

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

# Computer Gaming World

DECEMBER 1997  
NO. 101

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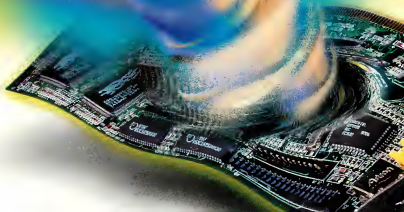


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# Computer Gaming World

COVER STORY

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

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## The CGW Holiday Hot 100

The holidays come early at CGW. Each day from September till November the postman throws open the hatch, and games come raining down on our heads. The resulting frenzy is like feeding time at the piranha tank. But we're able to try out these things before they release, to give you a good idea what's hot for the holidays. For a complete list of products, see page 12.

FEATURES

## Ultimate Game Machine, Part I

In our ongoing quest for the best, we test seven hot new machines to find the best off-the-shelf system for gamers. Machines from Dell, Micron, Gateway, Falcon Northwest, Sony, and even Macintosh showed up to play. We'll show you who's the fastest and who has the most for the least amount of money.

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XCar: Experimental Racing



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Imperialism

# Holiday Hot 100

**H**ow does a gamer spend the holidays? Spinning yarn with the relatives at grandma's house? Or annihilating opponents on a fire-breathing PC with every peripheral known to man? We think you know the answer, and to help you decide what to get the gamer in your life, we've put together the hottest 100 games and gadgets that should be in your sights for the holidays.



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"Microsoft heads right to the top of the real-time strategy class with Age of Empires..."

—Computer Games Strategy Plus, June 1997



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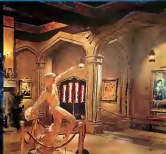
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# 'Tis the Season To Be Fragging...

*Have Yourself a Merry Old Time by the Monitor With 12 Playable Demos on This Month's CG-ROM*

**H**o-ho-ho, gamers! Satan Claus has been extra busy in his South Pole workshop, whipping up a demo that's packed with goodies and stocking-stuffer ideas for everyone on your holiday list. We have all kinds of delights this month, including six action demos (gamers with 3D cards will particularly appreciate *HEXEN II* and *G POLICE*) and a sprinkling of strategy and puzzle demos. Can't wait for *HALF-LIFE* to arrive under your tree? Well, we've got a whole new miniexpansion pack for *QUAKE* that was specially designed by a member of *HALF-LIFE*'s design team! Of course, the grand prize this month is the exclusive *JEDI KNIGHT* demo, which ought to help keep your chestnuts warm. Aren't you glad you were naughty this year?



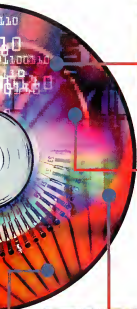
**DUNGEON KEEPER** The CG Choice-winning strategy game that requires you to be naughty, not nice.



**G POLICE** Serve and protect while flying a hovering gunship in this 3D action game. Bring your own doughnuts.

## How To Use the Disc

The CD is Autoplay enabled and should begin when you load it into the CD-ROM drive. Otherwise, select Run from the Program Manager in Windows 3.x, or Start Menu in Windows 95, and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. You may type D:\INSTALL to create a CGM program group on your Windows desktop for future fun. Many demos require the disc to be in the CD-ROM drive in order to run; therefore, we recommend installing the demos from our disc.



**JEDI KNIGHT** The CD-ROM exclusive demo of LucasArts' eagerly awaited *Star Wars* game.



**PRODIGY'S SPECIAL EDITION FOR QUAKE** Whorps through some new levels for Quake designed by one of Hux-Lux's level designers.

## How to Access Patch Files

Click on Patches under the CD-ROM 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 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.

## Didn't Get the CD-ROM?

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## DECEMBER CD-ROM TITLES

TITLE	PLATFORM	DIRECTORY	EXECUTABLE
Byzantine: The Betrayal	95 only	BYZANTIN	setup.exe
Chasm	Win/DOS	CHASM	install.exe
Claw	95 only	CLAW	clawdms.exe
Dark Rift	95 only	DRWEB	dr_demo.exe
Defiance	95 only	DEFIANCE	defiance.exe
Dungeon Keeper	95 only	DKMAG	setup.bat
G Police	95 only	GPDEM	setup.exe
Hexen II	95/NT	H2DEMD	h2demo.exe
ISP	Win/95	MSPRINST	setup.exe
Jedi Knight	Win/95	Jedi	jedidem.exe
Joint Strike Fighter	Win/95	JDINTSTR	nyedge.avi
Legends Football '98	95 only	LEGENDS	demo97.exe demo32.exe
Lose Your Marbles	95 only	MARBLES	marble.exe
Politika	95 only	PDLITIKA	promo2.mov
Prodigy Levels	DOS/Win/95	PRODIGY	prodigy.zip
Professional Gamers League (PGL)	95 only	TEN	setup.exe
SDOA Diff Road	95 only	SDDAEMD	setup.exe
Uprising	95 only	UPRISING	uprising.exe
Youngblood	95 only	YOUNGBLD	young95.exe



**YOUNGBLOOD** The new action/RPG based on Rob Liefeld's comic book.



**HEXEN II** This medieval romp, which uses the Quake engine, comes complete with ye olde sheep.

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MATURE



# CGW's Home on the Web

If you're looking for the fastest news and reviews in gaming, turn to the experts at **GameSpot**

**Z**iff-Davis has combined the talent and expertise of *Computer Gaming World*, *GameSpot*, and *ZDNet* to bring you the best gaming resources on the Web. Whether it's the latest game demos, breaking reviews, detailed strategy articles, hot scoops, or online forums, you'll find everything you need to stay on the cutting edge.

If you're looking for the fastest news and reviews in gaming, turn to the experts at *GameSpot*. Here's a brief overview of what you can expect on *GameSpot* over the next few weeks. To see these articles and others, point your browser to the ultimate gaming page at <http://cgw.gamespot.com/december>.



## ● Designer Diaries

Have you ever wondered what's going on behind the scenes while those much anticipated games are in development? *GameSpot's* Designer Diaries take you inside Activision's *Duke Reck* and Zink Games' *Incursion*, Ion Storm's *Armored Core*, Sierra's *Quest for Glory: Dragon Fire*, Acclaim's *Jack Nicklaus Golf 5*, and more!

## ● Strategy Guides

*GameSpot* strategy guides are unofficial game handbooks stacked with secrets and step-by-step instructions on how to defeat each level of your favorite game. Our strategy guides unlock those untapped hours of gameplay to help you get more fun for your buck. Here are four recent examples:

**Hexon II** Having a tough time making your way through the levels in *Hexon II*? Nobody said that it would be easy. *Hexon II* was designed to be highly challenging for the single player, but with the help of *GameSpot's* guide, you should be able to find everything that you need to get through the game successfully.

**Dungeon Keeper** The definitive guide to the popular

Building game is on *GameSpot*. You'll find thorough information about the rooms, the minions, the heroes, and more!

**Starline Academy** Interplay sends you to school in the *Star Trek* universe, where you'll learn to become a Starline officer. In order to follow in the footsteps of old James T. Kirk and company, though, you'll have to pass a few tests. With *GameSpot* providing your study guide, there's no doubt that you'll graduate with honors!

**X-COM: Apocalypse** The long-awaited third installment of the popular *X-COM* series finally made it, and *GameSpot* is here to help you through it by passing along general hints and tips, research trees, and useful statistics.



## • Demos

GameSpot has the most thorough and regularly updated game demo libraries on the Web. You'll find corresponding demos for some of the games reviewed in *CGW*, including *Nitroball*, *G-Police*, *Twinsty's Odyssey*, *Retribution*, *Akuma*, *Atomic Bomberman*, *Baseball*, *Moon*, and more.

## • Computer Gaming World

Turn to *CGW* Online for news, reviews, strategy articles, and behind-the-scenes features on hundreds of top computer games. Because of our joint venture with GameSpot, you'll also see some articles posted online before they're in print! In addition, be sure to watch out for a major new hardware section by Layd Case, entitled the *Ultimate Game Machine*, a joint venture from *CGW* and GameSpot! If you haven't already bookmarked our page, be sure to add [www.computergaming.com](http://www.computergaming.com) to your collection.

As you read through your issue of *CGW* each month, watch for the *CG* Online bug, which points to a related online article at [www.computergaming.com](http://www.computergaming.com). If you're interested in taking part in our discussions about gaming, check out the *CGW* Forums on ZDNet at [www.zdnet.com](http://www.zdnet.com) or [www.cshshow.com](http://www.cshshow.com). *CGW* reviewer and columnist Dennis McAuley and *CGW* Sysop Arlen Levine host ongoing discussions on ZD Net's Community Center.



## • Special Features

**Quake II Preview** You may have read stories about *Quake II* online, but you ain't seen nothing yet. GameSpot editors Trent Ward and Moira Mukdoon went down to Texas, where id Software let them inside to get the goods on the most anticipated game of the year. GameSpot has all the information; you'll find art, interviews, and plenty of other surprises in our comprehensive preview.

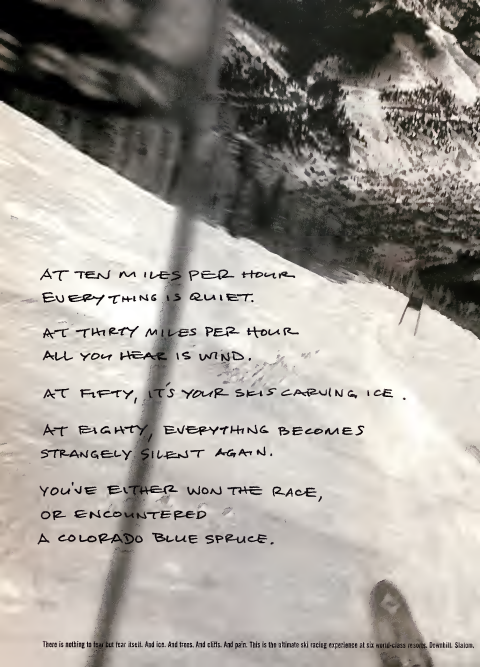
**Dominion Preview** Tactical combat is the name of the (real-time strategy) game in IGN Storm's *Dominion*. GameSpot took an inside look at the units, races, structures, and powers that be in our exclusive, in-depth preview.

**Playing for Real: The Military in Sims** Ever wondered what it's like for simulation developers to deal with the military? You can bet that the process involves secrecy, restricted access, and red tape. GameSpot takes a look at some of the issues and obstacles that developers have to deal with when they're attempting to put out the most realistic simulation possible.

**The Ultron Legacy** As the online gaming community awaits the arrival of *Ultron: Quake* with great anticipation, GameSpot takes a retrospective look at the ever-popular *Ultron* series. GS editors caught up with *Ultron*'s creator, Lord British (Richard Garriott), as he recounted the entire history of the series.

**DirectX 5.0: Into the Breach** Microsoft promised that the advent of Windows 95 and DirectX would be Nirvana for game developers. But DirectX has proven to be paradise for neither developers nor gamers. What will the next version, DirectX 5.0, bring, and will it fulfill Microsoft's promise of making life easier for computer gamers?





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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #371

# DEFIANCE

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ZDNet

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PC Gamer



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# Ho, Ho, 2.0

## My Holiday Wish List for Every Gamer

**S**ince much of this issue concerns holiday gift giving, I couldn't help compiling a list of the gifts I'd most like to see for computer gamers and the industry. As in the letters to Santa that some of us wrote as kids, some of these wishes may be unrealistic, but it never hurts to ask.

### A STABLE GAMING PLATFORM

I know, I've said that it's impossible to have a stable gaming platform. The "Hot Rod Syndrome" will always keep gamers going for the newest, tested, hottest machines available. The time frame for new generations of processors will keep diminishing, and new hardware peripherals like 3D and force-feedback will continue to appear. Still, it would be nice for gamers to be

able to use their machines longer than two years, and for software publishers not to have to guess at new base machine requirements two years down the line. We might also see more done about bugs if publishers were able to test only one platform, rather than many.

### DIRECTX TOOLS THAT WORK

It was only a couple of years ago that we heralded the Windows Gaming Revolution. We truly believed that DirectX would help us with such things as driver issues, machine compatibility, and development libraries. We thought that all of this would make it easier for gamers to install and run games, as well as for publishers to create and test games while supporting multiple peripherals. We hoped that the kind of noodling around that developers were having to do in

order to get DirectX titles to run correctly would be a "provisional government" that would give way to an unencumbered paradise. Things haven't turned out that way, but that hope still lives on.

### NEW GAME DISTRIBUTION

I wish we had a retail distribution system for computer games in which the retailers cared about games, and made their money from selling them. I'm afraid that, as long as they make their money off cooperative advertising, marketing programs, and special display allowances, we'll never see the kind of product selection and availability that gamers deserve. I hope that the continued expansion of the Web makes it possible for publishers and small developers to build games and take them right to the players without having to be in stores. If ever we needed an alternative sales distribution method, we need it now.

### A CALENDAR OF GAME RELEASES

The entertainment software industry tends to schedule titles for the fourth quarter, a cyclic prescription for retail glut, product slipage, and poor sales. I wish companies would schedule products for a full year of distribution so that gamers would get a chance to own and play all of the worthy titles.

### A GREATER VARIETY OF GAMES

Okay, so I'm a frustrated game designer. I'm still disappointed about

the number of games that are mere clones of others. Check out my short list of new ideas. Although some of these games wouldn't make money with our current distribution system,

“ I wish we had a retail distribution system in which the retailers cared about games. ”

we may still see them someday—if one of my earlier wishes comes true.

### YES, JOHNNY, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

I don't suppose there is any cause for me to be looking through my holiday packages this year for any of the games from this list, but since I refuse to grow up, I'll keep hoping for next Christmas and the next and the next. Hey, someday my wishes might come true. ☺

## Johnny's Dream-Game List

**DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN** 3D fantasy action with management and politics

**RAT PATROL 3D**, vehicular machine-gun combat in North Africa  
**OSS OR M15 WWII** adventure game based on declassified intelligence documents

**A SUPERHERO RPG** When are we finally going to see a good one?

**A MAD VICTORIAN RPG** Based on *Castle Falkenstein* or the Lord

Darcy novels

**WWII SUB SIM** A one- or two-man submarine sim would be amazing  
**INDIANAPOLIS SPEEDWAY LEGENDS** Covering the A.J. Royt and Parnelli Jones era

**HOCKEY MOGUL** Sports management on ice

**THE GODFATHER** Mob management: numbers, drugs, games, intrigue, and murder

**NEW WARGAME FODDER** Something based on Frederick the Great, the English Civil War, the Irish Easter Rebellion, or the Wars of the Roses



# War Is Heaven

SSG and Red Orb Team Up for a Fantastic Return to the Warlords Universe

by Tim Carter

**T**he Critical enters a dark and mysterious dungeon. He encounters an army of zombie programmers, and a victorious He finds... a gem. A big fat gem, in fact—one that will keep him happy for, oh, much more time than

he has available. *Warlords III*, basically the crew at SSG and marketed through Bluebird/Red Orb, is a winner from the minute your fingers hit the keyboard. Based on one of the few strategy game designs that deserves the accolade "classic," *Warlords III* brings early RPG depth, playability, and muscle to an already successful and enjoyable game.

*Warlords III* follows the basic turn-based system of its predecessors for solitary play, but offers simultaneous turns for those with a hankering for multiplayer mayhem with human opponents. It ran smoothly and rapidly on my Pentium 120 and was fully functional in Windows 95.

## REIGN OF HEROES

True to the original, gameplay in *Warlords III* revolves around the control of fortified cities. Individual units have a dizzying variety of attributes and abilities, and up to eight units may be grouped to form an army. Heroes may explore ruins for treasure or magical items, perform quests for useful rewards, and bestow a number of important combat bonuses to armies that march under their banner.

The command structure, which was pretty clean in *Warlords I* and II, remains quite impressive. Moving around the game will be simple even for someone unfamiliar with the interface.



WAR IS WELL *Warlords III* is a turn-based fantasy wargame in which combat is resolved on a strategic scale, as in Civ, not in tactical mode, like NEMO.

Little, if anything, seemed to have been left out of previous versions, but quite a bit has been added here. For instance, some of your heroes, depending on their class, may use magic to augment their abilities, which further depend on the race you are playing.

Unlike past versions of *Warlords*, individual cities no longer produce distinct units. Each race now has a pool of set unit types to draw on, consistent with that race's basic characteristics and attitudes. Any given race may have eight regular troop types, three mercenaries, four hero classes, four magical allies, and one beast unit.

The first time I played this system, I felt a tiny twinge of disappointment: The more limited armies lead to a bit dull after a while, and battles over castles aren't as massive in proportion. But after only a few games, I could clearly see the wisdom of this design decision. By bringing gamers to a consistent and hard set of troops, the designers have greatly extended *Warlords III*'s replay value. A game on the same map but with a different race is, functionally, an entirely different game. Moreover, within each

game, each of the different races you fight possess a somewhat different flavor, based on the strengths and weaknesses of their core units.

## WARLORDS CUBEQ

For those who love to mix and match, the scenario setup screen lets you create your own race using any of the greening units. You are limited only by the total number of different unit types per race.

The setup screen offers a huge number of other options that build replay value as well—including a prohibition on mixing cities (an important issue when playing against human opponents), an option that allows neutral cities to grow in power if attacked, and various placement of starting cities.

In addition to the twelve preset scenarios, the game comes with a random scenario generator and—surprise—intricate campaign game.

As just one example of the playing value in *Warlords III*, the classic first map from the original game is included one of the preset scenarios. This map constituted the entire game in *Warlords*



Price: \$49.95  
**Minimum System Requirements:** Pentium 75, Windows 95, 10MB RAM, 4MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM, 256-color SVGA graphics, Sound Blaster 16 or 100-percent-compatible 16-bit sound card, 28Kbps or faster Internet connection.  
**Multiplayer Support:** Modem, direct connect (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-4 players)  
**Designer:** SSG  
**Publisher:** Red Orb Entertainment  
 Novato, CA  
 (800) 546-1798  
[www.rcorb.com](http://www.rcorb.com)  
 Reader Service #: 342





**BRIGHTY TIN** Heros play an important role in *Warlords III*, since they can hunt for treasure, embark on quests, cast spells, and bestow bonuses on your troops.

Without many of the options and variations available here. Yet in *Warlords III* you control a tiny fraction of the console game. Having spent a dozen or so minutes on the *Warlords* map already, I can say with some certainty that games will not run out of things to do with *Warlords III*.

#### WILL TO ARMS

What you do in *Warlords III*, of course, is fight. A list. The core *Warlords* combat system hasn't changed a structure, but a wide range of modifying factors has been added, giving you more options when building or taking out the enemy. For instance, individual leaders or units may behave positive (to your side) or negative (to your opponent's side) modifiers,

while many units also have special attributes or abilities such as assassination attacks, archery attacks, poisoning, and disease.

A major asset of past *Warlords* games was the strength of the AI. *Warlords III* is no slouch in this department, although I found the "Psycho" level scenario easier than I would have expected for the most

difficult level. While the computer still fails to manage its heroes properly (not picking up to save lying on the ground when an enemy hero is killed, and ignoring some traps), it has become much more adept at knocking off your heroes, particularly if you leave them exposed.

I was especially impressed when the AI, during the fifth or sixth scenario of the campaign, made a systematic effort to kill off the heroes I had been carefully nurturing into powerful higher-level paladins and mages. The computer will also raid your home territory frequently and is not averse to scorched-earth tactics if it starts to lose.

According to the manual (generally well done and useful for learning the game and for reference), the diplomatic system has been tweaked considerably

from earlier versions. I must admit that I didn't find much functional difference in the new system. The computer players tended to fight amongst themselves until I had become the biggest single power on the map, at which point they ganged up on me.

#### FRIENDS AND FOES

Along with the campaign game, the greatest addition to *Warlords III* is the multiplayer option. Playing via the Internet or a LAN, up to six players can compete in a real-time *Warlords* game here. Chasing down enemy heroes and deciding the order in which to move—and saving resources to scout at the last second—are now key decisions when playing against live opponents.

The game has little to dislike. If the premise doesn't interest you, you may do better shopping elsewhere, but for fun of fantasy and strategy or just strategy for that matter, *Warlords III* is a winner from the Internet chess seat to its Seleznik clegh and shock cavalry. **C**

**APPEAL:** Anyone who likes strategy games.

**PROS:** Fun, ultra-clear; tons of replay value; great campaign; multi-player support.

**CONS:** We're still looking.



## Campaigning for Warlords

New to the Windows system, the campaign brings things together in a series of scenarios meant to plot that has you lead the Selentines against the evil forces of

quite adept at picking off unprotected high-level heroes lurking too near the front lines.

After each scenario you get the option of upgrading some

of the undead Lord Bane. Bane has at least one primary ally and uses the powers that are supposedly in your vision of good as he tries to stand their armies against you as against the principal foe.

The campaign allows you to carry your top heroes and a limited number of magical items from one scenario to the next, which becomes useful as your heroes grow in power. Be careful, though, as the computer becomes



**FOR THE SELENTINES** A welcome addition to the campaign in *Warlords III*, in which you take the undead forces of Lord Bane.

of your core military units. I found this almost as attractive as carrying heroes forward, being able to give your heavy infantry more movement and a better attack factor outweighs a major bonus over the course of multiple scenarios.

I also found the scenarios in the campaign—which can't be played separately—to be among the more challenging recent games. In many, your enemies get natural advantages from terrain, the placement of neutral cities, or the starting disposition of forces. This makes a nice change of pace from scenarios in which each side starts out equal.

## ASTRO NAUGHTS

As I just finished watching the trailer for the new *Wing Commander* game, I couldn't help but feel the same disappointment I felt while watching the *Star Wars* movies or any episode of *Star Trek*. What do they think would conduct the sound vibrations in outer space? Also, these games don't correctly simulate space travel. If we travelled at the speed of light, it would take us four years to get to the nearest star. Even if we had at our disposal some sort of spacecraft that could generate an enormous amount of acceleration, it would take us several weeks just to reach Mars. Plus, the speed at which we would have to travel would be extremely unpleasant, if not lethal. The only games that have ever tried to realistically simulate space travel were *ELITE* and its successors. I just wonder why people keep calling these arcade games "space simulators."

Johnnie Commeyon  
New Jersey

In *Star Wars*, John Williams conducted the vibrations, as well as the orchestra, right? Seriously, the games and the movies would all have been pretty boring without sound. We always thought *ELITE* was without sound because it was done on the Apple II. Chips versus cool MIDI explosions just don't cut it.

## THE WIZARD OF OS

I have a question about games and operating systems. I personally do not like Windows 95, as I prefer to use Windows NT 4.0, which is more stable. Some of the literature on it has stated that for an application to carry the Windows logo, it must run on both Windows 95 and Windows NT without difficulty. However, when I tried to run *RED ALBERT* (which has the logo) on WinNT, I got an error message informing me that it was a Win 95-only program. Are games subject to different standards than applications, or is there a way to get NT to run games that have the logo but are "only Win 95"?

Robert Marks  
via the Internet

Business applications must run under both operating systems in order to receive the logo. However, since *DirectX* has not yet been integrated into the Windows NT operating system, it is not possible to require compliance between games that, like *RED ALBERT*, use *DirectX* and the Windows NT operating system. Currently, NT uses *Direct Draw* and *Direct Sound*, but does not have *Direct Input* and *Direct Play*. We hope that Microsoft will eventually integrate *DirectX* into NT and migrate everyone onto that platform. However, that doesn't seem to be a high priority.

## LEGENDS OR MYTHS?

I saw the ad for Accolade's *LEGENDS FOOTBALL* game in your magazine and expect a review is forthcoming. As you prepare, I thought I would point out something interesting that my friends and I noticed. We love football, and were hoping *LEGENDS* might serve as a good vehicle for a group league.

In the ad, the top left box says, "You Want Stats? We Got Stats!" But take a look at all those QBs listed on the screenshot. Every one of them shows a completion percentage which is higher (in some cases over 10 percent higher) than the actual quarterback (except for Troy Aikman, and his is only 1 percent lower).

Good coaches look for tendencies. This signals to me that this is another in the seemingly endless "paw-happy" games that appeal to the Nintendo mentality who feel that unless there is a touchdown every other possession,

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

## STAR BORED

Hey, I just wanted to inform you of a little error in the "Prophecy Motive" article in October's issue. Terry Coleman wrote "... some over 3 kilometers long—has to be seen to be believed. It takes a long time just to fly past one of these monsters. In comparison, the *Star Wars* Death Star would look like a PT boat in the wake of a battleship." I know this might make me sound like an obsessed *Star Wars* fan, but even the Super Star Destroyer, the one that crashed into the Death Star in *Return of the Jedi*, is 8 kilometers long, almost three times as long as the ships he was describing. The object of his comparison is much, much more massive. The first Death Star was 140 kilometers in diameter and the second was 160 kilometers in diameter. Maybe he just got the comparison backwards and the Death Star is the battleship and *Wing Commander* capital ship is the PT boat or, more accurately, a person in a lifejacket floating in the ocean. Anyway, keep up the good work. I think CGW is the best computer game magazine out there and I have the collection (without a missed issue since 1993) to prove it.

Lawrence Zasliwy  
via the Internet

Hmm, while Death Vader's ship, the *Executor*, was indeed 8 kilometers long, our CGW lab rat and official *Star Wars* fan, Scooter, indicates that most destroyers were 1.6 kilometers long. Scooter cites West End Games' *Imperial Sourcebook* for the *Star Wars* Role-playing Game, and *A Guide to the Star Wars Universe* as his sources. The number of Super-class Star Destroyers depends on whether you believe the movies (only Vader's was shown) or the numerous books (which agree on five such vessels), but nevertheless the normal Star Destroyers we see in all the movies and games are only 1.6 kilometers long. In fact, if you boot up *THE FORCE* and go to the ship section, it will list the length of an Imperial Star Destroyer as 1,600 meters. Since these figures support Terry Coleman's figure of speech, we're going to stand by it.

**80% SHIP** *Wing Commander* Prophecy's capital ships are three kilometers long, while the big *Star Wars* vessels are 1.6–8 kilometers long, but it's not the size of the ship that matters as much as how you use it.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #342



the game must be boring. It is a shame, because the graphics do look very nice and there appears to be a multitude of options. But sports fans have to send the game companies a message: A sports simulation, whether football, baseball, or any other sport, is useless unless one can count on realistic results. I look forward to your review.

RRK Foster  
Orlando, FL

We, too, were disappointed in the final version of the game. You'll find our review on page 362.

## STARFLEET: A TRAVESTY

After having purchased and played the just-released *STARFLEET ACADemy*, I have a few gripes I would like to share. Loyal gamers, such as myself, who buy the first available copy of a game, are usually the ones who get the most grief with bugs. This first group consists of die-hard beta testers who must endure the game without any patches. Yet, they receive little help from the software publisher's tech support departments because there are, as yet, no identified problems with the game. Do you have any advice for

us, I am sure they will not jump out of their shoes to send me back some working CDs. I hope you will be able to warn people who have not yet given their \$\$\$ to Interplay so that they will not go through the same headaches I am experiencing.

Leo Unkovic  
Bu on the Internet

Unfortunately, we have no good advice for you if you're willing to buy the game as soon as it comes out. Even we've been fooled by pre-release versions of games that are seriously used but features that were subsequently removed before shipping. The sad fact is that those on the leading edge are usually on the bleeding edge, because there are dozens of factors that work against stable, tested code for every possible system configuration.

## DOUBLE TALK

I was intrigued to find diametrically opposed reviews for *MENT PERFECT* in your magazine and on your Web site. (Robert Coffey gave the game 4 out of 5 in *Computer Gaming World* and Craig Newsvin gave it a 4.3 out of 10 on *GameSpot*.)

Amazingly enough, one reviewer calls the game original, while the other calls it derivative. The latter seems to be that one reviewer was able to overlook the control problems, while they proved too much for the other to stomach. I guess it really does pay to get a second opinion before deciding who gets those precious gaming dollars. I side with *GameSpot*. A platform shooter with control problems is bound to run out my frustration-o-meter.

Cludio Fazio  
via the Internet

*GameSpot* has a separate editorial staff from *CCW*, with an entirely different stable of writers. The two groups have a slightly different reviewing philosophy, in that *GameSpot* shocks its reviewers with an electric cattle prod each time they die in a game, while *CCW* rewards reviewers with blood money directly from the advertiser for every favorable review. And if you believe that, you're sure to find a test group with plenty of supporters sometime soon.

Seriously, we don't ask *GameSpot*'s reviewers to conform to our opinion and they don't require us to conform to theirs. We do swap guidelines occasionally, but the payoff is there since you get a second opinion and we get the space of 16



members of the oppressed group?

The inspiration for this

letter was from the following experience: I have been playing *STARFLEET ACADemy* from Interplay. My second CD will not load. At the "Insert CD #2" prompt, you just hear a loud "clink" (CD skip noise) which repeats five seconds later. Interplay support initially claimed that it was a problem with my new Diamond Monster 3D drivers. However, I called Diamond and they say my drivers are fine. Thinking it could be a defective CD, I exchanged the game at Electronics Boutique, but got the same result.

Interplay insists that I send all five of my CDs back, and combined with the long-distance tech support calls to Interplay and Diamond, I have spent over \$25 just trying to find the problem. Based on the response Interplay has given me so

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## BEAM ME UP, SCOTTIE

I've been an avid reader of your magazine for the past three years and I love it. I always try and buy the CD plus magazine package, it's much more convenient. Anyway, with great anticipation I took out my old online CD and signed up for Kik. Well there sure is a whole new world out there on the Net, but I'm not sure if it contains any intelligent life forms. So for my week of wandering and trying to find a home, I've been installed, crashed at, cut out of games... and I've become disenchanted.

The maturity level displayed by many of the QUAKE, WARCRAFT II, and DUNE 3D players makes one wonder who is on the Net. There appears to be a lot of sick-minded people who take this stuff too seriously.

At the SSI site, you would hope to find some WARWIND players (wrong). When I vis-

ited the SSI site, I thought surely there would be intelligent wargames hanging out there. After visiting many sites during various times from early morning to midnight, I found very little variance in the type and style of player on Kik. What I did find was a bunch of fool-modified lads and adults that live an alternative life inside the Web. I wonder if they can even make a distinction between online and reality. It reminded me of my old AD&D days when some of our players really lost touch with reality. Needless to say, I don't role-play anymore.

I would love to find a group of die-hard wargames. NARCAPIN in Russia would have been a blast online with someone, but alas, not on Kik. I have a CompSense account and find much more friendship and excitement in their service. I only wish it didn't cost so much to play online using CompSense.

Well, thanks for the experience!

*Clayton Rowan*  
via the Internet



Last month we inadvertently used an incorrect screenshot for entry 19 in our Real-Time Shootout, CYBERSTORM 2. Here is what the game actually looks like. We apologize for any confusion arising from our mistake.

If you're looking for wargame action, we highly recommend checking out the Leaders' PSEM Wargame Club. The URL is [www.leadates.com](http://www.leadates.com). There are competition ladders for STRAT. PENTAGON, PENTACON, and ADVANCED CAMPAIGN, among others.



**EAT LEAD** You'll find plenty of wargame opponents on the Leaders' PSEM Wargame Club.

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Edited by Charlotte Panther (CPanther@zd.com)

# CGW Does Dallas

*3D Games To Drive You Wild*

While on a trip to visit Ritual for our *Sin* preview, CGW made several visits to other prominent 3D-action developers in the Dallas area, including id Software, ION Storm, and 3D Realms.

## Ritual Entertainment

The team that brought you *SCOURGE OF ARMAJON* is busy working on *Sin*, its first-person Quake Killer, which should reach completion by March, 1998. At this point, the company is deep into level design, and is still in the process of integrating the non-human monsters into the game. For more on *Sin*, and

Ritual's progress on the title, turn to our Sneak Previews well for a full preview.

## ION Storm

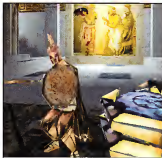
Our visit to ION Storm was surprising in that we were actually able to see quite a bit of *Duress*, as well as *Archonix*. *Duress* now looks very impressive, with an incredible amount



of detail in the monster skins and textures, even more so than in *Quake II*. The levels are deep in development, we were able to see the Alcatraz level from the last episode, Future San Francisco, and it looks incredibly accurate. The Greek levels are also impressive, with their colossal architecture.

We also had a chance to sample the music of *DARKMAN*, which is being crafted by Will Loconto, a former member of Information Society. Every level will have a unique theme, as will each endboss. The music of each episode will also be different. The music ranges from heavy-metal guitar to MORRIK KAWAKI-like techno to Dark Ages period music. After listening to the game music, we think it might be one of the best features of *DARKMAN*, which looks on track to make its March 1998 ship date.

*AVATARBOX* has an even later scheduled ship date (late 1998), but we were able to see the main character, Sly Boots, running through two very alien rooms from the game's third-person perspective.



**Kesmai Corporation** recently announced that it filed suit against **America Online (AOL)** for flagrant violation of federal anti-trust laws, federal and state trademark laws, and unfair competition laws. The suit charges AOL with using its monopolistic control of online services and internet access to prevent small content providers from being able to compete fairly. AOL recently acquired Kesmai competitor **imaginNation Network**, and relabeled it under the name **WorldPlay**, which gives AOL control over basic management, programming, and promotion functions on the AOL games channel. The move, according to Kesmai CEO Chris Holden, forced game companies to either become subsumed under their competitor's brand (WorldPlay) or leave AOL, although Holden claims that AOL made Kesmai virtually invisible to subscribers, and as a result, Kesmai's business has been reduced by 92 percent. Kesmai also claims that AOL's decision to institute a \$1.99 per hour surcharge has driven usage down and scared game companies away.

AOL, which already has more than twice the subscribers of all of its competitors combined, stands to gain another 2.7 million subscribers from the acquisition of **CompuServe**, which would allow it to control 79 percent of the market. Kesmai's lawsuit, Holden says, is an effort to fight, on behalf of all small AOL content providers, for a return to fair competition. At press time, AOL was unavailable for comment. Stay tuned to ReadMe for news on the case as it progresses.

## Short takes on games and hardware released just prior to press time.

### 7TH LEGION

Generations ago, the elite of an overpopulated and ecologically devastated Earth fled for the stars. These "Chosen" have returned, but the 7th Legion, the surviving descendants of those left behind, won't let them back without a fight. Whether commanding Clasen or 7th Legion forces, the pace of the real-time strategy missions is dizzying, but engaging. Troops gain credits and

experience ranks with each kill, and headquarters replenishes your credits based on your rank and body count. The resulting damage is staggering. A lone unit has a battlefield life span measured in heartbeats. And there are legions aplenty to replace the fallen—Seven Messiahs.

**MicroProse**, (800) 729-4050  
**Win 95 CD-ROM**  
**Reader Service # 207**

### TAKE NO PRISONERS

*Take No Prisoners* is a bloody action game from a different perspective. As with most action games, there are plenty of power-ups, lots of destruction to wreak with your multitude of weapons, and various monster-filled levels. The top-down

perspective takes some getting used to, it gives you a good view of what's surrounding you, but fails to convey what dangers might lie ahead. With some well-done levels, plenty of action, and good multiplayer options, *Take No Prisoners* could be a worthy distraction for the trigger happy gamer.—*Shel Hsu*

**Red Orb Entertainment**, (800) 474-0185  
**Win 95 CD-ROM**  
**Reader Service # 302**



## id Software

id gave us the opportunity to sit down in front of *Quake II* and take it for a last drive through the low level levels. We were very impressed. The graphics are as good as you'd expect from the technical wizards at id, and the integration of puzzles and interconnected levels is coming together well. Kevin Cloud, project leader on *Quake II*, revealed that the first game will have the quad damage and invulnerability power-ups, as well as infrared goggles, invisibility, enviro-suit, and some other power-ups.

Most of the humanoid monsters are plugged into the game, though finishing

touches are being put on the non-humanoids, including the demon, which will have fiend-like speed and ferocity. The two player characters, the male and female marine, were being finished by Paul Steed at the time of our visit. Currently, the male character is bald, while the female character, in addition to being fully armored, has a pony tail atop her head.

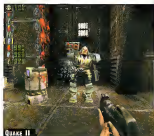
We were also able to see John Cash's AI at work. The monsters actively duck under rocket fire and duck in and out of cover. The first action is hard coded into monster AI, while the second action is actually scripted on an individual basis. The end result, though, is that you'll see monsters acting more intelligently. Moreover, certain monsters, such as the berserker, will chase you down, while some grunts will run into other rooms to call for reinforcements.

While running through the various early levels, we also saw many interactive elements in place, such as breakable glass, floors, and ceilings. We also saw the new sky in the background, which id will use as a marker to record your progress. For example, you'll see the planetary gun on

the horizon on one level, and on the next level, which is closer geographically to the gun, you will see the weapon looming larger in the sky. On the very next level, you might actually be in the gun complex.

Id is still very confident of making its Christmas ship date, though certain features, such as 3D sound support, will have to be pulled. Also, you will no longer be able to see each type of weapon in *DeathMatch*. However, there will be three generic gun sizes available when you change weapons in *DeathMatch*, so you will at least be able to tell whether your opponent has a big, medium, or small weapon. There will also be a different look and animation for the grenade.

Cloud also assures us that John Carmack plans to increase the number of respawn sites in *DeathMatch*, especially since *DeathMatches* will now have up to 200 player limits.



THIS JUST IN

### MACHINE HUNTER

MGM's third-person shooter, *Machine Hunter*, has you fighting a series of increasingly difficult robots while navigating through futuristic levels. Before each robot dies, you have the ability to possess its body and take over its skills and weapons. The game's top-



down perspective proves to be a bit confusing—it was sometimes difficult to tell where ceilings ended and the floor below began. The robots can also see you before you can see them, allowing them to take multiple shots at you before they are visible. Despite these quirks, *Machine Hunter* has an arcade-like feel that delivers a quick dose of shooting enjoyment.

—Mattew Scheeler  
MGM Interactive, (703) 790-2350  
Win 95 CD-ROM  
Reader Service # 309

### ENTREPRENEUR

Sometimes the most addictive games come from the smallest underdogs. *Entrepreneur* is a



title that could be a sleeper. Designed by Stardock Systems—previously an OS/2 publisher—this real-time combat game exchanges the world of military tactics for corporate warfare. Though the graphics aren't pretty, the gameplay is. As CEO for a computer manufacturer, you must battle against your competitors and bring your product to every corner of the world at a faster, cheaper, and more reliable

rate than your competition. You control the design, production, and marketing of your product, and then send your business "botmen" out to get market share. An involving game with lots of micromanagement, and also a lot of fun. —Eliot Orr  
Stardock Systems, (800) STARDOCK  
Win 95, OS/2 CD-ROM  
Reader Service # 304

### CONQUEST EARTH

Human exploration of Jupiter accidentally kills millions of Jovians, resulting in a war of the worlds. Players can control Earthers or Jovians in a series of missions or direct the global war effort. The plot may be tired, but the game





### 3D Realms

We were really impressed by the progress on *Pier*, 3D Realms' contender for the next generation leader in first-person shooters. *Pier* relies on what is called portal technology. In a somewhat oversimplified nutshell, it means that whenever there is a doorway or "portal" along a wall, the program automatically "clips" the graphics related to the other room and only calculates and draws the visible segments. Most games calculate all segments in the other room and then mask the non-visible parts, using up a few processing cycles to do so. By handling the portal issue differently, the *Pier* team is able to create rooms with mirror-style puzzles and enhance the idea of inter-dimensional travel. Some of the test-level designs are extremely impressive, as is the robust and easy-to-use editor.

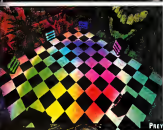
Paul Schuytens, lead designer on *Pier*, also promises that *Talon Brave*, the Native American custom of *Pier*, will be as true to Native American custom and spirit as Schuytens can possibly make him. Many of the situations and puzzles within the game itself will come from the character's heritage, and Schuytens is using a Native American consultant to ensure that no repetition of *Sitewok Wakaon's* inept handling of cultural traditions will occur.

3D Realms' other big 1998 release is *Duke Nukem Forever*, slated for a summer launch. Though the buzz on the title centered around 3D Realms' decision to use the *Duke II* engine for the game, George Brossard, project leader, says that *Duke Forever* will be every bit as innovative as *Duke Nukem* was. 3D Realms will also strive to inject the same personality into *Duke Forever* that made *Duke Nukem* such a success. We'll definitely give you a sneak preview when we find out more about the next *Duke* adventure.

—Elliott Chin and Johnny Wilson



Duke Forever



Pier



Pier

### THIS JUST IN



looks beautiful. From combining explosives right down to siltan steps of alien armor lying off under a hail of gunfire, the richness and minute details visible in 16-bit high color screens quality. Too much attention to detail in the mechanics of gameplay, however, makes it slow going at first. The manual is a doozy, but the varied unit com-

mands eventually develop satisfying strategies. —Soren Mikkelsen  
Eidos Interactive, (415) 547-1200  
PC CD-ROM  
Reader Service # 305

### PUZZLE-3D NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL

Hasbro has taken the popular 3D historic landmarks puzzle games and recreated them electronically, adding lots of multimedia clips about the buildings, and the ability to explore them virtually, once the puzzle is completed. A good idea in theory, but poor in execution. Most of the pieces are hard to see, except in the closer zoom views, which necessitate endless scrolling

around the table. The tray feature has an annoying tendency to dump pieces from one tray into another if clicked on accidentally, and you can't pick up more than one piece at a time. For extreme jigsaw fans only.

—Kate Hartman

Hasbro Interactive, (800) 638-6027  
Win 95 CD-ROM  
Reader Service # 306



## News Flash

►►► **Activision** has announced a stand-alone expansion pack for *Interspace '76*, Interspace *'76 Ninja Pack*. The *Violent Files* will allow players to experience life as an auto-vigilante by assuming the role of their favorite *'76* characters, including *Taurus*, *Jade*, and *Skeeter*, in approximately 20 new action-packed single-player missions. The *Violent Files* also includes a series of bonus missions that can be played once all of the main character missions have been completed. The game will also offer 25 new multiplayer missions for up to eight players, including *Capture the Flag* and *Racing* options. The game is slated for an early 1998 release.

►►► **GT Interactive** announced the acquisition of **MicroProse** for about \$250 million in stock value. This follows the news that **MicroProse** has dropped the official company name of **Spectrum HoloByte, Inc.** Until now, the company had been known as **Spectrum HoloByte**, but had always developed and published its games under the **MicroProse** brand.

►►► In our September issue, *CGW* listed the title *Snec Baines Must Die* on our vaporware list. However, *Snec Baines Is*, in fact, very much alive. The first-person 3D action/adventure game being developed by **Pulse Entertainment** is due to ship in June 1998. Look out for a full update on the title, complete with screenshots, in next month's *Read Me*.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #256

# Myst Opportunities

## RIVEN: THE SEQUEL TO MYST Will Continue to Mystify Gamers

**M**YST is the "Franklin Comes Alive" of computer gaming. Like that gangly guitarist from the '70s, *Myst* was in the right place at the right time—in *Myst*'s case, it was in the perfect position to take advantage of those new-fangled CD-ROM drives, selling a bazillion (or, more accurately, 3 million) copies, and becoming the one computer game that everybody and their grandmother had ever heard of. Nearly four years after its initial release, *Myst*—amazingly—still routinely tops the PC Data list of best-selling games.

Now, after years of anticipation and months of media buzz, Red Orb's long-awaited *Riven: The Sequel to Myst* will be hiding the shelves as you read this. And whether you loved or hated the original, there's no denying that this is one of the year's biggest releases, guaranteed to sell well to the faithful and the curious, regardless of what the critics say.

At the time we wrote this month's Holiday Hot 100, we had seen nothing more than a few screen shots of *Riven*, but, just in time for this news section, we received a shrink-wrapped final copy. Here is a quick first look—a full review will appear in next month's *OSW*.

In a nutshell, *Riven*'s plot is this: After helping Atrus sort out the problems with his sons, you are now enlisted to help him and his wife, Catherine, who has been trapped on another of Atrus' fantasy worlds, *Riven*.



Those expecting something radically different than *Myst* will be sorely disappointed, for designers Rand and Robyn Miller have made a game that is unabashedly similar to the original. Once again, you must navigate your way through a strange, mostly uninhabited world, pulling levers, fixing water pumps, repairing strange machines—all the puzzle types that *Myst* made so popular.

*Riven*'s graphics are extraordinary, with a beautiful photorealistic look that is far more detailed than in *Myst*. The designers made some good attempts to liven up the environment, with shimmering water, insects and animals, and even the occasional humanoid wandering through the landscape. Some of the game's cut-scenes, such as the underground/underwater roller-coaster, are truly stunning to behold.

*Riven* shows that, once again, the Miller brothers do what they do better than anyone. As such, *Riven* looks like the ultimate *Myst* done—which should thrill the legions of *Myst* fans, and confound everyone else.—Jeff Green

## News Flash

► **Electronic Arts** recently announced the appointment of John S. Riccitiello as the company's new president and COO. He will be responsible for EA's worldwide distribution, marketing, and operations. Riccitiello comes from **Sarah Lee Corporation**, where he served as president and CEO of its bakery division. Our first thought was that EA was trying to duplicate the success **Apple** saw after hiring a CEO from **Pepsi!** But this does appear to be method behind this madness. Sources tell us that Mr. Riccitiello is actually a hard-core gamer, so he can't be all bad.

► **Avolon Hill** recently teamed up with **ZDNet** to bring an exclusive preview of *Avolon Hill's* 3D combat simulation game, *Denace*, to the Web. The demo resulted in over 16,000 downloads within the first 20 hours of being online, and that figure was up to 54,426 at press time. *Denace* marks *Avolon Hill's* first foray into the first-person 3D action genre. The game has you diving around in an LAV-6, a hovering battle vehicle, and defending your home base against an army of space mutants. The demo is still available for download at [www.zdnetlaunchpad.com](http://www.zdnetlaunchpad.com) and is also featured in this month's **CG-ROM**.

## THIS JUST IN

### RESIDENT EVIL

With all the subtlety and quality of a made-for-TV movie, *Resident Evil* tries to deliver a highly atmospheric action/adventure hybrid game. The question is what kind of atmosphere it shoots for: nesting terror or straight-up cheesiness? The only way to



answer that question may be to search through the game's mansion yourself, blowing away the flesh-eating zombies and finding out whether your skin crawls or you laugh in disbelief. These action elements are interspersed with cut-scenes whose tone leans less toward impending doom and more toward self-parody. The end result is an okay game that's hard to take seriously.—Matthew Schaefer  
**Virgin Interactive Entertainment**  
(800) 874-6607  
**Win \$5 CD-ROM**  
Retailer Service # 307

### TEMUJIN: THE CAPRICORN COLLECTION

Apparently unimpressed with the dismal failure of previous video-based adventure games,

**SouthPeak Interactive** is jumping into this most unproven of genres with *Temujin*, a mystery adventure in which some obscure assassin is plotting the resurrection of Genghis Khan. *SouthPeak* has been hyping *Temujin's* engine forever, and yes, it's better than previous attempts. The game was shot completely on 3Dmm film with no pre-rendered backgrounds and sure looks pretty. But, who cares? The story is ridiculous, the puzzles are uninspired, and the acting and dialog is atrocious. Even the engine is a bust—running slow as dirt even on a P200. **Gong!**

—Jeff Green

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #108

# Loaded

Weaponry  
through the Ages



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# 3Dfx: Keeping the Customer Satisfied

The edition of the Works features a chip under construction from **Integrated Device Technologies (IDT)**, a lesser-known compa-



ny in PC gaming hardware, and finds a very well-known 3D company doing some damage control. In a move to quell some irate Voodoo Rush customers, 3Dfx is offering a swap for Hercules Stingray 1283D owners. Customers can send 3Dfx their Voodoo Rush daughterboard (keeping their Alliant AT3D-based 2D board), and 3Dfx will send them a stand-alone PCI Voodoo-based board as a replacement. The offer does not extend to single-board Voodoo Rush owners, only those with the main board/daughterboard configuration. The move stems from consumers upset by Voodoo Rush's initially slower performance running GL Quake. However, subsequent driver revisions have narrowed the performance gap between the two parts. Improvements are also being made to Voodoo Rush's Direct3D drivers to bring their performance closer to parity with Voodoo.

IDT is busy at work on a part that could have quite an impact on the 3D graphics landscape, although it isn't a 3D accelerator. Already a player in the X86 CPU market with its Centaur chip, IDT has a new spin of that CPU in the works which beats up floating point and MMX performance. Both AMD and Cyrix have brought their Socket 7 competitors to market, and while both deliver impressive integer performance, neither can match Intel in floating-point performance, which is the key to keeping 3D data flowing smoothly to a 3D accelerator. IDT's new Centaur is aimed squarely at being a gamer's CPU, and as soon as we get a chip in-house, we'll give you the lowdown on how it fares.

Next month, we'll have another 3D graphics roundup to test the newest boards coming out for the holidays. We'll look at Rise 128 based parts from **ASUS** and **Canopus**, Voodoo Rush parts from **Jazz** and **Intergraph**, Rendition V2200 parts from **Hercules** and **Sierra**, Parmedia 2-based parts from **Creative Labs** and **ELSA**, ATI's Expert@Play using their new Rage Pro chip, and **Matrox's** PowerVR-based m3D, plus a few surprises that I can't quite tell you about yet. —Dave Salvo

## PLAYING LATELY

### CGW Survey\*

	Last Month	Months on Chart
1. <b>Diablo (Blizzard/CUC)</b>	1	8
2. <b>Civilization II (MicroProse)</b>	2	19
3. <b>Quake (id Software)</b>	3	12
4. <b>Dungeon Keeper (BullFrogEA)</b>	-	1
5. <b>Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin)</b>	5	9
6. <b>X-COM: Apocalypse (MicroProse)</b>	-	1
7. <b>Heroes II: PDL (New World Computing)</b>	7	3
8. <b>Links LS 1998 (Access)</b>	-	2
9. <b>Tomb Raider (Eidos)</b>	-	5
10. <b>AH-64 Longbow (Jane's/EA)</b>	-	1

\* Check your mailbox. We mail a survey to 7,500 randomly-chosen subscribers each month. The results of *Playing Lately* indicate what games readers are blowing the most time on, as opposed to the reader's overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.

### PC Data Best-Sellers\*\*

1. <b>Myst (Broderbund)</b>	1
2. <b>Diablo (Blizzard/CUC)</b>	2
3. <b>Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin)</b>	6
4. <b>Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft)</b>	6
5. <b>Monopoly Multimedia (Hasbro Interactive)</b>	7
6. <b>NASCAR II (Papyrus/CUC)</b>	-
7. <b>Dungeon Keeper (BullFrogEA)</b>	3
8. <b>Tomb Raider (Eidos)</b>	4
9. <b>Links LS 1998 (Access)</b>	4
10. <b>WarCraft Battle Chest (Blizzard/CUC)</b>	10

\*\* The list indicates what the top selling PC games were, as calculated by PC Data, during August, 1997.

THIS JUST IN

### SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE

LucasArts' PC port of the N64 game *Shadows of the Empire* shows off just how good Direct3D can be if done correctly, with its well-executed visual effects, such as translucency and smoke. The actual gameplay, though, is a mixed bag, ranging from rail-shooter to third-person action game. Some levels are a step up from earlier rail shooters, giving you more range of motion, but still limiting the area you zoom around in. All in all, this isn't as much of a dog as *Yan Sins and Red Assault*, but doesn't really approach the greatness of *The Force and Jedi Master*. —Thierry Nguyen



LucasArts (800) 985-0227  
**PC CD-ROM**  
Reader Service # 309

**MAGIC THE GATHERING: SPELLS OF THE ANCIENTS**  
A lot like the original computer

release of *Magic*, this add-on pack has plenty to like—and plenty that will annoy you. The computer opponent is better, although the AI still has a tendency to do really dumb things at odd times. The new cards really increase the variety of cards in play and improvements in the interface make it easier for you to maneuver. Despite the slicker look and enhanced options, however, *Strius* or the *Ancients* is mostly smoke and magic mirrors. Until the proposed *Maneive* launches—supposedly here

on the Internet—you still can't play live against another human mage. In the meantime, though, there are enough *SPeLLS* here to keep your addiction for a while. —Ervy Colman  
MicroProse, (510) 522-7164  
**WIN 95 CD-ROM**  
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE # 118

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MUST BE OVERTHROWN. THE STATUS QUO MUST BE SPANKED. AND CONTENTMENT  
MUST BE ROUTINELY TAKEN OUTSIDE AND SMACKED UPSIDE THE HEAD. IT'S A  
DIRTY JOB, BUT SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT. AND WE'RE ALL READY TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION.

WE'RE **ION STORM**, A BUNCH OF MISFIT, ZEALOT FREAKS WHO TRIED TO REST ON  
OUR PAST SUCCESSES BUT JUST DIDN'T FIND IT COMFORTABLE. THERE WAS A GAP OUT THERE.

A BIG FAT VOID. AND WE WERE HELL-BENT ON FILLING IT. WE HAD ALL  
LIVED ON THE EDGE, BUT WE WERE READY TO JUMP OFF. SO HERE WE ARE. NEW NAME,  
NEW IDENTITY, NEW GAMES RATTLING THEIR CAGES, WAITING TO BE LET OUT.

**JOHN ROMERO:** LONG-HAIREO SMART-ASS KNOWN FOR HIS FAST FERRARI AND HIS UNCANNY  
ABILITY TO SING THE THEME SONG TO THE SPIDERMAN CARTOON REALLY, REALLY WELL.  
OH YEAH, THERE WAS ALSO THAT 000M AND QUAKE THING.



DAIKATERY WILL BREAK YOUR ASS DOWN.

**TOM HALL:** A FUNNY GUY WHO WANTS TO GET ALL TOUCHY-FEELY WITH HIS GAMES. HAS SOME SILLY  
IDEA THAT COMPUTER GAMES HAVE TO BE STUFFED FULL OF PERSONALITY, INTERESTING CHARACTERS  
AND INTERACTIVITY. IN A PAST LIFE,

HE CO-CREATED WOLFENSTEIN 30, 000M AND  
RISE OF THE TRIAD, AND WAS ONE

OF THE ORIGINAL FOUNDERS OF SOME  
SMALL COMPANY CALLED IO.



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EVERYTHING: ART, FILMMAKING, 3-D MODELING AND ANIMATION.

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BUNCH OF STUFF HE KEEPS  
UNDER HIS BEG AND WON'T  
SHOW ANYBODY.

HIS JOB DESCRIPTION NOW

SAYS HE'S IN

CHARGE OF ALL ART, SO IF ANY OF YOU OUT THERE  
ARE DOING ANYTHING EVEN SLIGHTLY

ARTISTIC, IT NOW NEEDS TO BE SUBMITTED TO  
JERRY FOR HIS APPROVAL.



DOMINION, DOFFELBANGER, DARK

**EIDOS**  
INTERACTIVE

# THE EYE OF THE STORM

# IONS



# ION STORM



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TODD PORTE: A MANOBLIN-PLAYING, NATTY, GQ TYPE WHO THINKS GAMES SHOULD BE AS STYLISH AS HE IS. GOES

AROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE "WITH THE GAMING INDUSTRY, THERE IS NO TOMORROW." THEN TURNS AROUND AND DESIGNS

THAT WAY DANGEROUS WITH A HAMMERED DULCIMER WHEN HE'S BEEN OUT DRINKING.

# Sony Goes Deep

*EVERQUEST To Challenge ULTIMA ONLINE in '98*

**W**hen Sony launches EverQuest, prior to mid-'98, gamers will be able to choose from 12 different races (Barbarians, Dark Elves, Dwarves, Erculites, Gnomes, Half-Elves, Halflings, High Elves, Humans, Ogres, Trolls, and Wood Elves) and 14 different character classes (Bards, Clerics, Druids, Enchanters, Magicians, Monks, Necromancers, Paladins, Rangers, Rogues, Shadowknights, Shamans, Warriors, and Wizards). Better yet, the choices won't be trivial: In choosing a race, you also choose your starting location because you'll start in a racial center. Also, certain racial types will have advantages, such as infrared vision.

Alignment is also important in the game. Although the game doesn't test your awarthood, it does set flags based on persons and monsters killed and quests are set for their effects on alignment. Necromancers who complete a good quest might experience a reduction in their evil power, just as paladins who commit an evil action may lose their power until the alignment is readjusted.

Skills aren't slighted in the system either. Everything in the game is highly skill-based and there are over 100 types of skills. Further, it is also possible to increase in social advancement.

Some titles will be awarded based upon successful quests.

In order to keep the game to the level of the system, five game-masters will create new quests and operate non-player characters in interesting ways. Gamers will be able to customize greetings, salutes, and social ceremonies so that they can graphically wave, slap backs, make gestures, or embrace other characters when they meet.

Best of all, the entire environment is 3D with a significant amount of physics thrown in. Particle based rain and snow not only changes the looks of the environs, but adds to the slipperiness of roads, steps, and slopes. Rainwater puddles. Snow accumulates.

EverQuest has all the heritage of nobility on the role-playing family tree. If online gaming is to become stronger, it will take efforts like EverQuest. —Johnny Wilson



**1** The starting environs for the races are different, as are such obvious characteristics as height and pigmentation.

**2** Even missing your target with the long-ranged spells in EverQuest brings out fascinating visuals.

**3** A ranger character and a barbarian warrior prepare to square off in combat as a shaman watches.



THIS JUST IN

## PGA TOUR PRO CLASS COURSES VOLUME ONE

With the recent entries of *Foxes Pro Sports Golf* from Sierra and a resurgent Jack Nicklaus at Accolade, EA's PGA Tour Pro is in the auspicious (and possibly of fighting to maintain its market share, and it's



unlikely that this course disk will change the status quo. Aweed, Sawgrass, Spyglass Hill, and Spanish Bay are pretty enough, but most of these are the same courses that were bundled with the basic PGA Tour game, and none of them can touch Pebble Beach. So, to whom is EA marketing this game? Another gaudy step from the folks who seem to own the computer sports world—except when it comes to golf. —Tony Coleman  
EA Sports, (800) 245-4525  
**Win 95 CD-ROM**  
Reader Service # 317

## VIRTUAL SPRINGFIELD

If you plan your Sunday nights around watching Fox at 8 o'clock, if

your usual exclamation when something goes wrong is "d'oh!," if your mate gives you dirty looks when you look at dinner and say "Mm mm... brown meat like sub stance," then *Vampire Simulators* is for you. This interactive tour of The Simpsons' home town has some gameplay with mini arcade games, such as *Archie* and a card-collecting challenge. But it's of most interest to Simpsons fanatics who want to peek into Bart's bedroom, browse the Reik E Mart, or go backstage at the Krusty show. The show's cast has lent their voices to the title, and there are tons of in-joke



references to various episodes of the series. A must-have for any Simpsons fan—and, mmmmm...it's shaped like a donut. —Denny Allen

For interactive, (313) 369-7500  
**Win 95 and Power Mac CD-ROM**  
Reader Service # 312

# Sega Gets Sporty

*NBA ACTION '98 and DAYTONA USA DELUXE Lead Off Sega's Sports Push*

As you read this, the 1997 NBA season will just be swinging into action, and the big question on everyone's mind will be whether any team will finally be able to take down Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. In the PC sports world, EA Sports' NBA Live series has maintained a similar dominance. This year, however, a serious contender is on hand in the form of Sega Entertainment's NBA ACTION '98.

Although we looked at it too late for consideration in this month's Holiday Hot 100, NBA ACTION '98 is indeed one of the most promising new sports games of the season. The game features full NBA licensing, with all the players, including Shaq, and—for the first time in years—Charles Barkley (though Jordan is missing, as usual). The game (which we checked out in alpha



looks as if it will offer a great degree of realism and control, with team-specific playbooks, a full fatigue mode (including injuries), signature moves from key players, and robust gamepad support. Also, along with the now-obligatory support for 3D acceleration, NBA ACTION will also reverse the recent trend of prohibitively high system requirements by letting you play in a less-demanding 8-bit color mode (which doesn't

look pretty, but works nevertheless). There have been a few basketball games to challenge NBA Live over the last couple years, but none have had the same potential to succeed that NBA ACTION '98 has. Keep your eyes open.

In other sports news, Sega is updating the PC version of their classic arcade racing game, DAYTONA USA, and this time it looks as if they may get it right. DAYTONA USA DELUXE is fixing the most egregious mistake of the previous version by adding 8-player



**WOULD-BE CONTENDER** NBA ACTION '98 May Well Give EA Sports' NBA Live a run for its money.

network support, as well as a 2-person split-screen mode. The game features six tracks, including one built especially for the PC version, and will also include support for force feedback joysticks. If Sega gets the multiplayer game up to par with the arcade version, expect DAYTONA USA DELUXE to shut down office productivity everywhere —Jeff Gray

## NO SIMS FOR SANTA

Sega's Dynamic division has delayed Acas X-Flare's, its World War II flight sim, until Fall of 1998. Apparently, some members of the development team have been pulled over to Dynamic's other sim products, Red Baron II and Pro Pilot, to insure that they will ship in time for the holiday season.

Source: within Sega say the X-Flare team is actually jazzed over the delay, as it will give them more time to enhance the simulation.

Similarly, MicroProse's Eurowar An War has also been delayed past Christmas; expect the sim in late winter or early spring.

—Denny Altin



**SECOND TIME LUCKY** Sega's DAYTONA USA DELUXE promises to fix the mistakes of its earlier version, the most notable correction being the addition of 8-player network support.



# THE MOST WAR GAME GOD'S BLA





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mortar or flamethrower...



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# TEN Digs Deeper

*New Lineup Showcases True Multiplayer Online Fare*

To say that the Total Entertainment Network (TEN) is abandoning online versions of retail software is a bit of a stretch. But TEN has significantly changed its focus, as I discovered on a recent visit to its San Francisco sanctum. Almost everything

I saw had been designed for multiplayer from the ground up. Some of the games were nostalgic, like *Zinc: Storm Worlds*, which is nothing if not Asteroids for the '90s. *Wiz War*, the old boardgame favorite, now sports a Win 95 interface and is playable by 2-6 would-be mages. Even *AD&D Dark Sun Online* is being revamped to



Wiz War

game masters, the online component may finally come close to matching the paper D&D experience.

In trying to overtake its competitors, TEN is attempting to combine this nostalgic feel with the latest gaming trends. *Twilight Lands* looks to leave *Morrow* 59 in the cyberdust with a MUD back-end, but it's more likely that the rich character development system (from ICE's *MUD* REALM online game) will keep RPG-starved gamers coming back for more. Likewise, *Wolfram: Metal of the Ancients* is a



Zinc: Storm Worlds



Twilight Lands

make it more dynamic: With an ongoing storyline maintained on a daily basis by

team-oriented sci-fi hover-tank blast-test that can be easily played by the "click-and-go" crowd. But to their credit, TEN and the developer, Bolt-Action

Software, are attempting to enclose their half-dozen 3D-generated worlds within a strategic shell of base management, scouting missions, and even orbital bombardment. Whether TEN's new lineup will revolutionize multiplayer online gaming remains to be seen, but at least the company seems to know why and what it's doing, rather than just slavishly mimicking the latest hits.—Jerry Coleman



Wolfram: Metal of the Ancients



Dark Sun

## Pro Gamers?

*TEN Launches Professional Gaming League With \$250,000 in Prizes for First Year*



If you think having a job at CGW might be cool, imagine what it would be like to really play games for a living. If the Total Entertainment Network (TEN) has its way, that's exactly what you could be doing. The Professional Gamers League, or PGL, kicks off this November with its Fall season (which runs from 11/97

through 1/98), featuring competition in *Quake* and *Red Alert*. The following Winter, Spring, and Summer seasons (through 10/98) will add competitive events in real-time strategy, 3D action, simulations, and, possibly, even team play.

After a made-for-Internet launch on November 3, qualifying events will run through the end of

the month. The top 128 point-getters then make the cut for the tour, much like winners in satellite tennis making the main draw at Wimbledon, or golf pros earning their PGA tour cards. They then compete in seeded single-elimination tournaments, with the top finishers carving up \$30,000 cash and \$32,500 in prizes per season. Major sponsors include AMD, Logitech, Rendition, GTE Internetworking, and 3COM US Robotics.

While TEN is trying to position the PGL as a separate entity, there's no question that it provides the company with a much-needed shot of funds—and of energy. Especially when you consider that to play, you have to play... and it's only available on TEN.—Jerry Coleman



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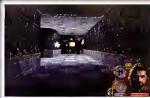
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# Psygnosis Soars With WINGS OF DESTINY

**W**ings of Destiny seems destined to conquer the combat flight-sim market, although the game probably won't use that title in the U.S. (Broderbund once published a WWII arcade game under the same name). Veterans from DID's THX team have formed their own company, General Simulations, Inc., and have crafted

some of the most beautiful WWII planes ever to grace a computer screen. Since I haven't flown any of the missions, I don't know how sold the flight model will be, but I sure like the planes so far.

In Wings of Destiny, you'll fly one of two Luftwaffe models, the ME 109 or ME 262, or one of two Allied planes, the Spitfire or P-51 Mustang. The physics model is alleged to be such that the torque

You'll be supported in each mission by wingmen of various skill levels. Interestingly enough, these wingmen (as well as the artificial opponents) will be working with cut-down flight models with the same limitations as yours, ideally balancing play sufficiently to convince you that they are doing real maneuvers instead of cheating.

The multiplayer portion of the game will feature head-to-head dogfighting, but will also feature team play, via local network or Internet. Asked about pilots being disadvantaged when using a slower machine against a faster one, the design team indicated that their technology ties action to the speed of the slower machine.

—Johnny Wilson



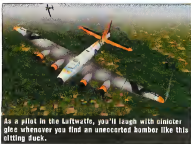
An ME 109 pilot swoops underneath the soft underbelly of his opponents.



Should you join the Allies, you'll have the option of piloting this Spitfire or a P-51 Mustang.

from the propeller causes the planes to veer left unless you provide a rudder correction. Such early indicators bode well for this type of simulation.

The game consists of a campaign built out of consecutive missions with the results and subsequent narrative provided through a period-style comic book. The comic book narration has the advantage of offering information faster than FMV or cut-scenes, and goes a long way toward building ambience.



As a pilot in the Luftwaffe, you'll laugh with cinder glee whenever you find an unaccounted bomber like this sitting duck.

## Pipeline

<b>Aces: X-Fighters</b> Sierra	Q3/98
<b>AH-64 Longbow 2.0</b> Jone's Combat Sim	Winter '97
<b>Asheron's Call</b> Turbine/MicroSoft	Early '98
<b>Baldur's Gate</b> Ravens/Winterplay	Winter '97
<b>Battlezone</b> Activision	Early '98
<b>Black Bahla</b> Tale2	Xmas '97
<b>Cliv II: Fantastic Worlds</b> MicroProse	12/97
<b>Curse of Monkey Island</b> LucasArts	Winter '97
<b>Dalibana</b> Ion Storm/Eidos	Xmas '97
<b>Deep Six</b> Virgin	Spring '98
<b>Descent to Undermountain</b> Interplay	Xmas '97
<b>Dark Nations: Forever Apoc3D</b> Realms	Sum '98
<b>Earthlogs 3</b> Sierra	Early '98
<b>Epic Warhammer 40k: Final Redempt</b> SSI	Xmas '97
<b>European Air War</b> MicroProse	2/98
<b>F-22 Raptor</b> Hoal/epic	Xmas '97
<b>Falcon 4.0</b> MicroProse	2/98
<b>Fighter Jet 2</b> Inlogames	Spring '98
<b>Final Fantasy VII</b> SquareSoft	Early '98
<b>Freedom in the Galaxy</b> Avalon Hill	Fall '98
<b>Galpato</b> Cook.com	Early '98
<b>Guardians: Agents of Justice</b> MicroProse	3/98
<b>Hidden Wars</b> Remn	1/98
<b>IA-10 Warbird</b> Interactive Magic	Fall '98
<b>Intel748 30 Chip</b> Intel	Xmas '97
<b>Intestate '77</b> Activision	Winter '97
<b>IPanzer 44</b> Interactive Magic	2/98
<b>Jagged Alliance II</b> Sir Tech	4/98
<b>Jana's F-15E/Jana's</b>	Early '98
<b>Jenja</b> Habros	4/98
<b>Joint Strike Fighter</b> Eidos	1/98
<b>King's Quest: Mask of Eternity</b> Sierra	Early '98
<b>K-1 Tank Platoon II</b> MicroProse	Mid '98
<b>MAX II</b> Interplay	Early '98
<b>Neop: Planetwalkers</b> MicroProse	12/97
<b>RockWarrior III</b> MicroProse/FASA	Mid '98
<b>RIG Alley</b> Empire	Spring '98
<b>Rift &amp; Magic VI</b> New World3DD	Winter '97
<b>Myth: The Fallen Lords</b> Bungie	Winter '97
<b>Panzer Commander</b> SSI	6/98
<b>Phantom Ace</b> Virgin	2/98
<b>Populous: The Third Carnage</b> EA/Bulldog	Early '98
<b>Procy Apoc3D</b> Realms	Late '98
<b>Quake II</b> id Software	Xmas '97
<b>Quest For Glory V</b> Sierra	Early '98
<b>Reach for the Stars</b> Microsoft/SSG	Spring '98
<b>Redguard</b> Bethesda	Early '98
<b>Return to Kronos</b> 7th Level	Early '98
<b>Savage FI</b> Interactive Magic	2/98
<b>Sikes</b> EgoSoft	Mid '98
<b>SimCity 3000</b> Maxis	Spring '98
<b>Sn</b> Activision	Early '98
<b>Soldiers at War</b> SSI	3/98
<b>StarCraft</b> Blizzard	12/97
<b>Steel Panthers III</b> SSI	Xmas '97
<b>Su-27 Flanker 2.0</b> SSI	4/98
<b>TFX 3</b> DID	Winter '97
<b>Trespasser: Jurassic Park</b> DreamWorks	Early '98
<b>Thik Crye</b>	2/98
<b>Ultimate Race Pro</b> MicroProse	2/98
<b>Uprising</b> Cydrene Studios	Late '97
<b>WarBreeds</b> Broderbund	2/98
<b>WarCraft Adventures</b> Blizzard	4/98
<b>Wizardry VIII</b> Sir Tech	Mid '98
<b>Worms 2</b> MicroProse	12/97





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# In the Company of Lions

**A**t a time when originality in game design is being strangled by profitability, one man stands at the top of the list of exceptions to the rule of conformity: Peter Molyneux, game designer and co-founder of Bullfrog Software, wouldn't be caught dead designing a clone of anything. From *Populous* to *Swoon*, *Magic Carpet* to *Dungeon Keeper*, every one of his games has crackled with the sparks of original genius.

Hinting at frustrations with an increasingly corporate environment at Bullfrog, which Molyneux and his Bullfrog partners sold to Electronic Arts in 1996 for over \$40 million, Molyneux left the company this summer to found LionHead Studios in Surrey, England. CGW caught Molyneux in the midst of start-up frenzy to ask a few questions about his new venture.

by Chris Lombardi

## Can you tell us anything about your works in progress?

I can't tell you anything about the game design that I am working on at the moment, but what I can tell you is that it is the most important game of my career. We are being very ambitious about both the game concept and the technology it will use. It will definitely be on the PC—true color, ultra hi-res—and it will have singleplayer and be massively multiplayer. The amount of AI and gameplay that the design demands is currently scaring the shit out of me.

