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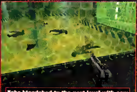

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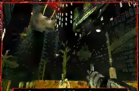
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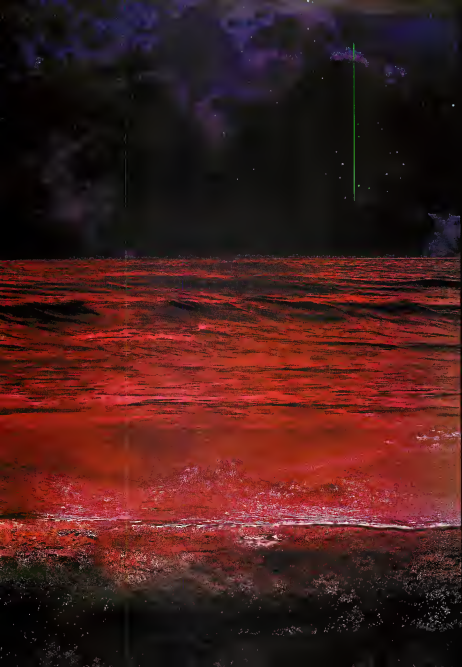

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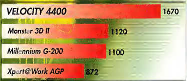

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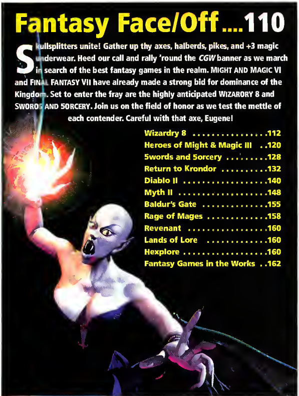

Fantasy Face/Off....110

Skullsplitters unite! Gather up thy axes, halberds, pikes, and +3 magic underwear. Heed our call and rally 'round the *CGW* banner as we march in search of the best fantasy games in the realm. MIGHT AND MAGIC VI and FINAL FANTASY VII have already made a strong bid for dominance of the Kingdom. Set to enter the fray are the highly anticipated WIZARDRY 8 and SWORDS AND SORCERY. Join us on the field of honor as we test the mettle of each contender. Careful with that axe, Eugene!

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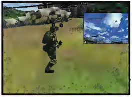

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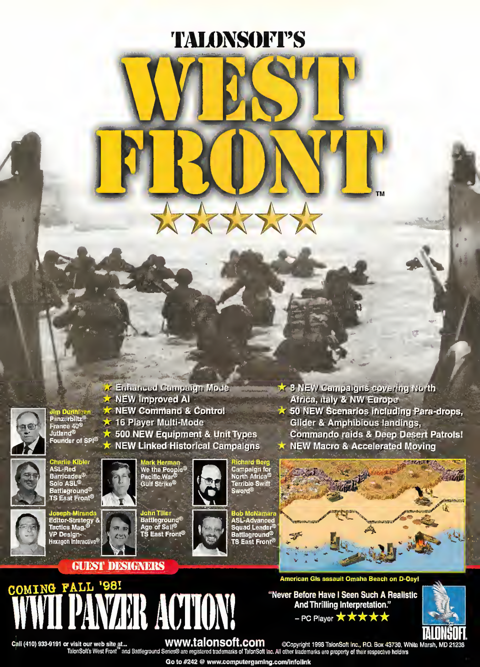

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She Saw Farther!

Dani Bunten Berry's Legacy Brings People Together

In the 1960s, all of the would-be revolutionaries heard The Youngbloods sing, "Come on people now/Smile on your brother/Everybody get together/Try to love one another/Right now."

In the '80s, a software artist named Dan Bunten designed games specifically to do just that: Get people together. The games were designed to bridge the gap between humankind and the machine, to create social interaction. What was truly amazing was that the young artist was designing these games for the personal computer. Given today's multiplayer environment, it might seem strange to recall that the personal computer was believed by many to be an antisocial gaming platform.

In the '90s, that same artist bridged the gender gap by becoming Dani Bunten Berry. As Dani, this pioneer in multiplayer gaming continued to espouse the idea that playing together brings us together.

As I write this, Dani Berry has just passed away after a protracted bout with cancer, but the idea of bringing people together will always be part of her well-earned legacy.

M.U.L.E. SPINNER At the first public CGDC, Dan Bunten (soon to be Dani Berry) retold the fascinating history of the development of M.U.L.E.

At a time when most computer games were designed for solitaire play, her games almost always involved more than one player. Her first published game, WHEELER DEALERS, offered something different, an auction motif which was to surface in one of her masterpiece games, M.U.L.E. In her game of business management, CARTELS & CUTTHROATS, several gamers could compete at the same computer by using its hard-copy planning sheets and utility to print game reports for off-line perusal and decision making. In her game of futuristic combat, CYTRON MASTERS, and in her game of gridiron strategy, COMPUTER QUARTERBACK, paddle controllers and joysticks were used to enable simultaneous play by two gamers on the same computer.

Long **before** Kali was available for **Internet** play, **Dani** was bringing gamers **together** online.

By the time Electronic Arts was formed, the then Dan Bunten was tapped as one of the initial cadre of electronic artists who could "see farther."

She definitely did see farther. She saw the potential for socialization as she created her masterpiece and *CGW* Hall of Fame game, M.U.L.E., named for the futuristic pack animal/gadget that was used on a planet for mining and drayage. M.U.L.E. allowed up to four gamers to play on the same computer. On each player's turn, the other gamers would be allowed to make simultaneous input during the auction phase. Things got pretty exciting during those phases and everyone was involved. Alas, M.U.L.E. was probably more pirated than purchased, and Dani never really saw the fruits of her labor.

Ironically, her next two games were solitaire games. SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD was a major commercial success, and HEART OF AFRICA sold moderately well as a semisequel. Of course, her heart wasn't really in HEART OF AFRICA, and her next game was a turning point.

GAME GURU At more recent conferences for developers, Dani continued to share her design insights with a new generation.

ROBOT RASCALS was a scavenger hunt for the whole family in which each member takes turns looking for items on a distant planet. The catch was that the game used a deck of playing cards, as well as the computer, and the gamers interacted by stealing cards, swapping cards, or passing discards left or right according to the computer moderator's instructions. Its disappointing reception became an epiphany for Dani.

She spoke at an Electronic Arts artist symposium shortly after ROBOT RASCALS made its disappointing debut and explained, "We've failed at gathering people around the computer. We're going to have to connect them out of the back by connecting their computers to each other." At this point, her vision of point-to-point gaming and the technology she and Dave Maynard were building to allow all of EA's games to be played modem-to-modem was unveiled. MODEM WARS was the product which she created—CYTRON MASTERS meets the modem. 688 ATTACK SUB (not by Dani) was the only other EA game to use the code developed for this point-to-point gaming.

By this time, Dani had been wooed by MicroProse and had had two other important multiplayer titles published. In COMMAND HQ, which won *CGW's* 1991 Wargame of the Year award, she created a successful title that moved beyond the MODEM WARS formula. Then, in GLOBAL CONQUEST, she showed how four players could connect at once. Long before Kali was available for Internet play, Dani was bringing gamers together online.

In addition to the important products that Dani created over her career, she spent her a good deal of time in recent years consulting with other designers and continuing the job of teacher and design guru that she began, almost by default, in the early years of the EA artist symposiums and the Computer Game Developers Conference.

Dani did not go gentle into that good night, but designed and tutored against the dying of the light. It still shines, Dani.

For more information on the life of Dani Bunten Berry, visit her memorial Web site at ***www.mpath.com/dani/****.*

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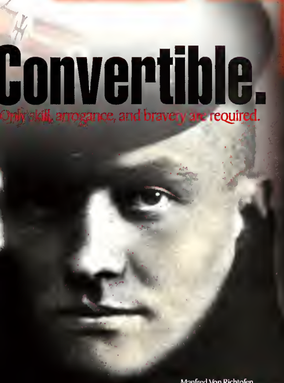

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The Perils of Patches

Why Can't Companies Get Simulations Right the First Time?

It's an unfortunate reality that most sims aren't all they can be out of the box. Patches add features and/or fix bugs in programs. That's a good thing. The bad thing is that they're necessary in the first place.

You can't fault a company for sticking with customers and fixing its product. You *can* fault it for shipping a product with known flaws and figuring it can fix them later with a patch. Consider your less hard-core gaming friends, and how few of them know what a patch is, much less where to find one and how to install it. When these folks get a new sim home and have problems with it, their solution isn't to go to the company's Web site and search for a patch, it's to return the sim to the store. Another potential sim fan goes running back to the "safe" world of QUAKE and STARCRAFT—or even worse, back to the Plug-and-Play safety of a PlayStation.

There are a number of reasons patches come to be. Not all of these are bad: Sometimes patches are written to add support for new hardware that didn't exist when the programs were under development. Witness the addition of support for 3Dfx accelerators in JETFIGHTER III, for instance, or patches for JSF and F-22 ADF that add support for Voodoo² boards. Sometimes patches simply enhance already-working gameplay, such as the improved Internet play in recent versions of F-22 RAPTOR.

But all too often, patches are necessary to make basic features of a game work at all. Witness Sierra's PRO PILOT, which shipped with terrible flight models, stuttering graphics on Pentium IIs, and numerous other problems. By the time the second patch was released, the program was a decent instrument-flying sim, but how many people gave up long before then? Compare that to Looking Glass's FLIGHT UNLIMITED II. Here, patches did fix some problems with air-traffic control and plane AI, but they also added major features. Higher-resolution graphics, force feedback, an adventure creator, and even a new plane were added in various patches—all wonderful bonus features, but not features necessary to enjoy the sim out of the box.

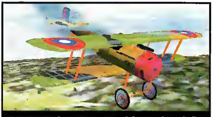
Why do companies ship games that need bug-fix patches? Sometimes, a product incorporates such a wealth of features that problems just slip through despite heavy testing. This happened with JANE'S F-15, which has been patched to fix a crash bug in the Iran campaign, and to fix some avionics systems that didn't work properly. Sometimes a company in financial trouble has to ship products in order to survive—although shipping a buggy product is likely to hasten the rush toward bankruptcy, despite whatever cash it may raise in the short term. Sometimes co-marketing deals are struck with retail chains that require products to ship by a certain date. Sometimes the marketroids and bean counters get fed up with a program's protracted development and insist that it ship *right now*, so as not to miss the holiday season.

Shipping a **buggy** product is likely to **hasten** the **rush** toward bankruptcy.

Still, there's little excuse for programs to ship when they need patches for general playability. Consider that Novalogic and Jane's Combat Simulations have released numerous products that were quite playable out of the box, but used patches to fix only minor glitches and to add user-requested features. Compare that to last year's release of RED BARON II by Sierra—it needed patches just to make the game work as advertised.

Sierra seems to have seen the light with regard to releasing programs too early. As part of the company's reorganization earlier this year, it has made vocal commitments to releasing no more products before their time. As evidence of its renewed commitment to quality, Sierra's Dynamix division has kept the RED BARON II team working on the product for nearly a year since the game's release. Recent patches have dramatically improved the flight modeling in the game. By the time you read this, another patch will be available that will add 3Dfx (and possibly Direct3D or OpenGL) support to the game. I tried the preliminary version of this patch, and it was very impressive, with dramatic special effects, trees at low altitudes, faster frame-rates, and better-looking cockpits. Despite the cost of keeping the development team on this project instead of moving them to the next game, the RED BARON II "SuperPatch" will be a free download, and Sierra also plans to offer it on CD at no cost (other than shipping and handling). Sierra does plan to release a new retail "RED BARON 3D" package as well, which will add support for 100-plus players in multiplayer games. Sierra has stated that owners of the original RED BARON who purchase the 3D version "will receive a substantial (if not entire) refund on the purchase price of the new retail package."

Sierra has promised that the upcoming ACES OF THE PACIFIC II and ACES: X-FIGHTERS will be of the quality gamers used to expect from the company's products. The commitment Sierra has made to ensuring that RED BARON II purchasers get their money's worth is a good sign. Let's hope the "new" Sierra/Dynamix sets a good example that the rest of the industry can follow. CGW



BETTER BARON The RED BARON II patch features dramatically improved flight models, 3Dfx support, and trees to make low-level flight easier.

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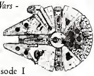

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TERRY COLEMAN

Agents of Injustice

After Milking MOO and MOM, MicroProse Shuts Down SimTex

Despite the creative spin doctoring you'll hear from MicroProse, GUARDIANS: AGENTS OF JUSTICE is dead—as dead as CHAMPIONS, that poster child for much-anticipated games that will never ship (at least AGENTS never graced a *CGW* cover). It would be easy to dismiss the demise of AGENTS as just another casualty of the dreaded Comics Curse that has afflicted virtually every superhero game for the past decade. But it would be wrong to do so, because the problem goes much deeper than that.

The End of an Era

The official shelving of AGENTS—MicroProse, you see, still retains the rights to the game, so that it can be published at some later date (maybe February 31 of the year 2001)—coincides with the shutdown of SimTex. Oh, excuse me: Technically speaking, that studio was known as MicroProse Austin, and you know how important a name is when you are striving for stability—just ask the Candlestick folks about how much their lives have changed now that they work at 3Com Park.

If you've been following this industry for a while, you know that shutting down a studio is hardly anything out of the ordinary. Even so, these folks were the geniuses behind MASTER OF ORION (MOO) and MASTER OF MAGIC (MOM), both justly enshrined in the *CGW* Hall of Fame. In an era of clones, studios such as SimTex are badly needed to provide variety and depth of gameplay.

Of course, if you listen to MicroProse, AGENTS wasn't going to provide either of those essential gaming qualities—which must have been the reason that they were showcasing the game at E3 mere weeks before killing the product. Supposedly, the X-COM style combat system was "slow as a pig," the code was ratty "even for turn-based," and the strategic component was supposedly "non-existent," at least according to the online comments posted by the head of the MicroProse Hunt Valley studio (who couldn't possibly have had an agenda).

It's **frustrating** to see talented people **shut down** by suits who don't **understand** their audience.

Dark Side of the MOO

Now, it's possible that all of these negative things may have been true, because we at *CGW* haven't had a beta of AGENTS to test-drive for more than 18 months (which is why we never ran a sneak preview). Even before its untimely passage to gaming purgatory, AGENTS suffered from an identity crisis—and several redesigns as a result. So troubled was its development that the game holds the dubious record of having been shown at the past four E3 trade shows—which just happen to be the only four E3 shows *ever*.

And to be fair, for all their brilliance in game design, the SimTex folks did have a "patchy" reputation. I never could play MOM until version 1.3, and it's a tribute to the quality of the design that I (and other spellheads) kept at it despite the avalanche of crashes. Even the best-selling MOO II required a patch for multiplayer.

Maybe the world is better off without AGENTS, once described by a rival designer as "X-COM in tights," which, at the time, was a pretty accurate assessment of the gameplay. If the game had shipped, but required a patch after three and a half years of development, it could have been the final blow to MicroProse's reputation—and its pocketbook.

Ironically, it's by shutting down such perceived marginal projects (and evidently studios) that MicroProse plans to stay alive, praying that the imminent release of FALCON 4.0 (really, any day now!) will deliver them from impending financial ruin. Don't kid yourself: If EUROPEAN AIR WAR isn't ready for prime-time soon, the Hunt Valley studio risks following the SimTex folks into the dustbin of gaming history.

And what of Steve Barcia, the MOO Man himself? To his credit, Barcia remains a loyal company man despite the shutdown of the studio he created (and sold to MicroProse in 1994). His role, as it has been for the past year, is to continue as Creative Director of all MicroProse products. It's similar to the position Sid Meier held his last few years at MicroProse, and everyone knows how well that worked out.

I could go on about the cancellation of the Borg action title, or comment on the rumor that MicroProse might lose its *Star Trek* contract entirely. But I'm not trying to be mean-spirited just for the sake of it. It's just frustrating to see a group of talented people get shut down by some suits who really don't understand their audience. Don't forget: These are the same people who surmised that SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION II would only sell 38,000 copies, and, over one million units and two years later, they can't figure out how to follow up on CIV II's success.

And call me a brand loyalist if you must, but I can't get too excited about the direction the X-COM line is going these days. Space sims and 3D shooters? Yeah, that's really serving your fans. If Westwood can finally get around to doing DUNE 2000, we deserve an SVGA version of classic X-COM strategy, complete with multiplay. Then again, role-playing is hot right now, so we have a better chance of seeing a DIABLO-style RPG with little green men....

Let's hope that the shutdown of SimTex isn't the beginning of the end for MicroProse. It would be a shame if the company that once set the standard for strategy games couldn't stick around long enough to publish BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION, much less a potential MOM II or CIV III.

You can reach Terry at terry_coleman@zd.com.

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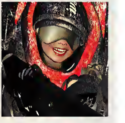
Dueling Dads

I just read your article on turning your kid into an antisocial zombie gamer. As much as *Parenting* and *Sesame Street* editors may cringe to hear this, my four-year-old learned his letters playing X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter. And learned them enthusiastically, because that meant he could play anytime, without dad's help. Now, he's moved on, using his new skills on Outwars. And to think, all this time I've been designing "kids" software. By the way, my pre-schooler can whup your pre-schooler at X-Wing any day. :)

—Andy Purviance
Broderbund's Kid Studio
Via the Internet

Jeff Green responds:

Yeah, sure your kid could beat my kid at XvT. That's because my kid moved on from that game six months ago, after beating every kid in California. Now, if you want to talk about Unreal or StarCraft—you're on!!!



Jeff Green's 4-year-old still refuses to go anywhere without her Terran marine uniform.

Rotten Rabbit Redux

In the August issue of *CGW* your writers mention, twice, how they received actual rabbit's feet (aka, "mutilated rabbit remains") as a promo from a software company, and how "tasteless" they found such a gift. I found this laughable. Poor Mr. Wilson, one of the recipients of such a horrifying present. Somehow, though, I imagine his reaction would have been different had the promo been a pair of leather Air Jordans. And I have no doubt that there were a large number of formerly living critters consumed by hungry reviewers at E3, in the form of chicken wings and pork dimsum provided gratis at the parties thrown by software companies eager to curry (had to do it) favor with the writers.

Grow up! And give us a break from your political correctness and sanctimonious attitudes. If I really wanted to read that sort of thing I'd pick up a copy of *Time*. By the way, I'm pretty sure the poor widdle bunny-wunnies weren't simply slaughtered by poachers who only took their feet, leaving the rest of the carcass to rot in the hot African sun, merely for the profits gained in the lucrative international rabbit foot black market; no, my money's on rabbit's feet coming from farm rabbits raised for meat and leather, a lot like cattle. The use of the feet is simply a way for the slaughter-house to use the entire animal, as well as make a few more bucks.

Let's look at a few facts: 1) Your magazine is printed on paper, which, of course, comes from trees. 2) Trees and forests are habitat for many types of wildlife, including rabbits. 3) If you were really all that worried about the welfare of rabbits you'd be trying to protect habitat instead of writing about how cool the castles look in Age of Empires II.

In the future I think I'll stick with magazines that don't spend quite as much time shilling Micro-soft products.

—Brian Whitehurst
Via the Internet

Boy, someone woke up in grumpy town today. Fine, but don't come crying to us when they hack off your limbs and leave you rotting in the hot African sun. We'll be busy playing AoE II.

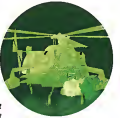
Playing Havoc

M1 Tank Platoon 2 is a five-star game. No, it's not a three-star game or a two and one-half–star game (*CGW* #169, August '98). Anyone that has been playing the patched version of the game for the past six weeks knows that it is a five-star game. Also, on page 185 you identify the copter as a Mi-28 Havoc when, in reality, it is an Apache.

—Steve Calovich
Via the Internet

While the patched version of M1 Tank Platoon significantly improved the game—as noted in the review—we review based on the final shipping version you buy. We believe that readers are better served by reviews that cover what they're getting in the box. We can't wait for multiple rounds of patches, and gamers have expressed mounting frustration with buggy games, so we rate final code.

As for the helicopter, it was correctly identified as an Mi-28 Havoc. The Apache is very similar, but the staggered cockpit canopy, X-style tail rotor and five-bladed main rotor clearly identify this copter as a Havoc.



Let's Go Retro

I don't want to sound ungrateful for the advancement in graphics and gaming-related technology these days, but I am calling for a retro movement in gaming. I don't believe that better graphics and taking up more space on my hard disk means a better game. Some of my favorite games of all time have pathetic graphics by comparison to today's upcoming games—but so what? I play games to have fun, not for awesome animation sequences. I walk into my favorite computer store and look at the selection of games with hesitation and contempt. The games have pretty boxes and an appeal based on what they promise, but if I don't wait for the review in *CGW* I'm afraid I'm going to buy a lemon.

I remember when games like Zork had to have awesome game-play because they had lame, or no, graphics. Back then there was more pressure to make a good quality game because graphics and glitz couldn't sell the game by itself.

Looking at *CGW's* Reviews Index for the last three months, I see that only 28 of 72 games received better than a three-star rating. Hello? Is there so much pressure to get the games on the shelves that beta testing and such is being totally abandoned? I would rather wait an eternity for companies to make a game right (i.e. MechWarrior 2) than to rush it to the shelves without thorough testing. Why bother to send products out prematurely? Some people may not consider *CGW's* review of games to be law, but I do. Rarely have I disagreed with a review or bought a game before a review and not gotten burned. Until every game released can be of four-star quality or higher, *CGW* will remain my guide to computer game quality control and purchasing habits.

—Bryan Lucke
Via the Internet

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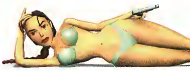


Don't worry—you won't see this kind of crap in *our* magazine.

The New Look

CGW's new look is very interesting, but I still prefer the old look over the new. Sure, it's not hard on the eyes and it is a "breath of fresh air" (in regard to Jeanne Conrad's letter in the August issue), but the new look isn't as colorful and fun to look at as the old look was. It's very plain and the font on the cover looks like something from the '80s.

Another thing: Please don't start showing Lara Croft in a bikini blowing kisses at her readers. The last thing we need is to look at gigantic polygons for breasts filling up the page, turning on the desperate, lonely male readers without girlfriends. *Don't be like* PC Gamer!

—Kent Anjo
Via the Internet

P.S. You should be given an award for blowing up Coconut Monkey on the CD. Nice one!

Thanks! PC who? <g>

Gone to Hell in an HTML Basket

What has happened to the only decent computer gaming magazine and Web site? The Web site now looks like *GameSpot* and acts like *GameSpot*—put it back the way it was! I say separate *CGW* from *GameSpot*. You guys have let Ziff-Davis screw up *Computer Gaming World* ever since they took control of the magazine and now, the final nail in the coffin, the Web site: ARRRGGGGHH! If you don't revert back to the old format of the Web site I will never visit it, it's useless now!!!

And please bring back the *CGW* of old, this new format is horrible, I feel like I'm reading a magazine for teeny boppers. I have been an avid reader of *CGW* since 1987. It's bad enough that I have to be looked upon as a 39-year-old kid for playing computer games, but now you add insult to injury by turning the only magazine about gaming worth reading (and the only gaming magazine that respected adult gamers) into some worthless pile of hormone-induced dribble. And where the hell are the email addresses for the staff at *CGW*, I want to personally explain why I feel this is a bad move to Johnny Wilson. Or have you pulled a Jimmy Hoffa on Mr. Wilson? Somebody call agents Mulder and Scully ASAP!

I refuse to buy another issue of the magazine until you remedy this injustice. And I will actively seek out the boycott support of my fellow Graybeard Gamers to join with me in pushing for the non-support of *CGW*.

—Mark Mitchell
A Highly Enraged (Now) Former Reader
Via the Internet

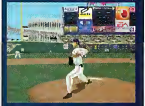
Sorry you don't like the new site, but Ziff-Davis assigned CGW*'s Web administration to* GameSpot*, so we can't do anything about it. We will work with* GameSpot *to try to improve the site and add new features.*

As for the print redesign, that's what magazines do to stay current in the market. Our editorial staff wanted to refine the design, preserving the aspects that worked while enabling us to include more text and screenshots. Most of the feedback has been positive, although some disagree. If you look at the issues from a few years ago you'll see why we've made changes. Put another way, lots of people love automotive styling from the '60s, but the manufacturers no longer make those cars. **CGW**

Department of Corrections

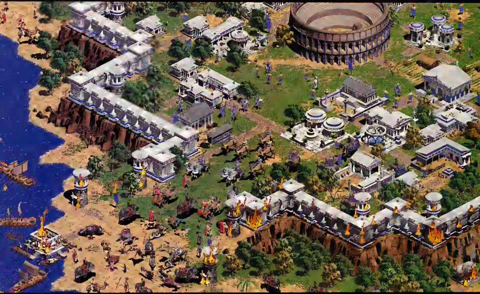
In our August review of EA's TRIPLE PLAY 99 we inadvertantly showed screenshots of TRIPLE PLAY 98. DOH! Here's a correct screenshot of this game, which we rated 2.5 stars. If you want to see more screens, go to www.easports.com/99/tp99/index.html.

Last month in our 100+ Hot New Games feature we printed the wrong release dates for two games. We don't want to say whose fault it was (way to go, Johnny), but Bethesda's REDGUARD and Dreamworks' TRESPASSER are both scheduled to ship during the fourth quarter of this year. Also, the correct phone number for Dreamworks is (310) 234-7000.



The Rise of Rome took 520 years.*

*Your results may vary.



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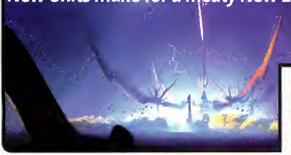
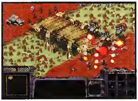
StarCraft, Round II

New Units Make for a Meaty New Expansion Disc





All is not quiet on the STARCRAFT front. Although the Overmind has been defeated by the Protoss forces, Kerrigan, the new Zerg Queen of Blades, has decided to consolidate the disparate broods and unite the Zerg for a strike against the traitorous Emperor Arcturus Mengsk I of the Terran Empire. Meanwhile, the Protoss are trying to rebuild their homeworld and to unite the Dark Templar and the mainstream Protoss.

In STARCRAFT: BROOD WAR, the upcoming STARCRAFT expansion disc from Blizzard, you can play three new campaigns, one from each race. As the Terrans, you'll battle Kerrigan's advances and another potential civil war. As the Zerg, you'll track the progress of Kerrigan's rise to power. And as the Protoss, you will shepherd the reunion of the Protoss people.

In addition to the continuing STARCRAFT story and campaigns, BROOD WAR will present three new tile sets: the nuclear wastelands of the Korhal, the homeworld of the Dark Templar, and an icy planet.

The most exciting additions to BROOD WAR, though, are the extra units. (At this stage, many of the new units' stats are being balanced and could change significantly in the final product.)

The Terrans will get a medic and the Valkyrie missile frigate. The medic will be able to heal organic units, cure any Terran units of Zerg ailments, and permanently blind units with a flash grenade. The Valkyrie frigate will fire volleys of missiles for air splash damage, a perfect defense against clusters of mutalisks or scouts. Blizzard scrapped early plans for a Valkyrie bomber in favor of the current missile frigate.

The Zerg will get the lurker and the devourer. The lurker is a heavy unit that has no attack above ground but can burrow and then attack targets with multiple spikes. It will mutate from the hydralisk and have more hit points and a heavier attack. The devourer will mutate from the mutalisk (giving the mutalisk two aspects) and fire corrosive acid at a greater range than that of the mutalisk. Each attack by the devourer will reduce the target's hit points by one-third, with a minimum damage of three.

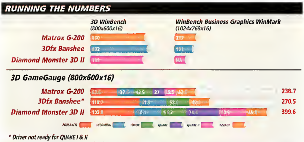
The Protoss will get the ability to build the Dark Templar, which will be little different from the units available in the original STARCRAFT Protoss campaign, although their attacks may be mellowed for balance issues.

Protoss will also be able to build the corsair, an air-to-air interceptor with a rapid plasma attack that will be most useful against mutalisks and scourges. It will also have the ability to cast disruptor fields that prevent units from firing ranged weapons within the field.

Finally, you'll be able to combine two Dark Templar to create a Dark Archon. The Dark Archon will have no attack, but it will possess three powerful spells: mind control, feedback, and shockwave. The mind control spell will be extremely costly, but will give permanent control of an enemy unit. Feedback will wipe out a target's energy bar and then inflict damage on that "spell-casting" unit. Shockwave will temporarily paralyze a field of organic units. It will be great in tandem with psionic storms against Zerg hordes. In addition to multiplayer support for the new units on battle.net, you'll find 30 new missions. For more info on BROOD WAR, go to **www.gamespot.com/previews**.

Banshee Set to Scream

Early Results From Guillemot Intl. Gamer3D Phoenix Are Impressive



** Driver not ready for QUAKE I & II*

Note that Banshee drivers are test versions, and results with shipping boards may vary significantly

3Dfx's success as a 3D-only company has been truly remarkable. Even more remarkable is that the company has achieved this success by standing the typical graphics business model on its head. Typically, graphics makers sell about two-thirds of all their wares in new systems, and the other third in stores as upgrades. 3Dfx, from the advent of its first Voodoo chipset, went the opposite way, appealing to the hearts and wallets of gamers in stores, and picking up some deals for putting its chips into new systems. The company's first 2D/3D effort, Voodoo Rush, was just that: rushed. The result was that Voodoo Rush had pretty solid 3D performance relative to Voodoo, but its 2D was weak, because the 2D chipset and the Voodoo chipset shared the same clock. And, to make matters worse, while the Voodoo ran at about normal clock speed, the 2D chipset, Alliant's AT3D, was underclocked.

Well, 3Dfx still has an eye on the big-ger pie, and it's looking to get a giant piece with the latest 3Dfx chipset, Voodoo Banshee, a 2D/3D integrated part that should deliver near-equivalent performance to Voodoo², and 3Dfx says its 2D will be competitive with the best of the lot. We tested Guillemot's Gamer3D Phoenix board (which uses the Banshee chipset) with Alpha 2 drivers. While these drivers were stable, they were very early versions, and Glide wasn't yet working in them, so QUAKE and QUAKE-II wouldn't run (since 3Dfx's mini-GL driver runs through Glide). But even so, Banshee delivered very solid Direct3D performance, and its 2D, though not as impressive, was still pretty good. We stacked it up against Matrox's Mystique G-200, the fastest 2D/3D board we've seen to date, and Diamond's Voodoo² board, the Monster3D II.

Banshee outgunned the G-200 on 3D WinBench as well as on 3D GameGauge. What's remarkable about the Banshee's 3D GameGauge score is that it doesn't include any contribution from running QUAKE or QUAKE II. Its 2D performance is 26 points behind Matrox, although that may improve with driver optimization. Compared to Voodoo², Banshee was actually a hair faster running Direct3D games, and was also faster on 3D WinBench.

Banshee does have a downside, however. Unlike Voodoo², which has two Texture Mapping Units (TMUs), Banshee has only one. For single-pass rendered games (all Direct3D games and QUAKE in 3D GameGauge), this is fine, but as multitexturing games begin to arrive, Banshee won't get the second pass for free, as does Voodoo². Instead, the Banshee's fill rate will be cut in half, from about 100Mpixels/sec maximum to 50Mpixels/sec.

Still, Banshee will be a tough competitor this fall, with Banshee-based boards recently announced from Guillemot, Intergraph, and Diamond Multimedia, to name just a few. Watch for more Banshee-based board reviews in the coming months in *CGW's* Hardware section. *—Dave Salvator*

Interplay's Ultimate Strategy Archives

A Great Deal, Especially for Laptops

When CD-ROMs were young, Interplay helped to legitimize the format by publishing collections of ex-floppy games on CD. It seems only fitting, therefore, that Interplay returns to its roots with ULTIMATE STRATEGY ARCHIVES, an eclectic package that includes—you guessed it—some games that originally shipped on floppies. Some of these games are dated—SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION is really rough around the edges—but any of these games will run on a 486 (and even a 386, in some cases), and the gameplay, in most cases, is still timeless.

With the exception of DARK COLONY, almost all of these games really are classics: the original HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC; the ambitious MAX; the grandiose CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD; the deluxe version of SID MEIER'S RAILROAD TYCOON (with 16-color VGA graphics!); the underrated JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES; and the original, as yet unsurpassed, X-COM.

If you're looking to fill some holes in your strategy collection, or to introduce a friend to gaming, it would be hard to go wrong with this collection—especially at the suggested retail price of $34.95. *—Terry Coleman*

Civ Who?

Activision and MicroProse Settle Their CIVILIZATION Dispute

Talk about confusion. Earlier this year, MicroProse had three products based on CIVILIZATION in the works. Meanwhile, Activision was touting its sequel to the game and, along with *Civilization* boardgame developer Avalon Hill, telling MicroProse that it couldn't use the CIVILIZATION name anymore. Well, the legal dust has finally settled, and MicroProse has come through it with the rights to the CIVILIZATION name—not only for computer games, but for boardgames as well.

The result of the proceedings is that MicroProse will use the CIVILIZATION name on its upcoming CIVILIZATION II: MULTIPLAYER GOLD EDITION, as well as on the CIVILIZATION II: THE TEST OF TIME add-on pack. In the meantime, Activision will still release CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER, but under license from MicroProse.

The big loser here is Avalon Hill (which, at press time, had been bought by Hasbro), which lost all rights to the game it had been selling for nearly two decades, and which will probably never publish a completed design for a *Civilization* card game. Its CIVILIZATION III project is also in limbo after MicroProse shut down its Simtex development studio.

So how did all this come about? In the early '80s, small European developer Harland Trefoil released a boardgame called *Civilization*. The game de-emphasized combat, unusual for designs of the time, but it gave you plenty to do: discover pottery, navigation, philosophy, and the like—all the while trying to reach the Iron Age before your Mediterranean neighbors.

Avalon Hill acquired the North American license to the boardgame, and it sold quite well. It eventually spawned a sequel, *Advanced Civilization*, along with a number of additional cards and map extensions.

Sid Meier followed with his version of CIVILIZATION in 1991, which had about as much in common with the boardgame as WARCRAFT II does with *Lord of the Rings*. Still, Avalon Hill execs weren't very happy about the name and threatened to sue MicroProse. A compromise was reached: There is no record of any money changing hands, but several copies in the first run of Meier's game had flyers advertising the Avalon Hill boardgame.

Avalon Hill proceeded with its own computer game, but ADVANCED CIVILIZATION (1996) simply didn't have any resources behind it, and the game's release was a disaster, selling less than 20,000 copies. MicroProse, in contrast, had its biggest hit in years when Meier and Brian Reynolds teamed up for CIVILIZATION II, which has since sold more than 1.2 million copies worldwide.

Civilization: Call to Power

Activision attempted to fill the CIVILIZATION III gap by licensing the CIVILIZATION name from Avalon Hill's boardgame. But MicroProse countered that Avalon Hill had rights only to North America, and therefore Activision's claim was invalid.

Lawsuit will ensued, until MicroProse bought Harland Trefoil's company—thus neatly sewing up the rights to the game's name from the original designer. —*Terry Coleman*

1998 ZD Shareware Award Winners

On July 16, 1998, ZDNet hosted its annual awards ceremony for the Shareware Games of the Year. Hosted by ZDNet's Shareware Guru, Preston Gralla, the awards ceremony celebrated the best shareware programs as selected by the editors of *Family PC*, *PC Magazine*, and *Computer Gaming World*. During the selection process, ZDNet tabulates the most popular downloads from its Shareware Library in each program category. These become the nominees for each category. Then, the editorial panels of respective ZD, Inc. magazines examine each product and vote on the winners. You'll find all of this year's winners on this month's CG-ROM disc.

Overall Shareware Game of the Year: EXILE III: RUINED WORLD v. 1.0 (Jeff Vogel, Spiderweb Software) This game takes us back to those early days of role-playing. The graphics are crude and remind us of early ULTIMAS, but the gameplay is solid "hack and slash" for those gamers who simply want an exciting dungeon crawl.

Action/Adventure Game Winner: EXILE III: RUINED WORLD v. 1.0 (Jeff Vogel, Spiderweb Software)

Board Game Winner: LASERCHESS 98, v. 1.0 (Blue Carpet Software)

Card and Casino Game Winner: SOLITAIRE CITY, v. 1.01s (Pete Wiseman)

Strategy, Puzzles, and Logic Game Winner: MVP WORD SEARCH, v. 2.1 (MVP Software)

CG-ROM

Check out more Shareware Information on this month's cd.

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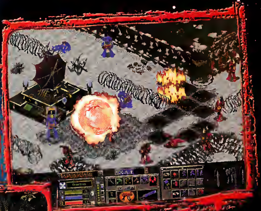

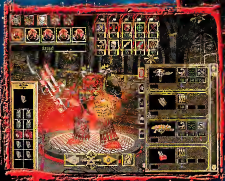

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101: The 101st AIN	Empire Interactive	Q4 '98
Asheron's Call	Turbine/Microsoft	Q4 '98
Alien vs. Predator	Fox	Q4 '98
Baja 1000 Racing	Red Orb	Q1 '99
Baldur's Gate	Interplay	Q4 '98
Battle of Britain	TalonSoft	Q4 '98
Birth of the Federation	MicroProse	Q4 '98
Blackstone Chronicles	Legend/SSI	Q4 '98
Civilization: Call to Power	Activision	Q1 '99
Combat Flight Simulator	Microsoft	Q4 '98
C&C: Tiberian Sun	Westwood	Q4 '98
Creatures II	Mindscape	Q4 '98
Dark Vengeance	GT Interactive	Q4 '98
Daikatana	Ion Storm/Eidos	Q1 '99
Diablo II	Blizzard	Q2 '99
Drakan	Psygnosis	Q1 '99
Enemy Infestation	Panasonic	Q4 '98
European Air War	MicroProse	Q4 '98
Falcon 4.0	MicroProse	Q4 '98
Fallout 2	Interplay	Q4 '98
Fighter Duel 2	Ocean	Q2 '99
Fighter Squadron	Activision	Q4 '98
Fighting Steel	SSI	Q4 '98
Final Countdown	Impact	Q1 '99
Flanker 2.0	SSI	Q1 '99
Fleet Command	Jane's/EA	Q1 '99
Force Commander	LucasArts	Q3 '99
Gabriel Knight 3	Sierra	Q4 '98
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	Q4 '98
Harpoon 4	SSI	Q2 '99
Heavy Gear II	Activision	Q4 '98
Heretic II	Raven/Activision	Q4 '98
Homeworld	Sierra	Q4 '98
King's Quest: Mask of Eternity	Sierra	Q4 '98
Klingon Honor Guard	MicroProse	Q4 '98
Knockout Kings	EA Sports	Q1 '99
Indiana Jones/Inf. Machine	LucasArts	Q2 '99
Int. Rally Championship	THQ	Q4 '98
Interstate '82	Activision	Q1 '99
Jagged Alliance 2	Sir-Tech	Q4 '98
Luftwaffe Commander	SSI	Q4 '98
MechWarrior III	MicroProse	Q2 '99
Messiah	Shiny/Interplay	Q1 '99
Myth II: Soulblighter	Bungie	Q4 '98
National Hockey Night	ESPN Digital	Q4 '98
North vs. South	Interactive Magic	Q4 '98
Omikron	Eidos	Q1 '99
Panzer Elite	Psygnosis	Q1 '99
Prey	3D Realms/GT Interactive	Q1 '99
Prince of Persia 3D	Red Orb	Q2 '99
Professional Sports Car Racing	Virgin	Q4 '98
Quest For Glory V	Sierra	Q4 '98
Railroad Tycoon II	Pop Top	Q4 '98
Requiem	3DO	Q4 '98
Return Fire 2	Panasonic	Q4 '98
Return to Krondor	Sierra	Q4 '98
Revenant	Eidos	Q1 '99
Smart Games Chal. 3	Smart Games/Hasbro	Q4 '98
Space Bunnies Must Die	Panasonic	Q4 '98
SpecOps: Ranger Team Bravo	Panasonic	Q4 '98
SpecOps: Pro Pack	Panasonic	Q4 '98
StarCon	Accolade	Q4 '98
Starship Troopers	MicroProse	Q4 '98
StarSiege	Sierra	Q4 '98
Sword & Sorcery	Virgin	Q4 '99
Tomorrow Never Dies	MGM	Q4 '98
Trans-Am Racing '68-'72	GT Interactive	Q4 '98
Ultra Fighters	Interactive Magic	Q4 '98
War of the Worlds	GT Interactive	Q4 '98
WCW Nitro	THQ	Q4 '98
West Front	TalonSoft	Q4 '98
Wheel of Time	Legend/GT Interactive	Q2 '99
Wings of Destiny	Psygnosis	Q1 '99
WWII Fighters	Jane's/EA	Q4 '98
You Don't Know Jack 4	Berkeley	Q4 '98

NEWS FLASH

Ultima: Ascension Producer Steps Out

Ed Del Castillo, producer of ULTIMA: ASCENSION, has left Origin, citing "philosophical differences." This led many hardcore ULTIMA fans, who had expressed disappointment with the direction the series is taking, to speculate that this might make for a turn back to traditional ULTIMA. While there have been no major changes to the design, Origin is obviously concerned with keeping the dedicated fans on board. The company released a Q&A soon after Castillo's departure which stated that the product is still taking a new angle, but promising "character creation, statistics, inventory, and all the usual aspects associated with an ULTIMA."

Celtics' Antoine Walker to Assist NBA Live 99

EA Sports has signed the Boston Celtics' Antoine Walker to assist in the design of its upcoming basketball title, NBA Live 99. EA Sports has routinely drafted professional athletes to aid in the development of its games in order to enhance realism and quality. Walker will join the ranks of such previous All-Star EA collaborators as Tim Duncan, Tim Hardaway, and Mitch Richmond.

Regarding his new role in game development, Walker said, "I am thrilled to join the EA Sports team to work on NBA Live 99. I continue to be amazed at how well EA Sports replicates the game precisely as well as captures the NBA lifestyle in one package."

Activision Acquires Head Games

Activision has acquired Head Games Publishing in an attempt to broaden its consumer base and become a player in the "value-priced" software market. Head Games, publisher of popular mass-market titles such as Cabela's BIG GAME HUNTER, is now a wholly owned subsidiary of Activision.

WarCraft II Platinum Offers Online Play

Finally, WARCRAFT II comes to battle.net! Blizzard announced that WARCRAFT II PLATINUM, set to ship during the holiday season, will feature free play on the company's battle.net service. This new version of the classic will be a Windows 95/98/NT game, but will retain multiplayer compatibility with the MS-DOS version. Along with the missions from the original game and the BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL expansion set, the PLATINUM edition will include two all-new Orc and Human veteran campaigns. The product will sell for $35, with a "substantial rebate" for current WARCRAFT II owners.

America Online and Kesmai Work Out Legal Problem

America Online and Kesmai have ironed out their legal dispute. In a joint statement, the two companies announced that they will prolong their professional relationship at least through February 2001. Kesmai, which provides multiplayer online games to AOL, sued in September 1997. The gaming company claimed that AOL unfairly promoted its own games at the expense of Kesmai's licensed content.

Where to Meet Women? Online Games!

A study by the Interactive Digital Software Association (ISDA) claims that 53 percent of gamers who play online are female. These findings seem to go against the conventional wisdom about who plays games online and what they like to play. According to Josh Fershee, ISDA Manager of Membership Services, women tend to "see things in terms of their connectedness to other people. Online gaming offers this sense of relationship [with others]."

Although male online gamers prefer the action, strategy, and wargame genres, women online seem to stick to trivia, card, and boardgames. The statistical emphasis on the classic/puzzle genre may require online game services to refocus their target audience.

Multi-Player Games Network Announces Free Service Option.

Multi-Player Games Network (**www.mpgn.com**) has recently instituted a plan that allows new subscribers to access all games free of charge. The biggest difference between the free plan and the pay service is the introduction of mandatory banner advertisements. Players will have some movement restrictions in the RPG KINGDOM OF DRAKKAR and the DRAKKAR II. Furthermore, players will not be able to perform character maintenance with the free service. Still, players will be able to get a taste of the range of MPG-Net's services before committing to a monthly fee.

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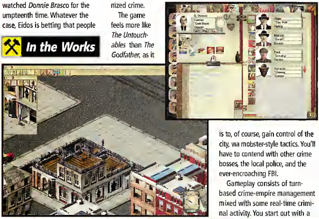
Gangsters: Organized Crime

Eidos Dares You to Order a Hit This Winter

In the Works

Perhaps that trip to the New Jersey shore has put organized crime on your mind. Or you may have just watched *Donnie Brasco* for the umpteenth time. Whatever the case, Eidos is betting that people want to experience life as a mob boss, and will publish Hothouse Creations' GANGSTERS: ORGANIZED CRIME to give gamers a legal venue for organized crime.

The game feels more like *The Untouchables* than *The Godfather*, as it focuses on 1930s Chicago-style mob warfare, in which you play a new-blood crime boss for your local district. The aim of the game is to, of course, gain control of the city, via mobster-style tactics. You'll have to contend with other crime bosses, the local police, and the ever-encroaching FBI.



Gameplay consists of turn-based crime-empire management mixed with some real-time criminal activity. You start out with a host of menus that let you hire new goons, scope out your controlled territory, and issue orders about what you want your goons to do in the upcoming week. Orders range from simple extortions to contract killings to torching buildings. Once you've issued your orders, you start the next phase of the game by "hitting" the streets. You then get to watch and control your goons in real-time. You can opt to have your goons do some extracurricular strong-arming after they finish their initial orders, or you can have them wander the streets and expand your power base.

The mix of turn-based "empire" management with the real-time "missions" (and a dash of multiplayer) could make for an interesting challenge for strategy gamers. And hey, when was the last time you ordered a hit on a guy because he looked at you funny? —*Thierry Nguyen*

JUPITER PRB 1
MARS PRB 2

BattleCruiser's Back

The Controversial Title Is Finally Set to Hit the Shelves in Finished Form

It's hard to think of a project that had a rockier development than that of BATTLECRUISER 3000AD. The product has seen nearly a half-dozen publishers and years of delays, and it even suffered through the premature release of an unplayable alpha version by Take2. Despite a lack of financial support from a publisher and merciless Internet flame attacks, developer Derek Smart has stuck with the program, and a series of free patches has resulted in a fairly solid, entertaining game with a number of enhancements—including 3Dfx support.

Now the product is set to hit store shelves with all the bug-fixes, a variety of enhancements, 50 new missions, and a comprehensive mission builder; the new moniker will be BATTLECRUISER 3000AD 2.0.

The product will ship under Interplay's affiliated title program at a budget price somewhere around $20. Purchasers of the original version of the game will be able to download an upgrade to BATTLECRUISER 3000AD 2.0 that will include all of the game's core features except the mission editor, but with only 25 new missions.

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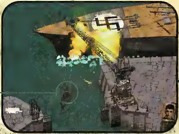

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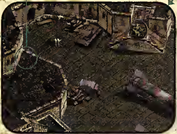
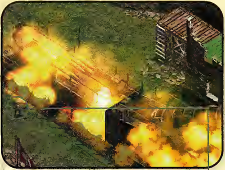
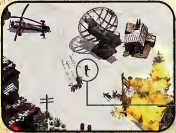




You send in your pyro lovin' munitions expert to take out enemy mobile missile capability. Apparently, there's plenty of dynamite to go around.

INFERNO



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Golf: The Action Game?

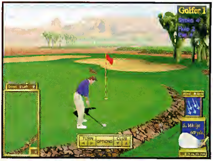
GOLDEN TEE GOLF Takes an Arcade Approach to the Green

It's fair to say that golf isn't the game most people have in mind when they think of arcades. Yet, since 1996, Peter Jacobsen's GOLDEN TEE 3D GOLF has consistently rated among the industry's Top 5 coin-op machines. Its popularity—believe it or not—has been compared to the original PACMAN phenomenon of the late '70s. Now PC gamers can find out for themselves what all the hullabaloo is about with Incredible Technologies' Win 95 version of the arcade smash.

In the Works

Much like Sony's addictive HOT SHOTS GOLF on the PlayStation, GOLDEN TEE GOLF eschews hard-core realism in favor of blazing speed and sheer fun. The title's 3D accelerated 16-bit graphics engine delivers lush, detailed environments—featuring special effects such as fog, water reflections, and multilayered shadows—while the relaxed physics model promises forgiving gameplay for even the most frustrated duffers.

Three 18-hole courses are scheduled to ship with the game, playable by up to four people (hotseat, modem, direct link, LAN, or Internet). Although only two scoring styles will be offered—stroke or skins—numerous variables provide the potential for long-term play value, such as the ability to change pin and tee placements, alter green contours, and adjust wind velocity.



Unlike the coin-op game, which uses trackball controls, the PC version uses the mouse to simulate the natural backswing and follow-through of a club swing. Called TrackSwing, this control method is remarkably easy to learn, allowing players to concentrate more on techniques and strategies, and less on swing mechanics. No more twitch-and-click.

Streamlined, yet loaded with features, look for GOLDEN TEE GOLF to make a huge impact on this highly competitive sports genre. —*Scott A. May*

Playing Lately

CGW Survey *

		Last Month	Months on Chart
1.	StarCraft (Blizzard/Cendant)	1	2
2.	Might and Magic VI (3DO)	4	2
3.	Age of Empires (Microsoft)	3	5
4.	Quake II (id Software/Activision)	2	5
4.	Unreal (GT Interactive)	-	1
6.	Diablo (Blizzard/CUC)	7	17
7.	Jedi Knight (LucasArts)	8	7
8.	Wing Commander: Prophecy (Origin)	8	4
9.	Fallout (Interplay)	-	1
9.	Total Annihilation: The Core Contingency (Cavedog)	-	1
9.	Myth (Bungie)	-	1
9.	Battlezone (Activision)	-	1

** Check your mailbox: We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly chosen subscribers each month. The results of Playing Lately indicate what games readers are blowing the most time on, as opposed to the readers' overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100*

PC Data Best-sellers**

		Last Month
1.	Final Fantasy VII (Eidos)	-
2.	StarCraft (Blizzard/Cendant)	1
3.	MechCommander (MicroProse)	-
4.	Unreal (GT Interactive)	2
5.	Flight Simulator '98 (Microsoft)	10
6.	Deer Hunter (GT Interactive)	3
7.	The X-Files Game (Fox Interactive)	-
8.	Titanic: Adventure Out of Time (Cyberflix)	4
9.	Myst (Red Orb)	5
10.	Sim City 2000 Special Edition (Electronic Arts)	-

*** This list indicates what the top-selling PC games were, as calculated by PC Data, for June 1998*

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Age of Empires: The Rise of Rome

Age of Empires: The Rise of Rome

GENRE: Real-time Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: Ensemble Studios
PUBLISHER: Microsoft

With Camel Riders, Fire-spouting Galleys, and a Ben Hur*–mobile, This Expansion Should Nicely Bridge the Gap to AoE II*

by Ken Brown

A conversation at the Roman bath:

Supercilious: *The Empire is once again under attack! Tomorrow we must marshal our asses to the borderland and join Lugubrious Sextus in repelling the ill-tempered and foul-smelling Huns!*

Pusillanimous: *Not again. These Huns keep coming back like the meatloaf at the Coliseum. They are really getting on Minerva.*

Supercilious: *We face dire threats! New enemies oppose us from the north, the east, and the south. Reports say they have terrible new beasts that never drink and only relieve themselves when no one is watching. It could mean curtains for everyone in a toga.*

Pusillanimous: *Get Agrippa. The Roman army is the best in the world. Rather than bleeding to death in the wilderness, I think it better I remain here with my concubines and my divine thoughts.*

Supercilious: *Pusillanimous, you idiot! If you don't fight we'll be overrun! Do you not wish the honor of being victorious in battle?*

Pusillanimous: *Only if I can do it without having to leave my villa.*

Supercilious: *Bah! May you be crushed by Carthaginian war elephants!*

Pusillanimous: *All right, don't be such a Titus. Tell me more and maybe I'll queue up some Centurions.*

If you're one of those guys who thinks an expansion pack is just another wave of Huns, we've got news for you. The RISE OF ROME has new units, new civilizations, new technologies, and several other new features that can significantly affect the fortunes of war. And since our advance scouts tell us AGE OF EMPIRES II has been delayed until early next year, this may be the only chance you have to reign victorious until then.

Developer Ensemble Studios seems intent on giving gamers their money's worth. Rather than farming out the expansion to an outside developer, they've worked on it themselves with the same attention to detail shown in the original game. They even enlisted former id Software Designer Sandy Peterson to lead the design.

Civs and Uncivility

THE RISE OF ROME includes four new civilizations (in addition to the 12 from the original game): the Carthaginians, Hellenes, Palmyrans and Romans. Carthage was a Phoenician colony founded around 800 BC near modern Tunis. Hellena controlled the Aegean Sea and most of the Greek peninsula for 450 years after the death of Alexander the Great. Palmyra (meaning place of palms) was a desert city in the Middle East on the trade route between Damascus and the Euphrates River. And we all know the Romans, everyone's favorite ancient sports team, unless you were Christian (or from the People's Front of Judea).

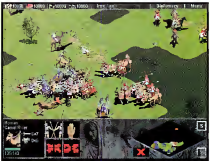
The new civilizations benefit from several of the Expansion Pack's new units and technologies. In the version I played, the Carthaginians have four new units and four new technologies, in addition to numerous units from the original game. But all of the civilizations from the original game have at least one new unit, and most have three or four.

There are five new units in the expansion pack. Slingers are Tool Age infantry units that throw rocks with a sling. They have a +2 attack against archers and increased attack against walls and towers. Camel riders are fast Bronze Age units that have special advantages against horse-mounted units. Horses were unaccustomed to camels' odor in ancient times, and they often refused to engage them. Consequently, camel riders have an attack bonus against all cavalry, scouts, horse archers, and chariots. Since both of these units can be introduced relatively early on, they can create some new challenges even for experienced AOE players.

The other three units are all from the Iron Age. The scythe chariot is a *Ben Hur*–era sport utility vehicle with two horses and scythe blades on its wheels to chop up defenders like a Cuisinart. It has more hit points, more attack strength, and more armor than does a chariot. It also has a high resistance to conversion and a double attack against priests. Armored elephants are expensive upgrades to war elephants, but they pack a wallop and they're hard to bring down. They have +1 piercing armor; more attack strength than war elephants, and siegecraft, which aids them in destroying walls and towers. Like war elephants, they inflict trample damage to adjacent enemy units. Good luck defending against them—try converting them instead. Lastly, fire galleys are like floating flamethrowers. They're very effective against triremes, but are vulnerable to catapults and catapult triremes, because artillery does bad things to flaming pots of fire.

New Technologies

As with the new units, RISE OF ROME has interesting new technologies that can change the dynamic of the game. There are four new technologies: logistics, martyrdom, medicine, and tower shield. Logistics is a Bronze Age technology that allows you to exceed the population limit with barracks units. With logistics, barracks units (except slingers) only count as half units toward your population. This makes it easier to build lots of shock troops and visit them upon your former allies.



ROMAN BLOODBATH Roman and Carthaginian camel riders and scythe chariots earn their combat pay. Neither last long in such circumstances.

The other three technologies are all in the Iron Age. Martyrdom lets you convert an enemy unit instantly by sacrificing one of your priests. (You can't use martyrdom on other priests.) Medicine increases the priests' healing rate by as much as three times, making it possible to heal even war elephants fairly quickly. Finally, the tower shield adds +1 infantry armor against ballista, heliopolis, and missile weapons. Only infantry and academy units benefit from this technology.

Most of the civilizations have three or four of these new technologies, except for the Palmyrans, who have none. (However, the Palmyrans are currently slated to get all five of the new units.) The Hellenes and Yamato each receive only one new technology.

Perhaps the most interesting new technology is available to every civilization at any time: unit queues! Yes, you can now order up a number of units from any production facility (as in STARCRAFT or TOTAL ANNIHILATION), and they'll keep churning out as long as you have sufficient resources and you haven't exceeded the unit population limit. If you exceed the limit, a message appears and production is halted. The units remain queued up, though, so you can do a hasty "angel of death" act to resume production.

As in the original game, you can stop the production of units at any time. You can also decrease the queue by right-clicking on the unit button in the interface.

New Units

Slinger: Rock-slinging infantry with attack advantages against archers, walls, and towers.

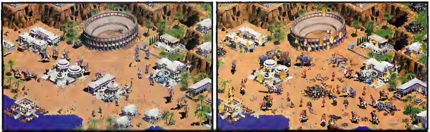
Camel Rider: Camel units have an attack bonus against cavalry, scouts, horse archers, and chariots

Armored Elephant: This behemoth has siegecraft, more attack strength, and more armor; but if it's converted, look out.

Scythe Chariot: The *Ben Hur* unit is conversion-resistant, and is hell on priests; the scythes on its wheels damage adjacent enemies.

Fire Galley: The dragon of fighting ships, it spews flames to take out triremes, but takes more damage from catapults.

