mine, you discover an open sarcophagus. Could it be grave robbers, or something even more sinister?

SHUFFLING ALONG

Mummy's story takes place over two "game days." On the first evening, you wander around the mining camp and introduce yourself to the key characters in the story. These include the mine's sinister manager (Malcolm McDowell), Cameron's old girlfriend, who is investigating the box found in the mine, and the mine's geologist. On the second day, things get a little more exciting, both in the game's story and the role that you must take in moving events along.

As in many adventure games, *Mummy* is basically a game of hide-and-seek—the designer hides the items and information you need, and you have to seek them out. Thankfully, *Mummy* has few puzzles that

don't spring smoothly from the story line. You spend most of the early period finding important items and information, while the latter part of the game involves finding lots of hotspots. Unfortunately, there are some places where you must use objects that don't appear as hotspots until you wave the correct object (retrieved from nearby or from your inventory) over them.

As in *FRANKENSTEIN*, wandering in the *Mummy's* "towers"

often proves tiresome, as it's very easy to lose your sense of direction. Fortunately there are only a couple of them, and they're fairly small. A major improvement in this game is the availability (after solving some puzzles) of mini maps that help you get your bearings. Another

bonus is a map of the mining camp itself, where many of the buildings look similar.

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE

While there is a mummy in this game, his stature is significantly less threatening and comports than expected based on the game's title. There is a lot of Egyptology in the game, however, and you'll even find some ghosts! *Mummy: Tomb of the Pharaoh* is an entertaining story with well-acted movie sequences and good graphics, sound effects and music. The puzzles are sometimes challenging (or obscure, depending on your point of view), but are appropriate to the story and its setting. If not a groundbreaking title, but *Mummy* should provide gamers with a pleasant journey into the mysteries of ancient Egypt. ☺



Price: \$34.95
System:

Requirements: 486/33 or better (486/50 or higher recommended), 8 MB RAM, 22 MB hard disk space, ZX CD-ROM, Windows 3.1 or better, mouse, Windows compatible sound card.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Amazing Meds

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

Reader Service #: 328

Mummy Is Here to Help

While most of *Mummy's* puzzles are fairly straightforward, there are a few places where it is easy to get stuck. Try the following tips:

When trying to escape from the mines during the earthquake that you trigger on the last mine level, make your way to the pulverizer on the first level using the mine cart. There is an exit through here to the outside.

APPEAL: Traditional adventure game enthusiasts and fans of Egyptology.

PROS: Decent graphics, story line and puzzles, with mazes less annoying than in *Frankenstein*.

CONS: Some difficult puzzles and the absence of expected hotspots in critical locations will trip up some gamers. Needs more mummy, fewer mazes.

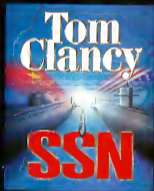


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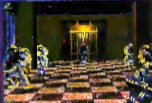


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Ecstatic Again

ECSTASIA 2 Brings The Round Look And Great Action Back To The PC



Andrew Spencer's world is decidedly round. *ECSTASIA*, his clip-soid answer to the polygonal *ALONE IN THE DARK*, was published without much fanfare late in 1994 and quickly earned huzzahs for its realistic feel and visceral combat, as well as a few jobs for its modest dimensions.

ECSTASIA 2, due from Pygostis around February or March of next year, looks poised to garner more of those huzzahs and, this time, fewer of those jobs. An early version reveals that this action-adventure—with accent on the action—is much larger, prettier, deeper...and rounder.



WHAT'S UP? In *ECSTASIA 2*, your character returns home only to find his castle invaded and the land threatened by a consortium of mages and an evil, otherworldly entity.

UNWELCOME VISITORS

It seems you left your castle door unlocked when you took that horse ride to *ECSTASIA*. You've returned to your own castle to discover it's been taken over by demons. They take you prisoner and put you in your own stocks. Demons evidently are no strangers to the concept of

array—but are forgetful of history. No one ever figures out that holding an established hero as prisoner (rather than killing him outright) inevitably results in the valiant escape of said hero to dish out some mean payback.

Naturally, this mess is a prelude to a larger purpose. Evidently a sorcerer has been conjuring some things best left to H.P. Lovecraft's imagination...much to his regret. This mage attempted to control a summoned entity but ended up

on the wrong end of the mind-control spell. While under its domination, the wizard and four other magicians broke the holy seal that guards the secret of existence (whatever that is). They distributed among themselves the magical fragments and plan to reassemble them in a complete vision on the summer solstice.

“**ECSTASIA 2** looks much larger, prettier, deeper...and rounder.”

SNEAK PREVIEW
GAMES & APPLICATIONS

INSIDE ACTION

► Epic MegaGames has a publisher for its '97 *QUAKE* killer, *UNREAL*: GT Interactive.

► It turns out Raven and id are working on *HEXEN 2*, which will use the *QUAKE* engine. This one will have four character classes and some very beautifully constructed 3D environments. Word is these environ-

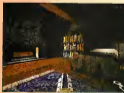
ments will be more realistic than the empty hallways of *QUAKE*; in some levels you'll fight through libraries stacked with bookshelves and tables, and in others you'll roam through cathedrals with stained-glass windows and benches. No word yet on whether you'll be able to smash up the pretty houses.

► One of my favorite early PlayStation games is in-

bound for the PC. Virgin is bringing *AGILE WARRIOR: F-11X* to Windows 95. The game supports 3D accelerator cards, offers high-resolution graphics (a beta ran in an ultra-crisp 1024x768 on my system), and brings over the superb explosions. It's due in November.

► Around the same time, look for *SCRAMBLER 2*—with six new tracks, four new cars, weather, net player, and a new 3D engine, all for about \$20. This compares very nicely to *SEGA RALLY* on the Saturn.

► A *DUKE NUKEM 3D* levels compilation from Sierra? What's next? A 3D fighting game? Exactly. And, based on a beta, Sierra's *CYBERGLADIATORS* for Windows 95 is looking good, with lifelike movement, great atmosphere, and the ability to use onscreen debris in your battle—oh, and plenty of silly poses by the winner.



A HEX ON THIS LAND Here is a beautifully rendered room in *Hexen 2*, which id and Raven are busily working on. Notice the bookshelf, bed, rug, and fireplace.

PETER OLAFSON

"It's your job to collect the pieces and reassemble the broken seal before the magicians cook up their own nasty version. If they succeed, then evil, unseeable gods and their creatures will invade our world and plunge it into a sea of blood and tears."

No wonder you pop out of the stocks like a cork from a bottle. As you cautiously test your freedom, you happen upon a sword that someone has unthinkingly left



QUICK, RUN FOR THE HILLS The graphics are much improved over the original *ECSTASY*, more and cleaner ellipsoids make for a richer graphical environment.

in the straw behind you. The closing goblinoesque diases around you wrap to attention, and the battle is joined.

And this time out, you're much better equipped to fight it in detail. Your character in *ECSTASY 2* had only a modest number of options: move, pick up items, attack with the left or right hand, and dodge. That was it, but at the time, it seemed like plenty. Spencer has since discovered the virtues of the Ctrl and Alt keys. When used in combination with the direction arrows (naturally simpler than *ECSTASY 2*'s number keypad controls), these produce a daunting range of maneuvers—including karate-like jumping kicks and punches, roll, back flips, and some mousehouse stapes that put me in mind of a similar, decapitating maneuver in the classic Epps beater *DEATH SWORD*.

Also, there were no flying ellipsoid heads that I could see. However, you will see sparring elliptical blood. Of course, there's no shortage of enemies to do the sparring. Giant spiders rule the ground. Something akin to a walking rock is guarding the entry hall, and a hulking something-or-other—the camera never

TIPS!

Estalier 1: If you're inspired to give *ECSTASY* another go, here are a few pointers that will see you through the early stages. Don't try to kill the werewolf, who may blindside you at the start. (It can be killed, but it's not worth

the effort.) Instead, sneak by his door and, if it comes to a fight, sock him a few times until he appears dazed and then abandon the field and hide in the grassy patch in the far corner of the barn to heal up. Similarly, pass up the armor you'll find. I've seen tortises move faster in combat. (Do get that sword, however.)

gets close enough to show you just what—is standing senile over the descending ladder outside. Jet-black fighters appear on the stairs and landings. Upstairs, gaseous green clouds stain the floor. I even intercepted one of the goblin types in a workshop while he was (ahem) Doing God's Work.

What to do against this ruminous rabble? Happily, demons make careless housekeepers, and they have left potions and the odd weapon lying around for you to find. The weapons are obvious. The potions are unpredictable. You can't tell what they'll do until you use them, and sometimes not even then. Some will heal you. Some will lay you low. Some will make you invisible for a time and so allow you to sneak into off-limits areas right under the demon's watchful eyes. (I low they miss your sword and the potion in hand, I'm not sure.)

A GRAPHIC LEAP

The game looks terrific; you almost wouldn't know this was an *ECSTASY* relative. In the original game, the spheres that composed the objects and characters were too few and too obvious. Creatures looked like primitive circles and less like what they were supposed to be. Now, the ellipsoids are much finer—sometimes twice as many per character—and the cumulative effect, when they're used to build walls, is a much more realistic type of texture than is typically achieved by folding graphics onto a

flat polygon. Surfaces stand out in relief, and what should look rough really does look rough. You get the feeling that you could almost touch the stone walls.

Finally, you'll have a lot more to explore than in *ECSTASY*. *ECSTASY 2* is significantly larger than its predecessor, and "significantly" is just my being restrained. *ECSTASY* took up 140 megabytes on CD. The uncompressed *ECSTASY 2*, with close to 1,000 distinct locations, was pushing a gigabyte in mid-September.

In short, it's looking awfully good, and I haven't even mentioned the level of scenic detail or the subtle movement touches—like the way you can knock doors off their hinges, or the way your character wipes his mouth when left alone.

So my character had this weakness I he died. A lot. And the demons just left him where he fell. The wind kept blowing down the castle corridors, the rats came and went, and the demon-spawn kept nasking their rounds. It was as if they didn't care. As if I didn't matter. I plan to re-try that come February 8.



AND DON'T GET UP There are many nasty beasts, such as goblins, and more unspeakable things, but they do die to great effect, spilling spherical gobules of blood.

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I saw.

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- Julius Caesar

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exhibit A

Suspect wrecks "allotheslino" between two pylons, knocks oncoming driver off his vehicle, steals said vehicle, then runs over driver repeatedly with it. Clearly he was participating in a "friendly" game of "Rocket War."



exhibit B

Suspect drives at speeds in excess of 100 mph over speed limit, cutting off other drivers, endangering drivers by running them into walls and pylons. On the street, this is known as "Rocket Racing."



exhibit C

Suspect, armed with large ball attached to cable, drives erratically, smashing ball into oncoming vehicles, harling ball at other drivers in an attempt to score points during illegal, unmentioned game of "Rocket Ball."

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Looks To Kill

Here's All You Need To Make Your Marines Look Even Meaner In *QUAKE*

by V. Long

One of my favorite Quake C mods is the "gapping hook," because it makes me feel like a comic book superhero, like Spiderman or Daredevil. The id guys probably feel the same way; they like it so much, they plan to include a similar weapon in *Quake 2*.

Of course, what good is being a superhero if you don't look like one, or if the other players don't look like villains? Changing your skin, or look, in *QUAKE* is relatively simple. Every 3D object in *QUAKE* is a 3D wireframe model covered by a texture-mapped "skin." So if you want to paste on a new superhero skin to go with your gapping hook, you can. Add a Batman outfit to that hook and line, and you could be swooping down from the walls of *QUAKE*, like the Dark Knight.

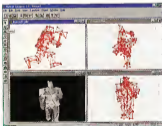


NICE TATTOO We posted a CGW tattoo onto this marine for kicks. If you want to create your own skins in *Quake*, we've got instructions on the CGW Web site.

For details on how to switch skins, visit the CGW Web site at www.zdnet.com/gaming, where I'll explain exactly what you need to do just that.

UGLY GOES CLEAN TO THE BONE

If you want your superhero, villain, or monster to look downright mutant, you'll need to cut deeper...right into the 3D wireframe models.



IT'S A BREEZE This freeware program, Breeze, makes it easy to change the fundamental sizes of objects, like grenades, or warp creatures even further.

Then use MedDL.e to extract a raw file from the .mdl. Models for the player and monsters each have many frames because of animation. These models require frame-by-frame extraction (you'll have to type MDL-E FRAME1.RAW 1 PLAYER.FRMDL for the first frame; MDL-E FRAME#2.RAW 2 PLAYER.FRMDL for the second, and so on).

Let's start with a simple, single-framed model, such as the grenade, as an example. Use Wipack to extract `grenade.mdl` from `pk3.pak`, and then use MedDL.e to extract `grenade.raw` with the command `line MDL-E CRENADE.RAW 1 CRENADE.MDL`.

Fire up Breeze and start a new "scene." From the file menu, import the raw file. Since you're only modifying an existing model, select points from the palette bar along the left side. Use the mouse to expand the grenade's dimensions by dragging the vertices outward. Because of the true 3D nature of the models, you'll find yourself working in several windows simultaneously (i.e., XY Front, YZ Side, and XZ Plan views). It's bizarre at first, but with a little tinkering you'll soon get the hang of it.

Save your handwork as a Breeze .eod file, and export it as a raw file. Then import the raw file back into the original .mdl. To import `grenade.raw` into `grenade.mdl` via MedDL.e, type `MDL-I CRENADE.RAW 1 CRENADE.MDL`, hit [2] for 2D mode, and then hit [s] to save. The existing skin will stretch to fit the vertices.

Put the `grenade.mdl` and `prog.dat` into the appropriate subdirectories, and voilà! Naturally, these custom models with fresh skins need special homes. So next month I'll show you how to create your own custom levels with Wadedit. (Some *QUAKE* time...Some *QUAKE* Page 6)



Breeze Designer, Paint Shop Pro, and other programs can be loaded from the enclosed CD-ROM.



For a crash course on pasting your own look onto Quake characters, check out our Web site at www.zdnet.com/gaming.

You are here



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and here.

BEDLAM

Download the demo at
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MIRAGE



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Get Medieval

UNDERMOUNTAIN Builds On DESCENT With AD&D-Style Role-Playing

by Elliott Chin

It's no secret that as the competition gets stiffer in the 3D action game, companies are adding non-traditional action elements to the mix in order to broaden their games' appeal. *HEAVEN* may have made role-playing fashionable for action games, but *DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN* has a much greater chance of tapping the potential of this exciting new gaming hybrid. *UNDERMOUNTAIN* brings the visceral appeal of Parallax's *DESCENT* 3D engine to the Forgotten Realms city of Waterdeep, from *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, where you adventure through more than 20 levels of dungeons. In most cases, you explore them on foot, flying around *DESCENT*-style is reserved for those who find the right magic spells. And instead of shooting your enemies from afar, you back-and-slash them in the true spirit of *AD&D*, up close and personal.

Just as in *DESCENT*, *UNDERMOUNTAIN* offers 360-degree viewing and 3D environments. Using the mouse, you are free to look in all directions both fluidly and without



DUNGEONS OF DESCENT *Undermountain* uses the *DESCENT* engine to good effect, dumping you in an underground network of fantasy and magic, where you'll hack your way to the ultimate evil.

restriction. Certain levels also take advantage of the 3D, so that bats will attack you at eye level, while below you will be pits with skeletons. At the current stage of development, *UNDERMOUNTAIN* didn't seem to have levels as advanced in 3D architecture as *QUAKE*. On the other hand, the controls are completely customizable, and after a few tweaks, I was able to run through the dungeons with my usual *QUAKE* configuration. You can

even invert the axis of the mouse, something you can't do in *DUSE*.

WATERDEEP, MOUNTAIN HIGH

You have come to this fabled city in answer to a summons by Kheben "Blackstaff" Anusius. It seems that the great mage has need of a few adventures to venture into the dungeons beneath Waterdeep and exterminate the evil that ferments in those subterranean depths. These range from little goblin rudies to an evil goddess named Lloth who threatens to consume Waterdeep itself.

As you fight your way through the dungeon, you will grow in abilities and gain more power in *AD&D* fashion (see sidebar). One really cool feature of the game is your acquisition of spell use. Only the mage and priest classes can cast spells naturally, but the two other classes, fighter and thief, will find magic items. Most of your favorite *AD&D* spells are here, allowing you to toast goblins with a fireball spell, make yourself invisible, or perform other feats of pre-hypnotism.

UNDERMOUNTAIN also features a robust multiplayer system, with deathmatches, cooperative play, deathmatch

"Behind the Scenes" Combat

The combat system from *AD&D* is used in *Undermountain*, though it is largely invisible. Your "to hit" probability is affected by your character

level, the luck of the dice and the armor class of your opponent. Basically, every time you swing, the computer will make an invisible roll and check it against the armor class of your opponent to determine if you hit him. You may occasionally get unlucky and miss your enemy, even if it looks like you hit pay dirt. At least the monsters you face suffer from the same limitation, and their "to hit" chances remain static, while your character's attack skill improves as you gain levels. Likewise, you may improve your defense through better armor or magic items—an option not available to the creatures you face, thankfully.



CC SNEAK PREVIEW
GAMESTILL A DEVELOPMENT

CC SNEAK PREVIEW

GAMESTILL A DEVELOPMENT

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GAMESTILL A DEVELOPMENT

CC SNEAK PREVIEW

Choose Your Own Adventurer



with monsters and even multi-player adventuring. The game should support serial, modem, LAN and internet play, the last through Interplay's

Engage online gaming service.

There is a whole lot more here than in the

typical first-person-perspective shooter, and for AD&D fans, this game looks like a winner. However, gamers expecting the fast and furious firefights of *Quake* might be disappointed. But if you're willing to trade in your railgun for a battle-axe, you might find that hacking away at your enemies is more satisfying than sniping from a corner.

In any case, it's more likely that if anything about *UNDERMOUNTAIN* is questioned by gamers, it will be the 320x240 low-res graphics. Since the engine is completely polygonal, a higher resolution would require even more CPU power. But in an era where 640x480 is expected, the advantages of being a real-time-rendered, polygonal engine may not overcome the expectations.

UNDERMOUNTAIN uses more than just the AD&D license to separate itself from other 3D action games. Your character's statistics—strength, intelligence, constitution, etc.—affect how much damage you do, how many spells you can learn, how many hit points you have, and so on. The six different races you can choose to play—human, elf, half-elf, dark elf, dwarf and halfling—each have different abilities. Elves, for instance, can see outlines around secret doors.

You also choose to be a fighter, priest, mage or thief. Mages can cast destructive spells, priests have healing magic and thieves can open locked doors. Non-human races will also be able to choose more than one class, so you could play as a fighter-mage combination if you were an elf, or a thief-fighter combo as a halfling. You'll also advance in level as you amass experience points by killing more creatures, solving puzzles and completing quests. Each level advancement will reward you with more hit points and greater abilities congruent with your class (mages will gain more spells, fighters will do more physical damage). Interplay says the level limit in *DTU* is 7, so you can't advance beyond that level, but the sequel will have a level limit of 12.



RECOGNIZE IT? The map should be familiar to *Descent* fans. This interface is great because it lets you view the map and still roam around the dungeon.

Whether Interplay can start a franchise with this game is largely dependent on perceptions. All the elements are there for a very successful first-person-perspective gaming experience: The role-playing aspects are even more refined than in *HEXEN*, which should please all those who played that game and also satisfy the AD&D fan. The hack-and-slash combat will undoubtedly put off some action gamers, but I think that many will enjoy the change-of-pace fighting. While the engine could use a higher resolution, there's little else to complain about. We'll see when *UNDERMOUNTAIN* hits store shelves in late November, but even from this early look, we believe Interplay could make Winterkeep a very popular town. **S**



HACK AND SLASH A variety of fantasy creatures are out to get you, and they look rusty and fight tough—though they could use a few more polygons to get rid of their bloody look.

Another Crusade

Origin's Follow-up To NO REMORSE Explodes With More Action And Tougher Challenges

by Thierry Nguyen

A year ago, Origin unleashed the CCW Premier Action Game of the Year, *CRUSADER: NO REMORSE*. With its isometric perspective, SVGA graphics, and extreme violence, *NO REMORSE* captivated action gamers everywhere. Now Origin has unveiled *NO REGRET*, the "sequel" to *NO REMORSE*. While there will be a *CRUSADER 2* with a new engine (tentatively titled *NO MERCY*), *NO REGRET* is to *NO REMORSE* what *DOOM II* was to *DOOM*: essentially the same game but with a sprinkling of new weapons, enemies, and devious missions to challenge old fans.

FROM REMORSE TO REGRET

Taking place right after *NO REMORSE*, the intro opens with a view of the wreckage of the mighty Vigilance Platform that was destroyed by our friend the Silencer. After we watch him go down a few bolts on the way to more conquest on the moon, the title sequence plays, and the game starts.