## Will 3D environments continue to be a primary focus of your designs?

3D environments are great to design. It is easy to visualize on-screen what you imagined the game being like in your head. However, I am sure that there is more that can be done with 3D, and so we are looking at some unique enhancements to 3D environments.

## Will multiplayer play be a major facet of LionHead's projects?

All LionHead's games will be multiplayer in some way or another—in fact, every game I have ever worked [on] from *Populous* onward has always had a multiplayer component. I have been saying that multiplayer games are the future since 1989!

## Designer Peter Molyneux Talks About His New Pride and Joy



## What role will you play in the new company? Will you be leading the design teams for all projects?

In a small company you always end up doing everything, so my responsibilities at LionHead include designing games, programming, and making coffee for everyone.

## Any special significance to the name "LionHead"?

LionHead was the name of Mark Webley's (a LionHead co-founder) hamster, and we liked the name and the hamster so much that it was our first idea, but then, sadly, LionHead died. We felt that perhaps this wasn't a very good omen and investigated a number of different ideas. One was "Starfish," but after watching the film *Yainspouting*, where a chocolate starfish is referred to on many occasions, we felt that perhaps this wasn't a good name either. Our next choice was "Red Eye," but we found that there were already other companies with that name—mainly in

the soft porn business—so, desperate for a name, we reverted to LionHead.

## What lessons learned at Bullfrog will most influence the way you will run the new company?

Bullfrog taught me thousands of lessons, but the major one is, keep it small, keep it simple. LionHead will never grow beyond 20 people and all of those people will be friends. You have to enjoy work, as it takes up such a large proportion of your life, and I believe the people you work with can play a very large part in enjoyment of work. Bullfrog became too large for me when it grew beyond 30 people.

## What are gaming's biggest problems at the moment?

I think there are three main problems. First, the industry must get away from producing clone after clone. I understand the temptation to try to reproduce a "winning formula," but if the industry is to move forward it must avoid publishing the same games over and over again. Second, the industry has to come up with more mass market concepts that appeal to a broad sector of the population. Third, and rather worryingly, the number of reputable publishers seems to be shrinking to an all-time low. There are now only a handful left of any worth.

For the latest on LionHead, visit its Web site at [www.lionhead.co.uk](http://www.lionhead.co.uk)



The Development Team at LionHead Studios.

# THE SIMPSONS Revisited

Matt Groening Chats About All Things Simpson at the Launch of Fox Interactive's VIRTUAL SPRINGFIELD

Followers of *The Simpsons* will no doubt recall that, on the show's season premiere back in September, a lucky fan became the proud owner of a life-sized replica of the Simpson family's rainbow-colored palace. In the midst of a boringly-normal cul-de-sac on the outskirts of downtown Las Vegas, this blazing, orange-and-yellow edifice now screens out at its neighbors.

Well, you may not have won the house, but *Simpsons* fans who long to bring a slice of sunny Springfield into their own home can do just that with Fox Interactive's new product, *Virtual Springfield*. (Check out this month's This Just In and page 216 of our Holiday Buyer's Guide for more information about the product.) At the launch of *Virtual Springfield*, *CGW* tracked down *Simpsons*' creator Matt Groening to find out some more about everyone's favorite yellow family.

Our first question? Where did these crazy characters come from? Not simply a product of Groening's imagination, the residents of Springfield are actually based upon people he knows. "They're a combination of my family and all my friends," Groening explains. "But the [main] characters are named after my own family: My father's name is Homer, my mother's name is Marge, and I have sisters, Lisa and Maggie."

Where, then, did Bart come from? "Well, I guess Bart would be me," Groening admits sheepishly. Bart may well have born some resemblance to a younger Groening, but as he gets older, Groening admits that he's beginning to identify more and more with Homer—so much so, in fact, that the Simpson family

patriarch has replaced Bart as Groening's favorite *Simpsons* character.

So, how did his contribution to the CD-ROM differ from his usual work? For his part, Groening says that the making of *Virtual Springfield* was actually a very similar experience to working on the television series. What the team did, he explains, was to write "an incredibly long, detailed script, just like for the show." The nature of the

rather than hard-core gamers. "This is basically for people who can't get enough of the show," Groening says. "There are all these games and puzzles and just little funny sight gags."



A quiet, suburban cul-de-sac in Las Vegas is now home to this life-sized replica of the Simpsons' house.

CD-ROM, with its necessity for multiple paths, allowed them to cram more and more information into the script. "Once you've been, say to the living room in the Simpsons' house," Groening points out, "you can go back to it and something completely different will happen." You'll also be greeted by a different member of the household each time you knock on the Simpsons' door, and you'll run into different characters each time you enter a room.

While the CD-ROM is full of games and puzzles, it is clearly aimed at die-hard *Simpsons* fans,



PICTURE PERFECT *Simpsons*' creator Matt Groening (center) and members of the *Virtual Springfield* development team.

And does Groening consider himself a gamer? "I play a few shareware games," he says. "My kids love a game called *Ku the Furo*, so I play that. But I [play] a lot of regular video games. [for the] PlayStation and Nintendo 64. And Tetris, of course!"

—Charlotte Parlier



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# Youngblood: From Comic-book to Computer Game

**B**ased on the popular comic-book series by Rob Liefeld, GT Interactive's *YOUNGBLOOD: SEARCH AND DESTROY*, features all the characters in the Youngblood team (from original members, such as Shalt and Chapel, to some newer faces like Toll and Palfire). A hybrid action/RPG, the object of *Youngblood* is to follow specific missions in order to complete different objectives; objec-

## In the Works >

tives that usually boil down to "defeat this villain." Gameplay involves controlling multiple team members in the isometric perspective (à la *Tomb Raider* and the *Sonic* series). While you can control up to six members, the game will usually assign you less. You'll use mouse-clicks to decide where to go, whom to kill, and what weapon to use. In addition to the usual melee and distance

attacks, each team member comes with a special move that only he or she can perform. Examples include Diehard's ability to heal other characters, Badbrock's earthquake ability and Toll's rolling ability. Characters will improve in terms of skills gained and battle efficiency, giving *Youngblood* its RPG-esque feel.

While this isn't the first game to use a comic book license, it could be the first not to disappear into total mediocrity. With GT Interactive's marketing muscle and the Liefeld name, this could be the start of a niche genre of comic-book based games — *Thery Nguyen*



What's a comic-book based game without some comic-book style scenes?

Youngblood fans, be sure to check out our Q&A session with artist Rob Liefeld at [www.computergaming.com](http://www.computergaming.com)



If you don't like the game's suggestions, go right in and assemble your own *Youngblood* team for the mission.



Out on the field, it's best to use everyone and attack an enemy simultaneously.

## In the Works >

# Prevent World War III

**E**lectronic Arts' helicopter action shooter, *Soviet Strike*, was a moderate success on the PlayStation. Now, EA is planning to bring the sequel, *Nuclear Strike*, to the PC. It's a top-down action game, reminiscent of old arcade shooters, with impressive graphics.

What's noteworthy about this game is that it is a fast-paced, combustible console-style game for the PC. It's different from the usual first-person fare, but it looks fun and beautiful.

You ride a variety of vehicles, including a modified Apache, a Cobra gunship, an A-10 Warthog, and a hovercraft. All of them carry some sort of heavy ordinance, including homing missiles, rockets, chain guns, and bombs.

The game's levels include many 3D objects that can be destroyed, and you can also interact with all of these objects. You can blow apart buildings, set trees on fire,

and create massive craters in the ground. *Nuclear Strike* will support 3D acceleration via 3Dfx cards.

The action-oriented gameplay is centered around a story of political turmoil in East Asia, as you seek to stop a mad warlord from instigating World War III in Indochina and Korea. I've only had a chance to look at the preview version of the game, but it shows promise. Look for *Nuclear Strike* to hit the PCs sometime in November — *EWOT/CHN*



*Nuclear Strike's* beautifully-rendered, top-down, console-style action is a refreshing change from the normal first-person PC fare.

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# The British/French/ Germans *Aren't* Coming

*Some Eye-Opening European Games That May Never Reach U.S.*

One of the joys of attending the European Computer Trade Show (ECTS) is getting an opportunity to look at European software that may never be officially marketed in the U.S. Since direct ordering via the World Wide Web makes it easier than ever to order foreign software, it seems useful to share some of the jewels that don't currently seem slated for U.S. distribution. Here are three games that we think will interest CGW readers.

**Infogrames' Phalanx** boasts a proud lineage. Though, at first glance it looks like a hybrid of



**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT** With its lush graphic detail, **Phalanx** seems to be a distant relative of **Journeysman Project 3**.

**Myr and Journeysman Project 3**, it has two very important contributors. The story was written by Paulo Coelho, the mystical author of the best-selling *The Alchemist*, and the game was illustrated by Moebius, France's most famous illustrator.

Action takes place in A.D. 1208 when a member of the Knights Templar finds a Coptic manuscript purported to be the lost Gospel According to St. John. The manuscript falls into the hands of the player's character, Simon, and it is his job to avoid the dreaded inquisitor Diego

D'Osme and get the artifact safely to Toulouse. Another interesting game that may not make it across the pond is Eidos' *Benno Enemy Lines*.



**ROADSIDE ATTRACTION** Along your quest, you'll meet *non-player* characters, such as this knight.

This game of squad-level, infantry combat takes place in four distinct environs: Norwegian fjords, North African desert, Norman beaches, and the Rhine Valley. *Benno Enemy Lines* is a relatively simple action/strategy game with a wide variety of weapon and vehicle combinations. Plus, it features an interesting mix of attribute-driven and personality-driven AI that should really make each mission play differently than the last. Eidos hasn't decided whether or not to market this product in the U.S.

Eidos has quietly unveiled what they believe to be the cultural descendant of *Euro: I-War* is not about information warfare (*I-War* is a technical term used by information warfare specialists), but features an epic battle for control of a Commonwealth of governments who have banded together to stave off rebellion. In a series of story arcs, the player



**U LOOK MANVELOUS** The cut-scene graphics in *I-War* are extremely spectacular and the in-game graphics don't degenerate very much.

must fly/commmand everything from a single-person fighter to a mega-transport in order to defeat the rebels. —Johnny Wilson



**“IT  
MAY VERY WELL  
REDEFINE  
THE STANDARD FOR  
ACTION GAMES.”**

STEVE KLETT  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
PC GAMES MAGAZINE





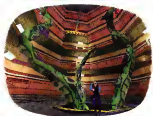
Half-Life 2 = decay constant  
 $t_{1/2}$   $\lambda$



VALVE







SHE'S SMART,  
HAS A GREAT PERSONALITY,  
AND KNOWS THAT THE WAY TO A  
MAN'S HEART  
IS THROUGH HIS  
STERNUM.



*SHE'S A TRAINED  
GOVERNMENT ASSASSIN  
WHOSE ONLY GOAL IS TO  
SILENCE YOU— PERMANENTLY.  
AND YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF PLACES TO HIDE.*

*THINK THE ONLY OPPONENTS WORTH FIGHTING ARE  
THOSE YOU MEET IN A DEATHMATCH? THINK AGAIN.  
WITH HALF-LIFE'S ADVANCED CHARACTER AI, YOU'LL  
BATTLE ENEMIES SO SMART, YOU'LL SWEAR THEY'RE  
ALIVE. THEY'LL TAKE COVER, RECRUIT OTHERS AND  
WORK TOGETHER TO BRING YOU DOWN.*

*AND THE REALISM DOESN'T STOP THERE. THINGS ACT,  
LOOK AND SOUND LIKE THEY DO IN THE REAL WORLD.  
HE COULD FEEL YOUR HEAD WITH TERMS LIKE 16-BIT  
COLOR, FULL-SPECTRUM LIGHTING, DSP SOUND, AND  
SKELETAL ANIMATION. WHAT IT ALL MEANS TO YOU IS A  
GAME SO REAL, SO UNPREDICTABLE, SO ALIVE, YOU'LL  
SWEAR IT HAS A PULSE. ADD A 3D CARD AND YOUR OWN  
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FRIENDS ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS SHE IS,  
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HALF-LIFE



# So Evil, It's Good

*Will SIN, Ritual's Next QUAKE-based Title, Succumb to the Sophomore Jinx?*

by Elliott Chin

**A**nger, Envy, Gluttony, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth. These are the seven deadly sins that will destroy man, but in the hands of Ritual Entertainment (the creators of *Source* or *AWACON*), they're the basis for an amazing next-generation 3D action game. *Sin* is the name of the game, and it Ritual's past successes are any indication, this could be a hit capable of topping all the other *Quake*: Killers on the horizon.

## THE START OF SOMETHING EVIL

Sell 100 years in the future, *Sin* takes place in a world where law enforcement has become prohibitively expensive for local government. Without adequate protection, one

city has fallen prey to the machinations of a powerful crime boss, Elexis Sinclair. Since the police can't stop her, the city has turned to a private law enforcement agency and its hero, Colonel John R. Blade.

As Blade, you have no inkling at the beginning of the game as to Sinclair's devilish plans. Your first task, in fact, is to respond to a bank robbery. But in apprehending the robbers, you discover that Sinclair is behind this and other recent crimes.



**BANG, YOU'RE DEAD** This is the Discovery level, where buildings look like half-completed structures. Notice the transparent windows and the map on the table.

influence each other. Says project leader Joe Selmske, "The different missions play out like the chapters of a book, and your actions during a particular mission will affect other portions of that mission."

The first mission, called Discovery, covers the bank robbery and your subsequent chase of the robbers through a construction site and warehouse. Your discoveries in Mission One will then lead you to Mission Two—Sin'lik Industries—which includes various levels in Elexis Sinclair's high-tech factories. During Mission Two, you'll discover that Sinclair has plans to expose the entire population to a

genetic virus. She plans to introduce the virus to the city by poisoning the water supply and by detonating virus-carrying bombs over the city.

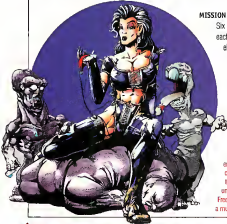
At this point, the Ritual team will offer a choice in the game: You can go either to Mission Three, the Military Base, to thwart Sinclair's attempts to steal

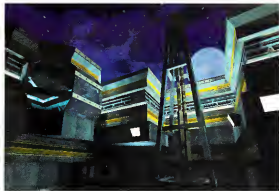
## MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Six missions make up the game, each with several levels. The levels within a given mission will be linked, and you may need to travel back and forth between levels to complete puzzles. The levels and missions will also

## THE CAST

**Elexis Sinclair:** The game's villain, Sinclair is the head of an industrial conglomerate, Sin'lik Industries. Her dabbling in chemicals has led to the creation of Vanity, a beauty-enhancing drug she has used on herself to gain comic-booklike looks and proportions. Now she is turning to political domination. She plans to unleash a powerful metagen upon the citizens of Freeport, through the water and air, in order to create a mutant army with which to take over the world.



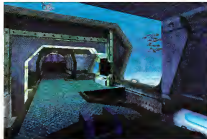


**OFFSHORE DRILLING** This is a shot of the Oil Rig level. It appears fully functional, with derrick and dink; you can interact with both of them.

warheads and equipment, or to Mission Four, the Aqueduct System, to protect the water supply from contamination.

Whichever you choose, by the end of the mission you'll have the evil mastermind Sinclair within your grasp. Mission Five, the Ocean Pursuit, entails chasing Sinclair to an offshore oil rig—her waypoint for shipping weapons—and her underwater base, which includes a transport to her island stronghold, the sixth, and last, mission of the game.

The missions progress logically, and Ritual plans to have in-game cut-scenes between missions to reveal more of the game's story. I played through several levels of the game for this preview, and they look fantastic. The initial Construction Site level in Discovery and the Oil Rig and Underwater Base during Ocean Pursuit are every bit as well-designed as the best *Amazeon* levels, with plenty of interactive elements. These levels exemplify the more realistic approach that Ritual is taking to level design in *Sin*. The Oil Rig, for example, has a dink and derrick, while the Aqueduct System has intertwining pipes and pumps. The levels in Island Stronghold, designed by Levelord, who designed many *Duke* 3D levels and the Edge of Oblivion deathmatch level in *Amazeon*, look really good.



**UNDER THE SEA** The Underwater Base is one of the cooler levels, with glass walls that enable you to view the underwater environment and nearby schools of fish.

Target Release Date: March 1998

Developer: Ritual Entertainment

Publisher: Activision

One of his levels, the Derwin Chambers, will be so challenging just as an obstacle course that he's limiting the number of monsters you'll have to fight. His Mansion level, which is Sinclair's home, is well designed with traps and all the accoutrements you'd expect in a tycoon's multi-story house.

#### TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

It's clear that Ritual wants to make *Sin* an immersive experience, rather than a simple action shooter. Not only will the levels be more realistic, but the overall feel will be as well. In some areas, such as labs and control rooms, you'll run into lab workers and technicians. You wouldn't

expect these people to be hostile, and in fact, they won't bother you. But they will sound the intruder alert unless you holster your weapon or quickly kill them.

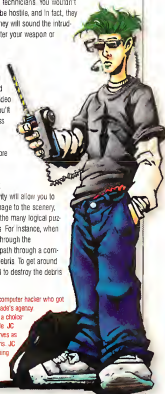
Instead of finding weapons spinning in air, you'll pick them up from gun racks and from dead bodies. When you see video consoles or monitors, you'll actually be able to access them to eavesdrop on Sin's communications, read email, and learn more about the game's story.

#### LEAVING YOUR MARK

The game's interactivity will allow you to do some incredible damage to the scenery, but it will also play into the many logical puzzles in the various levels. For instance, when you chase the robbers through the Construction Site, your path through a corridor will be blocked by debris. To get around the obstacle, you'll need to destroy the debris.

#### THE CAST

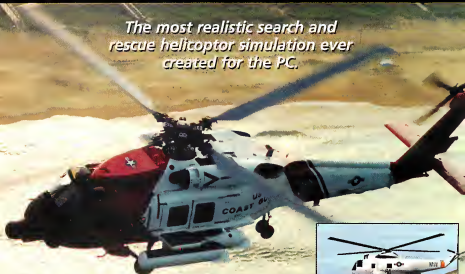
**JC:** Blade's sidekick is a computer hacker who got caught trying to invade Blade's agency. Blade gave the youngster a choice: Go to jail or work for Blade. JC chose Blade, and now serves as his companion on missions. JC is a valuable asset, informing you of secrets and objectives for each level.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #088

## The Second-Generation Engine

Ritual plans several enhancements to the Quake II engine to create a visually stunning and action-packed game. We will have all the Quake II engine improvements, such as rotating brushes for swinging doors and spinning wheels, as well as faster speed, due to its move to DLL files. So, like Quake II, we'll also have a "360-degree environment-mapped sky." That means that the sky will be much more realistic than in previous Quake games. But unlike Quake II, we will feature 36-bit color, which creates a richer palette and more detailed textures for the game's environments. We will also have colored lighting and blended color lighting, both of which will contribute to better spatial effects—like translucency and refraction—and a more immersive atmosphere.

Ritual also plans to include masked textures for chain-link fences and crates. The masked textures look and behave realistically. This means you can fire through the holes in the grating, provided that your bullets are small enough.

Jim Dase, one of the programmers for Sin, introduced us to the game's scripting language, which will be level-based. The scripting is separate from the map code, so you can hide and splash in portions of levels or objects to create unique events without compiling the whole level. Ritual uses the scripting language to build greater interactivity into its levels. This will flow seamlessly into the game as the levels by building in their own interactive elements.

Animation and AI will also be improved for Sin. In the case of animation, Ritual is moving to a skeletal-based model. All creatures are composed of bones, over which is draped a continuous mesh. In Quake, by contrast, characters are basically composed of "blocks." By using the skeletal model, designers can make characters move in a more fluid and realistic way. This means that in cutscenes you can see what weapon another person is wielding. With the skeletal model, you can attach scripted events to a bone under the character's skin, so that if you shoot in the neck, you can have blood squirt from that location.

Finally, Sin's AI will be more competent than Quake's. Certain enemies will be able to duck you and cover (use flashlights to look for you in the dark, and pick up weapons and health). The way the AI communicates is also great. Enemies will actually sound alarms and radio each other for backup. As I ran through a level with guards, I could hear them chatter with each other, calling for reinforcements. However, if you are quick enough, you can shoot guards before they radio for help. Yes, proving that you can see and defeat

(we won't tell you how) and then jump the gap in the corridor.

Interactivity is just one part of Ritual's formula to create a realistic environment. With the use of "action-based-outcomes," Ritual is ensuring that what a gamer does in one level will have consequences in another. Solishe offers this example: "If you are playing one mission and decide to blow up the power generators at the power plant, when you go to the aqueduct system the power may be off and the security systems disabled. This is a good thing. But if you run through another mission blowing up everything, you may not be able to deactivate the chemical plant's security systems, and you will have to fight the fortified security forces now on alert."

Ritual also wants to mix up the game play for different levels. In one level, the game might be fast-paced, as you try to chase enemies through a level while your sidekick, JC, keeps yelling, "Hurry! Hurry!" In another level, you might need to exercise caution and stealth as you try to infiltrate a base teeming with guards. In these cases, JC will set the tone by briefing you on your objectives.

From what I've seen, Ritual has a great-looking game on its hands. With the increased interactivity, linked missions, and action-based outcomes, the designers are striving to create an environment you can influence and a gaming experience that feels fluid and dynamic. So far, this hasn't been done that successfully on the PC, but with a March release date, the Ritual team has plenty of time to get it right. I, for one, think they'll deliver on the promise. **B**

## THE CAST

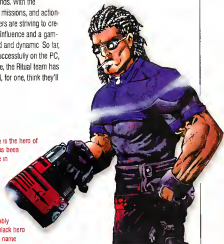
**Colonel John R. Blade:** Blade is the hero of the game, a hard gun who has been tasked with keeping the peace in this crime-ridden city. Ritual wanted to create an atypical hero for Sin. As a side effect of creating realistic environments, Ritual had to make Blade taller than the Quake manne. He's also probably the gaming world's first half-black hero with dreadlocks and a normal name.



**BLUE LIGHT SPECIAL** This top-down look at some scrambling guards illustrates the game's colored lighting.



**BE VEWY QUIET** This is the control room in the Mancos level.



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*Next Generation*

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*E-mailed Gamer*

*Feedback*

"This game has to be the best  
that I've seen in years!"

*E-mailed Gamer*

*Feedback*

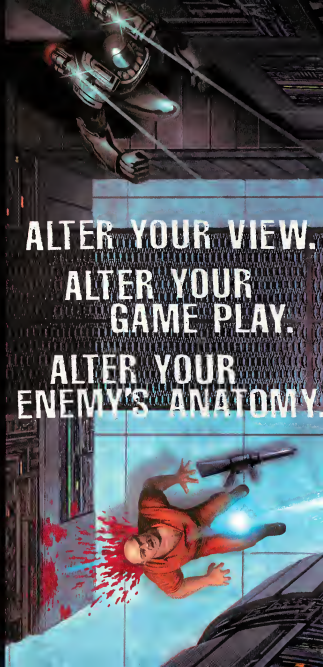
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where: above, below, behind, in front.  
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way the game looks, they change the  
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20 non-linear territories;  
no set path; explore ahead before  
completing previous levels.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #389

Target Release Date: November 1997

Developer: Valve Software

Publisher: Sierra On-Line

# Halfway to Perfection

*Sierra's Next Action Title Could Be the Sleeper QUAKE Killer of the Year*

by Thierry Nguyen

**A**s I write this, most of the Quake community is currently busy playing the just-released Hexen II. Hexen II was the best of the "Quake Killers" featured in our June cover story, and now everyone is looking forward to the other Quake Killers slated to arrive this Christmas, including Quake II. One that caught our attention after we finished the June roundup was Valve's HALF-LIFE. The surprising thing about this new Quake Killer isn't the fact that Sierra is publishing it, nor is it the game's diverse development team (which includes passionate hobbyists and industry veterans alike). Rather, what makes HALF-LIFE so surprising is its inclusion of excellent new features; features that could make HALF-LIFE the best Quake Killer this Christmas.

## ALIEN BODY SNATCHERS

HALF-LIFE starts out in a subterranean, decommissioned missile base that is now being used as a research station. The



**PACK ATTACK** The Half-Life AI is impressive. This pack of houndeyes (alien dogs) demonstrates the peck-mentality AI. They attack only in numbers.

main project at the base, the Portal Device, is activated, conjuring a score of aliens looking to foment a hostile takeover. What ensues is absolute havoc: Aliens run amok, scientists flee in panic, security guards shoot first and ask questions later, and CIA-like "Cleaner" squads attempt to neutralize the situation. Amid the chaos, you (a weapons research scientist) must try to stop the alien menace.

One of the first things you'll notice in Half-Life is the multitude of enhancements Valve has made to the Quake engine. You'll see such eye-candy effects as 16-bit color, colored lighting, and transparency in both glass and water. And that's without a 3D accelerator. Load up Half-Life GL, and these effects look wonderful. There are also some fine sound enhancements: We now get proper echoes, muffled underwater effects, and 3D sounds, all without special hardware.

Also, taking a cue from such Quake "films" as Operation: Bayfield and the forthcoming Ranger Gene Red 3, Half-Life will tell its story via cut-scenes



**IT'S GOT ME!** This eerie scene shows a security guard being dragged into a vent by who-knows-what.



applied in at appropriate times. Like the amateur Quake videos mentioned above, these cut-scenes are composed with the game's 3D engine, rather than prerendered FMV. For example, you might stumble upon a guard and scientist arguing, only to see the guard fling the scientist toward a nearby monster.

#### QUAKE LAB RAT

Most of the action takes place in the base as you try to make your way to the surface; but you'll eventually have to go through the Portal Device and confront the aliens on their own turf. In a feature similar to Half-Life's hubs, you move back and forth between the levels, which are all interconnected within the base. The result is a huge real-world

environment, rather than a string of levels. When you run from the alien research wing to the officer warrens to the reactor core, you actually move through three levels, even though you don't see any level-loading screens. There's much running back and forth, since you're shutting down power, circumventing security, or crawling around vents here and there.

Since most of the game takes place in a base, the architecture is logically rendered. There are specific labs, offices, stations, and break-rooms laid out as you'd expect in a real research installation. Although Half-Life isn't as architecturally exciting as some of the other Quake killers, the look and feel is much more realistic.

Also, the environment is dynamic, so you can leave bullet holes and blood splashes on walls, or shatter glass as you go. Finally as in Ritual's *Source* or *Ammon* Quake pack, Half-Life's levels sometimes change shape as you roam around in them. One particularly eerie segment, which seems straight out of *Aliens* or *Jurassic Park*, occurred when I walked down an abandoned hallway. Suddenly, the ceiling caved in, and a



**LOCK AND LOAD** Using skeletal animation, Valve is able to create incredibly realistic and fluid motion and animation for its creatures.



Play Half-Life on this month's CG-ROM!

**SP**  
G.POLICE

EVER BURY THE ONE YOU LOVE IN  
A MATCH BOX? THAT'S ALL THEY  
LEFT OF HIS SISTER.

FOR SLATER, EVENING THE  
SCORE WASN'T VENGEANCE. IT  
WAS SIMPLE JUSTICE.

AND IT WAS TIME FOR THE  
EXECUTIONER TO DO HIS WORK.

**SEE YOU  
IN HELL!**



**G Police** ... (back-slattering about "let us comply... prepare for the ride of your life" - PD Center

You are Jeff Slater, 21st Century cop. Fly your Zorac gun ship on 20 minutes through 51 of Colucci's domed arcstrata. You have fly-anywhere 550° maneuverability and tons of firepower. Serve & protect.

SLATER  
RETURN TO  
FORMATION!!

THERE, ON  
THE HORIZON!

HOLY  
MOTHER  
OF...!!



BEFORE THEM, A CORPORATE WARSHIP,  
A FLYING CITY OF DEATH, GOLD AND  
BLACK, WITH ENOUGH FIREPOWER TO  
TAKE OUT THE ENTIRE DOME.



3-D Accelerator Card Required.



FEAR, LIKE FINGERS OF ICE AND TITANIUM  
WRAP AROUND SLATER'S HEART-  
SQUEEZING, SQUEEZING, SQUEEZING...

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"Too Much of a Good Thing."

- Games Domain



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Interplay



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**"Hot Computer  
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**"Makes Quake  
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**"A Foul-Mouthed  
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Pleasure."**

- PC Games

**"Raucous Action and  
Hysterical Graphics"**

- Score 9 - Computer & Net Player



## REDNECK RAMPAGE



whole flock of Bull Chickens dropped from above and attacked me.

#### THE HALFOOD OF GAME ENEMIES

While the united and realistic levels look good, the true stars of this game are the enemies. *Half-Life* has some of the best adversaries in the entire action game genre, both in respect to movement

and intelligence, because it employs a skeletal model of animation that allows for extremely smooth and realistic movement. For example, seeing a "Cleaner" grunt duck behind a crate and reload his rifle with near-perfect movement makes the blundering Quake grunt look really simple.

The AI in this preview seemed only halfway done, but it already eclipses the enemy AI in any

other action game I've ever seen. The Cleaner units regularly patrolled their defined route, and they flanked me from all angles when attacking. If I hit them a couple of times, they'd duck behind cover, emerging only to take an occasional snipe at me. The biggest surprise came when I ducked behind a crate. I expected them only to shoot when I popped up to take a potshot at them, but

# NOTHING LIKE A GOOD




First, there's the rush. Six degrees worth of it. Coming or going? Who knows. But you're at the center of this suicide mission, and whether you like it or not (you do), you know you're gotta get this rage out of your system, or you may end up in a splatter of self-destruction (not to mention world-wide devastation). With the weapons, raids, assassinations and other assorted chaos-and-adrenex thrashing your every molecule, you don't have to descend to get down and dirty. It'll take you in all directions of once. But that's you. All over the place.



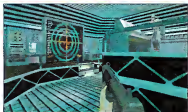
instead, they tried to flush me out by throwing grenades at my location.

Peck animals act in perfect sync. One time, I encountered a lone houndeye (alien dog), which I spared after sending it under a desk with a few gunshots. I later found a pack of them, and ran away, leading them to the lone houndeye under the desk. Sure enough, after seeing its friends, it gathered the courage to join the fray, at which point they all started attacking me.

My look at Half-Life was based on only three main areas (which are subdivided into about three to five sections each), and I was able to see only a few of the enemies. But, it looks as if Valve is on the winning path. There is still much that the designers are trying to squeeze into Half-Life, including puzzles, but if the final product polishes the excellent AI even further and comes through with consistent level design and other enhancements, Half-Life could take the genre by storm. 



**GOING FOR A SWIM** These two shots illustrate the differences between Half-Life's software engine's graphics and the GL version's graphics. While it's obvious that the GL version on the left looks better, the software engine still has transparency and color depth at 320x200 resolution.



**WELCOME TO THE WAR ROOM** Colored lighting, deeper color overall, and new textures combine to make Half-Life a more graphically rich game than Quake.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #362

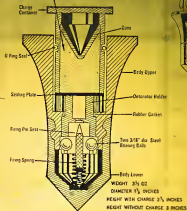
**IT'S NOT JUST A GAME.**

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Blood vessels and wires should never have been crossed.  
Softe and concavity, beam streams and processors.



WEIGHT OF EXPLOSION CHARGE 3.00 TONS



19:11

THE LINE BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE  
SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ERASED.



1200  
27.9 A  
184.5  
33.007 0  
0.2 A  
134.2  
Zu  
0 L  
Time

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**USMC**

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BY FOLLOWING THE STEPS BELOW AND STAYING WITHIN 25 METERS, YOUR 5MM RIFLE SHOTS WILL BE 201 (2014) - 200 (2014) (2014) (2014)

- DO NOT MOVE FROM YOUR POSITION AT THE TIME IT WAS SET AT THE FACTORY OR BY A PREVIOUS SHOOTER AND SHOULD BE VERY CLOSE TO YOUR ZERO
- CENTER THE REAR SIGHT APERTURE BY TURNING THE WINDAGE KNOB LEFT OR RIGHT (THIS IS CALLED MECHANICAL ZERO WINDAGE)
- THE UNWINDING APERTURE SHOULD BE 1/2"
- ROTATE ELEVATION KNOB IN THE DOWN DIRECTION (COUNTERCLOCKWISE). THE ELEVATION RANGE SHOULD SHOW THREE (3) INCHES FAST THE 200 METERS MARK. THE REAR SIGHT SHOULD BE ALL THE WAY DOWN FOR THE 200 METER WHOLE "0-100" BEFORE IT BOTTOMS OUT THIS IS CALLED MECHANICAL ZERO ELEVATION. FOR THE REAR SIGHT IF YOUR RANGE SETS A PIVOT, SET LINE UP IN THE ABOVE MANNER, AN APPROXIM. WILL BE PROVIDED TO ADJUST THE RANGE SCALE FOR YOU.



"Quake II will establish id as the pre-eminent blast-masters more than ever before."

—PC Gamer

So, to I'm was on the  
cave and next in line  
for my goodnight kiss.  
When I wake from the  
big heavy sleep, there will  
be only hell. And there  
will be hell to pay. My  
rail gun and BFG will make  
sure of that. The Straggs killed  
my parents and my only sister.

NEEDLESS TO SAY I AM  
NOT A PACIFIST.



U

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LINE NO.	EVALUATION
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3	Intense environments Mao gun barrels. Blow up subways. Smash glass. Toss grenades with perfect control. Cuss to evade hits. Give them Hell.

"Quake II, without a doubt, the game of E3."

—Computer Gaming World



CHAMBER



5:19:47 14:35 ALIEN SCUM CAN KISS THE BUTT OF MY RAIL GUN. Orders came in from the brass this morning. Tonight, I'll be on the C-30K Marine Carrier with the rest of 101st Spaceborne. A little hypostep, a couple thousand gallons of rationed I.V. Amusement, a few hundred light years, and we'll be knee-deep in Stragg's blood.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #340

Target Release Date: November 1997

Developer: Psygnosis

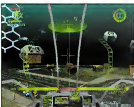
Publisher: Psygnosis

# Blade Gunner

*Psygnosis' New Shooter Offers Urban Environments Under Glass*

by Mark Clarkson

**T**he future looks bleak—but then, doesn't it always? A hundred years hence, all of Earth's resources have been depleted and mankind has pushed out into the solar system in search of more. Huge corporations, with their own selfish agendas, control what's left of humanity. They conduct an ongoing war, both



**▶ SCANNING...** The 35 missions in *G Police* run the gamut of mission objectives. In some cases, as in this shot, you'll need to scan crates for contraband.



**▶ BOGEYS** You'll attack laser-pecking criminals and track down your sister's murderers. Although the solo play should be rich, there are no plans for multiplayer support.

hot and cold, against each other and against your employer, the governmental police force: the *G Police*.

The *G Police*, an underfunded force, fly outdated equipment. Your primary ride, the Havoc jet gunship, dates from before the Martian wars. But like the French Foreign Legion of old, the *G Police* don't run background checks on recruits—and that's perfect for someone like you, who has reasons to hide his true identity.

## PLAYING HAVOC

This is the setup for Psygnosis' *G Police*, a work in progress that takes helicopter action into the future. This first-person shooter looks initially to be a helicopter sim, but it isn't. Your Havoc doesn't fly like a helicopter; it's substantially less maneuverable. You can't even fly sideways. I mean, c'mon!

The action takes place on the Jovian moon Callisto, in glass domed, dense urban environments, complete with skyscrapers and Blade Runner-type flying cars. Each dome has its purpose within the game universe, and each sports its own look, be it industrial or residential.

At present, *G Police* runs fast and pretty on a P-133 sys-

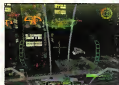
tem with a Diamond Monster 3D card. On this system, which will be the minimum requirement for the shipping version, the game sports high frame rates, nifty lighting effects, and dramatic, shrapnel-spewing explosions. The final version will support most major 3D accelerators and AGP systems.

The atmosphere is foggy and dark (Callisto is a long way from the Sun). Scenery fades to black with distance for an effect that's not terribly realistic, but pretty damned cool. The cut scenes are very nicely done. They play at the end of each mission, and reveal a little more about your plot to solve the murder of your sister, a fellow *G Police* officer.

Although you can destroy vehicles, both civilian and hostile, you do no damage to walls or buildings. I would have liked to see the occasional poorly armed missile blow the side out of an office building, à la *Blade Runner*, but it's probably just as well, since everyone lives under big geodesic domes. What's that old saying, "People who live in glass domes shouldn't throw rockets"? Something like that.



**▶ HAVOC** This is the Havoc jet gunship, the vehicle you pilot. Because it isn't state of the art, you'll also get help from AI-controlled wingmen.



**▶ GPHQ** A civilian vehicle flies past the *G Police* headquarters. The game tries to create an immersive environment with skyscrapers, cars, and civilians.



Play the *G Police* demo on this month's CG-ROM!



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MyCR's 3D engine brings to life explosions that clear the landscape and send limbs flying across the battlefield trailing gore.



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MYCR  
THE FALLEN LORDS

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Target Release Date: November 1997

Developer: Endless Software

Publisher: Interactive Magic

# Crossing the Alps

*HANNIBAL Takes Up the Fight Where ALEXANDER Left Off*

by Jim Cobb

**A**ll too often, the second game of a successful series lacks the initial thrill or the originality of the first, leaving naught but a pale shadow in its wake. Following quickly on the heels of *GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER* comes *GREAT BATTLES OF HANNIBAL*, another game about tactical combat in ancient times—which would appear to be an obvious candidate for this “son of...” syndrome. After all, no technological advances occurred in the century between Hannibal and Alexander; fighting was a matter of close combat with edged weapons. To the credit of both Endless Software and Interactive Magic, however, they made a tough design choice. *HANNIBAL* plays quite differently than *ALEXANDER* via a simple change of focus: *HANNIBAL* is a study of one man’s genius versus Roman military doctrine.

## IT'S STILL ABOUT LEADERS

*HANNIBAL* does maintain the central theme of the series. Leaders’ abilities are all-important. Superior ratings allow generals to move more

troops sooner and more often than officers still unclear on the concepts. Good generals can rally the troops and keep them in order by removing cohesion hits. Troop qualities are based on size, training, and weapons. Victories are won not by annihilation or by gaining position, but by demoralizing the opponent. Small, elite armies therefore can mow down hordes, if directed well. This system reflects Hellenistic combat well in *ALEX* and continues to do so in *HANNIBAL*.

*HANNIBAL*’s graphics look better than *ALEXANDER*’s, with more textured terrain and increased detail. Since the battles represented took place in North Africa, Spain, Northern Europe, Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor, terrain features are also more varied than in *ALEX*. The effect this has on gameplay is more psychological than mechanical; players will think more tactically if units actually look like they are in



woods, not simply standing on a leafy tile. *HANNIBAL*’s detail in depicting units would do the Osprey series on miniatures proud. Historically, Hannibal’s army was a polyglot formation, with contingents from Africa, Europe, and Greece. Thus, each nationality and tribe in the game is portrayed uniquely and clearly. The Boeotian slingers are shown in their short tunics, twirling their weapons, while the Celts make a fashion statement with their checked pants and multicolored shirts. The Romans are also clearly detailed with the different uniforms of the Hastati, Principes, and Triarii distinctly delineated.

The most significant new units are the different kinds of Roman legionaries (see the Manipulation sidebar). African and Indian war elephants also make their appearance, the former with head armor and “towers” on their backs.

## HANNIBAL’S BATTLES PLUS

Although Hannibal fought during the Second Punic War, the 11 battles in the game include one from the First Punic War (Bagradas Plain), four engagements where Scipio ate away at



**SCIPIO SHUFFLE** *HANNIBAL* realistically depicts the flexibility of the Roman legions. Here is a Roman formation at the battle of Zama. Note how, after the Roman player uses a manipular line extension, the holes in the Roman line have nearly closed.



**TOWER OF POWER** Baecula offers an assault on a Carthaginian fortress during the First Punic War, a nice change of pace.

Hannibal's bases in Spain and North Africa, and the greatest phalanx-versus-maniple battle, Cynoscephalae. Naturally, all of Hannibal's major battles are here, including his masterpiece at Cannae and his final defeat at Zama. Reinforcements are available that begin the battle off-screen, which is a nice addition. Cavalry pursuits also enliven combat, although they produce command-control problems. The campaign game, in which the Carthaginians must subjugate Italy in 10 turns, differs only in that the Romans in *Hannibal* are much more apt to take the strategic offensive than the Persians were in *Great Battles of Alexander*.

Even with all this variety, the enhancement that most sets *Hannibal* apart from *Alex* is one small command: manipular line extension.

(MLE). You see, a typical Roman army formed its infantry into offset columns of maniples (the Roman equivalent of the modern company). This gave their units the flexibility to fight on the broken ground of Italy and disrupt the rigid lines of the Greek phalanx. This formation also allowed lanes between the rear ranks if the forward troops had to retreat. Disciplined and well-trained, the Roman troops could swing quickly into line by extending the maniples. The line could then charge the disordered enemy with a unified, flank-encompassing wave.

This system of flexibility was the key ingredient to Rome's tactical successes, even in the hands of mediocre generals. Hannibal's genius often put the Roman system to the ultimate test, and it is this tension that makes *Hannibal* a potentially great gaming experience.

On the down side, the *Great Battles* system still lacks a log-of-war feature; you

can examine every detail of every unit at any time. Obviously, no real-life commander ever had this capability. Also, with the exception of Scipio Africanus, each battle features the same roll call of dunderheaded Roman commanders. These guys are so inept that it seems impossible for them to survive 20 years of battle. Hopefully the final version will have a more accurate array of Roman leaders. Finally, the combat animation really slows things down, especially in Internet play. You can turn off the animation, but why should you have to? Still, if this early version is any indication, *Hannibal* is much more than just *Alex* in Western Mediterranean clothing. **S**



**COLO FEET** The improved graphics let you play *Hannibal* from a more zoomed-out level. The snow at Trebbia provides a nice contrast, too.

## MANIPLE-LATION

The manipular formation of the Roman legions was based on four kinds of troops. These are new to the *Great Battles* series, and in *Hannibal*, they are depicted as shown on the right.

As the Punic Wars progressed, the Hastati, Principes, and Triarii were melded into one body, the Cohort, which would become the standard Roman fighting force.



### VELITES

Unlike most skirmishers, these troops were trained to engage in light shock combat after throwing their javelins. They could clear away their opponents, as well as disorganize the main enemy formations.



### HASTATI

These formed the first battle line of regulars. Armed with javelins and short stabbing swords, they could continue to disorganize the enemy while going in to finish the job. Their articulated armor and curved, body-hugging shields were lighter than the Greek Hoplite's equipment, but equally as effective.



### PRINCPES

Equipped like the Hastati, these experienced men would either shore up the first line, or deliver the decisive stroke.



### TRIARI

Savvy veterans who had lost a step, the Triarii formed the rear ranks. Their main purpose was to form a wall of long, thrusting spears behind which the younger troops could rally if things went wrong.

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Availability: Available Now

Developer: Genetic Anomalies

Publisher: Genetic Anomalies

# Cyberpunk Combat

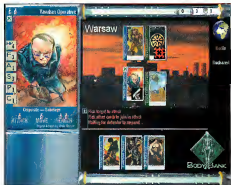
*An Online, Collectible Card Game That's Virtually Free*

by Johnny L. Wilson

**A**ll that stands in the way of your faction's plan for world domination are: a few hundred hackers, some terrorist gangs, a smattering of alien technology, the resources of a few megacorporations, a half-dozen James Bond-class spies, some criminals, and a UN anti-terrorist force or two. Should be a piece of cake, right? You just find the headquarters of your rivals, waltz in with your top operatives, and destroy them before they can destroy you.

Of course, it's a complicated world out there. It's move and countermove in a life-or-death situation. For every operative and every plot, there is a counterplot. Think of *Chron X* as *MASH: The Gathering* for science-fiction buffs or as *Ultimate New World Order* with

out the laughs. It's a serious-looking game with some hard-edged, graphic novel quality art. As with most collectible card games, the artwork was commissioned to a dozen or more artists in order to ensure sufficient variety. Unlike those in most collectible card games, *Chron X*'s cards exist only in cyberspace. Using encryption technology, Genetic Anomalies has created a world in which you can purchase and trade virtual cards more easily than you can run down to your local game store to grab booster packs of game cards.



**PRIVATE SPY** Using a 'Yousban Operative is often effective because it takes a counter-terrorist card to block its attacks.

with ranked players on the competition ladder. You'll also be able to trade cards with other players after you've registered.

## THE PLOT BECKONS

Once you've gotten your deck, you'll want to use the system's Manage Decks command to create a default deck for playing the game. Default decks must contain at least 40 cards, and it's a good idea to keep close to half of those as bases. Bases are divided into corporate, top-secret monastery, military, United Nations, and terrorist installations that yield covert, cyber, or military resources. Some bases are indefinite, meaning that they continue to provide a certain number of resources either until the end of the game or until they are destroyed. Others merely provide a certain number of resources for 15 turns. All resource points are cumulative and go into a resource pool. You'll need to pay attention to the yields on these bases because whenever you deploy, move, attack with, or use the special abilities of your operatives, you'll have to spend one of the three types of resources or



**DECK HAND** You'll need to use this screen in order to create the most effective possible deck or trade with other gamers.

Best of all, *Chron X* is a game that you can try out for free. Just go to [www.geneticanomalies.com](http://www.geneticanomalies.com) and download the current build of *Chron X*. You'll get a starter deck of 60 cards absolutely free. With that starter deck, you can play against the artificial opponent (a trainer designed to get you familiar with the game mechanics) or engage in non-ranked skill tests. If you decide to register, you download additional cards and can compete

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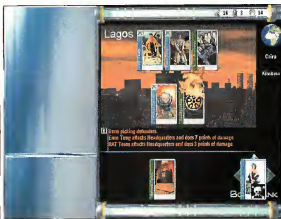
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# MAX 2

MECHANIZED ASSAULT & EXPLORATION



**NAPALM IN THE MORNING** Whenever a base or HQ is nearing destruction, an animated flame becomes visible to both players.

a combination thereof. So, it's advisable to balance the bases to ensure that you're likely to have some of each resource at your command throughout the game.

At the start of each game, you determine what the battleground will be. Beginners will generally take the United States since, with fewer cities, it doesn't take as long to find your opponent's HQ and get into combat. As players get more and more sophisticated, they will tend to expand their horizons to Europe, Asia, and the World! in order to extend game length.

As a game begins, you'll place bases and operatives in a pattern designed to tempt out the HQ of your opponent. Once you locate an opponent's HQ, the game usually becomes a battle royal of that city. One defensive strategy is to pile up your operatives in the HQ city. However, that means that your opponent will have no trouble moving from city to city, destroying your bases and cutting down on the number of resource points available to you in the cumulative resource pool.

Individual cards are rated by the number of resources needed to deploy, attack, move, or utilize special abilities (self-healing, healing others, increasing resources, reviving units from the Body Bank, and more). Cards are also rated for hit points, firepower, armor protection, stealth ability, perception, and cyber affinity (ability to use special cards

representing computer programs). Other cards allow you to repair damage to bases or HQ, steal your opponent's cards, or provide immobile defenses.

#### THE PLOT SICKENS

Most players discover that, as in *Macra: The Governance*, *Chron X* works best if you build special decks. Some players build decks of terrorist units, while others build military, corporate, or cyber units. Some decks are defensively oriented while others are unabashedly offensive in nature. Some decks have enhancement cards that build up the armor or firepower ratings for any card, and some have enhancement cards that work only for cyber operatives or UN operatives.

With my initial deck, I put myself in an A bomb-squad blast hole from the start. First, I built too large a deck for competition (meaning that my best cards appeared too rarely) and tried to have some of every type of unit. My strategy backfired when I would have a special weapon or enhancement for one type unit, but couldn't draw such a unit to deploy in order to save my life (or, in this case, my HQ). I quickly discovered that special decks were necessary.

In general, you'll find yourself building bases and deploying units of various types. You'll need counterterrorist units to block terrorists and you'll need special intervention cards to

nullify some special attacks. Naturally, this means that you'll need to trade cards with some other gamers and/or buy enough booster packs to get the special cards you want. Here's where collectible card games tend to get expensive. However, Genetic Anomalies says that in the beta test period, the highest-ranked gamers spent around \$50 in order to get enough special cards to be competitive against anyone. Without those special cards, it can get frustrating. I know that I deployed my best strike force with extra armor and firepower (playing a total of four different cards and spending plenty of resources to do so), only to have the unit stolen from me by a special "Worm" card. Such special cards provide surprise and balance, two vital elements in keeping the pace in one of these games, but it underscores the difference between the haves and have-nots within the game, nonetheless.

#### THE PLOT DEEPENS

In playing the beta version of *Chron X*, I've found that there is a sufficient mass of players to find an opponent at most times of the day. Unfortunately for me, some of those opponents are the very top-ranked players, and I've lost far too many ranked games to them. However, *Chron X* tends to be a fast-playing game (about 20 minutes per game for Europe and 30 minutes per game for Asia) with plenty of differing strategies and surprises. I find myself trying to play at least one or two games every night whenever I'm home and have access to my "all you can eat" ISP account. Of course, since it's free, you don't have to take my word for it: You can find out for yourself. You might even get a chance to beat up on me. ☹



**PICK YOUR BATTLES** This screen allows you to select the amount of territory you plan to conquer in a *Chron X* game.

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**KILLER EXPLOSIONS** A bad guy buys it in *Psychosis*'s upcoming *G Police*. Already it has great graphics, with high frame rates, cool lighting, and amazing explosions.

#### CITIES UNDER GLASS

By *Continued from pg 98*

*G Police* reminds me of the old *Quarantine*. The domes bustle with activity. There are multiple levels of traffic, both ground and air. The drivers appear to obey the traffic laws and pay attention to the functional stoplights. Although *Psychosis* says that *G Police*'s AI will be very good, with different behaviors for different wingmen and characters, the AI in the current beta is still far from perfect. I was unable to complete one mission because my ground support team got stuck in a traffic jam and couldn't make it to the rendezvous point. On second thought, maybe one should consider that another level of realism.

*G Police* missions aren't just combat oriented. You'll tail suspects around town (don't get too close), scan incoming freight for contraband, protect motorcades, and immobilize fleeing suspects. But all the missions—at least all the ones I played—include a good allotment of bad guys to blow out of the sky with an assortment of weapons. The final game will have 35 missions, which will take you through several of Callisto's domed cities.

All the missions I saw had multiple objectives, both major and minor. These objectives often require you to be in two places at once: defending your ground teams from aerial assault while simultaneously keeping tabs on a suspected smuggler who's blocks, or domes, away. Luckily, it's possible to win a level without completing all the minor objectives.

There's an ongoing story line but I couldn't tell, from the levels I played, that one's performance during a mission had any impact on how the story unfolds.

I suspect it doesn't, but we will have to wait until the final game ships to find out.

#### A PREVIEW WITH PROMISE

The preview version that I looked at had no analog joystick support (a temporary condition, while *Psychosis* works out the bugs in its force-feedback routines), and I was forced to play the game with the keyboard—not fun. *G Police* also allows you to drive with the mouse...in the cry. In practice, I found mouse con-



trol untenable, with a huge and nonadjustable null zone and poor feedback.

Still, I like what I've seen very much. It doesn't have the realism and complexity of *M-24 Hvo*—you can't choose your own load-out, for example, and there's no communication with your wingman—but in *Hvo* you don't get to fly between skyscrapers...at night...while dodging flying cars, now do you? **S**



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# MONSTER

## Buyer's Guide

### *Our 1997 Holiday Hot 100 Is Better Than Ever*

**I**t's never been easy being Santa Claus, Father Christmas, Hanukkah Harry, or any other legendary gift giver. And it's never been easy trying to be the Sanity Clause of an entertainment industry like the computer game business, either. We started out in 1987 with a Christmas Buying Guide. The photographer used a blue filter to try to get a "cool" effect, and we ended up with a near-blue Christmas tree on the cover. We tried to get working code on everything we covered, but even then, the publishing schedules for magazines and software diverged considerably. Everyone wanted their products included, and, at that time, there was room to include pretty much everybody.

Then, we wised up. We discovered that we actually had readers who didn't celebrate Christmas, so in order to include more products, we modified the title to the Holiday Buying Guide. Later, we tried to be comprehensive and list everything coming out for the 4th Quarter. Eventually, we realized that the big list wasn't really serving our readers, because it only described the games; it didn't make enough of a critical judgment. We started trying to include, as the

prologue to *The Princess Bride* claims, "only the good parts." Three years ago, we decided that the "good parts version" would be better as a list of the Top 100 games that we believed would be available during the 4th Quarter.

There was one major problem, however: Lots of the top games didn't ship during that time period. Every year since then, we've tried to be more stringent, and every year, more games in the Top 100 don't ship. So, this year, we've asked for working code on every product listed in the Top 100. We have played some portion of every game in this listing. If we couldn't play it, it ended up in each genre's appendix and wasn't eligible for inclusion in the actual Top 100. It's not a perfect system, we'll still have some games that won't ship in time for the holidays. After all, we had code for *Reo Baron II* and *Star Fleet Academy* prior to last year's guide. However, we're trying to minimize the chance for error in order for the list to be more useful for you. After all, what good does it do to hand a highlighted copy of the guide to your parental unit, spousal affiliate, significant other, bosom buddy, or guilt-ridden colleague if they can't buy you the games that are listed?

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## action

HEXEN II

### 1. *Quake II*

Windows 95, NT CD-ROM, \$40.95  
id Software/Activision, (800) 477-3650  
[www.idsoftware.com](http://www.idsoftware.com)

The hottest action title this holiday will be id Software's *Quake II*, the followup to last year's revolutionary 3D shooter, *Quake*. *Quake II* will be better than *Quake* in every sense, and will be the single-player game that *Quake* should have been.

Though *Quake II* is a sequel, everything about it is new. There are all new monsters, levels, and weapons. Even the storyline is different (or, you might say, existent). You are now part of an advance strike team sent to take out an alien enemy's defensive systems to allow an Earth-based space fleet to attack the alien planet.

Multplayer support will be better than in *Quake*, with faster internet games, more gameplay options (such as capture the flag), and browser support for joining games via your Web browser. Also, *Quake II* will be better in a technical sense, with richer graphics, more detail, and 3D card support out of the box.

We'll see drastic improvements in AI, as monsters duck under missiles, chase you, track you down by sight and sound, and even use your own weapons against you. Levels will also be more intelligently crafted, with real world environments and puzzles you will be



*Quake II will be the single-player game that Quake should have been.*

required to move back and forth between levels to solve the puzzles). There will also be an inventory system for picking up multiple items; you can then save those items for yourself or give them to a friend later. Also, levels will be more interactive, with plenty of breakable objects.

In all respects, *Quake II* looks to advance the 3D shooter genre even further, and would make an excellent gift for any action fan.

## 2. Half-Life

Windows 95 CD-ROM, STBA  
Sierra On-Line (800) 757-7707  
www.sierra.com

**S**ierra On-Line is known for its adventure games, but this Christmas expect HALF-LIFE to put Sierra on the action-game map. With great

graphics, an amazing AI, and better overall design than some other wannabe Quake Killers, HALF-LIFE should be a winner.

HALF-LIFE casts you as a scientist in a top-secret research facility you've just made a brilliant discovery that has the unfortunate side effect of causing a massive, hostile alien invasion. The whole situation has created a feeling of mistrust among the remaining humans, so even your friends start to turn on you, as HALF-LIFE becomes a game of every man for himself.

On the technical side, the game's designer, Valve, has included a multitude of effects, such as transparency colored lighting, and well done animation. If you play this game with a 3Dfx card, it looks absolutely gorgeous. The true star of the game is the AI, which models fear and team tactics well.

In the interest of realism, HALF-LIFE also seamlessly integrates its levels, so you never notice that you are moving from one level to the next. Instead, players will always feel as if they are moving through one gigantic, continuous environment.

*The true star of HALF-LIFE is the AI, which models fear and team tactics well.*

## 3. Jedi Knight

Windows 95 CD-ROM, STBA  
LucasArts, (800) 985-8227  
www.lucasarts.com

**S**tar Wars fans and action gamers alike will want to play LucasArts' DARK FORCES II: JEDI KNIGHT. You play Kyle Katarn, a one-time mercenary who is now training to be a Jedi Knight. You can join either the Dark or Light Side as you fight a Dark Jedi and his Force-adept henchmen. Woven into the game's missions is a rich story of the battle between Light and Dark. As you play the game, you'll find a variety of weapons, including Stormtrooper rifles and light sabers, and you'll also have to master a number of Force powers.

Jedi is a great sequel to DARK FORCES, with multiplayer capabilities and well-designed missions and levels



action

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## 4. Hexen II

Windows 95, NT CD-ROM, \$49.95  
 id Software/Activision, (800) 477-3650  
[www.idsoftware.com](http://www.idsoftware.com)

**H**exen II is yet another game using the Quake engine, but it features a fantasy setting and role-playing elements. You can play as one of four character classes (including a female assassin), as you attempt to stop the evil plans of a powerful godlike Serpent Rider and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The levels are more interactive, with breakable windows and furniture, and combat features a mix of melee and ranged weapons. The graphics are brighter and more colorful than those in Quake, and the architecture and textures for the game's four different time periods are breathtaking. Both fantasy buffs and action fans will enjoy this game.

## 5. Tomb Raider 2

Windows 95, DOS CD-ROM, \$79A  
 Eidos, (415) 547-1200  
[www.eidosinteractive.com](http://www.eidosinteractive.com)

**L**ara is back in her second adventure, *Tomb Raider 2*, and this time she's not content to just snoop around in dark tombs and caverns.

*Tomb Raider 2* looks a little better than the original, with more detailed creatures and locations, but isn't a huge leap in terms of graphics.

However, Lara does boast more animation now, in order to facilitate an even wider variety of moves and actions. In this adventure, Lara will travel to Venice, Tibet, and the Great Wall of China, while fighting more beasts and human antagonists, such as dark monks and Chinese assassins.

*Tomb Raider 2*, with its continuing brand of wonderful gameplay, smooth graphics and



animation—and the brains and beauty of Lara Croft—will make a good holiday gift.

## 6. Interstate '76

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95  
 Activision, (800) 477-3650  
[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)

**T**hough *I-76* is six months old, it's still a great holiday buy. Set in an alternate universe 1970s, the game allows you to drive around in souped-up muscle cars, burning rubber and shooting bullets at auto villains and vigilantes.

With a good storyline, cool cut-scenes, and goal-oriented missions, *Interstate '76* is a more sophisticated game than regular action shoot-'em-ups. The game also benefits from good voice acting on the part of your partner, Taurus, who drives along with

you for a good portion of the game to help you learn the ropes.

*I-76* has good multiplayer support, as well as good graphics and a great '70s-style soundtrack, that is perfect for funky action gamers looking for something different.



## Stocking Stuffers

**I**f you want some gift-giving ideas for the action gamer on your shopping list, try comic books. Some are well-written, with intelligent plots and great character development.

Nell Gaiman's *Sandman* comics are adult-themed, with great stories. Other well-written comics include Mark Waid's *Flash*, Grant Morrison's *JLA* (*Justice League of America*), and the *Batman* books. Visit your local comic book store for all of these likes.



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## 7. G Police

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Psygnosis, (800) GETPSYG

[www.psygnosis.com](http://www.psygnosis.com)

A helicopter ride on G Police would make a good holiday gift for those action fans who want vehicle action without the complexity



of a simulation. This Psygnosis title is a helicopter action game set in a futuristic, Blade Runner-like metropolis. As part of an elite police unit, you pilot a revolutionary VTOL aircraft, raid criminal hideouts, shoot down enemy aircraft, and patrol the skies and streets of your city.

With excellent graphics, gorgeous 3D accelerated visuals (note that a 3D accelerator is required), and fluid controls, G Police has the gameplay and the graphics to please most action fans.

## 8. Abe's Oddysee

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

GT Interactive, (800) 469-5961

[www.gtinteractive.com](http://www.gtinteractive.com)



ONCE UPON A TIME, Abe's Oddysee would be a great title for action fans and those who like classic platform games and engaging adventure environments. Abe's is a mix of both action and adventure, as you help our friend Abe

## Stocking Stuffers

A game controller is always welcome in an action gamer's stocking, since many action games are best played with either a gamepad or a joystick. The Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad is a good bet, as is the Microsoft Sidewinder force-feedback joystick. Microsoft's phone number is (206) 882-8080, and their Web site address is [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com). The gamepad costs \$45, while the joystick is \$150.



If your action gamer has a console system, some good games to get would be *GoldenEye* for the Nintendo 64, and *Fury*, *Furber VII* for the PlayStation. You can get these games at any electronic gaming or toy store.

escape from a meat processing plant where he is about to be made into somebody's lunch.

The worlds are in 2D, side-scrolling fashion, but the levels are richly detailed and gorgeously rendered. Graphics are top notch, and so is the gameplay. In addition to the normal fare of dodging, running, jumping, and fighting, you'll also talk to inhabitants of Oddworld in your journey, all of whom react and respond to you intelligently and have their own thoughts and motivations.

## 9. Shadows of the Empire

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$42.95

LucasArts, (800) 965-8227

[www.lucasarts.com](http://www.lucasarts.com)

SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE is a port of the popular Nintendo 64 game, which is set between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*.



You play a mercenary, Dash Rendar, as you try to thwart the evil machinations of the crime lord Prince Xizor. *Star Wars* is a hodge-podge of action gaming, with several levels of various types of gameplay, including snowspeeder and speeder-bike flying, Doob-style action, and 3D platform jumping and shooting.

With its different types of gameplay and its *Star Wars* storyline, *Star Wars* is a good bet for the casual gamer or *Star Wars* fan.

## 10. Legacy of Kain

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Activision, (800) 477-3650

[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)

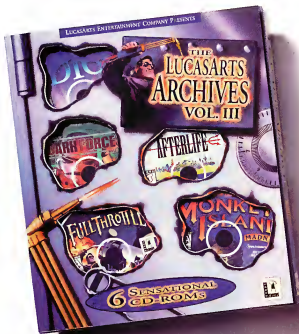
BLOOD SUCKING and vampire hunting are the hallmarks of *BLOOD OMER: LEGACY OF KAIN*. You play a dead nobleman who has been resurrected as a vampire to hunt down the ones who killed him.

Gameplay consists of running through room after room, all the while dodging dangers, hacking at enemies, and sucking blood from hapless victims chained to wells (in order to replenish your health reserves). This is not a game for children or the faint hearted, but is a decent buy for gamers looking for more serious fare. It is also reminiscent of console-based role-playing games, and has that same level of richness in story and character development.





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## Even More Gifts for Action Fans

**O**ur holiday recommendations are all games we've actually played, but here are a few games we've seen but for which we weren't able to get playable code in time for this article. We can't vouch for their holiday release dates, but if they do show up in time for Christmas, they would make great buys.

**UNREAL** is the Quake Killer that the press was talking about even before Quake hit the shelves last year. GT

Interactive tells us that **UNREAL** will finally arrive this holiday season, with shareware possibly appearing in October and the full game to follow a month later. **UNREAL** features 3D card- and MMX-supported graphics, a female lead character, and a bevy of weapons and monsters in a space/sf-fi story and setting.

**TRESPASSER: JURASSIC PARK** is Dreamworks' digital sequel to Spielberg's *The Lost World*, and looks to be better than the movie. You play a person stranded at Site B who must evade hungry dinosaurs and apply

your logic to real-life puzzles in order to escape the island. The world depicted in the game will be fully interactive and alive, so, if you want, you can just climb up a tree and watch the dinosaurs live their lives in a completely consistent and contained ecosystem.

Fox Interactive's **CROC** is a 3D platform game

in the style of the N64 classic, *Super Mario 64*. You play a cute little baby



TRESPASSER: JURASSIC PARK

minded action game. With its lovable mascot, good graphics, 3D-card support, and scads of well-crafted and difficult levels, it's a game to appeal to all ages.

**Activision's NIGHTMARE CREATURES** has a gothic tone. You hunt down werewolves and zombies in foggy dark tombs and graveyards.



NIGHTMARE CREATURES



UNREAL



CROC

crocodile that must save some captured furry creatures and defeat an evil boss. Though the game is perfectly suited for children and teens, it has enough challenging and deep gameplay to entertain any open-

You can play as either a male or female hunter, smashing through a gauntlet of evil with sword or staff, while picking up power-ups like grenades and pistols. **NIGHTMARE CREATURES** plays like *Tomb Raider* (from a third person chase view), and has good 3D graphics, as well as 3D card support.

AT LAST, A GOLF GAME  
WITH NO HANDICAP.



FEEL THE CLUB THROUGH YOUR FINGERTIPS. YOUR MOUSE IS POISED TO ADDRESS THE BALL. A SUBTLE OPENING OF YOUR WRIST ANGLES THE CLUBFACE. SWEEP THE MOUSE BACK, THEN FORWARD IN ONE ELEGANT MOTION. A SMOOTH AND RHYTHMIC SWING, FULL OF POWER & CONTROL. TRUE CONTACT. MOUSE ON BALL.

*A low drive into the wind? A fade with a six-iron round a tree? An explosion shot from a deep pot bunker? You have the technology.*

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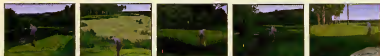
*Serious golf.*

*It feels perfect. And it looks perfect too. Floating terrain, surveyed to the last inch. Fine textures down the rolling fairway to the contoured green. The bunkers raked, and 20,000 frames of animation put you in the correct stance even in the most awkward lie.*

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The gameplay's packed with strategy, puzzles, and plenty of gun fighting action.



First person shooter action lets you set your sights and pull the trigger.



After you gun down the last outlaw, you'll ride off triumphantly into the sunset.

MEANT LOADING QUICKLY AND SHOOTING STRAIGHT.



Get ready for the good, the bad, and the even worse. As Marshall James Anderson, you'll face a horde of ornery, gun-slinging outlaws. You'll shoot your way through a twisted plot of greed and revenge. You'll arm yourself with firearms, as well as your wits. You'll fight alone, or engage in multi-player gameplay over modem, LAN or Internet. So go ahead, and make your day.



<http://www.lucasarts.com>



# adventure & rpg's

## 1. The Curse of Monkey Island

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95  
LucasArts, (415) 472-3400  
[www.lucasarts.com](http://www.lucasarts.com)

The third installment in LucasArts' classic *Monkey Island* series was our No. 1 pick in our E3 roundup in September. Now that we've actually had a chance to play it a bit, we're happy to report that it's still our No. 1 pick. *The Curse of Monkey Island* looks like one game that's actually going to deliver the goods.

*CURSE* is in the able hands of veteran LucasArts designers Jonathan Ackley and Larry Ahern, who worked on *FULL THROTTLE* and *THE DIG*.

*Curse* puts us back in the role of Guybrush Threepwood, dorky pirate extraordinaire, as he once again matches wits with the evil LeChuck, and attempts to remove a curse from his true love, Elaine Marley. Although it's been five long years since *Monkey Island 2* and series designer Ron Gilbert has moved on, *Curse* is in the able hands of veteran LucasArts designers (and *Monkey Island* fans) Jonathan Ackley and Larry Ahern, who worked on the last two LucasArts adventures, *FULL THROTTLE* and *THE DIG*.

*Curse* will have all the hallmarks for which the *Monkey Island* series (and LucasArts adventures in general) are known: outstanding animation, challenging and clever puzzles, and the most hilarious dialog trees in the business. Graphically, the new game is light years beyond *Monkey Island 2*, with richly detailed, wonderfully expressive animation that wouldn't be out of place on any movie screen. Gameplay-wise, don't expect anything radically different from any other LucasArts adventure—which, for most of us, is not a bad thing. The game's brain teasers are punctuated with a few short action sequences, à la *FULL THROTTLE*, while extended, ridiculous conversations with the usual cast of goofballs will constantly reward you—even if they never help you finish the game.

*The Curse of Monkey Island* looks like it will be a worthy addition to this classic comic series. For adventure gamers, it's a can't-miss title.



adventure & rpg's

## 2. Zork Grand Inquisitor

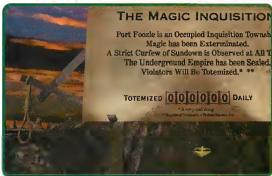
Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Activision, (310) 255-2000

[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)

**L**ike the Curse of Monkey Island, Zork Grand Inquisitor is a follow-up to a classic adventure series, only this series—Zork—happens to be just about the oldest and most beloved in all of computer gaming. And it, too, looks—at least from the beta we played—as if it will live up to its famous pedigree.

Zork Grand Inquisitor takes place about 100 years after the last game, Zork Nemesis. Now, the fantasy world is in a time of crisis. A tyrannical



fellow calling himself the Grand Inquisitor has seized control, sealed off the Great Underground Empire, and banished the practice of magic. You must join a magic resistance and time-travel back to different eras of Zork history to recover legendary objects (from previous Zork games) that can help restore magic to the land.

While ZGI shares the same basic engine as Zork Nemesis, the two games are as different as can be, in terms of graphics, the humorless, NYStical tone of Nemesis has been

replaced by a more comic, light approach—without sacrificing an overall sense of foreboding and mystery. Gameplay has been enhanced beyond the standard adventure puzzles to include spellcasting—a welcome throw-back to the old Encantamen series.

For longtime fans, Zork Grand Inquisitor is nothing less than a must-have. But this might also be the perfect Zork game (unlike the previous two) for everyone who's ever wondered what the fuss was all about.

*Zork happens to be just about the oldest and most beloved series in all of computer gaming.*

## 3. Diablo and Hellfire

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$29.95

Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707

[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)



*The first DIABLO add-on disk, called HELLFIRE, will be released in November by Sierra On-Line.*

**O**kay, you've probably played Blizzard's Diablo. But if, for some unfathomable reason, you haven't, drop this magazine now and go pick up a copy. Yes, CGW's Game of the Year is more dungeon romp than traditional RPG, but it's the best dungeon romp in years—so stop being a fuddy-duddy already.

If you have played Diablo to death, you'll be thrilled to know that Blizzard has just authorized the first add-on disk, called Hellfire, to be released in November by Sierra On-Line. We haven't seen it yet, but it couldn't sound more promising. Hellfire adds new quests, a new character class (the Monk), 30 new magic items, 5 new spells, 20 new monsters, and more. Keep your eyes peeled, and sharpen that ax. We're all going back to hell again. Woo-hoo!

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## 4. *Twinsen's Odyssey*

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Activision, (310) 255-2000

[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)

The latest adventure game from French designer Frederick Raynal (*Alone in the Dark*) is one of the best and most unique games of the year. This sequel to *RELENTLESS* (or *LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE*) places you in the role of Twinsen, hapless hero and father-to-be on the planet Twinsen, a beautiful, surreal 3D world that is the focus of destruction by a race of evil aliens. Can you save the planet? Will your dino-ily ever fly again? And what's up with those walking hot dogs? Combining adventure puzzles with action sequences, *Twinsen's Odyssey* is a long, challenging game with extra qualities rarely seen these days: charm and true artistic vision.