AGE OF EMPIRES: THE RISE OF ROME



RISE AND FALL OF ROME Here's a closer look at the new Roman building set, including the new Coliseum wonder. And moments later, what the city looked like as Nero fiddled.

Unfortunately, the expansion pack will not let you set unit gathering points, as you can in STARCRAFT, which would certainly make directing traffic easier. It appears we'll have to wait for AGE OF EMPIRES II to do that.

Cartography 201

If you're tired of the random maps from the first game, RISE OF ROME will let you play with four new map types: continental, Mediterranean, narrows, and hill country. Continental is one big land mass with water around the periphery. Mediterranean is almost the opposite, with a sea in the middle and land around the edges. (If you play with four players on this map, each player starts out in a corner.) Narrows is similar to continental, but with rivers and shallows. If you don't like water, you'll love hill country—there's not even a lake.

In addition to the new map types, there's a new map size to play with. The new gigantic map is 250x250 tiles, as opposed to the 200x200 tiles in the huge map. This should give players in multi-player games more space to spread out.

No matter on which map type you play, you should see a more equitable distribution of resources. The random-map generator is said to provide each player equal access to berry plants and other resources. They've also changed the water width parameters so you shouldn't have problems with boats getting trapped behind docks anymore. Most random maps will now also include cliffs.

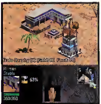
Artificial Incompetence

One of the biggest gripes players had with AOE was how stupid the units were. How many times did you see your units idly stand by while their comrades were being hacked to bits a short distance away? And how many times did you have to personally usher a unit around the map so he wouldn't get blocked by trees or water? We've been assured that these problems will be a thing of the past. Pathfinding has been improved, and, in fact, there are different options for pathfinding now in the game settings. Units also seem to be more aware when their buddies are being attacked. (Ensemble did release a patch for the original game that accomplished the same thing. We highly recommend it.) Another AI problem in the first game was the tendency for siege units to fire at enemy units even if they were in the midst of your troops. This resulted in disrupted attacks and friendly-fire damage. Some crafty players capitalized on this by building house foundations in the midst of enemy catapult groups. Ensemble indicated that they've booted that little crutch.

Veni, Vidi, Vici

Most expansion packs feature new campaigns, and THE RISE OF ROME is no exception. The campaigns are still under construction, but it appears that there will be four or five new campaigns with four to six scenarios in each. Three of the campaigns will trace the history of Rome from its early days as a city-state in 400 BC to the *Pax Romana* period when Rome controlled vast regions of Europe and the Middle East. The *Rise of Rome* campaign includes battles with the Etruscans, the Carthaginians, and Hannibal. The *Ave Caesar* campaign puts you in Caesar's toga to battle pirates, invade Britain, suppress the revolt in Gaul, and crush Pompey in Greece.

So with the new campaigns, new units, new civs, and new features, will this pack be enough to make you spend your gold? Well, the campaigns won't put many veteran AOE players over the top, but the new features will make the package worthwhile if the price stays around $20. CGW



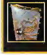
QUEUE UP! RISE OF ROME has simple unit queues that help you spool up production. Unfortunately, you can't designate automatic gathering points à la STARCRAFT.

New Technologies

Logistics: Barracks units (except slingers) only count as half units toward your population.

Martyrdom: Lets you instantly convert an enemy unit (except priests) by sacrificing one of your priests.

Medicine: Increases priests' healing rate.



Tower shield: Adds +1 infantry armor against ballista, heliopolis, and missile weapons.

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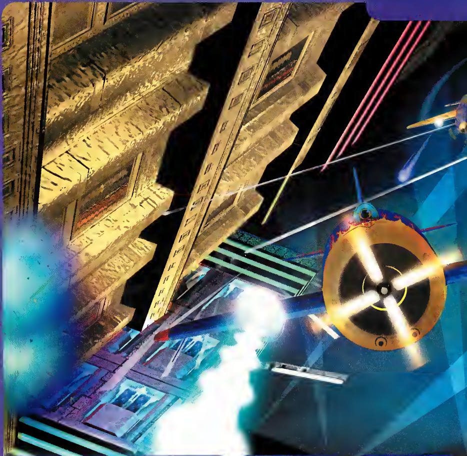

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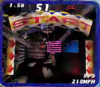

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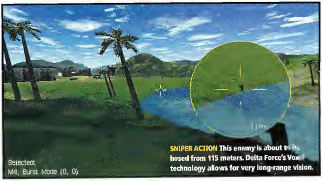


SNIPER ACTION This enemy is about to be hosed from 115 meters. Delta Force's Voxel technology allows for very long-range vision.

Delta Force

This New Soldier Sim Could Put Gamers Into Battle Like Never Before

by Joe Vallina

You are the elite, a Delta Force commando. Not just the best, but the best of the best. According to Jeff Beatty, out of a typical recruiting class of more than 300 soldiers (who are hand-picked from the U.S. Army Rangers, Green Berets, and paratroop squads), only around 14 will make it to Delta Force. This group is so highly regarded, says Beatty, that during the Gulf War, the Israeli government gave the allies an ultimatum: Send the Delta Force on Scud-hunting missions, or Israel would enter the war.

That's a pretty good recommendation, indeed. And Beatty should know. President of Total Security Services International and a former Delta Force assault-troop commander, he has commanded Delta Force squads all over the world. He received commendations for valor in Grenada after his helicopter was shot down and he escorted the survivors to safety, and now he's serving in a new role as advisor to Novalogic. This new mission, while not involving life or death, could be very important for gamers interested in the most realistic, squad-based gameplay to date.

UnQUAKE

Novalogic is quick to point out that DELTA FORCE is not a QUAKE clone, nor is it meant to be—first- and third-person shooter graphics notwithstanding (you'll be able to toggle between the two views). This game is a simulation, pure and simple, and this means that you can forget about health meters and surviving a point-blank rocket blast. Instead, one well-placed bullet can take you out, just as in the real world. Snipers from unprecedented (in gaming, at least) distances can target and hit you before you even see them. (Those not so simulation-inclined will be able to toggle the game's realism level.)

Using Voxel-based rendering technology has enabled Novalogic to show distances heretofore unknown in this type of game, and with a minimum performance hit. Unlike in games such as QUAKE, in which showing large distances meant slowing down frame-rates (hence discouraging the use of large, open spaces in the games), in DELTA FORCE, these distances present less of a performance problem. However, that's not to say that you'll be able to see seamless gameplay if it's running on a bottom-line machine.

The first time I played DELTA FORCE, it was on a top-of-the-line Pentium II, 400MHz monster machine, and the game ran flawlessly. However, on slower machines (a Pentium 200MHz MMX, for example) the game slowed noticeably. At this stage in its development, DELTA FORCE isn't fully optimized, and 3D-card support has yet to be added. I hope that the game will run passably on slower systems when it's in the final release. As soon as *CGW* gets final code, we'll let you know.

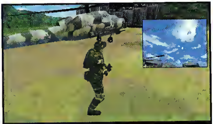
Delta Force

GENRE: Sim
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: Novalogic
PUBLISHER: Novalogic

The Heart of Combat

Character movement in the game will use motion-capture technology that was directly supervised by Beatty. According to the former commando, Delta Force training is different from that of other military forces, in that Delta Force operatives are trained to be able to offensively fire at the enemy at all times. This means that such seemingly simple actions like crouching, crawling, and even running are taught in a way that maximizes the soldier's ability to shoot. Novalogic is making sure that this training is incorporated into the way that your character moves onscreen.

The game's missions will be based in reality as well. The game will be divided into five campaigns, each of which will consist of two or three lengthy missions, and you'll choose which mission to start with. In the end, all players will play every mission in the campaign, but each mission's difficulty will depend upon the order in which you play them. For example, if your overall campaign objective is to destroy an enemy fire-base, it may prove beneficial to first play a mission in that campaign that lets you destroy the enemy's communications facility. In this way, you can keep the enemy from calling in reinforcements when you begin



OVER THE SHOULDER When you play in the third-person perspective, you'll be able to see what your character sees, via a small view screen (upper right corner).

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– *Computer Gaming World*

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the main assault on the base in a later mission.

The five campaigns will take place in different areas of the world. These will include Peru (or another South American jungle country), Libya, Uzbekistan, Siberia, and the Indonesian coast. Keep in mind, though, that DELTA FORCE is still a work in process, so these regions could change prior to final release.

Promised mission objectives will include search-and-destroy nighttime raids, hostage-recovery missions, base-destruction raids, and the like. In the game, you will work individually or, more typically, in groups of three to four commandos. According to Beatty, the real Delta Force uses the minimum amount of squad members deemed necessary to accomplish the given mission objectives, and DELTA FORCE's gameplay will reflect this strategy. Also, you could work in conjunction with local law enforcement, such as in a mission where you have to capture a drug lord—and the evidence needed to convict him.

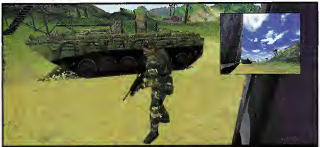
Beatty promises that the game's missions will challenge gamers with life-and-death situations, and to add to the pressure, many of the missions will present a moral dilemma as well. You'll be forced to choose not only between mission objectives, but also between right and wrong.

More Than One Way to Skin a Cat

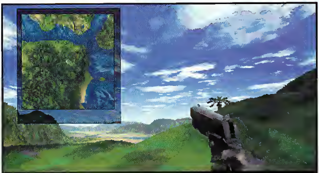
One of the more intriguing aspects of combat in the game is the addition of hand-to-hand sneak attacks, in which your character must employ chokes and lethal knifings to silently gain access to mission objectives. This is in stark contrast to the "get the biggest gun you can and kill everything that moves" objectives in most shooters. In fact, in many missions, you may well want to avoid conflict altogether, if that would facilitate the accomplishment of the specific objective.

Of course, if you do want to get that big gun, you'll have several from which to choose, all from the real Delta Force commandos' arsenal. Weapons in the game will include the M-203 grenade launcher, the M-P5 submachine gun, the M-4 machine gun (a shorter version of the standard M-16), hand grenades, claymore mines, and various handguns, among others. Also included will be a simulation of the hand-held computerized devices used by the real-life Delta Force commandos to coordinate objectives, coordinates, and the like.

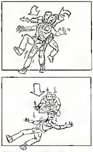
Although the opponent AI components and actual motion-captured graphics weren't complete as of press time, if Novalogic comes through with all of its promises, DELTA FORCE should enthrall gamers who want more realism in their first- and third-person action. For many gamers who are intrigued by the prospect of a war simulation, but who don't want to join the virtual air force to play one, this could be the ticket. CGW



TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES Capturing this tank could be one specific mission objective in an overall campaign.



GROUND ZERO TO OVERLORD As in real-life missions, in DELTA FORCE, you'll be able to use satellite mapping to find your way around the area.



SMILE WHEN YOU DO THAT If these storyboard drawings are any indication, the motion-captured graphics in DELTA FORCE will make sure you enjoy the dirty work.

ONE LAST TWITCH With DELTA FORCE's realistic combat, take one bullet in the head and you'll become really familiar with this proposed scene.

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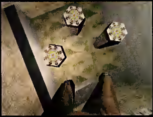

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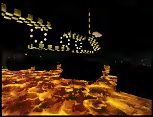

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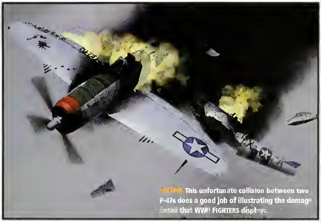

[illegible] This unfortunate collision between two P-47s does a good job of illustrating the damage detail that WWII FIGHTERS displays.

WWII Fighters

This Audiovisual Feast Takes Sims to the Next Level

by **Denny Atkin**

Every couple of years, a flight simulation comes along that advances the state of the art and sets new standards for the sims that follow. That honor has been shared by such titles as RED BARON, FALCON 3.0, BATTLE OF BRITAIN: THEIR FINEST HOUR, F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III, EF2000, and LONGBOW 2. If the development team working on WWII FIGHTERS keeps up at its current pace, this sim will join that hallowed list as the first sim to truly take full advantage of 3D technology.

It's Got the Look

The most striking aspect of WWII FIGHTERS (née FIGHTER LEGENDS) is its graphics engine. We're the first to admit that there's a lot more to a good simulation than good graphics, but part of the enjoyment of a simulation is a convincing environment, one that lets you completely lose yourself in the experience. And no other simulation—in fact, no other computer game I have seen—has managed to re-create so accurately the appearance of a real-world combat environment.

You see the difference when you drop into the cockpit. Most sims swap between a detailed, prerendered bitmapped cockpit and a simpler, polygon-based virtual cockpit. Here, you're always in the virtual cockpit view, but that doesn't mean the cockpit lacks detail. Each instrument is 3D rendered, right down to stuttering needles and shadows around the dials. This level of detail extends even to the warning messages written on the panel. All the instruments are simulated—not only the common instruments like altimeter, airspeed, and horizon gauges, but also the turn-and-bank indicator, suction, manifold pressure, coolant temp, and the panel clock.

Pan around the cockpit using the mouse or joystick view hat and you'll see the throttle, various toggle switches, trim controls, dials, and other cockpit details, all meticulously rendered in 3D.

Pop to an external view of your aircraft and you'll find a stark contrast to the factory-fresh, crisp appearance inside the cockpit. The aircraft textures are highly detailed, down to paint chips in the camouflage and stains from firing guns. Things get more dramatic when you start taking hits. Holes (both bullet-hole textures and actual transparent holes) appear in the wings, fuselage, and control surfaces. If a wing or control surface is blown off, you'll even see primer-colored structural pieces at the separation point. At one point, the cowling blew off the front of my P-51, exposing the top of the Merlin engine.

Nice Atmosphere

In the version I evaluated four of the flyable aircraft were mostly complete graphically, but there was still a lot of work to be done with the landscape. There were very few objects placed around and only basic city landscapes. Still, the details that were there—trees, cows in open fields, horse-drawn carriages around farms, and tanks and artillery crossing the countryside—were very well done. There's a rolling landscape, but there are only a few sharp changes in terrain elevation, so you probably won't be diving into valleys to dogfight.

The most impressive thing about the environment, though, is the simulation of clouds. The only place you've ever seen clouds like these before is out the window of a 737. With all the details cranked

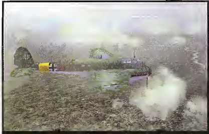
WWII Fighters

GENRE: Flight Sim
RELEASE DATE: Q3 '98
DEVELOPER: EA San Mateo
PUBLISHER: Jane's Combat Simulations

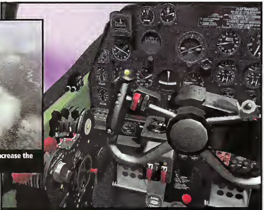
The Reference Desk

The interface in WWII FIGHTERS is a beautifully rendered virtual museum. Here you'll be able to access the various mission types or get more information on the planes and the pilots who flew them. The reference information from Jane's *All the World's Aircraft* is presented nicely, in a far more readable manner than the text in LONGBOW 2 and F-15. You'll also find surprisingly lengthy *Wings*-style videos that give background on the Ardennes battle and the planes flown during it.

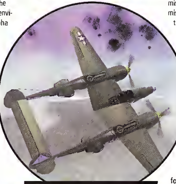
The real gems, though, are the interviews with various WWII aces. Pilots like Francis "Gabby" Gabreski (above), Clarence "Bud" Anderson, and Gunther Rall provide video anecdotes on what it's like to fly the fighters simulated in the game.



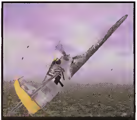
CLOUD NINE The striking cloud layers do much to increase the immersion factor in WWII FIGHTERS.



DELUXE PANELING The 3D virtual cockpit features a full suite of working instruments; take damage and you'll even see broken glass in front of crucial dials.



BLACK SKIES The white clouds below may be harmless, but the black flak bursts could ruin the day for this P-38.



QUITE A MESS This Messerschmitt Bf-109 is about to enter the fray. The sim's flight models are impressive so far.

up, you'll see both cloud layers and individual cumulous ("puffy") clouds. The transition into and out of the clouds is strikingly realistic. The 3D puffy clouds add yet another layer of atmospheric authenticity, but be warned that they may suck a lot of your computer's resources. Turning the 3D cloud layer off (the flat cloud layer still provides a convincing environment) doubled my frame-rate in the alpha version; however, the code may be optimized before the game's release.

Fly Me

Now, we all know that Fernando's old adage, "It is better to look good than to feel good," doesn't apply to sims. So how does WWII FIGHTERS fly? The good news is that the flight models are far more impressive than what we saw at E3 a few months ago. There are five flight-model settings, from "Rookie" to "Wicked." With the realism turned up, I was able to spin and snap-roll the Mustang. Performance seems to be quite accurate, with Me-262 drivers being forced to use boom-and-zoom tactics against slower but more maneuverable Spitfires. If you get into a turning fight, popping out your flaps can help you pull the enemy into your sights. The adjustable enemy AI was still in the works in the version I flew.

The view system is very well done. The virtual cockpit allows a top-notch padlock view, which follows the targeted enemy plane. This is complete with an optional pop-up window, which can help you gauge your plane's attitude. You can also access a set of fixed views from the numeric keypad, or you can use the mouse or view hat to manually look around.

Branches of Service

There are five modes of play: Instant Action, quick missions, single missions, campaign missions, and multiplayer missions. The quick-mission builder is similar to that found in the U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS series, allowing you to choose four sets of up to four aircraft on each side, as well as time of day, weather, and ground targets. Single missions and campaign missions are all set during the Battle of the Ardennes, better known as the Battle of the Bulge. The missions are prescripted (the powerful mission editor is also accessible, which gives you the option of creating your own missions), but your performance will affect the mission that follows. In fact, if your side's performance is poor enough (or good enough, if you're flying for the Axis), the Germans can actually win the battle.

Multiplayer mode should prove very popular. Not only will you be able to fly quick missions over LAN or Internet, but you'll also get to fly cooperative single missions.

All this innovation does come at a price. WWII FIGHTERS will require a good-quality 3D card (the game supports 3Dfx Glide, Direct 3D, and OpenGL) as well as a fairly fast processor. Although the game is stunning at 1024x768 with 3D clouds enabled, you're probably going to want to run at 640x480 with clouds disabled, unless you own a fast Pentium II system. Still, if the crucial computer pilot artificial intelligence comes together in the final product as well as the rest of the sim has so far, a few minutes at the stick of one of this game's fighters may send you out pricing a new PC. CGW

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Caesar III

Watch Your Back in This Ambitious Strategy Sequel

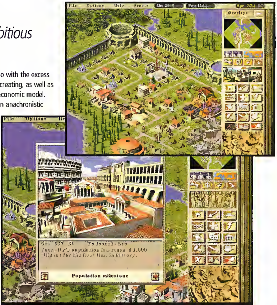
by Johnny L. Wilson

CAESAR III appoints you as the governor of a province during the age of the Roman Republic (fifth century B.C. forward—after the fall of the Etruscans at the end of the sixth century B.C.). As in SIMCITY, you start with a clear landscape with various topographical features and must determine the most efficient layout and growth pattern for a profitable, content, and ever-increasing population. You'll fight entropy in the form of crime, shoddy construction, inefficient protection and power grids, economic factors, and invading enemies.

Success requires considerable tweaking and micromanagement, so it is really more for the SIMCITY 2000 manager than those who enjoyed the original SIMCITY. On the province level, the game is not dissimilar to CAESAR II, but it has significantly better graphics and sound, along with more options.

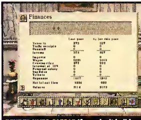
Aedile Pleasures

Unlike CAESAR II, though, CAESAR III really focuses on the city level more than the empire level. Many gamers who purchased CAESAR II really enjoyed the micromanagement required to make the most out of a province in that game, but found the empire level strategies to be disorienting and unsatisfying. In CAESAR III, the perspective of empire is brought to you via both the trade and emperor function. The trade function gives you something to do with the excess goods you are creating, as well as adding to the economic model. The emperor (an anachronistic abstraction representing the two consuls who controlled the Roman Republic during peacetime or the dictator who controlled the republic during military crises, as well as the Caesar of Imperial Rome) demands goods and accomplishments, which must be completed within a certain time frame.



VOX CONSULIS, VOX POPULI You'll build the city in CAESAR III and the simcitizens will determine if you're successful or not by "voting" with their feet. More population is better, since it increases the tax base.

This intervention by the emperor is an interesting touch because it gives you a sense of purpose in the game. SIMCITY always had a tendency to be more free-form; it was more of a toy than a game. CAESAR III avoids this sense of purposelessness by giving you these mini-goals to be fulfilled within certain time frames within the less time-sensitive objectives of the individual scenarios. Unfortunately, in one of the tutorial scenarios in our pre-Alpha version, we found the emperor demanding a shipment of weapons in a scenario in which there was no option to start mining for ore or building a forge. I hope this will be fixed in the final version. Otherwise, this intervention will quickly become annoying and frustrating to gamers.



RENDER UNTO CAESAR If you don't build enough government buildings, the only things sure about CAESAR III are debt and taxes.

As in SIMCITY, building up the quality-of-life is extremely important. In CAESAR III, you can build amphitheaters, theaters, coliseums, fountains, gardens, baths, libraries, and more in order to help citizens feel better about their lives. The animated sequences are delightful and the associated sounds build ambience without being too intrusive. I'm one of those guys who regularly turns off sound and music after the first couple of playings, but I didn't in CAESAR III.

CAESAR III also addresses something that was marginalized in Sid Meier's CIVILIZATION—religion. Much of what we know of Classical Rome, we know with regard to myth as well as embellished history. Can you imagine a Rome without the gods? CAESAR

Caesar III

GENRE: Strategy
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: Impressions Software
PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios

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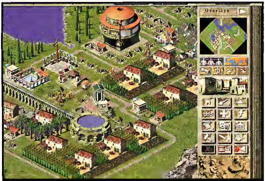


IN VINO VERITAS It takes wheat farms, vineyards, olive groves, and pig farms to recreate Rome's economy. Note that the vineyard and winery are depicted differently from the wheat farm.

III gives you the opportunity of building temples to various gods, as the need arises. It's even amusing at times. At one point, I received a message from Neptune stating that he was going to wipe out my ships if I didn't build a temple to honor him. Upon reading that message, I could just imagine a one-eyed oracle wandering through my city, reading the bloody entrails of a recent sacrifice, and cursing our lack of reverence for the god of the sea. Although that would make for interesting animation, the nice thing about the way religion is integrated into the system is that you know exactly where the effects of neglect are going to ripple through your economic system.

Quaestor Glory

A quaestor was sort of a B.C. Securities and Exchange Commission administrator. For me, one of the most enjoyable features of CAESAR III is the economic model. It's like a combination of SID MEIER'S RAILROAD TYCOON and SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION. The graphics remind me more of the small maps in RAILROAD TYCOON and I always enjoyed the sense of building up the industries and towns flanking the railroad depots in that game. CAESAR III gives me a chance to do so with even more satisfaction. In CAESAR III, you don't merely harvest the forest and start building. Instead, you harvest the forest by building a timber yard. You use the timber to create furniture by building a workshop. You store the furniture in a warehouse. Eventually, you establish a trade route to sell your goods elsewhere. To build weapons, you'll have to mine the ore to fuel the workshop to build the weapons. Pottery moves through the same stages, beginning with the clay pit. The interdependence of the economic food chain is interesting.

Plus, you get a real bonus in CAESAR III. Each economic activity has its own animated sequence. You'll see farmers taking their wheat along the road to the granary and granary workers hauling the grain up into the storehouse. You'll see lumber stacking up in the timber yard and being hauled in carts to the workshop. You'll see clay being hauled to the pottery workshop. Prefects march along the roads, bash rioters in the head, and throw buckets of water on fires. Right-click on citizens and you'll get some idea of their feelings and agenda. The citizen database must be very robust to keep this happening. Further, the path-finding AI seems quite intelligent for these citizens with only one glaring exception in the pre-Alpha we were playing: In our version, the prefects could collide with barbarian citizens and be unable to extricate themselves. Other than that, the movement was remarkable.

Consul of War

The combat sequences were the weakest part of CAESAR II. They weren't truly integrated into the core game and they were more of a distraction than an interesting pastime. In addition to building forts, walls, and military institutions, you'll need to set the formations of your units and direct their attacks. A certain amount of your city's defense will come from the ballistas built in advance, but your orders to various units can be critical.

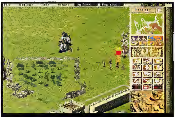
To command your units, you right-click on the group and get a choice of formations. Formations include: the tortoise, line abreast, line in column, regular, and "mop up." Once the formation is selected, you can point-and-click on the target point where you wish to send the units. Unfortunately, in the early version, the cohorts or legions would slavishly go to that specific point rather than engaging the enemy. If the enemy was on the move, it was sometimes difficult to get the units into physical contact. Assuming your subordinate AI gets a little smarter, though, the battles could be considerably more interesting than those in CAESAR II.

The AI for the defenders seems significantly smarter. During some battles, I saw some defenders stand atop the city wall defying the destructive onslaughts of elephants until said heroes died under a crumbling avalanche of rubble as the walls collapsed. This was intensely impressive, to say the least. I also appreciate the automatic defense of the ballistas being able to wear down the attack waves before you were forced to risk too many *gladius*- and *pilum*-bearing (sword- and spear-wielding, respectively) soldiers.

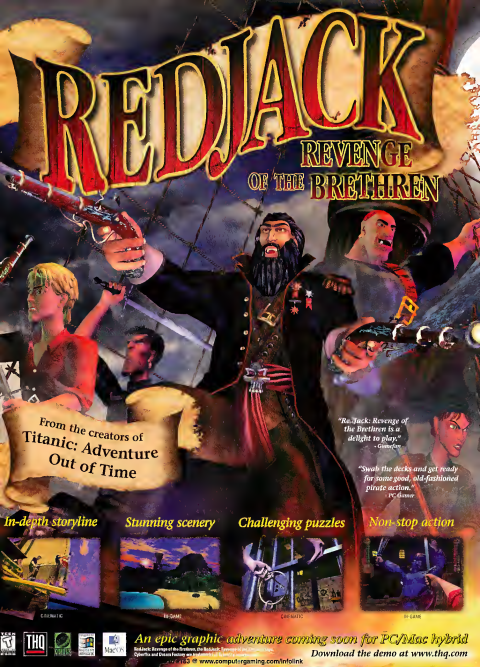
Good Forum

As the deadline for this article looms over my head like the crumbling tenements of ancient Rome, I find myself continually drawn back to the game to take just one more screenshot or try just one more tactic before I put this article to bed. To paraphrase Shakespeare's Antony, "I come to praise CAESAR III, not to bury it."

This early in my experiences with the Republic, I'd say that CAESAR III looks likely to build a bigger empire than even that of CAESAR II.



TRUNK-AIDED CARTHAGINIANS In this battle representing a Punic War era conflict, your cohort won't stand much of a chance against Hannibal's elephants. Note the ballista atop the tower in the lower part of the screenshot.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I HAVE AN ARSENAL OF WEAPONS AT MY FINGERTIPS.
I'VE DESTROYED BUILDINGS IN MY WAY.
SO WHY
I AM ONE WITH THE CROSSHAIRS.
I AM A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH.
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RLD 50%
AMR 50%

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I'VE DRIVEN MY VEHICLES LIKE A MANIAC.
AM I DEAD?
I HAVE THE FIERCE AIR FORCE.
I TORCHED A TAERKAST BIPLANE.
I KNOW HOW TO DEFEND MY HOST STATION.

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West Front

D-Day Approaches for TalonSoft's Revamped Engine

by Loyd Case

The folks at TalonSoft are a lot like American GIs during World War II. When they succeed, they keep pushing forward. If they run into a setback, they drop back, regroup, and come out swinging. Last year, TalonSoft shipped EAST FRONT, which sported an ambitious new tactical turn-based combat engine. The game initially had significant flaws, but TalonSoft has steadily issued patches to address key problems. With WEST FRONT, TalonSoft hopes to substantially tackle the issues of the first game, while adding features that address the unique nature of the Western Front in WWII.

Many Games in One

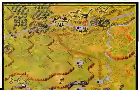
WEST FRONT, like its predecessor, will consist of a large number of battles combined with tools to create individual scenarios. However, TalonSoft is also adding a historical campaign, which should appeal to grognards who want to compare themselves against history—more on that a bit later.

In some ways, WEST FRONT is even more ambitious than EAST FRONT was. It spans the entire history of the Western Front of World War II, from 1939 to 1945—including the North African theater. According to TalonSoft's Bob McNamara, the North African battles are almost a separate game, as the nature of desert warfare differs considerably from combat in the hedgerows of Normandy or the winter forests of Bastogne. In fact, Jim Rose, TalonSoft's CEO, insists that armored combat in the North African desert has the fluidity of naval warfare.

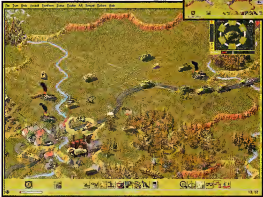
The conclusion I drew from my conversations with McNamara and Rose is that the core engine—the brains of the game, if you will—can accomplish only so much. The heart and soul of the game thus lies in the hands of the scenario designers, a fact that was borne out in a mostly completed scenario that TalonSoft provided on the Omaha Beach landings.

You see, a distinct shortcoming of EAST FRONT's campaign was that each battle would contain only a few victory point locations. The result was that gameplay often resembled a bizarre turn-based strategy genre, as the struggle degenerated into melees around the victory-point hexes.

The Omaha Beach battle in WEST FRONT, however, employs a series of spread-out victory locations. So, when I was playing the Americans hitting the beach, the Germans tended to fight on a diffuse front, which made for a tense, enjoyable scenario. If all the other scenarios are as well designed as Omaha Beach, we're way ahead of EAST FRONT.



SMOOTH HEXSIDES The sloped terrain of WEST FRONT definitely looks better than the "falling off the shelf" effect of EAST FRONT.



SAPPERS, GUNS, AND MONEY It's a good thing that the WEST FRONT engine runs so much faster, since you have to push around so many gorgeous graphics every turn: everything from flaming tanks and panic-stricken infantry to engineers erecting bridges over streams.

Campaign Squared

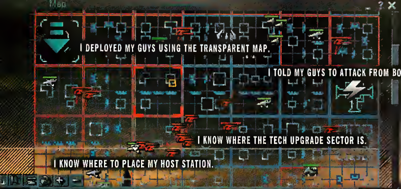
The WEST FRONT team is taking a hard look at the dynamic campaign, one of the main sources of criticism directed at the game engine. McNamara suggested that one feature in the final game would give the gamer limited ability to tweak his forces and their start locations *before* the next battle, much as in STEEL PANTHERS. This would prevent, for example, a battalion from showing up with *five* HQ units. He also alluded to fixes in the overall AI—the opposition forces won't lead with an HQ unit, for example. Dynamic campaigns are planned for Tunisia, the Western Desert, Italy, and Northwestern Europe.

The new type of campaign consists of a series of linked scenarios. You'll be given a unit that's a battalion in a famous unit, such as *Panzerarmee Afrika*. You then take that battalion through a series of historical battles, giving you a chance to see how you compare to your real-life counterparts. The campaign will have some branching, depending on how well you perform, so there may be some hypothetical battles as well (shades of PANZER GENERAL II's invasion of England—if you crush France quickly enough).

Casualties carry over from one battle to the next, but there's also opportunity for replacements. I'm hoping that TalonSoft provides some detailed unit histories to go with the campaign. Historical campaigns include the Big Red One (First Infantry Division in Sicily), Kampfgruppe Peiper at the

West Front

GENRE: Wargame
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: TalonSoft
PUBLISHER: TalonSoft



I DEPLOYED MY GUYS USING THE TRANSPARENT MAP.

I TOLD MY GUYS TO ATTACK FROM BOTH FLANKS.

I KNOW WHERE THE TECH UPGRADE SECTOR IS.

I KNOW WHERE TO PLACE MY HOST STATION.

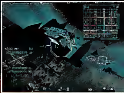
I KNOW WHERE THE POWER STATIONS ARE.

SO WHY AM I STILL DEAD?

I SAW A MYKONIAN CUBOID FORMATION.

I'M BEING SMART ABOUT MY MOVES.

I KNOW WHICH SECTORS ARE SECURE.



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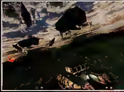

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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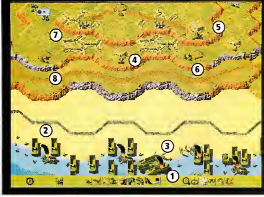
D-Day: Omaha Beach



A TOUGH NUT FOR THE ALLIES TO CRACK

1. The interface allows you to call in supporting air or artillery fire with the click of a button—and you'll need it.

2. U.S. landing craft hit the beach, with infantry drawn to scale.

3. Some landing craft aren't quite so lucky—graphically showing why amphibious assaults were so risky.

4–5. The Germans have placed a variety of pillboxes, some with artillery support, others armed with antitank guns.

6. In addition to the rain of small-arms fire, advancing troops also have to deal with mortar installations.

7. Breastworks and entrenchments dot the landscape, providing plenty of cover for defenders.

8. At least with the new graphics, it's easier to tell where the best defensive slopes are—and which paths to avoid.

Battle of the Bulge, the British Guards Armored Regiment at Arnhem, and the 3rd Recon of the 21st Panzer in North Africa.

The Good War

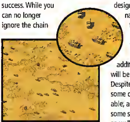
There are quite a few differences between the eastern and western fronts of Europe during WWII, which has led to some serious style modifications in the combat engine. And as is normal for the second game in a series, WEST FRONT sports several technical enhancements to its engine.

Although the graphics appear much the same, there are subtle improvements. Most hexsides are now sloped, giving a more realistic, less choppy appearance to the map. The designers plan to add 3D animations of aircraft making passes during close air support. Unfortunately, the 2D map is still somewhat spartan in appearance.

One feature that should appeal to everyone is the inclusion of paradrops and glider troops. The scale of the game is such that individual platoons scattering during a paradrop will be handled by disrupting the entire unit, rather than trying to account for individual men scattered across terrain. As in the original, the only units in WEST FRONT representing a single man will be leaders; there will be no provisions for snipers.

A feature that tends to puzzle newcomers to the game is supply management. To address some of the confusion, pressing the W key now shows you the best resupply radius (that area in which your unit has a 50 percent or higher probability of being resupplied).

McNamara also let us in on another big change: Units in WEST FRONT will move and fight within a command radius, through the use of command posts. Moving individual units willy-nilly will now be very inefficient—command and control are now paramount to success. While you can no longer ignore the chain of command, you'll now be able to give orders to entire companies, and they'll actually move as a single unit. This change alone should speed up play immensely over that of EAST FRONT.



SHIFTING SANDS **In far-out zoom, these mechanized units are camouflaged nicely; when viewed up-close (inset), you can see a lot of subtle details that weren't available in EAST FRONT.**

McNamara noted that there's no provision in the game engine to account for nationality differences. For example, early in the war, American GIs tended to break easily, but then would reform quickly. This would often confuse German units when an enemy they thought they'd beaten would suddenly hit back hard. So, it's up to the WEST FRONT scenario designers to put their spins on nationality differences, and from what we've seen so far, such designs look likely to happen.

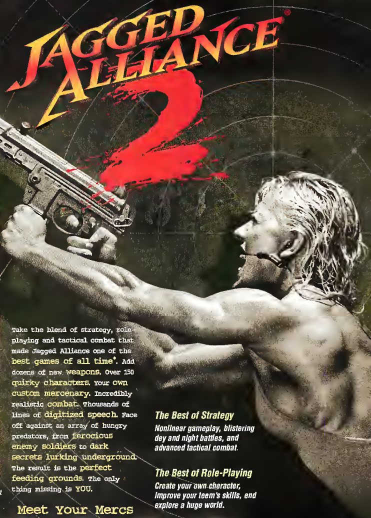
Speaking of scenarios, in addition to the campaigns, there will be 40–50 individual battles. Despite EAST FRONT's problems, some of its battles were enjoyable, and there will no doubt be some sleep lost over WEST FRONT as well, given famous battles such as the Bulge and Arnhem. In addition to scenarios that cover the campaign areas, there will be the usual share of unique battles, like the Italians invading Greece and some hypothetical 1939 battles between the Allies and Germany.

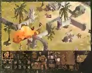
Command and Control, Human-style

One of WEST FRONT's most exciting aspects is its multiplayer option. Instead of the familiar two-player option, the game will support up to eight generals over a LAN or the Internet. One advantage of WEST FRONT's turn-based system is that latency won't be a big issue, as it is with multiplayer real-time strategy games. Each side will have an overall commander who issues orders, determines who gets reinforcements, and handles overall strategy.

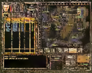
Command and Control is no longer a hypothetical idea. It will be interesting to see how some games play out over the Internet: The simulation of commanders getting orders from afar makes Internet play reflect the real-world issues of distant subordinates. Individual battalion commanders can either choose to follow orders—or not. Just remember—the overall commander determines where the reinforcements go! QUAKE has its clans; maybe wargamers can create virtual combat commands of their own. As for me, I'm looking forward especially to the North Africa battles, but they all sound appealing. Now I just need a few good battalion commanders.... CGW

WELCOME TO THE FEEDING GROUNDS

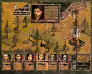




Your mercenaries will climb, swim, jump and crawl their way through blistering firefights.



Fight to free an entire nation – sector by sector, town by town.



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Nonlinear gameplay, blistering day and night battles, and advanced tactical combat.

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Create your own character, improve your team's skills, and explore a huge world.

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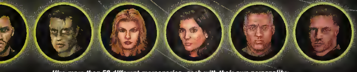

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*Minus the faeries, spells, and other crap.

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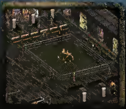

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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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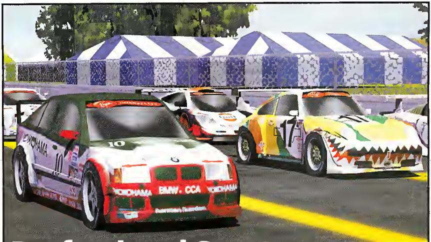


Professional Sports Car Racing

Setting the Pace for the Next Generation of Racing Games

DEJA FUEL Both the technical specifications and the appearance of the cars (except for the lack of alcohol and tobacco ads) are as close as possible to the real cars in the Professional Sports Car Racing Association.

By Johnny L. Wilson

You don't expect to see mechanics in one of the sponsor's luxury boxes between races. Even if you did, you wouldn't expect to see them huddled around a computer watching a beautiful brunette play a driving game. And even if you expected to see all that, you still wouldn't expect to see them laughing as smoke rose from the tires of a picture-perfect image of an expensive Porsche spinning out of control into a guard rail.

You wouldn't expect that, of course, unless you knew that this was the owner, head mechanic, and pit crew of a rival BMW team watching the product manager for Virgin's PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING demonstrate the game at the Las Vegas Speedway earlier this year. They then watched their own BMW go through its paces. They were impressed with the realistic look of the car and they were impressed with the way it handled. The members of the BMW team quickly agreed to let Virgin put their car in the game—and just as readily agreed to give the company plenty of technical specifications to make the car handle even more realistically in every circumstance.

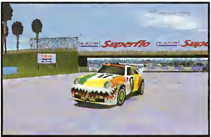
Professional Sports Car Racing

GENRE: Sports
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: Virgin
PUBLISHER: Virgin

Such was my first encounter with PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING. I listened to the mechanics ask questions and I heard the producer, Chris Dudas, offer the right answers. I waited for the pros to leave and then tried my hand at the game. Having just taken a ride in the pace car, I thought I knew the Vegas track fairly well. Not at high speeds, I didn't! Skid marks painted the track as I spun out of control on my first attempt to navigate the tight curves in the Vegas infield. For the first time, I began to realize that Virgin intended to create a real simulation instead of the arcade racers on which the company had cut its 3D teeth.

Taking the Wheel

I decided to redeem myself. I had the Virgin gang load up the Road Atlanta track. This was one I'd driven myself. I knew where the braking points should be and I



PORSCHE SURROUNDINGS The bold paint job of the #17 Porsche sparkles on the track at Sebring, Florida.

Odds of landing this move: 10 to 1.
Odds of fathering children afterwards: 1,000,000 to 1.
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Sick stunts and even sicker crashes. 16 get-some-serious-air stunts, like the outrageous Heel Clicker and insane Nac-Nac. Loads of notify-your-next-of-kin wipeouts. Either way you land it, you're a crowd favorite.

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What makes a phat ride? Physics. Separate physics models for rider and bike mean you can pull wheelies out of the gate, dive into hairpin turns, and showboat during your Big Kahuna stunt (as if the Big Kahuna ain't showboaty enough).

Choose a track. Or not. Over 30 tracks, including Supercross, Nationals, Baja, and the dreaded Stunt Quarry, plus off-track terrain that's so hairy you may find yourself saying, "Track? What track?"

Boredom is a four-letter word. You'll constantly admire the mind-messingly photorealistic environment, whether you're face-down in the dirt or 20 feet in the air. And keep it all fresh with a built-in track editor and 8-person multiplayer capability.

Motocross Madness™ requires a 3-D card.

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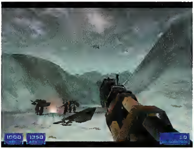
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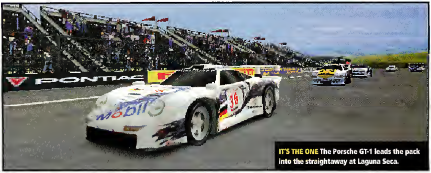


IT'S THE ONE The Porsche GT-1 leads the pack into the straightaway at Laguna Seca.

figured I could find the racing line fairly easily. This one was significantly better, thank you very much. The track was just as I remembered it—save for two small details. The "S" was slightly constricted in the game. The real track lets you cheat through it on a line if you get the right angle and there's no one beside you (fat chance!). The game didn't. Also, the game didn't give you that feeling of falling away to the right as did that final curve before the grandstands on the real track. The producer promised to check on those points and we looked at other tracks.

Sebring! Ah, there was a surprise. I don't ever remember a PC racing game that allows you to change drivers in mid-race.

If you want to drive a realistic 12-hour race at Sebring, the program is supposed to let you change drivers and have the AI spell you. The producers admit that they don't know if anyone actually will drive the full 12-hour Sebring race, but they are planning for it, and that sounds like a neat feature—even if it is rarely used. Someone needs to do something for the fanatics, and I'm glad Virgin wants to do it.

Back in the Garage

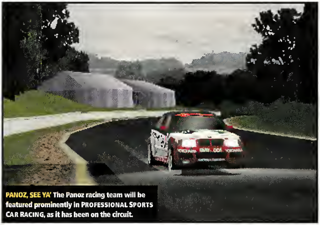
For the detail-oriented, Virgin is already able to confirm that speedways at Sebring, Mossport, Las Vegas, Road Atlanta, Laguna Seca, and Lime Rock will be in the game. Night driving and weather will play intricate roles at each of the tracks. Drivers will be able to choose from GT3 to GT1 cars, from an assortment of actual Porsche, BMW, and Panoz team cars. The cars look great and are faithful to the actual appearances, except for the omission of tobacco and alcohol advertising.

Setup isn't quite as robust as in some of the Papyrus games or in CART RACING, but it is sufficient. Time in the garage will enable gamers to adjust brake balance, weight distribution, starting fuel, gear ratios for 1–6 gears, front air dam, and rear wing. In addition, there are specific front and rear settings for ride height, tire pressure and compound, spring tension, camber, bump, and rebound. So, there is plenty of tinkering to do and a chance to get an edge at each track by having the optimal setup. Everything is easily handled via sliders, and all racing setups can be saved for future use.

What's the Difference?

Many gamers will want to know what the difference is between this and other racing games. Like others in its class, PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING offers race replay from multiple angles, plenty of setup options, a quick race feature for those who don't want to go through qualifying, and a career mode. In addition, it offers a look at sports car racing, a form of professional racing that's very accessible to most of us. We can identify with the idea of driving a Porsche or BMW, even if we can't afford one. Finally, PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING offers a unique racing experience in the lengthy races where drivers change.

We don't know how good the driver AI is going to be or how well the simulation will handle caution flags, but we do believe that PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING is going to win the checkered flag with a lot of race fans if those features are well-implemented. Folks at Virgin hope it will put them in the winner's circle for good.



PANOZ, SEE YA' The Panoz racing team will be featured prominently in PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAR RACING, as it has been on the circuit.

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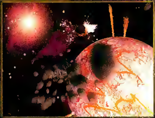

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101: The 101st Airborne in Normandy

This Air Assault Takes a Few Chances

by Marc Dultz

Although dozens of U.S. combat divisions saw action in the European Theatre of operations during World War II, one elite formation—the 101st Airborne—came to symbolize the resolve of the American Army; they demonstrated the skill, flexibility, and sheer tenacity of the average serviceman. Involved in several of the most climactic battles of the war, the legendary Screaming Eagles would inevitably play a decisive role in both the Market-Garden and Battle of the Bulge campaigns, time and again smashing the Axis juggernaut and helping to pave the way to total Allied victory.

Of all its heroic deeds, however, the 101st was most acclaimed for its pivotal role during D-Day. Dropped onto the Norman countryside in the early-morning hours leading up to the invasion, these gallant men were called upon to seize vital objectives, destroy as many German units as possible, and generally cause confusion in the enemy's rear area. Without them, the fortunes of war could have easily been reversed.

101: The 101st Airborne in Normandy

GENRE: Wargame
RELEASE DATE: Q4 '98
DEVELOPER: Interactive Simulations Inc.
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive

Air Assault 101

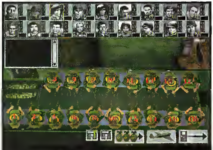
In 101: THE 101ST AIRBORNE IN NORMANDY, publisher Empire Interactive and developer Interactive Simulations have teamed up to recreate the storied exploits of the Screaming Eagles, portraying—in rather stark and sometimes brutal fashion—the paratroopers' role within the framework of the D-Day invasion. Although the game attempts to remain faithful to the history of the invasion, certain events and engagements have been altered to preserve the overall flow of the game and play balance.

Serving as a squad commander, you are charged with selecting, paradropping, and leading a "stick" of 18 paratroopers behind enemy lines. You and your troops must then locate and fulfill your primary mission objective within a prescribed period of time. Landing scattered, sometimes injured, and often miles away from your main objective, you and your men must come to grips with many of the same hazards the real-life soldiers faced in the crucible of battle.

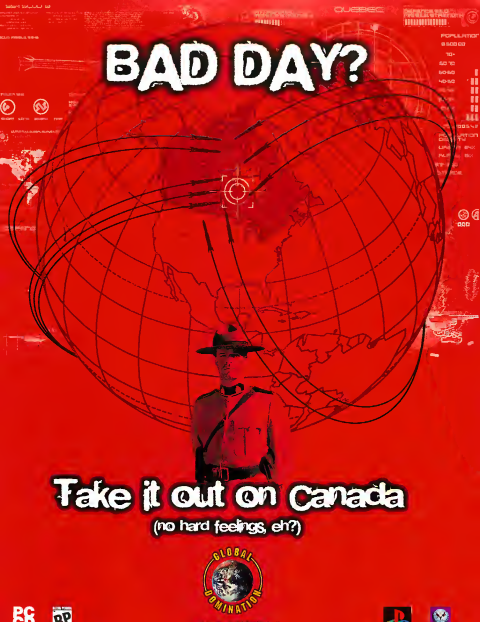
First, you must determine where the bulk of your forces have landed in the early morning darkness, and in the process eliminate any local opposition within the immediate drop zone. After securing the landing site, you must quickly coordinate remaining forces, determine which troopers can perform certain critical functions, and decide how to best accomplish the mission at hand. To this end, the troopers must immediately scour the countryside to find their weapon and supply caches: two all-important equipment bags that parachuted with them during the initial drop. Afterward, you'll dole out all of the heavy weapons, ammunition, provisions, and other gear to the remaining members in the group, being careful not to waste anything, since re-supply may not be possible during the mission.

To finally move toward the primary objective, you must identify, with some degree of confidence, distinguishing terrain features found on the tactical map, then compare this information with data provided on the strategic map. After fixing the objective's position, the squad must then proceed with haste toward it, being careful to avoid prolonged entanglements with the enemy, since skirmishes inevitably sap the squad of precious men and materiel.

The squad may be ordered to link up with French Resistance fighters in the area, or to join with other units, allying themselves with men that may be lost or following a different set of orders.



PARADANCE If you fail to give thought to the arrangement of your officers and specialists on the transport plane, you run the risk having them separated from the main group—which provides a nice touch of realism and challenging gameplay.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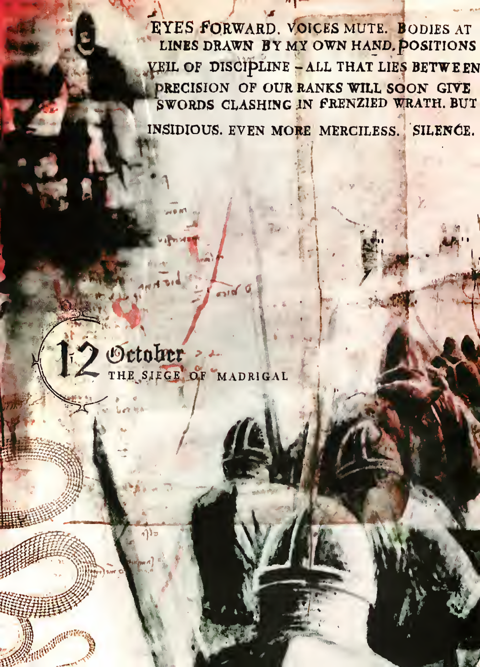
PRECISION OF OUR RANKS WILL SOON GIVE
SWORDS CLASHING IN FRENZIED WRATH. BUT
INSIDIOUS. EVEN MORE MERCILESS. SILENCE.



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WAY TO SCREAMS GURGLING FROM BLOODY MOUTHS AND
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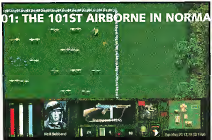
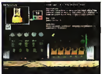
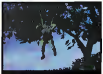
101: THE 101ST AIRBORNE IN NORMANDY



MOVE OUT! Each soldier can stand, crouch, lay prone, crawl, walk, run, and even hide.



GOVERNMENT ISSUE Beyond the basic gear, each trooper's load contains two chutes, a "Mae West" life jacket, and some spare clothing.



SILK STALKINGS This trooper would be wise to cut himself down quickly, before a German squad spots his chute.

While reinforcements are always welcome, it should be pointed out that these units could also end up sidetracking your squad from its primary objective.

Look Before You Leap

101 uses neither an isometric nor a 3D perspective to portray the battlefield, opting instead to use a series of expansive overhead maps, similar to the type employed in CLOSE COMBAT. Even more remarkable, 101 is turn-based, instead of the more fluid real-time system embraced by many of today's strategy games. Tim Brooks, founder and president of ISI, explains why he elected to buck the trend:

"There are basically two reasons. The first has to do with the AI. The real-time gaming engines of today don't allow for a very intelligent computer opponent. There isn't time for the detailed calculations necessary for an intelligent AI. The second reason, which is just as important, has to do with a true strategy game. 101 is designed to appeal to the pure strategy gamer. Being a boardgamer from way back, I wanted the strategy element to be strong, as it is in boardgames. I think we have accomplished this, while at the same time developing 101 to appeal to a more casual gaming audience."

Each turn in the game represents 20 seconds, while each terrain tile measures approximately six feet across. Beyond the game system, players will no doubt be struck by the incredible depth of play and enormous attention to detail in virtually every facet of the game. In fact, just about every imaginable aspect of a paradrop operation has been painstakingly modeled, beginning with the briefing and outfitting phase back in England, and continuing to the actual airdrop on French soil.

First, you choose which of nine different types of missions to attempt, which range in scope and scale from the seizure of an important bridge to the blowing of a fuel depot. Next, you can choose to let the computer autoselect the 18 paratroopers who will comprise the stick, or you can handpick each man from the more than 40 different enlisted men and officers portrayed in the game. Each soldier possesses different personality traits, skills, and special training, rated in various categories from intelligence and endurance to weapons usage and throwing ability. Certain soldiers can even speak French or German, invaluable skills should the mission entail having to interrogate prisoners or converse with the locals.

Players then move on to the armory and quartermaster's office, where they outfit each soldier or let the computer handle it for them. Again, the lengths to which the designers went are incredible. For example, you must carefully consider not only which type of weapon each soldier will take into battle, but also whether or not he's toting cleaning patches, water canteens, two types of field rations, and even personal items. How's that for authenticity?

Once the soldiers have been properly outfitted, squad members must board a transport aircraft for their date with destiny. Just prior to takeoff, you choose where each soldier will sit on the airplane, since a soldier's seat assignment ultimately determines the order in which each paratrooper will exit the aircraft. Let's assume you bunch together several officers or explosive experts in one section of the transport plane. If the plane is subjected to flak or drifts off course during the critical jump phase, several members of the squad may become separated from the group with no hope of ever rejoining their squad mates.

When it's finally time for the soldiers to hit the silk, each man in the stick steps into the doorway then hurls himself into the ominous void. One by one, a series of .AVI files vividly depicts how each soldier fared during the jump. Most land without a scratch and can cut loose from their chutes and make ready for battle moments after touchdown. Others aren't so fortunate and drift off course, while others crash into trees or buildings. Some soldiers may fracture a limb on impact, while the truly luckless hang like limp targets for any German snipers that may be lying in wait. It's a brutal scene, no doubt, but one that accurately reflects the perils of a nighttime drop into hostile territory.

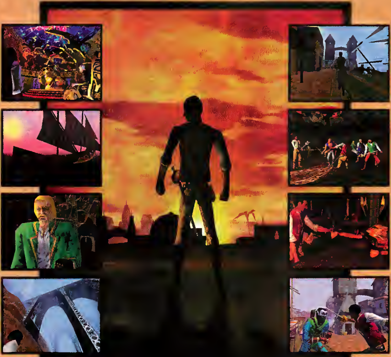
Once the troops are on the ground, the gamer then controls the actions of each soldier. Action points are expended to perform various functions, conduct movement, exchange items and, when the case warrants, fire at the enemy. It's a familiar, tried-and-true system that seems to work especially well given the level of detail depicted in this simulation.

Death From Above?

101 has a long way to go before it earns its jump wings as a combat simulation. Still, what we've seen so far makes us believe that this could turn out to be one of the most exacting portrayals yet of men in combat—exemplifying in graphic detail the trials and tribulations of that unsung warrior of World War II, the paratrooper. CGW

NEXT STOP, BERLIN 101 provides a wide variety of missions, such as ensuring that German reinforcements never reach the front.

ONE MAN AGAINST AN EMPIRE



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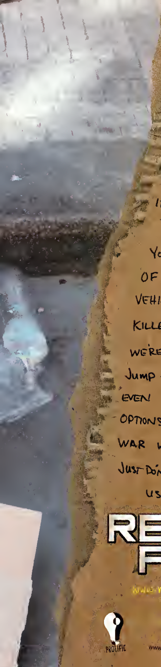

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Twelve New Fantasy Games Take You to Other Worlds for Mind-bending Exploration and Heart-pounding Combat

Reality stinks: Bills, traffic jams, George Clooney movies. It's enough to drive some people to drink, and other people straight off to other worlds entirely.

Take us, for example. Confronted with the mundane assignment of, say, writing the opening text for a *CGW* cover story, one writer took refuge instead in his favorite fantasy realm, MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, bravely slaying a horde of angry dwarves while searching for a magic artifact. Who cares about deadlines when there's treasure to plunder?

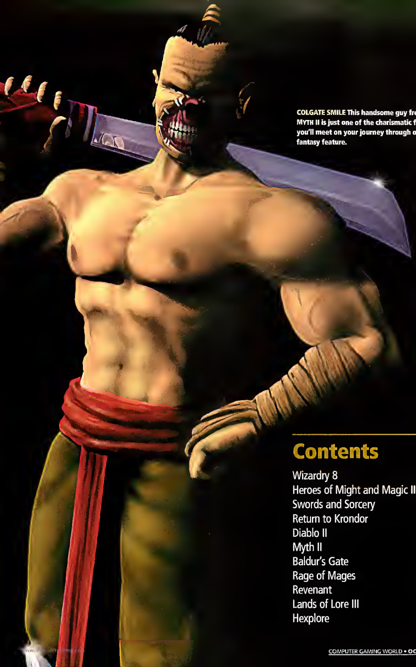
Fantasy can offer much more than simple escape. From J.R.R. Tolkein and C.S. Lewis to modern practitioners such as Raymond E. Feist and comic book artists Linda Medley (*Castle Waiting*) and Jeff Smith (*Bone*), the best fantasy stories explore the most ageless of themes: honor, courage, loyalty, and trust; bonding with others in times of adversity, and sacrificing oneself for the greater good. Plus lots of head-bashing and guts-impaling.