The plot of *NO REGRET* is almost identical to the plot of *NO REMORSE*. The Lunar Mining Cartel on the moon is analogous to the WEC of Earth, and there is even a moon chapter of the Resistance. As in *NO REMORSE*, the Silencer will be sent out on missions to liberate the moon colony inhabitants from the LMC.

One immediate improvement is the use of the WING COMMANDER IV movie-playback engine. Combine that with better acting, and you have good and entertaining cut-scenes between every mission that enhance the overall game.

There are 10 missions in *NO REGRET*, compared to the 16 in *NO REMORSE*. But these 10 missions are larger and better designed. While each mission has a "straight path" from entrance to exit, this path is littered with secret rooms and passages and other such side trips. Later, some missions have time limits. Take too long in these situations, and all is lost. Fortunately, the time limits are reasonable; I only ran out of time once as an experiment.

The LMC seems to invest much more in security than the WEC, for being caught on camera has harsh consequences. Instead of merely sounding an alarm, some cameras decide to call upon extremely powerful turrets on their side, usually eliminating you in one shot. Also, Origin has lifted the level with those oh-so-titile laser tripwires, which trigger giant traps involving rockets or ultraviolet cannons. One trap in particular occurs near



TWISTS AND TURNS The missions in *No Remorse* are much better designed, with more secrets and traps sprinkled about the levels, and even nastier weapons and enemies.

the end of a mission, where you teleport unsuspectingly in front of a tripwire. Walk forward, and you are barbecued by the rocket, forcing you to reload your game so you can eliminate the annoying tripwire before you step forward.

THE SILENCER'S NEW TOYS

The enhancement Origin is heavily promoting is the set of new weapons. The three new weapons are: a gun that vaporizes your enemy into a pile of ash, a "trailer" gun that turns your target into a fleshy

pile of goo (really the goriest gun in history), and a freeze ray. I particularly like the freeze ray, because it has the best freezing model of any game I've seen, rather than merely turning the opponent blue, the freeze gun "sets in," hence your writhing opponent can be frozen in a variety of positions. There is the mandatory shattering effect as well, but there is no "locking" or any other



READY, AIM, FIRE Traps like these are one reason why *No Remorse* is much harder than the original. The minute the cameras spot you, the two turrets will start spitting fire.



Price: \$39.99

System:

Requirements: IBM compatible 486-75 or better, MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 65 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1

Designer: Tony

Zurovec and Mark

Vitek

Publisher: Origin

Systems Inc.

Austin, TX

(512) 335-5230

Reader Service #: 329

MISSIONS IMPOSSIBLE



tuning a computer on only to be greeted by a fully armed robot kept me on my toes.

Another feature Origin is pushing is the enhanced AI. Though the AI may look enhanced, it's not as hard as it could be.

One improvement: soldiers will shoot at approaching spider bombs, so you need to be sneaky with them. But I can still have soldiers run into and shoot each other by

accident, or trick a soldier into shooting a nearby barrel and bombing himself. And while the soldiers can roll just like you, their rolling is totally scripted. They won't dynamically roll away from fire; instead they have a predictable pattern of sit-and-roll.

NO REGRETS ON BUYING

In the end, *NO REGRET* is a worthy buy for the hardened *CRUSADER* veteran. It offers good mission design along with new cosmetics and items, and it retains the same great gameplay. Though the difficulty may put off novices, and the AI isn't as hot as Origin claims, the mean criticism that could be directed at *NO REGRET* is that it's just more *NO REMORSE*. So if you didn't like *NO REMORSE*, turn the page to the next review. But if you did like *NO REMORSE*, *NO REGRET* is a great play until *NO MERCY*. **B**

FAPPEAL: Hardened Crusader veterans looking for a new challenge; novices can apply if they want to get a sound beating.

MPROS: Good mission design, good weapons/gadgets, nice addition of moves, better cinematics. It's *No Remorse*, but better.

PGONS: The game is quite hard, which may put off novices, and the AI isn't so hot. It's also basically more *No Remorse*, so it may not be enough for some people.



Honing Your Combat Tactics

With the harder missions, it's time for a few new tactics. Here are some basics:

- ▶ **Don't be seen:** Everyone knows to shoot the camera to avoid alerting security. How about indirectly destroying said camera? That little puff of fire from your grenades/rockets is affectionately known as "splash damage" and can reach through walls. Try hitting a camera with a rocket from around the corner or on the other side of a wall. Here, the explosion from your weapon engulfs the camera on the other side of the wall.
- ▶ **Avoid traps:** With the designers scattering trip-



mines everywhere, you'll want to leave your VIR Imager on as much as possible, especially during the later levels. While it does sap energy, you can see all the tripwires, and cut down on nasty surprises.

▶ **Rollers aren't Einsteins:** Soldiers who roll are usually ones who sit in a corner or behind some boxes. They also don't start rolling until you advance within a certain range. If they are rolling from behind boxes, learn the pattern and fire a rocket or whatever weapon you prefer at the spot they are rolling from. If they are rolling from around a corner, try to explode a spider mine near the corner; hopefully the splash damage will kill them. The worst way to deal with them is to just bear the brunt of their burst and hit them fast enough to kill them.

▶ **Roll with it:** You have a better brain than they do; use it when you roll. Since you can move by crouching, it's very easy to duck behind bars or boxes and crawl about, gun at hand. Rolling forward is a great evasive maneuver as it is fast and keeps you under some cover.

▶ **Cheat:** If you really need some help, the new cheat code is *LOOSECANNON16*. F10 will resupply you, while Ctrl-F10 will grant you invulnerability.

NO DICE Though gifted with a few new moves, the AI hasn't really been improved. AI rolling is actually just a scripted movement that you can exploit.

hand-to-hand combat, so you will have to shoot your new sculpture.

I think the true stars of the show, though, are the new items for your Silencer utility belt. Ranging from data picks to VIR Imagers to more types of explosives, *NO REGRET* adds a wonderful array of gadgets that help ease the difficulty somewhat. Proper use of these new gadgets is essential for survival in *NO REGRET*.

DANCE, DUMBO!

Also, some desperately needed moves were added to the Silencer's repertoire. Now you can move while crouching (quite handy when hiding behind boxes or crawling through vents), and you can roll forward, for those times when you need to be sneaky and fast. There is now joystick/keyboard control, in addition to the keyboard/mouse and keyboard-only controls.

There are four new enemies in *NO REGRET*: one new soldier and three new robots. The new soldiers are just elite units who appear only in the last level and have both snazzy uniforms and extremely powerful guns. The new robots are the Avatron, a mild security bot that often sports lasers or machine guns; the Cryotron, a robot encountered later that only uses the freeze gun; and the most annoying enemy in the game, the Carnotron. Carnotrons camouflage themselves as barrels, computers, and other such items and reveal their true colors when you least expect it. Suffice to say,



I'll Fight You Yesterday

Bend The Laws Of Time In This Gorgeous Rail Fighter

by Mark Clarkson

In the 22nd-century world of Activision's *Time Commando*, humans have cracked the time barrier. But, in typical sci-fi fashion, that's not necessarily a good thing. Disaster soon follows the discovery of time travel, beginning with a computer virus and soon threatening to obliterate the past and future of Earth. As a member of S/W/E (Special Action for Virus Elimination), it's up to you to save the world from this untimely fate. So, as the Time Commando, you enter a temporal vortex to kill every man, woman and dog you meet, throughout all of time, to put everything right.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD, PART I

You begin in prehistoric times and fight your way through ancient Rome, feudal Japan, medieval Europe, the age of the conquistadors, the Wild West, modern wars and into the future. Along the way you'll wield weapons unique to each era,

like rocks, clubs, swords, six-shooters, rocket launchers and laser guns.

This constant change-up keeps things interesting. Just when you're getting tired of going at it with rocks and clubs, time shifts and you get to use swords and blowguns, or revolvers, or even yo-yos. My favorite is the broadsword,

although for pure, high-ou-loud entertainment, nothing beats the really, really big club. As you're pulled through the vortex into the next time period, you lose everything except your skin-tight Time Commando fatigues, starting over with no weapons except your fists and feet.

Generally speaking, the only way to get a weapon is to find somebody who's pack-



WHEN IN ROME Keep your guard up in each of *Time Commando's* nine eras, everyone in each period is out to get you, including innocent-looking maidens.

ing one and kick his ass. Need a bigger weapon? Kick a bigger ass. This means you're constantly battling dudes wielding better hardware than you. In between gun battles and bouts of fabricuffs, you'll collect various power-ups scattered about each level: extra lives, health, weapons of various types, and RAM chips.

To halt the spread of the virus, which a



Price: \$39.95

System

Requirements: 486DX2-66, 8 MB RAM, 10 MB hard drive space, VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, MS-DOS 6.22 or Windows 95, Microsoft compatible mouse, Sound Blaster compatible sound card.

of Players: 1-5 (hotseat)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Adeline Software

Publisher: Activision
Los Angeles, CA
(800) 477-3650

Reader Service #: 330

Interfacing with Time

Moving around the screen with the cursor keys is simple. Left and right rotate you clockwise and counterclockwise, up moves you forward and down backs you up. In conjunction with the Alt key, the cursor keys jump you in one of four directions; used with the Control key, they perform one of three attacks and a parry. In the case of ranged weapons, the four keys let you aim, fire and reload. There is no battling army of secret fighting moves;



WHERE'S THE ACTION? The camera often limits your view. Here, half your body is obscured by the enemy, while the other half is off-screen.

you can't even duck. However, you can dodge left and right.

There are hidden items and rooms throughout the levels, as well as buttons and controls that you can manipulate. To open a secret door, climb a wall or access terminals, you need only stand before the object and hit the space bar.

However, on occasion it's excruciatingly difficult to achieve just the right position in order to find the hidden item or switch. Because of this, you risk leaving some items untouched.

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chronicled at the top of the screen, you must collect RAM chips and upload them at memory upload terminals placed throughout the levels. The virus creeps along as time builds up, so if you wait too

(and leave) advance before you've had a chance to check out a secret room or grab a power-up.

Worse, the action often moves off-screen behind a wall or just beyond the



MADE IN JAPAN Among the game's power-ups are, from left to right: red and yellow wedges, which add an extra life; red cubes, which replenish health; blue chips, which stall the progress of the virus.

long to beat up the bad guys and finish the level, the virus will overcome the system memory, and you'll die.

RUNNING RAILS THROUGH TIME

The action is all third person, as your onscreen alter ego walks, jumps and punches his way through time and space. As you progress through the levels, the camera moves, pans and tilts to track you. The viewpoint periodically cuts from one camera to the next, though you have no control over the camera view. In this respect, TC resembles rail-running games such as CYBERIA, where a fixed picture plays in the background with various objects superimposed upon it. But unlike those games, here you can move around in 3D space within that environment.

The linear action-over-video motif, while providing a lovely look and cinematic feel, also yields the game's biggest problems. For starters, you can't back up. If you've walked far enough down a trail or a power-up to scroll off the screen, that item is forever lost to you. You thus tend to develop a certain tentativeness of movement, elicited not by any trepidations about baddies lurking around the corner but rather by fear of letting the camera

edge of the viewing area. During a fight, you have to worry about being knocked into a position where you're unable to see yourself or, in some cases, your opponent.

On the Easy setting, any gamer should be able to complete TC in an afternoon. Even on Normal or Hard, it will only take a day or two. Luckily, the game has more variety than the average rail runner: Each time period yields different monsters, the backgrounds are beautiful and the action is fairly intense and gripping. Overall, you'll have a fun, if short, trip through past and future as the TIME COMMANDO. **S**

APPEAL: Warriors who want something different in their rail shooters or fighting games, and who don't expect anything deeper than bashing and shooting.

PROS: Single control, simple concept, and pretty to look at; brisk, basic fun.

CONS: No save games, just pass-wards; linear gameplay; action sometimes takes place beyond your sight; occasional undesirable camera movement.



ACTION



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Just Another Pretty Face

Microsoft's *Fury* Sequel Delivers Mindless Action In Gorgeous 3D

by Robert Coffey

You'd think that mankind would finally wise up and stop trying to bio-engineer the perfect warrior. Each time they do, those ideal war machines invariably turn on their creators before attempting to take over the universe. Thankfully, these consummate leifers generally fail to eliminate the best pilot/soldier/ack-bomber and pay a terrible price for their negligence as the aforementioned ubertwoscy proceeds to kick their techno-organic butt. That's the situation you face in *HELLBENDER*, after the very same Bionx you thought destroyed in *Fury 3* renew their assault on the Coalition of Independent Planets. As mankind's last hope, it's up to you to jump in the Hellbender prototype attack craft and wipe out enemy forces over seven planets and deep space.

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE OF SPACE

The first thing you notice about *HELLBENDER* is how gorgeous the graphics are. The ante has been upped considerably from *Fury 3*, with beautifully texture-mapped rolling terrain and complex 3D structures. Each planet features a unique environment and look, from the constant acid rain and lightning on gloomy Mofos to the bright green skies and floating mountains of Eyrke.

But such eye candy doesn't come cheap, and gamers without some serious hardware are bound to feel cheated. *HELLBENDER* is built to take advantage of Microsoft's Direct3D API and 3D accelerated graphics cards. Without the hardware acceleration and with all the graphics options at their highest settings, even a Pentium 150 with loads of RAM will experience a significant drop in frame rates whenever things start getting hectic. Gamers whose machines meet the minimum requirements will likely be forced to turn off the sky textures and run the game at 320x200 resolution just to keep things moving and playable.

FLY THE UNFRIENDLY SKIES

But don't let the pretty visuals lull you into a false sense of safety—each world is clearly and loaded with enemy fighters,

Militant Managerie

Here are some of the more sophisticated weapons in *HELLBENDER* and their best usage.

LEGION MISSILES These fire four auto-locking missiles at once. Save your legions for taking on and taking out the ground-based Bion bosses.



INDEPENDENCE

MISSILE Composed of multiple sledgehammers, the independence missile fires off multidirectional rockets upon impact. You won't get many, so hold them until you need to wipe out a nest of pesky gun turrets and rocket launchers.



HELLION MISSILE When fired, the hellion automatically replenishes your energy and repairs your hull.



You're not going to find many, so keep them in reserve until you're getting hammered by Bionx with nowhere to run.

DOOMSDAY NINE Dropping a few doomsdays while veering away is a good way to turn an enemy's head-on strafing run against him.



Price: \$44.95

System

Requirements: IBM-PC compatible

Pentium 75, Windows 95, 8 MB RAM, 32 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics with local bus video, 4x CD-ROM, Windows compatible sound card, DirectX 2.0 (on disc), 14.4-Kbps modem for head-to-head play

of Players: 1-8 (LAN, direct modem connection, or Internet)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Terminal Reality, Inc.

Publisher: Microsoft Corp.

Seattle, WA (800) 344-2121

Reader Service #: 331



THE DEEP GREEN SEA The attention to detail is evident in 3D environments like the satellite tower platform. Note the treacherous undergrowth and the towering waterfall beside it.

**WARNING: Before Playing,
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CD-ROM



ANOTHER BIRD TO SHOOT One problem with *HELLBENDER* is that the routine of shooting enemies and grabbing the power-ups they leave behind gets boring fast.

gun turrets, rocket launchers, and the occasional *Bion* boss. Fortunately, the *Hellbender* craft is particularly well suited to deal with these threats, sporting a handy cloaking device, radar to pinpoint both enemies and power-ups, and an impressive arsenal of 11 destructive weapons. The spaceship is remarkably responsive and nimble, provided you're using a joystick—try to pilot *Hellbender* with the keyboard and you'll find yourself plunging from the sky faster than you can say "SkyLab." Cutting you through the nonstop action is *E.V.E.*, your Enhanced Virtual Entity, voiced by *The X-Files'* Gillian Anderson.

While each mission has several objectives, the only real goal in *HELLBENDER* is to shoot everything, both for your own safety and to get precious ammo and power-ups before your hull caves in. And that's where the game starts to let you down. Flying real fast and shooting things is fun for a while, but eventually it gets old and repetitive. As distinctive as the visual elements of *HELLBENDER* are, they fail to create an immersive environment or much of a sense of danger. You won't find yourself ducking your head to avoid incoming missiles the way you do in *Quake*.

The game's unimpressive level design doesn't really help the situation. While each planet is more dangerous than the one preceding it, the increased challenge is primarily accomplished by piling on more and more enemies. Adopting a few basic strategies goes a long way toward alleviating the threat of more adversaries but

quickly reduces gameplay to a series of clones. Shoot this, blast that, take out the garbage. And for a game with such an emphasis on visuals, three of the four boss *Bions* you encounter look downright silly.

Like most games, *HELLBENDER* is a different beast in multiplayer mode and really shines with human opponents. Strategy and cunning come into play during the furious combat and power-up seas

that distinguish online play. Setting up an Internet game is easy through Microsoft's *HELLBENDER* page (<http://www.microsoft.com/games/hellbender/>).

Unfortunately, like most games, *HELLBENDER* has its bugs. One annoyance was my onscreen avatar's intermittent refusal to toggle back on, which became a real drag when I tried to find

my way out of a convoluted tunnel system. Even more infuriating, several times I lost all my accumulated weapons when restoring a saved game. The only solution to this is to restore an earlier game and hope for the best.

Still, *HELLBENDER* is a pretty good game, and a big step forward for flying shooters. If the same thought that went into the look of the game had gone into gameplay, it could have been great. **B**

APPEAL: Action gamers looking for good-looking, airborne rampart destruction.

PROS: Richly detailed, individualized environments; challenging multiplayer gaming; lots of things to blow up.

CONS: Even a beefy *Perlim* will experience occasional jerkiness; repetitive gameplay and lack of level variety can make the game routine after a while.



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Warped Warfare

Capture The Flag Goes Arcade, With Comic Relief

by Gordon Goble

SURE, RETURN FIRE looks like a real-time strategy game. Yet it plays like a pure arcade shooter, a mix of Capture the Flag with strongly spoo-fy classical music and a down 'n' dirty, blow-everything-up mentality. It is also a clever and addictive game that makes war a blast. As the leader of the Browns, your mission is to capture the flag of the enemy, the Greens. They have it hidden away in a "Flag tower" (uh, eh), with a gamut of armaments blocking your way. If you blow up enough vehicles and obstacles to secure a path to the flag, you can grab it and bring it home for a victory.

The game opens with a cutaway view of your command center, an underground bunker stocked with a selection of three tanks, three helicopters, the same number of ASVs (Armored Support Vehicles) and eight jeeps. Each has its own strengths—choppers are good for pre-strike surveillance and light strafing, and the heavily armed and armored tanks and ASVs with their rotating turrets are perfect for mass destruction. According to game rules, speedy little jeeps are the only vehicles permitted to pick up the flag. Considering that their weaponry consists merely of a few grenades, they should be used after a switch has already been cleared.

In any case, you have a limited amount of ammunition and a limited amount of space, both of which can be replenished by returning to the bunker. Therefore, he who moves the quickest, strikes the hardest, and makes the most judicious use of his equipment will emerge victorious. It's important to remember that there is no scoring system (although fast times are saved), so capturing the flag is the only real measure of success.



▶ RUN, 'CAUSE YOU CAN'T HIDE Here, a tank has mercilessly squashed a few tents and is now busy chasing down some grenade-lobbing soldiers.

SHOCK THE MONKEY

The battlefield is viewed from a 3D third-person perspective, and the camera pans and zooms automatically in top-down and 3/4 views. There are a hundred missions, divided into nine levels of difficulty and featuring such names as Shesed Weasel, Chicken Parts, and Irish Spring.

Though initial levels may take only a few minutes to clear, they do become more challenging and intricate as you advance. For a real thrill, the two player/coop computer mode lets both participants vie simultaneously for each other's flag on a split screen, and makes for a good time. Sadly, neither modem nor network play is supported.

Sure, it's a glorified version of Doom, but with guns play that's fast and crumpled full of scenery destruction and warped humor, it's pretty hard to resist. Palm tree in the way? Blow it up. Flaming on deserting? Humongous submarines emerge and launch deadly missiles at you. Spending too much time sitting still? Enemy drones move in to finish you off. Blow anything up and it will burn or

explode with graphic ferocity.

To top it all off, RETURN FIRE is rife with familiar classical music selections, all appropriate in their placement.

Like any game that lacks real complexity, and gives its repetitive landscapes and simple scenarios, RETURN FIRE will certainly become less and less amusing with time. It's not a game that will stay long on your hard drive, but when war is this much fun, you just have to grab hold, hang on, and go for the ride until banishment is reached. **B**

▶ APPEAL: Tank veterans, and anyone who enjoys fast-paced explosion tests.

▶ PROS: Solid graphics with surprising attention to detail; great sense of battlefield comic relief; thunderous sound, and a superb classical music score.

▶ CONS: There is no back story, and scenarios get pretty repetitive. No control over camera views and no modem play.