## 5. *Fallout*

Windows 95, Macintosh CD-ROM, \$184

Interplay, (714) 553-6655

[www.interplay.com](http://www.interplay.com)

At long last, a computer role-playing game without an elf or archmage in sight. Interplay's *FALLOUT* is a dark, futuristic RPG set 80 years after a devastating nuclear war. Mankind has been forced into underground vaults, and, as the game begins, you must venture outside—where mutants, radiation, and other hazards lie in wait—to find a chip for your vault's water purification system. As many gamers know, *FALLOUT* was originally based on Steve Jackson's *GURPS* system, but as... well... *Fallout* between Interplay and Jackson forced Interplay to create its own system. The beta we've been playing shows some holes, such as somewhat weak combat, but we're keeping our fingers crossed. If it's done right, this'll be the most original RPG of the year.



## 6. *The Space Bar*

Windows 95, Macintosh CD-ROM, \$30.95

Segasoft, (888) SEGA-SOFT

[www.segasoft.com](http://www.segasoft.com)

Steve Meresky's *The Space Bar*, released this past spring, is one of the year's best adventures, but, unfortunately, it never seemed to find an audience (call it the curse of *Rocket Science!*). *The Space Bar* puts you in the role of Alias Node, defective on the planet Armpit VI, whose search for a murderer takes him on a twisted trip through the eyes of various alien beings. Anyone familiar with Meresky's classic text adventures (*HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY*, *ZORK ZERO*) knows what to expect: tough puzzles combined with unabashedly silly humor. Marred only by horrendously annoying disc-swapping, *The Space Bar* is a first-rate title that showcases a master designer at the top of his game.

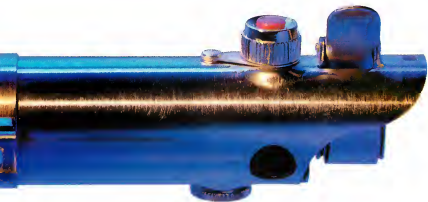


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[www.lucasarts.com](http://www.lucasarts.com)



THE OFFICIAL STAR WARS WEBSITE.  
[www.starwars.com](http://www.starwars.com)



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## 7. Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.99

Virgin Interactive Entertainment, (714) 833-8710

[www.vie.com](http://www.vie.com)

**B**ROKEN SWORD: THE SMOKING MIRROR is the sequel to last year's *CIRCLE OF BLOOD*, one of the best adventure games of 1996. This time, numerous technical and game-design improvements have been made. Expect to see the same great animation that *CIRCLE OF BLOOD* featured, spruced up with shadows and translucency effects. And for design, get ready to see the same strong plot, but with half the dialogue—and the chance to play as both George Stobbart and Nicole Collare. We only hope this sequel gets more attention than its underrated predecessor.



## 8. Dark Earth

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78

MicroProse Inc., (510) 522-3584

[www.microprose.com](http://www.microprose.com)

**A**fter years in development, the long-awaited *DARK EARTH* should be out in time for Santa's elves to load it on the sleigh. This unique adventure game, developed by Kalisto, tells the epic struggle of mankind 300 years in the future, following a cataclysmic meteor shower that has left the planet in perpetual darkness. In this world, you play the role of Anihan, a "Guardian of Light," who becomes involved in a deadly political and religious struggle.



The deep plot is matched by dazzling 3D graphics and a detailed, yet easy-to-learn, combat system. One look at the beta and we were ready: *DARK EARTH* looks awesome.

## 9. The Last Express

Windows 95, DOS, Macintosh CD-ROM, \$39

Broderbund Software, (415) 382-4400

[www.jstexpress.com](http://www.jstexpress.com)

**T**HE LAST EXPRESS is another great game that didn't fully get its due—which is why we're recommending it here. Created by veteran designer Jordan Mechner

(*PANIC IN PERAZA*), *THE LAST EXPRESS* is a murder mystery set aboard the Orient Express on the eve of World War I. With its unusual rotoscoped animation, sophisticated storyline, "real time" gameplay (events proceed on the train whether you do anything or not), and multilingual soundtrack, *THE LAST EXPRESS* looks and feels like no other adventure game you've ever played. Check it out.



## 10. Black Dahlia

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95

Take2 Software, (212) 941-2988

[www.bdahlia.com](http://www.bdahlia.com)

**O**nce again, Take2 has taken a serial killer (last year, it was Jack the Ripper) and created a first-person adventure game with the killer at the center of the plot. This time, *BLACK DAHLIA*

has a richer and darker plot—one that involves Nazis, occult rituals, and the Cleveland Torso Killer—all mixed together with good gameplay and decent FMV. With graphics that immerse you in the late '40s setting, quality acting (by game standards) from the likes of Dennis Hopper, and puzzles that are integral to the plot, *BLACK DAHLIA* looks as if it will outdo its predecessor, *REPERE*, and be one of the better adventure games to be released this year.



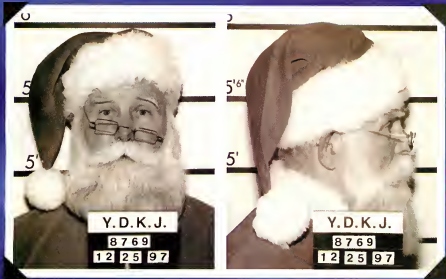
## Stocking Stuffer

In anticipation of Take2's upcoming *BLACK DAHLIA*, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of James Elroy's classic crime thriller of the same name. Elroy's *Black Dahlia*, the first part of his stunning L.A. Quartet, is one of the best novels of the 1980s—a dark, disturbing tale of love, obsession, and violence, centered around the legendary "Black Dahlia" murder in Los Angeles.



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**Category: A Christmas Case History**



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GAME #302

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## Other Holiday Adventures

Thankfully, after a long drought of decent games, there are plenty of adventure and role-playing titles on the horizon—and many of them actually look good. The following games nearly made our Top 10 list, but the lack of playable code at the time of this writing held them back. They are all worthy contenders, though.

New World Computing's **Night and Magic VI** would probably have landed at the very top of this list, had we seen any code, but, alas, it was not to be. This latest entry in one of gaming's classic RPG series, now updated with a brand-new 3D engine and a storyline tied into that of the *Hearts of Magic* and *Magic* games, is the one we're most looking forward to playing this Christmas—if it ships. We shall light a candle and pray.



Westwood's **Lands of Lore 2: Guardians of Destiny** is another long-awaited role-playing game that will be out by the time you read this, but it didn't get into our hands in time for us to play. See our preview in CGW #159 for details.



You've probably heard by now that Red Orb is preparing the release of **Riven: The Sequel to Myst**, which was apparently some kind of adventure game that a few people bought. We got Riven as we went to press—see the story in our

Read Me section. Keep your eyes peeled for Red Orb's **The Journeyman Project 3**, the latest game in this seminal graphic adventure series.

The great, hilarious Douglas Adams (*Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) is returning to computer gaming in a big way with the imminent release of **Starship Titanic**, a graphically-based comic adventure about the maiden voyage of an intergalactic spaceship that happens to crash into your house.



Bethesda's **Battlespire** is a follow-up to *Daggerfall*, set in the Elder Scrolls universe, but it is not a sequel to that game. Think of it instead as an action-oriented side quest, with lots of first-person 3D combat and multiplayer deathmatch options.

Sierra On-Line is embarking on two quests this season: **Quest for Glory 5: Dragon Fire**, and **King's Quest 8: Mask of Eternity**. The former is the latest—and probably last—entry in the company's popular *Quest for Glory* fantasy RPG series, which includes completely updated graphics and a new combat system, as well as new multiplayer options. Sierra is going way out on a limb with *King's Quest 8*, Roberta Williams' classic adventure series, by transforming the game into a first-person, action-oriented affair. Sierra promises that it's still an adventure game, and, with Roberta Williams still at the helm, there's no reason to be skeptical—but to be honest, we're a little skeptical. We'll see.

## Stocking Stuffer

Fantasy RPG fans looking for a great, immersive story to dive into when they're away from the computer should check out Jeff Smith's wondrous comic book, *Bone*. This independent, black-and-white comic mixes elements of Disney and Tolkien in an epic struggle of good and evil. Funny, charming, scary, addictive—*Bone* is a future classic. Jump on the bandwagon now.





**Category: Drop the Herring, Dirtbag!**



**Q:** Because of the origin of the phrase "Five-O," what would be a logical name for "Hawaii Five-O" in Alaska?

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# MONSTER

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Colonies cost +50 each  
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# puzzles & classics

MONOPOLY STAR WARS EDITION

## 1. Smart Games Challenge #2

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95

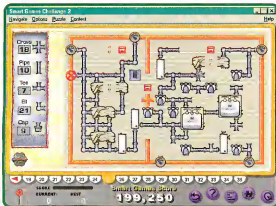
Smart Games, (800) 788-8815

[www.smartgames.com](http://www.smartgames.com)

The first **Smart Games Challenge** was clever and fun, a sleeper that, partially buoyed by its aggressive price point, stayed atop the best-seller lists for months (and it's still selling, more than a year later). Successful though it was, however, **Challenge #1** was still basically a mix of traditional logic, manipulation, and brain teaser puzzles brought to the computer. For the encore, Smart Games is doing a very good job of avoiding the dreaded curse of "sequelitis" by including puzzles in **Challenge #2** (many from well-known puzzle designers around the world) that take advantage of your PC. For example, one addictive game

must be solved by manipulating audio cues into a jigsaw puzzle format. If that isn't your speed, you can always try **Poll**, a cross between pool and golf, complete with sand traps for your billiard ball. **Swire Games** doesn't normally give hints—after all, it does have a contest with cash prizes for defeating the entire set of puzzles—but, responding to feedback, the designers are including tips for all but the top tier of puzzles this time around.

There are dozens of different puzzles, all with multiple levels, which translates to hundreds of hours of mind-bending enjoyment. The color palette is improved immensely as well (which helps a great deal when



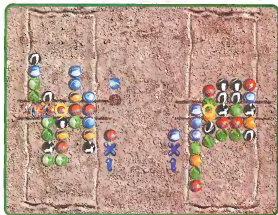
*There are dozens of different puzzles, all with multiple levels, which translates to hundreds of hours of mind-bending enjoyment.*

it's three o'clock in the morning and you're looking for that final piece to the puzzle). Now that this is a true Windows 95 application, the biggest challenge may be getting any work done once it's been installed on your desktop.

## 2. Lose Your Marbles

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$19.99  
SegaSoft, (888) SEGASOFT  
www.segasoft.com

**W**hile having the perfect gift for anyone who is addicted to Tetris or plays Baku Baku incessantly, *Lose Your Marbles* is an addictive little puzzle that is great fun in single-player mode against the computer,



and even better when you challenge a real-life opponent (via hotseat or LAN). The idea of the game is to clear your marbles off a grid by lining up three or more of the same color before your opponent clears his. If you manage to line up five in a row, you'll dump a nasty load of marbles onto your rival. The skill lies in looking ahead, so that when you remove marbles from the board, a row of the same color might drop into place, causing a chain reaction. As your play area begins to fill up, it becomes more and more difficult to maneuver your rows of marbles. Allow your screen to fill up with marbles and you lose the game.

*Lose Your Marbles* includes three skill levels (easy, difficult, and hard), multiple levels of gameplay, bonus marbles, and, in single-player mode, additional bonus rounds. This fast-paced, frustrating frolic makes an excellent addition to any puzzle-meister's collection.

*This fast-paced, frustrating frolic makes an excellent addition to any puzzle-meister's collection.*

## 3. You Don't Know Jack 3 and You Don't Know Jack TV

Windows 95/Mac CD-ROM, \$29.99 each  
Berkeley Systems, (510) 540-5535  
www.berkeley-systems.com

**B**erkeley Systems is adding two new titles to its *You Don't Know Jack* lineup, just in time for Christmas. *Jack 3* promises new question types (Threesomes, a multi-player version of the *Dis or Dat* question, Impossible Questions, Fiber Optic Field Trips To The Dead, and the What Is This? question), improved graphics, and a new dose of acidic wit and sarcasm.

In *Jack 3*, couch potatoes may well be able to answer all the questions, but you'll never get the batter of your smart-mouthed host, since greater customization now allows him to be ruder than ever. If you decide to play on a weekend, for example, he'll greet you with remarks like "Hey, loser, why are you staying home on a Saturday Night?"



YOU DON'T KNOW JACK TV



YOU DON'T KNOW JACK 3

puzzles & classics

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{Floyd from Accounting}

**NEW**

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Oh, so you've beaten Floyd already? Well, while you've been basking in the glory from your last victory, Floyd's been picking up a few flying tips from the Empire and the Rebels. Because he has *Balance of Power*. It's an add-on CD that's the icing on the asteroid for X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter



because it lets you fly for the Rebels or the Imperial Navy. With two new story-driven campaigns and cut scenes that dazzle the senses, you'll find your shorts wedged up at light speed. And watch out for Floyd. He hasn't exactly forgotten your last encounter.

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Where do you want to go today?® [www.microsoft.com/sidewinder](http://www.microsoft.com/sidewinder)

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**SIDEWINDER**  
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## 4. Pictionary

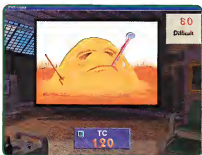
Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$29.99  
 Hasbro Interactive, (508) 921-3700  
[www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com)

Hasbro Interactive has joined forces with the creators of the Pictionary boardgame, leading one to believe that the CD-ROM version might retain the style and personality of the original—no easy task. Of the six different game types, it is the “you draw” category that is most reminiscent of the boardgame. Still, for those of you who were never any good at drawing with a pen and paper, we’re sorry to inform you that you’ll be no better with a mouse. The artistically challenged can, however, pick up points during the other five games. *Pictionary* offers single player, multiplayer, and team play with hotspot, internet, and LAN capabilities.

## 5. Acrophobia

Online only  
 Berkeley Systems, (510) 540-5535  
[www.hezerk.com](http://www.hezerk.com)

If you weren't convinced that the folks from Berkeley Systems are the zaniest game designers this side of Steve Merensky, you'll be a true believer after playing this game. This online-only contest pits you against three to more than a dozen people, as you all attempt to write witty answers to acronyms ranging from three to eight letters in less than a minute. The winners are decided by votes from the participants, with an edge given to fast typists. After a set number of rounds, the two top scorers face off for the acronym title. (We realize you can't actually buy this online game in the store. But if you're looking for a gift for a



computer gamer whom you don't really care enough about to spend money, why not just get a card and write the URL inside?

## 6. Monopoly: Star Wars Edition

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.99  
 Hasbro Interactive, (508) 921-3700  
[www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com)

**M**onopoly: Star Wars Edition includes all the features of Hasbro's original *Monopoly Multimedia*, but this time, the location is a galaxy far, far away. In the opening sequence, players are greeted by C3PO (with



the game, your character will be blasted into oblivion by the Death Star. The game also includes footage from the recently restored *Star Wars* trilogy.

## Stocking Stuffers

*World Champion Openings*  
 Centura Publishing, \$14.95  
 ISBN 0-943645-88-9

*Kasparov v. Deeper Blue*  
 A Batsford Book, \$14.95  
[www.batsford.com](http://www.batsford.com)  
 ISBN 0-7134-8322-9

Eric Schiller is a noted chess journalist and author whose many credits include work on the highly successful *Chessmaster* series. In his book, *World Champion Openings*, he deftly combines teaching acumen with the eye of a fan, in a comprehensive look at chess as played by every world champion, from Paul Morphy in the 1800s to



the modern mastery of Fischer and Kasparov.

Daniel King is the official match commentator, which gives *Kasparov v. Deeper Blue* a sense of authenticity. King tries to balance the action on the board with the media circus surrounding the event, and largely succeeds. If the account isn't totally

unbiased, it is gripping and human—which is more than can be said for the outcome of the match. Well worth a read, even if you aren't a pawnpusher.

## 7. Microsoft Entertainment Pack Puzzle Collection

PC CD-ROM, \$34.95

Microsoft, (206) 882-8080

[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

**T**en all-new puzzles—several created by Alexey Pajitnov himself—with an obvious Tetris influence. The collection features many innovative puzzle types, including the wacky Moxed Genetics, which has you playing God, breeding strange mutated animals to create a pure species; and the clever, strategic brain-teaser, Firty Flush. The CD offers a custom-install option, so that you can delete the games you don't particularly care for, and run your favorites directly from your hard drive. The Puzzle Collection is the perfect gift for those who like to combine strategic thinking with fast reflex action.



## Stocking Stuffers Creatures

**C**REATURES isn't really a game, rather, it's more a software toy à la *SimCity*, in which you raise little munchkins that seemingly stepped right out of the movie *Gremlins*. It's a lot more tailored to adults than *Tamagotchi* (see our *Kids'* software guide), and it's really nice to see some quality AI work in a game that focuses on something other than blowing things up. Charming and addictive.

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$29.99

Mindscape, (408) 737-6800

[www.mindscapegames.com](http://www.mindscapegames.com)

## 8. Chessmaster 5500

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A

Mindscape, (800) 234-3088

[www.mindscapegames.com](http://www.mindscapegames.com)

**T**he prominent chess program is back with better graphics and an enhanced chess engine. Better yet, the chess library seems to



work a tad more smoothly than in the last few versions of *Chessmaster*. The best part of this series has always been the incredible variety of computer opponents styled after famous grandmasters, which still seem to be a move or two ahead of the competition.

## 9. Smart Games Word Puzzles

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95

Smart Games, (800) 788-8815

[www.smartgames.com](http://www.smartgames.com)

**A** totally different breed from Smart Games' *CHALLENGE* series, this game is the closest you'll ever come to having a crossword puzzle magazine on your PC. If it isn't overly ambitious, it is very accessible, and offers a fast, pleasant diversion for any-

## Sealed Move

Despite disappointing sales, Sierra is moving ahead with *Power Chess 95*. Whether its fresh approach, including some more down-to-earth opponents, will challenge the dominance of *Chessmaster* remains to be seen. Interplay would seem to have a better shot



one, whether their passion be word searches, anacrostics, or a deviously difficult New York Times-style crossword.

## 10. Bookup

Bookup, (800) 949-5445

DOS \$149, Windows \$199, Mac \$99

[www.bookup.com](http://www.bookup.com)

**I**t's hard to believe that the same folks who brought us the simple yet effective *Boyer Fischer Teaches Chess* could create this complex software aimed at intermediate to advanced players. Even so, it's the best training guide there is for any chess player who aspires to a bit of Kasparov genius. Once you're familiar with the system, consider taking advantage of the large number of quality Chessworks books on CD-ROM.



with USCF Chess, backed by both the US Chess Federation and an all-star cast of grandmasters. Hasbro will try to continue its dominance in the classics genre with *Bookup*, but you have to wonder how much longer they can keep getting away with straight conversions of old boardgames.



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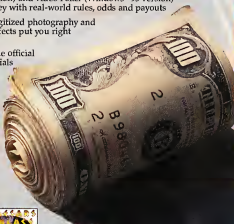
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The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

# sports

MICROSOFT CART PRECISION RACING

## 1. NBA Live 98

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$40.95

EA Sports, (415) 571-7171

[www.easports.com](http://www.easports.com)

The world's greatest athletes don't need tough competitors to keep their edge; their greatest motivator stares back at them from the mirror every day. Such is the case with EA Sports' NBA Live, CGW's Sports Game of the Year for the past two years, and a game that gets better with each new release, despite the fact that there have been almost no competitive basketball titles on the PC. And hoops fans, here's the best news: From what we've seen and played so far, NBA Live 98 looks as if it will continue that trend. This game has every chance of pulling off a three-peat.

EA has (thankfully) listened to the criticisms of the last version and seriously improved the biggest flaw: poor player control. The game's programmers cleaned their glasses and discovered that gamepads have more than two buttons, so gamers will have much greater ability to control the action—instead of just hammering on the Turbo button. Ball carriers can now execute pivots and crossover dribbles, for example, and can lean in or go for a

layaway jumper when they shoot. All new motion-captures better illustrate the action—player "sliding" looks as if it's been lived.

EA has also deepened the gameplay by allowing you to create your own leagues and by adding a 3 Point Shootout. With support added for 3D accelerators, the graphics are more awesome than ever. If you don't have an accelerator board yet, this might just convince you to get one.

If Santa had to bring us just one sports game this year, NBA Live 98 would be our pick.



*NBA Live gets better with each new release, despite the fact that it has no real competition.*

## 2. Baseball Mogul

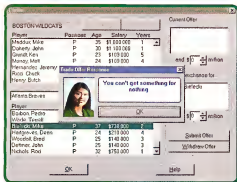
Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Infinite Monkey Systems, (888) 88MOGUL

[www.imonkey.com](http://www.imonkey.com)

The freshest and most original new sports game of the year came not from one of the heavyweights, such as EA Sports or Sierra, but from a small start-up company called Infinite Monkey Systems. **BASEBALL MOGUL** is unlike any other baseball game you've ever played. It puts you not on the mound against Tony Gwynn or in the batter's box against Clemens or The Big Unit, but rather, in Steinbrenner's leather armchair,

managing the business of baseball. In this game, you strive not just for runs or strikeouts, but for cold, hard cash, as well. You assume the role of one of Major League Baseball's 26 general managers, and work toward building a successful, profitable franchise—managing your roster, trading trades, setting budgets, dealing with contract demands. It's a control freak's dream, with every decision under your thumb—from whom to start to how much to change for hot dogs. Think you're smarter than the bozos currently running the game? Here's your chance to find out.



***BASEBALL MOGUL is a control freak's dream, with every decision under your thumb—even how much to change for hot dogs.***

As with the text-based simulations, **BASEBALL MOGUL** isn't for everyone, but those who love the wheeling and dealing of fantasy sports will have a blast. This is one "little" game that definitely belongs in the big leagues.

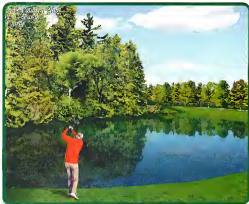
## 3. Links LS 1998 Edition

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$79.95

Access Software, (800) 800-4800

[www.accesssoftware.com](http://www.accesssoftware.com)

**Links LS** was not just the most popular golf game last year; it was one of the best sports games in general, retaining the top spot in our reader's poll all year long. We tried it too, except for one big problem: The load times were horrendous, even on fast machines. Access has cranked things up considerably in the 1998 edition, so that screens now redraw in just a few seconds. Other notable improvements include impressively easy-to-use internet play and two new games (scramble and alternate shot). New graphic enhancements, such as water reflections, improve the already jaw-dropping graphics. After all these years, **Links** is still the one to beat.



sports



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HAD BRAINS THEY'D  
BE LINEBACKERS.



**MADDEN**  
**98**



[www.easports.com](http://www.easports.com)

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#### 4. ABC Sports College Football: Heroes of the Gridiron

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95

DT Sports/ABC Interactive, (212) 456-7747

[www.abcinteractive.com](http://www.abcinteractive.com)

**O**FT Sports is following up last year's okay-but-titled *Monstrous Men* Football with two new games, based on similar engines but with a lot more polish: *Monstrous Night Football 98* and *ABC Sports College Football: Heroes of the Gridiron*. Though both look good, we're recommending the college game because of its original concept. You can choose from among 32 college teams, using a dream team of real-life players from different periods in the schools' history. The attention to detail shows a real love of the college game, and the ABC chrome—such as commentator Keith Jackson—adds to the charm. One big gripe from our sports editor, though: Where the heck are the Cal Bears?



#### 5. NHL 98

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

EA Sports, (415) 571-7171

[www.easports.com](http://www.easports.com)

**A**long with *NBA Live*, this was the other big franchise from EA Sports to make the jump to 3D last season. But unlike the hoops game, *NHL 97* received a very mixed reaction, wowing many gamers with its unbelievable graphics, but annoying knowledgeable hockey fans who couldn't deal with its faulty AI.

Fortunately, EA's designers know they have something to prove this time around, so they've created an entirely new AI for *NHL 98*, with assistance from Colorado Avalanche coach Marc Crawford, that they hope will add to the game's realism. Our guess after looking at the beta? They're getting there. Look also for international tournament play, new motion-captured signature moves, and enhanced graphics for 3D boards in the new version.

#### 6. Microsoft CART Precision Racing

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$54.95

Microsoft, Corp., (206) 882-8880

[www.microsoft.com/games/](http://www.microsoft.com/games/)

**W**e don't know if it's just Jeff Gordon's good looks or what, but suddenly auto racing is grabbing much more mainstream attention these days. Microsoft, never one to let anything go by, has jumped on the bandwagon big-time with an astounding-looking Indy car simulation, *CART Precision Racing*, that just might blow everybody away. With challenging and detailed racing action, accurately modeled tracks, downloadable driver and team statistics from real-life races, Internet playability, and force-feedback support, *CART Precision Racing* shows that Microsoft is not meekly entering the PC sports world—they're flooring it. The game might not make it in December, but a "trial version" is being readied for a November release.



#### Stocking Stuffers



Looking for a little extra time to spend with the family? Why not get a little extra time to spend with the family? Visit a SportsZone [www.espn.sportszone.com](http://www.espn.sportszone.com)! With up-to-the-minute live scores, and more, the site will suck productivity out of you the hourful every day. You can access the site for free, but for \$19.95 a year, you can receive great extras, such as opinion pieces by first-rate columnists. Gamers should know, too, that the site's fantasy sports leagues are a fine treat.

Yeah, You Don't Know Jack: Sports is a trivia game, but it's a great one, and one that every sports nut should own. Think you know more than your friends about sports? Gather around this digital parlor game—filled with questions that will humble even the most insufferable sports know-it-all—and prove it. Know what a scrummage is? Can you identify the "sport of queens"? Like all the Jack games, this one is wrapped in a slick, colorful, and hilarious package.

Windows 95, Win 3.1, and Mac CD-ROM  
Berkeley Systems  
[www.berksys.com](http://www.berksys.com)

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100



## 7. Jack Nicklaus 4

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$48.95  
Accolade,  
(408) 985-1700  
[www.accolade.com](http://www.accolade.com)

Well, Accolade's Jack Nicklaus 5 is supposed to be out about the time you read this, but we haven't seen anything as of this writing, so we're going to recommend something we have played instead: Jack Nicklaus 4. This is a great golf game, with much friendlier system requirements and load times than Links LS, and with one huge advantage over its glitzier competitor: an awesome course architect that lets you create, as well as import, custom courses. Five 18-hole courses, eight play styles, a realistic terrain model, and robust multiplayer support round out an awesome package for desktop duffers.

## Also On Deck

There are six more sports games coming up from north to south in this guide, so here's a list of others to watch out for in the next few months.

Along with Six Racers, Sierra's Field Pro Sports lineup this fall includes FPS: Football Pro '98, a follow-up to its long-running pigskin classic, but with a completely revamped interface, and FPS: Tench Rivers, the latest in its oddly successful fishing simulations. Also from Sierra, keep an eye out for SODA: Off-Road

Racing. The idea, taking inspiration from Papyrus, the results of NASCAR Racing.

Look early next year for two of the baseball games that slipped out of the '97 season: Microsoft's Microsoft Baseball 3D and Accolade's HomeRun 6, both of which needed more time to fine-tune their 3D graphics. In the meantime, Interplay says that its long-awaited 3D baseball game, VR Baseball, will be out before you read this. We haven't seen it yet.



## 10. Front Page Sports: Ski Racing

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A  
Sierra On-Line, (206) 648-8800  
[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)

And now for something completely different. Sierra is expanding its Front Page Sports line this year with a brand new title, FPS: Six Racers—and it makes our list simply for being so original. Oh, yeah, and it looks good too. More than an arcade racer, this downhill ski sim lets you compete in single or multiple event, or an entire season, at six real-life resorts. Gamers will need to choose their equipment, keeping in mind weather and snow conditions, and make other decisions such as ski length. Still skeptical? Look what Sierra did with fishing.

## 8. Rally Championship: International Off-Road Racing

Windows 95, DOS CD-ROM, \$34.99  
Virgin Interactive, (714) 833-8710  
[www.vie.com](http://www.vie.com)

This off-road racing game from Virgin has a surprisingly successful blend of arcade and simulation elements, easily making it the most accessible, and most fun, PC racing title of the year. You compete in any or all of the 28 stages of the 250-mile British Network O RAC Rally in one of four play modes:

Championship, Arcade, Individual, and Time Trial. Weather, sound, and terrain effects are awesome, yet the game retains a Daytona-like arcade feel that keeps things from getting too heavy. If NASCAR

leaves you cold, give Rally Championship a try.



## 9. Madden NFL 98

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95  
EA Sports, (415) 571-7171  
[www.easports.com](http://www.easports.com)



EA Sports' popular Madden series looked as if it could roar back into contention again this year...maybe...but at the last minute we've learned that EA has scaled back its overly ambitious plans to ship the game on time. The new 3D-rendered stadiums, motion captures, and native Windows 95 code are all in, but many of the hoped-for AI improvements, such as added penalties and extended stats, won't make it into the shipping version. They are to be issued in a later patch. We like what we've seen so far—a lot. Let's hope EA follows through.



manx tt

SEGA hard stuff  
www.sega.com

Pray to the motorcycle gods. Manx TT, the killer arcade game, is now on PC. Pick from 9 custom built SuperBikes. Gaa it down one of the most treacherous race tracks on the planet, England's Isle of Man. And try not to scrape your knops off through the turns. Just so you can feel it all in your gut, we've recreated every last bump and dip on the road. Equipped with 8 player Network Play over IPX and TCP/IP so you can race other speed freaks across the country. Get down on your knees.



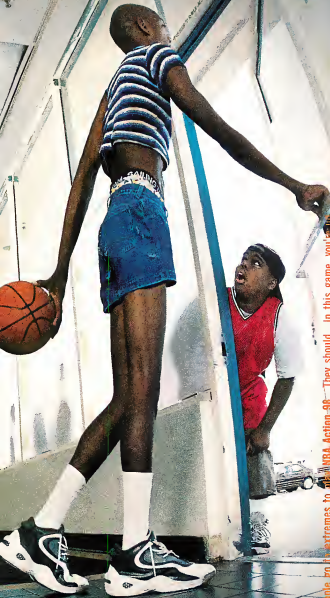


nba action 98



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[www.sega.com](http://www.sega.com)



Some people go to extremes to play NBA Action 98. They should. In this game, you set up a game, play it, and win nothing better than to send your puny little torso packing. We're talking real NBA players, every NBA team, all 19 Arenas. Team specific plays. Behind the back passes. Alley oops. It's all here. Chick Hearn even calls the plays. NBA Action 98. See how you measure up.



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daytona USA deluxe





As stock car racers say, "If you can't beat 'em, wait skill," beat 'em with a root vegetable." Welcome to the white-knuckled world of Daytona USA Deluxe, the phenomenal 3D sequel to the hit arcade game, now on PC. 8 different stock cars & heart-pounding courses. 70 air-ride tracks. 400 network play means up to 7 of your buddies can eat your rubber at once. Plus With-Force Feedback's support, you'll feel every bump, miss and wall bounce. Gentlemen, start your engines. If you ca



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# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## simulations

### 1. Longbow 2

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95

Jane's Combat Simulations, (415) 571-7171

[www.janes.ca.com](http://www.janes.ca.com)

**W**hen you take a helicopter simulator that was universally acclaimed as the best simulation of 1996 and add a deadly realistic campaign, ground-breaking multiplayer features, and breathtaking 3D graphics support, you have a real winner on your hands. *Longbow 2* takes the award-winning basics of its predecessor and adds support for flying two new helicopters (the OH-580 Kiowa Warrior and UH-60 Blackhawk), a new dynamic campaign engine with a wargame's richness of detail, and new battle environments that literally light up the game with explosive action.

Multiplayer support ranked as one of the most requested features from *Longbow* players, and Origin Skunkworks has delivered in spades. Up to eight gamers can participate in LAN combat, four over the Internet. Gamers fight coopera-

*Longbow 2 sports some of the most dramatic lighting effects yet seen in a sim.*

tively in the Azerbaijan campaign, or on opposite sides in Army wargames. You can pilot any of the sim's three helicopter models and choose to either man a craft solo or fly with another player in the copilot/gunner position.



The simulation supports 3Dfx Voodoo graphics cards and sports some of the most dramatic lighting effects yet seen in a sim. (They're a bit "Hollywood," but they look great.) Terrain is four times as detailed as that in *Longbow*, and there are plenty of nooks, crannies, and hills to use for cover.

*Longbow 2's* fully dynamic campaign lets you modify missions to your heart's content, which means you'll never find yourself flying the same mission twice. The best helicopter sim out there just got better. Don't miss it.

## 2. Flying Nightmares 2

Windows 95 & Macintosh CD-ROM,  
\$49.95, Eldos Interactive,  
(415) 547-1200

[www.eldosinteractive.com](http://www.eldosinteractive.com)

One of the most innovative flight simulations to come along in recent years, *Flying Nightmares 2* is the gift of choice for the

gamer who likes a little strategy with his flight simulations.

In single-player mode, *Flying Nightmares 2* is a conventional, but impressive, simulation that lets you fly the AV-8B Harrier vertical-takeoff-and-landing attack jet and the AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopter in defense of Marines around Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The campaign here is scripted, but impressive in its detail. Native support for all the major 3D cards makes for fast, visually exciting combat.

What makes this sim unique is its Commandant mode. In it, two teams of up to eight gamers

*FLYING NIGHTMARES 2 is the gift of choice for the gamer who likes a little strategy with his flight simulations.*

participate in a coordinated battle, via LAN or Internet. On each team, one player is Commandant, using a map interface to control land and air forces and send orders to the other players. The remaining players pilot Harriers and Super Cobras in support of the team's objectives. There's no *Command and Conquer* simplification here: Ground and air unit capabilities are modeled realistically, and you'll need to utilize such resources as E-3C Hawkeye AWACS aircraft and RPV drones to find and destroy the enemy.



## 3. Red Baron II

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$54.95  
Sierra, (800) 757-7707  
[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)

After a very long time in coming, *Red Baron II* should finally reach store shelves in time to make sure that thousands of sim fans will ignore their families on Christmas Day. This World War I flight sim features adjustable realism levels, authentic historical terrain, and a fully dynamic campaign that models dozens of missions.

*You'll need to be careful not to overstress the fragile plane and snap your wings during combat.*



Flight models are very realistic, and you'll need to be careful not to overstress the fragile plane and snap your wings during combat. Multiplayer action is there

as well, with free online play on Sierra's Internet Gaming Service. The only major downside is lack of support for 3D graphics cards.

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100



## 4. Jane's 688(I) Hunter/Killer

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95

Jane's Combat Simulations, (415) 571-7171

[www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com)

If you're looking for a sim with real depth, embark on Jane's 688(I) from Jane's Combat Simulations. This nuclear submarine simulation puts you at the helm of an improved Los Angeles-class attack submarine. Developed in conjunction with Defense Department simulation contractor Soranalysis, this sim pairs realistic submarine systems with missions that range from routine to Tom Clancy-esque. A mission editor lets you create your own patrols or utilize user-created missions downloaded from the Internet. Twelve detailed operating stations are modeled, you can run the entire sub yourself or enlist the aid of AI crew members. Multiplayer support rounds out the best sub sim since the classic Red Storm Rising.

## 5. Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$44.99

Virgin Interactive, (714) 633-1999

[www.vic.com](http://www.vic.com)

This freshman flight sim from Virgin and Eagle Interactive covers the too-long-ignored Korean air war. Pilots can fly for the U.S. in an F-51D, F-80, and F-86, or for the Russians in a Yak-9 or MiG-15. The reflective natural metal aircraft look fantastic on 3D cards; if you're still running 2D, better ask Santa for a 3D card to enjoy this sim. The game sports about 50 missions, along with a quick-mission creator and multiplayer modes. Although the canned missions limit replayability, there's unprecedented depth, due to the fact that Eagle enlisted the advice of Adm. Paul Gallcrest on mission creation and pilot AI issues.



## 6. Armored Fist 2

MS-DOS CD-ROM, \$44.95

Novalogic, (800) 858-1322

[www.novalogic.com](http://www.novalogic.com)

Novalogic's Armored Fist 2 sports some of the best graphics you'll see without a 3D card; the company's Voxel Space 2 technology works great with this tank sequel, which far outshines the original Armored Fist. You'll drive an M1A2 Abrams against Russian armor in single-player missions and



both cooperative and antagonistic multiplayer play. The controls are simpler than M1A2 ABRAMS or the upcoming SPEARHEAD, as the emphasis here is on action. That's not meant to be damning at all—this is the game of choice if you're more interested in blowing across the countryside than figuring out the controls of a tank's IVIS display.



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# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

## The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

### 7. Flight Unlimited II

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95  
Looking Glass Technologies,  
(800) 360-7455  
[www.lglass.com](http://www.lglass.com)

This civilian flight sim covers only a small territory—the San Francisco Bay Area—but it does so with unprecedented detail. More

than 11,000 square miles of terrain are modeled at a detail of four meters per pixel. And for once, you're not alone in the skies—hundreds of other planes share your airspace, executing realistic flight patterns. You can listen to them on radio, via the game's detailed air traffic control support. This is the first sim that will really give you an idea what it's like to go through the entire process of departing or landing at a very busy airport.



### 8. Jetfighter: Full Burn

MS-DOS CD-ROM, \$54.95  
Take2 Interactive, (412) 539-6407  
[www.take2games.com](http://www.take2games.com)

Aiming to be the Wing Commander of flight sims, Jetfighter: Full Burn combines the impressive looking 3D-enhanced simulation engine of



the latest Jetfighter II patch with the cinematic adventure engine of Black Dawn. The two campaigns on the game's four CDs give you the opportunity to fly in a future conflict on either the UN or Russian side. As far as realism goes, this is pure Top Gun: You'll fly F-22s off an aircraft carrier, or the stealthy MIG-42, if you choose to fly for the Russians. For the first time in the Jetfighter series, multiplayer play will be supported, with both cooperative and antagonistic missions available.

### Stocking Stuffers

What better gift for the flight-sim fan than the chance to fly a real airplane? Log

on to [www.beapilot.com](http://www.beapilot.com) and you can request a certificate that will entitle you to an introductory flight at a local pilot training center for only \$35. Wrap up the

certificate with a copy of Microsoft's Flight Simulator or Sierra's Pro Pilot, so your gift recipient can get some practice in before taking the real flight.

### 9. F/A-18: Korea

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$TBA  
Graphic Simulations Corporation, (972) 386-7575  
[www.graphsim.com](http://www.graphsim.com)

This sequel to F/A-18 Hornet 3.0 takes the campaign to Korea and adds a wide variety of user-requested enhancements that should make this the gift of choice for the serious simulated jet pilot. In addition to the impressive avionics and light modeling of the original, F/A-18 Korea adds a detailed mission editor that will allow budding strategists to create their own missions and share them over the Internet. The most obvious enhancement is the sim's support for the 3Dix graphics chipset, which will provide fully texture-mapped graphics. Of course, the speedy 2D shaded polygon-based engine is still there for owners of other graphics cards.



### 10. Pro Pilot

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$54.95  
Sierra, (800) 757-7707  
[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)

If you're interested in becoming a real pilot someday, Pro Pilot is the sim of choice. Sierra packs the sim's two CDs with AVI tutorials that teach you all the basics of VFR and IFR flying; interactive instructional sequences are available as well. As long as you're a U.S. resident, you'll be able to practice from the same airport you plan to take lessons from, as Pro Pilot models every U.S. airport and navigational aid. The biggest downside here is Pro Pilot's lack of support for 3D graphics cards, which means it's not as graphically impressive as its competitors.



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PC Gamer

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250 feet

100 feet

## Wish List

Three highly anticipated simulations missed our holiday buying guide for various reasons, but they are definitely worth checking out if they make it to store shelves before Christmas.

### Fighter Squadron: Screamin' Demons

**Over Europe**, the only World War II sim slated for release before Christmas, puts you in combat over the English Channel, the German Rhineland, and the North African desert in German, American, and British aircraft. Physics that have been radically improved



SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE

over developer Parsott's A-10 Cues! are complemented by damage models so complete that parts shot off aircraft have their own flight models. The sim's 3D graphics are so

## Stocking Stuffers

If the flight-sim fan in your life doesn't have a 3D graphics card yet, you now know the perfect holiday gift. Adding 3D graphics hardware can make an incredible difference in both the look and performance of newer flight sims. While there are a variety of good cards available now, our top choices for this holiday season are cards based on the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset: They have the widest support and top-notch performance. The Canopus Pure3D ([www.canopuscorp.com](http://www.canopuscorp.com)) is the most feature-packed of these, possessing 6MB of memory and a video output for playing games on your TV.



F-22 ADF

Activision promises to host free Internet play. A mission editor rounds out the package, supporting the creation of single and multiplayer missions. Activision couldn't get us a beta in time for our buying guide, and the planned mid-December ship date is cutting it awfully close if this is to make it to the shelves in time for the holidays.

Another sim that's high on our list but questionable for a holiday release is Digital Image Design's **F-22 ADF**, the

sequel to *EF2000*. The sim packs beautiful 3D card support, improved flight and systems modeling, and a scripted campaign that features input from Air Force veterans who helped plan U.S. strikes in the Gulf War. You can fly the F-22 in combat missions or coordinate the action from a strategic standpoint at an AWACS radar station. In addition, DID plans to release *F-22 TAW* early next year; it will be an inexpensive package that will add a fully dynamic campaign that promises to be much beefier and more realistic than the one in *EF2000*.

Finally, there's Novologic's **F-22 Raptor**. At press time, the company still wasn't showing the game or giving much information on its feature set, but it was promised for an October release. We do know this sequel to *F-22 Lightning II* will run under Windows 95, feature MMX (but not 3D card) support, and include improved flight models. Most intriguing is that Novologic recently announced an agreement with Lockheed-Martin, under which the aerospace giant will provide input into the game's design and allow its name on the *F-22 Raptor* box.

detailed that you can view the instruments from outside the plane. Multiplayer is included, and

## Santa's Stocking Sims

Some other sims that didn't make the Top 10 are definitely worth consideration. World War I aviation fans who insist on 3D graphics card support will want to check out *Fovus Coers Gaus* from Empire. In addition to Direct3D graphics and force-feedback joystick support, this enhanced sim includes full multiplayer support (available as a patch for owners of the original *Fovus Coers*), an editor for creating your own missions, and several new aircraft.

DID's *EF2000 V2.0* supports 3Dx and Rendition-based video cards. This updated package includes the TacCom mission editor, various AI improvements over the original version, modem support, Internet play (via TIB!), and both OOS and Windows 95 versions of the sim. With the abbreviated *EF2000 Strategy Guide* included, this is a great starter simulator, but it will appeal to experienced PC pilots too.

If you have a family member who's addicted to SST's Su-27 *Flanker* (they're the ones who can read the words *altitude*, *airspeed*, *fuel level*, and *vertical velocity*—but nothing else—in Russian), you'll want to pick up the Su-27 *Flanker 1.5* mission disc for them. This adds a number of improvements to the simulation engine, OpenGL 3D graphics support, more than 150 new missions, support for longer missions, and 16 player multiplayer missions.

Games who live for dynamic mission environments, in which the entire war is generated each time you launch a campaign, should ask Santa for a copy of Interactive Magic's *F-22*. The sim has some problems, such as inconsistent graphics, but no other jet sim released this year rivals its campaign engine.



SU-27 FLANKER



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ACTUAL GAMEPLAY SCREEN



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There are 7 deadly sins  
in the world....



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one of them  
right now.



# space sims

## 1. *Wing Commander: Prophecy*

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95  
Origin Systems Inc., (800) 245-4525  
[www.origin.es.com](http://www.origin.es.com)

It's a new dawn for the *Wing Commander* series. With the departure of series creator

Chris Roberts from Origin, the team faced the task of proving that the game wouldn't suffer. Once gamers unwrap *Wing Commander: Prophecy*, there will be no doubt that the series is alive and well. In fact, the fresh blood in the

development team has paid off, as *Prophecy* is poised to deliver the richest gameplay experience since *Wing Commander II*.

Although you play a new character—a rookie named Casey—old favorites Mark Hamill, Tom "Maniac" Wilson, and Ginger Lynn Allen are back for the cinematic sequences. *Prophecy* delivers some of the best-looking cinematics yet, but the emphasis here is on the action, not the movies. An all-new 3D space combat engine delivers beautifully rendered, fast action—with or without the aid of a 3D card. The look is greatly improved, with dynamic lighting effects and better explosions, as well as nebulae and other effects. Ship combat now features lighter craft with radically different capabilities. The capital ships you face are of unprecedented scale, and aren't likely to be taken out in one mission. The look is very *Babylon 5* esque, down to the organic appearance of the ships flown by *Prophecy's* new, malevolent enemy race. For once we'll see a space-action sim in which battles can have differing outcomes—they aren't always win/lose situations. Also here is multiplayer capability for the first time since the premature *Wing Commander: Armada*.



## 2. Starfleet Academy

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95  
Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY  
[www.interplay.com](http://www.interplay.com)

The final frontier is yours to explore—if you have what it takes to graduate from *STARFLEET ACADEMY*. In this space simulator, *Star Trek* fans finally get the opportunity to try their hands at commanding a Federation starship. You'll take to the stars on a variety of missions at the helm of various classes of starships, with interim sequences at the Academy featuring William Shatner, George Takei, and Walter Koenig, reprising their roles as Kirk, Sulu, and Chekov.

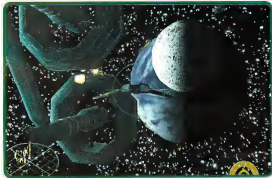
Battle sequences are the best yet in a *Star Trek* game, but they have a flavor that is more *Wing Commander* than traditional *Star Trek* (with a bit more targeting ability and damage control). However, this isn't just a space shoot-'em-up. As in the original series, it's rare that phasers are the first solution on a mission. Instead, you'll often find yourself playing the diplomat or solving intergalactic dilemmas as you boldly go where no gamer has gone before. In addi-

tion, *ACADEMY* sports multiplayer support, so that you can engage up to seven friends in space battles. In this mode, you'll be able to pilot Klingon, Romulan, Tholian, and other

ships. It's not the tactical speed game some were hoping for, but a strong story and interesting mission structure makes it a fulfilling gift for the Trekkies among us.



## 3. The 10th Planet



Windows 95/DOS CD-ROM, \$69.99  
Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-0700  
[www.bethsoft.com](http://www.bethsoft.com)

Although it takes place right in our own solar system (there's this nasty 10th planet causing problems for the Earthers), this is space combat on a grand scale. All the newer space sims attempt to portray the huge dimensions of large space vehicles, but nobody does it as well as Bethesda. In addition to being able to completely customize your own ship (to the point of designing new missiles), you'll also find a comprehensive strategic element. So aside from flying space combat, you'll be able to deploy Earth's defenses across the solar system, deciding which valuable resources to protect.

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## 4. Heavy Gear

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95

Activision, (800) 477-3650

www.activision.com

Although Activision no longer has the *MechWarrior* franchise, the company is still planning to be a major player in the giant robot sim arena. *Heavy Gear* has much of the look and feel of the *MechWarrior* series, but it takes place in a universe based on Pod 9's *Heavy Gear* role-playing and strategy series. Even at the pre-beta stage, *Heavy Gear* showed enemy AI with some cunning tricks up its sleeve. Enemy Gears will take cover behind rock outcroppings and structures

when they come under fire, and will break into an all-out retreat if they're heavily out-gunned. Units will try to circle around and flank you if you concentrate on a single enemy to the exclusion of others. Coordinated attacks also appear to be present, although it's hard to tell from a two-level playable demo. Gear maneuvers include crouching, sidestepping, dropping items, and picking up new weapons. You can even lob grenades over buildings and onto any enemies lurking on the other side. Although the engine is familiar (despite its 3D enhancements), the new gameplay aspects should make *MechWarrior* fans happy to find this in their gift pile.



## Stocking Stuffers

Space-sim fans tend to be science-fiction fans, so what better gift than the recently released video set of the *Star Wars Special Edition* trilogy? How about some classic science-fiction books that, with a little imagination, can beat even the most expensive efforts of Industrial Light and Magic. We suggest the space-battle classics *Starship Troopers* by Robert A. Heinlein and *Endr's Game* by Orson Scott Card. They'll take you on epic space battles right in the confines of your mind—now that's a hi-res display device!



## 5. Forced Alliance

Windows 95 CD-ROM,

\$49.95 Ripcord Games,

(408) 653-1897

www.ripcordgames.com

*Forced Alliance* is a game in which rank, faction, and foreign relations all matter. Here, rank isn't merely a pretty badge on your character graphic; with greater rank comes greater responsibility (whether it be commanding a squadron or an entire battle fleet). In the campaign, you'll be able to decide which alien races to ally with, maintain neutrality, or engage in outright hostilities. Your decisions have a real effect on the direction the story takes, so unlike most story-based space sims, *Forced Alliance* offers real replayability. The graphics engine isn't as state-of-the-art as in other titles on this list, but the gameplay makes up for that.



## More Space

*X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, last year's No. 1, arrived on the scene to a less-than-stellar reception. Though the space sim had good multiplayer elements, the single-player game was sorely lacking. The release of the *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter: Balance of Power* expansion pack provides a few more multiplayer missions, but more importantly, it adds a single-player campaign, complete with cut-scenes for both the Rebellion and the Empire. There are also other improvements, such as 3D graphics-card support. This expansion package should fill the gameplay gaps in *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*.



# A NEW FORM OF LIFE..

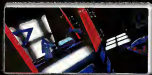
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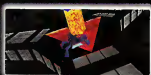
**MENDEL MUST ESCAPE FROM GALAPAGOS!**



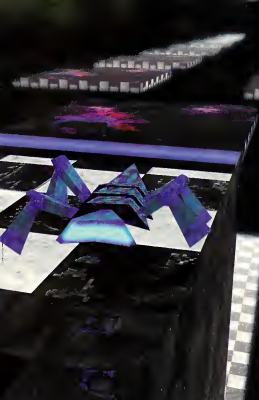
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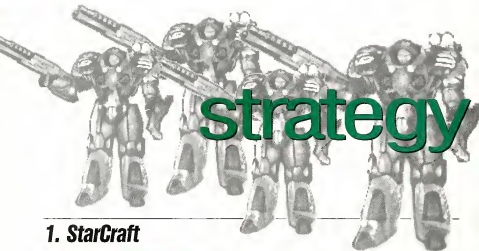
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# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100



## 1. StarCraft

Windows 95, Windows NT, or Macintosh CD-ROM, \$50  
Blizzard Entertainment, (800) 953-SNOW  
[www.blizzard.com](http://www.blizzard.com)

**O**f all the games coming this holiday season, few are as anticipated as Blizzard's *StarCraft*. Not only is the *CRAFT* series regarded as one of the most fun of all strategy lines, but the folks at Blizzard always seem to be able to give their games that special magic that impresses even the most jaded gamer.

In *StarCraft*, you can play as one of three races, each one having its own strengths and weaknesses. The Terrans play similar to *WarCraft II* units, and benefit from mobile buildings and the ability to scavenge resources from wreckage. The savage Zerg, the closest thing to bad guys in *StarCraft*, are cheap and plentiful, and have many special abilities such as regeneration and burrowing. The third are the Protoss, which are more costly, but also more powerful, with spell-like psionics at their disposal.

*In STARCRAFT, you can play as one of three races, each one having its own strengths and weaknesses.*

There will be three types of battles—land, space, and installation—for a greater variety of scenarios and challenges. Installation battles, especially, will inject a sense of role playing, as you'll command unique units and more specialized forces in more goal-oriented missions.

Among the many gameplay enhancements are queuing of orders, more combat realism, terrain and environment effects, and experience and inventory systems for units. *StarCraft* also includes a campaign editor for creating your own scenarios and joining them into a custom campaign. Multiplayer support is included and features player handicapping, world-wide rankings, and team play. These benefits—as well as free Internet play—will be available over Blizzard's battle.net gaming service.



strategy

## 2. Age of Empires

Windows 95, NT CD-ROM, \$54.95  
Microsoft, (800) 426-9400  
[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

Microsoft's first truly good game will be *Age of Empires*, a real-time title that mixes Civilization-like depth with Warcraft II esse and fun.

You play as 1 of 12 ancient civilizations, ranging from the Egyptians to the Persians, in four campaigns, a slew of single scenarios, and an infinite number of multiplayer games. *Age* is different from other real-time strategy games in that you need to research technology and advance to new ages of development, moving from the Stone Age to the Tool Age and beyond. In each age, you'll be able to make new discoveries that will allow you to build better military troops, but will also give you economic and diplomatic advancements, such as the plow for better farming, and writing for map sharing.

Gameplay isn't strictly military, and you will be able to win games by peaceful means, such as by building fantastic Wonders, by finding all

the religious relics of the world, or by simply amassing the most points. In multiplayer games, you'll be able to set your victory conditions.

*Age* comes with a scenario editor for modifying existing missions and creating your own. There is also Internet support for multiplayer games over Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone.



## 3. Dark Reign

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.94  
Activision, (800) 477-3650  
[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)

*Dark Reign* is Activision's depiction of the sci-fi battle between Imperium and Freedom Guard. It takes the real-time genre and pumps it up with improved gameplay and realism. *Dark Reign's* many enhancements include realistic terrain effects on movement, line of sight, and

***DARK REIGN** also has a map editor for creating your own scenarios.*

attack, as well as special unit abilities, such as morphing, burrowing, and stealth.



*Dark Reign* also has waypoint movement, production queues, and formations and patrol paths (which can be saved). In addition, gamers can set AI variables, such as when, and how long, to pursue

opponents. *DARK REIGN* also has a map editor for creating your own scenarios. Multiplayer support includes team play and Internet play over Activision's online gaming service.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #083

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## 4. Warlords III

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.95  
Red Orb, (800) 548-1799  
www.redorb.com

While most of the games this holiday are real-time fare, there are a few turn-based gems available. Warlords III is one of them. It has a fantasy setting and a role-playing element, as you recruit level-growing heroes to lead your armies.

Warlords III, unlike its predecessors, has a more story-oriented campaign in which you fight an evil lord. You hire heroes, build troops, and march them across the map, completing quests and laying siege to enemy castles (in order to take them over and apply them to



your own (and war effort)

With LAN and internet play and a variety of scenarios in addition to the rich campaign, Warlords III would be a good buy for the fantasy-minded gamer.

## Stocking Stuffers

There are plenty of other gifts besides computer games that might interest the strategy gamer on your list. Typically, strategy games employ fantasy and science-fiction themes for their backstories, so chances are your strategy gamer enjoys both genres in film and literature.

Some books to get at your local bookstore are Timothy Zahn's Star Wars trilogy, which provides a greater glimpse into the Star Wars universe, or Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, which shows from where many games and current books derive their fantasy themes.

## 5. Total Annihilation

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.99  
GT Interactive/CaveDog, (800) 469-5961  
www.cavedog.com

Total Annihilation's plot is a familiar refrain: Two factions battle out on a single planet with the entire galaxy as the prize. The gameplay, though, is innovative and fresh.

Combat is very realistic. You can affect the environment, and the environment affects you. Terrain can slow down your troops and nearby explosions and debris can cause damage to your units.

There are plenty of units in the game, and more are available from the developer's Web site if you purchase the game. With many options—for interface, multiplayer matches, game effects—and multiplayer support that includes Internet play, Total Annihilation should make any strategy fan a happy gamer.



## 6. Myth

Windows 95, Mac CD-ROM, \$49.99  
Bungie, (800) 295-0060  
www.bungie.com

Myth is one of the most dazzling games that will appear this holiday season; it features great 3D graphics, special effects, and interactive terrain.

The game has a rich fantasy campaign with intelligently crafted missions. In each one, you are handed some troops to command in typical real-time fashion, but terrain effects and a real physics model make combat more realistic and engaging. Dwarven bombs can warp terrain, and persistent debris remains on the ground.

If you have impatient warmongers on your shopping list, Myth, with its eye for good graphics, rich story, and bloody gameplay, would be a welcome buy.



strategy

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## 7. Dungeon Keeper

Windows 95, DOS CD-ROM, \$49

EA/Bullfrog, (800) 245-4525  
[www.ea.com](http://www.ea.com)

Among the many real-time games available this holiday, *Dungeon Keeper* could be the most sadistic and evil. You play an evil *Dungeon Keeper* who must guard his lair and treasure from enemy keepers and goody-two-shoes heroes through 20 challenging levels.

As an evil lord, you'll get to command a host of misbegotten minions, including trolls, orcs, dragons, and demons. You'll also get to motivate them in cruel ways, such as

through torture and repeated slipping. The game will challenge you to build elaborate dungeons using building files (in classic *SimCity* style), but also to order your creatures about constantly to dig rooms out of the underground, research destructive spells, build devious traps, and battle your disgustingly righteous enemies.



## 8. Magic The Gathering: Duels of the Planewalkers

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A  
MicroProse, 800-699-GAME  
[www.microprose.com](http://www.microprose.com)

The incredibly popular collectible card game is coming to the computer again, just in time for the holidays.

*Duels of the Planewalkers*, a newer incarnation with even more features than the first computer version, includes the full *Magic The Gathering* computer game, as well as an expansion set of more than 40 additional cards and multiplayer Internet support.

The game allows *Magic* fans to play the card game against the

computer or against opponents online. There is also an adventure portion to the game with a story and character development for a richer solo-play experience.

*Duels of the Planewalkers* would make a great gift for a *Magic* veteran or someone who wants to see what the *Magic* buzz is all about.



## 9. Red Alert and Expansion Packs: Aftermath and Counterstrike

Windows 95, DOS CD-ROM, \$24.99  
Virgin/Westwood, (800) 874-4807  
[www.westwood.com](http://www.westwood.com)

Though *Red Alert* is a year old, it's still one of the great games of the real-time genre, boasting the same gameplay that started the whole game moving. Why buy this when there are other, newer real-time games on the market? Simple—for the new expansion discs, *Counterstrike* and *Aftermath*. With these expansions, more units and scenarios, as well as more multiplayer options, are now available for the classic *Red Alert*. They would be the perfect gifts for your strategy gamer.



## 10. Conquest Earth

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$49.99  
Eidos, (415) 547-1200  
[www.eidos.com](http://www.eidos.com)

For the more action-oriented gamer or the *X-Files* watcher, *Conquest Earth* could be a good gift. You can play as either humans or aliens in this game in which aliens from



Jupiter invade Earth. Both sides have distinct looks, interface, and gameplay. There is also a strategic overlay for strategy fans, whereby they can coordinate the Earth's defenses against the alien menace.

Where action fans will get their kicks is in the direct control feature; you can control any unit if you want, moving him and shooting for him in arcade style.



# INSANE

## [3D CAR COMBAT]

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into Stores  
This November!



The most twisted driving and shooting game ever created just packed its bags and hit the road — Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Antarctica, and beyond. With eight new levels in all, hidden areas, world landmarks to destroy, new weapons and killer combo-attacks — it's a whole new world to blow away! A monster hit for the PlayStation™ game console, Twisted Metal 2 for Windows® 95 is a direct port with a network play option that allows you to annihilate up to 8 friends in a single match. Also compatible with all Direct3D video accelerators.



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# TWISTED METAL 2

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

## The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

### Strategic Gift Buying

Though we've already included a number of recommendations, there were just too many games for us to list properly, so some are added here. With strategy games, especially, there are many good titles that will be released by December, and just because you see it here, and not on the main list, doesn't mean it's any less a recommendation.

Any *Star Wars* fan would be thankful to receive LucasArts' **Rebellion** as a gift this holiday, provided they enjoy deep-thinking strategy games. This game puts you in control of either the Empire or



the Rebellion, with the power to rule worlds, build massive space fleets, and order about the stars from the movie (Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Darth Vader, and Princess Leia).

Blue Byte's **Incubation** is one of the few turn-based games available, and it's a good buy for those who like to spend time mulling over moves. It looks good with its 3D graphics, and is even better with a 3Dix card. You command squads of marines, outfitting them before combat with weapons and equipment, and then ordering them about against vicious aliens. The game looks good, and could be a good gift for the strategy gaming alien aficionado.

**NetStorm** is a relatively good game that emphasizes unit placement rather than the constant commanding of troops. You play on floating islands, and must position nasty buildings and weapons on your island to destroy enemy land masses. Activision's **NetStorm** is really designed as an Internet game, so it can be played quickly even over an Internet connection, and supports hundreds of players in a number of online arenas.

**Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain** is a grand life in which you get to command a galactic empire—colonizing worlds, desig-

ing and building massive fleets, researching world-bending technologies, spying and dealing with your alien neighbors, and managing the infrastructure of a vast star empire. THQ's epic strategy game is in real-time, with a tactical combat engine to handle battles between enemy space fleets. If the gamer on your shopping list likes science fiction, Pax would be a good choice.

Finally, MicroProse's **7th Legion** is a good game for those who want a quick and fun time at their computers. Like other real-time strategy games, **7th Legion** has base building, but you get all your money by killing, not by harvesting resources. This makes gameplay fast and frenetic. The game also lets you hold special cards in a hand, which can be played for special effects or bonuses, adding a twist to the real-time wargaming.



### Stocking Stuffers

The **Magic: The Gathering** card game would be an addictive gift. MicroProse's computerized **Magic** game and its expansion sets are a good buy, but so are the original cards. You can purchase a booster pack (the starter deck you need to begin playing) and additional cards at many comic book, game, and book stores for under \$10. You can visit the Magic company's Web site for more information at [www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com).



# BRUTAL

[ALL-TERRAIN RACING]

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# Dungeon Keeper™ is really bad.

*"Fiendishly good."*

- Computer and Net Player, 10/10

*"It brings bad things to life"*

- Computer Gaming World, ★★★★★

*"Wonderfully evil and wickedly addictive"*

- PC Gamer, 90%

*"Hell is bubbling out of your PC."*

- Happy Puppy

*"The bad guys have more fun."*

- Newsweek



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[www.bullfrog.ea.com](http://www.bullfrog.ea.com)

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# wargames

EAST FRONT

## 1. East Front

Windows 95 CD-ROM, STBA  
Talonsoft, (800) 211-6504  
[www.talonsoft.com](http://www.talonsoft.com)

Talonsoft has consistently improved its products with each release—only stumbling slightly when it ventured into the real-time arena with *Age of Sails*—but none of its previous games will quite prepare you for the potential of this grand tactical WWII simulation.

*EAST FRONT manages to capture the gritty feel of WWII street fighting, even in the early version we played.*

*EAST FRONT* wears its wargaming heritage proudly. The hexagons housing the various formations aren't just roomy, they're simply enormous; the tactical-level combat is as familiar as a boardgame layout, but feels less abstract; the game is, as expected, turn-based. But the design team isn't bound by tradition, either. The sequence of play has been trimmed considerably from the *Battlefront* series, yet it somehow manages to capture the gritty feel of WWII street fighting, even in the early version we played. The AI already seems better than previous Talonsoft games. With the fever phases per turn, *EAST FRONT* should work much better for battles between two human generals (both email and Net play are planned).

In an attempt to do justice to the largest land campaign in history, Jim Rose has assembled some of the finest minds in wargaming—Richard Berg (*Jumble Swif Show*), Jim Durnnigen (more than 400 game designs), and Dana Lombardy (the classic *Streets of Stalingrad*)—to consult on the design. While we usually shy away from design by committee, the overall effect here seems brisk, tense, and addicting—a fitting beginning to what promises to be another memorable wargame series.



## 2. Panzer General II

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$59.95  
SSI, (800) 601-7529  
www.ssionline.com

There are sequels, and then there are departures from the norm. While the first *PANZER GENERAL* was lauded for its clean SVGA-graphics palette, it looks dated indeed when compared to the lush splendor of *PG II*'s hand-painted maps. The core of *PG* is still there, as fun is still the main emphasis.

*The original PG was the best-selling wargame in history, and we'll be very surprised if this sequel doesn't quickly usurp its throne.*



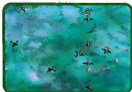
Nevertheless, a lot of subtle touches add needed realism. You must now trace to a city or map edge for supply; heavy bombers are replaced by medium bombers more appropriate to the operational nature of battle; the abilities of recon units are enhanced; and you can't simply drop into the enemy rear areas and start cranking out units.

The campaigns are different from before, and include minicampaigns and separate campaigns for the Soviet, U.S., and British forces. There are also more levels of victory, with some of the "take every last town" excesses from *ALLIED GENERAL* happily gone. The original *PG* was the best-selling wargame in history, and we'll be very surprised if *PG II* doesn't quickly usurp its throne.

## 3. Achtung Spitfire

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95  
Avalon Hill, (800) 999-3222  
www.avalonhill.com

Ever since *Flight Commander II*, Charlie Moylan has been a designer to watch for the unique angles he brings to old-style games. This Over the Reich sequel benefits from an operational real-time overlay, but retains the initiative-based phased tactical combat of its predecessor. A simple learning curve combines with a great AI to produce the best simulation of the Battle of Britain since *Twelve Finest Hours* (see Robin Kim's review this month). Our own Denny Atkin called this a "realistic, turn-based flight sim." Who are we to argue?



*Our own Denny Atkin called this a "realistic, turn-based flight sim." Who are we to argue?*



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# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## 4. Sid Meier's Gettysburg

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A  
Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525  
[www.ea.com](http://www.ea.com)

**S**id Meier is no stranger to real-time games, as anyone who has played *Parkitect* or *Railroad Tycoon* can attest. As usual, Sid places fun first, but the pleasant surprise is that the design has a lot of American Civil War flavor without getting bogged down in details. The dynamic campaign includes a number of reasonable "what-if" engagements, the famous and bitter fighting around Devil's Den and Little Round Top, and even randomly generated scenarios. It looks as though Sid has another big hit on the horizon.



## 5. Close Combat II

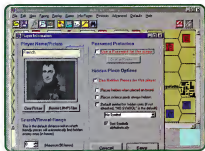
Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A  
Microsoft, (206) 882-8080  
[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

**F**or all the hoopla surrounding real-time games, most of them are actually overblown copies of *Command & Conquer* or *WarCraft II*. The folks at Atomic Games at least follow their own muse, and everything seems to have finally come together for them in this sequel to *Close Combat*. Moving from France to Arnhem makes for a lot more interesting WWII gaming situation, and when you add in the improved line-of-sight algorithms, better AI, and vastly improved interface, it's hard to recognize much of the original. This should be Atomic's best game since 1994's *Operation Crusader*.

## 6. Aide de Camp 2.0

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$78A  
HPS Simulations (408) 554-8381  
[www.hpsims.com](http://www.hpsims.com)

**A**IDE DE CAMP is not a game per se, but a combination editor/utility/design kit that's a godsend to anyone who still enjoys playing board wargames via email. The new version is Win 95-native, and supports high-res, so that your panzer divisions look as vibrant on the PC as on cardboard. You must own each individual boardgame to use the product—no rules or AI are included—but it certainly beats having your cat take out the Iron Brigade with a well-placed paw. Of the more than 100 games supported by AIDE DE CAMP 1.0, over 95 percent should convert to the new graphic format, and HPS adds new titles every month.



# Attack points

continuous rapid blows to protrusions on back can impair creature's balance.

powerful but inefficient wick. exploit by changing direction of attack often.

vulnerable pressure point between first and sixth ribs.

weak abdominal tissue.

contacts are tactile sharp and capable of snake-like reflexes.



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## 7. Man O' War

**B**ack in the prehistoric era, Simulations Canada crafted realistic naval wargames that were solely text-based. Strategy First is a company that believes that graphics are a necessity rather than a luxury. Somehow, these companies have joined forces to create a game that re-creates the Age of Sail era from a command perspective.

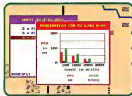


It's totally different from other AH's *Wooden Ships & Iron Men* or Talonsoft's *Age of Sail*, and is one of the finest wargames of the year.

**Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$TBA**  
Virgin, (800) 874-4607  
[www.strategyfirst.com](http://www.strategyfirst.com)

## 8. Tigers on the Prowl 2.0

**D**espite lackluster graphics, this game remains high on the *CGW* readers' Top 100 list, because it is simply the most realistic, detailed simulation of WWII tactical combat to be found



anywhere. If you're awake at night concerned how changes in humidity on the battlefield might affect average shell velocity, this is the game for you.

**DOS, \$59.95**  
**HPS Simulations (408) 554-8381**  
[www.hpsimps.com](http://www.hpsimps.com)

## 9. Prelude to Waterloo

**T**his final flourish for the original *Battleground* system stretches the old engine to its limits. There are both set piece assaults and battles of classic Napoleonic maneuvers to be found here, along with the usual caveats; it's still pretty and enjoyable, but it's still quite complex, as well. And if the full campaign takes a long time to complete, well, this is the only Bonaparte currently on the horizon for the PC.



**Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$TBA**  
**Talonsoft (800) 211-6504**  
[www.talonsoft.com](http://www.talonsoft.com)

## 10. Civil War Generals

**N**ot only Robert E. Lee, but Sherman, Grant, and the whole gang join in for this mid-19th century extravaganza. Our main concern is that the engine seems much the same as last year's, and the combat lacks the sheer fun of *So Many's* *Gettysburg* or the layers of detail found in the best of Talonsoft's *Battleground* series. Still, having a scenario editor and plenty of battles in the western the-



ater should cause Civil War enthusiasts to give this one a look.

**Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$TBA**  
**Sierra (800) 757-7707**  
[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)

## Stocking Stuffers

### Songs of the Civil War

**I**f you enjoyed Ken Burns' epic TV mini-series *The Civil War*, you are in

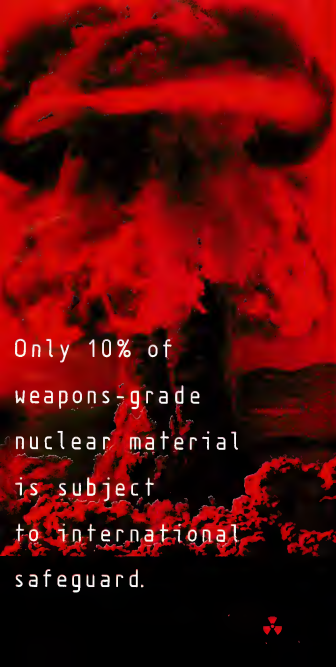


for a treat with this soundtrack. It includes "Ashokan Farewell," the "quintessential American lament," according to Burns (though it was written in the 1960s), as well as period songs by artists as diverse as Ritchie Havens, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Judy Collins. The various tunes are alternately biographical, soaring, bitter, and mourning—all in all, a microcosm for one of the best documentaries ever made.

### Command Magazine

This is not the original boardgame-in-a-magazine concept—that honor goes to *Strategy & Tactics*—but it's the best. Every two months, *Command* explores conflicts from the famous to the delightfully obscure, with the focus on playability and a huge dash of historical flavor. The editors have a bitzane sense of humor—the *Spartacus* game had a dead ringer for Kirk Douglas, complete with dented chin—and aren't afraid of controversy: *Past* games have covered a potential U.S.–Japanese conflict in the late '90s, and a "What if England and France got embroiled in the American Civil War?" For the price of one computer game, this gives you six wargames (plus historical articles) on topics that you are highly unlikely to see on a computer screen anytime soon. Plus, many of these are supported by *ACE* or *CW*.

**One-year subscription with games, \$70**  
**Command Magazine, P.O. Box 4017**  
**San Luis Obispo, CA 93403**  
**(800) 488-2248**



Only 10% of  
weapons-grade  
nuclear material  
is subject  
to international  
safeguard.