The best fantasy computer games play off such themes as well. Slipping into the worlds of WIZARDRY or MYTH or DIABLO, gamers can plunge into situations far removed from dreary reality, where axe-wielding is a prized skill, where magic—both good and evil—is a fact of life, and where every deed fulfilled is rewarded with a pot of gold.

With the success of recent titles such as MIGHT AND MAGIC VI and FINAL FANTASY VII, the fantasy genre is well represented on the PC these days, and in the coming months it's going to get a whole lot better.

In the following pages, we take a look at some of the most highly anticipated projects, including Sir-Tech's WIZARDRY 8 and Virgin's SWORDS AND SORCERY, as well as some very worthy titles you might never have heard of. Most are role-playing games, but two of the games, MYTH II and HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III, are strategy games steeped in high fantasy.

So ready your armor and weaponry, Grasshopper, and follow us now on our quest for the best fantasy games for the coming year.



COLGATE SMILE This handsome guy from MYTH II is just one of the charismatic fellows you'll meet on your journey through our fantasy feature.

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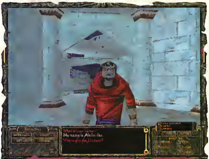
WIZARDRY 8

Life, Chaos, and the Knowledge of Everything

by Johnny L. Wilson

Return with me now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. No, I'm not talking about the days of Trebor and Werdna in the earliest WIZARDRY games. Return with me to the conclusion of WIZARDRY 7: CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT, the last game in D.W. Bradley's trilogy that began with WIZARDRY V. At that conclusion, you discovered that the secret of life is matter infused with energy in the correct proportion.

In WIZARDRY 8, you discover that the Astral Dominae (the ultimate artifact of life which was incarnated in WIZARDRY 6: BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE, and which the Dark Savant recovered at the end of WIZARDRY 7) is not the only artifact crafted by Phoonzang, the Cosmic Lord. Indeed, Phoonzang also shaped the Chaos Moliri (the ultimate artifact of change, currently in the possession of the Mook, those dog-like creatures introduced in WIZARDRY 6) and the Destinae Dominae (the cosmic cache of all knowledge).



What is your name?
My name is Aletheides.
Where are the Umpani?

TRUTH TO TELL In NPC encounters, such as this one with Aletheides (whose name is rooted in the Greek word "truth"), you'll use the parser or keyword list to discover if NPCs are telling the truth.

The last artifact was hidden by a madman on a planet called Dominus. Phoonzang had hoped that the artifacts were hidden beyond the reach of mortal hands. Unfortunately, chaos and entropy have caused those talismans of power to become accessible once more.

Indeed, at a time when the Cosmic Lords are preparing for the Ascension (an apotheosis unseen in our world since the physical demise of L. Ron Hubbard), a tremendous wave of would-be successors are converging on the planet Dominus.

Wizard of "Ha"s

So, in the grand tradition of the previous WIZARDRY adventures, magic and technology meld in a strange blend of medieval hack-and-slash, enhanced by just enough science-fiction to keep gamers from getting complacent. The indigenous races on Dominus are low-tech, the spacefarers chasing the three grails of Phoonzang are definitely high-tech.

Indeed, the high-tech races introduce the possibility of a new character class—the Gadgeteer. The Gadgeteer's best special ability (each character class and each race has its own special abilities) is the capacity to merge items together, a cosmic cross between Rube Goldberg, Doc Savage, and Inspector Gadget.

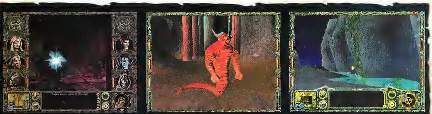
As always, the WIZARDRY background and plot line allow enough comic (or should that be "cosmic?") relief so that a lighter tone overall exists in this universe than in most role-playing universes.

Part of the fun is in conversation. Characters will talk to the rest of the party and to the leader, as did the characters in JAGGED ALLIANCE. Better than in JA, however, you'll be able to choose the voices for members of your party. When you create characters, you'll choose a voice sample and the personality that goes with it. The personality choice will determine whether the characters provide comic relief or an obnoxious counterpoint to your leadership.

WIZARDRY 8 doesn't always have a light hand, however. Brenda Garno, the long-time WIZARDRY expert who has taken over the reins of the series, is keenly interested in character interaction. At times, you'll be faced with moral dilemmas and conflicting agendas. At other

WIZARDRY 8

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: [illegible]



VIEW MASTER You'll be able to choose between a traditional, full-screen, or modified interface screen as you explore WIZARDRY 8.

times, you may face illness or possession by another being or spirit. You may have to deal with a kidnapping. You might merely have to decide whether to trust a non-player character (NPC). You might even end up killing the NPC who was placed in a situation in order to warn you about an upcoming trap or offer a clue about a puzzle you'll need to solve. Of course, sometimes NPCs will lie to you.

NPCs are built around an evolving knowledge database. Many have a need-based agenda of their own and this is continually modified by what gets discovered in the course of the game and how that information is traded. This means that you could feasibly have an encounter with an NPC at any point in the game. The NPC encounter structure even has an elaborate system for trading information and items, as well as for sorting through any of the existing knowledge database by letter, person, item, time, place, or other. You can type in questions using the traditional parser system or you can click on keywords in the keyword list. Best of all, you can customize the keyword list according to what you learn in the game.

You can also recruit up to two NPCs to join your party. Of course, they won't always want to join your party; and even if they do, they won't always stay long. Sometimes, they'll even steal some of your hard-earned goodies, but the logical behavior and individual agendas of the NPCs add to the credibility, as well as enjoyability, of the WIZARDRY 8 universe.

Wizard of "Ah"s

WIZARDRY 8's new C++-based engine allows for more flexibility than ever before. Naturally, it follows the de rigeur trend of providing a smooth-scrolling 3D perspective with full D3D and Open GL support. Gamers will also have a choice of three different screen sizes (which they can change at any point in the game). One screen has character portraits and iconic attribute information for every member of the party, framing the action window or first-person perspective. The player's command is augmented by an extremely intuitive interface along the bottom of the screen. In that interface, you get a dynamic overhead view showing the party's relative position and threat detection on a more strategic map, the traditional WIZARDRY text descriptions of each battle round, and a directional view that shows the party's facing with regard to threats—much like a flight-sim's radar instrumentation.

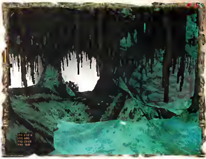
Sounds just like the WIZARDRY 7 look with smooth-scrolling and a couple of new features, doesn't it?

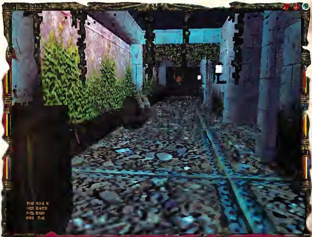
Wrong. This is not your ancestor's WIZARDRY. You can also opt for a wide-screen view where you get a bigger action window, but only have attribute sliders and an abbreviation for each character framing the sides of the action. You still have the helpful interface below, but have more room in the combat window. Or, you also have the option of a full-screen view where the interface disappears entirely. You'll still be able to call it up when you need it, but most of the time, it's out of your way.

Most importantly, the new engine allows for some extremely asymmetrical environments. Mountain paths are uneven and narrow, towns and fortresses feel more like actual architecture, and large structures offer a true sense of proportion. In addition, the game features nearly 90 spells, and more than 3/4 of those spells have unique spell effects, complete with dynamic lighting. WIZARDRY 8 has plenty of visual pizzazz to spare.

Wizard of Pause

The philosophy underlying WIZARDRY 8's combat system has





ENGINEERING FEAT **WIZARDRY 8's new engine allows for interesting territories, such as a sea cave (top), and large interiors, such as this passageway.**

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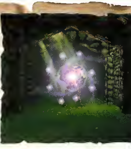
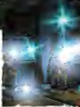
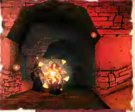
only changed slightly. Instead of hopping on the real-time bandwagon, WIZARDRY 8 has opted to stay with phased combat. This allows for better management and more tactical nuances. (Remember, phased combat isn't just taking turns. It's applying action points and initiative to determine who can get in the first shots and who can perform multiple attacks per round.) Realizing, however, that there is a new generation of gamers that doesn't have the patience of the hard-core role-players, the new game also features a "continuous combat" system. Once you've input your basic tactics, the party will continue to use those tactics without having to have round-by-round input from you as the player. Better yet, this is not a one-time decision made at the start of the game, but you'll be able to move freely back and forth between the combat systems according to your mood or needs.

My favorite change in combat, however, is the ability to perform preemptive long-range combat before the bad guys or monsters are in tactical range. It never made sense to me that I had to wait until the party was at swordpoint to unleash a game's version of the Nuclear Blast spell on unwitting opponents who blunder into my sphere of influence. I also like the fact that the new magic interface allows you to determine whether to put all of your spellcaster's strength in one massive attack or to divide up the attacks among smaller opponents. The new magic interface is a considerable improvement over previous games.







MYSTIC PIZZAZZ **The new spell effects for psionic blast (top), magic missiles (middle), and fireball (bottom), illustrate WIZARDRY 8's dynamic lighting effects.**

Another welcome change is the program's ability to switch targets automatically. Assume you're underwater and fighting a school of razor-toothed Baruta fish. You choose the optimal attack forms for each of your characters and proceed to wipe out one of the fish during the first round of combat. Previously, you would have had to make all of the same choices for the next target before proceeding. Now, the program merely follows through and applies your attack choices to the next closest target in the group of monsters.

All of which leads to the most important combat change in the game. The monster AI is much smarter than in previous games. Monsters navigate around each other, avoid collisions, and *hunt you down*. They run away when they have no chance of winning, and they know how to use ranged combat to ambush *you*. Plus, the database underlying the monster creation is such that they may not only have multiple attacks per round, but multiple types of attacks. For example, a crocodile's teeth would do cutting and biting damage, but the tail is basically a club that does crushing and bludgeoning damage.

Finally, though it may be obvious, each weapon is databased in such a way that you will only be able to choose attack options that make sense for the type of damage that weapon can do. WIZARDRY 8 is much more robust in this area than previous WIZARDRY games have been.

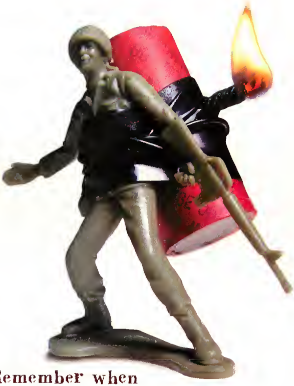
Wizard of Laws

Early (pre-alpha) experimentation with WIZARDRY 8 indicates several probabilities. First, WIZARDRY 8 looks to be more than a worthy successor to its heritage—this game could be a defining moment in the series. Second, WIZARDRY 8 seems likely to offer the richest RPG experience yet. Third, WIZARDRY 8 is sure to miss first quarter of '99 and head into mid-year. Fourth, it seems almost certain that Sir-Tech Canada, Ltd., the developer of the game, will become a major developer—even if Sir-Tech Software ceases to be a full-service publisher. Fifth, and finally, it seems very probable that at least three editors at *CGW* will lose more than 100 hours of their lives on this game. It's that magical.

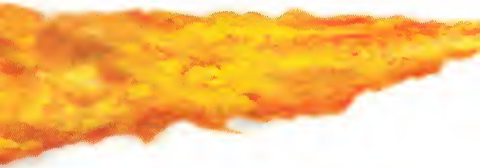
Defining Personality in WIZARDRY 8

When creating a character in WIZARDRY 8, you'll need to consider psychological factors. Personality generation is basically a quick-click process. You choose the general description of your character, modify that by a specific qualifier, and then choose a sample portrait, voice type, and sample quotation. Following is a chart of the personality descriptions and qualifiers.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION	*SPECIFIC QUALIFIERS*
Tough	Aggressive All Muscle Burly Leader Chaotic
Intellectual	Eccentric Arrogant Kindly Smug
Sly	Con Artist Cunning Loner
Carefree	Laid-back Clown
Other	Nervous Savage Thrill Seeker



Remember when
you used to
torture these guys?



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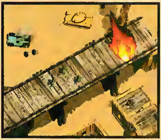

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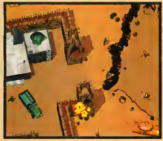

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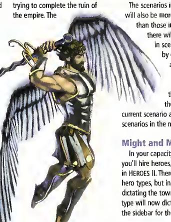
HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III

Everything Gets Bigger and Better in New World's HEROES II Sequel

by Elliott Chin

The best turn-based strategy franchise in recent years is about to get even better. HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III is slated for a December release, and it looks like HEROES II on steroids. Jon Van Caneghem, the creator of both the MIGHT AND MAGIC and HEROES series, says that HEROES III will be bigger and better than HEROES II, but it will be similar enough to keep that HEROES feel. It's more than just HEROES II with new graphics. The entire town and heroes model has changed, and the spells, monsters, and artifacts have been beefed up with plenty of additions.



The Third Chapter

If you've played MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, you know that New World is now tying its HEROES and MIGHT AND MAGIC series together with a common story. The story in HEROES II led to MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, which in turn leads us to HEROES III. In MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, we discovered that Queen Catherine left Enroth shortly before King Ironfist disappeared at the beginning of the game. At the end of MIGHT AND MAGIC VI, we were still left to wonder what had become of Queen Catherine. In HEROES III, we find out that Queen Catherine returned to her home of Erathia to find her father dead and the land in disarray. As she sets about trying to rebuild her father's empire, she finds a mysterious undead enemy at her doorstep trying to complete the ruin of the empire. The mysterious figure turns out to be the raised body of her father. Now, Queen Catherine needs your aid to destroy the evil armies, lay her father to rest, and restore the empire to its former glory.

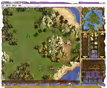
The campaign for HEROES III is a little different from that of HEROES II. Instead of a large campaign, the game's story will be told through six minicampaigns that are split into three acts. Act I has three minicampaigns that you can play in any order. In each campaign, you'll play from a different side—Catherine's, the enemy's, or a neutral side—so you see the war from three different perspectives. Act II has two minicampaigns, one in which you play for Catherine's side and one in which you play for the enemy. Act III is the last minicampaign, and here you play Catherine's general in the final showdown against her undead father. Each minicampaign will have from three to four scenarios.

The scenarios in each campaign will also be more story-oriented than those in HEROES II. Now, there will be quests within scenarios. Basically, by entering special adventure sites, you'll be given optional quests that might affect the outcome of the current scenario and successive scenarios in the minicampaign.

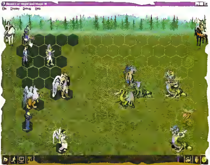
Might and Magic

In your capacity as a general, you'll hire heroes, just as you did in HEROES II. There are now 16 hero types, but instead of the hero dictating the town type, the town type will now dictate the hero (see the sidebar for the castle and hero types). Basically, each town produces two hero types. At the Castle, for instance, you can hire a knight or cleric. At the Tower you can hire wizards or alchemists. Of all the HEROES II hero types, only the sorceress does not make an appearance in HEROES III.

The heroes' abilities will also be more differentiated. The HEROES II skills return, but with 10 new types. Certain skills will be available only to certain hero types. For



WORLD WITHOUT END HEROES III's world maps are going to look like a lusher version of what we're used to, along with a number of underground sites to explore.



PARTY FOR YOUR RIGHT TO FIGHT Bigger combat screens, tougher monsters, more spells—all this and more means we'll soon be up all night again, battling it out in HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III.

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]
DEVELOPER: N[illegible]
PUBLISHER: 3DO

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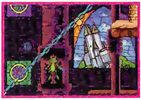

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example, you can select the Battle Tactics skill for the knight and barbarian, but not for the wizard.

You'll also be able to personalize heroes via equipment. Instead of just dumping artifacts on a hero, you'll now equip them on a "paper doll." Each hero will now be able to wield one weapon, a suit of armor, a shield, and a few rings or other special items. You'll no longer be able to load up on multiple weapons, but there will now be more artifacts (their number increased from 64 to 128) to distribute among your heroes. And some of the artifacts can be combined for greater effects.

The spell system is also improving. Now, all spells fall into four schools of magic: air, earth, fire, and water. While the Wisdom skill will still determine what level of spells you can learn, the Elemental skills will determine the skill at which you cast those spells. Greater proficiency in an Elemental skill will mean greater effects for your magic. So, even though a knight might be able to cast spells via Wisdom, he will never learn fire magic, and thus never be able to cast fire spells as well as a wizard. This added level of learning means there will be even more powerful grades of magic and more differentiation between spellcasting and fighter-style heroes.

Call to Arms

Combat in HEROES III will be bigger. Both heroes and towns will have seven slots for troops. To accommodate the greater number of slots in a stack, the tactical map will nearly double in size. There will also be more terrain nodes that could affect movement or attack on the battlefield.

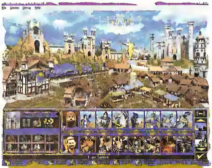
The monsters you'll command will also be beefed up. Now there are 59 creatures, and every monster type has an upgraded form—for a total of 118 monsters. Those upgrades won't just be different-colored creatures, however. The upgraded beasts will be re-rendered (HEROES III uses 3D prerendered monsters) and will sport new attacks and animation.

Heroes will now also be able to purchase more war machines to bring into battle. In addition to the catapult from HEROES II, you'll be able to buy a ballista that will shoot at troops behind enemy walls, a first-aid tent that will regenerate the hit points of the first unit-group in your stack, and an ammo cart that provides unlimited ammunition to your ranged troops. You won't be able to have more than one of each type, but you can load up on all four war machines for battle.

The Economic Side

The enhancements in HEROES III extend to the towns themselves. Now, there will be more buildings to increase your economy. Each town will have a town hall that can be upgraded for increased gold and creature production (like a combo of the statue and well but with upgrade opportunities). The town's defenses can likewise be upgraded, from simple walls to a moat and missile tower to two more towers and fortifications. Each town can also build a market place with a resource silo that adds a resource bonus for that town's native resource-type. For example, the castle town (knights and clerics) gets a gold bonus, while the tower town (wizards and alchemists) gets a mercury bonus.

Every town will also have some blacksmith who can build the new war machines. However, a town will offer only one machine type. The knight blacksmith can build catapults while the wizard blacksmith offers first-aid tents.



TOUGH TOWN Like everything else in the game, the towns are being beefed up with more units and expanded with many more options. See that floating city in the sky? That's home to the angels and archangels—the game's toughest new units.

Each town will also have some special, advanced building. One town type can build artifact artisans, a building that allows you to buy or sell artifacts. Another town type can build a freelancer's guild, which allows you to sell creatures. Yet another town type has the Portal of Summoning, which basically gives you a bonus creature pool for one type of creature home you control on the global map.

Other additions to the global map will be more adventure sites, including quest sites, as well as entrances to the underground worlds of HEROES III. Many scenarios in HEROES III will have underground sections, which can sometimes double the map sizes.

Good Tidings

It's seems like an eternity since HEROES II shipped, and many strategy fans have been yearning for another good turn-based strategy game to play. With all the promise it holds and the addictive quality it's sure to possess, HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III might just give us fantasy junkies that fix we so desperately need. Let's hope all goes well between now and the game's projected release date in December.

Towns and Heroes

Here are the eight different town types, the heroes they support, and some monster examples per town:

Town	*Heroes*	*Sample Units*
Castle	Knight, Cleric	Cavalier, Archangel
Tower	Wizard, Alchemist	Archmage, Genie
Rampart	Druid, Elf	Battle dwarf, Gold dragon
Inferno	Demoniak, Heretic	Hellhound, Devil
Necropolis	Necromancer, Death knight	Vampire, Ghost dragon
Dungeon	Warlock, Overlord	Beholder, Black dragon
Stronghold	Barbarian, Battlemage	Wolf rider, Cyclops
Fortress	Witch, Beastmaster	Basilisk, Chaos hydra

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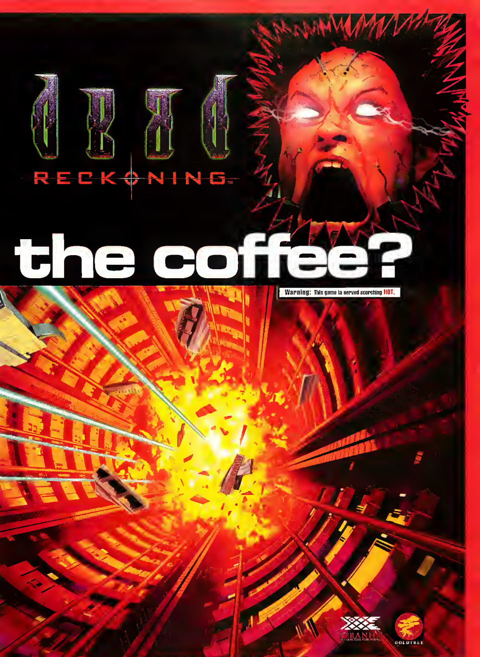
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the coffee?
Warning: This game is served scorching HOT.
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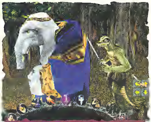
SWORDS & SORCERY: COME DEVILS, COME DARKNESS

D.W. Bradley's Long-awaited Return to Role-playing Is an Old-school Fantasy—With a Few New Tricks

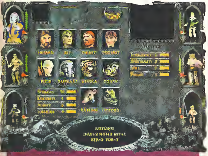
By Jeff Green

My job in life is to make the world's greatest RPG." Thus speaks D.W. Bradley, designer of SWORDS AND SORCERY: COME DEVILS, COME DARKNESS, a fantasy role-playing game due this Christmas from Virgin Interactive Entertainment. And though that might sound like an impossible burden to place upon oneself, if sheer enthusiasm and force of will were all it took, you'd almost have to take him at his word.



NICE TRUNK SWORDS AND SORCERY's 3D engine keeps all the characters in sharp perspective, even at close range. Shown here are two of the more fantastical races, the elephantine Ompheaz and the sneke-like Lizzord.

Bradley—designer of Sir Tech's WIZARDRY V, VI, and VII—is a long-time, hard-core gamer who loves RPGs, loves to talk about RPGs, and most importantly, loves to talk about *his* new RPG, which he's designing with a 16-person team at his new company, Heuristic Park. After spending some time with him and playing a pre-alpha version of the game, I can say that SWORDS AND SORCERY is certainly one of the most ambitious RPGs of the year.



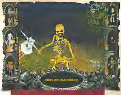
THE RACE CARD You can create e party of up to six characters from 10 distinct reces. You could even play the game with a solo character, but you probebly wouldn't last very long.

Old School

At its core, SWORDS AND SORCERY is an unabashed high-fantasy, old-school RPG of yore, with a rich, stat-heavy character system and a storyline that actually tries to tell a story, while providing enough freedom of exploration and subquests so that gamers don't feel that they're on a leash.

The plot, actually, isn't likely to break any new ground, but it remains firmly in the "heroic quest" genre. Set in the fantasy world of Gael-Serran, the game sets you upon a quest to retrieve a legendary magic sword, which you'll need as the first step toward defeating Cet, the Lord of Death who has recently awakened from an entombed state.

Your explorations will take you to three distinct environments: Badeen (a forest setting), Ishad N'ha (mountains), and Seaville (The Great Sea). Within each "hub," as Bradley calls them, there are four regions, for a total of 12 distinct game environments. These environments will run the gamut of classic fantasy settings: a serpent temple, dwarven mines, haunted castle ruins, ogre lands, a sunken city, a pyramid, and more. Each hub serves as a central location, in which players can buy and sell items, heal or resurrect party members, and store excess inventory items and gold.



EAT THIS, SKULL BOY Whether you're exploring or fighting, you'll be eble to switch on the fly between first- and third-person perspectives—from any character's viewpoint. In this screenshot, we have a first-person attack on a skeleton seen from the eyes of the mighty Babar.

The party-based game lets you create and use up to six characters, though you can use fewer if you want. Fantasy fans disappointed by the human-only characters in MIGHT AND MAGIC VI will be thrilled to know that Bradley is including 10 races in SWORDS AND SORCERY, including the Whiskas, a feline race (a staple of Bradley's games), and the Oomphaaz, a spiritual elephantine race. Each will have its own particular advantages and disadvantages. After selecting a race, you'll choose a class for each character, assign ability points, choose skills and spells, and name your character.

Stats are divided between mental traits (Intelligence, Spirituality, Will, and Presence) and physical traits (Strength, Dexterity, Agility, and Fortitude).

SWORDS & SORCERY
COME DEVILS, COME DARKNESS

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One of the more interesting gameplay aspects of the party-based system will be the ability to group characters. At some points in the game you're going to want to split up the party—to have some members perform sentry duty, for example—and Bradley said there will probably also be puzzles in which your party will definitely need to be in two places at once.

New School

So far, so good. Though, clearly, we're on well-traveled ground for the long-time RPG player. What does Bradley have up his sleeve to modernize the experience?

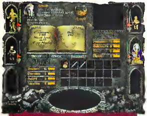
"WIZARDRY VII was my last statement, my farewell to that style of gameplay. I knew that 3D would be the next big thing, and it's taken me three years to figure out what to do with it." What he decided to do was to craft a 3D engine that will allow a third- or first-person perspective from the point of view of any character in your party—a perspective that can be switched at any time, on-the-fly. Whether traveling through the world, or in combat, you'll thus have multiple angles, and multiple viewpoints, from which to view the action.

While playing the pre-alpha, it almost felt like *too* much choice (Whose perspective should I follow? Am I better off in first- or third-person?), but it became clear with time that that kind of decision-making will figure into the game's strategy—and was clearly more dynamic and liberating than the static party perspective in standard first-person RPGs.

Combat is another area that has a different feel to it. You can pre-assign characters to attack on their own or to wait for you to take control. Rather than a strict turn-based or real-time system, the game employs phased turns, somewhat akin to FINAL FANTASY VII's phased combat, in which battles take place in continuous time, but each character can only attack when "ready" (a state determined by stats, damage taken, and so on). The speed of phases can be adjusted, so battle can play out as fast or slow as you want to deal with it.

Newest School

But Bradley's biggest innovation—and biggest challenge—is in the integration between SWORD AND SORCERY's single- and multiplayer modes. The idea for multiplayer is not deathmatch, but cooperative play, in which gamers can explore the world together.



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS **Each character class has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages. The Omphaaz are spiritual beings, and thus begin the game with a high level of Spirituality. That elephantine body also gives them a high rating in Strength.**

"I'd been involved in live role-playing, creating adventures, since college, when I did it on pen and paper," says Bradley. "What I miss in terms of interaction I've tried to recreate on the PC."

Coolest of all is the fact that you will have the ability to freely transfer party members and game items between single- and multiplayer games. Anything that happens to a character in one game will be true for that character globally, which could be both good and bad. You can advance your character in a multiplayer game, or pick up some badass weapon, and then take it back to your single-player game. Conversely, if your character dies in a multiplayer game, you'll need to revive him/her at the town hub for your single-player game as well. The idea is to build an emotional attachment to the characters you create—to make your actions have consequences. There will also be items that you can customize and interchange between single- and multiplayer games. Players with the correct abilities will be able to cast enchantments or spells on a weapon, for example, to increase its speed or inflict extra damage on dragons. Bradley envisions players going specifically to buy, sell, or trade items with each other, which players could then use in single- and multiplayer games.

How to make this kind of integration between modes work is a huge problem, and neither Bradley nor Virgin pretend to have all the answers yet—but they claim that they're almost there. One problem the team just solved was how to script and code NPCs in multiplayer mode. That is, if three different human players all approach an NPC, how does the NPC carry on three conversations at once? And does the NPC have the *same* conversation, or does it carry on different ones depending on who it's talking to?

Such concerns both inspire and frustrate Bradley.

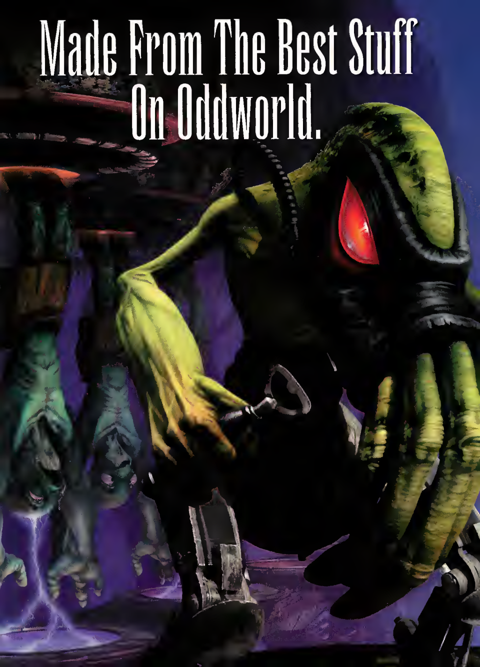
"I had a vision of all this 25 years ago," he said. "To get to see it happen, to be a part of it, is a very cool thing. That's the great part about this job. Of course at other times, when trying to get the game done, the job sucks and all I can think is, 'Please shoot me.'"

Quest for Glory

SWDRDS AND SORCERY appears to be the kind of RPG that is going to either soar or sink, depending on Bradley's ability to make his visions work—and on his ability to keep the game fun as well. As he put it himself, "It doesn't matter how cool an algorithm you create; if it's boring—it sucks."

Combining old-school sensibilities with new-school technology, SWDRDS AND SDRCERY has the potential to be a first-rate fantasy game. Here's hoping that all the algorithms work, and that the game doesn't suck.

THIS TOWN IS OUR TOWN **SWORDS AND SORCERY has three town "hubs" to which your party can return for buying and selling, healing, resurrecting, and more. These hubs are represented visually by 2D screens.**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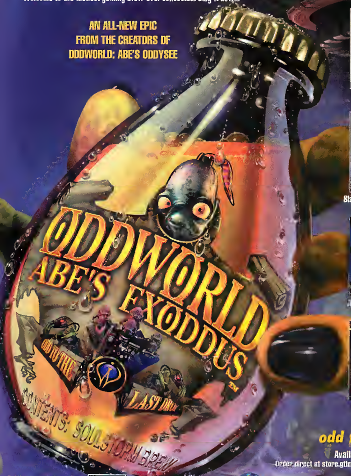

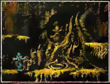

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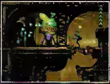

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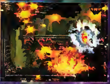

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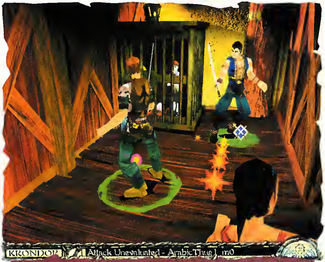

SWORD PLAY RETURN TO KRONDOR's combat will be turn-based, but in a 3D-space, which will allow for complex tactical thinking.

RETURN TO KRONDOR

The Next Chapter in Fantasy Author Raymond E. Feist's Epic Tale of Midkemia Is Done at Last

by Jayne Hitchcock

After languishing for years on the vaporware list, with its demise foretold by many, Raymond E. Feist's RETURN TO KRONDOR is finally back on track. You've heard this many times before, but rest assured, fantasy fans—everything is ready to roll for an October release.

When Sierra On-Line, developers of the award-winning BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR, dropped the KRONDOR license a few years back, the highly anticipated sequel was thought to be lost forever. Although THIEF OF DREAMS (the title of the proposed sequel) never came to fruition, 7th Level jumped at the opportunity to purchase the KRONDOR license in 1996. The sequel was promptly renamed RETURN TO KRONDOR—but bad luck seemed to follow it.

7th Level produced some wonderful backgrounds, got the character voices recorded, and had the basics of the game down, but it seemed to have trouble with the technical aspects of the game. In stepped PyroTechnix, a Cincinnati-based game development studio (developers of the True3D engine licensed by Sony for TANARUS and EVERQUEST), which furiously began working on the game code. Soon RETURN TO KRONDOR was alive and well once again.

In late 1997, 7th Level found itself on the verge of collapse, and it looked as if RETURN TO KRONDOR would be going down with it. PyroTechnix's General Manager, Sinjin Bain, felt he had to save not only his own company, but RETURN TO KRONDOR as well. This is when Sierra came back into the picture, purchasing PyroTechnix in December 1997, along with the rights to RETURN TO KRONDOR. Once again, the world was right for RPG fans everywhere—and especially for fans of Feist's fantasy world of Midkemia.

RETURN TO KRONDOR

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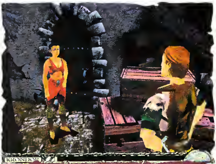
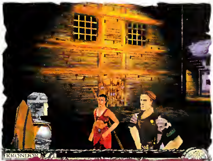
Big World

Everyone at PyroTechnix calls RETURN TO KRONDOR an "epic" game, and after spending a day at the company's studio, I have to agree. This is a *huge* game, with upwards of 2,000 backgrounds representing more than 200 locations, 180 real-time 3D characters, 25,000 frames of motion-capture, more than 100 inventory items, 30 cinematic scenes, and over 100 individually designed, turn-based combat scenes.

Although there are similarities to BETRAYAL, the True3D engine provides an enhanced perspective,



DO YOU WORK OUT? One of the game's main characters is Jazhara, a Keshian sorceress, who apparently has enough free time when not casting spells to work on her abs.



TALK TO ME Like all of his work, Feist's 10-chapter story will be dialogue- and plot-rich, allowing for great flights of fantasy in between all the head-bashing.

with a mix of 2D and 3D for fast rendering in software and hardware, freedom of motion in characters, and real-time audio, among other things. One of the most fantastic features is the game's real-time 16-bit lighting, which creates lifelike shadows and colored lighting as the game moves from day to night. Overall, the game has a much more realistic look and feel, and it's guaranteed to draw gamers deeper into the story than did BETRAYAL.

"It was tough for anyone [two years ago] to understand what RETURN TO KRONDOR was going to look like, except for the backgrounds, which are beautiful," Bain says. "But that's not what this game is about. It's much deeper and more complex—the voices, the music, the characters, the whole nine yards. As Ray [Feist] saw the characters come to life with the motion-capture and combat animations, he became very excited and understood the experience that we were going for.

"It's such a big game and there have been so many modifications," Bain continues. "For instance, the voice recording was done more than a year ago and the script has changed a bit, so we have to reloop dialogue—things like that. Jeff Mills [formerly with 7th Level] is reauthoring and reimplementing the design.

We have some nice camera-switching and formation algorithms, so there are some views that are missing or are less than optimal that we have to regenerate to maintain the continuity."

Combat not only looks better, but is more fluid and realistic. Your character has a green ring of fire around his or her feet, and as you fight, the ring changes color to show your health. When you control more than one character at a time, there is a solid ring around the other characters to keep track of all the health colors. Three fighting styles offer a variety of choices, each with unique advantages and disadvantages. You'll be able to jump easily from one character to another in order to coordinate an effective combat strategy.

If your character can cast spells, you select a spell best suited for your character's combat situation. As the spell is cast, it's rendered in 3D from the character's hand to the opponent. Although there are 60 preset spells available in the game, you can make new potions with ingredients you've gathered in your inventory (if your character is a Lesser Path mage). Spells are arranged in six Paths, each concentrating on a magical theme.

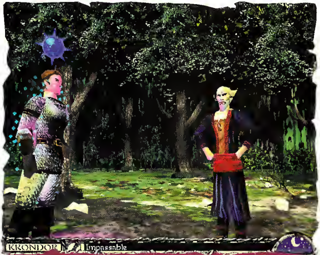
Return to Midkemia

Pyrotechnix has added other minor creative touches, but the script and storyline are as originally developed by Feist, 7th Level, and Steve Abrams As in BETRAYAL, the game is being divided into "chapters," and you'll have a party of characters at your command: James (a.k.a. Jimmy the Hand from earlier Feist books), Jazhara (a Keshian sorceress), William ConDoin (son of the magician Pug), Brother Solon (an Ishapian Warrior-Priest), and Kendaric (a wizard).

The plot is a blend of fantasy, political intrigue, and adventure, set in Midkemia during the time immediately following the events in BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR.

Sidi, a magician driven insane by contact with the mind of Nalor, the God of Evil, hires a sinister crime-lord named Crawler to attack an Ishapian transport ship and retrieve the Tear of the Gods, a valuable Ishapian religious artifact. Sidi hopes the Tear will act as a direct link between him and Nalor—giving Nalor an eye on the world, and Sidi direct access to Nalor's knowledge.

The Crawler knows that the Ishapian ship will be well-guarded



HEAL, BOY All of the spells in RETURN TO KRONDOR are animated with unique graphics. Here, we see a heal spell.

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and assigns his toughest, most ruthless operative to the case: a vicious mercenary known as Bear. Sidi presents Bear with a magic amulet that will grant him immense power as well as give him protection from Ishapian magic. Sidi intentionally fails to mention the amulet's other properties.

The amulet's power stems from the evil that seethes within Bear's innermost being. During a fierce battle, the Ishapian ship is sunk and its crew is killed. As Bear fights his way toward the Tear, the amulet protects him from the magic of the Ishapian priests by absorbing their spells and turning their power against the hapless defenders. Before Bear can seize the Tear, however, the Ishapian ship sinks, carrying it to the bottom of the Bitter Sea. Knute, the pirate ship's first mate, is horrified by the changes taking place in Bear, and with the idea of stealing an object holy to the Gods. He escapes with most of the loot from the Ishapian ship and flees to Krondor, where, after hiding the treasure, he is promptly arrested for piracy. Meanwhile, Bear has come to Krondor to pressure the Wrecker's guild into raising the ship, only to find out that Knute has been caught. He plans to kill Knute and anyone else who might know of Sidi and the Crawler's plot. It is this volatile situation in which you and your party find yourselves as RETURN TO KRONDOR begins.

The Magic Hour

So far, everything has been on schedule since Sierra resurrected the game last December. The ship date has not moved beyond October. This coincides with the timing of Feist's upcoming novel, *Krondor: The Betrayal*, which is slated to come out in hard-cover in November—and, in a rare reversal, the book will be based on the original computer game (see sidebar). If you're ready for dragons, vampires, skeleton snakes, adventure, great turn-based RPG combat, alchemy, spellcasting, and graphics that will knock your socks off, roll up your sleeves and get ready for RETURN TO KRONDOR. Again.

Interview with Raymond E. Feist

At 52, an age when most authors are content with writing just books, Raymond E. Feist continues his active participation in the KRONDOR computer games. We spoke with Feist as he was getting ready for the upcoming launch of RETURN TO KRONDOR.

CGW: How was it that you originally settled on 7th Level for RETURN TO KRONDOR?

Feist: When you see RETURN TO KRONDOR, you'll see why that was a good call. I was a little concerned about the structure of the company, and that proved to be a reasonable trepidation, as later events proved. In the end, the people who were left at 7th Level, especially co-founders Bob Ezrin and Scott Page, were heroic in their attempt to "do the right thing" and keep both the license holders and stockholders from losing everything. My hat is off to them for that and for keeping RETURN TO KRONDOR alive.

What was the experience like writing *Krondor: The Betrayal*, based on the first KRONOOR computer game?

After having written books for almost 20 years, I was surprised at how different it was to work from someone else's script. The problem was finally realizing I couldn't write a book of the game, but rather I had to break the game down to its essential elements, then construct a novel from that. The game and novel are very different from each other in significant ways, which is what you'd expect, given the nature of each medium. People who are very familiar with the game will be surprised, I think, by the novel, but if they liked the game and the characters, they'll like the novel.

How do you feel computer games have evolved since you first got into them in the 1980s?

From the beginning, games have driven a large part of the development of computers. Each game is developed to be "faster, smarter, sexier, louder, better, and bigger" than the last one, and yet the developer is always consumed about backward-compatibility.

Television producers never worry about how many people out there have compatible TVs. It's a fascinating issue and one that has far more impact on choices made in game design and development than most people realize.

Trying to straddle technology is one of the single most potentially destructive issues in game design, and it's unique to game design. As a writer, who needs only pen and paper, this is a constant source of amazement to me.

Are you an avid gamer?

I'm sort of a one-game-at-a-time type. I find something I like and beat the hell out of it before I move on. I've played lots of things once just to see what the fuss was about, but right now I'm trying to get that perfect CIV II game.

Do you think we'll see more KRONOOR games now?

As many as people want. I don't see any reason why we can't eventually see 10, a dozen, whatever. The thing about this type of fantasy role-playing design is that it's novel-like. In other words, no matter what the mechanics of the game might be and no matter how they evolve, along with no matter how computer technology evolves, at the bottom line, games are story-driven. Given that, as long as the stories are good, the games will be good. The only thing that would end the franchise would be if people just didn't care that much for fantasy role-playing games set in my universe.

Web Sites About Raymond E. Feist

Midkemia Press
www.midkemia.com/stevea/

The Raymond E. Feist Internet Resources Index
www.netunlimited.net/~srussell/Feist_Resources.html

Raymond E. Feist Book Reviews
home1.swipnet.se/~w-17633/books/re_feist.htm

RIFTMUSH—An RPG based on Raymond E. Feist's Riftwar Saga
www.ptbo.igs.net/~amanley/rift/

Usenet: **alt.books.raymond-feist**

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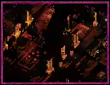

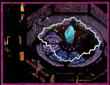

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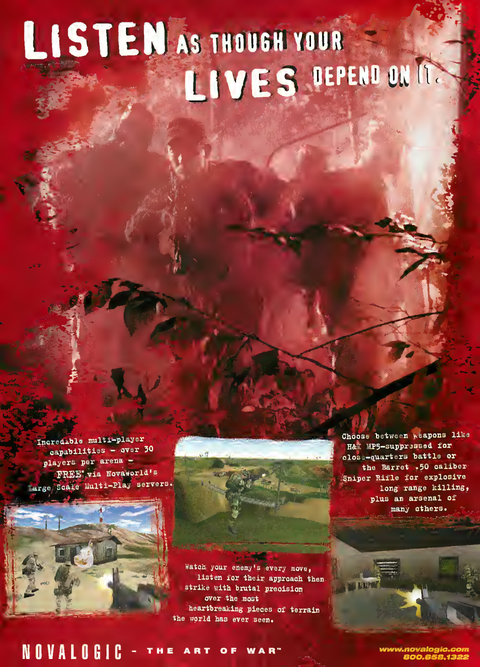
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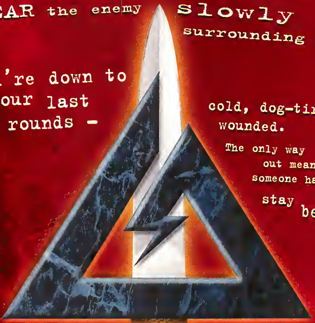

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DIABLO II

Blizzard's RPG Sequel Gets More Time for a Major Facelift

by Elliott Chin

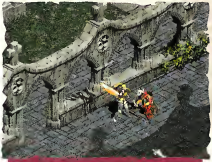
Unless you've been living under a rock for the past two years, you've no doubt heard of DIABLO, the real-time action/RPG that (dare I say it?) revitalized the role-playing game genre. Are those boos I hear? Well, even though DIABLO wasn't a hard-core RPG in the way MIGHT AND MAGIC VI or the classic ULTIMAs are, it was an undeniably addictive game that made plenty of gamers give the role-playing experience a try So, in that respect, it was a good thing for role-playing games. Now, although the RPG is no longer in need of a jump-start, DIABLO is still coming back to work his magic a second time.

Since we reported on DIABLO II in our February cover story, a lot has been added to the game Recently, we talked to David Brevik, founder of Blizzard North, and Erich Schaefer, co-art director and co-designer for DIABLO II, to learn more about the game's progress

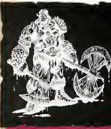
The Classes

The first character class we revealed in February was the amazon, but her four cohorts were just revealed several months ago With DIABLO II, Blizzard North is trying to further differentiate the character classes. Each class will have up to 30 different, unique abilities The abilities of the amazon will be exclusive to her class, as will those for the paladin, and so on. Even spells will be exclusive to a character class, so that the sorceress and necromancer, for example, won't share any spells. Some essential spells, like Town Portal and Identify, can't be learned and will instead be cast solely through scrolls or staves.

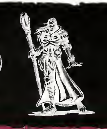
The way characters learn new spells and abilities will also change. The current plan is to present a skill tree to a player when his character levels up. The player can then pick a skill to learn from the list presented. You'll also be able to learn some skills when you complete a quest. No more studying books. However, Schaefer says books will still help you. You won't be able to automatically increase in skill just by reading a book, but they will offer temporary bonuses.



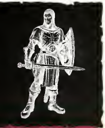
SCALE THIS Blizzard has changed the scale of the architecture in DIABLO 2 to more accurately depict the characters in the world. That doesn't mean it's going to hurt any less when you're flailed, though.



OH, YOU BARBARIAN! DIABLO II's big-ass fighting machine, the barbarian is skilled in a variety of two-handed attacks. One drawback: no magic for Mongo.



DEATH BECOMES YOU The necromancer is a spellcaster with the game's most interesting ability—to summon monsters, often more than one at a time.



GOOD KNIGHT The paladin is second to the barbarian in terms of melee fighting, but he also has a host of defensive and healing magic spells at his disposal.

Let's take a closer look at the five character classes.

Amazon: We covered her extensively in our February cover story. She is a cross between the rogue and warrior from DIABLO, with the most powerful ranged attacks and medium-strength melee attacks Her primary weapons are the bow, crossbow, spear, and javelin, and many of her skills derive from the use of those weapons.

Paladin: The paladin is a holy warrior, and the game's second most powerful melee fighter. He also has a good array of defensive and healing magic. He will fight with the sword and shield combo or other variations of this theme. Some of his skills will be special melee attacks, including a sword and shield bash that temporarily

DIABLO II

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DEVELOPER: [illegible]
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stuns the target. The paladin will also be able to cast defensive spells that increase spell resistance or bestow temporary regeneration. In multiplayer parties, he'll be a good character to have.

Barbarian: This is the game's ultimate fighter. All the barbarian's skills will be physical attacks. Some skills will include a charge (like the Rhino Demon from DIABLO), a whirling attack that allows him to hit multiple enemies, slashes that knock an opponent back (like the Bear ability in DIABLO), and the ability to wield two weapons simultaneously. In fact, the barbarian will be the only character that can fight two-handed. The barbarian will be unable to use magic (except for perhaps Town Portal), but will instead have natural magic resistance.

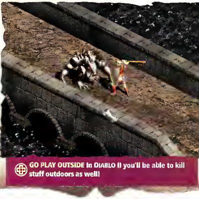
Sorceress: The sorceress will be very similar to DIABLO's sorcerer. She will be the character with the most direct and spectacular magic attacks. In DIABLO, there were basically three types of magic: fire, lightning, and miscellaneous. In DIABLO II, there will also be cold and poison spells. The sorceress' spells will be drawn from the fire, lightning, and cold schools. She'll have close to 30 possible spells, which will include fire walls, fireballs, lightning blasts, a freezing spell that duplicates the Stone Curse spell, warmth (another name for healing), and enchanting weapons with flame or cold. These are only some of her spells, and Blizzard North has more sensational spells planned. Of course, she'll be weak in hand-to-hand combat.

Necromancer: The necromancer is the other spellcaster, but his abilities are more subtle than those of the sorceress. He'll be weak in melee attacks, but he will have a powerful spell repertoire that will be split into three categories:

The first type of spells will include the ability to manipulate existing monsters. The necromancer will be able to control or confuse monsters, heal them, or improve their attacks with spells.

The second type of spells includes summoning monsters and raising monsters. The low-level raising spells will allow a necromancer to create a skeleton or ghost from an existing corpse, although the reanimated minion will be at half hit points only. The more powerful summoning spells will require no corpse and will call full-fledged monsters. Unlike DIABLO's golem spell, where only one could be in effect at a time, Schaefer says barring memory constraints, you should be able to summon multiple monsters to do your bidding. And, they'll fight with better AI than did the golem. In both cases (raised and summoned monsters), the necromancer will get XP for the creatures his minions kill.

The third type of spells will include some direct, poison-based spell attacks, as well as the ability to poison his own weapons for added damage.



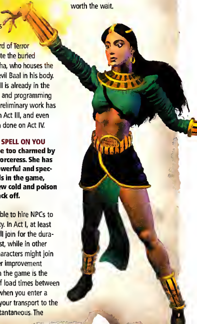
GO PLAY OUTSIDE In **DIABLO II** you'll be able to kill stuff outdoors as well!

Going to Town

Act I in DIABLO II takes place in the Sisters of the Sightless Eye Monastery and its surrounding encampment. You have to battle the demoness Andariel and save the corrupted rogues.

Act II takes place in the deserts around the Tomb of Tal Rasha and the nomadic town of Lut Gholein. You'll be following DIABLO to this location, where the Lord of Terror hopes to locate the buried monk Tal Rasha, who houses the soul of the devil Baal in his body.

While Act II is already in the major design and programming phase, only preliminary work has been done on Act III, and even less has been done on Act IV.



I PUT A SPELL ON YOU Don't be too charmed by this lovely sorceress. She has the most powerful and spectacular spells in the game, including new cold and poison spells. So back off.

You'll be able to hire NPCs to join your party. In Act I, at least one rogue will join for the duration of a quest, while in other acts, other characters might join you. The other improvement we've seen in the game is the elimination of load times between levels. Now, when you enter a town portal, your transport to the surface is instantaneous. The same goes for the transition from a town into the wilderness.

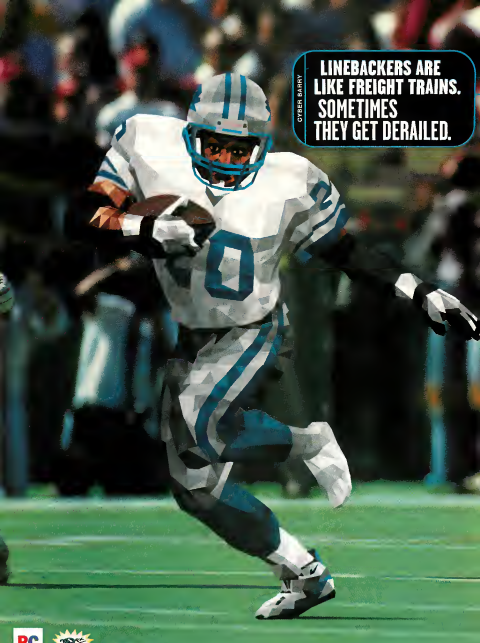
ONLINE

For monthly updates on DIABLO II's progress, check out *GameSpot's* DIABLO II Designer Diary at **www.gamespot.com/features/diablo2_dd/**

Artificial Intelligence

Brevik says that the monsters' AI will distinguish them from one another. He admits that in DIABLO, all the monsters just rushed at you, but in DIABLO II there will more enemies that act differently.

While the look of DIABLO II might seem similar to that of DIABLO, the engine is, in fact, completely rewritten. This type of makeover takes time, and Blizzard wants to be sure that the game is perfect before its release in mid-1999. From what we've seen, barring any mishaps during development, DIABLO II should be well worth the wait.


CYBER BARRY
LINEBACKERS ARE LIKE FREIGHT TRAINS. SOMETIMES THEY GET DERAILED.
PC

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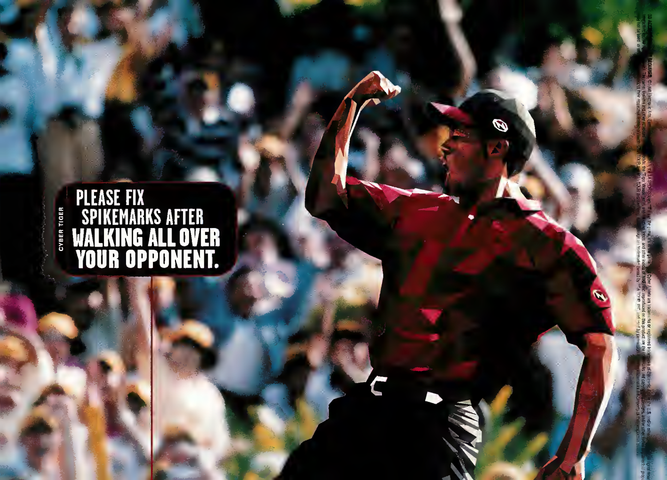
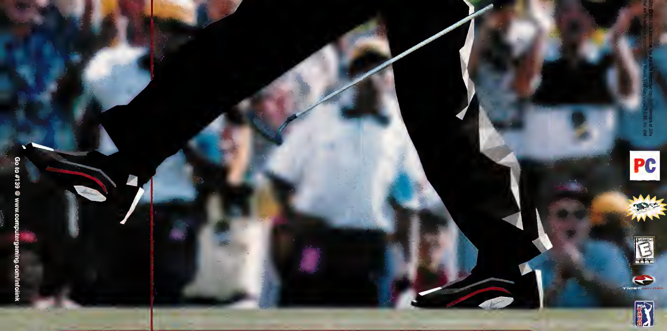

CYBER TIGER
PLEASE FIX
SPIKEMARKS AFTER
WALKING ALL OVER
YOUR OPPONENT.



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EA SPORTS
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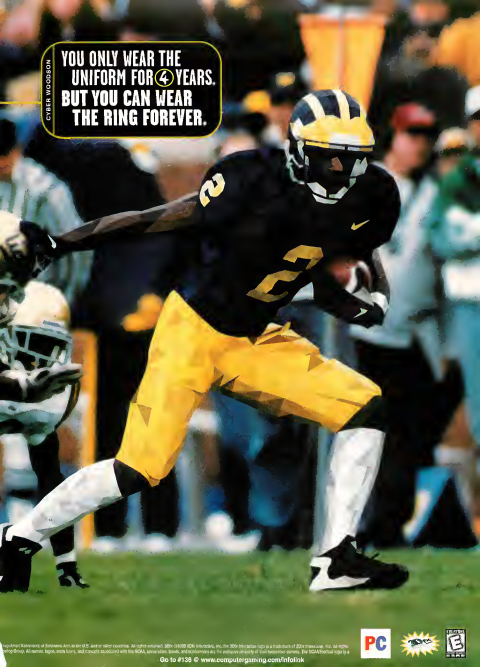
CYBER WOODSON
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MYTH II: SOULBLIGHTER

Bungie Plans to Up the Ante With Its Second 3D Tactical Strategy Game in the MYTH Universe

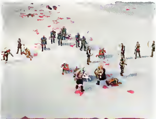
by Elliott Chin

Late last year, Bungie's inaugural PC game, MYTH, crashed into the gaming industry like a tidal wave, washing aside traditional strategy fare and picking up strategy game of the year awards from numerous game publications, including *Computer Gaming World*. That was no easy feat, especially with competition like TOTAL ANNIHILATION, DARK REIGN, and AGE OF EMPIRES. Yet, what MYTH had, and what its competitors lacked, was true 3D terrain and in-your-face, tactical gameplay.

But even Bungie would have to admit that MYTH was far from perfect. Sure, it was innovative and beautiful, but it was sometimes a bit too hard to play and control. So, this year, Bungie has decided to revamp the game's interface, streamline the controls, and adjust the pacing. And, to create a true sequel to MYTH, rather than just a tweaked rehash, Bungie has improved the gameplay with a more ambitious design.

The Fallen Have Gotten Up

MYTH II's story picks up 60 years after MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS. Alric's peaceful kingdom is under attack by mysterious forces. The graveyards of villages are being robbed, and you must start out on an expedition to investigate these thefts. Eventually, you discover that Soulblighter, a Fallen Lord from MYTH, is behind the evil doings.



WHO'S GONNA CLEAN UP THIS MESS? Battles will be just as juicy and carnage-filled as they were in the first game.

Since your ultimate enemy is a Fallen Lord, the armies you'll face will consist of many undead creatures. There will also be large living beasts, such as the Trow and Ghol from MYTH. Also joining the Fallen Lords will be another behemoth: the Maul, a giant who wields a spiked club. Soulblighter will also gain the services of the Stygian Knight, a slow but heavily armored nasty, and the Warlock, a spellcaster that will take advantage of MYTH II's new magic system (more on that later). Bungie also says that a third faction, an ancient race mentioned in passing in THE FALLEN LORDS, will present themselves as a powerful enemy in an unexpected part of the game.

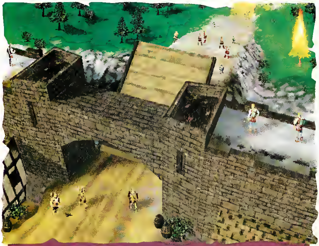
You'll have some new allies to help you fight the new tide of enemies. All the units from MYTH will return, but the number of total units will jump from 15 to 25. According to Bungie Publicity Engineer Doug Zartman, among your new cohorts will be Journeymen, who rediscover the physical prowess of their days as the elite Guard of the old Kingdom. You'll also gain the services of a new magic-using unit that will have some deadly spells.

Out With the Old

The most immediate changes to MYTH II are its interface and controls. We all had a rough time with the gesture clicking and with keeping our units under tight control. MYTH II will address those issues.