Price: \$39.99

System

Requirements: 486-100 or better, 8 MB RAM, 1 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, VLB or PCI video card, Windows 95; supports most major sound cards.
of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designers: Silent Software

Publisher: GT Interactive Software
New York, NY
(800) 610-GTIS
Reader Service #: 332

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Circle Reader Service #570



Hands Solo

HOYLE and PRETTY GOOD SOLITAIRE Shuffle For Position



For years, computer companies have been trying to sell desktop computers to businesses on the grounds that they increase worker productivity. This is a lie. Not since Culligan started peddling water coolers has there been a technology more given to draining a worker's productivity than the desktop PC. And the name of the game in lost productivity is solitaire.

Sure, there's *THEMIS*, too, and in networked offices with souped-up PCs, *DURE NUSUM* may provide a few hours a day of interdepartmental slaughter. Still, it's solitaire that comes on every machine ever shipped; it's solitaire that even the most technically illiterate gamer knows how to play; and it's solitaire that, despite its superficially simplistic and repetitive nature, has managed to keep gamers engrossed for 30 generations.

Why is it satisfying to lay down pieces



ACES HIGH? While the rule interpretations may differ from *Pretty Good*, the *Hour* version of *Acés Up* has the sound with neat aircraft sound effects

of pasteboard in certain arbitrary arrangements according to arcane sets of rules? You may as well ask why it's satisfying to fill letters into a blank grid in response to oblique clues. Yet which of us, stuck on a flight from New York to California, won't reach into the seat-back pocket and retrieve the in-flight magazine on the grounds that even a watery crossword puzzle is better than no crossword puzzle at all?

The better question may be why play-

ing software is not satisfying, to the extent that it is not, since the answer to that question explains, I think, the overwhelming popularity of computer solitaire games (as opposed to computer crossword puzzle games, which have never really caught on). There are a number of problems with traditional solitaire.

Among them: you have to keep shuffling the cards; you need a big

enough empty surface to lay the cards out on; the surface has to be stable so that the cards don't slide all over the place; and you have to remember all the rules of the particular variation you are playing and be scrupulous enough to stick to them. Taking moves back in a game of pasteboard solitaire is less than easy. The same applies to keeping all the stacks, rows, and columns neatly arranged.

Playing on a computer solves all of these problems. Computers are fantastic at

remembering and applying arcane sets of rules, and stacks of cards on a computer screen can be laid out, moved, and manipulated without making a mess of your desktop (or tray table). Taking back moves is simple, and so is cheating, if the computer has been programmed to allow it. The computer takes all the work out of solitaire, leaving only the enjoyable and uncontestedly enjoyable core gameplay

“ The name of the game in lost productivity is solitaire. ”



HOYLE SOLITAIRE

Price: \$39.95
System Requirements: 486-33 or better; 8 MB RAM; 1 MB hard drive space; 256-color SVGA graphics; 2x CD-ROM; Windows 3.1 or better; supports General MIDI sound.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Gayle Rowbottom, Paul Horn
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Inc.
 Coarszewald, CA
 (800) 757-7707

CHECK!



The Solitaire Wizard

Click here to create your own solitaire games!

- ▶ *PRETTY GOOD SOLITAIRE* designer Tom Warfield has other card games available, including *SOLITAIRE WIZARD*, which lets you design your own solitaire games, at <http://users.aol.com/GoodSol/PrettyGood.html>.
- ▶ Have the Os and Zs worn off your old wooden tiles? Then check out Hasbro Interactive's new *Scrabble*, with excellent graphics that give a taste of what *Risc* and *Battleship* will look like later this year. And there's Internet play, too, so you can argue with your friends from Botswana about whether "possiq" is a real word. In any case, our resident wordsmith gives *Scrabble* the full CGW treatment next issue.
- ▶ The most topical solitaire game would seem to be *Poulnacoe* by Masque Software, featuring caricatures of the presidential candidates, among other notable political figures. Politically inclined card flippers should check out our CG Online review at <http://www.zd.com/gaming>.



52-CARD PICK UP It isn't strictly solitaire, but Hoyle's card flipping game is plenty addictive.

MORE FLAVORS THAN BASKIN ROBBINS

Some people will be surprised to learn that there are dozens of varieties of solitaire and an unlimited number of possible variations. They spring up and then become canonical in much the way folk songs or nursery rhymes do: no computer is credited, no one can remember where they came from. Yet they're memorialized in books like *101 Solitaires for Rainy Days*, or in games like Stern's *HOME SOLITAIRE* or Tom Warfield's *PRETTY GOOD SOLITAIRE*.

Both of these compilations try to make a virtue out of sheer mass. *HOME* has 28 variations, and *PRETTY GOOD* a whopping 60. Each contains the expected best-of- breed games, such as Klondike (the version that comes with Windows), Crazyfold and Yoker, plus some of the more popular novelty solitaires such as Golf (where you "putt" all the cards into a single "hole" rather than stack them by suit). After that, the gloves are off.

HOME tries to make up the difference in variations with amenities: beautiful background music ranging from classical to hip-hop; a dozen choices of art for the deck and the "room"; perfect sound effects. When you start a game of Aces Up, for example, you hear an airplane roar off a runway, while siege noises accompany the start of *Belleguarded Castle*. For good measure, the designers have even thrown in a minor action game in which

you have to flick cards from a moving hand into a distant receptacle, one of the most addictive little games I've ever played.

PRETTY GOOD, on the other hand, is a piece of shareware programmed by Tom Warfield, a professed solitaire freak. *PRETTY GOOD* has no sound effects and little name in the way of graphics,

and the sensualist. Anyone dedicated enough to try both will discover inconsistencies and find things to swing him to one over the other. *HOME*'s beauty is marred by the very small cards, and the magnification feature is awkward to use. *PRETTY GOOD*, on the other hand, can overwhelm you with its crudeness: after learning the fifth subtle variation on Klondike, you may have trouble remembering which is which. But both games do what they set out to do, which is to expand the horizons of the gamer whose lunch hour has been extended only by a single, simple solitaire. American industry should put out a contract on Msrs. Warfield and Hoyle immediately. ☛

Where its strength lies is in its designer's encyclopedic knowledge of his game. Warfield not only offers more than twice as many variations as the next guy, he helpfully groups them according to rule similarity, offers historical anecdotes and strategy tips, and even includes some variations he has invented himself.

PRETTY GOOD is for the die-hard solitaire player, *HOME* for the casual player



ALL BABA, WHERE ARE YOU? You're a solitaire d/ner indeed if you can win consistently in *Forty Thieves* from *Pretty Good Solitaire*.

TIPS!

Tips for Pretty Good Solitaire

- ▶ Don't be too quick to move cards off the playing field and onto a foundation. It's sometimes more important to have flexibility on the playing field, to free up "trapped" cards (especially ones that are face down), than it is to build a foundation quickly.
- ▶ In standard four-foundation games, try not to let any one of the foundations get too far ahead of the others. While you can normally only build foundations within a single suit, cards on the playing field can often be stacked with less (or even no) regard to suit. Don't take your low cards out of play until you

Solitaire
1 Deck
 Object: To get all the cards onto four 13-card out sequences.
 Layout:

- 7 Tableau piles—built down regardless of suit. Groups of cards in descending sequence as not easy to moved as a unit. Fill spaces with any card.
- Stock (above the Tableau)—Clicking deals 1 card to each Tableau pile. All empty spaces must be filled before a deal.

know you don't need them anymore.

▶ Beginner solitaires such as *Bowling*, *Pyramid*, or *Golf* are lots of fun, but don't assume that they'll give you a good grounding for tough traditional solitaires such as *Scorpion* or *Sherlock*. Instead, start on one of the tough games and make liberal use of the "undo" feature to see what effect different moves have on a game's outcome.



PRETTY GOOD SOLITAIRE

Price: Shareware, \$19 for registered version
System

Requirements: 486 or better, 4 MB RAM, 2 MB hard drive space, 800x600 graphics, Windows 3.1 or better

Protection: None
Designer/Publisher: Tom Warfield
 P.O. Box 9155
 Springfield, IL, 62791-9155
GoodSol@aol.com



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Trivia Torment

Microforum's MINDGRIND Is Too True To Its Name

by Charles Ardai

Dress a pig up in spats and a fully smart, it's still a pig. Dress a trivia game up with extravagant sci-fi graphics and animations, it's still a trivia game. In both cases, the clothing is inappropriate and more than a little bit ridiculous, and in both cases one questions the judgment of the customer. But it's the latter case that's more troubling. You can always strip the pig and make him of him, stripping the good trivia game parts out of Microforum's MINDGRIND is impossible.

I, Q

In place of YOU DON'T KNOW JACK's side-off-screen gameshow host, MINDGRIND's onscreen host, Newton Knowmore, is one part Star Trek villain Q and another part Don Rickles—as nasty and unnecessarily needling as that combination sounds. The questions come at you in five different contexts. First, you select categories from an eight-by-eight grid, trying to get four in a row correct before your opponent does—sort of extended tic-tac-toe. Second, you must jump from the bottom of a screenful of pillars to the top,



I CAN'T SWIM If you're wrong, MindGrind doesn't give you the right answer—a real shame, since half the fun of trivia is learning, rather than just regurgitating.

answering a question for each pillar you land on. (The longer the jump, the harder the question.) "Move of the Mind" is third, where you must navigate a top-down maze, answering questions to pass through locked doors. The fourth game brings platforms that shrink and grow with your right and wrong answers. Too many wrong answers and you're crushed to jelly against the top of the screen.

"The Search for Intelligent Life" marks the big finale, as you pilot a spaceship around a solar system, avoiding asteroids and answering questions at each of 10 space stations. Complete with thrusters, brakes, navigational controls, "turbo thrust" and a fuel gauge, this is just awful. People who want to play WING COMMANDER aren't going to prefer MINDGRIND.

QUESTIONS, WE GET QUESTIONS

Through each of these questions, regardless of category, the questions stay the same. Never mind that some types of questions are not well suited to a multiple-

choice format—ridiculous fire badly here—or that King Arthur comes up under Honor instead of Mythology. Worse, many questions aren't fair: "What is the largest pineapple?" is bad enough, but how about "How tall in centimeters is the world's tallest cactus?" The world's

shortest dog? The world's deepest ocean?

If you guess wrong too often, the computer picks up on it and in later rounds gives you nothing but questions in your worst category. In my case this meant that I had to stand on that stack of platforms answering World Records questions after World Records questions, 40 in a row, with no variation. Any computer game that insults me and then humiliate me with questions it knows I won't enjoy isn't worth playing. All the fancy graphics in the world don't make MINDGRIND less of a pig. **C**



Price: \$34.95

System:

Requirements: 486DX2-66 or better processor, 8MB RAM, 10MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, Windows 3.1 or better, 2x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster compatible sound.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Publisher: Microforum Toronto, Ontario

(416) 656-6368
Rester Service #: 333



ROSWELL ROUNDTABLE The shtick here is that Earth is the prize in a galactic trivia game. If these trivia questions are the best the aliens can come up with, humans have little to worry about.

▶APPEAL: Trivia fans who have lots of patience for cheesy sci-fi frame stories.

▶PROS: Some of the questions are good, requiring ingenuity or calling on reserves of half-forgotten cultural knowledge.

▶CONS: The rest of the game is just grating, from the singularly unpleasant host to the deliberate attempt to bury you in questions the designers know you can't answer.





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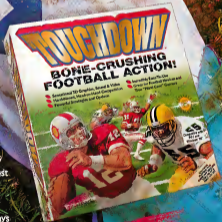
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NCAA Pigskin Action

Class of '97 College Games Look To Break Those NFL Blues



A higher education. Remember sweating over lengthy term papers, and pulling all-night study sessions in the university library? Or perhaps your college memories are a blur of fraternity hushes and rowdy spring break. But for the proppier head and party animal alike, autumn Saturday afternoons remain a special time. That's when college football takes center stage to the accompaniment of colorful marching bands, raucous student bodies and incredibly leggy cheerleaders. Unfortunately, when it comes to NCAA pigskin action, computer sports games have had to make do with slim pickings.

With the NFL hogging the gaming spotlight, college sims have been few, far between and of rather uneven pedigree.

This could be the year that changes all that, however, with a variety of options licensing to suit the budget and hardware of any fan.

HEAD OF THE CLASS

By far the most heralded prospect for NCAA fans is ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL, a Windows 95-native graphical sim that is one of the first offerings from the newly-formed OT Sports. Backed by ABC and Disney, the OT team hit the ground running with a high-profile NFL offering, *MINI or NIGHT FOOTBALL* (see review in this issue). Their college game takes the MNF engine and dresses it up in school colors for fans who prefer their football in South Bend and Ann Arbor rather than Buffalo or Green Bay.

ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL, scheduled for a November release, could be the kind of game that blurs the traditional line between action and realism. While I haven't seen the finished product, I've spent plenty of time with its big brother, MNF, which has a promising (but

flawed) gaming engine. While the OT Sports designers initially toyed with creating a whole new interface for their college sim, they changed their mind once they saw how well MNF's innovative play-calling window worked. This feature allows gamers to not only select formations and plays, but to modify them in real time, much like calling an audible at the line of scrimmage. If OT Sports can successfully plug it into their college game, your virtual coaching chores will be a breeze.

Action-oriented fans will enjoy the arcade options in ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL, which supports a wide variety of controllers. Would-be Lou Holtzes and Joe Paternos, on the other hand, can choose the game's coach mode. Gamers of all stripes should appreciate the multi-player options via modem, LAN or the Internet. Players should note that arcade control is only available on offense during Net games. On the defensive side of the ball, you'll have to jump into coach mode due to latency problems associated with the simultaneous use of two joysticks.

“ We licensed the 1,400 greatest college (football) players of all time. ”

—Glen Hendrickson, producer, ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL

ON DECK

▶ Here's the first released screen shot of EA's NBA Live 97. Not much new to report that we haven't yapped about already, except for this tidbit: Shaq will be in this game.

▶ MicroLeague's long-awaited *MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL 6.0* has been delayed until the start of the 1997 baseball season.

MicroSports designer Dave Holt is taking over the project for MML, and will be incorporating a brand



new game engine developed for Pro League Baseball into the resurrected *MICROLEAGUE* sim.

STAR POWER

In an effort to add collegiate flavor to the MNF engine, producer Glen Hendrickson and the design team added authentic touches like triple-option plays and the walkhome offense. The game features 32 teams using authentic all-time great college players, and is best suited to exhibition or tournament play. This is a design choice that may not please everyone, particularly gamers intent on seasonal replays, or those who would like to pit all-time great teams against each other using their original rosters. OT Sports has



AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL The new version of coach-only All America College Football will feature variable camera angles and viewable player numbers.

included high-profile teams like Penn State, Notre Dame, Nebraska and Florida State in the mix, and packed them with the best players to ever represent their respective schools. So when the Nitary Lions play the Fighting Irish, you're likely to see QB Rick Mirer trying to evade biting 76-ers LB Jack Ham. USC against Illinois will feature tailback Marcus Allen slammering helmets with legendary linebacker Dick Butkus.

Licensing the actual stars was a key decision for self-described college football nut Henderson, who laments the lack of real players in many college games. "It's more fun to control Don Sanders than it is to control Number 24," he says. "With that in mind we licensed the greatest 1,400 college players of all time."

Capturing the game's excitement, not just its mechanics, is clearly a priority for the OT crew. ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL includes broadcast legend

Keith Jackson along with

TIPS!

Can't stand the wait for NBA Live 97? German fan Tim Schirmer's latest

is his series of great patches for NBA Live 95 and 96 are available on his Web site with all missing players, updated trades, 96/96 statistics, 96/97 lineups, and more to get you up to speed for the start of the new season. Check out his site at www.usans.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/~tim/ba95.html (substitute ba95.html after the last slash for the 96 version).

color man (and pro ball-of-line QB) Bob Crise. It's all designed to transport the glitz of big-time college football from your TV screen to your computer screen.

HOLT EVERYTHING

MicroSports is a small Tennessee game company best known for its PRO LEAGUE FOOTBALL series. Withing pigs in a cove for the better part of a decade, company president Dave Holt has weathered the ups and downs of the highly competitive computer gaming business, including an unhappy and short-lived partnership with IBM. (At press time, IBM, parent company of MicroLeague, had signed a letter of intent to purchase the Micro Sports line. Under the agreement, all future releases would appear under the MicroLeague label.)

On the college front, MicroSports has issued several iterations of ALL AMERICA COLLEGE FOOTBALL over the years. For those familiar with Pro League, AACF's interface is virtually identical—a coach-only game that emphasizes play-calling and statistics. While older versions featured a top-down perspective, last year's model presented a sideline view that was the best-looking MicroSports product to date. This year, Holt promises an all-new interface for both PLF and AACF that will feature variable camera angles and individual player numbers.

While his college and pro games have a similar look and feel, Holt has varied the underlying formulas to account for essential differences between NCAA and NFL competition. In Holt's view, the college game is considerably more wide open, and the veteran designer attributes this to positional mismatches. After all, he reasons, even the last player on an NFL squad was a college star, while college games feature a wide variation in athletic ability. With release scheduled for

October, AACF will feature an estimated 800 college teams, including complete seasons from 1993-1995. But it won't have individual player names like ABC SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL.

SMALL SOLUTIONS

Maybe you haven't made the Pentium jump yet. Or maybe you live for stats and don't particularly care about cutting-edge graphics. Either way, you have a couple of noteworthy test-based choices.

Lance Halfter's 3-IN-1 FOOTBALL includes an incredible number of NCAA teams from the 1995 season along with a complete NFL package. Replay the Orange Bowl, the Army-Navy game or stage your own playoff system for the National Championship. 3-IN-1 provides individual player stats and accounts for several evolutions in NCAA rules. The game system has been around for a



ZONE GLITZ OT Sports has peeked ABC College Football with licensed NCAA stars from football's past and present.

decade, and has been tweaked by Halfter Games to provide an accurate, albeit bland, representation of college ball.

An oddity of the 3-IN-1 interface allows college and pro teams to be matched against each other based on stats alone, without regard to the competition level. This makes it possible for, say, Florida State to manhandle a team like the Jets.

Another test-based NFL sim that offers optional college disks is ACTION PC FOOTBALL from Dave Koch Sports. Camera can choose either either last season's Top 20 teams, or a collection of the NCAA's major conferences.

At last, there's no reason to get stuck in that same old NFL rut. **S**

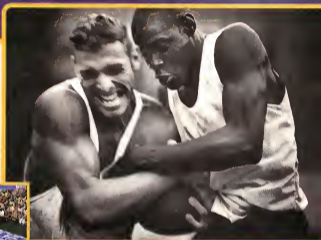
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TOO COMPETITIVE
AT HOOPS.

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Ice Dream

EA's NHL 97 Is A Graphic Masterpiece, But Is It Real Hockey?

by Gordon Goble

I am a Canadian male and as such must obey certain regulations. Rule Number One: Love Thy National Sport, or some harem-fucked government agent will come and confiscate all thy baby seal pelts. Fortunately, I'm a huge hockey fan, so as I close up my igloo and prepare for an indoor winter, it's good to know that computer replications of the sport are suddenly everywhere. The latest is the fourth installment of EA Sports' heavyweight hockey series, the grandiose and much-anticipated NHL 97.

So, let's get to the point: NHL 97 is simply the best-looking, best-sounding sports game ever made for the PC. From an astounding introduction that never lets up to the menu-driven interface and exciting gameplay, it's a head-on sensory body check that'll leave you gasping for air. Even the installation routine will crank your stick.

But, as they say, you can't judge a book by its cover, and what a lot of sports games have been doing recently is using all that stimulus to cover what really makes long-haul gameplay intriguing: NHL 97, for all its greatness, is somewhat guilty of this,



ICE CAPADES NHL 97 boasts the most beautiful graphics to ever grace a computer sports game, bar none.

too, as some of the real-life intricacies of hockey were once again deemed a bit less critical than the look of the game.

HEAVY METAL

You can call this game "full-metal hockey," because that's what it is, both visually and audibly, as you work your way through. In the style of FOX hockey telecasts, NHL 97's menu screens have a high-tech look of big, glimmering steel and futuristic machinery, accompanied by the effects-laden guitar virtuosity of Sabo Kosken. NHL 97 designers have once again supplied virtually every option you'll ever need to customize your hockey experience (aside, curiously, from coaching, something successfully reintroduced recently in Virgin's NHL PowerPlay '96) in an

unprecedented show of chrome. EA Sports is so far ahead of its rivals in this area that it just doesn't seem fair.

With licensing from every conceivable source, all the National Hockey League players and teams are represented, with some international squads thrown in for good measure, each ranked in a juggle of categories and presented with statistical records. Gorgeous head shots and personal information on players only add to the fun. Should the mood strike you, you can trade any player you like or even create your own line-up from scratch.

When you play a full or partial season, the program keeps a running total of even the most unimportant stats, including the status of players with long-term injuries. If you haven't set things quite to your liking before you lace the skates, in-game hot keys and an ample pause menu allow for resolution switching, detail adjustments, line editing, and "rule changes" on the fly.