The  
remaining  
90% is subject  
to more  
extreme security  
measures.



# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## hardware

Diamond Viper 330

### 1. Diamond Viper 330

Viper 330, \$199 (4MB)

Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468-5046

[www.diamondmm.com](http://www.diamondmm.com)

**T**opping the hardware list this year is Diamond's new Viper 330 2D/3D graphics board, powered by NVIDIA's speedy RIVA 12B chip. This board took top honors in our recent 3D graphics roundup last issue, and for good reason. Viper packs a wallop on all fronts: Windows 2D, 3D, and DDS, and it also has video-in and video-out.

In all of our testing, Viper turned in solid benchmark numbers, with performance on par with 3Dfx's venerable Voodoo chipset. Direct3D games moved along smoothly, with smooth frame rates in almost all

cases. And as for the Spousal Rationalization Factor, Viper turns in very fast scores on WinBench 97's Business Graphic WinMark, so it will run your business applications speedily as well (the that really matters). Viper also handled DirectDraw and DOS titles with aplomb. In addition, its set of bundled game titles doesn't suck either, consisting of *Maxx Racer*, *MDK: Mission Lazarus Bravo*, and a full version of *IMagic's IF-22*.

About the only downer about Viper is that it only comes in a 4MB configuration. The RIVA chip currently can't address more than 4MB of memory, so there won't be an 8MB version of Viper any time soon.

*The Viper, the first shipping 2D/3D board we've encountered that delivers on all fronts, will make any gamer's holiday merry.*

However, RIVA does support a special DMA mode that allows it to rapidly retrieve textures from main memory.

The Viper, the first shipping 2D/3D board we've encountered that delivers on all fronts, will make any gamer's holiday merry.



hardware



## 2. Cambridge PC Works

PC Works, \$99.95

Cambridge SoundWorks, (800) 367-4434

[www.hill.com](http://www.hill.com)

Cambridge SoundWorks has made quite a name for itself over the last several years. They, along with a few other speaker makers, have redefined the quality of the audio put out by PCs. But, like most other things, bringing that kind of quality home would set you back more than a few shekels. Well, not anymore.



*This \$99 satellites-woofer combination delivers solid performance for game audio and music.*

Cambridge SoundWorks recently introduced PC Works, a \$99 satellites-woofer combination that delivers solid performance for game audio and music. And while the PC Works won't rattle the rafters, it does put out enough sound to comfortably fill the room; and it still sounds good at lower volume levels as well.

In an A/B comparison against its sibling, the \$350 MicroWorks, the PC Works' high-end had comparable clarity and definition, though the PC Works' low-end and max volume were clearly not as strong. Gaming audio was solid, with more than adequate bass on explosions, and the PC Works' high-end was again clear. Another minor annoyance is the PC Works' wall-wart power supply, which gloms most of an electric outlet, but that's a minor complaint.

If your old gray mare speakers just ain't what they used be, and you're looking for a low-cost way to brighten up your PC's audio, check out the PC Works.

## 3. Saitek X36 125

X36 125, around \$109.95

Saitek, (310) 212-5412

[www.saitek.com](http://www.saitek.com)

For anyone at all serious about flight sims, a solid joystick and programmable throttle are standard issue. But in the past this duo could set you back upwards of \$200-300. Well, Saitek has flown in under the radar to deliver the X36 Flight Control System. Now another stick/throttle combination might not be very newsworthy, but a solid-performing duo priced at about \$100 certainly is.

This system brings out the control freak in us all, with the joystick featuring a bany of buttons and two eight-way hat switches, while the

throttle is equally endowed with an array of switches, buttons and dials, and also includes an innovative rocker control which emulates rudder pedals. The X36edt Windows programming utility is fairly straightforward, albeit not entirely glitch-free.

For experienced flight-sim jocks as well as neobees looking to get started, the X36 system will put you firmly in control.

*This system brings out the control freak in us all, with joystick and throttle featuring an array of buttons, hat switches, and dials.*



hardware

# A GOOD 7TH LEGION RECRUIT ALWAYS SALUTES HIS VICTIM.



**SCREAM** through combat strategy and savor every **GUT-WRENCHING** moment of annihilating your enemy. With rage in your veins and **ASSASSINATION** on the brain, be prepared to command this "7th Legion" battalion in the ultimate **UNTAMED DEATH FEST**. Because once you're in—it's all about balls-to-the-wall real-time combat action, where "paying your respects" is done with a dignified **SINGLE FINGER SALUTE**.

**MICROPROSE.**  
www.microprose.com  
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #396



## 7TH LEGION

AVAILABLE ON WINDOWS PC. NOT FOR SALE. INCLUDES CD ONLY. 1,999.955. ESRM: 24. NORTH U.S. AND CANADA

© 2002 MicroProse, Inc. All rights reserved. 7th Legion is a trademark of Epic Games, Inc. MicroProse is a registered trademark of MicroProse, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective holders.

**APTITUDE.** Your ravenous band of ruthless mercenaries gets smarter as they collect mutilated bodies for cold hard cash.

**ANARCHY.** Wage war with up to 8 legions via modem, LAN or Internet—then deploy action element cards to weak havoc on enemies.

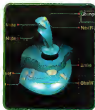
**ACTION.** MMX technology delivers frenzied, finger-blistering combat with action faster than any other real-time strategy game.

#### 4. Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback Pro

SideWinder Force  
Feedback Pro, \$149  
Microsoft, (206) 882-8080  
[www.microsoft.com/sidewinder](http://www.microsoft.com/sidewinder)

While there's been a whole lotta shakin' goin' on about force-feedback, only a few products have actually shipped, and game titles are just beginning to take advantage of this technology. But given the number of titles currently in the works that incorporate this technology, a force-feedback controller may soon be standard-issue equipment for any gamer. Microsoft and Logitech, the leaders in the joystick market, are both doing force-feedback sticks, but Microsoft has gotten to market first with its SideWinder Force Feedback Pro.

This second-generation stick's digital design allows for more subtle effects, and it's DirectX 5 compatible. And although it doesn't ship with a force editor, you can download Immersion's i-Force Studio 2.0 and edit DirectX games' forces that aren't coded directly to SideWinder: if you wait the holidays to be a wilder ride, take a look at the new SideWinder



#### 5. Thrustmaster Rage 3D 100

Rage 3D 100, \$39  
Thrustmaster, (503) 815-3200  
[www.thrustmaster.com](http://www.thrustmaster.com)

To say there are more than a few gamepad offerings out there for your PC would be an understatement of understatement. But despite the gaggle of offerings, most seem targeted toward those gamers who have smaller hands, leaving most adults with "gamer's claw" after a long session. To remedy the problem, Thrustmaster has come up with its Rage 3D (no relation to ATI) gamepad controller. Specifically designed for larger hands, this new controller uses a "lizard-eye" thumb pad in lieu of the more traditional thumb dish. The result is much easier operation and reduced fatigue from prolonged usage. With a host of 3D sports titles on the way for the Holidays and early next year, Rage 3D will add hours of "claw-free" game time.

#### 6. Plextor 12/20PieX

12/20PieX, \$230 without SCSI adapter,  
\$350 with PCI SCSI adapter  
Plextor Corp., (800) 888-3935  
[www.plextor.com](http://www.plextor.com)

The Plextor 12/20PieX is the fastest CD drive you can get, period. Ignore "24x" drives, the 12/20 blows away every so-called 24x drive we've seen so far. Given that DVD drives will arrive in full force next year, the 12/20 may very well be the last CD-ROM drive you'll ever need—it's that good. It reads just about every CD format out there, and also comes with a nifty tool for managing your CD drive. You can set the maximum spin rate and the delay before the drive spins down; you can even do one-click CD copies. The only potential downside is that the 12/20PieX is a SCSI device, so if your system is SCSI-deficient, you'll need to add a host adapter.



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## 7. Diamond Stealth II

Stealth II, \$119.95

Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468-5846  
[www.diamondmm.com](http://www.diamondmm.com)

In the past, low cost and high performance were mutually exclusive concepts when it came to graphics cards. If it was cheap it was slow, if it was fast, it'd cost ya. The Stealth II from Diamond turns this logic on its head. The Stealth II uses Rendition's new V2100, which delivers superb 3D speed and solid 2D performance. The best part is the price:



\$119.95 gets you a hot graphics card with 4MB of RAM. It benchmarks within an inch of a 3Dfx card and you don't even have to give up an extra PCI slot. The one downside is slow 320x200 VGA graphics, which is becoming more irrelevant every day. This card can grace anyone's Christmas list with relatively little pain to the wallet.

## 8. 3Com ImpactIQ External ISDN Modem

ImpactIQ External ISDN, \$330  
3Com, (800) 838-3266  
[www.3com.com](http://www.3com.com)

Okay, so it's a "terminal adapter with built-in NT1," but ISDN modem is easier to write. The external version of the ImpactIQ was one of the easiest datacomm devices we've ever set up. Plug the cable into the serial port. Plug the ISDN jacks in, install the driver, follow the SPD wizard and you're connected. All you need to know are the two ISDN numbers



The two standard phone jacks in the back of the unit are another nice feature. You can have a voice phone and a fax machine attached, both of which work flawlessly when you're not connected. Throughput is quite good—I've seen download speeds of more than 4,600 bytes per second from CompuServe (which supports only a single 56Kbit connector). The one downside is your phone company. Even in ISDN-friendly California, getting the line working can be the biggest headache.

## 9. Canopus Pure3D

Pure3D, \$179  
Canopus Corp., (408) 954-4500  
[www.canopuscorp.com](http://www.canopuscorp.com)

Arriving late to the 3Dfx party, Canopus brings a 6MB dedicated 3Dfx accelerator to the table. 2MB are dedicated to frame buffer and z-buffer and 4MB are for storing texture maps. Having 4MB of dedicated texture memory helps even in current games—some of

those annoying pauses that occur when new textures are loaded from main memory disappear. However, it will really come into its own with the next generation of games, which use higher resolution textures. There's no software bundle, but the price is right. If you're just now looking for a 3Dfx add-on card, this is the one to check out.

## 10. Hitachi Superscan Elite 751 19-inch Monitor

Superscan Elite 751, \$1149  
Hitachi NSA, (800) 441-4832  
[www.nsa-hitachi.com](http://www.nsa-hitachi.com)



We've moved enough 21-inch monitors to know that we never want to lift another one. Yet lately, 17-inch monitors have begun to seem, well, inadequate. The answer is the new crop of 19-inch monitors. The Hitachi 751 represents one of the best of

the new breed. In addition to weighing only 55 pounds, it fits neatly into the space of a 17-inch display. With an 18-inch viewable screen, it seems huge compared to the old one. It has a full set of digital controls, can support true 1600x1200 resolution, offers a very high refresh rate, and is energy friendly. If you're in the market for a new monitor, check out the 751.



# DEATH is NOTHING WITHOUT TORMENT.



## MAGE'S LAYERS

A malevolent  
3D fantasy quest from the  
creators of HEXEN™ and HEXEN II™

Play as one of four powerful war-casters of magical attacks like Chain Lightning and the Firewhip.

Play as one of 4 death-dealing Mageslayers across dozens of hellish levels.

Death would be too easy. Too little to repay a thousand year old debt. Too quick to satisfy the hunger of one you betrayed in another millennium. Before he extracts his terrible price on your soul, you are bound to wander through five worlds of atrocity. Stoking your powers. Gathering magic for one last, desperate struggle against Evil. Only then will he anoint you with the last sacraments of your torment.

No. Death would be too easy.

Sub-destroying 3-D environment, teeming with diabolical traps and mysteries.

Spread the Evil with several modes of Multiplayer action for up to 16 players.



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Windows® 95

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www.gtgames.com

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #281

# MONSTER BUYER'S GUIDE

The 1997 Holiday Hot 100

## kids' stuff

ATTACK OF THE MUTANTS

### 1. *Spy Fox in Dry Cereal*

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$39.95  
Humongous Entertainment, (800) 499-8386  
[www.humongous.com](http://www.humongous.com)

Junior secret agents, prepare for action: A most heinous crime has disrupted breakfast. Dairy cattle all around the world have been corralled by a disgruntled billy goat, forcing children everywhere to eat their morning cereal milkless! Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to help secret agent Fox—Spy Fox—on his quest to capture the evil Billy-the-Kid. Your journey takes you to the Greek island of Acropolis, where Professor Quack, creator extraordinaire of spy-gadgets, is waiting for you, as is your faithful assistant, Monkey Penny. Before you explore the island, you'll need to slip a few of Quack's latest creations into your tuxedo pocket (Spy Putty, X-ray Gum, and Spy Trap should prove useful).

As you guide Spy Fox through the adventure, you'll encounter a menagerie of eclectic characters, who'll help you solve the case. Play Go Fish with Mr. Big Pig; chat with Bea Bear, the loose-lipped canina waitress; attempt to glean some information from the mysterious feline fatale, Russian Blue; or summon assistance from Mata Hely. Targeting an older demographic range (ages 5–10) than the previous Junior Adventures, *Spy Fox* contains more traditional adventure game elements. After you speak to certain characters, for example, their information will be stored in thought balloons (which you can later use to ask other people about the characters).

While far more challenging than the previous titles, *Spy Fox* still maintains all the great little Humongous touches—an easy-to-use interface, amiable characters, and an abundance of delightful hoistpots for kids to click upon. And you can bet that the James Bond spoof-theme will provide plenty of laughs for parents, too.



### 2. *Backyard Baseball*

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$39.95  
Humongous Entertainment, (800) 499-8386  
[www.humongous.com](http://www.humongous.com)

Remember those halcyon days when you used to grab a few pals, a bat, and a couple of balls and find a quiet, dusty street, for a few innings of baseball?

Well, now your kids can enjoy the same experience, even when it's rainy outside and nobody else wants to play.

**BACKYARD BASEBALL** lets kids select their own team of players from a gaggle of neighborhood kids, all with unique quirks and traits. There's a pair of twins who will only play well if they're on the same team, as well as a brother and sister duo who perform better on opposite teams. The game features two main modes of gameplay: You can either play a Pick-Up game—a single game on one of seven makeshift fields—or you can enter the Backyard Baseball League and begin the first of 14 games against a variety of different teams.

Once you've picked your team, named it, and selected your team colors, you're ready for action. While your team's at bat, your mouse-click determines when each team member will swing, how hard they should swing, and where they should hit the ball. And don't forget to prompt your players to run the bases. Similarly, when your team is fielding, your mouse-click indicates where they should throw the ball. You'll also be in control of pitching, but go easy with those "heat" pitches: You mustn't let your pitcher run out of juice before the end of the game.

**BACKYARD BASEBALL** is not only the first game in Humongous' Junior Sport's line, it's the first computer baseball game designed for children, period. It will appeal to boys and girls alike, and its colorful cast of characters and engaging gameplay make this an excellent addition to any game collection.



### 3. Schoolhouse Rock: 1st & 2nd Grade Essentials

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$34.95  
Creative Wonders, (800) 543-9778  
[www.creativewonders.com](http://www.creativewonders.com)

Parents, we guarantee that you'll be rocking out along with your kids when you hear the familiar sounds of "Conjunction Junction," "Unpack Your Adjectives," and "My Hero Zero." The highlight of this CD-ROM has to be this superb collection of popular Schoolhouse Rock tunes, along with the original animation. Schoolhouse Rock 1st & 2nd Grade Essentials also includes a great selection of interactive games specific to the first- and second-grade school curriculum. The games extend the songs'



themes, teaching your child the basics of math, science, reading, languages, and social studies. It's hard to say who'll enjoy this product more...children experiencing Schoolhouse Rock for the first time, or grown-ups consumed by waves of nostalgia.

### 4. Grossology: The Science of Really Gross Things

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$35  
SegaSofT, (888) SEGASOFT  
[www.GrossologyGames.com](http://www.GrossologyGames.com)

Warning, this title is not for the weak of stomach. Grossology teaches the ins and outs of the human body—focusing, of course, on the gory elements—in a down-to-earth manner that children will love. Aimed at kids aged 6-14, Grossology features nine Yucky Games, including Poo Poo Pinball, Bux-D-Rama, and Ack Attack, in which you must match a slang term (such as "butt hole opening") with its official biological term. While this one may just be too much for some parents, it's guaran-

teed to maintain your child's interest, and there really is a valuable biology lesson to be learned, if you can manage to look past all the goo.



### 5. Pirates: Captains Quest

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$34.95  
Discovery Channel Multimedia,  
(800) 678-3343  
<http://multimedia.discovery.com>

Pirates: Captains Quest, from Discovery Channel, takes kids back to the beginning of the 18th century on a journey across the high seas. In the role of ship's captain, your child will be given a quest, and must navigate a merchant, privateer, or pirate ship across the Caribbean, deciding when to do battle and when to bring the ship into port. The captain must

trade and negotiate with merchants and chat with the townsfolk, who may have information pertaining to the quest. Part adventure, part strategy game, Pirates eases your children into the concept of resource management. And, as you'd expect from a Discovery title, they'll learn a little history along the way.



### Wish List

Only's Diverse Store, from Broderbund, will provide a creative outlet for your kids. They can draw pictures to complement the young Jamaican girl's stories, or choose to write and illustrate their own tales.

Mercer Meyer's Little Monster is brought to life in GT Interactive's storybook, Little Monster: The Smelly Mystery. Children can help Little Monster and his assistant, Detective Klopopus, figure out who has been switching the smells around in Monsterville by uncovering clues hidden throughout the story.

Saturday-morning cartoon star Nightmare Ned makes his CD-ROM debut in an action/adventure game (with a Nightmare Before Christmas feel) from Disney Interactive.

kids' stuff

# YET ANOTHER EVIL PLOT TO UNDERMINE THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE AMERICAN WORKER.



Work fast to match up marbles and make them disappear.



To win you have to Lose Your Marbles.

Lose Your Marbles. A puzzling diversion of 3D marbles, manic maneuvers, and multiplayer action. Available now.

**BETTER THAN TETRIS®  
OR YOUR MONEY BACK.**

Free demo at [www.segasoft.com](http://www.segasoft.com)



SEGA SOFT



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## 6. Madeline Classroom Companion: 1st & 2nd Grade

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$34.95  
Creative Wonders, (800) 543-9778  
[www.creativewonders.com](http://www.creativewonders.com)

**M**adeline, the bony-bony French girl, is back with a new CD-ROM that is magnificent.

As does Scholastic Rock, *Madeline* follows the first- and second-grade school curriculum, teaching basic skills through gameplay. *Madeline's Magic Show*, for example, tests your child's knowledge of science.

Madeline and her friend, Yvette, ask your child to help them with addition and subtraction. Most fun of all, though, is Madeline's Stationery Store guessing game, where kids can match words and images in either English, French, or Spanish. *Madeline Classroom Companion* also includes a vast range of printable activities, including an adorable Madeline paper doll with a selection of outfits for kids to cut out and keep.

## 7. Secret Paths in the Forest

### Stocking Stuffers

If you're looking for a gift for a young teen, you can't go wrong with any one of R. L. Stine's best-selling Goosebumps books. If you're planning to buy Dreamworks' *The Attack of the Mutant* CD-ROM game, why not include the original novel as part of the same gift package?

Goosebumps Book Collection  
Parachute Press/Scholastic Inc.

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$29.95  
Purple Moon, (800) 2PURPLE  
[www.purple-moon.com](http://www.purple-moon.com)

**S**ECRETS PATHS, a "friendship adventure," for girls aged 8-12, allows your daughter to meet and interact with computer chums, and help them resolve certain issues. In order to assist her virtual friend, your child will venture into a secret forest. Auditory clues and puzzle solving will lead her toward secret stones containing messages that will assist her friend. The game can be extended into "real life" via Purple Moon's online community, which provides a



safe place for girls to chat online, and allows them to collect and trade "Virtual Treasures." Look out, too, for Purple Moon's other title, *Rockett's New School*.

## 8. The Cat in the Hat

Windows/Mac CD-ROM, \$34.95  
Broderbund, (800) 521-9263  
[www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)

**T**oo wet to go out and too cold to play ball? It sounds like your child could benefit from the company of a certain floppy-hatted feline. The latest interactive storybook to be brought to life by Broderbund's Living Books division, *The Cat in the Hat* allows kids to play an active role in Dr. Seuss' tale. See how many items you can make the cat balance, draw funny faces on pictures hanging on the wall, or try giving Thing One and Thing Two makeovers. For ages 3-8.



## 9. The Adventures of Valdo and Marie

PC CD-ROM, \$29.95  
UbiSoft, (415) 547-4000  
[www.ubisoft.com](http://www.ubisoft.com)

**Y**oung historians will want to check out UbiSoft's

*VALDO AND MARIE*, an adventure game set in 1580, which follows two youngsters on a journey from Portugal to Japan. As Valdo, you must locate and reconstruct the missing fragments of the map that will guide you to your destination. Based upon primary source information, the game promises to give 10-14-year-olds an accurate lesson in history. Don't let that put your kids off, though. They'll be so busy digging up clues, thinking through strategies, and solving puzzles that they won't realize they're actually learning something until it's too late.



## 10. Goosebumps: Attack of the Mutant

Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$39.95  
Dreamworks Interactive,  
(800) 428-9400  
[www.dreamworksgames.com](http://www.dreamworksgames.com)

**T**he second Goosebumps title to be brought to CD-ROM, *Attack of the Mutant* calls upon your child to save the world from evil. The idea of this 3D action game—which features the voices of Adam West and Jim Belushi—is to outsmart the bad guys, and foil the nefarious Masked Mutant's evil plan to turn the world into a comic book. While the game does require strategic thinking and problem-solving skills, there isn't a great deal of hidden educational value in this one. Nonetheless, it's a lot of fun.



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## santa's other surprises

### 1. *The Simpsons: Virtual Springfield*

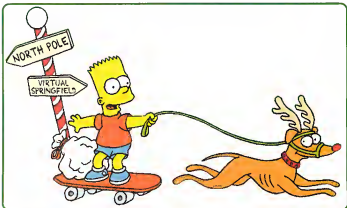
Windows 95 and Mac CD-ROM, \$29.98  
Fox Interactive, (310) 369-7000  
[www.foxinteractive.com](http://www.foxinteractive.com)

**W**ondering what to buy your pals for Christmas? Don't have a cow, man,

we have the perfect solution—a trip to exotic Springfield, and a chance to spend some quality time with America's favorite dysfunctional family. Fox Interactive's 3D recreation of the Simpsons' home town allows you to visit all the well-known hangouts. Meander through the streets of Springfield, drop in for a beer at Moe's Tavern, stop for a doughnut break at

the Nuclear Power Plant, and check out the hilarious outtake tapes at Krusty's Studios. The more mischievous among you can launch water balloons from Bart's Tree House, or chuck candy bears

at the poor unsuspecting citizens as they venture into the movie theater. Or, you can just hang out at Bart's house and become one of the family. Don't like that idea? Fine. Eat our shorts.



santa's other surprises

## 2. Easy CD Creator Deluxe Edition

Windows 95 and Windows NT CD-ROM, \$99.95

Adaptec, (800) 442-7274

[www.adaptec.com](http://www.adaptec.com)

**W**ow, how exciting! Software to control a CD-ROM burner (or so you might think). But Adaptec's Easy CD Creator Deluxe is more than just software that allows you to archive your downloads and other important data to CD-Recordable discs. The package also includes the innovative CD Spin Doctor program, which allows you to connect your home audio equipment to your sound



card and record your favorite old cassette tapes and phonograph records onto a CD. Now you'll never have to worry about scratches or tape breaks again when you want to play those old Blue Öyster Cult singles or the extended dance mix of the Vapors' "Turning Japanese." Of course, the program also works with CDs, allowing you to create mixes with songs from your favorite audio discs. It's also the most reliable general CD-R software we've seen, allowing you to do other things while burning data to disc without the worry that you'll create a coaster. The software creates data, video, and audio CDs, and allows you to make backup copies of unprotected CD-ROMs. If you're looking to buy (or ask Santa for) a "big ticket" Christmas gift this year, you could do much worse than Easy CD Creator Deluxe and an under-\$500 CD-Recordable drive.



## 3. MGI VideoWave and ATI All-in-Wonder

VideoWave: Windows 95 CD-ROM, \$99.95

MGI Software, (888) MGI-SOFT

[www.mgisoft.com](http://www.mgisoft.com)

All-in-Wonder: For Windows 95, \$270

ATI Technologies, (905) 882-2600

[www.atitech.ca](http://www.atitech.ca)

**I**f your favorite gamer is also an amateur video producer (you know the type: the one who makes sure every family moment is forever preserved on 8mm videotape), we have just the gift combination for you. MGI's VideoWave lets you digitize, cut, splice, and add titles to video. The speedy MMX-enhanced package rivals the capabilities of professional video editing software costing six times as much. Whether you want to grab video clips of your adorable baby to email to Grandma or edit scary Uncle Albert out of your holiday films, VideoWave makes it easy. Your edited video can be saved in AVI or MPEG format, which are suitable for use on Web pages, or for writing to a CD-Recordable disc.

In addition to a video source (a VCR or video camera), you'll also need a way to get the video into your computer. Our favorite is ATI's All-in-Wonder card. As a standard video card, the All-in-Wonder has great 2D performance and some of the best video playback we've seen, as well as passable 3D graphics (action and sim nuts will want to pair it with a 3Dfx-based card). But the card also includes a cable-ready TV tuner, which lets you watch TV in a window or even as your background wallpaper, as well as video input and output for digitizing video or playing games on your television set.

*santa's other surprises*

Here leads them a Tokyo skyscraper



Tanks, half-tanks, boats, fu-kitties: Drive to kill



Head to two-armed mode: Kick butt karate-style



## WHO WANTS SOME WANG?

Shadow Warrior is here. Lu Wang, an Assassin, an Yakuza abuser, an Forak fragger, an Mutant mutilator, an reason to be scared of the dark, an Son-of-a-Bitch. So say Sagomara to all the Ninja wannabes that have gone before and put on your combat sandals... Lu Wang is coming to the Land of the Rising Sun to turn out the lights. Shadow Warrior. The Zen is going to hit the fan.

*"There's no doubt that Shadow Warrior cremates the competition."*

GameSpot Weekly



Fog, multi-colored lighting, transparent water...total immersion.



More N-jutsu, Lu Wang 100%, and total immersion from Duke Duker's 3D



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# Lo Wang is Shadow Warrior™



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #367

# Getting Great Gifts for Gamers

## A How-to Guide for Finding the Right Game Gift for the Holidays

Your holiday shopping is going well. You finally found a Tickle Me Cookie Monster for little Jessica, a Mucous Tick for your nephew Max, and a green tie for Uncle Doug. All that's left is to find something for cousin Lee, the computer gamer.

Upon walking into your local software store, however, your senses are assaulted by brightly colored boxes of all shapes and sizes. Everything from tanks and airplanes to dinosaurs and severed limbs vie for your attention. How on earth do you choose the right gift?

### The Hard(ware) Choices

The first thing you'll need to determine is what kind of computer Lee has, and how it's equipped. Of course, doing this without giving away why you're asking will take some smooth talking. You might express interest in getting a computer of your own, and ask what kind of system Lee has for comparison.

Is it a PC, running Microsoft Windows, or a Macintosh? This determines in which section of the store you'll need to shop. PCs and Macs use different programs, although a very few games will include both PC and Mac versions on a single CD.

Next up is determining which operating system (the program that controls how the computer works) they're using. On a PC, this will normally be Windows 95, Windows 3.1, or MS-DOS. On a Macintosh, it will be System 6, System 7, or Mac OS 8. Check the system requirements listing on the box of the product you're buying to determine which operating system it's designed for. Most new games are designed for Windows 95, so if your giftee has a PC and is still running MS-DOS or Windows 3.1, Windows 95 might be the gift of choice instead of a game. Note that MS-DOS games will run on Windows 95 systems, but setting up the computer to run them properly can sometimes be a complex task. Unless the person you're buying for is very computer-savvy, it's best to stick to Windows 95 games.

Other computer specifications you'll want to determine and check against the game's system requirements box are the following:

1. The amount of RAM (generally 6MB, 16MB, 32MB, or more)
2. CD-ROM speed (2x, 4x, 8x, or faster)
3. The type of processor (486, or the faster Pentium, Pentium Pro, and Pentium II in the case of a PC; or 68030, 68040, or PowerPC in the case of a Macintosh)

4. The speed of the processor (usually a number ranging from 25MHz up to 300MHz)

Note that it's fine if you have more than what the box requires, which means a game that requires a 100MHz 486 with 6MB RAM should work just fine on a 233MHz Pentium II with 32MB RAM.

Finally if Lee owns a PC, you'll need to find out what kinds of add-ons it has. Almost all gamers will have the Super VGA-graphics capability required by today's PCs, but a few cutting-edge games require a 3D graphics card, as well. A mouse is de rigueur on today's PCs, but does the game require a joystick or gamepad, and if so, does Lee have one? At least there's one less add-on hassle—if you buy a Windows 95 game, you shouldn't have to worry about what kind of sound card Lee has.

### It Takes All Kinds

Now you know what type of system Lee has, so you can tell if a game will work on it. But you still haven't actually chosen a game! We've listed a variety of interests below, along with the genres of games that usually appeal to folks with those interests. Once you determine the genres Lee is likely to be interested in, check the appropriate section of the "Holiday Hot 100" for some can't-miss games.

INTEREST	SECTION
Aircraft, military aviation, ships	Simulations
Auto racing, motorcycles	Action, Space Simulations
Brain teasers	Classics/Puzzles
Card games, classic games	Classics/Puzzles
Children	Kid's Software
Computers	Hardware/Santa's Other Surprises
Dungeons & Dragons	Adventure/Role-Playing
Economics	Strategy
Fantasy novels, myths, fiction	Adventure/Role-Playing
Fast-paced action, violence	Action
Football, baseball, golf	Sports
Mental stimulation	Classics/Puzzles
Military History	Wargames, Simulations
Politics	Strategy, Wargames
Science Fiction	Adventure/Role-Playing, Space Simulations, Strategy
Sports	Sports
The Spice Girls	(Wrong Magazine)

#### 4. Kodak DC-210

Windows 95 or Macintosh, \$899

Kodak, (800) 508-1531

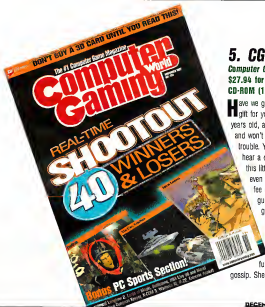
[www.kodak.com/dadHome/dc210/](http://www.kodak.com/dadHome/dc210/)

Show us a computer gamer who's not into gadgets and we'll unmask him as a WornPearce bull who's just trying to look cool. One of the hottest gadgets out there right now is the digital camera, which lets you take pictures without expensive film, and immediately download them to your computer. Until recently, a digital camera with good resolution that wasn't limited to just a few pictures cost a bundle, but new lower-priced offerings from Kodak, Olympus, and Sony have brought them into the realm of obtainability for those of us still stuck down in the middle class.

One of the better values out there is the Kodak DC-210. The camera takes shots in 1152x864 resolution, and features a 2x zoom, a red-eye reduction flash, an LCD preview screen, and



video output for displaying your pics on the television sets of computer-Luddite friends and family. Compact Flash picture cards can hold up to 60 images, and allow quick downloads via a laptop. And Adobe PhotoDeluxe is included, to make it easier to cut and paste your kid into the image of a jet fighter cockpit (or your boss into a photo of a compromising position).



#### 5. CGW

Computer Gaming World, (800) 827-4450

\$27.94 for naked edition, or \$42.95 with

CD-ROM (12 issues), [www.computergaming.com](http://www.computergaming.com)

Have we got a Christmas gift for you. It's sixteen years old, a ton of fun, and won't get you into trouble. You'll never hear a complaint from this little beauty, not even if you spill coffee on her. Still guessing? Let us give you a clue. She's available once a month, and will arrive full of the latest gossip. She'll offer tips,

strategies, and everything else you'll ever need to know. She even comes with her own seedy room, which is jam-packed with hot demos and plenty of other goodies. This is the gift that just keeps on giving. Not only will you be able to enjoy this little gem at Christmas time, but you'll receive a brand-spanking-new model each month thereafter. And did we happen to mention that, at only \$27.94 for the naked edition, she's also extremely good value. If you haven't guessed by now what we're talking about, let us spell it out for you: CGW.

santa's other surprises



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*In Our Ongoing Quest for  
the Best, We Test 7  
Top-of-the-Line Systems  
from Major Manufacturers*

*by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator*

**W**ell, it's that time of year again. A time when we go in search of the one thing every gamer covets. No, not a blind date with Agent Sculley, but what may well be the next best thing for hard-core gamers: The Ultimate Game Machine (UGM). This time, we looked for the machine that cuts no corners, makes no trade-offs, and hits on all cylinders from the nanosecond you fire it up. Many showed up to play, but only a select few put the right components in the box and integrated those parts into a seamless unit. Not an easy task, given the drastic changes that have unfolded over the past year in the world of computer-gaming hardware.

Since last year's UGM roundup, we've seen the introduction of a new CPU, the Pentium II (P-II); Intel's Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP); a new generation of faster 3D-graphics chips; and the Universal Serial Bus (USB). The Pentium II brings together several key technologies: a faster P6 (Pentium Pro)-class architecture, MMX, and the ability to scale up clock speeds that currently top out at 300MHz.

As games relentlessly push hardware to its limit, AGP will give the PCI bus some much-needed relief, allowing 3D games to increase both scene complexity and the amount of texture maps used to create next-generation titles. At the end of the larger AGP pipe waits a new generation of 3D accelerator engines, which, coupled with the P-II CPU, will offer substantial speed and image-quality improvements over previous generations. And while USB will become more important to gamers over time, the current dearth of controllers, combined with DirectX/USB teething pains, seems to indicate that the dawn of the USB age is not quite upon us.

In this first part of our four-part series, we went looking for the best off-the-shelf "burn, baby, burn" system we could find—the kind we would buy if money was no object. We wanted performance and lots of it. And we found it, at times in some unlikely places. So hold onto your hat: We're set to tell all about the folks who did—and didn't—put together all the pieces of the silicon puzzle for this year's magnum opus.

## Dell Dimension XPS D300

**A** longtime player in the home/multimedia markets, Dell is starting to make inroads into the gaming machine market as well. In its new XPS D300, Dell has put together some solid components, including an AGP version of STB's Riva 128-based Velocity 128. The result is a pretty stout rig that fared well for the most part in testing and caused no notable headaches during setup.

A large step-by-step foldout manual details the setup process, and we got the box ready to roll in 10 minutes. The system's Phoenix BIOS allows rudimentary access to low-level system settings, though it doesn't get into much granularity. Getting to the innards is a breeze; remove one thumb-screw and the tower's side panel slides off to reveal easily accessible system components. Other accoutrements include a 19-inch monitor, an Aitec-Lansing ACS-490 speaker system, and Microsoft's SideWinder Pro joystick.

The XPS D300 arrived with DirectX 5.0 installed, though this unit is a press

eval road-dog, and DirectX may have been installed at its previous stop. In real mode drivers, Dell goes two for three: Mouse and audio drivers are ready to go, though a real-mode CD-ROM driver wasn't included. In a quick look at its USB functionality, the XPS D300 detected the ThrustMaster Top Gun Joystick and installed the driver without incident.

As for performance, sometimes second-best is fine. The XPS D300 turned in very respectable second-place finishes behind Falcon Northwest's mighty Mach V in most tests and actually edged out the Mach V in the CD-ROM WinMark test. In all four game tests, the XPS D300 posted very speedy frame rates, and it never hiccuped during general gameplay. In fact, along with the Falcon, this Dell box was one of the least troublesome rigs we tested.

Perhaps the XPS D300's only downer is its somewhat plain-Jane configura-

tion. While it certainly covered the fundamental bases, including a US Robotics Sportster 56K X2 modem, Dell opted not to include more game-specific hardware, such as a PCI-based sound card that supports 3D positional audio, or a dedicated game card that would better hold calibration settings for analog controllers. Also absent was a Zip

*In all four game tests, the XPS D300 posted very speedy frame rates, and it never hiccuped during general gameplay.*

drive for larger files and backup. Of course, all these items can be picked up after-market, and the Zip drive is an add-on option from Dell.

For about \$3,600, then, Dell's Dimension XPS D300 delivers solid game performance across the board. You may need to add bells and whistles to taste, but this box provides a good foundation.

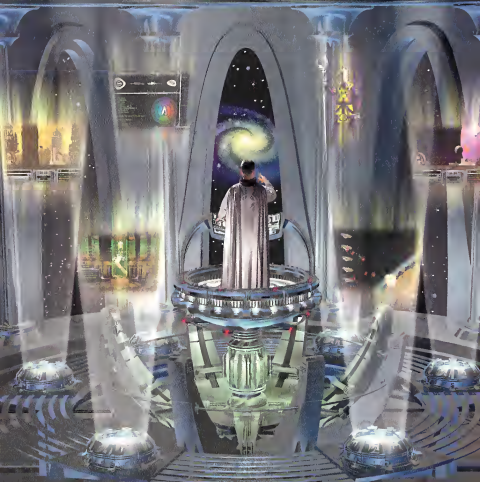
—DS



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #127



## Falcon Northwest Mach V



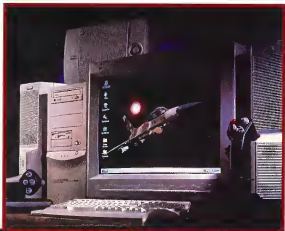
Falcon Northwest has long built custom systems tuned to the needs of hard-core gamers. This version of the Mach V system redefines the phrase "over the top."

Out of the box, everything sets up easily, though you may need help hefting the 21-inch Viewsonic monitor onto your desk. Falcon Northwest also delivers custom documentation that lists your personal setup, including hardware and software configurations. All the DOS real-mode drivers—CD-ROM, mouse, sound—are present and configured into the system, as was DirectX 5.0. Oh, and there's also the famous black T-shirt.

The Mach V begins with an ASUS P2L87 AGP motherboard set at a 68MHz system bus clock—the Pentium III processor actually runs at 306MHz. The Falcon's Award BIOS has lots of nifty tricks built into it for tweaking your system, but be wary—a poor choice means a very unstable system. Slip into the mix 128MB of 100MHz SDRAM, toss in a Diamond Viper 330 AGP accelerator (a *CGW* Editor's Pick last month) and you have a smokin' 2D/3D accelerator. However, the RIVA 128 wasn't good enough for Falcon Northwest, so it tossed in the Quantum3D Obsidian 100, which consists of two (yes, two) linked 3Dix Voodoo PCI boards, each with dedicated frame buffer and level processors. Of course, it takes up two PCI slots, but the result is a GL Quake TimeDemo average (at 640x480) of 54.3fps!

As you might guess, the system performed pretty well in other areas, too. The Plextor 12/20 CD-ROM drive generally kept pace with the supposedly faster EIDE CD-ROMs in other systems. In harmony with this system's "everything and the kitchen sink" philosophy, Falcon Northwest builds in a Creative Labs DVD-RDM drive. This first-generation DVD system, however, is probably the weakest link in the system;

a better job of staying calibrated than sound card joystick ports. The Mach V also ships with a full complement of CH flight controllers, including the F16 Combat Stick, Pro Throttle, and Pro Pedals, a setup befitting the Mach V moniker. The keyboard is about the only mildly choosy detail, but everyone seems to deliver mushy keyboards these days



*This version of the Mach V system redefines the phrase "over the top."*

Of course, any hotrod system needs fast mass storage, and the Mach V certainly delivers. If one 10,000RPM Seagate Cheetah Ultra-Wide SCSI hard drive is good, then two should be better—especially when paired with a DPT caching RAID controller used to stripe data across the matched pair of Cheetahs. RAID Level 0—disk striping—essentially writes data across two drives in the most efficient manner possible, seriously increasing disk throughput. The twin 4.5GB Cheetahs are seen as a single 9GB volume. This mass storage subsystem generated a Business Disk WinMark nearly four times faster than the nearest competitor. The drive subsystem comes formatted as a single FAT32 volume.

image quality isn't all that great, nor is performance.

The Mach V racked up very solid 2D benchmarks, and the rest of the Direct3D benchmarks were pretty stellar. The innards of the system are cleanly laid out; to get into the case you merely remove two thumbscrews and pop the top off of the midtower case. All connectors are labeled. In our quick USB test, Mach V saw the USB joystick without a problem, and then loaded its driver.

Gamers are Falcon Northwest's bread and butter, and it shows in the company's attention to detail. For example, the system ships with a CH Products speed-adjustable game card, which does

All this excess of technology does have one downside: There are no slots free in the Mach V if you like to occasionally get together with friends for a network frag-fest, you're out of luck—you'll fly the Mach V sans wingman. Of course, with the Supermodem, you can always play over the Internet, but nothing matches the visceral experience of watching your best friend's reaction as your AIM-BK flies up his tail pipe. We suggest that Falcon swap in the Obsidian 50 (which takes up only one PCI slot) and make a PCI Ethernet card an option.

Still, while the Falcon Mach V seems a bit excessive, you'll be hard pressed to find either a better performing system or one better tuned to the needs of gamers—if your wallet can survive the \$8,500 price tag. —JC



## Micron Millennia XKu

**M**icron was the only five-star rig reviewed in last year's UGM Off-the-Shelf Roundup. This year, it has put together another solid box that is an able performer and has many components in common with the other top finishers. Notable additions to this year's offering include an AGP-based Diamond Viper 330 that uses NVIDIA's Riva 128 chip and Cambridge SoundWorks' MicroWorks speaker system.

Getting the box up and running is painless, thanks to the poster-size installation guide. Ports are clearly labeled, and the XKu is up and running in 10 minutes. Getting to the insides of the XKu is a matter of removing one thumb-screw and sliding off the case's side panel (it looks as though Dell and Micron have found the same case supplier). The system comes with DirectX 5.0 pre-installed, though we had to go digging for real-mode drivers for mouse, CD-ROM, and audio (which we eventually found), and then we had to configure them ourselves. The XKu did pass the USB test without any hiccups, and its Phoenix BIOS offers basic settings, though it lacks more detailed settings.

*Notable additions to this year's offering include an AGP-based Diamond Viper 330 that uses NVIDIA's Riva 128 chip and Cambridge SoundWorks' MicroWorks speaker system.*



Like last year's offering, Micron's latest turns in solid performance across the board, and it's comparable to the Dell system. Favorable bumps came in 3D WinBench 97, and, to a lesser degree, running WinBench 97's Graphics WinMark test. But Micron's CD-ROM WinMark score was much slower, owing to its using a DVD-ROM to put double-duty as CD-ROM drive and DVD-ROM. In game testing, Micron was again nearly dead-even with Dell in just about every test, but was unable to run the TerraMark test, owing to a firmware bug that will most likely be fixed by the time you read this.

Like Dell, Micron opted to have Microsoft's SideWinder Pro joystick be the only bundled game controller, and depending on your preference, you may want to nix it in favor of your controller of choice. Micron's box is also somewhat plain Jane, covering the fundamental bases well, but not offering additional amenities, such as a choice of game controllers or a PCI audio board that supports positional 3D audio. Still, Micron has put together another solid offering, which fares well in nearly every test, though Dell delivers nearly equal performance and squarely beats the Micron on price. Micron does provide better speakers, and the DVD-ROM and decoder may be useful (or you could swap them out and save a few bucks). Aside from the DVD-ROM, the only real difference between the two systems is the speakers, and that probably isn't worth \$500. —DS







## The Internet of Yore

March 10, 1876: Alexander Graham Bell spoke these famous words through his electrical speech machine, "Mr. Watson, come here, I need you."



## Prehistoric DVD

December 28, 1895: Auguste and Louis Lumiere's Cinematographe projector was publicly demonstrated.



## Home Entertainment of Yesteryear

Late 1970s: White square is ponged between two paddles in thousands of homes. The revolution begins.





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## Solid Computing Game King

The name is a little cheesy and the box is plain-Jane, but the Game King delivers reasonable performance at a decent price. Unfortunately, since Solid is a fairly small fry reseller, its system is a generation behind in components and overall performance.

Unpack the Game King and you find a rather unremarkable beige box. Setup is pretty straight-

forward—Solid just missed the boat on the AGP-enabled 440LX motherboards, meaning that its system didn't have the advantage of an AGP graphics card or SDRAM. Intel's AMI BIOS doesn't allow for much tweaking, either, although I've found that the automatic settings are usually fairly optimal.

Solid's choice of graphics adapters is actually very conservative, resulting in what would have

been an "ultimate" rig about six months ago. A Hercules Dynamite 128 Video chip handles the normal 2D Windows and VGA-graphics chores, while 3D acceleration falls upon the venerable Diamond Monster 3D card. The 266MHz Pentium II, while a damn fast CPU, isn't up to the 300MHz muscle of the competition.

The choice of older components puts the slower CPU at an even greater disadvantage, and its performance numbers reflect this. Overall performance trailed everyone except the Sony Vaio and was almost even with the Gateway Destination in benchmark tests. One nice surprise was the performance of the Toshiba 24x CD-ROM. We ran into problems running WinQuake, but a driver update fixed the problem. Game King turned in a respectable 27.7fps average running GL QUAKE, and all frame rates were over 30fps on the four game tests. Despite some aging components, Game King's audio subsystem is a pleasant surprise and includes Creative's AWE-64 value edition (not a bad card in its own right) and the Diamond Monster Sound for 3D positional audio. Of all the systems we tested, Game King alone offered hardware-accelerated 3D audio, and the components mated very nicely with the Cambridge SoundWorks speaker system.

Although the Game King is nicely set up for gamers and has the most interesting audio setup of any system tested, its overly conservative components mean that this system—priced just under \$3,500—will become obsolete more quickly. For Solid to move into the



big leagues, it needs to update its system to AGP and faster graphics.

—LC

*Game King turned in a respectable 27.7fps average running GL QUAKE, and all frame rates were over 30fps on the four game tests.*

forward, but we needed a bit of screwdriver work to open the case. Game King arrives with DOS real-mode drivers for CD-ROM and sound card configured, though we had to add the mouse command line ourselves. And though the system arrived with DirectX installed, it was the now-antiquated 3.0 version, not the current 5.0 version. In our quick USB test, Game King detached the USB ThrustMaster joystick and took the driver with no problem.

The system features an Intel Portland Pentium II motherboard, which uses the older 440FX

been an "ultimate" rig about six months ago. A Hercules Dynamite 128 Video chip handles the normal 2D Windows and VGA-graphics chores, while 3D acceleration falls upon the venerable Diamond Monster 3D card. The 266MHz Pentium II, while a damn fast CPU, isn't up to the 300MHz muscle of the competition.

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Overall performance trailed everyone except the Sony Vaio and was almost even with the



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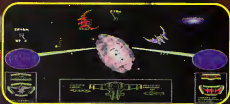
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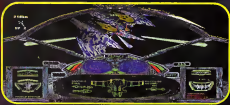
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# Performance Tests

## How We Tested

It's always a challenge to test systems. We assembled quite an arsenal of benchmarks and games to exercise all the systems we gathered. General system testing was performed with WinBench 97; we used the Business Graphics WinMark, Business Disk WinMark, CD-ROM WinMark, CPUMark 16, and CPUMark 32. Benchmarking 3D graphics began with 3D WinBench 97 and continued with a host of games, including Microsoft Flight Simulator 98, EA's Moto Racer, Psygnosis' Wipeout XL, Eidos' TerraMark, and Quake (DOS, WinQuake, and GL Quake, where appropriate). We also benchmarked DOS performance using CBench.

We conducted the synthetic tests with each system just as it came out of the box, since most people don't tweak with BIOS settings or defrag the hard disk to move all the applications to the outer tracks. The Graphics WinMark tests were conducted at 1024x768x65,565 colors and 800x600xtrue color (24-bit color for some systems, 32-bit color for others). In addition to the CD-ROM WinMark, we measured the CPU utilization for the CD-ROM. Be aware that we did only overall CD testing, not outer-track testing, but since most of the drives were either CAV (constant angular velocity) or partial-CAV drives, the outer-track performance will be better. Since most CDs aren't full, though, you'll rarely see the maximum performance possible on some systems.

	66S Quake TimeBench at 640x480	WinQuake TimeBench at 640x480	GL Quake TimeBench at 640x480
Sony	20.2	22.1	Not Applicable
Solid Computing	14.6	18.1	27.6
Micron	18.1	15.9	Not Applicable
Gateway Destination	13.0	13.5	32.3
Falcon Northwest	31.2	28.4	54.3
Dell	16.1	17.7	Not Applicable

	3D WinBench	WinBench 97 Business Graphic WinMark 16x7x16	WinBench 97 Business Graphic WinMark 6x6x24
Sony	56	74.2	82
Solid Computer	193	91.6	102
Micron	250	131	127
Gateway Destination	112	Resolution Not Supported	Resolution Not Supported
Falcon Northwest	268	158	155
Dell	249	124	120





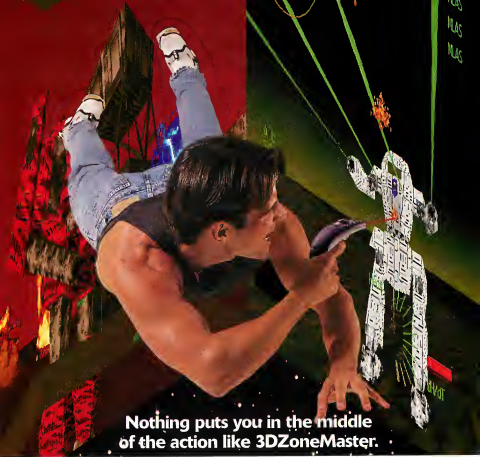
Many system tests are performed out of context, to stress a single part of the system. While we did our share of those kinds of tests (3D WinBench 97, for example), game testing was performed with audio enabled and, where appropriate, joysticks connected. After all, you wouldn't play FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98 with the keyboard and no audio, would you? Ultimately, we wanted to see how the systems behaved with realistic loads.

We conducted all the game tests at 640x480, unless otherwise noted. The QUAKE numbers are collected using QUAKE's built-in TimeDemo feature. We ran TimeDemos 1, 2, and 3 and averaged the results. We ran MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98 with detail features cranked up and in full-screen mode. You enable the frame-rate counter by pressing Shift-Z twice when in flight mode. We captured the frame rate using the supplied "new features" VCR replay that comes with the title.

To enable the frame counter in Moto Racer, start the game from a DOS Window and type "moto -ijklnop". Then, in the racing screen, hit Shift-F1 to turn on the frame counter. Wireour XL's frame counter is enabled by simply typing "framerate" at the race screen. The TERRAMARK benchmark, based on Eidos Interactive's TERRACIDE game engine, was supplied to us by Eidos; it's not available for wide release. —LC

TERRAMARK	MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM 98 Test	Wireour XL Initial Frame Rate Test	Moto Racer Initial Frame Rate
15	10.3	8	12
30	31.2	37	35
Fireware Bug	15.6	37	82
20	16.0	27	D3D HAL Not Detected
46	37.0	30	30
48	35.0	42	84

WinBench 97 Business Disk Winmark	WinBench 97 CPU32	WinBench 97 CPU16	CD-ROM WinMark
1010	589	452	1220
1070	679	520	1470
1260	733	568	893
1110	679	520	848
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## Gateway 2000 Destination



Though designed to live in the living room, the Gateway 2000 Destination (D6) is still a full-blown PC that turns out to be a reasonably solid gaming rig. Two things make it especially compelling: a colossal, 31-inch monitor and the brassy Harmon-Kardon Dolby ProLogic audio system. But the good news for gamers is that Gateway has finely added a long-missing component: 3D Iron in the form of VideoLogic's PowerVR-based Apocalypse 3Dx card. In addition, Gateway has added a Toshiba DVD drive and MPEG-2 decoder to make DVD movie-watching quite an experience.

Setting up the D6 is pretty intuitive—thanks to the foldout, step-by-step installation poster—but moving the 31-inch monitor is a task for at least two burly types, and maybe three. The speakers for the Harmon-Kardon receiver are a 5.1 configuration, and Gateway includes a spool of monster-cable for wiring them. Getting into the box requires a screwdriver, but six screws later you can get at most the components without skinned knuckles. The AMI BIOS offers basic access to system settings, though more detailed settings, such as memory timings, aren't exposed.

As for game-readiness, D6 didn't arrive with DirectX installed, and though the unit shipped with real-mode drivers for mouse, DVD-ROM, and audio, we had to manually set those up. D6 didn't ship with the Windows 95 OSR 2.1 USB patch, but after we installed it, D6 had no problem finding the USB Top Gun joystick.

When it came to the tests, D6's benchmark numbers fell decidedly in midpack, except for the CD-ROM WinMark test, where it fared poorly, owing to the presence of only a Toshiba DVD-ROM. And because the D6's monitor supports a maximum resolution of only 720x480 (3:2 aspect ratio, making the Desktop a bit wider), we couldn't get an apple-to-apples comparison here. But at 720x480, the D6 turned in an unimpressive 79.3 Graphics WinMark, one of the slowest scores seen this roundup. CPU and storage subsystem benchmark results were respectable, and 3D WinBench 97 came in at 112; a decent score, though it pales in comparison to some other contestants. Duke and WinDuke TimeDemo scores at 640x480 were unimpressive, but GL Duke on the PowerVR was truly a sight to behold. TimeDemo scores averaged 32fps, and gameplay was a gas. Fast 3D accelera-

tion, big screen, big sound," trutt said. Running DirectX3D games, we discovered that the D6's 2D board has to be set to at least a 72Hz refresh rate or it and the PowerVR card won't play nice together. We saw a rather strange behavior in which the PowerVR ran *Tomb Raider* and *WireOut XL* without problem, but *Moto Racer* wouldn't recognize the PowerVR card. The D6 posted good frame rates on those first two titles, though they were a good bit slower than the frame rates on the Dell and the Falcon. DVD playback on this unit was terrific, and not just because of the big screen/sound: The actual MPEG-2 decode quality was impressive.

All told, the verdict on the D6 is, well, mixed. It's an impressive living-room PC, but that does not a great game rig make. The PowerVR card is a welcome addition, and performance is generally good, though not great, save for GL Duke. If you want your next rig to reside in the living room, then D6—at about \$4,400—is your guy, but if you're looking for a more conventional, badass gaming box, you'd do well to cast an eye toward Dell or Falcon. —DS





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## Sony Vaio

For this roundup, Sony wins kudos for the most unusually colored box purple. The home electronics behemoth has been shipping PCs for a little more than a year now, and its latest Vaio ("vie-o") puts a few interesting twists on the conventional PC—like front-mounted video and audio inputs, for example. And while embedding speakers in a monitor isn't a new idea, Sony puts a woofer in the monitor's base to beef up the overall sound. The Vaio isn't touted as a game-specific box per se, but this could be an interesting machine for part-time gamers.

Setup was very straightforward: The combination of a step-by-step foldout poster and color-coded cables made for a 10-minute installation. Because Sony is positioning the Vaio as a consumer rig, it even hides the boot-up sequence behind its logo ("Ignore that man behind the curtain"). One key-press reveals the boot-up sequence, and you can then get inside the Vaio's Phoenix BIOS by hitting F1. Like most Phoenix BIOSes, it's long on basic tweaks and short on granularity. Getting into the Vaio is as easy as pushing one button and removing a side panel. DirectX was nowhere to be found on this system, though real-mode drivers for audio, mouse, and CD-ROM were preconfigured and good to go. Vaio also detected the USB ThrustMaster joystick without a hitch. In terms of audio, the Yamaha DPLSA chipset sounds fine under Windows 95, but its Sound Blaster audio is very tinny, and DDS gaming audio has an annoying ring to it.

Neatly tucked away on the front panel is a drop-down door, behind which are CD-ROM, floppy, and Zip drives. In addition to a woofer in its base, the Vaio's monitor also has one USB port and a WalkMan headphone jack so you can mute the speakers for play-time in the wee small hours. But despite all the well-thought-out design touches, the Vaio turns out to be an underachiever as a gaming box. Conspicuously absent is any game controller, and Vaio's numbers are, for the most part, less than stellar.

The system turned in consistently slow numbers, bringing up the rear in most benchmark tests. These underwhelming numbers stem in large part from the Vaio's slower 233MHz Pentium II clock-speed and from Sony's decision to use ATI's PCI-based VGA All-in-Wonder, which, though versatile, uses the aging Rage II chipset. Vaio turned in surprising second-place finishes in both Quake and WinQuake TimeDemo tests. In D3D game testing, Vaio's frame rates trailed well behind all other contestants, and gameplay was sluggish in most titles except Quake and WinQuake.

For gamers who are less concerned about fiery 3D performance and who want a versatile box that can pull part-time gaming duty, the Vaio, priced at about \$3,300, might be a good choice. But in this roundup, that wasn't what we were after. And so for the killer gaming rig, we'd recommend that you look elsewhere.—DS



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**Gateway 2000  
Destination**



CPU	P-III 300MHz	P-III 300MHz	P-III 266MHz
Motherboard	Intel Portland	ASUS	Intel Portland
Chipset	440LX	440LX	440LX
RAM (Amount/Type)	64MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM	64MB EDD RAM
2D Graphics (chip, AGP/PCI)	STB Velocity 128, AGP	Diamond Viper 330, AGP	STB Video Rage II, PCI
3D Graphics (chip, AGP/PCI)	STB Velocity 128, AGP	Diamond Viper 330 (AGP) and Obsidian 3D, PCI	Apocalypse 3Dx
Hard-Drive (Size/Type)	8.4GB IBM Deskstar EIDE	Twin 4.5GB Seagate Cheetahs, 4.5GB UAW SCSI	6.4GB EIDE Quantum Fireball
CD-ROM or DVD	12/24 Toshiba	12/20 Plex and Creative DVD	Toshiba DVD
Monitor	Dell 17-inch	ViewSonic G810 21-inch	Gateway 31-inch
Audio Subsystem	Creative AWE 64	Creative SB16 w/Yamaha DB50KG	ENSDNIQ Soundscape VIVO
Speakers	Altec Lansing ACS 490s	Altec Lansing ACS 500s	Harmon Kardon 6-channel
Modem	USR Sportster 56K Voice Internal	SupraExpress 56Kc	Telepath Windows X2
Game Controller(s)	Microsoft SideWinder	CH Stick, Throttle, Wheel, Pedals	Microsoft SideWinder
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## The Power Macintosh: A Different Drummer

### Power Macintosh 6500/300

Contact: Apple Computer, (800) 538-9696; [www.powermacintosh.apple.com](http://www.powermacintosh.apple.com)

With all the public scrutiny over Apple Computer in the past few months, we felt compelled to take a look at the Macintosh line of computers as a gaming platform. Apple supplied us with a Power Macintosh 6500/300, which uses the PowerPC 603e clocking at 300MHz. The system comes with 64MB of RAM, 512KB of Level 2 cache, and an onboard ATI Rage II chip with 2MB SGRAM for graphics. The system we tested also came with a 12x CD-ROM drive (some models have a 24x drive), a 4GB hard disk, a built-in Zip drive, and a 33-Kbps modem.

As expected, setup is a snap. Unplug the system, plug in the various cables, and turn it on. There's a small woofer actually built into the base of the midsize tower; the sound quality, while not reaching eardrum-splitting levels, is balanced and pleasing. We had to install Apple's latest system software update, System 8, as this Mac arrived with 7.6.3.

It's hard to compare Macintosh performance to PC performance. Games that are ported from the PC run—not surprisingly—slower than their PC counterparts. For example, *MacDuxie* gets around 13–14fps at 640x480—about the same as on a Pentium P55C/200 with a good graphics card. *Duke Nukem 3D* for the Mac is even worse, at around 30fps (as opposed to 40–45fps on a 200MHz Pentium system with a good graphics card). *Duke* isn't really a good benchmark for the PowerPC, though, since it uses a lot of 8- and 16-bit data structures initially designed to wring the last ounce of performance out of Intel CPUs.

Macintosh games fared better. *MechWarrior 2* looked smoother than *MacDuxie*, although we didn't get actual frame-rate numbers. Included in the box is a 3D accelerated version of *MechWarrior 2*. Its performance seemed reasonably good,

and the image quality was pretty good, though not up to 3Dfx standards.

Speaking of 3Dfx, there's now a 3Dfx board available for the Power Macintosh: the Techworks Power3D. We couldn't get one to test before deadline, but we'll be checking it out in the near future.

One of the truisms about Mac gaming is that many of the better PC games make it to the Macintosh—eventually. The wait can be in excess of a year, though. As CGW's sports editor Jeff Green laments, however, action sports games almost never make it to the Macintosh. Exclusive development of Macintosh games is becoming a thing of the past as well. Education titles fare better—most come with both Mac and Windows versions in the same package.

So what's a Mac user to do? You might try an interesting software package that was released recently: Insignia's RealPC software emulator. Insignia claims it will run any DOS game, emulate MMX and Sound Blaster audio, and run most Windows 95 DirectX titles if the user supplies his own copy of Windows 95. Again, we'll check this out in a future issue.

Overall, the Macintosh 6500/300 is a nice system that would make a great gaming box if only leading-edge games were delivered on it in a timely fashion. Perhaps if Apple's fortunes turn around, Macintosh gamers won't have to play the worst game of all: the waiting game. —LC



## Conclusion

We asked the vendors for the best cut of high-performance systems for computer gamers. Falcon Northwest, alone, really took us at our word. Although way over the top, its Mach V shows the attention to gamers on which Falcon Northwest has built its reputation. The other companies interpreted our request a little differently.

Dell delivered a very high performance system with a fairly straightforward selection of components and few frills. Solid's Game King bundled some aging technology (except for audio), but did perhaps the best it could with the resources of a small reseller. With a technology facelift, this would make for an interesting system. Until then, it's hard to give it a strong re-

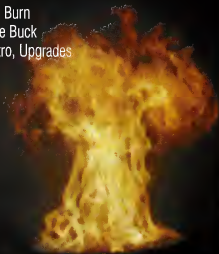
commendation. Gateway's Destination came through as a pretty solid gaming rig, and GL Quake on the PowerVR has the potential to suck you in for marathon sessions in front of the Destination's 31-inch screen. Of all the systems we tested, the Sony was probably the most undistinguished. Sony really needs to get off the dime and do a better job of delivering bleeding-edge game performance.

If your pockets are very deep, the Falcon Northwest Mach V makes a very compelling argument for the kitchen-sink approach. It's clear from the overall choice of components that the guys at Falcon know what gamers need and try hard to take care of them. If your wallet can't handle the Mach V, the Dell Dimension is a very solid, albeit austere equipped rig. ☞

## Next Month

We'll be back with the results of our off-the-shelf, "bang for the buck" Ultimate Game Machine for under \$2,500. And here's a breakdown of what else is in store this year in CGW's Ultimate Game Machine series:

- Part 1:** Off-the-shelf—Burn, Baby, Burn
- Part 2:** Off-the-shelf—Bang for the Buck
- Part 3:** Build Your Own, Turbo/Nitro, Upgrades
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## Are You Connected?

BY LOYD CASE  
AND DAVE SALVATOR

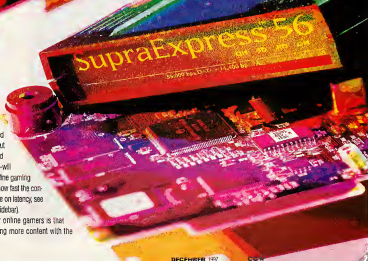
**T**here's been quite a bit of fast talk about faster data rates for getting on the Internet. With at least half a dozen different modem types all vying for dominance, and an ongoing standards squabble still raging over 56K technologies, the landscape has

become cluttered, to say the least. These technologies range from the fairly familiar (56K, ISDN) to the more exotic (Hughes Network Systems' DirecPC satellite dish). But one has to wonder: Is enhanced throughput the sole requisite for a better time online? If all you do is surf the Web,

# DATA MADNESS

then it pretty much is. For gamers, on the other hand, more speed is certainly welcome, but two things—latency and dropped data packets—will make or break your online gaming experience no matter how fast the connection speed (for more on latency, see the “How We Tested” sidebar).

The good news for online gamers is that developers are creating more content with the



Internet as the primary run-time platform, not as just an afterthought. So as the data pipes into our homes continue to widen, developers are learning how to make games that are not only tolerable to play on the Internet, but are also truly compelling. Titles, for example, Interactive Magic, with its WWII flight-sim title *Warzone*, or id Software's reworking of *Duke* into *DukeWorld*, a much more Internet-friendly version of the original title.

Despite these encouraging trends, however, we need to face the fact that a lot of online gaming is still, well, sub-optimal—especially if you're accessing the online world using an aging 14.4Kbps modem. Or perhaps your once-speedy V.34 33.6Kbps modem is starting to feel a bit poky. What's your next move? Will a 56K modem deliver enough additional performance to make it worth shelling out \$100-200 bucks, or do you get more aggressive, and opt for ISDN or some other burgeoning higher-bandwidth technology?

We tested several 56K modems and ISDN terminal adapters and came away with some interesting findings. We examined not only how fast these units can bring the online world to your screen, but also something equally, if not more, important for gamers: how much latency they introduce. We also took a look at the current state of evolving technologies on the radar screen, such as ADSL and cable modems. So without further ado, let's see what these babies can do.

## ISDN

### LAGGING NO MORE

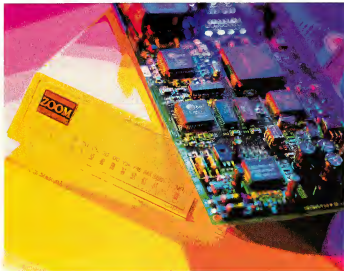
ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) has been something of a stepchild in the data/communications community. Too expensive for most homes in the past and too slow for most businesses, ISDN was often referred to jokingly as "I Still Don't Need (it)."

But deregulation in the telecommunications industry is changing much of that in some parts of the country, with many of the Bell Operating companies now offering home ISDN services, mainly for Internet access.

If you're one of the lucky ones who lives in a part of the country with low cost ISDN availability, be aware that it's not quite as simple as adding another phone line. Although terminal adapters (aka ISDN "modems") are much easier to use, it's still helpful to understand the basics.

ISDN service into your home is known as a BRI, or Basic Rate Interface. It consists of two 64Kbps (that's kilobits per second) B channels plus another 16Kbps D channel that's shared between the two B channels and is used mostly for signaling (for example, ringing the phone). The D channel can actually be used for data after a

call is initiated, giving a potential aggregate throughput (before compression) of 64Kbps + 64Kbps + 16Kbps, or 144Kbps total. You'll be assigned two phone numbers. In addition, most phone companies assign SPIDs (Service Provider IDs) to each line. For example, my Regional Bell Operating Company, Pacific Bell, just tacks 0101 at the end of each phone number for the SPID. Not all areas make proper use of the D channel, however. Some parts of Pacific Bell (mine, for example) instead "steal" 8Kbps of bandwidth from each B channel for signaling purposes. Thus, instead of two 64Kbps + one 16Kbps—144Kbps total—I have a pair of 56Kbps lines, or 112Kbps



total. This temporary situation will fade as digital switches are upgraded.

ISDN is much cheaper now, but still not as cheap as POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service). While typical monthly rates for a pair of ISDN lines are only a little more than a single analog phone line, even local calls have a per-minute charge during the business day—but you get up to 200 free hours of night.

The fast data pipe is certainly attractive: You can do better than postage-stamp video-conferencing, though it's still pretty jerky. You can download those game patches much faster. However, for gamers, ISDN's real benefit is reduced latency. Anyone playing games over the Internet knows what a killer high lag time can be. In tests using the Windows 95 TraceRoute program, even the slowest ISDN terminal adapter had packet round-trips about two thirds that of a 33.6Kbps modem—the fastest adapter could send and retrieve a packet of data in only 25 percent of the time it took a standard modem. More noteworthy is that ISDN terminal adapters turned in lower TraceRoute times than even the fastest 56K modem tested here as well.

As with modems, all ISDN terminal adapters (TAs) are not created equal. We took a look at three representative TAs, and found that each has its own unique way of connecting you to the Net.

## 3COM IMPACT IQ

The 3Com ImpactIQ behaves much like a traditional external modem, although the external case more closely resembles 3Com's Ethernet hubs. There are convenient connectors on the back for two analog telephony devices, such as a standard telephone or fax machine. Unlike most modems, there is no power switch; it's always running, which is a good thing if you have a phone or fax attached. There's an RJ-45 jack for the ISDN connection and a 25-pin serial port for connecting to the computer. 3Com supplies both cables.

Installation and setup is the easiest of all the TAs tested. Since it's external, all you need to do is plug in the power brick, attach the serial cable at both ends, and plug in the ISDN cable. The real gem, though, is the software for setting up the phone lines. You don't have to enter anything: The ImpactIQ software autodetects the switch type, sets the numbers, and sets up your SPIDs. It was one of the simplest setups I'd ever done.

ImpactIQ uses the standard Hayes AT command set to communicate with your computer. I was able to establish a direct

connection to a CompuServe ISDN number by dialing direct, which is convenient.

In our TraceRoute tests, the ImpactIQ proved to be the slowest, probably partly due to the serial port overhead. Still, TraceRoute times averaged about 82 mill seconds (ms), versus the 116ms posted by the SupraSonic 33.6 baseline V.34 modem. And despite its poor performance versus other ISDN TAs, it's still faster than even the fastest 56K modem.

Overall, the 3Com is the simplest to set up and use—almost a "no-brainer." Although a little on the slow side, the two always active telephony connections and ease of use make the 3Com a contender.—LC

### ImpactIQ External

**Price:** \$275

**Contact:** 3Com, (800) 638-3266

[www.3com.com](http://www.3com.com)

**PROS:** Easy to set up and easy to use.

**CONS:** Slowest of the ISDN TAs.



## DIAMOND SUPRA NETCOMMANDER

The NetCommander differs from the other two ISDN devices by appearing as a network interface card for your computer. It shows up in Windows 95's Device Manager as a WANNDIS device. The benefit is faster connection times, especially if you have a true 2B+D channel connection. The downside is that you can't direct-dial another ISDN adapter.



Hardware setup is about as easy as any ISA card. The NetCommander is a Plug-and-Play device, and since it's not seen as a modem, it doesn't conflict with the serial port (but it does need its own IRQ). Configuring the ISDN lines wasn't quite as easy, but the NetCommander's utility had a pretty simple user interface. That's good, because the manual is nearly useless once you get past installing the hardware; the online help was only a little better. It does have a connection for a POTS device such as a telephone, but the connection is live only while the computer is powered up.

Once connected, the NetCommander posted some of the fastest TraceRoute times we've seen, averaging a little under

36ms. This card may be the closest thing to nirvana for the Internet gamer; if you can get an ISDN line, if you're interested in getting into ISDN for relatively little cost, check out the NetCommander.—LC

### Supra NetCommander

**Price:** \$249 (MSRP)

**Contact:** Diamond Multimedia,

(800) 468-5846

[www.diamondmm.com](http://www.diamondmm.com)

**PROS:** Easy setup; fast connection.

**CONS:** Poor documentation.



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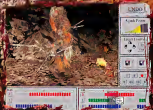
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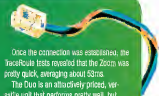
**A**t first glance, the Zoom/Duo looks like the best of both worlds. It combines a standard, 33.6Kbps V34 modem and an ISDN terminal adapter on the same card. The reality is a bit different, it works—but getting there is a rough ride.