Now you'll be able to rotate the screen by moving the mouse to the corners of the screen (simple, but surprisingly missing from the first game). You can issue movement orders on the overhead map and give waypoints by holding down the Shift key.

The game will also feature an optional control bar at the bottom of the screen with all the common



BRIDGE OVER GHOULISH WATER Animated 3D objects, such as this drawbridge, will be prominent in MYTH II: SOULBLIGHTER.

MYTH II: SOULBLIGHTER

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]

DEVELOPER: [illegible]

PUBLISHER: Bungie [illegible]

ERATHIA
AVLEE
VORI
DEYJA
TATALIA
ERATHIA
EEOFOL
NIGHO
KREWLOD
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Build,
Explore,
Anticipate...

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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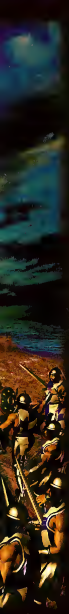
*September Issue of Computer Gaming World, Top 100 Chart



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commands presented as easily accessible buttons. Gesture clicking will be eliminated. You can simply click and drag a unit or formation with the mouse to change its direction. An arrow at the selected unit's feet will point in the direction it is facing. Alternatively, you can use the left and right arrow keys to rotate your formations.

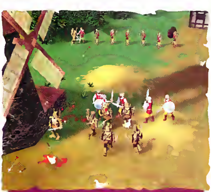
Player feedback will also be improved. Now, when you pass your cursor over a unit, a dimly lit display of its hit points or spell points will appear. Mission objectives will also be presented more clearly at the start of levels, as will new objectives that pop up during the course of a mission.

Bigger Graphics

The look of the graphics is the other obvious area where MYTH II will improve. Although at first glance the graphics might seem to be a minor enhancement over the first game, there is a lot more being done to create a richer environment. The mesh for the terrain will be finer, for example, meaning that it will be much more detailed. You'll see bumps and grooves in the road, and travel through levels with sharp cliffs and smoother hills.

There will also be indoor environments and fortifications. Some battles will take place within castles (the roof will be cut away so you can see the units inside). Zartman showed us one example of a level that blends indoor and outdoor environments; in it, you'll have to storm a castle only to see the enemy raise his drawbridge (yes, the game will include 3D animated objects). You'll then have to send a dwarf to destroy the winch for the bridge, at which point you'll brave a hail of arrows from the ramparts and then break into the castle to capture a baron. The baron will try to flee through the castle hallways with his entourage, and you'll have to catch him before he makes his exit.

In addition to 3D objects like the drawbridge, there will be rotating windmills and 3D fire. Archers will be able to fire flaming arrows that will set trees on fire and spread flames through a forest, impeding the movement of troops and damaging those caught within. Colored lighting will also be added, so fire will glow and objects will have more realistic shadows. The improved lighting will probably be most prominent in night missions. The rendering of water will also be improved, and liquids will have realistically undulating waves and reflections.



WE GOT YOUR SIX Formations will return in MYTH II, and thanks to double the combat animations, battles will be even more realistic.

The levels will be more populated and varied. For instance, you'll see flying birds and more ambient villagers and farm animals. The characters, while still 2D sprites, will have double the frames of animation for smoother movement. They'll also feature multiple-attack animation for more realistic-looking fighting.

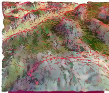
Single-player Enhancements

The other criticism leveled at MYTH was the difficulty of the single-player missions. Says Zartman, "The spectrum of difficulty levels is much wider. The timid levels will be cakewalks for gamers who knew their way around MYTH, but still interesting for newbies, while Legendary [difficulty] will be even tougher than the first time." Higher difficulties will not only add more troops, but also include different troop combinations and placement.

Bungie is also improving scenario design for MYTH II to add more variety to the gameplay. In addition to the indoor missions, there will be some missions that add gameplay elements from multiplayer MYTH modes.

There will be increased character interaction, as in the MYTH scenarios in which a townsperson led your troops to a secret meeting between a corrupt official and the Fallen Lord's troops. Zartman says, "There will be more talking to characters. For one thing, they will now give you hints if you seem to be missing the point of the level. We don't want it to get RPGish, but, just as the ambient life will add more verisimilitude to the landscapes, so [will] more talking among NPCs make the villages more real."

Gameplay enhancements include a new magic system based on spell points. Says Zartman, "Every spell depletes mana, which regenerates in time, so the number of spells is effectively infinite. There are also many new spells, like the fireball and cloudkill." (The latter sends a lethal cloud drifting slowly toward the enemy formations.) There will also be spells to confuse enemy units and prevent them from attacking. However, the magic won't take over the focus of the game, which will still be tactical combat. Zartman says, "We aren't going to let it turn into a game of dueling magic users—the magic units will have their place."



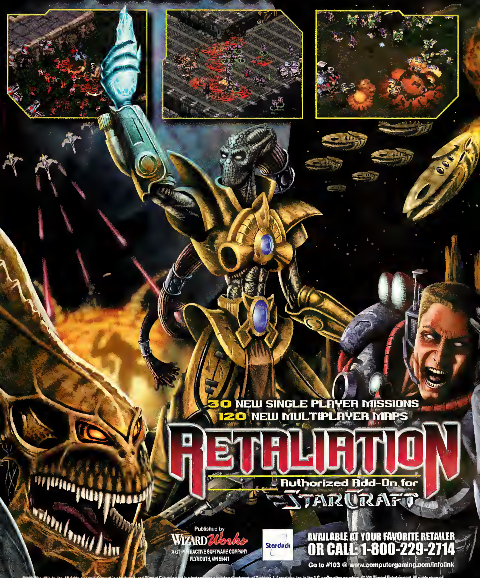
NOOKS AND CRANNIES The terrain texture mesh used to create the landscapes in MYTH II is much finer than before, which translates into more realistic terrain.

KNOCK, KNOCK Moving gates will add to the game's feel.

The enemy AI is also going to improve, with better pathfinding so formations won't get tangled up or get caught in friendly fire. Bungie is also planning multiplayer enhancements and new multiplayer game modes.

From what we've seen and heard already, it looks as if Bungie's work is going to significantly improve the gameplay of the original MYTH. If so, look for MYTH II to be one of the biggest fantasy strategy games in recent years.

THE SAGA CONTINUES...



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BALDUR'S GATE

The Wait Is Almost Over for the Most Anticipated Advanced Dungeons & Dragons *Game in a Decade*

by Tahsin Shamma

There are two kinds of people. Those who know of and eagerly await BALDUR'S GATE, and those who know nothing about computer RPGs whatsoever. From what we've seen, BALDUR'S GATE is going to be the best *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* computer role-playing game to come around since the gold-boxed games of years past.

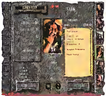
At the heart of it all is a true role-playing system, set up just the way casual friends would get together and play in the real world. The single-player mode allows players to create their characters and then adventure with a group of NPCs throughout the world of the Forgotten Realms. Players who want a more "real-world" gaming experience go through the same steps, but instead of NPCs, a true party adventuring system allows for groups of gamers to connect online and adventure together—just as they would in a normal game. To make this system manageable, multiplayer games allow one player to become the party leader, making decisions such as in which general direction the party travels, and who is allowed to speak to NPCs. Basically, it confers the status of the Dungeon Master upon the computer, but allows all the freedom of party adventuring.

The other monumental thing about BALDUR'S GATE is the amount of time and effort that Bioware has put into making the game look and feel like *AD&D* adventuring should. The game's art is spread across five CDs, giving players one of the most detailed gameworlds ever. In addition, the weapons and armor all appear on the adventuring characters just the way they look on the character's equipment view. Spells have also been duplicated as closely as possible to the effects listed within the *AD&D Player's Handbook*. Fighters will be allowed to specialize in weapons to four different levels of mastery, as per some of the more recent *AD&D* rules. Another added bit of realism is the game's reputation system, in which players' actions reflect upon how the locals view them.

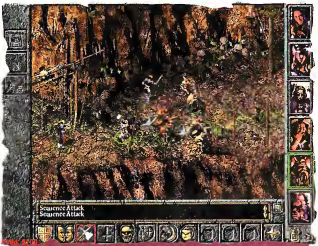
Don't think that all these enhancements in graphics and realism will diminish the core of *AD&D* gameplay, however. The designers, being avid role-players themselves, have made the character creation and advancement system as true to real *AD&D* gaming as possible within the limits of computer gaming. You're allowed to adjust your statistics within reason, as well as choose proficiencies. As complicated as character creation can sometimes get, Bioware has trimmed down the procedure to provide only the essentials and leave the role-playing to the players.

To further enhance your character, the predrawn portraits for the player characters are nothing short of amazing. The level of detail and the personality within the pictures bring the whole realm of fantasy adventuring to life. But if you fancy yourself a better artist, there's even an option that allows you to import your own pictures in place of the portrait.

For *AD&D* fans who miss their college days of gaming with their buddies, BALDUR'S GATE is a godsend. Interplay plans to support the product even further by offering expansions. If you're any kind of role-playing enthusiast, BALDUR'S GATE will surely be on your must-get agenda this fall.



FEEL LIKE A NUMBER Number-crunchers will appreciate the extent to which BioWare has gone to faithfully re-create the *AD&D* rules and systems in BALDUR'S GATE.



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BALDUR'S GATE

[illegible]
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: Interplay

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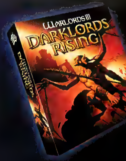

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- 5 new uniquely skilled heroes for a total of 15
- 9 new multiplayer games including Crusade, North vs. South and Instant Chaos
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- Bonus: Includes original campaign and scenarios from *Warlords III: Reign of Heroes*

In short, more adventure, deeper gameplay and fewer chances for survival.

WARLORDS III
DARKLORDS RISING

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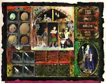
RAGE OF MAGES

Into the Darker Side of RPGs

by Johnny L. Wilson

Dark images abound in fantasy: Instruments of torture; decaying corpses; and magical components like boiled druid skulls, the ashes of immolated royalty, and herbs from the darkest, swampiest, and most dangerous portions of the land all make an appearance sooner or later. Über-mages must either conjure the most sadistic plagues on their victims or mysteriously invoke the most benevolent altruistic forces, depending on their moral orientation.



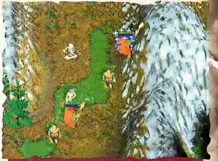
MICROSOFT STORE-ROOM Buying and selling at the general store in Plagat is as easy as clicking and dragging in any Windows program.

BLAH, BLAH, YADDA, YADDA Conversation is provided in both audio and text format, but the badinage is not exactly out of *Lethal Weapon 4*.

RAGE OF MAGES understands the darker side of fantasy. RAGE OF MAGES may look, at first glance, like a Super Nintendo Entertainment System role-playing game from an earlier era, because it uses a top-down perspective in which tiny figures navigate the terrain, but RAGE OF MAGES features considerably more graphical detail and darker images than you'd expect in a console game. Criminals hanging from gallows and corpses that decompose prior to yielding up their treasures are just right for the game's ambiance. You'll also notice that the terrain offers 3D similar to that in TOTAL ANNIHILATION, as well as dynamic lighting effects.

RAGE OF MAGES also offers a detailed statistics-based character system. Characters are rated in physical strength (Body), nimbleness and dexterity (Agility), intelligence (Mind), and magical capacity (Spirit), as well as the familiar hit points, spell strength (Mana), armor class, encumbrance capacity, and experience points. Fighters and mages can have up to six primary fighting/casting skills, and all characters are rated in accordance with their resistance to differing types of magic (Fire, Water, Air, Earth, and Astral). Also, since everything operates in real-time and the lighting is dynamic, each character is rated in terms of visual range (Sight) and movement (Speed).

But RAGE OF MAGES isn't just another old-fashioned RPG. It features real-time combat that makes sense. Not only can you command individual characters, portions of the party, or the entire party to attack or defend, but there are other optional commands. Characters can be told to guard another character, defend themselves, stand guard at a specific point, swarm against a strong enemy, or retreat from battle. In short, the characters can be handled via the standard pointing, lassoing, and clicking that players are familiar with in real-time strategy interfaces. And, if you just like the combat aspects of the game, RAGE OF MAGES promises multiplayer support for up to 16 players.



CLOBBERIN' GOBLINS Llewellyn the mage blasts the goblins over the hill with fireballs as another mage, Renasta, simultaneously heals him.

Further, the AI is sophisticated enough so that, should you have two mages at your disposal, you will find that one mage will cast offensive spells while the other continually and automatically heals the members of the party who are being wounded in combat or replenishes the mana points of the mage engaged in the offensive spellcasting. It's a formidable combination and not something routinely built into the AI routines for a questing party.

RAGE OF MAGES may have quests that resemble the standard "Kill Foozle" or "Medieval FedEx Courier" scenarios, but you never have any doubt concerning what your party is supposed to be doing. Think of it as mission-based role-playing with a real-time combat style. You know if your mission is to look for survivors in a labyrinth, get the plague cure to a healer, clean out an outpost of your enemies, or chase down the treasure in a lost hero's grave. You never have to worry about backtracking.

The game assumes that victory is the climax of a mission and returns you to the headquarters town of Plagat via the standard *Indiana Jones*/1930s–like serial convention of an animated dotted line crossing an antique map. Unfortunately for those who need cut-scenes to tell the story, RAGE OF MAGES doesn't contain any fancy animated sequences.

RAGE OF MAGES is an intriguing RPG that offers bite-sized chunks of play that are serialized into a larger story. You'll be able to sit down and play through a mission in an hour or less, and still have that overall epic experience. If you're like me, you'll have trouble stopping at the end of just one.

RAGE OF MAGES

RELEASE DATE: [illegible]
DEVELOPER: [illegible]
PUBLISHER: [illegible]

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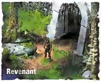
REVENANT

Eidos Draws Its Sword in the DIABLO Clone Wars

Release Date Q4 98
Developer Cinematix
Publisher Eidos Interactive

With Blizzard's DIABLO II still at least half a year away, what's the RPG hack-and-slash fanatic to do? The answer might very well be REVENANT, a third-person, isometric, action/RPG coming this fall from Eidos Interactive. Though the game definitely shares DIABLO's basic look and feel, and Eidos has consciously acknowledged the influence, the company is doing enough that's different to make REVENANT stand out on its own.

The game is set on the fantasy isle of Ahkuilon, a land of ruined civilizations that is now controlled by three Warlords. You play the role of Locke D'Averam, a warrior who has been summoned back from the dead (hence, the game's title), to help one of the warlords take revenge on another, who he believes has kidnapped his daughter. More than just window-dressing on the combat, the story (and extensive backstory) is key here, and should even please non hack-and-slash fans.



Unlike in DIABLO, Locke and the rest of REVENANT's characters are rendered with full 3D-polygons, and Eidos is claiming that it has motion-captured over 50 different movements for combat alone, with a wider range of strikes, parries, and other moves not often seen in games of this type. The spell system is also extensive, with eight categories—Life, Phase, Flame, Lightning, Earth, Frost, Wind, and Body spells—from which to choose.

We've had a chance to play the game a little bit, and though there are many balancing issues still to be worked out, the one thing that puts this game over, even at this early stage, is its graphics. Done with the assistance of Canadian fantasy artist Den Beauvais, REVENANT's rich, colorful look (with ambient lighting throughout) helps create a beautiful fantasy world—the kind of world we love to get lost in (and beat stuff up in). Look for it this fall. *—Jeff Green*

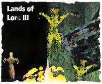
LANDS OF LORE III

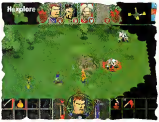
Westwood Studios Fights Back With a Newer, Better LOL

Release Date Q4 '98
Developer Westwood Studios
Publisher Westwood Studios

You kind of had to feel bad for Westwood Studios regarding LANDS OF LORE II. Here was a hugely ambitious, years-in-the-making, epic, fantasy adventure/RPG sequel to a much-loved game—it looked like it couldn't lose. But the "years-in-the-making" proved to be the game's undoing, because by the time it came out it looked at least a year out-of-date, and ended up a big disappointment.

Now, however, we're happy to say that Westwood's LANDS OF LORE III, due this fall, looks as if it will return the fantasy series to prominence, as you embark on a quest to prove yourself worthy of claiming the throne of Gladstone.





As in the previous games, LANDS OF LORE III will still be a first-person adventure/RPG hybrid, with the same basic look—but it will be enhanced in every possible way. First of all, the engine is fully accelerated for 3D, and all the FMV characters have been replaced by voxel-based ones. The entire interface has been revised, including the inventory system, spell and weapons screens, and automap feature, making the game much easier and more intuitive to control.

The most intriguing new feature is the addition of four guilds (warrior, wizard, cleric, and thief), which will let players develop different sets of skills, depending upon which guild they choose. Joining a guild will also give you access to a familiar (an independent creature that can be summoned to aid you in battle, as well as help with other tasks, such as hunting, spying, and stealing). LANDS OF LORE III will maintain a stronger RPG feel than did the previous games in the series.

We came down hard on LANDS OF LORE II, but we're looking forward to this next game as much as anyone. Westwood looks as if it has learned its lesson—let's hope so. *—Jeff Green*

HEXPLORE

Infogrames' Retro RPG Brings Back Old-school Gameplay

Release Date Q3 98
Developer Infogrames Entertainment
Publisher Infogrames Entertainment

DIABLO made the old-school gameplay formula of "thwack creatures, get gold, gain experience" popular again. The clones are now following, but don't dismiss Infogrames' upcoming HEXPLORE as one of them. Despite its retro look, HEXPLORE manages to add some features and enhancements that may please the old-school RPG gamers out there.

HEXPLORE casts you as Mac Bride, a rough'n'tumble Scottish adventurer. An evil mage named Garkham is looking for *The Book of Hexplore*, which holds the precise location of the Garden of Eden. In typical fantasy fashion, Mac Bride needs to get some friends and thwart the evil mage.

HEXPLORE is played from an isometric point of view, but gives you the ability to rotate your view a full 360 degrees around the map. In addition, you control up to four characters in your party (Mac Bride and a warrior, a mage, and an archer, with about three to four characters in each occupation offering to join your adventure). The single-player game also has a story that comes to light as you go to certain places and talk to people who direct you through the game. The interface is click-and-point, à la DIABLO, and the game boasts over 200 maps and a huge number of monsters, weapons, and items. You can also play multiplayer games in which you and a team of up to three friends can try to retrieve *The Book of Hexplore*.

HEXPLORE's dated look may hold the game back, but its gameplay—which is reminiscent of DIABLO and GAUNTLET—combined with its size, story, and multiplayer elements, means that it could be a nice addition to your fantasy hack-and-slash library. *—Thierry Nguyen*

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IN THE WORKS

Axe-wielders, mace-slingers, and flingers of pixie dust gather round. There are many more quests to pursue and skulls to bash in games due out over the coming year. Because we must get back to our ale-drinking and other important pursuits, we don't have the time to give them all their proper due, but here are some of the other fantasy-based titles you can look forward to in the near future.

Total Annihilation: Kingdoms

Cavedog Entertainment is taking its wildly popular real-time strategy game into the realm of fantasy with TA: KINGDOMS, due early next year. Look for a brand-new storyline, involving four distinct sides dueling it out with combat and magic.

Legend of the Five Rings: Ronin

Activision's upcoming RPG, based on the collectible card game of the same name, is one of the fantasy games we're most anticipating, because of its feudal Asian setting. Will it be a samurai DIABLO? We should have a bigger story to tell in next month's *CGW*.

The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind

Bethesda's follow-up to DAGGERFALL is still way, way off (a year, at least, and probably more), so don't get your hopes up anytime soon. But the company's REDGUARD, due by year's end, is a TOMB RAIDER-style hack-and-slash adventure also set in the fantasy world of Tamriel. See *CGW's* August cover story for more info on REDGUARD.

Ultima Ascension

The latest and, apparently, final chapter in Richard Garriott's mega-popular ULTIMA series is well in the works and stirring up a lot of controversy. Garriott's attempts to take the series in new directions has some of the diehards up in arms, while others are adopting a more wait-and-see attitude. We've been guilty ourselves of some pre-judging. Now we're waiting and seeing. We hope, as much as anyone, that this legendary fantasy series goes out with a bang.

Anachronox

Tom Hall's already legend-in-the-making fantasy RPG for Ion Storm is well on the way, but may be later than we first thought. Rumor has it that Ion Storm pulled some members of the ANACHRONOX team off the game to help finish up John Romero's delinquent DAIKATANA.

A Fantastical Year

Is your inner elven mage eager for battle? Check out the past year's worth of fantasy-based games reviewed by CGW.

GAME	*RATING*	*ISSUE*	*WORTHY TITLE?*	*COMMENTS*
BATTLESPIRE	★★☆☆☆	May '98	Nay	DAGGERFALL follow-up has dated graphics and limited, overly difficult gameplay.
BETRAYAL IN ANTARA	★★★☆☆	November '97	Maybe	Traditional turn-based RPG with good story is long and kinda dull.
BIRTHRIGHT	★★★☆☆	December '97	Maybe	*AD&D* strategy/fantasy hybrid is deep, but overly ambitious for its own good.
CIV II: FANTASTIC WORLDS	★★★★☆	March '98	Yea	Expansion set for CIVILIZATION II takes the classic game to new and different worlds.
DUNGEON KEEPER	★★★★½	October '97	Yea	Original, funny game lets you play an evil underground overlord puttin' down the good guys.
HELLFIRE	★★★★☆	April '98	Yea	DIABLO expansion kit isn't great, but it's a no-brainer for hard-core DIABLO fanatics.
LORDS OF MAGIC	★☆☆☆☆	April '98	Nay	Hellishly buggy, disappointing nightmare of a game that coulda been a contender against HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II.
MIGHT AND MAGIC VI	★★★★½	August '98	Yea	Huge, addictive game is a triumphant return for one of the classic fantasy RPG series.
MYTH	★★★★½	February '98	Yea	Brilliant, ground-breaking game with deep gameplay and story. *CGW's* 1997 Strategy Game of the Year.
WARHAMMER EPIC 40,000: FINAL LIBERATION	★★★★☆	March '98	Yea	Good game based on the classic tabletop miniatures game is marred by ugly art.
WARHAMMER: DARK OMEN	★★★★☆	July '98	Yea	Best *Warhammer* computer game yet is a 3D-strategy game à la MYTH.
WARLORDS III	★★★★★	October '97	Yea	Wonderfully addictive turn-based strategy game is the best in a great series
WARWIND II	★★★½☆	April '98	Maybe	SSI's real-time strategy game is a decent WARCRAFT-alike.

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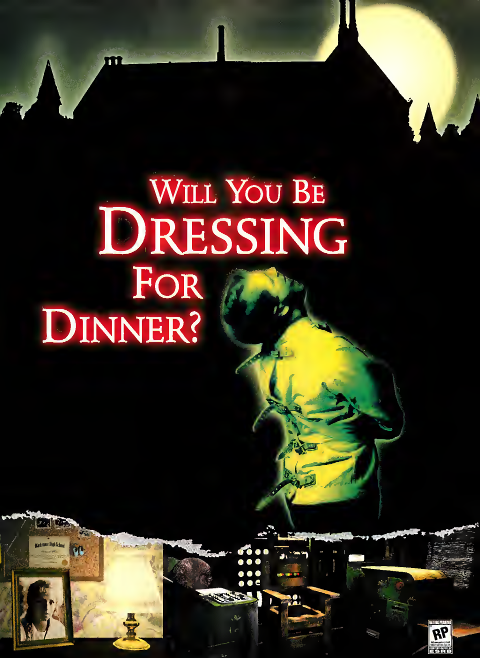
WILL YOU BE
DRESSING
FOR
DINNER?
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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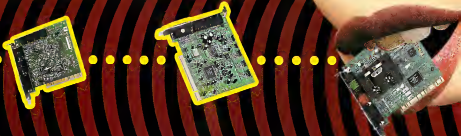
Page 179



Aural Fixation

A quiet revolution has begun taking over the noisiest part of your PC: the audio subsystem. SoundBlaster compatibility, once the Rosetta stone of PC audio, has become less and less important as games have migrated to Windows 95/98.

More and more, games are using higher-resolution audio, and some titles have even incorporated Dolby Surround for ambient effects. Speakers, that crucial last step in making audio come to life on your PC, have improved considerably, with very solid-sounding units as low as $100. In the first section of this feature, beginning on page 170, we'll put 12 new speaker systems to the test.

Meanwhile, sound cards have almost all moved to the PCI bus, and most can accelerate 3D positional-audio. The question is, should you replace your audio plumbing or just get new speakers—or both? In the second section of the story, which begins on page 179, we'll give you an earful of PCI sound cards to help you make up your mind. Let's listen in....

Text by **Loyd Case** Photography by **Michael Falconer**

Page 170

DEMONS FROM THE
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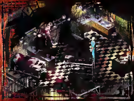

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Speak No Evil

New Speakers Offer More Sound for Less

Sound quality in most games is better than ever. But an audio subsystem is only as strong as its weakest part. And despite all the advances that have taken place recently in sound cards, many gamers are still using the tiny speakers that came with their "multimedia kit." Trying to drive high-quality audio through a pair of $5 speakers is like trying to attach a garden hose to a fire hydrant. Something's gotta give, and it's usually audio quality. But there's really no reason why your ears—or your pocketbook—have to suffer. Just take a listen to the latest crop of powered speakers, which range in price from $70 to $350. For the most part, it's all ear candy.

The Sub-$200 Limbo Stick

The field of sub-$200 speakers is crowded, so you have to be pretty good to stand out. However, the laws of physics are tough to violate, and since most of these units are fairly compact in size, it's tough to get good sound out of them. Manufacturing cost is a factor, too, so some of the really inexpensive speakers cut corners, such as having permanently attached cables instead of (more expensive) connectors.

Advent Powered Partners AV390

★★★½

The AV390s are the high end of Advent's Powered Partners product line. They sport features like virtual Dolby ProLogic (using a chip developed by Aureal Semiconductor) and a DSP to broaden the sound stage.

The bass unit is large and square, and is meant to be mounted sideways, as its controls face down. If you have a side of your desk or a nearby wall free, this is a cool feature, but if you have tube-framed furniture, then this design is problematic, as the bass unit will take up a large floor footprint. Setup is fairly simple, with straightforward cable connections, and all the needed controls are on the right satellite, except for the power switch and bass volume (which is usually set only once anyway). The mute switch is a nice feature. You punch the volume control, and the speakers mute.

The DSP and virtual ProLogic work, although I preferred the DSP setting to the ProLogic setting.

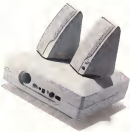
Actually, I *really* preferred the non-surround setting the best. In WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY it sounded as if there were some nearby sounds to the right and left of me, but I didn't really experience the rear effect. The missing (virtual) center channel seemed to be insufficient.

As standard speakers, the AV390s sound pretty good. Overall tonal balance is smooth and slightly warm. They do tend to distort when you turn them up very loud, however. Still, you could do far worse than a set of AV390s. Give them a listen before you purchase them, though.

Advent Powered Partners AV390
*Price: $199.95. Contact: Interact, (800) 732-8666, **www.poweredpartners.com***
***PROS:** Pleasant, warm sounding speakers, easy setup, no power brick. **CONS:** Distort at high levels, bass unit should be mounted sideways to minimize floor footprint.*

Advent Powered Partners AV190

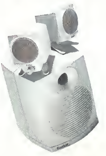
★★★★



These are minuscule versions of Advent's AV390s, and they lack the AV390s' virtual Dolby surround capability. The bass unit has a 5.25-inch long-throw woofer, and the satellites consist of single 3-inch drivers in the classic triangular cabinet. As with the 390s, you can attach the bass unit to the side of a desk or a wall, which is the preferred setup.

The AV190s aren't as loud as the AV390s, but the overall tonal quality is quite similar. With music, they sound a bit warm, especially vocals. It was also easy to overdrive these speakers with "hot" music source material, but I didn't notice it so much with games. Of course, you can't shake the rafters with these babies, nor does the bass go as low as in some of the more expensive speakers, but that's the point. These speakers are *cheap*. At $70, nothing in their price range can match them, unless you can find a good deal on a pair of Cambridge SoundWorks' PC Works.

Advent Powered Partners AV190
*Price: $69.95. Contact: Interact, (800) 732-8666, **www.poweredpartners.com***
***PROS:** Pleasant, warm sounding speakers, small desktop footprint; no power brick. **CONS:** Distort easily, large bass unit floor footprint, not very loud.*



Boston Acoustics BA-635

★★★★★

When I had to give these puppies up for the photo shoot for this article, I was nearly reduced to tears. I really liked these tiny guys. Although they aren't really loud, they put out more than enough volume for a small office or dorm room.

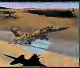
CONFIDENCE IS HIGH

Virgin INTERactive

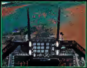
F16 AGGRESSOR

-16 Aggressor is the closest anyone utside the military will get to experiencing light in the cockpit of an F-16. Selected as ne of 1998's "Hot 100" games by both *Computer Gaming World* and *PC Gamer,* -16 Aggressor boasts a fly-by-wire system hat's been modeled and integrated to erfection—a technological feat few if any light sims can claim.

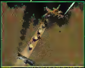
The difference is tangible. Takeoff is incredible. Acceleration is awesome. Manueverability is phenomenal. Dead-on representations of the F-16's cockpit and controls enhance your flight experience as you take out enemy targets in 40 geo-political missions over destabilized regions of Africa. F-16 Aggressor. Any closer to the real thing and we'd have to shoot you.



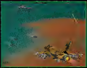
Jorld class technology eaturing flight modeling o accurate that only top ecret military features ave been excluded.



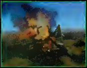
The F-16 "Fly-by-wire" system has been precisely modeled and integrated to offer you a flight sim that soars above the rest.



40 exciting missions spread across 4 campaigns with a vast array of military targets.



Uniquely detailed enemy A.I. that controls tanks, helicopters, boats, trains and cars with incredible realism.



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PlayStation
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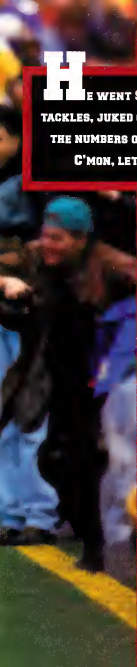

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Moreover, when playing music, they sound very smooth and uncolored. Even when cranked up, the BA-635s have very little noticeable distortion. With games, they sound even better, and are great when paired with a low-cost A3D-capable sound card.

The bass unit is *tiny*, and yet it seems to put out enough low-frequency audio to satisfy every-one except Bach organ fugue aficionados. Boston Acoustics is one of the few speaker makers that manufactures its own drivers, and the results seem very positive. If all you've got is $100, then the BA-635s are a good buy.

Boston Acoustics BA-635
Price $99, Contact Boston Acoustics, (978) 538 5000, ***www.bostonacoustics com***
PROS: *Clean, uncolored sound, small desktop/floor footprint, easy setup.* ***CONS:*** *They're not very loud*

JBL Media 2000

★★☆☆☆

These speakers *look* deadly cool. In fact, these were probably the best looking speakers in the roundup It's too bad they don't sound as good as they look.

JBL has long had a history of developing studio monitors, and its home speakers are decent as wall. That's why I was scratching my head after listening to the Media 2000s. The only theory I can come up with is that they were designed for people who want to listen to music at low volumes.

The overall sound is fairly clean, but the bass unit doesn't deliver any punch. Musical material sounded fine at low volumes, but distorted if you turned the volume up past the 50 percent level. No matter how much I fiddled with the sound card or the speakers, these guys sounded anemic, at best.

Game audio was equally disappointing. For $160 (the going street price) you can do a lot better.

JBL Media 2000
Price $160 (street) Contact JBL, (800) 336 4JBL ***www.jbl com***
PROS: *They look cool* ***CONS:*** *Incapable of high volume, no bass punch, anemic sound*

MIDILand/S2 4030

★★★½☆

I've liked what I've seen of S2 speakers before, but they were always devilishly hard to find. Last year, S2 signed a distribution agreement with MIDILand, so perhaps its speakers will be more widely available in the future.

The 4030s are a set of relatively low-cost sub/satellite speakers. S2 has attacked the control issue by

Look, Ma, No Sound Card

Imagine a world with no sound cards. You would no longer have to hassle with IRQs, DMA, and a host of other annoyances that assault us even in a Plug-and-Play world. Sounds too good to be true, eh? In fact, such a world may be just around the corner. We managed to get a sneak peek at a pair of USB speaker sets. One is from longtime speaker giant Altec-Lansing, and the other is from a little outfit in Redmond called Microsoft. That's right, Microsoft is doing speakers. As you read this, the Altec-Lansing ADA 70 should be in your local computer superstore. The Microsoft speakers—code-named "First Bass"—should be out before Christmas. I took a look at preproduction versions of both units.

Not surprisingly, both speaker sets are designed for Windows 98. However, they do have analog inputs, so you can still plug sound cards into them should you feel you're not ready to make the move to Windows 98. But if you do upgrade, under Windows 98, the digital audio is streamed out the USB port and the digital-to-analog (D/A) conversion to analog sound is handled by circuitry inside the bass module.

Plugging the ADA-70s into the USB port was a startling experience. Windows 98 detected the speakers and installed all the drivers. No software came with the system. Within minutes of setup, the speakers were live—not a single reboot needed. The audio quality of the ADA-70s seemed to be a bit warm, and they were fairly loud. You can control output levels from a knob on the right speaker or from the Windows mixer. There was a low crackling sound, but Altec-Lansing is aware of the problem and promises that it won't be in the shipping product.

Microsoft "First Bass"

The Microsoft speakers were also quite loud Unlike the ADA-70s, the First Bass system did ship with software. Included was a nine-band, software graphic equalizer and a new MIDI software renderer. The First Bass sound was warm overall, but the equalizer allowed me to tweak the audio balance to my heart's content. You can adjust volume, bass, and treble from controls on the right speaker. The bass unit used a 5.25-inch driver coupled with a 5.25-inch passive radiator—a fairly sophisticated technique that gets a bigger bass sound out of relatively small drivers.

When running the ADA-70s, MIDI music is generated by Windows 98's new software MIDI renderer, which caused a fairly steady 15 percent CPU load on a Pentium II/400 (according to the Windows System Monitor). The Microsoft speakers, ironically enough, have their own custom software that took just under 10 percent of the CPU cycles. However, MIDI is less prevalent in recent games than in those from years past, so this may not be much of a factor in the long run. Certainly the quality of the MIDI sounds—based on Roland Sound Canvas samples—was pretty good.

There are still reasons to have sound cards—neither speaker set handled 3D audio. There was a tantalizing "3D Audio" checkbox in the Microsoft equalizer, but it didn't seem to do anything. Even so, both speaker sets worked amazingly well. Maybe we will be able to ditch that sound card after all. —*L.C.*

Altec-Lansing ADA-70
Price $149 95, Contact Altec Lansing (800) ALTEC88, ***www altecmm com/***
Microsoft "First Bass"
Price ± $200, Contact Microsoft, (425) 882-8080 ***www microsoft com/hardware***

AMD

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MIDWEST CONNECTION

Quake players and clans in the Pacific time zone have gotten the lion's share of the fame and glory, at least in the eyes of the general public. But the Quake cognoscenti have always known that America's Midwest and East regions are home to some of the country's greatest players and teams. Well, the PGL is an equal-opportunity kind of league, and as the MidWestern gods of gaming join up, it's our duty – nay, our pleasure – to make them known to a wider audience. Here then is a closer look at the MidWest's scariest squad, *Unforgiven...*

UNFORGIVEN TEAM HONORS/TITLES:

Big12 - First Place, Division DC-Con 3 - First Place DC-Con 4 - First Place DMCon '97 - 1st Place DMCon '98 - 1st Place Elite Eight - Second Place T2 - Quarterfinalists T3 - Second Place

REAL NAME: Thomas Dawson **ARCHNEMESIS:** none **PREFERRED WEAPON:** I "really" like the lightning gun. **CONTROLLER:** mouse/keyboard **ALSO PLAYS:** Anything that's multiplayer, I'll play it :) **BIRTHPLACE:** Champaign, IL **RESIDENCE:** Monticello, IL **AGE:** 20 **CONNECTION:** T1 **CPU SPEED:** 300mhz **FAVORITE LEVEL:** Any of the Quake deathmatch levels **FAVORITE SAYING:** "ZoinkS" **HOBBIES:** Reading, competitive games/athletics, tinkering with computers

REAL NAME: Dave Chun **ARCHNEMESIS:** Originally, Brett Honneus, aka "honus." Now, I don't really have one... **PREFERRED WEAPON:** There's no feeling like having a lightning gun and a lot of cells. **CONTROLLER:** Logitech Mouseman 96 + keyboard **ALSO PLAYS:** Tekken2, and I dabble in all of the 3D shooter games. **BIRTHPLACE:** Chicago, IL **RESIDENCE:** St. Louis, MO **AGE:** 19 **CONNECTION:** formerly dual T3 ethernet, now modem **CPU SPEED:** 200mhz **FAVORITE LEVEL:** DM4, Favorite Saying: "asdkjf;alskdjfsa;j" **HOBBIES:** Messing with computers, playing/watching sports, I'm also a big movie buff

REAL NAME: Dan Hammans **ARCHNEMESIS:** none really =) **PREFERRED WEAPON(s):** Rocket Launcher/ Lightning Gun/Boomstick **CONTROLLER:** Logitech Mouse + keyboard **ALSO PLAYS:** All Games **BIRTHPLACE:** Ames, Iowa **RESIDENCE:** Ames, Iowa **AGE:** 18 **CONNECTION:** 128K ISDN **CPU SPEED:** 166mhz **FAVORITE LEVEL:** DM4, **FAVORITE SAYING:** "wouldn'tyouknowitmyspacebarisbroken" **HOBBIES:** Car stereo, hockey, IRC, model railroads

REALNAME: Eric Paik **ARCHNEMESIS:** myself **PREFERRED WEAPON(s):** Double Barrel Shotgun w/ Quad **CONTROLLER:** Logitech Mouseman and Keyboard **ALSO PLAYS:** Windows solitaire **BIRTHPLACE:** Omaha, NE **RESIDENCE:** Omaha, NE **AGE:** 22 **CONNECTION:** Cable Modem **CPU SPEED:** 300mhz **FAVORITE LEVEL(S):** Deathmatch: DM6; Teamplay: DM3 **FAVORITE SAYING:** (not suitable for publication) **HOBBIES:** Reading, Golf, chillin' on IRC

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DreamForge

ASC GAMES

placing all the speaker controls in a small box, which you can mount in a free 5.25-inch drive bay in you PC. It's a slightly geeky, but a very workable solution.

For a fairly small set of speakers, the 4030s pump out a robust sound. It can't be described as "uncolored," but it's still pleasing to the ear, and you can crank up these speakers pretty loud. When playing music, the 4030s seemed to emphasize the vocal spectrum, and there was just a touch of edginess to the sound quality. Game audio sounded pretty good. If you can't mount the control box in your PC, you can always attach it to your monitor with some user-supplied velcro.

All in all, these are a decent set of affordable speakers that manage to pump out a reasonably impressive volume.

MIDILand/S2 4030
Price $189, Contact MIDILand, (888) 592 1168, ***www midiland com***
PROS *High volume for such small units, good control layout, compact size*
CONS *Music has a slightly edgy and colored quality to it*

Quickshot Sound Force 680/Bass Machine 2

★★★

We reviewed the Sound Force 680s a few months back and found them to be a decent set of low-cost speakers. This time around, we paired them up with a Bass Machine 2. The combination retails for $140, but Quickshot gear tends to be discounted heavily, so you can probably find this setup for much less.

These speakers sound pretty good during gameplay. I say that first, because you wouldn't want to play much music through them. Vocal material sounded strained, in particular, and sibilants (the "ssss" sound) were quite exaggerated. The Bass Machine had a two-position crossover switch that either overemphasized or underemphasized the bass material, though some fiddling with the bass volume helped.

In games, though, you can crank these babies up *loud*. The Bass Machine provides a satisfying rumble during explosions and other similar effects. The real downside is that these are separate units and don't seem all that well tuned to each other.

Quickshot Sound Force 680/Bass Machine 2
Price $69 each, Contact Quickshot (408) 263 4163, ***www quickshot com***
PROS *Don t distort loud gaming audio relatively low cost* ***CONS*** *Music quality not very clean*

Sony SRS-PC71

★★

These goofy-looking, stand-alone speakers would look right at home in Jean-Luc Picard's quarters. They are also paradoxical: They sound *terrible* with music, yet pretty darned good with games.

These speakers distort at the merest whiff of any dynamic range in strong musical scores. Part of the problem may be the lack of a dedicated bass unit (the midrange/bass driver is only 2.6 inches). I don't recommend these at all if you like playing your music CDs in your PC.

Game audio is a different story. I cranked up the audio in MECHCOMMANDER and QUAKE II pretty loud, and didn't notice any distortion. Even in-game music seemed fine. Go figure. At any rate, if you like the way they look, and you don't listen to much music, you might consider these. But you can really do better for less money.

Sony SRS-PC71
Price $105, Contact Sony (800) 352-7669 ***www ita sel sony com/products/av/personal/***
PROS *Star Trek look, decent game audio*
CONS *Expensive for what you get lousy music playback*

Yamaha YST-M100

★★★

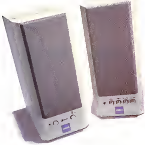
If these speakers had come out about three years ago—before the shift to dedicated powered bass units—I probably would have raved about them.

First, these are *big* desktop speakers. Although they'll work with a subwoofer, they don't ship with one. These are two-way design, with a 3.5-inch woofer and a 0.6-inch dome tweeter. However, therein lies the problem. Although these speakers sound fairly clean, the lack of a subwoofer is really noticeable. Yamaha specs the frequency response down to just 50Hz, and that's an optimistic number.

In addition to being big, these guys are also heavy, although they do have a 20 watt-per-channel RMS amplifier. Music audio sounded clean and uncluttered, but suffered from the lack of bass. Game audio fared better, but big explosions or rumbling sound effects were a bit tinny.

If you have the desk space and a few more bucks for a dedicated subwoofer, these might be very solid speakers. They would also be superb as the rear speakers in a four-speaker setup—but that would be an expensive set of rear channel speakers

Yamaha YST-M100
Price $180 Contact Yamaha (714) 522 9000, ***www yamaha com***
PROS *Clean sound, easy setup*
CONS *Big desktop footprint low end response is lacking*



The High-Price Spread

These speakers are for people who want to go a bit beyond the mundane—and have the dollars to do it.

Boston Acoustics MediaTheater and MediaTheater Surround

★★★★

The MediaTheater system consists of a (by-now) familiar powered bass-plus-satellite configuration, with a couple of twists. First, as with the Advent AV390s, the MediaTheaters support virtualized Dolby ProLogic. However, unlike the Advent system, the MediaTheater can come with a pair of actual rear-channel surround speakers, housed in a single cabinet, as an option, if you don't want to go with the virtualized Dolby.

The MediaTheater's 6.5-inch throw woofer and 3-inch midrange/tweeter drivers deliver satisfying volume in most cases. Adding the MediaTheater Surrounds are a nice bonus, but bear in mind that they work only with Dolby ProLogic sound sources—you can't use them, for example, to act as the rear speakers in a four-speaker DirectSound3D setup.

Overall tonal balance was a little bright, but, unfortunately, the MediaTheaters have no built-in treble control with which to adjust the tonal balance. So, if your sound card can't adjust the tonal balance, you'll have to live with the brightness.

The subwoofer control is on the right satellite, which is a nice touch. Music sounded pretty good (although, as before, it was a bit bright), and these speakers didn't sound strained until very high volume levels.

Game audio can be pumped up pretty loud, though it won't shake any rafters. The virtual ProLogic works reasonably well, but you get the best sound quality with the optional MediaTheater Surround speakers—which work surprisingly well.

The MediaTheater system is not cheap, but price aside, it does deliver a solid audio experience. This system gets bonus points for ease of setup, convenient controls, and the rear surround speaker option.

Boston Acoustics MediaTheater & MediaTheater Surround

Price: $299 (MediaTheater), $99 (Media Theater Surround), Contact: Boston Acoustics (978) 538 5000

www.bostonacoustics.com

PROS: *Ample volume, easy setup, good overall sound quality* ***CONS:*** *Slightly bright, no treble control, pricey*

MIDILand/S2 4100

★★★★½

These are the most expensive speakers in the roundup (unless you add the Surround option to MediaTheater). These were also the only ones that were so loud they actually hurt my ears.

The S2 4100s deliver stunning volume, and for the most part, the tonal balance is pretty good, albeit a bit bright. Like their smaller siblings, the 4030s, the S2 4100s have a slick (or goofy, depending on your perspective) control box. Although the tonal balance did tend to be too bright for my tastes, I was able to adjust the treble control a tad to get a more pleasing sound.

The satellites are beefy two-way units with a 4-inch midrange and 0.6-inch dome tweeter. The huge subwoofer section (which is very near to a "true" subwoofer) sports a 50-watt bass amplifier and a 25-watt-per-channel amp for the satellites. The woofer itself is an 8-inch long-throw woofer. The whole affair can pump out superhigh volume. I ran the MECHCOMMANDER intro movie through these speakers and the experience proved to be mind-blowing, and game audio sounded positively incredible. The "3DSP" feature does a decent job of widening the sound stage.

Despite being a bit bright, these are terrific speakers, especially if you don't mind irate neighbors.

MIDILand/S2 4100

Price: $349 (estimated street price), Contact: MIDILand, (888) 592 1168,

www.midiland.com

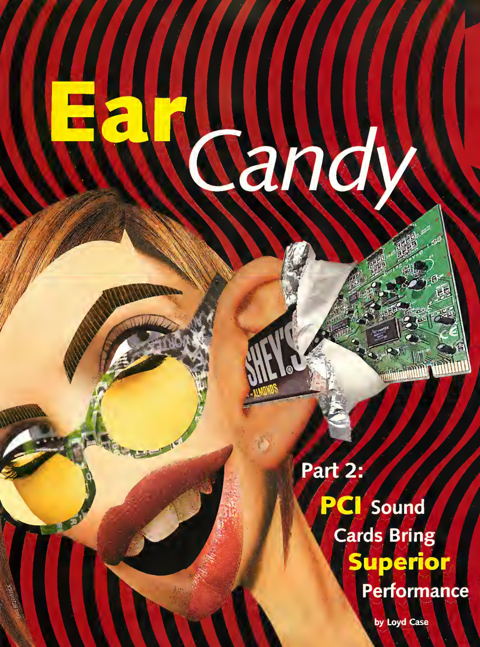
PROS: *Really loud, good sound quality overall, good controls* ***CONS:*** *Slight edginess and brightness to the tonal balance, not cheap*

How We Tested

Testing speakers is a challenge, especially if you don't have access to an anechoic chamber with an oscilloscope. I used a wide variety of musical sources to check out speakers' overall sound quality. My ears tend to be biased toward what used to be called "classical" speakers, so I prefer those speakers that don't emphasize any portion of the sound spectrum at their default settings. As a reference, I used the Eminent Technologies LFT-11s. While ostensibly "multimedia" speakers, the LFT-11s can stand up to audiophile speakers costing upward of $1,000.

In addition to music, I ran a number of .WAV files with test tones, which ranged from 30Hz to 15,000Hz. I also used some in-phase and out-of-phase pink noise samples. Then I put them through their paces with a number of games. Oddly enough, some speakers that didn't sound that good with music performed better with game audio, and I tried to point this out when it was the case. Finally, to test the pair of Dolby ProLogic–capable speakers, I fired up the intro to WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY.

Ear Candy

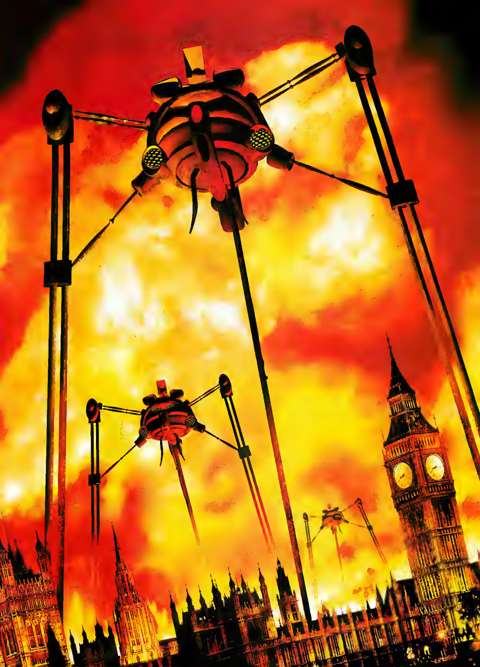


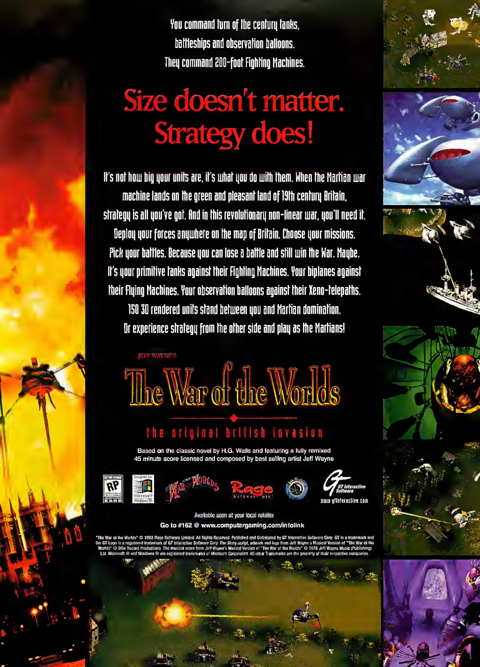
SHEY'S
ALMONDS

Part 2:

PCI Sound Cards Bring Superior Performance

by Loyd Case





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My production system (the one I use to write all these reviews) still has an AWE-32 with a Roland SCD-1S Sound Canvas daughtercard. I think it's time to retire the old ISA standard-bearer. Of course, I couldn't just *pick* a card. I had to test a range of them, for both my benefit and yours.

Why PCI sound cards? One thing driving the move to PCI audio is the Microsoft/Intel PC 98 spec. But it's not just the Wintel giants strong-arming an unwary public—there are some very good technical reasons to move to PCI.

Game audio is getting more complex. Positional 3D audio—including DirectSound3D and Aureal A3D—moves a lot of data across the bus. Throw in multiple sound streams, which are becoming increasingly prevalent, and you can easily leave the old ISA bus gasping for breath. PCI's faster bus speed—up to 133MB/sec—gives audio much more bandwidth to make use of.

The sound-chip designers have been hard at work taking advantage of this newly available (to audio, anyway) bandwidth. As with 3D graphics, we now have audio chips capable of accelerating DirectSound streams. I reviewed a representative sample of these new cards and revisited three others that *CGW* rated recently. The results follow: a handy guide if you're comparison shopping for a new sound card.

AUDIO
AZTECH
PCI 338-A3D
3D Positional Audio

Aztech PCI 338-A3D

★★★

Lurking under this mouthful of a name is a card that superficially resembles the Turtle Beach Montego. The version we tested lacked a wavetable header, but I've heard that some of the 338s do have wavetable headers. How you can tell without opening the box is anyone's guess.

The driver set appears to be the Aureal reference drivers. The sound quality was comparable to the MagicWave PCI, but this card didn't pop when I powered up. Some users have reported odd crackling in some games, but I didn't encounter this. There's no real manual, just a thin flyleaf that looks photocopied. The card comes with a minimal software bundle of multimedia utilities.

The MIDI sounds were on a par with the other cards in this roundup, and digital audio seemed fairly quiet, though there was a little hiss at higher volumes. Overall, there's not much to distinguish this card from the pack.

Aztech PCI 338-A3D

Price $69 Contact Aztech, (510) 623 8988 ***www.aztechca.com***

PROS *Fairly easy installation, A3D positional audio* ***CONS:*** *Practically nonexistent documentation, slight ambient hiss*

Worth Another Look ...

Before we dive headlong into the newest cards out there, let's look at these summaries of our most recent PCI audio-card reviews from past issues, along with the cards' CG scores, so you can compare.

Monster Sound M80

★★★

Monster Sound MX200

★★★★½

The retail prices for these two cards differ by $50. The core cards are very similar, but the M80 has a cheesy wavetable and supports only two speakers. On the other hand, the MX200 has a superb wavetable (based on the Roland Sound Canvas sample set) and also supports four-speaker DirectSound3D.

Both cards use Aureal's A3D positional audio algorithms, but they have a DSP (digital signal processor) solution instead of one that uses an Aureal chip. Neither card does well in DOS.

The digital audio on both cards is pretty good, and the cards are pretty quiet. Both cards had some teething problems with some joysticks, but the most recent driver set seems to have solved most of the issues. If you can spare the $50, the MX200 is the better card.

The full CGW reviews for these cards are in the following issues M80 June 1998 MX200 September 1998

Monster Sound M80 and MX200

Price $99 (M80) $149 (MX200) (both prices are MSRP), Contact Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468 5846 ***www.diamondmm.com***

DIAMOND
Monster Sound MX200
PCI AUDIO
PCI AUDIO ACCELERATOR
Advanced Sound for Heart-Pounding 3D Gaming

Turtle Beach Montego

★★★★

The Montego is probably the best of the Aureal Vortex cards currently on the market. This is a very quiet card—you'll hear no discernible hiss, even when the volume is cranked all the way up. There's also a wavetable header, so if you don't like the Aureal wavetable, you can add your favorite MIDI daughtercard. The Montego is a solid, unassuming card that, with some careful shopping, can be found for under $100.

The full CGW review for the Montego is in the August 1998 issue

Turtle Beach Montego

Price $129 (MSRP), Contact Turtle Beach, (800) 233 9377 ***www.voyetra.com***

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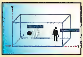
What is Environmental Audio™?

Environmental Audio™
by CREATIVE®

Environmental Audio — the next audio platform by Creative. Its revolutionary technology recreates real-world multi-dimensional audio on your PC. It immerses you in sound so vivid, you experience games, music, and other existing audio applications rather than just hear them.

By nature, the human ear is intolerant of audio imperfections. The Environmental Audio Platform addresses this problem by introducing a system comprised of the following components:

- **Environmental Audio Hardware** powered by the powerful 1,000+MIPS, 2 million transistor EMU10K1™ audio processor chip, Sound Blaster Live! provides the highest possible audio fidelity with multiple digital audio input/output (I/O) capabilities.
- **Environmental Audio Software Technologies** created by E-mu Systems®, Inc., a subsidiary of Creative, that provides high-end audio equipment to Hollywood studios, will change the way you perceive audio forever. They include:

  E-mu Environmental Modeling™, which accurately positions audio objects in a 3D space by rendering audio reflections and; **Creative Multi Speaker Surround™**, which allows real-time panning and mixing of multiple sound sources using two or more speakers. These technologies will greatly enhance audio content from the past, the present, and the future.
- **Environmental Audio Extensions** (EAX) enable game and application developers to easily enhance their software with high-quality Environmental Audio effects. EAX is designed to be a natural extension to Microsoft® DirectSound® 3D API and has received overwhelming support from hundreds of software developers
- **Environmental Audio Speaker Systems** work well with two-speakers, but Environmental Audio will deliver its full potential with Creative's new line of multi-channel systems.

The **PCWorks™ FourPointSurround™** speaker system is the best companion for your Sound Blaster Live!. It offers four compact satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.

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FourPointSurround
Cambridge
SoundWorks

The **Desktop Theater™ 5.1**, a great companion for your PC-DVD™ system, is a five-satellite plus powered subwoofer speaker system with an amplifier and a built-in Dolby® Digital decoder.

*Look for the **Environmental Audio logo** on selected Creative and Cambridge SoundsWorks® products, and new supported game titles to ensure you are getting the Live! experience.*

Sound Blaster® Live! Card

Digital I/O Card

Technical Specifications

Wave-Table Synthesis

- E-mu® Systems EMU10K1™ music synthesis engine
- 64-voice polyphony with E-mu's patented 8-point interpolation technology
- 192-voice polyphony PCI wave-table synthesis
- 48 MIDI channels with 128 GM & GS-compatible instruments and 10 drum kits
- Uses SoundFont® technology for user-definable wave-table sample sets; includes 2MB, 4MB, and 8MB sets
- Load up to 32MB of samples into host memory for professional music reproduction

Effects Engine

- E-mu Systems EMU10K1 patented effects processor
- Supports real-time digital effects like reverb, chorus, flange, pitch shifter, or distortion across any audio source
- Capable of processing, mixing, and positioning audio streams using up to 131 available hardware channels
- Customizable effects architecture allows audio effects and channel control
- Full digital mixer maintains all sound mixing in the digital domain, eliminating noise from the signal
- Full bass, treble, and effects controls available for all audio sources

3D Audio Technology

- User-selectable settings are optimized for headphones and two or four speakers
- Accelerates Microsoft® DirectSound® and DirectSound 3D
- Support for Environmental Audio™ property set extensions
- Creative Multi Speaker Surround™ technology places any mono or stereo sound source in a 360° audio space
- Creative Environments—user-selectable DSP modes that simulate acoustic environments like Hall, Theater, Club, etc. on any sound source

Hollywood-Quality, 32-Bit Digital Audio Engine

- User-selectable bit rates from 8- to 16-bit
- User-selectable sample rates from 8kHz to 48kHz
- All sound sources are handled with 32-bit precision for highest quality output
- Analog and Digital I/O modes supported
- Hardware full-duplex support enables simultaneous record and playback at 8 standard sample rates
- Utilizes AC97 audio codec

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- Supports MPU-401 UART mode
- IBM® compatible 15-pin joystick port with analog support
- Support for digital and DirectInput™ game devices

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DIAMOND
SONIC IMPACT
PCI AUDIO

Diamond Sonic Impact

★★★☆☆

The Sonic Impact uses the ESS Maestro 2 audio chip, the latest PCI audio accelerator chip from ESS, which is a significant improvement over the Maestro 1.