When game time does hit, it strikes with a flourish. Gone are the spires that populated NHL 96, and in their place are



Price: \$59.95

System Requirements:

Pentium 75 or better, Windows 95 or DOS 5.0 or higher, 8 MB RAM (16 MB for Windows 95), 25 MB hard drive space (40 MB for Windows 95), VESA compatible SVGA graphics card (DirectX 2.0 supported card for Windows 95), 4x CD-ROM, mouse, most major sound cards supported.

of Players: 1-4

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Lance Wall, Kurt Kinnert

Publisher: EA Sports, San Mateo, CA (800) 245-6225

Reader Service #: 334



OOH! Player movements and reactions are eerily realistic; when a player takes a tumble on the ice, you'll want to reach for the first aid kit.

YOU?

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Circle Reader Service #201

NBA

HANG TIME



ESPN

IT'S GAME TIME.



3D-rendered polygon skaters, each built upon a player skeleton driven by motion-captured data. Accurate in all directions, the end effect is absolutely uncanny as players hold and lunge, crash and bang, and act and react with home authenticity from every angle. These guys even have faces and mustaches and, when penalized, vent their wrath by smacking their sticks against the glass.

As has become the norm with EA Sports, multiple cameras are at your bidding, from rafter cams that give an overview of the situation to several ice-level perspectives, reverse angles and more. Replays, with manual control over rotation and angles and featuring absolutely monstrous zooms, are beautiful enough to bring a tear to the eye, while FOX-like "talk" alerts the wake of whistling pucks. Uniforms carry players'

with the program controlling the pitiful Senators, I led out a narrow 4-3 victory, pumping 100 shots on goal. Was it fun? Yes. Does it in any way make sense? No.

Yet my complaints get far more specific than that. Line changes take way too long, leaving the ice momentarily vacant of that team's skaters and triggering multiple breakaway opportunities per period. Then, during those offensive thrusts, you'll find your defenseman sometimes hovering just outside, rather than inside, the blue line—a sure no-no in the real world.

Although players are wonderfully malleable, jumping on loose pucks and such once things get going, there's virtually no variety to the computer team's attack from team to team or level to level—it's usually the same motions in the same places with the same outcomes. And as for those guys in stripes, they've called countless offsides that weren't and have signaled at least two goals where the puck did not cross the line (I have the replays to prove it). Built-in human error? I hope so.

NHL 97 also still has the "predestine" feel to it that I've complained about in previous versions of the game. For example, should the program dictate that you miss eight-foot wrist shots at open net? No. Should it allow you to score two goals in a row from the center ice face-off? No. Should a computer-controlled team "dump it in for a line change" when they have a two-man breakaway? No. None of this favors the human or computer-controlled teams, but it gives you the impression that, no matter how good or bad you are currently playing, the payoffs are based on what the program wants at that given time. It can fill you with a helpless feeling.

Finally, the lack of an omnipresent time clock and the conspicuously absent penalty clock can be a definite hindrance when a tired unit is ready to leave the ice.

And though I appreciate EA's first attempt at play-by-play commentary (by colorful real-life Vancouver Canucks broadcaster Jim Hughson), his verbiage is sometimes just plain wrong, completely misstating on-ice action.

HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS

To be fair, NHL 97's gameplay negatives are partially offset by obvious strengths and improvements over last year's product. Controller button assignments are far more sensible, goals don't hold the puck of possession, and penalties and faceoffs are a result of your own indications. Five-man units experience graduated realistic fatigue over the course of time, meaning it's nearly impossible to get a fresh line near the end of a period, and dinking a goalie is so realistic you'll think you're really there. Of course, EA's rink sound reflects every audible incident there is.

For all its graphic glory, though, NHL 97 is not a wholly realistic depiction of the sport. It's a skin-bang reflex-o-matic featuring spectacular action, cunning animation and overly frequent killer hits. It also has sometimes questionable smarts, vicious yet common trips that should be called "interference," and little of hockey's subtlety. It's kind of a playable highlight reel.

So why do I want to play the damn thing again and again? Probably because something that looks this good and is so much fun to play commands respect, if not quite enough to see me through a full season. **B**



SUCH NICE BOYS You can compare player stats side-by-side to assemble your dream team of killers.

names and numbers, and EA has even included the NHL's recently adopted "second" uniforms for good measure.

PUCK FICTION

But as much as NHL 97's graphics floored me, its gameplay AI and realism left me a bit disappointed. In command of the bottom-of-the-barrel Ottawa Senators, I faced off with the all-powerful and hypothetical Team Europe—at the toughest skill level no less—thrashing them 5-2 and outscoring them 69-49. Taking the same teams at Rookie level

APPEAL: Anyone who enjoys computer hockey, with a proviso that the accent here is on visual beauty and action rather than the nuances of the real sport.

PROS: The best graphics and animation of any sports game, ever. Exciting if not always authentic gameplay, with user-customized options galore.

CONS: No team coaching strategies; AI and realism hasn't improved



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Circle Reader Service #365





Stormy Monday

MNF Gets Mixed Reception With Great Net Play But Bad AI

by Dennis McCauley

Don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle. It's the first lesson in Marketing 101. The folks calling the plays at OT Sports apparently heed that class, as the company's major role in ABC's Monday Night Football, has flung-out nailed the exciting aura that surrounds the NFL's prime-time spectacle. The game's opening sequence is a definite keeper, with Hank Williams, Jr. belting out the now-famous "Rowdy Friends" theme as video images of gorgeous cheerleaders, screaming TVs, and rocking NFL action flash across the screen. Of course, this has little to do with MNF's play value, but it does set the mood perfectly.

Once past the opening, would-be coaches arrive at the game's main interface screen. The Monday Night Football TV look and feel is effectively conveyed here by simulated production truck controls. As you pick opposing teams, for example, full-motion video highlights start rolling on monitors flanking each team. With your combatants selected, another click will trigger five video previews of the game from Frank Clifford, Al Michaels, and Dan Dierdorf. This is well done, with team-specific commentary. Other click points allow the gamer to set weather, graphics and assorted play options. Coaches can also jump to team and roster editors, where starters can be replaced and player ratings tweaked.

With opposing teams selected, play moves to the stadium. Unfortunately, the on-field action shows MNF at both its best and worst. The OT Sports design crew deserves real credit for the play-calling interface, which has to be the slickest, most intuitive device I've ever come across in a sports game. Taking full advan-

tage of MNF's native Windows 95 status, the play caller pops up before each snap, offering easy access to a seemingly endless variety of choices. On offense, coaches can view and select any type of play, run it from any formation, and edit things like motion, blocking assignments and primary receivers on the fly.

If you can use a mouse, you'll find you can quickly call an audible play in MNF. Creative coaches will want to save their most innovative Xs and Os in playbook

Berman appears back in the studio offering statistics and advice. The Berman segment is fun, but his ideas aren't always on the mark. For example, with my QB's stats showing 34-38 for 423 yards and 5 TDs at halftime, Berman suggested that I mix in some running plays because the defense was "adjusting" to my passing attack.

Even the regular ABC crew stumbles occasionally, with comments that seem out of context with the overall course of the game. Dierdorf, for example, compli-



AUDIBLY IMPRESSED The play-calling interface is a dream in MNF, allowing you to edit things like blocking assignments and primary receivers on the fly by dragging the mouse

files for later use. On defense, gamers select the coverage and formation, and can alter individual rooks, blitzes and other assignments. With just a little practice, the MNF play caller becomes second nature.

ROWDY FRIENDS

The game's prime-time flavor is the central theme throughout. You'll feel like you're watching from your cozy chair as Al Michaels provides play-by-play, while Dan Dierdorf and Frank Clifford offer color commentary. Al highlights, Chris

mentis a team on the wrong end of a 49-46 score, saying, "This is such a well-coordinated defense." On another occasion, my kicker nailed a 66-yard field goal, thus eclipsing a quarter-century-old NFL record. The usually talkative ABC crew left the moment pass in silence, however.

Everyone knows that you can't tell the players without a scoreboard. In MNF, however, you can't tell the players, period. Although names are displayed in the play caller, once you get down on the field, you're left guessing. There are no jersey numbers, nor is there the usual toggle for



Price: \$55.00

System

Requirements: Pentium 90 or better processor, 16 MB RAM, 10 MB hard drive space, Windows 95, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports all Sound Blaster 16 compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1-2

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Doug Whitley

Publisher: OT Sports
Hurt Valley, MD
(410) 771-8550

Reader Service #: 335

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names or numbers, so it can get mighty confusing when the ball is snapped.

Graphically, MNF is appealing, but breaks no new ground. The player animations are decent, but certainly not eye-popping by today's standards. Although MNF's action can be followed from a mere eight angles, at least the default view was well chosen. From a position behind the passer, it allows full-field vision for effective arcade quarterbacking, since you're able to see your receivers as well as the defensive secondary and pass rush.

RUMBLIN', BUMBLIN', STUMBLIN'

While the pigskin action in MNF is entertaining, it stumbles in several key areas. The first is interior line play. It's virtually impossible to establish a running game between the tackles. The offensive and defensive lines seem to entangle each other, and nothing gets through. In MNF, if your running game isn't going to the outside, it just isn't going. Saeties seem affected by the traffic jam, too, occurring mostly when the QB leaves the pocket.

Internet Action

MNF has carved out an impressive niche for itself with its options for head-to-head play. Using Windows 95's dial-up networking, it's a snap to connect to fellow football fanatics via the Internet. This is an especially attractive option since it doesn't require the expense of using a multiplayer gaming service. Both coaches simply log onto their respective Internet service providers. One plays host while the other connects to the first's IP address.

The game functions quite smoothly in Net play, providing that unbeatable rush that comes from matching Xs and Os in real time with a live opponent. With head-to-head gaming all the rage, MNF's stable platform could go all the way with Net-savvy coaches. MNF also offers modem and LAN play for those who prefer their action in those flavors.



GET A CAMERA ON HIM! MNF's main interface screen is a simulated TV production truck, with a bank of TV screens from which you direct your action.

Passers who hang in there usually have plenty of time to throw. In one game a computer-controlled Neil O'Donnell hung around in the pocket for 20 full seconds without being flushed. In arcade action, I've held my QBs ground even longer.

For football purists, however, will be most disappointed by MNF's weak computer opponent. I discovered early on that the key is to find a good play and stick to it. Frustrated by my inability to establish a running game, I started throwing short to my backs, à la the West Coast Offense. Using the play caller, I designed a half-back swing pass to the left flat, and found that I could run it all day since the defense failed to adjust.

Coaching the hapless jets, I shamelessly abused this play, trouncing the world champion Cowboys 41-12. Along the way, journeyman HB Adrian Murrell hauled in 35 balls en route to Player of the Week honors. As an experiment, in a later game I used this play exclusively on one series, marching to a score on seven straight completions. The computer opponent never caught on. In that game my backs cooled up catching a combined 40 passes before the final gun. West Coast Offense indeed!

MNF's situational AI doesn't always add up, either. In the waning moments of one game, my computer opponent, down by three, decided to try a 75-yard field goal rather than go for a 4th and 5 with 51 seconds left. In another contest, the comput-

er-led Cowboys twice called fullback sweeps with Darrell Johnston logging the ball on 3rd and 12. Both of Moore's runs resulted in big losses, as more inviting targets like Michael Irvin, Jay Novacek and Everett Smith stood idly downfield.

Stat freaks will definitely find that MNF is not their cup of Caterode. Perhaps because the running game is somewhat inhibited, computer-controlled teams in MNF really air the ball out, generating numbers that are completely unrealistic. In two seasonal replays, NFL all-time

passing records were shattered by over a dozen QBs. Warren Moon threw 72 TD passes in one simulated season, exceeding Dan Marino's NFL record by 24. More alarming, Eric Kramer tossed 13 TD passes in a single game, a 97-20 Bears win. High scores were standard, although usually in the 30- to 40-point range.

FIRST AND GOAL

What's the bottom line on MNF? Despite some significant problems, I recommend it. While MNF doesn't succeed as a one-player game due to its brain-damaged AI, its brilliant interface and exciting connectivity options should make it the game of choice for head-to-head play. As much a look-and-feel game as a simulation, it truly captures the essence of Monday Night Football. **C**

APPEAL: Games who want to put their football savvy to the test against live opposition using real NFL teams, authentic playbooks, and an easy yet sophisticated interface.

PROS: Easy Internet play options, superb play-calling interface, effective recreation of the Monday Night Football experience.

CONS: Poor AI on both offense and defense, wildly inflated passing game, no league management tools, no visual identification of players.





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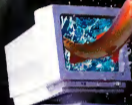


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Sabre Rattling

Upstart Eagle Interactive Flies Into The Early Jet Age

It's hard to imagine an air combat arena more exciting than Korea. You not only had the best propeller-driven aircraft ever built—including the Corsair, Mustang, Yak-9, and Skyraider—but also early jets

such as the Sabre, MiG-15, and Thunderjet. The Korean air war preceded the onset of missile combat, and was the last hoorah for the pure gun-fighters—pilots who relied on energy management and tactics far more than on high-tech hardware.

Yet the Korean air war has been largely ignored by developers. Flying in to fill this gap is upstart developer Eagle Interactive, whose *SABRE ACE* is set to usher in Korean simulations in style.

Although *SABRE ACE* is Eagle's first product, the team members producing the sim aren't rookies.

Captaining the Eagle team is Dave

Kinney, who comes to the world of PC simulations with a rather unique set of qualifications. During his stint in the Marines, Kinney was able to log backseat time in a number of Marine jets, including the FV-4 Skyhawk, T2 Buckeye, and F-4 Phantom II. After helping design A/F and B-2 Spirit simulators for the aero-

rebuild from actual military simulators or the forward fuselage/cockpits of decommissioned fighters), huge high-res graphics screens, and a networked combat environment that can be tuned for beginners or hard-core jet fighter fanatics.

Last year, Kinney left *Fightertown* to form Eagle Interactive. Although *Fightertown* has been very successful in introducing kids from 8 to 80 to the world of air combat, formation flying, and carrier landings, its reach is limited to those who can visit its Lake Forest, California, location. Kinney wanted to create a simulator experience with a wider reach. "This was born Eagle Interactive and *SABRE ACE*."



SHOOTING STARS These diving F-80s are not from a video sequence—that's what the sim engine looks like on a good 3D board.

space industry, Kinney co-founded *Fightertown*, devoted to creating simulations for the general public. *Fightertown* features full-cockpit jet simulators (some

SABRE DANCE

Despite the name, *SABRE ACE* is more than just an F-86 Sabre simulator. This Korean War sim lets you fly on either side of the conflict. American pilots will start the campaign in the cockpits of F-51D Mustangs and transition to the F-86. If you choose to fly on the side of the North Koreans, you'll start the war as a prop-driven Yak-9 and move up to the jet-powered MiG-15.

You'll find more than 26 aircraft types sharing the Korean skies, including the AD-1 Skyraider, F9F Panther, B-26 Invader, F-94 Starfire, RB-45 Tomado, F1D-2 Skyright, and IL-40 Stormovik. Although *SABRE ACE* is a historical aircraft buff's dream, Kinney is quick to point out that this simulator is not about the planes

Papyrus Design Group's David Kaemmer has been secretly hunkered down for the past two years completely retooling the company's highly regarded physics model. He reports that the results are "awesome" and "significantly more realistic," with adaptability to any future Papyrus sim. Apparently the new technology still has a way to go and won't debut for at least another year.—Gorobo Goble

ON THE RADAR

PCGW greasemonkeys have learned that Papyrus is working on a historical simulation based on mid-60s Grand Prix Racing. Papyrus producer Matt Sentell promises that the sim will include such storied tracks as Germany's Nürburgring. Sentell wouldn't reveal the product's name, but he did say that many licensing issues have been cleared up, and that nearly a dozen programmers are involved.



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INTO THE SUNSET Although not complete in this preliminary rendering, the instrument dials jitter realistically. Sabre Ace has the best panels this side of F-16:ren Dux.

it about the pilots who flew them.

This philosophy will be reflected in most every aspect of the simulation, as your pilot's career to the actions of a aircraft around you. Your computer appleganger will gain rank as he gains experience. This isn't unusual in PC sims; the difference here is that you'll gain real responsibility with that rank. You'll start out winging as a wingman (doing what you're told), then work your way up to section leader (commanding your own wingman), eventually ending up as flight leader (commanding the entire flight). On the American side, once you reach a certain level of experience you'll be able to choose more art for your Sabre. Your responsibilities will reflect those of actual jobs—you won't be stuck running the office war single-handedly when you

reach the top ranks. Also, you're not some SILENT THUNDER-style monkey here; wingman and section tactics are of the utmost importance.

Helping to build the "you are there" feeling is an environment that strives for historical authenticity. Along with accurate terrain that's so detailed that you can use real charts to navigate to

your target, you'll also find authentic squadron markings for all the aircraft. If you encounter a group of F-52 Twin Mustangs in the air, their paint jobs will reflect those of an actual F-52 squadron operating in that area in that time period.

The same authenticity will apply to enemy aircraft you encounter. The fantastic kill-to-loss ratio that American Sabre pilots enjoyed was a result of superior USAF pilot training and tactics, as the MiG-15 was actually superior to the Sabre in many performance regimes. Chinese, North Korean, and Russian MiG-15 pilots will all fly using tactics appropriate to their various levels of training. There are four levels of enemy AI, ranging from "new guy" who may try to escape without even trying to join the fight, to top aces. If you see a brown-camoed MiG-15 in the

Expert Advice

► Eagle's primary goal with Sabre Ace is to create a convincing atmosphere of what it was like to be a fighter pilot in Korea. To that end, they've hired Rear Admiral Paul T. Gilchrist (USN, Ret.) as an advisor. Gilchrist is providing input on human and strategic elements of the game, formations and tactics used by pilots of the era, and so on. Having served as an instructor at FAGU (the predecessor of TOPGUN), a test pilot, and a combat pilot over Vietnam, Gilchrist brings 30 years of experience to Eagle's team.

► Gilchrist has written a number of superb books, and if your interest stretches past sims into aviation history, they're a must-buy. Titles include "Feet Wet" (Pocket) and "Vulture's Row" (Schiffer), both detailing the carrier pilot experience; as well as "Crusader: Last of the Gunfighters" and "Tomcat" (both from Schiffer), focusing on pilots of the F-8 and F-14 respectively.



Rear Admiral Paul T. Gilchrist

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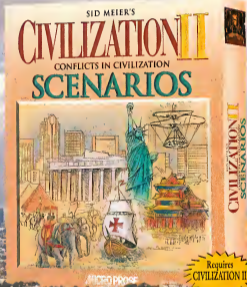
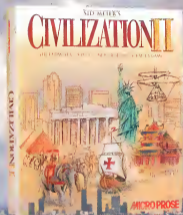
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combat arena, it's being flown by a top-notch Russian pilot, so you'd probably better bug out unless you have a position/energy advantage.

Luckily, you'll have some help learning to survive in this environment. *SABRE ACE* is supposed to include the most sophisticated flight- and combat-training module yet seen in a flight sim. On training missions, you'll be accompanied by a back-seat instructor (you'll see him in the check-six view) who will talk you through various maneuvers, similar to the instructor in *FLIGHT UNLIMITED* and *AH-64D LINGROW*. He won't be reciting a canned script, either. After takeoff, he'll tell you to raise flaps. If you don't do it, he'll follow by telling you which switch (or key, in this case) to use. If you still don't do it, he'll raise them himself and move you onto the next task. Screw up like this in advanced training and you'll hear an exasperated "how'd you get past Primary, anyway?"

On the American side, you'll start piston-engine training in a T-6 Texan and move up eventually to the jet-powered T-33 Shooting Star. Russian pilots will start in the Yak-18 and graduate to the two-seat MIG-15UT. Training will encompass topics ranging from basic flight through risk-reversing with friends and enemies alike, and of course combat tactics.

TOP FORM

One bit of training you'll need to pay particular attention to is formation flying.



GROUND CLUTTER While the landscape looks spectacular from altitude, things get bloody near the ground when you're away from target areas.

Most sims cop out on the formation aspect of air combat by making you fight leader, so the rest of the aircraft in your group follow you. Here, you'll start as a wingman, and it will be your responsibility to stick by your leader. Luckily, along with comprehensive training, *SABRE ACE* also features Formation Augmentation. This feature is a sort of simple autopilot that can be adjusted to do everything from keeping you from sliding out of formation to practically locking you onto your lead's wing. After flying the alpha version of *SABRE ACE* with Form Augmentation active, I'm convinced that this will be a much-copied feature, eventually becoming standard on almost all sims.

An enhanced Automatic Direction Finder (ADF)/Ground Controlled Intercept (GCI) dial is the only fictional addition to the otherwise authentic instrument panels. Korean War pilots were given GCI information over the radio to a degree not feasible to implement in a current-generation sim, so the ADF/GCI dial

TIPS!

EA has slipped another surprise "aircraft" into the latest USNF sequel. Jane's NATO

Fighters. Along with the Atomic Moth introduced in *Marine Fighters*, NATO includes the Quetzalcoatluses, pterodactyl-like creatures. Smaller and more maneuverable than Atomic Moths, these creatures are armed with four boulders for air-to-ground work, and deadly worst for air-to-air encounters.