The Duo's setup was pretty annoying. First, the documentation, while complete, was poorly organized. Setting up phone numbers and SPIDs involved using the third-party Bitcom software, but there was no mention of this in the main manual; a loose sheet of paper points you toward the Bitcom software. Since the Zoom/Duo is a Plug

and-Play card, hardware installation was fairly smooth. The Duo looks like a modem to the system, so I did have to disable a serial port to avoid conflicts.

Even after I found the Bitware modem setup program, my troubles weren't over: I couldn't connect to my ISDN line. A long support call to Zoom revealed that the Duo assumes you have a 2B+D channel setup, and it couldn't handle my 2B/56Kbps line.

An AT command fixed the problem, and I was able to connect—finally, it's likely that most ISDN users won't run into these problems, since most lines in this country are 2B+D.



Once the connection was established, the TraceRoute tests revealed that the Zoom was pretty quick, averaging about 53ms.

The Duo is an attractively priced, versatile unit that performs pretty well, but buyers should beware the setup: it may not be trivial. —LC

### Zoom/Duo

**Price:** \$299 (MSRP)

**Contact:** Zoom Telephonics, (800) 681-3118  
[www.zoomtel.com](http://www.zoomtel.com)

**PROS:** Integrated V.34 and ISDN in one card.

**CONS:** Poorly organized documentation; setup can be difficult.



## HOW WE TESTED

**O**f any computer-related technology, modem testing is truly a black art, usually best left to magi, swamis, and clairvoyants. The difficulty of the task is compounded by the fact that modems are used, by and large, to connect to the Internet, itself a very unpredictable beast. With that in mind, our testing centered around trying to remove as many other components from the equation as possible. Now bear in mind that in the real world, any one of these components (your ISP's modems, a slow router, phone-line conditions,

planetary alignment) can still affect performance. Our testing breaks down into two areas: throughput and average ping time to and from terminal server.

To gauge throughput of the 56K modems, we ran tests over a public switched telephone network (PSTN) simulator, which follows the proposed guidelines initially described by International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The Throughput versus File Type (TVP) test evaluates a modem's compression capability on a line with low impairment levels for three representative file types: moder-

ately compressible text, slightly compressible executable, and an incompressible file. The files were transferred from the digital server to the client modems and throughput performance was noted.

Perhaps more than throughput, the real party-killer for gamers can be latency, a measure (in milliseconds) of how long it takes a piece of data to be sent from one modem to another, and for the receiving modem to send back an acknowledgment that it received the data. Lower ping times are better. To give you an idea, on an Ethernet local area network (LAN),

## 56K MODEMS AVERAGE THROUGHPUT VS. FILE TYPE

	ZIP File	Executable File	WordPerfect File
USR Sportster	4720	7255	9565
Global Village	5120	8125	10250
Zoom Fax Modem	5423	8735	9136
Diamond SupraExpress	4401	5005	7067

Bytes Per Second



## OTHER ON-RAMPS

Until now, the only widespread alternative to analog phone lines for home users has been ISDN. In the coming year, that will begin to change. The hunt for faster data pipes and reduced latency is in full force. The Holy Grail of Net gaming—latency equivalent to a local area network—may not be as far off as feared. Almost all of the new services are asymmetric in nature: Downloads typically occur faster than data going to the network from your PC—albeit faster than a standard modem (except for DirecDuo).

A lucky few in some parts of the country are beginning to get cable modems. Cable modems are rolling out slowly, though, partly because many local cable networks were never designed for two-way communication, and have to be retrofitted. Another reason is that cable-modem standards have fluctuated (until recently). A cable modem attaches to your system via an Ethernet connection, so in addition to the cable modem, you'll need a LAN adapter. One of the unresolved controversies is performance. You may see great performance when you're the only connection at your head end, but as more users are added in your neighborhood, the bandwidth gets shared, and individual modem performance will most likely suffer.

The various regional phone systems have finally woken up to the threat of cable modems, and have responded with XDSL. "XDSL" is a catchphrase describing a set of digital subscriber line services (hence the "DSL"). The one that will affect consumers the most is ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line). ADSL is cool in that it doesn't require upgrading your telephone lines (if they're fairly new)—it works

over copper. However, current technology requires you to be within 3.5 miles of the central office, leaving rural areas and many outlying suburbs out of the picture. The minimum distance will probably increase as the technology gets better. Pacific Bell, for example, will be offering two types of ADSL. One form will allow downstream speeds of up to 1.5Mbits/sec, but upstream is only at 384Kbps. The other service option is 384Kbps in either direction (not really "asymmetric," but the technology is the same). Pricing hasn't yet been set.

One final alternative is DirecDuo, from Hughes. You can get cable-quality television and Internet services from a single source. However, the implementation appears a bit kludgy for gaming purposes. You communicate upstream to the ISP via your good old analog modem. Downloads are handled through a small (roughly 18 inches in diameter) satellite dish that picks up a transmission from geosynchronous orbit (roughly 23,000 miles up). Can you say "lag time"?

It's very possible that within a year, many people will be using alternatives to your good old analog modems. Still, it's hard to beat the low cost of today's 56Kbps modems. Even if you throw in a second phone line, it's still a pretty cheap way to connect. But it will never give you the low latencies of a LAN. —LC

## HOW WE TESTED

ping times are often under 30ms, and in a game like Quake, are usually somewhere around 20-40ms. On the Internet, ping times are usually in the 200-300ms range, or worse. Modems can sometimes account for nearly 100ms of that latency, so finding a modem with the lowest ping time can make quite a difference.

To figure out both the 56K and ISDN modems' ping times, we used a Windows 95 program called TraceRoute

(tracert.exe), which will report, hop-by-hop, how long the round-trip transmission/receipt acknowledgment took. We focused on the first hop, which is from the client modem to the ISP's terminal server modem, took 50 samples, and then averaged them. For testing 56K modems, we used two different ISPs, CompuWorld and InReach, both of which are currently supporting both 56K standards. For comparison, we also tested

Diamond's SupraSonic 336V+ V.34 modem as a baseline to see how much faster the 56K modems would be. For ISDN TraceRoute tests, we used Pacific Bell's ISP service. When looking at latency numbers, assume that the client modem is responsible for about half of the latency, and the terminal server modem for the other half.

—Dave Salvator, with Rob Schenk and Brian Flies, Computer Shopper Labs

## AVERAGE TRACE ROUTES TO TERMINAL SERVER

56K MODEMS	at CompuWorld		at InReach		ISDN	at Pacific Bell	
	ms	ms	ms	ms		ms	ms
Zoom (K56 Flex)	93	184	93	184	3Com Impact 10	84	168
Diamond (K56 Flex)	92	183	92	183	Zoom Duo	53	106
Global Village (X2)	117	107	117	107	Supra Netcommansier	37	74
USR (X2)	118	107	118	107	V.34 Modem (baseline)	119	238
Diamond SupraSonic V.34 (baseline)	135	187	135	187			

Milliseconds - Lower Is Better

Milliseconds - Lower Is Better

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #184

# 56K MODEMS

Despite more exotic offerings, 56K modems still represent the main Internet hookup option for many people. With technologies such as ISDN, ADSL, and cable modems, there may not be a local service provider, or, for that matter, an ISP who offers these connectivity options. But the biggest problem with 56K modems is that this technology has splintered into two variants: X2 and K56Flex. Which standard will win the day is still an open question. So, the more important question is: Will the 56K modem I buy today still work after the new single 56K standard is solidified sometime next year? Most modem vendors are promising upgrades to this new standard (some of them free), so the news on the continued compatibility front seems pretty good.

Even with 56K, however, your ISP may not yet even offer these services, or may have opted to offer only one. That could therefore limit your choice of which 56K modem to consider. In addition, you may have to look for a new ISP to take advantage of your 56K modem. Before making any investment, find out from your ISP which flavor it is supporting or plans to support.

Another issue to consider: Your mileage may vary from ISP to ISP. There are a myriad of possible explanations for this variance, but you should remember that, just because you got a hot new 56K modem, you won't automatically see the 50Kbps+ data rates brazenly promised by modem makers. In fact, the best rates we saw from the four units reviewed here was right about 50Kbps. Apparently, there's some current FCC regulation that caps peak X2 modem throughput at 53Kbps, and you'll most likely get that speed only on a sunny day going downhill with a tail wind. Still, 50Kbps is faster than the data rates most of us currently live with. And there's more good news for gamers.

Most of the 56K units here get better ping times than the V.34 baseline modem used, and the difference can be dramatic. Echoing last year's message, we recommend external modems, simply because their installation is so simple. All four units installed problem-free, and because the COM



port's I/O resources are readily known to OCS, older OCS titles should have no problem getting at the modem either. And despite the current schism in the 56K world, all four units reviewed here are software-upgradable, and all four companies are offering free upgrades to the new single 56K standard when it arrives sometime next year.

So if you're in the market for a 56K modem, check out our evaluations of these units.

## USR SPORTSTER 56K

A longtime player in the modem market, US Robotics (USR) developed, and has been the main proponent of, X2 56K technology. Even after being recently acquired by 3Com, a driving force behind the Open56K specification (see sidebar), USR continues to heavily evangelize X2 technology, and has lined up a fairly hefty array of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in its camp.

Getting the Sportster up and running was fairly straightforward, though USR doesn't include a serial cable needed to connect the unit to your machine. Sportster's ports are clearly labeled, and though there are DIP switches for enabling/disabling different features, they too are clearly labeled. The unit also has a power switch and volume control, and its front panel status lights will give you a good idea what the unit's up to during operation.

While Sportster's numbers show that it's not quite the fastest of the lot, it is still consistently fast. It had the highest reported initial connect speeds of all the 56K units we looked at (around 50Kbps), and its ping times to ISP terminal servers were again, not the fastest, but not the slowest. Its ping-time numbers and reported initial connect speeds between the two ISPs we tested with were pretty consistent however.

USR has publicly stated that it will offer free upgrades to the forthcoming single 56K specification when it is finalized, so Sportster will continue to be Net-worthy. If your local ISP is supporting X2, the Sportster should serve you well. —DS

### Sportster 56K

Price: \$219 w/ \$50 mail-in rebate

Contact: USR/3Com, (800) 342-5877

www.x2.usr.com

PROS: Good features;  
consistent  
performance.

CONS: Serial  
cable not  
provided.

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## OPEN56K: PANACEA OR PIPE-DREAM?

If 56K technology had an astrological sign, it would be Gemini. Since its inception, there's been a twin-track of development, splintering into Rockwell/Lucent Technology's K56Flex, and 3Com/USR's X2. Unfortunately, these two flavors of 56K, though in many ways similar, are different enough that they won't intermingle. And as these behemoths duke it out for dominance over what will be the prevalent method for connecting to the Internet for the next couple of years, it's we, the end-users, who wind up having to tolerate the headaches created by this megaspall. Why can't the players involved just get along?

The controversy stems from several factors. The principals, USR/3Com and Lucent Technologies, are each trying to leverage their intellectual property (IP) patents—some held, some pending—and in turn are trying to put into place licensing fee structures for use of their respective technologies. At a recent meeting of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Study Group 16 in September, the major players failed to produce a "determined document" outlining technical details of the new "universal" 56K modem specification, dubbed VPCM. The result is that a final version of VPCM that vendors can actually use probably won't show up until sometime next spring. Fortunately for end-users, almost all modem vendors worth their salt are offering free upgrades to the new VPCM standard once the ITU and the players involved iron out the details.

What's at stake here? Big bucks. Until other communications technologies can compete on both price and performance, the winner of the lion's share of the burgeoning 56K modem market will be laughing all the way to the bank. Should you hold off until next year, when the new VPCM modems are available? Not necessarily. If you're still slogging along with a 14.4Kbps modem, a new 56K modem, X2 or K56Flex, will offer a considerable performance boost. Come next year, you should be able to upgrade it to remain compatible with the new VPCM standard. —DS

## DIAMOND SUPRAEXPRESS 56E

Diamond Multimedia bought its way into the modem business by acquiring Supra several years ago. The company has offered a line of modems ranging from a fairly basic model up through its SupraSonic (the V34 version that we used as a baseline for comparison in our final connect speed and ping-time tests).

Diamond's latest K56Flex-based SupraExpress 56E is a pretty basic 56K offering.

The unit itself is pretty unsexy, and its ports are unlabeled. It does come with hard-wired serial cable, but lacks a power switch and onboard volume control. Its front-panel status lights are pretty minimal. They show power, send data, receive data, and off hook.

The SupraExpress's performance is decidedly mixed. On the one hand, it was the poorest performer across all three test types in the average throughput test. It also had just about the slowest reported initial-connect speeds with both test ISPs. On the other hand, it had the best ping times with both ISPs, a real plus for gamers. And in gameplay testing, SupraExpress held its own.

At \$140, the SupraExpress delivers fast TraceRoute times, but bear in mind its spotty throughput performance. —S



### SupraExpress 56E

Price: \$140

Contact: Diamond Multimedia, (800) 488-5948

www.diamondmm.com

PROS: Pretty ping times; inexpensive.

CONS: Poor performance on throughput tests.



56Kx's throughput numbers are unimpressive, though they are faster than Diamond's. In just about every test except for the ZIP file, the 56Kx is slower than both X2 units. Its average initial connect speeds were also somewhat disappointing, in the lower 40s. In ping-time tests, we saw something of a Jekyll-and-Hyde effect. When connected to CompuWorld, 56Kx's ping times were the fastest (tied with Diamond), but when connected to InReach, they were slower even than the V34 baseline unit, and we saw numerous time-outs, indicating dropped packets. Gameplay confirmed the number, as the 56Kx seemed to cause numerous freezes. Its gameplay performance was smoother when connected to CompuWorld, however.

The 56Kx has its moments, and the sluggish performance we encountered was only going through one ISP. But that, coupled with its unimpressive throughput numbers and average reported initial connect speeds, leaves us somewhat reluctant to recommend the 56Kx as a gaming modem. —DS

## ZOOM 56KX

Perhaps hoping for brand recognition from a generation of users raised on PBS educational programming, Zoom has both a 56K modem and an ISDN unit in this roundup. The company's K56Flex-based 56Kx modem, however, presents something of a mixed bag.

The unit has labeled ports and a front-mounted power switch (nice touch), but doesn't ship with a serial cable to connect it to your machine. The front panel has the most elaborate array of status lights of any 56K unit tested, and will even indicate in which mode you're connected: V34 (33.6Kps) or 56K.

### 56Kx

Price: \$149

Contact: Zoom Telephonics, (800) 631-3116  
www.zoomtel.com

PROS: Complete array of status lights; front-mounted power switch.

CONS: Spotty ping-time performance; so-so throughput performance.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #375

# GLOBAL VILLAGE TELEPORT



**G**lobal Village is a modem maker more familiar to Mac-heads, but the company's X2-based TelePort modem is its first foray into the PC market. In entering the 56K fray, Global Village opted to use USB's X2 technology, which several other modem makers have also embraced.

A very slim external unit—a little bigger than an audio cassette case—the TelePort has port labels that are Mac-style iconic symbols for the phone line and phone connections. The unit has a power switch, though it lacks a volume control. TelePort ships with a hard-wired serial cable, and its front-panel status lights are pretty

minimal, showing only power, connect, and data transfer.

In testing, TelePort was the faster of the two X2 units we looked at, and performed well versus the K56Flex modems in the roundup. Its reported initial connect speeds to the two ISPs were slower than the USB X2 unit, but Global Village achieved



higher initial connect speeds than either K56Flex unit. As for average ping times, TelePort's was identical to the USB unit, and were comparable to the K56Flex units going to one ISP, though were slower in going to the

other than the Diamond SupraExpress was.

If you don't need status lights, TelePort (at \$99) is an inexpensive unit that delivers solid performance and consistent ping times. —DS

### TelePort

Price: \$99

Contact: Global Village, (800) 738-4821  
www.globalvillage.com

**PROS:** Inexpensive, fastest throughput performance on four of six tests.

**CONS:** Lacks front-panel status lights and onboard volume control.



# Conclusion

**D**espite advances by 56K modems, and several interesting connectivity technologies on the horizon, ISDN is the way to go for now if you can get service in your area. Though certainly not as cheap as standard dial-up service, ISDN clearly delivers lower latency, and setting up an ISDN terminal adapter, though not always stupid-simple, has gotten considerably easier. If ISDN isn't an option, 56K modems do deliver better latency performance than their V.34 predecessors, but that performance can vary widely from ISP to ISP.

So, in addition to investing in a new 56K modem, you may find yourself having to seek out another ISP to get optimal latency times. For the purposes of Internet gaming (there's

another use for the Internet? Oh, yeah, downloading game patches) the Supra NetCommander seems to be the sweet spot. The 3Com ImpactII deserves kudos for convenience and ease of setup, but the relatively slow speed is a concern. Finally, the Zoom!Duo may be of interest to someone who really needs the V.34+ISDN capability—and it's certainly fast enough—but be aware that setup may be troublesome.

As for the 56K guys, Diamond's SupraExpress 56e delivered the best performance in terms of latency, though its throughput numbers underwhelmed. The X2 units both turned in identical latency performance, which was

consistent, though not as fast as Diamond's. And while the difference in latency times compared to Diamond was noteworthy when connected to one ISP, it was negligible when connected to the other. Their throughput numbers were also better across different file types, how ever Zoom's 56Kx delivered spotty latency performance, and mid-pack throughput. If your ISP offers only K56Flex, we would lean toward the Diamond. If your ISP offers only X2 service, we'd give the nod to Global Village. ☺





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# And the Verdict Is...

Finally—the Answer to the Eternal “DOS vs. Win 95” Question



**W**hen I wrote my column “Performance on Tiel,” I knew I would get responses. And I did. What surprised me, though, wasn’t the volume, but the outcome.

First, let me state my bias up front: I use Windows 95 almost exclusively, even when playing DOS games. For one thing, I find myself playing fewer and fewer DOS games. Part of the reason is the emerging preponderance of Windows games. Part of the reason is time—I need to muck around with configurations much less with DOS games than I did in the past. To be honest, getting here has been a long road—taming the beast hasn’t been easy. But like Cordell and Shadowfax, I find this horse to be better than past mounts.

Now, on to the votes. In fact, it was pretty even. There were 24 guilty verdicts (that running games on Windows 95 was a bad idea), 23 not guilty, four readers for “probation”

(which basically means wait and see), and two Macintosh aficionados suggesting that they had a better alternative than either DOS or Win 95.

This is by no means a scientific sample, but I was surprised at how even the responses were. Given the email I tend to get, I was convinced that I would get far more guilty than not-guilty verdicts. Interestingly, the users voting guilty were often more vehement than the not-guilty voters. Some seemed to dislike Windows 95 for no other reason than it was from Microsoft. The guilty votes also tended to come from highly technical PC users, whereas the majority (though by no means all) of the not-guilty votes were from less technically sophisticated users.

Of course, one of the main issues with Windows 95 has been DirectX, which has generated a lot of controversy. Despite preferring Windows 95 in general, I’ve had my share of problems with DirectX, though my woes haven’t been nearly as terrible as some. I’ve seen, as with any new technology, DirectX has had teething problems. But unlike past technology innovations—

CD-ROM, for example—DirectX has affected many more users in a much shorter period of time. Which brings me to this month’s topic.

## DIRECTX 5.0: THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

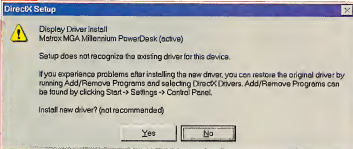
I’ve been playing around lately with Microsoft’s latest incarnation of DirectX, version 5.0 (there was no 4.0, by the way). The gang in Redmond has added a lot of features to DirectX, including a new mode, DrawPrimitive, that greatly eases development of 3D-accelerated games. Multiplayer capabilities—particularly Internet multiplayer—have been boosted. DirectInput now has a force-feedback component, courtesy of the folks at 3-Force. And a 3D positional component has been added to DirectSound.

While the new features are interesting, what excited me about this release was how much control had been returned to users.

It’s always a bit daunting installing a new version of DirectX. Previous moves

“ Sometimes, mixing new and old technology results in a whole that is much less than the sum of its parts. ”

FIGURE 1 readers for “probation”



to the forefront: Will my games get hotter? Will I have to reinstall Windows? Will my carefully tuned driver setup be reduced to digital dust?

On my systems, the answer was no. I have read of other users who have had problems, but my regular correspondents seem much happier with the new release—as am I. In fact, I felt a great sense of relief when the display driver install screen popped up during the installation (figure 1).

Finally, I thought, the installation routine actually gives a recommendation that makes sense. Even though the DirectX install didn't see a "certified" driver, it didn't feel as if it had to step on my system to tell me who was boss (yes, that's a "not recommended" next to the "install new driver" question). Even more important, DirectX 5.0 now provides a method



FIGURE 2

for restoring your old driver. Hallelujah!

As in all things software, it's not perfect; at least one reader's system failed to revert to the old driver, but in my testing, I was able to restore drivers easily.

#### RELEASING CONTROL

I was basking in the glow of this unexpected find when I made the next astounding discovery: There it appeared in my control panel, unheralded (figure 2).

What was this blue and yellow icon... and what the heck happened to my joystick control pane? Clicking on the blue icon brought up the... gasp!—DirectX control panel (figure 3).

Note the "Restore drivers" button and a list of version numbers. Note, also, the tabs at the top. Most of the controls are still somewhat sparse, but the DirectDraw tab reveals a veritable geek's delight (figure 4).

There are a couple of interesting features on this screen. You can now tell, at a

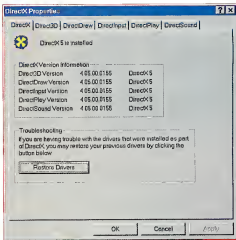


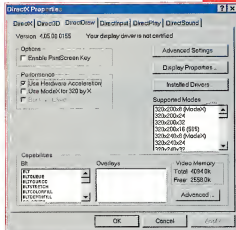
FIGURE 3

glance, all the different graphics modes your graphics accelerator supports, as well as the acceleration capabilities. You can now specify "mode X" for certain graphics resolutions; this can affect performance positively or adversely, depending on the graphics chip.

Click on the "Advanced Settings" button, and it pops a control screen, which seems to be useful mainly for troubleshooting (figure 5).

The setting that looked the most interesting was the "Show frame rate" checkbox, but checking it didn't do anything, as near as I could tell. It may

FIGURE 4





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#### DRIVERS/API SUPPORT

OS2, Windows® 3.1, Windows® 95  
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#### SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

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4MB RAM (8MB required for Windows® 95)  
Windows® 3.1 or Windows® 95



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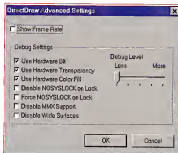


FIGURE 5

be a DirectX 5.0 feature that doesn't work with games written for earlier versions of DirectX, but that's only a guess.

I could devote an entire column to exploring all the buttons on DirectXDraw. Suffice it to say you can now get more information than you ever desired—and even alter some DirectX behaviors. This makes troubleshooting a lot easier. You can turn features on and off, turn hardware acceleration on and off, and even activate a “debug” mode, though I

old joystick control panel, but it does look a lot more like a standard Windows 95 control panel.

#### A WORK IN PROGRESS

DirectX 5.0 feels a lot more polished than past releases, but it's still a work in progress. While DirectX3D is more robust,

haven't opened that can of worms yet.

Then there was the mysterious new “Game controllers” icon. Clicking on that brought up a revamped joystick control panel (Figure 6).

In truth, it probably isn't an updated version of the

and 3D games are finally hitting the streets in quantity, Microsoft continues to dog its feet when it comes to OpenGL acceleration for Windows 95. This has the effect of reducing choice for the end users. With the loss of fast 3D accelerators now on the street, it's really unfortunate that GL\_QUAKE and all its cousins and siblings continue to be supported on only a couple of 3D chipsets.

DirectX 5.0 is worth getting, however, if only for the setup and user control enhancements. At this rate, Windows gaming might one day actually be easy, stable, and fast. ☺

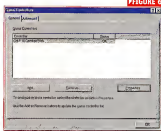


FIGURE 6

## CTIPS!

### GETTING REAL (MODE, THAT IS)

One of the thornier issues with Windows 95 games is running titles from the DOS prompt. If you run from a Windows 95 DOS box, performance may suffer. If you “Restart the computer in MS-DOS mode,” you need to have your DOS CD-ROM and other necessary drivers loaded in CONFIG.SYS. The problem with this is that some CD-ROM device drivers, when loaded before Windows 95 starts up, put Windows into “compatibility mode”—and performance suffers. (You can tell by popping up the “System” control panel applet and selecting the performance tab.)

However, if you're the lucky owner of a Creative Labs sound card, you may have a better alternative. It's

called CTLOAD. CTLOAD is a small program that lets you load a device driver from the DOS prompt. Why is this useful?

The answer lies in the DOSSTART.BAT file, which executes when you run the “Restart in MS-DOS mode” shutdown option. Sure, you can always create custom configurations that will load all your drivers, but this is easier. Here's an example of CTLOAD in action in a DOSSTART.BAT file.

```
C:\ASPI800S.SYS /D
CTLOAD C:\ASPICD.SYS:ID
MSCDD01
C:\mscdex.exe /d:mscd001 /m:16
C:\logitech\mouse\mouse
```

ASPI800S and ASPICD.SYS are required for running DOS games off a CD-ROM, but I sure don't need them cluttering up my CONFIG.SYS file. Luckily, CTLOAD solves that problem nicely.

### SHEDDING OLD FUR

If you've been digging around in your root directory, you may have noticed a couple of hidden extraneous files taking up space. The names of the files are SUNHDD.0AT, WBSUNDD.0AT, and WBSUNDD.INI. These files are created when you upgrade over an existing Windows 3.x installation. WBSUNDD.0AT, in particular, can take up more than 6MB of disk space, since it contains compressed versions of Windows 3.x files that were replaced by the Windows 95 upgrade process. If you don't think you'll be going back to Windows 3.x, you can safely remove the files by running the “Add/Remove Programs” control panel applet and uninstalling the “old Windows 3.x and MS-DOS files” entry. Don't just delete them, unless you've reinstalled Windows 95 from scratch since the original upgrade.

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# Fast 3D for Less

*New Diamond Stealth II Breaks the \$100 Barrier*

by Loyd Case

Every now and then some product comes out of left field, grabs me by my lapels, and screams "Pay attention!" The Diamond Stealth II is such a product. It uses Rendition's new V2100 2D/3D accelerator chip, and the combination of Diamond's driver-writing abilities coupled with the innovative architecture of the Rendition chip make for a very interesting product. Throw in 4MB of E2-ramosced SCRAM and sell it for \$99, and it moves from the "interesting" column to the "jaw lands here" column.

The card installed very smoothly, and Diamond's by-now-familiar driver setup process also went smoothly. During testing, we encountered only one glitch: The CIBench SVGA-graphics test crashed with a divide overflow, but we had no problems with QUAKE, DESCENT II, or DUK: NUKEM 3D in SVGA-graphics mode.

Using our test-bed system, a 200MHz Pentium with MMX, the WinBench 97s Business Graphics WinMarks scores were pretty good: 85.2 at 1024x768x16 and 80.7 at 800x600x32. More impressive was the Stealth's 3D WinBench score. At 126, it was just a tad shy of Diamond's 3Dfx-based Monster 3D (which posted a 130).

Actual gameplay was pretty good, too. Direct3D games played smoothly for the most part and looked great. FLIGHT SIMULATOR 96 ran at a steady 18–22fps, and MOTO RACER ran 25–40fps. DirectDraw performance was good, too, with both WinQUAKE (using -nowindirect) and DESCENT II/95 running smoothly. SVGA-graphics scores were also quite good: 57fps for DukeBench and 16.2fps running DOS QUAKE's three Time Demo tests. While standard VGA-graphics



performance in Rendition's newest chip has improved somewhat, it was still pretty slow. We saw only 39.1fps in CIBench VGA-graphics and an average of 26.1 fps in QUAKE using its DOS VGA-graphics mode.

Still, with VGA graphics increasingly becoming a moot issue, the overall performance of the Stealth II was a very pleasant surprise. It's not just that it's very affordable, it's about the best \$100 card I've ever seen. ☺

**APPEAL:** Gamers on a tight budget looking for a fast 3D accelerator.

**PROS:** Very good 3D and 2D Windows performance; good SVGA-graphics performance; very low cost.

**CONS:**

Poor standard VGA-graphics performance.



## THIS MONTH IN HARDWARE

- 286 **ASUS AGP Motherboard**
- 286 **Goldstar 24X CD-ROM**
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- 291 **Thrustmaster Millennium Joystick**
- 292 **Logitech Wingman Extreme**
- 294 **CH Racing Wheel**
- 294 **OR Technology LS-120**

**Price:** \$99

**Vendor:** Diamond Multimedia, San Jose, CA (800) 458-5846

[www.diamondm.com](http://www.diamondm.com)  
**Reader Service #:** 317

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# matrox

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #246



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# Do-It-Yourself AGP

by Loyd Case



If you've been waiting with bated breath to upgrade your system to ACP, then read on: The ASUS P2L97-S represents the first of a new breed of motherboards, as it integrates the Intel 440LX chipset with a built-in Adaptec Ultra-Wide SCSI in a compact, ATX form-factor package.

Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) is designed as a high speed, dedicated bus specifically for graphics. ACP doesn't help much for 2D graphics, but does enhance 3D graphics performance—especially when there are textures too large to fit in the RAM on the video card. The 440LX has full support for 2x-sided addressing and AGP texturing, and the dedicated bus should also help, once contention with the PCI bus begins to increase. The 440LX also supports SDRAM—though only at a 66MHz system clock—and UltraDMA33 hard drives. The double-decker rear panel

ATX port layout has two USB ports in addition to the usual parallel, 2-serial, mouse, and keyboard ports.

There's also a CD containing Windows 95 bus-mastering EIDE drivers and an INF update for the chipset, as well as some system management. ASUS even supplies the flash update utility on the CD for future BIOS updates. The manual is well-written, though at times it's a bit terse.

Installation is pretty typical for a motherboard, though the ASUS' compact size makes it a bit easier to install than your average board. The ATX form factor eliminates the need to figure out serial connections. This board only uses DIMMs, so be prepared to pony up for SDRAM or 3.3 volt unbuffered EDO DIMMs. It takes up to 384MB of RAM in three DIMM slots, parity and ECC RAM is supported. The onboard SCSI interface is easy to connect, but you need

a special adapter (not supplied) to connect to external devices. One other cool feature is that you set the CPU speed in the BIOS—no longer do you need to play "hunt the jumper." For serious gear-heads who want to know, the board comes with the A3 stepping of the 440LX chipset.

Overall, the P2L97-S is another step in the evolution of system boards. The nod to ACP has finally been opened for do-it-yourself upgraders. ☺

**APPEAL:** Do-it-yourselfers looking for a solid AGP motherboard.

**PROS:** AGP; UltraDMA33 and onboard SCSI support; jumperless; ATX form factor.

**CONS:** Typical motherboard installation.



Price: \$325 (without CPU)

Vendor:

ASUS Computer International  
(408) 474-0557  
www.asus.com  
Reader Service #: 310

## ★★★★★ REVIEW • GOLDSTAR CRD-824IB SLOT DRIVE

# Caddie-Lack

by Loyd Case



Every now and then you come across a product with an impressive new feature that transforms what might otherwise be a no-hum device into something that tames eyebrows. The Coldstar CRD-824IB is just that.

The first thing you notice when you unpeck this drive is the honey-looking slot in the front. There's no door or caddy. If you have Windows 95, installing the drive is pretty straightforward—screw the drive in, attach your power, IDE, and sound-card cables, and turn the system on. One reboot later, you're live. If you have DOS or Windows 3X, there's a supplied driver disk. The front panel has a full set of CD transport controls (Play/Eject, Stop, and Fast-Forward) and there's even a SPDIF (Sony-Philips Digital Interface) on the back for digital audio output. The drive reads just about every possible CD format including the new CD-RW disks.

There's no CD tray and no caddy on this drive. Instead, you slip the CD into the front slot (as with most car CD players). The slot is really a handy feature. Recently, I trashed a CD-ROM drive in my tower system when I bumped the opened tray with my knee. Small children also seem to have an easier time with the slot drive.

As is typical with these high-speed EIDE CD-ROM drives, the random-access transfer rates for very small files is fairly slow—22KB/sec for files just 2KB in size. Once the file sizes get bigger than 8KB, the performance catches up considerably. Sequential transfers are much faster, all the sequential transfers run at 1600–1700KB/sec. Since the Coldstar is a CAV drive, I also tested the outer-track performance for transfer rates. Not surprisingly, I saw speeds on the outer tracks of

2500–3500KB/sec. Note that most CDs don't have much data in the outer tracks. CPU utilization was pleasantly low for an EIDE drive—43 percent on average, and only 16.2 percent at a 600KB/sec transfer rate.

If you're in the market for a high-speed, EIDE CD drive, and the slightly higher price of the Coldstar doesn't put you off, it's worth a closer look. ☺

**APPEAL:** Users looking for an easy-to-use, high speed IDE CD drive.

**PROS:** Slot loading minimizes chance of drive damage; low CPU utilization for an EIDE drive; fast spin up times.

**CONS:** A little slow for random transfers of small files.



Price: \$179 (MSRP)

Vendor: LG Electronics  
(800) 243-0000

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Reader Service #: 318



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #306

# ISA's Last Stand

by Loyd Case

It is a sad truth that just as a technology matures and gets easier to set up and use, it's also made obsolete by the next technology shift. So it goes with sound cards. The next generation of sound cards will be PCI based and offer sophisticated, 3D-positional audio. But there's still life left in the world of ISA sound cards, as evidenced by the MediaTrix AudioTriX (say that three times, quickly) 3D-XG.

The 3D-XG is about as easy to install as any Plug-and-Play audio card. If you have a fairly plain system, then you'll have no problems with some systems, you may have to tinker some of the I/O address settings in the Device Manager. There's also a handy DOS (remember DOS?) control panel for adjusting settings for DOS games.

At first, the specs for this card look very interesting. They feature an attached, Yamaha-manufactured SWS68XC wavetable digitalizer. The fly in this ointment, though, is the Yamaha OPL-SA

sound chip ("SA" stands for "Sound Blaster Architecture"). In addition to Sound Blaster compatibility, it has Windows Sound System compatibility, kind of silly considering that this now-defunct standard cuts up an IRQ for no good reason. The "3D" audio is not true positional 3D, but rather a stereo "field-widener."

In testing, the drivers seemed a bit unstable, though we encountered no problems with several Windows 95 games. But using Windows 95's Media Player to play MIDI files would occasionally wreak havoc with the system—problems even included the dreaded "Blue Screen of Death."

In DOS, both Quake and Doom: NEXUS 3D sound like good, although the digital audio in DOS games was a little muddy (this wasn't the case with native Windows 95 games). The 3D-XG supports only Sound Blaster Pro compatibility—no 16-bit audio in DOS (Windows audio is full 16-bit). Overall sound quality in

Windows 95—including low-resolution WAV audio—was pretty darned good, though.

Despite the good sounds in Windows 95, the crash problem with Media Player is troubling. What's more, 3D-XG doesn't come cheap at \$295. If MediaTrix can address some of this instability—and free up the IRQ unnecessarily grabbed for Windows Sound System compatibility—this could be a more interesting card. ☹

**APPEAL:** Anyone looking for an alternative to Creative Labs.

**PROS:** Great wavetable; clean sound in Windows 95.

**CONS:** Expensive; DOS digital audio a little muddy; occasional crashes with Media Player.



Price: \$295  
Vendor: MediaTrix  
(819) 829-8749  
[www.mediatrix.com](http://www.mediatrix.com)  
Reader Service #: 319

HARDWARE

## THRUSTMASTER MILLENNIUM 3D INCEPTOR • REVIEW ★★ ★ ★

# Not Just Rock 'n' Roll

by Greg Fortune

The Thrustmaster Millennium 3D Inceptor (M3DI) is certainly the strangest joystick I've ever put my hands on. This is not due to any funky ergonomic design or strange multifunction base, but rather its unique approach to joystick motion. Modeled after the control sticks on the space shuttle, which have a gimbaled Y-axis, the M3DI is an accurate and versatile joystick.

First, the basics. The M3DI is a digital Windows 95-only controller. If you want to run DOS games with this stick, you'll have to do it out of a DOS window under Win 95. It has six buttons (including the trigger), one four-way hat, and a throttle control. The buttons are completely mappable via the included software. Overall, the M3DI feels like a sturdy, well-built piece of equipment with a comfortable grip and well-placed buttons.

The real surprise comes when you first move the stick. Pushing the stick left and right works as does any other joystick, with the fulcrum in the base. The stick twists left and right for yaw control as well, similar to the Sidewinder joysticks. But, instead of pushing the stick forward and backward to pitch up and down, the grip rotates forward and back, as if you were turning a side-mounted wheel with your hand. In fact, there is no Y-axis motion at the base at all.

By having two separate movements for the x and y axes, you gain accuracy in a flight sim, there's no chance that you will inadvertently affect the vertical pitch of your plane when you push the stick over for a banking turn. This controller worked well for the games I tested it on, including *Jane's Laserwar* and *US Navy Fighters 97*.

The motion of the Millennium 3D Inceptor is easy to get used to and

provides the ability to adjust movement in one direction without affecting any other inputs. The one glaring omission is native DOS support, and this is my only gripe. Is this the future of joystick design? I'm not sure. But one thing is certain—for many Win 95 games, I've got a new favorite joystick. ☹

**APPEAL:** Win-95 gamers looking for a new twist in game control.

**PROS:** Easy configuration; solid construction; highly accurate, digital output; easy-to-use programming front-end.

**CONS:** No direct DOS support for legacy games.



Price: \$89.98  
Vendor: Thrustmaster  
(503) 615-3200  
[www.thrustmaster.com](http://www.thrustmaster.com)  
Reader Service #: 321

HARDWARE



# To the Extreme

by Jack Rodrigues

Logitech's latest offering, the WingMan Extreme Digital, has several distinguishing features: a comfortable (provided you're right-handed), molded contour grip, rubber-coated buttons, a throttle with a bullet-shaped nub, and a weighted base (which gives the controller a solid feel).

The best feature, however, is the easy-to-install (and use) Logitech Entertainment Control Center (LECC) software that is used to customize the WingMan's buttons. After you attach the stick, the WingMan's CD installs the LECC and adds an icon to the Windows 95 Control Panel. It's a quick process if you have AutoPlay enabled. There are 6 buttons that can be programmed (6), if you decide to reassign the four-way directional hat). Four are on the stick and two more are on the base unit.

The LECC consists of two tabs: Game Setup and Joystick Setup. In Game Setup, you add a game and create

a set of commands for it. In Joystick Setup, when you click on a game title the drop-down menu for each button displays the list of the commands you have created. Select an item on the menu list and it is assigned to that button. These settings are saved to disk. The last game settings you selected in the LECC panel will be assigned to the joystick and will remain in effect until you change them.

You calibrate the joystick using the DirectX 5.0 Game Controller (which replaces the joystick icon) in the Control Panel, though some games have their own calibration programs. The WingMan holds calibration well after prolonged daily use.

There is one sour note: The throttle can't be programmed and will function only if the game you're playing supports and recognizes it. I was able to get the CH Pro Pedals to function as a rudder in conjunction with the joystick in flight sims, but not as pedals in racing sims. WingMan's customized

buttons function only for games running under Windows 95. For DOS-only games, the joystick emulates either the basic Thrustmaster FCS with the directional hat or the CH Flightstick Pro with a throttle.

Despite a few glitches, the WingMan is a solid, easily programmed, inexpensive stick that's ideal for gamers on a budget.

**FAPPEAL:** Gamers who want a programmable joystick that is flexible enough to work with most games.

**PROS:** Inexpensive; comfortable grip with a weighted base and easy-to-use software.

**CONS:** The throttle doesn't function in all games; customized buttons can't be used in DOS-only games; stick movement may be a bit stiff for some gamers.



Price: \$49

Vendor: Logitech  
(800) 231-7717

www.logitech.com

Reader Service #: 320

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #257

# Floppy Heir or Just a Flop?

by Loyd Case

The lowly 1.44MB, 3.5-inch floppy disk drive has been the mainstay of removable storage in PCs since the Pleistocene era, or so it seems.

Recently, a couple of challengers have come along. First, looms arrived on the scene with the Zip Drive, a 100MB removable using a floppylike technology that's quite a bit faster.

Shortly after that, the LS-120 arrived on the scene: The LS-120 uses magneto-optical media to deliver 120MB in a cartridge that looks remarkably like a standard 1.44MB floppy drive, and can also read and write to standard floppy disks.

This seems like a winning combination, but there are a few problems. First, you need to have a fairly new motherboard with a recent BIOS. The floppy drive is the default boot device when there are no hard disks present, and you don't want to be without one should you need to reformat your boot drive and re-

install the operating system. The LS-120 is an IDE device—but won't be recognized as a boot device unless the BIOS knows about it.

Second, if you want to avoid driver hell, you'll need either Windows 95 OSR2 (revision 950 B) or Windows NT 4.0. Alternatively, you can get a new IDE controller for your ISA or PCI slot.

In my testing, the drive was supposed to show up as a D: drive, but on my test system it appeared as the A: drive (good). That put the system into the slower compatibility mode (bad). I couldn't come up with a workaround, though new drivers were in the works at press time.

On the plus side, there's the convenience factor: Having a single slot for both media types has a lot going for it. It would have been even more convenient had Microsoft allowed the 120MB floptical to be a recovery disk, but, alas, the boys in Redmond let you use only



standard floppies. If your system meets all the right requirements and the phase of the moon is right, then this might be a good solution; otherwise, wait for the technology to mature a bit. ☹

**APPEAL:** Those looking for an alternative to the 1.44MB floppy drive.

**PROS:** 120MB flopticals are more resilient than magnetic alternatives.

**CONS:** Installation is tricky, system requirements are fairly strict.



Price: \$149  
Vendor: OR Technology  
(408) 856-3000  
www.ortech.com  
Reader Service #: 324

# Get Your Motor Running

by Greg Fortune

CH Products, a long-time maker of sturdy game controllers, has done it again. Its new CH Racing Wheel, an analog, four-button steering wheel, is just the ticket for racing- and driving-game enthusiasts who want to improve their lap times and still have a little cash left over for gas.

Setup of the wheel is straightforward and painless. The wheel attaches to most flat table surfaces with a pair of suction cups and a pair of clamps. It took all of five minutes to connect, configure the Windows 95 Control Panel, and be up and running in *INTERNET 76*. You can change between "wheel only" and "wheel with pedals" mode with a flick of a switch on the unit. Wheel-only mode sets the buttons on the back of the spokes to emulate the joystick's-axis movement,

allowing speed control without taking your hands off the wheel. If you happen to have a set of rubber pedals, all four buttons on the wheel become available for functions mappable by your game.

The Racing Wheel feels solid and doesn't exhibit any rattle or looseness in the steering column. One curious exception: There's no spring to center the wheel and provide resistance. The wheel doesn't suffer tremendously due to the absence of a resistance mechanism, but I did blow a couple of starts by not being centered when I "popped the clutch" as the light turned green. And while the CH Racing Wheel is an analog device, it held calibration well, with no perceptible drift.

The CH Racing Wheel is a solid controller that features easy installation, good performance, and a very reasonable price.



If you are in the market to buy an entry-level wheel, the CH is a solid choice. ☺

**APPEAL:** Entry-level motorists looking to upgrade their driving gear.

**PROS:** Inexpensive, good overall feel.

**CONS:** Lack of centering spring.



Price: \$89.95  
Vendor: CH Products  
(619) 598-2518  
www.chproducts.com  
Reader Service #: 323



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## CG Choice Games This Month



"One has to give Sierra credit for some serious chutzpah for bringing out a sequel to a game that only recently was knocked out of first place in the 'Most Bungled Game' category by *BATTLECRUISER 3000*."

— Martin E. Cirulis, reviewing *Outpost 2*

### HOW DO WE RATE?

We only review finished products, not pre-release versions. The ratings are as follows:

**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. It 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. It can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. It 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.



"The Force is strong in this one."—Darth Vader

# Jedi Knight Returns

LucasArts' *DARK FORCES* Sequel Is Another Great *Star Wars* Game

by Thierry Nguyen

In the past, LucasArts always achieved success with its *Star Wars* games, releasing such classics as *TIE FIGHTER* and the well-loved *DARK FORCES*, even the mediocre *REBEL ASSAULT* series managed commercial success. Recently, though, there's been reason to doubt LucasArts' magic touch, as shown by the release of *YODA'S DESKTOP STORIES* or even *X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER*, which never did capture the hearts of *TIE FIGHTER* veterans and *Star Wars* fans like me. Well, all the naysayers can now shut up, because *JEDI KNIGHT* has come through, and so has LucasArts' magic. *Star Wars* touch.

## IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

*JEDI KNIGHT*'s story is completely separate from the rest of the *Star Wars* universe, yet it contains many parallels with the original trilogy. It's the story of Kyle Katam from *DARK FORCES*, a young man gifted with the Force, who must face Jerec, a power-hungry Dark Jedi. Kyle has two reasons to hunt Jerec: He wants to avenge the death of his father—a Jedi Master—and to prevent Jerec from robbing the Jedi Valley of its power.

Unlike *DARK FORCES*, there are no cutscenes of any sort in *JEDI KNIGHT*. Vader doesn't

follow up on his threat at the end of *DARK FORCES*, and there is no "Katam vs. Fett, Round Two." I like this better, because there are no odd continuity issues to violate plot canon, which makes the story flow better.

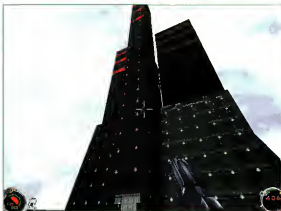
## A BETTER MOUSETRAP

The first thing you'll notice is that LucasArts has finally migrated to "true 3D" with a new engine. *JEDI KNIGHT* features truly complex buildings replete with turbolifts, rooms on top of rooms, and dizzying heights throughout. While *DARK FORCES* had good levels, *JEDI*'s architecture is outstanding. One perfect example is Jerec's onerous palace in Baron's Hed. Not only is the exterior awe-inspiring, but when you sneak inside you'll appreciate the detail

in both the interior and the exterior environments.

The gameplay in *JEDI KNIGHT* is identical to *DARK FORCES*, in that you have missions with specific goals to fulfill before you can exit levels. The levels range from such locales as the gritty city of Nar Shaddaa to the grandiose summit of the Valley of the Jedi. The level goals range from escaping a crashing ship to defeating a Dark Jedi. This time, instead of romping through 14 levels, you have to make your way through 21, all of them gaudy.

Also, the full-motion video cut-scenes are tightly integrated with the gameplay. The levels often start with a cut-scene that leads perfectly into the level. Following an animation of Kyle blocking laser fire with his lightsaber, the level



**TOWERINGLY INFERNAL** *Jedi Knight* has some amazing level design. Just looking at this tower, and knowing that I'd be in it, inspired a sense of awe—and dread.



Price: \$54.95

### Minimum System

Requirements: Pentium-90, 16MB RAM, Windows 95, 40MB hard-disk space, 2x CD-ROM, VGA graphics card, Win 95-compatible sound cards

### Multiplayer Support:

Modem, serial (2 players), LAN, Internet Gaming Zone (2-32 players).

Designer: Justin Ghn, Brett Tosti

Publisher: LucasArts  
San Rafael, CA  
(415) 985-8227  
www.lucasarts.com

Reader Service #: 330

starts with laser fire blasting all around you. Or you could see yourself flipping a hired gun onto a table in a cut-scene, and then watch the level start with the mercenary recovering from the blow. This is the closest I've seen video and gameplay integrated in an action game.

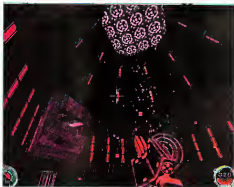
In response to criticism over the lack of save games in *DARK FORCES*, *JEDI KNIGHT* allows you to save wherever you please. To balance this feature, LucasArts made the game longer and harder, by increasing the level count from 14 to 21, and making the levels much larger in general.

#### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE FORCE

All these enhancements are great, but there is one other factor that elevates this game above its predecessor, as well as just about every first-person action game. No, it's not the addition of multiplayer; it's the "Jedi Knight" factor. The ability to become a Jedi Knight brings about a whole slew of gaming elements that help make *JEDI KNIGHT* a great game. These elements include the addition of Force powers, the development of your character via your actions, and true lightsaber combat.

Force powers are similar to power-ups in other action games. As you go through the game, you learn new powers, and are given "Force stars" to allocate to your powers (two stars for every rank increase, one star for finding all the secrets in a level). There are four neutral powers, and five Force powers for both the Dark Side and the Light Side. The powers range from invisibility to telekinesis. In the single-player game, the two most useful powers are Force Pull (which enables you to yank weapons and items toward you) and Force Jump (which helps you make tall leaps in a single bound).

Whether you are a Light Jedi or a Dark Jedi is defined by your actions. If you ruthlessly kill civilians and learn more Dark side powers than Light side, the game will consider



LUCK OF THE IRISH *Jedi* has its fair share of aggravating puzzles, such as this one. You'll need either lots of luck or light-speed reflexes.

you a disciple of the Dark Side. On the other hand, if you save more civilians and choose to heal rather than destroy, you'll remain faithful to the Light. This is the first time I've seen an action game character defined by his actions rather than a multiple choice question, and it brings *JEDI* a step closer to a character-driven RPG than a mere action game.

#### THE FINAL TEST

The heart of this game are its mano-a-mano lightsaber duels. In order to confront and conquer each of the seven Dark Jedi in the game, you will need to engage in a lightsaber and Force-only contest. This time, the bosses require

strategy and technique, like the real duels in the movie. Instead of merely unloading every weapon you have (like most action games) or manipulating the environment to indirectly kill the boss (à la *QUAKE*), you'll have to strike, parry, observe technique, and counter appropriately with both the Force and your lightsaber. The duels take place in a variety of locales, and the Jedi each have their personal technique, so no single strategy will defeat all Jedi. This is a definite step forward for action gaming.

One particularly amusing trend is that many Dark Jedi are right-handed, which means they often leave their left side vulnerable. What other game factors hand-

#### BEWARE

##### THE DARK SIDE...

Amit! All these improvements, there are a few factors that prevent *JEDI KNIGHT* from being the greatest *Star Wars* game ever.

The engine is true 3D, but it's only slightly better than first-generation *QUAKE* technology. The characters have a lower polygon count, and while they have great death animations, their final throes are identical. Every



SI, KYLE AND THE DRAGON You'll face many terrific *Star Wars* enemies and creatures, like this Hell Dragon.



**1:30 PM,**

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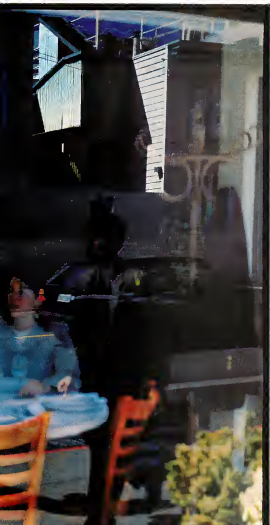
EXPLAINS IT, "I SEE HER EVERYWHERE...

IN THE PUB, THE SHOPS AND ONCE, RIGHT THERE

NEXT TO ME IN THE LOO. BUT THEN, I TURN MY HEAD

AND SHE'S GONE." CONAL'S MOM THINKS HE'S "PLAIN BARKING

MAD." HIS BEST BUDDY MICK JUST WISHES IT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM.



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The cult classic is back!



## Students of the Force

One of the most eagerly anticipated features for *Jedi Knight* is multiplayer gaming. We spent a few nights dueling with lightsabers, lasers, and Force powers, and we liked it. While you can play deathmatch, teams, or capture-the-flag, multiplayer gaming really differs from other action games with the introduction of Force powers.

Force Persuasion (invisibility) and Force Grip really change the dynamic of deathmatches, since you can now sneak up on deathmatchers or steal their weapons.

The multiplayer feature not only gives us another reason to like *Jedi Knight*, but also provides for some different and refreshing styles of deathmatching.



**THE MAWS OF DEATH** Dueling with the Dark Jedi Maw is challenging not only because he levitates, but because one misstep could mean instant death.

Stomptoozer collapses the same way, and every Imperial Officer gives the same last gasp before dying. Interactivity also isn't as high as in *ELDEN II*. While the graphics are better than *QUAKE 5*, those in *HALF-LIFE*, *QUAKE II*, and *SIN* will soon surpass them. Of course, as I write this, *JEDI* is the only one of these games actually on store shelves.

Another drawback is questionable AI. The enemies' AI is generally competent, but when you deprive foes of their weapons, they seem to be rendered senseless. Once you snatch their weapons with Force Pull, they run

around like headless chickens. I understand people running away when their guns are snatched, but running in circles, or into walls, or into you? And even when the gun is next to them, there is no attempt to recover the weapon. Then again, how smart were your wargames in *TIE FIGHTER*?

Also, besides the *REBEL ASSAULT* series, this is the first game

with a lot of full-motion video (FMV), and sometimes it gets downright hokey. I particularly didn't like Boc the Twi'lek, and sometimes Kyle had some truly bad lines. Still, the addition of FMV is an overall bonus.

Finally, one could consider the difficulty a negative. LucasArts was a little stingy with the health and shields in

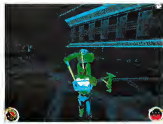
some of the levels. There is enough ammo, but you're almost guaranteed to start each level at the bare minimum shields, as it is hard to have any surplus shield power by the end of a level. Also, some of the more action-oriented puzzles require either godly timing and reflexes or extreme luck. If you are easily frustrated by difficult games, consider

yourself warned. If, on the other hand, you can stand a stiff challenge, you won't be disappointed.

All in all, *JEDI KNIGHT* is an extremely good single-player action game. It has a decent storyline that is well tied to gameplay, well-done levels, and some of that old Star Wars magic. LucasArts took everything that was good about *DARK FORCES*, and made it better, much like MicroProse did with *CIVILIZATION II* or Blizzard did with *WARCRAFT II*. There are some flaws here and there, but the good gameplay elements easily outweigh the flaws. While *TIE FIGHTER* is still the greatest Star Wars game ever, *JEDI KNIGHT* comes awfully close. **B**



**UNARMED UGNAUGHT** There are plenty of civilians in the game, like this Ugnaught. His bite indirectly affects your movement toward the Light side or the Dark.



**TWIN DUEL** Dueling with Gore and Pic is particularly annoying since you're fighting two Jedi at once. The duels are the best part of the game, though.

**APPEAL:** Star Wars fans, first-person action gamers, and those who always wanted to wield a lightsaber.

**PROS:** True 3D engine; save games; multiplayer; good integration of Force powers; excellent integration of story and gameplay; good simulation of being a Jedi Knight.

**CONS:** May be too difficult for novices; AI has some terrible lapses; some of the FMV is hokey; not enough interactivity in levels.





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# Dud Omen

*A Novel Premise Shouldn't Keep You From Driving a Stake Into This Game's Heart*

by Robert Coffey

**V**ampirism, torture, copious bloodletting, plague, revenge, and buckets of gore don't exactly add up to the feel-good gaming hit of the season. But they don't necessarily prevent a game from becoming a hit, either. Not unless you lose in repetitive gameplay, disappointing graphics, sloppy controls, and an unfriendly save feature.

## LEGACY OF PAIN

**BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN** begins as the still-human Kain, an treasury fortune hunter, a waylaid and slain by highwaymen to the land of Nosgoth. Finding himself in Hell, Kain accepts the offer of the necromancer Mortimus to be resurrected as a vampire so that he

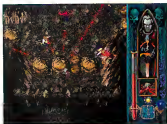
may exact his revenge among the living. Play begins as the gaunt, cast as the vile Kain, hunts down his murderers and becomes enmeshed in a story that will ultimately decide not only the vampire's fate but the fate of the world as well. In fact, the plot that

drives **KAIN** is one of the game's strengths. Rich and original, it is revealed largely through almost a half hour of animated cut-scenes.

The overall look and feel of the game is decidedly dark, which is no surprise. As Kain pursues his destiny he cuts a bloody swath through the dungeons, homes, and countryside of Nosgoth. Chained prisoners beg pitifully for mercy in virtually every building, wagons filled with the rotting corpses of plague victims choke the city streets, and grisly beheadings permeate the cut-scenes. With its relentless imagery of decay and torture, **KAIN** is one of the most horrific games in memory.

## BLOOD SIMPLE

The bulk of the game's action takes place in countless dungeons across



**FEED ME** The vampiric equivalent of telecommuting, Kain's ability to suck blood across large distances from multiple victims via his "Blood Shower" spell is an effective way to replenish lost health while waging out enemies.

Nosgoth. Viewed from a top-down perspective, Kain hurls and slashes his way through countless packed with 170 different types of enemies, environmental hazards such as quicksand, and various traps. While it sounds as if **KAIN** offers endless variety, the gameplay itself is undeniably repetitive. The enemies have only about four attack types, with simple movement patterns, and are differentiated by only minor cosmetic alterations. Traps involve little else aside from fireballs and spikes. With its overreliance on clichéd "find the switch" puzzles, **KAIN** is unlikely to challenge even the most casual gamer with its problem solving.

The game's challenge, instead, comes precipitously from trying to withstand the constant onslaught of enemies. Kain has four primary weapons and four types of armor to help him weather the assaults, but his most effective weapons are the various spells and magic objects he acquires on his journey. These powers can explode the bodies of his foes, reduce enemies to toxic pools of putrescence, shear their souls from their bodies, or just blow them up, among other things. You can also find power-ups that replenish mana and health (measured by a beaker of blood on the game screen), but Kain's best sources of blood are his victims and the captives he finds.

In spite of the use of magic, hand-to-hand combat is a constant in **KAIN**. Unfortunately, so are the unresponsive and cumbersome controls that complicate it. It often takes repeated mashing of gamepad buttons to get a response onscreen. Kain's hand-held weapons play more as ranged weapons, forcing you to



**PIGGYBACK** The real-time lighting effects of Kain's fire blade in a mountain village are nice, unlike the enemy's perch for standing on top of the bloodsucker, which makes for frustrating combat sequences.



Price: \$49.95

Minimum System

Requirements:

Windows 95, Pentium 100, 16MB RAM, 195MB hard-disk space (12MB for minimum install), VLB or PCI video card with 1MB RAM, 16-bit high color, 4x CD-ROM drive, Sound Blaster-compatible sound card, Microsoft-compatible mouse, supports joystick and gamepad.

Multiplayer Support:

None

Designer: Crystal

Dynamics

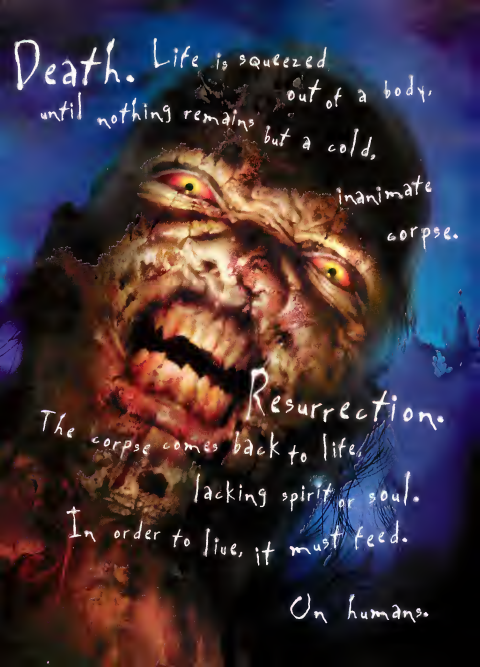
Publisher: Activision

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## The Hidden City

**P**ower-ups and magic objects are the key to success in *Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain*. While most secrets aren't too tough to locate and plunder, there's one that is devoutly hidden. Since it holds about 25 percent of the game's total secrets, it's definitely worth the trip.

After you get the Mist form, keep an eye on the moon phase. When you're creeping up on a full moon, change into Bat form and fly to the Bat Beacon near the cave where you first got the Mist form. You'll have to head west a bit, then south toward the water. Use a Repel spell to deal with the plants while you chop up the wolves. Don't cast spells to fight since you'll need lots of mana soon. When you reach the shore, turn into mist and walk west over the ocean—make sure you have plenty of magic power or your form will revert somewhere over the briny deep.

Eventually you'll reach an island with a large Stonehenge-like structure on it. In the center of the standing stones is a teleporter that leads to the hidden city. The gates to the city won't open until the moon is full. Once it is, teleport over and pick up loads of goodies. By now you've got enough gameplay under your belt to deal easily with the obstacles in the city—the real challenge is to find the place



**PRETTY PICTURES** The detail and quality present in Kain's overhead map are sorely lacking in the actual game screens

struggle to find exactly the right distance to keep away from your attackers so that you actually strike them. You cannot attack and move simultaneously, and enemies have a frustrating tendency to stand right on Kain's head, preventing you (and your foe) from inflicting damage.

### BAD BLOOD

The biggest shortcomings in *LEGACY OF KAIN* lie in the graphics and the save feature. Directly ported from the PlayStation, KAIN's graphics have been cleaned and brightened—a little—from the original. Anyone running the game with less than a P166 will be saddled with a 320x240 resolution and severely pixelated images, which makes the game's 170 enemies indistinguishable from one another and makes finding those ubiquitous switches virtually impossible at times. Running at the higher 640x480 without a beefy machine will get you better, though still unremarkable, graphics, but it will also stick you with stiff, foot-dragging game action. The real-time lighting effects are well done, but are wasted in a blockbuster gaming environment that truly shines only in the map function. The maps are sharp and often beautifully rendered, but gameplay stops when you access them.

Perhaps the biggest drawback *KAIN* has graphically is that similar games—the *CRUSADER* series and, especially, *DIABLO*—have raised gamers' expectations as to what these bloodbaths will look like. KAIN's blocky, rudimentary look and action fall far short of the smooth animation and rich design of a game like *DIABLO*. Incredibly, KAIN requires more computing power to deliver less.

KAIN's save feature simply sucks. The game can be saved only at designated

"save posts" scattered sparsely across the game world. Make the mistake of dying before you reach one, and you'll have to replay up to two hours or more to make it up—and still die. And while save posts are generally found right before you battle a boss, you may emerge from one of these epic battles (after several tries) severely weakened and without

a save post, forcing you to try to survive in hostile territory until you find one. The save feature alone accounts for Activision's claims of 80–100 hours of gameplay—an incremental save would cut game time to about a quarter of that. In the end, this vampire bites. Should you accidentally let this bloodsucker out of his box, be advised that the hole in the CD-ROM is perfect for accommodating a wooden stake. ☹

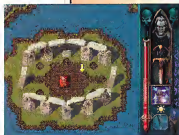


**THIS SUCKS** These save posts are few and far between, guaranteeing that you'll have to replay large portions of the game over and over and...

**APPEAL:** Anyone who cares more about body counts than gaming enjoyment; Marilyn Manson fans.

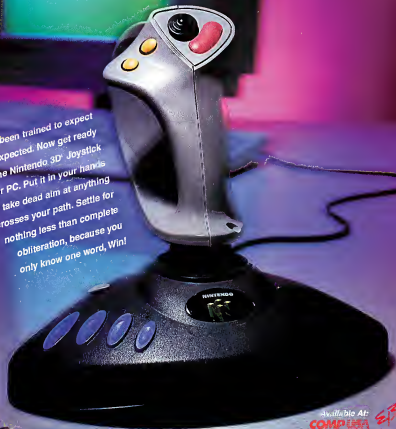
**PROS:** Almost constant action; original premise and story revealed through lots of well-animated cut-scenes.

**CONS:** Lame save feature guarantees hours spent replaying huge amounts of game; steep system demands for unimpressive graphics; dull, repetitive play in uninspired levels; unresponsive controls that can make routine skirmishes disastrous.



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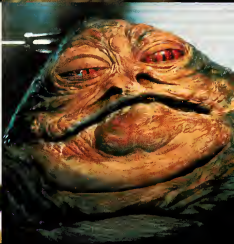
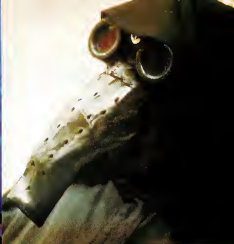
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CSA



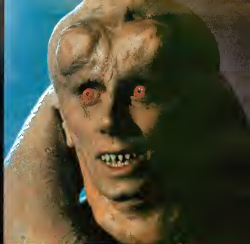
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# Terrible Descent

*Eidos' First-person Shooter Won't Fill That DESCENT Void*

by Mark Clarkson

**G**uess what? A fleet of evil alien spaceships is threatening the Earth. Things look grim, but there's a slim chance that one superhuman pilot, at the helm of a lone attack ship, might be able to infiltrate the alien fleet, destroy it, and save the Earth. Yes, you've been chosen to be that pilot.

Sound a little banal? Good. At least now you're prepared for **TERRACIDE**, a new first-person shooter from Eidos that's clearly trying, but failing, to be a better **DESCENT**.

This time, the fight to save Earth takes place within the ships of an alien invasion fleet. Inside, you must battle your way through a small collection of legless robots, alien fighter ships, and gun turrets—fighting strong winds and gravity blocks, flipping switches, and exploring twisting corridors—until you face and vanquish the ultimate evil alien.

You play a few levels within each ship, then escape into space and watch that ship explode, fight off a hunk of alien fighter craft, and then plunge into a conveniently open hatch on the next ship in line.

## COLLECTIBLE CLUTTER

Luckily, those unifty aliens leave lots of weapons and ammo floating around within the passageways of their battleships. There's even a special pop-up radar screen on the HUD, just to assist you in acquiring those power-ups. You'll need it. They're damned hard to hit, especially since you'll be in a hurry. Most power-ups, left behind by exploding enemies, will themselves explode a few seconds after they appear. Successfully snagging power-ups may well be the most challenging part of the game.

The power-ups include photon guns, bombs, sockets, guided missiles, and more. Most of the weapons are available in one of three flavors: single shot, scatter shot, and rapid fire. You can mount



**TIERED REFRAIN** Once again Earth is threatened by aliens, and a lone spaceship pilot must battle the evil alien fleet to save mankind.

up to three weapons at a time, each triggered by its own joystick button.

I found little use for some of the more exotic weapons, such as the gravity bomb, although they were fun. Some of them, like the bouncing bombs and the teleporter gun, would probably be most useful in a multiplayer game.

The chain gun is all but worthless. I could hardly blow the covers off ventilator shafts with it. Rockets remain my personal favorite.

## WHERE AM I?

**TERRACIDE** has no map, although you get a 3D compass, resembling a swissdial die, which shows you what direction you're pointing and which way is up. But your weapons, which you'd expect to be outside, can sometimes obscure your compass, which you'd expect to be inside. In similar fashion, clos-

ing doors can sometimes obscure other parts of the HUD.

Eidos eschews **TERRACIDE**'s AI, and I did notice a few buddies ducking around corners, but they don't need cleverness to beat you. They can see, fire, and fly through walls. Evil aliens were forever shooting at me from behind closed doors.

I'm pretty sure this is a bug, not a feature. Time after time, I'd come sailing around a corner only to confront a closed door. As I lurked to a stop, I'd



**HEY, BOSS** *Terracide* is fairly linear. You fly through several levels inside an alien ship, kill the end boss, and then jet to the next conveniently derelict ship.



Price: \$50

## Minimum System

**Requirements:** Pentium 90 (with 3D accelerator), Pentium 150 (without 3D accelerator), Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, 2MB SVGA card; supports all Windows 95-compatible sound cards and input devices.

## Multiplayer Support:

Modem, Null modem (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-16 players).

## Designer:

Sirius Ltd.  
Publisher: Eidos Interactive  
San Francisco, CA  
(415) 547-1200

www.eidosinteractive.com

Reader Service #: 325

hear the sound of a bad guy warning up, and missiles or rockets would fly through the solid door to explode around me. I'd fire back, the door would open, and, sure enough, there was a bad guy shooting at me. Sometimes they wouldn't even wait for me to open the door—they'd just pop through like Casper.

I never managed to go through a closed door myself, but I did clip my way into several places I obviously wasn't supposed to. Once, I popped right through the wall and out into space.

Speaking of those walls, I've got two words for TERRACIDE's designers: *Flexible textures*. The textures here look terrible. I can't figure it out. The developers have obviously gone to lots of trouble to exploit 3D hardware. These are options to turn different kinds of filtering on and off, to tweak texture quality, and so forth. And yet it looks bad on every setting.

I ran TERRACIDE on a Pentium III with an Intergraph Reactor 100 card, using the Rendition Verite chipset,

## Tips for Preventing TERRACIDE

- Check your compass often, especially before entering tunnels, taking sidetracks into rooms, or going into unknown areas.
- Pay close attention to the color of the tunnels and doors as you pass through them. Color is often your only navigational cue.
- Never be too proud to retreat at maximum speed, especially in the space battle segments. I completed one level with very low shields and was having trouble surviving the ensuing space battle. The secret turned out to be flying backward, away from the ship, at full throttle. The enemy fighters tend to cluster around the ship

they're defending. If you stay close to the ship, they inevitably swarm you from behind. But if you fly backward, they come at you from the front, making themselves easy kills.

- Crates, switches, shaft covers—it's square, blast it. Some boxes are vitally important to destroy, some are indestructible, some conceal booty, and some make no difference, but I never found an instance in which destroying one proved fatal.
- Draw your own maps. If you find yourself lost in the bowels of an alien battleship, circling the same corridors over and over, break out pen and paper and make a map. I did.

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# INCUBATION

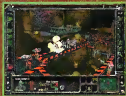
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and with a Diamond Monster 3D running the 3D's Voodoo chipset. The problems persisted on both setups.

The explosions are admittedly cool, although everything is obviously hollow and breaks up into simple polygons. The sound is acceptable, if not exceptional—although your own engine makes a swirling whir that is particularly annoying.

There are minor problems too numerous to mention, but TERRACIDE wasn't a complete disaster. It never crashed. It took advantage of my CH Combatstick and nudges its use of 3D acceleration hardware kept the frame rate high and the textures dense. It sported head movement, realistic inertia, and auto-pitching and leveling help.

Ultimately, though, I just didn't care whether I got to the next level or not. It wasn't the bad textures that spurred my spathy; it was the fact that there really wasn't a good game behind those textures. TERRACIDE's graphics are only a manifestation of the game's core problems: lack of design, lack of quality control, lack of attention to detail. ☹



▶ **MIXED 3D BAG** While Terricide does have 3D support and fast frame rates, it suffers from a flawed engine that allows enemies to fly and shoot through objects.



▶ **DIRECTIONS, PLEASE** As you navigate the corridors of the spaceships, take note of the colors around you. They will serve as a useful navigational tool.

▶ **APPEAL:** Gamers who have memorized all the tunnels in Descent and Descent 2 and are itching for more.

▶ **PROS:** 3D hardware support for fast frame rates.

▶ **CONS:** This is an uninspired game with uninspired levels; flawed 3D engine.