The Sonic Impact's installation was pretty straightforward. The card has two output ports, but there's no mention of DirectSound 3D support. Connecting a second speaker set seemed to just play back the same stereo channels. Turning up the amp with no audio playing revealed golden silence.

The MIDI sounds were decent, though unspectacular. The Sonic Impact supports DSS (downloadable samples), which may see support in future computer games. The joystick port works fine with most game controllers, but the READ.ME file specifically calls out the ThrustMaster Millennium 3D Inceptor and Rage3D gamepads (or any "3.3-volt controller") as not working.

All in all, the Sonic Impact is a decent, low-cost PCI sound card. It's unpretentious, generally works well, but isn't really leading-edge in any way.

Diamond Sonic Impact

*Price: $69.95, Contact: Diamond Multimedia, (800) 468-5846, **www.diamondmm.com***

***PROS:** Low cost, clean digital sound, and decent MIDI. **CONS:** No apparent 3D positional audio support, problems supporting certain game controllers.*

MagicWave PCI

★★★☆☆

Aureal's Vortex chipset has found its way into a number of relatively low-cost retail sound cards. The MagicWave PCI from IOMagic is one of two such cards reviewed here.

The MagicWave bears a strong resemblance to the original Vortex reference board, right down to the bare-wire connectors for the CD-RDM audio cable. Hooking up the CD audio is a bit of a chore. It took a couple of tries to get the software to install, but there were no major meltdowns. The MIDI sound is pretty much what we've come to expect with Vortex boards. It's decent, but unspectacular. The acoustic piano is a bit muffled and the horn section has that characteristic "synth" sound. However, the card does ship with a software version of the Yamaha XG wavetable—which is fine for musical playback, but isn't too useful for gaming MIDI because of the potential CPU hit.

I ran several analog and digital game controllers, including Microsoft's Freestyle gamepad, without any problems, but I didn't have the somewhat problematic Rage3D to test. There's just the slightest hissing noise when the gain is turned all the way up. Also, a distinct popping sound (though not loud) occurs when you first power up the system.

While the Turtle Beach Montego is more expensive, it's definitely quieter and has the wavetable connector, should you want to replace the default Vortex MIDI. If you're on a budget, check this out.

MagicWave PCI

*Price: $69.95, Contact: IOMagic, (949) 727-7466, **www.iomagic.com***

***PROS:** Low cost, A3D positional audio **CONS:** Distinct popping sound on startup, some ambient hiss*

Sound Blaster PCI 128

★★★★☆

Creative Labs acquired Ensoniq not long ago, and the company immediately began pumping out sound cards that use Ensoniq's established PCI technology. The PCI 128 is the latest card in the series. This card has support for DirectSound3D through support for four speakers. (To take advantage of that very feature, Creative also offers a four-satellite version of its PCWorks speakers.)

Sound BLASTER PCI128
CREATIVE
BLASTER PCI128
Four-Channel Audio for True 3D

Creative's setup software has improved steadily over the years, and the installation of the PCI 128 went flawlessly. One reboot later I was greeted with an entirely new Windows startup sound.

The first thing I did was turn the volume on the speakers up—way up. My ears were greeted with a most pleasing silence.

MIDI tests revealed very crisp acoustic piano, a hallmark of Ensoniq MIDI. The drum sounds were a bit more problematic, as the kick drum sounded a little flat in the 2M8 sample set. The snare drum transmogrified into a wood block in the 4M8 set when playing back our sample MIDI files. The horns sounded much better with the 4M8 set, though. Digital sound quality was pretty good. I briefly attached a set of rear speakers just to see if this feature worked. Playing UNREAL was certainly a different experience—somewhat better than Aureal A3D virtual positional 3D, but not much so. If you have the space and the inclination, the four-speaker setup may be an interesting option.

I/O MAGIC
MAGICWAVE PCI
A3D AUDIO ACCELERATOR

All I had on hand for DOS audio was QUAKE; the PCI 128 handled the audio chores with aplomb. There was no noticeable crackling, as has been the case with past Ensoniq cards.

Overall, the PCI 128 is a decent low-cost card that offers positional audio only through four-speaker support. The PCI 128's MIDI is reasonably good, its digital sound is

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YAMAHA
WAVEFORCE 192XG
SOUNDCARD

clean, and its installation is simple. This is one card that's definitely worth a listen.

Sound Blaster PCI 128
Price $99.99 Contact Creative Labs, (408) 428 6600 ***www.soundblaster.com***
PROS *Very easy to install support for four speaker positional audio* ***CONS*** *No virtualized 3D audio, slight inconsistencies in MIDI playback*

Yamaha Waveforce 192XG

★★☆☆☆

When I heard that Yamaha was bringing out a PCI sound card incorporating XG MIDI with 3D positional audio, I was pretty keen to test it. But then the horror began.

Actually, the Waveforce 192XG sounds pretty good. Its MIDI is very realistic—certainly the best in this roundup. When I cranked up the amp with no sound playing, there was a little noticeable hiss, however. Games and low-res .WAV files played back without any noticeable breakups or artifacts, though.

The big problem with the Waveforce 192XG is its installation. I tried installing it under both Windows 95 and Windows 98. Under Windows 98, it went into a weird infinite-reboot cycle. Even after a second clean Windows 98 installation, the same thing occurred. Every time I booted up, I'd get a message telling me, "Your configuration has changed; you need to restart Windows for the changes to take effect." Rebooting would simply bring up the message again.

The only workaround for this situation was to click the cancel button, go to device manager, and click the "Restart" button there. Only then would Windows do a soft restart, and I would have audio.

In Windows 95, I never got the joystick port to work properly, despite the fact that I carefully followed the installation instructions. Then there's the 100 classical MIDI sequences, complete with friendly front-end to allow you to select which piece you want to play back. Unfortunately, no matter which title I selected, the same music would play back.

So I'm left scratching my head. This is a terrific sounding card with one of the worst setup debacles I've run into since the days of late, unlamented UltraSound. I'd have to give this one a bye until the software is cleaned up.

Yamaha Waveforce 192XG
Price $99 Contact Yamaha, (714) 522-9000 ***www.yamaha.com***
PROS *Very realistic wavetable* ***CONS.*** *Terrible setup, slight hiss with high gain joystick problems*

Sound Goods

As for my choice of sound card, I'll probably switch to the Diamond Monster Sound MX200 for my production system. It's a solid card, it's fairly quiet, and it has terrific MIDI, A3D support, and four-speaker capability. It's lacking in DOS performance, but I find that I just don't run DOS games anymore anyway. I really wanted to like the Yamaha Waveforce 192XG, but the setup difficulties make me leery. Creative Labs has shored up Ensoniq's PCI offering with the PCI 128. It's a fine sound card with no glaring weaknesses, but it doesn't really stand out, either. Of the Vortex cards, the Turtle Beach Montego bears serious consideration, but it also costs a bit more than most of the others.

Now that PCI audio is a reality, the last real holdout on the ISA bus is fast becoming history. Now if we could just have some PCI-only systems.... *CGW*

Features Comparison

Product	CGW Rating	Price	3D Support
Aztech PCI 338.A3D (510) 623-8988 www.aztechca.com	★★★	$69.00	DirectSound 3D, A3D
Diamond MonsterSound M80 (800) 468-5846 www.diamondmm.com	★★★	$99.00	DirectSound 3D, A3D
Diamond MonsterSound MX200 (800) 468-5846 www.diamondmm.com	★★★★½	$149.00	DirectSound 3D, A3D
Diamond Sonic Impact (800) 468-5846 www.diamondmm.com	★★★	$69.95	None
Magicwave PCI (949) 727-7466 www.iomagic.com	★★★	$69.95	DirectSound 3D, A3D
Sound Blaster PCI 128 (408) 428-6600 www.soundblaster.com	★★★★	$99.99	DirectSound 3D
Turtle Beach Montego (800) 233-9377 www.voyetra.com	★★★★	$129.00	DirectSound 3D, A3D
Yamaha WaveForce 192XG (714) 522-9000 www.yamaha.com	★★	$99.00	DirectSound 3D, CRL

DEMONSTRATION:

1. Tear out this page.
2. Crumple into ball.
3. Toss over your shoulder.

▶ The sound this ad will make when it hits the ground *behind* you is the power of A3D™ from Aureal, the only audio that works the way your ears do.

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3D

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Voodoo Banshee™

Contest URL: www.3dfx.com/win-a-banshee

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Is Xeon Right for Gamers?

Intel wants to sell more CPUs. Now before you say, "duh," consider that this simple statement belies the number of different target markets they're trying to sell to. These range from the sub-$1,000 PC segment to gamers to business users to the high-end workstation and server market. Intel has a lot of competition on the low-end and in the business segment from AMD, Cyrix, and IDT/Centaur, but it enjoys a performance lead selling to gamers. So having an interesting high-end story completes Intel's market picture. To address this, Intel has begun shipping its Xeon processor. Is Xeon something gamers should be thinking about buying? Most likely, the answer is no.

First of all, the plumbing differences between Xeon and the rest of the Pentium II line have nothing to do with the CPU core itself, but rather the Level 2 (L2) cache architecture. Pentium IIs ship with 512KB of L2 cache that runs at half the CPU's core clock-speed on its own back bus, which means that it doesn't have to share bandwidth with main memory. So a PII/400MHz CPU's L2 runs at 200MHz. Xeon runs a larger, embedded L2 cache—512KB, 1MB, and, eventually, 2MB—at the same core clock-speed as the CPU, so a 400MHz Xeon's L2 also runs at 400MHz.

Now, all of you early adapters out there may be saying, "Where do I sign up?" But having an embedded L2 increases the CPU's die size and manufacturing cost, although this added cost doesn't quite explain the Xeon's astronomical price-tag—$2,800 for a Xeon with a 1MB L2 cache. The question is, even if you're prepared to pony up for this thing, will it affect your games' performance? On nearly all desktop applications, including games, the sweet-spot for L2 caches is right around 512KB, and anything beyond that may yield a small gain, but most likely doesn't justify the additional cost, and certainly doesn't in the case of Xeon. *—Dave Salvator*

3D Labs and Number Nine Ready New Metal

3D Labs is well known for its high end, OpenGL-oriented 3D accelerators. Their low-end accelerators, the Permedia line, have been decent entry level OpenGL parts, but have lacked robust Direct3D functionality and fill rate. 3D Labs has now seen the light. The company has created a division to focus on the consumer market space, and has announced the Permedia 3 chip, whose "native" API is Direct3D 6.0. Certainly, its paper specs are impressive. As with the RIVA TNT, the Permedia 3 sports dual-texturing engines and a claimed fill-rate of 250Mpixels/sec (or 125 trilinear MIP mapped pixels per second). Also like the TNT, the Permedia 3 focuses on DirectX 6 features, including bump mapping, multitexturing and stencil buffers. The chip does 32-bit rendering throughout the pipeline. It also supports anisotropic filtering, AGP 2X, 32-bit Z-buffer, and has a special, demand paged virtual texture mapping capability that the company claims speeds up texture fetches and eases texture management. Shipments are slated for late Q3 or early Q4 '98.

Number Nine Buys a New Ticket

Number Nine dipped its toes in the 3D waters last year with the Revolution 3D, which used their 3rd generation Ticket-2-Ride chip. Although its 2D performance was top-notch, its 3D performance was lackluster. So the company went back to the drawing board and created the Ticket-2-Ride IV (T2R IV).

The T2R IV offers the now-familiar set of 3D features, including 16- and 32-bit Z-buffering, per-pixel MIP mapping, and trilinear filtering. There's also support for 4- and 8-bit palettized textures and full-scene antialiasing. It's the first chip we've seen in the consumer arena that will support up to 32MB of video RAM, though the first offerings will be 16MB.

The T2R IV is a fully 128-bit chip and has a built-in 250MHz DAC. Plus, it's a full AGP 2X part. Number Nine isn't quoting fill-rate numbers, but they look to be in the 100–150 Mpixel/sec range. As with past efforts, it should have superb true-color 2D performance. *—Loyd Case*

The T2R IV

TechWatch

nVidia RIVA TNT: This is nVidia's next-generation 2D/3D graphics accelerator, which may well out-perform two, yes two, Voodoo^2 boards running SLI. The company anticipates that the TNT will have a fill rate of 200–250Mpixels/sec, as compared to twin Voodoo^{2}s, which are generally in the 180–200Mpixels/sec range. ETA: Q3 '98

FireWire: This part, also known as IEEE 1394, is a high-bandwidth bus (400Megabits/sec, or 50Megabytes/sec) that will support high-quality digital video, hard-drives, and other storage devices. All FireWire devices will be hot swappable, which means that you can attach/detach devices and immediately be able to use them without rebooting your machine. ETA: Q4 '98

Intel IA-64: Intel's next-next-generation of processors will be a substantial departure from their traditional X86 CISC-based architecture. This new 64-bit CPU will use a new set of Very Long Instruction Word (VLIW) instructions, and use a technology termed EPIC (Explicitly Parallel Instruction Computing) to execution of instructions in parallel. ETA: Q4 '99

S3 Savage3D: Since the 3D performance for S3's ViRGE part faltered, S3 realized that it needed to produce a competitive 3D part, and so it is working on the Savage3D. This part should have a fill rate of around 125Mpixels/sec drawing trilinear filtered pixels, which should make it competitive with nVidia's RIVA 128zx, Matrox's G200, and Intel's i740. ETA: Q3 '98

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Another Year, Another DirectX

DX6 Is More Than Just a Nip-and-Tuck

We're quickly approaching the Christmas shopping season. This means new graphics cards, new games, new computers—and a new version of DirectX Hey you, there in the back row: Stop wailing and gnashing your teeth

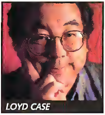
It's Better. No, Really...

Past versions of DirectX have given users quite a number of headaches. I'm confident that this release will probably cause an equal number of headaches. The multitude of different computer configurations almost guarantees there will be problems But I've been running the beta of DirectX6 on one computer, and have been pleasantly surprised at its relative stability Of course, most of my hardware is fairly current. Most of the problems I've heard about come from people who have older systems, or who have older devices (such as non–Plug-and-Play sound cards) in newer systems

There are some real improvements here, though many are from the developer's perspective. DirectX is now somewhat more accessible to developers, and its documentation is beefed up However, it may be post-Christmas before we see shipping games that take full advantage of DirectX6

More Input

After a very bumpy ride, DirectInput now finally understands USB, paving the way for easier game controller setup and multiple-controller support. That's right, you'll no longer have to remove and reinstall joysticks Windows 95 users have long been tantalized by the apparently long list of controllers that *seem* to be supported. However, you could never activate the second controller. That little problem will be fixed (at least if you're using USB). The four-axis limitation of the old game port will finally go away, and we'll have easy hot-swap support for game controllers.



> We should all **rush** out and download **DirectX6** when it ships, **right?** Not necessarily.

The new version of DirectInput introduces support for HID (Human Interface Devices), which is a generalized way of approaching all input devices It's the underlying software technology that enables support for USB as well as multiple devices

Sounds Good to Me

Audio support has also improved in a couple of key areas. There will be support for 3D positional audio through DirectSound3D. There's even a provision for virtualized positional 3D through the use of HRTF (head related transfer functions) algorithms. In layman's terms, this means that you can get positional 3D audio with only two speakers. Another emerging technology is DirectMusic, which, when fully operational, will allow dynamic music scores using MIDI. In other words, a composer might create a motif that will be changed on the fly by DirectMusic, depending on the type of action in a game. Having dynamic, context-sensitive music in lieu of canned loops may breathe life into the waning support for MIDI in games.

Getting Graphic

DirectDraw has been improved to handle multi-monitor support under Windows 98. There's better AGP support, though most of that's under the hood. There are some additional visual features, such as better support for 2D transparency.

But the biggest improvements have been to Direct3D. One of the major complaints from developers regarding Direct3D has been its use of execute buffers, which forced experienced 3D programmers into a completely different paradigm for rendering 3D scenes In DirectX5, Microsoft introduced DrawPrimitive, which began looking a bit like the way OpenGL does things—but it was still slower than execute buffers. In DirectX6, according to some sources, DrawPrimitive has expanded into several different methods for drawing polygons, and is actually faster than execute buffers. There's support for other features, too, like bump mapping and stencil buffers.

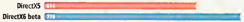
All of these things are important, but the biggest change is DirectX6's significant performance improvement. You probably won't see much improvement in current Direct3D games, but titles that use the Direct3D geometry pipeline for lighting and transforms will get a big boost. You can see this in 3D WinBench 98,

Continued on page 197

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS

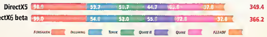
3D WinBench 98 (800x600x16)

ONWARD AND UPWARD DX6's optimized geometry engine makes for a 26 percent jump in 3D WinBench performance.



3D GameGauge (800x600x16)

RUNNING DX5 GAMES: The optimizations produce a small bounce for dx5games. dx6 games using d3d's geometry engine will get a bigger bounce.



How we tested: *The test system was CGW's Lean Machine, a Pentium II/300 with the 440BX chipset, 64MB of RAM, and a Diamond Monster3D II with 8MB of RAM*

The Phoenix has Landed

Maxi Gamer Phoenix™

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Guillemot's Maxi Gamer Phoenix brings the next generation of graphics after Voodoo2™. This Voodoo Banshee™ based 2D/3D card delivers world fastest 2D and scorching 3D.

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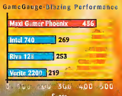
Experience the Power of
Phoenix.



Performance based on a PII-400 system, all competitive numbers recorded from CGW, Voodoo Banshee score run and recorded at 3Dfx with Alpha driver.

Key features of the Maxi Gamer Phoenix

√ Industry first 128-bit VGA, 100 MHz single-cycle Windows GUI Acceleration

√ High-resolution : up to 1600X1200 in 32 bit with a vertical refresh rate of 120 Hz

√ Voodoo2™ technology developed by 3Dfx Interactive® Inc.

√ Ultimate 3D experience with 100 Mpixels/sec, 100 Mtexels/sec & 4 Million triangles/sec.

√ No-compromise 3D image quality at high frame rates with 16MB RAM on board

√ Compatible with all games developed for Voodoo™ technology.

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Tech Tips

Copy Windows Setup Files to Your Hard Drive

I've written about reloading Windows 95/98 in the past. One huge timesaver is to copy the contents of the WIN95 or WIN98 folders on the Windows 98 CD to a similarly named folder on your hard drive. These folders contain the install files for Windows. With OSR2.x, the install files will take up about 70MB; the Windows 98 directory takes up about 170MB. Heck, that's less than most games these days. If you need to load/reload Windows, just point at the appropriate directory and run SETUP. Your install will be much smoother, and there will be no more "hunt the CD" games. It will be faster, too.

Game Crashes With PCI Sound Cards

While reviewing PCI sound cards (see this month's sound card roundup), I found out that some games just don't like DirectSound acceleration. If your game crashes with a DirectSound error, try disabling DirectSound acceleration. You can easily do this with most Aureal A3D cards in their Control Panel. Other sound cards may not offer the option. However, Windows 98 has an acceleration slider under the Advanced Properties tab. Sliding this all the way to the left disables audio acceleration. Mostly, you want to keep it on—it does help overall game performance—so don't forget to turn it on for most games.

Nuke the Temp Folder

Recently, I peeked inside the Windows temp folder (\windows\temp) and found nearly 60MB of junk there—old install files and other useless garbage. I deleted all of it. You might do the same. It's perfectly safe to remove anything in \windows\temp, and you'll free up some space in the process.

Continued from page 195

which uses D3D's geometry pipeline. Most of today's D3D titles don't use the geometry pipeline, though, because it was slow and inefficient. It's very likely that the new geometry pipeline will be faster than most of the custom-written pipelines. So you probably won't see much of a boost in current Direct3D titles. Curiously, GL QUAKE and QUAKE II run quite a bit faster, even though the D3D games in our 3D GameGauge score didn't shift by much.

However, there's a more significant reason for developers to use the new geometry engine: CPUs. The trio of CPUs that support AMD's 3DNow! instruction-set extensions (AMD, Cyrix, and IDT/Centaur), as well as Intel's upcoming Katmai CPU release, can significantly improve performance of Direct3D games—but only if they use the D3D geometry pipeline. Developers could actually hand-code their own T/L engines, but that's a big can of worms to open.

The new version of DirectX is even efficient in terms of code size. In DirectX5, all the .DLL files (18 or so) for Direct3D took up more than 3.5MB. In DirectX6, there's now one .DLL file that's about 750KB. That's right, folks, here's a release of a product from Microsoft that actually takes up *less* disk space than its predecessor. Will miracles never cease?

One other addition is the reference rasterizer, which isn't something a gamer would use on a regular basis, but it is a great tool for 3D-card driver writers. The reference rasterizer generates 3D images from Direct3D code that look the way Microsoft intends them to look. It's a guaranteed way of getting a "good" image. If the 3D card's images can't at least look as good as those generated by the reference rasterizer, then there are either driver problems or limitations in the hardware.

Caution Is the Watchword

All this sounds great, and we should all rush out and download DirectX6 when it ships, right? Not necessarily.

For one thing, you should check to see if your drivers support DirectX6. In the beta version, at least one Direct3D-capable card had worse image-quality problems with Direct3D using its DirectX5 driver under DirectX6.

Make no mistake about it, DirectX6 is a big leap—at least as big as the jump from DirectX3 to 5, but this is possibly even more significant. For one thing, Windows NT 5.0 will finally have full hardware support for DirectX6. But you might want to be careful about using it until you have a reason—a DirectX6-capable game, for instance. Compelling game titles: Now *there's* a good reason to upgrade. CGW

QUESTION:

There's two outs with a runner on third, count is two and two, and the game is on the line. As the pitcher winds up, you see your teammate barreling towards home and you step away from the plate. The ump yells "Strike Three," at the same time your teammate touches home. The run scores?

TRUE
Go to Page 226

or

FALSE
Go to Page 251

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KILLER RIGS

BUILD THE BEST SYSTEM MONEY CAN BUY

These are our top picks for each component.* Use this list to build your dream system, or to upgrade select components. All products tested using ZD, Inc. benchmarks or a variety of games, or both.

NO HOLDS BARRED

COMPONENT	PRODUCT	PRICE	WEB ADDRESS
Motherboard	ASUS P2B-LS	$353	www.asus.com
CPU	Pentium II/400	$638	www.intel.com
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM	$119	N/A
Disk Controller	Built-in Ultra2 SCSI	$0	N/A
Primary Graphics	Canopus Total3D/128V AGP	$194	www.canopuscorp.com
Secondary Graphics	Quantum3D Obsidian X24	$599	www.quantum3d.com
Hard Drive	Seagate Cheetah 9LP	$606	www.seagate.com
CD-ROM/DVD	Plextor Ultraplex	$139	www.plextor.com
Monitor	Sony 500PS	$1,295	www.sony.com
Primary Audio	Diamond Monster Sound MX200	$105	www.diamondmm.com
MIDI	Roland SCD-15	$188	www.edirol.com
Secondary Audio	AWE-64 Gold	$136	www.soundblaster.com
Speakers	LFT-11	$599	www.eminent-tech.com
Modem	3Com ImpactIQ	$186	www.3com.com
Networking	Built-in Intel 10/100 chip	$80	N/A
Case	In-Win IQ500	$115	www.in-win.com
Power Supply	Turbocool 300	$125	www.pcpowercooling.com
Keyboard	MS Natural Keyboard	$49	www.microsoft.com/hardware
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech Mouseman Plus	$43	www.logitech.com
Action-Game Controller	Rage 3D	$20	www.thrustmaster.com
Flight Joystick	Saitek X-36	$129	www.saitek.com
Rudder Pedals	ThrustMaster RCS	$90	www.thrustmaster.com
Driving Controls	TSW	$375	http://soli.inav.net/~thomas/

TOTAL: $6,183

LEAN & MEAN

COMPONENT	PRODUCT	PRICE	WEB ADDRESS
Motherboard	ABIT BX6	$139	www.abit.com.tw
CPU	Pentium II/300	$251	www.intel.com
Memory	128MB SDRAM	$118	N/A
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33	$0	N/A
Primary Graphics	Real3D Starfighter	$101	www.real3d.com
Secondary Graphics	Diamond Monster 3D II 8MB	$149	www.diamondmm.com
Hard Drive	Seagate Medalist Pro 6.5	$179	www.seagate.com
CD-ROM	ASUS 34x CD drive	$54	www.asus.com
Monitor	Optiquest Q71	$239	www.optiquest.com
Primary Audio	Turtle Beach Montego	$94	www.voyetra.com
Secondary Audio	N/A	$0	N/A
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA635	$99	www.bostonacoustics.com
Modem	US Robotics V.90	$82	www.3com.com
Networking	N/A	$0	N/A
Case	Elan Vital T10A8	$90	www.elanvital.com.tw
Power Supply	Built-in, 230W	$0	N/A
Keyboard	MS Natural	$49	www.microsoft.com/hardware
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech Mouseman Plus	$43	www.logitech.com
Action-Game Controller	ThrustMaster Rage3D	$20	www.thrustmaster.com
Flight Controls	CH F-16 Combat Stick	$34	www.chproducts.com
Driving Controls	N/A	$0	N/A

TOTAL: $1,741

*We have made every effort to ensure that this information would be timely and accurate. However, new hardware is constantly being released, and magazine production and distribution involves an 8- to 10-week delay. In cases where new products were close to release at presstime, we have kept our current top choice so that we only recommend finished products we have tested. *Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.*

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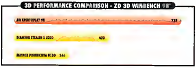

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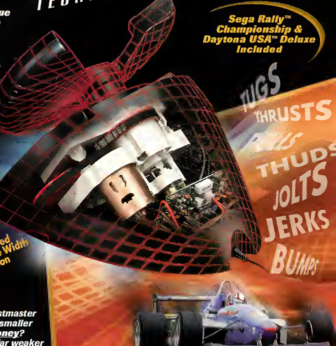

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I-FORCE

REVIEW • REAL3D STARFIGHTER PCI

We Don't Need No Stinkin' AGP

by Loyd Case

Most of the action on the new 3D-chip front has been revolving around AGP (with the notable exception of 3Dfx). This makes gamers with PCI rigs nervous about obsolescence, not to mention green with envy.

I mean, have you tried to find a good ISA 3D accelerator recently? Believe me, it's tough.

The folks at Real3D, who had a lot to do with the Intel i740 architecture, have noted the anguish of these users, and have ridden to the rescue. They took the i740, which is ostensibly an AGP-only part, designed an AGP-to-PCI bridge chip and came out with a PCI version of the Starfighter.

There will be several configurations of the PCI Starfighter; the board I tested had 8MB of main memory (frame buffer) and 8MB of AGP (texture) memory. The i740 only uses system memory for texture storage; the bridge chip fools the i740 into thinking that the local texture-memory is system memory.

The Starfighter PCI's overall performance was pretty good. The 2D performance in Business Graphic WinMark test at 1024x768x16-bit color was nearly as fast as the RIVA 128 2D numbers I've seen in the past—just a bit under 100. The 3D WinBench 98 numbers were also pretty good, coming in at 294 at 800x600. 3D GameGauge came in at 139 at that same resolution. Contrast that with 144 for an STB Velocity 128 running at 640x480, and you see that the Starfighter PCI is a solid performer. Having all of that local texture-memory certainly helps.

However, this performance doesn't come cheap. In an era where you can pick up a Diamond Stealth II 4MB card for under $100, the Starfighter PCI 16MB is expensive at $199. Of course, that *is* 12MB more than the Stealth II.

So if you're in the market for a good 3D primary card with good 2D performance for your PCI-only rig, then check out the Starfighter PCI. As an added note, this might also be a great card for those with an AGP Starfighter looking to do Windows 98 multimonitor setups. **CGW**

photo: Michael Falconer

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
★★★★½

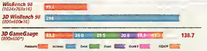
APPEAL: PCI users looking for a little AGP action.

PROS: Faster than most PCI accelerators we've seen.

CONS: It ain't cheap

Price $199
Manufacturer: Real3D
(800) 393-7730
www.real3d.com

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS



*Refresh rate was 85Hz
Test system: Pentium 200MHz with the 430TX chipset, 64MB of EDO RAM, and EIDE storage components.

REVIEW • MYSTIQUE G200

Mystique's Revenge

by Loyd Case

The original Mystique left us baffled. At the time the part first shipped, it had reasonable performance, but at a relatively serious image-quality penalty. Matrox listened, went back to the drawing board, and came out with the MGA-G200 accelerator chip. The G200 is a fully AGP 2x compliant part with a full suite of 3D rendering features, including per-pixel MIP mapping, 32-bit rendering, table fog and blending modes.

The Mystique has built-in TV-out capability, which the business-oriented Millenium G200 lacks. However, Mystique uses less expensive SDRAM. We put the 8MB Mystique through its paces on our Pentium II 400MHz No Holds Barred rig with Windows 98 and DirectX6.

2D performance came in at an impressive 217 running WinBench 98's Business Graphics WinMark at 1024x768x16 and 176 at 1024x768x32. On 3D WinBench 98, Mystique scored an 800 at 800x600x16, and passed all 25 quality tests. The G200 posted a 234 on *CGW*'s 3D GameGauge at 800x600, and image quality is the best we've seen yet. I also took it out for a spin with the newly enhanced, large-texture version of BATTLEZONE at 1024x768. The frame-rates hovered between 27

Mystique G200

and 35fps during gameplay, and image quality was terrific.

Low QUAKE II and GL QUAKE scores dragged down Mystique's overall 3D GameGauge result, but that score will probably only get better. Matrox is initially shipping a D3D wrapper, which translates OpenGL calls to Direct3D, but Matrox is readying a full OpenGL ICD which will probably be available by the time you read this.

Overall, the Mystique G200 heralds the coming of third-generation, multipurpose graphics cards: fast, beautiful 3D coupled with excellent 2D and digital video performance.

Mystique's combination of versatility and performance makes it a strong contender as your next 2D/3D AGP card. **CGW**

photo: Michael Falconer

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
★★★★½

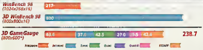
APPEAL: Users looking for fast 2D and fast 3D with lots of expandability.

PROS: Solid Direct3D, excellent 2D, lots of room for add-ons, OpenGL functionality via D3D wrapper.

CONS: OpenGL ICD not quite here yet.

Price: $149 for 8MB; $198 for 16MB
Manufacturer: Matrox
(514) 822 6320
www.matrox.com/mga

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS



*Refresh rate was 85Hz
Test system: Pentium II 400MHz running Windows 98 and DirectX6.

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Finally, a Viable CPU Alternative

K6-2 Is AMD's Strongest Showing Yet Against Intel

by Dave Salvator

Competing against Intel ranks right up there with root canals on the fun scale. More to the point, to compete against Intel is to try not just to make a better CPU, but to make a better CPU than the company that invented it. And yet, there are four companies making the attempt: AMD, Cyrix, IDT/Centaur, and, most recently, Rise.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers on a budget looking for the best non-Intel performance

PROS: Solid integer performance, impressive game performance when running on 3DNow!

CONS: Standard floating point performance still lags behind Intel when 3DNow! technology is not used, potential motherboard compatibility issues

REQUIREMENTS: Socket-7 motherboard compatible with K6-2.

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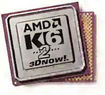
www.amd.com/products/cpg/k623d/index.html

Most of the non-Intel CPUs can compete with Intel in integer performance (important for business applications). Where they trail is in floating-point performance, which is key to making 3D games go fast. But that may be changing. AMD has implemented a new set of floating-point instructions, dubbed 3DNow!, that can accelerate the CPU portion of Direct3D's and Glide's pipeline. And as our tests show, AMD's new K6-2 not only matched a similarly clocked Pentium II, but, in some cases, outgunned it. How'd they do that?

3DNow! Explained

AMD's new technology consists of 21 new floating-point instructions that can put two floating-point values into a single MMX register and compute two results in parallel. And since 3DNow! can issue two instructions simultaneously, there's a potential peak throughput of four floating-point operations per cycle. This matters to gamers because previous AMD CPUs handled at most one operation per cycle; the deeper pipelined Pentium II's floating-point unit (FPU) can issue only two. Another important new feature is called



Pre-Fetch, which keeps the floating-point unit from stalling while waiting for more data to process. This could mean that for the first time Intel finally has some serious competition on all fronts of X86 CPU performance: integer, floating-point (3D), and MMX.

But AMD's success with 3DNow! is far from a given. AMD will have to clear at least one major hurdle before it can declare any kind of victory: Games don't get the 3DNow! performance boost "for free." A game must be written using either Direct3D's transform and lighting (T/L) engine, something very few developers have opted to use, or custom assembly code. Ironically, in wooing game developers to use Direct3D's T/L engine, AMD may actually have a friend in Intel. Intel's next processor, code-named Katmai, will have its own set of instructions for accelerating Direct3D transforms and lighting if D3D's T/L engine is used. Given that, there will be great incentive for developers to use D3D's T/L engine. The DirectX 6.0 version of the D3D T/L engine has also undergone a substantial rewrite, and should perform much better than its predecessor. But a downside for AMD is that aside from the (important) 3DNow! advances, AMD made no enhancements to K6-2's floating-point unit: Games that aren't 3DNow!-aware will still trail Intel's performance.

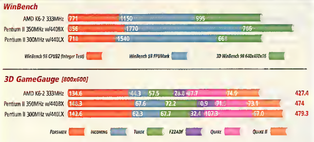
A Run for Their Money

A look at the numbers shows AMD often trailing both Intel CPUs, though AMD scores a few victories with its 3DNow! technology. The lift that 3DNow! provides showed up in 3D WinBench 98 (which uses D3D's T/L engine), and in QUAKE II because AMD wrote a 3DNow! driver. However, AMD's standard FPU is much slower than either Intel chip, which is evident from the 3D GameGauge score. An accelerated version of INCOMING was in the works at press time.

While AMD trailed Intel in many tests, the K6-2's numbers are still respectable. And given AMD's aggressive pricing, it could be a good choice for gamers on a budget. Socket 7 motherboards with AGP and a 100MHz system bus are on the market, and AMD has a list of compatible motherboards on its Web site. Also, at press time, there was a serious scarcity of 333MHz chips, though 300MHz parts seemed to be widely available.

If you want to do an inexpensive upgrade, the K6-2 on an AGP-equipped motherboard will keep most games cruising smoothly. It won't match Intel performance across the board, but it will get the job done. And if 3DNow! takes off, AMD will be an even more compelling option. **CGW**

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS



Testing Notes: *All three systems had 64MB of RAM, RIVA 128 AGP accelerators, and a single Voodoo^2 board. We used the Voodoo^2 board for all 3D tests*

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MILLENNIA 400

- Intel Pentium II processor 400MHz
- 64MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 8.4GB Ultra ATA hard drive
- 17" Micron 700Vx monitor (15.9" display)
- New MicroTower case
- 82440BX chip set
- 512KB internal cache, 2MB flash BIOS
- 3.5" floppy drive
- 32X max speed CD-ROM drive
- nVidia Riva 128, 4MB SGRAM 3D AGP graphics
- PCI 64-voice Wavetable sound
- Advent AV009 stereo speakers
- 3Com/U.S. Robotics 56K WinModem**
- 104-key enhanced keyboard
- Microsoft IntelliMouse
- Microsoft Windows 98
- Microsoft Home Essentials with Microsoft Power Pak
- 5-year/3-year Micron Power limited warranty

$1,899 | $76/mo[†] Consumer Lease

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- Intel Pentium II processor 400MHz
- 128MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 10GB Ultra ATA hard drive
- 19" Micron 900Lx monitor (18" display)
- MiniTower case
- 82440BX chip set
- 512KB internal cache, 2MB flash BIOS
- 100MB Iomega Zip drive
- DVD-ROM drive and PCI decoder card***
- 3.5" floppy drive
- 32X EIDE variable speed CD-ROM drive
- Real 3D Starfighter i740, 8MB AGP graphics
- 64-voice Wavetable 3D stereo sound
- Advent AV009 stereo speakers
- 3Com/U.S. Robotics 56K WinModem**
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- Microsoft IntelliMouse
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REVIEW • ADS TECHNOLOGIES USB PCI CARD

...And USB for All

by Dave Salvator

USB is what gamers have been waiting for. USB will solve all your controller problems. USB will let you connect your weed-whacker to your PC. USB will...blah, blah, blah.

With champions like Intel and Microsoft, USB has been the victim of marketing hype run amok. The one sober question about USB is, "When the hell is it going to really work?" Well, it would seem the answer is: Now. Having already taken the better part of two years and seen the arrival of one operating system and several versions of DirectX, it would appear that USB is *finally* something worth paying attention to.

But what if your current rig doesn't have USB ports? Are you left out in the cold? Not necessarily. ADS Technologies has come up with a PCI card that adds a USB hub and root controller (with two ports) to your existing system. Unfortunately, there's a catch: You need to buy a rather large USB utility called Windows 98 before it will work. The ADS folks wrestled with trying to make this device Windows 95–compatible (OSR 2.1 with USB supplement) but ultimately abandoned the effort in favor of a single Windows 98 version.

The thing you'll probably notice immediately after you open the box is what's missing: a driver disk. The card's drivers are already on the Windows 98 install CD, and after we installed the card and powered up the system, Windows 98 asked for its CD and installed the driver. One reboot later our Pentium MMX 233MHz test system had two USB ports.

To put the ports through their paces, we hooked up Logitech's new WingMan Force joystick, which can run over USB. The stick, by way of the USB card, ran flawlessly in WARBIRDS, with smooth input and all of WARBIRDS' force effects coming back down to the stick. We even hooked up ADS' four-port USB hub and ran the WingMan Force through it, and again, all components played nice together.

If you're wanting to get in on USB, and your current system lacks USB ports, ADS' card will get the job done, provided you've got Windows 98. You need to decide if USB functionality is worth an operating system upgrade, but if you were planning to make the move anyway, then ADS has a cool way for you to add USB without a motherboard swap.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★½

APPEAL: Gamers with slightly older rigs looking to ride the USB bus.

PROS: Brings USB to the USB-challenged; inexpensive; stupid-simple installation

CONS: No Windows 95 support.

Price: $49.95
Manufacturer: ADS Technologies
(562) 926-1928
www.adstech.com

USB Port
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Add 2 USB Ports to your PC!
USB Port
ADS

photo: Michael Falconer

REVIEW • ADS TECHNOLOGIES USB HUB

Reach-Around: Just Say No

by Dave Salvator

USB will...whoops wrong review. Yet another offering from ADS Technologies is its four-port USB hub. Given the current dearth of USB gaming devices available, a four-port hub may seem like overkill. But if you've got a USB mouse and another USB device, there's no room at the inn for a third device. ADS to the rescue.

The other purpose this hub serves is to put USB ports where they belong: in the *front* of your system instead in the back.

ADS' four-port hub looks like a small external modem, and includes power and individual port LEDs, though these port LEDs don't seem to serve any purpose other than to add a little color to an otherwise unexciting box. They don't indicate whether a device is connected (say, by changing color), and they don't show any bus traffic from each connected device.

Installation is truly plug and (install driver) play. The unit ships with one of those adorable wall-wart power supplies we've all come to know and loathe. So, after sacrificing almost an entire electrical socket, I tested this hub on two systems: one with Windows 95 (OSR 2.1 with USB supplement) and the other with Windows 98. In both instances, the unit was recognized by the OS, and after each found its respective driver for a generic USB hub, the unit was good to go. Because each OS includes this driver, the hub doesn't ship with a driver disk. However, it would have been handy if ADS Technologies had included the Windows 95 USB supplement for Windows 95 users, although it is available on Microsoft's Web site.

I then ran Logitech's WingMan Force joystick through the hub, and it performed without a hitch. A flythrough of WARBIRDS went smoothly, both for joystick input, and force information coming back down to the stick.

If you're getting into USB, and you're tired of reaching around to the back of your rig every time you want to swap devices, then check out this hub. You'll get the added bonus of being able to hang more USB devices on your system as they become available.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers with a full-blown USB jones.

PROS: Adds four USB ports to your existing setup; easy installation; makes USB ports accessible in front of your system; price.

CONS: Brain-dead LEDs for each port; no bus traffic indicator; wall-wart power supply.

Price: $89
Manufacturer: ADS Technologies
(562) 926-1928
www.adstech.com

photo: Michael Falconer

MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER FREESTYLE PRO • REVIEW

Every Which Way but Loose

by Dave Salvator

Game-claw. You sports guys and Bruce Lee wanna-bes know what it is. After a long gaming session, you can barely move your left thumb and wrist because you've been digging into your gamepad's D-pad for two and a half hours. Sure, you've got your gaming jones to feed, but you don't want acute arthritis by the time you're 35. What to do? The bad boys in Redmond may have an answer. Make the whole controller the D-pad. Using motion-sensor technology, Microsoft's new SideWinder Freestyle Pro lets you drive, fly, run, and steer by moving the whole controller.

The controller installs painlessly, and has an activator/config editor that makes it easy to create game-specific configs. When you bring up the Freestyle's control panel applet, the D-pad position indicator has a "tail" on it, so you can track the controller's movements. In the Config Activator/Editor, you can change game configs, and set the movement sensitivity. You can also set MS-DOS emulation (CH Flightstick or ThrustMaster) for driving DOS titles within Windows 95. But there's no native MS-DOS support.

The Freestyle ships with Microsoft's new MOTOCROSS MADNESS, where the free-wheeling Freestyle is a lot of fun for turning or jumping your bike. In FIFA ROAD TO WORLD CUP 98 and NBA LIVE 98, it worked well, but was somewhat more unwieldy. A button on the device disables the motion sensor, and you can then use its traditional D-pad. But because of Freestyle's Batarang shape, using its traditional D-pad wasn't very comfortable. And while hard-core fly-boys would scoff at using the Freestyle to go aloft, it controlled WARBIRDS reasonably well, with controls for throttle, joystick and view-hat.

The Freestyle has one major shortcoming: You can't daisy-chain multiple controllers, although you can connect two controllers to your USB ports. But if you don't have USB, so much for hot-seating. Still, it brings something new to the market, and it works. Whether it's a gimmick or a game-enhancer will depend on what you want to control. For arcade-type driving titles, it's a good fit; for sports, it's okay, and it's even a passable flight-sim controller. But it's not the most comfortable traditional gamepad, and if you use it traditionally, you may get game-claw. **CGW**

photo: Michael Falconer

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★½☆

APPEAL: Gamers looking for a different kind of gamepad

PROS: Cool motion-sensor technology; easy programmability

CONS: No daisy-chaining, no native MS-DOS support; somewhat unwieldy for sports titles

Price: $64.95
Manufacturer: Microsoft
(425) 882-8080

www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/sidewinder.htm

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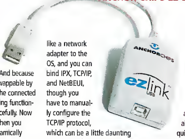
ANCHOR CHIPS EZ-LINK USB • REVIEW

Instant LAN

by Dave Salvator

Imagine having true Plug-and-Play networking. Come on, quit laughing. Plug in a device, and the networking is live. We've all been waiting to put those USB ports on our systems to good use, and Anchor Chips may well have something that kills two stones with one bird: a USB-based peer-to-peer network. And because USB devices are hot-swappable by design, if you unplug the connected machines the networking functionality disables itself gracefully. Now here's the cool part: When you reconnect, EZ-Link dynamically restores networking sans reboot.



We hooked up EZ-Link between two machines: one running Windows 95 (OSR 2.1 with the latest USB supplement) and the other running Windows 98. In both cases, the machines immediately recognized it when we plugged it into the system. And once we fed the machines a driver disc and each operating system's disc, which loads standard networking protocol drivers—and then rebooted—the networking was live. The EZ-Link device looks like a network adapter to the OS, and you can bind IPX, TCP/IP, and NetBEUI, though you have to manually configure the TCP/IP protocol, which can be a little daunting to the uninitiated. While running a QUAKE II multiplayer DeathMatch across EZ-Link, we saw ping times just a little higher than those found on an Ethernet LAN; they were generally in the 30–40ms range. Lower ping times mean smoother gameplay, and overall gameplay was smooth between the two test systems. EZ-Link's topology can be in either daisy-chain or star formation, with all machines connected to a USB hub, though each machine on the wire needs an EZ-Link device.

According to Anchor Chips, EZ-Link can achieve only 2–3Mbits/sec—or 256–384KB/sec—versus 10-Base Ethernet, which usually clocks around 6–8Mbits/sec, or about 1MB/sec. Doing a quick file-transfer test of a 2MB file, EZ-Link achieved a throughput of about 1.75Mbits/sec.

To be honest, EZ-Link isn't doing anything new here, it's just making it much faster to set up and break down. The "instant network" factor of being able to quickly connect and disconnect machines is very cool, though its slow throughput is somewhat disappointing. But for sheer ease of use, EZ-Link is hard to beat, and for gamers looking to connect a few machines for an afternoon of multiplayer mayhem, EZ-Link will do the trick. **CGW**

photo: Michael Falconer

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Gamers looking for an easy, quick way to network several rigs.

PROS: Delivers ping times nearly comparable to an Ethernet LAN; easy setup.

CONS: Slow throughput relative to Ethernet; you still need to know a bit about networking to set up TCP/IP.

Price: $79.95 (street, includes a 10' USB cable)
Manufacturer: Anchor Chips
(619) 676-6815

www.ezlinkusb.com

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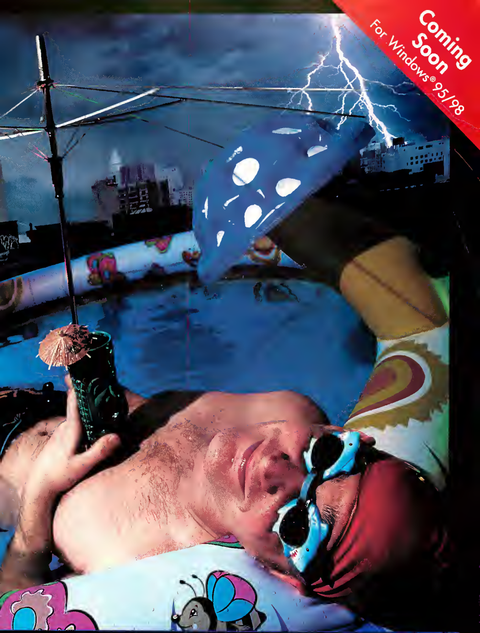
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REVIEWS

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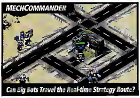
DESCENT FREESPACE

Finally, a Challenger to WING COMMANDER

DOMINION

Ion Storm's First Launch Is Three Years in the Making—and It Looks It


MECHCOMMANDER

Can Big Bots Travel the Real-time Strategy Route?

Coaster of the Month

FOX SPORTS SOCCER '99

"It's gonna take a whole lotta soccer game to dethrone FIFA 98, and FOX SPORTS SOCCER '99 doesn't even come close."

— Joe Vallina

This Month CGW Editors' Choice Games Are Indicated in Red

GAME	RATING	PAGE
Addiction Pinball	★★★½☆	233
Beast Wars: Transformers	★☆☆☆☆	233
Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions	★★★★☆	250
Cyberstorm 2	★★☆☆☆	270
Descent: Freespace—The Great War	★★★★☆	236
Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3	★★☆☆☆	280
Fox Sports Soccer '99	★☆☆☆☆	264
Incubation: The Wilderness Missions	★★½☆☆	284
Insurrection: Campaigns for StarCraft	★★★½☆	284
Jazz Jackrabbit 2	★★½☆☆	233
Leisure Suit Larry's Casino	★★★☆☆	287
MAX 2	★★½☆☆	276
MechCommander	★★★★☆	267
Medieval	★★★☆☆	282
Mega Solitaire	★★★★☆	290
Microsoft Baseball 3D	★★★☆☆	252
Microsoft Golf 98	★★★☆☆	260
Rampage World Tour	★★★☆☆	230
Redneck Rampage Rides Again	★½☆☆☆	230
Terra: Battle for the Outland	★★☆☆☆	230
Tribal Rage	★★★☆☆	284
Vangers	★★★½☆	224
X-COM Interceptor	★★½☆☆	241

The Game Genres

Our reviews are categorized by genre. Not every game fits neatly into a single genre, but here's how we define the categories in general:

Action Games that emphasize fast gameplay over story or strategy

Adventure Games that require you to solve puzzles to move through a story line.

Classics/Puzzle Classics are old standbys such as *Chess* and MONOPOLY. Puzzle games emphasize problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a story

Role-Playing A subset of adventure games, these stress character development through attributes. The gameworld tends to be large, the plot less linear.

Simulations Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective, including flight sims and space simulations.

Sports A broad genre encompassing action sports games, such as NBA LIVE, strategic sports games, such as FPS FOOTBALL, and even driving games, such as CART PRECISION RACING.

Strategy Problem-solving and planning are the keys here. These games emphasize resource and risk-management. Includes conflict-based sci-fi and fantasy games as well as construction programs like SIMCITY.

Wargames A subset of strategy games, these re-create historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic.

How Do We Rate? *We review only finished products, not prerelease versions. The ratings are as follows:*

★★★★★ **Outstanding** The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

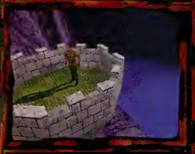
★★★★☆ **Very Good** Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆ **Average** Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or simply vanilla.

★★☆☆☆ **Weak** Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone

★☆☆☆☆ **Abysmal** The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

Adventure
Gaming
is not
dead



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SIERRA STUDIOS

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CGW Reviews Index *These Are the Games We Have Reviewed in the Last Three Months*

	Game	Publisher	Month	Page	CGW Rating
ACTION	**Army Men**	3DO	September	229	★★★☆☆
	Die by the Sword	Interplay	August	174	★★★⯪☆
	Forsaken	Acclaim	August	178	★★★★☆
	Grand Theft Auto	ASC Games	July	152	★★☆☆☆
	Hexen II: Portal Of Praevus	Activision	July	148	★★★⯪☆
	Monster Truck Madness 2	Microsoft	September	228	★★★⯪☆
	Outwars	Microsoft	August	176	★★⯪☆☆
	Quake II: The Reckoning	id Software	September	224	★★★⯪☆
	Shadow Master	Psygnosis	July	146	★★☆☆☆
	Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way	Ripcord	September	225	★★★☆☆
	Ultimate Race Pro	MicroProse	July	144	★★★☆☆
	Unreal	GT Interactive	September	220	★★★★☆
ADVENTURE	**Black Dahlia**	Interplay	July	154	★★★☆☆
	Might & Magic VI	3DO	August	180	★★★★⯪
	Sanitarium	ASC Games	September	238	★★★★⯪
	Starship Titanic	Simon and Schuster	September	236	★★⯪☆☆
	The X-Files	Fox Interactive	September	230	★★★☆☆
CLASSICS/PUZ	**Bridge Deluxe II with Omar Sharif**	Interplay	August	224	★★☆☆☆
	Kuba	Patch	August	224	★★☆☆☆
	Mastermind	Hasbro	August	224	★★★⯪☆
	Monopoly World Cup '98	Hasbro	September	266	★★★★☆
	Sorry	Hasbro	September	267	★★★☆☆
	Ultimate 3D Puzzle	GlobalStar Software	September	267	★⯪☆☆☆
	Ultimate IQ Test	Virtual Entertainment	September	267	★★★⯪☆
SIMS	**747-400 Precision Simulator**	Aerowinx/High Flight	September	247	★★★★☆
	Comanche Gold	Novalogic	September	247	★★★★☆
	F-15	Jane's/EA	July	160	★★★★⯪
	F-22 ADF Red Sea Operations	Infogrames/DID	September	247	★★★☆☆
	iF-22 Persian Gulf v5.0	Interactive Magic	July	162	★★★☆☆
	M-1 Tank Platoon II	MicroProse	August	185	★★★☆☆
	Panzer Commander	SSI	August	194	★★★★☆
	Team Apache	Mindscape	September	240	★★★⯪☆
SPORTS	**Deer Hunter**	WizardWorks/GT	July	166	★★⯪☆☆
	F1 Racing Simulation	Ubi Soft	July	164	★★★★★
	Front Page Sports Ski Racing	Sierra	August	214	★★☆☆☆
	Game, Net & Match	BlueByte	September	264	★★★⯪☆
	HardBall 6	Accolade	August	208	★★⯪☆☆
	High Heat	3DO	August	204	★★☆☆☆
	The Golf Pro	Empire	August	211	★★★⯪☆
	Triple Play 99	EA Sports	August	202	★★⯪☆☆
	World Cup 98	EA Sports	August	201	★★★★⯪
STRATEGY/WARGAMES	**ChronX**	Genetic Anomalies	August	220	★★★★☆
	Dark Reign Expansion: Rise of the Shadowhand	Activision	July	195	★★★★☆
	Dragoon	Art of War	July	197	★★★⯪☆
	East Front Campaign CD 1	TalonSoft	July	195	★★★⯪☆
	Extreme Tactics	Piranha	September	262	★★☆☆☆
	Great Battles of Julius Caesar	Interactive Magic	July	184	★★★★☆
	Industry Giant	Interactive Magic	September	261	★⯪☆☆☆
	Operational Art of War	TalonSoft	September	250	★★★★⯪
	Soldiers at War	SSI	August	216	★★☆☆☆
	StarCraft	Blizzard	July	168	★★★★★
	Star Wars Rebellion	LucasArts	July	172	★★★☆☆
	Total Annihilation: Core Contingency	Cave Dog	August	217	★★★★⯪
	WarBreeds	Red Orb	July	189	★★★⯪☆
	Warhammer: Dark Omen	EA	July	178	★★★★☆

Two worlds colli

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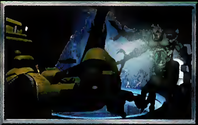
e in the search for life. Only one will survive.



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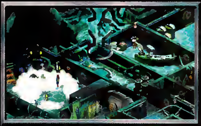

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RATING PENDING
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

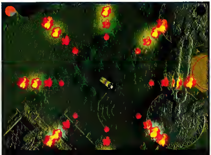
Mad Maxima

Drive Yourself to Distraction in VANGERS' Campy Carnage

by Charles Ardai

Most boys are infected with a love of cars and trucks around the age of four, and for many of them, this fascination lasts long past the deterioration of their motor skills in the twilight of their adult years. While I don't drive much in real-life (preferring the equally visceral thrills of the New York subway), I have found it tough—ever since the days of POLE POSITION—to resist the siren call of a really good racing game.

And so it was that I looked forward to VANGERS, a paean to gamers who grew up collecting Hot Wheels. After you choose and outfit your VANGER *mechos*—all-terrain vehicles that could be right out of *Mad Max*—you have the pleasure of guiding it vigorously across landscapes every bit as rugged as those in a lavishly produced Jeep commercial.



PURPLE PROSE OF CAIRO (OR GLORX) "A Vanger possessing this thingy," pens the feverish writer, "becomes completely wacky. He can invoke some mysterious powers and horrify every next man. What he can't do, however, is postpone his dreadful doom." Or ours, it would seem.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★⯪☆

APPEAL: Gamers who like their driving/combat sims detailed and dark, with really campy dialogue.

PROS: Ten strange and wonderful worlds filled with alien creatures and constructs, simulated down to the dust on your tires; aggressive pricing.

CONS: Confusing visuals; controls that are too-complicated, contrived futuristic vocabulary, solutions to all of the game's puzzles are in the READ.ME file.

DIFFICULTY: Advanced.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166 Windows 95 16MB RAM 195MB hard-drive space, DirectX-compatible graphics and sound, 4x CD-ROM drive.