Atomic Moths battle it out with Quetzalcoatluses over the Baltics.



To access the Quetzalcoatluses, hold down the right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys and click Quick Mission. Continuing to hold these keys until the mission starts, click on the aircraft type until Quetzalcoatluses appears. Choose your opponents, then click Okay. Once the mission starts, release the keyboard and let the vomit boze!

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VARIETY YAK-9 You'll start Russian careers in the vintage Yak-9 before graduating to the MIG-15.

is used for navigation to targets or to rejoin your group. It's a small compromise that adds much to the sim's accessibility.

SURE ACE also has a keyboard view that lets you check navigation maps and other information typically found in a pilot's strike notes.

MISSION ORDERS

After completing the 25 training missions, you'll be able to fly 45 active duty missions, from either side of the battle. In addition to the ubiquitous Instant Action mode (in this case, F-5Ds vs. IL-10s), there's also a Custom Combat selection that lets you pit various combinations of aircraft against each other. For a real challenge, take a flight of four Yak-9s up against eight B-29s escorted by four ea F-50s. If you just want to practice deflection shooting on easy targets, take a MIG-15 up against a group of F-5 trainers.

Given Eagle's experience with actual military sims, expect top-quality flight models in the final product. The Yak-9 I flew when I visited Eagle's offices displayed believable turn rates, appropriate energy bleed in turns, and good handling in the landing pattern. Fuel loads and external stores realistically degrade performance. Unfortunately, rather than model damage to discrete systems (such as loss of a chunk of your horizontal stabilizer) and degrading performance accordingly, it appears the sim will simply use a damage-percentage model.

The flight model will include realistic handling of ditching, as many Korean-era pilots preferred to ride their damaged mounts to the ground rather than hang in a parachute as a slow target for small-arms fire. If you do choose to eject, you can

steer your parachute. If you're close to friendly lines when you bail, you might be able to fly your chute to safe territory and avoid becoming a POW.

NEXT GENERATION ENGINE

Because Eagle is entering the flight sim market late in the game, the company isn't saddled with a library of old code. This has its ups and downs—while **SURE ACE** will utilize the latest Win 95 3D graphics technology, the need to build everything from the ground up means we won't see multiplayer capability in the initial release.

The graphics are nothing short of spectacular, taking full advantage of Direct 3D to provide beautiful texture-mapped aircraft and ground targets that look like the ones you're used to seeing in pre-rendered opening animations. On systems with 2D graphics cards, the sim looks good, but it truly shines on a card equipped with a



CHECK TEN Outside and peekaboo views will be in fixed increments, as Eagle feels virtual cockpit panning is too slow.

Resolution Verite or 3D6 Voodoo chipset.

In keeping with the pilot-centric design of the sim, you'll be able to carry your experienced **SURE ACE** pilot over to Eagle's next effort, the Vietnam-based **PHANTOM ACE**. Although Kamey was mum about the third sim already in the planning stages, **EAGLE ACE** seems a likely candidate.

SURE ACE will fill a gaping hole in the historical simulation market, and it looks ready to do it with finesse. There are a few things missing—it appears the planned Navy mission evident in the alpha interface will be dropped due to time restrictions, as will multiplayer capability in the initial product—but hopefully these will show up in an expansion disc. ☺

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Hell On High-Tech Wheels

A Game To Make M1 TANK PLATOON Fans Enlist For A New Tour

by Patrick C. Miller

One reason Germany's blitzkrieg tactics were so effective in early World War II was the Wehrmacht's deployment of tanks equipped with three-man turrets, when most allied tanks relied on two-man turrets. Free of guncrater duties,

German tank commanders could coordinate their maneuvers better, spot threats sooner and exploit opportunities more quickly than their counterparts.

Today, the U.S. Army's latest version of the M1 Abrams main battle tank, the M1A2, uses advanced technology and digital electronics to give American tank commanders a similar decisive edge in combat. An M1A2 commander has an unprecedented amount of information at his fingertips and an unmatched ability to locate, target and destroy his enemies. Interactive Magic's MIA2 ABRAMS simulation not only accurately portrays those capabilities but also significantly improves upon



DESIGNATED HITTER The Independent Thermal Viewer enables the commander to designate targets for the gunner. The multifunction display records the relative positions of friendly and enemy units.



ANYONE HOME? MIA2's detailed graphics provide stunning views of vehicles and the surrounding terrain. Yes, those are chickens in the farmyard.

MicroPro's highly acclaimed M1 TANK PLATOON, released in 1989.

SPIRITUAL SEQUEL

Former MicroProse colonel Bill Staley (now chairman of Interactive Magic) and Arnold Hendrick (the original designer of M1) have learned up again to develop a tank simulation that's an evolutionary sequel, rather than a revolutionary advancement of the genre. Those who long for a more up-to-date version of M1's outstanding gameplay probably won't be disappointed. There are many similarities between M1 and MIA2. At the same time, the sim's new 3D engine—developed by Cyberbit Enterprises—is a major improvement over M1's "pool table" terrain and its boxy, bright red and green vehicles.

Hendrick says MIA2 will feature terrain maps from real-world locations in Bosnia, the Ukraine and the Persian Gulf, developed with the aid of satellite

imagery. The undulating terrain provides the feel of riding in a tank, and also offers more realistic cover and concealment. The SVCA graphics lend an impressive amount of detail to the vehicles and their surrounding environment. Running under Win 95, Hendrick says MIA2 will be playable on 486-66 with 8 MB of RAM, although a VGA resolution only. A Pentium with 16 MB will be required for SVCA resolution.

When I took MIA2 for a test drive, I quickly learned the value of the tank's high-tech features. In the original M1 simulation there was little to do while buttoned up in the tank commander's position. You spent most of your time either with your head sticking out of the turret, at the gunner's station, or at the display map issuing orders. But now, with the Commander's Independent Thermal Viewer (CITV) and the Multi-Function Display (MFD), you can damn near run

***Continued on pg. 114

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***Continued from pg. 265

the whole show from this station without ever opening the hatch. Indeed, one of the criticisms of the real MIA2 is that some commanders no longer feel the need to stick their heads outside the turret to see what's going on.

HUNTER-KILLER TACTICS

Leading a platoon of four MIA2s, I set out to hunt down a T-72 platoon hidden in a Bosnian valley. A glance at the MFD told me that just over the next rise, less than 500 meters away, the Serbian tanks were waiting in ambush. After issuing commands to maneuver around their flank, I ordered the driver to reduce speed and switched to another screen on the MFD to make certain that my gunner had a sabot round loaded. The tank slowed noticeably when it began to climb

the rise. As it neared the crest, I used the CTIV to scan the tank's frontal arc.

All of a sudden I could see the three enemy tanks. I had come up on their left rear flank, just as I'd planned. I quickly centered the crosshairs of the CTIV on the nearest T-72 and squeezed the joystick trigger. "Roger that," the gunner said as the 120mm gun slewed toward the target I'd designated. In an instant, the gun boomed and I heard "On the way!" The T-72 exploded in flames, its turret cartwheeling through the air. With a click of the mouse, I took over the gunner's duties to finish off the other tanks. Why let the AI have all the fun?

Thanks to two new rounds for its German-designed Rheinmetall gun, the MIA2 has a couple of new tricks up its tube. The MPT round is equipped with a proximity fuse that provides antiaircraft capability. A switch at the gunner's station puts the tank's laser range finder in air mode to engage helicopters. There's also the STAFF round, which is equipped with a special sensor. When fired over an enemy vehicle, the sensor automatically detonates a warhead that attacks from the top, against the vehicle's thinnest armor. This round is even effective against armored vehicles in full defile positions.

COLD WAR, PART 2

You'll need all the capability the MIA2 can deliver because the armored opponents are tougher and better equipped than those in MicroProse's MI. The game's premise is that a nationalist government has taken control of Russia. It wants to return the Ukraine to the former Soviet fold, and has provided its Iranian and Bosnian allies with some of Russia's newer armor designs, including up-armored T-80s. You'll also face the T-90, the new BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicle, and the T-95—a futuristic tank equipped with an unmanned, automated turret. The Russians and their allies will have plenty of artillery plus close air support from F-16 and Su-25 Frogfoot aircraft.



▶ **QUICK ENGAGEMENT** Looking down the gun tube of a T-72 from point-blank range can ruin your day unless you get off the first shot.

Although the MIA2 sports highly effective armor, the Russians have antitank guided missiles with tandem warheads designed to pierce the Abrams' armored shell. The supporting cast for the MIA2 hasn't changed much since 1989. M2 and M3 Bradleys, M90 antitank vehicles, AH-64 Apaches, and A-10 Warthogs provide most of the additional firepower. New units include HIMMWW scout vehicles, M98 forward observer vehicles, and the Stinger-armed antiaircraft HIMMWW.

TREADHEAD HEAVEN

Hendrick says MIA2 will feature fewer role-playing elements than MI. Tanks within a platoon will receive a rating based on their experience. Players can't promote or decorate individual crew members as they did in MI, but they will be able to take members of their platoon from one campaign to another. During a campaign, core units attached to the primary MIA2 platoon will receive an overall rating for their performance.

According to Hendrick, the sim will include multiplayer TCP/IP and IPX network capability. Up to eight people will be able to play cooperatively or head-to-head. Direct modem-to-modem connections remain an uncertainty.

During Desert Storm, the MI made a shambles of the Republican Guard, the best-trained, best-equipped armored force in the Iraq army. In the world Interactive Magic is creating, the MIA2's foes will be much tougher, and the challenges greater. But for those who have waited years for a worthy successor to MI Tank Platoon, that's great news. ☺

The Real MIA2: Updated Abrams

Externally, practically the only difference between the M1A1 of M1 Tank Platoon and the MIA2 modeled in this simulation is the small, canister-shaped bulge over the tank commander's station on the turret top. This is the Commander's Independent Thermal Viewer (CITV), an optical device that enables the commander to spot and designate targets for the gunner, even at night. Internally, however, the two tanks are quite different.

The analog systems of the M1A1 have been almost totally replaced in the MIA2 by digital electronics. This integrated system provides the tank commander with detailed information on his vehicle's status and supplies him with navigational data, as well as the locations of friendly and enemy units. Stabilization of the gunner's sight has been improved, providing the MIA2 with the ability to effectively track and engage fast-moving ground and air targets with its 120mm main gun and new smart munitions.

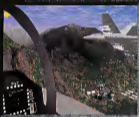


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Back On Track

NASCAR Returns With Fresh Paint And A Rebuilt Engine

by Gordon Goble

The biggest surprise about NASCAR RACING 2 may be that it's not a milestone racing product, and that's a first for Papaya. It's not a standard setter like INDIANAPOLIS 500—THE SIMULATION, it doesn't take us to a new height of realism like INDIANAPOLIS RACING, and it won't up the screen resolution stakes or offer a new form of competition like the original NASCAR RACING did. What it does do is make a superb racing sim much better, while broadening its appeal.

TUNING IT UP

So, what's new and what's not? According to NASCAR 2 producer Adam Levesque, the oh-so-tasteful NASCAR RACING car modeling hasn't been appreciably altered, but that seems to fly in the face of my own experience with the alpha test version. In practice, I found the drive tighter, with less "wobble" through the turns—a subtle difference noticeable only on the cruel corners of a road course like Watkins Glen.

Papaya has rebuilt portions of several tracks for NASCAR 2 (there's 16 in all this



INSTRUMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS You'll have to judge your own speed as you round the corners at Sears Point, as the unrealistic speedometer is now optional.

time around—licensing issues preclude Indy and Daytona), and Levesque was quick to admit the reconstructed Watkins Glen track might have something to do with that seemingly improved feel.

Substantial facelifts are also evident at Darlington, in keeping with its real-life high line, and at Talladega Superspeedway. "The banking was incorrect, the apron was incorrect, so we redid the entire track geometry. You can't run at full speed on the inside of the Talladega apron anymore," warns Levesque, signaling a move that will undoubtedly have repercussions for NASCAR vets who've been mysteriously using that circuit over the last two years.

PAINT TOUCH UP

Cognitively, NASCAR 2 simply looks more solid than NASCAR RACING, and that is most definitely not just a matter of personal perception. "We completely redid the graphics system. Now there's less 'sparkling' in the distance," says Levesque. Add in the sudden presence of clouds and a more authentic depiction of grass and mud

texture, and NASCAR 2 will be one hot-looking program, perhaps as sophisticated as GRAND PRIX II. There's no more primitive "H" switch needed in the command line to access hi-res mode. Screen resolution is now altered from within the program.

Meanwhile, back in the cockpit, the NASCAR 2 instrument panel sports a new layout with added textures and shading, and no more speedometer (not found on real NASCARs) or gear change indicator. Don't worry if you've grown accustomed to those little luxuries, however, because tapping the S key will pop both onto the screen, on the left edge of the dash. "We also toyed with putting in a real shifter, but it would have been in the bottom right corner, where the 'black box' info would cover it up," says Levesque.

Audibly, NASCAR 2 should be a full lip ahead of the original. Gear changes are accompanied by a realistic "clackback," accidents and impacts trigger a volume of sound, and certain events spark commentary and advice from a talking crew chief. (Check the sidebar for more info on this welcome innovation.)

CG SNEAK PREVIEW
COMING IN NOVEMBER



Test drive NASCAR RACING 2 with the demo on this issue's CG-ROM.



TUNE-UP TIME The integrated car setup screen makes tuning easier, and due to NASCAR regulations you won't have to worry about tweaking stagger and the front air dam anymore.

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- Willie Tyler

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PAINT BY NUMBERS The improved paint shop makes it easier to put Marlboro ads on your favorite NASCAR.

FRONT END ALIGNMENT

One of the prime reasons for the creation of NASCAR 2 is to criticize those who found NASCAR RACING just too difficult. In that respect, Papyrus has added Steering Help to its list of driver's aids. Now, with steering, braking, and shifting assistance, that mean old pig is suddenly a sweet little piglet.

And if that doesn't tame the beasty

enough, an arcade mode will service those who need a more gentle break-in period. The NASCAR 2 arcade mode wasn't ready for testing, but Levesque insists it will be "like a super driver's aid with better brakes, better cornering, and more resistance to spinning out." When quizzed as to just how arcade-ish it will be, Levesque says that "there will be no big moments with a Some Hedgehog on it, but it will be easier to drive."

As for those all-important vehicle setups, there's marked revisions here, too. Most noticeably, the entire procedure has been fit into the confines of a single screen, looking much like it would on a crew chief's hand-written clipboard. Now, with everything available at a glance, it's much less confusing, and lessome to juggle a little here and juggle a little there.

A Comments section, designed to hold those little setup notes we've probably all been keeping on paper, is especially nice, but mechanics behave—there are a few items gone or missing. In keeping with

real-life NASCAR mandates, you won't be toying with the stagger and front air dam any longer, and fuel loads are adjustable only in pure-practice mode (a change brought about in part by Papyrus advisor Bobby Labonte). All this will have an effect on just how fast a car can go, but such is the price of fashion.

NASCAR 2's interface has been spruced up and simplified, with fewer screens, smaller fonts, and commands bars across the bottoms and tops. The Driver's Info Screens will feature head shots of all



SPEED RACING The improved Quick Race setup screen makes it a snap to jump into custom races.

Life With A Talking Crew Chief

Green, green, green!" With those three words, the dawn of a new era in computer racing is upon us, that of the talking crew chief. He's bright, he's verbose, he's excitable, he knows all and sees all. Actually, he's aware of much more than just a single crew chief ever could be, and that's why Papyrus is billing him as a combination crew chief-spotter. Once you've shared a race with this guy, you probably won't ever want to drive any other way.

You see, he's much more than just a verbal showpiece. Sure, he's got a solid command of the obvious: when the race starts, when it ends, and that sort of stuff. But he's also an invaluable source of tactical information throughout each race.

"Keep it to 55," he'll warn as you navigate through pit lane or threaten a hot entry. "There's an accident on the back straight," he'll advise, which may or not already be obvious depending on whether you caused the carnage in the first place. "Last lap. You're the man! Bring it home," he'll shout

as you blaze to victory. For added realism, his phrasing changes from time to time, and each transmission is preceeded and ended by a short blast of radio static as his mike is keyed.

In traffic, his assistance is even more appreciated and surprisingly adept. Hardened NASCAR veterans know the feeling of diving into a turn as another car lurks perilously just off their right door. It can get pretty dirty, to say the least. But with this Ned Jarrett sound-alike (it's actually Ron Gaines, a good bud of Bobby Labonte) barking directions like "You've got a car up high, stay low!" "He's still there," and eventually "Clear," you'll be buying this good buddy a virtual beer post-race.

Unfortunately, with the exception of the pit radio keys that have been there all along, you won't be able to directly communicate back to him, and that situation won't change until there's a voice recognition standard for PCs. But if you're anything like me, going back to the original NASCAR without this guy will be a very lonely feeling indeed.

competing drivers and provide access to the updated high-resolution car-painting module.

Replays, already top-notch in NASCAR RACING, have been improved here as well. Now, lots of background information is displayed as you watch yourself in action, including your current position, speed, intervals, average speed, and best lap times. This is a great way to monitor what you've been doing right and wrong.

START YOUR ENGINES

On a more humorous note, I found it interesting that both Dale Earnhardt and a tow truck would be introduced to the game at the same time! C'mon guys, whifre you trying to tell us? Actually, Dale's not so bad, and the tow truck, although doing the job, is invisible, so it's a mixed message at best.

At this early stage, it looks as though NASCAR 2 will have more than enough to seduce NASCAR RACING owners back for more. It's less imposing for newcomers, meaning potential interest outside the cultish Papyrus fan club. And that's just what Papyrus and Sierra are hoping for. **S**



Meching A Profit

Combat Has Its Price In This MECHWARRIOR 2 Prequel

by Greg Fortune

Computer widows, beware. Rip this review from this magazine, and under no circumstances let your significant other go near a software store until this blows over. *MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES* will be building the ranks of computer widow support groups across the country. Ask my wife—she'll tell you all about it. You may think my warning's a bit extreme. After all, isn't this just *Mech 2* with prettier graphics and some new missions? Not a chance!

COST CONSCIOUS

Certainly, *MERCENARIES* bears a strong resemblance to its predecessor. You travel from world to world manning the cockpit of a mech—a giant, heavily armed robot—using weapons of mass destruction to wipe out installations and enemy mechs. Only this time you're not putting your life on the line for the honor of clan and family. No, in this prequel you're motivated by something much more powerful: cold, hard cash.

You'll earn C-bills for missions and objectives you complete, but you also have to pay for every missile and every bit of damage done to your squad. You'll



LIGHT DAMAGE Dynamic lighting from energy weapons and explosions whites out the battlefield; the light is particularly useful in night missions.

need to weigh the time span and risks of a contract against the monetary and salvage compensation you'll receive upon successful mission completion.

You can play with the economy disabled, which is just like being back home in the clan. Here your missions will be selected for you. But be aware that you're missing out if you play this way. The mercenary commander always gets the most C-bills, and you'll get whatever falls off of their plate

behind you, but you can't always rely on circling tactics here. Some pilots will lead you with their shots, and they can dismember a mech faster than you can say "why am I face down in the dirt?"

That question reflects another improvement, one that fixes the "one-legged super-mech" quirk of *Mech 2*. Now, when a mech loses a leg, it crashes to the ground, where it will stay unless it has jump jets available to right itself.

The enemy AIs aren't the only ones with improved, variable abilities. Checking out a potential LanceMate (the mercenary equivalent of a Starbuck) reveals a letter grade rating for both piloting and gunnery skills. Also provided is a psychological profile, allowing you to better determine whether the merc will be an asset or a liability. Some of these pilots are really good, allowing you to actually use the "engage at will" command without worrying about some beta warbler around aimlessly while your enemies



Price: \$49.95

System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66 (Pentium 75 for Win 95 version), 8 MB RAM (16 MB for Win 95), 2x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics, 75 MB hard drive space, DOS 6.2 or Windows 95, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards (DOS) or all Win 95 compatible sound cards.

of Players: 1 (2-8 in modem or internet play)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Tim Morten and Jack Marzas

Publisher: Activision
Los Angeles, CA
(310) 473-9200

Reader Service #: 336



SNOW CHANCE Blow the leg off a mech and he topples to the ground; without jump jets, he's soon to be toast.

pound the life out of that Comrade that you've paid for. On the flip side, there were a couple of bots I would have killed myself if it wasn't going to cost a couple million C-bills to replace the mech they were in.

You can also get a hand from some Acrotech (aircraft) support, which you also like from the same personnel data in your computer. Unlike your Lance mechs, these pilots come with their own aircraft and make their own repairs, so you just have to pay them their flat monthly fee.