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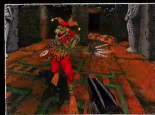
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# Time Out

by Elliott Chin

Fighting games are a sad genre on the PC; PC gamers get the console and arcade leftovers, and the original content that gets created for the PC just doesn't cut it—even against console competition. *TIME WARRIORS*, a collaborative effort from Sionards and Maloffm, does nothing to reverse this trend.



**NOTHING TOO SHARP** *Time Warriors* has good 3D graphics, but only average gameplay.



*TIME WARRIORS* is a 3D fighting game in the mold of Play Station's *TOSHINDEN* and *SOUL BLADE*. As one of eight weapon-wielding characters, you play through a tournament to defeat a final end boss. Gameplay mixes a bit of *STREET FIGHTER II* and a lot of *TAKEN* controls, meaning that you'll have to memorize many button combos and a few semicircular moves on the ground.

The game features good-looking graphics, especially on supported 3D accelerators (3Dfx, ATI, and Matrox), but, even with accelerated graphics, it pales in comparison to the gorgeous *SOUL BLADE*, and even *TOSHINDEN*. The special effects, such as smoke and transparencies, are poorly done, and the character animations are more chunky than realistic.

The characters in *VIRTUA FIGHTER PC* move with more fluidity and realism.

*TIME WARRIORS* clearly outclasses other PC fighting games when it comes to 3D graphics and character rendering, but it suffers from sluggish gameplay. As for combos, it isn't intuitive at all, but, rather, requires you to memorize button sequences. Still, *TIME WARRIORS* isn't a bad game, nor is it expensive. It's just another middle-of-the-pack fighting game. **C**

**APPEAL:** Fighting fans who don't own a console system.

**PROS:** Good-looking 3D graphics.

**CONS:**

Sluggish gameplay; combos aren't intuitive; nowhere near the level of console-based fighting games.



ACTION

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #272



# Dragon Me Down

*DRAGON LORE Returns for More, But... Why?*

by Peter Olafson

**D**ragons have a bachelor's fragile sense of order and an elephant's memory. Everything may be slightly out of place, but they know where everything is because they spend most of their lives sleeping on it. J.R.R. Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins had only to remove one gear from Smaug's piled hoard to send that great lizard into a fiery.

**DRAGON LORE II: THE HEART OF THE DRAGON MAN (DL2)** could use a little of that fastidiousness. The three-CD first-person adventure (distributed by Interplay for Cryo Interactive Entertainment) surrenders a share of its appeal to a conventionality (and even carelessness) of approach. The few gems are definitely out of their normal positions

from location to location), basic object-based puzzles, fighting, and, in the loose sense of the word, role-playing. You have to keep up Werner's health, stamina, and the magic points that support his small arsenal of spells.)

## WE CAN BE HEROES

Once again, you're controlling the David Bowie-like Werner Von Wallemod—a say-it-five-times-fast name if there ever was one—as he sets off on dragon-back for a tournament to reestablish his challenged claim to the Dragon Knight title. Along the way, he's jumped by a squadron of dragons and crash-lands in a misty forest, barely escaping with his life. Before he's done, he will have to find his way out of the woods on foot, and explore a stony medieval city and the huge maze that lies beneath it.

The original **DRAGON LORE** was released back in 1994 by Mindscape, and as does the original, DL2 mixes exploration (following proscribed paths



**YOU LOOKIN' AT ME?** You'll have to waste this snail-like demon in order to escape the forest.

from location to location), basic object-based puzzles, fighting, and, in the loose sense of the word, role-playing. You have to keep up Werner's health, stamina, and the magic points that support his small arsenal of spells.)

And while not ground-breaking in the way **DRAGON LORE** was, DL2 isn't unpleasant—it's just average. The rendered 3D graphics are smooth (if you've got a decent CD-ROM drive to pump them out) and pretty (but aren't they all?). The sumptuous CD music occasionally attaches itself to a bit of gameplay and lights the adventure right up. I enjoyed the moody way DL2 handles

the passage of time. The pre-dawn hours, late afternoon, and the dead of night all seem peculiarly real.

## MUCK AND MIRE

It must be said, however, that Cryo has done some rather odd things along the way. For starters, the opening trip to Draconia is too short to give much sense of process or adventure. Once Werner's out of the woods, he's at the city gates. The whole opening sequence of the game, in which you select your weapons, collect supplies, learn your quest, and saddle up a dragon, is handled largely on automatic. I

have the impression this was once a full-fledged part of the game—it doesn't feel like an intro—and should have been left that way. Let us explore the palace. What's the rush?

The combat—pleasantly infrequent—isn't accompanied by clear feedback on how often and how effectively you're hitting your enemies, until they (or you) finally go down. Your enemy's health



**JUST DO IT** The first of three tournaments in **DRAGON LORE II**. I had no idea what I was doing, but the spectators seemed to think I did okay.



**Price:** \$49.95

**Minimum System**

**Requirements:** Windows 95 or MS-DOS 5.0 or later, 390 for Win 95 (486DX2/66 for DOS), 12MB (Win 95) or 8MB (DOS) of RAM; 4x (Win 95) or 2x (DOS) CD-ROM drive, DirectX 3-compatible sound card for Win 95 or Sound Blaster-compatible sound card for DOS, DirectX 3-compatible SVGA video card for Win 95 or Vesa 1.2-compatible SVGA video card for DOS; 12/16 hard-disk space; mouse.

**Multiplayer Support:** None.

**Designer:** Cryo Interactive Entertainment

**Publisher:** Cryo (distributed by Interplay) Irvine, CA

(714) 533-9655

[www.cryo-interactive.fr](http://www.cryo-interactive.fr)

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is represented by a status bar at the top of the screen, but if you fight intuitively with your eyes on your opponent, it's not clear whether you're getting anywhere. (That backward march could indicate a hit or a dodge.) I'm not asking for geysers of blood, but a bloody nose and a couple of informative grunts and growls might have been nice.

For that matter, the game's does fail to address the jousting that begins in midgame. Admittedly, it's a fairly intuitive, if laborious, procedure—and regardless of how you perform, the fix seems to be in on the final result. (Now, that's annoying. If you're going to have to go through the process of scooping out and selecting your adversaries, it should count for something.) But I'd like at least to be certain what end of the stick I'm getting, and that's unclear from the removed, third-person view of the actual unseating.

DL2 also has a bad habit of failing to update the graphics to subtract what you've collected in your inventory, leaving in place objects that you've taken. The ultimate affront was my discovery that the Purple Talism—a stolen religious artifact that the player needs to recover early in the game—is the gift that keeps on giving. You can repeatedly collect it from your connection and return it to the temple again and again—each time receiving a reward and thereby removing money as a gameplay consideration. (A shame, as Cryo's gone to some lengths to inject money into the game—including a Yabbero-like dice contest at the inn and three Deactivation shops where you can buy and sell supplies.)

**SUCH A DRAG**

There are other problems. Way too much time is taken up by disc-swapping. I sometimes found myself changing them three or four times within a few minutes. A disc change may be necessary to enter the temple and always



**▶ GUN CRAZY** You'll find your weapons in the armory. Take everything that isn't nailed down. Even if you don't use them, you can sell them later.

happens when visiting the general store, your room at the inn, and at nightfall and daybreak. Moreover, every time Werner dies, you have to insert Disc 1 to load a saved game. No thank you.

Conversation with the minotaur-like characters is flat, and the choices you make from the menu are meaningless. If you choose the wrong talk, you can always cycle back until you find the right one. And it's sometimes a source of inconsistency: (You're told that the temple scribe can answer only one question, as he fires easily, but you can nevertheless talk his ear off on related subjects.) Similarly, the compass with which you're equipped in the forest vanishes once you reach the city proper (only to return in the maze), while the game's characters continue to feed you compass-oriented directions.

Cryo has also abandoned the strategic underpinning that graced the original game. DRAGON LORE let you influence the endgame vote by the way you played the game—or by killing knights likely to vote against you. Call it pride or self-

absorption, but I liked that MASTERS OF DRAGON-like sense of being watched and evaluated. I expected that extra level of play in DL2, and it's just not here.

Moreover, they haven't replaced it with anything really new—a shame, because Cryo did have something new to offer in its stead. If you've seen their recent ATLANTIS, you've experienced the beguiling effect of smoothly turning through 360 degrees of sumptuous terrain. Instead, DL2 seems to have used something closer to the old DRAGON LORE engine, and the effect is rather dated and laborious. (It can take multiple, odd-angled moves to cover just a few feet.)

In short, Cryo just hasn't built on DRAGON LORE's successes. DL2 is just another adventure with nothing particular to recommend it. They can do better. So can you. **C-**



**▶ DANCES WITH GOBLINS** Always cast a protection spell at the beginning of combat. In this battle with the goblins in the under-city maze, it could spell the difference between success and failure.

**▶ APPEAL:** Rendered adventure newbies unfamiliar with the original *Dragon Lore*.

**▶ PROS:** Uh...pretty pictures; nice use of light to show the passage of time; music hits some triumphant notes.

**▶ CONS:** Little of the appeal of the original *Dragon Lore*; sloppy inventory and monetary systems; lots of disc-swapping; weak combat feedback; generally uninspired.



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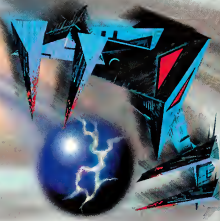
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #070



# Xtraordinary, Yet Xasperating

*Complex and Ambitious, XCAR Hits a Few Potholes Along the Way*

by Gordon Goble

If, as in some revelation from an episode of *Outer Limits*, David Keimner and his associates at Papyrus Design Group had never existed, XCAR: EXPERIMENTAL RACING would now be the second-best racing simulation for the PC. As it is, XCAR trails all of the latter-day Papyrus offerings as well as MicroProse's GRAND PRIX II in the race for the checkered flag. At least it qualifies as a sim, something that

can't be said for the supposedly "authentic" racing games that have surfaced recently in this still painfully unhabitated genre.

In fact, Bethesda's look at the "next generation of closed-wheel, closed-cockpit race cars" may well be the most difficult racing game ever—from both a driver's and a mechanic's perspective. Imagine a setup mode that makes even GRAND PRIX II's "advanced" setup area seem pale in comparison, or a car physics model that at full realism is more sadistic than realistic, and you've got an inkling of what XCAR is like.

Unfortunately, XCAR is so difficult that it borders on annoying rather than challenging—not quite capturing the feel of the wheel as accurately as Papyrus' racing products and throwing simply too much effort and too much of the game into garage and testing facilities. The sad truth is that the only way most of us will find enjoyment in this ambitious but mildly maddening effort is by detaching the authenticity and treating it as an arcade-type racer—albeit one of the most complex and certainly the most realistic ever made.

## IT'LL TAKE THE XUDO

XCAR gives you a choice from among 17 slightly futuristic "sports prototype"



**ROUGH RIDERS** Without a 3Dfx card, XCAR (and, in particular, the cars themselves) won't get much smoother than this

wide corners, never mind emerge victorious in a race. Granted it was meant to be difficult, but many of the problems you'll experience stem from inconsistencies and problematic physics.

I first realized just how tough driving an XCAR can be during the imaginary "Seattle Grand Prix." *Boak, boak, boak...* Like a pitbull, I bounced from

wall to wall to wall on a narrow two-lane ramp at just 80 mph. In real life, I've managed to keep my wife's '94 Escort blamish-free on that very same ramp at that very same speed, so being unable to do so with a sports prototype of any description made no sense. And, yes, I tinkered with setup and jumped from joystick to wheel and back again with no appreciable difference.

Once you've selected from the field of cars (which, contrary to the usually informative XCAR manual, perform quite differently from one another even before you begin twinking), you're off to the races. Eleven trac is available, ranging from simulated real-life circuits to completely imaginary courses of the NASCAR FOX SPEED variety. You can tackle them as single events or as part of a custom-designed series, and in practice, qualification, or race modes.

With full realism switched on, you'll find that XCAR strives to go the NASCAR RACING 2 route, but fails to deliver on several levels. Most critically and most obviously, it's just too hard to hop into one of these babies and drive cleanly on anything but straightaways or

will to wall to wall on a narrow two-lane ramp at just 80 mph. In real life, I've managed to keep my wife's '94 Escort blamish-free on that very same ramp at that very same speed, so being unable to do so with a sports prototype of any description made no sense. And, yes, I tinkered with setup and jumped from joystick to wheel and back again with no appreciable difference.

## WIPE OUT

With cars that sometimes look too large in the foreground and too small in the distance, the game's scaling also takes some getting used to, as does the obnoxious feeling that the scenery is moving past you rather than vice-versa. Add the hampering nature of XCAR's often flimsy circuits and the possibility of program crashes (I encountered a number of them on two distinct machines), and you've got one heck of a lightfest.

Although the game looks pretty fair on a high-end Pentium with a 3Dfx video board, you should expect to lose some detail or frame-rate speed if your rig doesn't meet those requirements. In either case, the exquisite look of GRAND PRIX II or the flat-out beauty of NERD



Price: \$49.99

### Minimum System

Requirements:  
Pentium 60, DDS 5.0 or greater, 256-color SVGA VESA 2.0-compatible video card, 2X CD-ROM drive, 16MB RAM, 10MB hard-disk space (minimum install), Sound Blaster or compatible sound card, joystick or steering wheel.

**Multiplayer Support:** Modern or null cable (2 players), LAN (2-8 players).

**Developer/Publisher:** Bethesda Softworks  
Rockville, MD  
(301) 677-0700  
www.xcar.com  
Reader Service #: 335

## A Trip Down XCar's Pit Row

There's just one mechanical rule in XCar's class of racing: If it makes the car go faster, do it. XCar pulls no punches in the modification department, packing the most complex, if not imposing, setup of any racing game currently available.

Admittedly, the physics behind your car's actions and reactions in the heat of battle aren't always perfect, but if you can live with the miscues, XCar is a mechanic's paradise. Intricate? Take a gander at the "aerodynamics" section: You can choose from single or multiple wings at both front and rear before determining the length, width, and angle of each, and even the size of the endplates. Then, of course, you can fiddle with the underbody rake angle to further increase or decrease ground effects. Whew!

Apart from aerodynamics, there are literally dozens of engine, fuel, gearing, braking, and suspension adjustments you can make—an amalgam of all that's complex in the genre's top titles. The steering section, with its numerous compensations for control devices and personal preferences, is a particularly good place to spend some time before moving elsewhere.

The really good news is that XCar drivers won't have to leave the testing grounds to audition their setups. No fewer than four test tracks (oval for top speed, drag strip for acceleration and braking, skid pad for cornering, and slalom for handling) will handle that for you. Are the results believable? Only a futurist would know for sure,



but the telemetry and tech displays seem to remain consistent throughout the testing context.

With a visual presentation nowhere near as sleek as that of, say, *Gran Turismo*, the XCar garage area won't win any aesthetics awards, but it will keep you busy—very busy.

FOR SPEED I just isn't in the cards. My personal enjoyment was further hampered by sporadic audio glitches, damageless accidents, graphic pop-throughs, extremely pixelated cars, and an only marginally attractive and very sexist championship celebration.

Nevertheless, and despite all my whining, XCar does a number of things right. Engine notes are full, reverberating through tunnels and reaching lovely highs and lows. In-car options and tools are plentiful, including on-board maps, a full-controlled POV (forward, left, right, and behind), minor mechanical alterations



**CATCHING AIR:** The XCar physics model can do strange things at times—here, sliding a car airborne at just 37 mph. Fortunately, cranking down the realism seems to get rid of such oddities.

from within the cockpit, accurate rearview mirrors, and an "on-the-windshield" HUD crammed with information.

Competitors are pretty smart, but not smart enough to react to you if you commit driving errors. Replays are magnificent, with real-time readouts and telemetry, multiple perspectives, and all the periphery of an editing suite.

Another thing XCar does very well is graphically showcase your vehicle's shortcomings and strengths in relation to those of your foes. I found myself in a three-lap race with one fellow, getting consistently outgained through the same two sweeping corners while recapturing ground on the tight turns and the pair of straightaways. Considering all the factors of this event and the settings of my car, it made perfect sense, and I was able to remedy the situation later. Nice.

### AT THE FINISH

The best part of XCar comes when you've switched on the steering help, taken damage off, decreased the ability of your opponents, and loosened up a bit. Suddenly you can take pleasure in the thing and experience the wide variety of the courses—from oval to mountain rollercoaster and figure eight—

without the fear of ultimate destruction around each bend. Although it isn't a full-bore sim in this mode, it's the next best thing and very enjoyable.

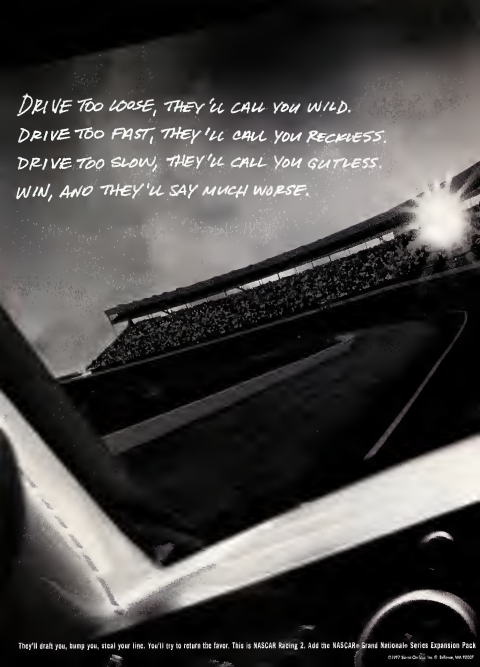
XCAR: EXPERIMENTAL RACING valiantly attempts to go where few, if any, have sped before. It makes an interesting addition to any computer driver's library—if they fully understand its limitations beforehand. **B**

**FAPPEAL:** Hard-core tinkers and fanatical cyber-mechanics. Sim drivers who thought NASCAR RACE 2 was too easy and/or predictable. Arcade-racing fans who want a new level of authenticity.

**PROS:** Deep, really deep vehicle modification area, complete with test tracks and telemetry; loads of user options; multiple POV perspectives; sophisticated VCR component; truly "far" to drive once realism has been delisted.

**CONS:** Driving model is just too hard and seemingly too wonky of full realism; most road courses are extremely narrow; rough-looking cars and occasional choppy graphics on anything other than a 3Dfx card.





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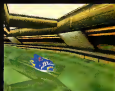
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #273



# Ruby Monday



*Last Year's Benchwarmer Looks Like This Year's MVP Contender*

by Dennis McCauley

**W**ith sports games suffering their share of disappointments recently, it's great to see a game plan come together. Such is the case with ABC's *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*.

'98 from ABC Interactive and *OT Sports MNF '98* builds on last year's version, which debuted to only lukewarm reviews. While fans enjoyed the innovative play-calling interface and Internet games, they ultimately were turned off by a weak AI, so-so graphics, and heavy system demands.

After coming up short last season, designer Doug Wisnisky and the crew at *OT Sports* went

back to the chalkboard, keeping the best of *MNF*, and focusing their efforts on the weak spots. The results should

please hardcore and casual football fans alike. The new AI, for example, is as challenging as you'll find in a computer sports simulation. Home PCs

have caught up with *MNF* in the last 12 months, as well. While many gaped about last year's requirement of 16-bit high color, the influx of 3D video cards and cheaper, faster MMX-based Pentiums has made *MNF '98* quite accessible to the typical home system.



**DENNIS DOES DALLAS** *Monday Night Football '98* features TV-style matchups of all the NFL teams. The game is often unusually low scoring, as shown here, where the Cowboys would normally be up by about 30.

Back, too, is the TV-studio front end that so effectively sets the *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL* atmosphere. From the catchy Hank Williams, Jr. "Rowdy Friends" theme song, to the insightful pregame commentary from Al

## SCRIMMAGE LINE

From the studio screen, players have an opportunity to pick their teams for a casual matchup, examine team rosters, or select league play. *MNF* should suit your taste in gameplay, from CPU-vs.-CPU quick aims to multiplayer action via serial cable, LAN, or the Internet. Also included in this year's edition is hot-seated, local two-player action.

Once past the familiar front end, *MNF* veterans will immediately note the enhanced graphics. The new player sprites are roughly twice as large as last year's, have a more defined appearance, and feature readable jersey numbers.

The gameplay has upped the ante as well, with the small details signaling quality design. Steve Young, for example, is realistically depicted as a lanky passer. NFL fans will likewise be pleased to see QBs throwing the ball away under pressure to avoid sacks. *MNF '98*'s player animations have a more authentic look, although they occasionally get tangled up, especially after time-outs if there's a grippe with the visuals, it's the generic stadiums. In *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*, the historic frozen tundra of Lambeau Field looks just like the frozen tundra of the other 29 NFL venues.



**YES, WE HAVE FROZEN TUNDRA** No realistic football sim would be complete without the ice-cold frozen tundra of Lambeau Field. Too bad the stadiums, in general, look so much alike.

Michels, Frank Gifford, and Dan Dierdorf, it's clear that this is no mere Sunday afternoon game. Additional star quality is provided by Chris Berman's halftime report, and Lynn Swann, who appears with occasional sideline commentary.



Price: \$39.95

Minimum System

Requirements:

Pentium 100, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, Sound Blaster 16 or compatible sound card, 2MB video card, 14.4K modem, Internet service provider required for multiplayer games.

Multiplayer Support:

Hotseat, Internet, LAN,

modem (2 players)

Developer: *OT Sports*

Publisher:

ABC Interactive

www.abcinteractive.com

Reader Service #: 328

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If you have an ear for football, you'll get a kick out of MNF's ambient sounds, which are dead-on. An honk, crowd noise, referee whistles, crashing helmets, and grunts combine to add a large dollop of football flavor. Even the commentary of the broadcast crew seems

improved, although Michaels occasionally states the yard line as the gain on the play. The special teams model also needs some additional practice time. Missed extra points are frequent, and the occasional lock returner fails to run after kicking the ball. Punters don't

## Armchair Quarterbacking

**J**ust how easy is Monday Night Football's play editor? Here's one example.

Coaching the Packers, I wanted to draw up a swing pass to RB Dorsey Levens. With most slots, you could spend hours designing and testing a play even as simple as this. With MNF, however, you can work the Xs and Os in seconds.

Selecting the Edit option in a Pro Set pass, I switched to I-formation, and highlighted flanker Robert Brooks. Brooks was sent in motion left, dragging a defensive back along, thus giving Levens one less man to beat on the strong side. Clicking on Levens to make him the primary receiver, I selected the right flat from the numerous choices on the pass route tree. To open the strong side more, I directed TE Mark Chmura to run a slant to the middle of the field. Since "Chow" will attract a linebacker in pass coverage, this provides even more running room for Levens. The result? A three-yard gain—just what I was looking for. Total time spent in play design? About 20 seconds.

Be sure to turn off the play dock in the options menu while you're learning, or else you'll be tagged with five-yard walk-offs for delay of game. The play-crafting system makes audibles a snap, too.

Simply right-click to bring up a menu of plays that you can change at the line of scrimmage.

Actually, my swing-pass example doesn't begin to show the depth of Monday Night Football's play-design interface, which gives players the ability to manipulate virtually any aspect of football. Each player can be given a variety of authentic assignments. Blocking patterns can be changed for linemen. Quarterbacks can take varying drops, roll out, or fake handoffs. Defensive play is especially sophisticated, with options for man-to-man, zone, or combination pass coverage. Within each, there are subsets that account for formations, coverage, line play, blitzes, and reads. The diagrams in the play caller show what your selections will look like when the ball is snapped. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of MNF is its easy access to such difficult choices. You don't need to be a football expert to drive into pro football's most complex equations: Monday Night Football. '98 has literally opened the NFL's playbooks for you.



READY FOR HIS VICTORY LAP Jeff George is in the pocket. Note the back assigned to stay home and pass block.



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**BLIMP'S EYE VIEW** MNF '98 features 10 camera angles. This blimp view is great for checking out pass coverages.

seem to account for field position, as their kicks inside the 50-yard line invariably sail into the end zone. Overall, though, MNF '98 has a crisp look that adds visual appeal to what is, at its heart, a very sophisticated Xs and Os sim.

#### SMASHMOUTH FOOTBALL

That's not to say that MNF doesn't feature worthwhile arcade elements. The game provides support for six-button joysticks, and is quite challenging in action mode. However, the depth at which MNF '98 explores the strategic aspects of the NFL makes it seem more like this year's game of choice for serious pro football fans, rather than carpet-tanned bait for joystick jockeys.

The innovative play-calling interface has been retained and enhanced from the original. This intuitive system takes a layered approach. Plays are selected from a menu box, which appears over the field options. Players can call the suggested play, or click to drop down a diagrammed listing of all plays in that category. Any play can be edited on the fly, which is the beauty of MNF '98.

There is a problem with the included team playbooks, however. Their contents could have been matched better to the personalities of the clubs. For example, the Eagles employ a 4-3 defensive alignment, while the Panthers favor a 3-4. Yet all of the zone and combo plays included in both playbooks are 3-4s. Gamers who want to personalize their favorite team's plays are advised to roll their own, a simple enough task, given the ease of MNF's editor (see sidebar).

**MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL's** smooth Internet play has also

returned. Last year's rudimentary system of giving the host IP address is back, but the new version's inclusion of free head-to-head gaming on Mplayer should make MNF '98 accessible to the less technically inclined. I had an opportunity to test a very late beta version of the Mplayer option, and can report that it ran scabiously. As most gamers have discovered, matching football sims against a live opponent is infinitely more exciting than taking on the AI, especially given MNF's rich strategic options. While some may be disappointed with MNF's lack of arcade play in Internet games, this is a common problem in all sports sims, due to latency issues.

#### SEASONS IN THE SUN

**MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL '98's** league play offers a player

editor as well as roster and schedule management utilities. While not as robust as those in Sierra's **FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL** series, the MNF tools are serviceable. There is no career mode, however, a design choice that may disappoint some. Fortunately, the design team intentionally left room for ambitious gamers to tinker with MNF's data files. If the game gives a following,



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**CONTROL ROOM** This is the TV studio front end, where you set up your games. Say, is Berman wearing a clip-on?

expect a crop of hometown utilities to sport on the Net. Knowledgeable NFL gamers will recognize that the rosters need some personal attention, as the default settings are incomplete at some positions.



**SPEED RACER** Even in the falling snow, Robert Brooks still has his breakaway speed.

League play in MNF allows you to select any team, and you can also use the computer-controlled quick sims. Games take several minutes to play in this mode, and the stats generated proved inaccurate in the initial release; shutouts were far too common, and some teams seemed to have uncharacteristic problems establishing a running game. Penalties and injuries also

seemed to occur at unrealistically low frequencies. On the bright side, COT Sports has demonstrated a commendable responsiveness on the Internet, releasing a September patch that, in part, addressed problems with roster assignments, particularly on special teams. Gamers lacking the patch are likely to find linebackers returning kicks, and tackles kicking field goals.

MNF '98 also earns high marks for first-class presentation. Inside the box you'll find a well-written, bound manual as well as an extra CD for head-to-head action. The final score on MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL '98? Despite a few flaws, it's a surprisingly impressive football sim, much better than the original. It's a legitimate contender for Sports Game of The Year. **B**

**APPEAL:** Action-oriented football fans, especially the NFL variety.

**PROS:** Excellent play calling and play-design interface; free Internet play; improved graphics; improved AI; "Monday Night" excitement; easy accommodation of user-generated add-ons; strong company support.

**CONS:** Stats skewed toward low-scoring games; special teams perform badly; roster problems on initial release; unrealistically low penalty and injury ratios.



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# No Contest

*LEGENDS '98 Is Anything But Legendary*

by Terry Coleman

Remember the 1995 Miami Dolphins? They were fresh off a season in which only a one-point loss on the road to the San Diego Chargers kept them from a Super Bowl (where the Chargers, totally outmanned, lost to a very good 49ers team). By the time the team entered training camp, the Dolphins had 17 former first-round draft choices on their roster. Nearly every football expert was convinced that quarterback Dan Marino would finally get the Super Bowl ring he craved to top off his incredible career.

Well, Marino did set a lot of passing records in 1995, but the Dolphins found ways to lose every other week. Eventually Miami stumbled into the playoffs with a 9-7 record, only to be blown out by Buffalo Goodbye coach Don Shula, hello Jimmy Johnson.

Right now, there are a few CCM'ers who feel like those football punts who jumped on the Miami bandwagon in '95. You see, we are always hoping for something new and different, and LEGENDS FOOTBALL '98 seemed to fit the

ticket perfectly. It had the fresh premise of any sports product in years, letting you match up the leather-helmeted stars of the 1930s with Joe Namath's 1965 AFL Jets, or the run-oriented Giants of the '50s with today's pass-happy NFL squads. The game had fast action, seemingly solid research, and all those hall-of-fame players from which to choose. How could it go wrong?

## BUSTED PLAY

Well, as published, LEGENDS '98 is, despite its promise, the worst football game in years. Almost nothing in the game feels finished, from the league functions to individual player performances. It's as if Accolade published a beta in order to meet an arbitrary ship date near the beginning of the real-life NFL season. This has happened before, notably with ABC MONSTER NIGHT FOOTBALL last year, but it's rarely been so painfully obvious.

Football games on the PC have always been a bit quirky in terms of controls, but LEGENDS is more irritating than most. For example, the game works well with a



**WATCH OUT FOR #88** The kicking game is modeled fairly well, but as you can see, all the players have the same jersey number.

you still have to recalibrate it for LEGENDS, worse yet, calibration goes out for no apparent reason (even at halftime of a game you're playing). And unlike, say, FRONT PAGE FOOTBALL '95, a joystick doesn't work anywhere near as well as a pad in LEGENDS, especially when taking handoffs or passes.

Even more damning is the lack of 3D hardware or software support. It's hard to understand why LEGENDS requires DirectX 5.0 when the game doesn't seem to take advantage of any of its features. The animation is far from fluid, and the player sprites often seem to skate along the ground rather than run across it. Yes, the game has been in development for more than a year, but so have Rendition and 3DIX.

Gravis

gamepad, the different colored buttons correspond to your primary, secondary, and tertiary receivers, a nice touch. But using any gamepad other than a Gravis is asking for trouble. Even if you have the pad properly set up in Windows 95,



**WHO NEEDS TIMING PATTERNS?** The offensive vs. defensive line battles are engaging in the running game. But linemen on both sides stand around too much on passing plays, giving QB's time to complete long passes.

## MISSED TACKLES

LEGENDS is an action-oriented game, which you would expect, coming from the company that gave us the HARBALL baseball series. Yet, for all its inflated home run numbers and other statistical faults, HARBALL seems like an exciting sports simulation compared to LEGENDS. When we did our sneak preview of LEGENDS, the limited number of teams available needed some tweaking, but they were reasonably play-balanced. The typical game score was something like 35-31, a little high, but no worse than Madden or any of the other action-heavy games.

In the final verdict of LEGENDS, regardless of the era in which you play, the scores resemble basketball more than football. It's



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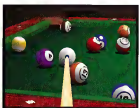
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**FRESH SMELL OF LEATHER** Legends '98 is at its best when re-creating bygone NFL eras. Sadly, the poor animation and simulation faults spoil the vivid re-creation of vintage stadiums and uniforms.

nothing for a team to score 60 points, in one game, the score was 64-58 at the end of the third quarter. By the end of one season I simulated, three teams had broken 800 points for the season, and one of those teams had given up more than 800 points as well. This is NFL football?

If these bizarre results occurred only during simulated games, you could at least enjoy playing the games "live." However, evidently while tweaking the code, the design team wrecked the statistical and player ability models as well. Regardless of their real-life talent, teams routinely move the ball down the field with abandon. To test my theory, I took the hapless Indianapolis Colts, who scored but one offensive touchdown in the real NFL during September—and found, to my honor, that I easily averaged more than 40 points a game.

The computer opponent seems busted, too. It is especially prone to long bombs on second-and-short, it blitzes at inappropriate times, and in general, is more reminiscent

of the abysmal UNDEFEATED REVENUES AI than the LEGENDS AI we observed mere months ago.

Worse, the AI routines for plays on your own team make no sense. I'm not talking about plays missing a block or missing a poor pass route, that's OK, assuming that the player is rated low for intelligence or experi-

ence. What's puzzling is when star players can't perform at any acceptable level.

For example, Larry Allen is generally considered the best offensive lineman in pro football. In LEGENDS, he can't make a lead block on a screen pass without missing his target, allowing a sack, or incurring a penalty. On defense, it's worse: Deion Sanders tackles better than his real-life counterpart, but he can't stop a routine run pattern by any journeyman receiver. In fact, during one of my games playing the Colts, I completed three passes on Sanders in a row, en route to my winning TD. So why are Deion's ratings among the highest in the game? They obviously don't make much difference in gameplay.

#### DOES ANYTHING WORK?

The really irritating thing is that LEGENDS still has some nice touches buried underneath the morass. Playing in 1932, for instance, there are no hashmarks. So, you often find yourself with a difficult situation on third down,

trapped against the sideline. Do I throw the ball (fetter than its modern counterpart), try a risky end-around play,

or simply run to the middle of the field to set up a punt? It's also interesting to take a modern team back to the days of no facemasks, although I found that the modern teams throw the ball at will, even in the prehistoric era.

The play editor in LEGENDS is fairly simple to use, but it's nothing new. MICHAEL NICKER FOOTBALL still has the best play-calling and audibles system, even though it's a year old. League management functions in LEGENDS have some improvements over those of PRIME TIME FOOTBALL, the leader in this category; you can trade multiple players, but they have some problems as well. It's fairly easy to get the players you want with a little patience, the AI isn't much of a GM. And since the ratings don't matter that much anyway, why bother trading at all?



**PLAYMAKING PURGATORY** The editor does some strange things. Here, it locked in my right HB's blocking assignment, and randomly altered my left back's motion route.

NFL LEGENDS is a sad example of a game that had everything going for it. It was a great idea, had an ambitious design, and was produced by a company with a history of successful sports games (but one that lost sight of what it was that made their games a bit in the first place). Careers always wonder why there are so few original designs. Perhaps it's because so many promising games are served up half-baked like this one. ☹

## 10 Worst Aspects of LEGENDS '98

- The 225MB complete install
- The 125MB compact install
- The negligible performance boost from complete installation
- A "truly 3D" game with no 3D hardware support
- Typical game score is 62-58
- The football, when thrown, resembles an inflated brown balloon
- Lousy computer opponent
- Lousy AI for your own players
- Bizarre trading AI
- A patch that addresses none of the above

**FAPPEAL:** For football fans who prefer concept over execution.

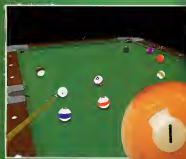
**PROS:** Captures feel of running game; lets you pit NFL stars from different eras against each other.

**CONS:** Almost everything else; the best sports game concept in years is ruined by premature shipping.



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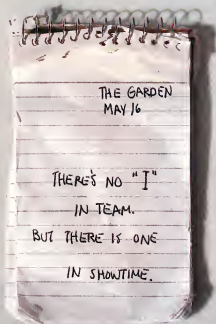
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# Frenzied Federation

*This Star Trek Simulator Is Stuck in Transwarp*

by Denny Atkin

**C**adet's Leg, Stardate 97092.5. My acceptance to Starfleet Academy finally arrived, and I've spent the past couple of weeks in the simulator, learning the ropes. I've discovered that diplomacy doesn't just take place over the viewscreen—sometimes it's just as necessary when dealing with your own crew. But perhaps more surprising is the sheer pace of combat—when reviewing the old videos of Captain Kirk and his crew, things never happened this quickly...

The long-awaited **STAR TREK: STARFLEET ACADEMY** has finally beamed onto store shelves after a number of production delays. Touted as a starship simulator, the game combines

simple adventure elements with a branching tree of starship combat missions. If that smacks more of **WING COMMANDER** than "The Trouble with Tribbles" to you, you're more on target than you'd think.

That's not to say it's not worth a look. As with the third season of the original *Star Trek*, some of the plots aren't what you'd expect, and some of the acting is hammy—but it's still a fun ride.

## FEDERATION FRESHMAN

**STARFLEET ACADEMY** is set in "classic" *Star Trek* times, apparently right before the events portaged in *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan*. You play the part of Cadet David Forester as he enters the Academy's command track. The game-

play is split between two locales: the academy grounds, where you interact with your fellow cadets and your instructors, and the starship simulator. This is a replica of a *Constitution*-class (for example, the *U.S.S. Enterprise*) bridge, as seen at the beginning of *The Wrath of Khan*.

You don't choose where to go on the academy grounds; rather, you view full-motion video sequences that include breaks in which you choose where to take the decision. It's these decisions that cause the conversations to branch. Early in the game, for example, two of the cadets under your command nearly come to blows. Whether or not you break up the fight, the tone you use when confronting the cadets, and whom you choose to blame can have effects

not only on future events and decisions in the game, but also on your crew's performance ratings.

Similar conversational interactions take place over the bridge: viewscreen as you work your way through the nearly 30 academy missions. As the game progresses, a number of stories unfold. Dealing with your crew may not seem all that exciting, even when that crew includes an Andorian and a Vulcan, but things get more interesting when you discover a conspiracy afoot at the Academy (Yes, the "conspiracy within the Starfleet snaks" plot is pretty hackneyed at this point, but it's a *Star Trek* staple, and it's handled with some aplomb here.) You'll also



Price: \$59.95

### Minimum System

Requirements: Pentium 90 (P150 recommended), Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 130MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics (Direct3D supported), 4X CD-ROM, mouse, DirectX-compatible sound card, joystick

### Multiplayer Support:

Modem, Direct Connect, LAN (2-8 players)

Designer: Rusty Bucket

Publisher: Interplay

Irvine, CA

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**▶ FRIENDS AND ENEMIES** Some missions will find you unexpectedly allied with Romulans and Klingons—but you can't always trust them.

encounter a number of stories running through your simulation missions, including renegade Klingons, aliens with delusions of godhood, and sun-endeavoring space creatures. The mission tree branches depending on your decisions, and the game has multiple endings.

There's a wealth of full-motion video on the game's five CDs. Interplay filmed actors in Starfleet uniforms and then composited them into computer-rendered backgrounds. This is very convincing, for the most part. The alien makeup was supervised by Michael Westmore, the artist who does the makeup for the current *Star Trek* series.

The acting, unfortunately, is very inconsistent. Walter Koenig and George Takei do a nice job as instructors Chekov and Sulu, and, for the most part, Peter



**SHE C'NOT TAKE IT, SIR** The damage-control screen is vital during combat; you can alter repair priorities to protect vital systems.

Kluge is pretty convincing as lead character David Foster. William Shatner pops up in the game from time to time as Admiral Kirk; he hasn't been convincing in that role since the second *Trek* film, and the self-celebration continues here. The rest of the acting varies wildly, ranging from "as good as the TV show" to "so, you did plays in high school, eh?" It's unfortunate that bad acting pops up as often as it does, because the story—penned by Dan Greenberg, Scott Bernie, and Rusty Buchert, with additional input from a number of other writers (including *Trek* cosplayer Diane Carey)—is pretty immersive, until someone starts delivering lines with all the emotive range of a supermodel.

#### WARP FACTOR 15?

Your actual missions take place on the starship bridge simulator. You boldly go where no man has gone before while sitting in the captain's chair of the bridge sim, which can be configured to simulate a variety of starship classes. Pinpoint has a role against blowing up the *Enterprise* (never mind how many times the ship's been destroyed in the movies and series), setting the space missions around a simulated bridge not only skirts this restriction, but it also makes it plausible to replay missions.

All the major bridge stations are modeled and are fully functional. These include the helm and navigation consoles, as well as science, library computer, engineering, and communications stations. For the most part, you sit in the captain's chair, directing the ship and jumping to the various other stations when necessary.

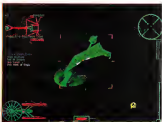
Simulator missions vary from pure space combat to puzzles and diplomacy runs where no shots will be fired. There's almost always decision making involved, and communication choices can make the difference in whether the mission turns hostile.

The best thing about the missions is their open-endedness. In games like *X-Wing*, there's usually a certain chain of events that must be executed in a particular sequence to win the mission. Here, not only are things fairly free form (you can decide for yourself which system to warp to when you have multiple goals, for example), but there's often more than one way to skin a mission. My personal favorite is a mission later in the game that you probably could win by going in with phasers blazing, but where a little creative conversation can result in victory in a classic Jim Kirk fashion—you're able to confuse a sentient computer into self-destructing. Missions such as this truly capture the flavor of *Star Trek*.

Unfortunately, when it does come down to combat, the *Star Trek* flavor is overwhelmed by a heavy seasoning of *Wing Commander*. The original plan for this game was to develop a starship simulator in which the action would take place with the flavor of the television series—an almost battleship- or submarine-like combat pace. Somewhere along



**DIPLOMACY BY PHASER** Sometimes you'll have to disable an antagonistic ship before they'll agree to talk.



**TACTICAL DISPLAY** The full-screen tactical display includes a bit of artistic license, but it puts all the vital information in one place.

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**DIRECT HIT** When engaging a Bird-of-Prey in multiplayer mode, try to take out its cloaking device first.

the time it was decided that the gameplay would be better with faster-paced combat, the fact that the game would be marketable to a wider audience that way very likely played into the decision as well.

So what you end up with is space combat with a seriously fighterlike bent. While you can play the game from the command chair and jump from station to station to access peripheral functions, you'll probably want to choose the full-screen tactical view, as it gives you all the vital information and access to the ship's functions from a single screen.

The biggest problem here is lack of situational awareness. The main viewscreen and the tactical screen view in only one direction—straight ahead. This means you'll have to use the *Enterprise*-style radar (shouldn't that be sensors?) redout to bring an enemy into your sights. It also means that you won't be able to take advantage of rear-firing photon torpedoes when you're flying Klingon ships in multiplayer mode. The developers say that previous *Interplay Trek* games did have side and rear views, but that many users got confused about which direction they were looking. (Sad, isn't it?)

This wouldn't be as big a problem if the external views present in beta versions (and splashed all over the game box) were present here. But, due to technical difficulties, they were pulled from the game before release.

The good news is that the external camera will return in the first patch, and the side- and rear-view issue may be addressed as well. Still, given the lengthy delays in releasing this product, Interplay should have bit the bullet and waited another month to fix the external view problems before shipping the product. It's time developers stopped relying on

the paradox of patches to get their games right.

#### SHARED SPACE

In addition to the main storyline, there's also a quick-encounter creator that lets you create battles between up to eight starships. In this mode, most of the ships in the game are available for you to pilot. ostensibly because the battles take place in the starship simulator, you'll still see the Federation-style bridge, even when you're at the helm of a Romulan Bird-of-Prey or a Klingon D7-A.

It's here that you can get a feel for the "flight models" of the various ships. Handling and capabilities vary dramatically: The Klingon Supercruiser, for instance, has a great weapons load, but handles like a pig.



### Battling Khan Over Kali

Although *Starfleet Academy* doesn't support Internet play, it works very well over the Net using the Kali IPX emulator. Just pop over to [www.kali.net](http://www.kali.net) and download the latest version of Kali, then talk over the \$20 shoreware fee to disable the utility's time limit. Although it may seem annoying to spend more just to get Internet capability, Kali works with almost all network-capable games, and the registration fee includes free upgrades for life. I played a number of *Starfleet Academy* games over Kali (check out the "Flight" server to find other *Starfleet Academy* players) and found that lag was minimal. In addition, *Starfleet Academy* supports dynamic entry, so players can join and leave games at will.

Where the individual ships really come into play, though, is in multiplayer action. There are four levels of Neo-Anarchy (beatmaster) play, each with various limitations on the sizes of ships you can choose. In addition, *Cabletite War* puts you in a race between the Federation and Klingons to colonize opponents' planets by transporting ground crews down to the surface. Finally, the Net Profit game lets you do *PIRATES*-style missions, transporting items and searing planets for profit, which you can then use to buy better ships. You can play it purely economic, or you can try to use your might to attack opponents before they grow wealthy enough to be a real threat.

The developers deserve kudos for including more than just deathmatch games here—Net Profit is a blast if you have time for a long session. But a nospberry goes to the corporate folks at Interplay who apparently decided to leave TCP/IP support out in their own game of Net Profit. (Interplay likely wants to prevent free play so the game can be offered on the \$2/hour Engage service.) Luckily, the game works very well over the Internet using Kali.

#### WOULD CYRANO JONES BUY IT?

Overall, *Starfleet Academy* is a mixed bag. Good writing is hampered by inconsistent acting. Superb graphics (in both 2D and Direct3D versions) are balanced by a crippled view system. Access to the multiplayer features is hampered by the lack of direct support for Internet play.

If you're a *Trek* fan, though, and you can get over the very unstarshiplike pace of combat, you'll likely find this game worth bearing up—after you take it back to starbuck to get the patch. ☞

**APPEAL:** Star Trek fans who don't mind a little creative license in space combat.

**PROS:** Good writing; excellent graphics and sound; missions are true to the Star Trek mythos; intriguing multiplayer options.

**CONS:** Arcade-style space combat; no side, rear, or external views; some very poor acting; no built-in Internet play; steep hard-drive requirements.





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# 3D's the Charm

*The Venerable Classic Gets Graphics and Handling Updates*

By Denny Atkin

Microsoft's **FLIGHT SIMULATOR** has been around in one form or another for nearly two decades—SubLogic introduced the first version for the Apple II way back in 1979. As more and more modern features have been grafted on to what, in this industry, is Pleistocene code, the old classic has started to show its age. Last year's release, **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 97**

and map-mapping. These combine to eliminate the severe terrain blockiness in the previous version. The new effects cause the ground to appear blurry at low altitudes, but it's significantly better looking than the "jaggy pixel" effect. If you don't have a 3D card, the aim uses a software filtering technique that also produces more realistic-looking terrain at low altitudes.

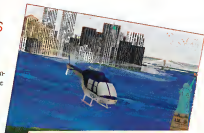
With 3D active, planes and buildings look better, and the "shimmering" effect in the distance is eliminated. Also, clouds gain a bit of transparency, and foggy conditions are easily realistic.

Like most Direct3D games, speed and graphics quality will vary dramatically, depending on the board and drivers you're using. By far the most consistently good performance was on a P166 equipped with a Diamond Monster 3D

card based on the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset. Running the simulator at 800x600 in 3D mode with the latest drivers from 3Dfx, screen updates ranged from a minimum of about 15 frames per second in the city to over 30 fps in open country. The STB Velocity I25, based on the Riva I25 chipset, showed performance that rivaled that of the Monster 3D.

Mid- and bottom-range 3D cards didn't fare nearly as well. Running in 3D mode on an ATI All-in-Wonder, based on the Rage II chipset, I was able to get the better-looking graphics of the 3D mode, but the frame rate on a P166 ranged from 8 to 14fps—nearly identical to the speed running without a 3D card.

A Diamond Stealth 2000 Pro, based on the S3 Vire DX, fared even worse, giving slower performance in 3D mode than 2D. I also tried the simulator on a Pentium II equipped with a PowerVR PCX2-based board. Although the graphics were speedy, special



**RINGS A BELL** For the first time, *Flight Simulator* includes a helicopter—the Bell 206.



**BARE BONES** To get a good frame rate without a 3D card, you'll have to turn the detail down.

Windows 95, was a disappointment for many due to its poor performance on even the fastest hardware systems.

Now Microsoft is back with a new version that delivers a desperately needed performance boost—if you have the right hardware. **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98** brings Direct3D and multiplayer support, better flight modeling, and numerous new airports to the party. Unfortunately, it also comes forward some baggage from earlier releases.

## SPEEDY 3D

By far the most significant upgrade is support for 3D graphics cards. Using the Direct 3D API, **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98** supports virtually all the consumer 3D cards available today. With a full-featured 3D card, you'll be treated to 65,000 colors (versus 256 without), Command shading,



**NEW PANELING** The new hi-res panels look fantastic at 800x600 or above, but at lower resolutions some numbers are so blurred as to be unreadable.



**Price:** \$99.95

## System Requirements:

Pentium 90 (P133 or better recommended), Windows 95, 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), 100MB hard disk space, SVGA graphics, mouse; supports Windows 95-compatible sound cards.

## Multiplayer Support:

Modem, Direct Connect, Internet (2-8 players)

## Designer:

Bruce Artwick

## Publisher:

Microsoft  
Redmond, WA  
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Reader Service #: 342



effects such as fog didn't work properly on this board.

Unfortunately, those without 3D hardware will find the simulation even slower than *FLIGHT SIM 95*. On a Pentium 133, running at 640x400 resolution with detail and scenery density dropped to medium, frame rates varied from 6fps to 12fps—slow enough to make controlling the plane very difficult at times. To get up to a smoother 40fps average, I had to turn all the graphics options down to minimum settings.

#### MANUFACTURER CERTIFIED

Flying is much easier in *FLIGHT SIM 98*. Part of this is due to the increased frame rate when running on a 3D card—smoother graphics make for much better controllability. But most of the aircraft have seen flight model updates as well. In fact, the new Cessna 182S and Learjet 45 models are certified by the actual aircraft manufacturers. The planes are no longer as squirmy and pitch-sensitive as in previous releases.

In addition to the classic Cessna Skylane 182R RC, there's now a fixed-gear 182S based on the model Cessna has recently resumed manufacturing. The Learjet 45 replaces the earlier model simulated in *FLIGHT SIM 95*. The Boeing 737-400, Extra 300S, Schweitzer 2-32 sailplane, and Sopwith Camel return, improvements with these vary, with the Extra's flight modeling dramatically improved, while the Sopwith Camel's overly lame responsiveness is seemingly unchanged.

For the first time, *FLIGHT SIMULATOR* now includes a helicopter, the Bell 206B JetRanger. This craft is quite challenging to learn to fly, and you'll



**SHOOTING THE BRIDGE** Multiplayer support via the Internet Gaming Zone has been added, but there's not much to do other than chase each other

want a set of rudder pedals or a joystick with a "twist" axis before attempting to fly this with the flight model realism turned up—it's much more difficult to control than military helicopters such as the Longbow. I've only flown fixed-wing aircraft in real life, so I can't judge

personally, but a real helicopter pilot I talked to was fairly impressed with the Bell's realism.

#### PLACES TO GO, PEOPLE TO SEE

*FLIGHT SIM 98* has more than 30 times the number of airports as its predecessor, with more than 3,000 present in this version. The majority of U.S. airports are modeled, so you're likely to be able to fly from your home airport, whether that's Buchanan in Concord, California, or Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional in Mississippi. You'll also find major airports from around the world present, so you can fly into Rio, London, or Moscow, if you choose. In all, there are more than 45 new cities modeled, and all the expansion scenery (except the recently released Southern California disc) is now included.

## Manual Labors

**F**light Sim 98 dispenses completely with paper documentation, including only a tiny booklet with six pages of installation instructions and a number of sectional maps. Microsoft has finished its transition to an online manual in the form of help files—a very bad move.

If you've flown every version of *FLIGHT SIMULATOR* for the past few years, this may not be that big an annoyance for you. But for most users—those new to *FLIGHT SIMULATOR*, those who skipped a version or two, or PC pilots who are ready to stop sightseeing and learn about how to fly using VORs and ILS systems—the online documentation is likely to prove frustrating. It's not that it's incomplete—in fact, most sections are very thorough. The problem is that there's so much information to work your way through. If you're really interested in learning how to fly properly that you'll be bleary eyed long before you get your virtual Private Pilot certificate. Also, despite the ability to use the help system's search capabilities, it's often much more difficult to locate information than it would be with an indexed paper manual to flip through.

Printing the manual isn't really a viable option, as it's formatted for screen viewing, and the resulting pile of single-sided printouts would be even more difficult to

search for information. I'm sure Microsoft has plenty of research that shows that most of its users don't crack paper manuals, and for some products, such as *Word* or *Monster Truck Madness*, this is a valid point. But a serious simulation deserves a serious manual, especially when that product retails for around \$70 and comes from a company with the resources of Microsoft. If Microsoft is convinced that many users wouldn't use paper documentation, they should offer a free paper man-



ual by mail as an option for registered users, as they used to do for *Word* users who desired *WordBasic* documentation.

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You'll find the scenery and elevations have improved for the most part. The Rockies and the Grand Canyon look great, but the mountains around Sedona, Arizona, are pretty poor. Considering that the entire U.S. and much of the rest of the world is included, it's pretty impressive.

Navigation aids such as VORs and NDBs are available, so you can use the included sectional maps for IFR flights. VOR ranges have been made more realistic, although some long-range VORs didn't seem to have enough range. A number of new adventures, challenges, and situations have been added, such as stunt-flying down the Las Vegas strip, for those who prefer structured goals in their flying.

Multiplayer capability has returned to FLIGHT SIMULATOR. (Older versions had direct-serial connection capability, but that feature disappeared long ago, along with the WWI game and built-in airplane designer.) You can connect via modem, network, Internet, or the Internet Caring Zone to take flight with

other players. Flying on the Zone is very smooth, but I'm not sure how much use this will see after the novelty wears off. Despite the addition of a virtual cockpit, the view system isn't good enough for formation flying, and chasing unarmored aircraft around cities gets old after a while. Air racing is out, since it's too easy to cheat (such features as painting and changing aircraft are enabled in multiplayer flight). If Microsoft had put the simple WWI combat game back in to this version or added an organized air race or aerobatics mode, the value of multiplayer would have increased dramatically.

Other new features include support for force-feedback joysticks (effects on a Sidewinder Force Feedback Pro and CH Force FX were impressive, although the runway bumps were

severely congested), higher-resolution instrument panels, and numerous new digital sounds.

Older add-on instrument panels aren't compatible with FLIGHT SIM 98, but the new format will allow easier panel customization and bundling of panels with aircraft files. A converter for Flight Shop



**LOOSE WINDOWS** You can "unlock" any of the sim's windows and arrange and resize them independently, under Windows 98 or NT, you can even drag them to separate monitors.

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SIMULATION/SPACE

**VIRTUAL WORLD** Virtual cockpits have been added, but some working instruments. Panning is too slow to be useful in multiplayer formation flying; a padlock would have been nice.

planes should be available by the time you read this, and Fuzer's Sim 95 scenery files should work without modification.

#### MISSING LINKS

While there are many notable improvements here, there are other areas that should have been addressed before a major release. The biggest problems are the lack of air traffic control (ATC) simulation and of other intelligent aircraft. ATC is vital when you're really trying to learn all the procedures a private pilot must follow (Canned ATC is included in the adventure files, but not normal flying.) Some airports do have other planes taking off and landing, and they're somewhat smarter now—at least they won't taxi through you. However, what many of us would really like is re-creation of the crowded stoppage and landing patterns of airports like DFW and ORD.

Many long-standing quirks, such as the need to reset scenery density and dynamic scenery after loading a new terrain area, are still present. And there are some new quirks as well. When you play multiplayer on a system with a 3Dfx card, the chat window doesn't appear on the 3D screen; you're forced to use your system's policy 2D card to display the game if you want to chat with your fellow pilots.

Overall, though, this is a worthwhile update for

Fuzer's Sim-ULATOR fans who have fast 3D cards. With real competition on the way from Sierra and Looking Glass, however, the lack of ATC, intelligent air traffic, and a real manual may eventually see the current king of civilian sims knocked from its throne. ☺

**APPEAL:** Flight Simulator fans looking for 3D card support or more places to fly.

**PROS:** Wide variety of airports and scenery areas; realistic flight modeling; great performance with a good 3D card; amazing third-party support.

**CONS:** Tumble frame-rate without a 3D card; no air traffic control outside of adventures; multiplayer mode needs some structure.



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# Scenario A





# Scenario B



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# Jet Déjà Vu

The US NAVY FIGHTERS Series Resurfaces for the Last Time—Really!

by Denny Atkin

**M**y reaction, when I heard that *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* was to be yet another game based on the cruddy US Navy *FIGHTERS* (USNF) engine, could best be described as apathy. With seven titles (*USNF*, *ATF*, and various expansion packs and "Gold" versions), "variations" not startling to smack of "rehash," especially after *ATF GOLD* was released sans any significant new features.

Surprisingly, though, I found that the improvements in Jane's new *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* made this series worth revisiting one more time. Along with all the missions, aircraft, terrain areas, and multimedia reference materials from US Navy *FIGHTERS 97* and *ATF GOLD*, *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* adds 28 new aircraft, a number of new combat theaters, and enhanced multiplayer support.

## FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS

Make no mistake: At its heart this game isn't much different from the three-year-old US Navy *FIGHTERS*. The graphics engine has seen a little performance tuning, but compared to the 3D-card visuals of today's sims, it looks positively antiquated.

Instruments and flight models are still very basic as well. *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* doesn't attempt to replicate the cockpits and systems of 100+ individual aircraft. Instead, it uses a full-screen, out-of-the-carry display with small pop-up MFDs (multifunction displays) for radar, systems, navigation, targeting, and order



**HEADS UP** The sim includes no instrument panels, relying instead on pop-up MFDs for radar and other readouts.

warning functions. These work well for aircraft like the F-22A Lightning, but they're out of place and too powerful when you're flying a classic A-1 Skyraider or MiG-17.

The sim's flight modeling is of medium fidelity. Although there are some maneuvers in which the planes don't react properly (especially during landing), the handling during combat is convincing enough—stalls (normal and accelerated), spins, energy bleedoff, and other effects are modeled. And while

some aspects of the flight logic are simplified, the various aircraft do exhibit the proper relative performance (an F-16 will turn circles around an F-4 Phantom, for instance). This level of realism won't satisfy the hard-core sim pilot, but it's plausible enough so that it won't teach new flight sim pilots any bad habits.

The game's six scripted campaigns and the individual missions come from *USNF*, *ATF*, and their respective expansion discs. You'll need to use the Quick and Pro Mission builders to create missions in order to utilize the new planes and combat arenas.

## WHAT'S NEW

The most intriguing aspect of *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* is the amazing variety of flyable aircraft. It's highly unlikely that you'll ever see stand-alone simulations of such aircraft as the American A-1 Skyraider, Swedish Draken and Viggen, Taiwanese IDG Ching-Kuo, Israeli Kirit, or Chinese J-7E MiG-21 clone—but you can fly them here. You can use the mission builders to



**THUD RIDGE** The inclusion of the F-105 Thud helps flesh out user-created Vietnam missions.



Price: \$54.95

### Minimum System

Requirements: Pentium 90, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 74MB hard-disk space, 4x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics, DirectX-compatible sound card, joystick

recommended

### Multiplayer Support:

Direct Connect, modem, network (2-8 players), Internet (2-4 players)

Designers: Andre

Gagnon and Brent

henson

Publisher: Jane's

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# EXPLOSIVE BREAKTHROUGH IN FLIGHT SIMS.

## Flying Nightmares<sup>2</sup>

It's challenging enough to create a realistic air battle. But when your intent is to create a full-scale, immersive war experience, you need an element of strategy as well. For this reason, Eidos developed Commandant™, a real-time strategy engine designed specifically for integration into flight sims. Commandant™ increases the level of immersion and challenge for the intelligent gamer.

Adding to FN2's sense of immersion is the most sophisticated multi-player technology ever seen in a flight sim. It allows for unprecedented levels of communication and coordination between players. You'll be in air battles with up to 16 flight jocks while freeing your troops from danger below. The end result? An immersive war experience sure to blow you away.

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create a flight of F-85 Thunderchiefs escorted by F-4E Phantoms, and pit them against MiG-17s and MiG-21s over North Vietnam. Fly an Argentine Super Etendard with Mirage III escorts against British Sea Harriers and Buccaneers over the Falkland Islands. Or re-create past and future conflicts in such hot spots as Pakistan and Taiwan, with fighters ranging from the F-49 Starfighter to the enhanced Su-35 Flanker. The variety of planes here lets you re-create virtually any air conflict from 1960 to the near future.

The real fun comes from using these planes in multiplayer mode. Like its predecessors, *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* supports multiplayer in Quick Missions as well as in both user-created and built-in Single Missions. Both cooperative and antagonistic play are available. The variety of planes and relatively simple interface make this a great sim to use to introduce gamers to multiplayer flight sims. You can headcap simply by plane choice—the expert can take, say, a little A-37 Tweet, while the newbie flies the powerful F-22 Raptor.

#### BASE PLAYER

The biggest addition to the game is the new Airbase Attack mode. Available only in multiplayer, this mode pits two teams of up to four players against each other. Your goal is to take out the enemy pilots' airbases. To



**▶ SPAD AND TWEET** Fly the technologically primitive A-1 Skyraider and A-37 Dragonfly for a real ground-attack challenge.

do this, you stock your airbase at the beginning of the game with up to six different plane types, usually a mixture of fighters and bombers. Each time you're shot down, you can then choose another aircraft from your home airbase—as long as the base hasn't been destroyed. If it has, you're stuck flying the plane you're in, so you'd better take care of it.

You can land at any friendly base to rearm and refuel.

If all your planes are shot down but your airbase is still active, you don't have to sit back while the rest of the players fight it out. You can man a mobile air-defense platform, a tank-like vehicle you can drive around and use to shoot guns and SAMs at enemy air targets as they pass near your field.

To make it easier to find other players, Jane's has set up a matchmaking service on its Web site at [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com). At press time, it just provides basic chat and the ability to launch *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* after you've gathered your player group. Jane's plans to add support for kill boards and other statistics as the area matures.

#### ONE MORE TIME

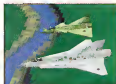
Typical of Jane's titles, the manual is top-notch, with 394 pages of information covering the game, the aircraft, and basic combat maneuvers. In addition, the title includes a second disc that contains all the multimedia reference material from the earlier titles in the series. This disc can also be used to launch the game once it's been installed, so if you have two computers at home, you need only one copy of the game.

Is *FIGHTERS ANTHOLOGY* worth it? If you have all the previous titles in the series, there's not a lot new here, unless you plan to use the online matchmaking service or the multiplayer Airbase Assault mode. If you missed any or all of the previous

## Sky Warriors Lite

One of the new aircraft in *FIGHTERS Anthology* is Chuck Yeager's BIAI-Marchetti SF-260, which performs acrobatics at air shows while sporting Jane's colors. If you want to take an combat out of the realm of radar and missiles and into gun, airman-ship, this is the plane to choose. Just set up a head-to-head game with each player flying an SF-260 armed with a carbine gun pod. Pros: You have a fairly good simulation of what it's like to fly in such real-life air combat experiences as *Sky Warriors* or *Air Combat USA* (the latter actually flies SF-260s). You don't get to feel the G's, but you also don't have to spend \$700.

games in the series, however, and you don't need a somewhat simplified sim, you're likely to find plenty of entertainment value here. But you may be disappointed to pay full retail price (a \$15 rebate is available if you send in a previous title in the series) for an all-in-one package with relatively minor updates. If only the developers had included some new built-in missions to take advantage of the new aircraft and combat theater, or perhaps updated the graphics engine to support 3D views, the purchasing decision would be easier to make. **S**



**▶ HOW SWEET IT IS** *FIGHTERS Anthology* allows you to fly jets like the Saab Draken and Viggen for the first time.

**▶ APPEAL:** New sim players; USNF series fans looking for enhanced multiplayer capabilities; aviation buffs.

**▶ PROS:** More flyable aircraft than any other sim; easy multiplayer setup and matchmaking; accessible to beginners; superb manual.

**▶ CONS:** Dated graphics; no new missions; no instrument panels.



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# S'marbelous



Lose Your Marbles in More Ways Than One With This TETRIS Clone

by Charlotte Panther

**W**e've been subjected to many TETRIS clones over the years. Most are consigned to the CD-ROM junk drawer after just a few weeks. There are notable exceptions, such as Sega's *BAZU BAZU*, which still makes me skip appointments and miss deadlines. It's fitting, then, that SegaSoft, a division of the same company, has released a new puzzle game that's addictive enough to threaten *BAZU BAZU*'s place of honor on my hard drive.

## GRID CLEANER

The premise of *LOSE YOUR MARBLES* is simple: Clear your grid before your opponent clears his, by hitting up some-colored marbles in a "pitch" line. Three or four matching marbles placed together will disappear. Five marbles of the same color will not only disappear, they'll also dump a load on your opponent.

While you're moving columns back and forth, marbles will constantly drip onto



**NO FREEWAY BYPASS** If you dally in getting rid of your marbles, resign yourself to gridlock.

your grid. Allow a column to fill up and you'll have no leverage to maneuver. Then, the only way to match up marbles is to use the Rollover move: Hit the space bar, and the marble on the far right-hand side will jump over to the far left, pushing all the other marbles one place over. The overall



**ROLLOVER BEETHOVEN** By using the Rollover move, player 2 (on the right) can line up the green marbles, thus matching the Marble Counter.

effect is fluid and very competitive for two-player play.

## NO DIRT IN MY SANDBOX

The five game boards progress from sandbox (easy) to hardwood floor, all playable at three different skill levels. In single-player mode, you must beat your AI opponent in five rounds, after which you enter a bonus round. If you successfully complete this puzzle, you'll receive bonus marbles. Bonus marbles consist of three different types: Refuges, which dump immovable stone marbles on your opponent; Chains, which set up chain reactions; and Columns, which change the entire row to match the color of the Marble Counter (the colored marble in the center of your screen).

The Marble Counter also determines the number of marbles that you dump upon your opponent. As your game improves, you'll begin to set off chain reactions—lining up rows of same-colored marbles in advance, so that they fall into place automatically. In the multiplayer game, which can be played by LAN or with two players on one keyboard, you can start on any of the five

gameboards. There are no bonus rounds here, but you will receive bonus marbles. While it's challenging to beat the computer, there's nothing quite like the feeling of subjecting a friend to marble gridlock.

The only downside I encountered was an occasional glitch in the background music. At the first level, the music stopped, without my altering the options. Another time, Level One was without music, even though the options indicated that it should be at full volume. This was rectified, however, by editing and re-entering the game.

But this is a small price to pay for what is otherwise a first-rate puzzle game. If you can combine strategic thinking with fast reflex-action, this is for you. But watch out—those shiny, little colored balls may not be the only marbles you lose! ☹

**FAPPEAL:** Tetris fans looking for a classic puzzle with fast multiplayer action.

**MPROS:** Fast-paced and more addictive than even *Bazu Bazu*.

**CONS:** Some occasional glitches with background music.



**Price:** \$19.99  
**Minimum System Requirements:** P60, 8MB RAM, 5MB hard-disk space, SVGA graphics, Windows 95, 2x CD-ROM, Windows-compatible sound card  
**Multiplayer Support:** 1-2 players (Hotseat or LAN).  
**Publisher:** SegaSoft  
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ded by late 2076.  
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Meticulous turn-based combat system lets you target specific body parts to wound, cripple, or kill as you see fit.



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# Pushing the Envelope

*DARK REIGN Comes Close to Dethroning COMMAND & CONQUER*

by Martin E. Cirulis

**B**y now, I would suspect that, unless you've been kept on the Dark Side of the Moon for the last year by little gray aliens, you have heard some talk about the flood of *COMMAND & CONQUER* clones that has crowded the shelves of every software store in the country. Not being a company to miss out on a good thing, Activision has obviously worked hard to bring us *DARK REIGN*, a game destined to be a very close contender for the top of the genre. While in the end, this real-time slugfest just fails to rise above its origins, it nevertheless offers the best bang for the buck in recent memory.

## "REBEL SCUM!"

*DR* takes place in a fashionably dark future that resembles a fascist theme park. The human galaxy is a tableau of perfect order and perfect humor—perfect, that is, except for one tiny,



**WHAT REIGN?** *Dark Reign* represents several improvements over *C&C*, but strongly clings to the genre's formula.

insignificant group of rebels known as the Freedom Guard, who are trying to cause trouble on one imperial world after another. As befits the advanced planning of totalitarianism, this rebel movement is nipped in the bud when imperial warships destroy the rebel Messiah and the entire world beneath him. But wouldn't you know it, things never seem to go right for any imperial entity, and a rebel ship containing a time machine, of all things, drifts through space, waiting to be

found by rebel forces—which turn out to be you. If you can prove yourself a master-class tactician (by winning a series of simulated battles), the probe will transport you back in time to save the Messiah and end the imperial tyranny.

So basically, we have yet another premise for you to be clicking on various units from an overhead map, and sending them off to do or die—and initially, this looks as if that's all you're in for. We've seen it before: two different sides, cosmetically different buildings, two sets of directly analogous units, a series of discrete missions that can be played from either side while taking you through a melodramatic storyline. When you couple all this with a hip interface, solid SVGA graphics and a bug-free implementation, it comes out as a slick, yet unoriginal, game.



**Price:** \$49.95  
**Minimum System Requirements:**

Pentium 90, Win 95,  
16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), 130MB hard-disk space, 1MB local bus video card, mouse, Windows 95-compatible sound card

**Multiplayer Support:**  
14.4 baud modem, serial (2 players), LAN (8 players), Internet (4 players)

**Designer:** Activision  
**Publisher:** Activision  
Santa Monica, CA  
(800) 477-3650  
[www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com)  
**Reader Service #:** 343



**GRAB SOME FRIENDS** This partial view of the multiplayer setup screen shows the more robust multiplayer options in *Dark Reign*.



**MADE TO ORDER** The many good features of *Dark Reign* include excellent terrain effects, a very slick interface, and customizable AI.

And while it is an unoriginal game out of the box, there is more to *DARK REIGN* if you are willing to put in a little time and effort.

#### PANDORA'S TOOLBOX

The first thing you'll notice is that the terrain here is not just for cosmetics. Of late, there has been a trend in the real-

time genre to try and make terrain more than SVGA-graphics wallpaper, and *DR*, unlike many others, manages to bring things close to the level of a "serious" wargame. There are seven levels of altitude, and slopes that run from gentle to clifflike, with corresponding effects on movement and line of sight. The combat engine even factors in relative altitude to weapon ranges. When you combine this with terrain types—forests and rough ground that affect movement and sight- ing—you start to come close to a realistic combat environment. In fact, the only drawback to the terrain engine is that 2D effects just aren't enough to convey what is going on! Many gamers may have trouble interpreting the level changes through the sometimes too-subtle slope shading.

The units, while not stunningly original, have some nice twists, and the combat engine itself gives players an unprecedented level of control. While a tank is basically a tank and a foot soldier is a foot soldier, *DR* differentiates

## The New Real-time Standard

With the recent rush of titles in the C&C mold, it has become apparent that the genre has evolved from its origins somewhat, and that what was acceptable (or even admirable) a year and a half ago just isn't good enough anymore.

The first major development involves terrain. No longer is it enough for terrain to be a pretty rug to drive your units over, with the occasional impassable icon. Games like *Enemy Nations*, and, in a more primitive form, *K&ND*, began to introduce the concepts of altitude and cover into the formula. Now it's pretty much a given that top-line games like *Dark Reign*, *Total Annihilation*, or *Conquest Earth* make allowances for altitude, ground cover, and line of sight in one way or another. Even the passing of night and day is being modeled in games like *Dark Cavalry* and *Duress 2*. In fact, things have progressed so far that I suspect *Dark Reign* will represent the pinnacle of 2D

terrain in the genre. There just doesn't seem to be anywhere else to go, unless you switch to a full 3D engine.

Another absolute requirement seems to be a waypoint system of some kind or another. It will no longer cut it to force gamers to watch their units pick their way across deadly battlefields at the whim of some dazy movement AI, which treats deadly defensive turrets like rock gardens. Now you have to be able to move units, either singly or in a set formation, exactly where and how you want them to go.