3D SUPPORT: None

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet and LAN (2–8 players); 1 CD per player

Price $29.95
Publisher: Interactive Magic
Research Triangle Park NC
(919) 461-0722

www.imagicgames.com

Moreover, the game's designers have managed to create the most technically realistic environment ever seen in a game like this. The detailed environment "remembers" what you do to it: bridges collapse under you and stay collapsed; mounds of dirt wear the scars of your tire treads; everything you see on the screen is a fully functional element with which you can interact, rather than just graphics put there to catch your eye. But, too often I found this mammoth achievement in simulation to be incidental to the gameplay. Gamers with less than stellar systems may even be tempted to turn down the level of detail in order to make the game run faster. While, on the whole, I enjoyed playing VANGERS, I must warn you that it's often irritating.

The Sinister Bouillon

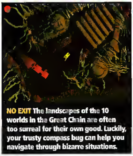
An interminable introduction sets up the backstory, and after slogging through the annoying futurespeak—"cirt," "Eleepods," "ghOrb gear," "macHOTine guns," "kernoboos," and "beeboorats," to name a few—you have to wonder if the writer spoke English. *[Ed. note: He didn't. He's Russian.]* Even the screens of text that are nominally written in English sound like the work of a translator whose day job is subtitling chop-socky films: "...biomolecular chaos erased all the original Softie and Crypso and formed the sinister bouillon of Spawn." And: "Achtung! Vangers approaching!" Achtung, indeed.

In any case, you start with a low-end mechos and 500 beebs with which to buy weapons and other gear. Almost everything costs too much, especially a better vehicle, so you start taking on assignments to earn a couple of beebs here and there.

Your first assignments come from rude, Jabba the Hutt–type slugs,(Eleepods) who send you on fetch-and-carry missions: from the escave (underground city) of Podish you carry some nymbos (which seems to be either an organ or a type of excrement) to Incubator; then the counselor of Incubator makes you carry some "phlegma" (mucus-in-a-bottle) back to Podish. On the way you run across other vangers, most of which are bigger than you and quick to pull a trigger, as well as crawling insects—beebs!—which, if collected, add credit to your bank account (don't ask).

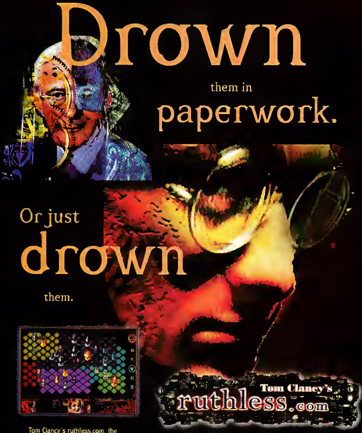
The Little Mechos That Could

The main task of the game is getting from one place to another, and the reason this is difficult is that no path goes very long without being blocked by obstacles.



NO EXIT The landscapes of the 10 worlds in the Great Chain are often too surreal for their own good. Luckily, your trusty compass bug can help you navigate through bizarre situations.

INTERNET GAMING ZONE
PLAY IT ON ZONE.COM



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WRONG!

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and learn some
fundamentals! Even as
your teammate crosses
the plate, the third
strike ends the game.
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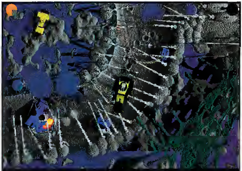
VR Baseball 2000 you
gotta have game, you're
in the big leagues now.

FOR THE CORRECT
ANSWER,
GO TO PAGE 251

VR BASEBALL 2000
NEXT GENERATION BASEBALL



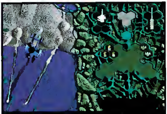
ALIEN ARCHIPELAGO The wild terrain layout forces you to think while moving and shooting, but your mechos' controls aren't always up to the task.

Your mechos can jump—quite high, in fact—but jumps use up precious energy and often leave you turning end-over-end as you come crashing back to the planet's surface. When you're rich, you can also buy devices that help you float on water, hover or fly through the air, or tunnel through dirt and rock. If all else fails, your mechos is one tough little truck and, like the Little Engine That Could, it usually grinds its way over an obstacle if you just keep trying long enough.

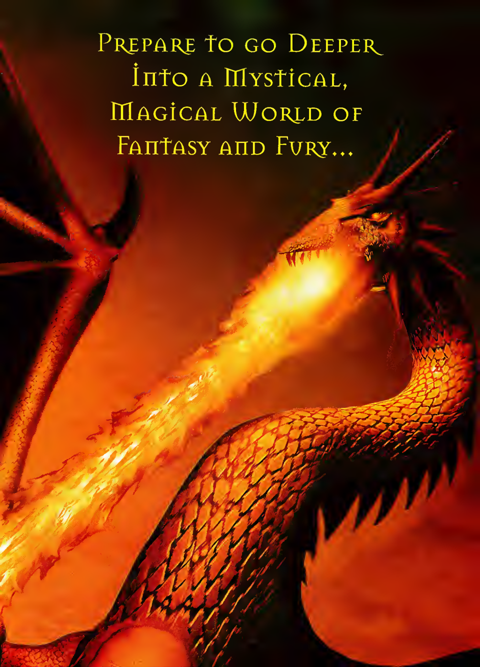
There are a number of tools to help you out, including a map and (my favorite) a red compass bug that floats in front of you, showing the direction and distance to any location. Since it's easy to get lost driving around (the visuals, though striking, are so strange-looking that it's sometimes hard to see where you are and where you can go), the compass bug is an invaluable guide.

Even when you know where you're going, though, and how to deal with the terrain, the presence of vicious enemies makes your job sometimes more difficult than it should be. There's nothing wrong with enemies shooting at you, because you can always shoot back, if you buy a gun and keep it charged. What's irritating is that the impact of enemy weapons turns you around, dumps you on your back, or sends you running away willy-nilly—which would be OK, too, except that your mechos' controls become mysteriously less responsive than they should be in situations of duress.

The game is difficult enough to learn and play—sometimes you'll feel as if the controls require 10 fingers and a toe for emphasis—without making combat situations overly difficult merely to artificially extend gameplay. And even this would be less of a problem if the payoff for your pain was more than five more screens of trippy babbling about the "pipetka," the "zeex," and the "Infinite Mind." Don't get me wrong: I have my cult film (and game) favorites like anyone else. Just be warned that it is mainly such cultists who will enjoy VANGERS, and the shame is that the game's wonderfully rich environment shows you how much more it really could have been. CGW



MECHOS IN MAUVE If you want to upgrade from your low-end macHOTine guns, there are several unpronounceable weapons scattered in power-up fashion on most maps—complete with purple hexgrids to make even wargamers feel at home.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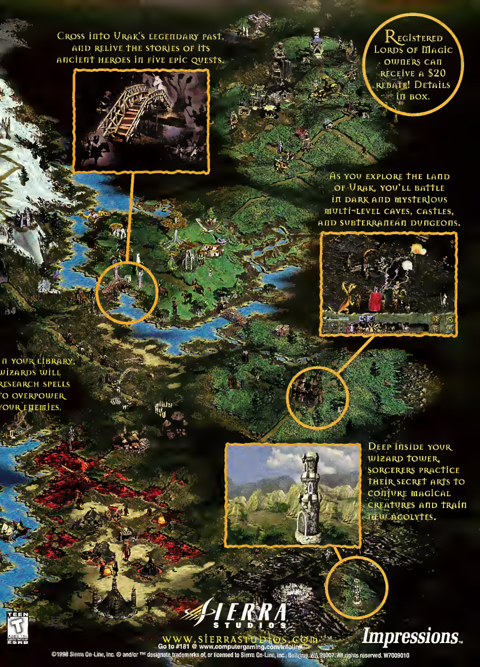

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Crush, Crumble, and Chaw

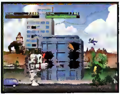
These Twitch-happy Titles May Sate Your Action Appetite

Rampage World Tour

★★★☆☆

Publisher: Midway
Price: $39.95
www.midway.com

Science tells us that nothing is ever truly lost, it's just transformed into a different state of matter or energy. This law of nature might help to explain the flood of PC conversions of arcade games of yore, of which RAMPAGE WORLD TOUR is the latest. As remakes go, it's a great idea: Who can resist playing a classic monster—a giant ape, giant lizard, or giant wolfman? You get to tear through a city, stomping on cars, punching and kicking buildings, and gobbling pedestrians while all of the city's armed forces (tanks, planes, choppers, and guys throwing sticks of dynamite) try to bring you down.



This carnage goes on in city after city with only minimal variation, but what keeps it fresh is the animation variety. When you punch a helicopter, it usually just explodes, but if you punch its tail, it spins out of control before crashing. Grab food you find behind a broken window and you're revived, but grab an electrical appliance and you light up like a cartoon character, your skeleton showing through your monstrous hide. Gobble ordinary citizens and you're rewarded, but gobble a group of nuns and a lightning bolt strikes you.

The graphics get jagged and the action slow if you play in full-screen mode, and the picture is playing-card sized if you opt for smooth graphics and fast action. The action may be too basic for some tastes, as well. Still, RAMPAGE is suffused with all the monster movie fun that was conspicuously lacking in the recent *Godzilla* film. If you remember feeding quarters to these monsters way back when, you'll want to try this version at least once. —*Charles Ardai*

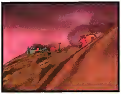
Terra: Battle for the Outland

★★☆☆☆

Publisher: Kaon Interactive
Price: $9.99/month—Online only
www.kaon.com

There's no denying the ambition behind TERRA: BATTLE FOR THE OUTLAND. But there's no denying the mediocrity of it, either. TERRA is an online-only tank game that takes place in a persistent world where clans fight to control vast slabs of yet another post-apocalyptic Earth. After conquering region-controlling forts, players can set up power grids, purchase defenses, and otherwise plot to extend their power.

While the designers have a background designing sims for the military, they don't really have a gaming background, and it shows. The world is too large, forcing gamers to wander the wasteland for long periods of time looking for a fight. It doesn't help that there aren't many other players: I never saw more than 30 players logged on at a time. Graphics, even with 3D acceleration, are downright ugly.



Kaon's Web site trumpets its attempts to beat the latency issues that plague most Internet-only games. Unfortunately, the company's solution is to saddle all players with slow and unresponsive controls, reasoning that if everyone's tank control sucks, then the playing field is level.

On top of that, the controls are unwieldy and create battles that are dominated by long-distance missile slinging against barely visible targets. You *do* see your enemy up close during occasional jousting-style drive-bys, in which you both fire away in a futile attempt to hit the enemy—again, compliments of the controls.

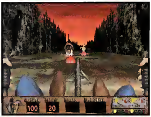
TERRA is a virtual world with few citizens and bad gameplay. Even with the free 30-day trial offer from Kaon, we can't recommend that you plan an extended visit. —*Robert Coffey*

Redneck Rampage Rides Again

★⯪☆☆☆

Publisher: Interplay
Price: $49.95
www.interplay.com

Bikers, cheerleaders, and jackalopes make up your new foes in REDNECK RAMPAGE RIDES AGAIN, and you get to blast them from a mortar-launching hydrofoil and a machine-gun–equipped motorcycle. Problem is, there isn't a whole lot else that's new here. What seemed funny the first time around now feels like a one-joke game. Worse, the too-standard action generally has you seriously outgunned and under-supplied. Most enemies are hard to shoot since they jump around like crazy: a difficulty compounded by an occasional bug that causes your shots to make 90-degree turns.



Levels include swamps, rotting gambling boats, and a haunted pueblo, and all show real care in their intricate construction. Unfortunately, they quickly devolve into tiresome, backtrack-plagued key hunts once you've slaughtered the bad guys. I've never had so much trouble just getting out of a level.

And I *really* wanted out of those levels. REDNECK RAMPAGE has never been pretty, but RIDES AGAIN really revels in that ugly palette. With those herky-jerky enemies and the generally harsh graphics I developed a headache that lasted for days. Gamers now used to Windows 95 can expect another headache when they load up drivers for this game's DOS-only play.

Time hasn't treated the Build engine well. It just can't compete with the graphical richness and sense of immersion generated by true 3D engines like QUAKE II and UNREAL. Even Duke Nukem, the Build poster boy, has moved to the QUAKE II engine for his next installment. The REDNECK folks should take a hint. —*Robert Coffey*

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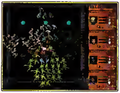

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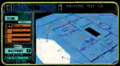

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Bunnies, Beasts, and Bumpers

Arcade Hits and Misses, From Side-Scrollers to Pinball

Jazz Jackrabbit 2

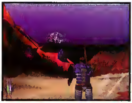
★★½☆☆

Publisher: Epic Megagames
Price. $34 95
www.jazzjackrabbit.com

Side-scrolling, platform games have had a tough go making the leap from console to PC. Though not without its charms, JAZZ JACKRABBIT 2 doesn't quite have what it takes to distinguish itself from every other anthropomorphic, gem-gathering, ledge-leaping, cutesy animal hero game.

Each of the episodes is packed with levels, but they're not that big, and the game's emphasis on speed makes them whiz by. Levels range in locales from Victorian towns to giant pinball machines, and they are loaded with power-ups, tricky timing sequences, and secret areas. While a large variety of weapons adds some spice, the game lacks the flavor of truly original fare, such as ABE'S ODDYSEE. In a break from console tradition, JAZZ JACKRABBIT 2 will let you save at any point, and there are five multiplayer modes and a level editor to keep things hopping.

Unfortunately, JAZZ JACKRABBIT 2 has problems beyond being merely an average game. Leaving a game is a tougher test in reflexes than any of the levels—you have to bang that Y key repeatedly after hitting Quit or you'll be brought right back into the game. Your character can get stuck on some objects, forcing you to reload a previous save. Sticking problems continue in multiplayer play, forcing you to either restart or wait to get killed: some choice. Lastly, while those pinball levels are kind of cool looking, they're nigh onto impossible to negotiate at times. You might overlook these things in a stronger arcade game, but JAZZ JACKRABBIT 2 just isn't that game. *—Robert Coffey*



Beast Wars Transformers

★☆☆☆☆

Publisher: Hasbro
Price $19.95
www.hasbro-interactive.com

You remember Transformers, I'm sure: those versatile warriors that could change from laser-firing robots to beasts and back again. Well, the toys were cool, but BEAST WARS TRANSFORMERS is an over-the-shoulder port from the PlayStation that has almost nothing to recommend it. You can play as either the Maximals or the Predicons, but there's so little difference between them that you can take your favorite without any worries that your choice will affect the gameplay.

The gameworld is bathed in strange radiation, called energon, the poisonous effects of which build up over time, impacting your health. You recharge either by gathering energy power-ups or, more likely, by transforming back into beast mode. Surprisingly, no matter how powerful a beast you may be—rhinoceros, gorilla, even dinosaur—you are powerless. While you're in beast mode, you can't bite, punch, or kick either offensively or defensively (obviously, Hasbro never saw my collection of Transformers). So, your quality beast time is spent mainly in hiding, waiting to recharge so you can play some more. Stop the fun.

If you happen to die on a mission, you lose that Transformer and must finish the level with another. By picking up a special power-up, you gain access to a special, flying-rescue mission that allows you to recover lost Transformers—if you want to bother.

The game's quirky autotargeting system makes targeting alternately way too easy or maddeningly difficult. Speaking of control, I love playing this style of game via the keyboard, especially when it has lots of movement options (jump, crouch, sidestep, fast-turn, and so forth). The only way I could get keyboard control to work (despite several calls to tech support) was to completely uninstall the joystick every time I played the game. What's a Maximal beast lord to do? Probably wait a short time for this game to hit the $4.99 discount bin. *—Mark Clarkson*

Addiction Pinball

★★★½☆

Publisher: MicroProse
Price $29 95
www.aztech.com

PC pinball has always been a bit of an odd duck. For starters, short, wide computer monitors are ill-suited to displaying tall, narrow pinball tables. Some games, such as Sierra's 3D ULTRA PINBALL series, modify pinball rather drastically for a better fit. Others, such as MicroProse's ADDICTION PINBALL, continue to pursue the pure pinball experience.

ADDICTION PINBALL features dead-on physics and gorgeous graphics, complete right down to the realistic reflections on the ball. The table wiggles when nudged, and you can spell your name with the flipper buttons. (If you need more ambience, get a friend to cuss and slap the computer next to you.)

Even at maximum detail (1024x768 resolution and 32,000 colors), gameplay was as smooth as glass on my PII/266. My venerable P133 showed only the slightest hesitation running at the highest settings, and it ran perfectly when I turned the game down a notch to 800x600 graphics.

You can view the pinball table at a variety of angles, including the almost hallucinogenically disorienting sideways view. Unfortunately, there are only two tables—*Worms* and *World Rally Fever*—but they are nicely laid out and fairly deep, with extra modes, missions, and games. Surprisingly, there's no multiplayer mode.

The least addicting thing about this game is the headache-inducing guitar soundtrack behind *World Rally Fever*. Still, for pinball purists seeking the arcade experience at home, ADDICTION PINBALL is well worth putting a few coins in the old slot. *—Mark Clarkson*

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NEXT GENERATION MAGAZINE

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NEWSWEEK

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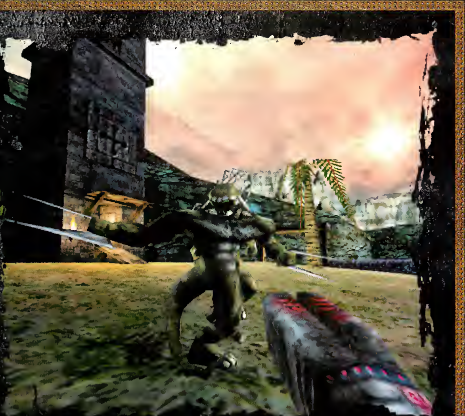

Actual gamaplay screen shot

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Descent's Ascent

The Tunnel Shooter Makes a Successful Transition to Deep Space

by Thierry Nguyen

Don't be fooled by the title. The DESCENT moniker is on this game only because it was made by the crew who created DESCENT. This game bears no resemblance to that claustrophobic action shooter. In fact, DESCENT: FREESPACE turns out to be one of the most solid space sims of the past couple of years. While it is, at heart, a clone, this isn't some hastily put together mishmash. This guy has a lot of heart and polish.

FREESPACE casts you as a rookie pilot on the Galactic Terran Destroyer *Galatea*. The Galactic Terran Alliance (GTA) has been locked in a brutal, 14-year war with the Vasudan Empire, another sentient alien race. But the focus of this game is a third alien race that joins the battle.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Space-sim fans looking for a new, if not original, game.

PROS: Excellent wingman AI; good pacing; great pyrotechnics; customizable HUD and controls; campaign editor.

CONS: Evolutionary, not revolutionary; much-touted multiplayer needs work; campaign isn't exactly "branching."

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133 with 3D accelerator (P-166 without), 32MB RAM, 210 MB hard-drive space, 8x CD-ROM.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D, Glide.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: TCP/IP, LAN (2–12 players); 1 CD per player.

Price: $49.95
Publisher: Interplay
Irvine, CA
(800) 468-3775

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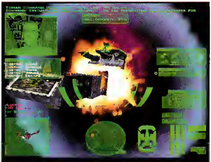


DOWN SHE GOES The explosions of the capital ships in DESCENT: FREESPACE are the best yet.

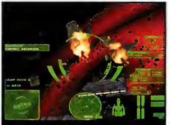
Mysterious ships suddenly emerge from subspace and lay waste to every Vasudan and Terran ship in the area. This sounds a lot like WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY, of course, but (surprisingly) I found these badass aliens more intriguing than the Nephilim from PROPHECY. In fact, the first contact that you have with these alien ships reveals that you can't target them and you can't communicate with them. Plus, they have shield technology, while you don't.

Luke, Meet Blair

Gameplay in FREESPACE can best be described as a combination of the better elements of the *Star Wars* and *Wing Commander* series put into one game. You have a nice, overarching plot, à la PROPHECY, but you don't interact with the pilots here. The atmosphere is like a *Star Wars* sim, in that you're just another pilot who gets caught up in the important part of the war. There are no names and faces attached to you or your squadmates.

The space combat is a lot like that of the *Star Wars* sims, in that it focuses on the fleet feel rather than the dogfight. Missions in FREESPACE will often have multiple types of craft fulfilling different objectives out in the field. But then, the HUD-only interface and the refined wingmen command interface are very reminiscent of the *Wing Commander* games. Also, the scale of the larger, capital-class ships is a lot closer to that of WING COMMANDER than that of the *Star Wars* sims.

After getting a *Star Wars* sim-style briefing (complete with a map screen and little animated icons), you proceed to choose your craft from what's available (seven ships in the end) as well as its loadout. The mission style is very much like that of a *Star Wars* sim: You'll find yourself doing things ranging from defending the *Galatea* from asteroids to escorting bombers on a bombing run on an enemy vessel (If you're saying "This sounds more than a bit derivative," give yourself a gold star.) The missions are also scripted, which takes a bit away from replay value (you see it once, you'll see it every time you replay it). Of course, you can just use the FRED mission editor to give the game more replay value yourself.

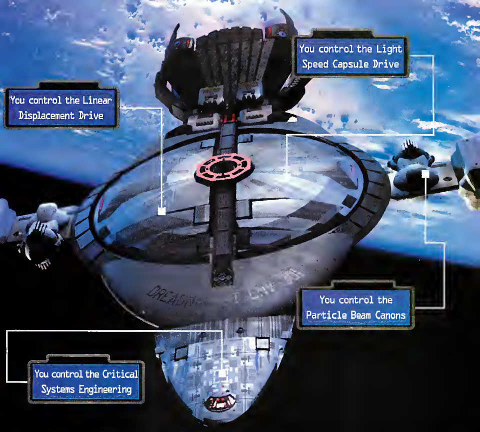


GALACTIC TITANIC Missions such as saving the *Galatea* from asteroids add some spice to the standard space-sim missions of other games.

Descend Into Space

The two strongest parts of the space combat are the AI and the capital ships. FREESPACE puts you in a position to control up to four wings of fighters (three plus one reinforcement). Not only are there a variety of commands that you can issue, but your wingmen are actually competent enough to follow those orders.

You can issue commands by navigating the menu system, or you can press a hot-key combo and choose whom the order goes to. The commands range from the always handy "Cover me!" to the more specific "Destroy targeted subsystem" or "Protect target." These smart wingmen will provide much-needed backup. No longer does it feel as if you're a superpilot and your wingmen are cannon fodder. Many times, I was able to rip apart a capital ship by orchestrating a complex assault, having different ships attacking different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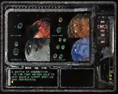

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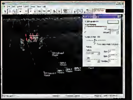
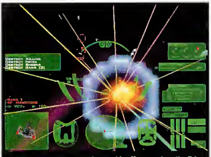


FRED, the mission editor included in FREESPACE, looks a bit daunting, but it isn't that hard to use once you've spent a little time playing with it. The included RTF document makes for a decent technical reference, and it features a nice tutorial. One Web site that is valuable for FRED users to check out is Peter Drake's "Using FRED" at www.cs.indiana.edu/~pedrake/gamer/fred/fred.html. You can also join the Freespace Developer's List to exchange info with other FRED users and Volition personnel (info at www.descent-freespace.com/lists/fdl/index.html). Finally, if you'd like to try out some new missions for DESCENT: FREESPACE, start your exploration at Xanadu's Freespace Mission Archive at http://xanadu.ml.org/freespace/.

parts of the target (such as having Alpha 1 and 2 attack communications while Beta Wing attacks the engines). This was much more satisfying than other games that feature simply a generic command to "destroy target."

The capital ships are also superb. While they don't quite have that weird, organic look of the ships in WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY, they have the most functional appearance I've ever seen. Each subsystem that you can target affects the ship's performance when that subsystem is destroyed. Destroying communications slows or stops reinforcements. Disabling the general-weapons systems lessens their accuracy and the use of the larger guns on the ship.

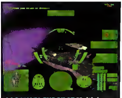
Your reward for a good shot is incomparable. In other space sims, I was always disappointed with the explosions, which at best can be described as "many fireball sprites and the ship is gone." FREESPACE starts with electrical currents running through, then smaller explosions emerging, followed by a massive explosion plus shockwave that rips the ship apart and looks as if it's straight out of a sci-fi movie. The explosion is so strong it can actually damage your ship substantially (a first in my experience), and it's even better when using a force feedback joystick. The only flaw is that the capital ships aren't quite as big as the advertising makes them out to be.



COLORS OF THE RAINBOW The graphic effects, such as the firing of this defensive swarming missile, are nicely done.

Lost in the Void

What is unfortunate is that one of the biggest attractions to the game doesn't work quite so well. Multiplayer is only decent—if you play over a network or a fast connection. There have already been two patches released to make Internet gaming playable, and it could still use some help. Using a 33.6Kbps modem with a relatively low ping time, I was able to play some Internet games. At times, the ping time soared and I found myself firing seconds after pulling the trigger, all while enemy ships warped all around me.



LAG KILLED THE PILOT Multiplayer FREESPACE on the Net is hampered by lag, as seen in the upper right corner and the flashing "net" icon near the center.

LOCK AND LOAD The technology pacing is nice, doling out more ships and weapons to choose from every so often.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES The capital ships, while impressive overall, aren't quite as big as the game's ads suggest.

While online multiplayer isn't totally broken, and Volition is rushing to patch improvements into the code, don't expect an optimal flying experience unless you have a great connection. What was also disconcerting was reading the READ.ME file, which stated that the pure free-for-all dogfight option that's mentioned in the manual was no longer supported.

Also, beware of the branching campaign moniker. This isn't like the branching plot trees in WING COMMANDER. What changes here is how much technology you get. The better you perform in missions, the sooner that better technology arrives, and in larger quantities. The missions themselves are relatively unaffected; here, it's more about how much firepower you and the enemy are packing. One nice touch is that if a ship gets destroyed in an earlier mission, it remains destroyed in later missions.

Overall, FREESPACE is simply a very solid clone. It doesn't quite push the entire genre forward, but it's a great challenge to the WING COMMANDER and *Star Wars* franchises. Clones of all types are easy to find, but a clone that is done this well is hard to find. Combine its solid gameplay with its customizability and you have a great package. It's too bad its multiplayer isn't all it could be, and that the campaign and the ships aren't quite as good as the ads would have you believe. CGW

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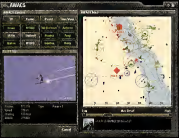

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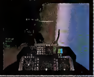

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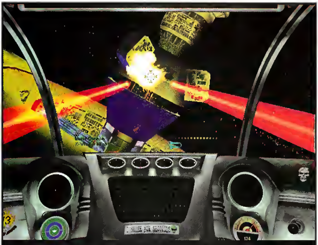
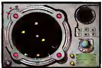
Identity Crisis

This Split-Personality X-COM Can't Match the Magic of Its Predecessors



A MURKY BLEND The latest X-COM game blends equal parts of strategy and first-person space combat. But it's a mix that's not too successful.

EAT LASERS, SECTOIDS To wipe out the aliens, you'll engage in many brief, average flight missions. There are more dull dogfights than base attacks.



THE STRATEGIC HUD You'll spend a fair amount of time in X-COM INTERCEPTOR monitoring UFO activity and managing your bases and ships from this screen.

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APPEAL: For X-COM fans who don't mind frequent interruptions for space combat.

PROS: Decent strategy gameplay.

CONS: Repetitive and boring missions; strategy gets in the way if you want to fly; flying gets in the way if you want to play strategically; 3D acceleration barely improves graphics.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166 or P-133 with 3D accelerator, Win 95, 16MB RAM.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem, serial cable (2 players), LAN (up to 8 players); 1 CD per player.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dfx, Direct3D

Price $49 95
Publisher MicroProse
Alameda, CA
(800) 695 4263

www.microprose.com

by Elliott Chin

There are few strategy games more respected or well-remembered than X-COM: UFO DEFENSE, a smart strategy game with global strategic gameplay and tactical squad-based combat. It was an addictive combination that earned it *CGW's* Game of the Year Award in 1995. Since then, three additional X-COM games have come on the scene: X-COM TERROR FROM THE DEEP, X-COM APOCALYPSE, and X-COM INTERCEPTOR. Of all these, the least satisfying is INTERCEPTOR. True, none of the successive X-COMs has been able to match UFO DEFENSE, but at least the other games knew what they were trying to do. X-COM INTERCEPTOR tries to be two games at once, and succeeds at neither. We're reviewing INTERCEPTOR in the simulations section because it's billed as a space sim with X-COM strategy elements. That's a pretty fair assessment of the game. But is it a good space sim? Not really. In fact, the best part of this game is the classic X-COM strategic gameplay

The Belly of the Beast

INTERCEPTOR takes place between TERROR FROM THE DEEP and APOCALYPSE (a good move on MicroProse's part because the APOCALYPSE storyline was definitely lacking). After stabilizing the situation on Earth, X-COM has taken the fight into deep space and the heart of alien territory. As the X-COM commander, you start the game with a single base randomly placed on the map. At this stage, with only three starting fighters and limited technology, you can realistically defend only a small area of space. Your ultimate goal, though, is to take over this sector of space and eradicate the alien stronghold. You'll need to expand your reach by building more bases and then beef up your fleet by researching better technology and buying more interceptors and weapons. To do that, of course, you need money.

Accompanying the X-COM forces into the deepest reaches of space are rich mining corporations. If you've played other X-COMs you know the drill. These corporations pay out "protection money." If you defend them against UFOs, they'll graciously fill your coffers. If you fail to protect them, these corporations will either get stingy or shut down business, depriving you of their money. Protecting these corporate outposts is vital because they're your only real source of

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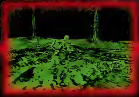
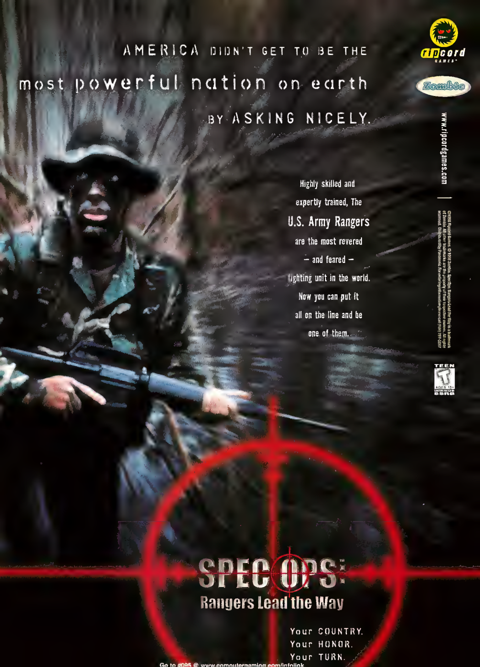
SpecOps: Rangers Lead the Way takes you from snowy Korean forests to steamy South American jungles.

RANGERS ALWAYS SWEAT THE DETAILS

From uniforms and vehicles to the foreign languages spoken by enemy soldiers, everything is authentic.



Like the U.S. Army Rangers, SpecOps: Rangers Lead the Way isn't for lightweights. It's intensely real, with motion-capture technology, photorealistic textures, stunning outdoor 3D environments and actual ambient and weapons sounds. Your missions range from blowing up SCUD bases in North Korea to rescuing hostages in Afghanistan. You might even receive a medal. But that's not why you signed up. You joined to uphold the honor of the Rangers and your country. So let's go, soldier. Your country needs you.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income for running the expensive X-COM operation. As you expand by building more bases, you'll be able to cover more area. As your reach grows, more companies will pop up and establish outposts under your umbrella.

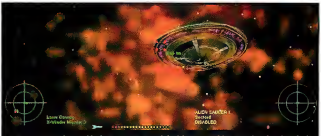
The Wheat and the Chaff

INTERCEPTOR is divided into two styles of gameplay. The first one to greet you when you start the game is the strategy portion. The main galaxy screen shows your currently selected region of space and menus for accessing your bases, ships, research, and equipment.

At the Bases screen you'll build new bases, add modules to your existing bases, view the interceptors and equipment at the currently selected base, or call up status reports on your bases. Each base can support several modules such as hangars, crew housing, download modules for downloading new technology, pilot training modules, and defensive laser turrets. Your initial base—and each subsequent base you build—starts with only the bare minimum of modules, so you'll need to build more as you find the cash.

In the Research screen, you'll engage in an X-COM hallmark: researching alien technology. Every time you engage alien ships in the space-sim portion of the game, you'll scrounge some new alien technology from the debris. Once you return to base with these new technologies, they become available for research. While you might have that new alien plasma cannon in your cargo hold, you won't be able to use it until your scientists tell you how it works.

INTERCEPTOR handles research a bit differently from other X-COM games. Instead of employing your own labs and scientists, you send captured technology back to Earth, where scientists do the dirty work for you. It's then a simple matter of downloading the research. The more advanced the technology, the longer the download. Of course, you can speed things up by building more download modules at your base. Each base can download a different technology, so you can download multiple technologies at a time. Research is important not only for weapons and ship advancements, but also for deciphering alien messages.



FLYING SAUCERS The graphics in INTERCEPTOR aren't bad, but even with 3D acceleration they don't match the visual quality of other space sims.

THE LURE OF TECHNOLOGY As in other X-COM games, you'll need to research new alien technology to defeat the alien menace.

The Ships screen is one you won't visit often in the beginning of the game. But once you acquire more technology, you'll come here to swap out old components from your interceptors and put in new equipment. You'll also assign and train pilots from this screen. This is one area in which the game isn't clear. The manual (which is barely adequate) says that pilots improve as they stay in training, but there isn't enough onscreen feedback to tell you how the pilot training is progressing. Still, at the rate the aliens pop up to harass you, you won't have much time to spend on excessive training, anyway.

One screen in which you'll spend a lot more time is Equipment, where you purchase your interceptors, weapons, and ship components, such as cloaks, ECM, and targeting systems.

Where's the Space Sim?

By now, if you're a strategy fan, you're probably into the aforementioned features, but if you are a space-sim fan, you may think that all this strategy just gets in the way of what you want: space combat. In previous X-COMs, once you encountered the aliens, you'd switch to tactical squad combat; in INTERCEPTOR, you jump into sim mode. The game clock can progress at any of six speeds (5 seconds, 1 minute, 5 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, or 24 hours). I usually set it to 24 hours and let the UFO encounters rack up. Once you get a warning of an alien presence, you can launch a mission to intercept or just ignore it. When you choose to intercept, you select the number of ships you want to send out (up to a maximum of five) from any bases in the vicinity. These encounters occur with plenty of frequency, so if combat is what you want, combat is what you'll get. But be careful what you wish for, because the space combat is boring. Each mission is pretty much the same. You engage in dogfights with three to six UFOs—ad nauseum. Sometimes there might be a tug or a probe, but for the most part, it's the same thing over and over again. Even worse than the repetitive missions are the wingman's taunts, which get old fast.

While space combat occurs frequently, it's by far the most boring part of the game. I found myself having the most fun when I was building and researching. And every time I set the game clock to 24 hours to accelerate my building and research, I was always crossing my fingers that I wouldn't get an encounter.

So, MicroProse has succeeded in creating a strategy/space-combat hybrid, but both types of gameplay suffer for it. The strategic gameplay isn't as engaging as in previous X-COMs, and if you are playing the game for the strategy, you have to contend with numerous interruptions in the form of the space combat. The best feature this game could have had is an automatic resolution for combat so that if you didn't want to fly a mission, you could just tell the computer to resolve the fight instantly and let you get back to the fun part. The space combat isn't terrible, but it just can't compare to X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER, WING COMMANDER PROPHECY, or DESCENT: FREESPACE. Only the end mission, which takes you into the heart of the aliens' stronghold, is memorable.

Graphically, the space-combat portions also suffer in comparison to those other games. Even when it was running with 3D acceleration, I didn't see an appreciable increase in visual quality. INTERCEPTOR does have multiplayer support, but the game falls down even there, offering only deathmatch between interceptors. Why can't we fly alien UFOs in a deathmatch?

Sadly, the space simulation turns out to be the least successful portion of the game. If you want to see an overall enjoyable, balanced X-COM design, better to unearth a copy of UFO DEFENSE. CGW

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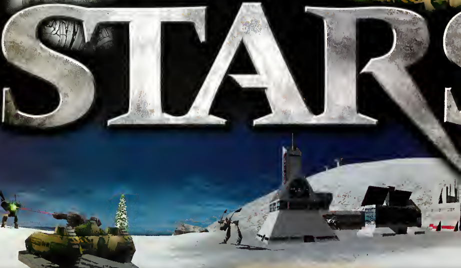

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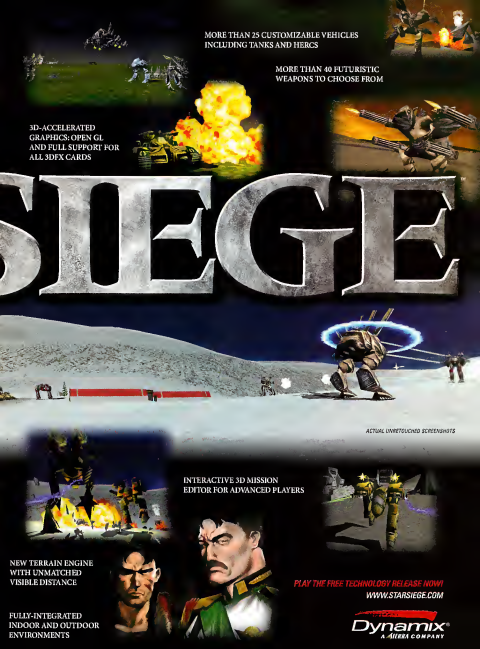

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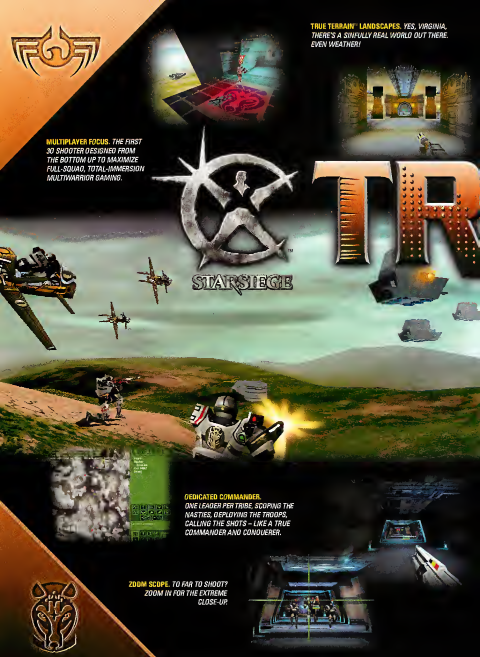

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By Gordon Goble

What would a PC bike racing game be without flying fists and chains, implausibly monstrous jumps, and physics that don't make you feel like you're either a) on rails or b) in a zero-gravity environment? Why, it'd be CASTROL HONDA SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONS, the first-ever quality computerized attempt at simulated real-world motorcycle racing. And a tasty little morsel it is.

Designed by England's Intense Entertainment Interactive (POWER F1), SUPERBIKE is a speed-soaked look at bike racing's World Championship level, essentially the equivalent of auto racing's Formula 1. From the saddle of the machine that won the 1997 World Championship—the 190-MPH, 160-HP Honda RVF-RC45—you're asked to negotiate the 10 tracks that make up the game's virtual "season." There's just one catch: It's really, really hard.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: Speed freaks, simulation and arcade racers, and anyone who's been drooling over the prospect of a semirealistic motorcycle racing game.

PROS: TV-quality graphics; dynamic tracks; a strong sense of being on just two wheels; the first true motorcycle racing sim.

CONS: Most courses are a bit too technical for bikes designed with high speeds and fast corners in mind; opponent engine sounds not indicative of their positioning; no race restart key and incredibly tough upper difficulty levels

DIFFICULTY: Hard.

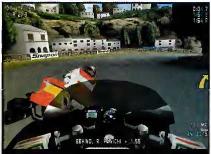
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90 with 3D card or Pentium 133 without, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 30MB hard-drive space, DirectX 5–supported SVGA video and sound cards, 4x CD-ROM drive.

3D SUPPORT: 3Dfx.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, modem (2 players); 1 CD per player

PRICE: $49.95
PUBLISHER: Intense Entertainment Interactive
Towson, MD
(888) 240-6172

www.intense-games.com



HOW LOW CAN YOU GO? Two unique approaches to the same corner—guess who had to back off?

Not Easy Rider

As a matter of fact, at the highest difficulty levels, you're gonna find it nearly impossible to win a race, never mind an entire championship. Fortunately, SUPERBIKE comes with difficulty settings more appropriate for us mere mortals, a bevy of rookie driving aids (braking assistance, best racing line, and the like), unlimited practice opportunities, a setup shop, and a consistent and impressive driving model—all of which conspire to keep interest high, even for newcomers.

The game doesn't, however, equip you with better reflexes, something you'll need in abundance if you wish to be at all successful. Pieced together from digitally re-created footage of real tracks (except for Honda's test track, Motegi, which appears in its entirety), SUPERBIKE's courses are an amalgamation of technical "thru-the-street" circuit, GP road course, and high-speed oval; and all demand total concentration and snappy hand-eye coordination. Lean too far into a turn and you'll find yourself in a wheels-first slide to ignominy.

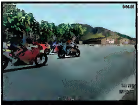
As for the bikes, let's just say that they are almost inordinately fast when you get them up to speed, slowed only to something less than the thing through undue care and attention, smack an obstacle, or come in contact with one of the none-too-evasive AI opponents. They're less nimble than expected from a dead stop or at anything less than 50 MPH, with poor acceleration off the mark and a big looping turning radius.

In the garage, the game lets you adjust tire compounds and overall and individual gear settings, each of which has an appreciable and believable impact on the track. You can save only two bike settings per track at a time, meaning you may have to break out the note paper should you want to create setups for various distances or lap records.

She's a Looker

Visually, SUPERBIKE rules. From your first-person perspective, you'll soak up incredible 3D-accelerated graphics that bring to mind such recent racing beauties as UbiSoft's F1 RACING SIMULATION. Awesome lighting and shadow effects, transparent fog, tire marks, and riders who move independently upon their mounts add even more oomph to the extremely high resolutions on display. The replay in particular, utilizing fixed and mobile camera positions, resembles a television broadcast.

Audio, meanwhile, consists of some truly lovely engine, tranny, and tire sounds from your own bike, though your opponents emit just an ad-hoc collection of roars and whines. This means it's tough to tell if the immediate competition is well behind you or *right frigging there,* a situation compounded by the lack of rear-view mirrors. Granted, they don't have rear views in the real world, but this is a game, and I'd have preferred mirrors to the temporary yet disorienting full-screen reverse perspective.



TRIPLE THE FUN Amid the lovely tropical vegetation and amazing lighting effects, three riders vie for sixth place.

I found myself lamenting the absence of a restart key, opponents who crash, and a victory celebration worthy of the accomplishment. Nevertheless, SUPERBIKE is a strong first entry in this daredevil sport—one worthy of close examination by race fans.

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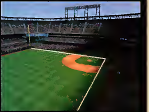

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Designed for Microsoft® Windows®95

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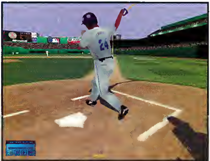
Billy Ball

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D Doesn't Quite Get Out of the Park

By Scott May



DUTTA HERE! Griffey whacks another one out of the park in MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D, probably the best arcade baseball game in this very thin year.

Microsoft's active interest with the coin-op industry appears to be taking shape at home, not at the arcades. Judged *only* by appearance and performance, MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D is, without doubt, the fastest, best-looking arcade baseball game that's available for the home computer.

Like Interplay's recent VR BASEBALL, Microsoft's version of hardball was designed solely for 3D-hardware–accelerated machines. Featuring graphics and camera techniques that mimic real life, BASEBALL 3D is geared primarily for the action crowd—those who get a bigger kick out of being on the field than in the front office. However, the game is not completely devoid of depth, as even stat hounds might enjoy the game's separate General Manager application (see sidebar).

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★☆☆

APPEAL: Arcade-style-baseball fans.

PROS: Drop-dead 3D graphics; exceptionally fast and fluid animation; nice stand-alone general manager app.

CONS: No multiplayer options; non-assisted fielding is a nightmare; annoying automatic view camera; shallow AI.

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95/98, 16MB RAM, 30MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 2MB 3D-accelerated video card, 16-bit sound card, 28.8Kbps modem.

3D SUPPORT: Direct 3D.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: To be announced.

Price $54 95
Publisher Microsoft Corporation
Redmond WA
(425) 882-8080

www.microsoft.com/games

Designed for one or two players, the game offers three modes of play: single game, season play, or playoffs Microsoft secured the necessary licenses to include all MLB players, teams, and ballparks, using lineups and stats from the 1997 season. A standard set of options lets you select the number of innings played, designated hitters, weather, and difficulty level (rookie, veteran, or all-star). Unlike most arcade-flavored baseball games, there's no sideline diversions like Home Run Derby. There's not even a practice mode.

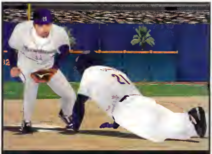
Murderer's Row

As we've come to expect from native 3D-accelerated games, the graphics in BASEBALL 3D are sensational—without doubt the best yet created for PC baseball. On-screen characters are purely polygonal, texture-mapped (in some cases) with the digitized face of the actual MLB player. Where no specific likeness is available, a generic face fits the bill. It's wonderfully surreal, if not downright creepy, to see the disembodied face of your favorite baseball star stretched like some rubber skin onto the angular torso of a computerized character. Digital art has entered a truly bizarre new realm: synthetic, genetic sculpting. Scary stuff.

Creepiness aside, player graphics and animation are both cutting edge. The developers, WizBang, claim to have used 500 motion-captured moves to create the incredibly lifelike animation, from leaping catches to base sliding.

What struck me as most impressive, however, were the little touches, such as the hesitant half-step infielders take before throwing the ball. Or the subtle routine of new batters—tapping the plate, adjusting their grip, and so on. It all adds up to a very realistic experience, made even more lifelike by the game's consistently smooth frame rate. From some angles, especially during instant replays, you'll swear you're watching a televised game.

I ran the game on a Pentium 233MMX machine with 64MB RAM, using a 12MB Diamond Monster 3D II (Voodoo^2) card. Believe it or not, this is one of those rare games that almost runs *too* fast on a PC beyond the recommended system (a P166). On offense, speed is great; on defense, it can spell trouble. Manual fielding is incredibly fast, hampered further by the odd angles provided by the game's automatic camera system. On a typical hit to the deep outfield, the view might change six times before the play ends. Sure, the transitions are razor-sharp, but it's easy to lose your bearings, not to mention a few easy outs, as the camera moves and spins. Very MTV, but not very practical.



FIELD OF NIGHTMARES With overly confusing camera work at play, manual fielding in MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D is dizzying—and, at times, next to impossible.

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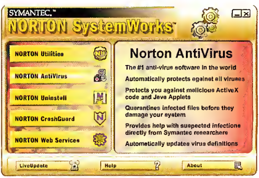

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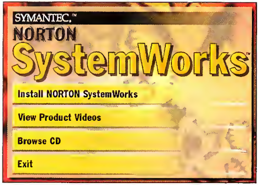

Easy to install with the CD Start screen.

Because Norton SystemWorks is so tightly integrated, it's easy to install and easy to launch. All the utilities included in Norton SystemWorks are designed to work compatibly with each other and duplicate functionality has been eliminated. Moving from one utility to another — say, from Norton AntiVirus™ to Norton Uninstall™ — is as simple as clicking a button on your screen. What's more, Norton SystemWorks features like CD Start and Launch Pad make it exceptionally easy to use.

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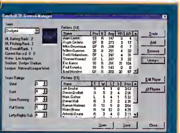
3D GENERAL MANAGER



Baseball 3D General Manager

Team: Dodgers
NL Batting Rank: 2
NL Pitching Rank: 2
NL Overall Rank: 1
Current Record: 0 0
Home: Los Angeles
Stadium: Dodger Stadium
League: National League West

Team Ratings
Steal: 5
Bunt: 4
Base Running: 5
Pull Starter: 5
Lefty/Righty Sub: 4

Fielders (14)

Name	Pos	B	Avg	HR	RBI
Juan Castro	SS	R	147	0	4
Roger Cedeno	OF	B	.273	3	17
Mike Devereaux	OF	R	.208	0	7
Wilton Guerrero	2B	B	291	4	32
Todd Hollandsw...	OF	L	247	4	31
Thomas Howard	OF	L	247	3	22
Eric Karros	1B	R	266	31	104
Paul Konerko	1B	R	143	0	0
Raul Mondesi	OF	R	310	30	87

Pitchers (11)

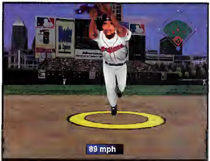
Name	T	W	L	S	ERA
Jim Bruske	R	4	1	0	3.63
Darren Dreifort	R	5	2	4	2.86
Mark Guthrie	L	1	4	1	5.32
Darren Hall	R	3	2	2	2.30
Ramon Martinez	R	10	5	0	3.64
Hideo Nomo	R	14	12	0	4.25
Antonio Osuna	R	3	4	0	2.19

The developers of BASEBALL 3D have designed one outstanding game feature that should be included in all sports games: General Manager, a stand-alone application that runs independently from the game program. By not packaging it inside the game itself, the designers have kept the game lean and mean, while allowing would-be managers to conduct front-office duties behind the scenes.

The General Manager loads entirely from your hard drive, so there's no need to have the game CD handy. The main screen displays both team and individual player stats and ratings, based on either the 1997 MLB season or current BASEBALL 3D season. Here you can modify player stats and attributes, such as height, weight, position, endurance, power, aim, and accuracy. You can even tweak the player model—as he appears in digital form—regarding physical build, batting stance, batting grip, and facial appearance.

The General Manager also lets you add players from a list of free agents, conduct trades, change starting lineups, and adjust your team's propensity for bunts, steals, substitutes, and innings played before pulling your starting pitcher. Presumably, Microsoft has the ability to make team and player updates available, to be plugged into the General Manager program.

Whether you've got a fast machine or one just barely cranking along, the game provides several options to help you speed up or slow down gameplay. Depending on your monitor and video card, you can change screen resolutions and refresh rates—lower (512x384) for slowpokes, and higher (1024x768) for speed demons. Other 3D graphic options can be toggled or adjusted, including three levels of player detail, shadows, triple buffering, and MIP mapping, as well as a variety of sound off/on switches. Give Microsoft and WizBang credit—they've done a remarkable job delivering both killer graphics and nimble performance.



CLONE BALL Is it Omar Vizquel or some kind of freak genetic mutation? The game's 3D graphics are awesome, but someone needs to figure out a way to make the faces less creepy.

Pitchout

Despite having spent an extra year in development, the game has its share of audio-visual quirks. Several times while I was playing, the crowd noise appeared to be stuck in an endless loop—as luck would have it, during a round of loud, ecstatic cheering—that wouldn't stop until the inning was over. That's annoying. I also made the mistake of changing the offensive batting view, from umpire (default) to catcher. Unfortunately, despite my repeated tries, the game refused to let me change it back, deciding on its own to use the skybox view instead. I had to quit and restart the game to swat this little bug.

The game can be played using the keyboard, gamepad, or joystick (analog or digital). Just for fun (read: gimmick) the game also supports force-feedback joysticks. I plugged in a CH Force FX to get a feel for the game. The feedback feature works as advertised, producing a sharp little *whack* when bat meets ball. Or a painful *thud* when the base runner slides into home plate—and into the catcher. New force-feedback slogan: *Feel* the shame.

The biggest drag is that, despite optimistic efforts from Microsoft, BASEBALL 3D failed to ship with multiplayer mode in place. As is, only two players can compete at the same PC. Reportedly, Microsoft will post a multiplayer patch on its game site, although none was available at the time of this writing. Let's hope so, because this game's computer AI runs on the shallow side.

Here's another, unexpected gripe. Joystick controls are set up in the traditional diamond pattern, looking toward the outfield: press down to throw home, right for first, up for second, and left for third. Unfortunately, with today's zoom-bang 3D graphics, our play perspective is now free to roam the field from any angle. Looks great, but unfortunately, the joystick controls remain fixed. So from an outfielder's perspective, throwing the ball to what visually feels like second base (down) will actually send it sailing home. Admittedly, it might be tricky to swap joystick coordinates in a blink of an eye, but as you can see, all this gee-whiz camera movement has its downside.

JOSE, CAN'T YOU SEE? Jose Canseco shows what getting old is all about, as the former superstar whiffs yet another one.

Ball physics are something of a mixed bag. Though pitches and hits appear true to life, the accelerated nature of the game causes outfield balls to rocket outward, then quickly drop, as if the forces of gravity increase the further you get from home plate. Given the slow response and bass-ackward nature of fielding, it's mighty disconcerting.

Batting .500

The problems with MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D can't be ignored or dismissed. But then again, neither can its considerable strengths. If you're dying for a high-flash baseball title that puts your 3D card through its paces, this is the game to get in this disappointing baseball season. CGW

TEAM LO
LUCKY FOR YOU
OURS COMES WITH A RESET BUTTON

1
TEAM LOSI
RC RACER

FINALLY, A REMOTE CONTROL CAR NOT EVEN YOUR BROTHER CAN BREAK. COMPLETE WITH 16 REMOTE CONTROL CARS AND 15 PULSE-POUNDING TRACKS, THIS GAME LETS YOU DODGE, WEAVE, AND SOAR THROUGH RICH TROPICAL JUNGLES, SUN-DRENCHED BEACHES, AND MURKY SWAMPS. EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE RACING, THERE ARE DOZENS OF HIDDEN PATHS AND SECRET FEATURES FOR YOU TO EXPLORE. ALONE, WITH A FRIEND, OR AGAINST THE COMPUTER, THIS GAME WILL SEND YOU THROUGH DOZENS OF COURSES -- NOT BATTERIES.

AVAILABLE ON WINDOWS®95 CD-ROM AND PLAYSTATION™ GAME CONSOLE

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Gremlin

FOX INTERACTIVE

PlayStation

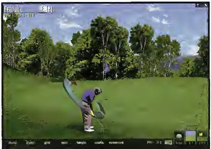
Swing Time!

Microsoft Steps Out of LINKS Shadow With a Decent New Golf Game

by Scott A. May

Well-presented, but inherently uninspired, the MICROSOFT GOLF series has never provided much cause for celebration. Licensed from Access Software, versions 1–3 were essentially LINKS LITE, sporting crippled renditions of that title's now-moldy game engine. But times change, and so has Microsoft's franchise. The latest entry, 1998 EDITION, shows that MICROSOFT GOLF is worthy to step out on its own.

Completely redesigned from the ground up by Friendly Software, MICROSOFT GOLF 1998 retains the polished, user-friendly feel of previous editions, but little else. Thank goodness. Veteran fans of the series will be surprised both by the game's new look and by its play and control options. Meanwhile, those who shunned the early versions for its lack of depth finally have reason to take another look.



SWING YOUR WAY MICROSOFT GOLF 1998 features four unique ways to hit the ball, including the all-new Natural Swing, which uses mouse movement to simulate tactile club control.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★☆☆

APPEAL: Golf nuts wary of just another version of LINKS LITE.

Microsoft
GOLF 1998

PROS: Dynamic new engine; clean interface; deep customization; four swing options.

CONS: No printed manual; can't use courses from previous versions; superfluous commentary.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90, Windows 95/98/NT 4.0, 16MB RAM (24MB for NT), 55MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, 16-bit sound card, 28.8Kbps modem.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Modem (2 players); IPX or TCP/IP (2–4 players); 1 CD per player.

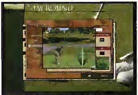
DESIGNER: Friendly Software

Price $54.95
Publisher: Microsoft
Redmond, WA
(425) 882-8080

www.microsoft.com/games

Of Course

Three 18-hole courses ship with the game: The Links and Teeth of the Dog at Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic; and Bay Harbor Golf Club on the shores of Lake Michigan. A bonus 9-hole course, The Preserve 9 at Bay Harbor, completes the unique lineup. Unfortunately, the downside to Microsoft's new game engine is its inability to use the myriad courses available to previous versions, including a sizeable chunk of the LINKS course library.



PIN HEAD MICROSOFT GOLF 1998's new variable pin placement dramatically increases the challenge and strategies needed for championship putting.

Five game styles include Stroke, Match, Skins, Scramble, and Bingo Bango Bongo. Up to four players can compete, using any combination of human/computer control, including remote multiplayer modes via modem, LAN, or Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. The only missing option is the ability to play against previously recorded games, which can be both challenging and instructional, when played against yourself or a friend.

The game's graphics are clean and photorealistic, combined with an excellent physics model that incorporates terrain elevation and user-defined weather effects. Despite the recent trend (backward) toward polygonal players, Friendly uses video-captured golfer animations that are clean and smooth. Most remarkable is how the video golfers blend seamlessly into the foreground. Many titles that use video-captured animation look as if they were cut-and-pasted onto the screen. Not here.