Mission variety is greatly improved. You can pick one of two or three missions available at a given time, which are all part of a nonlinear career path (if you have the economy enabled). There are a wide variety of mission objectives. You'll have to disable a renegade's mech while destroying the rest of his company, destroy a terrorist bomber's truck bound for a hospital targeted for destruction, and capture water tanks on a barren planet from an occupying force that will try to destroy them when the battle is going your way. You'll face missions in the dark, at dusk, in haze, and in the snow. You'll fight on several different types of terrain. All this adds up to enough variety to keep the missions interesting even after many hours of play.

TEXTURE HEAVEN

MERCENARIES is based on the same graphics engine as MECH2, but it has undergone a major overhaul. Everything is texture mapped now, from the ground and terrain to the enemy in your target reticle. Multiple light sources have been

Stop Bugging Me

T rue to its history with addressing Mech 2 problems, Activision is hard at work addressing user complaint about *Mercenaries*. (The first version had some mission scripts that didn't work as users expected them to.) The design and development group has taken the input, bug reports, and suggestions posted online and is busy turning them into patches and updates. This not only covers bug fixes but also includes a MechLab enhancement, a possible change in the salvage rules to include user selection of salvage, and the addition in the future of power-ups such as fuel or ammo trucks in MechNet that will allow you to refuel and repair during a battle. All of these patches and enhancements will be provided free of charge on Activision's online site, as well as being incorporated into future production runs of the CD. If you're having problems with the game, check www.activision.com for updates.

added, causing light reflections from your weapons to bounce off of the ground, buildings, and any other object near their path. This effect works particularly well during low-light missions. All of this adds a look and feel to the game that grabs you by the gray matter and doesn't

let go until you finish your mission or get blown to pieces.

While the CD ships with both DOS and Win 95 versions of the game, I found that this is really a game that flies the low overhead of DOS and runs best in that environment. While the game ran fine for me under Win 95, a number of users have reported problems with that version; a patch is in the works.

MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

Included on the CD is MechNet, a multiplayer utility based on the NetMech utility released for Mech 2. MechNet not only supports null modem, modem, and LAN connections, it also includes a PPP stack for live games on the Internet. With this support, you won't need Ter, Kik, or any other online server to play over the Net. This extends the replay value; indefinitely, you may only want to beat the missions a couple times, but who gets tired of beating up friends?

All is not perfect in the online department, however. Due to the inability to connect between the DOS and Win 95 versions of NetMech—because of Microsoft's proprietary DirectPlay routines—Activision this time included only a DOS version of MechNet. The DOS MechNet will run under Win 95, however, allowing you to join your DOS-based friends online. While some problems have been reported with the PPP stack, most people can get online without much trouble. Activision is working on several game patches as I write this, so expect a lot of these problems to be fixed.

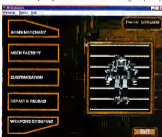
A FITTING CONCLUSION

MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries delivers significant improvements over Mech 2 and CBL, while retaining the high-energy action that made those games great. The improvements aren't just visual, but include new features that greatly enhance the gameplay—and game replay—value of this product. **C**

APPEAL: MechWarrior 2 fans looking for new missions and more play elements, as well as no-change veteran of play; action gamers who want to do more than run around and shoot everything that moves.

PROS: Very good AI for computer-controlled mechs; monetary elements freshen gameplay for even experienced MechWarriors.

CONS: Minor problems completing some missions; automated salvage destroys much of the monetary incentive not to just deactivate your opponents.



GOING SHOPPING Visiting the MechLab to repair and reload is likely to damage your wallet.

Lightning Light

Despite Claims Of Realism, This Sim's Targeted At The Action Crowd

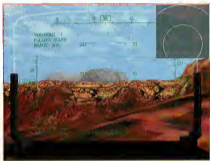
by Robin G. Kim

NovaLogic's F-22 LIGHTNING II is the first of a bumper crop of simulations of the F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter. With stunning graphics and bowery claims of unprecedented realism, it's tempting to declare it the victor before the others even appear on the scene. However, digging below the surface reveals that underneath the amazing visuals are significant flaws that may reduce its appeal for some players.

PIXEL PANACHE

LIGHTNING uses conventional texture-mapped polygons instead of NovaLogic's vaunted Visual graphics technology, yet the visuals are still incredible. From the strikingly realistic terrain rendering to the intricately detailed aircraft, this sim is a feast for the eyes. To ensure a good frame rate, it only displays the surrounding terrain out to a certain distance before it's gradually swallowed up in a haze, but the effect is nicely done. LIGHTNING provides a variety of resolution and detail options, making it possible to get good frame rates on most PCs. At maximum detail on a 133-MHz Pentium, it's remarkably smooth except during the busiest missions.

Despite the gorgeous external graphics, the cockpit views leave something to be desired. The only static view—besides the full-screen multifunction displays (MFDs)—is straight ahead through the head-up display. To look anywhere else, you must pan manually in virtual cockpit mode or use the pushlock view to track a target automatically. Both of these views show minimal HUD information. Worse, the virtual cockpit view is so sluggish it's almost useless—in the nine seconds it



RIDGE RUNNER Position is apparent at very low altitudes, but the terrain is generally free of distortion once you get away from the air base.

takes to check your six, a handoff has enough time to put on a little airlock before blowing you away. The pushlock view works well for tracking both air and ground targets, but its inability to show incoming missiles makes evasion difficult.

The game's sound effects can't match the impact of its graphics, but they are nevertheless well done, with a good amount of digitized speech. Alas, a glitch in this otherwise surprisingly bug-free sim prevents the simultaneous use of digital sound and music from a General MIDI daughter card.

CREATIVE AERODYNAMICS

Most people play a flight sim to fly, not just to enjoy the sights and sounds. Alas, LIGHTNING's flight modeling is its biggest weakness as a simulation. It's so primitive that you simply do not feel like you're flying an aircraft—the effect is more like a space combat game with gravity. If you bank the plane and let go of the stick, the nose drops but your heading doesn't budge an iota; turning must be accomplished by pulling back on the stick or using the rudders. Rudder input is indis-

closely effective: a 90-degree turn at Mach 1.5 using the rudders alone takes only eight seconds. Such quirky handling makes dogfights much less enjoyable for experienced pilots.

The real F-22's avionics systems are

designed to be very easy to use, integrating input from an array of sensors into a few displays. It's impossible to say how accurately LIGHTNING models these systems, since they're still classified, but the results are convincing. The plane's stealth advantage is also well simulated, with enemy detection ranges growing whenever you activate your radar or open your weapons bay to deploy ordnance.

The F-22 can carry Sidewinder, AMRAAMs, and JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition) smart bombs. Air-to-air missile performance is reasonably accurate. Attacks on unsway targets are almost 100% effective, while accuracy degrades substantially if the handoff breaks and drops countermeasures. Combined with its good avionics and stealth modeling, LIGHTNING turns out to be a respectable simulation of beyond-visual-range combat in spite of its lackluster dogfight. Air-to-ground work using JDAMs is also realistically portrayed, but it isn't especially challenging. As a concession to playability, the sim allows you to carry far more inside the plane's weapons bay than would be possible in real life. While



Price: \$44.95

System Requirements:

486DX4 or better, 8 MB RAM, 33 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, DOS or Windows 95, mouse; supports Sound Blaster, Microsoft Sound System, Crystal Semiconductor, and Turtle Beach TBS2000 sound cards

of players: 8 (modern and IPX, only one CD required)

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Randy Casey

Developer: NovaLogic

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SEE THE WORLD

The 41 canned missions included in *LIGHTNING II* will take you through six different theaters. The first stop is Nellis AFB for training, then it's off to Thailand for the first of four sequential campaigns leading you to Kazakhstan, Iraq, and the Ukraine. After completing those, you're treated to a fifth, undocumented campaign in Africa. The campaign missions are linear, so you must win each one before proceeding on. If stand-alone missions are more your bag, you also can fly separately any mission that's not part of the bonus campaign. When playing by modem or network you can run cooperative cam-

paigns. Once you've exhausted the canned missions, you can whip up more using a simple mission generator.

Within a campaign, the level of opposi-



CANYON RUNNING Although *LIGHTNING II*'s flight model needs improvement, missile performance is reasonably accurate.

tion adapts based on your past performance, tailoring the difficulty to match your abilities. Missions get much more challenging as you progress. Completing a campaign usually just gets you a short

animation, then it's on to the next one. You're not told anything about the aftermath, so there's no time to savor your victory. In fact, if you don't look closely at the next mission briefing, you may not even realize you've transitioned to a new campaign! Individual missions can be exciting, but they eventually become somewhat repetitious.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The game's artificial intelligence is good, but it mostly relies on confronting you and your wingman with overwhelming numbers. This fits in well with the campaign themes, however, and isn't implausible. In the largest missions, you may get support from numerous F-16s and F-15s. The huge furballs that result are impressive, involving dozens of planes with missiles flying everywhere.

There are just five wingman commands, but they are generally sufficient. Although your wingman also flies an F-22, his capabilities are inescapably different from yours. He won't engage from anywhere near the maximum range of his AIM-9Xs, and while he never carries JDAMs, he is somehow able to attack ground targets with his air-to-air missiles.

F-22 *LIGHTNING II* probably won't appeal to serious flight sim players because of its oversimplified flight model. At the other end of the spectrum, fans of arcade flying

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HAPPEAL: Sim players (who aren't sticklers for realism) seeking a goal-looking, moderately complicated air combat game with good multiplayer support; X-Box and TIE Fighter fans willing to take a step up in complexity.

PROS: Spectacular graphics, good simulation of beyond-visual-range engagements, slick network play.

CONS: Arcade flight model destroys the feeling of flight, making dog-fights unrewarding; missions somewhat lacking in variety; quirky cockpit view system.



games—who won't mind the space-fight-or-feel—may be turned off by having to work through the hefty manual to master the MFD modes and 35 essential key commands. Novel logic seems to be aiming

among these estimates: casual or beginning flight simmers who care less about total realism than involving game-play and impressive visuals. LIGHTNING probably won't beat out the three other

upcoming F-22 sims on every front, but with its accessibility, smooth network play, and state-of-the-art graphics, it's sure to be a strong contender among this segment of the population. **B**

Multplayer Modes

F-22 Lightning II's multiplayer support allows players to hook up via modem, null-modem, or IPX network. Gamers on a budget will be pleased to note that only one CD is necessary, even for an eight-player network mesh.

Performance is almost totally free of warps and lag over a network. Unfortunately, 28.8-Kbps modem connections, while smooth most of the time, grind to a crawl when players take off or fire weapons. While it's not possible to add a player to a game already in progress, rejoicing after you get shot down is as easy as pressing the (undocumented) Enter key.

In a novel twist, players determine mission parameters before takeoff by voting for the selections they prefer. The game supports both cooperative and deathmatch modes. Deathmatch is a free-for-all only-team play is not an option.

It's a simple matter to switch between cooperative and deathmatch over a network, but modem players are forced to break the connection and redial.

Cooperative missions include some interesting aspects not present in single-player mode. For instance, if your wingman lights up a group of badniks with his radar to identify them, the ID information is automatically downloaded to your display, allowing you to remain stealthy. These missions would be a lot more enjoyable if the game did not contain one truly regrettable omission: there's no way to chat with another player, whether you're in the air or on the ground trying to set things up. This detracts from the fun for players not co-located and severely restricts your ability to coordinate attacks with teammates.

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Online Blitz



TEN's PANZER GENERAL ONLINE Is As Exciting As The Boxed Version



After you've beaten down Britain, ramped over the Russians, and scored the Ultimate Victory over the U.S.,

where is there left to go to PANZER GENERAL? E-mail is an option, but the leisurely pace of sending even a turn a day means that games stretch out for weeks, even months. Finally, there is an alternative: TEN has teamed with SSI to adapt PG for online play. I can already hear you saying, "Why play a turn-based game online?"

The first reason, of course, is that you get a steady stream of new opponents. In over a week of online play, I never logged onto TEN without finding an opponent within minutes. While there is the usual online mix of beginning, experienced and married players for PC, most gamers were more than willing to accommodate players of varying skill levels. It doesn't hurt that PG has a minimal learning curve, either.



SUMMARILY EXECUTED You aren't necessarily home free here. Make sure that you've finished the setup routine in your C:\PGONLINE directory before logging on, or the TEN system won't be able to find PANZER.EXE.

WHO'S IN COMMAND?

The biggest change from the boxed to online version of PG is that the latter has true multiplayer scenarios. In a battle on the eastern front, for instance, you may find the German command split, one player having the majority of the air force, while the other has the heaviest armor. While I understand that PG ONLINE isn't trying to be more historical than its on-the-shelf progenitor, it would be nice if the forces were split less arbitrarily; if, say, my partner led Guderian's forces while I

controlled those of General Paulus, instead of each player commanding units scattered all over the map.

Still, the multiplayer aspects are a boon for online play. In addition to the friendly insults ("Your tread is dead, mein herr") so customary to online play, you can also set up battle plans by "whispering" to your partner during the enemy turn—a much better alternative

than simply waiting around for your turn to come up. There are always arguments over the best use of panzoops, whose to lay down suppression fire, and whether air units are better off in ground support or in taking out enemy aircraft.

REACTION TIME

The simplest way to play is the old, I-Go/You-Go method. But PG ONLINE shakes up the traditional flow by offering time limits to speed play, anywhere from 10 seconds to 90 seconds per unit (you may still play with no time limits if you prefer, but I'd suggest finding another opponent). The biggest departure for PG ONLINE, though, is that it lets you move in "impulses," where you move three Germans, I move four Russians, for example, within the same turn. This calls for exact timing on attacks, lest crippled enemies slip away to repair next turn. The interactive turn sequence also allows for counterattacks in the middle of a turn, which livens up any PG scenario.

Tactical questions abound. Should I soften up the enemy defenses with

“ Achtung! If you're looking for a great online strategy game, march to TEN's PG Online, mach schnell! ”



BRIEFINGS

Normally, when you log on to TEN, you may still have to download the PG Online software to play the game, which can take up to two hours on a 14.4 modem, over one hour on a 28.8. Since most people we know don't have a private T1 line, CGW has made an exclusive deal with TEN where we provide the PG Online software on our CG-ROM. See this

month's FAQ page for details. ▶ Our secret sources reveal that SSI may finally be turning to the American Civil War. The first tentative plans have been laid for Mr. LINCOLN'S GENERAL, featuring the campaigns of U.S. Grant. Given the many and varied methods that Grant employed near Vicksburg, this should be a lively game indeed.

BRIEFINGS

Surveying The PG Online Battlefields

Battle	Date	# Players	# Turns	Notes
Poland	9/1/39	2	11	Better balance than in the boxed game
Warsaw	9/10/39	2-3	21	Three-player scenario is surprisingly tense
Polk3	7/23/43	2, 4, or 6	15	Russians vs. exhausted Germans
N. Africa	3/31/41	2	24	Play at blitz speed—say, 10 seconds/turn
Caucasus	7/24/42	2, 3, 4, 6, 8	25	Too long, even with 6 or 8 players
Kaszy	7/10/43	2 or 4	22	Not the best test of skill, but cool hardware
Scotland	7/10/45	2, 3, 4	21	Brisk hypothetical scenario
2 or 4 Intro	12/25/45	2 or 4	25	Unimaginative name, decent scenario
Leros	11/12/43	2-4	6	Hardly Crete, but still fast and furious
Clash of Arms	3/17/45	2, 4, or 6	25	Soviets vs. Axis late in the war
Free-for-All	7/10/45	8	25	Just like it sounds, but goes on too long
Pakfront	7/4/43	2-4	15	Great scenario with depth and variety
Germany '48	4/1/40	2-4	31	Allies attack Germany in 1940, challenging
Barnwood II	1/17/45	2-4	16	Raptor strikes; carnage galore
Desert Duel	1/1/46	2	25	Very strange "post WWI" battle

artillery, knowing that he may move reinforcements in, or do I hit with armor first and ask the divided Regged Defense? Can I take the time needed to escort my bombers, or do I launch preemptive strikes against my opponent's fighters? One of the best things about playing with briefings is that it forces you to keep a reserve, normally not a concern in PG.

CREAKY TURRET

So, is everything perfect? Well, latency really isn't a problem in a turn-based game, so this will be a lot more fulfilling than a game of, say, DUNE NUBEM or WARREN? over a noisy connection. But there are a few things that keep PG ONLINE from completely emulating the five-star status of the original.

When you play the boxed version, it's

OK if the game is biased toward the German side, because you have those terrific focused campaigns. Despite the increased tactical and strategic options here, however, some of the PG ONLINE scenarios are really unbalanced for multiplayer play. It's a real surprise, given SSF's usual excellent reputation, but I can't believe that either they or TEN played tested these scenarios for anything other than bug-squashing.

With more tough, balanced scenarios like Poland and Germany '40, this could have been the perfect online strategy wargame. Where's Nank, or Fall of France, or Crete or any of the other classic PANZER GENERAL battles? And why isn't there a ranking system for challengers on TEN? For that matter, why aren't there sanctioned tournaments from SSF? When these questions are satisfactorily answered, this could activate online wargaming much as PANZER GENERAL did for wargaming in general. ☺

TIPS!

- ▶ When you first begin playing PG ONLINE, start with the Poland scenario. You'll find that the Poles have a much

Scotland is a good battle with which to experiment.

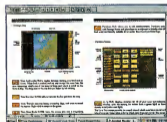
- ▶ To keep the chat window from becoming too cluttered, hit "F4" to change the color of your text. That way, it's obvious who's "talking."

- ▶ To "whisper," simply type the name of your partner, along with a colon (say, **General Johnny:**), and the message will appear on your screen and that of your partner, but not that of your opponents. This is a must for coordinated assaults in multiplayer games.

- ▶ If someone pulls out early or loses connection, don't panic. The TEN software will assign a computer player to take over so you can actually finish the game if you wish.

- ▶ In multiplayer scenarios, set up for "interactive impulses" of 3-5 units each. Newer players will be somewhat reluctant at first, but once you win them over, they'll keep coming back for the added tension and faster play.

- ▶ As a rule, don't let experienced players bulk jets with the Germans, or it's often lights out for the Allies.



WHERE ARE YOUR PAPERS? Having the manual available online is a nice touch, especially since you may access it during your opponent's turn.

better chance of victory when led by a human general.

- ▶ If you're unsure about a particular scenario, try playing it solo first.

FAPPEAL: Anyone who wants a challenging, fun strategy game against human generals.

IMPRES: Brisk play, variable time limits. Interactive "impulses" a big plus. As addictive as the original, with plenty of enthusiastic opponents online.

ICONS: The scatter-shot scenario design doesn't replace the wonderful campaigns, and why isn't there a ranking system, or tournaments?



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Better With A Friend

DEADLOCK Sacrifices Solo Play for Good Multiplayer Gaming

by Tim Carter

When computer games first criticized the marketplace, they filled two important gaps in the average strategy gamer's life. First, a computer could handle all sorts of

bookkeeping duties like hidden movement, logistics, and so on, that were too cumbersome to deal with in boardgames. Second, computer games were meant to give us a reasonably challenging and decent solitary gaming experience. Now the story has come full circle, as one of the key selling features in new releases is the ability to play against another person.

DEADLOCK, from Accolade, is one of these recent releases. It can be played solitary, but clearly a lot of effort went into making it a good multiplayer experience, over online gaming services, LANs, serial cables or direct modem connections.

DEADLOCK, like so many of its predecessors, is a game of planetary colonization and conquest. You have been sent by your race to colonize a particularly rich and potentially prosperous planet in a remote section of the galaxy. An interstellar truce prohibits fighting in space, so all of the action happens within the planet's atmosphere. Once in the atmosphere, however, all allegiances are off, and players can expect to spend as much time fighting as they do building.

Players take on the role of the planetary leader of one of a range of starfaring races, each with particular strengths and weaknesses. Sound familiar? As usual, you will have to develop a range of technology,



SEVEN RACES, ONE PLANET The name of the game is to defeat all your rivals by building the most city centers or conquering all the planet territories.

build structures, manufacture military units, and, eventually, overrun the planet.

DEADLOCK shows both what can be done in a multiplayer game, and where the boundaries lie between multiplayer and solitary gaming experiences. To keep the game viable in head-to-head play, the action is fast-paced and relatively simple. You must build your colony's economic and military power while developing new technology and keeping your people happy.

The map is randomly generated, and even at the largest setting, it won't be long before enemy units hover into view. This makes sense, since you wouldn't want to play head-to-head for hours without meeting your opponents. It does sacrifice the building aspect of the game, however, and

players often won't have time to establish a solid base before they are thrown into an open conflict.

To win, players must control a preset number of city centers, which may be built or captured from the other races on the planet.

Economic growth comes through the construction of various

buildings, each of which produces a raw material or finished good. For instance, you must build farms to produce food and wood, while mines will produce iron. A factory might then use the wood and iron to build military units. Everything you build costs money, which must be raised through taxes or the sale of raw materials. Usually players will be short of everything



INSTANT REPLAY *DEADLOCK*'s disappointing tactical module gives you no direct control over your troops. You can give them orders, but the computer resolves combat.