And finally, if you are planning to throw your design into the real-time ring, it seems you must be prepared to include some kind of map and scenario editor. Thanks to the ground broken by *WarCraft II*, gamers know that they deserve to be able to create their own battles after paying their bucks for the game. If these real-time wargames are going to live on



**WHAT DOES IT TAKE?** With the bar now raised, games need scenario editors, better interfaces, and more terrain influences to stay alive in this crowded field.

hard drives past their somewhat limited campaign games, then it's going to be through multiplayer battles over a steady supply of new battlefields, or through a host of downloadable single-player challenges, à la *Doom wads* and *WCII* maps.

All in all, you're going to need a lot of features to be taken seriously in the real-time world.

between different modes of movement, and gives more trivial units important abilities, such as being able to digrine themselves or burrow underground to hide. Also, once you start amassing these units, there is a smooth and simple interface that allows you to send them along any intricate path you might need, either for keeping them out of trouble or for rigging a multi-pronged simultaneous attack through a system of graphic waypoints. If this isn't enough control for you, then you can open up the AIs of the individual units and tailor them to your tastes in terms of when to retreat, how doggedly to follow their orders, and how far to pursue enemy units.

These things alone would be enough to put DR in front of the crowd by a head, but where the shoulders and torso become apparent is the rest of the material Activision has included with this game. The terrain and scenario editor is one of the most robust I have seen in any wargame since the glory days of SSCG. And if you get tired of building your own wars, there is even a pair of deep-code editors for both the Units and their AIs (though only experienced gamers should tinker with these files, unless you derive a great deal of pleasure from re-installing everything when you mess it all up). Quite literally, if you



**A BIT TOO REPETITIVE** Where *Dark Reign* falls down is in its units' arcade-like firing rates and the surprisingly dry scenario design.

willing to spend the time, you could make DR into just about any kind of wargame you wanted. If you like to tinker, then this toolset could be more fun than even the *WarCraft II* editor.



**WHOLE NEW WORLDS** *Dark Reign* shines with a very flexible editor that lets you practically create new games using the existing engine.

The bow on this package is a solid multiplayer suite, which is both adaptable and reflects most of the hard-learned lessons of online gaming. This is far more game than we usually get.

#### MAXIMUM CLONEAGE

Even all the things Activision was willing to give gamers with this package, it's a shame they didn't give this game a little more credit. Here and there DR is sabotaged by a seeming fear of drifting too far away from "The C&C Formula." For instance, while the units and terrain should allow for numerous subtle and realistic effects, these are almost completely negated by the ridiculously fast fire-rate of most units. While it certainly provides lots of fast, pretty explosions, one has to wonder if it was worth shooting so many good ideas in the foot just to please an alleged demographic of "short-attention-span gamers."

The scenarios themselves, although detailed and quite long, seem to stick needlessly to the type of battles we are so familiar with in this type of game. They are so cautious that I was amazed to find out the kind of battlefields that were possible using the editors, because there was so little of this potential revealed in the actual packaged battles. While it may have been too much to ask that the designers get away from the tedium of the "harvest, build, and buy a fairly limited variety of weapons in bulk" formula, certainly they didn't have to

stick with it to the point that it undermined the great things about this game.

Despite all that *DARK REIGN* offers, it seems that every time you get going and start enjoying it, you slam into some artificial limit or down-out scenario that throws the word "close" in your face. While this is hardly a problem if you love the formula, it may be more of an issue if you are getting tired of paying to play what is, essentially, the same game over and over again. Determining whether or not this game is for you comes down to one simple question: "Do you have room in your heart (and wallet) for more C&C?"

If the answer is yes, then *DARK REIGN* is the best money you could spend in the genre so far. But if you can't find an answer quite so positive, then perhaps you should pass this one by, or at least be prepared to put in a bit of effort to bring out all the originality this game has to offer. **B**

**FAPPEAL:** Real-time strategy gamers who want to play the current best in real-time gaming.

**PROS:** The best of the C&C clones so far. Excellent terrain effects; some nice gimmicks; slick interface; excellent scenarios and map editors.

**CONS:** Excessive arcade fire rate undermines combat engine; uninspired scenarios and battlefields.



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disappear.**

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*delete*

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# Avalon Hill's Finest Hour

*This Battle of Britain Mixes Real-time Strategy  
With Turn-based Tactics*

by Robin G. Kim

In the summer of 1940, the seemingly unstoppable German war machine set its sights on England, precipitating the first battle in history to be fought entirely in the air: The Battle of Britain had begun. Fighting at an exhausting pace against desperate odds, the determined pilots of the RAF held the line—barely—until Hitler was finally forced to shelve his plans for invasion.

ACHTUNG SPITFIRE focuses on this epic conflict, merging the turn-based air combat of its predecessor, *OVER THE REICH*, with a new strategic component. The Battle of Britain is played out in real-time over a map of southeast England and can be fought from either the British or German side.

## WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER

As the British, you simply must fend off the German bombers as best you can. Radar stations and ground observers will usually warn you of incoming raids, but their information is unreliable. You often won't know until it's too late whether an enemy forma-



THE GALLANT FEW As the British, you deploy fighters and respond to enemy sightings. The real-time strategic movement pauses whenever anything significant occurs.

tion comprises bombers on a real mission or consists only of fighters hoping you'll be foolish enough to engage. You must decide carefully, because you never have enough pilots and planes to deal with all situations. Interceptions involve manually guiding your fighters from their airfield to the enemy, usually striving to attack from out of the sun

(this direction changes throughout the day) to gain the advantage of surprise.

Between flights, your fighters must undergo considerable downtime to refuel and repair. Overcommit your forces against one raid and you may well find yourself with no planes ready to defend against the raids that immediately follow. Try to intercept too many incursions and

**Price:** \$45  
**Minimum System Requirements:** 486/33 (Pentium 50 or better recommended), 8MB RAM, 7MB hard-disk space, Windows 3.1 or better, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse.  
**Minimum:** 68040 or better (including Power PC), 8MB RAM, 7MB hard-disk space, System 7.1 or better, 13-inch monitor, 2x CD-ROM drive.

**Multipayer Support:** internet (2-8 players), email (2 players), supports PC vs. Mac play

**Designer:** Big Time Software  
**Publisher:** The Avalon Hill Game Company  
 Baltimore, MD  
 (800) 999-3222  
 www.avalonhill.com  
 www.bigtimesoftware.com  
**Reader Service #:** 3-95

## Squadron Leader

Each member of your squadron is rated for experience and such attributes as keen eyesight, good marksmanship, and even cowardice (a tendency to abort missions because of "engine trouble"). All squad members have noticeable effects on combat, and most will improve over time, lending a strong role-playing aspect to the game. Moreover, unlike the generic AI drones in some games, these men have names (which you can alter) and faces, which enhances your emotional stake in their success. At the tour's conclusion, you can continue their exploits by carrying them forward into *OVER THE REICH*.



Illustration: © David Johnson; Map: © Avalon Hill; Screen Shot: © Avalon Hill

your pilots will quickly become too exhausted to continue.

Playing the Luftwaffe side is no picnic, either. To pave the way for Operation Sealion, the invasion of England, you must suppress RAF Fighter Command, interdict supply ships, and damage infrastructure in several locations. You command a mixed force of fighters, medium bombers, and dive bombers, and decide



**WINDOW ON THE WORLD WAR** While you can't run them full-screen (even with a 3Dfx card), the archival war footage is a nice use of multimedia.

when and where to attack. Do you organize large, heavily escorted assaults or do you try to overwhelm British

defenses with a swarm of smaller simultaneous raids? How many bombers should you hold in reserve to exploit the occasions when most British fighters are likely to be on the ground refueling? Is it best to expend resources trying to blind the RAF Fighter Command by taking out its radar towers, or should you concentrate instead on the targets necessary for victory?

**LET EVERY MAN DO HIS DUTY**

Strategic dilemmas aside, the heart of *ACHTUNG SPITFIRE* is its tactical air-combat system. You maneuver aircraft one at a time across a scrolling overhead map using a highly intuitive interface. With just a few mouse clicks during the course of a four-second turn, you can specify any combination of moves a plane and pilot could physically perform. And you can tailor the complexity of the game through a variety of skill levels. Unfortunately, only the highest adds the third dimension—altitude—to the equation, making it the only choice for those seeking a truly realistic simulation of air combat.

The flight model underlying the movement system is both detailed and historically accurate. Different plane types vary widely in terms of speed, turning ability, roll rates, climb rates, and

even cockpit visibility—you can't fight what you can't see.

*ACHTUNG SPITFIRE*'s game engine boasts some major improvements. The designers tweaked initiative determination so that it's less likely you'll be forced to move before a handoff you're trying to follow. Negative g-effects are now accounted for, causing cutouts in the carbureted engines of early British fighters—a disadvantage that German pilots, with their fuel-injected engines, often exploited in real life. The only real flaw is that the implementation

allows impossibly high negative g loads in a few circumstances, the obvious way around this trivial shortcoming is simply to avoid pushing more than -4 g's, regardless of what the game permits. Finally, vertical maneuvering is much more realistic than that of *OVER THE RICE*, boosting the effectiveness of many real-world tactics such as high yo-yos. As a thoughtful gesture to those who own the predecessor, the *SPITFIRE* CD includes a patch that retrofits *RICE* with these flight-model enhancements.

Excellent gunnery and damage models coupled with authentic digitized sound effects and nicely rendered graphics help draw you into the intense aerial battles. The AI is outstanding, compelling you to think ahead on every move. Between combats, period music, black-and-white film footage, and digitized speech in French, German, or English (with a British accent, of course) contribute further to *SPITFIRE*'s immersive atmosphere.

A new play-by-email mode complements the two-player hottest and multi-



**STEP-BY-STEP DOGFIGHTING** Though turn-based, the combat engine does a surprisingly good job of capturing the fluid nature of air warfare.

**Low on Petrol**



Regrettably, a few bugs managed to sneak into *ACHTUNG SPITFIRE* along with all the new features. Tours of duty occasionally end prematurely, and planes that have completed refueling sometimes remain unready for missions. However, these problems were caught and fixed less than a week after the game hit store shelves; the patch can be downloaded from [www.bigtimesoftware.com](http://www.bigtimesoftware.com).

player internet options supported by the earlier game, but all are usable with only set-piece dogfights—forget about head-to-head campaigns.

As an early-war version of *OVER THE RICE*, *ACHTUNG SPITFIRE* is a worthy successor. The dozens of new planes and flight-model improvements alone make it a must have for fans of the previous game. The strategy elements introduced in the Battle of Britain campaign engine—possibly the best treatment of that turning point in WWII ever brought to a computer screen—are just icing on the cake. As ironic as it is that the wargame part of the battle is played in realtime while the flight sim is turn-based, the two complement each other well. For any gamer fascinated by the complexities of many-on-many air-combat tactics, or the Battle of Britain in particular, *ACHTUNG SPITFIRE*'s blend of depth, variety, and long-term replayability is sure to please. **S**

**FAPPEAL:** Strategy gamers and flight-sim fans interested in multi-aircraft tactics during the Battle of Britain.

**PROS:** Highly realistic tactical air combat; entertaining strategy sub-game; great AI, atmosphere, sound effects, and graphics.

**CONS:** Minor bugs (already fixed in the patch); combat missions and tours of duty incompatible with the multiplayer modes.



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# A Fine Conquest



SSI and Frog City Deliver a Fresh Game of Continental Conquest and Diplomacy

by Tim Carter

The knockout is a time-honored element of the computer gaming industry. Look at any successful product, from *CIVILIZATION* to *WARCRAFT* to *DOOM*, and you'll see literally dozens of shoddy, poorly thought-out imitations hiding behind them.

Thus, when my editor called with the assignment for *IMPERIALISM*, I was at first quite suspicious. Sure, it's from SSI, a company I generally respect, but many of SSI's *PANZER GENERAL* sequels failed to capture the spirit of the original, and *IMPERIALISM* at first glance looks a lot like a quickie imitation of *CIVILIZATION II*.

It's unusual for me to be so happy about being so wrong, but *IMPERIALISM* displays the three most important attributes of a great game: It's unique, challenging, and fun. And it's much too addictive to be consigned to the dark and steamy pits of knockout purgatory.

## AGE OF INDUSTRY

*IMPERIALISM* takes place during the industrial revolution, with both random and historical games covering from the Napoleonic wars to World War I. Don't confuse imperialism with colonialism, though. This is a strategy game of great power politics, and it concentrates on conflict up close, not across the entire globe. A typical historical scenario will center on Europe, from England in the northwest to the Ottoman Turks in the southeast.

Unlike most world-domination strategy games, *IMPERIALISM* does a good job of modeling international diplomacy and trade. Moreover, trade and diplomacy are important. In many strategy games, diplomacy consists simply of keeping your opponents happy until you're ready to kill them; here you must build effective economic and political relationships based on trade and diplomacy just to survive. And you can flourish considerably without firing a shot, as it is possible—crucial, actually—to bring minor countries into your empire through non-violent means.

I particularly liked the way the designers use the game's structure, rather than artificial conditions, to make the game more challenging. *IMPERIALISM* is blessed with as good an AI as I have seen in a computer game, but, all other things being equal, a human opponent will still win relatively easily. Many games make all things unequal by allowing the computer to cheat.



**STORM THE GATES** Although *IMPERIALISM* emphasizes diplomacy and trade, combat does occur, and it is resolved in a separate tactical module.



**WELL-OILED MACHINE** Much of the game takes place on the strategic map, where you locate resources, move prospectors, engineers, and defenses, and create trade routes.



**Price:** \$49.99  
**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Pentium 75, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 80MB hard-disk space, 2x CD-ROM, 1MB SVGA card; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards.  
**Mac OS:** Power PC, System 7.5.3 or later.  
**Multiplayer Support:** Modern (2 players), LAN (7 players).  
**Designer:** Frog City  
**Publisher:** SSI  
 Sunnyvale, CA (800) 234-3088  
[www.imperialism.com](http://www.imperialism.com)  
**Master Service #: 347**

# Where the hell...

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Photo: Jeff Parnowski

## THE CRITICS AGREE

"MicroProse's game offers weeks to months of gameplay."  
Computer Gaming World, June '97

★★★★

"Magic: The Gathering is just what the Simba Heiler ordered."  
Computer Games Strategy Plus, June '97

★★★★

"Magic: The Gathering is a near-perfect translation of the card game."  
PC Magazine, June '97

★★★★

"...hard-core gamers will appreciate the flexibility offered in the computer version."  
Newsweek, April '97

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or by going it huge advantages in material, money, or whatever.

For the most part, *Imperialism* puts you into a tight situation by having you experience the problems that arise from the struggles of great powers. If you are at a disadvantage, it's usually through something subtle, like diplomatic isolation, rather than a decreased cash flow. The result is a tightly run contest, particularly at the higher levels of difficulty, that should give even jaded professionals a run for their money.

#### GAME MECHANICS

Gamers looking for a beer-and-pretzels-type game may want to look elsewhere. *IMPERIALISM* is complicated. A careful reading of the manual is necessary, and even then you'll likely have to play a few complete games to master the system.

In my opinion, this is a good thing. The game's complexity is neither mind-

resource. Military units move between provinces or sea zones, depending on their type. Natural resources must travel over your internal transportation network or overseas via traders.

#### HOW TO RUN AN EMPIRE

To be successful you have to build an economy that functions smoothly and provides you with the finished goods necessary to fund large diplomatic and military efforts. As few countries are blessed with all of the necessary resources, you will have to trade with the outside world to get what you need.

In a typical turn you might begin by giving orders to your railroad system, perhaps reducing the amount of timber it carries in order to make more room for coal and iron. You might then order a prospector to investigate a mountainous square for resources, direct a miner to upgrade a mine, and have a farmer improve the efficiency of your food supply.

furniture, railroads, ships, or newer and better industrial facilities.

After attending to your industry, you might reallocate trade priorities. You can offer goods for sale and make bids on goods from other powers, major or minor. Using diplomacy, you can guarantee the supply of vital resources by engineering trade concessions and by ensuring that supplying countries remain friendly. Ultimately, you should be able to entice minor powers to join your empire, although this takes a lot of time, trade, and money.

Having finished all of the peaceful aspects of imperial management, you may want to move an army to any of your bordering provinces that look weak or to a colony that is threatened by another great power. If you are at war, you might decide to invade an enemy territory.

Combat is played out on a tactical map. The computer is surprisingly able in tactical combat, particularly on the defensive. On the high seas you can fight battles, conduct commerce raiding, blockade key ports, or launch amphibious invasions.

#### TRIAL BY FIRE

Unlike games such as *CIV* or *MOO*, *IMPERIALISM* puts you in the thick of things from the word go. At the start of most games you have minimal industry, a weak military, and little cash to spend on diplomacy. You're constantly forced to balance the production of consumer goods, which raises cash through trade, against the improvement of infrastructure. The computer opponents won't stand for the sort of peacetime industrial growth that brings winning results in *CIVILIZATION* or *MOO*. If you don't build a



▶ **THESE CITY WALLS** *IMPERIALISM*, though obviously reminiscent of *CIVILIZATION II*, requires industrial production, trade, and diplomacy to achieve conquest.

less not tedious. Rather, it stems from the range of options available and the many connections between political, economic, and military action.

Most of the action takes place on the main strategic map. Economic units, such as engineers, miners, and prospectors, work on individual squares, each of which contains a different type of terrain and, frequently, a

Then you might switch to your industry screen, controlled through your capital city. Here, you build and improve industries and allocate your work force to various tasks. Most raw materials must be converted to processed goods and then converted again to finished goods. For instance, timber fed to your mills will make lumber, which then can be used to build

decent army and navy, you will soon face a horde of opportunistic opponents looking for an easy kill.

All of this means that the game can be incredibly tense. Toward the end you may find yourself with an abundance of resources and enough military might to actually win wars against the other powers, but for most of the game you'll pinch your pennies and listen to the constant



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #340



**HISTORY 101** One of the more fun aspects of *Imperialism* is its historical scenarios, which cover various conflicts from the Napoleonic era to World War I.

pleas of various ministers for additional spending and development.

As with many domination titles, the endgame can take longer than necessary. If I made it into the 1850s with my empire intact, I generally was able to

mop the floor with the remaining powers, but it took some time for the game to end, even when the outcome was obvious. This is typical for the genre, but at least here you get the option to advance to another scenario if you

achieve two-thirds of the conditions for victory.

I suspect that *IMPERIALISM* will be a bit much for some people. There's an awful lot to do each turn, and it may take many turns before you reach a position of great power. If you don't secure an alliance early you probably won't survive the first few turns, but if you ally with the wrong power you won't survive the middle game. For those up to the challenge, though, *IMPERIALISM* provides one of the most satisfying gaming experiences I've had in a long time. **C**

**APPEAL:** Strategy gamers who enjoy deep, complex games of politics and economics.

**PROS:** Great politics; diplomacy and trade incredibly well-developed; tons of options; less gameplay.

**CONS:** Very complex; takes too long to finish after the actual contest is over; uneven graphics.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #357

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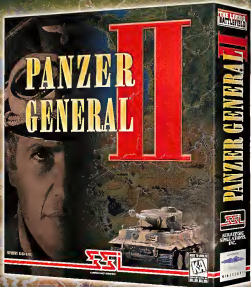
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CIRCLE NUMBER SERVICE #236



# Redemption

Sierra Clears the Outpost Name With a Complete—and Finished—Sequel

by Martin E. Cirulis

There was a time when the name *OUTPOST* brought either shudders or gifts of laughter from most computer gamers, depending on whether they were in the group who had wasted money on the title or the group who hadn't. One has to give Sierra credit for

some serious chutzpah for bringing out a sequel to a game that only recently was knocked out of first place in the "Most Bungled Game" category by *Take 2 BATTLECHAMBER 3000*. Despite my personal feelings toward the original game, when the glossy box for *OUTPOST 2: DIVIDED DESTINY* crossed my desk, I took a deep breath, repeated my "I will be impartial" mantra a few times, and cautiously installed this born-again strategy game. I'm not sure whether it was because of this game's ancestry or its combination of gaming styles, but *OUTPOST 2* has elicited more contradictory reactions from me than any other game in recent memory.

## TIMES CHANGE

My initial reaction to this game was "Oh, great, another C&C clone with a bad name stuck on it." However, as I got a bit further into the documentation and background, I realized that this reaction might be a little unfair. *Outpost 2* actually moves into the real-time combat world (as opposed to the real-time simulation of the original game) with some skill and intelligence. The premise for the game is that the last survivors of the asteroid-blasted Earth have come to live on a brutal, rocky world named New Terra. While this harsh, Mars-like world may have been the only choice, human beings don't necessarily have to take the hard route; they can do it their "Two distinct camps arise out of this ugly predicament: the

Transformers, centered at base camp Eden, who believe New Terra should live up to its name as quickly as possible—at any price; and a group who believe that the time for humanity to manage nature has ended, and that mankind should adapt to the new world, instead of the other way around.

Now this is truly an interesting conflict for a sci-fi game. While I am not quite sure if people would be willing to start a shooting war over an argument like this when there are only a few hundred humans left in the universe, the game does have the air of serious science fiction, and it seems to hark back to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars trilogy*, in which Transformers and Environmentalists were locked in a struggle for the future of a world.

Unfortunately, as I began to play through the two campaigns, I was disappointed to find this potentially rich backdrop reduced to a conflict in which the Transformers accidentally release a virus that breaks down the entire surface of New Terra. The campaigns become a race (against both time and the other

side) to identify the problem and then find a way to build a starship to escape.

This is an interesting premise for conflict, but nowhere near as interesting as it could have been. Instead of deciding the fate of a world and the philosophical direction of our entire species, you spend most of your time rushing around like someone 15 minutes late for a dental appointment.

## GUNS AND BUTTER

But my disappointment edged back toward pleasure when the full impact of the game's mechanics made itself known. Instead of chucking out everything except the name *OUTPOST* and just creating another *Build-a-base, Build-an-army* clone, the designers bravely tried to retain as much of what was good about the original game as possible, while still delivering solid real-time combat. Yes, you do build up armies of vehicles that destroy each other in graphically satisfying ways, but the whole base-building portion of the game is much more intrinsic to the scenarios than is the norm for the genre.



**Price:** \$49.95  
**Minimum System Requirements:** Pentium 60, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics card; supports Windows 95 compatible sound cards.  
**Multiplayer Support:** Modem, Serial (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-6 players).  
**Designer:** Dynamix  
**Publisher:** Sierra Online  
 Bellevue, WA  
 (800) 757-7707  
[www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com)  
**Reader Service #: 344**



**BIG-CITY WELCOME** *Outpost 2* shares a city-management aspect with its predecessor; in addition to real-time combat, there is plenty of realistic colony management.

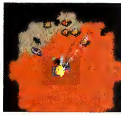




**THE LIVING PLANET** A good sci-fi story provides the backdrop for *Outpost 2*. You have to fight your rival colonists and stave the planet's own hostile overtures

In *OUTPOST 2*, building up your infrastructure isn't easy or tricky. To be successful, you have to take care of your people and deal with the harsh realities of your disintegrating world. It doesn't take long to realize that it's You vs. Them vs. New Terra. Instead of just creating workers at the click of a button, you have to create an environment in which people are comfortable enough to live and create families. Even as the world seizes falling meteors, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis, you have to shuttle materials from your mines to your smelters, allocate personnel from one vital facility to another, train scientists and workers, and be prepared to evacuate and leave everything at a moment's notice.

The designers were also careful to keep the combat systems and weapons consistent with the harsh realities of the game. There are no cool attack choppers or rocket artillery in this game; instead, both the tech and the weapons have a very realistic,



**GOOD NIGHT** This game has a dynamic feel, with active volcanoes changing the face of the planet, and day and night cycles adding to the sense of passage of time.

ad hoc feel. You have to do battle with beefed-up laser rangefinders and overpowered microwave generators until you have the resources to create dedicated weapons systems, which still look like they have been designed by MIT instead of the Pentagon. Another nice touch is the ability to put different turns on the same type of chassis, thus giving you access to low, medium, and high

durability weapon platforms. You can use the right turret for the individual job you have in mind. Plus, many of these weapon systems are designed to be used in conjunction with each other for maximum effect, leading to a very realistic combined-arms approach.

The terrain is also well done. While not particularly diverse, maps are huge in comparison to other games of this type, and the presence of erupting volcanoes, which can spew lakes of lava or spread waves of climate-grafting virus, makes for a nice dynamic atmosphere. Also included is a cycle of day and night, and a light sensor for vehicles that adds to the sense of realism. There's nothing like turning the lights off on your attack squad and watching them creep through the darkness toward the unwary enemy.

Of course, the downside to all this nice detail is the fact that just as you get the hang of it all, the game is pretty much over.

#### A GOOD START, BUT...

The single greatest problem in *OUTPOST 2* is that there just isn't enough of it. Both campaigns consist of only 12 missions, and, while they tend to be long because of the slow and detailed growth rate of your base, the time spent doesn't exactly give you

your money's worth. The scenarios are often artificially limited by the erupting virus premise. While it makes for an excellent real-time time threat early on, I found myself disappointed that it wasn't a menace to be conquered, so that the game could move on to a variety of situations. Running away is hardly the complex tactical and moral conflict the game usually promises.

Long-term play is bolstered somewhat by the game's nice multiplayer suite and by support on Sierra's own battle-net-like online gaming service.

*OUTPOST 2* is an excellent attempt to resurrect the franchise, but once again it seems that limited vision has damaged another promising Sierra product. There was enough depth in the premise and enough room in the design to create an



**LIFE'S TOO SHORT** This game doesn't live up to its potential. *Outpost 2* is too short of a game, and it ends just when you start to have real fun.

epic wargaming experience, one that could have left even the classic *COMMAND & CONQUER* in the dust...but instead, it seems we have to settle for simply a good, but short, game. **B**

**APPEAL:** Strategy fans looking for a more realistic sci-fi wargame; original *Outpost* buyers who felt cheated and are still looking to get their money's worth.

**PROS:** Deep real-time wargame with a hard edge of science fiction; some nice attention to realism in a genre that usually skimps on it.

**CONS:** Too damn short; game short-changes its potential with scenarios of limited imagination and detail.





# Still Birth?

Sierra's First AD&D Venture Tries To Be Everything, But Can't

by Gavin Hachlya Wasserman

**A**s for a Quest! Suite the fees. Unite the realm! Triumph over the malevolent hordes of the *Avatar* of evil. Sound familiar? Sierra's BIRTHRIGHT: THE GORGON'S ALLIANCE hopes to renew our hunger for all things medieval and fantastic, and to usher in a new generation of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* games. Combining a jumble of strategy and role-playing elements (including turn-based grand strategy, real-time wargaming, and first-person dungeon romps), Sierra's game challenges players to manage and marshal the forces of one of the 34 kingdoms squabbling over the fallen empire of Aerie.

Each warring power is governed by a regent of ancient lineage, and the blood flowing through these men and women is rich with mystical power. Unfortunately for them, the same divine birthright that fuels their quest for glory also makes them the natural prey of the Gorgon, an ancient creature whose power and corrupting influence are only matched by his hunger for blood.

## TREAD LIGHTLY

Excited? Ready to take on evil in all its many forms?

Hold on a minute. GORGON'S ALLIANCE ambitiously tries to meld two games, keeping as close to its AD&D roots as possible, while hinting that familiar sweet spot in strategy games that keeps them up and blinking into the gray of dawn. Unfortunately, despite its great potential, BIRTHRIGHT doesn't quite get it all right.

The adventuring part of the game is intuitive enough. Anyone who's been in front of a computer in the last few years will feel right at home exploring castles, haunted temples, and dark dungeons with a HEROIN QUINCY-type, first-person view: You run, jump, duck, slide left and right, and, yes, push buttons and open



**CLUTTERED KINGDOM** BIRTHRIGHT is a game with equal parts role-playing and strategy. It is incredibly complicated, and it's not for the micro-management challenged.

secret doorways. Picking up items, however, requires a little bit of mouse dexterity as well as excellent powers of observation. It is very difficult to point and click on tiny objects such as rings and keys that are just barely visible on the floor.

The exploration is fun. Hunting secret passages and fabulous magic items is a game in itself. Puzzles of finding keys, blundering through thorny walls, and dodging traps are pretty much familiar features. With no time limit, it's easy to get caught up in trying to find every little object (everything from potions to wooden plates). It would be peek-out heaven if you could just pay an attention to the other party members staring steadily at you each time you turn around and switch directions. All they do is tell you as if they were pre-labeled lemmings: They'll literally follow you over a cliff.

At least, until you enter into combat. Instead of cloning HESSEN for scumlessly integrated exploration and combat, Sierra tried to stay true to the AD&D dice-determined combat system. When the party encounters monsters, music begins and the game goes completely awry. Whereas one minute ago you had

complete control of mobility and actions, suddenly you're a passenger with the less than thrilling position of choosing between general attack types. The combatants (lemmings, et al.) swing their weapons again and again, marking granting noises and clinking sounds. After the initial novelty wears off, it becomes apparent that there is no arcade feel, no reflexes are necessary, and no excitement is generated. Combat is wholly a function of to-hit percentages and damage potential.

Unfortunately, while friends at a Fitzwatter table can make percentages interesting to themselves ("Yous! A natural 20! Dilya see it?"), the spastic acrobatics of the computer combatants are merely a poorly-disguised means to an end. Just kill the monsters and keep looking for stuff. And given that you don't start with weak characters, (you can hire 9th level and higher warriors, most of the monsters in the adventures are just speed bumps on the road to look.

## COMMANDING CONQUERORS

In contrast, the strategy part of the game is neither easy nor quick, even at



Price: \$29.95

### Minimum System Requirements:

Pentium75 (P100 recommended), 8MB RAM (32MB recommended), Win 95 or MS DOS 5.0, 35MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards, mouse.

### Multiplayer Support:

Modern (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-8 players).

### Designer: Synergistic

### Publisher:

Sierra On-Line, Inc.  
Bellevue, WA  
(800) 757-7707 (sales)  
www.sierra.com

Reader Service #: 348

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## "Bugs" or Quirks in the Kingdom

**1.** Units on the map aren't too bright when you try to tell them where to move. Unless a unit has a perfectly unobstructed, straight path to its destination, it will probably blunder off in the wrong direction. Aim a unit at a southwestern province and it may head first south, then southeast, then stop when it runs into a neutral territory it can't cross.

**2.** Some adventure scenarios involve passing into different dungeons levels, during which time the game resets your marching orders to the default and cancels all your memorized spots. Also, if you clear one level of the scenario, move to another level, and then come back, you'll find the entire level reset, with all the dead monsters alive again, all the doors closed, and all the treasure chests refilled with the exact same items you plundered just a moment ago (finding two Reds of Resurrection just isn't right).

**3.** In the adventure combats, magics, wands of fire (or frost), and necklaces of missiles are practically useless. A mage's fireball will not kill even a single guard. On the other hand, in tactical combat, the same mage can cast fireballs at a whole squad of elite infantry and cut down at least half of them. Likewise, priests' Turn Undead power hardly phases zombies and skeletons in dungeons, but saves the day on the battlefield, when all else fails against these undead.

**4.** While Fighters are practically unstoppable in adventure combat, they lose out in strategic combat. Guard your favorite warrior well; he may be able to single-handedly obliterate entire legions of heavily armed ogres in a dungeon, but could falter against raw recruits.

**5.** If you get 4:1 numerical superiority in the strategic combat, you win the battle. If you muster four weak archer groups against the Gorgon, the big bad boy has to turn tail and flee, even though he could single-handedly finish them all off like chicken strips.

the easiest setting. The game can be played at three levels of complexity: Basic, Advanced, and Expert. The printed manual is sparse, and most of the real info is inside the game's help function. Even the Basic game is not very intuitive. For instance, you can only move units into your territories, your allies' territories, or the territories of those regents upon whom you've declared war (in this, and only this, turn). Thus, biblioteks are a tactic used only on formerly friendly countries, because the others have to get engaged in battles before you can start moving troops into their yards. Luckily, the game has three excellent tutorial scenarios, one for each complexity level. They are quick, clear, and informative. Skip them at your own peril. However, once you've done them all, there's no point in playing anything but Expert level.

Once you've mastered the art of collecting taxes, paying wages, and creating holdings (which provide income and regency points—basically political/magic power), you can get down to the nitty-gritty of development, diplomacy, and destruction. Here's where GORGON'S ALLIANCE shows its best face. With so many opponents, the game is always in flux, and the map rearranges itself as kingdoms are engaged or micro-empires are snuffed.

The diplomacy is very simple to learn. It's merely a series of demands balanced by bribes. You want a relatively powerful neighbor to look the other way while you cross her borders to stamp a weaker neutral kingdom? No problem, so long as you've got the gold and regency to spare. And if reason and bribes fail, there's always the well-honed assassination.

The real-time tactical combat is more interesting to watch than the adventure battles. Surprisingly, you have more control over individual units in vast armies than you have over four characters in a dungeon. The main screen's graphics show units clashing, spells flashing, and bodies falling, but

the actual control takes place on the panel to the right of the screen. The panel reminds me a bit too much of the two-toe: The battlefield is divided into three rows of squares, and units move horizontally and vertically. As with adventure combat, it's just a means to an end, and you wouldn't want to play it for its own sake. There is a quick combat option, but, like most every game,



► **DUELING PERCENTAGES** Despite the ostensible role-playing elements, the adventures are really just dice-rolling abstractions, with little chance to build up characters or to role-play.

you're gambling with your armies by using this option.

Hard-core fans of AD&D will find things to really like in GORGON'S ALLIANCE, whether it be the chance to play powerful heroes in the Birthright campaign or just the opportunity to explore the well-designed castles and dungeons. Casual strategy gamers, though, will find the immense micro-management daunting, the RPG adventures cumbersome, and the payoffs limited. **C**

**APPEAL:** AD&D strategy or role-playing fans who want to sample the Birthright universe and aren't afraid to dabble in alternate-game gameplay.

**PROS:** Good diplomacy and espionage options; cool items and exploration in adventures.

**CONS:** Low production values; combat that is poorly disguised dice rolling; daunting micro-management; AD&D rules not consistently reproduced; some bugs.



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CIRCLE 10 FOR SERVICE #289

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# Bottoms Up

Steve Meretsky's *THE SPACE BAR IS TOUGH, FUNNY—AND A LITTLE BIT DISAPPOINTING*

**B**eing a cop, even a company cop, is no easy job. Just ask the flatfoot in Steve Meretsky's new adventure game, *THE SPACE BAR*. As Alkas Node, employed by the owners of Anapt VI, you're after a notorious criminal who's been traced to the "Thirsty Terrace" (the "space bar" of the title). To make matters worse, this crook is a shapeshifter who could be almost anyone in the bar. And just to add some icing on the cake, he kidnaps your partner, Malosh, and threatens dire consequences if you don't break off the investigation.

Of course, you proceed anyway, keeping your eyes peeled for anything unusual and checking out the patrons in casual conversation. Alkas has a special

ability, emp-tel (empathic telepathy), that allows him to get inside the mind of whomever he's talking to and solve a recent event in that being's life.

These flashbacks make up most of the game. Each segment is a self-contained sequence, with numerous puzzles to solve. Successful completion of a flashback yields important pieces of information, which are used in various ways back in the bar. For instance, Alkas might work a deal—"You tell me what I need to know, and I'll tell you what you need to know"—or obtain an item based on what he learned from the other creature's mind.

Not everything is done in flashbacks; there are several important actions that need to be accomplished in and around the bar, not the least of which is simply staying alive. So the game is a combination of present and past, and while items have importance, information is even

more important. Reading up on the various alien races is critical to winning the game, along with what you learn in the flashbacks.

## COME HERE OFTEN?

Interacting with others is simple: You enter a close-up view of a character, then click on him to begin a conversation. This brings up a menu of choices of what to ask or do, and you proceed from there.

Moving around is equally simple: Direction arrows point out the ways you can go, and clicking sends you there. The view is a full 360 degrees, but movement is more as it was in *RIFTER*. You don't go a step at a time, but, rather, glide forward to a predefine point, and stop.

For storing inventory items, receiving messages, reviewing clues, and so on, Alkas has his Personal Digital Assistant, or PDA. This is a computerlike device that sits at the bottom of the screen, and can be brought up any time by touching it with the cursor. The PDA holds all the items picked up during the game (all of the aliens in the flashbacks have a similar device for use in those segments). The PDA can display a complete annotated map of the area, showing your current position (except in the mine maze). The PDA also keeps a record of the important things learned during the flashbacks, as well as copies of voice messages Alkas receives throughout the game. It's also used to save or restore games, change the volume of the sound and music, or alter the brightness of the screen. These controls



“ While *THE SPACE BAR*'s concept is refreshingly novel, it wasn't used to best effect here. ”



**Price:** \$39.95  
**Minimum System Requirements:** P75, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 16-bit SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM drive, 8-bit Windows 95 Direct X-compatible sound card, Microsoft-compatible keyboard and mouse  
**Macintosh requirements:** Power PC 6100, System 7.5, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16MB RAM, color monitor  
**Multiplayer Support:** None  
**Designer:** Steve Meretsky  
**Publisher:** SegaSoft  
 Redwood City, CA (415) 508-2800  
[www.segasoft.com](http://www.segasoft.com)  
**Reader Service #:** 349



**BAR FLIES** Some of the patrons of the watering hole known as *The Space Bar* are not the kind you want to bring home to mother

are available at all times, through both the PDA and several predefined hot keys.

Happily, I had no technical problems with *The Since Bar*. The game installed fine and ran perfectly on my system. There were no crashes, nor did I come across any bugs. Everything performed as smoothly as it was supposed to. Something the game doesn't have, however, is test subtitles. You really need a sound card and the ability to hear well to play this one. While there are a few text boxes now and then, all the important parts are either spoken or are related through sound effects.

#### (REAL)TIME COP

In the matter of actual gameplay, *The Since Bar* is not for the novice, nor for anyone who is easily aggravated. This adventure is tough, obscure (sometimes needlessly so), and has too much real-time action in it.

The game as a whole has a time limit: You must discover the criminal before he can board a shuttle leaving at a certain hour. Of itself, that isn't a problem, but with so much to do in the game, you begin to feel the time pressure early on. Everything cuts up the clock, especially real-world actions in the bar. There hardly seems time enough to do everything



**BOATLOAD OF TROUBLE** One of the game's flashbacks will put you on a boat ride on the planet U'Bleek with the aptly named Tiseels—an alien species with three genders.

that needs to be done in order to make it successfully to the end. That is, if you plan to make it there without a good deal of restoring.

Some of the flashbacks have real-time segments as well—the Bartender and Deven-7 sequences, in particular. The Bartender sequence is especially unforgiving: In two different places, even one wasted move will require a restart. In the Deven flashback, in which you put together a business deal, I'm not even certain you can do all the research and negotiations necessary without running out of time.

Also, the game isn't as non-linear as it would appear. Some things must be done early, or you could be prevented from finishing the game later on. This happened to me when I solved the Deven flashback late in the game, nothing ever came of it afterwards. Chatting with him didn't turn up what it was supposed to, and in turn, this meant that time passed but the game didn't advance. Eventually, I went back to an early save and replayed about two thirds of the game, being sure to complete that flashback at the first opportunity.

Doing so brought about the correct response from Deven.

Too much in the game depends upon foreknowledge: You have to know ahead of time what needs to be done. That requires saving early, working

things out through trial and error, then restoring to do it over without any wasted moves. This is not great puzzle design.

*The Since Bar* is billed as an adventure, and that's what it is; it isn't a real mystery or detective game. You don't collect a bunch of clues and analyze them to determine the guilty party. While you perform routine printing of objects and voice-printing of suspects,

these actions don't mean much. What you learn in the flashbacks (except in one instance) has nothing to do with the criminal.

Sometimes during the game, you receive a video disk from someone that shows you the criminal morphing into his current form, and near the end, you experience a short but critical flashback in the mind of the thief himself, which points the way to uncovering him. While, of course, you had to play the rest of the game to reach this point, none of that could be called detective work in the true sense. This was somewhat disappointing.

#### NO CIGAR

Overall, *The Since Bar* is a game that just rubs the mask. While the concept is refreshingly novel, it wasn't used to best effect here. A difficult adventure is always welcome, but too many puzzles in *The Since Bar* are either obscure or require trial-and-error plus restoring to solve them properly. The real-time aspect puts an additional burden on the player.

Coming as it does from Steve Meretzky, *The Since Bar* has some genuinely humorous touches, but it isn't as amusing as, for instance, his earlier *Supershero League of Hoboken*. Much of the game's social satire and parody are often overdone and overlong. This one is best for those with a high tolerance for frustration. **B**





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ORACLE READER SERVICE #134

# Surfing for Action

Online Action Gaming Is Finally Growing Up

**I** don't mind admitting that I haven't played many online action games, because these are hardly *any* good ones available. There is one single-player game that has made a fantastic transition to the online world—*Quake*—but aside from that, there haven't been too many good action games to attract twitch fans onto the Internet. That could soon change as some of the best online games I've seen in recent months get ready to open their gates to action fans all across the Internet.

Why should you care about these games? Three

reasons: One finally brings social interaction, not just chatting via typing, into online gaming; another is a spin-off of a hugely successful real-time strategy franchise; and the last one brings 3D acceleration onto the Internet.

## INTO THE FIRE

*FIRETEAM* is an online-only game that deserves a lot more attention than it's been getting. It's the launch title for Multitude, a new company devoted to multiplayer gaming, which was formed by Edward Leiner and Art Min, both formerly of Looking Glass Technologies. Art Min, who has worked on *SYSTEM SHOCK* and *STRIKE FORCE: CRIMINALS: TERRA NOVA*, is the project leader on *FIRETEAM*.

*FIRETEAM* is a three-quarters, isometric shooter that was designed to be a multiplayer game with cooperative play, bite-sized 15-minute games, persistent characters, and powerful customizability. It will be immediately familiar to any action fan who has played *SYNDICATE* or *CRUSADER*.

## TIME TO PLAY FRIENDLY

What makes this game special is that it is a team game—and that it has the

against other teams in a virtual environment—that is a great gaming experience."

In *FIRETEAM*, you play a single, persistent character (the game will record your wins and stats), and you ally with your friends or find new teammates in a pregame lobby. Once you've set your teams, you enter an arena to play a variety of different multiplayer games, from capture the flag to a game that Multitude calls *Crusball*. Says Min, "It's combat football. You pick up a ball and your job is to score. You want people to protect you while you try to score. The other team is trying to take you out, and if you die, you drop the ball."

What makes *FIRETEAM* a truly multiplayer team game is that you can communicate with your teammates through microphone headsets, which are bundled with the game. When you play, you can shout orders, give updates, or beg for help. You can also taunt your enemies over the headsets in more a personal manner than you ever could by typing. The headsets really make *FIRETEAM* a social activity. You can't play the game any other way, and I don't think I'd want to.

appropriate technologies to really make team play and player interaction work.

Says Min, "Teamplay is the essence of *FIRETEAM*. There aren't any games on the Internet that emphasize team play. Team sports are some of the most popular activities in society. The social interaction and the shared experience are just the beginnings of why team play is cool. Our technology is Collaborative Play. Our early testers just can't get enough of the whole experience. We've built our entire game *from the ground up* on this idea of Collaborative Play. Working together in a team, in a 'hostile' situation,



**FACEOFF** Among *FIRETEAM*'s many cool features is realistic line-of-sight, which makes facing and ducking in and out of cover important.



“ There haven't been too many good action games to attract twitch fans onto the Internet, but that could soon change. ”

## EDITING AND OTHER FEATURES

Aside from its familiar gameplay, clean graphics, and unique cooperative and social elements, FIRETEAM has an editor that will allow gamers to build their own levels and objects. Says Min, "You can build your own maps and create your own scenarios. It will most likely be released after the game; it is unclear if it'll be a free/shareware/commercial product. We'll see the demand and go from there."

Multitude also plans to join with movie companies to create custom themes based on popular movies, and place them online for download. "They can play games that they can relate to. Watch the movie, then play it. Think about if people could play an online *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* or Schwarzenegger movie. And it's not static; the movie game will be up for a

few weeks and then another but movie will have its game on the service," adds Min.

One of the other game features Multitude is including in FIRETEAM is the ability to leave markers. For instance, you can tell your teammates to rendezvous at flag 2. Anyone who has played multiplayer *DIABLO* can



**EDITOR'S DAY** Multitude has plans for a robust editor that will allow them to create levels and themes for download in conjunction with big-budget movies.

attest to how difficult it is to give directions in a dungeon, where position is relative, but FIRETEAM makes it easy

with absolute markers as well as a minimap in the screen corner.

At this moment, Multitude hasn't yet decided on an economic model, nor do they know with which gaming service they'll partner, though they'll probably have their own gaming service (à la [battle.net](http://battle.net)) to complement their online strategy. What they do know is that FIRETEAM will be a retail product that you can purchase at stores. Inside will be the game, headset, and several months of free gaming on the FIRETEAM gaming service. After those few months are up, you can then start paying to play, though whether the fee will be monthly, daily, or hourly is undecided, as yet.

But don't just take my word for it. You can see for yourself how fun FIRETEAM is when Multitude starts beta testing in November. Visit their Web site at [www.multitude.com](http://www.multitude.com) for more information. The final game has a tentative ship date of early 1998. ☞

## Survival of the Fittest

**T**he other two online games of note are *CRUISING & CONQUER: SOLE SURVIVOR*, a spin-off of the C&C strategy line, and *TARMAUS*, a 3D-accelerated tank game from Sony.

As the name suggests, *SOLE SURVIVOR* is a pure action game in which you assume the guise of one C&C unit, run around a variety of maps, gather power-ups to soup up your vehicle, and blast all your enemies until



you are the last one standing. Since we last visited the subject in our February cover story, Westwood has been refining the gameplay and stability of the game.

Beta tests are winding down for this game, but I managed to jump on and play a few rounds. It's a fast game that features a continuous cycle of dying, respawning, and wreaking havoc. There is no pretense of strategy,

though you will employ whatever strategies you normally use in action games. You won't be able to camp near power-ups, though, because they respawn at random locations throughout the game world (this was premeditated). The final product is nearing completion, and should be in stores by Christmas. Pricing is still to be determined, though you will buy the game at retail. To play, you'll connect to Westwood Chat. However, Westwood is talking to several gaming services about hosting *SOLE SURVIVOR* games. For more information on the game, visit their Web site at [www.westwood.com](http://www.westwood.com).

Sony Interactive's *TARMAUS* is a title that I've only played briefly. It's a messy killfest, much like the Namco arcade game *TOKYO WARS*, in which you blast at enemy tanks and maneuver around different terrain.

The game supports the 3Dix Voodoo chipset for some nice graphics that are a marked improvement over the usual online fare. The game also has day and night missions and a variety of different locales to play within, including snow and urban terrain.

For more on this game and an opportunity to beta test, visit Sony's site at [www.sonygames.com](http://www.sonygames.com). Pricing should be available on its Web site by the time you read this.

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duel at a location and time of your  
choosing. I believe you to be a spineless  
assassin whose victories are achieved  
by luck, and no true champion of the  
skies. Rest assured that we shall meet  
sooner or later. Accept my challenge  
now and die an honest death, or  
demonstrate to the world your true  
cowardly nature.

Eight long years I have waited for  
this moment. The wait is over. Ich bin  
zurück!

*Manfred*

21 March, 1918



# The Baron is B



It's a Dynamix® first-3D with Camels in cyberspace. Multiplayer dogfighting action featuring internet and LAN support with up to eight players and two player head-to-head modern play.



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# Red Baron II

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## Featuring

Red Baron® II is much more than a combat flight sim. It's a virtual war in a box, where every character, vehicle and event is controlled by its own AI system, and all operate within meticulously researched historical settings. The entire world is alive at all times, ground activity is intense, historical battles rage whether you are there to see them or not and no two missions are ever alike.

Encounter 40 unique aircraft with 22 flyable planes from the early improved Pfalz D.VII and Sopwith Snipes. Dynamix's force-based, real world physics flight model faithfully simulates the performance envelopes of the actual historical planes.

User definable difficulty levels allow players of all abilities to take to the skies in a challenge uniquely customized to their own skills and tastes.

40,000 square miles of accurately mapped terrain put you in the real topography of the Western Front circa 1916, complete with accurately placed cities, villages, aerodromes, bridges, trenches and battle zones. Targets you'll recognize from the aerial recon photos in your briefings.

Total immersion is the name of the game. Force Feedback rocks you with turbulence from nearby explosions and direct hits, while authentic 3D sounds abound.

Bullets riddle your plane, shattering wood and shredding canvas. The sky screams with red tracers, smoke and explosions. And as the Red Baron himself blows out of the sun's glare... as you pull start to sweat and your pulse races... as you bear the ominous growl of stressed wings the instant before they shatter... you realize that this is much more than just a game. This is a taste of history. And your next move will determine whether you become a legend... or another kill in the Baron's book.



Visit our website and download the original Red B. you'll get free. <http://www.dynamix.com>

**Dynamix**

# Red Baron

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# Making a List

*Our Naughty-but-Nice Sports Columnist Shamelessly Begs Santa for His Christmas Goodies*



**D**ear Santa: The Christmas season is here once again, and I'm hoping you'll show a little more holiday spirit than you did last year. Look, I'm sorry I gave bad reviews to some of the games you left in people's stockings, but if you're going to cut cheesy distribution deals to unload turkeys like **BIG HURT BASEBALL** and **UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS**, it comes with the territory. After all, I do have an obligation to **CCW's** readers.

Okay, so maybe the red nose and fat boy jokes were a little heavy-handed. But no more bad games in my stocking, eh? Frankly, I'd rather have coal. On the other hand, if anthracite happens to be in short supply this year, there are a few

goodies I'd just love to find under my tree on Christmas morning.

## FEEL THE FORCE

A right jolly old elf like you knows how much fun a force-feedback joystick could be to a sports gamer. Although product support is limited right now, gamers should expect to see force-feedback options built into just about everything in 1998. **Visions of sugar plums** dance in my head when I imagine the sharp crack of white ash on cowhide in a baseball sim, or the lovely thud of the sweet spot in a golf game. Racing sims will quickly climb aboard the force-feedback bandwagon, and look for football games to follow suit. Imagine a helmet-removing blindside tackle, as the sensation of the hit rises through your hand while the graphics and sound play out simultaneously. Although it probably

won't fit in my stocking, Santa, I'm pretty impressed with Microsoft's new **Sidewinder Pro** model, but I'll gladly settle for a **CH Force FX**.

A new video accelerator would be nice too, even though the expected 3D explosion in sports gaming has been more like a popgun so far. Over at the **Elves' Workshop** they understand that 1998 will be the year that 3D video really begins to dominate the scene. Gamers who don't have a card that supports one of the leading chipsets will be missing the best sights in the new games, and will even be shut out on some titles that absolutely demand 3D, like **MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D**. Santa, a 3Dfx-based card would give me support for a broad range of games, but if you're in that cutting-edge mood, I'd really like a card based on the new **Voodoo Rush** chipset.

Since we're talking hardware, dare I mention the "U" word? As in "upgrade"? Like so many other sports gamers, I've found (to my dismay) that the **Peripherals 133** that looked so hot just last year is ready for retirement. Standing pat with my present system will leave me out in the cold with the latest sports titles by the end of 1998.

“ Dear Santa: No more bad games in my stocking, eh? Frankly, I'd rather have coal. ”



**MADDEN NFL 98** is at the top of most sports gamers' wish lists. But if it ships on time, will it be as good as first promised?



**MAY THE FORCE BE WITH ME** Looking for a good gift for CGW's Sports Editor? How about Microsoft's cool new Force Feedback joystick?

At best, I'll be running the new stuff with much of the detail toggled off. A Pentium II sure would look fine next to the usual socks and fruitcake in the present pile. I know it's asking a lot, Mr. Kringle, sir, but I've been good. I've gotten my reviews in by deadline. I've backed up my hard drive. I've even avoided taking cheap shots at console games (mostly). I know you're a Dickens fan, so to use the immortal words of Oliver Twist, you'll know I'm referring to CPU horsepower when I say, "Please, sir, may I have some more?"

#### BUY ME THAT

Not to be greedy, Santa, but all that new hardware without some cool sports games to play would be worse than managing a team of renderers without flea powder. So you'll understand my humble request for EA Sports' MADDEN NFL 98. You and I both know it looks to be the season's best football game. You know it's the first Win 95 version in the MADDEN franchise. You know that it blew the doors off every other gridiron game at E3. You know that Madden University has been enhanced, and that the game will have more sim elements than its arcade predecessors. And you know sports games can't wait to try it.

You'll also understand that I absolutely need (that's right—need) MICROSOFT BASEBALL MOCUL 3D. After all, this is the first big sports title from Cates & Co since FULL COURT PRESS debuted to mixed reviews in 1996. Add the historical significance of being the first sports title that requires 3D hardware support, and the bizarre/cool effect of having players'

faces scanned onto their polygonal bodies, and this one looks like a must-have. Right, Santa?

And gee, since it's better to give than to receive, can I send a few presents to some friends in the business? For Accelade, how about gift-wrapping a clue?

I thought the LEGENDS design team had things together with an extra year to work on the game. Did someone there really expect that sports gamers—the most demanding crowd there is—would accept a buggy, mouseless Win 95 product that looks and feels like a so-so arcade game? Was the cross-era hype all Accelade really had to offer? If so, they didn't even get that right. The older era uniforms aren't accurate, for one thing. For another, missed field goals in 1968 gave the opposing team possession at the 20 yard line, not the line of scrimmage. As one of the gaming journalists who contributed in good faith to the pre-release excitement, I'm doubly disappointed at the LEGENDS debacle.

For designer Ric Neil and the rest of the MADDEN crew at EA Sports, how

about some good project scheduling software? Last I heard, MADDEN 98's release had been pushed from October back to January, and then back to October again—but without some of the promised new features. I'm dying to see the final product, but I can't help thinking back to 1995, when MADDEN shipped completely into vaporware. So, Santa, do whatever you can to help the MADDEN team stay on schedule.

St. Nick, can you stuff a graphics expert's resume in MicroLeague game designer Dave Holt's stocking? Dave's an innovative designer who makes some of the best stat games in the business, but his products always fall just short on looks. His game engines deserve to shine behind some snazzy 3D graphics.

For Clay Drotolough at Infinite Monkey Systems, how about a big, fat contract, Santa? I hear he's been shopping his clever BASEBALL MOCUL design around to the big boys. EA Sports hasn't bitten yet, but they're mulling it over, as is at least one other major publisher. MOCUL is a great game, and deserves more support than Infinite Monkey can give it from the spare bedroom at the Drexelough Ranch.

Well, that's it for now, Santa. I'll be sure to leave the PC on for you. And lay off the Christmas cookies, eh, tubby?



**CHRISTMAS JEER** Legends 98 had everyone—including CGW's editors—crooning in anticipation for more than a year. Now that it's out, they're frothing at the mouth over the game's many disappointments.

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# It Could Happen

*Our Fearless Simulations Editor Gets Crystal Ballsy*

I always enjoy it when industry pundits make predictions for the coming year. It's fun to read imaginative prognostications about the future of computing. Of course, it's even more fun to stuff the columns aside for a year, come back and see how many predictions they botched, and get a good laugh at your colleagues' expense.

So that it can never be said that I'm not willing to risk humiliation in front of more than 200,000 readers, I've decided to join the elite ranks of such amazing visionaries as Nostradamus, Cornac the Magi-florent, and Jeanne D'Arc and offer my own predictions for what simulation gamers can expect over the coming year.

## SOFT FUTURES

World War II sims will make a strong comeback, eclipsing jet simulations in popularity (once pilots newer to flight sims discover the joy of dogfighting at close range). The first real Korean War simulations will please many aviation buffs, but they're likely to remain a niche product. The next big bandwagon will be Vietnam War sims, after game company marketing agencies notice the interest in Virgin/Eagle Interactive's PHANTOMACE.

Interactive Magic will become a competitive player in the flight-sim market when they release their next simulation, learning from the mistakes they made in

Competition should force sim developers to wait until a game is



**NO MORE MR. NICE GUY** Frustrated that Microsoft would have the gall to put multiplayer support in *FLYER SIMULATOR 98* without including combat, one of the many third-party add-on producers will create a hack to add combat functionality.

IF-22's design. There was a lot that was done very well in IF-22, such as the superb campaign generator, but the installation difficulties, superficial graphics problems, and pauses on some systems caused many gamers not to notice.

With the wealth of sims that will be available next year, gamers will no longer tolerate buggy initial releases.

fully cooked before releasing it onto the crowded flight-sim market, which will be a welcome relief for those of us tired of waiting months for a patch before truly enjoying a sim.

DID's F-22 ADF/TAW combo and MicroPose's FALCON 4.0 will both see limited use by an increasingly budget-conscious U.S. Air Force interested in



“ FALCON

4.0 and RED BARON II will ship—surely the fifth and sixth signs of the coming Apocalypse.”

ON THE RADAR

X-PLANE has been lauded by many of its users as the most realistic civilian flight sim around. (See [www.x-plane.com](http://www.x-plane.com) for details.) But with primitive terrain graphics and a high price, the sim has remained a niche product. In 1998 developer Laminar Research is expected to release a version that merges X-PLANE's detailed instrumentation and flight dynamics with the Digital Image Design's impressive F-22 ADF graphics engine. Best of all, this version should sell for well under the current version's \$199 price tag.



their systems simulation accuracy and networking capabilities. Potential USAF interest in F-22 ADP/T/W has already been written up in respected industry journal *Aviation Week and Space Technology*. DID has received expert input from Col. Richard T. Reynolds, a 21-year USAF veteran and author of *Heart of the Storm*, a fascinating look at the genesis of the air campaign against Iraq. MicroProse has again enlisted the advice of F-16 instructor Pete Bonnari, who recently gave Gilman Lantz a ride in the back seat of an F-16D to clearly illustrate the points he felt needed fine-tuning in *FALCON 4.0*.

Edon's **CONFIRMED KILL** will finally go live early in the year, and the online sim's historical World War II scenarios will be so popular that **MASTERS AIR WARRIOR II** and **WARREN** will follow suit with similar setups, at least as an option. The **AIR WARRIOR** gang will surprise everyone with 3D support that will finally bring their game's engine into the '90s.

Microsoft's **FIGHTERACE** will initially reduce pilots from the other online sims with its low, flat-rate pricing. The other providers will be forced to adopt new pricing models, and by the end of 1998 hourly fees for online sims will be a memory.

The "Electronic Battlefield," which will allow users of multiple simulations—air and ground—to fight in the same battle, will be announced yet again in 1998. This time it will really go live, but not before mid-1999.



▲ THE HOLY GRAIL: Yes, Falcon 4.0 will ship in 1998. Really. Well, we hope so, anyway.

One of the strongest players in jet-combat simulations next year will be a little company based in Redmond, Washington. Here's a hint: They probably wrote your computer's operating system.

The wiser of 238 land-crew flight simulators will file for divorce, the Thunderseat-equipped, six-monitor Thrustmaster F-16 cockpits in the basement being the last straw. Nearly 100 of these men will eventually notice.

#### THE HARD GUESSES

With new games shipping with DirectX 5, which isn't as vicious about trashing your system's video drivers as earlier versions, Windows 95 game installation won't be as big a headache as it has been. However, it will probably be DirectX 7 or so before game installation becomes as painless as it was finally getting to be in MS-DOS before Microsoft put the kibosh on that operating system (which will be about the time that Microsoft decides to move the home market to Windows NT; but that isn't likely to happen until the year 2000 or so.)

As more sims begin to incorporate force-feedback support and more gamers get a chance to try force-feedback joysticks, the technology will become a must-have item for serious sim players. You'll even see force-feedback support in some sims where

ON THE RADAR



F-22 ADP

it's not really appropriate, such as when the seat plane has fully fly-by-wire controls that don't provide any feedback in reality.

The 3Dfx Voodoo chipset and its 1998 follow-on will continue to dominate the "serious gamer" market, despite the presence of worthy competitors such as the NVIDIA Riva 128 chip. 3Dfx's early performance lead, the number of games written directly to support the board's Glide API, and its strong support for OpenGL will help it maintain the lead.

Direct3D will eventually win the 3D graphics API war, despite the strength of OpenGL as an alternative. Sun developers won't want to risk supporting OpenGL exclusively when support for the API isn't universal among consumer 3D cards. Ironically, by the time Microsoft gets through updating Direct3D to appease developers frustrated with its convoluted programming requirements, it may not look that much different from OpenGL anyway.

#### THE REAL WORLD

**FALCON 4.0** and **RED BARON II** will ship—surely the fifth and sixth steps of the coming Apocalypse. Once **EUROPEAN AIR WAR** follows, sim pilots will find themselves without long-term titles to look forward to for the first time in years. Despondent, some will disconnect their joysticks, go upstairs, and see if the wife and kids still live there. Others will refuse to buy the completed games, deny their existence on store shelves, and continue posting messages to the Internet asking when they'll finally ship.

Flip dig this column up this time next year, check my success record on these predictions, and decide to write next December's column on formation flying in **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 99**. ☺



"This bully takes every other air combat sim I've played, sucker-punches 'em and then shoves their faces into the dirt. **Hard.**"

-All About Games



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# Wargamer Gifts

Unique Gift Ideas for Would-be Conquerors

**D**o you often feel that finding a gift for the Caesar or Rommel in your home leaves you trapped in an endless hexgrid? Since Elliott Chin and I have already made our holiday suggestions for strategy/war games on the computer (see the Holiday Hot 100), here are some alternate gift ideas, including boardgames, films, and books; some of them might even get nongamers involved in the fun.

## BOARDGAMES FOR PEOPLE

### WHO HATE BOARDGAMES

#### 1. We the People

The American Revolution is generally given short shrift in wargaming, ironically because it's perceived as too political. So, designer Mark Herman (*CREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDRIA*) decided to

integrate the political aspects with the military conflict. Instead of the customary dizzying array of rules (and endless rules exceptions), the *We the People* is played primarily with cards—there are only a handful of card-board leaders and troops on the board

at any time, which keeps things simple.

Each player, in turn, plays a single card (seven cards are dealt out each turn, signifying one year of the war), and each card played allows you to move a leader (with his troops), place political control markers in the various colonies, place reinforcements, or

cause an event to occur. Events range from the momentous signing of the Declaration of Independence and/or gaining French aid, to various minor historical occurrences.

Except in rare cases in which George Washington is captured by the British, the only way to win the game is to control a majority of colonies. Thus, battles are fought for political control, rather than for the 19th-century goal of destroying the enemy on the battlefield—which makes you think like your historical counterpart. The game plays a lot like a modern version of Go, with the added benefit that you know the history.

We the People abounds with nice touches. Benedict Arnold is one of the best leaders for the Americans, but do you utilize him, knowing that the British might hold the "Treason card"? As the British, can you risk sending Cornwallis on a sweep through the southern colonies, knowing that the infamous "Swamp Fox" may be in

wait for him? When the game is tight, can you afford not to send Washington on a last-ditch winter offensive, hoping he might gain an edge in battle as he did historically in Trenton? This is simply one of the most elegant and replayable designs

in any gaming medium, suitable for anyone—even nongamers.

Avalon Hill, \$39.95  
[www.avalonhill.com](http://www.avalonhill.com)

#### 2. Rise of the Luftwaffe

Tired of card games? This one is not only unique, it isn't a collectible card

game. Aircraft from WWII are rated according to historical attributes, which are then translated to card play. Performance of a fighter, for example, is measured by how many cards you can hold in your hand. Horsepower determines how many cards you may redraw at the end of your turn, and each plane is also rated for how many bursts it may fire in a turn, whether it has afterburners, and so forth.

While playing single dogfights is fine, the game really comes alive in the campaigns, which introduce bombing and strafing runs, along with secret options for each mission. The add-on pack, Eighth Air Force, introduces jets, and is more focused on the air war over

Germany. Each game can be learned in minutes and is wonderful for introducing someone to the hobby.

GMT Games, \$25  
[www.gmtgames.com](http://www.gmtgames.com)

#### 3. Settlers of Catan

This German design was a huge hit at ConCon this year; the tournament reportedly drew more than 100 people, including a large percentage of women. Basically, this is a trading game reminiscent of *PA*, in which you trade various commodities (lumber, brick, etc.) in order to build towns and roads. The twist is that the puzzle-cut board pieces allow for a different starting setup with each new game, a rarity for a boardgame. As with all multiplayer games, diplomatic skills are often more important than



“...while computer games are fun, they aren't quite as social as playing a boardgame with a group of friends...”



board position or dice rolls—especially in the advanced game, where you may interfere with other players' plans more directly. There are several add-ons, including a privateer module, but the original game remains the most simple and addictive.

Imported through Mayfair Games, \$40  
[www.coalisites.com](http://www.coalisites.com)  
 (for the Mayfair Games U.S. version)  
[www.die-siedlers.com](http://www.die-siedlers.com)  
 (for the original German version)

#### 4. Quebec 1759

If you've ever played *Stratego*, you'll be instantly comfortable with this game. The wooden blocks used in the game to represent military units face toward you, so that your opponent doesn't know exactly who he is facing, much less how

many casualties you've taken, and vice versa.

The action focuses on the climactic battle on the Plains of Abraham, which decided the French and Indian War. Simple battle resolution reflects 18th-century tactics pretty well, especially considering the game was released 20 years ago. It takes just minutes to learn and is playable in around a hour—what more could you ask for? If you like the game, Columbia is one of the few boardgame companies still doing reasonable business: Sam Grant, its wooden-block game on the Civil War, just shipped a couple of months ago (though it is a bit more complex than *Quebec 1759*).

Columbia Games, \$36  
[www.columbiagames.com](http://www.columbiagames.com)

#### 5. Junta

This tongue-in-cheek view of a fictitious island republic is one of the most atrocious multiplayer games ever. The mechanics are incredibly simple: Whoever is elected El Presidente divides yearly funds and does out offices totally at his discretion; everyone is a general, admiral, or political keeper of the faith (with a gun). Each turn engenders a great deal of gambling, political maneuvering, and even assassinations between the haves and have-nots. Eventually, there is a coup attempt, and amidst much posturing and rolling of dice, the reigning President either survives or is ousted (and the losers are generally shot, to reappear as a "cousin," so that no one is ever really out of the game).

While there is some structure to the game, rules lawyers are at a huge disadvantage. Players may change allegiance at the drop of a hat,



## Bedtime Reading for Wargamers

### The Definitive Wargames Handbook

Wargaming icon Jim Dunnigan's show and tell of game design.

### The Civil War

Shelby Foote's three-volume set elucidates and entertains.

### Miracle at Midway

This is a very readable volume and goes well with *Pacific Genesis*.

### The Art of Wargaming

Peter Perla puts it all in perspective, great anecdotes.

### Battles of the Great Commanders

Anthony Livesey offers a coffee table book that really works.

### Red Storm Rising

Tom Clancy's tale of WWII; they used *Hexagon* to play out the battles.

### Fighter

Len Deighton's *Battle of Britain* is so vivid it reads like fiction.

### How to Make War

Jim Dunnigan and Austin Bay pull no punches in this best seller.

### The Face of Battle

If you haven't read any John Keegan, start here.

### The Killer Angels

Gettysburg comes alive in this Pulitzer Prize-winner by Michael Shaara.

and, as with all multiplayer games, anyone obviously in the lead is a big target. Oh, yes, there is a point to the game. Whoever can get away from the island republic with the most in his Swiss bank account wins, most people, however, simply play *Junta* for the sheer chaos factor.

West End Games, \$35

Keep in mind that while computer games are fun, they aren't quite as social as playing a boardgame with a group of friends or relatives—especially since the holidays are the most likely time for nongamers to show an interest in our peculiar hobby. If you do look to purchase some of the games listed above, whenever possible, please support your local hobby store. Who knows? You might even make a gaming contact. Happy holidays! ♣

## Epic Battles On Screen

### The Seven Samurai

Kurosawa's masterpiece is far better than *The Magnificent Seven*.

### Spartacus

This taught

Kubrick how to do

epics, like *2001: A*

*Space Odyssey*.

### Lawrence of Arabia

Get the newly restored

director's cut and crank it

up.

### The Civil War

Ken Burns' opus is the

definitive historical

documentary.

### Aliens

It may be sci-fi, but James

Cameron definitely nailed

the Marine attitude.

### The Longest Day

It's nearly the longest

movie, but it's still a

fine ride.

### Star Wars Trilogy

Watch the first two

(no *Ewoks*), then play

*Wing Commander III*.

### Henry V

Agincourt is grittier in

the Kenneth Branagh

version.

### Gettysburg

Overproduced, with

uneven acting, but

great battle scenes.

### Excalibur

Magic & maces, plus

I've always fancied

Guinevere as a brunette.





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## WALKTHROUGH

# Betrayal in Antara

*Our Walkthrough Wizard Gives You a Roadmap of Antara*

by Petra Schlunk

**B**ETRAYAL IN ANTARA is such a huge game that we could spend forever just discussing all the side quests. Instead, we're going to cut right to the chase. As in all role-playing games, you'll make the best progress by doing everything you can, selling everything you find, and speaking to everyone you meet. If you're an item hoarder, don't bother. Go ahead and use any potions and weapon enhancements when you find them (and you'll find plenty). Buy lots of serwater to see your gang through combats, and never adventure without basic provisions (such as shovels and rope).

### Chapter One

Go southwest to Britia. You'll have a fight as you leave town and Kaelyn then joins you. Speak with Scott in Apezzia's Inn. To end the chapter, go to the Escobar Estate in Parren.

### Chapter Two

The mage Finch is in a canyon north of Midova. He wants some Chaffan Tea. In Midova, speak with the man in the inn, Paolo at the imports store, and Antoni the banker. Return to speak with Paolo after seven days. Then speak with Antoni. You must find Enkodi (along the road between Ligano and Sortiga), who gives you gems to pay his debt.



Give Antoni the gems and get the tea from Paolo. Give Finch the tea. Find the canyon in the mountains northwest of Pariso (just north of the road to Ligano). Pass through the canyon and head north along the river to reach Waterfolk. Follow the road and enter Ticoro to end the chapter.



### Chapter Four

**K**'s Jyn will leave you for now. Pay the merchant for information at the crossroads between Ticoro and Vmussu. Head north of Vmussu and through a mountain pass to reach Istan. In Istan, speak with the gossipy old lady to learn about a theater performance. East of town, open the bead chest (north of the road) to get theater tickets.

North of Istan is the theater. Give the tickets to the box office agent and enter the theater. Speak with Maria to learn about Simon. Go to the Temple of Henne in Durst. Speak with the girl in the right pew to hear about the Covered Hand (Fellich Mann).

Speak with Fellich outside Ticoro to learn that Simon is in Revenne. Visit Simon's house there and find a note. Go to Levosche and find Simon standing in the middle of town. Speak to him to learn that the Shepherd's



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## Chapter Three

This chapter takes place within Ticoro. The only place you can rest is Henne's Shadow Inn in the southeast quadrant of town. Talk to the innkeeper, then to Scott (in the inn), and then to the innkeeper to get a room here.

In the southeast corner of town a man complains that his warehouses nearby have been broken into; you can inspect their locks. Talk to Lord Caverton (near the door by the outer southwest corner of the plaza) and show him Gregor's medallion. Speak with Lord Sheffield on the south side of the plaza. Visit Henne's Taberna in the north of the plaza and speak with the priest. Go to Knight's Promise Inn in the northeast and speak with Selma; show her the medallion.