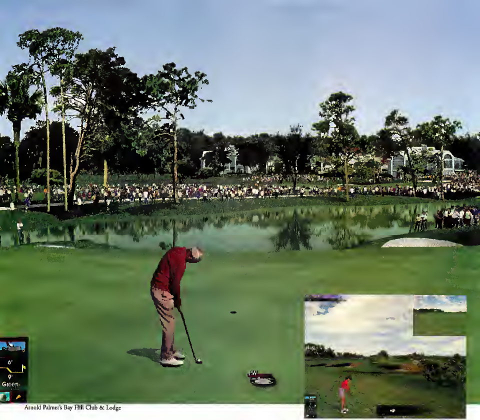
Long Range

One of the first new options you'll see is pin placement, an exciting feature that few other games offer. This option lets you choose from 10 variations of pin (hole) placement, including moderate, challenging, hard, or random. In a nutshell, changing the pin location on the green has a tremendous effect on approach and putting strategies. Almost as good as getting a free set of new courses, this option alone increases the game's long-term playability tenfold.

By far the most impressive new options, however, are in the area of player swing control. Not content with just a few variations, GOLF 1998 gives us four—the most of any golf game. The first two are old school twitch and click: 2- or 3-click swing meters. The third style, Natural Swing, is an exciting departure from tradition, using mouse movement to simulate the backswing and follow-through of a real club swing. Best of all, this feature lets you move the mouse the way you want—vertically, horizontally, or even diagonally. Natural Swing requires practice to master, but if you take the time, it provides the most tactile control I've felt in a golf sim.

The fourth method of swing control is a total departure. Called the Sim Swing, this method requires no player interaction at all. Instead, the computer handles the swing, based on attributes you assign in the pregame setup. To my knowledge, this managerial approach has never before been applied to a golf sim.

Overall, designer Friendly Software's total revamping of MICROSOFT GOLF keeps the series alive and vital in this increasingly competitive genre. CGW



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Links LS
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Way, Way Off the Mark

Fox Sports' Shot Doesn't Trouble the FIFA 98 Keeper

by Joe Vallina

It's gonna take a whole lotta soccer game to dethrone FIFA ROAD TO WORLD CUP 98, and FOX SPORTS SOCCER '99 doesn't even come close. Where to begin? The crappy graphics? The horrible announcing AI? The unrealistic player animations, perhaps? No, let's start with one of the most touted "features" in the game, the speeded-up gameplay.

Faster≠Better

Fox Sports has apparently decided that realistic soccer action is boring. So, in the interest of pumping some life into the game, the SOCCER '99 designers have purposely speeded up the gameplay. Well, I hate to break it to them, but the people who are in the market for soccer games like soccer action just the way it is in real life, thank you very much. Whereas, when playing FIFA 98, I sometimes felt as if I were actually watching a match on TV; when playing SOCCER '99, I always felt as if I were playing a bad PlayStation port of an even worse PlayStation soccer game.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★☆☆☆☆

APPEAL: Those who don't like realistic, fun soccer games.

PROS: Scenarios idea is kind of cool.

CONS: Gameplay is too fast and unrealistic; no player editing; bad camera angles; occasional crashes; jerky gameplay. Shall I go on?

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: 120Mhz Pentium, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 87MB hard-drive space, Windows 95–compatible graphics card, 4x CD-ROM.

3D SUPPORT: Direct3D, 3Dfx.

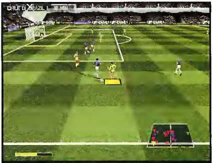
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: IPX, TCP/IP, serial, modem, (2–8 players).

Price $59 95
Publisher Fox Sports Interactive
Sterling, CO
(900) CALL4FOX

www.foxsportsgames.com

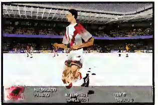
SOCCER '99's faster, unrealistic gameplay; weird camera angles; and lack of player control make the game incredibly frustrating to play. The faster action also makes it very difficult to mark the opposing side. The players move so fast that many times they run right past the opposing player or the ball. Amazingly, I found that the best way to defend was to set the difficulty level to amateur (in which you are assisted by the AI) and just *let go* of the controller until the opposing offensive player comes close enough that your AI player steals the ball. You have no control as to which of your players you will control at any given moment. Instead, you always control whoever is closest to the ball. This finds you switching players right as you go in for a slide tackle.

The problem is, if your previously controlled man was going in the opposite direction of the man you now control, by the time you've realized that the change has taken place, you've already run to the wrong side of the pitch.



FACT CHECK MUCH? Fox doesn't seem to know that Chile wears red, white, and blue uniforms, not yellow.

Player control in SOCCER '99 is minimal. You know all those crazy moves you can do with different button combos in FIFA 98? Forget about them. Heck, SOCCER '99 doesn't even use all of the gamepad buttons. Your control options are limited to passes, slide tackles, the one-two pass, shoot, speed burst, and the catch-all "one-touch" moves. The "one-touch" moves are headers-on-goal, volleys, and the bicycle kick; of course, the computer decides when you can do these, and it automatically chooses one for you when you press the shoot button. Thanks a lot. No, really, Mr. Pentium, I'll just watch.



WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? I don't know who this blocky-looking guy is, just that he plays for Madrid. But wait...is it Atletico Madrid or Real Madrid? Neither is realistically represented, so why bother?

And there's another annoying control horror: When you approach the goal and try to take a shot, you have to watch a golf-game-style power meter for your shot. Of course, the faster gameplay makes it nearly impossible for you to do this and avoid the defenders at the same time. Ugh.

But Wait, There's More

Did I mention the fact that no players' names are correct? At least let us edit the players to add the correct names ourselves! And there is no excuse for not having the correct team colors on the uniforms. What about the crashes or the fact that the play stops for a second every time the announcer wants to (ridiculously) call a fictional player's name?

The only semi-cool thing in the whole game is the scenarios option that lets you play in certain situations. For example: France 1, USA 0, 20 minutes left, and the French have a corner. Can you come back?

But even considering this one bright point, I could go on for days about how bad this game is when compared to FIFA 98, and some may criticize me for the comparison. But, here's the deal. FIFA 98 has raised the bar in soccer PC titles—and that bar is *high*, folks. So unless you at least close, don't even bother. FOX SPORTS SOCCER '99 isn't as realistic, cool, or least of all, fun as FIFA 98. And that means it's doomed. CGW

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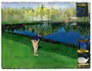
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One Small Step for MechKind

Despite Flaws, MECHCOMMANDER Adds to BattleTech Universe

by Loyd Case

Her uniform was soaked with perspiration as though she were in the overheated cockpit of the Mad Cat itself. The lumbering behemoth lurched and stumbled, its lasers melting through the tarmac like an oxy-acetylene torch through PVC pipe. In frustration, she frantically ordered up support as her pilot ejected from the heavy Mech. "It was easier doing it myself," she sighed, hoping for a miracle.

MECHCOMMANDER offers a unique perspective in the *BattleTech* universe, a fictional world in which far-future chevaliers pilot 10-meter-tall walking tanks called BattleMechs. The *BattleTech* paper games are still hugely popular, as is the MECHWARRIOR series of BattleMech sims. MECHCOMMANDER is a real-time strategy game in which, as in the film *Aliens*, you monitor the progress of your platoon on video screens. In MECHCOMMANDER, you are both the eyes and the voice in the sky as you direct the actions of your 1–12 Mech units.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: *BattleTech* fans and anyone looking for a different style of real-time strategy.

PROS: Unit management adds depth; multiple solutions for victory; good pacing, well-designed interface, fabulous Mech feel

CONS: Some missions are artificially difficult; no in-game save; no waypoints.

DIFFICULTY: Advanced

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95, 16MB RAM (32MB for multiplayer), 150MB hard-drive space, 2MB VRAM SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM, DirectX-compatible sound.

3D SUPPORT: None

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, Internet (2–6 players each), Modem and serial (2 each), 1 CD per player.

Price: $59.95
Publisher: MicroProse
Alameda, CA
(800) 695-4263

www.mechcommander.com

The single-player game consists of 30 missions, grouped into five separate operations. The campaign focuses on liberating the planet Port Arthur from Clan occupation. Think of the Clans as a high-tech Mongol horde sweeping over a more civilized, but crumbling, society going through a dark age, and you'll have a good feel for the game's back-story.

Into the Breach

The opening cut-scene—one of the best I've seen in any game—revs you up and sets the mood. Each operation opens with a video briefing from your CO. In the first mission, you have only three Mechs, but you do have a few components. The interface for modifying Mechs is pretty simple, and as you obtain more hardware throughout the game, it only gets more fun trying to figure out ideal loadouts for different Mechs. Some of the conventions of the paper game have been simplified. For example, MECHCOMMANDER abstracts heat generation, factoring it into the cycle time of the various weapons: So, you never have to deal with heat sinks, as you did in MECHWARRIOR 2.

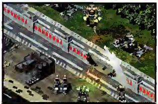
As you get more resource points for successful missions, you can spend them in the purchasing area on new Mechs, components, vehicles, and pilots. In the Mech Bay, you lock and load weapons and assign pilots. This is almost a subgame in itself. On the surface, resource points are a little silly in the context of a professional military unit, but it works pretty well.

The mission briefing presents you with a somewhat abstract map that has enough detail to give you a good idea of the lay of the land. It's here that you assign Mechs to different force groups. These aren't the same as the lance units from the board game—they're more flexible. You'll often have more force group slots than Mechs, so you can configure different groups for different tasks (a "heavy hitter" group coupled with a "fast mover" group, for example). Then you launch into the mission, and it's there that the inconsistencies begin showing up.

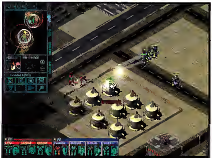
The Forlorn Hope

The first thing that you notice on the tactical board is the shroud, despite the fact that you had a map during the mission briefing. While I found this a bit silly, it's hard to criticize the designers for kowtowing to the conventions of the real-time strategy genre. The lack of an in-mission save feature, however, is a bigger problem, especially since so many of the missions are time-dependent. Deep into a mission, it's a real disincentive to try anything different or new: If you screw up, it's back to the beginning.

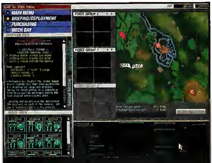
The game, similarly, has no waypoints, which would have added immensely to your tactical flexibility. You could set waypoints for a force group to make a big pincer movement as the hammer to an anvil force you move up to distract the enemy. In fact, the opening cut-scene makes a big deal out of setting waypoints, making the omission all the more glaring.



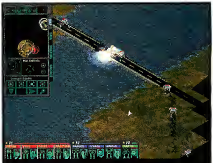
RED AND GREEN AND SCORCHED ALL OVER This screen shows how the nicely sculpted trees, missile trails, bursts of gunfire, and use of terrain all showcase MECHCOMMANDER's terrific engine and graphics.



SEE PRESSURE TANKS See pressure tanks blow up. See enemy Mechs go down like bowling pins.

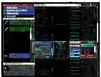


I'M NOT ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS Study the mission briefing map carefully. You won't see it again.

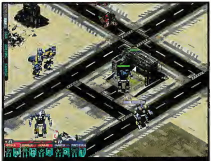


GUESS I'LL TAKE THE SUBWAY As shown by blowing this critical bridge, proper use of artillery often makes the difference.

SEE LOOP, ENDLESSLY Get used to this failure screen, because you're likely to see it often.



CHECK OUT THOSE SHINY, TWIN LASERS You can have a great time configuring your Mechs before you ever fire a missile in anger, and the process is a lot easier than in MECHWARRIOR 2.



DOCK OF THE MECHBAY Get instant repairs here—no waiting.

There's also a lack of a strategic AI. The individual enemy units seem to have relatively good tactical-combat AI, but all the events in the mission seem to be trigger-based or preprogrammed. There's none of the unpredictability you get with, say, CLOSE COMBAT: A BRIDGE TOO FAR.

Some of MECHCOMMANDER's missions are incredibly difficult, throwing enemies at you from disparate directions or forcing you to be at certain locations at certain times—all without any clue as to where you should be. Easily the most frustrating mission was Operation 4, Mission 5. You have to keep several large forces of enemy Mechs from exiting the board. Of course, you're heavily outnumbered and the enemy comes at you from several different directions. And you're doing this in the dark. All but the most dedicated gamers would probably just throw up their hands in despair and give up.

Honor and Glory

All of these factors may make MECHCOMMANDER seem like an exercise in drudgery, but they actually offer a considerable amount of freshness. For example, there's none of the "erect a base, build an army, and rush the enemy" routine. Because of the limited units at your disposal, you must carefully husband your resources—you can't win by simply outbuilding your opponent.

The game also rewards prudent tactics. Rushing in—even if you know the map—is almost always a recipe for disaster. Since there were relatively few units, I was able to move them using bounding overwatch tactics to prevent marching willy-nilly into disaster. (You do have to be careful not to let overwatch distances get too great due to the limited weapons range.) The use of sensor probes is a clever touch, although there's never enough of them.

Finally, when you get into combat, it's quite an adrenaline rush. The Mechs themselves behave relatively intelligently, so you see Mechs with long-range firepower moving back to engage with their heavier weapons while Mechs with heavy autocannons keep it up-close-and-personal.

Combat takes so long that you can actually maneuver—another advantage of a low unit-count. Moving a Mech to attack the rear of a busily engaged enemy was quite satisfying. It was also easy to vary orders by telling units to attack from the current position, or to change ranges.

There's also an engaging, though limited, role-playing element in managing the pilots. The pilots do improve over time, but they can also be injured. Do you take that elite pilot who's down two damage points or do you give him a break and take along the healthy rookie? And losing a pilot is a real tragedy.

Most missions allow more than one solution. For instance, I won the farm defense mission *without* a minelayer, an uncommon tactic. In fact, most of the game is fun and quite immersive, but that also made the occasional insanely difficult mission and other flaws stand out all the more.

After playing MECHCOMMANDER through, you feel relieved, exhilarated, and exhausted, because of—and despite—all of the game's flaws. MECHCOMMANDER is a very good game that could have been a great one, but it's a welcome addition to the *BattleTech* universe nonetheless. MECHCOMMANDER II, anyone? CGW

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Split Personality

CYBERSTORM 2 Isn't Fulfilling, Whether Real-time or Turn-Based

by Tim Carter

Another day, another half-baked sequel. Why, with the virtually unlimited array of potential game topics and game designs out there, do publishers keep returning to the same old well-worn concepts? And why—when they do revisit a concept—don't they use their experience to at least make better games?

Corporate Gaming

In CYBERSTORM 2, you take control of the military forces of one of eight interstellar corporations. Using a limited number of powered fighting vehicles called HERCs (which translates roughly as "Somebody Else Has the Copyright to 'Mechs®'"), you must dominate a solar system, defeat your competitors, and capture the all-important jump gate. It's hardly original, but that's never stopped computer game publishers before, has it?

CYBERSTORM 2 also purports to offer a choice between real-time and turn-based play. Reality, as is so often the case, doesn't quite live up to this marketing. Instead, the game delivers a real-time engine with a few stop-action parameters that give the cursory illusion of a turn-based game. Besides, Interplay's MAX really *did* offer both turn-based and real-time strategy play a year ago (see our MAX 2 review elsewhere in this month's strategy section).

The real-time play works as you'd expect, though it's pretty dull. If you elect for turn-based play, however, be prepared for things to get a little strange. You see, while you are moving your units turn by turn, the computer still moves and fires all of its units in realtime—until all AI units have expended their movement and energy available for that turn.

This isn't always a problem, but it is annoying to be playing a different game from your opponent. For example, one of my assignments was to raid a defensive platform. The platform, unfortunately, didn't know that it was part of a turn-based game and fired continuously throughout my move as well as throughout its own.

Also, you can get "outrun" opportunity fire in turn-based combat, just as you would do during real-time play, by ordering your units back as the projectiles come in. It's also possible to override opportunity fire by moving within range and then quickly firing all of your weapons, thus taking out the defender before it has a chance to finish firing.

Where's the Beef, HERC?

CYBERSTORM 2 is divided into a strategic game of base management, investment, and construction; and a tactical game in which your HERCs fight it out over various randomly generated battlefields. The strategic component of CYBERSTORM 2 is essentially static. You can upgrade your buildings and units and tweak your spending on research. Yet nothing really changes, and the entire system calls for little or no creativity.

The one area where a little planning could be fun is HERC design. Yet here, too, the wealth of options simply doesn't translate into addictive or even enjoyable gameplay. It's too easy to buy the best equipment available—occasionally customizing your units to fight in a particular environment or against a particular enemy—and then go about the same old battles.

Tactical combat is more fun, although I can't help feeling that the odds in a single-player campaign are so stacked against the humans that many players will quickly become frustrated. To win, players must tailor their units to the environment (some weapons work better than others in some environments, and different types of locations offer more chance for short- or long-range combat). You must also take advantage of terrain, particularly when faced with superior forces. The trick is often to lure your enemy into an ambush by using cover to ensure that all of your units take on your attackers piecemeal. Fortunately, the computer is quite aggressive, and the AI will walk straight into prepared ambushes.

All in all, CYBERSTORM 2 isn't an awful game; it just doesn't offer anything that's new or different. Unless you happen to suffer from chronic mech addiction, I really can't see any reason to spend good money or time on it. For an alternative to this game, check out our MECHCOMMANDER review in this issue. CGW

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★☆☆☆

CYBERSTORM 2

APPEAL: Mech fanatics, maybe.

PROS: Mech building and tactical real-time combat are okay.

CONS: Strategic aspects are dull; flawed turn-based component; no new ideas.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

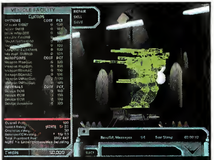
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Win 95, 24MB RAM, 50MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.

3D SUPPORT: None

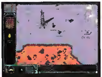
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: IPX (2–8 players), modem, serial (1–2 each); supports won.net.; 1 CD per player.

Price: $39.95
Publisher: Sierra
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707

www.sierra.com



MAIL-ORDER HERC Designing your mechs is more interesting than actually playing the game.



IS IT REALTIME? Or turn-based? Actually, when you play the computer, it can be both—at the same time!

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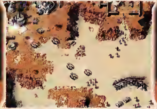

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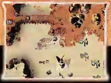

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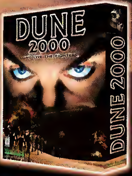

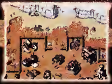

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I. Round up people for the lion pits.

II. Practice waving to the people (in adoring fashion).

III. Hire voice coach to help practice evil laughter.

IV. Send rival a basket of poisoned fruit.

V. Raise taxes to fund more tax collectors.

VI. Hire more vigils to patrol the slums.

VII. Meet Cleopatra for dinner (this might be the night).

VIII. Absolutely don't forget to...

CENTURION

This fruit basket looks absolutely delicious! It's awfully nice of you to have me deliver it to your arch rival. I thought you hated each other?

I wonder if anyone would notice an apple missing...?

PIG FARMER

Gotta wash the stench of horse manure out of my clothes in time for church! There will be a lot of single ladies at Venus' temple tonight. Rumor has it the priest is going to denounce birth control!

PRIEST

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III
Racing Towards the 1st Century.

Red Team Wins!

In Caesar III™ by Sierra Studios, you construct temples to various gods of the Roman Pantheon and witness the effects on your city. You also get visual feedback. The real-time effects of the player's actions are immediately visible on screen.

Marcus,

Saw the chariot races in the Circus Maximus today! Man, can those guys book! One of the chariots lost a wheel, overturned and wiped out into three other horses – it was so cool! They'll be wiping the blood off the sidewalls for weeks. Anyway, just wanted to let you know that I picked up that clay pot you fell in love with last time we were here, and will head home after the gladiators disembowel each other in the morning.

See you soon!

Love,

Athena

CAESAR III SIERRA STUDIOS MCMXCVIII

Marcus of Caligula
c/o West Forum
Caligula, Italy
00002

PC 20
Circus Maximus
Rome, Italy

Photo: A. Caesar

Sierra Studios
Impressions™

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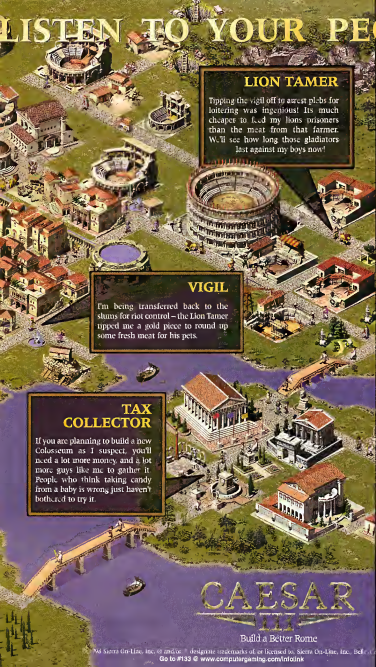
LISTEN TO YOUR PEOPLE!



LION TAMER

Tipping the vigil off to arrest plebs for loitering was ingenious! Its much cheaper to feed my lions prisoners than the meat from that farmer. We'll see how long those gladiators last against my boys now!

VIGIL

I'm being transferred back to the slums for riot control – the Lion Tamer tipped me a gold piece to round up some fresh meat for his pets.

TAX COLLECTOR

If you are planning to build a new Colosseum as I suspect, you'll need a lot more money, and a lot more guys like me to gather it. People who think taking candy from a baby is wrong just haven't bothered to try it.

- Build, rule and battle on one screen–no more switching between city, province and battle screens!
- Visual feedback: The real-time effects of the player's actions are immediately visible on screen.
- Various terrain sets include deserts, forests, mountains and multiple elevations.
- Construct temples to various gods of the Roman Pantheon and witness the effects on your city.
- More progressive career structure and intuitive interface mean more exciting, longer lasting gameplay.

www.sierrastudios.com

SIERRA STUDIOS

Impressions.

EVERYONE E ESRB

CAESAR III

Build a Better Rome

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MAX Factor

MAX 2 Tries Hard, but It Isn't an Improvement

by Patrick Miller

I'll never forget my first 10-speed bicycle—a sporty, golden-yellow Italian model. I liked the bike so much that I started adding improvements. First, there was a water bottle, then a tire pump, a rack, a speedometer, a light, and a saddle pack filled with tools and emergency gear. Before long, I had transformed my lightweight speed bike into a weighted-down, run-of-the-mill hardware-store special.

With MAX 2, Interplay has succeeded in doing to MAX (MECHANIZED ASSAULT AND EXPLORATION) what I did to my bike—and giving the sequel a flat tire to boot. MAX 2 tries too hard to be all things to all gamers, and it also suffers greatly from rushed-out-the-door syndrome.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★⯪☆☆

APPEAL: Strategy gamers who want the option of turn-based, simultaneous turns, or real-time play.

PROS: Three styles of play; a wide variety of options, scenario editor; rewards combined arms tactics.

CONS: Frequent game crashes, poor multiplayer support, weak AI.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

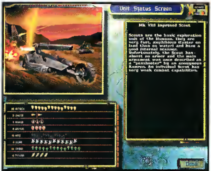
REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 80MB hard-drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, DirectX-compatible sound and video.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN or Internet (6 players), hotseat, serial, modem (2 players); 1 CD per player.

Price: $49.95
Publisher: Interplay
Irvine, CA
(800) 468-3775

www.interplay.com

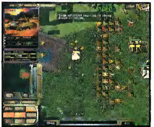


Unit Status Screen

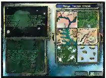
Mk VIII Improved Scout

Scouts are the basic exploration unit of the Humans. They are very fast, amphibious (faster on land than on water) and have a good internal scanner. Unfortunately, the Scout has almost no armor and the main armament was once described as a "peashooter" by an anonymous Kamren. An individual Scout has very weak combat capabilities.

SCOUT IT OUT The advantage of a scout unit is its ability to move fast and see far. Variations in unit strengths and weaknesses make combined-arms tactics a necessity.



FOREST FOR ALIEN TREES MAX 2's rendered maps are superior to those in the original game, but the lack of detail in the units leaves much to be desired, sometimes making it difficult for you to tell the difference between units.



PICK A MAP MAX 2 features 27 unique terrain maps that can be used for custom-made scenarios, skirmish games, and multiplayer games.

MAX Flashback

The original MAX was notable for avoiding the typical real-time strategy game formula employed by many COMMAND & CONQUER clones. MAX had a good concept, a decent storyline, nice graphics, depth, and interesting gameplay. It also offered the option of traditional turn-based play or play using simultaneous turns. Unfortunately, the game's multiplayer problems were never completely remedied, leaving some gamers feeling cheated.

Based on that experience, you might think that Interplay would be sure to deliver a complete product the second time around. But that's not the case: MAX 2 has a disturbing tendency to crash, displays annoying graphical glitches, and its multiplay features are almost nonfunctional. Interplay quickly issued not one, but two patches within two weeks of the game's release. These didn't solve all the problems, however. A third patch was in the works as this review was being written.

Not So Timely

The most significant new feature in MAX 2 is the inclusion of real-time mode, in addition to the turn-based and simultaneous-turn modes. The downside of adding this feature is that some of the depth and complexity of the original game has been sacrificed.

Specialized surveying units are no longer needed because all units are capable of spotting material and gold resources. Fuel resources, ammunition resupply, and the need to maintain connections between facilities are also gone.

On the plus side, the rendered, 16-bit color maps are a big improvement over the mostly flat, relatively featureless terrain of the original game. It's too bad that this graphic improvement doesn't extend to the game's units and buildings, which, even in the enhanced graphics mode requiring 32MB of memory, are less detailed and more difficult to identify than the 256-color versions in MAX.

Other significant improvements to MAX 2 include a spy camera that enables you to quickly view the action from up to eight units or locations using a display window. Unlimited movement waypoints, building queues for engineer and constructor units, the ability to issue orders while the game is paused, indigenous alien life-forms, and a scenario editor are also new features in MAX 2.

Options Not Optional

One of MAX 2's strong points is that the game provides players with a wealth of options. There are

Honor

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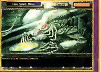
Race Relations, MAX 2-Style

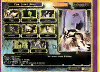
The sci-fi storyline in MAX 2 focuses on the Concord and human races, which are in the process of genetically bonding, and the Sheevat alien race, which is out to destroy them. During the campaign, you play the Concord side. But in some of the single scenarios and in skirmish games, you can play the Sheevat side. Here's the scoop on races represented in MAX 2.

Bad Bug



The Sheevat view Concord efforts to genetically bond with other races as a threat to the purity of their DNA.

Concord Cousins



There are eight races making up the alliance between the Concord and humans, each with unique characteristics.

Concord

Friendly aliens who represent an organization of most intelligent life forms in the galaxy. Because different Concord races are bonding with various human races, the humans can build and use Concord assault guns, gunboats, and attack aircraft. These powerful, organic units are self-repairing and gain experience through combat. Concord races bonding with humans are the following:

Aven

Aven are pilots who produce superior air units.

Aspen

Aspen excel at fixed defenses.

Fen

Fen are sailors who build superior sea units.

Beaker

Beaker are engineers who quickly build factories.

Cloaks

Cloaks are an intelligence-gathering race that excels at espionage.

Phemer

Phemer specialize in producing missile-armed units.

Kamren

Kamren possess expertise in manufacturing armored vehicles and gun defenses.

Elan

Skilled at avoidance and defense, Elan produce vehicles with superior speed.

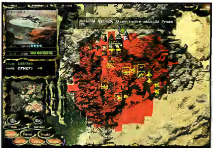
Sheevat Believing that their pure and ancient race is threatened by the Concord alliance, the Sheevat are out to destroy it. Their organically based units and buildings have shields rather than armor, are self-repairing, and gain experience from attacking.

Sheevat

The Sheevat possess unique weapons, such as biobombs, lightning cannons, and shock tanks.

23 stand-alone scenarios and four linear campaigns, each with nine missions. Also included is a custom scenario creator that enables you to engage in skirmish games against multiple opponents on any of the game's 27 maps. The multiplayer options include hotseat, serial, modem, LAN, and Internet capability for up to 6 players in network games. All of these options would be great, if only they worked.

The game's two resources are raw materials, which are mined to provide power and materials so you can manufacture units and construct buildings; and gold, which is used to purchase unit upgrades. The more than 50 air, naval, and land units are rated for armor strength, hits to destroy, attack capability, sighting and weapon range, speed, shots fired per turn, and the power needed to operate. These capabilities can be upgraded through research and then bought with gold credits.

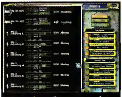


FLY SHEEVAT AIR Although air units are expensive, when used effectively, they do the job of many naval and ground units and can inflict enough damage to easily justify their cost. The red area shows the range of the aerial weapons.

Constructors exist to build mines, research centers, repair facilities, and factories that produce heavy and light ground units, air units, and sea units. Engineers build power plants, storage units, radar towers, bridges, roads, sea platforms, and static defensive structures such as gun, missile, and antiaircraft turrets. Bulldozers and mine layers are also part of the game.

The Big MAX Combo

MAX 2 rewards players who employ combined-arms tactics. On land, an effective mix of units would be scouts for reconnaissance, tanks for their ability to take punishment, and missile crawlers for long-range firepower. At sea, a group of antisubmarine corvettes, antiaircraft escorts, long-range missile cruisers, and rugged gunboats provides a nearly unbeatable combination. In the air, several fighters backed by a couple of ground attack aircraft and AWACs can cut a wide swath of destruction.



REPORT CARD The reports option enables players to do a quick status check on their units' health and their force's casualties.

Like most games in its crowded genre, MAX 2's artificial intelligence is adequate, but nothing out of the ordinary. The AI tends to be timid and often refuses to attack, even when the odds are clearly in its favor. In the scripted campaign missions and single scenarios, the AI can be challenging at the higher levels of difficulty. It is weakest in skirmish games, just as it was in the original MAX.

As a single-player game, MAX 2 is capable of providing hours of entertainment value. As long as you remember to save often, you can play through most of the scenarios and campaign missions. However, for those gamers who are looking for something new and different in the realm of real-time strategy gaming, MAX 2 comes with so few innovations and has so many problems that it almost seems superfluous. CGW

Vengeance

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Dominion Over None

Ion Storm's First Launch Lands With a Resounding Thud

by Terry Coleman

There's little question that the folks at Ion Storm have assembled some of the finest talent in the gaming industry. Tom Hall's ANACHRONOX RPG looks quite clever, and John "QUAKE" Romero's DAIKATANA has reached near-legendary status—despite the fact that neither title is anywhere close to shipping. So, let's just accept that Ion Storm is a bona fide supergroup, with the fame, fortune, and ridiculously inflated fan expectations that such stardom entails. Still, if the company's first release, DOMINION, is any indication, Ion Storm has a long way to go before it becomes the Beatles—or even the Sex Pistols—of the interactive entertainment industry.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★☆☆☆

APPEAL: Collectors of bad sci-fi strategy games.

PROS: Four campaigns; 60 multiplayer maps; passable AI.

CONS: Frenzied pace can't hide lack of depth; woefully dated, slow engine; incredibly derivative.

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 166 (P200 strongly recommended), Windows 95/NT, 32MB RAM (64MB strongly recommended), 140MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM; supports Sound Blaster–compatible sound cards

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: TCP/IP and IPX (2-8 players each, 1 CD per player); modem and direct serial, MPlayer support.

Price: $59.95
Publisher: Eidos
San Francisco, CA
(800) 617-8737

www.eidosinteractive.com

Total Dark Star Reign Oe'r Me

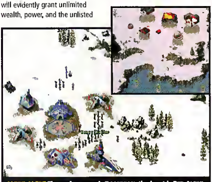
DOMINION has been in development for about three years—first at 7th Level, then at Ion Storm—and, unfortunately, it looks it. While DOMINION supports higher resolutions (1024x768 is probably most practical), you don't gain that much by using them. The grass/ground/rough textures are hardly up to RED ALERT standards, much less those of STARCRAFT, with no apparent 3D, à la TOTAL ANNIHILATION.

The graphic deadwood would be somewhat tolerable if the gameplay wasn't so derivative of every other real-time strategy game. Oh, sure, there's a more involved interface, but if anything, that just gets in the way. DOMINION does try to add some depth: You can set your soldiers on patrol, order them to stand fast, and the like, but games such as DARK REIGN and TOTAL ANNIHILATION managed all this far better more than a year ago. And DOMINION's overhyped AI, for my money, is nowhere near as challenging as that of STARCRAFT.

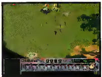
Mostly, DOMINION comes down to speed. If I can build more things faster than you can, I'll almost always beat you, and the design so overemphasizes frenetic play that it makes WARCRAFT II and AGE OF EMPIRES seem turn-based. The variety of weapons and races seems impressive, but most lack unique qualities. The Scorps are uncreepy crawlers, defensive specialists Darken are dull, and the humans, more flat than balanced, are pretty much a snooze. About the only thing in the game that's really clever is the Merc widowmaker, which can remotely control an enemy vehicle; problem is, this isn't much different from Porter's botjacking twist in G-NOME.

Exposed Plot

There are so many holes in the plot that it's hard to know where to begin. Our four space-faring races are fighting over the Messiah, a mysterious device that will evidently grant unlimited wealth, power, and the unlisted phone numbers of all galactic supermodels. This higher power will stand by and watch, of course, while the lesser races beat each other senseless. You have to build your infrastructure from scratch, ostensibly because a stalemate in orbit means that only small craft with minimal equipment can make it to the planet's surface. The Scorps are supposedly behind in technology (bad metallurgy, bad karma, whatever), but they manage to colonize space, build a lot of units quickly, and fight everyone else to a standstill. I could go on, but suffice it to say that after the wonderful back-stories of games like STARCRAFT, there is no reason to put up with this mindless drivel.



ALERT, ALERT The main screen is DOMINION; the inset is RED ALERT. If you can't tell a lot of difference, well, we couldn't either.



WORLD'S END The arbitrary placement of map edges limits the maneuvering in scenarios and forces play into predictable lines—which helps out the AI.

There aren't many technical glitches—provided you have a Sound Blaster–compatible card—but DOMINION's engine staggers like a turtle through a briar patch. On systems with a "mere" 32MB of RAM, scrolling is visibly slow. Needing 64M8 to adequately play a dated game like this is a joke.

There's nothing wrong with paying homage to greater works that have come before. DOMINION, however, lifts shamelessly from TOTAL ANNIHILATION, RED ALERT, DARK REIGN, and STARCRAFT—without capturing any of their innovation, elegance, or excitement. Let's just hope that Ion Storm learns from this experience before its next game ships, or its legacy may be closer to Blind Faith's than the Beatles'. CGW

Hope

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Mailed Men Just Ring Once

MEDIEVAL Sheds a Little Light on the Dark Ages

by Jim Cobb

So many action, fantasy, and RPG games use pseudomedieval themes that you could almost believe that the Dark Ages were filled with dragons and wizards MEDIEVAL strives to realistically portray this period with a mostly standard turn-based flavor, at a scale of 25 yards/hex and 25 men/unit. Units are rated for morale, fatigue, status, formation, armor, defensive values, and weapon types. The weapons are a treat, running the gamut from pikes to longbows, with missile weapons having limited ammunition—a nice touch in a game on this scale.

Formations are typical of the era: column, skirmish, square, and shield wall (for Battle of Hastings fans). Each formation adds capability at the expense of another, for example, a square improves defense, but limits mobility. Unit efficiency depends on morale and combat type, and ranges from peasant levies (rated at 30 points) to heroes (120 points). Leaders rally disrupted or routed units—a big deal when your peasants face an army of professional soldiers.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★☆☆

APPEAL: Gamers interested in medieval tactics.

PROS: Plenty of period flavor and lots of detail on a neglected subject; great weapons selection

CONS: Tedious movement system; Northern European bias; not up to standard set by ZULU WAR! and CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND

DIFFICULTY: Intermediate

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 4 5MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM

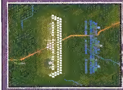
3D SUPPORT: None

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Email, 1 player per CD

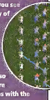
Price $39 95
Publisher Incredible Simulations
Chicago, IL
(408) 554 8381

www.incrediblesimulations.com

Battle of Hastings



This overview of Hastings looks a lot like a map from a historical text on the period...



While the normal battle view lets you see the variety of infantry, cavalry, and missile troops at the battle. You can also create more troop types with the handy editor.

We're Going *Where*, Sire?

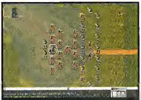
MEDIEVAL shows that moving an army around in the Middle Ages was a lot more difficult than it appears in any Hollywood movie on the period. Movement and casualties tend to lower morale, causing desertions and even surrender—there's no fighting to the last man here. On the other hand, high morale will ease formation changes and initiate berserkers and countercharges.

Automatic rally attempts start each turn, with failed units moving away from the front line. After a rally, clicking on a unit shows its movement areas and brings up a command window showing orders for facing, missile fire, formation changes, resupply, and charges. Clicking on a hex moves the unit there, and clicking on an adjacent enemy leads to melee. Missile units have possible target hexes outlined when the fire button is pressed and they may fire twice per turn at the risk of depleting ammunition. All in all, it's pretty simple.

Combat ability is enhanced when the activated unit is in its leader's command range. Combat results include defender or attacker retreat, destruction, surrender, or stalemate. If their morale holds, units can evade enemy charges. After all units have taken action, the computer checks for deserters.

Too Many Troops, Milord

MEDIEVAL features 10 historical battles that span the early 1000s to the late 1400s (one fantasy battle with Robin Hood is tossed in as a tutorial), with a bias toward late medieval, Northern European battles. You can set AI style and army morale level, which add to replayability, as does the powerful scenario editor. The map editor covers most terrain types, although the absence of stakes is regrettable. With such fine details and concepts, it's a shame that MEDIEVAL fails on a few points The unit-by-unit control makes handling an army of more than 40 units a real pain. This is especially tedious when one side stays on defense. If you play the Saxons at Hastings, plan on waiting up to 15 minutes before doing anything. Worse, the game system allows an ahistorical ability to concentrate attacks on a single specific unit from many troops grouped in a line—an order option to advance wings or battle lines could fix this Another flaw is the lack of missile reaction fire. At Agincourt, the French came under English longbow fire from the minute they came within range. In MEDIEVAL, some units may take four volleys before they hit the stakes



THE DRACULA WARS Here, Vlad the Impaler (the historical basis for the legendary vampire) tries some more down-to-earth bloodletting. But Vlad will have considerable trouble pursuing enemy infantry because of the spiked caltrops on the perimeter—a nasty impediment to horses' hooves.

It's easy to quibble about other aspects, such as the lack of any advance after combat, but none of these flaws is, by itself, huge The main problem is that MEDIEVAL doesn't rise above its quirks to be the definitive game on its subject. For aficionados of the period (or those wanting to keep themselves busy while they wait for AGE OF EMPIRES II), MEDIEVAL—especially the smaller battles—is still worthwhile. The rest of us will likely return to CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND, ZULU WAR! and REMEMBER THE ALAMO—games that earned Incredible Simulations its moniker. CGW

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Star-Cross'd Rage Incubates

More Reviews for the Strategically Inclined

Insurrection: Campaigns for StarCraft

★★★⯨☆

Publisher: Aztech New Media
Price: $24.95
www.aztech.com

If what you truly desire is more of a good thing, that's what you'll get—nothing more, nothing less—in INSURRECTION: CAMPAIGNS FOR STARCRAFT. This expansion disc adds 30 new campaign missions and a whopping 102 new multiplayer missions.

The campaign missions are set during the time of the Terran campaign in the original game. As in STARCRAFT, they're broken into three campaigns of 10 missions each: one campaign each for the Terrans, Zerg, and Protoss. The missions focus around an insurrection against the Confederacy, led by a splinter group called the Fist of Redemption. Don't even think of trying to tackle these until you've completed STARCRAFT's built-in campaigns, though. These are designed for experienced players, and you'll often find yourself facing overwhelming odds.

Each mission opens with an animated briefing sequence, just as in the original game (some of the voice acting here is good, but not as good as that in the original). What's missing here, however, is the rest of the framework. There are no gala 3D-animated sequences midway through campaigns, and a shell doesn't tie the missions together. To play through the campaign, you select individual missions in sequence (T1, T2, T3 [for the Terrans], and so on) from the Play Custom menu. This has the disadvantage (or advantage, depending on your point of view) of not forcing you to complete a mission before moving onto the next.

Many of the multiplayer maps are interesting, as many feature choke points that require unique strategies. Overall, the missions are well designed. The biggest problem here is that there are none of the extras people expect with expansion discs—no new terrain tiles, units, or AI features—just more of the classic STARCRAFT gameplay. It's a shame that the developers couldn't at least wrap an interface around the campaign; it feels kludgy, to put it mildly, to have to select the individual messages from a directory that doesn't even display them in order. *—Denny Atkin*

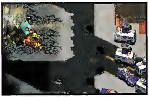
Tribal Rage

★★★☆☆

Publisher: TalonSoft
Price: $39.95
www.talonsoft.com

The thought of TalonSoft—that bastion of realistic, turn-based wargames—publishing a real-time strategy game, is a bit scary. Yet, if you dig below the surface, TRIBAL RAGE has some nice twists. TRIBAL RAGE's campaign plays much like that of JAGGED ALLIANCE. Areas you've conquered earlier may be contested later, and you can even go back into areas you've captured and build new mines to increase the rate of money collection.

In addition to the usual map editor, you can also customize units—even in the campaign game. As you buy technologies, you can create units from basic types that incorporate the new weaponry. Don't like the default missile van? Create one with a 75mm cannon on top. Think your Cyberpunk takes damage too easily? Beef up his armor.



There are a few warts, such as the uninspired tactical play, which doesn't do anything to distinguish itself from the rest of the real-time crowd. The pathfinding AI is one of the worst I've seen, as units routinely get hung up only a couple of pixels to one side of an obvious path.

Units *do* have limited ammo, so you have to pull them back to reload, or you risk losing all of them—a nice touch. The mix of races is varied and occasionally hilarious, which helps liven up the otherwise bland play. Still, when the unit editor is more fun than the game, you're in trouble. *—Loyd Case*

Incubation: The Wilderness Missions

★★⯨☆☆

Publisher: BlueByte
Price: $19.95
www.bluebyte.com

Your mission—and you have no choice but to accept it—is to take a new (and green) team of galactic marines into the creepy confines of Scay-Hallwa and return with a container of raw materials. Of course, what you end up having to do is fight a bunch of critters that shoot at you, try to eat you, and generally make for bad neighbors. THE WILDERNESS MISSIONS are more of BlueByte's homage to X-COM, *Aliens*, *Predator*, and no doubt some other sci-fi film or game I've forgotten.

Our good friend Sgt. Bratt is back from the original INCUBATION, and his soldiers get to face some new alien enemies (big surprise). There is the usual mix of more intelligent aliens, along with the valetlike aliens that generously shower you with acid even in their death throes, and others that I'd swear were pissed-off refugees from SIMANT. Some of the 39 new scenario maps are interesting, but too many of them resemble the industrial confines of the parent game. The computer opponent still has trouble coordinating combined-arms assaults, and the designers try to make up for this in many scenarios by hurling lots of bodies at you. As a result, the now-longer INCUBATION campaign that all of us wished for is more repetitious than fun. The new editor is cool, though.

This game tries to be "X-COM Lite," but is much more complicated than X-COM, and less fulfilling. Why, with so many buttons on the interface, you can't permanently set snap fire, is beyond me. And it still bugs me that a turn-based engine that supports 3D can't do more graphically: If it's dour the artists were striving for, they nailed it. All in all, this add-on just goes to show that being turn-based is no guarantee you'll have depth, replayability, or addictiveness. *—Terry Coleman*

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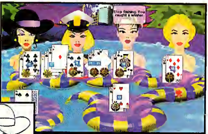
Sim Vegas

It's Not the Casino Games, It's the Camaraderie

by Charles Ardai

As many casino games as Sierra foists on the public, you'd think the company was based in Las Vegas. LEISURE SUIT LARRY'S CASINO gives us slots, poker, blackjack, roulette, and craps, along with the customary neon-streaked glitz, plus a new betting interface. Once again you're folding hands, standing pat on 17, and dropping simulated quarters into simulated coin slots.



WE'RE ALL WET If you get your jollies from Sierra's renderings of 2D babes, there are plenty from which to choose, complete with secret audio enhancements.

If that were all this game contained, it would be well worth a yawn. If it added only a bit of patented LEISURE SUIT LARRY smut to season the mix, it might be worth a chuckle. But what makes LARRY'S CASINO worth playing is that it really isn't a casino game at all. It's a casino.

★★★☆☆

APPEAL: Those who want LARRY-style raunch with their online fun.

PROS: Rich, well-populated gaming/chat environment with plenty to do.

CONS: Retro sex humor notwithstanding, online casino games are as old as the Internet.

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 90, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 120MB hard-drive space, 2x CD-ROM; supports Windows-compatible sound cards with DAC.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: WON.net (which is free, but requires that you have Internet access).

Price: $39.95
Publisher: Sierra
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707

www.sierra.com

Up All Night

Through its relationship with WON.net, Sierra has turned a budding retread into a dynamic, intriguing, and occasionally disturbing experiment in communal behavior. You see, while all the casino games can be played offline, all the other parts of Larry's casino—the restaurants, bars, comedy clubs, gift shops, and wedding chapel—can be accessed only via the Internet.

These online casino games give you Larrybucks, which you can use to buy virtual goodies for you or your fellow players; you can buy such things as a better hotel room, a fur coat, or the right to visit some of the casino's ritzier pleasure spots. Lose your money online and you can win a fresh stake by having your punch lines or pickup lines voted the funniest by your peers in the casino's clubs. Even if you don't care about money, you can just hang out by the slot machines or the pool tables, chatting your head off in realtime with folks from California, New York, Arizona, Georgia, and parts unknown.

It's the chat that makes this game—that and the variety of tools the designers have put at the chatters' disposal. You not only get to type sentences back and forth to each other, you get to use facial expressions (make your bosomy sexpot stick her tongue out at the frowning hunk next to her!) and audio codes (make your peers' computers erupt with disco music or lusty moaning!).

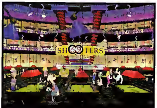
While all players have the same expressions at their disposal, the audio codes are secret. Since the only way to learn them is by word of mouth, and since Sierra keeps adding more, there are plenty of Easter eggs to find and trade with your newfound friends.

There is a dark side to all this, as some people become so enamored of the audio codes that they go around shouting them in others' ears. The comedy club is supposed to be full of people making each other laugh, but when I visited players were just voting for each other to fill their wallets, and no one was telling any jokes at all.

Have a C-note

Still, take away the hard-core casino gamers, the nuts who spend hours working all the angles to squeeze more Larrybucks out of the system, the children (mental or chronological) for whom fun is a smutty backslapping exchange, and you'll find some genuinely nice, intelligent, interesting folks. One of these, C-Note100, showed me the ropes and even gave me $2 million Larrybucks to make sure I could get into all the cool rooms.

C-Note and I will surely never meet. Yet for one Sunday night it was as if we had barhopped our way to a slightly soused but genuine bond. LEISURE SUIT LARRY'S CASINO is at times crude and clumsy, especially when it trades in embarrassing retro stereotypes, and it's often technologically weak, but it's our future staring us in the face. People will come back for hour after addictive hour. It's not all that different than the real Vegas, actually. Long after the tired poker and blackjack simulations are finally put out of their misery, games like LARRY'S CASINO, based on personal communication, are going to be huge. **CGW**



BALL IN HAND Whether you play pool competitively, or simply choose to chat with your virtual buddies, there's plenty to do in LARRY'S CASINO. And, no, Charles Ardai doesn't always carry his briefcase online.

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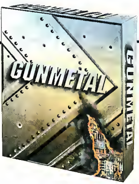
Urban Assault Vehicle Lately?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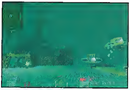

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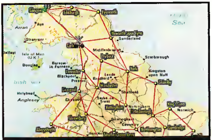
Sentimental Journey

MEGA SOLITAIRE Is First-class Fare

by Wyatt Lee

If MEGA SOLITAIRE was *only* an anthology of 200-plus solitaire games, it wouldn't be the addictive must-have puzzle game that it actually is. Not only does this spiritual descendant of the late, lamented QQP's SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY (both games were designed by Andrew Visscher) give the largest selection of solitaire variants to date, but, like its ancestor, it also provides a rationale for playing them. It offers three different kinds of campaign games: journeying across England or Colorado, playing tic-tac-toe by using different solitaire games, and playing a series of similarly-styled solitaire games for combination high scores.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Irish Sea
Liverpool
Sheffield
Holyhead
Anglesey
Chester
Stoke on Trent
King's Lynn
Nottingham
Norwich
Peterborough
Shrewsbury
Birmingham
Coventry
Aberystwyth
Northampton
Cambridge
Hereford
Stratford-upon-Avon

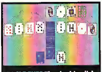
TRAINSPOTTING A successful trip in MEGA SOLITAIRE requires a strategy for route, time, and money.

Campaign Swings

Gamers who remember the concept underlying SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY will understand that you begin your trips at one end of a map with a set amount of money. Each city on the map has three different tournaments for you to enter, with a target score to hit in each tournament (you don't have to win every time in order to be successful). You pay the entry fee and proceed from city to city.

MEGA SOLITAIRE goes its ancestor one better. Not only do you have the same kind of money management and tournament entry strategy as in SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY, but you can also choose between slow and fast transportation (everything from handcars to rocket trains) according to your financial success. Naturally, faster trains equal a faster trip time so you're not only competing against your funds, but trying to chalk up the shortest times for the entire trip, as well. Merely reaching your destination, as you did in the earlier game, is not enough.

The *Tic-Tac-Solitaire* campaign is particularly difficult. The games have been divided into nine progressively more stringent difficulty levels. There is one tic-tac-toe grid for each difficulty level and each square of the grid has three possible solitaire games listed. Match or beat the target goal for one of those games and you get the "X" for the square. Get three in a row and you move to the next level.



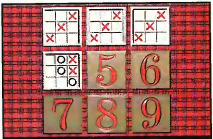
EAGLE EYES The double-click interface makes new games like *Eagle Wing* easy to play.

The tournaments are thematic, with some tournaments consisting entirely of "spider" variants, "siege" style solitaire games (which I particularly like), or "golf" challenges. Other tournaments have looser themes, like royalty and women's names. Some are merely grouped together by difficulty level. If you don't like the default tournaments, the game allows you to design your own.

Play List

MEGA SOLITAIRE has dozens of new games that its ancestor and most existing anthologies do not have. Some of the most interesting are *Casket, Cicely, Citadel, Courtyard, Fort, General's Patience, Imperial Guards,* and *King Tut.* Further, MEGA SOLITAIRE has advanced on the playability of the interface over Visscher's previous game. Now, you simply double-click and the chosen card will automatically fly to the most appropriate foundation. In some games, such as *Eagle Wings,* a mere single-click does the trick. This makes each game play more quickly and efficiently. Plus, there is provision for tournament play over AT&T's WorldNet Service.

MEGA SOLITAIRE is an ideal game for brief interludes between meatier fare. Not only does it provide a pleasant diversion for road warriors, but it offers intriguing campaigns for traditional strategy gamers as well. CGW



TIC-TAC-WOE Each level of *Tic-Tac-Solitaire* gets progressively more difficult to win.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

★★★★☆

APPEAL: The last solitaire game you'll ever need.

PROS: Incredible selection of addictive games; challenging campaigns; a steal at this price.

CONS: It's still solitaire on the computer.

DIFFICULTY: Easy.

REQUIREMENTS: 486/66, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 40MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, 8-bit sound card.

3D SUPPORT: None.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: Internet tournaments via AT&T WorldNet.

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StarCraft

The Zerg: Secrets of the Overmind

by Elliott Chin

In our ongoing attempt to grant you mastery of the STARCRAFT universe, we now dissect the hordes of the Overmind. For many, the Zerg are the easiest race to play: Unlike with the Terrans or Protoss, you can often get by building just one or two Zerg units, the hydralisk or mutalisk. While your Terran opponent is trying to coordinate a tank-marine-goliath formation and your Protoss foe is attempting to get his reavers, high templars, zealots, and dragoons in line, you can simply counter with a numerically superior force of hydras or mutas. If you want to play the Zerg well against superior opposition, however, you'll have to do more than hurl hordes at your opponents.

As we did last month with the Terrans, we'll break down each unit and study how to use it in both traditional and nontraditional roles. When you're checking out a particular unit's usefulness, make sure you take into account the type of damage it inflicts on the enemy, as well as its target classification.

ZERGLING

Strengths: Very early in the game, zerglings are great rush units. You can crank out six right away (two per egg) and rush the enemy base. However, this is good only on small maps. And you better know where your enemy's base is located. Later on, the zerglings are best in specialized roles. They are great against heavy units like reavers, dragoons, and siege tanks (they attack swiftly but are so small and numerous that the heavy unit can't hope to kill them all in time). They are also perfect against sunken colonies and photon cannons, which fall with laughable ease to zerglings. Make sure you upgrade their movement speed as early as possible, as well as the attack rate upgrade when you gain a hive. Zerglings are always great for taking down buildings quickly.

See the Review
JULY ISSUE • 5 STARS

Weaknesses: Zerglings have few hit points, so they don't last against zealots. Zerglings also can't attack air units. Later in the game, they become less useful against units and become building killers and cannon fodder. They will always succumb to firebats and zealots unless they grossly outnumber them.

HYDRALISK

Strengths: Hydralisks are the workhorses of the Zerg army. They have among the fastest firing rates and can attack air and ground targets. Although they do only half damage to small targets, their range and firing rate mean they should always serve as the backbone of a Zerg force no matter what enemy you're facing. Hydralisks make great ground support for guardians, and they can take down any wraiths or scouts that try to attack the guardians. On island maps, get to hydralisks and overlord ventral sacs quickly so you can drop a dozen hydras on an unsuspecting enemy base. Only the best STARCRAFT players, or those who plan specifically for this attack, can thwart it. If the enemy spends time building toward a hydra drop defense on island maps, he leaves himself wide open to an air denial strategy of scourges and mutalisks.

ONLINE
For help with this game and more check out **www.gameguides.com**

Weaknesses: The closest thing to a weakness that Hydralisks have is their tendency to bunch together. Because of this, beware of siege tanks, reavers, and high templars. Always target these units to eliminate their area effect attacks. If tough melee units such as zealots and ultralisks manage to get in close, hydralisks will succumb to their superior melee attack.

BUG OUT Zerg players have a relatively easy time with the versatile hydralisk and mutalisk, but there are even more potent weapons in the Overmind's arsenal.

ULTRALISK

Strengths: Ultralisks are resilient juggernauts. They are especially deadly versus Terran units, as the Terrans have no melee unit to muster against these gargantuan insects (firebats do only quarter damage to ultralisks). They are great against buildings and siege tanks in siege mode. Ultralisks covered by hydralisk fire and a defiler's dark swarm will wreak serious havoc on any enemy fortification. Because of their huge size, they shrug off attacks by firebats, vultures, and ghosts.

Queen

Strengths: Queens possess some very important abilities. They can serve as excellent scouts by using their parasite ability, neutralize large ground targets with their broodling ability, and slow down large forces with their ensnare ability. They are fast enough to flee enemy mutalisks and wraiths.

Weaknesses: Queens have no attack, so they can't defend against attackers. They have few hit points, so have mutalisk or hydralisk escorts. Without an energy upgrade, queens will spend a lot of time replenishing their energy.

Queen Abilities

Infest Terran Command Center: The queen begins with this ability. A queen can take over a Terran command center if it is below 50 percent hit points (the queen automatically infests if near the command center, otherwise you need to issue a command). The infestation takes a while, but once finished, the command center becomes a Zerg building (you can still move this building like other Terran structures). You can then build infested terrans from inside. However, you must use building queues for infested terrans as you would any Terran or Protoss unit. Infested terrans are kamikaze warriors that explode on contact with their target, dealing 500 damage to all ground targets within range. The infested terran has 60 hit points, 0 armor, and cannot have its attack strength upgraded.

Parasite: The queen begins with this ability also. When used, it lobs a parasite at any unit, enabling you to see what that unit sees. Every unit in the game is a legal target, even critters. In fact, since other players rarely click on critters, parasiting critters is a perfect way to scout an enemy without alerting him to your reconnaissance.

Parasites can be dislodged only by killing the host. Although a parasite will keep you abreast of your enemy's situation, beware of wise players who might use the parasite to confuse you. These players might send the parasited unit as a diversion while they attack you from another front.

Spawn Broodling: This targets any organic ground target and kills it instantly by spawning two broodlings from its dying body. Probes, reavers, and archons are the ground units immune to this ability. By attaching several queens to your Zerg attack forces, you can gain an instant advantage against enemy ground forces by neutralizing their heavy support units like goliaths, siege tanks, ultralisks, and dragoons. A broodling can also be used to eliminate a player's peon force; not only do you kill several peons, but you also spawn broodlings that can be used to attack the remaining peons.

Broodlings have 30 hit points, 0 armor, and a 4-damage ground melee attack. They count as small targets. Broodlings die after one minute, even with all hit points Intact.

Queens may be weak and defenseless, but they are essential: The ensnare ability is a great way to neutralize cloaked enemies.