Price: \$59.99

System

Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics, mouse, Windows 3.1 or Win95, supports most major sound cards.

of Players: 1-7 (via modem, serial connect, NETBIOS, LAN).

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Russell

Sniffler

Publisher: Accolade

San Jose, CA

(800) 245-7744

Reader Service #: 338



► S3M-DEADLOCK The biggest part of gameplay is managing your territories, where you can build structures, train troops, mine resources and set farm production for wood and food.

and success requires sound economic planning and a considerable degree of micromanagement.

The plane's surface is divided into zones, each of which is subdivided into individual squares rated for terrain and raw materials. As your colony grows, your population increases. Within each zone players may tinker with production by shifting where the population works. Moving the population around makes a huge difference to production, and is crucial to economic survival. Also, your people must be kept happy. Unhappy people won't work, and if enough people are unhappy they will riot, causing damage to buildings and industrial facilities.

Given that the economic situation is usually somewhat precarious, players may find themselves devoting considerable time to the management of their population. While this does allow you to control your economy in some detail, it can also become highly tedious. Unfortunately, the interface for gaining information about your economy is fairly clunky, so that micromanagement takes longer and is less efficient than it could be. In a long game, this can be quite a drag, as each turn you will have to shift people around and give your factories new orders.

This is particularly sad because a few tweaks to the design would make it all unnecessary. Take factory production, for instance. While your factories will wait for the necessary resources before producing the units you order, you must pay for each unit when you give the command to build it. As most colonies will be chronically

short of cash, this means that it is impossible to order a lot of units in advance.

The downside to this is that you will constantly have to access your factories and order more units. With a large empire capable of producing missiles, land, sea, and air units, this can be time-consuming and tedious. The treatment of combat in DEADLOCK

is clearly designed to make head-to-head play easier. If you wish to initiate a battle, all you have to do is send combat units into a zone containing hostile forces or population. The actual fighting takes place between turns and is completely controlled by the computer. Those used to a higher degree of tactical control will be disappointed, as winning and losing in war becomes a function of the units you select and your production capacity.

Also, the jumps in technology are often so great that many battles will be tremendously one-sided. If the technology is even, they are largely contests of attrition. Neither is particularly interesting.

On the one hand, it is quite easy to see why the designers chose to implement combat this way, as a MASTER OF ORION-type tactical battle might be either very complicated to program or very time-consuming to play. On the other hand, the lack of tactical command makes DEADLOCK a game of economics and planning rather than military strategy.

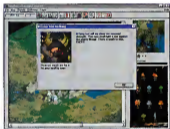
Moreover, players may build a variety of fortifications in their zones, and will usually have to overcome the same in enemy zones. The strengths and weaknesses of fortifications are largely controlled by technology, meaning that enemy zones will either be impenetrable or walkovers. (Expansionists are recommended to invest in mocketry technology.)

Personally, I believe that any effort to make games playable against a human opponent should be applauded. With the wealth of online and direct connection opportunities available, and the contin-

ued death of decent computer AIs in today's games, the ability to bash fellow players is always welcome.

Yet, multiplayer capacity does not, and should not, necessitate a weaker interface or a clumsy solo experience. There is no reason why these games cannot be as smooth and original as those intended solely for solitary use.

Is DEADLOCK fun to play against another person? Of course. Could it have been a lot more fun? Absolutely. Does it stand up as a solid solo experience? Not really. The artificial intelligence makes all of the mistakes that AIs usually do (like attacking at the same point over and over again), while the interface and game design offer no redeeming qualities or structures which might make it challenging. Any game, though, is always more fun when played multiplayer. DEADLOCK is a perfect example of that, because as a multiplayer game, it's great fun. As a solitary game, sadly, it just isn't! ☹



► TAKE THAT, PUNY HUMAN One of Devotax's better features is the diplomacy window, where you can taunt human opponents and offer various treaties and trade proposals.

► APPEAL: Anyone interested in a sci-fi strategy game designed for good, fun multiplayer gaming.

► PROS: Bulky and easy to understand, good multiplayer game, lots of options in head-to-head play for diplomacy and chatting.

► CONS: Clunky interface; lots of micromanagement; the game's pacing and non-interactive tactical module often consign it to a war of attrition.





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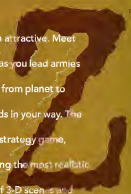
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It's a fight for Zed, for country and for beer. (Not necessarily in that order.)



PC CD-ROM



Jagged Alliance, Part Deux

DEADLY GAMES Adds Multiplayer Support And A Scenario Editor To The Addictive Combat Of JAGGED ALLIANCE

by Loyd Case

The sleeper hit of 1994, *Jagged Alliance* blended an addictive tactical strategy game with great RPG elements, along with a rather convoluted storyline. Sir-Tech's sequel, *Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games*, dispenses with the silly plot and instead goes for a straightforward, no-nonsense military campaign, coupled with a superb scenario designer, multiplayer capability and a limited, but effective, campaign builder. At the center, though, is the *Jagged Alliance* tactical combat engine, still superbly addictive after all this time.

Some new twists have been added, however, particularly in the campaign. The most noticeable difference is the addition of turn limits. In *Jagged Alliance*, you could take your time in completing each mission goal, and spend even more time searching the map for goodies. Now, though, you have to keep an eye on the clock, take a few risks and hustle to accomplish the mission objectives. This is probably more realistic, but it has generated a lot of controversy among original JA fans. To its credit, the *Deadly Games* design team has already released a patch that allows users to set a number of different turn limit parameters, including no turn limits at all.

ON YOUR OWN

Even given *Deadly Games'* multiplayer focus, there's plenty of meat here for the lone gamer. The 7-mission tutorial campaign that introduces new players to



LOOK FAMILIAR? *Deadly Games* has the same graphics and tactical combat as its predecessor, *Jagged Alliance*, but there are enough new twists to lure you back for more.

the game is a great learning experience, but still entertaining enough in its own right for more experienced JA players. The main solo campaign is 34 missions long (as I played it) and contains a tremendous variety of missions. Mission goals include retrieving strategic plans, photographing people, passing objects to neutral NPC civilians, and simply fragging all enemies. Some of the missions have tight timetables, and a few demand stealth rather than blatant gun-blazing charges.

Like its predecessor, *Deadly Games* allows you to build your squads with mercenaries from AIM (the Association of International Mercenaries, a sort of trade union for hired guns). Some are very good picks, others are poor; and while the poor ones aren't always cheap, there are a few bargains, too. A number of the less-capable ones also have enough intelligence to get better over time. Each of the merce-

naries has a unique personality, ranging from passive to toadying to in-your-face insubordination. As the game progresses, you can hire and fire members of your team, but do so carefully. Some of them will get upset and a few can even influence others, making it more difficult to hire certain mercenaries.

During missions, all team members have something to say, particularly when they bump into an adversary, knock off an enemy or take significant damage. Depending upon mission outcomes, some may even quit on you.

ROLL YOUR OWN

Once you get through the campaign, you can have the computer randomly generate one for you. However, *Deadly Games* provides you with an excellent set of tools to design your own scenarios. For quick campaign generation, there's also a simple tool for stringing together scenar-



Price: \$55.95

System Requirements:
486-66 or better; 8 MB RAM, 31 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM Drive, 256 color VGA graphics, mouse. Supports most major sound cards.

of Players: 1-4
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designers: Ian Currie, Alex Medina, Linda Currie, Shaun Lyng
Publisher: Sir-Tech
Opdenburg, NY
(315) 393-6633

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Deadly Games Hints and Tips

Make sure you leave a few action points for reaction fire during your opponent's move. In the screen shot below, Bud's in trouble—no APs left, and an enemy breathing down his throat.

It's useful having more than one merc with some medical skill—you'll definitely need to patch up some of your soldiers in the heat of battle.

Leave some empty pockets in your vests for any loot you might pick up.

Some characters have useful abilities beyond the obvious. Mouse, for example, although not a stellar gunman, is very sneaky. Give her an Uzi with a silencer and some camouflage, and she can almost always get the jump on an enemy. If you come across a piece of metal



HALT! If your merc is skillful enough, and has action points left over from your turn, you can react to the enemy, interrupting his turn.

pipe, save it—you can use it to modify your weapons and make them even more deadly.

Reaper weapons that drop below 70%, as they tend to jam.

Move in pairs as a minimum and keep some APs available for overwatch fire. Stay dispersed. There's nothing like a mustard gas canister dropped into the middle of your merc party to ruin your day.

If you get a merc like Fajal or Leech, who won't disengage from a particular enemy, simply take the guns out of their hands. They will then follow your orders docilely.

into a coherent campaign.

In the scenario designer, you first encounter the main interface screen. From here, you lay down tiles (17 different tile sets range from desert to urban to snow), create buildings, hide objects and place enemies. However, the heart of the scenario designer is the dialog box that pops up when you click on the SCEN button.

It's here that you pick the mission parameters: how many players, what the mission goal is for each player, starting objects and goal objects.

There are a large number of different mission goals available, making for some very flexible scenarios. There are many possible mission goals, including: kill everyone, escort a civilian, take a picture of an installation, steal a map, place a land mine. It's possible to design a multiplayer scenario where each player can succeed, or where only one player can win.

Once you place AI enemies for single player scenarios, you can give them initial weapons and specify what equipment they'll drop when they die (they don't have to be the same.) One of the nice touches to the scenario designer is the ability to set triggers. A bomb trigger will detonate an explosive—and the explosive can be anywhere on the map, not necessarily co-located with the trigger. One interesting trigger is one that, if tripped, sends the enemy AI units changing towards your location. There's also a "panic trigger"—if an AI unit spots you, it will make a beeline for the panic trigger, which will set off bombs.

With all these options, the scenario designer is limited only by your imagination.

In addition, there's a simple campaign builder, in which you assemble scenarios in a set order to create a linear campaign. When played, you still get your usual briefing from Gus.



IF YOU BUILD IT... The robust scenario editor lets you place buildings and objects, specify AI, and set mission goals, among other parameters.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

The multiplayer implementation in *DEADLY GAMES* works best over an IPX network (with Kall over the Internet, it's pretty slow), where up to four players can contest a single scenario or a full campaign. Being turn-based rather than real-time, though, you're often in the position of waiting for other players to complete their turn. However, if an enemy is spotted, an interrupt can occur, giving the opposing player the chance to react. Interrupts in multiplayer games are even more nerve-wracking than in single player mode, and some nice ambushes can be set up.


JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES builds on the original with a superb scenario designer and solid multiplayer options. While it's a good single-player game in its own right, it really shines when you get together with three of your friends for a good firefight. With the patch in place to make the game even more flexible, the only thing we'd wish for is higher resolution graphics and better Internet play. ☺

APPEAL: Fans of the original, or anyone looking for an engaging multiplayer, tactical strategy game.

PROS: Multiplayer capabilities (with an extra CD included!), a scenario editor, good solo campaign, more mercenaries, and the excellent *Jagged Alliance* tactical combat engine.

CONS: Plain VGA graphics; Internet play could be better.





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Circle Reader Service #304

World Creation 101

Making New Units, Scenarios And Rules For CIVILIZATION II

by Loyd Case

The verdict on CIVILIZATION II—Microsoft's follow-up to the classic, addictive game of world conquest—has been nothing but glowing. Most of the praise is heaped upon the enhanced graphics, new units, new Wonders of the World and new civilization

advances. The most significant (and over looked) addition to the game, though, is Civ II's high degree of customizability. Not only does Civ II have a robust game selection menu, but it also allows you to easily create your own worlds.

CIVILIZATION II players have been busy designing custom scenarios, complete with new terrain, new unit graphics and new rules, then uploading them to some of the online services. One scenario, for example, replaces fundamentalism with fascism, and tweaks communism as well. This "fascism patch" also adds new units in the form of storm troopers, rep-peltes, dive bombers and heavy tanks. There is even a custom scenario of the Battle of Tlatooine floating online, with units lifted from the Star Wars universe.

The key to making all these changes is stored in simple text files that reside in the game directory. Many of the basic game rules exist in the RULES.TXT file. CITY.TXT contains city names. Much of the game art lies in GIF files, a common, standard file format that's easily editable with most paint programs.



1. The Game Core: RULES.TXT

The most significant file is RULES.TXT. This file contains information on many basic rules, civilization advances, Wonders of the World, units and leaders. The file is divided into twelve sections, each preceded by an "@" sign. The most useful sections (for modifications) are @COSMIC (basic rules), @CIVILIZE (civilization advances), @IMPROVE (city improvements), @ENDWONDER (when Wonders expire), @UNITS (unit info), @TERRAIN (terrain modifiers) and @LEADERS (info on leaders).

To illustrate how this works, let's create a new type of unit and define the technology advance that will enable it.

CREATING A NEW TECHNOLOGY

The format for a technology advance looks like this:

Advance Name, AI Value, AI Modifier, Preq1, Preq2, Epoch, Knowledge Category

In the RULES.TXT file in the @CIVILIZE section, the Advanced Flight advance appears like so:

Advanced Flight, 4, -2, Rat, Tot, 3, 4, All

Here are the definitions for each value:

AI Value: How important the AI considers the advance when choosing the next advance to research.

AI Modifier: Positive numbers are valued more by "peaceful" leaders, negative numbers are valued by "militaristic" leaders.

Preq1, Preq2: The advances that you must have before you can research this one.

Epoch: Ancient, Renaissance, Industrial or Modern (0, 1, 2 or 3).

Knowledge Category: Military, Economic, Social, Academic or Applied (0, 1, 2, 3 or 4).

The abbreviation for the advance is listed after the semicolon.





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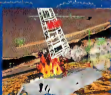
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Circle Reader Service #329

The last three entries in the advances list (00CIVILIZE) are for user-created advances. Let's create an advance we'll call "VTOL" (short for Vertical Takeoff and Landing), which would be something a Harrier attack aircraft would need. However, the unit we'll create with this advance is a ship: the Tarawa-class assault ship, which can carry aircraft and land units.

The VTOL advance would look like this:

VTOL, 3, -1, CA, int, 3, 0; U1

The AI would consider this a moderately useful but not high-priority advance, and it would be more compelling for militaristic leaders. It requires combined arms, but nothing else (that's what the "int" entry means.) It's a modern era advance and is military in nature.

CREATING A NEW UNIT

Okay, now that we have a new civilization advance, let's create the unit. The unit descriptions are listed like so:

Name, Expires, Domain, Move, Range, Attack, Defense, Hits, Firepower, Cost, Hold, Prog, Flags

A settler unit, as an example, would look like this:

Settlers, Exp, 6, 1, 0, 0a, 1d, 2h, 1l, 4, 0, 5, nil, 000000000000000

Here are the definitions of each value:

Name: The name of the unit type.

Expires: After this civilization advance, new units of this type can no longer be made.

Domain: Movement domain—ground, sea or air (D, 1 or 2).

Move: This is the number of movement points the unit has.

Range: Fuel supply carried by air units.

Attack: Chance to hit opponent when

attacking.

Defense: Chance to score hit when defending.

Hits: The number of points (x10) of damage the unit can sustain before being destroyed.

Firepower: Each hit causes this many points of damage.

Cost: Build cost of the unit, in shield rows.

Hold: How many units a ship may carry.

Role: The number designates what special abilities a unit has (5 gives the unit Settler abilities, 0 designates an offensive unit).

Prog: The civilization advance that must be researched before this unit is built.

Flags: A special number, in binary format, that controls special advantages and restrictions.

This number is 15 digits wide, but it's the position that's important. If the second digit from the right is a 1, then the unit can ignore zones of control. This number would look like:

000000000000010. The RULES.TXT file lists all the possible positions and what special abilities they confer.

So, since we've already created the VTOL technology, we can now create the resultant Tarawa assault vessel. The Tarawa statistics would look like this:

Tarawa, int, 2, 6, 0, 2a, 6d, 4h, 2l, 10, 3, 2, U1, 00000010000001

The Tarawa is an assault carrier; but it's only capable of carrying VTOL strike aircraft and helicopters. It also carries a contingent of marines. Or it doesn't like "dual role" units, so I couldn't have it carry both land units and aircraft. Having an assault ship carry stealth bombers would have been unrealistic, anyway. Since the Tarawa class aircraft is used for ground support, I generalized the ability by giving it the same capabilities as an Aegleis cruiser and allowing it to carry three land units in the hold. Of course, you can't build one unless you have researched VTOL technology.



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2. Creating A New Look

Now we have a new tech and a new unit. But wait—what's it going to look like?

The generic replacement for a sea unit is a bit goofy (a catamaran), so I found a photograph of a Tarawa on the Internet. Using Photoshop, I reduced it to a 64-pixel-wide icon and pasted it into



A NEW LOOK This is the UNITS.GIF file where the graphic images of all units are stored. You can open it with a competent paint program and alter these units or import files of your own.

the UNITS.GIF file, making sure to use the color palette from UNITS.GIF. (Note: you don't need an expensive package like Photoshop; Paintshop Pro, version 3.12, works just as well, and it's shareware.)

Next, the Tarawa vessel has to sound right when it's attacking. Civilization II uses a sound file named CUSTOM3.WAV for the third user unit slot (which is where I put the Tarawa entry). I simply went into the SOUND directory (in the CIV II game directory) and copied NAVBTTL.WAV to CUSTOM3.WAV.

Now the customization is complete: a new technology, which spawns a new type of unit, complete with graphics and sound.



BEFORE AND AFTER on the left is the picture of the Tarawa taken from online, and on the right is the Tarawa unit graphic created with Photoshop.

3. Playtesting

The only way to tell if any customization adds a positive element to the game is to playtest it. If a unit is too strong (a dangerous temptation), then the AI makes those units to the exclusion of many others. If the unit is somehow not useful, then the AI may never make one.

You can also "cheat," however. For example, let's say you make a very powerful ground unit, but you never want the AI to use it against you. All you need to do is give the unit a role as a diplomat. The AI won't use it to attack you, but you can freely use the unit on attack. However, these kinds of cheats really make the game less fun.

SCENARIOS

We've seen how rules, units and even technologies can be customized, but another fun aspect is creating scenarios. The two scenarios supplied with Civilization II are WWII and Rome. These two only touch on what can be done with scenarios. I've come across scenarios online that included a "tech"

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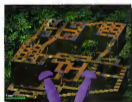
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ACTUAL
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Circle Reader Service #719

STRATEGY/WARGAMES

scenario that seemed like a cross between the *Battlefield* and *Terra Nova* universes, and an *Alexander the Great* scenario officially released by Microprose.

Creating a scenario is simple. If you want to create a scenario using a particular map, then you either need to find the map (usually online) or create one yourself using the map editor. If you like, you can even alter terrain graphics, which are in the files *TERRAIN1.GIF* and *TERRAIN2.CHF*.

Once you have your map, you start up *Civ II* as usual, either picking your custom map or having the game build a world for you. Once the game starts, you go to the menu labeled "cheat" and then toggle cheat mode to on. Cheat mode is not really for cheating (although you can certainly use it for that purpose), but rather for building scenarios.

In cheat mode, you can do a variety of things, including setting the game year, laying down roads and cities, and even placing units. You can edit kings, cities and technologies. In short, you can establish when the game starts, who will be in it and what all the players have.

The most important entry in the cheat menu is the Scenario Parameters option. This is where you really create the heart of the scenario. Parameters you adjust include: victory conditions, when the scenario starts and ends, how much time passes per turn, and others. There are two important considerations when setting scenario parameters. First, never use "Special WWII AI." This is a special



FIGHTING WITH SOME FORCE These familiar-looking units are part of a custom-designed scenario involving the Battle of Tatooine, complete with Star Wars troops, from AT-ATs to TIE Fighters to X-Wings.

option put in place for the World War II scenario supplied by Microprose, and it can cause mysterious behavior as other scenarios. Second, there is a special victory condition setting, "Toggle Use Objective Victory Flag."

Setting this means that the game ends when certain objectives (e.g., cities) have been taken. You can specify that Wonders of the World are counted. It's worthwhile playing the Rome scenario to see how an objectives-based scenario works. (For example, you can no longer build Wonders; you now have to capture them.)

AND MORE...

There are lots of other things you can do in *Civ II*, ranging from changing the personalities of the AI kings to altering the default city names. With the version 1.11 update, you can even specify which city improvements the AI will build using the *AUTOBUILD* option (the patch also includes "smart settlers," which takes a lot of the tedium out of managing settlers and engineers). Take the time to explore, but make sure you back up your files first, before making any changes.

The great thing about all of *Civ II*'s flexibility is you can pursue whatever level of customization you like. Minor changes are built in (such as being able to turn off spaceship building), and creating a scenario allows you to interactively make some serious alterations to the game. But real customization requires rolling up your sleeves, firing up the bit-map editor and poring over all the different text files. If you try, you might end up crafting a whole new game all your own. ☺

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Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke

the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for untold hours.