Speak with the guard in the gatehouse on the north side of town. After you leave, Kaelyn will mention that she noticed a hole in the ceiling. Find the rampart gate a little to the west and try to open it.

On the east side of town is an unlabeled shop called Keys and Bolts. Talk to the owner. Talk to the man standing in the

southeast corner of town. Return to the locksmith to get the rampart key. Use the key on the keyhole by the rampart gate and go upstairs, heading east toward the gatehouse. You will be told when you are near the gatehouse. Facing east, look on the brick floor for a tiny, gray hole on the night. Click on the hole to overhear a conversa-



**DAD COMPASS** The party arrow shows where to look for Kaelyn's father in Chapter Five.

tion. Go to the Green and the White Inn and talk to the seated man. Return to Henne's Shadow Inn and click on the innkeeper to end Chapter Three.

## Chapter Five

Kaelyn and Rael are traveling together and must find Kaelyn's father. Head toward Darvi and enter the woods to its north. Find the shack and click on it to get a letter.

## Feeling Betrayed?

### Try These Tips

#### Treasure Chests

Lockpicks can disarm trapped chests, but always save first, as traps are triggered regularly—even by an expert lockpicker. To solve the fewer chest riddles, make notes of all proper names, including those revealed when you examine objects.

#### Healing

Buy and collect enough food so your party can rest often. Resting in inns restores characters to full health (and is free in Briale). If someone is incapacitated, you must rest a long time. There is no miracle cure (short of reloading the game from an earlier save), although a circlet of Senectaria will cut a party member's healing time in half.



**WE'LL KEEP THE LIGHT ON FOR YOU** The Spitting Lion Inn in Briale lets your party rest for free.

Headquarters is in a cave northeast of Ticoro and that you need a trisman to open this cave. He has buried his trisman in his garden in Ravanne. Click on Simon's garden in Ravanne (no shovel required) to get the medallion, then examine it.

Head north of Ticoro to the cave and click on the stone door. Use the medallion on the close-up view and examine the staff. These symbols are the steps for the

Right-Left-Right combination. Open the door to end the chapter.



**NEED DIRECTIONS?** In Chapter Four, this merchant tells you where to go first.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #373





**SWAMP THING** Enter the guarded shack in the swamp north of Twiffth to end Chapter Six.

While you're in the woods see the wraiths (avoid them; you can't fight them yet) and encounter the Fat Father.

Find the cave in the mountains north of the woods. Head north through the woods until you find a lake. Then cut east looking for a small cave in a clump of trees wedged between the lake and the mountains. Enter this and find Kaelyn's father. Speak with him and give him your weapons to get them enchanted. Kill the five groups with wraiths in the woods nearby. Then speak with Kaelyn's father to end the chapter.

## Chapter Six

Aera and William are in the cave and their first goal is to find the Shepherd Leader. Explore the passages to the east and find the lever chest asking about a Carml wainter (answer: malkere). Take the lantern from the chest and head east to the mosaic on a locked door. Click on the door and then use the lantern on the sconce to the left to illuminate the mosaic. Press the highlighted buttons to open the door.

Find the Shepherd Leader in the northeast; after this encounter and the following episodes, you can leave the cave to the east. Now you must track down some mercenaries. Head east. In Corneth, talk to the inn proprietor. If you drink some Halden's Brew before meeting him, he will refer you to Lokath in Choth to learn more about joining the mercenaries. You can find some Halden's Brew in an empty house in Bakrl.

In Choth, talk to Lokath in front of the inn, and he'll send you to deliver 14 letters



**TIRED OF SLUGGISTS?** Then make some explosive flasks in Isen.

and a note to Birge in Isen. Give these items to Birge and click on the hole in the ground nearby. Visit Cliec in the Montari cave east of Sorrigi. Return to Birge and speak with him to get a letter.

Return to Lokath and show him Birge's letter. Get the letter and take it to Kahlath in the camp just south of town. You must now take some swamp-walking potions to some men southeast of Darvi.

Go to Twiffth and head north along the river to meet some men near a shack in the swamp. Give them the potions and then enter the shack to end Chapter Six.

## Chapter Seven

Kaelyn and Rael must find William and Aera. Near Crander, meet a LiKa who hands you a note saying that your pals are in Darvi. Unfortunately, they're not there. Someone in Dard and some-

## Chapter Eight

**Y**ou start this chapter in Ireland. Buy fiddil leaves from a shop here. Go to Havesty, speak with everyone, and explore the lighthouse. In a tavern in Rathby, talk to Peat; in this town's shoppard, speak with Captain Tye.

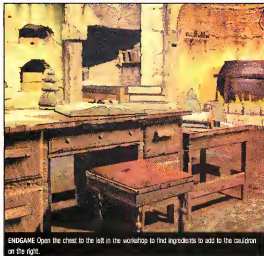
In Delucke, buy some fatty meat from the inn. Speak with Misha in the brothel. There talk with the man in the local shop. Give him fiddil leaves, seawater, and the fatty meat. Give the seacream to Misha to get Gregor's key.

In Kalgbridge, speak with the innkeeper and then visit the local artist and his subject nearby. Also, stock up, here and in Rathby, on whetstones, rope, shovels, and other important items; you will need them in Chapter Nine.

Go to Havesty and speak with Lord Sheffield. Give Gregor's key to the local innkeeper. Head Gregor's journal. Leave the inn and head toward Sheffield's castle to end the chapter.



**UP AGAINST A WALL** You'll find Finch standing by a canyon north of Midwa.



**ENDGAME** Open the chest to the left in the workshop to find ingredients to add to the cauldron on the right.

one else in Carrick will provide clues to William and Aven's movements. You must now cross the river to the west. You can pay 100 buldas to cross the northern bridge or you can join two hearts (one in Eastbank, one in Carrick) to cross for free.

In Exenton, a girl will tell you that William is going to Antara and is waiting with two others at the mountain pass. Head toward the mountain pass east of Isten and speak with William and Aven, avoiding the mercenaries nearby.

Buy some rope and oil in Isten and combine them to make three explosive flasks. Use these flasks on the three mercenary groups (in the 3D-world view). Follow your friends to Antara, where Rual will leave the party. Enter the capital to end the chapter.

## Chapter Nine

In the castle, find a cellar key and a note in a chest upstairs. Downstairs, use the key on the keyhole by the east gate to access the cellar. Speak with Lord Sheffield and Selana in the cellar, learning that you must find Sheffield's mage, Bryce.

Leave the castle. If you are unlocked on rope, shovels, etc., hop a coach to

Knightbridge, stocking up there and as Nathby. Take the Knightbridge coach to Damski and walk back to Havesly.

Enter the cave to the west behind Sheffield's castle. Use rope to cross the pits (keep your control panel unlocked). You will find more rope along the way. After traversing several cave-like areas, you will reach Bryce and his workshop.

Enter the workshop, talk with the injured Bryce, and read the journal. From the chest on the left, place the following into the cauldron on the right: hardening fluid, talcose powder, silkas leather, nooberies, and sewerite, then you can relax as the ending cinematic begins. ☺

## Combat 101

**A**lways sneak up on enemies and adjust your combat tactics as needed. Early on, gang up on one opponent at a time (their loot is important). Later, use Aven's spells. Unseeing Eye is useful in early chapters, Lightning Bolt and other damage spells become important in Chapters Three and Four, and Armorlight (prevents damage) is essential in Chapter Six and afterward. Finally, always keep your stuff in good repair and use potions in combat to improve your skills and to restore health and stamina as needed. (For more specific combat advice, see last month's *Gamer's Edge*.)



**NEED A SPARK IN COMBAT?** Lightning Bolt is one of your most useful spells for damaging enemies.

## Using Objects

**O**bject usage varies by situation. Double-click to use potions and books. Click whetstones and other items over objects they are meant to affect. Equip items by clicking them over your character's figure in the inventory. To use objects in the 3D-world view, click on them, then on the gauntlet under the inventory, and then on the target. Use objects with nonplayer characters by moving the object from your inventory to theirs.

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## STRATEGY &amp; TIPS

# Pacific General

## How To Achieve a Miracle at Midway

by Marc Dultz

**W**hen the curtain rose on 1942, the Japanese Empire had—in a stunning series of air, land, and naval attacks—conquered much of the territories dotting the central and southwestern Pacific Ocean. The Imperial Japanese Navy and Army—in a series of boldly executed amphibious assaults—had successfully invaded the Philippines, Malaya, Guam, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, Hong Kong, Cebu, and Wake Island, and were greedily eyeing lands beyond. By midyear, Japanese forces were poised to assault both India and Australia, two important member nations of the British Commonwealth, and the specter of a Japanese invasion of the continental United States became a frightening possibility.

To remove any potential counterstrike by the Axis Allies, the Japanese had launched a presumptive carrier-borne aerial bombardment against both the Philippines and the Hawaiian Islands, which laid to waste much of the American surface fleet moored in Pearl Harbor, as well as several hundred land-based combat aircraft neatly parked at nearby airfields. The Allies, hard-pressed to respond until sufficient forces could again be brought to bear, had little choice but to remain on the defensive throughout the early stages of the war. To stave off further Japanese expansion plans, American forces

braced themselves for the next onslaught, coupling whatever military assets were at hand with invaluable information obtained from Japanese radio messages intercepted and broken by the Magic decoding device.

Their determination and resolve proved decisive. Within a year's time, the fortunes of war would radically shift; this time irreversibly swinging in favor of the Allies. Two battles—one waged in the skies near the tiny island of Midway, the other, in the tropical swamps and jungles of Guadalcanal—would forever alter the balance of power in the Pacific. The outcome of these climactic engagements would set the tone and momentum of military operations for the rest of the conflict.

This month's article deals with ways to achieve a decisive victory in the Midway scenario of *PACIFIC GENERAL*. Next month, we'll get down and dirty on the island of Guadalcanal, one of the most bitterly contested campaigns of WWII.

### Midway

As the U.S. player, you are hard-pressed to repeat what your historical counterpart achieved. First, the preliminary victory point score is lopsided, weighing heavily in favor of the Japanese player (U.S. 0, Japanese: 356). Second, you have just 10 turns to locate, intercept, and, most importantly, sink at least four of the five Japanese aircraft carriers, which are protected by a screen of powerful warships and several squadrons of capable enemy fighters. Third, be mindful of the fact that the Japanese player is charged with occupying Midway; therefore, you must prevent his naval forces from moving adjacent to the island, while simultaneously minimizing your own losses.



**PRELUDE TO BATTLE** Japanese and American air forces (shown above) converge to deliver the fatal hammer blows. As the aerial storm gathers in intensity, so too does the action below. The strategic map to the right shows initial dispositions for each side's naval forces.





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**SAFETY IN NUMBERS** Solo aircraft carriers may be able to defend themselves better than their historical counterparts, but they're still vulnerable to critical hits. Group your carriers together in a single task force and surround them with plenty of smaller craft for AA defense.

Fortunately, there are several mitigating factors working in your favor: The island of Midway is, for all intents and purposes, an unsinkable aircraft carrier, able to service and repair both naval- and land-based combat aircraft. Therefore, if you can draw the enemy's forces within range of the island's air base, you should be able to increase your own air units' effectiveness—landing, replenishing, and launching air units to continue the battle in as few as two turns. The Japanese player, on the other hand, must either sail his aircraft carriers closer to Midway—further into harm's way—or fly his planes back to his awaiting aircraft carriers, in all probability located a turn or two outside each aircraft's movement range.

You also control more fighter aircraft than the Japanese player (13-9), many of which are excellent machines able to thwart the nimble Zero. If you can deliver the first blow—eliminating, severely weakening, or surrounding several Japanese fighters—your forces are all the more likely to destroy the remaining Japanese fighter units coming to the aid of their brethren. Finally, your two PBV Catalina aircraft possess a spotting range of six hexes, thereby making them ideal reconnaissance aircraft. Your opponent, no doubt, realizes their value as well, and will seek to eliminate them in earnest before they have the opportunity to locate his units and consequently upset his battle plans. As you'll soon see, this, too, can work to your advantage.

## Go West, Young Man

The U.S. player must remain aggressive, using his air and naval forces in the most efficient manner possible to effect a quick and decisive victory over the combined Japanese air and naval onslaught. To succeed, you must first defeat, in detail, the massive Japanese air force heading toward Midway, and thereby eliminate the threats posed to your tactical aircraft and surface fleet. Thereafter, you must turn your attention to the Japanese fleet before it can reach Midway or attempt

to retire to the northwest quadrant of the map. Therefore, the enemy's air and naval forces must be lured into battle, surrounded, attacked, and pursued before they can disengage and withdraw (you must do this well before the time limit expires).

Begin by immediately redeploying your contingent of land-based aircraft to the northwest, linking up with your carrier-based aircraft, and thereby forming the southern segment of your soon-to-be-constructed wall of aircraft. Next, move all of your carrier-based fighters several hexes to the west, lining them up along a vertical axis in the "27" hex row. Release the three F4F Wildcat squadrons flying CAP over your carriers, sending them to reinforce your aerial armada. Place your dive bombers and torpedo planes behind your wall of fighters, out of reach of the enemy's fighters but close enough to the enemy's surface fleet to deal them a mortal blow on the following turns.

Place one PBV Catalina at hex coordinate "20,21," well ahead of your own air fleet but not too far forward as to bring about its early demise. This PBV will be used as

bait to lure several Japanese Zeros away from the rest of their air force.

Move the second Catalina southeast, near your redeployed land-based aircraft. The second Catalina will be used to help locate the Japanese carriers after they inevitably turn tail and head for home. When the Zeros discover the first Catalina, they will have, at most, two opportunities to attack it, but they don't possess the movement range to surround it. Chances are, the Catalina will survive the encounter, providing important information regarding the disposition of the nearby Japanese aircraft. Afterward, it can then be withdrawn to the east until such time that it, too, can be used to help locate the Japanese fleet. Don't worry about the Japanese scout plane lurking just to the east of your naval squadrons. For now, it serves as bait, allowing the Japanese player to fix your fleet's position and drawing additional enemy aircraft into the trap.

## Consolidation Can Save the Nation

Consolidate the Yorktown Battle Group (Task Force 16) with the Enterprise and Hornet Battle Groups (Task Force 17). Place the carriers together in a tight formation, screening their position with cruisers and destroyers placed several hexes to the west. On subsequent turns, move all of your naval forces on a westerly course behind your air units, ready to recover and replenish returning exhausted units. Move your submarine due west, screening the island in the unlikely event that the Japanese head south then east toward Midway. Bear in mind that submarines can now move atop or below the



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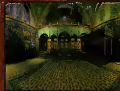
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #063

surface, trading speed for stealth and striking power.

As the battle unfolds, concentrate on destroying the Japanese fighter aircraft, then their cruisers and destroyers, and, finally, their tactical bombers and carriers. Since capital ships, including carriers, can be struck by critical hits, it may be wiser to simultaneously attack several carriers instead of finishing them off, one by one. Critical hits can, among other things, drastically reduce the carrier's movement allowance, permitting other aircraft to catch up with the fleeing vessel. Whenever possible, fly one of your aircraft (even those that have faced) into the same hex as the enemy carriers. This prevents the carrier from recovering their own aircraft unless they move to a new location. Finally, even aircraft carriers can inflict damage upon other ships, including carriers. If all else fails, move one of your carriers adjacent to his and blaze away. Although this is unrealistic, you should be pleasantly surprised by the results.

Don't bother purchasing new air units, since they arrive on Midway, far removed from the action occurring to the west. In similar fashion, it doesn't pay to replace returning battered fighters unless they're still sorely needed at the front. After all, units automatically receive replacements between scenarios. Instead, husband those valuable prestige points, since they'll come in handy further into the campaign.

When you mass for the attack on the Japanese carriers, use your Tactical bombers first to soften up the target, then use the torpedo planes to finish them off. Fortunately, it's far too early in the war for the Japanese kamikaze suicide aircraft to respond in kind. ☞

## None But the Brave

American and Japanese air forces mix it up in the skies near Midway. Navy F4F Wildcats initially flying CAP are ordered to join up with other aircraft already heading westward from the carrier groups. Instead of crossing the shipping lane beyond, they loiter along a north-south axis until land-based aircraft, dispatched from Midway, can form the southern shoulder of the immense air armada.

The trap (shown below), baited with a single PBV, lures several nearby ABM Zeros further eastward. This ambush strips the Japanese bomber squadrons of fighter protection. Meanwhile, the PBV has a fair to moderate chance of surviving the air attack and can then be withdrawn until it's safe to return.

Instead of retiring to safety, Japanese

bombers and torpedo planes will attempt to home in on their reconnaissance aircraft. They will then attempt to penetrate the American aerial screen, only to meet their swift demise. The reconnaissance aircraft can be dealt with later on, once the U.S. fighters are free to roam at will.

On the second American turn (shown at bottom), the feeding frenzy begins. Both Marine and Navy Wildcats take up positions ahead of the hapless Zeros, while the less lethal but sturdier P-40 Warhawks get in their licks on the flanks. The Warhawks possess a slightly higher air defense value than the Wildcats, and are therefore less susceptible to enemy air-to-air fire during the inevitable Japanese counterattack.

On turn three, aircraft are brought up along both flanks, surrounding the remaining Japanese air squadrons. Once their fighter escorts go down, the Japanese bombers have no place to go. Don't be afraid to use your own bombers. PBV casualties and the bombers to surround the enemy's tac bombers, thereby preventing them from leaving the scene until your fighters are free to resume their mauling.



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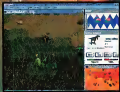
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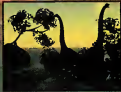
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## WALKTHROUGH

# Extreme Assault

*Part Two of Our Walkthrough Rockets You Past the Final Levels*

by Gordon Goble

Last month, in the November issue of CGW, we provided hints and walkthroughs for the more difficult or interesting missions of EXTREME ASSAULT's first two operations. This month, we return to the game with some mission walkthroughs for Operations 3, 4, 5, and 6.

## OPERATION 3 MISSION 2

Literally dozens of upgrades and power-ups wait in the opening loading bay, hidden in crates, barrels, trucks, and spiders. That said, don't expose too many of them too soon, because they all have a limited life span—if you don't pick them up or can't fit any more on board, they pull an annoying disappearing

act. Leave some behind so you can return in Mission 9 to reload.

Shoot out an air duct at the back of the bay to exit, then deal with the maze of passageways and all of their nasty little inhabitants. When you finally do get the "Mission Successful" message, you'll be outside. Ignore the message, turn 145 degrees to your right, then venture back inside and chomp away on those power-ups.

## OPERATION 3 MISSION 3

Check beneath the deck of your aircraft carrier for power-ups. Snatch them up, then watch the skies. If you happen to spot a large airbus approaching from over the water, shoot at it, and then head inland to the city for a heaping helping of hospitality.

## OPERATION 3 MISSION 4

Harmless native village or terrifying death trap? You just know it's going to be the latter, but don't let your lust for destruction screw up your day. You see, fearfully placed smack dab in the center of things are the three hostages you seek. If you use too much firepower, you could kill them instead of save them, so work the perimeters of the village and draw the enemy out. Then go in for the rescue.

## OPERATION 3 FINAL MISSION

Did I hear someone say "This sucks"? Well, yes it does, and if your ammunition is low, the final mission of Operation 3 will undoubtedly take repeated attempts and hours of your valuable time.

The only way I've found to defeat the Titanic tunnel digger is by throwing everything you've got right at its heart: the center and most fortified target. Of course, while you're beating away at it, it'll be firing back at you and moving ever forward.

Start by launching all your big guns from a safe distance, then wittle away with your laser cannon and fireflash. After your elevation to keep your own damage to a minimum, and recon from the supply of upgrades directly behind you. Remember, the faster



SHAKE IT, BABY Go straight for the center of this lissome earth mover in this, the final mission of Operation 3



you strike, the less chance you have of becoming an AH-23 pancake.

### OPERATION 4 MISSION 9

Use stealth in your T1 tank. Approach the first room cautiously and eradicate as many targets as possible from the cover of the entrance corridor. Tanks and powerful gun emplacements are crammed over on the left side of the room, but you can remove half of them without exposing yourself. Make a quick dash to the exit corridor and charge to the end, eliminating the tank shooting at you from the next room.

Now you can backtrack to the original room, get under cover, and do away with the remaining targets before scooping up some valuable power-ups. Head back to Room 2 and, from the cover of the corridor, shoot out the two generators with your razor gun. Mission successful!

### OPERATION 5 MISSION 2

Escorting the AH-23 will require at least one Smart Bomb or Thunderbolt. Take off immediately, ahead of the transport copter, and dive into the valley to the right. Hit the deck and hug the valley floor for protection as



**GUN IT DOWN** The gun emplacements at the end of this valley (Operation 5, Mission 2) must be removed before they see your transport. Work quickly.

you accelerate to the tunnel at the end, all the while launching missiles at the oncoming choppers. At the end of the valley, lift and turn sharply to the left to take out the last gun emplacement.

Turn quickly and fire your heavy-duty ordinance to eliminate as many fixed guns

as possible. Unlike the earlier emplacements, these last few guns will lock on and paste your transport chopper if given half a chance. Monitor your radar closely as the transport arrives, and eliminate any choppers or fixed guns that seem to be registering hits.



### OPERATION 6 MISSION 2

The AH-23 must blow its way into a huge fortress; guerrilla tactics are once again the key to success. Stay low and sprint into the blind spot inside the right arch. Turn and pick off the enemy heli-

copters from behind cover before moving back out front and blasting the launchers

above the ground-level force field. From here you must use the cover of the building itself to selectively shoot all the guns and launchers. Eventually, just the top generator remains. Once it's gone, the door is open.

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## OPERATION 6 FINAL MISSION

This is it—the granddaddy of them all, the Full Metal Donut, the Big Kahuna. Close-quarter fighting with this monstrosity will bring about your instant demise, so hug the canyon walls and keep out of radar range. Go for those end turrets first, then use powerful stand-off weapons to sanitize all the mothership's defenses before entering through the top access portal and dealing the death blow.

Congratulations. There's not much to do now but sit back and revel in the pyrotechnics.

▶ **BE VERY, VERY QUIET** Stealth rules: Pop in and out from the cover of the building itself to fight your way through Operation 6, Mission 2.

### OPERATION 5 MISSION 9

Back to the Sioux AH-23 again! Burst from the entry tunnel and head for either of the two lower-level garages. Using the partial cover provided, you can take out most of the enemy helicopters and tanks with the razor gun—and don't forget that propane tanks cause big explosions (judge, judge). Fly to the second garage for more shields, take out the remaining visible targets, and then get out in the open to clean off the rest of the small fries.

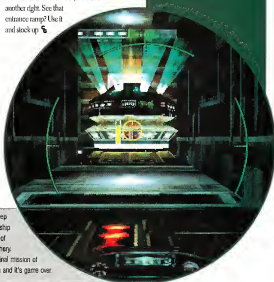
You'll now have an unobstructed line of fire to the boss UFO. There's a cache of weapon and shield power-ups located in a hidden crevice to one side of the entry tunnel. You'll need every last ounce of bug repellent you've got to finish this guy off.

steam ahead for one block, then take another right. See that entrance ramp? Use it and stock up. 

### OPERATION 6 MISSION 6

Welcome to the motherlode. Immediately turn right at the beginning of the mission (so you don't get creamed by the power station's defenses), then hang a quick left. Fly full

▶ **MOTHERLODE** Deep inside the mothership resides the hunk of malevolent machinery. Destroy it in the final mission of the final operation and it's game over.



## STRATEGY &amp; TIPS

# Su-27 Flanker 1.5

*Making Missiles Work in Realistic Simulations*

by Tom "KC" Basham

**T**his is the second installment in our "Rules of Engagement" series, which will explore both beginner and advanced air-combat theories. This month we look at the theories behind missile combat, and then apply those theories to SS&S's Su-27 FLANKER 1.5.

Contrary to popular opinion, missile combat isn't a long-range, push-button, one-shot, one-kill affair. This misperception has been reinforced by footage from the Gulf War and by computer games that have vastly oversimplified missile launch procedures. Very few sims on the market today actually contain realistic missile performance. So when you encounter a simulation such as Su-27 FLANKER or BACK TO BAYHEAD—two sims that feature very realistic missile models—you're likely to be surprised by how hard it is to score a hit.

## Home on the Range

Understanding missile range is vital to employing them—and avoiding the m—properly. Some flight sims give missiles ridiculously



**TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT** if you were to fire a missile at this range, you'd take damage when the warhead detonated.

long ranges; others shorten range well below the publicly released figures. Unfortunately, the topic of missile range isn't quite that cut-and-dried. A missile's combat range is highly variable, dependent upon several factors, including the airspeed and altitude of the launcher plus the airspeed, altitude, and heading of the target.

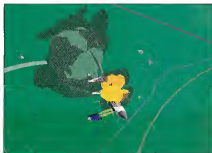
To evaluate missile performance, we have to establish some form of baseline. This baseline, called kinematic range, specifies how far the missile can fly before decelerating below Mach 1.0. Missiles, being



With the motor burning, the missile accelerates to top speed.



When the engine burns out, the missile decelerates to half the top-of-the-burn speed.



**ON TARGET** A close-in missile shot can be almost impossible to evade, as this F-15 learns.

is pretty much meaningless unless the launching altitude is specified.

Second, you must consider how far the target travels while the missile is in flight. Remember those math problems about different trains leaving different cities? Although less

necessarily limited in size and weight, carry a finite amount of fuel. Typically, the missile engine ignites, accelerates the missile to top speed, then runs out of fuel. The missile basically glides (albeit at very high speed) the rest of the way to the target. Since the missile conforms to the same physical turn-rate and turn-radius laws as aircraft, it needs enough airspeed to outmaneuver the target when it gets there. Moving at least Mach 1.0 should give the missile ample energy to complete the interception endgame.

Now, let's examine the factors influencing range. First, missile range increases with altitude, roughly doubling with every 20,000 feet or so. In other words, a missile fired at 20,000 feet will fly twice as far as the same missile fired at sea level. A missile fired at 40,000 feet will have roughly four times the range of one fired at sea level. For missiles fired at higher or lower targets, the range is basically tied to the median altitude between the launcher and the target. Therefore, citing an AMRAAM's range as 20, 30, or 40 nautical miles

militaristic, those math exercises describe the same basic problem involved in missile operations. For example, say a missile with a 20nm range is fired at a target 15 nautical miles away, however, the target is moving away at maximum speed. The missile will fly the intended 15nm only to find the target has moved some distance beyond. If the target has sufficient speed to cover 5nm during the time the missile covers 15nm, the target successfully escapes. The missile's effective range, therefore, is reduced.

Conversely, if the target is heading directly toward the missile, it will cover part of the range itself. While the missile flies, say, 20nm directly toward the target, the target flies maybe 5nm directly toward the missile. Under these circumstances, the missile's effective range is extended to 25nm.

Third, the airspeed of the launching platform directly affects the missile's effective range. The missile begins its flight at roughly the same speed as the launcher, accelerates to

## Close Counts in Warheads

Ideally, missiles would strike their targets dead center every time. In the real world, though, this doesn't usually happen. As one industry insider put it, "They're called MISS-iles instead of HIT-iles for a reason!" Generally, a missile makes a series of course corrections en route to its target, trying to keep the target in its forward field of view. The target, meanwhile, will usually be trying to evade the missile. The target may also employ electronic countermeasures (ECM) to confuse the missile. ECM doesn't usually cause missiles to veer off in the wrong direction; rather, it causes the missile to misjudge the target's position and to miss by a slightly greater distance.

Consequently, a missile is designed to explode when it detects that it has gotten as close to the target as it is going to get. Missile warheads are designed from a variety of materials designed to damage targets in the immediate vicinity. Some warheads basically propel a cloud of shrapnel into the air, others fire an expanding ring of iron rods. Although some warhead types are more effective against certain types of targets, they all use the same principle: Increase the lethal area around the missile until it intersects the target.

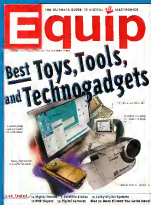


The Su-27 keeps the missile off its wing, pulling high g's as the missile heels.



The missile detonates near the aircraft, causing slight damage.

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- 3 Fire! The R-73 allows you to take out targets that are well out of your plane of sight.

maximum speed, then decelerates after the fuel runs out. The missile's average speed (and therefore how far it flies in a given amount of time) varies depending on its initial speed. The faster the initial speed, the quicker the missile reaches and maintains maximum speed, and the greater its average speed for the total time of flight. Increasing speed before launching a missile, therefore, extends the missile's useful range.

#### Energy

As mentioned earlier, missiles follow the same turn-rate and turn-radius rules as the

aircraft they attack. Subsequently, a missile with more speed has more maneuvering energy. The farther a missile has to fly, the less energy it will have available for maneuvering when it reaches the target, since it decelerates as it flies. And the missile's being able to maneuver during the endgame is crucial, because targets rarely fly straight and level.

At maximum range, the missile may easily run down a slow bomber that's lumbering in a gentle, 2g turn; however, it probably can't catch a nimble fighter pulling a 9g break turn. Just because the target is within the missile's range doesn't mean the missile can actually intercept the target when it gets there. The moral of the story: Always minimize range-to-target as much as is practical before launching the weapon.

Missile designers assume the missile needs to be able to pull three to four times the target's g-load; that is, if the target can pull 9g, the missile needs a 27g to 36g capability. A missile with extremely high-g abilities subsequently offers numerous benefits. First, the missile can engage high-g targets at a longer range. Secondly, and possibly more important, the missile can pull substantially more g's early in the encounter, letting it engage targets farther off the launcher's nose.

This "over-the-shoulder" capability of missiles like the R-73 in *SU-27 FLANKER* gives pilots the ability to engage targets that would normally be safely out of the way. Equipped with such modern weapons, fighters in situations that in the past would have been classified as "neutral" or even "defensive" can now maintain "offensive" postures. The old adage, "if he's pointed at you then he's offensive; if he's pointed away from you then he's defensive" doesn't hold true in the world of over-the-shoulder missiles.

Keep these concepts in mind as you go into a missile fight and you'll be far better equipped to know when you'll be able to score a hit. On the following pages are some specific tips on applying these concepts to SSI's *SU-27 FLANKER*.



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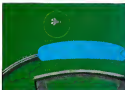


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## Missile Combat in SU-27 FLANKER

**R**ange to the target is a primary factor in determining a missile's chances of hitting. The farther the missile flies, the less energy it has. Even potent missiles like the AIM-120 AMRAAM and the R-77 (AA-12) Adder face range limitations. As a general rule, the closer the target, the greater the chance the missile will hit.



**LOSE SIGHT, LOSE THE FIGHT** Use the padlock view to keep an eye on the target.

### The Right Range

How close is close enough? Keep in mind that missiles have minimum ranges, so you can get too close. Missile warheads are designed with a fairly large "lethal radius." To ensure the launching aircraft isn't accidentally caught in that blast, missiles have to fly some distance before the warhead can be armed. This distance is known as the minimum

launch range. The target must be at least that far away from the launcher, or the launcher risks taking damage when the missile detonates.

Obviously, restricting missiles to their minimum launch ranges seriously underutilizes them. As a rule, therefore, minimize launch range as much as practical before firing, but don't miss your chance to get the first shot in



## The AIM-120: Deadly Accurate

**L**ike other military hardware developed in the past two decades, the AIM-120 AMRAAM medium-range-missile program had to resolve some problems while the media smothered it with criticism. When the dust settled, though, the AIM-120 emerged as a more-than-worthy successor to the oft-maligned AIM-7 Sparrow.

The AIM-120 entered service a little too late to participate in the 1991 Gulf War, but it has seen combat. Five AIM-

120s have been fired in anger, four of which hit their targets (including one American aircraft in a tragic friendly-fire engagement). The first, fired in December 1991 from an F-16D, intercepted an Iraqi MiG-25 operating in the Southern No-Fly Zone. The second, fired from an F-15C in January

1992, missed its target in the Iraqi Northern No-Fly Zone. Later that same month, an F-16C downed an Iraqi MiG-23 with an AMRAAM, also in the Northern No-Fly Zone. Later, in April 1994, an F-16C downed a Serbian Super Galeb over Bosnia with an AIM-120. Tragically, an F-15C shot down a US Army UH-60 with an AMRAAM in June 1994.

Including the friendly-fire engagement, the AMRAAM has scored four for five against a variety of targets, under a variety

of circumstances. By comparison, of six AIM-7s fired at Libyan and Iranian targets between 1991 and 1993, only one hit its target. So if AMRAAMs seem surprisingly accurate in flight simulations, it's not necessarily a sign that the sim isn't realistic.



**LAST RITES** An F-15 is about to receive a brand new R-73 up the tail pipe.

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**BULL'S-EYE** Let a missile get too close, and this could happen to you.

your effort to get closer. Use the target/weapon range scale along the left side of the HUD to judge when to fire.

Remember to use the SHLEM (helmet-mounted sight) mode in conjunction with the R-73 (AA-11) Archer missile. Using SHLEM to target high-aspect-angle targets coupled with the R-73's off-boresight attack capability lets you engage targets that could not be attacked with conventional missile systems.

### On the Defensive

On the defensive side of the equation, evading inbound missiles is one of the most difficult—and crucial—aspects of aerial combat. Remember that the missile is generally making course corrections throughout its flight, homing in on your position. The missile seeker has a certain field of vision. The seeker, mounted on gimbals, can move and steer its field of view around the sky. The key to defeating an inbound missile, therefore, is to maneuver beyond the seeker's gimbal limits and subsequently outside the missile's field of view.

Accomplishing this is no easy task. To begin with, you must be aware of an inbound missile (either from a cockpit warning indicator or a radio call from your wingman). Next, you must ascertain the bearing to the missile; if you don't know where the missile is coming from, you can't evade it. If you know that the missile has been fired from its maximum range, simply turn 180 degrees



**TIGHT SHOT** This is too close to use a missile, switch to guns.

and run away at maximum speed. Otherwise, turn your aircraft to position the missile at either your 3 or 9 o'clock position, directly off one of your wings. Continue a gentle turn in the same direction, pulling just enough g to keep the missile position off your wing.

As the missile gets closer, engage your electronic countermeasures (ECM) gear and begin dumping chaff and flares. Generally, I don't waste time trying to ascertain if the missile is a heat seeker or radar-guided; I just dump both chaff and flares like mad. By this time you should visually acquire the missile, which shouldn't be too hard if it's leaving a smoke trail. Hopefully the countermeasures will spoof the missile into detonating harmlessly behind you.

If the missile keeps homing in, you're in for the hard part. Keep the g-load fairly low, maintaining a gentle turn until the missile gets close. How close? Obviously, you want to be outside the warhead's lethal radius, but close enough that a sudden maneuver puts you outside the seeker's gimbal limits. When you see the missile bearing down, wait. When it starts to get close, wait some more. When you cannot stand it any longer, make a maximum-g turn toward the missile, creating the highest possible aspect angle between you and it. If you time the break turn right, you'll fly out of the seeker's field of view. If you're unlucky, the missile will track you for the rest of your simulated life ☹

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## ADVENTURE/RPG HINTS

# Scorpia's Mail

*Don't Fall on Your Dagger! Scorpia's Here To Chase Those Shivers Away!*

**W**ell, we're hitting the Christmas rush season, and I hope we'll be seeing some good games this year. We sure could use a few, especially RPGs. While we wait to see what Santa has in store, though, keep the questions coming on those older games—just make sure to enclose that self-addressed stamped envelope if you want a response.

## Diablo

There isn't much that's puzzling about the game, but some players have trouble with the big finale. Diablo is very susceptible to Holy Bolts. So, after opening the door to Diablo's room, just go partway toward it, and start chucking the Bolts in there; they affect only him. When you get a hit, duck back into the two-lever room and around a wall, and wait. He'll be with you shortly (grin).

This way, you get him out and don't have to fight all the friends he has with him

## Daggerfall

A lot of people write to me about problems with lycanthropy. It's not a great state to be in, and you're better off avoiding it entirely by restoring the game if a wrecritter takes a few chunks out of you. For those already afflicted, there's not much you can do about it. To stay healthy, you'll just have to go hunting now and then, and wait until the werewolf hunters show up with their proposition (sometime in the year following your infection). Even if you're not a mage type, look in your spellbook for a special spell that allows for the wrecritter transformation at your discretion (many players don't notice this one).

in the room. You just have to worry about killing him before he gets you.

## Shivers II

The bees in the closet of Burt's Trailer can be a problem. You won't be able to do much about them until after you've managed to get down into the mines, which first requires a fair amount of work in the gas station (and a few other places, too). Once in the mines, you'll find what you need to get rid of the bees.

## Discworld II

Having a little trouble convincing the sheep double to do some work? A picture (or three) is worth a thousand words. Getting those, however, is another matter. You'll have to cut down on your ironing and hang 30 first. This is a sticky situation (or ought to be).

## Shadows Over Riva

After you deal with the pirates in Riva, you may find that not much seems to be going on. This happened to me while replaying the

game; foreknowledge can be dangerous sometimes. In any case, visit the home of a pirate or two and the actors should start to pick up pretty quickly in a short while.

## Fable

While this game isn't especially difficult, it does have treely spots. One is just at the point where you drop down to visit the Engulfed Fortress. You have a conversation with some sealions, and at the end of it, one of them should give you an item. If you don't receive it, restore the game and try the conversation again (you'll most likely have to save before jumping in, as the sealions show up pretty quickly). Without the item, you won't be able to finish this section (or the game, for that matter).

## Reach Scorpia at

Email: [scorpia@scorpia.com](mailto:scorpia@scorpia.com)  
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[www.scorpia.com](http://www.scorpia.com)

U.S. Mail (enclose a SASE if you live in the U.S.)  
Scorpia, P.O. Box 328  
Greer Station  
New York, NY 10028

## Betrayal in Antara

You may find that Antara crashes when you try to go from Chapter Eight to Chapter Nine. It apparently has something to do with certain actions back in Chapter Five. The only way around this is to obtain the patch ([www.slurm.com](http://www.slurm.com)).



# VIRUS

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## Strategy/Wargames

### PACIFIC GENERAL

In a departure of sorts, a victory point system has been implemented in **PACIFIC GENERAL**, that tabulates the score and outcome of each scenario. The revised system calculates victory based upon the turn-by-turn ownership of certain key objectives while factoring in the number and type of casualties each side has inflicted and suffered. A decisive victory is achieved if your final victory point tally equals or exceeds a 3:2 ratio over your opponent's score. Likewise, marginal victories are attained if your victory point score melts to a paltry 5:4 ratio, while lower ratios are considered an outright defeat.

Even though you may be able to fulfill the requisite objectives set out at the scenario's inception, it is entirely possible to relinquish a decisive victory or

potentially concede defeat if your losses far outweigh the results you've achieved on the battlefield. As an all-important secondary objective, you must continually strive to eliminate as many enemy combat units as possible while minimizing your own losses, especially higher-value naval and air units and core formations.



## Sports

### FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO '98

#### OUR TOP SIX TIPS

##### 1. Don't throw anything but strikes.

Unlike real baseball players, the computer players won't swing at anything out of the strike zone, even when you're ahead in the count and it should be swinging defensively at borderline pitches.

##### 2. Don't bother trying to throw out basestealers.

Even when the ball beats the runner to the bag by four steps, the computer player will be safe.

Throwing the ball makes you vulnerable to possible throwing errors. Swallow hard, ignore the runner, and focus on getting the batter out.

##### 3. Don't try to field manually.

The interface is clumsy and awkward; the computer player will run around the bases while you struggle to get the ball out of your glove.

##### 4. Don't keep so-so fielders on the field late in a close game when you're letting the computer do your fielding.

**FPS: BASEBALL PRO '98** sports a fielding model that has Gold Glove-winning

centerfielder Steve Finley not charging a slow runner to center—thereby allowing a slow runner to score from first—so you're going to need your best gloves to make sure errors don't compound gaffes made by the bone-headed AI.

##### 5. Don't make trades with other league players based on a pending trade with a computer-controlled team.

While putting a player on the trading block may draw offers from other teams, the computer GMs may inexplicably

decide against following through and kill the trade (they'll even offer and kill the same trade every day for the duration of the season). So wait before pulling the trigger on other trades that depend on your getting a player from a computer team.

##### 6. Don't expect All-Stars to perform as they do in real life.

Stats in this game frequently bear little resemblance to a player's ability in the real world. If Tony Gwynn is barely hitting .200 (it will happen), don't feel guilty about benching, trading, or demoting him—chances are, he won't make a comeback. —Robert Coffey



## Action

### MEAT PUPPET

Do the annoying controls make **Meat Puppet** too tedious for you? Try typing in any of the following codes for a little relief.

- ~ingesth = Full health
- ~ingestw = Full ammo
- ~ingesta = Full energy
- ~ingestz = Full ammo and energy
- ~boom = Sets off small explosion
- ~dansmarthomb = Kills enemies on screen





## Simulations/Space

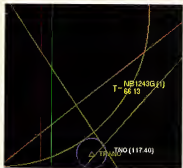
### FLIGHT SIM 95/PRO CONTROLLER

One of the worst omissions in **MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR FOR WINDOWS 95** (and **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98**, for that matter) was the lack of air traffic control (ATC). One of the most innovative add-ons yet for the venerable civilian simulator addresses just that problem, and adds a multiplayer element to boot.

The Squawbox system, by Jason Crooms, gives **FLIGHT SIMULATOR 95** full ATC by connecting to an Internet server. On the other side of the connection are a group of users running Crooms' **PRO CONTROLLER**, an air traffic control sim. On a good night there



Flight Sim 95 running Squawbox



Pro Controller

are enough controllers active that you can fly a controlled flight from L.A. to Chicago. You won't actually see other aircraft, but you can communicate with other players using Squawbox. For more information, see the **PRO CONTROLLER** home page at [www.netn.com/~jgrooms/atc](http://www.netn.com/~jgrooms/atc) and **AVSIM's Squawbox** page at [www.avsim.com/pages/squawk.htm](http://www.avsim.com/pages/squawk.htm)

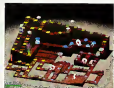
## Puzzles/Classics

### GUBBLE

1. The different fasteners Gubble has to remove take different amounts of time to unfasten. Pulling a nail with a hammer is almost instantaneous, but drilling a rivet takes a few seconds. You've got to take those extra seconds into account when planning your path and your timing.

2. You can avoid most of the monsters simply by flying above them or planting a tool in their path. What you really have to watch out for are the land mines, especially when Gubble is moving at high speed and precise timing is required in order to execute a turn.

3. Gubble can not only hover, but he can also move while flying. Hovering is enough to repel a monster, but you're making the



game harder than it has to be if you don't fly from place to place.

4. The worst thing you can do is accidentally drop a tool you still need in such a way as to trap a monster in a tight dead end. The monster will start pacing back and forth quickly, and if the distance is short enough, it can be impossible to pick the tool up again without getting knocked off when the monster completes its circuit.

5. Turn off the sound. The frenetic music and garbled alien speech encourage you to approach **GUBBLE** as an every-second-counts action game when it's actually a puzzle game. Ignore the timer, put on some relaxing jazz, and thank your way through each level. Would you do a crossword puzzle holding a stopwatch and listening to *The Flight of the Bumblebee*?

### WIPEOUT XL

PlayStation's new 3D racing game certainly isn't trying to be a serious racing sim, so far even more mayhem, by the following codes:



**At the title screen, type**

**RUSH** = Styly shape

**At the main menu, type**

**XTEAM** = Enable Piranha team

**XCLASS** = Enable Phantom class

**XTRACK** = All tracks

**Pause the game during a race and then type**

**PSYMEGA** = Infinite weapons

**PSYPROTECT** = Infinite energy

**PSYTYCKER** = Infinite time

**PSYRAPID** = Machine gun

**FRAMERATE** = Display frame rate

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**COMPUTER GAMES: STRATEGY**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
82	5/100	3000	Electronic Arts	91	5/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	92	4/100
83	96/100	HoMM 3	3D Realms	92	5/100	Age of Empires II	Microsoft	93	4/100
84	98/100	HoMM 2	3D Realms	93	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	94	4/100
85	97/100	HoMM 1	3D Realms	94	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	95	4/100
86	96/100	HoMM 4	3D Realms	95	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	96	4/100
87	97/100	HoMM 5	3D Realms	96	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	97	4/100
88	96/100	HoMM 6	3D Realms	97	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	98	4/100
89	96/100	HoMM 7	3D Realms	98	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	99	4/100
90	96/100	HoMM 8	3D Realms	99	4/100	Age of Empires	Microsoft	00	4/100

**TOTAL ANNIHILATION** Fully annihilated 300 units and towers. Over 150 units and 25 missions per side in single player campaign, plus full multiplayer support. Complex water units such as ultra carriers, floating factories and amphibious tanks that drive into and under water.

**BT (Warfare) (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$47

**'LORDS OF MAGE'** In a fantasy world where magic is common, trouble lurks. Dark Lord Rankin's evil war machine is awakening. Only you will stop his reign of terror, using 150+ items special on-line 3D items. Play with 8 friends over a network or modem.

**Serra (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$47

**'SANGRAFF'** Must gather your resources to accomplish your goals in this frenetic action game. You have 30 different missions in space, on planets, with your assistants. Scenario and map editor allows you to create your own campaigns.

**Blitzard (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$47

**'WTF' is a tactical level game of strategy warfare with unprecedented realism and detail. Sessions change during the course of the game affecting tactical decisions. Real 3D terrain, dynamic lighting and fog without compromise.**

**Bangaii (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$46

**COMPUTER GAMES: WAR**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
87	96/100	Call of Duty	Activision	88	96/100	Call of Duty II	Activision	89	96/100
89	96/100	Call of Duty III	Activision	90	96/100	Call of Duty: Bloodlines	Activision	91	96/100
92	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare	Activision	93	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Activision	94	96/100
95	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	Activision	96	96/100	Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	97	96/100

**'MAN OF WAR'** Truly, it is made an Admiral's life at sea, over 1750+ ships using actual tactics and strategies. Contains 12 historically accurate scenarios, large scale fleet action, and revolutionary 3D0 first person perspective.

**Virgin (War)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$41

**'PANZER GENERAL'** If you're fond of intense machine warfare and command knowledge. Also, all the attractions, play some from the Allied side. New campaign screen reflects battle damage. Multiplayer support.

**SSI (War)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$42

**'SAMURAI SWORDS'** Fight war in the tradition of the warrior samurai warrior! Collect income as a reward for a powerful conquest. Form a nuclear bond of loyalty with an enemy soldier to further your cause.

**William Bradley (Board Game)**  
 Release Date: NOW BG \$35

**'EUROPEAN AIR WAR'** Pick 20 strategically placed fighter planes from the American, British and German forces. Play in single missions, then in multipoint missions including verbal commands, night time, radio communication and ground support and visual effects.

**Micrograce (Simulation)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$45

**BOARD GAMES**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
82	96/100	Clash Royale	Hasbro	83	96/100	Clash Royale II	Hasbro	84	96/100
85	96/100	Clash Royale III	Hasbro	86	96/100	Clash Royale IV	Hasbro	87	96/100
88	96/100	Clash Royale V	Hasbro	89	96/100	Clash Royale VI	Hasbro	90	96/100
91	96/100	Clash Royale VII	Hasbro	92	96/100	Clash Royale VIII	Hasbro	93	96/100

**'YAX IMPERA 2'** Control every aspect of a civilization's economy. Research economic evolution and diplomacy. Build a fleet of mighty warships or quality establish economic dominance, the ultimate is yours to choose!

**TD (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: 01/98 PC CD \$45

**'POPELOUS THE THOSE COMING'** Large strategies can be planned and executed from fully playable grid of your forces. Certain warships/monsters, actions, aerial moves! Impact different challenges as your victory as you see from a bird's eye.

**Electronic Arts (Strategy)**  
 Release Date: NOW PC CD \$45

**'STEEL PANTHERS II'** Command mid-air war forces with military units and enhance your core command. Includes mission and auto-rotation for 20 World War II air and 40 post-World War II countries. Comes with 4 full campaigns and over 40 individual scenarios.

**Midnight (War)**  
 Release Date: 11/97 PC CD \$43

**HINT BOOKS**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
85	96/100	Call of Duty	Activision	86	96/100	Call of Duty II	Activision	87	96/100
88	96/100	Call of Duty III	Activision	89	96/100	Call of Duty: Bloodlines	Activision	90	96/100
91	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare	Activision	92	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Activision	93	96/100
94	96/100	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	Activision	95	96/100	Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	96	96/100

**COMPUTER GAMES: ARCADE**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
82	96/100	Clash Royale	Hasbro	83	96/100	Clash Royale II	Hasbro	84	96/100
85	96/100	Clash Royale III	Hasbro	86	96/100	Clash Royale IV	Hasbro	87	96/100
88	96/100	Clash Royale V	Hasbro	89	96/100	Clash Royale VI	Hasbro	90	96/100
91	96/100	Clash Royale VII	Hasbro	92	96/100	Clash Royale VIII	Hasbro	93	96/100

**COMPUTER GAMES: TRADITIONAL**

Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price	Title	Manufacturer	Year	Rated Price
82	96/100	Clash Royale	Hasbro	83	96/100	Clash Royale II	Hasbro	84	96/100
85	96/100	Clash Royale III	Hasbro	86	96/100	Clash Royale IV	Hasbro	87	96/100
88	96/100	Clash Royale V	Hasbro	89	96/100	Clash Royale VI	Hasbro	90	96/100
91	96/100	Clash Royale VII	Hasbro	92	96/100	Clash Royale VIII	Hasbro	93	96/100



**COMPUTER GAMES: ADVENTURE**

Y&Y: Eyes Under the Sky	11/92	120	Fighting Fantasy	11/92	54	Str. Family Med. Adv.	10/92	50	Shrek's Tower	10/92	54	Shrek's Tower	10/92	54
Y&Y: The 9th Wave	11/92	87	FTD: The 9th Wave	11/92	87	Str. Family Med. Adv.	10/92	50	Str. Family Med. Adv.	10/92	50	Str. Family Med. Adv.	10/92	50
Y&Y: Dead of Winter	10/92	273	Y&Y: Dead of Winter	10/92	273	Recap: Dead of Winter	10/92	54	Recap: Dead of Winter	10/92	54	Recap: Dead of Winter	10/92	54
Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87
Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87
Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87	Y&Y: The 9th Wave	10/92	87
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**THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND** includes all of the elements that made the series great and with a more highly polished, frustration-free, though an intuitive interface allows you to learn as you play. Also available in virtual directions throughout the game. (Licensor's Adventure)  
Release Date: 11/97 PC CD \$39

**OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS** Over every thousand years, pits good against the wicked world and the realm of the dead, offering opportunities to those who dare to save humanity from extinction. This is the time to step into a realm that could cause in a thousand years of darkness.  
Release Date: 11/97 PC CD \$46

**MINI 2** will provide an expansion experience through a new world filled with 7,000 images, over an hour of animation and original music requiring special skills of observation.  
Release Date: NOW PC CD \$52

**BADLY'S DAY** is set in the legendary forgotten fantasy campaign world. Uses a unique interface as gameplay that uses a real-time modification of the AD&D system. There are over 60 monsters to fight, you control a party of six each with unique abilities and powers.  
Release Date: 11/97 PC CD \$46

**DEFENSE** You are a lost pilot but an awesome new weapon when suddenly it is no longer a test. First, you must protect yourself from the levels of weapons, missiles and auxiliary weapons. Then, you must protect the system.  
Release Date: NOW PC CD \$40

**SHADOWMIND** In the world of 2053, magic has returned and aries, devils, aliens, and trolls have inhabited their long lands, with magicians and sorcerers in charge. When they visit something, they are going to see. You might be a healer, a thief, a warrior, or a mage. You'll see what you see, you'll read all the powers you possess to make a difference.  
Release Date: NOW PC CD \$20

**MAGIC THE GATHERING OASIS EXTENSION** This deck game is a full deck. Each player has their own deck. This deck may be enhanced with more cards in booster packs.  
Release Date: NOW PC CD \$7

**BREATH OF FIRE II** Immense environments allow players to travel through rivers, forests, and mountains and discover the secret of the Dragon Spheres or become an apprentice to learn magic and special abilities.  
Release Date: USA PSX \$32

**MAGIC KNIGHT REBIRTH** Three Japanese wizards must save a Princess to restore peace to the land. Involving wizards with over 60 minutes of audio. Who you talk to characters in the game, they reply!  
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# 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 feedback.

## TOP ACTION GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Duke: Pack 2: Dissolution of Eternity	id Software/Flagship	9.06
2	Duke: Pack 1: Scourge of Armageddon	id Software/Flagship	9.03
3	Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms	8.50
4	Tomb Raider	Electronic Arts	8.30
5	Crashout: No Remorse	EA/Digital	8.12
6	Duke	id Software	8.01
7	The Need for Speed SE	EA	7.99
8	Crashout: No Regret	EA	7.81
9	MDK	Playmates/Starline	7.82
10	Interstate '76	Activision	7.54

## TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Biblical Knight 2	Serra	8.25
2	Pandora: Dissolve	Accus	8.21
3	Rama	Serra	7.95
4	The Newblood	Dreamworks	7.69
5	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	7.65
6	Spycraft	Activision	7.54
7	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.47
8	Circle of Blood	Virgin	7.45
9	Leisure Suit Larry 7	Serra	7.37
10	Zark Nemesis	Activision	7.22

## TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack II	Barkeley Systems	8.41
2	You Don't Know Jack	Barkeley Systems	8.19
3	You Don't Know Jack Movies	Barkeley Systems	7.99
4	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Barkeley Systems	7.90
5	Power Chess	Serra	7.33
6	Incredible Toys	Serra	7.29
7	Sierra Poker	Serra	6.95
8	Mind Grind	Microland	6.89
9	Mazepoly	Virgin/Westwood	6.85
10	Boku Boku	Sega	5.98

## TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Digital	8.36
2	Ali-84 Longbow	EA/Digital	8.12
3	MechWarrior 2	Activision	8.11
4	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	8.11
5	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.87
6	Steel Hunter	SSI	7.85
7	EP2000	Orbus	7.63
8	Star Wars: Rebel Assault II	EA/LucasArts	7.53
9	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	7.52
10	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	7.47

## TOP SPORTS GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links LS	Accus	8.66
2	NASCAR 2	Serra	8.25
3	NHL 97	EA Sports	8.14
4	NBA Live 97	EA Sports	8.06
5	Grand Prix 2	EA Sports	8.02
6	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accus	7.60
7	TriplePlay 95	EA Sports	7.57
8	NASCAR Racing	Serra	7.56
9	TriplePlay 97	EA Sports	7.50
10	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	7.49

## TOP STRATEGY GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Nerosus II Price of Loyalty	New World Computing	9.17
2	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Bizzard	8.85
3	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	8.78
4	WarCraft II	Bizzard	8.76
5	Rise & Fall	New World Computing	8.7
6	Civilization II	Microware	8.72
7	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	8.54
8	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.27
9	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8.26
10	Civilization 2: Scenarios	Microware	8.19

## TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Ultima	Orbus	8.75
2	Daggerfall	Bethesda	7.44
3	Avail of Dams	New World Computing	7.15
4	Albion	Blue Byte	6.13
5	—	—	—
6	—	—	—
7	—	—	—
8	—	—	—
9	—	—	—
10	—	—	—

## TOP WARGAMES

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	8.75
2	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	8.57
3	Steel Panthers II	SSI	8
4	Steel Panthers	SSI	8.40
5	Battleground: Ball Race	Blizzard	8.11
6	Battleground: Shish	Blizzard	8.14
7	Battleground: Antitum	Blizzard	7.97
8	Tigercat on the Prowl II	HPS	7.91
9	Battleground: Waterloo	Blizzard	7.75
10	Battleground: Napoleon in Russia	Blizzard	7.73



RANK	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution of Eternity	id Software/Rogue	AC	9.09
2	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armoign	id Software/Ritual	AC	9.03
★ 3	Heroes II: Price of Loyalty	New World Computing	ST	9.01
4	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Bizzard	ST	8.86
5	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.78
6	WarCraft II	Bizzard	ST	8.78
★ 7	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.76
★ 8	Dialo	Bizzard	RP	8.75
9	Heroes II	New World Computing	ST	8.74
10	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.72
11	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.67
★ 12	Links LS	Access	SP	8.66
13	Steel Panthers II	SSI	WG	8.44
★ 14	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.43
15	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	8.40
16	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.39
★ 17	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.36
18	Duke Nukem 3D	3D Realms	AC	8.32
19	Tomb Raider	Eidos	AC	8.30
20	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.27
21	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.26
22	MASCAR 2	Serra	SP	8.25
★ 23	Sabotage Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.25
24	Pandora Directive	Access	AD	8.21
25	Civilization 2: Scenarios	MicroProse	ST	8.19
26	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.18
★ 27	Battleground: Bull Run	TalonSoft	WG	8.18
28	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	WG	8.14
29	NHL 97	EA Sports	SP	8.14
30	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.12
31	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.12
32	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.11
33	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	SI	8.11
★ 34	Dungeons Keeper	EA/Bufflog	ST	8.08
35	NBA Live 97	EA Sports	SP	8.05
36	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	SP	8.02
37	Quake	id Software	AC	8.01
38	The Need for Speed SE	EA	AC	7.99
39	You Don't Know Jack Movies	Berkeley Systems	CP	7.98
40	Battleground: Artillerist	TalonSoft	WG	7.97
41	Tiger on the Prowl II	HPS	WG	7.91
42	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	CP	7.90
43	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	7.87
44	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.87
45	Silent Hunter	SSI	SI	7.86
46	Rena	Sierra	AD	7.85
47	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	AC	7.81
48	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accolade	SP	7.80
49	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.75
50	Battleground: Napoleon in Russia	TalonSoft	WG	7.73

RANK	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
51	The Reservoir	Dreamworks	AD	7.88
52	TriplePlay 98	EA Sports	SP	7.87
53	EP2000	Ocean	SI	7.85
54	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	AD	7.85
★ 55	SSBN: NuclearKiller	EA/Galea	SI	7.83
56	X-DM Apocalypse	MicroProse	ST	7.83
57	MSK	Playmatics/Sierra	AC	7.82
58	Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Str-Toch	ST	7.80
59	NASCAR Racing	Sierra	SP	7.58
60	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.57
61	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	WG	7.55
62	Interstate '70	Activision	AC	7.54
63	Spycraft	Activision	AD	7.54
64	Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	ST	7.51
65	TriplePlay 97	EA Sports	SP	7.50
66	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	SP	7.49
67	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	SI	7.47
68	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.47
69	Circle of Blood	Virgin	AD	7.46
70	The Need for Speed	EA	AC	7.45
71	Daggerfall	Bethesda	RP	7.44
72	Fantasy General	SSI	ST	7.44
73	NBA Live 96	EA Sports	SP	7.43
74	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	SP	7.42
75	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	7.42
76	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	7.41
77	FPS Football Pro '98	Sierra	SP	7.41
78	Leisure Suit Larry 7	Sierra	AD	7.37
79	PGA Tour Golf 400	EA Sports	SP	7.36
80	Decisive Battles of WW II: Ardennes	SSI/SSG	WG	7.33
81	Power Chess	Sierra	CP	7.33
82	Tony LaRussa 3	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.33
83	Comanche 3	NovelLogic	SI	7.30
84	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	WG	7.30
85	Privateer 2	EA/Origin	SI	7.28
86	F-22 Lightning II	NovelLogic	SI	7.26
87	HFR 97	EA Sports	SP	7.24
88	Therm Hospital	EA/Bullfrog	ST	7.24
89	Flying Corps	Empire	SI	7.23
90	Magic The Gathering	MicroProse	ST	7.23
91	Pro Pinball	Empire	AD	7.23
92	Lighthouse	Serra	AD	7.22
93	Zark Nemesis	Activision	AD	7.22
94	Incredible Toys	Serra	CP	7.20
95	System Shock	EA	AC	7.20
96	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.18
97	Last Express	Broderbund	AD	7.18
98	Age of Empires Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	7.17
99	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.16
100	M.A.X.	Interplay	ST	7.15

Games on unnumbered lines are tied with game on line above ★ = Top game of type Blue = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing, SI = Simulation/Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargames, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are re-rated after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here you'll find, raised upon pedestals, the games that broke

the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### TIE Fighter

LucasArts, 1994

Ever since George Lucas opened our eyes to a galaxy far, far away in the Star Wars saga of the small Rebel on struggling against a merciless Empire has captured our collective imagination. The story has been fleshed out in successive years by books, more movies, and, yes, computer games. While several games have attempted to transplant us into the fiery battles of the Star Wars universe, none was more successful than TIE Fighter. Project leaders Lawrence Holland and Edward Kilham designed the game with an authentic Star Wars atmosphere, a superb storyline that expanded on the evil Empire, and a routing space simulator. Players discovered what it was like to be a TIE Fighter pilot who propped the Empire's power with progressively advanced lighter-craft. You could even fly escort for the dissident Dark Jedi himself, Darth Vader.

TIE Fighter had excellent graphics for its time and nicely animated cut-scenes, but what made this game great, aside from its atmosphere, was the gameplay. You could choose to fly up to five different Imperial spacecraft in the extensive Campaign Game, which pitted you against X-Wings, Frigates, and myriad Rebel craft in a host of progressively difficult missions. These missions were challenging and logical, fitting nicely into the storyline, and the enemy craft were intelligent, tough foes. Above all, TIE Fighter was immensely fun to play. There are few space sim games with a combination of great gameplay, plot, and atmosphere, but TIE Fighter stands out even among this elite company. For a true Star Wars experience, there is only one game worthy of the Emperor's favor, TIE Fighter.



### Their Finest Hour

LucasArts, 1989

The re-creation of the Battle of Britain in Their Finest Hour set standards that many of today's sims still don't reach. Even though it didn't even feature three-dimensional aircraft (they were pre-rendered from various angles), it provided a level of "you are there" immersion that many new, technically accurate sims can't re-create. The sim's well-designed missions and realistic aircraft performance (for its day) took you back 40 years—whether you were battling Bf 109s over the English Channel or diving through thick ack-ack in a Stuka as you closed in on a British airfield.

The game's dynamic campaign gave you a chance to alter the outcome of the Battle of Britain, either through superior performance in the Luftwaffe or poor flying in the British Fighter Command. The game's mission editor let you create and share missions (which kept the game fresh), and the in-flight camera feature let you record your missions and relive your glory—or agonize over your defeats.

In 1990 the game was COW's Action Game of the Year, and it garnered the highest reader ratings of any game in the magazine's history up to that point. Designer Larry Holland went on to create Star Wars: The Light Saber in 1991, which built on the Finest Hour engine, but which wasn't quite as historically immersive. Unfortunately for flight sim fans, he then went on to design X-Wing, and its sequel, a series so popular that his return to the flight simulation arena anytime soon is unlikely.



### Inductees Prior to 1989

**BATTLE CRESS** (Interplay Productions, 1988)  
**CHESMASTER** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)  
**DUNGEON MASTER** (FTL Software, 1987)  
**EARL WEAVER BASEBALL** (Electronic Arts, 1986)  
**EMPIRE** (Interstel, 1978)  
**F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)  
**GETTYBROS: THE TURNING POINT** (SSI, 1986)  
**KAMPEIBUSSE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)  
**MECH BROTHER** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)  
**MIGHT & MAGIC** (New World Computing, 1986)  
**M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)  
**SO MIKE'S PHANTOM** (MicroProse, 1987)  
**SMCITY** (Maxis, 1987)  
**STARBLINK** (Electronic Arts, 1986)  
**THE BARD'S TALE** (Electronic Arts, 1985)  
**ULTIMA III** (Origin Systems, 1983)  
**ULTIMA IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)  
**WAR IN RUSSIA** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)  
**WASTELAND** (Interplay Productions, 1986)  
**WIZARDRY** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)  
**ZORK** (Infocom, 1981)

### Modern Inductees

**ALONE IN THE DARK** (i-Motion, 1992)  
**BETRAYAL AT KNODDOR** (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)  
**GUNSHIP** (MicroProse, 1989)  
**HARpoon** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)  
**KING'S QUEST V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)  
**LEMBOS** (Psychosis, 1991)  
**LINES 386 PRO** (Access Software, 1992)  
**M-1 TANK PLATOON** (MicroProse, 1989)  
**MASTER OF MAGIC** (MicroProse, 1994)  
**MASTER OF ORION** (MicroProse, 1993)  
**PAKED GENERAL** (SSI, 1994)  
**RED BARON** (Dynamix, 1990)  
**SO MIKE'S CIVILIZATION** (MicroProse, 1991)  
**SO MIKE'S REBELION TYCOON** (MicroProse, 1990)  
**THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND** (LucasArts, 1990)  
**THEIR FINEST HOUR** (LucasArts, 1989)  
**TIE FIGHTER** (LucasArts, 1994)  
**ULTIMA VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)  
**ULTIMA UNDERWORLD** (Origin Systems, 1992)  
**WINE COMMANDER I, II, & III** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)  
**WOLFGESTER 3-0** (id Software, 1992)  
**X-COM** (MicroProse, 1994)

# Computer Gaming World

START THE  
NEW YEAR  
WITH A BANG!

## Falcon 4.0

After three years of waiting, we're finally going to test-fly Falcon 4.0. MicroProse's new cutting-edge sim looks to be the true heir to Spectrum HoloByte's benchmark 1991 F-16 sim (now in the CGW Hall of Fame). Designed with maximum realism for the hard-core simmer, it will also have simplified options for less-experienced pilots. The game runs in 65,000 colors without a 3D card, but if you do have one, the game looks photorealistic (as you can see by this 1280x1024 screenshot). Tune in next month to see if five years of development paid off.



THE ULTIMATE  
GAME MACHINE

## The Ultimate Game Machine, Part II

Want the best machine you can buy for \$2,500? Next month we'll test a slew of powerful new PCs to see which delivers the best bang for the buck. We'll rate machines from Micron, Compaq, Dell, Falcon Northwest, Packard-Bell, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and more. Gentlemen, start your propellers.

## 3D Graphics Cards Rated

Last issue we rated 8 new 3D graphics cards and described 10 more that hadn't released yet. Since then, 12 new boards have come crashing down on our tech editors' heads. Next month, they'll test and rate parts from Asus, ATI, Ganopus, Creative Labs, Diamond, Elsa, Intergraph, Jazz, Matrox, and Sierra.

## REVIEWS

*Abe's Oddysee*  
*Buccaneer*  
*iF-16*  
*Sabre Ace*  
*Panzer General II*  
*Total Annihilation*  
*Incubation*  
*Conquest Earth*  
*Man O' War*  
*Prelude to Waterloo*  
*War Inc.*  
*You Don't Know*  
*Jack III/Jack TV*

Plus lots more!  
(Subject to change if somebody goes berserk or gets a girlfriend.)

▶▶ JANUARY ISSUE ON SALE DECEMBER 2!!!

# What's the Deal With... Game Reviews?



**A** couple of weeks ago, I found myself in calm debate with an erstwhile colleague over the nature of this wacky world of game reviewing. Specifically, we were wrestling over the eternal question: What makes for a bad review? By this, we mean a review that is "bad" as in a job poorly done by the reviewer, as opposed to a job poorly done by the game designer. A one-star review of a game is still "good" if the game is really a one-star game. While nothing much was resolved, the discussion did manage to boil down to a single issue that might be actually relevant: How much of a game review should be about concrete facts, and how much is just a matter of opinion?

Superficially, this seems like a hair-splitting kind of issue, but if you take a moment to think about it, the entire accountability of gaming mags—not to mention the individual writers—hangs on it. It's an issue that's black and white and gray all over.

There can be no doubt that reviewers have their own opinions, and how a game strikes you is a matter of personal taste. In many ways, "taste" is a wonderful thing, but often it leaves a little logic to be desired, and so, while the reviewer's personal opinion is always a part of a review, it has to be

mitigated by some universally agreed-upon frame of reference. Personal taste is not enough to base an entire review upon. A bad interface is a bad interface, regardless of how you "feel" about a game.

The problem with checking up a "bad" review to simple opinion is that opinion is too slippery for anybody to get a handle on. Glossing over any

“There can be no doubt that reviewers have their own opinions.”

hard facts or denying a firm frame of reference leaves the consumer paying for a lot of pages of ads and words that have no more critical relevance than asking your butcher or mailman if they think you should buy *DARKFALL* or *MIGHT AND MAGIC VI*. "It's just my opinion" might be good enough for nutty columns like this one, but reviews need to contain a little more real information.

Some sort of expertise, no matter how flimsy, has to be the frame by

which a review is judged—experience with the industry, with software and games in general, or with the subject matter of the game. Whether a review is "Right" or "Wrong" is not an issue of its star rating. The gray area of personal opinion can account for the fact that one reviewer thought *MAAX* was worth 3.5 stars, and another gave it 4. On the other hand, the same among us can safely agree that any reviewer giving *BC3000* 4.5 stars is slightly mistaken. A very good review of a very lousy game is a problem of fact, not opinion.

If a reviewer personally thinks the potential of *BC3000* is worth the price of admission, then they are more than welcome to mention it in the body of a review. But alongside of that, you have to mention that the game doesn't work out of the box, and that installing the first generation of patches is only slightly less difficult than fixing the *Mir* space station. The reader can then decide what's more important to them. Hell, I loved playing *MACHIAVELL* with friends, but that doesn't mean I should have ignored its weak AI, dated graphics, and dryer-than-average combat model when reviewing it.

Downgrading a game's rating due to personal issues is also a problem. Is it relevant to dock *Dino* points for not being enough of an RPG, even though it was obviously meant to be more like *Rogue* than *Ultima*?

Should *POWER GENERATOR* be punished for not being a rigorously realistic WWII battlefield simulation, when it was obviously designed as a beer-and-pretzels wargame? Again, these "facts" can, and should, be mentioned in the body of a review, but when it comes down to the dreaded rating, a reviewer's opinion on such matters has to come second, behind the reality of the game in front of him. The reviewer may have wanted to talk to townspeople, or have yet another hard-core WWII recreation, but c'est la vie. The real issue is this: Is the game doing what it was meant to do?

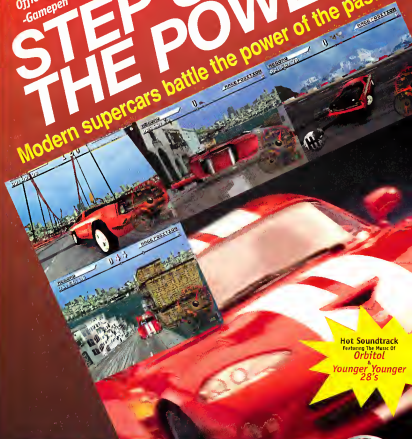
It goes without saying that rating systems of any kind are the bane of any well-thought-out critique, but the fact is, we are stuck with them because readers want them. So when the subtle balance of fact and opinion in a game review comes down to some inane percentage or number of icons, it's more important than ever to give the consumer something they can hang onto. In return, the consumer has to respect the reviewer as well by actually reading an article and understanding where the rating is coming from. If there is still a problem after carefully reading the piece and taking into account the "half-star give or take" taste rule, then the real argument over the reviewer's accuracy can begin. ☞



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