Ensnare: A net of green goop that covers all units in its effect area. The substance slows the afflicted units to half speed and slows their attack rate (not quite to half rate). This can make the difference when two opposing Zerg players throw like numbers of units at each other. It can also be used to slow air units that are soon to be attacked by scourges. Send one or two queens with your attack force and ensnare your enemy's forces just before you attack to gain an immediate advantage.

Ensnare can be used also to oncover cloaked units. Any cloaked units covered by ensnare are not only slowed down but are also rendered visible. Cast this where you see a shimmer if you don't have overlords around. If you manage to get the right area, the cloaked wraiths will be caught.

Multiple castings of ensnare on a unit will *not* have cumulative effects.

Weaknesses: Ultralisks are expensive and susceptible to multiple zealots and archons. Protoss players aren't as vulnerable to ultralisks as Terran players are. Be wary of Terran players who cast defensive matrix and irradiate on an ultralisk's target. Ultralisks cannot attack air units so provide your ultralisk army with hydralisk escort. Ultralisks are a pretty late-game unit, so don't be in a rush to acquire them. (In most instances, you can simply employ hydralisks and mutalisks to good effect until you determine that you really require ultralisks.) And although ultralisks do considerable damage, guardians will do the job better in most cases, because of their range. Ultralisks are the only zerg ground unit that cannot burrow.

HYDRALISK If a Protoss opponent builds too many dragoons in anticipation of a mutalisk rush, he leaves himself wide open for a hydralisk rush.

MUTALISK

Strengths: Along with the hydralisks, mutalisks compose the core of most Zerg armies. They are so cheap and quick to produce that you can have a large pack up and running in very little time. They can attack ground and air units and have secondary and tertiary attacks. While the first strike of a mutalisk's glave wurm attack deals 9 damage, the second hit ricochets to a new target for 3 damage, and the third hit ricochets to another victim for 1 damage Mutalisks are great against wraiths and marines that haven't been upgraded. Because they are considered small targets, mutalisks take only half damage from units that deal explosive damage (such as goliaths, wraiths, scouts, and dragoons). Mutalisks should be used in conjunction with the defiler's plague ability, which reduces afflicted units to 1 hit point. Units that are plagued can then be

ZERGLING Even after you start building more advanced units, zerglings are still useful, especially since photon cannon are useless against them.

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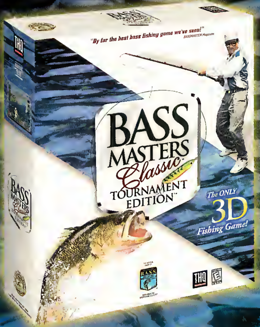
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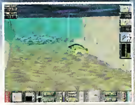

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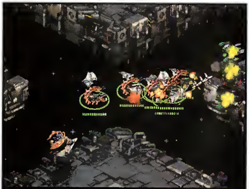


MUTALISK Cheap, easily produced, and versatile, mutalisks are the mainstays of the Zerg forces.

attacked by mutalisks and decimated by their multiple attacks. Mutalisks should be grouped into hit-and-run packs that roam the map looking for lightly defended outposts to attack. When playing against Terrans, attach an overlord or two to each mutalisk group to watch for cloaked wraiths.

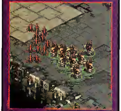
Weaknesses: Mutalisks take full damage from both battlecruisers and carriers. Mutalisks bunch up when attacking, so they are vulnerable to the science vessel's irradiate and the high templar's psionic storm. Both can reduce a mutalisk pack to ruins in a very short time. Watch out for those two units.

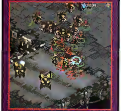
GUARDIAN

Strengths: For a reasonable price, mutalisks can be mutated into guardian aspects. Guardians have a devastating air-to-ground attack that does as much damage as an ultralisk's claws (20 damage when not upgraded). Guardians also have the longest range of any zerg unit and the longest air-to-ground range of any race's unit. Because they are air units, they are perfect for dismantling bunches of siege tanks or reavers.

A nearly unbeatable zerg combination is a guardian force escorted by a like number of mutalisks and double the number of hydralisks. The guardians will destroy any large ground units that threaten the hydralisks, while the hydralisks will tear apart any air units that attack the

Early Game Combo





Here's a smart though counterintuitive way to organize a combined attack. Send in hydralisks first and follow up with zerglings. The enemy will autoacquire the hydralisks, leaving the zerglings free to sneak into melee range, where they become deadly and tough to shake. If the enemy reorients its targeting, the hydralisks can fire with impunity.

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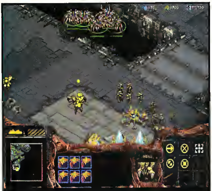

GUARDIAN Guardians are the Zerg tactical air units, with a great range and super ground attack. Make sure to have hydralisks nearby to protect your guardians from enemy air units.

guardians. The mutalisks can then chase any stray science vessels or high templars.

Weaknesses: Guardians cannot attack air units so they are highly vulnerable to any air-to-air attackers. Always escort guardians with hydralisks and/or mutalisks. Beware of high templars and psionic storm, which can destroy a guardian fleet in seconds. Because of their slow speed, guardians simply can't evade a psionic storm. Target any templars within guardian range. Also beware of the science vessel's irradiate ability.

SCOURGE

Strengths: Scourges are the perfect counter against heavy air units such as carriers and battlecruisers. They are also good for eliminating incoming transports quickly. For a small sum you can mutate two scourges per larva. Each does 100 damage and can outrun any air unit except an upgraded scout. Set them up on patrol around your base or the enemy base to take down any transports or scouting aircraft in the area. On island maps, you can set up these patrols to deny your foe any chance of expanding to other islands. Don't group a bunch of scourges and send them to the same target; they'll all converge on that target and self-destruct. For example, if you send a group of six to destroy one wraith, you'll have wasted four scourges. Scourges are good against Protoss spacecraft because the only units that can attack them either do half damage (scouts and dragoons) or are simply too slow to muster an attack in time (carriers).

Weaknesses: Scourges can be taken down quickly by marines so watch for any Terran ships escorted by marines. Also, Protoss players can cast a psionic storm in front of charging scourges and destroy your flock. Scourges can be cut down quickly by battlecruisers and are less effective when sent against large fleets, where there are multiple targets to confuse scourges and multiple enemies to shoot them down.

OVERLORD

Strengths: The overlord not only provides you with control to spawn more units, but it also serves as a cloak detector and a transport. Keep overlords around your base to spot cloaked attackers and near your mutalisks to detect cloaked wraiths. You need to research the ventral sacs upgrade at the lair in order to enable their transport ability. Like all transports, they have eight slots. Zerglings and drones take one slot, hydralisks take two, and ultralisks take four.

Weaknesses: Overlords have no attack and count as large targets, making them vulnerable to most antiair units like wraiths, scouts, and goliaths. They are also incredibly slow, so you must research their speed upgrade if you want to use them as effective scouts and transports.

Crushing Enemies

The temptation when playing the Zerg is to react—an easy enough trap to fall into, considering the ease with which you can win a game (or bail yourself out of a jam) with just the hydralisk or mutalisk. Granted, a hydra

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or muta rush is tough to beat, and such tactics can often win games against a lesser-skilled player. Experienced opponents, however, will know how to pick apart such a one-dimensional horde. It is only by mastering the fascinating and terrible secrets of *all* the Overmind's children that you will be able to brutally crush your enemies with the full might of the Swarm.

Join us next month, when we conclude our STARCRAFT strategy series with that most durable of spacefaring races, the Protoss. CGW

Defiler

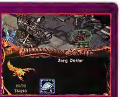
Strengths: Defilers have two great abilities–dark swarm and plague–that practically giftwrap the victory for a Zerg player. They are also fairly cheap, so it's a good idea to keep several around. Burrow them in the ground to replenish their energy and when they recharge, pop them out, cast their spells, and then burrow them for safety.

Weaknesses: Defilers have very few hit points. Be wary of siege tanks in siege mode, which can bombard a defiler before it can get within range to cast its spells. Irradiate is a handy way of disposing of defilers so watch for science vessels. Their medium size classification makes them vulnerable targets to nearly all units. Also, because their abilities are so expensive in terms of energy, you'll be waiting around to replenish energy unless you research consume and the energy upgrade. They have a slow movement rate so unless you have burrow or escorts, enemy units will catch up to defilers and kill them.

Defiler Abilities

Dark Swarm: Defilers automatically start with this ability. Dark swarm affects a large area and makes all ranged fire into that area ineffective. Any units inside the swarm cannot be harmed by ranged attacks from within or without. Only melee attacks can harm your units inside a dark swarm. This ability is extremely effective when used with the ultralisk. Just keep in mind that units can fire *out* of a dark swarm, but not *into* it.

The dark swarm is stationary and does not move. Although it also provides protection against air units, air units within the swarm are *not* protected (they hover over the swarm). Dark swarm has a long range.

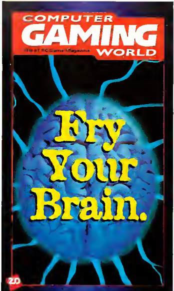


After reducing your enemies to a single hit point with the defiler's plague ability, send in your mutalisks to mop up.

Consume: This researched ability costs no energy to use. A defiler can "consume" any friendly Zerg unit, which kills the targeted zerg but gives the defiler 50 energy. This is a quick way to replenish a defiler's energy. With this ability, a defiler could constantly regenerate energy and cast multiple dark swarms and plagues. Keep several zerglings near your defilers (just right click a group of zerglings on the defiler and they will always follow it) so you can consume them as needed. Consuming larger zerg units is a waste of precious resources. Critters cannot be consumed. Consume must be cast next to the target.

Plague: Plague drains up to 299 hit points in 30 seconds to any units caught in its area of effect. It cannot kill a unit, so units with less than 300 hit points will remain with 1 hit point. Plague, like ensnare, is an area effect spell that will also uncover cloaked units.

After you plague enemy units, send in mutalisks, who have multiple stage attacks that will tear apart plagued units. Plague works extremely well against Terran units because once a plague brings a Terran building into the red, the building will continue to deteriorate until it explodes. A unit cannot be affected by more than one plague at a time.



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Sanitarium Part 1

Find Your Way out of Madness With Our Roadmap to Sanity

by Robert Coffey

Going insane trying to make your way through SANITARIUM? This no-frills guide picks up where the first chapter walk-through in the manual leaves off and takes you through the game's first half. A warning: This guide leaves very little to the imagination. Also, at any opportunity, you should talk to everyone about everything. We'll conclude our SANITARIUM guide next month.

The Innocent Abandoned

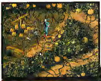
Clear up your identity problem by talking to the two kids playing tic-tac-toe and to the girl jumping rope near the school. Now you can pump everyone for information and play a rousing game of tic-tac-toe. Head south and talk to the boy fishing near the shore.

Ring the church bell by hitting it with a nearby rock. Go back to the shore and snatch Timothy's discarded fishing rod. Back in town, ride the spring pig in the playground, take it, then head north to the bridge. Fish the cross out of the river.

Head to the cemetery and get the crowbar from the maintenance shed to rip open the schoolhouse door. Back in the boneyard, talk to all the kids, beginning and ending with Dennis, the kid by the gate. Accept his hide-and-seek challenge. Kids can be found in the barrels by the fishhouse, in the church, in the school, up a tree behind the church, and under the bed in the house across the bridge. Still, Dennis won't give you your prize if you don't find the secret weapon.

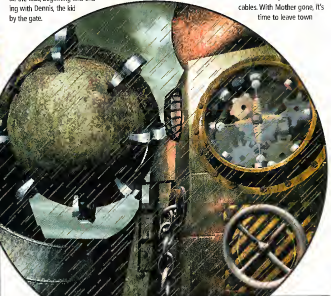
Borrow the shovel from the little girl near the feet of the statue, then dig up Carol in the graveyard. Get the keys from Dennis, open the General Store, and grab the gas can. Use the spring pig to bounce over the collapsed bridge, talk to Maria, and open the lock on the gate (remember that psalm?). Take the scythe and work your way to the pumpkin patch, killing crows along the way.

In the patch, take care to avoid Pumpkinhead and slice up the circle of pumpkins. Once they're destroyed one mighty hack should take the bad guy down. Open the gate, get the jumper cables from the tractor, then enter the barn for a long talk with Mother. When you're done, get the tool and use it to get the hose from the pool near the town hall. Siphon gas from the car with the hose and gas can. Fuel up the generator near the barn, attach the cables, and power it up. Stick the cross into the meteorite, then attach the cables. With Mother gone, it's time to leave town



SMASHING FUMPKINS **You can whack away at the pumpkin-headed scarecrow all day, but he won't die unless you first destroy that ring of pumpkins.**

HELLO, CREEPY Yeah, so pretty much everyone in SANITARIUM is hideous, but you'll have to make a point to talk to everyone if you're going to make any progress in the game.



DROPPED BALL Opening the laboratory gate is just a matter of figuring out how to release the clamps on this enormous ball. A simple, methodical approach will release it in no time.

See the Review

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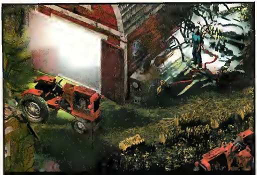


SHOCKING BEHAVIOR To finally leave the "Children of the Corn" small town, you'll have to introduce Mother's meteorite to the space-age benefits of high-voltage electricity.

The Courtyard and the Chapel

Talk to everyone inside the church. Preacher Bob will give you a quest. Go to the record room and play *Belladonna in A Flat*. The lunatic in the tutu will dance, revealing the cross. Bring it to Bob, then use the broom he gives you to open the control box. Manipulate the controls so only the third pipe fills with water. Yank the chain and then look in the fountain.

The Circus of Fools

Look through the binoculars, then talk to the ringmaster. Talk to the tattoo artist on the record room and your way to the midway. Use your Squid Squash pass, then play all the other games, collecting a bowling pin and at least 10 tickets. Cross the bridge, meet the O'Leary family, and snatch their oil can. At the Big Top, talk to everyone and receive a ball from the juggler. Return to the tattoo wagon and get the needle and rubbing alcohol. Now Inferno will teach you fire-breathing and give you a baton.

Enter the freak show, use the needle to free Timber, then walk to the carousel. Oil the carousel lever and enjoy a ride. Use the ball on the clown and you may enter the House of Horrors. You'll find a piece of mirror before exiting. After your fortune is told, you'll be teleported to the Big Top. Return to the O'Leary family, [illegible] Timber's hole, then jump in.

The Cave

Use the mirror on the twigs to light the cave and your fire baton. Move slowly through the water, burning the tentacles on your way. Avoid the falling stalactites by watching for the spray of pebbles that precedes them. When you find the Squid Boy, stand just around the corner from him and note the pattern of his deadly squid spit. After a triple-spit, dart around the corner, move in close, and burn him three times on the giant eye.

The Mansion

Leave the basement and get the brass key from the second-floor bedroom. Unlock the downstairs clock and set it for dinner time. Take the video and key from the now-opened study upstairs to watch the tape and unlock the attic door. Search the bear, use the trampoline to hop over the boxes, then unlock the chest. Follow the ghost downstairs and give the doll to Sarah.

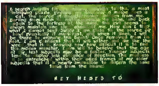
The Laboratory

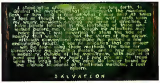
Make your way to the cupola office and investigate the portrait on the wall. Take the pipe valve and go outside and up the stairs to the machine. Insert the valve in the hole in the wall and turn it. To release the ball, turn the wheel so the electrode without a contact is in the 12 o'clock position. Pull the handle, then turn the electrode one position clockwise before pulling the handle again. Do this for every position around the wheel until the ball drops and opens the lab door.

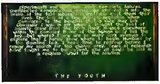
Inside the lab, listen to the tape recorder on the desk. Solve the chalkboard puzzles (see sidebar) then enter the code in the security panel next to the door. Open the door and continue your journey through madness. CGW

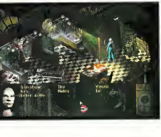
THE CHALKBOARD PUZZLES

Faced with the chaos and carnage of the laboratory, your character begins to wonder if he's the only madman in the asylum. While the scribbling on the chalkboards may at first seem incoherent, the words hold the key to both your nemesis' motives and the door out of the room. Clicking the first letter of each sentence drops it to the bottom of the board where you must unscramble it to form the words in these screenshots. When you've done that, access the security box by the exit door, speak the phrase, "Youth hides the key to salvation," and you're on your way to Chapter Six.









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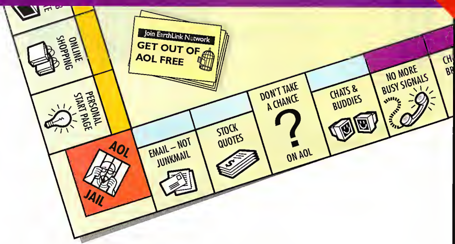

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Unreal

Must-have Cheats and Map Shortcuts

by Terry Coleman

While UNREAL certainly has its detractors (particularly with regard to its multiplay), the game has gained a huge and well-deserved following for single-player action. Even so, a lot of the weapons are less than intuitive for those of us raised on DOOM and QUAKE. So, here are some quick-and-dirty codes to get you into the heart of the game, where you can drool over the sumptuous graphics to your trigger finger's content:

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For help with this game and more check out **www.gameguides.com**

The Summoning

In addition to the usual cheat codes, you can hit Tilde [~], then type summon, along with the name of an item, and get just about anything you want. For example, if you type summon flakcannon, the result is pretty obvious. But if you're bored, you could also type summon Skaarjwarrior, and that enemy would appear instantly. A good way to improve your shooting skills in a hurry is to enter god mode, summon an enemy, and blast it with a variety of your weapons.

WHO NEEDS A TRAVEL AGENCY? Checking out an area is as easy as typing in ISVKRAN32.

Real Cheats

To activate cheat, hit Tilde [~], then type one of the following entries:

Cheat Code	Effect	Comment
allammo	Gives you 999 ammo for all your weapons	Overkill, but good when learning the game
behindview1	Puts you in third-person view	Compare this to TOMB RAIDER, I dare you
behindview0	Resets to first-person view	Flipping between views makes for a good slide show
flush	Cleans up garbage graphics on walls and creatures	Helpful on slower machines
fly	Lets you fly around	With UNREAL's dangerous AI, this can get you into trouble
god	God mode	Don't tell me you're surprised this works
Invisible	Turns you invisible	Sometimes the (cheating) AI finds you anyway
killpawns	Kills all monsters	Doesn't help your chess game much
playersonly	Freezes time	Press again to resume time passage
walk	Use this to stop flying	A good idea in areas where you can't easily hide

Open Sesame (or Whatever)

If you are impatient or stuck on a level, remember this:

1) Usually, killing the last creature on a level magically opens a door (irritating, but true);

2) UNREAL is hardly as subtle as it first appears, and you'll usually find that you've just overlooked something;

3) You can always map the level with pencil and paper.

For those of us who don't wish to return to the days of text adventures (the automap function was invented for a reason), there is a solution. Once again, hit Tilde [~], then type open and the name of the map (where the designers' betray their fondness for ancient arcade games). To get to the *Chizra-Nali Water God* map, for example, you would hit ~, then type open chizra. We are proud to offer the following map names and codes for your greater blasting pleasure.

See the Review
SEPTEMBER ISSUE • 4 STARS

To reach this map hit Tilde [~] and type open and

Bluff Eversmoking	bluff
Cellars at Dasa Pass	dasacellars
Ceremonial Chambers	ceremony
Chizra-Nali Water God	chizra
Dark Arena	dark
The Darkening	extremedark
Dasa Mountain Pass	dasapass
Demonlord's Lair	nalilord
Demon Crater	dcrater
Depths of Rrajigar	dug
Ending Sequence	endgame
Gateway to Na Pali	skycaves
Harobed Village	harobed
Illumination	extremedgen
Isv-Kran deck 1	isvdeck1
Isv-Kran decks 3 & 2	isvkran32
Isv-Kran deck 4	isvkran4
MotherShip Basement	extremebeg
MotherShip Core	extremecore
MotherShip Lab	extremelab
Nali Castle	nalic
Na Pali HavenV	skytown
Noork's Elbow	noork
NyLeve's Falls	nyleve
Outpost 3J	skybase
Rrajigar Mine	dig
Sacred Passage	passage
Serpent Canyon	naliboat
Skaarj Generator	extremegen
The Source Antechamber	extremeend
The Source	queenend
Spire Village	spirevillage
The Sunspire	thesunspire
Temple of Vandora	ruins
Terraniux Underground	terralift
Terraniux	terraniux
The Trench	trench
Velora Pass	veloraend
Vortex Rikers	vortex2

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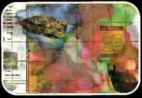

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Simulation/Space

DESCENT: FREESPACE

Having trouble warding off wave after wave of marauding Vesudan attack wings? Fortunately, help is at hand even though GTA HQ knows nothing of it. The final version of DESCENT: FREESPACE still contains debug cheat codes that'll improve your odds in battle and teach the aliens a thing or two about a good Terran butt kicking. To activate this special cheat mode, first type www.volition-inc.com. Then simultaneously hold down the tilde key [~] along with one of the following:

Code	Effect
C	Send message to enemies
Shift C	Toggle availability of countermeasures for all ships
K	Kill target
Alt Shift K	Apply approx. 10 percent damage to target
Shift K	Destroy selected subsystem on target.
Alt K	Apply approx. 10 percent damage to yourself
I	Toggle invulnerability for you
Shift I	Toggle invulnerability for target
O	Toggle DESCENT-style physics
Shift W	Infinite weapons for all ships (including yours)
W	Infinite weapons for your ship
G	Mark all primary goals as complete
Shift G	Mark all secondary goals as complete
Alt G	Mark all bonus goals as complete
9	Scroll forward through all secondary weapons
Shift 9	Scroll backward through all secondary weapons
0	Scroll forward through all primary weapons
Shift 0	Scroll backward through all primary weapons
R	Issue a rearm request for target

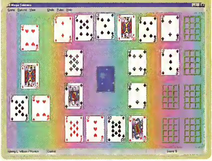
Repeat the keystroke combination to disable the cheat. —*Marc Dultz*

Classics & Puzzles

MEGA SOLITAIRE

Although most people don't need any help with solitaire, two of the variants in MEGA SOLITAIRE require a slightly different strategy than most. In *Casket*, there are three points that can lead to more frequent victories. First, remember that the key to winning is clearing off the lid (the reserve) at the top of the casket's "U." Try to move as many of the cards from the lid down into the casket. Second, whenever you deplete a stack in the body of the casket itself, the top card of the reserve automatically fills that space. So, remove a full stack only when there is a card on top of the reserve that will enable you to move another card down from the casket lid. Third, note that there are three waste piles. It is good to divide these numerically so that one pile handles deuces through fours, another fives through eights, and another nines through kings.

In *Senate*, you'll want to use the four tableau spaces as often as possible. Instead of building down from the highest cards in your reserve stacks, as you would in most games, try building from the middle of the suit down. In this way, you'll blow through the stacks faster and have more options. —*Wyatt Lee*



TEAM APACHE

If, like a lot of fixed-wing air jockeys, you feel that choppers are unsafe enough skirting the laws of aerodynamics as they do, here are a few tidbits to keep you flying safe and sound:

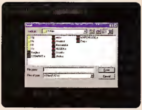
1) Never approach known enemy force concentrations at high speed. You need to have time to slow down early so you can pick the bad guys off from the perimeter and then work your way in. If you go charging ahead at full speed, you may end up surrounded by tracer-spitting enemies by the time your copilot/gunner (CP/G) spots his first target, which will put you in a world of hurt.

2) Always fire Hellfire missiles in LOAL (lock-on after launch) mode. This lets you launch before you get a solid lock, improving your response time and fire rate. For targets less than 2 km away, wait about two to three seconds after your CP/G designates it until you fire to be sure the missile has time to lock on and guide. Beyond 3 km, you can launch as soon as a target is found. Be sure to order your CP/G to track your Hellfire's target before you pull the trigger. This will minimize the chances of your CP/G switching to a different target and spoiling the shot.

3) High-explosive rockets are your best bets against enemy infantry. Their blast effect can turn a near miss into a hard kill. Reduce the salvo size to just one rocket and you should still be able to take out one soldier per shot as long as you hold fire until you are within about 650 meters. —*Robin Kim*

Adventure/RPG

X-FILES



It's hard to fight the future with a lack of hard evidence, but it's even worse when you have to struggle with only three save-game slots. In true Lone Gunman fashion, however, there is a workaround hack. On the menu screen, click on either Save or Load while holding down the Shift key. Instead of seeing the normal Save/Load screen, you should get a standard Windows Save-As or Load screen. When saving, this method will automatically put in the right file extension, which you can later load at your leisure. Now you can go back to finding the truth. *—Thierry Nguyen*

Action

OUTWARS

A little frustrated with Microsoft's latest blast-fest? These cheats are more fun than functional, but they'll still spice up your sci-fi gaming experience:

Code	Effect
Phantom	Spy on creatures using F11 and F12 keys
Bigears	Toggles placeholder sounds
Framerate	Frame counter
Weaponcam	Weapon Optics Display —Follows fired rounds, like a smart bomb camera.

Strategy/War

MECHCOMMANDER

While you're learning and trying to develop your tactical style, be mindful that MECHCOMMANDER differs in many ways from the standard real-time strategy game. Here are some tips to get you started:

Sometimes firing at something *other* than the enemy gets a better result. Some of the maps in MECHCOMMANDER are littered with fuel tanks and explosives storage. Luring enemy units into one of these, then setting them off is immensely satisfying. Just remember that the same can happen to you.

If at any time you see an aerospace spotter, start running—and kill the spotter quickly. Enemy close air support is often devastating.

Husband your artillery strikes until you really need to use them. Get the hang of timing artillery strikes against moving targets; it's often the difference between victory and defeat.

Your units tend to move around in combat based on the range of their weapons. Mechs with long-range weapons—even if those happen to be lasers—will try to back up to fire. Take these effects into account when planning your force mix.

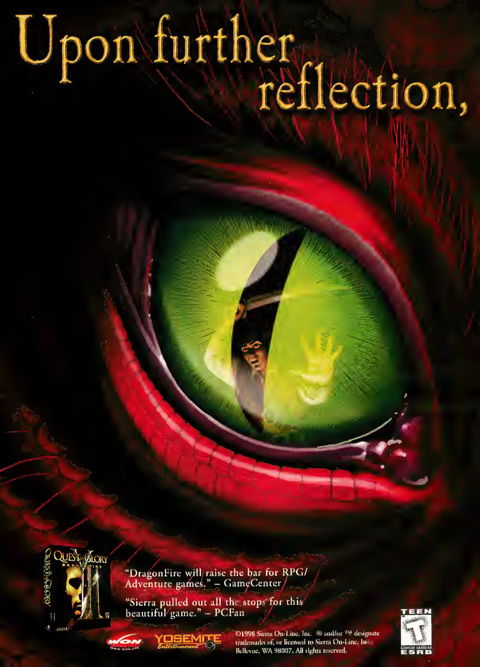
Use refit trucks and Mech repair bays to repair armor and resupply ammo. In some of the missions, a refit truck is worth more than two Mechs.

Whether you use minelayers a lot depends mostly on personal taste; I got through most of the missions without one. The minesweeper is relatively useless, however. And don't waste valuable resource points on tanks.

Avoid the rush to melee found in most real-time strategy games. Armed with long-range weapons, your Mechs can support their melee brethren without worry, because there's no friendly fire in this game! *—Loyd Case*

EXTREME TACTICS

- Run from pods. If they get next to your units ... they aren't your units anymore. The extra time you gain by moving away gives you an extra couple of shots to take them out.
- Make weapon and shield relays your primary targets. Often the enemy will put only high-tech weapons on its MCC. Losing the relays will make it a sitting duck or whimpering puppy.
- Lots of small, fast, and cheap units can overwhelm bigger, slower, and more powerful ones.
- Always give your MCC ground/air weapons.
- Never go in the front door. Explore your enemy's flanks. Often there are unguarded paths.
- Many weapons can fire beyond your LOS. Deploy sensors so you can use weapons to hit "unseen" targets without getting hit back. *—Lance Larka*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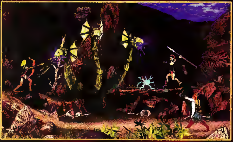

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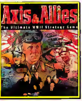

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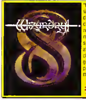

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TOP 100

CGW'S MONTHLY READERS' POLL

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

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1		Unreal	GT Interactive	8.77	
2	1	Quake II	Activision	8.64	4.5
3	3	Quake Pack 1: Scourge	id Software/Ritual	8.58	4.5
4	2	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution	id Software/Rogue	8.57	5
5	4	Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	8.51	4.5
6	5	Jedi Knight: Mysteries	LucasArts	8.33	4
7	7	Quake	id Software	7.97	5
	6	Tomb Raider	Eidos	7.97	4
9		Forsaken	Acclaim	7.82	4
10	8	Moto Racer	EA	7.82	4

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	Curse of Monkey Island	LucasArts	8.28	5
2	3	Blade Runner	Westwood/Virgin	7.79	4.5
3	4	Twinsen's Odyssey	Activision	7.68	5
4	1D	Zork Grand Inquisitor	Activision	7.58	N/R
5	5	Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	7.45	4.5
6	7	The Neverhood	DreamWorks	7.44	4
	8	Last Express	8roderbund	7.44	4.5
8	6	Rama	Sierra	7.40	4.5
9	9	Circle of Blood	Virgin	7.39	4
1D		Starship Titanic	Simon & Shuster	7.38	2.5

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	You Don't Know Jack 2	8erkeley Systems	8.32	4.5
2	2	You Don't Know Jack 3	8erkeley Systems	8.13	4
3	3	You Don't Know Jack Movies	8erkeley Systems	8.00	4.5
4	5	Smart Games Challenge 2	Smart Games Inc	7.76	5
5	4	Worms 2	MicroProse	7.73	4
6	7	You Don't Know Jack TV	Berkeley Systems	7.64	2.5
7	6	You Don't Know Jack Sports	8erkeley Systems	7.59	4.5
8	8	Shanghai Dynasty	Activision	7.55	3
9	9	Power Chess	Sierra	7.35	N/R
1D	10	Lose Your Marbles	SegaSoft	6.62	4.5

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	Longbow 2	EA	8.58	5
2	2	Wing Commander: Prophecy	Origin	8.43	4.5
3	4	F-15	EA	8.07	4.5
4	3	F-22 ADF	DID	7.91	4.5
5	5	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	7.68	4.5
	6	Fighters Anthology	EA	7.68	3.5
7	8	M1 Tank Platoon	MicroProse	7.60	3.5
8		Panzer Commander	SSI	7.48	4
	7	Flight Unlimited 2	Looking Glass	7.48	4.5
10	9	Flight Sim 98	Microsoft	7.29	3.5

TOP SPORTS GAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	3	NHL 98	EA Sports	8.62	4
2	2	Links LS	Access	8.58	5
3	1	FIFA Road to World Cup 98	EA Sports	8.43	4.5
4	4	NBA Live 98	EA Sports	8.35	4.5
5	6	NASCAR Racing 2	Sierra	8.15	5
6	5	Jack Nicklaus 5	Accolade	8.12	5
7		TriplePlay '99	EA Sports	8.00	2.5
8	7	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	7.95	5
9	8	NHL 97	EA Sports	7.85	4.5
10	1D	N8A Live 97	EA Sports	7.83	4.5

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	Heroes II: Price of Loyalty	New W. Computing	8.98	5
2	2	StarCraft	8lizzard	8.89	5
3		TA: Core Contingency	Cavedog	8.82	4.5
4	3	Heroes II	New W. Computing	8.60	5
5	4	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	8.53	4.5
6	5	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	8.25	4
7	6	Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	8.23	4.5
8	7	Age of Empires	Microsoft	8.01	4.5
9	8	Civ II: Scenarios	MicroProse	7.92	4
10	9	Civ II: Fantastic Worlds	MicroProse	7.91	4

TOP ROLE–PLAYING GAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	Might and Magic VI	New W. Computing	8.92	4.5
2	2	Diablo	8lizzard	8.55	4.5
3	3	Fallout	Interplay	8.31	4.5
4	4	Hellfire	Sierra	8.04	4
5	5	Daggerfall	8ethesda	7.05	4.5
6	6	Shadows Over Riva	Sir-Tech	6.46	N/R
7	7	Lands of Lore II	Westwood	6.16	N/R
8	8	Meridian 59	3DO	5.41	3.5
9	9	Ultima Online	Origin	4.82	1.5
1D	1D	Battlespire	8ethesda	4.37	N/R

TOP WARGAMES

THIS MO.	LAST MO.	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE	RATING
1	1	Steel Panthers Camp. Disk	SSI	8.43	4
2	2	Steel Panthers II Camp. Disk	SSI	8.40	4.5
3	3	Panzer General II	SSI	8.36	5
4	4	Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Firaxis	8.08	4.5
5	5	Steel Panthers II	SSI	8.03	4.5
6	6	Battleground: Napoleon	TalonSoft	7.89	4.5
7	7	8attleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	7.87	5
8	8	Battleground: 8ull Run	TalonSoft	7.84	4
9	10	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	7.75	5
10	9	Tigers on the Prowl II	HPS	7.74	4

Games on unnumbered lines are tied with game on line above. ★ = Top game of genre. Red = New Game, **AD** = Adventure, **RP** = Role-Playing, **SI** = Simulation/Space Combat, **ST** = Strategy, **WG** = Wargame, **AC** = Action, **SP** = Sports, **CP** = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

	THIS MO	LAST MO	GAME/ PUBLISHER	GAME GENRE	POLL SCORE	CGW RATING
★	1	1	**Heroes II: Price of Loyalty** New World Computing	ST	8.98	5
★	2	2	**Might and Magic VI** New World Computing	RP	8.92	4.5
	3	3	**StarCraft** Blizzard	ST	8.89	5
	4		**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	AC	8.82	4.5
★	5		**Unreal** GT Interactive	AC	8.77	4
	6	4	**Quake II** Activision	AC	8.64	4.5
★	7	10	**NHL 98** EA Sports	SP	8.62	4
	8	5	**Heroes II** New World Computing	ST	8.60	5
★	9	13	**Longbow 2** EA	SI	8.58	5
		9	**Links LS** Access	SP	8.58	5
		7	**Quake Pack 1: Scourge** id Software/Ritual	AC	8.58	4.5
	12	6	**Quake Pack 2: Dissolution** id Software/Rogue	AC	8.57	5
	13	11	**Diablo** Blizzard	RP	8.55	4.5
	14	12	**Red Alert** Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.53	4.5
	15	14	**Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II** LucasArts	AC	8.51	4.5
	16	19	**Wing Commander: Prophecy** Origin	SI	8.43	4.5
		8	**FIFA Road to the World Cup 98** EA Sports	SP	8.43	4.5
★		15	**Steel Panthers Campaign Disk** SSI	WG	8.43	4
	19	17	**Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk** SSI	WG	8.40	4.5
	20	18	**Panzer General II** SSI	WG	8.36	5
	21	21	**NBA Live 98** EA Sports	SP	8.35	4.5
	22	16	**Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith** LucasArts	AC	8.33	4
★	23	20	**You Don't Know Jack 2** Berkeley Systems	CP	8.32	4.5
	24	22	**Fallout** Interplay	RP	8.31	4.5
★	25	26	**Curse of Monkey Island** LucasArts	AD	8.28	5
	26	23	**Red Alert: Counterstrike** Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.25	4
	27	24	**Total Annihilation** GT Interactive	ST	8.23	4.5
	28	29	**NASCAR Racing 2** Sierra	SP	8.15	5
	29	30	**You Don't Know Jack 3** Berkeley Systems	CP	8.13	4
	30	25	**Jack Nicklaus 5** Accolade	SP	8.12	5
	31	27	**Sid Meier's Gettysburg** Firaxis	WG	8.08	4.5
	32	49	**F-15** EA/Origin	SI	8.07	4.5
	33	32	**Hellfire** Sierra	RP	8.04	4
	34	31	**Steel Panthers II** SSI	WG	8.03	4.5
	35	33	**Age of Empires** Microsoft	ST	8.01	4.5
	36	24	**Tripleplay '99** EA Sports	SP	8.00	2.5
		37	**You Don't Know Jack Movies** Berkeley Systems	CP	8.00	4.5
	38	36	**Quake** id Software	AC	7.97	5
		34	**Tomb Raider** Eidos	AC	7.97	4
	40	39	**Grand Prix 2** MicroProse	SP	7.95	5
	41	38	**Civilization II: Scenarios** MicroProse	ST	7.92	4
	42	35	**F-22 ADF** NovaLogic	SI	7.91	4.5
		40	**Civilization II: Fantastic Worlds** MicroProse	ST	7.91	4
	44	41	**Battleground: Napoleon in Russia** TalonSoft	WG	7.89	4.5
	45	42	**Battleground: Shiloh** TalonSoft	WG	7.87	5
	46	43	**NHL 97** EA Sports	SP	7.85	4.5
	47	47	**Battleground: Bull Run** TalonSoft	WG	7.84	4
	48	45	**NBA Live 97** EA Sports	SP	7.83	4.5
	49		**Forsaken** Acclaim	AC	7.82	4
		51	**Moto Racer** EA	AC	7.82	4

THIS MO	LAST MO.	GAME/ PUBLISHER	GAME GENRE	POLL SCORE	CGW RATING
51	46	**Blade Runner** Westwood/Virgin	AD	7.79	4.5
52	44	**Diamond Mind Baseball 7.0** Diamond Mind	SP	7.78	3.5
53	54	**Tomb Raider II** Eidos	AC	7.77	4
54	56	**Smart Games Challenge 2** Smart Games Inc	CP	7.76	5
55	50	**Battleground: Antietam** TalonSoft	WG	7.75	5
	65	**Battlezone** Activision	AC	7.75	5
	52	**The Need for Speed SE** EA	AC	7.75	N/R
58	48	**Tigers on the Prowl II** HPS	WG	7.74	4
59	53	**Worms 2** MicroProse	CP	7.73	4
60	55	**MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries** Activision	SI	7.68	4.5
	59	**Fighters Anthology** EA	SI	7.68	3.5
	58	**Twinsen's Odyssey** Activision	AD	7.68	5
63	63	**You Don't Know Jack TV** Berkeley Systems	CP	7.64	2.5
	57	**F1 Racing Simulation** UbiSoft	SP	7.64	5
65	73	**M1 Tank Platoon** MicroProse	SI	7.60	3.5
66	62	**You Don't Know Jack Sports** Berkeley Systems	CP	7.59	4.5
67	87	**Zork: Grand Inquisitor** Activision	AD	7.58	N/R
	60	**Triple Play 98** EA Sports	SP	7.58	3
69	64	**Crusader: No Regret** EA/Origin	AC	7.56	4.5
70	79	**Shanghai Dynasty** Activision	CP	7.55	3
71	66	**Jack Nicklaus 4** Accolade	SP	7.53	5
		Monster Truck Madness 2 Microsoft	AC	7.53	3.5
	72	**Virtual Pool 2** Interplay	SP	7.53	4.5
74	67	**Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games** Sir-Tech	ST	7.51	4
75		**Panzer Commander** SSI	SI	7.48	4
	68	**Flight Unlimited 2** Looking Glass	SI	7.48	4.5
77	70	**Myth** Bungie	ST	7.47	4.5
78	69	**Realms of the Haunting** Interplay	AD	7.45	4.5
	71	**Interstate '76** Activision	AC	7.45	4.5
80	75	**The Neverhood** DreamWorks	AD	7.44	4
	76	**Last Express** Red Orb	AD	7.44	4.5
82	81	**Steel Panthers III** SSI	WG	7.43	3
83	74	**Rama** Sierra	AD	7.40	4.5
	77	**Dungeon Keeper** EA/Bullfrog	ST	7.40	4.5
85	78	**Circle of Blood** Virgin	AD	7.39	4
86	74	**Starship Titanic** Simon & Shuster Interactive	AD	7.38	2.5
87	85	**Power Chess** Sierra	CP	7.35	N/R
88	88	**Black Dahlia** Interplay	AD	7.34	3
	80	**PGA Tour Pro** EA Sports	SP	7.34	3.5
90	84	**Achtung! Spitfire** Avalon Hill	ST	7.32	5
91	92	**Baseball Mogul** Infinite Monkey	SP	7.30	4
92	83	**Tripleplay 97** EA Sports	SP	7.29	4
	82	**Flight Simulator 98** Microsoft	SI	7.29	3.5
94	86	**Age of Rifles Campaign Disk** SSI	WG	7.28	4
95	91	**Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror** Virgin	AD	7.24	N/R
96	88	**MDK** Playmates/Shiny	AC	7.23	4.5
	109	**Dungeon Keeper** Expansion	ST	7.23	N/R
98	95	**Close Combat: A Bridge Too Far** Microsoft	WG	7.22	4.5
	90	**Lords of the Realm II** Sierra	ST	7.22	4
100	89	**X-COM: Apocalypse** MicroProse	ST	7.19	4

HALL OF FAME

WELCOME TO THE COOPERSTOWN OF COMPUTER GAMES. Games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

Alone in the Dark (I-Motion, 1992)
Lovecraftian horror goes 3D, with shifting camera angles adding to the creepy atmosphere

The Bard's Tale (EA, 1985)
Pioneered three-point animation, 3D color mazes, and automapping

Battle Chess (Interplay,1988)
The Franklin Mint of computer chess games, with violent and funny animation disguising a solid chess engine

Betrayal at Krondor (Dynamix,1993)
As rich and imaginative as Raymond Feist's world itself

Chessmaster (Software Toolworks, 1986)
The Cadillac of castling, it gets better with each version

Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios, 1995) Moved beyond Dune II with innovative features and multiplayer play, ushering in the current real-time strategy game explosion

Day of the Tentacle (LucasArts, 1993)
Offbeat sequel to Maniac Mansion, the interactive equivalent of a classic Chuck Jones cartoon

DOOM (id Software, 1993)
Revolutionized PC action games and network gaming, now surpassed in technology, but not in gameplay

Dungeon Master (FTL Software, 1987)
Trend-setting graphics, digitized stereo, and great hack-and-slash from a decade ago

Earl Weaver Baseball (EA, 1986)
Revolutionary physics-based baseball game pleased both action and statistics fans; still unsurpassed more than a decade later

Empire (Interstel, 1978)
World War II in space, this mainframe transplant brought elegant mechanics, depth, and unending replayability to the PC

F-19 Stealth Fighter (MicroProse, 1988)
A "thinking man's" sim, with great missions, in which sneaking around is as fun as dogfighting

Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
Tough, detailed jet sim with ambitious AI, graphics, and connectivity to match its realism

Front Page Sports Football Pro (Dynamix, 1993)
Physics-based system, good AI, and unmatched career play make this the ultimate in pigskin play

Gettysburg: The Turning Point (SSI, 1986)
First variable order of battle changed the look of all American Civil War games on the PC

Gunship (MicroProse, 1989)
Great character continuity, R&R for fatigued pilots, and even sick leave; best chopper fare until Jane's Longbow.

Harpoon (360 Pacific, 1989)
In-depth modern naval battles in real-time, based on the world's Cold War fears

Kampfgruppe (SSI, 1985)
Its WWII East Front armor battles were a success on multiple platforms

King's Quest V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
Redefined the graphic adventure with new parser and VGA graphics.

Lemmings (Psygnosis, 1991)
The lovable cartoon Lilliputians were hits on every platform

Links 386 Pro (Access Software, 1992)
Topped the leader board in graphics and realism for its era

M-1 Tank Platoon (MicroProse, 1989)
Realistic sim that properly focused on armored formations rather than on single vehicles, good mission designs

Master of Magic (MicroProse, 1994)
The atmosphere of Magic: The Gathering with the sophistication of Civ.

Master of Orion (MicroProse, 1993)
Remarkable diplomatic AI, deep and varied technology tree, aliens required radically different playing styles

Mech Brigade (SSI, 1985)
Improved Kampfgruppe system for modern armored battles

MechWarrior 2 (Activision, 1995)
A serious treatment of Mech design and resource management, combined with complex and addictive battles, legitimized "giant robot simulations"

Might & Magic (New World Computing, 1986)
First-person, maze-based RPG with huge environment and tough combat

M.U.L.E. (EA, 1983)
A landmark multiplayer strategy game that had no weapons of destruction, just cutthroat competition that made economics fun

Panzer General (SSI, 1994)
Entertaining wargame with an elegant interface, great campaigns, strong AI, good graphics, and impressive sound

Red Baron (Dynamix, 1990)
WWI air combat with great graphics, incredible realism, and a versatile replay feature.

The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)
Comedy that set new standards in writing quality and social sensitivity.

Sid Meier's Civilization (MicroProse, 1991)
CGW's #1-rated game of all time; indescribably addictive world-conquest/exploration game

Sid Meier's Pirates (MicroProse, 1987)
Combines pirate adventure, action, RPG, and strategy to make the most successful hybrid of all time

Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon (MicroProse, 1990)
SimCity meets 1830 with robber barons for emphasis.

SimCity (Maxis, 1987)
Urban planning with fascinating consequences and challenges, the first great software toy

Starflight (EA, 1986)
Depth, great characters, and a good sci-fi storyline set early RPG standard

Their Finest Hour (LucasArts, 1989)
WWII sim with great campaigns, realism, and many crew-member options.

TIE Fighter (LucasArts, 1994)
Most satisfying *Star Wars* space-combat game to date, lets you live on the dark side

Ultima III (Origin Systems, 1983)
Coherency and surprising subtlety emphasized role-playing, and set the tone for later Ultimas.

Ultima IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
High-concept RPG explored meaning of virtue and put the role in role-playing.

Ultima VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
RPG as morality play, replete with moral choices and realistic environs

Ultima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992)
The first truly 3D RPG, and still the most convincing; its dungeon walls were nicely "painted" with texture-mapped graphics.

War in Russia (SSI, 1984)
More realistic than Eastern Front, it captured the essence of the largest land campaign in history.

WarCraft II (Blizzard, 1996)
More cerebral than most real-time strategy games, it offered deceptive depth and personality to spare

Wasteland (Interplay, 1986)
Derived from Mike Stackpole's *Mercenaries, Spies, and Private Eyes*, this is the definitive postapocalyptic RPG

Wing Commander (Origin Systems, 1990)
A hot spaceflight engine, unfolding story path, and great characters.

Wing Commander II (Origin Systems, 1991)
Darker story, grittier feel, sound card advances, and tougher AI made this a sequel of sequels

Wing Commander III (Origin Systems, 1994)
Surprisingly satisfying FMV space-opera didn't lose the essence of the space-combat game.

Wizardry (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
Defined the computer RPG with maze-based viewpoint and atmospheric spell names

Wolfenstein 3-D (id Software, 1992)
Smooth-scrolling action blastfest cleverly updated the original, and put shareware back on the map

X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)
Premier tactical squad-level engine combined with alien tech research and pop culture for a sci-fi game nearly as addictive as Civilization.

You Don't Know Jack (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
Fresh and irreverent, Jack turned trivia gaming on its collective ear to become the first mainstream CD-ROM with a gleeful gameplay bite.

Zork (Infocom, 1981)
The progenitor of adventure games on the PC; its humor and challenging puzzles seem timeless. The game has since spawned a number of sequels, none of which has equaled the original.

GameSpot and CGW Online

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Even expert computer gamers need help with a game from time to time. That's why when we do a strategy guide we don't sell you short. For the hottest games, *GameSpot's* editors try to provide you with all the help you need, from start to finish. And through this commitment, *GameSpot* has built a solid reputation for providing the best strategy guides available anywhere on the Web—and ours are free.

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Sybex's Army Men Official Secrets & Strategies
AND MANY MORE!

Designer Diaries

Ever wonder what's going on behind the scenes while those much-anticipated games are in development? *GameSpot's* Designer Diaries follow the progress of game designers such as Jane Jensen, who is embarking on her third Gabriel Knight game for Sierra On-Line, and Tim Schafer, who is working on Grim Fandango for LucasArts. Tom Hall also gives *GameSpot* readers regular updates on his new game at ION Storm, Anachronox, and Lead Designer Brian Reynolds writes about Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri. Also just added: Diablo II.

Special Features

The Sid Meier Legacy

It has been a long and illustrious career for the MicroProse founder. Since the early days of computer gaming, Sid Meier has never lost touch with one firm belief: The game's the thing. Go online at *GameSpot* and take a walk down the road of Sid's career, as Sid Meier himself recounts his experiences with each of his games.

1998: YEAR OF THE RPG?

That's right. The grand ol' genre has been severely lacking, but this year might be the year for the long-awaited turn-around. *GameSpot's* RPG guru, Desslock, takes a look at all of the RPGs currently in development.

Demos

GameSpot has the most thorough and regularly updated game demo libraries on the Web. Here you'll find demos to some of the games reviewed in this issue: MAX 2, Microsoft Baseball 3D, Microsoft Golf 98, Beast Wars: Transformers, and more.

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G.I. Disc

The Troops Await Your Orders, Sir!

This month's demo disc features two very different ground combat experiences. The first is 3DO's ARMY MEN, which has been among the top three best-sellers for weeks. In this exclusive first demo you'll train in boot camp and play through two of the game's scenarios. The game's mouse control is a little awkward, but it's not hard to get used to. Have fun with the flamethrower!

If you want a deeper challenge, you'll get it in spades with Norm Kroger's tour de force THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR. The demo on this month's disc lets you play a company-level scenario that takes place during the Korean War.

Should you tire of slogging it out on the battlefield, take to the sky in the EUROPEAN AIR WAR demo. The demo lets you fly a P-51D Mustang on a bomber escort mission or a Fw190A-B on an intercept mission against B-17s with P-51 escorts. Good luck, airman!

Do people complain that you live in a fantasy world? Prove them right by playing MEDIEVAL or HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC II. Or take a journey into the land of the living dead in GRIM FANDANGO, one of the most anticipated adventure games this year.

Other demos include BRUNSWICK CIRCUIT BOWLING and the arcade racers INTERNATIONAL RALLY and MOTORHEAD. Last, but not least, check out some of the winners of the Shareware Awards. One person programming in his or her spare time can still make a good gaming experience.

How to Use the Disc

The CD is Autoplay-enabled and should begin upon being loaded into the CD-ROM drive. Otherwise, select Run from the 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 CGW 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.

To Get the CD-ROM

To subscribe to the CD-ROM version of the magazine, call (303) 665-8930. If you already receive the magazine without the CD, you must wait until your current subscription expires before receiving the CD version. Please address subscription complaints to cgw@neodata.com. Neodata is a magazine fulfillment house which is not owned or operated by Ziff-Davis.

October CD Titles

PRODUCT NAME	PLATFORM	DIRECTORY/DEMOS	EXECUTABLE
Army Men	W95	ArmyMenDemo	setup.exe
Brunswick Circuit Bowling	W95	Thq_bowl	bowling.exe
DirectX 5.2	W95	directx	dxsetup.exe
EarthLink opt 1	W95	earthlink1\win95	setup.exe
EarthLink opt 2	W95	earthlink2\win95	setup.exe
European Air War	W95	EAW Demo	setup.exe
Exiles III	W95	exiles3	exilet.exe
Grim Fandango	W95	Grim_demo	grimdemo.exe
Heroes of M&M II	W95	heroes2	h2demo.exe
International Rally	W95	rally	ral.exe
Interstate '76 Upgrade	W95	i76upgrade	i76upgrade.exe
Laser Chess	W95	laserchess	laserchss.exe
Medieval	W95	medieval	setup.exe
Motorhead	W95	Motorhead D	mdfox3dfxintro.exe
MVP Word Search	W95	mvpword	mvpwrd.exe
Op Art of War	W95	TOAW Demo	setup.exe
Solitaire City	W95	solitaircity	scity.exe

ARMY MEN

Pay tribute to the stalwart green soldiers of your youth by blowing them away in this exclusive demo.

EUROPEAN AIR WAR

MicroProse's follow-up to 1942: PACIFIC AIR WAR finally takes flight.

GRIM FANDANGO

Twist me up one of them, eh fella?
Some festival, eh?
BANG!
I have to go. That sound makes me want to kill somebody.

You'll face schemes and double-crosses as you travel the Land of the Dead in LucasArts' upcoming adventure.

THE OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR

Hard-core grognards take note of this Norm Koger masterpiece.

GREENSPEAK

Another Page of Filler

Or, Please Stop Reading This and Get Back to the Ads

Those who profess to know something about journalism, like those chicken-necked goobers you always see pontificating on shows like *Nightline*, like to talk about the "great wall" between editorial and advertising departments in the media. Despite the fact that those people have spent their entire adult lives in a university and therefore know nothing, actually, they're mostly right. So, I really don't have a gripe with them. I just like calling them chicken-necked goobers.

Honestly, though, here at the *Computer Gaming World* office, we have more than just a wall between departments—we're living on separate planets. I'm sure that if we brought in a genealogist to trace the roots of all the staff members, he might be able to find some common human ancestor between the sales and editorial people. Like some kind of caveman cross between an infomercial pitchman and Urkel.

Let's say you decide to visit our office in San Francisco. (Attention, psychos: Please don't really do this. There's barbed wire, and we shoot on sight.) If you make *a* right turn off the elevator, into the sales department, what you'll find is a very quiet, tidy, and fetchingly decorated set of offices, with a group of sincere, professional people working in them. These people all very good-looking, dress in "outfits," and have nice complexions. They "exercise." They are, also, for the most part, not gamers. Every once in a while, some well-coifed salesperson will venture into the editorial area—with a look on his or her face somewhere between fear and disgust—and ask a question like, "VR BASEBALL—is that a sports game?" (Actually, that's kind of a trick question....)

JEFF GREEN

But even though they may not know jack about gaming, they are the golden ones in the *CGW* empire. Why? Because they are "the profit center." They bring in the ads, which bring in the money, which pleases The Suits in New York because it makes them rich.

■ ■ ■

If you make a left turn off the elevator, you hit the editorial side of the office, and, well, life couldn't be any more different. What's it like? Think of it as *M*A*S*H*, but without the war, the doctors, the martinis, the helicopters, or anyone named Hot Lips.

What you do have is a collection of slovenly arrested-development cases who live, breathe, and—if we could (and some of us have probably tried)—eat games. We are geeks. Big time. *Monty Python*, comic books, *Star Trek*—the works "Fashion" is a matter of deciding which black gaming T-shirt smells the least bad every morning. ("Let's see, I wore the TOTAL ANNIHILATION shirt yesterday, the day before, and the day before that—so, okay—one more day!")

Actually, to digress for a moment, there is a third division at *CGW*, and that would be Wargames Editor Terry Coleman. If you turn left off the elevator, go straight, and then left again, you'll probably find TC in his cubicle in authentic Civil War garb, rattling a saber, playing SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG, and shouting things like "Take a musket-full a'that, you yella-bellied blueshirt!" We just occasionally throw him some red meat and guide him to the door when it's time to go home.

■ ■ ■

The point is, though the editors have been hired by The Suits in New York to produce the magazine, I often get the feeling we are more of an annoyance than an asset to them. "Content," in their world view, is just the filler between the ads.

The good thing about that is that it doesn't really matter what we write, because they don't read it. Thus, as long as I don't use any swear words, and as long as Joe the Falangist copy chief goes along with it, I can write whatever the heck I want, and no matter how stupid, and no one's going to do anything about it. Let's give it a shot:

Godzilla—*boy, that sure blew didn't it? Uh oh. I just wet myself! Man, was* Alf *a good TV show or what? Boingy boingy boingy. Yuk—what's that on my finger?*

You see? It doesn't matter. They'll print anything.

The danger is that they'll wise up to this, and replace even more content with ads. You can see it already in these dumb fold-out ads with our copy on the back, as if the article were in the way.

> As long as I don't use any **swear** words, I can write whatever the heck I **want.**

But don't worry. All is not lost. Even if the rest of this magazine becomes an ad catalog, you still have me. A bastion of integrity and honor in the world of gaming journalism. This space, I assure you, is pure. No random product placements or shameless company plugs from me. I know which side of the wall I'm on.

Nobody **(Blizzard)**, and I mean nobody **(LucasArts)** tampers with Jeff **(ThrustMaster)** Green's copy. You have my **(Microsoft)** word.

What Jeff doesn't realize is that beginning next month, this page will be replaced by a full-page fertilizer ad. If you notice any difference, let Jeff know at jhgreen@zd.com.

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FIG 2 TROUT BAITUS
FIG 3 TECHNO OUTDATUS
FIG 4 HIGHWAY ROADKILLUS

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°Personal leasing arranged by Dell Financial Services L.P., an independent entity, to qualified customers; amount of monthly lease payments above based on 36-month lease. All above monthly lease payments exclude taxes which may vary (for example, Hartford City, IN sales tax $4.32/month); shipping cost due with first payment; no security deposit required; subject to credit approval and availability. Lease terms subject to change without notice.