HIGHLIGHTS

DOOM

Id Software, 1993

I took all of five seconds to boot up *Doom*, take two steps forward with the new American Hero and realize, "Holy Cow, this is something new." At that moment, we knew we'd found The Next Big Thing. People who had never before played computer games, or even heard of them, were "What's this Doomed thing?" Game developers everywhere scrambled to develop "Better than *Doom*!" titles. But no one could match the gritty visceral feel of blasting howling imps into a bloody pulp with the Rocket Launcher, or the pleasure of slaking an unsuspecting DeathMatch opponent (or two) with a shotgun. Realistic sound effects and a brilliant soundtrack by Bobby Prince helped deepen the player's immersion in the game.

Doom fired the shot heard around the world in the network gaming revolution; being able to play at work over a network drove worker productivity down and MIS eyeballs up. Some gamers played head-to-head via modem connection, while others joined *DWANGO* and began building the kind of loyalty that new online gaming services are striving to achieve.

The story behind *Doom* is simply that the guys at Id Software wanted to make a game for themselves to play—with and against each other. *Doom* also broke with tradition by giving away the entire first episode as shareware.

Veteran gamers may recall that *Doom*'s seeds were laid a few years earlier in *Castle Wolfenstein 3D*, one of the first point-of-view 3D environment games. But to a whole new generation of computer gamers, *Doom* is it.



DUNGEON MASTER

FTL Software, 1987

With the obvious exception of *Ultima IV*, you would have trouble finding a game that had more influence on role-playing games than *Dungeon Master*. Originally released in 1987 on the Atari ST, *Dungeon Master*'s trend-setting graphics moved away from the screen look. Moreover, its terrific sound effects—making full use of the stereo capabilities of the Atari and Amiga machines—helped to create a terrific adventuring atmosphere, by turns creepy, exciting, and even funny. Though in many ways it was a typical hack 'n' slash dungeon romp, *Dungeon Master* introduced several subtle twists to the mechanics of role playing, many of which have been emulated by other games over the years—our favorite trick was luring monsters into passages and shutting doors on them. The character generation routine, in particular, was both clever and enjoyable, a far cry from the typically cardboard characters found in many of today's RPGs. The great irony of this game's history is that, while it helped to launch the popularity of the Amiga and Atari ST, it took FTL over two years to complete the IBM conversion of the game, by which time many other games—most notably SSI's *Eye of the Beholder* game from their *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* line—had adopted and improved upon its innovations. Though the long-awaited sequel, *Dungeon Master II*, turned out to be a major disappointment, the original *Dungeon Master*'s innovations and sheer sense of fun easily earn it a place in our Hall of Fame.



Modern Inductees

Inductees Prior To 1989

BATTLE CRESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1985)
DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)
EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1985)
EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1986)
GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
Mech Brigade (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
PRINCES (MicroProse, 1987)
SimCity (Maxis, 1987)
STARLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)
ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1988)
WIZARDRY (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
ZORK (Infocom, 1987)

ALONE IN THE DARK
 (i-Motion, 1992)

BEZELBALL Air KANARON
 (Dynamix, 1993)

Day of the TENTACLE
 (LucasArts, 1993)

DOOM
 (Id Software, 1993)

FALCON 3.0
 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO
 (Dynamix, 1993)

GAMSEP
 (MicroProse, 1995)

HARPOON
 (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)

KNOX'S QUEST V
 (Sierra On-Line, 1990)

LEMMINGS
 (Psygnosis, 1991)

LEGO 386 PRO
 (Access Software, 1992)

M-1 Tank PLUNDER
 (MicroProse, 1995)

MASTER OF ORION
 (MicroProse, 1993)

RAILROAD TYCOON
 (MicroProse, 1990)

Red Baron
 (Dynamix, 1990)

Six MEN'S CIVILIZATION
 (MicroProse, 1991)

THEIR FINEST HOUR
 (LucasArts, 1989)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
 (LucasArts, 1990)

THE FIGHTER
 (LucasArts, 1994)

ULTIMA VI
 (Origin Systems, 1990)

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD
 (Origin Systems, 1992)

Wing COMMANDER I & II
 (Origin Systems, 1990-91)

WALFRIDEN 3-D
 (Id Software, 1992)

X-COM
 (MicroProse, 1994)

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, and will be until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. New patches are in red.

AH-64D Longbow V.1.0BF: Updated flight dynamics, easier hovering and auto-rotation come to the hot helicopter simulation, along with new rotor/engine sounds.

Battleground: Waterloo V1.02: This new battle plan corrects errant PBEM replays and solves other random crashes.

Chaos Overlords V1.1: Restoring order from Chaos means fixing some bugs and making some interface changes, such as a new Search Sites panel.

Civilization II V2.41 Update: It prevents crashes with auto-savers, help and Civilization screens, in addition to many other tweaks. This patch will reportedly work with and supersede all previous patches.

Conquest of the New World V1.1 Update: This international patch contains the latest fixes for the German and French versions, as well as English.

EF2000 V2.4: A new executable for the CGW Premier award-winning sim that doesn't add any new features, just fixes bugs.

Descent II Video Upgrade: New drivers for the S3 Virge 3D Accelerator Video Chip only.

Fighter Duel V1.92: In addition to new aircraft in your hangar, you receive some minor fixes and additional joystick support.

Flight Unlimited Win 95 Direct X 2.0 Update: Microsoft's latest redistributable version of Direct X 2.0, this will update the Direct X 1.0 version which currently ships with Fusler Uxumroo r0a Win 95. It provides both greater video chipset support and enhanced Direct Draw resolution support. (Note: If you have a registered copy of Windows 95, you are licensed to use this update for your other games as well.)

Grand Prix Manager V1.02: Please install version 1.01 before shifting into gear with this latest patch.

Heroes of Might and Magic for Win95 V1.1: Animate with the cursor and in the Map Editor are magically cleaned up.

IndyCar Racing II for Windows 95 V1.01: This latest pit stop prevents system crashes while exiting and modem play bugs.

Ripper V1.05 Update: Now, there are no black screens after the introduction to Ripper, and other similar problems associated with Compaq and Hewlett Packard computers are removed. You may even choose who the Ripper will be.

Star Trek Judgment Rites V 1.01 Update (Mac only): Mac users with 32MB of real RAM, or Macs with two monitors, will find this patch more helpful than Mt Scott during a Klingon attack.

Steel Panthers V1.2: This armor upgrade cleans up the map editor, squashes a few bugs and polishes the AI.

Terra Nova Installer Update: Do file copy errors have your galactic squad down? Commanders with a rudimentary knowledge of standard DOS Copy commands will be able to strike back with this patch.

Tigers On The Prowl V2.02: Many minor problems are dismissed, along with the involuntary dismount bug.

Top Gun: Fire At Will V1.1: You can more easily fly at will with many of the crash problems solved via this upgrade. Missile dodging is now easier, gun kills are harder to get, and a more accurate fuel usage model is added, in an attempt to make the sim more "realistic." Suicoon F-15E joysticks

now have a Key file as well. After installing this patch, make sure to type "clean" to get rid of the unnecessary patch files after installation.

Warcraft 2 V1.2: Orcs and Humans alike will appreciate the new multiplayer options, including the shareware version of Kall and IPX network code optimized for better performance. The Exorcism spell problem is cast out, and you may now have more than 255 PUJ files in the WAR2 directory.

Wizardry Gold V1.1a: Problems with saves in the earlier patch? This takes care of that, and also clears up difficulties with level increases when skills reach 100. Finally, it also allows you to set combat and non-combat text speeds separately.



Click for new patches on the web's Web.

ZDNet

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major on-line networks (CompuServe, AOL, ZDNet) and Computer Gaming World's web site (<http://www.zdnet.com/gaming>) but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's web sites or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

Publisher Web Sites

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers, at the following sites:

- Accolade: <http://www.accolade.com>
- Activision: <http://www.activision.com>
- Apogee/3D Realms: <http://www.apogee1.com>
- Atomic Games: <http://atomig.com>
- Bethesda: <http://www.bethsoft.com>
- Bizzard: <http://www.bizzard.com>
- Bullfrog: <http://www.bs.com/bullfrog.html>
- Domark: <http://www.domark.com>
- EA: <http://www.ea.com>
- EA Sports: <http://www.easports.com>
- Epic MegaGames: <http://www.epicgames.com>
- Id Software: <http://www.idsoftware.com>
- Interactive Magic: <http://www.imagicgames.com>
- Interplay: <http://www.interplay.com>
- LucasArts: <http://www.lucasarts.com>
- MicroProse/Spectrum HoLoByte: <http://www.microprose.com>
- Microsoft: <http://www.microsoft.com>
- Mindscape: <http://www.mindscape.com>
- New World Computing: <http://www.newworldcomputing.com>
- Ocean: <http://www.ocean2000.com>
- Origin: <http://www.origin.com>
- Papyrus: <http://www.sierra.com/papyrus>
- Phlips: <http://www.aima.com/games>
- Sierra On-Line: <http://www.sierra.com>
- Spectrum HoLoByte: <http://www.microprose.com>
- SSI: <http://www.ssi.com>
- Take 2: <http://www.take2games.com/main.html>
- Virgin: <http://www.vie.com>

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF CGW SUBSCRIBERS

Each month, 2,000 CGW subscribers are selected at random to rate 100 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your experience.

TOP ACTION GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms	8.63
2	Crossfire: No Remorse	EA/Origin	8.27
3	The Need For Speed SE	EA	8.09
4	Orako	id Software	7.96
5	Dark Forces	LucasArts	7.83
6	Doom II	id Software	7.78
7	The Need For Speed	EA	7.62
8	Descent II	Interplay	7.53
9	EWJ 1&2: Whole Can O' Worms	Playmates	7.42
10	Time Commando	Activision	7.42

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Phantom Biorace	Access	8.53
2	Galeon Knight 2	Sierra	8.28
3	Spycraft	Activision	7.78
4	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.53
5	Zork Nemesis	Activision	7.49
6	Under A Killing Moon	Access	7.32
7	The Dig	LucasArts	7.33
8	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	7.27
9	Star Trek: TNG, Final Jeopardy	Spectrum Holobyte	7.05
10	Reckless	EA	7.04

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack	Berkley Systems	8.00
2	Incredible Years	Sierra	7.29
3	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	7.10
4	Monopoly	Wizwood	6.82
5	Looney's Paintball	Playtronic	6.69
6	Scrabble	Philips	5.58
7	Treasure Quest	Sierra Publishing	4.30
8	—	—	—
9	—	—	—
10	—	—	—

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8.55
2	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	8.41
3	MuchWarrior 2	Activision	8.40
4	AN-E: Longbow	Origin	8.25
5	Wing Commander 3	EA/Origin	8.25
6	EF2000	Orca	8.09
7	Silent Hunter	SSI	8.00
8	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.94
9	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	7.87
10	NASCAR Racing	Sierra	7.79

TOP SPORTS GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links LS	Access	8.57
2	NHL Hockey 98	EA Sports	7.92
3	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	7.78
4	NBA Live 96	EA Sports	7.67
5	NBA Live 95	EA Sports	7.65
6	Toy i-Rolls 3 96	Stormfront Studios	7.53
7	PGA Tour Golf 480	EA Sports	7.41
8	FPS Football 95	Sierra	7.39
9	Hardball 5	Accolade	7.18
10	FPS Baseball Pro 96	Sierra	6.97

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Bizzard	9.10
2	WarCraft II	Bizzard	9.00
3	Civilization II	MicroProse	8.86
4	C&C: covert operations	Virgin/W.wood	8.56
5	Command & Conquer	Virgin/W.wood	8.50
6	Heros Of Might & Magic	New World Computing	8.08
7	Master Of Magic	MicroPhase	8.03
8	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	7.89
9	WarCraft	Bizzard	7.73
10	MissionForce Cyberians	Sierra	7.70

TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Might & Magic: Claws Of Fear	New World Computing	7.89
2	Avail Of Dawn	New World Computing	7.44
3	Stonekeep	Interplay	7.17
4	DivineMight: Sins Prophet	SSI	6.92
5	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	6.21
6	—	—	—
7	—	—	—
8	—	—	—
9	—	—	—
10	—	—	—

TOP WARGAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Steel Panthers	SSI	8.55
2	Paizer General	SSI	8.35
3	Battleground: Shiloh	BlotSoft	8.12
4	Battleground: Waterloo	BlotSoft	7.87
5	Battleground: Gettysburg	BlotSoft	7.52
6	Perfect General II	QOP	7.11
7	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	7.07
8	Clean Combat	Microsoft	6.89
9	Allied General	SSI	6.83
10	Age Of Rifles	SSI	6.82

	RANK	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★	1	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Bizzard	ST	9.10
	2	WarCraft II	Bizzard	ST	9.00
	3	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.90
★	4	Links LS	Acclaim	SP	8.67
★	5	Guke Mulem 3D	3D Realms	AC	8.63
	6	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.56
★	7	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	8.55
★	8	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.55
★	9	Pandora Directive	Access	AD	8.53
	10	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.50
	11	Grand Prix 2	Spectrum HomeByte	SI	8.41
	12	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.40
	13	Panzer General	SSI	WG	8.35
	14	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.28
	15	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.27
	16	AM-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.25
	17	Wing Commander 3	EA/Origin	SI	8.25
	18	Battleground: Skilah	TalonSoft	WG	8.12
	19	Nerves Of Night & Magic	New World Computing	ST	8.08
	20	The Need For Speed SE	EA	AC	8.07
	21	Master Of Magic	MicroProse	ST	8.03
	22	EP2000	Ocean	SI	8.01
★	23	You Don't Know Jack	Berkley Systems	CP	8.00
		Silent Hunter	SSI	SI	8.00
	25	Snake	id Software	AC	7.96
	26	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.94
	27	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	SP	7.92
	29	Jagged Alliance	Str-Tech	ST	7.89
	29	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	SI	7.87
		Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.87
	31	Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	7.83
	32	NASCAR Racing	Sierra	SI	7.79
		Quom II	id Software	AC	7.79
	34	Spycraft	Activision	AD	7.78
		FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	SP	7.78
	36	WarCraft	Bizzard	ST	7.78
	37	Missionforce Cyberstorm	Sierra	ST	7.70
★	38	Might & Magic: Clouds Of Xen	New World Computing	RP	7.69
		Fantasy General	SSI	ST	7.69
	40	Warlords II Deluxe	SSI	ST	7.68
	41	NBA Live 96	EA Sports	SP	7.67
	42	The Need For Speed	EA	AC	7.62
	43	NBA Live 95	EA Sports	SP	7.56
	44	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.53
		Tony LaRussa 3 96	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.53
		Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.53
	47	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	WG	7.52
	48	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.51
	49	Zark Nemesis	Activision	AD	7.49
	50	Chet	MicroProse	ST	7.47

	RANK	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
	51	Avail 31 Dawn	New World Computing	RP	7.44
	52	X-Core: Terror From The Deep	MicroProse	ST	7.42
		EWJ 162: Whole Can O' Worms	Playmates	AC	7.42
		Time Commands	Acclaim	AC	7.42
	55	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.41
	56	Magic Carpet 2	EA/Billfrog	AC	7.40
		Hecon	id Software	AC	7.40
	58	FPS Football 95	Sierra	SP	7.39
	59	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	7.38
	60	San City CD-Rom	Mads	ST	7.30
	61	Incredible Years	Sierra	CP	7.29
	62	The Sig	LucasArts	AD	7.28
	63	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	7.27
	64	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	7.22
	65	Wings Of Glory	Origin	SI	7.21
		Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.21
	67	Terro Nova	Looking Glass	AC	7.19
		Nyper 3D Pinball	Virgin	AC	7.19
	69	Hardball 5	Accolade	SP	7.18
	70	Stonesoup	Interplay	RP	7.17
		Warhammer	Mindscape	ST	7.17
	72	1942 Pacific Air War Gold	MicroProse	SI	7.15
	73	Caesar II	Sierra	ST	7.13
	74	Perfect General II	QOP	WG	7.11
	75	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	7.10
	76	System Shock	EA/Origin	AC	7.09
	77	Flight Commander 2	Avolon Hill	WG	7.07
		Keretic	id/Raven	AC	7.07
	79	Star Trek: TNG, Final Velocity	Spectrum HomeByte	AD	7.05
	80	Relentless	EA	AD	7.04
	81	Aces Of The Deep	Sierra	SI	7.02
	82	FPS Baseball Pro 96	Sierra	SP	6.97
	83	Apache	Interactive Magic	SI	6.95
		Legends Of Nyxadia 3	Westwood	AD	6.95
	85	Earthiege 2	Sierra	SI	6.94
	86	Ravenhill: Stone Prophet	SSI	RP	6.92
	87	Close Combat	Microsoft	WG	6.89
		Fire Fight	EA	AC	6.89
	89	Destruction Derby	Playgross	AC	6.87
	90	Allied General	SSI	WG	6.83
	91	Age Of Rites	SSI	WG	6.82
	92	Monopoly	Westwood	CP	6.82
		King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	6.78
	94	Mortal Kombat 3	GF Interactive	AC	6.77
		Magic Carpet	EA/Billfrog	AC	6.77
	96	Descent	Interplay	AC	6.75
	97	Concept Of The New World	Interplay	ST	6.73
	98	Earthworm Jim	Activision	AC	6.71
	99	TopGps For Windows	Arsenal	WG	6.67
	100	FPS Baseball 96	Sierra	SP	6.64

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game. AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing, SI = Simulation/Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Casual/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

What's The Deal With... Real-Time?

We have a new popular front in wargaming, and like all new things, some are

proclaiming it to be the best thing since sliced bread and others are moaning that it's the End of the World. Yes, folks, it is the Age of the Real Time Wargame—and everybody and their dog's software company seems eager to jump on the bandwagon.

Virgin and Blizzard get credit for turning this type of game into a full-blown trend with the very successful *Command & Conquer* and *Warcraft* series, respectively. Thanks to them, you can't swing a dead PR rep now without smacking some tactical/strategic wargame that has thrown over the traditional turn-based dogma for some trendy real-time combat mechanics—and the old groggnards are screaming bloody murder, as if this were the death-knell for the pedantic counter-pushing wargames that they love (the kind that would be just as at home on a board as they are on a computer screen). Since I'm enough of a traditional boardgamer to consider Europa a fine introductory wargame, I think I'm qualified to argue that not only does real-time pose little threat to "serious" combat simula-

tions, but that in some circumstances it is actually the road to more, not less, realistic games.

First of all, let me address the concerns of "serious" wargamers, some of whom have cautioned against the evils of real-time in these very pages. Their greatest fear seems to be that the lack of turns will encourage bad AI, because programmers can make a computer fast instead of smart—and so games will become an issue of reflex reactions instead of brains. (The same tired point was made about multiplayer capability. "If wargames are all networked, they will stop putting good AIs in.") The argument is that if the computer moves five times faster than you can point-and-click, it can be dumb and boring and still whip you every time. (Anyone remember the computer player in *Arctura*?) While this may be true, I'd like to see the rule that states turn-based play guarantees quality AI! I've got one word for you on this concept... *ASSEMBLY*. Here was a turn-based game without even multiplayer capability—and lo and behold, not a competent AI to be found. Much the same thing could be said about the initial release of *Master of Magic*. So I think it's safe to say real-time is hardly a more substantial threat to challenging wargames than short-sighted project managers.

Now the other, more relevant problem some have with RT wargaming is

that it can come down to a point-and-click test. While I used to disregard this objection as another nit-pick, a nasty experience at a *Warcraft 2* journey at Seattle's annual *DragonFlight* convention convinced me that game designers need to take a few precautions in their games—just to make sure the on-line world isn't dominated by annoying, socially challenged adolescents with hyper-fast point-n-click skills, honed by the

“ You can't swing a dead PR rep without smacking a real-time wargame. ”

countless hours they don't use for coding. While RT games are vulnerable to players who excel at the mechanics instead of the game, little changes in the code can prevent that from being a problem—things like competent AI for each piece, so they don't just stand around if you aren't there to command them, and a set-up utility that sets the speed of the game at the beginning, displaying it as an initial game condition before others join in.

My honest opinion is that real time is far more realistic for wargames than this utterly artificial, you-move-move routine, which has been drilled into us because wargaming started on boards with no way to mimic time realistically. While I agree that the passage of time for decision-making is probably moot at the Corp or even Divisional level, once you get past that point I think turns are actually a bad thing for a wargame, as they foster the stunted, chess-like thinking that makes arm chair generals so bad at analyzing real combat. For a simulation to make any claims to realism, events must at least unfold at no slower than 1:1 time. Players should have the added tension that once they order that pie to roll out, there is no calling it back into place without some muss and fuss. Traditional computer wargames could do worse than explore the realm of "slow" real-time and, while there is little doubt that *Star Wars* is a better game than *Close Quarters*, I think it has less to do with turns and far more to do with Gingsby being the better designer. *Star Wars* running in 1:1 time would be a real nail-biter, as well as the tactical mind-bender it is now.

So in the end, I guess I do wish for the End of the Turn-Based Games as we know them, not because I am a twitch-reflex arcade fiend, but because the real world isn't polite enough to move in phases. ☺



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